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BIRTH PARENT LOVE PORTRAYED IN DOMESTIC ADOPTION

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

By

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A THESIS

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This thesis examines domestic adoption children’s literature published in the 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s, to assess if the authors portrayed birth parent love through narration and/or illustration toward the child relinquished for adoption. The study reveals that over time there is a statistical increase in publications focusing on domestic adoption; however, there is no statistical difference between the three decades studied in the frequency of portrayals of birth parent love for the child relinquished for adoption. In the 1970’s there was one book demonstrating birth parent love and by the 1990’s this number had increased to fourteen. However, in the 1990’s these fourteen books published were a small percentage of the forty one books which were surveyed and which were published in this decade. This research reveals that even though by the 1990’s open adoption had begun to become the most popular method for domestic adoptions, there was still uncertainty present at least in terms of how it was represented in literature directed toward young children.
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This thesis is dedicated to my children, Madeline and Gabriel. Every day the two of you are an inspiration to me. I will always love you!
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Introduction

Historically, the topic of adoption was not discussed publicly because of the secrets surrounding this act of love. Prior to the 1980’s, birth parents had only the option of a closed adoption if their child was being relinquished for adoption. This meant that no identifiable information was shared between all three members of the adoption triad (birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptee). This method of adoption was found not to be favorable with many adopted persons because they desired information surrounding their biological families. Birth parents, especially the birth mothers were not satisfied with closed adoptions because they internally questioned who is raising their child, where their child is located, what the child’s interests are, and if the child is content with their adoptive parents. These questions manifested much anxiety for the majority of birth mothers and the staff working with them found that this anxiety could be decreased if given the opportunity to communicate with their child. Therefore, in the 1980’s open adoptions emerged by first giving the birth parents a chance to write a letter to their child to say good-bye and describe why they chose adoption for their child. Over time more information was allowed to be shared between all members of the adoption triad and the option to form a relationship with all involved materialized.

I am fortunate to have established a relationship with both of my children’s birth mothers. These relationships are growing with time and my children have had the opportunity to know who their birth mothers are. I must acknowledge that these women love the child they placed in my arms. My hope is that my children will grow up knowing they are loved not only by my husband and me but also by their biological families as well. This is why I searched out children’s literature portraying birth parent
love in books focusing on domestic adoption for preschool-aged children. Specifically, I identified books portraying domestic adoptions from the 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s. I focused on this timeframe because adoptions were closed in the 1970’s but in the 1980’s openness emerged and became the preferred form of domestic adoption.

Interestingly, the majority of books portraying birth parent love focused on the birth mother and only a few mentioned a birth father. The role of the birth mother is predominately represented as the birth parent demonstrating love toward the child relinquished for adoption. The birth father not being represented as having a significant role in the decision to place his child for adoption is significant to the readers. I feel that the authors view the birth father’s role as being insignificant due to the history surrounding the role of the birth father. Many men stepped aside and allowed the woman and her family to make the decision surrounding the pregnancy. Most birth fathers in the past did not have a voice if their child was going to be placed for adoption. These men were able to move on with their lives, some hiding the fact they were a birth father and tucking away the grief they suffered.

My hope was when reviewing the literature throughout these three decades that over time there would be an overall increase in publications geared towards children that depict domestic adoption. In addition, I wondered if there would be a similar increase in the frequency of the depiction of birth parent love in these texts that mirrored the increasing acceptance of open adoptions in this timeframe. In order to see if there was an increase in the presence of birth parent love in stories of adoption between 1970 and 1999, I conducted a thorough search of adoption literature geared toward children that was published in these years. Then, I examined each piece of literature and noted
whether or not it depicted birth parent love. After that, I conducted two Chi-Square analyses to address two key questions. First, I wanted to know if there was an overall increase in the number of children’s books that discuss domestic adoption across these three decades. Second, I conducted an additional analysis in which I gauged if there was an increase in the proportion of these texts that depict birth parent love across these three decades. My first analysis reveals that there was an increase in the number of publications depicting domestic adoption over the three decades, $X^2(2) = 31.6, p<.05$. However, there was only a marginal increase in the percentage of these publications that portrayed birth parent love in the three decades studied. This small increase was not statistically significant when analyzing the data by Chi-square analysis, $X^2(2) = 1.92$. This means that although there was an increase in the number of texts depicting domestic adoption from the 1970’s to the 1990’s, this was not paired with an increase in the proportion of those texts depicting birth parent love. This data demonstrates that even though openness had begun in the 1980’s there was still uncertainty surrounding it in the 1990’s. Future work expanding upon the current research to include the 2000’s may reveal how open adoption has become less controversial.

This thesis will incorporate my own personal journey with becoming an adoptive parent and the emotions surrounding this topic. Also, it will discuss how the relationships with both of my children’s birth mothers have grown over time. Historically, birth mothers and adoptive mothers did not have the opportunity to form relationships with each other. Because of this, chapter two will focus on the historical dimension of adoption and how national events affected the role of the birth parent and changed how the majority of domestic adoptions are conducted today. Chapter three will
illustrate the methodology used to acquire the literature needed for this project and will
discuss the parameters used to limit the scope of this study.

The results of my analysis of the literature will be discussed in chapter four. I
will compare domestic adoption literature published during the decades of the 1970’s,
1980’s, and 1990’s, focusing upon whether love was represented in the depiction of the
birth parents. In the 1970’s only 11% of the books published demonstrated love by the
birth parents. This percentage increased to only 34% by the 1990’s.

This thesis will conclude by discussing other areas of research that remain to be
done on the topic of adoption in children’s literature. For instance, expanding this thesis
to include the present decade of children’s literature published to analyze if birth parents
are discussed more prevalently. Are birth parents discussed more freely in teen adoption
literature? What feelings do adopted individuals have toward their birth parents? Are
these feelings similar or different if their adoptions were closed or open? How does
children’s literature focusing on international adoption compare or contrast with domestic
adoption literature? These are just a few of the ideas that need to be investigated more
fully in the years ahead.
Chapter 1: My Adoption Journey

The focus of this thesis generates from a very personal topic. I am an adoptive parent of two young children, and when my adoption journey began it was a time of mixed emotions for me and my spouse. After a long period of frustration, anxiety and sadness, adoption was the option that provided me hope for becoming a mom. I feel blessed every day that I was given the opportunity to parent; however, it is difficult to educate my children on what adoption is, and how their birth parents integrate into our family’s life, especially in terms my children will understand. To help my children begin to comprehend this complex topic, my husband and I began reading to them literature with adoption as the primary focus. The majority of these books are creative in how they tackle such a theme, but many did not even mention the role a birth parent has in adoption or how much love the birth parent has for the baby they entrust to others.

Therefore, I desired to examine how birth parent love is portrayed in children’s literature across three decades, the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s. These decades were chosen specifically because domestic adoption in the U.S. evolved from being “closed” in the 1970’s to becoming “open” in the 1980’s. My hope was when reviewing domestic adoption literature published for preschool age children between these decades that over time there would be an increase in publications demonstrating birth parent love toward the child they relinquished for adoption.

The popularity of open adoptions increased throughout the 1980’s. This came to fruition when society realized providing information about one triad member to the other fostered healing with the birth parents as they grieved and benefited the adoptee because they could now know of their biological family and not question where they came from.
However, openness evolved over time and the level of openness can be different from one family to the next. To be considered open, the adoption must include communication between the adoption triad members (birth parent(s), adoptive parent(s), and child). The level of openness needs to be determined by all involved so everyone feels comfortable with the relationship.

The majority of domestic adoptions done today are open; therefore, one might surmise that in the domestic adoption literature, published for preschool-aged children, between the years 1970 and 1999, there would be an increase over time in the number of publications portraying love of the birth parents for their children. I discovered, however, that during these three decades there was no significant increase in the percentage of books representing love between the birth parent and child. This confirmed to me why my family had difficulty finding books presenting all three members of the adoption triad and acknowledging the love a birth parent feels. Discovering these books was important for my family because we do have open relationships with both of my children’s birth moms and I have accepted the fact that these two women loved and still love my children. They will never forget the children they placed in my arms and therefore it was imperative for me to locate children’s literature portraying love between all three members of the adoption triad.

It is easy to write about an adoptee and the adoptive parents because of the joy associated with these two parties. It is more difficult to tackle the object of the birth parent because for so many years society pushed them aside and believed that a birth mom could carry a child in her womb, give birth to this child, and then forget all about this child. One of the purposes of this paper is to let my children’s birth moms know that
I will never forget them and can accept they will not forget about my children or stop
loving them.

The adoption journey I have been traveling down has not been all joy and
happiness. As adoptive parents, my husband and I have dealt with infertility and the
perplexities surrounding why others can conceive a child so easily and we cannot. The
roller coaster of infertility issues and accepting not being able to conceive a child is a
difficult feat for many to overcome. Many couples choose not to parent, but my husband
and I both knew we wanted a child in our lives. This led us to research adoption
agencies, interview them, and eventually choose the one with which we felt the most
comfortable. It took us one year to complete all the necessary meetings and paperwork,
after which began the dreaded waiting period. The waiting period is the most difficult for
prospective adoptive parents. In domestic adoptions, prospective adoptive parents may
wait only one month or several years to be notified a child is available for them. During
the waiting period, I would come home from work each day to see if there were any
messages on the answering machine. I pondered what items to purchase before receiving
“the call” and then became overwhelmed looking at all the baby gadgets and accessories
you can buy. I waited…and waited…and waited. I started exercising and got a personal
trainer to help occupy my mind. I focused hard at work and in graduate school. Every
day I wondered if today was going to be my lucky day and “the call” would come.

For both of my children, “the calls” came very unexpectedly. For my oldest, her
call came when I had taken a day off of work to prepare for a vacation out east. It was
3:30 p.m. and I was in the kitchen when they called to let me know that my husband and I
were chosen by a birth parent to raise her child. I was so overjoyed that I did not know
what to do but cry. My husband and I were so excited; however, we also had to be realistic and acknowledge the birth mother had not terminated her parental rights and nothing would go through until that occurred. So, we pleaded with our parents and siblings not to tell anyone (I am not sure if they actually followed through with this promise) so we would not have to call up a lot of individuals with an explanation of what happened if the placement did not go through. Therefore, as thrilled as my husband and I were about being chosen by a birth mom, we could not shout to the world that we possibly might be parents.

My husband and I met with the birth mom after returning home from our vacation. This was the foundation of the relationship we have built and are continuing to build with her. We were told at this meeting that our daughter was to be born in one month. My husband and I did not rush out and purchase lots of items for this child. We only bought necessities and were reluctant to do more because until this birth mom terminated her parental rights we were not going to be this child’s parents. This waiting period once again was not easy. As prospective adoptive parents, we had absolutely no control. We could not control when the child came into this world and we could not control if the birth mother would ultimately elect to terminate her parental rights. I was full of emotion. I was hesitant to become excited and I was full of fear. I truly did not want another disappointment in my life and I definitely did not want to shed any more tears on this subject.

I was at work, when the agency called to let me know our birth mother was in labor. She was two weeks early and I had three summer students working with me who were not ready to be on their own. I did not know what to do. Anxiety, excitement,
nervousness, were only a few of the emotions I felt as soon as I hung up the telephone. Chaos then set in because I needed to leave work quickly. The first thing I did was call my husband and let him know that he needed to get off of work early, then I raced and told one of my colleagues who found my boss. I sprung from work and headed home to meet my husband. We were told by the agency to pick up a gift for the birth mother and take this with us to the hospital. What would we buy a woman who was giving us the gift of life? My husband and I chose the appropriate month's birthstone that was on a pendant and we placed it on a necklace. I can remember the sales clerk telling us the items we chose were not on sale and I looked straight at her and told her I did not care. The amount of money I was spending was the last thing on my mind at that point.

My husband and I drove to the hospital where our daughter was born. We were both so nervous because we had met the birth mother but not her family. A nurse met us as we entered into the maternity ward and took us to the birth mother’s room. Here we were greeted with hugs and enthusiasm from our birth mother’s family and both birth mother and child were healthy and doing fine. My husband and birth mother changed the baby’s diaper and clothing together. The birth mother showed us what formula she had been giving her and told us when she was fed last. We all climbed into the birth mom’s hospital bed and took pictures. This was an overwhelming day for me, my husband and for the birth mom.

The next afternoon we were told to return to the hospital. When we arrived a nurse took us aside and began giving us parenting tips. As she was instructing us, a knock came to the door. The birth mother’s caseworker was the first to walk in. Following her, the birth mother came holding our soon-to-be child. The caseworker
explained to us that the birth mother had said her good-byes and was going to leave the hospital. The birth mother, trying so hard not to cry, handed us her child and left the room. This was too much for me to take in and I broke down. The nurse ended up leaving my husband, daughter and me alone for quite some time so I could adjust to what had just happened. I had such an overwhelming sense of guilt flow through my body that I could not control. It was as if my mind and heart were telling me that she was not my child, that this child has another mom. It took me a while to calm down and then I could begin to look at this child before me in a new light. Excitement emerged at the thought of really becoming a mom. I could hardly believe it was happening. What I did realize was that I may not have given this child my genes but what I could give her was my love.

My husband and I learned to bathe our new daughter and to care for her. We were able to spend her second night of life with her and we stayed at the hospital until we received another call from the agency telling us that the birth mom had relinquished her parental rights and they asked us to drive to the agency for a placement service that the birth mom and caseworker prepared. The placement service is when all three members of the triad are together and initiate the formation of a relationship with one another. This service is not the same from one adoption to the next because the birth mom has a role in the preparation. Because of the role our birth mom had in arranging this service, this was a very emotional event for me. The service was quick, but I will not forget the prayer and poem that were said that day. We prayed for our daughter, for my husband and me, and for the birth mom. The service was not a specific religious ceremony, but our faith was incorporated into the prayers. I will always be thankful this ceremony
occurred because it enforced how we will all be connected because of our daughter’s birth.

When we left the agency office and began driving home, my husband and I just looked at one another and we were both thinking “Now what?” Our lives had forever been changed by the birth of this child and our future began to unfold like any other first-time parents. We dealt with the adjustment of having a child and the responsibilities associated with that. We found her an appropriate daycare setting so after a few weeks off of work, I could jump back in. However, life did become a little more difficult trying to juggle family, work, school, and household responsibilities.

My family had to wait six months until being able to begin the process of officially adopting our daughter. Our caseworker had to come to our home three times to assess how we were all adjusting and bonding together. After that point, we had the approval to contact an attorney. Eight months after our daughter came home from the hospital, she finally became ours legally. She may have been part of our family in our hearts and minds but by this legal motion she could now share our name.

Our son’s adoption story is much different. I received “the call” at work, again at 3:30 p.m., but this time the call came after he had already been born. The agency wanted us to meet the birth mom the following evening and then we would be able to take the child home with us soon after. Wow! What a crazy place my home turned into in only one night. We had to find the containers storing all the baby items, get a room ready and prepare our three-year-old to become a big sister. It was once again excitement and anxiety rolled into one. Just as when we met our daughter’s birth mom, my husband and I were nervous to meet our son’s birth mom. We wanted to impress her and yet just be
ourselves. I worried whether being ourselves was going to be good enough? What if she meets us and decides we are not good enough? These were the questions that went through my mind when I was driving to meet the woman who might entrust her child to me. However, what I found was once we all met and sat down to begin talking we found a commonality that we all shared. This helped break the ice and then what needed to be addressed regarding the child could be done with honesty.

After meeting with our son’s birth mom, we were notified that we could take him home in a week. That week was nice to have so we could prepare our daughter for what was to come. We bought her a big sister shirt and let her pick out toys to buy for the new baby. We brought her to the placement ceremony the night we took our son home. Again, the birth mom and caseworker put together a service that was meaningful to all of us. Our daughter met our son’s birth mother and his foster care mother and everyone tried very hard to make our daughter feel like she had a big role in this event. However, my daughter could not understand why I started crying after her brother was placed in my arms. She kept asking me, “Why are you crying mommy?” All I could get out of my mouth was how guilty I was feeling again. The same rush of guilt, just as with my daughter, occurred all over again. My son’s birth mom kept telling me not to feel guilty, that this was her decision not mine. My daughter was patting me on the back and my husband took the baby until I could calm down again. Our caseworker assured me that many adoptive mothers have had the same guilty feelings that I had and eventually it would go away. He was right, and for the second time these feelings dissipated.

Our son was a few weeks old when we were able to bring him home. I was nervous that it might take a longer time for him to bond with us, but I was wrong. He felt
right at home with us. It took us ten months to get his adoption finalized but it was worth
the wait. We had an outstanding judge who had taken the time beforehand to get to know
us through all the documentation he received and spoke freely to us about the challenges
we may face when adopting a biracial child. This not only was good for my husband and
me to hear, but also for our extended family and friends who were there to support us.

What is difficult not to do is compare the two birth moms. Our daughter’s birth
mom is 10 years younger than our son’s. One birth mom was raised by her parents and
the other was raised by her grandparents because of her parent’s untimely deaths. One
birth mom has email and the other does not. There are so many dissimilarities.
However, we have such a good time visiting with each of them. We see them three to
four times a year and either go out to dinner or go somewhere fun with the kids. We
communicate on the phone prior to our visits and exchange letters and photographs two
to three times a year. We do not see them often but it is nice to have the connection so
our children know where they came from and who gave birth to them. I can be truly
honest and say how easy it would be to disregard my children’s biological families. My
husband and I could carry on with our lives ignoring the fact that our children’s biology
is different from our own and overlooking their birth moms as if they did not exist.
However, as an adoptive parent, I feel very passionate about my children understanding
where they came from, why they do not look like me, and creating an environment where
my children can freely discuss their adoptions. Each child’s beginning was different and
this needs to be acknowledged. In order to do this, my husband and I felt the need to
build a relationship with the birth parents. How amazing it has been to be able to
communicate with these wonderful ladies! To learn and to understand why they made
the difficult decision to place their children for adoption and to get to know each of these women has been and will continue to be a great experience. The truth is, they both loved and still love my children. They will never forget the children they placed in my arms. This is why I sought out children’s literature demonstrating love between adoptive parents and adoptee but also birth parents loving the child they so unselfishly entrusted to others.
Chapter 2: History of Adoption

American attitudes toward single mothers and the options available to those mothers to place their children for adoption have changed dramatically over the years. In the nineteenth century, it was common for an unwed pregnant woman to have her child and if she was not getting married, find employment so both mother and child would be together. These women were scorned and ridiculed by the public because of giving birth to what was referred to as an “illegitimate” child. Adoption was not an option for these women because their children were not wanted due to their mothers’ supposed sin of having sex before marriage and the infants were not viewed as desirable for most families (Edwards 163). When and if adoptions occurred, families were interested in adopting older children because they could be trained to do hard labor and earn an income, which the adoptive families could benefit from. Infants did not become more desirable for the typical American family to adopt until after the Great Depression began in 1929. During this time, adults were so desperate for employment they acquired the jobs the older children generally performed creating an unemployment status for the older children. Thus, this left the older orphans less desirable for adoption, since the family could not benefit monetarily from them.

Because infant adoption was not popular in the late nineteenth century, exclusive maternity homes did not exist until the early twentieth century. These homes evolved from institutions dedicated to rescuing prostitutes, drug addicts, alcoholics and pregnant unwed mothers to facilities that only provided services to the pregnant unwed mother. The action of helping these women began because of the vision of Charles Nelson Crittenton. Crittenton earned his fortune in the pharmaceutical industry and after his
daughter, Florence, died he devoted his time and financial resources to help rescue women who were in need. Crittenton was able to promote his vision by holding revival tours inspiring evangelical women across the country to begin work in their own communities with “fallen girls” (Kunzel 14).

The mission of Crittenton’s homes and others were to rescue, reform, and convert the unwed pregnant mother to Christianity. These homes in communities throughout the U.S. were opened primarily by evangelical protestant middle class women who had sympathy towards the unwed mothers. They believed seduction and abandonment was the reason why these women were in this situation and claimed “a sisterhood with fallen women” (Kunzel 23) because their situation was a “crime against the sex” not the woman herself (Kunzel 23).

These early maternity homes strove to keep mother and child together. Some homes even had the women entering sign a document that they intended on raising their children (Kunzel 32). Women living in the homes were required to work and had little time for recreation. Once the child was born, the homes assisted women securing employment or resources to continue their education. The most popular occupation for these women was as a domestic servant. The women would have learned all they needed to at the home for this vocation and there was a need available.

By the 1940’s, the same homes that stressed that mother and child be together began to focus on adoption as the option for these women. The influential 1947 statement that was issued by the National Florence Crittenton Mission (NFCM) stating that it was now surrendering its policy of keeping child and mother together was a critical turning point. This was an important statement because the NFCM was the largest
maternity home organization in the U.S. This change in attitude of promoting adoption as the best alternative for these women was primarily due to society shifting its attitude toward unwed pregnancy being a disgrace. Furthermore, the influence of social workers and their belief that professional intervention was needed for these women enhanced adoption as the central option for these women.

It is interesting to note that prior to 1940, women seeking maternity homes were predominately from the working class. However, in 1940 this shifted to predominately white middle class women seeking a room in a home. The shift in attitude to viewing unwed pregnancy as being a disgrace for the family initiated this trend. When white middle class parents would discover their daughter was pregnant, Solinger describes fathers wanting to pretend their daughters were dead and mothers “frequently effaced her daughter more quietly by denying the girl ownership of her own life” (109). It was not uncommon for these daughters to be restricted to only attend school and come immediately home with no socializing with friends until a decision was made as to what the family was going to do about this situation. The majority of these pregnant women were in love with their boyfriends and felt helpless after they learned the boyfriends wanted nothing to do with them after they found out about the pregnancies. These women were distraught by being abandoned by their boyfriends and knowing how disappointed their families were with them. This is why they felt like they had no voice when discussing what was going to happen to them. They went along with the plan their families came up with including the lies told about why they were leaving town and where they were going. The women’s families believed that sending them away to a home, living among strangers would be no embarrassment to the family and was in the
best interest of the pregnant women and themselves. The women could arrive at a home, stay until after the baby was born, then return home leaving their children and all those memories behind. They and their families could go on with their lives as if the pregnancies never happened and the children did not exist.

Maternity homes became increasingly overwhelmed with the number of women in need of their services. By the 1950’s and 1960’s, many women could not enter into a home until their seven month of pregnancy because there were often no beds available. This left their families in the position of finding a place for their daughters to hide, due to their physical changes becoming noticeable to the public. Many families either chose to arrange for their daughters to stay in a city becoming a family’s nanny and/or housekeeper, or, if the daughter’s family could afford it, the woman would be placed at a wage home (a daily or weekly fee was applicable to stay here) until she could be transferred to a maternity home. Many of these women moved from place to place and were lonely and scared.

After the late 1930’s, once living at the maternity home, many women were forced to relinquish their children for adoption. These women felt they had no control because of shame and finances. Fessler argues that many maternity home staff members did not provide a “realistic picture of the responsibilities and costs of raising a child and allowing them (the unwed mothers) to weigh that information against the resources available to them so they could participate in making an informed decision, they were rendered powerless” (150-1). Typically, the staff made these women feel they had nothing to offer to their children. They used persuasion and guilt to convince these women to relinquish their children and some even lied to them about who would be
raising their children. An example of this was in an interview conducted by Fessler. A birth mother states

The social worker was telling me, “No man is going to want to marry you, no man is going to want another man’s baby.” She proceeded to tell me that the adoptive parents they would find for “the baby” would be college educated, degreed, they would be much older, they would own their own home, have high incomes. They would be able to give “the baby” everything that I could not. They told me I was unfit because I wasn’t married. I didn’t have this, I didn’t have that. Well, it turns out her adoptive parents were just a couple of years older, and neither one had a college education. Nothing against them, but the adoption agency lied to me. They also divorced when she was fourteen. I’m with the same man for thirty-eight years. Financially, her adoptive family was better off than we were, but other than that it wasn’t anything like what the agency promised. (151)

Unfortunately, this means of persuasion occurred frequently and the pregnant woman or new mother in some situations felt powerless.

Financial incentives were another method the agency could use to help convince a birth mother she should relinquish her child for adoption. Typically, the pregnant unwed mother’s family paid for their child to stay at the home, if they could afford to do so, and after the child was born the unwed mother was asked to sign termination papers for her parental rights. If she was reluctant, then the social workers were instructed to let the unwed mother know she would be responsible for paying the debt that she owed for her maternity care and hospitalization. Fessler provides an example of this in an interview with a birth mom. She writes “They (the agency) said, ‘Well, you would have to pay all
the expenses if you keep your daughter.’ I didn’t have any money. I was still living at home” (160). These women were in no way prepared for such a large financial burden. However, even after relinquishing many women had a large debt to pay. Some had to pay back family members or the agency for their stay. Months after their child was taken from them, many women were still financially burdened, and grief-stricken by their stay at the maternity home.

By the 1960’s, birth mothers began speaking out regarding being in a maternity home and the aftermath of that experience. Fessler discusses how many of these women had long term effects from this experience. Some never had another child because of the extreme guilt that they had for placing their child for adoption. Others had difficulty in their personal lives with friendships, marriage, and family relations and many of these problems where associated with the anger of not feeling they had a voice in the relinquishment of their children. Not all birth mothers suffered, but all would never forget the children they relinquished. Support groups began to form to help these women deal with their grief and loss. Examples include Concerned United Birthparents, Sunflower Birth Moms Support Groups, and Origins USA. These organizations and many others not only provide emotional support for these women but some also help facilitate searches and reunions with the children they relinquished.

Maternity homes today typically fall into three categories. They include homes that offer only maternity services, regardless of the woman’s choice to parent or place her child for adoption, but offer no adoption services; homes that offer maternity and adoption services only to those clients seeking adoption plans; and homes offering both
maternity and adoption services to those who may choose to parent or place a child for adoption. These homes are much smaller and typically house 6-10 clients at a time.

Edwards provides three significant reasons why a woman may enter a home today. The first is to escape abusive or stressful living arrangements. Many young women who do not have the support of their parents (parental abuse is present or parents will not provide them a place to stay because of the pregnancy), reach out to the homes because they have nowhere else to go. These women would be homeless if not for these homes.

A second reason to enter a home is to avoid the stigma now associated with placing a child for adoption. In the past, the stigma had been in keeping the child and today there is much more support in society for single mothers than for birth mothers who relinquish. Many question “how can you give up your child?” I feel that today there needs to be more education to show that relinquishing one’s child for adoption is an act of love not one of abandonment. However, this is where the stigma affects the birth mother. In my personal situation, my son’s birth mom’s sister cannot understand how she could place her child for adoption. This unsupportive attitude creates difficulty in their relationship. This is why if a woman does not have support from her parents, and/or friends and wants to place her child, she may turn to live in a home where she will receive support, counseling, and other assistance when needed.

Lastly, Edwards points out that women entering a home today want to provide resources to their children or themselves with a stable family. Many of these women are lacking stability and truly want that for their children. They search out adoption and have the opportunity to choose who the adoptive parents will be. If the relationship between
the triad members is to be open, the birth mother may gain a sense of family from this unit. In the majority of domestic adoptions done today, identifiable information is shared between members of the adoption triad and friendships develop over time. These friendships are considered to be similar to and thought of as extended family members.

Today’s maternity homes are managed differently from the past. Beginning in the early twentieth century, maternity homes went through an administrative change from being run by evangelical women to social workers taking control. This adjustment coincides with the American attitude shift toward unwed pregnancy that occurred in the late 1930’s. The majority of the American public believed professional intervention was necessary to help decrease illegitimacy because the unwed pregnant woman was now no longer a family private matter but a “public humiliation” (Kunzel 145). Social workers believed that illegitimacy was in their domain of expertise. Their view on unwed pregnancy and illegitimacy was much different from the evangelical women who were running the maternity homes. The evangelical women had sympathy for the unwed mothers and believed that a sexual double standard existed that punished them. Whereas with the social workers “replacing the melodramatic story of seduction and abandonment with feeblemindedness and sex delinquency took illegitimacy out of the emotional, moralistic world of old-fashioned benevolence and into the objective, empirical realm of science” (Kunzel 62). Social workers strove to find psychological, intellectual, and emotional reasons for a woman to find herself in this situation. By the 1940’s, social workers had published material and held conferences focusing on out of wedlock pregnancy and had established themselves as the professional experts dealing with illegitimacy.
These differences of opinion between the evangelical matrons and secular social workers led to increased conflict about how the maternity homes should be managed. Beginning in the 1920’s, many maternity homes were “subject to social workers’ intrusions and accountable to their demands” (Kunzel 141). By the 1930’s, many homes employed at least one social worker. The matron no longer interviewed the woman entering the home. This was now the responsibility of the social worker. However, there were many women entering who did not trust the social workers. Many women lied to the social workers regarding their family history, who the father of their child was, and any information that they asked that seemed to be personal because they were fearful their confidentiality would be broken. Social workers had to earn the trust of these women before asking them such personal questions surrounding their pregnancy.

Over time, social workers gained full control over the maternity homes. This was not an easy task considering between the years of 1945 and 1965 there were approximately 200 licensed maternity homes in the U.S. (Solinger 103). By 1980 only 99 homes were open (Gross 1) due to fewer women needing to run and hide at these facilities. The disgrace associated with unwed pregnancy had decreased dramatically and there was a more societal acceptance of a single woman becoming pregnant. However, by 1989 it has been reported that this number increased to 140 licensed maternity homes due to pro-life activists opening homes. Currently, President Peggy Hartshorn, Ph.D., of Heartbeat International estimates that her organization has identified 300 homes nationwide. However, “she wouldn’t even hazard a guess as to how many are actually out there” (Beyerstein, www.rhrealitycheck.org). As in the past, today’s maternity homes
are predominately run by religious organizations; however, today women have the option
to parent or place their child for adoption.

A woman being able to have the option to place a child for adoption and also
having the authority to choose if they want an open or closed relationship with the
adoptive parents, gives the birth parent more control in the decisions surrounding her
child. This was not the case prior to open adoptions being employed. Prior to the 1980’s,
closed adoptions were the only adoption process available. This meant that the birth
parents and adoptees had no identifiable information regarding the other. Both of these
parties began to speak out about wanting to know information regarding the other. Birth
parents wanted to know about the child they relinquished and many adult adoptees
wanted a way of locating or finding out who their biological parents were. Support
groups formed for both of these parties but what angered the majority of individuals
involved were the laws regulating sealed birth records. Adult adopted persons could not
view their original birth certificates and find out exactly who gave birth to them because
they had to be granted permission by the courts in order for the original records to be
opened. The courts did not want these documents opened because of breaking the
promise of confidentiality for the birth parents. In 1971, Florence Ladden Fisher, an
adoptee who successfully located her biological parents, founded the Adoptees Liberty
Movement Association (ALMA). Its goal was to end the practice of sealed birth records
and allow any adopted person access to their original birth certificates. This group was
unsuccessful in eliminating sealed birth records; however, ALMA became the nation’s
largest adoption search group. This group inspired hundreds of other search groups
across the U.S., England and Canada (Wegar 442).
In 1996, another activists group called Bastard Nation unveiled itself. Its goal was also to open records for all adopted persons who wanted access to their original birth records. They used civil rights ideology as their means to gain legislative approval permitting adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates in the state of Oregon in 1998. This ballot initiative is known as Measure 58 and “it was the first time in U.S. history that an initiative to restore the right of adopted adults to request their original birth certificate had been attempted and been victorious” (Wegar 454).

Nebraska currently still has sealed birth records. An adopted person cannot gain access to their original birth certificate unless it is ordered by a court. However, a licensed Nebraska agency has the authority to locate necessary information if an adult adoptee or birth parent wishes to begin a search for one another. The agency can receive the identifiable information and contact the one that is being sought out. If the one being sought out wishes to remain anonymous then identifiable information will not be disclosed. However, if a reunion is desired then the agency makes these arrangements possible.

Searches and reunions by members of the adoption triad are common today because there were so many closed adoptions done in the U.S. prior to the 1980’s. The National Survey of Family Growth reports that prior to 1973 8.7% of children born to all women between 15-44 years of age relinquished their child for adoption. The percentage dropped to 4.1% between the years of 1973-1981 and continued to decline to 2% in 1982-1988 (Bachrach 29). By 1996, this decline was still consistent with 1.9% of live births to unmarried women being placed for adoption (Adoption Factbook III 40). This decline in relinquishment was noted by Maza when reviewing data collected by the Children’s
Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics. Maza reports that in 1960, with 50 states reporting data, there were 57,800 unrelated domestic adoptions. In 1970, with 49 states reporting, 89,200 unrelated adoptions took place. By 1975, with 40 states reporting the adoption rate had dropped to only 47,700. The National Committee for Adoption published that in 1982 there were 50,720 unrelated domestic adoptions and in 1986 this number stayed fairly consistent with 51,157 (1989 Adoption Factbook 90). This trend of approximately 50,000 domestic unrelated adoptions stayed consistent throughout the 1990’s and by 1996 it was reported that 54,492 adoptions occurred (Adoption Factbook III 43).

By the mid 1970’s and early 1980’s, why did the number of infants placed for domestic adoptions decrease dramatically? And why did fewer women in the 1980’s and 1990’s relinquish their child for adoption even though, “open” adoption was an option for them? One significant reason is that the stigma associated with unwed pregnancy began to decrease following the sexual revolution and the 1960 decision of the FDA approving the usage of the birth control pill. The sexual revolution was a sexual liberation for women. By having the birth control pill available, allowed women to have more freedom to involve themselves in sexual activity and help protect themselves against unplanned pregnancies. Even though the pill was hard to come by in the beginning for unmarried women, eventually by the 1970’s doctors began prescribing it more often due to President Johnson using federal money to attack the causes and consequences of poverty (Bailey 120). Therefore, not as many unmarried women were getting pregnant because of using the pill as protection and “greater social acceptance of unwed motherhood” (Edwards
165) emerged with more women confident that they had the potential to parent their child instead of placing the child for adoption.

One other factor which did decrease the number of live births and influenced the decline of adoptions was the legal motion of Roe vs. Wade in 1973. If a woman became pregnant after 1973, she now legally had the option to abort her child. In select published data focusing on abortion and adoption trends, many researchers believe that abortion was the significant reason for the decline in adoptions (Stolley 32). However, this has not been found to be the sole reason for the decline. Today many researchers tend to believe that the legalization of abortion had an initial impact on the declining adoption trend, however more significant was the shift in social acceptance for unwed mothers (Mosher 8). This shift from negative to a more positive perception allowed the unwed mothers the freedom to not hide their pregnancies and therefore, confidentiality was no longer an issue. These unwed mothers may have still felt shame from their families but the attitude had turned back to the unexpected pregnancy as being a private family matter not a “public humiliation” (Kunzel 146).

This decline in mothers relinquishing their children for adoption has prompted researchers to focus on why this trend is occurring since the cost of raising a child has soared. Bachrach, Kalmuss and others note interesting facts regarding those women who choose to place their child for adoption versus those who choose to parent. When looking at demographics, white women place their children for adoption increasingly more than black women. In general, a woman with a lower economic status, fewer years of education and less interest in career goals will parent their child. Whether or not a woman’s mother completed at least one year of college influences her daughter’s
educational goals and occupational success and thus influences the decision to place the
child for adoption. Attitudes on adoption, and education on open adoption, also can
influence one’s decision to place a child for adoption.

Adoptions moving from closed to open came about because of several factors.
The combination of birth parents speaking out about the grief and loss they suffer, adult
adoptees desiring more information on their biological parents, and the decreasing
number of children being placed for adoption led agencies and private attorneys to begin
offering open adoptions as an option for birth parents in the 1980’s. Openness began
with agencies allowing the birth mother to write a letter to their child prior to
relinquishment. This letter did not have to give out identifying information but it let the
child know how much he/she was loved and possibly the circumstances surrounding why
this was the best option for the child. Writing this letter was a valuable tool to help the
birth mom deal with her grief and provide as much information about herself as she felt
comfortable offering. This opened the doors for agencies to begin allowing letters to be
exchanged between birth parent and adoptee (or adoptive parents if the child was too
young). Over time, this led to giving out identifying information, and the contact
between the parties was determined by all involved. Some individuals feel that providing
each other with names and not addresses is enough and so letters are exchanged through
the adoption agency. Others have contact with each other outside of the agency via
telephone conversations, letters exchanged, email messages or meeting in person. This
type of openness was a gradual response to help the relinquishing mother deal with her
emotions and the adoptee know of his/her identity. Open adoption is considered to be in
the best interest of the child when all members of the triad are in agreement with this
decision. It is my hope that because of the decision I have made to have open relationships with both of my children’s birth moms that my children will not question their identity and will know and understand why their birth mothers made the decision they did in the best interest of each of them.

My quest to find literature my children would enjoy reading portraying birth parent love is important to me because of the relationship I have with their birth moms. With adoption being such a complex topic, finding literature to help me educate my children on what adoption is and who birth parents are is essential to me. I had difficulty finding preschool-age literature showing love between all three members of the adoption triad and, because of my research, I understand why. There is not an abundance of published material readily available for parents demonstrating love by all three members of the triad. My hope is that the number of published material portraying this love will continue to increase over time. This would demonstrate that society has increased its acceptance of open adoption and more significantly that the birth parent is not invisible in the adoption triad.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The research for this paper was conducted by locating literature for preschool-aged children about adoption, and determining if the books demonstrated love by the birth parents toward the child they relinquished through illustrations and/or narrative content. I chose to examine literature published between 1970 and 1999, in particular, focusing on domestic adoption. The years chosen were specific since only closed adoptions occurred in the 1970’s and throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s open adoptions grew more common. This sample allowed me to assess the creativity of many authors in dealing with such a complex topic and most importantly, to investigate whether during this critical period in the history of adoption, when we witness the important transition between closed and open adoptions, more authors would avail themselves of the chance to express birth parental love.

In order to obtain as much published material as possible, I located the books I analyzed in a variety of ways. I was able to utilize my own books, those at the public library, the university library, and those located at the adoption agency I used for both of my children’s adoptions. A great resource to me was the online catalog, World Cat. This enabled me to locate a great number of books and utilize interlibrary loan to receive them. Without this resource, the number of books I would have been able to acquire would have been far fewer.

My motivation to focus on domestic adoption literature was two-fold. First, I had experienced domestic adoption and I was searching out age-appropriate literature my children would enjoy reading. On my own, I was having difficulty locating books focusing on domestic adoption and acknowledging birth parents and the love they have
for the children they relinquish. This was important for me because of having an open relationship with both of my children’s biological mothers. I wanted literature in my home that could help my children understand and spur their curiosity about what adoption is and what birth parents are. I also wanted to instill in them what I have been communicating to them since they joined our family: that they are loved by not only the family they live with but by their biological families as well.

Another reason to focus on domestic adoption literature was a way to limit the scope of my analysis given all the literature that is in print that could potentially be relevant. There are many books published focusing on international adoption but because so little information is generally known about the birth families in international adoptions, and because I have not gone through this experience, I felt these books would not be relevant to this study.

I also elected to limit my study by examining books published between the years of 1970 and 1999. These years were chosen specifically because in the 1970’s only closed adoptions occurred, but by the 1990’s openness had gained popularity among domestic adoptions. Therefore, in the 1970’s one could surmise only a few books would mention a birth parent, let alone demonstrate the love a birth parent has toward the child they relinquished. This is because during this time, the majority of society was still viewing the birth parent role as being invisible in the adoption triad. Many believed that once the child was born and placed for adoption that the birth parent could return to life as it was prior to the pregnancy. It was not until the 1980’s that professionals associated with adoption began to publicly acknowledge the birth parent as being an important
member of the adoption triad. This helped generate assistance for more birth parent support groups and strengthened the movement for closed adoptions to become open.

Because of open adoptions beginning in the 1980’s, I hoped that by the 1990’s there would be an increasing number of published literature demonstrating birth parental love, either through illustrations or narrative content. There were many more books published focusing on adoption in the 1990’s versus the 70’s and 80’s: however, there was no significant increase in those demonstrating birth parent love towards the child they relinquished. I hope that future work will investigate the current decade of literature published because I was unable to assess the current literature since the decade is not complete.

My analysis showed birth parent love was present in 30% of the literature surveyed for this study. Birth parent love was found in only eighteen books out of the sixty one total books analyzed for this study. There was an increase over time in publications demonstrating this love. In the 1970’s, 11% of books surveyed portrayed birth parent love. By the 1980’s, 27% of books revealed this love and by the 1990’s 34% demonstrated birth parent love. However, this increase in the percentage of books depicting birth parent love was not a reliable increase when analyzing the data by Chi-square analysis, $X^2(2) = 1.92$. The findings reveal that there is no reliable increase in the frequency of birth parent love portrayal in children’s books about domestic adoption across the three decades studied. This means that these slight increases across the decades may have just been a coincidence rather than due to a reliable shift in the attitudes about open adoptions and birth parent love.
Those books demonstrating birth parental love did so through illustrations and/or narrative content. Authors were extremely creative on how they approached such a complex topic knowing their audience was young children. It is my opinion, at least for my children, that the illustrations are just as important if not more important than the author’s words. The illustrations get their attention and help them focus on the story. After a book has been read a few times, and the children have seen the illustrations over and over again, then they begin to focus on the narrative. An example of this is the story And Now We Are A Family, written by Judith Meredith (1971). The book is printed in red and blue ink and the drawings are of hands lying close to one another with the narrative written around the hands or inside of them (Figure 1). There are not very many illustrations of people, but the few that are done are in a child-like fashion. Children would enjoy seeing these simple illustrations and, importantly to this study, all members of the adoption triad are mentioned. Specifically, the book mentions how the child’s first mother and father “wish you love” and “made good plans for you” (17).

Another example of creativity was in the writings of Anne Braff Brodzinsky in The Mulberry Bird Story of an Adoption (1986). She demonstrates the love a birth mother has by the actions a mulberry bird goes through when trying to protect her new baby bird (Figure 2). The mother bird realizes she cannot care for the new baby bird properly and gives this new baby to a couple of birds wanting to adopt a baby bird. The author portrays the mother bird’s love through illustrations and narrative. Brodzinsky incorporates all three members of the adoption triad and importantly emphasizes how adoptive parents should speak freely and truthfully about their child’s adoption.
In 1992 a book by Jeffrey R. LaCure was published called *Adopted Like Me*. Using bears as the characters of this book, not only were words written demonstrating love by all members of the adoption triad but the birth parents are illustrated as their story is told (Figure 3). The illustrations are all in color and by using animals as characters sustain the audience’s attention.


These books that I recommend all mention love portrayed by the adoptive parents and birth parents. The majority of these books were published in the 1990’s, demonstrating that openness had begun to be incorporated in the adoption process. Also, more individuals no longer wanted to conceal what adoption is. No longer were secrets needed surrounding this act of love, helping to lift the stigma associated with adoption for all three members of the adoption triad. I would hypothesize that books published and that are presently being published in the current decade would demonstrate an even greater acceptance of birth parent love, which would be illustrated in the published
material. The more recent publications are beyond the scope of my current analysis, but I could easily extend my work to incorporate more recently published works sometime in the near future.
Figure 1. Illustration from book *And Now We Are A Family*
Figure 2. Illustration from *The Mulberry Bird Story of an Adoption*
Figure 3: Illustrations from *Adopted Like Me*

A.

B.

C.
Chapter 4: Analysis

A total of sixty one books focusing on domestic adoption for preschool-age children were reviewed for this study. Again, I reviewed a sample of child literature in which adoption was depicted that was published in the 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s to examine the portrayal of birth parent love across the three decades of literature.

Throughout the decades examined, there was an increase in the number of books published focusing on domestic adoption over time. In the 1970’s, there were only nine books published and throughout the 1980’s I found eleven available. The adoption topic overall had expanded by the 1990’s because I was able to locate and read forty one published books during this time period (Table I). In fact there was a reliable increase in the number of books published depicting domestic adoption across the three decades, $X^2(2) = 31.6, p< .05$. I would surmise that the increase of almost four fold in the number of books published, comparing the 80’s to the 90’s, reveals that adoption was no longer a secretive topic but a topic many wanted to make known. Publishing books is one way for the topic of adoption to gain exposure and to educate the general public.

From the sixty one total books that were studied, eighteen demonstrated love by the birth parents toward the child they relinquished (Table I). Table I shows that during the 1970’s only one book was found demonstrating love by the birth parents. However, this number had increased to fourteen by the 1990’s. When first looking at this data, I was excited about the increased number of publications from the 1970’s through the 1990’s. However, when analyzing the data by percentage of published books portraying birth parent love we see a marginal increase from the 1980’s to the 1990’s (Figure 1). In the 1970’s, this percentage was at 11% with only one published book. The 1980’s
increased to three books published, which calculated to be 27%. Even though the total number of published material focusing on domestic adoption increased dramatically from the 80’s to the 90’s, the actual percentage of these books acknowledging birth parent love was only 34% in the 1990’s. When analyzing the data by a Chi-square analysis no increase in the frequency of birth parent love was depicted across the decades examined, $X^2(2) = 1.92$. This data reveals that even though open adoptions had begun in the 1980’s, by the 1990’s openness in adoptions and the depiction of birth parent love may have still been controversial. Future work expanding upon the current research to include the 2000’s may reveal how open adoption and birth parent love have become more alien and accepted over time and to what extent.

The mode the authors use to depict birth parent love is valuable to the children reading these books. Children are engaged first by the illustrations and secondly by the narrations. Therefore, I assessed more closely the eighteen books that did portray love by the birth parent toward the child. Out of the eighteen books portraying birth parent love, ten demonstrated love through narration only. The other eight used illustrations along with narration showing birth parent love (Table II). No books studied utilized solely illustrations to portray birth parent love. Also, none of these books only focused solely on birth parent love. When birth parent love was displayed this was in conjunction with adoptive parents portraying love toward the child. Many of these books used the adoptive parents to tell their children how much love their biological parents had towards them. For example, in the book Never Never Never Will She Stop Loving You by Jolene Durrant, the adoptive mother discusses with her child how her birth mom will always love her and how this love was demonstrated by what her birth mom did to care for
herself and her child during her pregnancy. Specifically, she provides examples of how this birth mom took care of the child’s needs before her own, ate healthy and received good prenatal care during the pregnancy. This book did not mention the birth father. It strictly focuses upon the birth mother.

The majority of the books portraying birth parent love concentrated more on the role of the birth mom then the birth father. In the book Adoption Is For Always by Linda Walvoord Girard, both birth parents are mentioned but love is expressed only between the birth mother and child. This representation was very common throughout the books surveyed. The birth mother was showed demonstrating love toward the child but the birth father was hardly mentioned. However, I did find books that specifically mention and/or illustrate the birth father along side of the birth mother. In Virginia Kroll’s book, Beginnings How Families Come To Be, she describes an open adoption case where the birth parents are illustrated in the hospital holding the child with the adoptive mother standing at their side (Figure 5). This book emphasized how both of the birth parents loved this child and from the illustration the reader can conclude that both of the birth parents were involved with making the adoption plan for the child.

In some books, the author used the adopted child to bring up questions regarding his/her biological families. In Mario’s Big Question Where Do I Belong? A Child’s Guide Through Adoption, the main character Mario begins questioning issues surrounding his adoption. One of the questions that he tackles is about his birth parents. Both his birth mother and birth father are discussed. However, similar to Adoption is For Always, this book only demonstrates the birth mother’s love toward Mario. His adoptive
parents express how his birth mother loved him and how difficult it was for her to relinquish her parental rights.

I believe the birth father is not shown in most of these publications because of the history surrounding this triad member. In the past, birth fathers did not have a voice if their child was relinquished for adoption. This was because if the two involved did not marry then most of the men did not want to be an active participant in the decision process after the pregnancy occurred. Many fled away from the situation and let the woman and her family deal with the pregnancy. If the woman and her family chose to send her to a maternity home, and it was after the 1930’s, most likely this child was placed for adoption. It is unclear what legal right a birth father should have until recently. Throughout my readings, the social workers were interested in the birth mother relinquishing her rights and not the father.

Historically, it was the birth mothers who began speaking out about their experiences in the maternity homes and, more than the birth fathers, they wanted to try to locate their child years after being placed for adoption. This may be because it was easier for birth fathers to move on with their lives after the birth of their child because they did not have to go through nine months of hormonal changes and experience the physical along with the emotional grief like the birth mother. This is not to say that birth fathers do not grieve. I feel they do grieve. However, there is not much research collected on birth father’s feelings and their emotions surrounding this topic to give an accurate account on how birth fathers cope when their child is being placed for adoption.

The data collected from this study demonstrates that 30% of all the books studied showed that birth parents and adoptive parents love the children that unite them together
in the adoption triad. This is compared to 57% of books published, during the time frame of this study, portrayed love to the child only by the adoptive parents. The remainder 13% of the published books did not demonstrate love by either the adoptive parents or the birth parents. These books showed love by God, love towards friends adopting a child, or no love was present in the narrative or illustrations (Figure 6).
Table I. Number of Books Published about Domestic Adoption and Examined for Birth Parent Love Throughout the Three Decades Studied

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<th>Number of Published Books</th>
<th>Number of Books Demonstrating Love By Birth Parent</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>1990’s</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>18</td>
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Figure 4. Percentage of Books Published Demonstrating Love By Birth Parents
Table II. How the Authors Chose to Demonstrate Birth Parent Love Throughout the Decades Examined

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<th>1980’s</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative and Illustrations</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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Figure 5. Illustration from book *Beginnings How Families Come To Be*
Figure 6: Percentage Distribution of Who Portrayed Love To Child(ren) in Literature Examined

- Love Portrayed by Adoptive Parent Only: 57%
- Love Portrayed by Birth Parent and Adoptive Parent: 30%
- Other: 13%
Chapter 5: Conclusions

My thesis began from my quest to locate children’s literature concerning adoption that would be appropriate for my children to read. I found it difficult to find published literature demonstrating not only the adoptive parents’ love for a child but which also portrayed the birth parents’ love for the child they relinquished for adoption. Locating books that represented a birth family’s love was essential for me because I maintain an open relationship with both of my children’s birth mothers. I wanted to be able to read stories to my children that featured open adoption relationships so as to help instill confidence in my children that they are loved by my husband and me as well as by their birth parents. Therefore, this thesis emerged. I was able to utilize the resources at my university to examine a sample of literature from the 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s to monitor the depiction of birth parent love across these decades.

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to get to know my children’s birth mothers and their families. The friendships that we have are developing over time and have provided my children significant information about themselves and their origins that we may not have otherwise received. The information that has been shared with us has been medical, psychological, and emotional, giving us a broader picture of why each of our birth mothers chose adoption for their child. My hope is since we have established a relationship with each one of them, that the information they have shared, along with memories of us all getting together, will help my children establish their own identities and not question “Where did I come from?”

The relationships that my family has built with our birth mothers would not have been possible prior to the 1980’s. This is because closed adoptions were the only method
utilized before the 1980’s and with closed adoptions no identifiable information is shared between all members of the adoption triad. This was believed at that time to be the best approach, ensuring the identity of the birth parents would not be revealed.

Confidentiality was important at that time because of society’s views regarding out of wedlock pregnancy. Prior to the 1930’s, an unwed pregnant woman would be scorned by the family and church, however, her pregnancy was dealt with within the family. The unwed pregnant woman, if sent to a maternity home, would have received vocational training and mother and child would have remained together. After the 1930’s and early 40’s, society shifted its attitude on out of wedlock pregnancy from being a family matter to a “public humiliation” (Kunzel 145). Social workers began to refer to out of wedlock pregnancy as their specialty and they felt, along with society, that these women needed professional intervention. Therefore, in the maternity homes it became institutional practice not to keep mother and child together, as it was felt not to be in the best interest of the child. As such, the practice of closed adoptions increased and child and mother were separated.

Closed adoptions remained popular until several factors occurred that influenced agencies and attorneys to reconsider this method of adoption. These factors included adopted persons speaking out and wanting to know who their biological parents were, the birth parents’ desire to know where their children were placed and the dramatic decrease in the number of children being placed for adoption. This decrease in adoption placement occurred because of the lessening stigma associated with out of wedlock pregnancy. All of these factors combined created the momentum for open adoption to emerge as an option for an unwed pregnant woman. Openness began by the birth
mothers being allowed to write a letter to their child explaining her situation and why she chose adoption for her child. Agencies noted that this greatly helped the birth mother deal with her grief and, soon after, birth parents and adoptive parents and child began exchanging letters and pictures between all three parties using the agency or attorney as the gateway for this to occur. This led to the birth parents choosing the family their child would be placed with and personal information about each of the members of the triad began being shared between all parties. This is how the majority of domestic adoptions are done today. Most adoptive parents have an open relationship with their child’s birth parents (sometimes both or one or the other) if a domestic adoption occurred.

Because of the increasing popularity of openness, I hypothesized that looking over three decades, 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s, there would be an increase over time of the number of publications portraying birth parent love towards the child they relinquished for adoption. This love could be demonstrated through illustrations and/or written in the narrative of the story. I focused upon domestic adoption literature written for pre-school age children. I was able to find these books searching local libraries, using WorldCat and interlibrary loan provided by my university.

The total number of books located for this study was sixty one. Nine books were published in the 1970’s and eleven in the 1980’s. In the 1990’s there was a significant increase in the number of books about domestic adoptions available and I was able to locate forty one during this decade. Out of the sixty one books studied, only eighteen or 30% portrayed love by the birth parents through narration and/or illustrations. No books focused only on love being demonstrated by the birth parents. The books that did
illustrate birth parent love did so in conjunction with love being revealed by the adoptive parents.

Prior to the 1970’s, I found only two books published focusing on domestic adoption. One was The Chosen Baby published in 1939 by Valentina P. Wasson. This book was typical of its time because there was no mention of birth parents and most revealing was the agency allowed the prospective adoptive parents to look at the child and then choose whether or not they wanted to take the child home with them. The other book I found was published in 1951 written by Florence Rondell and Ruth Michaels. The title is The Family That Grew. This book was ahead of its time because it mentions the biological families. It states “something happens so that people cannot take care of the babies they start and that happened to the lady and the man who started you” (3, 4). Rondell and Michaels continue by writing “…what they could do to be sure you had a Father and a Mother to love you and take care of you” (4). This book does not illustrate love by the birth parents, however, they are at least acknowledged in their writings.

Adoption literature has become more prevalent on book shelves in libraries and retail stores. However, as an adoptive parent it is important to read the book prior to purchasing it to make sure it is appropriate for the child(ren). Is the book demonstrating your child’s experience with adoption? Is the book relevant for a domestic or international adoption? Could the book be used for either? Does the book illustrate individuals with the same ethnicity has your child? Are the illustrations in the book colorful and/or imaginative and generate interest from your child so he/she would want to read it over and over again? These are questions as an adoptive parent one may want to consider when purchasing books for child(ren) to read. The more interest a child has
with the book the more information about adoption they will learn. This will spur their
creative minds with questions surrounding their own adoptions. This is what adoptive
parents should strive for. Adoptive parents must be willing to be open and honest with
their child(ren) regarding their adoptions and answer all the questions the child(ren) may
ask.

One of the questions a child may have concerning their adoption is “Did my birth
mom love me?” The answer is YES! Birth mothers do love their children. They are
given the strength to look at not what their desires are but place the child’s needs above
all. White writes when discussing parental love, “the welfare and flourishing of the child
is the most important thing…parents will sometime sacrifice themselves and even their
own relationship to their children in order to achieve this end” (85). This is what birth
parents do. They can look beyond their own desires and entrust their child to someone
else in hopes this child will get everything it deserves and more.

The sacrifice birth parents make today is more than the guilt associated with the
relinquishment of their child. They must also deal with the stigma associated with being
a birth parent and being open about it. As I mentioned in chapter two, society has
changed the way it views out of wedlock pregnancies. In the past, these women were
scorned and sent away in hiding until after the birth of the child. Today, the majority of
these women live and work among us not hiding their pregnancies. Once the baby is
born and they entrust this child to someone else, people question this decision. Others
may ask them “How could you give up your child?” or “Can you live with knowing you
are not raising your baby?” Until more individuals in society can understand the sacrifice
these women make then the stigma with being a birth mom will remain. The media
needs to continue to broadcast stories on open adoption and the benefits of this method. The story of birth mothers and how courageous they are needs to continue to be covered on the local and national news, so as to better share their stories and why they chose adoption for their child. The more published material and television time the subject of adoption and birth parents receive will help decrease the stigma associated with relinquishing a child for adoption. If this were to occur, the number of women who elect to place their child for adoption may increase over time giving more hope to those couples who desperately want a child of their own.

Adoption is a topic that many did not want to discuss until recently. No longer are secrets necessary surrounding this act of love. I believe future research on this topic may reveal that openness in domestic adoptions will benefit the child and the child will grow to not have bitter feeling towards his/her biological parents. The feelings that adoptive children have may be different or similar depending upon if their relationships with their biological parents are closed or open. More research in this area is necessary to continue providing resources for adoptive families and their children.

Another area of research that needs to be studied is how international adoption literature portrays birth parents in comparison to books focusing on domestic adoption. There are more adoptive parents taking their children back to their native countries to show their children where they came from and also trying to locate biological ties to their children. Because of this, I question if books being published currently mention more about the biological parents than they did in the past.

One of the future projects I plan to explore is if during the 2000’s there is more published material portraying birth parent love then in the 1990’s. I will focus on
children’s literature to continue what I have researched for this thesis. However, what would also be interesting to note is whether teen literature follows the same trend as children’s literature. Does the number of publications continue to increase throughout the decades studied? Are birth parents mentioned more frequently in teen literature versus children’s literature? Is love portrayed more often by the birth parents in teen literature rather than in children’s literature? I would speculate that similar to children’s literature there is an increase in publications concerning adoption and birth parents are portrayed loving the child they relinquished for adoption more frequently over time. I would also hypothesize that birth parents are mentioned more frequently in teen literature than in children’s literature simply because of age and how teens can comprehend more of such a complex topic. Research continued in this area would be able to address these issues and resolve some of the questions brought forth.

Birth parents are an important component in the adoption triad. Open adoption has provided the unwed pregnant woman a positive option. It must be comforting for her to know who the adoptive parents are and how the child is thriving as it grows, compared to birth parents in the past who were not privy to this information. Today, birth parents can acknowledge the love they have for their child and are able to express this love. As an adoptive parent, I must accept that this love is present and admit that it will never go away. My children’s birth mothers will never forget the day my children were born and will not forget the day each placed her child in my arms. They each entrusted her child to me and it is essential for me not to forget about them.

Michelle Madrid-Branch writes “Adoption Means Love” in her book *The Tummy Mummy*. This is what I want my children to realize as they grow older. Love can be
expressed by all three members of the adoption triad to each other in any way each
person feels comfortable with. This is my way to say thank you and express the love and
gratitude I have for my children’s birth mothers. I will never forget the sacrifice they
made so that I may have a family.
Appendix

Books Reviewed For This Study

* = Love Portrayed by Adoptive Parents and Birth Parents

1970’s:

* And Now We Are A Family, Judith Meredith

Peter and Susie Find a Family, Edith Hess

Families Grow In Different Ways, Barbara Parrish-Benson

The Hollywell Family, Margaret Kornitzer

Abby, Jeannette Caines

Adopting Baby Brother, Barbara Gilchrist Taber

The Pretty House That Found Happiness, Eleanor Eisenberg

Aaron’s Door, Miska Miles

Why Was I Adopted?, Carole Livingston

1980’s:

Bullfrog and Gertrude Go Camping, Rosamond Dauer

Wayne is Adopted, Sue Wagstaff

Bobby the Mostly Silky, David McKelvey

The Just-Right Family, Larry Callen

Our Baby A Birth and Adoption Story, Janice Koch

* The Mulberry Bird Story of an Adoption, Anne Braff Brodzinsky

* Adoption Is For Always, Linda Walvoord Girard

Adopted and Loved Forever, Annetta E. Dellinger

Twice Upon-a-Time Born and Adopted, Eleanora Patterson

Lucky Me! An Adoption Story, Anna Fairbank

1990’s:

Zachary’s New Home A Story for Foster and Adopted Children, Geraldine M. Blomquist and Paul B. Blomquist

The Day We Met You, Phoebe Koehler

* God Gives Me A Family, Rhoda Bontrager

William Is My Brother, Jane T. Schnitter

Oliver A Story About Adoption, Lois Wickstrom

Horace, Holly Keller

* A Forever Family A Child’s Story About Adoption, Roslyn Banish

* Steven’s Baseball Mitt A Book About Being Adopted, Kathy Stinson

* Adopted Like Me, Jeffrey R. LaCure

Downy, Pistachio and Family, Anne-Marie Chapouton

Sarah A Story of Love and Adoption, Kathie Nichols

Lucy’s Feet, Stephanie Stein

A Mother For Choco, Keiko Kasza

Is That Your Sister? A True Story of Adoption, Catherine and Sherry Bunin

* Tell Me A Real Adoption Story, Betty Jean Lifton

* A Koala For Katie An Adoption Story, Jonathan London

When Joel Comes Home, Susi Gregg Fowler

Howie Hugemouth, Angela Elwell Hunt
* Did My First Mother Love Me? A Story For An Adopted Child, Kathryn Ann Miller

* Beginnings How Families Come To Be, Virginia Kroll

  Anthony’s Surprise, Roz Grace

  When Will We Be Sisters?, Virginia Kroll

  Let’s Talk About It: Adoption, Fred Rogers

  Cora and the Elephants, Lissa Rovetch

  Adoption Stories for Young Children, Randall B. Hicks

  Two Birthdays for Beth, Gay Lynn Cronin

  How I Was Adopted: Samantha’s Story, Joanna Cole

* Pugnose Has Two Special Families, Karis Kruzel

  Happy Adoption Day, John McCutcheon

  Tell Me Again About The Night I Was Born, Jamie Lee Curtis

* Amy Angel Goes Home A Heavenly Tale of Adoption, Kathleen Lathrop

  One Wonderful You, Francie Portnoy

  Mis’ Luci, Beverly Rose

  Look Who’s Adopted, Michael S. Taheri and James F. Orr

* Angels of Love, Lynda Arnold

* Never Never Never Will She Stop Loving You, Jolene Durrant

* A Whale of a Tale For Abigail, Douglas J. Simon and Susan Port Simon

* Let’s Talk About Adoption, Diana Star Helmer

  The Little Green Goose, Adele Sansone

  A Blessing From Above, Patti Henderson
Little Miss Spider, David Kirk
Works Cited


