Online Group Discussions with Adolescent Intercountry Adoptees in New Zealand: A Qualitative Investigation into Their Experiences

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgement), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 17 May 2013

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Abstract

The current study investigated the experiences of intercountry adoption from the perspectives of adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand. Many adoption studies have focused on specific developmental domains of younger adoptees, and collected data from secondary sources (e.g., adoptive parents). Additionally, adoption studies in New Zealand are scarce. For these reasons, the author decided to conduct a research project.

This qualitative descriptive study recruited three adolescents aged between 16 and 18 years. They were adopted from Russia to New Zealand. They discussed their experiences and opinions about intercountry adoption in synchronous (i.e. real-time) online group discussions over eight sessions using Blackboard's Elluminate online chat space. The discussion topics included early institutional life; transition to New Zealand; ethnic identity; attitudes toward adoption; disclosure of adoptive status; feeling different from others; school life; birth family and adoptive family.

Content analysis was carried out and four themes were identified. The intercountry adoptees said that (1) they need love and a sense of security, (2) they have a desire to fully integrate into their adoptive country (3) they want to have positive relationships with their adoptive parents and peers, and (4) their origins are also an important aspect of their lives. In light of these findings, implications for intercountry teens, families, and professionals have been suggested. Strengths and limitations of the current research project and future research are also discussed.

Key terms

Adoptee	An individual who had been relinquished by birth parents, and has been placed with new family.
Adoptive parent	An individual who has been qualified as a social and legal parent of an adoptee.
Asynchronous online communication	Online communication medium allowing different-time communication. Discussion board and emails are some examples.
Birth family	Individuals who are related to an adoptee by birth.
Birth parent	An adoptee's original parent who is related by birth.
Cognitive domain	Aspects of an individual's thinking, language skills, learning, and sensory process.
Confidential adoption	Adoption arrangement which allows no information about birth parents to adopted children. Also known as closed adoption.
Culture	The system of beliefs and values of a group of people that helps them understand the world. It is important to note that the group does not necessarily refer to ethnic group.
Domestic adoption	Social and legal placement of a relinquished child into an adoptive family within the same country. Also known as intranational adoption.
Eastern European	A group of individuals with the same racial background with New Zealanders but with some exceptions (e.g., Romani).

Ethnic identity	A cognitive and affective understanding about self with regards to ethnicity, and how one identifies with which ethnic group they belong to.
Ethnic socialisation	Participation of ethnic activities such as return trip to birth country and heritage camp.
Ethnicity	The sense of belongingness to a group of people who share a similar historical background
Grief	A coping process of the loss.
ICANZ	It stands for Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand. It is an organisation that supports New Zealand families and their children who have been adopted internationally.
Identity	Aspects of an individual's personality, social pattern and perception of self by other individuals.
Institution	Orphanage
Intercountry adoption	Social and legal placement of a relinquished child into an adoptive family in another country. Also known as international, transnational adoption, and ICA.
Kiwi	New Zealander
Loss	Affective states after being separated from emotionally attached figures.
Mediated adoption	Adoption arrangement which lies between confidential and open adoption in the openness spectrum.
Mourning	Adaptation process after the loss and grief have occurred.
Open adoption	Adoption arrangement which allows all information about birth parents to adopted children.

Physical domain	Related to biological changes or conditions, such as body growth, and medical issues.
Psychosocial domain	Aspects of an individual's behavioural and emotional aspects and social functioning.
Race	A group of people who share similar physical trait, such as skin colour
Synchronous online communication	Online communication medium allowing real-time communication. Online chatting is one example. The same time

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"'It was horrible in that place. The staff used to hit us and the food was inedible. I never want to go back to a place like that. My life there was just eating and sleeping - just existing,'

'I had to have a lot of medicine in the institution, even when I wasn't sick. The staff used to give us injections to calm us down. I don't know what it was, but it made us sleep for a long time.'

'Life was a continual struggle for survival. I remember one member of staff saying to me: 'You're just a source of income for us.' (McGeown, 2005, July 12)*"*

By a glimpse of the accounts of intercountry adoptees from media, it seems that their experiences before the adoption must have been unpleasant. What is worse is that many other intercountry adoptees also have similar negative experiences in their early life: Abused, under-nourished and so on. Fortunately, on the other side of the world, there are couples who want these children. The children have been taken the very best care of by the couples, so that these adopted children can grow up in a more favorable environment.

These internationally adopted children and adolescents have not only received the attention of their adoptive parents, but also from scientific communities. From a researchers' perspective, intercountry adoption (ICA) can be seen as a natural quasi-experiment, in which children happened to be placed in a deprived environment in their early life for various reasons, followed by the introduction of an enriched environment

provided by the adoptive families. For a researcher, this is an opportunity to make scientific enquiries to understand the influences of the deprived environment in early life and the dramatic positive environmental changes made by the support from the adoptive family on the intercountry adoptees' later adjustment.

The author has made a scientific enquiry to understand the experiences of ICA from an adolescent intercountry adoptees' perspective in New Zealand through synchronous (i.e., real-time) online group discussions. There are four chapters in this thesis: Chapter One will be devoted to reviewing the literature, stating the research question and explaining the rationales of the current research; Chapter Two will present the methodology and the method employed in order to answer the research question; Chapter Three will present the research results; and Chapter Four will discuss the research findings along with implications, limitations and suggestions for the future research. Conclusions from the current research will be considered at the end.

Before stating the research question and explaining the rationales of the current study in this chapter, it is important to present our current understanding about ICA and online research method. What is more important is to identify the gaps and areas where there is disagreement in the adoption literature in our understanding, as the current study aimed to address the gaps and the disputed areas in the adoption literature. Therefore, Chapter One is divided into three parts. Part One will present the literature review on ICA. Part Two will present the background information about online research method. Having reviewed our current understanding about ICA and online research, Part Three will conclude this chapter by explaining the rationales of the current research, highlighting the gaps and the disputed areas in the adoption literature, and stating the research aim and the research question.

A literature review on ICA

The first part of the current chapter will present a review of the ICA literature. This part of the thesis is made up of three sections. The first section will briefly describe the background information on ICA. The second section will review empirical studies on the adjustment of intercountry adoptees, and the third section will present theoretical perspectives on the development of intercountry adoptees.

Background information on ICA

The current section will present the background information on ICA. It will first describe the global and New Zealand trends of ICA. Second, it will present the motivations of birth and adoptive parents for ICA. Despite the current study focusing on the experiences of intercountry adoptees, this section is included for a couple of reasons. The statistics on ICA will help us understand the importance of ICA in New Zealand. It will be also useful to see which countries intercountry adoptees in New Zealand are coming from. The country of origin is known to be an important factor in predicting the adjustment of intercountry adoptees (Dalen, 2007; Odenstad et al., 2008). Thus, this information will help us understand the adoption experiences in New Zealand.

The reasons to include the motivations of birth and adoptive parents to adopt a child in this section are threefold. First, it will explain the reasons for ICA, as it is a common practice to form a family in the modern society. Second, the motivations of birth and adoptive parents are known to be one of many factors that influence the adjustment of intercountry adoptees. For example, adoptive parents' infertility, one reason for adoption, is reported to be associated with more positive outcomes than any other reasons (Barth & Brooks, 1997). Lastly, an intercountry adoptees' understanding of the motivations of birth and adoptive parents for the adoption is a crucial part of identity formation for some adoptees (Neil, 2000). The resolution of their identity issues is known to have impacts on children's emotional health (Phillips & Pittman, 2007). Overall, this information will be helpful in understanding the experiences of intercountry adoptees in New Zealand.

Statistics of ICA

Over the past three decades, the global number of ICAs had increased steadily. Between 1980 and 1989, the global number of ICAs had increased from 11,336 to 19,631 per year (Kane, 1993). In 1998, the number of ICAs around the world was approximately 31,710, and it had reached 45,288 in 2004 (Selman, 2009b). The main sending countries are China, Guatemala, Russia, South Korea, and Ukraine, and the main receiving countries are Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, and the United States (U.S.). The U.S. accounts for nearly half the total number of ICAs around the world (Selman, 2009b).

Recently, however, the number of ICAs has declined (Selman, 2012). The number of ICAs around the world has decreased from 45,288 to 34,968 between 2004 and 2008 (Selman, 2010). This was due to a reduction in the supply of children from major sending countries. In China, there is an increasing interest in domestic adoption as the child welfare systems improve. The Chinese government is concerned about the negative image over the long-term, if large numbers of Chinese children continued to be adopted by other countries. The China Center for Adoption Affairs announced a new guideline that adopters now are required to be heterosexual couples who have been married for at least two years. As it was estimated that a third of all Chinese adoptions in the U.S. in the 1990's were by a single women (Selman, 2009a), this would limit the number of ICAs in China (Selman, 2009b).

Another reason for the decline in the number of ICAs was due to growing concerns for the welfare of adopted children (Selman, 2009b). Romania and Bulgaria sought to join the European Union, but Romania and Bulgaria were charged for selling children to foreign families; thus, they were banned for ICAs. Russia reduced the number of adoptions from 9,425 in 2004 to 4,833 in 2007, because of the media reporting murder cases of Russian adoptees by their adoptive parents in the U.S. (Khabibullina, 2006; McGuinness & Pallansch, 2007). Despite the recent decline in the numbers in some countries, it is still expected that a high number of ICAs would continue over the next decade (Selman, 2012).

As mentioned previously, New Zealand receives a relatively high number of intercountry adoptees. United Nations (2009) reported that New Zealand receives the 16th-highest number of intercountry adoptees in the world. In the fiscal year between 2002 and 2003, there were 336 ICAs in total in New Zealand, and there were 72.7 ICAs of children under the age of five per 100,000 births. Since the late 1980's, Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand (ICANZ) has helped approximately 900 children find families in New Zealand; 662 of which are from Eastern European countries, (ICANZ, 2012). Other countries of origin were Cambodia, Chile, Hong Kong, India, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Tonga (Grunwell, 2011, May 29). Many of these Eastern European adoptees are now in adolescence (Nelson, personal communication, May 17, 2011) and early adulthood (Hawke & Scherman, 2010). In addition, there is a high interest in ICA in New Zealand. Some couples have

spent three years of waiting to adopt a child due to complicated adoption procedures and between $10,000 and $50,000 on traveling to overseas, accommodations, and paperwork (Grunwell, 2011, May 29).

Despite the beginning of 21st century showing a global decline in ICAs, due possibly to government policy, protection of child welfare and availability of children, overall, when looking at the longer history of ICA, the number seem to have increased over the last 30 years. The increase in the number of ICAs as well as the high interest in ICA in New Zealand underscore the importance of conducting more research on ICA.

Motivations of birth and adoptive parents for ICA

Both birth and adoptive parents have reasons for adoption. There are mainly two reasons for birth parents to relinquish their child. The first one is that the birth parents do not want their child. Neil (2000) reported that complex family issues, negative feelings toward the child, domestic violence or child disability can lead the birth parents to make a decision to relinquish. The second reason is that despite the birth parents wanting their child, they have to relinquish because it is mandated from social services or the courts. The birth parents may be considered incapable of providing safe and adequate care to the child, or the birth parents may be suspected to maltreat the child (Neil, 2000).

There are a number of reasons why adoptive parents would adopt a child. One reason for adopting a child is for adoptive parents to create a family. For example, adopting a child enables infertile couples to have their own baby. It can also add meanings to their life and fulfill their religious or spiritual beliefs (Tyebjee, 2003). Another reason for adoption for adoptive parents would be humanitarianism (Tyebjee, 2003). Some studies report that "many millions of children worldwide need homes because they have been orphaned, abandoned or removed" (Bartholet, 2010, p. 95). Empathy toward the relinquished children is a main reason for the decision to adopt a child. Adoption can provide a new home and family to children without parents.

Summary

The current section of the thesis has presented the statistics of ICA and discussed the motivations of birth and adoptive parents for ICA. We have seen that ICA is popular around the world and in New Zealand. Although there was a recent decline in the

number of ICAs, the number has increased gradually in the past decades. The relatively high number of ICAs from Eastern European and other countries, and the high interest of prospective adoptive parents in New Zealand emphasise the importance of ICA in New Zealand. We also have seen that these children are available for adoption because birth parents relinquish their child due to their negative feelings toward the child or poor parenting skills. Adoptive parents want the children because of infertility and humanitarianism. How these children are adjusting in adoptive countries will be the focus of next section.

Empirical research on ICA

A large number of children have been adopted internationally around the world and in New Zealand for various reasons. These internationally adopted children will have different life experiences with non-adoptees. There are three major life events that distinguish intercountry adoptees from non-adoptees: The relinquishment from birth parents; the exposure to early life adversity (e.g., abuse or neglect); and the exposure to the enriched environment provided by adoptive parents. Even among internationally adopted children, the extent to which these three major life events influences adopted children and adolescents is different. For example, some adoptees may be treated poorly from others in an institution, whereas other adoptees may be treated better. Due to heterogeneous nature of adoption experiences, there may be challenges to understand intercountry adoptees as a group.

From a developmental psychological perspective, the adjustment of intercountry adoptees can be seen in terms of physical, cognitive and psychosocial domains (Hoffnung, Hoffnung, Seifert, Smith, & Hine, 2010). While a relatively small number of adoption studies have focused on the physical and cognitive domains, a considerable number of studies have been conducted to investigate the psychosocial domain. How are intercountry adoptees adjusting in various developmental domains? To answer this question, the current section of the thesis will review empirical studies conducted on intercountry adoptees, and their developmental progress throughout childhood and adolescence. From the literature review, it will be also possible to predict the experiences of intercountry adoptees in New Zealand based on the ICA literature.

Physical domain

Adoption researchers have sought to understand the physical domain of intercountry adoptees. In the developmental psychology literature, physical domain refers to growth status, motor skills and physical health (Hoffnung et al., 2010). The current sub-section will only focus on two areas: Physical growth and medical conditions.

Physical growth

To investigate the physical growth of intercountry adoptees, researchers measured their height, weight and head circumference. Miller, Tseng, Tirella, Chan and Feig (2008), for example, recruited 71 male and 77 female children adopted internationally from Eastern Europe, all of whom were between 7 and 59 month-old at the time of adoption. Within three weeks of arrival to the U.S., the researchers measured height, weight and occipitofrontal circumference (OFC), and compared these measurements with the norm population. It was found that 22% of the children had growth failure (under -2 standard deviation) for height, 34% for weight, and 12% for OFC. Higher percentages of internationally adopted children with the growth failure were found in a given population than it was normally expected. Similar results were also documented with Chinese adopted children in Canada (Cohen, Lojkasek, Zadeh, Pugliese, & Kiefer, 2008). This finding suggests that internationally adopted children have growth failure at the time of adoption.

Miller and colleagues (2010) followed up with the children after six months. Catch-Up Growth (CUG) was defined as a gain of more than 0.5 SD in height, which was observed in 85% of the children. Seven percent of the children remained stunted. A meta-analysis study in the Netherlands pooling 33 papers with 122 study outcomes together, van IJzendoorn and colleagues (2007) found that intercountry adoptees from all continents of origin had smaller height, weight and head circumferences at the time of adoption (average 19 month-old) than non-adoptees. However, almost complete catch up for height and weight and significant catch up for head circumference were observed after adopted (average 49 month-old). Despite these longitudinal studies (Cohen et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2010) and the meta-analytic study providing strong evidence for growth catch-up of intercountry adoptees, these findings are limited due to a short follow-up period. It is difficult to make a conclusion from these studies that CUG would continue during adolescence.

Sonuga-Barke, Schlotz and Rutter (2010) conducted a longitudinal study on physical growth of 138 adolescents adopted internationally from Romania to the U.K. The authors compared height, weight and head circumference of the adoptees with a group of domestic adoptees in the U.K. at the ages of 6, 11 and 15 years. They found that the Romanian adoptees were smaller in weight, height, and head circumference than the U.K. domestic adoptees at the age of six years. Almost complete catch up was observed for height and weight by age 11, but not for head circumference. At age 15, it was observed that the rate of catch up for height and weight slowed down, but head circumference continued to catch up. Other longitudinal studies (Le Mare & Audet, 2006) also reported similar findings. It seems that CUG does occur during childhood and adolescence, despite the initial physical growth failure at the time of adoption, but it is not complete. However, only a small number of studies considered physical growth of internationally adopted adolescents. In addition, considering that having negative body images during adolescence is known to be associated with poor psychological well-being (Brausch & Muehlenkamp, 2007; Verplanken & Velsvik, 2008), it would be worthwhile to investigate the impact of such growth delay on internationally adopted adolescents.

Medical conditions

A number of researchers also have sought to understand the physical health status of intercountry adoptees. Several researchers obtained medical records of intercountry adoptees from a birth country and compared it with medical evaluations in an adoptive country to investigate general health of intercountry adoptees (Albers, Johnson, Hostetter, Iverson, & Miller, 1997; Cataldo & Viviano, 2007; Miller et al., 2008). Often little is known about pre-adoptive conditions of intercountry adoptees, so this study design is advantageous in an aspect that the pre-adoption medical reports would provide some insight into conditions of these children prior to adoption. In addition, medical evaluations collected in a laboratory setting in the adoptive country would provide accurate, current medical conditions with precise measurements. Albers, Johnson, Hostetter, Iverson, and Miller (1997) are one of the research teams which collected data from birth countries and adoptive countries. They compared pre-adoption medical reports of 47 children adopted from the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with medical evaluations after their arrival in the U.S. It was documented in the pre-adoption

medical reports that the intercountry adoptees have serious medical conditions such as *perinatal encephalopathy* (n=25), *hydrocephalic syndrome* (n=3), and *intracranaial hypertensive syndrome* (n=2). However, from the medical evaluations in the U.S., no such serious diagnoses were confirmed. Instead, some children (n=4) were diagnosed with minor medical conditions (e.g., *brachial plexus injury*). Other researchers also found similar results (Cataldo & Viviano, 2007; Miller et al., 2008). Despite the expectation that pre-adoptive medical records would bring some insight into conditions of the children prior to adoption, it was found that the pre-adoption medical reports are not reliable. Therefore, the conditions of the children prior to adoption remain unclear.

While some researchers have focused on general health of intercountry adoptees (e.g., Beckett et al., 2003; Cataldo & Viviano, 2007; Landgren et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2010), others have studied more specific medical aspects such as infection (e.g., Saiman et al., 2001; Stadler, Mezoff, & Staat, 2008; Trehan, Meinzen-Derr, Jamison, & Staat, 2008). Beckett and colleagues (2003), for instance, investigated the pattern of health problems of 6-year-old children adopted internationally from Romania and domestically in the U.K., reported by adoptive parents. It was found that the Romanian adoptees had more respiratory, skin and gastro-intestinal infections, hepatitis B, dental problems, hearing loss, strabismus, and skin problems than the domestically adopted children. They also found that these health problems are associated with some behavioural problems such as quasi-autism and inattention and overactivity.

Saiman and colleagues (2001) investigated infection diseases of intercountry adoptees by examining medical records of 504 children in the U.S., aged 1.6 on average, who were adopted from 16 countries including China, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Russia, and Southeast Asia in 1997 and 1998. They found that many intercountry adoptees had high prevalence of infection from *latent tuberculosis*, *hepatitis B*, *giardia lamblia*, and *gastrointestinal tract pathogen*, and the prevalence was higher in Chinese and Russian, and female adoptees. From these, it can be concluded that intercountry adoptees are more likely to have infectious conditions at the time of placement.

Robert and colleagues (2009) investigated fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in children adopted from Eastern Europe to Canada by conducting medical evaluations and surveying the adoptive parents. A person with FASD has a wide range of physical,

mental, behavioural and learning difficulties, when exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. The researchers measured growth status, facial features, neurodevelopmental status and fetal alcohol exposure of twenty-nine children, after five years of adoption. It was found that three percent of the children were classified as FASD and sixty-nine percent had FASD related symptoms.

Regardless of the study design, overall, researchers consistently reported that intercountry adoptees have more physical problems, such as growth delay and medical problems, than non-adoptees. However, few studies investigated long-term health outcomes of intercountry adoptees. In particular, little research has been conducted to investigate the physical health of adolescent adoptees. Additionally, impacts of the physical problems on the intercountry adoptees would deserve more attention from adoption literature.

Cognitive domain

Adoption researchers also have sought to understand the cognitive abilities of internationally adopted children and adolescents. Cognitive domain in developmental psychology includes intelligence, memory, perception and language (Hoffnung et al., 2010). Many adoption studies have focused on intelligence and language development, but the current literature review on the cognitive domain will be limited to the school performances, as it is relevant to the current study.

One way to investigate the cognitive abilities of internationally adopted children and adolescents would be to compare their school performance with non-adoptees. To investigate the school performance of intercountry adoptees, researchers assessed the perception of school performance. For example, Cohen and Westhues (1995) compared the perception of school performance of intercountry adoptees with birth children of adoptive parents in Canada. The researchers interviewed 123 mothers, 113 fathers, 155 intercountry adoptees, and 121 Canadian-born siblings in the adoptive families. The age criterion was 12 or older. Forty point one percent (40.1%) of intercountry adoptees reported that they were doing better than average at school, and 38.1% of their parents said that they were satisfied, whereas 59.3% of non-adopted siblings reported that they were doing better than average at school and 77.4% of their parents said they were satisfied with the siblings' school grades (Cohen & Westhues, 1995). Other studies

found the similar results (e.g., Westhues & Cohen, 1997; e.g. Westhues & Cohen, 1998b). These findings indicate that the perception of school performance of biological children were better than adopted children.

Recently, a number of studies directly assessed the school performances of intercountry adoptees in Sweden and Norway. To assess the school performances, researchers converted the school grades into 5-point-scale scores, and compared the scores between intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees. For instance, Vinnerljung, Lindblad, Hjern, Rasmussen and Dalen (2010) compared school performances of 1,434 Korean adoptees, 5,014 non-Korean adoptees, 533 birth children of adoptive parents and the Swedish norm population during adolescence by converting the school grades of theoretical subjects (i.e., physics, Swedish, and history) and practical subjects (i.e., music and sports). The results showed that non-Korean intercountry adoptees had poorer school performances, but Korean intercountry adoptees and the birth children had better scores than the Swedish population. It was also found that the scores for theoretical subjects were higher than practical subjects. Other researchers also found similar results (Dalen, 2002; Lindblad, Dalen, Rasmussen, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2009). Overall, existing adoption research suggests that not only are intercountry adoptees likely to have poorer school performances than non-adoptees, but also the adoptees and their family members' perceptions were more negative than non-adoptees.

However, researchers do not agree on the reasons that intercountry adoptees have poorer school performances than non-adoptees. Some researchers attribute such poor school performances to physical and psychosocial reasons. For example, van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 62 studies in the Netherlands, and found that the intercountry adoptees had similar levels of intelligence scores in comparison to their non-adopted siblings born to the adoptive parents and environmental peers (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006), but intercountry adoptees had lower academic performances. They argued that the lower academic scores of intercountry adoptees were due to physical and psychosocial factors.

On the other hand, other researchers argued that the poor school performances were associated with intellectual abilities. For instance, Lindblad and colleagues (2009) compared military intelligence test scores and school performances of 320 Korean

adoptees, 1,125 non-Korean adoptees, 190 birth children of adoptive parents and the Swedish norm population during adolescence. One of the research findings was that non-Korean intercountry adoptees had lower intelligence scores and school grades than the birth children and the norm population. This indicates that intelligence scores seemed to be associated with school grades (Lindblad et al., 2009).

van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2005) found similar intellectual abilities between intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees, and yet, Lindblad and colleagues (2009) found higher intellectual abilities for non-adoptees than intercountry adoptees. The different, and conflicting outcomes of these two studies raises some questions. For example: what could explain the different outcomes for intellectual abilities for intercoutnry adoptees and non-adoptees? One reason may be due to different comparison groups. In the previously described meta-analytic study (van IJzendoorn et al., 2005), the researchers combined general population, classmates, environmental siblings and norm population (on which the assessment tools is based) for a comparison group for their analysis, which resulted in nonsignificant difference of intelligence scores between intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees. However, Lindblad and colleagues (2009) compared the intelligence score between intercountry adoptees and birth children of adoptive parents and general population. Lindblad and colleagues (2009) critiqued the other researcher team's analytical approach, arguing that the intelligence score of intercountry adoptees in the van IJzendoorn and the colleagues' study (2005) was actually lower than general population and environmental siblings. In addition, since only a small number of studies involved both intelligence and school performances in their meta-analysis, it should not be concluded that intercountry adoptees have poor school performances due to physical and psychological factors, in spite of similar intellectual ability (Lindblad et al., 2009).

It seems that it is common in the ICA literature that researchers make conclusions using different comparison groups. For instance, O'Connor, Rutter, Beckett, Keavene, and Kreppner (2000) found that the score of McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities for six-year-old Romanian children adopted before they were six-months-old was 114; this was higher than 100 (i.e., an average intelligence score for norm population on which an intelligence testing tool is based). On the other hand, Beckett and colleagues (2006) found that the score of Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children for 11-year-old Romanian children adopted before six months of age was 100.86, which was lower than

the scores (i.e., 105.06) of domestic adoptees in the U.K. (i.e., general population). Another problem with the ICA literature is that researchers used different instrument tools may have also contributed inconsistent results. For instance, one study used McCarthy Scales (O'Connor et al., 2000), while the other study used Wechsler Intelligence Scale (Beckett et al., 2006), thus different conclusions were made.

It is important to note the finding that intercountry adoptees have poorer school grades on theoretical subjects, but to a lesser degree for practical subjects (Lindblad et al., 2009). This may be because the theoretical subjects require abstract reasoning and the practical subjects require non-verbal reasoning. Studies have reported that intercountry adoptees have more difficulty with language. Dalen (2002), for instance, collected various measurements including language skills from 193 intercountry adoptees and 193 Norwegian non-adoptees aged between 11 and 16. Language skills were divided into two categories: Everyday language and academic language. The former involves the contextualised language in which meaning and understanding are anchored in the here-and-now situation, while the latter represents a more abstract and decontextualised language (Dalen, 2002); thus academic language is more complex than everyday language. It was found that intercountry adoptees have more difficulty with academic language than everyday language (Dalen, 2002). More difficulties with theoretical subjects may be because intercountry adoptees find academic language challenging.

Overall, the existing evidence suggests that intercountry adoptees have poorer actual and perceived school performances, particularly in theoretical subjects, than non-adoptees. Researchers do not agree on the reasons why there is such difference between intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees. Some researchers attribute it to physical and psychological factors, while others argued that the poor school performances were due to intellectual ability. This was because studies made conclusions from different population group and by using different assessment tools for data collection. There are only a few studies on school performances of intercountry adoptees (Dalen, 2002), and little is known about school life of intercountry adoptees in a general sense.

Psychosocial domain

Adoption researchers have sought to understand the psychosocial domain of intercountry adoptees. As mentioned before, overall, a large number of adoption studies

have investigated psychosocial domain of intercountry adoptees, especially, many researchers studied mental health aspects of intercountry adoptees. However, some areas need more research attention. Adoptive identity and relationship are some examples. The current sub-section of the thesis will focus on following three areas: Mental health, identity development, and relationships.

Mental health

A large number of studies have been conducted to investigate the mental health issues of intercountry adoptees in comparison with non-adoptees. Some researchers measured the number of internationally adopted in- and out-patients in clinical settings to investigate the mental health issues of intercountry adoptees. Haugaard (1998), for example, documented that, while only 1% to 2% of the U.S. population is made up of intercountry adoptees, 2.4% to 15% of patients in clinics are internationally adopted children and adolescents (Senior & Himadi, 1985). Since intercountry adoptees received more clinical support than it was expected, it can be concluded that they have more mental health problems than non-adoptees.

However, some researchers interpreted this conclusion with caution. This is because adoptive families as a group have higher socioeconomic status, more financial security, and higher educational attainment than non-adoptive families (Ingersoll, 1997). These adoptive parental factors are known to be associated with a lower threshold of help-seeking behaviours than non-adoptive parents (Miller, Fan, Christensen, Grotevant, & van Dulmen, 2000). Therefore, it was argued that the higher numbers of intercountry adoptees in clinical settings may be due to adoptive parental factors. It then becomes natural to ask the following question: Is the high numbers of intercountry adoptees in the clinical settings due to more mental health problems or is it due to the adoptive family's lower threshold of help-seeking behaviours?

Miller, Fan, Christensen, Grotevant, and Dulmen (2000) investigated psychological and behavioural problems of internationally adopted adolescents in the U. S. They surveyed 1,587 internationally adopted adolescents and 87,165 non-adoptees by using Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ) to measure school grade, participation in extra-curriculum activities, school troubles, feeling about school, skipping school, substance use, self-esteem, emotional distress, future hope, and health issues. The participants

were aged between 10 and 19, and adopted from Hispanic and Asian countries. The researchers found that adopted adolescents scored higher for various psychological and behavioural problem items including school achievement, substance use, psychological well-being, physical health, fighting and lying to parents. It was initially concluded that intercountry adoptees are more likely to have behavioural problems than non-adoptees. From this finding, it seems that the high number of intercountry adoptees in clinical settings is due to mental health problems. However, further analysis showed that the majority of intercountry adoptees have few behavioural problems, but only the small numbers have more likelihood of developing severe mental health problems than non-adoptees. From this study, it can be concluded that the high numbers of intercountry adoptees in clinical settings may be due to mental health problems, but adoptive parental factors also seem to contribute to the high number.

To investigate types of mental health problems exhibited in intercountry adoptees, researchers used a well-known problem behaviours classification system designed by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1978). According to the system, problem behaviours can be broadly classified into two categories: externalising problems are associated with irritability due to anger (e.g., delinquency and aggressive behavior), and internalising problems are related to obsessions, compulsions, phobias, and somatic complaints. The literature suggests that intercountry adoptees exhibit more externalising problems than non-adoptees (Simmel, Brooks, Barth, & Hinshaw, 2001). Two meta-analysis studies found that internationally adopted *children* had more internalising problems for than non-adopted children (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006), but there was no difference in internalising problems between *adolescent* intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees (Bimmel, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2003). It seems that younger adoptees have internalising problems but older ones do not have such issues.

Other researchers used narrower categories to study the mental health issues of intercountry adoptees. Keyes and colleagues (2008), for example, used Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (Fourth Edition) to assess psychological symptoms. They recruited 514 internationally adopted adolescents with psychological symptoms and their adoptive parents, and found that the intercountry adoptees are more likely to have Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Seasonal Affective Disorder than non-adopted adolescents.

Simmel, Brooks, Barth, and Hindshaw (2001) found similar results, that 21% of intercountry adoptees had ADHD and 20% had ODD. Hjern, Lindbald, and Vinnerlijung (2002) also found that intercountry adoptees are more likely to be suffering from suicidal death and attempts, psychiatric disorders, drug abuse, or crime commitment than Swedish-born children. However, the findings of these studies may not be representative of all interocuntry adoptees, because they are based on clinical population.

Overall, epidemiological and symptomatological studies suggest that intercountry adoptees have more mental health problems than non-adoptees. However, it is also important to note that internationally adopted adolescents should not be considered as a problematic group, because many are adjusting well, and overall rates (i.e., intercountry adoptees with and without clinical conditions) of mental and behavioural problems are low (Bimmel et al., 2003).

Identity development of intercountry adoptees

Identity can be defined as "an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, belief and individual history" (Marcia, 1980, p. 159). In other words, it is an affective and cognitive understanding about self. Those who have made successful resolution of identity issues are aware of themselves. Exploring identity issues is a complex, life-long process, but it is particularly important for those who are in late adolescence. This is because late adolescence is the first time that physical, cognitive and psychosocial skills enable adolescents to reflect about self and determine their pathway into adulthood (Marcia, 1980). Resolving identity issues can be especially challenging for intercountry adoptees, since they need to resolve identity issues as an adoptee, in addition to the resolution as an adolescent (Grotevant & Korff, 2011). Current focus of the thesis will deal with three aspects of identity: Ethnic identity, adoptive identity, and openness in adoption.

Ethnic identity for intercountry adoptees

Ethnic identity is one component of identity development, and it can be a significant part of life for many (but not all) people. It has been reported in the adoption literature that exploration of ethnic identity issues (e.g., being familiar with diverse culture) is associated positively with psychological adjustment (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007;

Yoon, 2000), academic and behavioural outcomes (Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009), self-esteem (Mohanty et al., 2007; Yoon, 2000), and cultural competence (Thomas & Tessler, 2007). Resolving ethnic identity issues can be challenging especially for intercountry adoptees. This is because they belong to two ethnic groups (i.e., birth country and adoptive country), whereas many non-adoptees belong to only one ethnic group. Since ethnic identity is important for intercountry adoptees, this section of the thesis will discuss ethnic identity issues.

Before discussing ethnic identity further, it is important to clarify some terminologies, because there are a number of terms in the academic literature that are similar, but different in subtle ways (Scherman, 2010). For the purpose of the current thesis, ethnicity will refer to a sense of belongingness to a group of people who share a similar historical background (Murry, Smith, & Hill, 2004). For example, if someone says that his/her ethnicity is a New Zealander, it technically denotes that he/she is internalised the customs of New Zealanders, and thus belongs to that particular ethnic group. An ethnic group will refer to a group of people with shared historical experiences. Race will refer to a group of people who share similar physical trait, such as skin colour (Murry et al., 2004). Culture will refer to the system of beliefs and values of a group of people (note: the group is not necessarily an ethnic group) that helps them understand the world (Murry et al., 2004). Ethnic identity will refer to a cognitive and affective understanding about self with regards to ethnicity, and how one identifies with which ethnic group they belong to. Ethnic socialisation is participation of ethnic activities such as return trips to birth country (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010) and heritage camp (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Knowing the importance and the meaning of ethnic identity, it is natural to ask the following question: What ethnic group(s) do intercountry adoptees feel that they belong to? To investigate this matter, Westhues and Cohen (1998b) interviewed 155 Canadian intercountry adoptees (mean age of 17.3) to find out how the intercountry adoptees identify themselves ethnically. It was found that 51% of the males and 40% of the female adoptees identified themselves with Canadian, and 10% of male adoptees and 5% of female adoptees identified themselves with hyphenated Canadian (e.g., Korean-Canadian or Haitian-Canadian). Approximately 25% of male adoptees and 38% of female adoptees identified with birth countries. Five percents of males and 4% of

females did not know about their ethnicity. Other researchers used an instrument tool to measure ethnic identity directly. For instance, Scherman and Harre (2008) assessed 50 New Zealand intercountry adoptees (average 12.9 years old) using the Phinney Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). It was found that 20% said that they identified themselves with a Kiwi, 26% said that they identified themselves more with a Kiwi than the ethnic group of their birth country; 38% saw themselves as an equal identification; 14% identified more with the ethnic group of birth country than a Kiwi; and 2% said they chose only the ethnic group of birth country. These two studies conducted in Canada and New Zealand respectively (Scherman & Harre, 2008; Westhues & Cohen, 1998b) seem to suggest that the vast majority of intercountry adoptees identify with both birth and adoptive ethnic groups, and a small proportion identifies with only the birth ethnic group. However, these studies are mainly descriptive in nature, and do not explain why intercountry adoptees identify with both birth and adoptive ethic groups and why so few of them identify with their birth ethnic groups.

To address such questions, researchers conducted a study to find out if adoptive parents play any role in formation of ethnic identity. Huh and Reid (2000), for instance, surveyed and interviewed intercountry adoptees and their adoptive parents in the U.S., and found that the intercountry adoptees formed a strong sense of ethnic identity with both birth and adoptive ethnic groups, if their adoptive parents provide a culturally diverse environment to the intercountry adoptees (Huh & Reid, 2000). This finding seems to suggest that adoptive parents play an important role in formation of strong sense of ethnic identity. Some researchers investigated the extent to which adoptive parents are involved in ethnic socialisation processes with their adopted child, but there was a disagreement. Some researchers found that most adoptive parents in the U.S. and other western countries do not consider ethnicity and culture important (Mohanty et al., 2007), while others found that many adoptive parents in the U.S. make a lot of efforts to provide cultural exposure to their children (Friedlander et al., 2000; Westhues & Cohen, 1998b). It is unclear why there is such a difference in parental involvement in ethnic socialisation with their child.

Other researchers conducted a study to find out if non-parental factors play any role in formation of ethnic identity. Adams, Tessler and Gamache (2005), for instance,

investigated how school environment influences the development of ethnic identity. In particular, they examined the association between attitudes of Chinese intercountry adoptees (on average seven years old) in the U.S. toward various ethnic groups and ethnic and racial diversity in school. It was found that more cultural diversity at school encourages identification of intercountry adoptees with their adoptive ethnic group (i.e., the U.S.). However, little is known how the school environment influences the development of ethnic identity in *adolescent* adoptees. Nevertheless, from these two studies, it seems that exposure to diverse cultures through adoptive parents and school is important in the development of a strong sense of ethnic identity (Adams et al., 2005; Huh & Reid, 2000; Yoon, 2000).

It is interesting to note that the participants identified with the mainstream ethnic group (i.e., the U.S.), rather than the culture of birth country (i.e., China), with more exposure to diverse cultures at school (Adams et al., 2005). The authors reasoned that the Chinese adoptees identified with the mainstream ethnic group because of their higher socioeconomic status than ethnic minority group in the U.S. It seems that more exposure to culture of birth country is not necessarily associated with identification with birth country. Other researchers also found similar results (e.g., Mohanty et al., 2007; Scherman & Harre, 2010). For instance, Scherman and Harre (2010) surveyed 44 adolescent intercountry adoptees with a mean age of 12.6 years in New Zealand by using the MEIM to measure their sense of ethnic identity, and surveyed their adoptive parents to explore adoptive parents' interest in adopted children's birth culture. It was concluded that adoptive parents can influence adopted children's interest in their birth culture, but it is not associated with *identification with* a particular ethnic group.

Overall, resolving ethnic identity issues is important, especially for intercountry adoptees. This is because a sense of ethnic identity is associated with the developmental outcomes in various domains. This is also because this population can identify with two countries (i.e., birth and adoptive countries), making this process more challenging for them to resolve than most non-adoptees. The adoption literature seems to suggest that many intercountry adoptees tend to identify with both birth and adoptive ethnic groups, and few identify with the ethnic group of birth country. The adoption literature also seems to suggest that exposure to diverse ethnic cultures through adoptive parents and school is important in forming a strong sense of ethnic identity (Adams et al., 2005).

However, the exposure to diverse ethnic cultures does not necessarily means that intercountry adoptees will be identified with a particular ethnic group. It is up to the intercountry adoptees that have to decide what ethnic group they wish to belong to. However, little is known about factors that determine belongingness to particular ethnic group, and thus, further investigations would contribute to the literature to increase our understanding about ethnic identity.

Adoptive identity

As mentioned before, intercountry adoptees have additional identity issues to resolve (Grotevant & Korff, 2011). Not only do they need to understand about themselves as adoptees, but also as adolescents. The focus of the thesis now will be about adoptive identity issues. Included in this section are (1) intercountry adoptees' understanding in adoption, (2) feeling of loss, and (3) interest in adoption.

There is an important difference between intercountry adoptees and non-adoptees: The former ones need to learn of their adoptive status, whereas the latter ones do not. Despite the importance of an understanding in adoption to resolve adoptive identity issues, few researchers have investigated an intercountry adoptees' understanding in adoption. One of the few researchers who have investigated this issue provided a developmental framework to help better understand an intercountry adoptees' understanding in adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011). Generally speaking, an intercountry adoptees' understanding in adoption increases with the development of their cognitive abilities. For example, when adoptees are between the ages of 3 and 5 years, they learn to talk about adoption without having a real understanding. However, the cognitive abilities of adopted children mature as they reach the ages between 6 and 12 years. As a result, they are able to recognise that their birth parents had alternative options other than choosing to relinquish their baby. Consequently, they begin to ask many questions about adoption to their adoptive parents in an effort to understand the motivations of adoption of their birth parents. And, at this age, they also realise that before adopted, they were firstly separated from their birth parents. With this new understanding, they begin to experience the feelings of loss (Brodzinsky, 2011).

One of the most frequently recurring themes among internationally adopted individuals is feelings of loss, grief and mourning. Subtle differences among these terms should be

noted. Loss is referring to affective states after being separated from emotionally attached figures (Courtney, 2000). In the context of adoption, the attached figures may refer to birth parents and caregivers in institutions. Grief is referring to a coping process of the loss, and mourning is referring to adaptation after the loss and the grief have occurred (Courtney, 2000). Smith and Brodzinsky (2002) emphasised the importance of feelings of loss among adopted individuals, arguing that adoption is inherently related to the loss of birth parents and their relatives, the loss of status, the loss of ethnic, racial, and genealogical connections, the loss of stability within the adoptive family, and the loss of identity. Despite the importance of feelings of loss among adoptees, few studies have been conducted in these topics, especially from internationally adoptees' perspectives.

Smith and Brodzinsky (2002) investigated the feelings of loss experienced by 82 adopted children aged between 8 and 12 and their grief process, reported from international adoptees and one of their adoptive parents. Particularly, they were interested in finding out about the degree to which they experienced the feelings of loss and the ways of which they cope with the feelings, and the association between the feelings of loss and their current adjustment. The feelings of loss were operationalised into two components: negative affect such as anger, sadness, confusion over relinquishment and unhappiness due to birth parents; and preoccupation over appearance of birth parents, motives for adoption and autobiographical information. It was found that the adoptees had the feelings of loss at a low to moderate level. Those who had negative affects about their birth parents used a behavioural avoidance approach (e.g., staying away from situations that made them feel negative) to cope with the feelings of loss, and those who had a curiosity about birth parents used a problem-solving approach as coping strategies. The negative affects were associated with depression and the curiosity about birth parents was associated with behavioral problems. However, the researchers mentioned that their study findings were limited by having not explored all dimensions of the feelings of loss experienced by the adoptees. The authors insisted further investigations to explore the holistic aspects (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002). Indeed, there is a lack of research that investigated the feelings of loss experienced by adoptees, especially the late adolescent adoptees. The more studies would contribute to the adoption literature.

Intercountry adoptees begin to grasp a deeper understanding about adoption as they grow up. Having higher interest in adoption will encourage them to have even a deeper understanding in adoption, and it is a normative part of adoption experiences. In fact, it is an important part of their identity formation processes, and it should not be considered as having difficulty with adjustment in their new adoptive environment. Despite its importance, this aspect of ICA has not received much attention from adoption researchers. One such study surveyed adoptive parents of internationally adopted children and adolescents aged between 4 and 16 (Juffer & Tieman, 2009). They found that 95% of the Chinese intercountry adoptees and 87% of the Indian intercountry adoptees had interest in adoption. Particularly, they were interested in photos and videos of their adoption, adoption themed stories and movies. The adoption literature seems to suggest that the majority of intercountry adoptees have a strong interest in adoption. However, this finding is limited in that it did not distinguish an interest in adoption from an interest in the birth country or birth family. In other words, intercountry adoptees may be interested in knowing about their birth family, but not necessarily associated with ICA. It is also important to note that, as it can be seen from the research findings, not all intercountry adoptees have the same level of interest in adoption. Regardless of the significance of adoptive status to intercountry adoptees, the interest in adoption is an important part in identity formation (Grotevant, & McRoy, 1998, as cited in March & Miall, 2000), and further investigation will be helpful in understanding adoptive identity formation.

Overall, the research on adoptive identity is scarce. Many researches did not collect the data directly from intercountry adoptees, and the assessment age was young. As adoptive identity is associated with behavioral problems, it would be worthwhile to explore further about these issues.

Openness in adoption

The extent to which adoptive identity is achieved depends on openness in adoption. According to Brodzinsky (2006), openness can be classified into two categories: structural and communicative openness. The former refers to the arrangement prior to placement between birth and adoptive parents, facilitated through the adoption agency, about ways in which they might share adoption information such as birth parents' identifying information (e.g. names, addressed, medical information, etc.). While

confidential adoption arrangements allow no information about birth parents to be shared with the adopted children, fully disclosed adoption allows all information to be passed to adopted children. Mediated adoption lies between confidential and fully disclosed adoption in the openness spectrum. Communicative openness, on the other hand, involves exploration of adoption issues among adoptees and their birth and adoptive parents (Brodzinsky, 2006).

Openness in adoption mainly has been researched in the domestic adoption context (Ge et al., 2008; Grotevant et al., 2008; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011; Von Korff, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2006), and little has been investigated in the ICA context. One such study was conducted in the U.S. to investigate communicative openness in adoption (Freeark, Rosenblum, Hus, & Root, 2008). Sixty-six couples with an internationally adopted child aged between four and seven years were recruited and were asked about adoption conversations with their children. It was found that adoptive mothers were more involved in communicating with adoptees than adoptive fathers. Better marital relationship was associated with more adoption conversation (Freeark et al., 2008). However, these study findings were based on the accounts of adoptive parents and were about younger adoptees.

A study was conducted to investigate communicative openness in adoption in the U.K. (Hawkins et al., 2007). One hundred and thirty-three intercountry adoptees and 47 domestic adoptees were recruited at the ages of 11 years, and were asked about family conversation about adoption. It was found that the majority of the adoptees felt comfortable and happy about the adoption conversations with their adoptive parents. However, according to the authors, these findings may be limited because they had some difficulties with interviewing the young adoptees. Some participants had difficulty talking about this issue. Despite the limitation, this study contributed to the literature by reporting the accounts of internationally adopted adolescents, rather than reports from the adoptive parents.

In addition to talking about adoption with adoptive parents, a considerable number of adoptees have searched for birth parents. However, again, the majority of studies on searching have been conducted in the context of domestic adoption (e.g., Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2006; Grotevant et al., 2008; Von Korff &

Grotevant, 2011; Wrobel, Grotevant, Berge, Mendenhall, & McRoy, 2003), with only a few investigating searching within the context of ICA. One recent longitudinal study surveyed 1,417 intercountry adoptees (between 24 and 30 years of age) in the Netherlands and compared their adjustment among four groups: uninterested non-searchers, interested non-searchers, searchers and reunited searchers (Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2008). It was found that 31.6% of intercountry adoptees searched for their birth parents. This figure is much lower than 40% to 50%, figures for domestic adoptees searching for their birth parents (Selman, 1999, cited in Muller & Perry, 2001). The lower number of intercountry adoptees searching for their birth parents than domestic adoptees may be due to more difficulty in seeking information from overseas. Language and geographical barriers are thought to be the main reasons. It was also found that the searchers had more adjustment problems. Considering that the domestic adoption literature suggests that the outcomes of searching are mostly positive (Grotevant et al., 2008; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011; Wrobel et al., 2003), the authors concluded that searching is not associated with adjustment problems. This study is significant in that it has contributed research findings about searching in the context of ICA. However, the participants were young adults. Considering that adolescence is an important period of identity resolution, further investigations with this population would be worthwhile.

The literature also reported that adoptees may contact their birth parents with the intention to seek adoption information (e.g., medical history or personal history). With these verified information from birth parents, adoptees are able to answer questions from other people about the biological background (March, 1995). The reasons for not searching for birth parents include insignificance of adoption as part of their identity and negative feelings toward birth parents (Berge et al., 2006). Regardless of whether or not adoptees search for birth parents, the decision is an important part of identity formation for intercountry adoptees.

Overall, a considerable number of the studies on the openness in adoption have been conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews and assessment tools to measure the variables such as the openness and the satisfaction with the openness from their birth mothers or adoptive parents. However, the majority of studies on openness in adoption were about domestic adoptions. In addition, many studies collected data from

adoptive parents, whereas the voices of intercountry adoptees, especially in their late adolescence, has been lacking. The current study made an attempt to address these methodological limitations.

Relationships

The relationships of intercountry adoptees have received relatively little attention from adoption researchers. Following will review the adoption literature on relationships broken into (1) family functioning and (2) social competency.

Family functioning

Family relationships are important in adjustment of children and adolescents. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the impacts of family relationships on the development of non-adoptees (e.g. Pike, Coldwell, & Dunn, 2005). However, the literature generally has ignored the adoptee population. Few studies conducted on adoptees' family functioning indicate that intercountry adoptees have poorer family relationship than non-adoptees. For instance, Rueter, Keyes, Iacono and McGue (2009) measured the quality of family relationships by observing and surveying all members of 284 adoptive families and 208 non-adoptive families about their warm, supportive communication (e.g., "I talk about my concerns and my experiences with my mother/father" and "My mother/father praises me when I do something well."), parental control (e.g., "I make it clear what I want my child to do or not do" and "It is important to me that my child obeys the law.") and family conflict (e.g., "Often there are misunderstandings between my child and me"). Both adoptive and non-adoptive families had an adolescent of mean age 14.9. The researchers found similar scores between the adoptive and non-adoptive families for communication and parental control. However, the adoptive families had higher scores for conflict. It is not clear what the causes of such high family conflict are in adoptive families as there are few studies conducted on family relationships in the literature.

Adoption research suggests that the quality of family relationships is associated with intercountry adoptees' later adjustment. Two studies compared the quality of family relationships between delinquent and non-delinquent intercountry adoptees. Elmund, Melin, von Knorring, Proos and Tuvemo (2007) surveyed 20 adoptive families with a delinquent adopted adolescent, and compared the questionnaire scores with 21 adoptive

families with a non-delinquent adopted adolescent. It was also found that the delinquent adopted adolescents had more family conflict than the non-delinquent families, and the former cases and their families blamed each other for the faults more often than the latter. Moitra and Mukherjee (2012) assessed 200 delinquent and 200 non-delinquent intercountry adoptees and found that non-delinquent had more satisfaction with communication with their parents. Particularly, the communication with their adoptive mother was more important than their adoptive father. Overall, the two studies found that the quality of family relationships was poorer in the delinquent adoptee group than the non-delinquent adoptee group.

It is important to note that both Rueter and colleagues (2009) and Moitra and Mukherjee (2012) asked the participants about communication with family members. Despite the researchers using the similar terminologies, different concepts were measured: the former assessed emotional support from family (e.g., "I talk about my concerns and my experiences with my mother/father." and "My mother/father praises me when I do something well."), and the latter measured understanding of each other (i.e., satisfaction with communication with their parents). Consequently, the conflicting conclusions between Rueter and the colleagues (2009) and Moitra and Mukherjee (2012) may be related to the methodological differences. It is important that when defining a complex variable such as quality of family relationships, it is done in a consistent way across adoption studies.

Other researchers investigated non-delinquent intercountry adoptees to investigate the association between the quality of adoptive family relationship and adoptees' adjustment. Whitten and Weaver (2010), for instance, surveyed adoptive parents of 701 intercountry adoptees aged between 13 and 17 years, and found that better family relationships were associated with less likelihood to skip school, to be suspended, and to report substance abuse or police trouble and gain better school grade in language arts. Tan (2008) surveyed 40 adoptive mothers of Chinese adoptees with mean age 3.5 and biological children with mean age 5.3 years in the U.S., and found that the adoptees' behavioural adjustment was associated with their first impression of their adoptive mother and relationship with biological children. In other words, family relationships (i.e., parent-child as well as sibling-child relationships) do have impacts on adoptees' adjustment. However, these studies' findings may be limited because adoptees' voices

are missing. And because few studies focused on the impacts of siblings in adoptees' adjustment, it is difficult to conclude how sibling relationships influence adoptees' adjustment. Overall, it seems that intercountry adoptees have poorer family relationship than non-adoptees due to communication problems. As a result, the poor family relationship influences intercountry adoptees' later adjustment. However, there remain gaps in the literature.

Social competency

Few studies have been conducted on interpersonal relationships of intercountry adoptees, and the existing evidence on interpersonal relationships presents conflicting findings. One of the few studies (Tan & Camras, 2011) investigated interpersonal relationships of 869 Chinese adopted girls from preschool, primary and secondary schools in the U.S. The quality of interpersonal relationships was measured using adoptive parent- and teacher-reported questionnaires. It was found that the scores of social skills were higher in the adoptees than the scores of the U.S. norm from preschool to secondary schools. There were few differences in the scores between the adoptive parents and the teachers. This indicates that intercountry adoptees are adjusting better than non-adoptees in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, Raaska and the colleagues (2012) surveyed 364 9 to 15-year-old intercountry adoptees and their adoptive parents on bullying and victimisation in Finland, and found that intercountry adoptees are more likely to bully or be bullied by others than non-adoptees. These high bullying and victimisation ratings in intercountry adoptees were attributed to a lack of social skills. This indicates that intercountry adoptees do have difficulty with interpersonal relationships than non-adoptees.

However, these findings (Raaska et al., 2012; Tan & Camras, 2011) need to be interpreted with caution. First, the study participants are Chinese (Tan & Camras, 2011). In the past studies, in general, Chinese adoptees were adjusting better than adoptees from other countries (e.g., Dalen & Rygvold, 2006). This was because of relatively fewer early adversities experienced by the Chinese adoptees than others such as Eastern European adoptees. In addition, Tan and Camras (2011) also found the association between early adversity and interpersonal relationships. This may mean that adoptees with more severe adversity may have poor interpersonal relationship with friends. A recent study conducted by Barcons (2012) supported the notion that Chinese adoptees

are adjusting better than non-Chinese adoptees in interpersonal relationship. They found that Asian and African adoptees have better social skills and less social stress than the adoptees from other countries (Barcons et al., 2012).

Second, the findings from Tan and Camras (2011) and Raaska and the colleagues (2012) should be interpreted with caution because their approaches to investigate interpersonal relationships of intercountry adoptees are narrow. The former collected data only from adoptive parents and teachers, and adoptees' voice was missing. The latter only focused on bullying and victimisation, and other aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as social stress (Barcons et al., 2012) and intimate relationships (Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2006), are missing. In order to gain a full understanding of the quality of interpersonal relationships of ICA adolescent adoptees, a more holistic research approach would be particularly beneficial.

Tieman, van der Ende and Verhulst (Tieman et al., 2006) investigated the quality of relationships in a more holistic way. They did not limit their study to only measurements of relationships with family (i.e., parents and siblings) and friends, but also with partners. The authors approached 2,148 young adults who had been adopted internationally aged between 24 and 30 years in the Netherlands, and made comparisons with non-adoptees in interpersonal and intimate relationships using written surveys. It was found that intercountry adoptees had some problems with forming relationships with their family and friends, but these were not significant in their real life. It was also found that they were less likely to have intimate relationships, to live with a partner, or to be married than non-adoptees. This may indicate that intercountry adoptees have difficulty of forming close relationships. However, despite its holistic approach, it is only a single study whose population was based on young adults, thus it says little about interpersonal relationships of adolescent adoptees.

Nevertheless, according to the adoption literature, it is still expected that internationally adopted adolescents have some difficulty forming relationships with friends and partners. Jaffari-Bimmel, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg and Mooijaart (2006) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate quality of social development of 160 intercountry adoptees from infancy to age 14. Social development was operationalised to rejection, acceptance, prosocial competence, friendliness, social

esteem, and social problems, and these were reported by adopted adolescents, adoptive mother, and teachers. It was found that social development was stable throughout infancy, childhood and early adolescence, and that the quality of early parent-child relationships and maternal sensitivity were important factors influencing social development. As the study conducted by Tieman and the colleagues (2006) suggested that the intercountry adoptees had difficulty forming relationships during young adulthood, such difficulty with forming relationships is also expected during mid to late adolescence.

Summary of empirical studies on ICA

To sum up, the empirical research on the impacts of ICA is for the most part, positive. Intercountry adoptees are adjusting better than those who have stayed in their birth countries, and the majority of the adoptees are well-adjusted. However, some studies report that a few adoptees continue to have some problems in physical domains. They have growth delays at the time of adoption in comparison with non-adoptees, and it continues even during adolescence. In addition, it was reported from the medical records of birth countries that they may have had serious medical problems, but only minor medical conditions were confirmed in the medical assessments in the adoptive countries.

Cognitive delays were also documented. Studies reported that intercountry adoptees have lower school grades, particularly in language subjects, than non-adoptees. The intercountry adoptees and their family members also perceive that school performances are poorer than that of their siblings in the adoptive family.

Intercountry adoptees also have a higher risk of developing psychosocial problems and additional developmental tasks. For example, intercountry adoptees have higher risks of having mental health problems, and they have to deal with identity issues as related to being an adoptee as well as being an adolescent. Their relationship functioning was also problematic. However, it is important to emphasise that the majority is doing well, and it is only a minority who has some developmental problems. Theoretical perspectives on ICA will be the focus of next section.

Theoretical perspectives on ICA

Theories in developmental psychology are a set of empirically supported statements to describe, explain and predict the human development (Costley, 2006). There are numerous theories in developmental psychology, and each theory emphasises different aspects of human development. The current section of the thesis will discuss development of intercountry adoptees using two developmental psychology theories: (1) Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, and (2) Erikson's psychosocial theory. These two developmental psychology theories are included due to its integrative approach to understand the human development. The former focuses on the context in which a developing person is situated and the latter focuses on the development of an individual person throughout the lifespan. Other developmental psychology theories tend to focus on specific domains of human development (e.g., Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Bowlby's attachment theory).

Bioecological theory

From ancient times, there have been heated debates about factors that affect human development. While some scholars argued that personal qualities are passed on from birth parents (Bishop et al., 2003; Plomin, Fulker, Corley, & DeFries, 1997), others argue that personal qualities are developed by surrounding environments. Bronfenbrennor's bioecological theory is similar to this nature and nurture debates in that the theory views that human development is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. What is different is that the theory emphasises developmental process, rather than developmental outcomes (e.g., physical size, school performance and social skills), and the theory systematically categorises the environments in terms of contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). There are mainly four levels of a developing person's context.

Microsystem

Microsystem refers to factors that directly affecting an individual (Bishop et al., 2003; Plomin et al., 1997). Institutions are one important microsystem to many intercountry adoptees. Studies reported that more than 80% of intercountry adoptees have been institutionalised (Meese, 2005). Despite the high number of intercountry adoptees having been institutionalised, little is known about the conditions of institutions (Dalen, 2002). Castle and colleagues (1999) reported that institutions were hygienically

inadequate and the places were not ventilated. Daily nutritional requirement was not met, and there was a frequent change in caregivers. Wilson (2003, p. 474) also reported in the review article that institutions often are "under-funded, under-staffed, and ill-equipped" to meet the needs of the institutionalised children. There is a lack of food, social contacts, and stimulation. Gunner (2007) reported that the ratio of caregivers to the children in Romanian institutions was low. There were not enough trained caregivers to take care of institutionalised children. Some children may even be favoured by caregivers, whereas other children may be neglected or abused (Gunnar et al., 2007). As a result of the exposure to a deprived environment, the institutionalised children have higher risks of having developmental delays in various domains such as growth and cognitive functioning, and medical problems.

Because little is known about adopted children before adoption, many researchers estimated the effects of institutionsation by the age of adoption. Research suggests that late adoption tends to increase risks of adjustment problems (Beckett et al., 2006; Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999; Dalen, 2002; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2000; Rutter et al., 1998; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005), growth delay (Sonuga-Barke et al., 2008), and cognitive impairment (Beckett et al., 2007; Beckett et al., 2006; Dalen & Rygvold, 2006; Morison & Ellwood, 2000). Country of origin is another factor that can be used to estimate the effects of institutionalisation. This is because the quality of institutional care differs depending on country of origin (Dalen, 2007; Odenstad et al., 2008). Research suggests that Korean and Chinese adoptees have better adjusted (Dalen, 2002; Dalen & Rygvold, 2006; Frydman & Lynn, 1989; Kim & Staat, 2004; Kim, 1995; Kim, Shin, & Carey, 1999; Lindblad, Hjern, & Vinnerljung, 2003; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005). As there are many Eastern European adoptees in New Zealand, it can be expected that they have developmental problems. Overall, research suggests that intercountry adoptees with the experiences of institutionalisation in the early life are more likely to have growth failure, cognitive delay and behavioural problems (Johnson, 2000).

Adoptive family is another microsystem for intercountry adoptees. An adoptive family is usually perceived to be a positive environmental factor. This is because adoptive families tend to have higher socioeconomic status than general population. Adoptive families are more likely to be financially secured and are better educated (Ingersoll,

1997). Literature suggests that adoptive parents play an important role in helping their adopted children resolve ethnic identity issues (Huh & Reid, 2000), and adoptive identity issues (Freeark et al., 2008; Hawkins et al., 2007; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 1998). However, despite all these benefits, having poor relationship with adoptive family can increase the risks of having adjustment problems (Elmund et al., 2007; Moitra & Mukherjee, 2012).

School is also an important microsystem for intercountry adoptees. Through interactions with teachers and classmates, cognitive abilities can develop. However, adoption studies suggest that intercountry adoptees are more likely to have poorer actual and perceived school performance (Cohen & Westhues, 1995; Dalen, 2002; Lindblad et al., 2009; Vinnerljung et al., 2010; Westhues & Cohen, 1997), and have more experiences of bullying and victimisation (Raaska et al., 2012; Tan & Camras, 2011). Little is known about school life of intercountry adoptees.

Mesosystem

Mesosystem refers to the transition between two microsystems. Broadly speaking, adoption is all about the mesosystem. Intercountry adoptees move from birth country to adoptive country. Most intercountry adoptees experience dramatic environmental changes from unfavorable conditions to enriched conditions. After adoption, many children catch up dramatically in various aspects including physical growth (Cohen et al., 2008; Le Mare & Audet, 2006; Miller et al., 2010; Sonuga-Barke et al., 2010; van IJzendoorn et al., 2007) and cognitive abilities (van IJzendoorn et al., 2005). However, little is known about the transition period from a birth country to an adoptive country. For example, a few anecdotal accounts documented that many intercountry adoptees experience very positive experiences with their adoptive family especially in the beginning, which was termed a *honeymoon period*, but few empirical evidences are available in the adoption literature (Palacios, Wrobel, & Neil, 2009).

Exosystem

Exosystem refers to an environment with which a developing person has no direct contact, but still influences the person. Professionals such as social workers, teachers, researchers and doctors are some examples of exosystem (Note: If these professionals are directly interacting with intercountry adoptees, then they become a part of the

microsystem). ICA literature review suggests that medical records of intercountry adoptees in the birth country are not reliable (Albers et al., 1997; Cataldo & Viviano, 2007; Miller et al., 2008). The medical records in a birth country report that intercountry adoptees have serious medical conditions, but medical assessments in an adoptive country did not confirm such diagnosis. Consequently, adoptive parents may have wrong information about their adopted children and provide insensitive care to them. In addition, the ICA literature suggests that intercountry adoptees are over-represented in clinical settings partially because adoptive parents seek support for their adopted children from social services more than non-adoptive parents (Miller et al., 2000). It seems that professionals play an important role in the development of intercountry adoptees, and therefore, professionals should be aware of adoption issues. In general, little is known about how professionals influence the development of intercountry adoptees. Additionally, more research should be conducted in order to develop evidence-based professional practice.

Roles of media also can influence the development of intercountry adoptees. Media report about ICA frequently, and potentially can play a negative role on the development of intercountry adoptees. For example, media portraying the negative aspects of intercountry adoptees may cause the formation of negative images on ICA (Khabibullina, 2006; McGeown, 2005; McGuinness & Pallansch, 2007), creating societal stigma about adoption.

Macrosystem

Macrosystem refers to the broader context of an individual's environment. Societal perception toward adoption is one example macrosystem. Societal perception can shape the motivations for adoption. During 1950's there was a conventional belief in the society that family members should be only related by birth (Hoksbergen, 1998). As a result, many adoptions had been done to form a family. However, during the 1970's, the society became more open to diverse family structure and felt empathetic towards parentless children. Consequently, many couples began to adopt children for humanitarian reasons. Researchers and adoption agencies also contributed the decision for ICAs by claiming that there is no difference between adopted and non-adopted children as long as adequate care is given to the adopted children (Hoksbergen, 1998).

Adoption literature suggests that the motivations of adoption can influence the development of intercoutnry adoptees (Barth & Brooks, 1997).

One study on societal perception on adoption found that adoption is generally perceived positive (Tyebjee, 2003). Ninety one percent of participants reported to have positive attitude toward adoption, and only 5% had negative attitude; 4% had natural view. In particular, Caucasian had more positive attitude than African American, and Hispanics, and younger population and those who are familiar with adoption and from smaller household had more positive attitude. Despite the positive attitude, the main reasons for not adopting a child were personal life situation. Having big family already, too young or too old, career limitations, and having financial issues were some examples.

ICA law is another example of macrosystem. As the number of ICAs increases over the past decades, complex human and legal complications have begun to occur. To "ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interest of the child and with respect for the child's fundamental rights" (Parra-Aranguren, 2008, p. 1), the *Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* was developed. According to the convention, ICA should be done in the best interests of children. Abduction, sale and trafficking of children for adoption must be prevented. And, ICA should be considered only when no one within a country is available to provide best care to children. This international law has been established to ensure that children without parents are also provided with appropriate care for the children's well-beings, and can influence the microsystem (i.e., an adoptive family environment) of intercountry adoptees.

Psychosocial theory

According to Erikson, there are eight developmental stages throughout lifetime (Erikson, 1995). For each stage, a developing person must resolve one of two psychosocial crises in order to process to the next one. Once each stage is successfully resolved, a developing person displays a positive virtue. However, this process is never fully achieved, but is on-going throughout lifespan. For the purpose of the current literature review, the first five stages will be discussed. The following discussions are based on the work of Brodzinsky (1987), who has applied Erikson's psychosocial theory to the adoption context.

Infancy

During infancy, one must resolve psychosocial crises between trust and mistrust. In order to develop trust, a caretaker must consistently identify and satisfy the developing person's needs. However, adoptive parents tend to have parental distress for a number of reasons. First, as discussed in the background section, one of the motivations of adoptive parents to adopt a child is infertility. It is possible that the infertility cause an infertile couple to experience anxiety and insecurity. Secondly, adoption process can be stressful as it takes long period. Some adoptive parents wait for years to receive their adopted child. Moreover, their performance as adoptive parents gets evaluated. Thirdly, societal stigmatisation on adoption can cause adoptive parental distress. Family members may not be welcoming to the adopted child, since they prefer birth child. Likewise, friends may have negative feeling toward adoptive parents for their infertility, for instance. Therefore, adoptive parents may feel distress. These psychological distresses may cause their ability to be sensitive to their adopted child's need and to provide adequate support. Inconsistent caregiving may increase chances of the adopted child experience mistrust.

Toddlerhood and preschool period

During toddlerhood and preschool period, one must develop a sense of autonomy and initiative. To develop such a sense of autonomy and initiative, children and adoptive parents must overcome fear. Children need to overcome fear in order to explore the world independently, and parents need to overcome fear, allowing their child an opportunity to explore the world independently. In the context of adoption, adoptive parents may feel fear when disclosing adoptive status to their child, since adoption revelation means adoptive parents acknowledging that they are not birth parents, creating a distance between the adoptive parents and the child. Despite the parents' desire not to accept that they are not birth parents and not to reveal their child's adoptive status, acknowledging the difference between birth and adoptive parents will more likely be helpful for adjustment of intercountry adoptees. Successfully overcoming fear, such as process of adoption revelation, can help intercountry adoptees to feel a sense of autonomy and initiative, thus developing positive virtue, will and purpose.

School years

During the school years, one must develop sense of industry. At this stage, as cognitive abilities develop, adopted children ask themselves what it means to be adopted for the first time, and they gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of adoption. For example, they understand that in order to be chosen by their adoptive parents, they first need to be relinquished by their birth parents. New insights about adoption may trigger negative feelings. This is considered to be a normative developmental process for adoptees. It helps them understand the meaning of being adopted at a deeper level and begin the "adaptive grieving" process. Upon resolving these psychosocial crises successfully, developing persons can attain competency.

TABLE 1 ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF ICA

Life stages	Developmental tasks	Examples
Infancy	• Resolve the conflict between trust and mistrust.	• Adoptive parental stress due to infertility, a long adoption process, and societal stigmatisation can make themselves insensitive to their adopted children.
Toddler and pre-school Period	• Resolve the conflict between autonomy and shame and doubt. • Resolve the conflict between initiative, and guilt.	• Adopted children need to overcome the fear of exploring a new environment. • Adoptive parents need to cope with stress of disclosing adoptive status to the children.
School years	• Resolve the conflict between industry and inferiority.	• Adopted children gain an understanding of the meaning of adoption. • Adopted children need to deal with possible negative emotions toward their birth and adoptive family.
Adolescence	• Resolve the conflict between ego identity and identity confusion.	• Adopted children make decisions on how to deal with their adoptive status.

Adolescence

During adolescence, one must resolve identity issues. As physical and psychological changes take place, many adolescents feel that they are a different person, and thus seek to connect the current sense of self with the past. However, adoptees find this process

challenging, since some of the autobiographical information is not available to them, especially if the adoption was confidential. Therefore, some adoptees actively look for the information to satisfy their curiosity and make sense of who they are as adoptees. On the other hand, the others choose not to explore adoption related identity issues due to feeling of disloyalty to their adoptive parents. This may lead to role confusion. However, upon successfully achieving this developmental stage, developing persons can attain fidelity.

Summary of theoretical perspectives on ICA

The current section of the thesis discussed theoretical perspectives of ICA. First, it has discussed how genetic/biological and environmental factors influence the developmental outcomes of intercountry adoptees. Second, it has discussed the roles of contexts on human development in the context of ICA. Third, it has discussed five developmental stages in the context of ICA. This concludes the literature reviews on ICA. The following part will present a review of online research literature.

Background to online research

In the past decade, the Internet has become increasingly popular as a tool for communication, entertainment, learning and everyday tasks (Fallows, 2004). This is, especially, true for teenagers who use the Internet more frequently than any other age groups (Chase & Alvarez, 2000; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). According to Statistics New Zealand (2012), 82% of New Zealanders had access to the Internet in the past 12 months; 93% of New Zealanders aged between 15 and 24 years had access to the Internet. This suggests that the Internet is a significant part of teenagers' lives. Recently, the Internet has also become an alternative medium to collect research data (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Stewart & Williams, 2005). Various online research strategies such as online interviews and focus groups have been used. This part of the literature review will critically review the research on the use of online methods for conducting research as it makes comparisons between face-to-face communication and computer-mediated communication; synchronous and asynchronous online communications; and in-depth interviews and focus groups, in an effort to determine the best approach for the current study.

Face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication

Traditionally, qualitative researchers have collected data through face-to-face in-depth interviews or focus groups. With the development of technology, researchers have begun to collect data through different communication media. Telephone interviews, online interviews and online focus groups are some examples. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), these communication media differ by richness of information. In other words, these communication media differ by the ability to change understanding within a time interval. For instance, face-to-face conversation is considered to be rich because it allows immediate feedback, and because there are visual (e.g., body language) and auditory (e.g., voice tone) cues. On the other hand, online text-based conversation is considered to be lean, because communication is done through only written messages. Rich communication media are useful for data collection when meaning of the messages is ambiguous, whereas lean communication media is useful when meaning of the messages is clear (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Recently, qualitative researchers have begun to use the Internet as a communication medium for data collection, but relatively few studies have investigated the efficacy of such online research.

A few studies noted several characteristics of online research. Firstly, research participants may find online research more comfortable than they would find face-to-face research. This may be because participants can take part in research at their homes. From researchers' perspective, this is more practical than conventional face-to-face research, as it may be difficult to find a time that is suitable for all participants, and to gather those participants in one place, particularly if they are geographically distant from one another (Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007). Studies also have reported that participants enjoy online discussion groups more than they enjoy other such groups (e.g., face-to-face interviews and surveys) (Adler & Zarchin, 2002).

Secondly, in online research, participants' privacy can be more protected due to lean communication medium. Therefore, the risks associated with disclosing personally sensitive information are reduced (Joinson, 2003; Weinberg, Uken, Schmale, & Adamek, 1996). The less risks associated with self-disclosure may lead to more disclosure of personal opinions (Chase & Alvarez, 2000; Tourangeau, Couper, & Conrad, 2004; Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).

Thirdly, online research may be helpful for participants. Studies have reported that writing is helpful in better understanding our emotions and attitudes (Joinson, 2003), and it also may be therapeutic (Weinberg et al., 1996). Such benefits may occur because writing requires higher cognitive functioning such as more organised and exact thinking, and more clear expression (Marra, Moore, & Klimczak, 2004; Reid & Reid, 2005). In the context of online research, for example, participants may have such benefits by translating verbal thoughts into readable online text. From the researchers' perspectives, writing can be helpful also since they do not need to transcribe the data.

Lastly, online research can be less expensive to conduct than face-to-face research. Clapper and Massey (1996) argued that the cost of typical face-to-face research may involve moderator salaries, rental of research facilities, payments to participants, travel costs, and tape production and transcribing, and only larger organisations can often afford these costs.

Synchronous versus asynchronous communications

Online research can be categorised into two types according to communication mode: if all people are participating at the same time, it is said to be *synchronous*; when people join a conversation at different times, it is said to be *asynchronous*. Instant messaging and chat rooms are examples of synchronous communication, whereas e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, blogs and social networking utilities are examples of asynchronous online communication (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

In synchronous online communication, participants tend to share information, offer advice, generate ideas and share emotions to a greater extent than occurs in asynchronous online communication (Fox et al., 2007; Reid & Reid, 2005; Stewart & Williams, 2005). Comments tend to be shorter than in asynchronous online focus group, and conversation flow tends to be fast. However, there may be also a high occurrence of flaming: anti-normative behaviours or socially undesirable behaviours (Reid & Reid, 2005), in synchronous communication. Moderators are more likely to be criticised due to the spontaneous and democratic nature of synchronous online focus group. In addition, it is often recommended to conduct online focus groups with a small number of participants as some may be just observing the conversation and not contributing to the synchronous group discussion (i.e., lurking), or there may be multiple threads so that

conversation is difficult to flow. Therefore, generally, when conducting synchronous focus groups, a larger number of groups may be necessary in order to gather enough data.

The most important advantage of asynchronous online focus groups would be convenience. Participants can take part in the research regardless of time and place (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland, & Myerburg, 2003). Because of the flexibility in time and place, the participants can reflect on the discussion question with as much time as they need. However, while there may be more flexibility, the group interaction can drop dramatically over a short period of time, especially in a small group. For instance, Stewart and Williams observed that while larger online discussions groups (e.g., 45 members) continued over two months, smaller groups (e.g., 15 members) lasted only one month. Participants may lose interest in participation in the research quickly, and group identity may not form (Stewart & Williams, 2005). Overall, synchronous and asynchronous online communications have both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, it is important to consider the aims of any study before the making decision to conduct online research.

In-depth one-on-one interviews versus focus group interviews

In-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups are common ways to collect data when conducting qualitative research. According to Pope and Mays (1995, p. 43), in-depth interviews are "face-to-face conversations with the purpose of exploring issues or topics in detail," whereas focus groups are "methods of group interviews which explicitly include and use group interaction to generate data." Focus groups differ from naturally occurring group discussion in that focus groups are carefully planned group discussions (Stewart & Williams, 2005). Although both in-depth interviews and focus groups are used to collect qualitative data, differences exist between these two methods.

One of the greatest differences between in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups is the number of participants from which a researcher gathers the qualitative data. Usually the former involves only one research participant at a time, while the latter involves one to ten research participants depending on the nature and the complexity of the subject of interest (Powell & Single, 1996).

The larger number of participants in focus groups helps explore the fuller perspectives of research participants than in-depth interviews (Powell & Single, 1996). As the participants interact with each other, one idea can trigger more ideas. Thus, focus groups are useful ways to collect multiple perspectives and opinions that might otherwise be missed, if using in-depth interviews.

Because focus groups use the larger number of research participants than in-depth interviews, interactions among participants during the focus groups are considered important. Kitzinger (1994) suggested several advantages of participant interactions during focus groups. Firstly, it helps understand research participants' attitudes, priorities, language, and frameworks of understanding. Secondly, it is helpful in hearing opinions from a variety of research participants. Thirdly, it can be easier to explore embarrassing subjects and experiences than in-depth interviews can achieve (Kitzinger, 1994). This may be because participants can support each other.

TABLE 2 ONLINE RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS

Online Communication	Face-to-face Communication
• More comfortable • More enjoyment • Geographically diverse • More privacy, thus less risk of self-disclosure • Gain more self-awareness, when written communication is done • Cheaper to run	• Rich information • Useful when messages are ambiguous
Synchronous	**Asynchronous**
• More self-disclosure • Shorter comment • Fast-paced • More flaming • Better with smaller group due to lurking and multiple threads	• Convenience due to flexibility with time and place • Fewer group interaction • Lose interest quickly • No group identity formation
In-depth interviews	**Focus groups**
• Privacy protection	• Use of group interaction • Understand group attitudes, priorities, language, and frameworks of understanding • Hear a variety of opinions • Group support • Gain data from a large group size

However, Powell and Single (1996) argued that focus groups are not useful in gathering in-depth information due to the collective nature of focus groups. Research participants may not want to disclose personally sensitive information in focus groups. Disclosure of personal opinions may be inhibited by the vulnerability felt when sharing personal information. This contradict with other researchers who argue that focus group interviews are useful in exploring embarrassing subjects and experiences (Kitzinger, 1994). Indeed, some researchers used group interviews to investigate personally-sensitive subjects such as intimate sexual health (e.g., Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004). Current literature presents conflicting findings whether focus groups should be used to gain a deep understanding in topics of interests.

Summary of online research literature

From the review of literature, there are advantages and disadvantages in each of the features of online research (See table 2). It appears that online may be preferred to face-to-face because participants can be recruited without a geographical barrier, and less risk of self-disclosure; synchronous has more features that make it preferable to asynchronous because participants are expected to disclose personal information more and it is more effective in smaller discussion groups; and group is best for collecting diverse ideas than one-on-one interview. It is also possible that participants can support each other. These are the elements of online research that will be adopted in the current study.

Rationales for the current study

So far, the literature review on ICA and online research has been presented. This part of the thesis will present the rationale of the research. In order to do this, the current part is divided into two sections. The first section will describe the limitations identified in the ICA literature review. The second section will state the purpose and research questions of the current research.

Limitations of the current literature

While ICA has been the subject of international research for several decades, gaps remain in our understanding of the international adoptees' developmental progress (Zamostny, O'Brien, Baden, & Wiley, 2003). In particular, the current literature review identified that more attention from adoption researchers is needed in the following

topics: life before adoption, school life, school performances, ethnic identity (e.g., factors that determine the ethnic identification), adoptive identity (e.g., intercountry adoptees' understanding about adoption, conversation about adoption with adoptive family), feeling of loss, and adoptive family relationship.

Another limitation of the ICA literature is that many studies have focused on single, specific domains of development (e.g., Raaska et al., 2012; Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002). For example, studies have only explored feeling of loss or vicimisation experiences. This approach may restrict the ability of the research to fully demonstrate the complex nature and experience of ICA (Cohen, Coyne, & Duvall, 1993). And, as a result of this approach, some research topics have received more attention than other topics.

The ICA literature is also limited in terms of their methodology. Many researchers used assessment tools and survey methods to collect data, yet relatively few qualitative studies have been conducted. As a result, our understanding about ICA may be limited. For example, two studies were interested in the quality of adoptive family relationship. However, the assessment tools that were used to measure this complex variable did not agree each other, and as a result, different conclusions were made (Moitra & Mukherjee, 2012; Rueter et al., 2009). Qualitative studies may be helpful to address some of these limitations.

Many researchers have collected data from secondary sources such as health professionals (e.g., Saiman et al., 2001) or adoptive parents (e.g., Tan & Camras, 2011)), rather than approaching international adoptees directly. It is important to hear from adoptees directly, as their adoptees' perspective may be completely different. For example, Scherman and Harre (2010) found no correlation when they compared the ethnic identity scores of a group of Eastern European adoptees to predicted scores of their parents, showing that their parents could not accurately anticipate how their children would score on ethnic identity measures.

The focus of many adoption studies has been on adopted children (e.g., Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006; Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002), and relatively fewer studies have investigated adolescent and adult intercountry adoptees (Hawke & Scherman, 2010). Many researchers investigated adopted children's growth status, health, feeling of loss, and adoptive identity. An increasing number of the previously adopted children

in New Zealand have "grown up" and are now in adolescence or young adulthood (Hawke & Scherman, 2010; Nelson, personal communication, May, 17, 2011).

Not many researchers have investigated ICA in New Zealand. The vast majority of research has been undertaken overseas in the U.K. (e.g., Beckett et al., 2003; Beckett et al., 2006; Hawkins et al., 2007; Sonuga-Barke et al., 2010) and the U.S. (e.g., Albers et al., 1997; Huh & Reid, 2000; Miller et al., 2008; Saiman et al., 2001). This is surprising because there is a high number of ICAs and high interest of parents in New Zealand.

Research question and rationale

The current study aimed to address the limitations in the adoption literature identified thus far. Having identified the gaps and debated areas in our understanding about the development of intercountry adoptees across a broad range of domains, and noting that many studies have focused on very specific developmental domain, it seemed pertinent to conduct a study taking an integrated approach to investigate the international adoptees. In other words, there is a need for a study that investigates all three primary developmental domains (i.e., physical, cognitive and psychosocial) of intercountry adoptees. In addition, having seen that many studies have collected data using the methods of assessment tools and surveys, that data have been collected from secondary sources and that the focus of many studies have been on younger intercountry adoptees, it seemed that qualitative data directly collected from adolescent intercountry adoptees would bring new insights into ICA literature. Lastly, having seen that many studies have been carried out in the U.S. and the U.K., a study conducted in New Zealand, where there is a relatively high rate of ICA, would be helpful.

Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to investigate the experiences and subjective, personal perceptions of adolescents who were adopted into New Zealand from overseas. While there are a number of gaps in the adoption literature, the current research attempted to address many of them in the one broad research question: What do adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand say about their lives?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Introduction

In Chapter One, the thesis began by introducing background information about ICA. It then reviewed the literature on the adjustment of intercountry adoptees in physical, cognitive and psychosocial domains. Theoretical perspectives on development of intercountry adoptees also have been presented. To determine the best approach for the current study, it then reviewed the literature on online research methods. Chapter One concluded by discussing limitations of the literature on ICA and presenting the research question.

Chapter Two will present the methodology of the current study implemented to address the research question. This section is divided into four parts: methodology, research strategy, procedure and ethical considerations. Part One will present the rationale for using a qualitative descriptive approach. Part Two will discuss the reasons for using synchronous online discussion groups to collect data. Part Three will describe the procedures used to conduct the current study. Included in this part are participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and author's bias. The last part will discuss ethical issues considered to increase the benefits of the current study with minimum of risks associated with it.

Methodology: Qualitative description

As illustrated in Chapter One, the current study aims to investigate the experiences and opinions of adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand using a developmental approach. In order to answer the research question, the current study used a qualitative descriptive approach. In general, the aim of qualitative methodologies are to "describe the informant's perception and experience of the world and its phenomena" (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009, p. 53). This aim is usually achieved by

gathering a qualitative form of data from a naturalistic environment (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Neergaard et al., 2009), where the qualitative data refers to a textual form rather than a numeric form, and the naturalistic environment refers to a natural state, rather than being modified for a research purpose.

There are numerous types of qualitative methodologies. A qualitative descriptive methodology aims to obtain a "rich, straight description of an experience or an event (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 53)". In addition, the qualitative descriptive studies are data-driven (Neergaard et al., 2009). In other words, these qualitative descriptive studies focus on facts about an event based on the data as well as the meaning that participants give to those facts (Sandelowski, 2000). The use of pre-existing knowledge and theories about the event is discouraged in qualitative descriptive studies. As such, this methodology is more inductive (as opposed to the fully deductive nature of quantitative methodologies). Other qualitative methodological approaches take different strategies. For example, phenomenological studies focus on interpreting the meaning of an event to informants from a researcher's point of view. Ethnographical studies interpret an event from a particular cultural perspective. And grounded theoretical studies that focus on the development of a new theory (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2010). All of these qualitative methodologies present descriptive and interpretive findings, but qualitative descriptive studies are more descriptive and less interpretive than others (Sandelowski, 2000).

The qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate for the current study. This was because gathering qualitative text-based data, rather than quantitative numeric data, from a naturalistic environment (i.e., participants' home) was considered the best way to hear about the life of adolescent intercountry adoptees. In addition, it was thought that taking a data-driven nature of qualitative studies without pre-existing perceptions was better than interpreting the meaning of these events. As the current study did not aim to interpret within a particular cultural setting, nor was it attempting to develop a new theory, other qualitative approaches were not considered appropriate.

Research method: Synchronous online group discussion

The current study used online discussion groups to collect written data. The use of the Internet becomes increasing popular in recent years in academic research (Fox et al.,

2007), and there were several reasons why this online research method was a better choice for the current research than traditional face-to-face discussion groups. Firstly, it was observed from previous online research that participants disclosed more about themselves in an online environment (Chase & Alvarez, 2000; Tourangeau et al., 2004; Tourangeau & Smith, 1996). As the privacy was protected, the risks associated with disclosing the personally sensitive information were reduced and therefore, the participants would be free to disclose their personal information more readily (Joinson, 2003). Secondly, online research may be helpful for the participants. Studies have reported that written communication encourage more learn about ourselves (Joinson, 2003; Marra et al., 2004; Reid & Reid, 2005), and thus, it is therapeutic (Weinberg et al., 1996). Thirdly, the participants would likely to find online research methods more comfortable than they would find in the traditional face-to-face research method due to more enjoyment (Adler & Zarchin, 2002), and more familiarity with online communication than any other age groups (Chase & Alvarez, 2000; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Finally, the online research methods are less costly to conduct than are for the traditional face-to-face research methods (Clapper & Massey, 1996). Overall, because of the higher level of privacy, a possible benefit and more enjoyment for those participating, plus a lower cost, online research methods were considered more appropriate for the current research.

For the current research project, a synchronous online group discussion was chosen over an asynchronous one. Studies reported that participants tend to disclose more personal information and provide more group support in the synchronous online group discussions than asynchronous ones (Fox et al., 2007; Reid & Reid, 2005; Stewart & Williams, 2005). Furthermore, it has been reported that the number of group interactions in asynchronous group discussions could decrease quickly, especially in a small group (Stewart & Williams, 2005), suggesting it is difficult to collect data through asynchronous communications. Although asynchronous communication does have many advantages, such as more flexibility with the place and the time for the participants to come for the online group discussions (Moloney et al., 2003), data collection through synchronous communications seemed more suitable for the current research project, after considering that the participants were only going to be recruited within New Zealand; thus the time-zone difference was of no concern.

The current study used online group discussions, rather than in-depth one-on-one interviews to collect data. Studies suggest that group discussions have a number of advantages over one-on-one interviews. First, group interactions are helpful in understanding group attitudes, priorities, language and frameworks of understanding. Second, it is possible to gather data from many participants. Third, group support is available when exploring sensitive topics (Kitzinger, 1994; Powell & Single, 1996).

In order to carry out the synchronous online group discussions, a computer program was needed. Among the many options, the Blackboard Learning System was chosen for the online discussion groups. This software is already in use at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) as a tool for online learning environments. Therefore, the software was easily accessible to the researcher, as was technical supports from the AUT Information and Communications Technology Services. In addition, the Blackboard Learning System supports online written "chatting", as well as other features that were useful in running the online discussion groups, including the administration of the online discussion groups. Most importantly, the Blackboard Learning System is managed by AUT and, therefore, participants could feel safe logging into the system.

Procedure

This part of the thesis describes the procedures used to the current research project. It is made up of four sections: participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and author's bias.

Participant recruitment

The current study aimed to recruit adolescents adopted from overseas to New Zealand between 1993 and 1996, aged 15 to 18. This age range was chosen, as it was expected that these adolescents were more articulate and computer literate than younger children would be due to their higher cognitive abilities (e.g., abstract thinking). Also, it is an important period for identity achievements (Marcia, 1980), and an under-researched population in the adoption literature.

The project had full supports of ICANZ who undertook multiple strategies for recruitment, including placing the information about the current research project on their official website (www.icanz.gen.nz) and their Facebook page. Also, electronic

invitations were sent to all adoptive families with children in the required age bracket, as well as known adopted teens whose emails were in the ICANZ database. Finally, using the ICANZ director's in-depth knowledge of the families who have adopted from overseas, any identified potential participants were sent personal invitations.

When the participants indicated their interest in the research, a set of documents were posted to them, including: (1) Participant Information Sheets about the research, (2) Participant Consent Forms for Parents, (3) Participant Assent Forms for Teens and (4) pre-addressed, postage-paid return-envelopes. Once the consent forms and the assent forms were signed by parents and their teenagers, and received back to the primary supervisor, they were contacted and offered further instructions. Parental consent forms were obtained from two of the three participants, as they were under the age of 18, and thus, legal minors. The participants who were 16 or older filled out a consent form, and those were under 16 filled out an assent form (See Appendix C for parent information sheet. See Appendix D for teen information sheet).

It was initially planned to recruit 24 intercountry adoptees for the current study. This number was chosen after taking the size of group discussion and the number of discussion groups into consideration. Krueger and Casey (2009) asserted that each focus group should be small enough for all members to contribute ideas, but large enough to allow for diverse views. They recommended that generally, an online focus group should have between five and eight members, but group size can be smaller or larger depending on the types of groups and aims of the research. For instance, if discussion topics are sensitive to participants, then a smaller group should be recruited (Krueger & Casey, 2009). From this, it was thought that four to five members in each group were appropriate.

Regarding the number of discussion groups, Gibbs, Kealy, Willis, Green, Welch, and Daly (2007) asserted that ideally, data should be collected until no more new ideas are forthcoming from the discussion groups, otherwise known as *saturation*. Krueger and Casey (2009) recommended that researchers should conduct at least three or four group discussion sessions, For the current study, it was aimed to have six group discussions. Thus, it was thought that approximately 24 participants was appropriate for the current study.

However, there were some challenges in the recruitment process. First, needing parent consent required that we recruited through parents. This created something of a gate-keeping dilemma. Second, while some parents were keen for their adopted teens to participate, the teens themselves chose not to. A final problem was some unexpected delays in the study due to accessing the online platform, from which we lost potential participants, as they were no longer available when the interviews were finally scheduled.

After all of these challenges during the recruitment process, in total, three participants decided to participate in this study. To compensate the unexpected low number of participants, it was decided to conduct more group discussions. Eight one-hour sessions of group discussions were conducted. Having the small number of participants may limit generalisability of the current study findings. However, having more group discussions can mean being able to gather more in-depth information from the participants. Therefore, it was thought that the number of participants would still be considered adequate.

Data collection

Prior to the data collection, the researcher and the participants met online to arrange the times and days for the discussion sessions. Many considerations were given to the convenience of the participants in determining the times and the days. School assessment periods and holidays were avoided when scheduling the online group discussion, and all the participants' preferred times and days were considered. In addition, in the meetings with the participants, the researcher introduced important features of the online chatting software. Following figure 1 below shows the appearance of the software.

The researcher and his supervisor conducted all of the online group discussions. There were eight sessions of online group discussions, each lasting approximately one hour; the first session was shortened slightly, to allow 10-15 minutes for "icebreaker" activities. Krueger and Casey (2009) recommended that when researching young people, the duration should be shorter than when collecting data from adults. They also noted the need for the icebreaker activities (Krueger & Casey, 2009).
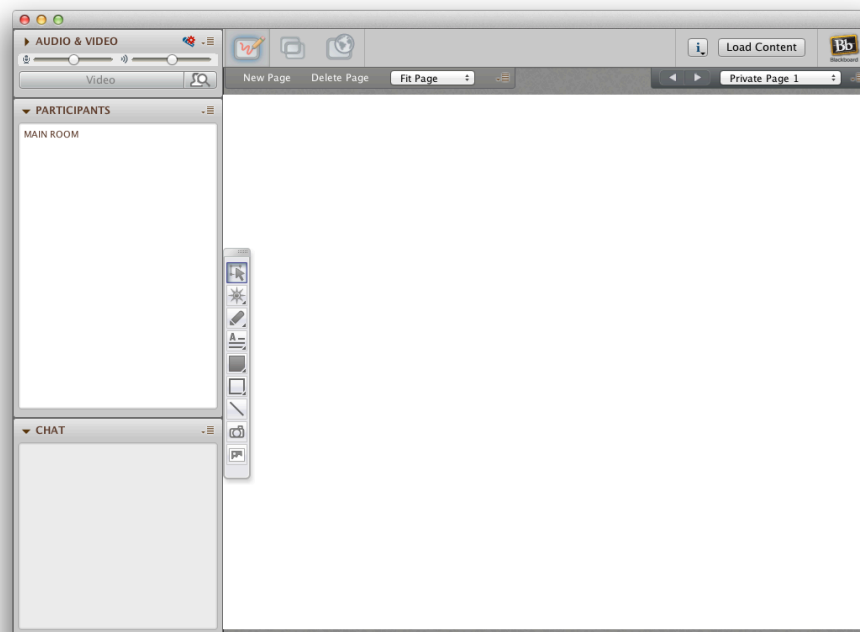
FIGURE 1 APPEARANCE OF DISCUSSION SPACE WITHIN BLACKBOARD SOFTWARE

In the initial online group discussion session, rules of conduct were provided. For example, the participants were asked to not share their identifying information such as names or contact details. Instead, they were asked to introduce themselves using pseudonyms. In addition, they were asked to use appropriate language. If any concerns rose in the group, participants were encouraged to let the researcher know immediately. Moreover, despite the fact that communications were done in a written form, the participants were informed not to worry about spelling. This was because some participants may be concerned with their written language skills. Focusing on the content, rather than grammatical aspects, was felt to be helpful for expressing themselves. Also, text-speak was acknowledged, since this age group commonly uses such language.

For each session, the researcher asked the questions and conducted the focus group, whereas the supervisor, after welcoming everyone, remained mainly in the background, so she could watch for any signs of possible distress by the participants. Open-ended questions, rather than closed, specific questions, were asked, drawn from the literature. This was because asking the closed, specific questions may results in inaccurate data being collected from young people (Baker-Ward, Gordon, Ornstein, Larus, & Clubb,

1993; Waterman, Blades, & Spencer, 2001). Moreover, asking the open-ended questions encouraged group interactions, rather than each participant just answering a specific question.

At the end of each session, the time and day for the next session were confirmed from the participants. At the completion of the data collection (at the end of 8 weeks), all the participants were thanked, and each was given a $20 iTunes gift voucher as a koha for their participation.

Data content

The researcher considered a variety of adoption topics for the data collection. The topics were drawn from the adoption research literature on international adoption and developmental psychology, as well as in consultation with ICANZ. The online group discussion was broken down into ten topics. In addition, participants were encouraged to raise any other topics of interest for discussion. The full question list is enclosed in the Appendix B. Table 3 describes each topic with sample questions.

Data analysis

In qualitative descriptive studies, content analysis methods are used for data analysis (Neergaard et al., 2009). Content analysis can be done in various ways. For the current study, an inductive approach was taken. Views and thoughts of participants were noted, and then these were combined into higher-order categories derived from the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This approach is in contrast with the deductive approach, where views and thoughts of participants are combined into pre-existing categories derived from the literature—typically used in quantitative research.

The current study only focused on manifest data, and it did not analyse latent data. The former is interested in content of text and latter is interested in underlying meaning of text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Examples of the latent data would be silence, sighs, laughter, posture (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This was because of the online format, which prevented the collection of the latent data. Furthermore, by focusing on only manifest data, it was possible to keep interpretations of qualitative data to a minimum, thereby it is better to focus on the accounts of the participants.

TABLE 3 GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Topic	Sample focus group questions
Introduction	• Tell me about yourself • What do you want to get out of this?
Health	• How is your health in general? • Have you had any serious illness when you were a child, or even now?
School	• What are your favourite subjects? How is your school?
Getting to know about adoption	• How much interest do you have about adoption? • Have you wished that you want to be born in your adoptive family?
Conversation about adoption with others	• Have you ever talked about adoption with other people? • How comfortable do you feel talking about adoption?
Living with your adoptive parents	• What is the best thing about living with your adoptive family? • How close do you feel with your adoptive family?
Your birth country and New Zealand	• Which ethnic group do you feel you belong to? • How much do you know about your birth country?
Birth parents	• How do you see your birth parents? • How much do you want to contact them?
Before adopted	• Do you remember anything before you were adopted? • How do you think life before adoption influence you now?
Friendship	• How are you getting along with your friends? • Have you had any boyfriend or girlfriend?

In qualitative research, the unit of analysis is also an important aspect, the unit of analysis refers to "whole interviews that are large enough to be considered a whole and small enough to be possible to keep in mind as a context for the meaning unit (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106)." In the current study, the unit of analysis was considered as one description of international adoptees' views, thoughts and experiences about the topics introduced in the group discussions.

The following steps were used to analyse the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). First, transcripts from the online discussions were downloaded and prepared for data analysis. The preparation involved formatting the transcript document into a more workable format. For example, the raw transcript text was bound by table

format, and the table was removed. The transcript file documents were imported into a software called Scrivener for data analysis. Second, the transcripts from each discussion group were read several times to familiarise the researcher with the data. Third, relevant text was identified from the transcript. These were descriptions of international adoptees' views, thoughts and experiences about the topics introduced in the discussions. Fourth, the identified texts were divided into the smallest unit, or the unit of analysis; each unit contained only one view, thought or experience. Fifth, each unit of analysis was condensed into the simplest form. In other words, size of the text was reduced without changing the meaning. Sixth, similarities and differences among coded texts were identified, and a label was given to each group of coded texts organised by the similarities. Seventh, transcripts gathered from other discussion group sessions were combined together, and coding was continuously revised. The labels from each group may be subdivided or combined, depending on the characteristics that made up that topic. Lastly, all the labels were sorted into categories and subcategories, and main themes were identified. The findings reported themes shared by international adoptees. Relevant quotes were included, where pertinent. After describing the experiences and opinions of the group, overall themes were identified and discussed.

Trustworthiness

When conducting quantitative research, it is important to ensure that the findings are valid and reliable. In qualitative research, these concepts are referred to as *trustworthiness* (Shenton, 2004). One way to ensure that the research findings in this study were trustworthy was to achieve *credibility*. In other words, it was important to make sure that the collected data were what was intended to measure. To do this, collecting honest responses from participants was important (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, communicating via the Internet was helpful, because privacy could be protected effectively in online environment. Thus, it was expected that participants would find disclosing their personally sensitive information easier (Joinson, 2003). Also, asking about previously raised topics repeatedly using rephrased questions was helpful. If there were any discrepancies between responses to the rephrased questions, then the suspect data were discarded or attempted to explain (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, for qualitative analysis, how categories and sub-categories emerge from the collected data was an important aspect (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). To make sure that the

categories and the sub-categories were well-organised, quotations from participants were presented as examples for each category and sub-category.

Another way to achieve trustworthiness was to make sure that the findings had *transferability*, or that they could be generalised to other situations; and *dependability*, or being able to collect similar data by repeating the study. These aspects of trustworthiness were more challenging, especially for the current study, in light of the small number of participants who were recruited from a specific setting. Therefore, sufficient contextual and methodological information were outlined above so that it is possible to determine if findings could be transferred to specific situations, and data could be collected in the same manner (Shenton, 2004).

Lastly, *confirmability* is important to achieve trustworthiness. In other words, findings should reflect participants' experiences and ideas, rather than preference of researchers. Discussions with primary and secondary supervisors were done to minimise bias in the data analysis. Also, the participants were asked to read transcripts for accuracy in transcription and description.

Author's bias

It is important to note that the author be aware of any bias that may exist on the topics being studied. I have been an international student in New Zealand since early adolescence, and could therefore to relate some experiences of intercountry adoptees. On the other hand, my own experiences were different enough that they would not bias my interpretation. I believe I achieved the right balance of objectivity and subjectivity.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee was sought, as the research involved legal minors. The research project was developed in concert with members of ICANZ. A thorough consultation process with the director of ICANZ has ensured that the project met the express needs of adoptive families that ICANZ represents. In fact, it was the international adoptive families who have influenced the decision to undertake the research, in light of their desires to (1) better understand their children; (2) help and support their children; and (3) engage their

children in a way that most parents of teenagers struggle to achieve. Therefore, the project has full support of ICANZ.

Privacy

Protecting participants' privacy was an important issue, because disclosing socially undesirable information (e.g., describing a certain behaviour that may incite ridicule) could have a negative impact on the participants (Joinson, 2003). To protect participants' privacy, a number of strategies were used to ensure their anonymity. Firstly, while the researchers collecting data knew participants' identities, the participants did not know each other: All of the adoptees used pseudonyms while in the discussion groups. Participants were also asked to refrain from disclosing any other identifying information like names of schools, parents, etc. during the discussions. Furthermore, participants were geographically diverse so that they had less chance of encountering one another in an offline environment. Finally, no identifying information was included nor will be in the final reports, thesis or articles to result from the study. Nor did the final report use any descriptions that could possibly allow an individual to be identified. All of the outcomes were discussed as an aggregate—not individually identified.

Informed consent

Another ethical issue concerned informed consent from participants. The participants and their parents were informed of the research process. Information such as nature of this research, research aims, roles of participants, and methodology were given to participants. In fact, two sets of information sheets were developed – one for a parent of adolescents and the other for the participants. To emphasise anonymous nature of the project, the participants were also informed that they were taking part in online group discussions privately, and with a small number of other teen adoptees. Also, they were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. This included terminating participation in the online forums. Any previously collected data, consent forms, etc. were destroyed, as outlined in 18.4.3 of the AUTEC guidelines, and, thus, the data would not be included in the report. Lastly, the participants were informed that they were protected through our provision of clear instruction. Once it was clear that participants understood the relevant information about the current research, signed consent forms from adoptive parents and

signed assent forms from the adoptees were obtained voluntarily. (Note: No participant withdrew from the study.)

Safety of participants

The safety of participants was of tantamount concern for the researchers. In this research, there was a possibility that participants might feel some discomfort due to the disclosure of potentially personally sensitive information during the online discussions. One way to avoid such discomfort was to protect participants' privacy. As mentioned before, this was because disclosing socially undesirable information could have a negative impact on the participants (Joinson, 2003). Second, the primary supervisor moderated each discussion session, guiding the online conversations at all times, and watching for any signs of distress on the part of the participants. If they had concerns, the moderator was there to address these immediately via private online communication channels, as participants were encouraged to contact the researcher or his supervisor, using contact details made available on the Participant Information Sheet. In addition, the moderator watched for any warning signs such as got out of hand (e.g., swearing) (Note: no inappropriate conduct occurred.), and able to exclude specific individuals. The participants were also instructed at the beginning of each discussion session to alert the moderator if they are feeling distress or any other negative emotional reaction. Lastly, participants were informed of the appropriate online behaviours expected of them, so that they can enjoy discussions safely. In this way, the participants could feel safer (used for the online group discussion), and be more willing to disclose personal topics.

Benevolence

Although our project was not explicitly measuring the potential benefit to participants, it was anticipated that the participants would find the online group discussion helpful. Past research has reported that expressing opinions and experiences in written form helps us to understand our emotions and attitudes (Joinson, 2003). Also, peer support created in the online group discussions could be beneficial to emotional health. For example, sharing personal stories and opinions can create peer support, and, as a result, the teen adoptees may have felt that they were understood.

Our project may have benefits to communities, contributing to existing overseas adoption literature, and providing information relevant to the New Zealand context. It is expected to help adoptive parents and other professionals such as teachers and clinicians as they provide support to intercountry adoptees in New Zealand more effectively and efficiently.

Lastly, our project may benefit researchers. Not only the current research advanced adoption field of knowledge through their participation, it also introduces a novel research method to the literature, which could be further developed. The researcher may benefit also by achieving personal growth and gaining a qualification.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Two presented the methodology and the method used to conduct the current study. To amplify the voices of adolescent intercountry adoptees, the researcher took a qualitative descriptive approach and collected data using a synchronous online group discussion method. The qualitative descriptive approach presents a detailed description of the phenomenon of interest with less focus on interpretation of the data. The procedure of the current study was also outlined along with ethnical considerations.

Chapter Three will present the research results. This section consists of two parts. Part One will describe the participant demographic information; and Part Two will present the descriptive findings in light of the research question.

Participant demographic information

Three intercountry adoptees participated in the research (referred to throughout as participants M, P, and S). One was male and the other two were female, with ages ranging between 16 and 18. All participants were adopted from Russia into New Zealand, but one participant moved to Australia. All participants had at least one sibling. The participants' ages at the time of adoption ranged between 3 and 6 years. All three participants said that the reason for their participation in the research was to find out how other adoptees felt about being adopted.

What do adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand say about their lives?

This was the primary question driving the study. After analysing the transcripts of the online group discussions, nine (9) themes emerged (see Table 4 for summary of themes and subthemes). In this section, first level headers indicate the main themes, whereas the second level headers indicate subthemes. The italicised details are direct quotations with the first initial of the participant online pseudonym. I have taken the quotations exactly as typed by the participants in the online group discussion to present accurate accounts of what the participants said. Grammatical and spelling errors were not corrected. It is also important to note that AUT moderator in the italicised details below was the primary supervisor. The findings are discussed in the next chapter.

Theme 1: Deprived life

Participants described their deprived life before they were adopted. This theme is divided into three subthemes: (1) Birth home; (2) Institutional life; and (3) Attitudes toward institutional life.

Birth home

All participants made negative comments about the conditions of their birth home. Two participants said that they had been exposed to alcohol.

Participant M: my mum did drink alot of alcohol

Participant P: My mom and dad now, told me awhile ago that i was like this because of the alcohol inside me.

Two participants said that their birth family's home was cold and had little food.

Participant S: Yeah, you see i went straight from a crap home with very little food to an orpahnage. so it was a bit different.

Participant M: my home had no food and it was cold too!

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Themes	Subthemes
Deprived life	• Birth home • Institutional life • Attitudes toward institutional life
Transition	• Before adoption • Arrival at new home • Early adjustment
Ethnic identity	• Feeling like a Kiwi • Being Russian
Attitudes toward adoption	• Positive feelings toward adoption • No more interest in adoption
Disclosure of adoptive status	• Choosing who to tell
Differentness from others	• Being different • Wanting to be similar
School life	• Feelings toward school and friends • Challenges with learning • Victimisation
Birth family	• Meeting with birth family • Positive feelings toward birth family • Negative feelings toward birth family
Adoptive family	• Positive feelings toward adoptive family • Relationship with adoptive family

Institutional life

All three participants said that they had stayed in institutions. Two participants commented that the food provided by their institution was not good.

Han: how did you find food there?

Participant P: It wasn't the greatest.. But i guess, it was better than nothing.

Participant M: it was soup soup soup and tea with 60 sugars ha ha

Participant S: hahahah

Participant M: lots of sugar

Two participants said that the adults (e.g., caregivers) and the peers in the institution were mean.

> *Han: so people were mean before they knew you were gonna be adopted?*
>
> *Participant P: Yes.*
>
> *Participant M: yes*
>
> *Participant P: Very mean.*
>
> *AUT MODERATOR: [Participant] P ... were the adults the ones who were mean to you... or was it most the other kids?*
>
> *Participant P: Yeah.. The adults.. ... i got locked away for awhile. So i didn't disrupt others. They put me somewhere away from the other kids for abit.. spent 1 on 1 time with me..*
>
> *AUT MODERATOR: were they mean to others or mostly just you?*
>
> *Participant P: Mostly me..*
>
> *Participant M: the adults [were mean], the kids were always the same*
>
> *AUT MODERATOR: and by same ... do you mean nice or mean?*
>
> *Participant M: mean*

One of the participant said that he/she was the only one who was treated poorly, and the other one participant said that everyone in the institution was treated poorly. It seems that the conditions of every institution vary.

> *Han: they were mean to only you?*
>
> *Participant P: Yes.*
>
> *Participant M: no they were mean to every child*

Two participants said that, after their adoption was confirmed, adults (e.g., caregivers) in the institution treated the institutionalised children differently.

> *Han: just wondering, did you guys treated differently, when people know that you were going to be adopted?*
>
> *Participant M: yes they were much nicer.*
>
> *Participant P: Oh, i was treated differently. They had a close eye on me.*

*Han: what do you think the reason? ^^*

Participant M: becasue i was leaving and they can't be mean to me anymore cause i might tell my new mum and dad

Participant P: Incase i like did something bad. They made sure i was safe, and people weren't pulling at me or being mean.

AUT MODERATOR: you said that you were treated better when they knew you wer leaving... was this kids or adults?

Participant M: the adults,

Participant P: Well when the nurses at the orphanage found out that we were getting adopted, they put me and [name deleted for privacy] my brother now in a room area together so we could like.. bond..

One participant said that the institution was cold with little food.

Participant M: ah no but how to survive the coldness and hunger

One participant said that he/she did not have a chance to learn in the institution.

Han: did you learn anyting at orphagne?

Participant M: they [my adoptive parents] think i had a really hard deprived life in russia and didn't get a chance to learn anything. like no one talked to me much and didn't have any toys or pens and stuff

Attitudes toward institutional life

Despite their descriptions of the deprived institutional life, all three participants made positive comments about it. It seemed as though they wanted to normalise their experiences of deprivation at the institution. Despite the reality that the participants may have had experiences in the institution that may have been quite disturbing, the participants spoke of their orphanage experiences as if nothing serious had happened to them.

Han: do you remember the caregivers in the orphangaw?

Participant S: yes i do, they were not the nicest. but i remember them. but hey, they must have treated me alright because i survived under their care haha

Participant M: they were kind of nice. i think they liked me. but at night there was trouble. i could [not] get out of bed to go the bathroom, because a lady sat at the door and hit us with a stick

Participant P: Well i didn't want to leave the prphanage.. Well mom now, explained to me that the girls in the white coats.. were very nice to me...

Two participants found their institutional life scary. One of the participants also felt sad.

Participant S: Hmmm... i do remember the mural of a rabbit on the wall. i went back there in [year] and saw the mural and i was like! WHHHOOOOAAA! that is creepy, i cried then and there.

Participant M: you need a friend in that place cause its scary

Participant S: I remember my father telling me that when i was eating, i was proteccting my food so it wasnt stolen by some other hungry children. sad aye?

Theme 2: Transition

Participants described their experiences and opinions of transition between Russia and New Zealand. This theme is divided into three subthemes: (1) Before adoption; (2) Arrival at new home; and (3) Early adjustment.

Before adoption

Two participants described their experiences and opinions about coming to New Zealand. One participant described what he/she felt when leaving the institution and the other participant described how institutionalised children would feel about moving to a new country.

Participant P: ... tried to pull away and go back to them [caregivers at the institution] because i knew them and [adoptive] mom and dad were taking me away from the people i knew into a whole new place and i didn't even know them [adoptive parents].

> *Participant M: the kid will be scared in a new house [adoptive family's house]*

Arrival at new home

Two participants described their experiences of arriving at their new home. Two participants clearly remembered when they arrived at a new country. One participant did not remember it.

> *Han: do you remember coming to new zealand at first time?*
>
> *Participant M: yes i remember the first day i came home. i arrived in [the date and year], [it was] the hottest summer.*
>
> *Participant S: Well, i didnt go straight back to NZ, we stopped off ... in Auzz [Australia].*
>
> *Participant P: No.*

Two participants also clearly remembered their excited feelings when they arrived at their new home.

> *Participant M: i ran around the house like 30 times i danced and got really sweaty*
>
> *Participant S: i just remember being naked and running around and throwing things around. ... Yeah, i was very excited to be out of the orphanage. VERY EXCITED*

Early adjustment

All participants described the experiences and opinions about early times of adoption. Two participants said that they received much emotional and educational support in the early days of their adoption.

> *Participant P: Well when i was sad or upset cryingnon stop mum and would lie a blanket down on the ground and i'd lie in it, then they'd throw me up in the air and catch me in the blanket intill i was red in the face laughing, if i didn't sleep they'd rock me in the blanket off the ground till i fell asleep, happened till i was about 5.*

Participant M: i learnt to speak english easily. my mum stayed home from work for a year to teach me to read . in grade 4

One participant said that he/she was worried about being sent back to the institution.

Participant M: yes i felt like i was going to go back all the time , for a long time i think, yes orphanage

When they were asked to give a piece of advice to prospective adoptive couples, two participants said that it is important for adopted children to feel love and security.

Han: if you knew a NZ couple who wanted to adopt a child from Russia, what would you want to tell them? what do you think they need to know in order to best parent that child?

Participant M: think about it [adoption] first cause it's a big decision. need to know if the child is allergic to anything and other medical stuff. so you can look after it well. love them and tell them they're safe ... hug them , love them and tell them this is new home forever and ever

Participant S: yes

Han: do you think that love is enough?

Participant S: Security, is

Han: what would security mean? feel secure about...

Participant S: Their house, their school, their friends and family. another.

Participant M: [and] play and have fun and laugh alot

Participant S: they need to feel secure and fun

Han: um.. so [Participant] M, knowing that the children belong to a very large family helps feel secure..?

Participant M: yes because you know you can go to any of them and they will look after you and love you, because they do... like you need to know all your aunties and uncles so you know you are in a really big family

Participant S: Yes,

When they were asked to give a piece of advice to children who are going to be adopted, two participants said that the children will be loved and safe in their new home. This is the same advice to the adoptive parents.

> *Han: ok.. my next question would be, what would you tell to children who are going to be adopted? to the children who are in orpahgage and going to be adopted..what advice would you have?*
>
> *Participant M: it will be o'k they [adoptive parents] will love you [adoptees]. you will be safe, it's one of the greatest things people can do , to get you out of this country*
>
> *Participant M: yes it's most everything that's important and trying to make them know this is a family forever and they are not going to lose this family*
>
> *Participant S: yes*
>
> *Participant M: and you need to tell them a plan of who look after them if their new mum and dad died or went away from them*

Theme 3: Ethnic identity

All three participants described how they felt about themselves ethnically. This theme is divided into two subthemes: (1) Feeling like a Kiwi; and (2) Being Russian.

Feeling like a Kiwi

Three participants said that they felt more like a Kiwi (or Australian, in the case of one participant) than Russian.

> *Participant M: i feel like a australian*
>
> *Participant S: far out, it depends on the circumstance. i feel russian some days, then somedays i feel kiwi. just depends. but i consider myself to be fully kiwi.*
>
> *Participant P: Same.*

Three participants said that they also supported New Zealand in the recently held Olympics games.

> *Han: you know, Olympics a few days ago.... who did u support? Russia or kiwi?*

Participant M: i support nz and australia. i like to see russia but i always go for nz and australia first

Participant P: I supported NZ.

Participant S: NZ ALL THE WAY.

Three participants said the reasons for feeling more Kiwi than Russian. The reasons were staying longer time in New Zealand, more family members are in New Zealand, feeling more home, knowing about New Zealand, and warmer weather than Russia.

Participant S: Yeah man, the country is nice and all, but i like to be kiwi as it is part of my everyday life and culture.

Participant P: Cause i've lived my life here.

Participant S: Because i lived here longer than i did in Russia, and because most of my extended family live here too, Makes it feel more like "home"

Participant P: I was raised here i know this place better than Russia

Participant M: yep

Participant S: Yeah bro. and its not as cold here...

Three participants said that they did not have any Russian friends.

Participant M: i don't have russian friends now.

Participant P: I'm with [Participant] M, don't have Russian friends anymore.

Participant M: no cause i dont' know any but i don't care if people are russian or australian or whatever

Two participants said that it is up to person who should decide what ethnic groups they choose to belong.

Participant S: so its up to the person to make a concious decision about their own ethnic background

Participant M: agree with [Participant] S.

Being Russian

All participants said that they have Russian characteristics within themselves. Despite the fact that they feel more a Kiwi, all three participants said that they had Russian names that other people could recognise.

> Han: do you think anyone will recognise you are russian thou?
>
> Participant P: Well. my name kinda gives it awaay.
>
> Participant S: by the name, YES. but not by the accent or behaivour.
>
> Han: how do you feel when people say your name look strange.. or somehting?
>
> or u look different to kiwi?
>
> Participant S: haha i just always correct the pronounciation of the name.
>
> Participant P: Ya, they always say my name wrong. so i have to repeat it to everyone

Three participants said that they had Russian appearance.

> Participant M: i think russians wld know i am russian cause of my looks but aussies don't
>
> Participant P: xD ya. [xD indicates one type of emoticons indicating a smile.]
>
> Participant S: yeah bro, i will always be russian and feel russian and look russian, i cant change that.

Two participants said that they liked their name and look, but one participant said that he/she wanted to change the name.

> Han: do u wanna change your name or your look to more kiwi or aus?
>
> Participant S: NAHH! god no. i love my name
>
> Participant P: I do wanna change my name.
>
> Participant M: no way i love my name and my hair

Three participants said that their adoptive parents did not want to change their name.

> Han: do your parents want to change your name or

Participant P: Nah they want me to keep it.

Participant M: yes they did want my name. they gave me a second name

Participant S: Yes, because they thought it was the only thing that they decided not to change, becuase they had changed me so much but decided to keep my russian name to keep my identity.

Two participants said that they knew about Russian culture, but they did not know a lot.

Participant M: kind of. i know about the history and the tsars well nichlas and anastasia

Participant S: I like the food. Borscht etc, but i do not know a lot about the culture etc.

Participant M: i hate the food i had at russian school wehn i come to Australia

One participant said that his/her adoptive parents made him/her learn about Russian culture, whereas another participant said that his/her adoptive parents made him/her learn more about New Zealand culture.

Participant S: Nope. as soon as i got to NZ, the parents pushed me to learn english. so i lost my russian by 6yo

Participant M: mum and dad took me to russian school for 2 years on saturdays . i liked it but too hard to learn caause the other spoke russian at home

One participant said that he/she does not want to learn Russian culture. He/she was more interested in Australian culture. Another participant said that he/she has an interest in Russian culture.

Participant M: no cause i don't live there anymoe so i don't really want to know much. i like to know the history of australia cuase i live her now

Participant S: I would really like to speak fluent russian the same as i did when i was 5yo. coz that would be wicked. Yeah it would be cool, if i could squeeze it into my busy life.

Theme 4: Attitudes toward adoption

Participants described their attitudes toward adoption. This theme is divided into two subthemes: (1) Positive feelings toward adoption; (2) No more interest in adoption.

Positive feelings toward adoption

Three participants said that they feel lucky to be adopted.

> *Participant S: So im pretty lucky tbh*
>
> *Participant M: yep i think we all lucky too*
>
> *Participant S: yeah bro*
>
> *Participant P: for sure.*
>
> *Participant M: i have a great family in australia and everything i didn't have in russia like food, love, friends,*
>
> *Participant P: No problem. Yeah..*
>
> *Participant M: iphone4s - sorry had to add that*
>
> *Han: do you think other adopted kids feel the same way?*
>
> *Participant S: Most certainly. i reckon*
>
> *Participant P: I'm sure many of them do.*
>
> *Participant M: i think so. yep*

Two participants viewed adoption as the best thing happened to their life.

> *Participant M: the greatest thing in my life*
>
> *Participant S: well i have been adopted, and i see adoption as a good thing.*

One participant said that he/she was satisfied with his/her life.

> *Participant M: life's good for me*

No more interest in adoption

All three participants said that they did not have an interest in adoption. In other words, they did not have a particular interest in adoption as a general topic, nor did they have an interest in their own adoption experience.

Participant P: I dont mind. I'm not there, doesn't really bother me.

Participant M: but not watching movies about it cause i know about it already

Participant S: because it was a once in a life time event, a lot of russian kids do not get adopted and spend their lives out in strawberry farms etc. so i guess i have taken adoption lightly. and because i am here now, so why would i even care how i got here haha. as long as i am here now and not somewhere else.

Participant S: well i have been adopted, and i see adoption as a good thing. but i have no interest in it anymore.

Two participants said that they do not talk about adoption much.

Han: Ok.. How much do you talk about adoption with your family?

Participant M: not much cause it doesnt matter

Han: How about [Participant] P?

Participant P: We don't really talk about it much.

It is interesting to note that one participant explained his/her understanding about adoption.

Participant S: Yeh because they [other kids] did not understand the concept that adoption is not usually consented straight away from teh [p]arents. and the kids think that my parents "gave me away" even though that was not teh story.

This can be interpreted that participants used to have much interest in adoption, but have lost their interest in adoption, as they have gained an understanding about adoption.

Theme 5: Disclosure of adoptive status

Participants described how they deal with the disclosure of their adoptive status to other people. This theme presents one subtheme: Choosing who tell.

Choosing who to tell

Two participants said that they only tell their adoptive status to close friends, whereas the other one participant said that he/she has told everyone about his/her adoptive status.

> *Han: Does anyone other than your parents know that you were adopted?*
>
> *Participant M: all my friends and my english class know too*
>
> *Participant P: Yeah. Whole town knows.*
>
> *Participant S: i only tell people tht i am really close to that i am adopted. otherwise people dont know. personally,*
>
> *Participant M: me too. just people i trust*

> *Participant S: i do not say i am adopted because i do not like silling the beans out to loads of people. i just keep that sort of stuff to myself.*

One participant said that people who know about adoptive status treated the same.

> *Han: Do the people close to you treat you differently when they know that you were adopted or the same?*
>
> *Participant M: the same*

Two participants said that they feel uncomfortable about other people knowing about their adoptive status.

> *Han: How comfortable do you feel?*
>
> *Participant P: Not very..*

> *Participant S: i guess it gives us a sence of security aey. i can only tell the people to keep quite about the story that i have previously shared with them*

However, the participants said that it is important to disclose adoptive status to professionals such as teachers and doctors with confidence.

Participant M: in grade 1 to 7, no don't tell them cause they tease you, but in year 8 to 10, maybe you can tell them if you trust them and in yr 11 and 12 it;s ok if you want to tell them

Han: what would the teachers should know so that they can provide good environment to learn for adoptees?

Participant M: ask them to let you tell your story so they understand

Han: so, you mean, it is important that the teachers understand about adoptees?

Participant S: Yes, because they can then incorperate them into the class, and not make them feel left out.

Participant M: you have to tell doctors, its no problem

Theme 6: Differentness from others

Differentness from others was another theme that occurred during the group discussions. They seemed to like being different from other people, but they do not want to be too different that they would stand out. It seems that they also express a desire to belong. This theme is divided into two subthemes: (1) Being different; and (2) Being normal.

Being different

All three participants said that they were different to other people in some way.

Participant S: just being different from other kids when i was younger.

Participant M: yeah i am the only one with [my name]

Participant P: Im the only one with [my name]..

Two participants said that he/she liked being different from other people.

Participant S: its kind of cool and it seperates me from them in a good way now.

Participant S: NAH! i like my name because i am the only one in my uni with that name! and because its AWESOME!

Han: hey.. you said that you love your blond hair.. can i ask you why?

Participant M: cause it's different from other kids and its not fake blonde hair

Wanting to be similar

Two participants said that they don't want to be too different to other people.

Participant M: but you don't want the teacher to treat diffently cause then you come a teachers pet and get teased

Participant S: ummm, just geting into groups for activities. kids [d]ont want to go with a group which has a "strange kid" in it

Participant M: yes you don't want to stnad out and be different when you're in younger grades

Participant S: yes. exactly [Participant] M

Participant S: yes, because it means that they will stand out. and not be normal. ...

One participant said that he/she is happy that he/she looks similar to adoptive family. Another participant said that he/she is not happy that he/she looks different to adoptive family.

Participant S: i actually look really similar to my adoptive parents, so i do not get trouble from others about looking different.

Participant P: I look different i think.

Han: do you like to be different? how do you feel

Participant P: Not very good i guess.

Han: you mean, you wanna look more like your parents, eh?

Participant P: Yea.

Theme 7: School life

Participants described how they felt about school and friends. This theme is divided into three subthemes: (1) Feelings toward school and friends; (2) Challenges with learning; and (3) Victimisation.

Feelings toward school and friends

Participants described their feelings toward school and friends. Two participants made positive comments and one participant made negative comments.

Participant M: i like school, i like my friends

Participant S: i have really good friends, so i have had a really good time at school. i guess i was lucky.

Participant P: Schools annoying for me, thankfully it's my last year.

Challenges with learning

Participants discussed about the challenges that they have with their study. All three participants said that they have some learning difficulties.

Participant M: but learning to read and write has been hard

Han: do your parents know any idea what caused it?

Participant M: probly came from different country

Participant M: hey [Participant] P i have a hard time with school work too

Participant S: i only read mags, coz i dont have the concentration to read biig books.

Participant P: I have Learning problems and Behaviour problems. But my behaviour is getting better. cant pay attention very long i got sidetracked and started fidgeting.

One participant said that his/her learning difficulties were due to the health condition that started as a result of the exposure to institutional experiences.

Participant P: Uhh, getting it into my head.

Han: do you think it was because FAs?

Participant P: I do. It just wont sink into my brain.. no matter what i do it just doesn't stay..

Two participants said that the learning difficulties were due to a lack of sensitive support from teachers.

Participant M: [teachers should] talk slow

Han: Have you asked any help to teachers?

Participant P: I have, but they're busy now with the whole NCEA thing and exams. so i guess theresno point asking for help when Exams are just a few weeks away..

Participant P: Yeah, my teachers pressure me too much then it turns bad.

Participant M: oh yeah that happens to me too but mum says ignore them becasue my best is the best for me

Participant P: I try but i get put on detention..

Participant M: teachrs should know you try your best and too bad for them if its not good enoguh

Participant P: Mhmm. Oh yes.

Two participants said that they have done their best for the study.

Participant S: Yeah, i worked for it [good grade].

Participant M: i just always try my best and mum say thats the best anyway

Participant M: it was really hard and i used audio books alot and now i really like reading books but i use the audio book and the paper book

Three participants said that they enjoy their study. They all had their favourite subjects and they wanted to specialise in that subject.

Participant M: no because i do my favourite subjects, drama, drama, drama and drama... i want to be a actress when i grow up

Han: how about [Participant] P? what s your favourite subjects?

Participant P: Uh.. Art... I really love music.

Han: what is your dream [Participant] P?

Participant P: Either to be an Artist or a singer.

Participant S: i only love cycling. i only love cycling and i will only love cycling. i find cycling my one true passion. i practically live on my bike haha.

Han: So, [Participant] S will be in the Olympic? cyclist??

Participant S: YEEEAAAAHAAAAA! cant wait

One participant said that he/she found school works easy. Another participant said that he/she found school works difficult.

Participant S: I found high school easy, i passed ncea level 1 2 and 3 with merit.

Han: how did you do at school work, [participant] P?

Participant P: I didn't.. Well, i still don't.

Victimisation

Participants described their experiences of being bullied. One participant said that bullying is common especially at lower grades at school.

> *Participant M: it's ok to be diffenrt in yr 11 and 12 cause kids understand cause thye're older but kids in yr7 are just stupid and mean*

All participants said that the bullies call them names.

> *Participant P: They make fun of it [participant name].. ;/ I'm not good on that.. gets a bit annoying.*
>
> *Participant S: people always call me [name]!*
>
> *Participant M: so do i*

One participant said that the bullies commented that the birth parents did not love adoptees.

> *Participant S: they always said that my parents didnt love me and stuff. because they did not understand the concept that adoption is not usually consented straight away from teh arents. and the kids think that my parents "gave me away" even though that was not teh story.*

Two participants said that the bullies commented on how they look different from their adoptive parents.

> *Han: why do you like to look more like your adoptive parents?*
>
> *Participant P: Then people wont be so mean to me i guess*
>
> *Participant S: how are they mean to you?*
>
> *Participant P: They keep saying im nothing like my parents and ehh..*

One participant said that the bullies just ignore.

> *Participant S: Yeah, i was picked on in high school and primary. its just pure ingnorance from the bullies.*

Two participants said that they do not want to be too different and express their desire to belong.

> *Participant M: but you don't want the teacher to treat diffently cause then you come a teachers pet and get teased*

> *Participant S: ummm, just geting into groups for activities. kids [d]ont want to go with a group which has a "strange kid" in it*

> *Participant M: yes you don't want to stnad out and be different when you're in younger grades*

> *Participant S: yes. exactly [Participant] M*

> *Participant S: yes, because it means that they will stand out. and not be normal.*

Theme 8: Birth family

All three participants described the relationship and the feelings toward their birth family. This theme is divided into three subthemes: (1) Meeting with birth family; (2) Positive feelings toward birth family; and (3) Negative feelings toward birth family.

Meeting with birth family

Two participants said that they have met their birth family. One participant said that he/she planned to meet his/her birth family.

> *Participant P: I travelled back to russia with my family and saw my biological father and my half brother. just two years ago.*

> *Han: are you still in contact with your biological family?*

> *Participant P: Well not really. Dads busy. it's interesting to see if we could meet again.*

> *Participant S: Yeah bro, we went back to russia in [year], saw my brith parents.*

Han: i see.. how about [participant] M.. did you go back to your birth country?

Participant M: not yet. will try and contact her when she turns 18 cuase i don't know if she knows shes adopted

Two participants had positive memories of meeting their birth families.

Participant P: Yeah, twas amazing! Dad met me with a big bunch of flowers. My half brother hugged me. so we had the three of them sitting on the bed.

Participant S: was very wierd having my birth parents there and my adoptive parents also present.

Participant P: Yeah, i know right.

Participant S: we were all crying and stuff.

Participant P: Yeahh.

Participant S: hahah good ol times aey!

One participant even celebrated the day he/she visited the birth parents every year.

Han: What does it celebrate?

Participant P: when we visited Russia it as the day after we left for Rome.

Positive feelings toward birth family

Three participants said that they had positive feelings toward their birth families.

Participant S: yes i have good feelings towards them ... nah nah nah, a mother is very important. i wouldnt have got here if i didnt have a mother! so not having a mother must be really hard.

Participant M: my mother died and i don't know who my father is. i still love my mum but god did what he had to do

Participant M: i can be a big sister to her and be a best friend

Participant P: I mean.. i had a chance to meet the one who gave me life.. To see what she looked like, how she'd react to me.. to actually met the people who made me.. but when i found out mum was gone.. I was sad for awhile..

Two participants said that having a connection with other birth family members is important.

Participant S: ... try not to spread a family around the world. so choose a child to take who either has no relatives, or has family in the same counrty ... Try to kee[p] teh[the] connection between the birth parents and adoptive parents

Participant M: that would work

Negative feelings toward birth family

All three participants said that they had some negative feelings toward their birth families due to the inability to take care of the participants.

Participant S: but would not go back well, as sad as it sounds, the birth parents didnt do anything good for me, and if i wasnt adopted, only the lord knows where i would be.

Participant P: Yes, i hear yu.

Participant S: but certainly not in a nice house, with a good job, getting a great education.

Participant M: yep really understand

Participant M: good one yep

Theme 9: Adoptive family

Participants described the feelings and the relationship with their adoptive family. This theme is divided into three subthemes: (1) Positive feelings toward adoptive family; (2) Relationship with adoptive family; and (3) Different looking to adoptive family.

Positive feelings toward adoptive family

Two participants said that they have positive feelings toward their adoptive families.

Participant S: i guess that keeping n touch with my relatives was the best thing that they could have done to me. they are really special to me and they will outlast my parents. yes, we try to get together once a year and go camping for a week. its great fun!!! hahaha yeah, it was great!!! its just really good to know that they are ok and leading good happy lives. because if i did not know where or how they were doing, i would get pretty worried. it just reassures me that they are ok.

Participant M: i see my brothers and sisters about 1 time a month. i really love them. they love me

Relationship with adoptive family

Three participants described their relationships with their adoptive families. Two made positive comments and one made a negative comment.

Participant S: Ahh, yes we get on really well. i really like our relationship that we share

Participant M: no we don't argue cause they are older than me and i don't live with them. yes we talk whenever i want to. but i'm just happy anyway and i don't think i have the label adopted

Participant S: yes, i can talk about anything with my family. its great that we can all do that. we can help each other if we know what everyones going through.

Participant S: yes. my family and i share thoughts and opinions os practically anything.

Han: ok... with your brothers and sisters too, eh?

Participant M: yep me too

Participant S: yes, we can tell how we feel just by looking at eachother! its pretty special. we are not hte only family that can do that

Participant S: its because your family understand you.

Participant M: but my family understand me better

Participant P: Uh.. well they're all busy.. its very had to get along with my brother.. ;/ my brothers so annoying its not funny.. ;/ we always argue.

Participant S: Ahh, i can relate to that also

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Three presented the results of the current study. It presented participant demographic information, and nine descriptive themes extracted from the data.

This final chapter of the thesis will discuss the research findings. Chapter Four is divided into five parts: Part One will present the four over-arching macro-themes that emerged from the descriptive themes that were presented in Chapter Three. Part Two will situate the research findings within the existing ICA literature, and explanations will be offered where needed. Part Three will discuss possible implications. Part Four will discuss the strengths and the limitations of the current study. Part Five will suggest areas for future research. The chapter will end with an overall conclusion.

What do adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand say about their lives?

The purpose of the current study was to explore adolescents' perspectives of the experiences and opinions about their adoptive lives in New Zealand. The data obtained from synchronous online group discussion were divided into a smallest unit of analysis, which was one description of the participants' views, thoughts and experiences. The units were combined together by similarities into sub-themes and themes. These themes were identified in order to best describe the lives of the adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand. The nine themes were further combined together in order to understand the core elements of the intercountry adoptees' lives. The four macro-themes that occur

throughout the nine themes will be presented. They are: (1) desire for love and security, (2) integrating into a new country, (3) desire for belongingness and not standing out, and (4) looking for the origin.

The current part of the thesis will discuss the core elements of the intercountry adoptees' lives based on the themes identified in Chapter Three. It will offer explanations of how I arrived at these interpretations.

Macro-theme 1: Desire for love and security

Desire for love and security is an important aspect of intercountry adoptees' lives. This is illustrated by the finding that all three participants needed emotional support and a sense of security from their adoptive parents in their early lives. For example,

> *Participant M: hug them , love them and tell them this is new home forever and ever*

> *Participant S: they need to feel secure and fun*

> *Participant P: Well when i was sad or upset cryingnon stop mum and would lie a blanket down on the ground and i'd lie in it, then they'd throw me up in the air and catch me in the blanket intill i was red in the face laughing, if i didn't sleep they'd rock me in the blanket off the ground till i fell asleep, happened till i was about 5.*

The desire for love and security is also illustrated from the finding that all three participants did not want to disclose their adoptive status to other people. In particular, two participants said that they have disclosed their adoptive status to people they most trust. The other one participant said that he/she told everyone about the adoptive status and felt uncomfortable about it. For example,

> *Participant S: i only tell people tht i am really close to that i am adopted. otherwise people dont know. personally,*

> *Participant M: me too. just people i trust*

> *Han: what would the teachers should know so that they can provide good environment to learn for adoptees?*

> *Participant M: ask them to let you tell your story so they understand*

> *Participant M: you have to tell doctors, its no problem*

> *Participant P: Yeah. Whole town knows.*
>
> *Han: How comfortable do you feel?*
>
> *Participant P: Not very..*

One participant said that choosing to disclose their adoptive status is related to a sense of security. For example,

> *Participant S: i guess it gives us a sence of security aey. i can only tell the people to keep quite about the story that i have previously shared with them*

Unwilling to disclose the adoptive status may be due to stigmatisation associated with adoption. These comments (i.e., importance of support from adoptive parents and unwilling to disclose the adoptive status) suggest that intercountry adoptees want to feel loved from their adoptive parents and from other people.

The desire for love and security may have come from the early exposure to deprivation. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, there are eight developmental stages throughout the lifespan. In order to successfully resolve issues in the first developmental stage (i.e., developmental crisis between trust and mistrust), children must receive sensitive, consistent care from parents in their early lives. However, since intercountry adoptees are not likely to receive such sensitive, consistent care, they have a higher chance of having negative developmental outcome, which is mistrust. Having little trust in their environment in which intercountry adoptees live, love and a sense of security would have been an important aspect of their lives in order to gain positive developmental outcomes.

The finding that all three participants are willing to disclose their adoptive status only to people they most trust also illustrates that intercountry adoptees have the desire for love and security. Although the ICA literature suggests that many people see adoption in a positive way (Tyebjee, 2003), adoption can still be stigmatised in the current society. The reasons for such stigmisation associated with adoption is that adoption literature (Salmi, 2009) and the media (Khabibullina, 2006; McGeown, 2005; McGuinness &

Pallansch, 2007) have often focused on negative aspects of intercountry adoptees. Researchers, adoption agencies (Hoksbergen, 1998) and the media can shape the society attitudes. Therefore, not willing to disclose the adoptive status can be seen as a way to protect themselves from negative perceptions from others. As all intercountry adoptees need to deal with disclosure of adoptive status, a sense of security is an important aspect of their lives.

Macro-theme 2: Integrating into a new country

Intercountry adoptees have desire to *fully* integrate into an adoptive country. This can be illustrated by the finding that all three participants identified more with an adoptive country than their birth country, despite of the fact that they acknowledged that they had Russian characteristics, such as name and appearance, within themselves. For example,

> *Participant M: i feel like a australian*
>
> *Participant S: far out, it depends on the circumstance. i feel russian some days, then somedays i feel kiwi. just depends. but i consider myself to be fully kiwi.*
>
> *Participant P: Same.*

> *Han: do you think anyone will recognise you are russian thou?*
>
> *Participant P: Well. my name kinda gives it awaay.*
>
> *Participant S: by the name, YES. but not by the accent or behaivour.*
>
> *Participant M: i think russians wld know i am russian cause of my looks but aussies don't*

The desire to fully integrate into an adoptive country also can be illustrated by the finding that all three participants had positive feelings toward adoption. They said that they felt lucky to be adopted, and they viewed that adoption is a good thing that has happened to their lives. In addition, the participants had little interest in adoption. For example,

> *Participant S: So im pretty lucky tbh*
>
> *Participant M: yep i think we all lucky too*
>
> *Participant S: yeah bro*

Participant M: the greatest thing in my life

Participant S: well i have been adopted, and i see adoption as a good thing.

Participant P: I dont mind. I'm not there, doesn't really bother me.

Participant M: but not watching movies about it cause i know about it already

Participant S: because it was a once in a life time event, a lot of russian kids do not get adopted and spend their lives out in strawberry farms etc. so i guess i have taken adoption lightly. and because i am here now, so why would i even care how i got here haha. as long as i am here now and not somewhere else.

Han: Ok.. How much do you talk about adoption with your family?

Participant M: not much cause it doesnt matter

Han: How about [Participant] P?

Participant P: We don't really talk about it much.

The finding that all three participants felt more a Kiwi than a Russian, despite the fact that the participants have Russian characteristics, means that they have internalised the New Zealand customs, and that have a sense of belongingness to the adoptive country norms (Murry et al., 2004). This indicates that they want to *fully* integrate into their adoptive countries, rather than living as a Russian migrant or moving back to Russia. The finding that the participants said that they have Russian characteristics within themselves indicates that they still acknowledged that they were originally from Russia, but their perceptions of themselves are more strongly linked to the adoptive country.

Participants also said that they felt lucky to be adopted and they saw adoption as a good thing. According to Teigen (1997), a person feels lucky when something worse could have happened, but it did not happen. For example, a person feels lucky to survive in a major car crash with a minor injury, because something worse could have happened. In addition, feeling lucky is associated with a feeling of gratitude. On the other hand, feeling good is associated with usefulness of an event. For example, when a person feels good to have a job, it indicates that having a job is useful or advantageous for the person

(Teigen, 1997). Considering these studies, the finding that the participants felt lucky to be adopted indicates that they feel gratitude (perhaps to adoptive parents or in a general sense), because they could have lived in a deprived environment for the rest of their lives. Instead, they live in an affluent environment. In addition, the participants' positive attitude toward adoption can be interpreted that participants perceived adoption positively because they live in an affluent environment. It seems that intercountry adoptees have satisfaction with their new lives, thus wanting to integrate into an adoptive country.

Macro-theme 3: Desire for belongingness and not standing out

Intercountry adoptees have a desire for belongingness and not standing out. This macro-theme is different to macro-theme 1 in that the former is concerned with emotional needs and the latter is concerned with "fitting into a group". The current theme can be illustrated by the finding that two participants did not want to be too different to other people. For example,

Participant M: but you don't want the teacher to treat diffently cause then you come a teachers pet and get teased

Participant S: ummm, just geting into groups for activities. kids [d]ont want to go with a group which has a "strange kid" in it

Participant M: yes you don't want to stnad out and be different when you're in younger grades

Participant S: yes. exactly [Participant] M

Participant S: yes, because it means that they will stand out. and not be normal.

The desire for belongingness also can be illustrated by the finding that one participant was happy with his/her similar appearance to the adoptive parents. And, another participant was not happy with his/her different appearance to adoptive family. For example,

Participant S: i actually look really similar to my adoptive parents, so i do not get trouble from others about looking different.

Participant P: I look different i think.

Han: do you like to be different? how do you feel

Participant P: Not very good i guess.

Intercountry adoptees are different with their adoptive family and peers in many ways. Intercountry adoptees have different appearance and name. According to Smith and Brodzinsky (2002), intercountry adoptees feel emotional pain of being different. This may be because they feel distance to their adoptive parents and friends, despite of the fact that intercountry adoptees emotionally feel close to them. Considering that many intercountry adoptees grow up with the pain of being different, it is not so difficult to see why they have a desire for belongingness. A sense of belongingness is important aspect of intercountry adoptees. It is also documented in few studies on a sense of belongingness that the experiences of belongingness to a group can influence identity development (Kim, Suyemoto, & Turner, 2010) and their later adjustment (Feigelman, 2000).

Macro-theme 4: Interest in their origins

Intercountry adoptees have an interest in their genealogical origins. The interest was illustrated by the finding that two participants met with their birth family and formed positive memories, and the other participant expressed the desire to meet his/her birth family. For example,

> *Participant P: Yeah, twas amazing! Dad met me with a big bunch of flowers. My half brother hugged me. so we had the three of them sitting on the bed.*
>
> *Participant S: was very wierd having my birth parents there and my adoptive parents also present.*
>
> *Participant S: we were all crying and stuff.*
>
> *Han: i see.. how about [participant] M.. did you go back to your birth country?*
>
> *Participant M: not yet. will try and contact her when she turns 18 cuase i don't know if she knows shes adopted*

In addition, the interest in the origin was illustrated by the finding that all three participants had positive feelings toward their birth family. For example,

Participant P: I mean.. i had a chance to meet the one who gave me life.. To see what she looked like, how she'd react to me.. to actually met the people who made me.. but when i found out mum was gone.. I was sad for awhile..

Participant M: my mother died and i don't know who my father is. i still love my mum but god did what he had to do

Participant S: nah nah nah, a mother is very important. i wouldnt have got here if i didnt have a mother! so not having a mother must be really hard.

It is also important to note that the participants met or have a plan to meet their birth family despite that all three participants had some negative feelings toward their birth families.

Participant S:... the birth parents didnt do anything good for me, and if i wasnt adopted, only the lord knows where i would be.

Participant P: Yes, i hear yu.

Participant S: but certainly not in a nice house, with a good job, getting a great education.

Participant M: yep really understand

Participant M: good one yep

Many developmental psychology theorists, notably Marcia and Erikson, argue that identity resolution is an important developmental task especially during adolescence. This is because adolescents' physical, cognitive and psychosocial abilities enable them to reflect about self for the first time (Marcia, 1980). It was also argued that unsuccessful resolution of identity issues during adolescence hinders further development into adulthood (Erikson, 1995). The finding that the participants in the current study expressed a desire to meet their birth parents, despite of the geographical and language barriers, suggests that identity issues are an important developmental task.

Unfortunately, it is challenging for intercountry adoptees to resolve their identity issues. This is because they are burdened to resolve their identity issues as adoptees, in addition to as adolescents (Grotevant & Korff, 2011). For example, ethnic identity is an important identity issue to resolve during adolescence. However, because intercountry adoptees can actually belong to two ethnic groups (i.e., birth and adoptive ethnic

groups), they need to decide whether they belong to the adoptive ethnic group, or to the birth ethnic group, or both.

In addition to ethnic identity issues, whether to meet their birth family or not is an important adoptive identity issue (non-adoptees do not need to consider this issue). However, this decision is more complicated than it may seem. This research found that one participant expressed negative feelings toward his/her birth parents (due to birth family's inability to provide positive environment in which they can grow), and the other two participants also understood the feelings, and all three participants expressed negative feelings toward deprived lives in birth country. This research also found that all three participants had positive attitude toward their birth families (due to appreciation of birth parents to give birth to them and acceptance of them as a family). Having these ambivalent feelings toward their origins can be challenging for intercountry adoptees, because they have a need to resolve their adoptive identity issues, but at the same time, they may not want to make efforts to resolve their adoptive identity issues due to negative feelings associated with it.

The findings in the context of ICA literature

Chapter One reviewed the literature on adjustment of intercountry adoptees in physical, cognitive and psychosocial domains. The current part of the thesis will compare and contrast the research findings with the ICA literature.

<u>Health</u>

The current study reveals that intercountry adoptees have health problems and learning difficulties. This finding is strongly documented in the ICA literature. Other studies also found that intercountry adoptees are at higher risks of having developmental problems (Beckett et al., 2006; Cederblad et al., 1999; Dalen, 2002; Dalen & Rygvold, 2006; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006; Morison & Ellwood, 2000; O'Connor et al., 2000; Rutter et al., 1998; Sonuga-Barke et al., 2008; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005), and medical health problems (Beckett et al., 2003; Cataldo & Viviano, 2007; Landgren et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2008; Saiman et al., 2001; Stadler et al., 2008; Trehan et al., 2008), and mental health problems (Bimmel et al., 2003; Haugaard, 1998; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2006; Keyes et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2000; Simmel et al., 2001). It is worth noting that the majority of ICA literature has focused on the health of younger

adoptees and few have investigated the health of adolescent intercountry adoptees. This research made a contribution to the existing ICA literature that intercountry adoptees continue to have medical and mental health complications even during adolescence.

School performance

The current study reveals that intercountry adoptees may find school work challenging due to their physical and mental conditions that started as a result of the exposure to institutional experiences and a lack of sensitive support from teachers. However, despite the challenges, these intercountry adoptees seem to be making efforts to learn and have future plans for their careers. Consistent with the ICA literature, intercountry adoptees are less likely to be satisfied with the school performance (Cohen & Westhues, 1995; Westhues & Cohen, 1998a), and more likely to have poorer school grades (Vinnerljung et al., 2010). Dalen (2002) found that intercountry adoptees have difficulty with academic language. Teachers' sensitive support for intercountry adoptees may be important to internationally adopted students.

It is worthwhile to note that one participant found school work easy. This is surprising because the participant also indicated that he/she had learning difficulties. Based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, one possible reason for the satisfaction with the school performance could be due to the teen's high intelligence inherited from the birth parents. Another reason can be attributed to the exposure to positive environmental factors, such as enriched resources available from its adoptive parents, a positive relationship with adoptive family, support from school and teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). As with the literature (Lindblad et al., 2009; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005), it is not clear which of these factors are influencing intercountry adoptees' school performance. Perhaps, it may be that the participant felt satisfaction about practical subjects, such as drama, music, art, and sports. According to the literature, intercountry adoptees have more difficulties with theoretical subjects as with verbal subjects, such as English and history (Dalen, 2002).

Ethnic identity

It was found that intercountry adoptees identify with a mainstream ethnic group of the adoptive country. This finding is only partially in line with the ICA literature. Other researchers found that intercountry adoptees identify ethnically with *both* of the

mainstream and birth country culture (Scherman & Harre, 2008; Westhues & Cohen, 1998b). The current study also reports that the reasons for identifying with the mainstream ethnic group are familiarity with the culture, having family in an adoptive country and a better living standard. It is important to note that familiarity is identified as one factor for ethnic identity. However, ICA literature suggests that the exposure to diverse culture is not associated with which ethnic group intercountry adoptees would identify (e.g. Mohanty et al., 2007; Scherman & Harre, 2010). The disagreements with the previous studies may be due to the qualitative nature of the current study. The current study did not measure ethnic identity using a psychological testing tool, and the sample was not big enough to represent the New Zealand intercountry adoptee population.

Adoptive identity

The current study reports that intercountry adoptees have positive *attitudes* toward adoption. One participant in the current study also showed that he/she had a deep understanding of the meaning of adoption. Surprisingly, despite the positive attitude and deep understanding of adoption, the participants in this research showed little *interest* in adoption. They even want to hide their adoptive status to other people. These findings are significant, as little has been documented in the ICA literature regarding adoptees' interest in adoption.

A few studies on adoptees' interest in adoption contradict the finding from this research. Juffer and Tieman (2009) found that the majority (95% of Chinese and 87% of Indian) of their participants had much interest in adoption. This contradictory finding may be due to different racial groups of participants. The participants of the current study were Russian and the participants of the Juffer and Tieman's study (2009) were Chinese and Indian. ICA literature suggests that there are many differences between Asian and European adoptees in their adjustment (Dalen, 2002; Dalen & Rygvold, 2006; Frydman & Lynn, 1989; Kim & Staat, 2004; Kim, 1995; Kim et al., 1999; Lindblad et al., 2003; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005). This difference in interest in adoption may be another difference between Asian and European adoptees. Another explanation for the contradictory finding may be simply due to a small number of participants in this study, thus the finding in this study may not be generalised to a wider population.

It is also important to note that despite all three participants in this study having a strong interest in their origins (i.e., birth parents), they also expressed some negative feelings toward their birth parents. For example, one participant said that he/she did not want to keep in touch with the birth family because they had not provided appropriate care, and the other two participants signaled in the forums that they understood these feelings. In the ICA literature, these ambivalent feelings also can be seen as a feeling of loss, as Smith and Brodzinsky (2002) defined the feeling of loss as negative affects such as anger, sadness, confusion over relinquishment, and unhappiness due to birth parents and preoccupation toward the birth parents. This feeling of loss is a common experience for intercoutnry adoptees (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002).

At the same time that the participants expressed some negative emotions toward their birth families, the current study also found that intercountry adoptees had desires—and even plans—to meet their birth families. ICA literature also reports that considerable numbers (31.6% to 42.9%) of intercountry adoptees have searched for their birth family (Tieman et al., 2008; Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004), even though there are geographical and language barriers. This suggests that resolving identity issues during adolescence is important (Marcia, 1980).

Relationships

The current study reveals that intercountry adoptees have positive relationships with their adoptive families. They feel that they can talk about any topics (including adoption) with their adoptive families. Despite having frequent arguments, they feel satisfaction with the adoptive family relationship. This is consistent with the ICA literature that intercountry adoptees have little difficulty in communicating with their adoptive family, but have frequent argument with them (Rueter et al., 2009).

In terms of peer relationships, the current study found that the intercountry adoptees have experienced being bullied by their peers. However, this issue has received little attention from adoption researchers. From the few studies that have been done, it has been suggested that intercountry adoptees are more likely to bully or be bullied by others than non-adoptees due to a lack of social skills (Raaska et al., 2012). The current study suggests that the adoptive status may also be an important factor that is associated with bullying and victimization. This is because the participants in this research said

that their peers often make fun of the Russian name and appearance, and commented that the birth parents did not love the adoptees. Since two participants also said that they have positive feelings toward their friends, it is unlikely that the participants have a lack of social skills.

Deprived life

The current study reveals that intercountry adoptees have experienced deprivation in their early lives, either at the birth family's home and/or at the institutions. A similar finding is strongly documented in the ICA literature. Neil (2000) reported that one reason for relinquishment of the children by birth family is their incapability of providing a safe environment for their children; in this case, due to poverty. McGuiness, Mcguiness and Dyer (2000) found that many (40%) Russian birth mothers in their study abused alcohol. This indicates that intercountry adoptees' homes do not always provide a favourable environment for children. Meese (2005) found that most (80%) of the intercountry adoptees in that study had been institutionalised. ICA literature has consistently reported that the conditions of institutions are poor (Castle et al., 1999; Gunnar et al., 2007; Wilson, 2003).

What is missing in the ICA literature is detailed descriptions of institutions (Dalen, 2002). The current study add to the knowledge in that it provides further evidence of deprived life at institutions—from the adoptees themselves. The current study reveals that the institutions were cold, provided food of poor quality, offered little or no education, and maltreated the children. This finding is also consistent with the studies that investigated institutional life (Castle et al., 1999; Gunnar et al., 2007; Wilson, 2003).

The current study also documented the intercountry adoptees' attitudes toward their institutional lives. It was found that intercountry adoptees have negative emotions (e.g., fear and sadness) toward their institutional lives. On the other hand, it was found that intercountry adoptees tend to normalise the experiences of deprivation in institutions. Studies in maltreated children (e.g., Henry, 1999) also reported similar findings that they attempted to normalise the abusive environment. It was interpreted that normalisation of the abusive environment provided "the protection of not feeling trapped in the frightening world" (Henry, 1999, p. 528). Despite of the fact that the

participants are no longer in the deprived environment, normalising the deprived environment may mean that the way intercountry adoptees view the world is still influenced by the deprived experience in their early lives. The current study is significant in that it reports the description of deprived life as well as intercountry adoptees' negative attitudes toward it. From the researcher's knowledge, this has never been addressed in the ICA literature.

Transition

The current study reveals that a transition period from a birth country to an adoptive country can be both positive and negative for intercountry adoptees. Due to a dramatic positive environmental change, they have positive experiences, especially in their early times in an adoptive environment. These positive experiences are termed a *honeymoon period* in the anecdotal literature (Palacios et al., 2009). The current study provides some empirical support for this finding. However, the transition period is not always perceived to be positive. At first, intercountry adoptees may want to stay in the birth country due to attachment to caregivers at institutions and fear of new people and places in an adoptive country. Even after adoption, intercountry adoptees may have an anxiety of being sent back to birth country. ICA literature has paid little attention to the transition period (Palacios et al., 2009). The current study contributes to ICA literature by providing an empirical account of the experiences of transition period for a few of the intercountry adoptees.

Table 5 summarises the key findings from this study and the ICA literature.

TABLE 5 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ICA LITERATURE

Developmental domains	The current study	ICA literature
Health	• Three participants reported of having learning difficulty, fetal alcohol syndrome, concentration, and reading difficulties.	• Intercountry adoptees are known to have higher risk of having mental health issues (see p. 14), medical complications (see p. 8), and growth delay (see p. 7). However, health of adolescence is not known.
School performance	• Two participants reported academic difficulties, but one felt satisfied with his/her academic performances.	• Intercountry adoptees have higher risks of having academic problems, but the cause is not clear (see p. 10).

TABLE 5 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ICA LITERATURE CONTINUED

Developmental domains	The current study	ICA literature
Ethnic identity	• Three participants identified with a Kiwi, acknowledging Russian characteristics. • The interest in Russian culture varied. •	• Intercountry adoptees identified with both birth and adoptive ethnic groups (see p. 17). • Parental and non-parental factors play an important role in ethnic identity (see p. 18). •
Adoptive identity	• Three participants expressed positive feelings toward adoption, but little interest in adoption. • Three participants expressed ambivalent feelings toward birth parents. • Three participants expressed an interest in their birth parents.	• Intercountry adoptees have a strong interest in adoption (see p. 22). • Feelings of loss are common (see p. 21). • Intercountry adoptees have frequent conversation about adoption (see p. 23). • A lack of studies on adoptive identity issues the ICA contexts.
Relationship	• Three participants reported to have positive relationship with adoptive family (e.g., open communication). • Two participants reported to have frequent arguments with adoptive family. • Three participants reported to have experiences of victimisation from peers due to differentness (e.g., different appearance and names and adoptive status)	• Intercountry adoptees have positive relationships with adoptive family (see p. 25). • Intercountry adoptees have frequent arguments with adoptive family (see p. 25). • Intercountry adoptees have experiences of bullying and/or victimisation from peers due to a lack of social skill (see p. 27).
Deprived life	• Three participants reported detailed descriptions of their deprived lives.	• Little is known about the lives before adoption (see p.30).
Transition	• Three participants reported that the transition period between birth and adoptive countries was characterised by negative feelings (e.g., fear, sadness) and thoughts (e.g., normalisation toward their deprived lives). • Two participants reported positive experiences at arrival to the new homes.	• Intercountry adoptees experience dramatic environmental changes while moving from birth and adoptive countries (see p. 32). • Intercountry adoptees achieve dramatic developmental catch-up (see p. 32). • Anecdotal literature reported positive experiences in the early days at the adoptive homes (see p. 32), but generally, little is known about transition period.

Implications

This research investigated adolescent intercountry adoptees' life experiences after being adopted from Russia into New Zealand. Their accounts provided full descriptions of the life experiences as adopted individuals. The current research reveals that intercountry adoptees want (1) love and a sense of security; (2) to integrate into a new country; (3) to belong and not stand out; and (4) to understand their origins. The findings from this research will have implications for other intercountry adoptees, adoptive families and professionals (e.g., teachers, clinicians).

Implications for other adopted teens

This research may be helpful to other intercountry adoptees in that it increases their understanding in adoption. For example, this research found that adolescent intercountry adoptees have an interest in their origins. Knowing that other adoptees also have the interest in their origins can be helpful, because they know that it is not abnormal to have such an interest in their origins. In addition, all three participants in this research said that they wanted to find out the experiences and opinions of other adoptees. It seems that these information may be helpful for them to achieve healthy adoptive identity.

Implications for families

The findings of the current study offer adoptive parents some valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of teens adopted from Russia. For example, the study shows that one thing that adoptive parents can do for their adopted children is to provide a consistent, caring environment in which the children can grow up. This is especially important for these children with experiences of deprivation, because they can learn to trust their adoptive family. Building a sense of trust would be important for psychosocial development into adolescence and adulthood. In addition, with much support from the adoptive parents, intercountry adoptees may be able to adjust into a new environment more quickly. It was also found in this research that two participants said that they appreciated emotional and educational support from their adoptive parents in the early days in an adoptive country. For example, one participant said that his/her adoptive parent stayed at home for one year to teach English to him/her. Providing these emotional and educational support may be helpful to internationally adopted children.

Adoptive parents should ask clinicians for full medical check-up of their adopted children. In this research, the participants reported that they have learning difficulties, fetal alcohol syndrome, and concentration difficulties, and these complications influence the participants even during adolescence. It would be better if these medical or mental complications are identified and addressed as early as possible.

Adoptive parents should not disclose the adoptive status of their teens to other people unless the teens give consent. This research found that intercountry adoptees prefer to disclose the adoptive status only to those people they trust. This may be because of possible stigmatisation associated with adoption. They have desire not to be labeled as an adoptee by other people. However, it is important to note that it is not always possible to keep the adoptive status hidden from others. For example, if appearance differs between an adoptee and the adoptive parents, it may be necessary to explain the difference. In spite of the challenges, it is important to stress that in ideal situations, adoptive parents should refrain from disclosing the adoptive status of their adopted children without having first consulted the adoptee.

Another thing that adoptive parents can do for their adopted teens is to help them adjust well at school. For teenagers, school is a significant part of their lives. Therefore, it may be a good idea to provide support so that the teens can adjust well at school. In particular, adoptive parents should be aware of how well their teens get along with their peers. This research found that all three participants have experiences of being bullying by their peers. Therefore, it is also possible that other adopted teens can have similar unpleasant experiences. Learning is another important aspect of intercountry adoptees' school life. This research found that all three participants had learning difficulties. Despite of the finding that one participant felt satisfied with his/her school performance, it is important that adoptive parents be aware of any learning difficulties that their adopted teens may have. Seeking professional support can be one option, if necessary.

It may be a good idea for adoptive parents to support the intercountry adoptees' interest in their origins. This is because learning about the origin is an important part of intercountry adoptees' lives for resolution of identity issues. This research found that intercountry adoptees have an interest in their birth parents. Two participants in this research have already met their birth family and the other one participant has a plan to

meet his/her birth family. Supporting the interest in the origin can be done, for example, by providing assistance in finding their birth families, or staying in touch with their known birth family regularly.

Adoptive parents may consider actively communicating with professionals such as teachers and clinicians. This research found that intercountry adoptees did not express any concern about disclosing the adoptive status to the professionals, despite of the finding that the adoptees were reluctant to disclose their adoptive status openly to other people. In this way, the adoptive parents can inform the professionals of any special needs that the adoptees may have, which in turn allows the professionals to provide sensitive services to the adoptees. In addition, by communicating with the professionals, the adoptive parents can have a better understanding about adjustment of adopted children in different contexts (e.g., school).

Implications for professionals

Professionals should be able to provide adoption sensitive services to intercountry adoptees. Children may have learning difficulties or emotional problems. It is important that professionals understand the special needs of adopted children. In order to understand adoptees' need, talking to adoptive parents is a vital first step, as well as to learn as much as possible about the experiences of adoptees and their adoptive families. This means tapping into adoption-specific training, empirical literature and other resources.

As mentioned previously, this research found that all three participants reported experiences of being bullied from their peers to some extent. Teachers, in particular, should also be aware of bully issues. It may be worthwhile to check if other adopted students in their classes have similar experiences with their peers.

It is also important that teachers treat adopted students as they would treat other students, despite the fact that intercountry adoptees have unique experiences and may have a need for special attention. It was found from the current study that while intercountry adoptees may need additional support, they do not want to be perceived differently to other pupils. They do not want to be labeled as adoptees or to stand out; they want to belong. This means that teachers and other professionals need to be skilled at offering support but in a manner that does not highlight the adoptive status.

Strengths and limitations of the study

A number of important strengths and limitations need to be considered. A strength of this study is that it explored the broad perspectives of intercountry adoptees' lives. It explored intercountry adoptees' physical and mental health, school life, cultural issues, adoption issues, adoptive family relationship, friendship, and birth family issues, deprived life and transition experiences—all of which was done collectively, rather than focusing only on one aspect of development. It did not only investigate their current life, but also retrospections of their childhoods. As a result, it was possible to document the experiences of intercountry adoptees' lives as a whole. This is advantageous because adoption research so far has been limited to outcomes of intercountry adoptees' adjustment. Additionally, some topics of adoption have been under-researched. Hopefully, this research has contributed to the ICA literature by documenting intercountry adoptees' experiences, as well as bringing under-researched adoption topics for more attention.

Another strength of this study is that it used the Internet as a communication medium to collect data. As a result, it provided a safe place for the participants to talk about their lives, within a medium that they were comfortable with and skilled at using. Additionally, it was also possible to recruit participants without a geographical barrier. In this study, the participants were in New Zealand and Australia at the time of the data collection.

On the other hand, the most important limitation lies with the fact that the number of participants was small, with only three[1] agreeing to participate. This was due, in part, to the narrow inclusion criteria of participants for this research. In particular, only intercountry adoptees between 15 and 18 years old were recruited. It was expected that older adolescents are more articulate and computer literate than younger ones. As a result, only six people expressed the interest in this research. However, three people declined to participate in this research. One adoptive parent wanted the adopted

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[1] It is worth noting that while there may have been only three participants, these three were quite committed to the study. They were regularly on-time for the start of each forum, and frequently surprised and a bit saddened when the hour ended. They also expressed strong desire to have such an online forum continue, although for general conversations, rather than for continued research. They all expressed how enjoyable it was to get to chat with other adoptees, who clearly had similar experiences.

adolescent participate in this research, but the adoptee did not want to participate in this research because of not wanting to associate with adoption. It was not clear why the other two declined to participate in this research. The fact that the participants self-selected to participate in this research may also be potentially problematic. Perhaps, intercountry adoptees who agreed to participate in this research are different to those who declined to participate. Because of the small sample size, generalisations of the research findings should be made with caution. For future studies, therefore, it is important to consider practical aspects of recruitment. While it was desirable to only target older teenagers, perhaps it should have been anticipated that it is not always possible to recruit as many participants as was desired for that a small age range. This is particularly so when the target population for the research are considered a "vulnerable population". Targeting a wider age range in order to increase the number of participants would have been more effective.

Due to group forum format of the study, it was possible to ask the same questions of all three participants in the same manner. Nonetheless, there were occasions when some participants did not answer some interview questions. It is possible that the participants did not comment because it was a sensitive topic for them, or it may have been a topic that was not pertinent to them (e.g., questions about contact with birth family when no contact had yet been made). As a result, some topics were not explored as thoroughly as was planned. In truth, it was not possible for all three participants to talk about all aspects of their lives in the limited time.

Suggestions for the future research

This research sought to investigate the perspectives of adolescent intercountry adoptees. It would have been better if the age criteria of participants for this research were wider. One limitation of this research was a small number of participants. The reason for such a small number of participants may be due to too strict participant selection criteria. If the age range was broader, including those who are in early adolescence and adulthood would have increased the number of participants. This study would have been advantageous since the perspectives of adolescents and adults can be different. Therefore, further insights about younger and older adoptees' lives would be fruitful.

This research took a broad perspective of intercountry adoptees' lives. This was because the existing literature on ICA has focused on single, specific domains of development, rather than taking a holistic, inclusive approach. However, this holistic approach has a downside. Despite the efforts to look at intercountry adoptees in a broad perspective, it was not possible to gain an in-depth understanding of intercountry adoptees' lives. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to conduct a qualitative research on more specific and under-researched areas of intercountry adoptees' lives. For example, it would be interesting to investigate further about intercountry adoptees' attitudes toward their birth family. First, this is an under-researched aspect of ICA. Second, it would be interesting to see how the intercountry adoptees' attitude toward birth parents is related to the searching behaviours and the interest in the origin. Little is known about how possible positive and negative attitudes about birth family influence the searching behaviours and the interest in the origin. This information would be helpful for adoptive parents and adoption professionals, such as clinicians, to understand about intercountry adoptees, and thus to support them.

Stigmatisation associated with adoption may be another area worth investigating. This is also an under-researched area of ICA. The existing ICA literature suggests that the public's perception toward adoption today is positive (Tyebjee, 2003). However, the current research reveals that the participants said that they do not want to disclose their adoptive status to other people. It would be good to understand why the teen adoptees are reluctant to disclose, and if it is related to fears of being stigmatised. Perhaps, it may be also worthwhile to investigate the extent to which stigmatisation associated with adoption in New Zealand society, and to investigate ways to which such stigmisatisation, if any, may be improved. This information may be helpful for intercountry adoptees to integrate into an adoptive country.

This research used the Internet as a way to collect data. It would be interesting to assess the efficacy of online research methods. Originally, the research was designed also to investigate the efficacy of online research methods. However, due to a small number of participants, it was not possible to measure the efficacy of synchronous online group discussion as a data collection strategy.

Finally, in light of the teens' enthusiasm for the idea of a continued online discussion forum, it would be worthwhile investigating ways that adoptees could communicate with other adoptees. This could involve the development of an online teen adoptee peer group, followed by a programme evaluation study. Or it might involve finding other ways for teen adoptees to meet and communicate, perhaps through social networking sites like Facebook. Either way, it is clear that the teens desire—and benefit from—opportunities to talk with other adoptees.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to investigate the experiences and perspectives of adolescent intercountry adoptees in New Zealand using synchronous online group discussions from three internationally adopted participants. The intercountry adoptees said that they need love and a sense of security, and they have desire to fully integrate into an adoptive country. They also want to belong to their adoptive family and peers, and they have an interest in their origin, such as their birth parents.

It is felt that this research has contributed to the ICA literature by using a holistic developmental approach, and by documenting intercountry adoptees' current and retrospective experience, as well as from raising under-researched adoption topics. However, more research is needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of this population, currently and as they mature into adulthood.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Ethnical approval

APPENDIX B: Online group discussion questions

APPENDIX C: Participant information sheet for parent

APPENDIX D: Participant information sheet for teen

APPENDIX A: Ethnical approval

MEMORANDUM
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To:	Rhoda Scherman
From:	**Dr Rosemary Godbold** Executive Secretary, AUTEC
Date:	4 October 2011
Subject:	Ethics Application Number 11/239 **Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences.**

Dear Rhoda

I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 12 September 2011, subject to the following conditions:

1. Clarification of the researcher identified in the section A.6.1 of the application;

2. Alteration of the titles of each Information Sheet to clearly identify the potential participants for whom each sheet is provided;

3. Provision of the email that will be used for recruitment;

4. Amendment of the Information Sheets for parents and legal guardians and for the participants, as follows:

    a. Careful checking of the grammar, including the consistent use of the first person when referring to the researcher and the second person when referring to the potential participants or their parents and or legal guardians;

    b. Use of simple everyday language;

    c. Revision of the section of alleviation of discomforts and risks to simply and clearly state how the discomforts referred to earlier are being alleviated;

    d. Inclusion in the section on benefits of the advice that the researcher may obtain a qualification;

    e. Alteration of the clause 'will remain anonymous' to 'identities will not be known';

    f. Inclusion in the section on concerns of the current Executive Secretary details, as given in the Information Sheet exemplar (available via the Ethics Knowledge Base (http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics);

5. Amendment of the Consent Form for parents and legal guardians as follows:

    a. Removal of the screening demographic data being requested in the ninth bullet point. AUTEC advises that consent forms may not be used for data collection;

    b. Alteration of the term caregiver to parent or legal guardian;

6. Amendment of the Assent Form for the children as follows:

    a. Careful checking of the grammar;

    b. Inclusion of an eighth bullet point saying something like ' I wish to receive a summary of the research findings O Yes O No'.

I request that you provide me with a written response to the points raised in these conditions at your earliest convenience, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTEC also requires written evidence of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. Once this response and its supporting written evidence has been received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application.

When approval has been given subject to conditions, full approval is not effective until *all* the concerns expressed in the conditions have been met to the satisfaction of the Committee. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. Should these conditions not be satisfactorily met within six months, your application may be closed and you will need to submit a new application should you wish to continue with this research project.

When communicating with us about this application, I ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6902.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

From the desk of …
Dr Rosemary Godbold
Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142
New Zealand
Tel: 64 9 921 9999
ext 8860

APPENDIX B: Online group discussion questions

1. INTRODUCTION

Tell me about yourself. What country you are from? When did you join your NZ adoptive family? Your nickname and why you choose that name. What made you decide to participate in this study? What do you want to get out of this? What topics are you keen to talk about?

2. HEALTH

I want to know about your health. Because I heard that when you were young in your birth country, it was not good place to live in generally. I am just thinking you may have poor health.

1) How is your health in general?

Have you had any serious illness when you were a child, or even now? Any infection?

How often do you go and see your doctor?

How were your doctors? Did you tell them you were adopted?

How much are your parents concerned about your health?

2) How satisfied with your appearance in general?

3. SCHOOL

I wanna know about your school life.

1) How's your grade like?

How happy are you with your grade?

What are your favourite subjects? What subjects do you find it easy? What subjects do you find it difficult?

What do you think about your grades compared with your classmates?

2) How is your school, other than the school work?

How is you school like? Many students from different countries?

How do you get along with your classmates? Have you ever been bullied?

Do your teachers or classmates know that you are adopted? If yes, how is that? If no, why not?

Is there anything that you wish it is different about school in general?

4. GETTING TO KNOW ABOUT ADOPTION

You know you are a teen. A very important period in your life. It is really important to get to know about yourself.

1) How did you know that you were adopted?

How was it when you found out that you are adopted?

What was the reason for your adoption for your adoptive parents and birth parents?

Have you wished that you want to be born in your adoptive family?

How much interest do you have about adoption?

What made you interested in adoption, or not interested in adoption?

How important is adoption to you?

How much do you think about adoption?

Are you interested in reading about adoption? Movie? Your photo?

5. CONVERSATION ABOUT ADOPTION WITH OTHERS

I want to know if you are talking about adoption with other people.

1) Have you ever talked about adoption with your adoptive parents?

How often do you talk about adoption?

Who do you prefer to talk about adoption (mother, father)? If no one, why?

Who usually start talking about adoption?

How comfortable do you feel about talking about adoption with your adoptive parents and your brothers and sisters?

Do you think they are comfortable talking about it?

How comfortable are you talking about adoption with other people?

6. LIVING WITH YOUR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

I am curious about your experiences living with your family. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Birth siblings that came with you? Siblings born to your parents? Siblings who were also adopted fro other families.

1) What is the best thing about living with your adoptive family?

2) How close do you feel with your adoptive family?

How much do you argue with your family members?

How often do you do family activities together?

How are you getting along with your brothers and sisters? Is the relationship influenced by the adoptive status? (IE: if they have siblings born the parents)

How similar or different do you look with your adoptive parents?

3) How easy or difficult about moving into a new family?

7. YOUR BIRTH COUNTRY AND NEW ZEALAND

You have two countries that related to you. Your birth country and New Zealand.

1) I am just wondering, which ethnicity do you feel you belong to?

What made you feel in that way? Was it always like that?

2) How much do you know about your birth country?

How much do you know about culture of your birth country?

Music? Food? Festival? Book? Language? Geography? Internet search? Travelling?

How much do your parents encourage you to know about your birth country?

Have you ever talked to people from your birth country? How was talking to them?

Have you ever wished that you want to change your look so that you look more like a kiwi?

8. BIRTH PARENTS

I want to know about your opinions about your birth parents.

1) How do you see your birth parents?

How is it different from when you were a child?

How much do you think about them?

2) How much do you want to contact them?

Why do you want to contact them?

What do you want to ask them when you meet your birthparents?

How is it going with searching for your birth parents?

9. BEFORE ADOPTED

I wanna know how you see about things before you were adopted.

1) Do you remember anything before you were adopted?

Were you in institution?

How was your institution? How did you find your food? How were your mates? How was the place? Warm? How did you find your caregivers? What did you learn when you were in institution?

2) How do you think life before adoption influence you now?

10. FRIENDSHIP

1) How you are getting along with your friends?

Do you feel close to your friends?

How much stress do you feel about friendship?

How do being adopted impact on you in terms of family relationship and friendship?

How have they treated you after finding out that you are adopted?

2) Have you had any boyfriend?

APPENDIX C: Participant information sheet for parent

Participant Information Sheet For Parent

Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 December 2011

Project Title

Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences

An Invitation

Hi, my name is Han Lee. I am a psychology student at AUT University. As a requirement of my degree of Master of Philosophy, I am conducting a research project on international adoption in New Zealand. I would like to invite your adopted teen(s) to participate in this research project. Participating in this research project is voluntary, and any information shared will be confidential. There is no adverse consequence from not participating or withdrawing from participating prior to the completion of data collection. Please email me by 20 January 2012 to let me know your interest, or if you would like more information. Thank you.

What is the purpose of this research?

I would like to know how international adoptees are adjusting to live in New Zealand. In particular, I would like to understand their experiences, feelings and thoughts as international adoptees, and how these may differ depending on factors such as *gender, country of origin, age at the time of the adoption,* and *family structure (e.g. number of siblings).*

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand (ICANZ), a not-for-profit organisation supporting New Zealand international adoptive families, which many of you will be familiar with, has placed information about this research on their official website (www.icanz.gen.nz) and Facebook page. Also, ICANZ has sent electronic invitations to all adoptive families in their database who meet participant criteria. In fact, it was in consultation with ICANZ that this project was developed—as a way to help families like yours to better understand your internationally adopted teens!

To participate in this research, your teen will be one who (1) has been adopted internationally; (2) resides anywhere in New Zealand; (3) is aged between 15 and 18; and (4) has Internet access in your home.

What will happen in this research?

Your teen will be invited to four online discussions in a private online space. Topics of the group discussions will be about your teen's experiences, feelings and thoughts as an international adoptee, such as *school experiences, friendships, interest in birth culture,* and *family in the birth country* (See attached page with details of the group structures and possible topics). Additionally, in order to investigate the use of online forums as a research tool with this age group, your teen will be also asked to give some feedback on the Internet research processes.

From a total of about 24 participants, your teen will be placed into an online discussion group of 3-5 teens organised by a demographic background, for example, *birth country* (Eastern European countries vs Non Eastern European), and will engage in private online, written discussions (NOTE: These are not face-to-face forums, but rather in-time, written discussion groups). Along with myself, there will be a professionally trained facilitator guiding the online group discussions. After the first session, discussion groups will be re-configured based on other demographic backgrounds, such as *family structure, gender* and *age at the time of the adoption.* It is planned that there will be up to four group discussion sessions; each session will last approximately one hour in duration.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There is no anticipated physical risk for your teen. However, I acknowledge that the adolescents may feel some discomfort during or after online group discussion due to the sharing of personally sensitive experiences and opinions.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

A clinically trained facilitator will be online to guide and monitor the online conversations at all times. She will be watching for any signs of distress on the part of your teen. If she notices any signs, then she will contact him/her privately during the discussion and check if he or she is feeling okay. After the group discussion, she may also provide more support. The teens can also contact the facilitator directly and privately during and after sessions, if he or she is having any concerns.

Additionally, rules during online group discussion are given to all of the adoptees participating, so that online group discussions run safely.

What are the benefits?

Participating in this research may be helpful for your teen's emotional health. The groups will be asked to share personal experiences, feelings and opinions as an international adoptee, and this sharing may make your teen feel understood by the other group members who also have been adopted internationally. In addition, your teen will be writing to other group members, and research suggests that writing down can be helpful to better understand oneself. I expect that sharing and writing has a positive impact on your teen's emotional health.

Furthermore, findings of the research may provide you with greater insight into your teen. It is known in the developmental psychology literature that teens are often reluctant to "share" their experiences with their parents, and are often more likely to talk with their peers. This online group discussion may provide an opportunity for your teen to be open about adoption. Consequently, I expect that outcomes of the current study will offer greater understanding of internationally adopted teens to other professionals such as teachers and clinicians, who are often called upon for support and guidance (And, you may request a copy of the findings from me).

Lastly, your participation will assist me in obtaining my Masters of Philosophy degree (MPHIL).

How will my privacy be protected?

Your teen's identity will not be known to other participants primarily due to the fact that the discussion forums are NOT face-to-face but rather written in-time online groups. Privacy is also made possible as all of the participants will use pseudonyms in the online group discussions, and will be asked to refrain from sharing any identifying information (e.g. contact details, etc.) during the online group discussions. Also, no identifying information will appear in the final reports, thesis or articles to result from the study. Furthermore, because participants will be selected from across the country, your teen will have less chances of encountering another participant in an offline environment. Finally, reliable software called *Blackboard Learning System* will be used for the online discussion for security reasons.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Each online group discussion will be about one hour, and there will be four sessions. Your teen will be using your own computer and the Internet connection.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You will need to sign a Consent Form and complete the Demographic Survey about your adopted teen(s). They will also need to sign a Consent Form (for teens 16 – 18 of age) or an Assent Form (for teens 15 years of age), all of which will be included with this information sheet. If not, these forms can be sent to you electronically (via email) or by post. If you agree to participate in the research, please return the completed forms to me using the enclosed pre-paid envelope.

Participating in the research is voluntary. Even if you choose to participate, your teen (or you, on their behalf) may still withdraw from the study at any time and without any adverse consequences. Although it may not be possible to remove all of his or her contributions to that forum (due to their conversational nature), relevant data will be excluded from any reports. Please contact me if you wish to withdraw from participation in the research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, you will receive the results of the study, if you are interested. Please let me know your interest (as indicated on the Consent Form), and the report of this research will be sent to you by email.

It is also anticipated that findings from the study will be published in the ICANZ Magazine.

This version was last edited on 11 December 2011

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Rhoda Scherman, *rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz* (phone numbers below)

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Dr Rosemary Godbold, *rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz* (921 9999 ext 6902)

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Han Lee, fvs5338@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7228 (mob: 021 262 9447)

Dr. Deborah Payne (secondary supervisor), debbie.payne@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7112

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 October 2011, AUTEC Reference number 11/239.

RULES OF CONDUCT DURING ONLINE FORUMS

1. **Respect**
- Be supportive to one another.
- Show respect to everyone in the chat group.

2. **Honesty**
- Tell your true stories and opinion, even if you disagree with other person in the group.
- Respect that others might have different opinions.

3. **Privacy**
- Please refrain from telling or asking for contact detail.
- Be sure of what you want (and do not want) to tell about yourself.

4. **Safety**
- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You may withdraw from participation at any time and for any reason.
- Please contact us, if you have any concerns or questions.

Researcher Contact Details:

Han Lee, fvs5338@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7228 (mob: 021 262 9447)

Dr. Deborah Payne (secondary supervisor), debbie.payne@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7112.

Parent Consent Form

Project title: **Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences**

Researcher: **Han Lee**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Rhoda Scherman**

O   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 December 2011.

O   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have those questions answered.

O   I understand that the identities of the adopted teen participants will be kept confidential to the group.

O   I understand that the discussions will be in written form, resulting in text transcripts that will be analysed in the research project.

O   I understand that I may withdraw my child from participation after consent has been given, without being disadvantaged in any way.

O   If I withdraw my child, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the group discussion that have already taken place, every effort will be made to remove child-specific information.

O   I agree to allow my child to take part in this research.

O   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): O Yes   O No (to be sent via email)

Parent Signature: ....……………………………………………...

Parent Name: ....…………………………………………

Parent email: ....…………………………………………….

Parent Contact Details

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

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Date: ………………………………..

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 October 2011, AUTEC Reference number 11/239.

This version was last edited on 11 December 2011

APPENDIX D: Participant information sheet for teen

Participant Information Sheet For Teen

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 December 2011

Project Title

Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences

An Invitation

Hi, my name is Han Lee. I'm a psychology student at AUT University. I'd like to invite you to an online discussion group for my research project. I want to learn more about your experiences as international adoptees, and how these experiences may differ depending on different variables, such as your *gender*, *country of origin*, *age of adoption*, and *family structure*. Participation in the research project is voluntary and confidential. Please email me by 20 January 2012 to let me know your interest, or if you'd like more information. Thank you.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand (ICANZ) is a not-for-profit organisation supporting New Zealand international adoptive families, and they have placed information about this research on their official website (www.icanz.gen.nz) and Facebook page. Also, ICANZ has sent electronic invitations to all adoptive families in their database, who meet participant criteria.

To participate in this research, you'll be (1) an internationally adopted teen; (2) reside anywhere in New Zealand; (3) be between 15 and 18 years old; and (4) have Internet access in your home.

What will happen in this research?

You'll be invited to four group discussions in a private online space. You'll be asked to talk (i.e. in the form of writing, as this is not a face-to-face forum) about your experiences and opinions as international adoptees on such topics as *school experiences*, *your friendships*, *family back in birth country*, and *your adoptive family*. You will also be asked to give some feedback on the Internet research processes.

There will be about 3-5 participants in each group. Each session will be approximately one hour in duration. Along with myself, there will be a professionally trained facilitator guiding the online group discussion.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There are no anticipated physical risks for you. However, we acknowledge that you could feel some discomfort during or after the online group discussion due to sharing personally sensitive experiences and opinions.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Firstly, a clinically trained facilitator will be online to guide and monitor online conversations at all times. She may contact you privately during the online group discussion. You may also contact the facilitator directly and privately during forum, if you are having any concerns.

Secondly, rules during the online group discussions are given to all of the participants, so that the online group discussions run safely.

What are the benefits?

It is expected that you will learn more about yourself, as you share your experiences and opinions with other international adoptees, and learn about other teens with similar experiences. And, for me, your participation will assist me in obtaining Masters of Philosophy degree (MPHIL).

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity will not be known to other participants primarily due to the fact that the discussion forums are not face-to-face but rather written in-time online groups. Your privacy is also protected by us asking all of the participants to use pseudonyms during the online group discussions. You will also be asked to refrain from sharing any identifying information (e.g. contact details, etc.) during the discussions.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Each online group discussion will last about one hour, and there will be four sessions. You will be using your own computer and the Internet connection.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You will need to sign an Assent Form (for teens 15 years of age), or a Consent Form (for teens 16 to 18 of age), and your parent will need to sign a Consent Form and Demographic Survey, which will be included with this letter. If not, these forms can be sent to you by email. If you agree to participate in the research, please return the completed forms to us using the enclosed pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope.

You can also withdraw from participating in the research by informing me. Although it may not be possible to destroy all records of the group discussions of which you participated (due to their conversational nature), the relevant information about you will not be used in the report.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, you will receive the results of the study, if you are interested. Please let me know your interest (as indicated on the Assent/Consent Form), and the report of this research will be sent to you by email.

It is also anticipated that findings from the study will be published in the ICANZ Magazine.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Rhoda Scherman, _rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz_ (phone numbers below)

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Dr Rosemary Godbold, _rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz_ (921 9999 ext 6902)

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Han Lee, fvs5338@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7228 (mob: 021 262 9447)

Dr. Deborah Payne (secondary supervisor), debbie.payne@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7112

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 October 2011, AUTEC Reference number 11/236.

This version was last edited on 11 December 2011

RULES OF CONDUCT DURING ONLINE FORUMS

1. Respect

- Be supportive to one another.
- Show respect to everyone in the chat group.

2. Honesty

- Tell your true stories and opinion, even if you disagree with other person in the group.
- Respect that others might have different opinions.

3. Privacy

- Please refrain from telling or asking for contact detail.
- Be sure of what you want (and do not want) to tell about yourself.

4. Safety

- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You may withdraw from participation at any time and for any reason.
- Please contact us, if you have any concerns or questions.

Researcher Contact Details:
Han Lee, fvs5338@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Dr. Rhoda Scherman, rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7228 (mob: 021 262 9447)
Dr. Deborah Payne (secondary supervisor), debbie.payne@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 7112.

Consent Form

(for teens 16 - 18 of age)

Project title: ***Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences***

Researcher: **Han Lee**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Rhoda Scherman**

○   I've read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 December 2011.

○   I've had an opportunity to ask questions and to have those questions answered.

○   I understand that the identities of all participants will be kept confidential to the group.

○   I understand that the discussions will be in written form, resulting in text transcripts that will be analysed in the research project.

○   I understand that I may withdraw from participation after consent has been given, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○   If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the group discussion that have already taken place, every effort will be made to remove my information.

○   I agree to take part in this research.

○   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): ○ Yes   ○ No   (to be sent via email)

Participant name: ....………………………………………………

Participant's email: ....………………………………………………

Participant's Online Name (to be used in the discussion group): ....………...

Participant's Signature: ....………………………………………………

Date: ………………………..

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Assent Form

(for teens 15 years of age)

Project title: ***Online group discussions with adolescent international adoptees in New Zealand: A qualitative investigation into their experiences***

Researcher: **Han Lee**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Rhoda Scherman**

O   I've read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 December 2011.

O   I've been able to ask questions and to have them answered.

O   I understand that all participants' identities will be kept confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.

O   I understand that the discussions will be in written form, resulting in text transcripts that will be analysed in the research project.

O   I understand that while the information is being collected, I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.

O   If I stop being part of the study, I understand that all information about me may not be possible to be destroyed, but it will not be used in the research report.

O   I agree to take part in this research.

O   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): O Yes   O No (to be sent via email)

Participant name: ....

Participant's email: ....

Participant's Online Name (to be used in the discussion group): ....

Participant's Signature: ....

Date: ....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 October 2011, AUTEC Reference number 11/236.

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