

CROSS-CULTURAL ADOPTIONS AND THEIR EFFECT
ON IDENTITY FORMATION

by

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Thank you to my parents who raised my brother and I in a home where we felt important and education was valued. I hope to pass those same values on to my children.
Thank you also to my husband Karl and daughter Isabella who offered their love and encouragement throughout this endeavour.

Abstract

Adoption is a custom that has existed for many generations. However aspects of this practice have been, and continue to be controversial.

This project examines issues relating to Aboriginal cross-cultural adoptions and their effect on identity formation. It asks the question “Does cross-cultural adoption negatively effect identity formation in Aboriginal children?” This question is not answered directly but insight is provided into the disputes and problems that arise in the context of cross-cultural adoption. While this project is grounded in research relating to identity formation, cultural identity and cross-cultural adoptions, it also contains a historical overview with a focus on Aboriginal children growing up in caucasian homes.

The aim of this project is to gain a better understanding of how best to meet the needs of Aboriginal children growing up outside their birth families and communities. A framework for the issue of Aboriginal cross-cultural adoptions is provided through an instrumental case study of one woman’s struggle to find her Aboriginal identity growing up in a caucasian home. This story, based on a case example from the writer’s own practice experience, highlights past practice approaches and the need to change policy to reflect the best interests of the child. Finally, implications for policy are examined with the hope that these suggestions may provide children and families impacted by cross-cultural adoptions with the support they need to develop confident and secure identities to live in a society where they will inevitably experience racism and prejudice.

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Acknowledgement

This masters of social work project examining cross-cultural adoptions and their effect on identity formation, arises from a personal interest in how Aboriginal children fare when adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. I strongly believe that while every child deserves a family it is vital that we consider the effects these adoptions have on Aboriginal children and their communities. I hope that this project will increase awareness around the importance of a child's unique cultural identity and the maintenance of familial ties.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to Professor Glen Schmidt, my Masters of Social Work Project Supervisor. He has been invaluable as a supervisor and teacher and I am very grateful for his help and encouragement. Thank you also to Margo Greenwood and Sandra Kioke for the time and energy they invested into my education. It was very much appreciated.

Chapter One: Introduction/Research Question

When I began research for this subject I never imagined the many different possibilities that were available for me to investigate. I found information ranging from the impacts of cross-cultural adoptions on infants and toddlers to the intergenerational effects on adolescents and adults. There is information on the effects on birthparents, on adoptee families, on Aboriginal communities, and on siblings. At times, it was difficult to maintain focus as I was distracted by the wealth of academic literature on African, Asian, and Aboriginal cross-cultural adoptions and identity formation. I eventually decided that the focus of my project should be directed toward the ethnic group with whom I can most closely identify, Aboriginals¹.

This paper will therefore examine issues surrounding the question, “Does cross-cultural adoption negatively affect identity formation in Aboriginal children²?” Before doing this, allow me to offer an outline of the next several chapters, provide definitions for the terms being discussed, and acknowledge why the subject of cross-cultural adoption and identity formation is important to me.

Chapter two provides a literature review, where I will explore the subject, and briefly discuss, how the material is important to my project.

¹ I am going to be using the term “Aboriginal” to define First Nations and Inuit people of North America.

² means a child:

- a. Who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada).
- b. Who has a biological parent who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada).
- c. Who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who
 - i. is of Aboriginal ancestry, and
 - ii. considers themselves to be Aboriginal.

I will next use an instrumental case study from my past practice as an adoption social worker with the Ministry for Children and Families in British Columbia to provide a framework for the problem being addressed. It is in this chapter where I will introduce one Aboriginal woman's story of her cross-cultural adoption and the subsequent journey to discover her identity. In this chapter, and throughout the project, my personal experience as an adoption worker, and personal understanding as an Aboriginal person, will assist me in highlighting some of the difficulties experienced by children being adopted cross-culturally and by their adoptive parents.

In chapter three, implications for policy, government policy changes and ensuing practice changes within the adoption system will be addressed. Here, I will discuss policy and practice implications as suggested by the academic literature and as understood by myself.

In the concluding remarks, I analyse the implications and limitations of current and proposed future policy and practice restructuring in relation to Aboriginal communities. I will acknowledge new strategies that the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) in British Columbia, together with Aboriginal communities, is developing in order to preserve and maintain the cultural heritage of Aboriginal communities. I will also make suggestions for further research.

It is important to be aware that I am using a limited definition of 'cross-culture' in this paper by focusing on the adoption of Aboriginal children by Caucasian families. Simon and Alstein (1977) illustrate the fact that cross-cultural or transracial adoptions began in the late 1940s after the Second World War. Caucasian families adopted many black and Asian children and there has been much research done on the effects of these adoptions. Westhues

and Cohen (1998) list a number of these studies (United States: Divirglio, 1956; Rathburn, 1965; Simon & Alstein, 1977; 1981; 1987; 1992; Kim, D.S., 1978; England: Bagley and Young, 1980; Norway: Saetersdal & Dalen, 1991; Germany: Textor, 1991; Denmark: Pruzan, 1977; Rorbech, 1991; Sweden: Hofvander, Bengtsson, Gunnarby, Cederblad, Kats and Stomholm, 1978). These studies highlight the adjustment of the children to their new countries and cultures. As a result of sorting through the stated studies and literature, I believe there are many opportunities for longitudinal studies to be developed and structured for further research.

Definitions

The terms I will be using in this paper are derived from the Adoptions Act of British Columbia, Canada, 1996. They include:

Adoption: to take into one's family as one's own child – terminates the legal parent-children relationship between the child and their birth parent(s).

Cross-Culture Adoption: adoption by parents usually of Caucasian European origin of an ethnically different child of another origin.

Identity: the distinctive character belonging to an individual. The state of being a specific person or thing and no other.

Formation: the manner in which a thing is shaped or formed.

Aboriginal child: means a child:

- a. Who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada).
- b. Who has a biological parent who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada).
- c. Who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who

- i. is of Aboriginal ancestry, and
- ii. considers himself or herself to be Aboriginal.
- iii. is 12 years of age or older, of Aboriginal ancestry and considers himself or herself to be Aboriginal (Child and Family Services Act, 1996)

Why is this topic of interest to me?

This is an extremely personal topic for me as I am the child of a mixed marriage. My mother is a Caucasian woman from Australia and my father is an Aboriginal man from Fort Ware, British Columbia. I was born and raised in Mackenzie; a small company town in Northern British Columbia. I consider myself an Aboriginal person and I have two Aboriginal foster brothers. As a result of growing up in a family that included foster children, my reality was dynamic and ever changing. This non-traditional family form encouraged me to explore and become interested in the notion of family, and especially adoption. Given the research on the developmental task of identity formation, I was especially curious to know how Aboriginal children and youth that are placed in non-Aboriginal homes, fare. My interest in this topic was further peaked while working for the Ministry for Children and Families as an adoption worker in 1999. While employed in this position, I noticed that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children were being adopted into non-Aboriginal families. As a result, I became preoccupied with discovering if these adoptions were in the best interest of the child. Due to this personal connection to the topic, I will be using the term “I” in the body of the paper, situating myself personally into it’s words.

Historically (and up until the recent past), aboriginal children have been subject to removal from their homes for placement in residential schools and, more recently, in foster or adoptive homes. The governments of both the United States and Canada have historically established their position of authority over the Aboriginal nations and asserted substitute guardianship over Aboriginal children.

There are currently hundreds of Aboriginal children in permanent care of the Ministry for Children and Family Development. Sometimes, Aboriginal children may be considered for placement within an Aboriginal community solely on the basis of their Aboriginal heritage and the fact that the family willing to adopt is also Aboriginal, regardless of the fact that they are from a different Aboriginal nation and/or tradition. When this happens, the family needs to be encouraged to assist the child in developing a sense of attachment and identity with their own nation of origin. I was curious to know what factors make for a successful adoption. Hoopes (1990) states that factors such as the age of the parents or the child at the time of the adoption or the financial security of the family are not as important as the ability to give love or have a well functioning relationship between the parents and the children.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

For the purpose of this literature review, I concentrated mainly on Canadian articles that focused on Canadian Aboriginal children. Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of literature available that focuses on the cross-cultural adoption of Canadian Aboriginal children. Overwhelmingly I found that the available literature is unsupportive of cross-cultural adoptions due to the cultural confusion that these children inevitably experience. In this chapter, I will provide a general overview of pertinent academic literature both for, and against, cross-cultural adoption. Further, I shall discuss how this material is important to my project.

There is much contradiction and confusion in the literature about the adoption of Aboriginal children. Despite the controversy surrounding cross-cultural adoption, there is a sizeable amount of research, which indicates that cross-culturally adopted children are as well adjusted, close to their families, and are as self-assured as other adopted children (Silverman & Silverman, 1984). What has been much more of a contentious issue has been the argument over the quality of positive ethnic identity that these adopted children have developed. The results of some research have shown that most of the cross-culturally adopted children are capable of developing positive ethnic identities (Simon & Altstein, 1977; 1987; Shireman & Johnson, 1988). Even so, other researchers have indicated that many cross-culturally adopted children are grappling with issues of ethnic identity and may not have connections to their ethnic communities (Ladner, 1977; Gill & Jackson, 1983).

During my research, I found a plethora of studies pertaining to cross-cultural adoptions involving African American children and Caucasian parents. This literature indicates that adoptive children in these families can develop healthy identities. The same

cannot be said for cross-cultural adoptions of Aboriginal children. Simon and Alstein (1981) have argued that the case of Aboriginal people is a special one as they have been subjected to a singularly tragic fate, and their children have been particularly vulnerable.

Identity Formation

When I began my research for this project, I was interested in what the literature revealed as I asked, “What is identity?” And, “How does one develop a sense of identity?” As was previously mentioned, I was raised as an Aboriginal child with two foster Aboriginal brothers and parents of different cultures; one being Aboriginal. I was curious to know how I developed my sense of identity. I believe that having a strong sense of secure attachment to primary caregivers is important to developing a strong, confident sense of self.

The developmental tasks of children growing up include forming basic trust (Erikson, 1950) or secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1978). The primary task of a baby is to develop a sense of trust in the world, which is accomplished through attachment to her caregivers. When the newborn is crying it is her way of letting us know that she is uncomfortable. In general, a loving person (mom, dad, primary caregiver) quickly attends to a baby’s needs, by picking them up and engaging the infant, by doing such things as cooing, stroking, comforting, speaking softly, making eye contact, or rocking the baby. The baby usually settles when her need is met, and the loving person is, in turn, rewarded by virtue of having successfully comforted the baby. This reciprocal cycle is repeated over and over again. The baby experiences being calm and safe and develops a reason to trust that over and over again, her discomforts and needs will be addressed and remedied, usually by the same loving, familiar person. John W. Santrock in his book *Life-Span Development* (1997) suggests that early childhood development can be viewed as a series of attachments and separations that

help children learn to view themselves as independent people. He discusses the classic 1959 research study by Harlow and Zimmerman, which demonstrated that “contact comfort”, or affection with a caregiver is more important than “feeding contact” (1997). This research was conducted with infant monkeys who were removed from their mothers at birth and raised by surrogate mothers for six months.

Psychologist, Erik Erikson (1968) was convinced that the first year in an infant’s life was crucial for the development of healthy attachment; he termed this the oral sensory stage, and noted that the basic conflict of this stage is trust versus mistrust. In the first couple of years the stages of attachments, the beginnings of separation, and the expression of feelings probably are the same whether the child has been adopted or raised by their biological parents. As children grow older, they develop a sense of self-concept and self-esteem. Children develop an internalised picture of themselves that reflects how others perceive them. Children who experienced secure attachment will have confidence to explore and master their environment. Through play and imitation, they explore their world and identify with their family. Social skills and competence are developed in this process. In the elementary school years, the child’s world is extended to peers and the community; her self-concept is influenced when she compares herself to her peers. Many factors, such as separation, neglect, malnourishment, post-partum depression, substance misuse, inadequate caregivers, neonatal illness, or a chaotic environment can all contribute to and interfere with the structure of a secure attachment between infant and caregiver.

According to Erikson (1968), individuals pass through eight developmental stages (Erikson calls them “psychosocial stages”). Each stage is characterized by a different psychological “crisis”, which must be successfully resolved by the individual before they can

move on to the next stage. In her article, *Adoption and identity formation*, Hoopes (1990) states “...it is the period of adolescence which is identified by many writers as the time when the primary task is that of identity formation” (p. 144). Adolescents must research and answer such important questions as “who am I?” and “where am I going?” Erikson (1950) suggests there are both positive and negative outcomes depending on whether or not the individual successfully resolves the crises. When an individual is refused or only has limited contact with their birth family they constantly ask questions such as “do I have any other siblings?” or “which side of my family am I most like?”

As recorded by Hoopes (1990), Erikson proposes there is an “optional sense of identity” which he refers to as a sense of “... psychosocial well-being and a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of knowing where one is going...” (p. 145). The task of the adolescent is to successfully resolve the conflicts of the earlier four stages and if they do, they develop a strong sense of trust, independence, competence, and feel in control of their lives. When the adolescent successfully navigates through this stage they will emerge with a strong identity. If they cope with a particular crisis in a maladaptive manner, then the outcome will be more struggles with that issue later in life. According to Hoopes (1990) Erikson also suggests that if the adolescent unsuccessfully navigates this stage it may lead them to sink into confusion and they will be unable to make decisions and choices, especially about vocation, sexual orientation, and their role in life in general.

Erikson presents a male perspective on identity formation. Carol Gilligan (1982), in her book *In a Different Voice*, offers another view of identity formation from a female perspective. She points out that developmental theorists often fall into the same observational bias as Erikson, which is, adopting the male life as norm. Gilligan (1982) recognizes that

feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than the masculine personality does. Thus, while Erikson talks of independence and separation he is ignoring the female reality of being defined through attachment. Instead of this difference being acknowledged and valued, it is viewed as a failure in development if separation and independence are not achieved.

Gilligan (1982) declares that the male experience defines Erikson's life-cycle conception. She states that only his initial stage of trust versus mistrust speaks of what Erikson calls intimacy. The rest of his stages are defined by separateness, with the result that development itself comes to be identified with separation, and attachments appear to be developmental impediments. Therefore, women who define themselves in a context of human relationships, rather than by individuation and individual achievements will be seen as weak, as opposed to different. Gilligan argues that life-cycle theorists must recognize female development as it relates to attachment. Theories that ignore the female experience and focus only on the male's experience are not complete; they are one-sided and fraught with inaccuracies.

Cultural Identity

British Columbia and Canada have many diverse Aboriginal communities, possessing unique cultures and languages. As a result, it is very important for adoption workers to be involved in a process, which identifies, assists, and ensures that a child's unique cultural identity is preserved. When I talk about cultural heritage I refer to those shared qualities, customs, and behaviours as they apply to a particular ethnic group which includes: diet, style of dress, child rearing traditions, language, religious values, and ceremonial activities.

Each person's cultural identity is a unique mix of biology, group history, and personal experience. As a young person explores her identity, she draws on the cultural role model that she is exposed to and the values that are communicated to her. As well, each individual adopts their own level of identification with Aboriginality; this is influenced by the family system and the surrounding social reality (Morrissette, McKenzie and Morrissette, 1993).

Many families have experienced a historical erosion of traditional cultural practices and as a result, such practices are passed on to their children in limited ways. For the Aboriginal child adopted into a Caucasian home, these cultural practices will not be passed down at all unless the adoptive family makes an effort to expose the child to their culture in meaningful ways.

The second way traditional value practices are incorporated into one's life is through their social reality. Aboriginals are constantly being bombarded with the values and the practices of the dominant Caucasian society. Thus, Aboriginals often have a stronger identification with Caucasian society than with their own. Morrissette, McKenzie, and Morrissette (1993) speak of variations in identification with traditional Aboriginal culture. At the traditional end of the continuum, many Aboriginal people still adhere to the teachings of the Elders, have a strong relationship with the earth, have traditional expressions of spirituality, use traditional medicines, sweats, and healing circles. Others can be identified as "neo-traditional". This refers to individuals who combine spiritual beliefs and practices, which identify with both worlds – traditional Aboriginal and dominant society. Then there are those that adopt a non-traditional lifestyle. These individuals adopt the norms and

practices of the dominant society; however, these people may or may not be totally assimilated into the dominant culture and may feel internal conflict as a result.

No matter how an Aboriginal person identifies with their Aboriginality, the fact remains that dichotomy exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds, which is something Aboriginal people live with daily. This reality is no different for the adopted child, and needs to be addressed. The goal for the adoptee is to not only take on the beliefs and practices she was brought up with, but to integrate them with an awareness of the connections to other people with whom she shares a common history. She has a need to feel comfortable looking into those connections (Hollingsworth, 1998). The identity crisis of adolescence is likely to be especially traumatic for the Aboriginal child growing up in a Caucasian home.

Children adopted cross-racially or cross-culturally face identity issues that are different from children adopted into families of the same race or culture. At some point, they will turn to their origins to learn about their roots. The more information and support their adoptive parents can provide, the easier the process can be" (Ministry for Children and Family Development, 1997).

Bagley's 1993 Calgary study in Alberta is the only random sample research to specifically examine adolescent outcomes for Canadian Aboriginal children adopted by non-Aboriginal parents. His research involved a child development questionnaire undertaken in Calgary and data from similar questions found in two mental health surveys. Although a volunteer sample (which may indicate higher functioning families) the outcomes were not positive, with identity formation problems, such as delinquent behaviour, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation, cited as the major reason for placement breakdown in adolescence.

Emotional aspects of cultural identity have been assessed in the empirical literature by asking questions about attitudes of various cultural groups. The acculturation strategies used by individuals as they decide whether cultural identity and customs are of value include: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1994).

Assimilation occurs when cultural identity is given up to become part of the dominant group. Integration is described as taking place when a number of distinguishable groups co-exist within the larger culture. If there is withdrawal from the dominant culture there may be either separation or segregation, depending upon whether the dominant or non-dominant group is in control. Marginalization arises where there is collective and individual confusion and anxiety, characterized by feelings of alienation, loss of self and cultural identity.

Variations of these strategies can occur depending on the situation and the developmental stage of the individual. For the adopted child, recognition of these attitudes is vital especially if the adoptive parents are culturally different from the adoptive child. If a child is to have a healthy cultural identity formation, the adopted parents need to ensure that these attitudes or strategies are not present. Acceptance, knowledge, and pride in one's own cultural identity is necessary for Aboriginal children no matter what home they grow up in. As Kimelman (1985) disclosed,

Native culture is worthy of retention and enhancement. Despite the concerted and continuing efforts of missionaries, Indian agents and society as a whole to obliterate it, the culture of Canada's native people has survived and is, in fact, enjoying a recent rejuvenation (p.131).

Hayes (1993) argues the necessity of instilling a sense of ethnic identity and an awareness of cultural heritage, when he states,

By describing identity and heritage as rights and needs, opponents of transracial adoption assert that a particular and subjective form of child rearing has a universal and objective value. The effort to instill a sense of ethnic identity and an awareness of cultural heritage is seen not as an option but as a necessity. It is maintained that there is no acceptable alternative (p.304).

Cross-Cultural Adoptions

Within the politics of “adoptions”, there are many aspects to be aware of, from the strengths and shortcomings of adoption, to debates about the adoptions of children in foster care. When I talk about adoption, I realize that adoptions can occur in a number of different ways. The most common form of adoption is within family, where a child is placed with a relative. In the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, this is still the most common form of adoption, whether or not it is made legal. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even cousins will sometimes adopt a relative. Another form of adoption is non-relative adoption where a child is placed with a non-family member.

Adoption Processes

There are also different types of adoption processes available within British Columbia. An open adoption can have several layers. The first is one of basic openness, where a child is told they are adopted. The adoption is neither a secret to the child or to the extended family. The second layer is referred to as semi-open. In a semi-open agreement, the names, identifying information, and other background information of the adoptive parents or the birth family are not known to either party and the letters, gifts, or pictures that they agree to send are done through a third party in Victoria. A fully open adoption means

everybody knows who and where everybody is and there are usually visits and phone calls as part of the openness agreement. A closed adoption means that the child is placed with no contact with any birth family after placement. Closed adoptions were typical of past practice. Today, this is very rare and happens only when there really is no one for the child to connect with, such as parents who have disappeared or contact with the parents puts the child at risk. Even with this degree of privacy, the adoption agency usually tries to secure openness with grandparents or extended family.

A custom adoption refers to a situation where an Aboriginal child can be returned to territorial land, and the family of the child must still live on reserve land. If the band has a recorded tribal process for adoption, then the adoptive parents approach the tribal chiefs and ask permission for adoption. If the chiefs agree, then the adoption is filed as a transfer of custody, and the band has their own customs for the adoption.

An assisted adoption is where a child, under a Continuing Care Order with the Ministry for Children and Families is placed for adoption by the director, and where the child can be designated as having special needs. Then the prospective adoptive family can apply for financial assistance to meet the special needs of the child, providing that they pass a financial test. If the child's culture can be preserved through adoption by family, or by a current foster parent, then the family may qualify for maintenance, which is the basic foster home rate. Adoptions, as a whole, may be facilitated by either a private agency or government agency.

Past and Present Adoption Practices

In British Columbia in 2002/3, there were 136 completed Aboriginal adoptions with the Ministry of Children and Families. Of these adoptions, only 30 children were placed in Aboriginal homes, with 106 Aboriginal children placed in non-Aboriginal homes.

In cross-cultural or transracial adoptions, there may be a limited exchange of pertinent knowledge about the child's culture of origin between adoption agency and adoptee family (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The cross-cultural child may look different from their adopted family yet consider themselves to be like their non-biological family in a psychological sense. This, in turn, leads to a sense of confusion at their lack of cultural or racial history when one does not know their biological parents or extended family. Simon and Altstein (1987) argue that these uncertainties may hamper psychological development and identity formation. Often, fear of hurting the feelings of adoptive parents conflicts with the need of adolescents to know the details of their birth histories and information about their biological parents. They grapple with the circumstances of their birth, the reasons for their placement and their feelings about those circumstances.

Due to poor record keeping practices, it is often difficult to determine how many Aboriginal children have been adopted throughout the years. It is known, however, that Aboriginal children are frequently placed in non-Aboriginal environments where they may be exposed to racist attitudes and behaviours, and where their cultural identity is not supported. "The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and the Adoption Act requires that a child's cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious heritage be given consideration when making an adoption plan" (Ministry for Children and Family Development, 1997).

The children who are in the greatest demand for adoption are those under the age of one year, adoption becomes increasingly more difficult as a child gets older. In the 1950s and 60s, many Aboriginal children were adopted into non-Aboriginal homes or were taken into foster care. Patrick Johnston in his study *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (Canadian Council on Social Development Series) coined the phrase "Sixties Scoop" to describe this phenomenon (Johnson, 1983). Due to attitudes towards illegitimacy and single mothers in those decades, there were more infants placed for adoption. Today, however, due to a change in these attitudes and more support becoming available for single parents, there are more families looking for infants than there are infants for adoption. This shortage has led to a greater number of adoptions of infants from abroad and of special needs children or children from a minority culture being considered for adoption.

Adoption Legislation

Aboriginal children are the future of the Aboriginal Nations. Literature indicates that there continues to be a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children represented in the child welfare system. Even though Aboriginal communities in Canada are increasingly taking control of their own child welfare services, there are still an inordinate number of their children in out-of-home care. Removing Aboriginal children from their families and their culture has had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal communities of British Columbia. Aboriginal people have long viewed Aboriginal children being cared for in non-Aboriginal homes as a problem, as the separation severs the children's ties with their heritage and cultural identity. For Aboriginal communities, this remains an emotionally and culturally destructive influence, foreshadowed only by the trauma they experienced by the residential schools system. In order to protect their own distinct culture and future, their unique

Aboriginal cultural identity must be preserved. The Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia and the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) are currently co-ordinating their efforts to involve Aboriginal people in planning for their children at every stage of Ministry involvement and indeed, for the transition of child and family service away from the Ministry and back to the Aboriginal communities.

Canadian reports on Aboriginal cross-cultural adoptions include the *Kimelman report* (1984) on adoptions in Manitoba and *British Columbia's Liberating our Children, Liberating our Nations* (White & Jacobs, 1992). These reports argue for Aboriginal control of child welfare and self-determination in social, health, and education services. They document the devastating effects of residential schools and interracial adoption rather than customary adoption practices which, together with repressive economic and educational policies, led to the destruction of the Aboriginal family and community life. Children were separated from their families, communities, land, traditional ways, language, and culture. Essentially, they experienced the destruction of their cultural identity. The findings in these reports are based on extensive consultations with Canadian Aboriginal peoples, written submissions, commissioned research, and personal histories.

Aboriginal leaders continue to be concerned about the removal of their children from their communities under the guise of "best interests of the child." These leaders readily admit that their native parenting styles are different than those practised by the mainstream society. They also maintain that accessing one's culture and heritage is vital to the healthy development of positive self-esteem for their children. Kimelman, in his 1984 report to the Manitoba Government, examined the differences in raising children in an Aboriginal community and how a person, unaware of this life style, may mistakenly interpret the reality.

He describes an Aboriginal mother leaving her child with a relative or friend for an extended period of time. An uninformed, well-meaning social worker, that does not understand the native concept of a child belonging to the village, might perceive the child to be abandoned rather than just being left with “auntie” for a few days. Similarly, an Aboriginal mother might give her child a great deal of independence, which may be viewed as being neglectful. As Kimelman, (1985) states “The evidence is growing that the claim of Native people about the ability of a child to relate to a number of adults in a child/parent role is healthy for development” (p.36).

Until recently, the adoption legislation in British Columbia was based on a European assumption that a child born to one family could, through adoption, become the child of another family. Present legislation in many parts of North America provides for the child’s name to be changed, and if the adoptive family chooses, a complete disassociation of the child from his or her natural family. The idea that a child can become something/someone, who they were not born to be, completely contradicts Aboriginal culture and is in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This model does not consider the rights of the birthparents and assumes that they can give birth to a child, and then walk away from their child, carrying on with their lives as if nothing has happened. Kimelman (1985) acknowledges,

The Indian community presents the proposition that it has a claim to any child born to any of its members in that the child represents the future of the Indian people as a distinct cultural group. That basic right of the Indian community has been recognised by the federal government through the provision of funds to tribal organizations for child welfare services (p.37).

In Bagley's (1993) review of relevant research on Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes, he noted the large numbers of Aboriginal children adopted by non-Aboriginal parents in Canada and the lack of systemic outcome studies. Bagley (1993) refers to Fanshel's 1972 study, which followed adopted Aboriginal children to the age of eleven years. Parents were interviewed after placement when children were approximately 4 years old and overall they were satisfied by initial adjustment. Fanshel (1972) states the following,

Even if the adjustment of the children proves to be somewhat more problematic as they get older- particularly during their adolescence when the factor of racial differences may loom larger- the overall prospect for their futures can be termed "guardedly optimistic". When one contrasts the relative security of their lives with the horrendous growing up experiences endured by their mothers...one has to take the position that adoption has saved many of these children from utter ruination (p.339).

Bagley (1990) questioned the social policy of the time for its concern with "saving" individual Aboriginal children from what Fanshel considered "utter ruination" by placing them for adoption with Caucasian parents, rather than placing them with their extended Aboriginal families. This was clearly an example of his biased attitude that Aboriginal children should be integrated into Caucasian society. It seems he was not alone in his prejudiced thinking, as Kimelman (1985) states, "all available information would indicate that the Indian people were correct in their assertions that once their children entered the child care system they were not likely to ever be returned to their own families"(p.147).

Cultural Self-Concept

Berry (1994) undertook a literature review and research on Aboriginal cultural identity for the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People*. In his research, he uses the term self-concept in two ways, one way as the subject (we know our beliefs and knowledge) and the other as the object (what we believe about ourselves). He further differentiates between self-concept (the way we identify ourselves or describe ourselves) and social identity, which includes identification or relationships with social groups, such as being Canadian, or Sekani. He argues that social identity requires both knowledge about one's membership in a social group or groups and the value or emotional significance of that relationship. Berry (1994) identifies four aspects that constitute Aboriginal cultural identity:

- belief that one is Aboriginal,
- the importance of one's relationship to the group,
- positive or negative self-esteem derived from being Aboriginal, and
- the degree of identity maintenance wanted.

These four aspects are believed to affect whether and how cultural identity is expressed in daily behaviour. Denying a child knowledge of, and access to, their natural family has had tragic consequences for Aboriginal children's development of healthy identities.

This concept of "right to access" is further supported and acknowledged by Hayes (1993); "both supporters and opponents of transracial adoptions agree that minority children available for adoption have a right and need to develop a sense of ethnic identity and a knowledge of their cultural heritage"(p.301). Hayes (1993) writes about the importance of having an ethnic culture and the difficulty in assessing such a commodity. He discusses the

complexities that adoptive parents have to contend with when considering a cross-cultural adoption. Hayes (1993) writes,

The unwillingness or inability of caucasian parents to instill a strong sense of ethnic identity and knowledge of cultural heritage in their minority children has been the main theme taken up by critics of Trans Racial Adoption (TRA). Identity and heritage, it is argued are crucial measures of the success of TRA; other measures are “irrelevant.” Yet research efforts to measure identity and heritage often appears naive. They may be based on the perceptions of White parents or on simple tests that do not get at the richness and complexity of a sense of identity, or knowledge of heritage (Chimezie, 1977). It is also argued that when parents are faced with a dilemma; they have the contradictory task of incorporating a child fully into a family and simultaneously promoting a sense of distinct ethnic identity (Gill & Jackson 1983, p.701). The very “success” of TRA, therefore, is indicative of its failure, as this success has been achieved at the expense of the development of ethnic identity [Kirn 1978, p.485] (p.303).

The historical system of residential schools, followed by years of removal and subsequent placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes, has resulted in large numbers of children living in situations where traditional native practices have not been established (York, 1990). Wharf (1993) estimates that as many as one in seven Aboriginal children in the late 1970s and 1980s were raised by non-Aboriginal parents. According to Grant (1993), there is evidence that suggests children who were removed from reserves and placed in caucasian, middle-class urban homes experience a form of “culture shock”. Not

only does their physical environment change but, also, there are distinctive differences regarding child rearing practices of Aboriginal people and those persons of a European background.

The Ministry for Children and Family Development has published information on the over representation, and increase of Aboriginal children for adoption. They also compare adoption plans for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in care during a five year period. See Appendix #1 for a copy of this fact sheet. The fact sheet clearly demonstrates that while the number of Aboriginal children taken into care increased by 97% the plan to find aboriginal adoptive homes for them increased by only 5%, which is indicative of the lack of significance placed on finding suitable Aboriginal families that are interested in adopting. According to Grotevant (1997),

The traditional mid-20th century definition of adoption in western societies has been that it was a social and legal process in which a parent/child relationship was established between persons unrelated by birth. Through this process, a child born to one set of parents became the child of other parents, and thus a member of another family, thereby assuming the same rights and duties of children in birth families.

This thinking is directly opposed to the Aboriginal view of adoption as Kimelman (1985) states,

Adoption is said to be a custom deeply rooted in Indian societies. A child might be given to a family, which has no children. A teenager might move in with a grandparent to provide needed services. The band may conclude that a family has too many children to provide proper care and remove some children to be raised by another family. The major difference between

traditional Indian adoptions and the adoption practices of the formal childcare system is that the natural parent and the child do not lose contact with each other (p.131).

It is clear in the literature that the loss of ethnic identity puts adopted Aboriginal children at risk for low self esteem, delinquent behaviour, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse, which lead to adoption breakdowns and chaotic lifestyles (Bagley, 1993; Berry, J. 1994; Fanshel, D. 1992; Grotevant, 1997; York, 1990). Bagley (1993) conducted a comparative longitudinal study of the “adjustment of adopted adolescents from contrasted ethnic groups and family situations” (p. 224). The adopted children were found through a 1988 survey of 1,990 households in Calgary that had adolescent children. This survey established comparison groups of Aboriginal adoptees, inter-country adoptees, and non-adopted aboriginal children. As a result Bagley was able to compare the adjustment of the aboriginal adoptees placed in non- aboriginal homes to the comparison groups.

Results from Bagley’s (1993) own research were disturbing showing that the Aboriginal group were three times more likely to have had suicidal thoughts, or to have perpetrated deliberate acts of harm within the previous six months. At the time, it was not clear why outcomes were poorer for Aboriginal adopted children than for Caucasian children adopted by non-Aboriginal parents. Bagley (1993) suggests a lack of cultural contact and ethnic stigmatization, without supports of parents from the same ethnic group as a possible explanation. Specifically, Bagley (1993) found that issues of ethnicity were viewed as problematic for adoptive parents who were unable or unwilling to come to grips with issues of ethnic identity. Parents tended to treat the children like themselves; however, among the Aboriginal adolescents, half of them failed to integrate or respect ethnic identity. Bagley

(1993) also concluded that identity problems and identity confusion are major factors in the behaviour problems that are associated with adoption breakdown of one fifth of Aboriginal adoptees. Thus, he states that special supports to help deal with these role dilemmas may help support a healthy identity formation. Bagley's findings are similar to other work on the adjustment of inter-country adopted children in North America (Feigleman & Silverman, 1983).

Adoption Transitions

As noted earlier, one of the main tasks of an adolescent is to achieve unity and coherence in her sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). While this can be a stressful time for all adolescents, it is a particularly difficult time for a child in an adoptive home to struggle with identity formation tasks (Steinhauer, 1991). There is no doubt that there were, and are, many non-Aboriginal adoptive parents who did their very best to nurture, heal, and raise the Aboriginal children entrusted to their care. Tragically, though, the outcome of adoption even by conscientious non-Aboriginal parents was often disastrous as the adoptees reached adolescence only to suffer the painful identity crisis of being adolescent, Aboriginal, and adopted (Bagley, 1993; York, 1990; Fournier & Crey, 1997). Bagley (1993) further notes that an adopted child that is ethnically and physically different from her parents in skin colour and features is, to some degree, stigmatized by the prejudice and oppression of the wider society. Bagley (1993) considers positive self-esteem key to identity formation. This, together with a warm parent-child relationship and a structured parenting style, are, in his opinion, critical components for a positive outcome. It seems obvious to me that cultural sensitivity, education and open communication between parent, child, and support group

regarding a child's ethnic heritage are also very important aids to achieving a positive outcome.

Adoptive parents have a major role to play in ensuring that children are connected to their heritage and culture. These parents must be sensitive to how a child may be feeling during the initial meeting and the 'home coming', when the child moves into their home. Everything is new to the child, from where the pots and pans are, to their bedroom (even the bedding can be new and strange). Sometimes even the diet is very different. Aboriginal children may be used to a diet containing wild meat and fish; very high in protein and fat, and the adoption family may be using a 'healthy diet' of fresh fruit and vegetables. These physical adjustments illustrate how complicated a cross-cultural or cross-ethnic adoption can be. All this "newness" is stressful for the child. Hoopes (1990) highlights this point, when she states,

Most children come to adoption as infants and hence have little or no memory of their biological parents. Others, however, have lived for varying periods of time with biological parents and siblings and hence have bonded to this family of origin. Children placed as infants or toddlers come to adoption at a very different stage and with very different experiences than children placed at older ages (p.148).

Besides misunderstanding what might constitute a warm 'homecoming' for an Aboriginal child, the well-meaning adoptive couple may, by words and actions, make oppressive comments about the child's Aboriginal heritage. Likewise, other children in the family or school community may tease her because she is different. Because of the possible embarrassment this can cause, some children may choose not to identify themselves as

Aboriginal and may also partake in slurs against their own people. Further difficulties arise as the mainstream societal group imposes their standards upon those in the minority. The child may not understand the norms of the home or of her new community and will require a great deal of patient explaining.

Being adoptive parents requires a great deal of commitment on behalf of the people who decide to accept this responsibility. Adoptive parents may be required to assist their adoptive children deal with past hurts, related to being abandoned by their biological parents. Where there may have been an occurrence of abuse in other instances, parents will need to provide equally important, though fairly different, support. The parents will need to be very sensitive to the cues that the child displays, and to their comfort zones. Being aware of, and trying to address their needs is essential in building a healthy bond with the child.

Sometimes, adoptive parents may be apprehensive of approaching the Ministry for help. They may fear that their parenting skills will be found to be inadequate and the child will be removed from their home. Social workers and families need time to establish a trust relationship where it is acceptable to ask for assistance prior to a crisis occurring.

In contrast to the literature cited thus far is a review stating that cross-cultural adoptions are not a risk factor for healthy identity development. Haugaard (1998) states that there is no significant evidence that parents who endeavour to promote cultural awareness are more successful than those who do not. Grotevant (1997) also concludes that there is no significant evidence that adoption is a risk factor for adjustment problems.

Grotevant (1997) summarises a greater body of knowledge surrounding the development of identity in adopted people. He centres his discussions on the premise that relationship processes centre on the core issues of connection, regulation, and autonomy. In

this study, the focus is on adopted adolescents with regards to their experience in their families and the impact of these experiences upon their identity development.

Grotevant (1997) continues by describing the key relationship concepts of connection, regulation, and autonomy as follows: connection, the quality of attachment, and the foundational sense of basic trust from which a child develops a sense of self. Adopted children then have to find a meaningful way to "connect" to families of rearing and birth.

Regulation of behaviour is a concept that addresses issues of structure and control in the child's life. Thus, for adoptive families, this speaks to adoptive parents' perceived right of entitlement. Alternatively, the adoptive child may believe that adopted parents are not "real" parents and therefore lack authority. And, finally autonomy, which speaks to the adoptive child's physical and emotional autonomy, which, in turn, leads to the healthy development of self.

In relation to my interest in cross-cultural adoptions, Grotevant's article is important. Identity development for adolescents is important because it serves as a foundation for adult psychosocial development and interpersonal relationships. Difficulties in identity development have been associated with problematic behaviour (Grotevant, 1997). Lack of self-identity, which is often a problem for Aboriginal children growing up outside their family of origin, is the crux of many other problems. There are issues concerning connections to the adoptive family as well as issues with autonomy.

Grotevant (1997) also highlights that adoptions have changed from closed arrangements blanketed in secrecy and from ignorance to open adoptions where the child is made aware that he or she came from a different family of birth. The degree of openness is

of course different for every adoption and Grotevant (1997) cites studies where the more open the adoption the better adjusted the adoptee.

Grotevant (1997) includes in his article the obvious, which is that the more well adjusted the adopted child, the fewer behaviour problems they will have in later adolescence. These findings may explain why cross-cultural adoptions involving Aboriginal children break down at a higher rate than other adoptions. These findings also show how vitally important it is for special care and consideration to be given when a cross-cultural adoption is made. The Ministry for Children and Families is finally recognising the particular importance of Aboriginal adoptees having connections with their birth family and communities, and openness concerning cultural heritage is now written into the adoption policy.

Given these findings which, are a mere percentage of other research supporting these claims, one might expect researchers to conclude that race is irrelevant in identifying suitable parents for children in need of adoption. Although there is research and studies that seem to show that ethnicity/cultural background is not a factor in identifying suitable parents for adoptions, the majority of research, that I have read, has illustrated that a child's knowledge of their ethnicity/cultural heritage is of vital importance. It is almost always stressed that the only suitable parents for minority children are those who endeavour to provide the child with information on his or her cultural heritage as well as promote a strong sense of positive ethnic identity in the child (Hayes, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1998; Bagley, 1993).

The Aboriginal panel appointed to write *Liberating our Children, Liberating our Nations*, in 1992, has outlined that in response to the social needs resulting from the experience of Aboriginal people, the government has further oppressed them. The government has used the dependency they created by extinguishing traditional Aboriginal

means of supporting themselves to formulate European cultural approaches to deal with resulting problems. Traditional community or holistic based approaches to resolving problems have been replaced by European medical models of treating individuals in isolation from their social environment (White & Jacobs, 1992). The result of such an approach is a 'band-aid' treatment of the individual, as the individual will have to return to a dysfunctional social environment. Without taking in to account the individuals social environment and social situation the system is set of for failure. The ensuing failures justify the continued apprehension of Aboriginal children, and often-ensuing adoptions, thereby perpetuating the cycle of cultural confusion, oppression, and cultural imperialism. It is not by coincidence that Aboriginal people have high rates of alcoholism, psychiatric problems, and crime. These outcomes are undoubtedly correlated to the oppression inflicted on them by dominant society.

As a result, the stage of family and child welfare policy that we are in today is in response to Aboriginal people's concerns with the child welfare system. Although the provincial child welfare system remains in control of legislation, there has been a policy initiative where Aboriginal people are developing proposals and negotiating agreements. As this occurs, Aboriginal communities are developing service models that reflect the experiences of their communities, culture, and history (Wharf, 1993). I hope that this policy trend will continue to the time when we see all Aboriginal people finally entrusted with the control over their own child welfare systems as many bands in Canada are already doing. Together with the Aboriginal Bands in British Columbia, MCFD continues to work co-operatively with the Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND) towards the development of/or provision of child and family services by First Nations Child and Family

Services Agencies. Hayes (1993) advises that the child has a fundamental right to information about their heritage. He states,

The North American Council on Adoptable Children, for example, contends that transracial adopters must realize that the ethnic and cultural heritage of the child is an essential right; therefore the families must be willing to seek out services and personal contacts in the community that will support the child's ethnicity (p.303).

Increasingly, new protocols and guidelines are being developed by the Ministry for Children and Family Development in fellowship with Aboriginal communities that will be used in determining the fate of their children. These hopefully will redress some of the grievous wrongs that have been perpetrated by government, against Aboriginal people in the past, and allow for more positive outcomes.

In an attempt to assist in positive results in fostering children cross culturally the State of Michigan Family Independence Agency has established an assessment guide to assist in screening prospective adoption parents who are considering adopting a child from a different culture or race. I have included a copy in Appendix 2.

Past adoption practices, which were based on systemic discrimination, have had detrimental effects on Aboriginal children, their extended families, and communities, (Bagley, 1993). Clearly adoption practices have changed over the years, but Aboriginal children placed in non-Aboriginal homes, even when cared for by devoted and well intentioned adoptive parents, are not likely to form healthy cultural identities (Bagley, 1993; Fournier & Crey, 1997; York, 1990).

In the past, relationships between Aboriginal communities and government agencies have been extremely one sided, with the government dictating the rules for apprehending children and for taking care of them. In February 2003, the Government of British Columbia formally acknowledged that its institutions have failed Aboriginal people across the province. Aboriginal communities viewed the separation and loss of children through apprehensions and subsequent adoptions as a tragic experience visited on their families. The importance of maintaining familial ties is important to the very existence of Aboriginal communities and therefore must be preserved. Family can be viewed as the most important survival mechanism of Aboriginal culture. It follows, therefore, that child welfare practice should focus on the home and family as its most important point of planning for Aboriginal children.

The following chapter will introduce one Aboriginal woman's story of her cross-cultural adoption and subsequent journey to discover her identity.

Chapter Three - Case Presentation

The method I have chosen to examine the issue of cross-cultural adoptions is an instrumental case study. According to Stake (1998) the case study as a form of research is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used. Case studies can be conducted using quantitative or mixed method data collection and analysis (Moon & Trepper, 1996)

An instrumental case study is used to examine a particular case to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 1998). The issue becomes the focus and the case just a method to illustrate or highlight, therefore, the actual case is of secondary interest. This presentation will be used to highlight the issue of cross-cultural adoptions. The information in my case will actually play a supportive role in facilitating my understanding of the effects of cross-cultural adoptions. In doing this, I have not chosen to use an extraordinary example of cross-cultural adoption, but rather, a typical case. Most case studies are descriptive and discovery oriented. Casual inferences must be made cautiously, if at all, with case study research (Moon & Trepper, 1996). Case study research cannot be generalized soundly without using a variety of cases to develop specific common and uncommon themes (Stake, 1998). However, I have chosen to analyse a single case, and therefore my project will primarily optimize the understanding of the case rather than generalize beyond (Stake, 1998). It must be noted, however, that the notion of generalizability is a troubling one. Ellis & Bochner (2000) note,

A story's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experiences or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives? Does it work...does it have 'naturalistic generalization', meaning that it brings

‘felt’ news from one world to another and provide opportunities for the reader to have vicarious experience of the things told? (p.751).

And so, I do not intend to generalize but rather to use this case as a stepping-stone to understand themes in the lives of cross-culturally adopted Aboriginal people. Although my work or my research was not exhaustive, it can have meaning for others and for the development of understanding.

Though I am only analyzing one case in this paper, I have tried to insure that my project has rigor by including a comprehensive literature review, a case study, and a review of Ministry for Children and Family Development policy and procedures regarding cross-cultural adoptions. In case study research, rigor can be measured by truth value (findings match reality), transferability (ability to generalize beyond case), and consistency (reproductive capacity) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As such, I have used a variety of information sources in my study.

The documentation in this case study is limited by a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the memories of the subject’s interview, and by the questions that I asked her. It is the story of a woman who experienced a cross-cultural adoption. However, it shall be my perspective of the woman’s story that will be narrated, as she is not present to record it for herself in these pages. It is presented as a documentation of her personal recollections on the subject.

“Mary” is the pseudonym that I will use for the woman I interviewed for this case study. As much as possible, I will not use identifying information so that the anonymity of this individual will be protected.

Mary is a thirty two-year-old Aboriginal woman living in a semi-remote Indian Reserve in Northern British Columbia. She is employed as a financial assistant at a band office in her community. Mary is currently in a relationship with an Aboriginal man, and they have a teenage son. I met her while I was employed as a social worker in the same Aboriginal community. I found her story very interesting and a little unique.

Allow me to begin by offering some background information on her adoptive family. Mary's adopted father had been orphaned in England and was sent to Canada when he was eight years old. She did not know why he was sent here. From the age of eight to eighteen, he attended a native residential school in Vancouver. After he left the residential school, he enlisted in the army, and was sent to serve in England, where he met the woman he married. After they married, they moved to Edmonton, Alberta.

Her adopted mother was forty-four when Mary was adopted; the age difference was mentioned a few times as a barrier to the intimacy between mother and Mary. She also recalls her adoptive mother being very strict. Her mother had had a child out of wedlock in the 1940s (when she was a teenager), which according to Mary was not a good thing. Mary hinted that something terrible had happened to cause the pregnancy but did not want to talk about it. The couple had only one biological child between them, a daughter. So, Mary was one of two girls in the family that raised her.

Mary's birth mother abandoned her in Calgary when she was four months old. She was discovered in a box, crying, and Social Services placed her with a foster family. The couple from the British Isles had wanted to adopt Mary right away. In the 1970s, unfortunately, foster parents were not allowed to adopt. The rules surrounding this issue were in the process of changing and Mary stated that she was four years old before the family

could finally adopt her. She states that her house was a typical Caucasian middle class home. She could not recall any discussion as to why she was adopted. She was born in 1970 and she thinks it may have been a trend to adopt Aboriginal children.

Mary remembers her father moving her family to a small Northern community, because of work he had there, when she was seven years old. She remembers having a “religious”(Protestant and Catholic) upbringing, and recalls being eleven years old when she was baptized. She did not understand why, at that age, she had to be baptized. Mary was beginning to explore other religions and felt that she was forced to become a Christian.

Mary states she always knew she was different from her sibling, even though she looked similar to her younger sister. Up to the age of thirteen, she had blond hair and was very fair skinned. She had never seen another Aboriginal person, except for some “old Indians.” She did not recall any prejudice or racial slurs against Aboriginals in her family home, although she recalls she knew she was an “Indian” from her earliest memories. She states that “Indian” had a bad connotation, amongst people in general when she was young. Mary remembers being teased a lot at school for being an “Indian.”

When she was 12 or 13 she saw “Bob” at school and fell in love with him. Mary states that she “hated” the rules at home, which contributed to her desire to move away. She felt she had to produce to be accepted in her mothers’ eyes, but that she was never good enough, she always had to prove herself. She moved to a northern reserve with a friend from school so she could be closer to him. Her adoptive parents, especially her mother, did not approve of her leaving home but they did not make her come back. Mary states that her adoptive mother resented her “native culture”, especially so when she moved to a reserve. She remembers her mother asking her “ How could you live on a reserve?” Her mother’s

anxiety and disappointment was acute when, at age 17, Mary informed her parents that she was pregnant. Mary found it very hard to relate to her. Age difference was again mentioned as a barrier in their relationship.

Mary states that she is closer to Bob's family as they have a similar culture. They taught her to be an "Indian." She also states that her father maintains contact with her and that he taught her to be proud of being an "Indian", but he could not teach her "how to be an Indian." Mary believes that she lost out on an understanding of her culture due to living in a Caucasian family, especially because of the lack of support from certain family members, like her adopted mother.

She recalls that her father supported and encouraged her in her desire to embrace and study Aboriginal culture. She attributes this to his going to an Indian residential school. A difficult upbringing in a native school led her dad to be tolerant and sympathetic towards people of her culture. She remembers that he was a driving force in her quest to discover which band she belonged to.

When she was twenty, and a mother of a son, she discovered that she is from a band in Manitoba. She is now registered with them. Mary has never met her birth parents. She is nervous, apprehensive, and curious about the reserve where her mother was born. She has never visited it and is not wanting to at this point.

Mary informed me that she has the adoption papers from the government to sign and if her birth mother has also signed them then they would be put in contact with each other. Mary has had the papers for about ten years and still has not signed them. She does not want to "create unnecessary complications" by delving into her past life.

The quality she remembers developing while “growing up Caucasian” is a strong work ethic; she is very headstrong and stubborn; and she fights for the “underdog.” She credits her father with always being willing to help in his community, and being especially willing to assist Aboriginals. She is very happy with her life and attributes her love for her culture to an inner voice that guided her, and to her father who encouraged and supported her in her search for her culture. Mary is so proud to be Indian she cannot imagine ever wanting to hide the fact that she is one. She has decided not to raise her son with the same pressure that she experienced as a child. The Aboriginal culture teaches that children are a gift from the “Spirit World” and if they are not properly cared for they may go back to the world from which they came. Even when the extended family is unable to take care of a young child the community at large would step in to assume the responsibility (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

In the early 1950s revisions to the federal Indian Act gave child welfare jurisdiction to the provinces. Social Services had the authority to apprehend children who were considered to be at risk or in need of protection. Aboriginal children who were raised in non-Aboriginal homes lost contact with their birth families and communities.

By being adopted into a non-Aboriginal family, Mary lost all of her rights as an Aboriginal. Adoption is a legal process by which a child’s legal rights and obligations towards her natural parents are terminated and similar rights and responsibilities towards the adoptive parents are formed.

Mary’s experiences of abandonment and separation are still commonly experienced by cross-cultural adoptees. When children have been moved from foster family to foster family there may be considerable attachment anxiety. Fortunately the government has moved from just providing a “family” with a “child” to being more acutely aware of the

needs of both parties involved. Now, the Ministry for Children and Family Development provides their adoption workers with guidelines for assisting parents in the adoptive process.

It's Mary's hope that future generations may be spared the heartbreak and trauma that can occur when necessary support and encouragement is lacking in the life of a child. In her views, every child is a gift.

Chapter Four - Implication For Policy

Aboriginal people all across Canada are over represented in homeless shelters; courtrooms, youth detention centres and prisons. These institutions are full of Aboriginal people who grew up in non-Aboriginal foster or adoptive homes. A 1990 survey of Aboriginal prisoners in Prince Albert penitentiary, Saskatchewan found that over 95% came from either a foster or adoptive home where they had non-Aboriginal parents (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Jerry Adams, a Nisga'a social worker for Vancouver Urban Native Youth Association, estimates that half to three-quarters of all habituated street kids that he works with are "graduates" of the BC foster care system or runaways from adoptions that did not work out. These kids are looking for the sense of identity and belonging with other Aboriginal street kids that they never got in their non-Aboriginal homes (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Alcohol, drug, physical, and sexual abuse are just some of the effects and symptoms of the degree to which Aboriginal extended family practices were undermined and damaged (York, 1990). There are issues of abandonment and separation and a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities associated with being a parent.

Given the absence of a general consensus within society as to what constitutes the best interest of the child, the outcome of any decision is little more than a prediction based upon the personal biases and judgements of the governmental decision-maker and of the middle class culture and ideology the decision maker represents. Therefore, I suggest that this subjectivity legitimises cultural bias by allowing decision-makers who are generally members of the dominant culture to impose family values that are known to be inconsistent with those of Aboriginal people. Furthermore, in Aboriginal communities, the collective

rights and responsibilities of the community are paramount and the community shares the responsibility of raising the children. However, Canadian society operates primarily on principles centred on individual rights. The Child, Family, and Community Services Act used by the Ministry for Children and Families in British Columbia, places a great deal of emphasis on child protection issues. Often when the best interest of the child is considered, it is separate from family and culture (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Within this context, cross-cultural adoptions have been seen as destructive to Aboriginal communities and families.

Another argument centres around the consideration given to the 'psychological needs' of the child, rather than on their own cultural identity and heritage. The courts often recognise the stability that adoption brings to a child's life, but dismiss the same notion of stability as it pertains to maintaining a connection with his/her culture and community (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This notion seems contradictory in light of the fact that Section 2(1) of the Child, Family and Community Services Act (Ministry for Children and Families, 1998), recognises that a child's culture and linguistic heritage rank at the same level as the mental, emotional, physical, and education needs of the child. As it is argued by York (1990), living one's cultural and linguistic heritage is essential to producing a mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy child.

In most cases where Aboriginal children have been completely removed from their communities and families, research has shown that as adults, they eventually find their way home (Fournier & Crey, 1997). When they return home, however, they are carrying emotional scars from this denial of their identity. They often experience a complete lack of belonging and are left fluctuating between two entirely separate and distinct cultures – neither feeling comfortable in the community they were born nor in the community where

they were raised. In the past when children were removed from their homes to be sent to the residential schools they experienced a loss of culture, identity, language, and family, and in some cases, their lives. Children were treated as second-class citizens in these schools. As adults, some survivors of the residential schools have taken their own lives and have misused alcohol and drugs.

The guiding principles of both the Child, Family and Community Services Act and the Adoption Act state that the recognition of such mandates as the preservation of the cultural identity of Aboriginal children, as well as kinship ties and the child's attachment to the extended family should remain intact whenever possible (Child, Family and Community Service Act 1998; Adoption Act, 1996).

In keeping with these guiding principles, it is necessary to examine these significant barriers that hinder the placement of Aboriginal children in the adoptive homes of Aboriginal people. The first major problem in the placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes encompasses the notion that it is predominately Caucasian, middle class social workers that exercise control over the adoption process (White & Jacobs, 1992).

Secondly, it is important to recognize who makes up 'the rules' in approving appropriate adoptive homes. The minimum standards to be met are determined by the Ministry for Children and Family Development through adoptive home studies, which adhere to a universal application of objective standards. As a result, the development of native adoptive homes has been severely inhibited by the rigidity of physical standards and issues of income and lifestyle considered by child welfare workers in the approval of homes (White & Jacobs, 1992). Bagley (1993) supports this argument by noting that social workers have traditionally selected as potential adopters Caucasian, middle class couples of conventional

behaviour and values and good material resources and Aboriginal people consistently fail to meet the necessary criteria.

The third argument relates to the fact that the present Adoption Act has an exception to policy for the placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes. The Ministry for Children and Family Development has approximately 300 Aboriginal children under the age of 12, in continuing care, with adoption as their plan. Social workers planning for these children are aware of and will use the Exceptions Committee, in case non-Aboriginal adoptive homes are being considered as an option for these children. A non-Aboriginal home may be considered when Aboriginal adoptive homes cannot be found within a reasonable period. Although there is an adoption unit located in Vancouver, there is no component that deals specifically with Aboriginal foster homes, or with the recruitment of Aboriginal adoptive homes. Thus, when there is no dedication to Aboriginal homes, the prospect is bleak that they will be found, let alone within a reasonable period.

There are specific guidelines for the adoption worker to adhere to when applying to the committee for an exception. The committee consists of Ministry personnel and they are accountable for ensuring the adoption plan proceeds in a timely fashion and to approve the use of a non-Aboriginal home for an Aboriginal child. Ministry for Children and Family Development adoption workers are provided with a cultural plan which present guidelines to ensure they are aware of the cultural issues involved in a cross cultural adoption. The worker is required to follow a list of principles, which include:

- Determine the Aboriginal identity of the child.
- Discover which band the child is a member of or may be eligible to be a member of.

- Ascertain if there is a First Nations/Aboriginal Child & Family Service agency in the community.
- Make sure the child's cultural identity is known.
- Work co-operatively with the Band/Agency to develop a plan for adoption.
- Confirm there is a primary contact person who will be the cultural link in the planning.
- Discuss with the adoptive parents the importance of the cultural identity of the child and ensure they will participate in the cultural planning for the child.
- Finalise the Cultural Plan that which both parties, the Band and the adoptive parents have agreed to.

It is important to keep in mind that there will always be occasions where placement of an Aboriginal child in a non-Aboriginal home is necessary. At these times, the importance of cultural connection can be challenged by the necessity for permanent placements and the psychological and emotional bonding the child achieves in non-Aboriginal homes. This, of course sparks the what-is-in-the-best-interest-of-the-child debate.

Regarding the notion of “the best interest of the child”, it is necessary to examine this in the context of the present liberal ideology (Kline, 1992). In child welfare cases, this ideology has served to perpetuate the removal and placement of Aboriginal children away from their families as natural, necessary and legitimate; rather than coercive and distinctive (Kline, 1992). More often than not, the courts are finding psychological bonds the child has developed with his/her non-Aboriginal caregivers as more consistent with the “best interest” than maintenance of his/her Aboriginal identity and culture.

The neo-liberal view of cross-cultural adoptions would say that individuals are responsible for themselves and their families. Thus, if the state has to get involved as a last resort and the children are removed, this is a result of bad parenting. Neo-liberals do not work to promote social equality, thus, if a child should have to be placed in a cross-cultural adoption situation, this is not the state's responsibility. Should this lead to a lack of cultural identity formation that contributes to the child acting out, and then the child is labelled as "bad" rather than the product of state neglect. Due to the neo-liberal cutbacks on social spending, money will not be put forward to enable finding of appropriate Aboriginal adoptive homes for Aboriginal children a priority, thus, perpetuating the instances where Aboriginal children will be placed cross-culturally.

Although the law is clear in its stipulation that decisions about adoption placements should be in the best interests of the child, the parties involved may not agree on what constitutes this concept. Baker (1995) suggests that one factor that may be discretely taken into consideration is the financial cost. It is more effective and less costly for an agency to maintain an adopted child placed in a permanent home, than it is for a child to be placed in foster care.

Hollingsworth (1998) refers to a 1997 policy statement by the National Association of Social Workers that includes the following,

Placement decisions should reflect a child's need for continuity, safeguarding the child's right to consistent care to service arrangements. Agencies must recognise each child's need to retain a significant engagement with his or her parents and extended family and respect the integrity of each child's ethnicity and cultural heritage (p. 112).

Hollingsworth (1998) continues.

The social work profession stresses the importance of ethnic and cultural sensitivity. An effort to maintain a child's identity and her or his ethnic heritage should prevail in all services and placement actions that involve children in foster care and adoption programs, including adherence to the principles articulated in the Indian Child Welfare Act (p.112).

The influence of the international indigenous peoples' rights movement supported through the United Nations since the early 1990s has had ripple effects across the Pacific. There has been a resurgence of political and social activity concerning self-determination, land claims, and control of child welfare and adoption. Rather than being a child welfare issue, placement of Aboriginal children outside their communities of origin has now become a political issue tied to Aboriginal self-determination.

In Canada, research for the Aboriginal Peoples' Commission confirmed the negative impact of Aboriginal children being adopted by non-Aboriginal parents and the associated acculturation struggles of adolescents. Language, contact with Elders, and daily cultural behaviours all strengthened cultural identity. The losses associated with cultural identity are theorized to be typical of cultures that have faced extinction.

In 1997 with the development of the Ministry for Children and Families, the government of British Columbia began to do business differently with native communities. No longer did the government work in isolation but rather in partnership. There is now a movement towards full Aboriginal governance. In 1997, new protocols were established to assist the Ministry for Children and Family Development and Aboriginal communities to

agree on their respective roles and responsibilities. A change on a structural level is what is needed.

Chapter Five – Concluding Remarks

Does cross-cultural adoption negatively affect identity formation in Aboriginal children? After analysing the academic literature available on the subject, we see that it is indeed very possible if certain criteria are not met in the life of any given Aboriginal child. It is critical that extra focus be paid to social intervention at a personal level: supporting families and children who are in cross-cultural families maintain strong psychological, familial, and cultural ties in order for Aboriginal children to grow up with healthy and strong identities. Intervention also needs to occur at political and policy-making levels. Social workers need to be trained in working with cross-cultural adoption situations. They need to be culturally aware and sensitive to the diverse needs of the adopted child. Politically, intervention can occur by Aboriginal people moving towards self-government. Kimelman (1985) recommends that,

Treaty Indian children who have been placed outside their own communities have a right to be informed, and must be informed, of their Treaty rights and if they wish to re-establish contact with their own families, they have a right to expect that such contact will be expedited (p.147).

Protocol agreements, both formal and informal, between the government of British Columbia and Aboriginal communities have been used for many years to assist in service delivery. It is important to review the present protocol agreements to ensure they reflect the ministry's Aboriginal Strategy for Aboriginal children, this means retaining, and preserving their cultural identity and connection to their community. Where no protocol agreements exist, it is an opportunity to meet with the Aboriginal communities to develop a formal working relationship and establish how services will be most effectively provided.

I believe protocol agreements are required for a number of reasons. First, they provide a framework where the local Aboriginal communities and the government can work cooperatively to implement agreed upon strategies for service delivery. Protocol agreements help explain the roles and expectations of both parties. The Ministry is committed to improving their working relationship with Aboriginal communities; these protocol agreements are one way for holding them accountable and responsible. The Ministry is committed to assisting the Aboriginal communities to improve services. The Ministry believes that services for children and families can be best delivered within the communities. It is a requirement of the Child Family & Community Services Act which was enacted in 1996 and the Adoptions Act that the child's band be involved in planning. The child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the best interests of the child.

It is also vital that the person most affected by the adoption process, the child, be included in the planning process. In planning for the adoption of an Aboriginal child the social worker needs to discuss with the child the importance of preserving their Aboriginal cultural identity.

As there are many Aboriginal communities in British Columbia and Canada that possess a unique culture and language this makes it very important that there be a process for identifying and ensuring that a child's unique cultural identity is identified and preserved. The Aboriginal community needs to be approached and asked how they can participate in ensuring an Aboriginal child has access to the community and the culture in a meaningful way. No longer, can adoption agencies, neither private nor public, work in isolation; they must involve the Aboriginal communities.

Concerned people who support Aboriginal children and communities need to:

- Develop strategies for recruiting more Aboriginal adoption and permanent foster homes in BC.
- Provide even more opportunities for greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in developing and implementing placement plans.
- Encourage adoptee parents to promote cultural connection between the child and their Aboriginal community.

If Aboriginal communities choose to allow their children to be adopted by Caucasian families, then mutually agreed upon guidelines need to be observed. I feel it is crucial that children have a solid foundation where they can learn the values and social skills needed to become responsible and considerate individuals.

This research project has been a very valuable learning experience for me. It has concretized the notion that those of us working in the social work field need to examine and challenge the policies that currently govern us. It is only then that we can actually claim we are working in the best interests of the child. I believe there are still many aspects of cross-cultural adoptions that need to be monitored and examined in order to fulfill this assertion.

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Appendix # 1.**FACT SHEET**

1. The following table illustrates the over representation of Aboriginal children in care compared to the number of non-Aboriginal children in care.

| | March 1992 | Sept. 1997 | Increase |
|----------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Aboriginal | 1944 | 2663 | 37% |
| Non-Aboriginal | 4023 | 6082 | 51% |
| Total | 5967 | 8745 | 47% |

2. The following table illustrates the number of Aboriginal children in care in continuing custody under 12 and the increase in the number of Aboriginal children compared with non-Aboriginal in continuing custody under 12.

| | March 1992 | Sept. 1997 | Increase |
|----------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Aboriginal | 379 | 746 | 97% |
| Non-Aboriginal | 548 | 780 | 42% |

3. The following table illustrates the number of Aboriginal children in care compared with the number of non-Aboriginal in care with adoption as the plan.

| | March 1992 | Sept. 1997 | Increase |
|----------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Aboriginal | 214 | 215 | .5% |
| Non-Aboriginal | 391 | 393 | .5% |

Appendix # 2.

Part 11 - Appendix A - Guidelines & other information
 Cross-racial, Cross-cultural Parenting Assessment Guide

Prospective adoptive parents

With the permission of the State of Michigan Family Independence Agency the following information has been taken from their Cross-racial, Cross-cultural Parenting Assessment Guide

Cross-racial, cross-cultural Parenting Assessment Guide

When prospective adoptive parents indicate that they are interested in adopting a child who is from a different culture or race than themselves, an assessment is to be made to determine their capacity to value, respect, appreciate and educate the child regarding the child's racial, ethnic and cultural heritage. This assessment guide is to be used along with the home study guidelines.

The assessment process is by its nature personal and subjective for both the prospective adoptive parent and the social worker, therefore, it is essential that the worker be aware of their own biases and attitudes and have access to consultation and supervision throughout the process.

The assessment guide is to be used by the worker to assist the applicant in identifying their own needs, experiences, sensitivities, motivation, ideas, values, and priorities as they relate to parenting a child of another race or culture.

Identity needs of children placed cross-racially/culturally

Applicants are to be assessed for their capacity to meet unique identity needs of children who live with a family of a race or culture different from their own. These following needs are in addition to the qualities necessary to enhance the normal development of any child in a placement:

- the need to live in an environment that provides the child with on-going experiences with their culture, religion, and language;
- the need for same-race adult and peer role models and significant relationships on a continuous basis;
- the need for an environment that teaches survival, problem solving, and coping skills which give the child a sense of racial and ethnic pride;
- the need for a parent who understands the child's life and daily experiences related to racial and cultural differences and who responds to those experiences with acceptance, understanding and empathy;
- the need for a parent who accepts and can help the child accept the child's racial and cultural ancestry, and who can comfortably share knowledge and information about the child's racial and cultural ancestry with the child;
- the need for the child to have adults around them who understand what it feels like for the child to look different from their parent; and
- the need to have a parent that has knowledge of special dietary, skin, hair and health care needs.

Capabilities of persons who parent cross-culturally

To meet the identity needs of children who live with a family of a race or culture different from their own, it is desirable that persons who parent these children possess the following capabilities:

- an understanding of their own sense of personal history and how that helped form their values and attitudes about racial, cultural, and religious similarities and differences;
- an understanding of racism and whose life experiences have given them an understanding of how racism works and how to minimize its effects;
- previous life experiences and personal history that have given them the capacity or ability to parent cross-racially/culturally;
- are committed to, and capable of, serving as a link between the child and the child's racial/cultural community;
- the capacity and commitment to provide the child with racial and cultural experiences, and information and knowledge of their race and culture;
- adequate support from those significant to them in their decision to parent cross-racially/culturally;
- live in a community that provides the child with same-race adult and peer role models and relationships on a continuous basis;
- can tolerate and deal appropriately with the questions, ambiguity, or disapproval which arise when people question their relationship to the child;
- are willing to incorporate participation in cross-racial/cultural activities into their lifestyle and participate in racial/cultural awareness training;
- can acknowledge that cross-racial/cultural parenting makes their family an interracial/cross-cultural family which will have an impact on all family members and that the decision to adopt cross-racially will make the family interracial forever;
- can acknowledge and are prepared to deal positively and effectively with the fact that as an interracial family they will experience discrimination;
- the skills or the capacity, interest, and commitment to learn parenting skills, necessary to parent children to understand and accept their race and racial identity and to work to change the feelings of children who deny their racial identity;
- the skills or the capacity and interest to learn the skills to meet the child's special dietary, skin, hair and health care needs; and
- able to appreciate the child's uniqueness without making the child feel separate and different.

Assessment tool

The following information is intended to promote discussion and the exchange of information between the social worker and prospective adoptive parents. Ultimately the social worker is to make a recommendation in the homestudy about the applicants' ability to care for a child who is racially and/or culturally different from themselves.

The social worker is not expected to ask the following questions verbatim but to use them as a guide during the homestudy process.

There are four assessment categories:

- experiences and understanding regarding the role of race and ethnic heritage;
- motivation and support systems;
- community and opportunities for same-race role models and peer relationships; and
- life style and parenting ability.

In each category the social worker is to assess the applicants' experiences, knowledge, demonstration and use of knowledge, willingness and ability to change if needed, and their ability and willingness to view the situation from the child's perspective. At the end of each category, there are suggested exercises to assist the worker in their assessment and to provide opportunities for the prospective adoptive parents to experience and learn more about cross-racial/cultural parenting.

Experiences and understanding the role of race and ethnic heritage.

Discuss with the applicants their own nationality and sense of racial identity and knowledge of other races and cultures.

- When and how did they first become aware of their race and nationality?
- What role did their race and nationality play in forming their values?
- Can they remember when they first became aware of racial differences and similarities?
- What is their earliest memory of a person of a race other than their own?
- What have they done to learn about other races and cultures?
- What do they know about other races, especially the race of the child they are interested in parenting?

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- Who are positive role models for that particular ethnic group and what do they know about these persons?
 - What do the applicants know about how racial identity develops?
 - Are there similarities and differences between their life style and that of the child's racial and ethnic group? How might a child feel about those differences?
 - Have they had any experiences of being a minority? What were their feelings?
 - Have they ever felt discriminated against? Describe the situation and feelings.
 - How can they learn to know what it is like to live in a cross-racial situation so that they can be sensitive to the feelings of a child who would live with them?

Suggested Exercise: Have the prospective adoptive parents attend a community meeting, social event, place of worship, eat in a restaurant, or engage as a minority in other interaction and discuss it. Activities in an ethnic area and discuss their feelings about the experience. Have them interact with children of the same age and race of the child they wish to parent. Observe the

Motivation and support system

Discuss with the prospective adoptive parents the reason they are interested in parenting cross-racially/culturally and the impact of their decision on their family, extended family, friends and neighbours.

- What made them consider parenting cross-racially?
- Are there people of other races in their family? If yes, what have been their experiences with them?
- Have they discussed their interest in parenting cross- racially/culturally with their family? Extended family? Friends? What was the reaction?
- Do they have friends or neighbours who are of the same race as the child they wish to parent?
- Do they socialize with persons of other races/cultures? How frequently?
- What racially-mixed functions do they attend?

Suggested Exercise: Ecomap and genogram; a family meeting that includes the extended family and children. Refer to the Adoption Homestudy Assessment Guidelines for an example of a genogram.

Community and opportunities for same-race role models and peer relationships

Evaluate the racial composition of the neighbourhood, including schools and church child care centres, and other organizations a child would be a member of.

- What is the racial composition of the neighbourhood, including facilities that would be used by the child?
- What is the attitude of schools, churches, and their neighbourhood toward members of the child's racial ethnic group?
- Are like-race role models and peers available to the child as a regular part of the child's daily life?

Suggested Exercise: visit a neighbourhood school to observe how children of other races/ethnic groups function and are responded to in that setting

Life style and parenting ability

Assess the prospective adoptive parents' life style, ability to teach a child racial coping skills and a sense of racial knowledge, pride and identity.

- What do the applicants know about the values of the child's race or ethnic group?
- What do the applicants know about the music, entertainment and eating preferences of the child's race or ethnic group?
- What do the applicants know about the skin and hair care, and dietary and health needs of the child?
- How will a child in their home learn about the child's own race/culture, history and customs?
- How will they involve like-race people in the child's life?
- How do the applicants feel that their decision to parent cross-racially will benefit them? How do they feel it will benefit the child?
- How do the prospective adoptive parents feel that their decision to parent cross-racially might negatively affect them? How do they feel it might negatively affect the child? How will they handle the negative effects and the hurt?
- Because of their decision to parent a child who is of a different race and or culture than themselves will others relate to them and view them the same or differently than they do now?

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- How will they respond to the child when the child is called racially-derogatory names?
 - How will they teach coping skills to a child of a different race?
 - What problems do they think might come up in school, in the neighbourhood? How will they handle social mixing? Dating?
 - How might the issues for the child change as the child becomes older? How might the issues change for them as the child becomes older?
 - Might a child one day resent them for making the decision to adopt them? How will they deal with these feelings?
 - Are they willing to encourage the birth family to have contact with the child?

Suggested Exercise: Role play, attend a parent group with others who are parenting cross-racially, utilize a home study group, attend a parent group of birth families, visit a family who is parenting cross-racially/culturally and whose child is an adolescent or adult, provide opportunities for the prospective adoptive parents to interact with children of the race they wish to parent.

When assessing the applicants' strengths and limitations the social worker is to consider if there are areas where the applicants have limited ability. Can these areas be corrected? How will these limitations affect the child in the short term? In the long term? When opportunities to correct the limitations were offered, did the applicant respond and participate?

The social worker's assessment is to be incorporated into the homestudy