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# ***BLOOD TIES***

## ***THE LABYRINTH OF FAMILY MEMBERSHIP IN LONG TERM ADOPTION REUNION***

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
In  
Social Anthropology  
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## ***ABSTRACT***

This thesis reports original research conducted with twenty adoptees, adopted under closed-stranger protocols, who have been experiencing regular post-reunion contact with their birth families for more than ten years. It examines the themes of the mothering role, family obligation and family membership to uncover how adoptees navigate their family membership within and between two families (adoptive and birth family). This study presents the thoughts, feelings and observations of the participants in their own words to convey a deeper understanding of their experiences. Drawing upon in-depth interviews, this study has sought to expand on earlier research focussing on the search and reunion and immediate post-reunion stages to examine the long-term experiences of adoptees in post-reunion.

The principal finding is that reunited relationships have no predictable pathways and are approached with varying levels of ambivalence and emotional strain, and that there is no fixed pattern of family arrangements and relational boundaries. While closed-stranger adoptions and the subsequent reunions may eventually cease, this research may assist in understanding the issues surrounding the reunion between gamete (egg) and sperm donor's and their offspring in the future.

**KEYWORDS:** Adoption Post-reunion, Adoptee, Birth Family, Family Membership, Family Relationships, Closed Adoption Reunion.

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## ***GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS***

Adoption	The Adoption Act 1955 does not define adoption. Neither does it set out the objects, principles or social goals of the Act; it merely describes the necessary procedures for obtaining an adoption order and the legal effects (Griffith, 1997:17). Trapski's Family Law (cited in Griffith, 1997:17) defines Adoption as "a legal process culminating in the making of an adoption order by which the child's birth parents lose the parental status in relation to the child and are absolved from their rights and responsibilities".
Adoption Order	"Documentation detailing that by adoption order, the adoptive parents assume the status of parenthood and the accompanying rights and responsibilities in relation to the child. The child gains a new parent or parents and acquires a new set of relatives traced through the adoptive parent(s). The child loses its birth parents and the set of relatives traced through them. Adoption authorises and effects a legal transplant of the child, severing relationships with its family of origin and creating a new set of family relationships through the adoptive parent(s). An adoption order seeks to transmute biological and genetic links by legal decree and creates artificial parenthood in favour of the adoptive parent(s)". (Trapski's Family Law, cited in Griffith, 1997:17).
Adoptee	Person relinquished for adoption by genetic parent(s).
Adoptive Parent	Persons who adopt a child.
Adoption Triangle or Triad	Includes the three parties involved in adoption, the birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptee.
Birth Parent	Biological or genetic parent of a person relinquished for adoption.
Bonding Theory	Relates to infant-to-parent attachment. Based on Lorenz's and Bowlby's theories of attachment.

Closed Adoption	The adoption system based on the Adoption Act 1955 that prevented the release of identifying information pertaining to birth origins or adoptive parents details.
CYFs	Child Youth and Family.
DSW	Department of Social Welfare.
Environmentalism	The belief that environment will overcome heredity. Place a child in the right environment and it will grow likewise (Griffith, 1997:9).
Complete Break Ideology	The belief that if the adopted child is completely cut off from its genetic origins, then the environment will develop the child's personality to become fully integrated into the new family.
Open Adoption	Identifying information relating to the adoptive and birth parents are released or open for inspection as requested.
Jigsaw	Auckland based Support Group for anyone involved in adoption.
MOA	Movement out of Adoption – Support Group for Birth Mothers.
Psychodynamic Theory	The theory was developed and used to understand and explain the <i>real</i> reasons unmarried mothers got pregnant. It suggested the resulting child was not wanted for itself but merely a symbol of the mother's deeper needs. This led to the idea that unmarried mothers were immature and unstable and that the baby was unwanted. The theory was used to justify the complete break ideology of 1950-1980 (Griffith, 1997:305).