Rainbow Families: Cross-Cultural Adoption And The Best Interests Of The Child

Nicole M. Hemstad-Leete

B.S.W., University of Northern British Columbia, 2002

Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment Of

The Requirements For The Degree Of

Master Of Social Work

The University Of Northern British Columbia

December 2007

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48799-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48799-0

ABSTRACT

Charlotte Meyer shudders as she recalls the poster she spotted in her neighborhood. Staring back at her, a photo of a little boy resembling Aaron, her young son of African heritage. Above the caption read "Stop stealing our children and calling it adoption. Take back our children!" (Webber, 1998, p. 78).

Adoption is a process where people who are not biologically related to each other come together to create a family. When parents adopt children whose ethnicity is other than the parents, this is known as cross-cultural adoption. There are many people who believe that culture and ethnicity are the most important factors in determining whether children should be adopted, stating that children should only be adopted into families who share the same ethnicity and culture.

Cross-cultural adoption can and does create families and is one such alternative that presents an option which provides permanency for children. It is in the child's best interest to be raised in a family rather than in foster care. Borrowing from the grounded theory approach, using snowball sampling, comparative data, ethnography and thematic analysis, this study will examine the experiences of families formed through cross-cultural adoption. As a parent to four children who joined my family through cross-cultural adoption, my lived experiences are woven throughout the thesis through the process of auto-ethnography.

Final analysis confirms that cross-cultural adoption can and does work when children are encouraged to learn about their culture and ethnicity, are taught to be proud of their heritage and history, and have been encouraged to hold themselves in high regard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Si Transken for her unfailing support and encouragement throughout this thesis project. Thank you for allowing the possibility to write academically and creatively and for encouraging me to examine culture as it pertains to me. I thank my thesis committee, Dr. Willow Brown, Dr. Jacqueline Holler and Dr. Bruce Bidgood and the First Friday Research Group for your support, advice, and education throughout. I am forever grateful to my research participants – thank you for your participation in this project. Your words, experiences, strength and hope lend credence to this work. Thank you!

I was born and raised in Mackenzie, BC and never believed I would have the opportunity or ability to attend a university. I am eternally grateful to all the people who were instrumental in bringing a university to the north so northerners can obtain a university education. I thank police-based Victim Services, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, both child protection and adoption teams. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to become the social worker I am.

Thank you to my husband Jeremy for your constant encouragement, love, and support and for taking over parenting while I read, researched, studied and typed. Thank you for forever believing in me and for your unfailing encouragement and motivation. I am forever reminded of how fortunate I am to have you as my life partner, best friend and confidant.

I thank my parents Gerry and Linda Hemstad for believing that anything is possible and that I have the ability to do whatever I want in life if I work hard enough and believe in myself.

I especially thank my children – William, Sharona, Gerhard and Tristan for your courage, determination, resiliency and resistance in this world. Thanks for letting me be your Mom…….Now, we play!

DEDICATION

I know that life is not fair to many of the smallest and most vulnerable of all humans – the children. I am acutely aware of the injustices placed upon children throughout the world. Unspeakable and horrible events occur to children every second and every hour of every day. The resiliency of children always has, and always will continue to astound me. This work is dedicated to all of the brave and resilient children in the world who are homeless, family-less, unsafe in their homes, scared and alone.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Not flesh of my flesh, nor bone of my bone,
But still miraculously – my own.
Never forget for a single minute:
You didn't grow under my heart
But in it. (Conkling Heyliger, 2005)

As the mother of four children, all who were adopted and joined our family to create a cross-cultural family, I come to this thesis with passion, a thirst for knowledge and a need to create happiness for myself and my family. I have a burning desire to do everything within my power to help my children to grow with connection to ethnicity, culture and tradition and to hold themselves in high esteem. Our youngest son is of African ancestry, joined our family as an infant who was born in the United States and whose adoption is referred to as an Intercountry adoption. The oldest three children, also of African ancestry joined our family through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, (MCFD) and their adoption is referred to as a domestic adoption. It is my expectation that I will be able to research what I am passionately concerned about in a way that will excite others and provide a new way of viewing the topic of cross-cultural adoption. Through the lived experiences of those families that are formed through cross-cultural adoption, it is my hope that my work throughout this project will challenge some of the dominant theories that exist

when it comes to cross-cultural adoption. I am optimistic that my research will add a different perspective to the idea of family. This thesis explores the current phenomena of media, celebrities and cross-cultural adoption and the outcome from that current context. It is a collection of stories and experiences of challenges and struggles, but also testimony to the resilience of parents and children. This thesis exemplifies how diverse families have overcome the difficulties and struggles of cross-cultural adoption. Every child's connection to culture and ethnicity is vital to self-identification and self-esteem. However, without permanence in the form of a loving adoptive family, children available for adoption will never have the opportunity to connect to their culture and ethnicity. I believe that the most important factor in adoption is permanency and all other aspects are important secondary factors.

Establishing Research Purpose

My interest in adoption stems from my personal and professional experience with adoption. I came to the decision to adopt children when I learned I was not physically able to create biological children. Being a parent in a cross-cultural adoptive family has motivated me to learn more about how parents can ensure the best interests of their children are met. Being a practicing adoption social worker allows the opportunity to connect children with parents through adoption. Over the course of the previous ten years, I have witnessed an increase in the number of people who have adopted cross-culturally. Many people come to the decision to adopt cross-

culturally because there are more children available for adoption whose culture is other than that of the adoptive parents. I will use the term "other" rather than the term "different", as language is powerful and invokes images and feelings. I believe the term other does not imply that one group is better than, whereas the term different implies that one group is the norm and other groups are variances of the dominant group.

The ongoing debate regarding same-culture adoptions and cross-culture adoptions is also a motivating factor for discovering more about the best interests of children. The debate that exists is a controversial one, with much passion and opinion from both sides. According to Swize (2002), since the rise in cross-cultural adoptions began in the 1950s, adoption professionals, policy-makers, scholars, and decision-makers have debated over definitions of the best interests of the children. Opponents of cross-cultural adoption argue children are harmed by being placed in cross-cultural adoptive families because the children's cultural identity suffers. These opponents support same-culture adoptive homes and suggest that if same-culture adoptive homes are not available, the children should not be adopted. Advocates of cross-cultural adoption believe that cross-cultural adoptive parents can provide permanent families for children who otherwise would be without families. These advocates also point to the thousands of black African, First Nations, Asian and Mexican children who are available for adoption and the small numbers of same-ethnicity potential adoptive parents who are willing and able to adopt them.

Margaret Fleming is the director of a Chicago agency called Adoption-Link that specializes in African American adoptions. In an interview with a reporter, she shared "there are more black children available for adoption in the United States than there are families interested in adopting them" (Glaser, 2004). According to MCFD (2005), fifty-seven percent of children available for adoption in British Columbia are First Nations heritage. As an adoptive parent, adoption social worker and having worked five years as a child protection social worker, it is my belief that children need permanent, stable and loving homes first and foremost. Self-identity, connection to culture and heritage are extremely important; however, cross-cultural adoptive parents can assist their children to connect to their culture without being of the same culture.

Research Question

Given the controversy regarding cross-cultural adoption and the arguments on either side of the debate, I wanted to determine if other cross-cultural adoptive families were experiencing difficulties as suggested in some of the literature. I know that my experiences thus far as a cross-cultural adoptive family have been a positive experience, but I wanted to find out if others experienced the same or differing situations. My key research question was to determine if permanence is the most important factor in adoption, or if culture and ethnicity are of the utmost importance when it comes to placing children in adoptive homes. Would the stories of the

families counteract the position that cross-cultural adoption is not in the best interest of children? If my research participants experience challenges and rewards, I want to know what some of these challenges and rewards are and how they pertain to cross-cultural adoption. I also want to determine what the participants' reasons are for adopting cross-culturally. Given that some literature suggests that children suffer loss of identity and low self-esteem if they are not connected to their ethnicity and culture, I want to determine how parents connect their children to their culture and ethnicity. Interestingly, global media coverage is currently focused on the cross-cultural adoption of movie stars and entertainers. I want to determine how research participants feel about the massive coverage and how it pertained to them and their families.

Definitions of Terms

Adoption: A means of providing children with security and meeting their developmental needs…by legally transferring ongoing parental responsibilities from their birth parents to their adoptive parents….recognizing that in doing so…we have created a new kinship network…that forever links those two families together through the child….who is shared by both (Reitz & Watson, 1992).

Adoption Breakdown: the dissolution of an adoption that has been finalized by the courts (www.mnadopt.org).

Adoption Disruption: An adoption that has not been finalized by the courts that dissolves at the pre-placement stage (www.mnadopt.org).

Adoptism: A prejudice against adoption defined by several beliefs including the belief that adoption is not a legitimate way to build a family, the belief that birthing children is always preferable to adopting, the belief that adoptees are defined throughout their lives by the fact of their adoption. (www.labourlawtalk.adoption.com).

African Heritage: Of or relating to the nations of Africa or their peoples, "African languages" (www.cogsci.princeton.edu).

Age Out: Referring to children who are never placed in permanent homes and out of foster care. These children are raised in the government foster care system and are then released from government care on their nineteenth birthday without parents or family to support and guide them (www.connectforkids.org).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, (ADHD): A common developmental and behavioral disorder. It is characterized by poor concentration, distractibility, hyperactivity and impulsiveness that are inappropriate for the child's age. Children and adults are easily distracted by sights and sounds in their environment, can not concentrate for long periods of time, are restless and impulsive and have a tendency to daydream and be slow to complete tasks (www.webcenter.health.com).

Auto: Self (Holt, 2003).

Auto-Ethnography: A genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context, often written in the first person and featuring dialogue, emotion and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Holt, 2003).

Best Interests of the Child: A subjective term. Determining the best interests of a child usually depends on the philosophical framework or perspective of the person who is making a decision regarding that child (Davies, 2000).

Bias: Any attitudes, beliefs or feelings that result in justification or unfair treatment of individuals or groups (Davies, 2000).

Biological Parents: The birth mother or father of a child rather than the adoptive or foster parent or the step-parent (www.encyclopedia.adoption.com).

Black: A term often used for people with dark colored skin who come from or whose ancestors came from middle and southern Africa (Barker, 2002).

Blood Bias: A term used to describe society's preference toward keeping children with their biological family members.

Commercialism: Commerce, transactions (sales and purchases) having the objective of supplying commodities (goods and services) (www.werdnet.princeton.edu).

Cross-Cultural: Society or group that is composed of people from more than one racial or ethnic group (www.websters-dictionary-online.org).

Cross-Cultural Competence: Ability to function according to the cultural rules of more than one cultural system; ability to respond in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways according to the cultural demands of a given situation (www.wordnet.princeton.edu).

Cultural Paranoia: A sociological and anthropological concept referring to a person's expectations or mistreatment. This cultural phenomenon has evolved as a group coping mechanism to respond to the consequences of racism. Cultural paranoia does not refer to the psychological concept referring to a mental disorder. This is a healthy coping mechanism in response to the dangers of racism (Mahoney, 1995).

Culture: Customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, religious and political behaviors of a group of people in a specific time period (Barker, 2002).

Ethnicity: The recognition of difference. Can be seen as four different types – ethnicity as a class, as political movement, as revival and as token identity. It is about boundaries, control and meaning construction. Ethnic identity is shifting, transactional and sometimes uncertain. A sense of being different than other groups because of cultural traditions, ancestry, origin, history or religion (Green, 1999).

Ethnography: Involving highly personal accounts of an author's own lived experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Holt, 2003).

Ethnos: Culture (Holt, 2003).

Family: Primary social group, parents and children, people from a common ancestor. Two or more people who consider themselves family (Barker, 2002).

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, (FASD): Various forms of damage to an unborn infant as a result of maternal alcohol consumption. Potential problems include delayed growth, mental disabilities, cranial-facial and limb abnormalities (Barker, 2002).

First Nation: A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word Indian which some people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term First Nations Peoples refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both status and non-status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term First Nation to replace the word band in the name of their community (www.ainc-inac.gc.ca).

Foster Care Drift: A term used to describe what happens to children when they languish in foster care for years, often moving from foster home to foster home and without a plan for permanence. Typically, these children are moved out of the foster care system at the age of adulthood with minimal life skills, no parental relationships to depend on and without a feeling of connectedness to family, identity or self (www.futureofchildren.org).

Graphy: The research process, (Holt, 2003).

Grounded Theory: A theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Institutional Racism: Institutions have great power to reward and punish. They reward by providing career opportunities for some people and preventing career opportunities for others. They reward by the way goods and distributed and by deciding who will receive training, skills, medical care, formal education, political influence, moral support and self respect, self-confidence and the promise of a secure future for self and children. Examples include segregated schools, discriminatory employment and promotion policies, white control of media, IQ tests standardized on white children, diminished expectations for children of colour by white teachers. (Mahoney, 1995).

Institutions: Fairly stable social arrangements and practices through which collective actions are taken. Examples of institutions are government, business, union, schools, churches, courts, police and child protection agencies (Mahoney, 1995).

Media: Forms of mass communication. Newspapers, magazines, direct mail, billboards, bus signs, radio, television and internet are some important media that carry advertising (www.motto-glossery.com).

Open Adoption: The process of birth parents and adoptive parents creating a relationship together that is on-going both before and after once the child is placed in the adoptive home (www.adoptionconnection.com).

Prejudice: Unfavourable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, thought or reason (Mahoney, 1995).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Most often PTSD occurs after a serious threat to ones life or the life of a loved one, or following a sudden and traumatic loss, such as ones home. PTSD has been caused by such varied stressors as violent assault, rape, military combat, tornadoes, earthquakes, airplane crashes, torture, fires, kidnapping or severe car accidents. As some patients and their family members realize, it can also be caused by a sudden life-threatening illness (www.ptsd.org).

Race: The idea of race is not helpful in advancing our understanding of difference, but it remains a prevalent notion. The idea of race has no standing of any kind as a scientific concern - it is neither a culture nor a fact of nature. Historically, people of various races were described as primitives, heathens or subhuman creatures all of whom would benefit from conquering, missionizing and civilizing. There is no way the idea of race can be objectively defined or measured as no one person can be categorized as a member of race due to skin pigmentation or having a particular type of nose, eyes or hair. It is for these reasons that this term will not be used throughout this work. Instead, terms such as culture, heritage and ethnicity will be used (Green, 1999).

Racism: Any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates a person or group because of the color of their skin. Racism is not just a form of attitudes or actions. Institutions and institutional structures can also be racist. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practice through the major institutions in our society (Mahoney, 1995).

Rainbow Families: Upbeat phrase adoptive parents sometimes use to describe their families when their children are of mixed or other ethnicity (www.encyclopedia.com).

Snowball Sampling: Sometimes used in qualitative research; participants are identified by earlier participants in a study (www.motto-glossery.com).

White Privilege: A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens or liabilities. A privileged position; the possession of an advantage white persons enjoy over non-white persons (www.whiteprivlege.com).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adoption today is a sophisticated process involving social workers, lawyers, judges and government. Through the years, adoption in British Columbia has witnessed regulation and strict adherence to governmental guidelines. On February 26, 1997, Canada signed the Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, also known as the Hague Convention. This convention enforces policies that establish safeguards so that international adoptions will be carried out in the best interest of children (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2005). The reason for signing the Hague Convention is to ensure adoptions are occurring ethically and to prevent the abduction and selling of children in the guise of adoption.

Options in Adoption

There are three paths to adoption in British Columbia today. People can adopt children who are in government care and available for adoption. Children in care reside in foster homes or group homes after being removed from their parents' care when a judge has determined it is not a safe option to ever return to their parents' care. A second option is to work with a licensed private agency and have the agency match children with parents. A third path to adoption is family adoption is direct placement adoption where one family member agrees to allow another family member to adopt a child. In these cases, a lawyer can apply to the court to have the adoption finalized.

Arguments against Cross-Cultural Adoption

Limited research exists at this time regarding the long-term impact to children who were raised in cross-cultural, adoptive homes. However, what has been written details the adverse effects on identity and cultural identification of children who are involved with a cross-cultural adoption. In many adoption books, child welfare articles and papers written on culture and adoption, there is the explicit warning about adopting children from an ethnicity other than that of the adopting parents. Webber (1998) states in the 1970s, the National Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) in the United States called for an end to cross-cultural adoption, stating such adoptions are akin to cultural genocide. Canadian authors Fournier and Crey (1997) suggest that children of Aboriginal heritage are often placed in non-Aboriginal adoptive homes where their cultural identity and knowledge of First Nations' heritage are erased forever. These opinions are based on the history of discrimination, racism, forced assimilation and the loss of biological connection to family, ethnicity, culture, history and heritage.

It is important to understand the history of adoption as it pertains to cross-cultural adoptions. Any person in the role of care-giver whose ethnicity is other than the child must understand the history associated with that child's culture and heritage. It is also equally important for the child to be made aware of that history.

History of Aboriginal Adoption in Canada

Canada has a tumultuous history when it comes to the issue of adoption and its effects on the First Nations people. The First Nations people of Canada were the first to inhabit this land. They were colonized by European discoverers, had their land taken from them, and entire tribes of people were wiped out due to disease brought to Canada by European settlers. Once the Canadian government was formed, it was determined that the First Nations children would attend residential school as a way to assimilate children into the European culture (Cardinal, 1999). First Nations children were literally taken from their homes and transported to residential schools miles away from their families (Fournier & Crey, 1997). While at residential schools, many First Nations children were beaten if they spoke their native language, were not fed or looked after properly, and suffered sexual and physical abuse (Cardinal, 1999). When the children were finally sent home from attending the schools for years, the damage had been done. After spending their childhood in abusive and neglectful environments, the adults who had attended the schools did not know healthy ways of living and parenting. Many adults who had attended the residential schools turned to alcohol as a way of coping with the painful memories of physical and sexual abuse. This resulted in the children of these parents being deemed at risk by government social workers, and some children were removed from their parents' care. Many of the children were adopted into homes across the country and into the United States. This was the beginning of what is now known as the sixties scoop.

Beginning in the 1960s and carrying into the 1970s, thousands of First Nations children were removed from their homes and placed in foster care. The majority of these children were adopted cross-culturally throughout Canada and the United States. Fournier and Crey (1997) found,

> in the foster and adoptive care system, Aboriginal children typically vanished with scarcely a trace, the vast majority of them placed until they were adults in non-aboriginal homes where their cultural identity, their legal Indian status, their knowledge of their own First Nation and even their birth names were erased, forever (p. 81).

This is not to suggest that some of the non-native foster and adoptive homes did not do their best to nurture, heal and raise their First Nations children. Sadly, the reality is that many adoptions by the most conscientious adoptive parents ended in disaster as they were trying to raise children who were suffering from the "painful identity crisis of being adolescent, Aboriginal, and adopted" (Fournier and Crey, 1997 p.90) as well as the grief and loss issues associated with losing their culture and family of origin. It must also be noted however, that many of the First Nations children who were removed from their parents' care during the sixties scoop and were adopted into non-First Nations homes were not treated well.

The late Bridget Moran was a child protection social worker with the government at the time of the 60's scoop. Moran (1992) recalls how social workers had very little resources at the time and when a child was found at risk in the home, the social workers were delegated with the task of removing the child from the home. Moran concludes that the British Columbia government was the largest contributor to

child abuse in the province at that time. The majority of the children who were removed from their parents' care and adopted into cross-cultural homes lost their self-identity, culture, family and for many, their future. At the time, there were so many children to be adopted or placed with foster families, the government did not employ enough social workers to conduct thorough checks on the adoptive and foster parents. Many First Nations children were lost from their biological families forever and sentenced to remain with strangers, many of whom subjected them to abuse and neglect (Fourner & Crey, 1997).

Ernie Crey (Fourner & Crey, 1997) shares how he and his siblings were removed by child protection social workers when they were children in the 1960s and all were placed in separate foster homes, never to have been reunited as a family. Crey's sister, Dawn Crey was one of the women whose DNA was located at the Pickton pig farm in Port Coquitlam, BC in 2002. As is the case with many of the Aboriginal women who were missing and later determined to have been murdered at the Robert Pickton pig farm in Port Coquitlam, B.C., Dawn Crey was an Aboriginal woman who was removed from her biological family and was raised in the foster care system. Dawn was not adopted as a child and eventually aged out of the foster care system at the age of nineteen. Sereena Abotsway, Mona Wilson, Brenda Wolfe, Helen Hallmark, Georgina Papin, and Janet Henry are all Aboriginal women who aged out of the foster care system and whose DNA was found at the Pickton farm.

History of African Adoption in North America

In 1971, the number of black children placed into white foster and adoptive families in the United States peaked with 2, 500 black children joining white families (Fenster, 2002). In 1972, NABSW publicly criticized the Child Welfare League of America for condoning such cross-cultural adoptions taking place. The NABSW termed the practice of allowing white parents to adopt black children the 'cultural genocide of black children'. My youngest son was two years old in 1999 when I first heard the phrase cultural genocide in reference to cross-cultural adoption. My initial feelings of sadness and fear soon gave way to intense outrage and anger that this term was used as a phrase to describe my family. After much thought and reflection, I decided to educate myself around the reasons the NABSW had taken such a strong stance. This was the seed that was planted that brings me to this thesis work today.

In 1973, the Child Welfare League of America revised its guidelines to emphasize the importance of placing children available for adoption with adoptive families who share the same ethnicity. In the 1980s, NABSW's position was contested by supporters of cross-cultural adoption. Critics of NABSW's position pointed to the high rates of black children in foster care who were not being adopted. Essentially, black children's experiences in foster care consisted of being moved from foster home to foster home with no sense of belonging. In 1994, the NABSW modified its stance stating cross-cultural adoptions could occur but only as a last resort when adoptive parents of the child's ethnicity could not be found. Today, NABSW's position is that

every child's ethnicity and culture must be respected because these are integral characteristics in assisting the child to create a healthy sense of self-identity. In the same stance, NABSW also maintains that any barriers that exist to prevent a child from joining an adoptive family must be removed.

Just as in the case of First Nations people in Canada, the black African people of the United States have a history of colonization, abuse, genocide, and oppression from European people. In 1760, the United States began direct participation in transporting African people from Africa to the United States as slaves (Clarke, 1998). The United States continued with the slave trade until January 1, 1863, 103 years after it began, when President Lincoln ended slavery by signing the Emancipation Proclamation declaring all people held as slaves in any state are forever free (Clarke, 1998). Just as the First Nations people in Canada, the black Africans who were abducted from their homeland, and held as slaves for over one hundred years lost their culture, their language, their land and their families. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation determined it was against the law to own slaves, the belief that black people were inferior to white people was, and to some extent still is, a prevalent notion. American history is plagued with stories of racism involving the Ku Klux Klan, lynching, lynch mobs, rape and murder of men, women and children. It is important to note the similarities between advocates for First Nations groups in Canada and black African groups in the United States. Both groups have strong and justifiable opinions against cross-cultural adoption. Both the First Nations groups of Canada and the Black

African groups of the United States have a long history of colonization, oppression, genocide and the destruction of their heritage and culture. Racism is still alive and thriving in every city and town across North America. Understanding the history of both First Nations people and black African people aids in understanding the passionate and intense opposition some members of these groups feel toward cross-cultural adoption.

Racism

> *My having a bi-racial child may or may not change how I come to judge public policies regarding race. And it may or may not cause me to explode in white heat if someone slights my baby for wrong reasons. But it already has nurtured a sense of fidelity and shared obligation that, I dare say, our nation could stand more of.*
> (Pearstein, as cited in Parsons, 1996).

Pearlstein is president of the Center of the American Experiment, a conservative think-tank in Minneapolis. Several years prior to having been interviewed for a newspaper report, he had shared his belief that racism existed and is reprehensible, however it was not generally deep and that people focus too much on it while trying to understand and fix societal problems. Pearlstein, by his own account, later shared how becoming the adoptive parent to a little girl who had been subjected to racism changed his previous views regarding racism. One of the greatest criticisms against cross-cultural adoption is the concern that cross-cultural adoptive parents can not teach their children how to respond appropriately to racism. At times I have been struck by the amount of curious looks my children and I receive when we are in the

community without their father. I believe people are looking at us and trying to determine if my husband is black or white and whether or not my children are biologically mine, or mine through adoption. The danger exists when my family stops noticing these looks because we have become accustomed to them. Becoming accustomed means we have become desensitized and are no longer aware of the racism that exists around us. Even though we do not notice the otherness that creates our family, the remainder of society does and therein lays the danger for our children. Park (as cited in Reddy, 1996) says when white people adopt children of another ethnicity, they are eyed suspiciously by both the white community as well as the children's original community.

> In some instances, the children who have been adopted may likewise come to view their parents with suspicion. Such suspicions are often warranted and, if taken seriously, highlight the ways in which cross-cultural adoption is both politically and personally problematic. While these problems are not insurmountable, they do challenge social workers and parents like myself to think and reform traditional adoption practices (Reddy, 1996, p. 223-224).

As a feminist, a mother, and a social worker, it is a difficult job to balance the personal (parenting and teaching my children in a racist world), with the political, (struggling for equal rights, opportunities and fairness for all people at the meso and macro levels). What our children learn from friends, community, adults and media impacts how they view their own lives. When my children are subjected to racist comments from children on the school ground who are white, it results in suspicion towards all white people, including my husband and myself. When other children ask

my children why they are black and their mom and dad are white, it causes my children discomfort and results in the constant daily reminder that they are other than their parents.

Activist, professor, and writer, bell hooks (1994), in speaking with popular rap musician Ice Cube, asked about self-love and self-respect as a black man. Ice Cube's response is,

> it's hard to be black in America. Look at all the images that run across us, from television, school, just everything in general. It's hard....they put everybody in such a bad light.....we got to really fight to love ourselves because all these images of white TV, that's the only thing we see. So, when we look in the mirror, we changin' our hair, we changin' our eyes, try to change our features, try not to be black. We got to reverse that (p.127).

Ice Cube was asked about how he plans to connect his child with his culture. Ice Cube shares he has pictures and images of himself throughout the house, posters of Malcolm X and calendars depicting strong black people. Ice Cube states his son is too young to ask questions or speak about the images now, but when the time comes for his son to ask the questions about the images, Ice Cube will be ready.

In 1997, when I traveled to the United States to adopt my son, I was told by a well-meaning adoption worker that she loved to see children adopted into Canada because there is no racism here. It was a powerful moment for me, and one that I reflect on often. I believe that some people assume Canada is a more accepting country that is void of racism, discrimination, classism or sexism. These isms are very much alive in Canada.

The interview between hooks and Ice Cube is an illustration of the notion that it is important to help children who are other than white connect to their culture in a positive way. Without a strong connection to culture and heritage, children who are adopted cross-culturally have a weak connection to their self-identity. The consequence of lack of self-identity is people who have little pride in who they are, resulting in increased susceptibility to pain and rejection when confronted with racism.

White Privilege

> *I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.* Peggy McIntosh, (1988, p.1)

McIntosh shares her belief that as a white person, she hasn't been taught to recognize her white privilege in society because recognizing it therefore makes her accountable. She lists fifty ways she is privileged in society and makes mention of how her friends, neighbors and co-workers who are other than her heritage often do not share the same privileges. McIntosh's essay is a powerful reminder to those of us in society who belong to the dominant white culture that we are privileged.

Harper (2005) suggests that children adopted by parents who share the same culture and heritage struggle with issues pertaining to loss of their biological families and magical thinking regarding who their birth parents are. Many children belonging to a cross-cultural, adoptive family struggle with the additional loss of cultural identity that their adopted parents are unable to address. White parents may bring up their non-

Caucasian children as if they were white. The danger occurs when these children leave their parents' home and encounter racism and discrimination for the first time because they were protected by their privileged parents. White parents cannot confer their white privileges to their children who do not share the same ethnicity. Harper cautions parents who adopt cross-culturally to be prepared to immerse themselves in their children's culture and be prepared to saturate their children in their children's supportive community of origin.

We are the ones that truly know ourselves. We cannot be defined by the limitations, barriers, and boxes people entrap us in but fly though them with pride, bliss, and unity. Sometimes the scariest thing in the world is to be an individual. Your persona and your inner being must unite with love in order to create an interconnected web with the heart, soul, and mind. At the end of the day we must face ourselves. We are the freedom we desire. The truth is within you, and life is a journey in finding this enlightenment. Day to day, live with integrity and humility, and always remember love has no barriers.
(Mohn, 2005)

Arguments For Cross-Cultural Adoption

In a perfect world, all children would remain with their biological families and be safe and nurtured and have every opportunity to learn culture, tradition, ethnic origin, healthy self esteem and self identity while being safe and loved in their home. This is simply not the reality for thousands of children who are being raised in foster homes while in government care. For children unable to reside with their family of origin, second best would be to live with extended family or community members. If

children cannot be raised by their biological parents, family members, or community members, then cross-cultural adoption may be seen as a valid and vital way of giving children permanence while still maintaining connection to their culture and ethnicity. The sad truth of the current child welfare state is that there are many more children than there are safe and loving families to care for them. The time has come to make some serious decisions regarding what is important and attainable. Can children experience connection to ethnicity, culture and have a healthy sense of self with permanence through cross-cultural adoption?

Theorists such as Swize (2002), Bartholet (1999), Steinberg (1998), and Johnson (2001) speak to the realities of the current child welfare system. Children within the child welfare system experience abuse, neglect, foster-care drift and slim chances of being adopted if the child is over the age of five or if their ethnicity is other than white. According to the Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC), there are currently 1,298 children available for adoption in the province of British Columbia alone (Medeiros, 2007). Bartholet (2002) suggests that the number of black and Aboriginal children pouring into the already overburdened foster care system is increasing and there appears to be no end in sight. Current policies stand in the way of placing these children into adoptive homes because of the politics surrounding issues of ethnicity and culture. Bartholet states the time has come to re-evaluate if children can have both an adoptive family and a connection to ethnicity.

Blood Bias and Biology

Bartholet (2002) speaks to the blood bias that exists at the core of current child welfare policies and shares her belief that the biological or blood relationship between children and parents is what is central in the court system to determining what a family is. She explains the time has come for policy-makers, judges and social workers to understand the various meanings of the term family and that a biological connection to children does not automatically equal the best interests of the child. Various examples are provided from the United States, where Bartholet believes judges have made decisions to allow biological parents to parent their children based on the blood bias. In the examples given, the children died from the abuse they suffered at the hands of their parents, suggesting that opposition to cross-cultural adoption impacted the judges' decisions allowing the children to remain with their biological parents even when it was clear the children were in danger.

Bartholet's (1992) theory raises the issue of the definition of family. How do we determine what defines a real family and what does not? Family is what people perceive it to be and there is no evidence that cross-cultural adoptive families are less family than nuclear, biological ones. Given the changes society has seen in the previous forty years, it is clear that the traditional family consisting of a mother, father, and biological children is less common today. Family today consists of single parents, same-sex parents, blended families and adults parenting their nieces, nephews and cousins. However, the difficulty is creating change in the minds of people in society as

to what constitutes a family and what the meaning of family is. Dowd (1993) agrees with Bartholet's suggestion that parenting across racial, ethnic or national lines could affirm and therefore celebrate difference rather than cultural loss. He further contends adoption is often in the best interests of everyone involved. In cases where biological parents have made a choice for their child to be adopted and the adoption is an open adoption, Dowd suggests the actual process of placing a child for adoption can be a liberating experience for those parents. For the adopting parents, adoption can mean the realization of a dream to parent children.

Bartholet (1998) provides examples of cases where children have suffered serious and tragic damage from moving among many various foster homes and spending years in government care. She does not agree with the idea that cross-cultural adoption is a form of cultural genocide, but that racial matching in adoption deprives children who are non-white of permanent homes and results in lengthy stays in foster care. When one acknowledges the permanent and long-term damage that can results from lengthy stays in foster care, it is understandable how supporters of cross-cultural adoption believe it is in the best interests of children, regardless of ethnic origin. Wolff (2003) believes that cross-cultural adoption can and does work for children who need permanent families through adoption, as well as for the parents who long to parent those children. She suggests that white parents can teach their non-white children about culture and ethnicity so their children have a healthy sense of self-identity. The key is for parents in a cross-cultural adoption to understand how important their job is to

connect their child to that child's culture and ethnicity as well as harbour a healthy and strong sense of self.

Benefits of being a Visible Cross-Cultural Family

Benward (1998) suggests the issue of cross-cultural adoption is perhaps the best kind of adoption to venture into, as there is no way to keep the formation of the family a secret. Benward was adopted as a child, is a therapist, and is a parent to adopted children. Her suggestion is that cross-cultural adoptions are in the best interests of children as it is impossible to hide the fact that the family is formed through adoption. Such families can serve as examples of how different ethnicities, cultures, and traditions can come together. Vansant (1993) concurs with Benward, stating adoptive parents can cause serious emotional damage to their children if they keep the adoption a secret, if they do not assure their children that they have a permanent place in the family, or if they associate the adoption with negative beliefs. Adoptive parents can minimize or eliminate emotional damage to their children by telling the child at an early age that they were adopted, explaining the adoption process to them, frankly answering any questions that the child has about their biological parents, and by associating positive factors with adoption.

Chas (2004) suggests cross-cultural adoption can work if the parents and the children take part equally in group gatherings and celebrations that assist the family members to learn more about the child's culture and traditions, as well as the cultures

and traditions of other groups. It is important to note that simply taking part in various events periodically throughout life is not an acceptable way to connect children with their culture. What is necessary is for children to be constantly connected to people from their own culture who can teach and celebrate with the children their shared history, traditions, and the importance of their culture and heritage. Pearlstein (as cited in Parsons, 1996) believes that cross-cultural adoption can link people closer together across diverse ethnic lines and the time has come for people to celebrate their individual differences. Steinberg (1999) believes that cross-cultural adoption can have a positive impact on both children and parents; however, parents must be aware of the psychological dangers children are susceptible to if they do not have a solid connection to ethnic identity and a sense of self. Whitfield (1992), Lin (1999) and Irwin Johnson (1997) agree with Steinberg and list suggestions for parents who want to help their children connect with their cultural and ethnic identity in an adoptive family. These suggestions include immersing children in the traditions of their culture of origin and spending time with people who share the same ethnicity.

According to Steinberg and Hall (2001), many people wanting to adopt children from the overburdened foster care system are turned away because of the fear of backlash from organizations such as the NABSW. Ontario writer Infantry (as cited in Webber, 1998) contends that the most important issue is that children are placed in permanent homes where they are wanted, loved and nurtured and that people who have adopted cross-culturally have gone beyond colour and cultural barriers. This is not to

say that the children do not need to be educated about the history and culture of their ethnicity, but that the time has come for society to place permanency for children first and issues of culture a close second.

Webber (1998) spoke with black parents who have adopted black children, three of which are fathers who are parenting adopted children and "disagree vehemently with race restrictions" (p.145) pertaining to adoption. All parents interviewed agreed with Infantry's premise that children should be adopted into safe, loving family homes rather than remaining in government care or group homes until they reach adulthood.

Ethnicity, culture, traditions AND permanence? OR permanence?

> *It is wrong for any government to presume that a racial match (in adoption) is central to the happiness of every coupled parent and child, but it is equally wrong for it to insist on arranging parent-child couplings without regard to the racial feelings of the people involved.* (Bartholet, 1992, p.116)

Falhberg (1991) believes that most people agree that it is best for children to live with parents who share the same ethnicity and cultural background as the child, and equally agree that children need permanent families. Fahlberg questions which should take precedence when the child cannot have both a permanent family and the same ethno-cultural background. Fahlberg contends more emphasis must be placed on permanency for the child rather than a plan for foster care with people who share the same ethnicity as the child. Currently, MCFD has outlined guidelines with First

Nations representatives for decision-making for Aboriginal children in government care. First Nations band representatives must be notified of any foster care or adoption planning for the First Nations children belonging to a band and these band representatives can be involved with the proceedings if they choose. This process has forced government agencies, including child protection, the courts and adoption organizations to examine issues of ethnicity and culture as they pertain to the children when they first come into government care. However, this process is not the same for children whose ethnicity is other than First Nations.

Various studies have been conducted regarding cross-cultural adoptions. Silverman and Feigleman (as cited in Fahlberg, 1991) report that none of the studies that had been completed at that time regarding cross-cultural adoptions had found widespread problems and that non-white children raised in white homes identified with both white and non-white communities. A study conducted in 1983 by McRoy and Zurcher (Fahlberg, 1991) found that black children who were adopted into white families showed no significant differences in their self-esteem scores when compared to those scores of black children raised in black families. The researchers did find that the attitudes of children reflected those of their parents, confirming Grow and Shapiro's findings in 1984 that children whose ethnicity is different from their adoptive parents adjust better when those parents do not attempt to minimize the importance of their children's ethnic heritage. Simon and Alstein conducted a longitudinal study, reported in 1987, in which they followed the individuals who were adopted, rather than

the parents of the children who were adopted. This study followed the racial attitudes of black children who were adopted into white families from the time they were small children until they were adults. The study revealed that black children between the ages three to eight who were adopted into white families showed less ambivalence toward their own race than black children raised in black families. These young black children saw themselves as having African heritage and they did not attach any negative connotations to their heritage. As these young children became adults, they remained firmly committed to their white adoptive parents and their self-esteem scores were similar to their non-adopted, non-black siblings. This longitudinal study also found that friendship and dating patterns for these young adults included people from both white and non-white ethnicity. Feigelman and Silverman's study in 1983 indicated that most emotional and developmental issues and concerns experienced by black children who were adopted by white parents were related to pre-adoption life experiences, rather than being raised in cross-cultural, adoptive family. Fanshel conducted a study in 1972 of Native American children adopted by white parents and determined the children involved in the study experienced difficulty with identity formation during adolescence. Fanshel determined this difficulty with identity formation was the result of the children feeling alienated from both their adoptive family's culture and their Native American culture (Fahlberg, 1991).

What IS Culture and Heritage?

Cooking in my kitchen one recent afternoon, I was captivated by the sounds of black school children walking by. When I went to the window to watch them, I saw no black children, only white children. They were not children from a materially-privileged background. They attend a public school in which black children constitute a majority. The mannerisms, the style, even the voices of these white children had come to resemble their black peers -
not through any chic acts of cultural appropriation, not through any willed desire to "eat the other." They were just there in the same space sharing life - becoming together, forming themselves in relation to one another, to what seemed most real. This is just one of the many everyday encounters with cultural difference, with racial identity, that remind me of how constructed this all can be, that there is really nothing inherent or "essential" that allows us to claim in an absolute way any heritage.
(hooks, 1995).

A powerful point is made by hooks (1995). In all of the dialogue around culture and heritage and who has what right to which children, if people stop and listen and see what is happening around them, they just might find the answers. If the children in hooks' neighborhood can be together, sharing the same space and learning from each others' cultures, does it not seem sensible that the remainder of society could do the same?

Johnson (2001) is a black woman who was adopted into a white family as a child. Her master's thesis involved interviewing ten black-African adults between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-two who were adopted by white parents as children. Johnson's aim was to determine what the participant's experiences were with cross-cultural adoption and how the participants identified with their black heritage and culture. While all but one person felt their adoption was positive, they all wished their parents had done more to connect them with their African heritage and culture.

Additionally, some of the participants wished the adoption agencies that were responsible for placing the children with their adoptive homes were more responsible for training, monitoring and assisting their parents to expose them to their culture and heritage.

I agree with the concern critics of cross-cultural adoption have regarding the ability of white parents to connect their children to culture and ethnicity when it is not shared between parents and child. I can not identify personally with being the target of racism, or having a strong sense of self as a black or Aboriginal woman, as I am a privileged white heterosexual woman in Canada. Members of my children's cultural community of origin do a much better job of teaching my children how to cope with the pain of being subjected to racism by the very fact that these community members have dealt with acts of racism. Community members who share the same ethnicity, culture and traditions as cross-culturally adopted children do a much better job of teaching children what it means to be a strong, independent and proud person. Adoptive parents must educate themselves and their children about racism, its causes and effects and the appropriate ways to combat it.

According to Benward (1998), children whose ethnicity is other than that of their white parents deal with the stigma of adoption, always being on display and constantly reminded of the issues associated with being other. This results in the child and often the family as being doubly discredited; the family is seen as not being a real family because of having formed a family through adoption as well as not having the

same culture and heritage. My husband provides a powerful example of this when sharing a story of walking down the mall with our daughter. She is a beautiful fourteen-year-old girl who stands five feet, six inches tall, has long, dark, curly hair, brown skin and appears to be closer in age to twenty-one than fourteen. My husband stands five feet, ten inches tall, has short blond hair and appears to be closer in age to thirty-one than forty. Both were walking together at the mall when my husband noticed several disapproving looks and stares from people at the mall. My husband felt extremely uncomfortable, believing that those disapproving looks and stares were from people assuming all kinds of things about what his relationship was with our daughter. In my husbands words "people did not see us and think we were father and daughter. They looked at us and immediately wondered what is that man doing with that young girl? People assumed that we are involved in an inappropriate relationship, not that she is my daughter and I her father" (Jeremy Leete, personal communication, 2007). This exemplifies how difficult it can be for a cross-cultural family when strangers jump to conclusions and make assumptions because of differences in ethnicity. For the child, it can be very difficult as there is no way to hide the fact that she is adopted as the cross-cultural family is constantly a public display of adoption. Benward (1998) believes her adoption experiences would have been made better if there had been more open communication regarding adoption and otherness. She believes that open communication regarding what it meant to her to be a cross-culturally adopted child

could have resulted in her having better coping skills and learning "separate self-definition from the social norm" (p.2).

Culture as a Fluid and Ever-Changing Individual Perspective

Hearst (2002) states cross-cultural adoptions "generate serious questions about how cultural boundaries are determined and how cultural belonging and identity should be understood for both individuals and cultural groups" (p. 450). Hearst further discusses how cross-cultural adoptions render the idea of "culture of origin" incoherent for the children who are adopted cross-culturally, how cross-cultural adoption often results in loss of identity for the child who is adopted, and how the loss of children is a lived experience for the often marginalized groups of origin. Parekh and Kymlicka (as cited in Hearst, 2002) wrote that when children are adopted cross-culturally, members of the children's original cultural group must have control over who adopts the children. Additionally, requirements must be specified for adoptive parents to teach their children about their culture of origin. In theory, these suggestions make perfect sense; it would be invaluable for children to be connected to people who could teach them about their ethnicity and culture of origin. However, as Hearst points out, there is a flaw in this theory as both Parekh and Kymlicky assume that cultural groups are distinct and can be easily identified. As Hearst states "cultural boundaries can be notoriously open, as becomes immediately clear when these abstract notions are placed into concrete contexts. Determining who is in or out of a cultural group is a difficult

question at all times, but it becomes exponentially complicated when applied to adopted children. To which cultural group do adopted children belong, especially if they are themselves from a racially, ethnically, or culturally mixed group? How do we come to recognize, in law and public life, who is and who is not a legitimate 'cultural' group and who belongs to a particular group when the idea of culture is irreducibly ambiguous?" (p.459).

Green (1999) believes in the idea of culture as a "shared map" where members of society believe people share the same culture if they have similar beliefs and preferences and that culture is akin to a list of traits that is handed down throughout generations. Green suggests there is a fundamental problem with seeing culture as something that can be explained and identified as belonging to specific groups of people. Green suggests culture is a fluid and ever-changing concept that belongs to each individual person. Culture can not be identified as belonging to a group of people based on ethnicity, race or gender; rather it is a perspective that is as unique and different as each individual who identifies with her own specific culture. This concept is exemplified in the story of Julia Shiva, a young woman from the lower mainland in British Columbia. Shiva (2006) was raised in a multicultural family, with her mother of French-Irish heritage, her father of south Indian heritage, and her two brothers who are biological children of her parents. Shiva, of Guyanese and Indian heritage, and her younger sister, of Asian ethnicity, were both adopted. Shiva shares her struggle with identity as a teenager and explains how people assumed she was a

traditional Indian girl because of her physical appearance. In response, she says she went out of her way to shun any connection to Indian culture. Shiva explains,

> when I began dating, I made the conscious decision to avoid men of Indian heritage, fearing they would expect me to be a gentle, complaisant, and mindful Indian girl. I convinced myself that I had nothing in common with those people and, instead, situated myself in the broader white culture (p.1).

Shiva shares that she does not identify herself as an Indian person, or a Guyanese person. Instead, she describes herself as a punk person.

> Today, I believe people stare at me first and foremost because of my facial piercings. My skin colour is secondary to the shock value of the facial jewellery. Culture is an internally contested area in my life. I do not identify with any culture at this point in my life, but am more comfortable identifying with my subculture. Embracing punk philosophies and ideologies has been very cathartic for me; punk has been my place of refuge. It is a place where I can safely examine my belief system and begin to deconstruct my internalized racism. It is a place where I can accept the individual I am and the individual I am still going to become (p.2).

Culture as it Pertains to Cross-Cultural Adoption

It is common for people to assume that culture can be determined by a group's history, language, and ethnicity; however, in doing so comes dangerously close to stereotyping. When government officials determine what ethnic or cultural groups can adopt children who are other than the adopting parents, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for these officials to determine what cultural group the child belongs. Given that self-identity and connection to culture is a personal and individual concept,

it may be difficult for anyone to make a decision regarding family make-up based on a concept that is as vague as the concept of culture.

Resisting Representation

Hooks (1994) speaks of what the prominent white culture has done to black culture. She believes the time has come for a cultural revolution - the time has come for black people to resist what has been determined as their culture and carve out their own representation of what it means to be black. In the interview with Ice Cube, she provides examples of how black people are speaking their truth, through their own voices, music, and media. She shows how the dominant culture is forced and reinforced through popular outlets. This exact same theory may be applied for children who have been adopted cross-culturally. It is not my suggestion that children not be immersed in their culture of origin. I am suggesting the possibility for children adopted cross-culturally to carve out their own identity as young adults. This theory could work for any child, regardless of ethnicity, heritage, culture or whether the child was adopted or not. Given that, it is vital for children to connect to their heritage. I believe once those children are adults, they must be allowed to pave their own way or have the opportunity to determine what they feel represents their own culture.

Cultural Competence

Government officials in both Canada and the United States have stated they recognize the need to have children moved out of government care and into permanent families. Consequently, there needs to be a greater move toward educating social workers and parents about developing cross-cultural competence. Cross-cultural competence has been defined as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect and build upon ethnic socio-cultural and linguistic diversity" (Lynch & Hanson, 2002, p.51). The first important step in becoming culturally competent is to have self-awareness of one's own culture and ethnicity. According to Lin (1999), culturally competent parents have a very clear commitment to both their culture and their child's culture. Parents who are culturally competent model appropriate responses to racism - they do not deny, explain away, or make excuses for other people's racist behavior but instead, use the opportunity as a teaching tool for their children. Parents who are culturally competent acknowledge the anger and the pain that comes from seeing their children hurt by unacceptable behavior. This does not mean that parents tolerate the behavior, but by honoring the feelings they have about the experience, they are teaching their children that it is normal to have strong emotions and reactions to racist behavior. For parents unaccustomed to racist remarks about their family, it is important to have some ideas for responses ahead of time. Parents raising children who are adopted cross-culturally can ensure their children are strong individuals who are proud of their culture and ethnicity by not feeling ashamed

of their own ethnicity. It is important for parents to educate their children about white privilege so children can recognize when a person is abusing that privilege. Connecting children with strong members of the community who share the same ethnicity as the children is an important way of teaching them how to be proud of themselves. It is important for children to have toys, pictures, and books that depict people from their own ethnicity and heritage. The best parents can do is ensure their children have close connections to people who share the same ethnicity as the child and who can act as a positive role model. By ensuring children have healthy images in their homes, children have a better chance of creating a healthy self identity and a positive connection to their culture and heritage. When my youngest son was an infant, I was determined to find a black, anatomically correct male doll for him to play with. I was disappointed that I could not find one store in Western Canada that had such a doll. I ended up buying the doll I wanted when I returned to Philadelphia to finalize his adoption. It was interesting to note at that time, there were also no Barbie dolls, no children's books and few movies depicting black people in positive leading roles. My son was approximately three years old when he watched his first children's cartoon on TV depicting black families and children; Bill Cosby's Little Bill series. As my children are now pre-teens and teens, I am saddened by the way in which people from various ethnicities are portrayed on teen and adult cartoons such as *Family Guy* and *The Simpsons*. It saddens me to know that the majority of these shows depict people in

stereotypical ways, such as Abu the man of East Indian ethnicity who owns the corner store in the TV cartoon *The Simpsons*.

The Impact of Foster Care

There are more than 1,200 children in British Columbia who are waiting for adoptive families (Madeiros, 2007). Many of these children will not be adopted for reasons beyond their control. Some of them are older than what the majority of prospective adoptive parents are willing to adopt. Some of them were exposed to drugs and alcohol prenatally. Some of them have diagnosed mental illnesses and some of them act out inappropriately either with anger, aggression, sexual behaviors or intense sadness. Most of these children are angry at their biological parents, their social workers and at the unfairness of their lives. All of the children have experienced profound loss and difficulty coping with that loss. Some of these include the loss of birth parents, extended family, home, pets, schools, friends, belongings, and in many cases, culture. When discussing the debate between cross-cultural adoption and permanency planning for children in government care, it is imperative to know the effects long-term foster placement has on children.

Adoption in Canada

According to MCFD (2005), over fifty percent of the children available for adoption in British Columbia are of First Nations heritage. The majority of potential adoptive parents for these children are Caucasian. In situations where it is not possible for children to have a permanent family who share the same ethnicity, social workers need to make a decision regarding the best interests of the children. Does the chance of a child belonging to a permanent family outweigh the importance of same culture and ethnicity? Which is more detrimental: a child remaining in government care until the age of nineteen, or being raised in a family that does not share the same culture, ethnicity or heritage? These are difficult questions that professionals, policy-makers and legal personnel must answer.

There has been a recent trend for child welfare agencies across North America to place children into homes where members of the adoptive family have the same ethnicity and culture as the child. According to Fahlberg (1991), this policy poses problems. When children enter into the government child welfare system, minimal attempts are made to place those children into foster homes that match the children's ethnic background. Although MCFD does attempt to place children into foster homes that share the same ethnicity as the child, but the reality is there are few foster placements existing for many children whose ethnicity is other than the caregivers. The majority of foster homes consist of Caucasian parents and, in many situations these children remain with their foster families for months and sometimes years. It can take

several years for a court order to be granted that determines a child can be placed for adoption. The reason for this lengthy process is to ensure the biological parents are given ample opportunity to become safe and appropriate caregivers. When the main focus of an adoption plan pertains to shared ethnicity, Fahlberg (1991) believes that this focus sends mixed messages to children. Should a healthy relationship with essentially lifelong caregivers be ignored solely to preserve racial congruity? If so, does the underlying message to the child show that skin colour is more important than family ties? Which answer encourages or discourages feelings about racial identity?

The British Columbia Provincial government has set guidelines regarding the placement of First Nations children. The Adoption Act (2004) provides guidelines for decision making that pertains to the adoption of First Nations children. The Director of adoptions or the adoption agency must make reasonable efforts to discuss the child's placement with members of the child's band, or a designated representative of a First Nations community that has been identified by either the child or the birth parent (BC Adoption Act, 2004). This means that members of the child's First Nations community have the opportunity to be involved with the decision-making process involving permanency planning for their children. This process has forced social workers, policy makers, judges and agencies to examine the various cultural issues when a First Nations child becomes involved with the foster care system. It is important to note that this law only applies to First Nations children. Currently, laws do not exist in British Columbia for any other ethnic group.

How Children Become Available for Adoption in BC

There are two paths by which children become available for adoption in British Columbia. Sometimes healthy infants with no known special needs are born to parents who are unable or unwilling to care for them so the parents make an adoption plan. In these situations, the birth parents work with a social worker who presents the birth parents with several home-studies. A home study is a detailed document that presents a picture of the potential adoptive couple. Anywhere from twelve to twenty pages in length, the home-study details many subjects, some of which include: the adoptive parents' views on parenting; childhood experiences; likes and dislikes; home environment; extended family and views on adoption. Included in the home-study process is a criminal background check which is required for all potential adoptive parents, a reference check from the family physician, a Prior Contact Check with MCFD to ensure there has been no involvement of the potential parents involving the abuse or neglect of children, and four references from family and friends. After reading the home-studies, birth parents then make their decision regarding which adoptive family they wish to have parent their birth child. Adoptions that occur through this process generally involve only healthy infants, meaning the babies were not exposed to drugs or alcohol prenatally. According to the AFABC (2005), adoptive parents who chose to work with a licensed private agency to adopt an infant can pay anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 dollars, which includes the home-study, an educational component, as well as birth family counselling. Under no circumstances can money be given

directly to the birth-parent; to do so would be illegal and tantamount to purchasing the child.

The second path to adoption in British Columbia is through MCFD. Children available for adoption through the government are most often between the ages of four and ten years, although many are also teenagers with little chance of being adopted into permanent homes. Many of the children have special physical or medical issues due to exposure prenatally to alcohol and drugs. Most have suffered neglect or abuse and most come with family ties or are part of a sibling group.

According to the Child Welfare League of America (1997), half of the children available for adoption in North America are in government care for protective services reasons. Protective service reasons often include alcohol and/or drug addiction, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and neglect. Alcohol and drug abuse are factors in the placement of more than seventy-five percent of the children who are entering government care. The Child Welfare League of America reports that 80,000 healthy children have been orphaned by AIDS, with approximately one-third of that number entering the child welfare system. The reality is that with staggering statistics such as this, there are few adoptive parents available to these children because many people are frightened and unsure about their ability to cope with the difficulties associated with parenting children with such challenges.

The Impact on Children

Just tuck me in at Night

I think I know what it's like to be put down in life I know what it's like to be alone I think I know what its like to be put in foster care I know what it's like to not be tucked in at night It is really sad I want to have friends I want to have a family I want to have people like me as a friend

As I whistle through the wind … Can you hear me? I'm just looking for someone to love me Just tuck me in at night, Shane Sater (as cited in Agur, 1997)

Children in foster care are three to six times more likely than children not in care to have emotional, behavioural and developmental problems including conduct disorders, depression, difficulties in school, and impaired social relationships (Moran, 1992). According to a United States Government Accountability Office study that was conducted in 1985 (as cited in Moran, 1992) fifty-eight percent of children in foster care have serious health problems and sixty-two percent had been subjected to prenatal drug exposure, placing them at significant risk for numerous health problems. The educational needs of children in care can be substantial. The same study also found that children and young people in foster care tend to have limited education and job skills, perform poorly educationally compared with children not in foster care, lag behind in their education by at least one year, and have lower educational attainment than the general population. When children are denied nurturing from a permanent family, they are at high risk for having a diminished capacity pertaining to healthy future relationships and functioning (Bartholet, 2001). Child welfare experts have been stating for years that the impact of abuse, neglect and inadequate care is destructive to the child. These effects can last a lifetime.

A personal account from the foster care system

Adams has written about his own personal experiences of being a child in the foster care system. He regained his voice and speaks for the thousands of foster children today. Through poetry, articles and letters, his most painful feelings are shared. The following quote is an example of the pain, grief and anger Adams has experienced as a child in the foster care system.

> A baby boy has just been born. He should be wrapped in his loving mother's arms with her scent all about him and with family gathering full of joy at his birth. But he doesn't feel those loving arms nor hear the sounds of joy. The smells are those of a hospital ward. He is placed for adoption at birth, but no one comes to claim him as their own. He is NOBODY'S CHILD! He becomes a ward of the state...a "foster" child, and yet, remains alone. Years pass. He has heard strangers repeat his name and say "Pack your bag...you are leaving!" Ten different times...he is only six years old. Each time he has heard it, he has just begun to make friends...now they are gone. He begins to feel comfortable where he is...now it's time to move again. No one loves him. He is treated differently than others. No one wants him. He has no permanent home. He walks home from school to his temporary home slowly, having developed a fear that it may no longer be his home when he gets there. He has been placed in a juvenile detention centre with young men who have committed every imaginable crime. He is the youngest boy on the block, as well as the smallest. Christmas comes...the only gifts he receives are the clothes that were given him by the St. Vincent de Paul Society a week earlier, as his semi-annual clothing allotment. There is nothing from this family for him under the tree. This young boy has been moved fourteen times. He has been moved from the only place he considered home and the people he loved. He has made friends and lost them. He has changed schools. He has been made to feel a part of a family and as a stranger. He is alone again. Can you imagine how this young boy felt! Dig deep within yourself and touch it, taste it, smell it. Experience what he was feeling while stuck in the quagmire of the foster care system! (Adams, 2004).

Grief and Loss

Children who become wards of government care by being permanently removed from their families of origin suffer incredible grief and loss. They lose their parents, friends, homes and possessions. Children who end up in the foster care system enter the system plagued with confusion, multiple caregivers and often several different social workers. From a child's perspective, the experience of multiple losses is overwhelming emotionally and can affect cognitive functioning as well. According to Cotter-Kathwaroon (2004) young children may be unable to recognize their losses, let alone sort them one from another; however they feel the pain of loss just the same as children who can recognize it. Many children who enter into the foster care system receive unclear explanations or no information at all about why these losses have occurred. They are often distrustful of the bearer of bad news who is often the social worker. Suspicion develops and confusion often adds to the grief process. At a MCFD manager's meeting in Prince George, a former foster child shared her greatest concerns when she explained:

> one of the things I wish was different when I was a foster child was I wish the social worker told me why I could not live with my birth mom. I never knew and I think things would have been a lot easier for me if someone had told me what was happening (Sharona Leete, 2005).

Another former foster child spoke at an information session for people interested in adopting children through MCFD in Prince George, BC. The following is what William had to say about being a child in the foster care system:

> I remember when I was six years old, I went to my first foster home and I didn't know why I was dropped off there by social workers. After about six months, I was moved back to my biological mom's house. I thought I was actually going to live with my mom at last, but I was wrong. After about eight months, these two people in black suits came and I was sleeping and my Mom woke me up. I was tired and confused at why there were two people in suits in the house. My Mom said I needed to go. I was confused and started to cry. That is just one of my many foster home stories. After my second foster home, I went to three others. Sometimes I think I was moved from house to house because of my behavior and sometimes I didn't get along with my other foster siblings. I don't even want to get into the details. What I am trying to say is that kids don't want to be moved from house to house not knowing why they were put in the foster home. I don't think teenagers should be put in group homes either because it is not fair to not have adoptive parents. Some teenagers in group homes learn not to trust the homes they are put in. Teenagers aren't what most foster and adoptive parents think they are. (William Leete, 2006).

Children who are experiencing the pain of unresolved grief exhibit classic signs and symptoms of that pain. Such behaviours can range from disorganization, rage and depression, to acting out, self-harming, hurting others, and anxiety (Cotter-Kathwaroon, 2004). Often a challenge for parents who adopt children who are suffering from grief is the fact that children can be skilful in hiding, disguising and avoiding their loss. Cotter-Kathwaroon suggests if the sadness is managed correctly, the grief experience is a process from which the child can heal. The term "managed correctly" is a confusing one. What does it mean to manage correctly a child's pain? Adoptive parents must educate themselves about how children can cope with grief and loss, they need to be aware of their own grief and loss issues and they must know when to call in professionals who can assist them and their children together and individually

with difficulties. Parents must develop skills that will enable them to know what is within their capacity to assist their children and when to access professionals. Cotter-Kathwaroon (2004) shared the following:

> Shanna is 14 years old. She's a lovely young woman with dark hair and a bright smile. While she has a friendly manner and is comfortable conversing with adults, it's clear that something is bothering her. It's not so much what she says as her body language and level of distraction. Shanna lives in a home with her two foster parents and four other children. She participates in chores, does her homework, spends time with her foster-siblings and hopes, one day, to be adopted. At this point, adoption is not the plan. She's in never-land, that gray area that places her somewhere between her birth family and her "official" family, headed by a ministry social worker. Some of Shanna's losses are easy to describe. She was removed from the home she shared with her birth mother at five years old, spent the next few years alternating between a relative, foster care, and returning to a mother who in the end could not care for her. She hasn't seen her mother in almost three years and no one has a reasonable explanation as to why. When Shanna left her home the first time, she left behind her most special friend, her dog Hobbs. Hobbs was there for the next three years when she'd return to her mother for short intervals. She has often asked herself why her mom could manage to take care of the dog but was unable to care for her. Still, Shanna was grateful for Hobb's presence every time she returned home for those short periods. One day Hobbs wasn't there. Her mom never told her why (p.3)

The longer children stay in government care, the more losses they will face. At the age of nineteen, children are considered adults and must leave the foster care system, often resulting in a life time of grief and loss that they never overcome. Understanding the detrimental effects to children who are raised in the foster care system begs the question: is ensuring children are adopted into same-culture families more important than providing permanent families for every child?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of research is to generate knowledge. Qualitative data have been communicated via poetry, song, metaphor, theater, or, more traditionally, through a case study or a listing of themes with supporting quotations (Byrne, 2001). As an adoptive mom to children adopted cross-culturally, it is fitting that I used auto-ethnography and ethnography throughout the thesis to share my lived experiences. I have used bricolage (Denzin 2003) which is an understanding that results from the interactions of different types of knowledge and experiences in relation to the social contexts, cultural patterns, and social actions that comprise an individual's lived experiences. Transken suggests bricolage research is a multi-layered method, involving personal experiences and social understanding within the larger cultural contexts (Transken, 2005). Denzin (2002) states bricolage allows the researcher to obtain research in the form of stories, concepts, perceptions and memories that have meaning to people.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined as research that focuses on the experiences, interpretations, impressions or motivations of an individual or individuals; seeks to describe how people view things and why; and it relates to beliefs, attitudes and changing behavior (Moran, 1992). Henning (2005) suggests that qualitative research is

an attempt to describe and interpret human phenomena. It is my intention to use the qualitative paradigm throughout my study. Combining my own experiences, thoughts and perceptions will serve as an auto-ethnographical approach to my work.

Tuhiwai-Smith (2001) believes that the quantitative way of conducting research that is scientific, numerical, linear and random is based on the western, European way of discovering information. However, it is difficult to capture people's lived and real experiences by using these traditional ways of conducting research. She adds that using westernized quantitative ways of research serves to aid in the colonization process of any group that is other than of Eurocentric ethnicity. Therefore, it is my intention for my research to be a study in which participants' voices, lived experiences, and realities remain their own. It is also my intention to communicate *with* the people who are sharing their personal experiences and stories with me, rather than *do* research *for* my own purposes only. Through the use of qualitative research, it is my hope that the exploratory nature of qualitative research will allow the culture of the adoptive groups to come across in the research and I will present a trustworthy snapshot of this culture. These expectations will be accomplished by the reciprocal dialogue which I hope will occur between myself and the participant throughout the interview process.

Bell hooks is a professor, author, feminist, social activist and black woman who examines the connections between ethnicity, class and gender and how these connections produce oppression and domination in a cultural context. She (1994) speaks of the importance of blending critical thinking with knowledge learned from

books as well as life experience while conducting social research. hooks is passionately concerned with education for critical consciousness, and is continually searching for ways to think, teach, and write that excite and liberate the mind, adding that she is "always searching to live and act in a way that challenges systems of domination: racism, sexism, class elitism" (p.2-3).

Qualitative research has three major components; data collection, analytic procedure and written report (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I collected information through interviews and used the constant comparative method to analyze the material gathered. My own experienced are woven throughout the thesis in the form of auto-ethnography. Ethnography and conversational analysis were used as a form of gathering data from the research participants. Given that the issue of cross-cultural adoption is something I feel passionate about, it is important for me to use naturalistic inquiry, where the understanding is that participants' realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The Naturalistic paradigm seeks to understand people's feelings, experiences and opinions pertaining to an issue, not to predict and deduce solitary findings about the issue. The Naturalistic paradigm, the use of grounded theory and ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research methods will best work for data collection and analysis as it pertains to cross-cultural adoption.

Identity Pegs

Transken (2001) builds on ideas from Goffman (1986) and creates the concept of identity pegs. As Transken defines them, identity pegs are the places where people attach important aspects of themselves such as race, gender, status, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. As stated by Henning (2005), in order to conduct sound qualitative research, it is important that the researcher have critical awareness of her own biases, stereotypes, morals, values and social beliefs; therefore, the researcher must first acknowledge her identity pegs. When examining my own identity pegs, I recognize that I am female, white, heterosexual, educated, middle-class and privileged. I am also researching cross-cultural adoption as a privileged white mother to four black children, which is another one of my identity pegs. Additionally, I am an adoption worker for MCFD and I work with people who want to form their family through adoption. Therefore it is essential that I use critical thinking and constantly check my own values, feelings and beliefs while conducting this social research. "It is self-awareness and an understanding of who we are and where we came from that allows for personal growth and positive change to occur" (Henning, 2005, p.23).

Auto-Ethnography

Auto-ethnography occurs when the author draws on personal experiences, connecting the personal to the cultural and placing the self within a social context (Holt, 2003). Denzin (2003) believes in the transparency of auto-ethnography, meaning

that the author's own experiences and personal information can and should be explicitly incorporated into the written material. Denzin suggests the authors of auto-ethnographic texts use personal experience and memory as the point of departure for writing about things that matter in everyday life. When effectively crafted, these texts create a sense of emotional truth for reader and writer, producing experiences of self-renewal and self-discovery (Denzin, 2002). Because I am a mother to black children and my family is formed by cross-cultural adoption, I must weave my own personal experiences throughout the thesis. Any attempt to remove my personal thoughts, feelings or opinions about the topic of cross-cultural adoption would be impossible for me. Therefore I have used the form of auto-ethnography throughout this work in order to make this project transparent, reliable, and real. It is my hope that my passion regarding the issue of adoption and my belief that there is a family for every child will result in work that is rich, inviting and educational. In writing about such a personal topic, I hope to provide new learning opportunities for me as well as others.

Ethnography

According to Holt (2003), ethnographic research involves highly personalized accounts in which participants draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture. It is my expectation that the participants who share with me their experiences as cross-cultural families will further my understanding of cross-cultural adoption. For the purposes of my research, I will use the words, and

experiences provided by participants whose family is formed through cross-cultural adoption. Saukko (2003) suggests that using new ethnographic research attempts to do justice in the lived worlds of others. For the purposes of this research, using an ethnographic approach allows the participants of my study to tell their own stories, experiences, feelings and thoughts about their adoption stories and experiences with cross-cultural adoption in their own way.

Throughout the development of this project, there has been a great deal of media coverage pertaining to cross-cultural adoption. For this reason, the role of the media and the impact it has on societal images, beliefs, and values toward cross-cultural adoption were examined and discussed.

Sample Selection

Given that I am a member of the small community of people in Prince George who have adopted cross-culturally, my selection sample of participants has been created through snowball sampling. Being a visible, cross-cultural, adoptive parent affords me the opportunity to meet other families similar to mine. Therefore, snowball sampling has proven to work most effectively for this research process. One person was told about my research topic through the AFABC, and contacted me directly. I was careful to ensure the participants did not have contact with me previously with me as their social worker and they as a client. All participants knew of me through the adoption community, not as their social worker.

Other people had heard through the community and contacted me to inform me of their desire to be participants. Any person who had adopted cross-culturally and who had not been involved with me on a professional basis was invited as a participant.

Data Collection

Participants of this study were asked to answer six questions; their answers to these questions were then taped and transcribed. The questions asked of the participants were:

1. What are some of the challenges of parenting children whose ethnicity might be seen as other than yours?
2. What are some of the rewards of parenting children whose ethnicity might be seen as other than yours?
3. What brought you to the decision to adopt cross-culturally?
4. What would you like the world to know about cross-cultural adoption?
5. What do you do to assist your child(ren) to connect with their culture and ethnicity?
6. How do you think the Angelina Jolie/Brad Pitt/Madonna cross-cultural adoptions have impacted the way the world views cross-cultural adoption?

These questions were created and selected as it was hoped they would elicit rich dialogue and content from the participants. Asking participants what they want the world to know about cross-cultural adoption is an attempt to allow the participants a way to share their personal opinion with the outside world about their family. The

question pertaining to connecting children to their culture and identity is a way to elicit people's ideas, perceptions, and definitions of what *is* culture and ethnicity. The final question about celebrity adoption speaks to the power of the media, the current climate of change in the world regarding the idea of family and participants' thoughts about the power of the media. These questions were asked of the participants over the phone at a pre-arranged time in order to attempt to ensure few interruptions and disruptions throughout the interview process. The telephone conversations were taped and later transcribed. The participants were located in their natural setting for the interview. The questions developed for this study were open-ended with the hope for meaningful dialogue which extracts the participants' feelings, experiences, opinions and thoughts about cross-cultural adoption as it specifically pertains to them.

Data Analysis

After participants were interviewed and the data transcribed, I used the constant comparative method to analyze the material. According to Goetz and LeCompte (as cited in Lincoln & Gouba, 1985), the constant comparative method,

> combines inductive coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed. As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they are also compared across categories. Thus, the discovery of relationships, that is, hypothesis generation begins with the analysis of initial observations, undergoes continuous refinement through the data collection and analysis process and continuously feeds back into the process of category coding. As events are constantly compared with previous events, new typological dimensions, as well as new relationships may be discovered (p.335).

Ethical Considerations

Cross-cultural adoption is a very close and personal topic to me and as such, it is important that I ensure I am being ethical throughout the process by weaving my realities throughout the paper as a form of auto-ethnography. The fact that I am a white, middle class female with four African heritage children is apparent throughout the thesis.

Participants had an information sheet which was reviewed and accepted by the ethics committee, detailing information about the research process. Consent forms were provided to participants with their signature, explaining they are under no obligation to continue with the process, if they did not want to. Conversations were taped for the purposes of transcription and will be destroyed. Transcripts of the interviews were provided to the research participants and at the end of the project, the researcher's copies will be destroyed.

I have followed the recommendations of my thesis supervisor and the suggestions of the thesis committee members. I have been clear that I am asking questions of my research participants as a researcher and I have checked in and followed up with them after the interview process. I have ensured the participants of the study had written material regarding the questions being asked and the reasons for conducting this study. Additionally, I have been a member of the University of Northern British Columbia First Friday Research Group since September, 2004. This group is formed by other students enrolled in the Master of Social Work program who

give consistent feedback regarding my writing style, research method, ideological choices and dilemmas. The First Friday Research Group has been available to me from the beginning of this process and has worked hard to enhance the trustworthiness of this research for the previous thirty-six months.

Limitations

My research participants are the parents of children who are adopted cross-culturally and not the children themselves. Therefore, a limitation is that I do not have data from those people who are most directly impacted by cross-cultural adoption. Additionally, all four participants are parents to children through cross-cultural adoption and therefore are very invested in the issue of adoption and the way in which it is portrayed in this work. As a parent to children through cross-cultural adoption, it can be difficult to maintain two different roles as researcher and mother. Weaving my personal experiences throughout the text challenges the traditional ways of research, which can result in questions regarding reliability. Having four participants for the research project is another limitation as more themes may have emerged as a result of data analysis had there been more research participants. Had there been more research participants, more themes may have emerged from thematic analysis, thus enhancing the richness of the findings. Additionally, all of the research participants are mothers, perhaps resulting in differing perspectives than male participants and therefore limiting the research conclusions.

Expectations

It is my hope that this project will pave the way to new ideas and create a new understanding of what family means. My expectation pertaining to the outcome of this project has everything to do with what I have experienced personally as an adoptive mother to children of diverse heritage. I believe I might experience some difficulty in determining the answer to the question: what is family. Various assumptions exist regarding who the 'real' parents of adopted children are, and if the parents will ever have 'their own' children. I believe that blended families, gay and lesbian families, cross-cultural families and single parent families are all examples of family. I also hope to dispel a popular assumption that adoption is a form of martyrdom. Many people have chosen to adopt because they want to be parents, because they have fallen in love with a particular child, or because they want to add to their family though adoption.

CHAPTER 4

THE POWER OF THE MEDIA

I believe television and film have a profound impact on the way society views, interprets and experiences the culture in which we live. The television media bombards our consciousness with foolish sitcoms, low- budget reality TV and serious dramas that glamorize wealth, beauty and power. Television completely ignores valuable social work issues such as care-giving, racism, sexism, political oppression, poverty and globalization (Henning, 2005).

The Culture of Media

There is a new wave of culture permeating our society and that is the celebrity culture. Started in the 1940s with the likes of Joe DiMaggio, Ernest Hemingway and Marlene Dietrich and followed into the 1960s with the blend of Washington and Hollywood with people such as Joseph F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Society have always been obsessed with celebrities and the media has always been happy to oblige with this obsession; however, it is only until recently that this obsession has begun to saturate the culture (Wolf Shenk, 1996). Celebrity obsession has created a culture unto itself with the new technological advances of the communications media, in the form of internet, satellites, and Ipods. The mixture of politics, world events, and celebrity status results in a "sea of change in cultural values" (Wolf Shenk, 1996 p.1). Given the extent of media coverage about celebrities, individual self-image and personal expectations are often molded by what people view. Media,

> set the images that we have to live up to whether it's a physical image or lifestyle - being beautiful or having a gorgeous home and perfect kids. Magazines talk about the perfect diet plan and show

> pictures of people with perfect legs and stomachs and at the same time run articles about how you should be comfortable with the way you look. You can recognize how the media's selling to you, but you still buy into it (Steyer, 2002, p.111).

Society today is constantly shown images, messages and language that are aimed at shocking, tantalizing and stimulating the imagination and curiosity of the viewers, listeners and readers. According to the evening news on Global BC in November 16, 2006, the top news stories of the day included: the flooding of the Fraser River in Chilliwack; a forty-nine year-old BC woman dying due to lack of ambulance service; Remembrance Day memorials; the divorce between singers Brittney Spears and her husband, Kevin Feterline; actress Denise Richards involved in an altercation with a news reporter in Vancouver; and the apparent miscarriage actress Pamela Anderson had experienced in Richmond. Three out of six of these top stories involve the sensational and tragic experiences of Hollywood celebrities. It is interesting to note how the media has determined it is newsworthy to have the general lives of Hollywood celebrities reported on the evening news. Buying groceries at any grocery store across the country, one can read the front pages of magazines that tell the tales of marriage, divorce, pregnancy, addiction and adoption experienced by Hollywood celebrities.

According to Robert McChesney, a communications professor at the University of Illinois, the entire North American culture is a commercial laboratory, creating a culture that is based on consumerism and commercialism that is packaged and sold to people via the media (Steyer, 2002).

> The commercializing effects of media culture have been dramatically demonstrated in remote regions where television, for example, has only recently been introduced. In a fascinating account, Todd Lewan of the Associated Press documented the transformation of the Gwich'in Indian tribe in Arctic Village, Alaska, after a tribal council member brought the first TV - a black and white Zenith - into the village in 1980. Within four years, the village had video games, a satellite dish, and a VCR. Since then, the tribe has abandoned much of its ancestral culture, based on hunting caribou, in favor of instant coffee, bubblegum, Nike shoes, M&Ms, microwave ovens, and Bart Simpson. "The TV teaches greed", observed Sarah James, a Gwich'in artist, "it shows our people a world that is not ours. It makes us wish we were something else." One family's home, Lewan reported - a 480 square-foot plywood A-frame was equipped with three television sets, two VCRs, and a Sony Play station. The parents put a television in their son's room so he could watch his TV shows while he played video games. Now, they said, the boy comes home from school, eats, and plays Nintendo for a couple of hours, watches TV, then watches a video movie and goes to bed. It's been difficult for native stories and traditions to compete with a medium so seductive and powerful that, as one forty-three-year-old Gwich'in recalled, "I wanted to watch it and watch it and watch it and watch it.....When I went out in the country to hunt", he acknowledged, "all I could hear was the TV in my head" (Steyer, p.107, 108).

What do media, celebrity status, and Hollywood all have to do with cross-cultural adoption? The next section will address the interconnectivity between these facets.

Celebrities and Cross-Cultural Adoption

"Each of us has some power. You can use your power in the service of what you say you believe. If you do not use your power, someone will use if for you, and in your name." Audre Lorde, Montreal, 1987, (as cited in Campbell, 2007).

It appears that adopting cross-culturally in Hollywood has become a trend. Harrison (2006) believes the general public is drawn to celebrities because of our current fragmented society. Since media play such an omnipotent presence in the lives of individuals, family and community values are crushed leaving fantasy relationships easier to focus on than real relationships. Whatever the reasons, people are becoming increasingly fixated on the lived experiences of celebrities and adoption is a current hot topic in Hollywood these days.

Osborne (2006) states Angelina Jolie, a famous Hollywood actress, made the statement several years ago that she wanted to have a rainbow family, referring to parenting children of different countries, ethnicity, religions and cultures. Jolie and her partner, Brad Pitt have four children at this time - a five-year-old son who was adopted from Cambodia, a three-year-old son who was adopted from Vietnam, a two-year-old daughter who was adopted from Ethiopia, and an infant biological daughter. Both have made public statements about their intention to continue to adopt children from various countries throughout the world. Coined "Brangelina" in the media, pictures of Pitt and Jolie are splashed across magazines, newspapers and celebrity television shows, often with pictures of their children. The amount of media coverage of these public adoptions seems to have fueled the debate over cross-cultural adoptions. Proponents of

such adoptions proclaim through the media that Pitt and Jolie, Madonna, and Meg Ryan are saintly humanitarians who are saving the children. Opponents suggest these Hollywood celebrities are adopting children cross-culturally as a means of gaining attention and furthering their careers. As mother of four children, I find it difficult to understand how someone would come to the decision to raise children simply as a means to gain celebrity status, particularly when they already have achieved such status as people like Ryan, Jolie, Pitt and Madonna. I believe that most people's decision to adopt comes from a place of love, responsibility and desire to create a family in such a manner. Opponents of cross-cultural adoption have very salient points of view however, when they raise the issue of culture and connection to home-land, heritage and understanding their roots and how this is lost when a child is born in one country and then adopted by people in another. Also of concern is how power, prestige and money play a part in these adoptions. Opponents to celebrity cross-cultural adoption question whether laws and policies are followed during these adoptions, or if celebrity status and wealth makes it easier for these celebrities to adopt their children.

The issue of power and money is an important issue to raise when discussing cross-cultural adoption. On the one hand, it could be argued that people who are affluent and have a great deal of wealth are best equipped to adopt children cross-culturally as they have the financial means to ensure their children maintain their connection to their culture and heritage with such things as visits back to their home-land. Conversely, an argument could be made that wealth, money and celebrity status allow for famous people to sidestep laws and guidelines that other non-famous families

have to follow in order to adopt. Important questions to ask are whether or not these famous adoptive parents are ensuring their adoptions are legal and ethical and if they will utilize their money and power to connect their children to their culture, heritage and birthplace.

Madonna: Maternal Girl in a Material World

Arguably, the most controversial cross-cultural adoption in 2006 was the adoption of a child named David by pop-superstar Madonna and her husband, Guy Ritchie. David was born in a small impoverished village in Malawi. On October 25, 2006, Madonna joined Oprah Winfrey on her television program to share information with viewers about her decision to adopt David. During the interview with Oprah, Madonna said it was her participation in the Live 8 concert in June, 2005 that prompted her to turn her attention toward Africa and the extreme poverty in that country. Madonna added it was this awareness that motivated her and her husband to open their home and give their lives to a child who otherwise would never have the opportunity to grow up in a family. Madonna explained that there was a human rights group in Malawi that is currently fighting the impending adoption of David suggesting that Madonna used her wealth and celebrity status to make the adoption happen. Madonna made it clear during her interview that she worked with an adoption agency, had a home study completed, and would continue to work with a social worker who would determine if the placement is in the best interests of the child. Madonna made it clear to the viewing audience that she followed all of the rules and regulations in both

Africa and the United Kingdom. It must be noted however, that there are no licensed adoption agencies in Malawi that could act on the child's behalf in this situation to determine if the placement is in keeping with the best interest of the child. It is important to also note that Madonna's adoption is the first of its kind to occur outside of the country, as children residing in Malawi are to remain in Malawi with the prospective adoptive parents for twenty-four months before the adoption will be finalized. Further, adoptive parents are to be residents of Malawi in order to adopt a child from the country.

When asked about connecting David to his birth-father who resides in Malawi, Madonna said she has met David's birth-father when he attended court in Malawi, and said with the assistance of an interpreter that he is "grateful his son will be given a life because if David had stayed in the village, he would have been buried" (Winfrey, 2006). Madonna was asked about her perception of the media reporting that David's biological father did not understand the adoption process, and that his son would be taken out of the country. Madonna's response was that the media is manipulating the situation and is spinning a story that is completely false. She further stated that media are both a help and a hindrance: It is a help in the sense that it is raising awareness about the plight of African people and bringing the issue of adoption to the forefront of the minds of people throughout the world; however, it is a hindrance in that it is spinning a story portraying Madonna as exploiting David and his father casting cross-cultural adoption in a negative light. Madonna ended her interview with Oprah by sharing her plans to connect David to his culture, stating she will take him with her

whenever she is traveling to Africa. Raising Malawi is a project she has created and is continuing to work on to end poverty in Malawi. With that in mind, it could be argued that Madonna is doing all she can to help create change for David's land of origin, as well as for David.

Karen Madeiros is the Executive Director of the AFABC and was interviewed on the Global BC News Hour regarding the media coverage of Madonna's adoption. When asked what she thought about the media coverage of the adoption, Madeiros responded:

> I think media exposure is always a good thing when it comes to adoption because you can't talk about adoption without realizing there are kids out there who need a family and it is always my hope that more people will adopt children who need families. However the recent media coverage of Madonna's particular adoption has trivialized cross-cultural adoption making it seem as if it is a fad when the reality is that parenting cross-culturally is hard work and loving children who come to a family through adoption is not any different than loving children who are biological children (Pope, 2006).

Madeiros added that there are currently 600 people in British Columbia who have adopted children of African heritage and shared that she is one of them. Global television interviewed Madeiros' teen-aged son, Garrett. When asked what he thought of the media coverage of David and his impending adoption by Madonna, Garrett responded, "I think he is a lucky little guy. Not lucky to have a superstar as his mom, but lucky to have a home and a family" (Pope, 2006).

Biology and Adoption - How the World Views the Children

Some people say you are going the wrong way, when it's simply a way of your own.
Angelina Jolie

During an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Tom Cruise was asked about his relationship with the children he adopted with his then-wife Nicole Kidman. When asked specifically how he helps his bi-racial son connect with his black culture and heritage, his response was "I do not see his colour. We're from the human race, human kind, I mean, what's there to talk about? He's my son. Listen, that's just how I feel about it. He's my son. I've never thought about colour, race, I just have not thought about that." (Winfrey, 2005). Perhaps it is time for Tom Cruise to start thinking about colour and race and how his son might cope with these issues when confronted with them. Perhaps Tom Cruise has not thought about the issue of racism as it pertains to his son because, as a celebrity, he has not been confronted with racism and discrimination. The reality is that racism is still an issue in society, and no amount of money, power, prestige or celebrity status will change that. If Tom Cruise's son has been immune to racism thus far in his young life, it is certain he will be confronted with it at some point and he will need to be taught how to deal with it. This is his job as a parent. Although it can be argued it is admirable that Tom Cruise says he does not see any difference when he looks at his child, the reality is that many people do. Tom Cruise can look at his child and see his son whereas the rest of the world sees Tom Cruise and his bi-racial, adopted son and quite likely a negative comment or situation will occur because of this difference.

At this point in time, the children who have been adopted cross-culturally by celebrity-status parents have had their pictures featured in many celebrity magazines, newspapers and entertainment shows throughout the world. One is left to ponder what is going to happen to these children as they grow into adults and are no longer the 'lucky' children they now are. If their celebrity parents acknowledge their ethnicity and make an effort to educate their children about their cultural backgrounds, will that be enough to ground these children and help prepare them for the negativity they will encounter in the world?

Because language is such a powerful tool used to communicate and words have powerful meanings and connotations attached to them, there are both positive and negative words used when discussing adoption - many of which carry assumptions with them. For example, when asked if adopted children are real siblings, or if they are the natural children of the parents, these words imply that children who are siblings through adoption are un-real or lack a real type of connection than that of siblings who are biologically related. Many times, I have been asked by complete strangers if my children are real brothers and sisters. We are no longer asked if our children are our real children as people assume that our children are ours through adoption and not biology. This speaks to the ignorance of people to ask questions without any thought of how their questions might impact our family. Similarly, people who ask adoptive parents if their children are real or natural imply that children who come to a family through adoption are unnatural or unreal. Research that was collected for this chapter of this work showed dozens of articles and web sites that referred to Pax, Maddox and

Zahara as Angelina Jolie's adopted children. Shiloh, the biological child of Jolie and Pitt, is referred to as their child. This distinction is particularly concerning given that there is every reason to believe there will always be the acknowledgement that the children who were adopted are really not their children. In July 2006, Madame Tussaud's wax museum in New York City unveiled their newest wax display - a wax replica of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt with their biological daughter, Shiloh. Unbelievably, the children to Pitt and Jolie who joined the family through adoption were not included in the display, serving to perpetuate society's belief that biological family is more valid than adoptive. What does this say about the children as they pertain to the family? To her credit, Jolie has stated that her biological child is no more special than the other children and that she loves them all with the same force (Campbell, 2007).

Ongoing Fascination with Celebrities, Adoption and Children

With the current media coverage on cross-cultural adoption, the result has been a societal focus on the fascinating intersection between adoption, culture, and celebrity status. An artist named Kate Kretz created the painting entitled *The Celebrity Worship Cycle*, (Appendix D). This painting depicts Angelina Jolie as an angelic, beautiful, and highly sexual woman in the clouds, holding her biological infant Shiloh, with Maddox and Zahara at her legs. At the time the painting was made, Pax had not yet been adopted by Jolie. Under the cloud upon which Angelina and her children stand is a check-out counter at Wal-Mart depicting rows of magazine racks with various tabloid

magazines and an American flag hanging in the corner. Kretz says she created the painting as a focal point for people to start discussing the celebrity obsession that exists with Angelina Jolie. Kretz (2006) states that psychologically oppressive environments like celebrity status and media coverage are one of the feeding sources for consumers who are hungry for information about the celebrity's private life. She states she is interested in the ramifications of celebrity worship, particularly as they relate to class. Angelina Jolie was chosen as the subject because of her unavoidable presence in the media, the world-wide anticipation of her biological child, her unattainable beauty and the good that she is doing in the world through her example. Kretz adds that it is this perception of doing good through adoption that adds another layer to the already complicated questions surrounding her status. Many comments have been posted on Kate Kretz's web site from people who have written in to discuss their interpretation of the painting. Most of the responses posted show an understanding of and appreciation for the painting, but others seem to lack understanding of the connection between celebrity status, the impact on Angelina's children and the power of the media.

Media Impact on Cross-Cultural Adoption

Given the interviews Madonna, Jolie, Pitt and Cruise have given in the media, I believe they have come to the decision to adopt from a place of genuineness and they truly want the best for their children. However, best intentions aside, there are specific questions all parents who have adopted cross-culturally need to examine. Van Kerckhove (2007) wonders if a better standard of living, healthcare, education and

loving adoptive parents can make up for what is lost when a child is removed from his country and culture? If a country is experiencing such extreme poverty that it cannot adequately care for its children or orphans, is international adoption the best, or the only solution? If people are motivated to action by a country's troubles, are there things that could be done to help solve some of the underlying, fundamental problems causing the troubles in the first place, rather than adopt the children from that country? In the case of such celebrities like Jolie, Pitt and Madonna, whose wealth lies somewhere in the 350 million-dollar range each, could their efforts be utilized more effectively than by adopting one or two children? These are difficult but important questions that need to be asked before people venture into a cross-cultural adoption in keeping with the best interests of the children.

Adoptive Parents' Perspectives

Readers who subscribe to the AFABC's magazine were asked what their opinions are of Madonna's cross-cultural adoption. Most of the responses were positive, with writers stating they were pleased that the media coverage of Madonna's adoption has brought the whole issue of adoption into the spotlight, with the hopes that more people would look at adoption as an option to build their family. As Lium-Hall, mother to a girl from Ethiopia, writes:

> before my adoption, I spoke with an adoption specialist about myriad moral and ethical dilemmas surrounding international adoption. During this discussion, I made the comment that I thought intercountry adoption was wrong. Her response has never left me; she said the whole world is wrong, the system, the inequities and the

> injustices. Then she said "in the meantime, what are you going to do about it?" International adoption is necessary to keep children alive. Until we can combat the rate of people dying from HIV/AIDS and other diseases and ensure clean water for all, we need to look to international adoption as a viable solution. This is not an end-all solution - far from it - but it is part of the immediate response. I believe that through their adoptions, Angelina and Madonna have brought more global awareness to Africa (Focus Magazine, 2006, p.2).

Wheeler, a mother of two little girls who were adopted from China adds,

> there are many arguments against international adoption, but to me, the final verdict should be the best interests of the child. To grow up in an orphanage without the love of a family is not the best choice for anyone (Focus Magazine, 2006, p.2).

There were criticisms about the way Madonna carried out the adoption, stating she used her fame and fortune to make the adoption happen, particularly from a country that did not allow intercountry adoptions to occur.

> As a mother of a daughter who was adopted internationally, I was appalled at the cavalier and egotistical manner in which Madonna did this adoption. A lot has been written about the manner in which Madonna involved herself in Africa to 'do good'; less has been written about her utter lack of understanding of the adoption protocols that should be followed to protect the children left behind and to ensure that the adoption is done in an ethical manner (Focus Magazine, 2006, p.2).

Another writer (2006) discussed the pictures that were splashed across many tabloid magazines depicting David's nanny travelling to Africa to get him once he was allowed to leave the country to reside with Madonna and her family,

> the Madonna episode left me irritated at her gall and apprehensive for the possible fallout. The news clip of Madonna's nanny scuttling through the airport with the baby sent the message that David's "new mom" was just too busy to do the job herself. My

> apprehension is for the families and children who may experience problems with their own African adoptions as a result of Madonna's folly (Focus Magazine, 2006, p.2).

Media Coverage and Its Impact on Local Adoptions

Beverly Fowlie is the team leader for the Prince George Adoption team for MCFD. In an interview with a reporter with the Prince George Citizen Newspaper, Fowlie shared her hopes that people who are considering adopting children will not follow the celebrity trend and first look to adopt in their community, province and country. Fowlie stated that there are currently more than 1,000 children in British Columbia who are available for adoption and hoping to join an adoptive family, but her concern is that there appears to be a downward trend toward local or domestic adoption at this time. "We haven't placed as many children this year as in other years. I'm concerned that there are not as many people coming forward to adopt as there has been in the past" (Skorepa, 2006, p.14). From April 1, 2005 to April 1, 2006, 48 children were adopted in the northern region of Prince George, through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. As of November 18, 2006, there were only 21 children who were adopted in the northern region. It is Fowlie's hope that people looking to adopt children would consider children needing permanent, loving and stable family homes in the Prince George area before looking to go to another country to adopt a child.

There is a wealth of material, controversy, varying opinions and suggestions pertaining to adoption, culture, and the best interests of the child. Given the current climate of media involvement in the daily lives of people throughout the world, the

issue of cross-cultural adoption is a passionate topic at this particular time. Regardless of people's thoughts, feelings and perceptions of adoption, the reality is that there are millions of children in the world who are in need of a permanent family. Whether people chose to adopt a child from another country or from their local area, the fact is that these children need a home and if celebrities are using their status in the world to draw attention to this fact, hopefully it will end in a positive result for children worldwide who are in need.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS

For this research project, four participants agreed to be involved in an interview-style discussion: Nina, Cheryl, Kerri and Erin.

Nina, a woman of African heritage married to a Caucasian male, is in the process of adopting three children of Metis heritage. Nina was born in Africa and was raised in an orphanage.

Kerri, an adoptive mother to four children and foster-parent to two others was adopted as an infant and did not find out about her Metis heritage until she was an adult, when she connected with her birth family. Kerri is married to a Caucasian man and all of their children are Metis or First Nations heritage.

Cheryl is a Caucasian, biological mother to two grown children and is adoptive mother to her four-year-old daughter who came to her home as an infant as a foster child.Cheryl and her partner Tanya, also a Caucasian woman are raising their daughter who is of First Nations heritage.

Erin, a Caucasian woman, married to a Caucasian husband, is an adoptive parent to three daughters of African heritage.

All interviews were conducted over the telephone, were taped and later transcribed for the purposes of data collection and thematic analysis. The names of the participants have been changed for this project in order to ensure confidentiality.

Challenges of Cross-Cultural Adoption

All research participants were asked the question, "what are some of the challenges of raising children whose ethnicity might be seen as being other than yours?" The following are the themes that emerged from the data pertaining to this question.

Racism

One theme that emerged from this question was the issue of racism. Almost all of the research participants identified racism as being a part of their lived experiences of belonging to a cross-cultural, adoptive family. Research participant Cheryl,

> a big challenge for us is the racism and stereotypes that we've encountered and how people will make comments and I never maybe really noticed it before, but now that I have a child of that ethnicity, I am now really hyper-sensitive to it. You know, it is really hurtful and stuff that I maybe would have let go before I really feel sensitive about and I really want to protect her. My family is not blatantly racist, they are good people, but they will make assumptions about people and they make stereotypical remarks about First Nations people - just from their lack of understanding about the history of oppression, of colonization, residential schools, and it's funny because they will make a comment like that and I will say, "you know that's my daughter you are talking about". She's a First Nations child and I find that putting it into that context makes it personal and it's almost that they don't see that they are talking about the same thing (Cheryl, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Kerri, in discussing how she has tried to connect her seventeen-year-old son to his Aboriginal heritage and a major challenge for her has been his lack of interest in

connecting with his Aboriginal culture due to the level of racism and negativity he has experienced in Prince George from other kids his age.

> Trevor really doesn't have any interest in his culture and I don't know where he gets that from. He just has absolutely no interest in his culture. He knows what his culture and ethnicity is, but he just doesn't have any interest in finding out anything more about it. I think it is from people he is around and that some people are really negative about Aboriginal culture and in some ways sometimes I think he is really embarrassed about being Aboriginal. You know in the lower mainland, there was maybe a few other Aboriginal kids, but here there's lots and some of the kids can be pretty negative. Not necessarily towards him, but just....you know.....it's racist. He, as a seventeen-year-old young man is deciding he doesn't want to have anything to do with it, (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Erin is raising her three daughters of African heritage and shared,

> people just feel that they can stop me anywhere and ask questions and comments about how beautiful my kids are, or where they are from or how much did they cost, or are they "real" sisters (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

In Nina's family, her children are of Metis heritage and her husband is Caucasian, therefore the children look like they could be biologically related to him instead of her. Nina shared,

> If my husband is with us, and because we are a bi-racial couple, people don't seem to have a difficult time. But, if it is just me with the kids, people just assume that I am the babysitter. And if the little one is running around saying 'Mommy this and Mommy that', then you can see their wheels turning and they are trying to figure things out.

It is important to note that even though some of these statements and events might not be thought of as forms of racism, they are. The questions, comments and

behaviors adoptive parents and their children experience are based upon the differences between the parents and the children which, although overt and likely unintentional, is still a form of racism.

Mental and Emotional Challenges

Both Nina and Kerri spoke of the difficulties of raising children who have been diagnosed with challenges such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, (FASD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, (ADHD). Nina spoke about her desire to have her children want to connect to their Metis culture and for them to ask her questions about her skin color and make comments about their differences. However she has found that

> having FASD and PTSD makes it difficult for the children to comprehend ethnicity. So, how I would love for ethnicity to be a bigger role. How I would love for them to come home from school and tell me that someone said to them, "you can't be my Mommy because your skin is brown". I would love to be able to deal with issues as simple as skin pigment but you know, the reality is that my kids don't function like we do because there is no cause and effect. So, ethnicity and culture-wise, it just doesn't compute (Nina, personal communication, September 14, 2006).

Kerri shared her experience with connecting her children to their culture and ethnicity, adding "and then there are always different issues like FASD and ADHD. And with parenting being the hardest job already, that stuff makes it even more difficult" (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Lack of Knowledge

All of the participants spoke about society's lack of information and knowledge about cross-cultural adoption and the impact this has on their children. Cheryl spoke about her family's lack of awareness about the history of colonization, oppression, the effects of residential schools on First Nations people and how their stereotypical remarks hurt her family and their fear of how those comments will harm their daughter. Erin spoke about how complete strangers have come up and touched her daughters' hair without thinking they might be crossing a boundary by doing so. All of the participants discussed the fact that society as a whole is lacking awareness around adoption, culture and celebration of difference. Erin also shared how people will make comments about how saintly she is for having adopted her children, adding how frustrated she feels when people refer to her children as being lucky to have been adopted by her. Erin shared that comments like this can be difficult to deal with and how important it is for these people to hear the message that she and her husband are the ones who are fortunate to have the children, not the other way around.

Rewards of Cross-Cultural Adoption

Participants were asked "what are the rewards of raising children whose ethnicity may be seen as being other than yours?" All of the participants were unanimous in what they determined to be the rewards.

Gratitude

Every research participant listed as a reward of cross-cultural adoption a feeling of gratitude and happiness that they became mothers to their children through cross-cultural adoption. Kerri shared "I was just so happy to be fortunate enough to be a parent and have a young mother trust me and me being a young mother myself, to be able to raise my baby (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Even with the difficulties Nina was experiencing parenting her children, she shared "having the little ones in the house and to hear them call me Mommy - that's a reward for me" (Nina, personal communication, September 14, 2006).

Cheryl used the word "magical" to describe her daughter and said she could not imagine what her world would be without her, adding "a reward for us is the opportunity to learn about her culture and share that with her" (Cheryl, personal communication, January 2, 2007).

Erin said her children form the family she never thought she would have and that she would not change the make-up of her family for anything in the world. Erin also shared,

> we have learned so much from them, you know and learned a lot about people and we are just so thrilled that they are our girls and I think it is really the rewards of raising any children, really (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

Open Adoption and Extending Family Connections

All of the research participants experienced some form of openness in their adoption and these participants felt their form of openness created a better understanding about adoption and culture for their children. Nina shared her connection with the foster parents for the children and how this relationship has helped her and the children in their most difficult times. Kerri spoke about her own experience of being both an adoptive parent as well as a person who was adopted as an infant. She discussed her happiness with finding out about her Metis culture as an adult after meeting her birth family for the first time. Kerri's belief is that openness in adoption is often a positive and important aspect when it is safe for the children to have contact with their extended family. When discussing the adoption of her oldest son, she shared,

> it meant everything to me to have the blessing of the elder - his Grandmother - and so, she made him a little sweater and a little hat and that was her way of giving her blessing that the adoption was okay (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Cheryl spoke of her experience with an open adoption, saying,

> it's exciting for us to have an open adoption, you know, phoning her Mom and it was her maternal Grandmother who wanted her to go to a Cree preschool and learn about her Cree culture, so you know....we have kept the family involved and up to date on what is going on and what she is learning. It does not feel like we have severed anything, we have just sort of added on to the family and extended family and we are all raising her (Cheryl, personal communication, January 2, 2007).

Erin shared how her middle-child has a biological sister who was adopted by a family who also reside in British Columbia and how it has been a rewarding and positive experience getting the birth-sisters together and building on their relationship,

> I want my kids to know their biological family and ask a lot of questions so they know who they are when they are older. Our family is so small and our kids have these huge, extended biological families and when they want to connect with those family members, they can (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

Both Cheryl and Erin shared their belief that openness in adoption can assist the child in understanding who their biological family members are and what their lived experiences are. Erin (personal communication, February 20, 2007) stated "openness stops the kids from having these images...these exaggerated images of who their birth family is" and Cheryl (personal communication, January 25, 2007) agreed,

> our daughter knows who her tummy-mommy is and that she comes to visit and that she doesn't live with her biological mom and so it's really just a normal part of her life and it's not this big magical, mystical thing.

Learning About Culture

All of the participants spoke of their desire and eagerness to learn about their children's ethnic culture and described how they have tried to bring traditions from the culture of their children into their family life. Kerri shared her happiness with finding out she is of Metis heritage and how she shared this heritage with some of her children. "I am learning about my culture as the kids are learning about theirs and it's all the same culture. I find I can teach my kids a lot because we are all learning together" (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Cheryl spoke about how exciting it has been for her and her partner to learn about their daughter's Cree and Metis heritage "it has been a really rich experience for us in that learning about and listening to her music and how she loves to drum and we

are just so fascinated with everything we are learning about her culture (Cheryl, personal communication, January 25, 2007). Erin and Nina have found that books, community resources and reaching out to community members who share the same ethnicity as their children have provided the opportunity to learn about their children's culture.

Why Cross-Cultural Adoption

Research participants were asked "what brought you to your decision to adopt cross-culturally" and all participants with the exception of one spoke of having experienced difficulty conceiving children or giving birth to children as the reason for deciding to adopt. However, the reasons for adopting cross-culturally were as varied as the participants themselves.

For Nina, her inability to have biological children coupled with her desire to be a mother, led her to the path of adoption.

> I had grieved the miscarriages I had and my urge to have a family was so strong. For me, I wanted a child and it didn't matter about race. Because I am a black woman and married to a white man, we knew that we wanted to adopt bi-racial children but when we went to the Ministry, we found there were not a lot of children who were part black and we just didn't care about the race, we were just happy to have the chance to be parents (Nina, personal communication, September 14, 2006).

Kerri knew from the time she was a child that she would be unable to have biological children and because of this and the fact that she was adopted, she always

knew that when she was an adult, she would adopt children rather than give birth to them. Kerri shared,

> the little boy we adopted is Aboriginal and once he joined our family, we just went on to adopt more children that were the same ethnicity as him. After we adopted him, I found out about my Metis heritage as well and that fit with his Aboriginal culture and that is how we came to adopt cross-culturally as a family (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Erin spoke about her desire to parent her children from infancy and the importance of raising children who did not have known mental and emotional challenges. Erin explained that the waiting list of people who want to adopt healthy Caucasian infant children in British Columbia and length of time it likely would take to adopt locally prompted her and her husband to look elsewhere. Erin shared,

> in our case, we struggled to have biological children and after doing a lot of research, and knowing we wanted a healthy baby we found out about the Open Door Agency in Georgia and how they have all of the medical records of the children. So, we knew that we could adopt healthy babies from the Open Door and the fact that the kids were black didn't matter. We just needed to know that a healthy baby was coming (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

Cheryl is a foster parent and her daughter was her first foster child. She is also a biological mother to two adult children. On the issue of cross-cultural adoption, Cheryl said,

> our daughter was initially a short-term foster placement and we really didn't have any intention of necessarily adopting a child but after having our daughter with us and knowing that we could adopt her, we knew that was exactly what we would do (Cheryl, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Connecting Children to their Culture and Ethnicity

All research participants were asked what they do to connect their children to their culture and heritage. Kerri spoke of the connections she has made with her children's band members and a Metis elder who has taken on a grandfather-like role to her and the children. Kerri further added her family attends pow-wows, the Native Friendship Centre in Prince George and that there are a lot of story books in the home that are based on Aboriginal culture.

When Nina's teenaged daughter was living at home, Nina attended Metis meetings and gatherings with her daughter. Nina shared that she has tried to have the younger children connect with their Metis culture, but she is also "dealing with issues that are bigger and more difficult than connecting the children to their culture" (Nina, personal communication, September 14, 2006).

Cheryl's family has books and counting cards with Haida legends and cultural components to them.

> We knew we had an obligation and she had a right to know where she came from, who she was, her biological family, her culture. That's a part of who she is and we would not be allowing her to reach her full potential if she was not connected to all that. And we feel it should be a part of her everyday life to know who she is and so that is something that we are really passionate about. The kinds of things we do to connect her to her culture is we have books, she has counting cards that have pictures of totem poles within her community. For example, there is a picture of a raven and on the back of the card there gives the legend in Haida about what the raven means and it will say that the raven is a trickster and so, she has counting cards just like any kid would have, but hers have a cultural component to them. Um, she has a drum and she has Haida music that she puts on and likes to drum....she likes to dance to her Haida music, she goes to the Cree preschool to ensure she is learning about

> her Cree heritage and she's smudged, she has had a naming ceremony....she's been to different community events - like Aboriginal days and I mean any possible thing that we can take her to....we have taken her to the Charlottes to meet her biological family and we are actually planning another trip this year....yeah, so she has been to her community, she's met her extended family, we keep her connected with them as well (Cheryl, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Erin and her family celebrate Kwanza, an African Christmas celebration as well as visit and maintain a connection to a biological sibling of their middle daughter. For Erin and her husband, it was important for them to adopt children who would have the opportunity to travel and meet extended family members in order to maintain a sense of identity and connection to their culture.

> Our smallest one was not quite two and we got a call and our middle daughter's birth mom was pregnant and she wanted us to take the baby. We had really thought we could manage to do the things we wanted to do with three, but that was a very, very hard decision to make, but we said no and they said they would try to place the baby somewhere close and they placed the baby with a family in Victoria. And it's our little one's biological half-sister and we all went down to Victoria last summer and met her and she wasn't quite two. It was awesome - it's really hard to explain how cool that was to see her and to have those girls know each other and as they grow, share their experiences with culture and themselves (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

What the World Should Know about Cross-Cultural Adoption

Participants were given the opportunity to answer the question, "what would you like the world to know about cross-cultural adoption?" Kerri and Nina shared the opinion that children are in need of permanent families and that although culture and

connection to ethnicity are important, belonging to a stable and healthy family is most important.

> Children are children and no matter what culture or race or anything, they are just children. I wish the kids that are in care now could feel the same feelings of permanency as kids not in care. If you just look at the percentage of kids who are looking for a forever family, they need that permanency before they need connection to their culture (Kerri, personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Nina agreed, stating,

> for all these kids who need a home so badly, having to move from home to home with a suitcase, not knowing where they are going to get to stay, or if someone will be there to help them with their problems, having to get used to new people, new places, new food, not knowing if you are going to be comfortable for five minutes. When you compare that to the issues of ethnicity or race, I think ethnicity and race are the most non-issues that ever lived (Nina, personal communication, September 14, 2006).

Cheryl shared her wish for more people looking to adopt to realize that love is not going to be a cure-all for the difficulties that will likely be encountered. Cheryl added,

> it is not good enough for you to just love them and assimilate them into your family. You need to honor who they are and where they come from and their roots. I think we leave big, gaping holes if we don't do that and I think that's the biggest thing is to embrace their culture and preserve it and help them learn about it. Don't be afraid of it! (Cheryl, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Erin summed up her thoughts by stating,

> it is awesome. There are no negatives about it. Everything has just been such an awesome experience. We have traveled this road now and if we had biological children, it wouldn't have been the same (Erin, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

Media, Celebrities and "Us"

Given the current media coverage of cross-cultural adoptions of celebrities such as Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and Madonna, research participants were asked about their opinions of how this media coverage may have impacted society's view of cross-cultural adoptions.

Raising Awareness

Kerri thought the media coverage is a positive event,

> I think it's a really good thing because I watched Oprah Winfrey when Madonna was on there. Madonna couldn't have said it better when she said my kids don't say, "why is he here", or "why is his skin a different color", they are just kids happy to have a little baby brother. And those kids are not asking those questions, they just have embraced him. And that's - she just said it so well - I was so happy with it because you know, people are saying she just did it because she is famous, well, she saw a child that was in need and with the foundation she is doing. She saw this one child who really stood out to her and she knew that no matter what, she was going to adopt that child. I just think it's great because they are just kids. Madonna said she was hoping that the negative publicity wasn't going to stop people from wanting to adopt, because it's becoming more negative. I like the other thing that she said is that her plan is to go back to Melawi and take all of her children and help her son to learn how to help the other people in Melawi. Madonna has the means to go to Melawi on a yearly basis, she said she will be able to go there and take her child there and I think that's great. It is bringing attention to the issue of adoption and that there are so many kids out there who need families (personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Nina shared a similar opinion as Kerri, stating,

> I think it's wonderful because the whole idea is to - especially because they are in the media, you know where cameras are following them twenty-four-seven, might result in the picture of

> them everywhere - people might not even have a clue that an African nation even exists, so for people to see their picture everywhere, they might think, "oh - isn't that weird", or, "oh, they must love each other". What is most important for those kids is family. I think it is good that they are bringing adoption more into the mainstream of society. So, to me, it is wonderful (personal communication, February, 20, 2007).

Erin also felt positive about the media coverage stating " I think the media coverage is great because there is still a lot of racism and because I think people tend to look up to celebrities, I think it is a positive thing".

Cheryl looked at the issue with consideration of wealth, money and power rather than culture and adoption,

> I have not viewed the focus of their adoptions as cross-cultural. The focus for me has been about wealth and power. So, interesting. I viewed it completely through a different lens. I just am amazed how people with money....you know, there are people who wait on wait lists for how long for kids and then, if you throw enough money at it, you know you can go and pick them - go to an orphanage and pick a kid. So that's really been more about what's been in my mind. As far as the cross-cultural piece, I don't really think I have given it too much thought. I would have to say that Brad Pitt and Angelina seem to have been quite positive as far as the type of work they do and that stuff, whereas Madonna seems to almost have been a little bit - I want to say that I remember some negative stuff around her adoption like allegations of buying a kid....so, um, obviously there again, it's not about cross-cultural for me, it's about ethics and money and power more so. On the one hand, I guess their money and power would afford them the opportunity to hop on a plane and take that child to their homeland and visit with their biological family, their roots, their heritage and all of that and on the other hand, my questions are, are they going to do it and do they understand the importance of doing it (personal communication, January 25, 2007).

The Need for Permanency

Both Kerri and Nina spoke about their hope that the media coverage will result in an increase in cross-cultural adoptions. Kerri shared,

> what I think is tragic is that there's all these Aboriginal kids that are in care and they are raised in Caucasian foster homes but can't be adopted into those homes. What's worse? Sitting in care for their life and never having a forever family just because adoptive parents are not the same culture as them? And that to me is just tragic because as a newborn baby myself, having been raised in a Caucasian family, not even knowing that I was Metis, I never, ever would have cared - Mom and my Dad were my parents and I had family. Learning about my culture and tradition came later and that's okay (personal communication, November 1, 2006).

Nina shared her belief that what is more important is for,

> kids to be safe, to have someone who loves you, where no one is going to beat you or call you names or make you feel like a.....no matter what you do, to know that this is a safe place. For kids to know that they are accepted and to know they are so safe there. For a child to know that, that's how I feel (personal communication, September 14, 2006).

After discussing with research participants their beliefs regarding cross-cultural adoption, it was clear that the research participants believed that permanency for children was most important, with connection to culture and ethnicity a close second. There were varying ideas and opinions about how to best ensure all children are given a safe and loving adoptive family while maintaining connections with biological family members and ensuring a strong link to culture and ethnicity. Many of the participants had creative and intelligent suggestions for how to create change and connect children to their culture and ethnicity when they are part of a cross-cultural family.

CHAPTER 6

SURPRISES, SUGGESTIONS AND SUMMARY

"And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, "Speak to us of Children."
And he said: Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls, For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable."
- Kahlil Gibran

When I decided to adopt my infant child 10 years ago, I was filled with all of the hope, excitement, anticipation and fear that I believe most parents feel when on the verge of becoming parents for the first time. After adopting my son and not caring about the differences between our skin tones, our hair, our culture and ethnicity, I realized that all my love and devotion in the world could not protect him from the brutal reality of racism. The moment I realized I could not protect my children from the harsh realities they would experience as children in a cross-cultural adoptive family was the moment I decided to arm myself with all of the education I could afford in order to be able to better assist them in staying resilient in the world. My scholarly

journey has allowed me to critically analyze the many multi-layered and multi-faceted components to culture, ethnicity, adoption, parenting, grief, loss and best interest of the child. This has not been an easy journey - I have been challenged to examine the harsh reality of foster care, the grim reminder of what happens to so many lost children and the fact that not all adoption stories end in happily-ever-after endings. The sad reality of the situation is that parenting across cultural and ethnic lines will certainly be difficult, messy and painful at certain times. However, it is absolutely worth the uncertainty, fear, trepidation and anxiousness that accompany cross-cultural adoption because the joys definitely outweigh the challenges.

Surprises

Perhaps the biggest surprise was how much cross-cultural adoptive parents have done to connect not only their children but also themselves to their children's culture. Throughout the research process, a great amount of information was found to support the fact that adoptive parents today understand the importance of connecting their children to their ethnicity and culture. When interviewing research participants for this process, the responses from the participants fit with the literature - adoptive parents today seem to understand the importance of ensuring their children had a strong sense of connection to their ethnicity and culture. The level of understanding adoptive parents had regarding adoption issues, grief and loss, culture, and what they believed to be in the best interests of all children was both a surprise and a relief.

Also surprising was the level of openness research participants had with their children's birth-parents, extended family and communities of origin. I had expected the research participants to have a level of anxiousness and negativity around openness in adoption. It was a pleasant surprise to find that the participants had some level of openness with the birth-families of their children and they understood the importance of their children maintaining openness with their biological family members.

Children who struggle with developmental, behavioral and emotional challenges present difficulties to their parents outside what is considered normal. Three of the four research participants were raising children who were prenatally exposed to alcohol and drugs and those children struggle with learning and behavioral difficulties. What was perhaps the biggest surprise to me was Nina's perspective on ethnicity, culture and heritage as they pertain to adoption. As a black woman who was orphaned as a child, my assumption at the beginning of this project was that she would have the strongest belief in connecting children to their culture and ethnicity. It was surprising to me to hear from Nina that for her, ethnicity, culture and issues of racism were not significant factors. For Nina, her struggles were not related to culture and ethnicity, rather with challenges such as FASD, ADHD, PTSD, and attachment.

I was further surprised about the intensity of my feelings throughout this process. Due to the fact that I am an adoptive parent, the literature review, the interviewing of the participants, and the day-to-day parenting my children in a racist world at times resulted in my feeling that the world is a dark and depressing place. Several times I would not listen to the news, decided not to write the thesis or read anything pertaining to cross-

cultural adoption because I just could not deal with one more negative statement about adoption, ethnicity or racism. The process of reading, writing and researching cross-cultural adoption was at times a challenge, but always in the end, there was the hope for a better future for all children and the strong belief that parenting cross-culturally in a racist world can and does work - this I never lost belief in.

Legacy of an adopted child

Once there were two women who never knew the other
one you do not remember, the other you call Mother
Two different lives shaped to make yours one
One became your guiding star, the other became your sun.
The first one gave you life, the second taught you to live it.
The first gave you a need for love, the second was there to give it.
One gave you nationality, the other gave you a name.
One gave you the seed of talent, the other gave you aim.
One gave you emotions, the other calmed your fears,
One saw your first sweet smile, the other dried your tears.
One sought for you a home that she could not provide
The other prayed for a child and her hope was not denied.
And now you ask me through your tears
The age-old question through the years
Heredity or environment
Which are you the product of -
Neither, my darling, - neither;
Just 2 different kinds of love

-author unknown-
(American Adoptions, 2007).

Suggestions

When I first ventured into adoption, I was twenty-one years of age and was sure that openness between me and my child's birth family was not going to be an option. I was frightened by what the openness would look like, that my child would someday grow to believe that because I am not his biological mother, I would lose the relationship I have with my child. Given time and further understanding about the best interests of adopted children and the grief and loss issues for birth parents, I have come to understand that some form of openness between the adoptive family and the biological family is certainly in the best interests of the children. Openness in some form allows for the child to maintain connection with heritage, culture and ethnicity. If the adoptive parents and biological family members can maintain a healthy and positive relationship, there is likely to be better understanding of adoption, grief and loss and separation issues for the child.

Openness

Research participant Cheryl spoke about her ability to maintain connection with her daughter's biological mother and grandmother, sharing that the relationship she has with these biological family members has added to her extended family and that her little daughter understands that her biological mother is her tummy-mommy with whom she does not live with. When little children are raised from an early age to understand that they are adopted and have biological parents and adoptive parents, these relationships are normalized.

Better Understanding and Education

Words cannot express the importance of gaining a better understanding, awareness and education regarding best interests of children and adoption-related issues prior to venturing into adoption. Parents who arm themselves with knowledge and understanding of adoption issues are better prepared for the challenges and difficulties they might encounter when parenting their adopted children. It is imperative for people to have a solid understanding of what FASD, ADHD and NAS is. Because adoption is based on loss for the parents, the children and the biological family members, adopting parents must be aware of the challenges pertaining to adoption, especially their grief and loss issues prior to adopting. Being educated around positive adoption language and being assertive enough to correct people when they make racist comments is essential. In the cases of cross-cultural adoption, parents must understand that they will experience the rage, heartbreak and helplessness that occur when their children have encountered racism at the playground or in the school hallways. Parents must understand the vital importance of being present, available and willing to discuss issues such as racism, classism, hate, and ignorance with their children. Parents must also understand that being a cross-cultural family makes them the target of watchful eyes, judgments, unwanted comments and questions.

Support

According to Melina (1998) it is the right of every child to belong to a family. If adoption agencies and government adoption workers have a low percentage of adoption

break-downs, or disruptions, they are not taking enough risks in placing children in adoptive families. Melina suggests that the chance of creating permanency for children through adoption outweighs the risks associated with disruptions and break-downs. She further suggests that support, knowledge, and ongoing assistance are needed for adoptive families who are struggling.

Adoption Language

With education comes an understanding of positive and negative adoption language. Adoption Resources (1995) has developed the following information regarding both positive and negative adoption language.

Positive Adoption Language	Negative Adoption Language
Birth Parent	Real Parent
Biological Parent	Natural Parent
Birth Child	Own Child
My Child	Adopted child; Own Child
Born to Unmarried Parents	Illegitimate
Place for Adoption	Give Up
Make An Adoption Plan	Give Away
To Parent	To Keep
Waiting Child	Adoptable Child, Available Child
Biological Father	Real Dad
Making Contact with Parent	Reunion
International Adoption	Adoptive Parent
Child Awaiting Adoption	Foreign Adoption
Court Termination	An Unwanted Child
Child With Special Needs	Child Taken Away
Was Adopted	Handicapped Child
	Is Adopted

Cultural Competence and Assessment Guides

It is imperative that adoption agencies and social workers do everything they can to assess the adoptive parents' ability and commitment to follow through with connecting their children to their culture and ethnicity. Chas (2004) developed a cultural competence continuum which ranges from cultural proficiency to cultural destructiveness. This continuum could also be used to determine the ability and commitment parents have to connect their children to their culture. It is vital for adopting parents to understand the important connection between culture and a child's identity formation. Without a solid understanding of this connection, there exists the potential for the child to grow up feeling alienated and lost.

For Future Exploration

According to Paddock (2006), children in the foster care system have been traumatized by their birth-parents but also by the very system that placed the children in the child protection system in the first place. Paddock suggests the cycle of trauma continues for years when children remain in the foster care system because the genetic connection between parent and child remains the most important aspect. Society allows children to continue to be abused and neglected by their biological parents because of the blood connection, trapping children in the foster care system in an attempt to maintain these genetic relationships. This pattern results in further trauma to the children. On the one hand, biological parents deserve the opportunity to make better choices for themselves and their children. There must be an opportunity for biological parents to

correct the mistakes that resulted in their children being removed from their care and brought into the foster care system. This is especially true when the problems are centered around addiction, poverty and lack of parenting skills. On the other hand, the longer children remain in foster care, the more damage and trauma that occur. The older the children are, the less likely they are to be adopted. Herein lays the difficult question - how long should biological parents be given to make better choices and prove they will be safe and protective parents to their children? At what point should the legal system determine that the children are to be available for adoption and should never return to their biological parents? If the children are of Aboriginal heritage and there are not enough Aboriginal adoptive families to adopt them, then should the children be allowed to be adopted into homes where there is no Aboriginal connection? What are the best interests of the child - to maintain a cultural connection by being adopted into a family that shares the same genetic heritage, or to remain in foster care with foster families who share the same culture and heritage, but not to have the permanency of a forever family? How do we, as a society, ensure that children who are adopted cross-culturally have the opportunity to grow and learn about their birth culture and their heritage after the adoption has been finalized? Who should be the people who monitor this and ensure this happens? And should adoptive parents be held to a higher standard to ensure this happens when biological parents are not? At what point can it be determined that a child has a right not to learn about his culture and heritage if he is uninterested in doing so?

I believe that the best interest of children is a plan for permanence. All decisions should be made to ensure the child will be safe, secure and not moved from family to

group home, eventually aging out of a government system without connection to family. I believe that permanence is the number one factor in ensuring the best interests of a child, and issues related to culture, ethnicity and heritage a close second. Without the safety and security of a permanent family, children will not have the opportunity to discover issues pertaining to culture, ethnicity and self-identity.

Final Thoughts

I found this entire project has left me with a deeper understanding of the complexities of adoption, cross-cultural issues, and the rights of children, birth-parents and adoptive parents. Something I had not anticipated when I started this thesis was the role the media was going to play in 2005, 2006 and 2007 and that cross-cultural adoption was going to become a controversial topic. The incursions of Hollywood, power, politics, and the media into the issue of cross-cultural adoption added another layer to explore and ponder. Waugh (2007) offers her perspective,

> if you look at international adoption from a theoretical, socio-political viewpoint, you can find lots of reasons why it's wrong. But the fact is, adoption is not a theoretical act. It is an intensely personal one, involving a particular child and a particular family. I doubt even the most vociferous proponent of local adoption would be able to go to an orphanage in Ethiopia, China or anywhere else, point at an individual child and tell them they'll be better off staying there, rather than being adopted. Will that adoption have huge repercussions on that child's life? You bet it will. But with education, and a real willingness to grow as a family, a child adopted internationally can grow up happy and in their own skin and able to integrate birth and adoptive cultures. Isn't our goal for any child that they grow up happy with themselves, who they are, and where they've come from? I don't know if adoption, local or international, can change the world and I don't know that it has to. But I do believe

> that it changes the lives of our families and children, forever, and for better (p.2).

I ventured into this process believing that the best interest of children is to be adopted into safe and loving homes first and foremost with connection to culture and heritage a close second. I maintain this belief, now more firmly supported by the academic literature and the lived experiences of other cross-cultural, adoptive families. Cross-cultural adoption can and does work as long as the adopting parents understand and appreciate the importance of connecting their children to their culture and ethnicity. Openness, communication, support, stability, patience, and understanding can ensure that children in cross-cultural adoptive homes are connected to their culture and heritage.

Sooner or later you have to give up the hope of having a better past, so focus on what you can do - help your children learn to count on you and make the rest of their lives bigger (Paddock, 2006).

REFERENCES

Adams, L. (2004). *A Child's Horror*. Retrieved on June 24, 2005 from http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewshortstory.asp?id=12575

Adoption Resources (1995). *Positive Adoption Language*. Retrieved on July 22, 2007 from http://www.adopting.org/article5.html

Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (2003). *Intercountry Adoption: What to Expect.* Retrieved on March 23, 2005 from www.bcadoption.com/info/howto.html

Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (2006). *Madonna's Cross-Cultural Adoption*. Focus on Adoption, 14, (p.2)

Agur, R. (1997). Surviving Foster Care: A Day with Shane Sater. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance.* Retrieved on May 13, 2005 from www.pactadopt.org/profiles.shane.html

Bartholet, E. (1992). *Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Bartholet, E. (2001). *Nobody's Children: Abuse and Neglect, Foster Drift, and the Adoption Alternative*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bartholet, E. (2002) *Transracial Adoption*. Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from http://www.familyhelper.net/arc/trans.html

Bartholet, E. (1999). Adoption and Race. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/adopt-race.html

Bartholet, E. (1998). Private Race Preferences in Family Formation. *The Yale Law Journal,* 107, 34-86.

Barker, R.L. (2002). *The Social Work Dictionary*. Atlanta: NASW Press.

Benward, J. (1998). Feelings of Differentness. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 06 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/differentness.html

Bowie, D. (2006). *Quotes*. Retrieved on November 09, 2006 from http://www.bizcommunity.com/Quotes/196/15.htm

British Columbia Adoption Act (2004). Victoria: Queen's Printer.

Byrne, M. (2001). *Disseminating and presenting quality research findings*. Retrieved on July 22, 2007 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FSL/is_5_74/ai_81161396

Campbell, L. (2007, January 17). I'll never do what Madonna did. *Sunday Mirror Newspaper*. Retrieved on January 22, 2007 from http://www.sundaymirror.co.uk/news/news/tm_headline=i-d-never-do-what-madonna-did&method=full&objectid=18409943&siteid=62484-name_page.html

Cardinal, H. (1999). *The Unjust Society*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.

Centre for Adoption Research (2004). *Advancing Knowledge to Support Adoptive Families*. Retrieved on June 12, 2005, from www.centerforadoptionresearch.org/default.asp?action=article&ID=168&CategoryID=29&CategoryName=Winter%C3%83%E2%80%9A%C3%82%C2%A02004

Chas, J.T. (2004). Building Racial Identity. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/racial.html

Child Welfare League of America (1997). *Foster Care - F.Y.I.* Retrieved on June 12, 2005 from www.casanet.org/library/foster-care/why/html

Chomsky, N. (2002). *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Clark, D. (1998). *History of American Slavery*. London: PRC Publishing.

Conkling Heyliger, F. *The Adoption Creed*. Retrieved on April 07, 2005 from http://www.adoptioninformation.com/includes/frame.php?referer=http://www.adoptioninformation.com/directory/poetry.htm&url=http://www.geocities.com/curtis_whalen/CurtisQuotes.html

Cotter-Kathwaroon, J. (2004). *Children and Unresolved Grief: Signs and Treatment.* Retrieved on June 29, 2005 from www.bcadoption.com/articles.asp?pageid=38&AK=grief%20loss&HC=1&AD=142

Davies, M. (2000). *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Work.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture.* California: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N.K. (2002). *Reading Race.* California: Sage Publications.

Dowd, D. (1993). Raising a Child of Another Race. *Multiracial Child Resource.* Retrieved on April 05, 2005 from http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/multiracial.php

Fahlberg, V.I. (1991). *A Child's Journey Through Placement.* Indiana: Perspectives Press.

Fenster, J. (2002). Transracial Adoption in Black and White: A Survey of Social Worker Attitudes. *Adoption Quarterly,* 5, (p.33-58).

Fournier, S. & Crey, E. (1997). *Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities.* Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.

Gibran, Kahlil. (2003). *Your Children are not your Children.* Retrieved on April 07, 2005 from www.cs.rice.edu/~ssiyer/minstrels/poems/1194.html-13k

Ginsberg, A. (2006). *Quotes.* Retrieved on November 09, 2006 from http://www.bizcommunity.com/Quotes/196/15.html

Glaser, G. (2004 July 4). Why are U.S. Birth Mothers Placing their Children in Canadian Families? *The Oregonian.* Retrieved on April 5, 2005 from http://www.canadiancrc.com/articles/The_Oregonian_USadoption_Canada_04JUL04.htm

Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Green, J.W. (1999). *Cultural Awareness in the Human Services: A Multi-Ethnic Approach*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Harper, K. (2005). *Transracial Adoptions, Interracial Families: Changing Faces, Changing Hearts*. Retrieved on July 03, 2005 from http://www.uua.org/ga/ga05/2067.html

Harrison, E. (2006, February 11). Divine Trash: The Psychology of Celebrity Obsession. *Cosmos* 7, 14-18.

Hearst, A. (2002). Multiculturalism, Group Rights, and the Adoption Conundrum. Law & Society Review, 36 (pp.489-505).

Henning, K. (2005). *A Feminist Approach to Deconstructing Media Images of Female Social Workers*. Thesis Project, 2005.

Holt, N. (2003 Winter). Representation, Legitimization, and Auto ethnography: An Auto ethnographic Writing Story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 2. Retrieved on July 22, 2007 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1/pdf/holt.pdf

hooks, b. (1995) *Art On My Mind - Visual Politics*. New York: The New Press.

hooks, b. (1994) *Outlaw Culture - Resisting Representation*. New York: Routledge.

Irwin Johnson, P. (1999). Sibling Attachment. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/sib-attach.html

Johnson, M.K. (2001). Parenting Transracially: Building Identity and Affiliation. *Adoptalk - North American Council on Adoptable Children,* 19.

Kretz, K. (2006). Blessed Art Thou. *Kate's Studies*. Retrieved on January 13, 2007 from http://katekretz.blogspot.com/2006/12/blessed-art-thou-2006-88-x-60-oil.html

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. California: Sage Publications.

Lin, J. (1999). Helping your Child Develop a Positive Racial/Ethnic Identity. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 05, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/helping.html

Lynch, E.W. & Hanson, M.J. (2002). *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence - A Guide For Working With Children and their Families.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
New York State Citizen's Coalition For Children

Madeiros, K. (2007). Talking Point: Adoption Is A Solution. *Focus On Adoption, Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia.* V.15, #4.

Mahoney (1995 May 13). Racism Issues and Multiracial Families: Attacking Rasicm Before It Defeats Your Child.. Retrieved on July 22, 2007 from http://www.nysccc.org/T-Rarts/Articles/RaceIss.html

McIntosh, P. (1988). White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies. *Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women,* 189.

McLuhan, M. (2003). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* California: Gingko Press.

Melina, L. (1998). *Raising Adopted Children: Revised Edition: Practical Reassuring Advice For Every Adoptive Parent.* Toronto: Harper-Collins.

Ministry of Children and Family Development, (2005). *BC's Waiting Children.* Retrieved on June 2, 2005 from http://www.mcf.gov.bc/adoption/bulletin_external/index.html

Mohn, E. (2005). Transracial Adoptions. Interracial Families: Changing Faces, Changing Hearts. *UUA News and Events.* Retrieved on July 03, 2005 from http://www.uua.org/ga/ga05/2067.html

Moran, B. (1992). *A Little Rebellion.* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Osborne, M. (2006). *No Such Thing as Bad Press? Consider how the Actions of Others Affect the Adoption Community in General.* Retrieved on November 14, 2006 from www.rainbowkids.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=416

Oprah Winfrey (Executive Producer). (2006 October 25). *Interview with Madonna* [Television Broadcast]. Chicago: Paramount Television.

Oprah Winfrey (Executive Producer). (2005 May 23). *Interview with Tom Cruise* [Television Broadcast]. Chicago: Paramount Television.

Paddock, D.A. (2006). Going and Growing through Grief and Loss: Parenting Traumatized Adopted Children. *Foster Care and Adoptive Community,* 2, (p.1-4).

Parsons, D. (1996, December 8). After Adopting a Biracial Child. *Star Tribune*, p. A13.

Pope, C. (Producer). (October 29, 2006). *Adoption in BC/The Evening News Hour* [Television broadcast]. Vancouver: Global News.

Reddy, M.T. (1996). *Everyday Acts Against Racism: Raising Children in a Multiracial World.* Washington: Seal Press.

Reitz, M.& Watson, K. (1992). *Adoption and the Family System: Strategies for Treatment.* New York: Guilford Press.

Saukko, P. (2003). *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches.* London: Sage Publications.

Shiva, J. (2005). Growing up in a Multiracial Family: My Concept of Self. *Adoptive Families Association of BC.* Retrieved on March 07, 2005 from http://www.bcadoption.com/articles/multiracial/family.html

Skorepa, C. (2006 November 18). Province Urges Adoptive Parents to Look at Home. *The Prince George Citizen*, p.18.

Steinberg, G. (1999). Bi-Racial Children and the Emperor's New Clothes. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance.* Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from www.pactadopt.oeg/press/articles/emperor.html

Steinberg, G & Hall, B. (2001). *Inside Transracial Adoption.* New York: Perspectives Press.

Steyer, J.P. (2002). *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media's Effect on our Children.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Thoery Procedures and Techniques.* California: Sage Publications.

Swize, (2002). Transracial Adoption and the Unblinkable Difference. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance.* Retrieved on April 05, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org

Trow, A. (2003). *Project Gutenberg. Selected Metadata.* Retrieved on July 22, 2007

http://www.archive.org/details/arntr10

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (2001). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New Zealand: University of Otago Press.

Van Kerckhove, C. (2007). Madonna, Africa, adoption, and the white man's burden. *Racialicious*. Retrieved on January 12, 2007 from http://www.racialicious.com/2006/10/27/madonna-africa-adoption-and-the-white-mans-burden/

Vansant, M. (1993). The Life of the Adopted Child. *American Mercury*, 214-215.

Waliszewski, B. & Smithouser, B. (2005). What's up with Today's Entertainment. Raising Media-Wise Teens. Dare 2 Dig Deeper, Parents Series. *Focus on the Family*, 3.

Webber, M. (1998). *As If Kids Mattered: What's Wrong in the World of Child Protection and Adoption*. Ontario: Key Porter Books.

Whitfield, J. (1992). Developing Cultural Competence. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 06, 2005 from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/competence.html

Wolf Shenk, J. (1996, June). Star Struck - High-End Periodicals' Obsession with Celebrities. *Washington Monthly*, 21-22.

Wolff, J. (2003). Family Resemblance in Transracial Adoption. *Pact: An Adoption Alliance*. Retrieved on April 05, 2005 from www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/resemblance.htm

APPENDIX A: Ethics Committee Information Sheet

1. Researcher's Name - Nicole Hemstad-Leete

2. Address - 1975 Catherine Drive, Prince George, BC, V2M 7B5

3. Phone Number - 564-9145
   E-mail Address - leete6@telus.net

4. Supervisor's Signature & Name - Dr. Si Transken

5. Program - Master of Social Work

6. Title of Project - "Rainbow Families - Cross-Cultural Adoption and the Best Interests of the Child".

7. Type of Project - Thesis required for the MSW.

   Class Project (Class projects are normally reviewed by professors after a protocol has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board)

   Thesis

8. Source of funding - N/A

9. Is this project a replica of an earlier project or protocol that received ethics approval?

   No (Go to question 10)

10. Purpose of Research

    This research project is a part of the thesis pertaining to cross-cultural adoption. The research project is intended to gather information from family members who's family is created through cross-cultural adoption. In being asked questions pertaining to the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher will gather evidence regarding:

- the challenges of being a part of a cross-cultural family,
- the rewards of being a part of a cross-cultural family,
- what could be done differently,
- what is being done well

- what the participant's feel is in the best interests of children.

11. Expected start date for data collection - Spring semester, 2006.

Completion Date - Spring Semester, 2006.

12. Does this project require any physically invasive procedures (e.g. blood tests), potentially harmful physical regimes (e.g. special dieting) or potentially harmful psychological or social experiments (e.g. illusory perception tests?)

No

13. Summary of Methods: In the space below give us a brief summary. Sufficient information must be given to assess the degree of risk to participants.

- It is my intention to use the qualitative paradigm to conduct the research. I will use the words and shared experiences of participants who's family is formed through cross-cultural adoption.

- It is my intention to have five questions to ask the participants involved with my study. The questions will include the challenges and rewards of being a part of a cross-cultural family, how the family identifies with and connects to their culture heritage, how children identify with their ethnicity, what the participants wish was (or is) done differently, and what the hope for the future is for cross-cultural adoption and thoughts regarding openness in adoption.

- Some potential participants are aware that I will be conducting this research as I share the commonality with them as being a member of a cross-cultural adoptive family. 5 participants will be chosen to take part in the interview process, where the 5 questions will be presented and a dialogue will ensue regarding the content of the questions.

- Once all of the interviews have been conducted, and the resulting material gathered, thematic analysis will be conducted as a means to find the threads or commonalities of the material emerging from the data.

14. Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols or questionnaires.

15. How will participants be recruited? In the space below give us a brief summary.

As a cross-cultural adoptive parent, I have made connections with other cross-cultural adoptive parents. Some of these parents have indicated they are interested in taking part in my research. It is my anticipation this will create a snowball effect with other potential participants who would want to take part in this research.

Participants who are willing to take part in the research will be presented with an information form and a consent form, (see attachments).

16. Will participants be competent to give consent?

Yes (Go to questions 17)

17. Will participants be compensated?

No (Go to question 18)

18. Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded?

Yes Please attach a copy of the Consent Form or the questions/statements to be recorded. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form at the time of signing.

Note: Checklist of items to be addressed in your Information Sheet or Consent Form is provided at the end of this Approval form.

19. Does the project involve any deception?

No (Go to question 20)

20. What is your plan for feedback to participants? How do you propose to distribute results to participants?

Each participant will be offered the option of receiving a summary of the results and will be invited to a group gathering with all participants.

21. Will the research participants be from an institutional population; .g. company, agency, schools., colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

No (Go to question 23)

22. If the answer to Question 21 is yes, attach a letter of consent for access from the institutions e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

23. Will the research participants be participating as representatives of, or on behalf of an Aboriginal group?

No (Go to question 24)

24. Does this project require any other ethical approval, e.g. Hospital, First Nations Band, Health Board, etc? If so, please ensure that all guidelines are followed.

No

APPENDIX B: Research Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in this research project and for your potential willingness to answer questions pertaining to your family. The purpose of this research is to gather your personal thoughts, feelings, reflections and experiences regarding the best interests of children regarding race, culture and adoption, as well as what has worked for you and what could be improved upon. It is my goal that you will have the opportunity to share information that you feel is important for people to know, based on your real and lived experiences as a cross-cultural adoptive family. It is my hope that your words and experiences will be the data used to educate and inform members of our community about cross-culture and adoption.

You are chosen as a visible adult member of a cross-cultural, adoptive family. Your responsibility as a participant is to take part in a conversation with the researcher. This conversation will be based on 6 selected questions pertaining to cross-cultural adoptive families.

The materials used to record your information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher's until the end of the research project. At the end of the project, (anticipated date is August, 2006), the written material will either be returned to you, or destroyed via a wood-burning furnace. Nicole Hemstad-Leete and UNBC will use their best efforts to ensure your identity is not revealed. The information you provide will be reflected in the final thesis, however anonymity will be maintained.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you chose to be a participant in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw as a participant of this study, documentation of the information provided will be returned to you, or destroyed. The potential benefits of this study includes the chance to inform readers of the thesis the strengths, benefits and challenges of being a cross-cultural, adoptive family. Your experiences, thoughts, perceptions and feelings could have a positive impact for others who are experiencing the joys and struggles of being a part of a cross-cultural, adoptive family. The participants of this study might gain strength and comradery from each other throughout the process. I believe there is no potential risk of this study.

Your name, identity and family information will be kept in strict confidence. Pseudo-names will be used and any identifying information will be kept confidential.

If any questions arise, the researcher can be contacted by email at leete6@telus.net. Any complaints about this project should be directed to the Office of Research, UNBC, 250-960-5820, or email officeofresearch.unbc.ca

APPENDIX C: Research Participant Consent Form

I understand that Nicole Hemstad-Leete, who is a graduate student in the Masters of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, is conducting a research project pertaining to cross-cultural adoption.

I understand the purpose of this research project is to gain awareness, insight and information regarding my personal experiences as an adult member of a cross-cultural adoptive family.

I understand I was chosen because I am an adult member of a cross-cultural adoptive family. I will be interviewed by the researcher based on 6 questions pertaining to my experiences as a family member of a cross-cultural adoptive family.

1. This consent is given on the understanding that Nicole Hemstad-Leete will use her best efforts to guarantee that my identity is protected and my confidentiality maintained, both directly and indirectly.

2. I give my consent freely and understand that I may terminate the interview at any point and can withdraw from the research process at any time.

3. I understand and agree that the information I have given to Nicole Hemstad-Leete I in our interview will be treated in the following manner:

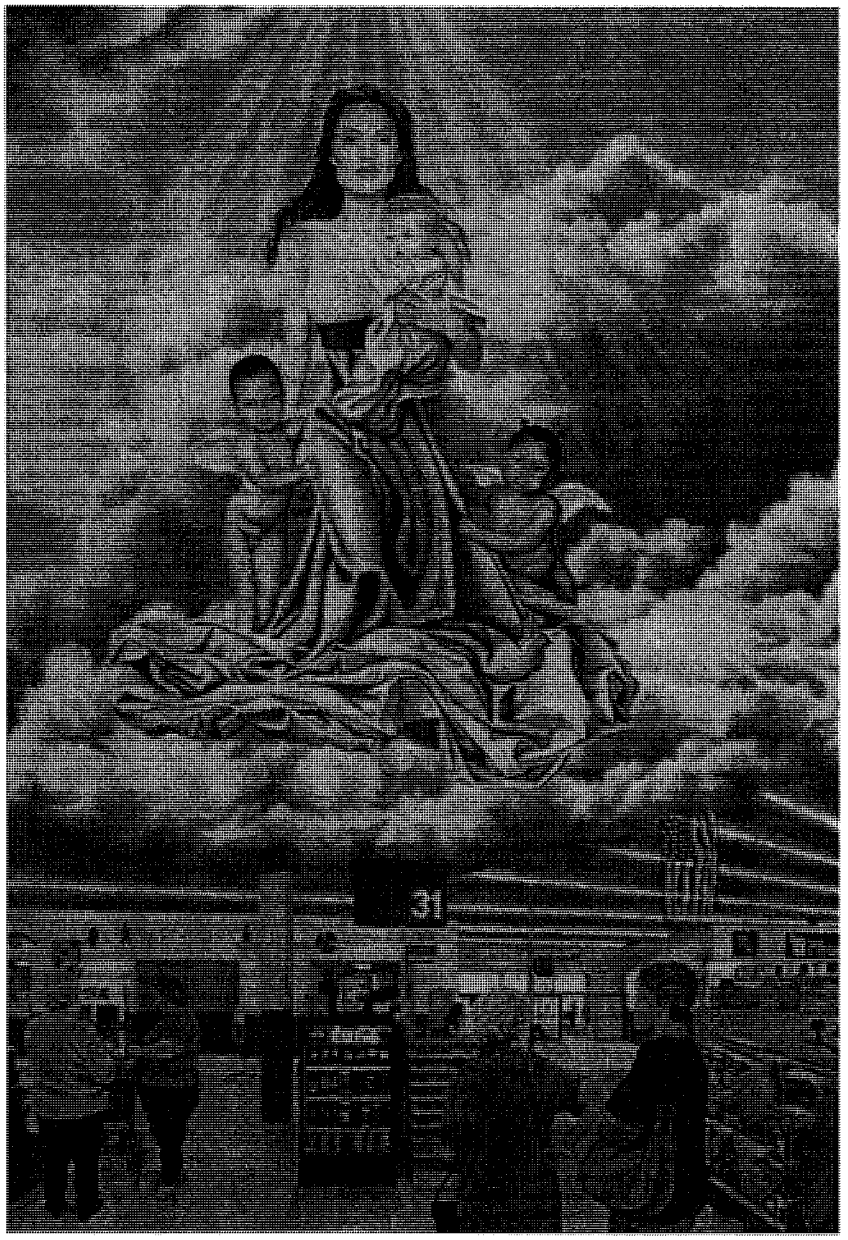
   a) hand-written notes will be taken during our discussion
   b) this data will be securely stored by Nicole Hemstad-Leete, only in a secure location in her private residence
   c) the data will be used only by Nicole Hemstad-Leete and only for her thesis project
   d) the data will either be returned to me or burned at the end of the thesis project.

4. I hereby waive any claim against Nicole Hemstad-Leete, Dr. Si Transken, the University of Northern British Columbia , its employees, administration, and Board of Governors with respect to the use of said information, provided it is used on accordance with this agreement.

5. I understand that if I have any comments or concerns, I can contact the Vice President Research, UNBC at 960-5820.

NAME:_____ SIGNED:_____
DATE:_____

APPENDIX D: ***Blessed Art Thou***



Kretz, K. (2006)