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Anne Mi Ok Bruining
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Anne Mi Ok Bruining
Whose Daughter Are You?
Exploring Identity Issues
of Lesbians Who Are Adopted

ABSTRACT

This study was an exploratory study which focused on the issues of lesbians who are adopted. Some of the issues which were explored included the coming out process, managing relationships with partners, conducting relationships with both adoptive and (if they found their) birth families, and searching or not searching for the birth family. This study also explored the dual yet separate elements which contribute to an identity: being adopted and being a lesbian.

A sample of 13 self-selected, self-identified lesbians who were adopted as infants or young children was interviewed for this study. These 13 women lived in the New York and New Jersey area. A standard interview guide was used to ask questions about adoption, children, partnered relationships, counseling, adoptive families, searching and not searching, birth families, the coming out process, lesbian identity, and lesbian community involvement. The interviews were conducted in person by the researcher.

The findings of this study revealed that most of the lesbians who were adopted were more comfortable with their lesbian identity than their adoption issues. Although most of the women reported that their relationships with their adoptive families were generally positive, a few

women were or had searched for their birth mothers.

For the women represented in this study, the clinical issues of loss, grief, sadness, anger, trust, intimacy and rejection were compounded by the dual elements of being adopted and being a lesbian. These issues were reflected in the partnered relationships and family relationships that these women had in their lives. The findings also reflected that the social work, lesbian and adoption communities have not addressed the issues of lesbians who are adopted. Overall the findings suggested a need for support services for lesbians who were adopted.

WHOSE DAUGHTER ARE YOU?
EXPLORING IDENTITY ISSUES
OF LESBIANS WHO ARE ADOPTED

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Anne Mi Ok Bruining

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

1992

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This study is dedicated to all lesbians who are adopted--as a testament to the spirit and courage in surviving.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Individuals who are adopted are often presented with special challenges in developing a secure sense of identity. Lesbian individuals also are presented with unique challenges in developing a secure sense of personal identity. Lesbian women who are adopted are confronted with both of these challenges.

Lesbians who are adopted must confront a variety of issues, including negotiating the coming out process, managing relationships with both adoptive and birth families (if they have found their birth families), and searching or not searching for the birth family. Exploring how lesbians who are adopted negotiate these issues is the purpose of this study.

This study will explore these dual yet separate elements which contribute to an identity: being adopted and being a lesbian. It employed a self-selected sample of women who were adopted as children and who consider themselves lesbians. This sample of women who volunteered to be interviewed, as most with other lesbians, represented varied levels of acceptance and understanding of their lesbianism and adoption issues.

It is important to study the identity issues of lesbians who have been adopted because there has been no previous research on this topic. The findings of this study will present differences and similarities as

no previous research on this topic. The findings of this study will present differences and similarities as reflected in interviews with these lesbians who are adopted. Race, age, relationship status, coming out or not coming out, searching or not searching, finding or not finding, and other social and emotional elements are the context within identity formation and development take place. The identity issues these women face may be presented in three questions: Where did I come from? Who am I now? Where am I going? These questions may be more difficult to answer when the context of family, genealogical, cultural and social histories has been disrupted--as in adoption.

Identity formation is the process of developing an individual's being and sense of self. In the study of personality, the term "identity" can be defined as the essence and continuity of a person's self where the concept of oneself is internalized and subjective (Reber, 1985).

Recent studies and research are focusing on female identity development as having moral distinctions and intrapsychic differences from male identity development (Gilligan, 1982). Current theoretical debates are challenging the theory that female development is similar to or not any different from that of male development.

This theory is reflected in early articles written on identity development where female identity formation was considered inferior to male identity formation (Freud, 1905 & 1954). Female identity development has not been historically addressed and is a recent area of study and exploration.

Both contemporary and/or feminist academic and clinical perspectives are beginning to challenge the historically white, male-dominated and patriarchally-defined content of theory about female identity. Freud (1905) presented theories of female identity development from the male model, thereby distorting psychoanalytic views of normative female identity development. One conclusion which has recently surfaced is that female identity formation does not depend predominantly upon the achievement of separation (as in male identity formation) but is defined through attachment (Gilligan, 1982).

"Lesbianism" is the gender-specific term for female homosexuality. I will be exploring sexual identity in the ego-syntonic context, when a woman accepts her identity and is comfortable with her behavior as a lesbian. This identity and behavior is also considered an expression of a natural sexual preference (Reber, 1985). This study explores the issues of women who are self-identified

lesbians. Self-identified lesbians are women who have "come out" to themselves and/or to others to greater or lesser degrees.

In Chapman and Brannock's (1987) article on lesbian identity development, it is argued that homosexual feelings in women originate from identification with (and possibly sexual transference towards) the mother. As a result of these early identifications with the mother, homosexual feelings may consciously and actively be accessible in all women's lives.

In her article on internalized homophobia and lesbian identity, Sophie (1987) presents her theory of lesbian identity in a linear fashion--these women "come out" in a series of identifiable stages, within the context of and as a reaction to homophobia. Recently, Sophie's theory of the development of lesbian identity has been challenged and presented as some women's reaction to sexism and to the oppression against women in social and political contexts (MacCowan, 1987). As a result of societal sexism and patriarchal oppression, there is a new generation of women who have "come out" as "political lesbians" (MacCowan, 1987). She argues that lesbian identity also can reflect more of a political identity and less of a sexual behavior.

The adult adopted population is a particular group that has not been visible in the lesbian community. Lesbians have also not been visible in the "adoption community" of adopted persons, birth parents and adoptive parents, which make up the adoption triad. Recent progress reflects the efforts of lesbians who are adopted to mobilize and to address their own issues (Baer, 1990). Although lesbians who are adopted have recently begun networking and establishing support groups within the lesbian community, this type of organization is concentrated in small regions on the West Coast. The population of lesbians who are adopted is therefore lacking in structured clinical, social and political support systems. The only publication known by this researcher that identifies as such is edited by a self-identified lesbian who is adopted. Articles are submitted to this newsletter by both lesbians and non-lesbians, adopted persons, and non-adopted persons. This newsletter, "Chain of Life," devotes itself entirely to a feminist perspective on adoption-related issues (Baer, 1990).

Recently, identity formation in adopted individuals is being explored and addressed (Deeg, 1991). Some of these studies reflect the social and cultural disruption and psychological trauma that adoption may have caused

in the identity formation of adopted individuals. Researchers are interested in studying the ramifications of separation, loss, grief and anger in adopted individuals and whether adoption has impacted upon the development of identity.

This study was conducted through interviewing a self-selected sample of lesbians who were adopted, who volunteered to participate in this study. A total of 13 women were interviewed. Some their responses were recorded on a standardized interview guide (see Appendix C), and the remaining responses were tape recorded and transcribed for the purpose of including some verbatim responses in the findings chapter.

As the researcher, it is my belief that this study will contribute to the clinical social work community as well as the population of adopted individuals and the lesbian community. As the researcher, I also believe that this study will make an important contribution to the visibility and validation of lesbians who are adopted in a positive and reaffirming manner. In studying and presenting the topic of lesbians who are adopted, other lesbians will be made aware and informed of other lesbians who are adopted. This awareness may minimize a sense of isolation and provide a sense of identification with

other lesbians who are adopted. Sharing the stories and experiences of these women who were interviewed for this study may also help the clinical social work community as well as non-adopted lesbians in the lesbian community to heighten their awareness of the issues of lesbians who are adopted. For other lesbians who are adopted, this study may help to reaffirm their own experiences in dealing with the issues they may have as lesbians who are adopted.

As an adopted person who is also a lesbian, I hope, as the researcher, that the subjective biases on this particular topic are maintained at a minimal level. I also hope, as the researcher, that the report of this study reflect the content of this study's findings with accuracy. This researcher finally also hopes that this study conveys the stories of the brave women who willingly and honestly shared their experiences with compassion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

After an extensive search, this researcher could find no research nor non-fiction literature on the specific topic of lesbians who are adopted. There is extensive literature on adoption and an increasing amount of literature written by and about adults who were adopted as infants and children. There is also literature on the development of lesbian identity and the obstacles to it.

Being both adopted and a lesbian are identities which have been historically shame-based and stigmatized in one's own family system, as well as in society. Thus, in the context of homophobia and historical social stigma, adoption issues can be more complicated when the adopted person is a lesbian. These potential challenges with combined adoption and lesbian issues have not yet been addressed documented in the social work literature.

Adoption Issues

History

Adoption is an enduring social phenomenon which has undergone many transitions within society. The definition of adoption is "to take (a child of other parents) as one's own child" (Woolf, 1972). This practice has been widely implemented for thousands of years in almost every

culture. In some cultures, particularly within the African American population, adoption is also known as "kinship," where the child is cared for by family relatives when the child's birth parents are unable to do so (Boyd-Franklin, 1989).

As Chesler states (1988), infertility has always existed. However, infertile people had to deal with the fact that they could not bear children and, until the late nineteenth-century, obtained children through identifying orphaned children and claiming them as their own, and then "legally" adopted these children by signing local court-approved documents. Infertility can now be traded for something else--for a price. This something else is called "adoption." However, some previously diagnosed infertile couples opted for expensive infertility "treatments," which occasionally were successful.

Laws were created to protect the rights of children and parents when children were designated as the property of a family (Lifton, 1988). These laws instituted adoption as the formal transferral of these rights from one set of parents (birth parents) to another set of parents (adoptive parents), usually when the birth parents were either unable or no longer living. In the circumstances of living birth parents, the practice of relinquishment

was developed to legally convey their rights to parenthood over to the adoptive parents (Chesler, 1988).

In Western European countries and in the U.S., these adoptions were "closed." All identifying information and documents were protected and sealed within the locked files of the adoption agencies. Secrecy and shame were carefully guarded. Most of the information and documents were destroyed. Until recently, to be adopted was to be "closeted" (Lifton, 1988). In the 1960s, when the political and social climates of society were changing, adoption was still a secret, a taboo, a stigma, and a silence (Lifton, 1988).

Historically, adoption had been introduced in the U.S. as a way for infertile, childless, heterosexual, married couples to obtain a child (Gilman, 1977). These adoptions of predominantly Caucasian infants and children by predominantly Caucasian parents are known as "domestic adoptions." Many of these "domestic" adoptions occurred within a closed adoption context where documents, records and files were sealed to the birth mother, the adoptive parents and to the adopted child (Caplan, 1990).

By 1929, every state in the U.S. had an adoption law. European countries had followed the Roman rule of a mutual agreement between the birth parents and adoptive parents,

while the U.S. followed the Massachusetts Law, which was passed in 1851, and was the first model in the U.S. to introduce a comprehensive state adoption law. The Massachusetts Law allowed for children to be made available for adoption without the consent of the birth parents, if the birth parents were considered unable to appropriately care for their children by the respective state (Arms, 1990). Each state developed their own variations of the Massachusetts Law with similar guidelines, and some changes were presented within each state regarding the definition of what constituted "inappropriate care" of a child (Gilman, 1977).

Adoption Trends

The issues of adoption have changed, reflecting the social and political climates in which adoptions are occurring. From the late 1890s to early 1950s, in European countries and within the U.S., adoptions of Caucasian children were processed. These children were adopted by predominantly U.S. Caucasian families.

Closed Adoptions

The existing "closed adoption" guidelines were established and enforced to protect the rights of the adoptive parents, and possibly the relinquishing birth parents also. Some closed adoptions were adoptions that

were processed without including identifying information about the birth parents in the adoption records. Closed adoptions also provided non-identifying information about the birth parents in the adoption records. These adoption records were then sealed and prevented the birth parents and adopted person from finding each other, thus obliterating the possibility of reunions occurring. Closed adoptions also provided the incentive for many adoptive parents to adopt children, who would have otherwise feared being found by birth parents as well as their adopted children successfully searching and locating their birth parents when they reached adulthood (Caplan, 1990).

Open Adoptions

"Open adoptions" are a recent phenomenon. This concept was first described in a 1976 article by Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, two California social workers, and Arthur Sorosky, a psychiatrist. This article was written as a provocative response to the increasing population of adult adopted persons who were addressing the issues of closed adoptions and sealed records (Caplan, 1990). Open adoptions, where the records are available to the birth mother/parents, adoptive parents and the adopted individual, are a rare occurrence (Caplan, 1990). In these open adoptions, sometimes a contractual agreement

is made between the birth mother/parents and the adoptive parents that overt contact be maintained for the sake of the adopted individual.

Cross-cultural Adoptions

Cross-cultural adoptions began as a response to the decreasing number of available healthy, Caucasian infant children in the 1950s. Many more children who were considered "special needs," who were older, physically disabled, mildly mentally retarded, sibling groups, and/or children of color and diverse ethnic backgrounds, were now more appealing for Caucasian pre-adoptive families who did not want to wait for five to ten years for a healthy, Caucasian infant. Previously, these children were considered "unadoptable" (Andujo, 1988). Adoption agencies readjusted their policies, guidelines and screening processes to encourage and accommodate families considering adoption. However, most of these adoption agencies did not implement cross-cultural education for the social workers or adoptive families until after there were disruptions in the adoptive families. A few post-adoption services have also been created to address the possibility of cross-cultural issues for these adoptive families (Bruining, 1990).

The adoption of Native American children was once

popular due to the desired efforts to assimilate these children into white culture (Kim, 1978). The Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) declared that the adoption placements of African American children into white families perpetuated cultural genocide (Gilman, 1977). A large population of Native Americans agrees with the ABSW's statement that cross-cultural adoption of children of color into Anglo families is cultural genocide (Kim, 1978).

In her article on ethnic identity of transethnically adopted Hispanic adolescents, Andujo (1988) compares two groups of adopted Hispanic children--one who were adopted into Anglo families (transethnic adoptions) and the other who were adopted into Hispanic families (same-ethnic adoptions). She compares the issues of ethnic identity, self esteem and the impact of environmental and familial factors of the two groups. One of the article's conclusions reveals that most of the transethnic adopted children identified themselves as "Americans" (non-Hispanic) and all of the same-ethnic adopted children strongly identified themselves as Hispanic. This and other conclusions suggest that the transethnic adopted children had more difficulty with ethnic identity formation. Another conclusion suggests that there were no significant differences in self esteem among the two

groups of adopted children but that self-identifying references and levels of acculturation varied noticeably (Andujo, 1988).

International Adoptions

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, U.S. families began to adopt children from Korea (Hall, 1984). Many of these children at the time were fathered by U.S. soldiers. In the 1970s, the adoption of Native American children and Black children by white families/couples was introduced as an effort to address the poverty and unfortunate situation of difficult-to-place children in the U.S. (Kim, 1978).

Later, in the early 1980s, U.S. families were still adopting children from Korea, and most of these children were Korean. Families were now also able to adopt children from India, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Hall, 1984). Most recently, children are now available for adoption in most countries in Central/Latin and South America (Gilman, 1977). Adoption programs in these countries have made adopting available children quicker and easier, thus creating a trend toward adoption for heterosexual, single parents and lesbian and gay couples, particularly since the availability of U.S. white, healthy infant children ("blue ribbon babies") is virtually lacking,

except through expensive, private, identified adoptions (Bruining, 1990).

Recently, with the political changes in Rumania, many more children became available for intercountry adoptions. It is obvious that there is a trend towards adopting these children, particularly the ones who are white, healthy infants (Baer, 1990).

With the recent political events in the former U.S.S.R. and the Ukraine, it is possible that many children from these two regions may be adopted into the U.S. and Western European countries. There is recent evidence from national newspaper articles and international media attention that, as in Rumania, many Russian and Ukrainian children have been warehoused in orphanages and other institutions for decades.

The Adoption Triad

In recent years, members of the adoption "triad" have organized and mobilized. The adoption triad is made up of three points of the triad: the adopted child/person, the birth parent or birth parents and the adoptive parent or parents. Many triad members are demanding that state legislature pass laws which allow for adoption records and documents to be unsealed and opened. Most of the triad members who are lobbying for unsealed records are

birth mothers, an increasing population of adopted individuals and some active and concerned adoptive parents (Caplan, 1990).

"The Adopted Child"

The term "adopted child" has been historically made in reference to adopted individuals. Even individuals who are now adults and who were adopted as infants or children are referred to as "adopted children" in the adoption community and within the adoption triad. This term may contribute to the pervasive attempts and efforts by the adoption community and triad at maintaining control over and denial of empowerment to adopted people. Some adopted persons may reject this term for these reasons in their identities as adopted people (Lifton, 1988).

Many of these adopted people are battling against the pervasive portrayal of being adopted as being helpless and powerless, as children are in this society. "Adoptee" is another term which has been rejected by some adopted individuals, because this also contributes to the belief and sense that to be an adoptee is to be without something--similar to that of an "amputee" (Bruining, 1990). Not all adopted people feel this way, but some adopted people are reclaiming their own identities as adult adopted people in attempts to become more visible

and instrumental in dismantling their feelings of powerlessness within the adoption community, the triad and society, in general.

Adult Adopted Persons

This researcher has found only a few studies written on the impact of adoption issues on adult adopted persons. The search for identity and sense of self is an issue that has been explored but not elaborated upon. Some adult adopted persons have written books about their experiences and their feelings about being adopted (Lifton, 1988).

An increasing number of books have been authored by and are being written by adult adopted persons. It is true that adopted persons and birth parents have their own biases. However, many of those who are accusing adult adopted persons of their biases are adoptive parents, who have their own biases (Bruining, 1990). Unfortunately, some of the more popular books are sensationalized, especially the ones written by people who are famous in the entertainment industry (Baer, 1990).

One may remember Christina Crawford's scathing account of her brutal adoptive mother, Joan Crawford, in her book Mommie Dearest. However, this book did raise some important concerns of child abuse that occasionally occurs

within adoptive families. For many adopted individuals who were abused in their adoptive families, this book was the battle cry for them to actively discount the myth that all adoptive families are loving and caring. This book and others similar to it also exposed the concern that the screening process of adoptive parents has historically been ineffective in protecting children who are adopted.

Birth Parents

More and more birth parents, particularly birth mothers, are writing and authoring books about their experiences (Chesler, 1988). Some adult adopted authors as well as birth mothers write that the adoption movement has historically catered to the needs of adoptive parents and has not addressed the issues of adopted children (Lifton, 1988). One of the sentiments that adopted individuals share with birth parents is the belief that adoptive parents have colluded with adoption agencies in preventing sealed records to be opened, regardless of some state laws which have legalized available records and documents to interested parties.

An additional resentment which birth mothers express is their belief that they were coerced by the adoption system into forcibly relinquishing their babies. Chesler

(1988) gives an impassioned account of several birth mothers and surrogate mothers who were emotionally punished for giving birth to children. The punishment for these women for their extramarital pregnancies was often relinquishment of their infant children (Chesler, 1988).

Birth fathers have often been excluded, unavailable and inaccessible within the adoption triad, but this has recently changed, and more birth fathers have joined the adoption community. Many birth mothers are publicly speaking of their early traumas of giving up their children under stress and anxiety, with little support by the adoption agencies (Chesler, 1988). Birth fathers are now speaking out about the traumas of not being informed about the early relinquishment of their children and not being given the choice to parent their birth children who were relinquished for adoption.

Opening Sealed Adoption Records

The opening and unsealing of existing files and records would make it possible for triad members to obtain identifying information. In the process of opening up sealed records, many triad members report that they feel less shame and embarrassment about their status as adopted people. As a result of triad members publicly speaking out for their rights in the adoption movement, society

has progressed to minimize the social taboo of adoption (Caplan, 1990).

Sachdev (1991) explores in his paper the debate over whether legislature and adoption agencies should make provisions for sealed adoptions records to be opened and how much information should be allowed to be given to birth parents and adopted persons. He challenges the historically mandated code of secrecy regarding the identifying history of the birth parents as potentially negative for adopted people, many of whom are respectful and concerned about their birth parents' privacy, but feel that their birth information regarding medical history, genealogy and adoption background are their birth right.

Searching for Birth Parents

Most of these adult adopted persons have written about "searching" as a vital element in the development or completion of their identity as whole, complete persons (Sachdev, 1991). "Searching" is a recent phenomenon among adopted persons and birth parents that many adopted persons and birth parents, mostly mothers, have conducted in their journey of identity and acceptance for the circumstances of their lives (Rosenweig-Smith, 1987). Kowal and Schilling's (1984) article about adoption as perceived

through adult adopted persons discusses the reasons and issues for searching. Kowal and Schilling conducted research on over 100 adults who had been adopted as infants or young children. The findings suggested that the large percentage of their sample had or were searching because of changes in their lives as well as in their relationships with their adoptive parents. Some of these changes included marriages, divorce, pregnancy, child birth, adoption of children and medical illness (Kowal & Schilling, 1984). It might be concluded that most adoptive parents and adoption social workers never assumed that adopted persons and birth parents would ever search (Caplan, 1990). Unfortunately, searching is expensive and may cost thousands of dollars for information which may not provide for a successful search or reunion.

Only recently are adoptions being processed where the adoption triad members have access to identifying information for future searches. However, many adoptions are still being processed as "closed" adoptions, where the identifying information is not made available to any of the respective triad members (Arms, 1990). Searching by adopted persons is still considered a betrayal of loyalty towards the adoptive parents. Both shame and guilt often prevent adopted persons and birth parents

from searching (Rosenweig-Smith, 1988).

In her article on factors associated with successful reunions of adult adoptees and biological parents, Rosenweig-Smith (1988) explores the relationships between the adoptees' ages at the initiation of their search and the success of the reunion. She also analyzes the relationship between grief resolution by the adoptees and the success of the reunion. Finally, Rosenweig-Smith examines the relationship between attributing the adoptees' blame for the relinquishment to the biological mother and the success of the reunion. Rosenweig-Smith's findings were that there were both positive correlations between age at the initiation of the search and the success of the reunion, and grief resolution and successful reunions. There was a negative correlation between blaming the biological mother for the relinquishment and a successful reunion. Overall, the findings proved that the older the adult adoptee was at the time of initiating a search, if the adult adoptee had resolved their grief to a certain point, and if they did not blame their birth mothers for relinquishment, the reunions were more likely to be successful in terms of the adoptees' satisfaction.

The identity formation in adopted adults has not been extensively explored in academic studies. Recent studies

are examining the possible differences of identity development in adopted individuals who were adopted as infants or young children.

Identity Formation in Adopted Individuals

It is clinically known that identity formation is vital to the determination of the self and that individuation from others is what follows identity formation. Freudian theory was the precipitating drive theory which evolved into Object Relations (Crain, 1985).

Many psychoanalytic theorists who followed Freud used Freud's theory to develop and launch their own theories of female identity development (Horner, 1984). However, Freud's theory of female identity development is considered distorted because female identity development was considered inferior to male identity development. Both contemporary and/or feminist academic theorists and researchers are beginning to challenge the historically white, male-dominated, patriarchally-defined theories about female development.

The theory of an adopted person's identity formation has only been explored recently. The identity formation of adopted persons is being compared to non-adopted persons in recent studies and research. This theory of "adoptee's" identity formation is being challenged and explored by academic researchers, psychologists and clinical social

workers (Deeg, 1991).

Marquis and Detweiler (1985) explore the differences of being adopted and non-adopted in addressing the essence of "adoptive identity." The differences which they identify in the context of re-interpreting some adoption literature are: control, status, interpersonal outcomes, and self-descriptive characteristics. The self-descriptive characteristics include poor self-image, inferiority, insecurity, fearfulness, abnormality and loneliness. These characteristics were personality descriptions in which the "adoptees" described themselves. In their article, Marquis and Detweiler (1985) mention that adopted persons lack the feeling of being free to direct their own lives. Many adopted adults mentioned in their study stated that they may feel like pawns who are used by the powerful. Pertaining to outcome, many adopted persons are described as having feelings of isolation and difficulty maintaining long-term relationships (Marquis & Detweiler, 1985). In terms of status, reports of perpetually feeling like an outsider, being alienated from others, incomplete, and false are pervasive in adopted persons.

Deeg (1990) elaborates on the theory of the adopted individual's cathexes of the lost object (the birth mother). He explores the six defensive functions of the

adult adopted person towards the biological parent representation, which are the psychodynamic ways that the adult adopted person relates and becomes attached to their adoptive parents who have replaced her/his birth parents. These six functions include: the biological parent as receptacle for warded-off negative aspects of the adoptive parent, as primitive narcissistic regulator, as a fantasy source of libidinal gratification, as a defense against (conscious) disruptive aggressive discharge toward the adoptive parents, as a defense against disruptive libidinal discharge toward the adoptive parents, and finally, as a means of masochistic defense (Deeg, 1990).

Shoberg-Winterburg and Shannon's (1988) article about adoption and psychosocial adjustment mentions that a few articles have been written on the psychosocial adjustment of adopted adults. Their article compares the psychosocial adjustment of adopted with non-adopted adults. Non-adopted adolescents contend with separation issues, but adopted adolescents deal with both the symbolic loss as well as the actual loss of a previous set of parents (birth parents) (Shoberg-Winterberg & Shannon, 1988). This loss makes adolescent adopted persons more vulnerable to additional experiences of loss, rejection, or abandonment later in their development, eventually having significant

impact upon their adulthood relationships (Shoberg-Winterberg & Shannon, 1988). In an effort to resolve issues of loss, rejection or abandonment, as well as other issues, adult adopted persons often search for birth relatives for one or more of these reasons: to fill a void, to understand themselves better, to obtain medical history and/or to obtain a sense of belonging (Kowal & Schilling, 1984).

In their article on damaged identity and the search for kinship in adopted adult persons, Humphrey and Humphrey (1989) collected clinical data through a quantitative study of several dozen adult individuals who were adopted as infants. This study's results showed that the identity formation of these adopted persons was problematic and the childhood developmental stages were disrupted by issues of being adopted. The repercussions of damaged identity revealed themselves in the difficulties these adults adopted had in the development and establishment of secure and stable relationships, the replication of rejection and abandonment experiences, and lack of trust and intimacy (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1989).

"Searching" (for birth parents) is an issue which non-adopted persons do not have to contend with in their lives. Whether the adoption was an identified or non-identified process, the issue of searching comes up

for the adopted person. An "identified" adoption is when the adoption was performed with the adoptive parents' knowledge of identifying information about the birth mother and/or birth parents--name(s), age(s), parental nationality, medical history, and other identifying information. Sometimes, the birth mother also is informed of the names and other similar identifying information of the adoptive parent(s). Rarely have the birth parent(s) and adoptive parent(s) met in person. Most often, the adoption is conducted through a private adoption agency. An "un-identified" adoption is when no information is given to the birth mother/parents or adoptive parents by the adoption agency or the acting liaison of the adoption process. In this particular case, the information is sealed for the protection of the triad members (Caplan, 1990).

In Rosenweig-Smith's (1988) article on successful reunions of adult adopted persons and biological parents, she discusses the factors associated with successful reunions and the reasons for searches at length. Identified adoptions make searching easier to conduct. However, many agencies' policies maintain that the records remain sealed to triad members if one of the triad members (most often the birth parent and/or sometimes the adopted person) wishes to remain anonymous and not be located.

Non-identified adoptions present more difficult and often arduous searching, and it can take years to find information such as the names or the cities in which the adopted person was found or adopted to.

Rosenweig-Smith (1988) also addresses the reasons why some adopted persons decide to search in her article. Many adopted individuals search out of a need to find their biological parents--to meet them in person, to reconnect the broken tie. However, some only wish to find information for medical history, genetic background and any information which may indicate that the adopted person has any birth siblings or half-siblings.

Identity Formation in Adopted Persons

In his article about identity and security in adoption and long-term fostering, Triseliotis (1984) compares the effects and impact of identity development in adopted individuals and persons who were "foster children." Some of the similarities Triseliotis discovered in conducting his research were that most of both the adopted people and fostered people felt comfortable and stable in their respective adoptive and foster families when they were nurtured and cared for and treated as if they were part of the family system. Most of the adopted and fostered people felt love and accepted in their families. The differences that were evident between the adopted people

and the fostered people were that the adopted people obtained the same last names as their adoptive families and the fostered people had different surnames. The fostered people experienced the danger of being taken away and this jeopardized the feeling of security and stability which the adopted people felt in their adoptive families. The security and stability of the foster people was also threatened by the frequency in which social services agency professionals monitored their foster families through meetings, appointments and home visits.

There is no known research on lesbians who are adopted. The following section will discuss the issues that lesbians cope with.

Lesbian Issues

Historically, the psychological literature on lesbianism has been generally written in a clinical pathological context and specifically from a non-feminist perspective (Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective [BPLC], 1987). For example, Freud's psychoanalytic theory is male-defined and Eurocentric. This is evident in his A Primer of Freudian Psychology (1905 & 1954). Lesbian identity has been clinically misrepresented in the context of academic studies. Scholars are now re-writing traditional theory about lesbian and gay identity development (BLPC, 1987).

Lesbian Identity

There is no singular lesbian identity, nor is there a singular development of lesbian identity (Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective [BLPC], 1987). Despite the removal of homosexuality as a diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), the recognition, identification and acceptance of lesbian behavior and lesbianism is a difficult process in light of homophobia and internalized homophobia (Sophie, 1987). Sophie (1987) argued that internalized homophobia and societal homophobia are unavoidable elements in the process of lesbian identity formation. According to Sophie (1987), it can be concluded that positive lesbian identity formation is a significant developmental achievement involving one's own acceptance of sexual identity within the hostile environments of homophobia and internalized homophobia.

Recent literature views lesbians and gay identity development as a process of developing an awareness of one's sexual orientation and integrating that awareness into one's concept of self (Stein & Cohen, 1986). Some recent studies have suggested that lesbian and gay identity formation occurs in four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment (Trolden, 1989). These stages represent manifestations of the

emotional, psychological and developmental process which lesbians and gay men experience in their phases of "coming out" (Troiden, 1989). They, however, do not necessarily reflect the steps for everyone's coming out process.

One theory states that homosexuality is a cultural concept and that lesbians and gay men can be considered sexual minorities (Lukes & Land, 1990). Lukes asserts that cultural identity is more than a situation of shared history, language and traditions. It is a manifestation of self-conceptualization which is self-assigned or socially mandated.

The implications of adopting a cultural identity conceptualization of lesbian identity are revealed in the developmental stages of lesbian identity: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment (Troiden, 1989). In the process of experiencing some or all of the developmental stages of lesbian identity, a lesbian often becomes involved in the lesbian community in whatever capacity she feels comfortable with. This involvement may be considered adopting an identity in the lesbian culture which a lesbian community may adhere to (MacCowan, 1987). The lesbian who grows up in a non-lesbian family does not usually experience the lesbian culture, except from perhaps a conceptualized perspective. A lesbian who has experienced

the lesbian culture in a conceptualized manner may have read books about lesbianism, be related to other lesbians in the family system, and/or have friends and/or acquaintances who are lesbians (MacCowan, 1987).

Coming Out

The coming out stages for lesbians differ in the process of lesbian identity formation. Coleman (1982) presents five developmental stages of the coming out process using examples of individuals with same-sex model orientations. The stages described in his article are: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and identity integration.

More recent research has revealed that not all lesbians and gay men proceed through all of these stages in the order given and not all lesbians and gay men may advance through all five stages, and Coleman (1982) also states this in his article. Some of the stages Coleman presents may vary among individuals. However, these developmental stages of coming out have produced new clinical models for treatment in the field of psychotherapy.

In their article on the similarities and differences in the coming out process for lesbians and gay men, de Monteflores and Schultz (1978) discuss and compare the similar and different ways in which lesbians and gay men identify themselves as non-heterosexual individuals.

These comparisons of socialization, the conducting of relationships, and the reasons for coming out are explored within same-sexed and opposite-sexed communities between lesbians and gay men. Some of the similarities that lesbians and gay men were described as sharing in their coming out processes include the personal to the public disclosure of same-sex attraction, the importance of initial involvement in their respective lesbian and gay communities, socialization, fear of homophobia, and the pre-coming out confusion of whether "homosexuality" is a choice or not. The differences that lesbians and gay men have in their coming out processes were described as the adoption of sex-roles and political and legal issues.

The presence of homophobia and internalized homophobia are recognized as hostile environmental elements in which lesbians (and gay men) who have "come out" experience throughout their lives to greater or lesser degrees. In her article on internalized homophobia and lesbian identity, Sophie (1987) discusses suggestions for therapists working with women who are having difficulty accepting their attractions to other women. She presents several coping strategies to assist women in achieving the goal of promoting self-acceptance and reducing internalized homophobia. Some of the strategies Sophie

describes include cognitive restructuring, avoiding a negative identity, adopting an identity label, self-disclosure, meeting other lesbians, and habituation to lesbianism.

Margolies, Becker and Jackson-Brewer (1987) discuss the relationship between the homophobic society and the impaired lesbian identity in their article on internalized homophobia: identifying and treating the oppressor within. They explore the issues of the intrapsychically damaging ramifications of homophobia which often negatively affect the internalized self concept of lesbians and can potentially prevent a lesbian from coming out. Margolies, Becker and Jackson-Brewer (1987) assert that "closeted" lesbians may experience more difficulty in their lives because they operate and function in a covert identity, having to deal with the constant fear of being discovered that they have been living a lie within their families, relationships, and workplaces. Their refusal to acknowledge their lesbianism may foster feelings of self-hatred and may impair the ability to trust, relate with genuine emotions, and promote a fulfilling sense of intimacy.

Summary

In summary, research and academic studies are lacking in regards to the identity formation of lesbians who are

adopted. There are no data that discusses whether lesbians who are adopted experience similar or different processes of identity development from lesbians who are not adopted. There are also no data that explores the possible challenges to identity developments among lesbians who are adopted.

This study is not intended to reach any conclusions about the "causes" of lesbianism, nor to identify any psychological dysfunctions with being a lesbian or with being adopted. This study is also not intended to compare an identified group of lesbians who are not adopted with a sample of lesbians who are adopted, since a control group of non-adopted lesbians is lacking. It is intended that this study will shed some light on the identity formation of lesbians who are adopted by discussing lesbian identity development and the identity formation of people who are adopted. This study will also present new data and information which may be used for further research on lesbians who are adopted. The findings of this research may also present new questions about the impact of adoption upon lesbians who are adopted, as well as the impact of lesbian identification upon women who are adopted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study is an exploratory project designed to explore the identity development of lesbians who are adopted. It was intended that the exploratory strategy of this study would most effectively reflect the experiences and stories of the adopted lesbians who participated in this study, presenting similarities and differences among them.

Some of the specific questions this study explored included: How do lesbians who are adopted perceive their sexual identity? How do lesbians who are adopted perceive their identity as adopted persons? What are the specific (if any) issues which arise from being both adopted and a lesbian? How does the "coming out" process impact upon lesbians who are adopted? How does "searching" or "not searching" impact upon lesbians who are adopted? How do adoption and lesbian issues affect intimate and family relationships? The answers to these questions might determine whether it is important that lesbians who are adopted seek support for their specific issues.

Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of 13 self-identified lesbians who were adopted as infants or young children. All of these women volunteered to

participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 22 to 59 years old; 11 were Caucasian, 2 were women of color, and all resided in the New York and New Jersey area, in close proximity to where this study was conducted.

The method used for sample selection was self-selection in that each of the volunteers were strangers to this researcher and each woman initially contacted the interviewer, except for the two volunteers who participated in the pre-test interviews. The sample was obtained through placing an advertisement requesting volunteers to be interviewed in two national publications--one a monthly, Boston-based feminist women's publication and the other a weekly, mainstream New York City-based publication. The advertisement in the former publication ran for one month and the advertisement in the latter publication ran for three consecutive weeks. About two dozen flyers requesting volunteers were also distributed to and posted at a few college and university women's centers, a few women's bookstores, a few lesbian organizations, and a few were given to colleagues and acquaintances--all in the New York City area.

Nineteen (19) women responded to the New York City newspaper ad, 2 responded to the other newspaper ad, 6 women were informed by colleagues, and none responded

to the flyers which were posted, for a total of 27 women who initially expressed interest in being interviewed. A sample of 25 interviews was initially intended for this study, but due to logistics--time constraints and scheduling difficulties--only 13 interviews were actually conducted. The other 14 women who initially responded to volunteer failed to be interviewed for the logistic reasons mentioned above. Of these 14 women, 10 did not return phone calls made to them when messages were left on their answering machines. Several attempts were made to contact them, but it was apparent that they had chosen to not participate in the study when they did not respond to requests to contact this researcher to schedule an interview. Four (4) women did respond to the messages left on their answering machines but either were not able to schedule a convenient time for the interview or lived too far away to travel.

In consideration for the interview guide limitations, long distance interviews were not encouraged nor conducted. All of the interviews were conducted in New York and New Jersey, within a 30-mile radius. Of the 19 women who responded to the New York City newspaper ad, 5 were eliminated who lived outside of the 30-mile radius of the New York City area.

Data Collection

The procedure for data collection was that a woman responded to the advertisement, an interview was scheduled, and the interview was conducted, either in a restaurant or at the volunteer's apartment or place of work. After the interview, the interviewer obtained the volunteer's address and phone number for the purpose of sending the study findings to the individual. Each of the 13 women who were interviewed expressed interest in receiving the study findings. This opportunity was the major incentive to participate in the study.

The method of interviewing was chosen to reflect the experiences of a sample of lesbians who are adopted by presenting their feelings and their stories. It was intended that personal reflections might best convey their issues of being adopted and being lesbians in a more humanistic approach, rather than through a more impersonal statistical analysis.

An interview guide of 90 questions was written (see Appendix C). The interview guide was divided into nine sections: identifying/personal information, relationship status, children/childhood, counseling/therapy, adoptive family, adoption issues, birth parents/family, sexual identity/lesbian issues, and conclusion/closure. There

were 10 identifying questions that asked for age, initial source of request for thesis participation, ethnicity, and other questions about social, professional, educational, relationship, and adoption background at the beginning and throughout the interview guide. Additionally, there were 34 "yes" and "no" questions, and the remaining 46 questions elicited open-ended elaborations of the interviewees' experiences, with "why?" or "why not?" Using this interview guide, person to person interviews were conducted with a total of 13 women.

The 2 pre-tests that were conducted resulted in some changes in the format of the interview guide: revision of the sections by adding new sections of children/parenthood and counseling/therapy, and conclusion/closure, the chronological replacement of questions, the elimination of some repeated questions, and the addition of new questions to provide a more effective transition from each section. The final interview guide (see Appendix C) resulted in a longer but more cohesive format.

At the beginning of each interview, the volunteer was informed that she could stop at any time if she was experiencing any discomfort. This interviewer represented herself as the person who asked the questions, then

remained silent until the question was answered. There was a minimal exchange of personal information, unless the volunteer inquired, and only then were details shared accordingly. Time limitations and the location of the interview determined the tone of the interview. The interviews conducted in volunteers' homes were more relaxed than the ones conducted in restaurants and/or the work place.

The actual interviews were conducted in a time range of 45 minutes to 1½ hours. This time range depended upon the length of the responses that the volunteers provided. The interviews were conducted within a two month period from January to March.

The advantages of this interview guide format reflect the varied and often eloquent expressions by the women who chose to elaborate on some of these questions. It was this researcher's intention to quote some of these women's own words in conveying some of the experiences of lesbians who are adopted and in examining some of the differences and similarities between the 15 women who were interviewed.

The disadvantages of this interview guide format were presented in the often vague and sometimes unclear responses that some of the women presented. These

particular responses made it difficult to analyze the issues which may be similar or different. Another disadvantage to this interview guide was that some of the questions were confusing and the volunteers did not comprehend the questions, thereby having difficulty in responding accordingly.

Data Analysis

Each interview was taped, and the tapes were then transcribed for the data to be analyzed. The general strategy for analyzing the data through the use of a data array supplied the statistics to be analyzed for percentages and counts describing the similarities and differences among the women who were interviewed.

The "why?" and "how?" responses were included to provide further elaboration of the "yes" and "no" responses. These "why?" and "how?" questions attempted to encourage the volunteer to freely articulate her own feelings, her experiences and perceptions of her issues of being a lesbian and being adopted, without limitations of time. These responses were then categorized by theme, similarities and differences. Examination of parenting or non-parenting experiences, family relationships, lesbian relationships, lesbian community involvement, searching, and finding was then made to determine if there were any patterns in the responses.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This exploratory study researched some issues of identity development of lesbians who are adopted. This study also focused on exploring the issues that lesbians who are adopted may have. Some of the issues which were explored are how lesbians negotiate their relationships with adoptive and/or birth families, relationships with partners, the coming out process and searching or not searching, and reunions with birth families.

Demographics

There were 13 women who were interviewed for this study. The ages ranged from 22 to 59 years old. Regarding age, out of the 13 interviews conducted, 6 were between 21 to 30, 5 were 30 to 40, and 2 were over 40 years old. As to the source of notification of the volunteer opportunity, 10 women indicated that they responded to one particular ad, and 3 were informed of the study by friends and/or colleagues.

In determining the ethnicity of the respondent, she was asked to identify herself as either Asian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, Native American (Indian)/Two-Spirited People, Latina/Hispanic, White/Jewish, White/Non-Jewish, Mixed Ethnicity, or "Other." Eight (8) women identified themselves as

White/Non-Jewish, 3 as White/Jewish, 1 as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 as Mixed Heritage/Latina.

Regarding level of education, 5 women had had some college, 2 were college graduates, 1 had been in post-graduate studies, and 5 were currently in post-graduate studies. In reference to professional and/or student status, all 13 women worked full-time, and 5 women were also currently studying part-time. When asked what their occupations were, the women responded accordingly and the varying professions were then categorized into two groups: 10 women worked in professional jobs. For example, one woman was an attorney and another was a high school teacher. Three (3) women worked in non-professional positions. For example, one woman was an electrician and another woman was a security guard.

Relationship Situation

Referring to relationship status, 3 women were single and not dating, 2 were single and dating, 3 were in a relationship but not living together, and 5 were in a current relationship and living together. Of the 5 women who were not in a current relationship, 3 had been involved in a relationship less than a year ago, and 2 had been involved in a relationship more than a year ago. Twelve (12) women reported that their current or past partners

identified themselves as lesbians, and 1 woman reported that her past partner was not lesbian-identified.

Twelve (12) women indicated that their partners were not also adopted, while 1 reported that her partner was also adopted. All but one woman discussed her adoption with her partner, but one woman said that she had not discussed her adoption with her partner. Most women felt that their adoption was something to be shared with their partners because it was a part of them. As one woman stated:

My adoption is an important factor of me. (It is) of what I'm all about. It's very important that I discuss it with anyone and everyone. It's the foundation of me, basically, so I think it's important that I let anyone I'm dealing with know that I was adopted and (that) these were the circumstances. Basically, this is the foundation.

Regarding whether their partner's ethnicity was the same as theirs, 7 women confirmed that their partners' ethnicity was the same as theirs, and 6 women had been involved with a current or most recent partner of a different ethnicity. Of these 6 women, 3 reported that they were involved with White/Non-Jewish partners, 1 reported that her partner was White/Jewish and the remaining 2 did not indicate which ethnicity their partners had been. All 13 women currently are or were involved in monogamous relationships with their partners.

Children/Parenthood

Of the women interviewed, 2 women had children, 1 adopted and one non-adopted, and 11 women did not have children. Eleven (11) of the women expressed interest in adopting children of their own, while 2 confirmed that they would not adopt themselves. In a question asked of the two women who were mothers--how do they think being adopted has affected them as mothers--one woman replied, "I don't know. I don't know how to answer that question. I come from an adoptive family and I would just raise my child the same way I was raised." The other woman in responding how being adopted might affect her as a mother said, "I am probably more inclined to look favorably on adopting."

Therapy/Counseling

Regarding therapy or counseling, 4 women had sought therapy for lesbian and/or adoption issues, and 9 women confirmed that they had not sought therapy at any time specifically for lesbian and/or adoption issues. More than half of the women felt that their adoption and/or lesbian issues were not necessarily problematic enough to be addressed in therapy. One woman in particular replied that she did not believe in therapy of any kind.

A few of the women denied that they had any adoption

and/or lesbian issues, although more women admitted that they had more difficulty dealing with their adoption than their being a lesbian. In response to the question about why these women did seek out counseling, one woman stated:

My adoption was a horrible experience. There was alcoholism, and there was a lot of physical abuse, in terms of what I sought counseling because of those issues, even though I didn't know I was adopted, but the family was really messed up, so, unfortunately, I felt I would be messed up also. Then there was this issue later on of lesbianism, so, all of that was the first time I sought therapy. It wasn't just for my sexuality, but basically trying to deal with myself. The second time I sought therapy, I had come to terms with what I was with my lesbianism. And I knew I was adopted and it was bringing all this together. And getting a better understanding of myself.

In contrast, in responding to why some women did not seek out counseling, one woman reported:

Because my adoption is an essential part of myself and my quest to figure out who I am, but my struggles don't primarily center around issues having to do with my adoption, although I would have to say that when you scrape away the veneer, you get that primitive, archaic part of my person. But it's (adoption) not an essential issue.

Referring to whether any of the women are in counseling, 4 of these women are currently in individual therapy--1 for under one year, 3 for over one year, and 9 women are not and/or were not in individual therapy at any time. Regarding couples counseling, 3 are or were in counseling with their partner, and 10 were not or currently are not in couples counseling. Most of the

women expressed that their relationships warranted couple's counseling, and some recognized the need for therapeutic intervention even if they were not currently in treatment. As to why 10 women did not seek out couples counseling, one woman stated, "I don't think we (partner and self) need couples counseling. I don't think anybody else has the answer."

Adoptive Parents/Family

Regarding their adoptive parents and family, 6 women confirmed that both parents were currently alive, while 7 responded that one or more parents were not alive: Out of the 7 women, 4 reported that only their mother was alive, 1 reported that only her father was living, and 2 reported that neither parent was alive. All 13 women reported that their parents are currently married or were married at the time of death of the spouse.

Regarding siblings, 10 women reported that they had one or more siblings: 5 women reported that their sibling(s) had also been adopted, and 5 confirmed that their sibling(s) were not adopted. Only 1 woman reported that her brother (also adopted) was gay, while the other 4 women confirmed that their sibling(s) were heterosexual. Three (3) women were only children and had no siblings. None of the women reported that either of their adoptive

parents were lesbian or gay, and 12 women reported that their adoptive parents were of the same ethnic background as they were, while only 1 reported a different ethnicity of her adoptive parents.

Adoption Issues

Three (3) women reported having been adopted under the age of 6 months, 5 confirmed that they had been adopted between 6 months and 1 year, while 5 other women reported that they had been adopted at over 1 year old. For the women who were adopted under 6 months old, all of them felt that they were an integral part of the family and that their adoption was a unique but not an exclusionary distinction from the family, including the women who were the only adopted children in their families. For the 5 women who were adopted as older children (over 6 months to 1 year old), they expressed confusion, questions, and wonder regarding the months or years before they had been adopted into their current adoptive families.

When the women were asked to explain how much information they currently knew about their birth parents/family, and how and by whom it was disclosed to them, most women expressed that they did not know much information and that what limited amount of information their adoptive parents did have was often shared with

them. Most women also expressed that their adoption stories were positive. The fact that they were told early of their adoption was greatly appreciated by all the women who were informed by their adoptive parents that they were adopted.

Many of the women felt deep gratitude and some obligation towards their adoptive parents, and a few expressed guilt towards their adoptive parents for their secret desires to search, which often prevented many of these women from not searching. However, for one woman whose adoptive family was dysfunctional, she reported her trauma:

I didn't find out I was adopted until I was 24 years old. There were always suspicions of that I didn't really belong with the family. I didn't look like anybody. Everybody was dark-skinned and then there was me (light-skinned). They basically lived with a lie and kept telling me, oh, yeah, you're ours. You know, never telling me I was adopted. They sort of always went around the issue. As a matter of fact my oldest brother became violent when I asked about it. So, I don't think it really affected me. It was something that doesn't fit and I don't really belong here and I don't know why. I just put it aside. I think it affected them (adoptive parents) more so than it affected me.

When asked how these women thought being adopted affected them as an adult daughter (regarding the positive and negative aspects of being adopted in their family, relationships, career, their life), most women expressed their coping mechanisms in varying ways. Some women denied

that they had any adoption issues at all. Some women described the fantasies they or their adoptive parents cultivated of their birth mothers in attempts to rationalize and justify their adoption, and some women felt it was a positive experience to be adopted. One woman shared this:

When I asked my (adoptive) mother why my (birth) mother couldn't keep me, she told me that my birth mother couldn't eat, or she was too sick, or she had too many kids. I used to imagine that she was the old woman in the shoe with tons of kids. But, I remember feeling rejected when I heard that. Even though the intention was that I was chosen--was that "we chose you because we weren't sick and we didn't have any children."

Most of the women expressed feelings of guilt, appreciation, loss for their birth mothers, and a sense of obligation towards their adoptive parents. As one woman reported:

This is very interesting. I'm a lesbian and out to my parents. My brother is also, he's gay (and adopted). And he came out to my parents later than I did. And his role in the family was the good child and I was the bad child. So, it was scary to contemplate how my parents would feel, when number two child came out. So, it was really, touchy at one point with my mother. She's very traditional culturally, but she's not very religious. And she says, "I think that God has sent me my son and my daughter because if they had been in another family, being who they are--being a lesbian and a gay person--that God made this arrangement so they could be in a supportive family." I was very moved by that.

Another woman expressed this when she responded to the same question--her feelings that she did not currently

feel affected in any way as an adopted daughter in relationship to her parents:

Well, not knowing how it feels not to be adopted, being adopted, I think I appreciate the pain my parents went through to adopt me. That was the choice that she didn't have to make. That's a choice that you appreciate. You tend to want to do more for her. Basically, it doesn't really have any effect, because you just want to put it back behind you. Because I have no access to any information about my adoption and I fully accept my adoptive mother as my mother. So, it's just like any other person.

When asked how each woman thought being adopted has affected her as an adult woman, most women spoke about issues of self esteem, insecurity, fear of trust and intimacy, or feelings of inauthenticity, while others didn't know or believe that their adoption affected them as adult women. One woman responded:

A lot of my insecurities stem from my being adopted and this is a definite learned behavior--how to overcompensate my insecurities. I take over a room. I walk in and everybody is focused on me. I hate it, but I have to do it, because it's like, my God, they're not going to like me. It's very difficult to deal with. My longest job was in an emergency room and I worked there for nine years and you have to be outgoing and ready and on. You have to take care of these people and you just click on and you are with people. I don't know where I came from. Who are these people (birth parents)? Who do I look like? Every person I'm with in an emergency room, you meet people with the same biological last name and you sit there and go, do you look like me? I mean you got kind of paranoid and you watch the shows on television and you sit there and you cry. And you don't know why you're crying about it. And you keep quiet, you don't want them (adoptive parents) to know you're crying about it, you keep it all inside. So it took a lot. Most of my traumatic things really do stem from being adopted and really not feeling

like I belong anywhere and I think that it interfered with my relationships also. I would go in and out of very bad relationships. I usually wound up with people who I thought needed me, so that means they would keep me. I just came to that conclusion. That was very difficult to see.

When asked how being adopted affected each woman as an adult sister, among the 10 women who had siblings--both adopted and non-adopted--the responses varied, depending upon whether the siblings were adopted or non-adopted.

One woman who had brothers who were adopted responded:

It's a different point, lately as adult relationships, it's interesting that when I talk with women who are adopted and my brothers think of their adoptions as men in a different way, they have a different emotional reaction to it. My oldest brother won't talk about it, he won't even acknowledge the fact that it's part of his life, his psyche. He finds it very difficult to even open up about it. My middle brother and I don't particularly see eye to eye on too many issues, so it's kind of not. We don't have a good communication about.

Another woman who was asked about her relationship as a sister with non-adopted siblings stated:

The relationship with my brother is fine. He has always been very open. We don't talk very often, but when we do, it's a continuing, ongoing conversation. We're quite different. He's married with two children. He has a very stable life. I'm on the other end of the spectrum. I think there's a part (of me) that probably wants what he has.

Regarding the questions which asked to explain how and when each woman found out about being adopted (first

memories, being told, not being told, what was she told, etc.), most women expressed that their experiences of being told their adoption stories were positive and helpful in terms of how they felt about themselves. One or two women felt ashamed as children in being adopted, and these women who felt shame had been told by their parents later as older children. Some of the women wondered out loud why they were not told sooner, and the women who were told they were adopted when they were very young expressed their appreciation towards their parents for disclosing the truth about their adoption.

Most of the women recalled their adoption stories with vague details, many of them did not recall any specific situations, moments or memories, but one woman did remember her earliest incident with being adopted at one year old, with vivid clarity. This woman disclosed:

My earliest recollection is being wrapped up on a blanket. I can remember the color. I can remember being in movement. I can describe this as an adult as being in a car. I remember this blanket coming over my eyes, shielding me and when I told my mother that story, she would freak out because that's when she picked me up at the adoption agency and I can remember that. You know the fact that she was able to put the time on that made it really significant.

Six (6) women confirmed that they currently do discuss their adoption together with their adoptive parents or family and 7 responded that they do not discuss their adoption with their adoptive parents. When asked why

or why not each woman does or does not discuss her adoption with her adoptive parents or family, some of the women who confirmed that they do currently discuss their adoption felt that it was an important topic to discuss, but most of these women felt that it was a difficult issue and uncomfortable for them and their families. One woman who does currently discuss her adoption with her adoptive family disclosed:

I think that we've always had a very open relationship. I think more than anything else, it's a struggle for my mother. I think she's got a lot of unresolved issues around her not being my biological parent, so she would often say to me, "Well, I've got the name of your mother, if you ever want to make contact and make the first foray, I'd be happy to". Since then (coming out), she's been very supportive, but she's got a lot of issues which make me uncomfortable, you know, because she's my mother.

For the women who did not currently discuss her adoption with their adoptive families, their responses reflected a need to protect their families from feeling rejected if they openly discussed their adoption and possibly the women's need to search or seek out information about their birth parents. Another woman who does not currently discuss her adoption with her adoptive family replied:

I've made a conscious decision not to talk to my dad about it. The last time it came up in conversation, it was so traumatic. It came up by my (a family member) saying, "We're both outsiders, we've got to stick together" and I burst into tears and my dad walked in and wanted to know what's going on and we had a long conversation about it. I let

him know then that I didn't feel any less about him because I'm adopted. But he was so shaken by that, I decided then, I made a decision then, I wouldn't talk to him about it. And I know that he has some information. We already have a tough relationship. Maybe if we got closer, I would be willing to talk with him and ask for more information, but right now I don't want to talk to him about it.

Searching for Birth Parents/Family

Regarding birth parents and family, 4 women confirmed that they are searching or had searched, and 9 women stated that they had not and were currently not searching for their birth parents/family. The 4 women who were currently searching or had searched did not find their birth parents or family, but one or two had found non-identifying information and were about to take the next step in the search process.

When asked if each woman knew what Open Adoptions are, 8 women knew and 5 did not know. For the 8 women who did know what Open Adoptions are, most of them felt it was very important and necessary for the adopted person to have identifying information about their birth parents or family. All of these women who responded positively to Open Adoptions had currently not searched, or, if they had searched, they did not find their birth parents.

One woman who felt it was positive replied:

I think it could be a very positive situation. I see a lot of very positive things coming out of it for everyone involved in the relationship. But it probably has some upshots on the other side, too. I would imagine if I were 15 or 16 years old and it was like this person is my mother and these people

are my adoptive parents, and I was to show up on somebody's door step, I think it would be weird, that would be a little bit awkward, but other than that, I think it could be a very positive situation.

Birth Parents/Family

Of the 9 women who were not searching or had not searched, 2 women were found by their birth mothers and other birth relatives. The remaining 7 women who had not searched nor found their birth parents or family expressed that they were interested but had not made the efforts to search, partly because they felt guilt towards their adoptive parents. Two women felt that because of their age--that they were older--it was too late to begin searching for birth parents who might have died. Most of the women who had not searched expressed that they did not want to disrupt their busy lives and felt that searching was too expensive, time-consuming and too much of an effort.

The women who were found by their birth parents or family were asked to explain how this was for them--was it positive or negative? One responded that it was positive and the other woman responded that it was negative. The woman who disclosed that being found by her birth parents/family was positive, responded:

The details surrounding being given up and their lives afterwards. Because for thirty years, I was

an only child (in adoptive family), the fact that I had parents was not the issue, the idea that I had (birth) siblings was the most telling thing.

The other woman who expressed that being found by her birth parents/family was negative, responded:

Initially, we went through the reason for the adoption, when I first met them (birth family). I did go. They're living in (state) right now, and we did go down to (state) to meet them. The reason (I went down was) because I was very curious to see if they looked like me and actually my natural mother looks very much like me. She's pretty young, but we talked about the reasons for the adoption and everything, but subsequently I really haven't kept in contact with them, although they want to.

Sexual Identity/Lesbian Issues

Four (4) women reported that they thought being adopted affected their sexual identity of being a lesbian, while 8 did not feel being adopted affected her sexual identity, and 1 responded that she did not know. Many of the women who responded to this question wondered aloud whether the interviewer was asking for the causality of sexual identity or being a lesbian, and thus responded accordingly. This interviewer's intention in this question was not to find the causality of sexual identity or being a lesbian but rather to find out if the "coming out" process had been affected by adoption and the relationship between the women and their families. This interviewer recognizes the confusion and vague quality of this question and has noted this lack of understanding.

The "Coming Out" Process

On the "coming out process," 12 women confirmed that they have come out as lesbians, while 1 responded that she had not. Seven (7) women expressed that they had come out under 21 years old and 6 women reported that they had come out as a lesbian over the age of 21 years old, with one of those women being someone who had come out to herself but not to others.

Eight (8) women reported that coming out or not coming out to their adoptive parents and family was positive, 2 women responded that their experiences were negative, 1 expressed that her experience was both positive and negative, and 2 responded that their experiences were neither positive nor negative. One woman who disclosed that her coming out experience to her adoptive parents and family was positive explained, "It's a lot easier for me because they're aware of my relationship, which makes it easier and makes me feel more comfortable."

Only 1 woman reported that her coming out to her birth parents or family was positive, and for the remaining 12 women, this question was not applicable. Eleven (11) women confirmed that their sexual identity and being a lesbian had affected their relationship with their adoptive parents or family, while 2 asserted that their sexual identity and being a lesbian had not affected their

relationship with their adoptive parents and family. Some of the women felt that their sexual identity and being a lesbian had initially negatively affected their relationship with their adoptive parents or family, but eventually improved to greater or lesser degrees. One woman stated:

She (adoptive mother) is as accepting as she can be with (partner). In her deepest heart of hearts, she would love to see me with a man. It never gets said anymore. I know it's hard, particularly around the issue of grandchildren. I'd like to have a child, and I know it's hard for her (adoptive mother) to accept two women having children. She can't tell anybody, "Look, this is a picture of my son-in-law." She's not like, "Oh this is my daughter's lesbian lover." So I think it's socially difficult for her.

Another woman who stated that her sexual identity and being a lesbian did not affect her relationship with her adoptive parents said, "My adoptive parents did not understand homosexuality. A lot was unsaid. They knew, but very quietly."

Being Adopted and Being a Lesbian

When asked whether their sexual identity and being a lesbian had simplified or complicated their adoption issues (if any), 5 women stated that their sexual identity and being a lesbian had simplified their adoption issues (if any), 3 reported that their sexual identity and being a lesbian had complicated their adoption issues (if any), and 5 confirmed that their sexual identity and being a

lesbian had neither simplified nor complicated their adoption issues (if any). Similarly, 7 women reported that their adoption issues had simplified their sexual identity and being a lesbian, 4 stated that their adoption issues had complicated their sexual identity and being a lesbian, and 2 confirmed that their adoption issues neither simplified nor complicated their sexual identity and being a lesbian.

One woman who felt that her sexual identity and being a lesbian had simplified her adoption issues said, "I don't really know. I mean, I don't feel like coming out was a negative for me in any way. Knowing I'm adopted kind of helps explain me as a person. So, identifying as a dyke furthers that explanation." Another woman who felt that her sexual identity and being a lesbian complicated her adoption issues stated:

One of the reactions my mom had with it (coming out as a lesbian) was, "It couldn't have happened with me (adoptive mother). It has nothing to do with me (adoptive mother). This is you (lesbian who is adopted). We (adoptive parents) didn't raise you to be that way (lesbian)." I didn't disagree with her. What I always thought was it's very interesting that I think you come as a package of haves, that I arrived as a complete person to be with my parents and my brothers and I were raised in the same environment and we are as diametrically opposed as three people can actually be. I know that being adopted is part in parcel of the whole thing and being lesbian is part in parcel of the whole thing. All entwined, intertwined.

The women who felt that their sexual identity and

being a lesbian neither simplified nor complicated their adoption issues, all of them stated that they felt their sexual identity and being a lesbian and their adoption were two separate issues and not at all connected. One woman who expressed this feeling said:

I never really found that I had the difficulty of coming out or with the idea of being adopted, because I've had a relationship the whole length of time that I've been out (as a lesbian). I'm comfortable and secure. I don't see it (sexual identity and being a lesbian) connecting with (adoption issues) in any conflicting way.

When asked in what ways the women thought being adopted had or had not affected their sexual identity and being a lesbian, most women did not feel that their being adopted affected their sexual identity and being a lesbian. As one woman said:

I don't think it (being adopted) has anything to do with my sexuality. I feel that my sexuality is rooted in my parents. I think it (being a lesbian) would have come out if I hadn't been adopted.

One of the 4 women who felt that her adoption did affect her sexual identity and being a lesbian replied:

I have something I firmly believe in, based upon various factors, on having and not having. I think that female affection and connection with my mother helped push me in the direction towards lesbianism, because she was not at all that type of person. She didn't even want to touch. She was the sort of person who did not show any type of affection or love. Yeah, I think it (adoption) had a great factor on my being a lesbian.

Lesbian Community

Six (6) women responded that they were currently involved in the lesbian community and 7 confirmed that they were not involved in the lesbian community. As to why some women were currently involved or not involved in the lesbian community, most of the women expressed that it was important for them, that it was vital to their identity as being a lesbian, and that they felt comfortable in the lesbian community. One woman who expressed the importance of being involved in the lesbian community stated:

Well, it's home. It's my family. I really do have a lesbian family that I spend my holidays with. Good friends that I spend time with. Everything. It's crucial.

For the seven who were not involved in the lesbian community, most of the women expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction in the lesbian community. Others stated that it was not important for them to feel they had to be involved in the lesbian community. One woman said, "I travel a lot and haven't much time to socialize nor do political activities within the lesbian community."

When asked if these women know or knew other lesbians who were adopted, 10 confirmed that they did know other lesbians who are adopted, and 3 did not know other lesbians who are adopted. For the 10 women who responded that

they did know other lesbians who were adopted felt that it was important and positive to know other lesbians who are adopted. One woman expressed:

It was nice to see that I wasn't the only one out there I guess. You could say that we were having an identity crisis. It's that unknown that constantly eats at you. And I definitely felt much better. I think that's what brought us together rather than us having any other similar characteristics. It was that (being adopted) that brought us together.

For the 3 women who responded that they did not know other lesbians who are adopted expressed that they did not feel it was important, nor did they feel it would be helpful to know other lesbians who are adopted. One woman replied, "It might be helpful, but I don't know. At this time, it isn't very important to me, because I am so busy right now."

Adoption Support Groups

Three (3) women confirmed that they had joined an adoption support group, while 10 expressed that they had not. For the few women who had joined an adoption support group, there were varying experiences of success--all felt that a lesbian-identified adoption support group was most important for lesbians to feel comfortable in also being able to deal with lesbian issues. One woman, who had joined a support group, when asked whether joining an adoption support group was helpful, responded:

Well, to discuss issues like who am I?. What am I doing? What does this mean? Not only from the

adoption perspective, but from the sexual perspective, at that time, so I did need a little more dialogue about it, but basically a group of people got together and got kind of self flagellating about it. I didn't like that very much, I didn't find it accomplishing anything, so I grew away from it.

Most of the women who had not joined an adoption support group felt that a group would not be useful nor necessary for them to be able to deal with their adoption issues. However, one particular woman expressed great enthusiasm and interest in a support group for lesbians who are adopted and requested that this interviewer start one up in the New York/New Jersey area.

When asked if they would like to network with other lesbians who are adopted, 8 women expressed interest in networking, 4 responded that they would not like to network, and 1 responded that maybe she would like to network with other lesbians who are adopted. The responses to this question appear to reflect the sense that most of the women who were interviewed for this study identify more strongly with being a lesbian in comparison to identifying with their being adopted. Most of the women felt more comfortable talking about their lesbian identity and appeared to have difficulty discussing their adoption issues--often stating that they did not have adoption issues, even when they were disclosing how difficult it was to be discussing their adoption.

None of the women were involved in the adoption

community; therefore, none of these women were out to the adoption community as a lesbian. Eleven (11) women reported that they were out to the lesbian community as an adopted person, and 2 stated that they were not out as an adopted person to the lesbian community.

When asked whether any of the women would be interested in seeing more written about lesbians who are adopted, 12 women expressed interest, while the 1 woman expressed indifference and responded that it did not matter to her. Most of the women responded that they thought writing a thesis was a good idea, that they had never seen anything written about lesbians who are adopted, and that they were interested to see if there was any theoretical correlation between being adopted and being a lesbian. One woman had a unique response:

I would like to see some good plays. I really would. I think that would be a brilliant idea. Well, being a (college) drama school graduate, I'm into theatre.

Another woman who was more adamantly interested in seeing more written about lesbians who are adopted by lesbians who are adopted, replied:

All. It's there. It's out there. I think there are a lot of us who are adopted and lesbian. When I originally spoke with you about causation or correlation. It's out there, whether either exist, I think it's a topic that should be discussed and it's something that should be looked into. And then out of those adoption issues, like I said, I wrote a poem, there's the creative aspect that comes out of it. It comes out of what you were and how you

evolved as a person, so I'd like to see all of it, academically and creatively.

Another woman suggested where and how more articles and literature, written about lesbians who are adopted should appear:

I'm interested in anything, perhaps research. I guess that would be the first forum/form. The presentation of papers. It would take a while for it to become a mainstream issue. It might be in Ms. magazine. Try for that.

Respondents were asked what thoughts they had about giving advice or suggestions to other lesbians who are adopted, based on their own experiences as a lesbian who is adopted. Some of the women suggested that joining a lesbians who are adopted support group might be helpful. Other women suggested more concrete approaches in the process of searching, and other women did not feel like they had much to offer in terms of advice or suggestions for other lesbians who are adopted. One woman articulated how she dealt with the emotional content of her experience:

I guess it would be the advice that was given to me--to be angry. To come to terms with it and let it go because you don't self actualize until you do that. You don't know who you are when you have that wall of anger. With the adoption situation, I think there is definitely something missing and I don't know if it causes it or it helps it along. There are many complexities, and anger. Seek help and try to let it go because there are so many questions about yourself and your being that you can't allow that hostility to be there and stay there if you want to understand yourself, so just basically try to work it out.

Another woman responded in what advice and/or suggestions she might give to other lesbians who are adopted in a similarly therapeutic approach:

I guess for everyone to struggle with whatever their issues are. Maybe there is a gain in the similarities (of being a lesbian and adopted), but find what's meaningful (for oneself) in the adoption and lesbian experience. I'd be happy to share my experiences if that would help somebody, if they were feeling like they needed to hear. I don't know what one could say, except that one could listen. Acknowledge that these are difficult issues, from the depth of what it all means. I would certainly encourage people in treatment (to seek help) in love affairs to relations with other people to find meaning.

The Interview Process

All 13 women expressed interest in receiving a summary of the findings, most explaining that the primary incentive for agreeing to participate in this study was their interest in receiving the findings of this study.

The final question of the interview guide asked how the interview was for each woman who participated in this study. Most of the women felt that the interview was fine, that they did not have a problem with it and that they were comfortable. None of the women criticized the content of the questions or the questions themselves.

There was some confusion about the meaning of the questions, but the interviewer attempted to clarify the questions which then facilitated the volunteers' ability to articulate whatever they felt. A few of the women

were initially nervous about the interview, and some of the women exhibited reticence about being interviewed after they initially contacted the interviewer. For these particular women, several telephone contacts were made to make the women feel more comfortable and receptive to being interviewed. Some of the women admitted that the interview provoked some issues and feelings about adoption that hadn't been considered before. One woman disclosed:

It's (interview) been fine for me. I hope it helped you a little bit. There's so much about that (adoption) I haven't even coped with or thought about. I was totally, completely comfortable with this interview. There are many funny issues coming up.

Another woman who was asked how the interview had been for her, added:

I'm glad that these issues are of interest to someone else. It took me a long time for me to recognize that they were significant for me, but I guess you have to see certain patterns in a relationship that you have, and kind of examine the variables, and adoption is definitely one of them. Yeah, this (interview) has been good.

Finally, one woman who was asked how the interview had been for her replied:

Interesting. Very interesting. There's a part of my identity (adoption) that I don't, as I said, have time to focus on that much. I think there were times in my life when I was more pre-occupied with it (being adopted), but now this (interview) reminds me that this is an issue.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Adoption Issues

Perhaps one of the most prominent conclusions of this study is that an overwhelming majority of the lesbians who were adopted and were interviewed for this study felt more comfortable with their lesbian identity than with their adoption issues. For most of these women, dealing with being a lesbian in their lives was easier and not as difficult as dealing with their adoption. For example, the majority of these lesbians who were adopted had come out as lesbians and were active in the lesbian community, to greater or lesser degrees. However, most of the lesbians represented in this study had not actively discussed their adoption issues with their adoptive families. Many of these women also had not joined a support group and thus felt isolated from and uninvolved in the adoption community. For the purpose of this study, the adoption community is defined as adoption support groups, search organizations and/or other groups which allow adopted people to network, communicate and make connections with one another pertaining to adoption issues.

Another important conclusion which surfaced was that this study indicated that there is a need for adoption support groups that focus on the issues of lesbians who

are adopted. Many of the women who were interviewed for the study expressed interest in joining a support group for lesbians who are adopted, either in the near future or eventually.

Adoptive Families

Most of the lesbians who are adopted who were interviewed in this study expressed that their relationships with their adoptive families were currently positive to greater or lesser degrees. Most of the women represented in this study confirmed that their adoptive parents depicted their adoptions into their adoptive families as positive and "special" early in their childhoods. These women also expressed appreciation to their adoptive parents for making them feel that their adoption experiences were generally positive. A few women felt differently and considered their adoption experiences as a shame-based issue--as something in the family that was not to be discussed openly, in childhood or adulthood. For these women, disappointment and shame was expressed in their feelings about being adopted.

Many of the women in this study asserted that their adoption was more of an issue for their adoptive parents than for themselves. These women stated that it was more difficult for their adoptive parents to discuss their

adoption than for them (the lesbians who are adopted), especially where these women were the only adopted child in the family system. Another reason for the difficulty that some of the women expressed that their adoptive families had in discussing adoption was that adoption was secretive and not discussed in the 1950s and 1960s when these women were adopted.

Attachment Issues

The issues of attachment and cathexis are addressed in the Deeg (1990) article on the "adoptee's" cathexis of the lost object. It can be argued that attachments to other objects are conscious and unconscious experiences between objects. For some of the lesbians who are adopted in this study, their assertions of being "real daughters" of their adoptive parents may reflect their attachments to one object (adoptive parent). These attachments to their adoptive parents may be replacing the loss of another object (birth parent) (Loewenstein, 1985).

Some of the women who were interviewed for this study expressed a similar sentiment when they stated that their adoptive families were their "real families" and felt that their attachments to their adoptive parents were similar to the attachments that most non-adopted people have to their birth parents. Some of the lesbians who

are adopted and were interviewed for this study felt that there was no difference in their relationship to their adoptive mothers than their relationship to their birth mothers. However, the women who stated this had not searched and therefore had not experienced the process of reuniting with their birth parents.

Loyalty Issues

Loyalty to their adoptive families was asserted, but not stated as being such, by the adopted lesbians in this study. Some of the women who participated in this study expressed that they did not or would not search for their birth parents because they felt it would hurt their adoptive parents. They asserted that their adoptive parents would feel betrayed if they asked questions and expressed even the slightest interest in their birth parents to their adoptive parents. It might be noted that all of the women in this study made references only to their birth mothers when they discussed their interest in birth parents. Only one of the women made any reference to searching for her birth father. Some of the women expressed interest in finding at least a birth sibling if their birth mother could not be located. A few of the women verbally expressed their fears that their birth mothers were dead but felt that perhaps a birth sibling

was alive, was "out there somewhere," and might be able to be located. A few of the women expressed deep sadness and regret for not searching for their birth mothers earlier in their lives, at a time when the birth mothers may have still been alive or living. This sadness and regret may be attributed to the primal wound which resulted in the early separation from the birth mother (Verrier, 1987).

Searching/Not Searching

One of the women interviewed was currently searching for her birth parents. She asserted the reasons for searching as wanting to know who her birth mother was and where she came from. Two other women had not searched but had been located by their birth mothers. Both of these women expressed surprise at being found by their birth mothers. Both women expressed that the experiences of meeting their birth mothers was positive, but one woman admitted that she decided not to maintain contact with her birth mother because she did not want to continue a relationship. At this time, this woman explained that meeting her birth mother and understanding the reasons for her being relinquished for adoption were important enough. The other woman who had been found by her birth mother stated that the experience was also positive but

the fact that she had living birth siblings whom she was able to meet and establish relationships was more profound. This woman had previously been adopted as an only child into her adoptive family.

The reasons for not searching were confirmed by most of the women who participated in this study as similar: fear of hurting the feelings of their adoptive parents. This unwillingness to hurt their adoptive parents' feelings was also aligned with the sense of needing to protect their adoptive parents from their own desires to find out where and who they came from and fear of possible secondary rejection, although not stated as such. Some of the women in this study also asserted a general denial of the importance of searching and the need to search. Most of the women also complained that searching was time consuming and financially expensive.

Birth Families

For the women who did not search, many of the women expressed and verbalized their fantasies of their birth parents, particularly their birth mothers. Most of the women rationalized their adoption situations with reasons for their relinquishments as infants or children. None of the women expressed any resentment, blame or anger towards their birth mothers for their relinquishments

and each one asserted that there must have been difficult, but worthy reasons for their relinquishments. Economic disadvantages--poverty and the status of not being married--that their birth mothers apparently experienced were the primary reason that these women gave to explain their adoption.

Most of the women who participated in this study who spoke of their birth mothers expressed sadness, regret, and wishful thinking in not knowing their birth mothers. These women's feelings towards their birth mothers reflect the findings in other studies conducted on adults who were adopted (Kowal & Schilling, 1984). Some of the women expressed the hope that they might meet their birth mothers someday, even though they had not searched at the time they were interviewed for this study.

The issues of identity that arise from being adopted were evident in the women who were interviewed in the responses that were given for the data collection. More women felt more comfortable with their being adopted than others. The women who expressed discomfort in being adopted asserted that their adoption was not an issue, but it was a part of their lives that they had accepted and didn't want to change. It is important to note that these particular lesbians who are adopted stated these

sentiments and had not discussed their adoption with their adoptive families and/or friends. Most of the women who felt comfortable with their identity as being adopted had discussed their adoption experiences with families and/or friends. A majority of these women who felt comfortable with being adopted asserted that they felt it very important to share their adoption experiences with friends and partners.

More of the women who felt comfortable with being adopted also had adopted siblings and expressed that it may have been easier to deal with being adopted because they had siblings with which to share their experiences. However, most of these women also stated that their adopted siblings were very different than they were in personality, attitudes and status in the family system. Most of the women interviewed in this study admitted that they were not closely bonded with either their adopted and non-adopted siblings.

Lesbian Issues

Most of the adopted lesbians participated in this study expressed that they were more comfortable with their identities as lesbians than with being adopted. This conclusion can be substantiated by the majority of the women who participated in this study who, after being

interviewed for this study, expressed that they felt they had not dealt with their adoption issues as much as they had dealt with their lesbian identities. Many of these lesbians who were adopted remarked after the interview that they had not realized that they had not dealt with their adoption issues. Some of the issues which these women admitted to not dealing with included relationships with their adoptive families, searching, interpersonal relationships, and emotional aspects in their lives as being affected by their being adopted.

Further evidence of the lack of involvement in the adoption community may reflect the adoption community's failure to address lesbian and gay issues which directly affect lesbians who are adopted. Many of the lesbians who are adopted who were interviewed expressed their reluctance to join an adoption support group because many of the adoption support groups that are available to join are not lesbian or gay-identified.

While a few women mentioned that their being adopted may have affected their being lesbians, most of the women adamantly expressed that they were undoubtedly "born" lesbians and their adoption had nothing to do with their sexual identity as lesbians. However, the intention of this study was not to explore the causality of lesbian

identity but to explore whether the lesbians who are adopted and participated in this study felt that their lesbian identity was affected by their being adopted.

Lesbians who are adopted cannot deny their being adopted, but are able to deny that they have adoption issues. For this reason, these women may attempt to deny their status of being adopted in the same way that some lesbians choose to remain closeted and proceed with their lives as heterosexual women. Many adopted people may proceed with their lives for years without acknowledging or dealing with their adoption issues. In fact, many adopted people adamantly state that they have no adoption issues, thus continuing to deny their adoption issues and therefore never addressing their adoption issues. Many adopted people choose not to search and express their beliefs that they feel as if they had not been adopted.

Coming Out Process

It appears by the evidence presented in this study that the coming out process for these lesbians who are adopted has been similar in that most of the women feel comfortable with their lesbian identities and being lesbians to greater or lesser degrees. All of the women interviewed in this study did come out to their adoptive families and friends, although some were more indirect

than others. Most of the women expressed the importance of coming out as part of their experience of being comfortable with their lesbian identities.

According to all the women who participated in the study, they felt that their "coming out" processes were similar to other non-adopted lesbians that they knew. These lesbians who are adopted also felt that their adoptive families reacted to their lesbian identities similarly to the families of their non-adopted friends, both positively and negatively.

Partner Relationships

None of the women who were interviewed for this study were currently involved with another lesbian who is also adopted. For some of the lesbians who are adopted in this study and were not currently involved in a relationship, these women admitted that their adoption issues had affected their past relationships in negative ways. Some of the issues which they attributed to adoption and which they discussed as being problematic in their relationships were fear of intimacy, fear of trust, and fear of rejection. Other issues, including an unwillingness to make a commitment and attempting to "rescue" their partners, though this was not seen as such, may also have been a result of their being adopted. Most

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of the women who experienced these issues felt that their adoptions had caused them to get involved in unhealthy relationships.

Regarding the women who were not currently involved in relationships, the responses from the interviews conducted indicate that there was interest in establishing committed, monogamous relationships. Each lesbian who is adopted who participated in this study and was not currently involved stated that they had been involved in committed, monogamous relationships in the past, some long term. These committed, monogamous relationships reflect a typical pattern of most lesbians.

For the women who were currently involved in a relationship, all were in committed, monogamous relationships and stated that this status was important in their lives. It appears that these committed, monogamous relationships indicate that a sense of stability and security was very important for the women who were currently involved in relationships.

Lesbian Community

Most of the women who are represented in this study expressed their involvement in the lesbian community to greater or lesser degrees. Their commitment to the lesbian community varied from social situations to political

activism. All of the lesbians who are adopted and participated in this study who stated that they were involved in the lesbian community asserted that the lesbian community was very important and vital to their lesbian identities. Many of these women defined the lesbian community as being their primary support system and described other lesbian friends in the lesbian community as being "family."

For one or two women who participated in this study, the lesbian community was important for them to identify with in terms of knowing it was available to them, but they expressed less willingness to be actively involved and establishing friendships with other lesbians was less important. Each woman identified strongly with being a lesbian and felt comfortable with her identity as a lesbian.

Each woman also had varying definitions of what the lesbian community represented to her in her life. Some of the lesbians who are adopted who were interviewed for this study expressed disillusionment and were not involved, while others were deeply committed to the lesbian community. It appears by the evidence of the responses given from the interviews conducted that all of the women who participated in this study were comfortable as

identifying as lesbians with or without involvement in the lesbian community. The final conclusion is that the women who participated in this study did not necessarily define their lesbian identities by how much they were involved in the lesbian community.

Conclusion

Given the time constraints and other logistic limitations, this study represents only a minimal percentage of the population that was initially intended to be studied. Thirteen (13) women were interviewed. This small number of participants of course does not cumulatively represent the entirety of all lesbians who are adopted. Several factors may be considered in further research on this topic and on the issues which were only introduced in this study. This researcher hopes that further research will be conducted to continue the exploration of the issues which were presented and initially discussed. Further research would undoubtedly continue to explore and elaborate upon the important issues which were introduced and outlined in this study.

Clinical Implications

The clinical implications for this study are represented in identifying and discussing the issues of lesbians who are adopted. As reflected in this small

sample of adopted lesbians, many of these women expressed a sense of connection and identification in the lesbian community. However, they also expressed a sense of feeling uncomfortable in the adoption community to seek out support in dealing with their adoption issues.

The issues of lesbians who are adopted are different from those of non-adopted lesbians. Some of these issues which are unique include searching or not searching for the birth parents/family, loyalty issues to the adoptive parents, and negotiating relationships with both the adoptive and/or birth family. The lesbian community may be able to address these issues if lesbian-identified and adoption-related clinicians and researchers are informed. Further study and research may encourage researchers to continue the exploration of these adoption-related and lesbian-related issues that many lesbians who are adopted are challenged with.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate that more research is needed to determine the distinctions in the issues which were presented on lesbians who are adopted. This researcher discovered in the process of collecting the data and examining the results that the study of lesbians who are adopted would have been more effective had there

been more than one group studied. Comparisons may have elicited more results had there been an additional control group of lesbians who were not adopted and a control group of women who were adopted and not lesbians. The issues of adoption and lesbian identity might have been explored in a more concrete and more comparative fashion with these additional groups of lesbians, adopted women and non-adopted women.

Upon conducting the interviews, it was discovered that the interview guide could have been more effective in facilitating more detailed and reflective responses. The interview guide also would have been more efficient with fewer repetitive questions. The interview guide contained a few significant questions that failed to explore further issues. These questions differed from the other questions that succeeded in provoking additional responses, specifically by asking "why," once the answer to a "yes" or "no" response was given. For example, one question asks if one would consider adopting a child in the future. However, there is no following question that asks why or why not, nor for an elaboration upon the "yes" or "no" response given.

After conducting this study, the results have prompted more questions than were initially presented when the

study was proposed. Some questions that have surfaced as a result of this study are: Why is lesbian identity apparently easier to deal with than being adopted? How do cultural and racial issues impact upon lesbians who are adopted into multi-cultural adoptive families? How does age at the time of adoption affect lesbians who are adopted in their relationships with their adoptive families? Does the inclusion or exclusion of other siblings who are adopted or who are not adopted in the family system make a differential impact upon the lesbians who are adopted? What kind of impact does searching or not searching make upon the relationships between lesbians who are adopted and their adoptive families? It is hoped that further research and study will help in finding the answers to these and other questions about the issues lesbians who are adopted are being challenged with.

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Appendix A

ADVERTISEMENT

Are you a lesbian who is adopted? MSW student seeking
lesbians who are adopted & interested in participating
in thesis study. Adults of any race. All info.
confidential. Call 212-653-0613.

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

I will be conducting a study of identity formation, looking to see if there are unique characteristics of women who identify themselves as lesbians and who are adopted. You are being asked to participate as a person who has described herself as a lesbian who is adopted. If you agree to participate in our study, you will be asked to answer several questions concerning the topics of family, relationships, identity, searching and not searching, coming out or not coming out, etc. Participation should require approximately 90 minutes of your time.

There will be no financial benefit to you and no other benefits anticipated, other than perhaps feeling that you have contributed to the further understanding of people who identify themselves as lesbians who are adopted. Your decision whether to participate or not to participate is entirely voluntary.

Confidentiality will be protected by the researcher, the information given by you will be used only in a way that cannot be identified with you. If you give your permission by signing this document, the data will be used anonymously in scientific presentations and publications.

Should the interview process prove upsetting to you, the researcher is prepared to provide a referral for counseling. If you need further information regarding counseling, please contact the researcher for counseling referral.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Your cooperation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any individual question. You may also change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. If you decided to withdraw, all data describing you will immediately be destroyed.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS
OR WISH TO WITHDRAW
YOUR CONSENT, PLEASE
CONTACT:

DATE

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Anne Mi Ok Bruining
2316 Vance Street, Bronx, NY 10469-6018

Appendix C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. IDENTIFYING/PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Identifying Number _____
2. (Age) _____
3. Where did you hear/read about this study?

4. Ethnic Background:
__ Asian/Pacific Islander __ African American/Black
__ Native American Indian/Two-Spirited People
__ Latina/Hispanic __ White/Jewish __ White/Non-Jewish
__ Mixed Ethnicity (Specify _____)
__ Other (Please specify) _____
5. Education (and/or highest level of graduation)
__ 8th Grade __ 12th Grade __ Some College
__ College Graduate __ Post-Grad __ Post-doctorate
6. Are you?: __ Working __ Not Working __ Full-time
__ Part-time __ Student __ Unemployed __ Retired
__ Self-employed
7. What is your occupation? _____

II. RELATIONSHIP SITUATION

8. Current relationship status (Please check accordingly):
__ Single, not dating __ Single, dating
__ In relationship, __ In relationship,
__ not living together __ living together

9. If not in relationship now, when was your most recent relationship?

_____ Weeks/Months/Years Ago

Please answer the following according to your current or most recent relationship:

10. Does/did your partner identify herself as a lesbian?

Yes No

11. Is/was your partner also adopted?

Yes No

12. Have/had you discussed your adoption issues with your partner?

Yes No

13. If yes or no, why or why not?

14. Is/was your partner of a different ethnicity than yourself?

Yes No

15. If yes, what ethnicity? _____

16. Is/was your relationship monogamous?

Yes No

17. How long have you been/were you involved with your current/past partner?

_____ Weeks/Months/Years

III. CHILDREN/PARENTHOOD

18. Do you have any children?

Yes No

19. If yes, is/are any of your child/children adopted?

Yes No

20. If yes or no, please explain if you discuss your adoption with your child/children and why or why not.
21. If you are/not a mother of a birth child (if you have not adopted a child yourself) would you consider adopting a child?

Yes No

22. If you are a mother, how do you think being adopted has affected you?

IV. COUNSELING/THERAPY

23. Have you ever sought counseling regarding adoption or lesbian issues?

Yes No

24. If yes or no, why or why not?

25. Are you currently in individual counseling/therapy now?

Yes No

26. If yes, how long?

_____ Weeks/Months/Years

27. If you are/were currently in a partnered relationship, are you/have you been in couples counseling?

Yes No

28. If yes or no, would you be willing to tell me more about this?

V. ADOPTIVE "FAMILY"

29. Are both of your adoptive parents alive?

Yes No

30. If no, who is still living? _____

31. If both are still alive, are they still married?
If not, were they married at the time of death?

Yes No

32. If divorced or separated, for how long?

_____ Weeks/Months/Years

33. How many sisters and brothers do you have and what ages are they? Which ones are adopted?

| Sister/Brother | Age | Adopted (Yes/No) |
|----------------|-------|------------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

34. Are any of your adoptive siblings lesbian or gay?
Please elaborate who: _____

35. Are any/both of your adoptive parents lesbian or gay?

Yes No

36. If yes, who is? _____

37. Is your adoptive parent(s)/family of the same ethnic background as yourself?

Yes No

38. If no, which ethnic background are they?

VI. ADOPTION ISSUES

39. How old were you when you were adopted? _____

40. Please explain how much information you currently know about your birth parent(s)/family and who and how it was disclosed to you:

41. How do you think being adopted has affected you as an adult daughter? (the positive and negative aspects of being adopted in your family, relationships, career, your life, etc.)
42. How do you think being adopted has affected you as an adult woman?
43. How do you think being adopted has affected you as an adult sister?
44. Do you think being adopted has affected your sexual identity/being a lesbian?
- Yes No
45. If yes or no, in what way(s)? ((How and why?))
46. How has being adopted affected your relationship(s) with your partner(s)?
47. Do you know other lesbians who are also adopted?
- Yes No
48. If yes, how important is that to you? If no, might that be helpful in any way?
49. Have you ever joined adoption support groups?
- Yes No
50. If yes or no, why or why not?
51. Would you like to network with other adopted women/lesbians?
- Yes No (Maybe)
52. Do you know what Open Adoptions are?
- Yes No
53. If yes, please explain your feelings about Open Adoptions (pros and cons, etc.).
54. Please explain how and when you found out about being adopted (first memories, being told, not being told, what were you told., etc.).

55. Do you and your adoptive parent(s)/family currently discuss your adoption together?

Yes No

56. Why or why not? (Is it positive or negative for you to discuss or not discuss your adoption [with your adoptive parent(s)/family]?).

VII. BIRTH PARENT(S)/FAMILY

57. Have you searched for your birth parent(s)/family?

Yes No

58. If yes, whom have you found?

59. If you have found, are any of your birth parent(s)/family lesbian or gay?

Yes No

60. If yes, please explain how this is for you (positive or negative).

61. If you have not searched, please explain why.

62. If you have not searched, how much do you currently know?

63. If you have found your birth parent(s)/family, do you discuss your adoption with your birth parent(s)/family?

Yes No

64. Why or why not? (Is it positive or negative to discuss your adoption issues with your birth parent(s)/family?)

VIII. SEXUAL IDENTITY/LESBIAN ISSUES

65. Have you come out as a lesbian?

Yes No

77. Do you think your sexual identity has complicated/simplified your adoption issues? (if you have adoption issues)
- Complicated Simplified (Both Neither)
78. If yes or no, why or why not?
79. Do you think your adoption issues have complicated/simplified your sexual identity/being a lesbian?
- Complicated Simplified (Both Neither)
80. If yes or no, why or why not?
81. Are you out to the lesbian community as an adopted person? (if applicable)
- Yes No
82. If yes or no, why or why not?
83. Are you involved in the adoption community?
- Yes No
84. If yes, are you out as a lesbian?
- Yes No
85. If yes or no, why or why not?
86. Would you like to see more written (academically, professionally, creatively/literary) about lesbians who are adopted?
- Yes No (Doesn't Matter)
87. If yes, what formats would you like to see about lesbians who are adopted?
88. What thoughts do you have about giving advice or suggestions to other lesbians who are adopted based on your experiences as a lesbian who is adopted?

IX. CONCLUSION/CLOSURE

89. Would you like to see a summary of the findings of this study?

Yes No

90. How has this interview been for you? (Please explain)