

ADOPTION AND HERITAGE IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

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Dedication

Oh! what a tangled web we weave

When first we practise to deceive!

Sir Walter Scott (*Marmion*, Canto VI, Stanza 17)

This project is completed with recognition of those in the many walks of life
who do what they can to diminish the burdens of secrecy.

Abstract

This project on *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* explores the potential meaning and impact of the loss of heritage experienced by many adopted persons in Canada, a country in which preservation of culture and heritage, and equality of citizens, are recognized in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. A bioecological approach is applied that involves reviewing literature on the psychology of adopted persons and then exploring how the Canadian socio-cultural context may impact this experience. At the level of the individual experience, topics covered include adoption loss and the meaning of heritage, adoptive identity development across the lifespan, adjustment to adoption, diversity among adopted persons, and motivations associated with seeking birth family and heritage. Recognizing the broader socio-cultural context of Canada, issues related to adoption and heritage (e.g., access to confidential adoption information) are explored with reference to the influence of public opinion, current adoption legislation and policy, and applications of national and international law. As well, ethical analyses of conflicting interests and controversies pertaining to seeking birth family and heritage are conducted by applying ethical principles in biomedicine, counselling, and psychology. For counsellors, this project presents questions, guidelines, and considerations for the purpose of developing adoption-sensitive counselling. For other professionals in psychology (e.g., educators and researchers) and the management of adoption (e.g., policy analysts), opportunities are discussed for increasing participation in social justice activities that contribute to ameliorating distress and facilitating the well being of adopted persons and their families.

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Chapter 1: Project Overview

The main purpose of this project entitled *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* is to promote recognition and understanding of the complexities of adoption with a focus on the potential impact and implications of the loss of heritage experienced by adopted persons in Canada. Initiated as a requirement for the Master of Counselling (MC) degree through the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology (CAAP) program, this project is intended primarily to be a resource for counsellors who are seeking to increase their sensitivity, competence, and effectiveness in assisting adopted persons and their families.

This project is developed on the premise that counsellors, educators, and researchers in the field of psychology apply their expertise for the purpose of ameliorating distress and facilitating well being. Hence, at best this project will support the capacity of these professionals to contribute more effectively to the resolution of concerns related to adopted persons and the loss of genealogical and cultural heritage.

Project Parameters

For feasibility, conducting this project requires setting parameters on scope, as adoption in Canada has become increasingly diverse and complex. To help define these parameters, the following is a brief definition of the many forms of adoption today.

Broadly defined, *adoption* refers to family circumstances in which biological or birth parents are separated from the social and nurturing responsibilities of parenting (Grotevant, 2003; Miall, 1998). This process generally involves transferring parental responsibilities and rights from the birth parents to others who become adoptive parents.

Variation in the forms of adoptive families today includes domestic adoption, international adoption, transracial adoption, private adoption, public adoption (foster

care), special needs adoption, relative adoption, and open adoption (Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003). Diverse configurations of adoptive families also are recognized, such as single-parent families, and gay and lesbian families. As well, considerable heterogeneity is recognized among adopted persons, birth parents, and adoptive parents—often referred to as the *adoption triad*, *triangle*, or *circle* (Prynn, 2000). Most inclusively, adoption is recognized as a process that also impacts extended family and community members—often referred to as the *adoptive constellation* or *adoption circle* (Dickerson & Allen, 2006; Sobol, 1997; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1978; Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003). (For more terminology, see Appendix A: Terms and Definitions, p. 131).

Recognizing the diversity of adoption and its impact on individuals, families, and communities, for feasibility the scope of this project is limited to a focus on exploring the experience of adopted persons who were adopted domestically (nonrelative) under circumstances that limited access to information about their biological or birth family and heritage. Most often, this occurs in closed or confidential adoptions that strictly control releasing identifying information about birth parents. As information about heritage may be released to adopted persons without identifying their birth parents, also raised in this project are questions about how best to meet the needs of adopted persons in Canada.

Project Rationale

The rationale for the development of this project is based on two tenets: (a) the process of adoption results in lifelong developmental challenges that are not typically experienced by nonadopted persons, and (b) the process and impact of adoption are not well recognized or understood by professionals in counselling and the field of psychology. The following is an explication of these tenets and project rationale.

In reviewing literature for this project, several authors identified the need for more methodologically sound research on adoption-related concerns—for example, by utilizing comparison groups in research studies on adoptive identity development (Freundlich, 2002; McGinn, 2000; Smith, Howard, & Monroe, 2000; Song & Lee, 2009; Wilson, 2004). Recognizing this concern, nonetheless, it was noted that authors in different sources of literature (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, clinical reports, and personal accounts) indicated that normal developmental processes of adopted persons are similar to and also significantly different from those of nonadopted persons (Brodzinsky, 1990; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Grotevant, 1997; Henderson, 2002; Lifton, 2002; McGinn, 2000; Penny, Borders, & Portnoy, 2007; Post, 2000; Smith et al., 2000; Wilson, 2004).

For example, based on an analysis of identity and adoption research, as well as clinician reports, and personal accounts, Grotevant (1997) concluded that identity development is a more complex process for adopted persons because it requires integrating the meaning of being adopted into the construction of a personal narrative. In other research, Penny et al. (2007) identified five phases of identity reconstruction among adopted persons in their middle years. Noteworthy, each phase was associated with different motivations about whether or not search for birth family—these would not be expected to emerge among nonadopted persons.

Highlighting the value of greater recognition and understanding of the unique developmental challenges of adoption by professionals in counselling and psychology, Brodzinsky (1990) applies a stress and coping model to adoptive identity development. According to Brodzinsky, a lack of public recognition and acceptance of adoption-related loss has complicated the development of adopted persons by impeding their process of

grieving and coping with sorrow and loneliness. McGinn (2000) also calls for increasing recognition and understanding of the obstacles experienced by adopted persons as they pass through the stages of normal human development: “To see adoption as simply a variation on the typical manner in which families are formed is to miss the complexity surrounding the whole process of relinquishment and adoption” (p. 28).

Building upon the first tenet, the second one emphasizes the value of increasing awareness and understanding of adoption by professionals in counselling and psychology (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Brodzinsky, 1990; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Grotevant, 1997; Henderson, 2002; Post, 2000; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Siskind, 2006; Weir, 2003). In an American survey of 210 doctoral psychologists, for example, Sass and Henderson found that 65% had never completed a graduate course that covered adoption-related concerns and that 90% indicated a need for more training in the area. Henderson emphasizes a need for researchers and practitioners in mental health to strengthen their attention to the psychology of adoption and related issues: “While society has begun to talk about adoption, particularly postadoption issues such as search and reunion, the behavioural sciences have remained largely silent” (p. 131).

As adoption has become more accepted and accessible, though still mired by controversial issues, Siskind (2006) forecasts that counsellors will work with more clients whose lives have been touched by adoption. Related to this, a national Ipsos-Reid (2004) survey of Canadians found that 59% either know a family member or a close friend who is adopted. Emphasizing the importance of specialized knowledge and skills for counselling adults who are adopted, Baden and Wiley (2007) recommend that counsellors be prepared for dealing with three themes that often emerge: (a) adoptive

identity development, (b) searches for birth parents and reunions, and (c) the psychological adjustment of adopted persons.

As proposed in the project, also relevant is a demand for professionals in counselling and psychology to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how adoption is influenced by broader socio-cultural factors such as community support, public opinion, provincial legislation, and national and international law (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Miall, 1996, 1998; Miall & March, 2005). Thus, this project includes a discussion of adoption-related loss with reference to applications of Canadian legislation for preserving heritage and maintaining equality rights—respectively, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) passed in 1988 and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* passed in 1982 (Department of Justice Canada, 2009).

Project Structure

This project on *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* is organized into seven chapters. Following this first chapter on an overview of the project, *Chapter 2: Project Development* provides more detailed information on the methodology and research constraints, as well as guiding questions for maintaining clarity of purpose and focus. Integrated into each of the following chapters are considerations for potential application to counselling practice with adopted persons.

Chapter 3: Adoptive Identity Development covers topics related to adoptive identity development, normal diversity among adopted persons, and the significance of heritage. *Chapter 4: Adopted Persons and Seeking Heritage* explores motivations associated with why some adopted persons seek information about their birth parents and

heritage, and others do not. Recognizing the impact of socio-cultural context, *Chapter 5: Adoption in the Canadian Socio-Cultural Context* explores the influence of public opinion, and national and international law on adoption concerns, such as access to confidential adoption records by adopted persons. In *Chapter 6: Applications of Professional Ethics to Adoption and Heritage*, ethical principles in biomedicine, counselling, and psychology are applied to attain a more in-depth understanding of controversial issues. To conclude this project, *Chapter 7: Project Applications and Conclusion* reviews applications for counsellors, educators, researchers, and others to consider for developing more adoption-sensitive practice, service, policy, and law.

Project Aims

The overall aim of this project is to explore and increase understanding of the experience of adopted persons in Canada who have limited information about their heritage. Another aim is to promote the development of adoption-related counselling practice, education, and research for the purpose of reducing distress and facilitating well being among adopted persons, their families, and others affected by adoption.

Towards achieving these aims, counsellors, educators, researchers, and others are challenged in this project to consider how they could engage in activities that result in beneficial social change, for example, such as revising counselling education or adoption policy. Given the aims and scope of this project, hence, the bioecological approach is utilized, as it is inclusive of the interests and influences of the different stakeholders—including adopted persons and their families (adoptive and birth), as well as the surrounding community, and broader national and international society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Miall, 1996).

For counsellors, for example, this project focusses on fostering awareness and understanding of the experience of adoption that might otherwise be overlooked, such as the challenge of consolidating an adoptive identity by integrating the genealogical and cultural heritage of two families, adoptive and birth (Beckett, Hawkins, Rutter, Castle, Colvert, Groothues, et al., 2008; Penny et al., 2007). Also emphasized is recognizing normal heterogeneity among adopted persons, as some are motivated to seek birth family and heritage, and others are not (Penny et al., 2007; Sachdev, 1992).

Pursuing the aims of this project also includes considering how adoptive identity and psychological development could be complicated by living in the Canadian socio-cultural context. Related to this, it is recognized that many adopted persons in Canada have grown up with limited information about their heritage, circumstances that contrast starkly with those of most other Canadians. Although not all Canadians participate in heritage activities, such as learning ancestral languages, songs and dances, many do.

At the socio-political level, the heritage of Canadians is not only of intrinsic value, it is officially recognized in legislation, such as the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009). At the broadest societal level, this project analyzes adoption-related concerns with reference to applications of human rights and international law, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (Strong-Boag, 2006). Although applying the bioecological approach increases the complexity of this project, the intention is that doing so will contribute to deeper understandings of these concerns and the generation of more effective resolutions.

Project Value and Utility

Fulfilling the aims of this project, as discussed, has potential value and practical application for increasing support for adopted persons and their families, as they meet the challenges of how to integrate the heritages of two families, birth and adoptive. By promoting increased understanding of these challenges, this project may contribute to the development of more adoption-sensitive services in human service fields, such as counselling and social work. This project also has potential for increasing recognition of how the services and members of each community influence the quality of support for adopted persons and their families.

For stakeholders at the broader provincial and national levels, such as analysts and law makers, the literature and analyses presented in this project may contribute to developing policy and law that are more sensitive to issues of adoption and heritage, as well as more congruent with Canadian values, such as respect and equality. At the international level, this project may support new perspectives on adoption practices and policies for maintaining the heritage for children who are adopted internationally.

Chapter Summary

Presented in this *Project Overview* were the project parameters, rationale, structure, aims, and value and utility. As this project applies a bioecological approach to exploring and understanding adoption and heritage issues, this chapter emphasized recognizing the breadth of stakeholders involved—including adopted persons and their families, as well as the surrounding community and society, national and international (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Miall, 1996). In the next chapter on *Project Development*, more detailed information is provided on the project

methodology, including project and researcher limitations. Also presented are the main research question and five areas of focus with guiding questions.

Chapter 2: Project Development

This chapter on *Project Development* provides details on the methodology, including literature sources, limitations and constraints of the research and researcher, and the lack of uniform language for discussing adoption without negative connotations. Also presented are the main research question and its five themes with guiding questions.

Methodology

Conducting this project is based primarily on the critical review and integration of literature gathered from diverse and, arguably, complementary sources. These include research journals, adoption organizations, and government publications, as well as articles and books written by individuals who have related life experience and/or professional work experience in the field (e.g., as an adopted person and/or therapist).

Applying a comprehensive bioecological approach, this project explores adoption and heritage concerns by integrating literature on a breadth of topics pertaining to the different stakeholders and domains of experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003). Topics include, for example, adoptive identity development (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007; Upshur & Demick, 2006), motivations associated with seeking birth family and heritage (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig., 1992; March, 1995; Song & Lee, 2009), the experience of different members of the adoption triad (O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Strong-Boag, 2006; Wegar, 2006), public opinion on adoption (Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Miall, 1998; Sachdev, 1992), applications of professional ethics (Canadian Counselling & Psychotherapy Association, 2007; Canadian Psychological Association, 2001; Ross & Malloy, 1999), and implications of national and

international law related to human rights (Department of Justice, Canada, 2009; Minister of Public Works & Government Services, 1998; Snow & Covell, 2006).

To facilitate counsellors with critically reviewing this literature and its integration in this project, reflective questions are posed throughout the following chapters. These questions also are intended to promote the development of counselling applications.

Literature Sources

Scholarly sources of literature for this project include peer-reviewed journals (e.g., *Adoption Quarterly*, *Counseling Psychologist*, *Family Relations*) and authoritative books grounded in research findings, such as *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s* by Strong-Boag (2006). To broaden perspectives on adoption and heritage issues, especially ones that contrast with my own, non-scholarly sources also were utilized (Katz, 2000; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Thus, also referenced are edited books with articles and chapters written by individuals of diverse backgrounds and opinions who are knowledgeable about adoption through their professional work (e.g., advocates and therapists) and/or status as a member of the adoption triad (Dusky, 2006; Lifton, 2002; Siskind, 2006). In addition, relevant literature was gathered from books and public sources such as Web sites of authoritative government offices and adoption associations, such as the Department of Justice Canada and The Adoption Council of Canada.

For socio-cultural relevancy and currency, most of the literature was selected based on its context and date of publication. Although Canadian or American literature produced within the last decade was preferred, for an historical perspective on development in adoption some literature was included that did not meet this criteria.

Changing social perceptions and values that impact adoption, for example, can be identified by comparing the results of early and recent surveys on community and public opinion (Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Sachdev, 1992; Miall, 1988; Miall & March, 2005; Rompf, 1993; Snow & Covell, 2006).

As well, some literature was included if the author was considered authoritative and influential in the field, as evident by citation in numerous publications (e.g., Brodzinsky, 1990, Freundlich, 2002; Grotevant, 2003; Lifton, 2002). The repetition in literature of different themes pertaining to adoption and heritage also was considered an indicator of significance (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005)—for example, the themes of recognizing the unique challenges of adoptive identity development and normal developmental variation among adopted persons (Beckett et al., 2008; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007; Triseliotis, 2000, Upshur & Demick, 2006; Wilson, 2004).

Also, some literature was included primarily because it extended the discussion with new perspectives and applications (e.g., Bastard Nation, 2004; Goodman et al., 2004; Grotevant, 2003; Kenny, 2006; Means, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). By utilizing a breadth of information sources, scholarly and otherwise, thus, a more inclusive and richer understanding of adoption and heritage may be attained (Strong-Boag, 2006).

Research Databases

Much of the literature for this project is from peer-reviewed journals in psychology and social work that were found in academic online databases (e.g., Academic Search and SpringerLink). Many relevant journal articles were located in these databases by conducting key word searches with terms related to adoption and heritage—

for example, *adopted person, adoption, birth parents, Canada, heritage, human rights, identity, loss, identity, multiculturalism, open adoption, policy, public opinion, and searching*. Also, much literature was identified by reviewing the reference lists of relevant articles and books. This literature was later located in print and e-resources through the Dr. John Archer Library, University of Regina (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Research Limitations and Constraints

As in all research endeavours, this project has inherent limitations and constraints (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). One overriding limitation is the literature, given the current underdevelopment in research on adoption (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Lifton, 2002; Song & Lee, 2009; Wilson, 2004). Related to this, researchers and professionals have identified a need more research on theoretical conceptualizations in adoption (e.g., lifelong adoptive identity development), different forms of adoption (e.g., the adoption of children in foster care), and effective counselling interventions with adopted persons (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Freundlich, 2002; Smith et al., 2000).

Also a limitation, the generalization of research findings on adoption is compromised by considerable within-group variation among adopted persons—for example, some seek birth family and heritage, and other do not (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007). Also limiting, there is a general lack of empirical research on adoption (Baden & Wiley; Wilson, 2004). Related to this, confidentiality and ethical constraints limit random sampling needed to form control and experimental groups for comparison of outcomes (Miall, 1998; Siegel, 2006). It would be unethical, for example, to break an adoption agency's confidentiality policy in order to access the client database for random sampling in an empirical study (Siegel). As well, it

would be unethical to assess closed and open adoption practices by randomly assigning children from an orphanage to experimental adoption groups (*closed* and *open*). Given the methodological concerns, hence, caution is recommended before generalizing research findings on adopted persons, especially to those living in significantly different socio-cultural contexts (Baden & Wiley; Seigel 2006; Wilson, 2004).

Towards addressing the limitations and constraints of this project, Baden and Wiley (2007) propose that such concerns can be addressed, in part, by regarding knowledge acquired through empirical research and practice as complementary. With a similar perspective, Katz (2000) also supports greater recognition of the value of knowledge acquired through non-scholarly activities (i.e., practice): “Researchers are not necessarily more objective than professionals, nor can research provide the answers to some of the more complex situations which professionals have to confront” (p. 219). Thus, there is a rationale for integrating a breadth literature sources in this project.

Researcher Declaration

Each researcher has a unique and fluid worldview and cultural identity that impacts the research process (Offet-Gardner, 2005). To assess the potential influence of researcher variables, Offet-Gardner recommends that researchers engage in the *cultural self-exploration* of their experience, worldview, and identity, including personal qualities and attributes such as attitudes, biases, beliefs, values, privilege, ethnicity, and heritage. Applied conducting this project *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context*, I have chosen to disclose my status as a person who was adopted and has experienced the loss of heritage, as well as its reclamation through reunion with my birth family and learning more about my heritage.

Adopted or not, self-awareness and disclosure of potential researcher biases and limitations are recommended for promoting the critical review of this project (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005; Offet-Gardner, 2005). Disclosure serves to alert the reader to instances in which researcher subjectivity might have skewed the selection, analysis, and integration of the literature. Hence, the reader is better prepared to consider alternate perspectives.

As an asset, my experience has sensitized me to adoption-related concerns that I otherwise might have overlooked. As a detriment, I risk interpreting and manipulating research and other information so that it aligns with my personal experience and viewpoints (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Offet-Gardner, 2005). Through awareness and disclosure of my researcher variables, thus, I have endeavoured to minimize the detrimental impact on this project. My strategies also include self-monitoring my reactions and preferences and utilizing an inclusive approach, for example, by including research on perspectives different from my own (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005).

Towards managing researcher biases, I also have endeavoured to fulfill criteria recommended by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) for evaluating qualitative research. In addition to *explicitness of biases* by disclosing my adoption experience, I have sought to maintain *purposefulness* by keeping a focus on the research question and not straying into tangential topics of personal interest. To attain *completeness, rigour* and *open-mindedness*, I have sought objectivity by including diverse viewpoints on controversial issues, such as access to confidential adoption records (Means, 2004). As well, I have endeavoured to maintain willingness to modify my personal opinions given sufficient evidence and rationales and, as previously noted, utilized the strategy of asking reflective questions that invite readers to critically think and determine their own viewpoints.

Although I do consider my personal perspectives to be valid within the context of my own life experience, I also am committed to respecting those of other adopted persons, as their viewpoints also are valid within the context of their unique experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In conducting this project, thus, I have refrained from assuming that my experiences and perspectives are the definitive ones. Furthermore, recognizing and valuing differences among adopted persons can contribute to a more informed and complete understanding of the complexities of adoption and heritage issues.

In my decision to conduct this project on adoption and heritage with a focus on counselling applications, I recognize that my motivations align with proponents of strengthening the integration of psychology and social justice (Goodman et al., 2004; Henderson, 2002; Palmer, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Related to this, Palmer regards counselling psychology as lagging in comparison with other disciplines and specializations (e.g., business, medicine, and social psychology), which have conducted multidisciplinary research for decades.

As evidence, in a PubMed search Palmer (2004) found over 5,400 references related to medicine and social justice. In comparison, Palmer found only 22 references related to social justice in *The Counseling Psychologist* and no references for the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Thus, this project explores expanded activities for counsellors to consider related to social justice, such as becoming more engaged in advocacy pertaining to adoption and heritage issues.

Another motivation for developing this project is a realization that adopted persons are a minority whose needs could be better served. With reference to the United

States, for example, Post (2000) regards adopted persons in closed, confidential adoption as comprising a minority group that has experienced discrimination:

Adoptees are the only group in America prohibited by law from obtaining original birth certificates and their own family medical records, as well as from knowing biologically related relatives. This decision was made for them by the adult parties involved in the adoptive process, and without the consent of the adopted person. (p. 366)

Recognizing that adopted persons comprise a minority group, arguably, has important implications for the development of professional counselling and psychology, as ethical guidelines call for greater attention to multiculturalism and diversity in research, practice, education, and social change (Goodman et al., 2004). Related to this, Vera and Speight (2003) emphasize that demonstrating a commitment to the tenets of multiculturalism and diversity will require professionals in counselling and psychology to engage in more activities such as advocacy, prevention, and outreach:

Social justice is at the heart of multiculturalism in that the existence of institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia is what accounts for the inequitable experiences of people of color, women, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people (among others)...Moreover, discrimination and prejudice are intimately connected to quality-of-life issues for these groups” (p. 254).

To conclude this researcher declaration, I recognize that the development of this project *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* is based, in part, on my view that adopted persons comprise a generally unrecognized minority group in Canada (Vera & Speight, 2003). Thus, this project is an opportunity to increase understanding of this

experience, which has implications for professionals in counselling and psychology to increase their activities for supporting broader social change (Goodman et al., 2004).

Language, Terms, and Abbreviations

Noted in developing this project was a lack of uniform language and terminology for referring to individuals who have experienced adoption (Strong-Boag, 2006; Upshur & Demick, 2006). Also, many adoption terms have multiple meanings that include negative or oppressive connotations, such as referring to an adoptive parent as a *second parent* (Strong-Boag, 2006). As neutral and succinct terms were not always found, for this project terms were selected for their (a) degree of respect, (b) conceptual accuracy, and (b) economy of word. For a reference on language used in this project, see Appendix A: Terms and Definitions (p. 131).

For example, the term *adoptee* implies a personal quality; in comparison, *person who was adopted* is considered more respectful and accurate, as it indicates that adoption is a circumstance of life (Upshur & Demick, 2006). Striking a middle ground between respect and accuracy, and for brevity, in this project *adopted person* is utilized.

Also selected were *birth parents* and *adoptive parents* over *first parents* and *second parents*, which imply that adoptive parents are of secondary importance and status compared to biological parents. (Pertman, 2006; Strong-Boag, 2006). All these terms, however, are preferred to *natural* or *real parent*, which implies that parents who adopt are somewhat “unnatural or fake” (Pertman, p. 65).

Also noted in developing this project was a frequent use of abbreviations in the literature for organizations or conventions with long names—for example, the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), and *The Hague Convention of Protection of Children and Co-*

operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions (HCIA). For a reference on abbreviations used in this project, see Appendix B: Abbreviations (p. 134).

Main Research Question, and Guiding Topics and Questions

Guiding this project on *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* is the main research question: “What are the meanings and implications of the loss of genealogical and cultural heritage, as experienced by adopted persons living in the socio-cultural context of Canada?” To address this question, each subsequent chapter focusses on five topics related to adoption and heritage: (a) the significance of heritage in adoptive identity development; (b) normal variation among adopted persons and their motivations associated with seeking birth family and heritage; (c) the influence of socio-cultural context on adoption and heritage issues with potential applications of national and international legislation; (d) ethical analyses of adoption and heritage issues (e.g., access to confidential adoption records); and (e) project applications for members of the adoption triad, counsellors and other human services professionals, and social justice.

To maintain purpose and a relevant focus in conducting this complex project and addressing the main research question, the following five guiding questions for each of the aforementioned topic areas: (a) “What is identity development for adopted persons?” (Chapter 3); (b) “How do adopted persons decide whether or not to seek their birth family and heritage?” (Chapter 4); (c) “How do communities, the general public, and broader society influence adoption and access to heritage?” (Chapter 5); (d) “How do ethical principles apply to adoption and heritage issues?” (Chapter 6); and (e) “What are the potential applications of this project for counsellors and other stakeholders?” (Chapter 7).

Recognizing the unique experience and individual variation among members of the adoptive constellation, exploring these topics is expected to yield a diversity of perspectives (Friedlander, 2003; Penny et al., 2007; Wilson, 2004).

Chapter Summary

This chapter on *Project Development* focussed on describing the research methodology employed with details about the selection of literature, research limitations, and selection of “better” adoption terms for minimizing negative connotations (e.g., *adoptee* vs. *person who was adopted*). For reference lists of the terms and abbreviations used in this project, see Appendix A (p. 131) and Appendix B (p. 134), respectively.

Included in this chapter was discussion on the challenge of conducting this project despite the underdevelopment of adoption research (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Katz, 2000). Also discussed, the researcher described assets and detriments associated with conducting this project as an adopted person, along with strategies for managing bias (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher also elaborated upon conducting this project as a means of promoting integration between psychology and social justice (Goodman et al., 2004; Henderson, 2002; Palmer, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003).

This chapter concluded by introducing the main research question: “What are the meanings and implications of the loss of genealogical and cultural heritage, as experienced by adopted persons living in the socio-cultural context of Canada? Also presented were the five main topics and guiding questions for the remaining chapters.

The next chapter *Adoptive Identity Development* begins with a guiding question for exploring and increasing understanding of the unique process of adoptive identity

development. Related literature is reviewed with a focus on understanding how the meaning of heritage can change across developmental stages.

Chapter 3: Adoptive Identity Development

As with each subsequent chapter, this one on *Adoptive Identity Development* begins with a guiding question for exploring a topic relevant to the main research question: “What are the meanings and impact of loss of heritage (genealogical and cultural), as experienced by adopted persons living in the socio-cultural context of Canada?” In this chapter, the influence of adoption on identity development is explored with the following question: “What is identity development for adopted persons?”

For counsellors seeking to increase understanding of the experience of adopted persons, this chapter presents research on the lifelong process of adoptive identity development and how it differs from that of nonadopted persons (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Included is literature on theoretical models of adoptive identity formation during adolescence and mid-life (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007), and challenges associated with integrating adoption-related loss (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Lifton, 2002; McGinn, 2000).

Emphasized in the following literature is recognizing diversity among adopted persons as normative variation—individual differences in the salience of concern about adoption status, for example, can range from *no interest* to *preoccupation* (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000). Patterns identified in literature on adoptive identity development, hence, are not assumed to be sequential and universal. Applied to practice, Wilson (2004) recommends that counsellors exercise caution before generalizing findings from adoption research and that they individually assess adopted persons.

Adoptive Identity Development in Context

Regardless of the circumstances of adoption, each adopted person is challenged to clarify, “Who am I as a person who is adopted?” (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004, p. 136). Addressing this question is an individual journey, one that occurs within a unique socio-cultural context of time and place with particular adoption laws, policies, and practices. Recognizing the interactive relationship between adopted persons and broader social influences, Upshur and Demick (2006), thus, define *identity* as “an integrated, coherent, and goal-directed self that involves an understanding of the self, of one’s relationships with others, and of one’s values and roles in society” (p. 92).

Melding this conceptualization of identity with the bioecological model of human development, adoptive identity development is considered product of a broad range of interactional factors, before and after adoption. Most inclusively, these factors pertain to the individual, immediate family, and broader surrounding community and society, national and international (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Penny et al., 2007).

Influential factors include maternal health, age at adoption, deprivation, and personality, as well as situational and historical factors such as the socioeconomic status of the birth parents and adoptive parents, and public opinion on adoption issues (e.g., open adoption) (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Grotevant, 1997; Miall, 1998). As adoption has become increasingly diverse (e.g., transracial and nontraditional), adoptive identity development has been complicated by more differences within and between adoptive families and their communities, (Grotevant et al., 2000).

This comprehensive, contextual approach to understanding adoptive identity development is supported by the results of Grotevant's (1997) integrative analysis of adoption research, clinician reports, and accounts of adopted. Based on this analysis, Grotevant describes adoptive identity development as a normative process involving three components: (a) self-definition, referring to the combination of personality characteristics and social style, which interact with various situational and historical influences; (b) the individual's subjective coherence of personality; and (c) continuity over time, "as identity involves construction of linkages across one's past, present, and future" (p. 5). Relevant to this project, thus, Grotevant indicates that preserving heritage, before and after adoption, is an important factor in adoptive identity development.

Adoptive Identity as Lifelong Development

Adoptive identity development is a complex, dynamic process that evolves across the lifespan (Friedlander, 2003; Grotevant, 1997; McGinn, 2000; Smith et al., 2000; Wilson, 2004). Based on extensive experience in the adoption field, Friedlander (2003) concludes that there is no developmental endpoint to the lifelong process of confronting and assimilating new understandings and feelings about being adopted, which often emerge at developmental milestones such as the birth of a child or death of a parent. Given the life circumstances of an adopted person, it can be considered developmentally normal to reflect upon identity-related questions such as "Where did I come from?" "Why was I placed for adoption?" "Do I have siblings?" and "What does adoption mean in my life?" (Baden & Wiley, 2007, pp. 135-136).

Normalizing this developmental process, Grotevant (1997) regards identity development as more complex for adopted than non-adopted persons and that this

difference “does not imply that there is anything pathological about it” (p. 4). Based on an integrative review of literature on adoption research and practice, Baden and Wiley (2007) similarly concluded that the mental health of adopted and nonadopted adults are similar; however, adjustment problems may emerge in a subset of adopted persons who experienced detrimental pre-adoption conditions, such as lingering in foster care.

As literature also indicates that adoption-related adjustment problems often arise during middle-childhood, Wilson (2004) explains that this also could be considered a normative response as the adopted child develops cognitively and seeks to integrate the meaning of adoption. As well, it could be normative for at-risk children placed in their first year to have more identity issues than those placed when older, as they may have more information or memories about their biological parents (Smith et al., 2000).

Grotevant (1997) also suggests that it could be developmentally normative for adopted persons to experience complications in progressing through later developmental stages and challenges, such as leaving home, entering a committed relationship, and experiencing parenthood. At such times of life change and transition, many adopted persons find that identity-related questions arise that require details about birth family.

Applied to counselling, Grotevant (1997) recommends that counsellors learn about how normal developmental challenges across the lifespan can be complicated by the nonnormative event of adoption (McGinn, 2000; Wilson, 2004). Counsellors who are prepared can better assess the adopted person’s strengths and needs, whether working with a minor or adult, and offer information, guidance, and interventions that are timely, developmentally appropriate, and effective (Grotevant; McGinn; Wilson).

Identities Assigned and Chosen

As discussed, Upshur and Demick (2006) propose that adoptive identity development may be best understood within a “holistic, developmental, systems-oriented approach to person-in-environment functioning across the life span” (p. 92). Within this complex developmental process, Upshur and Demick regard adoptive identity status as but one of numerous identities and distinguish between personal identities that are chosen from those that are not.

Chosen identities are under control of the person, such as occupational choice, political affiliation, values, and goals (Upshur & Demick, 2006; Grotevant, 1997). In contrast, identities that are inherent, given, or assigned are difficult or impossible to change, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and adoptive status. In counselling with adopted persons for identity concerns, awareness of this distinction can be applied for strengthening a sense of control and self-efficacy in making identity choices.

Most of the unique identity challenges facing adopted persons are about ‘givens’ in their lives rather than about choices they are to make. However, although adopted persons did not choose their adoption situations, they do have choices about how they *come to terms* with them and about how these identity components become woven into their personal narrative. (Grotevant, 1997, p. 9)

Grotevant (1997) elaborates that like race and sexual orientation, all adopted persons are challenged to integrate adoption status into their larger sense of identity. Alternately, Grotevant questions, “What are the consequences of constructing a personal narrative that ignores the fact of one’s adoption?” Based on personal and clinical accounts, Grotevant suggests that such consequences can be problematic.

Adoptive identity development, thus, is complicated by the challenge of integrating heritage from two families (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Miall, 1998). Heritage passed through birth parents could be considered an inherent or given identity that might be recognized and valued, or not, by the adopted person and/or others—such as family members, professionals (e.g., teachers), and general public, as well as institutions and broader society (e.g., government services).

In a personal account, for example, Canadian journalist Rick Ouston (1994) recalled that the message he received about adoption while growing was, “Don’t talk about it” (p. 13). Ouston explains that at the time secrecy was perpetuated in adoption law that codified “how babies born to others would be ‘as if’ born to their adoptive parents” (p. 13). Consequently, his background was “dismissed” (p. 13) by sealed adoption records, a practice considered in the best interests of the child and adoptive parents. However, as suggested by Grotevant (1997), ignoring or denying adoption status can be problematic; arguably, as explored in this project, so may be dismissing heritage.

Ethno-Cultural Heritage and Self-Ascribed Identity

According to Grotevant (1997), the development of a positive ethnic identity is a developmental task that begins in early childhood, becomes salient during adolescence and young adulthood, and continues to be negotiated across the lifespan. Complicating identity development in transracial adoption are the additional tasks of integrating the experience of being physically different from adoptive parents, the loss of birth heritage, and assimilation into White majority culture.

In related research on Korean children adopted by White American parents, for example, Song and Lee (2009) describe this type of cultural socialization as “more

extrinsic, explicit, and oftentimes more superficial than in same-race families because the responsibility for socialization of the child rests largely with White parents who do not share the child's ethnic and racial heritage" (p. 22). Given these concerns, a counsellor might be unsure of how to describe and assist adopted persons who express mixed feelings about their background, history, or ethno-cultural racial heritage (Upshur & Demick, 2006; Grotevant, 1997).

For consideration, an approach proposed by Smith (2006) is to facilitate such clients with self-ascribing their identity. Rather than assigning identity by the perceptions of others, especially for adopted persons of colour, facilitating self-definition demonstrates values of autonomy, respect, and authenticity: "We need to convey the message of respect: that we are truly free to develop ourselves from multiple kinds of families and multiple heritages" (Smith, p. 256).

However identity is self-defined, heritage is embedded—alternately, a person may identify with multiple heritages. To better understand the concept of multiple heritages, Watkins (2006) applies poststructuralist theory to propose the metaphor of describing adopted persons as rhizomatic; rather than lacking roots, they move between different ethno-cultural environments.

Adoption, Life Stories, and Continuity

Also relevant to this project is an exploration of the relationship between adoptive identity development and discontinuous heritage, as the life story of many adopted persons is not culturally or historically located or sanctioned (Simmonds, 2000). In contrast with the experience of most people, many adopted persons have an incomplete life story, which complicates the process of their identity development. Describing his

experience of living with unknown heritage, for example, Ouston (1994) recalled frustration with the lack of information and feeling alone, different, and abandoned.

Related to this, Upshur and Demick (2006) explain that “essential tasks in identity development concern differentiation of oneself as an individual of worth and establishing continuity with one’s past that can be projected from current to future” (p. 92). Thus, for some adopted persons the acknowledgement of their past is a validating experience.

As an example of how maintaining continuity can build self-worth, Katz (2000) describes the practice in the UK of developing life story books with children who have been fostered or adopted. Applying a rationale of attachment theory, the process of creating life story books facilitates a sense of personal coherence and a stronger sense of self. To explain, Katz writes that “children need to develop a sense of continuity and to internalize the positive experiences and people in their past” (p. 223).

As adopted children grow and develop cognitively, questions about their background and history can arise. Simmonds (2000) elaborates that “the capacity to be curious lies at the heart of an adopted child’s ability to lay claim to his or her history and inheritance, to develop the capacity to sustain knowledge and to make sense of themselves in their world” (p. 32). If not answered, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) explain that during adolescence the additional challenge of living with an unknown past can result in prolonged identity exploration, the delay of other identity work until issues of adoptive identity are better resolved, or a state of identity confusion.

Thus, it is important for counsellors to understand how learning about their past can benefit many adopted persons with attaining an authentic completion of their life story and heritage, which facilitates identity development. Ultimately, according to

Simmonds (2000), the best resolution to living with an unknown past occurs when the narratives of the adopted person, birth family, and adoptive family become integrated. For this reason, Simmonds supports adoption practices that allow for shared knowledge, contact, and flexible boundaries among members of the adoption triad.

Adoption Loss and Identity Development

For adopted persons, the process of identity development involves integrating adoption-related loss and grief (Brodzinsky, 1990; Grotevant, 1997; Lifton, 2002; Simmonds, 2000; Watkins, 2006; Zamostny, Wiley, O'Brien, Lee, & Baden, 2003). Even for those who were adopted as infants and have little information about their past, Brodzinsky (1990) explains that "lost birthparents often linger as 'ghosts'" (p. 9) in thoughts and emotions.

In counselling with adopted persons, Wilson (2004) states that "understanding the unique stress of relinquishment and adoption is imperative" (p. 692). Related to this, Brodzinsky (1990) calls for mental health professionals and the general public to better recognize the needs of children who were adopted as infants, as "too often it has been assumed that adopted children cannot feel loss for individuals (i.e., biological parents) they have never known" (p. 7). Thus, Baden and Wiley (2007) recommend that counsellors have an understanding of adoption-related loss, as now discussed.

Adoption Loss

Brodzinsky (1990) cites research indicating that adopted persons can experience different types of adoption loss across the lifespan. Examples includes separation from biological parents and extended family, instability in the relationship with adoptive parents, diminished status associated with being different, a lack of genealogical

continuity, and a general sense of loss of self. For adults, loss and grief often emerge at times of transition and special life events (e.g., birth of a child or death of a parent) when the meaning of adoption is recognized and renegotiated—for example, being unable to pass on heritage to children and grandchildren (Friedlander, 2003; Penny et al., 2007).

According to Brodzinsky (1990), experiencing a multiple adoption-related losses across the lifespan can lead to an adopted person “feeling incomplete, alienated, disconnected, abandoned, or unwanted” (p. 7)—related to this, Lifton (2002) proposes the concept of *cumulative adoption trauma*. Brodzinsky also adds that sometimes adopted persons express grief in emotions and behaviours that others misattribute as acting out.

Adoption Loss and Societal Support

Based on clinical experience, Brodzinsky (1990) and Lifton (2002) describe how the surrounding societal context influences the experience of adoption loss. According to Brodzinsky, “diminished societal recognition and support for this loss, as well as the realization that restoration of a relationship with the lost individuals is a possibility, combine to complicate the grieving process” (p. 10). Lifton elaborates upon the inner experience of adopted persons in dealing with hidden and unacknowledged loss:

To see the adoptee not only as a child who has gained a family, but as a child who has lost one. Because this loss is usually unacknowledged by society, adoptees often feel alone on their journey, even when surrounded by a loving adoptive family. They also feel invisible, for an essential part of them is not acknowledged: the part that was born of other parents, whose genetic code is stamped into every cell of their bodies. (p. 208)

Adoption Loss and Identity Development

Jones (1997) applies Piaget's model of cognitive development for understanding how grief can develop and impact the identity development of adopted persons. As children develop cognitively, they are able to engage in abstract thought, consider multiple possibilities, and formulate complex arguments about the past. Thus, adopted children become able to contemplate adoption issues of abandonment, rejection, betrayal, self-worth, separation, trust, loss, and identity. During adolescence, Brodzinsky (1990) explains, grief can emerge when realizing the loss of birth family and heritage, which can intensify a sense of being different from most family members and peers.

To cope with the loss or cumulative adoption trauma, according to Lifton (2002), some adopted persons dissociate their feelings of loss, grief, and anger. Others decide to attain a more coherent sense of self and identity by searching for birth family "to integrate the past and the present and move on into the future" (Lifton, p. 207).

In counselling with adopted persons, the continuum of reactions to adoption-related loss can range from minimal to highly distressed (Brodzinsky, 1990; Grotevant, 1997). Towards understanding this variation in reactions to adoption loss and the impact on identity development, Brodzinsky applies an adapted model of stress and coping first proposed by Lazarus and colleagues (Grotevant).

Stress and Coping Model of Adjustment to Adoption

Brodzinsky's (1990) model of adjustment to adoption conceptualizes adoption as an experience of loss (stress), and adjustment as a process mediated by cognitive-appraisal and coping activities. In application, *cognitive appraisal* refers to thoughts about the meaning of adoption and the evaluation of options for handling related

demands, challenges, and conflict. Coping strategies are classified as either (a) *problem-focussed*, related to action, negotiation, accessing support; seeking information, modifying aspirations or expectations, and restraint; or (b) *emotion-focussed*, related to minimization, denial, escapism, distancing, self-blame, and re-definition.

Applying this model for understanding adopted children with emotional or behavioral problems, Brodzinsky (1990) proposes that at least some of these difficulties could be attributed to adoption loss and grieving. In related research, Ingersoll (1997) found that adopted children requiring psychiatric intervention often demonstrate externalizing problems such as aggressive, disobedient, and overactive behaviours.

Supporting Brodzinsky's (1990) proposal, in a review of related research Smith et al. (2000) identified grief as the second most common emotional problem affecting at-risk adopted children (71%)—most common was separation/attachment conflict (75%). Also, 64% experienced identity issues that intensified and peaked during adolescence—as evident in statements such as, “I want to know more about who I am” (Smith, et al., p. 553). Thus, Brodzinsky's (1990) model has counselling applications for assessment and interventions for problems related to adoption loss and identity development (Brodzinsky, 1990; Grotevant, 1997; Zamostny et al., 2003).

Facilitating a client with a cognitive appraisal, for example, could involve clarifying perceptions of adoption and its impact, such as experiencing sadness and identity confusion related to loss. Current coping strategies could be identified and assessed for effectiveness as problem-focussed (e.g., gathering information on adoption support services) or emotion-focussed (e.g., expressing frustration by acting out). As needed, alternate and more effective coping strategies could be explored—Zamostny et

al. (2003) found, for example, that more favourable resolutions of adoption loss and grief were associated with positive coping strategies such as accessing support for search questions, obtaining information, or reappraising the information already received.

With a focus on how coping with adoption loss varies and can impact identity development across the lifespan, research is now presented on adopted adolescents and adopted adults in their middle years (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007).

Adoptive Identity Development in Adolescence

Identity formation is a hallmark of adolescence, a time when individuals strive to define who and what they are in relation to career, life, goals, friendship patterns, sexual orientation, religion, moral value systems, and group loyalties (Wilkinson, 1995). As proposed by theorist Erik Erikson, developing a strong identity involves reconciling individuation with acceptance and continuity with kin (Upshur & Demick, 2006). Applying Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, experiencing and resolving an *identity crisis* is a normal developmental stage of adolescence. For many adopted persons, however, the process of resolving these developmental tasks and crisis is complicated by unanswered questions about their heritage and sense of self in relation to two families, past and present (Friedlander, 2003; Katz, 2000; Penny et al., 2007; Upshur & Demick, 2006). For individuals adopted cross-culturally or cross-racially, this process is even more complex. (Friedlander, 2003; Penny et al., 2007; Upshur & Demick, 2006).

To more closely examine the development of adoptive identity during adolescence, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) interviewed 145 adopted adolescents (75 females, 70 males) on topics related to four identity domains: occupation, friendship,

religion, and adoption. For the adoption domain, Dunbar and Grotevant focussed on identifying feelings, beliefs, and knowledge related to their adoption status.

Identity Classifications of Adopted Adolescents

Based on their analysis, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) identified four distinct patterns or types of adoptive identity: *unexamined*, *limited*, *unsettled*, and *integrated*. Statistical analyses of the classifications by mean age and age range indicated the following: (a) 24 adolescents classified with *unexamined identity* (mean age 14.87, range 12.71-18.11); (b) 46 with *limited identity* (mean age 15.18, range 11.51-20.84); (c) 30 classified with *unsettled identity* (mean age 15-21, range 11.10-19.11); and 45 with *integrated* (mean age 16.67, range 12.75-20.56). Based on these findings, Dunbar and Grotevant thus concluded that identity development for adopted adolescents is a progression of increasing exploration and narrative development.

Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) found that adopted adolescents with *unexamined identity* had not thought deeply about adoption and that they described little positive or negative affect about being adopted. Asked about views on openness in adoption, for example, one adolescent responded, “I don’t know, I haven’t really paid attention to anything like that at all” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 143).

Adopted adolescents with *limited identity* demonstrated some reflection on adoption, viewed adoptive and nonadoptive families as mostly similar, and expressed mostly positive affect related to adoption (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). In the words of one interviewee, for example, “There’s no difference between whether I was their child, their real child, or theirs like I am now” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 149).

In comparison to these two identities, those with *unsettled identity* demonstrated a high degree of negative thinking and feelings about adoption (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). One interviewee expressed the following interest in birth family and heritage: “I’d like to first of all, be able to make contact with my birthfather. I’d like to know maybe ethnical background, like where—heritage in particular” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 135).

Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) found that adopted adolescents with *integrated identity* had thought deeply about the complexity of adoption and presented a coherent, positive view of its meaning and impact on their identity. Reflecting upon the potential influence of unknown birth family and heritage, for example, one interviewee shared the following: “I think you do pick up a lot from environment, but I think there’s also a lot, not necessarily chainwise but you know you have and don’t really know why, that comes from you parents, well birthparents” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 135).

Diversity and Adopted Adolescents

In presenting this research by Dunbar and Grotevant (2004), it is not assumed that those classified with *unexamined, limited, or unsettled identities* are experiencing difficulties outside of the normal range of the process of identity development for adopted adolescents. Although adopted adolescents with *integrated identity* were usually older than those in the other categories, this does not mean that the different classifications of identity development are necessarily sequential or universal.

Issues of Adoption and Heritage in Counselling

Relevant for understanding and counselling adopted adolescents, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) found that those with *unsettled or integrated identity* have motivations to connect with their birth family and heritage. Those with *unsettled identity* in a

confidential adoption were “bothered by the lack of information about their backgrounds and wanted to search, although they were ambivalent about making contact” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 152). Also, most adolescents with *integrated* identity were in fully disclosed adoptions and informed about their birth family. In general, these adolescents valued both their adoptive family and birth family, and intended to continue developing their relationship with birth family members, which they described as “safe, understandable, and rewarding” (Dunbar & Grotevant, p. 157).

Also noteworthy, adolescents with *integrated* identity and in a confidential adoption were interested in searching for their birth parents. Adolescents with *integrated* identity, but in a mediated adoption that allows some contact with birth family, most expressed interest in more contact. To explain this motivation for connection with birth family, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) describe it as a search for self-discovery, as evident in the following quotes: “It’s just discovering why I am the way I am” and “I want to see someone who looks like me because it’s the sense that ‘yes I belong in this family and stuff, but not really that I am connected to the world’” (Dunbar & Grotevant , p. 157).

Although this study by Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) did not directly investigate the value of heritage to adopted adolescents, this theme is embedded in their narratives. According to Upshur and Demick (2006), “the resolution of identity is made more complicated by difficulties addressing the continuity dimension of identity, questions such as “Where did I come from?” (p. 93); hence, seeking birth family and heritage can be an effective problem-focussed coping strategy for resolving concerns related to adoption loss and identity development (Brodzinsky, 1990; Zamostny et al., 2003).

Also important, however, is recognition of the many adopted adolescents in the study who did not describe motivations related to seeking birth family and heritage (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Thus, it is important that counsellors recognize normal diversity among adopted persons, as they endeavour to resolve developmental challenges and consolidate a sense of identity with greater continuity between the past and present.

Adoptive Identity Development in the Middle Years

As previously discussed, adoptive identity development can be conceptualized as a process of integrating new understandings and feelings about adoption as they emerge in childhood and adolescence and evolve across the lifespan (Friedlander, 2003; Grotevant, 1997; McGinn, 2000; Smith et al., 2000; Wilson, 2004). To better understand this lifelong process and the influence of heritage on identity development, findings are presented from Penny et al.'s (2007) study of how adoption could complicate normal developmental tasks in adopted persons in their middle years. More specifically, Penny et al. sought to clarify how adopted adults analyze and find meaning in adoption loss as they reflect on their lives in a midlife review.

In conducting their study, Penny et al. (2007) analyzed written narratives on the life story of 100 adopted adults (age range 35 to 55 years). Most (80%) of the adopted adults wrote lengthy narratives about relations with their adoptive parents, endeavours to address adoption issues, and views on adoption policies and practices. Of note, identity patterns emerged in the analysis of the narratives that are similar to those found in Dunbar and Grotevant's (2004) study of identity development during adolescence.

Identity Classifications of Adopted Adults in the Middle Years

Based on the analysis of these narratives, Penny et al. (2007) identified five patterns or phases of adoption reconstruction in midlife: *no awareness/denying awareness* (Phase 1), *emerging awareness* (Phase 2), *drowning in awareness* (Phase 3), *re-emerging from awareness* (Phase 4), and *finding peace* (Phase 5). Regarding adoption issues as never completely resolved or closed, Penny et al. refer to each phase as an active process of *adoption reconstruction*. Also of note, these phases of reconstruction are similar to the four classifications or domains of adoptive identity development found by Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) in their research on adopted adolescents: *unexamined, limited, unsettled, and integrated identity*.

Similar to adopted adolescents classified with *unexamined* identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), the 22% of adopted adults at Phase 1, *no awareness/denying awareness*, regarded adoption as a positive experience and did not acknowledge any adoption issues— Penny et al. (2007) also referred to this phase as *ignorance is bliss*. Adopted adults at this phase also indicated a sense of obligation to their adoptive parents and some wished to have been born into their adoptive family.

Similar to adopted adolescents with a *limited* identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), the 29% of adopted adults at Phase 2, *emerging awareness*, described adoption in a positive light, but with some awareness of adoption issues, such as curiosity about birth family or dealing with a sense of not belonging (Penny et al., 2007)—alternately, Penny et al. (2007) referred to this phase as *curiosity killed the cat*. Compared to Phase 1, *no awareness/denying awareness*, adopted adults at Phase 2 also wished that they had been

born into their adoptive family. Distinguishing those at this phase, however, was a strong regret about not having had more information about their birth family as a child.

Similar to adopted adolescents with *unsettled* identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), the 25% of adopted adults at Phase 3, *drowning in awareness*—also referred to as *ill as a hornet/mad as hell*—expressed anger, resentment, and sadness related to adoption (Penny et al., 2007). Distinguishing this phase, adopted adults responded to adoption loss with negative affect and expressed anger towards adoptive parents, birth parents, and the adoption system. Also evident was desire for more contact with birth family and wish that they had not been separated. Also typical of this phase was regret about not having been aware earlier in their life about the affects of adoption. Many also wished that they had had more opportunity to talk about and express their anger related to adoption.

Similar to adopted adolescents with *integrated* identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), adopted adults at Phase 4, *re-emerging from awareness* (17% of respondents)—also referred to as *rising from the ashes*—recognized adoption loss and problems in the adoption system (Penny et al., 2007). However, dissimilar to adopted adults at Phase 3, *drowning in awareness*, those at Phase 4 described accepting and integrating these challenges. Although adopted adults at Phases 3 and 4 shared similar regrets, those at Phase 4 did not regret the separation from their birth family.

Also similar to adopted adolescents with *integrated* identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), the 6% of adopted adults at Phase 5, *finding peace*—also referred to as *let it be*—indicated that they had satisfactorily addressed their adoption issues and were moving towards or had already attained a sense of peace (Penny et al., 2007). Those at Phase 5

also wished that had had more information about their birth family as a child—a regret shared by all adopted adults, except those at Phase 1 (*no awareness/denying awareness*).

Diversity and Adopted Adults in the Middle Years

Relevant to this exploration of adoption and heritage, thus, there is some evidence that heritage is an influential factor in the lifelong process of identity development of adopted persons—at least during adolescence and the middle years (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007). Based on the findings of Penny et al., even at midlife it is common for adopted adults to vary in how they renegotiate the meaning of adoption in their lives, as indicated by the different patterns or phases of adoption reconstruction. Thus, in counselling it is important to recognize that the meaning of adoption loss and heritage cannot be assumed, as there is considerable variation among adopted persons.

Issues of Adoption and Heritage in Counselling

For counsellors working with older adopted adults, Penny et al. (2007) describe how themes can emerge related to adoption loss and heritage. During the normal developmental process of a midlife review, themes of loss typically arise among adults, adopted or not, such as physical changes and unrealized career goals. Given this developmental norm, Penny et al. hypothesize that adopted adults in midlife can expect to review and reconstruct adoption loss in terms of new meaning and impact (e.g., unable to pass on heritage to their children). For counsellors, being informed about specific concerns that can emerge at different phases of reconstruction is valuable for assessment and selecting the most appropriate interventions.

For example, compared with adopted persons at all other phases, Penny et al. (2007) found that those at Phase 3, *drowning in awareness*, had significantly higher

depression scores with 62% classified in the range for clinical depression—arguably, adoption loss and related feelings of anger, resentment, and sadness are influential factors. Compared to most adopted adults at other phases, those at Phase 3 had significantly lower self-esteem and were least likely to describe themselves as securely attached (Penny et al., 2007).

As 25% of participants were at this Phase 3, *drowning in awareness*, counsellors working with this population should prepare as needed to assess the meaning and impact of adoption, such as the loss of birth family and heritage—also note that Penny et al. (2007) found that than 50% at this phase had joined an adoption support group. Counsellors may consider the potential utility of applying Brodzinsky’s (1990) stress and coping model of adjustment to adoption, which involves assessing cognitive appraisal and the effectiveness of different coping skills (problem-focussed or emotion-focussed).

Chapter Summary

This chapter on *Adoptive Identity Development* addressed the guiding question, “What is identity development for adopted persons?” Presented and discussed was literature on adoptive identity development as a lifelong developmental process, which is generally considered similar to, but also significantly different from that of nonadopted persons (Friedlander, 2003; Grotevant, 1997; McGinn, 2000; Smith et al., 2000; Wilson, 2004). A main focus in this chapter was understanding how adopted persons deal with challenges of adoption, such as loss of birth family and heritage. Related to this, Brodzinsky’s (1990) stress and coping model of adjustment to adoption was presented with related counselling applications for assessment and interventions based on cognitive appraisal and coping strategies (problem-focussed and emotion-focussed).

To explore the influence of adoption and heritage on identity development, Dunbar and Grotevant's (2004) research was presented on four patterns or types of adolescent adoptive identity: *unexamined*, *limited*, *unsettled*, and *integrated*. For comparison, also presented was Penny et al.'s (2007) research on patterns or phases of adoption reconstruction in midlife: *no awareness/denying awareness* (Phase 1), *emerging awareness* (Phase 2), *drowning in awareness* (Phase 3), *re-emerging from awareness* (Phase 4), and *finding peace* (Phase 5).

The next chapter on *Adopted Persons and Seeking Heritage* begins with a guiding question for further exploring adoption and the meanings of heritage. Also emphasized in this chapter is the recognition of normal diversity among adopted persons, as they vary in their motivations for seeking or not seeking birth family and heritage.

Chapter 4: Adopted Persons and Seeking Heritage

Further exploring adoption and heritage, the guiding question for this chapter is, “How do adopted persons decide whether or not to seek their birth family and heritage?” To address this question with recognition of socio-cultural context, this chapter begins with an overview of the emergence of the searching movement and divergent perspectives on adoption disclosure (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Burke, 2004; Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Pierce, 2004; Rompf, 1993; Strong-Boag, 2006; Triseliotis, 2000).

The major focus of this chapter, however, is on understanding the experience and motivations of adopted persons, as they make decisions about whether or not to search for birth family, a process often imbued with loss and grief (Campbell et al., 1991; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Grotevant, et al., 2000; Miall, 1996; Penny et al., 2007). Also covered are topics related to the significance of heritage and the experience of adopted persons who have reunited with birth family (Beckett et al., 2008; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Miall, 1998; Prynne, 2000; Smith, 2006; Strong-Boag, 2006; Watkins, 2006).

For counsellors, this chapter provides a foundation for understanding normal variation among adopted persons, as they make decisions about seeking birth family and heritage. Counsellors who are informed about this complex process and emotional experience, thus, may provide more adoption-sensitive counselling and be less likely to inappropriately judge or pathologize adopted clients and their decisions (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Grotevant, 1997; Grotevant et al, 2000).

Emergence of the Searching Movement

Historically, momentum for the development of the searching movement was generated by minority groups seeking to strengthen connections with their ethnic identities and by adopted persons voicing their need to realize a more complete sense of self (Triseliotis, 2000; Rompf, 1993). During the 1960s, advocates for searching focussed on abolishing secrecy and sealed adoption records. In the 1970s and 1980s, attention shifted to challenging the practice of permanent anonymity, which Rompf describes as the “hallmark of contemporary adoption practice” (p. 220) at the time.

Based on a review of Canadian literature and media accounts of adoption, Strong-Boag (2006) concludes that a romanticized perception of adoption persists in Canada today: “Adopted children and adults have been regularly pressed to assimilate, relinquishing previous life texts as irregular, ultimately disposable, preliminaries to the real thing” (p. 211). Strong-Boag elaborates that this romanticized perception of adoption generally excludes reference to family of the past—like in the popular book *Anne of Green Gables*, there is no account of Anne grieving the loss of birth family.

Applied to counselling adopted persons, assessment may include exploring the impact of romanticized perceptions of adoption on a client’s experience, such as the dismissal of grief and loss related to past family and heritage. This also may include assessing the client’s needs for support within the surrounding socio-cultural context.

Divergent Perspectives on Seeking Birth Family and Heritage

Whether or not adopted persons should seek and be allowed to access information about their birth family and heritage is an ongoing controversy (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Burke, 2004; Means, 2004; Miall, 1998, 2006; Modell, 2002; Pierce, 2004; Strong-Boag,

2006). Perspectives on this issue vary among members of the adoption triad and other stakeholders, including the general public, and adoption, social service, and cultural organizations (e.g., advocates for preservation of Aboriginal culture).

Advocacy for Searching and Open Records

Some proponents of searching and open adoption records focus on strengthening the civil rights of adopted people. Like all other citizens, adopted persons should be allowed access to records that identify their birth parents (Bastard Nation, 2004; Burke, 2004). As explained by Burke, an American advocate, the handling of adoption records is a policy issue with implications for civil rights and equality: “By denying adoptees access to birth certificates and court records about themselves, public policy creates a minority class of citizens whose civil rights are being violated by nature of their adoptive ‘class’ and over which they have no control” (p. 126).

Most arguments in support of searching and opening adoption records, however, focus on potential benefits for adopted persons and their psychological and emotional well-being. As an adopted person and adoption therapist, Lifton (2002) argues that secrecy in adoption compromises the well-being of adopted children by demanding them to repress a basic need to know about their origins; hence, an essential part of them is unacknowledged by their adoptive parents and society. Rompf (1993) proposes that “knowledge of one’s biological history constitutes an innate human need” (p. 220), which Brodzinsky et al. (1992) normalize as common also to nonadopted persons—for everyone the primary task of psychological development is to increase self-understanding.

Lifton (2002) elaborates that for many adopted persons the secrecy of adoption fosters a *divided self*: “Early on they get the message that they cannot grieve for their lost

kin but must commit themselves to the identity of the adoptive clan if they are to keep the adoptive parent's love" (Lifton, p. 209). Under these circumstances, thus, Lifton regards searching as a normal process, rite, and "quest for the missing parts of one's narrative, for origins, for meaning, and for a coherent sense of self." (p. 212).

Advocacy for Privacy and Closed Records

From an opposing perspective, proponents of privacy argue that closed adoption records protect all members of the adoption triad from distressful disruptions and complications that can arise when identifying information is released about each other (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Means, 2004; Miall, 1998; Ouston, 1994; Strong-Boag, 2006).

For adopted persons, for example, closed adoption records restrict learning about birth parents and ancestry and, hence, the complications of a reunion and challenge of integrating two heritages (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Miall, 1998). Closed records also avert other negative outcomes, such as disappointment or rejection from a birth parent who did not want to be found, or requests for emotional or financial support (Brodzinsky et al.; Lifton, 2002). Hence, one 27-year-old male adopted person explains why he hesitates to search and meet his birth mother: "Because if I do I might find I don't like her. More importantly, I may find she doesn't like me, and I don't know that I can tolerate another rejection" (Brodzinsky et al., p. 139).

Even if a reunion does go well, the experience could complicate developing a sense of self within the adoptive family, and other emotional and psychological challenges can arise. Lifton (2002) proposes, for example, that "perhaps the greatest loss in reunion is that of the fantasy ghost mother" (p. 212) created through a lack of knowledge, and for the birth mother, the loss of her "ghost baby" (p. 212).

For adoptive parents, closed records protect against feeling threatened, betrayed, and rejected in the event that their adopted child does seek a reunion with birth family (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Ouston, 1994; Strong-Boag, 2006). Hence, adoptive parents also are protected against intrusions by birth parents that can disrupt the relationship with their adopted child (Brodzinsky et al.; Miall, 1998).

For birth parents, closed records protect against contact, which can be painful and disruptive. Related to this, Means (2004) empathizes with the many birth mothers who surrendered a child for “sad and humiliating but compelling reasons” (p. 139), such as illegitimacy, sexual assault, or emotional distress.

In addition to protecting the adoption triad, some conservative voices argue that more openness and less confidentiality could be detrimental to the viability of the adoption system (Cloud, 2004; Pierce, 2004). Without assurance of privacy through closed records, more women might not place their child, or they might choose abortion.

Given the various risks, thus, counsellors are challenged to convey sensitivity, understanding, and respect when assisting members of the adoption triad with concerns related to searching and reunion. Whatever the outcome—positive, negative, or mixed—the adopted person has the responsibility of dealing with it.

Who Should Determine Access to Adoption Records?

Recognizing the concerns of proponents and opponents of more access to adoption records, Smith (2006) cautions that exploring birth culture does not always benefit the adopted person, as there are developmental and contextual factors at the individual and societal level to consider: “The question of each adopted person’s relation to birth parents is both a highly politicized public policy issue and simultaneously an

intimate and personal matter, bound up with self-concept and feelings about one's origins" (p. 250). Highlighting dynamic changes in adoption and society, Smith (2006) adds that support for openness in adoption has increased along with greater recognition .as the strengths of family ties developed through nurturing adoptive families.

After weighing arguments on both sides of the issue, Brodzinsky et al. (1992) conclude that decisions about access to adoption records should be "up to the adopted person, not up to the whims of adoption agencies or state legislatures or records clerks, whether information about his past becomes available. The relevant question is what the search means to the individual adopted person" (p. 140). As this perspective supports more openness in adoption, however, some stakeholders likely would not support it. In presenting these divergent viewpoints on searching and access to adoption records, thus, counsellors working with members of the adoption triad are challenged to prepare for responding to clients who may hold views that are different from their own.

Adoption Disclosure and Meanings of Adoption

No longer considered a singular event, for adopted persons learning about their adoptive status begins a lifelong process of clarifying and integrating the meaning of adoption—a process that continues whether or not an active search is initiated for birth family and heritage (Beckett et al., 2008; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007; Wilson, 2004). Adoption disclosure also initiates an ongoing process of integration for the adoptive parents, as they introduce information that often leads to a sense of abandonment for their child, and personal failure and loss for them (Triseliotis, 2000): "I love you but you are not mine and I am not yours" (Lousada, 2000, p. 62). Thus, most

adoptive parents do not disclose until they have established a sense of security with their child and feel obligated to introduce awareness of a birth mother (Triseliotis, 2000).

For counsellors working with adopted persons, it can be helpful to be informed about the challenges involved in integrating adoption into the developing self (Grotevant, 1997; Triseliotis, 2000). As described by Triseliotis, the process of integration has several components: a) understanding the meaning and implications of adoption; b) awareness of ancestry and ethnic heritage; c) accessing background information (e.g., genealogy and ethnicity) and possibly contacting birth family; d) acknowledging differences between psychosocial and biological parenting (e.g., differences in ethnic and/or racial heritage); and (e) dealing with loss and rejection. As part of this integration process, some adopted persons decide to search for birth family and heritage, and other do not.

Who Actively Searches?

There are no accurate or reliable statistics on the number of adopted persons who search or the total number of adopted persons, as many had been adopted through informal and private family arrangements (Strong-Boag, 2006). Brodzinsky et al. (1992) add that estimates on the number of adopted persons who search could be high, as organizations providing this data often are pro-searching. Thus, the following statistical and descriptive information on adopted persons who search is considered tentative.

Some estimates for recent years indicate that thousands of adopted persons actively search for information about their birth family with the potential of reunion. Research collected from several American organizations, such as the Adoption Forum and American Adoption Congress, Brodzinsky et al. (1992) estimate that 30 to 40 percent of adopted persons will search at some point in their life. One estimate for the United

States is that about 2% (250,000) of adopted persons actively search each year—over 10 years, this estimate is projected to 2,500,000 (Burke, 2004). Based on demographic studies, Brodzinsky et al. (1992) found that most are young adults (80% female) with an average age of 27, most of whom are married and employed in middle-class jobs.

However, all adopted person search in some way or form, even such as looking at the faces of other people for a familial resemblance (Brodzinsky et al., 2002; Lifton, 2002). Emphasizing the significance of connection with birth family, Brodzinsky et al. propose that “*every* adopted person carries on an intrapsychic search, involving fantasies and curiosity about his birth parents and the reasons for the relinquishment” (p. 140).

As adopted persons vary in degree of interest and concern about their birth family, hence, motivation to actively search for birth family and heritage also can vary (Triseliotis, 2000). For many, the motivation to initiate an active search is associated with a significant life event, such as marriage, a medical problem, the birth of a child, or the death of one or both adoptive parents (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Campbell et al, 1991; Lifton, 2002; March, 1995; Sachdev, 1992; Triseliotis, 2000). In working with adopted persons, thus, counsellors require preparation for concerns related to passive and active searching, and how search motivations can change across the lifespan.

Why Search?

Krueger and Hanna (1997) explain that adopted persons naturally engage in an existential quest for truth about their heritage, which can remain as a psychological longing or result in an active search. In both situations, questions commonly arise about origins, heritage, and identity concerns such as, “Where did I come from? Who are my

parents? Why was I placed for adoption? Do I have siblings? What does adoption mean in my life?" (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004, p. 135-136).

If adopted persons were not motivated to search, the adoption process would be simplified without loss and yearning for biological roots (Freundlich, 2001). To explain this need, Krueger and Hanna describe it as "a quest for authenticity, meaningfulness, and a sense of being, freedom, and belonging" (p. 201). Validating this motivation, March (1995) found that adopted persons who had not reunited with birth family experienced a "a sense of incompleteness from their inability to fully integrate their biological background information into their identity structure" (p. 653). Triseliotis (2000) elaborates that adopted persons often explain their motivations for searching by giving reasons related to identity development, self-worth, and potential relationships—for example, to obtain information about the circumstances of their adoption, and their genetic and genealogical heritage, or to experience a physical resemblance with birth family and possibly develop a relationship with them.

Why Not Search?

Why some individuals deny interest in searching for their birth family and heritage is an area for continued research (Freundlich, 2002; Triseliotis, 2000). Nonetheless, several reasons have been proposed to explain why an estimated three-fifths of adopted adults do not actively search (Triseliotis). For example, no intention of searching could indicate strong identification with the adoptive family and successful attachment (Triseliotis). Alternately, denial or "difference blindness" (Triseliotis, p. 87) could indicate internalized anger about separation from birth family or fear of separation from the adoptive family. Another reason is the protection of adoptive parents, as many

adopted persons do not search until after their death (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Lifton, 2002). Another reason for not searching or turning back in the middle, is risk and a lack of control over the outcome (Lifton).

Models of Search Motivations

Validating and normalizing adoptive families and searching, Triseliotis (2000) explains that “the paradox with adoption is that almost all studies support the success of psychosocial parenting, while at the same time a great number of adopted people search for their roots or seek reunions” (2000, p. 94). For counsellors seeking to better understand searching, reviewed are a four–motives model (Campbell et al., 1991) and different search motivations associated with the five phases of adoption reconstruction identified among adopted persons in midlife (Penny et al., 2007).

Four-Motives Model

Based on research with adopted adult persons (114 respondents) who had reunited with birth parents, Campbell et al. (1991) identified four main search motives pertaining to (a) life-cycle transition (e.g., death of a parent), (b) desire for background information, (c) development of a relationship with a birth parent, and (d) a quest for self-understanding. Campbell et al. elaborated that active searching often was initiated by a major life transition or event. For example, after giving birth one respondent realized that she would always want to know about the well-being of her child; hence, she no longer hesitated to contact her birth mother and risk and risk being regarded as intrusive.

For most respondents, another important motive was to obtain information about their background. Related to this, Campbell et al. (1991) found that 65% of respondents sought information about their health or why they had been placed for adoption. Also,

16% of respondents intended to establish a relationship with a birth parent, and 6% sought to increase self-understanding.

In addition to four main motivations, Campbell et al. (1991) reported that 40% of adopted adults had indicated that they simply “needed to search” (p. 331), and 31%, that “they were personally ready and able to get support in the search process” (p. 331). Although not well understood, based on their study, Campbell et al. proposed that “the need to know seemed to be tied to a sense of loss the adopted persons experienced, which they felt would be healed by making a connection with their origins” (p. 332).

Phases of Adoption Reconstruction and Search Motivations

For a more in-depth analysis and understanding of search motivations, related excerpts are presented from Penny et al.’s (2007) research on adopted persons during their middle years. Based on their analysis of a survey and written narratives, as described in detail in Chapter 3, Penny et al. identified five phases of adoption reconstruction that were defined by degree of awareness and efforts to find meaning in adoption: *no awareness /denying awareness* (Phase 1), *emerging awareness* (Phase 2); *drowning in awareness* (Phase 3); *re-emerging from awareness* (Phase 4); and *re-emerging from awareness* (Phase 5). For each phase, reviewed are search status and descriptions of experiences related to adoption loss and motivations for searching.

Phases and search status. Adopted adults classified at Phase 1, *no awareness /denying awareness* (24%), and Phase 2, *emerging awareness* (32%), were less likely to have initiated a search for biological parents than were respondents at Phase 3, *drowning in awareness* (79%), Phase 4, *re-emerging from awareness* (88%), or Phase 5, *re-emerging from awareness* (67%) (Penny et al., 2007). Overall, Phase 1 had the lowest

percentage (44%) of respondents who had either searched or indicated desire to search. Of the 12 respondents who indicated that they did not want to search or be found by their biological families, 10 were at Phase 1, 1 was at Phase 5, and 1 could not be classified. The percentage of respondents who had reunited with at least one biological parent also was lowest at Phase 1 with 20% —in comparison, percentages were significantly higher with 44% at Phase 2, 58% at Phase 3, 93% at Phase 4, and 75% at Phase 5 (Penny et al.).

To explain the lower percentages at Phase 1, Penny et al. (2007) hypothesized that these adopted adults had just begun exploring adoption issues and; hence, had spent less time engaged in searching compared to those classified in the other phases. To better understand variation in the meaning of adoption loss and its influence on search motivations, the following is a brief description of adopted adults at the different phases.

Phase 1: No awareness/denying awareness. At this phase, 44% of adopted adults had searched or desired to do so (Penny et al., 2007). Some indicated feeling curious and interested in commencing a search, but not immediately. Towards understanding why 60% of searchers at Phase 1 felt *neutral* about the outcome of their searches, Penny et al. clarify that none had yet located a biological parent.

In general, adopted adults at Phase 1 emphasized obligation and gratitude toward their adoptive parents and did not acknowledge adoption issues. One respondent explained, “For a number of us, we wait until our adoptive parents have died before pursuing the search for our birth parents, out of loyalty—or false loyalty” (Penny et al., p. 36). Also associated with not searching was fear of what might be encountered and, for a few, not longing to seek their origins (Penny et al., 2007). One respondent stated, for example, “The only thing I would want to do is thank my biological parents for loving

me enough to give me to my parents—they made the right decision” (Penny et al., p. 36). In related research, however, Campbell et al. (1991) notes that most adopted adults who were not actively searching, nonetheless, were pleased when contacted by a birth parent.

Phase 2: Emerging awareness. At this phase, 62% of adopted adults had searched or desired to do so (Penny et al., 2007). Like Phase 1, respondents at Phase 2 expressed gratitude and sensitivity towards their adoptive parents—the same, however, also was extended towards their birth parents. Related to searching, one respondent stated, “I appreciate what my biological mother did and wouldn’t want to hurt her but I would be concerned more about my adoptive mother’s feelings” (Penny et al., p. 36). Also in contrast to Phase 1, respondents at Phase 2 directly acknowledged some loss and adoption issues, such as a sense of not belonging and feeling curious about birth family.

Phase 3: Drowning in awareness. At this phase, 100% of adopted adults had searched or desired to do so (Penny et al., 2007). Contrasting the mostly positive view of adoption among respondents at Phases 1 and 2, however, those at Phase 3 described it as a pervasive source of many personal problems and negative feelings (e.g., anger and resentment), especially towards the adoption system. Some respondents stated, for example, “I detest their continued effort of control of my life into my 50s. It was their poor choice of placement which caused my life’s path to so unfurl,” “Closed records are a crime by the state,” and “I feel very angry when I look at my birth certificate and it is a lie” (Penny et al., p. 36).

Adopted adults at Phase 3 also described concerns related to rejection, separation, insecurities, and inadequacy—for example, “I never felt good enough” and “You never know when you can be removed for some unknown reason, so you walk on ‘invisible’

egg shells” (Penny et al., 2007, p. 36). Adoption loss was a major focus, as these respondents were more likely to describe dissatisfaction and conflict with their adoptive family—for example, for being “emotionally unavailable” (Penny et al., p. 36) and engaging in unhealthy or dysfunctional behaviours (e.g., mental abuse or alcoholism).

Despite the dissatisfaction, these respondents often felt compelled to search for the purpose of strengthening their sense of identity (Penny et al., 2007), as reflected in statements such as, “The void of not knowing her was too great in my life” and “I will not quit until I find out about them” (p. 37). For these adopted adults, “searching was essential for themselves and, some believed, for all adopted persons” (Penny et al., p. 37).

Of note, Penny et al.’s (2007) findings support those of Campbell et al. (1991) and Brodzinsky et al. (2002), who concluded that problems with the adoptive family are generally not the primary motivations for searching. As Brodzinsky et al. explain, “Classically, the searcher is looking for a relation, not a relationship; he already has a mother and a father. Even after a searcher has found his birth parents, it is still his adoptive parents whom he calls Mom and Dad” (p. 141).

Phase 4: Re-emerging from awareness. At this phase, 88% of adopted adults had searched or desired to do so (Penny et al., 2007). Similar to Phase 3, these respondents also expressed regrets about adoption and concerns about the adoption system, but did so less vehemently. Also in contrast, they described more of a mix of positive and negative adoption issues—for example, viewing adoptive parents in a positive light and also seeking a greater sense of connection or fill an emotional void. Respondents wrote statements such as, “Always felt some missing piece” (Penny et al., p. 37) and “Adoption is good AND adopted persons have to overcome things” (p. 37).

Respondents who had searched and reunited with a birth parent focussed on describing the positive psychological affects as a healing experience—for example, “Finding my identity and dealing with my repressed feelings have helped me to become more of a whole person,” “It fills a big void in my life,” and “Finding my birth family was healing in many ways, and I’m not as angry as most adopted persons, except regarding the sealed records” (Penny et al., 2007, p. 37). Some adopted persons also associated reunion with alleviation from depression or insomnia. The positive effects of reunion on emotional and psychological development also supports earlier findings that the primary motive for searching is to attain a greater sense of health and integration of identity (Brodzinsky et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 1991).

Phase 5: Finding peace: At this phase, 83% of adopted adults had searched or desired to do so. In general, these respondents had worked through adoption issues and held a mixed view of the impact of adoption (Penny et al., 2007). About two thirds described the personal benefits of adoption, and healing or integration through reunion.

Common themes also included a need to belong, a sense of being different, a void or emptiness, nature versus nurture issues, general midlife issues, and attribution of personal responsibility for their life choices and experience (Penny et al., 2007). While recognizing the positive and negative aspects of these themes, adopted adults at this phase were distinguished by a sense of peace and self-efficacy in being able to handle their concerns, for example, as reflected in the following quotes: “There is a hole, an emptiness that yearns for answers and for understanding,” and “As an adult, my happiness rests in my hands” (Penny et al., p. 37).

Summary of results. Overall, Penny et al.'s (2007) research showed that most adopted adults in midlife regarded searching and learning about their past to be a positive though complicated experience. More than 90% of adult searchers across the five phases of adoption reconstruction were either *glad* or *very glad* that they had searched, and none indicated that they were *sorry* or *deeply regretted* that they had done so.

Outcomes from this research, however, cannot be generalized to all adopted persons (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The sample is not considered representative of adoptees across all developmental stages or of those not motivated to engage in adoption-related activities such as searching or participating in a study. Nonetheless, Penny et al.'s (2007) study suggests that searching and reuniting are significant to many adopted adults.

For counsellors working with adult adopted persons, an understanding of their experience and motivations for searching, and how they vary at different phases of identity development, provides a foundation for providing adoption-sensitive counselling (Brodzinsky et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 1991; Penny et al., 2007; Triseliotis, 2006).

Valuing Genealogical and Ethno-Cultural Heritage

For many adopted persons, according to Triseliotis (2006), adolescence is when interest in biological origins first emerges. Katz (2000) normalizes this interest within a socio-cultural context where biological connections are widely valued:

Our society places enormous significance on 'blood ties', and adopted people are born into a world which does not give adoption the same status as 'natural' family ties. This means that people who have been adopted must struggle with the internal and external perceptions of 'self' in a way that most others do not. (p. 225).

Brodzinsky et al. (1992) elaborate that knowledge of family of origin and ancestry, and race and ethnicity, are important aspects of social identity for adopted persons and, generally, for most people. The social value of genealogical and cultural heritage in society is reflected, for example, in the common activity of creating a family tree (Strong-Boag, 2006). Many adopted persons, however, are unable to participate in such activities, as adoption practices of secrecy have broken continuity with biological origins, a loss which can then impede self-understanding and identity formation.

Heritage Lost and Found

For adopted person who have searched and reclaimed birth family and heritage, the experience can be profound. In research on 60 Canadian adopted adults, March (1995) found that reunion with a birth parent helped reduce a “sense of alienation from a society that regularly prioritized blood ties and genealogy” (p. 227). One 27-year-old woman described the meaning of her background and heritage:

To say that having this information was important to me is an understatement. It seemed to fill some kind of empty space in me that I didn't even know existed. It was like I had been walking around with holes or parts of me missing without actually realizing it. Suddenly someone hands you a piece and you realize it's part of you and it fits one of the holes. Amazing!” (Brodzinsky et al., 1992, p. 129).

Normalizing seeking biological family and origins, Katz (2000) explains that “humans have an innate desire to fill that gap, and are constantly seeking wholeness” (p. 225). Applying gestalt theory and the concepts of *holism* and *field theory*, searching can be conceptualized as a striving to realize greater wholeness and self-understanding in

relation to the surrounding field or environment of past and present families (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005).

Despite research supporting the benefits of adoption, Triseliotis (2006) questions whether strong relationships and emotional bonds developed in nurturing adoptive families can fully compensate for the loss of biological origins and heritage. Campbell et al. (1991) and Penny et al. (2007) found, for example, that adopted persons search primarily to strengthen self-understanding and identity. Knowing one's birth parents, origins, and heritage, thus, may be integral to emotional and psychological development.

Applied to counselling practice, thus, counsellors are challenged to consider the negative impact of secrecy on the development of adopted persons and society. To better understand the meaning and impact of broken connections with birth family and heritage on adopted persons, more research is needed, for example, on whether or not it is acceptable to promote a homogenous or generic Canadian identity for adopted persons.

Heritage in International Adoption

Continuing this exploration of adoption and heritage, related research is presented on the interest in heritage of Romanian children who were adopted as infants or in early childhood (up to 3½ years of age) by UK families. In the study, Beckett et al. (2008) interviewed 165 of the children at age 15 about their interest in learning about Romania.

Results indicated that 44% of the interviewees had a marked degree of interest, 27% had some interest, and 29% had no interest at all (Beckett et al., 2008). Compared to younger interviewees, those adopted at an older age indicated more interest in learning about Romania. Asked about visiting Romania, 75% said that they would like to visit or

return again, as 32 had already made the trip. In comparison, most (75%) of their parents did not have plans for travelling to Romania with their adopted child at age 15.

Thus, Beckett et al. (2008) concluded that there is some evidence of persistence of interest and motivation to learn about birth heritage, even among those who were adopted internationally at a young age. More research is needed, however, to more fully understand the deeper meaning of this interest, which could pertain to learning about birth family and ethno-cultural heritage, and/or to identity development. Applied to counselling, thus, it could be illuminating to ask adopted persons to provide more than a general description of their interest in searching and not searching.

Chapter Summary

This chapter on *Adopted Persons and Seeking Heritage* began with an overview of divergent perspectives on the controversial issue of adopted persons searching for their birth parents and heritage, which requires access to confidential adoption records (Bastard Nation, 2004; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Burke, 2004; Means, 2004; Miall, 1998, 2006; Modell, 2002; Pierce, 2004; Strong-Boag, 2006). For understanding of diversity among adopted persons, motivations for searching and not searching were discussed with a focus on experience during the developmental stages of adolescence and midlife (Campbell et al., 1991; Penny et al., 2007). Included were topics related to clarifying the meaning of adoption and the experience, positive and negative, of heritage “lost and found” searching (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Katz, 2000; Lifton, 2002; March, 1995; Triseliotis (2000); Yontef & Jacobs, 2005).

The next chapter *Adoption in the Canadian Socio-Cultural Context* begins with a guiding question for exploring how the surrounding socio-cultural environment of

Canada can impact adoption practices and the experience of adopted persons. Applying a contextual, bioecological perspective, adoption is discussed with a focus on the influence of broader forces, such as community values, and provincial and national legislation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Miall, 1996).

Chapter 5: Adoption in the Canadian Socio-Cultural Context

To explore how socio-cultural factors such as community values and provincial, national, and international legislation can influence the experience of adopted persons seeking heritage, the guiding question for this chapter is, “How do communities, the general public, and broader society influence adoption and access to heritage?” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007). For counsellors, this chapter focusses on recognizing socio-cultural factors that can affect adopted clients and their experience of heritage, such as public opinion on controversial adoption issues (e.g., access to adoption records) (Department of Justice Canada, 2009; Miall, 1996, 1998; Miall & March, 2005; Rompf, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Snow & Covell, 2006; Zamostny & O’Brien, 2003). Also discussed in this chapter are applications of relevant national and international legislation including the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Adoption and Heritage from a Bioecological Perspective

Similar to the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007), Grotevant’s (1997) environmental analysis of adoption adjustment or *adaptational outcome* is comprised of three domains of interacting variables: (a) *biological*, including genetic factors and prenatal experiences (e.g., low birth-weight); (b) *person*, including cognitive level, cognitive appraisal, self-esteem, sense of mastery and control, commitment, interpersonal trust, and personal values; and (c) *environmental*, including social support, familial demands, constraints and resources, placement history, and broader cultural and societal demands (e.g., adoption policy).

Thus, Grotevant's (1997) comprehensive understanding of adoption adjustment is inclusive of broader contextual variables, such as community values and legislation.

With a similar perspective, Wegar (2006) states that adopted persons and their families "cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Like all families, adoptive families are not isolated units but are fundamentally affected by outside forces" (p. 2). Emphasizing dynamic interaction, Grotevant (1997) elaborates that short-term adaptational outcomes directly influence *person* variables and indirectly influence broader *environmental* variables. As an example of how adopted persons can influence their environment, March (1995) proposes that searching could contribute to normalizing and neutralizing the persistent stigma of adoption in Canadian society.

Evolving Contexts of Adoption

A bioecological or environmental model also has application for understanding how the development of adoption has impacted adopted persons of different generations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Miall & March, 2005; Prynne, 2000; Sachdev 1992; Treacher, 2000). Although rooted in child welfare, historically adoption has developed as a response to the needs and biases of influential parties and the demands of the broader socio-cultural environment (Prynne; Treacher, 2000; Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003). When social values cast more shame on unwed mothers and their children, as in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, more infants were available for adoption and only very determined adopted persons initiated searching for a birth parent. (Triseliotis; Zamostny & O'Brien).

Despite more openness and acceptance of adoption in recent decades, the social stigma and minority status of adoption persist and continue to complicate the challenges

of adopted persons and their adoptive families (O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Wegar, 2000). For counsellors working with adopted persons, thus, awareness of socio-cultural influences at the time of placement is relevant in exploring and understanding concerns related to adjustment, identity, and motivations for searching.

Assessing Socio-Cultural Context

Applying a bioecological approach highlights the value of assessing the impact of socio-cultural context on adopted persons and their relationship with their families and heritage (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997). Advocates for more research on public opinion and debate on adoption policy and practice (e.g., access to adoption records), for example, emphasize the value of recognizing their impact on the level of support for adopted persons and their families (Miall, 1998; Sachdev, 1992; Simmonds, 2000; Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003).

As Miall (1998) states, it is “the community at large from which adoptive families are recruited and from within which the newly constituted families will live” (p. 559). Assessing community values and public opinion, thus, supports making more informed decisions in developing adoption legislation, policy, and services (Miall).

1998 Survey of Canadians on Adoption

For counsellors seeking a bioecological perspective on adoption and heritage issues (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997), presented are results from Miall's 1998 Canadian survey of public opinion on disclosure of confidential information, reunions, and open adoption. For the survey, Miall drew a random sample of 150 respondents (71 males, 79 females) living in a city in eastern

Canada, of which 63% consented to participate. Given the limited sample, the following results are informative, but not representative of all Canadians (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Opinion on Disclosure of Confidential Information

Miall (1998) found that 93% of males and 88% of females supported releasing identifying information about birth parents to adopted adults. Also, 86% of males and 81% of females supported allowing adopted persons to access this information without permission of their adoptive parents. Opinion also generally supported adopted persons having a right to medical and genetic information.

Asked about privacy protection, Miall (1998) found that most respondents supported not releasing identifying information about birth parents without their permission—only 29% of males and 41% of females supported release without this permission. Thus, some evidence indicates that privacy of birth parents is prioritized over needs of adopted persons for information about their birth parents and heritage.

Suggesting a trend in opinion on access and privacy, Miall's (1998) findings support Sachdev's (1992) earlier 1989 Canadian study on attitudes towards liberalizing confidentiality policy on adoption. Increasing access to information by adopted persons was supported by 88.5% of biological mothers, 81.1% of adopted persons, and 69.7% of adoptive parents. Among social work personnel, 64.7% supported access under certain conditions, such as releasing information about birth parents only with their permission.

Opinion on Reunions

Miall's (1998) findings also indicated support for reunions between adopted persons and birth parents. Community members generally agreed on two main points: (a) adult adopted persons have a right to a reunion and likely would benefit from it, and (b)

both parties must agree before a reunion can proceed. Support was reflected in statements such as, “The child has a right and desire to know those parents and ask important questions. ‘Why did you give me up?’” (Miall, 1998, p. 568). The 5% of males and 21% of females who did not support reunions expressed concern about raising unhappy memories and causing problems—“Some things are best left as they are” (Miall, p. 568).

Asked whether mutual consent should be required for reunions, respondents had mixed views. Some emphasized the importance of agreement—“If any are against it, it shouldn’t happen,” (Miall, 1998, p. 568), while others emphasized the child’s interests—“Every child should know where it has come from even if it is bad” (p. 568).

Indicating some consistency in public support for reunions, Miall’s (1998) findings supported Rompf’s (1993) earlier survey of Americans ($N = 646$). Asked, “Do you think most adopted children would want to find their biological parents?” (Rompf, p. 227), most thought they would—86% *yes*, 4% *no*, 8% *it depends*, and 2% *did not know*.

Opinion on Open Adoption

Miall’s (1998) survey indicated mixed support for *open adoption*, in which biological parents relinquish their legal parenting rights while maintaining ongoing contact with their child, as determined in collaboration with the adoptive parents (Rompf, 1993). The majority of males (58%) and females (71%) did not approve open adoption for three main reasons: (a) avoid conflict between two sets of parents; (b) prevent confusing the adopted child and dividing loyalty—“Bonding would be difficult” (Miall, p. 566); and (c) avoid interfering with the adoptive parents, regarded as capable parents.

To compare, the minority of respondents (29%) who supported open adoption gave reasons related to eliminating secrecy in adoption and facilitating the exchange of

information about the adopted child (Miall, 1998)—for example, “I would like to know what the birth parents are like, and to know if it had been a positive pregnancy, an experience which could have influenced the child’s development” (Miall, p. 567).

Supporting Miall’s (1998) findings, Rompf’s (1993) large-scale survey of Americans also found mixed support for open adoption—52% of adults supported open adoption and an additional 20% supported it in certain situations. Rompf also found significant racial differences—those who *strongly approved* (19%) or *somewhat approved* (33%) of open adoption were usually African American (71%).

In contrast to the findings of Miall (1998) and Rompf (1993), Snow and Covell’s (2006) recent survey of undergraduate students at a Canadian university found that over 90% of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students supported open adoption because it “would facilitate the child’s maintenance and understanding of his or her culture and heritage” (p. 116). Given the restricted sample, however, these results alone are informative, but not representative of Canadian public opinion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

When compared with results of a recent Canada-wide telephone survey ($N = 706$) conducted by Miall and March (2005), Snow and Covell’s (2006) findings may indicate a trend in public perceptions towards more openness in adoption. Contrasting the results of Miall’s earlier survey, Miall and March found strong support for open adoption. Also of note, over 75% supported unconditional release of identifying information about birth parents to adult adopted persons, and 91% either strongly approved or somewhat approved of reunions. As the sample was not fully representative of all Canadians, however, these results are tentative and require further research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Implications of Miall's 1998 Survey on Adoption

Comparing the results of Miall's (1998) survey with those of earlier and later studies on community and public opinion on adoption (i.e., Miall & March, 2005; Romp, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Snow & Covell, 2006) provides some evidence of increasing public support for allowing adopted adults to identify their birth parents, seek reunions, and participate in open adoption—all of which support the maintenance of heritage. There also is evidence of continued mixed opinion on issues related to the protection of privacy versus access to identifying information, and whether mutual consent is required.

Recognizing diversity and change in community and public opinion, Miall (1998) emphasizes the value of more research on public opinion on adoption and related social values, which can inform the development of adoption law, policy, services and support. Miall elaborates that “expertise in an area does not ensure and can even obscure attention to the social implications of policies arrived at without the public input” (p. 570). For example, Miall found that opinion supporting the disclosure of adoption to children was based mostly on a general social value of honesty between parents and children. Continued research on public opinion could avoid misinformed assumptions about important values underlying perceptions of adoption and concerns related to heritage.

2004 National Survey on Adoption

For more generalizable research on perceptions of adoption in Canada, results are reviewed from a 2004 national survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid (2005). The survey was requested by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption Canada, which aims to increase awareness of the more than 22,000 children in foster care and waiting for permanent homes (Canada's Waiting Kids, 2009; Ipsos-Reid, 2009).

A sample of 1,556 Canadians were randomly selected and interviewed in an online survey (Ipsos-Reid, 2005). Given the large sample size, results are considered accurate (within ± 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20). Data for different regions and other sub-groupings were weighted to ensure representation of the regional and age/sex composition of the Canadian population, as described in the 2001 Census. The following are selected findings relevant to this bioecological exploration of adoption and heritage (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997).

General Perceptions of Adoption

Survey results showed that Canadians generally have a positive impression of adoption—45% indicated a *very favourable* opinion and 46%, *somewhat favourable* (Ipsos-Reid, 2004). Most Canadians (74%) believe that parents experience the same reward and satisfaction from raising an adopted or a biological child, and 73% strongly believe that adoptive parents love an adopted child as much as a biological one. Most Canadians (58%) also strongly believe that adopted children love their adoptive parents just as much as they would birth parents.

Perceived Barriers to Adoption and Searching

Asked how much they would be concerned if their adult adopted child decided to search for birth parents, 11% indicated that this would be a *major concern*, 37% indicated a *minor concern*, and 48% indicated *no concern at all* (Ipsos-Reid, 2004). Asked about barriers to adoption, “Being sure that the birth parents could not take the child back” was a *major concern* for 78%, a *minor concern* for 14%, and *no concern at all* for 5% (Ipsos-Reid). Also a barrier, 49% believe that the reason many Canadians choose international adoption is that it is perceived as easier than domestic adoption.

Implications of the Ipsos-Reid 2004 Survey on Adoption

Of concern, the 2004 national survey on adoption indicates that the majority of Canadians have very positive perceptions of adoption and searching; however, this high level of acceptance is not reflected in statistics on completed domestic adoptions (ACC, 2005a; Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2006). In 2004, for example, projections indicated a high number of potential adopters (500,000+) and children available for adoption (22,000); however, the number of domestic adoptions (1,700) was relatively low and, in comparison, the number of international adoptions was high (2,000+ in 2005).

Related to these findings, Strong-Boag (2006) proposes that more potential adopters are utilizing international adoption or assisted reproduction technology to avoid the challenges associated with searching or open adoption: “By the end of the twentieth century, adoption required rethinking old assumptions about how children could be reared with reference to all the communities of which they were a part” (p. 241). For children in need, thus, the possibility of contact with their birth family and heritage could be a barrier to adoption (ACC, 2005a; Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2006).

Public Opinion, Adoption and Heritage

Research on public opinion in Canada provides evidence of a generally positive view of adoption by Canadians (Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Miall, 1998; Miall & March, 2005; Sachdev, 1992; Snow & Covell, 2006). However, the validity of this positive perception is questioned considering the thousands of children in foster care and relatively low number of domestic adoptions, as well as the utilization of international adoption and assisted reproduction technology (ACC, 2005a; Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2006).

Thus, the possibility is raised of a positive response bias in responding to public opinion surveys on adoption and related concerns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Also highlighted by opinion research and statistics on adoption to date is the need for continued research on concerns related to the acceptance of searching, reunions, and access to heritage. From a bioecological perspective, such research could members of the adoption triad, as well as counselling practice and the development of more supportive community and social services (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997; Ipsos-Reid, 2005; Miall, 1998). For example, there may be needs to promote more understanding of adoption among the Canadian public and to develop more supportive services for adoptive parents of children who are older or have special needs (Adoption Council of Canada, 2005a; Ipsos-Reid, 2005).

Law and Policy Relevant to Adoption and Heritage

For counsellors, a bioecological understanding of how socio-cultural context influences adopted clients and concerns related to heritage (e.g., identity formation) requires being informed about the development of adoption legislation and policy, all of which falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction (Dickerson & Allen, 2006; Snow & Covell, 2006). Also relevant is knowledge of national and international law, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009), *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Department of Justice, 2009), and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Snow & Covell, 2006).

In the following, selected legislation and policy are reviewed for their relevance to adoption and heritage. Counsellors may want to obtain more detailed information on legislation and policy for the jurisdiction relevant to adopted clients.

Change and Development in Legislation and Policy

During the 1960s and 1970s, a major development occurred when the tradition of secrecy in adoption was challenged by increased requests from adopted persons and birth parents for information and reunions (Miall, 1998; Rompf, 1993; Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003). In response, provincial and territorial governments began an ongoing process of revising adoption legislation and policy to accommodate more openness, while also protecting confidentiality and privacy—for example, by establishing contact vetoes. The result is that today there is considerable variation in adoption legislation and policy pertaining to the release of information from adoption records.

Adoption Records and Vetoes

Four provinces in Canada currently have unsealed adoption records: British Columbia, Alberta, Newfoundland, and, most recently, Ontario. Unlike its counterparts, Ontario does not have a *disclosure veto*, which allows an adopted person or birth parent to keep their identifying information sealed upon request (Adoption Council of Canada, 2005c). In Ontario, records now are kept sealed only if a compelling case (e.g., potential harm) is made to the Child and Family Services Review Board. Ontario does have a *contact veto*, however, which allows adopted persons and birth parents the option of requesting no contact—violation is an offence with a fine up to \$50,000. To put the demand for adoption records and information in Ontario into perspective, in 2004 only 887 reunions could be completed of the 57,000 individuals waiting on the Adoption Disclosure Register (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2005).

Variation Across Provincial and Territorial Jurisdictions

There is no uniformity in Canadian adoption legislation and policy, as social services are all under provincial and territorial jurisdiction (Dickerson & Allen, 2006; Snow & Covell, 2006). Hence, counsellors may need to become apprised of various adoption laws and policies when assisting adopted clients of diverse backgrounds.

Manitoba, for example, allows adults who had been adopted before 1986 to receive only excerpted summaries of non-identifying information (Dickerson & Allen, 2006). For adoptions completed after 1999, adoption records are available to anyone interested, unless a party has filed a written veto against releasing personal information. In Saskatchewan, open adoption is now encouraged with most birth parents requesting some form of openness, which can vary from exchanging identifying information to maintaining a direct relationship with the parents. In contrast to the policy of jurisdictions that release identifying information only to adults, Quebec allows adopted persons at age 14 to obtain the information needed to locate their birth parents.

Preserving Heritage: Adoption in British Columbia

Validating the significance of heritage in adoption, social workers in British Columbia are mandated by the Ministry for Children and Families to fulfill their responsibilities with “understanding and respect for the cultural, racial and religious heritage, place of origin, age and sexual orientation” (Dickerson & Allen, 2006, p. 81). Applied to practice and adoption placement, social workers must endeavour to preserve each child’s unique cultural identity and heritage. When placing an Aboriginal child, for example, the common practice is to consult with the family, Band or Aboriginal community about the potential placement.

With a focus on the best interest of the child, this approach to adoption recognizes the value and responsibility of maintaining an adopted child's culture and heritage, past, present, and future. Demonstrating commitment to this approach, The Ministry of Children and Family Development emphasizes the preservation of culture and heritage in its core values that guide placement: "Openness in adoption enables members of the adoption circle to maintain family and cultural connections and relationships and assists the child in developing a strong, healthy identity" (Dickerson & Allen, 2006, p. 80)—*adoption circle* is broadly defined as inclusive of birth parents, adoptive parents, adopted persons, extended families, and other significant people in the adopted person's life.

Preserving Heritage: Adoption in the North

In the Yukon and Northwest Territories, which are separate jurisdictions that share cultural identities, most adoptions are completed as Native Custom adoptions (Dickerson & Allen, 2006). Based on Aboriginal custom, which values openness over confidentiality, children are placed for adoption with the full agreement and cooperation of the birth parents and adoptive parents.

Preserving Heritage: Aboriginal Adoption

For many Aboriginal people, recovery from the institutionalized discrimination of an adoption system that did not value their culture and heritage has been a long road that continues today (Richards, 2000; Strong-Boag, 2006). Over about a 40-year-period, an estimated 20,000 Aboriginal children were placed in white adoptive homes, a practice based on attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, and deemed in 1982 by a Canadian judge as "cultural genocide" (Dickerson & Allen, 2006, p. 95).

Richards (2000) elaborates that “what ‘heritage’ anyone may want to claim from the past, or should be able to expect to find preserved for them, is a question for everyone” (p. 108). For Aboriginal children adopted into white families, however, the freedom to choose whether or not to learn and practice Aboriginal cultural activities was removed when placed into homes that did not validate and support their cultural origins. Consequently, through adoption many Aboriginal children became disconnected from their culture and heritage, and sense of self.

In recognition of this injustice, the Government of Canada subsequently issued a “Statement of Reconciliation” with an apology and commitment to thereafter manage adoption in partnership with Aboriginal peoples (Dickerson & Allen, 2006). Also, some provinces subsequently revised their adoption policies and programs to prioritize the preservation of Aboriginal culture and heritage (e.g., British Columbia).

Summary

For counsellors, this limited review of adoption legislation and policy highlighted a trend towards more openness and support for adopted persons seeking birth family and heritage. Also emphasized is the challenge of balancing this openness with protecting privacy, such as through disclosure and contact vetoes. Most relevant to this project, is the emphasis that some jurisdictions now place on the preservation of culture and heritage (e.g., British Columbia and the Yukon), especially that of Aboriginal children. (Dickerson & Allen, 2006; Snow & Covell, 2006).

As raised by Richards (2000), perhaps there are new understandings yet to be fully realized about the value of heritage for all Canadians—adopted or not, and

Aboriginal or not. Exploring this concern, discussed are potential applications of national legislation and values that emphasize the preservation of culture and heritage.

Applications of National Legislation and Values

Applying a bioecological approach, counsellors are introduced to national values, mandates, and legislation relevant to adopted persons and heritage issues (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997). As stated by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008), “Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging” (Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship section, para. 2). Canadian Heritage (2010) seeks “to support initiatives that engage Canadians and make them proud of our rich and diverse heritage” (The Department section, para. 1). Although intended to promote dignity, respect, and equality among all Canadians, there is a disjoint when the spirit of these statements is applied to adopted persons who do not have access to information about their birth family and heritage.

To explain the impact of this disjoint, Lifton (2002) describes the paradox of adoption: “Being adopted means being different, living an as if life; as if you were born into your adoptive family. It means being biologically disconnected. Being disempowered because you cannot know your origins or have your original birth certificate” (p. 209). For adopted persons living in Canada, thus, the impact of national legislation and values that promote the preservation of heritage warrants greater exploration and consideration.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Passed in 1982, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) formally recognizes the preservation of multicultural heritage and equality rights for all Canadians. The following is presentation and discussion of excerpts from the *Charter* that have potential application to adopted persons and heritage issues.

According to section 27 under Multicultural Heritage the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) is to be interpreted “in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.” (For the complete excerpt of this section, see Appendix C, p. 135.) Section 15 under Equality Rights states that all Canadians are equal under the law, meaning that they are entitled to equal protection and benefit without discrimination based on attributes and circumstances such as national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. Note that general equality rights do not preclude laws, programs, and activities that target the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups. Also relevant, section 24 under Enforcement states that individuals who have had their rights and freedoms infringed upon or denied may apply to have the situation remedied based on the *Charter*.

To explore whether or not the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) applies to the situation of adopted persons who are not allowed access to information about their birth family and heritage, which also has implications for children conceived through assisted reproduction technology, I sent a letter of inquiry (July 7, 1998) to the Court Challenges Program (CPP) of Canada. Set up in 1994 and closed in 2006, the CPP was established to provide funding support for “important court cases that advance language and equality rights guaranteed under Canada’s Constitution” (CPP, n.d.).

A response from Sarah Lutig (personal communication, July 14, 1998), Director of the Equality Rights Program at the time, suggested that the *Charter* might apply; however, the CPP would only consider challenges to federal laws, policies and practices that deny people information about their heritage. As adoption is under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, concern about adoption and access to heritage would not meet this criterion (Dickerson & Allen, 2006; Snow & Covell, 2006).

However, Lutig did introduce a potential avenue for addressing this concern based on section 15 under Equality Rights of the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009). In her written response, Lutig (S. Lutig, personal communication, July 14, 1998) stated the following: “*Every individual* is protected from discrimination by section 15....The ground of discrimination (the personal characteristic which forms the basis for the discrimination) need not be listed there for the individual to be successful in his or her claim.” Even though not in the list for protection, status as an adopted person may be an attribute or circumstance that warrants equal protection and benefit based on the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009):

The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that section 15 protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of marital status and on the basis of sexual orientation even though these two grounds of discrimination are not listed. One might successfully argue that section 15 also covers discrimination based on one’s status as an adopted person or person born via reproductive technology. (S. Lutig, personal communication, July 14, 1998)

However, a case to ascertain whether denying adopted persons access to heritage is an infringement of Equality Rights of the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada,

2009) would first require identifying “a government law, policy or practice which you believe to be discriminatory and challenge it using section 15” (S. Lutig, personal communication, July 14, 1998). Also questioned is whether denial of access to heritage also contravenes section 27 under Multicultural Heritage, which states that the *Charter* is to be interpreted “in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”

For counsellors, questioning equality issues based on the *Charter* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) serves to highlight the value of exploring and recognizing how the broader socio-cultural environment of Canada can impact the experience of adopted persons. A legal analysis that is beyond the scope of this project would be required to address these concerns, however, as well as related ones on protecting the privacy rights of birth parents and upholding signed legal adoption agreements.

Canadian Multiculturalism Act

Also relevant to this discussion are potential implications of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) (Department of Justice, 2009). Passed unanimously in 1988, this *Act* enacted into law a policy on preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of all Canadians. To recognize the needs of increasing numbers of immigrants and people of Aboriginal ancestry, and build a more inclusive society, the federal government legislated multiculturalism “as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian heritage and identity” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009, p. 4). The federal government thereby committed to “protect the rights of all Canadians” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p. 7) to fully participate in celebration of the country’s diverse heritage.

Complications arise, however, when considering how the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009) applies to adopted persons who have been denied access to information about their birth family and heritage. Given the intent and spirit of the legislation, it is questioned how well current adoption laws, policies, and practices of the provinces and territories are in compliance. If not, perhaps it is acceptable that Canadians with adopted status and unknown heritage do not have an equal right of opportunity to fully participate in their multicultural society.

Summary

Applying the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) and *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009) to the experience of adopted persons raises fundamental questions about whether access to heritage is best regarded a right or a privilege, conditional on the interests and decisions of different stakeholders. Applying a bioecological approach to counselling adopted persons, thus, concerns related to grief, loss, and identity development may involve assessing the impact of national legislation related to heritage and equality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997).

Applications of International Law

In addition to national legislation, most broadly the bioecological perspective is inclusive of the influence of international law on Canadian adoption law, policy, and practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2007; Grotevant, 1997). Of note are the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) and *The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions* (HCIA), which set international standards for the development of adoption

with attention to the well-being of children, and the preservation of their culture and heritage (Strong-Boag, 2006; Triseliotis, 2000).

In 1991, Canada ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), a treaty that set standards for protecting the human rights and well-being of children (Strong-Boag, 2006). In support of the continuity of birth culture, under the UNRC intercountry adoption is approved “only when youngsters could not be cared for in birth families or otherwise suitably, including in foster or including in foster or institutional care, in their countries of origin” (Strong-Boag, p. 199).

In 1994, Canada became a signatory of *The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions* (HCIA). As intercountry adoptions increased in Canada, provinces and territories began referring more often to the HCIA, which promoted the benefits of permanent families, first nationally and then internationally, over all other adoption arrangements (Strong-Boag). By 2004, all Canadian provinces and territories had passed legislation that supported the commitment of the federal government to these two international conventions.

Relevant to this exploration of adoption and heritage, and counselling adopted persons for related concerns, both the UNCRC and HCIA have prioritized adoption in the child’s homeland and recognition of “children’s rights to cultural and other heritages” (Strong-Boag, p. 50). Under the HCIA, for example, selection criteria for intercountry placement include the adoptive parent’s potential to “give due consideration to the child’s upbringing and to his or her ethnic, religious and cultural background” (Article 16, 1b) (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 1998, p. 10).

In addition to the preservation of culture and heritage for those adopted internationally, the UNCRC and HCIA apply to domestic adoption in Canada. For example, Aboriginal peoples have presented demands similar to those of the HCIA in stating their opposition to the interracial adoption of their children, which has resulted in the loss of heritage (Strong-Boag, 2006). For all the well-being of any adopted person, arguably, similar demands could be presented for allowing them to maintain connections with their birth family and heritage. Referring to article 21 in the UNCRC, Triseliotis (2000) describes heritage as a right to be protected: “Parties should undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity (nationality, name, family relations as recognised by law) without unlawful interference” (p. 84).

That stated, Triseliotis (2000) recognizes that adoption practices do not always adhere to this article. By the end of the twentieth century in Canada, for example, the provinces and territories had yet to fulfill their legislative promises to apply standards of the UNCRC and HCIA in management of international and Aboriginal adoption (Strong-Boag, 2006). Oftentimes adoptive parents, as well, have been able to sidestep regulations.

Recognizing Canada’s commitment to the UNCRC and HCIA, and given variation across the country in adoption law, policy, and practice regarding access to information about birth family and heritage (Dickerson & Allen, 2006), raises questions about whether there is a need for a national set of standards on adoption and access to heritage. Perhaps there are valid reasons why values of openness, honesty, and integrity in adoptive relationships, as embedded in the UNCRC and HCIA (Triseliotis, 2000), need not be applied with greater consistency and attention to human rights. Counselling

adopted persons, hence, can require considerable flexibility and affinity for complexity, as needed for integrating individual and broad domains of experience and influence.

Freedom of Choice

Given the emphasis in this project on exploring the meaning of heritage, it could be assumed that the norm for all adopted persons is to access heritage by seeking birth family and reunion. With reference to the philosopher Anita Allen, who distinguishes between a right to information and demanding that information, Smith (2006) clarifies that families and others have a duty to inform adopted persons about how to obtain information about their adoption and birth family—but, not to expect that all adopted persons will seek it. Smith elaborates that “a right means an option to exercise a choice. Choice entails the option to reject as well as embrace. Autonomy as an ethical value has a place in these matters for adopted persons developing into adulthood.” (p. 249). In counselling adopted persons, hence, recognizing this freedom of choice can help normalize a decision to not seek birth family and heritage (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Penny et al., 2007; Smith, 2006).

Chapter Summary

Applying a bioecological perspective, this chapter on *Adoption in the Canadian Socio-Cultural Context* explored how adoption and heritage, and the experience of adopted persons is influenced by socio-cultural context, including public opinion on adoption, and different provincial, national, and international legislation (Bastard Nation, 2004; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Burke, 2004; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Means, 2004; Miall, 1998, 2006; Modell, 2002; Pierce, 2004; Strong-Boag, 2006). Included was discussion on applications and implications of legislation such as the

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Snow & Covell, 2006). For counselling adopted persons, thus, this chapter focussed on understanding individual concerns (e.g., identity development) with consideration of broad socio-cultural context, such as values and law related to preserving heritage (Miall, 1998; Triseliotis, 2000).

The next chapter on *Applications of Professional Ethics to Adoption and Heritage* presents a guiding question for analyzing ethical conflicts related to seeking birth parents and heritage—such as when a birth parent does not want to be identified. For counsellors, conflicts of interest are analyzed by applying ethical principles in biomedicine (Ross & Malloy, 1999), and codes of ethics of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA, 2001), and Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA, 2007).

Chapter 6: Applications of Professional Ethics to Adoption and Heritage

The guiding question for this chapter is, “How do ethical principles apply to adoption and heritage issues?” Ethical issues in adoption are complex with many interacting psychological, social, and cultural domains of experience (Freundlich, 2000). For counsellors, this chapter demonstrates applying ethical principles and values in biomedicine, counselling, and psychology to increase understanding of conflict that can arise when adopted persons consider seeking their birth parent and heritage.

As a guide for this exploration, an ethics-based framework for understanding controversial adoption issues is utilized, as proposed by The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in the U.S. in collaboration with leaders in the adoption field (Freundlich, 2000). As proposed, this ethical framework has three main components and purposes: (a) identify and examine core principles and values underlying adoption policy and practice; (b) provide a comprehensive analysis of critical policy and practice issues; and (c) base future adoption policy and practice on a sound knowledge base.

With the framework as a general guide, this chapter focusses mostly on applying selected ethical principles and values to adoption-related conflict within and among members of the adoption triad and other stakeholders (Freundlich, 2000). Conflicts are analyzed by applying ethical principles in biomedicine (Ross & Malloy, 1999), and professional codes of ethics of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA, 2001), and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA, 2007).

Ethics and Adoption

By definition, *ethics* is a branch of philosophy that involves analyzing issues of right and wrong, good and bad, and authentic and inauthentic human conduct, and

questions related to duty, obligation, and moral responsibility (Ross & Malloy, 1999). Historically, according to Zamostny and O'Brien (2003), the focus in adoption has been on its utility for resolving social problems, and minimal attention has been paid to assessing impact on stakeholders and ethical concerns. Zamostny and O'Brien attribute this minimization to the assumption that adoption is parallel to biological family experience, a myth that has been largely replaced by conceptualizing adoption as an alternate family form with lifelong challenges—such as dealing with grief related to relinquishing a child (birth parents), infertility (adoptive parents), and separation from birth family and heritage (adopted persons).

Applying ethics to adoption and seeking heritage raises questions, for example, about whose rights should be prioritized for protection—those of the birth parents, adoptive parents, or adopted children? (Williams, 2006). Ethical concerns also can arise when asking questions related to defining the conditions for the release of information to adopted persons about their adoption, birth parents, and heritage, and whether it is sufficient to provide this information without identifying names.

Overview of Conflicting Interests

The history and development of adoption is embedded with controversy and ethical conflict related to ending secrecy and opening sealed adoption records, and challenging the practice of permanent anonymity (Rompf, 1993). The following are selected examples of conflict within and among members of the adoption triad that have emerged with increasing numbers of adopted persons seeking birth family and heritage.

Interests of Adopted Persons

To increase understanding of the motivation of adopted persons who seek their birth parents and heritage, Grotevant (2003) asks, “What could be more powerful and more personal than the story of one’s origins?” (p. 753). For many adopted persons, however, learning about their story is a complicated process that requires dealing with an interaction of complex biological, psychological, cultural, legal, and arguably, ethical issues (Grotevant; Freundlich, 2000).

In support of searching, Dusky (2006), a former representative for New York on the American Adoption Congress, has advocated for allowing adult adopted persons to have legal access to their original birth certificates; thus, adopted persons could decide on their own about whether or not to “seek out their birth parents and learn about their heritage, a right that should not be denied to any adult” (p. 180). Dusky (2006) also has argued that access to original birth certificates is an equality issue—adopted adults should have the same right of access as non-adopted adults.

On the other hand, accessing birth certificates and then searching for birth family can lead to negative outcomes for adopted persons, such as rejection by a birth parent who requests no contact. In this situation, an ethical conflict could arise about whether or not an adopted person should continue pursuing a reunion in such a situation. Ethical conflict also can arise when a birth parent or other birth family member (e.g., birth sibling) requests a reunion with an adopted person who declines contact.

Interests of Birth Parents

Supporting openness in adoption from the perspective of birth parents, Dusky (2006) explains that the majority of birth mothers have a strong desire to meet their child

and would rather not remain anonymous. Dusky adds that some birth mothers were not fully informed about their choices in the relinquishment process, for example, by not being offered opportunity to indicate if they would like future contact with their child.

From an opposing perspective, birth parents who support maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in adoption have argued for a right to privacy, which enables them to protect themselves and their new family (Dusky, 2006). Means (2004) cautions that allowing adopted persons to access identifying information about their birth parents would violate the privacy rights of birth mothers and contact could result in exacerbating feelings of pain, shame, and guilt. Some birth fathers also would prefer privacy and anonymity, especially if married (Kenny, 2006). Thus, ethical concerns arise related to whether the interests of birth parents supporting more openness in adoption supersede those of birth parents supporting closed adoption and anonymity.

Interests of Adoptive Parents

Oftentimes, a reunion contributes to the development of a closer relationship between the adopted person and adoptive parents (Brodzinsky et al., 1992). After learning about the circumstances of their adoption, for example, many adopted persons develop more appreciation of their adoptive parents. Proponents of confidentiality and anonymity in adoption, on the other hand, emphasize the potential negative outcomes and ethical concerns that can arise for adoptive parents.

Dusky (2006) explains, for example, that forced anonymity was intended to support adoptive parents in bonding and developing a secure relationship with their adopted child. Instead of a positive experience, however, for some adoptive parents a reunion results in feeling angry, defensive, and resentful by the complication to their

family life—especially if they had not been informed at the time of adoption about a birth parent’s intention to pursue contact (Kenny, 2006).

Applications of Ethical Decision Making in Biomedicine

For counsellors, the following demonstrates how ethical decision making in biomedicine, as proposed by Ross and Malloy (1999) can be applied to analyze and address controversial issues related to adoption and heritage. Common to bioethics in health care and applied ethics in human services, situations arise that require trusted professionals to resolve ethical dilemmas with a vulnerable patient or client. As in health care, professionals in human services, such as counsellors, psychologists, and social workers, are required to reflect on their interventions, which entail “two indissoluble component parts, the technical and the ethical” ((Ross & Malloy, p. 39). Applied to counselling adopted persons for ethical concerns related to adoption and seeking heritage (e.g., requesting contact with birth family), hence, counsellors are challenged to carefully consider interventions for their effectiveness and preservation of respect and dignity.

Foundation of Ethics

Applying ethical decision making in biomedicine to ethical concerns in human services (i.e., adoption and heritage issues) requires, first of all, an understanding of the foundation of ethics. As described by Ross and Malloy (2009), the foundation of ethics is comprised of three theories: (a) *deontology*, a rule-based approach that emphasizes obligation, duty, and behaviour that is *right*; (b) *teleology*, which focusses on identifying consequences according to behaviour and the amount of *good* produced; and (c) *existentialism*, an approach that assesses individual behaviour according to “how true the

person is to him or herself” (Ross & Malloy, p. 43)—that is, does the behaviour reflect personal integrity, genuineness, and being *authentic*?

Presented with an ethical controversy or dilemma, each theory provides a unique angle for analyzing the situation and informing decisions (Ross & Malloy, 2009).

Applying all three approaches can result in divergent judgments, not agreement. In this case, the challenge arises of deciding upon a moral judgment to accept.

Three Ethical Perspectives on Seeking Heritage

The following is an example of applying the three theories for decision making in biomedicine to analyze handling requests by adopted persons and birth parent for identifying information about each other. Depending on the province or territory, releasing the requested information might comply with adoption policy, or not.

If adoption policy does not permit releasing identifying information, applying the deontological approach, for example, a counsellor might decide, nonetheless, that disclosure would be the *right* choice based on the client’s needs. Doing so, however, could be wrong and illegal according to adoption legislation and policy.

Applying a teleological approach would require assessing consequences of disclosure in terms of potential positive or *good* outcomes, recognizing that many adopted persons and birth parents do not want to know each other. To decide whether releasing information would be sufficiently beneficial, the ratio of positive to negative outcomes could be assessed—for example, by reviewing research on reunions.

From an existential perspective, a counsellor would prefer the option that is most consistent with his or her personal beliefs and sense of higher truth. For example, a counsellor who highly values truth might believe that all children and birth parents have a

personal right and obligation to acknowledge each other. Alternately, a counsellor who highly values self-determination might strongly believe that everyone has a personal right to privacy. Authenticity and integrity in being true to oneself, thus, would supersede policy and law (deontology), and the ratio of good to bad outcomes (teleology).

For each of the three perspectives, underlying values may require further clarification through reflection and introspective questioning such as the following (Ross & Molloy, 1999): Is obeying rules (e.g., adoption legislation and policy) more important than assessing potential goodness or badness (e.g., intrusion) that could result?; b) Would you break a rule if you expected more goodness than badness to result?; c) How important to you is acting consistently with your beliefs?; d) If you were to develop the rules (e.g., disclosure and privacy policy), what would you decide?; e) If research indicated more positive than negative outcomes of reunions and access to heritage, or mixed outcomes, what would you decide?; and h) If you believe that integrity, authenticity, and being true to yourself are most important, what would you decide if others might disagree or be distressed by your decision?

Applying each approach, thus, involves ethical and moral reasoning that can result in opposing decisions and outcomes. For issues related to releasing identifying information, hence, it is understandable that viewpoints diverge among stakeholders (e.g., adoption triad, legislators, and general public). According to Ross and Malloy (1999), unanimity in ethical and moral judgments is rare; hence, resolving ethical dilemmas often requires making judgments about the human goals and outcomes (positive, negative, or mixed), and applying a more complicated process or model of decision-making.

Ethical Principles in Biomedicine and Counselling

For counsellors seeking a more in-depth analysis of issues related to adoption and seeking heritage, the next sections discuss applications of principles in bioethics and counselling, based on the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA).

Ethical Principles in Biomedicine

The five biomedical ethical principles of the Hippocratic oath that guide the practice of medicine also apply to allied health care: *nonmaleficance*, *beneficance*, *confidentially*, *respect for individual autonomy*, and *justice* (Ross & Malloy, 1999). The following is an example of their application to human services and counselling with a focus on issues related to adoption and seeking birth parents and heritage.

Applying the first principle, *nonmaleficance* or “first do no harm” (Ross & Malloy, 1999, p. 90), counsellors are challenged to consider how supporting searching for a birth parent or a relinquished child could result in intensifying emotional and psychological distress. Depending on the situation, supporting not searching also could increase distress. Applying the principle *nonmaleficance*, thus, highlights the value of assessing adoption systems, policies, and practices for their impact on exacerbating or alleviating harm on the short- and long-term for the individuals involved.

The second bioethical principle, *beneficance*, affirms the duty to act to relieve pain and suffering, and to restore health and well-being—that is, a “duty to do good” (Ross & Malloy, 1999, p. 90). Hence, counsellors have a responsibility to help reduce distress associated with searching, for example, by providing adoption-sensitive counselling and/or referral. As well, counsellors have a responsibility to support clients and reduce distress associated with not searching—for example, in the situation of an adopted person

who hesitates to search or declines a request for contact by a birth parent because of concern that his or her adoptive parents might feel offended or hurt.

The third principle, *confidentially*, which also pertains to nonmaleficance and beneficence, is especially relevant to adoption and seeking heritage (Ross & Malloy, 1999). Although many adopted persons and birth parents seek to learn about each other and possibly meet, others do not. For those preferring privacy and anonymity, adoption policy that allows releasing identifying information could be threatening—for example, in the situation of a birth mother who never told her husband or other children about having placed a child for adoption. On the other hand, maintaining closed records could exacerbate frustration, anger, and loss for those seeking information and possible reunion.

The fourth bioethical principle, *respect for individual autonomy*, also is especially relevant to adopted persons and birth parents, as it pertains to freedom of choice in making decisions about searching or releasing identifying information (Ross & Malloy, 1999). Historically, the practice in adoption has been to maintain confidentiality and privacy with no contact between adopted persons and their birth parents. With the emergence of the searching movement and more options for openness in adoption, however, new concerns have arisen about consent for contact between adopted persons and birth parents—for example, must adoptive parents provide permission before their adopted child, as a minor or adult, can request a search for a birth parent?

The fifth and final principle, *justice*, pertains to distributive justice and questions about whether all parties in the adoption triad deserve equal treatment (Ross & Malloy, 1999). Related questions include the following: (a) Should all adopted persons have a right to access non-identifying information about their heritage?; (b) Should only adopted

persons be allowed to initiate requests for contact and not birth parents?; and (c) Should birth parents and other extended birth family (e.g., siblings and grandparents) be allowed to request a search for an adopted person?

Thus, counsellors are challenged to comprehensively analyze concerns related to adoption and seeking heritage, such as why some stakeholders support more openness in adoption and argue for greater equality through access to birth records, and other stakeholders support more confidentiality and argue for a right to privacy and anonymity. Underlying such conflict is a fundamental adoption question of deciding whose rights are the priority—those of adopted persons or birth parents?

Addressing this question entails asking several other questions related to privacy and equality rights: Does freedom of choice to live without contact, intrusion, or disruption from a child placed for adoption—or from a birth parent seeking a relinquished child—supersede that of freedom of choice to pursue and realize an existential search for birth parents and heritage, or a relinquished child? This complex question and related concerns are further explored and analyzed by applying ethical principles in counselling, some of which are parallel to those of biomedicine.

Ethical Principles in Counselling

Four ethical principles of biomedicine—nonmaleficence, beneficence, respect for autonomy, and justice (Ross & Malloy, 1999)—also are included in the six ethical principles of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) *Code of Ethics* (CCPA, 2007), which guides the practice of professional counselling. The following are examples of their application to adoption and heritage issues.

As in biomedical ethics, the CCPA *Code* (CCPA, 2007) defines the principle of *beneficance* as doing “good” (Ross & Malloy, 1999, p. 90). Applied to counselling, this principle emphasizes that counsellors have a responsibility to proactively act in the best interests of clients—for example, by becoming informed about adoption and related services (e.g., support for adoptive families), and offering adoption-sensitive counselling.

Also in common is the principle of *nonmaleficance*, which refers to doing “no harm” (Ross & Malloy, 1999, p. 90) (CCPA, 2007). Applied to counselling, for example, counsellors who are informed about normal variation and processes in adoption (e.g., adoptive identity development) are less likely to inappropriately pathologize adopted persons and adoptive families.

Also similar, the CCPA principle of *autonomy*, which emphasizes respecting the right of clients to self-determination, is parallel to *respect for individual autonomy* in biomedical ethics (CCPA, 2007; Ross & Malloy, 1999). Applied to counselling an adopted person or birth parent who is considering searching, for example, a counsellor may choose a non-directive approach. Rather than deciding for the client, the counsellor would facilitate the client with taking responsibility for decisions made about searching.

However, the CCPA principle of *justice*, which emphasizes that counsellors respect the dignity of all individuals and support their just treatment, is similar, but also different from the biomedical principle of *justice* (CCPA, 2007; Ross & Malloy, 1999). To compare, in biomedical ethics this principle also includes a focus on distributive justice, which pertains to allocating resources, as well as deciding whether all parties or stakeholders should be treated equally and if equal can mean different.

Applying the principle of justice to adoption and seeking heritage is complicated. Questions are raised about how well justice can be realized, for example, when adopted persons are not allowed to access information about their birth parents and heritage, and when birth parents are similarly unable to obtain information about a child relinquished for adoption. Thus, a question arises about whether equality is demonstrated when only non-adopted people and their families can access identifying information about each other? If so, perhaps the biomedical principle of justice applies—that equal can mean different (Ross & Malloy, 1999).

In contrast, biomedical ethics does not include references to the CCPA principle of *fidelity*, which promotes honouring commitments to clients and maintaining integrity in the counsellor-client relationship, or *societal interest*, which supports accountability and responsibility to the broader society (CCPA, 2007; Ross & Malloy, 1999). In counselling an adopter person or birth parent who is considering searching, a conflict of interest or values could arise, for example, if the counsellor is an adopted person or an adoptive parent who does not support searching. In this situation, the counsellor has a responsibility to consult about continuing counselling or referring. Applying the principle of societal interest, a counsellor who identifies needed revisions to adoption policy, for example, has a responsibility to propose it, as appropriate.

Application of the CCPA Code of Ethics

In addition to a set of ethical principles, the *CCPA Code of Ethics* (CCPA, 2007) provides a set of articles for guiding practice in six specialized sections or areas: Professional Responsibility (A), Counselling Relationships (B), Consulting and Private Practice (C), Evaluations and Assessment (D), Research and Publications (E), and

Counsellor Education, Training and Supervision (F). In the following, selected articles are discussed and applied to concerns related to adoption and seeking heritage.

CCPA Section A: Professional Responsibility

Highlighted for their relevance are three articles under Professional Responsibility: Respect for Rights (A2), Boundaries of Competence (A3), and Sensitivity to Diversity (A10) (CCPA, 2007). In counselling for concerns related to adoption and seeking heritage, the following are examples of ethical challenges that could arise: (a) evaluating whether a birth parent's privacy has priority over an adopted person's needs for seeking birth family and heritage (A2); (b) self-assessing preparedness for providing adoption-sensitive counselling (A3); and (c) demonstrating respect and sensitivity in interactions with the diversity of clients who have experienced adoption (A10).

CCPA Section B: Counselling Relationships

Under Counselling Relationships, highlighted are four articles: Primary Responsibility (B1), Confidentiality (B2), Respecting Diversity (B9), and Referral (B18) (CCPA, 2007). Ethical concerns related to these articles include: (a) respecting the integrity of clients and promoting their welfare, which could be complicated if a counsellor's viewpoints contrast with their client's on controversial issues related to searching, contact, and the meaning of heritage (B1); (b) assessing policy on disclosure, confidentiality, and privacy when the interests of stakeholders conflict—for example, if a birth parent is committed to contacting a birth child without his or her permission or vice versus (B2); (c) respecting differences among adopted persons in their perceptions of the value and meaning of heritage (B9); and (d) self-assessing counselling assets and limits with attention to conflicts of interest and providing referrals as needed (B18).

CCPA Section C: Consulting and Private Practice

Under Consulting and Private Practice, highlighted is General Responsibility (C1) (CCPA, 2007). Applying this article, an ethical concern for counsellors is ensuring that they have sufficient competency acquired through education and experience to counsel clients who have experienced adoption. This could involve, for example, self-assessing knowledge of adoption from the perspective of different members of the adoption triad.

CCPA Section D: Evaluations and Assessments

Under Evaluations and Assessment, two articles are highlighted: Competence (D3), and Sensitivity to Diversity when Assessing and Evaluating (D10) (CCPA, 2007). Applied to counselling, these articles emphasize the responsibility of counsellors to self-assess their ability to demonstrate respect, understanding, and sensitivity when counselling for adoption-related concerns. As a minority, some adopted persons might feel, for example, that their concerns and experience related to identity development, such as the loss of heritage, have not been sufficiently recognized and validated.

CCPA Section E: Research and Publications

Highlighted under Research and Publications are two articles: Subject Welfare (E1) and Informed Consent of Research Subjects (E5) (CCPA, 2007). Applied to research on adoption and seeking heritage, researchers have a responsibility to protect the well-being of members of the adoption triad who may participate (E1). Related to this, researchers also have responsibility to ensure that participants are informed about potential consequences of their participation, for example, such as feeling distressful emotions (e.g., frustration and sadness) related to awareness of the impact of loss (E5).

CCPA Section F: Counsellor Education, Training, and Supervision

Under Counsellor Education, Training, and Supervision, highlighted are two articles: General Responsibility (F1), and Self-Development and Self-Awareness (F9) (CCPA, 2007). Both articles (F1 & F9) can be interpreted as supportive of strengthening attention to adoption and related concerns in the curriculum of educational programs and professional development activities for counsellors. Many counsellors could benefit from opportunity to develop more specialized knowledge and skills for providing adoption-sensitive counselling—for example, such as understanding how normal adoptive identity and exploring questions such as “Who am I?” can be complicated for adopted persons with limited information about their birth family and heritage.

Application of the CPA Code of Ethics for Psychologists

This ethical analysis of concerns related to adoption and heritage concludes with an application of the four main principles of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2001), as developed by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). As a social contract between society and the discipline of psychology, the CPA *Code* formalizes the profession’s commitment to assuring that “each member will place the welfare of the society and individual members of that society above the welfare of the discipline and its own members” (CPA, p. 29).

As a guide for ethical practice in psychology, the CPA *Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001) is comprised of four main principles: Respect for the Dignity of Persons (I), Responsible Caring (II), Integrity in Relationships (III), and Responsibility to Society (IV). Included for each principle are values and a set of standards for guiding the minimal behavioural expectations of psychologists, as well as broader and ideal attitudinal and

behavioural expectations. For counsellors, many of whom are registered psychologists, the following is an application of these principles to analyze ethical issues related to adoption and releasing information to adopted persons about birth parents and heritage.

CPA Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons

Principle I of the *CPA Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001) promotes the belief that “all persons have a right to have their innate worth as human beings appreciated” (CPA, p. 43). Applied to counselling, this worth is not dependent on a client’s preferences, characteristics, condition or status, including culture, nationality, ethnicity, colour, race, or religion—or, arguably, status as an adopted person, birth parent, or adoptive parent. Principle I also emphasizes that psychologists have the “greatest responsibility to those persons in the most vulnerable position” (CPA, p. 43). Applied to counselling and considering the interests of the different members of the adoption triad, arguably, the most vulnerable persons in adoption are the adopted persons, especially as children. Of the four principles, Respect for the Dignity of Persons generally has the highest weight.

Also included in Principle I of the *CPA Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001), are moral rights, such as the right to privacy, self-determination, personal liberty, and natural justice, all of which psychologists “have a responsibility to promote and protect” (CPA, 2001, p. 43). Doing so can be complicated in counselling, however, as how moral rights are promoted, protected, and exercised can vary across communities and cultures—as evident in the varied adoption policies and practices in Canada and Aboriginal adoption.

If an adopted client’s request for identifying information about birth parents and heritage is denied, for example, questions arise about how well moral rights of self-determination and personal liberty can be upheld for adopted persons (CPA, 2001). As

non-adopted persons generally have such information, restricting adopted persons from accessing the same could be regarded disrespectful and an affront to dignity. Also questionable is adoption policy that requires adult adopted persons to provide consent of their adoptive parents before receiving this information.

Also related to Principle I are ethical questions about whether some adoption practices are maintaining inequality based on status as an adopted person also arise (CPA, 2001). Applying biomedical ethics and distributive justice, however, equality might not always mean receiving the same treatment (Ross & Malloy, 1999). If so, it could be acceptable that some people have access to heritage and others do not, as when an adopted client's request for information conflicts with a birth parent's refusal and request for a moral right to privacy.

In analyzing this situation, it is noted that Principle I includes an ethical standard against participating in practices that are disrespectful of the legal, civil, or moral rights of others (I.4) (CPA, 2001). A psychologist could be presented with a conflict, for example, between supporting a moral right to privacy and, arguably, a moral right for adopted persons to be acknowledged by their birth parents and realize their heritage. Further complicating this situation are legal concerns related to respecting adoption agreements, and provincial, constitutional, and international law.

Also relevant under Principle I on Respect for the Dignity of Persons is consideration of the value of *Non-discrimination*, which emphasizes that psychologists should "not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of unjust discrimination" (I.9) (CPA, 2001, p. 47), and should "act to correct practices that are unjustly discriminatory" (I.10) (p. 47). Thus, psychologists are challenged to consider

whether it is discriminatory when adopted persons, as members of a minority group, are not permitted to access to information about their birth family and heritage. As well, questions arise about whether all persons have moral rights to freedom of choice and self-determination for making decisions about accessing such information. Also raised are questions about the legal rights of adopted persons under national and international law, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009), for securing greater equality with non-adopted persons.

Also relevant under Principle I of the CPA *Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001), is the value of *Confidentiality*, which emphasizes sharing client information with others “only with the informed consent of those involved” (CPA, p. 57), unless under extenuating circumstance such as risk of serious physical harm. Maintaining confidentiality could be complicated, however, when adoption law and policy do not allow releasing identifying information to an adopted person or birth parent without mutual consent. Given that psychologists have the “greatest responsibility to those persons in the most vulnerable position” (CPA, p. 43)—arguably, most often this would be adopted persons—ethical conflict could arise if a birth parent declines the release of their information.

CPA Principle II: Responsible Caring

Principle II of the CPA *Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001) emphasizes that psychologists should actively demonstrate concern for any individual, family, group, or community for whom they provide services. When considered with Principle I, which prioritizes protecting the most vulnerable, such as adopted persons, responsibility to demonstrate concern for other stakeholders, such as birth parents, adoptive parents, and the general public, would be “secondary” (p. 57). Applying Responsible Caring, thus,

raises questions about the role of psychologists in activities related to developing adoption policy on disclosure of identifying information.

Relevant to analyzing concerns related to adoption and seeking heritage, is the value of *Risk/benefit analysis* (II.13), which is similar to *teleological recognition* described by Ross and Malloy (1999). According to this value, psychologists should carefully assess each situation and “proceed only if the potential benefits outweigh the potential harms” (CPA, 2001, p. 59), which are defined in terms of physical and psychological effects on the short- and long-term. Factors to consider in this assessment include “social, family, and community relationships; personal and cultural identity; feelings of self-worth, fear, humiliation, interpersonal trust, and cynicism; self-knowledge and general knowledge” (p. 59). As described, thus, psychologists presented with adoption-related concerns may be challenged to assess similar factors—for example, community acceptance of adoptive families, the significance of heritage on adoptive identity development, promotion of equality and self-determination, and the existential search for a genuine sense of self, as an individual and/or in relationship with significant others, recent and past.

Also relevant under Principle II, the value of *Offset/correct harm* emphasizes that psychologists should “refuse to help individuals, families, groups, or communities to carry out or submit to activities that, according to current knowledge, or legal or professional guidelines, would cause serious physical or psychological harm to themselves or others” (CPA, 2001, p. 69). Psychologists also are challenged to “take responsibility for correcting clearly harmful effects that have occurred as a direct result of their research, teaching, practice, or business activities” (II. 16) (CPA, pp. 58-59), and to

proceed after assessing a problem only when the potential benefits are proportionately greater than the risks (II.17). Applied to adoption and seeking heritage, thus, questions are raised about whether psychologists could strengthen their contribution to the development of adoption law, policy, and practice that minimizes harm and promotes the well-being of adopted persons, arguably, those who are the most vulnerable.

Also for consideration, Responsible Caring emphasizes that psychologists “engage in self-reflection regarding how their own values, attitudes, experiences, and social context...influence their actions, interpretations, choices, and recommendations” (CPA, 2001, p. 59). Thus, those providing counselling related to adoption and seeking heritage are challenged to increase self-awareness of how their personal experience, perceptions, and assumptions could limit their sensitivity in working with members of the adoption triad—for example, such as associating adoption with pathology.

As both Principles I and II emphasize that psychologists should “increase safeguards proportionate to the degree of dependency and the lack of voluntary initiation on the part of the persons involved” (CPA, 2001, p. 59), compared to other members of the adoption triad, adopted persons could be considered the most dependent. Unless older when placed, most adopted persons as young children were unable to voluntarily choose to be adopted. Given their dependency as persons placed for adoption, the interests of adopted persons may supersede those of other members of the adoption triad.

Clarification is needed, then, on whether dependency is applicable to adopted persons only as children, and not as adults. If so, a question is raised about whether the self-determination of adult adopted persons is impeded when other stakeholders limit access to information related to them, such as identifying information about their birth

parents. Thus, psychologists who work in the adoption field can be presented with complex ethical problems related to access to information, especially when taking into account other factors such as legal and moral rights to privacy of birth parents.

CPA Principle III: Integrity in Relationships

Principle III on Integrity in Relations emphasizes that psychologists maintain integrity in relationships with clients by enhancing self-knowledge and engaging in critical reflection, as also emphasized in Principle II on Responsible Caring (CPA, 2001): “Personal values and self-interest can affect the questions psychologists ask, how they ask those questions, what assumptions they make, their selection of methods, what they observe and what they fail to observe, and how they interpret their data” (CPA, p. 73).

Applied to adoption and seeking heritage, when working with members of the adoption triad, then, psychologists have a responsibility to monitor the influence of their personal background, needs, interests, and values and beliefs on the development of an effective counselling relationship (Bordin, 1979; CPA, 2001). Sensitive role and ethical conflicts could arise, for example, if both the client and psychologist were members of the adoption triad—such as a psychologist who is an adoptive parent and a client who is adopted or a birth parent and seeking a reunion.

Applying Principle III, psychologists in such a role conflict, thus, are challenged to respond with openness and honesty, while at the same time communicating respect, dignity, and caring towards the client (CPA, 2001). Also highlighted is the value of *Objectivity/lack of bias* (III.10), which emphasizes that psychologists “evaluate how their personal experiences, attitudes, values, social context, individual differences, stresses, and specific training influence their attitudes and thinking” (CPA, 2001, p. 77).

Recognizing the value of *Avoidance of conflict of interest* (III.31), which cautions psychologists against engaging in such counselling situations where their ability “to be objective and unbiased” (CPA, 2001, p. 84) could be limited, highlights another set of potential risks. Alternately, a psychologist who does not have personal experience with adoption could be challenged to respond with integrity when, perhaps, insufficiently prepared for addressing adoption-related issues, such as grief associated with loss of birth family and heritage, or a child placed for adoption.

CPA Principle IV: Responsibility to Society

Principle IV of the CPA *Code of Ethics* (CPA, 2001) emphasizes responsibility of psychology as a profession to “promote the welfare of all human beings” (CPA, p. 87) and “ensure that psychological knowledge, when used in the development of social structures and policies, will be used for beneficial purposes” (p. 87). Given longstanding controversies related to adoption and seeking birth family and heritage, highlights opportunity for the profession to contribute more to their resolution (Strong-Boag, 2006).

Of note under Principle IV, those who have “direct involvement in the structures of the discipline, in social development, or in the theoretical or research data base...have the greatest responsibility to act” (CPA, 2001, p. 87)—especially psychology professionals in leadership roles or working in academia, social services, policy analysis, and research. Notwithstanding, those in counselling practice also have opportunity to apply their specialized knowledge, skills, and experience towards fulfilling this collective responsibility. The discipline of psychology and its various professionals, thus, have responsibility to the broader society for contributing, for example, to the development of adoption and related concerns in areas such as research, law, policy, and practice.

Also relevant, the value of *Development of Society* states that psychologists have an ethical responsibility to influence beneficial societal changes (IV.20), keep informed of relevant concerns (IV.21) (e.g., openness in adoption), and speak out on important societal issues (IV.22) (CPA, 2001). As well, the CPA *Code of Ethics* provides guidelines such as refraining from participating in “research or any other activity that contravenes international humanitarian law (CPA, p. 95). Applied to adoption and seeking heritage, thus, raises questions about how well adoption law in Canada complies with international law that emphasizes the protection of heritage, such as *The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions* (HCIA). Furthermore, psychologists are encouraged to speak out and/or act “if the policies, practices, laws, or regulations of the social structure within which they work seriously ignore or contradict any of the principles of this *Code*” (CPA, p. 95).

Chapter Summary

To facilitate critical thinking and understanding about controversial and ethical concerns related to adoption and seeking birth parents and heritage, this chapter demonstrated analyses based on ethical principles in biomedicine, counselling, and psychology (CCPA, 2007; CPA, 2001; Ross & Malloy, 1999). Included were applications of the codes of ethics of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA, 2001), and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA, 2007).

Recognizing that reviewers may disagree with some of the analyses, rather than agreement, the main purpose was to promote awareness and critical and ethical thinking about adoption and heritage issues, especially when counselling members of the adoption triad. Also highlighted was a general responsibility for professionals and others in the

field of psychology to consider how they could contribute to increasing understanding of adoption and resolve longstanding controversies, such as accessing adoption records.

To conclude this project, the next and final chapter on *Project Applications and Conclusion* discusses the potential value and utility of this project for different stakeholders. Topics include the development of adoption-sensitive counselling, and new directions for research and development related to adoption and seeking heritage.

Chapter 7: Project Applications and Conclusion

To conclude this project, the guiding question for this chapter on *Project Applications and Conclusion* is, “What are the potential applications of this project for counsellors and other stakeholders?” In addition to counsellors, this chapter discusses the project’s potential value and utility for stakeholders including members of the adoption triad, other professionals in psychology (e.g., researchers and educators), communities, and the broader society. The major focus, however, is on applications for counsellors who are interested in a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of adopted persons related to seeking birth family and heritage. Also discussed are considerations for research, counsellor education, and the development of professional psychology.

Applications for the Adoption Triad

This project is of potential value and utility to members of the adoption triad, as well as other extended family members (e.g., birth grandparents and siblings) seeking to explore and increase understanding of the impact of adoption on adopted persons, as well as themselves (e.g., meeting an adopted person’s adoptive family). In learning more about the unique challenges of adoption, emphasized was the importance of recognizing normal diversity among adopted persons and adoptive families.

For example, identity development was discussed as a lifelong process during which motivations to seek birth family and heritage can vary across a continuum of low to high interest (Campbell et al., 1991; Penny et al., 2007; Triseliotis, 2000). For members of the adoption triad, awareness of adoptive developmental processes and individual differences could contribute to normalizing the experience and complexities of adoption, while also avoiding unfounded pathologizing.

Applications for Counsellors and Other Human Services Professionals

For counsellors and other human service professionals (e.g., psychologists, social workers, teachers), this project integrated a breadth of information adoption and heritage from varied sources—including counselling practice, personal accounts, research, advocates, organizations, legislation and policy, and codes of ethics. In consolidating, analyzing, and raising questions about related issues and concerns, such as adoptive identity development, grief and loss, and equality rights, this project has potential use as a resource for the development of more adoption-sensitive counselling and services. For consideration, discussed in the following are respectful communication, self-awareness of assumptions, development of the client-counsellor relationship, respect for diversity in adoption, and normal variation in search motivations across the lifespan.

Language and Terms in Counselling

As emphasized in diversity counselling and the provision of other human services for clients of minority groups, practitioners have a responsibility to maintain self-awareness of personal values and beliefs, and be intentional in their communication and use of language—for example, as they can convey underlying personal assumptions about conceptualizations of the family and myths about adoption (Collins & Arthur, 2005; Wegar, 2000). Some adoption experts caution against using language, for example, such as *give up for adoption*, which implies abandonment, *natural* or *real parents*, which implies that an adoptive relationship is a deficient or a secondary bond, and *adopt-a-highway*, which implies similarity between adopting children and physical objects (Smith, 2006). Thus, Smith emphasizes awareness of assumptions embedded in communication, as “even with the best of intentions, certain linguistic formulations may

convey meanings that stigmatize, marginalize, and convey the very opposite of equal respect and equal recognition” (p. 244).

Counsellors as Environmental Variables

From a bioecological perspective, counsellors and other human services professionals can be considered *environmental variables*, mutually interacting and influencing clients who present with their own set of *person* variables (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Katz, 2000). Applied to counselling, this model explains how, as an influential variable, a counsellor can influence a client and the development of the client-counsellor relationship, which impacts counselling outcome.

Counsellors have a professional and an ethical responsibility to maintain awareness of their personal assumptions, values, and beliefs, which can directly and indirectly, verbally and nonverbally, influence interactions with clients (Bordin, 1979; CPA, 2001; Collins & Arthur, 2005; Schulz, Sheppard, Lehr, & Shepard, 2006). Towards maintaining this awareness, the following are reflective questions to consider, for example, when counselling adopted persons, whose concerns may be related to adoption and heritage: What assumptions do you make about a client’s heritage based on their last name? Do you allow clients to ascribe their own heritage? What assumptions do you make about clients who are motivated to learn about their birth family and heritage, and those who are not? When asking about a client’s personal history, do you assume that they know about their medical history? Do you regard adoptive families as inferior to biological ones? Do cultural artifacts in your office convey sensitivity to people of diverse cultures and heritage? What about clients for whom heritage is limited? Do you know where to refer a client for assistance with searching? Do you laugh at jokes about

wishing to be adopted? How do you react to birth parents who placed a child for adoption? What ethical, moral, and legal concerns do you have about adoption?

More generally, Schulz et al. (2006) suggests that counsellors reflect upon questions such as, “Are there values that I hold that could interfere with my ability to remain nonjudgmental and objective?” (p. 8). If so, an ethical course of action may be to consult with a colleague about options for proceeding. As emphasized by Smith (2006), “Language and communication are powerful vehicles conveying ethical values (both explicit and implicit), social norms, and cultural frames” (p. 243).

Managing the Client-Counsellor Relationship

Every counselling situation is a dynamic relationship involving the interaction of the histories and backgrounds of the individual client and counsellor, which influences the counselling outcome (Bordin, 1979). When counselling adopted persons, for example, a counsellor’s family history could be a significant influence on the counselling relationship, whether the counsellor is a member of the adoption triad or not.

When both the counsellor and client are members of the adoption triad, for example (e.g., an adoptive parent counselling an adopted person), there is an ethical responsibility to openly and honestly address conflicts of interest (Bordin, 1979; CPA, 2007). If counselling proceeds, the counsellor then may consider consulting about potential countertransference related to adoption, such as fulfilling personal needs to rescue or blame that could impact assessment and providing support (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Katz, 2000).

Recognizing Diversity in Adoption

Another consideration when counselling adopted persons, or other members of the adoption triad, is to avoid generalizing, or underestimating or overestimating the impact of adoption (e.g., loss, shame, anger). In assessment, for example, Golberg (2000) emphasizes recognizing a client's different needs, while also giving adoption "its proper psychic space" (p. 209). In avoiding overemphasis on the impact of adoption, a realistic balance is needed. Jones (1997) cautions, for example, that "colluding with the adoptee and her family in denying the importance of the adoption cements the conspiracy of secrecy and silence that surrounds the facts of adoption and the adoptee's past" (p. 68).

Also important, as in diversity counselling with members of other minority groups, counsellors have a responsibility to attend to the unique experience and circumstances of each client (Collins & Arthur, 2005). Adopted persons vary, for example, in their motivations and reasons for seeking birth parents and heritage, as well as for not doing so—such as feeling disloyal and protective of their adoptive parents (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Lifton, 2002; Penny et al., 2007; Rompf, 1993).

Triseliotis (2000) elaborates that "interest in biological origins or ethnicity is not static and can change over time. Equally, the boundary line between acknowledgement, natural curiosity, denial and overstressing the difference can be a very thin one and difficult to separate or measure accurately" (p. 88). Further complicating assessment and counselling, for example, Golberg (2000) observes that adopted clients often present with concerns related to strengthening their sense of self, which ultimately involves a need for more information about their origins and birth family.

Searching and Reunions

As searching and deciding about a reunion are common concerns for adopted persons, counsellors should be informed about this process, as well as the potential benefits and risks. Despite the positive outcomes (e.g., consolidating identity), for example, adopted persons have valid reasons for not actively seeking information about their birth parents and heritage, and a reunion. Some adopted persons refrain, for example, out of concern for their adoptive parents, who might feel hurt or threatened, or by the lack of control over the outcome (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Lifton, 2002).

Towards understanding many adopted persons do integrate their reality of having two sets of parents, Campbell et al. (1991) explain, for example, that “adopted persons have room for several parental images who frame who they are. These relationships do not compete, but together make up the adopted person’s identity” (p. 334). Whatever the reasons for searching and reuniting, or not doing so, counsellors must be prepared to respond with sensitivity, understanding, and respect for the client’s individual experience.

Applications for Researchers

For researchers, this project has potential for identifying new avenues of investigation on adoption in Canada, a socio-cultural context where preservation of culture and heritage is valued and promoted. Given the context, this project has explored themes related to adoption and the meaning of heritage to adopted persons, many of whom have not been allowed to access information about their birth parents and heritage.

Based on the exploration conducted in this project, the following are examples of questions for future exploration and research: “What factors are associated with counsellor effectiveness in working with adopted persons?” “How can the meaning and

value of heritage to adopted persons change across the developmental lifespan?” “How do adopted persons experience multicultural celebrations and events?” “What are ethical, moral, and legal implications of current adoption laws and policies pertaining to confidentiality and privacy, and access to information about birth family and heritage?” In addition to their relevance to adopted persons, some of these questions could be asked with consideration of their implications for future generations and their heritage.

Investigating the meaning and value of heritage and perceptions of adoption could involve, for example, surveying the general public and adopted persons with questions such as the following: “What do you know about your heritage?” “What does your heritage mean to you?” “What activities do you participate in related to your heritage?” “How do you think your life might be different by having/ not having information about your heritage?” “Should adopted persons be allowed to access information about their heritage?” and “Should this include identifying information about their birth parents?”

Future research also could involve exploring the value of different types of heritage. Many adopted persons attain information on their ethno-cultural heritage (e.g., Caucasian birth father of Polish heritage), but without identifying information about their birth parents. Thus, questions are raised about the meaning and impact of different types of information, whether identifying or non-identifying.

Another avenue for related research is exploring the experience of adopted persons who do not have information about their birth parents and heritage, but observe and participate in cultural and heritage activities of other people. Recognizing variation among Canadians, most can determine their level of participation in family, community, and national activities related to heritage—for example, practicing traditions, rituals, and

languages, and celebrating commemorative months and days (e.g., Black History Month and National Aboriginal Day). Adopted persons with unknown heritage, however, are limited in being able to fully participate in such activities. Given the diverse themes discussed in this process, future research likely would some require interdisciplinary collaboration between psychology and other social sciences and fields (e.g., ethics, law).

Applications for Canadian Communities and Society

The themes explored and discussed in this project also have potential to increase recognition of the influence of the socio-cultural environment on the experience of the adoption triad, as well as, more broadly, on the development of communities and society, including adoption law and policy. Based on a bioecological or person-in-the-environment approach to understanding the experience of adoption and heritage, this project focussed on recognizing interaction and reciprocating influences among members of the adoption triad (e.g., adopted persons advocating for access to information), and the broader community and society (e.g., public opinion and adoption law on access) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Miall, 1996).

Included and discussed in this project, for example, were excerpts from public opinion surveys on adoption. Despite large-scale survey results indicating public support for adoption and seeking birth parents and heritage, there is a large number of Canadian children in foster care in need of a permanent home (Ipsos-Reid, 2004; Miall, 1998; Rompf, 1993; Sachdev, 1992). Hence, questions are raised about whether interest in birth family and heritage by adopted persons could be a barrier to adoption for many potential adoptive parents. If so, perhaps increased awareness and understanding of adoption

myths and normal processes of adoption, as discussed in this project, could contribute to alleviating concerns—for example, feeling threatened by open adoption and birth parents.

Also noteworthy, this project raised ethical, moral, and legal considerations about adoption and preservation of the heritage of adopted persons, which also affects their children. However, uncertain is the importance of such concerns to community members and the general public, as well as to those involved in developing adoption law and policy. Raising these concerns, hence, may contribute to increased interest in assessing awareness and perceptions of them and, consequently, lead to the development of more supportive law, policy, and services for adopted persons and their families.

More broadly, applying professional codes of ethics (CCPA, 2007; CPA, 2007) and national and international legislation, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) and *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Snow & Covell, 2006), has raised questions about how well the needs of the most vulnerable, such as preserving the heritage of adopted children, are being met. Also raised is where adoption law of the provinces and territories are consistent and in compliance with relevant national and international law. The process of addressing these concerns may require clarifying important values and beliefs of community members, and the general public and society, which has potential for influencing social change in the interests of all stakeholders in adoption.

Psychology and Social Justice

The following are considerations, based on this project, for professionals in the field of psychology (e.g., counsellors, educators, and researchers) who are interested in extending their work into the area of social justice. As described by Goodman et al.

(2004), beginning work in this generally begins with a process of identifying contextual factors related to suffering and distress—for example, the impact of closed adoption records on adopted persons, such as experiencing grief and alienation related to loss of birth family and heritage. The next step then involves engaging in different activities for initiating and promoting change, such as proposing revisions to adoption law and policy.

Emphasizing opportunity and need for professionals in psychology to become engaged in social justice activities for ameliorating conditions that exacerbate distress, Vera and Speight (2003) caution that a lack of more such involvement “is likely to do little to eradicate oppression and will maintain the status quo to the detriment of historically marginalized people” (pp. 254-255). For this reason, Vera and Speight recommend that “multicultural competence must include interventions beyond the context of counseling” (p. 255). Thus, this may be an opportune time for more professionals in psychology to consider strengthening their contribution to the development of adoption law, policy, and practice and, hence, more fully realize the ethical responsibilities of their profession (CCPA, 2007; CPA, 2007).

Adoption and Heritage in Evolution

Applying the bioecological perspective, which emphasizes recognizing the impact of socio-cultural influences on the development of the individual, presented is an historical perspective on the evolution towards more openness in adoption legislation, policy, and practice in Canada (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Strong-Boag, 2006). For counsellors seeking to understand the ongoing evolution towards more openness in adoption, Strong-Boag describes the impact of a general socio-cultural and political movement towards greater equality and social justice:

Canadians, like others in the world, live in an age of apology and restitution, where groups seek to know their histories and to win acknowledgement of trauma and loss. Unhealed memories of Irish famine migration, head taxes on Chinese immigrants, Native residential schools, Armenian massacres in Turkey during the First World War, and the abuse of children by the Christian Brothers and Catholic priests, among other traumas, have all prompted demands for contrition, reparation, and redress. Canadians have been told that an equitable future, for the nation, as for the adoptive circle, depends ultimately on both addressing history and not perpetuating its errors into the present. In both cases, it is a message that has yet to be fully accepted. (p. 241)

With more progress yet to be realized, Strong-Boag (2006) projects that increased numbers of adopted persons will seek a reunion with birth family and, for those of Aboriginal heritage, more will seek repatriation rights. Strong-Boag bases this projection on a growing demand among adopted persons for greater recognition of the meaning and impact of the loss of birth families and communities, as well as greater recognition of the value and benefits of maintaining continuity with the past. Describing this movement as one of historical redress in adoption, Strong-Boag writes that “this wide-ranging assault on national amnesia has challenged the power of the mainstream to dictate relations and to ignore the bad news on which the present has so frequently been constructed” (p. 244).

Citing similar concerns, Pertman (2006) has criticized the media for its Pollyannish treatment of adoption. As an example, Pertman refers to the lack of media coverage in 2000 when the United States ratified *The Hague Convention of Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions* (HCIA). Instead of

investigative stories on the impact of the HCIA on restructuring international adoption, the media continued producing moving stories on adoption, such as the reunion experience.

Recognizing a need for more investigative analyses, perhaps now is an opportune time for increasing awareness of significant psychological, ethical, moral, and legal concerns associated with adoption and heritage, especially in Canada where the preservation of culture and heritage, and equality are valued and recognized in national legislation—the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) (Department of Justice, 2009) and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009). With greater demand for truth and honesty in adoption, Katz (2000) writes that a paradigm shift has been developing, as “children are seen as bearers of rights, rather than being purely objects of concern or beneficiaries of adult welfare” (p. 227), and “denying children the right to know of their origins is now a morally unacceptable stance to take” (p. 227).

Chapter Summary

This final chapter on adoption and heritage discussed potential applications of this project for different stakeholders, including the adoption triad, counsellors and other human services professionals, educators, researchers, and the broader community and society. As integrated throughout each chapter, the major component of this chapter was on applications for adoption-sensitive counselling, recognizing that there is one model or theory for counselling adopted persons.

Considerations for counsellors included using respectful language, monitoring assumptions (e.g., associating adoption with pathology), managing the client-counsellor

relationship and conflicts of interest, and recognizing normal differences among adopted persons, and understanding motivations to seek birth family and heritage. To conclude this chapter, new avenues for research were discussed (e.g., clarifying the meaning of heritage for adopted and non-adopted persons), and considerations for counsellors and other professionals in psychology to engage in activities for contributing to social justice, such as the revision of adoption law, policy, and practices (CCPA, 2007; CPA, 2007).

Project Summary and Conclusion

This project on *Adoption and Heritage in the Canadian Context* was conducted as a requirement to complete the Master of Counselling (MC) degree through the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology (CAAP) program. The main aim of this project was increase recognition among counsellors and other stakeholders (e.g., adoption triad, educators, researchers) of the demands of adoption and loss of heritage, as experienced by adopted persons who have no or limited information about their birth family. Integral to this project was an exploration of the influence of socio-cultural context, as Canada is a country where culture and heritage, and equality are valued and recognized in national legislation—the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) (Department of Justice, 2009) and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009).

Applying a bioecological approach to conduct this project required researching and integrating a broad range of topics relevant to adoption and heritage at the expense of more in-depth analyses in any one area (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cormier & Nurius, 2003). After Chapters 1 and 2, *Project Overview* and *Project Development*, the subsequent chapters integrated research on five main areas related to adoption and heritage: *Adoptive Identity Development* (Chapter 3), *Adopted Persons and Seeking*

Heritage (Chapter 4), *Adoption in the Canadian Socio-Cultural Context* (Chapter 5), *Applications of Professional Ethics to Adoption and Heritage* (Chapter 6), and this final chapter *Project Applications and Conclusion* (Chapter 5).

For counsellors, applications for counselling adopted persons were raised for consideration throughout the project. For other stakeholders, this project has potential to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of the experience of adoption and adopted persons. Increased awareness and understanding, ideally, would contribute to developing more family, community, and other societal support (e.g., revised adoption policy) for adopted persons and their families.

Hence, at best this project will support more informed, sensitive, and inspired counselling practice, that contributes to ameliorating distress and facilitating the well-being of adopted persons and their families. Ultimately, these benefits will also contribute to developing healthier communities and broader socio-cultural environment for all.

As an alternate to maintaining a Pollyanish perception that minimizes the challenges of adoption, the following quote by Betty Lifton (2002), an adopted person and adoption therapist, highlights the opportunity for all stakeholders to recast adoption with greater understanding, honesty and truth, and acceptance:

The time has come to approach the subject of adoption in a new and realistic way: to see where it connects to myth and to plain old life. We have to see the adoptee as a character marked by fate, but not doomed by it. To see birth mothers as women who have lost their children as surely as women lose children to accidents, disease, and war. To see adoptive parents as people who have lost their

chance for biological continuity, but who have taken other women's children as their own." (p. 207)

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Appendix A

Terms and Definitions

The following are descriptions of terms used in this paper with comments on the challenges of utilizing language that is respectful and free of negative or oppressive connotations. To date, there is no common agreement on the most respectful language to use for referring to people who have experienced adoption (Strong-Boag, 2006; Upshur & Demick, 2006).

Adoptee, or adopted person or person	A person who has been adopted. Applying guidelines of the American Psychological Association for reducing bias in language, Upshur and Demick (2006) support using the alternate term <i>individuals who were adopted</i> . Though more cumbersome, the implication is that adoption is an event, not a personal characteristic or condition. Recognizing this concern and for economy of word, in this project <i>adopted person</i> is most utilized.
Adoption triangle or adoption circle	The <i>adoption triangle</i> generally refers to the adopted person, adoptive parents, and birth parents. According to Prynne (2000), <i>adoption circle</i> better indicates movement among the different parties, not fixed positions. Note that the Ministry of Children and Family Development of British Columbia broadly defines the term as inclusive of adopted persons, birth parents, adoptive parents, extended families, and other significant people in the adopted person's life (Dickerson & Allen, 2006).

Adoptive constellation	In addition to members of the adoption triangle or adoption circle, the <i>adoptive constellation</i> is inclusive of extended family and the surrounding community (Sobol, 1997; Sorosky et al., 1978; Zamostny & O'Brien, 2003).
Adoptive parent or second parent	Both these terms have positive and negative associations, such as being altruistic and inferior to the <i>first</i> parent (Strong-Boag, 2006). As common in the literature, in this project <i>adoptive parent</i> is most often used.
Authenticity	As existential ethical theory, authenticity refers to congruence of cognitive and affective domains within a person, as well as between the person, his or her behaviour, and the world (Ross & Malloy, 1999)
Birth parent or first parent	Refers to an adopted person's biological father or mother, and is preferable to <i>natural</i> or <i>real</i> parent, which implies a negative connotation of parents who adopt as "unnatural or fake" (Pertman, 2006, p. 65). In this paper, <i>birth parent</i> is most often utilized.
Domestic adoption	Refers to adoption conducted within Canada, in contrast to international adoption with another country.
Ethics	Objective basis for rendering judgment of right or wrong, good or bad, or authentic or inauthentic behaviour (Ross & Malloy, 1999). <i>Ethics</i> and <i>morals</i> often are used interchangeably in appraisals (e.g., behaviour as good or bad, right or wrong).

First Nations	<p><i>Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations</i> often are used interchangeably. In this project, <i>Aboriginal</i> is usually used, unless the name of a tribal group would be more appropriate (Strong-Boag, 2006). <i>Indian</i> would be used only if previously referenced in another source.</p>
Métis	<p>A person of mixed European and Native ancestry (Strong-Boag, 2006).</p>
Morals	<p>As a central concept of ethics, <i>morals</i> refer to actions, behaviour and their guiding principles (e.g., though shalt not commit adultery) (Ross & Malloy, 1999). <i>Ethics</i> and <i>morals</i> often are used interchangeably in appraisals (e.g., behaviour as good or bad, right or wrong).</p>
Nonrelative adoption	<p>Refers to social parenting in contrast to adoption by a biological relative (Miall, 1998). Unless indicated as <i>relative adoption</i>, in this project adoption refers to the social parenting of children and youth.</p>
Norms	<p>Group or societal standards or sets of criteria used to assess behaviour (Ross & Malloy, 1990).</p>
Values	<p>Individual beliefs that motivate and guide behaviour and living in a way that is personally and socially preferable (Ross & Malloy, 1990).</p>

Appendix B

Abbreviations

- HCIA The Hague Convention of Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions
- UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Appendix C

Excerpts from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The following excerpts from sections of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009), which was assented in March 1982, are highlighted for their relevance to questions and concerns regarding the preservation of the culture and heritage of Canadians who are adopted.

Equality Rights

Equality Rights pertain to “equality before and under law and equal protection and benefit of law” (Department of Justice Canada, 2009):

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Equality Rights also pertain to affirmative action programs;

(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Enforcement

This section pertains to the “enforcement of guaranteed rights and freedoms” (Department of Justice Canada, 2009):

24. (1) Anyone whose rights or freedoms, as guaranteed by this Charter, have been infringed or denied may apply to a court of competent jurisdiction to obtain such remedy as the court considers appropriate and just in the circumstances.

General

The following section pertains to “multicultural heritage” (Department of Justice Canada, 2009):

27. This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.