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**Wade in the Water:  
Storying Adoptees' Experiences through the  
Adoption Act 1955**

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## Abstract

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Adoption Act 1955 legislated and governed adoption practices until 1985 when it was supplemented, but not amended or repealed. More than 80,000 children have lived with the effects of that Act. Underlying the legislation were assumptions about illegitimacy derived from notions of *nullius filius*, the child of no-man. Dominant culture sought to right the wrongs of illegitimacy through the practices of adoption producing a child *as if born to* legally married adoptive parents. Through these practices, adoptees became legitimate beings in the social world. The first two chapters of this thesis trace the legal and psychological narrative constitution of adoptees and make it possible for me to ask the question: how are adoptees enabled and constrained through specific subject positions within a particular moral order and how are social power relations implicated in the narrative constitution of adoptees? To address this question, I draw on a Foucaultian poststructuralist position using narrative theory to form a hybrid representation of the stories of 12 adoptees. The first analysis chapter considers how a legal narrative positions adoptees so as to exclude the possibility of articulating their experiences within ‘normal’ kinship and social narratives. To be positioned *as if born to* did not remove the history of being *born to* for the adoptee, or the ‘real’ lived effects of that lack. The second analysis chapter discusses the ways in which adoptees’ psychological experiences are affected by their legal positioning, how they cope while living the legal fiction and include accounts of, and resistance to, psychopathological narratives that constitute their experience. The next analysis chapter explores the complexity of reunion experiences in relation to ongoing identity construction for adoptees. A chapter on hybridity then draws the analysis chapters together to represent some of the complex and contradictory social elements of adoption. This thesis argues that it is possible that the legal exclusion from normalising kinship narratives constitutes the psychosocial responses of adoptees that are observed as abnormalities and result in their over-representation in clinical populations. From the participants’ perspectives, it is possible that their experiences are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.



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## **Prologue: At the Heart of Adoption**

This story begins with my conception. My 19-year-old birth mother was sent away when her pregnancy was revealed, to a family far away from her own. That family was not kind and she left and fended for herself. Everyone told her that giving her baby to a family who could care for me was the best thing to do. Her family were respectable middle-class Pākehā. Her mother was wheelchair bound at the age of 35 because of rheumatoid arthritis and her father was the carer. They thought they were making her do what was best. During my birth, she was given Largactil, an antipsychotic drug; perhaps they thought she needed to dull the pain. She was treated badly and after the birth ran away from the hospital. She was eventually found by the police and made to sign the adoption forms. I was in the hospital for three weeks before my adoptive family took me home.

Placed in a family that looked, sounded and acted in different ways to me meant that I always already lived difference. I had brown skin while my adoptive family was white. There was no ‘secrecy’ around the ‘abnormality’ of my family - skin colour does not lie. I was taunted and teased about my difference, and that hurt. As a child, I would think about the mother who did not want me, and imagined a drunk who was probably already dead. My adoptive family did not provide the stable nurturing duties befitting the ‘good’ adoptive family. I experienced poverty, alcoholism, violence and neglect. Over the years, people would try to guess at my ethnicity - Māori? Chinese? Both? After explaining my lack of a genealogical history, people would respond in silence or look at me with regret. I felt disconnected and misunderstood. Māori would try to claim me, but when I could not whakapapa, often the recognition was lost.

As a young teenage mother, judged for keeping her son, I held tightly to my belief that at least, with me, my son had a blood relative. Even at that stage, I knew that adoption mattered to the next generation. As the years passed, I noticed the effects of my lived experience as an adoptee on my son’s position in the world. For instance, he had an inherited medical condition that could not be traced. While doing a family tree activity for school, he was unable to access a birth history; together we fabricated a family in which we could both belong and be proud. My son lived the effects of adoption; I reproduced the lie.

I learnt that I embodied the effects of adoption, produced through deception and lies. After therapy to unpick the threads, I was ready to search for my birth history. Reuniting with my birth mother was the most wondrous and enlightening ‘gift’; I finally belonged. We mirrored each other so significantly that the connection cannot be described; I was where I was always meant to be and it just felt so very right.

For years, I had yearned to research the ways in which adoption matters and to add to the body of knowledge that makes a difference in the lives of adoptees. I realised adoptees had been silenced in their experiences; there has been no place to speak and no language in which to talk. I saw a gap in the way that psychology represented adoption and here I found a space to add a voice. By drawing on my insider knowledge and ensuing dedication to make visible what has been invisible, I aim to ‘trouble’

how adoption is understood in psychology and the social power relations that produce the ‘real’ lived experience of adoption.

The effects of adoption extend further than the subjectivity of the adoptee; birth parents, adoptive parents and extended family members are all influenced by the political and moral narratives that produce adoption. Therefore, in telling this story, I recognise that other stories connect to, effect and constitute one another. We all share, from our own positions, emotional experiences of loss, rejection, shame and guilt. While this research focuses specifically on adoptees, I acknowledge the others involved in the adoption triad and I take a moment to honour with a heartfelt tear, all who are affected.

This story is dedicated to my birth mother. Our reunion only lasted three and half years before we were separated again by an illness that took her life.

*Dear Mummy*  
*You gave me life then I lost you*  
*Many years past*  
*I found you and you found me back*  
*I loved you and you loved me more*  
*You once told me that I never knew what real love was*  
*But you showed me and now I know.*  
*Our love was unconditional, infinite and complete*  
*You made me whole; you gently care*  
*You held me when I cried; you hugged me when I hurt*  
*Or just because you could*  
*You held me in everyway*  
*In our short time together, we lived a lifetime*  
*I was a baby, a child, a girl and a woman*  
*I was your birth daughter; you were my mummy*  
*You growled me, you taught me, you nurtured me, and you understood me*  
*You were my mummy*  
*You once said*  
*You never deserved the title of mum*  
*But you were in every breath*  
*Every laugh, every tear*  
*And every gift*  
*To the moon and back...*

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# **Chapter 1:**

## **An Historical Reading**

*If we are to make progress, we must not repeat history but make new history.*

*We must add to the inheritance left by our ancestors*

*(Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948).*

## **An Historical Reading**

### **The Rationale for Storying Adoption and its Legislation**

During the 1997 Aotearoa/New Zealand International Conference on Adoption and Healing, Delany declared that the institution of adoption must be understood through a nexus of knowledge and power. We must question more than what we know about adoption, we must question “how we come to know what we know about adoption” (p. 115). The way in which that question is framed is vital because the practice of adoption, produced through adoption legislation and social movements, has long been misrepresented. Delany (1997) argued that adoption is socially constructed, whereby the problematic dimensions of adoption are positioned as part of its inherent practice. One such dimension is that the complexities of the social relationships produced through the legislation have ‘real’ lived effects, and responsibility for these effects is located within the individual. This thesis seeks to ‘tell’ a story of the production of the ‘adoptee’ that questions the ‘truth’ of the relationships and to enable reunions to be understood differently so that there is reconciliation to heal all who are hurting and socio-political intervention to end the conditions of their pain.

Worldwide, from diverse epistemological assumptions, there exists a plethora of research that considers the historical and contextual situatedness and trajectories of the institutionalisation of adoption. Similarly, within Aotearoa/New Zealand, research speaks to the history and rationale for adoption practices and the subsequent implementation of the Adoption Act 1955. Aotearoa/New Zealand’s social policies are constituted in economic, political and moral forces (Iwanek, 1997b). To trace a history that adequately represents the complexities of all changing social movements and adoption practices is not within the scope of this research. However, specific social climates influenced the advancement of adoption laws. The formation of the modern institution of adoption is an intricate and complex set of relationships between varying and complementary social, psychological, political and moral narratives and their trajectories that produce subjects (Delany, 1997). The account I produce here traces some of those trajectories that enable and constrain specific subject positions within a particular set of social power relations, including legislation. It draws from accounts of academic sources and the experts that have been involved in living and researching adoption.

## **Social Climates and Movements towards Adoption**

The institution of adoption depends on narratives about women and their role in the social hierarchy. Writing as a birth mother<sup>1</sup> and psychologist, Greenwood (2000) provides a history that seeks to understand how Western societies have long attempted to regulate their citizens and human relationships to fit into an idealised, patriarchal moral order. For example, restrictions on whom one marries, who receives financial support and who becomes a ‘good’ mother are but a few of the regulating practices in operation to achieve the desired standards. Moral orders produce relationships and actions to ensure that people conduct themselves in ways that maintain the social order. Movements towards adoption necessarily implicate women’s relationships within society, especially the governing of women’s sexuality, which is constrained and understood within the morality of reproduction and bodies. Historically, unmarried birth mothers who dared transgress from that moral order, represented sexuality as (immoral) pleasure, a position outside of the social order. The effect of such transgression was that the women were ‘shamed’ and left to fend for themselves, often with no means of supporting their children. The children of these women were also positioned as problematic and carried the shame of the transgressions of their mothers (Benet, 1976). Embedded within those cultural climates were religious values that ratified particular customs, rituals and family systems (Bridge, 2002; Simmonds, 2008). Christian religions mandated a moral authority and positioned sex outside of marriage as abhorrent, a ‘sin’ that brought shame on the family. They taught virtues of virginity and maternity (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). As a technology of power, this moral trajectory enabled the control not only of women’s bodies, but also the salvation of the child born into shame.

Burman (1994) argues that the social power relations that governed women, children and ‘good’ citizenship were also an effect of social anxiety on the performance of regulating and controlling populations. In the late nineteenth century, social unrest and upheaval were occurring worldwide. In Europe, and more specifically England, industrialisation meant increased urbanisation that saw the rise of Victorian slums and poor health for their populations. Upper-class English became concerned with the ‘quality’ of that population, who were also considered unstable and disorderly. Notions of degeneracy caused political anxiety about moral, mental and physical collapse of the social structure. The poor were reproducing faster than the middle-class and fears of their contaminating the ‘superior’ population grew (Rose, 1985). Children from the lower class were often unwanted, abandoned, destitute and illegitimate. At the time, British society was not accepting of adoption as a method of care because of the stigma of pre-marital birth and illegitimacy, a reluctance to pass on any

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<sup>1</sup> The language of adoption identifies the familial relationships; it names and explains each position. The Adoption Act 1955 uses ‘mother’ for the adoptive mother as she who raises the child. Adoption professionals use ‘birth’ or ‘biological’ to denote social outcomes and differentiate the two mothering relationships (Browning, 2006). Debate exists around the term birth mother because it relegates the birth mother to some form of biological cooker for the adoptive family while signifying the severing of the mother/child relationship at birth, when this relationship still exists. However, I have taken up the use of this term as it is most commonly used.

inheritance to outsiders, and the need to maintain class kinship structures. Children were positioned merely as the possessions of the parents; their welfare was of little concern (Burman, 1994; Griffith, 1997). Therefore in order to regulate the actions of citizens, acts of law and legislation provided the rules to define 'good' citizenship and reify the performance of the moral order (Foucault, 1982; Sarup, 1993).

### **The Role of the Law in Child Welfare**

A significant part of adoption history is the formation of the legislation that shaped the practices and effects on those subjected to its power. The moral trajectory of the political and social doctrines, which control, classify and legitimate practices of adoption also positions adoptees and mediates their relationships with birth and adoptive parents (Delany, 1997).

As with all matters involving social-political movements, the position of the law in child welfare has a long history. The enactment of adoption is embedded in the history of the position of the child within that law, and this history is necessary to understanding the effects of adoption. O'Halloran (1999) argues that child welfare is historically located through English common law, which developed out of notions of propriety, with its beginnings founded in guardianship of the heir's interests in property. More specifically, common law privileged male heirs whereby property rights were understood as paramount to the continuation of (gendered) hierarchical social relationships. The assumption was that neglect, abandonment and ill treatment of children by their 'fathers' resulted in socially unsanctioned behaviour. Once more, the needs of the child were not considered. Actions of common law included prescribing conduct, evaluating the circumstances of child welfare, setting thresholds for state intervention and adjudication without recourse. Similarly, adoption laws in the United States of America (USA) according to Moe (2007), were derived from Roman laws relating to inheritance. Here, adoption was not about the welfare of the child, it was to enable an heir.

According to O'Halloran (1999), the underlying concern for the state was the growth of poor houses and the increasing number of abandoned children becoming the responsibility of the state because voluntary relinquishment of children had become common practice. Voluntary relinquishment of children was countenanced through common law only when it was not considered an avoidance of responsibility. An informal process of relinquishment began to occur and unwed mothers who voluntarily relinquished their children were not subjected to the same standards of responsibility due to assumptions of their immoral status. The interpolation of law into the lives of children was based on the assumption that poverty was socially sanctioned and child welfare became a moral category based on puritan traditions, notions of inheritance and patriarchal rule.

Until 1873, when the Judicature Act enabled a more streamlined approach to child welfare, matters relating to children were addressed through common law courts or courts of equity, both valuing a paternalism that privileged rights of men, while the rights of women and children were few. As the new Act evolved, three legislative strands of law emerged: private (family), general public

welfare and social care law (O'Halloran, 1999). For the purposes of this thesis, my concern is with the emergence of family law and its principle of welfare that has enabled the institutionalisation of adoption. Family law deals with matters of adoption and, as argued by O'Halloran (1999), has "proved to be least conducive to the evolution of the welfare principle" (p. 43).

### **The Scorn of Illegitimacy**

Another assumption underpinning adoption legislation, thus fundamental to the institution of adoption, is the notion of *nullius filius*. Historically, English common law defined a child born out of wedlock as *nullius filius* - the child of no-man (Griffith, 1997; Van Doren, 1916). When you are born a child of no-man there are no rights to inherit land or property, no rights to a surname, or any rights to support or education from the mother or father. Conversely, under English common law, if *born to* legally married parents a child is deemed legitimate, and inheritance, surnames and support are a birthright. Legitimacy was of great consequence as inheritance was an important practice in English culture (Van Doren, 1916). Notions of legitimacy produced through legislation protected the distribution of property, encouraged marriage and highlighted the disapproval of sex outside marriage.

If a child was not legitimate, she/he was labelled a bastard (Griffith, 1991; R. J. Lifton, 1976). According to Kohli (2003), English law defines a bastard as someone who is born out of wedlock, and signifies a child who is ill begotten. An illegitimate child was positioned through a moral order that represented who was worthy of the rights of the father. Illegitimacy placed a significant risk to public morality (Carp, 2009; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Griffith, 1998). In 1916, Van Doren identified that "the lot of the child born out of wedlock was an intolerable one" (p. 698). From this storyline, the early movement towards adoption as a legal arrangement was a response to an increase in illegitimacy as a social problem. At the time, according to Griffith (1998), morality and bastards were a social concern and popular understandings through newspaper articles produced an account of the problem of illegitimacy as "a social cancer" (p. 5). However, before the practice of adoption was to become law, other social power relationships were enacted on illegitimate and abandoned children.

### **Child Care Practices**

Prior to systematic legislation of child welfare practices, an indenturing system of labour as a form of control of undesirable children was common practice and can be understood as an enactment of a crude means of adoption. According to Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundleby (1997), the children left to the state institutions, such as poor houses, were indentured into families. Such practices, while understood through notions of 'good', positioned the children as commodities whereby in return for food, shelter and education, they became enslaved into work for their keep.

Iwanek (1997a) stories the way in which colonising countries, including Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, encouraged indentured labour as a social practice, which relieved the state of any responsibility for the care of these children. Griffith (1991) argues that many of the children

suffered severe hardship due to the treatment they received from their ‘families’. Once indentured, the rights of and/or the conditions in which the children lived were largely ignored. By the mid-nineteenth century, large numbers of children in need overwhelmed the poor houses and indenture system.

Another social movement that emerged during the mid-1880s in response to the conditions of child labour and children in institutions was a turn to child welfare as a social concern. Religious revivalism enabled the emergence of religious groups and individuals (for example, Dr Barnardo) that saw the initiation of orphanage movements. However, similar to poor houses, orphanages had high infant mortality rates and it became necessary to place children within families based on the assumption that they would receive better care. Rural areas offered a prime location for housing children and fostering systems appeared. Rather than the indentured ‘purchase’ of children, settler families received financial support as an incentive to care for children. Foster homes were constructed as substitute birth families and a process akin to adoption evolved (Carp, 2009; Triseliotis et al., 1997). Again however, many such children were used as labour and their welfare was overlooked (Griffith, 1991). Neither indentured labour nor ‘foster’ placements redressed issues of legitimacy.

Throughout the world, adoption as a social practice emerged. In 1851, the USA passed an adoption statute; the Massachusetts legislation became the model for future USA adoption legislation. A common rationale of the early adoption laws in the USA was to decree adoption as a legitimate social practice (Griffith, 1991; Triseliotis et al., 1997). However in Great Britain, those practices remained unlegislated, offering no legal security to the adopting families. Acts of indenturing worked in place of adoption laws. It was not until 1926 that laws were enacted (O'Halloran, 1999; Triseliotis et al., 1997).

### **Aotearoa/New Zealand Introduces Adoption Laws**

Movement towards the legislation of adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand was specific to its history of colonial power. While much of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s legislation is based on English law and derives from the assumptions and values of the Victorian period, it was the first country in the British Commonwealth to legislate adoption (Griffith, 1997). Several socio-political movements during the initial period of colonisation enabled a difference to the ‘mother’ country. According to Else (1991), early settlers displayed a shift in attitudes, values, beliefs and practices for the immigrating populations. Colonial settlers prided themselves on having a ‘liberal’ social system in a vastly unpopulated country. Unlike Great Britain, Aotearoa/New Zealand’s colonising subjects did not necessarily take up narratives about the importance of inheritance to land, they were less bound by class structure or birthright than hard work and possibility (Iwanek, 1997a). There was an abundance of ‘uninhabited’ land to claim.

During this period, while many families housed impoverished and unrelated children in their homes, concerns about those fostering systems emerged. Advocates for child welfare argued for the rights of children, while those who had fostered children raised concerns that the birth parents could

demand custody, or use a child for extortion because there was no legal security (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998; O'Halloran, 1999). According to Else (1991), the practice of fostering was not necessarily an act of benevolence by caring people, as with other colonising nations, the benefits from child labour more than compensated for extra mouths to feed. Fostering parents preferred older children who were more economically useful for labour on the settler farms (Carp, 2009).

Within this context, Waterhouse's Private Members Bill, introduced into Aotearoa/New Zealand parliament in 1881, became the first legislated adoption act of the British Empire (Iwanek, 1997a; Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture*, 2000; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). He argued that in order to encourage the care of neglected or deprived children, a legal contract was required. The practice of legal adoption represented an appropriate way to save and protect children and was a more humane process than indentureship (Griffith, 1997; Iwanek, 1997a). The principles advocated by Waterhouse enabled an 'open' practice of adoption, thereby essentially acknowledging relationships with the birth family. Adoption cases, held in open court, allowed interested parties to make submissions. Through this Adoption Act 1881, birth certificates recorded both birth names and birth parents' names. An adoptee's birth name was retained with the adopted surname hyphenated (Griffith, 1997).

While researching the development of adoption legislation in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Rockel and Ryburn (1988) argue that Waterhouse's goal for legislating adoption was to protect the adoptive parents' investment in a child and to remove fear of the child being reclaimed by birth families when she/he became of age. However, opposing arguments emerged that were hostile to the legalisation of adoption assuming the 'unfortunate' would just abandon their children, a practice wider society assumed was common for the poor. Another argument against the legislation of adoption was a prevailing fear of inheriting 'bad blood' from an illegitimate child with inferior genetics. Although there was general public rejection of legal adoption in the late 1800s and early 1900s, during this period various policies to control adoption practices were implemented. While the aim for the Adoption Act 1881 had at its core the protection of those who were adopted, it was also to reduce the cost of unwanted children to the state. However, suspicion about legitimacy remained, especially where it enabled property inheritance (Griffith, 1991).

In tracing a legislative history, it is possible to see movement in the narrative trajectory towards adoption at the same time as social movements called for attention to the welfare of children. For example, the Infant Life Protection Act 1893 ensured that foster homes were licensed and inspected to meet particular standards of safety. As with other nations, within Aotearoa/New Zealand various groups, mainly religious, were concerned about child exploitation and it was assumed that legislation would ensure better treatment of underprivileged children (Greenwood, 2000; Iwanek, 1997a; Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture*, 2000). In 1895, the Adoption of Children Act was

implemented, and this significant change sought to enable the continuation of whāngai practices for Māori<sup>2</sup> (Weaver, 1999).

Despite early legislation, baby farming became common practice in the late 1890s and was of grave concern to authorities (Carp, 2009; Iwanek, 1997a; Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture, 2000). Baby farming effectively enabled an efficient and confidential way of ‘trading’ illegitimate children for profit; unwanted infants were hard to place into homes without scrutiny from the adopting families, and baby farming protected birth family shame. Often in response to newspaper advertisements, willing foster couples were paid to take an illegitimate child (Griffith, 1997; Iwanek, 1997a). In 1895, the execution of Minnie Dean for child murder incited a warning against baby farming<sup>3</sup>. By 1906, it became illegal for anyone to be paid for adopting children and the Infant Act 1908 consolidated existing adoption laws. The Infant Act 1908 included the licensing and inspection of any adoptive homes where adopted children could potentially live (Griffith, 1991). It also addressed matters relating to customary succession; working together the legislations enabled a child to retain the rights of succession from birth parents and succession rights for intestacy of the adoptive parent (Bradley, 1997). The trajectory of this historical account traces the inception of legislation that enabled inspection and documentation, further turning adoption into a social institution subject to public regulation and control (Herman, 2006; Wegar, 2000).

Around that time and perhaps also as a consequence of the horrors of World War I, Griffith (1991) identifies that Victorian ideas of propriety loosened and there was a marked increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. Public fear increased about state and charitable institutions being responsible for illegitimate children; the stigma of illegitimacy of the child and the condemnation of unwed mothers led to pressure for legislators to increase regulation of adoption practices. While many socio-political movements at the time were challenging Victorian values, unwed mothers were still positioned as a threat to the moral order. Between 1920 and 1930, there was a proliferation of residential homes for unwed pregnant women.

These homes for ‘fallen women’ were informed by Christian charitable values that dictated appropriate moral punishment for unrighteous behaviours. Consequently, it was still assumed that raising an illegitimate child was an appropriate punishment for unwed mothers and served as a warning to all women against any immoral behaviour, including pre-marital sex (Else, 1997; Griffith, 1998). Parental obligations for single women were a part of the punishment of stigma and social rejection. Up until the 1940s, adoption served as a solution to the ‘unfit’ behaviour of some women, such as in instances of adultery. In the circumstances, institutional or foster systems remained the preferred

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<sup>2</sup> A whāngai child is raised by someone other than their birth parents, usually a relative (Metge, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> In order to make money, Minnie Dean took in unwanted children. It is said that many children died while in her care, however baby farming records were not kept so exact numbers are uncertain. She is the only woman to be executed in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Griffith, 1991; Iwanek, 1997a). The case of Minnie Dean became a popular legend and as a form of social control, children were threatened with the ‘Minnie Dean Farm’. Many children sang the Minnie Dean folk song over the following decades.

solution (Else, 1991; Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture, 2000). Many of the residential homes were hidden from public scrutiny and provided 'support' (later understood as coercion) for unwed mothers to relinquish their children for adoption (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1991).

With the Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act 1915, Aotearoa/New Zealand became the first country in the world to amend birth certificates in the name of the adoptive parents (Carp, 2009). It was not the intention of the legislation to conceal an adoptee's birth history, but to serve as protection from the stigma of illegitimacy (Griffith, 1997). Further calls for changes to legislation during this period culminated in the Child Welfare Act 1925, which addressed the position of legitimacy of the children of unwed mothers. The legislation both increased state control over adoptive families and removed the rights of succession to birth families (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Iwanek, 1997a). Significantly, these changes locate the 'secrecy' of adoption and the early movement towards positioning the child *as if born to* the adoptive parents because adoptees' births were recorded under the family name of the adoptive parents when final adoption orders were complete. The implementation of the policy meant state intervention into issues of potential suitability of both child and adoptive parents prior to granting the order; a process that Herman (2006) coined "kinship by design" (p. 207).

Following the Child Welfare Act 1925, access to any family of origin information was prohibited. Such restrictions, intended to ensure legitimacy for adoptees, applied only to those who might be curious or malicious, not to those who were genuinely interested in their family of origin. The criteria for 'genuinely' interested was hard to discern (Rockel & Ryburn, 1988) and this legislation masked the 'open' adoption process intended through the Adoption of Children Act 1895. It effectively denied adoptees their birth history. Another effect of these changes was to produce that which constituted a nuclear family - a complex set of power relationships that produced specific values - the rights duties and obligations in the social fabric of a colonised country.

### **The Turn to Adoption as Socially Acceptable**

It is difficult to trace exactly how social rejection of adoption shifted from punishment to redemption was overturned. I suspect that slowly and subtly discourses transformed, within a context of rapid change in psychodynamic developmental theories and the onset of World War II. There was an increase in children born out of wedlock. Rockel and Ryburn's (1988) interpretation of events was that during the 1940s a social shift in attitude towards unwed mothers positioned them as able to redeem themselves for their immorality by relinquishing their children for adoption. Institutions that were involved with the care of unmarried mothers, such as Bethany (a Christian home), began to forcefully promote adoption. Keeping the child was now deemed an undesirable form of punishment for unwed mothers, and this shift meant that they were publicly scorned for not relinquishing their children. Religious rhetoric from colonial reform groups positioned illicit origins as unimportant, they could be overcome in the right spiritual setting (Iwanek, 1997a; R. J. Lifton, 1976).

The 1940s through to the late 1950s was the baby boom era in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which saw dramatic increases in marriages and births. However, incidences of infertility also increased. It was speculated that the rise in infertility was due to poorer mental and physical health during the Depression and rates of untreated sexually transmitted diseases. Many ex-service men returned home sterile, injured and suffering psychological stress (Carp, 2009; Else, 1991). As Carp (1998) reports, family and social values now deemed nuclear families a necessity for the health of the nation and with that came an increased demand to adopt children. Like illegitimacy, the plight of infertility for couples was a growing source of shame, so to avoid social stigma infertile couples sought to adopt children in unprecedented numbers (Griffith, 1997). Stories citing long waiting lists to adopt babies began to appear around 1949. Large families were also valued as a sign of health and parents with birth children began to adopt (Else, 1991). It seems that the shift in social position for unwed mothers if they relinquished their child simultaneously emerged as the demand for children in post war families was at a premium for restoring the social health of the country.

### **The Influence of Psychology**

Knowledge produced by psychologists advanced the practice of adoption, influencing the social conditions that made it possible. According to Karen (1998), during the 1930s the child psychiatry movement found a number of troubling trends with children without stable mothers. Illegitimate and institutionalised children not adopted early were understood as affectionless, generally unmanageable and warranting a psychiatric syndrome; being motherless was understood as a 'silent plague'. During this period, the authority of psychodynamic theory on personality and development, attachment theory, and nature/nurture debates produced a justification towards the legislation of 'closed', secret adoption practices.

Most significant to adoption researchers' understandings of the practices of adoption has been John Bowlby's work on mother-child attachment. Attachment research explored mother-infant separation and the impact of mothers' attitudes on emotional development. Bowlby's work was exceptionally influential in the 1950s; he acted as an 'expert' advisor to the World Health Organisation's Maternal Care and Mental Health Committee (Riley, 1979). His work instigated significant policy changes for orphaned and neglected children. According to Birns (1999), Bowlby found that maternal deprivation was harmful to an infant's psychological development, and it was assumed that early bonding was necessary. The rupture of that relationship explained the harm and suffering seen in war orphans. These arguments made it necessary for children separated from attachment figures to be adopted into homes before the age of two years, otherwise they would not be able to recover from the trauma of separation (Bowlby, 1980; Triseliotis et al., 1997). Many adoption researchers (for example Else, 1991, 1997; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Griffith, 1997, 1998; Triseliotis, 2000) cite attachment theory as pivotal to the progression of 'closed' adoption practices, and as having psychological effects on adoptees. Bowlby's theory also had implications for the ways in

which mothering should be enacted. Combined with practices of ‘good’ citizenship and moral behaviour, notions of attachment perpetuated the assumption that a woman’s natural role was as mother (Burman, 1994).

Assumptions of the ‘good’ mother included being married, stable, nurturing and attentive, while family and social discourses professed that children should be brought up in a two parent family, with the mother providing in home care. Clearly, because unmarried mothers’ were immoral and unstable they did not meet the criteria for ‘good’ mother, they were unable to provide secure attachment. With such overwhelming evidence of the ideal mother, it was not surprising that birth mothers felt they had no choice but to give up their child (Iwanek, 1997a). Furthermore, the limited, if any, practical or financial alternatives for birth mothers forced them to relinquish their child (Birns, 1999; Iwanek, 1997a; Schooler & Norris, 2002).

In her discussion on the history of the nursery movement, Riley (1979) asserts that other social influences around mothering and family normalised Bowlby’s theory of attachment. Where nurseries had been established during the war to enable women to work for the war effort, post war concerns were raised about the effects of outside care on children’s development and social stability, justifying and maintaining the dominance of necessary attachment. The turn towards the “rehabilitation of the family”, incited by governmental anxiety to maintain the family system, meant mothers were represented as the family lynchpin, while “reconstruction of the family” enabled the ideal family as the nuclear unit to be produced (Riley, 1979, p. 82).

### **Adoption as a ‘Norm’**

During the 1940s and 1950s, with the dependence on attachment theory, a narrative shift towards the normalisation of adoption became possible. The 1950s produced a significant swing from genetic determinism, the theory that genes determine and shape a person (Alpher, 1998), to environmentalist assumptions that nurture could overcome the possibility of ‘bad blood’ that had been a concern of adoption practices (Else, 1991). It was this assumption that enabled a social acceptance of a genetic relationship as irrelevant to the mother-child relationship; the ideology of environmental supremacy “reached the level of unquestionable acceptance” (Griffith, 1997, p. 46). Potential adoptive parents were assured that the ‘sins’ of the mother, her ‘moral fibre’, could be overcome through their family security and they could appropriately bond with the adopted child. In this way, the new and valued relationship with adoptive parents reproduced the practice of adoption *as if born to* and made it possible for a ‘complete break’ ideology to influence legislative change that would effectively ‘cut’ any ties to birth families.

However, before that, other legislative changes occurred. In 1951, the Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act legislated restrictions to birth records and original birth certificates. It became legally difficult to access any information about birth families, which enabled a wall of secrecy to be created. Public research and regulations through legislation and professional surveillance ensured

that the ‘risks’ to adoptive parents associated with adopting children were ameliorated (Herman, 2006). The state institutions extended their power and the needs of the adoptive parents became privileged.

### **The ‘Complete Break’**

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the second Adoption Act 1955 was legislated, reforming adoption and ratifying the ‘complete break’ ideology (Griffith, 1997). The implementation of this Act was in direct opposition to the earlier legislation (1895) that acknowledged relationships with birth families; two mothers and two families were now untenable. The government was still concerned that illegitimate children would become a burden to the state (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). Adoption became the “socially constructed transformation of public problems into private concerns” (Delany, 1997, p. 126). The state introduced and rationalised the Adoption Act 1955 and its practices as an unproblematic solution to the troubles facing children who were unwanted, illegitimate or experiencing hardship. There was no consideration for the ongoing effects of the finality and violence of the ‘cut’ of birth relationships (Douglas & Philpot, 2003; Griffith, 1997).

The Adoption Act 1955 created a legal fiction for adoptees. Fiction in law is a supposition that is a contradiction to fact, however traditionally accepted because it has practical implications. Legal fictions serve a purpose because they provide solutions to certain problems, in this case a new legal identity for adoptees. However, they create other problems such as the disregard for biological identity (Griffith, 1991; Ludbrook, 2012), and the invention and maintenance of the legal identity. Within the Act, the words *as if* constructed the fiction: adoptees gain new family status *as if born to* the adoptive family, establishing a parallel identity. Section 16(2)a of the Adoption Act 1955 states “as if the child had been born to that parent in lawful wedlock”. In this way the biological and genetic ‘truth’ of parenthood is replaced with legal parenthood, yet undeniably both exist (Ludbrook, 1997). The suppression of the birth relationship became the focus of the Adoption Act 1955, and what has become known as the ‘closed’ adoption period began.

Form 3—*continued**Effect of adoption order*

Upon the making of an adoption order—

- (a) the child is deemed for all purposes and as regards all relationships to become a child of the adoptive parents:
- (b) rights of guardianship and existing relationships in respect of the child cease except for the very special purpose of determining forbidden relationships in connection with marriage and with the crime of incest:
- (c) rights in respect of property and succession to property are determined according to the relationships created by the adoption, but property rights acquired before the adoption are not affected:
- (d) any paternity order or maintenance order or agreement which provides for maintenance of the child, if made before the adoption order, ceases to have any effect except as to arrears owing and except where the child is adopted by the mother or by the mother and her husband:  
provided that, where the child is adopted by the mother or by the mother and her husband, the adoption does not prevent the making of any paternity order or maintenance order which could previously have been made or prevent the mother from making an application for a paternity order or a maintenance order:
- (e) the domicile of the child is changed to that of the adoptive parents, but the child's race and nationality are not affected:
- (f) the child is deemed to be a New Zealand citizen by birth if at least one of the adoptive parents is a New Zealand citizen.

*Certificate by witness*

I hereby certify that before the said [*name*] signed the foregoing consent I fully explained to him (*or her or them*) the effect of the making of an adoption order as set out in the Adoption Act 1955, and that he (*or she or they*) appeared fully to understand the same.

Signature:

Figure 1. The Adoption Regulations: Effects of adoption order  
(Ministry of Justice, 1959).

## **Do Not Tell**

The Adoption Act 1955 in effect denied and concealed a birth history. Section 23(1) states “[a]doption records shall not be available for production or open to inspection except on order of the Court”. It mandated that records of the birth history be indefinitely sealed (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988; Simmonds, 2000). Access to information about biological identities for adoptees was governed by concrete guidelines; exemptions were made for special circumstances only, such as checks to prevent marrying a blood relative or needing information to settle an estate. During the next 30 years, only 30 of the approximately 80,000 adoptees in Aotearoa/New Zealand were granted access to birth information through the courts (Griffith, 1997; Iwanek, 1997a; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988).

The ratification of the ‘complete break’ produced secrecy as necessary to the adoption process. Griffith (1991) argues that in Aotearoa/New Zealand secrecy enabled a legal fiction to occur because it hid kinship ties and any relationships to birth families. However, secrecy protected adoptive families from the shame of infertility or the fear of being positioned as ‘abnormal’. It was said that potential adoptive mothers ‘acted’ their pregnancy with the use of a pillow months before the adoption (Else, 1991). Adoptive families experienced social stigma when judged as less than the biological family form (March, 1995; March & Miall, 2000; Watkins, 2006; Wegar, 2000). In this way, the focus of adoption was on the adoptive relationship and the social advantages for members of the new family. To exclude the family of origin was justified through the moral position of the birth mother, as unwed she was unfit to raise a child.

The practice of secrecy was also argued as important to protect the birth mother and her family. To maintain the fabric of a ‘good’ society, social movements at this time worked together to protect families from the shame bestowed upon unwed mothers. Secrecy as protection meant birth mothers were sent away to homes for unwed mothers to insulate their families against disapproving social sanctions (Gediman & Brown, 1991). The homes became agents of the state; they facilitated relinquishment of the child and ensured the evidence of birth history remained hidden. According to Gillard-Glass and England (2002), secrecy was socially engineered because it was not illegal for birth families and adoptive families to have contact. In effect, birth mothers could see their children without infringing on the law. In the implementation of the Adoption Act 1955, there were two versions of consent to the relinquishment of a child; one form of consent included the names of the adoptive parents and the other did not. There is evidence to suggest that the option of giving access to information about the adoptive parents did not occur in the consent process. Consent was not informed. This deliberate strategy undermines concern for the welfare of birth mothers, a practice that Shawyer (1979) argues is a form of social violence.

The ‘complete break’ practice of secrecy, based on moral assumptions enabled through attachment theory that produces a ‘good’ mother was argued to be in the best interests of the adoptee. It was assumed the adoptee would overcome the effects of such a ‘break’ in a better environment. The adoptive family setting, with its nurturing and care, was alleged to more than compensate for the loss

of family of origin (Griffith, 1991). However, despite recurring claims that adoption centred on the welfare of the child, it was more about the complexity of social power relations informing social movements and practices (Else, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). According to Else (1991), an assumption of eugenics or improving the qualities of the human species was still important to governing bodies, although it remained implicit post World War II due to the associated horrors of Nazi Germany. Rose (1985) traces the practices of eugenics back to the early nineteenth century with the rise of theories of degeneration, populations and norms. Fear of individual pathology and its linkage to the quality of populations meant the science of heredity flourished. However, in Aotearoa/New Zealand practices that endorsed upgrading stock through biological reproduction were denied, despite practices of the compulsory sterilisation of those deemed unfit continuing in North America and in Aotearoa/New Zealand until the late 1970s. It is also possible that the strategies that were engaged to implement the practice of secrecy had traces of eugenics, for example, characteristic matching between the adoptive parents and the child to conceal differences in their genetic connection (Karen, 1998; Van Leeuwen & Miller Wrobel, 2005).

### **Strategies to enable the secret**

The Adoption Act 1955 engaged social practices that served to keep any signs of adoption hidden. If stranger adoption was to be successful then the adoptive family had to resemble the birth family as much as possible to minimise differences for kinship relationships without blood (Else, 1991; Herman, 2006). It became important to match intellectual potential with parents who had interests, skills and social networks that would enable a child's development in specific ways (Griffith, 1998; R. J. Lifton, 1976). The social position of birth mothers as inferior remained, despite the privilege given to attachment over heredity underlying the Adoption Act 1955. Some adoption experts claimed unfit mothers were more likely to be of low intelligence. For example, it was argued there was "a very strong probability that at least one in four if not one in three illegitimate children may prove to be dullards, high grade defectives or in some way psychiatrically tainted" (Else, 1991, p. 55). They publicly warned potential adopters that the environmental argument was overly zealous and could not negate inherited deficiencies. Although such views were not widely accepted, they were evident through the manner in which adoption practices engaged matching (Else, 1991).

Additional matching practices that colluded with secrecy concerned physical, visible difference. According to Else (1991), at that time ideas about race meant skin colour rather than culture were coordinates for matching. Social workers were expected to find homes for all children, although it was more difficult to place Māori children through colonialising practices. Most applicants were Pākehā and cross-cultural adoptions contradicted strategies of physical matching. Some Pākehā applicants specified that a child needed to have fair skin if it was of 'other' ancestry. In 1967, a Christchurch survey demonstrated that 72 percent of people would not consider adopting 'coloured' children. However, there were also significant numbers prepared to adopt only Asian children,

demonstrating selective racism. The interplay of the complex relationship between secrecy and minimising difference through matching has produced another set of effects, including loss of access to cultural heritage<sup>4</sup>.

Minimising differences between the adoptee and adoptive parents through matching attributes such as intelligence or race was based on the assumption that stable identities could be achieved for everyone within the adoptive family (Watkins, 2006). Yet belonging is more complex than just a child's height or skin tone (R. J. Lifton, 1976). Herman (2006) explains that adoption as a normalising strategy produced families and legislated who belonged to them, producing 'good' subjects. The underlying assumption is that minimising difference would permanently sever the potential for the secret to come into view and do harm.

### **Challenging the 'Complete Break'**

Changes in knowledge about human development and subjectivity, or self as an experience shifted meanings underlying the practices of adoption and challenged the theoretical and practical assumptions of legislative adherence to the 'complete break' ideology. The turn towards existentialism, where freedom of choice and responsibility were understood as being important to personal growth, enabled the *as if born to* child to be questioned (Iwanek, 1997a). In this way, personal 'truth' and meaning was dependent on particular notions of knowing oneself. Without knowledge of their own history, an adoptee lacks the preconditions for conscious self-knowing.

According to Karen (1998), Erikson's theories of human development were also important in challenging the 'complete break' ideology. While he supported attachment, particularly the importance of infants trusting caregivers in order to resolve bodily regulation and secure separation from mothers as the basis of identity and wellbeing, he also stressed the significance of social influences on personality development. Knowledge of heritage is vital to psycho-historical aspects of subjective experience and intrapsychic experience (R. J. Lifton, 1976), and a sense of continuity and wholeness is necessary to identity. Erikson's developmental theory provided evidence for the need of adopted people to know their family of origin (Else, 1991; Erikson, 1950; Karen, 1998)<sup>5</sup>.

The importance of kinship emerged as a growing research interest (Iwanek, 1997a). Kirk (1985), a sociologist, was one of the pioneering researchers into the effects of dominant notions of kinship for children *as if born to*. His research suggests that when adoptive parents denied a difference between birth children and adopted children, the relationships were more problematic; the difference

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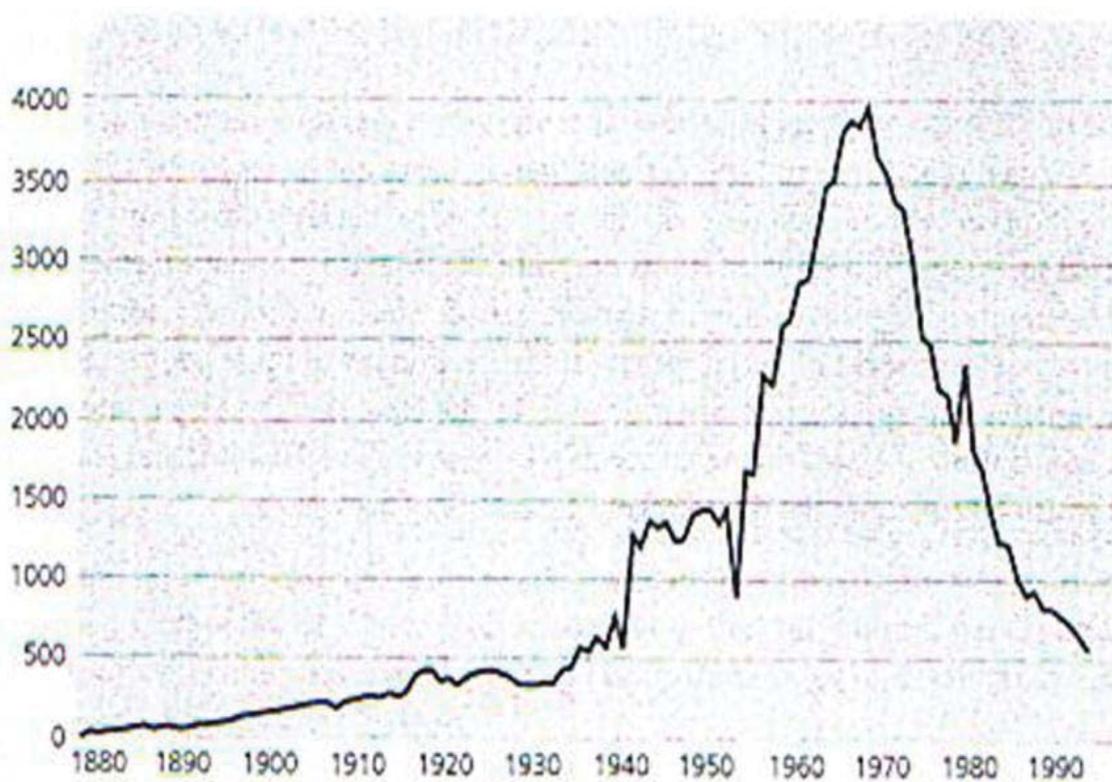
<sup>4</sup> The effects of the power of the institution of adoption were inappropriately enforced for Māori. Urbanisation meant traditional whāngai practices were problematic and the 'closed' adoption period enabled Māori to be removed from whānau systems. In 2008, Ngā Tangata Atawhai O Aotearoa, a rōpu for Māori who were adopted, fostered or whāngai, was established. It aims to restore hinengaro, wairua, tinana and whānau for the people who were dislocated and abused in and through the Westernised system.

<sup>5</sup> Erikson's interest in illegitimacy stemmed from his own status; his father abandoned him and his unmarried mother before he was born (Griffith, 1997). Perhaps this history influenced his understanding of human development as dependent on cultural and social contexts.

matters. Adopted children experience the effects of secrecy and silence in communication without a context to enable voice. Openly valuing difference enabled more reciprocal and creative relationships. His findings challenged the practices of 'closed', secret adoption legislation and agencies that advocated the 'complete break'.

### **Further Socio-political Movements**

Other social changes occurred in Aotearoa/New Zealand that influenced the practices of adoption. There were historical movements and legislation for the financial support of families abandoned by a married man in some circumstances, and as courts directed. However, it was the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit 1973 (DPB) that had a major impact on adoption practices. The introduction of the DPB saw the state financially invest in the welfare of abandoned women and children, including unmarried women who could 'prove' paternity through court, or by agreement between parties (Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture*, 2000). The office of the Law Commission attributed the eligibility of single mothers for the DPB to a shortfall in adoptable babies and more easily available contraception with the introduction of the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Bill 1977. The graph below represents the number of adoption orders made since the inception of the first adoption legislation.



*Figure 2.* Adoption Orders in New Zealand: 1880 - 1996

(Iwanek, 1997, p. 67).

As birth control alternatives for women became accessible, rapid change in both population and social movements were also occurring. The birth rate of babies born outside of marriage dropped between 1971 and 1976. The rates of adoption had been declining since the 1960s (Else, 1997; Griffith, 1991). Over time, changes in social movements enabled those affected by the violence of the ‘complete break’ to form powerful lobby groups.

### **Call for Law Reform**

As far back as 1965, according to the Ombudsman’s Report to the House of Representatives (Griffith, 1982), secrecy about birth name or status was in conflict with basic human rights. Under the assumptions of secrecy, it was not possible for adoptees to know their family of origin, and it was not expected that a successfully adopted child would seek this knowledge. If an adopted child sought such information, blame was attributed to the adoptee and/or the adoptive parents. However, lobby groups in the United Kingdom (UK) successfully informed legislative change in 1975 that provided for adoptees over the age of 18 to access their original birth certificates. It was this success that inspired law change movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Else, 1997; Griffith, 1982). Griffith (1991) provides a comprehensive discussion about action towards law change, of which two movements are significant to this historical narrative. In 1976, the national group Jigsaw was established based on the UK experience. It provided support for birth parents and adoptees to make contact with each other and later included adoptive parents in the network of support. They established a national adoption contact register and were at the forefront of political activism for law change. The movement of independent adoption support groups also emerged and many members of the adoption triad and social workers participated in the movement towards law reform; together they exchanged information and coordinated political action. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, opposition to ‘open’ records came from government agencies involved in the implementation of adoption practice; this included the then Prime Minister Bill Rowling, significant members of the legal profession and social workers. Opposition was based on fear, prejudice and the ongoing protection of secrecy (Griffith, 1982, 1991).

Social and political activism began to gain momentum through educational strategies, not only to inform stakeholders with an interest in the debates but also wider communities. There was a proliferation of public forums, lecturing at universities, gathering of research materials and international collaborations with overseas experts addressing the issues. The history of adoption, statutes, governmental debates and court cases became well researched and informed by international movements. Professionals with an interest in potential changes supported many of these movements often at no cost. A particular strategy to promote change was to provide judges who had consented to birth record access with information about subsequent reunions and personally thank them for their decision. Human rights legislators built cases for access to sealed birth records. Media campaigns for change also became effective (Griffith, 1991).

After 10 years of intense lobbying, the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 came into force in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The power of the legislation was to overturn the particular strategy that had suppressed adoptees' rights to know details of their birth. The legislation enabled adult adoptees over the age of 20 years access to their original birth certificates, providing it was accompanied by counselling from specialised services prior to the search for birth parents. Birth parents could also seek information of the adoptive birth entry. It allowed the possibility of protecting the identity of one or either of the birth dyad through the application of a veto. This provision continues to be contested by advocates as it excludes the right to know for those whose records remain 'closed' (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988).

Debates around opening adoption records are longstanding. According to Carp (2007) adoptive parents feared losing the love of their child, or for those who had completely concealed the adoption, there was fear that the secret would be revealed. Birth parents were also concerned that their past might be discovered in cases where families and friends had not been told of the child. For some, there was the fear that blackmail or coercion might befall those who did not want the secret revealed. Many countries (for example USA, Great Britain, Australia) decided that a way to balance the needs and concerns for all interested parties was to include the right to both information and privacy. While access to family of origin birth records is a starting place for reform, advocates argue that the practice of adoption as legislated by the 1955 Act and 1985 supplement remain problematic; the power continues practices of secrecy and potentially denies adoptees their rights to their own history. And the secret continues the 'break' (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988).

Around the same time as the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, practices to implement adoption were responding to successes of other civil rights movements that realised the possibilities of families that were 'other' to nuclear. The adoption law reform movement can be recognised as a civil rights movement, it informed a more 'open' shift in practice that acknowledged the relationship between adoptive and birth families. It became possible for both families to agree to knowledge of kinship origins; however, the power of those relationships, including negotiated contact, continues to lie with the adoptive family. Through legislation, the rights of the adoptive parents remain protected. The current 'open' adoption sanction and its practices, which include birth mothers having ongoing contact with the adopted child, is simply a 'gentlemen's agreement'. This information is reported in the Child Youth and Family (2007) pamphlet, which discusses adoption and what that may involve in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

### **What is open adoption?**

'Open' adoption is a process by which the birth parents and the adoptive parents meet and exchange identifying information. The frequency and regularity of ongoing contact between the birth parents and adoptive family is an individual arrangement, which is agreed upon by all parties. It is commonly known as a contact agreement. By its very nature it is a flexible agreement that can be reviewed over time by either party, as the need arises. *At present in New Zealand, these arrangements cannot be legally enforced.*

Openness in adoption is to ensure that the child has continuing access to information and/or contact with both families. As the child grows older, he/she usually participates in making decisions about the type and the frequency of contact. Adoption social workers can be involved in assisting the two families with reaching a mutually acceptable contact agreement.

*Figure 3.* Explanation of the way in which 'open' adoption works (Child Youth and Family, 2007).

The law has not been changed to include the rights of the birth relationship (Griffith, 1991; Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture, 2000). Adoption in these cases is 'open' only to the effect that the birth and adoptive parents agree on contact; once consent to adoption is signed all rights lie with the adoptive parents (Adoption Action Incorporated, 2011).

### **The ongoing battle**

After consulting widely, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture (2000) released a report that identified out-dated aspects of the adoption law, and reviewed adoption practices and procedures. The report states that the adoption law as it stands "reflects value judgements that are inconsistent with today's standards" (p. 3) for the best interests of children and their relationship with their family of origin. Despite the illegitimate 'legal' subject being overturned in the Status of Children Act 1969, the illegitimate 'moral' subject remains legislated. According to the report, "the concept of an effective transfer of legal title to a child, often a reaction to the stigma of

illegitimacy, has been discredited” (Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture*, 2000, p. 3). It recommends a legal framework that would more adequately address social changes, and the diverse forms of family that have emerged as a result of civil rights movements, such as one parent or same sex parent families, and through advances in technologies such as in-vitro fertilisation. Discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation and marital status has been unlawful for years under the Human Rights Act 1993 and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Adoption Act 1955 reflects the social discourses and moral values that prevailed for more than 50 years. It is a concern that successive governments have failed to make changes to this out-dated law that is patently discriminatory in many respects. It is the ongoing failure of the state to recognise the social justice implications of the Adoption Act 1955 that advocates argue is an abuse of state responsibility for the best interest of the child (Griffith, 1991; Henaghan, 2006; Ludbrook, 1997).

Adoption News and Views (Ludbrook, 2012, March) is a three monthly e-newsletter that advocates for adoption law reform by circulating information on the current status of the laws, policies and social practices affecting adoption within Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally. Law reform efforts by individual and/or groups are also reported. Currently edited by Robert Ludbrook and Anne Else, it points out that the responsibility for changes in adoption legislation rests with the Ministry of Justice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Over the last three decades there have been numerous reviews and petitions but successive governments have failed to act on any of them. For example, in 2003, the Associate Minister of Justice advised that a bill to amend the Adoption Act 1955 was to be introduced by 2004; however adoption reform was removed from the Ministry’s work programme. It took a further two years for its status on the programme to be restored, yet there has still been no action (Ludbrook & Marks, 2008, November). Robert Ludbrook, Legal and Policy Consultant, provided me with a chronology highlighting important reform movements over the last 33 years (Appendix E). This chronology represents the ongoing attempts by interested parties to bring changes to the archaic and unjust adoption laws and the incessant neglect of the state to rectify the human rights violations enacted by the laws.

The failure to change the Adoption Act 1955, according to Henaghan (2006), has been twofold. Firstly, in political terms, interest in adoption law reform represents a small political constituency and therefore falls into political insignificance. The second involves the state’s investment in protecting the moral position of the nuclear family. Controversial family reformation realised through the Civil Union Act 2004 has invoked debates about the morality of adoption by same sex couples; moral issues are major issues for voters. Adoption Action Incorporated (2011), an Aotearoa/New Zealand adoption law reform lobby group, state that the reluctance of governments to update archaic laws is puzzling. They argue that in 2000 the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* made more than 100 recommendations, while in 2004 and again in 2007, the Ministry of Justice made 40 recommendations for law reform. They suggest that the ongoing debate about legislating adoption for same sex couples adds to the moral and political standoff.

In May 2011, Adoption Action Incorporated (who now also produce the Adoption News and Views e-newsletter), held its inaugural annual general meeting to discuss strategies to oppose current adoption laws and to promote law reform that deals with the complexity of domestic and intercountry adoption. In July 2011, the group filed a claim (Adoption Action's Part 1A Claim) with the Human Rights Tribunal for the acts of discrimination that occur because of the Adoption Act 1955 and other adoption laws. They argue that the Adoption Act discriminates unlawfully on 15 different grounds in respect of marital status, religious beliefs, ethnicity, disability, age, sex and sexual orientation. The government denies all claims even though in 2010 the Attorney General conceded in a High Court decision that the Adoption Act 1955 discriminates on the basis of people's marital status. Mediation with the Crown is ongoing (Ludbrook & Marks, 2011, November). A media release was also produced to gain public support for law reform. Thanks to the dedicated and committed work of Adoption Action Incorporated, the fight for Aotearoa/New Zealand adoption law reform continues.

In February 2012, adoption once again hit local media when an Australian Senate Committee investigating forced adoption between 1940 and 1970 declared that the Australian Government needed to apologise and compensate unwed mothers who were coerced, bullied and terrorised into giving up their babies by the state and private institutions. This breakthrough acknowledgement of the injustice that was inflicted followed the Western Australian Parliament's apology in 2010 for unethical practices from the 1940s onward. After an 18 month inquiry, with hundreds of submission and interviews with numerous witnesses, the senators declared that the inquiry had been heart breaking. They wanted to reassure adoptees that their mothers had not abandoned them, instead authority figures that judged the women enforced barbaric actions and those actions were wrong. According to the Australian Senate Committee Report, the Federal Government's responsibility lies with the failure to provide unwed mothers with the welfare that widowed and deserted wives were entitled to up until 1973 (ABC News, 2012c; The Telegraph, 2012).

Throughout 2012, online media reports outlined proposed dates for Australian states to apologise to the people affected by forced adoption; the media also reported on the apologies that have occurred. For instance, in July 2012, the South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill's government expressed their regret to the many mothers that were forced to relinquish their children, often without consent, during the forced adoption period (ABC News, 2012b; Kappelle, 2012). On the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012, the Victorian parliament also formally apologised (World News Television New Zealand, 2012). Apologies for past adoption practices and for the pain and suffering they have caused to the mothers, fathers and children affected have now been made by seven out of the eight Australian State and Territory Parliaments and an apology is to be made by the Federal Government early next year. The apologies are given practical effect by the provision of counselling and support services for those who suffered emotional distress and harm.



*Figure 4.* Forced adoption victims to get apology in July (ABC News, 2012a).

While the Australian Government conceded its discriminatory and unjust adoption practices, adoption as a political and social issue also resurfaced in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Television New Zealand ran stories on the Australian Government's position, reporting how unlikely it was that the Aotearoa/New Zealand Government would apologise to the mothers forced into relinquishing their children here. Judith Collins, the Justice Minister, stated that New Zealand was different and the state was not responsible because they did not officially take part in any practices that influenced mothers to relinquish their children. Instead she blamed the families (Television New Zealand National News, 2012).

Adoption Action Incorporation (Ludbrook & Else, 2012, August) report that there remains some hope for law reform. Amendments to the Marriage Act 1955 proposed in 2012 include removing the discriminatory clauses that prevent same sex couples from legal marriage, and may eventually address the way in which the Adoption Act 1955 discriminates against sexual orientation and marital status. At present, to be granted legal adoption the adopting couple must be legally married (which is currently not permitted for same sex couples). There are also two Private Members Bills awaiting action that specifically address the Adoption Act 1955. The Labour Party is calling for the government to readdress the issue of adoption by asking that law reform be returned to Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture. This bill has yet to be drawn from the ballot. A Green Party

Member of Parliament and National Party Member of Parliament are also currently drafting a Private Members Bill to reform the Care of Children Act. These amendments are based on the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* (2000) report on adoption law reform. This is a complex process, involving 40 policy changes, such as the age of a child placed for adoption, Māori adoption and surrogacy arrangements.

Our current government continues to relegate adoption law reform to low political priority. In July 2012, Aotearoa/New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key was quoted as saying, "realistically it's not the biggest issue that we face. I know it's important to those people, but they're a very small group" (3 News, 2012, "Adoption reform is not a big issue, says Key", para. 6; Ludbrook & Else, 2012, August). To this day, despite the ongoing call for reformation, the Adoption Act 1955 has not been amended to remove its discriminatory practices.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Research and Psychopathology**

*The work of an intellectual is not to mould the political will of others;  
it is, through the analyses that he does in his own field,  
to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working  
and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities,  
to re-evaluate rules and institutions and  
to participate in the formation of a political will  
(Michel Foucault, 1926–1984).*

## Research and Psychopathology

By tracing this history of adoption and its practices, the emergence of psychological knowledge production is implicated in the constitution of the adopted subject. The way in which adoption is represented and understood within psychology matters because psychology produces knowledge that does particular things to particular people in specific ways. This chapter traces how adoption research emerged, how psychology positions and represents the adopted subject, and how psychology as a discipline locates the 'risk' of abnormality within the individual subject to explain the over-representation of adoptees in clinical populations.

Herman (2006) provides a history about the adoption research industry, predominantly empirical, which began around 1910. Historically adoption research, as with all research into social problems of the time, endeavoured to develop techniques for assessment and prediction of risk. Researchers argued that scientific inquiry would enable better strategies to further support the practice of adoption. Researchers, legislators and helping professionals assumed that such knowledge would enhance the general welfare of societies.

Early research findings supported and magnified social fears about the practices of adoption and divisions of blood tie kinship because it was found that removing a child from their birth family did not necessarily favour the adoptee's wellbeing. However, despite this early acknowledgement, adoption practices continued to discount the wellbeing of the child. Rather, in support of the ongoing institutionalisation of adoption practices, the response was to increase state control. Social science research reinforced the idea that more knowledge and legislation were needed to control adoption and other socially undesirable problems. In this way, the focus of empirical research worked towards normalising adoption (Herman, 2006).

Four primary forms of research took shape: field and outcome studies conducted by social science researchers advocated for stiffer adoption regulations, better standards for and improved practices of adoption after finding large numbers of adoption irregularities. Nature/nurture and clinical studies were conducted by developmental psychologists and psychiatrists, eventually becoming the field of behaviour genetics. In the latter, abnormality is assumed and regarded as an individual deficit. Adoptees were the starting point in addressing nature/nurture questions because the two were not conflated in their upbringing, and clinical studies probed at the association between adoption and psychopathology. Each area perpetuated and reinforced the now taken-for-granted knowledge, although contested, that any problems associated with adoption were purely based in managerial issues (Herman, 2006).

My literature findings correspond to Herman's (2006) four primary areas of research. Although not easily separated, these domains still operate strongly in the production of knowledge, narration and practices of adoption. However, over the past 20 years with the advent of postmodern and social

constructivist thinking, a more critical school of inquiry has investigated the construction of the institution of adoption and the ways in which those involved in an adoption triad are positioned. That coincided with, and is related to, the way in which adoptees were finding voice for their lived experience. Importantly, throughout the next section, by storying the problematics of adoption as pathology, I do not seek to negate the aversive psychological outcomes of the lived experience of adoption. Clearly, there are psychological effects. What I argue is psychology's individualistic lens ignores social power relations and lacks knowledge about issues of social justice. With my gaze on the positioning of adoptees' lived experience within psychology, I review some of the available literature.

### **A Clinical Population**

Throughout the world, adopted children and adolescents are reported as being over-represented in clinical populations, with mental health issues a significant factor (B. J. Lifton, 1994; Petta & Steed, 2005). Data from the USA represents adopted children and adolescents as having greater behavioural and psychological issues, including externalising behavioural problems such as aggression or antisocial behaviour (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Miller, Fan, & Grotevant, 2005). Research in the UK, Netherlands and Sweden has shown similar results. Carangelo (2003) reports that in the USA adoptees make up the majority of patients in private psychiatric care and private therapy, and are over-represented in juvenile and adult correctional populations. These data were drawn from a voluntary organisation that actively keeps adoption records and specifically advocates for family rights. They showed that a large percentage of birth family searching is carried out by incarcerated adoptees.

Within Aotearoa/New Zealand, statistics representing the number of adoptees in clinical populations are not collected, possibly because the trajectory *as if born to* positions adoptees as invisible. However, Aotearoa/New Zealand adoption activists and leading researchers, including Keith Griffith (1997) and Ann Else (1991), argue emphatically that the lived experience of adoption is problematic for adoptees' psychological wellbeing and systematic data collection is warranted.

The over-representation of adoptees in clinical populations internationally is concerning, not only to me, but also to many adoption researchers. The significance of over-representation has enabled ongoing questions about the effects of adoption on adoptees within family systems and psychological institutions (Miller et al., 2000; Triseliotis et al., 1997). However, a focus on clinical data is simultaneously problematic; adoptees are not a homogeneous group, general claims about the effects of adoption on behaviour are impossible to justify. Even within the context of mainstream empirical research there must be a distinction made between social and historical context, categories of adoptees (such as clinical and non-clinical) and the behavioural actions being assessed. Any demographics of the adoptees and any comparison groups need to be explicit. The context of these groups will affect the result (J. Smith, 2001). However, these factors are often not considered. For example, research on referral processes have suggested that behaviours exhibited by adoptees are not necessarily outside the norms of their non-adopted counterparts (Miller et al., 2000; Triseliotis et al., 1997). Research found

that adoptive parents were more likely to refer their adopted child to counselling services (B. J. Lifton, 1994; Miller et al., 2000; Wilson, 2004), suggesting that within an adoptive family, adoptees are positioned as being at risk for problematic development therefore more likely to be referred to a clinical setting.

Clinical studies that use comparison methods also construct images of adoptees being disproportionately represented among those designated as abnormal when compared to non-adoptees (Triseliotis et al., 1997). Although clinical studies have found differences in psychological wellbeing between adopted and non-adopted children, when comparing non-adopted children with children removed from their birth families due to adverse family circumstances, the difference becomes more exaggerated (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005). The utility of comparative research remains problematic because the presence of psychological risk factors for adoptees is subject to the group to which they are compared (Wilson, 2004). Researchers recommend variables that should be considered, including age of placement, prenatal and postnatal environments, intra and interracial difference and the constitution of the adoptive family. The demographics of any comparison group must be made explicit in the interpretation of results. There are at least three types of comparison groups: general population of non-adoptees or non-adoptive parents; general population of non-adoptees or non-adoptive parents with similar socioeconomic context and family makeup; and adoptive parents with similar socioeconomic positions as the biological parents (Hoksbergen & Laak, 2000).

Comparison between adoptees and non-adoptees is required to report causation, or that adoption leads to deviant behaviour (J. Smith, 2001). However, methodological issues including sampling size, little control over independent variables and errors in data interpretation and retrospective bias all matter to any causal finding. While these empirical standards assume that research is limited without representative sampling or control groups, such arguments also assume that causal findings are the preferred outcome. That there are other variables that interact with and matter to adopted experiences are indeed important issues, however researchers need to consider that comparative research sets a standard for the difference to be located within the adopted subject. There is no consideration of an adoptee's response to the adoption event and the ongoing context of that event. Similarly, retrospective studies of adult adoptees are also limited because the experience of adoption cannot be separated from the situatedness of the adoption experience, in relation to other life experiences (Triseliotis et al., 1997).

The social power relations operating in psychological knowledge production can represent adoptees as disordered or ignore aversive effects from the lived experience of adoption. While working clinically, Bonovitz (2006) found that there are two extremes in clinical perspectives towards an adopted child's behaviour, it is either overemphasised or overlooked and minimised. Adoption is used as a 'coat-rack' that any cloak of disorder or pathology can hang on. In this way, the adoptee is positioned as abnormal, or adoption is simply missed as a vital part of an adoptee's subjective experience.

## **Adoptees Disordered**

In accordance with the large numbers of adoptees in clinical populations, a plethora of research attempts to analyse and represent the psychological effects associated with the lived experience of adoption. I now represent some of the frequently discussed psychopathologies that adoptees are reported to experience and the way in which they are positioned within psychological frameworks, while being mindful of the research limitations just discussed and the problems of positivist approaches to the field more broadly. Obviously, this cannot be a comprehensive discussion, as each disorder warrants a thesis in its own right - each is socially and politically constructed within a particular historical and psychological trajectory, with each disorder producing subjectivities in multiple and complex ways.

Problematic attachment appears to be the most commonly researched phenomenon. It is alleged that adopting a child as an infant enables the development of healthy attachment with adoptive parents and produces a secure identity (Griffith, 1998), one of the arguments behind the 'complete break' practice. Yet a great deal of research demonstrates that adoptees have problematic attachment patterns and identity issues (Griffith, 1991, 1998; Hoksbergen, 1997b; Iwanek, 1997a; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Leon, 2002; Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005; Triseliotis, 1973, 2000). While researching the experiences of adoptive parents in reunion relationships, Petta and Steed (2005) found that adoptees experience genealogical confusion, whereby attachment relationships with adoptive parents and others are difficult. The process of genealogical confusion can occur because of mismatching between the child and the parents and affects a sense of belonging. Although adoption practices attempt to physically match adoptees with adopted parents, adopted children's mannerisms, traits or interests often did not match those of the adoptive families. When the child feels dissimilar to their adoptive family their sense of belonging is constrained (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Triseliotis, 1973; Upshur & Demick, 2006).

Hoksbergen (1997a), a leading adoption researcher from the Netherlands, found that some adoptees meet the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) criteria for Reactive Attachment Disorder, depending on the age at the time of adoption and contextual issues that affect the experience of adoption, such as interracial or intercountry adoptions. Reactive Attachment Disorder is an inability to form relationships with others, with no evidence of developmental or cognitive impairment. The essential features are disturbed and developmentally inappropriate social relatedness in most contexts, which begins prior to age five. It is associated with pathological care when there is ongoing disregard of a child's essential emotional and physical needs or continuous changes in the primary caregiver; each may hinder the development of stable attachment. Certain contexts such as poverty or parental inexperience can affect pathological care. Reactive Attachment Disorder can present itself in varying ways and at any time during an adoptee's life. For example, Goodfriend's (1993) case study of four premature infants diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder within a few months of age, found symptoms that included eating

problems, hyper-sensitivity to sound, irritability and eye contact avoidance. Extreme forms of that disorder are hypothesised to occur for an adoptee when as an infant they are unable to build attachment to a caregiver within the first two to three years. No research correlates Reactive Attachment Disorder to large numbers of adopted children. However, such research serves to highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships within adoptive families (Hoksbergen, 1997b).

Hoksbergen (1997a, 1997b) and Hoksbergen and Laak (2000) liken compromised attachment to a process of psychic homelessness for adopted people. Here, an adoptee can never have a sense of completely belonging to the adoptive family in which they grow up. Consequently, an adoptee can feel as if a part is missing, or they have an ongoing void in their experience. Psychic homelessness can create issues when bonding with others that is possibly linked to an unstable foundation - a rootlessness. Leading adoption researcher and clinical psychologist Nancy Verrier (1994) also states that adoptees can feel like a part of themselves is missing. She asserts that adoptees always hold a place for their relinquishing birth mother and as they grow older, they are at risk of developing psychic homelessness. An adoptive family who has an ambivalent identification towards the adopted child will aggravate the sense of not belonging especially where the specificity of adoption relationships is ignored. Rather than perpetuating the notion of *as if born to*, the particular experiences of adoptive families need to address the differences in family systems.

A comprehensive understanding of adoptees' lived experience must include notions of rejection and loss (Triseliotis et al., 1997). Being physically dissimilar to the adoptive family exacerbates loss of a physical mirroring and reifies the rejection of the birth family, compromising a stable sense of identity (Griffith, 1991; Hoksbergen, 1997a; Leon, 2002; Simmonds, 2008). Permanent separation from the birth family is inarguably a loss of significance, including kinship, cultural and ethnic groupings. Some loss is never resolved, especially where birth records exclude paternity, or are blocked through the legal process of veto. Rejection is a commonly understood experience among adoptees, even when they know about the context that resulted in their relinquishment (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1997; Triseliotis et al., 1997). Adoptees' knowledge of their position as having a dual existence can mean that conflicts about oneself, loss or rejection may surface unexpectedly, at any point in life, disrupting whatever identity formations the adoptee may have achieved (Carangelo, 2003).

McGinn (2000) identifies "obstacles" that adoptees may encounter in the critical life stage models of Freud and Erikson (p. 273). During Freud's psychosexual anal stage of development (18 months to 3 years), a child needs to resolve conflict with retention, or what is to be kept and eliminated. These eliminatory pleasures require reconciliation with social rules. The adopted child, if told of her/his adoptive status during this time, risks feelings of shame or worthlessness because the birth mother has relinquished her/him. McGinn (2000) also identifies that during the 18 months to three year stage adoptees struggle to reconcile Erikson's notions of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Here, an adoptee who has been abandoned, fears being abandoned again and any initiative in behaviour for them

runs a risk of rejection. During this age, personality differences between adoptive parents and the birth child are also becoming noticeable, highlighting the differences between them. In the industry versus inferiority stage (5.5 years to 12 years), adoptees experience low self-worth in relation to their peers when they compare their adoptive family to the normal non-adoptive family, noticing differences and seeing a lack.

Not all research represents adoption as leading to disorder. Some adopted children do not show any maladaptive processes, such as low self-esteem. Self-esteem is presented as a core component in healthy personality development; poor self-esteem has been associated with dysfunctional outcomes, including depression and externalising antisocial behaviours. Juffer and van IJzendoorn (2007) found that adoptees may develop resilience to adversity because of earlier experiences and they can also be well supported by adoptive families. Those protective factors provide a buffer against any risk.

Kelly et al. (1998) found that adopted and non-adopted students were indistinguishable on all measures of developmental tasks. In a study of 49 adopted and 49 randomly selected college students, the discrete aspects of identity formation (nine of eleven scales) on the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory found no differences between the two groups. However, on the scales of self-control and moral self-approval, adoptees were found to be more judgemental and critical of themselves. The variances in research results could signify the way in which sample sizes, operational definitions and statistical testing procedures, for example, are performed differently by researchers.

Problematically, much of the research literature assumes homogeneity of adoptees. Context, social power relations and individual differences are ignored. Simmonds (2000, 2008) raises questions about the ways in which the social work tradition positions adoption as a risk factor for the children adopted. He draws a distinction between adoption as an intervention and adoption as a solution. Where adoption as a practice of social ordering is a solution that 'righted the wrongs' of illegitimacy, at the same time it also positions the child as a risk to the family where the risk is understood as potential interference from birth parents. In this way, the 'complete break' practice is valued to ensure the healthy development of the child, and the loss of birth history continued to be excluded as part of the solution. Therefore, while the lived experience of being subjected to practices of adoption has emerged as a category of abnormality through attachment issues evidenced in clinical studies, it ignores the normal effects of the ongoing implications of the adoption event. An adoptee is positioned as either disordered or resilient.

### **Adopted child syndrome**

The pathology of the adopted subject implicates a distinctive disorder. Proponents of the adopted child syndrome argue that the transfer from a biological family to an adoptive family can mean some adoptees are prone to identity conflicts and problematic personality development (Miall, 1996). Adopted child syndrome is a unique pattern of psychopathology that manifests when an adoptee identifies a part of themselves as bad, often in relation to a biological family fantasy, yet dissociates

from the bad part. When the adoptee experiences loss or rejection the dissociated part may surface, often in a monumental way. It has been hypothesised that an adoptee can commit violence and murder as a result (Carangelo, 2003; Carp, 2004; J. Smith, 2001).

The syndrome emerged in response to the particular vulnerabilities specific to adoptees, often appearing in forensic or early intervention settings. According to Carangelo (2003) and Carp (2004), adopted child syndrome is used to describe a set of eight maladjustment behaviours. Outcomes of those behaviours include pathological lying, thieving, learning difficulties, arson, running away, truancy, aggression and promiscuity, and it is further characterised by a lack of normal guilt or anxiety about their behaviour and the consequences. Kirschner (1992, 2007), having conducted approximately 12,000 interviews with adoptees, found that most adoptees have the same emotional vulnerabilities as presented in extreme forms of adopted child syndrome. All adoptees are at risk, but not all will develop the syndrome.

An extreme example is found in the stories of adoptees that commit murder. Investigating homicide in adoptees, Kirschner (1992) found that the symptoms of adopted child syndrome were significant in the psychopathology of many adopted murderers. Yet the experience of adoption was overlooked as a contributing factor in any acts of violence. Kirschner (2007) reports that of the 500 recorded serial killers in the USA 16 percent were adopted<sup>6</sup>. That statistic is exceptional if we consider that only two to three percent of the population is adopted. Not only are adoptees over-represented as problematic children, they are over-represented as parricidal (Kirschner, 2007). When adoptees murder their adopters, it is often attributed to drug use or rebellion against parental authority, not the experience of adoption itself. Adoption critics argue that such acts of crime are due to mental disorders and that any disorder could have been inherited (Carangelo, 2003).

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<sup>6</sup> Notorious murderers who were adoptees include the Hillside Strangler Kenneth Bianco, who along with his cousin, raped, tortured and killed 10 women; David Berkowitz, also named the Son of Sam, confessed to killing six people and wounding seven others; and Gerald Stano was imprisoned for the murder of 41 women (Carangelo, 2003).

# Adopted child syndrome

Adopted children of the world beware. A new variation on the "abuse excuse" defense is about to stigmatize and demonize you. Your friends and neighbors will soon be looking at you warily, wondering whether you are afflicted with "adopted child syndrome" and thus pose a danger of violence.

This newest entry into the competition over which defense lawyers can come up with the most bizarre "syndrome" is from Joel Riskin's lawyer, Martin Efman. Riskin has admitted to murdering 17 women, mostly prostitutes. His "abuse excuse" for this serial killing rampage: "I was rejected by (my) biological mother." Riskin apparently believes that his biological mother, who gave him up for adoption as an infant, may have been a prostitute. And, according to his lawyer, this explains why he gravitated to the world of prostitutes. Fair enough, but why did he have to kill them? Simple! He strangled women to alleviate his own pain!

If this kind of psycho-babble were not becoming so prevalent in our courts of law, it would be a very sick joke -- or perhaps an hour-long sob story on Sally Jessy Raphael. But "adopted child syndrome" -- and its dozens of variations -- is now the defense of choice in a growing number of murder cases.

Nor are defense lawyers alone in their creativity. Psychologists and other professionals are lending their credibility to this parade of pathetic excuses. Dr. David Kirschner, a psychologist and director of a psychotherapy clinic in Baltimore, will be testifying on Riskin's behalf. Dr. Kirschner



Alan  
Dershowitz

has already assisted in the defense of 10 adopted children who have been charged with murder. Indeed, it was he who invented the name "adopted child syndrome," a claim to fame of which he is apparently quite proud.

This "syndrome" includes the following symptoms: "pathological lying, learning problems, running away, sexual promiscuity, an absence of normal guilt and anxiety and extreme antisocial behavior." These sound to me like some of the same characteristics shared by many, if not most, criminals and anti-social people. I doubt that a scientifically valid double blind experiment could distinguish which people with these general symptoms were, in fact, adopted and which were not. That is probably why the "adopted child syndrome" is not recognized by most psychologists or psychiatrists as a mental disorder.

But the important point is that the vast majority of adopted children do not kill. Indeed, I doubt that adoptees, as a group, have a higher rate of murder or other serious crimes than non-adoptees. Even Dr. Kirschner acknowledges that only very few adoptees commit violent crimes, and almost none be-

come serial killers like Riskin. Thus, the fact of adoption -- or, as Riskin's lawyer likes to put it, of "rejection" by one's biological mother -- neither explains nor justifies Riskin's murderous actions. Indeed, his adoption seems monumentally irrelevant to any assessment of his culpability.

Dr. Thomas Guthell, one of the nation's leading authorities on forensic psychiatry, argues that using this "syndrome" to raise an insanity defense "is meaningless noise." He is correct in calling it "noise," but unfortunately, it is not "meaningless." In addition to sometimes carrying the day in court, these new syndromes send terrible mixed messages about the millions of adoptive children who do not become serial killers.

These excuses du jour also send a dangerous message about personal responsibility. In this age of "blame-every-one-but-yourself-sob-stories," few people seem ready to take responsibility for their own actions. The quest for a scapegoat -- in this case Riskin's biological mother, who he believes was a prostitute -- is a lame attempt to deflect attention away from personal culpability for criminal behavior and onto either the victims -- in this case his mother's fellow prostitutes -- or some newly concocted "syndrome."

It probably won't work in the Riskin case, because the defendant is not as "sympathetic" a character as Lorena Bobbitt or the Menendez brothers. But the "abuse excuse" does succeed in pulling the wool over the eyes of some jurors, especially in cases where the defendant is sympathetic and his victims are not.

Figure 5. 1994 newspaper article on adopted child syndrome (Dershowitz, 1994).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, media coverage of twice convicted murderer Graeme Burton highlighted that he was an adoptee, yet drug use was considered the causal factor in his offending crime (Crewdson, 2007) and the implications of living adoption were ignored. In 2009 the case of Stephan Hudson, convicted of murdering Nicholas Pike in the Desert Road seven years earlier, also highlighted that he was an adoptee, with his birth mother providing an alibi for his whereabouts at the time of the murder (Stuff.co.nz, 2009). Once again, although his adoption status was reported, any associations or consequences of adoption were overlooked. More recently, a Television New Zealand documentary (screened October 15, 2012) “Beyond the Darklands”, an exposé on notorious criminal offenders in Aotearoa/New Zealand, highlighted the case of convicted murdered and paedophile Peter Holdem. Adopted after his birth mother died during his birth, Peter Holdem went on to murder a six-year-old girl and has served over 25 years in prison (Delacey, 2012). Peter Holdem’s adoption status was reported, locating his upbringing and behaviour as a child within his adoptive family; however, any reference to the practices of adoption being problematic or causing him psychological harm was not discussed.

Some professionals have not taken up the term adopted child syndrome because there is little empirical data to support its use. J. Smith (2001) challenges the concept and finds the ideas methodologically flawed. He claims that Kirschner’s research is not scientifically robust. He also claims that although there is little evidence for adopted child syndrome this does not negate that adoption carries inherent challenges for adoptees’ developmental lifecycles. He argues that the media distorts perceptions of adoption, where ‘natural’ and ‘own’ conjures binary images, such as ‘unnatural’ or ‘disown’. Individual responses to, for example emotional hurt or childhood taunting, also affect responses to and development in the adopted child.

The emergence of specific disorders and syndromes has produced an individual adopted subject who is prone to a range of ‘deficits’. Carp (2004) argues that advocating for adopted child syndrome or other genealogical issues such as abandonment or loss, stigmatises adoptees and produces anti-adoption rhetoric. He argues that in her fight to open adoption records, Betty Jean Lifton, adoptee, writer, researcher and a leader in the adoptee search movement popularised this disorder by stating all adoptees were vulnerable to adopted child syndrome. However, numerous adoptees grow up normally and are certainly not mass murders.

B. J. Lifton (1994) identified a similar set of symptoms to adopted child syndrome in adoptees, but she uses the term cumulative adoption trauma because in her non-clinical observations there are a succession of traumas that affect the adopted child. This succession begins when taken from the birth mother (the violent cut), and it occurs again when the adoptee learns of her/his adoption status (not the biological child), and again when dissociation results from pretending that there is no need to know a birth history (effects of silencing strategies). However, she also states that cumulative adoption trauma exists on a broad continuum - mild to severe. The majority has mild symptoms, struggling with self-esteem, trust and abandonment problems. In the middle range, externalising behaviours occur including

lying, cheating and addictions. A small subgroup exhibits criminal and violent behaviour, sitting on the extreme end of the continuum. B. J. Lifton (1994) suggests that responses towards adopted child syndrome are dependent on the person's position in the adoption triad (professional, adoptee, birth family member, adoptive family member).

Melding into notions of disorder and deficit is an adoptee's sense of themselves and ideas about how they take up identity. Problematic identity is positioned as a taken-for-granted condition that the adoptee, devoid of a birth history and blood kin ties, will experience. The next section presents some of the ways that identity is understood and problematised for the adopted subject.

## **Who Am I?**

Social identities are integral to the practices involving subjectivity, such as reflexivity, affect and emotion. A significant body of traditional psychological literature, which assumes a unified, coherent subject, talks to the problems with identity for adoptees. Kelly et al. (1998) report that many researchers consider that the formation of identity as autonomous, independent and mature, is intrinsically more difficult for adoptees because of adoptive experiences.

Identity diffusion is represented as an underlying problem for adoptees. Ego identity diffusion can be understood through the language of identity formation. Following Erikson, Sherman (2006) posits that identity is shaped within a process of identification with both parents. Identity is the integration of experiences of oneself in relation to early object identifications. Subjects internalise aspects of external relationships and modify behaviour and self-representations to fit with being similar to, or merged with, representations of that object. Upshur and Demick (2006) draw from James Marcia who further developed Erikson's model. They state that identity achievement in adolescence occurs when there is a search for identity, by trying on different roles and perhaps rejecting parental values. The moratorium status is a transitional phase where the individual is struggling to resolve their identity and foreclosure status occurs when an individual accepts goals and behaviour as prescribed by others and society without much question. The identity diffusion is the non-engagement of resolving identity issues. Successful adult adjustment is seen as the resolution of identity and is essential within social and cultural systems where ascribed behaviours and thoughts are less meaningful and stable. Here the reconciliation of "individuation/differentiation with acceptance/continuity" with one's family is pivotal (Upshur & Demick, 2006, p. 96).

Adoptees' identity is problematic when they are unable to have themselves 'mirrored' by the *as if born to* family. Here identity as a unique, coherent experience is not possible. Sherman (2006) doubts that an adoptee can feel a continual sameness within, when they often experience and feel a sense of difference from without. In this way an adoptee's identity formation is compromised through the conflicting experience of being relinquished by one mother and taken by another who is different from themselves; an extreme difference in interracial adoptions. Further, integrating their adoption

status, which is unchangeable, is vital to the adopted subject. However, this is difficult when questions of 'who is my mother' or 'where did I come from' cannot be resolved (Upshur & Demick, 2006).

Upshur and Demick (2006) represent identity as central to personal welfare and psychological adjustment. Identity, here, is understood as the development of personal values, priorities, self-esteem and fulfilment within social relationships. Some aspects are out of an individual's control such as gender and adoptive status, while other aspects are contingent on individual agency, for example work, friendships and locations. As socially prescribed the 'otherness' of adoption can therefore be challenging when addressing continuity issues of identity. However, the researchers argue that there is a paucity of research about identity issues being more severe for adoptees, despite shared understandings that this is the case.

Watkins (2006) asserts that adoption research must challenge hegemonic notions of identity based in taken-for-granted ideas of family and kinship. She argues that adoption represents a "creative resistance to normative ideas and assessments regarding family life and individual identity within it" (p. 260). Developmental challenges from the experience of adoption that are understood as predictive of continuous identity problems are merely taken from snapshot data that is then confused with an adoptee's developmental outcome as a whole. Presenting alternative ways of knowing that include the multiplicity of the many experiences within diverse social contexts can counter the assumptions of dualistic categories that either pathologise or ignore the effects of being adopted (Watkins, 2006).

Contradictory research about identity means there is no simple answer to whether or not adoptees have more negative outcomes than their non-adopted counterparts. However, the practice of 'closed' adoption forces adoptees to conform to a single identity - narrowed and reduced to that of the adoptive family, even when physical, mental and personal characteristics differ. Dualistic principles mean if you are not this then you are that, creating a sense of the 'other' for adoptees (Watkins, 2006). The assumptions of the research that Upshur and Demick (2006) regard as flawed, omit context and the social power relationships implicated in the institution of adoption. Practices of 'closed' adoption that demand secrecy produce adoptees as having to reconcile a silent or hidden experience of themselves (*born to*) with a false experience of themselves (*as if born to*). The masking of difference that constitutes the secret, positions the adoptee as necessarily 'inauthentic'. The difference that it makes through the moral trajectory that informs psychology in the same form as the 'complete break' is the constitution of the adopted subject that becomes pathological. It follows that the way in which phenomenon are perceived impacts on the way in which they are treated and psychoanalytical psychology has a long history of treating the disordered adopted subject.

### **Psychoanalytical Pathology**

I traced a history in psychology dedicated to a psychoanalytic perspective of adoption and its psychopathology, mostly addressing identity issues and the adoptive relationship within their constitution. For example, and as implicated above, four psychoanalytic processes were central to

identity problems: early object relations relating to attachment relationships have an effect on identity and adjustment; the Oedipus complex or the resolution of a healthy separation from adoptive parents is problematic where adolescent experiences are more troubled because of their sensitivity to loss and rejection. Weaker incest boundaries can also be experienced towards adoptive parents; to resolve negative emotions towards parents fantasies about being adopted are experienced by all children, however adoptees can prolong such fantasies around the adoption and fail to identify with the adoptive parents; genealogical bewilderment continues (Upshur & Demick, 2006). Siskind (2006) reports recurring themes narrated by adoptees in her clinical experience as:

Trauma, dislocation, loss, grief, and mourning; there is the feeling of being different and not belonging; there is living with secrets and living out fantasies rather than finding a way to live life; and there is unmanageable anger, distrust, self-hatred, shame, feelings of doom, pervasive self-doubt, and the identity confusion that so often festers (p. 9).

Until those experiences, the affective states and conflicts, are addressed being adopted remains forever a lingering shadow. According to Bonovitz (2006), much of the psychoanalytical literature on adoption focuses on an adoptee's emotional and fantasy experiences. It centres on the way in which disclosure of adoption has or will occur, the antisocial behaviour of adoptees, oedipal process, splitting of good/bad parental representations, genealogical confusion, fantasies, loss of birth mothers and attachment disorder. Other psychological fields focus on the searching process and reunion. The psychoanalytic literature isolates the child as the subject of adoption and forgets about processes of unconscious communication.

While the inter-subjective field between adoptees and adoptive parents is mostly ignored in adoption research, so too is the relationship with biological parents. The notion of inter-subjectivity can be understood as the space in which two subjects share engagement through the relationship in-between (Frie & Reis, 2001). Bonovitz (2006) states that clinicians have consistently disregarded the role of the adoptive parent in the shaping of the adoptive child. For instance, the way in which unconscious processes like grief for an adoptive parent at the loss of not being able to conceive naturally has an effect on parent-child relationships. Our unconscious defences against grief or loss are inter-subjective because they affect and are affected through relationships with others that are also contextual (Bollas, 1987; Hollway, 2000). The process of grieving the loss of the possibility of a natural child or the difference of the adopted child from the adoptive parents will affect an adopted child's comprehension of their origins, and any self-representations of the meanings of their adoption.

Where mental representations of the biological parents are based on fantasy and feeling for the adoptee, it is simultaneously impossible to construct a mental representation of a parent when there is no lived memory or experience of that parent (Lousada, 2000). Any understanding of the adoptee's relationship with birth parents is mediated through the adoptive parent relationship and how an adoptee

understands their origins impacts on the way in which she/he relates to the adoptive parents. In this way, the multiple relationships and the diverse experiences of grief and loss are important to the wellbeing of the adopted child.

This snapshot of a psychoanalytic understanding of adoption demonstrates the way in which psychopathology is located within the adopted individual, and while identity issues are addressed, adoptive relationships remain side lined. Similarly, literature on the adopted body in relation to adoptees' experiences is scarce, according to my extensive literature search. Explanations for this could include that the body is assumed as the empirical entity of the individual or that silencing strategies deny adopted experiences being different to biological family forms. Here, the adopted body is the same as the non-adopted body. However, when the adopted body becomes problematic it is included in psychopathological research.

### **Genetic Sexual Attraction**

The occurrence of Genetic Sexual Attraction as a pathology has received research attention and therefore needs to be considered<sup>7</sup>. Genetic Sexual Attraction was a term first coined by Barbara Gonyo, a birth mother who experienced an overwhelming sexual desire for her birth son when they were reunited. Genetic Sexual Attraction refers to a particular relationship that occurs between two adults, after having been separated at birth or in early infancy. Although technically they are biologically related, these adults have no kinship affinity. There are many reported instances of biologically related adults having consenting sexual relationships and as such they are a rich vein for moral debate (Greenberg, 1993, 1997).

Genetic Sexual Attraction and particular forms of adopted pairings are positioned as problematic because they are usually equated with incest, a taboo in most cultures. With the moral abhorrence of incestuous relationships, societies have strategies for dealing with it, including social denunciation and imprisonment. However, as a moral and intimate action that is socially scorned, incest still remains a social problem. According to Greenberg (1993, 1997), early theories on incest avoidance proposed by Freud and Westermarck, alluded to it being fundamental to developing human morality. Freud's theory initially appealed to popular culture - incest is a universal, primitive and largely unconscious process. Freud posited that early childhood development involved boys learning to repress a primitive desire for their mothers, resulting in the development of the Oedipus complex. In this sense, incestuous feelings are innate, but through repression inbreeding is avoided because it is socially useful to not produce children at risk of birth deformities due to the effects of inbreeding. Research by Bittles and Neel (1994) demonstrates a significant reduction in fertility and increased rates

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<sup>7</sup> There are websites dedicated to Genetic Sexual Attraction and the associated life experiences. While many are not specific to adoption, they encompass all relationships where separation and reunion produce unexpected emotions and intimate longings. For example see, <http://www.geneticsexualattraction.com/> or <http://www.experienceproject.com/groups/Experienced-Genetic-Sexual-Attraction/267982>.

of foetal loss for North American, inbred, Hutterite women. Consanguinity risks foetal aberrations and early death (Ober, Hyslop, & Hauck, 1999). For Westermarck, familiarity amongst kinship groups ensures incest avoidance, hence it is natural to seek sexual relationships outside of one's kinship base, and the laws and customs within societies and cultures reinforce those expectations (Greenberg, 1997).

B. J. Lifton (2010) proposed a specific theory for Sexual Genetic Attraction. Drawing from psychoanalysis, she argues that it is a regressive process that invokes an erotic attraction. With a reunion, birth mothers regress when the maternal feelings are reawakened while simultaneously experiencing the erotic feelings they had towards the birth father. These bodily experiences meld until the two become indissoluble. Birth fathers regress to themselves as a young lover, and see their daughter as a younger version of her mother. With this regression there is danger that an incestuous relationship will occur. Reunion parties are warned that intimate physical contact can be dangerous when the baby has an adult body. If the line is crossed, both parties can be resistant to ending the very deep, most profound relationship that they have ever had.

Clinical research conducted by Greenberg (1997) attributed Genetic Sexual Attraction to attachment behaviour. It is argued that Genetic Sexual Attraction needs to be understood for therapists to effectively work with the issues. Adoptees have a steadfast determination to find a biological relative, someone they lost at a pivotal time in their lives. When reunions occur, they are emotionally charged experiences. The need for intimacy or closeness with the lost relative translates itself into sexual desire that at times is acted on. Simultaneously, physical similarities and skin, smell and other sensory stimulation precipitate or increase sexual attraction. All of this contributes to a feeling of 'falling in love' and as adults, this love can be expressed in sexual ways. It often occurs within transgenerational relationships (adult/child) and less commonly intragenerational relationships (between siblings). Greenberg's (1997) clinical studies provide evidence for Genetic Sexual Attraction, although prevalence is unclear. It seems that more clinicians realise this is a valid experience and are therefore more receptive to it.

The story of Genetic Sexual Attraction produces particular understandings of the body in the adopted experience. It is a body that does not perform a repression but also a body that is regressed. It is a body that can fall prey to erotic sensation and thereby risk moral deviation. Here, perhaps, the story of an incestuous response constrains the way in which adoptees can understand and articulate particular feelings within the adopted body and adopted experiences. Moreover, the research into the adopted body as 'deficit' appropriates the legally adopted subject through criminal populations for evidence of the genetic determination of disorder.

### **Genetic Research**

Given the notion of blood tie kinship as the basis for family structure, the institution of adoption necessarily constitutes the adoptive family as pathological because of the assumption that it is second best to biological family forms (Griffith, 1991; Herman, 2006; Watkins, 2006). Psychology and the

wider social sciences contribute to blood tie notions of kinship where it privileges genetics in what it means to be human. Empirical evidence of aetiology of disorder reproduces the assumption that the adopted child inherits any problematic disposition from their birth parents.

The current evidence in genetic research represents a similar symbolic significance to that of the blood bond (Lebner, 2000). In this way, the 'complete break' ideology that was based on the notion that nature would override genetic influences is challenged (Griffith, 1991). Biomedical research has come to be accepted as expert knowledge, legitimated through the complex interplay of medical, educational and clinical research. The biomedical model professes that illnesses, diseases and mental disorders can be heritable, treatable and avoidable (Lebner, 2000).

Through the study and application of behavioural genetics, traditional psychology assumes it can gain insight into human behaviour and provide a universal language and criteria for mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). A clearly distinguishable population in genetic research are adoptees because it is possible to separate genes from contextual and environmental factors, which enables researchers to examine early experiences and the influence of heritability of particular diseases or disorders. Birth parents pass on their genes, but another set of parents raise the child, so it is assumed that research can ascertain if variables are biologically heritable, or produced through parental patterns or the environment (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005).

Within psychology, genetic research involves investigating familial patterns, examining first-degree biological relatives for a particular disorder and comparing those results to that of the general population. With an emphasis on causality, genetic research tends towards an explanation of disorder as being in the blood, rather than as produced through the complexity of social relations in which adoptees are embedded. Weagar (2000) recognises that a biological or genetic lens on adoption focuses on the problematic aspects of adoptees' inferior genetic makeup, which resonates with the fears of inheriting 'bad blood' through legal adoption. The mass of empirical knowledge on disorder that informs the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) mentions adoption only in support of the frequency of disorders and the probability of a genetic predisposition to that disorder.

To illustrate, within the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), Alcohol Dependence is linked to familial patterns, some of which are traced to genetics. Adoption studies highlighted a three to fourfold increase in risk for Alcohol Dependence when children were adopted and had adoptive parents without Alcohol Dependence. Smoking onset and maintenance also has a genetic component as demonstrated through adoption and twin studies. The degree of heritability is similar to that of Alcohol Dependence. Adoption and twin studies support a genetic component for Bipolar I Disorder, with first-degree biological relatives of people with Bipolar I Disorder shown to have elevated rates of Bipolar I Disorder (4%-24%), Bipolar II Disorder (1%-5%), and Major Depressive Disorder (4%-24%). Somatization disorder has a genetic component as also demonstrated through adoption studies.

Antisocial Personality Disorder and Substance-Related Disorder are also mentioned in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) as having biological determinants. However, the genetic component of these disorders is mentioned in relation to environmental factors as well. That is, having a biological or adoptive parent with any of these disorders increases risk for abnormal development. Familial patterns of Antisocial Personality Disorder are broken down into risk for female and male first-degree relatives. Therefore, if there is a female relative with the disorder then there is an increased risk of the child also developing that disorder. Again, adoption studies provided evidence for a genetic component, although both adopted and biological children of parents with Antisocial Personality Disorder are at higher risk of developing Antisocial Personality Disorder, Somatization Disorder and Substance-Related Disorders, thereby demonstrating the environmental associations with aetiology. It is mentioned that adoptees do resemble the biological parents more than the adoptive parents; yet environmental risk remains a factor. Genetic heritability is also implicated in the determinants of Conduct Disorder as the precursor for Antisocial Personality Disorder. Finally, adoption research shows that Schizophrenia has a biological risk, with a first-degree relative with the disorder increasing risk tenfold.

In societies that value risk assessment, prevention and treatment there is ongoing research into psychological disturbance and genetic heritability. Rose (2001) argues that our risk society is a means of state control. A resurgence of biological and genetic knowledge enables a technology of control to individualise human life, yet it discriminates against, constrains or excludes those positioned outside of desired social norms. The voice of biomedicine and biotechnology, which speaks of improving health and quality of life for individuals, threatens to control, subjugate and pathologise anyone deemed defective. The false power of genes presents a “rebirth of scientific racism” which positions and reduces people to their genetic makeup (Rose, 1990, p. 2).

Institutions that provide health care insurance take up the legitimacy of genetic research; they demand knowledge of genetic predispositions to disorder or disease. How biomedical knowledge has connected medical and genetic predisposition to ill health, including mental disorder, implicates psychology in the economic social power relations through evidence of inherited abnormality (Lebner, 2000; Rose, 1990). Anything can be seen as ‘risk’, which generates fear, danger or threat of something that is everywhere and nowhere (Rose, 1990). Insurance is a schema of rationality, which dices with change, probability, randomness, loss, and damage and produces populations to behave in particular ways. It is a social, moral and political technology of control (Ewald, 1991).

In a risk society, the adoptee as the conduit for biomedical knowledge of illness, disease and mental disorder, is denied that same knowledge for themselves. They continue to be limited in their access to a birth history, often where any manifestation of disorder is located in the individual subject or the birth family. However, the adopted subject remains the opportune research subject. The adopted subject also provides a rich body of research data for criminological characteristics.

### **Genetics, the environment and criminology research**

Criminology provides another example where practices of adoption and adoptees enable investigation into problematic behaviour and perpetuate assumptions about human behaviour based on genetic knowledge. At the same time, the violence of the adoptive act (the break) itself is ignored. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the Department of Corrections depends on empirical evidence in the practice of assessing criminal conduct and effective treatment (D. A. Andrews & Bonta, 2003), which is extremely attentive to the genetic aspect of adoption. With the objective of preventing criminal offending, researchers focus on the biological causes of criminal behaviour. It is anticipated that an understanding of genetic factors can predict a predisposition to criminality (Alpher, 1995).

Studying adoptees is alluring because criminology researchers also assume that the practice of adoption disentangles genetic and environmental influences (Rhee & Waldman, 2002). Risk is assessed through an analysis of criminal history of biological parents, adoptive parents and particular combinations of both. A hereditary effect is seen when the rate of criminality for adoptees with a criminal biological parent is higher than that of adoptees with a non-criminal biological parent (D. A. Andrews & Bonta, 2003).

While developmental theories attest to adolescent psychological maladjustment increasing the risk of adult psychological maladjustment, the literature is inconsistent. A birth cohort of 1,265 Aotearoa/New Zealand children, studied to the age of 16 years, found that adoptees had higher rates of antisocial and substance abuse behaviours than two parent biological families, but lower rates than children raised in single parent families (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998). While adoption practices tend towards placing children in economically and socially secure family settings, they have higher rates of problematic behaviour than non-adopted children reared in similar settings. Tehrani and Mednick (2000) identify that adoptees raised in higher socio-economic settings had reduced rates of criminal convictions when compared to adoptees raised in middle to low socio-economic situations. However, Dunham, Sokol-Katz and Zimmerman (1997) warn that many criminology theories overlook the complexity of family relationships and fail to explain specific child rearing problems that may be associated with the likelihood of later deviant behaviour. However, Fergusson and Horwood (1998) argue that in their study, externalising behaviours such as conduct disorder and substance abuse, are related to congenital determinants. Similarly, Miller et al. (2000) report that higher numbers of adolescent adoptees receive treatment for delinquent behaviours than non-adopted peers, and this is not the result of adoptive parents demonstrating low tolerance thresholds.

Poorly designed studies provided more support for the gene-crime link than well-designed studies. Alpher (1995) states that adoption studies often have methodological problems, for example assuming that between family variables in sibling environments will not affect within-family variability in those same environments. Environmental characteristics of adoptive and biological home environments are correlated, yet adoptive parents usually have greater socio-economic status. Baden and O'Leary Wiley (2007) also argue that adoptees are over researched, with methodological and

conceptual flaws and a narrow research focus limiting the findings. Additionally, according to D. A. Andrews and Bonta (2003) focusing exclusively on static factors, such as genetics or criminal biological parents, discounts dynamic risk predictors of criminal behaviour such as attitudes, values or personal characteristics.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is impossible to measure the number of incarcerated adoptees as the legislation that constitutes the ‘complete break’ reproduces the legal silence. Adoption status is noticeably absent as a question in screening and assessment tools. While support remains for the possibility of genetically determined disorders, it is contested, and an ethical problem emerges; if an adoptee is denied access to birth records, they are also excluded from access to knowledge of the possibility of carrying a hereditary predisposition for criminal behaviour. In this way, they are excluded from the resources that enable them to prevent onset, progression or duration of the illness or disorder. Where ‘good’ health is constituted through an ideal of ‘good’ citizenship, adoptees are excluded from attaining that ideal. It seems that the subjective lived experience of the adoptee is left out; their purpose is reduced to demonstrating evidence of deficit and abnormality.

### **So the Story Goes**

As a student of psychology I realized, as I voyaged through the plethora of psychological texts, that the way in which ‘closed’ adoption is spoken of, if at all, has been legitimated through pathology. Clearly, there are some aversive outcomes to being subjected to the institution of adoption. While that is not contested here, the specificity of the outcomes is problematic. Psychological literature mostly ignored the voice and lived experience of adoption.

Psychology’s knowledge and its practices have constituted subjectivity in certain ways, with and without particular competencies (Rose, 1999). Brodzinsky, Smith and Brodzinsky (1998) and Baden and O’Leary Wiley (2007) argue that psychology has lacked an involvement in more contextual adoption research, limiting an understanding of the experience of, and adjustment to, adoption. Psychology’s knowledge of adoption produces and reproduces what is normal and positions adoptees as deficit to that norm.

Traditional psychology has been privileged through a history that aligns with the demands of the state to create ‘good’ citizenship and maintain social order (Herman, 2006). Although difficult because traditional psychological strategies have become taken-for-granted action, Parker (2005) argues we need to refuse to individualise the phenomena we are studying and reject the practice of essentialising the topics we describe. Both practices obscure the effects of social power. In this way, it continues to maintain a trajectory of colonial power and reveal inferior characteristics of those positioned as other to the norm. Knowledge of adoption has been legitimated by social power relations that privileges “certain narratives and silences others” (Delany, 1997, p. 115).

As with any type of research, our epistemological location impacts on the type of questions we ask and the way in which we seek to find and interpret the answers (Unger, 1996). In the history that

produces adoptees as deficit, reductionist and determinist values produce adoption as a force existing on its own; any cultural, historical or contextual influences are removed. As a result, psychology has negated subjective responses to adoption and historical influences have been denied (Delany, 1997). In this way, psychology reproduces the same position for adoptees as the legislation that produces the adopted subject.

Discrimination towards the lived experience of adoption is evident in the history of psychological 'expert' knowledge locating deficit within the individual adoptee, thereby concealing the moral, political and social inequalities. This enables a question of ethical practice; how does the governmentality of this specific psychological trajectory participate in reproducing the adopted subject of the legislation? Emerson and Frosh (2004) posit that psychology has been used actively by governments as part of the state apparatus for selection, categorisation and treatment of citizens. The emphasis on the individual as the object of investigation makes assumptions about the relationship that separates the personal from the social. For example, it reduces one to the other (as if born to *and* the subject of deficit) and removes one from the other ('complete break' *and* disordered). Bringing together the legislative constitution of *as if born to* and the psychological constitution of deficit in family of origin to produce an inauthentic subject, I can question the ways in which the lived experience of adoption is enabled and constrained through the processes of governmentality. The 'complete break' ideology excluded the relationship with the (primary) other. The relationship between the 'complete break' and attachment disorder, among other syndromes and symptoms, constitutes a break in the natural order. The treatment of disorders excludes any attention to the underlying violence of the 'complete break'. Following Foucault (1982), to understand power relations it is necessary to analyse the rationalities behind power, not invoke the progress of rationalisation. Here, it becomes possible to question the legislative history and psychological research that produce the cultural, social and material conditions available to adoptees.

## **Chapter 3:**

# **Theoretical Framework**

*Oh Lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz  
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends...*  
(Janis Joplin, 1943-1970).

## Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I map out the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis to explain, substantiate and provide the reader with knowledge about how I situate this work and analyse the constitution of the adopted subject. Just as the reader approaches this text holding particular assumptions to interpret, make sense of and attend to this work, a researcher draws upon theoretical frameworks to read and represent the texts (Parker, 1999). The theoretical framework provides the reader with knowledge about the theories and concepts that are used throughout this work. It informs the research process, which in turn provides the reader with a rationale and plan of action for the particular methods that are employed.

As an adoptee living the effects of adoption in particular ways, it is important for me to be able to explore the social power relations that construct both my identity and sense of being-in-the-world, and that of the participants, beyond the limitations produced through traditional positivist and clinically based research. Clearly, for too long, subjectivities have been positioned by hegemonic, scientific knowledge that constitutes those that do not fit the socially desired norms as flawed and in need of fixing (Parker, 2005), as with the illegitimate adopted subject. The metaphors and methods of psychology as a natural science typically take up practices of reductionism, reducing entities to the interaction of their (smallest) parts. Here, naming and reifying concepts produces a ‘thing’ like entity, and once this thing like entity has been reified it becomes taken-for-granted and real (M. Crossley, 2000a; Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 2002; Eacker, 1972; K. Gergen, 2001; Gilbert, 2002; Parker, 2005; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1995). Whilst tracing the history of adoption within psychology, the location of adoptees as over-represented in clinical and criminal populations represents adoptees in particular ways - individualised, pathologised and disordered. While useful for research, adoption as a social and moral practice is marginalised where the social and political value is on advancing knowledge of disease and disorder, and subsequently, treatment. This work contests those positivistic theories of knowledge that have ignored context and excluded social power relations that produce the lived experience of adoption through legislative and social movements.

By taking up a critical approach I attend to adoptive subjectivities, our acting and interconnectedness, to enable us to be ‘known’ in multiple and alternative ways. I also attend to the political and moral dimensions of adoption by advocating for reform of the Adoption Act 1955, and I recognise the neglect of the state to remedy this human rights violation. Trying to define a critical theory can be difficult because, as Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) argue, there are many theorists and forms of critical work. In a sense, trying to capture the specificity of a critical approach is problematic, as disagreement, diversity and change are needed to avoid producing a blueprint that postulates a fixed set of characteristics or epistemological assumptions. Critical work is never static. However, in this work particular assumptions underpin my critical approach.

I value the way in which social and historical forces are influential in the construction of subjects and understand that notions of freedom and egalitarianism are problematic in a world where social power relations fundamentally mediate thought, being and action. As presented in Chapter 1, where I trace the historical movements of adoption and Chapter 2, where psychology is examined for its role in researching and positioning adoption, I explore the history of psychology for the relations of power and governance that produce knowledge about some form of an adopted identity. I question the way in which particular knowledge has been privileged and attend to practices that have marginalised and excluded stories as well as those stories that are ignored, following the work of others (Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Fine, 2006; Foucault, 1982; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). I pay attention to discourse to interpret the texts with a political agenda. Here, I borrow Foucault's assertions about the specific intellectual in that I work in a particular area and take up a micro-political position to enable a localised struggle against power relations of domination and subordination (Gutting, 2001; Sarup, 1993) that produce the adopted subject. As a critical researcher I appeal to those who enact material and social power to engage their experiences of injustice, and shift the what, how and when of their hearing, alongside their speaking, to encourage them to listen to experiences of social injustice in ways that matter to adoptees. Critical arguments need to appear in psychology to adequately represent the political struggles outside of it (Fine, 2006; Parker, 2009). This work is necessarily an intervention because I aim to interrupt the taken-for-granted knowledge that produces particular understandings of adoption (individualised, pathologised and disordered) within psychology to open space for counter narratives.

## **Epistemological Underpinnings**

### **A poststructuralist approach**

According to Barry (1995), during the last forty years or so poststructuralists have made significant contributions to psychological knowledge production and reproduction by enabling us to understand that particular knowledge is made possible under particular conditions. Our knowledge of the world is not secure. Poststructuralists critique notions of the human subject, challenging taken-for-granted knowledge of the individual that has free will as an intellectual agent, devoid of any historical or contextual influences. Here the subject is neither coherent nor autonomous. While questioning the conceptualisations of subjects, the term subject is used here to signify the individual as constituted through culturally specific and often unconscious processes (M. Crossley, 2000a; M. Gergen, 2001).

While speaking/writing from a poststructuralist position I do not suppose that an authentic 'self' exists or that I have found a story in the participants' narratives that represents a singular reality. In producing this research, I do not aim to profess a single, unified trajectory of the lived experience of adoption for adoptees, they are necessarily multiple. Poststructuralism enables me to understand that meaning is created through language use within relationships; what we know is not produced by an

individual subject (M. Gergen, 2001). We are spoken into our social worlds in and through discourse and narrative.

Reading/writing/speaking is not the passive production and consumption of a product, but a performance. Here I interpret Butler's (1993) rhetoric on performativity as being more than a single or purposeful act; it is the practice of repetition, the citational speaking of an authorial power through which discourses produce the particular effects in which it speaks. Our expectations invoke the very occurrence that we anticipate (Butler, 1999). Language is an unsteady system whereby it is impossible to ever limit the meanings of an act, text or intention (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000b).

Language produces particular characteristics of objects and subjects. It involves implicit rules that govern how we can understand particular people, places and things, including the institutionalisation of adoption and adoptees. Once selected, language and its meanings are taken up and accepted by those who use it, possibilities outside that which it speaks are limited by available discourse. Language necessarily constructs experience and in turn the experience of those for whom it speaks (Gutting, 2005; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Weedon, 1999).

Language as a linguistic signifying system is comprised of signs: a sound image, the signifier (such as the body of the adopted child), and the concept of an adopted child as the signified (bastard, abandoned, saved). Signifiers cannot signify separately from other signifiers (Minsky, 1996; Sarup, 1993). For example, the adopted child is always understood in relation to the birth mother. The linguistic sign is arbitrary, constructed by convention and usage, not an essential entity representing a material object. Poststructuralism moves the gaze from the signified to the signifier to problematise and understand what and how particular concepts produce and reproduce. Consequently, concepts such as identity, subject and causality are critiqued through a poststructuralist lens (Sarup, 1993).

From my poststructuralist position, I consider the way in which the institution of adoption and its discursive practices, such as the Adoption Act 1955, construct the lived reality of adoption. Poststructuralist theory enables me to step back from taken-for-granted knowledge and question the discourses surrounding adoption. I consider how adoptees' lived realities are enabled and constrained by the available discourses at any given time. Adoptees narrate their lives through a complex interplay of discursive resources, determined within wider social practices, such as legislative and social movements that constitute family.

### **Foucaultian knowledge**

Situated within a poststructuralist paradigm, Michel Foucault's philosophies have been pivotal to the crafting of this work. Foucault's ideas about a historical ontology enable me to value the ways in which context and historical situatedness position adoptees in particular ways, within particular cultural milieu. Instead of asking 'what is', a historical ontology questions 'how' something emerges and is necessarily historically situated (Tamboukou, 2008). These arguments enabled me to produce the first

two chapters of this thesis to sketch out the historical trajectories - social, moral and political - and the way in which social power relations are implicated in the constitution of the adopted subject. Studying the historical relationship between what we know as truth, knowledge and power, and the way in which discursive power works on the body to produce new forms of being-in-the-world is called genealogy (Danaher, Schiratio, & Webb, 2000; Gutting, 2001). Genealogical analysis, derived from the Nietzsche practice of delegitimising the present by untying it from the past, rejects traditional forms of historical analysis that seeks the point of origin, explains events within global systems and linear structures, and focuses on and celebrates particular people and moments within history. Instead, genealogy establishes and maintains the singularity of events, while privileging what has been discredited and denied a history. "Genealogies focus on local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge against the claims of a unitary theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge" (Sarup, 1993, p. 59). It is a practice of critique.

Foucault's notion of governmentality, the way in which governments produce citizenship to fulfil particular agendas, allows me to make sense of the way in which adoptees are governed and regulated through technologies of the state. Governmentality privileges the way in which knowledge, both academic and common sense, is never neutral; it is ideological, political and infused with moral and ethical commitments that together produce sanctioned ways of being and acting in the world. Governments are reliant on the production, organisation and legitimisation of such knowledge as it becomes quantifiable and workable (Schwandt, 2000). The institution of psychology is inextricably involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge that informs the processes of defining, analysing and ordering what and how citizens should behave. Psychology, as a technology of the state, can therefore be understood as a form of disciplinary power (Rose, 1999). Psychology produced 'evidence' that sanctioned the moral, legitimate reproductive body and produced adoption practices, including the violence of the 'complete break', because of particular assertions that early maternal bonding was pivotal to subsequent healthy development.

Disciplinary power does not locate power within a subject, institution or structure; here power is ubiquitous (Foucault, 1982). Power, according to Foucault, exists only when acted. To this effect knowledge becomes a practical form of power as it performs disciplinary actions on the body; it regulates thinking, controls behaviour and orders emotions (Clegg, 1997). Disciplinary power is efficient because subjects embody knowledge and rules to govern their own behaviour. When the social dictums are internalised, subjects become their own overseers. The state does not need to exert its power through dictatorship and force, instead practices of rationality and technologies of control implement political rule (Danaher et al., 2000; Gutting, 2001; Rose, 1999; Sarup, 1993). Power in this way involves minimal cost to governments (Sarup, 1993). By questioning the technologies and practices that enable power to operate, beyond a dominant centralised location of power embodied in the state, it elucidates the specificity of power. Relations of power are pervasive and tracing the movements of adoption requires careful analysis because the institutionalisation of adoption emerged

amongst many social, moral and political narratives. Accordingly, my tracing of a history of adoption is necessarily a partial telling about intricate and complex social relationships within particular social power relations.

Power, enacted through discourse, is exercised through dominant institutions. Discourse, in a Foucaultian sense, functions as a body of statements through which organisations and societies produce rules to direct knowledge, power and truth claims (Parker, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1993). Institutions use language and systems of signification, at the disciplinary, political, cultural and small group level and inform social practices, as with adoption. Discourses are not speech acts that represent some pre-existing 'reality' that awaits discovery, but are the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Power circulates through discourses to enable us to perform subjectivities, as our everyday common sense understands them, in ways that are compliant and/or resistant to sanctioned and legitimated knowledge.

Discursive practices that produce adoption depend on the moral ordering of legitimated knowledge of the dominant culture at any point in time. Institutions and knowledge claims support certain discourses while undermining, cutting, excluding and marginalising others, thus knowledge and power are intimately linked (Foucault, 1982; M. Gergen, 2001). Discourses are a public process whereby meanings and sense making are dynamically realised (Davies & Harré, 1990). Any problems or threats to public morality, as with illegitimacy, are produced and reproduced as social concerns (social denigration of the poor and sinful), and justify and determine how a 'problem' is understood and therefore addressed.

Foucault specifically questions what is made possible through discourse (Ramazanoglu, 1993). For instance, discourses can compete with one another or produce conflicting and multiple ways of being-in-the-world (Davies & Harré, 1990; Squire, 2000; Weedon, 1999). There are discourses that produce both 'good' and 'bad' mothers. Birth mothers, often positioned as 'bad' because of their indiscretions (sex outside of marriage), were coerced into positions that normalised codes of behaviour for women. This meant relinquishing their illegitimate child. An unmarried mother was positioned as 'bad' and compared to the norms of the socially sanctioned 'good' (married) mother. Here the dominant mothering discourse provided language, expression and reasoning for understanding the morality of the mothering experience within marriage.

As a complex network, discourse and power relations compete, oppose or coerce one another and produce unintentional outcomes from the technologies and social practices that in turn bound and transform these relationships. At times, power relations and their practices can provide a sense of stability; that is contingent, however, on the specificity of particular sites. Power is always already relational and precarious. Power exists through and within relationships, and here power is dependent on events or circumstances outside of people's control. This instability reflects the multiplicity of the intimate and elaborate institutional dependencies (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Sanger, 2008). The institutionalisation of adoption has many and varying social practices that produce the adopted subject;

it is within those interdependencies that I see the possibility of effecting ‘local’ disruptions. While power is understood as acting on a subject it also brings that very subject into existence (Butler, 1997).

Foucault, according to Butler (1997), explains the process of subjection and the way in which the subject comes into being as subjectification. This process of subjection or the practices of control that constitute a subject are paradoxical because power acts upon while simultaneously forming the subject of which it speaks. As a dominating force, power subordinates a subject yet without power, the subject cannot be brought into being. And although the subject can resist the external power that oppresses, the subject is dependent on that very power as it provides the conditions for existence and desires. To be autonomous a subject must be subjected to power and reliant on that power. Foucault (1982) argues that power relations are not a direct or instant action imposed onto others, but that power instead acts on actions. For instance, a power relationship occurs between the state and an adoptee when ties to the birth family are legally severed and the adopted subject is silenced.

Power, as a subordinating regulator, exists as a precondition to the subject; it moves outside and produces effects on the subject. For power to exist there must be a subject but that subject is not necessarily the genesis of power. So while power acts on the subject, it is also a transitory force in that it enacts the subject into existence. Power operates as the condition of a subject and its formation, while it also enables and constrains what a subject takes up and reproduces in its acting. For instance, while *as if born to* a legally constituted adoptive family an adoptee has access to the legally sanctioned family and is bestowed a name and socially sanctioned rights, duties and obligations. However, adoptees are also constrained to perform a legally constituted identity that denies any connection to a birth history. With a subject that belongs to power and also influences power, a subject can, in a sense, override the conditions of its own emergence with power. Power fights power. According to Foucault the process of subjectification occurs primarily through the body (Butler, 1997).

Subjects resist, just as they obey and “there are no relations of power without resistances” (Foucault, 1980, p. 142). These resistances practice inside the fleshy body (movements of tension or feelings of anxiety for example), and as Sarup (1993) argues there is something in the social body, an energy or a discharge that enables us to resist. The action of resistance does not have to derive from somewhere else, it forms at the place where power is exercised and as an accomplice of power, they exist together although it is a relationship of tension. Like power, resistance is multiple and enacted at many sites. Resistance, for example, can be located with the adopted subject who does not perform in a way that is expected of a ‘grateful’ adoptee. When adoptees question the imposed secrecy of their birth history, they enact a form of resistance. Here adoptees may embody multiple silences as a function of the rights, duties and obligations of the *born to* position.

While writing to labour process debates, Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) warn against any attempt to essentialise power because not only does it serve to reduce power, it also reduces those who perform the discourse of essentialism. When we question the ‘how’ of power being possible we doubt the existence of power and confine it within the parameters of a grand theory. From a poststructuralist

sense, grand or universalising theories are problematic because the criteria that establish a singular or ultimate 'truth' are not universal or objective; they reflect the internal structures of dominant androcentric and Eurocentric discourses (Weedon, 1998). A universal theory that encompasses a single common trajectory misrepresents the way in which remanence and the character of different discourses shape and produce multiple histories (Foucault, 1991).

Aspects of Foucault's methodology have been questioned, for example some feminist thinkers believe that patriarchal power is more than a product of discourse (Danaher et al., 2000; Naples, 2003) and, according to Knights and Vurdubakis (1994), some scholars find the arguments about power and resistance problematic because a space for resistance is not possible if one can never be outside of power. How, if subjectivity is positioned as an effect of power, can those same subjects be an agent of resistance? Noland (2009) contends that Foucault produces a binary theory of power, which reduces cultural practices to a totalising subjectification. Here, Foucault is read to supplement, even contradict, his rhetoric when the docile body, the control and regulation of bodies through institutions produce bodies that are practical and docile<sup>8</sup>, is able to take up multiple practices and pay attention to that same body. Rejecting these claims, Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) argue that Foucaultian critics impose dualistic understandings on particular relationships, locating resistance as opposite to and dichotomous with power. When resistance and power are understood as the "analytical conditions of each other's possibilities" (pp. 168-169), with each providing for the other a point of reversal, it is possible to 'resist' the dualism. Foucault (1994) argues that "the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between "partners", individuals or collectives; it is a way in which some act on others" (p. 340). Foucault distances his notions of power from other epistemological questions about what power is, for example power and its ability to modify, consume or destroy. When power is not some grand exterior force we can assume that resistance can operate within physical and social bodies (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994).

Resistance to and questioning the way in which adoptees are shaped or located within particular discourse does not depend on an assumption that subjects are void of agency, or that the docile body is essentially passive. Debate, however, occurs within discursive approaches about the notion of agency, or the activity of a subject, as some argue that we cannot exist outside of the language in which we are produced, while others assume a pre-discursive reality. Others conflate self and agency to resist determinism. The self as an agent can be overlooked in the quest to debate the very nature of a 'self' (M. Crossley, 2000a, 2003). And as argued by Davies et al. (2002), the subject has been contested in social science discipline since the discursive turn. Here the subject is no longer what it claims to be, it cannot reliably inform us about itself. Self is a subject that is inscribed, and to gain

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault's docile body will be discussed in-depth, as will the theorisation of the adopted body, in the following chapter.

knowledge of that self discourse or texts require analysis. Davis et al. (2002) further illustrate how a dualistic divide has created a focus on the individual as in mind, or the social as in language.

M. Crossley (2003) expresses concern about taking a purely linguistic approach to knowledge production because of the postmodern epistemology and the 'death of the subject'. Poststructuralism can contend that there is no essential nature of a 'self'; it is constituted through interpretation, multiplicity and difference. While there is no coherent or unified 'self' and while accepting that knowledge of language is relational because the individual does not exist - there is no subject. If there is no essence of a 'self' to analyse or describe then the notion of 'having a self' should stop. 'Self' is only studied as discursive acts, which perform social action. When taking a linguistic approach, context or socio-political embodiment is ignored. For Hollway and Jefferson (2000a) the Foucaultian idea of subjectivity, as a product of how we take up discourse, is now commonplace knowledge, however a reading of subjectivity only through discourse results in discourse determinism. Yet the concept of agency is pivotal because without it the discursive construction of a 'self' becomes deterministic and positions the subject as passive.

Arguing against such narrow interpretations of Foucault's work, Allen (2000) recognises what she terms the "anti-subjective hypothesis" (p. 114), or the belief that any archaeological investigation of historical records of societies for the discursive constructions of particular knowledge, such as 'self', within specific historical periods (Danaher et al., 2000) or genealogical analyses, undermines and necessarily removes the subject. However, Foucault's work enables historical, cultural and social conditions to be recognised and produces possibilities for the subject beyond that which is taken-for-granted and socially established. Indeed Foucault argues that subjectivity is produced through and within discourse and power relations. However, who this subject is and how they are in relationship to others is represented and determined within particular historical conditions (Allen, 2000), for example women's bodies as (im)moral for sex outside of marriage and 'bastard' children as illegitimate. Here subjectivity is contingent and requires explanation. Subjects are capable of ethical (moral codes within a society) dimensions; they can take up or resist governmental and social practices. Subjects are necessarily multiple as they move between different contexts and subject positions (Danaher et al., 2000). Foucault does not promise a 'truth' about the subject. Although true/false distinctions can be and are made, he provides us with the 'stage tools' to interpret and do with as we (the scholars) deem fit. This includes resisting disciplinary power and rewriting histories about a 'self' (Shumway, 1989).

In this work, 'self' is understood as that which is produced by institutions, discourse and power relations but it is a subject that is able to resist the particular identities that it has available. That is, the process of subjection enables us to take up and identify with certain subject positions over others. Like M. Crossley (2000a, 2003), I appreciate knowledge of a discursive construction of a 'self' but also value the 'coherent' and 'real' nature of subjectivity. In this work, I assume adopted subjects can and do act as 'agents' within socially constructed constraints. In this instance, adoptees - our subjectivities - are reliant on investment in available social discourses. To address the way in which adoptees are

constituted by and through some discourses and not others, I engage subject positioning theory as a way to theorise and understand how adoptees take up particular positions within legally and socially produced storylines.

### **Theorising Subject Positions**

Subject positioning theory produces narratives of agency, and its limits, and the ways in which people position themselves within discourse and take up particular narratives for sense making (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Dedaić, 2012; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Discourse is pivotal to positioning theory because it competes and constructs multiple and contradictory versions of reality (Davies & Harré, 1990). Here, for instance, our identities, experiences of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic location are all given by or taken from available social discourses. In subject positioning theory, subjects are understood as constructed in and through discourse and discursive practices while also having some decision in the way they are taken up. This is a dynamic interaction. Each position involves particular rights, duties and obligations. In their original work on positioning theory, Davies and Harré (1990) argued that subject positions become the “constitutive force of each discursive practice” (p. 46). Here positioning is primarily a conversational experience, whereby conversations are social interactions that produce interpersonal relationships. The social meaning of what is spoken is reliant on the position of the subject(s) that is produced in turn by the social force that a conversation is taken to have.

The action of positioning attaches particular assumptions to the subject. Here, one speaker will position another, however the way in which the position is interpreted and enacted is dependent on the way in which the conversation is relationally perceived and what psychological concepts cluster around a particular attribute. Davies and Harré (1990) name this process the “extension of the significance of the attitude” (p. 51). There is an indexical extension and a typification extension. The indexical position occurs when, in particular situations, a positional attribute is obligatory; once a position is interpreted, the consequences of the positioning are taken up within the indexical meanings derived from past experiences of that attribute or position. With typification, the subject position is drawn from, or embedded within, a cultural and traditional cluster of attributes. For example, a previous experience of an event will enable the assigned position to be interpreted and enacted. With both extensions, the subject is embedded within a narrative storyline that is crucial to the process of meaning making. However, it is also necessary to consider the nonverbal actions within conversations because the body does something, adds something, to the way that conversations happen. For instance, when positioning occurs to produce the adopted subject as different, the body feels and although there may be no verbally articulated response, the adopted body can speak in relation to felt positioning through gesture or posture. The adopted body speaks from a particular discursive space.

Conversations evolve, move and change as subjects attempt to, or jostle to make themselves and others socially determined (with and through the body). Illocutionary force produces sayings and

actions that do things within social interactions. Speech actions become speech acts when those participating in the conversation take them up. Multiple speech acts can be performed in a single saying and speech acts can be ignored rather than heard by the listener. There is a productive relationship between positioning and illocutionary force. The social meaning of what is spoken is reliant on the position of the subject(s) which in turn is produced by the social force that a conversation is taken to have (Davies & Harré, 1990). Morgan (2002) describes positioning theory as a way to “speak ourselves into our communities, producing ourselves as subjects and communities of voices simultaneously and reproducing them in various versions through multiple relationships” (p. 468).

Harré and colleagues (2009) recognise positioning as the discursive process that locates subjects in conversations as coherent beings in mutually produced storylines. However, Harré and Dedaić (2012) now describe a pre-positioning condition that involves assessing a subject’s skills, capacities or biographical history. In this condition, particular positions can be rescinded if the subject has shown to be deficient in the ability to fulfil the rights, duties and obligations assigned to that position. Positions require an adherence to discourse with the rights, duties and obligations of the discourse being circulated within personal interactions and everyday ordinary practices that are concretely located. A subject position has a conceptual repertoire, a range of actions that are commonly performed, and a location based on the structural rights for those that use that repertoire. After locating oneself within a particular discursive practice, the world is understood from that position. Interactive positioning entails subjects positioning one another, and with reflexive positioning we position ourselves (Harré et al., 2009; Hollway, 1984). We are able to accept or reject the particular subject positions that are made accessible through our own or other’s discourse (Morgan, 2002). While Harré and others (Harré & Dedaić, 2012; Harré et al., 2009) extend his original work by theorising the role of pre-positional condition, Davies (2008) moves to theorise positioning within interpersonal conflict and explores the way in which social power relations matter.

Davies (2008) argues that when we position the self that we understand we are, we always position another in relation to that position, and if others position us we can refuse to step into that position. Here the power relations in speech actions must be acknowledged as subjects are not located in comparable power positions. For instance, the adopted child is positioned lower in the social hierarchy than the adoptive parents. Within the everyday, taken-for-granted social order that produces subjects, there are repetitive citations that represent the way the world is and should be. These citations offer particular possibilities and lifestyles to some while simultaneously denying them to others. Citational speech, or the unreflexive repetition of taken-for-granted normative social discourse and rebellion against citational speech acts produce particular relationships that enact social power. Discourses that produce moral, legitimating social orders by normalising particular ways of speaking, and sanction rebellious speech functions to ensure subjects maintain social relationships of domination and subordination, inclusion and marginalisation through their conversational performances. Necessarily arguments, tensions or disengagement can occur when a speech act resists the positioning

of a subject within normative discourse through citational speech. For example, when the fiction of *as if born to* and legitimacy dominate normative discourse constituting adoption there were some adoptees who refused to be positioned as silent children of a beneficent governmentality, and advocated for the right to access birth history relationships.

A distinction is required between citational and rebellious speech because everyday taken-for-granted language that enables social norms requires little effort to produce while rebellious speech actions that endeavour to resist, are effortful because they draw attention to those citational practices that produce power and legitimacy, and the speaker risks social sanctions. Moral orders do not achieve equal status in social processes, since the one that is upheld by everyday repeated citations dismisses the other as rebellion. When discussing her earlier work, Davies (2008) argues that the subject positions available to Sano and Enfermada<sup>9</sup> are different because one is taking up the citational production of normative discourse while the other wants linguistic change: “[it] is very easy to trivialise Enfermada’s position, and to wonder why on earth she persisted, but her position is not trivial to the extent that she is challenging the very terms through which she comes to exist” (p. 176). Akin to Davies (2008), this thesis investigates the way in which the taken-for-granted moral order brings adoptees into existence while also positioning them as trivial and irresponsible for challenging such citational speech. In writing about the subject positions that adoptees have available, I must also be able to speak to the way in which adoptees take up particular subject positions and how or where they have acquired their knowledge and understanding of the attributes attached to those positions.

When a dominant group mandates particular discourse for moral and political sense making, those outside or rebelling against normative speech actions may lack accessible language to enable them to be heard as legitimate beings (Davies, 2008). Here, people are powerless to rebel against a subject position because rebellious speech is inconceivable, and therefore they endure punishment, condemnation or at least social exclusion. By understanding the way in which subject positions act on and within social relationships, I am aiming to make speaking positions available for adoptees to protest against moral norms; to produce rebellious speech acts from the repertoire of acts available to the adopted legal subject. I position my participants as protagonists in their own narratives, not the antagonists of the moral and social order, while simultaneously attempting to disrupt the power relations that subordinate adoptees to the legal system and to psychological discourse. Subject positioning provides a framework for considering power relations in psychology and wider social systems (Morgan, 2002). Taking up the theory of subject positioning allows me to attend to the processes that produce a series of consequences, intended or unattended. I am able to question how the

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<sup>9</sup> Sano and Enfermada attend a conference in an unfamiliar city. Enfermada has a cold and they walk the streets, seeking a chemist shop. When they cannot find one, Sano takes up a dominant position by claiming he is sorry he has dragged her around the shops. Resisting this position Enfermada argues that he is not responsible; yet Sano maintains his position of responsibility. For Enfermada, accepting that Sano is responsible positions her as not responsible, and therefore incapable of caring for her own wellbeing.

Adoption Act 1955 positions adoptees and how they take up particular discursive resources for storying their lived experience.

Morgan (2002) highlights the way in which narrative is also a part of positioning, because interpersonal communication involves telling stories and discussing particular experiences. Accounts of certain events, often biographical, are taken from memory of previous discussions and the telling of lived experience. These enable and constrain our knowledge of the selves we understand that we are. Stories are constituted through various discourses; the associated language, concepts, moral order and the available subject positions may vary even as they produce the speaker's discursive location. Positioning theory fits well with a narrative psychology because it understands that storylines unfold within narrative constraints that are also embedded in our everyday speech acts, through which we produce ourselves in relation to each other. Positions have rights, duties and obligations that are drawn from the clusters of attributes that function to reproduce social orders through the illocutionary force within social relationships. Here the telling of stories is constrained by the available social and moral discourses.

### **Weaving in the Narrative**

Positioning theory relies heavily on the notion of narrative as a way to theorise how people live as actors in storylines, both as experiencing their life stories and as storytellers. This research relies heavily on the assumption that “[w]e live in stories, not statistics” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 223). According to Sarbin (1986), narrative structure should be “a root metaphor for psychology” (p. 3). He argues that root metaphors of metaphysical systems address ontological questions. Metaphors construct the answers to such and once such metaphors are reified, metaphysical systems become ‘real’; they become the foundations of belief systems and enable trajectories to explain events in social reality. People assimilate new knowledge and experiences through identifying partial similarities with previous classification systems, such as a root metaphor, which in turn become analogies that are linguistically performed through metaphor. Sarbin (1986) argues that psychology as a discipline has entrenched root metaphors that drive the positivistic paradigm, such as mechanism or organicism. The metaphor of mechanism dominates Western societies; here a machine-like image enables events and persons to be understood as being constituted by forces, which in turn supports the scientific search for cause and effect, as with behaviourism. A root metaphor of organicism looks for parts within a whole; events and persons are investigated for their organic structure. That structure will invariably contain progressive steps or stages, just as an organism grows. A root metaphor enables knowledge of the world based on a narratory principle; people think, imagine, notice and make moral decisions within narrative structures.

Sarbin (1986) further argues for narrative as a root metaphor because narrative fits within a contextualist epistemology, locating what we know within the functions of a history and its context (Ludlow, 2005). Narrative psychology asserts that the self we know we are is constructed in, and of, cultural and social contexts (Monk, 2005). Here, any knowledge is based in the particular context of

that knowledge and is connected to historical events, and the stories we tell of those events. This valuing of context fuses well with a poststructuralist approach. History is constituted and remembered through narratives (Sarbin, 1986). Freeman (2002) explains that our history is grounded in culture and it is important to discern the multiple sources that enable the self we understand we are within these cultural resources. Narrative is not imposed onto life, but is woven into the cloak of our experience. Narrative psychology is concerned with the character of our existence and the structure of reality as contextualised by change, uniqueness and contingency (Crotty, 1998; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1995). Following Sarbin, Denzin (2000) identifies that everything we study is positioned within narrative. Scholars, researchers and academics are all storytellers, “telling stories about other people’s stories” (Denzin, 2000, p. xi). In that way, theories themselves are stories.

Narrative psychology shares an understanding of the central and practical way that language produces experiences of subjectivity and identity. A narrative turn privileges alternative ways of thinking about texts and the construction of subjects. It assumes that experience and action are meaningful. Therefore, if we are to understand humanness we must explore the ways in which meaning becomes sensible to us. In this way, narrative psychology ‘fits’ with poststructuralist paradigms. Narrative shares a commitment to highlighting the constitutive place of language in the formation and structure of a ‘self’ and identity (M. Crossley, 2000a), as this ‘self’ understands it.

Importantly, M. Crossley (2003) argues for a narrative psychology because it privileges an understanding of humanness to be more than just linguistic resources and social interaction. In that same sense, Burkitt (1999) argues that any form of discursive constructionism excludes notions of embodiment and the complex, multi-dimensional ways that we are in the world. There are experiential and personal aspects to being human, so how subjects make sense of themselves in relation to certain narrative events is of interest to narrative psychology rather than a more theoretical or abstract understanding of a ‘self’. These relationships are important to this research and I too did not want to “‘lose’ the experience of the subject by operating at those levels” (M. Crossley, 2000a, p. 40) where lived embodied experience seems inaccessible.

### **Narrative Matters: Structure, Style, and Organising Principles**

Within qualitative research there are diverse uses and interpretations of the term narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). Many researchers disagree on its origins and definitions and use it in different ways for different purposes (Denzin, 2000; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Polkinghorne (1995) argues narrative can be any text that is a reasoned and integrated statement, enabling coherence to be produced from our lived experience. While Gilbert (2002) argues that narrative and story are synonymous, Riessman (1993) contends that story is a particular type of narrative with distinctive structure and style. However, she too came to use narrative and story interchangeably, with narrative theoretically representing a story as it is told. Riessman (1993, 2008) cautions against the use of a simple

explanation of narrative to cover all applications because many kinds of texts (art, literature, speech) may be viewed as narrative.

The notion of narrative has become commonplace; “narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 4). For example, in its everyday use, the notion of stories can imply fantasy or falsehood, such as with children’s storybooks. It has become a term used in popular culture; everyone has a story - people as self-improvement projects are common and involve telling life stories for the media or self-help groups. Within these accounts, the analytical component of narrative is often unseen. The cultural resources that a story draws from are omitted, as is knowledge of how a story enables or constrains lived experience (Riessman & Speedy, 2007). It is important to delimit the concept of narrative within psychological research so that specificity becomes visible to our representations (M. Andrews, Day Sclater, Rustin, Squire, & Treacher, 2000; Riessman, 2008). In this way, narrative signifies everyday language in conversational contexts, not decontextualised phrases that fit an abstract structure. In the social sciences, narrative can refer to texts at many levels that also overlap: research participants’ stories, interpretive workings by researchers and also the construction of a narrative by the reader (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative theory realises that narratives and stories are organising principles of human action (M. Crossley, 2003; Denzin, 2000; Elliott, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Sarbin, 1986). That human action is the melding of previous learning and experience, current situatedness and future purpose argues Polkinghorne (1995). Human acting is unique and narrative theory enables us to investigate the characteristics and specificities of action. Stories allow people to make coherent sense of their lives, day-to-day experiences, actions and reasons for events. Stories are used to construct a sense of identity because the continuity of memory enables stories to produce a sense of oneself (Kirkman, 2002). The narrative production of identity and how it is performed is enabled and constrained through social power relations, as is the positioning of subjects in discourse (Gilbert, 2002; Parker, 2005). Narrative plots hold a story together and guide action. Plots enable the configuration of events by marking segments of time with a beginning and end. They provide criteria for parts of an event to be included in a story, temporally ordering events into a conclusion and clarifying the ways in which events contribute to a story as a coherent whole. Prior events are linked to later events, based on the taken-for-granted assumption that time is unilinear (Polkinghorne, 1995). According to Tappan (1991), a fundamental aspect of narrative theory includes the notion of time and relationships. Human experience occurs inevitably within both.

Riessman (1993, 2008) argues that narratives as structuring experiences organise memory, but the notion of structure has particular meanings for positions within narrative theory. Understanding narrative structure is important to sense making because some narrative structures or forms of storytelling are valued over others, positioning subjects in particular ways as other or deficient to the norm. For example, an adoptee who does not take up the position of ‘good’ citizen within a legitimacy narrative may be constituted as disordered within a psychological narrative.

It is also necessary to understand the performance of narratives, or the way in which institutional contexts produce and reproduce the narratives people perform to make sense of themselves and the world (Elliott, 2005). One purpose of a narrative theory is to tell a story about an event within its 'natural' context. Importantly, the impact of a story is reliant on its cohesion with other stories and contexts. When telling life narratives, they are performed within the "models of intelligibility specific to the culture" (Rosenwald, 1992, p. 265). Within Western societies, different narratives compete for dominance and approval. Dominant narratives of adoption therefore exclude many of the lived experience of adoptees. One aim of narrative research is to provide a platform in which marginalised life stories are voiced to enable alternative meaning systems, counter-narratives and the possibility of hearing lived experiences previously silenced. Narrative research may produce rebellious speech acts through the analysis of stories rarely told. This thesis seeks to tell those rarely told stories of the legislative and social history of adoption and how that matters to those subjected to the Adoption Act 1955.

### **Narrative research**

There are numerous ways in which to conduct narrative research. Narrative analysis can be understood as a 'family' of interpretive approaches (Riessman, 2008). This family has in common the representation of narratives in meaningful ways that produce psychological knowledge differently to positivist empiricist traditions. Narrative researchers draw from various aspects of a narrative approach to fit their research aims and represent stories in particular ways (M. Andrews et al., 2000; M. Crossley, 2000b; Denzin, 2000).

For example, M. Crossley (2003) understands narrative research as an exploration of language that has an emphasis on the relationship between 'self' and social power relations and this informs her understanding of the psychology of trauma. She advocates a substantive narrative approach that understands subjectivity through the specific lived experiences of people. M. Andrews and colleagues (2000) also advocate a psychosocial approach to narrative research, where an individual is always located within social relationships, with neither the social nor the individual privileged. Using narratives, subjectivity is understood as discursively produced, while being active and effective in social power relations. Discourses and action interact with subjective experience; those human desires and identities whereby people make choices, construct histories and futures within available frames of reference. Similarly, Emerson and Frosh (2004) argue a critical narrative analysis is one that pays close attention to the ways in which subjectivities are constructed socially within dominant discourses. Like M. Crossley (2000a), they assert the necessity of a political dimension in the often complex and competing relationships enacted through stories. Narrative is vital to personal sense making, but the construction of narratives, the storying of the self as we understand it, is connected to socio-political discourses and occurs within inter-subjective space.

Narrative research can be approached from many vantage points to consider any social problem, event or occurrence. For example, narrative research has enabled an understanding of grief experiences that are coherent rather than disordered (Gilbert, 2002). It has enabled experiences of spirituality to be valued in relation to psychological wellbeing (Cheals, Morgan, & Coombes, 2003) and it has also made sense of physicians' understandings of domestic violence to enable more effective intervention strategies (Mildorf, 2002).

Understanding that all narratives are knowledge of lived experience in their own right, a narrative analysis aims to represent common elements of stories and configure them into a meaningful or unified whole, where the unfolding movement climaxes towards an endpoint (Polkinghorne, 1995). This thesis engages with the knowledge produced by critical narrative researchers who explore the implications of social power relations and the technologies of control in the narrative construction of subjectivity to configure a story of the lived experiences of being adopted as told through narratives of adoptees. This story is told alongside the historical, social and cultural narrative of the institution of adoption. In this sense, it is something like a hybrid story; common themes, movements and events are edited and reshaped to create a metastory inscribed through the voices of the participants and the researcher. While a hybrid story can be a form of betrayal because it is not the participants but the researcher's principles, politics and theoretical positions that inform the story (Riessman, 1993), it is necessary to the production of knowledge that has the possibility of inclusiveness in the research and practice in the community of psychological wellbeing. The participants' stories are valued in as much as the stories of the lived experience of adoption are co-articulated to tell this particular story. The telling of their stories does not produce the narrative analysis; rather the analysis of their stories produces the narrative of the thesis.

### **Locating the Researcher**

In producing this hybrid story, and acknowledging that I am a researcher living the effects of adoption, my position is one of insider knowledge. Rather than assume an illusion of objectivity, detachment or distance, I embrace postmodern values that impel me to acknowledge my subjectivity and take up reflexive practice (Pettinger, 2005). I value reflexivity in my research practice because insider knowledge necessarily informed the way I approached this research and formulated my research question(s). The interviews were negotiated through my insider position in a community of adoptees. I was both an insider and a researcher when I interpreted and represented the literature, methodology and participants' narratives. As Parker (1999) suggests, I have the power to make public what is private. I am aware that by making my position explicit, I invoke a particular reading of this text, yet I signify my intention to do so throughout this work, as have other researchers before me (Barry, 1995; Davies et al., 2004; Davies & Harré, 1990).

## **Reflexivity**

Practices of reflexivity as critical self-awareness inform the way in which I constructed and shaped this project from conception to conclusion. A reflexive practice enables me to work with my lived experience, not just as a process of presenting a subjective ‘opinion’ in contrast to ‘hard’ facts but to narrate aspects of my conceptual process while producing academic work. In contrast to notions of disengagement as researchers, reflexive practice means that I represent myself as an active participant in the research process (M. Crossley, 2000a; Parker, 2005; Riessman, 2008). I therefore position myself by writing from the first person, from time to time, so as to interweave the researcher and the adoptee that I am into the research. As argued by Delany (1997) and Parker (2005), reflexivity is not a set of tools, but a subjective knowing and a way of being-in-the-world.

Debates about reflexivity rely on conceptualisations of a ‘self’. Skeggs (2002) warns about self-reflexivity being an historical production and an unequal process because of the way it intersects with class positions. For example, reflexivity can be authorial exhibitionism for the middle-class, while lack of reflexivity or inappropriate self-revelation is understood as the actions of the working-class. Similarly, in an individualist culture, and especially within an individualising discipline, like psychology, self-revelation might be more appropriate and easier to perform than in cultural contexts where individuals are understood more relationally. While considering these arguments, it is vital to ensure that reflexive practice and processes consider access to resources and positions of power, as more than a technique of the authorial voice. I was mindful about ownership of the stories, which invoked various questions: when a story is interpreted, reported and re-storied whose story is it? Is the interpretation meaningful for the participants? Does it speak of the lived material reality of the participants? While such questions are not easily answered, they have guided my practice of accountability towards my participants.

Throughout this research, as advised by Hollway (1984), I remained attentive to my underlying assumptions and embodied discourses while understanding that my lived experiences of adoption would be both similar and different to my participants’ lived experiences. Adoptees hold in common their constitution as legitimate through a specific act of legislation, but we have unique and varying experiences of the institution of adoption. Importantly, I assert that my personal interest did not bias the study negatively; instead, it enabled me to have a more inclusive and considered investigation into this significant social issue. Like Shawyer (1979), I question the notion that the lived experience of adoption could even be understood through outsider perception - “[i]t is impossible for most of us to imagine what it must be like not knowing who our parents are” (p. 4).

This work acknowledges Parker’s (2002) arguments about researchers needing to engage and attend to at least three layers of the research: our own position within the historical assumptions about research and how it is done; institutional limitations on what and how topics are explored; and who can answer questions and the role of personal alliances in the production of knowledge. Institutional discourses and regulations that govern knowledge production within the academy also delimited this

research. Telling stories through an academic institution is always situated and strategic, produced with a particular audience in mind (Riessman, 2008). However, I do have agency as I become what Behar (1993) identifies as a 'dual citizen' moving between the nation of academia and the land of adoption.

In qualitative research, reflexivity and ethics are intrinsically linked. Ethical practice at a conceptual level must begin with an understanding that power and knowledge are embedded in all aspects of the research. Reflexivity too, involves turning our analytic gaze on discourse and investigating how language works to construct us in our worlds (Davies et al., 2004). I simultaneously understand that I am caught up in my own subjectification while also seeing my participants as being constructed; we are delimited by the discourses of narratives available to us. As an effect, being reflexive means that I acknowledge the power relations within this research. As the researcher, I am a co-producer of knowledge and the interpretive agent with a particular kind of privilege in relation to other participants. Ultimately, I hold the legitimate position of the knower in terms of being the agent of investigation and the questioner - that is I shaped the interview context, gathered data and produced a particular story.

Understanding that the language I take up in particular ways represents lived experience has made me sensitive to the type of language I use. Research subjects are named as both subjects and participants with agency and are understood and positioned as the co-producers of knowledge (Parker, 2002). Cary (1999) talks to narrative histories being problematic as researchers can romanticise the use of voice, insufficiently contextualise situated knowing and the multifaceted nature of experience, and demand essentialist skills in narrating a story. My understanding of giving voice, as outlined by Josselson (2007), does not assume a collaborative role; as researcher, I am aware that my analysis did involve interpreting participants' meanings through their talk and their bodies.

### **Moving To and In an Adopted Body**

Interpreting talk is not always possible when it comes to adoptive experiences. Some experiences are located outside of taken-for-granted conversational language. In this sense, I am puzzled about the lived experience of adoption that seems to be without words; I am curious about the way in which this living involves bodies and how these bodies matter to adoptive experiences. Over the years while interacting with other adoptees, I noticed that there was a sense of affinity, a silent knowing or connection that occurred in the inter-subjective space between us. It was as if our adopted bodies recognised one another and enunciated a shared experience that non-adoptees could not know. That connection was powerful and yet it is unable to be verbally expressed, even amongst adoptees who recognised, felt and acknowledged it. This adopted body cannot access language because it is a body that cannot speak. Accordingly, to be able to value how the adopted body might matter, it is necessary to understand theories about the body. The following chapter attends to theories of the body that might contribute to an analysis of the participants' narratives in a bodily sense.



## **Chapter 4:**

# **Theorising the Adopted Body**

*A friend once asked me how I became involved in the adoption field.*

*I responded that it was easy. I was born into it. I was adopted*

*(Betty Jean Lifton, 1926-2010).*

## Theorising the Adopted Body

For the adopted subject, language to represent the adoption experience is bound by everyday knowledge of family, identity and the self we understand ourselves to be. Stepping outside of those taken-for-granted discourses is precarious and adoptees must attempt to speak a subjectivity beyond that which is spoken. I recognise that in my attempt to produce a text about adoption and adopted experiences I am constrained in and through the language in which I am produced. Language as a framework enables our day-to-day existence and our sense making and storytelling. Similarly, in writing/speaking about an adopted body, I am reliant on the language and theories of others and trying to enunciate a particular space for adoptees is fraught when there is no language for those experiences. In taking up particular language to speak about adopted bodies, I produce knowledge that signifies adopted experiences, but does not produce an authentic representation of an embodied experience. The adopted body is a lived/felt body that enunciates within a particular discursive space. That space is rarely accessible and telling the stories and experiences is a struggle. As an adoptee, I fight against the structure of language that disallows the place for the adopted subject. It is as if that place is just beyond my reach. And like Butler (1993), when I try to feel the “materiality of the body” I always find myself in “other domains” (p. ix). It is because of this, I necessarily want to enable a materialisation of adopted bodies.

*Adoption as a bodily experience struggles to be told; it is lived and felt at a cellular level. I learnt about the cellular level when my birth mother reached out and touched my arm for the first time and I felt a surge of electricity race through my nerves. It was an overwhelmingly unforgettable experience and the significance of it still puzzles me today. When I ponder what being adopted means my body whispers sounds, feelings and instinct, but it is unable to enunciate from that particular place. When I attempt to theorise how my body matters, my body speaks but in a feeling sense and I cannot name those feelings. For me the meaning of that lack in naming is twofold. Firstly the (im)moral illegitimate body has been denied subjectification, the practices of control that constitute a subject, because of being constituted as the legal fiction, as if born to and here the illegitimate body is denied a living birth history. Secondly, through the act of adoption taking up the born to position is problematic and removes any freedom to experience that position - and when it was taken up for me, after a reunion, the living and experiencing was limited - and that was always felt.*

After communicating with other adoption researchers and after reading and researching the adopted experience for a number of years, it became clear to me that adoption literature and research neglects the adopted body. Body is only represented through and within genetic and pathological discourse, where the adopted body expresses genetic heritability of disease or disorder (as discussed in Chapter 2). As a specific disorder, Genetic Sexual Attraction speaks an adopted body that defies cultural rules that prohibit genetic sexual relationships - yet how the adopted body matters to adoptees’

experiences is ignored. Perhaps this neglect spawns from the conviction that the adopted body is unimportant because the adoption event produced a legitimate body, bound by the same rules and regulations that constitute the non-adopted body. The adopted body becomes as if the non-adopted body - equivalent and the same. Historically notions of body/sense are associated with women and, as Grosz (1994) suggests, the male/female binary positions women as secondary to men with bodies that are “frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusion which are not under conscious control” (p. 13). As such, the study of bodies does not gain patriarchal or scientific respect. Perhaps here also, the birth mother relationship becomes non-existent when the practices of adoption construct alternative bodies and identities, and it is possible to ignore the violence of the birth child cut. Mainstream psychology relegates the body to an individualised empirical entity, valued only for its physiological effects, not as constituted and constituting. To enable the lived/felt experience of the adopted body to be written/spoken, theories of the body are necessary.

This chapter attends to notions of body, embodiment and emotion while discussing the problematics of speaking/writing and theorising the adopted body. I engage with Foucault’s notions of the docile body and represent Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological body to attend to the lived embodied experience of the adopted subject. I explore the literature on embodiment and what that may enable and constrain, and I look at the emotional body and how it is represented in a narrative sense. Narratives enable subjects to produce themselves in storylines; they are an organising principle of human action. Finally, Freeman’s ‘narrative unconsciousness’ enables the presence of the absence to be storied. While tracing the threads I asked, how do bodies implicate themselves in the experience of an adoptee and what are the effects?

### **Foucault’s Inscribed Body**

Foucault represents the body as inscribed with meaning (N. Crossley, 1996). Here knowledge as a form of power and a model of surveillance enables the regulation and disciplining of bodies. To elucidate how Foucault produced this premise it is necessary to trace some of the history that Foucault traced and to sketch out judicial practices and the rise of models of truth. The movements towards a body that is written upon can be seen in the varying forms of governance that enacted power onto its subjects (bodies). During the feudal and monarchical systems the king had limitless power over his nameless subjects (Foucault, 1994; Sarup, 1993). At that time, ideas of crime equated to those of sacrilege. While punishment was not about reformation of an offender, it aimed to reinforce the sanctity of the law. The judiciary exercised power, but only arrested small numbers<sup>10</sup>. Law, according to Foucault (1994), was an extension of war. Punishment had to be monumental to frighten and deter subjects from acts of crime. Power was exercised on bodies directly with armies waging war, taking goods, land,

<sup>10</sup> During this historical period, the notion of juridical related to the arrangement and the representation of power not the law (Tadros, 1998), as we understand juridical in today’s sense. Here juridical pertains to the law and the administration proceedings of the law.

property or estates, ultimately strengthening the power of the monarch. It controlled the distribution of goods and accordingly bodies (Gutting, 2005). However, practices of power among these societies were imprecise (Sarup, 1993).

In the second half of the Middle Ages, with a new political structure and the rebirth of inquiry (previously performed centuries earlier), judicial practices saw the beginning of European domination of the world. Here, to enact judicial practices, a representative of the king would draw on subjects deemed knowledgeable about morality, property and law. Sworn to honour, they were bestowed the power to deliberate and resolve certain social problems. The notables took up these positions without pressure or torture, and were encouraged to represent the truth. Truth was of great importance, and truth seeking occurred through intensive interrogation techniques, such as a public torture and execution. Foucault recognised that truth seeking practices were already being enacted in the Church, although more spiritually; for example with the confessional truth (Danaher et al., 2000; Foucault, 1977, 1994; Shumway, 1989). Thus, an origin for these practices of inquiry is located within administrative and religious spheres.

Such forms of judicial inquiry extended into social and economic knowledge production. From the thirteenth century, this model of inquiry, administered by the kings' prosecutors enabled new forms of inquiry procedures to proliferate. Here inquiry techniques were mainly administrative and economic, with examination of populations, money, resources and so forth. The overall goal was to increase monarchical power. It was during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that notables sought truth in the fields of geography, astronomy and the environment. These inquiries enabled the technique of voyage and the discovery and domination of other lands (Foucault, 1994), such as, and eventually, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The enlightenment period saw the ideals of freedom and movement contesting domination and control by the monarch over its citizens. The old order of mandated sovereignty, injustice and ignorance were replaced with an enlightened attitude of reason and rationality. However, a set of disciplinary techniques separate from the enlightenment ideal and riding on the back of revolutionary tactics in effect produced biopower. Here, knowledge and technology analyse, regulate, control and define the human body and its behaviour. It promised to be a more private, competent and effective way to control citizens than forms of punishment such as public torture or practices of war (Danaher et al., 2000; Shumway, 1989). Investigation enabled judgement of the truth of crime, its protagonists and the ability to apply legal punishment (Foucault, 1977).

The protests against public execution during the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century saw movements towards a disciplinary society (Foucault, 1977). This shift in social formation was traced through the penal justice system. Initially penal reforms involved deportation, forced labour, shaming, public scandal and retaliatory tactics as forms of deterrence against transgressing civil law (distinguished from moral transgressions). However, these modes of punishment quickly disappeared because they were thought to be symbolic acts. Acts of legislation began to define crime and regulated

what was harmful for society. This was the emergence of legislation as a form of control. The criminal became the social enemy. In the early nineteenth century, the formation of the prison system occurred, while the punished and tortured body through execution was largely avoided (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1994).

Penal legislation moved away from principles of social utility and targeted the individual. It was no longer about eradicating social harm, but controlling individual bodies through psychologically and morally reforming attitudes and behaviours (Foucault, 1980, 1994; Sarup, 1993). In this sense it became about what people could, might, or were about to do. Yet the judiciary alone could not achieve the control of individuals' (bodies) future actions. Institutions such as the police and psychiatric and medical facilities became technologies of surveillance and correction. It was now vital to correct individuals' potentialities to maintain civil and moral order (Sarup, 1993).

According to Sarup (1993), movement from monarchical power to disciplinary power is typified by Foucault's portrayal of the Panopticon. Derived from the rhetoric of Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is an architectural metaphor that represents the control of mind over mind. The holder of this control is the figure of the warden or inspector who acts as the invisible omnipresence. The Panopticon is a circular shaped building with cells around the circumference to hold prisoners. In the centre of the structure are wardens, with their watchtower providing the ultimate view of every cell, allowing for round-the-clock surveillance. Prisoners' cells are illuminated constantly, while the watchtower remains very dark. Prisoners are carefully scrutinised but with little idea of when or how they are being observed (Bozovic, 1995; Danaher et al., 2000; Foucault, 1977, 1994; MacLachlan, 2004; Sarup, 1993). Although prisons have not literally taken up such architectural design, Foucault takes up this metaphor as an example of the way disciplinary forces operate (Danaher et al., 2000). Panopticism exerts power, not through inquiry as with monarchical practices and truth seeking, but through surveillance and examination (Foucault, 1977, 1994; Shumway, 1989). The structure and properties of the Panopticon reverberate throughout society to discipline the bodies of citizens (Bartky, 1990).

The premise that prisoners learn to police their own behaviour extended to schools, army barracks and hospitals. The warden is replaced by the teacher, doctor, manager or anyone who holds a position of authority (Bartky, 1990; Foucault, 1980, 1994; MacLachlan, 2004; Shumway, 1989). Systems were established to enable this new form of power, panopticism, to take effect. Profiling, marking and classifying were all used, as was group surveillance of students and patients. These practices became generalised and widely used (Sarup, 1993). The social and political movements that constructed the institutionalisation of adoption, as explored in Chapter 1, represent the Panopticon in effect.

The Panopticon is a mechanism of power that cannot be avoided but which no-one knows. According to Sarup (1993), the Panopticon, the all-seeing, is synonymous with a Christian understanding of God as infinite wisdom, Freud's super-ego as the overseer of unconscious wishes and

computer surveillance in capitalism. The disciplining of the body needed technological power as populations grew and problems of public health and hygiene, housing, illness and fertility arose. Importantly such strategies of control are contextual, beginning with local conditions and specific needs. These strategies grew gradually and occurred prior to any class strategies. Here, we see the training and regulation of bodies emerging through institutions whereby bodies became practical and docile, industrious and subjective.

In contemporary societies, agencies of punishment and technologies of control are ubiquitous. As an impersonal system of surveillance, the psychology of the individual is paramount. Intention to act, not the transgression of an act is the criterion of guilt. Those previous acts of power did not justify the cost in relation to the results. Instead disciplinary power, enabled through institutions, knowledge and discourse, produce the body to become its own overseer (Foucault, 1980; Sarup, 1993). Disciplinary power becomes a system of self-surveillance.

Foucault has phrased his assertions about disciplinary surveillance and micro-power or the regulation of the body as 'the gaze'. We have a sense that we are observed constantly and when our bodies deviate from social norms, the expectations of the forms and actions it should take up, feelings of shame or guilt are experienced as power acts on the actions of the bodies. Control over the body's time and space is rigid. For instance, the ring of a school bell and clocking in at work regulate daily activities into discrete and segmented units. More is required of the body today than just a product of labour. The disciplinary society requires the body to conform in its gestures and behaviours. In this sense, the gaze is not just enacted by others; we embody and act out this as a form of self-surveillance. We monitor our own bodies and actions (Bartky, 1990; Danaher et al., 2000).

As previously discussed, forms of disciplinary power are, necessarily, not without resistance. Even within the prison systems, the technologies of control that produce the docile body are not without problems. Prisons can be a location whereby offenders come together, exchange ideas, strategies and so forth, or as Danaher (2000) puts it "where they can learn to be an effective and efficient criminal" (p. 80). Instead of reforming criminals into productive and responsible citizens, prisons produce new criminals where they go underground and perhaps become more ingrained in the criminal lifestyle (Foucault, 1980). When a system constantly speaks of deviant, lazy or useless subjects, they can in effect take up such rhetoric. In this sense, power has succeeded in 'writing' people; however, the results are not always as systematic or uniform.

MacLauchlan (2004) interprets Foucault's arguments as relevant to notions of embodiment because of the discourses that constitute normal/abnormal. Contrary to taken-for-granted knowledge of abnormality as a deviation from the norm, it is the reverse. We seek signs of abnormality to know what is normal. With abnormal or immoral bodies, we can then identify normal and moral bodies. No matter what the social function of abnormality may be in a given culture, the effects remain the same.

Foucault's notion of bio-history represents the way in which the human body is enmeshed in social practices and how they lead to processes of acculturation, knowledge and truth (Burkitt, 1999).

Pressures from the multiplicity of life and history interact with one another. Burkitt's (1999) reading of Foucault suggests that biological life is entangled with history, emotion and narrative sense making; separating the two is impossible. Each interacts and affects one another. The body is at the root of this connection between biology and history, and as the body moves with time so has the human capacity to think and know.

Danaher (2000) reads Foucault's understanding of power as discernible from the Marxist based theories of hegemony. Foucault had become disillusioned with Marxist theory (Gutting, 2001). For instance, in his writings on political hegemony as an educational process, Antonio Gramsci's Marxist theory argues that the powerful do not have to force their values and beliefs onto the less powerful. Instead, they are accepted as status quo; the differences in power and wealth within societies are natural and fair. People conform, as a form of sociality, and consent to the rules of the discourse that positions others as their superiors. Therefore, it is argued that hegemony is acted at the level of the mind because people come to believe that the social order is essential and just, it is not forced upon them (Danaher et al., 2000; Monasta, 1993). Problematically, as with any model that only considers individual beliefs or mental frameworks, is the assumption of a right way to reason resulting in the reification of sense making abilities through reason. For Gramsci, hegemony represents a type of false consciousness that can be 'righted' by showing people the truth of hegemonic dominance or exploitation (Danaher et al., 2000).

The Foucaultian view understands that there is no singular existence, no right or wrong, because the assumptions, discourses and institutional powers that form our societies mediate knowledge and experience of our subjectivity. Here, power is represented through the ways in which we perform, act or take up the bodily 'self'. Social rules, as written on our bodies, inform how we behave (Danaher et al., 2000). As asserted earlier, power is neither an institution, a structure nor a strength we possess; it is a complex strategic relationship within particular societies (Foucault, 1994; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994). For Foucault, power is the name given to certain coherency in social relationships. Adoptees, for example, embody secrecy and silence as a moral code for behaviour and as dictated by the Adoption Act 1955. Many adoptees do not overtly resist that code or perform outside of the desired socially sanctioned understanding of family as different or other to the norm. As the body is inscribed by particular rules it means they are always, already there. They are acted, often without thought.

### **Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Body**

Merleau-Ponty represents the body as lived (N. Crossley, 1996). Here, the body-subject is valued because accessing and being-in-the-world are achieved through our senses in everyday life. Often taken-for-granted, perception in lived experience is just how we exist; it is devoid of conscious thought. Prior to rational thinking, before our thoughts facilitate concepts and language, our body is always, already engaged. The body-subject is the foundation of thinking. We see, we hear, we feel - we

use our perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist, professed that we must rediscover the world through perception, a way of being that we are prone to forget because the rational thinking body is valued. Discarding dualistic thought, Merleau-Ponty argues that the mind and body are interwoven; one cannot exist without the other. Embodied we exist in the physical, denying this is to deny our existence at all. Merleau-Ponty, according to Noland (2009), is interested in how the body is implicated in what the mind thinks it knows.

Like most critical thinkers, Merleau-Ponty represents the human sciences as the dominant knowledge producing industry, to be problematic because it positions senses as untrustworthy, even delusional, denying access to what is 'real'. Ignoring senses occurs in the pursuit of the scientific rules and reasoning about what it means to know humanness. Here, science is again culpable for taking up a metaphor of physical and physiological mechanisms or reducing experience to pseudo-explanatory systems of intellectual operations, such as judgement or attitude. Merleau-Ponty did not dismiss the value of science and its movements and contributions to societies but he unquestionably wanted its fallibility read. Science does not provide a complete knowing of the world, nor should it profess to do so (Burkitt, 1999; Gutting, 2001; MacLachlan, 2004). It is insufficient to study concepts or actions that are founded in the much-lived experience from which it is reduced. Instead Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides a tangible account of being-in-the-world (Gutting, 2001). Knowledge of humanness requires understanding through perception, not a theory on how it should/must be. In this sense, when science prescribes particular ways of seeing the world it limits other possibilities for being-in-the-world (N. Crossley, 1996; MacLachlan, 2004). For example, when the adopted body is positioned as individualised and disordered, the adopted body as a product of a moral/social discourse is ignored. Merleau-Ponty's contentions provide a framework for enabling adopted experiences without the constraints of non-adoptees' models of humanness. The silenced, lived, felt existence can be understood because lived experience is valued as knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty, still situated within the turn to language, also assigns a place for the body. Language as part of our human survival produces and reproduces the depth or quality of our experience. The body is foundational and through the actions of the embodiment of language where it is spoken and sounded, in space and time, the body is able to live and speak to others. Language cannot be conceived of as an addition to the body, with speech the conduit of thought because often we do not know our own thoughts until spoken (Munro & Belova, 2009). Merleau-Ponty struggled with the phenomenological idea of there being a relationship between pre- and post-linguistic experience. He questioned whether pre-linguistic experience could ever be sufficient once language has been acquired.

Our embodied existence is in relationship to the world, our experience of the world is influenced and influences our experience of being-in-the-world (MacLachlan, 2004). We do not experience our own or others bodies as objects, like a table or a cup. However, in everyday living, we are not aware of minds and bodies just of other human beings. Knowledge of ourselves and others are experienced as a unified whole (Matthews, 2002). And how we relate to our own and other bodies

matters. In this sense, when we understand behaviour from the 'inside' it can enable phenomena, for example illness, disability, disease or dysfunction to be understood as more than mechanical malfunctioning of an object. Some experiences have emotional meaning to give them a quality and a relationship to other qualities that enables connections among experiences that otherwise have nothing in common. We only know others through their bodies, the way they move, talk, gesture and so forth. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body does not stand as a subject to an object, the possibility of meaning is engaged through the body-subject (N. Crossley, 1996). Corporeal reactions facilitate meanings that may be lived differently if the body is not engaged. Relationships to people, places and things are not distant; each speaks to our body and how we live in the world. Phenomenology is not a-historical, it values lived experience as historically and culturally mediated (Solomon, 2006). Merleau-Ponty represents the social and the biological as inseparable processes.

An important facet of Merleau-Ponty's argument is the movement away from the transcendental ego (identity that our minds create), and the meaning attached to consciousness. It involves a style of thinking that sheds what we know as existence, or what we commonly think of as existence. In doing this we open ourselves up to a more explicit understanding of the ways in which we are bound to, and situated in the world. By loosening our assumptions about consciousness, phenomenological analysis prohibits a complete reduction of our identity to our consciousness of ourselves from our embodied world (Gutting, 2001). Phenomenology does not seek to profess some previously unobtainable truth about the world, but challenges false conceptions as represented by science and everyday language. It is a return to the body, our genesis.

Intentionality represents the union between the world and consciousness. This unity is the fundamental beginning of phenomenology. Husserl's notion of intentionality was interpreted by Merleau-Ponty to mean more than knowing and experiencing the world through acts of consciousness that are directed towards some object, it is a fundamental priority which is intrinsic to us. Here, the body as a perceiving and experiential body is intimately entwined and engaged with the world (Gutting, 2001). Merleau-Ponty makes a shift in his understanding of intentionality to encompass notions of motility (Solomon, 2006). "Motility, then, is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point in space of which we have formed a representation beforehand. In order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the 'in-itself'" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 161). In this sense, motility refers to movements of cells within the body. It is towards a connected object, distinct from a transcendental ego, where movement occurs prior to any conscious knowing or explanation of it. The body inhabits time and space, and intentions are not secondary to the body. Movement matters.

The phenomenological field is the immediate experience as we live in it. We can never be fully disengaged from this field. We can never go below it as with empiricist reductionism, nor above it with idealistic philosophising (Gutting, 2001). By situating the body as central to our experience, we avoid transcendental analysis or scientific reductionism. Gutting (2001) provides the metaphor of a pinprick

to explicate the way in which the lived experience of bodies matters; the experience of a pinprick is dependent on the pin but also on the body experiencing the prick. Pre-conceptual structuring in the body enables the constitution, or experience of the object in a subject's experience. To belong in the world is not a disengaged, objective consciousness of a world, outside of us - we are in that world; there is no lucid separation between the subjectivity that perceives and the object that it perceives. However, the perceiver has a meaning that defines the limits of its engagement with the object.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) applies the case of the phantom limb to argue for the need for a being-in-the-world paradigm. After a limb amputation, it is possible to experience the missing limb as if it is still present. Physiological and psychological theories cannot explain that phenomenon in isolation. Both enable a more comprehensive understanding, therefore any need to select between describing the present nerve transmissions or the not present remembered limb needs to be removed. Merleau-Ponty (1962) challenges scientific efforts to explain the phantom limb empirically when he asserts that the absent limb is still in relationship to parts of the world that 'speak' to the limb. The limb has an ambivalent presence. The subject retains a practical knowing of action that was present before the limb was lost; the habitual body learns to do things in the world with continuous repetition, such as turning a doorknob or drinking from a glass. Therefore, objects such as a glass are always manipulable (reaching for the glass) even if it is not possible to do so. This impersonal response remains even when the personal experience of actually doing it is no longer available. Our being-in-the-world is ambiguous and the impersonal and personal are indistinguishable (Gutting, 2001). In the phantom limb example, the limb is a part of the past that remains quasi-present, it is more than a memory - it is a virtual experience. This experience can often remain on the periphery but at times, and under particular situations, it becomes central. The body matters.

Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran (1996), leading neurologists, conducted research into the phantom limb experience and inter-sensory effects. Patients who experienced phantom arms felt that they could move their phantom arms, although for many the phantom was experienced as paralysed into a cramped position that could be extremely painful. Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran (1996) suggest sensory feedback, via vision or proprioception, determines that the limb has not moved and results in the feelings of paralysis. The feedback is etched onto brain circuitry so that when the limb is absent the brain thinks it is paralysed. A virtual reality box, featuring a mirror, enables the visible restoration of the phantom limb. The patient saw the normal arm superimposed through the mirror onto the location of the phantom. When a patient moved their normal arm, they saw and felt the phantom move. Some patients no longer felt pain while for others the phantom and associated pain were entirely removed. This research highlights the way in which scientific research can be helpful to understanding the body and necessarily fits well with a phenomenological approach. Thomas (2005) argues for a phenomenological approach to nursing research because it offers invaluable insight into the lived experience of a range of disease conditions. The virtual reality box also enables a metaphor to understand the process of mirroring for adopted bodies; adoptees describe

missing a mirror of themselves - physically, psychologically and characteristically when raised in a family with no genetic similarities. It also represents the phantom m/other.

### **Melding Together Knowledge of a Body**

This work takes up the position that the body is both lived and inscribed. Following N. Crossley (1996), when melding together knowledge of the body cohesion occurs between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty when they agree that understanding the body as a lived experience, constitutive and constituting, is commonly missing in traditional research. Although the premise of the scientific reductionist approach is to value the body as the basis for behaviour, the empirical, rational body is simply represented as a closed, physiological object based system. Foucault and Merleau-Ponty understand the body as more than a physiological structure. They conceptualise a body that is acted on and responsive. Dismissing the body as a distinctive object, they both refute any mind/body split.

Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, in their particular representations, value the body as a socio-historical location and in this sense the body represents the vessel that carries a history. They both investigate the behaviour of bodies, and when moulded together their philosophies enable a body where the corporeality of habits (acquired skills and techniques) forms a basis for being-in-the-world. And as habit-based, the body takes up social actions from the available cultural resources. The body embraces, utilises and modifies these cultural resources skilfully, and as required. Both agree that intelligence and reason, founded in embodied action, are not some inner mental processes separate from the body.

Gutting (2001) reads the way in which Foucault and Merleau-Ponty sought a way of thinking that was based in a concrete reality of human existence, with an end point of liberation. Merleau-Ponty grounded this 'concreteness' in phenomenology through Marxist ideas and initially Foucault also took up such ideas. Foucault agreed with Merleau-Ponty's philosophies that transcendental subjectivity is possible only through a body that is in the world, which means it is also an object of the world. Here it is impossible to separate the subject-object. Both men opposed the reduction of man to either an empirical or transcendental division. Foucault, according to Gutting (2001), would assent to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its primary focus on embodied consciousness (man-in-the-world) because phenomenology offers a way in which to resolve the dual status of man. Foucault argues that man is an empirico-transcendental doublet in that he simultaneously represents the transcendental source of knowledge while also being the subject of that knowledge (Gutting, 2005). To remedy this problematic, understanding man as being-in-the-world enables analysis of real-life experience and contests reductionist assumptions, such as with the empirical or transcendental conditions. Phenomenology attempts to negotiate those tensions, separating the empirical and the transcendental whilst being directed at both.

Melding the philosophies of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty does involve tensions, with the differences between the two scholars lying in the way they develop their antecedent conditions (N.

Crossley, 1996; May, 2005). Further differences lie in the way in which historical behaviours are understood. While Foucault represents their political history and how they function, Merleau-Ponty understands their existential functions to enable being-in-the-world. N. Crossley (1996) highlights this point through feelings. Foucault seeks a genealogical analysis of feelings and explores how they matter in current life, while Merleau-Ponty locates feelings as situated forms of behaviour that constitute being in relationships or with objects. Change and constancy are another issue. Foucault advocates the unstable, fluid subject while Merleau-Ponty signifies the body-subject as stable because of its habits. Free agency is based in this stability. However, here, given that Foucault and Merleau-Ponty have different temporal positions, it is not problematic because Foucault's perspective is a historically enduring perspective, while Merleau-Ponty considers the hour-by-hour, here and now.

N. Crossley (1996) cites Levin's (1989) critique of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty in his work. Here, irreconcilable differences are found in the notions of agency and power. Foucault views the body as docile; technologies of power shape the body, which is contingent on the social times and what forms of bodies need to be produced. Although Merleau-Ponty has a culturally informed body, it is a body that actively enacts the rules of prescribed behaviour. The body depends on cultural repertoires and is responsible for the reproduction of social actions that are historically located. This is the 'acting' lived body. These arguments are challenged by N. Crossley when he states that both scholars represent the body as "active and acted upon: a locus of action and a target of power" (p. 104). Both believe that governmental regulation and constancy is achieved at a corporeal level. Here, the social order occurs with attempts to control and direct the actions of the body. Foucault understands power as a relationship between actors that is sustained by each recognising that one another is a person that acts; "[power] requires a person who acts and a person who acts upon those actions" (N. Crossley, p. 105). Merleau-Ponty does not implicitly discuss body-power, however he considers oppression and control and political situatedness. Nonetheless, both value the body as active and acted upon, while having different foci in that Foucault considers the acted upon agent, while Merleau-Ponty studies the active agent.

The conceptualisation of body and space is different for both. Foucault's theory of bodies conceptualises them as controlled and regulated by the organisation of space. That body is positioned in space and the environment; for example, hospitals, orphanages and family homes also secure and effect controls over the body. For Merleau-Ponty the active body, within its environment, creates a functional space around it. Using its schemas and habits, the body positions the world around it and uses the world to meet its ends (N. Crossley, 1996). Merging the ideas from both enables this thesis to value a body that is organised and controlled by space, but that this space can only serve its political functions by bodies that perform the functions required of that space.

Historically Foucault did have a relationship with phenomenology, albeit an existential phenomenology that was not derived from Merleau-Ponty's ideas. However, he came to reject aspects of the existential subjective standpoint, arguing that phenomenology is inadequate in its theories of

language, the unconscious and social systems. His definite break from phenomenology occurs at the historical sphere. Sartre, as read by Gutting (2001), claimed that history is known only via the free subject. Foucault rejected that assumption, claiming that Sartre ignored the impressive work of Ferdinand Braudel and his colleagues who moved away from individual experience (history as the acts of kings for example) and produced an interesting analysis of social history as seen through the broader perspective of geography and natural resources. In this sense, Foucault tried to effect a similar change of perspective in the history of thought. Foucault also dismissed Sartre's aims for universally recognised theories; theorising for him aimed only to highlight specific, localised issues such as madness or punishment. Foucault produced historical genealogies, not fundamental overarching theoretical knowledge. Further, Gutting (2001) argues that Foucault refuted the universal intellectual (the master of truth), by stating that theory and practice needed to solve social and political problems through the specific intellectual - those concretely embedded at the coalface. Grand theories, for Foucault, no longer had an effect. Arguments and evidence as tools for the normal academic approach were not a concern of Foucault. At times his engagement with notions such as embodiment were vague and rudimentary (N. Crossley, 1996; May, 2005).

Some theorists (Grosz, 1993, 1994; Levin, 1989) argue that Foucault and Merleau-Ponty are emphatically opposed. For example, from an psychoanalytic position, Grosz (1994) finds that the inscribed body discards any phenomenological body of intentionality (and indeed the psychoanalytic notions of psychic depth). Grosz (1993) does not believe they can be melded together because phenomenology, like psychoanalysis, understands the body as its experience, while a Foucaultian approach understand the body as that which is marked, written upon and produced by institutional power<sup>11</sup>. These differences produce competing accounts (N. Crossley, 1996; May, 2005). However, after careful consideration of the debates, I mirror N. Crossley's position and value the tensions between them as complementary knowledge of bodies. The body in this thesis is both acted upon and lived. Using this inclusive approach enables a broader, fuller and more inclusive understanding of adoption, where other possibilities for living adoption can emerge. Knowledge of both an acted up and acting body enables me to ask how the adopted body has mattered to the experience of adoptees and what effect that has had on the inscription of a moral and legitimate order.

## **Embodiment**

While situating Merleau-Ponty and Foucault alongside each other, it was also necessary to contemplate the notion of embodiment, or as MacLachlan (2004) broadly explains "the identification of an abstract idea with a physical entity" (p. 2). The language of embodiment is sated within critical literature and such literature is wide-ranging and diverse. How one takes up the notion and how it is written depends on the assumptions brought to the research. Morgan (2005) talks to how the body has "multi-vocal

<sup>11</sup> There is an entire field of post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that approaches bodies from another location, see Grosz (1993, 1994); however this work does not take up those ideas.

possibilities ... [that] enable us to speak of embodying domination and transforming social power relations” (p. 357). She argues that among and across talk, there is a shared interest and a common concern with the politics and ethics of the body. There are multiple ways in which we can enable the body’s multi-vocal voices to speak. These arguments enable me to recognise that by re-inscribing/writing bodies to produce particular forms of human subjectivities, within a critical location, it opens up other possibilities (material, pre-discursive etc.) while simultaneously evoking questions about the construction of body/embodiment. Here I borrow from Morgan’s (2005) argument about the multi-vocal body that transforms and shifts within temporal frames and defies the entitlement of a grand theory of embodiment and subjectivity. With that in mind, each of the theories that follow take up notions of embodiment, with their distinctive and overlapping meanings.

Embodiment represents the way in which the body cannot be separated from the mind, contrary to the Cartesian mind/body split. In the seventeenth century, Descartes declared that if he could think then he existed - “I think, therefore I am” (MacLachlan, 2004, p. 2). At this site, ‘pure’ knowledge is obtained and understood only by removing the senses because of their unreliable nature. Descartes produced numerous works and the Cartesian philosophy became foundational to natural science. Here, the emergence of a mind/body dualism, and such epistemological assumptions such as the mind not being a physical phenomenon has been widely accepted with a distinction between the mental and physical continuing today. The body is an object to measure, treat and modify. According to MacLachlan (2004) Christian rhetoric is also implicated in the separation of the body and mind. By objectifying the body, science could perform its work and remove any suggestion that God’s body was being tampered with, thereby preventing any disapproval from Christian communities. Further, Christianity positions the body as something imperfect and corruptible, therefore it is proper to transcend or subdue the body and bodily needs. Sex outside marriage (birth mother’s transgression) is an example of a corrupted body. Grosz (1994) postulates that the mind/body split is associated with notions of immortal and mortal. When alive, mind and soul are united, however the soul (as Christ) is immortal while the body and morality belongs in the human realm. Critical research has long contested this Cartesian mind/body split (Morgan, 2005).

MacLachlan’s (2004) idea of embodiment encompassing an “abstract idea with a physical entity” (p. 2), is understood, for instance, when notions of shame are represented in the body (sinking feeling in the stomach, head lowered). Here the shaming action or social discourse is embodied. Radley (1996) distinguishes between notions of embodiment and body, signifying embodiment, not body, as the vital condition of psychological and social life. As the medium for display, our embodiment talks to the collective and individual positions we take towards one another and shape the world in which we meet. It becomes the conduit for us to display what matters and how, and is the key to the social world. The physical body is bounded to individual events of corporeality, or social judgements and the constraints of bodily actions. It is recognised that the body feels pain, gets sick, has desires and is dependent upon the material world. However, we are more than a physical experience through our

individuated bodies. And in this sense, we engage and shape cultural norms to enable or prohibit our bodily functions. Further arguing against a division between the physical body and discourse where the body is relegated to a material resource of the signifying power of language, Radley (1996) asserts that bodily expression enables us to reconfigure the possibilities of life; we play, invite emotion, close off interaction and communicate. Embodiment realises a material and sentient position. We transform our bodies through collective action. This premise enables me to theorise the importance of body in the social world of the adoptee. For instance, in the case of an adoptee not matching in physical appearance to that of the adopted family, the physical world takes on a particular significance because the physical world is one of social engineering, where cultural norms have shared and contested meanings.

More specifically, Noland (2009) emphasises gesture in notions of embodiment. While trying to theorise human agency, Noland states gesture, the learned techniques of the body, is the site at which cultural conditioning is concurrently embodied and experienced. Noland's (2009) theory of agency places movement or gesture at centre stage because it is pivotal to understanding how humans are embodied within, and impress themselves on, the world. The moving body is more than chance because agency does not spring automatically from somewhere inside the body as an autonomous, undisciplined source. Gestures, as a form of inscription, are the grammatical constituents of the body; here the body represents itself as human anatomy while immersed within culturally specific bodily practices. While performing a task the body is concurrently measuring space, checking pressure and friction and negotiating weight. These kinaesthetic processes affect the making and meaning of gesture. So, gesture fashions the moving body, transforming it into a form of sign. For example, the moving body performs the socially sanctioned gestures for gender or ethnicity. Kinaesthetic awareness, such as noticing a reaction of anger, means that subjects can change the way in which they move.

Cultural practices are embodied and challenged through corporeal performance. In this sense, kinaesthetic experience as embodied gesturing is, to Noland (2009), a demand on the way in which the body is conditioned and therefore evokes variations in performances that account for larger innovations in cultural practice. Variations in performance speak to resistances, but not in the Foucaultian sense. Noland (2009) argues Foucault produces an agonistic account of binary power, with the docile body also able to take up and attend to that same body. For her, the cultural field is differential, not oppositional, which she claims allows her to investigate a range of variations in performance.

Another perspective concerns narrative and time. Munro and Belova (2009) discuss the body being present when there are gaps in the narrative storytelling. In such moments, when stories fail, the body no longer sustains its passive position. In these moments, the body makes itself known. These experiences, in time, can be fleeting if a new narrative direction is found and further action taken up. For example, I have experienced silence as an adoptee trying to narrate how adoption matters to my body and in those moments my body is felt, but as the conversation restarts my body is soon forgotten. The underlying assumptions here concern the link between the body and narrative. The body is reflexive and can move and shift with and within the materials that the world provides. Munro and

Belova (2009) remove conventional understandings of embodiment from their theory with the body becoming “a ‘resister’ of the interruption of narrative” (p. 87). When narratives are lost during conversation, the body becomes captivated, with a stream of sense data flooding the body. During these moments, we become present to what is, the noticing of materiality is intensified and a sense of time stopping is felt.

Notions of embodiment as a site of knowing have necessarily been critiqued. Latimer (2008) questions how bodies are located as knowing and unknowing and what is enabled because of this. Differently performed bodies produce different worlds. Embodiment is described as world reflecting, in that our bodies are shaped through culture and social actions. In this sense, bodies hold little possibility for change other than through local effects. The body becomes individuated and habituated. For change to occur it requires cultural mirroring. The notion of embodiment is relevant to the lived experiences of adoption. It enables a way to theorise how the body speaks and acts as constituted through the Adoption Act 1955 and as a place of resistance to the governing discourse that produces it. The adopted body that is culturally conditioned needs to be accessible. And another way in which it matters is through the experience of emotion.

### **Emotions as a Discursive Device for Lived Experience**

Psychology, in its many and varying forms, obviously has a long history of defining, researching and producing knowledge about emotions. Particular ways of taking up the study of emotion rest on particular sets of assumptions and affect the way in which emotions are read. For example, behavioural theory attests to four inherent emotions, with emotional complexities developing through conditioning and learning. Here, emotions are respondent type behaviours. Cognitive theory argues that emotions and cognition are intimately related and to think of emotion is nigh impossible without also considering cognitive function. Subjects make a cognitive appraisal of an event or situation which then causes a feeling or an emotional response (Manstead & Tetlock, 1989; Strongman, 2003). Physiological theory, possibly one of the most pervasive schools of thought, stresses either the neurophysiological (brain mechanisms) or the biological evolutionary (adaptive reactions based on survival) trajectories of emotion (Strongman, 2003). However, to draw entirely from an epistemology of emotion as physiology means that any emotional representation becomes simply secondary to physiological process. That is not to argue against emotions having a connection to the brain, as neurophysiological theory has us understand; indeed specific brain processes are attached to emotional states.

Emotions, however, can be understood in multiple and diverse ways and within the social sciences, the focus on embodiment has necessarily seen more attention given to the study of emotions (Burkitt, 1999). Emotions are more than a causal state attached to the brain, more than a bodily function that produces bodily response (facial expression, clenching of the fist). According to Solomon (2006), a phenomenological understanding of emotions means they are more inclusively positioned as bodily and experiential. In this way, a central feature of emotional experience is intentionality, the

phenomenological idea that the world and consciousness are united. From a phenomenological perspective, emotions have an object. The object of intention can be a number of things such as people's behaviour or a plot in a storyline, as previously explained. Emotions are an engagement with the world. That engagement can be towards a determinate or indeterminate object, such as something that is unknown. Solomon (2006) and Thomas (2005) explain how Merleau-Ponty positions the body as the subject of emotions. Any study of emotion must take up a phenomenology of the body and movement and if we ignore this then analysis of lived experience would be incomplete.

Further consideration is necessary to distinguish emotions and feelings. Some explanations include feelings as bodily sensations, feelings as essential to emotion and feelings as non-intentional (Solomon, 2006). Merleau-Ponty's ideas of motility enable an understanding of feeling as more than the physiological sensation of firing neurons, hormonal release or increased heart rates. Here motility, or action readiness, is intimately connected to emotional experience (Thomas, 2005). Emotional experience is a diversity of feelings, physiological and musculature. Voluntary muscle movement and their sensations can be spontaneous and hardwired, as in facial expressions. Other sensations can be due to action preparation, like when clenching teeth for biting. In a sense, the subject can be aware or not of the sensation, it can be conscious or unconscious. Nonetheless preparing for action is intended to result in action. And here intention meets intentionality. The feelings can be part of the emotion signal of intention to act and talk, to do something in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Solomon, 2006).

According to Solomon (2006), a phenomenology of emotion is an exploration of the essential structures of emotion. Solomon is uncomfortable with the language of structure representing an innate essence or rigidity, but his insistence on emotions having a structure is an insistence that emotions are imbued with judgement and concepts. He also insists that the most important structure is intentionality and that emotion is first and foremost an experience of the world. Intentionality and motility involve the way in which the body experiences and moves in the world prior to any conscious experience of the movement (Gutting, 2001). Experiences can include feeling one's body, including autonomic processes, or action and movement. These experiences are so vast and varying that to attempt to describe any fundamental nature of our engagement in the world that constitutes emotions is problematic.

Introspection or external bodily phenomena does not produce emotions. They have no uniformity or 'soul'. Yet Solomon (2006) argues that it is possible to attempt a general description that will apply to all emotional classes, if this description is specific and includes a variety of emotions to see if any generalisability withstands. It is problematic to attempt an analysis of a basic emotion, like anger, because it produces distinctions. For example, anger involves bodily changes and facial expressions, while social or self-reflective emotions, like shame or pride, can be positioned as a social category because they are said to be socially constituted. A phenomenology of specific emotions can avoid any generalising techniques. Further complicating any understanding of emotion, is the

knowledge that every emotional experience has particular dimensions, for instance a bodily experience, the judgements of the experience, the experience of the object of the emotion and the social context.

I read Solomon's (2006) discomfort while trying to explain emotional experience as having particular dimensions because of his opposition to 'component' type talk. However, he takes up this language in an attempt to explain the complex nature of the emotional experience. Here, it is plausible to focus on one particular dimension, but there should be no priority made to any dimension. Instead, we need to ask how each dimension can be organised into a phenomenological description. An emotional experience is one single experience with complex parts. With the experience of sadness, there are changes in our body in the sense that we see the object as upsetting and we take action, but this emotional experience is a unitary phenomenon. What can emerge from the language of intentionality is the separation of the object intention and the emotional experience as separate although they are not two components (the feeling and the object). An emotion characterises its object and an object characterises its emotion, therefore a full description of an emotion requires a description of its object. Necessarily describing the object of emotion comes from the subjectivity of that emotion, either real or imagined. An emotion is firstly a way of experiencing and engaging with the world, and here it can become a world of love, a world of anger or a world of joy.

Our consciousness emerges in our experience of emotion. As people, we are of the world and of ourselves in the world, and in a sense, we are awake to both our awareness and ourselves in the world. A phenomenology of emotion needs to consider how self-consciousness and reflection shape, engage and change emotional experiences (Solomon, 2006; Thomas, 2005). These processes necessarily emerge in our experience of emotion. From this position, the reflexive overlay within the complexity of emotion becomes part of the emotional experience. This may seem like a logical premise, but as previously discussed, some studies of emotion place human consciousness and reflexivity secondary to emotions, as with neurophysiology valuing the nervous system first. If emotions have a judgemental experience, then judgements about these judgements can change the original emotion (Solomon, 2006).

Some emotions are in and of themselves self-referential or self-conscious, as can happen with pride and shame. These emotions talk about the self as we understand it to be and take self as the object, for example when noticing the experience of shame, inferiority or disgrace can also emerge. This does not suggest all subjects are aware of the experience of their emotions. Conversely for subjects that do become conscious of an emotion, or reflexively aware, it requires a spoken self-recognition. And, with this self-recognition there are consequences. Our behaviour can change when we become aware of an emotion, such as adoptees becoming more ashamed when they realise their shame. Here self-consciousness and reflection merge. Yet this emergence must not negate the distinction between self-consciousness and reflection. Self-consciousness does not require language. Infants and even animals can display self-consciousness and emotions that involve self-consciousness. Yet language is necessarily part of reflection (Solomon, 2006). To me, this theory of emotion

represents an important way of speaking to the politics and ethics of the body and emotion. And, as argued by Morgan (2005), there is no grand theory of embodiment or emotion that speaks to a singular reality or represents a distinctive discourse on bodies and emotions. There are multiple ways in which to enable the body's many voices to speak.

Another position on emotions is read through Burkitt's (1999) relational and embodied perspective. Emotions are represented as a multidimensional set of complexes; experiences that encompasses bodily, symbolic and relational aspects. Here "the relations that structure embodied activity are the defining elements of the complex experience we call an emotion" (p. 110). Emotions exist in the context of relationships and cannot be reduced to discourses, social structures or the body. Emotions are constituted by the interaction of discourses, social structures and the body and are experienced in active, embodied beings within social interdependent relationships.

Burkitt (1999) uses the term body techniques to describe the way that the body acts through movements, gestures, expressions and so forth. Within social relationships, from infancy, we learn bodily techniques and control that become foundational to our actions and thoughts. Drawing from Elias (1987), Burkitt (1999) argues that emotions have bodily, behavioural and feeling aspects. However, any expression as seen through behaviour does not signify an underlying thing called emotion. Instead, the expression is the emotion, so that the behavioural, somatic and feeling experiences are aspects of emotion itself. Elias (1987) argues that emotional expression is about communication between people, not a sign of some inner world. There is no distinction between a genuine inner feeling and its external representation. In Western societies, we assume that an outward action is a representation of an inner process. He equates bodily expressions to representations of class positions and cultural habits. Psychology is located in the emergence of a theory of human behaviour that requires observation and scrutiny. Within everyday relationships, we watch for signs of an inner character, or thoughts and feelings. This is a form of disciplinary power, where citizens have internalised self-surveillance as a form of social power and become their own overseers (Danaher et al., 2000; Gutting, 2001; Rose, 1999; Sarup, 1993).

Relationships and interdependency are part of the demands we make upon each other, forming and shaping our cultural norms and actions. While these social controls regulate social action, they produce emotional responses. Discourses that produce the performance of emotion dictate the way in which we show or hide certain emotions and/or behaviours. When emotions are not represented on the body, they are understood as being within the subjective domain. Here, corporeality and subjectivity are distinct. It is through suppression that emotions become private and hidden from public view. Elias (1987) suggests that emotional experiences cannot be separated from cultural and social effects. Conflicts in feelings emerge in contradictory relationships or the control of emotional experience. These relations are necessarily power relationships.

Elias (1987) speaks to power relations and socially imposed behavioural norms as precepts and regulations. Censorship and pressure within social life mean that people either succumb to the demands

of society or are positioned as abnormal or sick. Power in this sense acts on people and forms our emotional habitus and body techniques learnt from infancy; power informs our dispositions with the production and suppression of emotional signals. Displaying inappropriate emotional responses shows a 'lack' and even the possibility of a disorder. Any absence of self-regulation or self-control is judged by the powerful. Elias (1987) argues that the techniques of control that encompass the body are imprinted on the body in the muscular system. The body must be disciplined in particular routines and habits through relations of power in order to be granted citizenship. Controls on emotions are represented in body movements, gestures, voice tone and so forth. Here, the human body becomes the site of the biological and the social. Emotions are performative.

Elias (1987) argues that the techniques that act to control the body can 'fail'. This process of failure has implications for any theorising of 'feeling rules'. Emotional signals can be spontaneous and go against any rules or particular norms within a given situation. People can experience contradictory or conflicting emotions towards people and things and are not always able to prevent themselves from feeling what they should not be or performing certain emotional responses within particular contexts. Similarly, ambivalent or ambiguous feelings can be experienced in relationships. The idea of feeling rules does withstand these situations. Burkitt (1999) argues that Elias attempts to do what Foucault does by locating the body as productive. Here the body produces, not just regulates emotions.

In his discussion of emotional life, Sarbin (2001) talks to embodiment as the body experiences that emerge when actors place themselves within particular narratives. Narratives are embodied. If an actor, for example, is located in a story of grief then embodiments like tears are likely to follow. Crying becomes an exemplar of embodied action. Emotions are a central aspect of a story; the participant is more than living out a story, the engagement is embodied. The ongoing narrative provides accounts of the intentionality of the embodied action. Embodied action can be used to advance identity goals but they can fail as a rhetorical tactic.

The adopted subject experiences a naturalised silence that may or may not be represented by an emotion, but it does communicate a profound loss. These experiences for adoptees are housed inside the body; it is felt through the senses and sensations, it is from a corporeality that this experience speaks. When the adopted subject struggles to articulate their experiences through taken-for-granted discourses of identity, personhood or family, emotions can give that experience a voice. The history of the experience of adoptees is felt and lived but often it is unable to be known.

Adoptees are discursively constituted as lack and this lack is embodied in a variety of emotions from anger through to deep-seated grief or feelings of missing something or a lack. Yet the adoptee carries a history that entails the violence of a birth cut, the loss of a genealogical history and a life of fiction. How that history may matter can be storied through the work of Freeman (2002, 2010) and his notion of a narrative unconsciousness.

## **A Narrative Unconsciousness**

Through Freeman's (2002, 2010) notion of narrative unconsciousness, the way in which the cultural dimension of autobiographical narratives and cultural texts becomes stitched into the fabric of memory, I was able to ruminate about how a narrative unconsciousness, that which has been lived but unthought-of, has affected the adopted subject. The narrative unconsciousness is more than the private, inner dimension posited by psychoanalytic understandings of unconsciousness. Here sources beyond the boundary of a subject become woven into memory. Freeman (2002) proposes that the narrative unconsciousness is the mostly unrecognised and therefore un-cognised parts of our histories that are inherited through our status as historical beings. We become aware of this narrative unconsciousness at the moment our historical and cultural situatedness comes into view.

Such a notion challenges the common sense autobiographical narratives that encapsulate the personal telling of a life story and values the shared life of culture. Freeman (2002) questioned the way that particular sources give rise to a sense of self that is known after a visit to Germany involved sights and sounds becoming "a kind of living, breathing presence ... monument to memory" (p. 197). Freeman (2002, 2010) began to wonder if there is an energy field or a non-material trace of past traumatic events that linger. Here, the past becomes inscribed in the present; it remains alive and active. Freeman (2002) argues for another less mythical interpretation to explain such events, and perhaps one we as rational beings find easier to comprehend, when he talks to "the presence of what is missing" (p. 198). It seems that whatever was there, for example, the adoptive mother, exists in relation to what is not, as in the absent birth mother, thereby making the absence present. It also suggests that unconscious elements (in a cultural sense) play a part in our embodied experience of things. We bring our history with us; knowledge from movies, books, stories, photographs and so forth all interact to construct our experiences and responses at any given time.

Freeman (2002, 2010) discusses the way in which the visible narratives of our life coexist with counter-narratives, which work together although from a place of tension. These counter-narratives stand against our common understandings of narratives, which conceal as they reveal. Our counter-narratives can pour into our being and add new meaning, depth and intricacy to our histories. For the adopted subject, taken-for-granted narratives prescribe taking up a new identity without questioning the birth history. However, particular counter-narratives, as represented by adoptees through the social and political movements for law reform, suggest that the fictional adopted identity is questioned, as is the need to know a birth history. Once the counter-narratives are accessible, it can enable adoptees to have another understanding of themselves.

Our life stories are embedded in the communities in which our identity is derived. MacIntyre (1981) asserts that we are born with a past. For adoptees, it is a past that is unknown and shrouded in secrecy and shame. When ties to the past are severed, it deforms present relationships. We are dependent on what we inherit, a past that is always present but in varying degrees. Our recognition of

that past, or not, matters to who we are and how we experience ourselves. Aspects of our historical inheritance can be conscious or unconscious and made present in particular circumstances.

*When I watched my birth mother take her last few breaths, I experienced an event I somehow knew I had witnessed, felt and known before. In that moment, I felt the presence of a narrative unconsciousness. It was as if I had watched her leaving before. I felt the violence of our separation both as an adult daughter and as a newborn infant. In that moment, I became conscious of a part of my history that lay dormant yet sensed but inevitably unknown and un-verbalised. It was profound.*

Freeman (2002, 2010) reminds me that the unconscious, the deep stratum of our history, is not yet woven into our story. He declares that this hiddenness is part of modernity or sovereign individualism and I add that for the adoptee the hiddenness is part of their constitution - the rights and duties bestowed onto them when they are granted legitimate citizenship. As the historical and cultural moorings are the foundations of our identity, I wonder what that means for the adopted subject when they are denied a birth history and are forced to take up another's history - the adopted fiction. I wonder at the effects of silencing strategies in articulating an awareness of the narrative unconsciousness.

## **Body Matters**

From this review of literature on the inscribed and lived body, notions of embodiment, the feeling/emotional body and the narrative unconsciousness, there is no refuting that the body is implicated in, and pivotal to, how we experience the world. The idea that in some important way the body matters to adoptees is realised when adoptees' bodies speak to experiences of the adopted 'self' produced by the same discourses that produce the non-adopted body. Here, when the adoption event produced a legitimate body, governed by rules and regulations that constitute the non-adopted body, the adopted body becomes *as if* the non-adopted body. There are limited words to speak of adoptees' experiences but adopted bodies speak in a feeling sense. Importantly, the lived experience of adoption is discursively produced at the site of the body; therefore the nexus between the adopted body and the adopted subject requires exploration. The adopted body, although not necessarily missing from research, necessitates theoretical accessibility.

This and the previous chapter elaborate my epistemological position, explaining how I know what I know, and following Crotty's (1998) lead, I have designed my research methodology to fit with my research questions, epistemological and ontological commitments (my assumptions about reality and knowledge), and my socio-political location. As I moved through the plethora of literature, I was responsive to events that were not initially imagined and either broadened or narrowed my research as required (Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994). Producing qualitative and reflexive research meant I described a research problem as historically, socially and culturally produced, not as a specific hypothesis (Oberle, 2002). The resultant research design and question formation continued to emerge, as I responded to texts and as the narratives were identified. What began as a generic inquiry into the ways

in which adoptees are affected by the Adoption Act 1955 was transformed to a more specific focus - how are adoptees enabled and constrained through specific subject positions within a particular moral order and how are social power relations and bodies implicated in the narrative constitution of adoptees?



## **Chapter 5:**

### **Method**

*All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance  
and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence*

*(Martin Luther King, 1929-1968).*

## Method

To address my research questions it was important to negotiate my theoretical stance alongside my insider status as an adoptee. Understanding that we bring our histories with us and that they matter to the way that we conduct research means that this method chapter is guided by my historical context, theoretical framework and lived experience. My theoretical position encompasses an understanding of language as constituted and constituting, that social power relations matter to adopted subjectivities and that the body is not only inscribed, it is lived and felt. This understanding enabled me to trace a legislative and psychological history of adoption through a genealogical analysis of the events that privilege and discredit some knowledge and experiences while valuing others. 'Closed' adoption was produced within particular social contexts and discourses that produce legitimate subjects within moral trajectories of 'good' citizenship. When adoption as a social practice that failed in its aims was ignored it concurrently produced particular psychopathological subject positions for adoptees. Assuming the storied nature of experience - that meaning is constructed through narratives and social discourse and that we make sense of our lives through story - means that the methods used to tell this research story are embedded in a narrative approach and aim to produce a hybrid story that addresses the research questions.

A challenging aspect of this research for me was the personal and unique relationships within the adoption community. Research with members of an already marginalised community required me to reflect on ways of negotiating safety in our relationships, not only for the participants, but also for myself. Through my personal relationships within this specific community, we discussed potential ways to honour our stories and at the same time use them in a project seeking social change. As an adoption insider, the necessity for interpretation presented a challenge to my commitment to represent the 'voices' of the participants as their own. It was important to the conduct of this research that an ethical principle of respect for the relationships between and among us is always present. The method outlined below tells of the ways in which I best met the safety and transparency concerns of the community, in the sense that this research would be a form of advocacy. I also discuss the process of the narrative analysis that produced a hybrid metastory from the participants' texts.

### Sampling and Recruitment

The community of interest (sample) in this thesis is those who have experience of adoption as 'closed'. In this way, following Willig (2001), the experiences we had in common, a specific situatedness, was purposeful to the aims of the research. While qualitative researchers assume that quality and depth of data are achieved through relatively few participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), I was concerned that this practice would somehow reduce the impact of this research. However, after conducting empirical research on non-probabilistic sampling and guidelines, Guest and Bunce (2006) found that

data saturation, or the point at which no new themes emerge, occurred within the first 12 interviews. Meta-themes appeared within the first six. The National Centre for Research Methods (Baker & Edwards, 2012) also produced a review outlining the opinions of 14 expert researchers and five early career researchers on ‘how many’ interviews is enough in qualitative research. It was concluded that ‘how many’ depended on the research question, objectives, resources and time. Such findings enabled me to be confident in a smaller sample size, set parameters based on my epistemological and methodological positions and take data saturation rather than sample size as the guideline.

Initially, I had hoped to use an adoption support group to which I belonged to recruit participants. This form of recruitment however, raised some ethical issues about social power relations; some members met my dual position as researcher and as group participant with resistance as there was concern that my personal relationships with group members could coerce participation in this research. That experience challenged me to look at my own assumptions as an adoptee and a researcher, and enabled me to reflect on my social power as a researcher and how that might impact the recruitment process. I was reminded that adoption has consistently been over researched to produce adoptees as ‘other’ to the norm and as a result adoptees can be cautious about how research occurs. I decided that the concerns raised by the group of which I was a member were appropriate, so using the technique of snowballing (Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994) I recruited the participants through my relationships within the wider community.

Some potential participants decided not to take part in this research because they were already dealing with the effects of their adoption, or were concerned about the wider implications for their families within the adoption triad. At times, I found the data saturation parameter frustrating because I wanted to enable as many voices as possible to produce this narrative. Throughout the writing of this thesis, potential participants continued to tell me their stories outside the context of the research project. Not inviting them into the research was difficult as I appreciate the importance of storytelling and value each individual adoption story.

### **The participants**

Twelve participants agreed to share their stories. All of them had experienced adoption through Aotearoa/New Zealand’s ‘closed’ legal system. All but two have had birth family contact. Two of the participants had been contacted by birth families while growing up; the other eight did not have birth family contact until their adult years. I excluded interracial adoption and other stories of ethnicity, as it is an important difference, which as Willig (2001) argues, requires a particular specificity in its own right. In this context, I acknowledge the work of Valeriere Maruru Perkins (nēe Devonshire) (2009) for her research “He aroha ahaea, he potiki piripoho: The unique experiences of Māori adoptive mothers in the ‘closed stranger’ adoption system” and Maria Haenga Collins (2011) for her work on interracial adoption “Listening to the silenced: The closed stranger adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families”. Both projects explore particular experiences for Māori adoptees within Aotearoa/New

Zealand and I felt comfortable that the specificities of research with Māori were well cared for by Māori.

The participants in this study ranged in age from 26 to 52, and I note that the age range covered nearly three decades, representing the period that ‘closed’ adoption was more closely practiced. More women than men participated and while I might have expected gender differences they are not the focus of this thesis. Gender as a social power relationship is already implicated in the constitution of the birth mother. I did not assume that I could represent the diversity of all adoption experiences in this research, although the stories of these participants were rich in their diversity.

### **Data Collection through Interviewing and Transcribing**

Riessman (2008) reminded me that interviewing and transcribing are major parts of constructing narrative data for analysis. Interviews are a collaborative process, and are dependent on what is attended to, including those ideas about the limits of language and the ways in which language attends to the complexity and depth of lived experience, practices of self-awareness and the ability to access the experience of an event, which are an embodied and a conscious process (Polkinghorne, 1995). Both the researcher and the participant, in conversation, make decisions about what is noticed, and then retold. Memory, interaction, interview context and the amount of times that the telling has occurred influence the narration of lived experience. Retelling can change over time and develop to meet the needs of the storyteller (Gilbert, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Personal narratives, as shared in an interview setting, contribute to a transformed understanding of the story; they cannot represent the events of the storylines themselves (Gilbert, 2002; Riessman, 1993). With the idea of collaboration in mind, I also assumed that relationships provide an inter-subjective space, where recognition and engagement occurs in the relationship in-between (Frie & Reis, 2001; Grosz, 1989). Conversations in interviews were opportunities to co-construct adoption stories in a context where my insider status enabled us to relate through mutual recognition and engagement. Transcription as a process can limit the narrative; it is always partial and selective (Riessman, 1993), where nuances of meaning may be lost. The process of transcribing therefore requires careful attention and reflexive decision-making.

#### **Interviewing style**

I understand that the construction of adoption is complex; it is intimately entwined with other experiences that constitute subjectivity. For example, problematic family relationships will necessarily inform the experience of adoption. To enable safe interviewing practices on a potentially sensitive experience I decided on one to one interviews. Individual interviews have the advantages of a conversation, where the storyteller can tell their personal narrative that constitutes their sense of who they are and how they want to be known within the context where their voice is honoured and their stories are recognised.

Semi-structured interviews enabled me to attend to both asking questions and listening to the response; a co-production through a conversation that values self-representation (Willig, 2001). Where some narrative researchers caution the use of semi-structured interviews because it is possible that participants may focus on managing their performance in the interview (M. Crossley, 2000a; 2001), this thesis assumes that telling is always already a performance of personal narrative that is socially and culturally contextual.

To address the aims of this thesis, I set boundaries using a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) that were designed as conversation starters to enable participants to talk about their experience of being adopted, how that is meaningful to their lives, the effects of the Adoption Act 1955 and how that has mattered to their understanding of themselves. In this way, participants were able to represent what was significant to them, through a conversation where I followed their story and asked questions to elaborate on particular storylines. We were able to create a text. I did not ask direct questions that specifically addressed issues of illegitimacy or secrecy, as I was interested to see if they emerged within the narratives. I noticed through the first few interviews that the participants tended to tell their story through lineal storylines, and this informed the structure of subsequent interviews. Most often, I did not need to question the participants, as the storylines flowed between us.

As a trained and experienced counsellor, I brought a particular way of listening to the interview, hearing and engaging with the participants that privileged safety and provided a comfortable and non-judgemental interview process. The participants knew I was an adoptee, so on the few occasions I was asked about my experience, I responded openly and honestly. According to Ribbens and Edwards (1998) non-judgemental effective listening, hearing and empathy encourage participant reflexivity. They are more willing to talk of events that they may not have discussed in a more formal setting.

Most of the interviews lasted approximately an hour, however some went for up to two hours and I suspect most of them could have gone on longer if other commitments and time had allowed. The interviews were recorded on a digital audio device to enable me to concentrate on the conversation. The interview settings were negotiated with each participant. For example, when more comfortable or suitable for the participant, the interview was conducted in their homes. Alternatively, interview space was accessed at both Wellington and Manawatu Massey University campuses.

### **Transcribing**

After gathering the stories, they were transformed into written form. I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after each interview so that the interview context/experience was fresh and to immerse myself in the texts to familiarise myself with the data and identify possible storylines, organising principles and themes within the stories. While transcription is time consuming and labour intensive, that process provided a comprehensive transcript that featured any interactions with me in the interviews and enabled me to mark nonverbal talk, such as pauses or sighs to discern unspoken text.

In this way, particular nuances drew my attention to meanings that may have appeared insignificant at the time of the interview.

Participants were given the opportunity to read and review the transcription of their interviews and to provide permission to use their stories to illustrate the analysis. Some of the participants were eager to read over their talk, while others declined the offer because, for example, it felt difficult for them to read their experiences and feeling about living adoption. Reviewing transcripts provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on the storytelling, to correct errors, modify or withdraw material and verify aspects of their stories. The transcripts were amended accordingly. At that time, participants agreed to the release of their transcript, giving me permission to use their stories (see Appendix B). Some of the participants have remained engaged with the project and therefore have contributed to the ongoing production of this research through later conversations that at times have enabled me to understand particular events in particular ways. According to Josselson (2007), having participant involvement throughout a research project produces more credible and participant focused research.

Following safe and ethical practice, recordings and transcripts were secured separately. Once transcripts were released, recordings were destroyed. All identifying information was removed from transcripts. Access to full data was limited to my supervisors and myself.

In the analysis chapters, extracts from transcripts are used as illustrations from particular stories. In some cases they are edited for ease of reading. Pauses in conversation and/or conversational turns are marked by [...]. Further, in the analysis are scare marks [' '] to problematise the use of terms that seemed inadequate and double quotation marks [“ ”] to indicate words and ideas that were used by the participants, however the double quotation marks [“ ”] were not always direct quotes.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Massey University's ethical requirements**

This research adhered to the Massey University's *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2008). Ethical considerations were discussed with my supervisors and ethical approval granted by the Massey University Ethics Committee (MUHEC Southern B (08/07)).

I did experience dilemmas with regard to producing an academic report that met the university's requirements, while also honouring the stories I collected. Both Parker (2002) and Josselson (2007) argue that there is a tension when balancing professional responsibilities in a scholarly institution with the responsibility for the wellbeing of those being studied. I wanted to represent the stories in a way that maintained the integrity of the storytellers. As an insider, I was aware of the constraints of academic knowledge on the experience of adoption and my goal was to represent a story that signified the more emotional and embodied aspects of adopted experiences. At times, whilst

conducting this research, being an insider meant my emotional subjectivity was challenged. When this occurred, I sought both academic supervision and personal support.

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

Due to the wide reaching effects of the institution of adoption and the many people involved in the adoption triad, privacy and confidentiality were essential for this research. As a researcher, I am bound by an ethical duty to protect and ensure the privacy and dignity of the participants. Confidentiality was enabled through the individual interview settings, and to protect privacy pseudonyms were negotiated and used for excerpts. All other identifying data such as parents or children's names and geographical locations were omitted from the typed transcripts and resulting report. In several cases, the participants requested using their 'birth' first name, possibly using this opportunity to claim that aspect of their story. I was also mindful that when using larger sections of text it is possible more people could be identified (Giles, 2002), and therefore to protect privacy it was critical to use an aggregate of smaller excerpts from participants to create a hybrid narrative in the analysis.

### **Informed consent, protection from harm and beneficence**

Ethical codes of practice require that consent to participate in research is well informed about the research aims and the processes and procedures in which participants will be involved if they decide to take part. Privacy and confidentiality respond to issues of identification and value respect and dignity by ensuring that participants confidentiality is maintained (Gilbert, 2002; Josselson, 2007).

Prior to the interview starting, information about the rights of the participants during the interview process, and the obligation of the researcher to provide information that provides a context for the purpose of the research was provided in writing (see Appendix C), and was negotiated verbally when required with the participants. Written consent to proceed was then obtained (see Appendix D).

The ethical practice of consent and protection meant that I needed to be aware of the shared effects of the constitution of secrecy and silencing strategies that marginalise the experience of adoptees. McAdams (1993) and Willig (2001) argue that the performance of a narrative may enable an opportunity for healing and change if the performance is validated; it can potentially be a beneficial process. However Parker (2005) warns against social power relationships that assume a therapeutic component. While considering these arguments, I did not assume that the interview process would be therapeutic, or that it needed to be, although the feedback from participants supported the 'beneficial nature' of the storytelling, and this is discussed in the analysis. I assumed that the telling of lived experiences of adoption could be a positive process, and at the same time I was mindful to negotiate safety throughout the telling. Together we discussed support networks.

A commonly understood 'anxiety' in adoption research is the experience of abandonment and rejection for adoptees (Griffith, 1997). Necessarily then, ending the interview relationship required

sensitivity to possible vulnerabilities and I encouraged a debriefing conversation. Once the digital recorder was turned off, the conversation took a less emotional turn and we talked about the interview. We negotiated my obligation to support them during the research process, including after the interview. I followed up with participants through a phone call several weeks after the interview, and reassessed safety at that time. All participants have my contact details and can contact me at any time, as the researcher and a member of the adoption community. Some participants remain in contact via email and other adoption networks.

### **Narrative Analysis: A Process of Constructing a Hybrid Story**

The way in which texts are analysed matters to the production of ethical research that values respect for and dignity of its participants, and to the effects of academic writing as a political activity. Constructing this hybrid story was a process that emerged as the analysis ensued. I did not arrive at one story through a unitary lens; it involved layers of analysis that occurred at times concurrently and other times linearly.

Drawing from my poststructuralist position, the analysis traced the texts for the way in which the institution of adoption and its discursive practices mattered to the lived experience of adoption for adoptees as told through their personal stories. Narrative theory realises narratives and stories are an organising principle for action (M. Crossley, 2003; Denzin, 2000; Elliott, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Sarbin, 1986), and critical narrative analysis enables the representation of social power relations, legislative and social, that are represented through the telling of shared stories (Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995). The form of narrative analysis represented in this work took common elements of stories and configured them into a unified whole, where at times the unfolding movement climaxed towards an endpoint (Polkinghorne, 1995). Creating a new story through the amalgamation of moments that were significant to participants produces an analysis that informs the positioning of adoptees within the discursive social power relations implicated in the Adoption Act 1955. This required a specific synthesis of data organised around particular moments where subjectivity is pulled through the discursive positioning of the subject.

To tell of these events, the analysis involved reading the texts for tone, imagery and themes as a starting point. Tone, according to McAdams (1993), is a persistent feature of a narrative and is implicated in the way that emotions and bodies matter to subjective experience. The tone is the use of pitch in the language of the storytelling and can provide clues to the nuances that represent embodied and emotional responses. We are produced and reproduce ourselves through stories and by observing how people interact and do things over time. The content and the form of the story contextualise notions of rejection or trust for example, and through social relationships, we come to interpret particular narrative outcomes. A less affirming storyline may involve a sad emotive tone, and signify perhaps a story with an unhappy ending (M. Crossley, 2000a). In this way, I was able to listen for a tone that organised the narrative in relation to embodied feeling.

As the narrative tone organises the ‘feel’ of the storyline, imagery is used to make sense and embody a narrative pattern (McAdams, 1993). Every narrative depends on a set of images, such as a particular metaphor, that is unconsciously employed to organise stories. The language that we use to describe and characterise life chapters and key movements provides a clue to meaningful metaphors. How we make images is dependent on our discursive repertoires however, and they are culturally and socially constituted (M. Crossley, 2000a). While attending to the language of representation, images and metaphors, I also heard those experiences that are not always accessible through everyday talk - the silenced stories told through hesitation and feeling. Interpreting talk can be problematic when it comes to adoptive experiences because some are located outside of taken-for-granted conversational language of kinship and family. In those moments, when language failed, there were traces of emotional content that could not be represented linguistically. Here, it was important for me to understand that bodies spoke prior to any conscious knowing. However, key metaphors enabled me to organise those movements and the specific storylines that I identified in the transcripts into a hybrid story.

McAdams (1993) also asserts that specific themes inform the narrative production of subjectivity and are represented in narrative through patterns of recurring talk over time. Narratives can contain patterns regarding what has motivated or been important to a subject (M. Crossley, 2000a). As the themes emerged, I coded them for the way in which people position themselves within discourse, and the moments and movements that enabled and constrained particular narratives for sense making. This process of subjection, where power acts upon and simultaneously constitutes the subject (Butler, 1997), was an important analytic storyline in the legally constituted adopted subject. I was constantly reading the texts for complexities in the data that would enable an understanding of how this mattered.

As I moved from the participants’ stories to my final representation, several filters altered the story and in that, something was gained but also lost (Gilbert, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Representation or re-representation, according to Ely (2007), includes researchers’ attempts at rhetorical forms to re-present, suggest or discuss the knowledge and outcomes of narrative research. Reading and interpretation is not merely a reproducing of the writer’s intentions, critical reading produces the text (Barry, 1995). When telling or constructing stories, I am mindful that the telling of a story means an omission of other stories (M. Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2004).

The following three analysis chapters are organised as a hybrid metastory that begins with the storylines of birth and the trajectories into early childhood experiences. The psychosocial effects, including, the *as if born to* adoptive family and coping strategies story ongoing adoptive experiences, while the final chapter stories the hope for resolution that is offered by reunion. These storylines follow the way in which they are meaningful to the embodied material reality of living adoption.



**Chapter 6:**  
**Once Upon a Time**  
**An Adoptee was Born...**

*I am society's child.*

*This is how they made me, and now I'm sayin' [sic] what's on my mind  
and they don't want that. This is what you made me...*

*(Tupac Shakur, 1971–1996).*

## Once Upon a Time an Adoptee was Born...

This chapter begins a narrative of adoption as meaningful lived experiences produced through socio-legal and psychological positioning of adoptees. Like the beginning of other stories, this narrative starts by looking back to the origin, remembering the earliest traces of meaning connected to the complicating action that follows. For participants, being an adoptee means lifelong subjective experiences constituted in and through a moral trajectory of legal and psychological discourse. The subject positions enabled and constrained through those narratives produce the specific lived experiences of being-in-the-world for adoptees.

This chapter analyses the participants' stories to make sense of *how* they take up available subject positions and how these matter to their experience of themselves from birth. The Adoption Act 1955 reifies notions of a moral order that feared illegitimacy, practised secrecy and enacted a neonatal 'cut' from the birth family for those subjected to its power.

### The Illegitimate Subject

The adopted subject is produced through legislation that sanctions what it means to be a legitimate moral citizen. Adoption enables an illegitimate subject to become legitimate; a binary relationship where legitimacy defines what is 'not'. All of the participants knew of their illegitimate moral status at birth and talked of the relationship 'between' the time they were illegitimate and legitimate. Their spoken sense of the time 'between' iterates traces of what has been excluded, or gone before. To articulate the 'between' and the traces of 'before', participants drew on particular metaphors to represent their embodied understanding of the experience of illegitimacy:

As I got older, I did think about the illegitimate side of it, you know when you suddenly become aware that children are born out of wedlock. I remember kind of thinking - oh I wonder how that works because I remember thinking that there had to be a time, like when you are born and when you are adopted when you are in no-man's land. (Mary, 272)

[I was] given away and they just, they probably want to blank that out so you know I'm blanked out so ... that's kind of a bit too big for me to kind of comprehend. (Barry, 995, 998)

Mary, for example, recognised that at some time she had been socially positioned as illegitimate, living in a between space, the “no-man’s land”. The metaphor of no-man’s land signifies the space between two armies; a place where no-one is safe and no-one belongs. To be born *nullius filius*, a child of no-man, positions the child in no-man’s land, neither *born to* nor *as if born to* prior to legal intervention.



Figure 6. Babies waiting to be adopted  
(Ryan, 2012, March 27).

To reside here, Barry experienced himself as “blanked out”. To be “blanked out” signifies a sense of nothingness, a total lack or void that is a difficult position for an adoptee to take up with any sense of legitimacy. It also stories something that is forgettable which is “too big” and challenging to “comprehend”. Adoptees live a lifetime travelling to and through no-man’s land while assuming they were forgotten by a birth mother when produced *as if born to*. Interestingly, most of the participants had some knowledge of the time they had spent in no-man’s land and their stories of this represent the significance of that time:

I was born in (city) umm, I was adopted as a baby, I don’t know how old I was but I presume it was within that umm first few weeks. (Barry, 24)

So she had me there and umm, and then she kept me with her for about 10 days. I got to stay in the same room and my grandparents came apparently and then umm, I got adopted 10 days later, from my family. (Maxine, 53)

Ten days I think. (Mary, 714)

I don't know, I think I was, I think I was about a week or two old when they first came to see me ... and they couldn't take me home until I was about six weeks old because I was premature and I was quite tiny. So I was about six weeks old when they took me home. (Shelly, 24, 27)

Two months, yep, yep. (Cooley, 97)

To live in-between directly after birth, and at times for weeks, leaves an adoptee feeling sad as they are remembering, especially when they imagine themselves as a baby alone in a hospital crib. There is no mother to offer maternal care:

Not having your mother there to pick you up and cuddle you every time, 'cause a nurse can't give 24-hour care. (Mary, 720)

Residing in no-man's land was recognised by Mary as a time without "cuddles" for the relinquished infants - without embodied comfort or connection. To not have "cuddles" represents no-man's land as a barren place where little grows; it is cold, rocky and isolated.

For the newborn infant, to reside in non-man's land is to lack maternal affection and love. For Brendon it was important to know how long he was neither *born to* nor *as if born to*:

It's important to me to know how long I was in that adoption hospital. You know, alone, but apparently I was well loved there by the nurses, but for two months. (Brendon, 25)

That the infant is left "alone" is important to know as I suspect it legitimates ongoing feelings of isolation and abandonment that an adoptee embodies. The time in no-man's land, represents the "alone" and the original time of the "alone", and the knowledge of the experience, felt through bodies and articulated through metaphor, endures.

Even where legitimacy is enabled through the practice of adoption, adoptees remain stigmatised by illegitimacy and embody shame about the stigma attached to their birth, a stigma that the process of adoption fails to rectify (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000; Else, 1997; Leon, 2002; Wegar, 2000). Dovidio et al. (2000) describe stigma as a process of dehumanisation, whereby members of a social group are positioned as less than or flawed:

They knew if they wanted to hurt me when I was a kid they'd say you're a bastard because you're born out of wedlock and you know back in the day that shit used to hurt - labels like

that you know ... that would cut me up but like the only one was my little sister who would say, “you’re not my brother, fuck you, you’re not my brother”. (Brendon, 108, 113)

Brendon, who was the only adopted child in a family with three biologically legitimate children, was positioned as a “bastard” by his siblings, a reminder of his ‘otherness’ that was painful. The metaphor of being “cut up” resonates with the embodied violence of a birth family cut and here ‘otherness’ as a lack of legitimacy is also the means by which Brendon is separated by and from his siblings. As biological children, the legitimate children’s blood relationship with each other is privileged, so that Brendon’s biological difference becomes a hurtful exclusion from the family that is supposed to give him the benefits of belonging and legitimacy.

No matter how the legal constitution of the adopted subject enables legitimacy, it is how adoptees embody the moral order of legitimacy that matters to their subjective experience. The metaphors that the participants used to describe their experiences of themselves reproduce meanings of deficit:

I think you’ll be judged that you are nobody. (Vaughn, 425)

My umm shame, embarrassment, I don’t know how I was conceived, mistake, that’s how I thought of myself - a mistake. (Toni, 451)

You know there is something fundamentally wrong with this ‘me’ baby, that wasn’t wanted, fundamentally wrong. It’s not right. (Maxine, 637)

To embody experiences and feelings of being “nobody”, “a mistake”, or “fundamentally wrong” is to suffer an inherent shame, a condition of birth to which adoptees are subjected throughout their life. Adopted subjects are positioned as the “passive victim[s] of the birth mother’s transgressions from the rules of ‘accepted’ social behaviour” (Simmonds, 2008, p. 31). The embodiment of shame can also be understood through narratives of being ‘not good enough’:

I wasn’t good enough. (Vaughn, 272)

I had this big secret, this big black secret hanging over me, which I sort of felt like I should be ashamed of, but which I had no control over. I felt that to try and be as good as everybody else I had to be that little bit better. (Shelly, 164)

I remember growing up feeling at the time a real sense of loneliness or a real sense of shame. (Toni, 498)

To have a “big black secret” hanging over you represents a dark cloud that threatens torrential rain. The ominous cloud hovers overhead, and in a sense ties the adoptee to feeling on edge, always waiting for the cloud to break: the secret shame to be released. It is recognised by Benet (1976) that adoptees can carry such feeling of ‘impending doom’ or the fear something is wrong. To feel shame at the core is to fear the experience of humiliation, embarrassment or guilt. To avoid this Shelly had to “be that little bit better”. To “be as good as everybody else”, adoptees feel as though they have to prove themselves. Shelly knew that the secrecy of adoption carried “shame”, although she realised she had no control over that. Toni also felt her experiences of adoption were enabled and constrained through “shame” with associated feelings of “loneliness” and she was not an agent of her moral guilt.

Secrecy reproduces shame and social isolation throughout childhood. An understanding of what it means to be illegitimate, and therefore shamed, is often taken up while “growing up”. The constitution of an adoptee as illegitimate, and therefore suffering a deficit is a constant challenge for adoptees throughout their lives, and surfaces at various times and in varying ways:

But that was more when I was old enough to probably realise, be aware that people could judge you more, because I never experienced it but as you become a, you know more adult. (Mary, 278)

I doubt in terms of their little happy white picket fence life that they necessarily want that known. He had an illegitimate child; do you know what I mean? (Barry, 993)

Mary became more conscious of being positioned as illegitimate by others as she became older. At the time of the interview, Barry connected his birth father’s rejection to his “illegitimacy” and a social justification for him living a secret. That his birth father acted outside of socially sanctioned norms means that he and his current family with their “white picket fence” would not want the previous transgressions known.

The legislation that produces the adopted subject as legitimate also depends on how that legitimacy is produced through relationships, both familial and state. To live as a fiction means threats to legitimacy could be used as a tool to control:

She (adoptive mother) would pretend to get on the phone to Social Welfare and tell them to take us back ... [or she was] going to sell us for a bag of rice and we believed it. So there was always this threat that we would be like - she chose to have us she could also choose to get rid of us - was there too; if we don’t do what we’re told, if we didn’t comply we’d get sent back. (Jan, 305, 313)

For Jan, the idea that her adopted mother “chose” her and therefore could un-choose her reminded her of her illegitimate position and the constant fear of the possibility of being “got rid of” if she did not behave appropriately. To know you have been relinquished by one parent means the possibility that it can happen again is real (Griffith, 1991) - lived and embodied. Here, it is the legitimacy sanctioned and granted by the state that can be revoked, and it is so significant that the threat of being sent back to no-man’s land is used to control the child’s behaviour. Some adoptees can develop resistance to being positioned within narratives of “shame” and Maxine now understands that as an effect of being constituted by the act of being adopted:

You know there is something fundamentally wrong with this ‘me’ that wasn’t wanted ... but that’s not the case, so I think that’s what adoption has done to me. (Maxine, 637, 640)

That adoption has been “done to” represents the power of the state that subjects adoptees to constitution through lack from the time of their birth. Maxine realises she is not “fundamentally wrong” but instead the actions of “adoption” are at fault. Adoptees feel the lived effects of being born illegitimate, despite the legislative decree of legitimacy; the illegitimate subject is reproduced in social relationships. For the adoptee, kinship is socially governed, so in order to constitute the child within the adoptive family and thereby remove the status of illegitimacy, a technology of control was used by the state to enable the practice of secrecy.

### **As if born to**

Seen as a solution to the problem of illegitimacy, the practice of adoption regulated the (moral) bodies of children born *nullius filius*; they were legally positioned *as if born to*. Some participants experienced this narrative constitution of adoptees as a legal fiction as problematic while the law was unable to revoke their birth story. In this way, the lived experience of being *born to* and *as if born to* limits a sense of belonging, perhaps because of residing in-between (Griffith, 1991; Webb, 1979). The adoptee necessarily needs to differentiate between biological and the psychosocial lived ‘reality’ of (adopted) family (Triseliotis et al., 1997). In the in-between space where blood relationships are privileged within the social and material experience of adoptees, the question of the relational link that is not blood emerges:

How can you be not blood related but still have that link? (Toni, 332)

In this position, the adoptee questions their own legitimacy when it may not be possible to experience a link that is the same as that of biological siblings and parents. Their struggle with legitimacy was realised in the participants telling of feeling “alone”:

I think when you're adopted you've got this; you're very much on your own. (Shelly, 907)

I felt (sigh) yep, I was completely lost and alone I guess ... acutely alone. (Barry, 340, 736)

I feel alone. (Brendon, 649)

Like I truly, I always feel alone, like no-one is going to be able to look after me apart from me, like I can't, if there's something going on I can't go running to anybody, like no-one can really help me and it's just how I feel. (Alice, 849)

It's been like that for a long time and I guess that's, I guess that's a direct response to feeling fucken totally and utterly alone. (Vaughn, 285)

I mean up until I had [my daughter] I was, felt like I was always totally, totally alone ... I was totally on my own, there was just me, there were no, I always felt like I was totally on my own, that I had no-one I could rely on but me. Okay there were friends, lovely friends, but it's not the same as family. (Margaret, 635, 918)

That you are "very much on your own", that there is "no-one" that is the "same as" having biological family positions adoptees as "utterly alone", and evokes lasting feelings of aloneness. That "no-one is going to be able to look after" you, is a life story that has its origins in no-man's land. Here you need to be self-sufficient because "friends" are "not the same as family" which means that adoptees' social relationships commit them to acting independently and they don't like to rely on others. In a sense, adoptees' difference is located in their aloneness. Producing the subject *as if born to*, legally, did not remove their sense of exclusion.

These experiences of aloneness resonate with Hoksbergen's (1997a) notion of psychic homelessness, the feeling of being an emotional in-between that does not fit comfortably in social relationships. The participants drew on metaphors of not "fitting" within the constitution of the adoptive family:

I just pick up waifs and strays (laugh). Probably feel like a waif and stray (laugh) I just, you know, yeah ... I've often felt like I haven't fitted in and not belonged. That fitting in is a really big thing. (Maxine, 322, 330)

I certainly had a rough time as far as, never felt like I quite fitted in, umm home was awful, hated being there, didn't want to be there. (Margaret, 168)

I didn't fit in anywhere ... I'm always in the middle and it's just like, it's not a very nice place to be, it wasn't a very nice place to grow up. (Alice, 753, 1115)

Maxine considers her later relationships with those she metaphorises as “waifs and strays” to reflect on her own position of not “fitting”. To feel like a waif and stray is to feel homeless and uncared for. Margaret represents similar feelings of not “fitting” as an “awful” position, while Alice locates herself as always in the “middle” which does not feel “nice”. Not belonging is reproduced in social interactions, and according to March (1995) social discrimination occurs when others question the rightful position of an adoptee within an adoptive family structure. In this way, the adoptee is positioned through their lack of entitlement to a legitimate place in the family:

Once a long time ago I was staying at my cousins and something came up about their neighbour. He was annoyed with the little boy next door and he said, “oh well, he's not their son, he's only adopted”. I haven't forgotten that because it really, it's done an enormous amount of damage, my cousin would have only been about eight or nine, he wouldn't have been very old when he said it ... and it really, it really hurt me. (Shelly, 61, 69)

Shelly's story highlights the way in which others positioned her as not belonging, with damaging effects. Her deep level of hurt occurred because “he's only adopted” stories confirm adopted families are not ‘real’ families. Such insensitive comments transpire often within taken-for-granted family norms (Simmonds, 2000). To position adoptees outside narratives of the ‘real’ nuclear family questions their legitimacy and constitutes them as ‘other’ to the norm. Herman (2006) called the process of adoption, as a tool for normalisation, a paradox. The challenge of an adoptee's legitimate place in the family is not only produced through the adoptive relationship, birth family members can also position adoptees ‘outside’ of the birth family. Alice talked candidly about feeling rejected as legitimate within her birth family. She specifically remembered a family photo event where she felt excluded. She experienced exclusion through comments from her birth great grandmother, and found it very upsetting:

They all got, they made this real big deal about the grandkids all being around to take a photo and [my birth brother] was the oldest, and you know. I was excluded from it ... but yeah I just felt really weird, like I had to get out of there and umm I, I, I overheard my great grandmother say to one of the other family that this was me and, and she felt sorry for [my birth mother] for having me. (Alice, 737, 739)

Alice was in fact the eldest child, but her birth family ignored her position and took up the fiction *as if born to*, aligning Alice with her birth mother's transgressions: Alice should never have

been born. Alice represents her distress as feeling “weird” accompanied by a pressure to “get out of there”. Her account resonates with stories of not fitting into adoptive families, and references to the ‘outside’ spaces to which adoptees are subjected.

Barry experienced similar interactions with his extended birth family. His birth aunty refuses to acknowledge him, and at a recent birth family event, he was not allowed to be acknowledged as part of that birth family. His birth family positions him as belonging to his “own” (adoptive) family and excludes his need to be connected:

They just can't deal with it, they've, they've, they, they kind of all believe like I have my own family and you know I have my own life and yeah it's nice to have, umm, it's nice that I'm in their lives, arrh particularly for my birth mother, and so I think there's a lot of respect there for her and their relationship with her so they're by proxy with me, but I really get that umm, it's not with me. (Barry, 673)

The exclusion or lack of desire to connect reproduces the legitimacy of *as if born to*, locating Barry in the adoptive family. Despite his relationship with his birth mother, he remains outside wider biological relationships. He is there by “proxy”, an assignee of his birth mother. Such interactions reproduce Barry's embodied sense of being “acutely alone” (736).

The policy *as if born to* limits an adoptee's connection within family, neither *born to* the adopted family nor *born from* a birth family: “I'll never be anybody's biological child” (Maxine, 195). Through the narrative constitution of adoptees where the adoptee is disconnected from biological family, the representation of family is contested and it is understood that the adoptive family is “not my family”. And at the same time “my family” reproduces the feeling of being alone:

I have a disconnection from my biological family, not that I want that, that's how it is and I also have, because they're not my family, even though they are loving people, from my umm well, they are my family (laugh) in their dysfunctional way - are from my adoptive family and that leaves me in a position where - well I'm alone, do you know what I mean. (Barry, 738)

I see how my two brothers from my birth mother, right, I see how they interact together, but they treat me like a brother and they love me, but the three of us sitting in a room, they've got something that I haven't got with them ... yeah and they love me (siblings from birth mother) and they're so open to me and they give me everything, but I haven't got what they've got together. (Brendon, 612, 620)

Despite both Barry and Brendon feeling love within their familial relationships, living the binary between connection and disconnection locates them in no-man's land; there is no access to the

‘thing’, the sense of belonging that birth family members experience together. Jan was able to configure her understanding of the process of adoption and disconnection from birth family systems as historically and culturally produced:

But the closed adoption and the cutting of ties it’s the tradition of coming out here, we’re not convicts. People came out here and they deliberately left their families so we have a culture of leaving, all that underpins it as well and cutting ties and making changes and not keeping connections, even though some do, quite a lot didn’t. They chose to run away and stop it, and that underpins it. (Jan, 934)

In this story, the practice of “cutting ties” is a part of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s colonial history, with the deliberateness of the ‘cut’ understood as a continuation of acceptable colonial practice. Where *as if born to* constitutes a legislative connection with the adoptive family, it does not necessarily provide a solution to the problems experienced by the violence of being ‘cut’ from the biological relationship. It appears that the very arguments that constituted adoption as the solution to any potential problems for illegitimate children were not realised. Adoptees and the adoptive family did not always experience a strong attachment or necessarily ‘fit’ together (Petta & Steed, 2005):

It was hard growing up with mum because she was so different and I got how different she was when I met my birth mother; it’s just like fuck. (Brendon, 187)

I still find it hard to be close with them, I mean I’m close to them but it’s not like, it doesn’t just flow you know. It feels so umm friction bit of friction probably more from me yeah. (Maxine, 254)

I think as an adoptive person you don’t have, I mean I feel like I have a forced relationship with my family (adoptive). It doesn’t come natural, we don’t have that same click ... we’re just different, you know so I don’t feel like I’ve ever really had that connection and still don’t and probably do more out of, I probably, like I go down and see her and I take her out and I do this ‘cause she’s 78 now, more out of, and I shouldn’t say obligation ‘cause that’s really horrible, but it probably is out of that. (Sally, 454,139)

Through the recognition of ‘sameness’ with his biological mother, the difference from his adoptive mother became contextualised for Brendon. Being different mattered to how the relationship with the adoptive family was experienced; rather than flow it felt like friction, rather than natural it felt forced. Despite a lack of connection, Sally felt a sense of “obligation” to her adoptive mother, which was problematic. The absence of ‘it’ was also articulated through feeling “different” from and this

difference was experienced as “abrasive”, “unnatural” and “disconnected”. Most of the participants experienced difference from rather than a sense of belonging to their adoptive family, and this is similar to research findings that three out of four adoptees experienced a lack of close adoptive family associations and a sense of belonging (Triseliotis, 1973).

Importantly, and not to negate more ‘connected’ adoptive relationships, two of the participants in this study experience close and supportive relationships with their adoptive families and very much feel part of their adoptive family system:

I am very much part of that family and I don’t feel like I’m an adopted part of that family. I do feel like I’m a part of that family and even my dad’s family who I don’t have much to do with because they live so far away, I don’t feel I’m an adopted part of their family either, I do feel like I’m part of their family. (Shelly, 112)

They’ve always, they’re really supportive but they’d always like offer advice, but you, they wouldn’t force it on me. I think she is the mother (adoptive) I was meant to have. (Mary, 208)

Shelly does feel like she belongs to her adoptive family and has an ongoing, devoted relationship with her adoptive mother. The relationship between Mary and her adoptive mother is experienced by Mary to be positive - the one she was meant to have. In this sense, Mary takes up *as if born to* as “meant to be” where the adoptive family relationships are supportive and loving. Triseliotis (1973) also found that adoptees who experienced successful adoptions took up environmental narratives that enabled them to feel *as if born to* securely:

I had a really good environment but I umm, so that for me to you know grow, it was a very positive environment to grow up in and very loving, warm umm environment. (Mary, 836)

Where meaning is attached to the positive influence of the environment, an adoptee is enabled a sense of belonging. For most of the participants, however, *as if born to* remains a fiction. Blood as kinship discourse produces a loss of connection to the *as if born to* family with any differences to adoptive family members reminding adoptees of the lack of “fit” within that family. At the same time, the *born to* relationships can position adoptees *as if born to* the adoptive family and when this happens adoptees feel uncomfortable because it is “not a nice place to be”. Positioned outside any familial relationship, the participants experienced a sense of psychic homelessness and acted independently because they lack support; they can rely on no-one. When neither *born to* nor *as if born to* is possible adoptees return to the in-between space in no-man’s land. And, while this is not a nice place to reside, the significance of a name is storied as a way to return to and connect with their origins.

### **The significance of a name**

One of the markers of being *as if born to* in the narrative constitution of the adopted subject is how the legitimate subject is positioned as entitled to the benefits of a father producing the moral (adopted) subject. Embedded within patriarchal social power relations, the legal right to property and inheritance is patrilineal. Access to the entitlements of the moral subject depends on the significance of the name of the father. The naming process produces subjects, identifying who we are and who we are not (Danaher et al., 2000). The legal practice of adoption transfers the benefits of a father to the adopted child, through the authority to name the child *as if born to*. In this way, the legitimate subject enters the moral order, and is subjected to the authority of the power relations that govern social relationships.

While the narrative constitution of adoptees depends on “kinship by design” (Herman, 2006, p. 207), most of the participants resisted the legitimacy that denied them their genealogical history. How they represented the significance of ‘naming’ in their stories spoke of the relationship between their *first* names given by their birth mothers, and the surname of their biological parents, when known, and the meaning of kinship. Narrating the significance of a birth name demonstrated a resistance to the moral trajectory of being *as if born to*, or being the property of the adoptive family as imposed by the act of being made legitimate:

I know I’m a [surname] so I’m Scottish ... then my adoptive parents changed it to [full name including her birth surname] which I think is fabulous because I don’t see myself as a [first name] ... but I’m a [surname] so that sounds really, a really strong Scottish name. (Cooley, 438, 445, 448)

It was incredible because her and I look so much fucken alike and there’s always a joke like I’m a [birth family name] that’s her, her family name, umm her unmarried name because I’m just one of them, you put me in a pile of [family name] man and it’s just like [them], fucken it’s, it’s amazing. It’s spooky aye. (Brendon, 543)

Being connected through genealogy enables adoptees an identity, knowledge of who they are, and a sense of embodied familiarity and affinity. Their birth family connects adoptees to their identity; “I’m a [birth family name]”. The name carries the embodied connection that legitimacy could not produce. This is felt strongly as referenced by Brendon’s emotive language “it’s just like [them]...fucken its amazing”. The biological experience is represented through names as an identity with a connection to kinship; it also speaks to the in-between:

That’s who I am, umm, umm the really simple, that’s the really simple answer ‘cause that’s just who I am. I am a [birth family last name] which is my biological family that’s who I, do

you know what I mean, that's who I am. The fact that I was, for whatever reason, given away to be raised by another family I can kind of get that doesn't mean that I'm a [adoptive family last name], it means I was a [birth family last name] who was given away. That's who I was, do you know what I mean - to be raised by another family because bla, bla, bla she was unmarried and bla, bla whatever, you know okay whatever but that doesn't mean I'm not a [birth family last name]. (Barry, 1041)

Barry represents clarity when stating that who "I am" is "really simple" and it is intimately connected to "who I was" before, and that history cannot be taken away through the trajectory of *as if born to*. The significance of a name to identity is not something "society" can take away through its social practices:

The fact that society tells me that I'm not a [birth family last name], really, really, really makes me angry because I just think fuck you and fuck that, to be honest, excuse my language (laugh) ... that's who I am and why do you think it's okay to take that away from me? No-one else gets to have to do that. (Barry, 1056, 1060)

Feelings of anger are experienced as an effect of the social relationships and legislation enacted through practices of adoption that denies the 'truth' (I am not) of "who I am". It is the very practice of adoption that takes away the knowing of oneself. Identity is represented in the significance of a name in the adoptees' experiences. The name given by a birth mother signifies a 'real' knowing of themselves; it indicates an authentic subject, an origin that is accessed through the identifying information on the original birth certificate:

When I got my original birth certificate, I discovered that my adoptive parents had changed my middle name from [name] to [name]. On my original birth cert. it seemed to me that the name I was given was [name], full stop. That's all. That was me - and how my [birth] mother named me. It didn't seem connected to my (birth) mother's family name and my [birth] father wasn't named. So that was me [no family name]. Just [name]. Me. I think I became real to myself then. (Jan, 1163)

For this participant, that the name given to her by her birth mother excluded a surname did not matter, "full stop. That's all. That was me". And how that name was given is also important to "me": having that knowledge enabled a "real to myself", historically located at birth, not a legal fiction and no longer *as if born to*, as a subject of the practices of adoption. Yet the knowledge of a prior relationship that enabled a sense of "real" is not legally legitimate when *as if born to*. The legal subject is subjected to the law of the father within the adoptive family. To take up the name given by a birth

mother, that represented “me” at the birth origin, it became necessary to obtain the legal sanction of the law through a deed poll process, which is registered with the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages arm of the state:

I got a Social Welfare ID with just [name] on it and then changed my bank accounts to that name. Later when I needed a passport I changed my name to [name] by deed poll and then got the passport in that name ... it was really nice to formally shed the names of my abusers, the family I grew up with and my husband, and honour the name I was given with love at birth. (Jan, 1167, 1169)

To return to the “real” enabled a “shedding of the name” of her “abusers” to position herself “honourably” in the love of birth. To honour that love, was felt as “really nice”. The significance of a name is also represented through the meaning of the stories that link genealogy and subjectivity, names are connected in origin, generationally; it locates oneself in history and enables a position within the “specialness” of being *born to*:

[Name] was my dad’s name so that’s my middle, my first name [name] which is my great uncle, which I found out, umm he, which is obviously my granddad’s, one of my granddad’s brothers, so it is, is that great uncle, anyway, so granddad’s brother was the only family that told my mum to keep me and that was my name. So my name and obviously [name] which was my dad’s name and [name] which is my family’s name is incredibly special to me...’cause it has so much (sigh) history, do you know what I mean, it says so much to me about who I am and my history. (Barry, 1109)

To know a history where genealogy is about “keeping me” is important and links all of the names as “incredibly special to me”. Barry sighed as he told this story. The sigh signified an embodied sadness for the history that connects him but that was lost in righting the wrongs of illegitimacy. The moral trajectory that constitutes the adopted subject legislates a break between - the disconnection/connection - and yet it also enables a position of resistance with the connecting of oneself to the meanings of their birth family. Although, not all participants had access to their birth stories, as reunions had not taken place, what was significant in obtaining access to birth records was the name given by the birth mother:

My birth name was going to be [birth name]. (Maxine, 406)

And that my name was [name] that my mother gave me the name [full name], which I thought, was lovely for her to do that - that she named me. (Cooley, 440)

A letter that you get back [about birth history] and all it says is that you had been called [name]. (Sally, 333)

I “was going to be”, or “had been called” is the name that enables a connection to the birth mother. Although being named by their birth mother feels “lovely” the meaning of the name, its history, remains disconnected. Despite the significance of a name, for Sally it was not enough. Sally has been denied a relationship with her birth mother because of the legal practice of veto. For her, the name is not a connection with the birth mother. As a child, for Brendon a connection to his birth mother was enabled through the storying of him as [baby name], which was based on the initial of his birth mother:

Mum made it special again by saying you know in the hospital they’d call the kids, I was called [name] in the hospital because my birth mother’s called [name] - they’d assign me a J. (Brendon, 86)

In this way, Brendon experienced “specialness” through his connection with his birth mother’s first name initial. With no experience, memory or stories to draw from to construct the birth parents, a child has no representation of the birth mother for sense making or connecting to an identity that they can claim is authentic and original. This lack of connection or relationship with the birth mother necessarily affects an adoptee. In that instance, the idea of a birth mother must be given up or fantasised about because secrecy meant there was nothing tangible to grasp (Lousada, 2000). For adoptees, the birth name or naming represents a connection to kinship and genetic ties.

### **Kinship, Blood and Genetic Ties**

While *as if born to* produces a moral subject entitled to the benefits of the name of the father, it did not protect an adoptee from the effects of being positioned outside the taken-for-granted assumption that ‘blood is thicker than water’. The act of adoption establishes kinship in law only; it does not reconstruct kinship biologically (Miall, 1996). Societies throughout the world narrate the significance of kinship through the value of blood as the symbol for real kinship. For instance March and Miall (2000) and Lebner (2000) report that within the USA the notion of kinship is a social structure based primarily on a construction of blood tie relationships. Moreover, Modell (1997) asserts “that in American culture a fictive kinship is perceived as lacking something, and this something is expressed in a vocabulary of blood, biology, genetics, roots, and other terms which have a similar rhetorical impact” (p. 47). Here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Griffith (1991) argues that knowledge of blood ties are connected through genealogy. Adoptees live with the distinction between blood and social ties and embody social discourses around notions of ‘proper’ blood kinship, which they know they lack - the “big black secret” as articulated by Shelly (164).

The practices of adoption, which legislate the adoptive relationship, depend on the construction of blood tie kinship as the moral order for family structure, thereby in effect positioning the adoptee outside the “real” within their adoptive family. Being *as if born to* leaves something out:

I guess you know it’s that thing like when I used to fight with my brothers they’d always say well you’re not our real sister anyway and it was kind of like you know, kind of feeling a wee bit, oh I don’t know. I used to kind of feel like a wee bit left out of things and I don’t know, yeah I (sigh). (Cooley, 64)

You know ‘cause when I was a child, daily, I was reminded daily that I was adopted man. (Brendon, 1372)

Her adopted brothers positioned Cooley as an inauthentic sibling. To be “left out” represents the lack in the connection to genealogy that is embodied. And here, while drawing on my own experiences, I suspect the feelings of aloneness are reiterated, felt and lived. Brendon “was reminded” of his difference daily, something that would not be easy for a child.

As a colonial nation, Aotearoa/New Zealand tells stories of migration and the ships that brought ancestors to this land. To be able to trace that genealogical history is considered important in societies that value blood tie kinships:

I remember the adopted family, they used to talk about - one of them said that umm [my adoptive mother] I think on [my adoptive mother’s] side of the family, they could trace their ancestors back to one of the first ships that came out and I thought but that’s not me. And then on [adoptive father’s] side of the family it was to do with a Scottish clan and I was always very aware that that’s not me, that’s not the blood that’s in my veins (laugh). (Margaret, 1030)

Margaret’s position within the adoptive family history was resisted as “not me”, knowing the significance of the blood kinship of being *born to*, “that’s not the blood that’s in my veins”. As Margaret tells this story, she laughs. Laughter here signifies her consciousness of the legitimacy of ‘blood’ and her recognition of a ‘cruel’ hoax that attempted to create a fiction that was not felt. The lack of blood kinship is constantly reproduced through stories of genetic inheritance that forever excludes adoptees:

My husband’s family are quite big on blood and umm, and you know umm I found that you know, there would be constant - oh doesn’t she look like so and so, oh she’s just like her father and I think that kind of irritated me because I had no comeback ... who’s in that and that did, and I kind of felt being adopted, you, you, you just sit there and take it. (Mary, 292, 305)

To have children positioned in the family through their genetic similarities, “she looks like”, is a lack that effectively remains a silence, an adopted place where you just feel as you “sit there and take it”. Being positioned in a social order that values the genetic inheritance of blood kinship is difficult to resist and also excludes the meanings of being connected to the wider relationships of storied ancestry and spirituality. The adoptee experiences lack:

What was there in relation to the adoption thing was that I didn't have whakapapa. (Jan, 102)

As far as being attuned to family, to blood, to who I am, my children are who I am, I see myself so much in my children, so yeah that's why I feel alone ... like a genetic - one of a kind. (Brendon, 643, 648)

I just, that's my dream - do you know what I mean? That we understand that family and our connection to it, to our genetic family, to our biological family is huge. It is who we are, it's not just who we are right now, but it's who, where we've come from, it's, it is our (tears), it is our ancestors. (Barry, 1745)

To actually know where I sit, you know, in the world and with my ancestors and you know, my yeah, my [biological] family. (Cooley, 632)

Not having “whakapapa” and not knowing where “I sit” among ancestors suggests a loss of more than a genetic inheritance, it is also a loss of storying where we come from and how we connect. The meaningfulness is an emotional loss, a grief for missing the connection to the past. Barry dreams of a society that understands what that might mean for adoptees, that loss of “genetic family ... is huge” because “it is who we are”, not the “who we are right now” that is produced through legislated fiction. Barry cried as he sensed his ancestors that were lost.

Again, loss resonates with subjection to an ‘inauthentic’ origin. Once there is a connection to biological relationships, adoptees are able to experience the ancestral and spiritual connection “felt” through an “instant” recognition that is beyond words:

That was amazing aye and instantly there's a connection - that whole unspoken thing - there's just whole catching eyes and just, our ancestors are there, you know with us, on our shoulders (tears). (Brendon, 562)

To feel your “ancestors are there” for the first time is an overwhelming embodied experience, one that brought Brendon to tears. To have a connection with the past is difficult to represent through

language; although there is an ‘intellectual’ account of adoption accessible as an adult, Maxine emphasised her felt embodiment as profound:

There’s nothing intellectual about adoption and the intellectual stuff is the adult stuff, the rest is cellular and umm, you know, it’s so profound. (Maxine, 584)

Here the reflective experience of connection is embodied; it is metaphorised as more “cellular”. The embodied speaks of a history of the primary relationship, the “bonding” that occurs in utero as Maxine narrates below. The bond has always been there:

They had already bonded, they’d long ago bonded ... it was already you know there, part of it; it already had its genetic history. It had nine months you know it was already a being. (Maxine, 901, 909)

The sense of history this brings is a position of “already” with an ontological status. A foetus is said to hear the voice of its mother, experience her biological rhythms and indeed all of her existence. Taking the neonate from its birth mother means the connection to a body that involves smell, movement and feeling is missing (McGinn, 2000). To deliver a neonate to an empty cot and/or eventually the adoptive parent’s arms, with no continuity of embodied connection is to produce a loss that for that infant is remembered and reproduced in familial and social relationships.

While blood tie kinship is privileged in family relationships, and adoptees are able to resist their *as if born to* lack by connecting to their biological histories, the trajectory of blood tie kinship reproduces the adopted subject as inheriting problematic dispositions. Western societies’ obsession with heritability and risk locates blame for problematic behaviour in ‘bad blood’ rather than in the practices of adoption (Carangelo, 2003; Lebner, 2000; Wegar, 2000). It seems that a ‘defective’ genetic history is used to moderate behaviour within an adoptive relationship and serves as a warning against problematic behaviour:

My mum who brought me up, I’m always going to call mum, my mum, said to me then “you’ve really got to watch your drinking, it’s in your genes, just be careful”. (Brendon, 330)

According to genetic discourse, Brendon is at risk of problematic drinking. He is coached to “be careful” as his “genes” could lead him astray. However, the legal, moral subject of adoption that the goal of adoption practised through a ‘complete break’ is premised on favouring nurture and environmental influences over ‘bad blood’. Nonetheless, social discourses on heredity, blood and problematic behaviour enabled Brendon to make sense of his own substance dependency:

It turns out that my birth father, umm he's an absolute, his whole family, there's just alcoholism all through that family, and all through my mother's family, and ... there's just a mass of addiction everywhere and the family I grew up in there's not, there's no, they don't, they're just not addicts. (Brendon, 307, 312)

There is tension between knowing and not knowing genetic histories for adoptees. For Brendon, the knowledge of his genetic history was useful to make sense of his addictive behaviour. Yet up until the inception of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, adoptees were denied any right to a generic history even when it could be construed as problematic within social discourse.

For some of the participants, there were fears associated with not having knowledge of their genetic history especially related to the possibility of incestuous relationships. The adoptee gains social legitimacy when *as if born to*, but is left with the possibility of unknowingly breaking the incest taboo (R. J. Lifton, 1976). The Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* (2000) argues that the Adoption Act 1955 is confusing in the event of marriage or incest because it is unclear whether the adoptive and natural parents are both considered parents in that instance. Legally, the High Court has discretion to allow marriage if the relationship is understood as affinity and not consanguinity (closely genetically related), a prohibition against genetic risk of inbreeding and protection of family integrity (Griffith, 1991). Yet fear of interrelationships between blood kin has led participants to want to know their birth information for the sake of future relationships, as a form of protection. This fear however, remains when the birth records are limited and the father's details are often not recorded:

I wouldn't like umm there to be any inter-marriage because you don't know, umm and so that's what I've always said to the children it, umm this is the name of the person, this is the married name, so they know that the door is open so if, if they had to do a check. (Mary, 421)

There should be some type of law that informs the children 'cause I think I was just watching Oprah or something and you know a boy and girl got together, you know, but they both hadn't met their dads before, had something in common, fell in love, got married, had kids, was doing like, you know, the six-year-old, seven-year-old family tree, delved into some research and found out that they had the same father. (Alice, 563)

Media representations of genetically related siblings having children sensationalise breaches of the incest taboo and the social implications can be traumatic for those who are unable to protect themselves with knowledge of their biological origins. Incestuous relationships are abhorred by society, yet Griffith (1991) argues that legislative secrecy means that some adoptees unknowingly enter into incestuous relationships. It is a "dark side of adoption nobody wants to hear about or face" (Sec

10, p. 4). The technology of the ‘complete break’ that severed blood ties is a legal problem; legal statutes that prohibit marriage between family members are not accounted for in the production of the (not knowing) legal adopted subject. In this way, the fear of Genetic Sexual Attraction or incest remains possible through not knowing a genetic history, at least partially, that produces a ‘real’ material and embodied risk for adoptees and their children. Fear and risk of incest speak to the significance of ‘blood ties’ that are lived by adoptees under the threat of the ‘dark cloud’ of secrecy about their genetic history.

Genetic risks were subordinated in ‘closed’ adoption despite taken-for-granted understandings of blood kinship as the norm so that knowledge about genetic history that is vital for social relationships and identity was suppressed. The moral order of legitimacy that produces a ‘complete break’ from the sins of the mother assumes that ‘bad blood’ can be overcome. Yet the significance of ‘blood’ and ‘genetic’ similarity was taken into account when the adopted child *as if born to*, physically and psychologically ‘matched’ the adoptive family.

### **Techniques of matching**

Despite the significance of the lack of blood kinship that is constantly reproduced through stories of genetic inheritance, matching was a technology that enabled differences that could expose the secret of the ‘complete break’ to be minimised. Matching similarities, physical appearance, intelligence and personality assumes that similarity enhances bonding and ‘stable’ identities for all family members could be achieved (Griffith, 1991). For the adopted child to look like its adoptive family also enabled the secrecy that protects adoptive parents. Two of the participants talked about the process of matching being significant in the history of their adoptive relationships:

The adoption was done through Social Welfare, umm my dad at that stage and my mum worked [in a related field] so my understanding was that they sort of told them that they wanted a reasonable child (laugh) sort of thing and I think they possibly academically tried to match me up more than they poss, I don’t know I’m guessing they may have to tried to do a better match [from an informed place] because umm while I love my mum very much, I’m very much like my dad and I could, in reality, have been his daughter, so I suspect that I could, it could have been luck, it could have been fluke, or they could have made an effort to try and do a good match. (Shelly, 16)

Mum would say stuff like well you know it’s amazing how they match you up with people that have the same hair colour, and people say we could be mother and daughter. You know she would say this stuff to me, but it’s kind of like (tears); I can never be their biological child. (Maxine, 190)

Storied as similar, matching enabled a set of attributes to be selected by adoptive parents to produce a “reasonable child” and enabled a sense of “could have been real” although it is possible that the similarities were more “luck” than careful choices. By “academically” matching Shelly and her adoptive parents, intelligence may have been privileged yet it is physical attributes that enable recognition of a biological relationship to those ‘outside’. Recognising physical similarity was “amazing” for the adoptive mother but experienced as a “loss” for the adoptee that embodies grief for a biological relationship that is ‘real’ rather than ‘lucky’ and also “can never be”. Acts of matching did not reproduce the subject *as if born to* as an authentic blood relationship:

There’s kind of like, not that mirror there, like, I don’t look at my family and go - oh yeah I can see myself, you know, and look there’s great uncle Bob you know bla bla. It’s just not there, it doesn’t exist at all ... the laugh, the talk, the you know mannerisms and that, they just don’t exist so it’s, it’s work. Even though I’ve lived with these people, you know my family all my life, lived with these people (laugh) all my life you know and umm, it’s still not, it’s comfortable, but those things don’t, aren’t there. (Maxine, 285, 293)

The attempts at physical matching, “looks like”, may have sometimes been partially successful, but for participants the “mirror” that enables authentic connection is lacking. To not see “mannerisms” like laughter means that social relationships become harder work. They are “comfortable” but without mirroring bodily gestures, something is missing. The importance of biological similarity to the secret that protects adoptive parents from those outside seeing the difference between them and their adoptive child, was experienced by one participant as “depriving” her of “siblings”:

After I was adopted, they, adoptions changed from umm, Social Welfare to be done through the hospitals and the matron of the children’s ward, the babies’ ward at [the] hospital, umm her parents lived across the road or really close to my parents. And the reason they wouldn’t adopt another child was because they didn’t want this person who lived near them knowing all about the child they adopted which I think is pathetic because it deprived me of having siblings because they were umm so over the top about people knowing. (Shelly, 38)

So convincing were the discourses of secrecy and shame, Shelly’s parents “wouldn’t adopt another child”; to be found out as lacking a biological child was a risk to their social position. While maintaining the secret prevented siblings, relationships with siblings were also storied through matching. There is little mention of sibling matching in the international literature however, to “match” or to “look like” siblings was important to participants:

She did her best to match that, you know. The mother, she said the mother was a lovely girl and she tried to, and so she looked obviously, she must have met my birth mother and then looked at the circumstances and then thought they matched quite well. (Mary, 609)

Now that he's grown up I can kind of see that we look a wee bit alike. (Cooley, 79)

Despite Cooley narrating a resistance to “likeness” between siblings, matching did not necessarily privilege physical “likeness”; it also matched similar birth mother histories, “the circumstances” with ‘suitable’ adoptive mothers. Later, and with knowledge of the practice of matching, some recognition of physical similarity is possible. The moral trajectory of selective matching enabled protection for the adoptive parents from social stigma when a biological family is the norm and blood ties and genetic history sanction legitimate children. It was also a means to protect the adopted child. The process of genealogical bewilderment, which can occur for adolescents within a ‘closed’ adoption system, is intensified with no physical matching (Petta & Steed, 2005; Upshur & Demick, 2006).

Interestingly, although matching was standard practice, the participants who were positioned as similar were more able to articulate the problematics of matching that failed to protect or ameliorate differences embedded in biological and genetic difference. Participants who did not match their adoptive families were already ‘marked’ as different. And, matching did not locate the adoptee within the blood kinship ties represented through the family tree.

### **The family tree**

Being located outside social and family norms is problematic for adoptees. The secrecy that protects adoptive parents does not protect adoptees from a social position of difference. As already discussed, genealogy is a valued commodity in the constitution of subjectivity and identity and is embedded in social relationships. For these reasons, a ‘family tree’ is an educational tool within school curricula (Griffith, 1991). The blood ties that produces ancestral branches are unknown for the adopted child and little understanding of that lack by teachers is enabled through the secrecy of the ‘cut’ that denies the difference:

I remember that being hell as a kid you know, like doing your family tree at school, just like there was me, my dad, my mum, and my brother and they were like, “well what about your aunties?” - it's just like I don't have any 'cause my mum didn't talk to any of her biological family at all ... I'd be like I'm adopted and then they used to be like well write up two, write up your adopted family's one and then it was just, like okay, so I've got [birth mother] [birth brother] and [birth grandma] (laugh) who else do I put in it you know 'cause you, you don't

know...I ended up just making up stuff like you know, you'd have it write up and I'd just make up people's names, names that I thought were cool. (Alice, 1189, 1198)

I used to find it really hard umm, you know, in teenage years, like when you had to do umm always at school, it's always like, "let's do your family tree" and I used to just, I couldn't, I just couldn't do it you know, and I couldn't even do my own adopted family tree. It was like I didn't want to have anything to do with it at all and umm you know, it was almost like, I had to get a written note to get out of doing it because I couldn't do it because it was always like this isn't my family. This isn't my family, it is my family but it's not my family so umm I don't know who my family is so I don't know, I can't do anything about it. (Maxine, 238)

The assumption that there is access to family tree information is experienced as "hell". Here, hell represents a dark, foreboding place that evokes feelings of pain and distress. The teacher's insistence that Alice complete the family tree exercise ignored that her family systems were outside of social norms. For Alice, to be required to construct two family trees meant fabricating a history. As an adolescent, Maxine found the requirements of studying her family tree at school "really hard", signifying emotions that are so unpleasant she "couldn't do it". She refuses to participate in tracing her adoptive family, as it was a reminder of her inauthenticity - the contradiction of "family" and "not my family". Ignorance of how family tree exercises might matter to them was significant to the participants who found ways to resist their 'otherness' to the norm by "making it up" or refusing to participate. B. J. Lifton (1994) argued for the need to understand that the adoptive family tree has roots that do not burrow back to an adoptee's forebears so they perch precariously on the adoptive family tree without the genetic and blood tie connections that are assumed by social discourse of 'normal' families.

In some instances, the adoptive family tree was understood as an important marker to their place in the adoptive family, and mattered to the telling of their history. In this sense, the link to adoptive family genealogy can stand in for the 'gap' in history for the next generation:

I mean at school they always pull out - do your family tree, do your this and that, I could always fill it out, it was more on, when it came; it was more for my children and because [my husband's] family can go back lots on one side but it stops on the other, so on that point of view it, it, it really didn't, I still had all the, filled out all the family tree because to me because to me [the adoptive family] that was, is my family. (Mary, 82)

For Mary, social relationships that value genealogical connection are reproduced through a sense of coherency with the notion of 'family', despite an absence of blood ties that underpin the metaphor of family tree. For others, the lack of a family tree is experienced as a lack of history raising the question of the significance of blood ties to a coherent experience of an identity:

It's just, made me think, could there be, you know, I wonder if things are any different, you know, in trying to track my mother down now, or you know wanting to know how to get, you know, my family tree ... well I've kind of wondered about it, but I haven't really dug any deeper, it's just kind of been a fleeting thought and then it's gone ... but sitting here talking to you it's kind of like made me realise just how significant it is for me. (Cooley, 625, 629, 632)

In Cooley's day-to-day living of a secret and silenced position, it is easy to wonder, but not dig "any deeper", letting the wonderings float by. That it is not significant can also be articulated as "not essential":

The other thing too I think, it is not essential, but I think it is quite nice to be able to, maybe trace the family roots, I don't think it's important in your everyday life because umm I don't actually think it's, unless you've got a culture that you need ... I think that history, you know like because umm you, it isn't, it's quite nice to be able to trace back family roots. (Mary, 309, 1245)

Even where the adoptive relationship was a strong connection, the idea of knowing "family roots" would be "nice" although not essential to day-to-day life. It seems in this instance that the value of knowing is culturally located where the metaphor of roots enables a sense of connection to land. Family roots trace a particular history and they enable biological connections more significant than "looking like":

It wasn't so much that I didn't want to be with them, it was that I really couldn't umm, I didn't, I looked like my dad but I didn't really look like my mum. I knew deep down I knew I wasn't theirs, biologically, and I wanted, I wanted to know what my roots were. (Shelly, 376)

To know "deep down" represents an embodied knowing of biological disconnection that does not satisfy felt needs for "what my roots were". The adoptee in this instance remains dislocated and the roots are planted in no-man's land. The connection between roots and land was realised through the metaphor of an "empty field". With "no roots" there is "nothing here", "no-one":

I'm just this person in an empty field and there was no-one. You know I just felt this whole, well you know this isn't my, there's no roots, there's no nothing here, you know, who, who am I? (Vaughn, 89)

The experience of being alone, constituted through disconnection, is an effect of a 'complete break' from both *born to* and *as if born to* families and the adopted subject is left without identity as a

connection with others. As discussed earlier, the *as if born to* did not revoke the birth history and without roots embedded in either family, a legitimate identity is a struggle. The metaphors accompanying a biological connection suggest another position of ‘no place’ - the “empty field”. When learning of their adoptive status, adoptees make sense of themselves as not biological children with biological parents; ‘I am not yours’, while simultaneously knowing that the adoptive family is ‘not mine’. Adoptees are deprived of having a family tree, their ‘roots’ in the world, through a moral order that removed all knowledge of biological connections at the same time as being thoroughly embedded in valuing blood ties as ‘proper’, ‘legitimate’ kinship, signified by a father’s name.

### **Access to a Medical History**

The legitimacy that disconnects adoptees from their biological history is also an exclusion from access to resources for health and wellbeing. There is no entitlement to knowledge of genetic predisposition to syndromes and conditions, which is considered vital knowledge in our Western preoccupation with health, medicine and genetics (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000). Through practices of secrecy, adoptees are denied the knowledge of a biological history for prevention and intervention in their health risk and management.

Within the health system, a key diagnostic tool is genetic heritability. For adoptees, it is not possible to ‘know’ of potential genetic conditions, and to “find out” through routine blood tests is a significant risk:

I have that [medical condition], there is only 10 percent of the population that have it, I have that [medical condition] ... I found out that I had that [medical condition] umm I went to, I had to get a blood thing for something, I think I had kidney problems years ago and the doctor called me back in and said, you know, ‘cause it’s actually quite important to know. (Sally, 496, 533)

To be *as if born to* is to be born without access to the health resources that enables positive health outcomes, especially when it is “actually quite important to know”. In the case of some health conditions, knowledge of genetic history may be the difference between life and death<sup>12</sup>. Among participants, lack of health related knowledge was represented through a fear of the unknown both in relation to future health risks for themselves and for their children, and as a constant reminder of their exclusion when unable to provide a genetic history to health care professionals.

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<sup>12</sup> In 2009, the Aotearoa/New Zealand TV3 series “Missing Pieces” storied the tragic situation of Kelly Traille, a 28-year-old mother of 3-year-old twins who was unable to find her birth father in time to save her life. Kelly was adopted at birth and had a rare blood type. After developing leukaemia she urgently tried to find her birth father in the hope of finding a match for a bone marrow transplant. Her family enlisted the help of TV3 in the search. Her birth father, who had no knowledge he had a relinquished child, was not found in time. In that instance the health risk was too great (Lomas & Heathcote, 2009).

### **Fear of the unknown**

In the chapter on research and psychopathology, it became apparent that the focus on adoptees' 'inferior' blood that may lead to psychological disorder and health problems concealed any moral, political and social inequalities for adoptees. As a useful research tool, adoptees produce knowledge of heritability of disease or disorder but without a genetic history they do not have access to knowledge of disease prevention for themselves. Therefore, participants experience fear of any unknown risks. Alice does have access to her birth mother's medical history, but her history is still partial because she does not have access to her birth father's medical history:

Like is there anything - diseases or anything like that, that are hereditary or you know things that come at boys, or you know, like is there anything on that side of the family, like all the women of that side of the family - what happened to them when they were pregnant or things like that? I mean that's all stuff that I just don't know and I think when I start having kids you know I probably will ask questions about it then. (Alice, 1209)

To question, "is there anything", is to embody uncertainty and fear for one's health and wellbeing. Information that might ordinarily be available for making sense of pregnancy as a familial pattern is "missing" and "not knowing" raises concerns for future children. Yet, genetic and health histories are more than risk of heritable disease, they are also the link between the ordinariness of having a connection with "what happened" within family histories to enable knowledge of potential outcomes. The lack of knowledge of medical predisposition to illness is problematic for participants not only when they think of having children but also when they consider the ongoing health of their children:

Then you worry about your kids; I haven't got that information for them. (Toni, 1059)

I just think that you should know things like that. Some of those things that when you, especially for your own kids, you know it's important, whether you might have diabetes in your family, that's important because you might bring your daughter up, or your child up differently. You might make sure that you; you don't bring on diabetes. (Sally, 552)

The presence of the lack is a "worry" that cannot be relieved and produces an anxiety about bringing up a child differently if there is "something" to know. Alice, Toni and Sally's fear extends into future generations; it involves the wellbeing of their children. Lack of knowledge of genetic predisposition positions adoptees as potentially less effective parents, because they cannot protect their child.

Access to medical history, without contact with birth parents is impossible. Adoptive parents are not given the information and the agents of the state did not obtain, keep or provide any possible

health information. The right to know is a legal issue and despite support from advocates and the medical system that privilege genetic information, it remains inaccessible:

I had two miscarriages for no reason one after the other and wanted to know what was in my medical history and I tackled my parents about that and they didn't know anything, at that stage I was trying to find my birth mother, I think I might have gone to Social Welfare and they weren't able to tell me any medical information and at that stage I spoke to the specialist I had, and I asked him if I, I was involved in [an] adoption support group then and I was seriously looking at bringing a test case to court on the grounds of wanting medical information ... and the specialist I went to, the gynaecologist I went to was prepared to go to court with me to try and push the issue on the grounds of adoptees being entitled to have any medical information 'cause you didn't. (Shelly, 229, 239)

Being prepared to "go to court" to gain access to medical information is a form of resistance to legal subjection that denies "entitlement" to a birth history. Specialists understand the implications of this for health outcomes and were willing "to go to court" to "push" the human rights issue. Shelly was willing to fight for her right to know whether her biological parents' medical history was the origin of her own medical issues.

A specific lack of birth history for adoptees is their prenatal experience. Some birth mothers endured aversive situations during the 'closed' adoption period, and according to Triseliotis (1973) any pressures during pregnancy might affect a predisposition towards psychological problems for the adoptee. Adoptees themselves query any risks:

You do have to wonder whether that prenatal environment, whether the positive and the negatives, because we all know that, you know, alcohol, you know this, that's, I forget now, it's a long time since I studied it but you know the effects of alcohol ... and drugs, yeah, yeah yes, so we do know that, I mean it's proven that that's had an effect. (Mary, 859, 863)

Knowledge of the effects of alcohol and drugs on the "prenatal environment" in general as a risk factor also raises questions for an adoptee's own "prenatal history" that are left unanswered, both "positive and negatives". The unknown is also realised through the relationship between medical history of mental health and heredity. Where understandings of "disorder" are genetic, and with the possibility of never knowing mental health histories, the unknown is a relentless presence:

I mean you don't know there might be bi-polar in the family, there might be depression you just don't know ... and whether those things help or not, who knows but it's that unknown, it's that constant unknown. (Sally, 564, 569)

The “constant unknown” may never be resolved for adoptees with partial or no knowledge of their birth histories. To be born in a specific historical location, and to have that removed to become a legal subject, is a constraint on being able to participate in the health care of ‘normal’ citizens. In health care, specifically, as in many other social relationships, adoptees are constituted as lacking or outside biological family norms.

### **General health and physical knowledge**

Having access to medical and physical knowledge enables adoptees to address their fear of the unknown through making sense of who they are and how they are physically similar to someone else. Through knowing something of their birth family, it was possible to gain some relief from the relentless unknown:

I’m not a fat person, but I’m not a skinny person either so now I can understand where that comes from so that’s, you know that’s been a little bit of closure you know. (Vaughn, 141)

One of the cool things for me was the double jointed toe that bends in is a family thing. I always thought my crooked toe was because the mother I grew up with made me wear shoes that were too small. (Jan, 435)

To have “closure” or to be able to recognise physical attributes as being “cool” rather than an abnormality is enabled through access to knowledge of heritability, and the physical mirroring of genetic sameness. In this way, there was some “closure” to not knowing, while also making sense of distinctive physical particularities as a “family thing”.

Adoptees face a particular discomfort when questioned by professionals about their family history and, according to Burgess (1976), they either assume their adoptive history, which is misleading, or take up the position of difference, without history. Either position is constrained through disconnection to their birth:

What I find frustrating is that when you go to the doctors or something and they ask you for a medical history - have you in your family ra de ra de ra. I’m like I, oh I used to say just no or I don’t know, but now I’m finding I’m saying no I was adopted (laugh) and then it’s sort of like, stops their questioning, yeah I don’t know why I just started to decide to say no, I’m adopted. (Toni, 1036)

Frustration is felt when subjected to questioning about a physical history that is unknown. The decision to specify their difference, to claim their history of lack, can be understood as an effective technique of resistance; “it stops their questioning”:

I think actually just saying that stops it, the pain from thinking about the adoption (laugh), it's like I'm not going there, no I was adopted and that's it, that's all you're getting out of me. (Toni, 1048)

What is enabled through this resistance is protection against the embodied "pain" of their lack. To be reminded of "the adoption" is to be reminded of relinquishment, the abandonment and the historical gap that constitutes an adoptee's sense of identity. Although not knowing a familial medical history is not necessarily exclusive to adoptees given the importance of history to predict risk, it seems that an adoptee's health risk becomes a matter of "luck" that is not in the best interests of the child:

Adopted children, they don't know their health history and I do think, even though you don't always get it, because I didn't get much from my husband's mother, you know information on the families and things ... I think that if at all possible if that any history that is relevant you know ... medical history is important for the children, you know it's something that's very helpful for the overall welfare of the child and that is if, where you've got, I see that as a negative ... I've had no adenoids out, no tonsils out, no appendix or anything like that but umm you know we are not all that lucky ... so I kind of think that that should be something that is made available. I don't remember, like when you're 21 ... I think that is something you as a person; it would be nice to have that information. (Mary, 771, 775, 778, 781, 784, 788)

The significance of the knowledge of biological history is that it enables the same rights as biological children to information about health and wellbeing. To be constituted without rights is a breach of social justice (Benet, 1976; Griffith, 1991; Ludbrook, 1997). In this way, there is a call to those who hold social power to take responsibility for connecting adoptees to their medical history, and to the "roots" that connect that history to their birth:

Social Welfare or somebody has to contact birth parents to ask them. I believe everybody has got that right, even if nothing else. You have a right to know that because I was concerned the reason I was miscarrying was, there could be a huge incidence of Down Syndrome or Spina Bifida or something in my family and that was the reason. I think that ... the adoptee still should have the right to medical knowledge and something about their roots. (Shelly, 246, 857)

Where the institution of adoption is understood to be enacted in the best interests of the child, the problematics of being constituted through a moral order that denies entitlement to the knowledge of birth history has an ongoing effect on health and wellbeing as well as identity, legitimacy and social relationships. The relentlessness of being positioned outside the right to know can be relieved with some understanding of familial likeness that enables a sense of closure. It seems possible then, that the

call to provide information that connects an adoptee with their history is a necessary obligation of the system that legitimated the risk in practice.

### **Legitimacy through Secrets and Silence**

The implementation of the Adoption Act 1955 that produced the legitimate subject binds those involved in the events and agreements to the practice of keeping secrets. In a double bind, to produce legitimacy that protects the morality of citizens, the Act also engaged in the fiction *as if born to*, through legitimating lies and denial (Simmonds, 2000). To achieve secrecy, legal records pertaining to birth history were permanently sealed, as if a child's birth could be erased. Adoption was cast as static, an event in time, with no consideration of the consequences for the adoptee in the future (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). While it became possible to access birth records after 1985, the legal position remained unchanged; it is still possible to permanently seal birth records.

Interestingly, all of the participants were told as children that they were adopted. Rather than the exclusive experience *as if born to*, with the privileges of biological normality, the participants had knowledge of their 'otherness', in contradiction to the secret. The significance of being told the secret has been widely debated. Triseliotis (1973) argued that how an adoptee is told and when it is important to tell, are meaningful to the experience. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, it was commonly accepted that early disclosure (prior to age 5) was best, although the child may not fully comprehend the significance of the knowledge (Griffith, 1991). Early research suggested that there was an association between earlier revelations and satisfaction and older revelations and dissatisfaction (Triseliotis, 1973). While Triseliotis et al. (1997) argued that in gaining an awareness of being adopted, there is also a sense of rejection and grief around the loss of the birth family and not being wanted by the birth mother. Some of the participants could not remember being told, it was something that they had assimilated into their lived experience:

I've known, I don't, I can't remember a time when I didn't know I was adopted ... so I've kind of always known. (Barry, 203, 206)

I'd just always been, been aware of knowing that I was adopted. (Margaret, 41)

My parents were always open about telling me, so that I always knew that I was adopted and umm I don't know, umm (pause). I couldn't even pin point an age that they told me and I don't know if I could, I don't know about, like, that's a little bit blurry about whether I could pin point an age that I really knew as well, like I probably always knew. (Maxine, 72)

Rather than something that comes to be known, adoption is something that has always been for these participants. Knowing is more than being told, it is always already incorporated into their

identities. To be told does not come as an “epiphany”. In this way, it is not something that necessarily comes from outside, it already resides within:

It’s not like something you suddenly come to know because it’s always there, so I couldn’t say - oh it was at age five, you know, nothing like that ... yeah it was just umm always there, but then it had the intellectual explanation added to it ... yeah, it’s kind of like it just didn’t happen, suddenly like I woke up one day, oh yeah that’s right I’m adopted, you know and what does that mean and my life just changed from there or something, it wasn’t some epiphany. (Maxine, 81, 89, 94)

For adoptees, the significance of being told is located in the how of the telling; it is more than age of revelation. By the age of five, Vaughn had experienced the death of his adoptive mother and his relationship with his adoptive father and stepmother was problematic:

[I was] nine [when I was told] you know and I, it sort of like blew me away, you know, it was like, here was this little olive skinned boy, you know, not quite, you know, and then sort of things were starting to come home you know. You don’t look like him. (Vaughn, 72)

By the time of revelation at age nine, the disclosure “blew” Vaughn “away”. Here blown away signifies being shocked, a felt response in his body. Yet the disclosure enabled him a way of “coming home”, recognised through his physical difference. Here “coming home” is understood as recognition of an already understood sense of disconnection. The secret of the birth history is maintained, despite disclosing the adoption. Without a history of their difference, their ‘locatedness’ in significant biological social relationships is ignored, downplayed, forgotten or denied (Shawyer, 1979). The participants experienced silent and silencing even in the disclosure of adoption:

I also knew you didn’t talk about it and that’s where, that’s where I had problems because I was told and then I was expected not to talk about it. It was not discussed ... yeah and if you’re told you’re adopted, you don’t talk about it - you don’t talk about it ... I felt that I couldn’t talk to them (adoptive parents) about it ‘cause they were too touchy about it. (Shelly, 129, 152, 385)

They wouldn’t talk about my adoption. (Margaret, 38)

For some of the participants in this study, being told without other contextual information was very difficult. Shelly’s parents were “touchy” about her adoption. She knew that it was problematic for her to be told of her adoption and also be “expected not to talk about it”. To enable that silence, very

little information, if any, was provided to adoptive parents, and children were excluded from rights to know their own biological history. Withholding information was rationalised as a means to ensure the code of secrecy and protect adoptive parents from harmful knowledge about birth families that may have impacted on the way in which they responded to the child (Miall, 1996; Wegar, 1995). Some adoptees resisted silence when they wanted to know about the significance of being adopted. Breaking the silence was a point of tension for Margaret and her adoptive parents:

I knew I came from somewhere that I wasn't allowed to know anything about, I remember having fights when I was really little about why won't you tell me and I actually don't think they knew very much, well they certainly weren't forthcoming and [my adoptive mother] used to get very upset - "why do you want to know? I can't tell you anything"! (Margaret, 104)

While she understands now that her parents had little information, they did "fight" her need to know, and questioned why she wanted to know. Experiencing adoptive parents as "touchy" or "very upset" positions adoptees as responsible for the emotional tension in the family. In the legal narrative constitution of adoptees, adoptive parents were complicit in claiming a child as their own, thereby accepting secrecy as part of the fiction. B. J. Lifton (1994) suggested that such "touchy" responses can be a reminder of their childlessness or failure to produce the socially sanctioned authentic family form.

Silence as a response to requests about birth history positions adoptees as being responsible for questioning the fiction and 'upsetting' the (un)natural order. Schooler and Norris (2002) argue that a conspiracy of silence enabled the acculturation of the adoptee into the adoptive family - *as if born to*. Yet the emotional meaning enabled through disclosing adoption is critical to an adoptee's sense of who they are (Simmonds, 2000).

For many adoptive parents adopting a child is more than just a bureaucratic process of making decisions, being vetted, waiting and placement for the adopting parents; it is also a "mission of reparation" (Lousada, 2000, p. 55). Adoptive families experience reparation when distress over infertility or abnormality is reduced through adopting a child. While secrecy protected adoptive families from the shame of infertility, the participants were told of the very stories that informed the adoptive relationship, histories of miscarriages and infertility that lead to adoption as a way to achieve the desired family. These disclosures were significant explanations for the adoption and yet the silence of the adoptee's birth history remained. In this way, the adoptee is positioned as, at least, a solution to the story of the 'failure' of the adoptive family to meet the social value invested in a biological family:

My mother couldn't have children. (Sally, 814)

They always wanted to have a girl and mum couldn't. (Maxine, 683)

They'd been unable to have children over quite a number of years. (Margaret, 7)

My parents couldn't have children themselves and adopted me ... my mum lost three children before they adopted me. (Shelly, 13, 59)

They couldn't have any or they did try but I think she miscarried. (Toni, 45)

My parents chose not to have any more children. They could have had some after, there was a point where technology changed ... but she didn't want to because she thought it might impact on us, she didn't want to have some adopted, some not. (Mary, 1143, 1148)

Mum had a number of miscarriages and they had been trying to have children obviously for quite some time and they had, had umm tests in terms of their fertility and the doctors had said that they're both fertile and umm, but maybe it was related to the stress of trying to conceive and the miscarriages. (Barry, 45)

She umm had ongoing health problems throughout her whole life umm, and it was quite amazing actually that she had conceived because of her condition and that she could put herself through that. (Vaughn, 45)

They had two children [name] and [name] and their plan was, 'cause mum couldn't have any more babies, was that they'd adopt two children you know. (Brendon, 37)

While positioned in relation to 'failure' within their adoptive history, adoptees also carry the emotional responsibility for knowing they are the conduits that enable the production of a 'normal' family. That the adoptee is responsible is produced through the social power relations that are governed by the secrets legitimated through legislation.

The professional enforcement of the silence that governs access to birth history is enabled through the moral trajectory that positions adoptive parents as 'good' for bringing up an adopted child. To ask any question of their birth history positions an adoptee as shameful; ungrateful (Benet, 1976), perhaps not valuing their legitimacy. When Shelly attempted to get information about her birth history from Social Welfare she was told:

What right do you think you have to come in here and ask things like that? You have perfectly nice parents bringing you up but you should be ashamed of yourself. (Shelly, 214)

In this instance Shelly is reminded of the shame she carries for her illegitimate history while also being positioned as shameful for attempting to question the secret; the Social Welfare Officer burdens Shelly with more “(a)shame(d)”. In this way, maintaining the secrets of an adoptive relationship becomes the obligation of the adoptee. The significance of this silence for the participants is represented through a lack of a place to speak.

Added to the already lived and felt shame inherited at birth and the shame reproduced in social relationships as ‘less than’ with no blood tie links, adoptees also feel shame through their position in the narrative of childlessness. There is shame in both locations maintained through secrecy and silence and the adoptee has no shameless access to their loss and grief. Secrecy increases feelings of shame and loss about the missing birth family (Leon, 2002), where practices of secrecy deny adoptees access to their loss, grief is silenced:

There is so much grief involved and, and it’s kind of like that you have and you’re not allowed to mourn it, and if you mourn it then you’re ungrateful because you know you are saying this stuff but you’ve got this family - look at what you’ve got, you should be grateful you know after all we’ve done for you (laugh) sort of stuff ... so there’s this huge grief that stays there, eating away and it doesn’t get mourned. (Maxine, 955, 963)

Mourning their loss positions the adoptee as “ungrateful”. Without a place to mourn, the silent “huge grief” “eats away”, perhaps producing the feeling of not being (w)hole or a sense of being incomplete (Griffith, 1991), or living in a disconnected no-man’s land. The experience of silent grief was produced through the trajectory that a successful adoption would override the need to know family of origin (Lousada, 2000), it was argued that a ‘good’ adoptee would be grateful for being chosen and know how fortunate they were (Griffith, 1991). These narratives produce tension for the adoptee:

The thing I hate the most about being adopted is that I was told from quite a young age that it was a really good thing that happened to me, I was really fortunate umm that these are my parents, my adopted parents these are my parents, this is my brother, this is who I am ... I obviously, I internalised all of that and that formed my identity yet internally of course I had a completely, I was having a completely different experience. (Barry, 466, 470)

The adoption story that constructs the adoption experience as “a really good thing” for the child is incongruous with the story that tells of who I am, “completely different” to my embodied experience. An “identity” is founded on a discontinuous subjective experience. The adoptee storied as ‘grateful’ has the responsibility for the success of the relationship; their experience of themselves is silenced. Adoptees carry the responsibility of ‘good’ citizenship and take up the duties of adhering to

the code of secrecy. And in this way, adoptees are complicit in the silence that engulfs their constitution as 'legitimate' subjects.

### **Chosen**

As if as an attempt to engage adoptees in the protection of the secret, and to mask the 'failure' of the adoptive family, a commonly held practice was to story the adoptee as 'chosen'. The prescribed institutional practice encouraged the chosen story because it hid the circumstances around the birth and relinquishment of the child (Griffith, 1991, 1997; Grotevant et al., 2000; R. J. Lifton, 1976; Winkler, Brown, Van Keppel, & Blanchard, 1988). Adoptees were told they were chosen and were expected to be grateful to have gone to a decent home (Grotevant et al., 2000). Barry shared his 'chosen' story:

It's something like a priest came to the door with a basket, with a like a, like a (laugh) umm, this is how it was in my head anyway, aye umm, umm like you go, in a picnic basket, umm saying "I've got this child, would you like this child" and you know, then offered this child to umm, to my parents but that was kind of conceptual, my first concept of how I was adopted. (Barry, 208)

"A priest with a basket" enabled a chosen story with the child as a meaningful "offering". In a sense, the story resonates with the story of Moses, recognised as one of the first ever adoptees. Moses' birth mother was unable to care for him after the Pharaoh of the time commanded that all male children be killed. After concealing him for three months, she finally put him in a basket, setting him adrift on the river Nile. Found by a handmaiden, Moses was given to the Pharaoh's daughter and was declared her son. Moses went on to become a significant religious leader and prophet (Browning, 2006; Griffith, 1991; Kirsch, 1998). Stories of being chosen enabled Brendon to manage his difference:

So I always knew I stood out like a sore thumb, I always knew that I was really different so [my adoptive mother] would always, told me this story of J - how they came to the hospital and saw J and you know, like I was meant to be in their family ... I remember as a kid, because honestly every night of my life until I was like eight, I needed to hear the story of J because I was so different than them. (Brendon, 83, 92)

To be storied as special was important to Brendon knowing that he "stood out like a sore thumb" although it simultaneously reproduced difference. To live a life as "sore" represents the pain and anguish that Brendon embodied, while the story that positioned him as "meant to be" made the knowledge and the pain of his difference bearable. For Brendon, the story of chosen helped "fucken big time" (92), however stories of "chosen" and "love" become problematic when the lived experience of physical abuse did not match the story:

My parents, the people that I grew up with, their story is that they went in and chose me and fell in love with me and umm ... [they were] abusive they were into corporal punishment in a big way and temper tantrums and bashing us so lots of, lots of violence, umm really restrictive. (Jan, 57, 144)

To be chosen as a love affair while being “bashed” produces further feelings of abandonment and shame for the adopted child. Being positioned as chosen was resisted as an explanation for difference where the experience of an adoptee is that they are first “not chosen” by their birth mother:

I used to say stuff like - “oh she gave me away, she didn’t want me”. “No, no, no she really loved you that’s why she gave you away she couldn’t keep you” and bla, bla, bla all those nice explanations - they thought they were probably doing me a favour but I felt like I’d been given away and she didn’t want me. “No, no, no it’s all okay” and we all lived happily ever after ... it didn’t, it made, it didn’t touch it, it made no difference you know and if anything it, it was more like umm they didn’t understand. (Maxine, 934, 946)

Knowing that “she didn’t want me” negates any special stories of being chosen for Maxine. To have the experience denied and re-storied as an act of love “made no difference” in her subjective experience as a relinquished adoptee, it does not “touch” her lived reality. I suspect most adoptees embody such counter-narratives, the binary knowing that stories of being chosen depended on first being ‘not chosen’. That “they didn’t understand” signifies the ongoing lack in social relationships constituted by a lack of cultural resources to story adoption. Adopted subjects are again silenced through stories of ‘specialness’, ‘chosen’ and ‘love’:

This whole thing of being chosen - I’ve never felt chosen and I’ve never felt special, and those things, seems to go with adoption - you were chosen and you were special and you know, because they might have wanted me, but somebody else had to not want me ... my parents used to always say that I was special, but I never felt special. (Maxine, 683, 153)

In this way, being storied as “special” is not taken up when before that, “somebody else had to not want me” first. There is a felt dissonance. The cultural resources that supported notions of being special were reproduced through texts that were intended to ‘normalise’ adoption (R. J. Lifton, 1976). To be given a book that locates children as biologically conceived and explains that adoptees are not of their parents only emphasises the impossibility of taking up the position of “special”:

I always remember not feeling special. Like I remember mum had bought me this thing and it was about being adopted, like not born of my blood or rib or all this sort of stuff but being

special, like having a special place in their heart and I used to hate it, you know I couldn't explain it but I used to hate this thing and umm she had it framed and everything and I hid it (laugh) ... put it away and hid it you know, so just umm, it didn't seem right, 'cause I guess in order for them to feel, you know, to have a place for me in their heart, you know it's kind of like well you know, I wasn't in somebody else's heart first. (Maxine, 165, 170)

They gave me a book when I was about eight years old, umm, you know, when they try and teach you about the birds and the bees in those cartoon books, they used to have that book like - where do I come from? You know, was I found in a cabbage patch? Dad said he found me in his beer you know, I was dropped off by the stork. They also gave me a book at the same time, must be by the same people and it was called why was I adopted? And they gave me that in, when I was eight and just basically gave me these two books ... I remember hiding downstairs under the stairs and reading it. (Alice, 857, 863)

Maxine embodied "hate" towards the reminder of not being in "somebody else's heart first". To hate is a strong emotion that can produce images of 'fire' or a sense of destruction, as represented when Maxine hid the framed reference. Texts that reproduce the adoptee as "not born of my blood" accentuate the loss of the birth mother. Being positioned as special in the adoptive mother's "heart" was experienced through the loss of the "heart" of the other - the birth mother. Alice's adoptive father made jokes of finding her "in his beer" which can be understood as a fondness and a caring connection that occurred between them. However, although said in jest, to be the product of "beer" could position an adoptee as a drunken mistake. In both instances, the participants "hid" the texts that were material evidence of the tension produced through choice.

Stories of being chosen and special also enable professional bodies to silence adoptees. According to Henderson (2002), when adoption professionals take up a "feelgood [sic] model of adoption as a win-win-win solution" (p. 134), any suggestion of 'failure' is professionally denied:

I found out the adoption was arranged through a doctor who was a friend ... and when I asked about any information on my birth mother or any of my background they just used to say you know, you don't want to know, you don't need to know, umm it's, you know you were chosen and you're, and you're not allowed to know that's what the, the government, you know the rulings are at this time. (Margaret, 86, 88)

Underlying professional control over the "needs" of an adoptee "to know" is an assumption that "being chosen" was enough to purchase silence, and maintain the secret. In this way, a doctor/friend embodied the power to impose a legally sanctioned silence and enforce a moral position on the need to know. Adoptees should not complain or go against the 'favour' that society has provided

for everyone involved; they must take up the position of being grateful (Henderson, 2002). That adoptees are ‘chosen’ also signifies that they are also commodities for exchange.

### **Children as commodities**

To live in a fiction that purchases secrecy and silence, an adopted child is positioned within the narrative as a commodity for exchange among adults. The birth family relinquishes their relationship when the adoption forms are signed; the relationship becomes non-existent. The adoptive parents procure all rights and titles of the *as if born to*. As Ludbrook (1997) argues, adoption law is synonymous with property law. Being storied as “special” because they were “chosen” was represented by participants as being “on a conveyor belt”:

My parents had the choice of twins before me, so, but they said they chose me, but I don’t think, that’s not how it works (laugh) ... well they obviously didn’t want twins and so they waited for a little girl to come along, sort of thing, you know twins were too difficult, it’s kind of like, it’s like umm, it’s like this little, this baby conveyer belt - oh no, no, don’t want the twins, eww look we’ll have this one. (Maxine, 700, 704)

Apparently she wanted a boy but the boy that she had seen, I think there was a few of us at that time, had gone, so I was left so therefore she took me. (Toni, 40)

I think probably about 6 or 7, but umm mum used to just say that they had a choice out of me or there was a boy and she said that she always knew that I was right for them ... they just kind of like put a stamp on ya and you belong to them. (Cooley, 48, 559)

The factory metaphor suggests a production line where adoptive parents select a child, from those available. To select that one and not the other does not feel special for adoptees left with a sense that any other might have been chosen first; a leftover. To be the “right one for them” is problematised within choice because of the conditions and implications of choosing. Cooley was aware that it was not an easy choice:

I mean you know it’s not an easy, easy fucken decision for, you know, for people to make, you know, when they go to the hospital and they look at the babies in their little cribs and then now umm you know which one shall we take? I mean you know my mother said, “we knew that you were the daughter for us” but I mean, you know I would think that was a fucken hard thing to do to have to choose when they are all just helpless. (Cooley, 512)

The process of choosing itself is questionable, especially where left babies “are all just helpless”. The questions that arise for adoptees about the notion of chosen are embedded in the idea of demand for babies as if they were commodities. What also matters to adoptees is the criteria the adoptive parents use for choosing:

They used to say this stuff about being chosen but I don't know about, that it was, there was a choice in that. Dad didn't want to have a crying baby in the house so they weren't going to have a baby. (Jan, 69)

And although conditions might exist, not wanting a “crying baby in the house” is a criterion for choosing. Although choice is sometimes possible, often the adoptive family had to take the baby that they are offered:

But the choice, there's not a lot of choice when someone from Welfare rings you up and says, “hey, I've got a baby for you. Come and have a look at it, it, you know, its first in first served”. Yeah get the kid so, so on the one hand they did choose and on the other hand, take the first available one that you even half way like the look of ... so that's something that I think about sometimes while there, well how much of a choice, well they didn't have a line-up of five babies go and pick one. (Jan, 73, 86)

Where potential adoptive parents were pressured by agents of the state through a strategy of “first in first served” the notion of choice is contested. And a dilemma occurs between choosing and taking what is available, negating any position of “special” or “chosen” for the adopted subject. There was not always a “line-up” of relinquished infants. To not be chosen is a narrative that also occurs:

I had a hip dysphasia, so I, I was in one of those splinters, so I actually wasn't adopted for quite a while, I was probably not adopted until I was about six months. (Sally, 759)

Triseliotis et al. (1997) identified that it is harder to place children with disabilities because of the extra care required. The lack of understanding of the ‘before’ is exacerbated for those with disability. Sally was unable to take up a position of chosen because the time prior to being adopted represents her not being wanted. The impossibility of being chosen means the story does not ‘fit’:

I, no-one wanted me. You're hanging out there - no they didn't want to adopt me because of my, I was in one of those wooden splinters, so back then that was actually quite different. (Sally, 766)

In this way, the time before was experienced as not chosen; when “no-one wanted me” you are “left to hang”, residing in the no-man’s land, in-between. Adopted children were commodities. Like a crop, they are produced and if a suitable couple fit the criteria, they can choose what type of crop they liked. However the *as if born to* subject was unable to rectify the social effects of an illegitimate body through living a life as a legal fiction. Greenwood (2000) questions the possibility of being ‘chosen’ when regulated by social power relations that righted the wrong of illegitimacy. Retelling the subject as ‘having a special place’, erases the ‘tellability’ of their specificity, their experience of loss.

### **There are no words**

The idea of the “paradox of untellability” where language is constitutive and yet “falls short of its task - it disintegrates under the strain” (Wajnryb, 2001, p. 36) was realised in the participants’ stories. Where the subjective experience of adoption is silent, it is difficult to produce the cultural resources to tell their story:

I think it’s hard to describe, yeah I do, umm think it’s hard to describe, I umm talk to my partner about it quite a bit he often puts back to me, ‘cause he says stuff that I find quite incredibly insensitive (laugh) sometimes. (Barry, 415)

I think it’s a knowing; it is actually more than just having a house and land, it’s, it’s knowing, yeah, that I haven’t actually got words for really. (Jan, 971)

It is always hard to explain because it’s kind of like a lot of, it is kind of pre-verbal you know and it’s accessing that kind of stuff ... yeah, like even if I was to think about you know when I was a bit older about, knowing, being adopted then umm it’s probably, (sigh) I could probably put some words to it. (Maxine, 104, 107)

The participants represent the experience of adoption as complex, outside of articulation, lacking the cultural resources for saying, “hard to describe”. There is a knowing that is “untellable”, “pre-verbal”: it is lived and embodied yet unspeakable. This untellability positions the adoptee without a voice amongst others and to be unable to tell is to be without a story that enables a coherent sense of identity. Without storying, adoptees’ unique lived experiences are not understood by non-adopted peers or adoptive parents and social relationships become problematic (McGinn, 2000). Lacking conversations with others about adoption may be understood as another form of silence, which requires them to be protective and to govern themselves carefully. The effect of such silence reproduces aloneness; there is no-one to tell:

I arrh yeah, I, I, I mean I haven't really sat down, you know I mean like I sit with my thoughts but I never actually have a, like I'm doing with you, have a conversation about you know that so it's kind of like, it's just kind of, I think it and then it just kind of goes. (Cooley, 429)

I've not really had anyone talk to me about it in great depth before. (Sally, 1)

While there are no cultural resources to tell, there is no-one to listen to any attempts to tell. The experiences are lived, embodied and thought, but when it cannot be told "then it just kind of goes". And any attempts to tell can be exhausting and frustrating and become events to avoid:

I don't know if I even argue the toss with people because I umm I know that it does. I know that other people know that it does and you know, unless they are asking for some information I just don't, don't want to go there. It's a waste of energy. (Maxine, 213)

That the nuclear (biological) family is privileged in everyday relationships means that to "fight for" understanding from a position of difference is "a waste of energy". And yet it seems that hearing the difference matters:

I've done it before and it's like, I mean if someone's really interested and they are open and they are flexible fine, but if they've formed their opinion and don't want to change it and don't want to listen I'm not going to, umm you know, bang my head against their brick wall. (Maxine, 225)

An adoptee's experience is difficult for others to comprehend, especially where they are not open to being present to any difference in notions of family. To tell is experienced as "banging my head against their brick wall"; a violent experience that hurts and potentially leaves the person unconscious - silenced. Shawyer (1979) argues that it is difficult for the experience of adoption to be understood in any meaningful way by those who do not experience the effects of the 'otherness' of adoption, as it is unimaginable to not know who our parents are:

People have had their families always, you know and known always where they have come from. (Maxine, 235)

That Maxine recognises that "people have had their families always" supports Shawyer's (1979) argument that understanding is limited for those that do not know of birth family loss. It is also told in Barry's story:

Unless you've been separate from it and then reconnected to it you aren't going to know that. I mean like if you are not adopted then you've always had that connection ... if you haven't been adopted and haven't been reconnected then you don't know you've lost it 'cause you never, do you know what I mean. Like you have to have an awareness of having it then losing it, to know that it wasn't there. (Barry, 563, 566)

To notice the disconnection of blood as kinship loss - the birth family - requires that a connection is knowable. To have something and then to lose it is to experience grief and loss that is outside the experience of the everyday and is often minimised by others, "it doesn't matter". To have the experience "denied" reproduces silence:

I've spent my life having people say, "oh no, it doesn't matter". You know there's that concept that - and everybody lived happily ever after amen and umm which is a concept of denial really isn't it. You know everyone was impacted. (Maxine, 207)

The ideal of "happily ever after" reproduces the dominant fantasy of family where everyone gets what they desire and live happily as a result. That sameness is valued in this fantasy of family excludes understanding of the impact of adoption and the constitution of adopted subjects. Without an experience of disconnection, their loss is invisible:

I talked to someone once about growing up in England and he said, "well there's nothing special about where I lived, wherever, there was no ancestral land" and I thought hang on it's just because he's actually lived there that you know forever his, you know, in the same block he didn't see it like that, but because we haven't got it, 'cause I haven't had it - I see it. (Jan, 989)

Understanding the loss of connection is significant to adoptees. Where connection might be "nothing special", when taken-for-granted by others the adopted subject is acutely aware of the lack and can "see it". To "see it" can also be experienced as feeling it. The silencing practiced through everyday social relationships that exclude difference was evident in participants' reflections on the interview process:

Fuck this is the first time I've talked about it in a long time. (Vaughn, 413)

I found it really amazing when you sat down and started and you said, "this is kind of like your chance to say stuff about you know, your experience of being adopted", it was like wow, I almost wanted to cry then, 'cause it's like wow, you know, most of the time people don't care,

or don't see that it makes a difference or they're not really interested and umm, and there's, there's not really a dearth of information out there and there's not a lot of books and there's not a lot of stuff really and it was like wow, you just gave me permission to talk about my experience which is really nice. (Maxine, 799)

Talking about this stuff is kind of arrh, quite umm, umm spiritual almost, it's not, I don't have such a strong sense of grief (pause) umm that this is who I am, this is my story and that's okay, it's almost like a sense of umm relief, if that makes sense, I don't know. (Barry, 793)

It's kind of just opened a little can of worms though. You know talking to you about it, about adoption and stuff 'cause I mean I don't really talk to anyone else about it ... arrh (pause) well I just never ... never really bring it up in conversation you know I kind of just keep it to myself. (Cooley, 606, 608, 612)

The interview process was an opportunity for their experiences and stories to be valued. Being able to tell was enabling; "amazing", "spiritual almost" a "relief", yet it was also experienced as "opening a can of worms" because while embodied silently, adoption is privately held. While reflecting on their responses, I was reminded of the ideas of Willig (2001), Polkinghorne (1995), Ribbens and Edwards (1998) and Pinnegar and Daynes (2007). They argue that interview settings are a vehicle for the construction of stories. As a collaborative process, what the speaker and the listener attend to, their level of awareness and their willingness to access embodied experiences shape the interview. Interviews are a co-production through conversation where attentive listening encourages participant reflexivity and marginalised lived 'reality' to be valued and legitimated.

Barry found that commonality is effective for making sense among 'others' located in marginalised groups. His experience with gay people supporting other gay people through shared experiences was helpful. Together they could draw an understanding of their difficulties and challenges:

There's shared experiences often that I could talk to other gay people about that they'd get ... the difficulties and the challenges and the growth that you, that go through to umm I guess, as, as part of being a gay person ... now I think exactly the same thing applies to being adopted. It's really hard to communicate that unless you're talking to another adopted person but then even saying that, which I guess is similar to the umm analogy I was just using with gay people not all umm adopted people are going to be necessarily that self-aware of the impact but, so I guess what I'm trying to say (laugh) is yes I agree with you and the people I'm most likely to get the closest understanding with are people who are adopted and have an awareness. (Barry, 325, 428, 431)

It is a sense of a shared understanding, the affinity of “an awareness” of the significance of being positioned outside the ‘normal’ experience of family that enables the silence to be storied. Without a shared understanding of their position as adoptees, the response from others was confusing and often met with “disbelief”:

When I was a kid and I was at primary school and I used to tell people I was adopted, some of my friends would like cry and I didn’t understand why they would be crying and then they would go home and tell their parents and then you know all of a sudden you know my mum’s at school and they come to school and they want to have like words with my mum ‘cause they don’t believe me when I’ve said I’m adopted and I upset them. Like you know I didn’t understand why her daughter would be crying and it’s like, you know, people used to be like, but you look like your dad, you look like your dad, you’re lying and it’s, yeah and it’s just like well I’m not lying ask my mum. I always knew and I never really had a problem with it and so you know when. I was at primary school or telling people and they’d have a problem with it I didn’t really understand why. (Alice, 337)

The ‘un-imaginability’ of living adoption meant that the telling was a problem. It was assumed that Alice was “lying” especially where matching meant there was physical similarity with the adoptive family, the marker of the ‘truth’ of the family. The adoptee then had to manage a “problem” that they did not necessarily “understand”. Here, although adoption was not a “problem” for Alice, for others it was “a problem”. Where adoptees are told and tell about their adoption, there was an assumption of it being “hard”:

People used to say to me, I remember at primary school, oh that must be hard or, or you know like adoption was a bad thing ... I used to always respond, like umm no I don’t agree, I don’t feel any different to you guys, you know I’ve got loving parents you know, it’s fine, it’s not an issue, I’ve always, you know it’s always, I used to always respond by going oh look I’ve always known I was adopted it’s not an issue. (Barry, 219, 222)

When adoption is positioned as a “bad thing” by others, the adoptee is obliged to normalise the difference; presenting themselves as “not different”. Minimising the “issue” that adoption might have on lived experience emerged as an attempt to be seen as ‘normal’ and fit better into social relationships. Given the constraints of an untellable story, a common language to tell a silence, to make sense of the experience is culturally inaccessible:

To go to school and you used to think about, used to think about umm you’d have mother and father talks, you know - what’s your mum you know, it’s just, how do you explain that? How

do you explain, well I don't know, I don't know you know, 'cause you don't know, I mean that's the worst bit about it (sigh). (Vaughn, 97)

Vaughn could not explain his situation because the code of secrecy positioned him outside language. And yet to not know is the "worst bit about it". The sense of coherence is unexplainable; it is silent in the sigh. To be unable to explain oneself in a way that is understood and valued by others is emotionally "tough":

Life was tough and I tried not to think about it, I tried to avoid all of that stuff and just push it away because I didn't know how to deal with it. (Vaughn, 101)

Funny because, because we aren't able to talk with others for various reasons about being adopted, we don't know why we do the things we do or don't actually know if that is a normal thing that we do or a, because of adoption that we do it (laugh). (Toni, 953)

The silence produced through not knowing meant the "tough" parts of life were "pushed away". With the silence comes a lack of knowledge to "deal with it". Not knowing also meant there was no way to explain particular behaviours as "normal" (biological), or as an effect of adoption. In this way, a strategy for "dealing with it" is through self-silence. According to Griffith (1991), the *as if born to* fiction remains silent through the adoptive family ignoring the effects of adoption, although members know and recognise that each other knows. In this way, the fiction of *as if* is maintained. The knowledge of the adoption is visible, but it remains unspoken.

To tell of something that is silenced involves a risk. The moral deficit of illegitimacy is a social burden for adoptees; as an illegitimate secret, the adopted child has a story that is not historically or culturally located or sanctioned. An adoptee's story is one that incites inquisitiveness, and that inquisitiveness leads to other complex stories that invoke feelings of rejection, abandonment and failure (Simmonds, 2000). Being "mindful" about safety is necessary where misunderstanding and inquisitiveness can culminate in further harm:

I need to umm be quite, arrh, umm mindful about choosing safe people to talk to this stuff about. (Barry, 810)

The stories that position adoptees without their specific history also limit access to a safe space. Secrecy and silence enable and constrain adoptees in the telling and the not telling, they do not have access to cultural resources that enable a speaking position (Noordegraaf, van Nijnatten, & Elbers, 2008). There are no cultural stories to fit with the legally constituted subject, and the silences that are produced are embodied in the loss.

It seems that kinship, blood links and genetics - the social and biological body - matter to adoptees who are well aware of their significance to the constitution of 'normal families'. Positioned within narratives of legitimacy, the untellable body cries out a resistance through lived, felt and at times unreachable emotions, that whisper sounds and remembrances that make the absence present. In the production of this hybrid story, it was possible to see the political and moral trajectories that enable and constrain subjectivities through the legally constituted narrative of adoptees. The social power relations as enacted by the state and its technologies of power produce a subject that is contradictory and incongruous, a subject that has no cultural resources through which to speak their experiences as authentic and legitimate. Being a subject within a narrative that produces binary positions, such as illegitimate/legitimate, chosen/not chosen, special/commodity, coincide with stories of origin characterised by loss, lack, disconnection and a perpetual return to living in the no-man's land outside normative family relations. These series of events and experiences - lived and felt - through social relationships have ongoing effects. And it is here that I argue that the effects are not only legally, but also psychosocially constituted. The following chapter as a turn in the narrative traces the meaning of the constitution of the psychosocially affected subject as a complicating action of legal and psychological discourse.



## **Chapter 7:**

# **Psychosocially Affected**

*Adoption loss is the only trauma in the world where the victims are expected  
by the whole of society to be grateful  
(Keith Griffith, 1930-2011).*

## Psychosocially Affected

In this chapter, the narrative of adoption continues and becomes more complicated by the action of psychological discourse in governing the production of adopted subjects. Psychological knowledge has produced the individualised adopted subject as if devoid of social power relations and the legislative context that conditions their experiences from birth. In the discipline of psychology, adoptees have been treated as a useful research population to address questions about the strength of the nature/nurture debate, the relationships of genetic predisposition to deficit, or an association between adoption and psychopathology, where adoptees are over-represented among those categorised as disordered. Yet this treatment constrains their constitution in psy-discourse, and ignores their lived experiences. To understand effectively how adoptees become over-represented in clinical populations, the narrative constitution of a legal fiction needs to be understood in terms of the ongoing effects on the lived experience of adoptees. This chapter represents the significance of the multiple relationships through which adoptees are positioned, and how they inform the implications of legislative change to the Adoption Act 1955.

### The Good Adoptive Family

As with the civil rights of any child, the *as if born to* child is entitled to the rights of a secure family where they are unconditionally nurtured and protected from harmful events. And as are families important to all children, the adoptive family environment is important to the adopted child's development, as a plethora of research attests (Burman, 1994; Griffith, 1997; Miller et al., 2000; Noordegraaf et al., 2008; Triseliotis, 1973). Specific to the adoptive family, relational openness and acknowledgment of difference are important for dynamic stability. Adoptive parents need to grieve for the symbolic loss that the child is not biologically produced. However, the secrecy and silence that constitutes practices of adoption means loss and difference as a family form is ignored (Griffith, 1991; Kirk, 1985).

Embedded in a history of legitimacy, the adoptive family is positioned as a socially sanctioned morally 'good' family. Two participants in this study represented their adoptive families as stable and loving. According to Triseliotis (1973), adoptees who experience their adoptions as successful are less likely to experience ongoing symptoms of anxiety and depression in their future relationships with others and have more ability to cope with future life events. By this psychological account, the origin of psychological distress for adoptees is located in the functioning of the adoptive family, and does not take account of adoptees' experiences of distressful feelings of aloneness and disconnection from the earliest times of social, moral and legislated intervention into their lives - their birth.

Some of the participants questioned the socially sanctioned criteria that characterise the 'good' family. Criteria based only on the marriage of parents and the legitimacy of their children, which

enables a child to be taken from a 'defective' family that did not conform to the moral trajectory of 'good' citizenship, and then placed into another family that was socially sanctioned by the state but 'defective' by other criteria was problematic for the participants. For instance, criteria that privilege the spiritual value of traditional patriarchal families (Iwanek, 1997a; R. J. Lifton, 1976) assume that a child's 'illicit origins' can be overcome, however religious affiliation did not guarantee a successful adoption:

My adoption didn't work. I remember asking, this naive 20, umm [my birth mother] telling me that the adoption place asked her what restrictions she'd want on the family she was adopting her child into and basically there only seemed to be a religious umm, thing, like do you ... that was the only question they asked her about the family I was being placed into. (Brendon, 491, 503)

Brendon's understanding of his placement was that it was "restricted" by practices that "didn't work" to provide a stable nuclear family and fit with the sanctioned moral order. That restriction only considered "religious" orientation to be important to the family that you were "placed into". They did not take account of other criteria by which the family's stability could have been considered.

That few restrictions mattered to the placement of the adopted child is problematic when I consider 10 of the participants in this research experienced their adoptive families as 'dysfunctional', drawing on histories of sexual abuse, violence, alcoholism and divorce to make sense of their own emotional struggles. Not only do adoptees embody the fiction *as if born to*, they are also located within problematic adoptive families that do not represent the tenets of salvation from instability and illegitimacy for the adopted child that justified practices of the Adoption Act 1955.

Margaret understood the suitability of her adoptive parents through their social status as an affluent, professional couple with no children. The social value of the position of her parents ignored how "good" their marital relationship was:

The marriage actually wasn't good and I think, and it, he was an alcoholic ... she umm used to have tranquilisers and umm all sorts of rubbish and they both drank quite heavily, yeah I always, I never felt like I fitted in and I felt I like, I had to protect my mother. (Margaret, 17, 20)

Margaret was embedded in a family story where she was adopted to be the 'cure' for her parents failing marriage, which also positioned her as feeling responsible for the "protection" of her mother from "an alcoholic" father. Her experience of not fitting was connected to her adoptive parents' dysfunctional behaviour and the burden of responsibility she carried. For Alice, alcoholism in her

adoptive family was a representation of dysfunction that was understood as ‘normal’ in social relationships:

Everyone kind of has a screwed up family. Like my parents were just alkie, like I think that’s an [name of a country] thing at the same time you know, it’s like, every single parent I knew, like, so I’ve only in recent years found out that umm (laugh) people are still together, like you know, like people’s parents are still together. (Alice, 64)

Having a “screwed up family” was understood as normal for Alice, so her expectations of a ‘normal’ family included characteristics that psychological discourse would construe as dysfunctional. When the instability in Barry’s family led to divorce he experienced it as “devastating”, suggesting that his understanding conformed more closely to normalised constructions of ‘family’ and ‘marriage’. Yet, the devastation Barry felt was complicated by adoption since he understood his feelings of “despair and fear” as a “form of terror” of being abandoned, again:

Just huge amounts of despair and fear and I guess, almost like a depression I guess ... I think I was experiencing umm, a form of terror really, umm of being abandoned again, do you know what I mean, like I think in many ways (sigh) I say that because that experience at eight, that emotional response that I had it was huge and devastating. (Barry, 186, 282)

In this way, for an adoptee that already embodies the “terror” of “abandonment”, their earliest lived experience becomes relived. Other participants’ storied family as experienced through various events and characteristics that are potentially distressing: alcohol and violence, the death of an adoptive parent, and single parenting within their adoptive family. Being raised by a single parent produced neglect for Brendon:

Mum was a real fearful person and she didn’t know how to cook or clean or look after shit so often, and being in the ‘70s, mum was quickly prescribed with Valium. (Brendon, 71)

Living in single parent family with a mother who was “fearful” of her ability also meant living with a socially ‘disordered’ adoptive mother, despite the legislative intention to protect the adopted child from the potential distress of associated with illegitimacy. Maxine also storied a mother with “mental health issues” (358) producing problematic experiences for her as an adopted child.

Experiences of violence within Cooley’s adoptive family led to her being removed. Cooley’s difficult relationships during adolescence, including her own aggression also constituted her adoptive family as dysfunctional:

Oh my God, fuck, yeah I just didn't know how to deal with my emotions and you know, I was getting fucken pummelled. (Cooley, 232)

She makes sense of her experience as a lack of knowledge of how to deal with her emotional response to the "pummelling" she received in her family. She draws on psychological discourse to explain her lack and at the same time accepts that it is her individual responsibility to 'deal with' how she felt in response to being victimised as a child.

While these stories of family dysfunction are not exclusive to adoptees, their significance for participants is that they already live the 'deficit' of illegitimacy and relinquishment, and the trauma experienced in their 'good' adoptive family is easily associated with their earlier trauma. Being a subject of psychological discourse, in this setting, complicated and strengthened the feelings of loss, lack, disconnection characterised by their stories of origin.

The lived experience of disconnection, of not fitting in, can be understood in psychological discourse as a 'failure' to bond within a dysfunctional family. Margaret, who has knowledge of successful adoption experiences, questioned whether having siblings might make a difference to feeling connected within an adoptive family:

Well I've met quite a few people over the years who were adopted into a loving family and they loved the situation they were in. They felt like they were part of the family and they had brothers and sisters which I think makes the difference but if you've got that bonding with a sibling and not just the parents ... I think that does make a difference. (Margaret, 293, 298)

To be more a "part of the family" might have been possible with siblings. Yet, what difference the difference makes is questionable within the 'space' where the possibility that "fitting in" with siblings might have enabled a buffer (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007) to the "rough time" she experienced:

I certainly had a rough time as far as, never felt like I quite fitted in, umm home was awful, hated being there, didn't want to be there. (Margaret, 168)

The lived reality of the relationship between a dysfunctional family and the psychological effects of adoption is difficult to untangle for the adopted subject, because their earliest constitution as children *as if born to* always remains "part" of their adopted family story:

And whether that comes from growing up with alcohol or the adoption thing, I don't know, it was part of it. (Margaret, 424)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural resources to speak adopted subjectivity as authentic and legitimate are not available and adoption experiences are difficult to talk about. When adoptees' experiences are contextualised through psychological discourse, an understanding of the effects of childhood trauma is accessible, yet still silences knowledge of birth history and the difference in the adoptee's experience of being *as if born to* is excluded. Where the lived effects of adoption on adoptees are not valued, adoptees have no place from which to speak, their specific experiences of family dysfunction remain difficult to untangle and speak.

The moral trajectory of adoption practices imply that a child saved from the 'sins' of the birth mother, surely deserves more than a family of 'dysfunction'; she/he needs to be nurtured and protected from harmful events, including the lived effects of their position as 'other' to the norms. Yet experiences of adoptive families that did not conform to the loving, protective family who were intended to redeem their 'illegitimacy' were common among participants. In the absence of cultural resources for making sense of their adoption experience within dysfunctional families, it makes sense that adoptees draw on the psychological accounts that are available for making sense of the psychosocial problematics they live. These experiences of family 'dysfunction' meant that, while drawing from psychological narratives, the participants embodied feelings of grief and instability, and remained sensitive to these types of distressing events.

### **Grief, Rejection, Abandonment and Instability**

The ongoing embodied effects of adoption are told through stories of pain that resonate with psychological narratives of pathology. Participants represented the specificity of emotional and psychological embodied pain through stories of grief, rejection, abandonment and instability, and taking up positions within psychological narratives affected their experience of themselves in relationships. However, rather than 'abnormal', the emotional significance of the subjective experience of adoption may be understood as produced through a particular moral order that assigns responsibility for feelings to the individual subject.

Understanding grief as always present through the loss of the experience of the birth relationship, necessarily affects interactions with others since in psychological terms relationships become 'triggers' for grief. For Barry, an affected relationship can be any "relationship where I have some investment" (356):

When the relationship's ended, I emotionally felt nothing matters ... I just don't think people realise how close to this line (laugh) of insanity we actually are 'cause I felt almost insane with grief, like I'd gone over this line and I could see where normal was - it was out of reach and I could sit back and I could kind of be reflective but I was looking out at my life and my world and was going - I actually don't care about anything in it. I was so devastated. (Barry, 314, 318)

To feel as if “nothing matters” is an experience of grief that affects Barry profoundly. The devastating effects of loss are represented as being on the edge of “insanity”, drawing explicitly on a psychological account. For adoptees prohibited from mourning the *born to* loss through lack of cultural resources specific to the experience, depression can arise as a sense of hopelessness, an emotion so intense that it pushes you “over the line”. Failure to grieve the birth family loss has mattered to adult relationships (Griffith, 1991), as Barry experienced. To be able to “see” normal and to have it “out of reach” even though he could “reflect on it” represents a dislocation between the traumatic lived effects of *as if born to* and the socially sanctioned account of redemption from illegitimacy. It is the loss of the birth relationship that means the experience is so significantly felt but cannot be “realised” by others. While Barry has engaged in therapy over a long period of his life to address the “issues”, he still experiences an “exaggerated emotional response” when he anticipates “loss”:

I’ve spent like about, since my twenties on and off in therapy, now I’m 36 so that’s 16 years ... trying to address these issues and even though I’m able to respond to life quite differently today because of work I’ve done on myself. I still have umm an exaggerated emotional response to any situation where umm there’s a perceived, going to be a perceived loss. (Barry, 345, 348)

While the experience of loss is a real material effect of adoption, the emotional response to loss becomes the responsibility of the adoptee to change and ‘normalise’. That the adopted subject is positioned as responsible for making sense of the embodied emotional responses is an effect of the practices of secrecy and silence and psychological discourses that individualise psychosocial experiences. Suffering individual responsibility, secrecy and silence means lacking the resources to process grief:

So there’s this huge grief that stays there, eating away and it doesn’t get mourned, and then it, yeah and you know what it’s like you get, you get to being an adult and it’s much harder to mourn the grief, I found, to get to reconnect back into some of that grief and start to process it and, and, and it’s so much easier if you can do it with children. (Maxine, 963)

Maxine’s ongoing experience of grief “eating away” at her represents the significance of the embodiment of grief, especially when “it doesn’t get mourned”. Maxine believes that had she been able to experience the grief as a child it would not be as difficult to cope with it now. Significant to the experience of grief on an adoptee’s subjective experience is the effect of being denied birth histories. Where the experience of adoption is produced through secrecy and silence, even the possibility for psychological wellbeing offered by taking individual responsibility for feeling is constrained.

When the loss of the birth relationship is understood as abandonment or rejection, it also affects future relationships. Griffith (1991) states that adoptees know they have been rejected by the birth mother and embody the fear that it may happen again. To anticipate further rejection is not only experienced as “anxiety”, but because the “fear of rejection” is always present, it also represents a difference that dislocates adoptees from understanding their experiences as socially normal:

I mean I do have, you know, like abandonment issues as an adult you know like that whole thing of like in relationships always thinking, oh and I don't do very well with rejection either, just kind of, you know, I just get into a bit of a panic state of feeling really quite, sort of, you know, a bit anxious ... you're feeling, you're feeling really different aye and just lost ... just remember kind of feeling like an alien, like not you know, not, not a part of. (Cooley, 142, 723, 725)

To have “abandonment issues” has ongoing effects on relationships, especially when “panic” occurs. The not ‘normal’ experience of adoption is experienced as alienation, repositioning adoptees as being from no-man’s land. As Benet (1976) argues, alienation for an adoptee signifies the way in which the *as if born to* did not replace biological heritage, and the specificity of this instability remains unspoken.

For adoptees, abandonment brings meaning to their feelings of “not fitting in”. The experience of being on the ‘outside’ is “definitely something” that is shared among adoptees, however there is some doubt as to whether this sense of shared dislocation is authentically connected to adoption or not:

I've felt like I've gone through my life with this big sign, neon sign that says I have these weak spots called abandonment and umm, not fitting in and stuff like that and you know, either that or I've just recreated it so I could deal with it, I really don't know but I still manage to get, be outside. (Maxine, 309)

Abandonment she calls it (author of book *The Primal Wound*) ... and perhaps adopted people do have that ... I would have to agree that there is probably lots of similar characteristics of people that are adopted, such as umm, such as ahh, maybe a lacking of self-confidence, maybe those sorts of things. I think maybe umm, I don't know whether you call it lack of self-esteem or self-confidence or but there is definitely something wrong. (Sally, 600, 603, 607)

Verrier (1994) wrote in her ground breaking book on adoption, *The Primal Wound*, that bonding between the mother and child occurs with physiological, psychological and spiritual experiences in utero. This embodied connection continues through the postnatal period, however when the natural cycle is disrupted, as with adoption, abandonment and loss are embodied and etched into the

unconscious psyche of these children, producing the primal wound. Whatever it is, the significance for adoptees is that there is “something wrong” or lacking within as an effect of being adopted. Abandonment as a “weak spot” suggests it is something that continually needs “dealing with” because there is “definitely something wrong”. Unlike many other psychological accounts, Verrier’s (1994) text does provide cultural resources for making sense of the specificities of adoption through taking account of the earliest experiences of adoptees, in utero. Making sense of herself by locating her experience as rejection took a long time for Toni to come to understand:

I think I’ve since learnt its rejection but then what is that? (Laugh) ... it took me a long time to even think that that was rejection, didn’t even know what the word was, what do I understand, umm, I think my understanding is that you were not wanted that you were rejected. (Toni, 227, 235)

To understand not being wanted by a birth mother as “rejection” enables an adoptee a way of understanding that the embodiment of the fear of “rejection” affects them psychosocially through their responses to life events and future relationships. Barry learnt that he needed people:

I was taken away from my mum, that’s a horrific thing to do to any kid ‘cause they feel like they’re going to die and I get put with other people and I learn shit, I need people, I need parents otherwise I’m going to die. (Barry, 1407)

To need people after the “horror” of being taken away was experienced by Barry as feeling like he was “going to die” and that sense can never be taken away; it is lived. To learn that you will die without people, positions adoptees as fearfully reliant on others for life because of the potential for rejection, again. And the lived experience of adoption endures:

You just don’t know how much something or the adoption or being given away or whatever it is affects you and still does. (Toni, 705)

You know I did, I felt you know, I felt like I was this little second best thing you know and it’s taken all this time to fix it you know. (Vaughn, 186)

I still live with it today, definitely it affects, affects my life umm, umm significantly and it’s often the thing I umm, wish I could umm, change the most. I believe that it umm, it’s the one thing that umm, has constrained yeah constrained my life significantly. (Barry, 363)

Adoption, it's shaped who I am but I wouldn't say that it's done any good shaping actually.  
(Jan, 1138)

No matter "how much" that affect is, it "still does" to the adoptee. Being positioned "second best" involves feelings that take a long time, if ever, to recover from. While the constraints experienced by Barry are significant enough to wish that his specific history could be changed, the lived history of adoption shapes "who I am" in a social context where grief, fear of rejection and an embodied sense of abandonment dominate his emotional experience. Living the legal fiction of *as if born to* necessarily involves loss of the biological history, lack, and emotional distress that produces the 'unstable' subject of psychological discourse.

It makes sense that without 'roots' or a birth history, the embodied effect of relinquishment is a subjective experience of a self, which we understand, without foundation. For Jan, to experience more stability she would have had to live a history of *born to*. "Instability", where the "foundation of self is based on sand" also represents a non-coherent experience of self, one that lacks solidness:

[If I wasn't adopted] it would have been more stable because there wouldn't have always been, yeah I don't think she would have, if she hadn't yeah, you could, I don't think, if she wasn't going to throw me out (laugh) I don't know whether that makes sense, I probably would have felt more stable in myself, yeah. (Jan, 904)

It's like you don't have the yeah, you don't have the umm (pause) that firmness, can't think of the words, the umm (pause) the surety the (pause), I don't know, and to me yeah, as an adult now (laugh) that's one of the biggest impacts that I can currently see in my life that adoption has had on me, is that I, umm, my foundation is unstable ... my foundation is based on sand.  
(Barry, 373, 1379)

Where a lack of firm "foundations" produces a subjective experience of instability, it also represents an inability to be firmly grounded which for Barry has seen the "biggest impact" of adoption on his life. To be "based on sand" also conjures images of quicksand, where any wrong movement can mean adoptees are sucked under, possibly to their death. I wonder if perhaps quicksand pits are scattered throughout the terrain of no-man's land. Barry's earlier narrative tells that losing his birth mother was experienced as "like" death, leaving him with the fear that making a wrong move with others means he is going to "die". Here I suspect that without a firm foundation the quicksand threatens to take him. Lack of a firm foundation means some adoptees do not "settle" or "put down" 'roots' anywhere:

I never put down ties or anything anywhere. I didn't own anything, I wasn't interested in owning anything, I just wanted to go and I found New Zealand really, I didn't have a good feeling about New Zealand, I never really felt like this was my home. Umm I actually, I don't know whether I still do, I don't know, umm I actually found it really difficult to settle anywhere, I never felt like I belonged anywhere and I don't know whether that was just the lifestyle I led or whether it was just, you know, who I was. (Sally, 229)

Living a silent history, not knowing "who I was" was experienced by Sally as "not belonging anywhere". An effect of not knowing her history was the ongoing disconnection from roots; there are no possessions, ties or affinity with land. The feeling of never being able "to settle or have ties anywhere", moving and leaving, resonates with Hokesbergen's (1997b) notion of psychic homelessness. Belonging no place - the embodied position of no-man's land - is a psychological effect with social significance.

That adoptees experience ongoing grief, rejection, issues of abandonment and instability are not necessarily understood in everyday interactions with others. While trying to explain other people's 'blindness' towards the lived effects of adoption, Jan named "absence as a trigger for noticing":

It's that thing of not having it noticeable by its absence, so not having had that and noticing that when it's present, it's really important, and if it got taken away it would become even more important. (Jan, 983)

The experience of meeting birth family enabled an understanding of loss. When the experience of adoption is excluded through the secrets and the silence, and when the birth history is found what was lost is noticeable by its presence. This resonates with Freeman's (2002, 2010) ideas of the absent being present within the narrative unconsciousness. Biological kinship and family are socially normalised as everyday and common; for the adoptee the significance of the loss is found in its everyday presence. The history of loss is shared among adoptees. The participants represented the effects of their adoption on ongoing interpersonal relationships and their various differences in the social world through psychological accounts of their emotional experiences and responsibilities. To be *as if born to* is to be born into a difference with a history of grief, rejection, abandonment and instability that constituted psychological experiences and is not acknowledged at a social or political level.

### **Ways of Coping when As If Born To**

Being born into psychological differences through legal and social constraints of secrecy and silence also means adoptees need to adapt to the effects of their lived experience. Coping can be understood as a psychological effort to manage the demands of a life as difference when produced as a legal fiction.

Constituted within psychological discourse, without the security of a 'normal' family and a solid foundation in the world, adoptees may even experience fear as a technique of coping with the impact of adoption in their lives:

I feel frightened something bad is going to happen to me ... because I believe anyway that was a survival technique I learnt from a young baby. (Barry, 1401, 1405)

The embodiment of fear of loss and rejection is understood by some adoptees as an enduring feeling that "something bad is going to happen". Barry understands it as a "learnt survival technique". He survives by anticipating that "something bad":

It just affects everything really umm, 'cause I don't have that umm, security that umm, I kind of, I kind of know that it's up to me and I have to rely on me ... I mean obviously I have adapted reasonably well 'cause I'm not dead (laugh) which is a pathway that I've had, you know many times that could have been, you know, I am quite surprised that I'm alive given the, the impact that this stuff has had on my life and the part, and where I could have gone. (Barry, 765, 770)

To know that it is "up to me" was realised by Barry as he made sense of the behaviours that could have led to his death through psychological accounts that individualise his responsibility. In this context, coming to understand the significance of "relying on me" is valued as an adaptation that enabled the possibility of being alive.

To be aware that life involves tragic events that can happen at any time and that are out of control can produce a lived state of hyper-vigilance. According to psychological accounts, this process is embodied in the sympathetic nervous system that triggers physiological reactions such as an increased heart rate, dilated pupils and muscle tension causing sensitive bodily states. The hyper-vigilant person is anxious, always trying to detect threats; long-term hyper-vigilance can produce exhaustion (McCarthy, 2012). However, although there are physical effects enacting a hyper-vigilant distance between oneself and others is another form of coping:

I umm, another thing is like umm I spent over the years is being really hyper-vigilant ... umm it's exhausting, being hyper-vigilant all the time, it's like umm you know under, under somewhere, I could be anywhere and I'm like, I'm so aware of all my surroundings and everything that's surrounded and people and stuff like that. (Maxine, 810, 813)

An "acute awareness of surroundings" as a coping strategy enables a position of safety from further pain. The adoptee who is always already excluded in and through social relationships fears

reminders of their felt exclusion and watches for them. That they live an embodied sense of “aloneness” produces independence, however to realise a need to be self-reliant, as a coping strategy, is not always achieved without access to some form of therapy. Some participants sought counselling to “talk to about things” such as how they were positioned in their relationships:

I met [my counsellor] ‘cause I just needed someone to talk to about things and, and my relationship with my mum and brother was completely crap and as usual and I kind of always got blamed for things. It was always like, always used to feel like I was, you know, never - the bitch, Sally was always the bitch. (Sally, 284)

Sally was positioned as the ‘problem’ in her adoptive family relationships. According to Benet (1976), adopted children are often the scapegoat for family dilemmas. The psychological accounts accessible through therapy can provide resources that justify ‘self-reliance’ and explain hyper-vigilance as mechanisms for coping. Yet these resources also produce the adopted subject as suffering a deficit and pathologise the problematics of their lived experience.

Being ‘pathologised’ by others positioned Alice as the ‘problem’ in her relationship with her birth mother. Being “sent to psychiatrists and counsellors” for her behaviour enabled her understanding that no-one could help. Alice also took up responsibility for ‘self-reliance’, echoing the ‘aloneness’ experienced through disconnection through taking individual responsibility for the effects of her constitution as an adopted subject:

Oh [my birth mother] sent me to psychiatrists and counsellors and I’ve, everyone’s always tried to send me to psychiatrists and counsellors and I just don’t really think anyone can help me, like, I just think that it’s up to me to help myself and that no-one else can really do that. (Alice, 56)

The trajectory that produces the adopted subject as not belonging becomes understood as not being able to be helped by others through exposure to psychological discourse that pathologises adoptees difference. Around the same time that Alice was sent to counselling, Henderson (2002) was arguing that mental health professionals remained silent on post-adoption problems and lacked understanding and information about adoption issues, specifically. Similarly a study published by Cubito and Brandon (2000) referred to professional knowledge of the lived experience of adoptees as scarce and contradictory, founded in groundless generalisations.

In her quest to understand her adoption, Maxine sought a counsellor who had specific knowledge of the lived effects of adoption. It has taken her years to work through the effects:

[It was] all about little [Maxine] and big [Maxine] and, and you know and I've only come to realise this just recently, God I've got to be 37 and I haven't, it's taken such a long time to work things out and I've done lots of work over the years on my adoption. I specifically went to counselling with someone who specialised in adoption counselling, you know, I sort it out and I went because I felt like I need to do this stuff, and umm, so it's always been there, it's not like I've gone to counselling because gee, you know, I'm having trouble making friends, it's always adoption, adoption, adoption ... kind of goes without saying. (Maxine, 595, 603)

That Maxine "felt like" she needed to have counselling represents the embodied effects of the adoption "stuff". Having problems with relationships was realised as an effect, for her the issues are "always adoption, adoption, adoption". Other participants talked about managing the emotional pain of living adoption through strategies that enable a sense of being "okay":

I've always been I'm okay, I'm fine, and I always, I think I've put, I've just, I've got a really good shut down defence mechanism. (Sally, 372)

Rather than taking up a pathological position, Sally copes by "shutting down", enabling her to present herself as "fine". "Shutting down" can be understood as continuing the silence, and yet the emotional pain that being adopted evokes is lived. Toni attempted to "stop" the painful feelings with a similar coping strategy, by "blocking them off":

To stop that hurt, those feelings, that stuff, I blocked it off, or so I thought and the blocking off was cutting her off (birth mother). (Toni, 508)

For Toni, after a reunion with her birth mother the relationship remained painful, and "blocking off" was an attempt to 'cut' the relationship with her. Drawing on the metaphor of cutting resonates with the 'complete break' practice produced through the Adoption Act 1955.

"Shutting down" and "blocking off" are strategies that protect adoptees against the enduring effects of being adopted by reinstating the silence of their origin story, psychologically and individually. These strategies enable them to lessen the consequences, in much the same sense that Vaughn took up a position of "hardening up" as an attempt to cope in everyday life:

I don't allow it to impact on my life. Harden the fuck up is my motto, although that's pushing it aside and that's a whole wrong approach to it (laugh) you know I say I try to be positive not negative ... it's just something that I've learnt to do. (Vaughn, 717, 724)

While this strategy may “push it aside”, Vaughn has learnt that it helps in his attempts to stay “positive” about who he is. Attempting to remain “positive” is a strategy that reduces the impact of ‘deficit’ on his life. Though for some, to take up a position that “hardens” against the effects of adoption reproduces self-reliance - “I don’t need you”:

I’m fucken sorted. I don’t need you, you or fucken you if the world fucks out I’ve still got me, you know what I mean...I don’t know either, but you know a link, I kind of just feel like I fucken, you know, look after myself. (Cooley, 478, 487)

The rejection of others in self-reliance may be understood as mechanism for coping with fear of rejection by taking individual responsibility for keeping others at a distance. Protection from the possibility of being close to another were literally inscribed on Cooley’s body:

My tattoos were just you know that whole thing of just protection, you know I’ll tattoo myself up so people won’t get close to me and I’ll you know protect myself from you know, being hurt from others I guess ... just being able to fucken handle that pain and you know, I think having tattoos is, you know, is more, I can accept, handle that pain more than emotional pain you know like it’s, it’s more bearable than, you know, like having some sort of heartache. I fucken you know, you know when you have a really heavy heart, you know, like being yeah, there was yeah, fuck that heaviness in the heart is something that you know is hard to sit with, whereas getting a tattoo is like (sound), it’s not a fucken problem, there’s a bit of pain but it’s like I can fucken handle that. (Cooley, 696, 701)

Tattooing embodies both social distance and the pain of social exclusion for Cooley. She inscribed her own body with pain as a resistance to being “close to others”. At the same time, tattooing the body represented a “bearable pain” unlike the pain of a “heavy heart”. To carry a “heavy heart” is to feel weighed down with emotions, issues and problems.

Aggression and anger were also evident among the socially distancing coping strategies that participants represented as embodying emotional responses to social and familial relationships that they didn’t otherwise know how to ‘deal with’:

So I think I just lashed out because that’s all I knew, I didn’t know how to deal with sadness or pain. (Cooley, 232)

As a form of coping, aggressive behaviour and anger at the social exclusion that “society” let happen reproduces social distance as it enables a way to “vent the steam” when the “feelings are too big”:

When these feelings are too big to process it's so easy, it's so much easier to flick into anger ... and acting out angrily, being angry 'cause it's easy man, it's nice to let the, to vent the steam you know, and it's so easy, I just so want to like 'go' society then, man - to let happen what happened. It's fucken not okay (laugh) man. (Brendon, 440, 444)

For Brendon, adoption was “not okay”, but there is no recourse in a “society” that sanctions and continues to silence the lived experiences of being constituted *as if born to*. While feelings of anger and injustice have no direct target he “acts out angrily”, which clearly produces other consequences. For some, other ways of coping were represented through specific histories of alcohol and/or drug use.

### **Alcohol and drug use**

The most common ‘coping’ story to emerge among the participants was told as a problematic relationship with alcohol and/or drug use. The embodied pain of loss was significant to the problematic behaviour, in different ways. Barry, Brendon, Vaughn and Cooley were all in recovery from alcohol and/or drug abuse. Toni, Sally and Alice used alcohol and/or drugs problematically. In this sense, notions of adopted child syndrome, a product of psychological discourse where problematic behaviour manifests in response to adoptees experiences of loss and rejection were storied into participants’ understandings of their lived experiences. Adopted child syndrome occurs when adoptees’ position positioning themselves as ‘deficit’, even bad but dissociate themselves from that ‘badness’. At times of intense emotion that dissociated part can act out in particular ways, including promiscuous behaviour and using substances dangerously (Carangelo, 2003; Carp, 2004; Kirschner, 1992; J. Smith, 2001). Carangelo (2003) and Carp (2004) argue that all adoptees risk developing the syndrome, but not all do.

The lived experience of “lack” and “survival” required strategies for relieving embodied pain and where they included problematic “alcohol and drug” use, they also produced a particular life trajectory:

I don't know how to cope with those umm feelings or the lack of umm, or the survival, I guess like, you know, as a young kid, you know, you learn survival strategies - how to survive all the stuff I went through, to survive being an adopted kid, but when I was approaching adulthood and leaving home those survival skills weren't necessarily particularly useful as an adult ... so I was in, you know, a lot of pain ... only coping strategies I probably had which was, like alcohol and drugs to cope with that and obviously that, those things umm, you know, had a significant impact on my life and lead me down a particular path. (Barry, 389, 394, 395)

Barry situates his alcohol and drug use in a developmental account of the differences between surviving as a child and as an adult. He always lived with “a lot of pain” and substance use helped him

cope as an adult. Brendon followed two paths that traced a relationship between “retreating and cannabis” and “alcohol and self-destruction”:

You know I could, I don’t know if I was retreating or just, whatever it was, yeah I definitely believed cannabis did that, but the alcohol, that was about destruction umm, there’s a, there’s a real rejection . . . you know, I was a reject, you know that hurt, that hurt like hell aye. (Brendon, 355, 359)

The painful embodiment of feeling “rejected” meant that “retreat” from the pain of social exclusion and the “destruction” of feeling rejected was achieved. “Destruction” is represented as acting out of/on the body. Vaughn also recognised that coping as an adult required different forms of behaviour than that of a child:

My way to deal with that was just to rebel you know and just, whether it was over indulgence in food or you know, escaping telling lies or whatever, just because I was different you know, I didn’t cope with it that well really. (Vaughn, 94)

Being different manifested in a range of rebellious behaviours as a child and adolescent. Problematic alcohol and/or drug use subsequently became a way in which to “escape” the lived experience of feeling pain, and at the same time enabled the experience to be “dwelt on”:

I used it as a place to escape, don’t have to think, don’t have to feel . . . where the drugs and alcohol factor difference, you know, plays with it, is the fact that for all those times that you know, you were using you could just dwell on it and you could just use it as an excuse. You could use anything as an excuse to use. I mean I just didn’t use socially I used to get wasted. (Vaughn, 857, 883)

Engaging in sexually risky behaviour and alcohol use was also storied as a mechanism for social distancing:

I didn’t know why I had put walls and barriers and accepted some people and not others and behaved in some really scary, probably self-destructive ways . . . well drinking was a big thing because that apparently blocks out everything (laugh) umm drinking, umm looking for love everywhere, with anyone, was another way to deal with it . . . yeah those were probably the two biggies and yeah I don’t know suicide, thinking of suicide, just really trying to blot yourself out or destroy yourself. (Toni, 247, 261, 265)

Creating a social distance by putting up “walls and barriers” as protection from hurt and engaging in self-destructive behaviour are ways of coping with the emotional pain of difference and are implicated together in Toni’s story. Using substances in “self-destructive ways” enabled the embodied hurt to be “blocked out or destroyed”, a kind of suicide. Although suicidal ideation was another coping tool to “blot yourself out”, Toni recognises that she was “looking for love”.

While it may be that problematic substance use is an effect of the lived experience of adoption, the representation that the experience is an “excuse,” occurred in Vaughn’s account. He constitutes it as an inappropriate way of coping although it does represent a strategy that enables an him “not to deal with anything”:

I mean really I had, I mean I probably took a load of drugs through my life ... I was probably taking lots of acid and cocaine and shit like that ... I think that I probably went through a good part of my life, just not dealing with anything and maybe that’s why I took drugs and drank, I think. (Sally, 203, 254, 411)

Through psychological discourses of ‘problematic’ self-medication and social distancing, some participants were able to recognise that alcohol and/or drug use no longer worked as a way to deal with the real ‘felt’ effects of their position in no-man’s land. And while some adoptees continue to use substances as a way to cope, others represented acceptance as a means of understanding that that particular history is their history.

## **Acceptance**

Coming to terms with the effects of their constitution in a moral order that excludes their lived experience of *as if born to*, as if it was not, does enable a shift or a movement within adoptees’ subject positioning. Maxine articulates this movement as a shift towards a position that is less “born from resentment” over time:

If you had interviewed me five years ago I probably would have been a lot more umm, I don’t know, resentful and umm, umm critical, sceptic, sceptic, critical ... critical - born out of resentment for being adopted, and anger. (Maxine, 861, 864)

Meanings are not necessarily stable over time as Maxine suggests. Alice storied that as a child she was not affected by her adoption status and had no problems sharing her news:

I remember running around telling everybody that I was adopted and I used to think it was really cool ‘cause I ... I just didn’t really think anything of it, like they explained it to me, like you know, they’d show me photos but yeah, I don’t know, I just always knew. (Alice, 78, 85)

Alice's experience of adoption as "cool" was enabled through an explanation of the story of her adoption that connected her to the story of the before. Here, Alice had photos of her birth family that enabled a particular connection. At other times, Alice has needed to "make peace" with her history through accepting that it "cannot be changed":

I think I just kind of made peace with it, like there was, I can't change it, I couldn't change the fact that I was adopted so I didn't really think there, much thought about thinking about it. (Alice, 864)

Accepting the "facts of adoption" does not necessarily exclude feelings of curiosity about birth families. Over time and as relationships become more important, Alice realised that "wondering" about her birth father was less about the importance of a relationship she had lost, and more curiosity about heritable likenesses:

I never really cared because I was young and I had an attitude, I think it's now that I'm older I wonder [about my birth father] ... yeah and it's not because I want to know him and have a relationship with him because now I'm older I realise the importance of relationships whether it be like you know, boyfriend, girlfriend or friendship or you know, type of relationships, but umm I never really sought the relationship with him. I was just curious to see if we'd have similar traits. (Alice, 533, 538)

Alice also tells a developmental story of how age matters to the lived experience of adoption, where getting older means that social relationships are understood and valued differently. Acceptance leads to curiosity that does not implicate a haunting sense of enduring loss explicitly. Another strategy that enables acceptance, a sense of being "fine" within a painful history, is to form an identity that enables life to be "right":

To survive being an adoptee you have to make your life right ... and [it has to] make sense to you, so you have to form an identity where that makes sense to you, so if, to make sense is that I'm fine and that this is great, well then that's what you're going to believe. (Barry, 4240, 1242)

Barry alludes to "life being right" as connected to a sensible identity. Coming to terms with the lived effects of adoption is making sense of the history in a way that enables a position that is "normal" in its own specificity. Understanding the specificity of lacking a birth family is "helpful" through its own incongruity:

It's really helpful in a most ironic way, is that you don't have anything to compare it against because that's all taken away from you and it's just that thing, how do you know really, what you've lost, if you don't have any connection to it ... you don't know what you've lost because what, 'cause the fact, 'cause what you have is all, is normal to you. (Barry, 1247, 1251)

To be *born to* a history that is then cut and kept secret requires acceptance and making sense of the lack as "normal". Although adoptees may embody grief and loss, you don't "know really, what you've lost" because the lived "connection to it" is missing. Through the practices of secrecy and silence it has not been allowed. Acceptance inscribes the "facts" of lack into the lived reality of the experience:

As we've got older we just accepted the fact that we were, if that makes sense, yeah. [The lack of medical history is] just part of being adopted I think, I think you just accept, or I have, that there are things in adoption that you just accept. (Toni, 152)

Again, the significance of a developmental account is evident in Toni's story of acceptance. And yet, to accept also means living with the ongoing embodied effects of adoption. In the lived reality the pain does not "stop":

I'm thinking when does it stop? And you sort of think it has, and you try to stop it, but it really doesn't yeah, they're still there, I know they're still there; prick it if you like. (Toni, 830)

In this way, history does not end, and the lived effects of the earliest origin stories are always already there (Griffith, 1997). Taking up the positions of acceptance requires understanding that "everything moulds ... who I am":

Everything has moulded, moulded me to being who I am today. I always knew as a kid that I would be covered in tattoos you know and that was, you know when I was, when I was about six or seven drawing on my arms ... you know, but who would, I wouldn't know who I would be today had I, you know, not been adopted. (Cooley, 407, 411)

Acceptance involves making the experience meaningful to "who I am", including embodying the social distance achieved through "tattoos", so it becomes the experience that is "me". Acceptance was also enabled through experiencing the love of another. For Shelly, the unconditional love of her husband and his unconditional love of her children, without a blood tie, enabled another position that produced acceptance:

Suddenly this thing comes out and it really hits you and you think yeah, well it was one of those and for me that was, from that time on and that would have been, 20 years ago, I haven't had the issues about the adoption 'cause I realised it didn't matter. Sounds trite aye ... from there, from that moment on, I was no longer somebody who had to, who was a, I no longer felt like a second-class citizen. From that time on that went and I haven't felt like that again - ever. (Shelly, 540, 555)

To know that she could be loved meant that her experience of being positioned as "second-class" no longer mattered. To no longer experience herself as "less than", ever, is located outside of her. It was a significant realisation for Shelly and facilitated acceptance of her lived experience as an adopted subject.

Where the secrets and silence are continued through the practice of veto, and reunion is impossible, acceptance enables adoptees to come to terms with the ongoing effects of exclusion from their birth family. To make sense of a history that cannot be known requires understanding that to find 'someone' who does not want to be found may be more problematic than always lacking knowledge:

I don't know if there's any way of bypassing the system, there's I, there's probably not, umm, but what would be the point. (Sally, 707)

In Sally's account "bypassing the system" is not taken up because she accepts that there is "no point" in forcing a connection with her birth mother. Cooley's acceptance is articulated as the way it is "meant to be," which represents a feeling of inevitability that knowing a birth history is beyond reach:

Well I just kind of feel like it's just, you know, it's the way it's meant to be (sigh) that, you know, couldn't find her back then, and we did everything that was possible at that time to do it, and I just kind of feel like umm, that's just how it's meant to be. (Cooley, 118)

When nothing can be done to find the *born to* history or familial connections, acceptance enables a sense of peace to be embodied. When unable to heal the original cut, acceptance enables a type of self-soothing. However accepting the life trajectory of *as if born to* does not mean never again feeling the pain. To accept the lack that cannot be undone is the "worst" infliction imposed through the 'cut' as sanctioned by the law:

There's no undoing that, can't undo that stuff it's happened we can't wind the clock back and I think that's probably the worst. (Vaughn, 880)

The recognition that this is the history that is my history and it cannot be changed, enables adoptees to accept (Griffith, 1991). While history does not change, acceptance of their specificity enables adoptees to take up a position embedded in a narrative of lack and because of that history it is possible to imagine oneself as truly remarkable for living and coping with the fictitious *as if born to* and all that it produced.

### **Empathy and commonality**

Coming to the position of acceptance enabled some of the participants to story themselves as having gained particular insights into the strengths their histories have enabled. Barry is confident that the lived effects of *as if born to* produces certain qualities and enables positions that value relationships - if you are “really lucky”:

I think, if we're really lucky, it gives an amazing amount of empathy and insight into the humanness of us all and what's really important in life because we've, because (pause) if you've always had something you don't really know how special it is. If you've lost it or not had it and then had glimpses of it ... and really bring into my life some incredibly loving people. I choose to surround myself with really loving, amazing people that in many ways, I'd say almost all of them have had challenging lives, us, us, in spite of that, they are the most, you know, really loving. (Barry, 1439, 1456)

Barry poignantly describes how being an adoptee enables him to have “empathy and insight” into meanings of “humanness” because he is able to value what it means to live with “loss”. Being able to “connect in love with others who have also had challenging lives” is what becomes important. For Barry, acceptance enables new forms of social connection that privilege love and commonalities that are not constrained by the normalisation of biological families. Cooley also positioned herself within narratives of “empathy” as emerging from her particular history:

I just think through everything I went through in my life has given me the, the knowledge and the empathy for what they go through. I see it, I feel it, so it's not from a book. (Cooley, 330)

Going through the lived experience, rather than “book knowledge”, enables Cooley to “feel” for others. Here an embodied connection enables a sense of commonality that gives insight into others' experiences. Toni too was able to position herself through her history, being adopted is part of her and produces the person she is today:

I think it's made me, the part of me, made me the person that I am today. I, I get some oh, enjoyment. It's like this link or this bonding with those that I meet that are adopted as well, I

don't know what that does, it gives you that oh, that arrh yeah, and that I wouldn't have had, had I not been adopted, umm, and [it] gives me an awareness of others umm, maybe not in a similar situation but an awareness of other's need to be accepted, need to be loved. (Toni, 1149)

Toni is able to feel empathy towards not only with those who are “bonded” through the shared experience of adoption, but also the “others that are in need of acceptance and love”. Like Barry, acceptance enables Toni to value love and connections with others that exceed biological kin relations. In this way, coming to terms with their own history has enabled participants to use that history to connect with others. It can be a “blessing”:

I do feel kind of blessed because I feel like I'm right where I have to be. This is my life ... I'm actually really thankful that I'm adopted, I can't believe I'm saying that (laugh). I hated being adopted but I'm really thankful that I'm here, where I am now, and where I am in my life now all came about because I was adopted. You know, I would have been somewhere else, and umm yeah, so in my life that's how I feel about adoption now, and yeah it's kind of a better place to be. (Maxine, 919, 1014)

Maxine's surprise at moving from 'hating' to being “really thankful” she was adopted speaks to the normalisation of consistency that psychological discourse attaches to notions of authenticity and the storying of psychosocial development. Maxine's shift to feeling “blessed” was located in the possibility that she may have been “somewhere else” that could have been worse. In recognising that lack, exclusion and distress took multiple forms. It was through having children that Mary was able to come to terms with what was enabled through her adoptive history. The “soul” or “essence” of subjective self is felt through the commitment to give her children what they “deserve”:

I still think the soul of what makes you, the essence of you, you have to, I think perhaps you get inner strength ... I think it gives me a strong sense of - you have the children, or you don't have the children, you have them, and you make a go of them, you know you, you, you don't have them unless you are prepared to commit and give them what they deserve. (Mary, 832, 974)

Although she is still positioned in psychological discourse constituting an ‘essential self’ and “inner strength”, her recognition of others, and her commitment to her children enables her to accept and even appreciate how her history has enabled her. Mary also values her difference with people, by appreciating commonalities:

That's another strong thing I'd say in adoption umm it's your soul - doesn't matter whether your, you know umm what nationality you are, it's actually what you are inside so therefore that's another thing that I don't have that some other people might think oh well you know they're, you're born such and such then you know, I don't see any difference in anybody. (Mary, 1546)

Acceptance of their histories can be understood as moving away from the 'deficit' of the lack. Finding a place to both embody that history and to resist 'risk' opens the possibility for an adoptee to take up a position enabling empathy and recognition of others, and valuing shared experiences of suffering and being-in-the-world. Adoptees are truly remarkable.

### **Questioning Adoption**

While many of the participants did achieve some kind of acceptance of their adoption, and while they appreciated the positive qualities that living a life of difference has enabled, the continuation of adoption as a practice was not something most participants supported. Where it was supported, it was conditional. For Mary, the idea of relinquishing a child was unimaginable:

I just, I just couldn't even imagine trying to carry a child full term and then give it up because it's so much a part of you. (Mary, 743)

Despite the singularity that is implied by the challenge of imagining a birth mother's experience, Mary constitutes adoption experiences as diverse and multiple. Rather than understanding adoption as "right or wrong", different experiences need to be understood:

I think adoption is an example of something that is not black and white ... that it's a different experience for everybody and as you say, there is no right or wrong, but there's, for me it was a very positive experience. (Mary, 593, 596)

The circumstances that lead to adoption are complex considerations for the participants. While ongoing practices of adoption might not necessarily be "black and white", it is the notion of taking away "truth and identity" through the process that is not acceptable. Adoption as a practice was held in tension with the alternative of abortion for a number of participants in the social context where illegitimacy is morally reprehensible and unwed mothers need to address their child's illegitimacy. For Jan, it is possible that abortion might be the "best choice" among "bad choices":

I don't really like adoption as a concept, as a thing at all, I guess it's a little bit like I don't really, I mean this is probably not the best analogy to use, but this is my own personal truth - I

don't particularly like abortion either as a thing, but I know in circumstances, certain circumstances it, it might be the best choice out of a whole lot of bad choices ... umm but what I really dislike about [adoption] is that you take away people's truth and identity from them. I think that is just fucked. (Jan, 1198, 1205)

The lived effects of the denial of "truth and identity" are something that adoptees do not wish to "inflict" on another. Previously positioned as "vehemently against adoption", Maxine wished she had been aborted for as long as she could remember. Her strong stance against, and experiences of, adoption enabled her to consider termination to be less harmful. However, having had an abortion, and working in the health field has enabled her to change her position from opposition to an understanding that the pain of the adoptive experience can eventually be healed:

I umm, have always been against adoption, vehemently against adoption you know, umm I got pregnant and I had a termination. I could have adopted the child out but it was, my, my thinking was, I wouldn't want to inflict that on anyone ... [At the abortion clinic I wondered] why these woman didn't adopt out their babies because I mean hello 18 weeks, another five weeks a neonatal unit you know, at what point you know, and it just sort of struck me that well I'm here because I was adopted and I wasn't terminated and umm, as much as I wished all my life that I had been [aborted], umm that wasn't the case and so, umm, my views around adoption have changed actually because it isn't so huge that it can't eventually be healed or helped. (Maxine, 86, 993)

To value "being here" and not being aborted is something that when realised, becomes a valuing of life over death. While "wishing" that adoption were not his story, Brendon was reminded that "not being" was the alternative:

I remember when me and my friends were sitting around in the shed and we all worked out we're adopted and like I remember saying to like, fuck man, I just wish that they didn't have adoption and I remember one of my mates saying, "well fuck the only alternative mate, is that we were aborted". (Brendon, 453)

For Brendon, the tension between adoption and abortion was starkly connected to life and death through their construction as alternatives solutions to the moral problem of illegitimacy. For Cooley the 'choice' of her birth mother to adopt rather than to abort was not only a choice about life, but also a decision of "love":

I guess for me, just the knowing that my mother loved me enough to adopt me instead of abort me ... as a kind of a comfort, you know she didn't just put me in a basket (laugh) on a doorstep or throw me in a bag in the river. (Cooley, 826, 829)

The significance of choosing life through adoption distinguishes Cooley's experience from that of being abandoned, like animals - "not being thrown into the river". However finding comfort in the choice of adoption rather than abortion is not easily available for other participants:

You know it's not our responsibility and it's you know, you almost think, you know, you almost think, well they really had abortion back then but would people be better doing that sometimes because it, you know you leave all these kids out there that have got all these things that are unanswered. (Sally, 751)

Acknowledging that the choice between adoption and abortion is not the adoptees' responsibility does not relieve Sally of feeling the social responsibility for having to live without answers. The struggles and problems, lack and exclusions of her experiences enable Sally to question whether abortion might be a "better" option to emerge. Interestingly, Sally explicitly reflects on the availability of abortion at the time she was adopted; yet the moral complexities involved in choosing between adoption and abortion are not historically contextualised in her account.

Vaughn draws attention to the very specific moral complexities that emerge from the tension between adoption and abortion in terms of choice through relating his experience of not having responsibility for the choice:

I guess that depends on the circumstances aye of the individual really and I guess you know [my partner and I] conceived a child, you know, and her whole thing was get rid of it. I didn't want that ... but she was no way in hell, and I guess I had to accept that ... it was pretty tough. (Vaughn, 741, 748, 751)

Vaughn found it "tough" that accepting the possibility that in his case abortion was the best choice for his partner. For Shelly, the best choice is also morally complex and can be dependent on "right and wrong reasons". If the situation is "right" then it is possible that adoption could be a good option:

I do feel like I'm part of their family. So that's probably made quite a, that's probably made a big difference to what I feel about adoption, in that I feel that while I think some people have their children adopted for the wrong reasons, and while I think some people adopt for the wrong reasons, I do think there are some people who have their children adopted for the right

reasons and I think there's some parents who adopt for the right reasons and it's like anything you have got to take each situation on its merit ... I don't think adoption is a bad thing. (Shelly, 115, 868)

In this account context matters, as each situation should be judged "on its merit". Shelly does not endorse a single moral solution and justifies her position with reference to her experiences of feeling "part of their family". For Margaret choosing between adoption and abortion is not the only choice to be made, and she kept her own child because in her experience, there are "no guarantees" about adoptive families:

I'll be blowed if I'm adopting [my child] out or having an abortion there's no way in the world am I giving my baby away to who knows who, what there's no guarantees is there, I thought I wouldn't give a child away in case it ended up in the same sort of crap that I ended up in. (Margaret, 443)

An adoptee's experience of adoption influences how they respond to being an adoptee and their views on adoption (Triseliotis, 1973). The tensions between life and death, right and wrong, are similar to the moral tensions between illegitimacy and legitimacy in as much as they are binary choices and there is no position outside the either/or for subjects to occupy. Many participants did not speak to the possibility of not being relinquished, perhaps because in their own experience this is not viable, there is no way back. Noticeably, though, whether a choice between adoption and abortion was construed as a straightforward or a morally complex choice, participants understood it as an individualised choice devoid of the effects of social power relations and historical conditions.

### **Challenging the legitimacy of adoption**

Although worldwide and within Aotearoa/New Zealand there is a history of political activism to overturn adoption legislation and while there have been in excess of 80,000 of us produced through the Adoption Act 1955, the effects of this Act remain socially and politically unacknowledged (Griffith, 1997, 1998). Despite the narrative constitution of the adopted subject through legislation, most of the participants did not have knowledge of the Adoption Act 1955 and did not necessarily connect it to the specificity of their experiences. Nonetheless, some of the participants did speak of the lack of attention to reform of Adoption legislation by successive governments.

The participants did not think that others consider their experience important. More specifically, the lack of interest by governments confirmed that the lived experiences of adoptees were insufficient to address the problematics of the legal fiction through which they were subjected as social power relations enacted by the state:

Well just, there just seems to be so much more that's more important, you know what I mean, like their little people fucken losing their jobs and what's happening overseas and all that stuff, you know, it's certainly not, it doesn't seem to be on their, I don't see it on their list of important things. (Cooley, 531)

Significantly, government's lack of action to redress the practices of adoption reproduces the adoptee as lacking importance - not good enough. This positioning resonates and reinforces the shame embodied through narratives of illegitimacy and relinquishment.

Lack of government action to change the law is argued in the literature as a gendered problem. It is the mothers who carry the burden for bearing illegitimate children and society positions children as inherently the concern of women (Farrar, 1997; Greenwood, 2000). Sally also understood government inaction as a matter of gender. Where "government" is understood as masculine and the responsibility for maternity is feminine, it is possible for "governments" to "walk away":

I think umm, it's a female thing and males aren't interested in that ... so how can a male that's sitting in a politician's sitting in government be interested ... because men walk away all the time. (Sally, 1161, 1171, 1175)

Barry locates the lack of government redress in a failure to recognise the human rights issues for children in the technological interventions into social relationships:

You know until we get some politician or, who's able to (sigh), with a lot of umm political savvy, then why would anyone care ... I actually think it's even worse than that, which makes me a bit despondent, but if we look at the dialogue I guess on umm reproductive technologies ... I find that just so offensive, and yet again what it shows about society is that adoption, which I guess is a form of reproductive technology for infertile parents, is that it's parent focused, adult focused. None of that dialogue is around the kids - rights lie with parents, with adults - not with the kids. (Barry, 1635, 1638, 1641)

The exclusion of "child rights" from the "reproductive technology dialogue" is the same exclusion that adoption law reformers argue is problematic in the Adoption Act 1955. "The Act contains no reference to the child's rights - its focus is predominantly on the two sets of parents" (Ludbrook, 2008, para. 2), an exclusion that Barry experiences as "offensive". It makes sense that there is a parallel between adoptees themselves being oppressed alongside the political issue of law reform.

The improbability of successful law reform was located by Jan in the lack of interest in the effects of living the narrative of adoption. When the parts of an adoptee's experience are addressed, adoptees become a "disposable population"; the adoption itself is not a problem:

[There is no law reform] because it's boring and I know I talk about disposable populations sometimes, and people who are adopted are part of that disposable population that people don't care about ... it's not, there's not a huge moral, 'cause well, as the adoption's happened there's stuff about sex outside of marriage, or being able to look after children, or abuse of children has been dealt with so there's actually, with the adoption thing itself, there's no huge dramas directly related to it. You can't, it's probably more difficult to get people's moralistic anger up about it, so you won't get, I don't think in public world, you'll, I don't think you'll get two hugely heated sides to the debate that then make an agreement happen in the middle, so the debate isn't going to be loud ... the pro's and con's will just be umms and arrhs, 'cause it's not quite, and it's only emotive for people who see that they have been directly harmed by it which is not all adoptees. (Jan, 1070, 1074, 1084)

More specifically, stories of the harmful effects of living adoption are reduced to the emotional and therefore 'treatable' in terms of psychological discourse. In this way, it is difficult to generate a moral response from those who do not live the adoption experience because the solution of individual 'treatment' is readily available discursively.

For some participants, the possibility that the secrecy of 'closed' adoption violates adoptees' human rights enabled them to argue for legal reform despite psychological discourse that individualises the lived effects of adoption. Shelly is able to make sense of, and justify, the secrecy of 'closed' adoption because of the protection that is enabled for individual birth mothers, yet she also argues that the rights of the child be redressed through access to "medical information and some knowledge of roots":

I don't think (pause) I think it should change, but I think that if, for whatever reasons the parents and the birth mother feel that in their situation a closed adoption would be better, I think that should be able to happen ... but I think that when the adoptee turns 21 or whatever they should have the right to information then and I think that through, all the way through, they should be able to have access to medical records and some sort of umm, sort of knowledge about their roots. (Shelly, 817, 821)

The right to know an adoptee's *born to* history is complicated by the individual rights of adult women to protect their reputations through the secrecy that keeps their 'morally reprehensible' pregnancies hidden and deprives their illegitimate children of knowledge about their birth families. In this context, the adoptees' right of access to medical history throughout the 'closed' period is privileged over redressing 'offensive' disinterest in the lived effects of adoption. And while medical history is privileged, the question of when it is appropriate for adoptees to have the right to "roots" is less clear.

The binary constitution of adoption as either morally good or psychosocially harmful does not attend to the complexities of specific lived experiences. If, through intervention, the ‘problems’ of adoption are located within the ‘dysfunctional’ adoptive family system, experiences of abuse or alcoholism for example, the ‘treatment’ for harmful effects are separated from the lived history of adoption. Where there is a separation of a subject from history, the political exercise of institutional power that constitutes adoptees *as if born to* those dysfunctional families remains untouched.

Adoption is an emotive issue for those involved in the adoption triad, and due to the complex social relationships enabled through secrecy and silence, resisting the social order is not only problematic because of the individualising of the ‘problems’ with adoption. For those living the experience, fear of further hurt, or hurting others within the triad limits the possibility to speak against the injustice of adoption publically. As a legally constituted marginal group, breaches of adoptees’ human rights, as children and as adults, are largely depoliticised and through psychological discourse, they are easily transformed into individual psychosocial problems.

*I could have chosen to follow a psychological narrative of pathology as I analysed the participants’ narratives for this chapter. However, from my insider position I emphasise that the problem with that narrative is that pathology positions the embodied experiences of adoptees as devoid of the social power relations that locate us as ‘abnormal’. From the moment of birth in the nullius in terra eboracensis place, we embody a position of ‘difference’. That difference continues as the legal fiction is enacted. We can never be ‘normal’ in a life trajectory that screams out we are ‘wrong’ as illegitimate, ‘other’ as non-blood relations and ‘not good enough’ to change the law. The participants themselves resist positioning through ‘deficit’. We recognise inherently that as adoptees we are always already other, and I question if it is possible for those who govern the border between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ to imagine the effects of adoption as a normal response to abnormal circumstances.*

## **Birth Family Reunions**

Within Aotearoa/New Zealand adoption reunions are reaching their peak, according to Browning (2006). Many years have passed since the inception of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and it could be assumed that those affected by ‘closed’ adoption who were interested in seeking a reunion or information on a *born to* history would have done so. However, according to Browning (2006), little research exists that explores long-term post-reunion relationships and this research is needed in order that lived experiences of reunion and possibilities for normalising alternative forms of kinship be understood.

Research, however, does indicate that particular relational settings can have implications for the reunion process. These include the way in which the birth mother/father respond, the way in which mirroring or difference occurs between adoptees and birth mothers/fathers, the feeling of connection and bonding within a reunion, levels of secrecy and empathy in the relationships, previous expectations, sense of self and boundaries, the adoptive parents reactions, and practical factors, such as

time and location (Gediman & Brown, 1991; Griffith, 1991; March, 1995; Trinder, Feast, & Howe, 2004; Triseliotis, 1973). There is no contesting that the multitude of events that constitute the reunion experience are important, nor that reunions may be sought by adoptees for various reasons. In the following chapter, participants' lived experiences of reunion are analysed with regard for adoptees' stories of origin in the no-man's land outside normative family relations and the complications of their lives by the action of psychological discourse in governing their production as subjects of pathology and individualisation.



## **Chapter 8:**

# **Returning to Origins**

*To my little darling, happy birthday my baby.*

*It is so special to share this day with you. I love you so much. Your Carole*

*(Carole Jean Shields, 1949-2005).*

## Returning to Origins

Significant to the narrative that locates an adoptee in an *as if born to* legal fiction was the experience of the process of a birth family search and reunion<sup>13</sup>. With the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, reunions became possibilities and held the promise of reconciliation with birth families. Adoptees could gain knowledge of their *born to* origins and heal any hurt from psychosocial complications. Birth family searches offer adoptees a way to ‘resist’ the secret that characterises their origin stories. Many adoptees take up a birth family search, which is not surprising given the desire for knowledge of themselves in history and the multiple challenges that adoptees encounter (March, 1995). In a narrative of adoption as meaningful lived experiences, reunion represents the most accessible form of at least partial resolution to a lived trajectory that begins in no-man’s land.

Importantly, I need to acknowledge that while this work traces some search and reunion experiences, the process of birth family reunions warrants far more research, given the complexity of the relationships involved. And indeed there is much research that has been focused entirely on this process (for example see Affleck & Steed, 2001; Browning, 2006; Gediman & Brown, 1991; Gladstone & Westhues, 1998; March, 1995; Modell, 1997; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Passmore & Feeney, 2009; Petta & Steed, 2005; Trinder et al., 2004; Weaver & Nation, 1997). According to Sachdev (1992), Affleck and Steed (2001) and Trinder et al. (2004) there is no consistent pattern to outline a positive reunion experience. Some relationships start out poorly and grow stronger; others are intense in the beginning and then decline. Expectations of one another, life histories and context all interact and influence how the relationships evolve. Browning (2006) argues that more research that explores long-term post-reunion relationships is needed, and specifically in Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, no single research project could encompass the multiplicity and diversity of reunion experiences.

Historically, adoption researchers have been more interested in the ‘why’ of the search rather than the lived experiences of adoptees seeking reunion (Sachdev, 1992; Trinder et al., 2004). Such research has found evidence of various reasons and motivations that justify the *born to* search. Initially it was argued (Affleck & Steed, 2001; B. J. Lifton, 1994; Sachdev, 1992; Triseliotis, 1973) that adoptees search because of poor relationships with adoptive parents, however this is now disputed. Searching adoptees can have positive relationships with their adoptive families and motivations for searching are not related to the strength or quality of the adoptive family relationships. It has been claimed that a search occurs because the adoption has failed in some way and the adoptee has a deep

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<sup>13</sup> For some the language of ‘reunion’ is problematic because it signifies a prior relationship that can be renewed when no previous relationship exists (Trinder et al., 2004). However, based on participants’ accounts and my own embodied knowing, this thesis acknowledges that there is an existing relationship that connects adoptees to their biological origins and makes sense of the notion of reuniting adoptees with their *born to* origins. Although metaphorically the act of adoption is a violent cut, there remains a heartfelt connection, a relationship always, already there.

psychological yearning for a birth connection (Griffith, 1991). Medical information is also cited as a motivating factor, according to Sachdeva (1992), and indeed the significance of the knowledge of a biological history has been shown previously in this research. While Trinder et al. (2004) argue that the birth family search is about establishing a relationship with a birth relative, Griffith (1991) states that many adoptees have an inherent need to search for a birth history to make sense of themselves and their difference while produced *as if born to*.

Furthermore, Griffith (1991) contests any expectation that adoptees need to justify their search. He problematises the research focus on questioning 'why' adoptees search and argues that their motivation needs to be normalised, reframed as a natural response to wanting to know about "your mother, your father, your grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, ancestry, history..." (Sec 11, p. 40). Through this argument, adoptees should not be expected to provide a reason for searching since it can be assumed to be a normal curiosity. When an adoptee does justify searching it signifies the way in which they are still constituted through illegitimacy, without any entitlement to knowledge of or connection with their *born to* family.

In this thesis, the focus is on participants' lived experiences of searching for and/or reuniting with birth families. All of the participants who were able to have a birth family reunion talked in-depth about the complexity of the process and the relationships with birth family members. Nine of the participants had initiated a search for their birth origins and three had been 'found' by their birth mothers. Of those who initiated a search, not all had been successful with one participant not being able to find her birth mother and another being denied the right to search through the practice of veto.

### **Keeping the Secret**

Despite attempts to allow access to previously secreted information after the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, it was still legally possible for birth families, especially birth mothers, to maintain the secret through a veto. Searching adoptees are aware of the legal sanction of veto and the legitimacy of keeping the secret is complicated by fear of further rejection, abandonment and pain. Many adoptees delay taking the first step in applying for an original birth certificate, as they are concerned, at times even terrified, that their search will be vetoed and they will encounter another form of legally sanctioned abandonment.

In practice, a veto can be placed by either birth parent, or an adoptee, to block the release of identifying information. In this way, limits to knowledge of birth origins are legally prescribed. According to Carp (2007), the veto provision is aimed at preventing adverse outcomes from disclosing the secret that include birth parents feeling an invasion of privacy, families being destroyed, careers being ruined or even suicide. Such provisions were intended to balance the interests of all triad members and uphold the legal commitment to secrecy as decreed by the Adoption Act 1955. Like the 1955 Act itself, the provisions intended in the best interests of all parties, serve to privilege the protection of secrecy that more strongly serves the interests of parents - both relinquishing and

adoptive - while perpetuating what adoption advocates understand as a violation of adoptees' human rights. The following figure outlines the Access to Information provisions for birth parents as stated in the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985.

Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 No 127 (as at 24 January 2009), Public Act – N... Page 1 of 1

### *Access to information*

#### **3 Birth parent may restrict access to identifying information**

- (1) Either birth parent of a person adopted before 1 March 1986 may at any time request the Registrar-General to have the original entry of the birth of that person endorsed to the effect that that person is not to have access to identifying information relating to the person making the request.
- (2) The following provisions shall apply to every request under subsection (1):
  - (a) the Registrar-General shall inform the person making that request of the counselling available in the area in which that person lives, from social workers and approved persons and organisations;
  - (b) that person shall indicate to the Registrar-General whether or not that person desires counselling;
  - (c) if that person indicates that that person desires counselling, the Registrar-General shall take no further action until that person requests the Registrar-General to proceed with the original request;
  - (d) if that person—
    - (i) indicates that that person does not desire counselling; or
    - (ii) under paragraph (c) requests the Registrar-General to proceed with the original request,

—

the Registrar-General shall cause the original entry of the birth of the adopted person concerned to be endorsed accordingly, and to be endorsed also with the date on which it was so endorsed.
- (3) The fact that there is upon the original entry of the birth of any person one unexpired endorsement under subsection (2) relating to any person shall not prevent a further endorsement under that subsection relating to that person.
- (4) Subject to subsection (5), every endorsement under subsection (2) shall continue in force until the expiration of 10 years from the date of its making, and shall then expire.
- (5) A birth parent of an adopted person may at any time request the Registrar-General to have removed from the original entry of that person's birth all endorsements under subsection (2) relating to that parent; and in that case the Registrar-General shall cause that entry to be noted accordingly, and those endorsements shall then expire.

*Figure 7. Adult Adoption Information Act 1985: Access to information*  
(Adult Adoption Information Act, 1985).

Within Aotearoa/New Zealand, access to original birth certificates is permitted through the Births, Deaths and Marriages arm of the state. Original birth certificates include the original name of the adoptee, place of birth, date of birth, sex, and original birth parents, although mostly only birth mothers' names are identified. Birth father information was often not provided or excluded, as it was not deemed to be important given that the adopted child would not inherit his name by definition of their illegitimacy. In some instances, according to current information provided by the Aotearoa/New Zealand Adoption Information and Services branch of Child, Youth and Family (2012), birth parents' name(s) can be omitted because names are either not available or a veto is in place. A veto can last for 10 years when it can then be renewed. It can be removed at any time by whoever placed it. If vetoed, the original birth certificate is sent directly to the inquiring adoptee because there is no identifying information provided about the birth family(ies) (Child Youth and Family, 2010; Griffith, 1991, 1997; Law Commission: Te Aka Matua O Te Ture, 2000; Triseliotis et al., 1997).

Interestingly, the law deemed that when identifying information on the original birth certificate was accessible, counselling to receive this information was mandatory yet in the case of veto, where adoptees are denied access to birth family names there is no requirement for support. Making support mandatory when it is possible to access a birth family history implies that finding out about adoptees' *born to* family could be psychologically difficult. That same consideration is not applied to those who do not receive any information even when they are at risk of experiencing abandonment again. When vetoed, the onus of responsibility to seek support lies with the adoptee; in this instance the adoptee can contact a social worker if they want to talk to someone or to inquire if a letter of explanation or other such information is available. Clearly though, mandating support for finding out, and not for receiving information about a veto, privileges the notion that something morally reprehensible was protected by the original secret, which would produce distress for the child *born to* were it to be revealed to them: an assumption that has little connection with the lived experience of adoptees who initiate searches.

For a searching adoptee, to be told via a letter that there is a veto on their birth records can be a devastating experience. The impersonal (legislated) approach to passing on information that you have been vetoed, is not received impersonally:

Umm, and I got this letter through the post saying there is a veto there and I was actually really upset. (Sally, 323)

Being "actually really upset" represents an emotional response that is difficult to articulate. It can encompass loss of hope since any chance of finding a birth mother is slashed; the birth family relationship is once again 'cut', and the original wound is reopened. Potentially all the lack, losses, exclusions and complications that emerge from beginnings in no-man's land could resonate through an adoptee's embodied response to an impersonal letter declining them crucial information about their history. For some adoptees, a veto realises the profound fear of being rejected again by the birth mother

(Griffith, 1997). Sally had never considered that her birth mother might not want to meet her, so she did not expect a rejection letter and her 'upset' refers to her shock that it happened:

I never thought about that. I truly didn't think about it being an option. (Sally, 328)

If a birth mother places a veto on her identifying information, the adoptee has to make sense of that decision, as most often there is no letter of explanation. As a legislated and impersonal 'cut', there is no other choice but to "move on":

That's the way it is, you need to close the door and move on to a certain extent I've probably thought well if she doesn't, there's a veto there, she doesn't want to be found so why open up a can of worms, umm and if she doesn't want to be found, why force the issue and it might be unpleasant for all of us. I mean I don't know if there's any way of bypassing the system, there's, I, there's probably not, umm but what would be the point? (Sally, 707)

Here, the idea of having to 'close the door' evokes an image of embodied movements towards a birth family reunion that are stopped abruptly. Vetoed adoptees can no longer move in the direction they want to go. When Sally's birth mother positions herself as not wanting to be found, it suggests to her that if the door is reopened there could be numerous problems waiting on the other side - "a can of worms" that feels "unpleasant" and makes the body squirm. For me, an embodied squirm signifies an experience of shame and the lived rejection that is embodied during the original relinquishment. These "unpleasant" feelings mean that for some adoptees there is no point in attempting to "bypass the system" that sanctions the rights of the birth mother to maintain the secret. And while the adoptee is left to "move on", any movement with a reopened wound is slow and painful. Adoptees are left puzzled and incensed:

But you see they did that but in one breath, they allowed them to put a veto there ... I mean what the hell is that? You know you either do something or you don't and to my mind they didn't. (Sally, 1132, 1135)

Sally's expression of "hell" evokes a feeling of heat - the blood racing - that is experienced in embodied anger for a contradictory law that enabled access to birth records for adoptees while simultaneously denying them access through the provision of a veto. The overwhelming feeling from the experience of being vetoed by a birth mother through the same legal system that warrants access to birth information is that further rejection is legally sanctioned:

Well I don't want to; I don't want any more rejection. I don't want to, I don't want to go there and have this person saying, "I just absolutely don't want anything to do with you", 'cause why would I put myself through that again. (Sally, 717)

As a response to that rejection, Sally resists being positioned at the mercy of a birth mother who might not "want anything to do with" her again. Sally's repetition that she does not want to experience rejection from her birth mother signifies her strong emotional reaction to the veto. Noticeably, though, she takes on the responsibility for not putting herself "through that again". As with other matters affecting the adoptive experience, such as managing the adoptive secret, the adoptee is again burdened with responsibility for the decisions of others; "why would I" "go there" means birth information remains inaccessible.

Participants who were not vetoed also questioned the practice of veto. It was strongly felt that it was the right of the adult adoptee to know their history because as children they did not have any rights in the original adoption. Therefore, only the adoptee should have a choice about releasing personal information once they reach adulthood. The Adoption Act 1955 legalised the power of the state and adult citizens, whereby all decisions regarding adoptions were made by adults, including the birth and adoptive families. Those citizens were the stakeholders that valued the needs and rights of the adults over the child. In this way, adult adoptees continue to be positioned as children with the rights and obligations set forth by legislation designed for children (Griffith, 1991). Akin to the Adoption Act 1955, the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 repositions adoptees with no choice and defends birth mothers' secrets through sanctioning vetoes by birth family members:

Everybody who made the decisions were adults. I didn't decide, you know, so now it's my turn to find out and I don't, I don't think it's right that the mother can veto that information. She doesn't have to answer the phone but you know there's, there could be other siblings, there could be a whole lot of stuff and it's that denial you know, and, and I just think that that part of it needs to be changed as well, they need to take off that ability to veto. If anyone needs to veto, I think it's the adopted child, the birth child that has the right to veto, because it was done to them the most yeah, that's how I sort of view the Act ... the umm Adult Information Act I think is, is for birth mothers. I think that, I mean obviously it's for me as well because I could search, I could use, I could access that but if my birth mother said I don't want to be found she could put a veto on it and for me personally I think that umm I think that's selfish. (Maxine, 771, 760)

For Maxine, adoption was "done to" the adoptee, as a child without rights, and to remove the possibility of knowing their birth history through the practice of veto re-enacts a breach of social

justice. To deny the possibility of reconciliation is a “selfish” act by the birth mother because there are other important relationships with birth family members at stake. It is not “fair”:

I think children have a right to know who their parents were so I don't, and I don't think it's, I think it's not really fair to, for it to, for, for mothers really to put a veto on it. I think children have a right to know umm, maybe oh, I think I, I wouldn't like to not, I wouldn't have liked to have not been able to have the opportunity. (Mary, 1380)

While arguing for the “right to know”, adoptees still fear encountering a veto that removes “the opportunity” to know. Participants were acutely aware that their rights were not prioritised by the legislation. And while the right for an adoptee to veto was discussed, none of the participants used the practice. However, having the opportunity to know did not necessarily mean contact with birth family followed. For Mary, knowing the identity of her birth family did not lead to meeting her father; though by “not placing a veto” herself, she enabled him the opportunity to find her:

I haven't vetoed anything, but I mean he's got to be [an elderly age] now. (Mary, 505)

When placing a veto, a letter or personal effects can be left for the inquiring party. Griffith (1991) found a large number of adoptees were able to surpass veto orders, mostly because they traced other types of identifying information. Aotearoa/New Zealand adoptee survey data collected by Iwanek (1997a) in 1989, showed that of the 76 adoptees vetoed, 75 embarked on an ongoing search, suggesting it was possible for the system to be bypassed. One participant talked of strategies to avoid the restrictions of veto, knowing it can be removed. When faced with a veto, Brendon “left a letter” (240) with the state agency for his mother that would be passed on if she changed her mind:

When I was twenty I found, my [adoptive] mum actually wrote to umm the people to get my birth certificate but my birth mother had vetoed me finding out ... but she'd done it because her husband, who wasn't my biological father she had remarried, and they'd had a couple of kids who were five and eight years away from me so we, I've got brothers from her that we've got the same mum and umm she vetoed cause she'd said nah, nah we've never told our boys this and he never wanted them to know but she thought no fuck this when I was like, she couldn't she waited six months after I was 21 and just couldn't do it and so she contacted me ... I left a letter ... I wrote the letter ... it was huge because I was a mess at 21, I was a very immature 21. (Brendon, 227, 230, 240, 242, 245)

To write a letter is a “huge” emotional process for a young adoptee, especially when he had just experienced rejection again through the veto provision. Fortunately though, for Brendon, “the letter” engaged his birth mother and eventually they did reunite.

Adoptees were offered the hope that the wall of secrecy could be torn down with the Adult Adoption Act 1985, and in many cases the right to access a birth history was enabled. However, for some, the provision of secrecy remained through contact vetoes. While only two participants in this thesis experienced vetoes, others felt strongly that the provision of vetoes continued to effect human rights violations for adoptees. Most were scared of feeling the grief of a second abandonment with a birth mother denying contact again in their search process. In their recommendations for law reform, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* (2000) argue that after a transition period no new vetoes should be allowed, acknowledging that successful reunions have occurred even when vetoes are in place. Recent research by Carp (2007) identified that very few vetoes are actually renewed in Aotearoa/New Zealand because the feared negative outcomes did not eventuate and interested parties changed their minds. That birth parents or adoptees do not search at particular times in their lives, does not mean that searching will never occur (B. J. Lifton, 1994). While the possibility for knowledge remains, there is also hope for reconciliation and healing hurt in the future.

### **Revealing the Secret**

From the participants’ accounts, it was obvious that the most important person to find was the birth mother. Based on the assumption that a child has a primary maternal preoccupation, Lousada (2000) argues that this primary preoccupation is complicated by the absence of the birth mother for the adoptee. From this location, I assume that the infantile primary preoccupation with a birth mother, although symbolic, is not resolved, producing the need to find her to enact a resolution. Research by Trinder et al. (2004) found that it is the birth mother that most adoptees think of during childhood, therefore she is the one with whom connection is sought. Of the 394 adopted adults who took part in their study, 91 percent had pursued their birth mother first.

Adding to this primary need, birth mothers represent society’s relationships with women as mothers more generally. Discourses of mothering mean that reproduction and relatedness are embodied in women (Farrar, 1997; Lousada, 2000). In this way, the responsibility for parenting is situated with the mother, not the father. A further complication is the constitution of illegitimacy where it is often a ‘single’ woman who is responsible for the breach of the moral order. The birth mother as a prenatal environment, within our cultural narratives, represents knowledge of the formation of physical, intellectual and emotional wellbeing. She is the conduit of the birth history - the conception, pregnancy, birth and birth family that are the secret:

I know it’s two of them, but I actually feel the importance, the mother was actually the one who carried me. (Mary, 537)

The significance of finding the “mother” is felt because she comes before birth; she is the “one who carried” the child. To be “carried” in a womb for nine months is to be enveloped, nourished and cradled by the birth mother, an embodied material, psychological and emotional connection.

The embodiment metaphor, according to Ogden (1989), is foundational to how our pre-symbolic and sensory experience constructs and organises our sense of who we are. Through contact with the birth mother, via the skin and other sensory modalities, including auditory heartbeats and speech, a child begins to embody experience. In this way the history of the pregnancy, what happens to the mother is ‘felt’ by the child:

My birth mother was sent away as well and so that feeling definitely goes, has to go, I mean all those feelings are, the feelings of the mother are, definitely go across to the child. (Mary, 542)

The “feeling” of being “sent away” is a shared experience but it is not only the feelings that “go across” to the child; other experiences produce traces of a non-material history shared by mother and child before the moment of birth when their connection is cut. And this history is also felt:

It’s interesting, I mean like I have this fear of being shut in small places and my mum was brought up in an orphanage for abused children. So I do have to wonder if she was shut in a cupboard because or you know or shut in something to be punished ‘cause I have this irrational fear of small places. (Shelly, 705)

Resonating with a psychological dependence on heredity, “irrational fear” may be something like a genetic psychological memory or an experience of the narrative unconsciousness, that which is felt and has been lived but not thought (Freeman, 2002, 2010). Knowledge of the birth history as heritable may enable an “irrational fear” to be normalised as rational and provide greater insight and reflexivity for the adoptee. It also provides stronger connections and more stories of a shared history with the birth mother. Browning (2006) identifies that a birth relationship enables a biographical history and a physical identity for adoptees. Certainly in this thesis, the desire to search was often understood as a curiosity about whom the participants are similar to:

I don’t think it was ‘til I was actually a bit older that I started to umm, think about trying to track my mother down, just out of curiosity, you know ‘cause I used to wonder what she looked like or who I looked like. (Cooley, 67)

I sort of felt, I wanted, I always wanted to know where I came, who, who I looked like. (Margaret, 112)

Margaret “felt” that she “wanted to know” where she came from. I interpret this “felt” as the connection to the birth history that is embodied; the “felt” as the body’s way of speaking. To be “like” another, to have a material and psychological mirror of yourself is something that being *as if born to* could not produce. Adoptees yearn to know what “she looked like” and if they “looked like” her too; to “look like” is a physical link to the *born to* history. Reunion is the opportunity to gaze into the mirror of heritable connections and see their material connections with their *born to* mother.

### **Timing a search**

Attempts to track a birth history emerge at various times throughout an adoptee’s life. Yet despite almost constant curiosity, the search itself is not necessarily a seamless process, especially when it is constituted within a legislated ‘complete break’ social environment. Even before the Act that enabled adoptees to access information for searches under specific conditions, some adoptees attempted to find out the *born to* secret mother anyway:

When I first left school, umm, actually I remember writing away to try and find out even before the Adoption Information Act came round; it was just a closed book - not allowed to know. (Margaret, 120)

Since Margaret’s early attempts to begin the search after leaving school preceded the change in legislation, her information was a “closed book” and her *born to* secret remained concealed. In this way, the enforcement of the silence that governs the right to access a birth history, “not allowed to know”, enacted the ‘complete break’ sanction of the law. Even after the legal sanction of reunion with the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, access to birth information is restricted until the legal age of 20, as Shelly found out:

When I was about 17/18 I went to Social Welfare ‘cause I wanted to get hold of my original birth certificate and try and find my parents and it took me a long time to pluck up the courage to go and ask them and I went to ask them, and I went up to the lady and I said, explained. I said I wanted my birth certificate and I gave her my name and all that and she went away and came back and she said, “you can’t have that, you’re adopted”. (Shelly, 214)

To “pluck up the courage” involves overriding any feelings of fear that can occur when there is embodied movement towards reunion. And to be told that you “can’t have that” because of the adoption status, means that your courage is unacknowledged and its significance is denied through a legally and socially sanctioned silence.

Adolescence is when most adoptees first seek information on birth origins. According to psychological discourse of human development, it is a time when identity issues are crucial. Self-

identity in relation to parents is explored and rather than being understood as ‘normal’ in the context of normalised kinship relations, for adoptees conflict in adolescents can be blamed on the adoption (Triseliotis, 1973). In participants’ stories of adolescent conflicts and identity issues, a yearning to break the secret about their *born to* mother becomes an intense focus:

I wanted to find my mother, I felt like I was a mess I didn’t really know where I was going, I didn’t really know what I wanted, I knew that I felt umm I just wanted someone who looked like me, I just wanted somebody that you know really did look like me and I wasn’t getting on all that well with my mum and dad at that stage but part of that was age and them wanting to keep me, you know, at home and a little girl and me wanting to, you know, my independence and umm it was a hard time ... I guess maybe I was looking for security that they couldn’t give me. (Shelly, 269, 278)

For Shelly, feeling like “a mess” led her to want to find someone “like me”. To not know where you are “going” or want you want is like embodying restrictive movement, while feelings of being lost perpetuate the sense of being alone. To want to know a birth history - “my mother” - is “looking for” similarity and “security” that *as if born to* experiences *could* exclude.

Preparing for parenthood is also recognised as being a time an adoptee needs to know more about their birth history (Triseliotis et al., 1997). Here the practical need of a medical history justifies the search. Wanting to understand their reproductive body and health can trigger a need to “find out”:

I kept miscarrying, that’s when I wanted to try and find my birth mother ‘cause I wanted to find out some of ... the medical stuff and I had [name] but I haemorrhaged at about six months with her and then I needed to find, then I still wanted to find my mother, I still wanted to find out what was in the history. (Shelly, 288, 291)

To become a mother can be joyous in both an embodied and psychological sense. However, for the adopted subject devoid of knowledge of heritability of disease or disorder, pregnancy can be challenging because there is “medical stuff” to deal with. According to B. J. Lifton (1994) some adoptees refuse to have children because they fear that a lack of biological knowledge could cause them to pass on an undesirable heredity issue to their child. This suggests the seriousness of the consequences when the timing and the legitimacy of searches are constrained.

After the implementation of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, it was possible to “request” information through official channels once you were 20 years old. This provision of the law meant some adoptees began to search “as soon as” possible:

As soon as I turned 20 I contacted Social Welfare and requested, put in, went through the process, put in the request. (Maxine, 369)

Just filling out the forms to request an original birth certificate can be an emotionally charged process. To access birth information that enables possible reunion opens up complex questions as well as opportunities to move towards reconciliation. Some adoptees think and talk about searching for years before they finally take action (Trinder et al., 2004). As Griffith (1991) argues “rejection fears are very powerful inhibiting force in adoption interaction” (p. 32) and compound the constraints of the legal and social processes involved.

### **Supporting a search**

Trinder et al. (2004) argue that support is important to adoptees through the searching period which can be as much of an emotional roller-coaster as other parts of the reunion process. Although the timing of searches varies and there are multiple accounts of why searches are enacted at specific times, the best time to search may be when adoptees have strong social support. Searches are stressful even when adoptees have talked and thought about them over long periods. Yet finding social support can also be challenging for adoptees in the context of secrecy and their lived experience of aloneness and not belonging.

Some adoptive families understand the importance of the *born to* relationship despite adherence to maintaining the secret. Adoptive parents can support the search process, whether by giving their consent or lending a hand with practical tasks:

I’ve always known about the adoption as far back as I can remember and my parents have umm, always said right from the word go, “if you ever want to search for your umm you know, birth parents then we’re very, we’re, we’re very happy to help you look” and all that kind of thing, not, not necessarily go with you but like they were happy with whatever was needed. (Mary, 246)

My mum helped me, oh helped me find like, ‘cause she’s good at researching stuff and yeah (sigh). (Brendon, 294)

According to the literature the type of support provided by the adoptive family matters to reunion outcomes (Affleck & Steed, 2001). Griffith (1991) reports that most adoptive parents understand the adoptive situation and support their adoptive children to find their birth history. While lobbying for adoption law reform in Aotearoa/New Zealand during the early 1980s, Griffith identified that 50 percent of adoptive family submissions to parliament agreed with granting access to identifying information for the adoptee and birth parents. When adoptive families support searches they affirm the

moral illegitimacy of secrecy in adoption, and position their adoptive children as having a right to knowledge of their history and information to enable them to search for their *born to* family.

The provision of mandatory counselling for adoptees engaging in the search process was enacted with the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. Although it could be possible to construe mandatory counselling as institutional support for adoptees' reunion searches, the provision was endorsed because at that point reunions were uncharted territory and stakeholders wanted to be reassured that they would be handled appropriately, according to the recommendations of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* (2000). For adoptees, this privileges the secret, as discussed previously, and support for the search from state bodies was not always useful. When requesting the original birth certificate, the applicant must nominate a counsellor to act as the courier for the secreted *born to* information; this nominated counsellor is sent a letter, as shown in figure 7, outlining the request by the adoptee to received their original birth certificate.



Figure 8. Example of a letter sent to a counsellor with an original birth certificate.

After receiving the instructions, the counsellor then contacts the adoptee and either assesses the adoptee's psychological wellbeing over the phone and if judged fit, they are then, perhaps, provided with hints on how best to search and they are sent the birth certificate or a face-to-face meeting is organised. For the participants, this mandatory process is understood as no more than access to the birth certificate and "advice on how to search":

She gave me my birth certificate; we chatted for a bit ... the counsellor gave me advice on how to search. (Maxine, 372, 380)

I was advised through the umm, whoever, you know the counsellor, the umm not quite sure, whichever was the Social Welfare of the time, that they had, they give you advice obviously and they said umm, search through and find her maiden name, get hold of her parents, get, say you're an old friend, and I felt very uncomfortable doing that 'cause it was a lie, but they said you have to do that or you may never get contact, so I did feel very uncomfortable with that. (Mary, 339)

Mary found the advice of the counsellor "uncomfortable" because "lying" was considered helpful for successful contact. While legislation that produced the adopted subject was founded on correcting the immoral behaviour of birth mothers and hiding the child's illegitimacy, in a sense righting the wrongs of the Adoption Act also required acting immorally. Priority on protecting the secret is traced through the suggestion that a lie may lead more easily to reunion than open acknowledgement that the secret has been disclosed.

Even though the 'intent' of the legislative change was to enable access to information, that 'right' does not necessarily meet the needs of the adoptee. Wegar (2000) argues that when professionals suggest lying to enable contact, they reposition adoptees in a moral order that constrains their entitlements. The mandatory counselling, advice and information, was limiting:

I got given [the original birth certificate] and had to do that little interview thing with the social worker, which all seemed a bit pointless (laugh) - give me that piece of paper! (Barry, 831)

BDM 107A

## New Zealand Birth Certificate Te Tohu Whānautanga ki Aotearoa

**Child / Tamaiti**

First/given name(s) Ingoa tapa  Surname/family name Ingoa whānau First/given name(s) at birth* Ingoa tapa i te whānautanga mai* Surname/family name at birth* Ingoa whānau i te whānautanga mai* Sex Tane, wahine rānei Still-birth/multiple birth (if applicable) I whānau kahu mai/i whānau whakareka mai (mēnā e hāngai ana) Date of birth Te rā i whānau ai Place of birth Te wāhi i whānau ai New Zealand citizen by birth** He kiriramu nō Aotearoa i te mea i whānau i konei** Name changes Ngā whakarekerekētanga ingoa	Mavis Ann  Shields - - Female  1 May 1968  Memorial Public Hospital Hastings  Not applicable to births that occurred prior to 1 January 2006  -
--	--

Issued for the Purposes  
of the Adult Adoption  
Information Act 1985

**Mother / Whāca**

First/given name(s) Ingoa tapa  Surname/family name Ingoa whānau First/given name(s) at birth*** Ingoa tapa i te whānautanga mai*** Surname/family name at birth*** Ingoa whānau i te whānautanga mai*** Age Ngā tau Place of birth Te wāhi i whānau ai	Carole Jean  Shields - - 19  Wellington
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Order of adoption of Mavis Ann Shields dated the 18th February 1969 made by Magistrates Court Dannevirke in favour of Fredrick David Blake and Diane Letitia Blake, his wife. Names conferred by order: Denise Diane Blake.

**Father / Matua**

First/given name(s) Ingoa tapa  Surname/family name Ingoa whānau First/given name(s) at birth*** Ingoa tapa i te whānautanga mai*** Surname/family name at birth*** Ingoa whānau i te whānautanga mai*** Date of birth Te rā i whānau ai Place of birth Te wāhi i whānau ai	Not Recorded  Not Recorded  Not Recorded  Not Recorded  Not Recorded  Not Recorded
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\* If name has changed / Mena kua rerekē te ingoa  
 \*\* As determined under the Citizenship Act 1977 / E ai ki tā te Citizenship Act 1977 whakaritenga  
 \*\*\* If different from above / Mēnā he rerekē ki terā o runga ake

Certified to be a true copy of the above particulars included in an entry recorded in this office.  
 E pono ana te ki he tauria tūturu tēnei o ngā kōrero o runga ake nei kua tuhia ki tētahi puka i tēnei tari.

Issued under the seal of the Registrar on 28 November 2012  
 I tukuna i raro i te maru o te Pouroki i te 28 Whiringa-ā-rangi 2012

**WARNING: This certificate is not evidence of the identity of the person presenting it**  
**KIA TŪPATO: Ehara tā tēnei tiwhikete i te taunaki i te tuakiri o te tangata ka tāpae atu**

**CAUTION: Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on the certificate, or (2) uses it as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution under the Crimes Act 1961.**  
**WHAKAHOHITI: Ko te tangata (1) ka whakarekē i ngā kōrero o tēnei tiwhikete, (2) ka whakamahi anō ahi he pono, me te mohio anō kei te hōri kē, ka taea te whakawhihi i raro i te Ture Tikahi Ture 1961.**

Registration Number / Te Tau ā-Motu  
**1968109466**



Figure 9. Copy of an original birth certificate, accessed December 2012.

For Barry, the interview itself detracted from being there for the “piece of paper”. Barry conformed to the mandatory requirement so he could receive information on his birth history - there was little benefit to the “interview thing”; the limit of institutional support that is received. The core information, the birth certificate, was sometimes supplemented with other information about the birth mother, recorded at the time of the adoption. However, neither the birth certificate nor the supplementary information enabled the adoptee to feel an embodied connection to the birth family. They are provided in an institutional context and that resonates with the disconnection that adoptees experienced in relation to their birth family:

It only gives you a paragraph of information. (Sally, 336)

[I had a] physical description of the person, it was really weird. Anyway, this is who they were. My birth certificate had my mum’s name on it but not my dad’s and they didn’t have a description of him and then I left it umm for quite some time, because it wasn’t until I was 28, it did feel like ages, it was maybe five or six years, umm before I then took another step. (Barry, 835)

The experience of reading the “description of the person” is felt as “weird”. The “person”, the birth mother that is imagined throughout life, is constrained to a description. The “information” lacks connectedness and this “weird” feeling can result in long periods of hesitation and ambivalence about initiating a reunion (Griffith, 1991). Institutional support through mandatory counselling is not helpful in coming to terms with the meaning of information about birth family at the time it is provided, even though it fulfils the legal responsibilities of the state for disclosing the secret that was constituted legally in the first place.

To have a name that potentially connects an adoptee to the *born to* history is a big step. However taking “another step” towards a reunion becomes difficult when fear of rejection has been embodied. The search process is complicated not just by legal sanctions but social relationships:

I think I hesitated before I ever rang her, it’s just that unknown and do you want to know because all my life I’d been told that you don’t really want, if you’re adopted you don’t really want to find out - you don’t know what you’ll find. (Margaret, 674)

To be told by those that are complicit in the legal fiction that “you don’t really want ... to find out” produces an embodied experience of hesitation and fear of not knowing “what you’ll find”. However, participants are also supported in institutional contexts where the support is more specific and non-threatening.

One of the participants was placed in a Social Welfare care during her adolescence and was supported by her case worker to use a community based independent adoption advocacy network, Jig Saw, to help her to make sense of her history:

I started looking when I was probably about 14-15 ... I had this case worker 'cause I was umm, put into Social Welfare and I had this case worker who umm, umm there was some umm place called Jig Saw. Yeah she tried really hard to get some information, but I mean I got my birth certificate and it said that, who my mother was and what her age was and that she was a waitress and that she had already had a son. She couldn't afford to keep us, so her friends adopted her son out and she umm adopted, put me in the hospital ... so I had a little bit of information about my mum and my dad umm, you know, so that was kind of nice to know that they hadn't vetoed the information you know, but we didn't have any luck finding her. (Cooley, 80, 85, 102)

Despite legislative sanctions, it was possible for Cooley to access a 'story' of her birth relinquishment and gain an understanding of her history with the support of her case worker and the adoption advocacy network. She had some information that mattered and knowing her birth parents had not vetoed their information "was nice". Cooley felt the warmth of not being rejected again, even though she has been unable to find her birth mother.

While the narrative constitution positions adoptees through a story of illegitimacy, some unmarried mothers did attempt to keep and care for their children. Social support was not only significant in participants' accounts of searches, but also in stories that made sense of the context of their adoption. Lack of social support often meant mothers had no option but to relinquish their children. In this sense, an adoptee can, with access to more information, learn something of their adoption circumstances:

She was estranged from her family in a way, she had left and wasn't particularly, wasn't talking to them. Umm, she never told them about me, umm she kept me for two years, she had moved from [city] to [city] and I think she was working in a hospital there and doing other stuff, but in between times she, she'd moved around and was doing babysitting and nannying ... yeah so she decided to adopt me out about the same time, as I was two. So I can still, I've got it, I've got a couple of weird memories of, of a blonde person. (Jan, 37, 51)

For Jan, to know of her history contextualised her relinquishment and enabled affection towards a birth mother who did try to keep her. Having some information about her birth history enabled her to make sense of "weird memories". Weird feelings that represent a sense of strangeness

can be disturbing for adoptees without memories to make them meaningful. Knowing she “kept me for two years” helped Jan to feel connected and make sense of the beginning of her life story.

### **Engaging with contact**

As is evident from the importance of social support for searching, legislating access to information does not necessarily enable easy contact with birth family members. Hours, days, weeks and months can be dedicated to searching records, government registers, such as electoral rolls, and following leads. The process is gruelling, both psychologically and emotionally. While searching, at some stage, adoptees need to come to terms with the reality of possible contact with a birth mother, as they are often ambivalent about initial contact (Benet, 1976; B. J. Lifton, 1994; Trinder et al., 2004). Barry found his birth mother’s name in the electoral roll:

Suddenly we got up to the current day and she was on an electoral roll, and then I went to the white pages and there she was in the phone book and I kind of went - oh my God I could ring her and there she is and that was pretty umm, pretty weird really, pretty weird, and then I think I sat with it for a little while again and then I wrote her a letter. (Barry, 885)

Barry experienced the possibility that he could ring his birth mother as “pretty weird”. In a sense it there is an initial feeling of shock, “oh my God”, to finally have the information needed for making contact. And while it was possible, Barry needed to “sit with it”, perhaps to overcome the shock and come to terms with knowing that contact was possible before he took any action. Making contact is not straightforward and even without advice to deceive their birth family initially, adoptees are thoroughly aware of the significance of the secret, since it has constituted their life experience for as long as they remember. Rather than cold calling his birth mother, or engaging in any deception, Barry made contact through a letter. For an adoptee, making contact involves emotions that are “scary”:

I was scared, I was really scared to umm, to be rejected ... I was really scared that if I made contact, I was really scared that - how I would respond emotionally if umm I initiated contact and they said no? (Barry, 843, 849)

What if he’d said, “bugger off” you know? He could have yeah, so it would have been protecting me as well from rejection at that level. (Jan, 421)

Yeah, yeah and there’s also that fear of rejection, of like, you know, being told to fuck off. (Cooley, 163)

Already feeling rejected from their earliest experiences in no-man's land, "fear" of rejection happening again runs through the life stories told by adoptees. These feelings of rejection are embodied. To prepare for the experience they fear most, they imagined being told "no" to a meeting, told to "bugger off" or "to fuck off." They recognise their fear as reopening the original wound; the violent cut of their legal constitution *as if born to* someone else, and their earliest feelings of not belonging. To risk being abandoned by their birth mother is overwhelming and they not only prepare by facing their fears, but also by taking responsibility for how members of their birth family might be affected breaking the secret. In the process of engaging with birth family, and especially birth mothers, adoptees often position themselves as the caring protector of the relationships involved:

[I] got hold of her brother, like within a really short time and just said I was doing research about something or rather I was protecting her ... but I think my first thought was to protect her and it was good that I did because she hadn't ever told them ever. (Jan, 417, 427)

I ended up talking to his mother in [city] and of course they were really resistant. (Maxine, 426)

Jan wanted to find her birth mother but to do that she had to find a strategy that would "protect" her from the consequences of any shockingly sudden disclosure of her legally sanctioned secret. Jan initiated contact with her birth mother's brother first to elicit information, and rather than risk causing problems for her mother in exposing her birth connection with her, she did engage a deceit. Maxine talked to her birth father's mother first. By not directly approaching her birth father, she was able to encounter her birth family's resistance to the disclosure of their secret without immediately risking his rejection.

It is not always the case that adoptees take responsibility for engaging in the process of searching and making contact themselves. Birth mothers also seek to find their child. Trinder et al. (2004) identify the "special emotional connection between birth mother and their children" (p. 33) as motivation for this search. And while some adoptees claim that they will never search, they respond to their birth mother's contact when they are found, because to be found means she cares (B. J. Lifton, 1994). And if their birth mother is searching, then there is also less risk that their fear of another rejection will be realised. To know you have been found can produce an urgent sense of need for contact:

You know, fuck I couldn't wait; you know I couldn't wait from that to getting the address to getting the phone number. I couldn't wait another month, another day, another hour. I, I, I had to ring, I had to know what the, you know, 'cause I'd grown up in this life that I just did not

like and I thought if I grab a hold of this and if this is really good I can have a better life.  
(Vaughn, 112)

The time between initial contact and the possible reconnection was an unbearable barrier for Vaughn who “had to know” and “couldn’t wait”. His urgency to “grab a hold” speaks to his embodied longing for a connection, his fear of losing his birth mother again, and his hope that reunion will restore him to a “better life”. When adoptees are found through a process initiated by their birth mother, the promise of reunion may become an urgent need for reconnection and reconciliation.

To find a birth family offers hope and yet contact with the birth family remains a ‘risk’ for adoptees when they search. They take responsibility for their fear of rejection and protecting their emotional wellbeing. Adoptees embody the experience of being relinquished once within a life story that begins with rejection, which makes their anxiety well founded. Once provided with the information to initiate a reunion adoptees are often ‘alone’ in taking the next step. The state provides no mediation or reunion services through which to enable a seamless encounter. Some adoptees are satisfied with minimal information, while others take the search as far as possible, seeking a birth family reunion (Griffith, 1997; Triseliotis et al., 1997). However, adoptees do not know what to expect, even when their birth mother may have initiated the search. They are on the cusp of meeting biological family, with the possibility of answering lifelong questions and the potential for healing hurts as old as they are. Yet they have little or no idea about their birth family, who they are, how they will be received, or what to expect.

### **Stories within Reunions**

From the time of their adoption, subject positions available to adoptees within families are divided between the legally constituted binary of *born to* and *as if born to*, producing a no-man’s land of lack, loss and disconnection in-between. All the participants told stories of reunion, and for some the significance of reunion represented an endpoint to the moral trajectory that severed ties to their family of origin. According to Griffith (1991), a reunion represents an interpolation into complex social and family relationships that are often confusing and emotionally challenging. Disclosing the secret, searching, and reuniting with birth families, unsettle the legal fiction of *as if born to*. In this context, the complexities and challenges of reunion as a means of resolving the break, the tensions and the struggles of being positioned as both *born to* and *as if born to* are significant. The promise of reunion has a lived history, perhaps understood as a link to the narrative unconsciousness; it has a ‘dreamy’ emotional content that is unable to be articulated even in the most creative fiction. It holds hope, though it does not always fulfil its promise and is often experienced as fraught with complexities. In this thesis, seven participants have ongoing relationships with their birth mothers, and four with their birth fathers. However, the relationship with birth families did not always evolve as they had imagined.

Reunions can have a ‘honeymoon’ period, where adoptees and their birth families seem to fall in love and want to spend as much time together as possible (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Initial contact tends to involve intense emotional connection (Pacheco & Eme, 1993) that justifies the comparison with falling in love. Brendon’s story represents this intensity as he recounts how he moved closer to his birth family to strengthen and develop the connections:

I packed up everything and moved down to be closer to their family because my mother’s brothers and sister all lived in the [area] or [area] or [area] ... so I was just going down there to be close to them and fuck I just grew up so much. I just remember I’d sit in the corner of the room and just watch these people and I just used to thank God aye, because I thought man this is where I’m supposed to be. (Brendon, 660, 664)

Structural factors such as geographic distance matter to the type and quality of contact within the reunion relationship (Gladstone & Westhues, 1998). Being “close” in proximity enabled Brendon to have a sense of belonging, locating him where he was “supposed to be”. Watching may be understood as seeing similarity or fit; to see yourself in someone else, something that has been ‘missing’ and denied because of living the *as if born to*. Gazing into the mirror of heritable connections and seeing physical connections with family is an experience that their *as if born to* family cannot provide, and a specific lack that reunion promises to resolve. Using the expletive “fuck” signifies a strong embodied response to the sense that Brendon “grew up” when this experience was enabled. Watching his birth family also enabled him to find a “place” of connection that was previously missing. Growing up is significant in the reunion process as it enables a genealogical lucidity (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Triseliotis, 1973): a way of making sense through a biological history that is so normalised it is taken-for-granted within developmental stories that normalise biological kinship. Mirroring through mannerism is “big even if you don’t grow up with someone”, as it enables a connection through genealogical similarity:

I walked in the house and she said, “well there’s no doubt whose daughter you are” ... we looked very much alike when we were little ... the mannerisms thing’s big even if you don’t grow up with someone, the mannerisms are. They, ‘cause that’s what I found when I met my father, that umm, the very first meeting they were laughing because, you know, there were, the way I walk apparently is my grandmother and then I’ve met umm, there is an aunt who lives in [country] who came out to visit and when I met her it was like oh God, not like umm she, they, they laughed about me being so like different ones in the family. (Margaret, 716, 730, 927)

Genealogical connection also enabled a sense of proximity to the birth family, a kind of returning ‘home’, a feeling of belonging through bodily movements, gestures and emotions that are not

necessarily experienced with the *as if born to*. To be “so like different ones in the family” brought ‘laughter’ and joy to the family interactions. It was “interesting” for Mary to see herself as having something in common with her birth mother, a connection that was unknown; missing while she was “growing up”:

Even though I never knew anything about the birth mother, umm the things that my mother, umm, well the things that I did as a child growing up, you know the, the dancing, the sports, the music were all things that we both excelled in, which is interesting (Mary, 332)

A genealogical connection was realised since they “both excelled in” particular activities. It also produced a feeling of similarity with the missing birth mother. And for Margaret, meeting “for the first time” enabled a “neat” “connection”:

We met and it was, it was really neat ‘cause for the first time in my life I felt like I can feel a connection here, that this is sort of real family. It was, it was strange ‘cause they were strangers but they were both, it was really quite neat to meet them and a relationship built up over the following years. (Margaret, 411)

The “connection” to a “real family,” a birth family was “neat”, suggesting a satisfying ‘tidiness’ that comes from recognition and similarity. At the same time the experience of this connection is “strange” because there is no lived history; they are “strangers”. Accordingly, building relationships with birth family members can be challenging because, as Trinder et al. (2004) argue, they are simultaneously biological kin and strangers. These are positions that do not fit easily into normalised discourses constituting family. And in order to ‘build up’, so the relationships become less strange to each other, Margaret, like Brendon, moved geographically closer to her birth father and lived with her half-sister:

So lived up there for a couple of years in [city] and [half-sister] flatted with me for part of that time. (Margaret, 812)

While there is an instant recognition and “connection’ to a family that is “real”, even while having close proximity to each other, lack of lived history together, the experience of being connected and yet strangers, means that it can take an adoptee time to adjust and establish an “unconditional” feeling of connection with the birth family:

I just, you know, I thought I don’t fit in here either, ehm until, it wasn’t until, as I said, I had [my daughter] that suddenly it was dawning on me then that, you know, it was unconditional.

We were, we were accepted, that without, without any conditions, without any say, that yeah you're part of this family, we found you. (Margaret, 912)

Initially Margaret struggled to feel a sense of belonging with her birth family - "I don't fit in here either". Her first experiences of reunion with her birth family didn't resolve her sense of disconnection that was embedded in life stories where "I've never felt like I'd fitted in anywhere" (Margaret, 898). It was not until Margaret became a mother herself that she was able to claim the biological connection between herself and her birth family without it being conditional on her feeling she belonged: genealogy is unconditional.

Discourses constituting normalised motherhood do not provide ready resources to speak of mothers who give birth but do not raise their children. Relationships with birth mothers are difficult to story; she is a mother but not a mother. The 'complete break' strategy positions the birth mother 'outside' the rights, duties and obligations of being a mother. Mother is a socially sanctioned term for 'she' who raises the child (Farrar, 1997) and in contexts where biological kinship is normalised, she is also assumed to be the woman who has been pregnant and given birth to the child. Modell (1997) recognises that traditional parenting practices are missing from the reunion relationship, therefore adoptees and birth parents draw from taken-for-granted notions of kinship and family to make sense of the lack in their shared histories. However, the cultural resources that enable an adoptee to 'know' their birth mother do not necessarily resolve the tension in the relationships with the birth and the adoptive mother. In their lived experiences, 'mother' distinguished the experiences of being *born to* and being raised by. Three of the participants talked of their birth mother as not "mum":

She wasn't my mum, but I loved her and she was very special. (Shelly, 349)

Well see, me and [birth mother] get on now, you know, these days because [birth mother] doesn't try to be like my mum. (Alice, 1104)

She was interested to see them (her children) of course, umm I don't know, it seems a bit cruel but my parents were the ones that have brought me up so she's just another person ... it's not a mother cause I already have a mother. (Mary, 395, 1755)

Although the birth mother was "special" she could not be "mum". A birth mother who does not "try to be like my mum" is easier to have a relationship with: she neither fails to meet the obligations of care that are those of a 'mum' nor does she become confused with the woman who did fulfil those obligations. To position birth mothers as "not mum" or as "just another person" reflects the ("cruel") history of being cut from their birth mother and 'brought up' by another. Some adoptees are able to

resist the construction of motherhood as she who cares for, as it does not fit with their lived embodied experience:

Somehow it had to be an intellectual concept that I was her daughter you know, and it's not intellectual, there's nothing intellectual about it, you know it's true, it's a fact; every fibre of my being knows that I am her daughter. (Maxine, 478)

For Maxine, the mother-daughter relationship was “not intellectual” despite the sense that missing a history of ‘being raised’ by her mother implied that their connection ‘had to be’ more logical than felt. Her relationship with her birth mother was “felt” in “every fibre” of her being, and that is the significance of the “true” mother-daughter bond - the inevitability of genealogical connection. Brendon found his initial relationship with his birth mother “amazing”:

I had a fucken amazing relationship with my birth mother, well nah, that's not right, that's not right, so basically what it was, we met and it's like oh my God we're fucken twins, except you're a woman and I'm a man umm, and we've got to catch up these 20 years. (Brendon, 1097)

Here Brendon struggles for words to express the connection he felt immediately with his birth mother: even “amazing” was “not right”. For him the similarity was so strong, like “fucken twins”, that it stirred a need to “catch up” the losses of “20 years”. However, not all participants lived an embodied biological connection with their birth mothers:

We probably had more of like - meeting a friend that's kind of got something in common so when we spoke we would probably be comparing the, the relationship we have probably more of a friendship than like she's, she'll talk about her children, I'll talk about my children, even though they're her grandchildren umm ... I wouldn't say it's a close friendship. I haven't got an association with her ... I've never met her ... friendships are built over time. (Mary, 92, 1757, 1764)

Having never met, although they have been in contact for approximately 20 years, Mary's relationship with her birth mother is more of a distant “friendship” based on having “something” in common, and through which they exchange information. Mary recognises that the “association with her” is limited because “friendships are built over time” which is not possible with geographical and emotional distance. For Mary and her birth mother “two years can go by without any contact, two or three or four years” (1732).

Mary also resists the responsibility for initiating a physical relationship as a means of resolving the emotional gap between her and her birth mother. Given her position in the adoptive triad subjected to a 'complete break' with genealogical history by law, I suspect she remains 'hopeful' that her birth mother will "want to take it further":

I'm pretty open, if she wanted to take it further or she wanted to see me that would be fine.  
(Mary, 1769)

Mary is not closed to the idea of contact but the responsibility for the decision rests with her birth mother. In a sense, that the onus of responsibility lies with the birth mother reiterates Mary's position as the child who lacks any part in the decision making of the initial adoption and whose interests are not prioritised in the veto provision of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985.

Shelly's struggle to connect with her birth mother took another trajectory. Her birth mother initially "denied the whole thing" (292) on contact, but after Shelly "went back to her again...she admitted it all" (300). However, her disclosure was followed by revealing, "she didn't want anything to do with me" (301). Shelly persisted and after writing her a letter, they continued to write "about every six weeks" (340) for approximately seven years. They eventually met in person, Shelly "loved her and she was very special" (349). While it was a slow process where Shelly took responsibility for persisting with contact to establish their relationship, their reunion meant Shelly could resolve the disconnection between, with love. Margaret's mother refused contact by drawing on the secrecy that had been legitimated by the legal act of adoption in her past:

Well my, my [birth] mother when she did speak to me on the phone, she said, "I tried to have you aborted". I was told that when I did actually have that phone contact with my real mother ... I never got to sit down and have a conversation with her, my [birth] brother had tried to talk to her to get her to like, well you know just talk, but no she was bitter and twisted ... it's history, it's past, she doesn't know about it, she doesn't, her excuse was she didn't want the other [family members] to know. (Margaret, 476, 586, 589)

The 'fear' of rejection that pervades many adoptees' initial attempts to obtain information about their birth families, and sometimes slows the process of making contact when the information is available, was realised in this story. Margaret's birth is presented to her as a "failed attempt to abort". Also realised in her story is a repeated denial of any choice in Margaret's cut from her birth relationship. And while she understood maintaining the secret of the past as her mother being "bitter and twisted", it also reproduced an ongoing disconnection that continues to hurt.

While Margaret's experience of contact left her with an understanding of her birth mother as 'bitter', other participants experienced the stories of their secret past as enabling a more nuanced

understanding of the emotional reality of adoption and reunion with their birth mothers. The birth mothers' stories enabled empathy with what they would have had to experience during the time of their pregnancy and the birth:

I think she probably felt ashamed (didn't tell husband or birth brothers), it was that generation ... and whereas if she'd, if she'd, she lived in a fairly small town, but I mean if she had been involved in the adoption movement here and, she would have realised it was quite acceptable and it was. People didn't have issues with it and the illegitimacy stigma and all that, she wasn't going to be judged and condemned but because of where she lived etc. and her age and her friends' ages and all that she would have been scared of people feeling, you know, umm thinking badly of her. (Shelly, 764, 768)

I think the story behind that was [birth mother] was just really young ... umm they told me that [birth mother] was like 17 when she got pregnant and 'cause she was like one of the youngest of her sisters that, and from a Catholic family, that it wasn't cool for her to be, you know, back in those days, like you know, to have a baby out of wedlock, that type of thing and that they wouldn't be able to sit, you know, like keep me and I guess I got told that my birth dad didn't really want to have me and umm, so they thought it would be [birth mother's] and my best interest to be adopted out, yeah. (Alice, 95, 97)

I respect her, I mean she could think it was a bit embarrassing for her children to know that she has had a baby out of wedlock 'cause it was quite different ... it was a hard decision but I've, and I've come through it and I think too, it's probably quite difficult for her, it would be like having to think about it all over again if she had to tell me all about that experience and I would say she's probably closed it all up and put it behind her and got on with her life and been everything to her family. (Mary, 453, 1805)

To have people "think badly of her", that it "wasn't cool for her" or that it "was a bit embarrassing for her children to know" means adoptees understand how feelings of shame matter and what the impact of being found out might mean for their birth mothers. The stories of their birth mothers relinquishing them are also important for adoptees to make sense of their positions in relation to the shame of illegitimacy. Accessing their birth mothers' stories and empathy for their shame enables adoptees to position themselves as connected to their birth mothers' lived experience:

Considering her [birth mother] being a single parent and having to make that decision with two kids, I just ... I don't think there would probably be a lot of support for a single woman; it was probably all hush, hush maybe. (Cooley, 127, 131)

What about if she's you know, if she was 15? What about if she just wanted to close the door and she didn't know any more about that part of her life and she's moved on 'cause in those days it was a no, no - it would have changed her life, so you know, do you go back and bring up all those horrible memories for her. (Sally, 726)

The narrative constitution of a birth mother's 'immorality' is significant to how participants make sense of their history; they understand the moral weight the birth mother carries:

Umm because it's so sinful to get pregnant out of marriage and umm, how embarrassing for the family and umm, when we need to hide this away so people don't know about it, so let's keep it a big secret and get those babies adopted out and we can get on with life as if nothing ever happened and get on being good citizens you know, however they always will be tarred with that brush because you know of what they did. (Maxine, 753)

Maxine narrates the story of a birth mother as "sinful" for being "pregnant out of marriage". That she is "tarred with that brush" means that the adoptee, as her child, is always connected to the shame of illegitimacy too. To "hide" the big secret as if "nothing ever happened" impacts on how the birth mother relates to the adoptee (Greenwood, 2000; Griffith, 1991; Ludbrook, 1997; Triseliotis, 1973) after they eventually make contact. Although reunion does not remove the lived and ongoing effects of being adopted, for both adoptee and birth mother, connection to and empathy with the birth mother's story enables some to achieve resolutions in which individual blame is avoidable:

I'm not saying that that would have been easy at all or blame her for the decision she made but yeah, I see, kind of see that acted out still today, and that's the thing that fucks me off the most as well (laugh), is the impact that adoption had, do you know what I mean, like, in forcing her to give away her child and the impact that I've seen it have on her life, like she tells me stuff. (Barry, 1140)

Barry does not censure his birth mother for "the decision" to relinquish him, knowing the moral burden of an illegitimate child to her position in her family. He also 'knows' that the decision was not in his best interests and is able to hold the tension between his best interests and her best interests at the time of his birth by attributing responsibility to the social and familial conditions that led to his relinquishment. He is angry as is represented by being "fucked off" that she was "forced" to give him away and he sees "that acted out still today". His relinquishment matters to both their lives and impacts on their relationship:

She's put her family before herself and therefore me, because that's why she gave me away - if she put herself and me first she wouldn't have adopted me out. (Barry, 1136)

To know that others' interests were put before their own, and even their birth mother's needs, positions an adoptee as always, already second best, and reiterates their illegitimacy. What was strongly realised in the participants' talk was a lack of resolution for that position and the ongoing experience of living 'in-between'. While it has been identified that the birth mother needs to understand her own emotional process and take responsibility for the 'needs' of the child at reunion (Weaver & Nation, 1997), this remains problematic to enact when the gap between the experience of birthing and raising the adopted child looms ever present. The way in which birth mothers position the adoptee in relation to the loss of their obligations to care for and raise the child they birthed can reproduce the experience of rejection for adoptees:

We were at a, a sort of bit of a gathering and there were some other people there and this woman said - "oh, so this is your daughter" you know, and [birth mother] goes - "oh yeah, I suppose she is my daughter". You know and it's kind of like - oh okay, I guess I am, but you know, I guess I came along 20 years later. Was there as a baby, came back 20 years later and there's a lifetime in-between. (Maxine, 472)

To be positioned as supposedly a daughter, does not enable reconciliation of the original disconnection between birth mother and adopted child. In my experience, it would be a 'cruel' reminder of the birth cut and an affirmation the "lifetime in-between" that maintains "distance":

And she just sort of kept, that distance, so I woke up; it was like I woke up and smelt the coffee one-day. It's kind of like, it's kind of like a reality check - well no I'm not really, you know I may have a fantasy or a longing to be, but I'm not you know, and so umm, I haven't kept in touch as much, I mean I've pulled back. (Maxine, 492)

The kept "distance" does resolve the "longing" that breathes hope into all the risks associated with reunion, including the risk of an enduring sense of 'rejection'; "I'm not really" her daughter is an inability to take up the position as "daughter" which changes the relationship. That it was like a "reality check" signifies the impossibility of removing the lived effects of adoption through the process of reunion.

While in some cases relationships with birth mothers are problematic from the first contact that intended to lead to reunion, some relationships become more problematic despite initially experienced as positive and affirming the hopes of a reunion. The complexity of social relationships between birth and adoptive mothers, birth and adoptive families often requires careful negotiation. Brendon's birth

mother is unable to understand his relationship with his adoptive mother and continually finds “fault” with her:

She’d always tries and finds fault with my mother in front of me and just tries to get in ... (sigh) she even still tries to divide today but she doesn’t even know she’s doing it ... I’ll say, “she’s still fucken moaning” and she’ll use that as an in, but I kind of allow those in’s and let her have her bent so we can all just get on with it. (Brendon, 1048, 1079, 1088)

To “get on with” his relationship, Brendon is required to “allow” criticisms of one mother by the other. The responsibility for “getting on” silences his hurt, and he justifies taking this responsibility through empathy informed by the idea that since “she doesn’t even know she’s doing it” she cannot take responsibility herself. Affleck and Steed (2001) found that empathy is integral to the themes and patterns of reunion. And indeed in this research the participants have great empathy for others as an effect of illegitimacy and belonging no-where and to no-one, yet for adoptees empathy enacts a problematic responsibility for ‘care’ in the context of the multiple risks of reunion:

I felt like I had to or I wanted to comfort her, but all the time you’re this kid still, you’re this baby that wants to know all these things, yep or you know, didn’t you love me? (Toni, 595)

To feel that you “had to” care for the emotional wellbeing of your birth mother is in direct conflict with seeking information about “all the things” that result from being her child, including the crucial question “didn’t you love me”? In this way, rather than the child being comforted by the adult in reunions, the emotional burden is carried by the adoptee, which is not an uncommon story in the adoption triad (Carp, 1998; Griffith, 1991; Triseliotis, 1973). Managing a relationship with both adoptive and birth mother was also complex in Alice’s story:

I used to feel really guilty you know, for what, all the nasty stuff that I did to my mum like you know, so I started to get a bit older and I started to think about the decisions that she had to make, I just felt guilty. I felt guilty that I was happy, I felt guilty that I wasn’t with her. (Alice, 93)

For a long time she embodied guilt at the “nasty stuff” she did to her (adoptive) mum that resulted in her living with her birth mother. Alice felt “guilty for being happy” and the burden of “guilt” for her behaviour was enduring. While it has improved over the years, guilt remains problematic for her “on both sides”:

I think for years and years and years, I think, you know, I probably still have a problem with guilt but it is so much better now than what it used to be, like I really came through it a lot and it was just always guilt. I always felt guilt and doesn't really matter which way I turned there's guilt on both sides. (Alice, 1050)

Browning (2006) uses the term obligation to describe how adoptees come to experience feelings of responsibility towards the adoptive family that can result in feelings of guilt like those in Alice's stories. For some adoptees, this sense of obligation also extends to their birth family:

So you're this kid, that for no reason of your own gets given away, adopted out and then you've got all of that to deal with ... you're trying to protect your parents, your adoptive parents and your family, your siblings, then you're trying to protect the mother or the father that gave you away, the mother mostly, because it's not her fault. (Toni, 728, 731)

Toni articulates the burdens of responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of the multiple relationships in the adoption triad that adoptees take up despite having no choice about the moral trajectory of their life stories as illegitimate children. To have "all that to deal with" is a burden that weighs heavily on the adoptee and matters to how reunion relationships evolve.

In contexts where biological kinship is normalised and there is also a distance between a *born to* and *as if born to* family, adoptees' responsibilities for managing the relationships 'in-between' deepen in complexity. Other researchers have suggested that managing family relationships is fraught with challenges because there is little societal understanding and no model to emulate. This means reunions are often painful and it may take time to come to a resolution (Affleck & Steed, 2001; Griffith, 1991). Without cultural resources to negotiate responsibilities, adoptees draw on available discourse, often giving psychological or developmental accounts of their situations. For Brendon, the conflicts emerging in his relationship with his birth mother after reunion were resolved through an understanding of them both as lacking the maturity to work through the pain they experienced:

Pre my marriage and we decided that, like the reason like, there was too much pain in our lives and we were just too immature to cope with our lives and now we've done all our work like, we can interact and I'll never call her mum, but I'm her son and she's my birth mother and she definitely sees me as her son and that's where our relationship is today and that's the best it's going to get and the best it's ever been and I'm really happy about it but it's been a hugely painful process to get to here. (Brendon, 1219)

As each "did their own work" which involved counselling and talking through the issues, they found a place to relate, as son to birth mother, a particular kind of resolution that they are "happy" with

now. However, there was no straightforward or clear trajectory to achieving the reconciliation that reunion promised. Sometimes the reunion has been so problematic that contact is stopped:

I remember one-day being in the supermarket and seeing her after all these years of not seeing her ... yeah, like 10 years, 12 years maybe and she - I seen her in this aisle aye, and I turned down, and I knew who it was straight away, I turned around and walked back the other way ... I'm embarrassed of her because you know I am, I want nothing to do with her. (Vaughn, 349, 352, 358)

After many years of not seeing his birth mother, Vaughn “walked away” again after recognising her in a supermarket. He is reminded of his feelings of embarrassment for who she is that remain unresolved despite a reunion with her, and Vaughn wants “nothing to do with her”. In some cases, the responsibility for managing complex relationships that have their origins in social and legal legitimisation of a birth mother’s moral reprehensibility cannot be met. Making a decision to have continued contact, or to meet or not to meet a birth mother may hinge on how adoptees understand the moral trajectory of their birth mother’s lives:

Would I feel disappointed if I didn't ever meet her, umm I thought no but I, I wouldn't feel bad if one of the children approached me, I'd never block something but I, I kind of feel it's important, she's the one who gave up the child, she's the one with, probably a lot of issues that perhaps could be hurtful for her to have to deal with. I mean she might look at me and go oh gosh she looks like - the guy - and I think that could be quite horrible. (Mary, 402)

Mary’s understanding is that the birth mother made the decision to “give up” her child, and in that way, she carries the responsibility for reconciliation. Mary “feels it’s important” that the birth mother makes the choice about “issues” that could be “hurtful” to her, which reproduces the empathy that enacts a problematic responsibility for ‘care’ in the context of the multiple risks of reunion. In this understanding, the birth mother has the “issues” and Mary has no desire to cause her harm. A particular “issue” identified by Mary was the potential to be “like” her biological father. This could be “quite horrible” not only for her birth mother, but for Mary too, who might see or sense her birth mother’s reaction. Mary’s empathy for her birth mother is connected with recognising her responsibility for initiating a reunion because she made the decision to relinquish. At the same time, Mary takes responsibility for protecting her birth mother and herself by not initiating the contact.

### **Secrets that remain**

While the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 enables the possibility of reunions, the quality of the information means that secrets are not always disclosed. Many secrets remain untold. In a social context where illegitimacy is defined by the lack of the name of the birth father, often it is his identity that is protected. Birth mothers did not always disclose details about the birth father and continue to maintain those secrets. Earlier researchers attribute the durability of this secret to the social stigma of illegitimacy (Benet, 1976; Griffith, 1991; Triseliotis, 1973). Of the 10 participants who have had birth family reunions, five were denied information about their birth father by their birth mother:

I've wanted to find out who my father is and she just won't tell me you know, she just outright refuses to say who it was. (Vaughn, 227)

Vaughn expressed anger towards his birth mother for her refusal to disclose, "who my father is". Many adoptees feel helpless and frustrated by the lack of available information about birth fathers and have no way to remedy this. While reunion holds promise of knowledge about birth families, continuing secrecy delimits its scope. And for some adoptees, where the mother has not disclosed, her subsequent passing means the secret remains:

I remember saying to her, "well okay you don't want to know me, maybe my father does - what's his name?" She said, "I wiped him from my memory" ... yeah, my mother wouldn't, wouldn't say anything and she actually ended up dying about a year later, within a year of that. (Margaret, 527, 581)

Lack of disclosure of a biological father's identity is experienced as ongoing secrets and lies; complex enough because of the way adoptees are implicated in the constitution of illegitimacy. And when stories do not "stack up", they can sometimes amount to a conclusion that is not simply a consequence of 'social stigma' or the moral status of illegitimacy, it is difficult for the adoptee to experience reconciliation or healing:

So I don't, you know I don't quite understand what she was trying to cover up anyway ... I didn't fucken get it and umm to me it just seemed like more lies and stuff and umm I don't know it just ... you know there were things that weren't stacking up here about answers and questions, I'm going to, I can't remember them all but I, I asked her again - I said "why" and then she gave me some bullshit excuse that she was raped, which made me feel even worse about myself. Here I was just this tacky piece of fucken sex. (Vaughn, 240, 243, 214)

Vaughn's story speaks to his anger at his birth mother for "trying to cover up", his lack of understanding of the lies that he "didn't fucken get", and his pain at being told that his birth is an outcome of rape. He may disbelieve his birth mother's story, especially when other stories had turned out to be "lies and stuff", yet there is enough credibility to the story as an account of her rejecting him, that it made him "feel even worse". Griffith (1991) argues that it is often the 'teller' of the secret of conception, the birth mother, who has difficulty talking about rape because many adoptees may have already considered that as a possibility. It is an available cultural resource that helps make sense of a birth mother's choice to relinquish her child, although it still comes as a shock for it to be personally relevant and it has complicating effects on the mother-child relationship at and after disclosure:

She'd gone to counselling and apparently got counselling, got told that she could liken it to being rape (clear throat) and I, and, and yes she was young and yes he was older, so I was trying to make some sense of that in my own mind, trying to umm think yeah I get that, I understand that you were young and of course he did what he did was wrong and but, but the hurt part was that hey I came from that rape then. Hey I'm, I'm here so, so that sort of rubbed that in even more ... I don't want to be insensitive to how it happened for her but to tell me, that was like umm (laugh). (Toni, 893, 902)

Toni's mother has difficulty 'facing' her, positioning Toni as her pain. Toni feels angry with this; she questions and resists the position:

Why do you treat me like this? I didn't do, I didn't get you pregnant. (Toni, 879)

Toni's birth mother continues to position her as representing the trauma of her conception. For Toni, this is felt as further rejection, and rather than "go there" again she has disconnected from their relationship:

Since that time, yeah, yeah it's all been sort of superficial. We don't, I don't ring her anymore, I used to write. I just don't want to go there anymore ... the fear of being hurt, I think, again ... the fear of rejection, again. (Toni, 545, 552, 554)

That the relationship is "superficial" speaks to the hope of a depth of resolution from reunion, where "fear of being hurt" could be relieved. Sometimes that *born to* relationships are "superficial" means that the significance of "letting go" can be traced as far as the origins of the emotional cut that adoptees experience in the no-man's land between *born to* and *as if born to*:

She's never been not nice to me or anything like that ... she let me go years ago, you know, it's time for me to let her go because umm I can't, I can't hold on, I can't hold onto her because then I'm just going to turn myself inside out emotionally trying to hold onto her, because I'm not going to, I don't have the her that I need, you know, that my baby self needs. At the time, in my mind's eye I reached out and took the baby back from [my birth mother]. (Maxine, 520, 536)

It is "emotionally trying" to negotiate between the "needs" of the adopted child, the relationship with the "baby self" and the knowledge that the experience of relinquishment, with all its losses and pains, remains. To resolve the tension, Maxine imagines taking "the baby back" because the birth mother she needs cannot be.

In some situations letting go birth family relationships depends on maintaining the secret of adoption within the wider relationships of the family. Eventually Shelly's birth mother told her husband about Shelly, but they never told their children:

Their father didn't know that his wife, my mother, had had a child before she married him and he's been incredibly accepting and I still have quite regular contact with him and I'm very fond of him. He's a really nice man and out of respect for him that's why I haven't contacted my half-brothers. (Shelly, 742)

Shelly has let go a possible relationship with her siblings to keep her birth mother's secret and accepts responsibility for its impact on the wider family system. She respects that the father of her siblings was 'accepting' of his wife's illegitimate child at the same time that she notices her exclusion from the family of her mother's legitimate children. Affleck and Steed (2001) suggest that a lack of understanding of the adoption experience means wider family members within adoptive and birth families are not able to meet the adoptees' expectations and need for connection:

My need for that relationship with them and my acute awareness of my connection to them umm, I don't umm, see being reciprocated or them having that same awareness or umm, desire or even knowledge to know how to bring that closer. (Barry, 684)

Despite reunion, Barry continues to experience himself as outside his birth family because the wider family lacks a similar "need" to connect to him. In this case, reunion does not lead to reconciliation in the sense of a reciprocal, familial sense of closeness.

Participants testified to a diversity of experiences that story the complex processes of reunions. This diversity speaks to the ways in which their subjective and inter-subjective positions are entangled within the 'complete break' between the *born to* and *as if born to* families from the origin of their

constitution as legally adopted subjects. Even after a reunion filled with love and interconnectedness, the Adoption Act 1955 continues to position a birth child as not belonging to the birth mother. The complexity of the birth reunion relationship is realised in issues of entitlement to inheritance. To be *as if born to* is to have no legal rights to birth family inheritance (Browning, 2006). Once titles and rights have been transferred to the adoptive parents they cannot be revoked:

So in terms of the law (sigh), it's exactly the same like, umm, so here I go along, I develop this relationship with my birth family, me and my mum love each other, you know this, it all goes well, going well you know, as part of that connection, not that I want inheritance or anything, do you know what I mean? But a simple, like being acknowledged umm, say umm, when she dies, I have no connection to that, do you know what I mean? ... It's not about, you know, as her son, you know potentially, you know, I have no legal status as her son so she could, you know, bequeath stuff to me in her will and other people could challenge that, that I'm not, and by the law you know, umm, they would be quite entitled to do that so that obviously leaves me in quite a precarious, insecure status. It's kind of like, oh yeah great, you know, hasn't this been enough? It has to continue, be further perpetrated with this umm, unstable, you know, status. (Barry, 132, 1331)

Constituted through a legal status of legitimacy is an act of law that is 'forever', even though there may be an ongoing relationship with *born to* that are a genealogical, kinship or whakapapa connection. Beyond revealing the secret, and negotiating the complexity of family relations between *born to* and *as if born to*, there is no redress for illegitimacy. That "me and my mum love each other" is not enough to produce a "legal status as her son". The legal constitution of the subject ensures that the "entitlement" to both property and legitimate family relationships remains cut. As a legal subject, the lack of acknowledgment of the birth relationship maintains an "insecure status", that feels unstable.

For Barry, inheritance is about the character and quality of the family relationships, not the materialism of possessing family legacies. Other researchers have also recognised that inheritance involves moral judgments that are not only about the value of goods, but also their symbolic social status (Finch & Mason, 2000). To be recognised as a member of the family entitles the adoptee to be "bequeathed stuff" without risk that "people could challenge that". However, reunion does not restore the legal or moral rights as a legitimate child:

[After my birth mother died] I knew that legally I had no right to anything. They kept telling me that everything from the house, I could help myself to it, and they gave me a great big huge bag of jewellery and said it was mine, and I was like, well no it's not actually mine 'cause I knew legally it wasn't really mine ... the uncle who was the trustee, he came into the motel at about half past six and stormed in my room and grabbed the bag of jewellery and told me not

to be a thief and it was just like, so somewhere along the line he'd probably actually learnt about his rights and obligations. (Jan, 762, 771)

Even where some members of the birth family thought Jan's connection to her birth mother entitled her to jewellery; it was not a legal entitlement. While the *as if born to* legal subject, Jan was positioned as a "thief" by the birth "uncle who was the trustee". Like adoptees in Browning's (2006) study, participants had no expectations of inheritance, yet a keepsake from their birth mother is a significant acknowledgement of their connection.

The complexities of reunions are multiple and contextual, and however they partially enable reconciliation, knowledge or healing, they do not expunge lived histories of lack, loss and disconnection:

Never, never felt yeah, no, I didn't feel like, you can't make up for 30, 34, 35 years that I hadn't known them. (Margaret, 901)

Margaret embodies "30, 34, 35 years" of not knowing them, and reunion cannot compensate those years. Legally, at least, the adoptee is always already positioned 'outside' the birth family, and diverse, enacted and felt exclusions complicate or prevent ongoing relationships. The birth family reunion involves a diverse range of experiences and complex relationships, reflecting the way in which we are all contextually and historically produced. And for many, reunions do not necessarily make up for the lack, the "time of not knowing", and the connection remains distant. In her research into post-reunion experiences (10 years and more) within Aotearoa/New Zealand, Browning (2006) found that "long-term reunited relationships have no predictable pathways", emotional and ambivalent experiences vary, and the adoptive mother remains the primary mother (p. iv). Even when there is long-term enduring relationships ambivalence, uncertainty and dissatisfaction endure. For adoptees, reunions, with all their complexities, are worthwhile (Affleck & Steed, 2001), but having been *born to* one family and then legally constituted *as if born to* another, enveloped in secrets and shame, (re)institutes the space between, the no-man's land of no-man's child, as the origin of their experience that cannot be un-lived.

**Chapter 9:**  
**Performing Mosaic Moments**  
**of Adoption**

*All the world's a stage,  
all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
and one man in his time plays many parts...*  
*(William Shakespeare 1564-1616).*

## Performing Mosaic Moments of Adoption

This chapter is a stage play. It stories the experiences that have been lived and felt by adoptees, their families and those within the wider communities in which adoption is embedded. It is necessarily a jigsaw that blends together the voices to produce this hybrid story.

Adoption discourse: Scenes from internal dialogues.

*Characters:*

Jean: Paul's birth mother

Nancy: A paediatric nurse

Paul: An adoptee

John: Paul's adoptive father, Mavis' husband

Margaret: A social worker

Mavis: Paul's adoptive mother, John's wife

David: Paul's adoptive brother

Diana: A counsellor

Emily: Paul's adoptive sister

Debra: Paul's girlfriend

Tom: A psychologist

Denise: A researcher

*Stage Director:*

Mandy Morgan

Scene: A darkened stage.

(A spotlight comes up to show a young woman sitting on the edge of a bed. Background noise of a hospital theatre ebbs and flows).

JEAN (voice over): *The baby is on its way. I am frightened and it hurts. I scream silently, but just whimper as a contraction buckles me over. Then it passes.*

*There's so much disgust in the eyes of the nurses, although one manages a caring smile and a gentle touch. I look around at the sterile, hostile theatre. It smells like disinfectant and the nurses are moving busily around me, beside me, behind me. I really need to go to the toilet but don't want to ask.*

*I feel like I need to push; my body and my baby do not feel real to me; this whole pregnancy has been like living in a hazy dream. No-one has really talked to me. And when the Social Welfare Officer tried to, I could only just agree with everything she said, 'yes if I love my baby I will have it adopted into a good home'. What else could I say? Mum and Dad want me to give the baby away and I'm only 17. I know I don't have a choice. It is easier to not think or perhaps I never learnt how. Growing up we did not express our thoughts, feelings, our desires or our dreams. We don't talk much at all in my family.*

*I will have the baby and it will go to a loving, caring and financially secure family. They will give it the home that I never can. The baby does not feel part of me. My body hurts. The labour is becoming more intense. Make it stop. Please.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a woman in a nursing uniform. It follows her as she cleans down a bench and puts instruments into a steriliser. Background noise of a hospital theatre ebbs and flows).

NANCY (voice over): *I heard that baby screaming for comfort in the nursery; no-one else was around; poor little thing was so lonely. I picked it up and cooed gently as I rubbed its back. When I decided to become a paediatric nurse I didn't realise I'd need to care for unwanted children. They are such helpless little creatures and I can't help but wonder what is to become of them. Many stay in the hospital with us for more than three weeks. We had a child who suffered with hip dysphasia and needed to wear a splint, which seemed to stop any potential adoptive parents from choosing her. That poor wee love stayed with us for about six months before a caring family finally took her home. The Ward Sister makes me angry because she so surly and sharp towards the babies like she's cutting them with every look. "Don't get attached," she barks at me; she shows no emotion even when she's changing or feeding a baby. I guess she has seen so many of these unfortunate souls that they no longer affect her. I hope I never become as cold as that.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a woman in a hospital bed, lying on her side, curled up, eyes closed).

JEAN (voice over): *They put the baby in its hospital cot beside me after he was cleaned up. I looked at him then and he is absolutely beautiful, (long pause, sob). But then they whisked him away. I am exhausted. I can't protest. I feel butchered down below and I don't want to move. Perhaps if I'd realised that I would never see my baby again I might have found the strength. I lay there on the hospital gurney for about half an hour. No-one talked to me. Even now, no-one talks to me. If I ask to go to the toilet, they bring me a pan. I can hear the nurses talking about me in the room next door. I'm*

*so ashamed. I know they are judging me for having sex when I'm not married and I'm so young. I know they think my beautiful baby is damaged goods 'cause he's illegitimate.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Nancy peering through the viewing window into the hospital nursery. Baby cries).

NANCY (voice over): *Listen to that. That duty nurse is sullen and compliant as always. Her meagre and pitying care isn't placating the baby. He wants to hear his mother's heart.*

(Crying stops, sucking noises, crying intensifies).

NANCY (voice over): *Look, sucking at air, poor little one. No-one can comfort him like his mother could. Her body was a comfort; it's all he's ever known. No wonder he's distressed. He's overwhelmed, poor mite. It's a violent, nasty thing they do - taking him away from her like that. He must wonder where she is, where his comfort has gone. I can't bear it.*

(She turns her back and walks into the darkness. Spotlight holds on window, crying sobs decreased to exhausted silence. Then darkness. Spotlight comes up on young man, lying on a rug on the floor - in 'relaxation' pose - hands open by his side).

PAUL (voice over): *I get that I'm supposed to just relax and let my feelings come up as they want, (breathes deeply). Is nothingness a feeling? Is empty what they're expecting? It's all that's here. It's always been here; been me. It's like I was "blacked out" at the very start when she rejected me. The violent cut resonates in my cells, and it hurts. I have cried. I remember crying until I couldn't cry any more.*

*I guess at first I only had my body to experience the world, I couldn't understand why my birth mother left. All I knew was that I was "alone" and that the "aloneness" was scary and produced a horrible painful grief right to my core.*

(He sits up, pulls a beanbag from the darkness and settles into it, picks up notepad and pen, starts writing).

PAUL (voice over): *I think that it was when I was alone in the hospital, right after I was born, that my genetic mapping was forever altered and my body in its many forms, produced a sense of not being good enough. The stirrings of shame and embarrassment as a mistake for being born feel like they go back that far. My body was already less than proper babies. Nausea gnawed in the hollow of my belly. It feels like the longing for my birth mother became a dull ache in the side of my chest as the days*

*turned into weeks. Obviously, I wasn't aware at the time, but this is how it feels. I didn't know at the time, the way I do now, that I had already become the passive victim of my birth mother's indiscretions. I carry the social shame of being born illegitimately. Society privileges my mother's morals over my human rights and my genealogical connection.*

(He stops writing, stands and stretches, puts down the pad and pen, lies down in the relaxation position again).

PAUL (voice over): *I think I'm getting too intellectual again - that stuff about rights and morals - I feel it passionately but I think I'm supposed to be connecting with what the counsellor calls feelings, (breathes deeply). Emptiness is a feeling. I do feel empty, nothing, loneliness, shame. They're feelings deep in the no-man's land where I started out - where I began being the wrong kind of person, the bastard. It's so familiar; it's like forever there. It's the landscape of my whole life and familiar to the core of me, (breathes deeply). There's a smell. It's like a whisper of comfort. A memory? A smell isn't a feeling, but...*

(He reaches out and grabs at air, curls up, cries. Then darkness. Spotlight comes up on a young man holding a baby).

JOHN (voice over): *I'm holding this baby as carefully as I can (looks intensely into baby's face), he's just so tiny. This is my new son. The adoption papers have been signed and we have named him Paul. He carries my surname, (pauses, looks up). Oh, now he's my responsibility and it's time to take him home, (takes hold of his little hand and cradles his body). He's a handsome boy. I so hope I can do him justice, be a good dad and teach him how to be a good man.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a middle-aged woman watching out a doorway that opens into darkness. She is smiling).

MARGARET (voice over): *This is such a proud moment for me. There they go, taking their brand new son home. I know that as a Social Welfare Officer, we perform a social duty. Helping these unwed mothers and childless couples is a win/win situation for both sides. This birth mother seemed like a sensible enough girl. I think she just let her emotions get away with her - it happens far too often, even to the sensible ones. So, it is important that the child goes to a good home and she can move on with her life. I think adoption is the best course of action. These young women are not capable of raising children on their own. They are not married, how would they survive? The baby is better off being raised in a financially stable adoptive family. Many young couples want children now and I love being*

*able to give them a child. I matched this baby to his new adoptive family. He has a Pākehā birth mother, and his adoptive family are Pākehā. It feels right that he's going to a good family home.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a middle aged woman sitting in the kind of chair used in a counsellor's office. She sits upright and faces ahead, is tearful, but stoic, at odds with herself. Mimes speaking, but not synchronised to the speech of the voice over - she appears to be saying something else).

MAVIS (voice over): *The Social Welfare Officer advised us to tell Paul that he was adopted at an early age because apparently this would help him adjust. At first, it was not obvious that Paul was not our biological child but as he grew, he developed a slightly olive tinge to his skin that represented a family difference that was noticeable to the uncaring eye. I would ignore the inquisitive looks and avoid questions that seemed to pry. It was no-one's business and it did not matter, he was my child. As the Social Welfare Officer informed us, a person's genes could be overridden in the right environment, if we cared, nurtured and loved our son he could grow up just as if he was biologically one of ours.*

*She also said we needed to make the adoption a special event to let Paul know that he was chosen and special. Paul's father and I fabricated a wonderful story about how he arrived on our doorstep in a basket and we also gave him books to help him understand about being adopted. At night, when he was small, I would put Paul to bed and tell him the story of how we chose him over all of the other babies because he was the most beautiful, and when he was delivered to us in the basket it was the most wonderful event. I truly do love my dear son. But as he grew it became obvious that he was not like us. He looked different, acted differently and thought differently to us. He did not seem to get on with his brother and sister and in fact, I think they may have been resentful at the special treatment they thought Paul was given.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul, sitting in the same beanbag writing in the same notebook).

PAUL (voice over): *The feeling of there being no-one that I belonged to, that I was alone did not abate. I love my adopted family, but these feelings seem to linger like the mist that hovers over the hills on a cool winter's day. It didn't always affect me on a daily basis; and like the mist, the warmth of the sun would melt the sad feelings away. I was too consumed with being a kid and doing what kids do - school, playing and sports. However, every now and then I'd sit pensively wondering about 'her' - what did she look like? Why did she not want me? Is she still alive? Does she ever think about me? Sometimes I feel an overwhelming sense of sadness that makes my body heavy like a cold, grey concrete slab, and other times I forget. Being adopted is just part of who I am. It's been like that forever.*

(Spotlight curves back to Mavis. She is sitting on a couch now, apparently more relaxed. She has a magazine in her lap, but is just flicking through the pages, distracted, and pensive. Occasionally she looks up and stares into space).

MAVIS (voice over): *My bond with Paul became strained, as he got older. Something about our personalities did not match. He seemed to become a sullen and insolent child. He disagreed with me on most things and trying to get him to do simple chores like making his bed was impossible, (long pause, sigh). His father appeared to have a good relationship with him and Paul spent hours playing outside on his own close to his father's shed. I began to worry that his birth mother's genes were too powerful because no matter how much I tried to guide him, Paul just seemed to grow bad. Although the Social Welfare Officer argued that the environment was most important, I began to wonder if genes had a bigger effect. Having two children of our own after Paul arrived was very hard work. I did not want to burden anybody with my family concerns - I didn't want my family to be burdened by me either. I became so unhappy and afraid for my family.*

(Long pause, puts down magazine, stands and walks into darkness).

MAVIS (voice over): *I used to worry that I'd have no family left one-day.*

(Spotlight on empty couch fades to darkness then comes up again. Paul is visible. He is perched on the arm of the couch, slightly agitated, looking at the space where Mavis has been. He looks up and directly addresses the audience, miming the voice over as closely as possible).

PAUL (voice over): *The differences between my adoptive family and me became obvious as I developed tastes and hobbies that the rest of my family did not enjoy. A couple of times I found the courage to ask my parents about my birth family but they would not talk, apparently the birth family records had been permanently sealed. I was told, and always knew of my adoption but was not expected to talk about it or ask too many questions.*

(Looks off in the direction Mavis left, and then turns back to the audience).

PAUL (voice over): *Sometimes mum became touchy and annoyed. Those stories of being chosen and special meant well, I get that, but I felt a responsibility to keep my family secret. My sense of being alone and the lack of words to express my experience meant that I locked my emotions away deep inside and carefully hid the key.*

*Although my adoptive parents were mostly loving, warm and provided the best of care, I was mindful of my difference and that difference hurt. They tried to tell me stories about how special I was*

*but as I listened I would think, someone had to not want me first. I remember they gave me a book on adoption, I felt overwhelmingly embarrassed and I did not know what to say; I grabbed the book and ran under the stairs. I cried silently inside. Often I couldn't understand why I felt so miserable deep inside my soul. When I first started misbehaving I didn't know why, something in me just rebelled. I felt angry towards my mum who was always fussing and annoying me. She was overwhelmingly protective but had an emotionally distant heart.*

(Stands and walks around the couch. Turns away from the audience then back again. Looks left and right, leans in towards the audience and seems about to reveal a secret. Mimes voice over as closely as possible).

PAUL (voice over): *My siblings taunted me and that hurt. I would watch the two of them interact and I noticed that they had something that I didn't have with them. At times, they were quite purposefully cruel; they reminded me about not being a real brother and laughed at my long, gangly legs. They were all small in stature. They'd say, 'you're a bastard because you were born out of wedlock.' God that would hurt. I was just so different from them. When caught, my siblings were reprimanded for their comments; however any conversation would end there. We did not talk about me or my position of adoption within the family. I think my adoptive parents did not quite know how to cope and I sense that they regretted adopting me.*

(Blackout. Spotlight comes up on a boy, about 10 years old; sitting crossed legged on the floor with his back to the audience. Evidently sulky).

DAVID (voice over): *Paul is a dork. He doesn't belong in our family and I wish he had never been born. He likes cars and war games, I don't. I want him to play with me, but he goes off and plays on his own mostly. He always saves his lollies and shows off when he eats them in front of us. He is just mean. He makes jokes about how short I am and calls me a baby, when he picks on my sister I fight him but he is bigger than me and his punches hurt. Sometimes I love him. He is my brother after all. Mum and Dad seem to tip toe around him and treat him like he is special, but he's not even their real child.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul, again sitting in the same beanbag writing in the same notebook).

PAUL (voice over): *My existence in the non-adopted world means that seemingly innocuous statements remind me of my aloneness and send sharp aches surging through my body. I remember how an innocent conversation by another child about someone being adopted or a family tree exercise at school accentuated my difference and momentarily returned me to no-man's land. I do not belong*

*anywhere and have nothing to claim as my own. Who am I? The gnawing in the hollow of my belly seems sharper and I feel physically sick. I slowly disengaged from my bodily yearning for the faint but familiar connection to my birth family.*

*To live in a world that values kinship, blood tie links and genetics is challenging because I don't have access to that information - I am denied the right. As a child, I could not articulate my experiences, as there was no space or language to do that. I tried to be the compliant and good adopted child and be grateful for my salvation, however sometimes I got angry and while loving my adoptive parents vehemently, I felt bad because I did not want to see them hurt. I had pangs of longing for what was missing and in the quiet times, I would fantasise about the family I was not allowed to know. I often questioned what I had done wrong for her to give me away and that wondering always involved self-blame and hurt. My young body ached, mourned and held sobs for the genealogical history that had gone before.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a middle-aged man, an older John. He is running on a running machine, breathing heavily).

JOHN (voice over): *I knew once my affair became known our marriage was doomed. I did love Mavis but her constant fussing and need to have everything just right was too much for me. We tried to work through it as Mavis was worried about what people would say, however as our relationship became acrimonious, I had to leave. I couldn't stand it anymore. I worried about Paul especially. He was a young adolescent, then. Mavis and Paul seemed to clash and the other kids didn't seem to care. That's why he came with me and they went to live with their mother. I tried to do my best but it was hard being a man on my own trying to come to terms with life as a single parent. I worked long hours and deserved a beer after work. He was a good kid. It all seems to make sense bit by bit, but something we did, something I did, must have gone wrong somewhere along the way.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul still sitting in the same beanbag writing in the same notebook).

PAUL (voice over): *On the one hand, I was relieved that I went to live with my father, while on the other hand I felt hurt and confused about why mum did not want me. I felt the rumblings of the deep and inaudibly familiar feelings of abandonment, rejection and loss. Once again I was losing my m(other) and had no-where to grieve that loss. It was as though my body began to freeze and I became comfortably numb.*

*I learnt to look after myself and being alone did not really bother me at all. Mum wasn't around to nag me and I didn't have to fight over things with my brother and sister. Dad worked a lot or came home drunk so my home life of 'aloneness' now matched what I felt inside. I was excited about*

*starting a new school and thought I could create a completely new me; being the cool and funny guy I always wanted to be. Unfortunately, that did not work out and once again, I found myself gravitating to other misfits. Mum used to say I'd pick up waifs and strays; I think that is because I probably felt like a waif and stray. We all used alcohol and cannabis, revelling in the euphoric escape. My alcohol and drug use lasted for years, at times it bordered on being a problem but I managed to keep it under control. I could ignore the uneasiness inside, especially when I was drunk.*

*Over the years I have encountered other adopted people and there is always a connection, a knowing or a special type of kinship that we experience with one another. We have camaraderie. Mostly this connection is not spoken of but it is living and felt. We understand each other without having to say anything. I wonder if it is like the return servicemen, there is a bond that is strong because of living an event that is traumatic and outside of the norm. Having an existence that is not tellable means that I am often misunderstood or my adoption experience is ignored. Non-adopted people tell me that it doesn't matter that I was adopted or they try to make adoption acceptable by claiming that they are not that close to their families either. When this happens, I get that familiar sensation of aloneness and my difference is sharply felt. I realise that people have had their families always; they have always known where they come from so they do not and are not able to understand that it is different for me. I look at myself and I go who the fuck are you?*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul still watching out a doorway that opens into darkness).

PAUL (voice over): *I remember when they changed the law and made it possible for adoptees to access their original birth certificates. It was strewn in the news like a momentous event. Mum asked me if I was going to look. I felt embarrassed at the time, we have never talked about my adoption and I didn't know how to start then. I did not want her to think I did not appreciate all that she had done and I was confused about what I wanted to do. I felt ashamed of who I was and convinced that my birth mother would reject me again because of my alcohol and drug history and my brushes with the law.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a middle-aged woman watching out a doorway that opens into darkness. She is smiling).

DIANA (voice over): *As a counsellor I ensure that an adoptee is safe and psychologically sound when they receive their original birth certificate. I am there to help with information, assistance and support. I needed to be approved as a certified counsellor by the Social Welfare authorities. That process involved jumping through hoops but I think it was well worth it if it meant that adoptees could get the help they needed. I am not legally allowed to withhold information and I can give advice on how to search and make contact with the birth family. That young man was very pleasant. He spoke and*

*presented well, except he did have a lot of tattoos. He seemed to understand that it may be difficult to find his birth mother after 34 years but assured me he had support if he finds the searching emotionally difficult. I wish him all the best.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul, looking out a darkened window. Pensive).

PAUL (voice over): *I don't think I really comprehended what adoption meant for me until I found my birth mother. When I first contemplated finding her, I thought it was because I wanted to know who I looked like. I thought that if I just met her then I could find some peace and close that chapter of my book. I did not believe that adoption mattered that much. I thought I was unhappy or lost because of my alcohol and drug use or that the relationships I was in were causing it. I was wrong.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Mavis, who is again sitting in the kind of chair used in a counsellor's office. She still sits upright and faces ahead; she looks irritated, but contrite; still at odds with herself. Mimes speaking, but not synchronised to the speech of the voice over - she appears to be saying something else).

MAVIS (voice over): *Paul and I don't really see much of each other anymore. I know his father visits him regularly but it seems that when we get together we still disagree and fight. Our visits can be very strained. I tell him I love him, but he never seems to care. I know he smokes that wacky backy as I smell it on him. That worries me. I wish he would stop taking drugs but he gets angry when I try to talk to him about it. He was caught smoking cannabis while at high school and although we got him into counselling at the time, he would never talk to us about it, he just promised he would not do it again. He has a lovely girlfriend now and I hope this relationship lasts. I do worry about his daughter. He tells me he might get custody of her soon. He is a good dad. His daughter's mother seems to be as unstable as Paul is. Maybe caring for her full time will be the thing that makes him settle down. He always seems so lost. I think I did my best as his mother. I tried to help him for so long.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a young woman, doing dishes in a kitchen sink. She seems absorbed in the task).

EMILY (voice over): *I love my brother. We are close now we are adults. As the only girl, I never really played with my brothers and they just seemed to fight all the time anyway. Paul and I have talked about our childhoods together, and he has said that he often felt like the odd fish in our family of five. I never saw him like that. I felt sad for him, but envious too when he went to live with dad. At least he didn't have to deal with the dragon everyday. I know my grandparents struggled to accept him; they*

*disagreed with adoption and were rather old fashioned anyway. I overheard them saying that they felt sorry for mum for adopting him.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul sitting in the kind of chair used in a counsellor's office. He looks up and directly addresses the space where the counsellor would be, miming the voice over as closely as possible).

PAUL (voice over): *As time moved forward and as I lived my life, my feelings of aloneness and inferiority faded, and only a faint trace of abandonment lingered. I think the drugs helped. The cannabis enabled me to think a lot more clearly in my own mind, but the alcohol that was about destruction. When I was court ordered to go to alcohol and drug counselling because of a drink driving charge, I gained some insight into why I needed substances to survive.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul sitting at a kitchen table. He is twisting his hands together nervously with one leg shaking constantly under the table).

PAUL (voice over): *I've always shaken my leg when I'm nervous, it used to drive my mum mad, but it feels good to me. I try to sip my coffee and eat my sandwich but my appetite is non-existent. I am about to meet my birth mother for the first time in person. I had my original birth certificate for about four years before I found the time, and perhaps courage, to begin the search. It seemed enough to know a name at the time. I was afraid that she would not want to know me, that she would close the door. I don't know what I feared more, not being able to find her or having her reject me again. Once I began the search, I was surprised at how easy it was to find her through her extended family and a phone book. I tired electoral rolls first but I had no luck and I could not find her name. However, years earlier, I think when I first began to get into trouble my parents had been given some information about my birth mother from the social welfare after they went to them for help. That information revealed that I had been born in Napier and that my birth mother was from Auckland. I knew where to look.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a middle-aged woman, an older Jean, sitting at a kitchen table with a teapot and cup in front of her. She picks up the teapot, reaches across the table - into the darkness - and appears to pour another cup of tea. She directly addresses the space where a friend might be sitting, miming the voice over as closely as possible. She's animated, possibly anxious).

JEAN (voice over): *When I first received the phone call from my birth son, I was speechless and shocked. Although I had often thought of this day, I did not really, in all reality, allow myself to believe it would happen. Over the years, I had accepted that I had lost any rights to my son and thought he would never want to know me anyway. At the time, when I gave him away, I was told that he was to go to a good home and would grow up healthy and happy. I am so full of shame and believe I was terribly bad for having an illegitimate child and at the time I hated myself for giving him away. Three years after I had him, I married and went on to have three more children. These children never replaced Paul. His life has always been entangled in mine. My lost child is my ghost. Sometimes when that ghost would appear my grief would cripple me. There was not a day that I did not think of him. As I watched my children grow, as they achieved their milestones I would often wonder about his. What did he look like? How did he celebrate his first birthday? Did he do well in school? Does he wonder who I am? Sometimes as I walked through town, I searched the faces in the crowds for him, but today we are to meet.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a young woman as she bends over a cot, arranging bedclothes and baby toys. She seems absorbed in the task).

DEBRA (voice over): *Paul is a good man. I'm glad he wanted me to be with him as he meets his birth mother for the first time, I think he needs the support. This is something so very important to him and although he is hiding it, he is scared. He cried after they spoke for the first time on the phone and we talked long into the night about what being adopted meant for him. He said he always felt like there was no-one there that he could rely on. He only had himself. We have been married for a year now and Paul no longer smokes cannabis and thankfully he only drinks in the weekends. Paul hit me once, but he quickly agreed to go to counselling because he realised he needed to address his anger problems. It seems to be working, he does not get as angry and shares his feelings more openly. Every second weekend we take care of his daughter, he is such a devoted dad. Our baby is due in four months. It is a boy. I watch Paul fidget nervously as we wait for his mother to arrive. I feel scared for him and pray quietly that she will be warm and open and that they will get on well.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on a young man, sitting at a desk typing onto a laptop computer. He is wearing a suit, though the jacket is over the back of his chair and he has loosened his tie).

TOM (voice over): *After a full psychological assessment it was obvious Paul was suffering from attachment disorder. He also met four out of the seven criteria for Substance Use Disorder/Substance Dependence. Paul has used substances for a number of years problematically, however has managed to maintain work (albeit changing jobs frequently) and is in a stable relationship. It is evident that Paul*

*continues to use cannabis despite encountering financial problems and while having difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships with friends and family. He needs psychological help. Paul is open to treatment and has responded well to the work we have done together, thus far. He is keen to attend the Springhill Residential Addiction Centre and leaves next week. I find Paul a likeable sort of chap.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Jean, looking out a darkened window. Pensive).

JEAN (voice over): *As soon as I saw Paul, I knew it was him. He looks a little like my father. My heart opened but I remained closed. We said hello and hugged awkwardly. This is my son. Memories of that horrible time in the girl's home - the abuse during the birth - came flooding back. I saw the snarly face of the mean old nurse who looked at me with disgust. I caught my breath as the waves tried to overwhelm me and ignite the pain. We sat down and talked. I told my husband but not my family that I had an illegitimate child that I gave away. I still haven't told my kids, I wonder how Paul will react to that. There is so much to tell him, and I wonder if I can adequately explain why I had to give him away. I think about my mum and dad and how they might feel knowing we are meeting. Mum used to play a special song on his birthday every year, she never said anything to me, but would just play that song. Other than telling me I'd done the right thing after I returned home, dad never mentioned it again.*

PAUL (voice over): *I've known my birth mother and her husband for four years now. I have three half siblings, but I haven't met them yet. She recently told them about me, and we plan to meet sometime soon. Apparently, they all reacted well to the news of the new arrival. My birth mother and her husband have been kind to me. We seem to get on well and mostly the relationship feels good. Every now and then, I get frustrated with her and I feel that she gets that way with me. We bring a lot of history to our reunion. I was there as a baby, came back 38 years later and there's a lifetime in-between.*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Denise sitting at a kitchen table with a coffee cup, a pad and a pen. She directly addresses the space where someone might be sitting, miming the voice over as closely as possible).

DENISE (voice over): *"This is an opportunity for you to tell your story of adoption," I said to Paul as he sat across from me looking pensive. Paul began. Two hours flew by and I suspect that we could have talked for two more. When he had finished, he looked at me earnestly, "I don't really talk about adoption like this, you know, I kind of keep it to myself".*

(Spotlight curves through the darkened stage and settles on Paul sitting at a kitchen table with a coffee cup and a digital recorder in front of him. He directly addresses the space where someone might be sitting, miming the voice over as closely as possible).

PAUL (voice over): *We live at opposite ends of the country so we only get together face-to-face three times a year. So, I think we have been slow to bond. She won't tell me who my father is, says she does not remember. I think that is a lie and it makes me mad, but I sense that I risk losing my relationship with her if I push her too far. She tells me that I look and act like her father, and when I see the family photos I can see me in there. It is strange to have a mirror after so long. I don't call her mum - she is Jean to me. It is amazing to know a little about my biological history and yet sometimes that is not enough. We cannot undo my childhood and my loss, and during the time when body and emotions yearn to be that little boy again, I hurt. I grieve and I cry for what I lost and what can never be returned. It is great that the New Zealand Government enabled reunions to happen and overall it has been amazing to find my birth mum. However, reunions do not repair the violent cut that marks me.*

(Spotlight cuts out. Stage in complete darkness and remains dark. Paul's voice is heard as if an echo).



## **Chapter 10:**

# **The Hybrid Subject**

*Hybridity keeps me from being rigid about most things. It has taught me to appreciate the contradictions in the world and in my life. I scavenge from the best*

*(Jessica Hagedorn, 1949- ).*

## The Hybrid Subject

This chapter draws together some of the complex and multiple social issues that matter to adoptees' identities and the way in which social power relations have shaped adoptees' subjectivity, their experience of themselves, their feelings and subject positions. From birth, adoptees carry the shame and stigma of illegitimacy. This stigma positions them as 'less than' or 'flawed', while they also carry the moral burden of their birth mothers' transgressions and unacceptable conduct.

According to participants' narratives, making legitimate what was illegitimate through the adoption event did little to ameliorate that history while the legally constituted status of *as if born to* did little to defend against the privilege of blood relationships as the marker for 'real' kinship, within taken-for-granted narratives of family as blood. Blood tie links as proper kinship reproduces the adoptee as "not the same" (Margaret, 918) and "a mistake" (Toni, 451) for living outside of the norm. Living the effects of otherness and exclusion is felt throughout an adoptee's lifetime where intense experiences of aloneness can be felt within relationships. Whether or not a reunion has eventuated, the adopted subject is constituted by both the *born to* birth family and the *as if born to* adoptive family identity and in order to theorise these experiences and the other complex social issues I am drawing on the metaphor of hybridity. The biological and the social hybrid metaphors are contextualised then discussed in relation to how they can enable a theoretical conceptualisation of adoptees' lived experiences of *born to* and *as if born to*, and their earliest sense of the no-man's land between their birth and adopted families. Following that, hybridity as a hyphenated space that allows in-between identities provides a framework to understand the enduring sense of no-man's land as a meeting place of legally and socially constituted subjection to discourses constituting legitimacy. Finally, I discuss hybridity as a third space that merges identities to produce new ways of understanding adoptees' lives in the 'between' of normalised and legislated spaces.

Within adoption research the metaphor of hybridity has been used to theorise intercountry adoption<sup>14</sup>. Gray (2007) and Walton (2009) for example, both completed doctoral research that explored the implications of intercountry adoptive identities. Gray (2007), an Australian intercountry adoptive mother, problematises narrow essentialist understandings of identity and suggests that intercountry adoptees are managing their fluid, hybrid identities within a culturally global and diverse Australian culture. Here, hybridity constitutes the blending of ethnicity, cultures, and traditions for intercountry adoptive families. Walton (2009), an intercountry adoptee, explores the significance of intercountry adoptions on Korean adoptees' identities. Much like this thesis, Walton (2009) argues that the "issues associated with adoptees such as 'loss', 'incomplete identities' and 'a need to search'

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<sup>14</sup> The term intercountry is more generally used by official texts when signifying the transfer of parenting duties from a country outside of the one where the adoptive parents reside (Bartholet, 2005; Gray, 2007). For examples, see the Child, Youth and Family website (<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/adoption/adopting-a-child/adopting-a-child-from-overseas.html>) and Hague Convention documents (<http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy/regulatory-impactstatements/hague-child-protection-convention>) for the use of the term intercountry.

should be contextually and socially situated, not viewed as individualised conditions” (p. xii). Such research has added new knowledge about intercountry and/or cultural adoptive experiences. Despite extensive research of the literature, I could find no readings that took up the metaphor of hybridity to theorise more traditional Westernised adoptive experiences.

Hybridity has been conceptualised in diverse ways within various disciplines because of the many theories and approaches to the study of identity; and indeed Bell (2004) claims that the notion of hybridity is itself a hybrid. Given this diversity, any claims for hybridity need to be contextualised within the history and politics of knowledge. According to K. Smith (2008) the genesis of hybridity is located in both the hard sciences (for example botany) and the social sciences.

### **Hybrid Species**

In plant biology, hybridity involves the grafting of one plant onto a different rootstock (Young, 1999) to improve plant colours, enhance flower characteristics or to yield disease resistant plants. The hybrid species can have varied meanings and functions for evolutionary biologists, including cross-fertilisation of organisms or genomic imprinting (Heslop-Harrison, 1990; Rieseberg, 1997). The consequences of these functions can include an increase in “intraspecific genetic diversity, the origin and transfer of genetic adaptations, the origin of new ecotypes or species, and the reinforcement or breakdown of reproductive barriers” (Rieseberg, 1997, pp. 359-360). Hybridity here exemplifies essentialism, which understands that the essence of a plant is located in its genes. Essentialism contends that particular attributes are inherent and necessary for organisms to function; these attributes are the core and defining elements of an entity (Bell, 2004; Meredith, 1998). Hybridity signifies the way in which the plant essence can be transformed or manipulated through various practices, such as genetic trait insertion which aims to produce plants that are disease and herbicide resistant. These practices produce hardier plants with an increased shelf life or nutritional value.

The hard sciences provide a hybrid species metaphor that facilitates an understanding of the narratives that constitute the child *born to* one rootstock being grafted *as if born to* another rootstock. The adoptive grafting was imperative because to be the child of no-man was seen as abhorrent and to rectify the wrongs of this illegitimate position it was essential to graft the child onto a family tree of ‘good’ stock. As discussed in Chapter 1, within the social and legislative history of adoption, the adoptive family was positioned as the ‘good’ family for providing salvation to the illegitimate child and the wayward birth mother. This goodness was inherent and constitutive. Discourses of the ‘good’ adoptive mother position her as a lawful and moral citizen who is married. The assumptions surrounding the ‘good’ mother required her to be caring, attentive and stable, while family discourses dictated that a family had two parents, with one parent, usually the mother, providing in home care. Conversely, the birth mother was positioned as sinful for her immoral sexual behaviour and was understood as unfit to raise a child. Not only did the child need protection from the illegitimate position she/he also needed protecting from the birth mother’s inherent flaws and adoption provided the social

practice to enable that. In as much as unmarried mothers' personalities were understood as dysfunctional, immature and unstable they did not fit the criteria for 'good' mother, nor were they able to provide financial security or secure attachment that was necessary to produce 'good' citizenship (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998).

The 'closed' adoption period as legislated by the Adoption Act 1955 occurred at a time when the dominant belief was that the environment could overcome any genetic heritability; however adoption was typically sanctioned when the child's genetic connection to the birth mother was not visibly obvious. The specificity of this practice signified traces of essentialism because the grafting as a form of social engineering aimed to place a child in a 'good' *as if born to* family thereby serving to eliminate any connection to the inferior *born to* genetic stock. Perhaps as a result of the atrocities of Hitler's regime during World War II, eugenics was no longer explicitly endorsed, yet the governing of bodies through practices of adoption justified by the dominance of environmentalism enabled similar effects. Producing, improving and rebuilding people, families and communities was vital post World War II and adoption provided a way in which to do this. The blood stock species could be improved. Although some zealous essentialists warned that the environmental argument was faulty because inherited deficiencies could not be negated (Else, 1991), these arguments were largely ignored as over 80,000 adoption orders were sanctioned under the 1955 Act.

The *born to* plant had to be cut to enable the grafting. The physical cut occurred when the newborn baby was taken from its birth mother, often immediately after childbirth. To be torn away from your birth mother, after nine months in utero, is understood here as a violent bodily cut. The metaphorical cut occurred when the birth mother signed the legal contract relinquishing all rights to her property. As argued by Ludbrook (1997), adoption law parallels property law with the child positioned as a commodity. The illegitimate subject was made legitimate as a new hybrid species when the adoptive parents signed that same contract accepting the rights, duties and obligations of parenting the child, *as if born to* them. At the time of the legal proceedings, the child was granted citizenship and the significance of the grafting was represented by the entitlement to a name. The adopted child's birth certificate realises the *as if born to* when the adoptive family is given the rights to name the child. Here the child becomes the property of the adoptive father and takes up the father's surname. A new adopted identity is produced. The *as if born to* identity produced a legal fiction, and in order to protect this fiction the *born to* identity is permanently sealed.

Strategies such as keeping secrets and telling lies enabled this fiction to be lived. The legal severing of the birth family relationship meant that the legal fiction could be kept a secret and everyone became, in a sense, complicit with the fiction. For the participants, silencing strategies meant "I've not really had anyone talk to me about it in great depth before" (Sally, 1). Such strategies produced the lived effects of adoption as untellable and left the adoptee without a voice. The introduction of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 assumed that access to birth history information would right the wrongs of the 'closed stranger' adoption period; however, fictions produce effects and those effects are

not remedied by knowledge of a biological history because of the many, varied and complex social relationships involved in the adoption triad. Many adoptees have not regained an adoption voice.

Being grafted *as if born to* was problematic for the participants when the legal fiction failed to remove the connection to any *born to* name. The social practice of removing a child from the stem of one family and grafting it onto another did not remove the embodied knowing of the *born to* relationship or any genealogical subjectivity. The original genes are still housed in the body. This connection to origins is represented in stories about the *born to* name. For some participants the *born to* name enabled a sense of wholeness, a connection to “I am” (Barry, 1041) and being “real to myself” (Jan, 1163) that the grafting did not enable. Here identity becomes problematic because although the adopted subject was raised as the *as if born to* identity, the embodied connection to the *born to* was not severed. It remains lived and felt.

The possibility of a feeling plant becomes problematic within the hard sciences, as affect and emotion are not necessarily considered within such paradigms. When researching plant grafting or genetic modification the scientist does not subscribe to subjective experience within the plant, and indeed discourses about plants having feelings and emotions have been relegated to the pseudo-scientific realm. As a biological metaphor, hybridity becomes fragile for adopted identities in this sense: it does not allow for felt connections with the ‘rootstock’. Rather than a metaphor with no connection to felt experience, the metaphor of the phantom limb offers a way to conceptualise the severing of the *born to* relationship, and perhaps the longing for or the missing of the birth mother. After a limb has been amputated, for some, the limb is experienced as still being present. There is a practical embodied (habitual body) knowing of the actions that occurred prior to the limb’s removal. Picking up a pencil is still possible to feel, even if there is no ability to act. The limb has a quasi-presence, where it is more than memory recall, it is a virtual experience (Ramachandran & Rogers-Ramachandran, 1996). Neither physiological nor psychological theories can be mutually exclusive to an understanding of the presence/absence of the missing limb, nor can either adequately explain the missing birth mother in relation to the felt experiences of adoption reported in this research. She remains forever present/absent to the adopted subject. Here the absent m/other is still in relationship to the adopted subject and has an ambivalent presence. In some way, the adoptee is aware of the m/other before she was lost and the violence of the birth cut remains problematic.

The embodied knowing of a birth history can shape the adopted subject, even when a *born to* reunion has not occurred. As earlier said, when one plant tissue is grafted onto another, the original plant still exists, and when neither plant is pruned, the hybrid plant returns to its original stock (Young, 1999). For the adopted subject, with or without a birth family reunion, returning to the ‘original’ is not always possible because of the intricacy of the social and historical relationships in which the adoption event is embedded. For instance, unable to know her birth mother Margaret was denied contact. Yet an embodied longing to return is already always there. Most of the participants talked about a having a curiosity for the *born to* relationships because of needing to know what their birth mother looked like,

who they mirrored, or where they came from. Initially, a reunion need is directed towards the birth mother, which according to Lousada (2000) is based in a primary maternal preoccupation, common to all children, but more complex for those with absent birth mothers. For adoptees the birth mother is the conduit of conception, pregnancy and birth family connections (including the birth father) that have always been a mystery.

Their relationship to the birth mother is ambivalent. She is mother and not mother, signifying more binary experiences. Adoptees understand mothering as that which is produced within mainstream discourses of mother as the carer and nurturer throughout childhood. While the absent birth mother does not fit this norm, an adopted body yearns for the relationship that was torn away. Some of the participants expressed this sense of longing and loss because the relationship will never be realised. Perhaps the 'original' manifests through the narrative unconsciousness, the embodied knowing that carries the history of what has gone before. Freeman (2002) explains that the narrative unconsciousness is a history that is embodied even though that history is not lived; for Maxine, the embodied history manifested in utero through a genetic history and bonding that remain difficult to explain or express within taken-for-granted blood as kin discourse. The felt relationship with the birth mother is more like the felt experienced of a lost limb than the cutting of a plant from its rootstock, with the absent birth mother remaining present.

Even so, the plant metaphor does epitomise common sense understandings of family trees that are constituted by language signifying roots, groundedness and strength. The tree has ancestral branches and a family connection that is based in blood and biological connection. Completing a family tree exercise while at school was a meaningful experience for some of the participants. Alice, Maxine and Cooley all experienced themselves as lacking 'roots' when contemplating what the family tree represents. Because of this, Alice fabricated a family when she was asked to do the exercise at school and Maxine refused to take part because she knew she belonged to another family first. The participants' stories represented the way in which being grafted *as if born to* did not constitute a strong attachment for them to the *as if born to* family tree. In a sense the hybrid species metaphor is again problematic because adoptees actively reject the hybrid position with the constitutive elements of blood tie kinships, so valued in genealogical discourse, is unavailable. To deny kinship as blood norm is to deny an adoptee 'roots' and a place to stand or voice their experience. Belonging no-where and being alone were dominant and reoccurring narratives that adoptees storied to tell of their experiences because of the loss of blood ties. Some participants talked of not having or knowing their ancestry or whakapapa and this loss was meaningful. It was also sensed and felt.

Identity for adoptees is forever compromised in a world that values blood ties as the marker for 'real' kinship. Adoptees will always already be othered to those who can take up the legitimate position of blood as kinship. Unlike the grafting of a plant, the grafting of a child on to a family tree does not produce blended (genetic) stock; it does not yield new tree sap. Even the social practices that attempted to sustain the new plant through secrecy and fiction failed to protect it from the harsh frosts of social

scorn at the lack of a blood tie connection and the burdens of illegitimacy. Cooley and Brendon's siblings would taunt them with reminders of their lack of 'inauthenticity' as adopted beings; while Barry, Maxine and Alice were all located outside of the *as if born to* by friends or family members. While positioned here, the experience of being 'different' and 'other' can be reinforced and the participants experienced the lived effects of being "utterly alone" (Vaughn, 285) or "never feeling like I fitted in" (Margaret, 20). Margaret resisted the grafting when she rejected her adoptive family ancestry. When the adopted subject does not fit into an essentialist discourse they are once again returned to their earliest sense of being in no-man's land. To find a solid place to stand again takes effort because as Barry signifies the place in-between is unstable because the "foundation is based on sand" (1379). In everyday interaction, through everyday language that produces subject positions, discourses of kinship and family reproduce disconnection for the adoptee. They are returned to no-man's land.

Historically, adoption advocates argued that a morally wholesome adoptive environment would override any inherited 'bad blood'; unwanted genetic influences from the original plant could be removed by grafting. However, medical discourses produce and disseminate knowledge of the genetic heritability of disease and disorder and adoptees are a useful research control in the study of their genetic aetiology. Being born into one family and raised by another spawns perfect conditions for researching the nature/nurture debate. Such research confirms that knowledge of a genetic history is an important precursor for the prevention of negative health outcomes, in our globally risk averse world, genealogical knowledge matters. Yet through the Adoption Act 1955, access to genetic knowledge was legally and socially prohibited for the adopted subject, and while it became possible to obtain that information through *born to* reunions, access to such knowledge remains problematic. So on the one hand adoptees are protected from the 'bad' genes of the birth family when *as if born to* and on the other their 'bad' genes provide vital information about the heritability of disease and disorder for others. And while assisting others to safeguard their health and being warned of their susceptibility to genetic predispositions of particular conditions, adoptees themselves are denied this right.

The participants storied living with 'fear' about the unknown. This fear is particularly palpable when it potentially impacts on their children's lives. Lacking a health history makes present what is absent; another reminder of the missing birth (m)other, and their illegitimate othered position. It produces "a negative" (Mary, 775) experience, "the painful reminder of the adoption" (Toni, 1048) experience that is full of grief and loss. In this way when adoptees are questioned about a familial medical history during a medical examination, not being able to respond can be embarrassing and health becomes more of a gamble. Alice and Shelly were concerned about familial health patterns during pregnancy while Toni and Sally worried about the lack of genealogical information that might privilege healthy outcomes for their children. Such "worry about your kids" (Toni, 1059) can produce anxiety, which matters to everyday living. Adoptees can be positioned as being less responsible because without genetic knowledge they cannot prevent the onset of particular disease or disorder. This

“constant unknown” (Sally, 569) is unresolvable with incomplete or partial histories. While the lack of medical knowledge is not exclusive to adoptees, being the child *born to* one rootstock and grafted *as if born to* another rootstock produces a specific lived experience of lack and fear.

Rothenberger and Starbuck (2008) explain that not all plants can be grafted. In order to form a strong union between plants, the grafted plants should be closely related. The rootstock (normally the root system of the grafted plant) and the scion (the detached plant sprout) need to be compatible or any union will be weak. For example, a sour cherry plant is not suitable stock for a sweet cherry plant, sweet cherries bond with Mazzard seedlings best. Plants from different families cannot be grafted and although it is believed that two plants can be made into genetically different plants by grafting, this is not true. Incompatible plants will grow poorly, come away or even die. In plant biology, the only way to determine plant suitability is through years of trialling, however trialling a successful adoption placement is obviously not possible. It is ethically and morally inappropriate to risk poor growth, break away, or eventual death with human beings. In effect this is what the metaphor implies for adoptees. Adoptees were placed with an adoptive family, often with few background checks and no previous knowledge of how healthy the grafting might be. Strategies of matching skin colour, race, religion or perceived intelligence were sometimes employed, however fitting in, belonging and family dynamics are far more intricate processes than a child’s height or skin tone (R. J. Lifton, 1976).

The hybrid species metaphor represents the way in which the adopted subject was cut from the birth family and grafted onto the adoptive family. For some, this cut was violent and the grafting did not heal the wounds inflicted nor did it heal the sense of loss and disconnection from the *born to*, particularly within socially produced blood-as-kinship discourse. For an adoptee positioned as other, with and without knowledge of blood kinship there are dual and conflicting positions that construct subjectivity; these positions are interactive and reflexive and all carry particular rights, duties and obligations. For example, when born illegitimate adoptees are positioned as immoral, throughout their lifetimes they can be taunted, judged and subjugated as *born to* bastards. Although that position was supposed to have been righted with the legal fiction of *as if born to* the legislation did not always produce social change. Some of the participants continued to be reminded of their illegitimate position, although legally it was expunged. Similarly, being constructed as a fiction did not remove the biological deficit of ‘less than’ when carrying the sins of the birth mother. And here adoptees take up the position of ‘second best’. Adoptees are constrained by biological discourses of essentialism, and the legal fiction of *as if born to* can never be fully realised within blood kin discourse.

### **The Social Mix**

Hybridity has also been taken up within the social sciences and is used to theorise the effects of colonisation, and the merging of cultures, on identities formed through postcolonial social power relations. According to Kraidy (2002), it is widely used within the many spheres of cultural inquiry; it is both respected and despised. It is positioned as a “site of democratic struggle and resistance against

empires, [while] others have attacked it as a neo-colonial discourse complicit with transnational capitalism, cloaked in hip garb of cultural theory” (p. 316). And at this juncture, as a result of complex historical and social relationships, the formation of the hybrid identity needs to be situated.

Historically, hybridity understood as cultural and ethnic blending was considered a morally reprehensible position. Bell (2004) asserts that during the colonisation of Māori successful assimilation was unidirectional; Europeans influenced ‘natives’, not the other way round. Within this racist discourse, social practices such as banning the use of tikanga and te reo aimed to destroy Māoritanga. At the turn of the twentieth century, due to colonial power and the introduction of war, guns, tobacco and disease the Māori population had reached its lowest point (Boyes, 2006; Walker, 2004). The taking of Māori land saw large numbers of Māori being moved to urban Pākehā dominated areas, which perpetuated Māori displacement and loss of whakapapa (Boyes, 2006). English schooling systems and religions aimed to remove the use of te reo and concurrently effected indoctrination of Māori into English customs and beliefs (C. Smith, 1994). As discussed in Chapter 1, embedded within this colonising history, is the history of adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The colonisation of Māori, the initial indenture practices of taking in destitute or unwanted children to help on the frontier farms and the ensuing ‘closed’ adoption practices were shaped within imperialist, hegemonic governance that dictated appropriate citizenship for its people.

During these times, colonisers erroneously believed that Aotearoa/New Zealand had become a unified nation because Māori were included in any definition of whiteness, and merging all people resolved the burden and problem of Māori (Brookes, 2007; Walker, 2004). Miscegenation, however, was feared because essentialists argued that identity occurred in nature, it is fixed and stable, and thus to be hybrid was emphatically negative because people are ‘tainted’ by any form of racial mixing (Bell, 2004). The assumptions underlying discourses of racial mixing signify a blurring of boundaries, both socio-cultural and biological. Biologically, hybridity evokes ideas of genetic mixing and blood quantum. Much like being tarnished by the sins of the birth mother, to be tainted with the genetic makeup and bloodline of Māori positioned a person as inferior. Social practices enacted these assumptions, for example derogatory terms that signified a transaction in the conception of mixed blood people such as *utu pihikete* (sexual services paid for with biscuits) were used to represent their lowly class position. The term half-caste also described a person of mixed blood and although its use waned during the 1920s, it continues to signify the negative assumptions underpinning interracial mixing<sup>15</sup> (Anderson, 1991; Boyes, 2006). Again, as with the illegitimate subject, it was assumed that Māori were less intelligent, morally weak and unappealing. It was argued that the plight of the ‘mixed’ child was reason enough to discourage interbreeding because of the assumed substandard life trajectory. Inter-marriage was also a concern to some Māori leaders because of the loss of Māoritanga to

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<sup>15</sup> Particular terms also precisely represented blood quantum with the measure of blood descent indicating the average of both sets of parents. That is, one could also be positioned as a quarter-caste or three-quarter caste (Anderson, 1991).

Pākehā customs and beliefs. For some, a distinct Māori race was desired by Māori for Māori and the dangers of assimilation through interracial marriage and breeding was also seen as a relevant and important Māori issue (Brookes, 2007). To have mixed blood produced fear on both sides.

By the 1840s, it was believed that the amalgamation of Māori with Europeans was continuing to occur quickly because of the higher rate of mixed marriage births over Māori births. For some miscegenation between Māori and Pākehā was unavoidable, therefore ordinary and acceptable, especially if it enabled more rapid assimilation of Māori (Anderson, 1991). According to Brookes (2007), unlike other colonised lands, Aotearoa/New Zealand had no legislative barrier to intermarriage and therefore such marriages became common. The continued welfare of Aotearoa/New Zealand as a fledging colonising nation depended on hybridity, although it was a hybrid identity that privileged Pākehā customs and beliefs as the desirable norm. Hegemonic governance meant that Western cultural practices were valued, and their dominant discourses inscribed the bodies of 'others' (Bell, 2004), including the illegitimate.

To construct a hybrid identity implicates institutions and power relations, as the grafting of one culture onto another is not a symmetrical process. Relations of social power have, and continue to disperse and scatter groups of people throughout the world (K. Smith, 2008), including adoptees. The hybrid identity is embedded in and constructed by larger social discourses, including discourses of class, gender, race and culture (Luke & Luke, 1999). A hybrid identity always relates to other categories of identity, such as gender and race. They mould, shape, enable and constrain one another. Producing assimilated bodies and respectable citizenship saw the alienation and fragmentation of any 'authentic' cultural identity. Nonetheless, 'authenticity' in relation to identity continued to be valued and this is understood in cultural studies as resistance to colonialist practices that robbed indigenous peoples of their culture and identity (K. Smith, 2008).

Most recently, the notion of hybridity was re-appropriated within postcolonial and cultural studies that were embedded within social constructionist epistemology. Here it is argued that identity is not an essentialised phenomenon that enables racial purity but that identity is historical, cultural and contextual all of which matter to the constitution and experience of subjectivity. Within the social sciences, hybridity is now conceptualised as a process of separation from racial, ethnic and/or cultural practices through colonisation (Bell, 2004; C. Smith, 1994; K. Smith, 2008). There are still arguments that caution the use of hybridity because of the way in which it can reduce a dominant culture with all others. Hybridising by the dominant culture can be perceived as a continuation of the colonial power that enabled assimilation and dislocation. Hybridity may be regarded as an abusive term for those who are produced through miscegenation and mix breeding (Bell, 2004; Meredith, 1998; Young, 1999). The essentialism that is associated with authenticity may be evoked strategically to resist colonising discourse and practices.

For Bell (2004), cultural hybridity references processes of regeneration and dynamic change, yet any claims of hybridity must be contextualised because ontological hybridity, the identities that

“arise from the *mixture* of two or more cultural origins” (p. 125), does not represent the removal of essentialism. Likewise, Young (1999) argues that, for some, hybridity echoes nineteenth century eugenicist and racist thought. There is still a sense of the natural or the essential embedded in the social science metaphor, evoked by the idea of the rootstock onto which another culture is grafted. Here, hybridity hybridises the ideas from plant biology and the social sciences; it does not elide essentialism.

Associations of identity to the essential can be problematic and are represented in Webber’s (2008) arguments about cultural hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Webber (2008) states that, since one in every 10 citizens belong to more than one ethnic group, we need to reconceptualise our national identity to embrace diversity. However, a dilemma ensues for those who are unable to locate themselves in an ethnic or racial social category; if an easy fit into a particular group is not always possible then dominant discourse serves to position them in an in-between space. Not to ‘fit’ into an ethnic, or a racial group, opens a gap, where a hybrid subject resides in-between - in the no-man’s land. For example, one might carry the markers of a particular race, as defined by biological characteristics or phenotypes, yet they do not fit into the assumed ethnic or cultural practices (shared meanings, language, food, customs) associated with that race. Alternatively, one might not carry the markers of a particular race and yet still take up the cultural practice of that group. To reside in this position is tenuous and requires the ongoing negotiation of the borders between.

Such experiences occur for adopted subjects as they negotiate the borders or fall between the gaps. Attempts at matching the physical characteristics and intelligence of the adopted subject and the *as if born to* family aimed to maintain the secret of the ‘complete break’ and improve relationships. However, an authentic connection was not always possible because the mirror of heredity was not there. Techniques of matching could not replicate familial traits and characteristics as embedded in biological and genetic discourse. Social relationships became fraught when adoptees did not take up the *as if born to* genetic histories, for instance in their struggles with the family tree activities at school. Participants who did not ‘match’ physical characteristics were already positioned as different. While devoid of blood tie and genealogical knowledge, taking up a hybrid metaphor to story their experiences can be problematic. They may have racial markers but have no knowledge of where their racial markers originate or what they mean because the *born to* relationships have been severed or if renewed the ancestral information is limited or unavailable.

Unlike a hybrid identity that can represent the mix of two or more races when blood tie links are known, the hybrid identity for an adopted person can be a struggle if it is embedded within essentialist discourses. Adoptees may be positioned within the ethnic and cultural practices of a particular social group because of their *as if born to* identity yet the social discourses of blood as ‘real’ family means they may not fit with cultural markers of identity. While hybridity is embedded in the essentialist discourse of blood-as-kinship, an adopted person can be reminded of their location outside of a hybrid identity that values blood as the racial, ethnic and cultural symbol of essence. While positioned here, the experience of different or other can be reinforced, so that it is difficult for adoptees

to identify with either 'side' of a hybridised position. Once again the adopted subject is returned to their sense of origin in no-man's land.

Bolatagici (2004) acknowledges the contradictions and struggles that happen while living in-between cultural or social groups. At this juncture, hybridity discards a racial and/or ethnic type of categorisation because it appreciates that some people are unable to take up specific positions within those categories, instead it signifies a coexistence that enables the representation and interplay between the different subject positions (Bolatagici, 2004; Carrillo, 1999; Webber, 2008), or locations within a family. For instance, when the participants were positioned as special or chosen by the 'good' *as if born to* family they simultaneously took up the position of not chosen first by the *born to* family. While being fed narratives of being special or chosen some experienced abuse that included sexual and violent acts. Being 'special' and 'abused', 'chosen' and 'rejected' were coexisting positions that preclude one place or the other as 'fitting' easily within their lived experiences. For that reason the participants needed to negotiate the positions and the movements between *born to* and *as if born to*, and chosen and not chosen. Similarly, after a reunion the adopted subject moves between the right, duties and obligations of the adopted position and the birth position within each family system, according to the needs of each. Often the *born to* family and the *as if born to* family are ignorant to the emotional and psychological needs of the adoptee, leaving them with the responsibility of care for all family members. Brandon experienced inappropriate comments about his *as if born to* mother by his *born to* mother, for example. In these dynamics adoptees are vulnerable to more hurt and are sensitive to ensuring everyone is cared for. Hybridity can enable the adopted subject to negotiate these family landscapes by enabling a blurring of the boundaries and the distinctions between the various constituents of an adopted identity, such as needing to move between being a compliant birth child while agreeing with his birth mother's scornful comments towards his adoptive mother and being the grateful adoptee and defending his adoptive mother.

Dual identity is another concept, like the metaphor of hybridity that values the constant interaction that occurs between families, including inevitable tensions. Within cultural studies, Carrillo (1999) argues that dual identities can exist, in some cases without contradiction. In his study of Mexican males' understandings of homosexual identities, it was found that notions of hybridity offer fluidity because of the contrasting positions that are made possible in a hybrid culture. Inside his research population (urban, middle-class), the rules about identity and sexuality enabled masculine and feminine identities to be lived concurrently. One can identify with a sexual group (I am gay), while also taking up social discourses of being masculine. However, there are also costs here, according to Carrillo (1999), in that these men sacrifice equality in order to enact their lifestyle without stigmatisation. They do not speak up politically for gay rights, as is the case in other countries. In a sense, they conform to mainstream social discourses of heterosexuality as norm to maintain their connections to wider society because of their desire to belong and maintain relationships with families. They enact the culturally sanctioned practice of silence.

Like the participants in Carrillo's (1999) work, conforming through silence enables adoptees to manage positions in social discourses that produce the adopted subject and serves to protect them from the hurt that challenging the adopted experience might entail. As I have argued, adoptees carry the responsibility, in a sense, of protecting themselves, their immediate family, their adoptive family and their birth families from the social disruption that may occur if the truth of their lived experience was to surface. Explicitly stating that the adoptee feels 'different', 'alone' or 'less than' risks blaming the adoptive family or shaming the birth mother. It risks the self-exposure of difference and otherness and rejection by non-adoptees who may not understand. Publically challenging any violation of human rights associated with adoption also carries such risks. There are consequences to speaking out.

While situated in a social mix, the metaphor of hybridity enables an understanding of the effects of colonisation on identities. Here institutions and social power relations are implicated with the grafting of two or more cultures being an asymmetrical process where the dominant culture and race is privileged. And while essentialist discourses of blood-as-kin dominate, adoptees as 'different' and 'other,' as lacking knowledge and experience of their genealogical history, are repositioned in no-man's land. The living in-between produces contradictions and struggles, yet while valuing identity as a historical, cultural and contextual practice that matters to the experience of subjectivity, hybridity can also mean the coexistence of different and contesting subject positions. When living both *born to* and *as if born to* adoptees are required to negotiate the space between and the terrain on both sides and carry the burden of the risk of social sanctions.

### **In the hyphen**

Another way that the metaphor of hybridity is understood is by locating it at the hyphen between identities. While studying Muslim youth residing in the USA post 9/11, Fine and Sirin (2007) consider a framework for hyphenated selves as a way of theorising identities within fluctuating social contexts. They argue that the hyphen is a "dynamic social-psychological space where political arrangements and individual subjectivities meet ... the psychological texture of the hyphen is substantially informed by history, media, surveillance, politics, nation of origin, gender, biography, longings, imagination, and loss" (p. 21). Discourses normalising blood kinship permeate the dynamic space of political, social and psychological 'textures' through which adoptees are positioned. How the hyphen is negotiated depends on particular contexts, including work, family environment or even talking with a friend, and they are informed historically, politically and socially by discourse. You can be born at the hyphen, in the cracks between (the no-man's land) that produce social identities.

Residing in the hyphen represents different experiences for different people; it can be disturbing or a 'space of shame' that involves feelings of anxiety (Fine & Sirin, 2007). For example, the hyphen metaphor can represent the way in which adoptees are positioned as no-one and belonging no-where. While not fitting within the *as if born to* position and having no biological family connection a gap is opened for the adopted subject: a lack that is realised though the legally fictitious identity of *as*

*if born to*. Shelly, Barry, Brendon, Alice, Vaughan and Margaret all storied feeling alone when noticing their lack in the adoptive identity. They questioned their own legitimacy when they could not experience a blood link. In this position the relational link that is not blood emerges and adoptees can become acutely aware of their difference from those constituted through normative discourse of blood-as-kinship. Here the gap represents the hyphen, a conduit to no-man's land. For an adoptee, in an embodied space, the time in neither *born to* nor *as if born to*, is a metaphoric birth at the hyphen and without significant care they are not returned to their original *born to* position, but to a space in-between. Negotiating this space relies on the context in which the hyphen is experienced. For example, participants did not think that others, including the state, understood or considered their experience as important enough for legal reform. The hyphen was experienced as a lonely and isolating space. Yet when supported, accepted and understood the hyphen can produce the truly remarkable adopted subject, who has empathy and insight.

Hybridity can represent "disruption" and "forcing" when "making difference into sameness [and] sameness into difference" (Young, 1999, p. 26). In this sense when constituting the *born to* as the *as if born to* discourses that constitute a child the same and connected within their families at birth constitute adoptees as dissimilar and disconnected: as Maxine said, "I'll never be anybody's biological child" (195). In forcing her to live *as if* the same as her adoptive family, her *born to* connection with her biological family was disrupted. This connection can never be fully repaired even after a birth family reunion - there will always be a cut. For some of the participants, the differences with their adoptive family were a forced and fictional similarity constituted from discourses normalising family as essentially connected by blood. Brendon, for example, stories how hard it was being raised in his adoptive family because his mum "was so different" (187). He didn't appreciate the significance of how different she was until he met his birth mother.

Young (1999) also discusses the way in which hybridity makes one from two separate and distinct things, such as a plant, however for the adopted subject the making of one did not occur with the grafting event. Instead what was once 'whole' when *born to*, was broken into two with the production of the *as if born to*. And although hybridity enables a valuing of both fragments, living as a fragment or the space in-between is full of tension. According to Young (1999). Derrida's logic of brisure, the simultaneous breaking and joining, a hinge that produces binary operations signifies the way in which hybridity forces the limitation of one by the other. In a sense, the felt presence of the absence mirrors and is a reminder of the breaking. This metaphor can be applied to adoptees as they live a lifetime swinging between brokenness (*as if born to*) and joining (*born to*) and sometimes they hang in-between.

Problematically, notions of essentialism invoke the sense of brokenness for adoptees. As discussed earlier, essentialism produces identities that are embedded in discourses of race, class, gender and culture that normalise fixed positions. Yet to live in the hyphen of a hybrid identity is a dynamic space that is reliant on shifting social and political contexts (Fine & Sirin, 2007). It is not a static

classification that hyphenates locations between inert racial, class, gendered or familial categories. Importantly, Bolatagici (2004) warns that a hyphen metaphor can obscure the complexity of living a mixed race identity because when located at the hyphen one can be reduced to the sum of their parts with the hyphen representing a juncture, a land fault that is both fixed and unfixable. Bolatagici (2004) highlights that the implication of a fissure leaves a perception of mixed race people having an innate disunion, which is not always the case. Similarly, living in the hyphen does not represent 'disunion' for all adoptees. For instance some of the participants storied having great insight and empathy from the experience of living in the hyphen, especially after they come to accept this position.

While the hyphen is informed by discourses of psychopathology, those in the hyphen are readily positioned in such a way as to be pathologised as they experience 'brokenness' as an individualised problem of their essential identity, rather than a consequence of their positioning in essentialist and normalised discourse of family. Political battles can ensue when attempting to argue for alternative position at the hyphen that foregrounds the social power relations constituting deficit positions. For example, while some advocates for adoption legal reform emphasise the harm that has been done to individuals by adoption, others, such as Bastard Nation in USA, advocate for the civil and human rights of adoptees to enable law reform (Bastard Nation, 2012). They do not argue for law reform because pathological disorders are attributed to adoption (Browning, 2006). Some even argue that pathological stigmatisation has occurred because law reform advocates present psychological disorder as justification for opening records, rather than the human rights issues of loss and identity (Carp, 2007). While the political and social contexts meet and mould subjectivity, how adoptees will experience themselves while positioned at the hyphen, perhaps as disordered and/or as suffering loss of their human rights, remains dynamic and complex.

Although the arguments against pathology for law reform are necessary, for some adoptees, the lifetime in-between cannot be fixed and by representing the hyphen it can enable the adopted subject to have a voice. Adoptees lack discourse to speak of their embodied relationships with the absent (m)other. They have no language in which to speak through the gaps and silences. And when adoptees attempt to narrate the secrets and silence that produce their subjective body "it's hard to describe" (Barry, 415). When adoptees try to talk about the juncture between *born to* and *as if born to* it is difficult in a world that privileges blood tie kinship as family and here the adopted subject becomes acutely aware of their lack of genealogical connection and their *born to* loss. In this space the adopted experience is neither understood nor valued by others.

Since a hyphenated identity is informed by often conflicting or contradictory social and political conditions, including discourses that construct mothers as she who raises the child or the felt mother as she who has birthed the child, the *born to* and the *as if born to* identities necessitate negotiation. This takes effort, strategies of management and the valuing of the complexity of this existence in-between. The participants' stories tell of how they manage negotiation at the hyphen that includes repressing emotions or other identities, taking mood and mind altering substances and/or

acting out with anger. For instance Sally used “shutting down” (372) techniques, while Toni found “blocking off” (508) or disconnecting from the difficult emotions as the only way to cope with painful lived experiences of being adopted. For Vaughn staying positive by a “harden the fuck up” (717) motto let his everyday life be lived. These techniques of management are readily constituted through discourses of pathology as deficits or disorders. Such disconnection processes also resonate with the cutting that occurred when removed from the *born to* family. Participants also spoke of negotiating their difference from their *as if born to* families, managing in the between place of identities. Cooley went as far as inscribing her body heavily with tattoos to accentuate her difference. All but three participants used mood and mind altering substances to help with surviving the pain and confusion of living in the hyphen - the no-man’s land. This produced other problematic life experiences and complexities that meant some participants took up psychological discourses to account for their struggles, rather than understanding the political, social and psychological ‘textures’ of adoption as constituting their experiences.

Two important management strategies were the abilities to adapt and accept. Often experiencing aloneness and consequently feeling the need to be self-reliant because of belonging to no-one and belonging no-where adoptees must adapt to this existence, both lived and felt, and accept that this is the way it is. There is no way back. Maxine, Alice, Barry, Cooley, Toni, Shelly, Sally and Vaughn all narrated acceptance as necessary to wellbeing: “There’s no undoing that, can’t undo that stuff it’s happened we can’t wind the clock back” (Vaughn, 880). The effects of being constituted within the ‘closed stranger’ adoption period are permanent; there is no way to regain the experience of being raised in and cared for by the *born to* family.

Even though acceptance is crucial to coping, according to Griffith (1991), fantasy about the relinquishing event, birth family reunion or substitute adoptive parents can occur at any time. When home life is problematic, adoptees can use fantasy as a way to cope. Most of the participants in this research did not speak about fantasies, which I suspect reflect the process of acceptance that can occur while at living at the hyphen. For Brendon and his adopted friends, to wish that adoption did not happen was to wish the loss of life because abortion was the alternative. Such binary tensions - including illegitimate/legitimate, blood/not blood, chosen/not chosen, mother/not mother - shape their experience of the world. To reside at the hyphen requires unique skills that produce particular experiences.

According to K. Smith (2008), the possibility of negotiating borders and boundaries, including bodies, language, culture and race can be advantageous because occupying hybrid space enables knowledge both locally and globally. While transcending two cultures, knowledge of both enables diversity, multiplicity and fluidity. The hybrid is able to mould, blend and perhaps conform to take up positions that are required within specific cultures. Here frequent renegotiation removes the sense of dislocation or alienation and enables new relationships within specific cultural practices to merge to construct a new hybrid culture. Innovative family rituals that blend both cultural practices may be

incorporated in the family structure. Death is an example of this whereby both Māori and Pākehā customs can be merged, with Pākehā including Māori traditions of taking the body home. Similarly, although not as common, experiences of both the *born to* and the *as if born to* families coming together for celebrations or to care for the needs of the adoptee are seen. For instance Alice's birth mother worked together with her adoptive mother to help Alice when she began to act out as an adolescent. Barry has ongoing struggles with problematic alcohol and drug use so both his birth and adoptive families come together for family meetings, including group therapy, to work with and support him.

After coming to the position of acceptance the participants represent themselves as having amazing qualities because of living the adoption event. They have great empathy and insight into the human condition, and this knowledge enables them to move between cultures and communities in a way that values subjugation and difference. Some of the participants storied that an effect of adoption producing them on the margins as 'other' and belonging no-where is that they value difference in others and engage with people with a level of caring and understanding because of their own lived pain. These types of life skills are not found in a book, they are unique to the effects, for some, of living in-between. The adopted subject can have fluidity and acceptance of a history of adoption takes away any sense of lack at being 'second best' or 'less than' - the deficit. The adopted subject can now take up a narrative of hero; they are truly remarkable for living a life in-between.

### **Hybridity as a Third Space**

From a hybrid metaphor there also emerges the possibility of a third space. This third space links to notions of living in the hyphen, although it produces particular positions and enables different knowledge. Like the hyphen, the third space is informed by social and political discourses and context that shape and move the space accordingly. For example, Meredith (1998) argued that a third space needed to be valued in social movements that addressed bicultural concerns in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Bicultural politics needed a more critical paradigm to reconsider or remove the binary assumptions implicit in discourses of culture and identity for and between Māori and Pākehā. To enable this Meredith advocated for the use of Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the third space because it became possible to reconceptualise the us/them binary into both/and, a relationship that acknowledges difference as well as values commonalities between cultures.

Meredith (1998) interpreted Bhabha's use of hybridity as explaining how culture and identity are produced within a climate of colonial antipathy and discrimination. In this sense, hybridity is a process of governmentality where attempts to interpret a colonised identity within a Westernised universal framework fail and instead something comparable but new is enabled. A hybrid identity emerges from the blending of elements of the coloniser and colonised; the space in-between culturally and racially bounded subject positions. Like the hyphen, this metaphor of a hybrid identity producing a space between is necessary for conceptualising adopted experiences too. As previously argued, while adoptees and their identities are described within a normative framework of blood links, they are

understood in particular ways as less than or “second-class” (Shelly, 555) and fail to privilege adoptees’ unique subjective experience. Equally, while located within clinical populations adoptees are pathologised and any mental health disorder is individual deficit because lived reality is not understood outside of taken-for-granted family norms produced within blood-tie-link discourse. The position of being both *born to* and *as if born to* is not necessarily valued; it is quite simply either/or.

In Bhabha’s theorising, according to Meredith (1998), hybridity acts as a solution to the way in which essentialism problematically constitutes attributes as inherent to an entity by enabling a space to disrupt and displace racist colonial discourse. Negotiation can occur. Established boundaries and categorisation of identity and culture are blurred. Practices of traversing cultures enable an interpretation and the negotiation of the differences and similarities between the cultures, while sustaining reciprocal and inclusive exchange between them. Hybridity is more than a reflexive space, it is a productive location that enables new possibilities to emerge. To understand adoption as a hybrid identity that occupies a third space enables adoptees to produce language for their subjective experience without blood-tie discourse and its associated assumptions as the context for interpretation. Importantly here, while elements of *born to* and *as if born to* are merged, new adoptive space is possible:

My dream is that we understand that family and our connection to it, to our genetic family, to our biological family is huge. It is who we are, it’s not just who we are right now, but it’s who, where we’ve come from, it’s, it is our (tears), it is our ancestors. (Barry, 1745)

For Bhabha (1990), hybridity is understood through a psychoanalytic lens as a process of identification involving the ‘other’/object with which the subject identifies, not an identity in-between them. Within this theoretical framework, the subject is understood as being ambivalent because of their relationship to otherness. Here, hybridity carries the traces of emotions and practices that inform it, always connecting to the other meanings and discourses through which it is constituted. Trace can be understood as signifiers of the future and the past, which occur in the moment, but which is neither. In Bhabha’s (1990) account, the third space does not arise from being able to trace any two original moments; hybridity is the third space. This third space shifts the histories that construct it, and enables the emergence of new structures and political positions from the cultural relationships of the past. In this way, I suspect that historical moments toward law reform could be constituted as shifting the history of adoption through the third space of political and social activism taken up by particular adopted subjects, for example, Keith Griffith. Here, the political voice for legal reform enabled the inception of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, providing access to the birth mother’s name. Reunion became possible.

The third space metaphor enables a narrative about the embodied traces of the birth (m)other/object while also valuing the way in which those traces inform any reunion process and

identification with and through the birth mother. Even when a reunion has been realised and is problematic, what is made possible means adoptees straddle different worlds. They live and experience the *born to* and the *as if born to* when they are negotiating and relating to both families. A reunion can mean the histories that construct the third space can be shifted and transformed. In their work on adoption reunions, Trinder et al. (2004) describe the way in which reunions can enable adoptees to know themselves, differently. This occurs when events such as finding answers to questions about blood connections, whakapapa and origins make it possible to reconcile the *born to* and *as if born to* identities. They can realise what it means to have been relinquished and look at the effects of growing up in the different *as if born to* family and how this helped to construct their sense of themselves. While taking up, understanding and living two identities, a third hybrid identity can emerge for the adopted subject. In a sense, a shift in the histories that construct the adopted subject enables a new position to emerge. And importantly the shift in space is also possible outside of having *born to* knowledge but it is achieved differently. As narrated previously, adaptation and acceptance enable a new space to emerge whereby the adoptee can value both positions and the possibilities of the third space that unique, self-reflexive knowledge enables.

Within a third space the merging of elements of identities can surpass binary assumptions of either the *born to* or the *as if born to* into both/and which acknowledges adoptees' dual positions while valuing the commonalities within. A metaphor of hybridity enables new space for producing knowledge of identity and subjectivity in a world that is culturally diverse and globalised (Bell, 2004; K. Smith, 2008). Hybridity as a mixing or blending of identity occurs through experience within those particular contexts that produce those identities. In this way hybridity enables inclusivity and represents the ways in which identities are shaped and form over time. It is at the intersection that disruption of taken-for-granted discourse can occur where histories are shifted and adoptees find a voice and produce new political positions.

### **A Hybrid Story**

This chapter investigates the metaphor of hybridity as a way to story adopted identities and subjectivities that have been enabled and constrained within particular institutions and social power relations. The hard sciences understand hybridity to be the grafting of one plant onto another and when located here, within a discourse of essentialism, the metaphor of hybridity produces a gap. Without blood tie links the adopted subject can experience not belonging in either the *born to* or the *as if born to* families and when this occurs the adoptee takes up residence in no-man's land. In this context, hybridity does not adequately represent an in-between space, the no-man's land that adoptees always, already encounter. Their first lived experience of no-man's land at the time of birth is not the last. During their lifetime adoptees often return to that space. Hybridity can mask unequal social power relations and often the dominant culture will emerge. Hybridity falls short of its task when the fusion is not defined or when adoptees are unable to meld or hinge the *born to* and *as if born to* identities

together. Hybridity as the grafting of one onto another is also fragile when feelings or emotions are ignored. The experience of adoption is lived, felt and embodied and this matters to what the hybrid metaphor can produce.

However, by realising hybridity is itself a hybrid (Bell, 2004) and by privileging notions of hybridity that do not take up essentialism as its core, adoptees are able to negotiate a hyphenated identity that is located in difference outside of blood tie kinship as norm. In this sense, knowledge of the *born to* (violent) cut and the grafting of *as if born to* can both be valued, enabling other possibilities to emerge. As a place of resistance hybridity enables the practices of secrecy and silence to be overturned, for example with political movements producing law reform.

And yet hybridity also values the *born to* relationship with or without reunion and can merge the *born to* and *as if born to* identities for adoptees. Here the contractions and struggles of living in-between realises a co-existence and another space becomes possible to negotiate the borders and boundaries between the two. Hybridity allows for the movements and fluidity of a hyphenated self, as we understand. That this identity might swing between brokenness and joining or residing in-between needs to be understood. Positions for adoptees as disorder and deficit can be resisted while also privileging that the lifetime in-between cannot be fixed. Ongoing legal reform is possible from a hybrid space where they can find the voice and the language to share the adopted experience with its unique and embodied ways. Bell (2004) states that hybridised identities open up a space between 'essence' and identity to allow for choice in the identities that are taken up. This work takes this knowledge and applies it to adopted experiences, enabling adopted subjects to have their unique and particular experiences and positions within lived events, including their upbringing, and claim an identity that best fits how they know themselves.

*With the dual citizenship of being an adoptee and a researcher I have existed in a liminal state. It has been both emotional and uncomfortable as I go between the interpretation and representation of the participants' experiences (and mine), and realise that through making visible the invisible it enables the place of no-man's land to be 'claimed'. When Mary expressed the metaphor of no-man's land it resonated with my own embodied knowing. It enabled me to access that which has always been out of reach. It explained the 'essence' of living life on the outer boundaries, fitting but never fitting, belonging but never belonging, knowing oneself but never quite. The embodiment of nullius filius is taken up as the 'truth' of who I am forever positioned as belonging to no-one and belonging no-where. Living in no-man's land is only ever a moment away. Through the inter-subjective spaces, and in relationship with others, I/we can be returned there, forever triggered into abandonment, rejection and 'other'. Ambivalence informs the landscape of no-man's land. It is inherent and unspeakable.*

## **Chapter 11:**

### **Coda - Contemporary Implications**

*Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others,  
or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope ...  
and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples  
build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance  
(Robert F. Kennedy, 1925-1968).*

## Coda - Contemporary Implications

The principal aim of this research was to ‘trouble’ how adoption is understood within psychology and how that understanding matters to those subjected to the legislation. This thesis is also necessarily a political intervention to relocate our understanding of the lived effects of adoption so that the contradictions in the origins of knowledge that locate natural deficit in the adoptee can be contested, and so it becomes possible to make visible a meaningful process in addressing the effects of loss and disconnection.

As I read through the literature I questioned the legislative history and psychological narratives associated with the social, cultural and material conditions that produced adopted subjectivities, feelings and lived experience. A critical reading of the literature and the participants’ narratives turned the thesis question from asking about the way in which the embodied effects of the Adoption Act 1955 mattered to adoptees and how adoptees’ narratives are understood in psychology, to questioning how the moral order of the legislation enabled and constrained adoptees’ subject positions, and implicated social power relations in their constitution. At the heart of addressing this question, the metaphor of no-man’s land served to organise participants’ stories and name the moral narrative through which legislation positioned, enabled and constrained them.

From the moment of legally legitimating the child *as if born to*, adoptees are constituted in and through a moral order; reproduced in legal fiction to become who they are biologically not. Adoptees were forbidden by legislation to know their *born to* families and were instead bound to a lifelong association with ‘strangers’. Practices of secrecy served to silence, constrain and reproduce adoptees’ sense of shame as immoral beings because of their illegitimate origins at birth and that perpetuates adoptees’ positioning in a moral order as a felt experience with particular psychosocial consequences. For some the legal sanction of a veto means the silence and the ‘lack’ endures through repeated denial of access to a *born to* genealogy and birth family connection with emotionally devastating effects. Practices of matching the child to the *as if born to* family often failed to hide difference when ‘personality’ and physical characteristics were so obviously different; for those affected it accentuated the lie and reminded adoptees of their ‘difference’. In our social world, with its emphasis on blood as the basis for kinship, adoptees have a subjective knowing that they do not belong. The practice of *as if born to* failed in its aims to ameliorate the social and moral consequences of illegitimacy and rather than reverse the ‘wrong’ it can now be understood as producing harm. For us the violence of the ‘cut’ is embodied and limits the possibility of normalised relationships within either *born to* and the *as if born to* families where assumptions of blood as kin produce real relationships.

While adoption can represent different experiences for different subjects, for adoption to be perceived as simply a variation to the formation of an ordinary family is to overlook the complexity

of the social practices that produce the adopted subject that involves a process of relinquishment and legal fiction (McGinn, 2000). Adoption does not produce problems for everyone and indeed there are some adoptees that protest any psychopathological problems such as identity diffusion or abandonment fears. Even so, the practice of adoption can and does produce aversive psychological experiences and those experiences can reappear repeatedly at different times and in different ways. As this research showed, maladaptive coping through alcohol and drug misuse, fear of rejection as well as an exaggerated sense of aloneness can be felt. Ludbrook (1997) states, the “consequences of adoption can be painful, hurtful, wounding to [all] the people involved” (p. 57). Acknowledging the grief, rejection and dislocation as embedded in social power relations makes it possible to resist the dominant psychological narrative that positions adoptees as ‘disordered’.

The moral trajectory of *nullius filius* produces the inevitability of no-man’s land, the wretched space outside social norms. Adoptees live the tension of this socio-political location, the legislated space of being, the indeterminate position of neither *born to* nor *as if born to*; entrapped in the embodied meanings of lack and belonging no-where. The experience of no-man’s land is itself barely perceivable to the adoptee; it is a lived embodied experience that is a permanent residence of in-between. Living as an adoptee involves felt, embodied experiences that are difficult to express.

By taking up a hybrid metaphor it becomes possible for adoptees to occupy unique psychosocial spaces that provide opportunities for compassion and recognition of other people’s struggles on the margins. It also goes some way towards enabling adoptees to take up particular strategies of acceptance when they come to terms with the knowledge that they cannot undo the human rights violations of being constituted as a legal fiction. In this position they can resist the discursive positioning as ‘bad’, ‘wrong’ or ‘less than’ for residing outside of blood as kin norms.

To achieve some form of reconciliation for the whakapapa mamae, the history of hurting, that endures for adoptees constituted within the ‘closed’ adoption period, I have argued that a metaphor of hybridity enables the lifetime of living in-between to be realised and provides a position from which healing can occur. In a third space adoptees can negotiate the landscape between the *born to* and *as if born to*. Recognising the complex interplay between both positions produces the possibility of fluid movements between the two. While valuing a shift in history, a psy-discourse of pathology can be restoried to take account of the socio-political context of adoption. In this way, adoptees can be understood as living a normal response to abnormalised positioning within the dominance of blood-tie discourse. Legal reform is possible from a hybrid space where the adopted voice is spoken and listened to and the language to share the adopted experience is valued in an embodied sense. I, therefore, argue that the adopted subjects be acknowledged as the truly, remarkable subjects that they are.

## Implications for Health Professionals

This thesis is also a socio-political intervention into ethical research and practice. In this way I call attention to how psychology understands adoption, and because this work is embedded within the discipline of psychology, it is imperative that I challenge the way in which psychological discourse constructs this crucial human rights issue as an individualised psychological problem. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, health professionals discriminate against adoptees when they position them as disordered and deficit, while ignoring the moral, political and psychosocial conditions that constitute the adoptee. Psychology reproduces the same position for adoptees as the legislation that produces the adopted subject.

Little research exists on the knowledge that mental health professionals bring to their work with adoptees, and I suspect this lack of research perpetuates ignorance of the lived experience of adoption within the mental health field. Of the research that I did review, all were damning, in some sense, about the lack of expertise within the mental health field. For instance, as previously mentioned, Cubito and Brandon (2000) found that professionals lack knowledge of the lived significance of adoption and any knowledge they do have is based on taken for granted generalisations. I argue that this lack in knowledge delimits critical reflection and any possibility for change in how professionals understand adoptees' lived experiences unless space is available for transforming psychological discourse to take account of their understandings. Similarly, Post (2000) claims that a majority of psychologists in the USA are not taught about adoption and its associated problematics, even though five to 10 percent of their patients are part of an adoption triad. This lack in professional knowledge means that secrecy and silence are preserved, and in this way psychologists are sharing in the legal fiction of *as if born to*. When they ignore the practices of adoption as an antecedent to 'psychological issues' health professionals deal with the presenting psychological problems; they attend to the deficit, but not adoption and the lived effects. They remain complicit to the human rights violations of secrecy and silence.

Another study in the USA established that court professionals were unable to understand or acknowledge the effects of living as an adoptee, although there are adult adoptees in every American prison and adopted adolescents make up 20 percent of the population in alcohol and drug rehabilitation programmes (Carangelo, 2003). Issues of ethical practice with adoptees are not just problematic for psychologists since many health professionals provide services to adoptees. They also share in perpetuating silence if they do not attend to the socio-political implications of the moral trajectory of *as if born to*. I maintain that the lack in knowledge of adoptees is systemically shared through taken for granted discourses, across the field. More recent research<sup>16</sup> conducted by Baden and O'Leary Wiley

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<sup>16</sup> As adoption contexts have changed and as intercountry and interracial adoption have become common practice, more research now explores therapeutic strategies within intercountry or transracial adoptions. For example see: Malott, K. M., & Schmidt, C. D. (2012). Counseling families formed by transracial adoption: Bridging the gap in the multicultural counseling competencies. *The Family Journal*, 20(4), 384-391. doi: 10.1177/1066480712451231

(2007) argues that although adult adoptees have been empirical research participants for the past 50 years, such research focuses on heritability or adoption adjustment and neglects domains of professional practice. That psychological discourse performs the normalising function of the legal fiction means that it ignores the way in which practices have effects. These effects matter to adoptees' lived experience and to remain uninformed is unethical practice.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand professional knowledge of adoption is similarly limited because adoption is also overlooked as an ongoing lived event. Only one of the adoptees participating in this research had engaged a professional who understood her experiences, and only then after a careful and deliberate search to find someone sensitive to her concerns. In the main, our experience of working with mental health professionals to deal with the issues that arise from our earliest positioning with legal and social relationships is that we are neither heard, nor understood. This may well be a consequence of broad compliance with the taken for granted norms of family and the secrecy and silence that perpetuates adoptees' pain. Research aims and perspectives that inform professional training continue to see, hear and understand adoptees as if their birthrights are 'normal' because they are lawful. Psychologists and other mental health professionals need to understand the social and psychological effects of the Adoption Act 1955 as a normalising intervention that failed. This thesis implores mental health professionals to listen to the lived experiences of adoptees on their own terms and refuse to be complicit with governing legislation, strategies of silence and regimes of normalisation from which adoptees are excluded.

The value of psychological counselling or therapy is not contested here. Adoptees draw from psychological discourse to make sense of their embodied, felt experiences, when access to knowledge of the narrative constitution as a legal fiction is not understood and they take up mental health services as needed. Professionals working with adoptees can potentially enable them to cope with psychological and embodied emotion, including distress that can arise from living in-between. They could also support adoptees to negotiate mutually beneficial reunion relationships. However health professionals need to acknowledge the impact that adoption has on the lives of those who are affected (Gladstone & Westhues, 1998) and reflexively critique their lack of knowledge, and their position in relation to normalising discourses of family, to ensure their practice is ethical. Attending to the psychosocial effects of living a fiction would enable the possibility of relationships outside of normal blood-as-kin, for example explaining post-reunion relationships as varied and unique (Gladstone & Westhues, 1998), would enable health professionals to share social responsibility for changing power relations that produce the lived embodied effects of adoption. Sharing social responsibility for change encapsulates an understanding of a third space that opens possibilities for resisting the human rights violations of an unjust and archaic law. There is already a history of resistance, a movement effecting socio-political change for adoption practices, as with the inception of the Adult Information Act 1985. The third space is a reflexive space from which to politicise the pathologising of adoptees as deficit and acknowledge that the deficit lies in the practices of adoption not within the adoptees themselves.

Henderson's (2002) plea for mental health professionals to find a political voice means refusing to be complicit in the state sanctioned moral, social and political trajectories that produce the legitimate subject and challenging strategies of secrecy and silence to support healing and reconciliations for all involved. To address this plea, I have produced this thesis and have also presented some of the key arguments in both academic articles (see Appendix F) and conference presentations. I have argued the necessity of privileging the contextual situatedness of living in and through adoption, rather than the legal determinates of the Act. The adoptees who took part in this research located the failure of governments to bring about legislative change in institutional power in separating the lived history from the legislation itself. The consequences reproduce the individual as the problem. Research that continues to collect 'evidence' on the injury done to all parties through statutory secrecy is ignored. Adoptees often become upset when parts of their stories are absent and it matters that the state continues to position their experience as unworthy to address. Although the Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua o te Ture* (2000) reviewed the adoption law and proposed legislative changes, they still have not occurred.

## **Reconciliation**

In 2008, I watched tearfully as Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister of Australia apologised to the indigenous population of Australia for their 'Stolen Generations', a social engineering that took tens of thousands of children from their biological parents because the moral trajectory of racism assumed that being raised in white settings was better than within Aboriginal culture. An apology was made for the laws and policies of previous governments, for the hurt, trauma and injustice suffered (Keenan, 2008).

The issues experienced by the 'Stolen Generations' resonate with 'closed' adoption. The events of 'closed' adoption are also a product of social engineering, whereby social discourses deemed that children were best served if removed from the *born to* 'bad' families. Illegitimate children needed to be shaped, moulded and changed to fit the 'norm' or respected criteria of citizenship. Throughout 2012, adoption continuously appeared in the Aotearoa/New Zealand media as various Australian states apologised to unwed mothers for the injustice they experienced at the hands of the state as a result of a Senate Committee report for the Australian Government. This report acknowledged that from the 1940s through to 1970s the Commonwealth's policies and the social practices engineered the coercion of many young, unmarried Australian women to relinquish their babies. It recognised that forced adoption did occur. Unfortunately however, although the Australian Government is making attempts to reconcile the previous hurts inflicted onto birth mothers our government does not extend the same consideration to Aotearoa/New Zealand's birth mothers.

An apology, according to Cunningham (1999), can enable an expression of regret for a situation whereby one is responsible, but intent to harm was absent. Many marginalised peoples have been given recognition for the wrongs they have endured and as a starting point an apology can promote positive change processes. It is important that the Australian Government recognised the

wrong done to birth mothers with the practices of forced adoption, but an apology also needs to be offered to adoptees. Although a long way from a verbal apology, the first step towards the Aotearoa/New Zealand Government demonstrating accountability for the loss inflicted on adoptees is reformation of the adoption laws. The injustice of the loss of a biological birth history is our whakapapa mamae.

Even if no one can be held responsible for events, policies and so forth that preceded the current government, and even if a generalised expression of regret can suggest a 'politics of gesture' with no accountability attached, an apology still serves a symbolic function. It can imply the acknowledgment of past suffering and the legacies that adoptees carry because of the social and moral trajectories of the Adoption Act 1955. If there is recognition of wrongdoing, then that in itself can act as a form of restitution or reparation (Cunningham, 1999). The current adoption law represents ongoing discrimination against adoptees and birth families. It is archaic and unjust. To change the legislation is, in effect, the beginnings of an apology.

To this day, the Adoption Act 1955 has not been amended to remove the construction of secrecy or to provide adoptees from the 'closed' adoption climate with access to more information than just the birth parents' names. The Aotearoa/New Zealand Government continues to discount law reform, thereby reproducing the social discourses that nurture the morality of the Act's inception. The current sanction of 'open' adoption does not involve legal change to reflect a more contemporary social acceptance of illegitimacy. 'Open' adoption will not be legal until the Adoption Act 1955 is reformed.

## **Postscript: Wade in the Water, Wade in the Water Children...**

For me, the verse 'Wade in the Water' has two meanings. Firstly, there is a connection to the Old and New Testaments; coming down to earth an angel troubled the water, and from that time on those who stepped into the water could be healed. People were relieved of disease. In this sense, wade in the water is a metaphor for troubling the moral trajectory that righted the 'disease' of illegitimacy by making the nullius filius child legitimate - the illegitimate/legitimate salvation.

Secondly, many popular books claim that fugitive slaves used the coded song 'Wade in the Water' to find their way to freedom, after escaping their legitimate owners. Wading in the water was a strategy to fool the 'massa' and the bounty hunters. By wading in the water their scent was lost to hunting bloodhounds on their trail. Here the metaphor resonates with challenges to an immoral legal system that legitimated damaging, often lethal, social relationships. We adoptees from the 'closed' adoption period need to blend our voices in a chorus to guide our way to freedom from legal oppression. We must continue to find ways for our voices to be heard; our stories valued; and our hidden histories revealed. Wade in the water children, wade in the water...

*If you don't believe I've been redeemed*

*God's gonna trouble the water*

*I want you to follow him on down to Jordan stream*

*(I said) My God's gonna trouble the water*

*You know chilly water is dark and cold*

*(I know my) God's gonna trouble the water*

*You know it chills my body but not my soul*

*(I said my) God's gonna trouble the water*

*(Come on let's) wade in the water*

*Wade in the water (children)*

*Wade in the water*

*God's gonna trouble the water*

*(Voices Across Time: American History Through Music, 2013)*



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews**

#### **Birth Plot: Storying Adoptees' Experiences through the 1955 Adoption Act**

#### **QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

To be used as a guideline and prompt only:

Tell me about your experience of being adopted; this could include adoptive family or birth family experiences.

What does being adopted mean for you?

How has adoption impacted on you and in your life?

Are you aware of the 1955 Adoption Act; if so has this had any consequences for you in your life?

How do you feel about this?

## Appendix B: Authority for Release of Transcript



SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY  
 Te Kura Hinengaro Tangata  
 Private Bag 11 222  
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 New Zealand  
 T 64 6 356 9099 extn 2040  
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[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)  
<http://psychology.massey.ac.nz>

### Birth Plot: Storying Adoptees' Experiences through the 1955 Adoption Act

#### AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Denise Blake, in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name printed

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Information Sheet



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### Birth Plot: Storying Adoptees' Experiences through the 1955 Adoption Act

#### INFORMATION SHEET

##### Researcher's Introduction

My name is Denise Blake and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. I will be examining adoptees' experiences of being adopted within the closed adoption climate and the ongoing impact of the 1955 Adoption Act on those experiences. I am conducting the research as part of my Master of Arts degree through Massey University. The contact details for me and for my research supervisor are as follows. Please feel free to contact either of us if you have any questions or concerns regarding the research.

##### *Researcher:*

Denise Blake, PO Box 1257, Wellington

Mobile phone: 021 522 953

e-mail: [deniseblake@xtra.co.nz](mailto:deniseblake@xtra.co.nz)

##### *Supervisor:*

Dr Leigh Coombes, School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North

Phone: (06) 350 5799 ext 2058

e-mail: [L.Coombes@massey.ac.nz](mailto:L.Coombes@massey.ac.nz)

Before deciding whether you wish to be involved, please read this letter carefully to ensure you fully understand the nature of the research project and your rights should you choose to participate.

##### **What is this study about?**

The aim of the study is to explore adoptees' experiences of adoption from the perspectives of the adoptees. My intention is to understand the impact that being adopted has on adoptees' lives. I seek to give voice to the lived experiences of adoptees and the implications of being an adoptee within a closed adoption climate. In this instance, an adoptee must have had a closed adoption, which

occurred between 1955 and 1987. The 'closed' adoption climate is being defined as the period between the 1955 Adoption Act and the inception of the 1985 Adult Adoption Information Act.

### **What would you have to do?**

If you agree to participate you would need to be available for an interview to share your experiences of being adopted. The interviews are intended to enable you to talk about your experience in as much or as little detail as you are comfortable with.

The interviews will be audio taped by the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used so that no identifying information will be linked to you. Audio tapes will be destroyed after transcription. Transcripts of the interviews will be sent to you so that you can request changes be made to what you have said. This includes clarification and removal of or adding comments. At the completion of the research you will be sent a summary of the research findings.

### **How much time will be involved?**

Each interview will take approximately one hour. They will be held at a convenient place that is suitable to both you and the researcher. Similarly, interviews will be held at a time that is convenient and safe for you.

### **What can you expect?**

If you choose to take part in the research, you have the right to:

Withdraw from the study up until one month after the interview;

Decline to answer any particular question;

Ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview;

Leave the interview at anytime without explanation;

Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;

Be given a summary of the findings of the study once it has been completed.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/07. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)

## Appendix D: Participant Consent Form



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY  
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### Birth Plot: Storying Adoptees' Experiences through the 1955 Adoption Act

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INTERVIEWS

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years.

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I also know that I am free to refuse to answer any questions, can withdraw any information I supply at any time, and can withdraw from the study at any stage prior to signing the release of transcript form.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that it is completely confidential and that this information I supply will not be used for any purpose other than this research and publications arising from this research project. I also agree to the researcher audio taping the interview, and know that I have the right to ask for it to be turned off at any time during the interview. I am also aware that I may have my tape returned to me at the conclusion of the research.

I understand that the researchers may use brief direct quotations from the interview(s) in their reports of the study provided these do not identify me in any way.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name - printed

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Chronology of Moves to Reform Adoption over the Last 33 Years**

(Ludbrook, 2012).

**January 1979 Justice Department *Review of the Law on Adoption: (Webb Report)***, This report made a number of recommendations for reform of Adoption Act 1955. Patricia Webb commented that “adoption is a legal fiction and legal fictions, while they may bring about a solution of some problems, inevitably create others. No amount of legal juggling with the facts of the biological relationship can create, though it may serve foster, the sound psychological relationship between adoptive parents and child that is the child’s basic need.”

**1987 *Adoption Act 1955 Review by an Inter-Departmental Working Party*** an inter-departmental review of the Act conducted by the Department of Justice. It made a number of proposals for reform.

**September 1988 *Puao-te-ata-tu (Day Break)*** Report of Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective, Department of Social Welfare commented that adoption, as understood by Western countries, is a totally alien concept, contrary to the laws of nature in Maori eyes, for it assumes that the reality of lineage can be expunged, and birth and parental rights irrevocably traded”.

**August 1990 *Report of Adoption Practices Review Committee*** a report commissioned by Department of Social Welfare while not asked to comment on law reform issues made 28 specific recommendations for changes to the Act and adoption practice.

**1993 *Review of Adoption Law – Maori Adoption:*** Social Policy Agency (a unit within Department of Social Welfare). This review made recommendations for change to adoption law to take into account Maori cultural values.

**April 1993 *New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*** Article 21 of the Convention states that countries that allow adoption of children shall ensure that the best interests of the child is the paramount consideration and that parental consent shall be an informed consent given after counselling. The Adoption Act 1955 does not comply in either respect.

**June 1997 *Minister of Social Welfare Hon Roger Sowry,*** in opening a conference *Adoption and Healing* stated that “The Coalition Government acknowledges that the Adoption Act 1955 is an old Act and in need of review. Work is progressing on this and I am personally committed to seeing it included on the legislative programme in the next 12 months.”

**1998 *Law Commission Review*** The Minister of Justice requested the Law Commission to review the Adoption Act 1955 and the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and to make recommendations on how the legislative framework should be modified to address contemporary social needs.

**October 1999 *The Law Commission Discussion Paper*** After a comprehensive review of the Act, the Law Commission published a detailed discussion paper *Adoption: Options for Reform* and sought comments from a wide range of individuals and organisations.

**September 2000 The Law Commission Report *Adoption and its Alternatives***

This report provided an excellent blueprint for adoption reform, placing strong emphasis of the rights and interests of children and proposing additional protections for birth mothers to avoid their being pressured to consent to the adoption of their child. The report contains over 100 recommendations for reform of adoption law.

**December 2000 New Zealand's 2<sup>nd</sup> report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** NZ's report *Children in New Zealand* annexed the Law Commission report and advised the Committee that adoption law would be reformed after a Parliamentary Select Committee had considered the options.

**August 2001 Parliamentary Government Administration Select Committee** issued an interim report *Inquiry into Adoption Laws* which gave general support to the Law Commission recommendations although there was disagreement between members on some of the proposed reforms. Ministers agreed to progress adoption reform.

**December 2001 Ministers of Justice and Social Development call for officials report on adoption reform** Hon Margaret Wilson then Associate Minister of Justice and the Minister of Social Development directed officials to report on proposals for adoption reform.

**October 2003 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** in its observations and recommendations on NZ's 2<sup>nd</sup> report welcomed the government's intention to reform adoption laws and recommended that children of a certain age should have to give their consent to adoption and that adopted children should, as far as possible, have access to information about their biological parents.

**November 2003 Cabinet paper** Hon Lianne Dalziel, then Associate Minister of Justice, presented a paper to Cabinet Policy Committee but was asked to amend the proposals and provide an amended paper.

**2003 Associate Minister of Justice** indicated that an Adoption Bill giving effect to the Law Commission's recommendations would be introduced later that year.

**March 2004 Memorandum by Associate Minister of Justice for Cabinet Social Development Committee** This Memorandum for Cabinet by Hon David Benson-Pope recommended that Adoption Act 1955 and Adoption (Intercountry) Act 1997 be repealed and replaced by a new Adoption Act. It had 97 paragraphs containing detailed proposals for reform.

**February 2005 Human Rights Commission *National Plan of Action on Human Rights***. The Action Plan identified as priorities for action the need to ensure that children's voice is given due weight in court proceedings and that the consent of children from the age of 12 onwards be required before any order is made for their adoption.

**2006 Ministry of Justice *Statement of Intent 2006/07*** asserted that the Ministry ensures that laws remain acceptable and relevant to changing societal needs by providing research and supporting the government's legislative reform. It further stated that the Ministry works to ensure that laws within its area of responsibility are aligned with New Zealand's international obligations. There was no reference to adoption reform.

**July 2006 Assurance by Minister of Justice** Hon Mark Burton met with a group of professionals who had expressed their concern at the lack of action on adoption law reform. The Minister expressed support for the need for reform and said he would try to get adoption reform included in the 2006/07 Ministry of Justice Work Programme. He assured the group that as long as he was the Minister communication would improve. Adoption reform was put back on the Work Programme later that year.

**2007 Ministry of Justice Paper for Cabinet Policy Committee** This Cabinet Paper stated that there are legal and social reasons why NZ's adoption laws need to be changed, adding that current legislation is fragmented, perpetuates discriminatory practices and creates a system which is open to abuse. It also referred to the need to align adoption legislation with New Zealand's obligations under international human rights instruments. It contained detailed proposals for reform including a comment that the 1955 Act might discriminate against persons on the grounds of their disability.

**June 2007 Ministry of Justice *Statement of Intent* 2007/08** lists as one of the major initiatives to be progressed in 2007/08 as "Reforming adoption laws to create a single, coherent piece of legislation to make adoption laws more accessible, eliminate inconsistencies between current legislation and to better reflect current practice and New Zealand's international obligations."

**June 2008 Ministry of Justice *Statement of Intent* 2008/09 to 2010/11** Adoption reform does not appear in the list of priorities nor is there reference to adoption reform in the Ministry's *Annual Reports* for 2008/09 or 2009/10

**November 2008 Ministry of Justice *Briefing for the Incoming Minister***  
This has no information about adoption reform.

**December 2008 New Zealand's combined 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** This report offers no explanation for the lack of movement in relation to the recommendation of the UN Committee made five years earlier. It states that:

"The Government has begun the process for a comprehensive reform of adoption laws with the Ministry of Justice conducting targeted consultation in 2003. A key objective in reviewing adoption legislation is to update the legal frameworks to better align with modern adoption practices, contemporary society structures, and values and obligations contained in international instruments. Due to other work programme priorities, the review was placed on hold for a period. Work on the reform recommenced in 2006. A considered and comprehensive approach is being taken to reviewing these complex issues."

**2009 Minister of Justice Simon Power** advises that adoption reform is not a priority for the National-led government in 2009/11.

**2010 Human Rights Commission Report *Human Rights in New Zealand*** identified as areas of priority for action the need to review adoption legislation and procedures (Right 21) and the need to take legislative steps to enable people to found and form a family regardless of their sexual orientation (Right 27).

**September 2010 Adoption Action is incorporated.** Its primary object is to propose and promote changes to adoption law which would eliminate discriminatory provisions in current law and reflect current social attitudes and values.

**February 2011 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child report on New Zealand** The combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> report expressed regret that the child's consent to his/her adoption is not required and that the government review of adoption laws is on hold. It recommended that adoption laws be revised to bring them in line with UNCROC and that the age at which adoptees can have access to adoption information be lowered to at least 18 years.

**July 2011 Adoption Action Inc. files claim with Human Rights Review Tribunal** It seeks a declaration under Part 1A Human Rights Act that the Adoption Act and the Adult Adoption Information Act discriminate on a total of 14 grounds. The government asked for the claim to be referred to mediation but no settlement could be reached and the claim will now proceed to a hearing.

**September 2011** A 90 page public consultation paper *Reviewing the Family Court* circulated by the Ministry of Justice contains no specific reference to adoption processes in the Family Court and the pressing need for reform despite submissions by Adoption Action and others.

**October 2011 Ministry of Justice Annual Report 2010/ 2011** contains no reference to adoption reform. States that one of the impacts the Ministry aims for is to ensure that NZ meets its international justice obligations.

**October 2011 Minister's valedictory speech** The retiring Minister of Justice, Simon Power, in his valedictory speech spoke strongly of the need for Parliament to address difficult issues.

"It is our job to tackle the tough issues, the issues the public pays us to front up to and come to a view on. There are many, many debates that Parliament does not want to have, for fear of losing votes or not staying on message: abortion, adoption law, children's rights, and sexual violence issues. I do not share this timid view. The truth is if we do not have those debates here, where will we have them?" (emphasis added).

**February 2012** The Ministry of Justice 42 page *Briefing Paper to the Incoming Minister* released on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012 contains no reference to adoption reform.

**Mid-2012** New Justice Minister Judith Collins indicates that she has no plans to give priority to adoption reform.

**July 2012** A Cabinet Paper released by the Minister of Justice proposes major changes to Family Court laws and procedures but there is no reference to the need to reform adoption laws and procedures adoption being one of the matters falling within the jurisdiction of the Family Court.

**October 2012** Minister Collins repeats that she has no plans to reform adoption law, despite adoption law being part of the government's work programme.

**15 October 2012** A Bill, the Care of Children (Adoption and Surrogacy) Amendment Bill was placed by Green Party MP Kevin Hague in the Parliamentary ballot as a private member's Bill. If enacted it would repeal the Adoption Act 1955 and the Adoption (Intercountry Act) 1997 and would move adoption laws into the Care of Children Act as recommended by the Law Commission in 2000. Many of its provisions give effect to Law Commission recommendations. The Bill has the support of National MP Nikki Kaye.

**Adoption Action Inc  
November 2012**

(R. Ludbrook, personal communication, December 5, 2012)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> A slightly older version of the Chronology (October 2012) is available online at <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/chronology.pdf>

## Appendix F: Articles Produced from this Research:

Blake, D., Coombes, L., & Morgan, M. (2011). 'Wade in the water ...': Rethinking adoptees' stories of reunion. Paper presented at the Refereed proceedings of Doing Psychology: Manawatu Doctoral Research Symposium 2011, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

### 'Wade in the Water ...': Re-thinking Adoptees' Stories of Reunion

Denise Blake<sup>1</sup>, Leigh Coombes<sup>2</sup>, Mandy Morgan<sup>3</sup>

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#### Abstract

In 1955, the Aotearoa/New Zealand government legislated the closed stranger adoption period. Approximately 80,000 children were constructed as a legal fiction when deemed *as if born to* a legally married couple. Birth family information was permanently sealed. Yet being raised in a fictional subject position and being denied access to any family of origin has consequences for all involved. After ten years of lobbying, the Adult Adoption Information Act (1985) came into effect. The power of that legislation was to overturn the strategies that suppressed adoptees' rights to know details of their birth. Adult adoptees over the age of 20 years could access their original birth certificates, which provided a birth mother's name. With this identifying information, reunions became possible. Birth family reunions involve a diverse range of experiences, reflecting the ways in which adoptees are contextually and historically produced. This paper reconsiders the identity implications of reunion stories using the theoretical concept of hybrid identity. The complexities of reunions are multiple, and adoptees negotiate their identities through being both *born to* and *born as if* and yet neither identity is safe. In the production of this hybrid story, it was possible to see the political and moral trajectories that enable and constrain a sense of self through the complexities of a legal context that produces binary subject positions.

**Keywords:** Adoption, adoptees, hybridity, identity, birth family, adoptive family, reunion.

#### Background

In 1955 the Aotearoa/New Zealand government legislated the 'closed stranger' adoption period, also known as the 'complete break climate'. Here illegitimate, unwanted or neglected children could become the child *as if born to* a legally married adoptive couple. Section 16(2)a of the Adoption Act (1955) states "as if the child had been born to that parent in lawful wedlock". In this way the biological and genetic truth of parenthood is replaced with legal parenthood, yet undeniably both exist (Ludbrook, 1997). This legislated birth created a legal fiction. Fiction in law is a supposition that is a contradiction to fact but accepted because of the practical implications. Legal fictions serve a purpose because they provide solutions to certain problems, in this case a legitimate identity for those who had none. At the point that the new legitimate identity occurred, birth family information was permanently sealed. Yet, while one apparent problem was resolved, other problems arose such as the disregard for biological identity. 'Closed stranger' adoption depended on concealing birth relationships and produced secrecy as necessary to the

adoption process. Restricting or stopping contact with the birth parents removed any 'bad' influences. This was in the best interests of the child. The 'complete break' practice of secrecy based on moral assumptions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering and enabled through attachment theory represented maternal bonding as vital to producing the 'good' mother. Adoption advocates assumed the adoptee would overcome the effects of a birth family 'break' in a 'better' environment. The adoptive family environment, with its nurturing and care, was alleged to more than compensate for the family of origin (Else, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). The adopted child could be shaped and constructed *as if born to* and any difference would never be noticed or could be denied with the birth history permanently sealed. Between 1955 and 1985, approximately 80,000 children were adopted under this system.

Being denied access to a birth history and living the effects of a legal fiction can mean aversive consequences for adopted people, including psychological dysfunction and feelings of homelessness (see for example Griffith (1991), Hoksbergen (1997), Iwanek, (1997), Petta and Steed (2004) and Triseliotis (2000)). Movements protesting the human rights violation of secrecy and denial began to arise. Adoptees themselves began to demand knowledge of their birth histories and saw this as a fundamental human right. After ten years of intense and dedicated lobbying by adoptees and related health professions, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Adult Adoption Information Act (1985) came into effect. Under this legislation adoptees over the age of 20 years could access their original birth certificates (Griffith, 1991). Reunions became possible but opened up new spaces for identity, which could be problematic.

The passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act (1985) enabled adoptees a place to 'resist' their birth history secrets. They could challenge the legal fiction and access information about a birth identity. Given the multiple challenges that adoptees encounter, such as identity diffusion and the sense of not belonging anywhere, it is not surprising that in most cases they search for their family of origin (March, 1995). In my research, I heard stories from adoptees that had initiated a search for their birth origins and those who had been 'found' by their birth mothers. They had experienced both the possibility and the impossibility of reunion. Some of their birth mothers were not traceable; some

had vetoed access to their information<sup>1</sup>, and, even where a reunion was possible, it was not always a solution.

Many of the searching adoptees that took part in this research delayed taking the first step in applying for an original birth certificate, as they were concerned, at times even terrified, that they would encounter a veto that feels like a legalised form of abandonment. They were also acutely aware that a birth family search involved fear of further rejection, abandonment and pain.

Yeah, yeah and there's also that fear of rejection, of like, you know, being told to fuck off (*Cooley*, 163)

I was scared, I was really scared to umm, to be rejected...I was really scared that if I made contact, I was really scared that - how I would respond emotionally if umm I initiated contact and they said no? (*Barry*, 843, 849)

What if he'd said, buggar off you know?...he could have yeah, so it would have been protecting me as well...from rejection at that level (*Jan*, 421, 423, 425)

Beyond the first step, there are also multiple pathways through the complex processes of creating and maintaining relationships with birth family members. This involves negotiating identities on either side, and in the space between biological fact and the legal fiction of their birth.

### A Hybrid Representation

To understand the complex and multiple experiences of reunion and how they matter to adoptees' identities, I am taking up the metaphor of hybridity. This metaphor produces an understanding of the adopted identity and the positions that are enable or constrained by it. Yet, to realise how this notion can represent the adopted reunion it is important to trace its history and the way in which it is used. According to Smith (2008), the genesis of hybridity is located in both the hard sciences (for example botany) and the social sciences. In plant biology, hybridity represents the grafting of one plant onto a different root stock (Young, 1999). When considering adoption, this biological metaphor could represent the child grafted onto a different family tree. Once legitimated and constructed *as if born to* a legally married couple the child then grows from another family tree.

Within the social sciences, hybridity is conceptualised as a process of separation from racial, ethnic and/or cultural practices through colonisation. When this separation occurs new practices for 'being' in the world are reformed. In this context, new hybrid identities and

cultures are constituted when there is a merging of elements of cultures. Here, the notion of hybridity enables new space for producing knowledge of identity and subjectivity in our culturally globalised world (Smith, 2008). In relation to race, ethnicity and culture hybrid positions enable newly imagined differences after colonisation.

The production of hybrid identities necessarily implicates institutions and power relations, as the grafting of one culture onto another is not a symmetrical process. Historically, hegemonic governance meant that white, western, colonising cultural practices were valued, and these dominant discourses inscribed the bodies of 'others' (indigenous, illegitimate, women girls). Discourse, in a Foucaultian sense, function as the body of statements through which organisations and societies produce rules to direct knowledge, power and truth claims. They construct objects and produce subject positions (Parker, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1993), so discourse actively governs subject positions and relationships among subjects and objects. At the same time, legislation legitimates particular moral trajectories, excludes others and delimits acceptable practices of citizenship. Through discourse, and law some subjects are positioned through hegemonic scientific knowledge, as flawed and in need of fixing when they do not fit the desired norms (Parker, 2005) as occurred with the illegitimate subject. As Smith (2008) posits, these relations of social power disperse and scatter groups of people throughout the world. Such processes of colonisation produce alienation and fragmentation from notions of essential or authentic identity. To take up a hybrid identity means a complex positioning of self within the larger social discourses of class, gender, race and cultural diversity (Luke & Luke 1999). Hybridity in cultural narratives represents the stories of racial, ethnic and/or cultural identities produced through postcolonial power relations (Smith 2008).

In postcolonial and cultural studies, the notion of hybridity has shifted from racial discourse of an essentialised notion of a natural category to representing a social constructionist epistemology that rejects essentialist views of identity existing in nature. The social constructionist position, according to Bell (2004) represents self as shaped by context and social interaction. Again, hybridity is a mixing or blending of cultures that occur through experience within the particular cultures. Here hybridity is constructive and represents the ways in which identities are shaped and form over time. Cultural blending is necessary in our global world. Bell argues that it encapsulates the process of regeneration and dynamic change and that any claims of hybridity must be contextualised because ontological hybridity, the identities that 'arise from the

<sup>1</sup> Despite attempts to allow access to previously secreted information after the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act (1985), it was still legally possible, through a veto, to maintain the secret. Both birth parents and adoptees could place a veto on their records to prevent the release of any identifying information. A veto lasts for 10 years.

*mixture* of two or more cultural origins' (p.125), do not represent a complete break from essentialism. There is still a sense of the natural or the essential embedded in the metaphor, evoked by the idea of 'root stock' onto which another culture is 'grafted'.

Even within a global postcolonial context, producing hybrid identities is problematic. While discussing the movements towards cultural hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Webber (2008) argues that since one in every ten citizens belongs to more than one ethnic group we need to reconceptualise our national identity to embrace diversity. However, in this process a dilemma occurs for those who are unable to locate self in an ethnic identity category. Not to 'fit' into an ethnic, or a racial category, opens a gap, where a hybrid subject resides, in-between - a "no-man's land" - within continuously negotiated borders.

According to Smith (2008) the possibility of negotiating borders and boundaries, including bodies, language, culture and race can produce advantages. In our global world occupying hybrid space enables both local and global knowledge. When transcending two cultures, knowledge of both enables diversity, multiplicity and fluidity. Hybridity can mean a life constantly punctuated by negotiations. Repeated re-negotiation removes the sense of dislocation or alienation and enables new relationships within specific cultural practices that merge to construct a new hybrid culture.

Theories of hybrid identities are not without critique. Webber (2008) and Bell (2004) describe resistance to hybrid identities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Internationally, hybridity is realised by non-white minorities who want to gain status in predominantly white societies. However in Aotearoa/New Zealand, resistance is not about enabling space for the colonised peoples inside dominant Pākehā culture; it involves taking up a unique Māori identity. With the revitalisation of *te reo* and *tikanga* Māori, embracing hybridity risks the loss of unique identity. It also appears as if there are two equal though distinct cultures available for hybrid identity formation. However, it has been argued that hybridity perpetuates colonisation through insidious practices of assimilation to Pākehā/Western culture. Bell posits that Pākehā value hybridity because it facilitates Māori to integrate and take up Pākehā customs. Historically, hybridity was viewed as a one way process because racist thought and practices meant that any Māori influences 'tainted' European superiority. Hybridity negates and rejects a distinct Māori identity (Webber, 2008).

While there are arguments against hybridity because some do not easily 'fit' into a particular category which locates them in an in-between space and arguments that caution against its use because of the way in which it reduces one culture to the dominant other, I am still taking up the metaphor of hybridity. Reunion processes are complex and hybridity enables a telling of the

reunion story that values the position of *born to* and *born as if*.

## Reunion

Research (Griffith, 1991; March, 1995; Trinder, Feast & Howe, 2004) indicates that particular relational settings can have implications for the reunion process. These include the way in which the birth mother/father respond, the way in which mirroring or difference occurs between adoptees and birth mother/father, the feeling of connection and bonding within a reunion. Levels of secrecy and empathy in the relationships, previous expectations, sense of self and boundaries, the adoptive parents reactions and practical factors, such as time and location. There is no contesting that the multitude of events that constitute the reunion experience are important, however here we explore the way in which the legal constitution of an adopted identity means there is always already no distinct adopted identity. And with this an adoptee must try to 'fit' into the binary subject positions of either *born to* and *born as if*.

'Not fitting' or not having a biological family connection opens a gap for the adopted subject: A lack that is realised though the constructed identity of *as if* *born to* an adoptive family. The imposed legislative identity produces an adopted subject who has to walk in a world that values personal identities which originate with blood ties and a connection to kinship. In this position the relational link that is not blood emerges.

How can you be not blood related but still have that link? (*Toni*, 332)

With no reunion or birth family history, this socially valued biologically connected identity is not possible - there is a gap. For some, after a reunion, connection through genealogy enables new knowledge of self, yet here the adopted identity and the biological identity can remain fragmented. For example, in Barry's experience his birth family positions him as belonging to his "own" (adoptive) family and excludes his need to be connected.

They just can't deal with it, they've, they've, they, they kind of all believe like I have my own family and you know I have my own life and yeah it's nice to have, umm, it's nice that I'm in their lives, arrr particularly for my birth mother, and so I think there's a lot of respect there for her and their relationship with her... so they're by proxy with me but I really get that umm, it's not with me (*Barry*, 673, 678, 680)

Necessarily, the adopted subject can experience not belonging in either the *born to* or *born as if* families and here the adopted hybrid subject resides in a no-man's

land. The adopted subject experiences no-man's land at a very early age and during their lifetime they can return there. Mary, for example, recognises that at some time she had been socially positioned as illegitimate, living in a between space, "no-man's land", and Barry experienced himself as "blanked out".

As I got older, I did think about the illegitimate side of it, you know when you suddenly become aware that children are born out of wedlock. I remember kind of thinking – oh I wonder how that works because I remember thinking that there had to be a time, like when you are born and when you are adopted when you are in no-man's land (*Mary* 272)

[I was] given away and they just, they probably want to blank that out so you know I'm blanked out so... (*Barry*, 995, 998)

The metaphor of "no-man's land" signifies the space between two armies, a place where no one is safe. However, by taking up the metaphor of hybridity it enables space for new possibilities beyond that of the *born to* and *born as if*. That space can allow negotiation between and through the borders and boundaries of the two identities, allowing and valuing a diverse, multiple and fluid adopted identity. Here identity occurs through valuing context, social interactions and bodies.

Homi Bhabha (1990) talks about hybridity enabling the possibility of a 'third space'. In this account, the third space does not arise from being able to trace the two original moments; hybridity *is* the third space. The third space shifts the histories that construct it, and enables new structures and political positions to emerge from the cultural relationships of the past. For Bhabha, hybridity can be understood through a psychoanalytic lens whereby it is not an identity but a process of identification involving the 'other'/object with which the subject identifies with. Within this theoretical framework, the subject is ambivalent because of their relationship with otherness. Here, hybridity carries the traces of emotions and practices that inform it, always connecting to the other meanings and discourses through which it is constituted. What this understanding enables is a possibility of making sense of the traces of the other/object and how they inform the reunion relation for adoptees, in particular the identification with and through (m)other/s. The embodied adoptee carries the traces of the birth (m)other/object and reunion enables identification with and through her to be realised.

Drawing from Bolatagici (2004), hybridity also realises the contradictions and struggles that are involved in living in-between cultural or social groups. Hybridity signifies a co-existence and enables the representation and interplay between two different subject positions, or locations within a family (Bolatagici, 2004; Carrillo, 1999). Hybridity within the

context of this adoption research provides a metaphor to represent the ways in which the adopted subject lives in the world negotiating two identities – the *born to* and the *born as if*. The hybridisation of an adopted identity values the constant interaction that occurs between their families, including inevitable tensions. However it is important to also note that within cultural studies Carrillo (1999) asserts that both identities can exist without contradiction in some cases, which is also possible for an adopted subject. Here it may take effort strategies of management and valuing the complexity of this existence in-between, but it is possible. Carrillo argues that hybridity enables the acceptance of a dual identity.

Even when both of those identities have not been realised through the process of reunion, the embodied knowing of a birth history shapes and splits the adopted subject. Moreover, if a reunion has been possible adoptees straddle the two different worlds. They can be simultaneously members of a family and not members.

I see how my two brothers from my birth mother right, I see how they interact together...but they treat me like a brother and they love me, but the three of us sitting in a room, they've got something that I haven't got with them...yeah and they love me (birth father siblings) and they're so open to me and they give me everything, but I haven't got what they've got together (*Brendon*, 612, 615, 620)

They all got, they made this real big deal about the grandkids all being around to take a photo and [my birth brother] was the oldest, and you know. I was excluded from it (*Alice*, 737)

Despite Brendon feeling love, living the binary between connection and disconnection locates him outside; there is no access to the 'thing', the sense of belonging. And Alice is able to interact with her birth family and yet is simultaneously excluded. After a reunion, a new identity may emerge for adoptees which can blend the *born to* and *born as if*. A hybrid identity, as Smith (2008) asserts, can emerge in response to the problematics of having two identities.

When one plant tissue is grafted onto another, the original plant still exists, in as much as it has been grafted onto the other plant (Young, 2008). Similarly the adopted subject produced as a legal fiction still embodies the 'original self', their birth history. Continuing the hybridity metaphor, when neither plant is pruned the hybrid plant returns to its original stock (Young, 2008). For the adopted person with or without a birth family reunion, returning to the 'original' is not always possible but the longing to return is always already there.

I sort of felt, I wanted, I always wanted to know where I came, who, who I looked like (*Margaret*, 112)

So in this embodied space, the time in which the adoptee is neither *born to* nor *born as if*, a literal and metaphoric birth at the hyphen occurs and without significant care, the adoptee can be returned to the place of no-man's land, here they are not returned to their origin, but to a space in-between.

According to Fine and Sirin (2007), the hyphen can be understood as the a "dynamic social-psychological space where political arrangements and individual subjectivities meet...the psychological texture of the hyphen is substantially informed by history, media, surveillance, politics, nation of origin, gender, biography, longings, imagination and, and loss" (p. 21). How we come to negotiate the hyphen is dependent on the contexts, such as work, family environment or talking with a friend. Fine and Sirin argue that you can be born at the hyphen, in the political faults (fissures) that produce social identities. For some the hyphen is a 'traumatic check point' or a 'space of shame' that may involve feelings of anxiety. For the adopted person the hyphen can be the conduit to stand in the place of no-man's land.

Hybridity can also be located at the hyphen, however according to Bolatagici (2004), again discussing race, the hyphen obscures the complexity of a mixed race identity. When located at the hyphen it reduces a person to the sum of their parts with the hyphen representing a juncture, a land fault that is unfixable. Bolatagici highlights how this fissure leaves a perception of mixed race people having an innate disunion. For some adoptees, the 'life time in-between' cannot be fixed and when adoptees try to talk about the juncture that cannot be fixed, it is difficult in a world that values blood tie kinship and the adopted subject is acutely aware of the lack and loss.

We were at a, a sort of bit of a gathering and there were some other people there and this woman said – "oh yeah, I suppose she is my daughter". You know and it's kind of like - oh okay, I guess I am, but you know, I guess I came along 20 years later. Was there as a baby, came back 20 years later and there's a life time in-between (*Maxine*, 472)

Unless you've been separate from it and then reconnected to it you aren't going to know that...I mean like if you are not adopted then you've always had that connection...if you haven't been adopted and haven't been reconnected then you don't know you've lost it... 'cause you never, do you know what I mean...like you have to have an awareness of having it then losing it, to know that it wasn't there (*Barry*, 563, 566, 568, 570, 572)

To 'have an awareness of having it then losing it' signifies the adopted disruption. Young (2008) uses the language of "disruption" and "forcing" to represent the notion of hybridity - "making difference into sameness [and] sameness into difference" (p. 26). Here similar becomes dissimilar and different is more than merely different. Young discusses Derrida's logic of 'brisure', the simultaneous breaking and joining, the hinge that produces binary operations to signify the way in which hybridity forces the limitation of one by the other.

Hybridity enables a way to represent adoption reunions and a blending of the *born to* and *born as if* identity for adoptees. It enables the possibility of a third space which can negotiate the borders and boundaries of the two identities and values the fluidity of the adopted identity. Hybridity also represents the hyphen. However, here it also signifies a gap. The metaphor of hybridity does not adequately represent the in-between space, the no-man's land, that adoptees encounter. It does not represent, when fusion is not defined, where adoptees are unable to meld identities or hinge them together. Future inquiry needs to explore that swing between brokenness and joining and how this enables and constrains an adopted subject.

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### **Standing in no-man's land: Adoption storied through the Aotearoa/New Zealand Adoption Act (1955)**

#### **Abstract**

The Aotearoa/New Zealand Adoption Act (1955) legislated and governed adoption practices from 1955 to 1985, and beyond. Over 80, 000 adoptees live the effects of this Act, yet its human rights violations remain socially and politically ignored (Griffith, 1997). Through an exploration of the historical, cultural and social assumptions underlying the Adoption Act (1955), this article questions how social power relations produce and reproduce subject positions for adoptees and their implications for lived experience. In-depth narrative interviews were conducted with twelve adoptees from throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. The researchers found the legal constitution of adoptees produces them as legitimate, however they remain 'other' through dominant discourses of illegitimacy. The experiences of 'other' tell of the effects of the relationship between illegitimate and legitimate, from a space in-between. Adoptees are both *born to* one family and *born as if* to another. They embody feelings of being "alone" and "not fitting". To continue to ignore the political implications of this Act perpetuates social power relations that exclude them.

#### ***The Rationale for Storying Adoption and its Legislation***

The movements towards legislating adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand are specific to its history of colonisation. In order to regulate the behaviour of particular citizens, acts of law and policy provide the rules that govern 'good' citizenship and reify the performance of a moral order (Foucault, 1982; Sarup, 1993). As with all social practices that are governed by legislation, a specific history of adoption is embedded in the legislation that shaped its practices and those subjected to its power. The moral trajectory of the political and social institutions, which control, classify and legitimate practices of adoption also position adoptees within particular discourse and mediate their relationships with birth and adoptive parents (Delany, 1997).

Taking a discursive approach to adoption legislation, to consider its implications for adoptees' positions and lived experiences involves treating 'power and 'truth' as enacted through discourses and exercised through hegemonic knowledge structures. Discourse functions as the body of statements through which organisations and societies produce rules to delimit knowledge, power and truth claims. They construct objects, produce subject positions (Foucault, 1991; Parker, 2002), and govern the practices of adoption. Understanding discursive notions of governmentality enable us to make sense of the ways in which adoptees are regulated through technologies of the state. Institutions use the language and systems of signification, which circulate at the disciplinary, political, cultural and community levels and inform social practices (Foucault, 1982).

Legislative governmentality emerges from the geo-political conditions enabled by local histories while the history that shapes legislation and its practices also enables discursive subjugation to its rule. A heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand's British colonial past is the legal principle of *nullius filius*, a child born out of wedlock as the child of no-man (Griffith, 1997; Van Doren, 1916). The constitution of 'the child of no-man' produced the illegitimate subject without rights to a surname, economic support, education, or the inheritance of property. Notions of legitimacy re-enacted a patriarchal moral order to protect and privilege the 'name of the father', the distribution of property, and the institution of marriage. According to this moral trajectory, an illegitimate child signifies a child who is ill-begotten, a risk to public morality and a burden to the state (Carp, 2009; Griffith, 1991; Kohli, 2003; Lifton, 1976). The institutionalisation of adoption resolved the public interest in private moral action and transformed public problems of morality into private concerns about legitimacy (Delany, 1997). The state introduction and rationalisation of the Adoption Act (1955) and its practices were spoken as unproblematic solutions to the troubles facing children who were unwanted, illegitimate or experiencing hardship. They also enabled childless couples or those wanting more children to meet the moral standard for childrearing that sanctions the nuclear family.

In effect, the Adoption Act (1955) created a legal fiction for adoptees. Fiction in law is a supposition that is a contradiction to fact, traditionally accepted because it has practical implications, in this case constituting a legitimate identity for adoptees on the premise that they are illegitimate (Griffith, 1991; Ludbrook, 2008). Within the Act, '*as if*' constructed the fiction: section 16(2)a of the Adoption Act (1955) grants legitimacy "as if the child had been born to that [adopting] parent in lawful wedlock". In this way the biological and embodied fact of birth relationships is replaced with legal parenthood, producing a parallel reality (Ludbrook, 1997).

Once the legal act of adoption was finalised, an adoptee was no longer legally permitted to access their birth relationships. The identity of the birth mother and/or father remained secret, closing off the possibility for an ongoing relationship: the Adoption Act (1955) enacted a secret through closure. Section 23(1) of the Adoption Act (1955) mandated that records of the birth history be indefinitely sealed, constructing a wall of secrecy through a violent cut from birth family connections for those subjected to its power (Griffith, 1991; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988; Simmonds, 2000).

Excluding the family of origin was justified through the moral positioning of the birth mother. The practice of secrecy was important to 'protect' the birth mother and her family from the shame bestowed upon them by her weak and sinful indiscretion (Gediman & Brown, 1991). This deliberate strategy undermines the welfare of birth mothers, a practice that Shawyer (1979) argues is a form of social violence. Support for secrecy enshrined in the Adoption Act (1955) was also necessary to protect adoptive families from the shame of infertility or the fear of being positioned as an 'abnormal'

family (March, 1995; Wegar, 2000). Secrecy performed a 'complete break' based on moral assumptions that to be *born as if* was in the best interests of the nuclear family. It recasts the adoptee as morally subjugated, with no access to their history, so as to overcome the 'sins' of the mother.

### ***Social Change and Legislation***

In 1985, after years of lobbying by interested parties against the human rights violations of a closed, secret adoption system, the government of Aotearoa/New Zealand passed the Adult Adoption Information Act. The Act provided a mechanism for adoptees over the age of 20 to access original birth certificates and this shift went some way to opening up the possibility of knowledge by enabling access to the identity of the birth mother and in limited cases the birth father (Griffith, 1997). However, the shift did not necessarily guarantee access to birth histories; closure could be maintained by veto provisions where birth parents and/or adopted children have the right to protect their identity. When the possibility of birth family information is thwarted by a veto, the secrecy is maintained.

The current 'open' adoption practices, reflects the intention to finally attend to the absence of access to birth information made possible by the Act, however legislative control remains with the adoptive family. Adoption law reform movements continue to challenge the exclusion of birth family rights as a breach of the rights of a child to have a relationship with their biological family. The Aotearoa/New Zealand Law Commission: *Te Aka Matua O Te Ture* (2000) reviewed the systems used in the practice of adoption, considered public discussion and identified out-dated aspects of the adoption law. According to their report the adoption law enshrines paternalistic values, even though social changes have discredited the transferring of a legal title of a child because of illegitimacy. The authors recommend a legal framework that more adequately addresses changes in moral values, and the diverse 'other' forms of family that have emerged as a result of civil rights movements, such as one parent or gay parent families. Advocates argue that the ongoing failure of the state to recognise the social justice implications of the Adoption Act (1955) is an abuse of state responsibility for the best interests of the child (Griffith, 1991; Henaghan, 2006; Ludbrook, 1997).

In the terms of liberal democratic political governance, failure to change the Adoption Act (1955) affects a small political constituency and therefore falls into political insignificance. Simultaneously, the state's investment in protecting the moral position of the nuclear family is reasserted (Henaghan, 2006). Controversial family reformation realised through the Civil Union Act (2004) has invoked debates about the morality of adoption by same sex couples as politically significant. The last three decades have produced numerous reviews and petitions that successive governments have failed to action as a consequence of marginalising talk about reform.

### ***Questioning Adoption***

The formation of the modern institution of adoption is a complex set of relationships between varying and complementary social, psychological, political and moral narratives and their trajectories that produce subjects in particular ways. Delany (1997) argues that the institution of adoption must be understood through a nexus of knowledge and power. We must question, “how we come to know what we know about adoption” (p. 115). The way in which that question is framed is necessary to understanding the effects for those subjected to its power. Psychology's interest in adoption has long been one of pathologising the experiences of adoption, where deficit is located within the individual. Social power relations are ignored, including the effects of legislation on lived experience of the adopted subject. The problematic dimensions of adoption are positioned as inevitably individualised.

Under these circumstances, historical and political, the terms of liberal democratic governance marginalise the rights of adoptees under law, holding them within legal fictions, sanctioning secrets concerning their biological families, and individualising their problems. This marginalisation ignores the psychosocial significance of positioning a child, and the citizen they become, as morally subjugated to the legitimacy of the nuclear family, and the principle of *nullis filius*. We turn to the narratives of adoptees to question how the fiction, including the delimited access to information provided by recent reform, is implicated in their lived experience.

### **The Study**

This research tells a story of the production of the adoptee that questions their constitution under unjust legislation historically enabled through the conditions of possibility. Whilst reading adoptees' accounts of their lived experience, we sought out the implications of the law within their narratives. Focusing on the central and practical way that language produces identity by engaging with the principles of narrative psychology we attended to the social power relations implicated in the history of adoption legislation. In particular we've engaged with subject positioning theory to analyse the ways in which people position themselves within discourse and take up particular narratives for sense making (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Positioning is the discursive process that locates subjects in conversations through mutually produced storylines. Positions involve discursive constructions of the rights and duties distributed within personal interactions and everyday ordinary practices (Harré et al., 2009). A subject position is enabled through the structural rights implicated by the discourse.

Twelve adoptees were recruited through a snowballing technique. All participants had experienced adoption through Aotearoa/New Zealand's 'closed' legal system. Their experiences were diverse. For instance, all but two have had birth family contact. The birth mother vetoed one of the two, while the other was unable to find any birth mother information. Two of the participants were contacted by birth

families while growing up; the other eight did not have birth family contact until they were adults. All were adults when they spoke with the first author in conversational interviews, about their experience of ‘closed’ adoption. While we understand that the construction of adoption is intimately entwined with other experiences that constitute participants’, and our own, subjectivities, together these stories produce a hybrid narrative representation of the lived experience of adoption.

### **Findings**

In the following sections we present analytic readings of adoptees narratives related to the lived experience of legitimacy, starting with their stories of illegitimacy and moving through the implications of living a legal fiction, to the way in which law reform has reproduced their sense of exclusion. The analysis takes the form of a narrative representation of the lived experience of being *born to* and *as if born*, told through positions of illegitimacy and legitimacy, and how the lived experience of ‘otherness’ informs the argument for law reform. In each section we discuss the discourses that enabled adoptees’ subject positions, realised in the hybrid story of their lived experiences. The findings of this study represent how adoptees embody and live notions of illegitimacy and the fiction of *born as if* in and through the discourses that produce social power relations and are enacted through law. Along the way, the lived felt effects of the failure of successive governments to address adoption as a human rights violation are also discussed.

### ***Illegitimacy***

Adoption enabled an illegitimate subject to be made legitimate constituting a binary relationship where legitimacy defines what it is ‘not’ (Gutting, 2001), and the patriarchal nuclear family is privileged in social power relationships. Participants spoke of their infant status as illegitimate, and its meaningful constitution of a ‘between space’ where they must once have been without the sanction of their adopted family. Mary, for instance, recognises that at some time she had been socially positioned as illegitimate, living in a “no-man’s land”.

*Mary:* As I got older, I did think about the illegitimate side of it, you know when you suddenly become aware that children are born out of wedlock...I remember thinking that there had to be a time, like when you are born and when you are adopted when you are in no-man’s land (272).

The metaphor of “no-man’s land” signifies the space between two armies, a place where no one is safe. To be born *nullius filius*, a child of no-man, positions the child as unsafe without the protection of their parents’ marriage and indicates the extent to which ‘wedlock’ is morally valued. The association of ‘no-man’s land’ with the child’s location at the moment she is suspended between birth

family and adopted family evokes the image of a conflict between moral positions where rights are accorded only to those who are legitimate.

The dominance of marriage in the moral conflict over legitimacy has consequences for the lived experience of bearing the birth family's social shame for a child born out of wedlock. Barry storied his experience as being 'given away' by his birth parents so that they could erase him from their family history;

*Barry:* [I was] given away and they just, they probably want to blank that out so you know I'm blanked out so...that's kind of a bit too big for me to kind of comprehend (995, 998).

Barry understands himself, almost, as being blanked out so that his illegitimacy could be erased. The positioning available to him represents 'nothingness', lack, a 'void'. This is an incomprehensible space to him, where he is nothing to his birth family once they have relinquished him.

The space between illegitimacy and adoption, the no-man's land of being no-man's child, occupied varying times among our participants, and some knew how long (more or less) they had been 'in between'.

*Mary:* Ten days I think (714).

*Barry:* I was adopted as a baby, I don't know how old I was but I presume it was within that first few weeks (24).

*Maxine:* So she had me there, and then she kept me with her for about 10 days. I got to stay in the same room and my grandparents came apparently and then umm, I got adopted 10 days later, from my family (53).

*Shelly:* I think I was about a week or two old when they first came to see me...and they couldn't take me home until I was about six weeks old because I was prem...(24, 27, 30).

*Cooley:* 2 months(97).

During this time, the lack associated with being in no-man's land included the kind of affection and physical contact that were usually taken for granted experiences of legitimate new-borns. Time spent in no-man's land was understood as a time without "cuddles" and "care" for the relinquished infants.

*Mary:* Not having your mother there to pick you up and cuddle you every time, 'cause a nurse can't give 24 hour care (720).

Even when carefully narrating experiences of love during the time in no-man's land, Brendon tells of himself as alone.

*Brendon:* It's important to me to know how long I was in that adoption hospital...you know, alone, but apparently I was well loved there by the nurses, but for two months (25, 32).

To know how long he was neither *born to* nor *born as if* is significant to Brendon since the time in no-man's land represents time isolated, even if lovingly cared for. By these accounts, the legal constitution of the adopted subject that enables legitimacy simultaneously enacts an experience of loss, lack, loneliness that is unsafe, from birth. Adoptees embody the moral order of illegitimacy through their positions as lacking safety, family, affection, connection, while they are spending time in no-man's land. These embodied experiences of illegitimacy matter to their sense of self (Triseliotis, 1973). In the participants stories, the identities we assumed they would be comfortable to share with us were frequently characterised by a lack, a specific, but unspecified deficit or error that continued long past the time the spent in no-man's land.

*Vaughn:* I wasn't good enough...I think you'll be judged...that you are nobody (272, 425, 427).

*Toni:* My umm shame, embarrassment, I don't know how I was conceived...mistake, that's how I thought of myself – a mistake (451).

*Maxine:* You know there is something fundamentally wrong with this 'me' baby, that wasn't wanted (637).

Living through the moral conflict over legitimacy, adoptees embody social understandings of what it means to be illegitimate, and therefore shamed. To be *born as if* does not protect an adoptee from the effects of moral deficit when the taken-for-granted assumption that determines legitimacy means 'blood is thicker than water'. The act of adoption establishes kinship in law only; it does not construct kinship biologically (Miall, 1996) and does not carry the same social meaning as blood-kinship. Brendon, who was the only adopted child in a family with three biological siblings, was positioned as a "bastard" by his siblings, a reminder of his 'otherness' that he experienced as painful.

*Brendon:* They knew if they wanted to hurt me when I was a kid they'd say "you're a bastard because you're born out of wedlock"...and you know...that shit used to hurt – labels like

that...would cut me up but like the only one was my little sister who would say, "you're not my brother, fuck you, you're not my brother" (108, 111, 113).

In Brendon's legal family, the biologically related children's blood-kinship was privileged so that Brendon's biological difference becomes a hurtful exclusion from the family that is supposed to give him the benefits of legitimacy. Being *born as if* to his adopted family did not repeal the discourses of 'proper' blood-kinship, which he knows he lacks - the "big black secret", as Shelly calls it:

*Shelly*: I had this big secret, this big black secret hanging over me, which I sort of felt like I should be ashamed of, but which I had no control over. I felt that to try and be as good as everybody else I had to be that little bit better (164).

The shame and isolation of illegitimacy and the burden of lack carried by adoptees is supported by discourses that are intended, paradoxically, to compensate for the child's abandonment. For instance Jan did not experience the idea of being 'chosen' by her adopted mother as meaning she was 'special' or 'valuable'. That her mother 'chose' her meant that she was free to reject her and this affirmed Jan's illegitimate position.

*Jan*: She (adoptive mother) would pretend to get on the phone to Social Welfare and tell them to take us back...[or she was] going to sell us for a bag of rice and we believed it...so there was always this threat that we would be like, she chose to have us she could also choose to get rid of us (305, 313, 317).

Here, it is the legitimacy sanctioned and granted by the state that is chosen and can be revoked. The threat of being sent back to no-man's land is so significant, that it controls the child's behaviour. The lived effects of being born illegitimate can surface in varying ways throughout an adoptee's life-story. Mary became more conscious of being positioned as illegitimate by others as she became older.

*Mary*: But that was more when I was old enough to probably realise, be aware that people could judge you more, because I never experienced it but as you become a, you know more adult (278).

Despite the legislative force of legitimacy, the illegitimate subject is reproduced in social relationships. For the adoptee, kinship is socially engineered, so in order to constitute the child within the adoptive family, and protect the status of legitimacy, the practice of secrecy was used by the state. The adopted child lives in a legal fiction - *born as if*.

*Born As If*

The narrative constitution as a legal fiction was experienced as problematic; the law was unable to 'remove' the birth story or the moral force of illegitimacy. The lived experience of being *born to* and *born as if* limits a sense of belonging (Griffith, 1991; Webb, 1979). Adoptees inevitably differentiate between biological and the psychosocial lived 'reality' of (adopted) family (Triseliotis, Shireman, & Hundleby, 1997). Where blood-kinship is privileged within the social and material experience of adoptees, the relational link that is not blood is questioned.

*Toni:* How can you be not blood related but still have that link? (332).

It may not be possible to experience a link that is the 'same' as blood-kinship, and this struggle was realised in the participants telling of feeling "alone"; there being "no one" that is the "same as" having family. The difference is located in the experiences of aloneness.

*Shelly:* I think when you're adopted you've got this, you're very much on your own (907).

*Barry:* I felt (sigh) yep, I was completely lost and alone I guess...acutely alone (340, 736).

*Brendon:* I feel alone (649).

*Alice:* I always feel alone, like no one is going to be able to look after me apart from me, if there's something going on I can't go running to anybody, no one can really help me...(849).

*Vaughn:* It's been like that for a long time and I guess that's...a direct response to feeling fucker utterly alone (285).

*Margaret:* I was totally on my own, there was just me, I always felt like I was totally on my own, that I had no one I could rely on but me (918, 635).

These experiences of aloneness resonate with Hoksbergen's (1997) notion of psychic homelessness, the feeling of being an emotional in-between that does not fit comfortably in social relationships. In particular, it is kinship relationships that do not fit comfortably for adoptees, and constitute psychic homelessness from the privileging of blood-ties in families. This sense of aloneness, of 'having no one', is indexed to the rights of birth children to support from their parents, and the obligations of blood-kinship for children's care. Adoptees lack these rights and embodied the abdication of obligations to them though intense and lasting loneliness. The metaphor of homelessness speaks to the

psychosocial rights and obligations sanctioned by kinship discourse, and the abandonment of children in a socio-political landscape where they have no such rights regardless of the way that legal fiction addresses their illegitimacy.

The metaphor of 'fit' was frequently engaged by participants to talk about the relationships within their adoptive family.

*Maxine:* I feel like a waif and stray (laugh)...I've often felt like I haven't fitted in and not belonged. That fitting in is a really big thing (322, 324, 330).

*Margaret:* I certainly had a rough time as far as, never felt like I quite fitted in, umm home was awful, hated being there (168).

*Alice:* I didn't fit in anywhere...I'm always in the middle and it's just like, it's not a very nice place to be, it wasn't a very nice place to grow up (753, 1115).

The metaphor of 'fit' indexes a sense of belonging, and a position that is sanctioned and located within the bonds of blood-kinship. The discomfort of not fitting, the roughness or at least unpleasantness, speaks to the embodied experiences of 'no man's land' that are relatively continuous within *born as if* relationships. Adoptees and the adoptive family did not always experience strongly attached bonds (Petta & Steed, 2004). The absence of 'fit' was articulated through feeling "different" from adoptive kin and this difference was experienced as "unnatural", "disconnected" and "abrasive".

*Brendon:* It was hard growing up with mum because she was so different...and I got how different she was when I met my birth mother, it's just like fuck (187, 189).

*Sally:* I think as an adoptive person you don't have, I mean I feel like I have a forced relationship with my family (adoptive). It doesn't come natural...we don't have that same click...we're just different, you know so I don't feel like I've ever really had that connection and still don't and probably do more out of, I probably, like I go down and see her and I take her out and I do this 'cause she's 78 now, more out of, and I shouldn't say obligation 'cause that's really horrible, but it probably is out of that (454, 457, 139).

*Maxine:* I still find it hard to be close with them, I mean I'm close to them but it's not like, it doesn't just flow you know. It feels so umm friction bit of friction probably more from me yeah mmm (254).

For Brendon, it was recognising his birth mother that contextualised his difference from his adoptive mother. Being different to also mattered to how the relationship with the adoptive family was experienced; rather than natural it felt forced, rather than flow it felt like friction. Discourses of blood-kinship naturalise nuclear families so that difference is deviant, strange and disconnected. Despite a lack of connection, Sally felt a sense of “obligation” to her adoptive mother, which was problematic to her because she understood that obligation alone, was not an appropriate social bond. Most of the participants experienced themselves as different rather than belonging to their adoptive family, and this is similar to research findings that three out of four adoptees’ experienced a lack of close adoptive family associations and a sense of belonging (Triseliotis, 1973).

Through the moral sanctions of legitimacy, adoptees embody ill-fitting and different positions on the ‘outside’ of normative narratives of the nuclear family through which they are othered. The challenge of an adoptee’s legitimate place in the adoptive family is not only produced through adoptive relationships, and the adoptee’s recognisable difference, but is also accessible to birth family members. Barry’s birth family positions him as belonging to his “own” (adoptive) family; positioning that ignores his experience of isolation and his felt need to be connected.

*Barry:* They just can’t deal with it, they kind of all believe like I have my own family and you know I have my own life and yeah it’s nice to have, umm, it’s nice that I’m in their lives, arrh particularly for my birth mother, and so I think there’s a lot of respect there for her and their relationship with her...so they’re by proxy with me, but I really get that umm, it’s not with me (673, 678, 680).

The legitimacy of positioning within the adoptive family *born as if*, serves to exclude Barry from connecting with those to whom he is naturally connected through normative narratives of the nuclear family. Despite his relationship with his birth mother, he remains ‘outside’ wider biological relationships. He is there by “proxy”, an assignee of his birth mother.

The policy that positions adoptees *born as if* limits their connection within family; neither *born to* the adopted family nor *born from* a birth family: “I’ll never be anybody’s biological child” (Maxine, 195). While *as if born* constitutes a legislative connection with the adoptive family, it doesn’t relieve the burdens of illegitimacy, nor heal the violent experience of being ‘cut’ from biological kinship. The arguments that constituted adoption as the solution to the moral sanctions of legitimacy, for illegitimate children, were not realised in the positioning or the lived experience of most participants.

For some, though, close and supportive relationships were experienced within their adoptive families. They felt part of their family system; connected and belonging. Mary’s relationship with her adoptive mother feels like a positive bond, and she regards her adoptive mother as the mother she was meant to

have. In this sense, to be *born as if* is taken up as “meant to be”. Triseliotis (1973) also found that adoptees who experienced successful adoptions took up environmental narratives that enabled them feel securely *born as if*.

Where meaning is attached to the positive influence of the environment, the value of blood-kinship does not resist an adoptee feeling a sense of belonging. For most of the participants, however, *born as if* remained a legal fiction; the loss of connection to both birth and adopted families reproducing a sense of ‘psychic homelessness’, belonging ‘outside’ any familial relationship – forever returned to no-man’s land.

### ***Adoption Law Reform***

For some adoptees, righting the wrongs of the moral dominancy of legitimacy and redressing the failures of the legal fiction, *born as if*, can be realised through reformation of adoption laws. Worldwide and within Aotearoa/New Zealand there is a history of political activism to overturn adoption legislation and practices. Yet while there have been in excess of 80,000 adoptees produced through the Adoption Act (1955), the effects of the Act remain socially and politically unacknowledged (Griffith, 1997).

The participants did not think that ‘others’ consider their experience important. More specifically, the lack of interest by governments implicitly addresses the connection between social power relations and the lived effects of adoption’s legal fiction.

*Cooley*: Well there just seems to be so much more that’s more important, you know what I mean like the government and their little people fucken losing their jobs and what’s happening overseas and all that stuff, you know, it’s certainly not, I don’t see it on their list of important things (531).

The significance of the lack of interest by governments in redressing the practices of adoption is that it reproduces the adoptee in the position of deficit: In this case not being good enough, lacking in importance. This deficit position fits with their lived experiences of the moral sanctions of legitimacy.

The inevitability of lack of government action to rectify the law is represented as a gendered problem. It is the mothers who carry the burden for bearing the illegitimate children and society positions children as inherently the concern of women (Greenwood, 2000). Where “government” is understood as masculine and the responsibility for maternity is feminine, it is possible for “governments” to “walk away”.

*Sally:* I think umm, it's a female thing and males aren't interested in that...so how can a male that's sitting in a politician's sitting in government be interested...because men walk away all the time (1161, 1171, 1175).

Barry locates the lack of government redress in a failure to recognise the human rights issues for children in the technological interventions into social relationships.

*Barry:* You know until we get some politician...with a lot of political savvy, then why would anyone care...I actually think it's even worse than that, which makes me a bit despondent, but if we look at the dialogue I guess on umm reproductive technologies...I find that just so offensive, and yet again what it shows about society is that adoption, which I guess is a form of reproductive technology for infertile parents, is that it's parent focused, adult focused...none of that dialogue is around the kids, rights lie with parents, with adults...not with the kids (1635, 1641, 1645, 1662).

The exclusion of "child rights" from the "reproductive technology dialogue" is the same exclusion that adoption law reformers argue is problematic in the Adoption Act (1955). "The Act contains no reference to the child's rights – its focus is predominantly on the two sets of parents" (Ludbrook, 2008, para. 2), an exclusion that Barry experiences as 'offensive'. It makes sense there is a parallel between adoptees themselves being oppressed alongside the political issue of law reform.

Shelly engages with a rights discourse to advocate moderate reform premised on a need for connection at least through exchanging significant information.

*Shelly:* I think it should change, but I think that if, for whatever reasons the parents and the birth mother feel that in their situation a closed adoption would be better, I think that should be able to happen...but I think that when the adoptee turns 21 or whatever they should have the right to information then and I think that through, all the way through, they should be able to have access to medical records and some sort of umm, sort of knowledge about their roots (817, 821).

For Shelly, the 'right' to know a birth history produces some challenges, and she focuses particularly on rights to access medical history throughout the 'closed' period. Discourses privileging blood-kinship are realised in valuing biological information, and in the idea of a right to know your "roots".

Recognising adoption as a human rights problem is crucial to arguments for law reform, but participants advocating change also recognised challenges to the success of their movement.

*Jan*: [There is no law reform] because it's boring and...people who are adopted are part of that disposable population that people don't care about...there's not a huge moral, 'cause well, as the adoption's happened there's stuff about sex outside of marriage, or being able to look after children, or abuse of children has been dealt with so there's actually, with the adoption thing itself, there's no huge dramas directly related to it. You can't, it's probably more difficult to get people's moralistic anger up about it...so you won't get, I don't think in public world, I don't think you'll get two hugely heated sides to the debate that then make an agreement happen in the middle...so the debate isn't going to be loud...the pro's and con's will just be umms and arrhs... 'cause it's not quite, and it's only emotive for people who see that they have been directly harmed by it which is not all adoptees (1070, 1074, 1079, 1084).

For Jan, indifference to living the effects of moral conflict over legitimacy makes law reform improbable. Adoptees' experiences are lost within the parts of a "disposable population". Relative to other social problems, adoption itself is not a problem. More specifically, stories of the harmful effects may be constituted as emotional and 'treatable' individualised problems. In this way, it is difficult to generate a political/moral response from those who live 'outside' the experience and/or who see adoption as a relatively insignificant, individualised issue.

Adoptees advocacy of legal reform recognises the legislative impact on their embodied experiences. The lack of governmental action towards adoption law reform continues to reproduce the adoptee as marginalised and individually deficient and adoption still remains an ignored political and social issue.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The subject positions enabled in the discourses available to the adoptees who talked with us about their experience of the legal fiction of the Adoption Act (1955) stress the psychosocial significance of morally subjugating children, and the adults they become, to the legitimacy of the nuclear family, and the principle of *nullis filius*. As illegitimate children, the Adoption Act (1955) subjects adoptees to the rights, duties and obligations of positions within discourses that constitute their legitimacy through naturalising the nuclear family and privileging blood-kinships.

Participants were born into a metaphorical no-man's land between the illegitimate blood-kin of their birth family and legitimate but often ill-fitting and alienating membership of their adopted family. The nurturing connections usually assumed as natural between mother and child were denied them, and they lived the shame and isolation of illegitimacy. As the child *born as if* to their adopted family, they felt psychically homeless, and lacked the rights of birth children to support from their parents, and the obligations of blood-kinship for children's care. Their recognised differences from their adoptive

family felt unnatural. Where environment was valued at least as much as blood-kinship, positive connections within adoptive families were enabled, however most of those we spoke with continued to live with psychic homelessness and moral burden which the legal fiction of adoption did not redress.

Some adoptees become advocates for legal reform, drawing on discourses of human rights to recognise their losses under the Adoption Act (1955). Advocates argue that the ongoing failure of the state to recognise the social justice implications of the Adoption Act (1955) is an abuse of state responsibility for the best interests of the child (Griffith, 1991; Henaghan, 2006; Ludbrook, 1997). In practice, those of us working in communities and applied social psychology settings can work towards supporting adoptees' calls for legislative change, and affirming their human rights to access their birth relationships, and share the burden of moral responsibility for illegitimacy.

Beyond legislative reform, and social recognition that adoptees' human rights need restoration, there remain questions of the moral conflicts that produced illegitimacy as a deficit to be borne by children whose parents are not married. Social change has arguably reduced sanctions against unwed mothers and/or fathers raising their children in Aotearoa/New Zealand, since fewer children are available for adoption, though no fewer are born illegitimate. As these contemporary social conditions transform the deficits of illegitimacy away from children born out of wedlock, we are left to question who is now positioned as morally illegitimate? Are the social sanctions of illegitimacy deferred to 'teenage' and 'welfare dependent' parents? And how might this matter to the lived experience of their children?

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## Wade in the Water: Awash in the Sense of Adoption

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### Abstract

A discursive approach to knowledge contends that language is the constitutive force of experience and lived reality. Meaning is created through language use within relationships, while discourses function as the statements that produce knowledge, power and truth claims. We cannot step outside of the discourses through which our knowledge of experience is produced, though their complexity always allows us to resist particular identities that are discursively available to us. Based on interviews with 12 adoptees constituted within the 'closed' adoption period between 1955 and 1985, this narrative analysis represents the way in which the adoptive body matters to participants' experiences of adoption and their resistances to the discourses that produce knowledge of adoption: Embodiment needed to be incorporated into this discursive work. Knowing, accessing and being-in-the-world are achieved through our senses in everyday life. We engage and shape cultural norms that enable and constrain corporeality. The adoptive experience is lived and felt through bodies that struggle to articulate their corporeality through discourse. Without discourses fit for purpose, speaking embodiment in and through adoption is precarious and adoptees attempt to articulate subjectivities beyond those allowed. This paper discusses the strategies used to materialise body matters in researching adoption.

**Keywords:** Adoption, adoptees, body, identity, birth family, adoptive family, reunion.

### Introduction

Institutions use language at the political, cultural and small group level to inform social practices, such as adoption. These institutional discourses become the rules and values that govern and allow subjects to make sense of the world and to act from those positions (Danaher, Schiratio, & Webb, 2000; Parker, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1993). Discourses do not represent some pre-existing 'reality' that awaits discovery, but are the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Possibilities outside of that which it speaks are limited by the available social discourses (Gutting, 2005; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Weedon, 1999). Stepping outside is precarious for it risks not making sense. For the adopted subject, language to represent the adoption experience is limited and bound by every-day, non-adopted knowledge of family, identity and 'self'.

A space outside of taken-for-granted family norms is rarely accessible and the stories and experiences of adoptees struggle to be told otherwise. The "paradox of

untellability" where language is constitutive and yet "falls short of its task – it disintegrates under the strain" (Wajnryb, 2001, p. 36), was clear to the research participants in the study that the first author has conducted. For Jan, being an adoptee, displaced from her birth family was "a knowing; it is actually more than just having a house and land, it's knowing, yeah, that I haven't actually got words for really" (971)<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, for Maxine adopted experiences are "always hard to explain because it's kind of like a lot of, it is kind of pre-verbal you know and it's accessing that kind of stuff" (104). The adoptive body matters to how experiences of adoption are lived and any resistances to the discourses that regulate adoption.

When I (first author) ponder what being adopted means my body whispers sounds, feelings and instinct, but it is unable to enunciate from that particular place. When I attempt to theorise how my body matters, my body speaks but in a feeling sense and I cannot name those feelings. Yet here the body hurts. Just like the research participants, in producing a text about adoption and adopted experiences I am constrained in and through my positioning within the taken-for-granted language of kinship, family, body and 'self'. Similarly, while attempting to theorise the adopted body I rely on the language and theories of others, and finding words to enunciate a particular space for an adoptee is fraught when language for those experiences has not been specifically produced. As an adoptee, I too fight against the structure of language that disallows the place for me, the adopted subject. It is as if that place is just beyond my reach. And like Butler (1993) when I try to feel the "materiality of the body" I always find myself in "other domains" (p. ix). It is because of this, the materialisation of the adopted body necessarily needs to be understood within this work. The adopted body is a lived/felt body that enunciates within a particular discursive space.

By tracing the historical, social and moral practices of adoption, it became clear that the adopted body is produced the same as non-adopted bodies and the bodies that are produced in mainstream psychological research are constituted as either pathological or informative to genetic heritability, effectively silencing adopted bodies.

<sup>1</sup> Numbers in brackets represent line numbers of the participants' transcribed interviews.

## Silencing Adopted Bodies

### The Legislated Body

In 1955, the Adoption Act came into effect in Aotearoa/New Zealand and legislated adoption as a social practice that completely severed all ties with the birth family. To enable this, Section 16(2)a of the Adoption Act (1955) established that it would be “as if the child had been born to that parent in lawful wedlock”, thereby producing the child as a legal fiction. Fiction in law, a contradiction to fact, is deemed acceptable with practical implications, such as righting the wrong of illegitimacy and hiding the immorality of the birth mothers’ indiscretions’ (Griffith, 1991; Ludbrook, 2008). The ‘complete break’ climate meant adoptees were not granted any contact with ‘bad’ birth parents or their families, legally or socially. Over 80,000 adoptees were constituted within this legislative and social act (Griffith, 1991).

When Vaughn described his illegitimate position, he said “I wasn’t good enough ... I think you’ll be judged ... that you are *nobody*” (272, 425, 427). To be born illegitimate, was to be born with no rights to a name, education or family and it was believed that illegitimacy posed a significant risk to public morality (Carp, 2009; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Griffith, 1998). To be “*no-body*” produces adoptees as less than, (not of this social world) and here they suffer an inherent shame, the embodied condition of their/our birth.

The implementation of the Adoption Act (1955) engaged social practices that served to keep signs of illegitimacy and adoption concealed. This included practices of secrecy to hide the adoptee’s birth shame, to protect the adoptive family from being positioned as different to traditional families (and/or to hide infertility) and to enable a life trajectory for the birth mother without retribution for her shameful behaviour. Great effort was made to protect the birth secret and its bodily implications, including adoptive mothers creating pregnant bodies by using pillows to imitate pregnancy (Else, 1991), matching observable genetic traits between adoptive parents and the child (hair, eye and skin colour and/or intelligence), and sending the birth mother away to discrete homes to have the child (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998).

Further, the consequences of the adoption event were not discussed, and little or no information was provided to the adopted child about their birth origins. Margaret said, “I knew I came from somewhere that I wasn’t allowed to know anything about. I remember having fights when I was really little, about why won’t you tell me and I actually don’t think they knew very much, well they certainly weren’t forthcoming and [my adoptive mother] used to get very upset saying – “why do you want to know? I can’t tell you anything”” (104). It was assumed that a good, loving environment would override any genetic predisposition and more than

compensated for any birth family loss (Griffith, 1991) Acting as *if* would produce secure attachment with adoptive parents and enable ‘stable’ identities for the adopted child within the adoptive family (Watkins 2006).

However, as some adoptees grew to maturity they began to contest the denial of any rights to a birth history, and after years of lobbying against the 1955 Act as a human rights violation, the Adult Adoptee Information Act came into force in 1985. The power of that legislation was to overturn the particular strategy that had suppressed adoptees’ rights to know details of their birth. Adoptees could now access their original birth certificates, which usually provided only a birth mother’s name. Reunion became possible (Else, 1997; Griffith, 1982). However, the embodied silence and lived effects of being enabled and constrained in political and social discourses that shunned and disallowed a birth history made reunions problematic. And again for adoptees, this lived experience is difficult to story, as Barry testifies:

Unless you’ve been separate from it and then reconnected to it you aren’t going to know that ... I mean like if you are not adopted then you’ve always had that connection ... if you haven’t been adopted and haven’t been reconnected then you don’t know you’ve lost it ... like you have to have an awareness of having it then losing it, to know that it wasn’t there (563, 566, 570, 572). Barry signifies how living as an adoptee is not understood by others that have always had blood-as-kinship relationships and that this is a ‘felt’ embodied experience, an awareness of the presence of the absence.

### The Psychological Body

Particular versions of adopted bodies are found in psychological research<sup>1</sup>. While tracing the social, moral and political history of adoption, it is apparent that where the adopted body has been discussed it is a deviant, pathological body that is only valued for its physiological character. The way in which this body is represented has mattered because psychology as a knowledge producing institution searches for a knowledge that does particular things to particular subjects in specific ways.

The adopted body is represented through the study and application of behaviour genetics. Here, traditional psychology assumes it can gain insight into human behaviour and provide universal language and criteria for mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Adoptees are a valued population in genetic research because it becomes possible to separate genes from contextual and environmental factors and researchers can examine early experiences and the

<sup>1</sup> For example see the work of Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, and Lash Esau (2000), Juffer and van IJzendoorn (2007) and Triseliotis (1973).

ascertain if variables are biologically heritable, or produced through parental patterns, or the environment (Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005).

Within psychology, genetic research involves investigating familial patterns, examining first-degree biological relatives for a particular disorder and comparing those results to that of the general population. Within the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), adoption studies highlight a three to fourfold increase in risk for Alcohol Dependence when children were adopted out of birth families and had adoptive parents without Alcohol Dependence. Adoption studies also help demonstrate a genetic component to Somatization Disorder and Bipolar I Disorder, with first-degree biological relatives of people with Bipolar I Disorder shown to have elevated rates of Bipolar I Disorder (4%-24%), Bipolar II Disorder (1%-5%), and Major Depressive Disorder (4%-24%). Weegar (2000) recognises that a biological or genetic lens on adoption focuses on the problematic aspects of adoptees' 'inferior' genetic make-up, which resonates with the 'fears' of inheriting 'bad blood' that are evident in the arguments for legal adoption. This emphasis on causality as being 'in the blood', negates the complexity of social relations in which an adoptee is embedded.

The occurrence of Genetic Sexual Attraction as an effect of the adopted body has received research and social attention. Genetic Sexual Attraction was a term first coined by Barbara Gonyo, a birth mother who experienced an overwhelming 'sexual' desire for her birth son when they were reunited. Genetic Sexual Attraction refers to a particular relationship that occurs between two biologically related adults, after having been separated at birth or in early infancy. Although they are biologically connected, these adults have no kinship affinity because they were not raised together and legally they are no longer related since the child is reconstituted *as if born to* another family (Greenberg, 1997). Genetic Sexual Attraction and particular forms of adopted pairings are positioned as problematic because they are unusual and equated with incest, a taboo in most cultures. With the moral abhorrence of incestuous relationships, societies have strategies for dealing with those who break the incest taboo, including social denunciation and legal sanction: imprisonment. During the closed adoption period, adoption legislation attempted to protect against such incidences by providing access to information about biological identities for adoptees in special circumstances that included checks to prevent marrying a blood relative (Griffith, 1997; Rockel & Ryburn, 1988). However, this did not always work and for the reuniting bodies that experience overwhelming feelings, emotions and sensation without discourses fit for purpose, it follows that sexuality becomes a form of sense making for these events. That something happens in the adopted body is not contested here; adoption is lived and felt at a cellular level as Maxine describes, "there's nothing

intellectual about adoption and the intellectual stuff is the adult stuff, the rest is cellular and umm, you know, it's so profound" (584).

The first author also describes her experiences of a cellular embodiment, "I learnt about the cellular level when my birth mother reached out and touched my arm for the first time and I felt a surge of electricity race through my nerves. It was an overwhelmingly unforgettable experience and the significance of it still puzzles me today".

Other than representing the adopted body through and in genetic and pathological discourse, where the adopted body is reduced to genetic heritability of disorder or pathologised through Genetic Sexual Attraction, *how* the adopted body matters is ignored in research. Therefore, to enable the lived/felt experience of the adopted body to be written/spoken, theories of the body need to be taken up. The following section discusses the strategies I have used to materialise body matters in adoption research.

### Theorising Adopted Bodies

Freeman (2002, 2010) proposes a way to understand shared histories and memories effecting bodies after a poignant and heartfelt visit to Germany, which involved sights and sounds becoming "a kind of living, breathing presence...[a] monument to memory" (p. 197). He questioned the possibility of an energy field or a non-material trace of past traumatic events that linger and give rise to a sense of, and an experience of a self. Here the past becomes inscribed in the present; it remains alive and active though not consciously 'known'. This experience is named the 'narrative unconsciousness' or that which has been lived but un-thought and affects bodies. Here the cultural dimension of autobiographical narratives and cultural texts are stitched into the fabric of memory. Barry understands the importance of history and cultural texts. He wants others also to privilege this knowledge:

I just, that's my dream, do you know what I mean? That we understand that family and our connection to it to our genetic family, to our biological family is huge. It is who we are, it's not just who we are right now, but it's who, where we've come from, it's, it is our (tears) it is our ancestors (1745).

A 'narrative unconsciousness' is more than the private, inner dimensions understood by psychoanalytic understandings of unconsciousness; sources beyond the boundary of a subject become woven into memory. Freeman (2002, 2010) proposes that the 'narrative unconsciousness' is the mostly unrecognised and therefore uncognised part of our histories that is inherited through our status as historical beings. We become aware of this 'narrative unconsciousness' at the moment our historical and cultural situatedness comes into view. Brendon experienced this on the first reunion meeting his birth mother:

[It] was amazing aye and instantly there's a connection – that whole unspoken thing – there's just whole catching eyes and just, our ancestors are there, you know with us, on our shoulders (tears) (562).

While talking about this experience, Brendon began to cry, his tears represent the grief and connection that was embodied. Embodiment, according to MacLachlan (2004), encompasses an “abstract idea with a physical entity” (p. 2), for instance, the shaming action or social discourse becomes embodied when notions of shame are represented in the body (sinking feeling in the stomach, head lowered). Embodiment, rather than the body as an empirical object, is the vital condition of psychological and social life. As a medium for displaying our social-psychological conditions, our embodiment talks to the collective and individual positions we take towards one other and that shape the world in which we meet (Radley, 1996). For example, Griffith (1991) states that adoptees know they have been rejected by their birth mother and embody the fear that it may happen again. To anticipate further rejection is not only experienced as “anxiety”, but because the “fear of rejection” is always present, it also represents difference. Cooley said “I do have, you know, abandonment issues as an adult ... just get into a bit of a panic state of feeling really quite, sort of, you know, a bit anxious” (142, 723). Embodiment enables adopted bodies to be the conduit to display what matters and how, and is a key to the social world. The physical body is bounded to individual corporeal events involving social judgments and constraints of bodily actions (Radley, 1996). It is recognised that the body feels pain, gets sick, has desires and is dependent upon the material world; however, we are more than a physical experience through our individuated bodies. (Radley, 1996). And in this sense, we engage and shape cultural norms to enable or prohibit our bodily functions

Embodiment represents the way in which the body cannot be separated from the mind, contrary to the Cartesian mind/body split (MacLachlan, 2004). In the seventeenth century, Descartes heralded the emergence of a mind/body dualism, where mind is considered non-physical. As an epistemological assumption, this view has come to be widely accepted with the distinction between the mental and physical continuing today. As shown through traditional adoption research, the body is treated as an object in which to measure, treat and modify disorders of mind. At this site, it is also argued that empirical knowledge can only be obtained by removing human senses because they are positioned as unreliable.

Contesting this mind/body split, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues for a body-subject because knowing, accessing and being-in-the-world are achieved through our senses in everyday life. Often taken-for-granted, perception in lived experience is how we exist; it is devoid of conscious thought, but not of subjective being. Before rational thinking, before our thoughts

facilitate concepts and language, our body is always already engaged. In this theory, Maxine's pre-verbal body that was difficult for her to access becomes legitimate and valued. The body-subject is the foundation of thinking. We see, we hear, we feel - we use our perception.

Merleau-Ponty (1962), a phenomenologist, professes that we must rediscover the world through perception, a way of being we are prone to forget because rational thinking is valued. Discarding dualistic thought Merleau-Ponty argues that the mind and body are interwoven; one cannot exist without the other. Embodied we exist in the physical, denying this is to deny our existence at all. According to Noland (2009) Merleau-Ponty is interested in how the body is implicated in what the mind thinks it knows.

Although assigning a place for the body, Merleau-Ponty is still situated within the discursive turn. Language as part of our human survival produces and reproduces the depth or quality of our experience. The body is foundational and through the actions of embodying language where it is spoken through sounds in space and time, the body is able to live and speak to others (Munro & Belova, 2009). Language cannot be conceived of as an addition to the body, with speech the conduit of thought because often we do not know our own thoughts until spoken.

Our embodied existence is in relationship to the world, our experience of the world is influenced and influences our experience of being-in-the-world (MacLachlan, 2004). We do not experience our own or others bodies as objects. However, in everyday living we are not aware of minds and bodies separately, just of other human beings. Knowledge of ourselves and others are experienced as a unified whole (Matthews, 2002) And how we relate to our own and other bodies matters to our being in the world.

In this sense, when we understand behaviour from the ‘inside’ it can enable phenomena, for example illness, disability, disease or dysfunction to be understood as more than mechanical malfunctioning of an object. Some experiences have emotional meaning to give them a quality and a relationship to other qualities that enables connections among experiences that otherwise have nothing in common. We only know others through their bodies; the way they move, talk, gesture and so forth (Crossley, 1996). Phenomenology is also not a-historical, it values lived experience as historically and culturally mediated (Solomon, 2006). Merleau-Ponty represented the social and the biological as inseparable processes.

An important facet of Merleau-Ponty's arguments is the movement away from the idea of a transcendental ego (an identity that our minds create), and the meaning attached to consciousness. It involves a style of thinking that sheds what we know as existence, or what we commonly think of as existence. In doing this we do not withdraw the self (as a transcendental ego) from the

and situated in the world. By loosening our conscious threads, a phenomenological analysis cannot become a complete reduction as we cannot separate ourselves from our embodied world (Gutting, 2001).

Merleau-Ponty's theorising of a body, according to Gutting (2001), includes intentionality or the union between the world and consciousness. This unity is the fundamental beginning of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty interpreted Husserl's notion of intentionality to mean more than knowing and experiencing the world through acts of consciousness that are directed towards some object, it is a fundamental priority which is intrinsic to us (Gutting, 2001). Here, the body as perceiving and experiential is intimately entwined and engaged with the world. Merleau-Ponty makes a shift in his understanding of intentionality to encompass notions of motility (Solomon, 2006) where the body inhabits time and space, and intentions are not secondary to the object. Movement matters.

In relation to adoption, I have found that Merleau-Ponty's case of the 'phantom limb', which he uses to argue the need for a being-in-the-world paradigm, provides a metaphor for an adoptees' embodied sense of their missing birth mother. In the case of the phantom limb, after an amputation, it is possible to experience the missing limb as if it is still present. Physiological and psychological theories cannot explain this phenomenon in isolation. However together, they enable a more comprehensive understanding, and remove the need to select between describing the present nerve transmissions or the not present remembered limb. Merleau-Ponty (1962) asserts that the absent limb is still in relationship to parts of the world that 'speak' to the limb and it has an ambivalent presence. The subject retains a practical knowing of action that was present before the limb was lost; the habitual body learns to do things in the world with continuous repetition, such as turning a doorknob or drinking from a glass. This impersonal response remains even when the personal experience of actually doing these things is no longer available.

The adopted subject experiences the presence of the absent birth mother in much the same sense, and here she is the phantom mother. Although removed, the birth mother remains present through bodies that question the why and how of relinquishment. For Maxine, they had "already bonded - they'd long ago bonded - it was already you know there, part of it, it already had its genetic history, it had nine months you know it was already a being" (901, 909). The connection of the body matters and for Mary, while her "birth mother was sent away...that feeling definitely goes, has to go...the feelings of the mother definitely go across to the child" (542, 544).

Our being-in-the-world is ambiguous. In the phantom limb example, the limb is a part of the past that remains quasi-present, it is more than a memory - it is a virtual experience. This experience can often remain on the

periphery but at times, and in particular situations, it becomes central (Gutting, 2001). Likewise, the absent presence of birth mothers for adoptees may move from the periphery to a more central aspect of our experience.

Merleau-Ponty represents the body as 'lived' (Crossley, 1996). Here, the adopted body can be valued as constituted and constituting adoptive experiences. Being-in-the world for adoptees occurs at the site of the body, and matters to how it is lived.

Foucault provides another way to materialise the adopted body. Here, knowledge as a form of power and a model of surveillance enables the regulation and disciplining of bodies. Foucault's notion of 'bio-power' represents the way in which the human body is enmeshed in social practices which lead to processes of acculturation, knowledge and truth (Burkitt, 1999; Danaher, et al., 2000).

Power enacted on bodies is not located within a subject, institution or structure; power is ubiquitous (Foucault, 1982). Moreover, power, according to Foucault, exists only when it is enacted. To this effect knowledge becomes a practical form of power as it performs disciplinary actions on the body; it regulates thinking, controls behaviour and orders emotions (Clegg, 1997). Disciplinary power is efficient because subjects embody knowledge and rules to govern their own behaviour. When the social dictums are internalised, subjects then become their own overseers. The state does not need to exert its power through dictatorship and force, instead practices of rationality and technologies of control implement political rule (Danaher, et al., 2000; Gutting, 2001; Rose, 1999; Sarup, 1993). Power in this way involves minimal cost to governments (Sarup, 1993).

Burkitt's (1999) reading of Foucault suggests that biological life is entangled with history and emotion and narrative sense making. Each interacts and affects one another. The body is at the root of this connection between biology and history, and as the body moves with time so has the human capacity to think and know.

Foucault represents the body as inscribed (Crossley, 1996). Adoptees, for example, embody secrecy and silence as a moral code for behaviour and as dictated by the Adoption Act 1955. Many adoptees do not overtly resist that code or perform outside of the desired socially sanctioned understanding of family as different or 'other'. As bodies are inscribed by particular rules it means they are always, already there. They are acted often without thought. Brendon describes how feelings inhabit his body and when they overwhelm, he acts his anger.

When these feelings are too big to process it's so easy, it's so much easier to flick into anger...and acting out angrily, being angry... 'cause it's easy man, it's nice to let the, to vent the steam you know, and it's so easy, I just so want to like 'go' society then, man - to let happen what happened. It's fucken not okay (laugh) man (440, 444, 446).

## Body Matters

This paper discussed body matters for adoptees. These matters include the strategies of silence that occurred because of the social, moral and political discourses that regulated the adopted subject *as if born to* and thereby the same as non-adopted subjects. Concealing a birth history meant adoptees were not allowed to discuss, resist or know about the *born to* relationship. They were positioned as the same as and equal to the non-adopted body. And while the adopted body is spoken to within traditional knowledge producing institutions, the privileging of the rational, unified subject meant adoptees were only understood in genetic or pathological speak. Instead, this work suggests that the ideas of Freeman, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault offer strategies through which to understand the complexity of the multi-vocal adopted body and how that might matter to the lived experience of being-in-the world *as if born to*. That the adopted body is unlike the non-adopted body matters, and in this way the adopted body necessitates theoretical accessibility.

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