A phenomenological case study of an adoptive couple's journey through the adoption process of a child from an Asian country

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A phenomenological case study of an adoptive couple’s journey through the adoption process of a child from an Asian country

by

Shannon M. Wetzler

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Kere P. Hughes, Major Professor
Mary Jane Brotherson
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
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Abstract

A journey of a Caucasian adoptive couple, residing in the Midwest, followed when they pursued the adoption of a child from South Korea. The history of transracial adoption (the placement of children with parents of another race) and international adoption was described in terms of how the early adoption policies currently influence adoptive parents today. Adoptive parent’s choice to travel to the child’s birth country, their experiences and introduction to adoption, and their attitude towards adoption were discussed. The importance of the adoptive parents having a social support network and understanding of the child’s birth culture were studied in regard to transitioning the child into their new family, and the need for further research in these areas.
Chapter 1. Introduction

History of Adoption

Adoption in the United States

Adoption in the United States has been in existence, legally and socially, since the late 1800s. Due to the shortage of healthy Caucasian babies available in America and an increase in adoptive seeking Caucasian parents, transracial and international adoptions placements began after the 1940s (Henderson, 2000; Serbin, 1997). Transracial adoption is when the adoptive child is of a different race or ethnicity from the adoptive parents and can be either domestic or international (Zamostny, O’Brien, Baden, & Wiley, 2003). International adoption is defined as the adoption of children from other countries by U.S. citizens. Therefore a child can be an international transracial adoptee (i.e., a child adopted from South Korea by Caucasian adoptive parents in the United States).

Initially transracial adoption occurred domestically, but social stigma and advocacy groups sought out restrictions to these adoptions. Some of the first transracial adoptions were chosen for the purpose of taking in orphans and for assimilation. An early example of the transition from same-race adoption to domestic transracial adoption was the Indian Adoption Project between 1958 and 1967. The project was designed to remove Native American children from the reservation in order to assimilate them into mainstream society (Moe, 2007). In the 1960s various child advocacy groups in the United States and Canada began to initiate programs to find permanent homes for orphaned African American children, thus expanding transracial adoption.

The transracial adoption of these children met with opposition, specifically from the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW). Their argument against transracial
adoption was that it’s a form of race and cultural genocide, and they passed a resolution in 1972 to end the transracial adoption of African American children (Lee, 2003; Rushton & Minnis, 1997). Arguments on a similar basis led to the dissolution of the Indian Adoption Project though the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (Altsein & Simon, 1991; Rushton & Minnis, 1997). This led to a sharp decrease in domestic transracial adoptions in the United States, turning adoptive parent’s attention to international transracial adoption.

**International Adoption in the United States**

Caucasian couples’ adoption of children internationally was seen as less controversial than domestic transracial adoption and more feasible than same-race adoption due to the lack of available adoptable Caucasian children. International adoption by American couples was influenced by “wars, poverty, lack of social welfare, and social upheaval in other countries” increasing the availability of the adoptive children overseas (Lee, p. 714, 2003). After World War II international adoptions began to increase in the United States (Hollingsworth, 2003; Kim, 1995; Rushton & Minnis, 1997). Kim (1995) also indicated that the adoption of these children was mostly for humanitarian reasons or the desire for a child, coupled with the decreased number of healthy Caucasian infants available through domestic adoption.

Between 1948 and 1953, the couples in the United States adopted approximately 2,418 children from Asia (Hollingsworth, 2003). Most of these children were adopted from Japan. These numbers of adopted children were related to a large number of orphaned and abandoned children in this country, a result of international conflicts and civil wars. Stigma and social ostracism has been directed to Eurasian children, which resulted in these children being relinquished to adoption agencies (Hollingsworth, 2003).
War once again played a major role in international adoption in the United States. When the Korean War ended (Baden & Steward, 2000; Kim, 1995; Ryan, 1983; Serbin, 1997), adoption of orphaned children from Korea totaled 50,000 following the cease-fire in July of 1953, compared to 9,000 in June 1950 (Hollingsworth, 2003; Tizard, 1990). After 1955, large numbers of orphans from the Korean and Vietnam wars, in addition to the mixed race children fathered by U.S. soldiers, were sent for overseas adoption. In the 10 years after the end of the Korean War, Korean children adopted by American families counted for 20% of all foreign adoptions in the United States. By 1986, 59% of all foreign adoptions in the United States involved Korean children (Kim, 1995).

In addition to the ending of the Korean War, Korean children became available for adoption through abandonment; possibly resulting from social stigma associated with their birth (They were born out-of-wedlock, or their parents were of different races.), poverty, parental neglect, or legal loss of parental rights because of mental illness. A result of policy changes inhibiting the release of Korean children for adoption abroad has decreased the international adoption of Korean children since the late 1980s (Hollingsworth, 2003; Tizard, 1990). The adoption focus in Korea recently shifted to keeping the children within the country. This occurred for two reasons: (a) concern over baby stealing and illegal adoptions (Tizard, 1990); and (b) decrease of the stigma of adoption through promoting in-country adoptions (Roby & Whittenburg, 2005).

Today Americans, mostly Caucasian couples, are adopting from more than 40 countries worldwide, and the majority of the adoptions are from Asian countries (Lee, 2003). According to Zamostny et al. (2003), the number of international adoptions in the United State increased from about 6,536 in 1992 to 16,390 in 1999. Of those adopted, nearly
one-half were children less than a year old, and 90% were children less than five-years-old, with most being female and Asian.

Policy Changes

Stories of “baby brokers,” (people who bought and sold children or even kidnapped and sold children), and health concerns of institutionalized children have fueled society to demand a more unified international adoption process. According to Lee (2003) concerns over standardizing international adoption have led governments to create more universal rules for adoption (e.g., Hague Convention on Protection of Children, and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption of 1993) as well as federal legislative policies (Intercountry Adoption Act, and Child Citizenship Act of 2000).

United Nations Convention and Hague Conference

Solutions to adoption from the United Nations Convention and Hague Conference were aimed at:

1. supporting biological families in terms of what was best for the children, for families living in poverty through policy changes;
2. reducing unjust social sanctions against children, allowing every child to be registered after birth to ensure them a name, a nationality and be if possible to know and be cared for by biological parents;
3. protecting children against gender discrimination;
4. respecting the rights of the children separated from their birth families and maintaining contact regularly if in the child’s best interest. An openness of records regarding children’s origin, including their parent’s identity and medical history if possible; and
5. respecting the preservation of the child’s identity (nationality, name, and family relations) as “recognized by law without unlawful interference” (Hollingsworth, p. 215, 2003).

Countries with children who were deprived of their identity would be expected to assist the child in re-establishing his/her identity and maintaining the cultural continuity of the child’s upbringing (ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background). Adoptive parents were charged with the undertaking of the child’s identity development and to aid them in that process, and providing the information on the child’s identity in regards to the birth parents to the adoptive parents. Efforts to eliminate deceptive tactics by which children were secured for international adoption agreements were created to stop illegal transfer and non-return of children. Parents who place a child in adoption would be given informed consent (Hollingsworth, 2003).

*Intercountry Adoption Act 2000*

The Hague Conference was ratified after seven years; it is now called the Intercountry Adoption Act 2000. The Department of the State is the central authority establishing rules in regard to “the accreditation of people providing adoption services under the convention” (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 216). It establishes procedures for recognizing adoptions in the United States that are finalized under the convention in another country and attempting to place a child within his/her birth country before being adopted by parents out of country. Adoption records were to be made available to access and disclosure for the adoptive family. The Hague Convention also provided the “maintenance of state law and the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, and procedures for adoptions of persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption” (Hollingsworth, p. 216, 2003). The enactment of a more universal policy of
adoption and the changing climate of society’s attitude toward adoption provide a basis in understanding adoptive parents. The decision to enter into the adoption process comprises a complex undertaking in which parents face unique aspects of childrearing.

**Korean Adoption Today**

At the end of the Korean War the United States’ adoption of Korean children increased and only recently started to slow down with the policy change in South Korea focusing on in-country adoptions. The adoption of Korean children in the United States has been viewed to stem from several factors: (a) the efficiency and reliability of the adoption system in South Korea, (b) the economic and political growth of Asian countries, (c) the increasing number of Asian communities in the United States, and (d) the stereotype of the well-behaved, hard working Asian people (Kim, 1995).

In the Census 2000 Special Report, Korea was the “largest single-country source of foreign-born adopted children” (Kreider, p.12, 2003) with about 57,000 children (22%) of all foreign-born adopted children. According to the U.S. Department of State (2006), the visa issuance for Korean orphans decreased from 1,773 in 2004 to 1,668 in 2005. This is believed to have resulted from an increased focus on in-country adoption within South Korea. The long standing history of adoption between the United States and Korea lends itself to consideration when deciding from which country to adopt. Other factors include the increasing media coverage of institutionalized children in Eastern European countries and the future affect on the adopted children’s development.

Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, and Stevens’ (2006) study on international adoption reported that when adopting internationally white parents “take the age, health status, and sex, as well as the race or ethnicity, of the child into account” (p. 1219). After further
research they learned that children from China and South Korea were more apt to be healthy than those from Eastern European countries. These results could be an indication why adoptive parents perceive Korea as a country of choice for pursuing adoption.

Adoptive Parents

Adoption Seeking

Adoption seeking, defined as a behavior which precedes the adoption of a child, begins with contact with a lawyer or an agency (Bachrach, London, & Maza, 1991). Bachrach et al. also state that the road to adoption typically starts from one of three points or a combination thereof: (a) desire for a child, (b) inability to have children (i.e., infertility), or (c) other (humanitarian interests). Attitudes toward adoption have changed over the past 30 years following a shift in the reasons to adopt. Before 1970, the focus of adoption was to adopt domestically and of the same race to blend the child into the family without outer appearances distinguishing the child as adopted. From the 1970s to 1985, the desire to care for a child in need was the driving force behind adoption as evidenced in the increase of international adoptions in the United States. After 1985, awareness of international adoptees dealing with health problems or having difficulty adjusting to their adoptive environment came into light, affecting the number of children and from which countries adoptive parents choose (Tyebjee, 2003).

Reasons for International Adoption

Some of the reasons for international adoption were: (a) the large number of younger children available for adoption abroad versus domestically, (b) the adoptive parents’ perception of the international adoption process being quicker, more cost effective, and with fewer possible interactions with the birth family compared to domestic adoptions, and (c)
increased knowledge about institutionalized children in need of homes (Linville & Lyness, 2007).

The larger availability of healthy infants internationally might also play a role in choosing international versus domestic adoption. A couple who desire an infant versus an older child would consider the availability of such children. South Korea’s history of providing quality health care and their large number of adoptable infants make adopting from Korea a reasonable choice (Johnson & Dole, 1999; Kim, Shin, & Carey, 1999). Infants who were available for adoption were more likely to be from Asia or Latin America (Ishizawa et al., 2006).

This Study

One benefit of the long standing history of Korean adoptions by American parents was the wealth of information available and the establishment of the adoption process in Korea. The majority of recent research on international adoption had focused on China, South America, and Eastern European countries due to the increase of children coming from those regions (Hollingsworth, 2003; Kim, 1995; Vonk, Simms, & Nackerud, 1999). A drawback of the combination of these two factors was a decrease in studies on Korean adoption. When Korean adoption was researched in recent years, the focus of the study primarily was on the adoptee, policy, or social worker/adoption agency. Therefore, a gap of information about adoptive parents seeking and caring for Korean adoptees occurred. Current adoptive parents or those seeking to adopt from Korea are in need of research which factors in the changing societies and policies of the two countries (Hollingsworth, 2003; Roby & Whittenburg, 2005). The adoptive parent’s perspective of the process of adoption was
important to understand so adoption agencies and social workers could address the current issues the parents may face.

*Researchers Connection*

Interest in the adoptive parent’s experience of the adoption process started when the researcher was an undergraduate student in developmental psychology. The unfortunate lack of information on international adoption was discovered while writing a paper on transracial adoption. The background of having two adopted brothers of a different race drove the researcher to desire a better understanding of the experience. Upon entering graduate school and deciding on a thesis topic, the memory of researching adoption kept returning. A tentative exploration of the recent articles on adoption showed an increase in studies of international adoption from the perspective of the adoptee or on adoption policy, but the voices of the adoptive parents were limited. To enter into the adoption process was a huge undertaking, especially for international adoption, because there were additional culture and political influences. The interest to discover what brings a person to choose international adoption emerged, combined with the researcher’s background with Asian adoptees, to create this study.
Chapter 2. Methods

A combination of phenomenological and case study structures was used in the data collection and analysis. According to Yin (1994), the theoretical framework for this study was an exploratory case study. An exploratory case study covers three concepts: “(a) what is being explored, (b) the purpose of the exploration, and (c) the criteria by which the exploration will be judged successful” (Yin, p. 28–29, 1994). What was being explored was answered by the main research question: What are the issues of adoption and international adoption which parents encounter?

To focus into the experiences of the participants, four additional research sub-questions were developed:

1. What led these adoptive parents to adopt from Asia?
2. What are the processes this family encountered when adopting from Asia?
3. What are the implications of traveling to the adopted child’s native country?
4. What are the adjustment issues this family now faces?

These research questions addressed the first issue of an exploratory case study—to add light to the adoptive parent’s perspective of international adoption. An important factor of adoption is the adoptive parent. In order for children internationally to be adopted here in the United States, an understanding of what brings people into the process is critical. Their experiences during and after the process can help adoption agencies prepare future adoptive parents. The information learned from this study could also benefit people who are entering into or planning to adopt. A greater access to information about the process and the unique challenges parents face through adoption could ease the transitional process for new adoptive parents as well.
The success of the exploration was determined by the wealth of information regarding the four research sub-questions. The ability to generalize to a large population the experiences of the participants was limited since their situations were tied with their own perspectives. The case study is a “particularization” (Stake, p. 8, 1995), not a generalization. A case is selected and studied in-depth to know what it is and what it does. Through understanding another person’s experience and perspective information gathered could be applied to aid the general public.

The data were composed of interviews, observations, and documents of a Caucasian adoptive couple to better understand their experience with adoption and international adoption. The initial interview questions focused on the couple’s experiences with the adoption process. In the nature of qualitative research, the interview questions changed, expanded, and clarified the views of the participants’ experiences.

Participants

Originally the researcher pursued several couples who had recently adopted or were in the process of adopting a child from an Asian country. In typical qualitative research fashion, the scope of the study emerged as the study progressed and interviews were conducted. The focus changed from interviewing several adoptive parents to a case study of one couple. According to Stake (1995), a case study “…is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The purpose of a case study is to capture the dynamics of a single case. The couple was the case, a “bounded system,” which brings attention to it as an object and not a process (Stake, 1995).
The participants were a Caucasian couple, Karen and John (pseudonyms), who resided in a suburb of a Midwestern university town. The age of the husband and wife in the study were 29-years-old and 28-years-old, respectively. The couple had been married seven years, having met in college, and each earned a Bachelor’s degree. Diagnosed with Crohn’s disease, Karen was advised to not have more children due to health concerns. Their two sons at the time of entering the adoption process were 5-year-old Billy and 3-year-old Stewart. The participants were gathered with the assistance of a gatekeeper—a qualitative research strategy of gaining participants by acting as an initial liaison between the researcher and the participant—through the university community. The gatekeeper informed the participants about the general concept of the research project and asked if they would want to participate. Their information was then given to the researcher to begin interviews.

The point of time in which the researcher entered the couple’s lives was a key element in deciding to do a case study. Prior to the first interview, the participants had received their travel call to fly to South Korea. A travel call is when the adoptive parents are notified that they can travel to their adoptive child’s native country to finish the paperwork and bring the child home. The rest of the interviews were conducted after the couple had returned home and were transitioning into their new family structure.

The couple was interviewed together and separately in a setting of their own choice: in a study room in the local library or in their home. The first two interviews were conducted with both participants together, with subsequent individual interviews. To introduce the participants to the research project and ease them into the interview process, they were first interviewed as a couple. The second interview was performed in their home to accommodate their adopted daughter’s sleep schedule and after the transcription of the first interview was
completed. This allowed for any additional information missed in the first interview to be followed up or to pursue new avenues inferred. Permission was given to collect data from an online journal (blog) created by the wife, which she had started at the beginning of their adoption process. Pictures and quotes were coded from this online journal following the second interview. The husband was asked to begin a journal to balance the wife’s journal.

Each participant completed a consent form and was given the necessary amount of time to read through it and ask questions prior to the interview (Appendix A). Two consent forms were signed by each of the participants. Due to the emergent quality of the study, a new consent form was developed to access the participants’ documents and to alter the research into a case study. The participants were given a verbal summary of why the interview was being conducted and the researcher’s personal connection to the study.

Interviews were audio recorded; when not in use by the researcher, the audio recorder was kept locked in a filing cabinet or case. In the transcription phase, the researcher either wore headphones or worked alone in her place of residence to maintain confidentiality of information recorded. Any documents containing the participants’ identities or personal information were locked in a secure location or pseudonyms replaced their identities.

Ethical issues in qualitative research are unique compared to quantitative studies due to the prolonged and often close relationship between the researcher and participants (Lichtman, 2006). As the study progresses, the issue of ethics in regard to the researcher’s behavior has to be addressed. In the interviews, intimate details were often shared which placed the researcher in the position of choosing what was necessary to disclose in the study. The struggle between ethics and the participants’ right to privacy and the reporting of information learned through the research was addressed. In this study an ethical
consideration regarding privacy was due to the small size of the university community in which the researcher and participants lived. Working and living in a relatively small community in which other people have knowledge of various aspects of the researcher’s study or of the participants’ home life became a consideration. As the study progressed, the researcher was faced with outside questions regarding the identity of the participants when inquiries were made about the research project. To address this issue, information regarding the researcher’s study was only disclosed in generalities and themes with the committee members.

Maintaining confidentiality at times became a concern with the children in the home and during the individual interview with the other partner in the home. To address this issue, the individual interviews were conducted in the basement of the participants’ house while the remainder of the family stayed upstairs. For the research paper the participants were initially given randomly assigned numbers in place of their names to maintain confidentiality, but after the first transcription, the numbers were replaced with pseudonyms. This change allowed for greater clarity when reading the paper.

Data Collection

Phenomenological and case study techniques were used to format the data collection and analysis. Three traditional forms of data collection were implemented: interviews, observations, and documents in the form of journals (Merriam, 2002). The interviews were the main source of data. The researcher conducted multiple interviews with each member of the couple in order to uncover underlying themes. A total of four interviews were performed. Initial interviews were with the husband and wife as a couple rather than individually to gain an insight into their marriage dynamic, as well as to ease them into the process.
Prior to the interviewing process, a list of questions were composed. These questions were grounded in the information gained in the literature review and from personal experiences with adoption. The first interview consisted of 11 questions (Appendix B), and as the study progressed, more questions were added and/or adjusted (Appendix C). The interview process was semi-structured with the list of questions used as a guideline, not asked in a particular order. In the first interview, a desire to maintain a free-flowing conversational style was suggested to the participants. If a conversation ended, the researcher asked follow-up questions or would refer to the list. The early questions mainly focused on the adoptive parents’ experiences with the adoption, their and other people’s perceptions of adoption, and their reflections on the overall experience: “Tell me about your first experience with adoption.” or “If you could tell your past self anything what would you say?”

The audio taped interviews ranged in length from 43 minutes to two hours and 24 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then coded for emerging themes and concepts. Follow-up interviews were conducted to address emerging themes, gain greater depth and clarification, and for member checks.

Over 50 hours were spent transcribing, checking the transcriptions, and coding the data. The total number of pages for the transcriptions was 131, with each transcription length between 16 to 61 pages. Twenty days were spent on transcriptions and data collection, and 192 codes were uncovered, resulting in four major themes. The interviews were conducted over a period of three months, averaging about a month between each interview, with the two individual interviews performed on the same day.

The second method of data collection was observations which were conducted in parallel with the interviews. Observations serve as a “firsthand encounter with the
phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, p. 13, 2002). When observation is done simultaneously with interviews, it is called field study. The adoptive couple’s interactions, body language, and facial expressions were observed when interacting with their adopted child in the second interview. After the first interview, a contact summary sheet (Appendix D) was filled out, with subsequent summaries and reflections of interviews recorded on audiotape following the interviews. Reflections on the home environment were audio recorded as the researcher drove home after the interview.

A third method of data collection emerged after the discovery that the wife had started an online journal of the adoption process at the beginning of their search. Once permission was granted to gather data from the online journal, information was taken and entered into the themes uncovered from the interviews. The importance of these documents was that the data existed prior to the study; they were not created for the researcher, which means there was no intrusion of the researcher to alter the data. To balance the information and perspectives of the couple, the husband was asked to begin a journal which he emailed to the researcher on a weekly basis for one month. Unlike the other forms of documents collected, these were “researcher-generated documents” (Merriam, 2002). The format of his journal was open-ended with the researcher’s desire to maintain a true journal form. The journals provided another look into the couple’s journey through adoption, in addition to a visual guide with pictures.

The data collected from the journals were formatted into tables identical to those created for the transcripts. Four word documents were created for each of the main themes with tables of the data. The only difference between journal data collection and the transcriptions was the inclusion of the dates the data were created.
Establishing Credibility

To ensure credibility for the findings of this research, several techniques were employed: (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, and (c) peer debriefing. Triangulation was addressed through interviews during different stages of the adoption process and through various sources of data. Member checks were conducted with the adoptive couple. The major professor and program of study committee members served as peer debriefers. These methods are examples of validation strategies in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a method of validity used in qualitative research that typically refers to using multiple sources of information in order to establish credibility (Lichtman, 2006; Yin, 1994). Data source triangulation was used to learn if the case remained the same in other contexts, places, or times (Stake, 1995). It uncovered whether the meanings remain the same in different situations, stages of the adoption process, and different sources of data collection. In case studies, using multiple sources of information will strengthen the research (Yin, 2003).

Triangulation was also achieved in this study by interviewing the participants when they were in different stages of the adoption process, providing various perspectives based upon their stage. The different sources of data collection also provided a form of triangulation. The researcher was able to learn their varying perspectives on adoption by conducting interviews with the couple together and separately in addition to information gleaned from the journals kept by the couple. This provided a look into the couple’s experience with limited outside influence.
**Member Checks**

Another method of validation used in this study was member checks as described by Creswell (2007). Member checks conducted with the participants occurred throughout the data collection by asking for clarification on answers given in the interviews. The purpose of these member checks was to ensure the researcher interpreted the data correctly through sharing findings with participants (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995). Examples of themes uncovered from transcriptions were shared with the participants via email, in addition to sharing the model developed from the transcriptions at the end of the data collection period.

The data was given to the participants to examine at their own pace in a weeks time. The researcher, understanding the couple’s busy schedule offered three ways (in person, phone or email) to discuss the information received. Karen notified the researcher that due to John’s work he would not be able to meet, and would prefer to communicate through email. A set of questions were developed asking if the information was accurate and if there was any additional information he wished to add.

1) Are there any questions or concerns regarding the themes?

2) Do you believe the themes accurately represent your experience?

3) In the case of the model do you have any questions or concerns?

4) Do you believe the model is an accurate depiction?

5) Is there anything else which you would like to address or add?

In response to the themes and model developed, John stated that both represented an accurate description of the entire process of adoption. Karen chose to discuss the themes and model via phone. She notified the researcher when she would be available and they went
over the information using the same questions given to John. Karen stated, “It looks good…I wouldn’t have thought of some of it…the substance [to it]” (Karen).

The member check enabled the participants to bring to light any further topics or issues which were not represented in the themes and model. Through obtaining feed back from the couple the researcher was reassured her interpretations of the data was a true representation of the participants experience.

Peer Review

The main mode of conducting the peer review was through regular meetings with the researcher’s major professor, in addition to discussing the data with a fellow peer. The peer was used as a sounding board which provided additional support when formulating and addressing the research. This provided insight from their perspectives on the data analysis as recommended by Creswell (2007). Themes uncovered from the transcriptions were shared with peers to gauge the codes developed from the themes. Analysis of data was shared with the major professor to explore all possibilities of how to assess the data. The model designed to represent the research was reviewed and discussed with the researcher’s major professor as well.

Self-Reflective Journal

To help create awareness of any biases throughout the data collection and analysis, the researcher maintained a journal of her personal experiences growing up with two adopted brothers of Asian descent. To address the biases the researcher’s past experiences might have had on the research, the participants were informed of the researcher’s views and experiences with adoption (Appendix E).
A self-reflective journal was kept on the experiences of becoming a qualitative researcher throughout the data collection process as suggested by Lichtman (2006). The self-reflective journal serves as a means to state the researcher’s background and how he/she is experiencing the research. A unique dynamic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the main filter through which the data flows; by maintaining a self-reflective journal, the functions of the filter are visible to the reader. The articles, books, and transcripts are all interpreted through the researcher’s lens, and, in order for the reader to know the quality and rigor of the research, this lens needed to be clearly stated. The self-reflective journal offers the reader the ability to understand the researcher’s approach and view, thus adding rigor and trustworthiness to the study.

*Researcher as Instrument*

The researcher disclosed to the participants her personal connection to adoption, thus letting the participants know what led her to do the study. The final reason to share this information was the desire for the interviews to proceed in a more conversational fashion. A connection of shared experiences was created through revelation of having a blended adoptive family. Since there were similarities between the researcher’s family structure and that of the participants, this shared knowledge added weight to a simple head nod during the interviews.

*Data Analysis*

The initial approach to this study was phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994). The methodology later emerged to incorporate a case study design. Therefore, a combination of phenomenology and case study methodology was used to analyze the data. A key concept to phenomenology is that people interpret experiences based upon their
“perspective of the meaning it has for them” (Merriam, p. 37, 2002). An element the researcher wanted to capture in this study was how the participants interpreted their experience with adoption and with adopting internationally. According to Moustakas, a phenomenologist wishes to understand human behaviors from the participant’s lens and how the world is experienced through their eyes. For him or her, the important reality is what people imagine it to be. Since the general idea behind phenomenology is to understand other people’s perspectives, this methodology was chosen.

The methodological approach of a case study was emergent in this research. As the researcher transcribed the first interview with the participants, a reoccurring thought was “this can be its own study; there is so much information.” Melding the two methodologies was not difficult due to existing parallels. Case studies typically focus in on one person, place, or event. The participants were the case study. The experiences and information learned from a single interview provided enough data to composite the four main themes. The methodological approach of studying the experiences of people (phenomenology) and focusing on particular people (case study) seemed an almost harmonious joining for this study.

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the research using constant comparison; the process of collecting and analyzing data, developing initial themes, and as the data collection and analysis process continued the data was tested to the initial themes. Analysis of the data was conducted through reading the transcriptions as a whole. Once this was completed, the researcher read through the transcriptions again with the purpose of finding “meaning units” (Moustakas, 1994). Meaning units are also known as emerging themes which sensitize the meaning or theme within the text of the transcription.
This is a phenomenological method of data analysis. These meaning units were written in the margins of the transcriptions. The initial codes were a summary of what was expressed in the transcription.

Upon completion, some of the first codes were determined to not fully express the quote. The researcher searched for more cohesive codes through online dictionaries (Appendix F). New codes were formulated and documented in the researcher’s journal (Appendix G). For example, the code “inconsistency” was created to capture the changing factors of their adoption process. After researching the meaning of inconsistency, it was replaced with the code “fluctuate.” Peers were asked to provide their insight into the code changes, and, after reading the quotes and the definitions of the codes, they reached consensus about the new codes.

Once the codes were finalized, they were grouped into categories or themes. Several themes with sub-themes were developed which portrayed the essence of the phenomena that the couple had experienced. The phenomenological method of looking at the particular (the quote) and broadening it into the general (the code) was applied when examining the transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). In case study methodology, data analysis is a direct interpretation and pulling out of the deeper instances found within the case. When creating the meaning units or codes to express the participant’s quotes, direct interpretation of the deeper instances was conducted.

In the data collection processes, the codes were arranged and/or rearranged into different themes to ensure an accurate expression of the data. After the first interview, four major themes were developed with sub-themes for each. In the data analysis, a concern over the coding and themes emerged after the second interview. Some of the codes did not fit
within the already developed themes. To analyze the conflicting data, the researcher wrote out the four major themes onto note cards with the challenging codes also on note cards. The four major themes were lined up in a row while the researcher pulled out each new code and looked at the transcript for the corresponding quote. After analyzing each new code, its specific quote, and the four major themes, the researcher placed the new codes under the appropriate themes. The researcher described in her journal the process of coding the interviews to ensure an accurate description (Appendix H).

At the end of this process, four major themes were maintained with each theme having eight to 10 sub-themes. The major themes were then placed in a model format to illustrate the phenomena under analysis—the adoptive couple’s experience with adoption and international adoption. To organize the data, the codes were highlighted in the transcripts by their corresponding major themes (Appendix I). The data were then transferred to tables for each of the four major themes. Each theme was placed in a word document with the sub-theme written on the left side of the table and the corresponding quote on the right side of the table (Appendix J). For quick reference a document containing the four major themes, the sub-themes, and a brief explanation of what the sub-themes was created by the researcher (Appendix K).

An unexpected aspect of the study was to understand the health concerns which led the couple into the adoption process. Prior to the second interview, the diagnosis of Crohn’s disease, which affected the couple’s ability to safely have more biological children, had to be researched. Mention of the name and how it influenced their decision to adopt was disclosed in the first interview. Before conducting the second interview, the researcher wanted to have a larger knowledge base of this particular issue to help develop future questions, so an online
search was performed. Information about the disease and how it can affect pregnancy was studied and reported in the journal for future reference and interview questions (Appendix L).

The observations collected played a supportive role to the transcriptions. The information gathered from the observations was used to help illustrate the themes developed from the transcriptions. The contact summary sheets provided information on questions to be included in future interviews, the development of possible themes, and the researcher’s own reactions and self-reflections on the experience of the interview. After the first interview, the contact summary sheet used in written format was changed to audio. It was decided to audio record the contact summary information immediately following future interviews (Appendix M). The audio-tape was then transcribed. This allowed the researcher to gather more information without any time delay. Emerging themes from the first interviews were probed and at times expanded on in later interviews, allowing for clarification and data saturation (data were repeated to the point where there was no new information). Throughout the data analysis, the themes developed were shared with the major professor and committee members to help refine the categories.
Chapter 3. Findings

The four main themes were: (a) *Connection*, (b) *Support*, (c) *Process*, and (d) *The Couple*. The themes were then color coded (i.e., the theme *Connection* was colored blue so every transcription quote categorized as *Connection* was highlighted in blue). This form of organization allowed the researcher to quickly scan the transcriptions after conducting more interviews to look for saturation of data. The highlighted codes were then placed into tables with their corresponding themes. On the left side of the table was the code, and on the right side of the table was the quote, giving the researcher a quick way to reference and analyze the data. The four main themes and sub-themes were formulated from the data collected from the journals, transcripts, and observations.

Several versions of a visual model were developed to express the dynamics of the couple’s experiences of adoption. Model evolved through four iterations before the selection of the fifth and final model. The model expresses the collected data which addressed the research question and themes.
The word connection was chosen to represent this theme because each of these codes expressed “a linking” or “a relationship” to the couple—a connection (“Random House,” 1999). This theme covers 10 subthemes: Past/Introduction, Adopted Child’s Name, Adopted Support, Process, Issues of Adoption and International Adoption, Connection, The Couple, Beliefs, Attitude towards Adoption Differences, Unit, Demographics, Use of Internet Guardian, Fluidity, Policy, Social Worker Agency, Fluctuating – the Ups and Downs, Choosing the Country, Turning Point/Health Stress, Information.
Parent to Child, Serendipity, Culture, Transitions, Birth Moms, Meeting Anna, Foster Mom/Sister, and Interactions with Anna. In each of these sub-themes the relationships which were created through the adoption process were addressed.

Overview of Connection Theme

The Connection theme was expanded from the first to the second interview. The first interview revealed the adoptive parents’ connection to adoption (past/introduction), the adopted child’s name, adopted parent to child, serendipity, and adopted child’s connection to their “native” culture. Past experiences and their first awareness of adoption were discussed to learn if this related to the couple’s decision to adopt. The adoptive couple’s family connection to their daughter’s name and the serendipitous events that occurred while going through the adoption process were two of the sub-themes. A sub-theme of culture was also created to encompass the adopted child’s connection to her “native” culture from the first interview.

In the second interview other aspects of connection were uncovered and added to this theme including the couple’s perspective of South Korea, the history of South Korea including the Korean War, and the differences between South Korea and the United States. The adoptive couple’s trip to South Korea allowed them to form a closer connection to their adopted child’s home country. Their perspectives of what South Korea was like, their knowledge of the country’s history, and their family connection to the Korean War all tie together in what they know about South Korea and thus their child. Their child’s history was tied to her birth country, and by traveling to South Korea and gaining knowledge of the country, they strengthened their connection to their child.
The sub-theme *Transitions* covered many aspects of the family’s transitions in adding a new member to the family, the adopted child’s transition, and the “steps” taken to bring the adopted child home with the couple. The reality of the birth mothers was visible because the adoptive couple chose to stay at the South Korean agency, reaffirming the connection of the adopted child’s past to the couple’s future. Exposure to the birth mothers at the South Korean agency brought the reality of taking another person’s child into their family to the forefront.

The two meetings with Anna, the adopted child, at the agency strengthened the connection between the couple and child and her “native” country. The sub-theme *Interactions with Anna* comprises the observations of the couple interacting with Anna during the second interview. The positive interactions between the couple and their adopted child showed the connection growing between them. Analysis of the data gathered from the individual interviews revealed an expansion on the sub-theme *Culture* to incorporate the adoptive couple’s state of residence in the U.S. and the connection to the foster mom and sister.

*Past/Introduction*

The connection to their daughter was as unique as their paths to her. They vary in length, exposure, and willingness to adopt. In the case of this couple, their backgrounds in experiencing adoption were varied. The wife, Karen, participated in the adoption of two of her cousins. She was included in the entire adoption process and drove her aunt to the airport to pick up one of the adopted cousins. This close connection to the adoption process sparked her interest and desire to adopt in the future. In the first interview she stated, “…I can’t ever remember not wanting to [adopt].” Her ability to see how the adoption process worked, even though it was a domestic adoption and not international, took the adoption process from an
unknown to a feasible level. Once this initial connection was made, Karen continued to research and gain information about different types of adoption. When referring to helping her aunt through the adoption of her two cousins she says, “It still is the best memory of my life…”

According to Young (2007), nearly 60% of the population in the United States has had contact with some aspect of adoption through knowing someone who relinquished a child, having an adoptee in the family, or knowing someone who was adopted. This reflects the John’s introduction to the adoptive process, which was more removed than Karen’s. He had knowledge and friendships with people growing up who had been adopted. Therefore, the concept of adoption was not completely unknown to him. The difference between their introductions to adoption was that Karen’s was experienced within her family, and John’s was within the community. The close proximity and therefore the insider’s perspective of how a family experiences adoption was unknown to John, which was best articulated by John himself:

…She was so directly involved with her cousins you know when she was growing up, when her aunt adopted them, and I think from that time on she has always wanted to adopt, where I really hadn’t even given it a thought, really. (John).

Research has indicated that a person’s introduction to adoption is related to their decision to adopt. Studies have shown that people who personally knew someone who had adopted or fostered a child were more likely to have a positive attitude about foster care and adoption (Tyebjee, 2003). These results indicate that when the interactions between adopted child and parent(s) are viewed first hand, there is a better understanding of the dynamic. This
was the case for Karen; her personal connection to the adoption of her cousins helped to create a positive attitude towards adoption.

**Adopted Child’s Name and Serendipity**

The sub-theme involving the connection between the adoptive couple and their adopted daughter’s name was an unexpected discovery. It played well into the concept of the various serendipitous events which occurred throughout the couple’s adoptive process. The definition used for serendipity was “the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident, and the fact or occurrence of such discoveries” (“The American Heritage,” n.d.). Throughout the data analysis of the first interview in particular, there was a surprising number of situations which had a feeling of coincidence or fate. These special occurrences wove together to create a stronger connection between the couple and their daughter.

The first of such instances began with Karen’s dreams. Two and one-half years prior to entering into adoption, she began having dreams of adopting a little boy from Korea. As the couple started to gather information about different countries from which to adopt, Korea kept resurfacing as an option. As she put it “…it [Korea] just kept popping up” (Karen). With the progression of seeking out information, Karen and John realized they had a family connection to Korea—the Korean War. John’s grandfather had fought in the war which became “a huge pivotal point in his family, for his grandparents it wound up being this amazing love story…and was just a key turning point” (Karen).

The family’s connection to their daughter continued as they learned more about her history. Prior to seeking out adoption, the participants had experienced two miscarriages. When reflecting on whether adopting their daughter was meant to be, they found out her birthday was on the same day as their nephew’s birthday. They believed this to be a good
sign. It wasn’t until a little later that they realized another connection. Their adopted daughter Anna was one week overdue, making her due date the same as one of Karen and John’s miscarriages.

The concept of name connection was revealed through the participants’ family history of having mostly boys. Each member had secretly wished to name their unborn daughter the same name. At the time when Karen and John learned they were adopting a girl, they were faced with the challenge of naming her. A desire to honor her Korean heritage and the rarity of Anna being named by her birth mother, they were able to incorporate her Korean name with her American name. Serendipitously the American name, which was a girl’s name other family members held dear, and the Korean name sounded almost identical. The participants were given the blessings of the extended family to use the treasured girl’s name which allowed Karen and John to honor Anna’s past while blending it with her future.

*Adopted Parent to Child*

In the first interview, one aspect of adoption discussed was the connection of the adoptive parents to the child prior to their meeting. Once the couple received the picture of Anna, the final piece was laid in the puzzle. The visual image of their daughter truly brought her home. She was no longer a name; she had a face.

…It’s kind of weird because you are going through the process and um I don’t know once you, once we accepted the referral we knew who she was, we saw the picture, you have an image to go with the name…. (John).

In many ways the visual image of his daughter made John her father more so than the paperwork. When he was able to put a face to the person who they spent months trying to bring home, the concept of loving another person’s child was no longer an issue. The picture
of his daughter made her his child. She was no longer Anna, the child they were adopting from South Korea; she was a little six-month-old girl waiting to come home. When John talked about the adoption process, he compared it to waiting for a child to be born from the father’s perspective—the preparation and “gearing up” to the point when you get to hold the child in your arms. As time passed, he described how the relationship between himself and his future child changed, “…just kind of over time you start to develop that…that sense of belonging to them and to you…” (John).

The perspective of the husband was interesting to learn since his connection to adoption was different from Karen’s. In many ways he was led to adoption versus coming to it on his own. His viewpoint and how it altered through the study was an unexpected gem for the researcher. Initially he was concerned about connecting and forming an attachment to an adopted child, but as the study progressed and he was brought physically closer to his daughter, that viewpoint changed. In the first interview he expressed fear when meeting Anna for the first time. Would he would be able to recognize her since the last picture had been several months old? He gave the example of walking into a room with a group of babies and being unsure which one she was: “…feel stupid not knowing which one is ours” (John).

This closer connection to Anna also brought up feelings of guilt. In every piece of information Karen and John received about their daughter, the bond between her and her foster mom was described. Knowing that their child was well cared for in South Korea was a comfort to the couple, but also caused feelings of guilt in separating them. “…You are happy to get her but it is conflicting because you don’t want to cause anyone else pain while you are doing it so…” (Karen).
Culture

The adopted child’s connection to her “native” culture was discussed in the interview, focusing on the couple’s decision on from which country to adopt and how they would incorporate Anna’s culture into their family. This sub-theme also included the cultural difference marked by the participants between South Korea and the United States, in addition to the culture of the Midwestern state in which the couple resides. The role Korean history played in the couple’s connection to Anna included their familial link to the Korean War.

In international adoption, the adoptive family is faced with the issue of culture and the culture formation of their adopted child. Culture is defined in this study using Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, and Petrill’s (2007) definition of culture as including “individual differences within families, their values, beliefs, and practices” and “family roles; communication patterns; affective styles; and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity” (p. 390–391). Karen and John discussed how they would take Anna’s lead on the degree to which Korean culture is integrated into the family. Karen’s reasoning behind this decision was based on information from other adopted children and adoptive parents, “…some children as they get older they want to know so much and some entirely reject it…” (Karen).

A desire and plan to visit South Korea in the future with the entire family was agreed upon by the couple and was encouraged by their Korean adoption agency. There were several programs offered through the agency in which Korean adoptees can reconnect with their “native” culture. Karen and John developed several strategies to connect to Anna’s “native” culture through educating themselves on Korea’s history, bringing back items purchased while on their travel call, and learning some basic vocabulary of the Korean language.
“We’ve tried…you know started to learn all the history and that kind of thing so when she asks questions we hopefully have…know how to answer or know where to go for the answers” (Karen). To document the event of meeting Anna and also to show to her when she gets older to help answer questions about her life prior to coming home, video and pictures were taken of the agency and Seoul (the city where the agency was located in South Korea).

While on their travel call, Karen and John were able to visit different parts of the city and take in some of the culture for future reference. This experience was enlightening for the couple because they were able to see some cultural differences between the United States and South Korea. The participants were told that traveling to South Korea, instead of having the child escorted, was a good experience because it can give one an impression of what it is like being a minority. This would give the adoptive parents an idea of what things will be like for their child being in a minority. Even though the couple remarked that it was obvious they were in the minority while in South Korea, it was not a negative experience. “…We just really didn’t, I mean yeah it is novel being a white person there, I guess. I had people taking my picture randomly” (Karen). A possible reason this was not a negative experience could be the positive regard Korea has towards Americans.

To add more to the experience of visiting South Korea, John and Karen went out to eat an authentic meal. The experience alone was entertaining. They went to a restaurant that catered to locals and attempted to eat. Using the universal ordering technique of pointing to the menu, they ordered their food from the wait staff who spoke broken English. “But we got like thirty or so dishes on the table by the end of it. They just kept walking in and bringing more…” (Karen).
John continued to discuss trying to eat the meal with chopsticks and his amazement with the other patron’s skills. “The lady beside us is eating one of these deals in her chopsticks and she sitting there just gnawing and gnawing, pulling stuff up, and I’m like, how do you not flip that up right out of your chopsticks” (John).

Figure 2. Authentic meal in South Korea.

A cultural difference which John and Karen both remarked upon was the issue of space. Physical space was limited in South Korea, especially Seoul, resulting in a different feel and design compared to the United States, which is more open. “But there everything is so much more simple and stream line and it’s just there, what you needed to be there was there it’s not all this extra…” (Karen).
The concept of physical space appeared to have more of an impact on John compared to Karen while he was in South Korea. “It’s crazy I can’t imagine living like that just people stacked on people, just…. No open space…even the subway, here we like our personal space, that area around us have our own space there…” (John). He visually expressed the lack of
room in the subway during rush hour by squeezing his arms to the sides of his torso and rolling his shoulders in towards his body in the attempt to become smaller.

The differences in culture between the United States and Korea were also experienced in Anna’s clothing and how she was raised by her foster mom. Typically in Korea babies are layered in clothing and carried in backpacks. When John and Karen took Anna home on the airplane, they had brought a change of clothes. While removing her clothes, they remarked that it was layer after layer before they even saw skin. “She is so thick looking. After she, we started taking clothes off of her, I was surprised that she could bend her arms” (John). A later observation made by Karen remarked on Anna working on pulling up to stand, “…they are carried a lot more there than here so I think a lot of it was just being lazy. We knew she could pull-up because we had seen [it]…” (Karen).

The participants’ trip to South Korea gave them another degree of connection to Anna and to her past. Through seeing Anna in her current lifestyle, a deeper level of understanding the reasoning behind Anna’s behaviors was created. John and Karen saw the foster moms carrying the babies on their backs in backpacks. This gave them an inside look into what might work with Anna when doing errands or working around the house. The backpack was a comfortable and familiar piece of Anna’s past, so her introduction to it was already laid. She didn’t have to undergo another transition through its use.

In choosing from which country to adopt, the acceptance of people from foreign countries by their hometowns (where their parents reside) and the larger community was considered. Since both Karen and John were born and raised in small towns (where their parents still live), they knew in the future their adopted child would be visiting those areas.
There was also the possibility of moving the family in the future to John’s family farm outside the small town where his parents live.

Karen expressed concern over prejudice against their child based upon the country from which they adopted. Her main issue was choosing a country that did not have a negative connotation connected to its history. For this reason and due to adoption policy issues, Vietnam was not considered. “Even though she’s Asian, they will know that she is from Korea, so I don’t think that, I’m worried a little bit, but not quite a bit as much as if she was from Vietnam” (Karen). This stemmed from Karen’s parents’ hometown and the understanding that some of the community still harbored ill feelings towards Vietnam due to the war. On the other hand John had no concern about Anna’s acceptance in either of their parents’ hometowns, “I guess I haven’t really worried at all about her acceptance down there” (John). Overall the concern over Anna’s acceptance was tempered with the knowledge that the adoption rate has continued to increase in both of their parents’ hometowns. “Yeah, we’ve talked about it and his home town they’ve had a couple you know different um…families who have adopted from Korea…” (Karen).

The awareness of potential prejudice and difficulties encountered by their daughter due to living in a more homogeneous state did not escape the couple:

______ [state where the participants live] is more sheltered obviously I would like to think that it isn’t an issue obviously but you know there are some instances where it is, in different places… that I could see that as possibly being a challenge… (John).

This was balanced out with the belief that their state of residence was also a more “forgiving” place, as Karen stated, by tending to accept people based upon who they are and not on outer appearances.
When reflecting on Anna’s future, Karen was able to temper her experiences with one of her sons with trouble Anna may face in school. The couple had already dealt with their son being picked on in school, which Karen related to children not always picking on other kids because of race or cultural issues.

But, you know there is always going to be something to pick on and I think having him already experience that because my mind does not automatically go it’s because of her race you know it is going to be a problem but it something that they all have to, have to learn. (Karen)

Reflecting on their own past histories with race and adoption, Karen and John took the viewpoint that it was up to them to raise all their children to know better than to judge someone by outer appearances. John compared it to his own childhood friendship with Korean adoptees. “…I was good friends with kids who were Korean, when you grow up with them you don’t think twice about it … she’ll have friends as she grows up and they won’t even…give it a thought” (John).

The issue of adoption and dealing with being adopted was stated as having a greater impact on Anna’s life in the eyes of John. His emphasis about her questioning why she was adopted, what her mother was like, and her foster mother seemed to be more of a concern than issues of acceptance in Midwestern culture. “…I imagine that all those questions might come up, or she might be curious about it. There will be some things there that we will have to talk about, to get through…” (John).

The family’s connection to the Korean War was one more thread woven into the tapestry of this couple’s lives. John’s grandfather fought in the war, and this personal history added to the couple’s decision to adopt from there. A desire to understand more about Korea
to pass onto others and their daughter also fueled Karen and John to learn about the country’s past. The wealth of knowledge that Karen shared regarding past rulers, palaces, and pieces of history were driven by her wish to create a bond with her child.

When reflecting on their experience traveling to South Korea, Karen was in awe of the country’s age. “It was just amazing to be in a country that old. You know the U.S. is so young comparatively and to have all that history” (Karen). The close tie South Korea established with the United States during the Korean War was still visible when Karen and John visited. The majority of the signs in Seoul were written in both English and Korean, and their interactions with the locals were overall very friendly. “We hadn’t experienced any animosity. Quite the contrary, people had just come up to ask us where we were from we would say ‘oh, the states’ and they’d say ‘oh thank you’. It was interesting” (Karen).

In the Korean War, North Korea pushed South Korea into the farthest southern corner of the country in an attempt to gain control of the land. The United States lent armed forces and relief aide to South Korea, giving them the help they needed to push North Korea back. Today the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a stretch of empty land separating North and South Korea. In the middle of this wasteland stands a lone building which people can enter for tours. John and Karen discussed their desire to tour the DMZ but were unable to do so because of the lack of time. They had been told it was an interesting place to visit because you cross over to North Korea for a short time, passing by armed soldiers. “People that have gone over there say it is kind of creepy…walking through there” (John). He expressed a familial reason to travel to the DMZ because it was a connection to his grandfather whose stories it would bring to life. “…After hearing stories when he was over there in the war and kind of get a…a feel of what it’s like now…” (John).
Transitions

The sub-theme Transitions included several different aspects of the transitional stages which the family encountered and the transitional factors of the roles within the family. This sub-theme was placed under the main theme Connection because, through experiencing these various transitions, each member of the family experienced another tendril of connection.

Travel call. A connection to their unmet child was verbalized in their desire to make the transition for her as easy as possible by learning as much about her as they could before taking her home. In the beginning of the adoption seeking process, the couple wanted to have their child escorted to the United States. Using an escort is a common practice in international adoption—an employee of the adoption agency brings the adopted child to its adoptive family.

Flight home. After further consideration they had decided to travel to South Korea instead. The change of plans was a result of reflecting on easing the transition for their child and themselves through information learned from the foster mother. Karen expressed the idea through learning the “tricks,” “what makes Anna tick,” and “what helps her go to sleep or what she is afraid of.” The experience of already having two children was an influence in the decision for the couple. They made comparisons between their two sons and the “tricks” they learned to help soothe and comfort them and knew that information would help in Anna’s transition into their family.

One of the first transitions occurred on the flight home from Korea. This was only the second time Karen and John had Anna alone since the two previous visits had been with the foster mom and an agency employee. The 34 hours without sleep while traveling over several time zones were taxing for all three. John expressed his concern over the flight and how
Anna would travel. Overall their first time visiting with Anna went smoothly with Anna crying only a little. Since the flight home to the United States was going to be a long trip with unfamiliar people, John thought:

I wonder how this flight is going to go you know [shrugs shoulders with a worried expression]…Is she going to be like this the whole way or is going to get over it quick? We just didn’t know. (John).

Armed with Anna’s “favorite” foods and bottles of formula, they embarked on their transition “home.” Experience with children became another positive factor for John and Karen when Anna refused all her claimed favorites, and “she would gag and pull it out of her mouth, like we were poisoning her” (Karen). Switching to bottles became their only option, and, by the time the family arrived in the United States, they only had two packets of milk left.

Karen. Each member of the family underwent a transition when Anna became a member. Some of the family members experienced a change or alteration in their role in the family. Karen had to undergo the mental switch of having a baby in the house again and dividing her attention between all three children. As a stay-at-home mom this transition was cushioned by the fact she did not also have to divide her time with an outside job. Karen expressed her transition back to a mother of an infant as comparable to if she had a baby biologically:

It has been a lot more difficult for me because the boys were self-sufficient and now you have to pay attention, it would be the same as if we had a biological child again you know just going back to it [having a baby] again. (Karen).
One difference she did mention between having a baby biologically and adopting was not having the newborn stage where the baby stayed where you put it. John also remarked on the idea that yes they have a baby, but she was very mobile. So the adjustment to being aware of where she was at all times versus caring for a three-year-old and a four-year-old who were more independent was a factor. The age difference between the children created a different challenge as Karen attempted to be there equally for all three:

It is harder because I am more tired trying to split, mentally more than physically really, trying to split time you know and be enough for all of them, classic mother’s tale you know, but before I felt like I was handling it better and now they are at such different stages that it is hard. (Karen).

One of the tests of caring for all her children came when the oldest son Billy was sick with strep throat. It was still early in Anna’s transition into the family, making her need of Karen’s attention equal to Billy’s. In this situation, Billy wanted to be held and Anna needed to have constant eye contact. Karen expressed her struggle in comforting both children and the difference between Anna’s and the youngest son’s needs. “…if it had been Stewart I could have been, ‘this is what is going on I can’t hold you today’, but with her you can’t do that” (Karen). She was able to understand Anna’s need for constant support and its importance in building their attachment through that support. Her solution to the problem allowed for both children’s needs to be met. “Well I was in the chair and she would stand between my legs and he was with me all snuggled up…” (Karen).

John. John’s transition with the addition of Anna into the family was slightly different than Karen’s. With another child to care for, running errands had become more of a struggle for Karen, leaving John the duty of completing them. Similar to Karen, he has to split his
time between three children instead of two. Since Anna was still young, her bedtime was earlier than that of the rest of family, making John’s time in the evening with her shorter compared to his time with the boys. “When I get home late in the day and she is only up for an hour before she has to go to bed it makes it a little more difficult…” (John). At the same time, John acknowledged his sons’ need to play with Dad since they haven’t seen him all day either. He expressed an understanding of the children’s needs by splitting up his time with them. “You’ve just…kind of have to split your time up a little more, you know, you don’t want to spend all with Anna because then the boys start feeling kind of left out…” (John).

*Sons.* The sons, Billy (five-years-old) and Stewart (three-years-old), have also undergone some transitions. Their time with their parents was now divided among three instead of two children, Stewart was no longer the baby in the family, and the boys had to learn how to live with a baby in the house. Karen and John expected some of the transitional issues which are typical with any new addition to the family. The concern over Stewart’s transition was higher versus Billy’s due to Billy’s desire to have a sister and since he was used to having a younger sibling. Stewart’s adjustment was anticipated by his parents to be greater since he underwent more of a role change. Both John and Karen commented on his transition: “Stewart is the one that thinks she is out to get absolutely everything that is his” (John), and “…we thought he [Stewart] would be super jealous, but it hasn’t been so much of that he is just possessive of his things” (Karen). These transitional issues have been dealt with by hoarding toys behind specifically arranged furniture which blocked Anna from a corner in the living room. For the time being this offered Stewart a safe haven for his toys, though his room was still subject to invasion.
Anna. Then there was Anna’s transition into her new family and home. Several factors helped ease her transition—her foster mom, her personality, Karen, and John. While in Korea, Anna’s foster mom provided Karen and John with Anna’s pillow. This simple and comforting object allowed Anna to self-soothe and has given her an anchor in a sea of unfamiliarity. Karen described Anna’s reaction when she pulled it out of Anna’s diaper bag on the plane home from Korea: “She got really excited when we pulled it out…was patting it and kissing it and loving it” (Karen).

This pillow also served as a transitional item to bedtime, since in Korea Anna was used to pulling it out and lying down on her mat to sleep. Now she can still have it when going to bed. It worked as a signal for her that it is time for bed when she has it. The pillow had also been helpful for car trips when visiting other family members. As long as she had her pillow, she was able to sleep, “…pretty much as long as she has that when she is asleep she is great” (Karen).

A particular part of Anna’s transition was dealing with her grief in losing her foster mom and family. Prior to traveling to South Korea, John and Karen gathered information on grief related issues for adoptive children, either through the online forums of which they were members or through their social worker. Aided with this knowledge, they have tried to ease Anna’s transition into their family.

She would wake up every half hour with gut wrenching sobs, scared, and you would have to try to get her to fully wake up and look you in the face and then she would lay down and be fine. Half an hour, twenty minutes later she would wake up, that happened for a couple of nights, then started again. (Karen).
To help Anna, Karen had changed from being called Mama by her children to Mommy because of the similarity between Mama and Umma (the Korean word for Mom). When Anna would hear Mama, she would look for her foster mom and become upset when she couldn’t find her. Karen and John’s awareness of this connection was implemented to decrease the stress of Anna’s transition. Karen described one day when she was feeding Anna, and she was trying to teach Anna to say Mommy.

She looked at me and she patted my check and she goes ‘Umma’. Ok I’ll take it, you know. It felt really good, but now she will only, she says, calls for me if she is mad.

I’ll get a ‘Umma, Umma’ [in a sad voice]. (Karen).

Though Anna had difficulty separating Mama and Umma, she had no trouble with the use of Dada. It was one of the first things she started saying repeatedly and especially when she saw John.

Another way to ease Anna in her transition was the idea to limit her initial exposure to different people and places. Unfortunately plans changed, and they ended up visiting several family members and had to drive hours to do so. At that point in time, Anna was still in the beginning phase of transitioning into the family. Anna’s adjustment had been advancing smoothly up until that point with a decrease in night terrors and greater exploration during the day. The experience reminded Karen and John that they still needed to limit her “outside” interactions. When remarking on the experience, Karen and John admitted to feeling like they had “screwed up.” “…She just completely flipped out so we have just stayed home, she has left the house once in two weeks and she is doing a lot better” (Karen).
**Birth Moms**

A unique aspect to their trip to the Korean adoption agency was random encounters with the birth mothers living in the facility. The program was designed to have the birth mother living in the facility prior to her child’s birth. She would have the baby in the agency’s hospital, and the infant would then be taken to the nursery. While staying at the agency Karen and John would cross paths with the birth mothers, dine at a table across from them, and even ride in the same elevators. Because of the language barrier and societal rules, Karen and John did not talk to the birth mothers. This lack of communication, though, was only external. In several of the interviews, Karen expressed she had had a strong desire to offer solace to the birth mothers by stating their babies would go to loving homes.

You want to give them be able to give them some assurance that you are going to be a good parent, that when they see people like us that they can trust you know that we are going to take care of these babies. (Karen).

The experience of actually seeing the birth mothers made their existence and role in their future children’s lives a reality. They were no longer just words written on a form; they were mothers who had to make the difficult decision to not raise their children. These encounters, though experienced in parallel rather than through interaction, brought to life the reality of Anna’s past to their future, acknowledging that someone had to create an adoption plan (preparation and paperwork to release a child into adoptive care) and follow through with it in order for them to have Anna. “Yeah and you feel for the birth mother you know” (Karen).
Meeting Anna

The two meetings with Anna were pivotal in forming a connection with their daughter. In the first meeting John and Karen were joined by Anna’s foster mom and the Korean social worker. In the second meeting they were able to take Anna to their room at the agency to be alone with her. Prior to the first meeting, John and Karen had an accidental interaction with Anna and her foster mom in the hallway. Since it was considered rude to be early in Korea, they found themselves waiting in the hall for their first meeting with Anna. As they stood there, they saw a small group of people coming from the doctor’s office. Some of the women were carrying babies on their backs. The wonderment and awe of the moment was captured in John’s words:

We just kind of looked over (deep breath) did a double take, and she [foster mom] looked at us and kind of gave us a smile and kept walking and of course Anna was in the carrier on her back just bouncing, looking around. I looked at Karen; we looked at each other and just smiled (laughing). (John).

It was in this moment that John’s worry about identifying Anna was erased. There was instant recognition. “There was no doubt when we first saw her, that’s her” (John). Karen expressed her joy in this event through her tears, which were unexpected. When she saw Anna she said, “oh my gosh it’s her, and she just looked right at us and smiled” (Karen).

After the accidental meeting in the hallway, John and Karen attended the official meeting for about an hour in a tiny room with toys. Inside this small room the four adults and the baby interacted. John and Karen described their first engagement with Anna as positive. “We just played and played, she took to us right away, crawled right over to us…” (John). A factor which possibly aided the couple in their meeting was Anna’s foster mom. This was her
seventh foster child, so she understood the process and was able to help facilitate Anna’s transition to her new family.

She kind of sat back you know and kind of pushed Anna out in the middle to play and she is a friendly anyway, so she was crawling around playing. But when, the foster mom, anytime she [Anna] would look at her foster mom for reassurance she would [gesture] “oh, its fine.” (Karen).

During this meeting the couple was also able to ask the foster mom about Anna’s likes and dislikes. This allowed them to gain more personal information about Anna’s personality and her life with her foster family. “We talked a lot we also played with her [Anna], but talked a lot to the foster mom…” (John).

The second meeting varied from the first since John and Karen were able to have alone time with Anna in their room in the guest house. Their confidence entering into the second meeting was fostered by the positive interactions in their previous visit. “We just felt pretty good about because the way she had been with us, played the first time” (John). Some tears were shed by Anna during this meeting which John believed were related to seeing the foster mom in the room and then not being able to see her again. Anna’s tears did not last long once Karen gave her a bottle and they played.

Foster Mom/Sister

The creation of the participants’ connection with Anna was assisted by her foster mom through various avenues. The foster mom provided Anna with her pillow which helped in her transition into John and Karen’s home. She also encouraged Anna to interact with the couple during the two meetings. Anna being raised in a loving home in which she established
an attachment with her foster mom laid the foundation for building a positive attachment with John and Karen.

Karen and John were thankful for Anna’s foster mom caring for their daughter, but they were also torn because of the separation the adoption caused. “That makes me sad, Mrs. _____ [foster mom] was so attached to Anna too and she was extremely professional, but how does that not rip your heart out” (Karen). John’s reaction to Anna’s relationship with her foster mom was similar to Karen’s. He was happy that she was in a loving home and was sad for them over the separation. John attributed the fact that her foster mom was experienced in raising foster children to possibly making the separation a little easier for the foster mom, but still expressed a sense of guilt in his role in the separation:

Because they spent, it’s been about eight months together…that had to been very hard, but at the same time you know it’s her six or seventh baby so if it was her first one, I…it probably isn’t any easier, but you know what to expect so it’s I don’t know, I’m not saying its okay that we took her away… (John).

John felt it would be important in the future to help Anna understand that she was cared for by her foster mom when Anna’s started asking questions about her past. He believed providing Anna with the information that she was loved and cared for by her foster mom would benefit Anna. John also expressed hope in reuniting Anna and her foster mom in the future. “…She had a pretty special bond I think with Anna and hopefully someday we can see her again or meet her again. . .” (John).

While Anna was in her foster home, she also had a foster sister. Karen noted that the separation from her sister is apparent when Anna sees a dark haired little girl about the same age. Cultural differences between the United States and Korea limited the amount of
information Karen and John could learn about Anna’s foster family. Karen’s words about the attachment between Anna and her foster mom best expressed the double edge of the relationship:

I can’t explain as a mom in words what it means for someone else to care for your child with that much love. Because yeah, the amount of gratitude is just beyond, and I’m not threatened by the bond she had with her. It laid a foundation for what she has with me, but it makes me sad on the other side because I don’t know that much about her [foster mom] and the cultural differences didn’t permit me to question her so if Anna asks questions later, I don’t know. (Karen).

*Interactions with Anna*

Interactions between Anna, Karen, and John were observed while conducting the second interview. Seated around the table in the kitchen of their home, the couple answered questions while feeding Anna a snack. She sat in her high chair munching on food, verbalizing loudly while we talked. The observation of these interactions between Anna and John were especially interesting because, of the two participants, he expressed more concern over the degree of attachment with their adopted child.

John attended to Anna throughout the interview, sitting next to her, feeding her crackers, and then getting her ready for bed. His interactions with Anna were positive and loving throughout the interview. While talking about their accidental meeting with Anna in the hallway of the Korean agency, John turned to Anna and smiled at her. “Weren’t ya [talking to Anna]? Wrinkle nose. [Anna proceeded to scrunch up her nose]. Yes, I think you are” (John).
Their home was warm, inviting, clean, and organized. I was surprised with three children how tidy it was. It had a very welcoming, open, loving feel to it. The kitchen was set up to cater to living with children. It had a play kitchen in the corner, the cabinets had locks on them for the baby, and the booster seats were set up. In the beginning of the interview, Anna sat with us and had some food. John, in a relaxed manner, fed her crackers and talked to her. When she was playing with her food and trying to knock it off the tray, he told her in a very firm voice “no.” There seemed to be an ease and comfort with her and with their children coming in and out of the conversation. The love and mutual respect between child and parent was visible in the communication and respect when the parents said “you have to leave the room,” and also when the parents accepted the boys coming into the room and listening to what they needed to say before asking them to leave the room.

Support

The second theme, Support, incorporated the various avenues of support given to the couple and the support they provided others. This theme included seven subthemes: Family/Friends, Social Worker, Parenting Seminar, The Other (Adopting) Couples, Foster Mom, Internet/Online Forums, and Advocacy.

Overview of Support Theme

The Support theme covered the support the adopting couple received from others, as well as that which they gave themselves. The couple’s families, friends, internet/online forums, other (adopting) couples, John’s hometown, John’s boss, their social worker, other adoption employees and services, the foster mom, and their adoption agency provided support throughout the adoption process. The couple also received support through their own advocacy and by advocating for others.
The **Support** theme originally had five sub-themes: *Family/Friends–Announcement, Own Advocate, Social Worker, Humor*, and *Advocacy–Stigma*. Analysis of the data showed a lack of substantial information regarding the concept of humor as a sub-theme for the main theme **Support**. Therefore, it was removed from the list. The sub-theme *Announcement* was incorporated into the family and friend’s sub-theme since the issues of announcing their adoption was related to the support of the friends and family. *Stigma* was incorporated into the sub-theme *Advocacy* because it dealt with the issues of stigmatism in Korean law against which Karen advocated. *Own Advocate* and *Advocacy* were combined under the title *Advocacy* since the participants were their own advocates and advocated for others.

After the second interview, four more sub-themes were added to this main theme: *Parenting Seminar, the Other (Adopting) Couples, Foster Mom*, and *Internet/Online Forums*. The couple received and provided support by working with other adopting couples. The adopted child’s foster mom provided support for the adoptive couple through the transition process. Online adoption forums and the use of the internet gave the adoptive couple support when sharing experiences and gaining knowledge. The parenting seminar which provided information on the adopted child’s experience of grief and identity development was added to the main theme of **Support**. The individual interviews did not provide any new sub-themes, only saturation of those previously uncovered.

**Family and Friends**

The sub-theme *Family and Friends* encompassed the support given to the participants as they embarked on and journeyed through the adoption process. Family members provided John and Karen support through their close-knit relationships. When choosing Anna’s name, they wished to maintain her Korean name as closely as possible but ensure it would be usable
in English and to also honor John’s grandmother. To solve part of this issue, Anna was given her great-grandmother’s name as her middle name.

As mentioned earlier, Anna’s name was a cherished family name that other members had wanted to name their child if they had had a girl. When John and Karen decided that they wanted to give Anna her name, they wanted to have family approval first. Since girls were a rarity in their families, the fact other members had also wanted Anna’s name was important to address. John talked to his sister about naming Anna to get her approval. “She said just started laughing…she said, ‘no we…I always thought we would…I tried it three times, didn’t work; I’ve given up’.” (John).

The issue of support from the family was a slight concern for Karen when disclosing their decision to adopt. The closeness of John’s family and the fact that her family already had embraced adoption eased this worry: “I figure they love children so they are a pretty tight-knit family so I figured they would be pretty supportive and I figured that my family would be pretty excited because there are the two cousins…” (Karen). The support given by the family was expressed by John’s retelling of a Christmas picture taken of his two expectant sisters holding their stomachs and Karen holding her stack of paperwork.

“There are just the three of us in the family…at Christmas time with the three of us all expecting…they stood up and Karen was in the middle holding her stack of paperwork…the three expectant mothers…” (John).

John and Karen’s families were not as surprised about their decision to adopt since Karen had discussed it for years, and they knew the concerns related to Karen’s health. Family members expressed relief regarding their decision to not have more biological
children out of fear for Karen’s health, and they accepted the couple’s choice to adopt as understandable since Karen and John wished for more children.

John found unexpected support from his boss when he asked for future time off for the travel call. When he explained the reason behind the trip, he learned his boss had been adopted domestically. “He really got, he kind of really perked up” (John). His boss provided John with support through telling his own and his sister’s adoption stories.

John’s hometown was a source of support even with Karen’s concern over Anna’s acceptance. Due to the small size of the town and John’s parents’ close connections to the community, the people there had rallied around John and Karen’s decision to adopt. There were also other members of the community who had adopted internationally or knew someone who had, which John attributed to their support.

Yeah and there are so many families in that town that either…have already adopted from Korea so many…have a family member that has done that so everybody since the time that they heard about it have been all excited about it (John).

Another way John and Karen received support from their family and friends was through gifts created for Anna’s foster mom and for the babies in the Korean agency nursery. John’s grandmother painted an orchid on a china plate for Anna’s foster mother as a gift for caring for Anna. On the back of the plate she wrote Anna’s name in Korean and her birth date. One of Karen’s friends made about 40 blankets with looped ribbon sewed along the edges for the babies to snuggle and touch. When John and Karen traveled to Korea, they arrived with an entire box full of these little snuggle blankets. The picture of the blankets given to the adoption agency was shown to the researcher during the second interview:
Picture of a big cardboard box filled to the brim with fleece blankets of all different colors. On the very top of the pile lays a soft yellow colored blanket. It is folded in upon itself. Spaced evenly along the edges of the blanket are loops of ribbon. Each unique ribbon has been sewn on separately. A white ribbon covered with rainbow colored polka dots stands out from the other ribbons. The satiny smoothness of the colored ribbons comes through in the picture, making your finger tips itch to confirm what your eyes see. The gift of comfort and warmth the blankets promise wait unadorned in the plain cardboard box. (Observation of picture, 2/27/08).

Karen’s friend also wrote a letter of recommendation for the couple when they were compiling their paperwork for the adoption. The creation of a personal forum to discuss with friends the trials and tribulations of pursuing adoption was a prominent source of support for Karen. In her journal she thanked them for their support: “Thank you, ladies, for being my Partners in Spaz” (Karen, 10/15/07).

Friends and family showed their support towards the couple by meeting them at the airport when Karen and John arrived home with Anna. The event was recorded, pictures were taken, and stories were told as everyone was introduced to the newest family member. John and Karen had known that some people would be at the airport, but family who had driven long distances was a surprise. As they descended on the escalator, the couple was welcomed by 10 family members and friends holding signs. John’s reaction to the experience:

Just everybody else’s reaction as we came down and saw her for the first time that was kind of neat to see, everybody’s faces. You know, they were just all kind of glued on her, watching her, getting every glimpse of her… (John).

Karen expressed similar feelings:
It meant so much and then it was cool because my Aunt pulled my cousins from school so it was a nice circle of life kind of a thing to have them there and my Aunt and the, my cousin who I drove her to the airport for, they were probably two of the most excited people there and you know it's, it was neat to see that. (Karen).

Advocacy

This sub-theme was unexpected and covered how the couple supported each other and themselves through advocating for the adoptive children in Korea. In Korea the law is established that the children are registered under the father’s name, not the mother’s. If the father is not known or the mother will not document his name, the child is not registered. Karen’s response to the effect this law had on Anna’s history was strong:

I cried, and I’m not big crier it’s going to sound like I am, I’m not, its just made me so sad for her, it’s just erased, it’s just gone, there is nothing left but her name and it’s not and it’s just sad. (Karen).

John and Karen also advocated for the babies in the Korean agency’s nursery. They brought the blankets which Karen’s friend made and spent time in the nursery caring for the infants. While staying in the Guest House, adoptive parents were encouraged to help in the nursery that cares for the newborns until the infants are declared stable and given to foster families. The couple had overheard that volunteering in the nursery was a challenge since it housed up to 27 babies and had only two staff members. Armed with the determination that they would fully offer their services, John and Karen stayed in the nursery for over two hours.

It was a small room with large windows facing the hallway and was lined with basinets on every wall. In each basinet lay a baby. A few remained empty while those
children were changed on the desk or rocked in the swing. Bottles were propped up next to an infant’s mouth by a towel. “Just sitting there, set the bottle, prop them up and walking away and so then they really didn’t have…the connection stuff” (John). Seeing the room filled with newborns was difficult, but Karen was comforted with the knowledge that someone wanted to adopt each and every one of them. Their experience in the nursery and the fate of the babies caused a reaction for anyone who saw the pictures which Karen posted on her online journal.

…Yeah I have had a lot of comments on that [picture of the babies in the nursery], and I only had one person say, “I wish you hadn’t shown that because it broke my heart.” Where everyone else it has moved, it has moved people to give donations, other people just want to go there and help take care of the babies whether for a mission trip or personal trip or whatever so I don’t regret it and it is what it is. It’s not like it isn’t the truth. (Karen).

John and Karen both remarked that by the time they finished helping in the nursery there were babies they wanted to smuggle out and take home. “There were three or four of them there that I wanted to fit into a suitcase and bring home…” (John). Karen said she wanted to hide them in her large smock which she wore while attending to the babies.

Social Worker

The couple’s social worker was a support system for John and Karen for several reasons. She helped them navigate the paperwork and legal process of adopting a child, but she also was able to provide information about being an adoptive parent from a personal perspective. Their social worker had adopted several children from Russia and therefore was familiar with some of the common issues which adoptive parents face.
One such issue was dealing with grief. This could be the grief over the separation from the foster family, grief over the change in environment, and so forth. To help Karen and John anticipate any such issues, their social worker discussed the possibility of Anna grieving. Karen also researched grief related to adopted children online to gather more information about what to expect. When Anna started to grieve more after her first two weeks home, Karen remarked on the change and asked the social worker why it hadn’t happened earlier. She was able to relate this event to her own experiences with her adopted children: “…she said ‘you don’t always know what is going to trigger it but all of the sudden it will come out again’” (Karen).

In preparing the documents for the adoption process, the social worker anticipated a potential set-back due to Karen’s health and the need to be ready to deal with any questions the Korean agency would have regarding the issue beforehand so as to not delay the adoption. When Karen and John waited to hear their adoption status and for the two governments to process their paperwork, the couple was supported by their social worker. “Yeah, so she definitely understood any pangs in waiting, like that, or when things don’t go right with the government and stuff” (Karen). As their social worker had personally experienced the trials and tribulations of adopting a child, her support was an extra comfort to the couple.

Today I “met” the social worker, ______, over the phone. We talked for an hour and a half! She's been through the process herself—four times over!—and has a crazy schedule so she knows what things are like on both ends. (Karen, 6/28/07).

She also gave the participants support through her positive comments about them. When she reviewed them in the home visit, the social worker remarked that the couple was
great. After the adoption was finalized, she asked Karen to let her know when they wanted to start the process again.

*Parenting Seminar*

The parenting seminar is scheduled once a year for adoptive parents to attend in order to learn information about cultural identity, grief, and other subjects which pertain to being an adoptive parent. This seminar is designed to support adoptive parents as they begin their transition in raising an adopted child. Karen and John did not attend the seminar prior to traveling to South Korea to pick up Anna. Because of the speedy acceptance, they had already missed the seminar. After bringing Anna home they once again were unable to attend because it would require an overnight stay, which they were not comfortable with since it was still early in Anna’s adjustment to their home. “We would have to leave, left her [Anna] over night and I was not ok with that and we called and they let us out of it” (Karen).

*Other (Adopting) Couples*

Support through other couples was received and given by Karen and John. The recycling of support from and to adoptive parents was an interesting concept. They called and gave us all kind of tips and tricks of the trade because they had adopted at that point and we just turned it all over…we have giving them all the travel advise that we have so it’s just going down the line. (Karen).

The participants’ social worker gave them contact information of other couples who had adopted internationally to discuss any additional adoption issues or ask questions. This other couple was meant to act as counselors for John and Karen to rely on as they entered the adoption process. Unfortunately there was no connection between the two couples. Some of the main topics John and Karen wanted to gather information on, such as traveling to the
child’s “native” country, the other couple could not comment on since their child had been escorted. Ironically, that same couple later went on a travel call, so John and Karen supported them in their latest adoption. “…So it’s been kind of like, it’s been reversed anyway” (Karen).

A difference John and Karen remarked on several times was fact that they already had children, and some of the other adoptive parents were first time parents. This difference reflects some of the expectations and knowledge of children that John and Karen had with Anna compared to the other adoptive parents and their children. The participants also had unique questions regarding their son’s transitions as Anna entered the family. “Yeah, so they [first time parents] don’t have any experience you know trying to see, you just don’t know the quirks or the things to try and so they were having a heck of a time” (John).

When Karen and John stayed in the Guest House at the Korean agency, they played a supportive role to another couple, Megan and Jim, who were adopting their first child. The inexperience of the couple combined with separation difficulties with the foster mother brought forth the participants’ desire to help Megan and Jim. The care Megan and Jim’s adoptive son’s foster mother had for him was visible, but also possessive. During the visits Megan and Jim were not allowed to have contact with the baby as the foster mother used her body to block him from their touch. “…Babies understand that. So they had a very hard transition, flight, just rough” (Karen). John and Karen both expressed their sympathy for the new parents and their struggles with the foster mother. “They didn’t know what to do, you know, and Megan was falling apart because…it was just bad” (John).

Megan and Jim shared the flight home to the United States with the participants. At one point on the flight, Karen returned to her seat where John told her to look at Megan and
Jim. While traveling they learned that the other couple had never been told that their child might grieve.

…We could see everything that was going on the whole time. I looked over there, “What’s going on?” he says “They’re crying.” So [big sigh] so I went across the aisle. “Is this normal [they ask Karen]?” Well their social worker never told them there might be grieving. (Karen).

Karen’s anger and disbelief over this oversight was expressive. “Never told them that the baby might grieve, so they had not…walked into that never knowing any of this might happen” (Karen). After hearing this, she talked to the couple for a time explaining about the grieving process of adoptive children, leaving the couple with a little comfort.

Once John and Karen returned home, they were then able to provide support to other adoptive parents through sharing their story. “…they had wanted tips on traveling and stuff so we’ve been on the phone calling…and emailing back and forth, helping them plan their trip too” (Karen). Karen’s ability to help other couples was seen as a fun way to provide support. She remarked that even having pictures of the infants in the Korean agency nursery could benefit a family one day since they were posted on her blog.

Who knows with the online forum I might be able to give somebody pictures of their baby from that time too you know, and that is part, I remember if this is what he or she was like that day and that is just one more piece for that family you know. It’s like a big puzzle. (Karen).

*Foster Mom*

An unexpected source of support for the researcher to uncover was Anna’s foster mom’s support of John and Karen. She created this support through various ways. As
mentioned above, she provided the couple with Anna’s pillow which gave Anna comfort and security. The foster mom also showed her support through her behavior during the meetings with the couple and Anna. She encouraged Anna to play and interact with the couple, while supplying them with detailed information on Anna’s likes and dislikes. John’s description of the giving and receiving ceremony in which the foster parents, adoptive parents, and child say a prayer and their goodbyes was an example of the foster mom’s level of support. “She handed Anna off and we played and talked and it wasn’t until towards the end that we were saying goodbye and they were saying their prayer, to bless the babies as they left, that she [foster mom] cried” (John).

The foster mom also offered her support to the participants through giving them a present. In the giving and receiving ceremony she gave the couple a cross-stitch which she had made for Anna. “…she made a cross-stitch picture for Anna and she wrote Anna in English” (Karen).

Internet/Online Forums

The internet was a source of support for the couple through their ability to research information on Korea and participate in online discussions about adoption in the forums. This form of support was mostly utilized by Karen. She was directed to online adoption forums by their social worker. Online forums are discussions performed online in which people can post questions and comments on topics of interest. Karen used sites that were directly connected or linked to adoption agencies. Initially she just watched the forums, reading the discussions. After about four months of this she began posting questions and comments.
The online forum allowed the adoptive couple to get instant feedback from other adoptive parents who either were experiencing or had experienced the same events. John remarked on getting feedback from other adoptive couples:

…Always two or three different internet forums that were full of people that were going through different stuff, that something came up or something like that or whatever, we are going through this thing, why is this happening, has this ever happened? (John).

The sharing and sympathizing through the online medium helped the couple feel like they were part of a community versus struggling alone. After John and Karen completed their travel call they were in a position to offer help to newer adoptive parents by answering their questions. “…If there is a specific question that I can answer, I usually do…” (Karen).

Karen’s creation of an online journal allowed her to update friends and family on the events in the adoption process, as well serve as an outlet for her frustrations and joys. She was able to communicate and receive assistance from a network of supporters. Originally Karen started the blog, but did not make it available for viewing. When she initially entered into the adoption process with John, she created the blog to provide information to everyone in a quick and concise format. Once more information was learned about their status in the adoption process; Karen made the blog viewable to family and friends.

Process

For the third theme Process, the codes were grouped together which covered the policies, laws, and the actual “road to adoption.” The seven sub-themes were: Policy, Social Worker, Agency, Fluctuating—the Ups and Downs, Turning Point/Health, Stress, and Information.
Overview of Process Theme

The Process theme incorporated the process and procedures the couple had to perform to adopt their child. This included the policies, the agency in the U.S. and in the child’s country, the event(s) that led to adopting the child (turning point, and health), fluctuating events that occur while going through the adoption process, stress involved in the process, and information learned about the future child. The sub-theme agency incorporated the couple’s experience when visiting the Korean agency (i.e., their interactions with the founder of the agency, caring for the newborns in the nursery, and a possible future sibling call).

The Process theme originally had the sub-themes of Policy, Agency, Fluctuating, Choosing the Country, Turning Point, Health, Stress, Miscommunication, and Information. After transcribing the second interview, the sub-theme of Miscommunication was removed and incorporated into the Agency sub-theme. The sub-theme Choosing the Country was directed more to the couple’s connection to the adopted child and tied to the sub-theme Culture, therefore, it was removed from this theme and placed there. The second interview added to the information on the sub-themes Health and Agency. Specifics of the health issues related to biologically having children was learned and how this played into the decision to adopt. Information discovered from traveling to South Korea was placed in the Agency sub-theme (i.e., the South Korean adoption agency, the founder of the agency, the nursery, and their experiences visiting the agency in South Korea).

Policy

The sub-theme Policy was composed of the laws and legal steps which the adoptive couple dealt with in their international adoption. Since they chose to adopt internationally,
the policies of the United States and South Korea had to be addressed. A change in South Korea’s policy with adoption was an increase of in-country adoptions versus intercountry or international adoptions. This affects the number of children that are placed into international adoption, therefore, affecting the wait time for adoptive parents to receive a child.

Karen retold two high profile cases which were making news in South Korea. In both cases, the political shift of in-country adoption over international adoption was behind the reports. The first case was of a Korean adoptee who was murdered by his adoptive American parents, and the second case was about a Korean adopted girl who was abandoned by her Dutch adoptive father. “They are trying to crack down on international adoption hard that was part of the rule change, why they are trying to promote domestic adoption there” (Karen). Currently Korea is one of the easier countries to adopt from internationally; this might be a factor in their switch to in-country adoption.

Policy change in the United States also affected the participants’ international adoption. When the National Assistantship Services changed their rules, it caused a reaction among prospective adoptive parents. According to the participants, this “…changed the rules a little bit, and changed the fees a lot so there was a huge influx of people trying to get their paper work in…” (Karen) to make the deadline before the policy change.

A specific policy about weight was another factor the participants had to negotiate when dealing with the Korean adoption agency. The agency the participants went through had a weight maximum and minimum for the adoptive parents. Even though Karen and John were both considered close to the average weight for their heights and ages, they had to watch their gain and loss to meet the agency’s requirements. The reason behind the weight requirements was for the health of the adoptive parents, which Karen said she understood.
“People get so mad about that, you know like why wouldn’t you want the healthiest because that is the way they are looking at it you know, why would [you] not want the healthiest person for that child?” (Karen).

The decision to adopt internationally versus a domestic adoption can intimidate some potential parents because of the perceived increase in paperwork. There were paperwork differences due to working with two separate countries, but the participants learned there wasn’t very much.

. . . Once we started digging in, and getting information you know, reading about it, how it all works, what you have to do, different things, there is probably a little bit more paperwork going international, but the process is fairly similar. (John).

*Agency*

The *Agency* sub-theme incorporated the process which the couple went through when working with the United States and the Korean agency, the nursery and the Guest House at the Korean agency, and the possibility of a future sibling call. A sibling call would mean that the participants would be contacted if in the future Anna’s mother gave birth to another child with an adoption plan. Karen and John would be notified of the child’s birth and asked if they would want to adopt him or her. The agency uses the sibling call as a source to keep siblings within the same home or, if that is not possible, then within the same town. The thinking behind the sibling call is for the adoptee to maintain a biological familial connection in their life. “Yeah, I have seen it happen a couple of times on the forums…there was a family that has 3 siblings together…” (Karen).

When Karen began searching for adoption agencies, the couple had already made the decision to adopt internationally, so the number of U.S. agencies they could use was limited.
In the Midwest there are a particularly limited number of agencies which deal with international adoption. A visit to the library was Karen’s first introduction to their future agency. “I had seen um a poster for our agency at the _______ [town] library a couple of times and so I went home and told him about it, and there was an informational meeting…” (Karen). After attending the meeting, the couple decided to go with the agency. “…It was just a feeling that it was right and that just felt like the right agency” (Karen). Their agency was a smaller one compared to some of the other international agencies. Karen particularly liked the Korean agency that was partnered with their agency.

Created in the 1970s, the Korean agency was founded by a retired doctor who wanted to provide a safe place for mothers who had created an adoption plan for their children. The facility has expanded over time by incorporating a hospital, doctor offices, agency offices, the Guest House, a nursery, housing for birth mothers, a cafeteria, and meeting rooms. The founder also developed a home for special needs children and a training program so special needs children and adults could learn a trade. “He has opened bakeries, train them to be pastry chiefs, so they have bakeries where they you know they have a chance to be something” (Karen). In Korean society, stigma against disabled people is still prevalent, so the founder’s creation of a facility to help the disabled was rather progressive.

Founder. Karen was awed and inspired by the work of the agency’s founder, which was the main reason she was drawn to working with that particular agency. “It was just amazing to talk to him the love he has for what he does…all the different services that they provide. It is just amazing, amazing” (Karen). While the couple stayed in the Guest House, they were able to have a meal with the founder and the current supervisor of the agency. When the participants met the founder, it was an empowering and enlightening event. “They
showed us a DVD of the whole _______ [Korean agency] and all that they do, not just where we stayed, but the…2 maybe 3 other compounds…” (John).

**Guest house.** The Guest House where the couple stayed while at the Korean agency was a designated floor in the agency building. When Karen and John first thought of adopting internationally, they initially wanted to have their child escorted, but then decided to travel to the country themselves. Their stay in the Guest House offered them a variety of unique experiences. As mentioned earlier, they were able to see the birth mothers in the building which might not have occurred had they stayed in a hotel. When reflecting back on their stay in the Guest House both Karen and John agreed it was a worthwhile experience:

> There is something to that when you go over there to experience the whole thing.
> It is just interesting I guess to see how it all works…I think we wouldn’t have gotten as much out of our trip, being there and seeing all the other stuff. (John).

![Guest House Entrance](image)

**Figure 5.** Entrance to the Guest House

In some cases the Guest House was full or adoptive parents chose to stay in a hotel out of comfort. When describing their room and the facility in general, Karen stressed the simple design of the accommodations. John and Karen felt the lack of amenities was compensated for through being included in the atmosphere and gaining the insider’s
perspective of the agency. After returning home with Anna, Karen urged other adoptive parents who were traveling to the agency to stay in the Guest House. Karen’s reasoning behind the benefit of staying in the facility was not only to have the insider’s perspective, but it was one more piece of information they could give Anna.

It definitely enhanced the understanding and it brings more emotion into it, it is just one more connection that you have. I can tell her [Anna] I saw where she was for a month, you know….There is so much that I can’t, but that much I can. (Karen).

*Nursery.* For the participants another benefit of staying in the Guest House was being able to help in the nursery. The nursery experience was mentioned in the *Connection* theme and will be briefly touched on here. The nursery was set up to provide each newborn infant with supervised care until it was about a month old; then the baby was given to a foster family until it was adopted. Karen and John wanted to work in the nursery as a way to connect to Anna and her past, as well as having the information to share with her in the future if she desired. While working in the nursery, Karen and John learned that two employees were caring for 26 infants. Due to the unbalanced ratio, the infants were provided with little physical contact. “That was more orphanage type of a feeling thankfully they are set up where they gave them to foster moms and are actually in a family where they can be loved, and cared for like they should be…” (John).

Since the infants were on different feeding and diapering schedules, and there were only two agency employees to meet the babies’ needs, bottle feeding was impersonal. When an infant was hungry, a warm formula-filled bottle was propped next to their head in the basinet with a towel. Karen and John felt they needed to give each child some type of
contact. While in the nursery, they burped, changed, fed, and cuddled almost all but three babies in the nursery.

You look at all those babies and you know that….the birth moms had such a hard choice just because they are in there doesn’t mean that they are not loved and to have been able to show them that through contact … (Karen).

Figure 6. Nursery at the Korean agency

A major challenge in the room was not only caring for the babies, but dealing with the noise. As soon as one infant started crying, others would join. In the entire time Karen and John were there, only two minutes of silence existed. Even with these difficulties the couple struggled when leaving, “…. It’s real hard to walk out of that room you know” (Karen).

Fluctuating—the Ups and Downs

Unfortunate realities of adoption were the ups and downs of the process. An adoptive couple might be delayed in receiving their child due to paper, policy change, or other unseen circumstances. Karen and John’s adoption process was comparatively quick compared to other international adoptions, but it wasn’t without delays. When they started the home study,
the couple was told the process would be 2–18 months; later they were told it would be more like 18–24 months due to policy changes.

There existed a lack of communication between the two agencies which could be related to cultural differences. Regardless of the reason behind this miscommunication, the adoptive parent and child were caught in the middle. “Instead of always matching on the Korean side or always sending referrals on the U.S. side, you are matched by the agency our agency is, we don’t always know what is going on” (Karen). The fluctuating of which side does the referral and which does the matching benefited Karen and John. “... If we went with another program or a few months later and hadn’t been matched on this side I don’t know if we would have gotten a referral actually ...” (Karen). Since Karen’s health might be considered a risk on the Korean side of the adoption, matching occurring on the U.S. might have made the adoption more feasible than if they had been matched on the Korean side.

At one point in the adoption process some very important paperwork was misplaced by one of the government agencies. This delayed John and Karen’s travel call to South Korea. They had to remain in the U.S. while the rest of their group went to pick up their children.

The referral packet had not come that day, and that meant given the holiday (Columbus Day? Like it takes effort to discover countries? Pa-shaw.) and ____ [John’s] meetings schedule, we weren’t going to be able to “meet” our little girl until Wednesday. Torture much?! (Karen, 10/15/07).

John and Karen learned that a lot of the adoptive parents time was spent waiting, which can be frustrating and unavoidable. “There is nothing that we could have done differently really because you just wait.” (John).
Karen was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease while attending college. The challenge with this illness was the variety of symptoms and side-effects. It took several hospital visits and examinations with specialists to receive her diagnosis. Crohn’s disease is a gastrointestinal disease which can effect anywhere from the mouth down. In Karen’s case it was her intestines. A possible result of Crohn’s disease was an inability to give birth due to the body attacking itself and creating excess scar tissue. Karen’s symptoms associated with Crohn’s disease were gastrointestinal bleeding, arthritis, weakness, and extreme side pain.

Karen began taking medication which improved her health. “They switched my meds. And I did better on it, and a couple of years went by …we got married and moved, and I got pregnant with Billy and that was horrible” (Karen). The reason it was horrible was because Karen hadn’t been in remission. Her body did not handle the pregnancy well, and she gave birth to Billy early. The doctors figured out that the pregnancy was difficult due to the baby pushing on the diseased area therefore aggravating it. After giving birth to Billy, Karen resumed her medication and consulted doctors who felt that having another baby was feasible. In between Billy and Stewart, they lost a baby to miscarriage. Stewart’s pregnancy was not as difficult as Billy’s, but by the end Karen’s health declined, and they scheduled an early c-section. The birth of their second son was joined with the happy news of Karen entering remission. “I had Stewart and like two weeks later I was instantly better, they did a scope there was no sign of disease whatsoever and I was declared in remission” (Karen).

Karen and John were warned that any future pregnancies would be too risky for Karen’s health. This information coupled with the desire to have more children turned the tide of talking about adoption to seeking out agencies and information. The declaration of
health Karen and John received gave them a letter of health documenting Karen’s recovery, which they gave to the Korean adoption agency when they questioned her illness. Since Crohn’s Disease can be very debilitating the couple’s social worker had their letter of health ready in case she received a call from the Korean agency.

Stress

Stress related to the fluctuating course of Karen and John’s adoption seeking path was inevitable. The elation when events progressed, waiting for the travel call, struggling with the government offices, lack of information and anticipating the arrival of their daughter all added to the couple’s stress levels. When Karen’s health was called into question, the couple was left waiting to hear if the Korean agency would accept them or reject them. “…We had already loved this baby for a month and a half you think of her as yours and they can jerk it away” (Karen). This particular delay happened late in the adoption seeking process which caused additional worry and stress because they had already begun to think of Anna as their child.

Information

The Information sub-theme is the information the adoptive couple learned from the adoption agency about Anna prior to meeting her, and what they discovered through their interactions with her. The amount of information the Korean agency shared with Karen and John was limited partially because of cultural reasons. “Just basic information, like her family and stuff…. Kind of sketchy…bits and pieces on the birth mom…that were offered up at the time, I guess” (John).

The couple was up-dated on Anna’s health but additional information was not usually provided. “They’ll send you information if there is something…like if she gets real sick, like
that, we would have been notified…” (Karen). Anna had regular check-ups with the agency doctors and her height and weight were given to the couple so they could track her development. Karen and John found some of information given to them regarding Anna to be culturally influenced. Anna’s hair color and eye color were not marked as black in the Korean documents, but would be considered black by American standards.

Prior to meeting Anna the couple was told her hair was wavy, which they joked about since there was only a slight flip visible in pictures. “…they called it wavy… Just a little bit of body and that’s it. It’s pretty funny and they called it curly…” (John). Once Anna was home they discovered her hair truly was curly after a bath. They also learned about Anna’s appetite after she arrived home. “It took several days to get back onto eating actual food” (John). Anna took some time switching back from bottles to solid food, but now it is joked in the family that she can eat more than Billy and Stewart.

In pictures Anna always had on a smile which John and Karen discovered was part of her happy and friendly personality. After having difficult pregnancies and experience with challenging early years with Billy and Stewart Anna’s happy demeanor was an unexpected surprise. “But she is the easiest baby we have ever had you just lay her in the crib and she goes to sleep, which is nice” (Karen). Anna’s happy personality could also be a factor in her transition, easing her way into her new life.

*The Couple*

The final theme was *The Couple*, which was developed to express the personalities and backgrounds of the participants who were entering into the adoption process. There can be no understanding of a couple’s experiences in the adoption process without learning a little about the couple itself. Therefore eight sub-themes were developed to better understand
the participants; Beliefs, Attitude towards Adoption, Differences, Unit, Demographics, Use of Internet, Guardian, and Fluidity.

Overview of The Couple Theme

The Couple main theme had four subthemes after the first interview and added four more after the second interview. It was composed of the couples’ individual beliefs about adoption, their attitudes toward adoption, their differences as people, and how they function as a unit. These four subthemes were uncovered after the first interview. It was important to understand the beliefs and attitudes a person has of adoption because it plays into their likelihood of adopting a child. Even as a unit the couple was composed of two individuals, the differences of these two people were shown through the sub-theme differences.

From the second interview these four new subthemes were added; Demographics, Use of Internet, Guardians, and Fluidity. The demographic subtheme covers the couple’s hometown demographics, where their parents still resided. Use of the internet and the concept of word use played an interesting dynamic in the couples’ interaction. The couples’ personalities were disclosed in their willingness to take on the guardianship of a friend’s young child, in addition to their own parenting responsibilities. Fluidity was a subtheme developed to express the couple’s adaptability in their thinking, and functioning. All of these subthemes help to better understand the couple who was going through the adoption process.

This theme incorporates the couple’s individual beliefs about adoption. How they perceive it, approach it, and embrace it in the end. Their attitudes about adoption were reflected in their connection to adoption. The researcher believes this theme was very closely linked to the Connection theme. How the individual was connected to the concept of adoption influences their attitudes and beliefs of adoption. If the individual was raised in an
environment where adoption was a familiar aspect the concept of adopting was not foreign to them. The closer the connection to the concept of adoption leads to a more open attitude towards adoption. There were differences between the couple in many ways; one of the facets was their perception of adoption. Then there was how the couple functions as a unit through the help they give each other and the balancing out of personalities.

**Beliefs**

When developing the sub-theme *Beliefs* it was important to have a clear definition of what a belief was. A belief is “something believed; an opinion or conviction” according to Dictionary.com (Retrieved January 24, 2008). The personal beliefs Karen and John have regarding adoption and specifically international adoption was a significant part in how they entered into the adoption process. With a positive belief system of adoption Karen and John were able to start their adoption search expecting positive things. When Karen entered the process she had a clear desire to have an adopted child, while John took a position of having experienced adoption but from a more distant perspective. He also sought adoption out of love for his wife, and health concerns connected to having another biological child. “[I] knew it was something that was important to her so we started thinking it over more” (John).

Faith played a role in Karen’s belief system when dealing with the adoption process. She spoke often of having faith, praying and waiting. “So you know it just happens, pray about it and see what happens” (Karen). In Karen’s blog and in the interviews the reference to God and faith reoccurred throughout the data collection process. In her blog when she and John were dealing with the waiting of adoption “We'll see what God's plan is, though. I know better [than] to argue (well, most days)” (Karen, 8/17/07).
Attitude Towards Adoption

The belief system and the couple’s attitude towards adoption were closely tied together. Similar to defining the term belief, having a clear understanding of the word attitude in this context was important. According to the Dictionary of the English Language attitude is defined as “A state of mind or a feeling; disposition” (Retrieved January 28, 2008). Karen and John’s attitudes toward adoption were different which was connected to their early experiences with adoption.

Karen had always wanted to adopt and specifically internationally. For her adopting domestically was never a consideration. She explained that for many people international adoptions were chosen because of the certainty of getting a baby at the end of the process since there were more unexpected delays in domestic adoption. In Karen’s case adopting internationally was driven by emotion. “I’ve always had the heart for international…” (Karen). A wish to adopt from China was not possible due to the age requirement (parent’s have to be over 30-years-old) so the search landed on Korea.

Karen also did not feel comfortable with the domestic adoption process. The adoptive parent creates a binder for birth mothers to go through to get a feel for the family which her baby will be joining. Karen’s opinion of this process was that “…there’s a lot more of ‘what’s in it for me’ feel to it than, you know and you can from a financial stand point you can sink a lot of money into it and never, never get a baby…” (Karen).

John’s perspective of domestic versus international adoption was never a factor. In his opinion the origin of the child’s birth was not an issue for him, it was getting around the general concept of adoption. “For me adoption in general was something I kind of warmed up to, I guess you would say she has always wanted to adopt, where I really hadn’t even
given it a thought, really” (John). He was unsure about entering into the adoption process, while Karen had always wanted to adopt.

I don’t know it was just a world of unknown I guess, just not knowing, not been through it, where she had that background with her Aunt and Uncle that I didn’t have so I don’t know it’s just different. (John).

One of John’s main concerns was his attachment or connection to an adopted child. He did not know if the attachment would be different than with a biological child. In the first interview, before traveling to South Korea, he spoke about this issue. “When you have a child, when they are born you know there is an instant connection you love that child like you wouldn’t believe is even possible” (John).

As the couple delved deeper into the adoption process and learned more about Anna, John’s opinion of adoption changed. It came full circle when he told me about some of his reflections on his initial worry about being attached to his child whom he had never seen before, and wondering if they would be able to become attached to each other.

Because now I know that I don’t love her any less than I do the other two boys plus I think that there is something about being Daddy’s little girl probably that has kind of a special bond to it too and thinking that it is even stupid for it to have even been an issue because here we are it is amazing how, how attached you are or get to it, and how much you do just love her. I mean as soon as we met her, saw her, and then all the sudden bam there it is so it is kind of interesting. (John).

He realized through that reflection the issue of forming an attachment with Anna was a non-issue. The fact he was surrounded with a great unknown most likely fostered his worries. After meeting Anna and getting to know her the worry disappeared.
Differences

This sub-theme focused on the couple’s differences in personality and how it figured into their adoption experience. Karen and John have their own personalities and therefore their own differences as a couple.

Compulsively checking the mailbox. That's what I've been reduced to. You know, since it only comes one day and all? But it's amazing the excuses you can think as a reason to double-back to the house in the morning since the mail should be there by now (Note: Only on MWF; I'm not insane enough to think that Mr. Postman is coming to our house by 7 a.m. on TRs.). The mail really ought to come multiple times a day. I've decided! (Karen, 10/2/07).

One difference between the participants was their roles in their relationship. John had the easy-going level headed personality, “He’s just so laid back” (Karen). While Karen tended to react strongly to delays and the fluctuating events in the adoption process, “I looked like a human pin-ball off our hallway and cause I’m just bouncing, bouncing, bouncing” (Karen).

Unit

The Unit sub-theme paralleled the sub-theme Differences mentioned above because the couple functions as a unit while still maintaining their individual personalities; their differences. Karen and John worked as a team through their adoption process. Their relationship was strengthened by their commitment to each other which started when John supported Karen during the beginning stages of her illness. “…If he was going to stick around you knew he was a keeper because I got so sick” (Karen).
As a unit John and Karen function in an open and friendly manner. This also influenced the researcher selecting them as the main participants for the study. When repeating stories from their trip to South Korea the couple mentioned an older man who they began conversing with while site-seeing, their friendly manner was highlighted in this tale. “…We are nice people so we kept talking to him…” (Karen). Karen herself even hit on the point of how friendly she and John were, “Well wherever we’ve lived we’ve gotten the comments about, ‘you are the nicest people we have ever met’” (Karen).

**Demographics**

The demographics of the couple’s hometown were important to note because of the couple’s plans to visit there with the family. Karen’s parents lived in a town which as she states was more like a hamlet than a town. “…It’s almost entirely white, there are a couple of Mexicans, and they have a mixed race family, the dad is black the mother is white, they are friends with my parents” (Karen). John and Karen’s parents both lived in the same part of the state, in rural small towns. John’s parent’s hometown was somewhat diverse “…there are some different races there, but mostly it is just your normal rural [Midwest]…white community…” (John). In both towns there were families who had adopted internationally contributing to the diversity of the areas.

**Use of Internet**

The participants used the internet to access information about international adoption, discuss adoption issues with other adoptive parents, and to find answers to disagreements. Karen and John’s familiarity with the internet was a key part of their relationship as a couple. The use of internet was accessed when the participants would disagree about information. They had a quick source of information in which to get answers and therefore end the
discussion. When they traveled to South Korea the couple was happy to still have internet access. “That’s right; we had our internet and our Google. Things we had to use if we had a disagreement. ‘I’m right’, ‘no I’m right’. Let’s go Google it!” (John).

Karen’s blog was a pathway for her to receive support, but it also reflected the couple’s personalities. Her use and ease of the internet enabled Karen to access outside help and other people’s perspectives. This allowed the differences between Karen and John’s personalities to balance out giving them additional aid. Karen was able to react spastically with her friends when faced with the fluctuating process of adoption, giving her that release which was the opposite of John’s personality.

*Guardian*

A piece of information which was unexpected for the researcher to learn about the couple was their role as guardians to a friend’s child. John and Karen had agreed to be the guardians to this child which speaks to their personalities. Even with their own family adjustments when Anna entered into their home the couple was still willing to care for the little girl.

She [the friend] will be deploy to Iraq next year so we will have her daughter but um she just got commissioned so she has to go to officer school in April through September so we will have Beth then too. (Karen).

The fact the participants were willing to take in a friend’s child was another example of the couple’s personalities.

*Fluidity*

The word to represent this sub-theme was difficult to decide upon. The term fluidity was chosen since the couple displayed a tendency to roll with the challenges they faced
instead of falling to the wayside. When Karen and John traveled to South Korea scheduling issues forced them to be flexible, but their personalities enabled the couple to deal with the changes. “So every morning we had this book and notebook and so I would flip through the book and we would find out things we would want to see…” (John).

The couple’s fluidity when taking on a third child was also reflected in their ability to handle the changes. John admitted that it helped that Anna was not their first child, “If it had been our first child it would have been total…upside down change” (John). Karen stated they were pretty flexible in taking on new duties which helped in the transition. John and Karen both agreed that if you plan a little more the challenges of having three children was easier to handle.
Chapter 4. Discussion

The findings of the study reflected the couple’s experience of international adoption and in doing so answered the main research question and four sub-questions. The issues adoptive parents face when entering into international adoption were synthesized in the four sub-questions; what leads the couple to adopt, the process of adoption, implications of going on a travel call, and adjustments to the family. Four main themes emerged from the interviews: Connection, Process, Support, and The Couple.

Adopting From Asia

The first sub-question was what led these adoptive parents to adopt from Asia? In the main theme Connection, the findings indicated that the couple felt a connection towards South Korea through John’s grandfather’s experience in the Korean War, and their introduction to adoption. From the Process theme Karen’s health in regard to having more biological children was uncovered which led to their decision to actively pursue adoption. In the main theme The Couple Karen and John’s attitudes and beliefs regarding adoption were expressed, which revealed a positive opinion of international adoption.

Connection

The participants past and introduction to adoption helped to formulate their perception of the process. In today’s culture adoption has become more commonplace therefore more people have had at least some variation of exposure to adoption. According to Young (2007), “sixty percent of the population has had contact with some aspect of adoption (whether knowing someone who relinquished a child, having an adoptee in the family, or knowing someone who was adopted, etc.)” (p. 89). Karen’s and John’s introduction to
adoption was through knowing someone who was adopted. For Karen it was her cousins, and John grew up with children who were adopted.

John was also connected to South Korea through hearing stories about his grandfather’s time in the Korean War. This familial link to Asia lent itself to the couple’s willingness to adopt from South Korea. In a study preformed by Johnson and Dole (1999) the research indicated that a family and emotional connection to a specific country can lead adoptive parents to adopt internationally. In the case of Karen and John their familial connection to South Korea helped them in the direction of adopting from that specific country.

In dealing with transitional roles in the family a study performed by Ryan (1983) indicated that adoptive parents who were more willing to share work and take on child care roles were also more likely to adopt transracially. Karen and John adapted to the transition of bringing a third child into their family by being flexible to take on new roles, and showing a willingness to alter their schedules. This flexibility and willingness to take on new roles may have helped the family in their transition. These traits might help them in the long run. According to Linville & Lyness (2007) families with flexible roles and who are able to adjust to demands tend to fare better overtime.

Process

A pivotal event for the couple taking adoption from a discussion to a reality was Karen’s health. The couple’s inability to have a child without endangering Karen or the baby, coupled with the desire to have another child, brought the participants to adoption seeking. Infertility or the inability to have a child biologically was one of the reasons why parents choose to adopt (Bachrach, London, & Maza, 1991; Hollinger, 2004).
Research conducted by Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, and Stewart (2004) state the adoptive parents who dealt with infertility and decided to then adopt children may have “solidified” their marriages and gained strength in negotiating stressful situations. The concept of adopting internationally was fully embraced by Karen, and her health along with the wish for more children led the couple to seek out adoption in South Korea.

Typically adoptive parents who adopt children from countries in Asia were White-Americans, who wanted infants and specifically girls (Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, & Stevens, 2006; Kim, 1995). John and Karen’s desire to adopt an infant girl combined with their interest in adopting internationally brought them to their country of choice, South Korea.

*The Couple*

Attitudes toward adoption and specifically transracial adoption influenced how adoption was perceived. The positive or negative attitude of transracial adoption would therefore influence a person’s decision to adopt transracially or not. In relation to this study Karen and John both held a positive attitude towards international adoption. Another factor that played a part in the decision to adopt was the willingness to adopt. Bausch (2006) conducted a survey looking at biological kinship, pronatalist beliefs, genetic background, and experience with adoption as factors in a person's willingness to adopt a child. The results indicated that infertility status, being exposed to adoptive relationships, and pronatalist beliefs (desire to reproduce) were significantly associated with willingness to adopt a child. In the case of the participants of this study all three factors contributed to their decision to adopt. Karen’s health was a major factor in determining their ability to have more children which they desired, combined with her close and personal relationship to adoption made her
willing to adopt. John’s love for his wife, their inability to have more children and his positive, though more distant, encounters with adoption united to bring him to adoption.

Hollingsworth (2000) performed a study based upon data from a national telephone opinion survey in which the attitudes towards transracial adoption were assessed. The results indicated that older people were less likely to approve of adoption than younger people, African-American women and Caucasian men were less likely than African-American men to approve of transracial adoption, and 71% of the people surveyed approved of transracial adoption. Karen and John fit within the results of the Hollingsworth (2000) study since they are a younger couple. Their age and the more acceptable societal perception of transracial adoption indicate that the participants were more likely to approve of transracial adoption.

The demographics of the adoptive couple also lend themselves to choose to adopt internationally. In a study conducted by Ishizawa et al. (2006) results indicated adoptive parents who have a higher education were more likely to adopt internationally. In addition to an adoptive parents education their age indicates whether they were more likely to approve of and pursue transracial adoption (Ceballo et al., 2004).

*Process of Adoption*

The second sub-question addressing the main research question taps into the issue of the process of adoption. What are the processes this family encountered when adopting from Asia? The themes uncovered from the data indicated several aspects which contribute to the process of adopting internationally. In the main theme *Support* the help the couple received from their friends, family, social worker, and foster mom aided John and Karen as they went through the ups and downs of the adoption process. The main theme *Process* encompasses the various pieces of the process of adoption that the participants faced.
Support

Family and friends. While undergoing the adoption search Karen and John found support from their families and friends in various ways. In a study by Linville and Lyness (2007) the social support an adoptive parent received was found to play a crucial role before and after the adoption as a protective factor for the families. Their study also reported that a significant role in adaptation and resilience was connected to the families who felt supported by extended family members. When adoptive parents did not feel supported it was one of the biggest difficulties throughout the process (Linville & Lyness).

Adoptive parents can sometimes entertain uncertainties in regard to extended family member’s reactions to adopting a child, therefore making their support system weaker in the transition to parenthood (Ceballo et al., 2004). In the case of the participants for this study they were reassured through the support given by their friends and families. The couple received support through the gifts given to exchange with the foster mom, and the infants at the Korean agency. Upon their arrival home from the travel call they were greeted by family members and friends at the airport in a show of excitement and support for their decision to adopt.

Kindle and Erich’s (2005) study on family social support indicated that was a key aspect of the adoptive families functioning. There was also a parallel between perceived high levels of support and high adoption satisfaction and improved parent-child interactions. These high levels of social support typically led to an increase in parental satisfaction, which then increased the positive parent-child interactions and child behavior (Kindle & Erich, 2005).
Support found by adoptive parents affects their support system, and family functioning. Santona and Zavattini’s (2005) study on adoption found that the amount of support given to adoptive parents would enable them to cope with difficulties related to adoption. The findings from this study combined with those mentioned above indicated that the social support an adoptive couple or parent faces influences their success in the adoption process. Therefore it is important for adoptive parents to have a strong support system which they can rely on as they undergo the process of adoption.

Other (adopting) couples. Social support can also be given and received from other adoptive couples, as the participants learned on their path to adoption. The advice they were given from families who had already adopted and the support they provided other couples strengthened their support network. In a study by Ryan (1983) results found that by connecting adoptive families to other adoptive families who were able to provide support can be helpful through sharing experiences and giving realistic perspectives.

John and Karen’s support network was multidimensional since they interacted with other adoptive couples person to person, but also via the internet. Research findings have found that adoptive parents were less likely to pursue professional services in favor of more informal support or services which make the internet a likely option (Welsh, Viana, Petrill, & Mathias 2007). The online forums provided access to many different adoptive parents who were in various stages of the adoption process. This allowed Karen and John to learn about what to expect, help other couples and vent frustrations to those who would understand. Research on the amount of adoptive parents who participated in these online groups has been largely untouched. According to Welsh, et al. (2007) the number of international adoptive families who “participate and find these services valuable” are mostly unknown (p. 301).
They do believe that these groups were very likely a dynamic influence in the advocacy and research of international adoption.

*Social worker.* Karen and John’s support network extended to their social worker. She provided support through her knowledge of what adoptive parents might encounter in international adoption, advice on grieving, and cultural issues. Hollingsworth (2003) suggested all social workers provide such support in her research.

In a study by Wind, Brooks, and Barth (2007) the services provided to adoptive couples prior to receiving the child would include “resources such as counseling, reading materials, information about the child’s psychosocial history, psychological testing, and interaction with other adoptive parents” (p. 379). Karen and John’s social worker fulfilled all of these areas in addition to providing the couple with personal experiences as an adoptive parent. She introduced John and Karen to other adoptive couples who had been through the same agency in South Korea and gave them as much information about Anna as the Korean agency allowed. Providing as much information and preparation services to the adopting parents as possible has been found to create a better understanding of the challenges which might be encountered and helped to establish realistic expectations for adoptive parents (Rojewski, 2005; Wind, Brooks, & Barth, 2007).

In Crockenberg’s (1981) study on attachment and social support the adequacy of support was found to be related to the infant-mother attachment. A mother who received support was more likely to form a secure attachment to her adopted infant. The affects of the social support network therefore can have a direct or indirect affect on the adopted child which was mediated through the adoptive parents (Chisholm, 1998). Crockenberg also found that the support felt by the adoptive mother (or father) would transfer to the child through the
amount of help she received from extended family allowing her to focus more on the child’s needs.

Process

Policy. As Karen and John underwent the adoption process they encountered the various South Korean laws and policies, as well as those in America. In international adoption three governments have to be dealt with (country of child birth, country and state of the adoptive parents) each with its own immigration and adoption procedures and laws (Hollinger, 2004). The availability of children for international adoption was affected through the change in Korean policy which promoted in-country adoption. In 1975 Korea implemented policies to regulate and reduce the number of internationally adopted children (Hollingsworth, 2003). This change along with a limited number of Visa’s being issued to internationally adopted children delayed Karen and John’s travel to South Korea to get their daughter. A study by Ceballo et al. (2004) researched biological, adoptive, and step-families. They found that due to the process of adoption, adoptive parents were more likely to work through distress, expectations, and conflicts before the child enters the home compared to a biological child or stepchild. Karen and John endured large amounts of stress when encountering the fluctuating events of Anna’s adoption. Their experiences of waiting for the travel call, the misplacement of paperwork and the Korean agencies questions regarding Karen’s health had to be dealt with prior to them receiving Anna.

Challenges which were unique to adoptive parents; public process of adoption and the possibility of dealing with infertility, and stress related to infertility has been shown to be greater for women than men (Ceballo et al., 2004). In Frasch and Brooks’ (2003) study on adoption they found that in the adoptive family life cycle was unique compared to other
family life cycles since there were feelings of loss of the biological child, stress related to adoption process, and social stigma.

Karen and John’s ages played a role in their chose of which country to adopt from since they were too young to adopt from China they looked towards Korea. Their ages might have played a role in why the Korean agency chose them. According to Ishizawa et al. (2006) “…South Korea’s guidelines give preference to parents who have been married for at least three years and who are between 25 and 44 years old…” (p. 1210).

The fluctuating events of the adoption process felt by Karen and John were not uncommon. Compared to many cases, their time of entering into the adoption process to the travel call was short. In a study by Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, and Waters (1985) adoptive parents sometimes have to wait years for a baby versus biological parents who once conceive know when their baby will arrive.

The events exclusive to international adoption which might deter adoptive parents from making that choice incorporate many factors which John and Karen discussed, such as the stigma associated with the child’s ‘native’ country, the costs, policies, and paperwork (Serbin, 1997). When Karen and John chose to adopt internationally some of these events were not a concern, such as cost, but others (stigma) were. The decision to adopt internationally was a lengthy one.

The combination of the policies, stresses, and uniquely associated events of international adoption leave the adoptive parents at risk. When adoptive parents have a strong social support network they were more likely to have a successful adoption. The help given to the parents reduced their stress and enabled them to focus on their future child, rather than spending energy on worry over acceptance.
Implications of the Travel Call

In Karen and John’s trip to South Korea, their travel call, they experienced the adoption process differently than adoptive parents who had children escorted. The third sub-question, which keyed into the main research questions asks, what are the implications of traveling to the adopted child’s native country?

The themes that address this issue were Connection and Process. Since the participants were able to meet Anna’s foster mom through their travel call they were given the opportunity to obtain additional information about Anna and form a connection with her foster mom. The couple also experienced a closer connection to the birth mother by having the unique experience of seeing other birth mothers while staying in the Guest House at the Korean agency. Karen and John participated in the visits with Anna at the Korean agency thus easing Anna’s transition versus her being brought to the United States and then handed over to them.

During their visit to South Korea, John and Karen learned more about the country and will therefore, have the opportunity to provide Anna with that information if she wishes to know in the future. The process of traveling to Korea had to be coordinated with the Korean agency as well and enabled the couple to learn inside information about the agency while staying there. The travel call also influenced those in John and Karen’s support network through Karen’s online journal. Knowledge about adoption and specifically from South Korea was then available for others which led people to desire to aide the infants there.

Connection

Birth moms. Since Karen and John chose to travel to South Korea and stay at the agency’s Guest House they had the unique experience of seeing the birth mothers. This
brought the reality of these women to the forefront. Karen and John desired to express their thankfulness and love that they as adoptive parents would give to their adopted child. Similar feelings were reported in a study of eight mothers who adopted Romanian children (Hollingsworth, 2003). When meeting the birthmothers they experienced feelings of ambivalence and sadness. The adoptive mother’s sought an understanding of the biological mothers’ experiences and the circumstances surrounding the decision to relinquish the child.

Compared to domestic adoption, adopting internationally less is known about the birth parents (Vonk, Simms & Nackerud, 1999). When commenting on the information John and Karen were given regarding Anna’s birth mom they stated it was limited and sketchy. One of the difficulties in accessing this personal information was the cultural issues surrounding the adoption. In Korea the policy was focused on maintaining confidentiality regarding the birth mothers and families personal information.

*Foster mom.* In addition to seeing the birth moms in the Korea agency, John and Karen also were able to meet Anna’s foster mom. These meetings enabled the couple to gain access to more personal information about Anna to help ease her transition into their family. Korea is known for their pre-adoption care and its policy to foster the infants into families instead of institutionalizing them. According to Vonk, Simms, and Nackerud (1999) Korea’s success rate had been calculated at 75-80%. The success rate, how successfully the family and child transition together, is believed to be influenced by the pre-adoptive care the child received.

Elbow and Knight (1987) stated that through the process of adoption the adoptive family, the child, agency and the child’s foster parent “become a system working toward the goal of integrating the child and family” (p. 546). This is an important factor to remember
when pursuing adoption. All involved need to work together for a smooth transition. John and Karen’s relationship with Anna’s foster mom was positive which could be related to Anna’s transition into her new home.

Anna’s foster mom promoted her move by providing Anna with her special pillow. In research on grief and mourning it is suggested that there were similarities between adults and young children in how they respond to losing a loved one (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Young, 2007). While experiencing this loss the adopted child goes through the various stages of grief, their “thoughts and behaviors expressing longing for the loved one, hostility, appeals for help, despair, and finally reorganization” (Ainsworth & Bowlby, p. 336, 1991). Anna was unable to have a familiar adult during her transition, which was suggested by Bove (1999) in regard to having a secure base for the young child when undergoing a transition but she was able to have her familiar object; the pillow.

In a study by Kim, Shin, and Carey (1999) which examined a small group of Korean children adopted in early life by Midwestern American families, indicated that the reasons for the favorable post-adoption transition “may include 1) the early age of adoption, 2) the well-organized pre-adoption care in Korea, and 3) the characteristics of adoptive parents” (p. 227).

Culture. When dealing with an international adoption the adoptive parents have to consider how they will incorporate the child’s culture into the family. In the case of Karen and John, they obtained a considerable amount of information about Korea and Korean culture. In a study focused on adoptive mothers and cultural resources a majority of mothers sought out resources and support from adoption agencies, education and support networks, within the communities and/or friends. The awareness and access to this information and
support regarding culture could benefit the parents in how they would address this issue (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007).

John and Karen sought out culture specific information and support through accessing the online forums, their social worker, and friends. In addition to the information learned about Korean history from internet searches. In the study by Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill (2007) current research focusing on cultural socialization indicated that many adoptive parents of transracial children attempt to teach their children about their ‘native’ culture. A drawback to the long history of Korean adoption in the United States may lead adoptive parents to be more complacent regarding issues of international adoption compared to adoptive parents of children from China who tended to be more vigilant regarding ethnic and cultural socialization, and searching for resources (Johnston et al., 2007).

There were various avenues adoptive parents can take when addressing their adopted child’s culture. According to Rojewski (2005) these assortments of actions performed by adoptive parents to incorporate their Chinese adopted child’s culture were (a) how families cope with the differences between the child and family, (b) how families acknowledged the child’s birth culture and heritage, and (c) the possible benefits and importance of incorporating Chinese cultural heritage into their family life.

Karen and John dealt with Anna’s cultural integration by gathering information to provide her with if she so desired it in the future. They believed the degree of cultural integration will be from following Anna’s lead. Their approach to Anna’s culture was similar to that of Rojewski’s findings stating that most adoptive parents believe in maintaining at least some connection to their child’s ‘native’ culture.
When Karen and John discussed Anna’s culture and her acceptance in the United States there was a degree of concern. Karen and John were aware of the possibility of Anna being discriminated or facing challenges because of her race. Their beliefs were similar to those of Hamilton, Cheng and Powell’s (2007) research on adoption which indicated that adoptive parents believe their adopted children will encounter intellectual, social, and emotional difficulties as they aged. The adoptive parent’s incorporation and beliefs pertaining to their child’s ethnic identity played an important role in the ethnic identity formation of minority adopted children (Tan & Nakkula, 2004). Therefore it is important for adoptive parents of international children to have an understanding on how they will address the issues of culture, and identity. The transracial adoptive parent’s decisions concerning this issue has been shown to influence the child’s identity formation.

Process

The implications of the travel call for Karen and John incorporated their interactions with the policies of the Korean adoption agency and South Korean laws. In South Korea the majority of children waiting to be adopted are cared for by foster parents rather than placing them in a more institutionalized setting (Kim, Shin, & Carey, 1999). Their establishment of this type of policy in adoptive care can also lead to how Korea was known for having a high standard of living with access to health care (Johnson & Dole, 1999).

An unfortunate aspect of adoption was the social stigma and social ostracism which have been directed to Eurasian children (typically U.S. military personal and Vietnamese and Korean citizens). These children were usually relinquished to adoption agencies because of the social stigma the child, as well as the family, would face in the future (Hollingsworth,
2003). This led to which children were more likely to be available for adoption and as Karen and John saw first hand which children are waiting for a new home.

The availability and accessibility of children for international adoption affected the adoptive parent’s ability to gain a child can be related to the stigma and policies of the sending countries. There has been a recent shift to view children as a state resource and emphasizing “the rights of children to a national or cultural identity, thus leading to laws or regulations that delay or restrict adoption by foreign parents” (Ishizawa et al., p. 1221, 2006). This cultural shift had a trickling down affect on the number of children available for international adoption.

Adjustment Issues

In the fourth sub-question, what are the adjustment issues this family now faces, the concept of what happens next after the family has been brought together was attended to. Transitioning a new member into the family required some degree of adjustment. In the case of Karen and John they faced unique issues when transitioning Anna into their family. The themes which tie into this adjustment topic were Connection and Support.

Connection

In a study by Ceballo et al. (2004) a comparison of the psychological implications for parents who gain children through the method of birth, adoption, or marriage was performed. The parents of adopted children reported a greater satisfaction with their family and higher family solidity than parents of biological children or stepparents. Adoptive parents compared to nonadoptive parents reported more satisfying experiences after the transition to parenthood.
Linville and Lyness’ (2007) research on adoption found increases in disagreements among adoptive couples after the transition into parenthood, although more than 80% of all adoptions are estimated to remain. The issues pertaining to adjusting to the transition of adding a new family member would indicate that disagreements could occur. The levels to which the adoptive parents had disagreements after transitioning into parenthood were also related to whether the adopted child was their first or if they already had children. Karen and John’s transition was different since they were already parents prior to Anna.

John and Karen took their sons transitional adjustment into consideration when bringing Anna into their home. The increase of interracial families, in part was due to a trend in international adoption and how parents considered race when adding a new member to their family (Ishizawa et al., 2006). Ishizawa et al. (2006) study also found that parents may also consider racial differences between children as a potential source of sibling conflict. In the issue of adjustment Marcovitch, Goldberg, Gold, Washington, Wasson, Krekewich, and Handley-Derry’s (1997) study on adopted children indicated that there was a similar pattern of adjustment to nonadopted children.

Research on adjustment has indicated that Korean adoptees show good psychological adjustment (Johnston et al., 2007) and the success of familial integration of Korean adoptees (Ryan, 1983). Even with the success of Korean adoption there were some transitional problems which might occur, some of these can include feeding difficulties, and sleep disorders (Johnson & Dole, 1999). Karen and John did face issues with Anna’s eating habits. She temporarily was uninterested in solid food and focused more on bottles. After a short period she began to show interest in solid foods again. Anna’s night terrors did not surface as much in the beginning of her transition, there was a delay of about two weeks. The
familiarity of her pillow and the attentiveness of Karen and John to her needs have lead to a decrease in her sleep disturbances since then.

Support

As mentioned above Karen and John received various types of support while pursuing Anna’s adoption, but their support network was also needed as they transition Anna into their home. The adjustment issues which the family now faces would benefit from continued support. Since social support appeared to play a crucial role before and after the adoption as a protective factor for the families in the study by Linville and Lyness (2007). There was also a parallel between perceived high levels of support and high adoption satisfaction and improved parent-child interactions (Kindle & Erich, 2005) which would lead to an easier adjustment for all family members in the transition period.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this research were important to address since this study was based around a single couple. The themes and findings cannot be generalized to a larger population although they can benefit the larger society. The findings from this research can be used as a stepping off point for future studies of international adoption dealing with transitions, support, foster parents, travel calls, social workers, and comparing adoptive parent’s perspectives about adoption.

Professionals could use the information learned from this study to aid prospective adoptive parents. When navigating the ever changing waters of the adoptive process a knowledgeable social worker could prepare them for their changing roles, and adoption specific issues such as grief. Future research on the differences between travel calls and having a child escorted to see if there are greater benefits to the travel call would be
beneficial to adoption agencies and social workers when discussing options to parents. A greater understanding of the adoptive child’s separation grief from foster parents or birth parents would help social workers better prepare future adoptive parents on their child’s transition.

In this study the adoptive parents already had two children when they transitioned their adopted daughter into the family. The boy’s experience of the adoption process was not studied due to time limits in this study. Future research on siblings through adoption is needed to gain knowledge in how the birth children and the adoptive children function during the transition process. The transitional differences for all members of the family whether they are biologically related or legally related would benefit social workers helping future adoptive parents.

Future research on transitional objects provided for adoptive children could help families in the early transitional process. In the case of Anna she was able to take her transitional object with her which she used as a comfort tool. The potential benefit of having a transitional object for a child when they enter into a new family could help adoption agencies better support the child and adoptive parents.

Parents would be able to use the information learned in this study to better prepare and understand the adoption process. How the international adoptive parent enters` into the adoption process, their beliefs, how they gain support, their transitions, and how they obtain their child (escort or travel call) would be vital to attend to so that their experience, as well as the child’s, result in a positive transition. Future research on adoptive parents use of the internet to access information and support is needed since currently there is limited data on this issue. The increasing use of the internet by society and the limited amount of research on
its use by adoptive parents will need to be addressed in the future. Research on internet use and its benefits would help potential adoptive parents have access to a greater understanding of what the adoption process entails and support through online sources.

Research on transitions with adoption and how parents can prepare for common adoption related issues when incorporating a new member into the family would help new adoptive parents. Having an understanding of what the adoptive child is experiencing and what as the parent they might experience would ease the sometimes turbulent early stages of the transition.

Adoptive parent’s knowledge of and access to support networks would better prepare them in transitioning their new family member home. The ability to rely on and vent with someone who has a similar understanding of the adoptive process would aid the new adoptive parent. Quick access to information about the inner workings of what adoption was like for other couples could help a future adoptive parent decide if it would be the right choice for them to adopt or not.

Research on international adoption will need to continue as long as international adoption occurs. Future studies aimed at helping adoptive families navigate through the early stages of the adoption process would not only benefit the family, but society as a whole. As the need for adoptive parents continue adoption agencies will have to create a greater understanding of what brings people to choose to adopt so that future generations of children find loving home.
Appendix A: Informed Consent Document

Title of Study: A phenomenological case study of a Caucasian couples’ journey through the adoption process of a child from an Asian Country.

Investigators: Shannon M. Wetzler (researcher), Dr. Kere Hughes (supervisor)

This is a research study for a thesis at Iowa State University. Please take your time to decide if you would like to participate, and feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

This study is being performed for a thesis paper by a graduate student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. Dr. Kere Hughes of the Department of Human Services and Family Studies is the supervisory investigator and major professor (contact information is provided below).

The purpose of this study is to gather information from a Caucasian couple in the United States about their beliefs, attitudes and motivations regarding adopting children from an Asian country. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Caucasian person, in a couple, who is adopting or have already adopted a child from an Asian country.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in this study, your participation will last for one year, and will involve interviews with the researcher. Four to eight interviews will be conducted with the researcher for approximately 45-50 minutes. The interviews will be conducted according to your available schedule. The interviews will be audio-recorded. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and will be erased following the transcription. Anecdotal notes about the interview process and environment may be taken. Documents pertaining to the adoption process will be collected. You will be asked to maintain a journal of your thoughts and feelings on the adoption process, electronically or handwritten. If a journal or online blog was started prior to this research information in said journal will be collected.

RISK

The risks of this study are extremely minimal. In the interview process you may experience possible discomfort in disclosing information. In the interview process you may possibly experience discomfort in being audio-taped. You have the right to not answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable, and may choose to not participate in this study at any time.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study, if you choose to participate. The information gathered in this study will benefit society by improving its understanding of the motivations, attitudes and beliefs of Caucasian couples’ who are adopting of have adopted a child from an Asian country. This information may lead to future studies in adoption and adoption policies.
COST AND COMPENSATION
You will not have costs from participating in this study. There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse participation or leave the study at any time. You have the right to skip questions you do not wish to answer and you may stop at any time. You may end your participation in the study or leave the study at any time for any reason without any penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records identifying participants in this study will be kept confidential and will not be made publicly available. To help ensure confidentiality the following will take place: The participants will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used on forms and in writings instead of real names. Any other identifiable details obtained during the course of the interview will be altered to protect confidentiality. All data gathered will be kept in a password coded computer file. The content of the interviews will only be applied to the writing of the thesis paper. The persons who will have access to the individual data and/or summarized data are the major professor and researcher, any information regarding names and identifiable information will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact: Shannon M. Wetzler (researcher) by phone (515-450-7002) or by email swetzler@iastate.edu.
- Or you may contact Dr. Kere Hughes (major professor) by phone (515-294-8441) or by email kereh@iastate.edu.
- For questions about the rights of the research participants or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator by phone (515-294-4566) or by email IRB@iastate.edu, or the Director, Office of Research Assurances by phone (515-294-3115) located at 1138 Pearson Hall, Ames, IA 50011.
PARTICIPANTS SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study; you have read and understand the information provided above, and your questions have been answered satisfactorily. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) __________________________________________

_______________________________________                       ________________

(Participant’s Signature)    (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered to their satisfaction. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

____________________________________________                   ________________

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)                                (Date)
Appendix B: First Interview Questions

1) How would you describe your experiences with the adoption process?
2) Tell me about your first experience with adoption.
3) Tell me about your interactions with other people when you talk about your adoption experience.
4) What led you to your path to adoption?
5) Tell me about your experience with the adoption agency.
6) What information do you have about your future child? Or information you have about your child before you brought him/her home?
7) Paint me a visual picture of how you see your future child or how you see your child in the future.
8) What would you tell another couple who is looking into or beginning the adoption process?
9) Describe your first visit to the adoption agency.
10) What comes to mind when I say kinship or blood ties?
11) If you could tell your past self anything what would you say?
12) What type of information or knowledge do you have about your child’s country of origin?
13) In what ways did your social worker prepare you for the adoption process?
14) How could your social worker have helped you prepare for the adoption process?
15) Before your child entered your home what type of information did you have about their background?

Expansive Questions: (Moustakas, p. 116, 1994)

1) What incidents connected to the experience stand out for you?
2) How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
3) How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
4) What feelings were generated by the experience?
5) What thoughts stood out for you?
6) Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?
Appendix C: Individual Interview Questions, Conducted 4/2/08

1) Tell me about any events that have occurred since we last talked.

2) When you first saw your daughter, in that moment before your first meeting, what went through your mind? (Asked husband, not wife)

3) In what other occasions have you traveled internationally? (Asked wife, she gave information so didn’t ask husband)

4) Have you had contact with the other couple since we last spoke? (As the main contact person I asked the wife only, not the husband this question)

5) What emotions come up when you think about the relationship between your daughter and her foster mom?

6) How often did you participate with the online forum?

7) What did it mean to you to see friends and family waiting for you at the airport?

8) What possible challenges do you think your daughter will face living in Iowa versus another state?

9) What is your impression of the Korean agency when you were staying in the guest house?

10) What types of thoughts went through your mind when you helped in the nursery at the agency?

11) In what ways have your role in the family changed since transitioning your daughter home?

12) What emotions or thoughts come up when you think about this change?

13) What factors brought you to choose international adoption versus domestic adoption?
Appendix D: Contact Summary Sheet

Location:          Date:
Participant:      

1) Reflection (difficulties, descriptions, etc.)

2) Main issues/themes in this contact

3) Questions skipped/unanswered or I perceived as difficult for participant to answer

4) Unexpected, interesting or important information learned

5) New questions or ideas for next time

6) Developing themes
Appendix E: Reflection Journal Entry 3/30/08

I am looking at Karen’s blog to piece together information on her journey into adoption…direct from the horse’s mouth, as the saying goes. The webpage is decorated with pictures of her family, adoption information web-links, South Korea information web-links, and past blog entries dating back to 2007. I have decided to create four separate word documents based upon my four themes in which I will abstract blog quotes to each word document according to category. I will type in the date of entry and the quote to its corresponding theme. From there I will be able to incorporate the blog information into my thesis. Since the information from the blog is solely Karen’s perspective it is one-sided information, but it also includes a lot of information that occurred before I entered into their lives, written in the moment, rather than from recall in the interviews. I think this will provide valuable information. Even the structure of the blog is interesting. It reveals an aspect of Karen’s personality, by providing information on the adoption agency that they worked with in South Korea, Korean history information and links. It is a way to give family and friends information and connection them into the whole process. The advantage of using the internet in the means of convenience is also expressed. Through posting events and occurrences of the adoption process and what is happening in the family Karen and John are subjected to retelling events repeatedly, if someone is interested in learning about what is happening they only have to log into the blog.
Appendix F: Definitions Found Online

**Belief**

be-lief  

- Show Spelled Pronunciation 

- IPA Pronunciation

- noun

1. something believed; an opinion or conviction: a belief that the earth is flat.
2. confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof: a statement unworthy of belief.
3. confidence; faith; trust: a child's belief in his parents.
4. a religious tenet or tenets; religious creed or faith: the Christian belief.

[Origin: 1125–75; earlier bile(e)ve (n. use of v.); r. ME believe, equiv. to bi- BE- + leave; cf. OE geléafa (c. D geloof, G Glaube; akin to Goth galaubeins)]

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**Attitude**

at-ti-tude  

- Pronunciation Key

- noun

1. A position of the body or manner of carrying oneself: stood in a graceful attitude. See Synonyms at posture.
2. a. A state of mind or a feeling; disposition: had a positive attitude about work.
   b. An arrogant or hostile state of mind or disposition.
3. The orientation of an aircraft's axes relative to a reference line or plane, such as the horizon.
4. The orientation of a spacecraft relative to its direction of motion.
5. A position similar to an arabesque in which a ballet dancer stands on one leg with the other raised either in front or in back and bent at the knee.


http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Attitude
**cat·a·lyst** - Show Spelled Pronunciation [kat·l-ist] Pronunciation Key - Show IPA Pronunciation

- **noun**
  1. *Chemistry.* a substance that causes or accelerates a chemical reaction without itself being affected.
  2. something that causes activity between two or more persons or forces without itself being affected.
  3. a person or thing that precipitates an event or change: *His imprisonment by the government served as the catalyst that helped transform social unrest into revolution.*
  4. a person whose talk, enthusiasm, or energy causes others to be more friendly, enthusiastic, or energetic.


**fluc·tu·ate** - Show Spelled Pronunciation [fluhk-choo-eyt]

Pronunciation Key - Show IPA Pronunciation *verb*, –at·ed, –at·ing.

- **verb (used without object)**
  1. to change continually; shift back and forth; vary irregularly: *The price of gold fluctuated wildly last month.*
  2. to move back and forth in waves.

- **verb (used with object)**
  3. to cause to fluctuate.


**ser·en·dip·i·ty** (sēr·ən·dip·ĭ·tē) Pronunciation Key

n. *pl. ser·en·dip·i·ties*

1. The faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident.
2. The fact or occurrence of such discoveries.
3. An instance of making such a discovery.


**re·cur** (rī–kūr′) Pronunciation Key
intr.v.  **re·curred, re·cur·ring, re·curs**

1. To happen, come up, or show up again or repeatedly.
2. To return to one’s attention or memory.
3. To return in thought or discourse.
4. To have recourse: *recur to the use of force.*

Appendix G: Developing Codes Journal Entry 1/24/08

I finished transcribing my first interview and developing codes. I then went through my codes and looked up some of the words I had chosen to decide if the word truly expressed what the data presented. After looking up definitions and using the thesaurus I feel more confident in my codes. I will list below the raw codes discovered in the transcription.

Attitude
Introduction
Family introduction
Belief
Health
Dreams
Connection
Turning point
Process
Agency
Social worker
Own advocate
Inconsistency
Policy
Miscommunication
Stress
Support
Humor
Agency information
Korea information
Information
Advocacy
Family
Connection to the past
STIGMA
DIFFERENCES
UNIT
ANNOUNCEMENT
NAME CONNECTION
CULTURE
INFLUENCES ON ADOPTION
CHOOSING COUNTRY

TOTAL CODES: 32

*THE CODES INCONSISTANCY AND CONNECTION ARE LARGER CODES THAT INCOMPASS MULTIPLE IDEAS. I HAD TO DEFINE INCONSISTANCY AND IN REFERENCE TO THE INFORMATION AND PROCESS THAT WAS EVER CHANGING FOR THE COUPLE I AM CHANGING IT TO FLUCTUATE. I WILL NEED
TO RE-READ THE CODED SECTIONS WITH INCONSISTANCY AND DECIDE IF THE CODE STILL WORKS OR IF I NEED TO CHANGE IT TO FLUCTUATE.

*I AM CREATING A NEW CODE FOR CONNECTION FOR SOME OF DATA TO SERENDIPITY. IN THE INSTANCES WHERE THERE IS A “FATE LIKE” QUALITY TO THE CONNECTION. I WILL RE-READ THOSE CODE AREAS AND ADJUST APPROPRIATELY.
Appendix H: Reformatting Codes Journal Entry 3/18/08

After developing the codes from the second interview I did have difficulty incorporating them into the themes from the first interview. Not wanting to negatively affect the codes, or the integrity of the data, I attempted to develop new themes. I have since decided to not go with the new themes, but I did learn that using a chronological order of presenting the data would be easiest for the readers. I went back through the second transcription looking at the codes I had developed and the text, making changes to the codes to best represent the text. I read through the codes which didn’t seem to fit right away, looking at the code and the matching text. As I read through these I also looked at the themes I had developed from the first transcription. I wrote the four themes on an index card, one theme per card, and spread out the cards on the floor. I wrote the “extra” codes on index cards. By doing so I was able to see how the codes fit together, by grouping them into sub-themes which fit under the four main themes. After making these discoveries I went back through the codes and altered any wording that needed to be changed. Through making these changes and not affecting the integrity of the data I was able to keep the existing themes. The following sub-themes were developed from the codes which had originally given me difficulty: Anna which goes under the theme “Connection” and the sub-theme demographics which goes under the theme “The Couple”.

Incorporation of the codes from the second interview into the themes developed from the first interview.

“Connection”
Perceptions of South Korea
Culture – South Korean culture, differences, history, respect for Dr.’s, Seoul Street
Korean War - Korean War Museum, Historical connection
Food/eating (Outback Steakhouse), Authentic meal
Clothes – culture, familiarity, BM

Anna – communication through sign language, personality, interaction (observation), hair, frown, Food/eating, bathing,

Korean agency - Birth moms, Founder, meal with founder, Giving and receiving ceremony, other (adopting) couples, other foster mom, Guest house – Guest House (rooms), Newborns

Meeting Anna - Meeting Anna/Foster mom, Second meeting, First meeting, Second meeting (frown), Second meeting (Anna’s Adjustment), Foster mom, Gift exchange

Transition – flight, awareness, home, getting to know Anna, mom, dad, boys/mom, house size, carpet, pillow, family size, son, juggling needs, and grief (title of mommy), Flight – food, culture/food, crib, bottles, Airport

“Support”
Advocacy – information, other couple, grief, social worker, blankets, other foster mom
Support – social worker, friends, family, internet, other couples, parenting seminar, john’s home town, welcoming committee

“The Couple”
Fluidity – parenting, experience, trip to South Korea (flexibility), Guardians, Unit

Advocacy – Knowledge of Anna, Word use

Demographics – Karen’s hometown, John’s hometown, Iowa’s changing

“Process”
Policy/Advocacy

Crohn’s Disease – pregnancy, miscarriages, letter of health

Sibling call, sympathy for birth mom

Giving and receiving ceremony

Car seat – ride home
Appendix I: Individual Interview with Highlighted Codes, 4/2/08

I: When I talked to you in the first interview about choosing the agency that you would go through for adoption we didn’t really talk about what brought you to choose international versus domestic so if you could tell me a little bit about that?

K: I never even wanted to do domestic.

I: okay.

K: I’ve always had the heart for international and when you look at the certainty of international, if you want to go at it, mine was an emotional tie, like I just wanted to do international, but a lot of people it comes down to when thinking about it you know in rational terms there is a guarantee there is a baby at the end. Domestic you could wait for years and never have it. Domestic is a lot more um, more of a pageant really you know because you get whether it is an online profile or um ah… binder of information about you, the birth moms are looking through these. They are picking based on whether they like the look of your house, your car, how much money you make or a lot of it, a lot of what it comes down to. You know I hear more about that than I do any, my cousins birth mom chose my Aunt seemed, our family because we looked warm and caring, and we were fun, you know a lot of them don’t, don’t do that or what you can offer them. I don’t mean to sound cold because they are still making a huge sacrifice, but there’s a lot more of ‘what’s in it for me’ feel to it than, you know and you can from a financial stand point you can sink a lot of money into it and never, never get a baby.

I: Um hmm.

K: And so that wasn’t ever my reasoning, but that’s a lot, when you talk to other families that is the reasoning they come up with, but I always I, in mind my it was always China that I always thought, but we don’t qualify in their programs. So…you have to be 30 and we don’t, and that would have put too much of an age difference between Stewart and the baby and I didn’t want that and um before we had Stewart we kind of looked around a bit and Korea was….I….it….I don’t know I liked it, I didn’t look into it too deeply and as soon as we found out that the doctors were willing to let me go through with having Stewart and when looked after I had Stewart, it just kept popping up, and it is a good program, you know its…

I: Um hmm.

K: There is an assurance at the end of it. It’s a lot more straight forward than a lot of countries, you get a lot of up front information as much as they can give you and still be fair to the birth family and then um I don’t know, some of it a lot from our social workers and the other families too, we thought that the amount of information we got was fine, you know.
## Appendix J: Theme Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards adoption</th>
<th>&quot;I can’t ever remember not wanting to [adopt].” (18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They (Aunt and Uncle) lost a referral in between, that was just completely heart breaking and they just kept….I was their girl you know for the longest time and they just kept me involved for the longest time.” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It still is the best memory of my life…” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…he (19) was kind of iffy on it [adoption]…” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…that’s not what he’s (19) thinking, not something he wants to do.” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…we always wanted three, and I still wanted to adopt…” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I knew it was something she had always wanted to do, but I wasn’t real big on the idea, too scary I guess for me, to enter into I guess.” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m a bit conservative type of person so I was kind of, let’s stick with what we know type of thing…” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I guess she kind of won me over after a long time of discussion.” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…it’s kind of hard to grasp how you could…when you have a child, when they are born you know there is an instant connection you love that child like you wouldn’t believe is even possible.” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t know it was just a world of unknown I guess, just not knowing, not been through it, where she had that background with her Aunt and Uncle that I didn’t have…so I don’t know…it’s just different.” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Is that [connection] even possible through an adoption, to do that?” (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…it was just a feeling that it was right and that just felt like the right agency.” (18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Adoptive Parent’s Connection to Adoption – Past/Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adopted Child’s Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adopted Parent to Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serendipity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birth moms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foster mom/sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions with Anna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Connection” theme is about how the couple is connected to the adopted child, to adoption through their past and introduction to adoption, and the serendipitous events that connect the couple to the adopted child. The sub-theme culture incorporates the adopted child’s connection to their ‘native’ culture, the couple’s perspective of South Korea, South Korea’s history including the Korean War, the difference between South Korea and the United States, and the culture of the adoptive parent’s state. Transition covers many aspects of the family’s transitions in adding a new member to the family, the giving and receiving ceremony, the adopted child’s transition, and the “steps” taken to bring the adopted child home with the couple. Through the travel to South Korea the reality of the birth mothers was visible, reaffirming the connection of the adopted child’s past to the couple’s future. The two meetings with Anna the adopted child at the agency strengthened the connection between the couple and child. By adopting Anna the couple gains another connection through and with the foster mom and sister who had previously been in their daughter life. The sub-theme interactions with Anna were the observations of the couple interacting with Anna during the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluctuating – The Ups and Downs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choosing the Country</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Turning Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Process” theme incorporates the process and procedures the couple has to perform to adopt their child. This includes the policies, social worker, the agency in the U.S. and the child’s country, how the couple chose the country to adopt from, the event(s) that led to adopting the child (turning point, and health), fluctuating events that occur while going through the adoption process, stress involved in the process, and information learned about the future child. The sub-theme agency incorporates the couple’s experience when visiting
the Korean agency, for example; their interactions with the founder of the agency, caring for
the newborns in the nursery, and a possible future sibling call.

Support  Family - Announcement
      Own Advocate
      Social Worker
      Humor
      Advocacy – Stigma
      Parenting seminar
      The other (adopting) couples
      Foster mom
      Internet/Online Forums

The “Support” theme covers the support the adopting couple receives from others and
themselves. The couples’ families, friends, internet/online forums, other (adopting) couples,
John’s hometown, John’s boss, their social worker, other adoption employees and services,
the foster mom and their adoption agency provided support through the adoption process.
The couple also received support through their own advocacy and humor.

The Couple  Beliefs
      Attitudes
      Differences
      Unit
      Demographics
      Use of Internet
      Guardians
      Fluidity

The “Couple” theme is composed of the couples’ individual beliefs about adoption, their
attitudes towards adoption, their differences as people, and how they function as a unit. The
demographic sub-theme covers the couple's hometown demographics, where their parents
still reside. Use of the internet and the concept of word use played an interesting dynamic in
the couples’ interaction. The couples’ personalities were disclosed in their willingness to take
on the guardianship of a friend’s young child, in addition to their own parenting
responsibilities. Fluidity was a sub-theme developed to express the couple’s adaptability in
their thinking, and functioning. Even as a unit the couple is composed of two individuals, the
differences of these two people were shown through the sub-theme differences.
Appendix L: Information Found on Crohn’s Disease, Journal Entry 1/31/08

After thinking about 18 and 19 talking about Crohn’s disease I thought that I should look it up in addition to asking them about it in the follow up questions. I know that 18 was very interested in adopting before she was told it would not be advised for her to have children, but in some ways I think that her health and safety in giving birth was the push in the adoption direction for 19. I believe that he is now a willing participant in the process, but if 18’s health was not a factor I don’t think they would be adopting. I got the impression from him that it is a second choice option for having children. So with this disease working as a catalyst for this couple to enter into adoption I figured it was definitely worthy of my researching it. The information below is what I found online through a Google search.

What is Crohn’s disease?

Crohn’s disease is an ongoing disorder that causes inflammation of the digestive tract, also referred to as the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Crohn’s disease can affect any area of the GI tract, from the mouth to the anus, but it most commonly affects the lower part of the small intestine, called the ileum. The swelling extends deep into the lining of the affected organ. The swelling can cause pain and can make the intestines empty frequently, resulting in diarrhea.

Crohn’s disease is an inflammatory bowel disease, the general name for diseases that cause swelling in the intestines. Because the symptoms of Crohn’s disease are similar to other intestinal disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome and ulcerative colitis, it can be difficult to diagnose. Ulcerative colitis causes inflammation and ulcers in the top layer of the lining of the large intestine. In Crohn’s disease, all layers of the intestine may be involved, and normal healthy bowel can be found between sections of diseased bowel.

Crohn’s disease affects men and women equally and seems to run in some families. About 20 percent of people with Crohn’s disease have a blood relative with some form of inflammatory bowel disease, most often a brother or sister and sometimes a parent or child. Crohn’s disease can occur in people of all age groups, but it is more often diagnosed in people between the ages of 20 and 30. People of Jewish heritage have an increased risk of developing Crohn’s disease, and African Americans are at decreased risk for developing Crohn’s disease.

Crohn’s disease may also be called ileitis or enteritis.

Is pregnancy safe for women with Crohn's disease?

Research has shown that the course of pregnancy and delivery is usually not impaired in women with Crohn’s disease. Even so, women with Crohn’s disease should discuss the
matter with their doctors before pregnancy. Most children born to women with Crohn’s disease are unaffected. Children who do get the disease are sometimes more severely affected than adults, with slowed growth and delayed sexual development in some cases.

http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/crohns/

Complications

Women with Inflammatory bowel disease shows that they "face a higher risk of adverse outcomes related to pregnancy, according to a report in the October issue of Gastroenterology" [1].

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crohn's_disease#Prognosis
So I just finished interviewing Karen and John and the interview I think went pretty well. They answered most of the questions. We had some interruptions with the boys coming in but understandably it is their home so they have to come and see what mom and dad are doing so I will have to edit that in my transcription. Um, an impression of their town is a population slightly over 1300, one four way intersection in the center of town. There is a country highway, road that goes through the center of town leading to another town about 6 miles away. If you turn one direction at the four way stop you go into town there are small shops and stores, a post office, and if you go the other direction there is a church and middle school. Houses all around, safe looking neighborhood, well kept houses. Some of them are early 1900s others are more modern. Their home was warm and inviting, clean, organized. I was surprised with three children how tidy it was. It had a very welcoming, open, loving feel to it. The kitchen was set up to cater to loving with children. It had a play kitchen in the corner, the cabinets had locks on them for the baby, and the booster seats were set up. In the beginning of the interview Anna sat with us, and had some food. John in a relaxed manner fed her crackers, talked to her. When she was playing with her food, and trying to knock it off the tray he told her in a very firm voice no. There seemed to be an ease and comfort with her, and with their children coming in and out of the conversation. The love and mutual respect between child an parent was visible in the communication and in respecting when the parents said ‘you have to leave the room’, but also when the parents accepted the boys coming into the room, and listening to what they needed to say before asking them to leave the room. The next interview will be conducted mid March, separate interviews, might go back to their home depending on their preference. I will have to contact them about a week in advance to set up the appointment. It was agreed that scheduling now for so far in advance would lead to forgetfulness on both sides, so contacting a week in advance was agreed upon. At that time I will hopefully have IRB approval for asking John to maintain a journal or to email me weekly on his thoughts and such. At that time I will also be able to collect their documents.

Themes:

The support questions were answered, how they found the online support, how that support was helpful, also got to hear about going to South Korea and what it was like for them, meeting other parents. Definitely compassionate care towards other parents, especially towards the couple who was adopting the little boy whose foster mother did not want to let go of. He was their first child, and the difficulty they had in the transition. Karen expressed her understanding of the difficulty the foster mother faced in giving the child to the adoptive couple, but also her anger towards the foster mother for making the transition so hard for the adoptive couple and child. Her relief in their foster parent in having the love and care she had for Anna but also her understanding that she had to let the child go to her adoptive parents.

I find it helpful that the comfortable relationship that John has with me will lead to him disclosing more information about his perspective about the adoption process when we have our individual interview. When he was able to express him concern in the first interview about attachment to a child who is not of his blood. His ability to express that concern, which is a typical concern of people who are looking into adoption. The fact that by the time the adoption had come full circle he could understand; he could see how it was possible. The
information he had gained about his daughter had made her more of a reality, more of a piece of him, and so by the time they went to get her she was his. That factor from the male perspective is very intriguing, because often it is the female perspective, the adoptive mother, the foster mother, the birth mother, or the social worker (who is typically female). There perspective is learned and studied, rarely is the male perceptive looked at and in particular the adoptive fathers perspective. What does he think of the adoptive process? How does he feel about having a child who is not biologically not his own? How does he make that connection to that child? The fact that he was able to disclose that concern makes me hopeful that he will be able to disclose more information in our individual interview or if not in person then perhaps in his journal or email to me. Also in the first interview he was able to express his love of his wife and his desire to expand his family through the path of adoption. The sense I got from the couple was that the adoption idea was always Karen’s it was always something she would do whereas John never considered it. He had the experience of adoption through knowing people who had adopted or were adopted, but he himself had never thought of the concept of him adopting. He meets Karen, they fall in love and marry, and through his love of her and her health making it inadvisable to have children and them both desiring to have more children once again opening up this concept of adoption. In a way opening up John to the concept of adoption. It is interesting when I was watching his interaction with Anna, seeing him care for her. Seeing the pictures that they had taken of their first visit with Anna and their second visit with Anna, them taking her home on the airplane.

The love and care he feels for her, for this child who was not born of his blood, was completely visible. It was visible in how he cradles her body to his, how he smiles at her when she smiles at him, how he reprimands her when she is doing something she is not supposed to, but doing it in an affectionate way that is reprimanding the action, but then continuing on in a playful and loving manner after the action has stopped. His ease with children was very visible when he took her to change her into her pajamas; he took her bottle and put her bed this evening. It was enlightening and very heartwarming to see someone who had expressed such concern for adopting a child and not being sure where he would stand on it. To see him fully embrace it.

There was complete love in his eyes when he was looking at her this evening, and you could see him falling in love with her in their South Korea pictures. In his conversations about her, hearing the love in his voice when he talked about her was expressed. I think that is one of the main topics of interest that has come up in the interviews, John’s experiences. I am interested in how both members of the couple are embracing, entering into, journeying through and gaining their child. But his perspective is definitely an intriguing angle because it is rarely studied and because he was brought into the concept of adoption, versus him bringing it to the relationship. It was not his idea, but yet he is fully embracing it. That is amazing to see. This would be a very interesting family to see down the road, their ease as parents is very visible. There is a competency there, the love of their children, the children’s love of them. You role with the punches and you accept things and the fact that Karen expressed a desire to know as much as possible about South Korea was shown in her knowledge of the countries history. Of the rulers, her knowledge of the adoption process, her knowledge of the Korean agency knowledge of the culture, her gaining additional information by joining and seeking forums about adoption.
The fact that as a couple they are mentoring other couples. The way they helped that couple who was dealing with the difficult separation, the way they talked to the couple on the plane on the way back, and tried to offer support to them through encouragement. The couple that they are giving advice to who will be going to South Korea to pick up their child. It is also an intriguing aspect to their relationship as a couple, also in how their experience has gone in almost a circle fashion. More like a spiral fashion. They received mentorship, they were the novices, and now they are the mentors. They stepped into the adoption process and now they are helping others step into it. And how they advocated for themselves by trying to gain as much information about South Korea, and their daughter. About taking the support offered to them from each other, and others. That is a form of advocacy, advocating for your need to take support from someone, allowing them to aide you.
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