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Assessing Preadoptive Experiences: Parents' Reflections of Adoption Agencies' Social Support

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ASSESSING PREADOPTIVE EXPERIENCES:

PARENTS' REFLECTIONS OF ADOPTION AGENCIES' SOCIAL SUPPORT

THESIS

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by

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ASSESSING PREADOPTIVE EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored married couple's expectations and perceptions of their adoption

agency's social support. Primarily, adoption has been researched in the fields of social work and

gender roles. Thus, this study offered a new perspective through the field of communication with

the use of expectancy violation theory. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know the adoptive

parents' expectations of the adoption agency's social support during the preadoptive phase; and

how those expectations influenced the adoptive parents' perceptions of the adoption agency

during the preadoptive phase. To address these issues, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were

conducted with six couples who adopted a child within the past five years. The interviews were

conducted through Skype, a free internet video software. Five identified themes gave insight to

the couple's preadoptive experiences with their adoption agency: use of referrals, preferred

characteristics of agency, education provided by agency, trust building, and agency

communication. These findings have practical implications for adoption agencies so they can

understand clients' expectations, evaluate their current practices, and/or modify clients' social

support.

Assessing Preadoptive Experiences:

Parents' Reflections of Adoption Agencies' Social Support

Most adoption research has been conducted by scholars in the fields of social work, family relationships, and counseling and sex roles (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007; Goldberg & Smith, 2008; Kline, Karel, & Chatterjee, 2006; Miall & March, 2005). Each of these disciplines provide offered unique theoretical frameworks as lenses though which to view adoption, such as family stress theory (Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010) and adoptive family developmental stage theory (Wind, Brooks, & Barth, 2007). This study offers a new perspective through the field of communication with the use of expectancy violation theory (EVT). This theory gives insight into the experiences of the parents and contributes to our understanding about how couples' expectations influence the experience of adoption.

Specifically, in this qualitative study, we examined how couples' expectations influence their adoption experiences and how those expectations affect their perceptions about their adoption agencies' social support. Results from this study have practical implications for adoption agencies by helping them address clients' expectations, evaluate their current practices, and/or modify clients' social support.

Literature Review

Defining Terms

Adoption is a complex process that involves legal, social, relational, and communicative challenges. Although definitions for adoption vary among agencies and states, the terms as defined below are used consistently throughout. While this current study did not examine all defined terms, understanding the linguistic nuances is valuable as the study is introduced.

The *triad relationship* refers to the relationship among the adoptive parent, child, and biological parent (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007). The dynamics of the relationship change depending on the type of adoption, of which there are several. In a *closed adoption* only minimal information (perhaps medical) is exchanged between the adoptive family and biological parent and ceases after the adoption placement (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006; Miall & March, 2005). A *mediated adoption* involves an adoption agent as the liaison who facilitates an exchange of "pictures, letters, gifts" (Miall & March, p. 382). However, full identifying information is concealed between the adoptive and biological family (Miall & March). *Open adoptions* involve direct and on-going communication between the adoptive family and biological parent, but the degree of openness varies from case to case (Child Welfare Information Gateway; Miall & March).

To facilitate the adoption process, adoptive parents have several options. *Foster care adoptions* occurs when foster families adopt a foster care child who cannot be reunited with the biological family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006). *Domestic private agencies* charge between $4,000 and $30,000 for their services, including counseling for adoptive and biological parents (Cost of Adopting, 2011). *Domestic public adoption agencies* typically place special needs children (as defined by each state). *Domestic independent adoptions* involve biological parents and adoptive families who work with a lawyer (rather than an agency) to oversee the process. *International* or *intercountry private adoptions* are more expensive than domestic adoptions and the process is cumbersome due to immigration policies and each country's laws. Adoptive parents either travel to the country or accrue escorting fees. In this scenario, the cost of

an adoption can range from zero to over $30,000 (Child Welfare Information Gateway) and this process is typically the most taxing on the adoptive parents.

Process of Adoption

Adoptive families are required to complete extensive education, family and individual counseling, a home study (which must be annually renewed), questionnaires about what type of child they prefer, and (depending on the state) physical exams. This process can take from two to 10 months (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006). Using all this information, international adoption agencies begin communicating with the chosen country to find a suitable match and domestic adoption agencies and/or the adoptive families create a profile for birth mothers to review. The individual agencies are responsible for determining the couple's suitability to adopt by examining their motives and relational, economic, and psychological stability.

Once the adoptive family is approved, they begin the wait. Depending on agency type, the adoptive family is chosen by either the biological parent (who reviewed their profile) or the agency (based on the needs of the child). The wait time in the U.S. ranges from a few months to a few years; international adoptions generally involve a shorter waiting period (Goldberg & Smith, 2008). After the child is placed, an assigned social worker conducts several follow-up visits. The adoption is finalized within six to 12 months after the child is placed in the new home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006).

The waiting process can be arduous; unlike the arrival of a newborn after nine months of pregnancy, there is no predictable timetable for when the couple will receive a child. Often international, federal, or state policies are passed as a couple is in the middle of the adoption

process, which causes a delay. Policy surrounding the adoption process has continues to evolve

to protect the triad involved.

History of Adoption

From 1945 to 1973, single motherhood was so taboo that 1.5 million unwed women gave

their babies up for adoption (Joyce, 2009). Biological mothers were assured they were making

the right decision and would avoid public shaming, while adoptive parents were able to create

the façade of a 'real' family; original birth certificates were sealed to protect the triad. In the

1970s, adoption reform began in response to adopted children becoming adults who were

inquisitive about their biological families. This movement's guiding principle was to abolish the

practice of sealing adoption records and remove the secrecy that surrounded the adoption process

(Carp, 2002).

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act was passed in 1994 and eliminated discriminatory

practices that denied certain children placement; the Adoption and Safe Families Act, passed in

1997, reduced the "timeframe for courts and agencies in working toward permanency outcomes

for children in foster care" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2002, p. 7). The "right of

adopted adults to request their original birth certificate" (Carp, 2002, p. 454) was denied until

2000 when Measure 58 was passed. Even today, policy changes continue to be amended to

protect the triad involved in the adoption process.

The adoption process has changed through policy and also through new technology. The

newest phenomenon is online adoption. As the Internet's role increases in our day-to-day lives,

adoption agencies have capitalized on the Internet's prevalence, presenting themselves as

mediators to serve as "a place for waiting families to market or advertise themselves to birth

mothers trying to find potential families" (Wahl, McBride, & Schrodt, 2005, p. 282). Adoption has even made its way into social media, such as Facebook (York, 2009). The Internet and social media have expedited the adoption process. Adoptive parents are able to market themselves to birth mothers seeking potential parents, while agencies are able to advertise services. Wahl et al. found that many adoptive parents viewed the traditional adoption process as cumbersome while the online adoption process as a utopian experience. The researchers stressed the irony of this 'point and click' adoption process because it dehumanizes the child who becomes a product. Both the birth mother and adoptive parents get "caught up in telling their own stories" and the child is "neglected in the discourse" (Wahl et al., p. 288). Wahl et al. concluded that consumer metaphors emerge as the language insinuates that the child is a commodity and the adoption is a transaction.

The actions of Madonna, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Julia Roberts, and Sandra Bullock represent another emerging trend: celebrity adoption. These celebrities, some single and some married, have adopted domestically, transracially, and internationally. Although the details of each adoption were kept private, announcements of the new family member appeared on magazine covers and were well received by the public. The privacy and secrecy of pre-1970s adoptions have been transformed by the celebrity adoptions. Adoption discourse is now welcomed and acceptable, no longer a topic to avoid. To date, no study has been conducted to examine whether the celebrity trend has positively or negatively affected attitudes toward adoption. However, this trend does reflect the societal change of what 'counts' as a 'real' family.

Defining a 'Real' Family

The traditionally dominant American ideology of a 'real' family necessitated biological kinship (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007; Goldberg et al., 2010; Kline et al., 2006; Wegar, 2000). From 1940 to 1970, adopting non-blood relatives was considered abnormal or deviant, as evidenced by the secrecy of adoption, and attributed to a notion of a 'second-rate' family.

The stigma of being 'second-rate' is compounded when a couple faces infertility issues, as another dominant American ideology is couples should reproduce (Kline et al., 2006). Many who adopt because of infertility face emotional trials that those who are able to bear children will never experience. Adoptive parent must be approved as 'fit', and then established themselves as a real family, all the while facing the adversity of being 'second-rate.' Creating a family through adoption is uniquely challenging; yet it might be the only way for the couple to create a family. To say that parenthood is an informed choice for adoptive parents is an understatement. In the case of adoption, there are no 'oops' babies.

According to Wegar (2000), "although adoption in this society is viewed by many as a form of cultural deviance, it would oversimplify matters to claim that no alternative visions of family relations exists" (p. 367). Statistically, today's alternative family units are the norm, and include single parents, lesbian/gay parents, divorced parents, and adoptive parents, thus nullifying the mainstream ideology of what counts as a 'real' family (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007; Single Parent Center, 2010). Only some states have legalized gay adoptions and there are no government statistics on same-sex adoptions. However, *USA Today* reported 12,500 children were adopted by same-sex couples (Stone, 2006). According to the Single Parent Center, there are 14 million single parents raising 21.6 million children in the United States.

Single women's decision to adopt reflects a significant shift in what counts as a 'real' family. Womanhood is culturally "so closely linked to biological motherhood, it is not surprising that adoptive parent status has been shown to be a particularly discrediting social attribute for women" (Weger, p. 364), especially if she is single. However, single women who consciously adoption blur the connection between motherhood and intimate relationships (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik).

The socially constructed idea of what constitutes a family is slowing shifting to include families who adopt. At the same time, "we need to be cognizant of the social label used when speaking about adoption. It is the use of labels, their connection to undesirable attributes, and creation of separation and loss of status becomes the rationale for believing that labeled person are fundamentally different" (Kline et al., 2006, p. 497). As long as the label "adopted" precedes "brother," "sister," "son," or "daughter," the label "family member" and "family" will be fundamentally different (Wegar, 2000, p. 367). Although a family created through adoption differs from that of biological design, the family unit is still one to be valued.

To facilitate changing the mainstream perspective of what counts as a real family, Kline et al. (2006) suggested broadcast news as on outlet. Kline et al. used broadcast news as a gauge of the general public's understanding of and degree of stigmatization toward adoption and found that broadcast news "appears to represent the features of a changing family ideology" (p. 494). Miall and March (2005) also assessed general attitudes toward of adoption and the degree of acceptance toward the unique family units. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed supported the continuation of confidential adoptions. In contrast, the authors found 41% of the survey respondents somewhat approved of ongoing personal contact, 44% somewhat approved of

meeting before with a card or letter after the adoption, and 43% somewhat approved of only the exchange of cards and letters.

Miall and March's data revealed that people continue to have reservations about open adoptions. While Miall and March (2005) did not explore why participants were increasingly reluctant with the more open adoptions, they found that people still value the secrecy of adoptions, an attitude traced back to the 1950s. The influence of society's perceptions of adoption is significant as it still affects the family unit all the way to the adoption agency:

> Social scientists have identified the community as a stakeholder in the adoption with values and norms that can help inform clinical practice in policy development on adoption. For example, awareness of community values is essential for understanding how adoptive families may or may not be supported in the newly constituted forms of open adoption being advanced by clinicians and social workers. Social support, emotional support, and acceptance from the community or lack thereof may affect positively or negatively the families constituted. (Miall and March, p. 403)

Wegar (2000) stated that adoption agencies are just as likely as community members to "characterize adoptive parents as inferior to biological parents" (p. 367). Furthermore, social workers' language surrounding the biological mother (i.e., "real mother") sends contradictory messages to adoptive parents and could negatively influence adoptive parents' experiences. The acceptance of what constitutes a real family is hindered when an agency inadvertently projects the notion that adoptive families are second-rate or alternative. However, there are many resources available to lessen the barriers for parents wishing to adopt.

Adoption Resources

Adoption agencies offer a variety of resources for adoptive parents. "Pre-adoption preparation includes resources such as counseling, reading materials, information about the child's psychosocial history, psychological testing, and interaction with other adoptive parents" (Wind et al., 2007, p. 379). For example, one non-profit agency, Adoption Together, offers adoption preparation classes that provide "information about adoption and infant care, coping with the wait, setting up support for the baby's arrival, relationship with birth parents, bonding and attachment, marital stress during the transition to parenthood, and preparing siblings for the baby" (Adoption Together, 2010). Similar seminars like this are offered throughout the year across the country. In addition, *Adoptive Families* magazine provides a database of support groups across the U.S., with 485 currently listed (Adoptive Families, 2010). Unfortunately, researchers have neglected to measure the effectiveness of these resources, seminars, or support groups.

In addition to the increase in social support services, another trend for adoptive families is financial support. Chase Bank offers assistance with the cost of adoption. "The Chase program works like other home-equity loans, in that borrowers take out a line of credit against the equity in their homes, borrowing money and paying it back as they would a credit card" (Tedeschi, 2007). In 2007, of the "1,000 major employers, 45% of [those] companies offered financial adoption benefits, compared to 12% in 1990" (Tedeschi). While these benefits may make adopting more feasible for those who are unable to have children and without the means to adopt otherwise, they may also perpetuate the notion of a child as a commodity by capitalizing on the

economic component of adoption (Wahl et al., 2005). However, just because a couple can easily

afford the cost of adoption, does not guarantee a smooth adoption experience.

Adoption Experiences

Most of the adoption research has analyzed postadoption services rather than preadoptive

experiences. For example, Gunnar and Pollak (2007) found that poorly trained international

mental health professionals were unable to provide effective psychological services.

Furthermore, "postadoption services in most agencies are either absent or modest at best" (p.

381). However, more services are available to those adopt a special needs child, including

clinical, medical, educational, financial, and counseling resources (Wind et al., 2007). Wind et

al. examined postadoption service usage and found that general and clinical services increased

over an eight-year period for reasons ranging from behavior problems, difficulties with

attachment, learning, social relationships, and the negative affect on the family as a whole.

In another study about postadoption services, Atkinson and Gonet (2007) questioned

adoptive parents about their unmet needs, greatest challenges, and which services had been most

helpful. Results from this study helped the agency improve its postadoption services. Because

the preadoptive phase is a neglected area of study, in this current study, comprehensive data were

sought to improve preadoptive services by multiple agencies.

To begin filling the gap in knowledge about the preadoptive experience, Goldberg and

Smith (2008) compared lesbian and heterosexual couples' relationship quality and their social

support. They found that being in an extended and stable lesbian or heterosexual relationship

was "associated with higher levels of perceived support from friends" (p. 291) as well as family

members, as it "may communicate a message of permanency to family members" (p. 291). In the

study, couples that pursued domestic adoptions experienced more uncertainty, a sense of lack of control, and anxiousness than those who adopted internationally. The current study builds upon Goldberg and Smith's findings by examining the aspect of expectations and perceived social support.

In a more recent study, Goldberg et al. (2010) examined newly adoptive couple's relationship quality through intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics. They reported that "feelings of strain can be mitigated if couples feel that their agencies support them in practical and emotional ways, whereas negative agency encounters can exacerbate stress that may in turn affect family functioning" (p. 224). These positive and negative experiences can positively or negatively influence the adoptive couples' relationship quality (Goldberg et al.). While Goldberg et al. were unspecific in which communicative acts qualified as support, they did suggest more research is needed to understand "adoption-related coping" (p. 224).

Perceived Social Support

While a pregnancy lasts nine months, the wait to adopt a child has no definitive timetable; couples may wait a few months or a few years. The unpredictability of adoption necessitates a rich understanding of adoptive families' perceptions of their agencies' social support while they wait. However, these experiences have been neglected among social scientists, so inferences about agencies' social support are made from other social support groups.

Social support is "the existence and availability of people whom one can rely and who provide care" (Izaute et al., 2008, p. 759). Perceived social support can have a significant effect on one's subjective well-being, and traumatic experiences and sensitive issues often require a

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significant amount of social support (Izaute et al.). For instance, Izaute et al. reported a strong correlation between poor social support and depressive episodes among those recovering from a traumatic brain injury. The adoption process is a significant and sensitive issue that also requires social support as a way to help navigate through uncertainty and emotional trials. An implication for adoptive parents is that if agencies are perceived as unavailable or undependable, parents may experience anxiety or despondency.

The degree of social support perceived and its influence of client satisfaction has also been studied among women who had abortions (Upadhyay, Cockrill, and Freedman, 2010). They reported that peer counseling, support groups, and internet-based support, promoted the coping and well-being of the women. Perceived support increased with an established, sympathetic client-provider relationship characterized by feelings of comfort, understanding, respect, warmth, trust, and listening. Other indicators of perceived social support included assisting with decision making, offering supplemental sources of support, and addressing stigmas. Upadhyay et al. concluded that emotional care, a form of social support, is "a critical component of abortion services; clients rate this aspect as the most important factor influencing their overall satisfaction with abortion services" (p. 415).

Upadhyay et al. findings have clear implications for adoption agencies. Adoption agencies should be mindful of each couple's unique situation (e.g. needs and circumstances) and offer the most appropriate client-centered support. Specialized social support services should be tailored to address "each individual's varying desire for information and for shared decision-making" (Upadhyay et al., 2010, p. 416). Additionally, adoption agencies must be cognizant of their clients' expectations.

Expectations

In general, parental expectations about the adoption process have been neglected by scholars in all academic disciples. For this reason, the present study was conducted to examine a broad range of social services that are relevant to the adoption experiences. From the psychology field, we know that, "individuals have expectations of their role and the therapist's role with regards to the process of therapy" (Patterson, Uhlin, & Anderson, 2008, p. 528). When clients who expected to contribute to the therapy process fulfilled their expectations, they experienced a positive client/therapist relationship. This dynamic may also be true for the adoptive parents and adoption agency relationship. Adoptive parents separating their relationship with the agency and the wait for a child may be difficult; perhaps a short wait is equated with a positive relationship or experience. If an adoption agency identifies their clients' expectations at the beginning of the process, the agency may avoid contradictions between the clients' expectations and experiences.

Westra, Aviram, Barnes, and Angus (2010) also studied the expectations and experiences of individuals in therapy, but also employed expectancy violation theory (EVT) as a lens to frame their study and analyze their data. They reported that there were "discrepancies between initial expectations and actual experience" (p. 443). Specifically, "communication that violates expectations intensifies positive (i.e., disconfirmation of negative expectations) and negative (i.e., disconfirmation of positive expectations) evaluations of the communicator relative to communication that confirms expectations and, accordingly, influences subsequent interactions" (p. 443). When client's poor expectations about therapy were disconfirmed after having a positive experience with the therapist, it positively affects the experience and attitude toward therapy. Furthermore, it is important for therapists to violate client's negative

expectations since clients frequently have unrealistic or inaccurate expectations (Westra et al.). Westra et al. concluded that pretreatment interventions to clarify "role and process expectations" (p. 444).

Westra et al. study has implications for adoption agencies and adoptive parents. Adoption agencies should be mindful adoptive parents' initial expectations; but of comparable value adoption agencies should also recognize the importance of sustaining the relationship with each adoptive couple as they wait for a child. For example, a negative experience later in the process might cause the couple to regress to their initial negative expectations. Because people and their relationships are fluid and nonlinear, scholars and practitioners should be cognizant to adoptive couples in regards to expectations. One approach to understand adoptive couple's expectations is through expectancy violation theory.

Theoretical Framework

In this present study, expectancy violation theory is the framework within which to study adoptive parents' experiences with their agencies; EVT posits that expectancies and expectancy violations shape communicative experiences. The frequency with which people deviate from expected behaviors convinced Burgoon and Hale (1988) it is an "important communication issue to determine if and when such violations have favorable as opposed to detrimental consequences" (p. 58). Because there is limited knowledge on how expectations influence experiences within the preadoption process, the use of expectancy violation theory allows for greater insight with the adoptive couple and agency relationship.

Expectancy violation theory is used to study interpersonal interactions, specifically the expectations we project onto an experience or a person's behavior. Afifi and Burgoon (2000)

proposed that unexpected behavioral deviations regularly "disrupt interactions" (p. 203).

However, expectations are often unrealized. Furthermore, individuals have a range or latitude of

acceptable behavior (Afifi & Burgoon; Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Nevertheless, individuals

become keenly aware of their expectations when they are violated (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006).

Expectations and behaviors deemed unacceptable are shaped by a variety of issues, ranging from

communicator and relational characteristics, context and societal norms, to a person's unique

past experiences and idiosyncrasies (Burgoon & Hale; Mottet, et al., 2006). Often, an

individual's "behavior is first compared to a stereotype associated with a group category"

(Kernahan, Bartholow, & Bettencourt, 2000, p. 86) and these behavioral expectations are used as

a predictor of future behavior (Harris & Fiske, 2010).

When an expectation is violated, the violated person is aroused by the relevant act and by

the one who committed the violation; this is called "valance" (Burgoon & Hale, p. 61, 1988).

Violations are based on many factors (e.g., likelihood of future interaction or status) of the

participants and the costs and rewards of the relationship are also considered (Bachman &

Guerrero, 2006). A negatively valenced behavior is perceived as failing to meet behavioral

expectations; a positively valenced behavior is perceived as exceeding behavioral expectations

(Bachman & Guerrero). After evaluating the behavior, the violated person determines a net

valence by positively or negatively assigning meaning to the relationship, person, or experience.

Burgoon and Hale (1988) stated that, "the benefits of interacting with the communicator

outweigh the costs" (p. 62).

Originally, EVT was used to explore nonverbal expectancy violations; however, it has

been extended to other communication subject manner (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). For example,

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EVT has been used to demonstrate that gender stereotypes can lead to stereotype-consistent evaluations, in that "nurturing" male professors are evaluated more positively than "nurturing" female professors (Meltzer & McNulty, 2011). McLaughlin and Vitak (2012) explored social norm violations on the social network site, Facebook, and EVT has also been used to explain students' tolerance to instructor unavailability and student course workload expectations (Mottet, et al., 2006). Hackett, Day, and Mohr (2008) used EVT to understand "the relatively consistent finding that emotionally expressive rape victims are perceived as more credible" (p. 326). In each of these studies, the nonverbal communication, per se, did not determine social norms, students' tolerance, or a rape victim's credibility. On the contrary, it was the evaluator/receiver's expectations compared with the sender's behavior.

Expectancy violations can occur among individuals as well as within groups. Joardar (2011) found that newcomers from different culture would violate a group's expectation of him or her by disconfirming the expectation. Group members altered their attitudes if the newcomer exceeded or failed to meet the task-based or relationship-based expectations. Joardar's study suggests that the adoptive parents' expectations may be readjusted based on of positively or negatively valenced behavior.

Two studies have especially clear relevance to adoptive parents' experiences with adoption agencies. In the first, Bachman and Guerrero (2006), labeled EVT as a "promising framework for explaining" relational quality and communicative responses after hurtful events in dating relationships (p. 958). Researchers reported that "negative valence was the chief variable distinguishing those who broke up from those who stayed together" and "hurtful events that cause uncertainty likely lead people to reevaluate their relationships as less secure and stable" (p.

959). Congruent with EVT's assumption, the participants reported that hurtful events are perceived as a negative valance and there is less relational satisfaction and constructive communication. Thus, EVT proves to be a promising framework for understanding the adoptive parents' experiences with their agency.

The second relevant study used EVT outside the context of interpersonal communication. Expectancy violation theory was used in marketing communication to assess the effectiveness of health communication campaigns (Campo, Cameron, Brossard, & Frazer, 2004). The targeted audience experienced "a violation of their expectation of the actual behavioral norm when receiving a message containing a statistic that is discrepant from their perception of the norm" (p. 542). Expectancy violation theory explained how social norms' messages may work to change judgments surrounding health issues, like alcohol use. Based on Campo et al.'s findings, expectancy violation theory may give insight to if and how expectations evolve as parents learn about and experience the adoption process.

The preadoption process has been sorely under researched. Moreover, the research about the preadoption process focuses on gender roles. Expectancy violation theory has never been applied to the subject matter of adoption nor the relationship between the parents and the adoption agency. This current study contributes to two areas of scholarly interest: applying EVT to the adoption agency and adoptive couple relationship and exploring the preadoption process.

The Current Study

After thoroughly examining the current literature surrounding EVT, there is gap in understanding expectations and violated expectations throughout the adoption process. While researchers have examined initial expectations, there is limited research about on-going

relationships and how expectations evolve and influence experiences. Westra et al. (2010) examined cognitive-behavioral therapy clients' "retrospective post-treatment accounts of both initial expectations and experiences" (p. 437). Although understanding how initial expectations influence experiences is significant, Harris and Fiske (2010) suggested that "people are constantly adjusting their perception of other individuals" (p. 78). Similarly, Rycyna, Champion, and Kelly (2009) stated "in on-going relationships, the receiver has common experiences with the sender and can evaluate the current experience while keeping the remembered impressions in mind" (p. 41). Expectations are constantly being confirmed or violated through interactions, and are then re-evaluated to form new expectations. However, "process expectations have received less research attention" (Westra, et al., 2010, p. 436). Thus, EVT helps identify the adoptive parents' expectations while giving insight to how those expectations influence the interactions between the adoption agency and adoptive parents.

Since the adoption agency links the parents to a child, one may assume that the parents associate the agency with a high level of valence. Adoptive parents enter the relationship with the adoption agency with a set of expectations, for example, how long they will wait and the service and support that will be rendered. As these expectations are confirmed or violated, it affects the parents' perspectives as they move through the adoption process.

The current qualitative study examined the experiences of married couples that adopted an international, transracial, or domestic infant. The following research questions were explored:

RQ [1:] What were the adoptive parents' expectations of the adoption agency's social

support during the preadoptive phase?

RQ$_{2:}$ How did those expectations influence the adoptive parents' perceptions of the

adoption agency during the preadoptive phase?

Methodology

Participants

Participants were identified through purposive sampling in order to select couples who

had experienced adoption, which corresponds with the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Inclusion

criteria for the study were the following: (a) couples must have adopted internationally,

transracially, or domestically; (b) couples must have adopted an infant (0 to 18 months old); (c)

couples must have adopted within the past five years; and (d) couples must be heterosexual.

Exclusion criteria for the study were the following: (a) couples who adopted a special needs

child; (b) couples who went from being foster care parents to adoptive parents; (c) gay/lesbian

couples who adopted; (d) those who did not use an adoption agency; and (e) couples who

adopted a relative.

Initial participants, often referred to as seeds, are recruited through the researcher's

contacts and then from other referrals (Johnston & Sabin, 2010). This method is beneficial when

the studied group is very small. Parents who have internationally, transracially, or domestically

adopted an infant fall into this category. Because the nature of adoption is a personal and

emotional process, the researcher attempted to gain the truest understanding of the participant's

experiences by establishing a relationship with or expressing a sincere interest in a significant

event in their lives.

Snowballing methods was used to form the sample group. This non-probability sampling

method has been criticized when researchers generalize the data to larger populations (Magnani,

Sabin, Saidel, & Heckathorn, 2005). To overcome this, the data collected in this current study remained tied to the experiences of those interviewed.

Data Collection

One member of the couple was sent an e-mail (Appendix A) requesting the couple's participation. Those who agreed completed the consent form (Appendix B), and each member of the couple read, signed, and returned it via e-mail or postal mailing. Once the consent was returned, the researcher and couple determined a mutually agreeable time to conduct the in-depth semi-structured interview. Couples were interviewed through Skype, a free, internet-based video conferencing program. All participation was voluntary. An alternative option given was to withdraw consent and discontinue participation.

The study posed minimal risk for participants. This investigation may have caused emotional discomfort as the participants reflected on past experiences. Although some questions might have been uncomfortable, participants were fully informed by the consent form that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Additionally, the researcher directed them to their agency, local adoption support group, or social worker if they appeared to need counseling. Pseudonyms were given to interviewees, their children, and the adoption agency personnel to protect their confidentiality. Further, participants were protected based on the assurance of strict confidentiality during and after the research process.

A potential benefit to participants is that the process might have served as a form of social support by allowing the participants to share their experiences with someone who was interested in a subject that is of great significant to them. Another benefit of the study was the implicit commitment to using the information gathered to try and improve the communication

relationship among adoptive parents, adoption agencies, families, and friends. Thus, participants'

informed views could contribute to future improvements of communication techniques in these

relationships.

Coding Procedures

To understand the expectations and perceptions of the adoption agency's social support,

the researcher focused on the couple's subjective reality of their social world throughout the

adoption process. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions allowed couples to disclose

their experiences and the researcher opportunities to ask for clarification as needed. This

conversational interview style facilitated the best comprehension of the couple's preadoptive

experience.

In this study, six couples were interviewed; four couples adopted internationally and two

couples adopted domestically. The interviews lasted from 25 to 37 minutes and were conducted

through Skype from each couple's home. Five couples were White and their adoption created an

interracial family; one couple adopted a White child. Children were adopted from the U.S.,

Ethiopia, and China. Two couples were childless prior to their adoption. Four of the couples

disclosed fertility issues as the reason to adopt.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. No

qualitative software was used. Each transcribed interview was read several times until emerging

themes provided understanding about the couple's preadoptive experiences with their adoption

agency. By becoming "intimately familiar with the data," the researcher developed a "heightened

sense of awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle,

tacit undercurrents of social life" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). In this immersion

strategy "categories are not preconfigured" and "rely heavily on the researcher's intuitive and interpretive capacities" (p. 155). When the researcher needed clarification on a statement made by a participant, the researcher would contact them for explanations to ensure proper analysis.

Themes in each interview were compared to other interview's themes to discover patterns among the couples' stories. Repeated concepts were identified and labeled. Emerging codes that were similar to one another were combined into a single code. Codes were constantly compared to ensure mutual exclusivity. Five themes emerged: use of referrals, preferred characteristics of agency, education provided by agency, trust building, and agency communication.

Validity Issues

There are some issues of validity within this study that are necessary to address. While the use of snowball sampling "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know cases are information rich" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 71), it may also lead to a homogenous group of participants. To counteract this threat, the researcher used contacts and referrals from across the U.S. and six different agencies were represented in the study.

The modified the criterion of the study created another validity issue. The original required age limit of the adopted child was 18 months because the researcher wanted to focus on families who adopted infants. However, finding participants who met all qualifiers was problematic. Many who expressed interest in participating in the study did not meet age requirement and there was a low response rate of those who did meet all of the qualifications. The criterion was expanded from 18 months to 3 years old so the study could include adopted infants to toddlers. One couple fell into the new requirements of the study. The interview's findings were congruent with the findings from the other couples interviewed.

Results

Adoptive Parents

Tom and Mona

Tom and Mona chose to adopt after Mona had an emergency hysterectomy. They chose a small but not local agency, Generations Adoption Agency, after speaking with a relative who had previously used the agency and had a positive experience. Tom and Mona wanted a "personal connection rather than being in a sea of waiting families." They constantly experienced Generations "personal touch," especially because the agency director was always available and responded to their communication "within a day."

During the nine months Tom and Mona waited for their newborn, Stephanie, they became involved in a support group unconnected to Generations. Tom and Mona were in the hospital with the birth mother when Stephanie was born. They felt connected to, and well educated by, the agency throughout the process of the open domestic adoption.

Annie and Patrick

Annie and Patrick chose The Helping Hand because Christian musician Steven Curtis Chapman has used the agency and one of their friends was using The Helping Hand at the time. Annie and Patrick felt the agency was slow to answer specific questions about forms and processes. Annie and Patrick were frustrated because although their preferred communication was via phone, The Helping Hand wanted to do everything by email. Even more disturbing, the only personal communication came from through the case worker who regularly sent group emails "just brow beating the clients."

After a two year wait, Annie and Patrick adopted 10 month old Kaylee from China. The six-family group with which Annie and Patrick traveled to China also expressed similar frustrations about the agency. Eventually, three of the 6 families adopted again but through another agency. If Annie and Patrick were to adopt again, they too would use another agency.

Joan and Dan

Unable to have biological children and acquaintance recommended Bethany Christian Services to Joan and Dan and they use Bethany twice to adopt their toddler daughters from China. Having a local agency with a physical office was important to Joan and Dan. Joan appreciated being able to drop in as needed and she communicated weekly with the organization. Bethany's staff was encouraging and reassuring for the family as they waited.

The Bethany personnel was calm and extremely helpful when paperwork mistakes were made and when Joan and Dan missed their flight to China to pick up first daughter, Lynn. The organization's helpfulness and professionalism continued from the United States to China. The first adoption was a two year process and the second adoption was a 16 month process.

Rachel and Adam

Rachel and Adam chose to adopt after discovering that they were unable to have children. They chose Bethany Christian Services after hearing a radio advertisement. They wanted an agency with a local office that was popular and had a lot of publicity. Bethany Christian Services has 80 offices across the United States and have placed 1,937 children with adoptive parents (Bethany, 2010). Rachel and Adam were unacquainted with anyone who adopted domestically so they primarily relied on online reviews. They were required to complete nine weeks of education

classes that they deemed unhelpful. Rachel and Adam were disappointed with Bethany's impersonal and infrequent communication.

After waiting two years for a placement with Bethany, Rachel and Adam were approached by an acquaintance who "was having a baby and needed to make a plan." Bethany's home study and adoption services were transferred to an attorney who arranged to place the newborn with Rachel and Adam. Thereafter, they transferred to another agency, Miriam's Promise, which was recommended by the attorney to complete the adoption process. They were highly dissatisfied with Bethany's services, but found Miriam's Promise to be less expensive as well as providing a pleasant experience.

Gina and Jose

Gina suffered several miscarriages and had a hysterectomy which led Gina and Jose to adopt. Originally they wanted to adopt from Vietnam but in the middle of the process, Vietnam closed to U.S. adoptions. They began looking online for an agency with Ethiopian adoptions and chose Celebrate Children because it was a smaller agency that advertised a "personal touch."

Although the agency was geographically distant, Gina and Jose always felt connected because Celebrate Children "made themselves very accessible." The agency also provided a multitude of educational resources about international adoption and interracial families. Gina and Jose waited one year to adopt their toddler daughter, Samantha. During the wait, they participated in a live chat room, received weekly updates, and even had videos of Samantha to stay connected until they could travel to get her. The director traveled with Gina and Jose and her presence put them at ease.

Kim and Scott

Kim and Scott adopted because they felt God wanted them to do so. After deciding to adopt internationally from Ethiopia, Kim and Scott joined a Yahoo online group to view parents' reviews of agencies. They chose Adoption Associates because this organization allowed them to adopt two children at once. Kim chatted online with a mother who enthusiastically articulated her positive experience with Adoption Associates and it reaffirmed Kim and Scott's choice.

The paperwork process was smooth and explicitly laid out for Kim and Scott. Each week Kim and the caseworker communicated through phone conversations and email. Kim and Scott waited 20 months to adopt their daughters. Although their experience in the States was positive, once they arrived in Ethiopia they learned what they were told in the States was incomplete and inaccurate. Furthermore, the traveling case worker was uninformed about their children, ignorant about cultural norms, and inadequately prepared Kim and Scott for the trip to get their children.

Themes

Use of Referrals

The use of referrals and outside support varied from celebrity endorsement to a direct referral from someone who had used the agency. Tom and Mona chose an agency used by a relative who had a good experience. Tom and Mona's expectations were shaped by the conversations they had with this relative and through others they knew that other adoptive parents they knew. Mona said:

> When you talk to people and you hear how their stories played out it just kinda gives you hope that if all these people had adoption work out for them, it's going to work for us too. It's good to hear from people that have been through the whole process and see that it does happen and it will happen.

Both Kim and Scott and Gina and Jose trusted the reviews of strangers while researching agencies online. Kim found a helpful Yahoo discussion board a resource she enthusiastically shares with others: "This part I like tell everyone. It was a very detailed rating. I just liked the feedback it provided."

Kim and Scott decided to use an average-rated agency and chatted online with a mother who articulated her experience. Kim valued the other woman's input, saying, "She was just able to describe the experience of traveling to Ethiopia and working with the people. So she had a really positive experience and that's what kinda sealed the deal."

Adam and Rachel were unacquainted with anyone who had adopted, nor did they engage in adoption chat rooms or blogs online. They chose their agency based on its publicity through the radio. No one they spoke with had any direct interaction with Bethany Christian Services. Rachel recalled:

> There wasn't a ton of people that knew a lot about it but everybody was like 'oh yeah, we've heard of Bethany. They're big.' And we read reviews about it. We really didn't really talk to anybody. We didn't know anybody that adopted through any agencies in Tennessee expect for like foster.

Adam and Rachel had, unquestionably, the worst adoption experience from among the interviewed couples. They were also the only couple lacking any communication with someone who had used their chosen agency. Their experience was so troubled they eventually changed agencies for their post-placement visits and chose the new agency because of a direct referral. Adam explained how they selected the new agency:

…what sealed the deal for me was when our adoption attorney is on a first name basis

with one of the ladies at Miriam's Promise...she is on a first name basis with Miriam's

Promise and works with them and knows them…and because we thought the world of her

it made their credibility rise in our eyes.

Like Adam and Rachel, Annie and Patrick also did not have a direct referral to a specific

agency. Instead, they relied on a celebrity endorsement. Annie remembered thinking, "If he used

it I'm sure it's a really good organization." Yet when Patrick reflected on their experience with

the agency, he called it "frustrating." Both couples who expressed frustration or disappointment

with their agency also did not have or use a direct referral. However, all couples, whether using a

referral or not, had preferred characteristics of their agencies.

Preferred Characteristics of Agency

Agencies were chosen for different reasons, yet each couple had certain desirable

characteristics for the agency. Rachel liked that Bethany was a well-known and established

agency and Adam knew that he want a local agency presence. Joan and Dan also valued having a

local office and the organization having a physical presence. Joan said:

…I was very concerned about not having an office to go in and ask questions- that

everything would be long distance…it was impetuous [important] for us to go with an

agency that was out of Michigan but has an office here in town. So that is how we chose

Bethany was because they're hands on…and our ability to go right into a local office, ask

questions, sit down with them, instead of do everything over the internet.

After researching agencies online, Gina and Jose called to interview the agencies. They

wanted an agency with a shared philosophy and transparent bookkeeping. Gina recalled:

We wanted to know if it was a Christian agency. We wanted to know were things on the

up and up as far as where the money was going, was there a good record keeping of

money that was being spent and that kinda stuff.

Another important characteristic for Gina and Jose was having a smaller agency. Jose explained:

…really liked them because they were a smaller group. It wasn't one of the huge ones.

We kinda chose them, one, because how they did things kinda resonated with us- just the

real personal touch they gave to us and leading us through the whole process.

Mona and Tom were looking for a smaller agency as well because they thought there

would be individualized attention. Mona stated, "We really didn't feel led to be in a large agency

because we kinda felt…we liked the idea of having a more personal connection rather than being

in a sea of waiting families."

In contrast, Rachel and Adam liked the idea of the exposure and networking opportunities

of a larger and established agency. Rachel reflected, "In our minds, we were looking for a big

agency that had been around for a while and had a lot of publicity out there." Rachel and Adam

also recognized that the agency's size and resources allowed the process to be run more

smoothly. Rachel commented, "I was very impressed initially with their organization."

Each couple, for varying reasons, were looking for an agency that made an ethos appeal

(an established agency), pathos appeal (an emotional connection), or logos appeal (transparent

and sensible bookkeeping) to satisfy their desires. These appeals were often satisfied through the

agency's education process.

Education Provided by Agency

The education provided by the agency played a major role in the formation of the expectations about the agency. Joan and Dan's initial interaction with their agency was quite informative and foreshadowed a mutually vested interest in their pursuit of adoption. Joan recalled:

> Our case worker was really sensitive when we came in and said we want to adopt. She was very sensitive in going through some of the steps to make sure we weren't doing a knee jerk reaction- like asking us about domestic, asking us about Russia, asking about a child that looked like us, you know. After talking to us for a while and realizing we were set on China…they asked some pretty good questions to make sure we were set on that.

Mona and Tom's agency educated the couple about the types of adoption, particularly open adoption. The agency provided an article about teenagers who grew up knowing about their adoption, and Mona and Tom were deeply affected by this resource. Mona reflected on that article:

> I think a big thing they run into is that a lot of people are intimidated by an open adoption. They were always looking for ways to broaden your understanding of some of the different types of adoption. So I remember during the waiting time reading that study and feeling like it was really helpful.

Tom was initially hesitant about an open adoption: "Open adoption seems a little extreme for me at first." Though prayer and using agency-provided resources, Tom spent a significant amount of time reflecting on open adoption. Now Tom feels much differently about open adoptions, "Today it's something I wouldn't do any other way."

The procedural education provided to Kim and Scott was thorough. Kim said, "They were really helpful. The steps were very well laid out. Their paperwork- it's like a binder of instructions to get your paperwork!" Adam and Rachel also felt adequately trained in the adoption process. Adam said,

> They did a good job helping to prepare us and talk us through a lot of…like in those initial training classes that were more like 'this is what is involved in adoption and this is what the process looks like with Bethany.' In those early classes, I felt like it was very informative.

In contrast, Gina and Patrick experienced many occasions when Gina had to take a day off of work to meet a deadline for a step in the process. Patrick said, "We never got a complete picture." Although Gina and Patrick's agency did a poor job with procedural education, they were pleased that the agency provided a rich understanding of Ethiopian culture and interracial families. Gina recalled that the agency supplied them with

> tons of books about Ethiopia, different Ethiopia cultures, stuff that we needed to know, and just basic books about bonding, attachment….Our favorite book was *I'm Chocolate and You are Vanilla*. Those books were a great resource for us bringing home a child with an interracial adoption. It was a great resource for us.

Tom and Mona echoed Gina and Patrick's sentiment. For example, Mona said, "Our agency wanted us to write a report on every book we had read with thoughts we had and what we gained from it and that kinda thing and we were supposed to turn that in."

When asked about the education provided by the agency, Rachel and Adam recalled the many lengthy classes they were required to attend for nine weeks. Rachel felt that most of the

classes "didn't apply to us." For example, one class was on adopting a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome or special needs and those were conditions that Rachel and Adam were unwilling to consider for adoption. Rachel said, "those classes didn't prepare you for what could actually happen."

According to Adam and Rachel, the best classes involved attending "play groups with people that had adopted." This was particularly valuable because Adam and Rachel had no exposure to others who adopted prior to their decision to adopt. Rachel said that learning about the adoption process through the play groups was "more helpful than the classes" because "you heard people's story and it at least gave you some kind of idea in your mind of 'oh, it could happen like that. It could happen like that.'"

Kim and Scott had felt prepared and informed in the States but when they arrived in Ethiopia they realized that the agency did not educate or prepare them about fundamental and vital cultural practices. In fact, Kim questioned her case worker's familiarity with her adoptive children's cases. Kim said,

> She really didn't know…she didn't understand where our kids were from. She didn't
> understand where they were exactly. And I don't think she really understood
> geographically Ethiopia…Like, you are supposed to bring gifts to give to everyone. Well,
> ya know, our lady didn't really understand that we had two kids from two different cities
> but they were both in Adis. So we visited three different orphanages that our kids…where
> they had been and where they were now and we were supposed to bring about seven gifts
> per orphanage. Well, we didn't bring the right amount of gifts because she told us that we
> would be two days in this one city.

Kim and Scott's case worker's poor training made her unable to educate and prepare Kim and Scott. Kim commented that they were "really unprepared for the travel, for the gift things-which was very offensive" and, as a result, the orphanages were "upset with us." Overall, Kim felt like "It was hard to work with somebody who [was] giving us information about Ethiopia who had never been there."

Education provided by the agency was extremely important in shaping expectations of the adoption process. The more meaningful information provided, whether procedural, cultural, or about types of adoptions (e.g., open or interracial), helped ease nerves and even expanded thinking about what adoption could entail.

Trust Building

An agency's ability to build trust with their clients' seemed to influence the perception of the organization. Jose and Gina's agency director established trust early on in the adoption process. Gina liked that the director "had met every child that was on their waiting list." The director maintained credibility because she frequently traveled to Ethiopia. Gina said, "we knew we would have frequent checkups and be able to get pictures if the process was long. So that really meant a lot to us as well." The director traveled with Jose and Gina when they went to Ethiopia, and because of their confidence and trust in the director, they felt at ease. Jose recalled his experience with the agency director:

> …she knew the ins and outs of Ethiopia and it was a first for us being there and really, I guess in a way, held our hand through and walked us through it all. It was… I think her being there kept us at ease about things. When we went to the embassy to do some

paperwork things, ya know, it took away some of that nervousness so just having her

there, her presence, was helpful.

Gina echoed Jose's feelings about the agency director, stating, "she had done that hundreds of

times so it was kinda just no big deal to her and it kinda put us at ease."

Trust building was developed through frequent office visits for Joan and Dan. Joan would

"stop by that Bethany office just because of nothing." Joan felt comfortable seeking "some

reassurance" from the agency. Joan said the case worker would "reassure me that our time was

coming and it was good. It was very positive." In fact, Joan expressed she felt safe enough to

share her insecurities about adopting without fearing judgment. She said during a conversation

with her case worker:

> I just remember crying, just getting teary, saying, 'I'm just so nervous about being a
>
> mother. I don't know if I'll do a good job.' And I remember our case worker said, 'That's
>
> a good sign. If you are worried about being a mom then you are going to do great'…and
>
> she sat and listened to me and was very supportive and very encouraging…There was just
>
> a support for us.

Joan and Dan liked that they had the same case worker that followed them through the

process and who allowed them to be transparent. Joan confessed:

> I really needed more emotional support. And so with the consistency with working with
>
> the same people in the same office, the emotional support was fantastic. There was a
>
> couple of times, I think, that I shed a few tears about the big decision, the big step we
>
> were taking. And because I had a relationship with them, I was able to be vulnerable and

they were able to be vulnerable. It wasn't just a case worker that they had brought in. It

was someone who followed us from beginning to end.

Dan and Joan's trust in their agency was reinforced when they missed their flight to

Beijing to pick up their first daughter. They immediately called their agency for guidance and the

agency quickly put them at ease. Joan said, "I will never forget this, they said, 'go get a hotel

[room] there at the airport, rest, relax, catch tomorrow's flight, and just catch up with your group

when you get there'. I mean they were so relaxed and so calming."

Jose and Gina's agency established trust through honesty, and it was welcomed by the

couple. Gina said, "If they couldn't tell us something they would say, 'I have no idea' and we

appreciated that. At least we knew something!" Jose and Gina felt comfortable asking for

clarification on topics because of how the agency positively responded to their inquiries. Jose

said, "We asked a lot of repetitive questions. We never felt, I never felt like a pest. I think that is

what they are there for. They are there to help us along with this journey and that's what they

do." Jose went on to say, "if we felt the need to make a phone call we would pick up the phone

right then. We felt like we could do that." Gina and Jose's agency nurtured a trusting relationship

as evidenced by the couple constantly reaching out for support.

On the other hand, some couples' agencies were uninterested in establishing rapport that

fostered trust. Patrick said their case worker "would send group emails out blasting the entire

group if one person, one client she was working with asked too many questions or was being

rude or got emotional." Patrick attributed her aggressive emails to her personal insecurities and

lack of maturity. He said, "It was a maturity issue, I really do think…that speaks to the

organization, Helping Hand. I think most of our negative experience ended up being with an

employee or two that was the face of the organization for us." Annie characterized the case

worker's emails as "brow beating." Yet, Annie rationalized the impatient and insensitive emails

because she,

> wasn't married, she didn't have any kids, she had never adopted. I think that had she
>
> known what we were going through, if she had adopted herself, that would have made, I
>
> think, her a little bit more compassionate to what was going on.

> Rachel and Adam's agency also failed at establishing trust. This a perception was

influenced by the agencies hands-off attitude, particularly when they were experiencing

insecurities or frustrations. Rachel recalled, "I didn't want to be that person who was like calling

the agency saying 'What's going on? Has anything happened?' Being like the nagging person…"

Adam said, "We didn't want to be perceived as the people either who were flakey or freaking

out, like we didn't want that to hurt our chances for placement, ya know?" Rachel and Adam felt

disconnected from the agency, particularly when they went "for 6 months without hearing a

word" from their agency.

> After the sixth month, Adam called the agency to ask whether their profile was even

active. He said the case worker "took offense that I would challenge or question their integrity

and they really had a problem with that." The disconnection led to a lack of trust that the agency

was supportive of Adam and Rachel's desire to adopt. Adam and Rachel viewed the agency as

"the people who are going to decide if we get a baby or not". They feared that expressing

insecurities would influence the agency's perception, and as a result, influenced whether they

received a child. Adam said he feared the agency would say "'oh, we shouldn't take the Adam

and Rachel's profile. They really are…ya know, out there.' We didn't want to change our perception."

Despite both couples using local agencies, Adam and Rachel's nonexistent trust toward their agency was remarkably contrasting with Joan and Dan's experience. Adam and Rachel felt distrust toward their agency and uncomfortable reaching out for support. Yet, Joan and Dan felt a high degree of trust toward their agency and frequently reached out for emotional support. Clearly, establishing trust with clients is very significant as it shaped their perception of and experience with the organization.

Agency Communication

Frequency

Annie readily admitted that her experience with their agency was "not a good one" and infrequent communication was a major contributor. The agency rarely communicated with them. Patrick said, "It was frustrating waiting-waiting for information, specific answers to specific questions on forms and processes." Annie added, "we wouldn't hear from them and then a deadline within a day or two, they would call and say, 'you've got to get this right now'. I'm a teacher and I've taken off days…they didn't give you any warning."

Joan contacted the agency for reassurance about every other week throughout the process and Gina and Kim spoke weekly with their agency. On the other hand, Rachel contacted the agency "maybe every two or three months through email just to touch base about something or make up some question to have about something." The agency would quickly reply but almost never initiated contact with Rachel and Adam. This was a major source of frustration,

particularly when they received a notice "it was time to update our profile and send them another check."

Rachel and Adam had different expectations or philosophies for the agency's communication frequency. Adam recalled the conversation he had with the agency after not hearing from them in six months:

> I said to our case worker, 'we need to hear from you guys, we need to hear something even if we weren't being placed' and her response to us was 'ya know we are here for you. We are here any time. We don't know when it's a good time or a bad time to contact our families so we kinda leave it up to you guys to contact us when you need us.' And I said, 'Eh, I disagree with your approach.'

Adam and Rachel expected the adoption process to take a year or even two. What they did not expect was infrequent communication with the agency. Adam said, "You always hope it goes quicker, but we expected a year or even a couple of years; but we expected to be shown. We expected to hear something. We expected that there would be some level of contact."

Medium

A contributor to the formation of perceptions of the agency was the medium of communication. For example, Kim and Scott preferred to receive information from their agency via email. Tom and Mona said their agency was very quick to respond over email and they also received a quarterly newsletter with agency updates. Jose and Gina were unbothered by the lack of face-to-face communication with the long-distance agency because they were available in many other ways. Jose said that technology enabled them,

> To keep things close. You felt like you were close although they were in Florida because whenever we would have a question we would pick up the phone and call them and they

> were very very…they made themselves very accessible. And even getting online, they
>
> had a really good website that answered all your questions and that helped a whole lot. So
>
> really, that wasn't a big concern for us.

The agency also offered online live chats, allowing them to stay connected with the agency and others who were adopting. Welsh et al. (2007) noted that "opportunities for interactions with other adoptive parents" is a best practices model (p. 303). Through these interactions via live chat groups, Gina and Jose were able to receive up-to-date information. Gina said:

> They gave us weekly updates and our agency had a great chat room so we had live chat
>
> once a week. So people who had traveled would be on there and they would talk about
>
> 'we visited such and such orphanage and I saw all of these kids.' So we were getting
>
> hands-on information from other parents and then our agency director traveled and we
>
> got information like that.

> In contrast, Annie and Patrick grew weary of the absence of face-to-face communication

or even phone calls. Annie expressed her frustration:

> They wanted to do everything through email. They never wanted to talk to me on the
>
> phone. That was really frustrating...Really the only time we got anything from them-
>
> personal things- was when our case worker was fed up with someone else or if I had a
>
> question and would call, she would email me. She never called- never. It was always by
>
> email.

Availability

> The availability and responsiveness influenced the agency's credibility. Kim commented

on their adoption agency's availability: "I could call them at any time and was always able to

talk to a person every day and [they would] usually respond to email that day. So the communication was very good."

Rachel and Adam perceived their agency to be unavailable, particularly because of the infrequent communication. Conversely, Tom said, "they seemed very approachable and they maintained that all the way through. We never felt at any point that we just couldn't get the information we needed from them." In fact, the agency's availability made the waiting period manageable. Tom said, "The director was always available. That was one of the cool things with being with a small agency. If we had a question- I remember a couple of times we'd email her directly and she'd respond within a day." When Tom was asked in what ways he felt supported by the agency, he said, "Just knowing that they were available. The director was always available just by email." Moreover, Tom valued the personal communication given by the director . He said, "I mean you know how it is when people get busy. But we never got an email from an administrative assistant. She gave access to us to her and she would respond in a real timely manner."

Mona often referred to her relative's experience throughout their own adoption process. Mona recalled her cousin's advice:

> She said that if she went so long without hearing from them she would just give them a call to check in and they were always open to that. So I guess in the back of my mind because she had said that if I felt like I felt disconnected from the agency at any point, since she had done that, I thought, well, I can always give them a call and check in.

Content

When changes in Ethiopian adoption procedures occurred, Kim said the agency did "the best they could with communicating that." They apologized because it was often on short notices and because changes often meant an additional expense that was outside the agency's control. Kim and Scott's agency kept them fully briefed on the status of their children and how many children were being placed. Kim said, "I mean if anything they almost provided a little too much communication on some parts." For example, the agency would tell the waiting couples how many children were placed each month and some months there were few children placed. Nevertheless, Kim and Scott agreed that while it was hard to hear, knowing what was happening or not happening kept them involved in the process. Jose and Gina felt the same way; they found out their daughter had gotten sick in Ethiopia before they arrived. While it was difficult knowing they could not care for their daughter, they were glad the agency told them about their daughter's condition.

Tom and Mona's agency sent out a monthly prayer email and update of "things that were happening in the agency" along with a quarterly newsletter. Mona said, "They sent out quarterly a newsletter with pictures and every single family…where a child was placed with an adoptive family. So you really got a sense of what was going on and what was happening." Mona also was able to stay connected through the agency's website on which had "usually eight to ten waiting families posted. So when they disappeared you knew they had decided not to continue with the process or they had been matched with a child. So you got to see how things were progressing."

Communication, the use of referrals, education provided by agency, and trust building were all key components for the formation of the couples' perceptions of their agency. Based on

the positive and negative experiences identified by the couples, there are practical implications

for adoption agencies to be more cognizant of their clients' expectations by evaluating their

current practices and/or modifying social support given to clients.

Discussion

This study highlights the importance of building a positive relationship with the adoption

agency and can inform agency practitioners in developing effective communication strategies.

For example, it is essential for an agency to be aware of adoptive parent's expectations in order

to understand how the parent may or may not feel supported. Social support from the adoption

agency, or lack thereof, may invariably influence the adoptive parents' perceptions about the

experience. In current study revealed that social support is demonstrated in a variety of ways,

including a compassionate and understanding case worker as well as education and frequent

communication. Education and communication reduce uncertainty and reinforce or reframe

expectations. In addition, the social support perceived by the parents affect their expectations and

is important to gain an understanding of the preadoptive experiences.

Confirming Expectations

The current study revealed a wide range of expectations regarding the preadoptive

experience. Expectations were initially formed through referrals. The parents who spoke with

someone one-on-one had a better understanding of the process than those who used a celebrity

endorsement or none at all. For example, Tom and Mona used Generations Adoption Agency

after speaking with Mona's cousin, who had used the organization. Tom and Mona referred back

to the cousin's experiences, asked questions, and made comparisons. Mona felt comfortable

reaching out to the agency during the waiting time because she knew that her cousin had done

the same. Oppositely, Rachel and Adam knew no one who had used Bethany Christian Services and, thus, were unable to refer to someone's experiences during the waiting process.

The variety of preferred characteristics of an adoption agency indicates that agencies must avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach to adoption. This study revealed that parents had a list of desired characteristics. Based on the preferred characteristics and the experiences of the participants, findings suggest the agency must be cognizant that parents come with a range of knowledge on the organization, whether it is from a referral, online chat group, or from a radio advertisement. The agency must also be aware of the major role they have in educating their clients with information about the agency and its practices. Additionally, parents should be encouraged to ask many questions during initial meetings with the agency and seek out couples who have adopted through their agency to find out about their experiences (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Addressing all of these issues will help adoptive parents develop realistic expectations.

Violating Expectations

While expectations were often not cognitized, parents were keenly aware when their expectations were violated (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). For example, Annie and Patrick used The Helping Hand because it was endorsed by a Christian celebrity. Annie was unhappy with the agency's form of communication, email. While she was initially unaware of her expectation to communicate via phone calls, this became a source of tension and disappointment. Annie's expectation was violated and it negatively influenced her perception of the agency. McLaughlin and Vitak (2012) suggested "when behavioral norms are ambiguous, it becomes more difficult to establish a formal set of norms to responding to perceived norm violations" (p. 300). If the

agency had initially discussed how they communicate, then Annie would have known if her case

worker's communication style demonstrated or violated the agency's norms.

Additionally, disconfirming adoptive parents' negative perceptions may result in a

positive evaluation of the adoption experience (Westra el al., 2010). For example, Rachel and

Adam were displeased with the initial adoption classes. They were uninterested in adopting a

special needs child yet were required to attend classes about adopting a special needs child.

However, their opinion of the classes changed when they had positive experiences such as

attending the playgroups with others who had adopted and heard other families' stories.

Social Support

In addition to the adoption process itself, parents' education should also include how the

agency communicates and what the agency-client relationship looks like with their organization.

By doing this early on, the agency can clarify their role as a way to reduce violating

expectations. By customizing their support efforts, agencies will also reduce negative

perceptions and experiences (Goldberg & Smith, 2008). For example, Gina and Jose were

provided with a customized education about the Ethiopian culture and interracial families was

what gave them an invaluable and rich understanding about their new family.

According to the parents in this study, there are two essential types of education:

procedural and cultural. Procedural education involves teaching the couple the agency's adoption

process, what to expect from the state or country from which they are adopting, and the agency's

and parent's responsibilities. Cultural education involves training the couple about cultural

norms of the country from which they will adopt specifically within the context of adoption. If

this had occurred with Kim and Scott, they could have avoided the misunderstandings about and their unpreparedness surrounding the gift exchange.

The interviewed couples' experiences reflect that education is something to be desired with adoption agencies. Gina and Jose received excellent cultural education but poor procedural education; Kim and Scott received excellent procedural education but poor cultural education. Adoption agencies must provide effective training in both procedural and cultural education to facilitate positive experiences. Training could come in the form of offering access to research, books, classes, online resources, or lectures; however, the training must be periodically evaluated to determine its usefulness and effectiveness to the parents. Adoption agencies are often unable to control of the rate in which a child is adopted; however, they can control the quality and customization of education provided to each couple.

Another controllable element for adoption agencies is their ability to build trust with their clients. Adoptive parents plunge into a new system, vocabulary, and world where they have little to no firsthand experience. They need a safe and understanding environment within which they feel comfortable asking questions. In this study, the use of trust building strategies was inconsistent among the agencies. Some felt their case workers were impatient and unwilling or unable to give clear and timely information; others felt supported and understood. Clearly, adoption agencies should employ trust building strategies to reduce the parents' anxiety and uncertainty (Goldberg & Smith, 2008).

Drawing from the experiences of the participants, one trust building strategy an agency could employ is scheduled check-ins with their clients, like Rachel and Adam requested. While there was no explicit policy on check-ins, the agency should have been sensitive to and

accommodated their clients' needs. Rachel and Adam might have perceived this as a demonstration of empathy and support. Another valuable trust building strategy is an 'open door' policy. Many couples felt complete freedom to call or stop by just to check in. Building trust efforts should begin immediately when the agency communicates their role as a service and support provider.

The agency's communication practices also shape the adoptive parent's experience. Frequency and medium play important roles the social support given to adopting families. Welsh et al. (2007) noted that it can be difficult to provide accurate information (particularly with international adoptions), thus agencies must make a concerted effort to provide as much information as possible. Parents spoke highly of their agency if their agency communicated frequently, responded quickly, and used a preferred medium. In contrast, parents were dissatisfied with their agency if their agency communicated infrequently, responded slowly, and used an undesirable medium. Even though the parent's ultimate goal of adopting a child was reached, the communication issue was lacking so much that the parents would discourage another couple from using the agency. The agency's ability to communicate, not just placing a child with the couple, plays a major role in the adoptive parents' experience.

Adoption agencies must be cognizant that adoptive parents are highly invested, emotionally and monetarily, in creating a family. The agency's procedures regarding communication style and/or medium should be outlined upfront; yet the procedures should also for adaptation to the needs of the adoptive parents, as appropriate. For example, at the beginning of the adoption process there should be a dialogue that establishes how the agency communicates, how frequently, and the expected response time. However, there must be a

reasonable balance of the parents and agency conforming to one another's preferred communication style.

The agency should create an organizational structure and protocol that allows for the case workers to reasonably accommodate the adoptive parent's preferred communication. An established set of expectations regarding protocol is critical because it provides guidance and boundaries of the agency's and couple's behavior (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012). This is particularly important when examining the experience of Rachel and Adam. Their adoption agency did a poor job communicating frequently with Rachel and Adam. Adam had a conversation with the agency expressing a need to hear from them more often. When the agency said Rachel and Adam should contact them if they needed anything, it significantly influenced their confidence in and perception of the agency. This conversation reinforced their perception that the agency was uncompassionate. Both the agency and couple expected the other party to initiate contact; consequently, there was miscommunication. It was the agency's responsibility to accommodate to their client's needs and because they were unaccommodating, Rachel and Adam had a negative experience, and later changed agencies.

Rachel and Adam were the only couple to express a sense of reservation about their agency. The other adoptive parents consistently contacted their agency, even those who did have frustrations or critiques of their agency. These five adoptive parents could be characterized as persistent and transparent with their agency. Unlike Joan and Dan, Rachel and Adam never disclosed anxieties about their fears of parenting, much less initiated communication. Perhaps this is because Joan and Dan viewed their agency as a vital support system and the means to a family. Yet, Rachel and Adam only viewed their agency as a means to a family.

Agencies must be aware of their own personal communication with each adoptive couple and sensitive to the couple's apprehensions and degree of openness; so when the agency experiences a guarded couple, they can work on trust building. Not only are there practical implications of this study but there are theoretical implications as well.

Theoretical Implications

The findings have theoretical implications as it builds on current EVT research. Traditionally, EVT has been used in quantitative research (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Hackett et al., 2008; Meltzer & McNulty, 2011; Rycyna et al., 2009); however, this current study adds to EVT's application in qualitative research (McLaughlin & Vitak; Westra et al.). Furthermore, this study broadens the utility of EVT beyond romantic relationships (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006), marketing communication (Campo et al., 2004), and workplace relationships (Joarder, 2011) as it is currently applied to a client-service provider relationship.

Expectancy violation theory has primarily been applied to initial impressions rather than sustained relationships (Campo et al., 2004; Hackett et al., 2008). This study builds on EVT research and what is known about the adoption process in that parents' expectations appear to affect the way they interpret experiences. For example, the parents' expectations of agency's communication (e.g., medium and frequency), not the actual medium or frequency are what influence the interpretation and evaluation of the experience. Understanding adoption expectations is significant because adoption is an on-going process and expectations are constantly violated or affirmed.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, all respondents were White, so the perceptive of other racial groups are unrepresented in the study. Secondly, this study included a small sample size of six heterosexual couples. This study excluded homosexual couples, who are increasingly adopting (Goldberg & Smith, 2008). Third, this qualitative data is neither generalizable to everyone who has adopted nor representative of the agencies discussed. Rather than providing generalizable data of this under researched population, this study's aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of the parents' experiences with and expectations of their agency.

Finally, this study was based on the memory and recall abilities of the adoptive couples. Therefore, couple's reports of their experiences and initial expectations may have been imprecise (Westra, et al., 2010). Despite these limitations, the current study broadens our understanding of the preadoptive experiences and perceptions of adoptive couples and calls for future research.

Future Research

A richer understanding is needed for adoptive couples' preadoptive experiences and perceptions. Research about the effectiveness of procedural and cultural education their influence on the adoption experience is needed. Adoption agencies would benefit from recognizing the value of this study's findings because it would allow the agency to implement successful procedural and cultural education and correct ineffective practices.

The scope of the current study left the topic of community (family and friends) social support unexplored, and future research will recognize this source of insightful data. If an adoption agency understood the role that friends and family play in providing social support, it

could influence the degree of social support given. The amount and accuracy of information that an adoptive couple's community has might influence the experience of adoption. For example, Mona and Tom knew many couple who had adopted, whereas Rachel and Adam were the first of their community who had adopted. Both couples had very different experiences; yet this study excluded and, therefore, was unable to determine the influence of their community's social support.

This study called upon the retrospective of the adoption process of the participants. A longitudinal study would capture more accurate emotions, expectations, and perceptions. Interviews conducted throughout the adoption journey would eliminate the recall problems associated with memory.

Finally, further research is needed to identify the degree to which adopting parents' personality characteristics and attributes (e.g., resiliency, depression, anxiety, or positive attitude) and their perception of, or experience with the adoption agency. Compton et al. (2010) found that anxious individuals express "an exaggerated reaction when expectations are violated" (p. 475). Compton et al.'s study could be contextualized to the adoption process. Future research may give insight to why there is a variance of perceived social support given by the agency.

Conclusion

Key factors for adoption agencies to consider are the customization and quality of the education, communication, and social support provided to clients. Adoption agencies cannot follow a one-size-fits-all model, because parents have diverse preferences. Whether the agency is long-distance or local, creating a culture of openness and supportiveness will significantly improve the experience of those adopting.

As long as adoption research continues and shared results with agencies, the support given to adoptive couple should progress. Ultimately, each agency should desire to improve their social support. While an agency's social support is immediately felt by the adopting couple, there are ripple effects from the agency's social support. When a couple has a positive experience with their agency, they may refer their agency to another couple. When this happens, adoption agencies can continue to help create new families.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear Research Participants:

Hello, my name is Betsy Thomas and I am a Communication graduate student at Barry University. The purpose of my research is to investigate the experiences of married couples that have adopted. Specifically, this current study is interested in your experiences while you waited to adopt and your perceptions of the adoption agencies' social support.

You are eligible to participate if you: (a) have adopted internationally, transracially or domestically, (b) have adopted an infant (0 to 18 months old), (c) have adopted within the past 5 years, and (d) are heterosexual. You would not be eligible if you: (a) adopted a special needs child, (b) went from foster care parents to adoptive parents, (c) are a gay/lesbian couple who adopted, (d) did not use an adoption agency and (e) adopted a relative.

I will be conducting 30-45 minute interviews with each married couple via face-to-face or through a free internet software, Skype. I will ask you several questions regarding your perceptions of and experiences with your adoption agency. I understand that this is a personal subject matter, so please take time to discuss with one another if you both would like to participate. If you think you would like to participate in this study, please complete the consent form. Each spouse should complete a separate form.

Once the consent forms are returned, then I will contact you to determine a mutually agreeable time to conduct the interview. If you would like to interview face-to-face, we can also determine a mutually agreeable location. If you chose to participate via Skype, please create a Skype account and I will contact you to exchange Skype account names.

Please return the consent forms in the pre-paid return envelope enclosed. After I receive the consent forms, I will email you both to can set up a mutually agreeable time for this interview.

If you have additional questions, please contact me at 305-899-3725 or ethomas@mail.barry.edu.

Thank you,

Betsy Thomas

Betsy Thomas

Enclosed:
2 consent forms
1pre-paid return envelope

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is *Assessing Preadoptive Experiences: Parents' Reflections of Adoption Agencies' Social Support*.
The research is being conducted by Betsy Thomas, a student in the Communication department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of communication. The aim of the research is to examine preadoptive parents' experiences and perceptions of the adoption agencies' social support while waiting to adopt. I anticipate the number of participants to be 6 to 12. In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: 30-45 minute interview conducted via face-to-face or Skype, a free internet-based voice over internet protocol (VoIP) program.

Skype may disclose personal information to respond to legal requirements, to protect Skype's interests, to enforce our policies or to protect anyone's rights, property, or safety. Skype shall not sell, rent, trade or otherwise transfer any personal and/or traffic data or communications content to any third party without your explicit permission, unless it is obliged to do so under applicable laws or by order of the competent authorities.

If you are a member of the Skype Manager, detailed information about the activity on your Skype account including traffic data and details of your purchases and downloads may be accessed by your Skype Manager Administrator if you have agreed to such access. You can withdraw your agreement at any time by changing the settings on your account page on www.skype.com.

If you provide personal data including your name and job title to be included in the Skype Manager directory, you acknowledge that such data may be viewed by other members of the Skype Manager. Your user profile is the information provided by you at registration which is displayed in your Skype profile in the Skype software client, in the Skype search directory and on your personal details page in your account on www.skype.com. It may include your Skype username, full name, address, telephone and mobile numbers, gender, date of birth, country, language, "about me" page URL, and any other information that you decide to make available. You can access your user profile from the "Skype" menu in the Skype software client or from your account on www.skype.com in order to view, correct or complete information, remove non-mandatory information; and to see the privacy settings associated with your profile information.

Skype shall take appropriate organizational and technical measures to protect the personal data and traffic data provided to it or collected by it with due observance of the applicable obligations and exceptions under the relevant legislation. Your personal and traffic data can only be accessed by authorized employees or consultants of Skype or the concerned Skype group entities that need to have access to this data in order to be able to fulfill their given duties.

You may be interested in inviting your friends to join Skype. In the event you wish to use Skype's referral service, you will be directed to a webpage and will have the possibility of adding one or more email addresses in an online form. The information entered in this form, will only be used for the purposes of automatically generating an email message to these potential Skype users. By entering your friend's email address you are confirming that your friend has consented to the supply of their details. Skype may identify you as the person who has made the referral in the email sent to your friend. You have the right to access and, where relevant, to amend your personal information. Some of your information may be viewed or edited online by signing into your account page on www.skype.com. We will respond to requests to view, correct, complete or remove your personal information within a reasonable period of time and upon verification of your identity. Please address any questions to our customer support team.

Skype will use all reasonable endeavours to accommodate requests to delete personal information unless it is required to be retained by law or for lawful business purposes. However, please note that due to the technical nature of the peer to peer network, it can sometimes take up to two weeks before your Skype ID disappears completely from the peer to peer network. Your details may still appear in the search directory during this time. (Privacy Policy, Skype Limited, 2011)

If both you and your spouse decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: read and sign the consent form for each participant, agree to an interview time via Skype and download Skype to your computer, or mutually agree to a face-to-face interview time and location (your preference), complete a 30-45 minute interview.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you or your spouse decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects on your physical, emotional, social, or economic well being.

The proposed study poses minimal risk for participants involved. This investigation may cause emotional discomfort as the participants reflect on past experiences. Some of questions may be considered personal and may cause a slight level of anxiety. Although some questions may be uncomfortable, you are fully informed by the consent form that you do not have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. Furthermore, the researcher will direct you to your agency, local adoption support group, or social worker should you desire counseling. In addition, you will be protected based on the assurance of strict confidentiality during and after the research process. There are no direct benefits.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. While I cannot ensure confidentiality during our exchange via Skype, I have outlined Skype's privacy policy to make you aware of the risks of using this communication tool. In addition, I will remove you from my contact list after we have completed our interview. You will be given first and last pseudonyms at the time of transcription. Any published results of the research will refer to group averages only and pseudonyms will be used in the study. Both signed consent forms will be kept in a file

separate from the data. Audio files and transcriptions will be kept on an USB, and all data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. All data will be kept for one year and destroyed July 2012.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Betsy Thomas at (305) 899-3725, my faculty sponsor Dr. Margaret Chojnacki at (305) 899-3455, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by _____ and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

_____   _____
 Signature of Participant   *Date*

_____
Participant's Contact Phone Number

_____
Participant's Email

_____   7/6/11   _____   _____
Researcher   *Date*   *Witness*   *Date*

(Witness signature is required only if research involves pregnant women, children, other vulnerable populations, or if more than minimal risk is present.)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you come to adopt?

2. How did you choose your adoption agency?

3. Explain how your agency educated you about the adoption process.

4. How long did you expect the adoption process to take?

5. Did you feel that your home study was completed in a timely manner?

6. Do you feel like the agency was quick to respond to your emails and/or phone calls? Why? Why not?

7. Tell me how you handled the waiting period.

8. To what degree did you expect the agency to communicate with you during the wait process?

9. Describe your experience with your agency.

10. Did you ever attend an adoption support group offered by your agency? If so, describe that experience.

11. Would you say you had a positive or negative experience with your agency? Why?

12. Who was the most supportive during the wait? In what way?

13. What was a good day for you during the wait?

14. What was a bad day for you during the wait?

15. After having experienced the process of adoption, what advice would you give to a couple waiting to adopt?

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL

BARRY
UNIVERSITY

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OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research with Human Subjects
Protocol Review

Date: June 14, 2011

Protocol Number: 110514

Title: Assessing Pre-adoptive Experiences: Parents' Reflections of Adoption Agencies' Social Support

Meeting Date: June 15, 2011

Researcher Name: Betsy Thomas
Address: Barry University
ADSOE
11300 NE 2nd Ave.
Miami Shores, FL 33161

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Margaret Chojnacki
Communication

Dear Ms. Thomas:

On behalf of the Barry University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have verified that the specific changes requested by the convened IRB June 15, 2011 have been made.

It is the IRB's judgment that the rights and welfare of the individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected; that the proposed research, including the process of obtaining informed consent, will be conducted in a manner consistent with requirements and that the potential benefits to participants and to others warrant the risks participants may choose to incur. You may therefore proceed with data collection.

As principal investigator of this protocol, it is your responsibility to make sure that this study is conducted as approved by the IRB. Any modifications to the protocol or consent form, initiated by you or by the sponsor, will require prior approval, which you may request by completing a protocol modification form.

It is a condition of this approval that you report promptly to the IRB any serious, unanticipated adverse events experienced by participants in the course of this research, whether or not they are directly related to the study protocol. These adverse events include, but may not be limited to, any experience that is fatal or immediately life-

threatening, is permanently disabling, requires (or prolongs) inpatient hospitalization, or is a congenital anomaly cancer or overdose.

The approval granted expires on June 20, 2012. Should you wish to maintain this protocol in an active status beyond that date, you will need to provide the IRB with and IRB Application for Continuing Review (Progress Report) summarizing study results to date. The IRB will request a progress report from you approximately three months before the anniversary date of your current approval.

If you have questions about these procedures, or need any additional assistance from the IRB, please call the IRB point of contact, Mrs. Barbara Cook at (305)899-3020 or send an e-mail to dparkhurst@mail.barry.edu . Finally, please review your professional liability insurance to make sure your coverage includes the activities in this study.

Sincerely,

Doreen C. Parkhurst, M.D., FACEP
Chair Institutional Review Board
Associate Dean,
Program Director, PA Program
Barry University
Box SGMS
11300 NE 2nd Avenue
Miami Shores, FL 33161

Cc: Dr. Margaret Chojnacki

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Note: The investigator will be solely responsible and strictly accountable for any deviation from or failure to follow the research protocol as approved and will hold Barry University harmless from all claims against it arising from said deviation or failure.