Families construct stories to validate milestones such as a marriage proposal or the birth of a child, and these stories heavily influence family members’ identities. But what happens when an essential narrative is incomplete, or “broken,” as is the case with birth stories in adoptive families? Adoptees are disconnected partially or entirely from those involved in their birth stories, so adoptive families must create adoption entrance narratives to fill the birth story void. These stories explain the concept of adoption to the child and establish an adoptee’s place in the family and in the world, thereby potentially yielding much influence over adoptees’ self concepts. Drawing from theoretical frameworks of narrative theory and symbolic interactionism, this study seeks to discover themes emergent from adoption entrance narratives, and then analyze the relationship between these themes and adoptees’ self esteem concepts.
LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENTRANCE NARRATIVES AND
ADOPTEES’ SELF-CONCEPT

A Thesis

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Introduction

Throughout our lifetime we are working to construct and reconstruct the story of our lives, our personal myth. The personal myth is the synthesis of all the components of our self into one self concept (McAdams, 1993). It impacts the way we view ourselves and the world around us, thereby impacting all interpersonal relationships. When told, the personal myth communicates who we are and who we want to be (Langellier, 1989). We mold and present ourselves through the personal myth. But these stories are not kept hidden and personal; they are subject to tremendous outside influence. Others’ perspectives, comments, and stories about us are internalized and added to the personal myth. Social influences shape both our presentation of self and our own self understanding (Rosenberg & Ochberg, 1992; Shaw, 1997). People rely on social interaction to create and maintain a sense of self (Mead, 1934). Thus, “identity is something of a collaboration between the person and the social world. The two are together responsible for the life story” (McAdams, 1993, p. 95).

A person’s social world is comprised of various groups and individuals, but the group most influential to the development of one’s personal myth is the family unit. We first begin building our personal myth as infants, when we look to our family for information for its construction. Families create familial narratives which, in turn, impact family members’ personal myths and self concepts. These familial narratives serve to construct, interpret, and solidify meaning to their experiences and function to create community in the family (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Koenig Kellas, 2005). Particular stories are told and retold until they become part of the members’ identities.

One particularly influential story is the family’s story about each child’s birth, or the birth story (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). The birth story defines who the child is, explains his/her birth into the family, and establishes where the child fits into and enhances the family (Baker, Sedney & Gross, 1994; Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). This story is significant in establishing the building blocks of one’s personal myth. Birth stories commemorate the birth and thus the children themselves. As children grow, they
become curious about the details of their birth story. But what happens when parts of or
the entirety of the birth story is missing, as in the case of adoption?

Adopted children are either partially or entirely disconnected from those involved
with their birth, and thus their birth story must be altered. Their birth story evolves into
an adoption entrance narrative (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Adoption entrance narratives
teach children what it means to be adopted, why they were placed for adoption, and
where they fit into their adoptive families. Further, a lack of personal stories about their
birth family contributes to an adopted child’s sense of loss (Galvin, 2006b.). Thus, these
stories have tremendous impact on the adoptees sense of place, history, identity, and
value (Krusiewicz and Wood, 2001). In 2001, Krusiewicz and Wood sought to
understand the idiosyncrasies of adoption entrance narratives by interviewing adoptive
parents on their construction of these crucial stories. From their research emerged five
themes: dialectical tensions, destiny, compelling connection, rescue, and legitimacy.
These themes function as a way to affirm adoptive children and to assert that adoption is
a valid way to form a family. It is useful to know the processes behind parents’
construction of adoption entrance narratives, but in order to realize the impact of these
narratives, the adoptees’ perspectives must be considered. The children’s interpretation of
their parents’ stories will dictate and reflect the story’s affect on their self concepts.

The current study seeks to understand the elements of adoption entrance
narratives and their relation to adoptees’ self concepts. As adoption rates are increasing,
more families are facing the challenges distinct to adoptive families. In 2000, 2.5% of
children less than 18 years old were adopted (Kreider, 2003). These numbers increase in
significance when considering all parties affected by an adoption; in 1997 the Evan B.
Donaldson Adoption Institute reported that approximately 60% of Americans had a
“personal experience” with adoption – they knew someone who was adopted, had
adopted a child themselves, or had relinquished a child for adoption. Communication
challenges unique to adoptive families include defining “family” within the family,
justifying the family to outsiders, and explaining the concept of adoption to adoptees
(Galvin, 2006a). Healthy family functioning is dependent upon communication practices,
particularly for those “discourse dependent” families. As adoption is becoming more prevalent, scholars and adoption practitioners must be aware of the forces unique to adoptive family functioning. This study seeks to advance research on narratives and adoption while providing the adoption community with practical information useful in adoption training programs, literature, and counseling.

Thus, this study utilizes narrative theory and symbolic interactionism to investigate the relationship between adopted persons’ self concept and adoption entrance narratives, as perceived by adoptees. A thematic analysis was conducted to discover the themes present in adoption entrance narratives. Then, each theme’s relationship to the adoptees’ self concept variables self esteem, identity, and generalized trust was assessed. The study will first review the literature on narratives, particularly drawing upon Fisher’s (1984) narrative theory; then it will discuss the literature on adoption and the interaction of adoptive families and narratives. Finally, it will investigate the intersection of the narrative and adoption elements with those of the concept of self, drawing upon Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism theory.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

Narrative Theory

From the cradle to the grave, humans construct and reconstruct the story of their identity. Each of us naturally constructs this story, called the personal myth, in order to synthesize the various components of our self into one self-concept (McAdams, 1993). But these personal myths are not a mere representation of ourselves; they are ourselves. As McAdams (1993) notes, “we do not discover ourselves through myth; we make ourselves through myth” (p. 13). Narratives report truth as the narrator understands it. Individuals constitute themselves as persons by constructing a story in which they think of themselves as characters that have existed in the past and will exist in the future (Schechtman, 1996).

Rhetorical scholar Walter Fisher (1984) offers the narrative theory to explain humans’ use of narrative to construct reality. Fisher contends that we are essentially “storytelling animals,” and he uses the term “homo narrans” to articulate the human dependency on narratives to construct both ourselves and our experiences. He posits that humans communicate through and live in the narrative paradigm, where a person’s most compelling claim is through narration. Narration is defined as “symbolic actions, words, and/or deeds that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (p. 10). According to the narrative theory, humans analyze the value of these narratives based on the premises of rationality and coherence. Rationality is the analysis of fidelity; the story must be externally valid by having the “ring of truth” to the audience. Coherence is the analysis of probability; the story must be internally valid by holding together as a credible sequence of events. If these two factors are upheld, the story will seem reasonable to the audience.

Stories may be told for the joy of telling, as an effort to relive the past, or, most notably, as presentations of self (Bennett, 1986). A person’s identity is constituted by the content and tone of the personal myth, and the experiences included in it (Schechtman, 1996). Within these personal myths are narratives that are not merely recounts of a past
event, they communicate the narrators’ points of view, their emotions, their thoughts, their interpretations (Chase, 2005). Stories reveal who we are and who we want to be, on both a surface and a deep level (Langellier, 1989). They are not only the ways in which we describe and explain ourselves; stories are, as Frank (1995) observes, “the self’s medium of being” (p. 53). Personal myths affect our understanding of ourselves, which in turn impacts our daily lives and relationships.

But stories are not merely unmoving representations of identity; they are influenced by external forces as well. In order to fully represent one’s self, a personal myth must have both an internal component – the orientation towards one’s life – and an external component – the story those around him/her tell (Schechtman, 1996). Likewise, Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) contend that personal myths are inevitably shaped by the norms and discourse within which they operate. Social influence not only shapes our “masks” that we present of ourselves, but also our private self-understanding (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Shaw, 1997). Our identities hinge largely on the stories we hear from others and subsequently internalize.

**Family Narratives**

We first begin constructing our personal myth as infants, where we gather material for its construction from our families (McAdams, 1993). Family narratives are significant in the development of one’s personal myth. They can be implicit through lessons on behavior and how the world works, or made explicit through stories we are told by our families. Part of this material comes from the basic narrative that a family works to create and maintain in the face of a shifting plot line brought on by life experiences. A basic family narrative is one that recounts events and in so doing, families attach, construct, coordinate, interpret, and solidify meaning to their experiences (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Koenig Kellas, 2005). Many of the stories that comprise the basic narrative are told and retold until they become a part of the family members’ identities.
Storytellers present their own perspectives in these family stories, and consequently there is an evaluative component engrained in them. Certain details of the story are emphasized and valued, and other details are left out or considered less important. They not only provide information on events and family structure, but also show a particular perspective or attitude towards those elements (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Vangelisti, Crumley & Baker, 1999). In this regard, family stories hold evaluative information by showing the manner by which people judge circumstances, individuals, and relationships. Family stories construct, interpret, and solidify meanings of family experiences (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Stone, 1988).

We hear family stories in early childhood, when our identities are most malleable, and oftentimes continue to hear them throughout a lifetime. Children receive stories until they become part of their own story, wielding much power over their self-concept. As Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) state, “we often grow into the stories until they fit as tight and are as unnoticeable as a layer of skin” (p. 524). The perspectives represented in these narratives are an indication of how people see, experience, and feel about their social world (Vangelisti et al., 1999). The stories significantly impact individuals’ self concepts from childhood through adulthood (McAdams, 1993).

But these family stories are not distinctly private or protected within the walls of the family home. Instead, they are subject to normative discursive practices and ways of doing family (Langellier & Peterson, 1993). Langellier and Peterson (1993) highlight the performative aspect of family, emphasizing the influence of normative conceptions of family on families and their stories. Likewise, most of the research conducted on family stories has looked at “traditional,” nuclear families (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). So, what happens to families that deviate from cultural norms? According to Tillman-Healy (2001), non-traditional families must formulate their family stories in response to cultural norms. Thus, gay and lesbian families, interracial marriages, single-parent families, and families with adopted children may feel the need to legitimize their form of family (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Yngvesson, 2000).
As previously discussed, family stories have a large impact on the self-concept of the members involved (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; McAdams, 1993; Schechtman, 1996; Vangelisti et al., 1999). Scholars have started realizing this impact, and begun studying the narratives in non-normative families. One such family is that which is formed through adoption. Because children in these families are not born into the family, but become part of it legally, adoptive families learn to construct stories to negotiate that aspect of their life. This study sets out to explore ways adoptive families construct narratives and how these narratives are related to an adopted child’s self concept. Next, background information on adoption and research on adoptive families will be provided to establish a context on adoptive identity in birth stories.

Adoption

The meanings of adoption and family are culturally-situated, and thus adoption practices vary according to culture. Galvin (2006a) notes, “adoption practices in the United States reflect a Western European orientation, emphasizing the primacy of the biological family,” unlike other cultures that have a more fluid representation of family and kin (p. 138). In the U.S. adoption practices clearly evolve with social norms of the country. In Colonial America, children who were born out of wedlock, orphaned, abandoned, or neglected were given to masters who maintained them in exchange for labor (Galvin, 2006a.). Urbanization with the Industrial Revolution brought about more orphanages due to economic stress and constrained living space. The emphasis on family during the World Wars was reflected in the trend to keep adoption a secret to both outsiders and the child (Reitz & Watson, 1992).

International adoption is a relatively new and rapidly growing phenomenon in the United States. International adoptions, or adoption of children born in other countries, were established through the efforts of veterans returning from Europe and Asia (Galvin, 2003). International adoption has been historically associated with disasters, natural or man-made, and the poverty that follows thereafter (Wilkinson, 1995). During the World Wars, 70% of all international adoptions in the U.S. came from homeless children in
Europe (McNamara, 1975). Since then, a growing number of children come from Central and South America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the former Soviet Union states due to the strife in those regions. International adoption has increased significantly in the United States over the past three decades due in part to rising infertility, legal abortion in the U.S., the rise of single motherhood, and controversy surrounding domestic transracial adoption (Galvin, 2003). Today more than 19,000 children are adopted internationally per year, with the largest groups being from the People’s Republic of China (5,053), Russia (4,939), Guatemala (2,219), and South Korea (1,779) in 2002 (United States Department of the State, Bureau of Consular Affairs). A high percentage of these children are adopted into European American families (Galvin, 2003).

Today, more adoptive families are being formed each year and the meaning of adoption is transforming with the change in trends. Two to four percent of children in the United States are adopted, with slightly more than half by relatives or stepparents (Brodzinskiy, Smith & Brodzinskiy, 1998). The 2000 Census, which included “adopted son/daughter” as a category for the first time, revealed that 2.5% of children under 18 were adopted (Kreider, 2003). These numbers increase in significance when considering that approximately 60% of Americans report having a “personal experience” with adoption, personally or through family or friends (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997). Thus, the adoption of one child not only affects that child and family, but their social networks and future children. Another factor influencing the changing meaning of adoption is the increase in open adoptions, where adoptive and birth families have more exposure to and open communication with one another. In open adoptions, the adoptive and birth families are more connected and interwoven, forming intricate relational situations. Also, stepparents adopt stepchildren; gay males, lesbians, and single parents may adopt in some states; surrogate parents may be used; and racial lines are crossed. No matter the variation though, adoption involves creating a family “that is connected to another family, the birth family, and often to different cultures and to different racial, ethnic, and national groups as well” (Bartholet, 1993, p. 186).
Adoption in Research

Despite the pervasiveness of adoption, it is a historically understudied area. Adoption has been shrouded in secrecy due to its connection with issues of morality, psychology, and politics (Galvin, 2006). Until the 1980’s, adoption agencies attempted to match adoptive parents and their child on physical characteristics, intellectual potential, and talents, assuming this would create a more natural family structure (Reitz & Watson, 1992). Many families would attempt to keep the adoption a secret from the child because of the emphasis on the value of a biological family. Because it was supposed to be invisible, it was difficult for researchers to access adoptive families for many years.

In the 1960’s, however, clinical psychologists started studying adoption. Researchers noticed that adopted individuals were a proportionately higher percentage of mental health patients, and began to address the challenges associated with adoption in families (Galvin, 2006a.). Since then, the adoption process has become more open and accessible to researchers. International, transracial, and open adoptions have increased, and social workers are promoting more openness in dialogue about adoption within the family. Currently, research on adoption has been studied in various fields, focusing on issues such as identity formation, long-range placement outcomes, the meaning of the search process, the birth mother experience, mental health in adoptees, and ethnic identification in internationally adopted children.

More specifically, scholars acknowledge that adoption is a viable way to form a family, but provides challenges to the people involved. Healthy family functioning is dependent upon effective communication practices, especially in discourse-dependent families such as those formed through adoption (Galvin, 2006a). Despite this acknowledgement, there has been very little communication research on adoptive families. Communication scholars have focused on adoptive family communicative functions such as the secrecy versus disclosure continuum, language of adoption, and artifacts and rituals (Galvin, 2006a).
Adoption Narratives

A new and growing area of adoption communication research is in family narratives in adoptive homes, or adoption narratives. As previously discussed, all families engage in discourse-driven identity building and this discourse shapes reality for that family and constructs identity for that person. Adoptive families must routinely engage in discursive processes that establish, maintain, and manage an identity (Yngvesson, 2000). The need to establish identity as a family comes both internally and externally. Identity needs surface at various individual and familial developmental stages, or when individuals face outsiders’ questions regarding their assertion of family (Galvin, 2006a). Thus, the more ambiguous or deviant the family form or family experience, the more a family must work to establish and maintain identity through communicative processes (Galvin, 2006a; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). These families become dependent on discourse in order to function as such.

One notable type of family story examined in adoption is the canonical story, a story of traditional cultural interest that helps define the family as distinctive (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). Canonical stories establish and express boundaries of acceptable family forms and family practices used to judge alternative forms and practices. They are promoted and reinforced throughout a family’s life cycle. A family’s story is told in the present in order to justify the past in order to go on as better, more wise people in the future. These stories reveal a family’s perception of the past and its images and dreams for the future. Canonical stories can be grouped into three categories: courtship stories, survival stories, and birth stories (Stone, 1988). The courtship story works to establish the meaning of heterosexual love for children of two parents, and serves as the family’s creation story. In this story, the parents simplify the trials and tribulations of their dating and subsequent pre-marriage life. The survival story teaches children how to cope with the dangerous world outside of the family. These stories often define the family in terms of racial, socio-economic, ethnic, and religious groups, and promote a sense of pride, toughness, and stamina. Many of Western culture’s cliché messages such as “don’t cry over spilt milk” are depicted in the survival story. The birth story is simply the story
about each child’s birth, including details about the pregnancy and labor, and events surrounding the birth. It works to establish a child’s place in the family by showing them their niche amongst the siblings. The entrance story defines who the child is, explains the process by which he or she was born into the family, and establishes where the child fits into and enhances the family (Baker, Sedney & Gross, 1994; Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). It carves a niche for the family’s new addition. Details often include the context of the child’s conception, the mother’s pregnancy and labor experiences, and the first few weeks or months of a child’s life. During childhood and into adulthood, children hear about how easy or difficult the pregnancy was and the events surrounding the birth that made it special. These stories commemorate the births and thus the children themselves.

However, when a family’s canonical stories deviate from traditional forms, they oftentimes go to great lengths to explain, justify, excuse, or legitimize this disconnect. This frequently occurs in cases of divorce, where the canonical “happily ever after” marriage story is broken (Scott & Lyman, 1986). Divorces and others trying to reconcile broken narratives have to justify their family form and behavior in response to canonical stories in which they are measured.

So what happens in the case of adoption when parts of or the entirety of the birth story is missing? Adopted children become curious about their birth stories as they grow up, just as non-adopted children do. But adoptees do not become part of a family through birth, and thus the birth story becomes more complicated. In order to convey the intricacies of adoption to a child, the current trend is for parents to provide their child with age-appropriate stories as they grow; this replaces the “one big talk” of the past (Galvin, 2006b). These age-appropriate stories are the beginning of an ongoing dialogue among the family members, which sets the tone for a family’s communication regarding adoption (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003). Thus, the construction of these stories is crucial to a family’s well being.
Adoption Entrance Narratives

Unlike biological children, adoptive children are partially or entirely disconnected with those involved with their birth and adoptive families reconcile this void by creating adoption entrance narratives. These stories teach adoptive children what adoption means, where they fit into the family, why they were adopted into this family, and why they were placed for adoption. Thus, the stories that adoptive parents create in place of the birth story will likely have tremendous impact on an adoptive child’s sense of place, history, identity, and value. They may also help fill the void created by the missing courtship story from the child’s birth parents. In their study on adoptive parents’ construction of adoption entrance stories, Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) identified five themes that emerged from adoptive parents’ recounts of adoption entrance stories: dialectical tensions, destiny, compelling connection, legitimacy, and rescue.

In the first theme, *dialectical tensions*, adoptive parents experience a tension between their feelings of joy and their perception of sadness and loss of the birth parents. This is informed through Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) work on dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships. Dialectical tensions are contradictory and interdependent forces that generate tension in relationships. Adoptive parents expressed tension between their feelings of joy and their acknowledgement of the birth mother’s feelings of loss. Two sub-themes comprised this theme. The first, “misfortune versus fortune,” spoke to the contradictory feelings about the adoption process. The new parents felt both the excitement of a new child, while also feeling sad for the loss of the birth family. The second sub-theme, “desire versus rejection,” illustrates the tension felt when explaining to children that they are wanted by their adoptive family, but were literally given up by their birth family. Many families reconcile this dialectic by portraying the birth family as making loving choices.

The second theme, *destiny*, emphasizes the inevitability and rightness of this child’s entrance into their particular family. Many parents claim that their child was “meant to be” for their family. Two sub-themes emerge from this category: “fate” and “God’s plan.” In “fate,” adoptive families feel that they had no control over certain
aspects of the adoption process, and thus they were meant to be brought together as a family. “God’s plan,” is a version of the destiny theme which highlights God as instrumental in creating their family. It was “God’s will.”

The third theme, compelling connection, highlights the parents’ immediate draw to their adopted child, and contains three sub-themes. In the first sub-theme, called “love at first sight,” parents claim that they “loved him from the moment I saw him.” Many adoptive parents portray dramatic narratives of the strength and immediacy of the connection they felt when first meeting their future child. The second sub-theme is “compensating for not giving birth to children,” which describes the stories parents construct when children ask why they did not grow in their mothers’ “tummies.” As noted earlier, children are fascinated by the origins of life, and will try to understand why they did not grow in their mothers’ “tummies” (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004). The third theme, “physical connection through appearance,” explains how adoptive parents reconcile the difference in appearance common to most biological families. They place strong emphasis on the likeness between them and their adoptive children. This construction of likeness supports Hoffman-Reim’s (1990) claim that persons construct resemblance in order to become closer (as cited in Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001).

Rescue is the fourth theme, in which adoptive parents describe their efforts to save the child from threatening circumstances or from birth parents who were unable to care for the child. This theme is particularly prevalent in international adoption entrance stories. Many parents portray the birth parents as loving but unable to care for the child, so the child needed to be rescued in order to have a good life. Parents explain that they adopted a child “so he could have a better life” or because “we were able to provide medical care that was unavailable” (p. 796). The Rescue theme is more prevalent in international adoptive families, where parents spoke of terrible conditions or circumstances in which the child was a part before the adoption.

The fifth theme, legitimacy, shows that parents feel compelled to assert the legitimacy of their family which contains one or more adopted children. Although Krusiewicz and Wood did not ask the participants to define family, three-quarters of them
adamantly did. They said things like “Adoption isn’t a last resort or last option. It was the choice we made. We wanted them and no one else.” (p. 796). This drive to justify the family structure shows that these stories are shaped by one’s context.

Researchers studying adoption entrance narrative themes have interviewed only adoptive parents. However, it would be useful to understand the adoption entrance stories from the perspective of the adoptee. Regardless of what the parent tells the child, the important element of the message is the child’s interpretation of it. The child’s interpretation and circumstances will dictate the story’s impact on his/her life. These circumstances include the composition of the family, the personality of both the family and of the child, and the nature of the adoption. One circumstance to note is the child’s culture of origin versus his/her culture of adoption. International and domestic adoptees face different challenges and address their adoptions in varying ways (Friedlander, 1999). The current study, however, focuses on the adoption experience as a whole. The study is cognizant of the differences in international and domestic adoptee experiences, and will allow those differences to emerge from the data if present. As outlined in the future research section, subsequent studies may explicitly investigate the differences in these two groups’ entrance narratives to help illuminate the varying paths by which adoptees make sense of their experiences.

It is likely that the children’s narratives will contain similar themes to the parents’; but, based on the transactional nature of communication, the child’s perspective of the story and its elements could be entirely different. It is a fundamental element of communication that there will likely be some disconnect, whether small or large, between the speaker and the listener. It is useful to know the processes behind parents’ construction of adoption entrance narratives, but in order to realize the impact of these narratives, the adoptees’ perspectives must be considered. The children’s interpretation of their parents’ stories will dictate and reflect the story’s affect on their self concepts. Thus, the first research question is posed:

RQ1: What are the themes in adoption entrance narratives from the perspective of adopted individuals?
Furthermore, the way family stories are told and retold can impact the child’s adjustment and well-being (Friedlander, 1999). Specifically, constructing these stories may be difficult for many families that have little information regarding birth parents, which is particularly the case in closed and international adoptions. A lack of personal stories about the birth family contributes to an adopted child’s sense of loss (Galvin, 2006b). In contrast, in cases of open adoption, the birth family may contribute to the construction of the entrance story and help the adoptive parent understand the emotions behind their decision. Consequently, an adoptive parent who understands the birth parents’ emotions is more likely to help the adopted child understand his/her early personal history (Neil, 2003).

Because family stories have been shown to affect one’s self-concept (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; McAdams, 1993; Schechtman, 1996; Vangelisti et al., 1999), perhaps it would be useful to know which narrative theme of the narrative corresponds with which component of self-concept. In fact, Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) note that “the stories that adoptive parents create about how and why their children entered adoptive families can be extraordinarily important in mending, further rupturing, or otherwise modifying the children’s sense of place, history, identity, and value” (p. 786). Thus, this study asserts that entrance stories will relate to an adoptee’s self-concept as a whole.

**Self Concept**

To be curious about self-concept is fundamentally human (Hattie, 1992). Individuals are eager to interpret themselves and others. It should not be a surprise, then, that humans have been studying the idea of self-concept since early philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and the early Christians (Hattie, 1992). Perspectives on and definitions of the self have evolved ever since. Currently, social scientists regard self-concept broadly as “a person’s perceptions of him- or herself” (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Self-concept has both an intrapersonal and an interpersonal component. In regards to the intrapersonal part, James (1892) contended that there is a stable aspect of the self which stays relatively balanced despite the highs and lows of human life. This
component of the self is formed early on and secured as the person ages (James, 1892). Later, Cooley (1912) acknowledged a similar belief in a stable image of self, but added the interpersonal part, dubbing it the “looking glass self.” Here, he asserted that an individual builds a self concept based upon reflected appraisals – a person’s interpretation of others’ reactions to him/her. These reactions come in the form of evaluations and reinforcements by significant others, and attributions for one’s own behavior.

Mead (1934) is credited for combining both intrapersonal and interpersonal components of self in his symbolic interactionism theory (Littlejohn, 1977). Central to this theory is the assumption that self-concept arises through social interaction. The self is a social construction. First, Mead distinguished between the “me” and “I” of self in order to establish its reflexive nature. The “me” is the socialized aspect of a person. It is a person’s understanding of his/herself based upon the environment and those in it. This is his/her “sense of self.” People learn who they are by monitoring the responses of others around them. If people often remark about a person’s tall stature, then that person will most likely view him/herself as “tall.” On the contrary, the “I” is a person’s unique, autonomous, creative nature. The “I” distinguishes humans from animals in that they are capable of thinking beyond mere instincts. In this vein, the “I” can be understood through Burke’s (1972) concept of action and motion. Burke believes that the distinguishing quality between humans and animals is the human ability to behave with intention and logical reasoning, or action, whereas animals are only able to behave according to instincts, or motion. Humans are able to understand the complexities of human relationships and experiences, and react with paralleled complexity. This Burkean action is Mead’s “I.” Mead believes that we are not automations, we are able to devise thoughts independent of the group. Thus, with one’s self comprised of both the “I” and the “me,” the self may be both the subject and the object of thought (i.e., “I love myself” or “I hurt myself”). Because of this reflexive nature, we may have a concept of ourselves, just as we may have a concept of any other object.

Because people rely on social interaction to create and maintain their sense of self, communication is an integral feature in the ongoing negotiation of self. As Coover
and Murphy (2000) state, “communication is the enactment of one’s self-identity” (p. 126). We see ourselves through others, learn to take on the perspective of these others, and then establish the role of others in our concept of self. Our perspectives of ourselves are strongly influenced by the responses of others toward us. Further, our view of ourselves strongly influences the types and levels of relationships in which we engage (Nicotera, 1993 as cited in Gayle & Preiss, 2002). Then, once two people enter into a relationship, they mutually invest in stabilizing and supporting each other’s self concept (Swann & Predmore, 1985). This view is supported by Goffman’s (1959) work on the presentation of self, where he concludes that relational interaction is actually a performance that is shaped by the environment and the audience. In this performance, the actors create impressions that are consonant with his/her desired goals. Later, Burgoon (1994) revised Goffman’s beliefs, stating that impression management behaviors function to avoid social disapproval and enhance others’ feelings in order to create an ideal identity (as cited in Gayle & Preiss, 2002). Because the establishment and maintenance of self concept is central to one’s communicative patterns, it is vital to have an understanding of group members’ self concepts. Research on self concept has explored varying groups of people and interpersonal relationships, including those of adopted individuals.

Self concept in adopted children is a highly contested issue. Early adoption research discussed the assumption that adopted children were referred for psychological treatment as much as two to five times as frequently as their non-adopted peers (Grotevant & McRoy, 1990). Later, Brodinzsky (1993) clarified this statistic by explaining that, while two percent of American children under 18 are adopted, they are five percent of children in outpatient mental clinics, and are 10-15 percent of those in residential care facilities and inpatient psychiatric settings. Nevertheless, several studies have concluded that although on average, adopted children fare well psychologically, they tend to be overrepresented in the clinical population (Friedlander, 1999).

Research on adoption has largely depended on comparisons between adopted children and nonadopted children. Both social scientists and behavior geneticists are
drawn to the “natural experiment” of adoption (Rutter, 2005). Because a child is not raised by his/her biological parents, adoption provides a fairly accessible way to study the nature-nurture interplay. The differences between the adopted and nonadopted children were greater in clinical studies than in academic studies (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005). In clinical comparisons, adopted children are generally found to have higher incidences of learning and behavioral problems and have greater difficulty adjusting to school. Often the reason given for these differences is the trauma of adoption in childhood specifically affects a child’s development (Friedlander, 1999). However, despite these significant differences between adopted and non-adopted children, the differences are relatively small to moderate in magnitude (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005). Factors such as a child’s age at point of adoption and the child’s prior life experiences can lead to differences in development between adopted and nonadopted children.

Generally, research findings comparing adopted and nonadopted individuals are varied. For example, Borders, Black, and Paisley (1998) found no significant differences between adopted and nonadopted children or between adoptive and nonadoptive parents. Other studies such as Sharma, McGue, & Benson’s (1998) have found that adopted children may perform worse in some areas such as Licit Drug Use and School Adjustment, but actually perform higher than their nonadopted peers in other areas such as Prosocial Behavior, Social Problems and Withdrawn behaviors. Contradictory findings may be due to diversity in families studied and/or limitations to obtaining representative samples (Brooks et al., 2005). Further, research on adoption has arguably overemphasized the comparison between adopted and nonadopted persons. Such a comparison may be appropriate in some situations, but researchers must be cognizant of the widespread intragroup differences in the adoptee population. Therefore, research on adoption may be quite valuable when comparing adopted children to themselves in order to learn of the varying experiences of adoptees and their families.

In order to find in-group differences among adopted individuals, the current study delineates self concept into several variables. Self-concept is an organization of many
components interrelated in complex ways (Rosenberg, 1985). This study uses three components of self-concept – self esteem, identity, and generalized trust – to create a holistic representation of an adopted individual’s sense of self. The concepts will first be defined and discussed, and then adoption research findings on that component of self-concept will be noted.

Self Esteem

Self esteem refers to the evaluative component of self-concept (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). According to symbolic interactionism theory’s premise of self reflexivity, a person may conceive of him/herself as an object. People have attitudes toward objects and the self is one of those objects. Self esteem, then, is a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object – the self. It is the extent to which an individual evaluates him/herself positively or negatively (Bylsma, Cozzarelli & Sumer, 1997).

Given the importance of the other in the symbolic interactionism theory, it is natural that self esteem is not only an intrapersonal phenomenon, but also an interpersonal one. Simply, since one experiences him/herself from particular standpoints of other individuals, then the evaluative component of those standpoints will also contribute to one’s sense of self (Leahy & Shirk, 1985). We take on the attitudes of others toward ourselves (Mead, 1934). We also evaluate ourselves through social comparison, or comparing our performance to that of another (Festinger, 1954; Leahy & Shirk, 1985).

The study of individual differences in self esteem is prolific in social psychology and interpersonal communication (Campbell, 1990). Perhaps the popularity of this topic can be attributed to the profound impact self esteem has on human behavior. Differences in self esteem have been found to affect behavior in areas such as competition, conformity, attraction, and achievement (Campbell, 1990). However, the study of self esteem is generally limited to research on adolescents. Although adolescence is a recognized time of considerable growth, self-concept and self esteem continue to evolve throughout one’s life (McAdams, 1993). Thus, studying self esteem at various stages of
the life course will be equally as enlightening. Rosenberg (1985) developed a scale to test self esteem of adolescents, specifically, but it has been used with other age and demographic groups successfully. This thereby indicates that adolescents are not the only group evolving specifically in terms of self esteem. Self esteem is linked to theoretically important outcomes such as achievement motivation, feeling in control of one’s life, efficacy, and behavioral functioning; and indirectly related to behavioral predilections via self-efficacy (Rosenberg, 1985; Waterman, 1993).

A substantial body of research has formed on self esteem of adopted individuals, but has reflected contradictory or controversial findings. Adopted individuals have been found to have lower self esteem than their non-adopted peers (Westhues & Cohen, 1997), but have also been found to have parallel or even higher self esteem than their non-adopted peers (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994). Likewise, some researchers claim that most of these studies have been overly relying on comparisons and minute differences between adopted to non-adopted children (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005). But what causes varying levels of self esteem? It is apparent that familial stories shape family members’ self concepts, so perhaps studying self esteem among adopted individuals relative to their adoption entrance narrative will help clarify the heterogenic self esteem research findings. Likewise, understanding the relationship between self esteem and adoption entrance narrative themes will be useful when counseling adoptive parents on the construction of their adoption entrance narratives. If adoptee self esteem is high for a certain theme, then it can be promoted in workshops and counseling sessions, and if self esteem is low, then it can be warned against. Thus, the second research question is posed:

RQ2: Do levels of self esteem differ depending on adoption entrance narrative themes?

Identity

Whereas self esteem is the evaluative component of self-concept, identity is the cognitive component (Reitzes & Burke, 1980). When self esteem refers to evaluations
such as “good” or “bad,” identity refers to definitions such as “academic” or “sociable.” In his seminal work on identity, Erickson (1968) defined it as “the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods, the style of one’s individuality, and that this style coincides with the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for significant others in the immediate community” (p. 50). Identity incorporates individual personality, social relationships, subjective awareness, and external context (Erikson, 1968; Grovetant, 1997).

The concept of identity is composed of personal identity, social identity, and collective identity, with the focus of the current study on personal identity (Grovetant, 1997). Personal identity includes at least two aspects. The first is the combination of personality characteristics and social style by which a person defines himself or herself. Identity represents the incorporation of a person’s context with his/her historical and situational context. The second aspect is the individual’s sense of coherence and continuity of personality over time. One’s identity must have continuity across past, present, and future (Erikson, 1968). This aspect of identity is in accordance with narrative theory’s concept of coherence in narratives (Fisher, 1984). The pieces of one’s story must come together in a meaningful and coherent way in order to be complete. In family and personal narratives, coherence can be investigated to understand how the different domains of adoption are connected to one another, and particularly how adoption is integrated into the whole (Grovetant, 1997). Identity development is a life-long process that begins in childhood and spans into adulthood. It is characterized by cycles of exploration and commitment or consolidation. Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel and Geisinger (1995) developed a scale to test this idea of an individual’s identity exploration and commitment. It assesses the two dimensions in terms of both ideological and personal beliefs, and focuses on both specific elements of one’s beliefs (i.e., their views on marriage) and also broad elements (i.e., the need to question one’s values). This scale measures participants’ identities at the point of study, not the development of their identities throughout their lives.
Most of the studies done on identity have focused on chosen qualities such as occupation, values and relationships; however, Grotevant (1992, 1997) argued that assigned qualities such as gender, race and adoption status actually contextualize all chosen aspects of identity. For example, adoptive persons do not have access to crucial components of their personal history and consequently may find identity development to be a longer and more complex process. Thus, these demographic qualities are vital to consider when studying identity. Literature reveals that communication from adoptive parents has consequences for the self concept establishment of adopted individuals, particularly for their sense of identity (Grotevant, 1997; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). Specifically, adoptees’ identities are greatly affected by their parents’ inability to answer questions about their adoptive status (Grotevant, 1997).

Adoptive children may experience confusion about their sense of identity (Roszio, 1990) and research has found that adoptees must understand their identity as adoptees in order to come to terms with themselves as adults (Grotevant, 1997). In fact, early research with adopted adolescents in residential treatment centers for emotional disorders notes that a high number of participants highlighted identity issues as keys to understanding their problems and moving forward with their treatment (McRoy, Grotevant & Zurcher, 1988 as cited in Grotevant, 1997). It is imperative to test identity formation in adult adoptees in order to learn the long-term consequences of identity influences and decisions made in earlier years.

One potential way to address these questions is through the adoption entrance narrative. It has been found that the coherence of a life story is viewed as the benchmark for identity in an individual (Polkinghorne, 1991). McAdams (1988) points to the intersection of narrative and identity, saying, “The problem of identity is the problem of arriving at a life story that makes sense – provides unity and purpose – within a socio-historical matrix that embodies a much larger story (p. 19). A body of developmental psychologists believe that reconstructed stories are the key to understanding current identity functioning of an individual (Grotevant, 1997). Our identities hinge largely on the stories we tell ourselves and the stories others tell about us. A person’s identity “is
constituted by the content of the self-narrative” (Schechtman, 1996, p. 94, emphasis added). With the adoption entrance narrative being a salient component to an adoptee’s self narrative, it is imperative that the components of this narrative are understood. However, research has not been done on how the construction of these narratives has affected identity specifically. Thus,

RQ3: Will identity differ depending on adoptees’ entrance narrative themes?

Generalized Trust

As previously noted, a salient component of self concept according to symbolic interactionism theory is the Other. Indeed, there is a relationship between the way we feel about ourselves and the way we feel about other people. Traditionally, there are two points of view on external influences on the self. The first view comes from Freud’s (1933) concept of libido and his theory of objective cathexis (as cited in Rosenberg, 1965). Here, Freud claims that a person has a certain “fund” of energy or love available to him/her; and that person has the capacity to use as much or as little of that energy or love on the self and on the other. In other words, those who love themselves more will thereby love others less. The second point of view on external influences on the self comes from Fromm (1947, as cited in Rosenberg, 1965). His contention is that a person’s general attitude toward humanity manifests itself in his/her views of the self and of the other. If these people trust and respect humankind, then they will trust and respect themselves as they are a part of humankind. Cognitively, the self is just another person. In this study, trust will be conceptualized as Fromm’s definition because it is reflective of symbolic interactionism. In this theory, Mead (1934) asserts that one’s point of view affects his/her communication tendencies, just as Fromm (1947) echoes in his view of trust.

Later, Stack (1978) acknowledged the influence of one’s relationships with specific others on a person’s view of humanity. He explained that from the moment of birth, infants encounter a variety of others who treat them positively or negatively, who keep their promises and who do not. Based on those early encounters, each person
generalizes human behavior to develop expectancies about how the next person will treat him/her. These expectancies about the trustworthiness of people in general are considered \textit{generalized trust} (Stack, 1978). Some people tend to give others the benefit of the doubt, trusting friends and strangers alike; whereas some people see “every man out for himself,” so to say.

Using Fromm’s definition of generalized trust, Wrightsman (1964) developed his Philosophies of Human Nature scale, which was designed to assess people’s expectancies of the ways in which other people generally behave. This scale was developed out of historical and contemporary writings from theology, philosophy, and social science in response to an overly-narrow view of human nature at the time. The scale contains two dimensions of generalized trust – trust, or the extent to which human nature is basically good, and cynicism, or the extent to which human nature is consistent and understandable.

As indicated by symbolic interactionism theory, our view of others has significant impact on not only our self concept, but on our communicative style and capacity as well. Generalized trust influences an individual’s social communication and interactions, and changes significantly over the course of a life span (Hart & Damon, 1985). Likewise, as previously noted, the elements and perspectives represented in one’s personal myth influence that person’s view of the social world (Vangelisti et al., 1999). Our view of the world is constituted by the stories around us, and especially those which we internalize (Schechtmann, 1996). Family narratives are a significant influence on one’s personal myth (McAdams, 1993), and the perspectives represented in these narratives indicate a person’s views toward their social world (Vangelisti et al., 1999). With adoption entrance narratives a salient component of one’s personal myth, it is imperative that we understand the impact of specific components of this narrative on adopted individual’s view of the world. Thus, in order to understand the way adoption narratives affect a person’s generalized trust, the final research question is posed:

\textbf{RQ4:} Do levels of generalized trust differ depending on adoption entrance narrative themes?
Empirical evidence for these research questions can provide a new approach to understanding the ways narratives and self concept are related. Literature has established that narratives are powerful to one’s formation of self; but the correspondence between the content of specific narratives, such as birth narratives, and self concept is unclear. Further, the child’s perspective of an adoption entrance narrative will shed light onto the power of these family narratives. This next chapter will outline the empirical methods used to test each of this study’s four research questions.
Chapter 2: Methodology

This study examines the formation of self concept in adoptees as related to adoption entrance narrative construction through the theoretical foundations of Fisher’s (1984) narrative theory and Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism theory. In order to achieve a holistic understanding of this interaction, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. The differences of adoption entrance themes were assessed in respect to adoptee self concept, as established through three quantitative scales. Rosenberg’s Self Esteem Scale (1985) measured self esteem; the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balisteri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995) measured identity construction; and the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale (PHN; Wrightsman, 1974) measured generalized trust. This section delineates the research procedures that were employed to test this study’s four research questions.

Participants

Participants in this study were 105 adult adoptees including 14 men, 90 women, and 2 non-specified sexes. They ranged in age from 18 to 84 years old with thirty nine 18-29 year-olds, twenty 30-39 year olds, eighteen 40-49 year olds, twelve 50-59 year olds, three 60-83 year olds, and 10 non-specified, averaging at age 35.5. Eighty-one of the adoptees identified as participants of closed adoptions, eight identified as participants of an open adoption, and four identified as participants of a within-family adoption. Twenty one of the participants identified as domestic adoptees, whereas eight participants identified as international adoptees. Seventy five participants were younger than six months when adopted, 11 participants were between 6 months and 1 year old, and 20 participants were one year old and older (ages ranging from 13 months to nine years old) at the time of their adoption. Two students received research participation credit; the rest of the participants required no compensation.

Recruitment of subjects took place in three steps utilizing the internet. Because of its ability to efficiently contact large populations, the internet has become a popular and
effective way to administer surveys (Dillman, 2000). The first method of recruitment involved distributing an email to university instructors, calling for them to announce the study in their classes. Each instructor could reward students with extra credit. A second method involved eliciting adoption discussion boards and support groups for participants. The researcher utilized the popular social network sites Facebook, GoogleGroups, YahooGroups and social support groups (i.e., Informed Adoption Advocates, Adopted Online, Soul of Adoption, Adult Adoptees Advocating for Change) to reach the adult adoptee population. These groups attract adoptees who want to look for their birth parents, talk about adoption issues, or form a social network with other adoptees. The researcher contacted the group or list serve owner, and then posted the call to research on a discussion board or sent it through an email to the group members.

Occasionally, the administrator or other participant would voluntarily post the call to research onto another site of which they were a part. That initiated the third phase of the project – a snowball technique. The call to research asked the audience to forward the call on to any adoptees who would be willing to participate in this study. Participants were also recruited by word of mouth, specifically through personal emails and Facebook postings.

The call for research prompted “adult adoptees” to participate (See Appendix A). Only adoptees 18 or over were recruited so this research does not affect a child’s development of self. The conceptual definition of “adoptive” included any form of adoption in which the participant identifies him/herself as “adopted.” The study did not distinguish between international or domestic adoptees, or family and non-family adoptees at the onset. Instead it will allow any differences in the groups to emerge from the data naturally.

**Procedures**

All participants completed the online informed consent form that was approved by the researcher’s university which mandated participants must be over 18 years old (See Appendix B). The online survey first elicited the adoptee’s entrance narrative, and
then quantitative feedback of self esteem, identity, and generalized trust. At the end of the survey, participants had the option of providing their name on a separate survey to receive research credit, and/or providing their email address in order to receive a copy of the final research report.

**Measures**

*Adoption Entrance Narratives*

The adoption entrance narratives were elicited through an open-ended question. According to Kvale’s (1996) recommendations, open-ended questions allow participants to present their ideas in a way that best represents their experience. At the beginning of the survey, the following paragraph defined and described the concept of entrance narratives to the respondents and provided directions for reporting their narrative:

> Instructions: As children grow, their families construct stories, or narratives, about different times in their lives. One of these important times is the child’s birth. Families create and tell birth stories which describe the mother’s pregnancy, the birth itself, and the behaviors of other family members (i.e., father, siblings, grandparents) during this time. For adopted children, this birth story is more complicated.

> An *adoption entrance narrative* is an adoptive family’s version of the birth story. Adoption entrance narratives teach adoptive children what adoption means, why they were placed for adoption, and why they were adopted into their family.

> Below, please write out *your* adoption entrance narrative. Consider the questions, “What did your parents tell you about your ‘entrance’ into the world?” and “What did your parents tell you about your adoption?” Please be as complete as possible in your telling of the stories.

The participants responded in a text box that providing ample room to construct their stories. The responses were later downloaded as text and converted to a Microsoft Word document.
**Self Esteem**

Self esteem was measured with Rosenberg’s Self Esteem Scale (RSES; 1985) was used. The RSES is a unidimensional measure of global self-esteem based on Rosenberg’s theory of self concept (Rosenberg, 1985). Historically, many researchers attempted to obtain a global self esteem index by summing scores of unrelated topics. This scale, however, illustrates the human tendency to consciously and unconsciously evaluate various personal attributes in regards to varying importance (Wylie, 1979). Rosenberg considered his scale to be a combination of one’s domain-specific judgments and global judgments (Rosenberg, 1985). The scale is a 10-item Likert-type scale on a four point scale (1 = strongly agree; 4 = strongly disagree). Items include “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel I have a number of good qualities.” In the present study, the scale had a reliability of $\alpha = .94$, $M = 29.91$, $SD = 7.09$. These self esteem scores were similar to those found in previous research on the adoptee population ($M = 31.4$, $M = 29.6$) (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006).

**Identity**

Identity was measured using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri, et al., 1995). The EIPQ is a Likert-type measure with subscales pertaining to identity exploration (e.g., “I have undergone several experiences that made me change my views on men's and women's roles”) and identity commitment (e.g., “My ideas about men's and women's roles will never change”). The scale consisted of 32 items which assess exploration and commitment in eight areas: occupation, religion, politics, values, family, friendships, dating, and sex roles. Thus, it assesses identity exploration and commitment through both broad criteria (i.e., personality and psychological adaptation) and specific criteria (i.e., interest in politics). Each item is on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). In the present study, the scale had a reliability of exploration: ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 63.13$, $SD = 11.77$), commitment ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 67.22$, $SD = 11.76$). These exploration and commitment scores are similar to those found in previous research on similar populations ($M = 62.0$, $M = 66.5$) (Balistereri, et al., 1995).
**Generalized Trust**

Generalized trust was measured with Wrightsman’s (1974) Revised Philosophies of Human Nature Scale. This 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree) measures one’s beliefs about human nature according to six dimensions which are divided into two subsets – beliefs about substantive characteristics of human nature (called “trust”) and beliefs about the extent of individual differences in human nature (called “cynicism”). The dimensions pertaining to trust were trustworthiness, altruism, independence, strength of will and rationality; and the dimensions pertaining to cynicism were the complexity of human nature and the variability of human nature. Items on this 20-item scale include “the average person is largely the master of his own fate” and “most people try to apply the Golden Rule, even in today’s complex society.” The scale has a reliability of: trust ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 35.42$, $SD = 8.65$), cynicism ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 33.47$, $SD = 8.90$). These trust and cynicism scores are similar to those found in previous research on similar populations ($M = 35.9$, $M = 36.8$) (Edwards & Shepherd, 2004).

**Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis was conducted to uncover the narratives themes in the data. Thematic analysis is an interpretive method that is particularly sensitive to meanings presented by each participant individually (Owen, 1984; Wood, Dendy, Dordek, Germany & Varallo, 1994). A theme has been defined as “the patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a (person’s) interaction centers. Themes, then, are less a set of cognitive schema than a limited range of interpretations that are used to conceptualize” (Owen, 1984, p. 274). People use themes to gain understanding of or insight into situations or relationships (Owen, 1984, 1985). They construct narratives about particular events rather than simply referring to occurrences (Chase, 2005).

Constructivist analysis was guided by the iterative themes and possible subthemes emerging from the data, not from extant research findings. Guided by grounded theory, researchers performing thematic analysis function as textual critics who interpret language. In order to be considered a theme, the following theme criteria had to be met:
(i) recurrence, (ii) repetition, and (iii) forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Recurrence is found when different words can express the same idea or meaning. This criterion allows for salient meanings to be acknowledged, even when they are presented implicitly. Repetition, on the other hand, occurs when key words, sentences, or phrases are repeated explicitly. In this study, the repetition of words may represent a repetition of specific and exact adoption birth narratives as told by the adoptive parents. The third criterion for a theme, forcefulness, is indicated by nonverbal cues such as changes in volume, tone, or inflection in oral reports, and by underlining, increasing size or print, bolding, or using color in text. This criterion focuses not on the content of the passage, but on the form of the discourse. When determining the themes, the researcher must be particularly cognizant of participants’ tendencies to use nonverbal elements to highlight certain points of the narrative.

A constant comparative analysis was conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a method which “reflects the methodological commitments of most analytic induction methods” (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001, p. 791). Here, the researcher and his/her assistant(s) continually established and reevaluated themes as they code for the themes. The current study’s analysis occurred in two stages. First, the researcher and a coder examined all the narratives and identified broad themes individually. Then, the researcher and coder discussed and evaluated each others’ findings. Themes were established and the researcher and coder coded 67 and 62 narratives, respectively, with 20 narratives, or 18.7% of the narratives, coded by both. After reevaluation of themes, the researcher and coder established sub-themes independently, discussed and evaluated each others findings, and then coded for the sub-themes. This methodology reflected a 93.3% intercoder reliability, suggesting adequate coding reliability.

The means and standard deviations were determined for each variable of self concept and compared with each narrative theme established. This descriptive data illuminated the relationship between the adoptees’ self concept and their adoption stories.
Chapter 3: Results

The following section describes each of the themes and subthemes, and then explain the quantitative self concept findings. The analysis of the nine themes and corresponding subthemes relies heavily on participant examples and illustrations in order to uphold the integrity of participant stories. All names used are pseudonyms.

To address RQ1, which asked to identify the themes that would emerge from adoption entrance stories, the researcher employed an inductive thematic analysis. Analysis of the data yielded support for this first research question. Nine themes emerged: Destiny, The Chosen Child, Coming Home, Rescue, Reconnection, Revelation, Deception, Different, and Artifacts (See Table 1 for frequencies).

Adoption Entrance Narrative Themes

Destiny

Thirty adoptees ($n = 30$, 29% of sample) reported that forces beyond human control united them with their adoptive parents. It was fate that their family came together despite the traumas associated with the adoption process (i.e., adoptive parents oftentimes being unable to conceive, babies being separated from their mothers). There is recognition that their family is a special kind of family; bloodlines are unneeded because fate brought them together. As one adoptee notes, “I have always been their child.”

In this theme, this driving force is intangible and unmoving. Whether it is God (i.e., “God let them pick us”) or fate (i.e., “it was a miracle”), the underlying assumption was that this adoption was out of human control and instead controlled by higher powers. Two subthemes emerged from the Destiny theme: God brought us together and I was the one.

God brought us together. Of those who used the Destiny theme, eight participants regarded their adoption as the work of God. Specifically, it was His plan that brought the family together. One participant stated, “God meant me to be their child.” While some portray God as the force that allowed the adoption to occur (i.e., “God brought us
together”), others see God as the giver of this child to the adoptive parents. For example, one adopted individual noted “I was a gift from God.” Both derivations of this subtheme suggest that the adoption was a holy plan. This religiosity of this subtheme could be attributed to the religious tendencies of either the adoptive parents or of the adoptee, or both.

_I am the one._ Contrary to those who suggested God brought their families together, 24 adoptees attributed their destiny to a more ambiguous, intangible force. These stories highlighted a sense of fate that, as one participant said, “I was the one.” In this subtheme, the adoptees report that this was meant to be, as one adoptee notes, “(my birthmother) had dreamed about me before I was ever born. She had always wanted me.” Again, this theme implies a sense of external attribution; the adoption was out of both sets of parents’ control and in the control of a positive outside force. These stories do not communicate an evil force at work, but a good force. The adoption was meant to be, and this specific child was meant to be “the one.”

In this subtheme, the adoptees communicated a miracle or phenomenon that indicated a sense of fate. For example, one adoptee reported that she arrived on Mother’s Day, and thus became a Mother’s Day present, and her brother arrived on their mother’s birthday, “it was the best birthday present she was ever given!” Other miracle instances were cited when the timing of “the call,” or notice that a baby is available to the hopeful adoptive parents, occurs at unexpected times. One adoptee noted,

> They (the adoptive parents) waited six years. One day when my brother came home from school my mom told him she didn't think they were ever going to get the call for a baby so she told him they would go take the baby room down and turn it into a play room for him. She took his hand and turned around to go upstairs and the phone rang, it was the adoption agency about me. We all think it was SO meant to be!

The adoption process is referenced often in these instances, where the adoptive parents are left to wait at the whim of the cosmos. They have no control over the situation, and
thus the adoption becomes fate. The theme of Destiny communicates that the adoptees’ lives began with a miracle, a miracle from God or from another force.

*The Chosen Child*

Whereas the Destiny theme cites an external force in control of the occurrences surrounding the adoption, the Chosen Child theme attributes nature of the adoption to specified internal forces. Like the Destiny theme, these adoptees see their adoption as purposeful, not as a random occurrence. But in this theme, the responsibility is given to their adoptive parents or their birth parents, not a higher power. Fifty nine adoptees ($n = 59, 56\%$ of sample) showed that there is a sense of activeness and purpose to their experiences. Most simply, these adoptees repeated “I was picked,” “I was chosen,” “my adoptive parents wanted me,” and “my birth mother chose them.” The repetition element of Owen’s (1984) thematic criteria was emphasized in this theme. Notably, the above phrases were often repeated multiple times within one narrative.

This theme emphasizes that the adoptees were never unwanted. Although they may have been placed for adoption at an early age, they were always loved. In fact, they were “the chosen children.” Their adoptive parents wanted them (i.e., “they had always told me how very much they wanted a baby”) and specifically chose them (i.e., “my adoptive parents picked me”). Along with this acknowledgement that they were purposefully picked, the adoptees report that they were “special.” One adoptee says, “my grandmother told me I was very special because my Dad chose me to be his little girl.”

Three subthemes emerge from this theme: Specially picked child, They were chosen, and Fulfilling a need.

*Specially picked child.* Thirty of the narratives that contained The Chosen Child focused on the message that these adoptees were actively picked by their adoptive parents. This subtheme makes clear that these adoptees are not of this family by chance, but because they were special. Specific phrases such as “I was picked,” “I was "chosen,” and “I’m special” were repeated extensively. These adoptees seem to feel a sense of
comfort in that, although they were not born into their family, they were specially picked to be so.

Another prevalent element to this subtheme was that one’s chosen status makes him or her special, unique, and good. Oftentimes, the adoptees communicated the idea of being picked and of being special in the same thought. One adoptee frames it this way:

It was near the Christmas season and I had a lot of questions about Christmas and Jesus’ birth in a manger. I remember they told me how special as I was, just like baby Jesus. They went on to tell me that even though mom didn't have me that I was special because they got to choose me. I remember feeling very special after they told me how I was different but only because they didn't have me like normal mom and dads. I remember feeling very happy because I felt very special. The connected picked-special ideas resonated through these Chosen Child narratives. The following comments illustrate this connection:

I was a specially picked child.

Mom and dad always made me – and my brother – feel special by saying they "chose" us. They were great!

They told me they "chose" me and that I was special to them because they chose me.

Any child having been adopted should know how special they are, and that they were chosen.

They were chosen. This subtheme explains how the adoptees (n = 26) see their birthmother as making a clear decision to place her baby with this particular family. The focus of this subtheme is the birthmother and her decision to select the adoptive family. Although the circumstances surrounding conception may have been unplanned or out of her control, she asserted control of the situation and made an explicit choice regarding her baby’s future parents. The idea that the birthmother chose the adoptive family was particularly significant in the narratives of which it was a part. One participant said, “My
birth mother chose my parents (from a list of candidates) of an adoption agency,” recognizing that she had a role in selecting the future adoptive family for her child. Acknowledging that the birthmother specifically chose the family for her child to become part of establishes a continuity and interconnectedness among the two lives. By having an active role in choosing the adoptive family, the birthmother gives her blessing to the family that will raise her child. One adoptee expressed this idea of activeness by the birthmother:

My adoptive mother told me that my birth mother loved me very much but could not provide the type of life she wanted for me so she put me up for adoption and selected the family that she thought would be best and how she wanted me to be raised. (My birth mother) looked through a collection of families' papers to see who she wanted me to go to and selected my (adoptive) mother and my (adoptive) father.

_Fulfilling a need._ Thirty two adoptees acknowledged that, by becoming a part of the family, they were filling a void. Specifically, they were becoming the child that their adoptive parents wanted, but did not yet have. The adoptees varied significantly on their level of specificity regarding the reason why their parents needed to adopt. Some stated that their adoptive parents “wanted a baby,” others said that they were “unable to conceive,” and some disclosed the specific medical condition that prohibited their parents from having children (i.e., “My mother who suffered from severe endometriosis couldn't have children following a full hysterectomy”). Some adoptees came to their family’s story after the first adoption, and thus the need fulfilled was in terms of the family structure. One adoptee said, “They adopted my brother and they needed to have a sibling for him.” Some adoptees acknowledged that their adoption fulfilled a need, and subsequently that role made them “special” or “chosen.” This mindset is exemplified through this participant: “They had always told me how very much they wanted a baby and that I was chosen.”
Coming Home

This theme embodies the nurturance and acceptance of “coming home.” Thirty-nine adoptees ($n = 39$, $36\%$ of sample) reported feelings of belongingness with their adoptive family, often expressed through their specific experiences of coming home with their new parents. One adoptee simply reported, “I was sent home with them and became their child.” Others see the coming home process as more symbolic, as noted by this adoptee as, “my mom tells me that the day they brought us home was the day she ‘gave birth.’” Two subthemes emerged from the Coming Home theme: Home is where the family is and Belonging.

Home is where the family is. This subtheme was established in 21 narratives. Unlike children naturally born into a family, adoptees often are not given a first-hand account of their birth. Their entrance into the family begins when the adoptive parents come to “bring them home.” The phrase “and then they brought me home” was repeated in twelve narratives. In these reports, the adoptees do not specify “home” as their “the adoptive family’s home” or “their home,” but as “home.” Within this subtheme, participants told stories of their parents picking them up from both domestic and international agencies (i.e., “They traveled to South Korea to pick me up, and I became part of the family”). Adoptees also told of surprise celebrations upon arriving home (i.e., “They didn’t have any baby gear at the time and were excited to find their front porch full of gifts from friends and family”).

Inclusion in family. Using this subtheme, 25 adoptees reveal their feeling of belongingness in their adoptive family. The adoptees show that they do not feel different from other families or other family members. One adoptee put it so precisely, “adoption was celebrated as something wonderful in my family because it was the means that brought us together.” She also noted that, “adoption, like birth, can be a wonderful introduction into the family.” Here, adoptees demonstrate their progression with this concept of belongingness. Some adoptees note that they have always felt a part of their family (i.e., “I was always part of my adopted family. I never felt like an addition.”) and have known no other. One adoptee said, “Being adopted seemed the most normal thing in
the world,” showing that the family acted as any family would, regardless of their blood ties or lack thereof. Others, however, note a transition period into becoming a family (i.e., “I understood that these people were now my family”), such as research has found in blended families’ growing sense of “familyness” (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999). This distinction seems to be logistical, based upon when the child was adopted into his/her new family, but it could represent different cognitive paths with accepting the idea of adoption or of family. Regardless, the end point of the familial relationship is marked by a sense of belongingness.

Some participants noted the tension between belonging to the family and being born outside of it. One participant said, “I know I was told about what Mom and Dad went through to get me, how long they waited, and how glad they were to have me in the family.” These kinds of statements show acceptance into the family despite the lack of blood ties. This adoptee summarizes this sentiment as such: “I wasn’t their biological daughter, but I was still their real daughter.”

Rescue

More than half ($n = 56, 53\%$ of sample) of the participants’ adoption entrance narratives contained an element of rescue. Rescue was expressed implicitly by explaining the reason that the children’s birth parents could not or chose not to raise them (i.e., “I was told that the mother who gave birth to me was too young to raise me and didn't have a daddy for me”) or explicitly by demonstrating that the child underwent a period of abandonment (i.e., “I was in a foster home for a little over 3 months before my adoptive parents brought me home.”). In both scenarios, the adoptive parents came to rescue them from a potentially threatening experience. The adoptees seem to be expressing an implicit gratitude to their adoptive parents, thanking them for rescuing them. Some express their gratitude explicitly (i.e., “The fact is, I was given a phenomenal family because of her decision and I am grateful every day for my adoption”), but implicit gratitude is the overwhelming trend (i.e., “They did not have any money and she felt it was unfair to bring another child into that lifestyle....So she made the decision to give me up to a better
family”). The message in these types of narratives is that their adoptive family is the better family, and thus the adoptee is in a better place. Out of this theme emerged two subthemes – External attribution for adoption and These people are now my family.

**External attribution.** Interestingly, an overwhelming majority (n = 52) of these adoptees portrayed their birth parents’ decision as one of external circumstances. Their birth parents were too young (i.e., “My mom told me that my mother was 16 and felt she was too young to (take) care of a child, so she put me up for adoption”), unable to financially support a child (i.e., “my parents have also showed me pictures of my birth-mother who was too young to be able to financially support a child”), vague statements (“My understanding at the time was that my birth mother wasn’t able to raise me”) or other reasons out of the birth mother’s control (i.e., “My birth mother, Victoria, died in child birth and her sibling Clora and William adopted me and cared for me”). Regardless of the specific reason presented, this subtheme suggests that the adoption was not the birth parents’ fault. One adoptee clearly represented the propensity of adoptive parents to paint birth parents in a positive light, “My parents told me that my biological mother was too young and could not care for me so she made sure that I had a family to take care of me. They were very positive about my birthparents and never said anything negative about them or about the adoption process.”

**These people are now my family.** This subtheme represents the participants (n=13) who mentioned a period of limbo between their birth parents and their adoptive parents. Most often these children were placed in orphanages (i.e., “I was then put into an orphanage for several years, and then I was picked by the adoption agency for the family”) or in foster care (i.e., “I was given up at birth and stayed with a foster family for 6 weeks. At that time my parents were eligible to adopt me”). The theme of rescue is very salient in these narratives, given that these children spent time between sets of parents, and thus between lives. Oftentimes these feelings were expressed factually (i.e., “I had been a foster child until I was in fourth grade at which point I was finally adopted into my family and my name changed”). But occasionally, the adoptees were overt in the rescue theme (i.e., “I was told that I was ‘lucky’ to be in their family and ‘rescued’ from a life of
ill repute”). One adoptee expressed this sense of rescue after a period of limbo quite succinctly:

During the adoption process, a child psychologist told my parents that I never smiled or talked because I blamed myself for the car accident that killed my birth father and tore apart my birth family. However, once I was placed in the care of my adoptive family, within just a couple of hours I was chatting and smiling and laughing. It would seem that I understood that these people were now my family.

Reconnection

Eighteen percent (n = 19) of participants indicated that they desired to reconnect with their birth family. Some of the adoptees expressed some affect toward “the search” (i.e., fear, hesitation, excitement), and others were very factual in their indication to find their birth families (i.e., “I’m still looking for 2 brothers”). Oftentimes, the adoptees expressed a dichotomy of interest and fear of finding their birth families, as expressed by this adoptee: “A large part of me wants to try and find out for sure who my birthparents are, but I don't know how to look for them. And what happens if by some chance I find them and they want nothing to do with me? I'm not sure I could maintain my sanity.” These adoptees are curious, but apprehensive to expose themselves to the traumas of their past. Others recount the support of their adoptive parents in finding their birth families (i.e., “They also encouraged me to look for my birth mother and offered their support if I chose to do so”). These adoptees show parental support for their impending decision, but are still apprehensive of the consequences of going forward with “the search.” Contrarily, some adoptees indicate that they have already engaged in the searching process and subsequently met one or more members of their birth family.

Most of the adoptees that expressed a desire for reconnection with their birth family were particularly focused on their birth parents. They talked about their intentions for meeting their birth parents (i.e., “I am really wanting to find my birth mother due (to) my adoptive mother and I don’t speak”) and reasons that they want to reconnect, but have not done so yet (i.e., “After I turned 18 I was legally able to contact my birth parents and
haven't done so yet. I actually would like to contact them but haven't had time or have had second thoughts”). Some adoptees have already searched and found their birth parents (i.e., “My parents have always given me the opportunity to contact my birth mother, I did at the age of 17”) or searched and have been unsuccessful (i.e., a woman who has been engaging in a “34 year search”). Others simply express their adoptive parents’ support or nonsupport of the search for the birth family.

**Revelation**

A majority of adoptees’ narratives (n = 86, 82% of sample) contained a mention of the moment they discovered they were adopted. The revelation of their adopted status is an essential and apparently meaningful component to their adoption entrance story. Some participants portrayed the revelation as being either nonmemorable, (i.e., “I don't remember ‘the moment’ when I found out I was adopted because my family made it a natural, positive part of my childhood from the beginning”), internalized (i.e., “I’ve always known”) or traumatic (i.e., “It was an ugly scene”). Those who felt surprised, betrayed, or traumatized by their revelation provide more details, even dialogues, of the event. They seem to have a keener memory of the revelation than those who have “just grown up knowing.” Nevertheless, the revelation is a significant component of the adoption entrance narrative itself. The way the adoptees discovered their adopted status is just as significant as components of the narrative. Emerging from this theme are two subthemes: I’ve always known and Found out later.

**I’ve always known.** A majority (n=59) of those narratives containing the Revelation theme discussed the adoption as something they have always known about. Adoptees often repeat phrases and ideas such as “I’ve always known,” “I don’t remember the exact moment,” and “my adoptive parents have always been open about my adoption.” These participants portray their experience as “just a part of my life.” They have internalized the story and regard it as just another component of their lives, as opposed to a particular event that occurred. There was not a moment of surprise or confrontation. One adoptee said, “My parents were always very honest about my
adoption. It was never kept as a secret from me, but my family never dwelled upon it either. It was simply a fact I kind of always knew.” The adoptive parents talked to their child about adoption from a young age in order to acclimate him/her to the concept. These adoptees seem to feel satisfied with the way their adoptive parents constructed “adoption” for them as a natural and acceptable way of beginning life and entering the family.

Contrastingly, there were 29 adoptees who remember their experience of finding out they were adopted. Many recall that they were particularly young (i.e., “My adopted mother told me at five that I was adopted”) and some recall that they found out later in life (i.e., “My parents NEVER told me about my adoption and I never asked. I was able to discuss it with my aunt and cousin when I found out at age 31”). Those who found out in childhood, even if accidentally, seem to be more accepting of the news than those who found out in their teenage years or adulthood. The following stories illustrate the difference between those who are unsatisfied by their revelation and those who are satisfied by the manner in which they were told, despite the timing of the revelation. This story is very simple in the adoptee’s mind:

I remember my parents sitting me down when I was younger. It had been hard growing up and other kids had begun saying I was different because I am Asian. I think my parents felt the time was right. They told me that my birth mom was unable to raise me, and they chose to adopt me. They traveled to South Korea to pick me up, and I became part of the family. My adoption story is pretty simple, and I am glad I was adopted.

Other stories are more complicated and contain an element of surprise or unplanned effort. Some of these narratives are accepted by the adoptee, like the following story. This adoptee found out at the age of nine, after a neighborhood kid said:

“That figures, the adopted kid would lose us the game!” worse than that, the whole group agreed meaning that everyone seemed to know I was adopted. Yet there I stood and I still didn't know what "adopted" meant! I went home and found my Mother making the bed in her bedroom. I asked, "What does it mean to
be adopted?” At this point the color drained out of her face, she looked panicked and said “It means that you were chosen! It means that you are special because you were chosen by us to be a part of this family.” Over a period of days and weeks after the revelation of my adopted status, my folks did piece together a story line that told of a sixteen year old unwed mother and how she was forced to give me up when she and her family could not continue to support and care for me. They told of a cold and snowy day that they drove from our home to the children’s home from which I was adopted and how on the way home they stopped for dinner and I loved the mashed potatoes. From this point, I knew the rest of the story growing up in our town, etc. For me, adoption had become "okay" and wasn’t some(thing) to be hidden or railed against.

Some narratives with the element of surprise are not as accepted by the adoptee. He/she may feel betrayed or shocked, and may react to that poorly. The following narrative illustrates such a reaction:

My adoption was a great family secret. I found out that I was adopted when I read some papers that my parents were completing about my brother also adopted. I was 16 years old. I did not confront neither of them until approximately 2 years later. It was not a pretty scene. I was angry about a punishment that I was being given and angry I lash out against them about them not being honest with me about being adopted. It was an ugly scene with my mother crying and telling me she loved as if she had me herself and my dad looking like I had slapped him. However, after the scene was over and I felt like I had destroyed the only people who loved me…

Thus, there was not a common relationship between the age at which the adoptee discovered their adoption and his/her reaction, except that those who found out “before they could remember” (i.e., ‘I’ve always known’ subtheme) who seemed to be accepting of the adoption. They adoptees did not go through the trauma of the revelation. They grew up with the knowledge and their situation seemed normal. However, as stated above, a narrative containing the ‘I found out later’ subtheme does not predict a feeling of
shock or betrayal completely. Certain parents and children handle the stress of the revelation in differing ways.

Deception

Thirteen percent (n=14) of participants reported deception within their adoption entrance narrative. Some found out as a surprise from another person (i.e., “The sister blurted out to me that I was adopted”) and some found out themselves (i.e., “I found out that I was adopted when I read some papers that my parents were completing about my brother also adopted”). Others always knew they were adopted, but later found out that their stories were partially inaccurate, as exemplified by this adoptee:

My Parents have always been open about it. My parents told me that my birth mum was only 16 years old and could not raise me at that age so she loved me that much that she gave me up to have a better life. Since (then) that I have found my BM (birth mother) and she has told me the truth about what happened.

The Deception theme upholds the forcefulness dimension of Owen’s (1984) criteria for a theme. When deception is present in a narrative, it has a distinct impact on the adoption story. Deception often affects adoptees in different ways, ranging from immediate acceptance to lingering resentment toward the adoptive parents. The more negative reactions are often accompanied with a story of that deception’s impact on their lives. The following is an excerpt from an adoptee who was told she was adopted in a deceptive manner at age 11:

As I grew older I would ask my adoptive mother questions about where I came from, and if she knew anything about my biological history. She would say no, and be angry with me for even asking. When I married and became pregnant with my first child, I called the adoption agency where I came from, and was given "non-identifying" information about my biological background - such as, my nationality, my parents' hair and eye color, their professions, and religions. When I told my adoptive mom, excited to be able to share the news, she pursed her lips, turned away from me, saying, “I knew that already.” Every step of the way it was
made very clear to me, that talk of my very being (adopted) was taboo. So, I
gained the opinion (however right, or wrong) through the years, that not only was
I not wanted by my biological mother; but my adoptive mother didn't care how I
felt about it.

Others would have liked the deception to be handled in a different manner, but seem to
be understanding of how difficult of a task it must be. This participant exemplifies this
attitude:

- My adoptive mother sat me down when I was 11 years old, at our kitchen table, to
tell me she had to talk to me about something. Mind you - I'm 11 at the time - a
few months away from starting my period, and heading down that pre-teen road
that is rocky enough on its own!! She said, "You know you're adopted, right?"
That's all she said - I had no idea what she was talking about - but when it hit me,
I burst into tears, and couldn't stop. She might as well have hit me with a brick on
the side of my head. It was like she decided when I turned 11, to tell me that I
didn't belong there. I know that's not what she meant it; and she was obviously
nervous, but she handled it wrong.

**Different**

- Like Deception, the Different theme upholds the forcefulness component of
Owen’s (1984) classification of a narrative theme. Nine adoptees (n=9, 8.5% of sample)
expressed they felt outcast because of their label as an adoptee, and that feeling was the
undertone of the entire story. These adoptees feel different because they know that their
life stories began differently, and that affects the rest of their life stories. One participant
expressed a feeling of difference:

- I was adopted WAY back when it was popular to tell adopted kids ‘they were
special’ because the adoptive family wanted and loved them so much. This never
sat well with me for two reasons -- first, it made me feel even more different from
other kids than I already felt and, second, it put a lot of pressure on me to, in fact,
BE special.
The adoptees often expressed feelings of difference through reports of feeling outcast (i.e., “It was like she decided when I turned 11, to tell me that I didn't belong there”), or through their conceptualization of adoption (i.e., “My adoptive mother would rock me to sleep with a song she made up about me being ‘Mommy’s adopted baby girl’” or “I was told that I was not ‘biologically’ a part of the family but rather adopted”).

Some narratives depict Difference as a response from their peers about their adoption, as with this adoptee, “I went to school and shared with some of my friends that I was adopted and remember how they teased me because they thought I was somehow different now.” In these cases, other people mention their “difference” as an adopted kid.

Artifacts

The final theme centers on a mention of an artifact, or physical thing. People attach meaning to certain artifacts, especially those that represent a significant occurrence in their lives. Twenty-one participants (n=21, 20% of sample) discussed artifacts within their narratives. Generally, the artifacts mentioned are those from or representing the birth parents, or those given to the adoptees to explain adoption. Thus, the subthemes for this theme are: From adoptive parents and From birth parents.

From adoptive parents. Ten of the narratives containing the Artifacts theme specifically referred to artifacts from their adoptive parents. These artifacts either welcomed their new child into the family or explained adoption to the child. Like any parents, adoptive parents take nesting steps to welcome and comfort a new baby. Some of these nesting procedures may be unique since adopted children often have to be legitimized as a part of the family (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Parents may have to establish their family as legitimate through words (i.e., explaining their family to others) or through artifacts, as seen here. Adoptees refer to a homemade baby blanket, a family photo album engraved with “not flesh of my flesh, but still my child, instead of growing under my heart you grew in it,” and pictures of their adoptive family celebrating the arrival of the new baby.
The second function of adoptive parent artifacts is to explain the concept of adoption to the children. This usually comes in the form of a children’s book, as explained by one adoptee, “I had a book ‘Why was I Adopted’ and I remember bringing it to show and tell in elementary school.” Adoption is a complicated concept, and these books explain adoption in a way that children can understand. An adoptive mother’s diary was also cited as a gift to the adoptee to help explain the process which her adoptive parents underwent in order to make her part of the family. Adoptees remember these books as the way that adoption was presented to them. In this way, these books are particularly significant in their lives.

*From birth parents.* The remaining adoptees mentioned artifacts given to them by their birth parents through various channels or representing their birth family. Artifacts are often “left” for the adoptive child to receive when he/she is old enough, or the artifacts “come with” the child during the time of adoption. Artifacts falling into this category include a necklace and letters from birth parents. The adoptees do not elaborate on the contents of the letters, but mention them as a notable part of their adoption story. These letters are indications that their birth families care about them. The second type of artifact from the birth parents is literally depicting the birth parents – photographs of the birth parents. Again, these adoptees merely acknowledge the presence of these pictures and do not elaborate on the content of them.

Regardless of the type of artifact in this subtheme, the adoptive parents are shown to be the gatekeepers of these gifts. The adoptive parents give the children the gifts “when they think it’s time” or at a young age. The timing of the gift-giving is seemingly a function of the children’s age and maturity, but also sends the message that the adoptive parents are the primary parents, and regulate in some way the child’s knowledge of his/her “other” family.
Table 1.

*Frequencies of Adoption Entrance Narratives Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Participants (N = 105)</th>
<th>Percentage of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chosen</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnection</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self Concept Variables**

To address the remaining three research questions, the means for self esteem, identity, and generalized trust were examined for each adoption entrance narrative theme. The data is descriptive in nature and statistical differences were not examined because of the lack of independence in the themes. Each participant’s narrative contains multiple themes.

The second research question queried the difference in self esteem among the adoption entrance narrative themes. The means were compared based upon the presence or absence of an adoption entrance narrative theme (See Table 2). The lowest mean in self esteem was in the Different theme ($M = 25.11, SD = 4.32$). The highest means were found in the Destiny ($M = 28.11, SD = 6.66$) and Rescue ($M = 28.15, SD = 6.23$) themes. Thus, the range of means fell between 25.09 and 28.15.
The third research question queried the difference in identity development among the adoptee’s entrance narrative themes. The means were compared based upon the presence or absence of an adoption entrance narrative theme (See Table 2). There are two dimensions of identity – identity commitment (\( M = 67.22, SD = 11.76 \)) and identity exploration (\( M = 63.13, SD = 11.77 \)). For the identity commitment measure, the lowest means were Deception (\( M = 60.99, SD = 12.09 \)) and Reconnection (\( M = 60.98, SD = 14.34 \)). The highest mean was Destiny (\( M = 65.46, SD = 10.27 \)). Thus, the range of means fell between 60.98 and 65.46. For identity exploration, the means had a smaller range (\( M = 58.24 \) to \( M = 61.16 \)).

The fourth research question queried the difference in generalized trust among adoption entrance narrative themes. The means were compared based upon the presence or absence of an adoption entrance narrative theme (See Table 2). There are two dimensions of generalized trust – cynicism (\( M = 33.47, SD = 47 \)) and trust (\( M = 35.42, SD = 8.65 \)). When compared amongst the various adoption entrance narrative themes, the cynicism component of generalized trust varied very little. The range was between \( M = 29.66 \) and \( M = 31.81 \). In terms of the trust component of generalized trust, the range was wider (\( M = 28.69 \) to \( M = 35.61 \)), with Reconnection at \( M = 28.69 (SD = 10.57) \) and Different at \( M = 35.61 (SD = 8.57) \).
Table 2.

*Self Concept Means for Adoption Entrance Narrative Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Self Esteem</th>
<th>Identity_Exp</th>
<th>Identity_Com</th>
<th>GTrust_Trust</th>
<th>GTrust_Cyn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>28.11 (6.66)</td>
<td>61.16 (9.81)</td>
<td>65.46 (10.27)</td>
<td>33.82 (7.47)</td>
<td>31.11 (7.09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chosen</td>
<td>27.61 (6.29)</td>
<td>59.61 (10.03)</td>
<td>64.25 (10.41)</td>
<td>33.73 (6.51)</td>
<td>29.67 (6.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>27.42 (6.88)</td>
<td>60.11 (10.65)</td>
<td>63.58 (10.61)</td>
<td>32.94 (6.61)</td>
<td>30.67 (7.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue</td>
<td>28.15 (6.23)</td>
<td>58.41 (10.57)</td>
<td>63.74 (11.67)</td>
<td>32.05 (8.17)</td>
<td>29.7 (8.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnection</td>
<td>26.51 (6.91)</td>
<td>58.96 (14.53)</td>
<td>60.98 (14.34)</td>
<td>28.69 (10.57)</td>
<td>29.73 (11.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
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<td>59.27 (10.42)</td>
<td>63.31 (10.72)</td>
<td>32.87 (7.32)</td>
<td>30.59 (7.61)</td>
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<td>Deception</td>
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<td>58.33 (8.59)</td>
<td>60.99 (12.06)</td>
<td>30.63 (8.42)</td>
<td>31.21 (9.02)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different</td>
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<td>58.24 (10.44)</td>
<td>62.67 (10.97)</td>
<td>35.61 (8.57)</td>
<td>31.81 (7.71)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*number in parentheses is SD*
Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify themes within adoption entrance narratives, and then to find the relationships between those themes and self concept outcome variables. In addressing RQ1, which sought to determine the themes of adoption entrance narratives, nine themes were identified with corresponding subthemes for all but two themes. RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, inquired about the potential differences in the self concept variables self esteem, identity, and generalized trust, based upon the participants’ identified story. To address these research questions, quantitative analyses were performed to determine the relation between self concept and adoption entrance narratives. The implications for these findings will be discussed in the following section through the lenses of attribution theory, expectancy violation theory, narrative theory, and Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) study on adoption entrance narrative themes. The section will conclude with explicit implications for those within the adoption community, such as adoptive families and adoption practitioners and social workers.

Research Findings and Implications

Attribution Theory

When discussing their adoption entrance narratives, adoptees are expressing their perspectives and attributions about their life circumstances. Their narratives illuminate the story-tellers’ opinions of the people responsible for their place in life. Who was responsible for your adoption? Whose fault is it, for better or for worse, that you were placed for adoption? Who is responsible for the way you feel about adoption? One theory that can shed light upon these questions is attribution theory (Heider, 1958). Attribution theory states that humans naturally desire to understand the behaviors and motives of others. The theory posits that people try to understand the behaviors of themselves and others by attributing the behavior either internally or externally. When attributed internally, the actor has control of his/her actions. He/she actively chose to behave in that
way. When attributed externally, it is not the person’s fault for his/her actions. The circumstances were not within the person’s control; instead, an outside or higher power holds responsibility for the actions.

The adoptees who communicate the Chosen Child theme are internally attributing the positive aspects of their adoption to their adoptive parents. They are placing responsibility for the success of their adoption on the adoptive parents’ choices, particularly on the choice to pick me as their child. The Chosen children were picked specifically by their parents in an active and direct manner. The adoptees communicating this theme seem to be implicitly grateful to their parents for making these correct, conscious decisions. If it were not for their adoptive parents, their life could have been vastly and perhaps painfully different.

Communicating the Destiny theme, on the other hand, can be understood as an act of external attribution. The adoptees are relinquishing responsibility to a higher power or force for their adoption. They are not faulting their birth parents for their circumstances, nor are they blaming their adoptive parents for their decisions. If it was fate, then it must be right. The Destiny theme provides a positive framework for adoptees to build upon when grappling with the concept of adoption. Adoptees who express Destiny seem to be externally attributing the circumstances surrounding their births. The narratives that contained the Destiny theme feel that adoption was “SO meant to be,” and not a consequence of negative actions or a circumstance imposed upon their family. According to Palacios and Sanchez-Sandoval (2005), adopted children need to reconcile with their early life traumas, whether the child remembers the adoption or not. Perhaps explaining their experience through higher powers helps adoptees view adoption as a positive phenomenon. One participant portrayed this cognitive development directly, “I was never ashamed of the fact that I was adopted as my parents made it very clear that God brought us together.”

Another theme identifying with external attributions is the Rescue theme. In many narratives, the adoptees reported that their adoptive parents spoke of their birth mothers’ circumstances in a positive light. They would say, “she didn’t have the means to take care
of you” or “she wanted you to have a better life,” as opposed to blaming the birth mother for her situation. An explanation for the tendency to externally attribute potentially negative behavior can again be found in attribution theory (Heider, 1984). Heider (1984) posits that people emotionally guard themselves from wrongful behavior. They attribute negative experiences to good people as externally-based, and positive experiences to good people as internally-based, and visa versa with inherently bad people. Here, adoptive parents do not want to portray their child’s adoption in a negative light. This is both protective of their own mental health, and meant to project that positivity upon their children. As previously discussed, personal myths are not just mere stories, they are a person’s presentation of self, their identity (Bennett, 1986; Chase, 2005; Frank, 1995; Schechtman, 1996). These adoptees are choosing to focus on the positive aspects of their birth story in order to present themselves in a positive light to others and to themselves. There are a few internally-based negative attributions (i.e., “From what the social workers told my adoptive parents, my birth mother was young and not very responsible, and either wasn’t willing or able to care for her three children alone”), but very few.

The feeling of rescue is innate in an adoption situation, but it is significant that these adoptees expressed that feeling. The strong presence of the rescue theme is expected, given that Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) found a rescue theme present in 17 of 18 adoptive parents’ stories. This shows that this theme is resonating with adoptive children and they are internalizing it as their own story. The other half of adoptees who did not give an explanation for their birth parents’ choice seem to be more forward-thinking with their adoption. Every experience is punctuated with a starting and ending point, and these adoptees’ life stories begin with their adoptive parents and family. They are undemanding of an explanation for their current situation. Perhaps this was an element of the adoption situation that was not stressed to them as children, or perhaps they are uninterested in their past life.

Both themes that contain external attributions, Destiny and Rescue, show comparatively high levels of self esteem in the participant sample, but arguably for different reasons. If adoptees need to reconcile their life traumas, (Palacios & Sanchez-
Sandoval, 2005), then the adoptees who communicate the Destiny theme have done so in a positive way. Those with the Destiny theme are higher in self esteem ($M = 28.11$) and higher in identity commitment ($M = 65.46$) than those with other themes. Perhaps these are more spiritual or religious people, as specifically indicated by their mention of God or Jesus in several narratives. Some feel that they were The One picked by God for this family. The miracles (i.e., a Mother’s Day present) accompanying these adoptions were validations that the circumstances surrounding this adoption were “right.” In fact, studies have found that religiosity and happiness are positively correlated (Pew Research Center, 2006), and other studies have found that happiness and self esteem are positively correlated (Cheng & Furnham, 2003). Also, those who undergo potentially harmful life experiences, such as an adoption, may find solace in the idea of fate or a higher power.

It is significant to note that the birthmother has much more of a presence in the Rescue and other entrance narrative themes than the birth father and the rest of the biological family. Oftentimes, adoptees note that their birthmother made the decision to place them for adoption. Perhaps this is a societal message, that women chose what to do in the occurrence of an unexpected pregnancy, or perhaps the focus on the birthmother is a cultural occurrence. This specific language could be fostered in adoption circles and agencies. Regardless of reason for the focus on the mother, it is important to note this phenomenon. Future research could investigate the focus on the birthmother in adoption entrance narratives and in the adoption culture globally.

Those utilizing the Rescue theme also have higher self esteem ($M = 28.15$) than those with other themes, but for different reasons than with the Destiny theme. As stated above, those who externally attribute negative experiences, such as being “left” by their birth parents, are ego protecting. They are not blaming themselves for the negative precursors or repercussions of their adoptive situations. With the These people are now my family subtheme, there is a feeling of belongingness and acceptance in these stories. These positive feelings may endorse higher self esteem in the child. Thus, at first, the Rescue theme seems to have negative undertones, but perhaps external attribution functions as an ego protector and thus fosters relatively high self esteem.
Expectancy Violation Theory

Expectancy violation theory posits that humans have expectations about what a given interaction should and will be like (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). We become aware of these behavioral expectancies when they are violated. When a violation occurs, it elicits an arousal wherein the receiver decides his/her opinion of the violation based upon two things: 1) an evaluation of the violation itself, and 2) an evaluation of the person committing the violation. Expectancy violation theory was originally a theory of nonverbal communication in initial interaction, but has since expanded its scope into verbal communication and into points of the relationship beyond the initial meeting.

Narratives containing the Revelation theme acknowledge expectations for the delivery of the adoption entrance narrative either implicitly or explicitly. When adoptees are supportive of the method by which they heard their adoption entrance narrative, they are communicating that their expectations have been met. Indeed, they often appreciate the method of delivery, as with those who “just always knew.” Their adoption entrance narrative is a natural part of their lives, just as a child’s birth story. Occasionally these stories become a child’s favorite story, recalled on their birthday or before bed, as with this adoptee: “It was my and my brother's favorite bedtime story as little kids.” Family stories are often told at special occasions or as special gifts (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004), and this fairy tale orientation demonstrates that familial nature. Family members recount stories, and in so doing emphasize “important” or “valued” family occurrences (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Vangelisti, Crumley & Baker, 1999). These stories are told as a bonding mechanism for the family, an act that brings the family closer and strengthens their ties. Adoption seems to bring these families together.

However, when their expectations were violated, as in Deception and Different themes, the adoptees have a more negative reaction to their situation. Of all the themes discovered in the adoption entrance narratives, the Deception theme shows to be the most hurtful. This seems natural in that people would not react to deception favorably as this violates the present role expectation. In this theme, the adoptee is communicating a sense of shock and confusion as to why his/her parents were not truthful. Deception sometimes
breeds hostility between the parents and the adoptive child, which can occur in retrospect or last into the present. An extreme example of this hostility is depicted in this adoptee’s account of the deception which surrounded her adoption:

My "parents" didn't tell me a birth story. I found out that I was adopted during an argument between my "mother" and her sister. The sister blurted out to me that I was adopted. I was also told I was adopted by my "father's" brother. A day after the argument between the two sisters, I asked my babysitter, who was also a 'friend of the family', if she knew anything about me being adopted and she bursted into tears. I was never told any stories about my birth or times when I was a baby, etc. Both of the people who raised me are dead now, but if they were still alive they wouldn't tell me a thing. They were extremely abusive physically and mentally, and I wish I never knew them.

This negative reaction to deception can be seen through expectancy violation theory (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). The current study posits that adoptees, like other children, expect their parents to be truthful with them about their past. Likewise, children expect that their parents are indeed their birth parents, unless told otherwise. Thus, when adoptees discover that they were deceived in their birth stories, they react unfavorably toward the deceiver. Sometimes this negative reaction is overcome, and sometimes it is not.

Given that adoptees with the Deception theme report having comparatively low identity commitment ($M = 60.99$), this negative reaction is related to an adoptee’s self concept. A person’s identity contains two components – the incorporation of one’s personality with his/her context and the individual’s sense of coherence and continuity of personality over time (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1997). In terms of the first element, if these adoptees see other children as having a consistent life story and themselves as having an inconsistent life story, they may feel a disconnect between their personal experience (i.e., personality) and their context. Throughout our lives, we compare ourselves to significant and general others to see how we “hold up” (Festinger, 1954; Mead, 1934), and in this case, the adoptees do not “hold up.” In terms of the second
element of identity, these individuals do not feel a sense of coherence and continuity because their birth story and sense of family changed dramatically and suddenly. If an adoptee created a sense of identity before his/her revelation, this identity will be jarred after the Deception. This explains the relatively low identity commitment levels.

The other theme that emphasized an expectancy violation is Different. People, especially adolescents, expect to be like and feel like their peers (Rosenberg, 1965, 1985). According to Festinger’s social comparison theory (1954), people seek to understand themselves by understanding how they compare to others. Mostly, we compare ourselves to those who we feel have reasonable similarity, such as a child’s classmates (Festinger, 1954). Thus, when adoptees compare themselves to most others, they may feel different in a variety of ways. An adoptee’s expectation of similarity to others is violated and they may feel negatively toward that violation. Statistically and socially, most people live with their biological families or minimally with parts of their biological family. These adoptees are cognizant of this, and see it as a difference between themselves and the “normal” population. Family and personal stories are not held in a vacuum; they are exposed to and react to outsiders’ perspectives (Langellier & Peterson, 1993), and some families must respond outwardly to cultural perspectives and norms (Tillman-Healy, 2001).

Likewise, their peers may deem the adoptee “different,” which several narratives highlight (i.e., “That figures, the adopted kid would lose us the game”). These expectancy violations uphold Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism theory, which states that we construct our idea of self through others’ perceptions. We construct our identities through others’ perceptions of us, and if our peers deem us “different,” then we will most likely feel so. Some adoptees depict other’s construction of their “differentness” as a kind of self-consciousness, as with this participant:

They told me I was adopted Dec. 1954 and I was 16 mo(nths) old at the time. They even celebrated it every year. At first I was proud and of course as a child it was great. More presents and then of course 2 days later more presents because it
was Christmas. Eventually I came to hate the celebration. It made me feel as though I wasn't a part of the family. I was different. I always felt different. As discussed previously, this sense of fitting in is particularly important in adolescence, and the feeling of being outcast can carry into adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1997). Specifically, if significant others voice their feelings of an adoptee being “different,” it is likely that this will be especially salient to the adoption entrance narrative.

The quantitative results of this theme uphold the meaning behind it. These adoptees in fact do feel different from their peers. They have high trust of generalized others ($M = 35.61$), meaning they see the general other as trustworthy, altruistic, and independently strong. However, they report relatively low self esteem ($M = 25.09$), which means that they evaluate their self concept as relatively bad. These adoptees have high regard for others, and low regard for themselves. Meaning, they participate in upward social comparison, comparing themselves with a reference group of people they strive to emulate, these adoptees will consequently feel inadequate (Festinger, 1954).

Narrative Theory

Just as this study was structured using narrative theory (Fisher, 1984), the results can be interpreted through its lens. As previously discussed, each person constructs a personal myth or narrative to synthesize various components of our life and self concept (McAdams, 1993). Narrative theory posits that humans assess the strength of narratives based upon rationality and coherence, where rationality is the external validity or ‘ring of truth’ of a story and coherence is the internal probability or credibility of a story. In their adoption entrance narratives, adoptees expressed that upholding coherence is particularly important to their psychological development.

The Coming Home narrative emphasizes coherence, or continuity from the child’s past life to his/her present life. In this theme, the adoptees show that their adoptive family is in fact their “real” family. They do not distinguish their adoptive family’s home from their home, instead they use phrases such as “and then they brought me home” as
opposed to “and then they brought me to their home.” The adoptees never saw themselves as an outsider to the family. This family’s home was always their home. The Coming Home theme is not preoccupied by the existence of a “second family” somewhere, but does not imply a disconnect from them either. There is an acknowledgement of the past, but not a focus on it. The entrance into the home marks the beginning of the adoptee’s life while acknowledging their past life.

Likewise, The Coming Home narrative emphasizes coherence within the family itself. Family narratives themselves create cohesiveness amongst family members (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Stone, 1988), and these stories emphasize that cohesiveness. The Coming Home narrative in particular creates a sense of wholeness in the family, despite the varying circumstances that brought the family together. It explicitly emphasizes the “familyness” of the adoptee’s family. As Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) note, “We consider family life, as we do life as a whole, to be a continuous struggle to create, maintain, and/or restore narrative coherence in the face of unexpected contingencies of lived experiences. In family life, there are bound to be bumps on the road, twists of fate, unanticipated losses, shifts in the plot line” (p. 515). These narratives pay particular attention to the necessity to create and maintain “family.”

A stronger desire to be connected with the past is present in the Artifacts theme. These adoptees want to create a coherent personal myth by maintaining an artifact of the past. This theme represents an adoptee’s search for comfort in a sometimes disconcerting struggle with adoption. Attaching oneself to an artifact from one’s adopted or birth parents may function as a sense of validation of love. For many adoptees, these artifacts are some of the only pieces of information they have of their birth parents.

Whereas Coming Home and Artifacts acknowledge their past life, Reconnection communicates a desire for their past life to be a part of their present life. These adoptees want to reconcile the void that has been created between their two lives and create a coherent life story. They want to integrate threads of both families into their narrative. Regardless of where the adoptees are in their search process, those who expressed a reconnection as part of their birth story seem to be articulating a feeling that their
entrance story is incomplete without the final step of reunion with the birth family. Although the research prompt did not mention the birth parent search, many adoptees feel that their birth story cannot end without mention of locating their birth parent. The feeling of unfinished story is supported by past research that found that the one of the strongest motivators for adoptees to search for their birth parents is because they “felt a void, a missing link, a discontinuity in life” (March, 1995; Sachdev, 1992, p. 58). The adoptees expressing Reconnection show that their adoption narrative cannot be finished without meeting their birth family.

A feeling of incompleteness in the narratives is directly supported by the quantitative findings. As previously discussed, a person’s identity is closely linked to the content and tone of the personal myth (Schechtman, 1996), and the current study verified that concept. Those with the Reconnection theme are comparatively low in identity commitment ($M = 60.98$), which indicates that they are unsure of their identity. These findings are also upheld by adoption search literature, which cite the need for a more cohesive identity or stronger self concept as a reason to search for birthparents (Sachdev, 1992; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). They are searching for a concrete basis for their self concept and identity. This concept of searching for one’s identity is consistent with the desire to search for one’s birth parents. These adoptees want to discover their past lives to discover themselves. The significance of searching for the birth parents in particular lies in a curiosity to “get the whole story.” Adoptees often desire an explanation for their unique position in the world (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1993). They want to find out what they were and what they could have been. Blood ties are strong, and adoptees are aware of the disconnect of blood and law in their worlds.

Nevertheless, many of these adoptees express their reservations in finding their birth parents. They want to find their birth parents, but are apprehensive about doing so, like the example of the adoptee who, after he was 18, he was “legally able to contact my birth parents and haven’t done so yet. I actually would like to contact them but haven’t had time or have had second thoughts.” This apprehension can be explained through the self concept quantitative data of the present study, which indicated that participants with
the Reconnection theme had comparatively low levels of generalized trust ($M = 28.69$). This demonstrates that these adoptees are hesitant about the human character in general, and this is illuminated in their distress regarding their birth family search. Implicitly or explicitly, these adoptees are cautious of their birth parents because of their past. One adoptee, referenced above, presents this argument as such, “a large part of me wants to try and find out for sure who my birthparents are, but I don't know how to look for them. And what happens if by some chance I find them and they want nothing to do with me? I'm not sure I could maintain my sanity.” In fact, Wrightsman (1964) reported a strong correlation ($r = .65$) between negative generalized trust and dissatisfaction with one’s self-concept. Likewise, in the present study, adoptees reporting the Reconnection theme exhibited lower identity commitment and generalized trust scores than adoptees reporting other themes. Future research could investigate this relationship to uncover the forces contributing to possible differences in identity and generalized trust.

Comparative Analysis of Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) Entrance Narrative Themes

In 2001, Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) completed a study on adoption entrance narratives through the perspective of adoptive parents. In this study, the researchers interviewed adoptive parents about the themes they constructed when creating their children’s adoption entrance narratives. The five themes found were Dialectical Tensions, Destiny, Compelling Connection, Rescue and Legitimacy. The current study utilized these findings as a structure from which to explore adoption entrance narratives from the adoptee’s point of view. The study was constructed under the transactional communication model, which suggests that messages disseminated are not identical to those received, nor does the intention of the receiver always become reality. The findings from the current study support and explain Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) findings.

Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) Dialectical Tensions explains that adoptive parents feel a tension between their feelings of gratitude and pure joy for the gift of a child, and the perception of sorrow and loss from the birth parents. Although this theme was not found explicitly from the adoptee perspective, it could be considered implicit
throughout the narratives. For example, in the Reconnection theme, adoptees often considered the state of their adoptive parents and validated them as good parents. One participant said, “I have never pursued finding my birth parents identity as I know who my real parents are, the ones who have loved me and raised me.” The current study’s Coming Home theme also expressed the dialectical tension of having two families, and living with the non-biological one. One adoptee expressed this tension as such, “I wasn’t their biological daughter, but I was still their real daughter.” This tension of having two families is something adoptees often acknowledge in their entrance narratives. Whereas the parents are managing the feelings of both the adoptive and the birth family at the point of placement, the adoptees reveal tensions regarding The Search.

Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) themes Destiny and Compelling Connection resonated through the adoptees’ narratives in the form of the current study’s Destiny and Chosen Child themes, respectively. The two studies’ Destiny themes were quite similar – both highlighted the inevitability and rightness of the child’s entrance in a particular family. Both studies found that a higher power such as God or, more vaguely, fate was responsible for the placement of the child in the family. The consistency here reveals that the Destiny theme from the parents resonated quite soundly with the adoptees. Krusiewicz and Wood’s Compelling Connection theme was similar to the current study’s Chosen Child theme in that both highlighted the parents’ immediate draw to the child. In Krusiewicz and Wood’s study, Compelling Connection emphasized the parents’ ‘love at first site’ as opposed to the active decision found in the current study. Here, adoptees validate their adoption by claiming that their adoptive parents were actively responsible for the successful and positive outcome. Additionally, threads of Coming Home are found in the Compelling Connection theme, where adoptive parents emphasize the family’s ‘familyness’ through ‘physical connection through appearance’ and placing emphasis on the likeness between them and their adoptive children. The Coming Home theme of the current study also emphasizes the family’s cohesiveness and belongingness. Non-adoptive families also use stories to create togetherness in their families (Jorgenson
& Bochner, 2004; Vangelisti, et al., 1999), but adoptive families use these narratives to validate and establish their families as such.

These two studies both found a Rescue theme in the adoption entrance narratives, which is anticipated given the nature of adoption. The Rescue theme of Krusiewicz and Wood’s study emphasized saving the child from threatening circumstances, ranging from mistreatment in orphanages to birth parents financially unable to care for their children. The Rescue theme in the current study encompassed those situations as well, but also incorporated an implicit or explicit gratitude for their rescue, as with the adoptee who said, “The fact is, I was given a phenomenal family because of (my birthmom’s) decision and I am grateful every day for my adoption.” Interestingly, both Rescue themes emphasize an external attribution for the birth parents’ situation. The birth parents are generally portrayed as loving, good people who got into a tough position, and inevitably made the right decision to place the child for adoption. This aspect of Krusiewicz and Wood’s Rescue theme strongly resonated in the adoptee’s version of the entrance narrative.

The final Krusiewicz and Wood theme, Legitimacy, was not as salient in the adoptee point of view, but still surfaced in various places. The Legitimacy theme justifies the family structure to both family members and outsiders, which is a function of many non-normative families’ stories (Galvin, 2006a.; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Tillman-Healy, 2001; Yngvesson, 2000). Some adoptees explicitly validated their adoption, such as one participant who said, “Adoption, like birth, can be a wonderful introduction to a family.” Others expressed legitimacy more implicitly by showing admiration for it (i.e., “adoption is love”). Regardless, the Legitimacy theme does not seem to reflect in the adoptees’ stories. Perhaps this is because the parents accomplished their goal of legitimizing the family, and the children internalized this sentiment. Possibly the children do not even consider the idea that their family would not be a family. It just is. This lack of Legitimacy in the adoptees’ may also be a function of the growing prevalence of adoption. As discussed previously, adoption is becoming a more common way to form a family and thus more and more people are being affected by adoption (Evan B.
Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997; Kreider, 2003). It is conceivable that it is becoming less necessary to legitimize this family group and thus the adoptees do not incorporate Legitimacy into their stories.

Four themes of the current study – Revelation, Artifacts, Deception and Different – were not significantly present in the adoptive parents’ entrance narratives. The absence of the Revelation theme may demonstrate a difference in perspective of the two populations. In the current study, the prompt asked “what did your parents tell you about adoption?” not “how did your parents tell you about adoption?” Yet most of the adoptees still included the manner in which they found out about their adoption. This speaks to the importance of how parents tell their children about adoption, something perhaps the parents of the Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) study did not voice as strongly. Similarly, the lack of an Artifacts theme in parents’ narratives shows that adoptive parents may not recognize the importance of particular objects in a child’s life. People naturally attach emotional importance to certain objects of their childhood (i.e., teddy bears, baby blankets), but the objects in adoptees’ narratives represent a piece of their life that is often missing. Sometimes the only piece of information they have of their birth mother is a picture of her. Adoptive parents did not incorporate these Artifacts into their narratives, perhaps because the objects are not as significant to them.

Notably, the finding of Deception in adoption entrance narratives is contradictory with this previous research. If the parents are not reporting using this theme or one similar, then why are the adoptees citing the use of deception? There are two explanations for this disconnect. Firstly, in previous studies on adoptive parents, the participants self-selected themselves for a study on adoption stories. If they were uncomfortable or regretful of the way their child learned about his/her adoption, then the parent would most likely choose not to participate. Like every study that is subject to self-selection bias, only those willing to share their stories will participate. Thus, the sample might be skewed toward positive experiences and effective parenting. Secondly, this study sought participants from websites and groups that are created for social support or mental health. The present study received all but two of its participants through online
adoption support groups, birth family location groups, and discussion boards. Thus, perhaps the sample was somewhat focused on negative experiences – those who had trouble with their adoption experience or who are having trouble attempting to find their birth parents.

Finally, the Different theme from the current study seems to be influenced by many sources, not just the adoptive parents. Participants demonstrating this theme attribute classmates’, peers’, family members’, parents’ and their own words and perceptions for feeling different. Thus, either the parents of Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) sample were unaware that their entrance narratives created this unease, or this feeling of Difference came from sources other than the parents. Adoptees gain information about adoption from various sources including peers, online support groups, various media sources and literature on adoption, and all contribute to one’s perception of the meaning of adoption.

As referenced above, the current study constructed under the transactional communication model framework, claiming that messages sent will be received and interpreted through the receiver’s lens. This study’s findings validated that perspective by comparing adoptive parents’ construction of entrance narratives with adopted children’s interpretation of those stories. Several themes resonated quite clearly with both groups, and other themes were rather distinct to a population. However, even the themes unique to the parents were incorporated into the children’s stories in more subtle manners. Perhaps the children internalized their parents’ messages, or perhaps the messages were less clear than the parents intended. Likewise, the unique children’s themes could have been influenced by sources other than their parents or come from parents unlike those sampled in Krusiewicz and Wood’s (2001) study. Thus, the transactional approach is an effective structure to utilize regarding familial narratives and their effect on individuals.

**Implications for the Adoption Community**

These findings indicate that adoptees’ experiences are related to the themes found in their adoption entrance narrative. This shows that family narratives are indeed
impactful on not only family functioning, but also on members’ self concepts. Thus, practical implications for these findings are vast. As established at the onset of the current project, these findings can be translated into practical suggestions for adoptive parents as well as practitioners and social workers who work with adoptive families.

The information generated from this study can assist social workers and other professionals in teaching future and current adoptive parents how to talk to their children about adoption. Adoptive families express high levels of interest in educational programs about raising adopted children; and those who receive preparation (i.e., workshops on family communication, attachment, and behavior management) exhibit more realistic expectations for the adoption (Brooks et al., 2005). Realistic expectations, in turn, reduce the likelihood of adoption disruption and enhance positive adoption adjustment (Sar, 2000). Adoptive families need to understand the impact that adoption entrance narratives have on the psychological development of their children.

Thus, adoption social service professionals should stress to adoptive parents the necessity of creating the most positive and cohesive story possible for their child. Parents must work to create an entrance narrative with a positive tone. Previous research shows that a person’s identity is closely related to the tone of one’s personal myth (Schechtman, 1996), and the current study supports the importance of the positivity. Very few of the adoptive parents seemed to speak of the birthparents negatively, despite the circumstances surrounding the adoption; but those who did express negativity did so in a particularly salient manner. Negativity in one’s story seems to penetrate the entrance story, creating an overall sense of negativity in the adoptee’s personal myth.

Likewise, as discussed previously, a discontinuity in one’s personal story can lead to a sense of loss (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1993; Galvin, 2006b., March, 1995; Sachdev, 1992). Thus, the Deception theme should be avoided. An expectancy violation of this nature is quite great for a child upon realization that their family is not their birth family. Openness in adoptive stories is ideal (Grotevant, 1997), and the current study endorses that sentiment. Likewise, if an adoptee express a desire to Reconnect with birth parents, then adoptive parents should recognize that as the adoptee’s desire to complete
his/her entrance story, and thus his/her personal myth, and support their child’s efforts in
the search. A few adoptees expressed a resistance from their adoptive parents regarding
the search, and this resistance manifested itself into resentment or confusion from the
adoptive.

Teaching adoptive parents about the potential outcomes associated with certain
themes may help them select the appropriate theme or path to take when talking to their
children about adoption. Parents need to be cognizant that messages about adoption are
particularly important to adoptees and to the development of their self concepts. For
example, certain personal Artifacts given to the adoptee are important enough to certain
adoptees that they include them in their entrance narrative. These are special and
significant items to these adoptees and should be endorsed as such. Parents need to know
of the potential positive power that these narratives can have on a family and on a child.
Employing the Coming Home theme can create and emphasize cohesiveness or
“familyness” necessary in healthy family functioning. Entrance narratives affect
adoptees, and adoptive parents need to use this potential power positively.

Just as themes can function in positive ways, they can also create or endorse
negative outcomes. For example, the Different theme may be detrimental to an adoptee’s
self concept. Adoptive parents need to remember that language that qualifying their
children as adopted (i.e., “this is my adopted son, Kyle”) reinforces the notion that
adoption is different and thus, the child is different. This feeling of difference is
especially disconcerting in the adolescent years when children long to fit in with their
reference group (Rosenberg, 1985), and may impact an individual’s self concept later in
life (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1997; Rosenberg, 1985). Language creates a sense of
reality to those who receive it, and these findings support that idea. Parents may be able
to alleviate the negative outcomes associated with a feeling of Difference by employing
themes such as The Chosen Child or Destiny. In these themes, adoptees see their
difference as a positive attribute. They see their difference as “special” or “meant to be,”
not “wrong.” Likewise, being able to identity the themes of an adoptee’s entrance
narrative may assist counselors and adoptees themselves in counseling. Adoptees often
feel that they need to reconcile their life traumas (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005), and perhaps a narrative analysis of their entrance narrative could help guide counseling or treatment.

**Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is regarding the sample. Preliminarily, there was a self-selection bias in this study, as in any study that calls for volunteers to complete research. People who take this survey are interested in discussing their adoption and thus adoption may be particularly salient in their lives. Likewise, based on the timing of participation in conjunction with call to research postings, the most lucrative step of the participant recruitment phase was when online support networks specific to adoptees were targeted. The data collected from these groups may have reflected their tendency to be a part of an adoption support network. These are people in which adoption is salient to their characters and their thoughts. Additionally, because this was a study performed online, the participants must have internet capabilities and computer literacy. They had to be able to read on a computer, type their story, and click through the survey.

It is also important to note the strong female presence of the sample. 85.7% (n = 90) of the sample was female. Perhaps there is a higher percentage of women on online adoption support and discussion groups, or perhaps women are more willing to talk about their experience as an adoptee. Regardless, women were a majority of the population sampled, and that may have affected the kinds of stories they were told as children and the way these stories impacted their lives. Future research may investigate the differences between men and women in terms of the adoption entrance narratives presented to them, and the affect of those stories on their self concepts.

The second limitation of this study lays in the data analysis capabilities. Because each participant’s narrative contained multiple themes, data analysis became descriptive in nature. The means of the quantitative data were utilized to examine the difference in self concept variables depending on the theme present in the adoptees’ stories. Analyses of variance could have been conducted if one theme were established per story. Future
research could use the data collected to establish a set of themes where each theme represented an entire story, rather than parts of a story. This may be insightful in determining the more successful overarching themes of stories. This could be used in conjunction with the data of the present project to have a more acute look at adoptive parents’ adoption entrance narrative construction and dissemination to their children, and the impact those stories have on the child.

Likewise, the methodology employed in the current study elicited two specific considerations regarding limitations. First, Owen’s (1984) definition of a theme states that narrative themes contain a component of forcefulness. Thus, some themes identified were established with a focus on the forcefulness characteristic, and thus the sample size is low for those themes. Although this is sound qualitatively, it weakens the findings quantitatively. In future research, if themes are identified that represent an entire narrative, rather than parts of the narrative, the populations for each narrative may be more consistent with each other. Secondly, the retrospective nature of the narrative collection could arguably produce narratives tainted by faulty memory or outside forces that convolute the story. However, the sense one makes of the past is vital to understanding the impact its effect on the individual. One remembers the significant and impactful elements of the narrative and subsequently, those are the elements they report.

**Future Research**

This study advances the legitimacy of narrative theory in interpersonal and family contexts and this should continue to be a focus of future research. Stories constitute our understanding of ourselves and of the world, and are worthy of investigation. As seen in the current study, familial stories are particularly salient to our self concept. Specifically, the consequences of entrance narratives can be explored further. What are the characteristics of the parents who tell these stories? How do the adoptees parent their own children? Also, a study could be conducted that lends itself to further quantitative analyses. This study could assess the statistical significance of differences in themes using a variety of quantitative analyses.
As indicated above, future research should study the more global, or meta-themes of these adoption narratives. That knowledge may expose the metacommunication present within adoptive families, thereby illuminating the relational functioning in and development of adoptive families. Adoption does not stop affecting a family after the adoption or the revelation, it continues to affect the relationships and family functioning throughout their lives. Specifically, future research could focus more on the way the adoption entrance narrative is communicated. As indicated in the Revelation theme, the vehicle for transporting the story may be as significant as the story itself. The Revelation is indicative of the overall tone of the story, which is an impactful element of the story (McAdams, 1993).

A comparative analysis of adoptive families’ and non-adoptive families’ entrance narratives would also shed light upon the impact of entrance narratives on adoptees. Perhaps (several of) the themes found in adoption narratives are similar to those in non-adoptive families. That would support the idea that adoptive families actually function very similarly to other families. Research should investigate whether ‘discourse-dependent’ families (Galvin, 2006a) are indeed all that different from normative families. If there are vast differences in the two groups’ discourse, how do those differences impact family and individual functioning? Specifically, entrance narratives could be compared within families with adopted and non-adopted children. This would shed light upon the differences in entrance narratives and adoption entrance narratives.

Likewise, a comparative analysis of domestic and international adoptees’ entrance narrative themes would shed light upon the needs and idiosyncrasies of each population. Perhaps particular themes would resonate within certain communities, as the Rescue theme did in international adoptive parents in the Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) study, and perhaps new themes would emerge. This line of research would provide researchers, social workers, and counselors information on the differences of domestic and international adoption experiences, which is particularly important with international adoption rates rising rapidly.
With the prevalence of online adoption networks and support groups, future research should investigate the communicative functions of these groups. Through the repetition of language and concepts seen in the narratives, this study demonstrated that these networks have a powerful impact on the lens through which adoptees see their experience. The online groups seem to even impact recollection of familial narratives, which in turn impact self concept. Future research should investigate the impact of these groups on adoptees’ perspectives of themselves and other adoptees, their communicative functions (i.e., social support, networking, relationship development), and the utility of these networks for social workers in the adoption field. These findings could also be applied to other groups of people in online social support groups.

Conclusion

As adoption is becoming a more prevalent way of building a family, communication researchers need to examine the dynamic forces influencing adoptive family functioning. Family stories are an important mechanism for developing and strengthening families, particularly those that often require discourse for validation and explanation, such as adoptive families. These families need to learn how to create and maintain supportive family narratives that foster positive family relationships, which in turn create positive self concepts of their members. Specifically, the entrance narrative is important to any individual, but especially an adoptive individual whose entrance into the world requires more explanation than most. This study found that these adoption entrance narratives have distinct themes amongst adopted individuals, and that these themes are related to adoptees’ self concepts. Because they are so vital to the functioning of society’s families and individuals, family narratives are essential to the study of communication. This research indicates the necessity of the study of family narratives, particularly in discourse-dependent families.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Call to Research

Research Survey for Adopted Adults!

A research study is being conducted in the Miami University Department of Communication on family stories of adopted adults. Only adopted adults (18 and older) can participate in this online survey. Participants will be asked to recount a family story, and then ask them to take a brief survey. It will take 15-20 minutes.

The survey can be found at: https://survey.muohio.edu/Checkbox/adoptionstories.aspx.

If you know anyone who is eligible to participate in this study, please forward this call to participation on to them. Your help is greatly appreciated!

For more information, please contact Haley Kranstuber in the Department of Communication at kranstha@muohio.edu or 513-529-7182.
Appendix B: Survey Instrument

Adoption Stories

Page 1 of 8

Description of Project: This research project is designed to investigate adoption entrance stories in families. You will be asked to write out your adoption story, and then answer a brief set of questions. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. All responses will be anonymous; no one will be able to connect your responses to you. Please read the following conditions, and respond accordingly below.

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

2. I understand that I can refuse to answer specific questions.

3. The purpose of this research has been explained to me, and I understand the explanation.

4. I understand that I have the right to have this study explained to my satisfaction upon completion of the questionnaire.

5. I understand that the information I give in this study is anonymous. The experimenter will have no way of determining which responses are mine. Although every effort will be done to ensure confidentiality of your responses, all Internet-based communication is subject to the remote likelihood of tampering from an outside source. IP addresses are not recorded with the survey data and data will be removed from the server.

6. I understand that the data I provide in this study may be used by other researchers for secondary analysis. Again, these data will be treated in the strictest confidence. No researcher will be able to identify individual responses.

7. I understand that a copy of the research report for this study will be made available to me upon request. You can choose to provide your email address at the end of the survey.

8. I am 18 years old or over.

9. I am an adopted individual.

Given these statements, I freely consent to participate in this research project.

If you have any questions about your right as a human subject, please contact the Miami University Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship (513-529-3834) or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

If you have any questions about the procedure of the project, please contact Haley Kranstuber, graduate student in the Miami University Department of Speech Communication (513-529-7182) or kranstha@muohio.edu.
Adoption Stories

Page 2 of 8

Explanation: As children grow, their families construct stories, or narratives, about different times in their lives. One of these important times is the child’s birth. Families create and tell birth stories which describe the mother’s pregnancy, the birth itself, and the behaviors of other family members (i.e., father, siblings, grandparents) during this time. For adopted children, this birth story is more complicated.

An adoption entrance narrative is an adoptive family’s version of the birth story. Adoption entrance narratives teach adoptive children what adoption means, why they were placed for adoption, and why they were adopted into their family.

Instructions: Below, please write out your adoption entrance narrative. Consider the questions, “What did your parents tell you about your ‘entrance’ into the world?” and “What did your parents tell you about your adoption?” Please be as complete as possible in your telling of the stories.

<text box to enter story>
Adoption Stories

Page 3 of 8

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please carefully read each of the following statements and indicate the degree to which your attitudes correspond with each statement using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. _____ On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. _____ At times, I think I am no good at all.
3. _____ I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. _____ I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. _____ I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. _____ I certainly feel useless at times.
7. _____ I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. _____ I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. _____ All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. _____ I take a positive attitude toward myself.
Adoption Stories

Page 3 & 4 of 8

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please carefully read each of the following statements and indicate the degree to which your attitudes correspond with each statement using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Slightly Disagree</td>
<td>Slightly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. _____I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue.
2. _____I don’t expect to change my political principles and ideals.
3. _____I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs.
4. _____There has never been a need to question my values.
5. _____I am very confident about what kinds of friends are best for me.
6. _____My ideas about men’s and women’s roles have never changed as I became older.
7. _____I will always vote for the same political party.
8. _____I have firmly held views concerning my role in my family.
9. _____I have engaged in several discussions concerning behaviors involved in dating
10. _____I have considered different political views thoughtfully.
11. _____I have never questioned my views concerning what kind of friend is best for me.
12. _____My values are likely to change in the future.
13. _____When I talk to people about religion, I make sure to voice my opinion.
14. _____I am not sure about what type of dating relationship is best for me.
15. _____I have not felt the need to reflect upon the importance I place on my family.
16. _____Regarding religion, my beliefs are likely to change in the near future.
17. _____I have definite views regarding the ways in which men and women should behave.
18. _____I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one for me.
19. _____I have undergone several experiences that made me change my views on men’s and women’s roles.
20. _____I have consistently re-examined many different values in order to find the ones which ones are right for me.
21. _____I think what I look for in a friend could change in the future.
22. _____ I have questioned what kind of date is right for me.
23. _____ I am unlikely to alter my vocational goals.
24. _____ I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure.
25. _____ My ideas about men’s and women’s roles will never change.
26. _____ I have never questioned my political beliefs.
27. _____ I have had many experiences that led me to review the qualities that I would like my friends to have.
28. _____ I have discussed religious matters with a number of people who believe differently.
29. _____ I am not sure that the values I hold are right for me.
30. _____ I have never questioned my occupational aspirations.
31. _____ The extent to which I value my family is likely to change in the future.
32. _____ My beliefs about dating are firmly held.
Adoption Stories

Page 5 & 6 of 8

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please carefully read each of the following statements and indicate how frequently your attitudes correspond with each statement using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 Disagree</th>
<th>3 Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>4 Slightly Agree</th>
<th>5 Agree</th>
<th>6 Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. _____ If most people could get into a movie without paying and be sure that they would not be seen, they would do it.
2. _____ Most people have the courage of their convictions.
3. _____ The average person is conceited.
4. _____ Most people try to apply the Golden Rule, even in today’s complex society.
5. _____ Most people would stop and help a person whose car was disabled.
6. _____ The typical student will cheat on a test when everybody else does, even though he/she has a set of ethical standards.
7. _____ Most people do not hesitate to go out of their way to help someone in trouble.
8. _____ Most people would tell a lie if they could gain from it.
9. _____ It’s pathetic to see an unselfish person in today’s world, because so many people take advantage of him/her.
10. _____ “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a motto that most people follow.
11. _____ People claim that they have ethical standards regarding honesty and morality, but few people stick to them when the chips are down.
12. _____ Most people will speak out for what they believe in.
13. _____ People pretend to care more about one another than they really do.
14. _____ People usually tell the truth, even when they know they would be better off by lying.
15. _____ Most people inwardly dislike putting themselves out to help other people.
16. _____ Most people would cheat on their income tax if they had the chance.
17. _____ The average person will stick to his/her opinion if he/she thinks he/she’s right, even if others disagree.
18. _____ Most people will act as “Good Samaritans” if given the opportunity.
19. _____ Most people are not really honest for a desirable reason; they’re afraid of getting caught.
20. _____ The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.
Adoption Stories

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Instructions: Below is a series of demographic questions about yourself. Please indicate the correct response.

1. Sex: _____ Male _____ Female _____ Other

2. Age: _____

3. Type of Adoption (please check all that apply):
   _____ Open _____ Closed _____ Domestic _____ International
   _____ Within-family _____ Other circumstance

4. Year of Adoption: _____

5. How old were you when you were adopted?
Adoption Stories

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If you are a current Miami University student, you may be eligible to receive research credit in certain classes. This specifically applies to COM 134, COM 135 and COM 136 students; but can apply to other students in other classes.

If you are a current Miami University student AND have been instructed by your professor to provide your name for research credit, please provide your name and the name of instructor.

If you are NOT a current Miami University student, please continue to the next page.
Adoption Stories

Thank you for your participation in this research project! This survey is part of a study working to understand the relationship between adoption stories that adoptive individuals hear and their overall self concept. It will advance the academic study of communication in adoptive families, and inform training programs on how to talk to your children about adoption for adoptive parents.

If you would like a copy of the research report upon completion, please provide your email address below. Again, your email address will not be connected with the data you just completed. Only provide your email if you are interested in a copy of the research report once completed. https://survey.muohio.edu/Checkbox/emailaddress.aspx

For any comments or questions, please contact Haley Kranstuber, graduate student in the Speech Communication department at Miami University, at kranstha@muohio.edu or (513)529-7182.

If you have any questions about your rights as a human subject, please contact the Miami University Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at humansubjects@muohio.edu or (513)529-3734.

Thank you for your participation! You may close your browser now.