How dual-earner adoptive couples distribute family labor responsibilities in special-needs adoptive placements

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How dual-earner adoptive couples distribute family labor responsibilities in special-needs adoptive placements

by

Darren Anthony Wozny

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies (Marriage and Family Therapy)

Program of Study Committee:
Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Co-major Professor
Ronald Werner-Wilson, Co-major Professor
Chalandra Bryant
Harvey Joanning
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Iowa State University
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2002
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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of
Darren Anthony Wozny
has met the requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Co-major Professor
Signature was redacted for privacy.

Co-major Professor
Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Cheryl Anne Wozny, who supported my doctoral studies in every way imaginable. She is my "secure family base."

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of a long-time friend, Lynn Lillebo, whose care and warmth provide a fine example for parents and neighbors to strive towards.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Byng-Hall’s (1999) concept of *secure family base* is critical to the maintenance of an intact adoptive placement for newly adoptive parents of special-needs children. The notion of a *secure family base* expands the dyadic attachment relationship between caregiver-child to a network of caregivers that define nurturance of family members as their principal function. A network of caregivers implies mutual negotiation of coordinated care arrangements between caregivers to meet the nurturance needs of all family members, particularly children.

LaRossa (1988) explains the parallel between hospitals and families and cites Zerubavel (1979) concept of a *continuous coverage social system*. This concept is closely linked to the premise of a secure family base that calls for a network of caregivers to coordinate caring needs of a family. The strong point is made that one parent at times will be primarily responsible for caregiving, while the other parent is secondarily responsible or ready to relieve when the other parent is tired or overwhelmed. Thus, parenting becomes a shared responsibility.

The negotiation between caregivers is complicated when each caregiver contributes significantly to the economic needs of the family. Thus, dual-income families must struggle to balance the needs of the family versus the needs of the workplace. It is not well understood how parents negotiate with their workplaces to facilitate their participation in the secure family base for their children.

Similarly, the process of how childcare arrangements are negotiated between adoptive parents of special-needs children is a significant unaddressed need. Under typical parenting circumstances, an inequitable traditional division of household labor, emotional labor, and child care would stress the marital relationship and often influence the development of mental health issues of depression and anger in women. Increasingly, the demands of special-needs adoption tax adoptive parents severally and call into question whether the traditional division of caregiving, that places primary responsibility with one caregiver, can respond adequately to children’s needs over time. With the responsibilities of the workplace added to
an already over-stressed primary caregiver, it becomes evident why some form of mutual
care taking would need to take place in order for the adoptive placement to remain intact.

The current study is organized into four main chapters. Chapter two will review the
relevant literatures and discuss the main themes and findings under each literature. Chapter
three outlines the study's methodology. The methodology chapter will include my
philosophical assumptions, researcher-as-instrument, participants, data collection, data
analysis, and data verification procedures. Chapter four presents the study's results and
reintegrates these results through several discussions with the previous literature of chapter
two. Chapter five briefly summarizes the study's primary conclusions and presents the
implications of the findings.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how adoptive parents of special-needs children negotiate a secure family base several literatures have been reviewed. The literatures include (a) special-needs adoption, (b) work/family balance, (c) division of household labor, (d) parenting-fathering, (e) parenting-mothering, and (f) parenting-childcare. In order to orient the reader to how each of the six literatures relate to the current study, I will present each of the literature's major themes and summarize the main studies.

Special-Needs Adoption Literature Themes

The special-needs adoption literature has five important orientating themes:

1. Adoptive parents of special-needs children often have unrealistic expectations that reflect a “myth of sameness” compared to non-special-needs birth families that leaves these families unprepared for the transition to special-needs adoptive family life.
2. Adoptive parents of special-needs children have little awareness of how special-needs adoption will impact family relationships.
3. Adoptive parents of special-needs children underestimate the extent/intensity of the emotional/behavioral issues of special-needs adoptive children.
4. Involvement of adoptive fathers is critical to special-needs adoptive placements remaining intact.
5. Theme of special-needs adoption outcomes within the first year of placement.

Work/Family Balance Literature Themes

The work/family balance literature has several salient themes:

1. Work/family balance with special-needs families.
2. Work/family balance strategies.
4. Level of satisfaction with work/family balance.
5. Employer response to parental requests for flexibility to meet family needs.
6. Predictors of work/family conflict.
7. How family influences the work context.
Division of Household Labor Literature Themes

The division of household labor literature has several relevant themes:

1. Egalitarian marital relationships versus the myth of equality.
2. Theoretical explanations for paternal involvement in the household labor.
3. Women being held primarily responsible for the household labor.
4. Predictors of marital conflict over the division of household labor.
5. Perception of fairness in the division of household labor.

Parenting Arrangements Literature

Parenting Arrangements is the umbrella category for fathering, mothering, and childcare literatures. For the most part, the themes of the childcare literature will be integrated with the separate themes of the fathering and mothering literatures.

Approaches to Childcare Arrangements

The noted exception is the theme of dual-income couples approaches to the management of childcare which is a dyadic theme and does not fit completely in either the mothering or fathering literature. However it does provide a helpful framework for the reader to review the fathering and mothering literature.

Fathering Literature Themes

The fathering literature has several important themes:

1. The incongruence between the culture and conduct of fatherhood.
2. Comparison of fathers’ to mothers’ involvement with their children.
3. Fathers being “secondarily responsible” for their children while mothers bear “primary responsibility.”
4. Paternal involvement in childcare arrangements.
5. Fathering is more influenced by contextual influences than mothering.
6. The impact of fathers’ and mothers’ work schedules on fathers’ involvement with their children.
7. Over-emphasis on contextual influences related to involved fatherhood.
Mothering Literature Themes

The mothering literature has several relevant themes:

1. Dominant cultural ideal of mothering.
2. Primary responsibility for household/childcare labor is related to differentially high levels of anger in women.
3. How the dominant cultural ideals of motherhood are reconciled through management of childcare arrangements for employed mothers.
4. Mothers being held primarily responsible for childcare.
5. Maternal distress.
6. Mothers' experience of limited support from fathers in management of childcare arrangements.
7. Advantages, disadvantages, and coping strategies for women in dual-income relationships.

The definition of “special-needs children” varies from state to state, therefore it is important to clarify how the State of Iowa defines “special-needs children” when considering adoption. The Iowa criteria for “special-needs children” eligible for adoption includes any one of the following: (a) Caucasian child who is eight years or older; (b) a minority or multicultural child of any age; (c) a child of any age with a physical or mental disability; (d) a child of any age with emotional or behavioral problems; (e) a child of any age who is developmentally disabled; (f) sibling groups of three or more children, to be placed together; and (g) a sibling group of two children, one of whom has special-needs, to be placed together.

Special-Needs Adoption Literature

The need for a secure family base in special-needs adoptive families is especially highlighted given that many special-needs children come from families where the parental rights have been terminated due to neglect and abuse of the children. These children learn that their parental caregivers are often inconsistent, unreliable, and sometimes dangerous in relation to care and nurturance. It is expected that when special-needs children are placed in an adoptive home there will be considerable distrust of caregivers due to the children’s previous experiences, however adoptive parents are often not prepared for this distrust.
Rosenthal (1993) found that consistent predictors of adoptive placement disruption included (a) unrealistic parent expectations, (b) status as newly-adoptive parents compared to foster-adoptive parents, (c) fathers' noninvolvement in parenting tasks (Westhues & Cohen, 1990), and (d) low support by family and friends.

The research on the predictors of adoption placement disruption is one of the reasons I chose to study newly-adoptive parents and how both fathers and mothers negotiate a secure family base among themselves and their respective employers. The process of negotiating a secure family base addresses many ingrained unrealistic expectations of special-needs adoption. The work/family balance focus tends to respect the contextual constraints experienced by men that often prevent their increased paternal involvement in maintaining a secure family base within their family. The work/family balance focus also explores the extent of support that adoptive parents experience from their coworkers when dealing with the additional family demands related to special-needs adoption.

It is important to study special-needs adoptive families within the first year of the adoptive placement since that is the window of time before the adoptive placement of the child becomes legal. Once the adoption of the child becomes legal, the barriers to dissolution (disruption of placement once the adoption is legal) are much greater and more complicated. Thus, understanding how parents negotiate a secure family base within the first year of the adoptive placement becomes critical to their decision to legally adopt the special-needs child.

*Unrealistic Expectations Related to "Myth of Sameness"

What is defined as an "unrealistic parent expectation" for prospective adoptive parents? This could feasibly cover a diverse range of parent expectations and so it became necessary to understand what constitutes unrealistic parent expectations and why it is currently relevant.

Miall (1996) surveyed a random sample of 150 participants (equal representation by gender) on their perception of differences in functioning between biological and adoptive families. The majority of the participants knew friends or families who had adopted and reported that this influenced their attitude toward adoption. She reported 67% of males and 69% of females perceived no more risk with adopting a child than with having one by birth. In addition, the majority (males=84%; females=79%) disagreed that adopted children were
more likely to be problematic than children born into the family. These findings highlight a broader cultural expectation that adoptive families are no different than biological families, promoting a "myth of sameness" that could contribute to the development of unrealistic parent expectations about special-needs adoption. This "myth of sameness" may influence newly-adoptive parents with birth children to assume that special-needs adoption is "just adding members" with the expectation of the typical adjustment process. In sum, these adoptive parents may assume that their current parenting arrangements are more than adequate to handle the demands of a special-needs adoptive child and that re-negotiation is unnecessary.

Similarly, Schmidt, Rosenthal, and Bombeck (1988) cited the need to cut through the idealism of parents' expectations and help families to expect and live with the reality of special-needs adoption challenges. They noted that adoptive parents identified that the pre-placement process lacked realism and was considered artificial. Likewise, Barth and Berry (1988) noted that adoptive parents of older adoptive children (average special-needs child is 8.5 years old) need help to realize the unique circumstances of special-needs adoption and modify their expectations which are typically based on experiences that do not accommodate this special case of parenting. Adoptive parents' idealism makes it likely that prospective adoptive parents who receive an adoptive child will still harbor an unrealistic expectation of special-needs adoptive family life when they receive placement of the adoptive child.

More recently, McRoy (1999) developed a list of pre-placement training competencies for potential adoptive parents based on "red flags" that often arose during the home study and screening process that created doubt for the case worker as to the parents' ability to manage a special-needs adoptive child. McRoy identified that the pre-placement competencies of prospective adoptive parents include being aware of their own idealism pertaining to their expectations for a less-difficult child as well as their limitations in parenting a special-needs child without adequate training and support. McRoy also mentioned the related pre-placement competency of prospective adoptive parents' ability to identify ways to lower expectations and develop a more realistic picture of special-needs adoptive family life. Thus, it is understandable how problematic the proposed study of the negotiation of a secure family base would be with prospective adoptive parents who have not
yet received placement of the adoptive child. The prospective adoptive parents would likely see limited need for any re-negotiation of parental responsibilities. This is the primary reason for studying adoptive parents who are within their first year of their adoptive placement. These adoptive parents see the relevance of the need for the re-negotiation of caregiving responsibilities within their parenting relationship and with their respective employers.

*Awareness of How Adoption Impacts Family Relationships*

Wozny and Crase (2001) in a study found that prospective adoptive parents tend to expect that the adoption of a special-needs child will mostly be a positive influence on their birth children. However, McDonald, Lieberman, Partridge, and Hornby (1991) in a study of adoptive families found that 78% of the disrupted placements identified conflict between the adoptive child and the birth children of the adopting family, whereas only 14% of the intact placements experienced this same difficulty. Similarly, McDonald et al. also found that 85% of the disrupted placements experienced conflict between the adoptive child and the adopting parents, whereas only 8% of intact placements had this difficulty. This finding suggests that parent expectations about family members “getting along with the adoptive child” should be assessed prior to placement. It is this increased risk of conflict within the adoptive family that highlights the need to have a strong coordination of care negotiated between the adoptive parents. If the parenting responsibilities are primarily distributed to one adoptive parent caregiver (usually mothers), the relational and individual damage from conflict can be overwhelming.

Similarly, Barth and Berry (1988) established that adoptive parents are often ill-prepared for the lack of responsiveness they receive from their adoptive child. This can result in the parents’ self-doubt of their ability to parent an adoptive child. Additionally, it conflicts with the initial parent expectation that the placement will have a positive outcome. This underlined the importance of nurturance/emotional support between adoptive parents when the adoptive placement becomes highly stressful. Support is an essential dimension of the secure family base in adoptive families. Specifically, there is a coordinated network of care provided by both parents to ensure that when any family member (child or parent) is in need of care, a response will be forthcoming. If an adoptive family is organized traditionally with
one primary caregiver serving the nurturance needs of the family, a dramatic problem arises if that parent becomes incapacitated due to physical/emotional demands.

Special-needs adoptions are often stressful on parents' relationships. Rosenthal (1982) found that adoption often places severe strain on adoptive parents' marital relationship. Wozny and Crase (2001) found that prospective adoptive parents only disagreed slightly with the statement that adoption would in no way impact their marital relationship. Fortunately, after the adoptive training/orientation, prospective adoptive parents became more aware of the impact of special-needs adoption on their marriages. Further, Festinger (1986) identified that marital conflict is one of the significant predictors of disrupted placement. It should be noted that caseworkers during the home-study process are supposed to carefully screen for marital problems. Thus, the explanation of pre-existing marital difficulties surfacing in an adoptive placement disruption is dubious. More likely, marital conflicts are the result of how traditional care arrangements between parents become insufficient in handling the increased care demands of an adoptive placement. If this is true it supports the need for coordination of care between adoptive parents. In families where the responsibilities for care of others are shared, it seems intuitive that their marital relationship would be strengthened regardless of the outcome of the adoptive placement.

**Underestimating Adoptive Children's Behavioral/Emotional Issues**

Rosenthal, Schmidt, and Conner (1988) discussed how developmental and/or physical problems of special needs adoptive children can relate to more realistic parent expectations because they are more easily identifiable whereas emotional/behavioral problems in adoptive children can be more insidious and relate to over-optimism in parent expectations. Rosenthal et al. would define developmental problems as mentally challenged children whereby their cognitive deficits would be readily identifiable to the layperson. This is consistent with Barth and Berry (1988) who identified that adoptive parents of older adoptive children expect to have a therapeutic effect on the adoptive child but few expect to become skilled in changing their behavior or acting as their case manager. In similar fashion, Schmidt et al. (1988) in their interviews of twelve couples and three single parents with disrupted placements found that one of the main themes related to disruption was the parents' expectation of a less difficult child. The adoptive parents found that they grossly underestimated the nature and
intensity of problems that special-needs adoptive children experience and their effects on the adopting family. These findings suggest that newly adoptive parents may be naïve about the kinds of behavior and emotional difficulties they will encounter and need to manage in the adoptive family. Thus, underestimation of the emotional/behavioral difficulties of a special-needs adoptive child by the adoptive parents can severally challenge the arrangement of parenting responsibilities that may have been sufficient in handling non-special-needs birth children previously.

*Importance of Adoptive Father Involvement to Placements*

Cohen (1981) found that special-needs children, if they attach at all to the adoptive family, often begin with the adoptive father followed by the birth siblings, and lastly the adoptive mother. In this early exploratory study of special-needs children, Cohen noted that adoptive mothers often become discouraged about the slow progress of the attachment bond and thus require emotional support from the adoptive father. Thus, the stability of the adoptive placement is critically linked to the adoptive father’s willingness to become affectively involved with his adoptive child. Furthermore, Westhaus and Cohen (1990) tested the hypothesis of whether adoptive fathers (N=58) were important to maintenance of special-needs adoptive placements. Westhaus and Cohen used the self-report inventory of the Family Assessment Measure (FAM) to compare fathers’ means in the sustainers vs. disrupters groups and used discriminant analysis to identify membership in sustainers vs. disrupters groups based on knowledge of FAM scores. The authors found significant mean differences between adoptive fathers in the sustainers compared to those of the disrupters group. The fathers in the sustainers group had significantly higher means in the affective involvement, affective expression, and role performance categories. Similarly, when the fathers’ self-report scores on the FAM’s affective involvement and affective expression were used in conjunction with other predictors it could correctly identify 97% of the sustainer group of adoptive placements. However, the main shortcoming of Westhaus and Cohen’s study was that their sample size was inequitably split between sustainers (n=51) and disrupters (n=7) families. This sample size makes conclusions more preliminary than conclusive. However, it does make sense that fathers who demonstrate more affective involvement and
expressiveness with their special-needs adoptive children stand a stronger chance of maintaining an intact adoptive placement.

Similarly, Ward (1997) in her review of the literature on special-needs adoption found that couples who were not equally committed to the placement and who had inflexible family roles and unrealistic expectations were more likely to disrupt. This emphasizes that both adoptive parents need to be significantly involved in the care of a special-needs adoptive child and that the high demands of the adoptive placement require parents to make large adjustments in their roles as mothers and fathers. It is not well understood how adoptive mothers and fathers of special-needs children negotiate these adjustments. It is possible that some of these changes are privately and individually negotiated, though in order to coordinate care for the special-needs adoptive child (secure family base) a significant amount of negotiation would occur between the adoptive parents and their respective employers.

Adoption Outcomes Within the First Year of Placement

Overall, Barth and Berry (1988) indicate that the most common estimate of special-needs adoption placement disruption is 15%, about one in seven placements disrupted before the adoption becomes legal. Additionally, Groze’s (1996) review of the special-needs adoption research notes that about 2% of all adoption placements dissolve after they are declared legal. Although 17% disruption/dissolution rate of adoptive placements might sound quite attractive, other adoption research suggests that not all of the remaining 83% of placements are satisfied and need-free. Groze (1996) as part of a longitudinal study of special-needs families, surveyed 199 families following their first year of the adoptive placement. When he questioned families about the overall impact of special-needs adoption on their family, he found very positive impact 51.6%, mostly positive impact 26.6%, mixed impact 18.8%, and mostly negative 3.1%. Rosenthal and Groze (1992) in a larger longitudinal study of special-needs adoptive families found similar results. They found very positive impact 47%, mostly positive impact 28%, mixed-positives and negatives were about equal 21%, mostly negative impact 3%, and very negative 1%. This would suggest that 22-25% of the special-needs families were struggling to adjust in their first year, significantly higher than the usual 15% that actually disrupt. Groze (1996) also inquired with these families about their sense of the overall smoothness of the adoption. Goze found smoother
than expected 24.6%, about as smooth as expected 44.5%, and experienced more ups and downs than expected 30.4%. Additionally, the percentage of adoptive families experiencing more ups and downs than expected about the adoption placement steadily increased from 30% in year 1 to 42% by year 4. This finding is a significant magnitude to warrant further study of coordination of a secure family base between adoptive parents and their respective employers.

Special-Needs Adoption Literature Summary

The special-needs literature emphasizes the importance of adoptive couples’ commitment to adoptive placements. One of the critical ways that adoptive couples’ commitment is tested is through their expectations about the adoptive placement. Miall’s (1995) “myth of sameness” emphasizes that adoptive couples equate the non-adoption-specific family challenges with the demands that are unique to special-needs adoptive families. This results in adoptive couples “underestimating” the demands that they will face in adoptive placement because they completely overlook the added layer of adoption-specific family demands. Not surprisingly, adoptive couples also underestimate how an adoptive placement will impact their family relationships. The impact of an adoption placement can negatively influence both their marital relationship and their birth/other children in the home. Adoptive couples also have underestimated the behavioral and emotional issues of special-needs adoptive children that they will receive in placement. Hence, adoptive couples’ underestimation of the need to prepare for an adoptive placement results in significant reorganization/adaptation within the early phases of placement. It is vital that adoptive fathers are involved in the adoptive placement because the additional adoption-specific demands of placement can easily overwhelm adoptive mothers who attempt to manage it on their own. Furthermore, the outcome research on adoptive placements suggests that even though most of the placements remain intact, a significant portion of them experience difficulties in adjustment. Thus, it is important to identify how “under-prepared adoptive couples” make the necessary adjustments to stabilize their special-needs adoptive placements.
One of the contributions of the proposed study is to describe how dual-income special-needs adoptive families negotiate work/family balance. However, it is also important to both adoptive parents, especially fathers, to appreciate the kind of support/non-support they experience in their work context for the demands of involved parenthood. This contextual understanding is essential because work responsibilities are a primary constraint to increased participation in parenthood for fully employed parents. However, parents must desire to be more involved with their family first, but it is often the large demands of the workplace that prevent many employed parents from becoming more involved. Thus, the work/family balance literature will help in understanding what non-special-needs birth families do to manage work and family demands. Then the task will be to outline the possible implications for special-needs adoptive families. Theoretically, much of the work/family balance literature utilizes Symbolic Interactionism as an orientating framework. Specifically, the focus seems to be on role strain, role conflict, and role clarity in the case of fatherhood. However, the issue of role clarity in the fathering literature will be discussed separately.

A noteworthy exception to studying how typical families manage work/family balance is Brennan and Poertner (1997), who surveyed parents of children with serious emotional disorders. Similar to special-needs adoptive families, these parents often had to miss work to take their child to various mental health appointments. They indicated that parents of special-needs children have the additional concerns of working to maintain the comprehensive insurance coverage needed to pay for mental health services as well as managing difficulties in finding child care centers to meet the child’s special needs. Brennan and Poertner noted that the school-age children needed their parents to be available for the parent-school staff conferences. Brennan and Poertner call for the need to probe the process and outcome of the job and career decisions parents have made in order to balance their work life with the demands of caring for a child with a serious emotional disorder. They also identify the need for careful examination of work and family role expectations carried by both parents who provide care to children with serious emotional disorders. Specifically, they highlight the need for understanding the dynamics of striking a balance between work and
family responsibilities among parental partners. This gap in the literature is addressed in the proposed study.

*Work/Family Balance Strategies*

Losocco (1997) interviewed 18 self-employed men (n=5) and women (n=13) on how they organize their work/family responsibilities. One strategy identified by both men and women was to separate the locations of work and family so that the boundary between work and family would become more distinct. Participants indicated that they refused to take business calls at home, or limited them to a certain hour, and/or strictly maintained the same work schedule. Another strategy involved trading some business growth and success to allow more investment of time/energy in their families. Many participants fit their work schedule around the needs of family and personal responsibilities.

Similarly, Becker and Moen (1999) interviewed 100 middle-class dual-earner couples to explore adaptive strategies they used to manage their work and family lives. The authors conceptualized dual-earner couples as *decision-making units*, to understand how couples mesh their work and family lives. Becker and Moen found that only a small minority of participants reflected career-orientated couples who hired caregivers to parent their children. The majority of the participants 75% engaged in some form of scaling-back strategy to manage the intrusion of work responsibilities on their family life. The three primary scaling-back strategies include placing limits, job vs. career, and trading off.

Becker and Moen (1999) describe placing limits as limiting work encroachments on home time. Examples included (a) limiting number of hours worked, (b) refusing to put in “face time” or overtime, (c) turning down jobs with more travel, and (d) turning down promotions requiring relocation. The authors indicate that the scaling-back strategy of placing limits is both an individual and couple strategy, though more typically is an individual strategy of women. Two-thirds of participants citing this strategy were women and only one-third were men.

Becker and Moen (1999) describe job vs. career as one primary breadwinner (career) and one job. They found that 40% of all participants utilizes the job vs. career scaling-back strategy. This strategy reflected more traditional division of responsibility where the spouse with the career was responsible for economic provision, and the other spouse with the job
was the primary caregiver in the family. In two-thirds of the couples, this strategy was employed along gender lines with women taking the job while men took on the career. This decision required that the family would follow the spouse with the career. However, in one-third of couples, it was the husband who took a job while the wife pursued the career. It is important to note that this different arrangement included the men becoming the primary caregiver to the children and managing the household.

The third scaling-back strategy, trading-off, places limits on who has the job and who has the career over time due to career opportunities or life-course events coupled by a shift in child-rearing and home responsibilities. This was a prime example of a couple-level strategy that was employed by one-third of the couple participants. Becker and Moen did note that women were more willing to engage in scaling back strategies across the life-course though men tended to only scale back if encountering increased parental responsibilities coupled with entrance into an established phase of their career development.

Becker and Moen (1999) identified the major overall theme as private vs. public responsibility for work/family balance strategies. Public strategies would be to place accountability and responsibility with larger social institutions of corporations and government in social policy reform. However, Becker and Moen found that most participant couples called for the private responsibility of family flexibility to adapt to the demands of work/family balance.

Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, and Current (2001) interviewed 47 dual-earner couples who successfully managed work/family balance to identify their adaptive strategies. Several of their adaptive work/family strategies were relevant to dual-earner adoptive couples' management of an adoptive placement. Haddock et al. identified that the work/family strategy of valuing family reflects that both parents place family as the highest priority through word and deed. One significant way they demonstrate this value on family is through each parent's willingness to place limits on their work responsibilities. Another work/family balance strategy involved striving for partnership that incorporated more equitable distribution of family labor responsibilities between parents that included sharing organizational planning responsibility. The maintenance of work boundaries adaptive strategy specifically called for dual-earner couples to each negotiate more flexibility for
family needs with their employers. Similarly, the adaptive strategy of being more focused and productive at work creates time to be more available for family needs. All of these adaptive work/family balance strategies could be potentially beneficial to dual-earner adoptive couples dealing with the high demands of a new adoptive placement.

**Gender Differences in Work/Family Balance**

Loscocco (1997) noted a gender difference in how self-employed participants made use of the flexibility of the work demands in meeting family needs. Two-thirds of the female business owners used flexibility as a resource to balance the needs of work/family. Female participants were more likely to give up income to address family needs, though male participants preferred to structure their work schedules similar to regular employment and use the flexibility of the self-employment very sparingly. It is noteworthy that despite being self-employed, the majority of these participants experienced considerable spillover of work on their family lives. Incidentally, none of the male participants cited work/family balance as an issue for them, yet one wife indicted that it was commonplace for business calls to occur during the supper hour. Loscocco points out that perhaps men are unaware of the extent their work lives interfere with their families. This may be a product of women’s gender socialization that orientates them to assume primary responsibility in caring for their families. Another key theme that emerged was the salience of the self-employed participant’s parental role identity and the willingness to organize their work around their care responsibilities, a theme most common for female business owners. Similarly, the participants’ provider status in their families played a significant role in whether they were business-orientated or family-orientated. For example, if the participant was the breadwinner, work usually was expected to take precedent. Loscocco explains that work/family balance within a couple cannot be addressed by just focusing on work constraints and ignoring the negotiation of parenting responsibilities between partners. She notes that self-employed participants replicated the gender inequities in parental/family responsibility. Men, despite being self-employed, underutilized their work flexibility to be more involved in family demands, structuring their work time similar to regular employment and being less willing to take time off for family needs. Women tended to use their work flexibility to continue to be available to the family to meet needs for care even if it meant loss of business.
income/growth. This difference promotes women continuing to be primarily responsible for care/nurturance in families despite their work demands.

Arendell's (2000) decade review indicates that work/family balance for employed mothers is more stressful than for fathers. Employed mothers were more likely to be interrupted at work for child-related reasons (e.g., illnesses, school problems, breakdowns in childcare arrangements) than fathers. The author notes that mothers are still parents even while at work and spend time worrying, thinking, and planning for their children. Arendell found empirical support that employed mothers do not spend less time with their children than full-time mothers. She surmised that employed mothers felt guilty about working and thus spent a greater amount of their non-work time interacting directly with their children. Arendell indicates that mothers continuously strategize work/family balance and focus on individual solutions because few formal programs are available. She found that mothers use reframing to emphasize the positive aspects of the work/family balance and downplay the negative aspects. Additionally, she noted that married employed mothers sometimes elect to work non-day shifts so that they can be home when the children are awake. Also, they negotiate with their paid childcare workers on how to provide a seamless network of care to their children while they are at work. Arendell asks, “How do mothers negotiate the activities of child rearing?” The implication is that fathers also are an important part of the negotiation and provide a gap for the dissertation.

Gender variation in how mothers and fathers ascribe meaning to their parent and work roles sheds light on the differential parent role responsibilities between mothers and fathers. Ferree (1990) challenges researchers to adopt a gender perspective that addresses how people construct and give meaning to their roles, as it is this meaning that carries consequences for individual well-being and family relationships. Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter (2000) identify the need for future research into the meanings people ascribe to their roles as parent, spouse, and worker. This is important because the social construction of the meaning of these roles can vary widely and have major implications. Simon (1997) was interested in assessing the gender variation in the meaning of role identities of persons with similar role configurations. He interviewed 40 employed married parents (20 fathers and 20 mothers) of dependent children on the meaning that they attached to the spouse, parent, and
worker identities. He found that the meanings people assign to role identities are based on the perceptions of costs and benefits of role involvement. In regards to the meaning of the work identity, two findings were most significant. The meaning most commonly cited among men (60%; n=12) was earning a living and financial security, while this was the second most common meaning for women (50%; n=10). This is not that surprising, though the second finding was more telling. The meaning of work identity cited most often for women (75%; n=15) was lack of time and energy for children and spouse. However, this was a critical gender difference because among men it was not cited as a reason by any of the men. It is noteworthy that of the seven meanings for the work identity of both men and women, six were positive and the only negative meaning (decreased time for family) was only a concern to women.

In regard to the parent identity, Simon (1997) indicated several meanings that are consistent with the concept of the secure family base. The most common meaning for men (50%; n=10) was teaching, guiding, and becoming a role model, while this was the least important for women (10%; n=2). Interestingly, both men and women identified the importance of giving love, support, and nurturance (40%; n=16). It seems contradictory that both genders emphasized the importance of nurturance and care, yet in the work context family remains only a concern to women. In addition, both men (20%; n=4) and women (35%; n=7) cited negative meanings and emotions (sacrifice, pain, and frustration) as a cost of parenthood. However, clearly negative emotions and meanings of parenthood differentially impact women more than men because women are typically the primary parental caregiver. This study highlights the importance of inquiring about how men negotiate work/family balance to gauge their commitment to the ethic of care within their family. It seems evident that both men and women identify the importance of nurturance of their children, yet it is unclear how it is expressed when men are at work.

**Level of Satisfaction with Work/Family Balance**

Voydanoff (1987) indicates that work/family balance is often handled by sequential or simultaneous work/family staging by women. Sequential staging is based on traditional gender role orientations where women leave the work force to assume primary responsibility for the care of their children and re-enter the labor market when the demands of children are
lower (school-aged children). Simultaneous staging is when work and family demands are experienced concurrently. Voydanoff indicates that it is the simultaneous staging of work and family that requires a more symmetrical division of labor between parental partners. Ferree (1990) noted that sequential staging has resulted in women sharing the economic provider responsibility with their husbands, but men have been slow to participate significantly more in the home. White (1999) found that satisfaction with work/family balance had a gender effect depending on type of earner family. In traditional single earner families (sequential staging), women are more satisfied with work/family balance than men. However, in dual-earner families (simultaneous staging), women were less satisfied than men with work/family balance. This would tend to make sense because in single-earner families, the responsibilities of work and family are defined across gender lines and women could more fully address themselves to family responsibilities. Though in dual-earner families that required more sharing of the family responsibilities between partners, it is noteworthy that women’s lower work/family satisfaction is suggestive of difficulty in coordinating family care with their husbands. This is relevant for special-needs adoptive families because the majority of these families fall into the category of dual-earner families (simultaneous staging) that must negotiate the coordination of care for their adoptive child while both parents participate in the work force.

Likewise, Gilbert (1988) indicated that spouses most satisfied with their current work/family arrangements were those who discussed before marriage their visions of how occupational pursuits, parenting, and household work would be balanced within a marriage. Gilbert notes that women are more likely to raise work/family balance as a needed topic of discussion. Additionally, Hallett and Gilbert (1998) call for future research to emphasize how women negotiate and manage conflict over household management, parenting, and work responsibilities with their husbands in dual-career families. This dissertation addresses this literature gap directly.

**Employer Response to Requests for Family Need Flexibility**

Hall (1990) described the “invisible daddy track” in workplaces where some men make considerable informal sacrifices to be involved family men. Catalyst (1986) found that out of 384 companies (a) one-third offered unpaid paternity leave policies, (b) only nine
reported that fathers used the paternity leave policy, (c) two-thirds did not consider it reasonable for employees to take paternity leave for any reason, and (d) 41% actually did not sanction the use of paternity leaves for employees. Men justifiably perceived in their work culture that formal strategies to involved fatherhood came at high cost to their career advancement. Hall indicated that “fast-track employed fathers” utilized informal ways to become more involved with their families. However, Hall failed to describe these informal methods of involved fathers on the career fast track. For the proposed study, it is important to be aware of the small private ways that fathers organize their work lives that facilitate their increased involvement in parenthood. Hall does note that one of the primary methods of work/family balance is restructuring the work responsibilities through negotiation with the employer. This would require employed parents to have more flexibility as to when they work though the expectation of similar output would be unchanged. This opens the possibility of more home-based work to complement the office-based work to facilitate better work/family balance.

McCarthy-Snyder (1994) found it troubling that mothers are saddled with the responsibility to find, arrange, maintain, and re-arrange childcare while attempting to balance responsibilities of the workplace. In her review of the literature, the author indicates that there is a relationship between responsibility for childcare arrangements and decision to participate in the labor force. Thus, the costs of childcare reduce the probability of mothers participating in the work force. McCarthy-Snyder asked employed mothers an open-ended question about their employers’ attitudes toward childcare. She noted that only a minority of respondents had a negative response to this question. However, closer examination of their responses revealed that the primary reason employers were generally positive about employee childcare was because the employed mothers worked hard to ensure that their childcare responsibilities did not interfere with work duties. McCarthy-Snyder indicated that this reflected the view that employed mothers saw that childcare solutions are more individual in nature than structural. However, the efforts of these employed mothers to keep childcare responsibilities from interfering with work is counter to previous studies citing that employed mothers have higher rates of absenteeism, need to leave work early more often, and fatigue issues related to childcare needs. The author concludes that the majority of
participants indicated that having good, dependable childcare enhances their worker productivity. McCarthy-Snyder notes that employers need to get away from the idea that work and family are completely unrelated spheres. There is a need to highlight that employers have a social responsibility to facilitate parental employee involvement in the care of their children, moving childcare away from being a private individual responsibility for solutions from mothers to include the work context (employers).

Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter (2000) address some of the social policy research that highlights the difficulty workers face if they want to continue to advance their careers but also take advantage of available federal and corporate policies regarding family leave. They indicate that the federal policy of Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) stipulates that parents are allowed to take up to 12 weeks from their employment with job protection in the event of the birth or adoption of a child. However, Perry-Jenkins et al. point out that this policy only applies to employers of companies with 50 or more employees with excludes 95% of employers and 50% of employees. It also is not a helpful policy to low-income families that can ill afford to have a working parent take three months of unpaid leave.

Predictors of Work/Family Conflict

Hammer, Allen, and Grigsby (1997) surveyed 2000 employees from dual-earner couples to examine what predicts the extent of work/family conflict (WFC). They tested multiple hypotheses. The authors confirmed that work salience positively related to work/family conflict (explained 7% of variance for females and 5% for men on WFC) and found a negative relationship between work schedule flexibility and work/family conflict (explained 5% of variance for females and 3% for males on WFC). Additionally, they indicated a positive relationship between level of family involvement and work/family conflict for females only (explained 3% of variance on WFC). Thus, for certain dual-income families, it is especially important to inquire about how they coordinate work/family balance. Specifically, the following qualities call for increased attention to work/family balance issues (a) one or more working parents in the family have high degrees of work involvement or career priority (work salience), (b) one or more working parents have low degree of work schedule flexibility, and (c) one or both working parents have high degrees of family
involvement or priority. These three criteria for work/family conflict are likely to be met in most special-needs adoptive families with dual-employed parents.

*How Family Influences the Work Context*

Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000) indicated in their decade review of work/family balance that one of four major themes of work/family balance research has involved the *multiple role perspective*. The multiple role perspective is concerned with how people balance their spouse, parent, and worker roles and the implications it has for their individual well-being and family relationships. Buffardi, Smith, O'Brien, and Erdwins (1999) surveyed 18,120 employees of dual-income households to examine impact of dependent care on job satisfaction and work/family balance. Buffardi et al. were testing whether managing multiple roles resulted in confirmation of the scarcity or expansion hypothesis. The scarcity hypothesis indicates that time and energy are finite resources and multiple roles compete for these resources with the result of increased stress and negative outcomes. However, the majority of the literature on multiple role perspective has emphasized the *expansion hypothesis*. The expansion hypothesis states that there are numerous benefits to participation in multiple roles such as increased income, heightened self-esteem, influence to delegate most onerous role obligations, opportunity for social interaction; and challenging experiences. In addition, the expansion hypothesis indicates that it is these benefits that result in increased energy for the person to handle their other roles. Yet, Perry-Jenkins et al. point out that multiple role perspective, regardless of whether it is based on role expansion or role strain hypotheses, has the serious limitation of a disconnection between role enactment (the behaviors attached to a role) and role responsibility (taking psychological responsibility for a role). The results of Buffardi et al. lend support to the scarcity hypothesis. Given the limited resources, the high demands of dependent care negatively impact aspects of job satisfaction. Not surprisingly, the impact of childcare responsibility on work/family balance was more dramatic for women than men. This emphasizes the need that dependent care responsibility be shared between mothers and fathers so that employed mothers do not become overwhelmed to the point that their dissatisfaction with work/family balance leaks into other domains of their life.
Additionally, Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000) indicated that family roles can impact the workplace. They indicate in their decade review that distressing family relationships negatively impact worker productivity and absenteeism. Given that women are usually held responsible for family caregiving, it is not surprising that it is women employees who suffer increased absenteeism, need to leave work early, and experience higher levels of distress (Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993; Emlen, 1987).

**Summary of Work/Family Balance Literature**

The work/family balance literature emphasizes the importance of how mothers and fathers in dual-earner couples organize their work responsibilities to facilitate their availability for family needs. The differences in how mothers and fathers approach work/family balance issues have implications for dual-earner adoptive couples of special-needs children. Mothers seem more willing to place limits on their work responsibilities than fathers resulting in mothers becoming predominately responsible for family labor since fathers feel they are more confined by their work responsibilities. Moreover, mothers have higher levels of dissatisfaction with work/family balance than fathers because the issue of making time for family seems to be more of a concern to employed mothers than fathers. Even self-employed parents seem to handle their work flexibility differently according to their gender. Self-employed mothers are likely to use their job flexibility to increase their availability for family needs while self-employed fathers are likely to under-utilize this benefit of self-employment. The implications for dual-earner adoptive couples of special-needs children are highlighted here because it is likely that family needs will interrupt work more than what typically would be expected. The adoption-related family needs includes therapy appointments, caseworker appointments, doctor appointments, and problems in daycare and/or school. Thus, if adoptive mothers are held primarily responsible for responding to family needs during work hours it is likely that the impact on mothers and their job performance will become problematic. Therefore, if we know that typically mothers are more willing than fathers to reorganize their work responsibilities to be more available to their families, we can encourage adoptive couples of special-needs children to not follow the same problematic pattern. Hence, the major implication of the work/family balance literature
is that dual-earner adoptive couples must have both spouses willing to reorganize their work responsibilities in order to adapt to the high demands of adoptive placements.

Similarly, it is very relevant to pay attention to patterns of how mothers and fathers utilize their respective maternity/paternity leave benefits. As expected, mothers are more willing to utilize their maternity leave than fathers are their paternity leave. However, it is important to be aware of the differential cultural messages that mothers and fathers receive about using their maternity/paternity leaves. Fathers are often subtly discouraged by their employers from using available paternity leaves while mothers are expected to take their maternity leave. Thus, it is important to not assume that fathers’ paternity leave usage is solely an individual decision. Yet, it should not be concluded either that fathers are powerless to negotiate paternity leave benefits with their employers. Given that many special-needs adoptive children have significant attachment issues it is important that adoptive fathers attempt to utilize any paternity leave benefit they have or can negotiate. If adoptive fathers follow the typical pattern of under-utilization of their paternity leave benefits while adoptive mothers maximize their maternity leave benefits, the adoptive placements will develop the precedent of mothers being differentially more available to their new adoptive children than fathers.

Division of Household Labor Literature

Egalitarian Marital Relationships Versus the Myth of Equality

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) interviewed and observed 15 couples on how they negotiated division of housework and child equitably. They cite Schwartz’s (1994) characteristics of egalitarian marriages as (a) the division of labor stayed within a 60/40 split for labor and responsibility, (b) both spouses believed that they had equal influence over important and disputed decisions, (c) both partners felt they had equal control over family economic resources and equal access to discretionary spending, and (d) each partner’s work was given equal weight in the couple’s life plans. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford recruited couples by asking couples if they shared equally the work of earning a living and rearing the children. The participant couples were somewhat atypical because they were well educated and in 40% of the couples the woman had a more prestigious occupation than their husbands. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford identified four primary paths to egalitarian marriages.
(a) dual-career couples where couples are guided by interest in growth of both their careers as well as co-parenting their children, (b) dual-nurturer couples where couples that are more child-centered than work-centered given that their work lives are organized around parental responsibilities, (c) post-traditional couples where couples that have made the transition from traditional role-orientations to more equitable role arrangements, and (d) external forces couples where couples that have been forced by external circumstances (e.g., illness of wife) to adopt a more equitable division of labor.

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) describe the dual-career couple, including (a) the partners compare their family labor contributions with those of their partner and not with same-sex peers, (b) both partners in each couple made some career sacrifices to balance work/family, but both parents were still committed to their career development, (c) both parents in each couple maintained commitment to child-rearing responsibilities, (d) only a small minority of these couples reported any serious conflict over the division of labor and the majority of these couples did not recall negotiation over the division of labor (only one couple had negotiated), and (e) in some of the couples the wife entered the relationship with higher standards for cleanliness though it was not used to justify unequal division of household labor but rather was negotiated to ensure that both partners continued to contribute equitably.

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) describe the dual-nurturer couple as follows: (a) the partners are home, family, and lifestyle-oriented rather than career-orientated; (b) parents who work for pay in order to spend time with each other and their children; (c) parents who are focused on the quality of their lives rather than material acquisitions or career development; and (d) parents who spend more time with children than with work. This is the type of family most conducive to the notion of the secure family base.

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) describe the post-traditional couple as follows: (a) parents who are dissatisfied with their previous more traditional role arrangements; (b) parents who had shift to an equitable division of labor; (c) parents who had a strong motivation to share family work fairly because they had previously experienced the less satisfying relationships that coincided with traditional divisions of labor; (d) parents who wanted to share the family work to protect their friendship with their spouse.
Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's (1998) description of the external forces couple include parents with external forces (e.g., job loss, illness) that constrained how the division of family labor could be negotiated.

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) were concerned with how control and power were distributed in these egalitarian marriages. They utilized Komter’s (1989) framework for analysis of power in relationships. Manifest power is the ability to enforce one’s will against opposition from spouse. Latent power is more covert and reflects influence to keep issues from being raised. With latent power, conflict rarely arises because the needs of the more powerful spouse are anticipated and met. Invisible power reflects that the differential influence of social groups (men and women) are so ingrained in the culture that women do not identify inequities as problematic. Thus, Risman and Johnson-Sumerford noted that two-thirds of the power-balanced couples indicated no discontent with the allocation of household/childcare tasks and responsibilities. When asked what they would like different in their relationships, participants only cited the need to have more time to spend together. The other one-third of power-balanced couples indicated that they had some areas of conflict about the division of household labor though each felt equally influential in the negotiation process. In the power-imbalanced couples, the power was typically in favor of the wives because they had higher incomes and more prestigious occupations than their husbands.

Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) identified three different types of approaches to meeting emotional needs in families among the egalitarian relationships including (a) the traditionally gendered emotional relationship is where the wife is more emotionally sensitive and this manifests itself in marriage and family interactions (“mother as emotional expert”), (b) family-shared emotional work is where neither mother nor father felt they were highly emotive nor either were intuitively connected to children, (c) parallel emotional workers is where both mothers and fathers felt they were highly emotive and intuitively connected with their children. The intense focus on nurturing in parallel emotional worker relationships did have the one negative consequence of jealousy between parents of opportunities to spend time with the children when the other spouse could not participate. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford call for future research to examine how family labor,
control, and cathexis (emotional work) are negotiated between husbands and wives in families. This would be a gap for the proposed dissertation study.

Coltrane (1990) interviewed parents from 20 dual-earner families with at least two school-aged children and fathers who participated significantly in childcare tasks. To qualify as a dual-earner family, both parents had to be employed at least 20 hours each week. Coltrane was interested in what influenced these fathers to be more involved in their children’s care and how that involvement impacted the fathers’ lives. The major theme Coltrane noted was that delayed parenthood helped fathers to initially establish themselves in their careers and marriages. Fathers reported that when parenthood came along they felt that they were not as much in the “life squeeze” between establishing their career and being an involved father and could more easily put more time into fatherhood. Coltrane also indicated that fatherhood was enhanced by maternal employment. The fathers reported that having opportunities to parent “solo” while their wives were at work allowed them to acquire confidence and competence as fathers.

Coltrane (1990) indicated that none of the 20 dual-earner families had the father primarily responsible for housework. However, in 55% of the families (n=11) mother was primarily responsible for household labor and in the remaining 45% (n=9), it was shared between the parents. In addition, Coltrane noted that in (40%) of the families the mother was responsible for the planning and supervision of household tasks. Because Coltrane purposefully sampled families with father involvement in childcare tasks it is not too surprising that the percentage of fathers who share the housework tasks are higher and the percentage of mothers responsible for planning are also lower than reports of division of household labor in other studies.

Coltrane (1990) noted a theme that fathers who become more involved in childcare tasks tend also to become more involved in the related housework tasks of childcare. Fathers reported that when their wives were at work and they were responsible for childcare they began to notice the housework tasks related to childcare such as laundry, meal preparation and cleaning.

Coltrane (1990) identified several motivations participants had for becoming more involved fathers including (a) feelings of being confined by a overriding focus on
employment, (b) wanting closure on the childless portion of their lives, (c) "readiness" to embrace the father role, (d) taking care of children required them to confront their anger and insecurities, (e) fatherhood helped them to become more tolerant and mature, (f) desire to do a better job of fathering than their own father, and (g) fatherhood help them to develop their emotional capacities to "tune in" to others' needs.

Coltrane (1990) described the wives' motivations for sharing domestic labor as (a) they wished their fathers had been more emotionally expressive and active, (b) delayed parenthood facilitated educational pursuits and career development that allowed wives to require more participation in domestic labor by marital partners, (c) education helped wives develop their assertiveness and negotiation skills in managing the division of domestic labor, (d) continuing to remind their husbands about household and child care tasks increased father involvement, (e) mothers relinquished responsibility for some tasks (cooking, cleaning, and childcare) by lessening compliance with their standards and allowing husbands to cultivate their own standard, and (f) being away from the house for employment purposes helped in getting husbands to participate more.

Coltrane (1990) noted some differences between early-timed and late-timed dual-earner families. In the early-timed families, the wives typically had less education and thus were more likely to accept full responsibility for household and childcare labor. Wives in the early-timed families justified this lop-sided division of household labor as women having "superior" parenting skills compared to men. Wives in the early-timed families were more likely to engage in sequential staging of their families and careers whereas wives in late-timed families were more likely to engage in simultaneous staging of career and family, placing more emphasis on division of domestic labor.

Additionally, Coltrane (1990) inquired with these dual-earner couples about how they allocated their division of household and childcare labor. The majority of participants noted that their negotiations were implicit and reflected an ad hoc style of task division. The parents indicated that time availability usually dictated who would take responsibility for domestic labor. Coltrane reported that these families were child-orientated though they did not have help from extended family, they knew other families that shared domestic labor as much or more than they did. These families minimized the use of non-parental childcare.
because they had limited assistance from extended family and moderate incomes. In addition, spouses tended to use cross-gender within-marriage referents to evaluate the division of household labor. Coltrane noted that the use of one’s spouse as a comparison referent was influential in the implicit and explicit bargaining over the division of household labor between spouses.

Braverman (1991) outlined several cautions regarding division of household/childcare labor.

Too many failed therapy sessions involve getting the wife to tell her husband what she needs and wants in terms of household and childcare responsibilities-only to have the husband find a way of doing it when it is convenient, hiring someone else to do it, or sometimes neglecting to do it altogether when other important business is pressing (p.27).

Braverman indicates that the allocation of housework and childcare between men and women is reflective of power inequalities in society. Braverman notes to be cautious of men who want to be more involved but are reluctant to learn from their more experienced wife. She feels that this is permission to continue doing things “his way” which is a variation of the “old way” and that the result will be her continuing to be responsible for the brunt of the household and childcare labor. Braverman’s point heightens awareness to power dynamics in marital relations regarding how the division of domestic labor is critically related to couples developing a “myth of equality.”

Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) interviewed 12 couples within their first year of marriage to explore how they negotiated the issue of equality between spouses. Particular focus was on the use of language in the social construction of equality. They used four criteria to determine equality within a relationship that included (a) partners that held equal status, (b) accommodation in the relationship is mutual, (c) attention to other in the relationship is mutual, and (d) there is mutual well-being of partners. Based on these criteria, the authors found three types of couples, (a) those in conscious movement toward equality, (b) those creating a myth of equality, and (c) those who recognized inequality and appeared dissatisfied with it. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney noted that 9 of the 12 couples fit the myth of equality category.
Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) identified strategies couples use to diffuse potentially conflictual equality issues. The three broad categories were (a) avoidance of dilemmas, (b) confrontation of dilemmas, and (c) power struggles. Regarding avoidance of dilemmas, they identified five types. Benign reframing/rationalization involves re-interpreting an unequal situation as something that is more positive and justifiable. Not examining consequences of choices involved only re-examining behaviors and decisions in terms of the “context of the moment” and ignoring the long-term impact on the well being of each partner. Settling for less than equal within a certain limit was one way partners accept inequality. Hiding the issues through the use of humor or minimizing was a somewhat less effective way to avoid conflict over inequality. Placing responsibility on the wife involved the wife “helping” to secure accommodation by the husband and is coupled by husbands’ expectations that their wives will change their behavior initially.

Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) noted that confrontation of dilemmas included several couple strategies to address and change marital inequalities. They include open negotiation, fighting, and power struggles. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney highlighted that wives were most likely to initiate confrontation of marital inequalities and in fighting or power struggles were more likely to keep the fight going. However, the authors note that in open negotiation, both marital partners were likely to share responsibility to continue to address inequality issues. The authors clarified that fighting involved a willingness to raise issues but were less mutual than open negotiation. This fighting helped couples define inequality issues and left the possibility to re-visit issues. Power struggles were defined as less direct where neither partner was willing to accommodate. Confrontation of inequality issues helped many wives develop the ability to voice their concerns with their husbands. It should be noted that power differentials for the most part were unacknowledged in these couples and when they did arise it was justified as a women’s lack of assertiveness in getting her desires across to her husband rather than the husbands’ need to be try to be more accommodating.

Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) described four ways language is used by couples to promote a “myth of equality” that included (a) give-and-take talk, (b) free-choice talk, (c) talk of oneness, and (d) partnership talk. Give-and-take talk implied that each cared
about the partner's needs regardless if this were actually the case. Free-choice talk framed that all aspects of the relationship were a result of each partner's personal choice of that arrangement. Talk of oneness was the attitude that what is good for one partner was good for the relationship ("one for all and all for one"). Partnership talk implied a mutual decision making process that was shared and for the mutual good of the relationship.

Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) underlined the importance of some conflict to explicitly address the inequality issues within marriages.

Couples in our study need to be able to tolerate conflict or spirited disagreement. Short-term conflict is probably inevitable as couples begin the process of acknowledging and challenging overt, latent, and invisible power differentials and giving voice to their different perspectives (p. 90). This idea is consistent with Wendel Ray's (1993) comment that conflict is how people work out the nature of their relationship. I intend to interview willing couples conjointly so that I can experience their current or re-constructed disagreements about equality issues in the division of household and childcare labor and related responsibility for emotional labor. Through this, I hope to identify the major aspects of the negotiation process.

_explanations for paternal involvement in the household labor_

Deutsch, Lussier, and Servis (1993) surveyed 66 couples during the wives' last trimester of pregnancy and 3-8 months following the birth of their child. They were interested in predicting paternal involvement in child care and household labor. Duetsch et al. indicated that four theories are usually cited in explanation of paternal involvement in child care and household labor that includes (a) relative economic resource theory, (b) demand-response (structural) theory, (c) family systems theory, and (d) sex role attitude theory.

Relative economic resource theory states that the larger the discrepancy of income and occupational status between husband and wife, in favor of husband, the less likely the husband will participate in domestic labor, including childcare. A version of this theory indicates that husbands/fathers with more resources engage in more paid work than domestic work because it is to the economic benefit of the family. Duetsch et al. (1993) notes that the research findings relevant to this theory have been inconsistent.
The structural theory indicates that paternal involvement increases when there is a greater need for childcare and it coincides with fathers’ availability of time. Previous research has supported this theory. Several researchers have indicated that paternal involvement in childcare is positively related to maternal hours of employment.

The family systems theory would indicate that paternal involvement is a function of the quality and dynamics within the marital relationship. Thus, wives’ support has been indicated by other researchers to be important if it is defined as holding fathers accountable. Negotiation of the division of labor through marital conflict is one method of holding men accountable.

The sex role attitudes theory indicates that men’s and women’s beliefs about gender drive the division of household and childcare labor. Thus, men with feminist ideology would contribute more labor in child care and household tasks. However, the research literature has been mixed.

Duetsch et al. (1993) found support for the relative resource theory in regards to paternal involvement in household labor, the significant predictor of discrepancy in income accounted for husbands/fathers with more resources doing less housework. Oddly, those with more prestigious occupations were more likely to engage in housework. Duetsch et al. found support for the family systems theory in regards to paternal involvement in household labor. They identified three significant individual predictors that included (a) husband’s marital consensus, (b) wives’ marital satisfaction, and (c) wives’ marital cohesion. It makes sense that these aspects of marital relationships are enhanced by men’s increased participation in household labor.

Greenstein (1996) examined the interactive effects of wives’ and husbands’ gender ideologies on husbands’ participation in domestic labor. As predicted, egalitarian husbands married to egalitarian wives engaged most in household labor. Traditional husbands married to traditional wives did the lowest proportion of housework while the two mixed gender ideology marriages were in the middle. Greenstein noted that women in the sample of 2719 married couples of the National Survey on Family and Households contributed 63% of all housework hours while men performed 31%. The remaining 6% reflected the contribution of children or paid help. This is consistent with other research on division of domestic labor. In
addition, Greenstein found support for the structural theory of domestic labor. As the hours of men's employment increase, his participation in domestic labor decreases. Similarly, as the wives' hours of employment increase, men's contribution to domestic labor increases, consistent with other research of structural theoretical studies on domestic labor.

Women Held Primarily Responsible for the Household Labor

Komter's (1989) conflict model of task allocation states that a more equitable division of labor depends on explicit scheduling and overt bargaining by wives with their husbands. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) support the conflict model by noting that women who are more educated, with higher proportion of the couple's income, and have spouses who work fewer hours are able to negotiate more husband involvement in household/childcare labor. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane found that fathers contributed 21% of the couple's total time devoted to housework and 26% of the couple's time for childcare. In their representative sample, the women worked in paid employment half as many hours as the men, while earning one quarter as much as men. The division of household and childcare labor was consistent with previous findings. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane did find that men who participated in one form of family labor (housework/childcare) were likely to participate in the other forms of family labor (housework/childcare).

Biernat and Wortman (1991) also noted that while men in this study did contribute more housework labor than in previous studies, the supervision responsibility was typically left to the wives. Interestingly, when they evaluated the perception of role performance, women rated themselves more harshly than the men. Women felt they could be better spouses and parents than they had been. This may suggest that the dominant cultural ideal of motherhood may influence these professional women to feel guilty for choosing to pursue careers instead of being at home full time.

Predictors of Marital Conflict about Division of Household Labor

Stohs (1995) surveyed 319 middle-class employed mothers to examine whether equity and/or practical factors predicted the occurrence of conflict over the division of household labor. Stohs found that a combination of equity and practical factors predicted conflict. The four predictors were (a) women who are less satisfied with the division of labor (equity factor), (b) larger number of household members (practical factor), (c) children
younger in age (practical factor), and (d) women who perform a larger number of household tasks (equity factor).

Stohs (1995) indicated that the most significant predictor of conflict over the division of household labor was wives' satisfaction with division of labor, which in turn was indirectly related to inequity, wives who were dissatisfied utilized a cross-gender comparison referent rather than a within-gender comparison referent. In addition, when she asked the women their reasons for conflict, 61% indicated it was because others were not doing their share and 68% indicated it was because the wives felt burdened. Chafetz's (1990) theory of gender equity highlighted the importance of equity factors in explanation of the occurrence of conflict over the division of household labor. Chafetz called for the unification of couples to be preceded by a period of interpersonal negotiation between spouses about how to establish their homes. This is consistent with the main thrust of this dissertation study.

Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Vliert (1996) surveyed 54 couples with a child under the age of 12 months regarding the relationship of dissatisfaction with the division of household labor and marital conflict. They used a regression analysis with husbands' and wives' dissatisfaction about the division of household labor as predictors of frequency of marital conflict about household labor. Results suggested that only wives' dissatisfaction about household labor was a significant predictor of occurrence of marital conflict, this indicates that women are more likely than men to voice concerns about the division of household labor which is consistent with other studies. Also consistent with other studies is that men prefer to avoid discussions of their dissatisfaction over division of labor with their wives. They indicate that future research needs to address how spouses interact when dealing with conflict over the division of labor and in turn how this impacts the division of labor. Kluwer et al. noted that like most studies, division of household labor in their study did not include division of childcare labor. They called for more research to how the division of childcare labor relates to marital conflict. Both of these directions for future research are addressed in the proposed dissertation study.

Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) surveyed 156 dual-earner couples to identify the relationship between domestic labor and marital satisfaction. They report that satisfaction with the division of household tasks and emotional work were some of the most significant
predictors of marital satisfaction for women in dual-earner relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Stohs (1995) and Klewar et al. (1996) who also identified that dissatisfaction over the division of household labor is a strong predictor of marital conflict. Thus, it is important that adoptive couples pay attention to how household labor is distributed between them because dissatisfaction among adoptive mothers could lead to marital instability and the marital conflict could put the adoptive placement at-risk.

Perception of Fairness in the Division of Household Labor

Mikula (1998) in a review of the research literature on the division of household labor and perceived justice classifies division of household labor distinct from childcare labor. He indicated that the vast majority of research studies do not regard the division of household labor as unjust. Mikula identified that typically 20-30% of women indicate that the division of household labor is a little or somewhat unfair and a very small percentage say the labor is very unfair. Milula reported that three theories most often used to explain inequalities in the division of household labor are (a) relative resources theory, (b) structural or time availability theory, and (c) gender ideology theory.

Mikula (1998) cited empirical support for the idea that if husbands contribute in other domains, such as childcare, women are less likely to perceive an unequal division of household labor as unfair. He found mixed empirical support for the association of gender ideology and perceptions of fairness in the division of household labor, there was also mixed evidence for the relationship of comparison referents and perceptions of fairness. He noted that there was some research support where the frequency of within-gender comparisons was linked to lower perceptions of fairness though more consistently it has been identified that between-gender comparisons are associated with lower perception of fairness in the division of household labor. Mikula consistently found empirical support for the relationship between justifications and perception of fairness. Similarly, Hawkins, Layne, and Christensen (1995) emphasized that women are more likely to indicate a division of household labor is fair if they had been part of the process to work out the arrangement.

Mikula (1998) also reviewed studies where perception of fairness in division of domestic labor was an independent variable and found consistent empirical support for the relationship between perception of fairness about household labor and marital quality. He
noted that lower perceptions of fairness about division of household labor have been repeatedly linked to less marital satisfaction, more marital conflict, and less marital stability, and in one study to depressive symptoms in women. Mikula drew the conclusion that perceptions of fairness are consistently associated with marital quality and psychological wellbeing in women.

Mikula’s (1998) literature review conclusion on the perception of fairness in the division of household labor is that meaning of domestic labor is more important than quantitative factors.

The main conclusion to be drawn is that the actual division of household labor is by no means the main determinant of perceptions of injustice. The amount of variation in the fairness ratings which can be explained by measures of quantitative aspects of the division of workload is rather small. The nature of the measures of family labor which showed the highest correlation with ratings of fairness suggests that the symbolic meaning of men’s and women’s contribution to family work is much more relevant than the mere amount of time and effort (p. 227-228).

Mikula (1998) indicates that the majority of studies on perceptions of justice regarding the division of household labor have neglected to ask participants what is their view of the ideal division of household labor. Perceptions of fairness are predicated on comparison to some other arrangement, though the omission of this question has led many researchers to insert the comparison standard of equality (50-50) arrangement that has been shown to be inappropriate. I intend to use this question in my interviews to better understand the parents’ framework for evaluating their division of household and childcare labor.

Mikula (1998) underlines several shortcomings of the justice literature in the division of household labor: (a) household labor has been confined to exclude childcare labor and thus less in known about perceptions of fairness in regards to division of childcare; (b) childcare is thought to be perceived, valued and divided differently than household labor, thus should not lumped together; (c) responsibility for planning and supervision for housework has been neglected in their relationship to perception of fairness; (d) focus has been narrowly confined to domestic roles and has neglected the work roles of both men and women and the relationship of trade-off of paid work for less domestic work in perceptions of fairness;
(e) the majority of studies have focused on women's perceptions of fairness and almost nothing is known about men's perceptions of fairness about the division of family work. My dissertation study will address many of the concerns in the following ways: (a) I plan to ask couples how they allocated the division of labor for housework, childcare, and responsibility for planning and supervision; (b) I plan to ask how they evaluate the division of labor in the above three domains; (c) I plan to ask how their efforts to balance work/family impact their evaluations of fairness in the division of labor; (d) I plan to interview mothers and fathers rather than focus exclusively on women's perceptions.

Mikula (1998) indicated that it is important to conceptualize the division of household labor arrangement not as a static agreement but as a dynamic changing process of on-going negotiation. Thus, in my proposed study, it is imperative not to describe the current division of labor arrangement but rather capture the process of how couples determine their division of household labor and how they evaluate and change it. Mikula's on-going work focuses on how families distribute household tasks to one another, specifically, the rules and procedures for doing so and how it relates to perceptions of fairness. This area of study known as procedural justice, has to do with the amount of participation, or ability to voice concerns, a family member has in the process of labor allocation. Thus, the process of how domestic labor is allocated between spouses is related to perceptions of fairness and justice. Mikula calls for more research into this area. My dissertation would be a contribution to the procedural justice literature.

Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) utilized a combination of the distributive justice framework, model of relative deprivation, and an attribution-of-blame model to examine women’s sense of injustice regarding the lop-sided division of household labor.

Women do not feel unjustly treated, or their entitlements violated because the distribution: (a) matches the comparison standards they use to evaluate what they are entitled to; (b) is perceived as justifiable; and/or (c) matches what they want or value from the relationship (p. 292).

Comparison standards can be either social or normative. Social comparison standards include either within-gender (women comparing their husbands’ contribution to domestic labor with that of other men) or between gender (women comparing their contribution to
domestic labor with that of their husbands). It is theoretically consistent that within-gender comparisons with regards to division of household labor are less likely to be perceived as unfair or unjust. In addition, research supports that the normative comparison standard invoked is a traditional division of household labor that is also likely to result in women feeling that their unequal division of household labor is not unfair or unjust.

Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) further indicated that women are less likely to perceive a lop-sided division of household labor as unfair to the extent that they feel that the arrangement is justified. Thus, it is important to inquire into reasons on how “unfair” distributions of domestic labor are deemed “fair.” An additional aspect of the distributive justice framework is women’s wants and outcome values from relationships. The literature has consistently noted that relationship outcomes are more important to women than task outcomes. Specifically, it may be more important to women to keep peace at home than to raise potential conflict with husband by overtly pressuring for more help with housework. Put differently, if women are satisfied in their relationship in other ways they may be willing to overlook an unequal division of household labor.

Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) point out that the relative deprivation model states the extent of women’s sense of injustice is tied to the correspondence between their desire for their husbands to contribute more to domestic labor and women’s feeling that they deserve larger domestic efforts from their husbands. The authors note that the attribution-of-blame model states women’s sense of injustice about the lop-sided division of labor is tied to the extent that women hold their husbands accountable for the domestic arrangement.

Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) tested their combined model of women’s injustice over the division of household labor with an available sample of 150 employed women. The combined model explained 50% of the variance of women’s perceptions of injustice. Additionally, the authors found women’s within-gender comparisons more important to their sense of injustice than between-gender comparisons. Thus, if husbands’ contribution to household labor was less than other men’s contributions the wives were more likely to perceive the division of household labor as unjust. They also noted that normative comparison standards involving traditional role orientation are related to women perceiving an unequal division of household labor as just. The authors indicated there was support for
the relationship between unfulfilled wants and injustice perceptions. Freudenthaler and Mikula also found that the use of justifications by women relate to their perception that unequal division of household labor are fair.

According to Major (1993), women's perceptions of the legitimacy can be based: (i) on the perceived appropriateness of the procedures or processes that produced the existing distributions; (ii) on the perceived appropriateness of the rules and arrangements which are used in the distribution of household chores (p. 306).

Major's (1993) comments are essentially what I am interested in studying in this proposal. Specifically, how do couples distribute responsibility for childcare and related household tasks? What is their process of evaluation and distribution?

Gager (1998) interviewed 25 dual-earner couples with small children regarding perceptions of fairness in division of household and childcare labor. Gager noted that both men and women associated negative feelings with doing housework tasks though husbands were allowed to opt out of onerous household tasks. This had the consequence of women feeling as though they did not have a choice and engaged in less desirable household tasks despite negative feelings. Gager indicated that the majority of the couples did not adhere to 50-50 sharing of household labor as the standard for perceptions of fairness and noted that most of the wives just wanted their husbands to provide a little more help because they felt overburdened. Gager noted that the women's valued outcome of self-esteem from housework downplayed attention to issues of unfairness in division of household labor. Gager suggests that if women experienced no valued outcomes from household labor they would be more aware and concerned with fairness in division of household labor. Additionally, Gager inquired about any felt conflict between work and family for men and women, though the vast majority of men called for the need to spend more time with their job rather than their family. This is consistent with the findings of the work/family balance literature.

Gager (1998) found a common theme among men and women that childcare was the most highly valued family task to such an extent that it was often not even reported as work. Likewise, when household labor was positively valued it tended to override concerns of unfairness in division of household labor. This is not to say that any household task that is considered caregiving to the family is immune to perceptions of unfairness, only the tasks
that are positively valued. Gager also identified that wives who were generally satisfied with other aspects of their marriage tended to overlook perceptions of fairness in the division of household labor, consistent with other findings (Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998). Gager also found that many wives who perceived unfairness in the division of labor colluded to avoid conflict with their husbands. The wives explained they took on the brunt of the childcare responsibilities because their husbands could not handle all the stress of their jobs and the children and that the husband needed the leisure time to recoup. Gager indicated that marital happiness and family harmony are as important to wives’ perception of fairness as actual division of household labor. However, it is uncertain what relates to husband’s perceptions of fairness regarding the division of household labor.

Gager (1998) noted a common justification wives used to explain why an unequal division of household and childcare labor was not unfair was that they were more efficient than their husbands and that their husbands had limited ability to “multi-task.” It is noteworthy that Gager found no wives questioning why their husbands are able to “multi-task” at work.

Gager (1998) focused interview questions about comparison referents for division of labor into the three areas of parental models, peers, and spouse’s community. The largest group of participants in parental models fell into the category of emulators of their parents’ usually traditional division of labor. This role arrangement typically faced conflict from two threats (a) wives who came from families of origin where the expectation of participation in domestic labor was greater for men, and (b) economic pressures influenced wives to enter the work force. The second group under parental models are identified as reactors. These husbands wanted to contribute more than their fathers because they reacted to their parents’ division of domestic labor. The third group included child labors who grew up participating significantly in household and childcare labor.

Gager (1998) noted that by far the most important comparison referent for men and women were same-sex peers. Men compared their contributions to household and childcare labor with other men they know in similar life stages. Women compared themselves to female friends, co-workers, and/or sisters who were in similar life stages. Men typically did not discuss in detail their participation in domestic labor with other men though women did
discuss in detail with same-sex peers. For women, it was relatively easy to find same-sex peers who were worse off, helping to make them feel that their division of labor was not as unfair.

Gager highlighted that husbands were most likely to use community comparison referents in regards to fairness about division of labor. Men typically invoked comparison to the mythical "do-nothing father" when they were unable to locate a "suitable" more immediate peer comparison referent, serving to make fathers who engage in little domestic labor feel superior to the community comparison of the father who leaves "everything" to the mother. This also was a half-hearted attempt to make wives feel less taken for granted in their current division of household and child care labor. However because wives had difficulty locating male referents who engaged in more domestic labor, they had little leverage in pressuring their husbands to contribute more.

Summary of the Division of Household Labor Literature

The division of household labor literature consistently finds that women are held primarily responsible for household labor in marital relationships. Furthermore, the division of household labor is typically distributed informally or on an ad-hoc basis. Some of the more common theories used to explain paternal involvement in household labor is the relative resources theory and the demand-response/structural theory. Relative resources theory explains that fathers that make the same or less income than their wives would contribute more to household labor than fathers that make significantly more money. The structural theory states that paternal involvement in household labor would increase as demands increase if it happened to coincide with fathers' time availability. However, the division of household research also shows that women often do not assess a lopsided division of household labor as unfair, offering many reasons why women indicate that their primary responsibility for household labor is not unfair. Some explain that mothers are less concerned about task outcomes than relational outcomes and therefore feel that if the marital relationship is progressing well it is not worth it to them to disrupt it with complaints about household labor participation. Similarly, others would indicate that if fathers are involved in other aspects of the family labor, such as childcare labor, mothers are less likely to assess a lopsided division of household labor as unfair. Also the use of within-gender versus between-
gender comparison referents makes a significant difference in mothers' assessment of the fairness of the division of household labor. Mothers often utilize comparison of father's household labor contributions to other men's contributions (within-gender referents) that typically result in mothers' assessment that the division of household labor is not unfair. However, several have linked mothers' dissatisfaction with the division of household labor to marital outcomes of marital quality and conflict. Thus, it is more likely that mothers who are dissatisfied with the division of household labor have switched to between-gender comparison referents whereby the ratio of mother to fathers' contributions to household labor are more problematic. It is important to note that the assessment of the fairness of household labor is not confined to merely behavioral indicators of labor efforts but also the meaning these contributions have for the mothers. Therefore, the meaning of fathers' contributions to household labor may be more important to mothers than merely counting how many times mothers and fathers complete certain household tasks.

Thus, the division of household labor is particularly relevant to dual-earner adoptive couples of special-needs children because much of the associated demands of an adoptive placement are housework-related labor. Because both adoptive parents work it is necessary that this household labor gets done and how it is distributed will partially highlight mothers’ and fathers’ commitment to the adoptive placement. Much of this household labor is indirect undesirable work not involving direct interaction with the adoptive child and so it will be interesting how this labor becomes distributed within these adoptive couple relationships. Similarly, it will also be important to identify if the division of household labor is viewed as fair or in need of re-negotiation with these dual-earner adoptive couples.

Parenting Arrangements Literature

Benefits to Equal Parenting

Gerson (1993) identified several significant benefits to equal parenting that includes (a) connection with children adds stability to the father's sense of the family, (b) opportunity to build emotional connection with the mother and less sense of rejection of the mother-child bond, (c) decreases mother's feelings of being overwhelmed, (d) provides emotional sustenance in the event the marital relationship does not survive, (e) cited study where husbands that share the housework had wives with lower rates of depression than husbands
that leave domestic chores to the wives, (f) cited another study that indicated the more housework a husband does the less likely the wife will consider divorce, (g) offers opportunity for fathers to share economic provision responsibilities with mother, and (h) cites research supporting positive child development outcomes (e.g., sons of families with fully involved fathers had an increased capacity to develop empathy).

Ehrensaft (1987) studied 40 couples with shared parenting arrangements between mothers and fathers. Ehrensaft divided couples with shared parenting arrangements into two categories: (a) ideological group is where the parents started the shared parenting from the time the child was born because of various personal, social, and political reasons related to gender relations; (b) pragmatic group is where the parents typically start with traditional division of household/childcare labor but mothers find this arrangement unworkable and plead with their husbands to get more involved. Ehrensaft selected couples who had the arrangement by choice (ideological group) and who identified that both mothers and fathers were the primary parents. Her distinction was not 50-50 sharing but at least 60-40 and both parents participating in the management aspects of parenting. This criteria eliminated couples where one parent, typically husbands, were “mother’s helpers.”

The women were quite aware that parenting responsibilities transcend the daily childcare tasks that an au pair or childcare worker provides. They involve, rather an emotional investment and twenty-four-hour-a-day psychological availability that only another ready, willing, and able parenting figure could share with them. And so they expect that investment and that availability of the man they make their child with (p. 23).

Ehrensaft noted that the mothers were the ones to initiate shared parenting and child-rearing discussions with the fathers. However, it seems as though mothers are still responsible for the management aspect of parenting. Ehrensaft notes that commitment is the cornerstone of shared parenting.
Emotional commitment goes beyond lists on the refrigerator of who's done what and if they've done it. It is something larger than the “role” of parents, with all its attendant duties, functions, and obligations. It extends beyond moral compunction. It is a reflection of one’s inner feelings, desires, and longings, of the anchors in life to which one attaches her or his soul (p. 52).

Ehrensaft made a distinction between the “being” and “doing” aspects of parenting. The point is that for women, mothering is a form of existence, a way of being. For men, mothering is a set of activities they are doing, defining a relationship in which they are involved, but which does not reside at the very core of their being (p. 97).

Thus, Ehrensaft pointed out that it is often more difficult for fathers when their children encroach on their own personal needs because fathering is framed as something you “do” or “stop doing.” However, for mothers, they seem more comfortable sacrificing their personal needs (e.g., time for self) to meet the child’s needs because mothering is part of who they are and not just something she does.

**Dual-Earner Couples’ Management of Childcare Arrangements**

Hertz (1997) asked 95 dual-income couples about the different approaches they adopt to provide care for their children. Hertz indicates that the combination of parental beliefs and economic factors explain the choice of childcare practices. Hertz identified the three approaches to childcare as “mothering” approach, the parenting approach, and the marketing approach. Hertz’s description of the aspects of the mothering approach included: (a) it assumes the person best suited to raise the couple’s children is the mother; (b) only the family can teach the proper values and moral upbringing; (c) belief that nurturance, love, and care provided by the family are integral to successful child development; (d) maximizes the availability of the mother to parent the child, the father typically maximizes his employment by either working overtime or taking a second job (minimizes his time with mother and child); (e) central belief that mothers are best for children guides how the work schedules are arranged; (f) scheduling of mothers and fathers work was for the goal of maximizing mothering; (g) mothering was more important than spending time with husband (mothers taking night shift jobs) and job advancement/loyalty; (h) using external economic explanations to avoid blaming father for not unilaterally fulfilling the provider role and
requiring maternal employment to help support the family; (i) the larger value is obviously not gender equality but rather the family value of self-sufficiency in providing childcare with the fewest external supports possible; (j) mother/child dyad is the most important family relationship and it is emphasized at the expense of other relationships; (k) division of household labor and childcare is taken for granted assumption of both mothers and fathers, an implicit aspect of the marriage with little or no discussion or negotiation between parents; (l) mothers worked outside the home during hours that did not count, when child was asleep or in school, so maternal employment would not interfere with the "mother is best" approach and keeps role of paid child care to absolute minimum; (m) in some families, neighbors may help out watching the children during transition points between father's and mother's offsetting work schedules; (n) fathers periodically watched the children if the mother was at work, though the mother was the central nurturer rather than father, neighbors, etc.; (o) fathers participated in nurturing their children in the absence of the mother (occasionally assumes the primary parent role when mother is absent-emotional labor); and (p) only the mother or adoptive mother is the person qualified to care for young children and instill a sense of family values in the child (father there to help with round-the-clock home care but is not core to the rearing of the child-father as mother's helper).

Hertz's (1997) description of the aspects of the parenting approach included: (a) the family ought to be organized around care for the children with the critical distinction that both parents are full participants; (b) both parents organize the work/family balance by either accepting less demanding jobs or negotiating more flexible arrangements with employers; (c) does not indicate the mother as the primary nurturer; (d) indicate that both parents are necessary for rearing a child, thus both parents are essential as nurturers and providers; (e) primary involvement of both parents in the care of their children limits the need for external child care providers though when used, it is kept to a minimum through babysitters and cooperative exchanges with other families of young children; (f) belief that both parents should share the full responsibility for child-rearing; (g) among middle-class couples, the parents re-structured their work schedules while the children were in pre-school but most of the fathers and some mothers went back to full-time work when the children entered school; (h) can be in response to underemployment-new work arrangements with parenting
emphasized; (i) for underemployed couples, the parenting approach is not because of liberal
gender ideological beliefs but rather in response to the structural constraint of
underemployment; (j) fathers indicate that a catalyst for the parenting approach is wanting to
be different fathers than their fathers; (k) parenting is the primary identity for mothers and
fathers; and (l) work advancement is considered secondary to parenting goals. The parenting
approach appears to be the childcare approach most consistent with the notion of the secure
family base.

Hertz’s (1997) description of the aspects of the market approach included: (a) hiring
other people to care for one’s own children; (b) both mother and fathers are career-orientated
and emphasized professional caregivers who replace the mothers (use of surrogates); (c)
multiple paid child care arrangements are used to meet the child’s development needs; (d)
mothering is de-skilled to emphasize individual achievements of mothers; (e) mother remains
primarily responsible for patching together the childcare arrangements while father
emphasizes career as in the traditional role orientation; (f) child-rearing value conflicts arise
between parents and childcare providers partly because providers often are members of
different social classes and race/ethnicity groups; (g) use center-based daycare that exposes
the child to their first learning environment (evaluate day-care based on credentials and
professionalism); (h) use of after-school programs essentially become the new neighborhood
of these families; (i) discontinuity is common among childcare arrangements because either
parents or providers become dissatisfied with the arrangement; (j) parents use quasi-
psychological reasons for developmentally appropriate educational enrichment experiences
for the children to discard childcare arrangements for new ones; (k) fathers’ report that
mothers indicated some guilt for emphasizing their career; (l) mothers indicated they felt they
needed to emphasize career because of heavy investments of time and energy and because
part-time work arrangements were not possible due to family financial demands; (m) fathers
are only sounding boards and marginal participants in the arrangements of child care and of
the three approaches to childcare, fathers are least involved with their children in this
approach; (n) fathers’ identity is tied to their career, though mothers’ identity still emphasizes
the balance of work and family (second shift-mothering dominates while fathers are still
emphasizing careers); (o) unlike the parenting approach, parents in the marketing approach do not make demands on their employers to accommodate family needs.

Hertz (1997) indicates that it is important to study the meaning that mothers (and fathers) give to childcare practices and the division of labor between spouses. Hertz noted that a research focus on childcare choices helps in understanding what conflicts arise, how they are given meaning, and how they are resolved. Hertz indicates that men have often been either not studied or minimized in their role in childcare choices, thus she emphasized that fathers need to be included in future studies on the meaning of childcare arrangements as families enact contemporary social changes. This literature gap will be addressed directly in this dissertation study.

Parenting Literature Summary

The parenting literature discusses that range of different philosophies associated with the various parenting arrangements for dual-earner couples. Hertz’s typology of childcare arrangements is a prime example of these different parenting philosophies. Hertz’s (1997) parenting approach is the most child-orientated of the three approaches and would be the approach most consistent with co-parenting. This parenting approach calls for parents to reorganize their work lives so as to maximize their availability to care for their children. This parenting approach would be the antitheses of the dual-career-oriented couples that are reflected in Hertz’s market approach whereby parents heavily utilize paid childcare as surrogates to facilitate both mothers’ and fathers’ career development. Hertz’s traditional arrangement is the mothering approach whereby mothers limit their work responsibilities so as to maximize their care availability for their children. Fathers in the mothering approach do the exact opposite as mothers whereby they maximize their availability to their careers instead of their family. The parenting literature indicates that the mothering approach is the arrangement that is most problematic for employed mothers because the dual demands of work and family place women at-risk for mental health and relational problems. Another aspect of parenting that seems to be consistently handled by mothers is the organizational planning and emotional labor responsibilities. Thus, assessment of how adoptive couples share the childcare labor must incorporate consideration of organizational planning responsibility.
How dual-earner adoptive couples distribute childcare labor responsibilities is critical to the health of adoptive placements. Hertz's (1997) parenting approach would be the childcare arrangement that would be most consistent with the development of a secure base for the adoptive children. However, it is feasible that adoptive parents could utilize a market approach successfully with their adoptive placement. Although, this market approach arrangement would require a strong coordination of care between the adoptive parents, their respective employers, and their paid childcare personnel to provide a consistent network of care for the adoptive child. Additionally, special-needs adoptive children with attachment issues may present particular difficulties for adoptive parents attempting a market approach to childcare management. Similarly, Hertz's mothering approach would be the most worrisome childcare arrangement that adoptive couples could attempt in their management of a special-needs adoptive placement. The demands of the adoptive placement would fall heavily on the employed adoptive mothers with the mothering approach and leave fathers only distantly involved with their adoptive children. This would be the least preferred method of managing childcare labor among the adoptive couples.

Fathering Literature

_Incongruence Between the Culture and Conduct of Fatherhood_

LaRossa (1988) described the mismatch between the culture of fatherhood (shared norms, values and beliefs surrounding men's parenting) and the conduct of fatherhood (what paternal behaviors fathers do). The culture of fatherhood has changed more quickly than the conduct. Rotundo's (1985) definition of the androgynous father captures the culture of fatherhood.

A good father is an active participant in the details of day-to-day childcare. He involves himself in a more expressive and intimate way with his children, plays a larger role in the socialization process than his male forebears had long since abandoned to their wives (p.17).

_Comparing Paternal Versus Maternal Involvement with Children_

Lamb (1987) defined what constituted paternal involvement in the family. This definition is an effort to make studies of father involvement (conduct of fatherhood) more uniform for meta-analysis purposes. Lamb indicated that three components are critical to
parental involvement. They are engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Engagement includes one-on-one interaction with the child (bathing the child; changing diapers). Accessibility is a less intense interaction with the child that involves the parent doing one task (e.g., laundry) but being available to the child if the need arises. Responsibility has to do with who is typically responsible for the child's welfare and care (for example, ensuring the child sees the doctor and dentist regularly). Lamb utilized this definition to compare level of father to mother involvement in single-earner (mother at-home, father employed) and dual-income families (both parents employed). Lamb found that when mothers are at home full time, fathers have lower engagement with their children (20-25% of the mother’s time vs. 33% of mother’s time when mothers are employed), and are less accessible to children (33% of the mother’s time vs. 65% of mother’s time when mothers are employed). However, in terms of responsibility for their children, mothers had managed this aspect of parental involvement 90% of the time regardless of status of maternal employment. Similarly, Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth (2001) more recently also identified that mothers are more involved with their children than fathers in all activities except play and social activities among older children. However, Yeung et al. did note that fathers are significantly more involved with their children on weekends compared to weekdays though their contributions to caregiving and household labor while increased are still significantly less than mothers’ contributions. This is important to dual-earner adoptive couples because when questioning about paternal involvement it is significant to inquire if weekend contributions are different than weekday contributions. Thus, some adoptive fathers may work long hours during the week and spend all weekend with the family and so it may be premature to assume that they are peripheral fathers. The fact that Yeung et al. highlight that the ratio of mothers’ to fathers’ contributions on weekends are still significantly in mothers’ favor suggests that mothers carry the primary responsibility for childcare and household labor.

In their study of the transition to parenthood, LaRossa and LaRossa (1981) found that within nine months postpartum, the division of childcare labor eroded whereby a traditionalization process developed with mothers bearing primary responsibility and fathers becoming less involved. LaRossa (1988) indicates that the clash between the culture and conduct of fatherhood is likely to result in significant marital conflict. He underlined the
importance of addressing the language fathers use to account for their low involvement with their children’s care. By implication, it is similarly important to pay attention to the language mothers use to justify or excuse fathers from greater involvement with their children. This may be highly relevant during the interviews and data analysis with adoptive parents of special-needs children.

Pleck (1977) theorized about a family/work role system that required participation by the mother and father in the family. Thus, increased father involvement would translate to less stress of role responsibilities for women. Baruch and Barnett (1986) indicated that fathers who participate more in childcare experience several positive benefits, such as higher self-esteem, increased parental competency and satisfaction, though they do suffer some costs, including not enough time for career and family interference with their work responsibilities. Berry and Rao (1997) in their study of levels of work/family stress among fathers found that increased father involvement resulted in increased levels of work/family conflict. However, men’s involvement with their children was confined to pre-scheduled, non-emergency, and less stressful events, thus leaving responsibility for the unscheduled emergency calls for childcare to the mother.

Berry and Rao (1997) invited men to describe in writing any fathering experiences that interfered with work. They found that the majority of responses 69% were focused on children’s needs (illnesses, school-related situations, teacher conferences, or attendance at extracurricular activities). Only 19% of the responses included the category of work/family conflict involved needing to provide care when the typical care arrangement has broken down, unexpected changes in wife’s schedule that presents a gap in childcare arrangement, or transporting child to and from care situations. Also only 12% of responses were categorized as family discord, such as conflict with spouse/child, phone calls from spouse regarding parental stress, and irritability toward family members related to work overload. Berry and Rao note that the work/family stress scale items with the highest mean level of stress were the family discord items. An example item is “I had an argument with my spouse over sharing child care arrangements.” The scheduled, non-emergency childcare events/needs were the items on the work/family stress scale that had the lowest mean stress levels. Basically, the mothers are being left to handle the most stressful childcare needs and fathers are involved
when the work/family stress costs are lowest. This would be consistent with LaRossa (1983) description of the “technically present but functionally absent father” who logged time with his kids, was there in body but not in spirit. Family discord is expected given that women are typically held responsible for emergency, non-scheduled childcare needs. Berry and Rao called for couples to re-negotiate their parental roles and suggested that the re-definition of motherhood and fatherhood would involve both parents being co-providers and co-nurturers.

**Fathers Assume “Secondary Responsibility” for their Children**

In Gerson’s (1993) interview study of involved fatherhood, 40% of her participants were able to become “primary or equal” parents with their wives. The other 60% were what Gerson described as “mother’s helpers.”

It is his participation in caring for his children that determines whether a man is an involved father, not the shared breadwinning that typically accompanies it (p. 216).

Gerson (1993) identified several dilemmas of involved fatherhood: (a) deciding whether to devote energy to earning money or spending time with the children; (b) nurturing a family or nurturing a career (more responsibility, more time at work, more travel); (c) pursuing personal interests (freedom) vs. demands of family involvement (loss of personal freedom and privileges). Gerson also identified methods fathers use to contain the costs of involvement: (a) fathers preferred the parental involvement and responsibility to be fluid and interchangeable, emphasizing flexibility, though many responsibilities/tasks were left undefined in a vague way that often allowed fathers to altogether opt out of certain tasks and pass responsibility to the mother (maintains personal freedoms); and (b) decision to have smaller families (limits financial burden and allows for more time).

Gerson’s (1993) primary contribution was on methods fathers use to escape primary responsibility for children. Resisting full equality, the strategies of “mothers’ helpers”: (a) they attempt to evade the “dirty work” of childcare while engaging in the enjoyable aspects of childcare; (b) they treat childcare and housework as separate domains and even at times will equally participate in child care but will leave the housework to the women; (c) they avoid responsibility for childcare and housework arrangements but are willing to participate in the tasks; and (d) they use rationales for their selective involvement. Avoiding the dirty work involved fathers participating in the care of their children, but avoiding the
activities deemed least attractive. The wives did not make the distinction between desirable and undesirable but were forced to handle the undesirable tasks fathers would rather not do. Gerson found that mothers’ helpers shared some of the tasks of childcare but avoided the housework or left it to the mother that seemed consistent with other studies.

The theme of mothers’ helpers participating in childcare without responsibility had several aspects to it including: (a) relied on mothers to assign tasks and make last-minute arrangements during emergencies; (b) these fathers were in the role of reactors while the mothers assumed the role of initiators; (c) mothers were responsible to see that tasks were assigned equitably and supervised to ensure they got done; and (d) some fathers limited their wives’ ability to secure equality because fathers decided if and when to participate knowing that the wives will ill in if he was absent.

The theme of explanation for the unequal participation from the mothers’ helpers occurred because the mothers’ helpers subscribed to gender ideal of equality and their conduct was incongruent. Mothers’ helpers accounted for their lack of participation in housework because of their wives’ level of cleanliness and different timetable for getting things done rather than their preference not to do it. Gerson (1993) made the point that the party willing to tolerate a messy home held the upper hand in negotiations about domestic labor.

A second way that mothers’ helpers accounted for their conduct was a version of the skills argument, such that their wives were more skilled (or they lacked skills) in housework and certain undesirable childcare duties. In contrast, involved fathers rejected the argument that men cannot nurture children though mothers’ helpers used to the nurture/housework skills deficit argument to get out of doing undesirable work. A third way that mothers’ helpers accounted for their incongruent conduct was to use comparison referents to other men to downplay the level of inequality in cross-gender referents (father vs. mother contribution). The majority of mothers’ helpers agreed that their wives were bearing the brunt of the household and childcare responsibility and they attributed the gap to situational difficulties rather than personal preferences.

Biernat and Wortman (1991) surveyed 139 professional couples with young children about the sharing of housework and childcare labor. They found that both wives and
husbands self-reported that wives were more involved than husbands in all childcare tasks except playing with the children. In addition, in regard to the responsibility for arranging of childcare, both wives and husbands agreed that the wives handled that responsibility. This is consistent with previous research findings though the main contribution of this study is that men acknowledge the inequitable division of childcare labor. Biernat and Wortman point out, as others have, that men choose to engage in the childcare tasks that are typically more “fun” (playing) while women are left responsible for the “mundane” aspects of childcare (making arrangements).

Paternal Involvement in Childcare Arrangements
Mason and Duberstein (1992) in their review of childcare and parental wellbeing, cited numerous studies related to father childcare. They cited an unpublished study from the Detroit Childcare Survey (605 employed mothers of dual-earner families) that indicated that mothers and fathers frequently 55% changed their work schedules to facilitate paternal childcare of pre-school children. This is surprising and counter to the literature in two significant ways: (a) demonstrates a willingness of fathers to negotiate a work schedule that is more conducive to caring for their children; and (b) demonstrates fathers’ participation as primary parent of their children. However, Mason and Duberstein do not indicate from this unpublished survey: (a) what proportion of the 55% who adjusted their work schedules were mothers and what proportion were fathers; (b) was the work shift that the mother and father worked day or non-day shift. This would shed light on the extent of negotiation that fathers did with their employers. Typically employers are relatively inflexible to men about childcare responsibilities. It would also explain if one or more of the parents worked non-day shifts and thus had work-schedule flexibility built into their work. Mason and Duberstein also found that the number of pre-school children in the home increases the likelihood of father participation in childcare due in part to the increased cost of childcare and the desire to reduce costs by families providing all the childcare. Mason and Duberstein indicate that future research needs to examine how parents decide what is the best way to provide care for their children. This need speaks to how parents construct a network of caregivers, that includes mothers, fathers, daycare providers, and others, to ensure care of their children. Mason and Duberstein also call for future research to study how parents weigh their child’s
needs with their own needs in making childcare arrangements. They indicate that father care is an understudied area, particularly what leads fathers to choose to father-reliant childcare arrangements and what consequences it has for fathers’ family life. These fathering literature gaps will be addressed in this dissertation study.

_Fathering Influenced More by Contextual Influences_

Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) indicate that fatherhood fits into a systemic framework that does not limit fathering to a behavioral set of actions of men but includes mothers, children, extended family, and community. “Fathering is a product of the meanings, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of all these stakeholders in the lives of children” (p. 275). Doherty et al. attempt to make the argument that fathering is more sensitive to contextual forces than mothering efforts. They cite the classic study by Glen Elder during the Great Depression that found that fathers spent more time with their children but the quality of the time decreased with fathers demonstrating more arbitrariness and rejecting behaviors. Thus, the father’s success/failure as a breadwinner has an impact on the quality of childcare provided to his children. Doherty et al.’s review also cited the work of Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) that used the four determinants of father involvement: (a) motivation (desire to father); (b) skills (has the parenting skills to parent); (c) social support (receives social support for fathering); and (d) institutional practices (is not undermined by work and other institutional settings). It should be noted that motivation and skills are individual variables and should be considered similarly to the contextual variables of social support and institutional practices. Doherty et al. cited federal studies demonstrating that many men are involved significantly with the care of their children. They indicate that when mothers work, fathers are just as likely to be a source of primary childcare as childcare centers and family day care homes. In fact, 23% of families with a working mother have the father assume primary responsibility for care of their children. Doherty et al. indicates in their review of the fathering literature that the issue of comparison with mothering tends to use mothering as the benchmark to evaluate paternal involvement with childcare. The authors call for an ecological approach in the care of children that incorporates personal, relational, and community influences. In order to establish the argument that fathering is more contextually-sensitive than mothering, Doherty et al. cite research to support the three
dimensions of their model: (a) the co-parental relationship; (b) factors in the other parent; and (c) larger contextual factors. In regards to the co-parental relationship, the outcome of the negotiation of childcare arrangements between parents is highly dependent on the mother’s and father’s meanings and expectations of father’s role because the father role is more variable than the mother’s role and there is less cultural consensus on the “job description of fathers.” In regards to contextual factors, most research on contextual factors focuses on support and usually centers on maternal support for fathering. However, Doherty et al. indicated that there is some research evidence that even highly involved fathers encounter negative attitudes from acquaintances, relatives, friends, and fellow workers. They make two important implications of their argument: (a) positive support from mothers and the larger context can influence men to become more involved with their children even if they have modest levels of motivation; (b) strong commitment, knowledge and parent skills of fathers will be necessary to overcome negative co-parental, maternal, and contextual influences. Doherty et al. indicate that systemic ecological models risk describing fatherhood as a contextually-determined phenomenon devoid of individual initiative and determination. Likewise, they identify that fathers play an essential role in discarding and formulating cultural messages about fathering identity and developing their parenting skills with their children. Doherty et al. indicate that active construction of fathering is not a prominent theme in the fathering literature and call for future qualitative studies to explore the kinds of identity development and social negotiation that constitute the experience of fathering. The authors say the marital relationship as the most important context for fatherhood.

The main premise, supported by a variety of studies, is that fathering is uniquely sensitive to contextual influences, both interpersonal and environmental. Fathering is a multilateral relationship, in addition to a one-to-one relationship. A range of influences-including mother’s expectations and behaviors, the quality of the co-parental relationship, economic factors, institutional practices, and employment opportunities-all have potentially powerful effects on fathering. These contextual factors shape the level of involvement with one’s children. When these influences are not supportive of the father-child bond, a man may need a high level identification
with the father role, strong commitment, and good parenting skills to remain a responsible father to his children (p. 289).

Walker and McGraw’s (2000) critique of the Doherty et al. (1998) article on responsible fathering challenged several points: (a) Walker and McGraw indicate that when fathers show involvement in the care of their children when the mother works evenings/nights, most of that time credited to fathers is when the child is asleep (difficult to compare with mothers caring for children during their waking hours); (b) they indicate that men experience few deterrents to participation in the workforce (highly valued activity) compared to women while men demonstrate that their participation in family work (low valued activity) is more discretionary, leaving women with the required responsibility. Walker and McGraw call for restructuring the paid and unpaid work between men and women within relationships. Walker and McGraw criticize Doherty et al. for placing too much responsibility for fathering on women and children. They indicate that men typically have greater access to the resources, thus it is not appropriate to hold women exclusively accountable for the care of dependent children.

Gerson (1993) described what contextually leads to equal parenting. Equal parent fathers did not avoid the dirty work of housework and childcare and assumed responsibility for childcare arrangements and supervision. In contrast, Gerson explained that unequal career and economic opportunities constrict the choices of mothers and fathers. Mothers’ helpers typically believed that their career had better economic and career growth opportunities, thus they felt justified in emphasizing their career and relying on their wives to be the primary caregivers to the children. Better economic and career opportunities were a disincentive to men becoming equal parents and justified inequality in domestic arrangements. This is consistent with the human capital perspective of the rational choice theory that indicates income inequality makes domestic inequality a rational choice plus economic inequality arises from men’s and women’s preferences. The position is that men naturally prefer to maximize their earnings while women prefer to balance domestic and paid work. Gerson goes on to explain that economic and career opportunities are more culturally defined by gender than by preferences. Men face severe social constraints if they want to focus on their family and less on their career. Women also face constraints if they try to develop more
human capital, economic and career opportunities for themselves. Thus, balancing work and family is difficult for men and women. Gerson found that fathers who were equal parents were more likely 28% than mothers’ helpers 7% to have wives with better long-term career prospects. This was influential in how they negotiated current family arrangements because it allowed fathers with stagnant phases of their careers to become primarily responsible for the children while their wives invested more heavily in their careers. The equal parent fathers viewed this as an opportunity rather than a burden. In order for equal parent fathers to choose this path that runs counter to social forces, they needed several incentives over and above finding caregiving pleasurable: (a) consent from self and wife; (b) promise of a happier marriage; (c) hope of expanding own occupational choices helped in fathers engaging in least pleasurable aspects of parenting. Basically the circumstances that give birth to possible equal parenting are rare but include (a) support by wife, (b) career stagnation coupled with wife’s career opportunities taking off, and (c) desire to be a fully involved father. These circumstances do not guarantee that fathers will choose to spend time and energy in fatherhood rather than some other career or personal pursuit.

Gerson (1993) identified several ideological obstacles to increased father involvement that include (a) social and cultural pressures expect men to pursue a career to prove themselves, (b) suppression of economic and career opportunities for women make it economically unlikely that men could devote themselves to care of their children and rely on wife’s income, (c) men are uncomfortable with thought of wife financially supporting the family, (d) most fathers worked in inflexible work situations where they desired more flexibility but for economic reasons continued to work there, (e) part-time work was a rare option in male-dominated fields, and (f) informal work culture pressures discourage men from participating in paternity leaves (employers are more accepting of health leaves because they view illness as involuntary though parenting leave is seen as a voluntary activity for male employees).

**Impact of Couples’ Work Scheduling on Paternal Involvement**

Brayfield (1995) examined data from the 1990 National Childcare Survey of 1452 families to explore the relationship between the mothers’ and fathers’ work schedules on fathers’ level of child care. Brayfield indicates that the question of why fathers do not take
more regular responsibility for the care of their children is related to work scheduling more than issues of commitment to fathering or a mere lack of time. By scheduling, he refers to whether fathers work regular or rotating shifts, weekdays or weekends, and day, evenings, and/or nights. Four factors have been found to constrain a father’s participation in the day-to-day care of his children: (a) conventional values, beliefs, and normative expectations about the division of household labor (Hochschild & Machung, 1989); (b) men’s greater economic resources and power (Brayfield, 1992); c) economic efficiency for the family unit (Becker, 1974); and (d) demands placed on fathers and their capacity to respond to the demands (Coverman, 1985). Brayfield concentrates on the demand/response explanation in examining the separate effects of mother’s and father’s work schedules on father’s participation in the child care of their children. Brayfield’s review of the literature on the impact of work schedules on fathers’ involvement in the child care found: (a) fathers are more responsible for child care when wives work part-time rather full-time and when wives work non-day shifts; (b) fathers are less responsible for child care when their wives work variable or rotating shifts; (c) fathers who work weekends or non-day shifts spend less time taking care of their children; (d) children are less likely to be cared for by their fathers if both parents work the day shift than if both parents work evenings or nights (US Bureau of Census, 1992); and (e) child is more likely to be cared for by the father if the father works day shifts and the mother works night shifts rather than the reverse (US Bureau of Census). Brayfield found that the number of hours of maternal employment was negatively related to paternal involvement in childcare of pre-school and school-age children. Although this was consistent with previous research, it was counter-intuitive to the demand/response hypothesis. However, Brayfield identified that maternal employment on weekends or on evenings/night was related to increased paternal involvement in the care of the children. For example, the probability that a father will care for his child: (a) changes from 26% for mothers employed weekdays day shifts to 57% for mothers that work at least one day on the weekend; (b) if mother works weekday day shifts there is only a 4.6% chance of father being primary caregiver while if the mother works non-day shifts the primary care responsibility increases to 27%; and (c) if father is not available while the mother is at her job, the probability that the father will be the caregiver is 18% while if the father is available for 20 hours/week while
mother is at work, the chance of caring for the child increases to 50%. Brayfield points out the aspects of maternal work schedules in more important to paternal involvement in childcare than aspects of paternal employment. However, it is noteworthy that when the mothers are unavailable for childcare, it does not always result in fathers stepping in to handle childcare responsibilities. It is understandable that atypical working hours would present fewer community childcare arrangements, though it is troubling when father’s are available for childcare in the mother’s absence and they only participate half the time.

Biemat and Wortman (1991) did find some support for the relative resources theory. As professional men’s income rose, they were less likely to engage in childcare. However, the authors found only modest support for the structural theory whereby as women increased their hours of employment, men did more childcare. Though contrary to previous findings, the most consistent predictor of paternal involvement in childcare was not wives’ number of hours of employment but rather men’s work hours. The more hours the husband worked, the less hours he engaged in childcare. Duetsch et al. (1993) found support for the relative economic resources theory. The only significant individual predictor of paternal involvement in childcare was discrepancy in income. They also found support for a structural theory. The only significant individual predictor was number of hours of maternal paid labor. Thus, the greater the maternal work hours, the greater the participation of fathers in childcare. However, although they did not find support for the family systems theoretical model, they did find support for the sex role attitudes theory. They indicated that father’s feminism was a significant individual predictor of paternal involvement in childcare, even when controlling for wife’s feminism.

Overemphasis of Contextual Influences on Paternal Involvement

Daly (1996) interviewed 32 fathers with children under the age of 6 about the meaning of time for them. Daly was interested in fathers’ discourses about time, specifically, the way that fathers talk about time serves as an important window into their beliefs, commitments, and priorities. Daly found several themes. The first was time as a commodity; this included time production and time as a fixed quantum. The production of family time reflected the idea that time was scarce and that several other commitments, such as business and social activities, take priority before making time for children and family. Time as a
fixed quantum indicates that time is a zero-sum game where time with children and family is
time away/sacrifice from other obligations. The second theme was control of family time.
Fathers espoused the importance of fatherhood in their lives (culture of fatherhood) though
their strong commitments of time to their employers prevented fathers’ conduct from being
consistent. Daly identified a consensus among the fathers that they were impotent or lacked
control of their time to reallocate more of it from work to family. Daly also found that some
of the men had difficulty controlling their time when they were with their children. The
fathers described that they were physically present with their children but still thinking about
work responsibilities and thus mentally and emotionally were absent for their children. This
is consistent with LaRossa’s “physically present though functionally absent” father
description. Daly indicated that men define time in terms of work structures that are the
dominant priority on fathers’ time coupled with children and family receiving secondary or
residual time (lower priority). Daly implies that men need to address their sense of impotence
over their time management. Daly makes the point that it is not just the act of reallocating
time from work to the family but adopting a humanistic value on time that reflects “how you
spend your time, defines what kind of person you are.” This is a deeper second-order change
at the level of personal values and identity. Daly also highlights the need to pay attention to
how parents negotiate between them how they are going to be temporally available to their
children. This is a direct request for re-distribution of parental role responsibility between the
mothers and fathers. This is closely related to the proposed dissertation focus. Daly also
identifies several useful lines of qualitative questions. Examples include: (a) how do
employed mothers construct meaning of their time; (b) how do mothers give meaning to
father’s time at home; (c) how does mother’s meaning of father’s time relate to father’s
meaning of his time. It is tempting to accept that uninvolved fathering is contextually-
determined and devoid of individual responsibility. However, this study highlights that while
fathers do experience the contextual constraints of work on their time, the individual is still
accountable for time spent on leisure pursuits that exclude family, as well as making oneself
emotionally available for family after a reasonable transition period from the hassles of work.

Cohen (1987) indicated that opportunity and choice are the key factors in determining
whether men will enact the father role. Choice is related to role attachment (not just father
behaviors but the emotional involvement in the father role). Thus, increased father role attachment leads to increased choice to enact the father role. Opportunity is dependent on the commitments one has made and the consequences of those commitments. Thus, Cohen developed a 2x2 typology involving the factors of choice and opportunity. In the consistent cells, father's preferences (choices) are both in line with their opportunities. The positive situation includes the fathers with a desire to be involved fathers and in a context that makes involved fathering possible (opportunity). The negative situation involves fathers with low desire for increased fathering (choice) coupled with a context that is non-conductive to involved fathering (opportunity). In the inconsistent cells, fathers' preferences (choices) are out-of-sync with their opportunities. In the first situation, fathers have a desire to be involved fathers (choice) but live in a context that provides few opportunities for fatherhood. In the second situation, fathers live in a context that provides many opportunities for fatherhood but fathers have a low desire for fatherhood (choose not to father). Cohen interviewed 30 men about their experiences in becoming fathers. Cohen indicated that all of the participant fathers reported feeling changed by fatherhood. The participants indicated that they changed routines, altered self-concepts, restructured priorities, and increased commitment to work. It seems that the last two participant categories were contradictory. How can new fathers restructure their priorities if their work commitments are increasing? What were their priorities before fatherhood? Perhaps work wasn't most important prior to fatherhood, however this is doubtful.

Cohen (1987) indicated that the importance of nurturant roles in fatherhood was emphasized by a majority of the participants. A minority of the father's emphasized that provider was the main role of the father, while the majority mentioned nurturant roles that included teacher, role model, companion, and providing emotional support for their children. Cohen noted that his sample of fathers engaged in only some housework and that the brunt of the housework was carried out by their wives. Similarly and more telling, the vast majority of these fathers were mainly engaged in what LaRossa (1988) would term "secondary childcare" while their wives' carried out the "primary childcare." This finding calls into question the validity of the fathering experience that these fathers describe. It reflects men's break between the culture of fatherhood and their conduct. Cohen indicated that division of
housework and childcare are contested dimensions of living. Cohen describes the majority of the participants as fathers who desire more involvement with their children (high choice) but who work in a context that provides limited opportunity (low opportunity). Many participants indicated that they had difficulty keeping their negative emotional feelings about work from interfering in their involvement with their children. Cohen does make the point that we need to be careful not to assume that becoming an involved father is solely an act of choice. It is also partly determined by opportunities. However, Cohen writes that opportunities can be pushed on men independent of choice as in the case of wives “demanding greater involvement from fathers in housework and childcare.” This is related to my dissertation’s focus.

Cohen (1987) calls for workplaces to re-examine the employment culture they help promote which results in men having few opportunities for involved fatherhood. However, it seems somewhat socially desirable to say that you want to be an involved father but only work constraints prevent it from happening. I think that any study on involved fatherhood needs to adopt a both/and position whereby the design includes contextual influences, such as the work place, as well as individual factors (desire, commitment, values, and beliefs).

Gerson’s (1993) description of strategies of mother’s helpers is a case in point. Gerson found that fathers often choose not to take advantage of their flexible work arrangements to care for their children. Gerson indicates that some of the mothers’ helpers explained their incongruent conduct by indicating that the wife’s work is more flexible and thus she is more available to be the primary parent. Gerson found that the majority of her sample of participant fathers had inflexible work schedules. However, 30% of the fathers had flexible work schedules but the majority of them chose not to use it to become more involved fathers but rather used it to pursue leisure activities or extra employment to make money. Gerson makes the point that if men do not have the desire to be more involved fathers, a flexible work arrangement will not be reflected in their fathering efforts. Gerson points out that flexible work arrangements sometimes came at a cost of limited career advancement and decreased income but were worth it if fathers desired the social benefits to fatherhood that included emotional support of their wives.
Fathering Literature Summary

The fathering literature consistently finds that fathers are significantly less involved in parenting than mothers and that mothers are the ones primarily responsible for childcare in families. However, the involved fatherhood literature has influenced fathers to be more self-aware of the gap between the culture of fatherhood and their current conduct resulting in fathers' overestimation of their paternal involvement. In every aspect of Lamb’s (1987) parenting involvement (engagement, accessibility, and responsibility), fathers only contribute a fraction of mother’s contribution. This ratio does not change dramatically with maternal employment, suggesting that mothers help with the economic provision though fathers are slow to increase contributions to the childcare labor needs. One of the major explanations for lower paternal involvement is that fathers have less job flexibility than mothers and therefore are less available to contribute more to the childcare. However, the fathering literature explains that while there are structural constraints to involved fatherhood, it is also important that fathers have the desire for increased involvement otherwise no amount of job flexibility will be helpful. It is very easy for noninvolved fathers to explain that their limited paternal involvement is solely because of structural constraints and that they really wanted to be more involved. Hence, Gerson’s (1993) description of the tactics of “mothers’ helpers” is very relevant here because it articulates how some fathers hide behind the structural constraints of their jobs to justify leaving mothers the majority of the childcare labor responsibility.

The fathering literature has major implications for dual-earner adoptive couples with special-needs adoptive placements. The health of these adoptive placements depends on how the adoptive couples distribute childcare responsibilities between the employed parents. Similarly, it is vitally important how adoptive mothers and fathers negotiate flexibility for family needs with their respective employers. Furthermore, it will be problematic if only adoptive mothers choose to negotiate with their employers because then adoptive fathers will be excused from increased paternal involvement with their adoptive children due to the supposedly structural constraint of their limited availability. Moreover, it will be important to understand if adoptive fathers are the same or different than other fathers in their patterns of paternal involvement with their children’s needs. For the sake of the adoptive children and the health of their placement, I sincerely hope they are.
Parenting - Mothering Literature

Arendell’s (2000) review of the mothering literature indicates that women receive little support from fathers in handling the responsibilities of parenting. Despite the increased cultural ideal of the involved father, women are still primarily responsible for the care of children.

**Dominant Cultural Ideal of Mothering Theme**

Arendell (2000) defined mothering as “the social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children” (p. 1192).

Hays (1996) indicates that the North American ideology of mothering is that of intensive mothering that is exclusive, wholly child-centered, emotionally involving, and time consuming (p. 1194).

Arendell (2000) notes that married Caucasian mothers encounter the deviance discourse if they elect to participate significantly in the labor market and are not full-time mothers. Arendell cites numerous statistical studies in support of the notion that the majority of mothers are in the workforce. Ardendell notes that 75% of all mothers with children under 18 and 60% of mothers with children under six are participating in the workforce, more women are electing to have careers and children simultaneously rather than sequentially. She notes that motherhood is the primary identity for women, even higher than spouse or work identity.

**Family Labor Responsibility Relates to Maternal Anger**

Ross and Von Willigen (1996) used a national data survey of 2,031 adults to test the hypothesis that the gender inequality that places mothers as primarily responsible for housework and child care (including making arrangements and paying for child care while parents are at work) results in increased levels of anger in women. They tested the hypothesis that gender inequality resulted in higher anger among mothers than fathers or childless adults. In contrast to the gender inequality perspective, the gendered response view purports that men and women face equal stressors and that men and women differ in their response to hardships, men respond with anger and women with depression. Men are socialized to respond with anger because they are more aggressive and competitive in our culture, while women are socialized to be caring and nurturing and thus are encouraged to turn their stress
inward in the form of depression. The results indicate that parents report significantly more anger than non-parents and women report twice as much than men. Ross and Von Willigen noted that the higher the proportion of childcare performed for the household, the higher the levels of anger. In addition, the greater the difficulty in arranging and paying for childcare, the higher the level of anger. In their large sample, mothers performed 76.5% of childcare and fathers 35.9%. The authors highlight that as the number of children in the family increase, the proportion of childcare and difficulty in arrangements of childcare increase. The authors cited research that asked women the object of their anger and husbands came up first. The implication of the study was that better negotiation over the division of housework and childcare responsibilities between men and women could significantly reduce women's level of anger.

Ross and Von Willigen’s (1996) findings support the gender inequality perspective but not the gendered response perspective. Women not only had the highest levels of anger, they were also the most likely to express them. Importantly, the medical model treats anger as a maladaptive emotion and a problem in and of itself and not as a product/consequence of social inequality. Ross and Von Willigen note that the anger among women could be relieved by re-negotiation among spouses so that each shares responsibility for childcare, housework, and economic provision of the family.

Arendell (2000) identified that study of women’s feelings is a considerable gap in the research literature. Ross and Von Willigen’s study on women and anger is a key contribution though more work in the area is needed. This provides another gap for the dissertation study.

Arendell’s (2000) review also noted that married mothers of dual-income families generally experience more positive emotions at work and more negative emotions at home. Conversely, men experience more negative emotions at work and more positive emotion at home because they participated less in housework and childcare and spend their time in leisure and relaxation.

*Motherhood Ideals Reconciled Through Childcare Arrangements*

Uttal (1996) interviewed 31 employed mothers of young children about the meaning they give to having others take care of their children for extended periods of time. She found
three primary interpretations of childcare including custodial care, surrogate care, and coordinated care. Uttal pointed out that the employed mothers' interpretations did not align with the dominant cultural ideal of motherhood. Uttal explains two typically dominant cultural ideals of motherhood: (a) full-time motherhood, whose only job is to provide care to the family; and (b) super-mom who manages to do it all - job, family, and self needs.

Uttal's (1996) description of the cultural ideal of full-time motherhood includes: (a) full-time responsibility where mothers are the primary agent who provide for the children's physical and emotional needs, ensure their proper socialization and moral character development; (b) mothers' are solely responsible for all aspects of child rearing except economic provision until children attend school; (c) non-child-related activities such as employment detract from the constant demands of mothering and are discouraged; and (d) mothering is women's primary interest and women derive their identity and self-concept from mothering.

Uttal's (1996) description of the alternative form of motherhood, the super-mom includes: (a) can meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of their child while simultaneously being involved in work-related activities that meet mothers' needs for personal fulfillment and development; and (b) permits mothers to transfer the care of their pre-school (infants, toddlers, and pre-school) children to others if it provides educational and social opportunities for the child.

Uttal (1996) indicates that both cultural ideals of motherhood are biased in the sense that they do not challenge the gendered notion of parenting that childcare is mother's sole responsibility. Even though the super-mom image includes employment, it utilizes as alternative childcare a market approach rather than holding fathers responsible for their share of childcare. An example of this is Garey's (1996) study of night-shift nurse who chose the work shift so they could be available to their children and involved in their activities during the day. Like previous research, this reflects an individual rather than social solution. Uttal indicates that the role of childcare in supporting employed mothers efforts to coordinate employment and family responsibilities is an under-studied area. This is an additional literature gap for the dissertation study to address.
Uttal (1996) noted that only 4.5% of children of employed mothers receive care by their mothers while they work. This makes the case for need to study child care arrangements for not just employed mothers but dual-earner families where coordination of child care is an issue that must be negotiated between mothers and fathers. Uttal indicated that the participant employed mothers differed in how they define “child rearing” and “childcare.” The participants defined what they expect their child care providers to do for their children and the boundaries/limits of that care. The definition of child care provider’s role provided the three primary categories from the mothers: (a) custodial care; (b) surrogate care; and (c) coordinated care.

Uttal’s (1996) description of the custodial care (cited by 9 of the 31 mothers) includes: (a) see child care from others as distinct from what mothers do for their children; (b) definition of caregiver duties restricted to physical supervision, limited emotional care, and certain activities; (c) mothering is more broadly encompassing than child caregiver duties; (d) the custodial definition is consistent with the dominant cultural ideal of motherhood, with the noted exception of full-time presence, where the mother is the primary agent responsible for their child’s emotional, physical, and social needs.

Uttal’s (1996) description of the surrogate care (cited by 3 of the 31 mothers) includes: (a) mothers define their child’s care provider as their child’s primary caretaker; (b) they define the child’s caregiver as the person whose relationship most closely resembles the cultural ideal of the domestic mother-child relationship; (c) they feel the caregivers are providing what mothers are supposed to provide—emotionally, physically, and socially; (d) employed mothers maintain their parental rights to supervise the child care arrangement and manage it; (e) in contrast to custodial care, these mothers acknowledge that they cannot fulfill the requirements of the dominant image of motherhood and acknowledge that their child caregiver does meet the requirements (child is more emotionally attached to the caregiver than the mother); and (f) they transfer the status and recognition of motherhood to the paid child caregiver.

Uttal’s (1996) description of coordinated care (cited by 19 of the 31 mothers) includes: (a) mothers perceive sharing mothering with paid child care providers and making a joint contribution to the child’s development; (b) similar to surrogate care, acknowledge the
influence of paid caregivers on their child's emotional and moral development though they do not view their mothering role as being replaced; (c) define this arrangement as co-mothering; (d) acknowledge that the paid child caregiver is performing all the functions of motherhood but the distinction is that the mothering functions are shared; (e) requires a high level of coordination between mothers and paid child caregivers-includes coordinating child rearing philosophies, values, practices, and communicating especially when differences arise. Uttal indicated that coordinated care challenged the dominant cultural ideal of motherhood in the following significant ways: (a) does not require the mother's constant presence; (b) allows the development of children to be influenced by others in coordination with the mother; (c) coordinated care moves childcare from a privatized activity that isolates mothers to a public socially coordinated activity. Thus, coordinated care is the approach most consistent with the secure family base concept.

Mothers Held Primarily Responsible for Childcare

Carlisle (1994) indicated results of the level of partner support for sharing household/child care tasks. Carlisle found that 26% shared equally; 56% shared significantly, and 13% gave insignificant support. It should be noted that Carlisle’s findings on partner support are significantly more positive than most previous research findings. Carlisle also found that only 63% reported that their husband gave emotional and encouragement support. Carlisle asked how women could better prepare for the dual-income marriage. The majority of female participants indicated the importance of early negotiation with husband on how to manage a dual-income marriage. This relates directly to my dissertation study.

McCarthy-Snyder (1993) indicated in her review of the literature that women are still primarily responsible for housework and childcare despite some evidence that fathers’ involvement in families is increasing. She noted that while fathers have increased their involvement, the increased time is far more likely to be spent on childcare than household tasks. Lamb’s (1987) studies of father family involvement found that men are spending more time in direct interaction and supervision of their children though planning and organization of a child’s day still remains the responsibility of the mother. Thus, the brunt of childcare responsibility is still women’s.
However, Ehrensaft (1987) sharply identified a loop-hole to shared parenting where an over-emphasis on the meanings of parenthood can distort the unequal reality of behavioral and time input by mothers compared to fathers. This would be the equivalent to LaRossa's (1988) description that the culture of fatherhood is often inconsistent with the conduct of fatherhood. Ehrensaft adds that flexibility and competence (parenting skills and management) are also cornerstones to the shared parenting arrangements. Ehrensaft indicates that responsibility for the management of childcare (sometimes referred to as emotional labor) is still the mother's sole responsibility.

Mom is the overseer, the organizer, the list maker, the keeper of inventory. Beyond overseeing practical activities, she is also able to look out for and interpret patterns and rhythms in the child’s daily life and respond to them accordingly. What is father doing while all this female organizing is going on? In this group of families, men either deferred to the women, taking the back seat, or remained oblivious (p. 71). Ehrensaft found support for the idea that the best way to invite fathers to experience the full range of parenting and simultaneously taking the mother out of the management/supervisor role is to have the father parent while the mother is not physically present. This would facilitate fathers handling difficult childcare situations.

Maternal Distress

Numerous studies are cited that consistently agree that the most stressed of all mothers are those who are married, employed, have young children, and encounter difficulty in locating and affording child care and handling childcare mostly alone (Arendell, 2000). Numerous studies indicate that mothers who are able to locate and afford childcare, are supported by their partners, have flexible workplace options and a sense of control in the workplace benefit most in paid employment (Arendell, 2000). In addition, Arendell’s review of the literature noted that mothers experience more parental strain than fathers though mothers enjoy increased attachment to their children as compared to fathers.

Limited Paternal Support Handling Childcare Arrangements

Leventhal-Belfer, Cowan, and Cowan (1992) studied satisfaction with child care arrangements at 6 months, 18 months, 3 ½ years, and 5 ½ years. They found that the only statistically significant factor related to mothers’ satisfaction with childcare arrangements had
to do with the support they receive for their childcare decisions by the fathers. However, only at six months was fathers' satisfaction with childcare arrangements related to support by the mother. By 18 months, fathers had assumed a traditional role orientation of being the distant provider, and thus, no factors predicted paternal satisfaction with childcare arrangements beyond six months. The qualitative aspect of the study identified that employed mothers experienced a decided lack of social support for their childcare decisions. This is consistent with the mothering literature emphasis on the cultural ideal of intensive mothering that emphasizes a deviance discourse to employed mothers who choose not to stay at home with their children.

Coping Strategies for Women in Dual-Income Relationships

Carlisle's (1993) study of sharing of household responsibilities in dual-career couples found only 26% of participants shared the work equally. Carlisle identified several advantages to the dual-career relationship for women including increased income, self-esteem, greater respect, greater cohesion, equal power, and autonomy. However, Carlisle also identified several disadvantages to dual-career relationship for women including work overload 82%, relationships 63%, role conflict 28%, career leveling 21%, and societal pressure 14%. To manage the disadvantages, Carlisle cited several of the most common coping strategies including encouraging husband to share workload 65%, hiring help for housework 44%, and support from others 19%. Carlisle's study supports the finding from other studies that the responsibility for coping with household/childcare issues typically falls to women. This means that even if husbands share the workload, the responsibility for planning and supervision of household/childcare arrangements are still typically handled by women.

Mothering Literature Summary

The mothering literature indicates that dominant cultural messages that mothers receive influences them to accept primary responsibility for household, childcare, and organizational planning labor for their families. The mothering literature consistently finds that this disproportionate responsibility for family labor places undue amounts of distress on mothers that result in higher levels of anger and coping difficulties. The chief coping strategies of employed mothers include requests for more help from fathers and/or hiring
external help with the family labor demands. One critical aspect of the mothering literature is how mothers manage childcare arrangements. Paid childcare is the most important of the hired external help for employed mothers because it facilitates their ability to work. Uttal (1996) described three different philosophical approaches that mothers can take in their relationships with their paid childcare support. *Custodial care* would indicate that mothers view the care that the childcare worker provides as limited emotional support and mainly confined to supervision and meeting basic physical needs. However, *surrogate care* suggests that mothers view the care of the paid childcare worker as meeting all the needs that a mother would provide and therefore the childcare worker would be seen as the child's primary caregiver in the mothers' absence. Finally, *coordinated care* indicates that the mother and the paid childcare worker represent a network of caregivers for the child and that there is significant negotiation on how child’s needs are addressed (teaching of values). The problem with Uttal's typology is that it assumes that fathers are not significantly involved in the childcare arrangements and maintenance.

The relevance of the mothering literature for adoptive mothers in dual-earner couples is that it is critical that these mothers do not follow the dominant cultural ideal of motherhood. This dominant “supermom ideal” may place employed adoptive mothers at-risk to become overwhelmed with the high demands of a special-needs adoptive placement. Similarly, the “supermom” image may also discourage employed adoptive mothers from asking adoptive fathers for more assistance with the family labor needs. This inherent danger with adoptive placements highlights the need to explore how family labor is distributed with adoptive couple relationships.

**Literature Review Summary**

The special-needs adoption, work/family balance, division of household labor, parenting, mothering, and fathering literatures all contribute significantly to the question of how dual-earner adoptive couples manage the early phase of special-needs adoptive placement. The special-needs literature highlights that prospective adoptive parents often assume that the demands of a special-needs adoptive placement are similar to the typical parenting demands of having a birth child. And although it is true that adoptive placements have the typical parenting demands of caring for any child, they also have an additional layer
of demands that are adoption-specific. It is these adoption-specific demands of the placement that adoptive couples will be most ill-prepared to handle. Thus, it becomes doubly important how these adoptive couples distribute family labor responsibilities to meet the demands of the adoptive placement. A lopsided distribution of family labor could leave one partner overwhelmed with the additional adoption-specific demands of an adoptive placement.

The work/family balance literature emphasizes two problematic patterns for adoptive couples with a special-needs adoptive placement. The first pattern involves the tendency for mothers to be more willing than fathers to place limits on their work responsibilities so as to facilitate increased availability for family needs. This is relevant for adoptive parents because if they too blindly follow this pattern, the impact of handling family needs during work hours will differentially fall to adoptive mothers that could lead to caregiver burnout and/or jeopardize their job security. The problematic pattern involves mothers' tendency to utilize their maternity leave more than fathers with their paternity leave. This is relevant to adoptive couples because if the typical pattern of maternity/paternity usage continues it will set the precedent that only adoptive mothers need to make career sacrifices for an adoptive placement. Additionally, many special-needs adoptive children present significant attachment difficulties that can potentially benefit with the presence/availability of both adoptive parents. Thus, the work/family balance literature indicates that it is vital that both adoptive parents negotiate with their respective employer more availability to meet family needs during work hours. Similarly, it is also essential that adoptive parents explore the maternity/paternity leave options with their employers so that they can be present and available to adjust to the family demands of an adoptive placement.

The division of household labor literature consistently finds mothers more than fathers are left the primarily responsible for this undesirable labor. This is another problematic pattern that could create difficulties for dual-earner adoptive couples with an adoptive placement. Even though mothers do not usually assess a lopsided division of household labor as unfair, the higher demands of adoptive placement could potentially push these family labor difficulties to the breaking point. Thus, how adoptive couples distribute the household labor responsibilities among them will reflect their commitment to the adoptive placement. Similarly, mothers are typically also left primary responsibility for the
family organizational planning that includes mothers’ identifying, assigning, and supervising the completion of household tasks for the family. This arrangement severely limits mothers’ opportunity to relax because they must still be involved in the management of the household tasks. Alternatively, adoptive couples that are able to share the household labor tasks and the responsibility for organizational planning will better protect their adoptive placement from this potential conflict.

The parenting arrangements literature outlines the variety of childcare management approaches that dual-earner couples can employ. Hertz’s parenting approach would be the preferred childcare management arrangement for these dual-earner adoptive couples though it requires the both adoptive parents to negotiate significant concessions from their respective employers in order for it to work in practice. Although this co-parenting arrangement would likely be most beneficial to an adoptive child, it is somewhat unlikely to be commonplace because the typical pattern is for mothers to place limits on their work responsibilities rather than fathers. Hertz’s market approach would be less preferable than the parenting approach for these dual-earner adoptive couples because it would require both parents to emphasize their careers, make no demands for concessions from their employers, and heavily utilize paid childcare. This market approach does not bode well for adoptive couples who receive a special-needs adoptive child with significant attachment issues because the adoptive child’s care time with the adoptive parents is limited with the fulltime use of paid daycare. Similarly, Hertz’s mothering approach is also problematic for dual-earner adoptive couples because it requires mothers to place major limits on their work responsibilities so that they can fulfill their primary caretaker responsibilities while fathers complement these traditional roles by emphasizing their career development. This is not preferable parenting arrangement because it places the work/family stress directly with employed mothers while fathers assume a peripheral role in the family. The additional demands of a special-needs adoptive child requires involvement of both adoptive mothers and fathers and so how these adoptive couples distribute childcare labor responsibilities becomes critical to the health of the adoptive placement.

The fathering literature highlights that fathers do not typically assume primary responsibility for childcare labor. Therefore, mothers are more involved with their children
than fathers in all of Lamb's aspects of involved parenthood (engagement, accessibility, and responsibility). Furthermore, fathers have usually explained that their inflexible work schedules are the usual culprit that prevents increased paternal involvement with their children. Thus, with adoptive fathers it will be critical to explore how they negotiate more work flexibility with their employers to facilitate opportunities for involved fatherhood. Similarly, how adoptive couples distribute childcare labor responsibilities in their relationships will determine if the adoptive placement is strengthened or weakened.

The mothering literature indicates that the dominant cultural image of the employed mother as a "supermom" influences many women to handle bulk of the family labor without soliciting assistance from others. This "supermom" image could be very problematic to the employed adoptive mothers because it encourages them to expect that it is their role to handle the primary responsibility for the family labor. Thus, it will be critical to identify if adoptive mothers have any complaints about the family work distribution by their requests for more help from adoptive fathers or if they prefer to instead follow the dominant cultural image of employed motherhood and handle it individually. The mothering literature outlines that there are significant maternal distress risks for mothers who choose to follow the dominant cultural image of employed motherhood. Thus, how dual-earner adoptive couples distribute family labor responsibilities between them will determine if the dominant cultural image of employed motherhood is controlled or commonplace in the adoptive placements.

All of the above literatures identify problematic family patterns that could potentially befall adoptive couples in placement. Thus, how dual-earner adoptive couples distribute family labor responsibilities will determine whether adoptive placements are protected or exposed to these problematic family patterns. Furthermore, adoptive parents' management of their work contexts will significantly influence their distribution of family labor responsibilities. Therefore, the willingness of adoptive fathers to negotiate more flexibility from their employers is critical to whether these problematic family patterns develop in the adoptive placements.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology section will begin with the researcher’s philosophical assumptions and a discussion of the researcher-as-instrument. The remainder of the methodology will outline the participants, data collection, data analysis, and data verification. The methodology section describes how the results were obtained so that the reader can have confidence in the integrity of the conclusions.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell (1998) describes five philosophical assumptions that impact the research process; these five philosophical assumptions are ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological.

The Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumption refers to the qualitative researcher’s view of the nature of reality (Creswell, 1998). My ontological assumption about the nature of reality is that it is subjective, multiple, and constructed in social interaction with others (social constructionism). The research implication of my ontological assumption is that multiple parent quotes reflecting their language will be used to support the multiple realities of each major theme related to the social interaction among parents in negotiating a secure family base.

The Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumption refers to the relationship between the qualitative researcher and the researched (Creswell, 1998). My epistemological assumption about the relationship between the researched and researcher is that it is a collaborative process and that the image of the “objective researcher” does not fit. The research implication of my epistemological assumption was that I spent two hours in the natural home environments of these special-needs adoptive couples to experience the context in which they live while I interview them. The member check process offers me another opportunity to talk with the participants and to fill in gaps that were missed/misunderstood initially. It is because of my epistemological assumption that I prefer a research methodology that allows me to interact with special-needs adoptive parents.


The Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumption refers to the qualitative researcher’s position regarding the role of values in a study (Creswell, 1998). My axiological assumption acknowledges that research is value-laden and that it is impossible to study any social process without influencing the process with the researcher’s values and biases. The research implication of my axiological assumption is that the researcher as instrument section is critical to the study’s methodology and in it I will discuss at length how my values and biases may influence interpretations of the interview data.

The Rhetorical Assumption

Rhetorical assumption refers to the qualitative researcher’s position on the appropriate language for disseminating research (Creswell, 1998). My rhetorical assumption indicates that the language of research is an informal, personal, and engaging narrative that utilizes first-person pronouns. An implication of my rhetorical assumption is that research terminology will tend to use terms from the qualitative tradition. For example, rather than discuss generalizability, I will use the qualitative term of transferability. I hope to use this informal literary writing style where possible though acknowledge that chapter 2 on the literature review will be written in a more formal manner. However, I periodically shared how particular studies influenced my thought processes on this study.

The Methodological Assumption

Methodological assumption refers to the qualitative researcher’s view on the nature of the research process (Creswell, 1998). My methodological assumption about the process of research in this study is that it involves inductive logic, occurs in an ecologically natural environment, and the design is not entirely pre-planned. This is not to say that I believe in completely emergent designs though I am aware that a certain amount of flexibility will allow me to deal with entry and data collection issues in the field. One implication of my methodological assumption is that I had a semi-structured format of interview questions (see Appendix C), determined ahead of time, though the two initial pilot interviews allowed me to add, delete, and revise the interview questions as needed. I preferred that the majority of interviews reflect similar questions because otherwise describing themes across the participant group would have been seriously hindered.
Researcher as Instrument

Studying how special-needs adoptive parents manage and coordinate a secure family base, both between partners and with employers, is important to me due to my values developed through personal and professional experiences. I have a great deal of admiration for adoptive families and their willingness to open their homes and their hearts to children who are in desperate need for a caring family. I was adopted at six weeks of age because my birth mother was 16 years old and was financially unable to care for me. I was placed in two foster-care homes prior to my adoption by the second foster-care family. The first foster-care family neglected my nutritional needs as an infant and I developed rickets with some bone deformations. Fortunately, the caseworker for Social Services in Canada identified problems with my first foster-care placement and placed me in a more secure family environment. My adoptive parents wanted another child because my adoptive mother's second pregnancy resulted in a miscarriage. I think my adoptive parents were worried that they would be unable to have a second child because my adoptive maternal grandmother experienced six miscarriages before the birth of their second daughter. For me to study adoptive families and to find ways to improve their quality of living is personally meaningful and professionally rewarding.

Many experiences in my family-of-origin speak to why I place so much importance on nurturance and caregiving in families. On both sides of my adoptive family, there are males who have become very successful in their careers at a high cost to their personal and family relationships. Both men, my maternal adoptive grandfather and paternal uncle, owned their own businesses and became multimillionaires though often worked morning, noon, and night to build and maintain their businesses. Family matters clearly were secondary and many of their personal and family relationships deteriorated over time. These extended family members taught me that they were financially independent and successful in their careers because they chose to invest in their careers and not in their families. I quickly learned that having a career is important but it is only one aspect of life and that family cannot be taken for granted.

Recently, I was invited to a National Research Conference sponsored by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and was listening to a
new researcher interview Bill Pinsof, a nationally renown senior researcher, about how he managed work/family balance issues early in his career. His response absolutely floored me. He indicated he basically neglected his family for the first fifteen years of his career and only in the last few years was he able to salvage his marriage by cutting back on his career. This experience reminded me of the same path my grandfather and uncle had chosen for themselves but it also seemed highly ironic that one of the research pioneers of our field that espouses family values would put his career over his family. That experience struck me as hypocritical and made me wonder how I was going to manage my career and family relationships.

The issue of how to balance work and family is a common discussion between my wife, Cheryl and me. Currently she has a career as a physical therapist though she would prefer in the future to be a stay-at-home mother. I plan to be a college professor and maintain a private practice that likely would be sufficient in supporting our family needs. However, I am concerned that my role as a spouse and father (in the future) would be severely compromised by my work schedule. Thus far, Cheryl and I plan for Cheryl to work part-time (three-ten hour days per week) and complement that with me taking responsibility for childcare one day per week. The remaining two days per week we would fill through a paid childcare provider. On evenings and weekends, the responsibility for childcare and household labor would be shared between us.

Fortunately, my relationship to my adoptive parents has taught me a great deal about both how to share parenting responsibilities and how to manage work/family balance. My adoptive parents would discuss and plan together how to handle particular parenting issues and logistical arrangements. Never once did I hear my mother complain that my father took her for granted. I would describe my adoptive father as an involved father. I remember that he was just as comfortable doing the laundry, cleaning the house, or talking to us about something we did wrong as he was fixing the car. I admire that my adoptive father is a nurturing and sentimental man who was not uncomfortable about expressing affection for my mother, my siblings, and me.

I also was greatly influenced from my adoptive mother. She taught me not to be materialistically-orientated. One time while driving with my mother through a wealthy
neighborhood in Winnipeg, I remarked to my mother that the houses were incredible and must have cost a fortune. My mother quickly retorted that what is most valuable is on the inside of these homes. Initially, I took her comment to mean that to furnish these homes must be more obscenely expensive than the houses but determined later that she was talking about family relationships. Similarly, the professional experience with Dr. Tahira Hira solidified my non-materialistic orientation. The research was on “Childhood influences on adult financial management.” The research study reaffirmed my belief that families live in a “culture of over-consumption” where the national savings rate is low and the amount of consumer debt is overwhelming. It should be made clear how the financial health of families relates to my interest in how couples coordinate nurturance and care to their children. My point is that if families are materialistically-orientated they are motivated by the need to acquire things (meeting basic needs in extravagant ways), they will need to work more hours to obtain them (or pay off consumer debt to acquire them) and the issue of coordination of care and work/family balance becomes more critical. Additionally, I was very influenced by Tim Mulaney’s dissertation topic on voluntary simplicity because it speaks to the value of nurturance of other family members over the accumulation of materialistic wealth. Incidentally, it struck me as odd in supervision one night behind the mirror with Tim that a cell phone rang and Tim answered it. He then proceeded to explain for a few minutes all the interesting features of his new Nokia cell phone. Oh well, perhaps he got it for a bargain price. The question is do families consume in such a way to ensure that they will have more or less time with their family members?

Both of my adoptive parents made career sacrifices for the sake of family needs. My adoptive mother entered the workforce as a secretary when I was in grade school because the cost of living in Canada had outgrown my father’s salary increases with General Motors. My mother’s sacrifice for the family was that she agreed to work for my maternal grandfather as her first job to learn secretarial skills and still be available to the family. This was clearly a sacrifice because my maternal grandfather was a ruthless businessman who frequently verbally and emotionally abused his employees. I remember many times my mother would be either under-paid or not paid at all for her work. When my mother made mistakes at her job, my grandfather often would yell at her. I think that family loyalty and low self-esteem
contributed to my mother putting up with those awful working conditions. Fortunately, two young psychiatrists needed a medical secretary and my mother found a more rewarding career opportunity.

Similarly, my father’s career sacrifice occurred when I was in junior high. At the time my father was in middle management for General Motors and was offered a promotion if he would uproot the family to GM Headquarters in Oshawa, Ontario. My father turned down the promotion because both our extended families were located in Winnipeg and my mother, brother, sister and I were happy there. I only learned many years later that my father’s subsequent job changes within GM in Winnipeg were all lateral moves and that the decision to not transfer placed a ceiling on my father’s advancement within the GM organization.

Jointly, my parents made a long-term sacrifice for the family with the decision to become commuting workers. My adoptive parents moved the family to Grosse Isle, Manitoba, a small town of 300 residents, when I was entering grade 5. My parents were concerned with big city influences on their children’s development and also were worried about sending their kids to schools with enrollments of 1000 or more students. Grosse Isle School had a total school population of 47 students and my track record of poor grades was broken in my first term report card there. Both my parents made the sacrifice of a 90-120 minute round-trip commute daily to Winnipeg to work so that the family could have a higher quality of living in the small rural town. This was a financial decision that would cost my parents severely (my father mentioned $100,000) due to the high cost of gasoline and flat property values. I have tremendous respect for my parents’ willingness to make career sacrifices that had a financial consequence for the sake of what, at the time, was best for our family.

Two additional professional experiences have reinforced the importance of the conceptual notion of the secure family base. The first occurred at the 1999 National Conference for the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) in Chicago, where three of my MFT classmates and I decided to conduct three focus groups with 14 MFT Masters degree students from around the United States on their experience of their programs integrating “the-person-of-the-therapist” in their supervision practices. Not only did we learn that person-of-the-therapist was either treated negatively or ignored
altogether, but we found that the vast majority experienced their supervision relationships with their clinical faculty as lacking a secure family/supervision base. The relationships seemed orientated to teaching techniques and evaluation of students and were lacking in nurturance of students. Many students experienced negative feedback to the extent of feeling like failures and contemplation of quitting graduate school were commonplace among them. This experience greatly disturbed me though I was encouraged to continue to use the secure family base as an orientating concept in my research interests.

The second professional experience occurred a few years earlier in Saskatchewan, Canada in my tenure as Family Psychologist for Mental Health Services in the North Central Health District. Since I was first introduced to the concept of a secure family base, I have been reflecting on the commonality of many of the marital presenting problems I encountered in Mental Health. They included the following complaints by wives/mothers: (a) the husband does not help out around the house; (b) the husband does not help with the kids; (c) my husband is spending too much time at work; (d) my husband is taking me for granted; and (e) my husband does not show affection/express emotions (except anger) to family. In retrospect, all these complaints were related to work/family balances gone awry and unfair distribution of family work (housework/parenting) responsibilities between marital partners.

All of these personal and professional experiences have significantly influenced me to develop a clearer sense of how to help families have better marriages and a stronger quality of living. I believe that if both partners managed their work responsibilities in such a way to facilitate their on-going active participation as spouses/parents and are committed to sharing the burden and benefit of family work responsibilities, family members would be healthier, happier, and more productive people.

It is important to consider how these experiences present personal biases. I suppose I expect parents to sacrifice career advancement to be more available and accessible to their children. This bias makes me aware that I need to particularly ask pointed questions to seemingly career-orientated adoptive parents so that I can better understand their involvement in parenting and not presume that they are placing their careers before their families.
Data Collection Methods

The pool of adoptive parents for this study were drawn from an earlier program evaluation study of the Department of Human Services’ mandatory 12-hour adoption training/orientation for prospective adoptive parents of special-needs children in the State of Iowa (Wozny & Crase, 2001). The DHS adoption training evaluation study was funded through Dr. Sedahlia Crase’s grant from the Child Welfare Project of Iowa State University.

The principal investigator reviewed the 159 adoption training project participant files to identify mailing addresses for eligible newly-adoptive parent couples. This strategy yielded 60 eligible newly-adoptive couples. A recruitment letter outlining the study’s purpose, procedures, recruitment criteria, compensation, and researcher contact information was composed for prospective adoptive parent participants (see Appendix B). A copy of interview questions were mailed with the recruitment letter to prospective participants. Prospective participants were asked in the letter to contact the researcher by phone or email if they wished to participate in the study. Only half (30) of the eligible newly-adoptive couples were mailed a recruitment packet because I wanted to test the recruitment strategy before committing more resources into mailing expenses. Unfortunately, this recruitment strategy yielded no participant couples. Thus, the principal investigator elected to abandon this strategy and instead recruited participants by direct telephone calls to eligible newly-adoptive parents to encourage their participation in the study. The 30 eligible participants were informed over the phone about the participant selection criteria, which included: (a) parents’ newly-adoptive status (excludes foster-adopt, relative-adopt, and neighbor-adopt); (b) participants needed to be in a marital relationship; (c) both parents must work at least part-time; (d) both parents must be willing to participate in the interview; and (e) parents must have received an adoptive placement. Consequently, the criteria of dual-employed newly-adoptive parents yielded only three participant couples. One reason for the difficulty in recruitment was that many eligible newly-adopt couples had not received an adoptive placement yet. Another reason for recruitment problems was because participants in other family forms (single, separated, divorced, cohabitation), single-earner status families, and non-newly-adopt status were excluded, which severely reduced the pool of eligible participant couples. Therefore, the principal investigator decided that access to dual-earner
newly-adoptive couples was too limited to adequately recruit for the study and chose instead to widen the eligible pool of participant couples by relaxing the criteria of newly-adoptive status couples to encourage any dual-earner adoptive couples early in their DHS adoption placement to participate. Thus, all adoptive parents with foster-adopt and relative-adopt status were now eligible to participate in the study with the new recruitment criteria.

This change in recruitment strategy necessitated the principal researcher to re-examine the original 159 adoption training project participant files to identify eligible participants with the broader search criteria that now included foster-adopt and relative-adopt statuses in addition to the original newly-adoptive status. Overall, approximately 60 different adoptive couples (all adoption statuses) were contacted by phone to elicit participation in the study. This recruitment strategy yielded another ten adoptive couples bringing the total number of participant study couples to thirteen (see Participants). Originally, thirteen participant couples were recruited for the dissertation study, though three participant couples were later dropped because they failed to meet the one or more of the eligibility criteria. One couple had elected to remain foster parents and decided to not adopt the child therefore violated the criteria of receiving an adoptive placement. The other two couples forgot about the scheduled interview and were not rescheduled due either to their location or difficulty in arranging a suitable interview time. Thus, these last two couples met all the necessary recruitment criteria except the stipulation that they be willing to participate in a conjoint interview.

Following the participant recruitment, interviews were scheduled. Participants were informed during the recruitment phone call that the interview would be audio-taped and also asked to limit any distractions (phone calls, visitors, and to arrange for childcare, if applicable) for the two-hour duration. The procedure prior to the actual interview involved explaining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality aspects of the study and collecting relevant demographic data from each participant couple (see Appendix D). All the interviews were conducted at the participant couples’ homes. Eight scheduled interview appointments with participant couples were rescheduled for several reasons: (a) participant couple forgot about the appointment (N=5); (b) participants called to cancel because of other commitments
(N=2); (c) principal investigator was unavailable for the scheduled appointment (N=1). The ten interviews were conducted between April 28, 2001 and September 8, 2001 (see Appendix A). All interviews were conducted conjointly with the participant couples because the researcher felt that the presence of both adoptive mothers and fathers would provide opportunities for each spouse to keep the other spouse’s comments in check. The researcher used pointed questions to keep each spouse’s report in check in the event that the other spouse did not challenge their partner’s responses. Two interviews were started (initial 20 minutes) with only the mother present because the father was running late. The remainder of the two interviews were conducted conjointly.

The interview was conducted by starting with the grand-tour question and other related questions on the interview question schedule (see Appendix C). The interview with the first couple was used as a pilot for the interview question schedule whereby confusing and unclear questions were dropped and other emergent questions from the interview were added in their place. Hence, the interview questions asked were well-established for interviews 2-10 by using interview 1 as a pilot. Therefore, all ten interviews had the same questions though interview 1 as a pilot improved the quality of the interview question schedule. Additionally, each interview contained relevant clarification questions and probes to draw out participants’ responses.

At the conclusion of the interview, the principal investigator explained again how the interview data would be confidentially maintained and also outlined the member-check process for the participants. Participant couples were told that the principal investigator would transcribe the tape and write in the margin (in pencil) a summary meaning statement for each participant response. The participants were told that the meaning statements are used to sort the transcript into categories and thus they are the building blocks of the category structure and should be checked for accuracy. Participant couples were told that within a few weeks they would receive the interview transcript and they would have one week to complete the member check process before the principal investigator would retrieve the transcript. Following each interview, the principal investigator’s summary meaning statements were read by the second researcher (Dr. Sedahlia Crase) and if disagreement about the meaning occurred, the second researcher wrote (in red ink) another summary meaning statement on
the transcript. Then the interview transcript, complete with the two sets of meaning statements, were taken to the participants' home by the principal researcher. The participants were encouraged to read their original response, the principal investigator's meaning statement and the second researcher's meaning statement (if applicable) and either place a check mark by the meaning statement they agreed with or to write their own meaning statement if neither statement was sufficient. Just in case the participant couple forgot the member check process instructions, the principal investigator attached a memo to the interview transcripts that succinctly outlined the entire member check process and its rationale (see Appendix E).

Participants

The participants consisted of ten adoptive couples within the initial 18 months of their DHS adoptive placement. Table 1 details the participant demographics. The participant selection criteria included: (a) all parents' adoptive statuses (foster-adopt, relative-adopt, neighbor-adopt, and newly-adopt); (b) participants needed to be in a marital relationship; (c) both parents must work at least part-time (20 hours/wk); (d) both parents must be willing to participate in the interview; and (e) parents must have received an adoptive placement.
Table 1. Demographics for Special-Needs Adoptive Parents (N=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>36.7 yrs (range 28-54 yrs)</td>
<td>39.8 yrs (range 30-55 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrs Worked/ per Wk</td>
<td>36.0 hrs/wk (range 12-45)</td>
<td>49.0 hrs/wk (range 40-60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income</td>
<td>$33,025 ($6,500-63,750)</td>
<td>$43,140 ($24,400-70,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exec/Managerial:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional:</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue-collar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the participant adoptive couples adopted at least one child and the majority (7 of 10) had other children in the home prior to the adoption. For demographics of adoptive children and other children in the home, see Table 2.

The participants in this study only differed significantly from the original sample (Wozny and Crase, 2001) in terms of family income. In the original larger sample, the average family income was $50,844 while in this study the couples combined income was on average $76,165. The adoptive parents were about the same age, worked similar number of hours weekly, same percentage were employed fulltime, and about the same percentage also had other children present in the home as the original sample of prospective adoptive parents.
Table 2. Participant Demographics-Adoptive Children and Other Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Target Adopted Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of Adoptive Placement</td>
<td>10 mos. (range 4-18 mos.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4 yrs (range 6 mos-13 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number with Adoptive Couples:</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number present in the home:</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of other children present in the home</td>
<td>9.83 yrs (range 6 months-19 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Other Children Present-in-the Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Couples With Other Children:</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Couples With No Other Children:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of Special Needs

All of the adopted children in this study were designated as special-needs children by the Department of Human Services (DHS), State of Iowa. The special-needs included: (a) trauma-related needs due to abuse/neglect, substance abuse, and other birth-family experiences; (b) medical-related issues; (c) behavioral-related issues; (d) educational-related issues, and (e) combinations of the above.

Trauma-Related Issues

Trauma-related issues were by far the most prevalent of the special-needs and commonplace in varying degrees in all of the adopted children of this study.
She was not born positive for drugs but (birth) mother did use cocaine and alcohol during the first trimester of the pregnancy, so she is cocaine and alcohol-affected.

Well, it was alleged that mom physically abused her, has hit her on her back and left bruising.

But they (her and her siblings) had a chronic use mother. The kids were living in a car. They were often left unsupervised, unclothed, and underfed.

When she first came, if we even laid a knife on the table, she would freak. ‘Not knives, not knives, don’t cut me, don’t cut me.

She has really come a long way. When she first came here, she didn’t want anything to do with adoptive father or men in general.

She could function and do things but she was like this little zombie walking around and making sandwiches for her (birth) mother because her mom didn’t do anything.

Both his mom and dad are drug addicts and had been for many years and dad is currently in prison during the TPR (termination of parental rights) hearings. His mom was in a halfway house for recovery and she has since the hearing, relapsed and was dismissed from the halfway house. Hence, that is why she is back to making threats and stuff (against the adoptive parents).

She coughed and kept coughing...she was coughing to get attention so that I would run in there, which I eventually did. When she ran to the bathroom and then came back and said, ‘oh, I didn’t want to be burned in bed.’ And from what they have said about her siblings and everything, we think that she was potty-trained by being burned with a cigarette if she had an accident. So she had a lot of those kinds of fears that we have had to work through.

*Medical-Related Issues*

Medical-related issues were much less common than trauma-related issues. Only one of the ten adoptive participant couples had an adoptive child with significant medical needs.

He had a lot of medical needs and (birth) parents that were very young and didn’t know what to do or couldn’t...didn’t have the parenting skills to do something as complicated as health problems.

Feeding him is an all-day kind of thing.

The adoptive parents indicated that their two-year old adopted son required a feeding tube and needed to be fed five times per day at 100 minutes per feeding. This medical issue was certainly a care-giving challenge to the adoptive parents.
Behavioral-Related Issues

Several adoptive children presented behavioral-related challenges to the participant adoptive couples.

We could not even go to the mall with her because she would go into a panic attack and start screaming.

But the temper tantrums, we are not having temper tantrums. Door slamming and all that kind of stuff.

The adoptive child with temper tantrums was thirteen years old that clearly demonstrates that she is behind in her emotional and social development due primarily to maltreatment from primary caregivers in her birth family.

Educational-Related Issues

Several school-aged adoptive children had significant educational needs on top of other trauma-related and behavioral challenges.

The older brother raised the younger four. And so he (brother) was busy raising these younger kids and so she (adoptive daughter) was not held and she was not read to.

And when we first got her, I (adoptive mother) did everything in ten-minute segments with her (adoptive daughter) because she had such a high level of energy...I did not know ADHD until her. I was probably in denial, I was like 'no way, she just needs structure.' But when she went into classroom settings, we got a lot of feedback from the teachers.

She is a beautiful reader but she has no clue about what she reads. Vocabulary is there but no comprehension. I would say that educational is her biggest thing.

The description of adoptive children’s special needs is presented here to make the unique care challenges of participant adoptive parents more understandable.

Data Analysis Methods

The principal investigator transcribed all ten interviews in order to become thoroughly familiar with the interview content and to reduce research project costs. The ten interviews yielded approximately 350 pages of interview transcript data. Each interview took approximately one week to transcribe. Each interview transcript was then read several times to become thoroughly comfortable with the content. The principal investigator wrote
(in pencil) a summary meaning statement for each participant response in the interview transcripts. In the event that the participant response contained multiple meanings, multiple meaning statements were written in the transcript margin. It took approximately one week to complete summary meaning statements for each interview transcript.

Once the summary meaning statements were completed, a second researcher (Co-major Professor, Dr. Sedahlia Crase) reviewed each interview transcript and the corresponding summary meaning statements for appropriateness. In the event that the second researcher disagreed with the principal investigator’s meaning statement, she wrote (in red ink) what she thought the summary meaning statement should reflect. The second researcher check on the appropriateness of the summary meaning statements also took approximately one week for each interview transcript.

In order to speed the member-check process, the principal investigator chose to drop off each interview transcript in person and informed each participant couple that the transcripts would be retrieved in one week. Participant couples were given the interview transcript and member-check instructions to review the summary meaning statements (see Appendix F). The principal investigator also picked up each interview transcript in person to save time. At that time, the researcher personally thanked each participant couple for their participation and informed them that they would receive a summary of the study’s conclusions when they became available.

Each interview transcript was cut into “response strips” to allow for sorting into categories and the interview number, page number, and identification of mother’s or father’s response was noted on each response strip. The first interview transcript’s “response strips” were sorted into meaning categories. In order to open a new category, the response strip would have to be first tested for inclusion into all of the other existing categories. Once a new category emerged, “response strips” from other categories were tested for better fit into the new category.

As expected, the number of categories mushroomed quickly even within the first couple of interview transcripts. Thus, themes were initially constructed by looking at the relationship between the various categories in order to reduce the categories/themes into more manageable numbers (collapsing several categories into a theme). Occasionally, one
category received a large number of “response strips” and needed to be meaningfully subdivided into categories to reflect the full extent of the various “response strips.” When a category becomes too large, it is assumed that the name for the category is actually the name for the theme above a group of categories. Thus, themes were developed through both category-collapsing to construct themes and also theme division into several categories. Once a rough theme/category structure was developed with the first two interview transcripts, each subsequent interview transcript’s “response strips” were used to test the structure. Once again, if any new categories emerged all previously placed “response strips” were tested for better fit into the new category. Once all the interview transcript “response strips” were sorted, the relationship between the remaining categories were examined and were either collapsed into an existing theme or became part of a new theme. The final category placement of each “response strip” was checked by the second researcher (Co-Major Professor, Dr. Sedahlia Crase). Any placement disagreements were brought to the principal investigator’s attention and were mutually negotiated. The final step involved the section of exemplars for every category under each theme in order to capture the full extent of the themes.

Evidence of redundancy for the categories were that by the latter interviews no new categories were identified and that the response strips were only further examples of existing categories. Thus, the latter two interviews provided further exemplars of the existing category structure though the structure remained unchanged. As mentioned above, the placement of each response strip was negotiated between the researcher and secondary researcher in the event of disagreement. This provides further evidence of agreement that redundancy had been established in the category structure.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study will be discussed in three sections. The first section discusses challenges facing adoptive couples. The second section outlines adoptive couples’ networks of social support and experiences that helped in their adoption adjustment. The third section highlights the process of how adoptive couples share family responsibilities. Additionally, the third section will demonstrate how adoptive parents manage their work responsibilities to facilitate their availability for family responsibilities.

In the first section, I will describe the challenges facing special-needs adoptive parents within the initial 18 months of placement. The challenges encompass two main types: (a) non-adoptive-specific family challenges; and (b) adoption-specific family challenges. Each of these two main types has several categories.

Non-Adoption-Specific Family Challenges

The category of non-adoptive-specific family challenges consists of four subcategories: (a) individual sacrifices; (b) couple sacrifices; (c) typical parenting adjustments; and (d) other sacrifices.

Individual Sacrifices

The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) mentioned the need for individual parent sacrifices in handling the demands of an adoptive placement. Overall, 15 of the 20 adoptive parents talked about individual sacrifices. More fathers (9 of 10) discussed individual sacrifices than mothers (6 of 10). Several, including both mothers and fathers, indicated that the adoptive placement required them to curtail or give up individual hobbies, activities, and “me-time.”

I would leave early Saturday mornings and I would come back 40 miles later and you do that a couple times a week. The first summer that we had our first adoptive child, I did probably 250 miles. This summer (addition of second adoptive child), I have yet to get to 250 miles because Saturdays are with kids and we have got to make sure that we spend lots of time with them up front so that they understand everything that there is to know and that we get to know them real well. You end of sacrificing a lot of peripheral things, you have to cut it back because kids in this area (special-needs adoption) are every time-intensive. (Adoptive Father)

Giving up basketball. There are many times that I gave it up when we had her because I couldn’t make it on a Monday night or that I had to go home. That kind of stuff and it was expected I think. (Adoptive Father)
But like our other hobbies, we golf, and like today is the first time I played all year and usually I played about six times by now. (Adoptive Father)

For me, it is time alone to go to the grocery store or go to Target alone to pick up some things or to do my book club. The alone time. (Adoptive Mother)

Well, I have had a side business of pottery and I do kind of crafty things and I am doing some of that but I find that this summer I have less time for that because she is more active. I have to do it when she is taking a nap, and so less of that. (Adoptive Mother)

I think what I miss the most is time 100% alone because I like time alone and doing…and I don't have any. Because even if I am going to the store I am taking a kid along. I don’t read, I don’t see the news, I am lucky if I get the paper and read a section or two. (Adoptive Mother)

Yeah, they determine it. I think, when you talk about changes... I know that I don’t watch TV anymore and I know that my wife doesn’t. (Adoptive Father)

I want to go out and work in the garage. And it like, feed the boy first. And I am like, no, I want to go the garage now (both laugh). (Adoptive Father)

Two adoptive parents noted the impact of adoptive placement on their sleep patterns and the need to function on less sleep.

I don’t know how we could get less sleep. I have a real hard time staying awake, even at school (workplace) it is a struggle sometimes because I really need more sleep than what I am getting. (Adoptive Mother)

But you know, as far as his job goes, he usually came home before and took a nap (father works a split day and night shift) and that is what he has had to cut out almost. Even when she is napping, some days he just cannot sit down and nap. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive parents (8 of 20) abandoned home/auto improvement projects due both to child safety concerns and lack of time to complete the projects. Thus, projects were either postponed or professionals were hired to finish what adoptive parents used to do.

And part of it is that I would like to replace that front window...but if I try to pull that thing out there are two kids...or I would like to work on the car so it would be nice to take the kids for a couple of hours so you can do stuff like that and they don’t get in danger. I need to fix the bathroom, that sort of thing. Where if I have my old tools out, I can’t hardly do it. Well, I still want to do that but what will happen is that I will hire a carpenter to do that. (Adoptive Father)
Just trying to get everything done... like we... we used to have all kind of things going, we’d be painting in one room and doing something in another room. We can’t do that stuff anymore. Like on a weekend we decide okay we are going to redo this room and we start tearing things up and then 2-3 months down the road ... that kind of stuff because there doesn’t seem as if there is enough time. One goes to sleep for 2-3 hours and you are hurrying to try and get stuff done there. (Adoptive Father)

I have been trying to finish stripping the wood and staining it and just painting this little entry way that it not very big. And then came our first adoptive son and I got a little bit done, and then came our second adoptive son and I gave it up. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive parents do have an acute sense of being more tied down with an adoptive child compared to their life before children.

You just can’t leave the house, it is different. (Adoptive Father)

However, several adoptive parents (7 of 20) handle the sacrifice of time for individual pursuits by redefining their life priorities from individually-orientated to child-orientated. Thus, these adoptive parents do not pit individual-time versus family-time as competing needs but rather place more importance on family-time and therefore are less upset when individual time gets sacrificed.

Really smooth, a year ago I wouldn’t have seen that ..I would have been really uncomfortable with a child, I think. It is kind of neat hanging out with him, it is quality time like I had said. The only change is that you can’t just go outside and do what you want when you want. That is one thing I noticed is that I can’t say go to the golf range and practice for an hour. (Adoptive Father)

I don’t really look at it there...I was doing some composing and I don’t have time to do that now or that it is not a priority. It is not so much that I don’t have time to do things as it is to prioritize the time that I do have. The only thing is that Katy needs to be a higher priority that some of the other things I used to do. I don’t feel like I don’t have time to do things that I need to do or want to do. (Adoptive Father)

Luckily, we seem to have a real high tolerance for that (no individual time). We really don’t get away from them very much. (Laughs) We do most of what we do as a group. (Adoptive Father)

Couple Sacrifices

The majority of adoptive parents (9 of 10) indicated that adoptive placement demands required them to make couple-level sacrifices. Most of the adoptive parents (16 of 20) made reference to couple-level sacrifices. More adoptive mothers (9 of 10) than fathers (7 of 10)
mentioned about couple-level sacrifices. Several adoptive parents described that focusing their energy on children and related-housework leaves little left for couple time.

We have dinner, we skip going to the movie, you work on two kids' homework and spelling words, baths taken, clothes changed, lunch is made for tomorrow morning, and then one goes to bed at 7:30 pm, one goes to bed at 8:15-8:30 pm. And then our oldest daughter does her homework in the evening but it is like 9 pm or after until we really have our time together. (Adoptive Father)

That got completely shut off (couple time). For a couple of months there was not...especially at beginning stages when my time off was 'lets drive to pre-adoptive daughter's hometown and meet with the DHS people and the therapists and do all those things.' She'd pick her up on Friday and I would drive her back late Sunday afternoon. There just wasn't time. (Adoptive Father)

We spend very little time for just the two of us. And part of it is that we used to...you know, there would be time to sit down and watch television together or something. We just don't do that at all because as soon as the kids go to bed then I have lots of other tasks that I have to get done. (Adoptive Mother)

We use to go to movies pretty regularly and now we certainly still could because we have people who could step in but half of the time we have been pretty tired. Get a video. (Laughs) We can watch it in the living room. (Adoptive Mother)

I think the only time we have done that (going out) is our anniversary, since we had him, it has been the only time that he has not been with us. (Adoptive Mother)

A few of the adoptive parents (3 of 20) explained that even though they get little couple time with the adoption placement they are not dismayed by this because it is more important to them at this point that they spend their discretionary time with their adoptive child.

We thought that maybe we would have dinner or something tonight. We are like, 'what is that like?' (Laughs) Yeah, there is very little of that (couple time). And that is by choice. We just don’t leave her with babysitters. We waited a long time for a child and we have had a great experience with her and things have gone very well for us and we feel very lucky and we just want to eat up all the time that we have with her. (Adoptive Mother)

That is by choice too, like she said, I know that we have a lot of choice people but we just love spending time with her. Your life changes when you have a kid, your couple time becomes couple time with a kid. (Adoptive Father)
Most of the adoptive parents equated the notion of "couple time" with going out on a date and failed to mention how they could carve out some quality couple time with their adoptive child present in the home.

We are getting babysitters a lot more, I have a sister in town. I am finding that we need to get out, the two of us need to get out. (Adoptive Mother)

We try to maintain one lunch a week together and we tried though probably unsuccessfully lately try to get an evening out weekly. (Adoptive Father)

We try to take once a month off to go out to a movie or out to eat. We used to go both nights of every weekend. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

We are still working that out a little bit ... we will get to setting up date night and stuff ... it is on the calendar. (Adoptive Mother)

Very few adoptive parents (2 of 20) clarified that they are able to have "couple time" in their daily schedule that does not require them to leave the house and go out on a date. These parents included "intimate couple time" in their definition of couple time. Going out on a date to these parents would supplement the couple time they already have within the home.

Well, we have enough time to talk and kind of be together here...but we have not done...well we keep talking that we need to pick a day and go out for supper for just the two of us. (Adoptive Mother)

The fact that so many adoptive parents took "couple time" to mean "going out on a date" could reflect that many adoptive couples struggle to find "couple time within the home." However, it is possible that several of the couples did not mention their intimate couple time together because the interviewer was somewhat unknown to them and they were not yet comfortable discussing the topic.

**Typical Parenting Adjustments**

The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) discussed the typical parenting adjustments associated with caring for a child. Most parents (17 of 20) described typical parenting stresses. About an equal number of mothers (9 of 10) and fathers (8 of 10) mentioned typical parenting demands. Several noted that caring for a child makes it very challenging to get other household tasks done. In fact, adding a member to the family
increases the amount of related household tasks but decreases the time available to complete them adequately.

It makes it harder for me to run to the store and do a bunch of errands in one evening with him (adoptive father) home alone with her or vice versa with me home alone with her at the age that she is because it is hard. You have to have constant supervision of her, which makes it hard to go out and get the dishes done and get the bottles made, and do some of the household things that need to be done too. (Adoptive Mother)

The change in our lifestyle and not being able to pick up and go. I am cooking more, I have to cook more. (Laughs) Picking up the house more, that kind of day-to-day stuff. (Adoptive Mother)

So I think for me, it is the time... not being able to go and do what you want when you want and leave the house or even to go to the store. To go to the store, you have to plan well, do I have the diaper bag with you and can I afford to go in there for half an hour. (Adoptive Father)

And the time. We use to have all the time in the world to do things, certain things. Now you got to...you got to get it done because I only have this much time to do that because I going to...you know. It just makes you think more about what you have to do and plan it a little more. (Adoptive Father)

Which is a thing that all...that is for every parent. All of a sudden you are a little more strapped down than you were, you know. (Adoptive Father)

Some of the adoptive parents (4 of 20) have dealt with the difficulty in being able to go on family outings with others by entertaining more in their home either by themselves or with friends.

Well, it is hard to take our adopted daughter with us to go see friends, particularly the ones that don’t have children. We invite them down here because it is hard...because you can’t just go out to a restaurant and meet them anymore, you know. You just can’t do that. (Adoptive Mother)

But the entertainment side of those things, we have pushed those away or we have done a different type of entertainment. Instead of going out and renting movies, we will stay at home and play games with the family. (Adoptive Father)

Some adoptive parents highlight that having a child who depends on you for his/her care totally reorganizes how you live your life.
I think that for me the biggest transition was to have somebody who is demanding of my time right at the moment. If he wants something or whatever, you have to go take care of him and that is something... typically it has just been my husband and I, and if I have to do something, it can be done now or done tomorrow, whenever. So that is the time element. (Adoptive Mother)

Yeah, a lot of dependency. He depends on you for everything you do for him. Our birth daughter is twelve and you just got to tell her what she needs to do on certain things but then she does it. It has been several years working away from that and then boom...you do not ease into it, you smack into it. (Adoptive Father)

Only a couple of adoptive parents (2 of 20) mentioned the financial strain of parenthood and the related stress of paying for full-time daycare.

I mean it has been difficult and we would be in a different place now financially if we didn’t have another child but we are in pretty good position even with another child. I think it was one of the first things that we discussed was how are we going to manage financially. The daycare issue was a real big one. And we had just gotten to where we weren’t paying daycare anymore and it was a really lovely feeling. (Adoptive Mother)

Other Sacrifices

A minority of adoptive couples (4 of 10) described other sacrifices associated with non-adoptive-specific family challenges. Only a handful of adoptive parents (6 of 20) talked about other sacrifices involved in being a parent. However, more adoptive fathers (four of ten) discussed other sacrifices than adoptive mothers (2 of 10). Several of the adoptive parents indicated the need to reduce their community commitments so as to maximize discretionary time available for family.

Were kind of distancing ourselves from other church activities for the next while. (Adoptive Father)

I expected us to go to church together, which we do and that has changed because our adoptive daughter has gotten more vocal at church. So she stays home right now because she can’t handle it. She ends up in the cry room screaming. We go to church at a different time now. (Adoptive Mother)

I think people understand. I think it is more hard, I don’t know about you but it is more hard for me to back down myself because we have a women’s group and I have been fairly involved with that. We just have monthly meetings which I still plan to go to but I also have been in charge of different events and things and the last three years I have been in charge of the April meeting, we have a big supper and spouse show. And it is a little more effort. I was actually literally in charge this year but I delegated
everything (laughs). And I told them that I have done it a couple of years but it is time for me... I’ll help the next person but someone else needs to do it now. (Adoptive Mother)

These are the things that are important to us. Obviously, me going to work is very important, to us our church is very important and our kids are very important and beyond those things, we have pulled back on a lot of things. I don’t ride my bike as much as I used to. (Adoptive Father)

The willingness of parents to limit their community activities demonstrates their commitment to their new adoptive family.

Adoption-Specific Family Challenges

The category of adoption-specific family challenges consist of seven sub-categories: (a) trauma/abuse/neglect-related challenges; (b) adoptive couple interaction/contact with birth family; (c) impact of adoption on birth children/other children; (d) development of secure attachment/relational bond; (e) dealing with the uncertainty of receiving an adoptive placement and second thoughts about the decision to adopt; (f) suddenness of the adoption placement; and (g) medical-related adoption challenges.

Trauma/Abuse/Neglect-Related Challenges

Half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10) discussed trauma-related challenges with their adoption placements. Less than half of the adoptive parents (9 of 20) mentioned trauma-related issues. About equal number of mothers (4 of 10) and fathers (5 of 10) talked about these challenges. One adoptive couple described the impact of abandonment in her birth family on their adoptive daughter.

With our adopted daughter, it is interesting too, I asked her yesterday, ‘how come you have started coming into our room?’ I said, ‘you need to stay in your own bed.’ And she said well…and it is just the way a four year-old mind works, ‘well if you, daddy, and Timmy are together you might leave without me.’ And I said…but if she thinks we are in three different rooms that that couldn’t happen. Yeah. But if we are all three together then we might leave without her. Then I said, ‘has that ever happen before?’ And she said, ‘yes.’ And named her (birth) mom. And I am sure that it did so that is a real fear. And once she figured out that Timmy was doing that, we have had more trouble with her sleeping and staying put. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive couples (4 of 10) highlighted the difficulty of adoptive fathers caring for their adoptive daughters who have severe histories of abuse from male primary caregivers.
But in that first six months if she was in the middle of a nightmare and I walked in, it was ten times worse. (Adoptive Father)

When we brought our adoptive daughter in, of course she didn’t know me from Adam and every other man in her life, whether it was legally her father or just a gentleman that happened to be living there, was a very negative influence and caused her great pain and agony. She wouldn’t trust me for the first six months. (Adoptive Father)

We really wanted her. But she has to learn to love and to trust men. (Adoptive Mother)

We would constantly show her, ‘here is how I act with our birth daughter. Here is what I have done for her. She has been ours since she was a baby. I am the one who holds the bowl if she is barfing. I am the one who cleans up the dog poop in her room when the dog poops there. I am the one who takes care of her at night and she trusts me.’ And she had to see all that. And after six months of watching that, that is usually long enough because if someone is going to abuse you or hurt you, they are going to do it within the first six months, it would have happened before then. And with all of us telling her, okay you start to break down that wall of distrust. (Adoptive Father)

It is hard to come home from work and be hated everyday. Sometimes you are stupid and you deserve it and you make your wife mad and then you are wrong, you know. But when you know haven’t done anything. (Adoptive Father)

And I am sure that this is a survival thing, if she does something wrong… I may be big and so she will lie. (Adoptive Father)

Some adoptive parents (6 of 20) raised the special difficulty of finding suitable babysitters for a female child with a severe physical, sexual, and emotional abuse history. This decision by the adoptive parents to leave their adoptive daughter with a babysitter is even more critical given the tenuous trust between adoptive child and the new adoptive parents.

I think you have to feel comfortable leaving a child with a certain person too. With our adopted daughter and what has happened to her, you have to feel comfortable that she will be here or she will be there. (Adopted Father)

One adoptive couple was astounded that their pre-teen adoptive daughter could have been neglected to the extent that she would totally lack personal life skills.
I think that it has been a challenge in that our adoptive daughter had not been taught about personal hygiene, about personal responsibility and family responsibility to get a meal on, to get a meal cleaned up. To shop, to cook. She hadn't been taught those things. You would expect a 12 year-old to have some stuff with that and she didn't. (Adoptive Mother)

Suddenness of the Adoption Placement

A slight majority of adoptive parents (6 of 10) indicated that the suddenness of the adoption placement presented an adjustment challenge. Half of the adoptive parents (10 of 20) discussed the suddenness of the adoption placement. More mothers (6 of 10) talked about the suddenness of the adoption placement than fathers (4 of 10).

And then we were home for the afternoon holding her thinking 'what do we do now with this baby.' With nothing in our house. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

We had nothing in this house for a newborn and that was a Tuesday and we picked her up Wednesday. So we called our friends...Yeah, very, very quickly. We weren't expecting a newborn at all. A young child we were hoping for. It was a very, very fast. (Adoptive Mother)

It has been hard to do because we don't have any other children. This has been thrown at us pretty quick. We just got told we were approved to adopt and then less than a week later we had her as a placement already. It was amazing. It was that fast. (Adoptive Mother)

It was shocking, it was shocking to me that it happened that fast. They called Thursday or Friday night to meet them on Sunday and I said what's the deal? And they said well, he is your boy. I said what? They said, he is your kid. Oh, okay. So we picked him up on the Tuesday, so that was kind of weird. (Adoptive Father)

Each of these adoptive parents was struck by how quickly the adoption placement occurred and the lack of a preparation time between the placement phone call and the child being in their home.

Uncertainty of Receiving an Adoptive Placement

The majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) identified that their most difficult adoption-related challenge was dealing with the uncertainty of receiving an adoptive placement. Two-thirds of the adoptive parents (13 of 20) discussed their worry about whether they would get an adoptive child from the Department of Human Services (DHS). About an equal number of mothers (7 of 10) and fathers (6 of 10) talked about this issue.
The only thing that comes to mind are dealing with the time period where there was any question about us being able to keep them. There was a time period with our adoptive son where a great aunt surfaced and that was stressful for awhile until we found out that she was not a player in this whole deal. (Adoptive Mother)

Yeah, because it was a nerve-racking situation anyway with the foster care situation and not knowing if we were going to be able to keep her. It was very hard. I don't know that I would go through it again. (Adoptive Mother)

I thought of that the second day that we had her because I was very tired and it wasn't because of having an infant, it was more about...we went through a very nerve racking situation of not knowing if we would get to keep her. Things kept changing and that was very emotional and very hard even imagining that we would have to give her up. And that is the hard part of the foster care situation is getting attached and the (birth) father comes into play and his mother thinks that she is going to have her...well he wasn't the (birth) father and you know. That was very upsetting and that was harder than the getting up during the night and all of that. That was the tough part. (Adoptive Mother)

Well, the whole foster care thing was a pretty difficult thing, the emotional roller coaster that that was. 'Is it going to happen?' One day she is going home and the other day she is staying. (Adoptive Father)

The first year was difficult on a lot of fronts and that is one reason that...and of coarse during all this time...it was not like that first year when we were going through all this that we had any idea that we would be able to adopt her. We had not lost...the parental rights had not been terminated. They could not discuss any potential for us to adopt her. So you go through all of this work and we knew that if she ever came up for adoption that we would do it. But at that point, we had no reason to believe that it would be possible. So you are putting in all this time and energy and not having a positive response come back to you (couple laughs). That is something that we would still commit to do. (Adoptive Father)

Adoptive parents’ willingness to emotionally weather the uncertainty of receiving an adoption placement highlights how badly these parents desired to adopt a child in need. One adoptive couple found small ways of dealing with the strong possibility that their foster child would not be available for adoption and would return to the birth parents.

We even did little things and people just (laughs)...when my co-workers found out they thought, Oh my god. We did little things, like we referred to each other as foster-dad and foster-mom to her, you know. Like do you want to go to your foster-dad or oh, foster-dad is home. They were like, she is an infant, you need to say da-da and ma-ma because that is who you are to her and she needs to learn those terms. It just became so much more personal when it was ma-ma and da-da and you know who is
daddy? And who is mommy? And it is like, are we? And are we going to be forever or are we not going to be? (Adoptive Mother)

If you are human, I don’t think that you can’t get attached to a kid that comes into your home at two months old. Those people that did it and don’t get attached, I don’t know how they do it. We knew going into it, it was the whole foster care thing. You have to tell yourself everyday that ‘she is going to go home, she is going to go home.’ (Adoptive Father)

A few adoptive parents indicated that the most difficult adoption-related challenge was dealing with their self-doubts in the decision-making process to commit to the adoption placement.

But I think the only thing…the only challenge is the emotional roller coaster you go through during the initial training classes. Are you making the right decision? How much is this really going to impact us? (Adoptive Mother)

With our first adoptive daughter, we knew everything about her, her strong points and her weak points and we knew what about her made us mad. We knew how we could deal with it. So we knew what our life would be like with her before we ever made the commitment. With our second adoptive daughter, we didn’t know what our life would be like. We could make good guesses but we had to decide ‘are we going to go through with this process?’ And you always get the option to evaluate it and change your mind but up front you have to say that if the process turns out to be good we are going to end up adopting her. But there is so much that you don’t know. You don’t know what she is like when she is angry and you don’t know what people have just plain forgotten to tell you. I mean, you are suppose to do everything for this person and then you are going to live with them for their pre-teen, teen, and then send them off to college and they are forever going to be part of your family but you don’t know anything about them. I think that is the biggest thing. (Adoptive Father)

It is truly inspiring that these adoptive parents were willing to open their homes to a special-needs adoptive child not knowing if the outcome would be positive for all involved. These parents must have believed in their hearts that they could make a difference in these children’s lives.

Medical-Related Adoption Challenges

Only a small minority of adoptive couples (1 of 10) dealt with medical-related adoption challenges. Thus, just 2 of 20 adoptive parents described medical-related adoptive challenges.
It seems like he is good at sleeping three hours at a time. I think that a lot of that relates back to the feeding tube issue because what we did was...we would hook him up and then he would go to sleep. Well then it takes an hour and forty minutes to feed him with the feeding tube and so he would be hooked up during that time and then we would go in and unhook him and flush the tubing and everything. And a lot of times he would wake up then too. And so I think he is into this pattern and has been for the bulk of his life, short sleeps and having not to fall asleep from an awake position. So it is really hard to break that because it is not like he has ever slept.

(Adoptive Mother and Father)

Our adoptive son, we put him to bed...My husband puts him to bed asleep. And part of that came from the feeding tube issue where he had to be asleep before we laid him down hooked up to his equipment because otherwise he would get tangled up and set off his alarms and it would be terrible. So he is use to this life experience where when I lay down, I am asleep. And so that has been real hard to break. (Adoptive Mother)

This couple explained that their adoptive son's feeding took 100 minutes each time five times a day. Additionally, their son had never slept through the night and the parents needed to tend to him each night. Further, once he started to eat on his own, they were on doctor's orders to give him high calorie foods whenever he wanted that created jealousy issues with their adoptive daughter. These medical-related issues with their adoptive son may have been too much for most parents to handle though these parents had weathered the extreme medical challenges of their birth son's six-week life that in comparison made their adoptive son's feeding tube issues seem manageable.

Development of a Secure Attachment/Relational Bond

Half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10) discussed the challenge of developing a secure attachment/relational bond with their adoptive child. Less than half (9 of 20) talked about developing a bond with their adoptive child. About the same number of mothers (5 of 10) and fathers (4 of 10) mentioned this challenge. Some of the adoptive parents indicated that they struggled to deal with their adoptive children who seemed to lack the usual healthy “stranger anxiety.” One parent noted that it made sense for these children to trust strangers more than their primary caregivers given their abuse/neglect histories.
And they did tell us that with her that she would go to anybody. And so they say that that is one thing that we have to watch is make sure that she knows what a stranger is and that it is not okay to just go up to anybody that you want or to sit on their laps. And she would go to anybody and she would say hi and everybody is like, you just have the friendliest child. Well yeah, but it is not good. (Laughs) It is not actually what we want. (Adoptive Mother)

Any female anywhere. She would be clinging on them. Like at church she would go up to someone that I don’t know and she would be latched on them. And it is much more appropriate now. She will go to our friends and people that we know and is very affectionate but she also shows some reserve or seems to check it out with us first, that is much more healthy. And it is hard for her because you can not explain to her that strangers are a problem...because for her, in her experience, strangers have been the best people in her life. The DHS worker that comes in that she has never know before, the doctors, or the nurses that have been there to help her have been the best people that she has known. So to tell her, be leery of strangers, that just doesn’t fly. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive couples were very encouraged when they noticed their adoptive children developing a stranger anxiety as a positive sign of secure attachment development.

And she still does that but we are starting to see some changes there, where she is starting to get a lot more shy around strangers. Like she came down...if you were...it would take her ten minutes and she might stare at you, you know. (Adoptive Father)

But she will even do it around family more now. Take her grandma and grandpa, she might want to stay with us for awhile first. So you can see that that attachment is building there. (Adoptive Father)

And so trying to find the time that I use to spend there (work), to try and find it here has been tough. Our adoptive daughter has not been playing by herself at all until this past three weeks. She has finally begun to play by herself. Otherwise, she did not feel safe enough to do that. She didn’t feel safe enough to venture away from me. She had to sit on my lap and she needed to be right here by me. I couldn’t even read the paper. And that has been real tough too. But now she has been beginning to play, she has ventured out. She is letting me do things. And I even brought work home the other day. Instead of staying at work to do it, I brought it home and that worked really well. We sat at the card table and worked side-by-side. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive couples were very concerned about whether an attachment bond would ever develop with their adoptive child.
Plus she was one that was up all night because she had nightmares so bad when she first came to us and she would not have anything to do with him (adoptive father) for almost a year, it was about nine months. Oh yeah. She was mine completely 24/7 because she would not have anything to do with him. She could not tolerate being near him. (Adoptive Mother)

We have also been concerned about her ability to bond. With our second adoptive daughter, she still doesn’t always have a need all the time for us. The bond is not there in what we would like right now and we know that because of her age (nine), that that is a constant thing that we have to work on. When she came to us and in documentation, everybody said that she is an emotionless child. And so we walk around the house and because she doesn’t know what emotions are...she cannot say if she is happy, she cannot say when she is sad, when she is frustrated she doesn’t know what that means. So we will say, boy, I am really frustrated and I will say why I am frustrated or how it makes me feel. This is making me feel frustrated and this is how I am feeling. Or I am really happy today, this is how I feel. Have you ever felt frustrated Nikki? And she will usually go, I don’t think so. And I am like, okay. Her birthday was just last week and I have never seen a child respond to a birthday in such a way in my entire life. Normally they are happy and bubbly. She was so withdrawn and never smiled. (Adoptive Mother)

Fortunately, the adoptive father who had suffered through total rejection by his adoptive daughter for nine months finally was accepted by her and now they get along very well.

**Impact of Adoption on Birth Children/Other Children**

The majority of adoptive couples (5 of 7) with other children in the home talked about the impact of adoption on their birth/other children. Overall, the majority of adoptive parents (10 of 14) discussed the issue of the impact of adoption on their birth/other children. Equal numbers of mothers (5 of 10) and fathers (5 of 10) were concerned about this issue. Some of adoptive parents were not aware about the impact of adoption on their birth children until their child brought it to their attention.

Another thing that has been really affected is the amount of time that we spent with our first child, our biological daughter. And we did not realize how much time had been taken away from her until she said, hey, you don’t see me anymore! She is very clingy, even at fifteen. And we did not realize how much that it had affected her. And so we had to really make sure that we were...and so now I make a specific time each week that she and I go out. (Adoptive Mother)

Other adoptive parents anticipated the impact of adoption on their birth children and involved them over time in the decision-making process around whether to adopt.
I think we talked about it for a year and a half on and off with him (birth son) for so long. We had many discussions. (Adoptive Mother)

More than just a couple decision. And in our family, everyone who is living under the roof has a choice. And so this girl that we are going to meet on this Thursday, everybody meets, everybody votes. Do we want to try this or do we not want to try this? If fact somebody called us about a former foster child that we had had and I said, he is pre-adoptive isn’t he? And they said yes. And so we asked our adoptive daughter and birth son, who are really the children effected by it and they both said, no. Because we had had him here for several months and they both hated him. So we are not going there if they don’t. (Adoptive Mother)

And one of the biggest things that my husband and I discussed is what impact it would have on our (birth) son too and our family. And we knew that it would be a big change being an only child for ten years and then bringing in another child that was not as young...without that whole maternity time. So we had a lot of talks with him. (Adoptive Mother)

That is one thing that we didn’t want to take time away from them. Didn’t want to...as it turns out, he hasn’t been a problem but there is always a chance that someone with a life like his that he would come with a set of problems that would make things difficult for them (birth children). Then with him being so young that has not been so much of an issue. Though with some people you bring a foster child into their house are...taking kind of a risk with their own kids with that kind of influence that the child may have. (Adoptive Father)

Some of the adoptive parents indicated that having birth/other children in the home eased the parents’ adjustment to the adoptive placement.

Well, I think they were kind of concerned and that they hear him crying sometimes and maybe we wouldn’t and so they would go in and comfort him and make sure that he is okay and I think that he appreciated that. And they like being big sisters to him, so. So now, if he is going to get up, they would be one of the first ones to get up because he would wake them up first. (Adoptive Mother)

If you already still have kids in the house that know the ground rules and know the limits, actually the kids do a lot of the training just being example and model. So we don’t have to...if you brought a kid into an empty house with no other kids then all of the stress is on us but we have two teenage boys that are very compliant and are...good examples. Other kids in and out, just watch and learn from them. So over half of the stuff is taken off of us. (Adoptive Father)

A few of the adoptive parents indicated that they are currently dealing with the impact of the adoption on their other children.
I don’t know...we have got some things to work on. He is used to falling asleep by being rocked or being held because of the feeding tube. That is a huge jealousy issue with our other adoptive daughter. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

Adoptive Couple Interaction/Contact with Birth/Foster Family

The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) discussed the challenges involved in interacting with the birth/foster families of their adoptive child. The majority of adoptive parents (15 of 20) described their experiences with their adoptive child’s birth family. More mothers (9 of 10) talked about these issues than fathers (6 of 10). Only a minority of adoptive couples had no contact with the birth family. For some of these adoptive couples they were relieved to not have to deal with the birth parents.

I guess we were lucky in the fact that when our adoptive daughter moved in with us that the parental rights were terminated a few weeks after that, so there really wasn’t...and she has no family in this area. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive couples learned directly the negative influence that the birth family can have on an adoptive family.

I have met his mom and dad and his grandmother who is now deceased and I had phone conversations with his mom on a weekly basis before the termination occurred. Since then the hardest part has been that she (birth mother) has made threats to come and get him. And she is not exactly at a stable place in her life. So that would probably be the hardest thing about our adopted son, to just be alert to that. And even though she is not suppose to know where we live, she knows we live in Madrid. And so it doesn’t take very much once you get to that point, you know. (Adoptive Mother)

However, negative influences also occur with interactions with previous foster parents of the adoptive child.

The foster mother adopted our adopted daughter’s birth brother. So she and her brother had been together there for three years and that foster mother had made a decision last may that she was not going to adopt either child. So we wanted Angie and her brother. Both are African-American and both are hard to place...lots of challenges but we just felt that we just wanted those kids. So then we had them both visit and her birth brother decided that he did not want to leave his friends and so he kicked and screamed and through a fit and so foster mother said, ‘okay, I will adopt you.’ But foster mother still did not want our adopted daughter and so we said ‘fine, we will take her.’ So then the foster mother three times during this year has commented on the phone that I would like her back and even said it to her and I overheard the whole conversation. I wondered why she had such acting out and such anger and slamming doors after phone conversations and so I decided to listen in on
the phone conversation to see what was going on. And I heard foster mother say, ‘I have spoken to an Attorney and I am going to try and get you back.’

(Adoptive Mother)

Relative-adoptions also can be very risky if the relationship between the adoptive parent and their family-of-origin has had a history of strained relationships.

I had no idea how many foster homes he had been through, how long he had been with my sister or any of that stuff. So we learned quite a bit of that stuff after finalization or just about finalization. So then of course for me another doubt was...having to interact with my family at least during the process. I have kind of...I am not real close with them and I prefer it that way. It is part of the reason why I don’t live in Waterloo anymore and had to get away. Our relationship is strained with all of siblings and my mom. I am not a very happy person when I have to...be aware of them and be around them and that kind of stuff or talk with them and deal with their problems on top of mine. So having to pull that back into my life was a little bit difficult for me. I knew that I would have an adjustment there and I had a real big adjustment and I had it more than I would have liked it effect me. So that was a big struggle for me, just knowing what I was to expect, my mom is very possessive and she thinks that because she is a grandparent that she has all these rights. She is my mom so she can tell me what to do and has a hold on me. (Adoptive Mother)

She (adoptive mother’s mother) has a hold I think that he (adoptive son) is not our son, he is my sister-in-law’s son and we do not see it that way. He is our son.

(Adoptive Father)

Clearly, the adoptive mother’s mother did not define them as the legitimate parents of her grandson. Several adoptive couples discussed the need to maintain relations with birth family through correspondence though they were uncertain how to do it anonymously.

Probably the one contact that I wish was possible but probably isn’t with all the things that they have going on, is that I wished they could have been more of a go-between birth families and us. To have a more organized way for birth families to send letters and such. Because we are anonymous to them we think, that they know who we are. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive couples were very glad they took the opportunity to get to know the birth family because they felt that it will help in the future in discussing “being adopted” with their adopted child.

After the second time that he (birth father) saw us together he stopped his visits and said, ‘that is where she needs to be.’ So yeah, it was like huge. So it was very feared but if he hadn’t ever met us he wouldn’t have ever known and he wouldn’t had ever consented and would have fought it the whole way. He has a prior termination that he
appealed because he didn’t like the home that the child was with. And I think that in some ways that made the adoption easier for me because I know that he (birth father) supports it and I know that that is going to pay out huge when it comes to time to talk to her about adoption and let her know that your (birth) father supported this. He even wrote her a letter, goodbye letter, where he talks about us and how much he liked us and that he knows that we are good for her and he supports her being with us. And so I think that that has made it easier knowing that we have that support. And just to know that in the end he could walk away and say ‘good luck in raising her.’ It is pretty big. (Adoptive Mother)

Once she made sure that she wasn’t going to get him back, then the following visits went much better, because I took him for weekly visits with her. And um...it is pretty incredible to watch. I feel pretty good that we got to know her. (Adoptive Mother)

Discussion of Adoption-Specific and Non-Adoption Specific Challenges

The adoptive placement included the typical first-time parent adjustments for half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10). The other adoptive couples had previous experience parenting their birth children and thus were more prepared for the non-adoption-specific challenges of placement. However, the typical parenting adjustments were difficult for both experienced and inexperienced parents.

The finding that the vast majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) discussed individual sacrifices that had to be made in the care of their new adoptive child indicates that their priorities were reorganized with the adoption placement in their family. This demonstrates the willingness of adoptive parents to forgo their individual time, activities, and hobbies to work on being a family, and also shows a commitment on the part of adoptive parents to their adoptive child. This is important because Ward (1997) found in her review of special-needs adoption literature that adoptive couples with unequal commitments to the adoptive placement and inflexible family roles are at higher risk for placement disruption.

More adoptive fathers (9 of 10) than mothers (6 of 10) talked about their individual sacrifices associated with the adoption placement. Ehrensaft (1987) distinguished between the “being” and “doing” of parenting. “Being” a parent was considered part of your identity and something you are and more consistent with mothers who showed less concern with individual sacrifices. The “doing” of parenting defines it as a set of activities and duties that can be stopped and started and were more consistent with fathers. According to Ehrensaft, I expected to find only adoptive fathers talking about the individual sacrifices. However,
although more fathers discussed their individual sacrifices, the majority of adoptive mothers discussed it as well.

Sacrifices were a common theme with the non-adoption-specific challenges. In addition to the individual sacrifices of the adoptive parents, most adoptive couples (nine of ten) also had to make couple-level sacrifices. This is not too surprising considering that Rosenthal (1982) found that adoption places severe strain on a marital relationship. Most of adoptive couples said the demands of parenting their adoptive child significantly limited their “couple time.” However, the majority of the adoptive couples equated “couple time” with the need to go out on a date more often and overlooked ways to carve out more intimate time while their child is in the home. A minority of adoptive couples indicated that they did have “couple time” as part of their daily schedule after their child’s bedtime. This “couple time” included opportunities to talk and be with one another. Some adoptive couples indicated that the increased housework associated with children precluded any hope of arranging “couple time” after their child’s bedtime. These adoptive couples used their “couple time” to get caught up on household tasks and other work. Thus, adoptive parents like most parents are challenged to find “couple time” in their busy family schedules. The reality of parenthood with these adoptive placements is inconsistent with adoptive parents’ expectation of the impact of adoption on their marital relationship during the pre-placement phase of the adoption process (Wozny & Crase, 2001). Wozny and Crase found that prospective adoptive parents mainly expected that adoption would only have a positive impact on their marital relationship, clearly an unrealistic expectation though not an uncommon one. Schmidt et al. (1988) found in interviews with parents of disrupted adoptive placements that they often grossly underestimated the impact of adoption on family relationships. Adoptive parents need to find creative ways to nurture their marital relationships in order to indirectly strengthen their adoptive placements. This need to nurture their marital relationship is supported by Festinger (1986) who found that marital conflict is a significant predictor of adoption placement disruption. Therefore, it is a poor solution to adjust to increased family demands by borrowing time and energy from the marital relationship.
Some adoptive parents noted that they made community-level sacrifices in addition to their individual and couple-level sacrifices. These sacrifices included scaling down the extent of their church activities and responsibilities in order to invest more in parenting their adoptive child. This further highlights the level of commitment these parents have made to their adoptive children.

However, although adoptive parents borrowed time and energy from their individual, couple, and community domains of their lives to have the resources to parent their adoptive child, they still struggled with the demands of parenthood. Many parents found it hard to maintain their previous level of household cleanliness with children and spent any available spare time doing household tasks. Other parents noticed that they were considerably less mobile with young adoptive children and had to plan extensively to do the most mundane tasks (grocery shopping). Overall, all the non-adoption-specific challenges were primarily the adjustment that comes with becoming a parent to any new child regardless of status (birth, foster, adoptive).

Still, adoptive parents have the added layer of adoption-specific challenges on top of typical parenthood adjustments. These adoption-specific adjustments can be more challenging because parents often lack previous experience with adoption issues in their circle of family and friends. Thus, typical parenting adjustments can be somewhat expected because of previous parenting experience with birth children and/or vicarious experience through other parent friends. Miall (1995) identified the myth of sameness operating when adoptive parents consider that the issues of adoption are no different than the typical parenting adjustments associated with birth children. Therefore, it is essential to describe some of the adoption-specific challenges that are unique to adoptive families.

Many of the adoptive couples discussed trauma/abuse/neglect-related challenges associated with adoptive placements. These adoptive parents talked about the difficulty of caring for children that have been maltreated by previous caregivers. Adoptive parents often do not expect to deal with these abuse-related challenges. McRoy (1999) highlighted that prospective adoptive parents need to temper their idealism regarding their expectation for a less-difficult adoptive child. However, even home visits between prospective adoptive parents and an adoptive child during the pre-placement phase of adoption may mask the full
extent of emotionally based challenges with adoptive children. Rosenthal et al. (1988) indicated that emotional problems with adoptive children are much more insidious compared to developmental or physical problems that tend to be more easily identifiable. Thus, simple things like trying to find adequate daycare providers become very hard when the adoptive child has extreme difficulty trusting an adult caregiver. The issue of trust is also at the cornerstone of a closely related adoptive challenge regarding the development of a secure attachment/relational bond between the adoptive parents and the adoptive child. Many of the adoptive couples discussed this difficulty at length and found it essential that they eventually succeed at developing a secure attachment. Barth and Berry (1988) were on target when they found that adoptive parents of older adoptive children often are ill prepared for the lack of responsiveness from their adoptive child. These adoptive parents are still operating under Miall’s (1995) *myth of sameness* when they expect their adoptive child with a significant abuse history to respond to their caregiver efforts as they would expect a birth child with no abuse history to respond. It was inspiring to see an adoptive child with a previous absence of “stranger anxiety” hide behind her adoptive father’s leg when she awoke from her afternoon nap during one of the interviews. The adoptive parents took this as a positive sign of a secure attachment development. Unfortunately, other adoptive parents struggle with their tenuous bonds to adoptive children because of their abuse history and extent of mistrust of adult caregivers. One adoptive father even withstood outright rejection from his adoptive daughter for more than nine months. It seems that one of the main adoption-related challenges for parents is to overcome their adoptive child’s previous maltreatment by having their child to accept their new adoptive parents’ care. Thus, the commitment to an adoptive child is tested to the full extent when an adoptive parent tries to provide care and receives little positive response or rejection in return for their efforts. These adoptive parents should be applauded for their patience in continuing to work with their adoptive children in hopes of breaking down the walls of mistrust and developing a secure attachment.

Compared to the frequency of emotionally based challenges, only one adoptive couple had the difficulties of handling medical issues with their adoptive child. However, this adoptive couple had the previous experience of dealing with extremely serious medical problems of their birth son who died after six weeks that made their adoptive son’s feeding
tube issues seem minor in comparison. However, the many hours per day spent feeding their adoptive son facilitated a strong bond with the birth father that may have been more difficult without the opportunity for interaction with the feeding tube routines. Similar to the adoptive children with emotionally based challenges, these adoptive parents noted the difficulty of finding suitable daycare where providers were comfortable in handling the feeding tube requirements. Additionally, the time spent between the adoptive parents and their adoptive son with the feeding tube routines (500 minutes/day) created jealously issues with their preschool adoptive daughter. Thus, it seems that medical issues with adoptive children are both a blessing (opportunity to bond) and a hardship (care requirements, impact on other children) for the adoptive couples.

Moreover, dealing with the impact of adoption on birth/other children is another adoption-related challenge in placement. Most of the adoptive couples (5 of 7) with other children in the home discussed the impact of adoption on their other children. The only adoptive couples that did not discuss the impact of adoption on their other children were the families with very young children where the impact may have been difficult to decipher. Some adoptive parents were completely unaware of how the adoptive placement impact their birth children until their child brought it to their attention. This is not unusual considering that Wozny and Crase (2001) found that the majority of prospective adoptive parents felt that adoption could only have a positive impact on their birth/other children. I was impressed that many of the adoptive couples with school-aged children discussed the possibility of adopting a child with their children several times over a long period of time to involve them in the decision to adopt. I worried that parents would ask their children, “We are thinking of adopting, what do you think about that?” as the full extent of their conversation, however that seemed to not be the case. Having parents talk to their children over time allowed their children to really mull over the thought of sharing their parents with another child. This is critical because McDonald et al. (1991) found that there was significantly more conflict between adoptive and birth children in disrupted adoptive placements compared to intact placements. Therefore, harmony between adoptive and birth/other children is a protective factor for an intact adoptive placement. This is another way that adoptive parents commonly underestimate the impact of adoption on family relationships (Schmidt et al., 1988).
Even the definition of “family” becomes expanded with adoptive families. The adoptive couple now involuntarily inherits the adoptive child’s birth parents and extended family members into their definition of family. Family may also include foster parents for some adoptive children who had been with foster parents for a prolonged period of time prior to their new adoptive placement. This “expanded family” carries the stressful challenge of dealing with previous caregivers who had mistreated their adoptive child. The vast majority (nine of ten) of adoptive couples were anxious to discuss this particular adoption-related challenge. Adoptive parents’ experiences with birth/foster families ranged from extremely negative to very beneficial. At worst, some adoptive couples experienced kidnapping threats from the birth mother or emotional manipulation/interference with the adoption from a previous foster mother. However, for most adoptive couples their experience with birth/foster parents was either somewhat negative (refusal to send pictures or provide relevant information) or very positive. Some adoptive parents were glad they got to know the birth parents through the scheduled visits prior to the termination of parental rights (TPR). One adoptive parent shared that the birth father accepted them as the right adoptive parents for his birth daughter and he even wrote a “goodbye letter” to give to her when she is older to help her in the adjustment to being adopted. Other adoptive parents indicated they felt an obligation to maintain ties with their adoptive child’s birth family through mail correspondence (pictures and letters) so that when their child is older they could decide for themselves if they wanted to cultivate those birth family relationships.

Other adoption-related challenges include the suddenness of the adoption placement between the time the adoptive parents are initially informed that they have been successful in the adoption process and the adoptive child being placed in their home. A majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) had this experience. With a pregnancy, the soon-to-be parents have nine months to prepare themselves emotionally and to prepare their homes to receive a child. Several of these adoptive couples indicated that they had only two days notice and a few hours in an extreme situation. For those receiving infants, it often left them without the necessary baby-related household items to care for a child. It seems as though these adoptive couples were so eager to receive any adoptive child that they were reluctant to negotiate time with their adoptive caseworkers to prepare their homes for their new children. Curiously, the
other adoption-related challenge involved the dealing with the wait and uncertainty of whether they would even get an adoptive child. The majority of couples (7 of 10) were worried that they would not be chosen to adopt a child. Most of the couples waited for a prolonged period for time (more than a year for some) to find out if they are chosen to have an adoptive child, however once they were selected and informed of the decision, the process moved too rapidly. Many adoptive couples described dealing with the uncertainty of getting an adoptive child as an “emotional roller-coaster.” This is where a strong relationship with the adoptive caseworker can make or break the adjustment for prospective adoptive parents. The caseworkers that keep them informed of their adoption application status and progress prevent prospective adoptive parents from worrying that they have been already denied another opportunity to become parents. It should be emphasized that in participant recruitment for this study, about half of the pool of prospective adoptive parents had not received an adoptive placement 15 months following the completion of their mandatory adoption training/orientation classes. Some of these prospective adoptive parents had not heard of their status yet and had given up on the process altogether. This is truly an unfortunate and preventable experience for prospective adoptive parents. Even in the event that prospective adoptive parents are not chosen to receive an adoptive placement, they have earned the right to learn of the adoption application status in a timely-manner and how they could strengthen their future applications for adoptive children. Such communication would serve to build the pool of prospective adoptive families for foster children in need of permanent homes. Marriage and family therapists could play a significant role in helping prospective adoptive families deal with the shortcomings in their adoption applications to improve their future chances of receiving an adoptive placement.

In sections two and three, I highlight how special-needs adoptive families manage both non-adoptive and adoption-specific family challenges. Section two focuses on adoptive families’ extent of social support and other family experiences that have been helpful in the adjustment to adoption. Both social support and helpful family experiences have several categories.
Extent of Social Support for Adoptive Couples

The category of extent of social support for adoptive couples has five sub-categories: (a) extended family and friends; (b) DHS caseworkers; (c) extent of interaction with other adoptive families and adopted individuals; (d) use of paid childcare/housekeeping to balance work and family; and (e) other professionals.

Social Support-Extended Family and Friends

A large majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) described the extent of support they have from their extended family and friends. Most of the adoptive parents (16 of 20) discussed their extended family and friends’ support for their adoption. Slightly more adoptive mothers (9 of 10) than fathers (7 of 10) talked about this type of social support. The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 9) experienced positive support from their extended family and friends. The adoptive couple that experienced positive and negative support involved a relative-adoption where there has been an estranged relationship between the adoptive mother and her mother.

We have a very good support system also. Even though we don’t have as big of a social life as we used to but we could call someone up and say, you know, this just ain’t working today. And they will be very encouraging and so we have a really great support system and we have very supportive families. And so that has made the adoption part… and my family is and his family is too, they are behind us 100%. Oh, they are ecstatic. They have taken both girls in. They treat them as though they are my birth children, not just ‘oh well, glad you found her.’ (Adoptive Mother)

And they have made it wonderful for my girls. As soon as my parents heard that our first adoptive daughter was our foster child, they were out here within the month and they live in Indiana. With our second adoptive daughter, they were out her even sooner. And they write letters and they tell a little bit about themselves and they are just a wonderful, wonderful support. So that has made our adoptions wonderful. (Adoptive Mother)

She is a wonderful, wonderful grandmother and I want to be her when I grow up. And so it is getting easier for her to come for a weekends. We are going to go to Sturgess, South Dakota in August and so she is going to come for a week to take care of the kids for us. So she is kind of getting to where now she is more local, she up in northern Iowa that she comes down and does things for us and with us. And so that is a lot nicer and she just adores our adoptive son, adores him. It is almost that she thinks that we got him for her. (Laughs) She just has that special bond and to see them together just… my eyes well up, it is just an awesome thing. (Adoptive Mother)
Several adoptive couples emphasize that their extended families support their adoption by their willingness to babysit anytime the parents need them.

And our families are... and if we need any help and we need to go to somewhere they are... somebody between sister-in-law or brother or my mother are willing and anxious, 'yeah, bring them over to play.' (Adoptive Mother)

And also it has given us... having that support, family support too, have given us the opportunity to do something for just the two of us, too. And so if every so often we want to just go off and have our own time we can because we have that support system. (Adoptive Mother)

We have had times when it has overlapped and I have had scheduled events that I have had no control over that occurred. Our parents were really good about helping. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive parents attempt to minimize the use of paid babysitters and instead prefer to utilize extended family members as caregivers.

It is certainly easier for us to think about leaving her with family that with non-family. And I just think that that is a two-part thing. Number one, it is family and maybe I feel that there is a higher level of care that would be given to her and then the other part of it is that I know that they love to spend time with her. And so it is giving them some alone time with her so that we are not there hogging her up and that they can have her to themselves to enjoy her and do things by themselves. (Adoptive Mother)

The only relative-adopt couple also experienced positive support from the side of the family-of-origin where their nephew originated.

Well, no one in the family discouraged it. They were all very much happy that we were going to be able to take him in and they were just like, 'oh yes, we are excited and good for you guys and we are so glad that you can do this.' (Adoptive Mother)

Many adoptive couples indicated that they have received strong support from their friends and co-workers since word had got out about their adoption.

Well we got a lot of support from our church, friends, work and we had, since we both work at farm bureau, a shower there and everybody at work is always asking how he is doing and everything. (Adoptive Mother)

Social Support-DHS Caseworkers

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed the extent of support they experienced from their assigned DHS caseworkers. The majority of adoptive parents (16 of 20) mentioned how
they got along with their caseworkers. All of the adoptive mothers (10 of 10) talked about their caseworkers though only some of the adoptive fathers (6 of 10) mentioned their caseworkers. Nearly half of the adoptive couples (4 of 10) experienced a lack of quality service and support from their adoptive caseworkers. A minority of the adoptive couples (2 of 10) experienced both good and poor service from their DHS caseworkers. However, some adoptive couples (4 of 10) were very pleased with the service they received from their adoptive caseworkers.

The uncertainties because everyday we are learning something knew and definitely not from the caseworker. And of coarse they have it in their notes somewhere but we wouldn’t know it. (Adoptive Mother)

We let the judge know that we had been waiting. And part of it was that this worker was looking for a different job. She stayed with Austin’s adoption because it was all the way through but then it was turned over to another lady at that time because she took a different position. That was frustrating. There was one time when she did call and I don’t know if she had forgot or whatever, we were waiting here until eight o’clock and obviously wanted to do other things. I was ready to call them up and say, hey, what is going on? And my wife was like, let’s not do that. (Adoptive Father)

We didn’t know a lot basically until finalization and I learned more from the lawyers than I did from the workers, pretty much. I kept asking for information and we didn’t receive any information. So we didn’t get the information that we needed and then I finally did get some reports. The adoptive worker finally did start sending me some updates. Like I got his medical records so that I could give them to my pediatrician. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive couples were discouraged from adopting again through DHS because of the poor service from their adoptive caseworkers.

We are not impressed with them. And I think that a social worker can make or break it. They can either…and if we had gone through our second adoption first, I would not be adopting again. (Adoptive Mother)

With our first adoptive daughter’s caseworker, she is very informative concerning anything that I could ask her and I know that I would get a response and that it would be a consistent response with what has already been said. With our second adoptive daughter, if you ask a question you might get an answer and then you might not get an answer. And then when they do give you an answer it totally contradicts with information that was previously given to you about something else and so it has been quite interesting and I think…we don’t know what it is. But we will be glad when the 180 days is over and we can adopt. (Adoptive Mother)
The relative-adopt couple indicated that the adoptive caseworker refused to take them seriously as plausible adoptive parents and wasted critical time in the pre-adoptive phase.

But I don’t think that anybody had actually... maybe my name had been mentioned possibly but the worker did not take it seriously so I was never contacted until my older sister called me and said that, you better step in. Then, my sister, his birth mother, did call a few days later and said, I need your help. And so I immediately contacted her worker and that was a horrible experience in itself. It took me three weeks to get her to take me seriously. She kept giving me the run around and sending me to Polk County, Dallas County... and his case was in Black hawk County and so she didn’t want to have anything to do with me, pretty much. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive parents noted that their caseworkers actively participated in the “stretching process” when they failed to share all available information about their adoptive child in the pre-adoptive phase.

And they made her sounds like this sweet, honey little girl and she is but there is so much more to her. It is like, we were going to take her regardless. We needed the information. (Adoption Mother)

And some of things they did tell us before we came and got her... when they came to the house and visited with us, like you are saying... they did tell us some things like she is a particular little child or a bit of the oppositional... like if you tell her to close that door she will probably go open it wider but okay, then when they told us stuff they would say, now, do you still want her? It was like, did we scare you already, exactly what you are saying. (Adoptive Father)

And what we would have really liked more information on was her home life before she came here. And the only one that will tell is that is the foster mother. They probably don’t know half the stories but foster mom has the two brothers who were there and are old enough to have memories of it. And they tell everything, oh, that she was kicked and on and on. And we need to know this. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive parents complained that their adoptive caseworkers were too quick to push the adoptive placement on them before they were ready.

They said the best thing for her would be for them to drop her into out house and for you to take her. And I thought, we just can’t. So we begged them and they said, maybe, maybe that would be alright. Why don’t you come meet her. We met her two weeks before she came, I think. Here I wished we had met her a couple times. (Adoptive Mother)

About half of the adoptive couples experienced excellent service and support from their adoptive caseworkers. These caseworkers greatly helped these adoptive families in the
pre-adoptive phase and also were beneficial for links to community services for post-adoptive challenges.

She (caseworker) contacts me at work and we talk about it. And she has made it very clear that she is available for anything. (Adoptive Mother)

Our caseworker comes out... I think he is suppose to see us every two months and he is like clockwork. And we have contact on the phone... he was checking into whether our case was going to pop up any time soon on the court because it had already been nine months. (Adoptive Mother)

With our first adoptive daughter, we had excellent contact. We probably had one of the best social workers that they ever had. She was great about responding to phone calls and she cared a great deal about us, we ended up being good friends and we got an announcement when her baby was born, all of this stuff. We really had a good worker and so it wasn’t like we had to fight for contact and there are others that did have to fight for their contact. (Adoptive Father)

Because of the nature of my job (social worker), probably more than most people do with their workers because I know her on a professional level. I have contact with her on a lot of other cases and so it was very easy for me to talk with her about our adoptive daughter’s case. (Adoptive Mother)

The caseworker that we had, he was here every week or other week and I called whenever if I needed. So it was like he would call, ‘do I need to come?’ And I would say, ‘no or yes, you better come. Why don’t you talk to her about this or that or whatever.’ (Adoptive Mother)

Interaction with Other Adoptive Families and Adopted Individuals

The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) discussed the extent of their interaction with other adoptive families and adopted individuals. Overall, 13 of 20 adoptive parents mentioned their involvement with other adoptive families or adopted individuals. More adoptive mothers (8 of 10) talked about this than adoptive fathers (5 of 10). Several of the adoptive families (5 of 8) discussed adoption-related issues with other adoptive families and adopted individuals. Some of the adoptive families (3 of 8) knew of acquaintances who adopted but did not discuss adoption issues with them. Some adoptive parents who did not have frequent access to other adoptive parents relied instead on other experienced parents and foster parents for support.
And I talk to ladies at work all the time, experienced mothers and we have a lady who is a special-education teacher who is an experienced foster care mother too so I talk to her all the time, She did this today. We laugh a lot about it too. (Adoptive Mother)

In this community, I know that there are other foster families that have adopted but I don’t know them personally. I did talk to a couple, that teacher that I had had that was a foster parent for a long time, so there were confidential discussions there about what changes occur in your life and stuff like that. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive couples did know other adoptive families and made a concerted effort to talk with them about adoption-related issues.

There are several families in our church that have adopted. There are two families that we have talked with more because they have children that are about our children’s ages. (Adoptive Mother)

And who we would talk to now that we have adopted would be the family who has her (our adoptive daughter’s) little sister because a lot of things she does, her sister does too. It is really interesting and they wonder, why does she yell shut-up all the time? Oh, yours does that too! Yeah they must have learned that in foster care. (Adoptive Mother)

Only one couple was currently involved with a community adoptive family support group. The adoptive parents, birth children, and adoptive children participated in this adoption support group.

But we go to an adoption support group so they talk about those things every month that type of thing. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive couples had friends/family members who were adopted. These adoptive parents talked to them when they were considering adoption and following placement as well. Several adoptive parents benefited by finding out what information is most important in the future with adoption so that prospective adoptive parents can be sure to obtain it during the pre-adoptive placement phase.

That is one thing... the interesting thing is that everyone that we know is that are adopted are males (Laughs). That is funny, kind of ironic. But the friends, the adopted ones say to me, Make sure you get all the information you can, especially medical. I wish I knew this, this, and this, and I am trying to find my birth mom for that purpose. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive families took the position that they did not talk with other adoptive families because it was not their problem-solving pattern to seek outside support for
family issues. Thus, it becomes moot on whether they knew of other adoptive families because they would not have discussed adoption-related challenges anyway.

We are kind of to ourselves. We don’t go out and seek that kind of stuff and we deal with problems on our own. I think we get on pretty well and we know where to go if we need help and we rely very heavily on each other to get through things and we always have, that is just how we work. And I know there are groups, we get fliers in the mail from Polk County that have different things for families, get-togethers and picnics and that kind of stuff. So we know that it is there for us if we ever need it. (Adoptive Mother)

Use of Paid Childcare/Housekeeping to Balance Work and Family

The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) mentioned their use of paid childcare/housekeeping to help deal with the demands of an adoptive placement. Overall, 13 of 20 adoptive parents talked about paid help with the adoption placement demands. More mothers (8 of 10) discussed use of paid help in the family than fathers (5 of 10). The majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) utilize paid childcare for their adoptive children. Of the minority (3 of 10) that do not currently use paid childcare, one couple previously used it but found that their adoptive daughter hated it so the mother decided to cut back on her work instead. Another adoptive couple is currently considering the use of paid childcare while the other adoptive couple has school-aged children that do not require after-school care. Some of the adoptive parents indicated that the use of paid childcare can create its own problems. Only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) use paid housekeeping services because some of the other couples handled the high demands of adoption placement by relaxing their house cleaning standards.

The other two have caused a lot of creativity on our part for me to still do it (work in the home). At first we actually put our adoptive daughter into daycare because it was to the point where I was not able to fill my responsibilities to my students and so we did put her into daycare during the time that I was teaching. And she hated daycare and so that did not help. (Adoptive Mother)

We also changed the daycare placement for our adoptive daughter. She was going to a home daycare where the woman is obsessed with taking temperatures and she kept thinking that she was sick. There was nothing wrong with her and her temperature usually runs a little high but every time it hit 99, she would call me at school and make me come and get her. And so we got her in a center where they are much more accommodating. (Adoptive Mother)
Several adoptive parents emphasized that the use of paid childcare helps give the parents some respite from constant care demands.

We were using my sister quite a bit and we would have a babysitter now and then. Babysitters are hard to find for now and then. She does go to daycare during the year and that is close to home. So we weren’t doing it as much and the other thing is that we could take her more places when she was smaller. And now she is at the point where it is very difficult to take her to a restaurant or anything at this age. So we are finding that we are having to really make time for the two of us. (Adoptive Mother)

A minority of adoptive couples preferred to minimize the use of paid childcare and chose instead to utilize their network of extended family and friends as caregivers.

We don’t really leave them with anybody but either our birth daughter who is the oldest, or my sister who lives in the area but that is about it. (Adoptive Mother)

And we have many neighbors where if we needed a babysitter really quick and couldn’t...we have neighbors around that would take her in a minute, that we know and trust. (Adoptive Father)

One adoptive couple indicated that their adoptive son’s medical issues made finding appropriate daycare providers very difficult.

Our adopted son has some medical issues. One of the reasons that he went to this home in the first place, and he was the only daycare placement there...is he was fed when we got him 100% by feeding tube into his stomach. And you cannot find daycare placement for somebody that needs that kind of care. But this gal’s nephew had some kind of feeding tube and so she wasn’t intimidated by it. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive parents indicated that suitable daycare is critical in order to allow both adoptive parents to work outside the home. Many adoptive parents appreciated flexible daycare providers and thought that daycare provided socialization benefits for their adoptive child that would not be easily available if one parent stayed at home to care for the children.

I wouldn’t be able to work if it weren’t for daycare, a good daycare. (Adoptive Mother)

It works out very well because she is very flexible. She will take her for an hour a day or eight hours a day. It is great to have her. (Adoptive Father)

We would drop here off there for that hour and that helped her adjust to the sitter too. So that was a good way for us to do it, and to get her a little of socialization too. (Adoptive Mother)
A few of the adoptive parents considered having paid help with the household cleaning because they preferred to focus their energies on parenting and work responsibilities.

The hiring out to clean the house... having somebody to come in so that I can work during the day and watch the kids so that I can work more than five minutes at a time. So we are finding systems. (Adoptive Mother)

Well actually we were thinking about getting a cleaning person so that we could spend less time doing that. It just seems like there is a lot more to do with a child around. (Adoptive Mother)

Other Professionals

Only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) discussed how other professionals supported them in their adoption process/placement. Overall only 3 of 20 adoptive parents, one adoptive father and two adoptive mothers, mentioned the contributions of other professionals to their adjustment to adoption. One adoptive couple noted that their lawyer went to great lengths to make the official adoption day a memorable event for the whole adoptive family and friends.

We have the best lawyer. And when it was time to adopt our daughter there was a couple of little glitches and we had to adopt her on this particular time to accommodate everybody's schedule and I was like, it has to be this day. And she pulled so many strings for us and it happened. And we have already talked to her about our adopted daughter and she is like, when you know, give me six weeks advance warning and I will make it the best. And even on the adoption day she was great, normally you are in and out but I don't do that with my clients. This is a special moment. And she even got the judge involved. I mean, he was really great, it was wonderful and they moved us into the big courtroom because there was so many people that had come. It was a big event for us. It was so exciting and the judge was so somber at first but then when he heard her name that just kind of broke the ice because we gave her three middle names and each one has a meaning. And the judge, that is the first time that he looked up and after that he just got involved. And if it had not been for our lawyer I don't think a lot of that would have happened. It was wonderful. (Adoptive Mother)

Another adoptive couple highlighted how the therapists have made a dramatic difference with their adoptive daughter. All of the adoptive couples with older adoptive children (three of three) have had positive experiences with their therapists.
We have excellent therapists. We have two of the better therapists at DHS and they are willing to say things that are very true to the world like, that really is the wrong way to act. You really need to not do that. That really is wrong. They will talk about the why and the what for's and all the psycho-babble but the bottom line in many circumstances will say, that really is the wrong way to react. That really is not the proper way to do it. And a lot of them don't do that and so we feel that we got a good therapist which in the long-run is really going to help make or break the kid. (Adoptive Mother)

Experiences that Helped with Adoption Adjustment

The category of experiences that helped with the adoption adjustment has three subcategories: (a) commitment to the adoption placement; (b) previous care-taking/parenting experience with birth/other children; and (c) continuing education efforts.

Commitment to Adoption Placement

The majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) talked about their commitment to the adoption placement. Nearly half of the parents (9 of 20) discussed their adoption placement commitment. More fathers (6 of 10) than mothers (3 of 10) mentioned their commitment to the adoption placement. The majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) indicated that their commitment to their adoptive child would help them with the challenges in the adoptive placement because they know that no matter what happens they will stick it out.

I don't know anything really helped. Just dealing with it and knowing that it was going to happen...it is life, it was our life, it was a decision that we made and it wasn't anything that we were going to back out of...we didn't go into it lightly. It was just something that was important...we don't commit to something like that and then decide that you are not going to do it. We were sure we were going to do it before we said 'we will', I guess. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

Well we agreed on that before we did it because in the classes we heard about the disrupted placements and how bad it is on the kid...and it is because the more they go back the less they feel about themselves and of course they may think they had done something wrong or I am sure that it weighs heavy on them. So we decided that no matter how, we could never do that. We would work through that because there is no way...I couldn't...and them send them away because that would bother me until the day that I die. (Adoptive Father)

We hesitated on it. I mean, there is no use jumping in on it. I don't think it is for somebody who wants to do it today and not do it tomorrow. It is a big responsibility. You have to make a commitment. (Adoptive Father and Mother)
I guess, the commitment that we made from the beginning maybe. We have been committed to keeping her home if her (birth) parents get terminated from the very beginning. The worry I guess if...what has made it easier is that we know that if her parents do get terminated, we know that she is staying here. (Adoptive Father)

**Previous Caretaking/Parenting Experience**

A minority of adoptive couples (4 of 10) indicated that previous experience parenting their other children or babysitting other people’s children helped prepare them for the adjustment to an adoptive placement. Overall, only 8 of 20 adoptive parents talked about their previous parenting or care-taking experiences with children. An equal number of adoptive fathers and mothers discussed this experience. Some of the adoptive couples without other children had experience taking care of children through babysitting their friends’ children. This care giving experience gave them a reference point in understanding their adoptive child’s behavior.

It kind of teaches patience too because of some of the things they (babysitting kids) did, he has done. You think, ‘oh, kids do that I guess.’ (Adoptive Father)

One adoptive couple suffered through the extreme trauma dealing with their birth son’s major medical complications and eventual death. This experience prepared them to handle their adoptive son’s underdeveloped digestive system problems that necessitated the use of a feeding tube.

And like you said it is what we have been through before...with our adoptive son...had we not gone through our birth son’s six-week life and everything we went through related to that and I had been in bed for four months before that...and things were so bad that our adoptive son and his medical issues might have seemed like a real big deal had we not gone through that. But they seemed like a little problem compared to the big problems that we have been through before. People freak out when we tell them it is a feeding tube, how do you do it? But we have had a son that had things all over his body, it doesn’t seem like a real big deal other than at first spending a hour and forty minutes each time feeding him. There is a time issue there. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

Another adoptive couple adopted their first son more than twenty years ago though they have had to deal with his drug abuse habits and criminal activities. For some parents this experience may have permanently sworn them off adoption but they took the perspective that
they have seen the worst and now they are better prepared for any issues that their latest adoptive child can present!

He has been in and out of jail and halfway houses and is living a totally irresponsible life. And so we have been through it with him on many occasions. Do we bail him out of jail or do we let him sit? Because he is African-American is there prejudice going on or do we just let the court take it. This kid has parents that care for him and he is not just a bum off the street or whatever. But we wasted a lot of time talking, praying, and crying and whatever discussing things, especially pertaining to him. He has been the one who has given us the most challenges and that is another reason why we decided to adopt because he has taken us through everything, what else could anybody offer. There is not much left that we haven't been through already and made some decisions on. (Adoptive Mother)

Similarly, one adoptive couple had adopted two previous minority-status children and thus felt prepared to deal with the race/ethnicity issues associated with minority adoptions.

We already dealt with the race issue when we adopted our other child. We have two children from different races so that wasn't any big deal. (Adoptive Mother)

In another adoptive family, the father had been married previously and fathered two children and used that experience to ease the anxieties of his second wife who was struggling with their adoptive daughter.

A little bit of the prior experience. My wife was pretty uptight when we first got our adoptive daughter and I said...and consequently our adoptive daughter was fussy and I just told her, ‘you got to relax because she senses that.’ And then when my wife started to relax with her then our adopted daughter started to relax and things went a little smoother. And since then it has been pretty normal. (Adoptive Father)

**Continuing Education Efforts**

Only a small minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) indicated how they managed to educate themselves about adoption-related issues.

No they...he wasn’t able to go that weekend but I went ahead and went. You could divide off into classes and they had...they were very specified classes. There was one that was taught by a child...well she is a foster mother now but she had been through the whole system herself, and it was from her point of view and I guess you just get the whole feel of what a child goes through. The whole experience and it gives you more of a feeling of what they are thinking too. I know the parents have all of these anxieties and what is going to happen and how am I going to deal with this or that but I don’t know if you always think of the perspective from a child’s point of view. (Adoptive Mother)
I have been reading a book, *Caring for the hurt child*...that I am reading and that comment was made that there are a lot of parents that just want a baby...which the older children are harder to place and people will fly overseas and get a baby but that doesn’t mean that they are not going to have problems. That baby could have gone through a period of time when he/she did not receive cuddling and the human contact that it needed. So it still may have problems later on and they gone to so much trouble and so far to get a perfect child. I understand why, a lot of people, especially if they don’t have any children, would like to have a baby. And it is understood. I think that is why we get most of the questions...or some of the questions that we have received from friends...well, that period is pretty much over now but when we started it was like, if you are going to get a child in your home, why would you want to get one that is over one or two years old, why wouldn’t you just ask for a baby? (Adoptive Mother)

It is impressive that this adoptive parent was pro-active to the extent that she sought out the continuing education opportunities in her community in order to get the information that she needed.

Discussion of Couples’ Social Support and Helpful Experiences

For the most part, adoptive couples have social support networks to assist them with the challenges of their adoptive placements. This is critical in understanding how dual-earner adoptive couples manage to maintain adoptive placements. It is also important to describe the typical players involved in an adoptive couple’s social support network and how they show support to the adoptive families. However, all social support players for adoptive couples are not helpful and some are actually problematic.

Most of adoptive couples (8 of 9) experienced positive support from their network of extended family and friends. This is a protective factor in maintaining an intact adoptive placement. Rosenthal (1993) found that low support for adoption from family and friends was a significant predictor of placement disruption. The adoptive couples indicated that their extended family and friends typically showed support for their adoption by their willingness to step in and babysit the adoptive child anytime they were needed. Other ways support was given involved family members and friends treating their adoptive child as if they were birth children. One grandparent went to great lengths at Christmas to ensure that the adoptive child received similarly valued gifts as the birth children received. This is consistent with Carlisle’s (1993) exploration of coping strategies for women in dual-earner marital
relationships where support from others was the third most common coping strategy behind getting more help from husbands and hiring housekeeping services.

The dual-earner status of the adoptive couples meant that their use of paid childcare and/or housekeeping services were essential in order for both parents to continue to work. Most of the adoptive couples (7 of 10) were currently using paid childcare for their children and the other adoptive couples (3 of 10) had either considered it, discontinued use, or did not require childcare services because of the ages of their children. It was noted that adoptive mothers were primarily responsible for organizational planning in these families that included making and maintaining childcare arrangements. This finding would come as no surprise to McCarthy-Synder (1993) who found that typically it was mothers who accept responsibility for childcare arrangements. Unfortunately, I did not inquire far enough into adoptive parents' relationship with their paid childcare providers to utilize Uttal’s (1996) typology of custodial, surrogate, or coordinated childcare arrangements. However, Hertz’s (1997) typology of how dual-earner couples manage childcare arrangements is highly relevant there. The majority of the dual-earner adoptive couples (6 of 10) utilized a market approach to childcare arrangements. The aspects of these adoptive couples that were consistent with Hertz’s market approach were: (a) hiring other people to care for their children; (b) mother remains primarily responsible for patching together childcare arrangements; and (c) parents that do not make demands on their employers to accommodate for family needs. However, there were some aspects that were inconsistent with the Hertz’s market approach. In most of the adoptive couples (5 of 6), the mothers were either considering or had had made concessions with their employers for responding to family needs during work hours. Yet, none of the adoptive fathers (0 of 6) negotiated arrangements with their employers for family needs, reinforcing their market approach to childcare and the importance of their careers. Fortunately, the remainder of the adoptive couples (4 of 10) utilized Hertz’s parenting approach instead of his mothering approach (0 of 10). The aspects of these adoptive couples that were consistent with the parenting approach were: (a) both parents were full participants in the care of their adoptive children; (b) both parents managed work/family balance by either choosing less demanding jobs or negotiating more flexible arrangements with their employers; and (c) primary involvement of both parents kept use of
paid childcare providers to a minimum. These adoptive couples used a tag-team approach and flexible work schedules to provide care for their adoptive child and other children with a minimum of paid childcare. In two of the adoptive couples, the fathers worked long hours and the mothers operated home-based businesses with the children present in the home. Yet, the critical distinction is that when these adoptive fathers came home in the evenings and on weekends, they assumed primary responsibility for the children so that their wives could focus on their home-based businesses. However, the assessment of how these adoptive couples fit Hertz's typology of childcare management will be revisited again when I explore in detail how adoptive couples distribute the family labor between them and manage their work contexts to facilitate availability for family needs. Thus, the use of Hertz's typology here is preliminary and mostly based on couples' philosophy regarding the use of paid childcare.

In terms of paid housekeeping services, only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) utilized this help because the majority (8 of 10) preferred to either use their couple time to catch up on household tasks or instead relaxed their cleaning standards since the adoptive placement. This is consistent with Carlisle's (1993) finding that only 19% of women in dual-earner couples utilized paid housekeeping services.

An aspect of social support unique to adoption involves adoptive couples' extent of interaction with other adoptive families and adopted individuals. The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) knew of other adoptive families or adopted individuals though only a slight majority of them (5 of 8) knew them well enough to discuss adoption-related issues. However, all the adoptive couples found the support that they received from other adoptive families/adopted individuals helpful. Adoptive couples indicated that these adoptive families/adopted individuals told them the important information to obtain prior to finalization and gave supportive feedback for any challenges they were experiencing with the placement.

Adoptive couples' linkage to professionals is critical in their social support network. The most significant of the professional groups are the adoptive caseworkers who represent the State of Iowa's Department of Human Services (DHS). Other professionals include therapists, lawyers, and judges. Only a minority of adoptive couples (3 of 10) mentioned the
role of therapists with their adoptive families though all indicated that their influence were beneficial. Just two adoptive couples mentioned that their lawyers were helpful in the termination of parental rights (TPR) and finalization process. However, it was adoptive couples' relationships with their adoptive caseworkers that were most variable. All adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed their relationship with their caseworkers and half experienced poor service/support and half experienced excellent service/support. Some of the complaints involved poor communication, failure to share requested information, and missed and rescheduled meetings. Some of the adoptive parents were so upset with the service/support from their caseworkers that they questioned whether they would adopt through the state again. Others noted that they would not ask their adoptive caseworkers for community service-related referrals if needed and would find their own services. This is an aspect of the adoption process that is in need of reform so as not to discourage experienced adoptive families from future consideration of state-sponsored adoptions. However, half of the adoptive couples had nothing but praise for the service/support they received from their adoptive caseworkers. These caseworkers would call parents at work to follow-up on how their adoptive placements was progressing and would respond in a timely manner to any questions/requests that the adoptive parents had both in the pre-placement and post-placement phases of adoption. These adoptive couples indicated that they would not hesitate to contact their adoptive caseworker if they were experiencing difficulties in their adoptive placement. Wozny and Crase (2001) noted in their evaluation of the State of Iowa's Adoption Training/Orientation that the majority of prospective adoptive parents expected to learn to work with adoptive caseworkers but found that very little attention was given to this topic. Obviously, DHS must accept partial responsibility in better training their adoptive caseworkers though it is also important to orient prospective adoptive parents on how to work with adoptive caseworkers during the adoption process. Many prospective adoptive parents are fearful of being denied an adoptive placement by their caseworker and therefore are likely to tolerate poor service/support from the caseworker without voicing any complaints. Therefore, it becomes a training issue for prospective adoptive parents to learn how to deal with an adoptive caseworker that wield significant influence in whether they eventually get an adoptive placement.
When asked what helped in their adjustment to the adoption, adoptive couples indicated that their commitment to the adoptive placement, previous caretaking/parenting experience, and continuing education efforts were all important. A slight majority (6 of 10) discussed that their commitment to their adoptive child helps them weather any challenges because they know they are in it for the “long-haul.” This is consistent with Ward’s (1997) review of the special-needs adoption literature showing that couples with unequal commitments to the adoptive placement are at higher risk for disruption. Thus, it is protective for these adoptive couples that both parents are committed to the adoptive placement. However, I have based my assessment of adoptive couple’s equal commitment to the adoptive placement on their self-report that may or may not fit with how they manage family needs during their work hours or how the family work is distributed within their couple relationships.

Several adoptive couples (4 of 10) mentioned that their previous experience babysitting children and/or parenting their birth children has helped in the adjustment to the adoptive placement. However, it is more likely that these previous caretaking/parenting experiences were only helpful in their adjustments to non-adoption-specific challenges. Thus, the typical adjustments in becoming a parent to a new child would be helped by previous experience caring for children. The adoptive couples’ idea that their previous babysitting or birth parenting experience is helpful with the adoption-specific challenges in placement demonstrates Miall’s (1995) “myth of sameness” whereby the differences between birth and adoptive families are obscured.

It was unfortunate that only a very small minority of adoptive parents (3 of 20) availed themselves of continuing education opportunities to help them maintain their adoptive placements. An experienced adoptive couple developed their own community adoption support group for adoptive parents, adoptive children, and birth children. They often arranged professional speakers to come to their dinner meetings. In addition, another adoptive mother took the time to go to foster/adoptive conferences on adoption/foster care issues and read several adoption-specific books to help her better understand her adoptive daughter’s experiences in the foster care system. She then shared her learning experiences with the adoptive father who did not typically read the books or go to the conferences. This
mother would be a prime example of the work/family balance adaptive strategy of being proactive in decision-making (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Current, 2001). Haddock et al. indicated that parents who made proactive decisions where most able to maintain their sense of control in their work and family lives. Thus, an adoptive mother trying to educate herself on the special issues associated with adoptive children from the foster care system will be better able to anticipate how these issues may challenge her to respond during her work hours. Additionally, adoptive parents taking responsibility to educate themselves about adoption-related issues can supplement the condensed adoption information covered during the adoption training/orientation. Thus, the finding that the vast majority of adoptive parents do not engage in continuing education efforts regarding adoption-related issues suggests that adoptive families may only seek out services once problems have already developed in their placements. This highlights the importance of post-adoptive services in the maintenance of adoptive placements.

Sharing Family Responsibilities

In the third section, I describe how special-needs adoptive parents manage the early adoption placement in two primary contexts, the family context and each spouse’s work context. I specifically outline how adoptive parents share the family responsibilities of an adoption placement. Secondly, I also focus on how each adoptive parent manages their work context so as to provide consistent care for their adoptive child. Each of the two contexts is subdivided into several categories.

The category of sharing family responsibilities consists of seven sub-categories:
(a) process of sharing family work (disagreements, communication, discussions);
(b) sharing parenting tasks; (c) sharing household tasks; (d) organizational planning;
(e) informality of the division of family labor process; (f) expectation of spousal involvement in family life; and (g) father involvement with their adoptive child.

Sharing Family Responsibilities - Process of Sharing Family Work

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed the process of family work distribution, all parents (20 of 20) talked about the division of family work within their couple relationship.
Bases of Family Work Distribution

The basis of family work distribution was divided into five types that includes parent availability, parent stress-level handoff, parent task competency, parent task preference/desirability, and parental guilt.

Parent Availability. Parent availability was the most common (8 of 10) basis for family work distribution within couple relationships. Parent availability means basically that the parent that is most available to perform the task is assigned the responsibility.

I am trying to do this, you need to take him. (Adoptive Mother)

And obviously I have more time with only working 40 hours per week than he does working 50+ hours/week and every other Saturday. And so I automatically pick things up and take care of things that he is not here to do. (Adoptive Mother)

We probably have had a few disagreements on who was going to do what or who had time to do what. So when she is stuck out at the clinic and I am stuck out mowing or whatever, who is throwing in the towel to go back and take care of the kids. (Adoptive Father)

But we tend to balance it out by making sure that somebody...if he has an appointment, I make sure that I am going to be here or we figure out what we are going to do. Definitely it has changed our life. (Adoptive Mother)

So if he is going to have a day where he is going to work longer then there are certain things that I’m going to do that maybe the next day he would do if I was going to work longer. So really each day I think that we just kind of flow with what our days look like and with what she is needing that day. (Adoptive Mother)

Parent Stress-Level Handoff. Parent stress-level handoff was the next most common basis (7 of 10) for family work distribution within couple relationships. Parent stress-level handoff refers to one parent handing primary responsibility for child to other parent because they are overwhelmed with stress. This may be initiated by the over-stressed parent or by the relief parent.

Well after too, I think that what he is talking about is our adoptive son is having a bad day and just doesn’t want to sleep or not wanting to do whatever, and after so long is like ‘okay, here you go, you take him.’ And he is less likely... I am more likely to do that than he is for whatever reason. (Adoptive Mother)
Then we literally say to the other person, you’re on, I am done. I need a break. And that works. And I am glad we can do that because that works out really well. And when he walks in the door he can usually tell if mom needs a break or if things have been going pretty well. (Adoptive Mother)

You can tell when she has had enough. You can just tell by watching the boys. They have pushed their limits clear to the end. Now she needs to go somewhere. (Adoptive Father)

So far we have it that when one person has had it the other is fresh and that we haven’t had it at the same time. (Adoptive Mother)

So I try to get home, she schedules a lot of her business stuff in the evening so I try to alleviate that time so that she can do what she needs to do and try and get away from them. (Adoptive Father)

Sometimes I get tired of doing it and have a day where I don’t have to do anything and somebody else can do that. He does pick up quite a bit of slack for me...basically we go through spurts, I guess...sometimes I will go on a cooking spree and have things cooked up for a whole week and the next week or two it will be like, I am not doing anything. And so he automatically will come home and say, do you have plans for supper or whatever, and I will say, no, find something, and he will take care of it. (Adoptive Mother)

So she will take off at night time sometimes and do different things. I would encourage that, especially if she is here all day long (with them). (Adoptive Father)

When my wife is real tired when there has been a lot of those nights sometimes I’ll get up (with adoptive daughter). (Adoptive Father)

I kind of let her go until I can see that she is over her head and then I will come in (mother laughs)...bail her out for awhile. (Adoptive Father)

The frustration level is just so high just because of the whole thing. And I think that by the time that he gets home and we have had supper there are some nights where I say, I think that you better take the girls away tonight. (Laughs) Like could you go on a bike ride? And don’t come home for 2-3 hours. And I will say that and the girls will have no clue (Adoptive Mother)

It is like we have this unwritten thing and he knows when you say certain things, that he is going to need to take up some slack where maybe he normally wouldn’t have done. (Adoptive Mother)
And there are times when I know, okay my wife is not feeling well. It is time for me to just pick the ball up and run with it. It usually is not too hard because things do not get done and I think, oh, I will do that in the morning before I go to work real quick and make sure that all the dishes get in the dishwasher and when I get ready to go I can just turn it on. (Adoptive Father)

*Parent Task Competency.* Parent task competency as a basis for family work distribution within couple relationships was also found in the majority (6 of 10) of adoptive couples. Parent task competency means that the responsibility for the task goes to the parent who is better at the task performance.

Well...he is better at it. I forget the laundry and it sits there for a day or two sometimes. I let him do it at much as possible. (Adoptive Mother)

I had him sort whites once day. Whites go in here and colors go in here. He chose this white striped shirt and through it in with the whites. The concept is not there. But we know who will handle it better. If I let him do the laundry we would have we would have really weird colored clothes. (Adoptive Mother)

You know what has to be done and someone just does it. If something is more important we say, okay you do that and we can do that later. You are better at that and I will take care of the others. Just work together and get it done. (Adoptive Mother)

I'd don't do the bath thing. She is much better at it than I am. (Adoptive Father)

I took this over, I guess, because she is bi-racial and she has African-American heritage her skin and her hair is somewhat high maintenance. She has a couple of different prescription creams that they has us try and one was specifically for her face and one specifically was for her body. One should be not used on her face and one should be used here and so trying to remember what is for what and instead of trying to explain all prescriptions and how to apply and where to apply, I just kind of took that over and that happens after her bath because you are suppose to put it on when her skin is still damp. So I just kind of took into that, I guess. (Adoptive Mother)

*Parent Task Preference/Desirability.* Parent task preference/desirability as a basis for family work distribution within couple relationships was also found in the majority (6 of 10) of adoptive couples. Parent task preference/desirability indicates that tasks are distributed based on what parents like to do and also what they find important.

We basically do what we like to do or what we are better at doing, I guess. For instance, he does not like to do the dishes so he very rarely does the dishes, that is my job. He does the laundry most of the time. (Adoptive Mother)
That is a chore (dishes) that I dislike, so he could do it. (Adoptive Mother)

Then I do...I kind of do the outside...the mowing. She probably wouldn’t mind the mowing but I remember when we got married that you didn’t care to mow so much. (Adoptive Father)

I mean, he fixes the lawnmower a lot more than me because he likes to do that kind of stuff and he knows how to do that kind of stuff. (Adoptive Father)

_Care_ about it, maybe. (Laughs) It is _more important to me_ to have things in their places, to be a little more tidy _than what he cares_. I mean, he wants things to be clean and organized but if there are dirty socks on the floor when he wakes up in the morning, he doesn’t care, he will walk past them. (Father laughs) Maybe by noon they will be picked up. But me, before I go to bed all the dirty socks are picked up off the floor, you know, so. It is just personality, it is not so much that I am a women and I do this stuff and he is a man and so he does that kind of stuff. It is personality, it is _what I care for, it is what he cares for_, you know. (Adoptive Mother)

I think actually that he does more for our adoptive son than he did for the girls. And I think it is partly because he is a boy and my husband is a boy. And with the girls bathing early on, he helped but as grew older and became more aware that they were different than daddy...just from some of the struggles that I had in childhood and some of the bad things that happened to me, _it was important to me_...not that I didn’t trust him or anything like that...just deep down inside, I felt more comfortable with him not having that kind of contact. So I definitely had more of a part in the bath time and pajamas time than he did. But with our adoptive son, I pretty much let him do most of that. (Adoptive Father)

I don’t pay much attention to what needs to be done inside the house and sometimes she will say, well, we need to do this today, like laundry. We can get the laundry started. That is no big deal. (Adoptive Father)

_Parental Guilt_. Parental guilt is the least common basis (2 of 10) for family work distribution within couple relationships. Parental guilt refers to when one parent begins to feel guilty that their partner is doing too much of the family work and therefore contributes more to the family labor needs.

If I think that she is doing it all, I will carry it (clothes) upstairs for her or do something. Kind of pitch-in a little so that I don’t think that she is doing it all herself. It would just bother me. (Adoptive Father)
Or if she was doing too much or I was doing too much, I think we would both just communicate again. We would communicate about that. Or one of us would feel guilty and it would just come out. (Adoptive Father)

Because it would bother me and a lot of times I would just ask her, you know, ‘do you need help with that or is there something that I could do?’ You know, so we kind of keep it close...we just kind of keep it pretty fair. It is just how we have always been. (Adoptive Father)

I don’t know, I guess...I would feel...I think, if I don’t feel like I am doing...if I sometimes feel like I am not doing enough, I would feel guilty. (Adoptive Father)

Sometimes I may feel guilty that she may be taking different things and stuff like that but I think about it, I think we do it fairly but sometimes there are...sometimes you think...and part of it is being tired and stressed. (Adoptive Father)

Other important aspects of the process of sharing family work included: (a) parent’s requests for more help from the other parent; (b) disagreements about family work distribution; and (c) changes in the family work distribution.

*Parent’s Requests for More Help from the Other Parent*

In the majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) requests for more help from their partner were common, clearly demonstrating that there is some dissatisfaction with how the family work is currently distributed. Similarly, in all of the adoptive couples (8 of 8) it is the adoptive mother who is making the requests for more help with the family work.

He can walk by the same pile of clothes for 10 days and not realize that I would like him to pick them up or do the laundry or whatever needs to be done. So most of the time it is just because I am reminding him to do something and maybe he doesn’t...he has been pretty good though. He probably doesn’t appreciate my reminders. (Adoptive Mother)

More early on, if I was getting frustrated and I thought this needs to be done, can’t you see that this needs to be done type thing. For some reason, maybe just that it bothers me more but I can tell, if there is a pile of dishes or stuff all over, whatever the problem is in the house, I am the one who notices it more. (Adoptive Mother)

I do say to him that I am going to be very busy in the next four months and I am not going to have the time to do some of the stuff that I normally do. I am not going to have any inclination to do it. So being the smart guy that he is, he picks up on it. (Adoptive Mother)
I think we talk about it too. I just say, I need you home just as soon as you can get here because both our son and I are looking for you. If I can have a breathier, then I can recoup and come back into the game a little later. (Adoptive Mother)

And I can be bossy and so I will say, will you please go and get the laundry for me. (Adoptive Mother)

I don’t know if it is a decision or just the way that it works out. I mean, she obviously would like me to do more than I do (Laughs). (Adoptive Father)

Cleaning, I guess. I mean, think a little more that just because he didn’t make the mess, doesn’t mean that he shouldn’t clean it up. If he comes home and there are crumbs on the counter and jelly all over the place, it is okay for him to clean it up even though he didn’t do it. It is just something that I just do. I am very aware of what is dirty and clean and the organization inside the house is just my thing. I pay a lot more attention to that than he what he would do. (Adoptive Mother)

I am getting tired of doing this all the time and I don’t want to do that. (Adoptive Mother)

Adoptive Father: Sometimes I feel that my wife feels that it may not divided fairly. Interviewer: What makes you think that?
Adoptive Father: She seems to get mad sometimes if certain things don’t get done. And she says, I am doing this and that, this and that, and I am tired. (Exchange with Adoptive Father)

And a lot of times the bad thing is that he will find out quickly and not necessarily in the best way. Like if I am trying to make supper and the kids are screaming or wanting something and they have just made a mess that needs to be cleaned up and I myself have just gotten home from school and I haven’t gotten to sit down and change clothes or do anything, then all of a sudden he walks in the door, he is going to find out like right now that he needs to do something. (Adoptive Mother)

Sometimes I will just say, Will you go and do the laundry today. Just a reminder now and then, but he does a lot. (Adoptive Mother)

I think that it is known that it is easier for me and I need to do it but then that poses the stress of, okay, I have missed a lot of work, how can I make this juggle with…you know, okay I have missed this work and now I have to make some of this up and get things done. ‘are you going to be home tonight to be with her so that I can get this stuff done?’ How can we make that kind of work? (Adoptive Mother)

Okay, can…I need you to help out in the evening in terms of one evening a month being home. Commit to me that you can be at home to be with her so I can go and do on my own that I want to do with some adult friends. (Adoptive Mother)
Sometimes my wife will say and tell me in private, you could have helped more. And then I realize that I was tired and I was unconsciously being a little selfish. (Adoptive Father)

We just kind of fell into it. And there are times when I say, I need you to vacuum the living room. Can you do that for me? And he will get the vacuum out and vacuum the living room. (Adoptive Mother)

*Disagreements About Family Work Distribution*

The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) indicated that they have disagreements about how the family work (household and parental responsibilities) is distributed between the parents.

I guess... I don’t know, I will hardly ever do dishes, and she knows that. And I am sure that it bothers her because there is no reason that I couldn’t do it. (Adoptive Father)

I did say this week, that why are we sending in our foster parent application when I would be the only one at home to watch the other kid. (Adoptive Father)

The only thing I have noticed other than me not getting up in the middle of the night sometimes to help out. I know that she has been frustrated with me about that. (Adoptive Father)

And we try really hard not to argue too intensely around the kids, but I also think it is important that they see how we deal with our problems. And if we are struggling with each other...we can actually, maybe our voices are a little louder that they need to be but we are not fighting, we are listening to each other and it is okay afterwards. I don’t know, we kind of pick on each other every now and again too. He doesn’t think of the finer details of whether the children have underwear in their drawers or not as much as me anyway. (Father laughs) And I think that he automatically assumes that certain things are done that need to be done. Vacuuming, moping, and grocery shopping. He knows that they need to be done but doesn’t...I make the lists and he may add a few things. Just the yucky stuff that needs to be done. (Father laughs) Making sure that there is dog food, the dogs need to eat too. (Adoptive Mother)

And I think that we have disagreements everyday about something. We don’t always agree. And we pretty much talk about it sometimes and we never come to blows. (Adoptive Mother)
There are a lot of things that need to be done that *I see* that he is not aware of. He is happy to help with household things, he is happy to help with anything that I tell him to do...but for me the issue is that if I have to tell him well that is the issue.

(Adoptive Mother)

The biggest disagreement that I can think of that I get frustrated about is *I think* personal time. Because he has some things that he likes to do, during the school year he plays basketball on Monday evenings with some friends but I guess that was the biggest thing. And I used to be in a book club before we had our adoptive daughter where once a month we would get together, we would read a book, and we would talk about it. And the book club became difficult for me to do because when he started his job in December there was a lot of traveling involved and I was home alone with her for a while. (Adoptive Mother)

I think that time off is the biggest disagreement about who is going to take time off and discussing that and disagreeing about it. (Adoptive Father)

A minority of adoptive parents (2 of 10) indicated that they did not argue about the division of family labor.

We never really had disagreements that were major, before ever in our relationship. We talk a lot more with each other and about things and we are both very sensitive people, towards each other too. (Adoptive Mother)

If there was something bothering me at night, I could...we would need to talk about it, I would need to talk about it even if we were talking until two in the morning...I would have too get it settled before I went to sleep and I think that is just the way we both are. (Adoptive Father)

I was going to say that I don’t think we have disagreed about anything. We always try to talk amongst us on how to handle something if something happened with our only son. (Adoptive Father)

I don’t know that we really had any disagreements. I think that it depends upon the stress level at work maybe, I think that that plays a big role in how we perceive things at home. Maybe nothing has changed at home but you are more stressed at work so you bring it home and then you think that everything is bigger than it is really. (Adoptive Mother)

Several adoptive mothers note that fairness in the division of family work is not important to them.

I don’t think that we really care if it is divided fairly and it is not an issue of well, I’ll do five loads of laundry this week, you do five next week. I’ll do this today and you do it tomorrow, I’ll do it for an hour then you do it for an hour. (Adoptive Mother)
I don’t think that we ever looked at it as, well did he do as much as I did. (Adoptive Mother)

To be fair is more...not so much a matter of equal as fair is a matter of...if I can function and if I can do the things that I have to do, then it is fair enough. But where I get to the point where I either have so many things to do and I can’t stay awake to do them or I have too many things pulling on me right at that very minute, then it doesn’t seem fair. As long as I can function and do it, then it is fair enough. But where I get to a point where I am at spot where I can not do this, then all of a sudden it does not seem fair. (Adoptive Mother)

Interviewer: How do you determine if the family work is determined fairly between the two of you?
Adoptive Mother: I don’t know, we have had to discuss it sometimes.
Adoptive Father: The more she does the more fair it is. (Father jokes with Mother).
(Exchange with Adoptive Couple)

Changes in the Family Work Distribution

Changes in the family work distribution were enacted in only a minority (four of ten) of the adoptive couples.

At first, I would say she did it (getting up with child in the night) 80% of the time but I realized that hey you got to share that with her more. (Adoptive Father)

Yeah, he could do more of it. That would be fine. There are some aspects of it that I don’t like to do at all. Bill paying that sort of thing ... the dirty work. But we are definitely getting better since our second adoptive child came because we are so much more busy that it is equaling out. So, I am really busy now so he is stepping in and doing more of it so I can see that changing. So that is really nice. (Adoptive Mother)

That was me, hence why the early-morning relief (with father) started to happen because I was like ... now he for the most part, we do not have to get up in the middle of the night if the schedule in the evening goes well. If I can get that last feeding in around 10-10:30pm, we are good to go. But otherwise ... yeah, I was getting up in the middle of the night and first thing in the morning and up all day and it was too much with a two-year old because they don’t nap at the same time usually. (Adoptive Mother)

It was too much for me to get out the door by 7:30 and be ready if we ate at 7:00. So he started doing breakfast because I said that you do not need to be anywhere until 9:00. But basically he started doing all the breakfasts and that worked out real nice. (Adoptive Mother)
Sharing Family Responsibilities - Sharing Parenting Tasks

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) mentioned the division of parenting responsibilities within their couple relationships. Nearly all of the adoptive parents (19 of 20) discussed the division of parenting tasks among them. This included all of the adoptive mothers (10 of 10) and most of the fathers (9 of 10). It was found that a slight majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) reported sharing parenting responsibilities.

Parenting, we do it co-completely. Actually when he comes home at night, he takes over almost 100% because I have been all day. (Adoptive Mother)

He keeps them...he basically says ‘this is what we are going to do and they do it’ and then he says that we are going to do this’ and they go do that. But unless I say that this has to be done tonight then he will implement that in but he is very good about basically taking over the evening. And I do not have to...well, I am here but I am not the one who has to go mentally, ‘okay, what are we going to do next. (Adoptive Mother)

I know that a lot of mothers say that they are on call 24/7. Well, I feel I am on call 24/7 but I feel that I have someone there who for about four hours I can leave and I can turn my pager off and I know that things are going to be under control. (Adoptive Mother)

I know it. That is why when I come home it is my job (primary parent responsibility). (Adoptive Father)

We both do...we both share all the responsibilities in terms of our adoptive daughter. (Adoptive Mother)

I guess you get into the habit of a couple of things that you can do but other than that if you see something that needs to be done, one person does it this time and the other person does it next time. Diapers aren’t necessarily changed by one person. She is not necessarily fed by one person, it is just who is making dinner tonight. (Adoptive Father)

We have a monitor in our room and so we both hear her and we don’t usually even discuss it. One person will just get up, and then...another person will get up. (Adoptive Father)

He changes diapers and I change diapers. (Adoptive Mother)

I expected her to be a big part in it and for both of us to share 50/50 of everything and it is working out that way. (Adoptive Father)
We pretty much go at it as a team. And that is the way we... the marriage was a team, the parenting is a team effort. Sometimes tag-team but team none the less. (Adoptive Mother)

He is very active in taking care of the kids. And the childcare role when he is here, he gets up in the morning with them both because they are both waking up at the same time. And so he gets up first and I am shortly to follow but at least I don't have to jump out of bed. He feeds the morning bottle and gets our son awake and around. They watch cartoons together to kind start the morning. When he comes home they do stuff with him then and throughout the evening he helps out with his one (youngest adoptive son), with both of them. Whatever needs to get done, it gets done. It is just whoever is doing what. We usually just divide it up. There are two of them. (Adoptive Mother)

Like when he was just eating bottles, we would pretty much evenly give him bottles like do you want to do this one. Well, like giving baths, we kind of alternate. (Adoptive Father)

I think that he is a lot more involved than I expected him to be. I expected him to have fun and play and everything but I didn't expect him to do as much of the work kind of stuff, changing diapers, giving baths and food. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive parents indicated that parenting responsibilities are distributed based on parent availability and/or parent stress-level handoff.

Obviously she seems to be pulling a little bit more because of the hours that she is working is a little bit less than mine right now. (Adoptive Father)

When she was really tiny we kind of went back and forth. When I was off work I would do most of it because I could go back to bed in the morning. But then...I remember one night, I said, I can't even hold her I am so tired, here. (Couple laughs) But that is when he would...she would sleep really well on his chest, so he would just take her and he can sleep in the recliner which I can't do. (Adoptive Mother)

Only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) reflected a combination of shared parenting responsibility for some parenting duties with adoptive mother being primarily responsible for other parenting duties.

Because I am more intimidated about waking people up at six in the morning. I just hate to make those (childcare) calls. (Adoptive Mother)
I think that we both got up with him initially, depending on how many times he got up during the night. I get up first, he would get up first and then the next time, the other would get up first. And then sometimes we both would get up if he was really bad. I think that we were both really concerned about him and we wanted to let him know that we were both there for him. (Adoptive Mother)

And since he (youngest adoptive son) is changing with food changes and stuff, I am the one who keeps up with that. With food and the different levels...He is then aware of it, and then I just tell him. (Adoptive Mother)

As far as the feeding and the changing, I probably get him dressed and undressed a little more often, but everything else is probably pretty even. (Adoptive Mother)

He does a much better job at entertaining them. He is much more the fun parent. I am much more the person who makes sure that you are fed and that you act decent. (Adoptive Mother)

And I think that if the kids need to go for their physicals or if they are sick or whatever, most of that rests on my shoulders to begin with and partly that is because I just take on that responsibility because I want to be there and I want to do that stuff and it is important. (Adoptive Mother)

Only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) had the adoptive mother as the primary caregiver in regards to parenting responsibilities.

Well yeah, we kind of talked about it, which is one reason I wanted a girl. I knew that...I would probably doing more of the running around and taking her places and the care taking. And he does quite a bit and we balance it out pretty well but he has done it one time around and I understand that. Yeah, we kind of had an agreement and I knew that I would be doing more of the care taking with her. (Adoptive Mother)

I probably do more of the care taking stuff like bath bathing, feeding...clothing, and diaper changing. (Adoptive Mother)

I have been there and done that and she wanted the mother thing. (Adoptive Father)

Sharing Family Responsibilities - Sharing Household Tasks

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed the division of household labor between the adoptive parents. Most of the adoptive parents (17 of 20) talked about division of household labor. However, more adoptive mothers (10 of 10) than fathers (7 of 10) mentioned household labor. It is duly noted that in the majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) it is the
adoptive mother that is primarily responsible for household labor. One adoptive couple indicated that they share the primary responsibility for household labor.

I have been working some overtime lately. It makes it kind of hard. It is nice because we share the household responsibilities probably more evenly than most couples do. As far as household duties they are pretty evenly split. I don’t think the work has been too bad. We are able to trade off and share responsibilities, it has gone pretty well. (Adoptive Mother)

In several of the adoptive couples (4 of 10), the arrangement was that mother was primarily responsible for “inside” tasks and father was primarily responsible for “outside” tasks. However, this does not mean that these adoptive fathers did not do any household work, as the majority of them (6 of 10) helped the mother when needed.

Otherwise, pretty much both of us participate in ... obviously, my husband is grocery shopping today, so he is doing that but we both of take care of the household stuff. I am still more in charge of that, probably. I can delegate pretty well though. (Adoptive Mother)

Yeah, like cleaning. Sometimes, she will do a lot of it, like the housecleaning but once in a while we will split it up, like I will do the upstairs and she will do the downstairs or I will vacuum and she will dust or something like that. Cooking, she does because I have never been the world’s best cook either. I usually clean off the table and she does the dishes. (Adoptive Father)

Everybody is assigned household chores that is usually the weekend, Friday night or Saturdays when we do our major cleaning where everyone pitches in between outside and inside because there is a lot of chores outside too. I guess, what we call household chores isn’t just in the house because we have our business outside and an acreage here to take care of. Everyone takes a piece and we all work outside a little bit and inside a little bit. When it is housecleaning time, our adoptive daughter will dust and our birth son will help pick up or whatever. (Adoptive Mother)

For the most part, I do care for the household, maintaining the home, meals and all of that. But he will pitch in and do dishes. Pretty much, I maintain the household myself. He does help do cooking and that kind of stuff. He maintains the outside and stuff like that. (Adoptive Mother)

You do the dishes after dinner and you clean her bottles and make bottles for the next day to go to daycare. (Adoptive Mother)
A lot of times...well this year we have a big project, we are building a deck in the backyard so I have recruited him to do a little of the yard work with me to get it done quicker. So we work together on that but generally I take care of the yard and the garden. (Adoptive Mother)

Most of the other stuff (household tasks). I try to help out but...I try but she pretty much does...the bulk of it really. I do a lot of the cooking...yeah, but as far as keeping the house and laundry kind of thing, she is pretty busy keeping up with that. It is more of a priority for her. (Adoptive Father)

Well, you know sometimes...and it goes back to her standards about what is clean and what is not, is probably the best to get me and the kids out of the way. (Couple laughs) Let her put stuff back up to our standards, whatever that is, you know. And like I had said, that is just part of trying to make a marriage work, too. (Adoptive Father)

I think we both like cleaning up but part of it is her time schedule is probably different...it would be on my priority list but it may not be on the top. (Laughs) With her, it is here is a mess we better clean it up right away, you know. It is probably one of the lists, she got lists obviously too but it may jump to a higher priority. Mine would be at this priority (motions lower). (Adoptive Father)

And cleaning kinds of things, it bothers me first before it bothers him. Probably my standards dictate that I have to do it myself, unfortunately. And by being the one who does the cooking, that makes me the one who does the shopping too. I wouldn’t want to have to make up the list and if I did it would have to be so explicit. Even when it was the two of us, I do more of the cleaning, household kind of cooking things. (Adoptive Mother)

So he takes care of cars, lawn and everything outside and regular household bills like mortgage and that kind of stuff. I do inside like food, clothing, and anything that goes day to day, and that just works best for us. It is not a hard and fast kind of thing. And he just likes doing that stuff and I prefer doing this because he hates doing inside stuff. (Adoptive Mother)

I want the experience and so I do more of that. And I did even before we had a child, I did most of the cooking (laughs) and he does a lot of the outside stuff and I do the inside stuff. (Adoptive Mother)

We probably do have more developed male/female roles as cooking, cleaning, and who takes care of the vehicles, pays the bills and so on. I typically take care of the bills and the outside stuff. (Adoptive Father)
Sharing Family Responsibilities: Organizational Planning

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) mentioned which parent was typically responsible for organizational planning for their family. Additionally, most of the adoptive parents (18 of 20) talked about responsibility for organizational planning. It was found that mothers were primarily responsible for family organizational planning in the large majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10). In the adoptive family where that was not the case, the couple reported that they shared the organizational planning responsibility. There were no adoptive couples where the father was primarily responsible for organizational planning.

That has been a harder challenge than I anticipated just scheduling and try to determine, well especially now if I am working late, okay he has this to do tonight so I have to make sure I am home tonight so that he can do that. (Adoptive Mother)

Me. You see that board back there, that was the best thing that we, I mean I ever did. It works very well to keep activities straight for everybody. (Adoptive Mother)

I make the doctor’s appointments and meet with the social workers because usually they come during the day. The worker visits during the day during his work time but if there was a couple times when he needed to meet with us both and he just scheduled it so that he could just come home. I think that would be the only thing that he doesn’t do… appointments and stuff. (Adoptive Mother)

I wrote him out a whole list to things to play. You need stuff to play if it is raining outside too. I talked to him (father) about it so he knew exactly. (Adoptive Mother)

Adoptive Father: She probably pretty much does that but even the daycare…when we had to get daycare, I guess I called her and kind of got that all set up.
Adoptive Mother: Because I told him to call. (Laughs) I was at school and told him that we need to arrange a babysitter before she comes. (Adoptive Mother and Father)

I handle them (organizational planning) all for the horse shoeing business and she keeps the personal stuff in line. Tells me what days I need to…like today, I need to be here for today. (Adoptive Father)

Or if the kids have a game, I think I pretty much handle the schedules and let him know when the ball games are. Or in soccer, both have had games in different directions so I would set it up that if he wasn’t available I would have a family member take one. And so I think that I pretty much take probably that responsibility. I think that is kind of natural. (Laughs) Since we have been married it has just kind of been that way. He would just rather call me and just ask, what time do I have to be there. (Adoptive Mother)
The organization of the appointments is done by her, as far as taking them that would weigh more heavily on her than me but I do take them to the appointments. (Adoptive Father)

Interviewer: Is that more because your work is harder to get away from (reason mother takes children to appointments)?
Adoptive Mother: He thinks that it is anyway. I think a lot of times he tends to think that they aren't as flexible in his job as they are.
Interviewer: So he hasn't tested them?
Adoptive Mother: No, he doesn't want to. I think that he just...
Adoptive Father: It is not that someone else would disapprove, I don't think...it is just me.
Adoptive Mother: I am a woman and they expect me to be able to miss work, and I do. (father laughs) That is what he is saying.
Adoptive Father: Well, that all depends. If it is in the afternoon, then it is more to me and if it is a morning deal then it is more to her.
Adoptive Mother: Most doctors' offices are open in the afternoon but that is okay. (Adoptive Mother and Father Exchange)

I would say that she does 90% of that (organizational planning) or even more. She is a better organizer than me. She is a ten times better organizer than me. (Adoptive Father)

I basically do it, I keep track of it and I don't make appointments for my husband. So I see that he is still late. Yeah, it's...I have a schedule up here on the fridge and we renew that every week so that everybody knows where they are suppose to be. They are suppose to write on it if they have any appointments or play practices, or soccer practices or whatever, so that we all know where everyone is going. (Adoptive Mother)

It (organizational planning) just fell to her. (Adoptive Father)

He pretty much has not been a part of the therapy part, I have done the majority of that and I have re-arranged my schedule to accommodate it. I have to be gone for...it was basically three hours by the time that we got there, we were there and by the time we got home. It was a three-hour commitment twice a week, which may not seem much but when it is in the middle of my day, and my work day also, it was very time consuming. Plus by the time that we would get home, our adoptive daughter was not in the best of humor and so I would have to work through whatever. And so I was the one juggling everything as far as my schedule because I did have a little more flexibility to do that. (Adoptive Mother)

I come home and say, want to do this, this, and this tonight, and those are all great plans but the kids all have to be in bed at this time and I have messed that up or they have had a previous commitment or they have just got into trouble and you cannot go
and do that and of coarse I did not know that when I went and laid all of this out. And it is like, okay, I will ask my wife first. So that is the truth. (Adoptive Father)

One adoptive couple attempted to share the organizational planning.

And I wouldn’t say that I necessarily dictate to him in terms of this is what you need to do, this is what I am going to do. We just kind of have daily conversations in terms of what is going on, what needs to happen, and what is your day like. I’d say that is shared (organizational planning). (Adoptive Mother)

**Expectation of Spousal Involvement in Family Life**

The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) discussed their expectations about spousal involvement in family life. About two-thirds of the adoptive parents (13 of 20) talked about their expectations of spousal involvement in the adoptive placement including about equal numbers of adoptive mothers (6 of 10) and fathers (7 of 10). Not surprisingly, the majority of these adoptive couples (7 of 8) expected their spouse to share the family work in the adoptive placement.

My expectation was that things would be shared, be the way that it is. He’d change diapers and I’d change diapers, he’d feed her and I’d feed her, he’d put her to bed and I’d put her to bed, and we would both get up in the middle of the night and that was my expectation. (Adoptive Mother)

Yes, the household tasks are the same. I think that we share equally with the kids’ duties and I decided that that was my expectation that we would share equally. I don’t know if my wife would agree with that. (Adoptive Father)

So I knew that he would be involved otherwise we would not have gone on. I mean, it is always a co-mutual decision. (Adoptive Mother)

Only one adoptive couple did not have the expectation that the couple would share the family responsibilities in the adoptive placement. With this couple, the adoptive father had been previously married and had already raised children in his first marriage while the adoptive mother very much wanted to be a mother and initiated the adoption process with the understanding that she would be the primary caretaker for their child.

Adoptive Father: I have been there and done that and she (adoptive mother) wanted the mother thing.
Adoptive Mother: I want the experience and so I do more of that. And I did even before we had a child, I did most of the cooking (laughs) and he does a lot of the outside stuff and I do the inside stuff. Yeah, we kind of had an agreement and I knew that I would be doing more of the care-taking with our adoptive daughter.
Adoptive Father: I kind of let her go until I can see that she is over her head and then I will come in (mother laughs)...bail her out for awhile. (Adoptive Mother and Father Exchange)

We talked about kids before we got married and I said, I have had kids, I am not interested. (Adoptive Father)

*Father Involvement with their Adoptive Child*

The majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) described the extent of adoptive father involvement with their adoptive child. These descriptions were elicited from 12 of the 20 adoptive parents and involved more adoptive fathers (7 of 10) than mothers (5 of 10). In the majority of adoptive father involvement descriptions (6 of 7) only one father’s involvement was concentrated in the “fun” aspects of parenthood, (e.g., playing with the child, going out to places with a child, and taking the child to work).

We take the kids with us as much as possible involved in those things (community activities, work). We are strong family-oriented so family take priority over work or other aspects. We try to integrate as much as we can. (Adoptive Father)

With this adoptive father there was an inconsistency between his stated work hours (Monday through Friday business hours plus a different job on the weekends that involved long hours) and his statement that family is more important than work. When asked how he balanced work and family, he replied as above, “I integrate the children into my other activities.” This seemed not a child-centered structure but rather a child being fitted into the adoptive father’s previously established work structure. However, this was the exception to the rule of significant father involvement in the participants’ descriptions. I define the less fun aspects of parenthood as diaper duty, disciplining children, and child-related housework. It seemed that most of the fathers (6 of 7) were involved in both the fun and non-fun aspects of parenthood.

I really enjoy picking him up at night, he crawls to me at daycare, you know. We have a nice chat on the way home. We come back and I feed him, we play or I read him a story or give him a bath at nine or whatever. I like doing everything, it is kind of fun. (Adoptive Father)

I thought she would take a motherly role and provide love and care for him and I have actually done some of that too, so that was surprising to me. (Adoptive Father)
Well I guess in our discussions prior to adopting, where we were talking about what is going to change and all this stuff and he basically said, I do not know about this, he wasn’t quite so sure about all of the changing diapers and stuff and if he would be able to do it or whatever. I was willing to do that and then he dropped in and wanted to do everything. (Adoptive Mother)

When I come home in the evening after we get done with dinner, I’ll be doing homework with them, I’ll be doing spelling words, I’ll be reading stories with them, if they have a disciplinary issue that will be dad’s to take care of. (Adoptive Father)

I always wanted children and when I thought about having them and it came close to us getting her, it scared me. It scared me to death. And I told her that, wow, the closer it gets, the more scared I am getting. And I think it is because you are worrying about whether you will do the right things and if you are going to be a good parent. And that what was scaring me. If I am going to be able to teach her things and be a good role model and stuff like that. And she just kind of said, it will just come kind of natural. You will be. It still scares me. (Adoptive Father)

Informality of the Division of Family Labor Process

The majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) talked about the informality of their division of family labor distribution process. This involved half of the adoptive parents (10 of 20) and equal numbers of adoptive mothers and fathers. It was noted that all seven of the adoptive couples reported that the division of family labor process developed informally and no couples indicated that they had preplanned who would be responsible for what household or parenting tasks. It seems as though these family labor arrangements are established through repeated daily patterns of interaction whereby particular responsibilities are “covertly assigned” to either mothers or fathers.

As far as having a serious discussion about it before he came into our house, no we really didn’t. We didn’t have any additional talks and say things need to change now that the boy is coming. (Adoptive Father)

I don’t know. I wish we could say we sat down and thought it all out and say here is our list, we should have done that but... I guess we jumped in and divided it up. (Adoptive Mother)

We really didn’t say that you are responsible for this and you are responsible for that. (Adoptive Father)

We never made a plan as far as sitting down and deciding you do this, and you do that. (Adoptive Father)
Household responsibilities goes back to what we talked about before...parenting, we never had a meeting...(Laughs). (Adoptive Father)

I am not sure that we ever decided, I think that it just sort of evolved. (Laughs) (Adoptive Mother)

If one person doesn’t do it the other person is going to do it and it is just going to kind of happen because we both know the things that need to be done on a daily basis around the house. I mean there are some things that we said earlier that are just naturally he does it or naturally I just do it but like he said there is not really a checklist. We never really sat down and discussed, you do this because I know that you like to do that better and I will do this. It is just kind of.... (Adoptive Mother)

How do we manage it...I think, kind of day by day. I don’t think that there is a plan that we follow in terms of who does what or how things work. Everyday is different. (Adoptive Mother)

And so it is not...and we don’t really have anything written down to say that, you are going to do this. And even with the kids at night and the discipline and the parenting skills and the fun stuff, it is not really written down it is just that we have fallen into a schedule, so to say. (Adoptive Mother)

Adoptive Parents’ Management of their Work Contexts

The category of adoptive parents managing their work context consists of three sub­categories: (a) work interference in family life; (b) consideration of work changes; (c) handling family needs during work hours; and (d) use of maternity/paternity leave and other time-off for the adoption.

Managing their Work Contexts-Work Interference in Family Life

All adoptive couples (10 of 10) mentioned about how they address work interference (if any) in family life. This included all twenty of the adoptive parents. An important trend was noted in this category. All of the adoptive mothers (10 of 10) made significant efforts to manage work interference in family life though only a minority of the adoptive fathers (3 of 10) also placed boundaries on their work. Thus, the majority of adoptive fathers (7 of 10) either indicated that their work did not interfere in their family life and/or were unwilling to limit the extent of their work hours and responsibilities during family time.

Well, just recently with her working a lot, sometimes I get a little frustrated thinking man, when is she coming home to help out with whatever. Oh, I guess we will just have to let it go until tomorrow. The lawn needed mowing all week and I was thinking, please get home tonight so I… (Adoptive Father)
When I get home... when I leave the office I turn off my cell phones and I have people hired to work for me and I have put it to them, look this is what you are paid to do, I do not want to be bothered unless it is a dire emergency. When I get home, I don't want to be working. I want to do things with the boys. (Adoptive Father)

It has been really been tricky for me because I use to spend... he never gets home until 7pm... so I will stay at work awhile and work on things that I needed to work on. I would get to work at the same time in the morning but stay later just so that I would have things prepared and be ready for the kids the next day. And just doing a Title 1 job and I am also the coordinator so I have to do all the paperwork and everything. It is a real busy time of the year. I am an incredibly organized person. I make my list and instead of going to the workroom and sitting down and having a break with the other teachers. A lot of time I will stay in my room and go and get done what I need to get done because I know I won't have a lot of extra time. (Adoptive Mother)

I think we are pretty fortunate, both of us, that we do not have to bring work home with us at night. There is not a lot of demand for overtime, there has been in the past but we (I) have pretty much stuck to our guns and said that we (I) have responsibilities at home and we (I) are not going to stay late hours and stuff at work. (Adoptive Mother)

I feel like my work has suffered. I kind if went from... well, I was single a long time and teaching. And I feel that was my best teaching because I didn’t do anything else. I lived my job. So in my career I feel like I have gone from teacher extradonaire because that is all that I did. Did that, then got married and then it kind ah... then I had more responsibilities and now even more. I think that it would be hard to start a different teaching position at this point. It is one of those things where I teach the talented and gifted. (Adoptive Mother)

I do a lot less work at home which is probably good this past year because I took a lot of work home and I just stopped doing it. I would do some when she went to bed and it all worked out okay. I always felt that I had to take papers home to check and I cannot do it all and I don’t. Occasionally, I get my lesson plans and things done in school but I always have work that I could bring home. And I just decided that I will never have a night where I don’t have something until sometimes I just don’t even bring it home anymore because it just sits there. So after she goes to bed I might sit down and do some of that now. I use to spend more time on it before we had her but it will always be there. (Adoptive Mother)

I have been teaching so long now that it is not as important as it use to be. It used to be the primary focus of my life and I found out that that is wrong. Oh...so I wasn’t home a lot to get in on first kinds of things, first steps, first words. And so this time around I am spending a little more time consciously with our adoptive daughter so that I can be in on that stuff. (Adoptive Father)
First time around the job and the students were my priority and I remember making decisions and being faced with a choice of well do I do something for my kids or do I do I do something for my students and I would go with my students. I think that is wrong and that was a big mistake and somehow if there is a choice it is a no-brainer. Our adoptive daughter gets the time and the attention because these other people's kids, other people can take the time for their kids if they so desire. (Adoptive Father)

Managing their Work Contexts—Consideration of Work Changes

All of the adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed whether they had considered making work-related changes. All twenty of the parents talked about their current and future work plans. Half of the couples (5 of 10) were planning to maintain their current work arrangements and the other half (5 of 10) were anticipating no changes to their work contexts. The majority of adoptive parents (12 of 20) who were planning to keep their current work arrangements consisted of more adoptive fathers (7 of 10) than mothers (5 of 10). However, the majority of adoptive couples (seven of ten) had at least one spouse who had made significant work-related changes. In two of the seven couples, both spouses had made changes to their work context. Overall, 9 of the 20 adoptive parents who had made work-related changes included slightly more adoptive fathers (5 of 9) than mothers (4 of 9).

I think we would have been okay without children but with children, the stress, and all the hours that I was putting in and he was putting in, there was just no room for children and that is not how our life was and that is not how I wanted our life to be...so something needed to change. (Adoptive Mother)

So we are looking for (work changes) ...because we want to raise our kids. So being at home is our priority. (Adoptive Mother)

Well, for a while, a couple or three years then maybe one of us may step away for a few years if it works out financially. We have talked about it. (Adoptive Father)

Well, she has several relationships at work you know. She has some friends and stuff. If she just sat around here... I would probably be better off than her, I could actually sit around and watch soaps all day and do the household stuff. It would not bother me at all. (Adoptive Father)

Financially, because I am making more money now, we have kind of thought about that too about whether he would want to stay at home. (Adoptive Mother)
I really like what I do, it is just that there are too many hours and I don’t like the hours. Actually, before we had Josh we were trying to figure our a way for me to stay home or figure out if it would be reasonable for me to go down to part-time, especially, well a just more reasonable number of hours. But since we have him, I have been having second thoughts, I am not sure that is what I would really want to do, to be here everyday. (Adoptive Mother)

Well, I just think it is nice to go and have a break and go and be around adults for awhile. And I really didn’t anticipate that. I just thought I would want to be home everyday. (Adoptive Mother)

Not really more time. It is more time right now because we are in qualification. But no, not really, it will just shift probably a little bit. But eventually, down the road when I get to where my director is and has been, he would like to quit his job and stay at home as well. So he would be the urban engineer. So we are looking at the flexibility of him at least having the option of doing what he would like to do. Whether it is part-time work or... he is also in the National Guard, so he does have another part-time thing. (Adoptive Mother)

I got some friends that are playing Mr. Mom while their wife is working and I told her before that I think it would be kind of fun, I think maybe, someday. So that is kind of an idea. (Adoptive Father)

Yeah. It is close to home, I am fifteen minutes from work...yeah, I like it. The job that I had before I would work from 4am to 9,10 or 11pm at night. I am glad I don't do that now because I would rather not. So I cut my schedule by quite a bit by going to this job and now I would like to get it fine tuned and running then I'd would like to work until 2pm and call it good. (Adoptive Father)

Not such a heavy schedule. When she gets to that level, I probably would work 2-3 days a week. I'd have to see what all the boys are involved in and see what happens. Once she makes it to that directorship, that is just helping us. (Adoptive Father)

It wasn’t because of it though I think that it played a small role in it just because I knew that the responsibilities were going to be greater. It was a very emotional time for me. I was dealing with my sister, obviously, giving her child up and me taking on another child, dealing with my children bringing in another child, my husband and myself, our relationship, and bringing in another child that we really never planned for. So that had added to already large stress that I had had at work in that job. I think that it made me really decide to change. So I think that it played a role in it but it was not the deciding factor. I had no idea what the position was going to hold for me that it was going to be a whole lot different, I just knew that I just wanted something different. (Adoptive Mother)
Yeah. Well, when we...I was kind of transitioning, I have the same employer but I recently changed jobs just a year ago. So just when we got him, I changed positions. And in my former position, it would not have been as easy. (Adoptive Father)

We could get by. But I think especially the...the people that know us know what we have gone through, first to get pregnant and have our birth son and then to see him die. And then to go through all this to get our adoptive children, I think they thought that I should want to stay at home and spend every waking moment with them and um...but I really like teaching and I think it is best for all of us that I am not with them 100% of the time. They have gotten to do so many neat things and get to meet people and be exposed to more other households, other groups of kids...as far as their socialization and learning what...like our adoptive daughter, what other 4 year olds do, which is very different from what she was doing a year ago, I think she needs to see a lot of that. I don’t feel a bit bad about them being in daycare. I don’t feel that is a detriment to them at all. (Adoptive Mother)

My own adoptive kids are the reason that I can’t go back to the classroom because I worked all day teaching then spent every evening correcting papers and weekends doing grades and papers and all of that stuff. (Adoptive Mother)

And my wife knows I do spend probably...and I do feel a little guilty, I spend more time, probably each day a little longer at work than I did previously. But I don’t have to worry about Saturdays or Sundays or anything as much. So that is the major reason is that I don’t have to...yeah, I want to spend time with the kids. That is just the way that I felt. (Adoptive Father)

Also in the last year, I have taken a new job where my time is more flexible but I do spend more time Monday through Friday at work. Not so much weekends or anything but some nights are a little bit different. What I try and do is that in the past I might have taken stuff home, now I try and get it done at work for two reasons. One is that I want to spend time with the kids, that is major reason. Second thing, I would never get it done anyway or it would be at 1 o’clock at night. You want to be sleeping. So as far as the work thing, I try and make sure that I get everything done at work if I can. (Adoptive Father)

And a lot of things that you look at is when the kids are in school, there is more of a block of time where you could go back to work if you wanted to do that. Like I have said, we talked about it. I don’t know, I leave it up to my wife. I think that the kids are adjusting very well the way it is going now. Obviously, problems in the future, we might have to do some thinking but at this point it seems to be going pretty good. (Adoptive Father)
Yeah, but if it gets me some more flexibility that is...that is my frustration with the school district. I love having the summer off but I don’t feel they give us any flexibility with needing to leave or if I want to go on a field trip with her when she gets to school. I’m going to be taking medical transcription classes and a lot of times they set you up in your home to do that and that is my goal to be able to work at home. (Adoptive Mother)

I hope that the hours decrease and I will have more (family) involvement, I guess. That is the only thing that I see in my workplace that would change. Eventually down the line it won’t be 60-70 hours a week, it will be 40-50 or 50, you know around there. (Adoptive Father)

So, I mean...ideally I would look at it and say, gee, I would love to be able to stay at home with her and then when I actually sit down and think about the day-to-day and what that would be like, I think wow, can I do that, would I be happy? Then I think of the tradeoffs in having her in daycare. There are so many things that they do for her developmentally and being around all those kids her age, she learns so much from them. And so it is a tradeoff and I don’t know that I will end up staying at home but we certainly talk about it from time to time. Because when I think about it, it kind of freaks me out not being in the social work field and being out of touch with all of that because that is pretty much who I am and what I do. (Adoptive Mother)

But as far as that goes, that has been my biggest challenge and I have actually had to cut back on my job to accommodate them because the flexibility is just not there with them here. When I just had our birth daughter, I had 21 students. And then when we got our first adoptive daughter, we bumped it down to 19 and this year I have bumped it clear down to 13 (with the addition of our second adoptive daughter). And that is a big, big difference for me but I just could not accommodate the job and the girls and we really felt that the girls were the priority over the job. (Adoptive Mother)

I am not planning to double my hours in a year from now for something like that. I am not planning on cutting back or taking a lower position just so that I can do more stuff at home. (Adoptive Father)

Handling Family Needs During Work Hours

All ten adoptive couples discussed the challenge of handling family needs during their work hours. This need to handle family needs during work hours was mentioned by all 20 adoptive parents. The typical family needs that come up during work hours include sick child, breakdowns in daycare arrangements, appointments, school-related issues, and other emergencies. Most mothers (8 of 10) were primarily responsible for responding to family needs during work hours because their work was more flexible than fathers’ work. Incidentally, more mothers (eight of ten) had flexible jobs than fathers (4 of 10). The other
adoptive couples (2 of 10) indicated that they shared responsibility for handling family needs during work hours.

I would say I am a little more flexible because of the nature of my job. If I have to be gone in the afternoon I can just stay later at night or alter my own work schedule at little more. (Adoptive Mother)

As a teacher it is real easy, especially in my job as a Title 1 teacher. I don’t have a classroom. I pull kids out and bring them to me. So that is an easy job for them to say, no sub. (Adoptive Mother)

I think that it is fair to say that you have things that need to be done on a day-to-day basis in terms of your job responsibilities and mine is a little different. And since I can kind of flex out my hours, it is a little easier for me to stay home, even if he wasn’t in a new job situation I would carry a little more weight in that respect because I can adjust a little bit easier. (Adoptive Mother)

I think that my job is a little more flexible than his job is about not necessarily needing me to be there all the time. His job is quite a bit more important to the daily needs that...I mean, if you don’t have a body there to fix a truck, the truck doesn’t get fixed...but I have got other same people that do my job that can pick up the slack if they need to. (Adoptive Mother)

Sometimes somebody even had to stay home because we couldn’t come up with somebody. (Adoptive Mother)

However, even adoptive mothers with flexible job demands still struggle to find the time to get their work demands completed. Additionally, these adoptive mothers often only have a finite amount of “family-needs time” in their work contracts, so once it is exhausted the family has to find another way to meet these emergent needs.

And so it has been easier for me to take the time off, however that is trying on my job because I am not there as much as I used to be before we has her and so that has been more difficult for me to juggle. (Adoptive Mother)

If I ask him or say, we need to make this appointment, can you take the child. He does it and never says, no, I can’t, unless there is absolutely no way that he can get away or something has come up and then I will do that. And I don’t mind doing it all of the time but I run out off sick time...and we have three children now and if we have a real sick year, my sick time can be used up in March and then I have nothing left. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive mothers did not have the benefit of flexibility to respond to family needs during work hours.
It is tough sometimes. My work is not very flexible even though I have summers off as a teacher, it is not at all flexible...it is like I have to be there at the beginning time. There is no such thing as taking off an hour for an appointment or anything like that. So that has been difficult. (Adoptive Mother)

We had to just...he had to take her to work and then come back. But we have not had a lot of problems with that. I have used my emergency days a couple of times if we didn’t have daycare or if she was sick or something. And we have sick time, sometimes you call in sick, you have too, you know. That comes first as far as I am concerned. (Adoptive Mother)

Some of the adoptive mothers with home-based businesses had particular difficulties managing family needs during the work hours because the boundaries between work and family were much less defined.

Very carefully. (Laughs) Since my business is based out of my home, I try to...I can do a lot obviously when they are with me. Nap times are the busiest times because I scramble as best I can. And then I have found that as the baby as gotten older what times work best ... what times in the day do not work best I don’t even try to do anything. So primarily I do a little in the morning, if I need to I make a couple of phone calls and then in the afternoon and the evening. There is a break there, I work different sections of the day. (Adoptive Mother)

Mine is different because I do work from home and with the girls here that has caused...actually that has been difficult. Because unfortunately they need almost 100% of my time when they are here, where with our oldest, birth child, she was with us always and it was just the way mom did things and she did not need that 100% time and I could say, ‘go downstairs and play’ and she could go and play and not come upstairs thirty times and interrupt. (Adoptive Mother)

So I have their schedules set up in ten-minute segments and so they move from one thing to the next and they don’t have to come and ask me. And so that has been from the moment that they walk in the door because I am teaching even before they get home from school. So as soon as they walk in the door they know what they need to do and then I can say, how was your day? And I can always tell by their response, how well their day was and so if I need to have a little interruption there I will take a minute or two in my schedule. (Adoptive Mother)

And like if one of the kids are sick, how I will schedule it is I will call and say I have a child that has whatever, they will be upstairs in their room with the door shut, (because we have a monitor so that we can hear anything that is going on), it will be up to you whether you come or not. And nine times out of ten they will come but I do have that one person that will say, I am not bringing my child, and that is fine. But if I were to call at the drop of a hat several times, I would actually lose clients. (Adoptive Mother)
Several adoptive couples noted that the adoptive mother is usually the person to arrange for who will respond to family needs during work hours. It was helpful to learn the process of how parents decide who will respond to these needs.

Well, I usually get the call first because the school or a family member will probably call me first. If I cannot get away, I can contact him at work and we can have this discussion. We usually talk once a day anyway at work. He usually calls me to see if there is anything that needs to be done. If I am not able to leave to come home, I will call him and we will have a discussion and usually one of us can make it. Well, always one of us can make it, but if I can't then he can usually come home and take care of the situation or emergency or whatever. (Adoptive Mother)

We both have pretty understanding supervisors when it comes to family things so if he was sick for an extended period of time we would probably just take every other day off and they would be okay about that. Like he has a doctor’s appointment on Monday, and we have not decided who is going to take him, it just depends on how work goes on Monday. (Adoptive Father)

The majority of adoptive couples reported that the father’s work has been fairly flexible and supportive about responding to family needs during work hours. However, for most of the adoptive couples it is the adoptive mother that takes time off from work when family needs arise. It is usually only after mothers have exhausted their family-related leave benefits or are unavailable at work to respond to the family-related need that fathers will leave work to handle the situation.

And after I used up those four days right off the bat then he started... he is more flexible to take an hour or two, or something over lunch or coming in late or leaving early, but I can not do any of that. (Adoptive Mother)

For me, my work schedule is that…my work is basically Monday through Friday and then my extra research time is in the evenings and weekends. I have to be...it is not like I can do my work from home, I can’t do that. There are days when I have said to my boss that I need to leave early and I have to be at this obligation. When we were working on the early stages of our adoptive daughter, there were days when I went to my boss and said I will be using my vacation time for these next couple of days, these next couple of weeks and I got my work schedule arranged such that I could do that so that if I had meetings I could put those on alternative days and I took those days or afternoons off work. (Adoptive Father)
Say I was here and it was 2pm and I take back to daycare at 3pm because I have to leave shortly after that. So I take her every day at 3. Say she got sick at 2pm, all of a sudden she came down with the flu...if there was nobody, I wouldn’t want to take her up there with the other kids because... I wouldn’t do that anyhow but if I couldn’t get a hold of her and have her (mother) come home or something and she probably couldn’t...she was in the middle of a class or something. If I couldn’t find someone to stay with her, I could call my employer. They are home so one of them could probably run the route. And they would be real good about that. So if it came right to that I could just call them. That is an understanding and they are real good about it. (Adoptive Father)

Some adoptive fathers with flexible work schedules are able to respond the family needs during work hours at least as much as adoptive mothers.

He is available to go to school if the kids have a school issue or they need to come home from school. He can be sitting her or arrange to supervise as he needs to. (Adoptive Mother)

They are pretty supportive. They do not like people to abuse the system. We had people interview with us were they said that at a drop of a hat they may have to go and take care of their kids. They are flexible but they do not want people to abuse it. (Adoptive Father)

I have had to leave early a couple of times because our backup (childcare) would say, yeah, I can do it but I can do it only until two o’clock. (Adoptive Father)

But then there has been times when I have been able to take off. They don’t care, it is understood, you know, that family comes first. I think that it has been that way in the companies that I have worked for. Everybody understands that you have a personal life and that family is important, more important than a job or a career. (Adoptive Father)

Yeah. I can do whatever I need to do. I am in charge of my schedule, in charge of my work. Jeff’s is ... is very flexible. I mean he does... if there was an emergency and unless he was gone and physically could not be around, he could probably leave. So that is not a problem. So, yesterday we got locked out of the house, or the day before. He is only ten minutes away, so I was able to call him and come and unlock the house. That was before ten o’clock in the morning. So there is some flexibility there. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive fathers handle family needs during work hours by taking their children to work to ease the burden on mother’s work-related demands.
We are strong family-oriented so family takes priority over work or other aspects. We try to integrate as much as we can. One of my businesses is mowing and snow removal so I used the kids as much as they wanted to work and earn some money. (Adoptive Father)

There have been times that he worked ... he is salaried but he works a lot of different hours. If there is nobody there, he will be there loading trucks and doing stuff. Sometimes he will take Matthew so that he can ride the forklift with him and he thinks that is great. (Adoptive Mother)

**Use of Maternity/Paternity Leave and Other Time off for Adoption**

All of the adoptive couples (ten of ten) discussed their use of maternity/paternity leave and other time off for the adoption. Almost all of adoptive parents (19 of 20; 10 of 10 fathers and 9 of 10 mothers) talked about whether they took time off from work for the adoption and the extent of that time. In the majority of adoptive couples who took time off for the adoption, it was the adoptive mother who took the time off from her work. The majority of adoptive mothers (7 of 10) utilized their maternity leave for the adoption. However, only one father used his paternity leave for the adoption.

I think it is expected that you are going to take the five days for sure and then most people, most mothers take six weeks. I think if you get much beyond six weeks, not that there....not quite as supportive if I said I was going to take twelve weeks off. (Adoptive Mother)

I used mine. All six weeks they gave me, which I think is wonderful. There is nothing in our contract about adoption. You know, it was all child birth stuff and I was like if nothing is in there, can I have six weeks? And they were very generous and said, go right ahead. And she needed six weeks. (Adoptive Mother)

You know, we would very much recommend that. I have been thinking about that. She has attached very well to us which is really surprising. She has got an attachment disorder and she is attaching to us. And that is because I was at home for six weeks and you (father) were at home for two months. (Adoptive Mother)

Some adoptive mothers experienced resistance from their employers when they requested paid maternity leave for their adoptions.

Very difficult for me. I was not going to paid at all and through the school district maternity leave is generally paid through your sick days. And I had over...I had 124 sick days that I had built up. If I had gone into the hospital and given birth, I would have gotten six weeks of paid maternity leave. But because I had this newborn and I hadn’t given birth to her, I wasn’t going to be paid. So I did go through my union
president and he dealt with personnel. I could take up to 12 weeks Family Medical Leave but they would all be unpaid and I just felt that to be really discriminatory with adoptions. (Adoptive Mother)

And so I have talked to the union president about getting that into negotiations for a contract for adoptions because I just find that to be very discriminatory...maybe not six weeks but four weeks. You cannot put a two-week old baby in daycare. I put her in at five weeks which is early. And not everybody can afford to take six weeks off without pay. It was a very trying and nerve racking situation. (Adoptive Mother)

I had gone to human resources first and they said, there really was no leave for adoption, originally. I did my own research (Laughs). I accepted that answer but I went out and continued to do research. Yeah. It is not publicized very much, I can tell you that. It took some time for me to pull the information out of the benefits handbooks that we do get. It is not something that is advertised much. (Adoptive Mother)

One adoptive mother found a way to circumvent her employer’s lack of maternity benefits for adoption.

And I was getting up with her in the middle of the night and I was tired from taking care of her so I did get a doctor’s excuse for at least three weeks of paid leave. I had one week unpaid and I took four and a half weeks. I did use my emergency day and personal day. I kind of had to get around it and they weren’t real happy but...They were really angry and one woman called the doctor’s office. The nurse said, what are you doing? And he said, ‘well she has had back problems and she needs three weeks off.’ (Adoptive Mother)

Several mothers had considered maternity leave for their adoption but did not pursue it for financial or job-related reasons.

With me, my work had been so good to me already that I didn’t dare pursue anymore because I was in bed four months before our birth son was born. And then requested a one-year leave of absence and they had given me that. (Adoptive Mother)

Well, it is kind of hard to take a leave at that point because you cannot tell your employer for 100% sure that we are adopting this child therefore this is the beginning of our adopting because it is such a gray...it is like, well, we are hoping to,...but when things are through DHS it is not like an international placement where obviously the child is here and obviously you are adopting. (Adoptive Mother)

However, it (Family Medical Leave Act) was without pay...so that option for most people including us, really wasn’t an option, I guess. (Adoptive Mother)
I don't think that if we had come up to our bosses and said, 'hey, we are adopting a child and thinking of taking three months off.' I don't think that they would have said, no, you can't. But obviously when you own a business and you have people that you are counting on and if they take an extended period of time off, it is not a good thing. You always have to make up for that extra person being gone. (Adoptive Mother)

Since I am self-employed I didn't have a traditional maternity leave. When we got our first adoptive son we had no notice, basically we were ... we had a week notice that we were chosen to be the adopted parents and the whole process was only three weeks long. So we got him very quickly. And so basically my business slowed ... almost to a stop for three months. (Adoptive Mother)

It seems that there was a trend for adoptive fathers not to use available paternity leaves at their workplace. Some did not even look into paternity leave available through the Family Medical Leave Act. Additionally, several adoptive fathers took no time (including vacation) at all for the adoption. This may be due in part to the financial burden that the adoptive families would incur if the fathers were off work for significant period of time.

I really have never had to access that at all. I have a certain amount of vacation time that I am allowed during the year and if I take time off, I just used that. I have never actually raised the argument to my boss that well I have to invoke the federal act. (Adoptive Father)

It would be very difficult for me to take time off. (Adoptive Father)

I guess I hadn't really looked. I think there is in the company policy and I suppose I could have used that but guess we just didn't. We didn't do that. They don't have any problem with people doing that. (Adoptive Father)

And as far as just starting a job and my vacation time, I would rather save it for family, where we can all go together. (Adoptive Father)

One adoptive father worked for an employer who had a new policy allowing a brief paid paternity leave for adoptions.

We were some of the first employees to get this paternity leave, 5 days for fathers, the first time ever and when we took him in I got the five days to take whenever which just had to be in the first six months. (Adoptive Father)

Another adoptive father had an unusual split shift that allowed him to be home with his adoptive daughter rendering a paternity leave unnecessary.
In my case too, I don’t need to take...I could have taken any amount of time I wanted off but I still come back during the day. I am gone early in the morning and I am almost back by the time she gets up. With me, I am here anyhow. So it works out good with the way my job works out. (Adoptive Father)

Discussion of Sharing Responsibilities and Workplace Management

It is important to understand how dual-earner couples manage special-needs adoptive placements because they have to handle both typical parenting demands and the added layer of adoption-specific demands. Thus, adoptive couples’ management of these demands is explored in two primary contexts: (a) family work distribution within the family context, and (b) each spouse’s negotiation with their employer to manage family needs in the work context.

*The Family Context*

The process of family work within each of the adoptive couples is explored through their basis for family work distribution. Family work distribution was handled in these adoptive couples through five primary methods: (a) parent availability; (b) parent stress-level handoff; (c) parent task competency; (d) parent task preference/desirability; (e) parent guilt. The family work distribution basis of *parent availability* was the most common basis (eight of ten) among the adoptive couples. Coltrane (1990) also found that family work in dual-earner couples as distributed based on parent availability because he identified that involved fathers tended to notice and handle more of the housework when their wives were at work. The basis of parent availability is both structurally and individually determined because parents are limited in their availability by their work schedules and those schedules are only flexible to an extent. This is where each spouse’s negotiation with an employer is essential because it determines the extent of their availability to handle the various family work responsibilities. Deutsch, Lussier, and Servis (1993) indicated that the demand-response (structural) theory is one of the theories used to explain paternal involvement in family labor. Deutsch et al. indicate that the structural theory states that fathers become more involved in family work when there are greater family labor needs and it coincides with father’s *time availability*. However, this theory assumes that father’s availability is fixed and non-negotiable with their employers. The effect of this assumption is that adoptive mothers
become primarily responsible to handle family needs when the adoptive fathers are unavailable because of their work demands.

The *parent stress-level handoff* basis of family work distribution was also common (7 of 10) among the adoptive couples. It is noteworthy that it was a basis used almost exclusively by adoptive fathers. Either fathers would notice that their wives were overwhelmed and would step in and take primary responsibility for their child(ren) or mothers would tell fathers that they were at their limit with their child(ren). Westhaus and Cohen (1990) found that father’s noninvolvement in parenting tasks is a significant predictor of adoption placement disruption. Therefore, regardless of whether the parent stress-level handoff basis is initiated by the mother or the father, it is protective to the adoptive placement that fathers are finding ways to involve themselves in their adoptive child’s care. Ward (1997) emphasized that couples with unequal commitment to the adoptive placement are also at risk for disruption. Thus, adoptive couples where fathers regularly find ways to provide respite for adoptive mothers shows their commitment to their adoptive child(ren). Moreover, Arendell’s (2000) review of the mothering literature identified that the most distressed mothers are those who are married, employed, have young children, encounter difficulty with childcare arrangements, and handle childcare mostly alone. Arendell also noted that mothers often experience more negative emotions at home because they are held primarily responsible for family labor while fathers experience more positive emotions because they benefit from their wives’ labor. Hence, adoptive fathers’ willingness to take over for their wives when they become overwhelmed with the primary care responsibilities of their adoptive child limits the impact of maternal distress within the adoptive placements.

The family work distribution basis of *parent task competency* was also found among the majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10). When both adoptive parents are available, the parent who is better at performing the childcare/housework task would be assigned responsibility for that task. However, this basis is fraught with problems because previous unfair distributions may have resulted in the disproportional assignment of “dirty work” to mothers who then become more competent in those tasks. This vicious cycle results in “dirty work” being innocently assigned based on competence to mothers and the underlying task distribution basis never questioned among couples. Braverman (1991) cautions us to be
aware of men who are unwilling to learn from their more experienced wives how to perform certain childcare/household tasks. She found that this was fathers' indirect method of maintaining the current family work distribution that would leave mothers primarily responsible for family labor, particularly undesirable tasks. This was also true in the interviews with the adoptive couples, around the topic of performance of household cleaning tasks. Several fathers identified that household cleanliness was less a priority to them than their wives and the unspoken implication of this that their wives were expected to handle the cleaning because it was more important to them. Interestingly, Gager (1998) found that wives often colluded in their assessments of unequal family labor distributions as fair by indicating that they took on more of the responsibilities because they are more efficient and could "multi-task" better than their husbands. This is only a slight variation on the "skills" argument but fascinating that mothers participate in the justification for the unequal family work distribution that impacts them negatively. However, Gager found that mothers are willing to cover for father's lack of participation in household labor if the father is involved in other aspects of the family, such as childcare. Yet, Gerson (1993) also would have difficulty accepting parent task competency as a reasonable basis for family work distribution because she identified how some fathers resist full equity by becoming "mothers' helpers." These mothers' helpers explained their unequal participation in family work through use of the "skills argument" whereby the fathers did less housework and the undesirable childcare tasks because they had fewer skills than their wives. Thus, parent task competency is a family work distribution basis that seems to benefit fathers at the expense of mothers.

Another basis for family work distribution was parent task preference/desirability that was utilized in the majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10). Parent task preference/desirability is as problematic a basis for family work distribution as parent task competency. Braverman (1991) would agree wholeheartedly with Gerson's (1993) point that fathers who are "mothers' helpers" would utilize parent task preference as a method to escape responsibility for undesirable family work. Gerson notes that "mothers' helpers" explain that they do less housework because their wives have higher cleaning standards and that cleanliness is a higher priority to mothers. Thus, fathers are saying that mothers should do the housework because it is more important to them (high preference) and less a priority
(low preference) to fathers. But this tends to confuse the notions of priority and preference for a household/childcare task. This begs the question for mothers to fathers, “Why am I required to do all the undesirable housework/childcare tasks that are more important to me than you?” Both parent task competency and parent task preference/desirability are individually determined bases for family work distribution and thus the most critical targets for change within couple relationships.

A more positive basis for family work distribution was parental guilt. However, this was the least utilized basis (2 of 10) for family work distribution and was also used exclusively by adoptive fathers. It is a very encouraging basis for family work distribution because these two fathers were attuned to the inequities in their division of family labor and used their sense guilt about their lesser efforts to increase their contributions. However, it should be clarified that one of the fathers used his guilt to increase his family work contributions while the other father became aware of the inequities at times and felt guilty though used justifications to explain why he did not do more to help. Likewise, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) described a promising group of couples who were in transitional phase to negotiation of a more equitable division of family labor. They indicated that these couples had recognized the inequality in their relationship and appeared dissatisfied with the status quo. This sounds very similar to the adoptive fathers who felt guilty at times for the lopsided division of family labor in their adoptive couple relationships. Unfortunately, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney found these “transitioning” couples to be a small minority and I found these adoptive couples to be uncommon as well.

In terms of improving family work distribution between adoptive mothers and fathers several of the bases hold hope for change and two are very encouraging. If adoptive fathers negotiated their work schedules such that they could respond more to emergent family needs that availability as a basis for family work distribution would become less problematic as a structurally determined basis. Additionally, if mothers questioned parent task competency and parent task preference as acceptable bases for family work distribution it could have the potential to help fathers become more involved in some of the least desirable family work. More positively, the use of parent stress-level handoff and parent guilt by adoptive fathers are an excellent step in the process of becoming more aware of inequities in the family work
distribution with their wives and hopefully will encourage more fathers to increase their family labor contributions in the future.

Family work distribution among these adoptive couples required re-negotiation because the majority of the couples (8 of 10) indicated that requests for more help were commonplace. This demonstrates that the current division of family labor between adoptive mothers and fathers were unsatisfactory, it is adoptive mothers who are dissatisfied with the current division of family work because in every couple (eight of eight) it is the mother that requests more help with the family labor. This reinforces Rosenthal's (1982) finding that adoption can place strain on a marital relationship. Additionally, Ward (1997) expressed concern that adoptive fathers' lesser participation in the family labor reflects unequal commitment to the adoptive placement and that, coupled with their inflexible parent role, would put the placement at-risk for disruption.

This unsatisfactory division of family work within dual-earner adoptive couples is problematic because Voydanoff (1987) emphasized that mothers with simultaneous work/family staging require a symmetrical division of family labor to adapt to the increased demands. Likewise, Feree (1990) noted that typically in dual-earner families, mothers have been willing to share the economic provider responsibilities but fathers have been slow to share the family work responsibilities. However, it is helpful that adoptive mothers are asking for more assistance from adoptive fathers and not trying to rely on individual solutions to the family labor problems. Further, Coltrane (1990) inquired what motivated mothers in dual-earner couples to try to share the domestic labor and found that mothers were encouraged to regularly remind their husbands to help more with the family work because it tended to get fathers to participate more with the family work. Yet, fathers may only participate more because mothers are asking for it rather than showing the initiative themselves. This still leaves mothers burdened with the responsibility for family work supervision. Braverman (1991) indicated that mothers had to ask fathers to help more because fathers' increased participation in the family labor may be on their own terms and may still result in mothers having to manage when fathers choose not to contribute. Thus, the family work distribution basis of parent task preference is often clearly operating even when adoptive mothers request more help from adoptive fathers. It is only when adoptive mothers
request more help from fathers and refuse to accept parent task preference as the basis to determine when fathers will participate more in the family labor that meaningful change will have taken place with these couples.

These adoptive couples where mothers are requesting more assistance with the family work from fathers are similar to Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (1998) couples who were in the process of negotiating more equality in their marital relationships. The authors described their couples as identifying inequalities in their relationships, they seemed dissatisfied with the current distribution of family labor. Moreover, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney indicated that one of the methods couples used to address equality issues was confrontation and also found that it was women who were most likely to initiate discussions on inequality issues. However, mothers' requests for more help are not a guarantee of equality as fathers' responses to these requests can be quite variable. In fact, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) found that women were more successful in negotiating increased father involvement in family labor if the mothers had more education, income, and longer work hours than fathers. Although, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane noted that their sample of couples, like my sample of adoptive couples, did not typically have mothers in more prestigious careers than fathers. Actually, the reverse was most common. Thus, it does not bode well for adoptive mothers requesting more help from adoptive fathers because usually it is the father who has the higher education, income, and longer work hours. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane found that when mothers worked half the hours of fathers and made one quarter the income that fathers engaged in only 21% of the housework and 26% of the childcare labor. This would suggest that mothers who contribute substantially less to family economic needs will experience the most difficulty in encouraging fathers to consistently respond to requests for more involvement in family labor.

Moreover, Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) explained that relationship outcomes are more important than task outcomes to mothers meaning that if adoptive mothers were satisfied in their marital relationship, they were less likely to raise conflict about the lopsided division of labor. It is interesting that most of mothers in the adoptive couples (8 of 10) in the current study had made requests for more help with the family labor. According to Freudenthaler and Mikula, their requests for more help may suggest that the
adoptive mothers are also dissatisfied with their marital relationship. If adoptive mothers are satisfied in their marital relationships, then the fact that most request more help from fathers calls Freudenthaler and Mikula’s finding into question.

Another way to view adoptive mothers’ requests for more help from adoptive fathers with the family work is in terms of maternal distress. Ross and Von Willigen (1996) found that mothers had significantly higher levels of anger than fathers or childless adults that suggests that women are dissatisfied with being primarily responsible for family labor. Ross and Von Willigen had asked mothers the source of their anger and the majority mentioned their husbands first. Thus, it becomes doubly important that adoptive fathers respond consistently to adoptive mothers’ requests for more assistance because inconsistency or refusal to help is likely to only fuel further maternal distress. However, Carlisle (1993) indicated that mothers requesting more help from fathers is the most common coping strategy (65%) for women in dual-earner relationships. Fathers’ responses to mothers’ requests for help will determine whether it is actually a coping strategy or a futile attempt to share the burden of the family labor.

Despite the majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) indicating that they have had disagreements about the family work distribution, no parents would indicate that the family labor arrangement was unfair. Not surprisingly, with the exception of one adoptive father, the majority of the disagreements about family work distribution were based on complaints initiated by adoptive mothers. And it is consistent with the literature that even mothers who are responsible for the brunt of family labor do not typically define it as unfair (Mikula, 1998; Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998; Gager, 1998). Thus, Mikula notes that the majority (70-80%) of mothers do not define the lopsided division of family labor as unfair, while a minority (20-30%) will note that it is somewhat unfair and a smaller minority define it as very unfair. Similarly, Freudenthaler and Mikula found support for the notion that women do not define inequitable family work distributions as unfair if fathers’ contributions are comparable to other men’s participation in family labor. Mothers would use this same-gender comparison to justify the unequal division of family labor. Moreover, Freudenthaler and Mikula also indicate that if mothers are satisfied in other aspects of the relationship they are less likely to define the lopsided division of family labor as unfair. Similarly, Gager found
that mothers were less concerned about issues of fairness because their valued outcomes were tied to the family labor and therefore it was important to them that they did a satisfactory job. Yet, Gager explained that mothers just wanted more help from fathers with the division of family labor because they felt overburdened but it was not an issue of fairness. It seems that the definition of a lopsided division of family labor as fair is inconsistent with the majority of adoptive mothers requesting more help and initiating disagreements about the family work division with fathers. If the family work distribution were not a problem, we would have found that the majority of adoptive mothers would not have asked for more help and that disagreements about the division of family labor would have been uncommon occurrence. However, Stohs (1995) and Klewer, Heesink, and Van de Vliert (1996) found that mothers’ dissatisfaction with the division of family labor was a significant predictor of marital conflict. If most adoptive mothers’ request more help with the family work and disagreements about family labor are common among the adoptive couples, it is safe to say that most adoptive mothers have some dissatisfaction with the current division of family labor. Therefore, issues of fairness in the division of family labor are somewhat of a misnomer with these adoptive couples that do have some conflict.

Encouragingly, some of the adoptive couples (4 of 10) described changes that had been enacted in their family work distribution. It is noteworthy that in all of the couples, it is the adoptive father that had made a commitment to participate more in the family labor. This is a positive sign for these couples and Ward (1997) would find it protective that these fathers are not constrained by inflexible family roles. It also demonstrates again how these fathers show commitment to the adoptive placement. Even Braverman (1991) who is usually skeptical about fathers’ stating that they are willing to help out more would be impressed by these fathers’ accepting more responsibility for some of the family tasks. This would be a prime example of a successful redistribution of family labor between parents. However, it is discouraging that the majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) failed to share the ways that they have been able to redistribute the family labor in their relationships. This may suggest that adoptive mothers’ requests for more assistance from adoptive fathers have gone unheeded.

To clarify the distribution of family work within the adoptive couple relationships, the sharing of parenting tasks, household tasks, and family organizational planning were
explored. It was noted that a slight majority (6 of 10) of adoptive couples reported sharing parenting responsibilities. The other adoptive couples (4 of 10) included families where the mother was the primary caregiver for the children though half of those couples (2 of 4) did regularly share some of the childcare responsibilities. Westhaus and Cohen (1990) would be concerned with the adoptive fathers who seem less involved with their parenting responsibilities because they have found that father noninvolvement places adoptive placements at-risk for disruption. Conversely, for the adoptive fathers who share the parenting responsibilities, their paternal involvement protects the adoptive placement from disruption. Similarly, Ward (1997) would question both their commitment to the adoptive placement and stubborn adherence to an inflexible family role for the adoptive fathers that are less involved with the parenting responsibilities. Ward also would consider these adoptive couples more at-risk for placement disruption. Yet, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) noted that paternal involvement in parenting responsibilities is dependent on whether the mother or the father is more educated, earns more income, and works longer hours. Likewise, they reported that mothers who worked half the hours of fathers and earned one quarter fathers’ income though fathers participated in only 26% of the childcare responsibilities. However, Yeung et al. (2001) found that fathers participate significantly more in childcare responsibilities on weekends compared to weekdays. But even on weekends, paternal involvement in childcare did not approach the maternal involvement level. Hence, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane do make a significant point when they highlight that negotiation over the division of childcare labor within a couple is influenced by the respective spouse’s education and work position (income and hours available). Overall with adoptive couples, fathers earned significantly more income and worked longer hours suggesting that mothers would experience difficulty in redistribution of the childcare labor. This seems consistent with the family labor distribution basis of parent availability because adoptive fathers work longer hours they are excused for less participation in the family work. Moreover, adoptive fathers’ higher incomes also partly explain paternal involvement. Fathers choose to maximize their time at work because their higher wages result in the increased benefits for the family while mothers maximizing their time with the children impacts the family less financially because of mothers’ comparably lower wages.
Hertz's (1997) typology of dual-earner couples' approaches to the management of childcare is also very relevant here. Only a minority (4 of 10) of the adoptive couples would fit Hertz's *parenting approach* whereby the family is organized around the childcare and both parents are full participants. The stumbling block for the other adoptive couples (2 of 10) that reported sharing parenting responsibilities is that the fathers were reluctant to reorganize their work hours with their employers to be more available for family needs. This inadvertently left the primary responsibility for responding to family needs during work hours to the adoptive mothers. Hertz's other two childcare management approaches are the *mothering approach* and the *market approach*. None of the adoptive couples were consistent with the description of the *mothering approach* because the criteria required mothers to maximize their time with the children while minimizing their time with all competing demands (work, husband, etc.). Similarly, fathers in the mothering approach were to maximize their work time while minimizing their time with family (children, wife, etc.). The fact that adoptive mothers on average worked fulltime hours would eliminate them from consideration of the *mothering approach* to childcare management. However, it seems that the slight majority (6 of 10) of adoptive couples utilized the *market approach* which states that couples emphasize their careers and use paid childcare to facilitate their ability to work. Hertz notes that fathers are only marginal participants with the childcare responsibilities with this approach that seemed consistent in only some of the adoptive couples here. However, it is consistent that adoptive mothers were still responsible for "second shift" family work responsibilities in the market approach.

The finding that the slight majority (6 of 10) of adoptive fathers share the parenting responsibilities with adoptive mothers is different than what the literature predicted. LaRossa (1988) described the incongruence between the culture and the conduct of fatherhood whereby fathers may be well aware of the discrepancy between the social expectations of paternal involvement and their actual involvement, resulting in fathers overstating their involvement with the childcare responsibilities. Lamb (1987) found that ratio of paternal involvement to maternal involvement in childcare (engagement, accessibility, and responsibility) were not significantly different for fulltime mothers compared to employed mothers of dual-earner families. This would suggest that adoptive mothers' employment
status makes little difference in the redistribution of childcare labor within adoptive couples. Similarly, LaRossa and LaRosssa (1981) found that for parents within the first year postpartum, the traditionalization process erodes the shared childcare labor distribution into mothers being left the primarily responsibility. Therefore, considering that the interviews with the adoptive couples occurred within the first eighteen months of placement, it is possible that childcare labor distribution had already undergone the traditionalization process for some adoptive couples.

Coltrane’s (1990) exploration of increased paternal involvement in dual-earner couples emphasized that fathers got more involved with the childcare labor because they were already established in their careers and maternal employment provided them ample opportunity to parent “solo.” This is consistent with the experiences of many of the adoptive fathers where the majority were in established careers and had regular opportunities to be the primary parent while the adoptive mothers were away from the home. The opportunity for fathers to parent “solo” would be an example of the family work distribution basis of parent availability. For most of the adoptive couples, fathers worked longer hours than mothers and therefore it was more likely that mothers would be expected to parent “solo.” In the adoptive couples (6 of 10) where fathers received regular opportunities to parent “solo,” only half of the adoptive couples were in situations where mothers work schedules required fathers to parent alone. In the other adoptive couples (3 of 6), adoptive mothers proactively arranged to have the adoptive fathers parent the child(ren) “solo,” providing mothers some personal time and fathers private time with the children. This may also be an example of the parent stress-level handoff basis of family work distribution whereby adoptive mothers were in need of regular breaks from the constant vigilance of childcare labor. However, it is positive that many of the adoptive fathers (6 of 10) are reported to contribute significantly to the childcare labor.

Unfortunately, in contrast to the slight majority of adoptive fathers (6 of 10) that shared the childcare labor, the vast majority of adoptive fathers (9 of 10) left the responsibility for household labor to adoptive mothers. Ward (1997) would wonder about these adoptive fathers’ commitment to the placement whereby they would assist with childcare but not household labor; the adoptive couples most at-risk would be those where
fathers were least involved in both childcare and household labor. Voydanoff (1987) highlighted the importance of a symmetrical division of family labor for employed mothers who stage their families and careers simultaneously. A lopsided division of family labor places undue stress on employed mothers and Feree (1990) would not be surprised that these employed adoptive mothers are still primarily responsible for household labor. Feree found employed mothers willing to help to ease the burden of economic provision responsibilities on fathers though fathers have been reluctant to help significantly more with the household labor. Similarly, Braverman (1991) indicated that employed adoptive mothers being held primarily responsible for household labor is another instance of power dynamics operating these marital relations. It is probable that childcare labor is more desirable than housework and therefore adoptive fathers are choosing to do less housework and requiring their wives to do more. This is a prime example of the family work distribution basis of parent task preference/desirability.

The finding that adoptive mothers are primarily responsible for household labor is consistent with Greenstein’s (1996) national survey results whereby mothers perform twice the amount of household labor as fathers. Iishi-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) found that mothers in dual-earner families performed four times as much housework as fathers. Yeung et al. (2001) also found in national surveys fathers performed less housework than mothers even when weekday to weekend contribution were compared. However, Stohs (1995) and Klewer, et al. (1996) found that mothers’ level of dissatisfaction with the division of household labor were a more significant predictor of marital conflict over the division of household labor than women that performed a larger number of household tasks. Thus, it is more important to pay attention to how mothers’ feel about the division of household labor than to merely compare who performs the household labor. Likely there is a clear relationship between level of dissatisfaction with household labor and the amount that women are expected to perform. In Mikula’s (1998) review of the literature, he found that women are less likely to perceive a division of household labor as unfair if fathers are significantly involved in childcare labor. This does seem to be consistent with the slight majority (6 of 10) of adoptive couples whereby father participated in the domain of childcare labor but opted out of the associated household labor domain. However, because the majority of adoptive mothers have requested
more assistance from fathers with the household labor, Mikula's conclusions are doubtful. Adoptive mothers may be reluctant to call the division of household labor unfair but their requests for more help demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the current labor arrangements. Moreover, Gager (1998) explained that women often justify the lopsided division of household labor by indicating that they are more efficient than fathers through their ability to "multi-task." This would be an example of the family work distribution basis of parent task competency, this time utilized by mothers to protect fathers. Gager reports that mothers often collude to avoid conflict with their husbands over the lopsided division of household labor. This, however, does not seem to be the case with the majority of the adoptive couples because most of the adoptive mothers made requests for more assistance with the household labor. The fact that these adoptive mothers refused to totally collude with their husbands in the description of household labor as a shared activity indicates that family work has the potential to be redistributed over time.

The majority of adoptive fathers would be consistent with Gerson's (1993) description of "mothers' helpers" whereby they will participate significantly in the childcare labor but not the related housework. Gerson indicated that "mothers' helpers" treated the domains of childcare and housework labor as separate and usually leave the responsibility for household labor to women because fathers choose to engage in the more desirable childcare labor domain and opt out of the less desirable household labor domain. This choice on the part of adoptive fathers places significant stress on adoptive mothers to carry the burden of the household labor. Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) found that maternal satisfaction with division of household labor are associated with marital satisfaction for women. Thus, these lopsided divisions of household labor could jeopardize the marital relationships with these adoptive couples. Ross and Von Willigen (1996) show that employed mothers had the highest levels of anger compared to fathers, and non-parent adults. Ross and Von Willigen show that the division of household labor does significantly impact mothers in dual-earner relationships. Moreover, Ehrensaft's (1987) review of the literature indicated that husbands who participate in little housework were more likely to have wives who were depressed and/or have considered divorce. There does seem to be ample support for the notion that being primarily responsible for household labor has an impact on women's health and their
marital relationship. This is another reason why it is so positive that the majority of adoptive mothers are requesting more help with the household labor from adoptive fathers. The redistribution of the household labor has the potential to decrease levels of maternal distress and marital conflict that in turn will protect the adoptive placement from possible disruption.

Unfortunately, organizational planning responsibility is distributed in these adoptive couples similar to the division of household labor. In the large majority (9 of 10) of adoptive couples, adoptive mothers are primarily responsible for organizational planning. This organizational planning typically includes making doctor and dentist appointments, childcare arrangements, and supervising the household and childcare labor within the family. Arendell’s (2000) review of the mothering literature found support that mothers spend more time at work worrying, thinking, and planning for their children than fathers. It seems that the domains of work and family are less compartmentalized for mothers than fathers. McCarthy-Snyder (1994) also found that mothers were typically left with the responsibility to find, arrange, maintain, and rearrange childcare in dual-earner couples. With adoptive mothers being left the primary responsibility for organizational planning and household labor while only a slight majority of fathers share the parenting responsibilities, it is evident that adoptive fathers choose to participate in only the most desirable family work. Coltrane (1990) studied dual-earner families where fathers participated significantly in childcare responsibilities and found that 40% of these employed mothers were still responsible for the planning and supervision of household tasks. Considering that Coltrane was studying involved fathers of dual-earner families, it does highlight that the majority of involved fathers do not participate significantly in organizational planning. Thus, it is problematic that adoptive fathers engage in the parenting tasks but opt out of the planning and supervision aspects of parenting because it limits the ability of fathers to give mothers a break from constant care demands. Thus, the family distribution basis of parent stress-level handoff is lessened because even though adoptive mothers may not have to engage in the parenting tasks, they still are worrying, thinking, and planning for their children, preventing them from full enjoyment of their personal time. It is noteworthy that the organizational planning requirements for special-needs adoptive parents are considerable because there is a lot of coordination with the adoptive caseworker, therapists, doctors, lawyers, birth parents, former foster parents, etc.
Barth and Berry (1988) indicated that adoptive parents expect to have a therapeutic effect on their adoptive children but do not expect to deal with the adoptive child's case management issues. Hence, it is especially important that adoptive mothers not be saddled with the organizational planning responsibility in placement because it is really a two-person job. Most adoptive fathers explained that their wives took responsibility for organizational planning because the wives had always done it in their couple relationship and were more organized than the fathers. This is an example of the family work distribution basis of parent task competency, which Gager (1998) found was used by mothers to justify unequal division of family labor. Mothers would explain that they did more because they were more efficient and could "multi-task" better. However, one adoptive couple indicated that the mother did the family organizational planning and the adoptive father did the organizational planning for the home-based business that demonstrates that sometimes the basis is not parent task competency but rather parent task preference.

The finding that adoptive mothers mostly handle the organizational planning responsibility is consistent with Ehresmann (1987) who noticed that mothers typically handled the management aspects of parenting. Additionally, Ehresmann explained the distinction between the "being" and "doing" of parenting whereby mothers are more comfortable sacrificing their personal time to meet the child's needs, psychological availability of "being" a parent, while fathers define parenting as a set of activities that you can stop "doing." Thus, mothers may take on the organizational planning because it is just part of the needs of her children and "being a parent" where fathers may define organizational planning as another group of activities that are demanding on their time.

Furthermore, the responsibility for organizational planning being primarily left to adoptive mothers is consistent with Hertz's (1997) market approach to childcare management where mothers are still required to patch together childcare arrangements while fathers focus on their careers. Similarly, Lamb (1987) conceptualized that responsibility for children is the type of paternal involvement that is most closely associated with organizational planning. Moreover, Lamb then compared the ratio of maternal to paternal responsibility for children for both fulltime mothers and employed mothers and found that regardless of maternal employment status, mothers did 90% of the management aspects of...
parenting. This suggests that the demands of maternal employment rarely result in organizational planning responsibility being redistributed from mothers to fathers.

Further, Daly (1996) also explored the meaning of time for fathers with pre-school children and found several themes that are related to organizational planning responsibility. Daly notes that the theme of the production of family time was the idea that business and social activities are more important than family time and that fathers make time for family only after those commitments. The other theme of time as a fixed quantum is the idea that it is a zero-sum game where time for family is time away from other obligations. And the third theme of fathers' lack of control of their time indicates that fathers often were still thinking of their work when physically present with their children. The final theme is closely associated with LaRossa and LaRossa's (1981) physically present but functionally absent father whose psychological absence makes the handling of the organizational planning difficult. Similarly, how Daly describes the meaning of family time for fathers (fixed, lower priority) is consistent with Ehrensaft's (1987) “doing” of parenting as opposed to “being” a parent. However, the fathers in Daly’s study seem to present the issue of limited control over family time as a structural issue devoid of individual responsibility. This will be addressed more at length in the discussion section on how adoptive parents manage their respective work contexts.

Gerson (1993) studied involved fatherhood and found that 60% of those couples were not equal parents but rather “mothers’ helpers,” so classified as because they engaged in the childcare and household tasks but without responsibility for them. Gerson found two ways that “mothers’ helpers” evaded responsibility for family work that included, (a) mothers being left to assign family work tasks and supervise them to ensure that they are completed, and (b) fathers took the role of “reactors” to family needs while mothers were the “initiators.” The majority of the adoptive fathers would also fit the description of “mothers’ helpers” in terms of their limited involvement in organizational planning. Adoptive mothers are left to anticipate the children’s needs and the fathers are mostly going along with mothers’ plans to meet those needs. Hence, adoptive mothers are psychologically and emotionally more involved with the children’s care and fathers may participate with the care plan but only after mothers have spent the time developing it and doing the “brainwork.” Biemat and Wortman
(1991) also have found fathers in dual-earner families tend to engage in the more desirable aspects of childcare (playing) and typically leave the mundane aspects of childcare (organizational planning responsibility) for mothers. This is another example of how the family distribution basis of parent task preference is commonplace in couple relationships.

Ross and Von Willigen's (1996) study of anger levels among employed mothers who are primarily responsible for family labor is noteworthy. They found that mothers have higher levels of anger than fathers and non-parents suggesting that the primary responsibility for family work has impacted mothers significantly. Mothers also said that fathers were the source of their anger meaning that they very much needed more sharing of the family work burden. One significant way that adoptive fathers could lessen the impact of the burden on adoptive mothers would be to become significantly involved in the responsibility aspect of parenting (organizational planning). This then allowed adoptive mothers to more fully benefit from the breaks that adoptive fathers offered them (parent stress-level handoff). This would be more consistent with the adaptive work/family balance strategy (Haddock et al., 2001) whereby both partners have equal input in the decision making process for the family.

Stevens et al. (2001) found that mothers' satisfaction with "emotional labor" significantly influences their level of marital satisfaction. Therefore, one way to improve the marital satisfaction for mothers in these adoptive placements is for adoptive fathers to become more involved in the organizational planning responsibility for the family.

It should be emphasized that the majority (seven of eight) of adoptive couples expected the family work to be shared in the adoptive placement. Considering that adoptive fathers seem to confine their involvement to childcare responsibilities and overlook the needs of household labor and organizational planning, it is safe to assert that the expectation of shared parenting has fallen short among most of the adoptive couples. Moreover, Westhaus and Cohen (1990) would not say these were "do nothing" fathers but would be concerned with the level of paternal involvement in many of the adoptive couples. They found that limited paternal involvement has been related to higher risk for adoptive placement disruption. Adoptive fathers could strength their placements tremendously by becoming more involved in the household labor and organizational planning responsibility. This then would be more consistent with their initial expectation of shared spousal involvement in family...
work of the adoptive placement. Similarly, this shortcoming in the expectation of shared parenting has the potential to strain the marital relationships among the adoptive couples and is consistent with Rosenthal’s (1982) finding that adoption can severely impact the marital relationship. Ward (1997) agrees with Rosenthal and Westhaus and Cohen that adoptive fathers’ limited involvement in the family work is problematic. Ward would seriously question the adoptive fathers’ level of commitment to the placement and their stubborn adherence to an inflexible family role. Ward states as does Westhaus and Cohen that this limited paternal involvement puts the adoptive placement at-risk for disruption. However, in defense of paternal involvement in the adoptive placements, the majority of adoptive fathers (six of seven) were involved in both the fun and non-fun aspects of parenthood, consistent with the finding that the slight majority (six of ten) of adoptive fathers shared the childcare labor responsibilities. Although this means that adoptive fathers were willing to do some of the undesirable tasks of parenthood, it still should be emphasized that adoptive fathers opt out of others (related housework and organizational planning). The undesirable tasks that adoptive fathers engaged in included “diaper duty” and “night patrol” when their adoptive children were distressed. So it is a positive sign that these adoptive fathers are handling some of the less desirable aspects of parenthood but there is much more progress in family work redistribution that has yet to materialize.

The overall finding that adoptive mothers are disproportionately responsible for family work begs the question of how these labor divisions came about for the adoptive couples. It was found that in many of the adoptive couples (seven of seven), the division of family labor evolved informally and no couples reported having explicit preplanned discussions regarding the distribution of family labor responsibilities. This informal division of family labor is consistent with Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) who found that most dual-career couples did not recall any overt negotiation over the division of labor. Similarly, Coltrane (1990) inquired about how dual-earner couples allocated their division of family labor and noted that their negotiations were typically ad-hoc and implicit. Hertz (1997) also found that the lack of discussions/negotiations over family labor is consistent with the mothering approach to childcare management. This makes sense because adoptive mothers are left much of the undesirable family work responsibilities and this arrangement
would be harder to preplan explicitly. Furthermore, Gerson's (1993) “mothers’ helpers” would need an implicit or covert distribution of family work responsibilities to selectively choose which desirable parenting tasks to become involved with. However, Coltrane did find that his educated sample of employed mothers were more comfortable in asking for help when needed. Likewise, Kundson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) indicated that mothers were most likely to initiate discussions with fathers about marital inequities that are consistent with an explicit method of family work redistribution. Interestingly, Gilbert (1988) found that spouses were most satisfied with their work/family balance if they had prior discussions to marriage about how career, parenting, and household work would be balanced in their relationship. Overall, although it does seem that the problems associated with the division of family work in the adoptive placements have evolved covertly and implicitly, it is positive that many of the adoptive mothers have explicitly requested more help from adoptive fathers with the family work. This indicates the trend of family work negotiations becoming more overt and explicit as the effect of implicit negotiations are increasingly felt by adoptive mothers.

*The Work Context*

The most important contextual influence on the distribution of family work among dual-earner adoptive couples are the spouses’ individual negotiation with their respective workplaces. How each of the spouses within the adoptive couple manage their work responsibilities with their employers impact the extent of their availability to respond to family care needs. Management of the work context consisted of several sub-categories: (a) management of work interference in family life; (b) consideration of work changes; (c) handling family needs during work hours; and (d) use of maternity/paternity leave and other time off for the adoption.

Work interference in family life seemed to be more of a concern to adoptive mothers (10 of 10) than adoptive fathers (3 of 10) because mothers were more likely to place boundaries between their work and family responsibilities. It is disappointing that the majority (7 of 10) of adoptive fathers either indicated that their work does not interfere with family life and/or they were unwilling to limit the extent of their work hours and responsibilities during family time. Once again, Westhaus and Cohen (1990) would question
adoptive fathers’ level of paternal involvement because of their reluctance to limit their work encroachment on their family time. Similarly, Ward (1997) indicated that adoptive fathers’ lax boundary between work and family life would be a further demonstration of unequal adoption commitments within adoptive couples. However, this finding that adoptive mothers tend to limit their work more than adoptive fathers has been found before. Becker and Moen (1999) identified that placing limits on work was the most common scaling-back strategy for work/family balance among dual-earner couples. In fact, Becker and Moen found that the scaling-back strategy of placing limits on work was twice as common among women than men in dual-earner couples.

One of the ways that adoptive mothers limited their work was to refuse to bring work home in the evenings when they wanted to be with their families. None of the adoptive fathers made a similar work concession. Many of these adoptive mothers had to become more efficient at work to meet the same work demands with fewer work hours. This work/family balance adaptive strategy of attempting to be more efficient at work so to increase time with family was found consistently in Haddock et al. (2001) group of dual-earner couples.

This difference between adoptive mothers and fathers in the willingness to place limits on work was also found among the self-employed parents. Both of the self-employed mothers severely curtailed their home-based businesses so to meet the needs of their new adoptive families though neither of the two self-employed adoptive fathers made these changes in their businesses. Loscocco (1997) found similar results between self-employed men and women indicating that self-employed women were more likely to utilize their job flexibility to meet family needs and were even willing to forgo income to provide care to their families. However, Loscocco noted that self-employed men preferred to under-utilize their job flexibility in favor of maintaining similar work hours each day like regular employment. This philosophical difference in how mothers and fathers operate their home-based businesses dramatically impacts the family work distribution among adoptive couples. It results in adoptive fathers choosing to under-utilize their availability for family needs while indirectly requiring their wives to make themselves available.

Simon (1997) also would not be surprised that adoptive mothers were more likely to place limits on their work than fathers. Simon explored meanings that mothers and fathers attributed to their parent and work identities and found that fathers most commonly attribute
the meaning of *earning a living and financial security* to their work identity. However, mothers most commonly attributed the meaning of *lack of time for children and family* to their work identity. Moreover, no fathers even mentioned the concern about limited time for children and family with their work identity though both mothers and fathers commonly attributed the meaning of *giving love, support, and nurturance* to their parent identity. This would suggest that adoptive fathers tend to focus on work while at work, while adoptive mothers tend to consider how to balance work and family responsibilities. If adoptive fathers are really not focusing on family needs while at work, it is understandable that they would be somewhat unaware that their work hours are leaking over into their family life. It almost seems as if adoptive fathers are more compartmentalized about work and family responsibilities than adoptive mothers.

Furthermore, Voydanoff (1987) and Feree (1990) expressed concern that adoptive mothers were more willing than the adoptive fathers to place limits on their work for the benefit of their families because mothers with simultaneous staging of work and family required a more symmetrical division of family labor than mothers in sequential staging. It has already been emphasized that this symmetrical division of family labor has not come about among these adoptive couples. Thus, adoptive fathers’ unwillingness to place boundaries between their work and family life is partly responsible for the inequitable division of family labor within these adoptive couples. Moreover, Hertz’s (1997) childcare management typology would say that the majority of these adoptive couples (7 of 10) would fit the *mothering approach* whereby fathers maximize their employment by working long hours so that mothers can maximize their care time with the children. Adoptive mothers accomplish this by placing limits on their work while adoptive fathers tend to avoid limits on their work. It is uncertain if this arrangement among these adoptive couples is explicit but if their ad-hoc negotiations over family labor are any indication, it is likely doubtful. Hertz would not describe these adoptive couples as utilizing the *parenting approach* because that would require both parents to place limits on their work to emphasize involvement with the children. Similarly, Hertz would not say these adoptive couples were mostly using the *market approach* because that would require both parents to avoid placing limits on their work so that they could emphasize their careers.
Both Gerson (1993) and Cohen (1987) explained that the work context greatly influences the level of paternal involvement in the family labor. Gerson indicated that the fathers with strong career and economic opportunities outside of the family will choose to emphasize those opportunities and rely on their wives to handle the slack in the family labor distribution. Similarly, Cohen utilized a 2x2 typology of opportunity (for involved fatherhood) and choice (for involved fatherhood) to explain how the two factors must converge in order for increased paternal involvement to occur. Choice is the individually determined factor and opportunity is the structurally-determined factor. Cohen found that the majority of the fathers fit the quadrant of high choice but low opportunity for involved fatherhood. However, this assumes that fathers' attempts at increased paternal involvement are completely constrained by their work environment. This tends to underplay fathers' ability to negotiate more availability to their families from their employers. Seeing that most of the adoptive fathers did not place limits on their work interference in family life, it is suggestive that these fathers preferred to emphasize work opportunities instead of family opportunities.

Another form of commitment to the adoptive placement other than emphasizing boundaries between work and family is the adoptive couples' consideration of significant work arrangement changes. Half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10) were currently considering work arrangement changes and half (5 of 10) were content with their current work arrangements. It is noteworthy that more adoptive mothers (5 of 10) were currently considering work-related changes than adoptive fathers (3 of 10), suggesting that most of the adoptive fathers (7 of 10) do not view their current work arrangements as problematic. I did not ask adoptive parents if they were going to make a work-related change, rather I simply asked if they were considering work-related changes regardless if they were plausible. Thus, most of adoptive fathers seem to believe that their current work arrangements were conducive to meeting emerging family needs with the adoption placement. Adoptive mothers, on the other hand, were more skeptical that their current work arrangements were suitable to addressing the family needs that may arise with the adoptive placement. However, two adoptive fathers considering work-related changes were thinking of becoming stay-at-home fathers. In both cases, the adoptive mother had greater career opportunities than the
father. Although, the theory that career opportunities override opportunity for increased family involvement is still intact because these adoptive families are considering reorganization based on the spouse with less opportunity becoming more involved with the primary care responsibilities. This said, it should be noted that it is only at a consideration level and that no reorganization of work arrangements had been made in these two adoptive families. It is encouraging that these adoptive fathers would even consider giving up their work responsibilities to care for their children fulltime. This would tend to challenge the cultural messages fathers receive that influence them to emphasize their careers over their families.

Similarly, the majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) had at least one spouse who had recently changed jobs and this included slightly more adoptive fathers (5 of 10) than adoptive mothers (4 of 10). All of these adoptive mothers’ new jobs allow them to be more available to their families should the need arise. One adoptive mother moved from fulltime employment to a home-based business while another adoptive mother with a home-based business scaled hers back to be with her children. Some adoptive mothers (2 of 10) either gave up or passed on career opportunities in favor of lesser positions with more flexibility for family needs. Unfortunately, this trend of choosing family over career was not as prevalent among the adoptive fathers who had made job changes. Most of the adoptive fathers reported changing jobs because of career advancement opportunities. These career opportunities required adoptive fathers to work either the same or more hours each week. Thus, while mothers were attempting to become more available for their families, adoptive fathers’ career opportunities were moving them in the opposite direction. However, one adoptive father noted that his new job made him work longer days during the week though he no longer was required to work weekends. This adoptive father was glad that he could be more available for his children on weekends though he did report feeling guilty that his wife had to do more during the week because of his absence. It seems that Becker and Moen’s (1997) scaling-back strategy for work/family balance of placing limits on work were primarily utilized by adoptive mothers. Becker and Moen explained that an aspect of the scaling-back strategy were parents refusing new jobs that required more travel because it resulted in more time away from family. Thus, it is this implied message that any job change that takes time away
from family would be declined seemed more consistent with the adoptive mothers’ approach to their job changes. Becker and Moen also found that placing limits on work was more common among women than men. Moreover, the differences in philosophy of how adoptive mothers and fathers address job change opportunities is most consistent with Hertz’s (1997) mothering approach to childcare management. As previously mentioned, the mothering approach maximizes mother’s care time with their children (requires minimizing her career opportunities), and minimizes father’s care time with family (requires maximizing father’s career opportunities). Hertz’s parenting approach would have had both parents emphasizing family over their careers while the market approach would have been the opposite with both parents as being career-orientated.

Overall, adoptive fathers’ approach to consideration of changes to their work arrangements seems consistent with Gerson’s (1993) dilemmas of fatherhood such as (a) emphasize time earning money versus time with children, and (b) choice of whether to nurture a career or nurture a family. It seems that most of the adoptive fathers who have made work-related changes have chose to nurture their career if given the opportunity. The two adoptive fathers that considered being stay-at-home fathers were not passing up career advancement opportunities but rather were trying to facilitate their wives taking advantage of their career opportunities. It is unknown how these two fathers may have responded if they were the ones given the career opportunities though it is troubling that fathers only consider becoming significantly involved with their families in the absence of career opportunities. However, Gerson found that the conditions ripe for equal parenting were fathers’ career stagnation coupled with wives’ career opportunities as well as fathers’ desire for more involved fatherhood. More worrisome is the finding that the majority of adoptive fathers (7 of 10) were not currently considering work-related changes suggesting that most do not see any incompatibilities between their current work arrangements and their family life. Knowing already that adoptive mothers are disproportionately responsible for the family labor in these families, it tends to demonstrate either that adoptive fathers are unaware of these inequities or choose to ignore how their work arrangements could help improve the division of family labor.
Adoptive parents' utilization of maternity/paternity leave and other time off were another way that they managed their work arrangements since they received their adoptive placement. Adoptive mothers were far more likely to utilize their maternity leave (7 of 10) than adoptive fathers' were to utilize their paternity leave (1 of 10). Adoptive mothers were also more likely than adoptive fathers to approach their employers about maternity leave benefits for adoption. Several adoptive fathers did not even ask their employers about paternity leave benefits. Two adoptive mothers were so dissatisfied with their employer's maternity leave benefits for adoption that they fought hard to ensure that the policies were more supportive of adoptive families in the future. This is consistent with Hallock et al.'s (2001) finding that one of the adaptive strategies of work/family balance for dual-earner families is to negotiate family-related needs with employers. The adoptive father that did take a paternity leave already had five days of paid leave in his employment contract and returned to work when the brief paid leave was exhausted. Several adoptive mothers took unpaid portions of their maternity leaves to be with their families. Other adoptive mothers who did not take a maternity leave did consider it but declined because of the financial hardships it would have placed on the family. This is a major shortcoming of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) because it allows for up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave for adoptions though few families can forgo that amount of lost income (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). It is certainly plausible that adoptive fathers did not explore paternity leave benefits for adoption because of financial reasons though the majority of adoptive fathers did not even look into the specifics of paternity leave for their upcoming adoption. Westhaus and Cohen (1990), and Ward (1997) would wonder about this missed opportunity for paternal involvement and possibly question whether fathers' commitment to the adoption was at a comparable level to their wives. Furthermore, adoptive mothers highlight their adoption commitment by their willingness to forgo income to be with their new adoptive children though adoptive fathers tend not to make this same sacrifice. Perhaps there is an unspoken arrangement that mothers are to take the leave benefits while fathers try to provide financial stability for the family during this time. This kind of an arrangement is consistent with Hertz's (1993) mothering approach that maximizes mother's time caring for the children and minimizes father's time with their children (maximizes his employment time). Even the self-employed adoptive
mothers severely reduced their businesses to facilitate maternity leaves in order to care for their new adoptive children. This gender difference in how female and male business owners choose to make use of their work flexibility is consistent with Loscocco's (1997) findings. Adoptive fathers' under-utilization of their paternity leave benefits tends to reinforce Simon's (1997) conclusion that fathers' main meaning associated with their work identity was "earning a living and financial security." Simon noted that mothers' main meaning for their work identity was "lack of time for children and family" that was not even mentioned by any of the fathers. Simon also found that both mothers and fathers associated the meaning of "giving love, support, and nurturance" with their parent identity though for men it is inconsistent with their main meaning for their work identity. This is further support for Ehrensaft's (1987) point that "being" a parent describes women better because when at work they are still partially occupied with the concerns of parenthood. Ehrensaft says that men are more wrapped up in the "doing" of parenting because when they are at work they tend to be focused on work issues and less on parent issues (parenting is something that you can "stop doing"). Doherty et al. (1998) talked about increased paternal involvement involving a combination of individual and contextually conducive factors. However, Doherty et al. noted that one individual factor was the desire for more paternal involvement that seems in question with the adoptive fathers who failed to even explore their paternity leave options. Even if their employers would have dissuaded them from taking paternity leave when they inquired about it, adoptive fathers would have then gotten high points on desire for increased paternal involvement. That would have been more of a pure structurally-determined situation with the paternity leave under-utilization rather than partially determined by fathers' choice to emphasize their career opportunities over fatherhood time.

Similarly, adoptive fathers' reluctance to explore their paternity leave options while their wives' explored and often took maternity leave benefits does not seem consistent with Mason and Duberstein's (1992) finding that parents often reorganize their work schedules to facilitate paternal childcare. The maternity/paternity strategy used by most of the adoptive couples emphasized maternal rather than paternal childcare. This is unfortunate because many special-needs adoptive children have attachment problems that really could benefit from use of paternity leaves for adoption. One adoptive father had an involuntary paternity
leave due to a knee injury that required surgery and resulted in a disability leave from work of two months. His wife had take her maternity leave and so their adoptive daughter with attachment problems received care from both parents for nearly the first two months of placement. These adoptive parents reported that their adoptive daughter needed the time with both of them and that they would strongly recommend that other adoptive parents make use of their maternity and paternity leaves.

Another primary work-related management issue for adoptive couples was the determination of how to handle family needs during work hours. In the majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10), the adoptive mother was primarily responsible for addressing family needs during work hours. Family needs that often arise during work hours include responding to sick children, breakdowns in childcare arrangements, and attending doctor, dentist, therapist, caseworker, and school-related appointments. These family needs arising the workday can be preplanned or spur-of-moment for adoptive parents. It is promising that a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) elected to share the responsibility of responding to family needs during work hours though unfortunate that that it was not more common among the adoptive couples. It is noteworthy that in both the adoptive couples where they shared the “family responder duty while at work” that the adoptive fathers had “flexible” jobs that facilitated that responsibility. Similarly, in all of the adoptive couples (8 of 10) where the adoptive mother took primary responsibility for the “family responder duty while at work,” all of the mothers reported having flexible jobs though so did some of the adoptive fathers (2 of 8). These adoptive fathers who chose not to make use of their job flexibility are highlighting their preference for career pursuits over family pursuits. Westhaus and Cohen (1990) and Ward (1997) would worry about these two adoptive fathers’ choice to limit their paternal involvement and be concerned about their adoption commitment. Rosenthal (1982) would not be surprised if these two adoptive fathers who under-utilize their job flexibility and overly rely on their wives to handle the slack in the family labor experience more marital strain in their relationships. Similarly, Arendell (2000) also found that mothers are more likely to be interrupted at work for child-related issues than fathers. Arendell would be concerned about the impact of work/family stress on these adoptive mothers because they are carrying the bulk of the work/family burden for these adoptive couples.
Simon also would not be surprised that adoptive fathers were not typically involved in responding to family needs during work hours because fathers' most common meaning associated with their worker identity was “earning a living and financial security.” This would suggest that fathers put on their “blinders” when at work that allows them to concentrate on making a living and avoid family matter distractions. In support of this assertion, Simon noted that none of the fathers associated the meaning “lack of time for children and family” with their worker identity though it was the most common worker identity meaning for women. This would help explain why adoptive mothers typically are the ones to respond to family needs during work hours.

Voydanoff (1987) would share Arendell’s (2000) concern about the impact of work/family balance on adoptive mothers here because all of the mothers are engaging in simultaneous staging of career and family that require a more symmetrical division of family labor in order for women to be able to cope well with the dual-demands of work and family. Moreover, adoptive fathers’ limited involvement in responding to family needs during work hours is inconsistent with Hall’s (1990) finding that fathers’ main work/family balance strategy was to restructure their work responsibilities through negotiation with their employers. Not only did most of these adoptive fathers fail to negotiate with their employers some flexibility to be available for family needs that may arise during their work day, but also they portrayed their work arrangements as “inflexible” without even talking to their employers. However, it is possible that the adoptive fathers may have become aware of the “informal workplace culture” that subtly discourages fathers from increased paternal involvement with their families.

Likewise, Hammer et al. (1997) found three factors significantly predicted work/family conflict that included (a) career salience, (b) work schedule flexibility, and (c) level of family involvement (for women only). Hammer et al. would explain that adoptive fathers were less involved in responding to family needs during work hours because their careers were important to them (work-focused) and that they had limited job flexibility. Similarly, adoptive mothers did respond to family needs while at work because family was more important to them than their careers and that they had more work schedule flexibility than fathers. The problem that I have with this explanation is that adoptive fathers’ career
salience could influence their assessment of their work schedule flexibility and thereby require mothers to have to take time off from their work responsibilities to respond to the family needs. Thus, I suspect that the adoptive fathers have more work schedule flexibility than they are willing to disclose because if mothers knew that their husbands were available more, they would expect the “responder duty while at work” to be redistributed between them.

However, Coltrane (1990) described a distinction between men in dual-earner families that are trying to be more involved fathers and many of the adoptive fathers with less paternal involvement. Coltrane noted that one of the motivations for involved fathers was the feeling of confinement by an overriding focus on employment. This is significant because the majority of adoptive fathers are still confined by their focus on their careers. This is supported by the finding that adoptive mothers are left the primary responsibility to handle family needs during work hours. This is further supported by adoptive fathers’ underutilization of their paternity leaves and reluctance to place limits on work interference in their family lives. Ehrensaft (1987) would be very concerned with these adoptive fathers who relied on their wives to respond to family needs during work hours because she felt that the emotional labor and psychological availability for family should be shared between mothers and fathers. This arrangement where adoptive mothers are constantly on “responder duty while at work” tends to place a lot of stress on women when fathers could potentially ease this burden. This is one of many problematic arrangements among adoptive couples. The “responder duty arrangement” being left to adoptive mothers is also further evidence of Hertz’s (1997) mothering approach to childcare because it once again requires mothers to maximize their care time with the children and fathers to maximize their employment time. Hertz’s parenting approach is inconsistent with the majority of these adoptive couples because it requires that both spouses negotiate with their respective employers the ability to be available more for the family that did not typically occur with these adoptive couples. Similarly, Hertz’s market approach is also inconsistent with most of adoptive couples because it required neither spouse to negotiate more availability for family with their employers.
Similarly, Berry and Rao (1997) also would not be surprised that adoptive fathers were less involved than adoptive mothers in responding to family needs during work hours because they found that mothers typically were assigned responsibility for non-scheduled emergency family needs while at work. Berry and Rao noted that fathers typically confined their involvement to scheduled non-emergency family needs (appointments) during work hours. With adoptive fathers, Berry and Rao’s finding are not intuitive because you would think that fathers’ employers would be more flexible in regards to emergency family needs than non-emergency family needs, though perhaps it is the planned aspect of non-emergency family needs that facilitate fathers’ ability to become involved. However, some adoptive fathers were less involved in non-emergency family needs as well.

Furthermore, Daly (1996) would say that adoptive fathers’ limited involvement in responding to family needs during work hours was a result of how men construct the meaning of “time.” Daly found that the idea of “time as a fixed quantum” would indicate that time is a zero-sum game where time for family is time away from other commitments, such as work. Another important theme identified by Daly was the consensus that fathers felt they were impotent or lacked control in allocating more time from work to family. However, this is the same argument that involved fatherhood is structurally determined by a work schedule etched in stone. This argument tends to underestimate the extent of adoptive fathers’ influence on the negotiation of flexibility in their work schedules to facilitate increased paternal “responder duty” during work hours.

Gerson (1993) indicates that one explanation for obstacles to increased fatherhood would be social and cultural pressures on men that push them to pursue careers to prove themselves. This may help us to understand why most of the adoptive fathers left the primary responsibility for “responder duty” during work hours to their wives. However, I do recall asking, “How easy is it in your place of work to ask for maternity/paternity leave?” The overall response by the adoptive fathers to this question was that their employers were “family-friendly,” casting doubt that adoptive fathers’ limited involvement in responding to family needs during work hours can be explained by “inflexible work schedules.” Inflexible work schedules were another obstacle that Gerson identified as limiting paternal involvement in families. It seems that this explanation for adoptive fathers does not fit. Gerson would
likely say that many of these adoptive fathers who rely on their wives to respond to family needs during work hours have decided to handle the dilemma of involved fatherhood by choosing to place priority on career over family while at work, tending to fall in line with the social and cultural expectation that men should derive their identity from their occupation rather than their father role.

Similarly, Biernat and Wortman (1991) would have surmised that adoptive mothers are left as primarily responsible for "responder duty" during work hours as expectable given that typically men are involved in the more desirable aspects of family labor while women are left to handle the brunt of the family labor. However, Mason and Duberstein (1992) found that the majority of couples rearrange their work schedules to facilitate opportunities for paternal childcare. Adoptive fathers had the opportunity for paternal childcare by responding to family needs during work hours though it seemed that it was mostly adoptive mothers' reorganizing their schedules to facilitate maternal childcare.

Cohen (1987) is another one attempting to use the "structural argument" of non-supportive work environments, explaining why adoptive fathers are less involved in responding to family needs during work hours. This explanation would be more plausible if adoptive fathers had not already indicated that their employers are "family-friendly." This statement tends to highlight that these adoptive fathers are less structurally constrained and prefer to place more priority on career pursuits over family opportunities. In support, Gerson (1993) found that "mothers' helpers" tend to under-utilize their job flexibility for family needs and tend to apply their job flexibility to make more money or purse leisure opportunities. However, the adoptive fathers did not typically pursue leisure activities but did seem to spend their "possible available work time" for family needs pursuing their careers. Ehrensaft (1987) would insist that this "responder's duty" during work hours as a maternal responsibility for adoptive mothers is an unacceptable arrangement because it results in a lopsided division of emotional labor within the adoptive couple relationships. This maternal "responder duty" arrangement would be viewed by Ehrensaft as just a variation on the second shift responsibility for employed women. So instead of stay-at-home mothers being responsible for the children in the evenings and weekends ("second shift"), employed
mothers are left primary caregiver responsibilities while at work. This is clearly another area for family work redistribution among adoptive couples.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Adoptive couples face a combination of typical non-adoptive family challenges plus the unique added layer of adoption-specific family difficulties in placement. The non-adoptive family challenges require adoptive couples to draw out their time and energy from individual, couple, and community domains of their lives in order to build up sufficient resources to meet the parenting demands of their new adoptive children. This willingness by both adoptive mothers and fathers to shift their individual, couple, and community commitments in order to work on providing a permanent home to a special-needs adoptive child is inspiring.

The adoptive families will need these extra resources to handle the additional unique demands of an adoptive placement. These adoption-specific demands commence in the pre-placement phase whereby these parents endure an emotional roller coaster about whether they would be selected to receive an adoptive child. Many adoptive parents do not find out they have been selected to adopt for a year or more. Also around the same time period, prospective adoptive parents are managing how the adoption may impact their birth/other children by broaching a series of talks about the possibility of having a new sibling and the changes it may require for the family. The parents in this study were all successful in receiving an adoptive placement. However, additional adoption-related demands accompany the adoption placement. One of the difficult adoption-related demands regards dealing with the adoptive child’s birth family during the supervised visits prior to the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). These adoptive parents feared interaction with their adoptive child’s birth family because of how they mistreated their adoptive child. However, aside from some difficult situations several adoptive parents were very glad they took the time to meet the birth family and feel that the meetings will be beneficial in the future for their adoptive child.

Many of the adoption-related demands of placements are needs associated with the adoptive children themselves. The majority of special-needs adoptive children have experienced some form of maltreatment from their previous caregivers and therefore come with trauma/abuse/neglect histories. This history of maltreatment often results in problematic attachment issues with the adoptive parents. Thus, it is not uncommon for adoptive parents to have to deal with children who lack the protective “stranger anxiety,” or have great
difficulties placing their trust in any adult caregivers. Therefore, adoptive parents’
commitment is tested when their attempts to care for an adoptive child are outright rejected
because of a lack of trust. However, once adoptive parents can develop a secure
bond/attachment with the adoptive child and trust is established, the placement progresses
more smoothly. However, some adoptive parents worry that the development of a workable
bond with their adoptive child may never come about because of the impact of a long history
of maltreatment.

For the most part, these adoptive couples had a network of support to deal with both
non-adoptive and adoption-specific family challenges. The support network included their
extended family and friends as well as other adoptive families and adopted individuals. Their
family and friends helped them by offering to look after their adoptive child anytime they
needed. Other adoptive families and adopted individuals offered some of the adoptive
couples an outlet to discuss adoption-related issues. However, some adoptive couples only
knew of other adoptive families as acquaintances and therefore were unable to utilize them as
resources for adoption-related difficulties, although, one of the most important parts of the
dual-earner adoptive couples’ social support network is their use of paid childcare for their
adoptive and other children. This was very important to these adoptive couples because it
permitted both parents to work. Some adoptive parents did experience difficulties in finding
appropriate daycare for their special-needs adoptive children because of their unique
challenges but were eventually successful. Only a minority of adoptive couples utilized paid
housekeeping services as part of their social support network though most adoptive couples
preferred either to do the tasks themselves or lower their cleanliness standards.

Adoptive couples’ social support networks also consisted of several professionals but
none more significant than their adoptive caseworker. With all the other professional groups,
such as lawyers and therapists, adoptive couples here experienced positive support though
this was not always the case with adoptive caseworkers. Some adoptive couples experienced
great service and support from their adoptive caseworkers whereby they were kept abreast of
their adoption cases’ progress and the worker was available to answer any questions they
may have had about the adoption. However, other adoptive couples had complained that their
caseworker did not keep them informed and was poor in responding to their queries. The
service/support was so lacking in some situations that some adoptive couples indicated that they would not ask their caseworker for community referrals if the need arose. Thus, adoptive couples’ relationship to their adoptive caseworker is the first area in need of significant changes. Part of the issue is that adoptive caseworkers need to be trained better and this responsibility falls to the Department of Human Services that employs them. However, the other part is a training issue for prospective adoptive parents to learn how to work with their adoptive caseworkers. Prospective adoptive parents are typically fearful that asking too many questions or being persistent with their caseworkers about their adoption application’s progress will negatively impact their chances of receiving an adoptive placement. Therefore, when prospective adoptive parents receive poor service/support from their caseworkers they usually do nothing with their complaints. Thus, prospective adoptive parents need to be taught how to handle poor service/support from their adoptive caseworkers without jeopardizing their chances of receiving an adoptive placement. This issue could feasibly be addressed during the adoption training/orientation that all prospective adoptive parents are required to attend. The net benefit of improving caseworker support for prospective adoptive couples is that these parents would be less impacted by their second doubts and worry about whether they would receive an adoptive placement. These prospective adoptive couples would know where they stood in the adoption process and could potentially share with their caseworker their doubts about receiving an adoptive placement so that the worker could reassure them of their potential to adopt.

How dual-earner adoptive couples manage the demands of an adoptive placement is primarily dependent on two contexts, including (a) how family work is distributed between adoptive parents in the family context, and (b) how each adoptive parent manages their work context to facilitate their availability for meeting family needs. Overall, when these adoptive couples are viewed through these two contexts it becomes evident that there are several problematic areas of concern. However, these adoptive couples also showed some areas of potential and promise that are encouraging.

The areas of concern among these adoptive couples center on how the family work distribution has resulted in adoptive mothers being held primarily responsible for household labor, organizational planning, and responding to family needs during work hours. In
examining the bases for family labor distribution among the adoptive couples, it was identified that parent availability, parent task preference, and parent task competence were commonly in operation. The family distribution basis of parent availability is the basis most impacted by the work context of each spouse. Thus, how adoptive mothers and fathers handle their work responsibilities significantly impacts the extent of their availability to handle family needs. It was noteworthy that adoptive mothers and fathers handled their work in philosophically different ways, each having implications on their availability to their families. Adoptive mothers were more likely than fathers to place limits on their work encroachment into family time. Similarly, adoptive mothers were more likely to explore maternity leave benefits and take the maternity leave even if portions were unpaid than adoptive fathers with their paternity leave options. Moreover, adoptive mothers were more likely to consider or change jobs to increase their availability to their family while adoptive fathers job changes typically further advanced their careers and made them less available for family. Finally, adoptive mothers were more likely to handle family needs during work hours than adoptive fathers due to their work schedule flexibility though most adoptive fathers did not explore the need to negotiate more flexibility with their employers.

The major implication for these adoptive couples is that their lopsided division of family labor puts these couples at-risk for placement disruption. Thus, it is essential that these adoptive couples develop a division of family labor that is protective from placement disruption. As previously noted, many of these adoptive couples showed potential in the redistribution of family labor within their relationships. The most encouraging of the bases for family labor distribution were the use of the parent stress-level handoff and parental guilt, both used mostly by adoptive fathers to help their wives with the family labor needs. Moreover, many of the adoptive fathers were significantly involved in sharing the tasks of childcare, including both desirable and undesirable duties. This is an improvement that most adoptive fathers did not confine their involvement to the fun aspects of parenting. However, given that most of the adoptive mothers reported requesting more help from their husbands with the family work suggests that the family labor distribution is in need of renegotiation. It is promising that adoptive mothers have become more explicit about their needs for more help because all of the adoptive couples report that the original family labor was distributed
informally in their relationships. Unfortunately, until adoptive fathers change their philosophy about how they handle their work contexts adoptive mothers will still need to carry the brunt of the responsibility for family labor. In sum, adoptive couples may be able to get away with these lopsided divisions of family labor in the absence of high stress demands though in times of need these family labor distributions will become vital to the health of these adoptive placements.

What do these adoptive parents need to do differently? These adoptive fathers could do several things to strengthen their adoptive placements: (a) adoptive fathers could accept more responsibility for the organizational planning; (b) adoptive fathers could participate more with the household labor; (c) adoptive fathers could accept more responsibility for responding to family needs during work hours and place more boundaries between work and family; and (d) adoptive fathers could further investigate paternity leave usage. Adoptive mothers could also do several things to strengthen their adoptive placement: (a) adoptive mothers could avoid accepting the problematic bases of family labor distribution as legitimate (parent task preference and parent task competency); (b) adoptive mothers could refuse to accept primary responsibility for organizational planning and household labor; (c) adoptive mothers could refuse to accept primary responsibility for responding to family needs during work hours; and (d) adoptive mothers could insist that fathers negotiate paternity leave benefits with their employers.

What professional support is needed for these adoptive families? I believe that most of these adoptive families would benefit from the assistance from marriage and family therapists to manage several significant issues early in the adoptive process and placement. These issues include: (a) difficulties negotiating family labor distribution; (b) helping adoptive fathers (and some mothers) negotiate paternity (maternity) leave benefits and work/family balance with their employers; (c) adjustment with typical parenting challenges; (d) adjustments with adoption-specific challenges; and (e) assistance coping with the struggles of navigating the DHS adoption application process.
## APPENDIX A. THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE INTERVIEWS

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APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear adoptive parents,

I am writing to encourage you as adoptive parents of a special-needs child to participate in my dissertation study. I am currently in my third year of the Ph.D. Program in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. My initial curiosity about adoption and families stemmed from my own adoption. My parents adopted me at six weeks of age because my biological mother was only 16 years old and unable to care for me. Thus, I have a great admiration for adoptive families who are willing to open their homes and hearts to children in need of a caring family.

This study is an extension of an earlier study you participated in at ISU regarding adoption parent training for special-needs children. We want to continue our commitment to improving the quality of life of special-needs adoptive families. Your participation is very important for this project.

I am particularly interested in four areas of adoptive families: (1) division of housework; (2) division of child care; (3) responsibility for planning, organization, and supervision of housework/child care; (4) work/family balance.

My intent is to explore how to strengthen adoptive placements in families. About 15% of adoptive placements disrupt within the first year and another 2% dissolve after the first year. Additionally, within the first year of placement, 30% of all adoptive placements experience more ups and downs than expected.

I am planning to interview only ten adoptive families of special-needs children. The following are requirements for participation in the proposed study:
(a) both adoptive parents must agree to participate in the joint interview;
(b) the adoptive parents must be first-time newly-adoptive parents and not foster-adoptive parents;
(c) the adoptive parents must have received placement of the adoptive child;
(d) both parents must be employed a minimum of 20 hours each week.

The interview should take no more than 2 hours and will take place in your home to facilitate your participation. The interview will be audio-taped, transcribed, and summary statements of meaning will be noted for each participant response. You will receive in the mail a copy of the selected parts of the transcript along with the summary statements of meaning to read and check for meaning accuracy. You will be interviewed a second time for 30 minutes (maximum) to discuss any meaning disagreements from the meaning summaries. During the completion of the project, you will receive a summary of the main findings of the study. All interviews will be scheduled between March and July 2001, on weekends to facilitate your participation. I will be available to answer any questions about the procedures. Each participant couple will receive $20 for participation in the project.

All information you provide is extremely confidential. No names will appear on any notes or interview transcripts. Only code numbers will be used to identify each participant. The file of corresponding names and code numbers and all notes, audio-tapes, and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet separate from all raw interview data. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without consequences of any sort.

I think this is a wonderful opportunity to help other adoptive families ensure that their adoption is a rich and rewarding family experience. Due to limited available space, the first twelve eligible adoptive couples will be included in the study. To participate in the study, please contact Darren A. Wozny at (515) 294-2996 or email me at dcwoz@iastate.edu.

I look forward to working with you.
Sincerely,

Darren A. Wozny, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate

Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Ph.D.
Professor
APPENDIX C. SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Grand Tour Question
1. How do you manage the household, parenting, and work aspects of your life?

Mini-tour Questions
1. How you each handle work and family?
2. How did you decide between you who would handle the various household/parenting responsibilities?
3. What disagreements about household and parenting responsibilities have you had? Who typically brings up the issues for discussion? How did you handle these disagreements?
4. What has been the most difficult part of the adoption adjustment?
5. What do you find that you do not have time for anymore?
6. How much contact have you had with your caseworker?
7. What are your adopted child’s special-needs?

Sub-Questions
1. What arrangement do you have with your employer about responding to family needs during work hours? How did this arrangement come about?
2. How easy is it to use your maternity/paternity leave at your workplace? Is it encouraged or discouraged?
3. Do you plan to keep your current work arrangements and schedules?
4. What expectations did you each have on the involvement of your wife/husband in parenting and home life?
5. How do you determine if the family work is divided fairly between you and your spouse?
6. Who handles the organizational planning for the family?
7. Who gets up in the middle of the night with the child?
8. With parenting/household tasks, are there any tasks that you don’t do?
APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

1. Parent Names _____________________________ and ____________________________________.

2. Ages: Mother _______ Father ________.

3. Parents’ address ________________________________________________________________.

4. Parents’ phone number __________________________________________________________.

5. Parents’ e-mail address (if applicable) ____________________________________________.

6. Number of hours worked per week: Mother _______ Father ________.

7. Income: Mother’s income ___________ Father’s income ____________.

8. Occupation: Mother _________________ Father _________________.

9. Length of adoptive placement in months ________.

10. Name of adopted child _____________________________.

11. Gender of adopted child _____________________________.

12. Age of adopted child ________.

13. Other children: Name Age Relationship (birth, foster, adopted, step)

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________
To: Adoptive Couple Interview Participants

From: Darren A. Wozny, M.A.
Iowa State University

Re: Instructions in reviewing interview transcript

Enclosed you will find a completed transcript of our interview. It is very important when analyzing the meaning of the transcript to check with the participants to ensure that the initial meaning for each statement by the researcher is verified or corrected. This way, any misunderstanding in meaning of statements between the researchers and the participants can be identified and corrected.

Initially, I had gone through the interview and written in pencil what I thought each of the statements meant. Secondly, my Co-major professor, Dr. Sedahlia Crase, read through the transcript and wrote in red ink anytime any of her meanings disagreed with my initial meanings. Your task is to review the transcript and read both the reported transcript statements and their respective meanings. If you agree with a meaning, just place a small check mark in blue ink and continue on. If you find a meaning is incorrect, place a single line through the incorrect meaning statement and write in blue ink beside it the corrected meaning. In some longer paragraphs you may find that there are more than one meaning statement which means that the statement had multiple meanings. With multiple meanings of a paragraph, it is important to place a line through the problematic meaning to establish which meaning is being corrected.

I plan to drop off the transcript and instructions to you on month/day/year. I plan to retrieve the transcript from you on next month/day/year. If you are not there when I drop it off, I will either place it in your mailbox or just inside the outer door of your house. If your are going to be gone on the pickup day, place the transcript back in mailbox or inside the outer door for me to pick up on my way through.

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study and best wishes with your adoption.
APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Participant Couple #1: Father, 35, assistant underwriter, and mother, 33, accounting manager, adopted a year old baby boy. The couple had no other children.

Participant Couple #2: Father, 31, director of marketing and logistics, and mother, 32, independent beauty consultant (works 15-20 hrs/wk at home) adopted their two-year old foster son. Additionally, the couple privately adopted their 6-month old baby son recently.

Participant Couple #3: Father, 38, mail carrier, and mother, 31, teacher, adopted their three-year old daughter. The couple had no other children.

Participant Couple #4: Father, 38, mechanic/horseshoer, and mother, 35, project analyst, adopted their eight-year old foster daughter. The couple also has an eleven-year old birth son.

Participant Couple #5: Sam, 38, shop manager/mechanic, and mother, 33, commercial banking assistant, adopted their three-year old nephew (relative-adopt). The couple has twelve-year old and seven-year old birth daughters.

Participant Couple #6: Father, 41, civil engineer, and mother, 40, teacher, adopted their four-year old foster daughter and two-year old foster son within five months of each other. The couple’s only birth son died at six weeks of age.

Participant Couple #7: Father, 53, landscaper/area rep, and mother, 54, nursing manager, adopted their 13 year-old foster daughter. The couple has three adopted children that are grown and live on their own. The couple also has a 19 year-old birth son and a 15 year-old birth son that is living at home.

Participant Couple #8: Father, 55, teacher, and mother, 41, teacher, adopted their 18-month old daughter. The father has two grown birth children from a previous marriage. The mother is contemplating quitting her job and starting a home-based business.

Participant Couple #9: Father, 30, operations manager-logistics (works 60 hrs/wk), and mother, 28, social worker, adopted their one-year old foster daughter. The couple has no other children.

Participant Couple #10: Father, 39, senior security analyst, and mother, 37, piano teacher (works 12 hrs/wk) adopted their nine-year old foster daughter. The couple adopted their seven-year old foster daughter. The couple also has a 15 year-old birth daughter.
APPENDIX G: CATEGORY MAP

Group 1: Non-Adoption-Specific Family Challenges
- Individual sacrifices
- Couple sacrifices
- Typical parenting adjustments
- Other sacrifices

Adoption-Specific Family Challenges
- Trauma/abuse/neglect-related challenges
- Suddenness of the adoption placement
- Uncertainty of receiving an adoptive placement
- Medical-related adoption challenges
- Development of a secure attachment/relational bond
- Impact of adoption on birth children/other children
- Adoptive couple interaction/contact with birth/foster family

Group 2: Extent of Social Support for Adoptive Couples
- Extended family and friends
- DHS caseworkers
- Interaction with other adoptive families and adopted individuals
- Use of paid childcare/housekeeping to balance work and family
- Other professionals

Experiences that Helped with Adoption Adjustment
- Commitment to adoption placement
- Previous caretaking/parenting experience
- Continuing education efforts

Group 3: Sharing Family Responsibilities
- Process of sharing family work
- Sharing parenting tasks
- Sharing household tasks
- Informality in the division of labor process
- Organizational planning
- Expectations of spouse’s involvement in family life
- Father’s involvement with their adoptive child

Adoptive Parents’ Management of their Work Contexts
- Managing their work contexts-work interference in family life
- Managing their work contexts-consideration of work changes
- Handling family needs during work hours
- Use of maternity/paternity leave and other time off for adoption
APPENDIX H: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Non-Adoption-Specific Family Challenges
- Individual Sacrifices
  - The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) mentioned the need for individual parent sacrifices in handling the demands of an adoptive placement.
- Couple Sacrifices
  - The majority of adoptive parents (9 of 10) indicated that adoptive placement demands required them to make couple-level sacrifices.
- Typical Parenting Adjustments
  - The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) discussed the typical parenting adjustments associated with caring for a child.
- Other Sacrifices
  - A minority of adoptive couples (4 of 10) described other sacrifices associated with non-adoptive-specific family challenges.

Adoption-Specific Family Challenges
- Trauma/Abuse/Neglect-Related Challenges
  - Half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10) discussed trauma-related challenges with their adoption placements.
- Suddenness of the Adoption Placement
  - A slight majority of adoptive parents (6 of 10) indicated that the suddenness of the adoption placement presented an adjustment challenge.
- Uncertainty of Receiving an Adoptive Placement
  - The majority of adoptive couples (7 of 10) identified that their most difficult adoption-related challenge was dealing with the uncertainty of receiving an adoptive placement.
- Medical-Related Adoption Challenges
  - Only a small minority of adoptive couples (1 of 10) dealt with medical-related adoption challenges.
- Development of a Secure Attachment/Relational Bond
  - Half of the adoptive couples (5 of 10) discussed the challenge of developing a secure attachment/relational bond with their adoptive child.
- Impact of Adoption on Birth Children/Other Children
  - The majority of adoptive couples (5 of 7) with other children in the home talked about the impact of adoption on their birth/other children.
- Adoptive Couple Interaction>Contact with Birth/Foster Family
  - The majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) discussed the challenges involved in interacting with the birth/foster families of their adoptive child.
APPENDIX H: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS (Continued)

Extent of Social Support for Adoptive Couples

- Extended Family and Friends
  - A large majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) described the extent of support they have from their extended family and friends.

- DHS Caseworkers
  - Nearly half of the adoptive couples (4 of 10) experienced a lack of quality service and support from their adoptive caseworkers. A minority of the adoptive couples (2 of 10) experienced both good and poor service from their DHS caseworkers. However, some adoptive couples (4 of 10) were very pleased with the service they received from their adoptive caseworkers.

- Interaction with Other Adoptive Families and Adopted Individuals
  - Several of the adoptive families (5 of 8) discussed adoption-related issues with other adoptive families and adopted individuals. Some of the adoptive families (3 of 8) knew of acquaintances who adopted but did not discuss adoption issues with them.

- Use of Paid Childcare/Housekeeping to Balance Work and Family
  - The majority of adoptive couples (8 of 10) mentioned their use of paid childcare/housekeeping to help deal with the demands of an adoptive placement.

- Other Professionals
  - Only a minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) discussed how other professionals supported them in their adoption process/placement.

Experiences that Helped with Adoption Adjustment

- Commitment to Adoption Placement
  - The majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) indicated that their commitment to their adoptive child would help them with the challenges in the adoptive placement because they know that no matter what happens they will stick it out.

- Previous Caretaking/Parenting Experience
  - A minority of adoptive couples (4 of 10) indicated that previous experience parenting their other children or babysitting other people's children helped prepare them for the adjustment to an adoptive placement.

- Continuing Education Efforts
  - Only a small minority of adoptive couples (2 of 10) indicated how they managed to educate themselves about adoption-related issues.

Sharing Family Responsibilities

- Process of Sharing Family Work
  - All adoptive couples (10 of 10) discussed the process of family work distribution, all parents (20 of 20) talked about the division of family work within their couple relationship.

- Sharing Parenting Tasks
  - It was found that a slight majority of adoptive couples (6 of 10) reported sharing parenting responsibilities.
APPENDIX H: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS (Continued)

Sharing Family Responsibilities (continued)

• Sharing Household Tasks
  • It is duly noted that in the majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10) it is the adoptive mother that is primarily responsible for household labor.

• Informality in the Division of Labor Process
  • It was noted that all seven of the adoptive couples reported that the division of family labor process developed informally and no couples indicated that they had preplanned who would be responsible for what household or parenting tasks.

• Organizational Planning
  • It was found that mothers were primarily responsible for family organizational planning in the large majority of adoptive couples (9 of 10).

• Expectations of Spouse’s Involvement in Family Life
  • The majority of these adoptive couples (7 of 8) expected their spouse to share the family work in the adoptive placement.

• Father’s Involvement with their Adoptive Child
  • In the majority of adoptive father involvement descriptions (6 of 7) only one father’s involvement was concentrated in the “fun” aspects of parenthood, (e.g., playing with the child, going out to places with a child, and taking the child to work).

Adoptive Parents’ Management of their Work Contexts

• Managing their Work Contexts-Work Interference in Family Life
  • All of the adoptive mothers (10 of 10) made significant efforts to manage work interference in family life though only a minority of the adoptive fathers (3 of 10) also placed boundaries on their work.

• Managing their Work Contexts-Consideration of Work Changes
  • The majority of adoptive parents (12 of 20) who were planning to keep their current work arrangements consisted of more adoptive fathers (7 of 10) than mothers (5 of 10).

• Handling Family Needs During Work Hours
  • Most mothers (8 of 10) were primarily responsible for responding to family needs during work hours because their work was more flexible than fathers’ work.

• Use of Maternity/Paternity Leave and Other Time off for Adoption
  • In the majority of adoptive couples who took time off for the adoption, it was the adoptive mother who took the time off from her work. The majority of adoptive mothers (7 of 10) utilized their maternity leave for the adoption. However, only one father used his paternity leave for the adoption.
REFERENCES


Daly, K.J. (1996). Spending time with the kids: Meanings of family time for fathers. Family Relations, 45 (October), 466-476.


