My father is my sister's brother: A Relational Dialectics study of intrafamily adoption

by

Courtney Forehand

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University of Colorado Boulder

College of Media, Communication, and Information

Thesis Committee:

Cindy H. White | Thesis Advisor | Department of Communication

Robert Wyrod | Department of Women & Gender Studies

Lori L. Poole | Department of Communication

## *Table of Contents*

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## Abstract

One underexplored category of adoption is intrafamily adoption, which occurs when an adult adopts a child who is also a relative. Using a relational dialectics theory framework, this study examined online posts from 40 intrafamily adoptive families to identify communicative tensions and struggles within the family following the adoption. This project explored how these tensions and struggles were expressed in the process of becoming an intrafamily adoptive family and how intrafamily adoptive families navigate their new familial roles following the adoption. This study found discourses of dynamic relating and familial inclusivity to be discourses intrafamily adoptive families use to guide their process of determining their family identity. The process of intrafamily adoption is difficult and challenging for the family unit, this project explored the communicative tensions within the family.

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## Chapter 1:  Literature Review and Rationale

**Introduction**

In my bar hopping days, my sister and I had a game we played with fellow bar patrons. We would say "we are sisters, but her dad is my grandfather" or "my dad is her brother." Our new friends would never understand, their intoxication level probably a factor. Despite our appearances, we really are biological sisters—we were both created by the same people. Although I was raised by my biological parents, my sister was adopted and raised by my grandparents. The adoption was never a secret within our family. I knew from an early age she was my sister, but I also knew she was a special or different kind of sister than normal. I always found it troubling when my parents would tell me she could not come home with us because she had to stay with her mommy and daddy at her house. "Why can't she come, she is my sister, isn't she?" I would ask. Of course, I did not understand. If she cannot come, how come my brother is allowed to? "Can't he stay, and she come with us?" was usually one of my last failed efforts to change my parent's minds.

Today, we are adults and we talk regularly. When my sister and I talk about our family, the conversation is unique; when she says, "my Dad," I say "Pawpaw," whereas "her Mom" is "Memaw" to me. Yet we understand who we are referring to and understand who the person is in relation to us individually. We understand the roles family members played in our lives was different, my aunts and uncles are her much older siblings whom she has an altogether different relationship with compared to my brother and me.

One day I asked her to describe growing up with different parents and what it felt like as an outlier of what families should represent. She described growing up with fear because her parents were significantly older than her school friend's parents. She said, "family isn't always blood," and although she did not have a blood relationship with her mom, it felt like her mom "because the love she had for me was so strong." But for her, growing up with two people taking care of "a child that wasn't theirs and rais[ing] and lov[ing] that child as their own. I couldn't tell the difference. It was all I knew, and to this day I KNOW they weren't my parents, but they feel like it."

The unique form of adoption experienced families who adopt children from within their own family is known as intrafamily adoption. This adoption process is one where an aunt adopts their niece or nephew, or a grandparent adopts their grandchild or any other adoption of a family member within the family itself. Becoming an intrafamily adoptive family like mine is not be an easy process, and this paper will focus on how these kinds of families create an identity following the process of adopting a relative child and how these family members represent and find their new familial roles. To begin, this paper will explore legislation enacted (or lack thereof) to help intrafamily adoptive families and how families create a sense of meaning through different defining characteristics of family. Further, this paper will examine how families from different forms of adoption have created their family identity, especially for outsiders.

**Literature Review**

Adoption, a prevalent phenomenon in our society, comes in many different forms: domestic versus international, closed versus open, foster into adoption, and state versus private agencies (Suter, Baxter, Suerer & Thomas, 2014; Types of Adoptions, 2013). Research on

adoption has examined topics such as the decision to adopt (Raphel, 2008), the struggle adoptive

parents face when creating their family identity (Harrigan, 2009; Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010;

Norwood & Baxter, 2011; Suter et al., 2014), and the process for the family system integrating a

new family member (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). However, there is a different form of adoption

many scholars have failed to examine in prior research: intrafamily adoption. Intrafamily

adoption occurs when someone adopts a family member and goes by many names, including

kinship adoption and interfamily adoption (CWLA Blog, n.d.; Generations United, 2017). When

grandparents adopt their grandchild, it can also be known as a grandfamily or sometimes a

second family (Generations United, 2017). The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA Blog,

n.d.) refers to the care of children by family members like grandparents, aunts/uncles, or older

siblings as kinship adoption. The CWLA also defines adoption as being informal (the child

living with the family member without custodial agreements or services) and formal (the child

living with the family member with custodial agreements and services). The prefix inter pertains

to being among or between an open group, but intra is used as a prefix for representing within a

closed group, in this case within a family unit. For this paper, intrafamily adoption will be used

to reference the phenomenon of a child being formally adopted and cared for by a family

member.

        **Legislation, Policy and Intrafamily Adoption.** According to Civic Impulse (2017),

there has been minimal legislation enacted to help adoptive families, in particular intrafamily

adoptions. This lack of legislation contributes to many adoptive families need of financial

assistance, information, and a sense of community (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016; Brooks, 2002;

Woodworth, 1996). Of the limited federal legislation introduced, the most recent is the Fostering

Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (referred to as the Fostering

Connections Act from here out). The Fostering Connections Act provides financial support from federally funded state agencies for adoptive parents until the child turns 21, depending on specific circumstances like enrollment in a college or university and/or working at least 80 hours a month (Civic Impulse, 2017). This act required states to put adequate effort into keeping siblings together and allowed relatives who adopted family members to receive financial services (Civic Impulse, 2017). However, intrafamily adoptions are not specifically addressed, leaving these types of families often struggling to find assistance if needed.

Even legislation designed to help adoptive families may not adequately consider the needs of intrafamily adoptive families. Suter et al. (2005) stated agencies prefer to place the adoptive child with a relative as long as the relative's home and life provided stability and safety for the child. However, these families may be ineligible for financial support and other services even though other forms of foster care and adoption receive support from federal and state legislation. In California, Berrick and Hernandez (2016) found evidence to claim policy support shifting in the direction of favoring intrafamily adoptive parents by providing financial support and services to families caring for their relative child. Unfortunately, inconsistencies in the care recommendations in these policies led policymakers to assume each family's needs were the same without considering individual family's situation, and therefore did not create a policy outlining adequate needs of these families.

It has also been argued shifting the rules could help realign support provided to intrafamily adoptive families (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). To learn more about options available to caregivers and the children placed into their care, Berrick and Hernandez studied mediated, mandated, and independent kinship care. According to their research, of the children adopted in 2000, one in five of those children were involved in an intrafamily adoption (Berrick

& Hernandez, 2016). They found children involved in intrafamily adoption are more susceptible to vulnerabilities such as less support and fewer services compared to their peers in foster care or adopted through agencies, which may stem from the adoptive parents facing vulnerabilities as well (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). Often, these vulnerabilities are either health ailments or the inability to adequately prepare for taking a child in before the child's placement in their care. The authors also found support from the foster care agency depended on how the child came into the relative's care; if a voluntary placement agreement occurred, the relatives usually remained eligible for foster care support thus helping intrafamily adoptive parents and children (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). Thus, some states have taken steps to recognize and support intrafamily adoptive families, but these steps are not working to support these families the way they need to be supported. In terms of intrafamily adoption, studying their demographics and socio-economic status could provide more information to initiate legislative policies to give these families the help they need.

   As noted above, California's move to support intrafamily seems a move in the right direction, and similar changes in Illinois also address this family situation.  Illinois which has one of the highest percentages of intrafamily adoption, received permission to create guardianship programs (Brooks, 2002). In Illinois, waivers from the federal government provide relatives who care for a child with the same financial support foster parents would receive as long as a few conditions are met.  These include the following: (a) the child will not return to the care of their birth parents, (b) the child has been in the foster system for a minimum of two years, (c) has lived with the relative for a year, and (d) the child is attached to the relative (Brooks, 2002).

Colorado also established an initiative in El Paso County basing financial support and services families receive on the amount determined by the family providing the care (Brooks, 2002). In other words, the amount of support a family receives in that state correlates to the additional amount of money the family expects to spend on care for the child. For Brooks (2002), change is possible when our perception and ideology adjusts to allow families who undertake intrafamily adoption a place in the community. Instead of reinforcing past policies, extending practices to include the possibility of children finding a new home with their relatives could provide different outcomes. Because adoptive parents and social professionals collaborate on the care of the adopted child, making professionals and caregivers more aware of the support available by sharing the information could provide a more collaborative care unit for the child. This shift in community perception is important to intrafamily adoptive families because it allows the opportunity to keep the family together, and Brooks (2002) found an increase in family members willingness to adopt their relative if subsidized support is available.

Recognition of intrafamily adoption cases in legislation is beneficial to intrafamily adoptive families, but more states need to recognize this phenomenon. Although California, Illinois, and a specific county in Colorado have sought to better address the needs of intrafamily care situations, for many families, there is still a sense of being left behind by agencies. Raphel (2008) and Tarrant, Featherstone, O'Dell, and Fraser (2017) all concluded that agencies typically stop assisting a family after placing the relative child in their care. Raphel (2008) identified the difficulties grandparents face when they adopt their grandchild, one of which is the lack of government support upon taking the child in. For instance, Raphel found relatives who care for their kin are likely to receive less financial support, compared to foster parents, and they may not receive any support. According to Raphel's study, local agencies do not have a system in place

for recognizing or assisting families who are the caregivers to their relatives. In fact, Raphel discovered children whose caregivers are relatives tend to spend more time with the family, moving fewer times. This implication typically results in the family caregiver feeling as if they or the child had been forgotten by the social worker.

   ***Grandparents as caregivers.*** With an increase in grandparents as primary caregivers to grandchildren, Woodworth (1996) concluded when they do take on the parenting toll, it comes at a significant cost to themselves. In her research, Woodworth explored the difficulties adoptive grandparents face after transitioning to caregivers of their grandchild and what outlets of assistance are available for this type of family. Woodworth's research examined the grandparents contacting the Grandparent Information Center, many of whom are on a fixed income when they take on the responsibility of raising their grandchild are on a fixed income. Through her research, Woodworth discovered most grandparents do not know what type of assistance is available, nor where to begin trying to find assistance. The lack of information for grandparents caring for their grandchild has become widespread, causing these grandparents to struggle because they cannot find similar people to share their experiences. Some grandparents turned to caregivers seek support groups; these grandparents are seeking other older individuals starting a second family and struggling to construct their family identity and roles as caregivers to their grandchildren. The need for support partly occurs because their experience may contradict what other, first-time parents experience when raising their child.

   Woodworth (1996) also explored the legality of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Her research claimed not all grandparents have legally adopted their grandchild, which can lead to difficulties in grandparents trying to enroll their grandchild in school or obtaining health benefits for their grandchild (Woodworth, 1996). While the decision to achieve legal custody of

a grandchild is considered an individual choice, Woodworth claimed there are a majority of grandparents were living on a fixed income, and their inquiries to the Grandparent Information Center sought information about, and requirements needed to receive financial support to assist them in raising their grandchild. It is important to note financial troubles for these intrafamily adoptive seeking families did not go away upon finalizing the adoption. For many grandparents, especially those on a fixed income, caring for a child is a cost they cannot provide. Providing legislation to support intrafamily adoptive families could help ease some of the pressure and difficulties these elderly caregivers already experience.

However, not all grandparents want to make caring for their grandchild a permanent solution because they want to fill a temporary parent role until the bio-parent becomes more stable. This was also found or able to be true for other relatives caring for children. take on the parenting role. Nonetheless, adopting a relative can have its boundaries (Bramlett & Radel, 2017). In a study of children in non-parental care—children living with people closely tied to the family (relative, godparents, and so forth)—Bramlett and Radel found relatives are less likely to adopt. Their study collected data from two separate national surveys—the National Center for Health Statistics, the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health and the 2013 National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care—to find children not living with their biological parent. Upon identifying those households, Bramlett and Radel examined caregivers who had considered adoption, with and without plan to adopt the child, and families who had finalized adopting the child in relation to those who had not considered adoption, as well as caregivers who had finalized adoption. Their study identified factors contributing to a family member's consideration of adoption but without a current plan of following the process through. Some of the critical elements that led to a decision not to adopt were foster care status of children in non-kin care,

difficulties in getting information about the adoption, and the child's ADHD diagnosis. When examining families who were planning to adopt a relative child, factors that put adoptive parents at a higher chance of adoption included the special health care needs of the child, lower education level of the household considering the adoption, and relative's understanding of the child. Finally, Bramlett and Radel (2017) found families who had already adopted the child considered the child's involvement with child protective services when making the decision to adopt the child.

Importantly, the child's age factored into the decision-making process. However, the birth parents' reluctance to surrender their parental rights or the family member caring for the child objecting because the birth parents still played a role in the child's life was also a significant factor in the decision-making process of adopting kin relative children (Bramlett & Radel, 2017). Results showed the plan to adopt is less likely among poorer households and more likely among educated families, but this finding is only relevant to the idea of adoption but not the actual adoption process itself. Their research concluded that there are many reasons relatives did not want to adopt, including wanting to avoid situations within the family that would make the bio-parent feel as if family had given up on them. In all, Bramlett and Radel claimed adoption is less likely if the caregiver is a relative, but there are many other factors unique to the family and situation attributing to reasons behind the adoption. When added to the concerns of intrafamily adoption, all these factors are additional layers to this unique family system, making it worthy of study and consideration because this research shows that not every family is willing to take on the care needs of their relative. Further, although all these factors were important, it is useful to note that the relationship with extended family members complicated the decision of adoption.

The lack of support and recognition provided to intrafamily adoptive families is not only an American phenomenon, but one with international implications. Tarrant et al. (2017) also noted a systemic failure in the United Kingdom in providing financial support and resources to relative caregivers. Their research studied a registered charity that provided connections between relatives and caregivers with children's services in Wales and England (Tarrant et al., 2017). All of the participants in their research study were chosen because they contacted the charity due to being dissatisfied with their experiences with child services; however, the limits of this study did not extend the research process to social workers or professionals.

As stated, one primary group involved in intrafamily caregiving and adoption is grandparents. This group of scholars claimed when acting as a caregiver, grandparents were often asked to demonstrate their worthiness to agency professionals (Tarrant et al., 2017). Because of this and a lack of support received from government and agency professionals, grandparents often faced additional levels of stress and turned to other agencies or charities to find the proper resources to engage with the welfare system. Many grandparents face the burden of deciding to adopt their grandchild or allowing them to go into the foster system, sometimes aware of the hardships ahead and how it could implicate family relations. For the grandparents who decided to adopt their grandchild, most felt as if agencies would typically assume their willingness to take on the responsibility of the child without support (Tarrant et al., 2017). The evidence from this study suggests grandparents desire to maintain a relationship with their grandchild and not allow the child to enter into the foster system. However, it goes on to they argue that oversight from legislation and the welfare system makes it difficult for grandparents to continue care for their relative child, which may also be the case in the intrafamily adoptive families from this current study.

Another issue grandparents face when deciding to adopt their grandchild is how the adoption of a grandchild will reshape the family dynamics and relationships (Hinterlong & Ryan, 2008). Hinterlong and Ryan (2008) studied families of adoption with an older-adult as the head of the family. Their research extended to families under formal and informal care arrangements: Grandparents raising their grandchild, kin adopting kin, and kinship care (Hinterlong & Ryan, 2008). Their research collected data from the Florida Adoption Project to determine the aspects of the older adoptive parents and the children, the relationship before the adoption, and to determine the attributes of the relationship between the adoptive parents and characteristics of the relationship between the family and the adoptive kin (Hinterlong & Ryan, 2008). Hinterlong and Ryan found adoptive parents in kin adoptive families made less than those adoptive parents in non-kin adoptive families, fewer kin adoptive families reported marriage, and kin adoptive parents on average had fewer children than non-kin adoptive parents. Among the characteristics noted about the child, Hinterlong and Ryan found adopted children (by kin or non-kin), were usually placed in the care of an adult around the same age as other children placed into care with their relatives. Kin adoptive parents reported enthusiasm for repeating the adoption process if given the opportunity, even though the adoption of the child caused issues within their family and impacted the relationships within the family (Hinterlong & Ryan, 2008). Hinterlong and Ryan concluded the adoption of grandchildren and creation of grandfamilies (or intrafamily adoptive families) is positive for the child, and while it entails difficulties, it is often the best option for providing the best care and support for the child.

Many other factors may contribute to a grandparent or relative's decision about the adoption of a family member, and financial considerations seem to be essential. In their research, Hinterlong and Ryan (2008) claimed an adoptive parent's education level and the family poverty

level are important factors in becoming a kin adoptive family. Bramlett and Radel (2017) also noted a relative's financial and educational background contribute to the adoption decision. Berrick and Hernandez (2016) stated family caregivers are more likely to be in poverty, single, and have a low level of education, sometimes not having obtained a diploma from high school. Although Hinterlong and Ryan found parents who adopted a family member would do it again without hesitation, their financial situation and the impact on family identity and functionality after the adoption played a part in their decision. Woodworth (1996) claimed grandparents caring for their grandchild comes at a significant financial and familial burden for the grandparents; however, Brooks, (2002) noted once presented with the opportunity for relatives to initiate the intrafamily adoption process instead of maintaining their guardianship, intrafamily adoption in Illinois rose to 60 percent. However, willingness to adopt does not mean families will find the process of creating new working relationships and defining their family roles easy.

**Meaning of Family.** Prior research has focused on discovering the meaning of family and how families create their identity for others (Baxter & Pederson, 2013; Kellas, 2005; Holtzman, 2008). Although this research has not focused specifically on intrafamily adoption, it is relevant to understanding how family identity is enacted and managed. One issue this paper seeks to address is the importance of the meaning of family, given that cultural meaning of family may not align with the nature and experience of intrafamily adoptive families.

Baxter and Pederson (2013) examined the relationship between family communication and satisfaction. Their research focused on two features of family communication patterns: ideal family communication patterns and perceived family communication patterns (Baxter & Pederson, 2013). To understand the relationship between perceived and ideal family communication patterns, the relationship between parents and their college-aged child was

studied via a survey administered to college students and their parents. The authors analyzed

differences between a parent and their child in perceived and ideal communication patterns and

the unmet ideals of the communication patterns, finding parents reported higher perceived and

ideal patterns of communication than college-aged children (Baxter & Pederson, 2013). Baxter

and Pederson found families rely heavily on their communication patterns to predict the level of

ideal and perceived norms in family satisfaction, noting family satisfaction leads to the family

identity. Family satisfaction is important to consider in adoptive family's construction of their

identity as well. In adoptive families, the process of sharing entrance stories within the family

could determine how deep of a connection the adopted child feels with their adopted family.

Holtzman (2008) considered how families create their identity based on societal, cultural,

and family influences. In her research, Holtzman wanted to understand how the traditional

definition of a family either competes with, complements, or coexists with the socially-accepted

definition of alternative forms of family. Holtzman was also interested in discovering how

parents reinforced the bond and interpretation of family they described with their child.

Holtzman's researched consisted of an in-class assignment asking participants to write a paper

about their decisions in a hypothetical scenario where they learned the hospital had accidentally

switched their child at birth, and their decision to getting back their biological child or continuing

to raise the child they had parented as their own for the past year. She found that some

participants invoked a traditional view of family, which has been defined as a family with

biological children and one wife and husband as parents. Other participants relied on a cultural

definition of family, which has had a shifting meaning over the last years to include stepfamilies,

divorced families, cohabitating families, gay and lesbian parented families, and social

relationships that are developed through shared experiences and time spent together. Further,

Holtzman determined these definitions coexist; the definitions were typically simultaneously used by the participants, even though in the end, one definition would be favored over the other.

Additionally, when describing their decision about parenting, some participants were willing to share custody of the child, which Holtzman defined as a complementary definition of family. Other discourses used, represented by participants using only one definition of a family as the basis of their decision, she defined as a competitive definition (Holtzman, 2008). Holtzman (2008) declared it a competitive definition because participants use of only one definition assuming biological or social relationships as a family resulted in a discourse of winning and losing.

Further, Holtzman found that many students used vocabulary reinforcing the definition of a traditional family, one with biological ties, by using terms like "real." Further, she found gender roles influenced participants' understanding of what parenthood represented; women, for example, responded to a physical connection with the child (an example of a complementary discourse), and men responded using language demonstrating their biological ties and relationship to the child (an example of a competitive discourse).

Holtzman also found evidence that participants would acknowledge the relationship they had developed with the child and simultaneously extract themselves from those emotions and attachments. Although Holtzman found these participants upheld and preferred the traditional view of family, she concluded the definition of family has become fluid, something influenced by societal and cultural norms. Participants seemed to us both definitions simultaneously coexisting with the individual's definition of family. This dynamic definition of family is something participants would use in comparison to traditional definitions of family when trying to decide if they would want to have their biological child back or keep raising the child

accidently switched with at birth. All of this means both definitions co-exist in our culture and definitions of family may be changing in society. This comes into play when considering intrafamily adoption because intrafamily adoptive families are fulfilling both of these definitions as a family of biological ties and a family of adoption.

Additionally, research by Kellas (2005) concluded storytelling is essential for families in creating their family relationships and identity. In other words, a family identity can stem from experiences the family shares together and through creating a meaning of family specific to the relationship. Kellas studied how families either build or tear apart their family identity through joint storytelling efforts when stories families narrate together. Her research investigated the content of family communication and the process of the interaction (Kellas, 2005). Kellas's research examined whether themes in family storytelling can predict family adaptability, family functions, family cohesion, and family satisfaction. Kellas recorded family triads telling a family story together. She coded the themes of the stories and characteristics of the interaction, such as engagement and turn-taking. Her research concluded the process of joint storytelling and the content of the shared stories creates the family identity. The most important discursive factor to identity creation within joint storytelling efforts of families was the perspective members would take to explain their family because the perspective family members would take during storytelling led to high levels of family satisfaction and cohesion. The perspective a family member takes during the joint storytelling process is important because the perspective helps provide insight into the family and constructs the family narrative. This narrative further defines the identity of the family. However, with intrafamily adoptive families, storytelling can be difficult because of the history the family shares. When family members can happily relate a story cohesively, we can identify a jointly created family identity. However, not all families can

describe their family identity in such confident and cohesive ways. Adoptive families, for example, struggle with creating an identity because of their identity conflicting with cultural assumptions of how a family should be defined. It is this storytelling process that will need to be explored in this current study to determine if this sharing is part of how the meaning of family is determined within intrafamily adoptive families.

**Identity Struggles.** When a family adopts, creating a family identity can be difficult because U.S. cultural assumptions about family often focus on biological relatedness as central to family (Harrigan, 2009; Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010; Norwood & Baxter, 2011; Suter et al., 2014). Families may also struggle communicatively as they narrate and share their family story to others (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). The identity traditional families have developed and maintain collides with the identity adoptive families are trying to build and even more so with the identity of intrafamily adoptive families. For example, since societal preference for defining families is based on a biological connection to their child (Suter et al., 2014), adoptive parents might struggle to narrate their family identity to a part of the population. Research on adoptive families has noted the challenge adoptive families face recounting their history and their "creation," sometimes also considered as the child's placement into the care of their adoptive parents. For instance, Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) studied how adoptive parents share the story of their child's birth and adoption, and how the child became a part of the family in creating their family identity. Interested in discovering whether themes were present in adoptive parent's entrance narratives, Krusiewicz and Wood's interviewed adoptive parents about how the child came into their family and identified five themes adoptive parents use when creating and sharing their family narrative. Dialectical tensions were evident when adoptive parents simultaneously expressed feeling joy for their gain with feelings of pain for the birth parent's loss or when the

adoptive parent expressed to the child a sentiment of wanting the child, always being wanted, and not rejected or sacrificed (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001).

Other adoptive entrance narratives emphasized themes of destiny, indicating fate brought the child to the adoptive parents or divine intervention from higher powers. A compelling connection captured in entrance narratives when adoptive parents proclaimed love at first sight with the child or a search for a physical similarity with the child. The final two themes Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) identified were rescue and legitimacy. Rescue narratives described situations of removing the child from dangerous situations where birth parents did not provide adequate care to the child, and legitimacy narratives declared adoption as a form of family. Further, these narratives are part of a process for the adoptive parent and child to develop their family identity and find their place in society (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Narrating the entrance story of the child helps the family find an identity in our society and leads to a sense of belonging.  But this entrance story is different for intrafamily adoptions, which is yet another aspect of importance when looking at how these unique types of families struggle to form their identity.

As previously noted, most adoptive parents are eager to create family identities, and they may be called upon to narrate their family situation to others (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Harrigan and Braithwaite (2010) found when the parent and child have visibly different heritage traits, adoptive parents often struggle with creating a family narrative. Using relational dialectics theory as a conceptual framework, they interviewed 40 parents with a visible heritage difference from their adopted child. Harrigan and Braithwaite discovered one contradictory discourse adoptive parents might face when disclosing their adopted child's birthplace is pride in the home country where their adopted child is from, yet possible feelings of imperfection in the home

country leading the child to be adopted in another country. Parents of children from poverty-ridden nations, for example, try to stress the values and benefits of the child's home country while also trying to express to their adopted child those conditions are the reason for the child's adoption in the first place. Adoptive parents also wanted to create a narrative explaining the child had always been loved, but constraints like the home country's economy or laws prevented birth parents from caring for the baby, so the birth parents sacrificed their ability to raise the child by letting someone else, the adoptive parents, raise the child (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010). Harrigan and Braithwaite found adoptive parent's discursive contradictions of difference, pride, and enrichment incorporated into how adoptive parents create their family identity. Further, when adoptive parents construct their family identity, they argue for their family legitimacy by comparing similarities between their adoptive family with traditional families. When adoptive parents partake in this comparison, it further reinforces the cultural definition under the bases of traditional family centering on biological relatedness (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010). It is this need to create and explain relatedness that will be examined by looking at intrafamily adoptions.

Additionally, Harrigan (2009) found in visible adoption, adoptive parents try to find similarities between themselves and their adoptive child to accentuate during the construction of the family identity, sometimes ignoring noticeable differences. This study attempted to identify contradictions parents face when they start creating their family identity (Harrigan, 2009). Harrigan found parents want to manage the amount of information disclosed to others but doing so creates a tension between connecting with their community and seeking to maintain privacy and autonomy. For some adoptive parents, creating a family identity may be difficult. The adoptive parents wanted to respect the heritage of the adopted child, but they may also have wanted to highlight and accentuate the similarities between themselves. Harrigan also found

some adoptive parents were eager to share their story with strangers when they are prompted to share because some adoptive parents feel as if they are inviting the stranger into the adoption community. When conveying family identity, especially when the family includes adopted children, having a narrative to share with strangers is beneficial. Not only does the narrative help the adopted parents identify their adoptive family to outsiders, but it also helps the adoptive parent create the adopted child's sense of family and identity. Additionally, it helps the adoptive parent understand their position and new role as a parent in the adoptive world. Harrigan noted the need for future scholars to study communicative contradictions between adoptive parents and family members, something this paper aims to consider by reviewing intrafamily adoption.

Suter et al. (2014) noted the difficulties foster adoptive parents face in creating their family identity: The discourses used in society still emphasize family as defined by biological ties. Within the construction of adoptive family identity, adoptive parents' act of creating a narrative for outsiders is a way to develop their family identity, and this construction they create to share with others is something adoptive parents try to uphold within their family (Suter et al., 2014). Suter et al. examined blog entries of foster adoptive parents creating their identity online. Using a framework of relational dialectics theory, they wanted to know which discourses adoptive parents use in their online narratives to construct their meaning of family. They found two discourse patterns adoptive parents use when creating their narrative: the discourse of constitutive kinning and biological normativity. The discourse of biological normativity claims families with biological relations are true families, whereas the discourse of constitutive kinning is a family identity constructed through shared experiences and interactions. Their analysis noted the interplay between these discourses family in the way foster adoptive parents positioned their family experiences and identity when attempting to display their family identity to others. Suter

et al. noted four themes as part of constitutive kinning. A sense of family as created by how members feel toward each other and how they act toward each other which counters believing biological ties contribute to the meaning of family. They also claimed families care for each other, love unconditionally, and are forever. Suter et al. found three themes relating to discourse of biological normativity (a need to fulfill the perception of a biological tied families as real): True families proclaim a biological relation to the adopted child, communicating similar features to claim biological relatedness, and accepting reunification as a possibility to keep biologically related families together (Suter et al., 2014). Suter et al. stated the discourse of biological normativity reinforced cultural and societal definitions of the importance of biological ties in family identities and the discourse of constitutive kinning constructs family identity through acts and behaviors. Their research concluded it is important to identify different discourses helping construct a family's identity and how our culture and society emphasizes a biological view of what a family should be. This paper will consider how the cultural and societal interpretations of family come into play with intrafamily adoptive families.

Similar to the importance of identifying the discourse of foster adoptive families is the importance of identifying the discourses adoptive families use when they construct their identity for birth parents to select them as the caregiver to their child. One exemplar of relational dialectics used as a framework to study adoption is Norwood and Baxter's (2011) research examining the discursive complexity of adoption in adoptive parents' letters to birth mothers who were seeking adoptive parents for their unborn child. According to their study, when adoptive parents are forming their letters, they need to convey an identity that appeals to the birth parents (Norwood & Baxter, 2011). Norwood and Baxter used relational dialectics to examine the competing discourses present by randomly selecting letters from websites letters written by

parents seeking to adopt and how they lead to a family meaning and identity. Norwood and Baxter identified four discursive struggles adoptive parents face when constructing their letter: Adoption as gain versus lost, desirable parenting versus a last resort, birth mother as a good versus bad parent, and birth mother autonomy versus independence. Adoption as a gain versus a loss was evident in letters when adoptive parents did not explicitly state a loss for the birth mother, but rather articulated how the child would gain a better life and the adoptive seeking parents would gain a child. Adoptive parents also indirectly addressed stereotypes of the birth mothers' parenting skills and ability to care for the child by directly addressing the sacrifice the birth parent is making (Norwood & Baxter, 2011). The last discursive struggle Norwood and Baxter found was birth mother autonomy versus independence which described open relationships between the birth mother and the adoptive family. They concluded that adoptive parents created their letters in ways that suppressed the negative stereotypes of birth mothers who had placed their child up for adoption (Norwood & Baxter, 2011). The formation of the letter adoptive seeking parents send to the birth parents could contribute to the identity created by the family in the years to come. The letter not only needs to cater to the feelings and emotions of the birth mother but correctly respond to the cultural assumptions of traditional families and adoption.

In today's society there are many different forms and definitions of family. In American culture, the traditional view of family, also known as a nuclear family, describes two heterosexual people living together tied by marriage and raising their biological children (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015). In some groups, a family is defined by people chosen to be a part of their family (McCarthy & Edwards, 2014). In a fluid and changing context of family, this paper will research how intrafamily adoption families create the meaning of their

family and their identity. Further, this paper will explore how families navigate their roles and create a family identity after an intrafamily adoption. Although research has been conducted in exploring narratives (Suter et al., 2014), meaning-making processes (Norwood & Baxter, 2011), and identities in families of adoption (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010), there is a lack of research about how intrafamily adoptive families create their identities and navigate their new family roles after the adoption. Information provided has shown the increase in relatives becoming caregivers for a relative child; therefore, researching contradicting dialogues with our understanding of intrafamily adoptive families will add another layer of knowledge about how families are defined. This information could be valuable to researchers interested in understanding non-traditional families such as intrafamily adoptive families.

**Relational Dialectics Theory**

Family identity is usually constructed through shared experiences and collective discourses. But these experiences and discourses are different in intrafamily adoption in a myriad of ways. Considering the discourses and cultural definitions of family available in our society can reveal important insight into the challenges and possible tensions faced by families who do not align with the cultural norm, such as foster adoptive families (Suter et al., 2014). It is these tensions around the understanding of shared experiences and use of discourse that make using relational dialectics ideal when studying intrafamily adoptions.

Relational dialectics theory (RDT), according to Baxter (2011), examines how language patterns of discourse create identities for individuals and relationships, and how those trends construct a system of meaning and understanding. Baxter claimed discourses, or linguistic systems of meaning, are constructed through context and situation. Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin (Baxter, 2011), RDT assumes competing and contradicting discourse lead to the meaning-

making process. Baxter stated that identities form through discursive struggles. Relational

dialectics theory is not about identifying an individual's impact on discourses with other people

or about how parties navigate contradicting feelings and emotions in dialogue. The goal of RDT

is to understand communication patterns *within* relationships and between relationships and

society; RDT also considers how conceptual assumptions can conflict with past, present, and

future discourses (Baxter, 2011). It is this understanding and isolating of communication patterns

in intrafamily adoptions that will be the main focus in using RDT to look at these types of family

systems.

RDT examines discourses between individuals to understand the contradictions in their

discourses and considers how discourses circulating in society shape understanding between

communicative partners (Baxter, 2011). Relational dialectics theory does not focus on the

tensions between individuals, but instead focuses on how prior utterances from previous

experiences and conversations build to give the speaker an understanding of their conversation at

hand. Relational dialectics theory examines how the words, experiences, and interactions in

conversations interplay to create a meaning and understanding of relational reality, and it

considers which meanings are privileged in society. Using RDT as a framework for this study is

helpful because it shows the tension in privileged discourses; for instance, the view of a

biologically related, traditional family is the privileged discourse creating the representation of a

family. However, studying how discourses differ in intrafamily adoptions will help reveal other

tensions or dialectics that may occur in these unique family units.

RDT seeks to identify the dialectical tensions present in relating (Baxter, 2011).

However, it is important to note tensions do not solely represent negative discourse. Tension,

more specifically, refers to the differences or opposition found when discourses offer competing

views of a relational circumstance. Another way to think about tension is to think about magnets and magnetic fields. If you hold two magnets near each other, the magnetic field pulls the magnets together. However, if you flip the polarity of one of the magnets, they resist one another. These tensions should also be viewed as positive interactions because relationships tend to grow through such resistive discourses. Therefore, it is safe to say RDT is particularly useful for thinking about relational situations where the nature of the relationship does not align well with cultural expectations, such as intrafamily adoption. It considers the way discourse shapes and constrains the experience of relating (Baxter, 2011). Therefore, RTD is helpful in thinking about the challenges that emerge when families do not have labels to define relationships and when family forms do not align with cultural norms—thus causing tensions to arise. This paper will explore if these tensions are possibly found in intrafamily adoptive families.

Prior research on relational dialectics theory has identified dialectical tensions that are frequently part of relating. Baxter (2011), identified expression-nonexpression as a dialectic that emerges because relationships both demand openness but may entail restricting communication to protect self or others. Regarding intrafamily adoption, a dialectic of expression-nonexpression may be evident in a bio-parent's expression of love and care or nonexpression of love or acknowledgement of the child. Likewise, this tension may be evident in the discourse the intrafamily adoptive parents use when describing the bio-parents relationship with their adopted child, or their view of appropriate levels of expression or nonexpression. Investigating how this phenomenon ties into intrafamily adoption may provide insight into understanding the identity intrafamily adoptive families create following their intrafamily adoption.

Intrafamily adoptive families are in a unique position when defining their families, and this process can be fraught with tension. Not only are these families expected to rely on the

traditional definition of a family representing biological relations, intrafamily adoptive families also rely on shifting cultural definitions representing a family of more than a hetero-married couple with children. This paper will use RDT in consideration of intrafamily adoption when it comes to defining family and the tensions felt within these units. With the traditional representations of what a family should be and current cultural alterations to the definition of family, this study will consider how families created by intrafamily adoption respond to and counter those definitions. By studying how intrafamily adoptive families create their identity and how that identity contradicts society's accepted definition of a traditional family, this research study may provide insight into processes of intrafamily adoption. The following question is presented as the first research question:

> RQ 1: *What is the process of becoming an intrafamily adoptive family, and how does the*
>
> *process contribute to a family identity following the adoption?*

Further, this paper will explore contradictions in the roles family members enact after the adoption; for example, a bio-parent may want to maintain the parental figure following the adoption but the intrafamily adoptive parent may prefer otherwise. The process of defining and following roles after adoption lead to the second research question:

> RQ 2: *How do families navigate their new roles?*

As previously mentioned, this paper is interested in exploring the dialectical tensions present among intrafamily adoptive family members. To do so, the first step is identifying the dialectics present. Finally, the last proposed research question being used to guide this research is:

> RQ 3: *Which relational dialectics, if any, are most prevalent in interfamily adoption?*

Understanding the process of becoming an intrafamily adoptive family and examining the new familial roles after the adoption could give insight into the satisfaction of these family units of intrafamily adoption. Additionally, understanding the dialectics present could provide insight into how the family relates with one another.

## Chapter 2: Methods

**Textual Analysis**

This qualitative study examined online narratives of intrafamily adoption family members. Online narratives were used in this research because of the difficulties accessing family members involved in intrafamily adoption for one-on-one interviews. Online narratives designed as discussion posts were the main point of collection because they allowed the researcher to examine posts within a community of adoptive parents. Online discussion board posts allow researchers to learn about the experiences of individual who may be difficult to access for interviews, and it is useful to note that these posts provide an authentic context for individuals to share their experiences with others rather responding to researcher inquiries. Blogs were initially considered as data to be included in this study. However, these narratives were more editorial and less authentic causing the researcher to eliminate this data.

After receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), online narratives were collected from password-free websites where adoptive parents went online to disclose their adoption narrative. Google search terms like "grandparent adopt grandchild," "kinship adoption," and "adoption of nephew/niece" were used to find narratives relative to this study. All of the posts examined pertained to intrafamily adoption and were pulled from the following sites: Adoption.com, grandparentingblog.com, circleofmoms.com, yesandyes.org, sbs.com, americanadoptions.com, and adoptivefamiliescircle.com.

To be selected for analysis, a post needed to (a) be from non-password protected websites, (b) the family role of the person posting online was clearly stated, (c) the poster mentions the adoption process (succeeding guardianship) or clearly state the adoption process will be finalized within a few months, (d) the narrative shared online consisted of at least 80

words, and (e) the online post was within the past five years. Sixty posts were collected for

analysis based on their criteria. The researcher further narrowed the data down to 43 online

discussion posts by eliminating posts that seemed more narrated or edited for publication and

less about expressing emotions and feelings.

It is important to note that specific demographics of posters were unobtainable in this

study due to how data was collected. However, the content of the posts suggests that many of the

posters were female and were not brand new to the adoption process (that is, their posts narrated

a history of caring for the child/children and interaction with family members over time).

**Data Analysis**

The researcher initially analyzed the data by reading it multiple times to become familiar

with what was being shared. Then, the researcher went through each post to note (a) the

relationship between family members, (b) worries, questions, and concerns intrafamily adoptive

parents stated in their posts about the bio-parents and bio-family, (c) and, if available, what

actions and situations led the intrafamily adoptive parents to adopt their family member. Further,

the researcher recorded important quotes which were later used for analysis.

Next, the research read the posts again and used a color coding system to separate the

posts into different groups: Protection, role navigation, family support, and challenges. With the

different themes identified, the researcher organized those posts by theme to further develop an

understanding of what intrafamily adoptive parents were saying about their family making

process and family reshaping following the adoption.

In analyzing the data, key terms like "but," "yet," "support," and also questioning phrases

like "should," "opinion," "advice," "suggestions," and "anyone else" were used to find phrases

and statements that could be contradicting the meaning prior utterances or building a different

understanding of the family dynamics. In an effort to unfold the data, the researcher asked

questions like: *So what?, Why is this important?, What does this say about communication and*

*the process intrafamily adoptive families go through?*

To understand how intrafamily adoptive families created their identity, the researcher

looked for reoccurring statements from participants describing what they believed to be

important for the child or qualities they expected from family members. For example, the

researcher looked for posts asking for advice about how to handle bio-parents wanting to be

around the adopted child without attending or completing some form of rehab.

The researcher took precaution in presenting the statements as they were directly stated

online, including the special formatting, capitalization participants used, and spelling or

grammatical errors. The researcher was interested in preserving the language participants use

because these statements were genuine and provided insight into the emotions intrafamily

adoptive parents felt while constructing their post. Further, the researcher felt preserving the way

the participants wrote their post also helped present the participants stories.

**Chapter 3:  Findings**

Using the current model of relational dialectics theory, this study examined 41 online discussion posts from intrafamily adoptive parents. This data showed most of the participants identified themselves as parents to biological children in addition to caring for their intrafamily adopted child; 15 identified themselves as adopting a grandchild, 12 identified their adopted relative being a niece and five participants said the child was their nephew before the adoption, five identified their adopted child as a cousin prior to the adoption. For four participants, it was unclear what their relationship with the adopted child was before the adoption. Only one stated their adoption happened because they were contacted on Facebook. Additionally, 14 participants noted they adopted their relative child because of drug related issues (one participant said drug and alcohol abuse, one participant noted drug abuse and physically abusive relationships, two participants noted drug abuse and child abandonment/neglect, and three participants noted the bio-parents were drug users and either headed to jail or already in jail). Four participants stated the adoption was due to mental health issues, and one participant said both drug abuse and mental health issues led to the adoption. For 13 participants, it was unclear what circumstances led to them adopting their relative. Seven participants said they decided to adopt because the bio-parent was not in a situation to raise the child. Two participants said their reason for adoption was due to the death of the bio-parent. One participant, in addition to a multitude of other concerns, the intrafamily adoptive parent mentioned adopting their relative child because the bio-parent allowed the child's image to be captured in pornographic films.

Further, 16 intrafamily adoptive parents also mentioned a struggle with deciding to allow the bio-parent and extended family members contact with the adopted child. Twenty participants noted their quest to decide if bio-parents and extended family members should be included in

activities and life events following the adoption. Intrafamily adoptive parents also mention a tension with role management following the adoption; 16 participants noted this. Further 20 participants noted their need to protect their adopted child from harmful situations, 14 participants commented on family support or a lack thereof, six participants noted a problem connecting with their intrafamily adopted child, six participants placed concern on how they would tell the child and when the appropriate time would be, and five participants struggle between continuing or repeating the adoption.

Findings of the study provide insight into the discourses that intrafamily adoptive parents engage and the tensions they encounter as they narrate their families. Three themes that were the most evident in the findings include: The dialectical tensions intrafamily parents experience following the adoption, the struggle intrafamily adoptive parents face in navigating new familial roles, and the challenges of the intrafamily adoptive process. The first theme referred to dialectical tensions present is intrafamily adoptive families. The following will provide insight to an identity the intrafamily adoptive parents provide to protect their adopted child from their bio-parent (or parents), who is also a family member to the intrafamily adoptive parent. This is a challenge and unique aspect of intrafamily adoptive families. In a sense, these families represent traditional families as all family members have a biological tie. However, these parents and family members also represent and identify with adoptive families. Intrafamily adoptive families are in unique positions because, while identifying with both traditional and adoptive families, they create their own defining features, like protection from family members. Additionally, severing contact with a family member is never an easy task. For some intrafamily adoptive parents, ending contact with their family member is more of a personal convenience, but many of these parents worried about the impact it would have on their adopted child.

Moreover, the data provided insight into how these families navigate their new roles following the intrafamily adoption. Some intrafamily adoptive parents felt conflicted in allowing their adopted child to address them with a parental title, while other intrafamily adoptive parents very much wanted this title but expressed concern about securing the cooperation of bio-parents or extended family in using the new titles and enacting new roles after the adoption. Finally, the third theme identified in the data yielded insight into the challenges intrafamily adoptive families face after the adoption. Of those challenges, intrafamily adoptive parents mention a fear of connecting with the adopted child in a supportive and caring way, gathering support from their family members following the adoption, and continuing or repeating the adoption process.

From the data, it is clear many intrafamily adoptive parents are searching for validation of their feelings and decision. Parents wanted answers and support from their intrafamily adoptive community. The following analysis provides a more in depth look at the discourses in the data, how intrafamily adopters negotiate roles, and the challenges they face.

**Discourses of Dynamic Relating and Familial Inclusivity**

This current study sought to identify the discourses that animate intrafamily adoption and the tensions present in those discourse. After reviewing the data, the researcher identified the discourse of dynamic relating and the discourse of familial inclusivity, respectively, as discourses intrafamily adoptive parents use to animate their posts. The term 'dynamic relating' was chosen to reflect a tension between intrafamily adoptive parents and extended family members; the tension represents a push and pull between family members to change as a system following the adoption process. In this discourse, these families are constantly changing and developing their identities and family meaning because of their struggle with the extended family members. Further, the discourse of dynamic relating is a discourse describing the process for

these families in new, emerging family experiences. Additionally, the main difference between these discourses and the discourses used by Suter et al. (2014) is the relationship between the parties involved in the adoption prior to the adoption, whereas foster adoptive parents do not have a relationship with the adopted child beforehand and intrafamily adoptive parents do have a familial relationship. Although previous research was interested in studying the discourses animating foster adoptive family's relationships, this study focused on families with a biological and genetic tie prior to the adoption and the impact the relationship had on family relating (Suter et al., 2014).

The discourse of dynamic relating, similar to Suter et al.'s (2014) discourse of biological normativity, acknowledges and accepts the traditional definition of family being a married couple with biologically related children. However, the discourse of dynamic relating also invokes a discourse from extended family members, specifically describing care as a responsibility for the bio-parents, their relative, in raising their child. The discourse of dynamic relating is relevant to intrafamily adoption because of the familial relationship prior to the adoption between the adoptive parent and child being adopted. Therefore, the relationship the adoptive parent and child had before the adoption was finalized differs from Suter et al.'s discourse of biological normativity because the intrafamily adoptive parents do not have to search for biological relations as they already exist, and typically will not struggle building connections with the adopted child in the new roles because of previous family relationships (however, the relationship with the child does not typically reflect the adoptive parents relationship with extended family members). Finally, the discourse of dynamic relating differs from Suter et al.'s discourse of biological normativity in the pressures from extended family

members, specifically, in allowing a relationship with the bio-parent and the adopted child. One example of a discourse of dynamic relating can be seen in A16's post:

> She is freaking out over name changes (planning to change last names only) and really has not come to terms that this situation is real and that she isn't going to be allowed to swoop back in and be mommy. She even went so far as to say…I am worried that A is going to call you mommy.

The discourse of familial inclusivity is similar to the discourse of constitutive kinning (Suter et al., 2014) and invokes the definition of family as fluid and changing. But, the discourse of familial inclusivity goes a step further to describe a discourse that involves intrafamily adoptive parents positioning themselves as better, more responsible caregivers compared to their family members, the bio-parents. This discourse differs from Suter et al.'s discourse of constitutive kinning because the discourse of familial inclusivity already includes a biological and genetic connection with the adopted child and maintains a tension between family members following the adoption of their relative. Because of the prior familial relationship between the intrafamily adoptive parent and the child, the discourse intrafamily adoptive parents use expresses a re-alignment of roles and interactions from before the adoption. The discourse of familial inclusivity is a discourse of wanting to keep the child safe and protected from extended family members as well as the bio-parent. The discourse of familial inclusivity also differs from Suter et al.'s discourse of constitutive kinning in the love intrafamily adoptive families feel for one another. Because intrafamily adoptive families have a familial relationship before the adoption, learning to love the child or getting to know the child is not necessarily something intrafamily adoptive families experience. While the discourse of familial inclusivity does focus on building relationships among intrafamily adoptive family members, the relationship building

is in the form of acceptance and conformity to the new roles from the family. In A9's post, she said, "my family doesn't think I should allow her to call me "MOM!"" In this post, we see the family struggling with the new responsibilities and roles family members are supposed assume following the adoption. Finally, the discourse of familial inclusivity is a discourse displaying the importance of keeping a family as united and authentic as possible. One example of a discourse of familial inclusivity was evident in A13's comment, "I adopted him to protect him from being put in the system." Here, we can see the intrafamily adoptive parent's attempt to keep the child in the family and keep the family as cohesive and together as possible.

In work on foster family adoption, Suter et al. (2014) identified two discourses that animate foster family adoption: biological normativity and constitutive kinning. The discourse of biological normativity reflects on cultural assumption that families are biologically related and blood ties are natural and superior to other types of family relationships. The discourse of constitutive kinning counters this idea by highlighting that family meaning is created through interactions and time spent together; interactions and love are more important than biological ties. Suter et al. found foster adoptive families struggle between these two discourses as they narrate their experiences of adoption.

It is important to distinguish the difference between Suter et al.'s (2014) discourses described for foster adoptive parents and the discourses described for this study of intrafamily adoptive parents. These families are still one biologically cohesive unit, but relationships have realigned from traditionally accepted cultural (and societal) norms of family relationships. The interplay between these discourses was evident in the way intrafamily adoptive parents positioned their choice, discussed familial support (or lack thereof) for the choice, and narrated their struggle around including or excluding bio-parents in interactions or events with the child.

To understand the interplay of these discourses, three dialectical tensions were identified through participants posts: Protection-risk in the form of removing the child from certain situations, inclusion-seclusion in the form of intrafamily adoptive parent's struggle trying to decide if bio-parents and other extended members of the family should have contact with the intrafamily adoptive child, and certainty-uncertainty in the form of intrafamily adoptive parent's trying to decide if bio-parents and other extended family members should be included in life events and celebrations. All of these dialectical tensions will be examined in detail on the next few pages, as well as how these tensions affect intrafamily adoptive families.

**Protection-risk.** One dialectical tension that was evident in many of the posts examined was protection-risk. Intrafamily adoptive parents positioned themselves as protecting their adopted child from risky situations. Participants noted many circumstances leading them to adopt a relative; protecting the child from drug using bio-parents or mental instability were most prevalent. For some of these adoptive parents, protecting the child from harmful situations was of utmost importance. For example, one participant came into the intrafamily adoptive scene because her cousin ran into a moving train with the child in the car, stating "my cousin was convicted of premeditated attempted murder by reason of insanity and is in a state hospital" (B3), while A3 said her "...little guy wouldn't have to know he was abandonedby [sic] parents who preferred their drugs." Characterized by the discourse of familial inclusivity because of the intrafamily adoptive parent positioning themselves as the better caregiver, these discourses frame bio-parents as being more concerned about their self-interests than the interests of their bio-child. To manage the care inadequacies of the bio-parent, the adoptive parent invokes a discourse of familial inclusivity, positioning the adoptive family as better and assuming the position of caring

for the child in a way that will show the child love and support and teach the child how to be a proper member of society.

> For some adoptive parents, protecting their adopted child from their bio-parent reflects their reaction to what they perceive to be a conglomeration of inadequacies they observed in bio-parents:

> > …we have her in our home for 3yrs. When there was allowed phone contact thru court order BP did not exerices [sic] that right but 3 time, they are both addicted to drug with no rehab completed. BF is in jail and my sister is still unemployed, selling her meds for money and still taking. While they had their daughter they taught her to steal, medicated her and did drugs in front of her, at two she knew what a needles was for. They allowed her to smoke ciggs and thought it was funny for her to puff on a pipe. They also ran a porn site from their home with the child allowed to play in the room she was caught on camera twice. (A15)

These intrafamily adoptive parents emphasized the risks their adopted children would experience had the bio-parent been continuing care. This discourse of familial inclusivity depicts the adoptive parents as better caregivers. From a relational dialectics perspective (Baxter, 2011), the traditional definition of family conflicts with the definition of family that intrafamily adoptive families create because they proclaim their superiority over biological parents.

> The discourses these intrafamily adoptive parents compared their actions and care practices against the bio-parents actions and practices. Many intrafamily adoptive parents drew on a discourse of familial inclusivity by positioning themselves as parents who will properly release their adopted children into society as, productive citizens without criminal records. These intrafamily adoptive parents depicted themselves as saviors and someone better positioned to

raise a child compared to the child's bio-parent. From A15's statement, we see an example of an intrafamily adoptive parent using a discourse of protecting the child from the harmful and unhealthy situations the bio-parent put their child in, a prime narrated example of the discourse of familial inclusivity.

**Inclusion-seclusion.** For some intrafamily adoptive parents, there were questions about how to deal with bio-family members and decisions about how, whether, and when to have contact with the adopted child. Although a key tension was determining inclusion of bio-parents, some families continued to allow contact between other bio-family members and their adopted child. However, allowing the bio-family member a connection with the adopted child could create issues for the adoptive family because of a lack of respect from bio-family members:

> My husband and I are at our wits end as to what to do about family members. The girls
>
> grandparents basically took care of all the kids until they were placed into foster homes.
>
> My 2 girls are now ages 23 and 14 so they are very aware of who their relatives are.
>
> We've tried very hard to allow the kids to stay in contact with them but every time they
>
> go to their grandparents something always bad happens, whether it be bad mouthing
>
> myself and hubby and bio children to inappropriate discussions with the girls. (A12)

Adoption is a difficult process, and, adopting a child from within the family can impact the cohesiveness and unity of the extended family. Regarding the process of intrafamily adoption, the family's inability to help support the decisions of other family members in adopting the child causes tension between family members.

Intrafamily adoptive parents also contemplated allowing contact with bio-family members because the bio-family members struggled with conforming to the new roles and titles in the process of becoming a new family after the adoption:

> NONE of the adults seemed to have an issue with the kid dissing my DD's [dear
>
> daughter] description of me as her mom. It took her over 2 years to even use the M word
>
> when it comes to me... and now, her family… hell, my family... is telling her not to use
>
> that term….my snap decision/instinct was that we need to distance ourselves from this
>
> group of people. (A10)

This participant noted a discourse of dynamic relating. This discourse is evident in how extended

family members are going against the new family roles following the adoption. Some intrafamily

adoptive families were interested in keeping their traditional family prior to the adoption as

whole as possible while other intrafamily members saw continued connections with the bio-

parents as dangerous for the child and disruptive to current internal family relationships; these

participants' posts showed a discourse of dynamic relating. Although intrafamily adoptive

parents' state they love their family member, the intrafamily adoptive parent see the troubles and

pain it causes their adopted child as at odds with their obligations for familial inclusivity.

**Certainty-uncertainty.** Further, as an example of familial inclusivity and dynamic

relating, intrafamily adoptive parents felt concern about including bio-parents in events. This

concern is a discourse of familial inclusivity because the intrafamily adoptive parent is

considering including the bio-parent in events, which would keep the family united and allow for

a sense of togetherness. Meanwhile, this is also an example of dynamic relating because of the

pressures from extended family members, including the bio-parents, in allowing familial

inclusion. A17, for instance, stated concern with inviting her daughter—the bio-mother of her

adopted daughter, to the court proceedings to finalize the adoption because "it will be a sad thing

for her [the bio-mother] and I want it to be happy." Similarly, B9 asked whether she should

invite her adopted daughter's bio-parents to a family celebration or if it "would be weird if I didn't mention it to them?"

Other intrafamily adoptive parents were concerned with allowing the adopted child to have a relationship with their bio-parents because of negative impacts the relationship could have. For example, two participants noted a concern with "manipulative" bio-parents. B8 was concerned with allowing her intrafamily adopted boys around their bio-father because the children always come home with "very unrealistic idea[s]" like "wanting to hypnotize the judge." Another participant stated she was having issues bonding with her adopted child because the bio-mother was still playing a role and was questioning if cutting ties would benefit her relationship with her adopted child or if it would "back fire" (A23).

Many intrafamily adoptive parents wanted to change the initial terms agreed upon for the adoption. For B7, her family was looking for advice on how to handle messages received from friends of the bio-mother asking about the child:

> …she sent me a pm on facebook [sic] saying she wanted to see our AD [adopted daughter] and giving a half hour notice, then showed up at the house to see her. We were not home that day, so she came into work to confront me the next morning, very loudly in front of customers and coworkers. 2 [sic] days later she showed up at the house again and only my Husband was home. Not believing him she tried pushing past him to see AD…a week later the 1st rumors of her wanting to kidnap our AD started….Now her current boyfriend and other random people have been finding my husband to ask him how BM [birth mother] daughter is or telling him that he should be considering her right to see BD [birth daughter].

The data shows the relationships between the bio-parent and the adopted child could be stressful, but the relationships between the adoptive parents and the bio-parents are even more trying. A19 stated:

> Relative adoption is the absolute hardest thing to deal with. Just want all of my other relative adoption folks to know…you're not alone in your quest to create a stable family while outside relatives try to stir the pot and create unnecessary drama.

These parents are in an interesting position because although the bio-parents are family members, the adoptive parents struggle to decide whether allowing a relationship with the adopted child is healthy.

Intrafamily adoptive families struggle to create relationships that will support children and appease other family members. For some intrafamily adoptive parents, protecting the child from risky situations was of utmost importance. Meanwhile, other intrafamily adoptive parents struggled with allowing contact with extended family members, including bio-parents, to continue. The data also showed intrafamily adoptive parents struggled determining if allowing relationships and bio-parents to attend events was a healthy decision for the child.

The discourse of dynamic relating and the discourse of familial inclusivity are important to intrafamily adoptive families because they animate these families' narratives and bring insight into the formation of the family's identity and way of relating as a familial unit. The discourse of dynamic relating animates the tensions within intrafamily adoptive families struggling to accept and fulfill their familial roles following the adoption. The discourse of dynamic relating also displays tensions among the intrafamily adoptive parent and extended family members because the extended family members feel the bio-parent of the adopted child should still play a parental role in the child's life. The discourse of familial inclusivity animates intrafamily adoptive

families because this discourse displays families as trying to keep their family unit as cohesive and united as possible. Further, the discourse of familial relating is unique to intrafamily adoptive families because of the relationship, biological and familial, the intrafamily adoptive parent shares with the intrafamily adoptive child.

**Navigating and Introducing New Roles in Intrafamily Adoptive Families**

The second research question asked about families navigating their new roles after the intrafamily adoption. For some intrafamily adoptive families, navigating, accepting, and understanding their new role as the adoptive parent was challenging. For others, helping family members understand their role was the challenge. The following section examines how intrafamily adoptive parents had a hard time with extended family members accepting their role following the adoption and how intrafamily adoptive parents faced a struggle of describing roles of family members to the child and outsiders post adoption.

**"No, not that daddy."** One issue intrafamily adoptive parents faced when navigating their new role was the tension between family members not accepting their new position. In instances of intrafamily adoptive families, prior to the adoption a grandparent was a grandparent, but following the adoption, a grandparent became a parent to the adopted child. Similarly, an aunt before the adoption became an intrafamily adoptive parent, and the bio-parent became the aunt. A18 said:

> It must be nice to lay down, make a baby and run off with no responsibility and yet still be called a daddy. My husband is amazing with all our girls….We love them all the same and they are not referred to as adopted or bio, they are ours period. It just really bugs me sometimes that he (birthdad) [sic] always tells her (3 year old) [sic] go see daddy. The last time they did it, she ran to my husband in which his wife said, no not that daddy.

Other participants stated bio-parents try to actively play the parent role in the adopted child's life by sending gifts to the child, setting rules for the intrafamily adoptive parents to follow, or not adhering to the boundaries in place surrounding the adoption. So, negotiating roles in the new family entails negotiating with other adults and with the child.

Additionally, intrafamily adoptive parents sometimes felt uneasy about how their adopted child should address them in their new adoptive roles. Even though A3 said, "the psychologist said all children want to have a mommyand [sic] or daddy and not to discourage him…", other participants said they felt "odd" or "weird" when addressed with a parental title by the child. Because intrafamily adoptive parents are concerned the new role "is just so overwhelming for his little mind to handle" (A26), these parents are searching for "thoughts on explaining this to our son in the future" (A6) that "while we are mom and dad to him, he was our grandson prior to the adoption and his sister A is his birthmom [sic]" (A5).

**Introducing new roles.** Intrafamily adoptive parents also struggle with finding the words to explain the roles and relationship of other family members to the child following the adoption. One intrafamily adoptive parent said:

> Our issue is that she will know who her biological mom is (who she will refer to as her aunt), and she also has cousins (sisters) involved. We realize this will be confusing for her at times, so we will obviously be there to support her and answer any questions that she may have. I am just afraid that she may feel some sort of resentment or anger toward either us as her parents, or her bio mom. (A2)

Some intrafamily adoptive parents were searching for books or answers for "how to handle the dynamics" (A4) of the bio-parents playing a new role in the child's life. Other parents worried

about the bio-father's reactions to questions asking if he is the father or brother to the child when having public outings (A1).

Of the participants searching for insight on how to explain the roles of family members following the adoption, all of the intrafamily adoptive parents were concerned with how the child would react or feel, how and when to tell the child who family members are, and the role family members plays in the child's life. This bears similarity to Baxter's (2011) dialectic tension of expression-nonexpression in relationships. Intrafamily adoptive parents recognize the need to tell the child and others about family roles, but they also want to protect the child and define new roles in ways that are stable. This dialectic tension is unique to intrafamily adoptive families because of the relationship the bio-parent and the child have before and after the adoption.

**Challenges for Intrafamily Adoptive Parents**

The process of adopting a family member is not an easy one. While many parents state they are doing so to protect the child, doing so can cause conflict within the family regarding role management and including bio-family members in events or the intrafamily adopted child's life. Further, after the adoption, these families face other challenges such as connection with their adopted child, finding family support, or making sense of repeating the adoption.

One of the challenges intrafamily adoption families face is a tension with developing a connection with their adopted child. A21 said:

> I want so badly to love her the way she deserves to be loved and feel that connection but I
> don't and its breaking my heart and stressing me out! I love her, but I want to LOVE her
> like I LOVE my boys and I just don't know how…

While, for other intrafamily adoptive parents, their "problem is both of us are grieving the loss of out [sic] niece and not seeing the positive of having a daughter, (she is pulling back very hard

will show 0 emotion either positive or negative)" (A11). Further, intrafamily adoptive parents

feel like they are having trouble connecting with their adopted child because the child wants their

"old life" back "with drugged out absentee parents, Dad in jail most of the time, no utilities,

homelessness, violent people, overdoses, drug deals, not being registered in school" (A25).

Intrafamily adoptive parents' struggle to connect with their adopted child shows us that although

the family is biologically connected, a key feature to defining a traditional family, their identity

as a family is at risk.

Although some intrafamily adoptive families felt developing a connection with the

adopted child was difficult, other intrafamily adoptive parents expressed that support from

family members, or lack thereof, is the challenge. In the process of finalizing the adoption of her

niece in a situation where the bio-mother is going to jail, A9 said that in addition to all the rules

the bio-mother is trying to place on her, caring for a child born with hepatitis C and drug

exposure, her "family doesn't think I should allow her to call me "MOM"! [sic]" As the adoptive

mother to her grandsons, A8 said:

> even after they [sic] boys told them [maternal grandfather] to stay away…because of the
>
> way he treats them…the grandfather would show up at the boys' soccer games…to their
>
> school at Christmas time and left a card for one of the boys (not both as he blames the
>
> older one for reporting his daughter to authorities for neglect and for convincing the
>
> younger one not to see him anymore)…[and] ordered pictures they had made at the
>
> school. I found out because the pictures I ordered never came but instead got mixed up
>
> with the ones he ordered and he got them.

Finding support from the bio-family can be difficult for intrafamily adoptive families, especially if blame is poorly placed or family members are unwilling to acknowledge the change within their family.

However, one intrafamily adoptive parent reported their support system came from within their family. A7 said the bio-family reached out to them to adopt their relative via Facebook because the bio-parents were unable to properly care for and raise the child. While this instance contradicted reports from other intrafamily adoptive parents, it was an interesting deviation from the rest of the data collected.

Some intrafamily adoptive parents worry about whether they made the wrong decision and can maintain the care for their adopted child necessary. For example, A22 stated, "I wonder about my energy level and if it is up to the daily rigours [sic] of raising to [sic] young boys." For other intrafamily adoptive parents, they "feel an obligation" to care for the kids and "think we would be very happy adding them to our family but worry how we would handle [5 kids]" (A20). One participant, B15 who was the only participant to mention this, was worried that adding another adopted relative to the family would "cause a good bit of tension" between her and her husband, even though it was a "safe place" for the child.

The data showed that not all intrafamily adoptive parents are willing to continue the process of caring for their intrafamily adopted child or would repeat the process and adopt more relative children. Prior research suggested that most adoptive parents of relative children are willing to adopt again (Hinterlong & Ryan, 2008); however, with an increase in grandparents as primary caregivers to grandchildren, Woodworth (1996) concluded when they do take on the parenting toll, it comes at a significant cost to themselves. A13 said she:

…adopted him to protect him from being put into the system with the understanding that Mom would take him back once she got back on her feet. I just don't have it in me anymore and can't see me doing this for another 2 – 3 yrs. The Mom is capable…I told her earlier this year I'm done and I need her to take him back soon.

Although Hinterlong and Ryan (2008) found intrafamily adoptive parents are happy with their adoptive decision because they realize it is the healthiest option for the child, A13 contradicts this notion, claiming she feels as if she is a "convenience" for her daughter, the bio-mother, to "dodge the responsibility" of caring for her bio-child. This shows us that some intrafamily adoptive parents feel as if they are being taken advantage of by their family.

This is important in intrafamily adoption because noting the internal struggles of intrafamily adoptive parents connecting with their adopted child, adopting more relatives, or finding support from extended family members shows the hardships intrafamily adoptive parents experience. Nevertheless, adopting a relative can have its boundaries and struggles (Bramlett & Radel, 2017). Intrafamily adoptive parents face different struggles compared to other forms of adoptive parent's struggle's because the tensions lie within the family whose roles have been shifted to represent a completely different role. In contrast, parents of other adopted children, like internationally adopted children, completed rigorous processes (e.g. application approvals and financial payments) and a considerable amount of time determining if adoption was their best option. However, intrafamily adoptive parents are usually going through the adoption process because one of their family member is no longer adequately caring for their relative child and the adoptive parent is seeking a temporary parental role (Bramlett & Radel, 2014), and they are often asked to step in to care for the child in response to a crisis.

**Chapter 4:  Discussion**

Managing new roles after the adoption is often difficult for intrafamily adoptive families because of a tension among family members accepting their new roles and explaining the roles of extended family to the adopted child. Research showed intrafamily adoptive families feel as if navigating their new roles is unfamiliar ground, causing some family members to resist their new role. Other intrafamily adoptive families found explaining family members and their relationship to the child to be challenging because those families were unaccustomed to their new relationship position. Additionally, intrafamily adoption families also faced a number of challenges following the adoption. Some intrafamily adoptive parents could not build a relationship with their adopted child. Other intrafamily adoptive parents struggled with gathering support from family members, and others felt continuing the process of caring for their relative child or adopting other relative children was no longer an option because of exhaustion.

This research used Baxter's (2011) latest version of relational dialectics theory to discover dialectic tensions in intrafamily adoptive families. With a lack of prior literature surrounding intrafamily adoptive families, how intrafamily adoptive parents present themselves compared to the biological parents develops an understanding for contradicting yet defining features of family. Intrafamily adoptive families are unique adoptive families because the child will have a biological and genetic relationship with the adoptive parents, representing the traditional family definition. However, these families are also adoptive families which collides with societal standards on caregiving rights for children.

The data was initially examined for the discourses of biological normativity and constitutive kinning defined and used by Suter et al. (2014) in research on adoptive parents' experiences of foster adoption. However, after further reviewing the data, the researcher defined

two discourses more aligned with intrafamily adoptive families. The major difference between the discourses represented in this study and the discourses used by Suter et al. is this study is that the discourses present in intrafamily adoptive families center around a biological and genetic relationship between extended family members, the intrafamily adoptive parents, and the adopted child as one family unit. The two discourses identified in this study used were: the discourse of dynamic relating and the discourse of familial inclusivity. The discourse of dynamic relating used by the intrafamily adoptive parents reinforced traditional definitions of family. This discourse described intrafamily adoptive families as relying on the bio-parent to raise and care for their bio-child. Statements described tensions between family members using a discourse of dynamic relating and how the discourses created problems between intrafamily adoptive families and their relationships with extended family members. The discourse of familial inclusivity was evident in discourses intrafamily adoptive parents used to legitimize their position as caregiver for the child, discourses describing the intrafamily adoptive parents as the responsible caregiver.

Intrafamily adoptive parents also mentioned a struggle with loyalty among family members following the adoption. Baxter (2011) noted a competition of loyalty in relationships, a tension displayed in relationship's struggle with individual's self-interest and the community's interest. Further, community interest represents actions and responsibilities that are morally just, and individualism represents self-interest and can be a threat to the community (Baxter, 2011). This is important to intrafamily adoptive families because some members of the family are displaying discourse of loyalty to themselves, the individual, and other members of the family use discourses of loyalty to the community (as in the society the family lives in and will raise the child to inhibit). This concept can be applied to intrafamily adoptive parents' struggles with their families to acknowledge the role the intrafamily adoptive parent is filling following the adoption.

The struggle of accepting the roles can be interpreted as disloyalty from family members. After all, loyalty to one individual does not provide room for loyalty to other members of the family.

**Links to Prior Literature and Implications**

Using Baxter's (2011) latest version of relational dialectics theory as a framework, this study found tensions of protection-risk, connection-seclusion, and certainty-uncertainty were evident in the data. As previously noted, a dialectical tension of protection-risk was displayed when adoptive parents arranged their discourse to display themselves as the idyllic choice in caring for their relative child. Inclusion-seclusion was evident is intrafamily adoptive parents discourse of tensions between allowing a connection with extended family members, members who were also biologically related to themselves and their adopted child. Finally, the dialectical tension found in the data was a discourse of certainty-uncertainty. This discourse displayed a sense making process for the intrafamily adoptive parents trying to determine if they should include the bio-parents in events, how much the bio-parent should be included, and if allowing relationships with bio-parents is healthy for their adopted child.

This study examined prior research surrounding the meaning of family and how families construct their identity and create their system of relating (Baxter & Pederson, 2013; Kellas, 2005; Holtzman, 2008). The data did not provide insight into the identities intrafamily adoptive families create. Instead, it can only be speculated that intrafamily adoptive parents created an identity for themselves as protectors of the child from harmful and risky situations with the bio-parents because the discourse they used was laden with references to protection.

Baxter and Pederson (2013) studied family communication patterns in relation to family satisfaction. Since this study examined posts from intrafamily adoptive parents, a tension of family satisfaction was evident in the findings for this paper through the relationship struggles of

intrafamily adoptive parents with their extended family members. For these adoptive families, family satisfaction failed short because of family members lack of support in the adoption process. Holtzman (2008) was interested in studying competing and complementary discourses defining a family based on biological ties and defining families of alternative forms (e.g. adoption, stepfamilies, etc.). Regarding intrafamily adoptive families, the use of competitive and complementary discourse was evident, but the discourse was directed toward tensions with extended family members.

This study also examined the identity struggles adoptive families experience when creating their family's identity for nonfamily members (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010; Norwood & Baxter, 2011; Suter et al., 2014; Harrigan, 2009). Although constructing an identity for someone outside of the family was mentioned in one post, no other participants mentioned this struggle. Therefore, explaining and defining roles within the family, especially to the child, is more of a struggle for intrafamily adoptive families than explaining and defining their family identity to outsiders because explaining your adoptive family means admitting your family unit collides with societal standards and norms.

Krusiewicz and Wood (2001) were also interested in discovering how family identities are communicated but focused on how the adoptive parent shared their identity with their adopted child. Although slightly different in needing to introduce the family identity to the adopted child in intrafamily adoptive families, a lot of the data presented in this research paper suggested intrafamily adoptive parents struggles with explaining the new family roles to their adopted child. The narratives adoptive parents created to describe their family are especially important for families of different heritages because these families, per Harrigan and Braithwaite (2010), try to position their identity as close to a traditional definition of family as possible.

Harrigan (2004), went one step further to claim adoptive parents of children with visibly different heritages search for sameness to explain to outsiders, further trying to reinforce the idea of a traditional family. These processes are more complex for intrafamily adoptive families because intrafamily adoptive families are more likely to be visibly similar due to their genetic relationship. That similarity will make blending into and being accepted by society easier but is problematic for relating within the family and among extended family members. The problem for these intrafamily adoption families is the history that led to change in their family structure.

Further, Suter et al. (2014) studied the discourses foster adoptive parents use in creating their family identity and the relationship the identity holds with the traditional definition of family. Regarding intrafamily adoptive families, admitting adoption and sharing entrance narratives to outsiders would be difficult for intrafamily adoptive families because it would mean acknowledging the issues within the family that detour the family from representing a healthy family unit, and further requires intrafamily adoptive families to admit the family's history to the outsider. Sharing the identity intrafamily adoptive families create is uniquely different from other forms of adoption because these families are sharing intimate and private details about their extended family members' personal lives and struggles. Other forms of adoptive parents do not typically have a personal relationship and biological connection with the family of the child they are adopting.

This project has given insight into why intrafamily adoptive relationships are not easy for many reasons. This phenomenon is important to study and develop an understanding of because even the intrafamily adoptive parents are confused about what to do and how to handle situations and events with bio-parents and extended family members. Intrafamily adoptive families are in such a unique relationship position because of biological and genetic ties; therefore,

understanding how intrafamily adoptive parents create their identity and navigate tensions within the family could provide insight into the relating process of the family.

One interesting finding was A7's description of becoming an intrafamily adoptive parent. A7 said their family members reached out to them via Facebook asking them to adopt the child and claims they may be the first people to ever adopt a child through Facebook. This was an interesting deviation in the data because most of the other intrafamily adoptive parents mentioned a struggle and tension with social media use between their new immediate family and extended family members. Some participants noted extended family members, especially the bio-parent, reaching out to the child through social media platforms and other participants noted they received contact from the friends of bio-parents, almost in a threatening manner. Using social media to connect with people, especially family members, is common in our society. It is interesting to see how social media was used for good but also used inappropriately among family members.

A surprising finding was intrafamily adoptive parent's concern about or unwillingness to continue care. It is clear family members stepped up to adopt their relative child to remove the child from situations deemed dangerous and unhealthy, because they wanted to keep the child within their family. However, this does not mean the intrafamily adoptive parent wants to continue raising and caring for their relative child. This was interesting because of where the child would be left in this situation; the child could enter into foster care, another relative could adopt the child, or the bio-parent could resume responsibility and raising the child. However, the implications such an action could have on the family is immense. If families struggle with family roles following the adoption, studying how the family communicates after the intrafamily adoptive parent relinquishes their rights would add an additional level of complexity to relating

within the family. Although this study found many interesting things related to intrafamily adoptive families' processes and struggles following the adoption, there were a number of limitations.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This research project used online posts from intrafamily adoptive parents to learn about intrafamily adoption experiences. Because of the limitation in the type of data used, an opportunity to ask probing and follow-up questions was not available. Future scholarship could consider interviewing parents of intrafamily adopted children to allow that opportunity. Interviewing intrafamily adoptive parents would provide a more succinct interpretation of the meaning and identity created by intrafamily adoptive families. Future scholars could also interview the bio-parents of children who have been adopted by relatives to gather an understanding of their communicative tensions and struggles following the adoption of their bio-child. Scholars could also consider interviewing extended members of the family to examine tensions from outside the immediate members of the intrafamily adoptive family. Additionally, future scholars should consider studying the perspective of the child who was adopted navigating the new roles their family had.

Another limitation/constraint of this research project was the inability to identify intrafamily adoptive family's demographics or the specific circumstances of the intrafamily relationship. Because the online posts were sharing experiences or seeking advice, they give a limited view of the nature of the participants' family situation. Future scholarship that can better determine the nature of family circumstances could provide insight to how class, education, age, and other socio-economic demographics contribute to the intrafamily adoptive community. As Bramlett and Radel (2017) stated in their research, certain characteristics of the adoptive family

and the child are considered for adoption. Studying how socio-economic demographics interfere or assist with intrafamily adoption decisions could provide insight into what makes families more likely to adopt a relative.

Additionally, because of the type of data collected for this research, legislative information was not obtained. The lack of conversation about legislation and financial support could be something for future scholarship to explore. The lack of data may stem from the original search terms the researcher used; future scholars could use a search term such as "financial support grandparents raising grandchildren." Understanding financial support available is beneficial for intrafamily adoptive families because polices that provide financial support can help alleviate some of the pressures from adopting a child within the family.

One limitation of this research in the researcher's relationship with intrafamily adoption. As noted in the beginning, the researcher's sister was adopted and raised by their grandparents. Because of the researcher's relationship with intrafamily adoption, the ability to comprehend the data may stem from the personal connection with intrafamily adoption. Future scholarship may consider their role and ability to enter the conversation of intrafamily adoptive families from an outsider perspective.

**Recommendations for Intrafamily Adoptive Families**

As noted, intrafamily adoption is not an easy process for the family because it can interfere with family experiences and cause tension within the family. Developing an understanding of intrafamily adoptive struggles and processes is useful but more attention needs to be paid to how these families manage their new relationships and roles, and how legislation could help these families. For instance, one way that families could manage these tensions is through open and direct communication. This communication would allow the families to set the

groundwork as a new family and might provide easier shared family experiences. Further,

legislation should recognize these families as in need of additional assistance. More efforts need

to be taken by lawmakers because these families are prevalent in our society and deserve the

same assistance as any other adoptive family. As is, these families are taking in a child who is

their relative, and as a result, that child will typically not enter the system. Incentives should be

offered for intrafamily adoptive families because of their efforts.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Since the inception of this project, I reached out to my grandfather, my sister's intrafamily adoptive father, to talk about his perspective on the adoption process of my sister. He has told me that he and my grandmother knew it was the right thing to do because they knew her bio-parents could not support her and, "they [the bio-parents] approached us to adopt her because they wanted us to keep her in the family"—displaying a dialectical tension of protection-risk and a discourse of familial inclusivity. My grandfather said they had an open adoption; her bio-parents were able to come see her whenever they wanted but would only take the time to see her for birthday parties. Soon after my sister's first birthday, "they took off to Florida," missing most of her childhood and thereby foregoing their inclusion in life events.

My sister told me a story: It was around her eighth or ninth birthday and she got a phone call from family members with birthday wishes. My paternal aunt got on the phone with her, gave her birthday wishes, and then said, "hold on, your dad wants to talk to you." Recounting the story, my sister said, "I was confused because I was looking right at my dad, he was standing right in front of me." My sister says today she understands that comment as an issue with my aunt's ability to accept the new roles of family members, even years after the adoption—displaying a discourse of dynamic relating.

These intrafamily adoptive families offer a unique context future scholarship because there is almost no research on their experiences as families. These intrafamily adoptive parents went from loving a relative child because they were family to loving a relative child because they were now the parent and caregiver of said child. This paper explored intrafamily adoptive families processes integrating into a new family unit and the issues presented from the adoption with extended family members.  I found that the process is not an easy one, which could be

because of a lack of information about intrafamily adoption and support out there for these families, or it could be because the family struggles with new roles and keeping their family unit together.

This research focused on the difficulties families of intrafamily adoption face following the process of adoption and found that many factors impact their experiences. One factor, how extended family members prescribe to their new role following the adoption, was an important difficulty. Intrafamily adoption is a phenomenon our society should take more time to study because it has found a place in our society, and although this research found the process is not an easy one, examining it closer could provide better insight into these family relationships and the struggles they experience.

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# Appendix A

University of Colorado Boulder

## APPROVAL

17-Nov-2017

Dear Courtney Forehand,
On **17-Nov-2017** the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---:|---|
| Type of Submission: | Initial Application |
| Review Category: | Exempt - Category 2 |
| Title: | A narrative understanding of intrafamily adoption. |
| Investigator: | Forehand, Courtney |
| Protocol #: | 17-0653 |
| Funding: | None |
| Documents Approved: | 17-0643 Protocol (17Nov17); 17-0643 Consent Form (17Nov17); RecruitmentEmail_Forehand.docx; InterviewSchedule_Forehand.docx; |
| Documents Reviewed: | Protocol; Consent Form; HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application v8; |

The IRB approved the protocol on **17-Nov-2017**.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: Summary Page Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
Douglas Grafel
IRB Admin Review Coordinator
Institutional Review Board