ADOPTIVE PARENTHOOD: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF PRE-ADOPTION COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION ON POST-ADOPTION FAMILY ADJUSTMENT AND COPING

Lara N. Seebeck, B.A.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2012

APPROVED:

Brian K. Richardson, Major Professor
Zuoming Wang, Committee Member
John M. Allison Jr., Committee Member and Chair of the Department of Communication Studies
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

Master of Arts (Communication Studies), May 2012, 67 pp., 11 tables, references, 48 titles.

There are over a million adopted children in the United States, which makes up over 2% of the population. In spite of the fact that the majority of children are adopted into loving and caring homes, early life trauma puts them at higher risk for developing behavioral and emotional problems than non-adopted children. Due to these issues, many adoptive parents encounter post-adoption stress. This stress is often linked to minimal education regarding short- and long-term challenges associated with adoption. The adoption agency is likely the best group for addressing challenges, yet few researchers have studied adoption agency communication and adoptive parent adjustment. In this study I examined pre-adoption communication satisfaction, post-adoption adjustment (life change and parental adjustment), and coping strategies. Hypothesis 1 questioned the relationship between adoptive parents’ pre-adoption communication satisfaction with their social workers and post-adoption family adjustment; this hypothesis was supported only for problems related to home and work life adjustment. Hypothesis 2 predicted coping strategies would mediate the relationship between communication satisfaction and family adjustment. H2 was not supported for both life change and parental adjustment. Research Questions 1a and 1b inquired about the coping strategy that had an impact on life change and parental adjustment; escape-avoidance coping was most common for problems related to parental difficulty adjustment. A second research question was added post hoc; it questioned if special needs adopted children had an impact on family adjustment. Results indicated the special needs designation is related to home and work life
adjustment. After discussing the theoretical and practical implications of this study, I offer limitations and directions for future research.
Copyright 2012

by

Lara N. Seebeck
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Brian Richardson, for your assistance and guidance through this thesis writing process. I value your honesty and encouragement and appreciate everything you did to help me pursue this topic.

Second, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jay Allison and Dr. Zuoming Wang. Thank you for agreeing to be on my committee and for your invaluable input. Thanks especially to Dr. Wang for your help with the data analysis.

I would also like to thank my family for your unconditional love and support through everything that I've done. I specifically want to thank my husband, Lucas, for encouraging me to go back to school and for always being so understanding and helpful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Adoption</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- and Post-Adoption Preparation and Support</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and Coping Theory</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHOD</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Implications</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Over 1.5 million children have been adopted in the United States, making up over 2% of the country’s population (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2001), and from 1999 to 2010, 224,615 international children were adopted by American parents (Intercountry Adoption – Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2010). In spite of the fact that the majority of children are adopted into loving and caring homes, early life trauma often puts adopted children at higher risk for developing behavioral and emotional problems than non-adopted children (Stams, Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn, & Hoksbergen, 2001). For example, Smith and Brodzinsky (2002) stated that “adoptees are over-represented in outpatient and inpatient clinical settings and, regardless of clinical status, exhibit more academic problems and externalizing behavior problems, such as aggressiveness, oppositional behavior, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and running away, than non-adoptees” (p. 213). Because of the problems that many adopted children face, adoptive parents encounter stress when bringing these children into their homes and often are not prepared for problems they encounter post-adoption (Paulsen & Merighi, 2009; Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001).

Bird, Peterson, and Hotta Miller (2002) suggested that adoptive parent stress can come from many things such as not being able to bond with the child, managing pressures of instant parenthood, the child’s developmental and mental health concerns, financial consequences of adoption, fear of the role of birth parents, infertility issues, and how or when to disclose adoption information with the child. The challenges that each family faces can either strengthen the family by allowing them to discover new ways of coping, problem solving, and adapting, or can cause unseen stress and difficulty with coping that can lead to
termination of adoption (Farber, Timberlake, Mudd, & Cullin, 2003). Because of the changes that an adopted child can bring upon a family, adoptive parents and families need to understand short- and long-term challenges associated with adoption. Many individuals and groups could serve as sources of information for adoptive parents to learn more about the adoption process and life after adoption; these include other adoptive parents, adoption support groups, family members, and Internet searches. One group that is generally overlooked in this regard is the adoption agency itself. The adoption agency is likely the best positioned group for addressing these needs; however, communication scholars know little about whether the pre-adoption educative information provided by adoption agencies helps the adjustment process of prospective parents.

Adoption agencies are the liaison between adoptive parents and children that have been legally relinquished by birth parents for adoption and play a significant role educating and counseling prospective parents. Unfortunately, legally mandated requirements for adoption agencies are limited. According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ “Minimum Standards for Child-Placing Agencies” (2007) parents wanting to adopt undergo a professional assessment of adoptive parents and family in a pre-adoptive home-screening. During this process, a social worker interviews prospective parents, and their family and friends, to determine if the adults would be suitable parents. Social workers examine the prospective parents’ homes and assess their quality of living. After the home-screening process, if the parents are accepted to proceed with either a domestic or international adoption, the social worker must maintain quarterly face-to-face contact with the parents. During that time they are to provide education and training on three topics: 1) bonding with the adopted child, 2) parenting issues and concerns, and 3) children with
special needs (if applicable). Once the child has been placed with the adoptive parents, the social worker completes a post-placement report, at least five months after the adoption regarding: 1) the child, 2) the adoptive parents, 3) the family of the adoptive parents, 4) the environment, and 5) the adjustment of all individuals involved in the child’s placement. At this point all agencies are required to offer post-placement counseling services through referrals outside the agency.

The counseling process between adoption agency social workers and prospective parents is communicative in nature. The social workers are the only official source for information that adoptive parents have when learning about the adoptive child, and social workers are meant to be a guide for adoptive parents during the adoption process (Wind, Brooks, & Barth, 2007). The interaction between social workers and adoptive parents may either enhance or diminish parents’ adoption experiences. McDonald, Propp, and Murphy (2001) found that one in five adoptive families in the United States were dissatisfied with the adoption process because of a lack of social networks and support systems. Paulsen and Merighi (2009) argued that if proper communication and education are provided to parents, they are more likely to be satisfied with the adoption process and, more importantly, know to expect challenges with the adopted child and have the necessary resources to overcome those challenges.

Researchers and policy makers have generally neglected the area of adoption counseling, and adoption experts are beginning to argue that it is imperative for specialists to understand complications and psychological effects of adoption on children and families (Zamostny, O’Leary Wiley, O’Brien, Lee, & Baden, 2003). According to O’Brien and Zamostny (2003), “research revealed that therapists often discount the role of adoption
when providing therapy to adoptive families...and many practicing psychologists indicated that they need additional education about adoption” (p. 679). Because of the lack of research in this area, it is unclear whether these specialists have had communication training and what information they provide adoptive parents other than what is mandated by state adoption laws. Researchers (Paulsen & Merighi, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2001) have indicated that when parents are not given adequate information they are not prepared to deal with the problems that arise with their children post-adoption. Thus, in this study I examine the communication between adoption agencies and adoptive parents to address the dearth of research on pre-adoption communication between adoption agency representatives and prospective adoptive parents. Because such communication may be invaluable for preparing and aiding prospective adoptive parents, researchers should begin to assess how communication between social workers and prospective adoptive parents affects parents’ expectations and stress following the finalization of the adoption.

Adoption can lead to unforeseen stressors on adoptive families (Bird et al., 2002); thus, parents could benefit from coming to terms with the issues at hand and finding ways to cope. Researchers have not examined adoptive parents as much as adopted children. In a study of adopted children, Smith and Brodzinsky (1994) argued that “childrens’ adjustment to adoption is mediated by the way they understand and appraise the adoption experience and by the types of coping patterns they use to deal with adoption-related stress” (p. 92). Similarly, for parents the adoption process may be experienced as stressful, which leads to coping efforts that may facilitate adjustment. Thus, stress and coping theory provides a lens for investigating how pre-adoption communication may alleviate stress for
adoptive parents and may suggest ways of coping when challenges arise after a child has been placed with the family.

Bird et al. (2002) used stress and coping theory to examine adoption from the perspective that it is a life event that triggers stress and protective coping strategies. Proponents of the theory proposed that communication is essential to the experience of stress and coping because, as Afifi and Nussbaum (2006) reasoned, “although much of coping is cognitively based, the way people cope is largely a function of their interaction with others” (p. 282). Following this line of thinking, researchers can expect that adoptive parents find ways to cope with the stress involved in the adoption process by finding social support groups or other outlets through which they can express concerns and find help. In this context, social support consists of social workers, counselors, friends, and family members, who should be providing information to adoptive parents. Communication between social workers and adoptive parents is especially central as parents seek to understand the process of adoption as well as what to expect post-adoption. However, adoptive parents often receive little communication or support from these individuals during the pre-adoption phase (McDonald et al., 2001) and are left to navigate the adoption process and post-adoption stress on their own (Paulsen & Merighi, 2009).

Thus, my purpose in the present study is to use stress and coping theory (Smith and Brodzinsky, 1994), which researchers have used primarily to focus on adoptive children, as a framework to understand how it can be used to understand coping related to adoption for adoptive parents. I also assess how communication satisfaction with adoption agency social workers is related to and affects adoptive parent adjustment and coping. Additionally, I evaluate whether coping strategies affect the relationship between pre-
adoption communication with the social worker and post-adoption adjustment for adoptive parents. In order to understand how coping strategies affect post-adoption family adjustment, I investigate which coping strategies have the most impact on adoptive parent stress and coping.

As described, there is a lack of research on pre-adoption communication between adoptive parents and adoption agency social workers as well as on understanding if that communication has any impact on post-adoption family adjustment. Therefore, in this study I look at how adoptive parents perceive pre-adoption communication and how they use coping strategies for family adjustment during the post-adoption period. In the following chapters I review existing literature on adoption and communication, explain the method and results of the study, and conclude with a discussion that includes limitations of the study as well as directions for future research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adoption is a unique way of forming a family that has many benefits for children and parents but that also can cause challenges and stressors (O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003). Couples who choose to adopt experience various trials and find ways to cope with family changes and struggles by using coping strategies and by seeking social support (Bird et al., 2002; Levy-Shiff, Goldshmidt, & Har-Evan, 1991). Because of the difficulties that arise for families formed through adoption, pre-adoption communication is essential for adoptive parents in order for them to possess realistic expectations. Adoptive parents should feel educated on issues that may arise after the finalization of the adoption. When adoptive parents have knowledge of these issues, educative communication between adoptive parents and social worker is established. To establish a foundation for this study, I examine the history and stigma of adoption, followed by a thorough review of literature regarding communication research in relation to adoption. Next, I review the literature on pre- and post-adoption preparation and support to illuminate the importance of understanding how these factors are essential to adoptive family functioning. Finally, I explore stress and coping theory as a way to understand the stress that adoptive parents face, as well as how adoptive parents deal with the stress of becoming parents in a nontraditional way.

Adoption

Adoption is a common practice in the United States and "6 in 10 Americans have had experience with adoption (i.e., either they or a family member or close friend was adopted, placed a child for adoption, or adopted a child) and...one third of all adults have considered..."
adopting a child” (Zamostny, O’Brien, Baden, & O’Leary Wiley, 2003, p. 652). The practice of adoption is rich in history but complex due to the multiparty nature in the process of adopting and the people involved. Zamostny, O’Brien, et al. (2003) explained that “adoption involves three sets of participants collectively known as the adoption triad – the adoptee, the birth family, and the adoptive family” (p. 652). They further noted that adoption in the United States is accomplished two ways: domestic adoptions (adoptions of American children) and international adoptions (adoptions of children from other countries). Parents can accomplish these types of adoption either through public (foster care) or private agencies (non-profit agencies), which is a direct placement of the child from birth parents to adoptive parents. Based on the relationships of the people involved, adoption is either classified as “open” or “closed,” which refers to the communication that can take place between adoptee and birth family.

Since adoption practices vary by type and by levels of involvement, over the years the research on adoption has grown in order to break stigmas and to offer assistance to adoption agencies, adoptive parents, and others that could potentially be involved such as counselors or therapists. Zamostny, O’Leary, et al. (2003) stated “half of those surveyed in a large study of adoption attitudes believed that adoption is inferior to having a biological child, and one quarter felt that it is harder to love a child who is not biologically related” (p. 648). Similarly, O’Brien and Zamostny (2003) determined that many people feel a family formed through adoption is inferior to a biological family. Because of these attitudes and the challenges faced among the members of the adoption triad, Zamostny, O’Leary, et al. (2003) argued that “emphasis on developmental tasks and models, healthy coping skills, prevention approaches, adjustment to life transition, and multiculturalism, among other
things, are particularly relevant to understanding and therapeutically responding to the challenges faced by the adoption triad” (p. 648). While some adoption researchers have shown that adopted children and adoptive parents can overcome challenges and adapt to the changes the adoption forces on those immediately involved (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007; McDonald et al., 2001), Galvin (2003) noted that the past forty years of adoption research provides limited focus on communication dynamics that are important to creating and sustaining adoptive families. To this point, family studies specialists, sociologists, and psychologists have conducted the most influential research on adoption. These researchers have concentrated on attachment, adjustment, and developmental concerns without taking into consideration the importance of communication (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Galvin, 2003). Therefore, researchers need to examine adoption from a communicative perspective to understand how communication between adoption agencies and families can enhance and change the adoption experience.

Communication and Adoption

Communication is an integral part of the adoption process and is key for family functioning (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). Most research on communication related to adoption focuses on the impact that communication has after the adoption has been finalized, and addresses family challenges and creating family identity (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Galvin, 2003; Jones & Hackett, 2007). With that in mind, Galvin (2003) explained that families acknowledge or reject differences in family structure through discourse, which is a significant communication issue associated with adoption. Similarly, Jones and Hackett (2007) expressed how communication relates to adoption by explaining communication through openness. They argued that exploring the meaning of adoption
with regards to the adoptive family is important to understanding and having communicative openness. Jones and Hackett (2007) acknowledged the challenges of communication for adoptive families and concluded:

> While adoptive families have a right to live their lives without further state intervention, it could also be argued that the state has a moral obligation to ensure that adoptive families are equipped with information and evidence relating to current best practice in order to give adoptive families the greatest chance of success. (p. 173)

Adoptive families and agencies need to understand the impact communication has on creating healthy adoptee-adoptive parent interactions. Adoptive parents need support and advice in order to create healthy family relationships, which should be a significant role of adoption agencies through pre-adoption education and support.

**Pre- and Post-Adoption Preparation and Support**

A majority of research on adoption, regarding adaptation and coping, focuses on post-adoption services for families (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007; McDonald et al., 2001; McKay, Ross, & Goldberg, 2010; Monck & Rushton, 2009; Wind et al., 2007). Findings from these studies have demonstrated the importance of post-adoption services such as support groups, counseling, and therapy. Atkinson and Gonet (2007) conducted interviews with 500 adoptive families in order to understand what strengthens the relationships that are formed through adoption and to determine where the family members find support and respite from daily struggles. The families interviewed ascribed value to post-adoption services and encouraged continued support, even after the adoption has been finalized. Researchers also found that because of the problems adoptive parents face and the support
services they need, adoptive families should be familiar with adoption-related issues. These include developmental, medical, and psychological conditions, behavioral troubles, and educational disabilities that adopted children may face as well as community resources for dealing with these concerns. Similarly, McDonald et al. (2001) looked at the post-adoption experience and how families had adjusted to the adoption. Based on survey research, they determined that:

The services most needed that were not received at the time of the survey included support or self-help groups for parents and respite services. Other possible service needs included advocacy services, support groups for siblings, emergency assistance, and crisis intervention. (p. 90)

In a longitudinal study, Wind et al. (2007) reached similar conclusions about the need for support services. At the conclusion of their eight-year study, they found that adoptive families used both general and clinical services after the finalization of the adoption at an increasing rate over the eight-year-period. This finding was supplemented by another in which they argued that their findings reflect the influence of pre-adoption preparation on parents’ understanding of the post-adoption adjustment challenges for all family members, as well as an appreciation for communication and mentoring through adoption services. When parents received more pre-adoption education they were more likely to use post-adoption help and support because they were aware that these services were available and because they had resources for problems that arose after the adoption was finalized. The findings of these studies demonstrate that post-adoption services are needed and helpful and could be encouraged by agencies in the pre-adoption stages of parental preparation.
In comparison with research on post-adoption support, pre-adoption preparedness and support has been largely overlooked. Researchers’ findings in post-adoption studies suggest that it is crucial for researchers to examine the impact of pre-adoption preparation and support in order to understand its impact on family functioning. Paulsen and Merighi (2009) conducted a study about adoption preparedness in which they found that several of the families who took part in the study felt minimally prepared for their adoption and did not have an understanding of obstacles they could encounter with the child. Similarly, McKay and Ross (2010), in their study of the transition to adoptive parenthood, found that parents had not expected challenges they encountered. These findings suggest that communication about prospective problems to adoptive parents as well as about available resources could help them feel more prepared when they transition into parenthood.

Supporting this suggestion, Houston and Kramer (2008) found that:

Pre-adoption support was linked with lower levels of family conflict and a greater desire among parents to adopt again....Pre-adoptive assistance from formal agency support systems can play an instrumental role in setting the adoptive family on a positive trajectory during the early stages of adoption. (pp. 163-164)

While all of these researchers have concluded that more pre-adoption education and support is needed for better post-adoption outcomes, most do not address communication between parents and adoption agency social workers in the pre-adoption phase. Farber et al. (2003) focused on the adoption agency and concluded that while the adoption agency plays a significant role in preparedness, “prospective adoptive parents need to replace their fantasies about a perfect, healthy child with a realistic appraisal of possible environmental and hereditary consequences” (p. 191). They deduced that the agency plays
a role but that adoptive parents are as much responsible for preparing for adoption. Not only is parental preparation and support in the pre-adoption phase important, it is also crucial that agencies provide adoptive parents with realistic expectations about what could potentially happen and what typical outcomes might be. This outcome could be enhanced with a satisfactory communication experience between the adoption agency and the parents before the child is placed.

Stress

Adjusting to changes in family life can lead to stress. The majority of adoptees and adoptive parents experience adoptive stresses, which can lead to varied outcomes of coping and adjustment (Farber et al., 2003). Many adopted children experience some sort of early life trauma; common experiences could include, among other things, abandonment, abuse, or neglect. These experiences put adopted children at a higher risk for developing behavioral and emotional problems than non-adopted children (Stams, et al., 2001). Golding (2007) confirmed that early experiences in life have an impact on adopted children, which can lead to physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive problems; these complications can present significant challenges for adoptive parents. Atkinson and Gonet (2007) found that when families asked for assistance “60% of families cited behavior problems, followed by school-related issues (47%), adoption issues (38%), attachment issues (27%), and social adjustment problems (8%)” (p. 93). When asked about the child’s challenging behaviors, “more than half (54%) reported a serious diagnosed condition including...attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, reactive attachment disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, bipolar disorder, fetal alcohol effects/syndrome, depression, mental retardation, autism, and schizophrenia” (p. 93). The factors that are a part of an
adopted child's background as well as the adoptive parents attempts to incorporate the child into family life causes adoptive stressors for both parents and children. Bird et al. (2002) identified a number of adoptive parent concerns: being able to bond with the child, demands of immediate parenthood, the child's future development and mental health, and the financial strains associated with adoption. Parents clearly have many issues to cope with as they adjust to adoptive parenthood, which is why pre-adoption communication on these issues as well as education on coping strategies could be helpful for adoptive parents.

Stress and Coping Theory

As stated earlier, the adoption experience can lead to parental stress. In order to create and maintain a healthy family environment adoptive parents must learn how to cope with difficulties that arise. In order to understand whether pre-adoption communication with adoption agency social workers can enhance coping in adoptive parents, Brodzinsky’s (1990) stress and coping theory is utilized as a framework for the present study. Psychologists used this theory to assess children's adjustment to adoption. Smith and Brodzinsky (1994) explained that the central assumption of the model is that “children’s adjustment to adoption is mediated by the way they understand and appraise the adoption experience and by the types of coping patterns they use to deal with adoption-related stress” (p.92). Smith and Brodzinsky (1994, 2003) have proposed that children cope with adoption in one of two ways. Some children assess adoption in a neutral or positive way, which leads them to experience only a small amount of adoption-related stress. Other children appraise being adopted as threatening or potentially disadvantageous; therefore, they experience negative emotions and a great deal of stress. In the present study I extend stress and coping theory to address the way that adoptive parents assess and deal with
adoption related stress. The following section provides an explanation of adoptive parental
distress and coping.

Pearlin (1989) claimed that life events, such as adoption, are a primary stressor
(cited in Bird et al., 2002). Adoption is a stressor whether adoptive parents are first-time
parents or are adding an adopted child to a biological or adoptive family. New parents
experience stress because they are inexperienced and do not understand the demands of a
child. Parents that already have either biological or adopted children experience stress
because of the addition of a child that has different needs than the other child or children
(Levy-Shiff et al., 1991). When stress occurs, parents find ways to deal with life’s demands
by using coping strategies. In a stressful or threatening situation people cope first by
appraising the potential threat, then by physically or mentally combating the threat (Lyons,
refer to the ways that people deal with situations appraised as stressful. Coping strategies
usually are activated either to manage the problem causing the distress or to regulate the
emotions aroused by the problem” (p. 216). Researchers (Bird et al., 2002; Levy-Shiff et al.,
1991) have investigated adoptive parental coping strategies, but they have not examined
whether adoptive parent communication satisfaction during pre-adoption sessions with
adoption agency social workers is related to lower stress and enhanced coping for adoptive
parents once the adoption has been finalized.

Bird et al. (2002) argued that because strains arise post-adoption, adoptive parents
need to understand during the pre-adoption phase what could lie ahead. They argued that
helping parents to understand and expect potential problems would enable them to
prepare and practice problem-solving strategies as well as find resources that can assist in
alleviating stress and enhancing well-being. Understanding stress and coping patterns of adoptive parents can be a challenge because each situation is unique and complex. If pre-adoption communication satisfaction is linked to lower post-adoption stress levels, adoption officials might recognize the importance of educational interactions between social workers and prospective adoptive parents.

I use stress and coping theory (Brodzinsky, 1994), to examine three variables. First, the independent variable that is examined is adoptive parents’ pre-adoption communication satisfaction with the adoption agency social worker. The dependent variable to be measured is parental adjustment, post-adoption. The mediating variable is coping, suggesting that different coping strategies will moderate the relationship between pre-adoption communication satisfaction and post-adoption adjustment. Based upon this literature review, the following hypotheses and research questions are offered:

H1: Pre-adoption communication satisfaction with social worker will affect post adoption family adjustment such that as satisfaction with pre-adoption communication increases so, too, does post-adoption family adjustment levels.

H2: Coping strategies (confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal) mediate the relationship between pre-adoption communication with social worker and post-adoption adjustment.

RQ: Which coping strategy (confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem
solving, and positive reappraisal) has the most impact on post-adoption family adjustment?

These hypotheses are presented in visual form in Figures 1 and 2.

**Figure 1.** This figure illustrates Hypothesis 1.

**Figure 2.** This figure illustrates Hypothesis 2.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have provided an overview of adoption in order to create understanding of how adoption is practiced and the challenges that are common among adoptive families. Stress and coping theory was offered as a framework for guiding the investigation of how adoptive parents regard their communication experience with the adoption agency and how they cope following the adoption. In the following chapter I provide a description of the methodology utilized to conduct this study.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Sample

The data for testing the hypotheses and addressing the research questions was obtained through a quantitative study of adoptive parents. To participate in the study, parents had to have at least one adopted child where the adoption had been finalized, according to Texas law.

Participants were parents with at least one adopted child where the adoption was finalized in the state of Texas ($n = 104$). The majority of adoptive parents who completed the survey were Caucasian (87.3%). The majority of participants also indicated that their spouses were Caucasian (92%). Participants indicated that their adopted children were Caucasian (44.8%), Asian (21.9%), and African-American (20.8%), with the remaining children being multi-race, Hispanic, or other (12.5%). The number of years since the finalization of the adoption varied among the participants but the average length of time was 5.4 years. Just over 60% (64.4%) of parents reported that their adoption had been finalized for 3 years or less, 11.4% of parents reported that their adoption had been finalized for 4 to 7 years, and 24.2% of parents reported that their adoption had been finalized for at least 8 years.

Participants reported having one biological child (21.6%), two biological children (11.8%), three biological children (8.8%) or four or more biological children (5.9%). Most participants reported having one adopted child (48%), while others reported having two adopted children (35.3%), and fewer said they had three or more adopted children (16.7%). When asked if their adopted child has any special needs (medical, psychical, or
emotional disabilities, or considered “at-risk”) 30.4% of parents said “yes” and 69.6% said “no.”

Almost half (49%) of participants indicated their total household income as $100,000 or above, 10% indicated a total household income of $80,000-$99,000, 24.5% indicated a total household income of $60,000-$79,000, and the remaining 15.7% indicated a total household income of $59,000 or less.

Procedures

Most participants were found through convenience and snowball sampling methods and were asked to complete an online survey on www.qualtrics.com. First, I utilized convenience sampling. Convenience sampling uses participants that are in naturally formed groups or are volunteers (Creswell, 2009). Local church and public adoption support groups and online Texas adoption chat forums were contacted and asked to provide the link to the online survey to adoptive parents who might be willing to take the survey. Six church and local adoption support groups and one online forum agreed to help distribute the survey to qualified parents. These organizations sent personal emails to group members and three different groups posted an advertisement on Facebook that included the survey link. In addition to the convenience sampling method, I utilized snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when the author contacts a small number of participants and asks them in turn to contact others they might know who fit the same participant criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). For this study, I composed a mass email that was sent to family members, friends, and acquaintances requesting participation from those who qualified with a link to the online survey. Email recipients were encouraged to forward the link to others they knew that fit the participation criteria. Likewise, the study's
participants were encouraged to forward the survey link to other parents or to leave an email address of other parents that fit the survey requirements.

As a final effort to gather participants, I recruited undergraduate students at a large southwestern university who knew people who qualified to take the survey to send the survey link for extra credit. All groups and participants were first contacted by email and then some by phone to explain the details of the study. The only face-to-face contact was to the undergraduate students when they were asked if they knew participants that would qualify. Participants and survey responses were collected for two and a half months.

Research Design

Respondents generally required between 10 and 20 minutes to complete the online survey. The survey primarily assessed three variables: ways of coping, communication satisfaction with adoption agency social worker, and adjustment to parenthood. An introductory page to the survey concisely explained the study's purpose and encouraged participants to complete the survey fully. In order to get participants thinking about their adoption experience, the survey began with questions that asked about participants’ children and demographic information. A drawing for an Amazon.com gift card was offered as an incentive for participation. Participants were given the choice to refrain from being entered into the drawing.

Measures

Three measures were used to assess the dependent and independent variables in the study: ways of coping, communication satisfaction with adoption agency social worker, and adjustment to parenthood. A copy of the survey is found in the Appendix. Each measure is discussed below.
Ways of Coping

To measure coping strategies the Ways of Coping Checklist, developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) was used. This checklist has been used in a number of studies examining stress-related issues. The checklist is comprised of 66 items, measuring 8 dimensions of coping with 4 to 8 items per dimension: confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving, and positive reappraisal. Because of concerns with the length of the survey, I located the scale and included the three highest loading items on each factor to measure each respective coping method (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). From the original study, reliability indices for the eight scales ranged from .61 to .79. The items on the checklist were measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale: 0 = not used, 1 = used somewhat, 2 = used quite a bit, 3 = used a great deal. Sample items include: I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted; I went on as if nothing happened; I tried to keep my feelings to myself; I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice; I criticized or lectured myself; I hoped a miracle would happen; I made a plan of action and followed it; I found new faith.

The dimensionality of the 24 items from the Ways of Coping Checklist (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) was analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. Two criteria were used to determine the number of factors to rotate: the scree test, and the interpretability of the factor solution. Consequently, four factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. The rotated solution, as shown in Table 1, yielded four interpretable factors, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, positive reappraisal, and distancing. Planful problem solving accounted for 31.7% of the item variance, escape-avoidance accounted for 10.2%, positive reappraisal accounted for 7.9% of the item variance, and distancing
accounted for 6.3% of the item variance. The reliability score for each factor was as follows: planful problem solving = .80, escape-avoidance = .84, positive reappraisal = .84, and distancing = .57. The four factors were reduced to three, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal because of the low reliability score for distancing. All further analysis utilized these three factors as coping strategies.

Table 1  
Factor Analysis: Ways of Coping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>7.626</td>
<td>31.777</td>
<td>31.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape Avoidance</td>
<td>2.452</td>
<td>10.218</td>
<td>41.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>1.909</td>
<td>7.955</td>
<td>49.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>1.526</td>
<td>6.360</td>
<td>56.310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  
Reliability: Ways of Coping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Skill</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving (α = .80)</td>
<td>I talked to someone who could do something</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concrete about the problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I just concentrated on what I had to do next – the next step</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I made a plan of action and followed it</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape Avoidance (α = .84)</td>
<td>I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with</td>
<td>.681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hoped a miracle would happen</td>
<td>.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal (α = .84)</td>
<td>I came out of the experience better than when I came in</td>
<td>.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I changed or grew as a person in a good way</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing (α = .57)</td>
<td>I made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I didn’t let it get to me; refused to think too much about it</td>
<td>.702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I went on as if nothing had happened</td>
<td>.730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication Satisfaction

I used a modified version of Downs and Hazen's (1977) Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). Downs and Hazen's questionnaire measures eight dimensions of communication satisfaction, including communication climate, relationship to superiors, organizational integration, media quality, horizontal and information communication, organizational perspective, relationship with subordinates, and personal feedback. In previous research, the scale has resulted in high reliability scores, including Mueller and Lee (2002) whose reliability score with the scale ranged from .80 to .90. Instead of measuring the relationship between supervisor and subordinate communication, I modified the instrument to match with the interests of the present study. Specifically, I measured the adoptive parents' communication satisfaction levels with their respective social workers. Adoptive parents rated statements using a 7-point scale, with higher numbers signifying higher satisfaction with communication. Sample items include: extent to which my social worker knows and understands the problems faced by adoptive parents; extent to which my social worker listens and pays attention to me; extent to which my social worker offers guidance for solving adoption related issues.

The dimensionality of the 10 items from the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (Downs & Hazen, 1977) was analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. Three criteria were used to determine the number of factors to rotate: the a priori hypothesis that the measure was unidimensional, the scree test, and the interpretability of the factor solution. The factor analysis tests confirmed that the scale
was unidimensional and the questionnaire maintained the 10 items. The reliability score for this questionnaire was very high ($\alpha = .96$).

Adjustment to Parenthood

To measure adjustment, I used questions from the Parental Expectations and Perception of Parenthood Adjustment (Kach & McGhee, 1982) questionnaire. Questions from the scale that were relevant to adoptive parents transitioning into parenthood were used. The scale is comprised of 29 items, and has received high reliability levels in previous studies, including a .86 in Levy-Shiff et al.’s study (1991). This questionnaire can be used pre- and post-adoption but due to the nature of my study they were only asked after the adoption was finalized. The original questionnaire includes both open-ended questions as well as statements to be rated. In this study I only used the rated statements in order to keep the entirety of the questionnaire uniform with the other measurements. I was unable to locate all 29 items from the original questionnaire, however Kach and McGhee (1982) provide a list of the most commonly noted adjustment items for new parents. I used the 17 items from the questionnaire that were common adjustment items for new parents, but changed the word “baby” to “child.” Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with $1 = not prepared at all$ to $7 = fully prepared$. Sample items include: love and attachment that is felt for the child; lack of sleep and energy; time and responsibility involved in caretaking for a child; difficulty involved in getting out and going places; difficulty in getting used to the child’s schedule.

The dimensionality of the 17 items from the Perception of Parenthood Adjustment (Kach & McGhee, 1982) was analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. Two criteria were used to determine the number of factors to rotate: the scree test, and the
interpretability of the factor solution. Consequently, two factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. The rotated solution, as shown in Table 3, yielded two interpretable factors, problems related to home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment. The problems related to home and work life adjustment accounted for 45.6% of the item variance, and the problems related to parental difficulty adjustment accounted for 7.3% of the item variance. The reliability score for each factor was as follows: problems related to home and work life adjustment = 0.82, problems related to parental difficulty adjustment = 0.76.

Table 3
Factor Analysis: Post-Adoption Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems related to home and work life adjustment</td>
<td>7.758</td>
<td>45.636</td>
<td>45.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems related to parental difficulty adjustment</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>7.369</td>
<td>53.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Reliability: Post-Adoption Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment Problem</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems related to home and work life adjustment (α = .82)</td>
<td>Marital problems and irritability toward spouse</td>
<td>.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial pressures</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not being able to work</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interference from relatives and in-laws</td>
<td>.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worry over leaving your child with a sitter</td>
<td>.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems related to parental difficulty adjustment (α = .76)</td>
<td>Difficulty involved in getting out and going places</td>
<td>.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of social life/time for self</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time and responsibility involved in caretaking for your child</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of sleep and energy</td>
<td>.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing what to do when your child cries or is sick</td>
<td>.639</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of the two factors that resulted from the Perception of Parenthood Adjustment (Kach & McGhee, 1982), H1 and 2 as well as the research question became the following:

H1a: Pre-adoption communication satisfaction with social worker will affect problems related to home and work life adjustment such that as satisfaction with pre-adoption communication increases so, too, does adjustment to home and work life change associated with adoption.

H1b: Pre-adoption communication satisfaction with social worker will affect problems related to parental difficulty adjustment such that as satisfaction with pre-adoption communication increases so too does adjustment to parental problems associated with adoption.

H2a: Coping strategies (escape-avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal) mediate the relationship between pre-adoption communication with social worker and post-adoption problems related to home and work life adjustment.

H2b: Coping strategies (escape-avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal) mediate the relationship between pre-adoption communication with social worker and post-adoption problems related to parental difficulty adjustment.

RQ1a: Which coping strategy (escape-avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal) has the most impact on post-adoption problems related to home and work life adjustment?
RQ1b: Which coping strategy (escape-avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal) has the most impact on post-adoption problems related to parental difficulty adjustment?

Next, I explain my analysis tests. In order to test H1a and b, I conducted a correlation test. For H2a and b a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The same was done for RQ1a and b.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

To test H1a and b, correlation coefficients were computed among three variables: communication satisfaction, problems related to home and work life adjustment, and problems related to parental difficulty adjustment. Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I error across the correlations, a p-value of less than 0.05 was required for significance. The results of the correlational analyses of all independent, dependent, and mediating variables are presented in Table 5. As the table indicates, one out of the two tested correlations was statistically significant. Communication satisfaction ($M = 5.55, SD = 1.39$) and problems related to home and work life adjustment ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.24$) correlation was significant $F(1, 87) = 3.87, p = .052$. Communication satisfaction and adjustment related to parental difficulty was not significant $F(1, 95) = 3.48, p = .065$. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported at the 0.05 level; Hypothesis 1b, although close, was not significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5
Correlations Among Communication Satisfaction and Parental Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Communication Satisfaction</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problems Related to Home and Work Life Adjustment</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Problems Related to Parental Difficulty Adjustment</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between problems related to home and work life adjustment and communication satisfaction with adoption agency social worker (H2a). The independent variable, communication satisfaction, included three covariates, which were the coping strategies: planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. The dependent variable was problems related to home and work life adjustment ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.21$). As shown in Table 6, the ANOVA was not significant $F(4, 77) = .714, p = .859$ (planful problem solving) $p = .325$ (escape-avoidance), and $p = .780$ (positive reappraisal), not supporting H2a because the coping strategies acted as control variables between communication satisfaction and problems related to home and work life adjustment but not as mediating variables.

Specifically, the presence of the three control variables negated the positive correlation between communication satisfaction with social worker and home and work life adjustment.

Table 6

*Dependent Variable: Problems Related to Home and Work Life Adjustment. Results for ANOVA Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>4.270&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>.714</td>
<td>.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>39.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39.098</td>
<td>26.136</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.229</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.229</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>115.186</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1.496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2351.320</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>119.456</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For H2b, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between problems related to parental difficulty adjustment and communication satisfaction with adoption agency social worker. The independent variable, communication satisfaction, included three covariates, which were the coping strategies: planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. The dependent variable was problems related to parental difficulty adjustment ($M = 5.32, SD = 1.14$). As shown in Table 7, the ANOVA was not significant $F(4, 81) = 1.38, p = .512$ (planful problem solving), $p = .075$ (escape-avoidance), $p = .449$ (positive reappraisal). Meaning H2b also was not supported because the coping strategies acted as control variables, not mediating variables, and the relationship between communication satisfaction and problems related to parental difficulty adjustment and the relationship became inconsequential. Additionally, none of the relationships between the covariates and the dependent variable were significant.

Table 7  
Dependent Variable: Problems Related to Parental Difficulty Adjustment. Results for ANOVA Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>7.133$^a$</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.783</td>
<td>1.387</td>
<td>.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>50.188</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.188</td>
<td>39.032</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Satisfaction</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>4.178</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.178</td>
<td>3.249</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td>.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>104.150</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.286</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2550.400</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>111.284</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To test RQ1a and b, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between which coping strategy has the most impact on family adjustment regarding problems related to home and work life adjustment and problems related to parental difficulty adjustment. The independent variable, coping strategies, contained three factors: planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. The first dependent variable examined was problems related to home and work life adjustment ($M = 5.23, SD = 1.21$). As shown in Table 8 the ANOVA was not significant, $F (3, 79) = .770$, $p = .886$ (planful problem solving), $p = .140$ (escape-avoidance), and $p = .790$ (positive reappraisal). The three coping strategies had no impact on problems related to home and work life adjustment. The second test, for RQ1b, was conducted in the same manner as RQ1a except that the dependent variable was problems related to parental difficulty adjustment ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.14$). As shown in Table 9 this analysis showed that the coping strategy escape-avoidance had the most impact on problems related to parental difficulty adjustment $F (3, 83) = 1.579$, $p = .583$ (planful problem solving), $p = .037$ (escape-avoidance), $p = .502$ (positive reappraisal).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>3.413$^a$</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.138</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>212.622</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>212.622</td>
<td>143.997</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>116.649</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.477</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 8 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2387.320</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>120.062</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*Dependent Variable: Problems Related to Parental Difficulty Adjustment. Results for ANOVA Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>6.074&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.025</td>
<td>1.597</td>
<td>.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>228.843</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>228.843</td>
<td>180.525</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>5.712</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.712</td>
<td>4.513</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>105.215</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.268</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2579.560</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>111.289</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post Hoc

Based on qualitative comments that were written in the questionnaire regarding coping strategies, as well as studies about special needs adopted children, I thought it was important to look at the statistics of parents noting that their adopted child was special needs or “at-risk”. Specifically, several parents wrote about disagreements with their spouses related to special-needs issues arising with their children. Therefore, I ran an additional test based upon two new research questions:

RQ 2a: What effect does special needs designation have on problems related to home and work life adjustment when controlling for communication
satisfaction and the three noted coping strategies (planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal)?

RQ 2b: What effect does special needs designation have on problems related to parental difficulty adjustment when controlling for communication satisfaction and the three noted coping strategies (planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal)?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between designating that an adopted child is considered special needs and problems related to home and work life adjustment. The independent variable, special needs, included four control variables: communication satisfaction, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. As shown in Table 10, the dependent variable was problems related to home and work life adjustment (M = 5.22, SD = 1.21). The ANOVA was significant at the .05 level, $F(5, 76) = 1.727$, $p = .393$ (planful problem solving), $p = .263$ (escape-avoidance), $p = .871$ (positive reappraisal), $p = .020$ (special needs designation), $p = .747$ (communication satisfaction). This finding suggests that problems related to home and work life adjustment are influenced by adoptive parents noting that their adopted child has special needs or is considered "at-risk" with $p = .02$.

Table 10

*Dependent Variable: Problems Related to Home and Work Life Adjustment. Results for ANOVA Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>12.188$^a$</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.438</td>
<td>1.727</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>39.421</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39.421</td>
<td>27.930</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
For RQ 2b the same analysis was conducted. The independent variable, special needs, included the same four control variables: communication satisfaction, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. The dependent variable was problems related to parental difficulty adjustment ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.14$). As shown in Table 11, the ANOVA was not significant for special needs related to parental difficulty adjustment, $F(5, 80) = 1.208, p = .313$ (planful problem solving), $p = .069$ (escape-avoidance), $p = .470$ (special needs designation), $p = .593$ (communication satisfaction). This finding suggests that adoptive parents noting that their adopted child has special needs or is “at-risk” does not have an impact on problems related to parental difficulty adjustment.

Table 11  
*Dependent Variable: Problems Related to Parental Difficulty Adjustment. Results for ANOVA Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>7.815$^a$</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.563</td>
<td>1.208</td>
<td>.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>50.771</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.771</td>
<td>39.225</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 11 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance Positive</td>
<td>4.391</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.391</td>
<td>3.395</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td>.487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Satisfaction</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>103.469</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.293</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2550.400</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>111.284</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goals of this exploratory study were to determine if pre-adoption communication satisfaction with adoption agency social workers influenced post-adoption family adjustment and coping. The study was also designed to understand if coping strategies used by adoptive parents affected parents’ perceived post-adoption family adjustment. Adoptive parents completed a survey that asked questions about coping, communication satisfaction, and levels of adjustment to parenthood. The quantitative results determined there was a relationship between communication satisfaction and post-adoption family adjustment but that relationship was mediated by coping strategies. Though the results were not as significant as was anticipated, they do raise additional questions about pre-adoption communication and post-adoption adjustment.

In the first four chapters I introduced problems related to adoption and communication, reviewed current literature on adoption, pre- and post-adoption support, as well as stress and coping related to adoption. I also discussed the methods used to address the hypotheses and research questions, and reported the survey results. Chapter V includes a discussion of the results, which indicate the relationship between communication satisfaction and post-adoption adjustment, and the influence of coping strategies on that relationship. The rest of Chapter V includes four sections. First, in the theoretical implications section I examine how this study’s results align with stress and coping theory. Next, in the practical implications section I discuss what the results of this study mean and how adoption researchers can use them to expand on pre-and post-adoption communication. I then offer suggestions for adoption agencies helping families
with the adjustment period during and after the finalization of an adoption. In this section, I also discuss qualitative responses that were part of my survey. Although these were not part of the hypotheses or research questions, they do suggest areas of concern for adoptive parents, and areas for future research. Finally, in a discussion of limitations and directions for future research I explain some of the shortcomings of this study and make recommendations for other scholars who wish to continue adoption communication research.

Theoretical Implications

Stress and coping theory is a useful framework for gaining insight into the perspectives of adoptive parents who experience difficulties during and after the adoption process. Lazarus (1966) theorized that there were two central concepts to the theory: appraisal, which looks at an individual's evaluation of what is happening and why it is significant, and coping, which explains what the individual thinks and does to manage specific demands (Lazarus, 1993). This theory was originally used in psychology studies to examine physiological stress. Over the past several years, it has been used specifically for adoption research. As suggested by Zamostny et al. (2003) this theory rests on the belief that adoption involves challenges that test adoptive parents' coping responses and that the theory can be applied to the adoption experience overall. Being able to understand how adoptive parents handle stress and use coping strategies can account for individuals' differences in adoption adjustment (Zamostny et al., 2003).

The present study addressed stress and coping related to adoptive parents' perspectives of the adoption experience. Findings from this study offer possibilities for explaining parents' adjustment to adoption situations, their appraisal of communication...
satisfaction with adoption agency social workers, and how their coping strategies affect the relationship between communication satisfaction and post-adoption adjustment.

In the present study, through H1a, I found a positive relationship between pre-adoption communication satisfaction and post-adoption adjustment related to marital problems. Therefore, the more satisfied adoptive parents felt with their pre-adoption communication, the fewer problems they encountered with regard to post-adoption home and work life adjustment which included factors such as marital problems and irritability toward spouse, financial pressures, not being able to work, and several other items. H1b was tested similarly to H1a, but instead of looking at problems related to home and work life adjustment, H1b addressed the relationship between communication satisfaction and adjustment related to parental difficulty adjustment. The relationship between communication satisfaction and parental difficulty adjustment was not significant.

These findings suggest it is possible that pre-adoption communication with social workers can prepare adoptive parents for problems that may arise post-adoption. Specifically, better communication with one’s social worker might result in fewer problems related to home and work life adjustment. This finding could be explained through uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), and suggests an integration of uncertainty reduction and stress and coping theories might be beneficial to other researchers. Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) proposes people do not like uncertainty and therefore communicate to various targets in order reduce it (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997). More specifically, uncertainty leads to stress and anxiety for individuals. In order to manage this stress/anxiety, individuals ask questions, observe their environments, and interact with others to reduce their uncertainty and subsequent stress.
This idea relates to adoptive parents and communication satisfaction because as parents enter into the adoption process many aspects are unknown: birth parents and family medical history, the background of the child (whether a baby or older child), how to handle issues that they will encounter as new parents (Bird et al., 2002). URT suggests that adoptive parents will want to reduce this uncertainty by talking to their social worker or other knowledgeable adoption sources to understand how to approach many of these situations. When the social worker can help, communication satisfaction is increased, uncertainty is reduced and parents experience less anxiety related to adjustment.

Researchers have found that poor communication can result in heightened uncertainty about situations, self, other people, and relationships, and that communication satisfaction is connected with the amount of information available (Madlock, 2008; Madlock & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2010). Likewise, results of the present study suggest interacting with the adoption agency social worker reduces uncertainties that adoptive parents face, which helps parents with adjustment and stress. While the present study did not test stress and coping theory holistically, its results suggest a connection to uncertainty reduction theory. Specifically, stress and coping theory might be extended to include aspects of uncertainty reduction theory, particularly through integrating the relationships between uncertainty and stress, and communication and uncertainty/stress reduction.

Although the findings for H1b were not significant, a correlation test revealed that problems related to the two dependent variables, home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment, were highly correlated. It is important to ask why this relationship between communication satisfaction and home and work life adjustment is significant, but not the relationship between communication satisfaction and parental
difficulty adjustment, particularly considering both adjustment variables were so highly correlated. I suggest that the relationship between communication satisfaction and home and work life adjustment is significant because the communication with a social worker might be more related to sorting roles in the home as life changes occur. Perhaps social workers have more experience with common problems that adoptive parents face as a couple and would be able to offer suggestions of how to work together to avoid problems with irritability toward each other. It is also possible that social workers have seen common patterns of maladjustment and can offer more advice regarding the issues that are part of home and work life adjustment rather than the issues that are a part of parental difficulty adjustment. This finding is unclear, especially because problems related to home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment are highly correlated but communication satisfaction is only significant with problems related to home and work life adjustment. Researchers need to study this finding further in order to understand this relationship.

H2a and b predicted that coping strategies mediate the relationship between communication satisfaction with social workers and problems related to home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment. The results from testing H2a and b show that coping strategies act as a control and change the relationship between communication satisfaction and adjustment. It is important that H1 shows a relationship between communication satisfaction and adjustment but the findings of H2 explain that coping strategies could mitigate poor communication that adoptive parents might experience with social workers. This finding is also important because parents can be satisfied with the communication they have with their social worker but this
communication does not necessarily lead to better overall adjustment. Problems and conflicts that adoptive parents encounter on a day-to-day basis can result in higher levels of stress (Bird, et al., 2002; Paulsen & Merighi, 2009), and it would be impossible for an adoption agency to be able to tell adoptive parents the exact problems they may encounter.

In the results of the ANOVA test, I found that coping strategies act as a control variable to the communication satisfaction and adjustment relationship but, it is also important to note that the relationship between the three coping strategies and adjustment was not significant. This finding raises the question of what is significant? There are other types of coping strategies that are not taken into consideration in this study because of low reliability levels (confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, and accepting responsibility). In future studies, researchers should explore other coping strategies for their impact on the communication satisfaction-adjustment relationship.

In order to understand which coping strategies have an impact on post-adoption family adjustment, RQ1a and b was designed to look at the relationship of coping on problems related to home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment. RQ1a showed that the three coping strategies had no impact on problems related to home and work life adjustment. Contrary to the finding of RQ1a, RQ1b showed that the coping strategy escape-avoidance had significant impact on problems related to parental difficulty adjustment.

The results of RQ1b align with stress and coping theory because they suggests the stressful process of adoption leads to particular ways of coping. However, this finding is interesting because escape-avoidance, which is a negative way of coping, had the most impact on parental difficulty adjustment. In the coping questionnaire, the items that were
used most frequently for escape-avoidance were, “I had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out,” “I hoped a miracle would happen,” “I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time,” and “I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.” Researchers have demonstrated that using the escape-avoidance coping technique can be detrimental to relationships and psychological well-being. For example, Giunta and Compas (1993) found that in relationships, the more that one person uses escape-avoidance, the more the other uses the same coping strategy, which causes more distress for both people. Some researchers who examined post-traumatic stress (Chung, Easthope, Chung, Clark-Carter, 2000; Chung et al., 2003) have found that the more that people used escape-avoidance, the more they avoided thinking and talking about problems they encountered. These findings also explained that using this coping strategy could be a sign that individuals have not come to terms with their problems. Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) found that escape-avoidance is significantly related to higher levels of stress, but also that the more stress a person encounters the more likely the person is to use escape-avoidance. In relation specifically to adoption, researchers (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002) noted that escape-avoidance coping behavior often leads to problems related to adjusting.

The correlation test showed that communication satisfaction was significantly and inversely correlated with escape-avoidance. This finding suggests that a good social worker might help parents with positive coping strategies; therefore, increased communication satisfaction could lead to less use of escape-avoidance.

After analyzing the qualitative results, a new research question (RQ2a and b) was proposed in order to understand the impact that the adoption of special needs or “at-risk”
children has on problems related to home and work life adjustment and parental difficulty adjustment. An analysis of RQ2a showed a significant relationship between the designation of special needs or “at-risk” and problems related to home and work life adjustment, but there was not a significant relationship with problems related to parental difficulty adjustment. In the analysis, special needs and “at-risk” designation was more highly correlated with problems related to home and work life adjustment than were communication satisfaction and coping strategies. The items comprising the home and work life adjustment scale included the following: “marital problems and irritability toward spouse” “financial pressures,” “not being able to work,” “interference from relatives and in-laws,” and “worry over leaving your child with a sitter.” All of these components are sensitive topics and could be related to how parents might handle a child being special needs or considered “at-risk.” For example, adoptive parents of special needs children would likely find it hard to leave their child with a babysitter because of the different type of care that the child may need. Similarly, with the differences that a special needs child might bring to a family, parents could likely have a harder time getting along and would also have more issues related to finances.

Other researchers have noted similar findings related to special needs and “at-risk” children. For example, a study of special needs/”at-risk” children, parents admitted that they were so focused on their adopted children that they ignored the needs of their spouses (Baskin, Rhody, Schoolmeesters, & Ellingson, 2011). Other researchers that have looked at family adjustment and special needs children with interesting results: Schweiger and O’Brien (2005) noted a link between spousal support and family functioning for families with special needs adopted children. They also noted decline in marital satisfaction and
challenges in balancing new roles after adopting a child. Researchers Perry and Henry (2009) have also found that a poor marital relationship is often considered unsupportive and can act as an added stressor that will exhaust other resources. Also, marital relationships can be disrupted by stressful events, which then leads to reduced spousal support. Arguably, the findings from this study and previous studies may demonstrate that stress and coping theory might be more accurate for parents who adopt children with special needs or are considered “at-risk.”

Practical Implications

The findings of this study, suggest several practical ideas that might prove helpful for adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and adoption communication scholars. The findings from H1, that communication satisfaction and problems related to home and work life adjustment were significantly correlated, suggest that researchers need to examine the interactions between social workers and adoptive parents. Researchers might examine, for example, how social workers are trained with reference to adoption related issues and also how they are trained to interact with parents. Social workers should to be trained to conduct a realistic appraisal of adoptive parents during their communicative encounters. If social workers are able to help adoptive parents through communicative encounters, it is likely that adoptive parents might feel satisfied with their communication with social workers and communication could continue to improve.

The results from H2a and b, have several implications for the relationship between communication satisfaction, adjustment, and coping strategies. Since the relationship between communication satisfaction and adjustment were insignificant once coping strategies were factored in, it is important to consider the role of the social worker and the
communication related to coping strategies because they are a logical source for helping parents understand coping strategies. Social workers could provide a needed service in their area of expertise and be diligent in understanding worries or difficulties that adoptive parents are facing and in turn, present the parents with recourses for positive coping strategies. Specifically, adoption agencies could hold workshops that address common issues faced by adoptive families with suggestions of overcoming problems with positive coping. Another important aspect in improving the relationship with communication satisfaction and adjustment related to coping strategies is for adoption agencies to offer as much pre- and post-adoption support as possible, perhaps even pairing new adoptive families with more experienced adoptive families in order for parents to have an example and to create realistic expectations about what to expect through the post-adoption adjustment period.

As seen from the results associated with H2a and b, coping strategies have a large impact on adjustment for adoptive families. The analysis of the data associated with RQ1a and b revealed that the coping strategy escape-avoidance has a significant impact on problems related to parental difficulty adjustment. Since researchers have found that using negative coping strategies, such as escape-avoidance, leads to problems related to adjustment (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005; Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002), adoption agencies, again, need to prepare adoptive parents in a way that allows them to use positive coping strategies in order to adjust in a more positive manner. Other adoption researchers (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007; McDonald et al., 2001; McKay, Ross, & Goldberg, 2010; Monck & Rushton, 2009; Wind et al., 2007) have argued that adoptive parents need just as much pre-adoption support as they do post-adoption support. With pre-adoption support parents
could learn about possible issues they may encounter as well as coping strategies; with post-adoption support, parents that cope negatively could benefit from support groups, counseling, and/or therapy in order to encourage more positive adjustment and coping.

As noted earlier, a new research question was proposed as a result of the analysis and qualitative responses from the survey. RQ2a and b examined how the designation of the adopted child as special needs or “at-risk” influenced problems related to adjustment. The analysis of the data showed that this classification has a significant impact on problems related to home and work life adjustment.

Several responses from parents that took part in the survey explain this finding and also suggest topics of education and advice that social workers and adoption agencies could consider. One adoptive mother explained, “The biggest disagreement was with money and how we could afford to adopt and the potential problems once we brought [our child] home relating to money, the cost of therapy and doctor appointments, etc.” Adoptive parents with special needs or “at-risk” children need to have realistic expectations about the cost of taking care of their child and how financial issues can be a part of difficulties for home and work life adjustment. Another area of concern for adoptive parents and special needs children is understanding how to care for their children and knowing to expect the unexpected, such as not knowing the background of the adopted child. Another mother wrote:

Our youngest was born addicted to cocaine. We have not had disagreements per se but it is a lot of handle in the first years of life. Trying to find the best resources for your child is always stressful but when you don’t have definitive answers about the pregnancy and delivery of your child it can be hard.
Similarly, another mother wrote:

We talked about most of things beforehand, but like in most relationships, unexpected things come up. One of our children was very violent, because his mother drank when he was in her womb. Though we didn't want to send him away, eventually we had no choice.

As noted with positive coping and adjustment, pre- and post-adoption support is an important part of successful family adjustment. Reilly and Platz (2004) suggested the lack of formal and information resources for families that adopted special needs children caused significant stress and impacted the success of the adoption. Researchers (Schweiger & O'Brien, 2005) also found a link between spousal support and family functioning for families with special needs adopted children. Specifically, they noted decline in participants’ marital satisfaction and challenges balancing their new role after adopting a special needs child.

The findings from the present study and previous research help explain the importance of education and support for adoptive parents in order to encourage successful post-adoption adjustment, especially with problems related to home and work life adjustment. This information could also be included as part of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ “Minimum Standards for Child-Placing Agencies” regarding the regulations for social workers to give education and training on children with special needs. The findings of this study suggest that the pre-adoption communication between social workers and parents is either ineffectual or non-impactful and does not reach its potential in facilitating adoption adjustment. Thus, changes in social worker-adoptive parent communication in Texas should to be examined. Adoption agencies and social
workers should understand that special needs and “at-risk” children pose special
challenges, and the impact these specific classifications have on adjustment in order to help
families in ways that are most beneficial. These challenges can only be met if social
workers are trained properly and adoption agencies have the resources and education that
parents need.

Limitations

There are several limitations for this study. First, the sample size for this study was
small for quantitative results, which limits its statistical power. When sample sizes are
small, it is more challenging to find differences amongst variables, which reduces the
chances for relationships to be identified (Reinard, 2001). In addition to the overall small
sample size, many of demographic variables were underrepresented. The majority of
participants were white, affluent families. Expanding the research to a more diverse
population could offer valuable insight into complexities of adoption such as multi-racial
families or minority families. The length of time since the finalization of the adoption could
also be seen as a limitation. Because of the changes to adoption practices over the past few
decades, parents that reported the finalization of their adoption was greater than 10 years
(10%) likely had social worker interactions that were not as relevant or memorable as
those whose adoption had been finalized for less than five years (79%). For more accurate
information about the impact of pre-adoption communication with social workers,
researchers should study adoptive families within a 2-year window following the
finalization of the adoption before the new parents can settle into their own ways of
parenting.
The results from the Ways of Coping Questionnaire represent another limitation. The original questionnaire produced eight coping strategies in other studies; in this study only three of the coping strategies had high enough reliability to be used. Therefore, the scale had to be reduced and important types of coping, such as confrontive coping, self-controlling, seeking social support, distancing, and accepting responsibility, could not be taken into consideration.

Directions for Future Research

In future studies of pre-adoption communication and post-adoption family adjustment, researchers should consider the following suggestions. First, researchers should study couples instead of individuals. Understanding the likeness or dissimilarities between how the husband and wife cope and adjust to difficulties with the adoption process could prove beneficial to adoption agencies or counselors in understanding how to help with these differences in a relationship. Further, studying communication between couples will help scholars and adoption agencies understand how to counsel couples in the pre-adoption stages. Future researchers should also include participants other than heterosexual couples; single adoptive parents who have less social support, as well as same-sex couples who contend with societal stigma could provide other significant perspectives. For example, the studies that look at the transition to parenthood have not compared relationship trajectories of heterosexual versus same-sex couples (Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010). Therefore, including these groups could provide insight into how different family types affect adoption communication with post-adoption family adjustment.
Future researchers should also explore parental communication and interaction differences between parents with biological children and adopted children from the same family. In a qualitative survey response, one mother explained:

I recently had a disagreement with my husband about his unwillingness to share the responsibility of issuing consequences for negative behavior displayed at times by our adopted daughter...with our biological children, this isn’t the case. He is an active participant in teaching right from wrong. I am concerned his lack of action and emotion is a sign he isn’t emotionally invested in our adopted child.

Another mother wrote:

My husband tends to raise his voice and we have had a disagreement on this not being appropriate due to the fact that they came from an abusive home. Although my husband may raise his voice with his biological children these kids have to be disciplined differently.

The responses of adoptive parents about different interactions with biological and adopted children suggest that communication variances in adoptive families might be a fruitful avenue for research, as well as how these differences impact both biological and adopted children.

Additional research on adoption agencies’ support and educational systems as well as social worker training about adoption and home-studies would be beneficial in order to understand what information is communicated to adoptive parents and how it is communicated. Researchers could gain valuable information by following social workers and doing a content analysis to learn how these interactions take place and the strengths and weaknesses of such interactions. Finally, a longitudinal study of pre-adoption
communication and post-adoption adjustment would be helpful in understanding how family adjustment changes over time. This type of study would also be helpful for understanding what problems are resolved as well as those that get exacerbated over time.

**Conclusion**

In this study, pre-adoption communication satisfaction between parents and social workers was measured in order to see whether and how parent’s perception of pre-adoption communication influenced post-adoption adjustment. Post-adoption adjustment was also examined by measuring common coping strategies that adoptive parents use to deal with difficulties they encounter as new parents. These variables were examined through stress and coping theory. Stress and coping theory is a useful framework for examining issues that adoptive parents encounter because the theory suggests that as adoptive parents encounter stressful situations they use either positive or negative coping strategies to deal with the issues they face.

Through this study I found that communication satisfaction was positively correlated with family adjustment during the post-adoption period. Although this finding is important, I also found that when coping strategies are measured, the relationship between communication satisfaction and post-adoption family adjustment becomes insignificant. These findings suggest mixed support for Hs 1 and 2. The coping strategy that has the most influence on post-adoption family adjustment is escape-avoidance. This negative coping strategy is negatively related to family adjustment therefore; the more that parents use escape-avoidance the less they are able to adjust in the post-adoption period. These findings are important for adoptive parents and adoption agencies to consider.
because parents need to use positive coping strategies in order to have successful family functioning.

Through the remainder of the study I looked at the influence that the designation of special needs or “at-risk” has on adoptive family adjustment. The results from the ANOVA test showed that this classification of adopted children negatively influenced home and work life adjustment. This finding supports previous research related to family adjustment and special needs adopted children. This finding also relates to previous research suggesting adoptive parents need greater pre- and post-adoption support in the form of support groups or counseling to understand how to deal with the needs of a special needs child and also to learn how to cope with stressful situations.

Although there are limitations to this exploratory study, it is important to understand that communication satisfaction does not influence post-adoption family adjustment as much as coping strategies or special needs related to the adopted child. Further research could help adoption agencies and adoptive parents know how to communicate with parents regarding coping strategies for family adjustment and special needs of adopted children in order to lead parents toward a successful adoption and well-adjusted family.
APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE
I am a graduate student at the University of North Texas (UNT) in the Communication Studies Department and this questionnaire is part of my research project for my Master’s thesis. This study is aimed at understanding communication between adoptive parents and adoption agency social workers and coping strategies that are used by adoptive parents as they adjust to being a parent to a newly adopted child. In this questionnaire, I begin with demographic information. Next, I ask you to describe a disagreement or conversation with your spouse in regards to raising your adopted child and answer a series of questions in response to that disagreement or conversation. You will also be asked to answer questions about the communication between you and your adoption agency social worker (the term social worker refers to the person who conducted your home studies), and finally, reflect on how prepared you felt to adjust to a new routine after adopting your child.

It is important that the information provided is factual. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (940-565-3940).

Participation in this project is voluntary. Your answers will be treated confidentially and your name will not be used. In fact, it is requested that you write no names on the survey. Although it is important to have all questions answered, you may decline to answer specific questions. If you would like to enter your name into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card for those who have participated in the study, please indicate so on the online survey. Also, you may at any time decide not to complete or return this survey. Most people will take about 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire. If you wish to add comments to your answers, you may use the margins or the last page to do so. If you have any questions about this questionnaire or any other portion of our research project, please contact me at the email or phone number listed below.

NOTE: This survey is a two-sided copy.

Thanks for your help!
Demographic Information:

To begin this questionnaire, please take a couple of minutes to answer some background, demographic information about your adoption and your family. *If you have more than one adopted child, please answer the questions considering your most recent adoption.

Number of years since the finalization of your most recent adoption __________
Number of biological children ________  Number of adopted children ________
Does your adopted child have any special needs (medical, physical, or emotional disabilities or considered “at-risk”)? _____ YES _____ NO
Your Race: Caucasian  African American  Hispanic  Asian  Other_________
Your spouse’s race: Caucasian  African American  Hispanic  Asian  Other_________
Total household income level of adoptive parents:
______ Less than $20,000
______ $20,000 – $39,000
______ $40,000 – $59,000
______ $60,000 – $79,000
______ $80,000 – $99,000
______ $100,000 or above
This study is interested in understanding parental adjustment to adoption. The following questions will help me gain a better understanding of how adoptive parents adapt to family changes during and after the process of adopting a child.

*Briefly describe a disagreement you had with your spouse in relation to raising your adopted child (if you have more than one adopted child, think about an encounter regarding your child that was most recently adopted), where it took place, what happened, and who was involved. If you cannot recall a disagreement, please think of a communication interaction that you had with your spouse about raising your adopted child.*

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

*In reference to the incident above, please read each item below and indicate to what extent you used each item in the situation you have just described:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Used</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Used Quite</th>
<th>Used A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ______ I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice
- ______ I came out of the experience better than when I went in
- ______ I changed or grew as a person in a good way
- ______ I criticized or lectured myself
- ______ I didn't let it get to me; refused to think too much about it
- ______ I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem
- ______ I found new faith
- ______ I had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out
- ______ I hoped a miracle would happen
- ______ I just concentrated on what I had to do next – the next step
I kept other from knowing how bad things were
I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work
I made a plan of action and followed it
I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time
I made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it
I realized I brought the problem on myself
I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted
I talked to someone to find out more about the situation
I talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem
I tried not to burn my bridges, but leave things open somewhat
I tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind
I tried to keep my feelings to myself
I went on as if nothing had happened
I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with

Next, reflect back on all of the conversations you had with your social worker or the adoption agency itself and respond to the following questions using the scale provided. If you had contact with more than one social worker, please answer the questions based on the social worker you had the most contact with.

Extent to which my social worker knew and understood the issues faced by adoptive parents
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which my social worker listened and paid attention to me
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which my social worker offered guidance for solving adoption related issues
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which my social worker’s communications were interesting and helpful
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which my social worker trusted me
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which conflicts are handled appropriately through proper communication channels
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied 1                2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which my social worker was open to ideas
Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied
Extent to which our meetings are well organized
Very Dissatisfied       Very Satisfied
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which the attitudes toward communication with my social worker were basically healthy
Very Dissatisfied       Very Satisfied
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Extent to which the amount of communication between my social worker and me was about right
Very Dissatisfied       Very Satisfied
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Please indicate the amount of communication you received from your adoption agency or social worker on the following subjects:

Developmental and medical issues that your child could face
None          Great Deal
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Psychological issues that your child could face
None          Great Deal
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Behavioral and educational issues that your child could face
None          Great Deal
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Think about your adjustment to being a parent after your most recent adoption. Please read the following items and rate each item indicating how well prepared you felt.

Love and attachment that is felt for your child
Not prepared at all       Fully prepared
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Lack of sleep and energy
Not prepared at all       Fully prepared
1               2               3               4               5               6               7

Time and responsibility involved in caretaking for your child
Not prepared at all       Fully prepared
1               2               3               4               5               6               7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not prepared at all</th>
<th>Fully prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty involved in getting out and going places</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in getting used to your child’s schedule</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being able to work</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry over leaving your child with a sitter</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to doing your spouse’s chores</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference from relatives and in-laws</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra work required by your child and difficulty in finding the time to do it</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what to do when your child cries or is sick</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of social life/time for self</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling time around your child</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time for spouse</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Not prepared at all</td>
<td>Fully prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial pressures</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5   6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting your child to sleep</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5   6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital problems and irritability toward spouse</td>
<td>1   2   3   4   5   6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


