

COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADOPTION

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The differences in perceptions of adoption among college students were the focus of this research. The research was conducted in response to a lack of literature in the area of college students and adoption. The results indicated that college students perceived adoption to be more stressful than having a biological child, and perceived having a biological child more satisfying than adopting. Still, many college students stated they would consider adopting. These findings are consistent with the often expressed view of adoption as “second-best”. The purposes and hypotheses discussed in this research are important for families, students, counselors, educators, and social workers. There is a lack of information available to college students considering adoption, a lack of support to adoptees, and insufficient knowledge about the process and outcomes of adoption. Understanding college students’ attitudes toward adoption should give direction regarding future social, legal, and educational views and pursuits related to adoption.

Further research is needed to determine general findings, specifically research including more adoptees as well as a more diverse population of college students in various settings such as private, parochial and racially diverse college populations. Studies must focus on adoption and address stereotypes presented in literature, media, and educational materials. Expanding the body of literature will assist educators, advocates, parents, and counselors in taking the next step of shifting the paradigm of adoption to a more favorable one.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to adoption; the purpose, the pain, the passion, the process. It is also dedicated to people like me, who, because of adoption, are here today.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

<i>df</i>	Degrees of freedom: numbers of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
<i>M</i>	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
<i>p</i>	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
<i>r</i>	Pearson product-moment correlation
<i>t</i>	Computed value of <i>t</i> test
<	Less than
=	Equal to

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
DEFINITION OF TERMS	viii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. METHODOLOGY	5
a. Review of Literature	5
b. Approach.....	20
3. RESULTS	24
4. DISCUSSION.....	40
REFERENCES	51
APPENDIX.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

1. Characteristics of the sample	26
2. Associations with adoption	29
3. Responding to an adopted child	31
4. Adopted Children are part of the family	32
5. Would you consider adopting	32
6. Satisfaction with adoption.....	33
7. Stress of adoption.....	34
8. Willingness to adopt	35
9. Stress in adoption.....	36
10. Willingness to adopt	37
11. Stress in adoption.....	38
12. Willingness to adopt	38
13. Stress in adoption.....	39

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Adoption: The official transfer through the court system of all of the parental rights that a biological parent has to a child, along with an assumption by the adopting parent of all of the parental rights of the biological parents that are being terminated and are assumed in their entirety by the adoptive parents, including the responsibility for the care and supervision of the child, including nurturing and training, physical and emotional health, and financial support.

Attachment: The formation by a child of significant and stable emotional connections with the significant people in his/her life. This process begins in early infancy as the child bonds with one or more primary caregivers. A failure by a child to establish these types of important connections before the age of about five years may result in the child experiencing difficulties with a wide variety of social relationships at significant periods of time in life. Failure to attach may fit within the definition of a more permanent condition known as "reactive attachment disorder."

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Adoption is often a primary option for parents who are physically unable to produce children, although there are persons who adopt to increase the family size or who do not prefer having a biological child. Adoption often arises out of the coincidence of two unplanned life events: pregnancy, whether planned or unplanned and the discovery of infertility (Freeark, 2005). As the common precursor to adoption, infertility affects one in six couples, 15% of the population of child-bearing age (Baumann, 2008). With about 60,000 annual adoptions occurring in the United States (Juffer & Marinus, 2007), the assumption can be made that all parties, including families and children are benefiting from adoption in that it often replaces an institutionalized setting with a generally nurturing family environment for a child. A study reveals, however, that half of respondents in a national survey stated adoption is, “not quite as good as having your own child” (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997). This is evidenced by the decline in adoptions annually from 175, 000 in 1970 to 60,000 today (Fisher, 2003a).

While there has been a decline in national adoptions, a greater acceptance of international adoptions has emerged. Since 2001, Russia and China have become the countries providing the largest number of children for adoption by Americans; 4680 Chinese children and 4279 Russian

children were placed for adoption in 2001. (U.S. Department of State, 2002). However, international adoption is a political and economic practice and is successful only when countries are willing to participate. Therefore, even with the high rate of success and recovery adoption provides, there remains a major decline in the number of adoptions, both abroad and nationwide.

What is the reason for such a decline? Has our society begun to devalue adoption as a means to gain a family? Perhaps the answers to such questions lie in understanding the meaning and outcomes of adoption as interpreted by people. The current study focuses on opinions of college students, as they are some of the future parents in our country. Insight into their perceptions may provide a clearer understanding of what action is needed to keep adoption a successful option and a positive experience for those who decide to adopt. The college atmosphere provides a setting in which students can test behaviors, experience feelings (Fisher, 2003a), challenge views and develop concrete ideas within the safety of being a college student. College students also tend to have liberal views (Whatley, Jahangardi, Ross, Knox, 2003) and are more willing to accept “new” ideas that others may have abandoned. This population is also of interest, because as the findings of one study suggest, “College students do not have strong attitudes toward adoption in either direction at this point in their lives” (Bonds-Raacke, 2009). The current study seeks to understand whether or not college students’ do indeed have a strong directional attitude toward adoption and discover some common perceptions surrounding the issue of adoption.

The views of college students who have been adopted shed some light into their views and ideas about adoption. One adoptee expressed the following,

I have a lack of completeness. I watch other students who have brothers and sisters attending the same college and others who have a family tree. When you

are adopted, you are not the same as others-you are missing a biological tie and there is no way to fill that.

The views of these college students accurately reflect the need for a study specific to college students and their perceptions of adoption. Just as the adoption experience affects motivations and interests of adopted college students (Kryder, 1999), it can be assumed that the perception of adoption by college students in general may affect their motivations in educational pursuits, as well as nonacademic choices, such as a marital partner, ideas about conception, and the decision whether or not to adopt.

While this research has been conducted on college students' perceptions of adoption, a literature review revealed no other studies have been extensive or specific in asking about college student's perceptions of adoption. One major theme that did emerge in the literature was that college students are less accepting of new medical methods for achieving conception than they are of adoption (Dunn, Ryan, O'Brien, 1988). However, a more recent article by Bonds-Raacke (2009) indicated that students had more favorable attitudes toward having a biological child than an adopted one. Another reason research on college students and their perceptions of adoption is so important is because of the skewed portrayal of adoption. Sociologists have focused mainly on the problems associated with adoption; this is evident in many college textbooks (Fisher, 2003a). This lack of holistic information could discourage students from considering adoption as a means of forming a family. Because 90% of college students express an interest in marriage, and about 15% of these couples will experience infertility, it is important to view adoption as an option for consideration (Whatley, Jahangardi, Ross, Knox, 2003).

Having a better understanding of how college students identify with adoption will increase the body of knowledge about adoption, will encourage potential adopters, and will

increase the possibility adoption will be viewed in a positive manner. Information about college student's perceptions on adoption is important because 1) the extent of this awareness is currently unknown; 2) a person's willingness to adopt affects one's choice of a spouse, marital expectations, and overall family satisfaction, and 3) identifying information about college student's acuity related to adoption can help guide authors, instructors, and family life educators. College students represent a large portion of our country's population; therefore, it is important to gain insight into what they deem important, as their views will determine our nation's values.

Some limitations to this research are the participants. Many college students have not adopted, and it would be beneficial in future research if there were a sample comparison of those who had adopted. Also, results vary according to demographics, including marital status, working class, sexual orientation, and racial identity. Persons in any of these categories were not specifically addressed and may provide more insight into college students' awareness of adoption. Future research in this area may be necessary.

The current study will prove helpful to educators, family specialists, and, specifically, agency workers. For example, the insights held by workers in adoptive services correlate to children's perceptions about adoption. Workers strive to ensure that the family is able to meet the child's needs. This is a main concern of the adoptee, and how they discover this need affects the attachment that is formed by the child to the adoptive parents. An increased understanding of the assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions surrounding adoption will prove invaluable to those working in adoptive services (Carter-Black, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The literature review provides an overview of adoption and the effect it has on society as an alternative to forming a family. The overview summarizes how college students perceive adoption. Also included are the outcomes of adoption and the benefits of adopting.

Adoption as a common occurrence

Adoption, the legal transfer of parental obligations and rights, is changing the idea of family. For many years family was defined as a mother, father, and child who were a biological product of the mother and father. Adoption is so unique and significant in experience because it creates a family without regard to race, sexuality or genetics. Adoptive families are represented in stepfamilies, single-parent homes, and families headed by gay and lesbian partners (March & Miall, 2000). Adoptees are becoming more common (Lum, 2009) and are changing the way the world views family. Adoption is also affecting the way society regards the fundamental concepts of life such as nature vs. nurture and the role of biological relations with an adoptive family member.

With about 60,000 annual adoptions in the United States (Juffer & Marinus, 2007) and about 200,000 adoptions worldwide, the assumption can be made that adoption has become a

natural occurrence in American society and the world. Those who are not adopted are still closely related to the adoption experience. The National Adoption Attitudes Survey (2002) as cited by Fisher (2003b) indicated that 64% of Americans had a personal experience with adoption; either someone in their family or close friends had been adopted, had adopted a child, or relinquished a child for adoption. Americans have also begun to adopt more internationally. By 2001, 4680 Chinese children and 4279 Russian children were adopted by American families (U.S. Department of State, 2002). Halifax & Gokalp (2005) state that the number of people applying to adopt a child in France has nearly doubled in the last fifteen years and now exceeds 10,000 per year. This country has the highest number of adopted Haitian children, with over 700 adopted in 2008 (McKenzie, 2010). France ranks second in the world behind the USA for the number of foreign children adopted (Halifax & Gokalp, 2005).

The idea of a closed adoption, where the adoptee has no further contact with the birth parent(s), has become almost obsolete. Many believe that closed adoption is too secretive and makes the grief worse for the biological mother (Fisher, 2003a). Now open adoption has become more acceptable and seems to be more beneficial because the birth mother remains in contact with the adoptive family. This contact, “provides the birthmother with the reassurance that adoption provided a better option for their children than what they themselves could provide and that the particular adoptive parents were the right choice for their children” (Freundlich, 1998). Adoptive parents involved in open adoption also report an increase in empathy toward the birth parent(s) and child, a stronger feeling of permanence with their child, and fewer fears that the child may be taken by the birth mother (Strong, DeVault, Sayad, & Cohen 2001). Open adoption was not shown to produce any confusion of identity or lowering of self esteem. Parents of

children in open adoption reported positive outcomes for their child as well as the family (Crea & Barth, 2009).

Adoption must be viewed as a lifetime event, not just a legal proceeding (Baumann, 2008). This research provided insight into the adoptees' feelings regarding their being adopted. A large majority of adoptees are well adjusted (Juffer & Marinus, 2007), and this is due in part to the information provided by parents and the effect that information has on the self-esteem of the child. That self-esteem carries over into areas of socialization and grades, as well as a general self-concept. Studies show that adoptees wanted to be like their adoptive parents, and got along with peers and friends (Shireman, 1986).

It is important to remember, that in adoption, it is the one who has no voice, the child, who is impacted the most (Baumann, 2008). Open adoption does take into consideration the child and shows positive results in regards to their understanding of "who they are". The process of learning "who they are", however, is a very complicated one for adoptees (Shireman, 1986). By six years old, children differentiated between adoption and birth as paths to parenthood but don't understand anything about the process. While adopted children are exposed to more adoption information at an earlier period than nonadopted children, adoptees lack much more information about their adoption process (Brodzinsky, 1984). With the growing trend toward private, nonagency adoptions, (Baumann, 2008) children are not exposed to the openness that formal adoption includes. In an era of completely confidential adoption, openness in formal adoptions is a relatively new development (Berry, 1997). Openness is more likely when the child is adopted by relatives and/or did not have a history of mistreatment. Unfortunately, many of the persons who relinquish their children for adoption do not have such a history.

Who adopts? Why? Who relinquishes? Why?

Many infertile women feel they have failed in their procreative role, and this discovery of infertility creates a crisis of normalcy, adequacy, and shame, all of which may later impact the experience of becoming adoptive parents (Freeark, 2005). The psychological process of building an attachment between child and adoptive parents commences when a couple contemplates changing their family structure to include a child (Farber, Timberlake, Mudd, Cullen, 2003). Even abroad, the same is true. Adoption is delayed by repeated unsuccessful attempts to conceive and medical infertility treatments. These couples have no biological children and finally give up on artificial treatments.

There are, however, people who adopt for altruistic purposes; “preferential adopters”, referred to by Feigelman & Silverman (1983) as persons who choose to adopt even though they have no fertility problems. Preferential adopters adopt “hard-to-place” and special needs children. Of these parents, 53% say their primary motivation in adopting these children is to give a home to a needy child (Goodman & Kim, 1999). For many adoptees, adoption by families abroad is a chance to survive because they have no parents to care for them (McKenzie, 2010). Nearly half of these parents already have biological children when they make the choice to adopt. These parents felt that the adoption experience made them better people, and only 10 of the 70 adoptive parents in a research study expressed regret about their decision (Goodman & Kim, 1999).

Typically those who adopt are heterosexual, married couples. Years ago, the belief was held that for lesbians or any other unmarried person, gay or straight, adoption was a rare option (Albers, 1999) now these groups are becoming the norm. Various limitations such as age, marital status, and sexual orientation are common when adoption is presented. Authors in various

college textbooks asserted that it is extremely difficult for persons over age 40, for lesbians, gay men or for single persons to adopt (Fisher, 2003a).

However, this situation has been changing. Single parents now account for 15% of all adoptions (Pertman, 2001). While there is limited research, it shows favorable outcomes. Haugaard (1999) states that single parent adoptive homes are no more problematic than two-parent families, and those children with difficulties experienced those difficulties before the adoption. “Even though it is difficult for gays and lesbians to adopt children legally, such adoptions are as likely to have positive outcomes as adoptions by heterosexual parents” (Fisher, 2003a). Many gay and lesbian parents often conceal their sexual identity for fear of not being able to adopt, so the true number of these adoptions is unknown. It is estimated that the number of children being raised in these homes may be as high as 6-14 million, although some researchers suggest that number is inflated (Johnson & O’Connor, 2002). Regardless of the number, children in these homes were not found to be harmed or compromised in any psychological aspect, and the parents were seen as responsible, loving, and as nurturing as other parents.

The most diverse group, however, is not the one adopting; rather it is the one relinquishing a child for adoption. The number of women who place children for adoption has declined, with the rise of single parenthood. The issue also calls for a racial breakdown as persons in minority groups are less likely to formally relinquish their children. Instead, the children are often placed with a family member in kinship care. In a study of African American adoptees, these children were twice as likely to be placed in kinship care as their white counterparts (Harris & Skyles, 2008). There are also more white families seeking to adopt

children of their same race, but there are more minority children available for adoption, which in turn places more minority children in the foster care system.

Those who place their child for adoption tend to be disproportionately white, from relatively advantaged backgrounds, and from intact families that support their decision (Fisher 2003b). These women perform better in school; have high aspirations for a college education and a career (Miller & Coyl 2000, Sobol et al. 2000, Stolley 1994, Sobol & Daley 1992). These young mothers make adoption plans because they see opportunities ahead in which childrearing would interfere. The results of a mother relinquishing a child for adoption have both positive and negative results. The negative effects including trauma and anguish which were often long lasting and a sense of loss that increased over time (Fisher, 2003a). However, others believed they have made the right decision and were comfortable with it; 78% of those respondents said they would make the decision again (Kalmuss et al., 1992). International relinquishments often do not decide; it is imperative that adoption occur because of their terrible economic status. Recently, thirty-three Haitian children arrived in France for adoption because of the devastating earthquake (McKenzie, 2010). These women have overwhelming social disadvantages, and are poorly educated and unemployed. These mothers give up their children in despair, in hopes of securing their survival and life in a better environment (Pilotti, 1993 as cited by Fisher, 2003a).

Outcomes of adoption

One view of adoption is that it is a risky venture that produces deeply troubled children and frustrates parents (Fisher, 2003a). Most Americans find these perceptions to be true. A poll of 1416 Americans found that people believed adopted children had more drug and alcohol problems, medical problems, school and home issues (National Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2002). Even abroad, adoptees are two to five times more likely to be referred for psychiatric

treatment (Sharma, 1995). The most common explanation for these problems is the emotional trauma of being relinquished for adoption.

Adopted children learn in childhood to suppress curiosity about their own adoption if their adoptive parents show disapproval, indignation, or lack of appreciation concerning the adoption. Children fear that they will be disloyal to their adopted parents, be rejected by their biological mother, or experience the death of the biological mother (A Sachdev, 1992). The children's perceptions of these fears can cause them to fantasize and wonder about their birth parents as they get older (Freeark, 2005). Between the ages of eight and eleven, children's concept of adoption broadens, and they begin to appreciate the uniqueness of their family status, but it is not until middle adolescence that children recognize what adoption involves (Brodzinsky, 1984). For adopted adolescents, normative developmental tasks, individuation from family, and intimate relationships can be complex and take on very different meanings (Freeark, 2005). Research further shows that adolescents identify differences in their family regardless of whether the differences really exist (Daniels, 1985). Longitudinal studies suggest that middle childhood is the most vulnerable period emotionally for adopted children (Freeark, 2005) because they must allow cope with the common personal insecurities of growing up (i.e., puberty).

While the opinion is adoption is a risky venture and it produces deeply troubled children, the truth is significantly positive. The majority of adoptees do well in every aspect considered "important" in society. The majority of parents are satisfied with their children, and family members see the adoption as successful (as cited by Fisher, 2003a (Brodzinsky et al. 1992). Most Americans place adoption in high regard. A survey of Americans age eighteen and older say there is "overwhelming support" for adoption despite their negative beliefs about adoption, with

63% of the respondents citing a “very favorable” attitude towards adoption (National Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2002) and more than 80% of respondents agree raising an adopted child is just as, if not more, satisfying as raising a biological child. Despite the process, the finances, or the length of time it takes to make an adopted child your own, the results of finalizing adoption are overwhelmingly favorable.

Those parents who feel most stressed are those who raise a child who was adopted at an older age. These parents feel that they are challenged to develop safe and comfortable relationships and wonder if they are the type of parent the child needs (Bird, Peterson & Miller, 2002). These parents also feel responsible for solving the problems the child may have previously encountered. Stress also occurs in international adoptions in trying to determine the child’s history or medical records (McGuinness & Pallansch, 2000). Despite these stressors, adoption is still a positive experience for the birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted child. Adopted children and parents show no serious problems that would warrant concern. These parents see adoption as a realistic and desirable option for forming a family (Fisher, 2003b).

The stigma of adoption

Link and Phelan (2001, p.365) most accurately describe a stigma as “a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context.” It can be argued that adoption is highly stigmatized through attitudes about adoption as well as actions. Half of respondents in a national survey agreed that adopting a child is “not quite as good as having your own” (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997). While attitudes have appeared to become more favorable toward adoption, fewer Americans (excluding same-sex and single parents) are adopting, especially unrelated children. Fewer white women have relinquished children for adoption, and overall adoptions have declined. Many Americans view adoption as the final alternative to having a

child rather than an optimal choice. Only 15% of infertile women have ever considered adoption (Hollingsworth, 2000). Furthermore, in a study by Daly, (1994) as cited by Fisher data in 2003 suggest that at the attitude level, adoption is a good idea. However, when asked if students themselves had to make the decision, they would not choose adoption.

Much of the decline in adoption may be attributed to harsh views of adoption by society. The message society sends is that it is not natural for a birthmother to give away a biological child. The public is unable to see the positive side of adoption due to the unbalanced one presented by media. A survey of articles reported negative outcomes of adoption more than twice as often as positive ones (Fisher, 2003a). Textbooks, although generally sympathetic to adoption, still regarded the process as not quite natural. Some reported outcomes of adoption are true, however because of the stigmas placed on adoption; society still views it as “second best” (Creedy, 2001, p.97) An observation of adoption is the behavioral and psychological problems of the adoptee. Fisher (2003a) found that textbooks cited that adoptees were more likely than biological children to experience severe problems. Textbooks also asserted that available adoptees are not healthy children, rather, sickly minority children who are not in high demand and those children who are healthy are more costly.

Problems of adoption

There are many issues that must be taken into account as one prepares to adopt. Many of these issues are stigmatized as more distressing than the reality, but some are not. Many problems of adoption are perceived and when persons actually adopt they discover these problems are minimal or nonexistent. Adoption does restructure the family atmosphere and in turn produces stressors, socially and economically (Bird, Peterson & Miller, 2002). Some of these stressors include concern about being able to bond with the adopted child, handling the

pressures of instant parenthood, the children's future, and unexpected financial burdens of the adoption (Barth & Berry, 1988; Barth & Miller, 2000; Berry, 1989-90). Adoptive families must also cope with infertility issues, the fear that birthparents may desire the child back (although there is a time period in which the biological parents' rights are terminated), and knowing when and if to disclose adoption information with the child (Brodzinsky, Singer & Braff, 1984).

While adoption replaces an institutionalized setting with a generally nurturing family environment, adopted children change the dynamics of the family due to the issues that they are facing. Adoptees may have possible feelings of loss and rejection caused by the adoption process. They may feel cut off from the birth parents and rejected by them; they may blame themselves for the relinquishment and think that they were not worth enough for the mother to keep them (Juffer & Marinus, 2007). These feelings may appear early and be problematic, more in boys than girls (Shireman, 1986). The child may not understand his or her feelings, even if their parents have talked with them about adoption. Earlier research suggested that children should be told of their adoption fairly early. During the preschool years, adoptive families often have their first conversation about having become a family by adoption rather than natural birth (Freeark, 2005). However, in a longitudinal study of black adoptions, 40% of children did not ever remember talking to their parents about adoption (Shireman, 1986).

One of the most difficult problems is the adoption-revelation process, specifically when to tell the child about their adoptive status. Children whose parents are emotionally present and help the child experience the meaning of adoption in a way that was attuned to cognitive and emotional development produce children who were less occupied with trying to understand the meaning of adoption (Kryder, 1999). These clear developmental trends in children's knowledge

of the nature of the adoptive family relationships assist in children's understanding of the underlying motivational basis of adoption (Brodzinsky, 1984).

Although the public views adoptive children as the defenseless party in adoption, agencies acknowledge that adoptive parents are also vulnerable (Farber, Timberlake, Mudd, Cullen, 2003). The process of adoption changes the dynamics not only for the parents, but also for the whole family. A number of adopted children come from unhappy childhoods with their biological parents and thus adopters are more likely to have negative impressions of the biological parents (Daniels, 1985). Parents are less likely to share this information with the child, and this causes greater problems (Brodzinsky, 1984). Birth parents have a strong psychological presence in the mind of adoptees and adoptive parents, and this affects the openness between the child and members of the family. Many adoptive couples have had natural born children prior to adoption, and adopted children in mixed families had higher personal adjustment scores than ones in adopted families (Ternay, 1985). This suggests that although the environment is different, the placement of an adoptive child in a mixed family does not affect the overall adjustment of the natural child and may in fact have positive effects on the child. However, all children do not have this positive adjustment. While adopted children are able to develop normative levels of self-esteem, a large number show more developmental delays, attachment problems, and internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Juffer & Marinus, 2007).

Awareness in children emerges fairly early. Already at age three, children are able to understand that people can experience differences in emotions and desires on the basis of their discernment. Just before their third birthday, children start to talk about what they or other people do in terms of desires, intentions, perceptions, and beliefs (Bartsch & Wellman, 1989, 1995; Dunn, 1991; Schult & Wellman, 1997; Wellman, 1990; Wellman & Liu, 2004). That is to

say, young children are already aware of reasons for their adoption and begin to view themselves differently. However, the ability to explain other's actions in terms of implicit desires is still developing.

Children can not understand the need they have to attain a more cohesive identity, (A Sachdev, 1992) and the understanding of acuity is an important prerequisite to explain others behaviors in terms of alternative desires(Colonnaesi, Koops& Terwogt, 2008). These children cannot comprehend why a parent did not make the decision to keep them, which in turn affects the sensitivity that they have toward them. Evidence shows that there is a relationship between children's psychological explanation and their understanding of insight and intention. As the child matures, family relationships are subject to strains not found in biological families. The lack of a mutual biological tie between parents and adopted child lead to feelings of insecurity, and adoptive parents may have difficulty believing that the child is really theirs. This attitude, when sensed by the child, may create anxiety and tension that could affect the entire family relationship (Kirk, Jonasson & Fish, 1966; Ladner, 1977; Lewis, Balls & Gore, 1975).

Attachment

A study by Dries et al. (2009) posed the question, "Are adopted children less often securely attached to their adoptive parents than children reared by their biological parents?" This question is most important in the current study as college students must determine whether or not they will be able to form the desired parent-child bond with an adoptive child as seemingly occurs naturally with a biological child. This bond is long-lasting and important for the child's future decisions, interactions, and relationships. Research has shown that by changing the attachment in one's life, childhood resilience may be preserved (Wan & Green, 2009). Dries et al. (2009) supports this idea; children adopted before turning one year of age were just as

securely attached as a biological child; those who were adopted after turning one showed less attachment.

The researchers cite separation and loss of a birth parent as reasons to expect a lower level of attachment to adoptive parents. This loss is also experienced on the part of the birthmother, who also feels a sense of loneliness and abandonment (Aloi, 2009). Conversely, the depression that the birthmother is feeling may in turn protect her from negative attachment in her child (Wan & Green, 2009). It may seem that the birthmother, being stripped of her child at such an early period in development would not be able to attach to the child, however, one of the consequences of adoption include overwhelming grief over the “lost” child (Aloi, 2009) and is apart of the early attachment process. Researchers agree that because of the early separation, loss, and often neglect experienced by biological mother and child, (Dries et al., 2009) disorganized attachment is created. This attachment is magnified in both parties if there is no resolution made for the loss (i.e., the adoption is open and communication is maintained).

A recent study by Loehlin, Horn & Ernst (2009) on parent-child closeness in adoptive families found that adoptive children view themselves as less close to their parents; siblings agreed. Parents also felt more emotionally close to their biological children than the adopted children, although they cited higher levels of attachment with the adopted children than the adoptees self-reported. The study also found that sons were not as attached as daughters and there was a closer bond between the mother and child.

It is important for the adoptee to see the caregiver as a “secure base” (Wan & Green, 2009). The most optimal care giving provides the child with a secure attachment. Those children who were given secure attachments earlier were protected from the negative behaviors present in child with insecure attachments (Wan & Green, 2009). Those children who experience insecure

attachments may feel unloved and understand the world to be unpredictable (Dries et al., 2009). Dries et al (2009) hypothesized that the age at placement may affect the attachment with the adoptive parent, but later determined that age is independent of attachment. Wan & Green (2009) cites that the length of time in which the adoptee (specifically an infant) is exposed to the maternal attachment impacts the overall attachment. Unfortunately, many birth mothers are experiencing feelings of being undeserving and bad, resulting in self-esteem issues (Aloi, 2009) which may develop an insecure attachment to the child if he or she is with the biological mother for an extended period of time. Dries et al, (2009) concluded that adoptees are able to overcome adversity and risks and develop healthy and secure attachments as well as biological children. These attachments have long term relationships for the children, including emotional regulation.

It is also important for the birthmother to reach a point of regulation. One of the ways in which the mother may overcome the grief of “losing” a child includes being able to hold the child, observe the child’s physical health, telling the child the reasons for the adoption, and expressing wishes of well being for the future (Aloi, 2009). These steps may help the mother to develop a healthy attachment to child although she is giving the child up for adoption.

Parent- child interactions, including those between biological mother and child as well as adoptee and adoptive parents interact with genetic factors determining the attachment outcomes of the child (Wan & Green, 2009). This means that an adoptee may develop secure attachment as well as a biological child, if there is a ‘secure base’ for the child, and the biological mother may also develop a positive view of herself and her decision. The attention given to the biological mothers requires more research (Aloi, 2009) as well as the attachment between adoptees and adoptive parents.

College students and adoption

The family relationship between parents and the adopted child deals directly with the beliefs held by either party. A study found that college students would exhibit a more positive attitude toward a couple having a biological child rather than a family adopting a child. The results indicated that college students did not have strong attitudes toward adoption at this point of their growth. (Bonds-Raacke, 2009). This paper seeks to refute the previous hypotheses. A previous study indicated that college students would prefer to adopt a child rather than use technology to create child (Dunn, Ryan, & O' Brien, 1988). College is a setting in which issues about family and the future are introduced and discussed, during which time students begin to entertain ideas of marriage, children, and infertility.

Adopted college students understand this time very clearly as they have experiences directly related to their adoption. International adoptees, more specifically, have parents who are unable to give their children a personal identity or educational experience (Lum, 2009). One adoptee responded with the following (Kryder, 1999):

In college you grow as a person and college is an environment where you can learn who you are and discover yourself and being adopted coincides with that so, being adopted, you think about it and reflect on it, and grow from it.

These college students also expressed that often there was a conscious, preconscious, or subconscious choice of major connected with the experience of adoption. This is direct evidence that adoption affects a student's interest and motivation. (Kryder, 1999). This is of great importance because understanding choices adopted college students make gives insight into the understanding of choices their nonadopted college peers will make about adoption.

The review of literature has established that adoption is a generally positive experience, and those who adopt do so for various reasons. Not only does the literature summarize who

adopts and why those persons adopt, but it also reveals the many outcomes of adoption, the stigma of persons who adopt and the adoptees, as well as some of the major problems associated with adoption. One of the major problems with adoption is the revelation, where parents inform children they are not biologically tied to the parent. While parents are encouraged to disclose this information at an early age, evidence suggests children do not recognize all adoption involves until early to middle adolescence (Brodzinsky, 1984).

The literature further suggests that there is a negative portrayal of the adoption process, the process and outcome recorded in textbooks, which could directly affect a college student's decision to adopt. Specifically, textbooks examine the behavior, legal, and racial/ethnic problems that are associated with the decision to adopt.

The current study will add to the body of literature examining college students as those who may one day adopt, relinquish a child for adoption, or be involved in the adoption process. While much research has focused on adopted college persons, on college students' attitudes toward trans-racial adoption, and brief notes about attitudes toward adoption, little research exists on how the perception of adoption would affect a college student's decision to adopt. The current study will try to determine if there are other variables that influence a college student's decision to adopt. Hopefully, this study will provide some insight into the college student's values and attitudes regarding family and its formation.

Approach

Purpose

The general purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of respondents concerning their willingness to adopt and relate those perceptions to selected variables. The specific purposes of this study were:

- 1) To examine college students' perceptions concerning whether adopted children express more behavioral and emotional problems.
- 2) To examine perceptions concerning how college students would respond to a child who felt you were not his or her "real" parent.
- 3) To examine the perceptions of college students concerning whether adopted children are really part of their adoptive family.
- 4) To examine the degree to which college students are willing to consider adoption.

Hypotheses

Another purpose of this study was to examine the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is satisfying.
- 2) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family.
- 3) There is no significant gender difference concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 4) There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 5) There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Methods and Procedures

A sample of 514 participants was drawn from the undergraduate student body at The University of Alabama in the Human Development and Family Studies department. IRB approval was granted for this study. The questionnaire was administered to University of Alabama Human Development students in undergraduate classes during regularly scheduled meeting times. After the questionnaires were completed, they were immediately collected. Students also completed the questionnaire using surveymonkey.com. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, likert/closed questions to examine: a) the degree to which college students are willing to consider adoption, b) the degree to which attachment is perceived to take place in adoption compared to having a biological child and c) perceptions concerning information that would be helpful to persons seriously interested in adoption. Open ended questions were utilized to determine a) reasons as to why one would or would not adopt and b) perceptions of how to interact with a child who feels the parent is not their own.

Data Analysis

A frequency and percentage analysis was used to examine the perceptions of respondents concerning:

- 1) Whether adopted children express more behavioral and emotional problems.
- 2) How college students would respond to a child who felt you were not his or her “real” parent.
- 3) Perceptions of college students concerning whether adopted children are really part of their adoptive family.
- 4) The degree to which college students are willing to consider adoption.

The t-test will be used to examine each of the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is satisfying on marriage and family.
- 2) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family.
- 3) There is no significant gender difference concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 4) There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 5) There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The general purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that college students have of adoption. A secondary purpose was to relate those perceptions to selected variables. Variables included race, age, religious preference, and family structure. Descriptive statistics, percentage, and frequency counts were used to examine the selected variables.

The specific purposes of the study were to examine the following perceptions:

- 1) College students' concerning whether adopted children express more behavioral and emotional problems.
- 2) How college students would respond to a child who felt you were not his or her "real" parent.
- 3) College students' perceptions concerning whether adopted children are really part of their adoptive family.
- 4) The degree to which college students are willing to consider adoption.

and to examine the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is satisfying on marriage and family.
- 2) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family.
- 3) There is no significant gender difference concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 4) There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 5) There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning: (a) willingness to consider adoption and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Characteristics of sample

This study included a total of 514 participants. The participants were drawn from various HD 101 classes at The University of Alabama. Of the 514 participants, 402 were female (78.2%). Over half of the respondents were in their freshman level of college (55.4%). The largest percentage of respondents was 19-20 (63.8%), and the second largest were 17-18 (18.3%). The majority of the sample was Caucasian (80.9%) and Baptist (26.1%). This particular sample generally viewed themselves as religious (57.4%) or very religious (22.4%). The

participants grew up mainly in nuclear families (75.5%) while 13.4% were raised by single mothers and 8.2% in a step-family. Table 1 presents detailed information concerning the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1

Characteristics of the sample

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	112	21.8
<i>Table 1 (continued)</i>		
Female	402	78.2
Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Asian	6	1.2
African American	80	15.6
Caucasian	416	80.9
Mexican American/Chicano	2	0.4
Native American	2	0.4
Hispanic	7	1.4
Other	1	0.2
Age	Frequency	Percent

17-18	94	18.3
19-20	328	63.8
21-22	72	14.2
23-24	4	0.8
25-30	9	1.8
Over 30	7	1.4

College Level	Frequency	Percent
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Table1 (continued)

Freshman	285	55.4
Sophomore	134	26.1
Junior	59	11.5
Senior	36	7.0

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
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Single	494	96.1
Divorced	7	1.4
Married	7	1.4
Separated	1	0.2
Remarried	0	0.0
Other	5	1.0

Religious Background	Frequency	Percent
Catholic	72	14.1
Jewish	5	1.0
Protestant	78	15.3
Baptist	134	26.1
Methodist	58	11.4
Christian	91	17.7

Table 1 (Continued)

None	27	5.3
Other	45	8.8
Skipped Question	4	

Faith	Frequency	Percent
Very religious	115	22.4
Not very religious	87	17.0
Religious	295	57.5
Not religious at all	16	3.1
Skipped Question	1	

Family structure	Frequency	Percent
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Nuclear family	388	75.6
Single mother with children	69	13.5
Single father with children	3	0.6
Step- family	42	8.2
Other	11	2.1
Skipped Question	1	

Associations with adoption

Table 2 presents the 514 respondents associations with adoption. The majority of the sample (97.3%) was not adopted. Most of the participants (81.9%) did know someone who had adopted a child, and 87.3 percent knew someone who had been adopted. An overwhelming percent of respondents did not believe adopted children had emotional or behavioral problems.

Table 2

Associations with adoption

Respondent was adopted	Frequency	Percentage
YES	14	2.7
NO	498	97.3
Skipped Question	2	

Respondent knows someone who has adopted	Frequency	Percentage
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Table 2 (Continued)

Respondent knows someone who has been adopted			
		Frequency	Percentage
YES	420		81.9
NO	93		18.1
Skipped Question	1		
NO		65	12.7

Skipped Question 1

Respondent believes child express more behavioral problems			
		Frequency	Percentage
YES		129	25.1
NO		384	74.9
Skipped Question		1	

Respondent believes children express more emotional problems			
		Frequency	Percentage
YES		236	46.2
NO		275	53.8
Skipped Question		1	

Perceptions of adoption

When participants were asked the open-ended question, “How would you respond to a child who felt you were not his or her “real” parent?” the responses were diverse. The two most popular responses were “Even though I am not your “real” parent, I still love and care for you

like a “real” parent would” (33.3%), and understand and giving an explanation for the adoption (18.7%). The third most frequent included continual love, care, and comfort (13.3%). However, the fourth most frequent response was that the respondent would be hurt and upset. Twenty of the participants omitted this question. Table 3 provides more details.

Table 3

Responding to an adopted child who feels adopted parent is not his/her real parent

Even though I am not, I still care	171	33.3
Understand and explain adoption	96	18.7
Love, care, comfort	68	13.3
Hurt and Upset	58	11.3
I am your real parent	50	9.7
Not sure	32	6.2
Did not respond	20	3.9
Look for biological parents	10	1.9
Demand respect	5	1.0
Would not adopt	3	0.6
N/A	1	
TOTAL RESPONSES	514	100

As shown in Table 4, the majority of respondents (95.1%) agree that adopted children are really part of their adoptive families. A small percentage (4.9%) reported otherwise.

Table 4

Perceptions concerning whether adopted children are part of the family

Do you believe adopted children are really part of their family?

	Frequency	Percentage
YES	483	95.1
NO	25	4.9
Skipped Question	6	

Respondents were asked whether or not they would consider adopting. Most all of the participants (89.3%) answered affirmatively. Responses are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceptions concerning whether respondent would consider adoption

Would you consider adopting?

	Frequency	Percentage
YES	458	89.3
NO	55	10.7
Skipped Question	1	

Examination of Hypotheses

Another purpose of this study was to examine the following hypotheses regarding college students' perceptions of adoption. The results of the hypotheses are presented below.

Hypothesis 1. There is no significant difference between the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is satisfying.

As Table 6 indicates, a *t* value of 24.981 was obtained using a paired samples test revealing a significant difference between the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive having a biological child is satisfying. The difference was significant at the .001 level. The respondents reflected a higher mean score (9.52) regarding the perception that having a biological child is satisfying as compared with a mean score of (8.35) regarding the perception that adopting a child is satisfying. These results suggest that the respondents perceive that having a biological child is more satisfying than adopting a child.

Table 6

Comparison of perceived satisfaction in adopting a child and perceived satisfaction in having a biological child

	Mean	SD	Correlation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Adopting a child	8.35	1.70				
Having a biological child	9.52	1.28	.79	24.98	510	.001

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family. As Table 7 indicates, a *t* value of 13.411 was obtained using a paired samples test revealing a significant difference between the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful and the degree to which they perceive having a biological child is stressful. The difference was significant at the .01 level. The respondents reflected a higher mean score (5.41) regarding the perception that adopting a child is stressful as compared with a mean score of (5.13) regarding the perception that having a biological child is stressful. These results suggest that the respondents perceive that having a biological child is less stressful than adopting a child.

Table 7

Comparisons of perceived stress in adopting a child and perceived stress in having a biological child

	Mean	SD	Correlation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Adopting a child	5.41	2.38				
Having a biological child	5.13	2.58	.99	13.41	510	.001

Hypothesis 3. There is no significant gender difference concerning: a) willingness to consider adopting and b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Hypothesis 3 (a): There is no significant gender difference concerning willingness to adopt: A Chi-Square test of independence was performed to examine the difference between gender and willingness to consider adoption. The relation between these variables was significant. The Pearson Chi-Square Value of $\chi^2 = 14.42$ indicated that a significant difference was found in willingness to adopt according to gender. Table 8 reveals a chi square value of 14.42 was obtained indicating a significant difference at the .001 level. ($\chi^2(1) = 14.42, p < .001$) Males were more likely to indicate that they would not adopt (20.5%) than were females (8.0%). This finding indicates that gender does impact one's willingness to adopt and that males are less willing to consider adoption.

Table 8

Gender differences concerning willingness to adopt

	<i>X²</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i>
Males			
Females	14.42	1	.001

Hypothesis 3 (b): There is no significant gender difference concerning perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare gender in the perception of adoption as stressful. There was a significant difference in males ($M=2.15, SD=.791$) and females ($M=6.30, SD=1.823$) perceptions of adoption as stressful. A t value of 23.19 was obtained, which is significant at the .001 level. Results are detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

Gender Differences concerning perception of degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family

	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Males	2.15	.79		
Females	6.30	1.82	23.19	.001

Hypothesis 4. There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning: a) willingness to adopt and b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Hypothesis 4 (a): There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning willingness to adopt. A Chi-Square test of independence was performed to examine the difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted and willingness to consider adoption. There was a significant difference between those who knew someone who had adopted and those who do not concerning whether or not they would consider adoption, ($\chi^2(1) = 281.30, p < .01$). Table 10 reveals the results. Those who knew someone who had adopted indicated that they would adopt (82%); those who did not know someone who had adopted indicated a lower response of 7.2%. This finding suggests that those who know someone who has adopted are more likely to consider adoption.

Table 10

Comparison on those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not concerning willingness to adopt

	<i>X</i> ²	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Those who know someone who has adopted			
Those who do not know someone who has adopted	281.30	1	.001

Hypothesis 4 (b): There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family. Participants who knew someone who had adopted reflected a significantly lower mean score (M=4.67) than those who did not know someone who had adopted (M=8.77) on the perception of adopting being stressful on marriage and family. Table 11 reveals that a *t*-value of 20.22 was obtained, which is significant at the .001 level.

Table 11

Comparison of those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not concerning perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family

	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Those who know someone who has adopted	4.67	1.920		
Those who do not know someone who has adopted	8.77	.809	20.22	.001

Hypothesis 5. There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Hypothesis 5 (a): There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning willingness to adopt. There was no significant difference in those who were adopted and those who were not regarding willingness to adopt. Chi Square tests reveal ($\chi^2(1) = 1.74, p = .19$). Results are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Comparisons of those who have been adopted and those who have not been adopted concerning willingness to adopt

	X^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Those who have been adopted			
Those who have not been adopted	.174	1	.19

Hypotheses 5 (b): There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family. An independent samples test was conducted to compare adopted persons and biological participants in the perception of adoption as stressful. A significant difference was found between those who were adopted ($M=1.00$, $SD=.000$) and those who were not ($M=5.53$, $SD=2.296$) concerning their perceptions of adoption as stressful on marriage and the family. As Table 13 indicates, a t value of 6.54 was obtained, which is significant at the .001 level. Persons who were not adopted viewed the perception of stress in adoption as neutral.

Table 13

Comparison of those who have been adopted and those who have not been adopted concerning perception of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family

	Mean	SD	t	p
Those who were adopted	1.00	.000		
Those who were not adopted	5.53	2.30	6.54	.001

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions that college students have about adoption. In addition, this study examined whether demographic and background variables affected the respondents' decision to consider adoption. Data was collected from college students at The University of Alabama in Human Development 101 courses. The sample represented 514 college freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The data was collected using a questionnaire format students could complete online at [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) or on paper during a regularly scheduled class.

The first section requested demographic information as well as family and religious background. Another section asked about personal perceptions concerning adoption, including a scale determining the degree of perception to which adoption was considered stressful and satisfying and having a biological child was considered stressful and satisfying on marriage and the family. The remaining section consisted of open-ended questions about adoption and the family. The specific purposes of this study were:

- 1) To examine college students' perceptions concerning whether adopted children express more behavioral and emotional problems.

- 2) To examine perceptions concerning how college students would respond to a child who felt you were not his or her “real” parent.
- 3) To examine the perceptions of college students concerning whether adopted children are really part of their adoptive family.
- 4) To examine the degree to which college students were willing to consider adoption.

Another purpose of this study was to examine the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is satisfying and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is satisfying.
- 2) There is no significant difference concerning the degree to which respondents perceive that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and the degree to which they perceive that having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family.
- 3) There is no significant gender difference concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 4) There is no significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not know someone who has adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.
- 5) There is no significant difference between those who have been adopted and who have not been adopted concerning: (a) willingness to adopt and (b) perceptions of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and family.

Procedure

To fulfill these purposes, data were collected using a questionnaire administered to 514 undergraduate students at The University of Alabama. The sample consisted of 112 males and 402 females primarily 19-20 years of age. 416 participants (63.8%) identified themselves as Caucasian and Baptist (26.1%) was the most prominent religious background. Demographics identified over 75% of participants were raised in a nuclear family.

Results

This study examined the perceptions of college students toward adoption. Results indicated that while few participants were adopted (2.7%), many knew someone who had adopted (81.9%), or who had been adopted (87.3%). Regarding whether or not respondents believed adopted children express more behavioral problems, almost 75% answered no. Over half responded the same regarding adopted children expressing emotional problems. The two most prevalent responses to a child who felt you were not his or her “real” parent were, “Even though I am not your real parent, I still care for you” (33.3%), and understanding and explaining the adoption (18.7%). Ninety five percent of the participants did agree that adopted children were really part of their adopted family, and 89.3% of the respondents said they would consider adoption.

A paired samples test was used to examine hypothesis 1. Results indicated a significant difference between the degree to which respondents perceived that adopting a child is satisfying and having a biological child is satisfying. Respondents believed that having a biological child was more satisfying than adopting. ($p < .001$)

A paired samples test was used to examine hypothesis 2. Results indicated a significant difference between the degree to which participants perceived that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family and having a biological child is stressful on marriage and family. These

results suggested participants perceive adopting a child as more stressful on marriage and family than having a biological child. ($p < .001$)

The Pearson Chi-Square was used to examine hypothesis 3a. Results indicated a significant difference in gender and willingness to consider adoption. Males were less likely to consider adoption than females. ($p < .001$)

An independent samples t test was used to examine hypothesis 3b. Results indicated a significant difference in gender and the perception of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and the family. Females perceived adoption to be more stressful on marriage and family than did males. ($p < .001$)

The Pearson Chi-Square was used to examine hypothesis 4a. Results indicated a significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not concerning willingness to adopt. Those who knew someone who had adopted were more likely to consider adoption than those who did not know someone who had adopted. ($p < .001$)

An independent samples t test was used to examine hypothesis 4b. Results indicated a significant difference between those who know someone who has adopted and those who do not and the perception of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and the family. Those who did not know someone who had adopted considered adoption to be more stressful than those who know someone who had adopted. ($p < .001$)

The Pearson Chi-Square was used to examine hypothesis 5a. In contrast to the other findings, results indicated no significant difference between those who were adopted and those who were not concerning willingness to adopt. ($p = .19$)

An independent samples t test was used to examine hypothesis 5b. Results indicated a significant difference between those who were adopted and those who were not and the

perception of the degree to which adoption has a stressful impact on marriage and the family. Those who were not adopted viewed the stress of adoption on marriage and family as neutral. ($p < .001$)

Discussion

Many themes emerged from the responses to questions in this research study. One of the strongest findings was the perception by college students that adoptees were truly part of the family (95.1%). Less than 5% of participants believed otherwise. When asked why, responses included, “Because family is who you love, not whose DNA you have”, “Because when a family signs the adoption papers, they are proclaiming their dedication and love to a child”, and “Family is something more based on love than blood”.

These findings suggest that adoption is still a preference for the formation of a family, although the child is completely unrelated (Dunn, Ryan, O’Brien, 1988). While blood did not bring the family together, there is still a bond that holds them together. This finding also challenges the idea, although positive, found in many textbooks. The idea states that, “Some parents adopt for humanitarian reasons, not just because of infertility” (Fisher, 2003a). The current research suggests that persons would adopt because adopted children complete a family, not just because the adoptive parents are “good people”. Adoption is much deeper than civic responsibility; it is a responsibility of the heart.

The results of this study reflected a more positive perception of the outcome of adoption than some previous research has indicated. For example, a theme represented in this research was the belief that adopted children do not express more behavioral or emotional problems than their biological counterparts. Almost 75% of respondents believed adopted children do not express more behavioral problems, and more than half believed the same regarding emotional

problems. These findings emphasize the idea that adopted children do not express more negative psychological issues than those who are not adopted. These results are inconsistent with previous research which suggests that adoptees are more likely to face serious problems that require treatment from professionals (Fisher, 2003b), and adoption is perceived as an experience that produces children who are “deeply troubled” (Fisher, 2003b), do not adjust as well, are not as happy, and are more likely to be less confident (National Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2002).

The current research study found one hypothesis to be insignificant in regards to willingness to adopt. Nonadopted persons and adoptees both responded positively to considering adoption. This finding appears to reflect the generally positive views of adoption among this sample. This further suggests that adoptees perceive no significant difference between themselves and those who were not adopted. The finding that those who were not adopted perceived a greater degree of a stressful impact on marriage and family may be due to an anxiety about the unknown. Those who are adopted have experienced stressful situations in the family and have developed a method of coping. Adoptees are directly involved in the stress of marriage and family and may perceive that stress to be nonsignificant. Nonadopted persons have no direct contact with the experience. Because of this, perhaps, those adopted persons are more comfortable with the issue of the stress of adoption on marriage and family.

Another interesting finding in the study is that those persons who had associations with adoption were significantly more likely to consider adoption. This finding may be due to the fact that when people have previous connection with an experience, it reduces the unknown quality of that experience and often contributes to a greater comfort about participating in that experience. This also may be related to research indicating that persons who had dated outside

of their race were more willing to adopt outside of their race (Whatley, Jahangardi, Ross, Knox, 2003).

One of the most interesting findings in this study was the difference in gender and willingness to consider adoption and the perception of the impact of stress on marriage and family. The finding that women were significantly more likely than males to consider adoption may be due to the cultural emphasis that many men feel, when they link masculinity to fathering a biological child. Perhaps because of the greater gender role freedom women experience, they are not as compelled to define their self-worth or success as a woman by giving birth to a biological child (Levant, 2003). Women who may experience infertility may feel pressure to parent and turn to adoption as a means to motherhood. However, the feeling of being infertile may contribute to the perceived stress of adoption on marriage and family. It may be those women anticipating infertility issues in the future would perceive adoption as more stressful. The findings of the current study did address this issue, and many female respondents stated that the main reason they would consider adoption would be the discovery of infertility. The finding that women were more likely to perceive a significantly greater degree of stressful impact on marriage and family may be due to the fact women are more likely to emphasize emotions and feelings in communication and are more likely to address conflicts and problems in relationships (DeGenova, Stinnett, Stinnett, 2011).

The research conducted concluded that college students in this sample reflected concrete, clear views concerning adoption, which is inconsistent with the research of Bonds-Raacke (2009), who did not find strong attitudes in a specific direction concerning adoption. Bonds-Rackee suggested that adoption may not be salient for college students at this time. The present investigation suggests college students are thinking about parenthood, are developing

thoughts regarding the stress of adoption on marriage and family, and already have strong views about adoption in general. The results indicate many college students would consider adoption despite their feelings regarding the outcome as more stressful and less satisfying than having a biological child.

While the results indicated a preference for biological children, there was a generally positive attitude toward adoption that contrasts the stigmas often presented in society and reported in research. For example, some previous research has reported outcomes of adoption are twice as likely to be mentioned more negatively than positively (Fisher, 2003a). The present investigation reflects a more optimistic view in that it provides more positive perceptions in reference to adoption.

This research adds to the growing body of literature pertaining to adoption. It highlights the importance of perception and how these opinions affect future decisions to adopt, respond to, and accept adoptees as part of the family. This current study was intentionally specific and extensive in determining the perceptions of college students. No study presented in current research has been conducted in such depth or focused specifically on adoptions as a means of gaining a child. There are limited studies on college students and adoption, and this study reflects a level of uniqueness in its construction. The hypotheses included in the current investigation had not been thoroughly examined in previous work. Included in this research were the perceptions of college students and willingness to consider adoption, hypothesizing that there would be differences in gender, experiences with adoption, adopted persons, and the perceptions of satisfaction and stress associated with adoption.

Even though the current research provided an in-depth look at college students' perceptions of adoption, the issue of adoption must receive more attention, in research as well

as in an educational and social setting. Even adopted college students understand the need for adoption to be given more attention. One student writes,

I think there should be more written about being adopted...I didn't have any information and nothing is available to college students (Kryder, 1999).

The participants of the current study also understand the need for more information regarding adoption. When asked what information would be helpful for persons seriously considering adoption, over half (59.2%) responded adoption process. The participants also included financial issues (50.6%), legal issues (46.7%), and marriage and family impact (45.3%), and attachment issues (33.7%) as helpful information. More information must be available to college students to increase awareness of adoption, uncover its truths, and dispel its myths.

Educators, family specialists, and agency workers must be thoroughly trained in the area of adoption so that they can present a clear and true view of adoption rather than the distorted, unbalanced image (Fisher, 2003a) presented in society. Researchers agree (Frances, Curtis, Chapman, 2007) there are many therapists who, because of a lack of training, do not even consider the issue of adoption during treatment. Miller et al. (2000) suggests counselors receive training on adoptive identity, the adopted family, and other issues relevant to adoption. It is also recommended therapists become knowledgeable of the laws of adoption and services available post adoption.

One implication for educators is to inform students of the importance of discourse about forming a family. Educators should emphasize that family does not have to be formed by blood and emphasize acceptance. Many of the negative responses in this questionnaire come from stereotypes society has portrayed of adoption. Education programs should be implemented to

include a component of family formation, to include stepfamilies, kinship care, single, gay and lesbian families, and adoptive families. The more people know, the more people will understand, and hopefully, begin to accept.

These findings can be used by counselors for those college students interested in marriage. The questions from this finding may be useful to assist the couple in clarifying expectations for the family, how it will be formed, and stress that may be involved. The responses to the degrees of satisfaction and stress of adoption or having a biological child may begin dialogue between the future couple that may have not otherwise occurred.

These findings may also help adopted persons feel more comfortable sharing their stories, struggles, and/or successes. This research assists in the efforts to bring adoption to the forefront of society. If adoptees felt that society was more accepting of adoption, they may become more open, involved and willing to change the negative views of adoption. This would allow people to see adoption for what and the adoptee for who he/she is.

Of all the information perceived as helpful, changing the overall view of adoption would be the most beneficial. Cahn (2003) presents a most challenging idea of adapting and recognizing a difference in adoption. That is, accept that adoption is not the same as having a birth child and adapt your lifestyle to meet this difference. It is not better, it is not worse, it is different. Cahn further suggests that the definition of family can be modified without undermining the structure on which it stands. When we attempt to deny the differences rather than embrace them, the stigma only deepens. Adoptive families need not conform to the standards of biological families, (Cahn, 2003) rather they must define their own standards.

The primary limitation of this study was the disproportion of respondents. The majority of the sample was Caucasian, female, Baptist, religious, and grew up in a nuclear family. These

demographics may not be reflective of prevalent population, so none of the findings should be generalized. The sample population of adopted persons was not significant to suggest any extensive findings. This study, were it conducted with a more diverse populace, may have yielded more conclusions due to different and stronger variables. Further research for college students in the area of adoption may include, “Would you give your child up for adoption?”, and “College Students’ Perceptions of Adoption Part II: Historically Black Colleges and Universities”.

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APPENDIX

(both mother and father present and both are parents of children in the home)

- _____ Single mother with children
- _____ Single father with children
- _____ Step-family with one or both parent's children
- _____ Other (please describe)

Check yes or no for the following questions

9. Were you adopted? _____ YES _____ NO
If yes, at what age? _____
10. Do you know someone who has adopted a child? _____ YES _____ NO
11. Do you know someone who has been adopted? _____ YES _____ NO
12. Do you think adopted children express:
- a) More behavioral problems _____ YES _____ NO
 - b) More emotional problems _____ YES _____ NO

Rate the following statements

13. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate the degree to which you believe that adopting a child is satisfying, with 1 representing the least degree of satisfaction and 10 representing the greatest degree of satisfaction
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
14. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate the degree to which you believe that having one's own biological child is satisfying, with 1 representing the least degree of satisfaction and 10 representing the greatest degree of satisfaction
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
15. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate the degree to which you believe that adopting a child is stressful on marriage and family, with 1 representing the least degree of satisfaction and 10 representing the greatest degree of stress
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
16. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate the degree to which you believe that having one's own biological child is stressful on marriage and family, with 1 representing the least degree of satisfaction and 10 representing the greatest degree of stress
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Answer the following questions

17. Would you consider adopting? _____ YES _____ NO
If yes, what are the major reasons that would lead you to adopt?

If no, what are the major reasons that would lead you to not adopt?

18. How would you respond to a child who felt you were not his or her “real” parent?

19. Do you believe that adopted children are really apart of their adoptive family?
_____ YES _____NO Why?

20. What information would be helpful for persons seriously considering adoption?
(Circle all that apply)

Attachment Issues
Legal Issues
Financial Issues
Availability of children
Marriage/Family Impact

Adoption Process
Racial/Ethnic barriers
Post adoption support
Restrictions on *who* can adopt
Other_____