

THE CREATION OF A SOCIALLY SHARED PAST:

ROMANIAN ADOPTION

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ABSTRACT

Using an exploratory, qualitative approach, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with adoptive mothers of Romanian children. Interest focused on whether Mead's theory of the past was viable for exploring how these mothers create socially shared pasts for their children within the family. In addition, Kirk's adoptive kinship theory and Goffman's theory of social stigma were used to explore whether (a) an adoptive mother's acknowledgement or rejection of the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood; and (b) her perceptions of social stigma around Romanian adoption shaped the content of her construction of this past.

All four dimensions of Mead's theory of the past were evident in this study - the implied objective past, the social structural past, the symbolically reconstructed past, and the mythical past. Substantively, respondents made use of three types of strategies in constructing a socially shared past: (1) verbal personal adoption stories created for their children; (2) lifebooks to document their children's histories; and (3) affiliation with self-help support groups or with other adoptive parents.

In this study, Kirk's categories of acknowledgment and rejection of difference between adoptive and biological kinship were not mutually exclusive as respondents showed a pattern of high to low acknowledgment of difference only. This acknowledgment focused on the formation of the family rather than on its functioning. All respondents showed open disclosure patterns with their children and others, a trend in adoption as an institution.

Although respondents provided detailed descriptions of perceived stigmatizing beliefs about adoption in general and Romanian adoption in particular, they showed low levels of personal internalization of

these beliefs. It was also demonstrated empirically that stigma can be responded to in positive ways. Specifically, self-help support groups offered positive social and emotional support, and provided individuals with a strong sense of belonging not experienced in "normal" interaction.

It is argued that the task of adoptive parents is not only to inform adopted children of their birth and cultural histories. Parents must also try to understand how the children experience adoption. Allowing the children to take the lead in discovering and understanding their unique histories will aid their mothers in creating socially shared pasts for their families.

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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

AN OVERVIEW

In recent years, the number of children in Canada in need of homes has diminished. However, adoption continues to be an important component of child protection. Increasingly, the children in need of homes are children who are considered to have special needs. These are children who have been abused, institutionalized, physically handicapped (Hibbs:1991), or emotionally or cognitively challenged, some are members of a sibling group, of racial or ethnic minority background status. Others were not adopted as infants, or have a history that suggests future problems. A large number of these special needs children are adopted from other countries, many from Eastern Europe and/or politically unstable countries.

Romania is one such Eastern European country. It was, for twenty-four years, under totalitarian rule. Recently, large numbers of Romanian children have become available for adoption by Canadians. However, the process of adoption of Romanian children is unique. Following the overthrow of Romanian President, Nicolae Ceaucescu in December, 1989, it has become known that an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 children were abandoned in state-run institutions. Although these institutions contained healthy children whose families simply could not support them, the 'orphanages' also house children who, in Canada, would have been placed in extended care hospitals, or in foster homes. Some children have mental and physical handicaps, some have alcoholic or unmarried parents. In addition, some of these children are true orphans. There is a high rate of maternal mortality in Romania where Ceaucescu's

forced breeding policies made contraception and abortion illegal.(1) Until January 1990, adoption of Romanian children by foreigners was not allowed. This meant that when the country opened its doors and allowed foreigners to adopt, there was no established international adoption process in place. Although these processes exist in other countries where international adoption is more common, we know very little at present about the effects of the Romanian adoption process on the thousands of families in Canada which have adopted children from Romania.

Recent studies of Romanian adoption have focused on the children who have been adopted by Canadians (Ames *et al.*:1992, Marcovitch *et al.*:1994). These studies focus on the developmental, psychological and physical growth of the children. Although Westhues & Cohen's(1994) study examined intercountry adoption in Canada and presents a wealth of information on how children and families involved in international adoption have fared, Romanian adoption patterns were not explored because the sample only included adopted children who, at the time of the study were at least twelve years of age. There has been little, if any, focus on the experiences of the adoptive mothers of Romanian children and their families. Bartholet(1993:xx) for example, in her book which focuses on international adoption from Peru, has argued that current policy concerning parenting options contains a powerful bias in favour of biological parenting. Further, she concludes that adoption as an alternative parenting experience is socially constructed as inferior to biologically reproducing a child, and is considered a choice of last resort (Bartholet:1993:xxii). This social construction, is based on the belief that "...parenting is equated with procreation and kinship with the blood link."

Similarly, H. David Kirk, in his 1953 sociological study of adoptive families, concluded that the social construction of motherhood is based on the assumption that motherhood is essential to women, and the belief that motherhood must be based on biological or genetic links. Recent research by Miall (1995) has shown that while community attitudes continue to stress the importance of biological ties in family formation, there is also a strong approval of adoption as an institution. Miall (1995:27) has concluded that:

North American society has witnessed the increasing emergence of family forms characterized by the blending of parents and children who are not biologically related, yet who function effectively and, often, in a traditional family pattern.

Goffman (1963) and Herman and Miall (1990) have documented positive consequences arising from the experience of social stigma, for example, the emergence of the self-help support group. Support group membership has been shown to foster information sharing, shared experience with others who are in similar situations, and a strong sense of belonging within a group (Phufl:1986). This research explores the importance of the support group for respondents who are "sharing their fate" with others who have also adopted children from Romania.

There are also specialized issues relating to Romanian adoption. These include (a) the loss of control adoptive parents experience when they interact with official agents, both Canadian and Romanian, during the adoption process, (b) the social stigma surrounding abandoned and orphaned children, a stigma which may or may not be perceived by adoptive

parents, (c) the negative media coverage of conditions in Romanian orphanages, (d) the reports of the poor health of the children, particularly, the high incidence of AIDS and hepatitis in the orphanages, (e) the widespread view that the adoptive parents of Romanian children have "rescued" them, and (f) the widespread view that Romanian children are special needs children. Although the social work literature deals with the preparation of parents for adoption, there is no sociological literature that deals specifically with the process of adoption of Romanian children and with the unique issues it raises. These concerns, compounded by society's cultural norms concerning adoption, need to be addressed.

The goal of this research, therefore, is to provide theoretical and substantive information on Romanian adoptive family experiences. Using a theoretical framework that draws on Mead's theory of the past as presented by Maines and his colleagues (1983), on Kirk's (1964) theory of adoptive kinship, and on Goffman's (1963) theory of social stigma, the experiences of thirty Canadian families with Romanian adopted children were explored. Attention will now turn to the theoretical framework informing this research.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I) The Definition of the Situation

W.I. Thomas has explored the powerful effects of societal and cultural views on the individual. His theory of the definition of the situation concludes that human behaviour occurs in terms of what is thought to exist by members of a society. He suggests that definitions of situations can constitute both process and product (Thomas:1951:226). As process, definitions occur in socialization when individuals

learn acceptable behaviours by having situations defined for them by others in the cultural group. As product, the definitions are embodied in social codes that come to govern normative behaviour. However, these definitions sometimes become problematic for those individuals in society who do not adhere to the norms. Thomas (1951:227) argues that the codes are:

developed by the methods of the definition of the situation. This defining of the situation is begun by parents in the form of ordering and forbidding and information is continued in society by means of gossip, with its praise and blame and is formally represented by the school, the law and the church. When there is a defined code, no matter what its' content, its violation provokes an emotional protest from society, designed to be painfully felt by the offender.

This theory is closely linked to the concept of social stigma. If Canadians tend to believe that biological blood ties traditionally represent "real" parenthood, then adoptive families may be stigmatized for not adhering to this definition.

II) Mead's Theory of the Past

It is clear that the concept of the definition of the situation is very much related to Mead's theory of the past which he discusses in terms of continuity and discontinuity. The development of a sense of continuity involves an overlapping of present actions and experiences with past events and future goals. This overlapping of presents becomes "a succession of events which connects phases of a continuous process" (Maines et al.:1983:162). Mead equates these

connected events with the social structure and argues that continuity cannot exist as a continuity of events without acting persons:

It rests with what we call our mental processes to place these images (of the past) in the temporal order. We are engaged in spreading backward what is going on so that the steps we are taking will be a continuity in advance to the goals of our conduct (Mead:1929:237).

Given this situation, human action is not comprised of many isolated presents or moments, but is in fact a social process that involves a continuity of these presents. The placing of our images of the past can be seen as involving the codes of society that Thomas proposes. These codes are learned by individuals in the past and used in present action to define a situation.

As discussed by Maines and his colleagues (1983:162), Mead argues that the passage of present actions or events contains elements of both continuity and discontinuity in that discontinuity is created by unexpected experiences. The past must be reconstructed in order for there to be continuity in so far as unexpected events create problems of "bridging contingent factors." If individuals cannot bridge unexpected events as they arise in order to join with the foundation they have laid in past actions, then discontinuity results. Thomas (1951) further argues that when these rival definitions or codes do arise, we may anticipate some degree of social disorganization and personal demoralization. Emotional instability and delinquency may result from these conflicting definitions. When the normative social order is altered and an individual is unprepared, then the phenomenon, according to

Thomas, becomes especially troubling. For instance, discontinuity could occur because of a lack of recognition by parents of an adopted child's cultural past. An unexpected event, such as acquiring knowledge of one's past history which was previously unknown, might spark a crucial life change. A crisis may not be acute or extreme, but it constitutes a threat or challenge to an individual, affecting his/her behaviour and influencing his/her personality and identity because of the loss of expected stability in life. In this research the process of continuity is a major focus. Specifically, the sociological implications of constructing a socially shared past are considered, or "grounded" within the real life experiences of Romanian adoptive families.

Mead's theory of the past, as presented by Maines and his colleagues (1983) contains four dimensions.⁽²⁾ These include the following: (a) the implied objective past, (b) the social structural past, (c) the symbolically reconstructed past and (d) the mythical past. Maines and his colleagues propose that each of the four dimensions is an integral part of the continuous process of reconstructing the past, even though they argue that the "implied objective past" and the "social structural past" remain relatively obscure and vague in Mead's definition.

(1) The implied objective past

In the implied objective past, Mead stresses that the event had to have occurred in order for a person to have knowledge of it. In terms of its relevance to the present research, the implied objective past is reflected in those general, objective events, which have occurred in the past, such as residence in a Romanian orphanage before adoption, or

the reality that the Canadian couple's infertility led them to pursue Romanian adoption. These facts will, of course, be part of the family's and the child's reality. The important implication of this dimension is that it allows both the parents and the children to feel that the past is not lost (Maines et al.:1983:164). Maines and his colleagues also argue that an individual selects certain aspects of the past that are remembered, often because they fit into his/her present structure or arrangement. In a sense, the implied objective past provides "a factual basis" for the continuity that is being created. It allows parents to suggest explanations for their child's present actions based on factual past occurrences. Biological parents do this regularly. In fact, they generally take it for granted because this information is readily available to them through their biological blood tie.

The process of remembering past events is the same for members of both biologically related and adoptive families. What differentiates them is the content of the implied objective past. Whereas biological parents have information about past events readily available to them because of their biological blood tie, adoptive parents are faced with issues of confidentiality and the lack of knowledge of past events concerning their children's origins and cultures. In the case of Romanian adoption, a fair number of parents are able to search for and acquire some of this information at the time of adoption. The past, then, becomes an important part of the present, contributing to the family's sense of continuity. It also provides a feeling of security, particularly when individuals feel that the past fits together well with the present.

(2) The social structural past

Mead's second dimension, the social structural past, follows the implied objective past, and requires an intuitive understanding in that it involves the documentation of facts in a sequence. Thus, it creates and establishes a continuity for the family which begins with the past, and which is connected to the present and anticipates the future. Mead argues that the nature of this ongoing process involves more than just reconstructing the past. He argues that reconstruction is possible because past experiences condition the present. "The "continuities of space-time" are the contexts of experience and are made up of sequences of activities" (Maines et al.: 1983:163). Mead further argues, "the order within which things happen and appear conditions that which will happen and appear" (Maines et al.:1983:237). When adoptive parents establish the sequence of reconstructed symbols that will form the family's socially shared past, this sequence conditions connections with future sequences of activities. These activities thus form the structure for continuity.

This dimension may be examined through the adoptive parents' construction of the sequence of the child's life story. This representation of continuity can be differentiated from the discontinuity which could arise if the sequence and conditions of the past life story were not laid in the present, thereby forming the groundwork for the future. An adoptive family might then find itself involved in mere passage of time, with no solid connections to build continuity.

(3) The symbolically reconstructed past

The symbolically reconstructed past, the third dimension, also implies a process which links the past with the present and with the future. It assumes that there must be a "chosen" beginning point in the reconstruction of the past. In my interpretation of the theory, although the "facts" of the past may be known, they do not necessarily have to be acknowledged in the reconstruction of the past. The goal of this research is to explore whether, within the Romanian adoptive family there may be two possible symbolically reconstructed beginnings that parents choose when they undertake the social construction of the family's past. They may begin with the child's Romanian cultural and birth history, or they may begin at the point at which the adoptive family came together. Mead argued that this process of symbolically reconstructing the past helps to redefine the meaning of past actions so that these actions allow an individual to give meaning to his/her present actions. Ultimately, continuity is created. This allows the individual to direct future-related goals. With regard to the adoptive family, the theory behind the symbolically reconstructed past can be closely linked to the successful creation of a socially shared past.

The experiences of both the children's known pasts and unknown pasts become symbols that parents may use in order to build their children's stories in the present, all the while sharing these new experiences as a family. As part of this process, parents are working to develop a continuity that allows for the anticipation of future-related goals, such as the expectation of the children's future questions concerning their beginnings. Of course, this does not imply that parents are able to control the future. However it does give them a

way of planning and preparing for future goal-related activities.

A distinction can be made in the theory between, first, the reconstruction of the children's cultural pasts as one way to create socially shared pasts, and, second, the reconstruction of the past which begins with the coming together of the adoptive family. Hoffmann-Riem (1990:223), a noted German researcher, argues that: "Familiarity with the entire biographical history probably makes it easier to decipher the meaning of a great deal of the child's action than does being cut off from the biological start to the child's life". This passage suggests the importance of reconstructing the children's biological and cultural pasts. This reconstruction is considered positive because it is believed to enhance family continuity and integration and to promote the children's self-identity. Although studies have shown that a reconstruction of the cultural past is an essential element in the formation of children's identity (McColm:1993), some Canadian adoptive parents may decide not to incorporate their children's Romanian culture into the family's socially shared past. On the other hand, they may include Romanian cultural celebrations within their family tradition.

(4) The mythical past

The mythical past, the fourth dimension in Maines and his colleagues (1983) interpretation, contains the fictitious creations which are not empirically grounded, yet may materially affect social relationships because they suggest ways of thinking, such as the belief that something is real, or that it was meant to be. Mythical pasts are created

precisely for purposes of establishing validity, and so contributing to the continuity of the family's actions. For example, the notion that God brought the adoptive family together may be considered to be a part of the mythical past. For Mead, mythical pasts are "purposeful creations which control and shape behaviour" (Maines et al.:1983:164). Pasts may be considered mythical because they belong "to the realm of ideation, but have practical value in solving situational problems" (Maines et al.:1983:164). Mead's theory describes myths as past explanations that are based partly on truth, and partly to establish validity of the past, present and future. The mythical past may be considered a useful tool in the interactive process which allows anticipation of continuous or future actions. For example, this mythical past allows the family to adjust to present situations by establishing a continuity with the past. Mythical pasts become valid for individuals because they are formed through an interactive process that allows people to anticipate continuous actions. Maines and his colleagues (1983:165) argued that "if a past is created which believably "fits" with other pasts, presents and futures and is acted upon as such, it is real".

The theory behind the mythical past can be linked to Thomas' definition of the situation. Thomas (1951) argued that human behaviour occurs in terms of what is thought to exist. As with a mythical past, what one remembers from the past to be true in the present becomes real in its consequences. It is these present beliefs that will be built upon in the future. In reconstructing the past, adoptive families are able to make sense of unexpected experiences by relating them back to past experiences. This aids the parents in preserving their sense of continuity.

In conducting research on how families construct a socially shared past, time becomes an essential element. The assumption is that both the past and the future have a hypothetical existence for an individual in the present - the past through one's memory and the future in one's anticipation. In the case of adoptive families, it is the adoptive mothers who are primarily responsible for connecting events in their children's past experiences and in the family's shared experiences into a continuous process.

Maines and his colleagues (1983) have concluded that Mead's theory of the past is a useful framework for organizing a wide array of sociological interests and problems. A review of the literature relating to this theory discloses a fairly comprehensive review of the theoretical issues involved. However, little empirical research has been conducted using this theory. Denzin (1987) argues that recent social psychological theories, with few exceptions, have either ignored or not given explicit attention to the concept of time. According to Denzin and other social theorists, such as Flaherty (1987), Maines (1987), and Charmaz (1989), the significance of the neglected dimension of temporality in social psychology lies in what Mead (1982) refers to as a "specious present". It is specious because of its elusive qualities. Mead (1964:336) argues that "our pasts are always mental in the same manner in which the futures that lie in our imaginations ahead of us are mental". This idea stems from his belief in the creative qualities of human nature in interpersonal relationships (Flaherty, 1987:146). Flaherty, in his study of the neglected dimensions of temporality in social psychology, claims that there is a tendency to look upon the past as nothing more than a set of irrevocable facts. However, Mead recognizes that the past is continually being redefined

by individuals. This allows for improvisation. He quotes Mead (1964:323) who claimed that "the past is a working hypothesis that has validity in the present within which it works."

Flaherty (1987:147) notes that it is clearly not enough to look at the artifacts of temporality, such as schedules and calendars. Rather, it is necessary to examine the junctures or disjunctures between both individual and social interpretations of temporality. There must be a commitment to look at the social conduct which people weave together in encounters. He suggested that temporality is shaped by the forms and processes of social interaction. As Maines and his colleagues observe in the symbolically reconstructed past, individuals use past experiences as symbols upon which they build in the present. However, these actions are always directed towards the anticipation of future related goals. In my research, adoptive parents might create continuities that allow for the anticipation of future related goals. The parents might try to imagine what comes next, but the future may surprise them. Moreover, the parents' actions must also be timed to fit in with their children's needs and the society in which they live.

Maines (1987) claimed that an incorporation of up-to-date conceptions of temporality into sociological work will contribute to a better understanding of human social life. The use of the theory of the past in an empirical study of the construction of socially shared pasts within adoptive families can provide us with a deeper understanding of the adoptive family's social integration process as they incorporate the child's past into their present experience, and in anticipation of future goals.

According to Katovich & Couch (1992), Mead (1934,1938) claimed that present action is compared to one or more imagined futures, and becomes encased in a temporal framework, moving toward a projected objective. They go on to argue that one task that confronts researchers is the need to specify how the interface between social pasts in relation to joint acts and anticipations of joint acts in the future are accomplished (Katovich & Couch:1992:44). The authors answered this question by asserting that it is not enough to rely on the present to explain social life. The past and future also need to be woven into the present by the actors for action to occur in the present. This interface is often accomplished by use of a discourse. Indeed, it is largely through discourse that different memories and views of pasts and futures are resolved in the present.

Those researchers, who have used Mead's theory of the past in their research, have shown that their findings support the claims made by Mead and by other more current theorists. For instance, Denzin(1987) examines the phenomenon of "first-time thoroughness", which describes how social events are experienced in real time. Multiple "readings" of a made-for-television film titled "Under The Influence" are used as evidence to support his conclusion that "the lived orderliness of everyday life rests on the sense of history that first-time thoroughness gives to problematic and taken-for-granted interactional experiences" (Denzin:1987:1). In the researchers' first reading of the film, time is the central topic. The experiences of the actors are dealt with in temporal sequencing; projection of futures, failed actions in the present and with the past. However, after repeated viewings of the film, it became clear to the researchers that the explanatory variable was the historicity of

interpretations. Specifically, the situated readings of the film built on one another. A single, first reading lacked this history. Denzin argued that this interpretive temporal feature of social life has received little attention in the social psychological literature. A theory that does not allow for the workings of the meaning of time cannot speak to the question of 'How society is possible'.⁽³⁾ Denzin further claims that the activity of interpretation gives a sense of "historicity" to everyday life. This is what provides the grounds for the conclusions that individuals make about their experiences.

Charmaz (1989) takes this theory a step further in studying how one's experience with chronic illness changes the meaning of the past, present and future. She argues that the theory of time is not a static assumption, but rather, one of shifting and changing reconstructions. People need to take, from their pasts, presents and futures images, and events which not only fit their views of their own selves and society, but also which explain and account for them (Charmaz:1989:140). Charmaz concludes that focusing on time may reveal under which conditions people move from their remembered pasts and create altered views for their present experiences and anticipated futures.

In her book The Adopted Child, Hoffmann-Riem (1990),⁽⁴⁾ describes how the structure of adopted family life demonstrates how members of a society "decipher" the past which exists in the present. She claims that the generally unknown past of the adopted child triggers intensive reconstruction work. Hoffmann-Riem's study considers how adoptive parents set about reconstructing their adopted child's past within the framework of attempting to solve specific problems. In doing so, she addresses the fundamental

problem addressed by Mead, the problem of how the past is restated in the present as conditioning for the future (Hoffmann-Riem:1990:223).

To sum up, these theorists claim that in human interaction there is a retrospective and prospective interpretation and that interactions assume a historicity from the beginning. Similarly, Hoffmann-Riem (1990) found that as adoptive parents reconstructed their children's biographies, the unknown past became more and more extensive. She documented how the focus of parental reconstruction shifted as the awareness of knowledge became greater. In trying to solve a specific problem, parents realized that they had to figure out much of the history for themselves. In other words, given the lack of factual information, they had to make their own interpretations using the information they had. These interpretations enabled them to account for and to explain their present situations in order to be able to anticipate their future interactional goals. In terms of my research with Romanian adoptive mothers, it becomes apparent that focusing theoretically on "time" may reveal whether and under which conditions mothers incorporate remembered pasts or create altered views, as Charmaz (1989) suggests. It follows that Mead's theory, as interpreted by Maines and his colleagues (1983), will necessarily incorporate all four of the implied dimensions as integral parts of the continuous process of time and temporality.

Focusing on adoptive mothers' perceptions of their adoptive experiences will shed some light on what is involved in the creation of socially shared pasts in these families. As part of this process, it will be necessary to consider Kirk's adoptive kinship theory and, in particular, his concepts of

acknowledgement and rejection of difference. Specifically, mothers' perceptions will be quite different, depending on whether they accept or reject the differences inherent in adoptive parenthood. The next section deals with Kirk's dichotomy and explores its relevance for this research.

III) Kirk's Theory of Adoptive Kinship

In 1953, Kirk conducted a mail survey of 97 Canadian and American adoptive couples' self-attitudes and experiences with the community. He concluded that the success of adoptive familyhood lay in acknowledging the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood. The theory stressed that the acceptance of society's construction of adoptive parent status aided adoptive parents in constructing a socially shared past with their children. The reconstruction of the past must have included this acknowledgement of difference on the part of the adoptive parents first, and then later on with the children.

Kirk's book Shared Fate(1964), is the culmination of ten years of adoption research involving some 2,000 Canadian and American adoptive families. He observed that there are two types of attitudes towards adoption that relate to the success of long-term adoptive placements. His research revealed that adoptive parents either acknowledge that their situation is different from that of biological parents (acknowledgement-of-difference), thus helping to create strong parent-child bonds, or deny that their situation is different from that of biological parents (rejection-of-difference), resulting in poor communication with subsequent disruptive results for the adoptive family (c.f.Kirk,1964:98).

Mead emphasized the importance of the social nature of the past, the idea that continuity cannot exist independently of acting persons. Kirk(1981:8) has also argued that "other people, and their attitudes and views, are the social environment which in large measure directs our thinking of ourselves and our lives." Kirk's research, which is an inquiry into the ways in which adoptive parents experience and adjust to others' attitudes towards their adoptive status, led him to assert that many parents did, in fact, deny the culturally given difference between adoptive and biological families (Kirk:1981:8). Kirk questioned this 'rejection of difference' in terms of the consequences it might have on parents, and on parent-child relationships. The result of this rejection, he argued is diminished communication and, therefore, a lower level of solidarity within the family. Later, this might result in identity problems for the child. What is argued to be most desirable then for a successful adoptive family relationship is the acknowledgment of difference. Kirk (1981:xv) suggested that:

given that the adoptive situation is objectively different from the situation of the family based on consanguinity, the solidarity of the adoptive family's membership is enhanced when their atypical reality is acknowledged in their daily relationship.

In discussing the dilemmas of adoptive parenthood, Kirk highlighted situational discrepancies for families which lead to parental 'role handicaps'(5)(Kirk:1984:36). He argued that, while adoptive parents must adjust their outlook on parenting from one of expecting to be birth parents, to becoming adoptive parents, they also encounter clues to the outlooks of others around them. Kirk's research has shown that this makes the adjustment more difficult for adoptive parents. Social and

cultural attitudes may make adoptive parents less confident of their parenting abilities and may lead them to regard adoptive parenthood as being less valuable than biological parenthood, thus creating role handicaps. These role handicaps serve as barriers to the parents' goal of integrating their child into the family unit. The success of this integration will have a major impact on how the children's cultural identities will eventually be presented to them.

Kirk (1984:45) argued that adoptive parents will work harder at this integration, which is taken for granted in biological families. Kirk also explored another concept that is closely linked to integration. This is the concept of differentiation. The idea is that, once the child truly feels part of the family, and has experienced solid attachments and love, he or she is ready for opportunities of independence. Once parents have reached this stage, "we may now state the normal parental goal in our society as one that involves progressive differentiation of their children on a firmly established base of integration" (Kirk:1984:45).

Applications in Empirical Research

Miall (1989) has documented a number of research studies that support Kirk's concept of the relationship between family stability and acknowledgement-of-difference. Researchers characterized acknowledgement-of-difference respondents as having more stable and realistic self concepts (Carroll:1964: 114-115), and as being less dogmatic and more flexible (cf. Jaffee & Fanshel:1970).

Kaye (1990) conducted a psychological study which explored Kirk's concept of the dimensions of acknowledgement

versus rejection of difference.(6) The sample consisted of forty intact, racially homogeneous families with at least one teenage child who was adopted before age two. The parents were interviewed with their adopted adolescents, and then each separately. Kaye's interest in comparing these families with one another was to investigate both the relevance of Kirk's coping strategies of parents a generation later, and to explore how the parents and children "process" the emotional content of their experiences as an adoptive family (Kaye:1990:122). Kaye concluded that Kirk's mutually exclusive categories of either an acknowledgement or a rejection of difference remains relevant. However, as this is a generation that is far less secretive about adoption, many subtleties were found in the parents' coping strategies which could be better distinguished on a continuum of a "high to low" level of acknowledgement or rejection of difference. Acknowledgement of difference was at the high end of the continuum and rejection of difference was at the low end. Kaye explained his findings as follows:

The fact that we did not find a unidimensional continuum of high versus low distinguishing among these parents does not mean we failed to see much 'rejection of differences'. It means that what we saw was more subtle and multifaceted than the literature suggests (Kaye:1990:132).

In one instance, for example, Kaye described how a mother handled a particular crisis with her daughter. The girl asked, "Do I have two mothers?" The mother had been telling her daughter from infancy that she was adopted so that she would grow up knowing her situation, and not suffer shock later. But, the mother answered her daughter's question by explaining to her what a mother does, such as helping her, making her

clothes and shopping. She then asked her daughter; "okay, how many mothers do you have that do those things for you?" Kaye concluded that the way in which the mother answered the question revealed a rejection of difference because she omitted from her answer that there was another woman who gave birth to the daughter. Over the course of this conversation, the mother's comments which would be rated as 'low levels of distinguishing' were equal in number to 'high distinguishing' codes. In other words, an adoptive parent, when acknowledging the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood, may not acknowledge all aspects of the differences inherent in adoptive parenthood. What Kaye suggested was that there was no evidence that a finding of 'low distinguishing' should be equated with "rejection" or "denial". Instead, the terms imply that all adoptive families experience many differences. This mother told her daughter she was adopted, but also chose not to discuss with her details of her birth mother's existence.

This recent literature contributes a great deal to our understanding of recent changes in attitudes towards adoption. However, Kaye's (1990) research focused only on the adolescent stage of the family life cycle. My study has focused on adoptive mothers' perceptions during the period when they are in the process of shaping and creating their young family's socially shared past. This will allow for a greater understanding of their actual experiences and will show why and when they choose to act the way they do. It will also serve to correct a substantive deficit in the literature. Moreover, the theoretical significance of these findings may go beyond adoption. They may also have relevance for the general study of family processes and their impact on children's development.

Theoretically, Kirk's concept of acknowledgement or rejection of difference only addresses the relationship between adoptive parents and their children, and how the adoptive situation is managed within the family. For example, is the child told about his/her adoption? Do the families celebrate the children's adoption anniversaries or any of the children's cultural ceremonies? This point of view may not extend to the relationship between adoptive mothers and the community at large. As Miall (1989) has concluded, "it is conceivable that an individual acknowledging the difference at home might present a different performance when in public." Kirk himself argues that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Parents may fall into both categories dependent upon the issues with which they are faced. Adoptive parents' experiences are informed by the attitudes of others in society towards their adoptive status. If the attitude is negative, parents may deny the culturally given difference between adoptive and biological families (Kirk:1981:8). This situation, which includes both acknowledgement and rejection of difference may have an effect on the stability and integration of the family.

This proposition deserves closer attention particularly when one considers dramatic changes that have occurred in areas relating to adoption. Over the past two decades, women's roles in society have broadened to include roles other than motherhood. This in itself may make adoption a more acceptable way of building a family. As Miall (1989) has pointed out, women may no longer have to "prove" themselves through personal reproduction, and they may then be willing to acknowledge the difference in adoption, both in the public and in the private domain. It is important to re-examine Kirk's adoptive kinship theory in the context of these social

changes. There is a link between the theories of Mead and Kirk with regard to the importance of both continuity and process in the creation of socially shared pasts. The cultural notion of adoption as second best may constitute a role handicap for adoptive parents. It requires "ingenuity to cope with impediments" (Kirk:1981:9). One of the known risks faced by adoptive parents is stigmatization. Indeed, the stigma of the adoptive status may play an important role in establishing how adoptive parents create socially shared pasts with their families. Consideration will now be given to that possibility.

IV) Goffman's Theory of Social Stigma

According to Goffman (1963), stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting. A stigma is a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype, which is created by society's beliefs. Goffman identified three types of stigma: (a) stigma due to physical deformities, (b) blemishes of individual character, for instance, those inferred by mental disorder, addiction, or dishonesty, and (c) a tribal stigma of race, nation and religion, which is transmitted through lineage. What these three types of stigma possess is an undesired differentness.

Goffman (1963) presented the idea that stigma is a social construct, a reflection of the culture itself, rather than a property of individuals, and that the "normal" and the 'stigmatized' are not persons but, rather, perspectives. Goffman (1963:32) argued that people who are stigmatized experience a unique socialization process. One phase of this process includes the learning of the standpoint of the "normal".

This involves incorporating the beliefs of society into one's own. Next, individuals learn that they possess a stigma and the social consequences of that stigma. These phases Goffman (1963:33) stresses, "form important patterns which establish the foundation for later development, and provide a means of distinguishing among the moral careers available to the stigmatized."

The issue of children and stigma were of special interest for Goffman (1963:91). He argued that parents may seem to protect their children from stigma by ignoring the social realities that the children may have to face. When children venture out into society, they do so as unwitting 'passers', particularly if the stigma is not immediately apparent. The children's parents, then, are faced with a dilemma with regard to information management. On the one hand, the children may be informed about the stigma when they start to attend school. However, they may not be mature enough to understand the information, and may disclose the information to those who need not know. On the other hand, if children are not told, they may not be prepared for possible consequences of a stigma. Moreover, children may be informed by strangers, who may not take the time or care required to present the situation in a constructive and hopeful light. This issue is closely related to Kirk's conclusions on acknowledgement and rejection of difference. According to Kirk, if adoptive parents demonstrate a rejection of difference, this will lead to the ill-preparedness of the children to cope with societal beliefs about adoption later on, thus interfering with the children's healthy sense of identity.

In considering efforts of individuals to manage stigma, Goffman (1963:6) claimed that the idea of stigma is simply

inapplicable to some people. It is possible...

for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by his failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human.

Using this technique of stigma management, the stigma is simply ignored. However, there are other techniques whereby many stigmatized individuals learn to deal more directly with their stigma. For instance, some individuals concern themselves with modes of adjustment to situations in which they are in contact with those who are not stigmatized. In these situations, stigma management becomes a social matter, and efforts must be made by the stigmatized individual to control or influence the information that others may have concerning the stigma.

According to Pfuhl (1986:157), there are three main techniques for the management of stigma. First, one may try to avoid the disclosure of damaging information. One example concerns parents who shield their children from social consequences. The second technique involves trying to make the already disclosed information less obtrusive and less stigmatizing. The third technique entails trying to bring about changes in the traditional meaning of the stigma. Regardless of which technique is used, Pfuhl argues that successful stigma management requires one to influence the social construction of reality. Reconstructing dominant social reality demands that one make an effort to counter the popular beliefs of the consequences that concern the stigmatized, as well as contesting the existing stereotypes and myths of the

stigmatized group.

Pfuhl (1986:183) also claimed that the creation of new social realities was intended to have either instrumental or symbolic consequences, such as changes in public policy that are consistent with the moral meanings sought by the stigmatized. Thus, techniques of stigma management may reveal, conceal or alter information, dependent upon how adoptive parents choose to manage the situation. This empirical question needs to be addressed.

The concept of stigma management can be related to the construction of the adopted children's lifebooks.(7) The idea of constructing lifebooks, or memory books, was introduced by the Metropolitan Toronto Catholic Children's Aid Society. The purpose behind the creation of this book was to give adopted children realistic views of their pasts. Thus, a child would have a foundation with which to build a future. Studies suggest that children have a great need to know as much as possible about their lives and families. Constructing lifebooks is an ongoing process. Parent may begin at birth or before and go on collecting more memories and information to give continuity to the children's lives. Thus, lifebooks may or may not be constructed to avoid social stigma.

It is possible that adoptive parents of Romanian children do not perceive a stigma associated with their social status. It can be argued that the status of adoptive parenthood does not fit any of Goffman's types of stigma. Or, it may be that adopted children may feel more of a stigma, while their parents may not perceive a stigma associated with being members of an adoptive family. They may however perceive a difference in family formation from that of a family formed

biologically. This speculation deserves attention as social values with regard to the family are constantly changing.

Sociological research suggests that there is a social construction of stigma around adoption present in Canadian society and that this may complicate the integration of the adoptive family, both within the family unit and in the larger community. Many studies (Kraft et al:1980, Smith & Miroff: 1981, Kirk:1984) have shown that in our culture "the biological blood tie is important for bonding and love, therefore bonding and love in adoption are viewed as second best; and adoptive parents are not real parents" (Miall:1987:34). According to Schnieder (1968:24), this blood tie is conceptualized as being indissoluble and mystical. It is seen as transcending legal or other kinship relationships. Kirk (1981:98-111) conducted research which provides evidence that "adoptive kinship in the nuclear family is not the equivalent of consanguineal kinship". Miall (1987) notes that emphasis on the indissoluble nature of blood ties may relegate adoption as an institution to the status of "cultural fiction". Thus, although adoption may establish kinship in law, the blood relationship is culturally defined as being an objective fact of nature, conveying the message that adoptive parents are not real parents. Miall (1987:283) also argues that "social values" surrounding adoption may have as much relevance for the success or failure of an adoption as the parents' modes of coping."

Public admission of adoptive status, then, may result in stigmatization for the family. Miall's research also reveals that "in a society that values biological kinship ties, the lack of a blood tie between a mother and her children may be an attribute which is discrediting or stigmatizing to her

(Miall:1987:35). If adoptive parents, mothers in particular, perceive stigma or are stigmatized in society, it will follow that their relationships with their children will be affected in some respect.

Goffman's (1963) argument for establishing patterns for future development supports Kirk's concept of family integration. Kirk argued strongly for the importance of continuity in adoptive familyhood and, Miall (1987), in using Goffman's notion of stigma to look at adoption, found that there are negative consequences related to discontinuity. For instance, an adoptive mother who perceives a social stigma around adoption may reject the difference inherent in adoptive parenthood as a means of managing the information and of avoiding stigmatization for her family. A discontinuity may develop due to this rejection within the family or between the family and the larger community or both.

Goffman (1959) argued that impression management involves the presentation of a "front" that is created by managing information about oneself in order to convey socially acceptable conduct, to maximize social approval and to minimize disapproval.(8) Parents acknowledging the difference in adoption in the home may reject the difference in public or vice versa. It is this issue that Miall (1987) explores and she concludes that one important reason adoptive parents may have for "concealment" of adoption information is a fear of rejection by their children or society in general (Miall:1987:285).

The social stigma around adoption is reflected in the patterns of speech and societal mores. Common proverbs like "Blood is thicker than water", or the terms used to describe

birth parents- "natural", which assumes that adoptive parenting is unnatural, "real", which implies that adoptive parents are not real parents and "own" children versus adopted- adoptive parents are not raising their own children but someone else's implies that adoptive parenthood is an inferior form of parenthood (Smith & Miroff:1981). These terms are used, not just by lay persons, but also by professionals working in the adoption field, who are seemingly unaware of the "biological chauvinism they are fostering" (Smith & Miroff:1981:25). The authors also report that some apparently positive attitudes suggest some doubt about the legitimacy of adoption. Subtle comments such as "how lucky for the child to have parents like you!" are often made. Comments of this nature reinforce a "rescue fantasy" by implying that the child was born of "inadequate parents" or was rescued from a life of neglect. Remarks like this are rarely made to biological parents. They usually hear such comments as "how lucky you are to have such a beautiful child!" (Smith & Miroff:1981:26).

Kirk, in his study of community attitudes towards adoption (1953), found that nine out of ten couples heard remarks such as "Isn't it wonderful of you to have taken in this child" or "this child looks so much like you that s/he could be your own". Four out of five were asked, "Tell me, what do you know about the child's background?" One out of two parents were told the following; "He is a darling baby and after all, you never know how your own will turn out". One out of three heard "How lucky you didn't have to go through the trouble of pregnancy like I did." One out of five heard "How well you care for the child, just like a real mother!" (Smith & Miroff:1981:26). (9) These comments, also noted by Bartholet found that the language surrounding adoption also gives the message:

...adoptive parenting relationships are less powerful, less meaningful, less loving than blood relationships. Adoptive parents are commonly asked "What made you decide to adopt?" and are commonly told "What a good thing for you to have done". The clear implication is that people would not adopt for the same reasons that they would produce a child - they would not expect to enjoy the same pleasures or experience the same kind of giving-and-getting relationship (Bartholet:1993:167).

Bartholet (1993:168) observed that the media coverage of adoption reinforces negative stereotypes. For example, popular elements of reports on Romanian adoption have been the stories about the improper removal of children from birth parents, and the existence of alleged baby-buying rings. These characterize prospective parents and adoption agents as breaking laws in order to place children. Bartholet concluded that the main point of these stories is that the adoptions have created a tragic situation for all involved. At the other extreme, adoption is viewed in more positive terms. Adoptive parents are shown being congratulated by relatives and friends, baby gifts are sent, showers are given and the occasion is publicly recognized. It is important to investigate how parents perceive the ways in which their adoptions are perceived in society. At present, there appear to be many more negative social beliefs relating to adoption than positive ones. Reviewing experiences of recent Romanian adoptive families will help to establish the extent to which these notions are perceived and experienced.

The general societal context is not the only concern in considering adoption and stigma. An "environment of sentiments" also surrounds an adoptive mother which may

reflect the values of the larger society (Kirk:1964:17). This environment "has at its core a mode of thought which identifies genuine parenthood as a chain of child-bearing and child-rearing" (Kirk:1964:32). Miall (1987) notes that the announcement of adoption may be met with disappointment, surprise or sympathy from parents, immediate family and friends. For example, Fiegelman & Silverman (1983:131) investigated how the immediate associates of adoptive parents reacted to the adoption of Colombian-born children. Although the results clearly show that the parents encountered very low levels of social antagonism, some antagonism was present. The authors concluded that Colombian children received about as much social support and approval as would probably be encountered by adoptive parents of white, American-born children. Parents of Korean children received intermediate levels of positive response, while the least support and approval were experienced by the white parents of black adoptees.

These results indicate that not only does there appear to be some stigma surrounding the issues of adoption as second best and the lack of a biological blood tie, but there also seems to be more likelihood of experiencing stigma around the issues of race and identity, particularly among those adoptive families that physically "look" different.

Pfuhl (1980) has argued that voluntary associations, established by those who have been stigmatized serve an important stigma management function. Initially, these associations were made up of groups of alcoholics, gamblers, the overweight, the aged and the mentally disabled who sought to establish organizations to help them with the problems associated with stigmatization and deviance. The recent

increase in the number and types of support groups has been linked to social change. Specifically, change has occurred in the definition of some forms of stigma, by promoting an image of the deviant as something other than a "sinner whose consignment to hell is a foregone conclusion" (Becker:1970:343). The changing reality of stigmatization has paved the way for increased organizational activity among different segments of the population.

Within the wide array of voluntary associations, Pfuhl(1980:173) differentiates between expressive and instrumental groups depending on the method members use to achieve an objective. Expressive groups exist primarily to serve members by offering social and recreational activities, information, and services. Adaptation is promoted and support is offered to all individuals who share the association. Instrumental groups exert social influence to maintain or create conditions or change, as well as to benefit members. Unlike expressive groups, instrumental groups seek to remove the stigma that is caused by their differences.

Goffman (1963:24) argues "that the members of a particular stigma category will have a tendency to come together into small social groups whose members all derive from the category". Thus, support groups may give rise to shared feelings while offering members a sense of validation which society may not offer. Although these groups may vary, it is clear that most grow out of friendship, and networks which constitute a part of the stigmatized subculture (Pfuhl:1980).

According to Pfuhl (1980) groups occur and are organized for two main purposes: (1) A sense of dissatisfaction with

some part of the status quo. Dissatisfaction usually arises out of individual and collective experience, particularly experiences linked with stigma. Relations among like-minded members may lead to the awareness of the need for change.

(2) The quest for change which must be viewed by the members as an attainable goal. Together, the members may be said to be searching for meaning and change.

According to Goffman (1963), stigma has the potential to be both stigmatizing and inspiring. Herman and Miall (1990) have also argued that there are positive consequences of stigma, such as experiencing personal growth as a result of managing stigma, strengthening family ties and enjoying social interaction with others who are labelled. (10) Clearly, self-help support groups offer members a safe place to socialize with other similarly situated families. Zimmerman (1977) argued that one way to look at the impact of a stigma on the social world of actors was to examine the changes in relationships from the beginning of the career and follow it through the process of social integration. This proposition deserves closer attention. The above studies have shown that stigma need not be viewed simply as a negative label. In fact, some support group members may not view their status as negative at all.

Goffman's argument that individuals establish patterns which form the basis for future action supports both Mead's theory of the past and Kirk's concept of integration. All three theorists argue for the importance of continuity in human life and, just as importantly, the negative consequences of discontinuity. Theoretically, it is important to examine these theories for these reasons: (1) Maines and his colleagues's (1983) interpretation of Mead's theory of the

past has not been examined empirically to any great extent. The authors argued that each of the four implied dimensions of the theory are integral parts of the continuous process of reconstructing the past in the present. They provide the link in grounding sociological theory with real life experiences, and in this case, with Romanian adoptive families. There is a need to test this theory empirically in order to ascertain whether these four dimensions together do provide the link or whether the process consists of a combination of some of these dimensions. (2) Kirk's adoptive kinship theory assumes another relevance for the adoptive family, given the greater emphasis that is now being placed on adoption disclosure in the screening process. These changes call for a reevaluation of the present theory, as well as further investigation. (3) The notion of adoption as a stigmatizing circumstance for the family is a fairly recent construction. It requires further examination in a variety of adoptive situations in order to see whether differences emerge in family and societal perceptions. The more recent investigations of Herman and Miall (1990) into the positive effects of stigma on the adoptive family also requires further empirical testing in order to better understand the extent of its relevance to the process of family and social integration. For instance, a stigma may allow individuals in a self-help support group to enjoy heightened interpersonal social interaction with other like-minded individuals. Stigmatized individuals may find this type of support positive.

Substantively, the following issues around adoption will also be explored:

- (1) How does the construction of a socially shared past relate to the acknowledgement or rejection of difference as observed by Kirk in his study of adoptive families?

- (2) To what extent is this construction used to integrate the family, despite their different origins?
- (3) How is this construction used as a strategy to manage social stigma (which may or may not be perceived by the adoptive parents?)
- (4) Does the adoptive family incorporate these differences from the past, and how do they use them to enhance their present and future family life?

In the next chapter, consideration is given to the research literature which informs the study of adoption.

CHAPTER 2

ADOPTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

In her American study of adoption and the family, Bachrach (1983) has conceptualized adoption as a social process that acts as a means of family formation. In this sense, adoption does not refer to the simple act of placing a child with a family. Rather, a process of family and social integration occurs within the adoptive family. There are many important issues encountered in considering the adoptive family. These issues affect both national and international adoptive families. However, there are other issues that are unique to international and cross-cultural adoptions, and these have not yet been addressed to any great extent in the literature. Hibbs (1991), in a recent book on international perspectives on adoption, identified the following pertinent questions for research. How do adoptees develop and function in society with the burden of early rejection from the birth family? How do they form an identity when vital genetic and historical information and cultural community are missing? What is the best way to raise children from different cultures and/or with special needs?

Adoptive mothers are the ones primarily responsible for promoting family and social integration by connecting their children's past events and the family's shared experiences into a continuous whole. The goal of this research, therefore is to study ways in which adoptive mothers of Romanian children construct socially shared pasts for their children.

(5) In this chapter, I review the research in six areas:

(1) The prevalence of international adoption in Canada, (2) literature on Romanian adoption, (3) socio-demographics of international adoptive parents, (4) adjustment of international adoptive families, (5) racial and ethnic identity of internationally adopted children, and (6) adoption disclosure.

THE PREVALENCE OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION IN CANADA

International adoption has become an important means of family formation in Canada in the last two decades. Sobol and Daly (1992) have observed that the number of families adopting children born outside Canada has grown from less than ten a year when records were first kept in 1970 (National Adoption Desk) to an estimated 2,400 or more a year in 1991. Sobol & Daly (1992) also document that there are two types of international adoptions. First, children are brought into Canada and subsequently adopted. However, very few of these cases are recorded as international adoptions. They are grouped with other domestic adoptions. Second, children are adopted by Canadian citizens in the children's home countries, and then brought to Canada as legal members of adoptive families. It is difficult to determine how many of these children have come to Canada, because record keeping by the federal government for this group only began in late 1991. What is clear is that most of the children from out-of-country have different racial and cultural backgrounds from their parents. The question for all those involved in international adoptions, and particularly for the adoptive children and their parents, is how these cross-racial and cross-cultural adoptions actually work.

Westhues and Cohen (1994) describe international adoption as having occurred in two waves in Canada. The first small wave, identified by Alstein and Simon (1987), was comprised primarily of children who were orphaned as a result of World War II, the Korean War, and those who were fathered by soldiers during these times. The second wave, dating from 1975, resulted from the changes in immigration policy in 1974. These new regulations permitted children who had their adoptions finalized in their home countries to enter Canada (Gravel and Roberge:1984). These children have come from poor countries, where they had been orphaned, abandoned or relinquished for adoption because their birth families were unable to care for them (McDade:1991). These countries include Korea, Peru, Brazil, Haiti, and, more recently, Romania (Sobol and Daly:1992).

The reasons for international adoption have changed dramatically since the mid-seventies. During the first wave of international adoption, the strong motivation for adoptive parents was thought to be altruism. The parents were seen as helping a child who was in need of a family because of war. Many of the adoptive parents had biological children, and there were many Canadian children available for adoption. At the present time, there are more families waiting for children than there are adoptable children in Canada. McDade (1991) explains that this new situation has come about because of changes in abortion legislation, more effective birth control, and an increase in the number of birth mothers who choose to parent their children, instead of relinquishing parental rights. Consequently, the primary motivation for international adoption today is thought to be the desire of infertile couples to parent (Westhues and Cohen:1994).

Recent studies of Romanian adoption have shown that many Romanian children have been adopted into families where there are already Canadian-born siblings. In their study of the development of children adopted from Romania, Ames and her colleagues (1992) have reported that 74% of the children entered homes where Canadian siblings were also present. Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) also found that 62.8% of their families adopting Romanian children had at least one previous biological or adopted child at the time. This new finding refutes the prevalent notion that the primary motivation for international adoption is thought to be the desire of infertile couples to become parents.

Westhues and Cohen (1994) raise important issues relating to the "morality" and the ethics of international adoption. They describe three major positions which have emerged in the adoption debate in Canada. These are first, opposition to international adoption; second, support for international adoption as being positive for all involved; and third, a recognition that there are both positive and negative features for the sending and receiving countries, and for the children, birth parents, and adoptive parents. The arguments advanced by those who oppose international adoption are:

(1) that the rich are exploiting the poor (Alstein and Simon:1991), (2) that the children will have a confused sense of ethnic and racial identity (Barrett and Aubin:1990, McRoy:1991), and (3) that international adoption takes pressure off governments to implement economic and social changes which would particularly benefit women and children (Bartholet:1988, Barrett and Aubin:1990).

Advocates of international adoption argue that many of the children who have been adopted by parents from Western

countries would have died of malnutrition, lack of medical care or as a consequence of war. It was therefore, in the best interest of the child to be adopted. Bowen (1992) has argued that adoption meets the needs of infertile couples to parent and also relieves the child's country from the expense of caring for children whose parents cannot care for them. Barrett and Aubin (1990) posit that, in some instances, international adoption is a way to help a country deal with the aftermath of a disaster such as an earthquake, a flood or a war.

The third position finds merit in both of the arguments presented. Proponents of this position agree that it is in the best interest of the child to grow up in a sociocultural environment where the child is not racially or culturally different. It supports the idea that all countries should have the resources to care for their children when the parents are unable to do so. This position also asserts that it is better for a child to be raised in a family context, with the intimacy and stability that this promises, rather than in an institution (Westhues and Cohen:1990). The case of the adoption of Romanian children touches on all of these issues.

ROMANIAN ADOPTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Adoption has undergone a succession of modifications as societal attitudes have changed. Hibbs (1991) documents that as early as eighteenth century B.C. in the Babylonian codes of Hammurabi, adoption was recognized as a means to ensure an heir, to ensure the continuance of business and to perpetuate the family name for childless couples. This rationale, which suggests adoption was viewed as a way to provide babies for

childless couples, predominated in North America until the early twentieth century. In the last thirty years, the focus has shifted to the best interest of the child and legal provisions have been set in place to ensure a stable, nurturing environment where a child's physical and emotional development may be fostered (Hibbs:1991:xv). In recent years, adoption has become an even greater challenge for all those involved since new issues have developed - specifically: independent adoption, international and cross-cultural adoption and the adoption of children with special needs. These issues have created controversies which affect all adoptive families.

As has been noted, the adoption of Romanian children is unique, however, in that, since the overthrow of Romanian President, Nicolae Ceaucescu in December of 1989, the world has learned that hundreds of thousands of children were abandoned in state-run institutions. Since international adoption did not exist in Romania until January of 1991, there was no international adoption process in place. As a result, we know very little about the effects of the Romanian adoption process on the almost two thousand families who have adopted Romanian children. A study of these families and their experiences is in order.

A substantial body of literature addresses the question of how international adopted children have adapted to their new countries. The results, however, are inconclusive (Tizard:1991). Some studies report that internationally adopted children are likely to demonstrate adjustment problems (Saetersdal and Dalen:1987, Verhulst et al.:1990). Others suggest that difficulties are likely to be encountered in the initial adjustment period (Ames et al.:1992, Marcovitch et

al.:1994). The recent studies undertaken on Romanian adoption have focused primarily on the children who have been adopted in Canada. This research focuses on the developmental, psychological and physical growth of the children. Ames and her colleagues (1992) studied thirty-nine Romanian children between nine and sixty-eight months of age at adoption. All of the children resided in orphanages for at least eight months. The majority were adopted before the age of two years and are living in British Columbia. Ames and her colleagues (1992) found that, with respect to cognitive development and behaviour, most of the children were delayed in their development because of lack of nurturing. Reports from parents and from provincial development programmes show that considerable progress has been made by the adoptees since their first few days following adoption. Ames and her colleagues (1992) also investigated the parents' experiences with respect to adoption. The adoptive parents were found to have heightened levels of stress when compared to non-adoptive parents. Ames and her colleagues concluded that these findings reflect, on the one hand, that the adoptive parents were highly motivated to adopt. On the other hand, these parents did not feel well prepared for the challenge of adopting Romanian-born children.

These findings are consistent with those reported by other investigators (Wolters:1980). Similarly, Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) found that one-half of the parents in their study reported that their adopted children had medical and developmental problems. Many of these parents were not prepared for these problems. Most felt that there was a need for educational programs and special support for those adopting Romanian-born children. Apart from these studies, which establish a general lack of preparedness among adoptive

parents, there has been little research carried out on other experiences of the adoptive parents of Romanian children.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Adoption is, generally speaking, a middle-class phenomenon (Humphrey:1969:13, Miall:1984). According to the research on adoption in Canada by Daly and Sobol (1993), adoptive parents tend to be of relatively high socio-economic status. The authors also show that, while those seeking adoption generally are well educated, there is a pronounced difference between publicly facilitated adoptions and all types of private adoptions. In the case of public adoptions, 54% of fathers and 50% of mothers were college or university educated, while for all independent adoptions, over 80% of the parents were graduates. Since level of education is associated with socio-economic status, it is clear that there are class differences between those who pursue adoption through public agencies and those who pursue adoption through independent agencies (Sobol and Daly:1993:52). This may be attributable to the fact that, in independent adoptions, better education is consistent with being able to access the greater resources required to pursue a private adoption. This may also be a function of having the financial resources which allow couples to pay for private adoptions. This research suggests then that those families pursuing Romanian adoption will generally be in the higher socio-economic groups, because these adoptions are all pursued privately.

These findings are consistent with the most recent research on the social characteristics of international adoptive parents. They are generally high income, well-educated people in professional and managerial positions and

between 40% (Jaffee:1991) and 80% (Fiegelman & Silverman:1983) of parents have a university education. The findings of the studies of Romanian adoptive parents are also consistent. Ames and her colleagues (1992) found that these parents were well-educated, with incomes ranging from \$35,000 to over \$100,000, with the median income being \$57,000 per year. The median occupation for fathers was represented by occupations such as accountant and credit manager. Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) reported that 72% of mothers and 76% of fathers have post-secondary education. Twenty-nine percent reported annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$69,000 and 50% of the sample reported incomes above \$70,000 (with 27% reporting income above \$100,000).

All studies report a very high percentage of international adoptive parents living in two-parent families - 95% reported by Westhues & Cohen (1993) and 93% reported by Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994). The findings presented on the age of Romanian adoptive parents is also very consistent. Ames and her colleagues (1992) found the median age of mothers at the time of adoption to be 35.8 years and the median age of fathers to be 37.5 years. Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) reported a median age for mothers of 38 and fathers of 41.6 years.

The general belief that there has been a decline in parents who adopt for preferential or altruistic reasons is questionable. Westhues & Cohen (1993) report that 25% of international adopters appear to be preferential adopters. By Fiegelman & Silverman's (1983) definition "they are adopting out of concern for world overpopulation, wanting to promote international understanding, or wanting to give a child from poor circumstances an opportunity for a better

chance in life." The findings of the Romanian adoption studies reveal, as reported earlier, that a high percentage of these children entered homes in which there were already Canadian siblings. Ames and her colleagues (1992) reported that at least 65% of their sample were second and third time parents. Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) reported similar findings for over one-half their sample.

ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Various studies have explored the quality of the relationships within international adoptive families. Westhues and Cohen (1994:16) have determined that the questions posed, "have tended to be global assessments about (the adopted children's) relationships with parents or siblings rather than ones which attempt to understand these relationships in their complexity" (Words in brackets my addition). For instance, Bagley (1991) asked mothers to assess the extent to which they felt there were problems in their relationships with their children. This research dealt with Native, white and international adoptees and with non-adopted white and native adolescents. Sixty-five percent of the mothers reported that there were no problems in their relationships with their international adopted children, while seventy percent claimed there were problems in their relationships with their international adopted children, while seventy percent claimed that there were no problems in their relationships with non-adopted, white adolescents.

Research conducted by Triseliotis (1993) suggests that there are many similarities between the outcomes of national, trans-racially-placed children and international adopted children. All of the recent studies carried out after arrival in the adoptive home suggest that, on the whole, children quickly overcome any developmental, linguistic and behavioural

difficulties. The more persistent problems appear to be related to the age of the child at placement. The older the child at the time of adoption, the more difficulties can be expected. Triseliotis suggests that this may also signify earlier, distressing experiences in the child's country of origin. At the time of his study, these experiences, such as lack of medical and emotional care, had not been well documented in the literature.

Both Ames and her colleagues (1992) and Marcovitch and her colleagues (1994) in their research on Romanian children, found similar patterns. For the most part, children progressed rapidly once they arrived in their adoptive homes. These studies also documented the children's medical and developmental histories in Romania, prior to adoption. However, in many cases, the adoptive parents were not always able to obtain complete histories. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the degree to which the children's past experiences have affected their progress overall, once in Canada.

Fiegelman and Silverman (1993) found that adopted children from Columbia adjusted remarkably well in their Canadian homes. This group was found to be more likely than most other groups of adoptees to have serious health problems upon arrival in their adoptive homes. However, their difficulties appeared short-lived and did not seem to affect their overall adjustment. Fiegelman and Silverman (1993:145) also defined an important link between younger age at adoption and overall positive adaptations.

The research conducted to date suggests that a large majority of international adoptive parents and their children

feel positively about their family relationships. It is apparent, as Westhues and Cohen (1994) claim, that these assessments are generalizations - they do not attempt to understand the complexities of the relationships which underlie these conclusions. There is a need for greater understanding of how parents perceive and work at their adoptive family relationships, both prior to adoption and later after placement. My study of Romanian adoptive mothers offers a unique opportunity to explore these issues. The adoptions are very recent. The first families came together in early 1990, and the majority of the children are presently in the early school years. This offers researchers the opportunity to share the families' experiences as they experience them, and to follow them longitudinally. This will also enable us to document specific issues as they arise, and to obtain a better understanding of social integration management strategies in families.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Currently, the argument is being advanced that international adoption works against "the best interests of the child." According to this argument, the best interest of the child is met when the child has the opportunity to grow up in a sociocultural environment where he or she is not different from the majority, racially or ethnically. Westhues and Cohen (1994) propose that research which tells us how internationally adopted children and their families have fared will help to decide the appropriateness of opposing international adoption. Few studies on the process have been conducted, although international adoptions have been taking place in significant numbers in the last fifteen years. Gravel and Roberge (1984) conducted a study in Quebec, they concluded

that the adopted children concerned were generally functioning well. The study by Westhues and Cohen (1994) has focused on the adopted children in adolescence, and has looked at the impact of adoption on both the parents and children. This research offers valuable information from the perspective of the parents, as to whether they have in fact, acknowledged their children's racial and ethnic differences, and shows what they have done to promote the development of their children's racial and ethnic identities. Simon and Alstein (1992) have concluded that racial and ethnic identity have been the least explored issues in the international adoption literature. Similarly, articles by Tizard (1991) and Triseleotis (1991) reviewing research results stressed a need for greater attention in this area.

The research on racial identity among internationally adopted children, shows that racial identification is weak, (Bagley and Young:1980, Simon and Alstein:1987). Simon and Alstein (1992) have explored some of the reasons for this weakness in identification. They found that about one-third of the parents in their study reported doing little or nothing to teach their children about their cultural backgrounds. The other two-thirds used books, magazines, music, television and movies to introduce their children to the cultures and heritages of their groups. Some of these parents also chose black godparents for their children and some attended racially mixed churches. About one-third of the parents said that they celebrated holidays associated with their children's cultural groups. Of those parents who did not actively develop their children's racial and cultural heritages, some indicated that their children were not interested and were very resistant to discussing the issue (Westhues and Cohen:1994:29). These areas require more investigation. In particular, it is necessary to

ask "Why do some adopted children fare better than others?" The literature has established that the attitudes of the adoptive parents are one important link to the children's well-being within the family and society. For the purpose of this study, parental attitudes towards racial and ethnic identity will be explored in order to understand their actions around introducing the Romanian culture to their children.

Recently, Humphrey and Humphrey (1993) have indicated that social workers generally are less enthusiastic about international adoption. A common objection made by social workers is that they believe the adopted children will grow up with an inadequate or incomplete sense of identity. They claim that these children may be close to their parents in many ways, but they believe that, at the same time, the children will experience feelings of alienation and not belonging (Humphrey and Humphrey:1993:7). The authors admit that, as a society, we still know all too little about the process of identity formation in children and adolescents, regardless of their origins or upbringings. Humphrey and Humphrey (1986,1989) have argued that:

...ignorance of one's origins is fully compatible with healthy self-esteem where the child has grown up in a sympathetic and loving adoptive home. It is primarily those with an unsatisfactory experience of adoption who are likely to develop an obsessive curiosity about their ancestry, leading to a compulsion to search for their biological relatives (Humphrey & Humphrey:1993:7-8).

The findings of other studies suggest that, while most adoptees adjust well psychologically and socially during childhood, when they reach adulthood they feel driven into a

more 'marginal position' as they face more discreet discrimination (Dalen and Saetersdal:1987:43). Most of these studies refer to own-country transracial adoptions as well as to international adoptions (Fanshel:1972, Kim:1976, Gill & Jackson:1983, McRoy and Zurcher:1983, Fiegelman and Silverman:1984, Johnson et al:1987). In many of these studies, the children's appearance (black, Korean and American Indian), was noticeably different from their adoptive families. It would seem then that, although all children adopted cross-culturally and cross-nationally have many similar issues with regard to biological identity and culture, children who also deal with the issue of race in a prejudiced society face different challenges.

Bartholet (1993) claimed that much of the literature on the identity formation of international adoptees draws on theoretical work from a psychological perspective. Often, the research is based on case studies of adoptees who have been referred for psychological treatment and conclusions are drawn in treatment that seek explanations for the patients's pathology. She notes that the assumption underlying this research is that adoption is not normal. According to Bartholet (1993:175), this research is informed by the "basic argument that adoptees are necessarily, by virtue of their transfer to an adoptive family, especially susceptible to identity conflicts and especially prone to problems in personality development". The theory holds that because of the existence of two sets of parents, and of the break in genetic and historical connections with the past, adoptees will experience "genealogical bewilderment" (Sants:1964:133).

Those theorists who coined the terms "Adoption Trauma" (Feder:1974) and "Adopted Child Syndrome" (Lifton:1973) have

contributed to the negative image of adoption as a destructive family institution. Much of this literature focuses on the entire group of adoptees, instead of studying the unique attributes of the many subgroups. Those members of subgroups who have problems are likely to have adjustment difficulties for reasons that are not related to adoption.

Bartholet(1993:178) notes that many of these children are placed in adoptive homes after many years of severely damaging treatment, such as abuse, neglect, and disruption of the significant bond with a primary caregiver. Others have physical and mental disabilities which are related to prebirth histories or postbirth experiences. Negative claims about the assumed pathology of international adoptees make a powerful contribution to the current stigmatizing of adoption. Viewed in this light, assessment of adopted children's identity formation is closely linked to the negative societal assumptions around adoption in general.

There is current psychological adoption literature which attempts to refute these negative claims. According to this literature, identity problems may reach a crisis stage for any adolescent. There is no consensus as to whether these problems are more severe among adoptees. Goebel and Lott (1986:6) observe that:

As they attempt to integrate past with future, they are hindered by the existence of two sets of parents; they experience an absence of generational sequence (Josselson,1980) as a consequence of unrootedness... Adoptees not only must form a synthesis of past and future, but must also integrate the now with those parts of self that have been left in the past.

This literature speculates that the resolution of the identity crisis that is experienced by all adolescents will be more complex for adopted adolescents.

Similarly, Brodzinsky (1990:150) writing on the psychology of adoption suggests:

...that adopted adolescents, like their nonadopted peers, will confront differential resolutions of identity conflicts. Some may struggle with the meaning of adoption for themselves and remain in moratorium. Others emerge as foreclosed or identity diffused, while some become identity achieved. What is important is the identification of those factors in the adopted family, in the broader social system or even with the adoptee, which lead to these various identity outcomes. How can the adopted adolescent be helped by the family and society to cope with the identity issues unique to adoption?

The attitudes of adoptive parents towards adoption have been shown to influence the adoptee's achievement of a sense of identity. Stein and Hoopes' (1985) American study of identity formation in fifty adopted adolescents, found that unfavourable reports about biological parents stressed by adoptive parents gave rise to identity problems among adoptees, who interpreted these reports as proof of their genetic inferiority. The literature strongly suggests that children who are adopted across racial and cultural groups are less likely to have a strong sense of their own racial and ethnic identity than are children raised within their own ethnic groups. However, there is no clear evidence that this leads to major psychological problems (Tizard:1991). Many researchers have addressed the importance of open

communication with regard to adoption issues. What is clear from the literature is that the more open the communication, particularly around racial and cultural origin and identity, the less likely it will be that an adoptee will experience identity problems.

We can conclude that positive parental attitudes are important for the identity formation of adopted children. As Kirk (1964) suggested, the most positive adaptation occurs when the adoptive parents are willing to acknowledge the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood. Secondly, societal attitudes have a powerful impact on the adopted child's sense of cultural identity. Triseliotis (1991) argues that there is a moral question involved in placing children in homes of parents of a different racial and cultural backgrounds. This relates back to the question of ethics around international adoption: Does international adoption address the best interest of the child? To adequately answer this question, more research is needed. The question that many social workers ask is "What can be done to protect the children?" (Humphrey and Humphrey:1993:7). One way to answer this question is to ask the adoptive parents about their family experiences with the social process of adoption as they experience it. It has already been established that adoption is not an act of simply placing a child in a home. It is also a process of family and social integration. In this research, this process will be examined with a view to further understanding its relevance in meeting the needs of Romanian adopted children.

The next section deals with adoption disclosure as it directly relates to the issues of morality, and racial and cultural identity.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Advocates of adoption disclosure argue that closed adoptions, in which birth families are completely cut off from contact with the children, have serious drawbacks and that there are negative consequences for all those involved in the adoption circle (McColm:1993:12). McColm, an adoptee herself, who also works in adoption at a Canadian Children's Aid Society, focused on adoption reunions from the perspectives of all those involved in the adoption circle. Her work has stressed, in particular, the experiences of adults who were adopted by the age of two, by families of similar racial origin. In her study, adoptees describe feelings of worthlessness and depression at having been 'given up' by their birth parents and having no contact with them at all.

Adoption disclosure for these adoptees has meant a reclaiming of their birthright and has given them a greater sense of their identity and belonging in the societal context. Although adoption disclosure at its extreme - meeting and creating a relationship with members of one's birth family - may not be possible or right for all adoptees, there are other levels of disclosure which can be positive for the adopted child's sense of identity and social belonging. As McColm (1993) has recognized, the adoption of older, interracial, international, mentally challenged and physically challenged children is on the rise, and each of these types of adoption present unique challenges which may be aided by adoption disclosure.

The question of whether or not to disclose adoption status has generated contrasting arguments in the literature. One argument claims that adoption disclosure is responsible

for the sense of insecurity in disturbed adolescents. This generalization is based on conclusions drawn from an earlier psychological perspective (TT & Magno-Nova:1975). The other argument, (Sants:1964) urges that children be told, not only of the adoption, but also of the facts of their racial and cultural origin. This argument suggests that family secrets around heredity are more disturbing than reality to identity formation (cf.Stein & Hoopes:1985:20).

Currently, a more compelling debate than the question of whether or not to disclose centres on when to tell children, and how much to tell. In addition, from the social work perspective, how much information should be made available to all parties involved in the adoption circle? Traditionally, adoption practice has been grounded in secrecy and anonymity as a presumed safeguard for all parties involved. Sealed records have been thought to help children develop stable, psychological relationships with their adoptive families, and to guard against possible psychological distress around disclosure of their birth circumstances(Sachdev:1984:141).

A contributing factor in the triggering of this controversy is the recognition by professionals, particularly psychologists and social workers, that knowledge of one's heritage in our culture is integral to identity formation. For instance, Erikson (1968) states that it is crucial for normal personality development for adolescents to derive a sense of identity from an identification with the past. Any interference with this process will likely result in identity confusion (cf.Sachdev:1984:142).

Another significant factor in the controversy surrounding adoption disclosure has been the adoptee's curiosity. The push for change to more openness has come primarily from adult adoptees (Bartholet:1993). It has been suggested in the literature (Rautman:1959, Schechter:1965) that a child's identity formation begins to occur between three and six years of age, and that identity formation is greatly intensified during adolescence. Schechter (1965) also found that the focus for adoptees is on the biological aspects of their heritage. Researchers who have studied the concerns and issues of adult adoptees have reported that some adoptees claim to be 'obsessed' with questions around their adoption and biological parents (Triseliotis:1973). These observations are confirmed by Sorosky and his colleagues (1978), and Kadushin(1978) who adds that this need continues into adulthood.

Research on adoption disclosure has shown that adoptive parents have generally felt threatened by the unsealing of adoption records (Lifton:1979, Kadushin:1980, McColm:1993). Parents express fear that their children's interest in their biological parents may result in a loss of love for them, may represent a failure of their parenting role, or may interfere with the children's integration into their adoptive families (Sachdev:1984:153).

There are few studies that explore the effects of adoption reunions. Generally however, the research tends to document positive experiences around the actual reunion (Triseliotis: 1973, Stevenson:1976, Sorosky et al:1978). The adoptive relationship does not appear to be adversely affected and there is often a feeling of greater closeness within the adoptive family (Thompson:1978; Lion et al.:1976; Sachdev: 1984:155; McColm:1993).

Bartholet (1993:59) an adoptive parent and activist, argues for openness. She states that "adoptive families should be understood as healthy, functioning families, not as fragile entities, that will fall apart if a "real" mother walks in the front door". Although Bartholet advocates more openness in adoption, she recognizes that this is a complicated issue in the current politics of adoption as the pressure for openness is coming from a movement that is hostile to the adoptive family form. This, Bartholet argues, may further denigrate rather than affirm adoption. She argues that society may want to embrace the idea of openness with respect to available information and to create a system where by birth and adoptive families are free to establish relationships in childhood or adulthood. Bartholet conjectures that most adoptees would not rush to make contact with birth relatives, but would have access to information. In addition, McColm(1993) stresses the importance of support and education for all parties involved in adoption disclosure. This research will explore attitudes towards disclosure as they relate to integration in the adoptive families of Romanian children.

CONCLUSIONS

A review of the literature clearly indicates that there is a lack of information on how international adoptive mothers perceive their situation vis-a-vis the larger community. This, in turn, may affect the process whereby family and social integration is achieved. Accordingly, this research focuses on a group of mothers who have adopted Romanian children with a view to understanding how they construct a socially shared pasts with their families. The analysis will offer an insider's view of (1) how Romanian adoptive mothers construct

socially shared pasts for their children, (2) whether or not these mothers accept or reject-the-differences between adoption and biologic parenting as Kirk (1964) defines it, (3) whether or not Romanian adoptive mothers perceive a social stigma, positively or negatively, around adoption, (4) how these mothers define and perceive their own situations, (5) how Romanian adoptive mothers manage information relating to their adoptive status through adoption support groups or community support and (6) whether issues related to race and ethnicity and adoption disclosure affect how these mothers construct socially shared pasts with their families.

The theoretical focus on Mead, Kirk and Goffman offers a grounding on which to identify the workings of the process of family and social integration. At present, little research has been conducted using Mead's theory of the past. As part of the process involved in creating socially shared pasts in adoptive families, it is necessary also to consider Kirk's notions of acknowledgement and rejection of difference with Goffman's theory of social stigma. For example, mothers' perceptions of the past will differ depending on whether they accept or reject the inherent differences in adoption, and whether or not they perceive social stigma around adoption.

It is important to examine these issues for these reasons:

- 1) Maines and his colleagues's interpretation of Mead's theory of the past has not been examined to any great extent.
- 2) Kirk's theory of acknowledgement and rejection of difference may assume yet another relevance, given the greater emphasis that is being placed on disclosure in the adoptive parent screening process.

- 3) The notion of adoption as stigmatizing for the family is a fairly recent construction and requires further examination in a variety of adoptive situations in order to establish whether or not difficulties emerge in perceptions.

Similarly, awareness of society's views on racial and ethnic issues will affect how parents promote development of their children's racial and ethnic identities. Disclosure is an issue that demands immediate attention, particularly in terms of how adoptive parents of young children handle it. All of these issues, together, may influence the process of constructing socially shared pasts in adoptive families. In the next chapter, the methodology used to examine these issues is described.

CHAPTER 3

THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND METHOD

Within the discipline of sociology, symbolic interactionism is seen as a theoretical perspective with a concomitant methodological orientation. Symbolic interaction is a paradigm which contains certain assumptions about the nature of reality, specifies concepts to be studied, interrelationships between concepts and suggests a methodological approach that is qualitative. Theory functions as a body of presuppositions which lead to an explanation of observable social phenomena. The methodology represents ways in which the researcher acts on these observations, the methods that make the research public and reproducible. According to Denzin (1978:6), "The sociological discipline rests on these elements: theory, methodology, research activity and the sociological imagination. Order is given to theory, methodology and research activity through the use of what Mills termed the 'sociological imagination'." Denzin argues that the sociological imagination demands a researcher be variable and open-minded to new ways in the research process. This may be accomplished by acknowledging vague images and different ideas inherent in the research process and working them out as opposed to trying to fit data into pre-existing forms. It is in these forms that original ideas first appear.

The sociological imagination is a method inherent in symbolic interactionism. Most proponents of symbolic interactionism utilize the qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research methods are quite different from quantitative methods in that they yield different measures and data. Generally, qualitative research methods are

utilized in exploratory studies to discover actors' perceptions and subjective meanings. This is in keeping with the symbolic interactionist perspective, which rests on the assumptions that (1) interacting individuals produce their own definitions of situations; (2) individuals are capable of shaping and guiding their own and others behaviour and (3) interaction is negotiated and often unpredictable. This perspective is symbolic because, in interaction, it involves the manipulation of symbols, meanings and language (Denzin:1978:7).

The fundamental theoretical interest of interactionists is in acquiring a greater understanding of how and why individuals interact. In order to acquire this understanding, it is necessary to study the actors' meanings. Denzin (1978:13) argues that the research subject's perspective must be penetrated.

It is often only after the act has occurred that sense is made of it. In retrospective ways then, persons explain their behaviours...most interactional studies must aim for the development of explanatory accounts of behaviour sequences. And these accounts must be grounded in the retrospective explanations people give for their behaviours.

This type of qualitative study is well represented by the interview method, a face to face verbal exchange in which the interviewer elicits information, behaviours and expressions of opinions and beliefs from the respondent. In terms of methodological strategies and the type of data collected, qualitative research differs from quantitative research. However, there is a need for both measures in sociological research. The next section will consider how these research

methodologies differ.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The strategy used in qualitative research is characterized as inductive, subjective and process-oriented, while the strategy used in quantitative research is considered to be hypothetico-deductive, objective and outcome-oriented (Reichardt & Cook:1979:9). According to Kidder (1981:103), the inductive researcher "...begins with data and generates hypotheses and a theory, from the ground up" while with the hypothetico-deductive method, "the researcher begins with a theoretical framework, formulates an hypothesis, and logically deduces what the results of the experiment should be if the hypothesis is correct". From these definitions, we can construe that different techniques offer different types of social explanations. In most research questions an argument can be made that there is a need for both.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are based on a fundamental reliance on empirical data. However, one of the basic tenets of qualitative methodology is the assumption that there is an 'essence' or meaning to social life which cannot be fully understood by just the observation of phenomena. The interpretation of meaningful behaviour through observation, for instance through vocabularies of motive and rhetoric is the fundamental assumption of symbolic interactionism (Mills: 1940).

Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1971) argued that there are two levels of understanding available to researchers seeking to explain human experience and meaning. The first level uses symbolization at the common sense level of everyday

understanding. Meanings are apparent through observation of empirical data. Hence, much of human experience has been excluded from study as this level of reasoning does not evaluate subjective perception. According to Schutz, researchers may only advance to the second level of understanding, which is a higher, deeper form of meaning after the first level has been experienced. This he considers a method of transcendence. In this respect, therefore, quantitative methodology involves techniques of the first level of observation. A methodology that relies on both approaches produces the most in-depth analysis.

The model of induction, when compared to the hypothetico-deductive model, emphasizes the discovery of individual perspectives wherein meanings are constructed as the research progresses. The inductive method can be further explained by considering Glaser and Strauss' (1967) generation of grounded theory. This perspective maintains that social theory is an ever developing entity involving a progressive mounting of empirical facts into a grounded formal theory. By allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, the researcher is then able to ascertain whether there is an existing theory that may assist in generating new substantive theory. Glaser and Strauss further argue that this results in a method which is more "faithful" to the data. Rather than forcing the data to fit an existing theory, it allows the generation of new formal theories and the reformulation of existing sociological theories. Qualitative methodology was chosen for this particular study as the nature of Maines and his colleagues's theory of the past requires a discovery of meaning and a process of construction of reality.

As the primary methodological approach of this research is qualitative, it becomes necessary to explore both the advantages and disadvantages of the use of a qualitative research methodology. According to Lofland(1971:59:63) qualitative research serves these important functions: it provides for an orderly description of rich, descriptive detail; it provides useful foundations for quantitative research. In addition, Patton (1980:306) notes that:

inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis.

On the other hand, a number of criticisms can be made of the qualitative approach to research. For example, problems of validity and reliability must be addressed. According to Shaffir and his colleagues (1980:11-12), "the problem of validity...concerns the difficulty of gaining an accurate or true impression of the phenomenon under study." Reactive effects such as the "guinea pig effect" described by Selltitz and his colleagues (1959:97) may intervene to affect the validity of the observations being made. They argue "If people feel that they are 'guinea pigs' being experimented with, or if they feel they are being 'tested' and must make a good impression , or if the method of data collection suggests responses or stimulates an interest the subject did not previously feel, distortion of the results may occur." McCall and Simmons (1969:78) have also discussed problems of validity arising from the selective perception and interpretation of the observer and the "...limitations on the observer's ability to witness all relevant aspects of the phenomena in question."

Member participation in a group as an actual member, prior to undertaking the research on a group, is often useful in providing insights and decreasing distortion (cf. Douglas: 1972:21). Becker (1970:31) has noted that "if the researcher, in his own private life, has achieved access to circles in which deviant activity occurs, he can use that access for research purposes." Indeed, Becker (1963:45) cites his own involvement with marijuana users as an example of how private experiences can facilitate access and insight. The researcher must be aware however, of the danger of "going native" wherein identification with the group impedes effective "sociological" analysis.

Qualitative research methodology can also be criticized because of the problem of reliability; that is the replicability of observations (cf. Shaffir et al.:1980:11-12). By their nature, many sociological studies are not easy to replicate. As a result, certain methodological conventions have emerged in sociology that are quite reasonable and practical in assuring a study that is as reliable as possible (Schwartz & Jacobs:1979:308). (1) It is important to avoid error in observation and inference, in other words, do it right the first time, and (2) the reward for "mere replication" of studies is low. Instead of replicating a study which has already been done, it is more practical to build on the existing research by collecting counterexamples or by giving an alternate analysis of the same or comparable data. By offering alternate analysis researchers promote discovery and further exploration into a sociological issue.

A third criticism of qualitative research methodology focuses on the generalizability of results obtained. Generally speaking, the use of qualitative methods is accompanied by a

small sample size, particularly as Becker (1970:49) notes, when the researcher is sampling "hidden universes of rare items". The generalizability or representativeness of such results may be problematic. On the other hand, qualitative methods are often used, as Patton (1980:100) points out, "...when one wants to learn something and come to understand something about certain select cases without needing to generalize to all such cases." Patton (1980:280) further notes it may be that "...social phenomena are too variable and too context-bound to lend themselves to generalization."

As noted earlier, the differentiation between qualitative and quantitative research strategies does not preclude their use together. Reichardt and Cook (1979:16) argue that apart from commitment to a particular theoretical paradigm, "the choice of research method should also depend at least partly on the demands of the research situation at hand." The problem of generalizability of results generated through qualitative research might be better addressed using a follow-up hypothetico-deductive research approach. Similarly, Denzin (1970:9) has suggested that the "fallacy of objectivism" in quantitative research might be avoided with greater reference to qualitative methods. The fallacy of objectivism has been defined as a researcher's belief that "...because his formulations are theoretically or methodologically sound they must have relevance in the empirical world." Rather, Denzin argues, "this may not be the case and in these situations a reliance on activities of exploration and inspection will be useful, indeed necessary."(16)

As the theory requires, the viewpoint of the actor is stressed in this research and the nature of the study is exploratory rather than hypothetico-deductive. Discovery,

rather than the testing of well-defined hypotheses, is the goal of this research. Consequently, the methodological approach taken in this research is essentially qualitative. This discussion will now turn to an explanation of the methodological process.

METHODOLOGY

As the symbolic interactionist perspective was utilized in this research, qualitative methods were employed. The research was designed to gather in-depth, qualitatively rich data capturing the social world as experienced by adoptive mothers. The study itself consisted of in-depth interviews containing semi-structured and structured questions. Open-ended and in-depth questions allowed for collection of descriptive and detailed data through categories grounded in respondent's own meanings and experiences. Closed questions in the interview schedule provided tools for the collection of more standardized information on the objective realities of the mothers' lives. As Glaser and Strauss (1967:17-18) have noted "there is no fundamental clash between the purposes and activities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data... We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory, whatever the primacy of emphasis".

Some of the interview questions were adapted from research schedules used in other adoption studies in order to facilitate comparison.(17) A pilot interview was also carried out in order to test and refine the schedule. Very few revisions were required from the pilot study. This reaffirmed the choice and the use of the questions in the interview

schedule. Responses were recorded in writing at the time of the interview and a microcassette recorder was also used where respondents indicated they were comfortable with it, which was in over one-half of the cases.

The research methodology directed the study to an investigation of the social processes around adoption that shaped women's experience of adoptive motherhood. The focus of the analysis grew out of the issues and meanings that were salient for the women in the study. However, the research was designed to go beyond the description of the adoptive mother's personal experience to the analysis of the social organizational context in which it was located. The decision to focus on adoptive mothers as opposed to both parents together, was made for two reasons. First, interviewing mothers alone allowed for the creation of a more intimate interview situation, conducive to the mothers feeling free to share personal information. Second, interest centred on whether adoptive mothers are primarily the ones who are responsible for creating and documenting the family's past, particularly in the children's early years. In the findings it became clear that the adoptive father's main contributions in creating socially shared pasts was during the adoption process. For instance, a few of the fathers travelled alone to Romania to complete the adoptions. During their stay, they kept daily journals and/or chose the cultural momentos for their children. On a day-to-day basis, the fathers seemed to contribute to the lifebooks by being asked their opinion on how the mother has chosen to document information. Although the inclusion of fathers would have yielded different findings, in this exploratory study, it became clear that it is the mothers who are pro-active in documenting the childrens' histories.

As earlier stated, the intention of this research was to examine, through personal interviews the relevance of Mead's theory of the past as it relates to the construction of a socially shared past within Romanian adoptive families. Theoretically, social pasts are considered to be foundations of everyday interpersonal life. Katovich & Couch (1992) have distinguished shared pasts as referring to specific and previous acts that individuals construct, from common pasts.

The purpose of the methodology was to guide an investigation into the importance of using common pasts and shared pasts in order to enhance social integration within the adoptive family and within their society. In an adoptive family, as opposed to a biological family, the socially shared past is created from uncommon pasts. An adopted child from Romania has both a different cultural and biological past from that of the adoptive family. This complicates the process of social integration in a society which historically has viewed adoption as second best to that of the biological blood tie. The design of this research was to go beyond the description of personal experience to explore the social organizational context. (18) Attention will now turn to the process whereby a sample was obtained for study.

THE SAMPLE

The data for this study were gathered in 1994/95 through in-depth interviews with thirty adoptive mothers of Romanian children residing in Ontario. All the mothers were Canadian educated, and had at least one adopted child from Romania living with them. All of the children had been adopted since January, 1990 and the children's ages at the time of the

January, 1990 and the children's ages at the time of the interviews ranged from three to eight years of age. In all cases, the mothers were the primary caregivers. Four of the mothers were single parents by choice. Each of these four mothers adopted their children as single women and planned to raise them in single-parent families.

This study, designed as a preliminary investigation of how Romanian adoptive mothers construct socially shared pasts with their children, limited itself to an inquiry into the meaning of adoptive motherhood under specific social circumstances. The findings do not apply to all adoptive mothers of Romanian children. As social circumstances change, so do identities and meanings. The sample included adoptive mothers of Romanian children for a number of reasons. First, this population represents a challenge to traditional forms of domestic adoption. Canadian born, healthy white infants are being adopted by white middle-class families. Second, these international adoptions raise issues not only around differences inherent in biological and adoptive families, but also around issues of cultural and biological identity.

Third, the experience of motherhood and familyhood changes with different stages of the family life cycle. Since intercountry adoption in Romania became possible only in 1990, this group is experiencing a clearly identifiable and particularly demanding stage of early motherhood. As these families are at the beginning of the family life cycle, this is a unique opportunity to follow them longitudinally as they grow.

The sample was made up of volunteers who were members of SPARK (Support For Parents Adopting And Raising World Kids).

In addition, five respondents who are not members of SPARK or any other support group were interviewed for purposes of comparison. SPARK is a Toronto-based group that offers support and opportunities to share experiences with preadoptive and postadoptive families. The membership consisted of 241 families, of which 116 families have adopted children from Romania. The members are generally white and middle to upper-middle-class. They seem to be typical of the Canadian adoptive population as adoption, both nationally and internationally, has come to be an expensive endeavour.(19) Approximately 90% of the adoptive members have successfully adopted a child or children after many years of dealing with infertility and reproductive technology. The other ten percent of the adoptive population were biological parents first, and have adopted for altruistic reasons or have become biological parents since adopting.

I approached the Chairperson of SPARK, with whom I have also done volunteer work with over the past four years, explaining my research interest. I received a very positive response. There seems to be a general belief among the group members that research is important for both societal acknowledgement of and the future of Romanian adoption. This is particularly so as a moratorium had been placed on Romanian international adoption in 1993. The moratorium is just beginning to be lifted, and, at this time, many parents would like to adopt additional children from that country. Further, as part of the research bargain, the SPARK Chairperson and I agreed that information would be gathered concerning member's views on the support group itself for use to improve the quality of group support. A series of questions addressing this issue were created. These will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Respondents were recruited in two ways. First, I telephoned those on the membership list, explained the research and requested an interview. I assured the respondents of complete confidentiality and anonymity. I had previously met some of the respondents as I too am an adoptive mother of a Romanian child and a member of SPARK. Once interviewed, many of the respondents suggested other mothers who might be interested in describing their experiences. All of those who were contacted agreed to be interviewed. Only one declined as she was about to move out of the city. Secondly, respondents were recruited through written announcements placed in the SPARK newsletter (See Appendix C for a copy of this form). The announcement described the practical importance of the research and the possible benefits of the study for the target population, were stressed. In addition, the announcement indicated that I as researcher shared characteristics with the target population, that I had experienced adoption, and was aware of the issues relating to Romanian adoption.

The sampling design was theoretical sampling which looks for representativeness by 'purposefully' choosing respondents who were typical of the population (Denzin:1978). Although this type of sampling does not allow one to generalize about the population, it does enable one to learn a great deal about the substantive and theoretical issues under study. Snowball sampling was also used, particularly when trying to find respondents who were not members of support groups. In order to protect anonymity, respondents were given fictional names.

THE SETTING

The interviews were conducted in Ontario. Of the thirty respondents, eleven lived in Toronto, four, in each of the cities of Mississauga, London and Brampton, two, in each of Kingston, Hamilton and Burlington, and one lived in each of Whitby and Barrie. The interviews lasted approximately two hours each, the shortest one being one and a half hours and the longest being four hours in length. The interviews were conducted in the mother's home or in a public place of the respondent's own choosing. Due to time constraints three of the interviews were conducted by telephone. Each of these telephone interviews lasted one to one and a half hours. Adoptive mothers were interviewed, because generally it is mothers who are primarily responsible for connecting their children's past events and the family's shared experiences into a continuous social process. This focus on mothers did not preclude examination of how other family members might be contributing to the processes of integration that were being studied. The interviews were conducted without other adults present in order to encourage frank discussion of the issues.

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule had the following sequence:

i) Background Information:

These questions were used to obtain information on the respondents' sex, age, educational background, occupation, religion, ethnic origin, marital status, year married and the number, sex and status of children. (Questions 1,2,3)

ii) Information on the Canadian Adoption Process:

These questions were used to discover the Canadian process as it was experienced by the respondents. This was useful both to probe respondents in order to remember the events and feelings they had experienced in the past, as well as to identify differences and similarities with the Romanian process.

(Questions 5,6)

iii) Information on the Romanian Adoption Process:

These questions were used to obtain information on the respondents' Romanian experience. These questions were also used as guides in remembering indepth experiences and perceptions relating to the adoption. Theoretically, they represented the operationalization of the implied objective past as described in Mead's theory. (Questions 10,11,12,13,14, 15,20,26)

iv) Perceived Stigma and Adoption:

Perceived opinions about public attitudes towards Romanian adoption, were explored using mothers' personal experiences. This also included questions which asked about actual details of events and their sequence. In particular, Questions 7,8,27,28,42,43,& 44 were a replication of Miall(1984). They were used for comparative purposes. Question 66 examined the reaction around adoption disclosure. (Other questions 21,22,63,64,67,79)

v) How Mothers Construct A Socially Shared Past:

The purpose of these questions was to explore with the respondents their personal attitudes, goals, concerns and experiences as they created socially shared pasts with their children. Questions 16-19 dealt with operationalizing the theoretical notion of the social structural past. Depending on

the information that was available to the adoptive parents, the documentation of and the sequence of the chosen events used to reconstruct the child's past were explored. Question 23 established whether or not a mythical past had in fact been created. Questions 50-56 dealt with the creation of lifebooks, the contents, the sequence and the contributors. (Other questions 24,25,48,49).

vi) Parental Opinion Towards Adoption:

These questions were aimed at discovering the mothers' own views on adoption and, specifically their own adoption stories. These might also indicate whether these mothers perceive there to be a stigma associated with adoption. (Questions 29,45)

vii) Acknowledgement or Rejection Of Difference Between Adoptive and Biological Parenting:

These questions based on Kirk's(1964:177-181) Acknowledgement of Difference (A-D) scale, were used to determine whether respondents coping activities or ways of dealing with adoption issues were of the acknowledgement-of-difference type or the rejection-of-difference type. These questions were modified to suit the particular circumstances of the adoptive families under review. Since Kirk's A-D score was first utilized in 1964, it will be interesting to see whether or not these questions still hold the same meaning, since cultural notions relating to adoption as a family form may have changed. Miall, in 1984, found that some of these questions did not have meaning for the respondents in her adoption study. (Questions 30,31,32,33, 34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,57,58,59,60,65,69)

viii) Parental Ethnicity:

These questions are used to determine the importance of the

respondents' own ethnicity to their lives. This may offer insight into the reasons why the Romanian culture was or was not important to the adoptive family. (Questions 46,47)

OTHER CONCERNS

ix) Biological and Adoptive Integration:

This question identified ways in which respondents have or plan to integrate both the biological and adoptive children into the family. (Question 62)

x) Strategies For Community Adoption Disclosure:

This question isolated special issues, concerns, points of tension and the presence or absence of strategies for handling potentially discrediting information. (Question 68)

xi) Adoption Group Support:

These questions explored the attitudes of those who belonged to support groups and their expectations of the groups and their members. This information was compared to the attitudes and expectations of those respondents who do not belong to an adoption support group.

(Questions 70,71,72,73,74)

xii) Perceptions of Community Support:

These questions explored people's public attitudes and their views towards Romanian adoption in light of the respondents' own personal experiences. (Questions 8,9)

xiii) Social Policy Questions:

Questions were included to obtain information about adoption policy. The Chairperson of SPARK, on agreeing to the recruitment of respondents from the membership list, requested that these data on social policy be presented to the SPARK

membership. (Questions 75,76,77,78)

Some of the questions in this interview led to conversations that linked the adoption story together in an orderly fashion. These discussions provided valuable information for the members of SPARK and for other Romanian adoptive families.

THE INTERVIEW SITUATION

At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was told of the purpose of the study following the format outlined in the written letter of announcement (see Appendix B). The respondent was given an 'Information For Consent' form to read and sign (See Appendix B for a copy of this form). The researcher then discussed the precautions that had been taken to ensure confidentiality. These included storing the interviews in a locked cabinet and the use of pseudonyms in the summary of the data. The respondent was then informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that the goal of the research was (a) to determine her experiences of adoption and (b) her perceptions of others' views on adoption. In addition, the researcher promised to answer any questions about her own situation following completion of the interview. Approximately one-half of the interviews were taped. Some of the respondents explained that they felt uncomfortable having this sensitive information taped, and that they preferred me to only write out the responses.(20) Extensive notes were made on all of the interview schedules. In fact, the note-taking often allowed the respondent to think about her opinions on the next question. At the time of the interview, a number was substituted for the respondent's name on the interview

schedule and on the tapes.

After each interview, I determined whether the respondent wished to receive a summary of the results. All of the respondents asked for summaries and they all expressed a willingness to be contacted again in the future for additional interviews, thus allowing the possibility of conducting a longitudinal study. After the interview I reviewed each interview schedule, jotted down further comments on what had transpired during the interview. Finally, all interviewed respondents were sent a letter thanking them for their participation (see Appendix C).

THE APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The purpose of lifebooks are to offer adopted children the foundation and information with which to build continuity and an identity which may have become fragmented by the process of adoption. Lifebooks are generally a pictorial history. They often look like a picture album, bright, warm, colourful and friendly. They usually start with a story and pictures and with as many details of the children's lives as are available. As the children get older, they are used to document anything that holds meaning for the children. For example, letters, special event pictures, valentine cards and report cards can all be included. It is the story of a journey through childhood which is sometimes happy, sometimes painful, but always meaningful and very important to the children. The lifebooks were operationalized by asking whether or not the respondents had created lifebooks for their adopted children, what goes into the books and what their plans are for these lifebooks.(21) The respondents were also asked for

descriptions of the lifestories that were being presented to the children and how these related to the information presented in the lifebooks.

The analysis of the qualitative data incorporated a categorization dependent on the use of the lifebook; for instance what was revealed and documented in the lifebook for the child. The categories include:

- 1) Those Who Completely Incorporated Romania in the Lifebook
- 2) Those Who Partially Incorporated Romania in the Lifebook
- 3) Those Who Did Not Incorporate Romania in the Lifebook

Once the respondents' stories had been categorized, I identified where respondents who 'acknowledge or reject the difference' fell in these three categories. In terms of stigma, fourteen questions in the interview schedule referred to perceived stigma and adoption. Of these questions seven (questions 28,42,43,63,64,66,79) were designed to measure perceived stigma around Romanian adoption in particular, and seven (questions 7,8,21,22,27,44,67) were designed to measure perceived stigma around adoption in general. If a respondent answered negatively to four or more of the seven questions in each category, she was considered to be demonstrating a high level of perceived stigma around adoption in general or Romanian adoption specifically.(22) These respondents were then incorporated into one of the three categories of lifebook mentioned above.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

There were a total of fifty children living with the thirty women interviewed for this research. Of these, nineteen mothers (63.3%) had adopted one child from Romania, and eleven

mothers (36.6%) adopted two children from Romania. There were also twelve biological children in the group, spread out over seven families. Two of the mothers became biological parents after they had adopted children from Romania.

Ages of the mothers at the time of the interviews ranged from thirty-two to forty-nine, with fourteen (46.6%) in the forty to forty-nine years of age category. Sixteen (53.3%) were thirty-two to thirty-nine years of age. The ages of the children at adoption ranged from one week to five and a half years old. The average age of the children at the time of adoption was fourteen months. The majority, twenty-two (57.9%) were adopted between birth and six months; three were adopted between seven and twelve months; three were adopted between thirteen and twenty-four months; four were adopted between twenty-five and thirty-six months and six were adopted between three and a half and five and a half years of age.

The educational level of these women was high. All but one of the respondents had completed high school and the great majority, twenty-five (83.3%) had some form of higher education following high school. Of these twenty-five, nine (36%) had completed Community College, six had completed University, and three had Master's degrees.

In order to obtain a rough indicator of the socio-economic status of the respondents, their occupations were noted before they adopted in the case of the full-time mothers. Present occupations of those who mother and work outside the home were also recorded. Although this research deals only peripherally with socio-economic status as a characteristic of the respondents, these data were reported for the mothers' and the fathers' occupations. To report only the mothers' occupations would have distorted the view of the socio-economic status as the occupations for the fathers tend

to be on a higher socio-economic scale.

Of the thirty mothers, twenty-one (70%) worked outside the home either part-time or full-time. Nine (30%) mothers are at home full-time with their children while the children are young. The occupations of those employed outside the home ranged from two in clerical positions; two in secretarial positions; two social workers; two nurses; two business owners; an editor; a police officer; a Director of an elementary school; and eight women in management positions. Generally speaking, these women were of middle-class to upper-middle-class status, working primarily in professional, semi-professional and administrative occupations. Many of the women lived in dual-income families. Seventeen (56.6%) of the working mothers said that their partners also worked full-time. All of the nine (30%) full-time mothers reported that their partners were employed full-time. Of the four single mothers, three were employed full-time and one was presently employed part-time outside the home. The occupations of the respondents' partners ranged from seven who were community service providers (firefighter, police officer, etc); six who were professionals; five were in managerial positions; three were tradesmen; three who were labourers; and two who owned businesses. The Canadian demographics for adoptive parents mentioned earlier, support the demographics of this present study, in that adoptive parents are likely to be well educated people, in professional and managerial positions.

In terms of marital status twenty-six of the thirty respondents were married, one was in a second marriage that had taken place several years before the adoption. The average number of years married was 12.8. Four of the respondents were single mothers who had chosen to parent as single women. In terms of religious affiliation, eight (26.6%) of the mothers interviewed were Roman Catholic. Six belonged to the United church. Five were Anglicans. Three were Protestant. Three were

Jewish. Five belonged to other denominations. In terms of ethnic origin, twelve (40%) of the women were Canadian/American, seven were British/Irish/Scottish, four were Northern European, two were Eastern European and five were of other ethnic origins.

Generally speaking, the majority of respondents interviewed became adoptive mothers in their forties, with adopted children between three and eight years of age, married, well-educated with a middle to upper-middle-class economic status, Roman Catholic and Canadian-born.(23)

The results of this research are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

In this study, an analysis was made of (1) how adoptive mothers of Romanian children construct a socially shared past with their children; (2) how they perceive others' definitions of adoption; (3) whether these adoptive mothers attempt to manage information about their child(ren)'s adoption with a view to protecting them from stigma; and if so (4) what kinds of strategies, in an analytic and descriptive sense are used. Also, (5) if stigma is not perceived in adoption, what definitions do they perceive? A number of questions indirectly relevant to these issues are also considered. For example, the respondents' perceptions of other adoptive mothers and the importance of a social support group. Consideration is also given to Kirk's (1964) categorization of modes of coping with adoption as they relate to the discussion at hand. Finally, in Chapter 5, the conclusions drawn from the research questions in this study are discussed in relation to the larger theoretical issues associated with Mead's theory of the past and the symbolic interactionist perspective.

RESULTS

1) The Adoption Process in Canada

Respondents were asked to retrospectively reconstruct their experiences with the Canadian adoption process. They were asked to talk about their decisions to adopt and their first experiences with adoption procedure, since the Canadian process is completed before the Romanian process. When the respondents were asked why they had chosen adoption as a way

of forming a family, twenty-one mothers (70%) gave infertility as the deciding factor. Eight (26.6%) said they had adopted for altruistic reasons, having made the decision to adopt after becoming aware of the situation in Romania. One mother chose adoption for personal medical reasons.

Seventeen (56.6%) of the respondents had been pursuing domestic adoption before they decided upon Romanian adoption. All of these women found that the waiting list for domestic adoption was too long. One of the reasons these mothers claimed for choosing Romanian adoption was that they were able to begin the procedure immediately, with little or no waiting time. Five of the respondents had been pursuing international adoption when Romanian adoption became an option. Eight (26.6%) of these mothers began preparing adoption paperwork after they became aware of Romanian adoption through the media. Of the thirty respondents, ten (33.3%) had sought additional social support, other than from their social worker. For instance, some had sought help with searching out information and with preparing for the journey to Romania. Of these ten mothers, four had contacted SPARK for social support during the adoption process. The length of time it took respondents to complete the Canadian adoption paperwork ranged from approximately one month to one year.

2) The Romanian Adoption Process

Respondents were asked why they chose Romanian adoption specifically as a way to form their family. Eleven (36.6%) answered that it was because of the media coverage surrounding the plight of Romania and the orphanages where the children lived in substandard conditions. Six said they found Romanian adoption by chance, through meeting others who were

involved in it or who knew of others who had adopted children from Romania. Four were not able to adopt in Canada. Therefore, international adoption was their only option. Three said that they chose Romanian adoption because they could adopt immediately, three said it was the right time for them to pursue adoption, and three listed other reasons.

The mothers were asked questions about their experiences with the journey to Romania in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mothers' meanings associated with how they created the socially shared past. Of the thirty families in this study, twenty-six (86.6%) travelled to Romania in order to pursue and complete the adoptions. Two of the women travelled alone to Romania. Three husbands travelled alone while their wives remained in Canada. And four women stayed on in Romania to complete the adoption while their partners flew back to Canada. A few of these mothers stayed on alone with their children in Romania for as long as six weeks.

When the respondents were asked whether or not they felt prepared emotionally to visit Romania, fifteen (57%) felt that they were prepared and eight (30.7%) felt that they were not prepared. In Romania, they had had to face poverty, culture shock and also the possibility of returning without a child. (Four women did not travel to Romania and two women did not respond). Of those who claimed that they were prepared, some noted that talking about what was involved and actually experiencing it were two very different things.

When the mothers were asked if they felt physically prepared to visit Romania, with respect to packing appropriate baby items (for example clothes, diapers, formula and so on), personal needs, food and "gifts" (care packages, cigarettes,

chocolate) for Romanians, twenty-five (90%) of the twenty-six mothers who visited Romania felt that they were prepared (one mother did not respond). Most of these mothers transported cartons of clothing, food and medical supplies to donate to orphanages. The respondents were asked how their journey to Romania was and what feelings and perceptions they remember having at that time. Of the twenty-six mothers who travelled to Romania, seven (27%) felt that their journeys were very good. Ten (38.4%) felt their journeys were good; and nine (34.6%) said they had been tolerable. The comments on their feelings and reactions to the journey ranged from very excited "to finally be in the action mode" to "mentally I was at rock bottom, I was prepared to go through anything, I wanted to find a baby." Generally, the respondents seemed very aware of the fact that there were no guarantees of success. Many of the respondents acknowledged that they had felt anxious, worried, frightened and excited during their journey to Romania. As Sarah remembers:

I was excited but doubtful. We were not confident enough to say 'we are coming back with two children'.

Beth said:

In the back of our minds, we feared we would fly back without a child. I told my husband I would stay indefinitely, I was not coming home without a child. It was our best chance.

Those respondents who felt very good about their journey to Romania remembered being in a very different frame of mind. As Karen explained:

It was one of the best experiences of our lives. The worst that could happen is that we would come home without a child.

And Judy remembered:

It was fabulous. We were so pleased we were finally in the action mode. We went through Vienna and stayed one night. We tried to go to the opera. We thought we would have children after this, so we better go to the opera now because we couldn't do it again for a while.

The length of time respondents stayed in Romania to complete the adoptions ranged from three days to two months. The average length of time spent by respondents was between two and three weeks (12,46%).

Eleven of the respondents (36.6%) adopted their children from Romanian orphanages, nine (30%) adopted their children from maternity hospitals, and ten (33.3%) adopted children from birth homes. In describing their first meeting with their children before the adoption was finalized, eight of the mothers (26.6%) first noticed health problems such as malnourishment, severe diaper rash and crossed eyes. One baby was not able to move his neck. Five mothers (16.6%) commented on how the babies were kept tightly swaddled. As one mother commented, "he was wrapped up like a sausage". Several mothers described how beautiful their child was when they first met. Susan summed up the majority response succinctly:

Oh my gosh, the most gorgeous little child, he was swaddled... I was jumping up and down inside!

Most of the respondents who adopted their children from birth homes met their children for the first time together with the birth mothers. These mothers described feelings of discomfort and explained that the situation did not feel real.

As Julie remembered:

The birth mother was holding him when she brought him to the house I was very nervous, I thought, this is like a movie! I was very aware of her feelings (the birth mother), I hung back and chatted a little. The translator said to me "do you like him?"

Sandy described her first meeting with the baby and the birth mother in this way:

She was in the hospital with the birth mother. The first time we saw her was in the car as we were driving to have the medical done. She was swaddled, we could only see this tiny face. I was more concerned with the birth mother at the time. We were with another couple. The translator asked the birth mother to decide which of us should adopt the baby. She chose us, but the other woman held the baby first.

Generally speaking, the respondents said they felt prepared for their journey to Romania and the situations they encountered there. Although it was an emotionally charged process, their perceptions of their journey and the process were good. It is important to note too, that all of these mothers were successful in adopting children from Romania during this first trip.

3) Perceived Stigma and Adoption in General

a) Overall levels of perceived stigma:

In order to gain an awareness of how the respondents perceived public attitudes towards adoption generally and Romanian adoption in particular, two groups of seven questions were asked. As was described in Chapter 2, if a respondent

answered in the predicted direction for perception of stigma to at least four of the seven questions in each category, she was seen to be demonstrating a high level of perceived social stigma around adoption. The level of perception of stigma was considered moderate if she answered yes to three of the questions. The level of perception was considered low if she answered yes to two or fewer questions.

The analysis of the first group of open-ended questions on adoption in general revealed a generally low level of perceived social stigma around adoption. Only one respondent demonstrated a high level of perceived social stigma, (five of the seven questions). Two respondents perceived moderate levels of social stigma. They gave negative responses to three of the seven questions. Six respondents gave negative responses to two of the seven questions. And eleven (36.6%) answered negatively to one of the seven questions. Interestingly, ten respondents (33.8%) did not give any negative responses at all to this group of questions.

b) Adoptive and biological parenthood-similarities and differences:

When attention was given to responses to individual questions about adoption, the following patterns emerged. Fifteen (50%) felt that society in general and neighbours viewed adoptive parenthood as "different" from biological parenthood, but that this was not the case with close friends and family. Only two perceived their close friends and their families as viewing adoptive parenthood differently from biological parenthood. As Hillary commented:

Close friends and family view it as different because they've never experienced it. But as we're raising him they are beginning to see

there is no difference. They have a good relationship with him.

When these respondents were asked why they perceived that people in society and many of their neighbours viewed adoptive parenthood as being different from biological parenthood, the responses varied. Whereas some referred to a focus on the infertility of the couple or the issue of blood ties, others pinpointed a lack of familiarity with adoption as an explanation. As Jackie observed:

People say to me "you couldn't have kids?"

Mary noted that:

In society generally, its still different, people seem fascinated with the whole process. They say "oh, we could never adopt, we want our own".

Similarly, Lorraine concluded that:

As long as we use terms like 'real parents' there will be a difference.

In terms of the degree of acquaintanceship affecting responses, Angela noted:

People in society generally are more negative. People, complete strangers ask how much did she cost. We got the feeling from others that adoption doesn't count. Also, she's visibly different. I would get rude questions about my husband being brown. Society is more negative than people we know who are more open to understanding.

And Sally observed that;

It's like a subculture, what do you know about drugs or AIDS or different lifestyles if no one

has been involved in it? It is the same for adoption if someone you know is adopting you should educate yourself around it. A large percentage of society see adoption as different - that its not a viable, lasting relationship like a biological one.

Respondents were asked if there are people who they definitely do not want to know that their children are adopted. Of the thirty mothers, six answered "yes". What is interesting to note here is that of the group of fifteen respondents who perceived society as viewing adoptive parenthood differently from biological parenthood, only four answered yes to this question. This response suggests that, although some respondents perceived a difference in society's views on adoption, most do not feel that there was a need to conceal their adoptive family status.

Thus, although respondents were aware of these societal beliefs, they did not appear to feel personally stigmatized by them. On the other hand, half of the respondents indicated that people in society, neighbours, friends and family do not view adoptive parenthood as being different from biological parenthood. Again, the explanations offered centred on familiarity with adoption. As Sandy pointed out:

Generally people are forward thinking. The experience has been that we are no different than other parents. Also, this is because she was a young infant at the time of adoption.

Hillary observed:

I have heard both opinions from everyone, society, friends, family, but as we are raising him they see it's no different.

When the respondents were asked if there are particular beliefs about adoption in our society that please them, fifteen (50%) felt that there were. Four felt that there are not, eleven (36%) did not know. Some of these beliefs that pleased the respondents focused on recent changes in attitudes towards adoption. As Mary noted:

There is an increasing pressure to be open about adoption.

And Susan argued:

There is a change of attitudes, things are better now. I see less difference. For example between the old lady's comments of how could we do it, raise someone else's child, to our neighbours who wanted to know how they could do it, go about adopting a child.

Those respondents who felt there were no beliefs in society relating to adoption that pleased them, focused, instead, on negative societal beliefs. As Angela observed:

I have come across more negatives and that surprised me. Society has had adoption as part of society for a very long time. I'm not sure where the stigma came from.

Grace noted:

Parental leave is different for adoptive and biological parents. It's society, it doesn't help adoption.

It would appear from the analysis of the responses outlined above that, although the adoptive mothers in this sample did not perceive high levels of social stigma, they were not unaware of negative social beliefs about adoption. They attributed these to lack of familiarity with adoption.

Perceived Stigma and Romanian Adoption

a) Overall levels of perceived stigma:

The analysis of the second group of questions dealt with how respondents perceive public attitudes towards Romanian adoption in particular. An analysis of open-ended questions that dealt with stigma and Romanian adoption again revealed a generally low level of perceived stigma. However, more respondents (four of the mothers) were considered to be demonstrating high levels of perceived social stigma (four of the seven questions), than was the case for adoption in general. Three of the respondents gave negative answers to three of the seven questions; eight respondents (26.6%) gave negative answers to two questions; seven (23.3%) answered negatively to one question; while eight (26.6%) gave no negative responses at all. Thus, although both groups indicated overall low levels of perceived social stigma, the stigma perceived to be associated with Romanian adoption was significantly higher than for adoption generally.

b) Romanian-born adoption versus Canadian-born adoption of children:

When the respondents were asked whether they think people perceive Romanian born adopted children differently from Canadian born adopted children, seventeen (56.6%) responded yes, they are perceived differently. Ten (33.3%) felt that people do not view them as different. Three did not know. Respondents linked these overall differences to the negative media coverage of Romania and the conditions of the orphanages. For example, depictions of adoptive parents rescuing babies, the rumours of 'baby-buying' and rumours of a high incidence of medical illness such as AIDS all contributed to this perception. As Carol described it:

Because of the media. Either they see the children

as 'special' or 'haven't you done something wonderful' because of the appalling conditions. People looked on it as "rescuing the children"

Karen stated:

There are media stereotypes painted around Romanian adoption. Orphanages are painted as the bad guys and it paints adopters as the 'saviours' of these children.

Angela concurred:

The media has done a lot of damage around health and mental health issues.

And Cathy argued:

The reasons they were placed for adoption were different. There are ethnic issues and medical issues. Our social worker wouldn't have anything to do with us when we told her we were going to Romania. She said they are mentally deprived. It was totally inappropriate.

In order to further explore actors' perceptions of societal attitudes towards Romanian adoption, the mothers were asked if there were any particular beliefs around Romanian adoption in society that annoyed or upset them. The majority of mothers in this sample, seventeen (56.6%) agreed that certain situations had annoyed or upset them. As was the case with the previous question, common responses centred on the ways in which the media had portrayed the situation in Romania. As Jackie claimed:

People think we got soaked financially - they want to know how much we spent and they wanted to know if we had to bribe people.

Patricia stated:

People think that you paid for children because of the media coverage.

Respondents were also asked if there were situations that they have avoided because it makes them uncomfortable as adoptive parents of Romanian children. Even though the majority, seventeen of the respondents described negative experiences, twelve (70.5%) of these seventeen mothers stated that they have not avoided situations that may make them feel uncomfortable. Of the four mothers who have avoided situations, one said that it was the media she avoids. Reporters claim that, although they are interested in focusing on these families, they are always looking for something negative such as medical illness due to early experiences in Romania to report. Two mothers described how they avoid the 'Romanian' part of the adoption when revealing their adoptive status, because many people have stereotyped the children. They have received the following kinds of reactions, "It must have cost a lot of money" or "They must like dancing and music." Julie described having had a plate of food arrive anonymously for their adopted child in a restaurant. Donna avoided potential situations by claiming that "no one had to know if I didn't tell them - it was an evolutionary process for us, we worked through to the point where we are comfortable as an adoptive family."

c) Revelation and response:

In order to gain an awareness of how respondents perceived the attitudes of friends and family, they were asked how they think their family reacts to their child's adoption story and also how their friends react to their child's adoption story. An overwhelming majority of the respondents

twenty-seven (90%) described family reactions as being very positive/supportive/showing great interest/and as being fascinated. As Patricia indicated, the family responded:

With great interest in everything we had to tell them. They have read all of the translations about her background.

Lillian observed:

They are really proud of her. We worked together as a family to adopt her.

Three of the mothers said that their families have accepted it but that they do not talk about it. The general reaction was that they felt their families found it difficult to understand the situation and cannot understand why the parents want to tell the children so much about their births and cultural histories. As Karen explained:

I don't think they are particularly interested. They think I dwell on it too much. My father had tears in his eyes when I told him that she knows her birth story. He said "Didn't that break your heart?"

Caroline noted that:

My mother said to me "Oh, stop talking that nonsense to her" when I was speaking Romanian to her. She's of the old school where biology occurs after the papers are signed.

Eight respondents (27%) indicated that their families were not particularly interested in the child's adoption story because they were concerned about the child's feelings.

As Jackie put it:

They feel bad for him because of his early circumstances that he will have to deal with.

In terms of the reactions of friends many of the responses were the same as those given for family. Generally, friends were perceived as being positive, supportive, and interested in the story. Some friends seemed to probe more and asked more questions than family. These questions included: "Do you wish you had met the birth family?" or "What information do you have?". This may have something to do with the fact that the respondents tended to confide more in family than in friends about the adoption story. Therefore, family members may have had many of their questions answered before they even thought to ask.

In two of the families, the children were experiencing emotional and developmental difficulties because of their early childhood experiences in Romania. Of the four children adopted in the two families, all were adopted over the age of three. Two had lived in orphanages in substandard conditions, and two were adopted from birth homes where physical and sexual abuse were apparent. Because of these difficulties, the children had been ostracized socially. Sophie explained it this way:

My friends do not want their children interacting with my children. I find it very isolating. The kids are labelled throughout the school.

Sophie also described her family's relationship with the children:

My parents are so supportive, they love the kids so much. My father helps me with the kids on a daily basis.

In this case, family members tended to be more supportive of the adoptive family, particularly in times of difficulty.

Perhaps, under circumstances where the children are not experiencing these out of the ordinary difficulties, there is not the same need to be understanding of the differences in adoption. Similarly, there may be less interest in the adoptive parents' decisions about how much to tell the children.

When asked what the main concern is that they have around Romanian adoption, the most common response was the lack of available information, records and documentation kept on the children's medical and personal backgrounds. Other concerns included the following: people were concerned that Romanian adoptions are not happening as frequently as they once were; that the six month abandonment law is problematic as they believe it is not in the best interest of the child; that Canadian bureaucracy slows up the adoption process; that respondents also believe that the two governments must work together to make adoptions happen.

To sum up, adoptive mothers perceived social stigma around adoption in general, and higher levels of stigma around Romanian adoption in particular. However, overall levels of perceived stigma were low and did not appear to affect or influence respondents' behaviour. For example, the majority did not seem to consciously avoid potentially stigmatizing situations. On the other hand, they did tend to choose the situations in which they discuss their adoption stories. For instance, respondents tended to discuss their stories more openly with family members than with friends. However, the vast majority did not hesitate to discuss adoption per se. In the next section, greater consideration is given to these issues.

4) How Mothers Construct Socially Shared Pasts:
Preliminary Findings
The Creation of a Lifebook

As was mentioned earlier, the lifebook is a child's memory book designed to help a child create a sense of identity. Lifebooks are ongoing, starting at birth or before, giving continuity to a child's life that may have become fragmented because of adoption. In order to determine how the adoptive mothers create socially shared pasts for their children, they were asked questions regarding the use of a lifebook and the sharing of their child's birth and cultural history with both their child and society. Of the thirty mothers, twenty-six (87%) had created lifebooks for their children. Some of these parents did not refer to them as lifebooks. This is a fairly recent term coined by The Children's Aid Society.(24) When the mothers were questioned as to the information collected for this book, there was an overwhelming inclusion of history other than that found in the traditional biological baby book, which generally records baby's first years of growth.

Of those respondents who had created lifebooks for their children, twenty-three (88.4%) said their experiences with family, friends and society had not influenced what they decided to put in or leave out of the lifebook. Of those who described why it has not made a difference, responses varied. Caroline stated:

There is not that much to include in the lifebook.
Everything I had I put in.

Sally said:

Sometimes I have to keep reminding myself that she is adopted and that there is a difference.

Two respondents believed their experiences with others influenced what went into the lifebooks. Julie said that family and friends send her information such as media articles to be included in the lifebook, while the second mother said that some of the children's earlier experiences would not be documented in the lifebook because it would be too disturbing for them. One mother stated that she does not yet know what she will do with the lifebook.

Respondents were asked to explain how they have gone about preparing these histories for their children and what goes into the books. Specifically, the types of information that make up these Romanian lifebooks may include media coverage of Romania from the time of Ceaucescu's downfall in 1989 (25), or the history of and photographs of Romania, or Canadian and Romanian adoption paperwork, or photographs of the birth mother and/or birth family and photographs of the orphanage, hospital and/or birth home where the child resided before adoption, the child's passport, documentation of the child's firsts such as a tooth, first words or first day at school, and also the child's medical and social history. Some of the parents kept journals of their time in Romania and have written their child's adoption history in a story form which can be retold to their child. A number of the mothers have reported creating lifeboxes or treasure boxes which hold birth and cultural mementos. For instance, they may hold the clothes the child wore on the journey to Canada, letters from the birth family, a pacifier, a Romanian flag, as well as mementos such as Romanian vases, linens or dolls.

The majority of mothers in this sample were responsible for creating and contributing to the lifebook. Ten(38%) of the twenty-six fathers contribute to the lifebooks. Fifteen (58%)

of the twenty-six couples discuss the contents of the lifebooks. Some of the respondents also receive contributions to lifebooks from friends, both Canadian and Romanian. These are in the form of media articles, books and mementos. Of the twenty-six families who have created lifebooks, seventeen (65.3%) said that their children have a role in contributing to the lifebooks, while eight (30.7%) feel that their children will have a role when they are older, and can better understand their lifestories and are able to read and write. One mother stated that she will not allow her child to discard anything from the lifebook until she is an adult. This suggests that there may be parts of the lifestories that will be disturbing to the children, but that the parents feel a responsibility for documenting and preserving the information for their children until they are responsible adults.

When the mothers were asked if there was any information that they felt strongly should be included in the lifebook, an overwhelming majority twenty-four (92%) said birth family information must be included. For instance, it was important to provide information about the biological family's life and circumstances, photos of the birth family, birth place and the birth family's address. Many mothers also indicated that the history of Romania should be included, particularly those events which led to the beginning of international adoption in Romania. Other responses included the following; everything we have, pictures of our child spending time with other Romanian adopted children, an incorporation of both the birth family and the adoptive family, and the child's own life achievements.

In order to acquire a more indepth understanding of how these mothers construct a socially shared past with their

children, it was necessary to determine (a) how the adoptive mothers share this information with their children, and (b) what were the mother's own views of the importance of Romanian culture for their child's birth and cultural history. With this in mind the respondents were asked if they planned to share their children's birth and cultural history with them. All of the respondents answered "yes" to this question. There was overwhelming agreement among the respondents that this information is a birthright and they believe it is important for these children to know their birth histories. This attitude mirrors the findings of the literature on ethnic identity, which suggest that children who are adopted across racial and cultural groups, must be helped by the family to deal with identity issues which are unique to adoption (Brodzinsky:1990:150). These children are less likely to have a strong sense of their own ethnic identity than are children who are raised within their own ethnic groups.

It is interesting to note that, in describing their views on the importance of Romanian culture for their children, some of the mothers made a distinction between the importance of birth history and cultural history. While all of the respondents felt their children must be told of their adoptions and lifestories, some did not think that cultural history was as important. These respondents claimed that they may not focus on their children's Romanian cultural roots unless the children became interested as they grew older.

The respondents were asked what they will include or leave out of the birth story as it is told to the child. Twenty (66.6%) of the respondents said that they will tell their children everything, that is, everything that they know, and are able to learn. The information will be given to the

children at age appropriate times. This evidence is in keeping with the responses of these mothers to the question that dealt with the disclosure of their children's ethnic identity. Some of the mothers admitted that their children's story will be difficult for them to tell the children. However, they believe it is their responsibility to give the children this information. Many mothers explained why they will include all of the information available. As Hillary said:

Nothing needs to be left out. I will be as straight as I can with him. I see it as a very positive thing. I think she (birth mother) was looking out for him every step of the way.

Susan shared her experience of telling her child the adoption story:

We told her we wanted a baby and we went on a big airplane. And we told the lady there that we would love the baby always, and we signed a paper to promise this. The baby was you.

Some of the mothers reported that their children ask to see the lifebook and they look through it together. This gives them a chance to tell the story both verbally and through looking at the pictures. Rita described an experience she shared with her six year old:

We have presented it in a way that hopefully she won't feel rejected. She said to me 'you know Mommy, if I could I would send my bed to Rita (birth mother) and sleep on the floor.' She understands the poverty there at the age of six!

Only two of the respondents said that there are things that they will leave out of the adoption story. These were

"the negative parts about the country" and "the money issue" which refers to the rumours of "baby-buying" and "bribery" of the Romanian people and government officials.

These responses suggest that the respondents were strongly committed to the belief that a child's birth and cultural history are an important part of his/her healthy sense of identity. In keeping with the above responses, thirteen of the mothers (43.3%) claimed their children's ethnicity to be Canadian/Romanian. Three of these mothers also included their own ethnic backgrounds. For example, Canadian/Romanian/Italian. Ten (33.3) said that their children are Canadian. Four claimed their children are Canadian/European (representing their own ethnic background for instance Canadian/Italian). Two said their children are Jewish, while one respondent did not know yet what she would say her child's ethnicity is. Twenty-six (86.6%) of the thirty respondents said they would integrate or already do integrate their child's Romanian culture with their Canadian culture. Two said that they would not integrate the cultures. Two did not know what they would do. The comments ranged from enthusiastic to somewhat guarded. As Sarah said "We will incorporate as much Romanian culture as we can", while Susan claimed "If she wants to celebrate Romanian customs we will, but we won't jam it down her throat." As these responses demonstrate, much will depend on the child's interest. There was a view among many of the parents that they would not deny the children their birth and cultural history.

To sum up, the data strongly indicated that (a) lifebooks are an important part of constructing socially shared pasts for these mothers, (b) The majority of respondents who have created lifebooks have included

information prior to the adoption, including birth and cultural history, (c) of those who began lifebooks at the time of the adoption, the birth history has been included if any was available, and (d) whether lifebooks were used or not, all of these adoptive mothers have begun to share birth and cultural histories with their children verbally by telling the adoption stories. What is important to note here is that the adoption literature strongly suggests that the attitudes of adoptive parents towards adoption have been shown to influence an adoptee's achievement of a sense of identity. Positive parental attitudes towards the children's birth and cultural histories, as these mothers exemplify, allows the children to develop a sense of identity. In addition, introducing children to their birth and cultural histories at young ages will encourage an interest in their history as they grow.

The Relation of Mead's Theory of the Past to the Construction of Socially Shared Pasts

The intention of this research was to examine Mead's theory of the past as it relates to the construction of a socially shared past within families who have adopted children from Romania. Maines and his colleagues (1987), in their interpretation of Mead's theory, have proposed that each of the four dimensions of the past are an integral part of the continuous process of reconstructing a past. These dimensions include the implied objective past, the social structural past, the symbolically reconstructed past and the mythical past. The findings of this study reveal that respondents do indeed construct socially shared pasts in stages which relate to the four dimensions of the past. Further, the intention underlying this construction is to create continuities between the child's past and the present, in anticipation of the

family's future shared life. The sociological implications of constructing socially shared pasts will now be considered in the exploration of the actual experiences of Romanian adoptive families.

Respondents were asked questions about how they incorporated the past and the present in order to inform the future for their families. Each of Mead's four dimensions was operationalized and analyzed separately. Then the results were compared, in order to determine the part each dimension plays in the construction of a socially shared past.

a) The Implied Objective Past

According to Maines and his colleagues (1987:164) the implied objective past "refers to the existence of previous events, not the meaning the past has for the present. Behavioural realities in the present lead one to the conclusion that there had to have been certain obdurate realities in the past." Maines and his colleagues have further contended that this dimension is the least obvious of all four dimensions of the past. In terms of this research, implied objective, factual events would include, for example, the existence of birth parents, time spent in Romanian orphanages, the infertility of the adoptive parents and so on for most of the families. In order to operationalize these implied objective facts, present "behavioural realities" of respondents were established as follows: respondents were asked (a) whether they presently have any contact with the Romanian birth family, and their views of this; (b) if they have thought about seeking contact with the birth family in the future, and why or why not. Further attention focused on discovering which 'facts' from the child's past were presented and included in the child's adoption story. The assumption was that the more events and facts recognized and included in the

adoption story by the respondents, the more concrete the implied objective past would become. First of all, respondents were asked about their experiences in Romania with birth parents.

Sixteen of the respondents (53.3%) met members of their children's birth families (most often the birth mother) while in Romania. The majority of these adoptive mothers described feeling grateful, humbled, and happy to have met her. The respondents felt that the birth mothers were sad women, warm, decent, and frightened. Some also found the birth mother to be distant and impersonal. This may have been due in part to the language barrier and the awkwardness of the situation. The respondents described these meetings as experiences they would never forget. Many of the respondents described an empathy for the birth family because of their life circumstances. As Barbara explained:

They were so sad and so poor. I wondered if they really wanted to do it. Her birth parents knew she had to come to Canada or she would not have made it, because she was so malnourished.

Patricia observed:

We only have these children through a loss to the birth family. In the taxi, the birth mother asked ME if she could hold him. And I said "yes, of course." The day we went to pick him up, the sister asked if she could dress him. We also met his godparents. It was a very emotional time. They were all attached to the baby. They all started crying when the sister gave him to me, I'll never forget it.

An Grace confessed:

I felt anxiety. We could speak to each other in

the same language. The grandfather said to us, "Just don't cut off his arms and legs." They had heard that babies were being sold for body parts and for research purposes.

Seven of the respondents (23.3%) presently have some contact with the birth family in Romania. Contact in this study is defined as (a) having the birth family's address, (b) the birth family having the adoptive family's address and (c) the exchange of letters or photos between the two families. Four (57%) of these seven respondents said they felt very good/good/fine with this contact; and three said 'not very good'. Those who were unhappy with this contact explained that they have received negative reactions from the birth family. The adopted parents expressed concern that this might be harmful to their child later on. Judy summed it up succinctly when she said:

I write to her a few times a year and I ask her questions (about the family). But she doesn't answer them. She just asks for things like a television and a VCR.

These mothers expressed concern for the type of relationship they would continue to have with the birth family and how they can explain this to their children. These letters suggest a disinterest in the child and an interest in monetary rewards. Yet, the respondents stated that they did not want to sever the contact as it is an important link to their child's birth and cultural history. And it may also be a link that the child will want to pursue in the future. The respondents who said they were happy with the relationship with the birth family stated that they have a one-way relationship involving the adoptive parents sending a letter and photograph of their

child once or twice a year. There is safety in this type of contact because presumably, the birth family does not have the adoptive family's address and would not be able to contact them. Some of the mothers expressed fears that birth families might want to take the children back to Romania if they were able to. Thus, although they believed it is important to have contact with the birth families for the development of the children's sense of identity, many of the mothers said that, when they sent pictures of the children, it was of the child alone with no identifying information and no return address.

Of those twenty-three respondents (76.6%) who do not have contact with the birth families, because of circumstances or the choice they made at the time of adoption, six did not feel positively about the situation. They stated that they would like to have contact in order to possibly obtain photographs and birth histories for their children. There was also concern expressed for the birth mother's feelings. As Patricia stated:

She gave birth to these children, she deserves to know they are healthy and happy.

Five said they felt good or very good about not having contact with the birth families. They claimed that they felt safer this way. Two mothers said they were advised by their Romanian translators not to seek contact. They were told that it was inappropriate. Karen explained:

We wrestled back and forth. The natural inclination was that we wanted to do something, not because they gave us the most precious gift, but because we are so lucky. So instead we give back to the orphanage.

Twelve respondents (52%) stated they were fine about

having no contact with the birth families. Several of the mothers felt that, at this time, it was better for the children not to have relationships which may be confusing for them. A few mothers said that they had tried to contact the birth families with no success. They had sent letters and packages which were returned.

The respondents were asked if they had thought about seeking contact with the birth families in the future. Nineteen (63.3%) said yes; four said possibly; five said no; and two did not know. Most of those who had thought about seeking contact said that they would pursue it when the children were older and only if it was what the children wanted. Some mothers felt uncomfortable with the idea. However, Nicki told this story about her five year old, who was adopted at the age of two years:

I am almost positive she will want to see them.
She pretends to phone Romania and she says,
"Hello birth mother, do you remember when I
loved you and you loved me?"

All of these respondents said that they would like to have more material on birth family history to give to their children.

Of those respondents who had not thought about seeking contact with the birth families, there was some indication of a level of rejection of the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood. This was apparent in Caroline's statement:

No, if the child is comfortable in the adoptive situation, they shouldn't desire a personal contact with the birth family. I do not think could even find his birth mother.

In addition, some respondents were fearful that, if there was contact, the birth family might try to take the child away from them.

In terms of the implied objective past, these results suggest that the following pattern is typical. Although all or most of the respondents shared factual, objective events in the past, for example, Romanian birth parents and adoption, respondents differed along several dimensions in terms of the present "behavioural realities" of the implied objective past. Variations were observed in (a) level of contact with birth parents; (b) possession of concrete material items and social information such as photographs and birth histories; and (c) evaluations of the importance of such contacts and information.

These findings suggest that the adoptive parents who do have contact with birth families and those who hope to have contact in the future, see this contact as one in which they have control over the situation. For example, the adoptive families have the birth families addresses, but the birth families do not have the adoptive families addresses. Given the distance between the families it seems realistic that this is the type of open-adoption these families can expect. Situations may change in the future if families return to Romania to meet birth families. Under the present circumstances it does not seem likely that the birth families would come to Canada. Generally, the respondents felt positive about having control over the situation. Attention will now turn to the social structural past.

b) The Social Structural Past

The second dimension, the social structural past, is concerned with the documentation of the past in terms of the sequencing of activities and events. According to Maines and his colleagues (1987:237) the structuring of the past is not deterministic. However, as "the past structures and conditions the experiences found in the present," social structural pasts establish probabilities for what will take place. As Maines and his colleagues have argued, "the order within which things happen and appear conditions that which will happen and appear." In this study, how respondents sequenced the events in their children's past experiences and documented them was used to operationalize the social structural past. Specifically, attention focused on (a) the creation of the lifebook, how much information was documented, and how it was ordered and/or (b) the adoption story that was verbally relayed to the child, how much information was documented, and how it was ordered.

The respondents were asked questions that were designed to elicit what information they had, the meaning the information held for them and how they chose to present it, both in the lifebooks and verbally as the adoption stories. The majority (nineteen) of the respondents (63.3%) were able to identify some social and medical history for their children. Of these, most received a homestudy(26) from the Romanian court with very little information on the birth history. Some were able to identify whether their child had siblings, and the circumstances around the reason for adoption, for instance, the birthparents were teenagers, or farmers, or gypsies living on a commune. A few of the mothers were able to obtain a very minimal medical history.(27) Two of the respondents, both single mothers prepared questionnaires

to take with them to Romania. With the help of a translator, they were able to obtain some social and family medical histories from the birth mothers which they have documented in the lifebooks for their children.

As discussed earlier, the majority of respondents said they were documenting all of the available information in the lifebook, and all of the respondents were verbally relaying an adoption story to their children. Thus, the factual documentation which represents the social structural past included medical and some social history in the majority of cases. Some of the respondents described however, (a) how they have removed photographs of birth mothers, and certain newspaper and magazine articles, or (b) have yet to include them in the lifebooks, as the information is not appropriate given the age and the stage of development of their children. This finding illustrates how these mothers acted to order or sequence past events in the present in the best interest of the child.

Twenty-seven of respondents (90%) returned from Romania with cultural and birth mementos. Most of these respondents specifically shopped for cultural mementos in Romania with the intention of returning with items symbolic of their children's birth country. The mementos included traditional Romanian dress, handmade dolls, jewellery, flags of Romania, maps of the country and photographs. Fewer mothers were able to acquire mementos of their children's birth history. Others however, had the clothes the baby wore in the orphanage or on the journey to Canada, a memento given to the child by the birth mother, pictures of the birth family or a Romanian toy. Many of the parents expressed an interest in returning to Romania with their children in the future. They stated that at

this time they hoped to bring back more cultural and birth mementos.

That the majority of respondents searched for and returned with mementos for their children suggested a desire on the part of the parents to create order and continuity from the past. As much information as possible was collected in anticipation of future attempts to foster the children's sense of identity. The parents' future plans to return to their child's place of origin were also interpreted as an indicator of this desire to socially structure the past in order to secure the future.

Notably, within the lifebooks, or in telling the adoption stories, respondents documenting the children's historical and social past, introduced into this ordering, the adoptive parents themselves. In this way, the Romanian experience became part of the entire adoptive family's socially structured past and laid the groundwork for their socially shared future.

To sum up, respondents made judgments about how to order or structure past experiences in their child's life. These ranged from documenting historical events such as media reports of Ceaucescu's overthrow, or obtaining cultural artifacts such as Romanian crafts, to including more personal medical and social histories. Respondents ordered events in terms of present goals - items deemed inappropriate for the age of their children were censored or set aside for inclusion at some later date. Respondents also expressed the intention to return to Romania to obtain further information to order the past. Most notably, respondents used these events and experiences to order their own appearance and to solidify

their relevance to a child's past, different and distinct from their own.

c) The Symbolically Reconstructed Past

According to Maines and his colleagues (1987:163), Mead's symbolically reconstructed past "involves redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning in and utility for the present." In this research, attention was focused on where respondents chose to begin reconstructing the past. Specifically, this dimension was operationalized by determining where the respondents began the adoption story and documentation in the lifebook. Twenty mothers (77%) reported including information in the lifebooks prior to the adoption. Those respondents who began the stories when the adoption took place, report that the lifebooks document historical events preceding the adoption. Yet the verbal stories begin with the journey to adoption. Marilyn's family story is explained this way:

We tell the children the story of how Mommy and Daddy met, we wanted to have babies and we couldn't carry a baby in Mommy's tummy. So we searched and found Romania. We then tell them how we found them and became a family.

Caroline described:

Volume 1 of the lifebook is the adoption paperwork. Volume 2 includes personal mementos, photos of the hospital in Romania, us in Romania, and mementos of her biological family's village. Volume 3 are photos when she came home, shower cards etc,. Volume 4 has the newspaper articles and twelve videotapes of North American T.V.

programs on Romania. Her brothers also contribute to the book sometimes as well, like the banner they made for her when she first came home. I would like the whole family to take part in the lifebook.

Sally explained:

His lifebook begins with our decision to adopt him and the reason why this was possible. There is a section at the beginning that is an introduction to my husband and I and a picture of the moment he was put in his arms. We made a family tree that includes both the birth parents and us. He also has a photo album that he keeps in his room. He likes to look at it before bed. One picture intrigues him - he always wants to see "the lady that gave me a bath" (the lady that cared for him in Romania). I believe our job is to prepare him for the possibility of what he may find out as he's older. There is a circumstance - they conceived him to have him adopted.

These findings suggest that at this early stage of development, the children's story needs to be simplistic. A description of a politically torn Romania and the plight of the children would not have been appropriate at this time. Thus, mothers described, how in creating the adoption story, they began with simple facts on which they could build as the children grow. The story will always be the same, with more detail being added as is appropriate. In building upon a story continuity is created. Respondents direct their present actions towards future goal-related activities. For example,

the majority of mothers had already begun to plan what they would tell their children. In most cases, they stated that they would reveal all they know to their children. For the moment however, they reconstructed this story to be age appropriate. Although present life experiences shared by the adoptive family may also determine when and how the child learns of her/his adoption story, there were factual events which were being symbolically reconstructed early on in the socially shared past. As Denise explained:

I feel strongly that everything we have should be included in the lifebook. The picture of her birthmother isn't there yet, she's not quite ready, and I don't let other people view the book, that is for her to decide.

It is interesting to note that twenty-six of the respondents (86.6%) revealed that they had renamed their children upon adoption. Although not an original focus of this research, it became evident that renaming the adopted children also constituted a symbolic reconstruction of the past. Paradoxically, name changes could also be considered to be part of the sequencing of events within the social structural past. Renaming altered "facts" and represented the symbolic "rebirth" of the child as a member of the adoptive family. Indeed, the most common reason offered for renaming the child was that the adoptive parents had chosen a name before the adoption, and they felt that they needed to rename their child as part of becoming a family. The renaming of the child symbolized the family coming together as a "real" family - a rite accorded the biological parents in naming a child born to them. This gesture may also be considered to be one of the first steps in the securing of a new sense of identity for the

child. Notably, some of the parents expressed concern over their child having a "cultural" or "ethnic" name and the possible consequences of this in Canadian society. This may have reflected perceptions of social stigma or concerns about the child being differentiated out from the family. Most of the mothers included the Romanian given name as a second name, however, stating that it was part of their child's identity. On the other hand, a few of the children had not yet been named by their birth parents. They were newborns and their births had not yet been registered. The naming of the child then, became the adoptive family's responsibility. As Susan explained:

We asked the birth mother what she would have called him. He had not been named yet because he was so young. We gave him that name as a middle name.

This is an example of how factual events in the past were symbolically reconstructed by the adoptive parents in order to contribute to present and future strategies of family integration. Notably, most of those respondents, who did not include the Romanian name as a middle name, expressed a regret at not having done so. Four respondents did not rename their children. Of these, one used the child's Romanian name. The others added their chosen name after the given Romanian name on the birth certificate. However, they referred to their child by the name they themselves had chosen.

It is clear that these adoptive mothers symbolically reconstructed the past in ways that created meaning in and utility for the present by (a) shaping information about events in the child's past in an age appropriate way; which (b) was reflected in where the child's history began in the lifebook and in the verbal adoption story; and (c) by

symbolically renaming the child. Notably, how the child was renamed (completely or partially) revealed the extent to which some mothers were prepared to acknowledge the child's "factual" origins.

Finally, twenty-five of the respondents (96%) indicated that their child would or already had a role in the creation of the lifebook, thus suggesting a pattern of interaction wherein parent and child would establish their links to one another.

d) The Mythical Past

The mythical past, the fourth and most intriguing dimension, represents these "fictitious" creations which are not empirically grounded, but which may materially affect social relationships, by suggesting ways of thinking (such as the belief that something was meant to be). An overwhelming majority twenty-seven of the mothers (90%), reported that they felt that God or fate had, had a hand in bringing them together with their adopted children. Only three of the mothers said that they did not know. Many of the respondents felt that their fate was written for them and that the reason they were infertile was so that they could adopt a Romanian child. It was through their faith in God that they were able to complete the adoption both physically and emotionally. Some mothers explained how their child physically resembled other members of the adoptive family or observed that their child fit right into the family, suggesting that the adoption was was meant to be. As Denise said:

I saw storks on the runway when we landed
in Bucharest. I thought at the time, this
is a good omen and it was.

Marilyn said:

The world is a tapestry - threads weaving themselves. I believe in God and that we control our own fate. Our thread was ultimately tied to Romania. The reason we could not bear children and we could survive that is because these kids need nurturing. I feel we were led.

Karen noted:

She had blue eyes and jet black hair like my mother. No one else in the family has these traits, funny personality traits like my mother.

Several of the mothers also said that they knew their child was "the one" the moment they saw him or her. They made an instant connection or bonding with their child. These findings suggest, as do Maines and his colleagues (1983), that the dimension of the mythical past has practical value. With respect to this study, creating a mythical past offered adoptive mothers useful tools with which to socially integrate the family.

It is clear that several observations were made which support the use of Maines and his colleagues (1987) four dimensions of the past. First, although all or most of the respondents shared "factual" objective events in the past (Romanian birth parents), they varied in terms of how these events were manifested in present "behavioural realities" (contact with birth parents and evaluations of these contacts) - the implied objective past. Second, respondents made varied judgments about how to order or structure past experiences in their children's lives to achieve present goals. For example, adoptive mothers ordered events and experiences to establish

their own relevance to their children's biological and cultural past in the present - the socially shared past. Third, respondents differed in constructing where the children's histories began (in Romania, in Canada, or at the time of adoption), and through renaming their children, symbolically reconstructed their children's biological pasts as a way of integrating the children into the adoptive family. Finally, respondents used notions of fate or God to support family integration - the mythical past.

Although the data supported the relevance of all four dimensions, there was overlap in that some events could be categorized as representing the social structuring or symbolic reconstructing of the past. For example, withholding information in response to the appropriateness of the children's ages. Further research is needed in other circumstances to determine whether this overlap is incidental or inevitable.

Parental Views On Adoption

Respondents were asked two questions that deal with their own views about adoption and, specifically, their own Romanian adoption experiences. The respondents were asked (a) how satisfied they were with their decisions to adopt. And (b) if they felt adoptive parents of Canadian born children had different experiences than they did. All the respondents stated that they were very satisfied with their decision to adopt. A common response was "I would do it all over again!"

Respondents were then asked to compare their Romanian adoption experience with their perceptions of the Canadian adoption experience. This was done to explore their own

attitudes toward Romanian adoptive parenthood. Twenty-four of the respondents (80%) claimed that Canadian adoptive parents would have had different experiences from theirs. Three reasons were offered for this observation. First, respondents referred to differences in the two processes in terms of (a) the amount of paperwork which was doubled for Romanian adoptions; (b) the appeal period in Canada. There is a waiting period of twenty-eight days in Canada after the adoption occurs, during which time the birth mother may change her mind about the adoption. Once the adoption is legally finalized in Romania, there is no further waiting period. This was described by the mothers as a positive difference for Romanian adoption, as many of these women had experienced the anguish of having a child removed from the home within the first month after a Canadian adoption placement had taken place. (c) The respondents also stated that there is less government involvement in mandatory follow-up visits by the social worker with Romanian adoptions. Respondents also viewed this as a positive difference. Some of the mothers described negative experiences with Canadian social workers who were regarded as intrusive. As Grace stated: "the social worker didn't stick her nose in our business when we came back." And (d) Due to the procedure or lack of it in Romania at the time of these adoptions, some of the respondents felt that Canadian adopted children would have easier access to their birth histories. In Romania, records were not often kept of birth histories. This is yet another indication of the importance these mothers placed on their children having access to their birth histories. This perception supports Kaye's (1990) findings which reveal that adoptive parents are far less secretive about adoption, particularly with their children, as compared to the respondents in Kirk's (1964) study (c.f. Miall, 1989). As the literature suggests, the trend

in the 90's is toward more open adoption. Adopted children are given their historical information or may be involved in completely open adoptions where the children have a relationship with the birth mother. As Sally stated:

In Canada there is a chance for more openness and the possibility of contact with the birth mother.

Second, differences between Romanian and Canadian adoption, were linked to the cultural differences inherent in Romanian adoption. For some of the mothers, this was a very positive difference. The opportunity to bring a new culture into their family identity seems to have been regarded as an enriching experience for these respondents. Barbara said that:

Canadian adoptive parents didn't have the advantage of going to Romania and experiencing a different culture.

Third, three of the respondents described social differences they had experienced through adopting children. These respondents believed that there was a stigma attached to Romanian adoption that was not present for Canadian adopted children. As Cathy summed it up:

People think that if you adopt in Canada everything is fine, but if you adopt internationally, people think you are buying a baby.

The other social difference described was the state of health of the children, all of whom were born into and lived in poverty and unacceptable conditions by Canadian standards. Health issues such as malnourishment, parasites, and lack of physical and mental stimulation were felt to bring with them

experiences which compounded the social issue of adoption for these families. As Sally said: "There is an easier acceptance of Canadian kids." Two of the respondents felt that there was no significant difference between the two adoptive experiences; while four did not know. Denise, who had, had an unusually positive Romanian experience throughout the process, and had experienced relatively comfortable living conditions during her six week stay, said:

I don't feel going to Romania was a hardship
it was faster and less traumatic than some
Canadian experiences.

It should be noted that all of the respondents were very satisfied with their decision to adopt from Romania even though there were some difficulties attached.

The Acknowledgement or Rejection of Difference Between Adoptive and Biological Parenthood

Questions were asked to discover whether these adoptive mothers acknowledged or rejected the differences inherent in adoptive parenthood. Interest also focused on identifying coping activities and ways of dealing with adoption issues. The research was also interested in exploring whether these questions, utilized from Kirk's (1964) A-D score currently hold the same meaning for respondents as they did thirty years ago. The sociological literature suggests that cultural notions toward adoption have changed. Miall (1987,1989) found that some of Kirk's questions did not pertain to the respondents in her study. A comparison of those findings to this study was also of interest.

A series of eighteen questions, divided into two

categories were asked of the respondents. (see Appendix D for these questions) These questions dealt with adoptive parents own views about adoption, as well as their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with adoptive parent status in society. The first set of questions based on Kirk's A-D score, were analyzed in much the same way as in his 1964 study. If a respondent answered "yes", to a question, it suggested acknowledgement-of-difference, whereas a "no" suggested rejection-of-difference tendencies. The higher the number of yes responses, the higher the level of acknowledgement-of-difference between adoptive and biological parenthood. The questions were modeled after those used in Kirk's study with modifications to fit the present sample. In this research, all of the respondents acknowledged a difference between adoptive and biological parenthood. Interest, therefore, centred on the meanings underlying these "yes" responses. Did respondents share Kirk's interpretation of what "yes" meant or not? The second set of ten questions focused on the respondents' own views around adoption, offering further insight into why they acknowledge the differences in adoption as they did.

As mentioned, the first group of questions dealt with the respondents' perceptions of the differences and satisfactions inherent in being an adoptive parent. They also considered reasons why adoptive parents think children should be told about adoption, the mother's feelings around their biological families, and their perceptions of their children's feelings about being adopted. In responses to whether it feels different being an adoptive parent compared to being a biological parent, twenty-one respondents (70%) said no. Analysis of open-ended responses revealed that those who answered "no" were referring to family functioning as opposed to family formation (Miall:1995) Thus, "no" in this instance

did not constitute a rejection of difference in Kirk's terms, as the mothers were referring to how their families function. As Caroline who is both an adoptive and a biological parent, put it: Having done it both ways - no, there is no difference. I don't handle parenting issues any differently.

The comments expressed by the mothers who answered negatively to this question support the notion that it is necessary to focus on respondent meanings underlying responses in order to fully understand what these responses mean.

Those eight (26.6%) answering "yes" to this question, responded in ways similar to Marilyn in saying that:

There are more issues that adoptive parents have to deal with.

Or as Katie said:

A birth mother had no choice but adoptive parents choose to be parents.

When respondents were asked if there are some satisfactions that biological parents have that adoptive parents do not have, nineteen (63.3%) agreed. Three reasons were given for this response which focused on the biological formation of the family. First, respondents felt that biological parents have the satisfaction of the childbirth experience. Second, biological parents did not have to deal with issues of genetics, identity or the lack of biological information about their children. Third, biological parents had the satisfaction of being with and watching their children grow from the day they were born. Nine (30%) of the respondents answered "no" to this question; while two said they did not know.

Alternately, respondents were asked if there were some satisfactions that adoptive parents have that biological parents do not. Twenty-four (80%) of the mothers answered "yes". When they were asked to explain this response, the most common explanation was that the personal satisfaction of becoming a parent was greater for infertile adoptive parents. These women described how difficult it was to become parents and observed that they did not take their children for granted. Judy summed up this view:

If you so wanted and waited for so long for something you can't help but appreciate his being. He is a miracle to me.

Other respondents described the personal satisfaction that comes from the accomplishment of having successfully adopted a child. There was also the satisfaction of knowing that they were able to offer a child a better life. Another common response centred on the Romanian cultural experience and the positive elements it had brought to their families. Cathy described her experience in this way:

Romania has changed us. Maybe it was the culture of the country, we take so much for granted here. Our satisfaction was with the experience we gained going through the process.

The respondents were asked whether they felt there were any disadvantages to being an adoptive parent. The responses were split on this question. Fifteen (50%) said "yes", fourteen (46.6%) said "no", while one respondent did not know. Those mothers who said there are no disadvantages also noted that there is a general belief that there are "challenges" to being an adoptive parent. Along with this belief, many mothers

claimed that others in society may view adoptive parenthood as being disadvantaged in the sense that it is considered to be 'second best' to biological parenthood. As Caroline observed:

Everyone in the world doesn't look upon it as we do. Its not as 'natural' as biological, there is a belief that blood is thicker than water.

Dorothy noted:

I don't think there is a disadvantage, but others may say 'its too bad that you had to resort to second best.'

Similarly, Sarah stated that:

I like to think that people have progressed in their attitudes. But my brother-in-law was unsupportive, he said 'why do you want someone elses' kids?, kids that someone else doesn't want?' I am afraid of that for my kids.

Although one-half of the responses to this question were categorized as "no" there is little indication of respondents rejecting the difference. As the quotes above suggest, respondents were aware of a social stigma caused by the belief that adoptive parenthood is different from biological parenthood.

Of those respondents who felt there are disadvantages to adoptive parenthood, a common response centred on the differences in the Canadian government's treatment of adoptive families. Parental leave provisions for adoptive parents are less than for biological parents, there are no government support systems equal to those for biological parents and funding for medical or psychological care is not available for children adopted internationally.

The respondents were asked if there were any particular times or circumstances when they were aware of the fact that they are Romanian adoptive parents. The majority, twenty-two of the respondents (73.3%) said "yes". The most common response was when they take their children to the doctor, which may be a reminder that there is no medical history or that there are medical concerns due to their children's impoverished beginnings. Another common response was when the respondents view media coverage of Romania. These mothers described a positive connection to Romania and its culture. Sally reported:

When I see media stories surrounding Romania
or when I meet newcomers to Canada from Romania,
I feel a kinship. Or when I watch Romanian
gymnasts on T.V.

When the respondents were asked if they ever refer to their child's biological family when they are speaking to their child, eighteen (60%) said that they do. All of the children at the time of the study were between the ages of three and eight years old. The parents reported the children to be at an age where they are beginning to ask questions about where they came from. The most popular question the parents were asked was "Was I in your tummy?" Those who referred to the biological family did so by telling their children that they came from "another lady's tummy." Those twelve respondents (40%) who answered "no" felt that their children were not yet ready for the information. These respondents said that they would talk to their children about their biological families when it was appropriate. This finding suggests that they are not rejecting the difference but are concerned with the best interests of the children and

the appropriate time to tell.

It is interesting to note that when the mothers were asked if they ever refer to their child's biological family when speaking to others, twenty (66.6%) said that they do, nine (30%) said "no" and one respondent did not answer. Of the majority who answered "yes", most said that they discussed the biological family more at first, when the adoption was completed. As time has passed however, they have talked about it less. The reason offered for this change was that the mothers believe the children's adoption stories are their own to discuss or not. Some of the parents expressed regret at telling people so much about their children's history, feeling that they had invaded the children's privacy. For those who answered "no" to this question, the reasons were much the same. There is a general belief that not everyone has to know everything about the adopted children's stories. There is an apparent difference in the way this question was interpreted when compared to Kirk's study. The main concern in this study was empathy for the children and a respect for the children's privacy. This question may have been better utilized by modifying it to reflect changing parental attitudes towards adoption. Adoptive parents are probably increasingly willing to acknowledge the differences in adoption but make judgments about when and how to do so.

All of the respondents said they imagine how their children will feel about being adopted. They imagine what the children's feelings may be. The children may have feelings such as curiosity, rejection, anger, sadness, grief and a sense of loss of the birth family. What they have done with these imaginings was to use them in the present to lay down the groundwork for their children in hopes that it would ease

the children into understanding and accepting the realities of their birth histories. As noted earlier, these mothers are developing a sense of continuity for their children by overlapping their child's present actions (their adoption questions) with past events (such as the fact of adoption) and future goals (how the children may react to the adoption information in the future). It is for this reason that it becomes important to acknowledge the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood both with the adopted children and in society. This acknowledgment facilitates identity construction for the adopted children concerned.

The final question in this group asked the respondents if they think that adopted children should be told about their adoption. All of the respondents answered "yes". In their responses, some of the mothers referred to the importance of creating a feeling of normality for their children, by telling children about their adoptive status at a young age. These respondents' views are yet another example of how, by acknowledging the difference between adoption and biological parenthood, a continuity is created which is necessary for the creation of socially shared pasts.

The second group of questions examined the respondent's views as to why they acknowledge the difference between adoptive and biological parenthood, as well as how they perceive other adoptive parents. The first question asked whether respondents, when introducing their children to new friends, ever use the word adopted. Sixteen (53.3%) said "yes"; while thirteen (43.3%) said "no" and one respondent did not answer. The general attitude of those who answered "yes" was that they did at first because of their excitement around the successful adoption and also because of the ages of some

of the children. For those who adopted older children, it became more of an issue. Also, some of the parents adopted two children who were less than nine months apart in age. This led to questions being raised by others who met them.(28) Of this group, most stated that they no longer feel the need to volunteer the information to people, and that they themselves would determine the appropriate situations in which to disclose the information. Of those who answered "no", the general response was that it was no one's business and they felt they were protecting their children's privacy.

In order to explore actor perceptions of the general attitudes of other adoptive parents, respondents were asked why they thought some adoptive parents may not tell their children that they are adopted. Responses centred on the fear experienced by the parents in terms of the children rejecting them and/or wanting to search for birth parents, fear of hurting their child or protecting their child from feeling different, and discomfort with their own feelings around their infertility and adoption. Several respondents also indicated that these views were old-fashioned, unfair to the children, and only served the parents' own needs. On the other hand, respondents were asked why they thought some adoptive parents may choose not to tell others that their children are adopted. Several respondents indicated that the child may be treated differently and by not revealing the information the risk of social stigma around adoption would be reduced. It was viewed, therefore, as a form of protection for the children. Others said that parents may not choose to tell because the information is private, it is the children's information, to tell or not. The way in which these respondents perceived other adoptive parents' views is not necessarily an indication of their own opinion. Several respondents stated in their

responses to the above questions that not telling the children or others about adoption was harmful to the child. This view reflects Kirk's concept that revelation is an acknowledgement of difference. The code of conduct presently advanced among adoptive parents and professionals is to disclose all of the adoptive information.

On the other hand, when respondents were asked why some adoptive parents may tell people they meet right away that their children are adopted, they responded because it was an exciting, different, happy experience and they wanted everyone to know. Respondents also stated that these parents would probably discuss it less as time went on- a response similar to that given by the respondents who said they had used the word "adopted" when they introduced their child to new friends. Another common response was that parents might tell people right away as a form of overcompensation, to justify to themselves that it was okay. Some of the respondents also said they do not understand why some parents may do it, because it is unnecessary and some people do not need to know. In terms of how these mothers view disclosure, the majority of respondents, although acknowledging a difference between adoptive and biological parenthood, stated that there is a time and place to disclose adoption information. These findings are well supported by Miall (1987,1989). Miall (1989:287) discussed how the respondents in her study indicated an awareness of the negative meanings of adoption in the larger society and this affected people's decisions as to when to disclose the adoptive status. For the respondents in this present study, it was also a judgement call and they believed it is not necessary to disclose everything. However, it is also wrong not to disclose adoption per se. These findings are in contrast to Kirk's findings, where a

respondent either acknowledged or rejected the differences in adoption. However, the findings of this study replicate Kaye's (1990) findings which revealed that the categories are not mutually exclusive, that parents' responses may include both acknowledgement and rejection of differences in adoptive parenthood. Kaye found that the many subtleties could be better understood by rating them, as opposed to being placed in a category. It appears that a distinction of high or low levels of the acknowledgement of difference may be a more appropriate way to assess parents' perceptions.

With regard to the information that the adoptive parents have concerning their children's birth histories, questions were asked which were intended to determine how the parents feel about the information they have and how they plan to share it with their children. The respondents were asked if they wished they had more information about their children's biological families. Twenty-eight (93.3%) said "yes". The most important information sought was medical histories of the families, information on the biological fathers, personal information regarding the biological families such as what they do for their livings, what they think about and whether there are any birth siblings. Several respondents stated that they would like to meet their children's birth family. The two respondents who answered "no" said that it was a pity that they did not have the information, but also that they do not want or need it.

Adoptive parents were asked about the age at which they began to share the information they do have with their children. The majority of respondents began to talk about adoption when the children were babies. Several of these mothers explained that they share the information by allowing

the child to take the lead in asking questions. Information is then shared as it is age appropriate. The older children knew of their adoption and these parents, too, shared the information as the children were ready emotionally and developmentally to learn about it. As mentioned earlier, other ways these mothers had for sharing the information with their children included, having written or created adoption stories for their children, showing the children lifebooks or photo albums and discussing the contents. A few of the mothers admitted that they did not know the best way to share the information. Twenty (66.6%) of the respondents said that they had no concerns about sharing this information with their child, while ten (33.3%) said that they do. The concerns expressed were whether they would be able to give their children the right information at the right stage, that the information did not come across as negative because it was important for their child's identity to have this knowledge. Some of the respondents expressed a concern about their children's responses to this information, such as a rejection of the adoptive parents, or what the children might encounter if they begin to search for their birth families. Of those who said they had no concerns about sharing the adoption story, the mothers felt confident about the ways in which they planned to disclose the information. A negative answer to this question should not be taken as demonstrating a rejection of the difference in adoption.

When the respondents were asked if there was any information that they did not want their children to ever know, and if there is any information that they would leave out of the lifebooks, only four respondents to each question said that there were. In both cases, the responses were the same. They did not want their children to know of instances

where the birth mother sent letters asking for money or gifts. One adoptive mother did not want her child to know that he was abandoned. Another mother did not want her child to know of her physical abuse as a young child. That there was information that a few mothers did not want their children to know or that they would keep out of the lifebooks was not taken to indicate rejection of difference, as the parents made this decision out of concern for the negative implications this information might have on their children's sense of identity and not, as Kirk suggested, to protect themselves.

The majority of respondents said that the ways in which they handle their adoptive parent status varies with the situation and the people they are dealing with (Miall:1987). Most of these mothers do not volunteer information about the adoption other than to close friends or family as easily as they once did, particularly as the children grew older and were more able to understand what was being said. Some respondents said they are protecting their children from possible stigma by not offering the information to everyone that they meet. However, others said that they take the time to explain adoption to those who are interested in knowing about it and they feel that these occasions provide opportunities to educate the public about adoption issues. The fact that most of these respondents chose not to tell everyone they meet about their child's adoption is not representative of a rejection of difference as Kirk defined it, but a decision made out of respect for their children and the belief that some family matters may be kept private.

To sum up this section, it was found that all of the respondents acknowledged a difference between adoptive and biological parenting. This finding was well supported by

Miall(1989) who also found the distinction to be "when" is the best time to disclose, and not the question of "whether or not" to disclose. The importance of this finding lies in examining how the mothers acknowledged differences and their views on why they did. As described in Kaye's(1990) study, Kirk's categories of acknowledgement of difference are not mutually exclusive. Parents' responses may include both and the many subtleties inherent in the respondents' views are better understood by rating them with regard to the extent to which they acknowledge the difference. The results of this study revealed a high level of distinction of acknowledgement of difference between adoptive and biological parenting. It was only through open-ended responses that the meanings underlying this acknowledgment emerged. For example, it was found in all instances that a negative response did not necessarily suggest a rejection of difference but rather a difference in adoptive parent perceptions. Although, 70% of mothers said it does not feel different being an adoptive parent than a biological parent, analysis of open-ended questions revealed that they were referring to how their family functioned as opposed to how their family was formed. Future research on adoption should continue to emphasize respondents' explanations of their own responses.

Ethnicity Of Parents

In order to gain an awareness of the respondents' views on the importance of culture and ethnicity, two questions were asked. These focused on (a) how important their ethnicity is to them; and on (b) whether they celebrate their ethnicity or not. The majority, twenty-one of the respondents (70%) stated that their ethnicity was very important/important to them. Twelve of these families were of European and Jewish descent

and uphold their traditional family customs, while nine celebrated Canadian culture. Seven stated that their ethnicity was not too important to them and of those, five claimed their ethnicity to be Canadian. Two respondents did not know. That the majority of respondents felt their own ethnicity to be important in their lives suggests one reason why they viewed their adopted childrens' birth and cultural histories as important to the children's sense of identity.

The Adoption Support Group: "Sharing Their Fate"

In order to gain an awareness of how these mothers viewed others who had also adopted, five questions were posed that explored the attitudes of respondents who belonged to support groups. I asked about their expectations of the group and of its members. These findings were then compared to responses of those who do not belong to support groups.

Of the thirty respondents in this study, an overwhelming majority, twenty-three (77%) said that they behave differently with other adoptive parents than with biological parents (Miall:1987). Four of these twenty-three respondents were not members of SPARK, the self-help support group discussed earlier. An analysis of open-ended responses to this question revealed that the difference was positive, in that respondents felt able to discuss adoption and adoptive parenting issues. There was also a rapport and an understanding of differences that they claimed is not present with biological parents. As Caroline put it: "we are kindred spirits." Eighteen (60%) of these respondents associated with other adoptive families excluding those in the SPARK group. All four of the non-members also associated with other international adoptive families. Twelve(40%) respondents stated that all of the

adoptive families they associated with are members of SPARK.

Of those twenty-six respondents who were members of SPARK, sixteen (61.5%) joined the group for the preadoptive services that were offered. Ten (38.5%) joined for the postadoptive services which included a social network and a regular newsletter. Four of these mothers are currently volunteers for SPARK, stating that they wanted to give back to the group and help others who wish to adopt a child. The most useful type of support for eighteen of the members (69%) has been the social and emotional support. This has included such social events as the annual holiday party and the annual summer picnic. In addition chapter groups have been formed in many Ontario cities. (29) Eight (31%) said that the most useful type of support has been the newsletter and the adoption education information. Several of the respondents also said that the group is important for the children in helping to create a sense of belonging for them now and into their future.

A few respondents offered suggestions for services which they thought should also be offered through SPARK. These included a greater emphasis on heritage and cultural awareness, a support group for the children, more information on parenting issues related to adoption, and information sharing around the issue of school and the adopted child, (most of these children are presently entering the school system). Fifteen (58%) respondents found support from SPARK around the disclosure of their children's birth and cultural histories. However, several mothers expressed a need for more information on this issue.

A summary of these findings indicate that a strong sense of belonging exists within this group as well as 'mutual aid' as Kirk coined the term.(30) The rapport of this group seemed to stem from shared experiences with the adoption process and adoptive parenting issues, and not necessarily from solving perceived "dilemmas of stigmatization and deviance" (Phufl:1980). This group as described by the respondents, offers its members social activities, services and information sharing around the issues of differences in adoptive parenting.

Perceptions Of Community Support

To determine whether traditional expectations of motherhood as biologically based might have influenced the respondents' perceptions of stigma around adoption in the community, consideration was given to questions which required the respondents to indicate; (a) if they had told their friends of their decision to adopt and what the responses were; (b) if the respondents felt they received the support they needed during the adoption process and after returning from Romania with their children; (c) whether there was anything about introducing their children to family and friends that pleased or displeased them; and (d) what they remembered most about adjusting together as a family in those first few months.

All of the women in this study had told friends about their decision to adopt. Many had confided in friends about the infertility which had led them to consider adoption. Some of the women discussed the adoption with friends as they proceeded through the process. A few described situations of telling friends just before they were ready to leave for

Romania. These said that they did not offer much detail as they were unsure about the process and how successful they would be themselves. The majority of respondents, twenty-one (70%) reported that friends' responses to their decision to adopt were supportive or very supportive. A few mothers received pessimistic responses or no response, and questions as to why they would want to adopt at all.

Twenty-five respondents (83.3%) felt they received the support they needed during the adoption process. Two felt they did not receive support, and three respondents said they did not need support as their partner supported them or they were confident enough about their decision to adopt. Thirteen (52%) respondents named friends as their best support during the adoption process, four said both family and friends, three said family, three claimed adoption support groups. Two said their husbands were their best support. The ways in which the respondents were supported included, emotional support during those times that they were unsure or frustrated over the process, financially, when one respondent's parents took a loan so they could pursue the adoption, spiritually, and in gathering information on adoption and the process itself.

These findings suggest that (1) the respondents perceived a low level of stigma around their decision to adopt. (2) The respondents received more support from friends than from their families during the adoption process. And (3) the support the mothers received was most likely to be "supportive" or "very supportive."

When consideration was given to the question of whether there was anything about introducing their child to family and friends after the adoption that pleased or displeased them, it

was revealed that an overwhelming majority, twenty-eight of the mothers (93.3%) were pleased with the responses. When asked why, several respondents described having been given welcome home parties at the airport, baby showers for their children; and visits from family and friends for weeks after their arrival home. Also, many gifts were presented to their children. As Marilyn remembered:

With our families it was all joy, the usual in-law stuff, you know, unwanted advice with a baby. But I wanted to enjoy all those normal baby things.

Both family and friends in nine (30%) instances were reported to have been more attentive to the child because the child was adopted from Romania, than would have occurred for a biological baby. The respondents perceived friends, family and neighbours as sharing in their joy of becoming parents, and also expressing empathy for the child and his or her beginnings in Romania. As Denise observed:

They made more of a fuss than they may have normally done. We went to visit my husband's family first and there was a big party when we got there. The baby's room was all finished when we returned home and there was a "Welcome Home" banner in the kitchen. Everyone wanted to come to the christening which is usually a small affair. We had eighty people there and a band!

Sarah noted:

We felt like we were celebrities. People who don't even send us Christmas cards, sent us gifts.

These responses indicate an acceptance and support of the adopted children. These baby showers, parties and gifts were perceived by these mothers as acceptance of the adoption by members of the community. Most of the respondents who adopted older children reported experiencing many of the same pleasant experiences such as showers in honour of their children.

A few of the respondents reported feeling displeased with family members when first meeting their children. Grace recalled that:

It wasn't the same as when the in-laws came to see my other two (biological children) in hospital. They made comments like 'he is so small'. Prior to us going over to Romania they said they would accept him into the family. But there is still a difference there between the biological and adopted children.

When respondents were asked what they remembered most about adjusting together as a family in those first few months, most described typical experiences associated with having a new baby in the home, for instance, sleep deprivation, less time together as a couple, and the change in daily routine. Some of the respondents claimed it was not an adjustment for them, that, instead "it felt so natural" or "the baby just fit right into our lives". Also, a few mothers who had spent their first weeks of motherhood in Romania, caring for a child in impoverished conditions, felt it was much easier once they returned to Canada. Those parents who adopted older children expressed the same feelings of joy over becoming parents as those who adopted infants. However, they acknowledged that there were adjustment issues to deal with.

Rosemary, who adopted two three year olds remembered:

We were in culture shock. The children were playful and happy but every new experience was traumatic for them, like baths, the first snowfall, they went into hysteria about every thing. We had to teach them how to play. At Christmas dinner they screamed because they wanted to eat right away, They still haven't stopped eating. We had no money left but we felt absolutely rich.

Social Policy Issues

Finally, respondents were asked questions about their experiences with Canadian and Romanian adoption policies, and whether they were satisfied or not with the services which were offered to them.

Generally, respondents felt that the adoption process was either not very effective or not effective at all in preparing them for adoptive parenthood. When asked why, most respondents stated that there was no information offered through the government agencies on issues like the process of decision making around whether or not to adopt, which type of adoption was best suited for them, adjustment issues on adopting an older child, parenting issues and coping skills, and the lack of available histories for the children.

There was also a dichotomy in responses about whether or not social workers were effective in preparing respondents for adoptive parenthood. Some respondents claimed that social workers were knowledgeable and tried hard to prepare them for adoptive parenthood, while others said the social workers did

nothing other than prepare the homestudy. This finding indicates that there does not seem to be a clear social policy on the amount and type of preparation social workers are required to offer preadoptive parents. It appears to be an individual decision on the part of each social worker.

Most of the respondents reported being annoyed with the lack of social policies and standardized procedures around Romanian adoption. The recently appointed six month abandonment law, as mentioned earlier, was stated by many as not being in the best interest of the children.

Twelve respondents (40%), claimed that they received preadoptive services, from SPARK and other adoption support groups, from other parents who had adopted internationally or from an adoption facilitator. Notably, none of these are government supported agencies. There are no Canadian or Romanian policies on required preadoptive information services directed towards preadoptive parents. Only four respondents stated they received postadoptive services. These mothers had sought out professional services from institutions such as The Hospital For Sick Children, McMaster Hospital, and the Clark Institute for their older adopted children. Again there are no required postadoptive services available.

Many of the respondents expressed a need for information and available social services both preadoptive and postadoptive as there are specialized issues involved in international adoption. This finding does not suggest that these parents are experiencing difficulties themselves, which require professional services, but that the government should recognize the social issues involved with adoption in Canadian society.

Having presented the results of this research, attention will turn, in the next chapter, to the theoretical, substantive, and social policy implications of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the creation of a socially shared past by mothers who have adopted children from Romania. A number of important implications for sociological theory have emerged from this study. The relevance of these implications for the theory of the past, adoption theory and the theory of stigma will now be considered.

1) Implications for Mead's Theory of the Past

The examination of the relevance of Mead's theory of the past as it relates to the construction of a socially shared past within Romanian adoptive families led to the following empirical issues:

1. To what extent is this construction used to integrate the family, despite their different birth origins?
2. How does this construction of socially shared pasts relate to the acknowledgement or rejection of differences as observed by Kirk (1964) in his study of adoptive families?
3. How is this construction used as a strategy to manage social stigma (which may or may not be perceived by adoptive parents)? Does the adoptive family incorporate these differences from the past and how do they use them to enhance their present and future family life?

When consideration was given to the results outlined in Chapter 4, it was concluded that each of Mead's four dimensions of the past were well supported in this study. Indeed, each played an integral role in the construction of a socially shared past by these adoptive mothers. Maines and his colleagues (1987) found that the implied objective past and the social structural past were relatively obscure and vague in Mead's definition. This research took the theory further in

revealing a distinction between the two, and demonstrated the need for both as separate dimensions, yet linked as part of the total process of creating a socially shared past.

The objective events of the implied objective past were recognized in the fact that the children were born in Romania and that they all have birth families living there. However, families differed in terms of actual contact with these families or present "behavioural realities", and in terms of information available from the Romanian experience. This study demonstrated obviously that the more events and facts were recognized and included in the adoption stories, the more complete or continuous the socially shared pasts became. As the literature suggests, this would result in a fuller sense of identity for the children. That all of the respondents had already begun to share birth and cultural histories with their adopted children, and that most stated they would include all the information they have, is an acknowledgement by the adoptive mothers that their children have a factual history which began before the adoptive family came together. Through the use of the theory of the past, the importance of continuity in the adoption story to these mothers became apparent, as 77% of mothers thought about seeking contact with the birth family in the future in order for their children to discover more about their birth and cultural histories.

The importance of continuity to these mothers was also revealed in the distinction between the implied objective past and the social structural past. Facts may exist and be known to the adoptive mothers. Yet they can choose not to include them in the construction of the socially shared past, thus connecting the succession of events in a way which will yield different outcomes in the future, and perhaps, discontinuity

in the socially shared past. A fact, such as the existence of birth siblings who may not have been relinquished for adoption, and whose existence has not been revealed to the adopted child, may be discovered by the adult later on. This revelation may affect the adult's present sense of identity. For example, the adopted adult may feel guilt or anger at being the one "chosen" while the others were left behind. The adult must then resolve this identity issue which would not have arisen if the facts had been presented as part of the adoption story. Goebel and Lott (1986) have observed that "as a consequence of unrootedness...adoptees must also integrate the now with those parts of self that have been left in the past." Thus, it can be argued that these birth family issues could be resolved more positively if all of the available information were disclosed early on in the construction of the socially shared past.

In this study, the operation of the process of symbolically reconstructing the past was evident in that the most positive beginning point was chosen by these mothers in the construction of the past. The placing and sequencing of events in the lifebooks, and the verbal adoption stories were tailored to the children's ages and reinterpreted as circumstances required. The symbolic renaming of the children as a way of "reshaping" the children's origins as members of the adoptive families was also evident.

The mythical past, although it does not represent a "factual" reconstruction of the past, was an important dimension in the creation of socially shared pasts in this study, as it enabled the adoptive families to fill in missing gaps and unanswered questions in the adoption stories. Also, it reaffirmed their belief that the family was meant to be

together. The usefulness of this dimension was evident in that 90% of mothers in this study reported that they felt God or fate had had a hand in bringing them together with their adopted children. The mothers' experiences with seeing storks on the runway in Bucharest, or noting a physical resemblance to adoptive family members represents the construction of mythical pasts which have practical value in establishing and aiding integration. As Bartholet (1993) has noted, recent studies on the quality of "attachment relationships" between adoptive mothers and children have shown that they do develop warm and secure attachment relationships. This finding may be due in part to the mythical past which strengthens the sense of belonging in the adoptive family, a sense which is important for continuity and the children's sense of identity. To conclude, in this study, the theory of the past, as represented in Mead's four theoretical dimensions, was clearly observed in the substantive examination of the process used to construct socially shared pasts.

According to theorists such as Mead (1964), Denzin (1987), Maines (1987), Flaherty (1987), and Charmaz (1989) the dimension of temporality in social psychology has been neglected in studies of human social life. This study has shown that the use of the theory of the past provides a deeper understanding of the process of social integration in adoptive families wherein the children's birth and cultural pasts are incorporated into the family's present experience in anticipation of the future goal of establishing the children's positive sense of identity, and a sense of belonging. However, it is important to note that the theory of time is one of shifting and changing reconstructions. As Charmaz (1989) noted, people need to take from their past, present and future images, events which not only fit their views of their own

selves and society, but also explain and account for them. The same theory applies in reconstructing a past for adopted children. Focusing on time in this study, revealed under which conditions respondents moved from remembered pasts, and their child's "factual" past, to create an altered view in the present in terms of an anticipated future. Respondents described instances in the lifebooks, for example, where they had taken out pictures of the birth families for the present time, as it was not considered appropriate information to disclose to their children at this time. When the mothers felt that the time was right, the information would be added to the lifebooks and disclosed. There were also differences observed in the information disclosed in the lifebooks and in the verbally told adoption stories. The adoption stories told in the present, were much more simplistic as they were meant to lay the groundwork for the complete stories that the mothers anticipated disclosing to their children in the future, when it became age appropriate.

Hoffmann-Riem (1990) found that, as adoptive parents in her study reconstructed their children's biography, the unknown past became more and more extensive. She described how this caused a shift in the parent's reconstruction as, given the lack of factual information, they had to make their own interpretations with the information available. Many of the respondents in this study encountered limitations in the information available to construct an implied objective past. The adoptive mothers explained how they have written letters to birth mothers asking for information, and many of the mothers plan to seek contact with the birth families in the future, in hopes of gathering factual information for their children. Until the time when they are able to expand on the content of the implied objective past, the beliefs of the

mythical past will enable these mothers to account for and explain their present situations and to anticipate future goals.

It has been established in this study that Mead's theory of the past is a viable way of examining the process involved in creating socially shared pasts in adoptive families of Romanian children. The findings support those of sociological theorists, Hoffmann-Riem (1990), Charmaz (1989), and Denzin (1987) who have also utilized the theory of time to reveal the social meaning of the past, present and future.

This research has extended the theory of temporality to consider Kirk's adoptive kinship theory in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the socially shared pasts are constructed by these mothers. Attention will now turn to these findings.

2) Implications for the Acknowledgment of Difference in Adoptive Parenthood

Two major results emerged when consideration was given to Kirk's theory of adoptive kinship: (a) all of the adoptive mothers acknowledged-the-difference between adoptive and biological parenthood in that all included birth and cultural information on their children in the lifebooks kept for them, or in the verbal adoption stories, (b) adoptive mothers showed rejection-of-difference tendencies in terms of how they disclosed the birth and cultural histories to others.

Kirk's (1964,1981) adoptive kinship theory suggests that adoptive parents experience a role handicap that is associated with their adoptive status, concluding that, in contrast to

biological parents, adoptive parents do not have the benefit of social support. According to this theory, the best way for adoptive parents to resolve role handicap is to acknowledge the difference in adoption. Thus, the ideal adoptive family situation is one in which the children clearly understand the unique relationships they have with their adoptive families and the birth families. There is no risk in this form of open adoption that adoptive families will pretend the children were not adopted or will deny their children access to birth and cultural histories.

In this study, as noted, all of the respondents acknowledged the difference between adoptive and biological parenting. However, in Kirk's terms, some adoptive mothers also rejected-the-difference. Whereas, in the past, this rejection might be construed as potentially harmful for the family, examination of the meanings underlying this "rejection" revealed a different process. Respondents, for example, did not reveal their adoptive parent status to everyone, or introduce their child as an "adopted" child. Disclosure of this information diminished over time and, in Kirk's terms, reflected rejection-of-difference tendencies. Respondents argued however, that concerns about privacy and the right of others to privileged information about their children were factors influencing the decision not to disclose. Miall (1989) has already established that adoptive parents acknowledging the difference at home, may present a different picture in public. Similarly, Kaye (1990) has argued that Kirk's acknowledgment/rejection dichotomy is too sharply drawn. He has suggested that the many subtleties inherent in the respondents' views are better understood by placing them on a scale of "high" versus "low" distinction of acknowledgment-of-difference. The importance of exploring

meanings underlying responses was also established in this study.

It was clear, for example, that the adoptive mothers in this research were less concerned with differences in how their families were formed (biological versus adopted) than with issues unique to international adoption such as the availability of information on the children's birth and cultural histories.

That all of the respondents in this study acknowledged the difference in adoption, is evidence of the usefulness of Kirk's adoptive kinship theory thirty years later. However, it became clear, that there are different degrees of openness within these adoptive families, dependent upon the adoptive parents' perceptions of the following issues: (a) the birth and cultural information available, (b) the children's needs and desires for this information, and (c) to a lesser extent, the influence of society's views on adoption, both past and present. The fact that these adoptive mothers were creating an atmosphere where the adopted children's questions, feelings and concerns about adoption were spoken about openly, may allow the children to take the lead in indicating to the parents when, and how much information to disclose at appropriate times. This is an important implication, not only for adoptive families, but for all family relationships. Watkins and Fisher (1993:57) have argued that we cannot expect adult comprehension from children.(31) They have also argued that:

We do want to provide a comfortable, accepting atmosphere in which the child can express whatever she is wondering about, and we want to give answers to her questions that are meaningful to her at her

point in development.

What the authors conclude and what is also supported in this study, is that the task of adoptive parents is not only to inform children of their birth and cultural histories. They must also listen to their children in order to understand how they experience adoption and what this means to the children at different developmental stages. Future research which focuses on realistic descriptions of how children understand adoption and manage their feelings, will further enhance our understanding of how socially shared pasts develop over time within adoptive families. Theoretically, the interactive process underlying this construction should also be explored.

Recent research (Watkins and Fisher:1993, Bartholet: 1993), indicates that semi-open adoption appears to offer the greatest benefits and the least risks for adoptive families. The practice of semi-open adoption usually involves an exchange of non-identifying information , pictures, letters, gifts and possibly a face-to-face meeting involving no exchange of identities. This seems less threatening to adoptive family integration and the children's sense of belonging.

If adoptive families are to be involved in semi-open or fully disclosed openness in adoption, postadoption programs should be made available to adoptive families and birth families. Adoptive parents must also have access to workshops as each developmental stage of openness may bring new challenges. Also, changes in the degree of openness might occur during the family's life cycle. More comprehensive research into the concept of semi-open adoption in relation to the construction of socially shared pasts particularly among adoptive children and their adoptive parents is needed.

Future research should also explore the impact of the acknowledgement of difference on adoptive families as they encounter unexpected life experiences. In particular, attention should focus on how adoptive parents and children manage and resolve adoption related issues in an environment of openness and disclosure. For example, will it become easier for families to manage unexpected issues than for families who, in the past have not disclosed the adoption story?

(3) Implications for Social Stigma in Adoption

In this study, consideration was given to Goffman's theory of stigma to examine its relevance for the construction of socially shared pasts among adoptive mothers. Results indicated that adoptive mothers were aware of negative beliefs about adoption in general, and Romanian adoption in particular. Overall levels of perceived stigma, however were low. Negative beliefs about adoption were attributed to a lack of familiarity with the process or media distortion. Thus, although the majority of respondents did not seem to avoid potentially stigmatizing situations, they did tend to choose the situations in which they discussed their adoption stories, for instance, more openly with family members and friends than with acquaintances or strangers. Moreover, although aware of negative beliefs, respondents did not appear to feel personally stigmatized by them.

On the other hand, respondents did make judgments about information they felt should be included in lifebooks for their children, which reflected this perception of stigma. Specifically, respondents refrained from including media coverage of Romanian adoption which focused on the improper removal of children from birth parents or stories about baby-

buying. An explanation based on the theory of stigma would suggest that respondents were withholding information for fear of (a) being stigmatized themselves or (b) stigmatizing their children. When questioned, however, respondents indicated that they had chosen not to include the information at this time as it was not considered age appropriate for their children. Most indicated that they planned to disclose this particular information at some later date as part of a more general policy of "openness". Notably, the few adoptive mothers, (four) who perceived strong social stigma around Romanian adoption, were mothers who had adopted older children or adopted children with medical or developmental concerns. Biological children coping with these issues would also face social stigma. Adoption itself, therefore, may not be the primary source of the social stigma perceived by these women.

Research on stigma and adoption has suggested that awareness of negative beliefs does not imply internalization or acceptance of these beliefs (Miall, 1987). Indeed, Kaye (1990) has suggested that there is a need to explore with adoptive parents and adoptees how differences associated with adoption can lead to positive benefits. Attention will now turn to this suggestion.

Perceived Stigma and Social Support

Studies utilizing the theory of stigma have focused almost entirely on the negative consequences of stigma. Goffman (1963) himself, however, argued that stigma could be inspiring. Herman and Miall (1990) have documented positive consequences arising out of the stigmatization associated with mental illness and infertility. In this research, respondents acknowledging a difference in how their families were formed,

sought out others who "share their fate". Specifically, almost all these respondents were members of SPARK or other self-help support groups. The four respondents in this study who were not members of SPARK were involved informally with other families who have adopted internationally.

Goffman (1963) has argued that support groups can give voice to shared feelings while offering members a sense of realness about their situation, a realness which may not be affirmed for them by others in the community.

The findings of this study revealed that respondents felt a strong sense of belonging in this group. This rapport seemed to stem from information sharing around adoptive parenting and not around solving perceived "dilemmas of stigmatization and deviance" (Phufl:1980). The majority of respondents (77%) did claim that they behave differently with other adoptive parents than with biological parents. These mothers did not view this difference however, as based on negative community responses. As with any other social experience, respondents felt drawn to others who have shared similar experiences and are "like-situated". SPARK also served to support parents, who were interested in sharing adoption information with the community at large.

In terms of the theoretical implications of this study, SPARK was an important link for adoptive mothers in creating a socially shared past. It offered members shared experience, support, information on how to create a socially shared past for internationally adopted children, and suggestions on how to deal with issues unique to adoptive parenthood. The support group also offered the children an opportunity to participate in their Romanian culture and history through social

involvement with other children who have shared similar experiences in the past and will continue to share experiences in the present and future.

In the past, studies linking stigma to the adoption experience have based their arguments on the relevance a blood or biological tie has for family formation and functioning. Adoptive parents have been considered stigmatized because of a lack of a blood tie and studied in terms of how they attempt to "normalize" their situation by acknowledging or rejecting the difference. This study of adoptive mothers has clearly shown that this may not be the case for all adoptive families however. Specifically, the adoptive mothers in this study readily acknowledged differences in their families based on this formation. Their concerns were focused less on their own blood relationships to their children than on the importance of having biological and cultural information to help secure their child's complete identity formation. This marks a significant shift in conceptions of adoptive parents and their approach to parenting. With adoptive parenthood comes a reconfiguration of the mothering role that brings with it new cultural responsibilities and a contingent set of exigencies.

Bartholet (1993) poses an extremely important argument from a feminist point of view in discussing why stigma in adoption still prevails in North American society. Most of the recent adoption literature shows that adoption works very well for all those involved. Bartholet argues that this success story is being suppressed because it may be too threatening for society, and suggests implications that will rock the notion that is grounded in patriarchy of the importance of the blood line. Bartholet (1993:165) draws the following conclusion:

It means, among other things, that women can give away their children or lose their capacity for pregnancy and still function as full human beings. It means that children who are mistreated by their birth parents can be removed for parenting by others. It means that biology is NOT destiny. ... It forces us to think about the appropriate definition of family and community.

As with all ideas concerning child-rearing and the best ways to parent, ideas change drastically over time.(32) Miall (1995) has argued that the recent increase of divorce has led to changes in the traditionally conceptualized, biologically related, nuclear family. Society has witnessed the increasing emergence of family forms characterized by the blending of parents and children who are not biologically related, yet who function effectively and often in a "traditional" family pattern. She concludes that there is an increasing awareness that commitment, and not a blood tie, is the more important factor in family life. The findings in the present study support these observations.

LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS

As in the case of any research endeavour, limitations in the research carried out must be acknowledged and the impact on the results obtained must be considered. As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study were affected by the availability of a sample of mothers who have adopted children from Romania, and should not be generalized to all adoptive mothers of Romanian children. The use of qualitative methods is usually accompanied by a small sample size. Thus, this

study was limited in the generalizability of the results obtained. Patton (1980:280) notes that some "social phenomena are too variable and too context-bound to lend themselves to generalization." As the viewpoint of the actor was stressed in this research and the nature of the study was exploratory, discovery of the variability of social phenomena was the goal of this research, not generalization to the adoptive community.

The sample selection process also imposed methodological limitations on the study. The majority of adoptive mothers were chosen from the SPARK membership list. Volunteers who could easily be reached by telephone were selected for participation. Also, we can assume that mothers who had a more positive experience with their adoption were more likely to volunteer to participate in a study. This selection process may have tended to bias the results in favour of finding greater satisfaction with Romanian adoption.

The focus on adoptive motherhood in this study also limited its generalizability to adoptive parenthood. A focus on fatherhood or both adoptive parents would have yielded very different responses. In creating socially shared pasts, mothers and fathers would have different views of the past, possibly contrasting opinions of how to deal with the present and a different anticipation of future goals. Adoptive mothers were chosen for this study as generally it is mothers who are the primary caregivers of young children and therefore are the ones responsible for connecting their children's past events and the family's shared experiences into a continuous social process.

The methodological assumptions underlying this research also made generalizations difficult. Problems with the validity and reliability of qualitative research results were outlined in Chapter 3. However, in this research, member validation was used as a way to deal with problems of validity. Indeed, there was consensus on the validity of the kinds of perceptions and experiences documented. In addition, the participation of this researcher in the adoptive parent support group prior to undertaking this research contributed to confidence in the validity of the results presented here (c.f. Douglas:1972:21, Becker:1970:31). Also, another way of ensuring validity was to view some of the Romanian documents and lifebooks the respondents had created. Finally, this study was an exploratory project by design, and all of the findings must be interpreted as being suggestive rather than definitive, and relevant only to the sample population.

It should be noted that stigma is a variable and what appeared salient at the point in time that an interview took place might not intrude to the same degree in everyday experience. What is important to note is the overall perception of stigma reported by the respondents in this research. Adoptive parent status was not perceived as deeply stigmatizing by the majority of respondents, although the impact on the mothers' lives of acknowledged differences with adoption varied.

Qualitative research methodologies have also been criticized because of problems with reliability, that is, the replicability of observations (c.f. Shaffir et al.:1980:11-12). As the focus of the holistic inductive approach is to generate hypotheses from data for more rigorous testing, the replicability of observations made here should be addressed in

future research, using a more hypothetico-deductive research approach. The results discussed in this study have reflected earlier studies of adoption, non-scientific observations found in self-help books, and in observations made through member participation by the author.

It has also been argued that retrospective interpretations of emotionally charged life experiences are nothing more than rationalizations. Lofland (1976:169) has pointed out that rationalizations must also be considered as forms of self-management or strategies for coping. In this study for example, several respondents rationalized their decision to not publically discuss their children's adoption stories by saying that while there was nothing wrong with adoption, it was no one else's business or that it was the children's information to disclose or not. Rationalizations as well, tell a lot about people's perceptions of a situation.

In terms of the specific findings of this study, other variables linked to the type of sample obtained may limit the generalizability of results. For example, the reported success of these mothers in creating socially shared pasts for their children may be attributed to (1) their relatively high educational level, (2) their affiliation with SPARK and other self-help support groups, (3) the fact that 30% of respondents were also biological parents, and (4) the young age of the majority of the children at the time of adoption placement.

Further, the mothers' apparent lack of internalization of the perception of negative stigma in adoption may have been linked to their participation in self-help groups. Generally, respondents in self-help groups and those agreeing to participate in studies on adoption are already acknowledging

the difference.

In addition, a social desirability response may have affected respondents' reported perceptions of stigma. Respondents may have felt that acknowledging problems with adoption constituted a "betrayal" of their children. My status as a member of the self-help group under review may have also exerted an influence. Further research with other populations of adoptive parents of Romanian children is required to address these issues.

From a theoretical point of view, it can be argued that the utilization of the dimensions of Mead's theory of the past will aid in the reliability of observations. Through the use of the four dimensions of the past, it became evident that in creating socially shared pasts, respondents tended to follow a general pattern. In any case, future research should continue to emphasize the role of the actor and the utilization of the theory of the past, concurrently with other applicable sociological theories when studying family relationships.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

(1) Theoretical Contributions

A number of important theoretical contributions emerged from this research. As many of these contributions have been discussed in detail elsewhere in the thesis, they are presented here in point form.

(a) The theory of the past was found to be a viable theoretical model as all four of the dimensions in the theory of the past were visible in the substantive data, (b) Each dimension was found to be linked to the overall process of

socially constructing the past, (c) The social construction of the past was informed by Kirk's adoptive kinship theory and Goffman's theory of stigma, (d) within the adoptive kinship model, the acknowledgment and rejection of difference in adoption was shown to have taken on new meaning from Kirk's meaning thirty years ago. Also, support was offered to studies which assert that stigma or negative social responses may be responded to in positive ways, and actors do not necessarily internalize stigma or negative social responses.

In addition, this research focused attention on the interactive nature of the process of socially reconstructing the past. Specifically, the acknowledgement of difference, with its emphasis on actor perceptions, community attitudes, and behaviour corrects a limiting theoretical bias in studies of adoptive kinship theory by reemphasizing the interactional nature of acknowledgement as a process in the creation and continuance of positive identities and behaviour.

Similarly, this research demonstrated that a definition of stigma which does not include the consideration of positive consequences cannot accurately explain actors' behaviour. Behaviour which may have a profound impact for the actors concerned and for others with whom they interact. Finally, by making use of these three theories concurrently to study the construction of socially shared pasts, this research has contributed much needed data to a sparsely researched theoretical area of study.

(2) SUBSTANTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

As noted earlier, most research on adoption has reflected medical, or psychological perspectives. Objective observations

of this group were largely lacking. In particular, very little was known about how these mothers managed their adopted children's birth and cultural information in creating socially shared pasts. Indeed, the notion of adoptive parenthood as generally non-stigmatizing has only recently begun to be demonstrated empirically (Miall:1995). Through this research, the following contributions to information on mothers of children adopted internationally were made: (a) all respondents acknowledged a difference between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood, (b) rejection of differences in adoption can no longer be assumed to have negative consequences for the adoptive family, (c) the majority of the sample did not internalize a stigma around adoptive parenthood, as reflected in their willingness to tell others of their adoptive status, (d) many respondents however, perceived negative beliefs and attitudes about adoption in the larger community, (e) semi-open adoption may be the best or most positive form of open adoption for the adoptive family, (f) a majority of respondents felt that society in general differentiates between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood. It was determined that the difference lies in the formation of the families, rather than in the functioning of the families, (g) those few respondents who perceived a social stigma, perceived it more so in relation to Romanian adoption than in relation to adoption in general. This view was reflected in their responses to the negative media coverage as having done a disservice to all those involved in Romanian adoption. Also, (h) respondents made use of three types of strategies in constructing a socially shared past, (1) verbal, personal adoption stories created for their children, (2) lifebooks to document the children's histories, and (3) affiliation with self-help support groups or with other adoptive parents who "share their fate".

This research, in focusing on a non-clinical sample of adoptive parents, has contributed to our understanding of the daily functioning of adoptive families. The majority of studies have focused on adopted children in clinical settings coping with medical and developmental issues.

Implications for Social Policy

In practical terms, the "cultural script" should be amended to some extent. Specifically, through the educational system, children should be made aware of the existence of alternate family forms, including families formed through adoption, lone-parent families, and blended families. On an international level, the Canadian government should become more involved in international efforts to aid the children of Romania. At present, there are more children living in Romanian orphanages than there were in 1989. However, only twelve Romanian adoptions were finalized in Canada between February 1992 and December 1994. Since January 1995 eight Romanian adoptions have been finalized and twenty are in process. In these cases, it has been due to a private group, Partners for Intercountry Adoption, not the government who have been instrumental in initiating the adoption process.

In therapeutic terms, social workers must reexamine attitudes which inadvertently reinforce negative views about adoption. It is time to acknowledge that adoptive families are not second best, and to accept differences in family formation by providing children with detailed information on their birth and cultural histories. An emphasis on the biological basis of parenthood has contributed to the continued abuse or neglect of children "forced" to remain with biological relatives who

cannot or will not care for them, or in unacceptable conditions such as Romanian orphanages. There is a need, therefore, to reexamine the meanings our institutions attach to what constitutes the nature of the family unit and human kinship. There is evidence in the literature that children raised in transracial and interethnic adoptive families are unusually open to, and tolerant of a variety of differences. Bartholet (1993) has argued:

It (adoption) creates a family that is connected to another family, the birth family, and often to different cultures. ...Adoptive families might teach us something about the value for families of connection with the larger community.

Canada should continue to be involved in international adoption, in keeping with the United Nations Convention on International Cooperation and Protection of Children in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1992). The findings in this study reaffirm recommendations put forward by Westhues and Cohen (1994) for social policy. These include the need for policies and programs that are structured around maintaining an identification with the childrens' racial and ethnic origins, while encouraging identification with Canadian culture.

In addition, provincial governments should offer preadoptive services with an educational focus to prospective adoptive parents. Parents need to become aware of the issues involved in becoming a transcultural family. They need to know about the possibility of health and developmental issues, and the need to become educated with respect to current social values. Also, non-profit organizations should be established to assist Canadian adoptive parents by providing the

coordination and monitoring of the adoption process, working with a small group of adoption coordinators and social workers in order to establish a code of ethics around international adoption. The government should provide preadoptive support to prospective parents. These organizations could work directly with the Romanian Committee for adoptions on behalf of Canadian adoptive parents.

Postadoptive services should also be offered for the adoptive parents and their children. Although the adoption literature shows that the children adopted internationally have fared well, the majority of parents in this study spoke of the need for ongoing support in parenting children from a different culture. These mothers also expressed the need for ongoing education and support which they felt was best provided through adoptive parents support groups such as SPARK. Groups for international adoptive families do provide them with information about their children's countries of origin, as well as support from others who have also adopted internationally. In 1994, SPARK proposed a workable process for adoption of Romanian children by Ontario residents, Partners For Intercountry Adoption, an organization which provides these invaluable services to prospective adoptive parents. More groups such as this one are needed throughout Canada.

It is clear that as much background information as possible be obtained about the children who are adopted internationally, particularly those children adopted at an older age. This information should include: (a) the children's life experiences, specifically any traumatic events, (b) the children's medical history, (c) information about the children's biological families, and (d) the children's birth

names and addresses of the birth families. This information would be helpful for the adoptive families if they should ever choose to have contact with the birthparents, whether in the form of a letter and a photograph sent once a year, or to seek a reunion in the future.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1) Further research which focuses on how children understand adoption and manage their feelings around this understanding will further enhance our understanding of how a socially shared past develops over time within adoptive families. It will also increase our understanding of the part the adoptive parents play in this development.

2) The qualitative approach taken in this research has yielded a rich data base essential to an understanding of how adoptive mothers create socially shared pasts. This exploratory approach should now give way to a more quantitative analysis with a broader sampling base. It would be useful to incorporate a longitudinal design into future research on international adoption. For instance, do the perceptions of adoptive parents change as their children mature? Does the impact of disclosure and openness in adoption change over time. And are there recurring plateaus when openness in adoption is intensified, for example, during the preadolescent and adolescent years? This concept is of particular interest to parents of internationally adopted children as this present generation of children are the first to grow up with such a wide degree of openness and disclosure from an early age.

3) Semi-open adoption may well be the best form of open adoption for adoptive families. Further research should be conducted to explore this approach, particularly for families with internationally adopted children. In terms of the relation between semi-open adoption and the construction of socially shared pasts, future research should further clarify the experiences of the families and should focus on their need for professional support. Also, it has been determined that semi-open adoption is in the best interest of these adoptive families. However, there are also the birth families to consider, as they too will be involved to some degree in semi-open adoptions. Research must be conducted on the needs and desires of all parties involved in semi-open adoptions.

4) The present research has revealed that all respondents acknowledged a difference in adoption. Earlier studies did not show this pattern. Therefore, future research should explore the impact of the acknowledgement of difference on adoptive families as they encounter unexpected life experiences. In particular, attention should be paid to how families manage and resolve adoption related issues.

5) This study has shown that stigma was not a suitable term to describe the perceptions of these adoptive mothers with regard to views on adoption. Further research should focus on changing community attitudes and on attitudes of adoptive parents towards their adoptive parent status.

6) It is important to link adoptive parents to the broader society by considering the social forces impinging on them. Alternate family forms, based on adoptive parenting, step-parenting, lone parenting, gay and lesbian parenting, and foster parenting, are much more prominent and have become

permanent family forms in North American society. Therefore, a focus on all family forms and the tolerance of difference are central to studies of kinship. As well, recent advances in reproductive technology have challenged the values of biological kinship. The potential consequences of changes in public opinions and changes in public policies for these many family forms and for the adjustment of the children raised in them necessitates the identification of social forces affecting these families.

7) Although we have seen some change toward more egalitarian roles between men and women, it is clear that aspects of "traditional" family roles have not been greatly changed. The decision-making process involved with family issues appears to still be female-centred. It would be useful to focus further research on the parental attitudes towards the division of labour in the home.

FOOTNOTES

1. This information about Romanian facts and policies was compiled by The Canadian Romanian Children's Link, a non-profit volunteer organization that was formed in January of 1990. It has since been aiding children in orphanages through Canadian donations and fundraising efforts. The press information and public information, including videos of the children in the orphanage were based on members' visits to the orphanages, and on media coverage and research done on Romanian history. I have been an active member of the board of directors for four years.
2. Mead's theory of the past has been thoroughly explored by sociologists Maines, Sugrue and Katovich in 1983. The perspective which this study of the theory has been based on is from their analysis of Mead's theory. The authors explain that there are parts of the theory which remain obscure, for instance, the dimension of the implied objective past. One of the contributions of this research is to deal with the obscurity in order to further our understanding of the theory and test its empirical usefulness.
3. The theoretical question "how is society possible?" is a philosophical and sociological question that dates back before Kant's time. Kant and Heidegger (1962) answered this question in terms of the theory of temporality and the meaning of time which Mead's theory of the past derives from.
4. Christa Hoffmann-Riem(1990), a sociologist who studied adoptive family life in Germany, where she resides, focused on child-rearing and identity, as well as the similarities and differences in family life and adoption in Germany and the United States. A central concern in her research is secrecy and disclosure with regard to the adopted child's origins. This is one of the few works that deals with the reconstruction of the past, specifically for adoptive families.
5. For a comprehensive discussion of 'role handicap' see Kirk's book, Shared Fate (1984), Pp.31-35.

6. Kaye's (1990) study of Kirk's coping strategies, that is either acknowledging or rejecting the differences in adoptive parenthood was based on a clinical population from a psychological perspective. The result of his study was an update on Kirk's coping strategies which take into account the changing societal views on familyhood in the 1990's. The few studies which focus on Kirk's coping strategies from a sociological perspective include Miall (1984,1987,1989,1994) and Hoffmann-Riem (1990).
7. The lifebook is a recent introduction. It was created by The Children's Aid Society in order to help promote continuity for children who are in foster care or adopted. It is promoted by social workers to the adoptive parents and in many cases where a child has been adopted from a foster home, the lifebook, has already been established and the child takes it to the adoptive home. For this reason, the lifebook becomes a useful tool in determining how mothers create socially shared pasts for their children.
8. For an in-depth discussion of impression managment see Goffman's Stigma (1963).
9. For a complete list of the attitudes recalled by adoptive parents in Kirk's study, see Appendix A of Shared Fate. Bartholet, in her book Family Bonds, also describes many community attitudes recalled by adoptive parents.
10. For an in-depth discussion of their findings on the positive consequences of stigma, see Herman & Miall (1990).
11. Mothers were chosen as the focus of this study for two reasons. First, they were chosen in order to simplify the design as this is an exploratory study, focusing on only mothers allowed for more in-depth analysis of the issues without complicating them at this time with a gender variable. Secondly, due to the young age of most of the respondents' children, it is mothers who spend most of their time with the children. They are the ones who are introducing them to their adoption stories.
12. Westhues and Cohen(1994) present a detailed discussion of the debate on international adoption in their international adoption study.
13. The focus of recent studies on Romanian adoption are on medical and developmental issues concerning the

children, with an interest in the parents' views and concerns for their children as well as the stress levels of these parents.

14. B.J.Lifton, an activist for the search and reunion of adoptees with their birth parents, along with other activists, paint a rather negative picture of all parties involved in adoption as suffering a lifetime of loss. According to Lifton in a news column; "the syndrome includes conflict with authority, preoccupation with excessive fantasy, setting fires, pathological lying, stealing, running away from home, learning difficulties, lack of impulse control."
15. Michelle McColm, in her 1993 study of all parties involved in adoption reunion, focuses on the importance of disclosure early on in the adoptive family relationship.
16. Denzin offers an excellent comparison of the advantages and disadvantages for both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in his book, The Research Act (1978). In addition, Reichardt & Cook (1979) discuss the debate surrounding qualitative and quantitative research methods.
17. For a list of the interview schedules from which the present interview questions were adapted, see Kirk (1964) and Miall (1984).
18. For a detailed discussion of these changes, see Miall (1994). These include, the recent increase in blended families as well as the increase in single women choosing to raise their babies as opposed to surrendering their parental rights to adoptive parents.
19. Facts on Romanian adoption compiled by SPARK in 1994, showed the fees for Romanian adoption were approximately \$15,000.
20. Occasionally the children were present during the interview. At these times, I avoided sensitive questions and if necessary, changed the ordering of the questions so as to avoid questions that may have raised sensitive issues for the family.
21. Whenever it was possible and appropriate, I asked to see the lifebook. Those who were asked seemed pleased and proud to show the book. There were others offered to show me the lifebook before I even asked.

22. The operationalization of this category was adapted from a similar one, used by Kirk in 1964.
23. Kirk's (1964) book Shared Fate is considered a classic in studies of adoption in Canada. However, he does not discuss the socio-demographic characteristics of his sample.
24. A few social workers from The Toronto Children's Aid Society, created and implemented the idea of the lifebook in the 80's. It began for those children in foster care who often moved from home to home. While a child was in foster care, it was the social workers' responsibility to manage the lifebook until a time when the child was placed in an adoptive home.
25. The media coverage that was most often documented in the lifebooks were articles on the orphanages and the impoverished conditions. Later on, as more families returned home with their children, stories were being written by magazines and newspapers pertaining to the family's journey to adoption. There were also many television documentaries made of similar issues. Some of these respondents have copies of these tapes which they have kept in their lifeboxes.
26. A Romanian homestudy is quite different from the Canadian homestudy. The Canadian document included a detailed description and analysis of the prospective adoptive parents, their family, childhood, interests, social values etc. This homestudy is completed over six hours, one hour is an in-home interview. In contrast, the Romanian homestudy consisted of a one or two page document prepared by a Romanian official at the courthouse. Once the adoption was approved, the birth mother and/or birth father would answer a few questions about place of residence, occupation and immediate family.
27. Generally, the child's medical history, if known, was made available through the orphanage staff, the people who cared for the child before adoption. There was not a great deal of information available, as the medical records in Romania are minimal and sketchy.
28. Most of these mothers who adopted two children whose

ages were less than nine months apart, claimed that they were asked by people if the children were twins. They would explain the situation, rather than letting them believe the children were twins.

29. Chapter groups, as defined by SPARK, were smaller groups of families, perhaps five or six, who resided in the same geographical area. These groups were meant to allow for more social involvement for both children and parents as well as provide an atmosphere conducive to gaining and giving social support.
30. Kirk(1984) in Shared Fate described "mutual aid" as one benefit of being a member of an adoption support group. However, in his definition adoptive parents could help each other "solve some of the problems related to adoption." This present research suggests that mutual aid might take on a different meaning. It can be a group of people who come together to focus more on educating themselves on parenting issues and concerns than focusing on problems.
31. See Watkins & Fisher(1993) for an enlightening and detailed discussion of open adoption from the perspectives of the children, the adoptive parents and the birth parents.
32. For a discussion of the nature of these changes, see the introduction to Watkins & Fisher(1993).
33. This figure does not include the province of Quebec. There a different legal system (the Napoleonic Code) and different legislation allows the province to certify, guide and monitor agencies which facilitate international adoptions. (L.Peterson, Proposal Towards a Workable Process for Adoption of Romanian Children by Ontario Residents 1994).

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APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

DATE

INTERVIEW #

CITY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about you personally.

Persons interviewed:

Mother

Father

Both

1. In what year were you born? Mother _____

What year was your partner born? Father _____

2. What year were you married? _____

3. Education M _____ F _____

(highest level completed)

Occupation M _____ F _____

(include previous occupation)

Religion M _____ F _____

Ethnic Origin(s) M _____ F _____

Number of Children

Name

Sex

Present Age

Age At Adoption

or check biological

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

I would like to ask you about your experience with the Romanian adoption process in Canada.

4. What led you to consider adoption as an option for your family? (Probe for know others who are adopted etc.)

5. Can you tell me about your experiences with the adoption preparation? How did you begin the process?

6. How long did it take you to complete the necessary adoption paperwork from start to finish? (Before you began the process in Romania) (Probe for Canadian Immigration, National Adoption Desk, Police Clearance)

7. Did your family (parents, relatives etc.) know of your decision to adopt at this stage of the process?

01 Yes

02 No

If Yes, How did you go about telling them that you were going to adopt?

If No, when and how did you eventually tell them?

What were their responses?

8. Did your friends know of your decision to adopt at this time?

01 Yes

02 No

If Yes, How did you tell them?

If No, when and how did you eventually tell them?

What were their responses?

9. Did you feel you received the support you needed during this time, if you felt you needed support?

Who has been your best support during the process?

In what ways?

10. What motivated you to pursue an adoption in Romania?

Now, I would like to ask you about your Romanian experience.

11. I am interested in how you went about adopting (child's name) and what happened throughout the experience. Can you tell me about it, beginning with;

a) How you adopted your child(ren). (Orphanage, help of a Facilitator, from a biological home etc.)

b) Did you travel to Romania? (alone or with others)

If not, who brought your child to Canada?

01 Yes

02 No

If yes to (b):

c) Did you prepare yourself emotionally to visit Romania?

(military presence, poverty, culture)

01 Yes

02 No

If Yes, How did you go about doing this?

d) Did you prepare yourself physically to visit Romania?
(food, clothing, sundries, personal items, baby needs)

01 Yes 02 No

If Yes, How did you go about doing this?

12. How was your journey to Romania? What feelings and
perceptions do you remember having at this time?

01 Very Good

02 Good

03 Tolerable

04 Intolerable

13. Once in Romania, how many match-searches did you
undertake? (could not locate birth parents, or located
birth parents who did not wish to give adoption consent)

14. What do you remember about the first time you saw
(child's name) How was his/her health at that time?

15. Can you tell me more about the details of the process you experienced in Romania?

16. Were you able to identify any social and medical history of the birth family? What kind of information?

17. Did you meet the birth family? What were your perceptions and feelings around this meeting?

18. Did you return with any momentos of the birth family, or cultural momentos?

01 Yes 02 No

If Yes, What were they?

If No, Why not?

19. Did you decide to rename your child? Why, Why not?

01 Yes 02 No

If so, what have you decided to do about his/her
Romanian name?

20. How long was your stay in Romania?

Now I'd like to talk to you about your first few months back
in Canada, after the adoption was completed.

21. Was there anything about introducing your child(ren) to
your family that pleased you, that displeased you, that

annoyed you? (Probe for giving showers, treated same as other grandchildren or not etc)

How about introducing your child(ren) to your friends?

22. What do you remember most about adjusting together as a family in those first few months? (Probe for family life, societal adjustment etc.)

23. Do you feel that God or fate had a hand in bringing you and your child(ren) together through adoption? If so, for what purpose?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Don't Know

24. Do you plan to share your child's birth and cultural

history with him/her? Why, Why not?

01 Yes

02 No

03 Don't Know

25. If so, what will you include? What will you leave out?

Why?

26. Do you presently have any contact with the birth family?

01 Yes

02 No

How do you feel about this?

01 Very Good

02 Good

03 Fine

04 Not Very Good

Why do you feel this way?

Have you thought about seeking contact with the birth family in the future? In what respect?

01 Yes

03 Possibly

02 No

04 Don't Know

If not, why not?

The following questions are aimed at discovering how you think other people view adoption.

27. For example, many people view adoptive parenthood as basically the same as biological parenthood. Others view it as basically different from biological parenthood. In your view which opinion is more prevalent?

In society today?

Among neighbours?

Close friends?

Close family?

Why do you think they feel the way they do? (Probe for types of differences, similarities, negative-positive connotations)

28. Do you think people perceive Romanian born children differently than Canadian born adopted children?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Don't Know _____

Why or Why not? (Probe for ethnicity, culture, health issues etc)

These questions are aimed at discovering your own views about adoption.

29. How satisfied are you about your decision to adopt?

(Meets needs? what kind?)

01 Very Satisfied _____

02 Satisfied

03 Neutral

04 Unsatisfied

05 Not Satisfied at all

30. Do you think it feels different being an adoptive parent in comparison to being a biological parent?

01 Yes

04 Refusal _____

02 No

05 Don't Know

03 Sometimes

In what way(s)?

31. Do you think there are some satisfactions that biological parents have that adoptive parents don't have?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Don't Know

Can you explain what they are?

32. Do you think there are some satisfactions that adoptive parents have that biological parents don't have?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Don't Know

Can you explain what they are?

33. Are there disadvantages to being an adoptive parent?

If so, What are they?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Don't Know

34. When you introduce your child(ren) to new friends, do you ever use the word 'adopted'? If so, in which situations? If not, why not?

01 Yes 02 No

35. Are there any particular times or circumstances when you are aware of the fact that you are a Romanian adoptive parent? (Probe for Doctor, school etc.)

36. Some adoptive parents do not tell their children that they are adopted? Why do you think they would not want to tell (probe for fear of hurting them, perception of being treated differently, fear of child reacting against them).

37. Do you ever refer to your child's biological family
when speaking to your child?

01 Yes 02 No

Do you ever refer to your child's biological family when
speaking to others?

01 Yes 02 No

To Whom would that be?

38. Have you ever found yourself trying to imagine how
your child feels about being adopted? If so, What do you
imagine?

39. Do you wish that you had more information about your
child(ren)'s biological family?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Not Sure

If so, What kind of information would you like to have?

If not, Why not?

40. Some adoptive parents choose not to tell others that their children are adopted. Why do you think they do that? (Probe for fear of stigma, want to be thought of as 'the same', fear of being treated differently or their children being treated differently)

On the other hand, some adoptive parents tell new people they meet right away that their children are adopted. Why do you think they do that? What do you do?

41. Some adoptive parents think it is best for adopted children to be told early and repeatedly that they are adopted, other adoptive parents do not necessarily agree. In your own case, do you think your child(ren) should be told about their adoption? If yes, why? If no, why not?

(Probe for perception of stigma, experience of stigma as it might be or has been perceived by the parent or child)

42. Are there any particular beliefs or situations around Romanian adoption that annoy or upset you? (Probe for meeting new acquaintances, birth parents searching for child).

43. Are there any situations which you avoid now or have avoided in the past because they would make you as a Romanian adoptive parent uncomfortable?

44. Are there any particular beliefs about adoption in our society that please you?

45. Do you think adoptive parents of Canadian born children may have had different experiences from what you have had or not? Why?

Now I would like to ask you about how you plan to deal with your child(ren)'s birth and cultural history.

46. How important is your ethnicity to you?

01 Very important

04 Unimportant

02 Important

05 Don't Know

03 Not too important

47. How do you celebrate your ethnicity?

48. What will your child(ren)'s ethnicity be?

49. Will you integrate your child's Romanian culture with their Canadian culture?

01 Yes 02 No

50. Have you created a lifebook or some other collection of history for your child?

01 Yes 02 No _____

If so, Can you explain how you have gone about preparing this history for your child? (Probe for obtaining photos, history, cultural momentos etc.)

If not, Why not?

51. If so, whose idea was it to create a lifebook?

52. Who contributes to the lifebook?

What kinds of information is put into the book?

53a. Do you and your partner discuss what goes into the book?

01 Yes 02 No 03 Sometimes _____

b. Do you agree or disagree? _____

54. Does your child(ren), or will they have a role in the creation of the lifebook?

55. Is there any information that you feel strongly should be included in the lifebook? What information? Why?

56. In your lifebook, have you included information prior to the adoption?

01 Yes 02 No

Where does the lifebook begin?

01 With the child's birth

02 With the adoption

03 In the orphanage

04 Other _____

57. Is there any information that you will leave out of the lifebook? What? Why?

58. At what age did you begin or will you begin to share this information with your child?

59. How have you decided to share this information?

60. Is there any piece of information that you won't want your child(ren) to ever know?

61. Do you celebrate the anniversary of your child(ren)'s adoption?

01 Yes 02 No

Are there any other special ceremonies that you celebrate? What are they?

For those who have biological children:

62. How will you go about integrating your adopted child's lifestory with that of your biological child(ren)?

63. How does your family react to your child(ren)'s

adoption story? How do you feel about this?

64. How do your friends react to your child(ren)'s adoption story? How do you feel about this?

65. Do you have any concerns around sharing the adoption story with your child(ren)? What are they?

66. Have any of these experiences influenced what you have decided to put into or leave out of the life book? How?

67. Are there some people that you definitely don't want to know that your child(ren) is adopted? Why? (Probe for at school).

68. What are some of the ways you've learned or developed for handling people who are unfamiliar with adoption? (Probe for: steering the conversation, ignoring, introducing experiences to demonstrate that you lead a normal life; getting angry, withdrawing, teaching or informing, etc.).

69. To sum up, would you say that the way you handle your adoptive parent status varies with the situation and with the people you are dealing with or does it not?

ADOPTION SUPPORT

Now, I would like to discuss your feelings about the role of an adoption support group.

70. Do you find that you behave or talk differently with other adoptive parents than you do with parents who have biological children? (Probe for feelings of comfort and rapport).

71. Do you associate with other adoptive families? (excluding those in the adoption support group.)

01 Yes

02 No

If a member of SPARK:

72. When did you join SPARK? Why did you decide to join?

73. What types of support that have been offered through SPARK have you found most useful?

b. Are there any subjects which you feel should be offered? (parenting issues, post-adoption workshops, social events access to cultural awareness.)

74. Have you found support through SPARK regarding the sharing of your child(ren)'s birth and adoption history?

01 Yes

02 No

What kind of support? (sharing of ideas, benefit of the experience of others).

These last few questions are intended to obtain your views on the effectiveness of adoption agencies and procedures both nationally and internationally.

75. How effective do you feel the adoption process was in preparing you for adoptive parenthood?

01 Very Effective

04 Not Very Effective

02 Effective

05 Not Effective at all

03 Somewhat Effective

06 Don't Know

Why do you feel this way?

76. Is there anything about Canadian or Romanian policy on adoption that annoys or upsets you? Is there anything you think should be changed or added?

77. Did you receive any preadoptive services? If yes, What were they?

78. Did you receive any postadoptive services, other than
the self-help support group?

79. If you were to put your finger on one concern that you
have about Romanian adoption, what would that be?

80. Would you be interested in seeing a summary of the
results?

Yes_____ NO_____

81. Would you be interested in participating in further
research?

Yes_____ No_____

APPENDIX B

ILLUSTRATION OF THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE PAST

The Reality, Empirical Data

IMPLIED OBJECTIVE PAST

The events which took place
in the past and during the process
of adoption, Canadian and Romanian

THE
PAST

SOCIAL STRUCTURAL PAST

The ordering of the "facts" from
the past which have been chosen by
the mother in the present in order to create a
symbolic reconstruction

SYMBOLICALLY RECONSTRUCTED PAST

Which facts are included, why they are
included, the order she has chosen and how the
facts are presented to the child
(often displayed in the lifebook)

THE
PRESENT

MYTHICAL PAST

Beyond the "facts"
Symbolic creations which affect the relationship

FUTURE
PROJECTIONS

The Abstract Meaning, The Reconstruction

INFORMATION FOR CONSENT

You are being asked to consent to be interviewed with regard to a Master's thesis study of the adoption process for Parents of Romanian children. The time for the interview will be approximately 2 hours.

There are a number of provisions which have been set in place to protect the confidentiality of your responses. First, the only identifying mark on this interview schedule is an identification number. This number is used to link together, for the purpose of analyzing the data. Second, the data that are obtained will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be stored in a locked cabinet. Third, the results of this study may be reported in academic journals. In these reports, no individual will be identified, only pseudonyms will be used and the data will be presented in a non-identifying, summary form.

Therefore, in consenting to participate in this study, I understand that:

- I am entering into the study voluntarily.
- I am guaranteed a pseudonym and a change of any identifying details.
- The data will be kept in a secure place, and only the interviewer will have access.
- I am free to refuse to answer any questions which I am uncomfortable with.
- I am free to withdraw from the study at any point, even after the interview has been completed.
- The study is being conducted independently from SPARK, except for the request to you for your participation.

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information sheet regarding the research on the adoption process for parents who have adopted children from Romania, and I consent to participate in this study.

Signature:

Date:

WRITTEN LETTER OF ANNOUNCEMENT

INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEW

I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to talk with me today. I am a Master's student at McMaster University in Hamilton, under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Miall. I am also a mother of two, a biological son, and my daughter who was also adopted in Romania. You will remember that I am doing this study so we might have a better understanding of how the Romanian adoption process has worked for parents like yourself.

I am going to be asking you questions about your child's adoption process and in particular, your experiences with the process. If there is anything you would rather not answer that's okay, just tell me and we will skip over that question. I would like to use a tape recorder during the interview, with your permission. The reason being so that I may go back sometime after the interview and be sure that when I am analyzing the data, I have interpreted your responses correctly. If you are not comfortable with this at any time, please let me know and I will turn the recorder off.

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

WANTED: YOUR ADOPTION STORY

Catherine Swanson is a member of SPARK and the mother of Joey and Daniella. She is currently working on her Master's Degree in Sociology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. The topic of the thesis is parental attitudes towards the Romanian adoption process. In effect, how the process, both Canadian and Romanian legal processes, and support from family, friends and society in general has touched your experience of Romanian adoption.

Catherine is looking for interested adoptive parents who would be willing to share their story with her in a personal interview, lasting approximately 2 hours, this summer 1994. Please be assured that this study is completely anonymous and confidentiality will be upheld at all times.

If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Catherine as soon as possible at 905-238-2658 in Mississauga, ON. We hope this research will prove to be of benefit for us as adoptive parents and for parents who will adopt children in the future.

SAMPLE OF THANK YOU LETTER SENT TO INTERVIEWED RESPONDENTS

4300 Hartfield Grove
Mississauga, Ontario
L4W 2Y7

September 1995

Dear

Please accept my sincerest thanks for your participation in my adoption research project. Your opinions were of considerable value while I was writing the final study. Apart from your participation, I enjoyed the opportunity to meet and talk with you.

As I mentioned, I am forwarding you a copy of the final study results. If you wish to get in touch with me, please do not hesitate to call (905-238-2658) or write to me at the address above. Once again, thank you for the effort you have made for this study. With best wishes for you and your family now and in the future.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cathy Swanson".

Catherine A. Swanson

APPENDIX D

LIST OF QUESTIONS TO OPERATIONALIZE THE
ACKNOWLEDGMENT OR REJECTION OF DIFFERENCE

Category 1: Mothers own views about adoption and their
satisfaction/disatisfaction with adoptive
parent status in society

- #30. Do you think it feels different being an adoptive
parent in comparison to being a biological parent?
- Yes Refusal
No Don't know
Sometimes
In what ways?
31. Do you think there are some satisfactions that
biological parents have that adoptive parents
don't have?
- Yes
No
Don't know
Can you explain what they are?
32. Do you think there are some satisfactions that
adoptive parents have that biological parents
don't have?
- Yes
No
Don't know
Can you explain what they are?
33. Are there disadvantages to being an adoptive parent?
If so, what are they?
- Yes
No
Don't know
35. Are there any particular times or circumstances when
you are aware of the fact that you are a Romanian
adoptive parent?
- 37a. Do you ever refer to your child's biological family
when speaking to your child?
- 37b. Do you ever refer to your child's biological family
when speaking to others? To whom would that be?

- 38. Have you ever found yourself trying to imagine how your child feels about being adopted? If so, what do you imagine?
- 41. Some adoptive parents choose not to tell others that their children are adopted. Why do you think they do that?

Category 2: How mothers acknowledge the difference in adoption and how they perceive other adoptive parents.

- 34. When you introduce your child to new friends, do you ever use the word 'adopted'? If so, in which situations? If not, why not?
- 36. Some adoptive parents do not tell their children that they are adopted. Why do you think they would not want to tell?
- 39. Do you wish that you had more information about your child(ren)'s biological family? If so, what kind of information would you like to have?
- 40. Some adoptive parents choose not to tell others that their children are adopted. Why do you think they do this?
- 57. Is there any information that you will leave out of the lifebook? What? Why?
- 58. At what age did you begin or will you begin to share this information with your child?
- 59. How have you decided to share this information?
- 60. Is there any piece of information that you won't want your child(ren) to ever know?
- 65. Do you have any concerns around sharing the adoption story with your child(ren)? What are they?
- 69. To sum up, would you say that the way you handle your adoptive parent status varies with the situation and with the people you are dealing with or does it not?