

BIRTHMOTHER, GOOD MOTHER

HER STORY OF HEROIC REDEMPTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, **The Family Research Council** published "**The Missing Piece**" a study that examined how women with unplanned unwanted pregnancies decide between three options: abortion, raising their children themselves, or placing their children for adoption. Using interviewing techniques that access the emotional mind, researchers found that the first decisions these women make is whether or not to carry their pregnancies to term. Later in the pregnancy, they vacillate between raising their children and placing them for adoption. The ultimate decision is not a discrete event. It is a long process of working through their fears and conflicts.

The women who elect abortion and raising their children reject adoption because of negative thoughts and feelings about adoption. Interviews showed that the women held automatic associations in their minds which equate adoption with these negative thoughts and feelings. These equations can be conscious or unconscious. "**The Missing Piece**" found the following negative equations with adoption, with both conscious and subconscious components:

- Adoption = A lie
- Adoption = Abandonment
- Adoption = Harmful
- Adoption = Deceptive
- Adoption = Painful

These negative feelings about adoption and are commonly reinforced by people with influence over the pregnant woman as they struggle with their decisions. Thus if they decide to give birth to their babies, they often decide to "keep" their children. Often, they do not seriously consider the adoption option. Adoption is painful sacrifice that they feel no mother should have to be asked to make.

Notwithstanding these perceived problems with adoption, some women with unplanned unwanted pregnancies do eventually elect the adoption option and feel great about the decision throughout their lives. We asked the question: Why do some women with unplanned pregnancies choose adoption, and feel right about it when they look back at the decision years later? That is the question which the National Council for Adoption and the Family Research Council sought to answer with the research on birthmothers reported here. Following the same research mythology of "**The Missing Piece**," researchers interviewed 51 women who had placed their infants for adoption two or more years earlier. Birthmother's range in age from 21 to 65. Elapsed time since placement range from 2 to 41 years.

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- Why do women and teens experience unplanned pregnancies decide to place their babies for adoption?
- When are the thoughts and feelings that lead to this decision?
- When other understandings and beliefs about adoption that make them feel right about the decision and what emotional needs does adoption fulfill?
- Are their key people who are influential in birthmother's decisions and in what ways did they influence those decisions?

- As a look back upon the decision years later, how do birthmother's feel about the decisions they make place their children for adoption? If they had second thoughts about their decisions, what do they say to themselves to restore the sense that they did the right thing?
- What role do counselors play in the decision-making process? How do they influence the decision, and what the counselors need to know to be effective in communicating the option of adoption to their clients?
- What message in counseling, media and society would be most active enabling women with unplanned pregnancies to consider adoption freely?

The methodology seeks to find the commonalities and psychological dynamics among the respondents. Therefore, the findings reported here apply to all or nearly all of the birthmother's we interviewed, except where otherwise noted. We report commonalities, statistical tables to tell us that we achieved a confidence level of 99%. Never the less, there are always some exceptions, and not all of the findings will apply to every birthmother.

Methodology

We conducted in-depth interviews approximately 75 to 90 minutes in length with birthmothers in Chicago, Illinois and Dallas/Forth Worth, Texas answer the aforementioned questions. The interviewing technique is a proprietary, in-depth, one on one methodology that uncovered subconscious emotional motivators are not apparent when traditional market research methods are used. Visualization, relaxation and repetition techniques are also used to circumvent rationalization, uncovering the real motivation for behavior. Respondents close their eyes and interviewers lead them through a series of visualizations in their mind eye in which they picture experiences related to placing their children for adoption. By accessing the visual images, interviewers are able to access the emotional impact of the experiences. This methodology uncovers emotional needs and barriers that underlie birthmothers reactions and decisions, rather than merely sampling their rational opinions, and pinpoint motivating factors that are often very different from surface explanations.

Although large numbers of respondents needed to pull and predict behavior such as voting in elections, analyst with smaller groups can serve a different purpose: to learn about the process or a mindset that is common to everyone, or nearly everyone. Child psychologist, for example, can study how a few children learn to play the piano or to read in order to understand the process that they used to learn, rather than to predict how many other children will also learn or to predict when they will learn. In the same way, this analogy will not predict how many women will place their children for adoption. Instead, the results will reveal their feelings that motivate birthmother as they make decisions about adoption. Because people are similar emotionally, this approach can gather results that can be applied to other people in similar situations. Large numbers of respondents are not needed to discover qualitative differences such as emotional motivations of women with unplanned pregnancies in choosing adoption. That purpose, the number is sampled in this study, 51, is sufficient.

By gathering a wealth of in-depth information from each respondent, in analyzing the interview information dissimilarities, discovery are made about the dynamics that apply to most or all of the people in the segment being studied. Because the information is greatly detailed, respondents descriptions of feelings and experiences provide information that is both significant and reliable. This interviewing methodology brings awareness of the motivations and perceptions the affect decisions that people make and enhance understanding of how emotional needs guide behavior.

THE BIRTHMOTHER NEED TO CHOOSE ADOPTION VOLUNTARILY AND WITHOUT COERCION

Some of the birthmother placed children are fifteen or more years before the interviews took place felt pressure and even coercion to do so. Their bitter feelings about their experiences set the stage for understanding the profound importance of helping birthmothers in the process of selecting loving families for their children. Many birthmothers who felt coerced or tricked into placing the children for adoption were not at peace with the adoption. The resentment one birthmother expressed regarding feeling forced into adoption with typical of those who had felt coercion:

"Coercion, lies and deceit... that worked on me... The mother child bond is really strong. And that's more important than having two parents. My baby was denied breast milk, knowing his grandparents. I was denied watching him grow and have a life together. Fear what makes people sign relinquishing papers, fear that is (keeping the baby) will make your life worse and better. (Birthmothers') fear is taken advantage of. It is deceitful. It (coercive adoption) is not really concerned with the best interest of the mom and baby... It's concerned with receiving healthy, white babies for people."

This birthmother felt that no one was really concerned about her and her child. She felt judged, shamed, and manipulated to serve baby marketplace. Birthmothers who feel this way often referred to adoption as an **"industry,"** rather than considering it social service in the best interests of children. Because she felt forced into it, she did not feel that the decision was her own and was bitter about her adoption placement. The birthmothers who felt this way were older, generally having placed their children more than 25 years earlier, when the stigma against single parenting was far greater than it is today. Then, as the birthmothers described, it was also more common for social workers and nurses to pressure women into adoption. Women should never feel forced into adoption, and when they are, the system has failed them.

Thankfully, such occurrences have become quite rare. The younger birthmothers felt that they had made their decision voluntarily, and as a result, they "own" their decisions. As they struggle throughout the process of making decisions, they successfully resist being pressured by others. One birthmother said:

"It was eye opening... You need to control yourself, how to handle people and situations. Look, I need, or we made this decision. I'm getting myself back the power. I did something I'm not happy or proud about (getting pregnant), but it's me that has the power. I'm in control. Nobody was telling me to do XYZ. They are just throwing out suggestions... When you're in control, you know I'm going to do A, then B and C... Look at me. Yes, this is what happened. Look what I did. Look at where I am now."

When she takes control of the decision herself, she feels and empowered and right about it. She is proud of herself making a positive choice, adoption: a choice she believe rectifies her previous mistake.

The primary goal of the research is to gain understanding of the psychology of birthmothers who feel that adoption is positive choice. The findings reported here, therefore, focused primarily on the experiences of birthmothers who voluntarily chose adoption and felt right about their decision to do so. When analyzing the interview material, we search for commonalities across respondents. These findings, therefore, record the emotionally based experiences of most or all of respondents who voluntarily chose adoption.

Organization of Finding

Feelings are organized into three sections:

- The Birthmother's Fears, Concerns and Perceived Obstacles regarding Adoption
- The Birthmother's Fears, Concerns and Perceived Obstacles regarding Parenting.

- The Birthmother's Resolved Feelings and Beliefs about Adoption that Empower Her to Choose Adoption

This organization is illustrative of the typical birthmothers decision-making process. They struggle with their options before finally settling on adoption. They wrestle with fears, concerns and perceived obstacles about both adoption and parenting and eventually resolve them with feelings and beliefs about adoption that make them feel right about choosing adoption.

Following the findings is a discussion regarding their application to counseling in communications approaches.

2. THE BIRTHMOTHER'S FEARS, CONCERNS AND PERCEIVED OBSTACLES REGARDING ADOPTION

Birthmothers experience an array of fears, concerns and perceived obstacles as they consider adoption. For example, at first they tend to deny that they are pregnant altogether, and then they deny the difficulties of raising a child alone. They view adoption as abandonment and believe it makes them bad mothers. They fear the pain of separating from their children and the fear that the adoptive parents will not love their children. They wrestle with the fear of how others will view their decisions. They fear making such a big decision on their own. Against the backdrop of the birthmothers' own words, this section of finding details emotional challenges that birthmothers face when they struggle with the dilemma of whether or not to choose adoption.

BIRTHMOTHERS EXPERIENCE DENIAL

When birthmothers first discover that they are pregnant, they often deny it to cope with the situation as the following verbatim shows:

"The only thing I could think of was not to tell anybody, to hide. It comforts me in some way; just pretend I wasn't pregnant for a couple of months."

Another birthmother said,

"I had known. I just waited until someone forced me to take the test. Saying it out loud made it real. I knew, but when you find out definitely, it becomes a real thing instead of just pushing the thought away."

Birthmothers do not want to face the reality of being pregnant, because they are fearful of what will happen when they admit to themselves and others if they are pregnant. In some cases, they deny their pregnancies so they can delay making decision about what to do.

After birthmothers admits that they are pregnant, they are often in denial about their immaturity and lack of readiness to parent a child. Denial allows them to delay their decision, hoping that everything will work out and that they can keep their babies. For example, a birthmother may hope that her boyfriend will marry her, even though he is rejecting her. She may tell herself that her parents will help her to raise the child, despite the fact that they refuse to support her. As one birthmother considering adoption said,

"Maybe there's some other way. Maybe I can keep my baby. I wasn't willing to say that is what I'll do. I remember resenting the idea, wanting some miracle. I stuck it out or sat through sessions in hopes that something else could happen... It's my baby. It's my first child, and I like kids, and I could be a good mom, even at 16, and my mom had worked when I was a baby, and I figured there were probably ways to have a connection with my son and make a difference in this life."

With the birthmother's denial and her lack of readiness to parent her child prevents her from seriously considering adoption at first. Before she can begin to consider how best to care for her baby, she must overcome her denial and acknowledge her true situation.

BIRTHMOTHERS NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND FEARS REGARDING ADOPTION

At first, birthmothers struggle with negative feelings and fears about adoption. As reported in "The Missing Piece," they adequately adoption with abandonment and feel that only an unloving mother would abandon her child. One birthmother captures this dynamic as follows: *"I feel guilty because my mother put me in a children's home and I said I would never do that... It's really tugging at my heart. I felt like I was abandoning the child."* By placing the child for adoption, she felt that she would betray her maternal instincts and become the type of woman she has always despised: the mother gives her child away. As another birth mother put it, *"I'm a failure because I became one of those women I hate it, one who gives their child up. They were looked down upon, less of a woman in my mind."* She sees adoption as the choice that an unloving mother makes, which prevents her from being open to adoption. She needs to see herself as a good mother who loves her child.

Birthmothers often believe that electing adoption would show them to the unloving, incompetent mothers who are unable to provide for and care for their children. One birthmother struggled with the feeling that she's a failure because she's not able to provide for a child, while she sees the adoptive couple as good parents because they can provide for a child. She says,

"If you say Annett and Charlie (the adoptive parents) were better, then that makes me worse. That makes me not good. That hurts and it's not really true... That's a hard one for me to get past... I'm a good mother. I'm a very good mother. I raised two other kids... It makes you feel not good enough... I don't want to be the loser."

Birthmothers' self-esteem is important to them. They want to feel good about themselves and believe in their competence and worth as people. They often perceive that choosing adoption is an admission of failure.

BIRTHMOTHERS' FEARS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN

Birthmothers are concerned about how their children will feel about having been placed for adoption. They wonder about the following questions:

- Will their children view their decisions as rejection?
- Will they feel that their mother abandoned them and did not love them?
- Will they turn will they in turn reject and disrespect their biological mothers and their choice be placed for adoption?

One respondent said:

"I'm happy, somewhat reassured everything turned out okay, but I wonder, does she hate me? I'm wishing she could know the circumstances at the time, and a wish she could know that I love her. It's important, it's who I am; I've always loved my children. I wouldn't want her to think I abandoned her."

Birthmothers want their children to see them as good mothers who love them and do what's best for them.

The fear of not having any idea of what becomes of their children is also an impediment to considering adoption. Some birthmothers are more open to adoption when they envision an adoption that will allow them to receive updates on their children's well-being.

BIRTHMOTHERS FEARS ABOUT THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Concerns about the adoptive parents also make birthmothers hesitant about adoption. Birthmothers are afraid that couples who seek to adopt will say almost anything, in order to "get" the baby. They fear that adoptive parents might lie about their desires and ability to love and care for a child. Birthmothers fear that adoptive parents could be abusive and unloving towards the child. Some birthmothers cited news stories about adoptive children who have starved, abandoned, and even killed by adoptive parents or foster parents. Birthmothers fear that their children could be one of those abused children:

"I wonder what if. What if he died tomorrow? Would they tell me? Cause you don't know. Because on the bad side it could be one of the horror stories, like kids locked in a basement or abused things that happened to kids even when good parents are watching."

This birthmothers fears that if she chooses adoption, her child could be abused.

When birthmothers feel a lack of respect and emotional support from the prospective adoptive couple, it makes them reluctant to place their children with them. If the adoptive parents are not supportive of her, the birth mother fears that they will not love and provide for her child. One birthmother described second thoughts about a prospective adoptive couple:

"For the first time I thought, 'Gee, I'm having a financial crisis and the family may be able to help.' It occurred to me to ask for help. I'm going to be giving them this wonderful child; maybe they can help me out. What came back shocked me – it said, 'We'll help with medical bills, but nothing else.' I thought, 'I'm feeding their child – doesn't it matter to them? What kind of ugly people are these?' Maybe I don't want them to have this child. I felt they were mean. How do I know what hand I'm putting her into?"

Birthmothers fear that the adoptive parents will not teach their adopted children to love, appreciate and respect their birthmothers. When birthmothers perceive adoptive parent as a respectful and caring, then the birthmothers trust them and feel confidence that they'll be loving providers for their children.

BIRTHMOTHERS' FEARS OF LOSS THROUGH ADOPTION

Birthmothers deal with many fears while trying to decide what to do. They fear that they'll become too attached to their children and that relinquishing their children through adoption will be too painful to bear. One respondent says, *"If I ever laid eyes on that child, I'd go head over heels in love, impossible to give up. Had to not allow myself to ever envision holding it. If I didn't I'd be in triple hell."* This birthmother prevents herself from envisioning holding her baby because it's too painful to imagine holding the baby, bonding with the baby and then "giving it away." At the same time, she knows that if she does not hold the baby when he is born, she will be in "triple hell" because she will have grown attached to him.

Birthmothers also fear losing the opportunity to be mothers. They fear that they may never have another chance to be mothers. They fear that if they choose adoption and do not have other children, they will never have a chance to nurture a child's infancy and childhood. Also, they feel the sadness that will come with missing out on important milestones in their children's lives, including the first words, first day of school, graduations and weddings. They fear that they would be giving away their families future.

BIRTHMOTHERS' FEARS OF WHAT OTHERS WILL THINK ABOUT CHOOSING ADOPTION INCLUDING PARENTS, FAMILY, PEERS AND COMMUNITY

Choosing adoption means that birthmothers cannot conceal their pregnancy from family and friends. Birthmothers fear what their family and friends will think about their unplanned pregnancy. They're most afraid of disappointing their parents;

"I'm thinking about my parents. What are my parents going to think? They won't love me anymore. I'm going to embarrass them in the community. I knew my mother would be understanding but not my dad. You always want your dad's approval, to think that your 'it'. It makes you feel like you have no self worth, like you're nothing. The disappointment you get from your family – they have high hopes for you, and you screwed up. I did want to hold my head up high. Dad always told me be proud of who you are, your last name."

This birthmother fears that her parents will stop loving her because she is unmarried and has become pregnant. She's afraid that they will reject her, because she has brought shame on them and tarnished the reputation.

Birthmothers also fear that their peers in their community will judge them harshly for getting pregnant and for choosing adoption. They are apprehensive that they'll be judged as immoral or as failures getting pregnant out of wedlock and as heartless for placing their children for adoption:

"She (my boss) had told my coworkers. Some said they disagreed. I felt uncertain and confused and angry – they're being judgmental... making me second-guess myself. It's stressing me out. Is it the wrong decision? I've always cared too much about what others thought. There are lots of women; it's a small town. Initially they said they were going to help me, and then they stop speaking to me."

Ultimately, this birthmother fears that her coworkers will view her as a bad mother who abandoned her child. She worried that others will think she is selfish and shirking her responsibilities.

Adoption service providers report that many women with unplanned pregnancies will rule out adoption, because they fear that the birth father's will interfere with the adoption and perhaps gain custody of the child. However, many women who choose adoption do not encounter this concern, because the issue did not arrive as a factor in their decision making process. It makes sense that such would be the case, because if birthmothers had significant concerns that the birth father might get custody of the child, then they would likely not become birthmothers. In fact, the birthmothers had very little to say about the biological father in the interviews. The fathers were mostly absent from the interview material, because the fathers were mostly absent emotionally in the birthmothers lives.

BIRTHMOTHERS' CONCERNS ABOUT THE DECISION THEY MUST MAKE

When adoption is presented to the birthmother as another option besides abortion or parenting, she often feels overwhelmed. The following respondent described how she feels when she begins to consider adoption:

"I feel nauseated after the video. Suddenly I had to rethink everything. Had a slight headache, too. I wasn't happy. I was melancholy, upset... It was like adding one more choice, but then it's such a big decision that even adding one more option, it changed everything. Instead of one or two, I have three options. I'm afraid; I feel a lot of anxiety, pressure... I feel lost, troubled. It's not fun. I feel very alone because I know ultimately the decision was up to me."

This birthmother feels burdened and pressured because she has to make such a big decision amidst her emotional turmoil.

Birthmothers reported feeling alone and vulnerable because of the momentous decision had to be all their own. As one birthmothers said,

"it's just you and me, God, you and me. I feel isolated, vulnerable because I have to make this decision on my own. I have to make it on my own because I have to live with it for the rest of my life. I feel vulnerable because if I let my guard down somebody may influence me to do something I'll regret. That builds walls and increases isolation. I have to live with this. I can't let this be somebody else's decision I have to accept the fact that I'll never know this baby and get on with the rest of my life."

This birthmother knew that she alone is responsible for decision, which will be permanent. She feels the magnitude of her responsibility. She is deciding her child's future as well as her own. She does not want to be forced into placing her child for adoption. She is very conscious of making sure it is her decision and no one else's.

3. BIRTHMOTHERS' FEARS, CONCERNS AND PERCEIVED OBSTACLES REGARDING PARENTING

When birthmothers consider parenting their children, they have fears, concerns and perceived obstacles that differ from the conflicts they struggle with when considering adoption. Birthmothers fear that they are too immature to parent. If they are single mothers already, they fear that they cannot handle more children. They worry that their children would suffer from being raised without married parents. They're concerned that they will be unable to provide for themselves and their children financially or that they will be too emotionally unstable to give children safe, nurturing homes. They fear that single parenting will change their identity and derail their future. They are also concerned about how others will view the decision to parent. This section describes those fears and concerns, which contributes to the birthmothers' decision to choose adoption.

BIRTHMOTHERS CONCERNS THAT THEY ARE UNREADY OR UNABLE TO PARENT

Many birthmothers are concerned that they do not have the maturity or life experiences to be a parent. They feel young, inexperienced and unprepared to be single mothers. One birthmothers says,

"I'm not where I want to be. I'm a pregnant teenager. I don't have a job, money, or a place to live. I'm not married, no husband, no knowledge or resources to raise this child. I'm a dumb thing and careless person."

This birthmother realizes that she's not prepared to take on the responsibilities of parenting. She knows that that she would not have the maturity and personal experiences to give her child stable and secure family life she deserves.

Some birthmothers feel that they are simply unable to provide the quantity and quality of parenting they feel their children deserve. They fear that they would be absent mothers, away from home a lot, working and spending time with friends:

"It boils down to I want something better for the little girl... Here I am, twenty-three years old. I have a decent job, currently living at my mother's house. She had a baby, one in the house... I knew in my heart, in my mind, I wanted something better for the baby. She deserve to have someone there for her the whole time, not just six to eight weeks during maternity leave. Her mom would go back to work 40 to 60 hours a week and struggle to be home... I'd have to be gone too much. I'd have to work."

This birthmother knows that she could not provide parenting she wants her child to have.

BIRTHMOTHERS CONCERNS REGARDING THEIR INABILITY TO PROVIDE A FATHER AND STABLE TWO-PARENT FAMILY FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Birthmothers are concerned that if they choose to parent, their children will not have father and will miss out on a stable married family. Birthmothers want their children to have both a mother and a father. They know that if they raise their children in do not marry, their children will be raised without a father. As one birthmothers says,

"The biggest part of it is not having someone, a spouse to help you in this journey... I think having a child and bringing a child in the world... They deserve a father and a mother. Anything less and you are robbing them of those important roles in their life. I believe that each of these people, a father and a mother, have such important roles. They're role models to what children need to see make them into good human being. I can only go by what I've heard of the importance of having a father in your life."

This birthmother wants her child to experience the complementary roles of mother and father. She believes that each parent contribution to the child is unique and irreplaceable.

Birthmothers also fear that if they keep their children, they will not be able to provide stable homes for them. Their children will have to move around a lot and go back and forth between homes. As one birthmothers says,

"I know that he never has to wonder where his next meal will come from or where he's going to lay his head. He doesn't have to move around. My big thing is I just wanted him to be stable and be with two people that weren't going to, won't split up and fight over him. Because I think if I would have kept him he would have grown up to hate me for the decisions I made the decisions I would have made."

This birthmother wants her child to have a stable and secure family life, and she knows she cannot provided it. She fears that if she raises her child as a single mother, he will resent her for her inability to provide a stable environment for him.

BIRTHMOTHERS FEARS REGARDING THEIR ABILITY TO PROVIDE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN

Birthmothers struggled with thoughts about how they will financially provide for their children. Many birthmothers fear that they would barely be able to afford housing, clothing, food and child care if they choose to keep their children:

"That's the thing; I can't give him anything but love. I couldn't buy him diapers. I couldn't get him the things he needs. It's tearing me up inside that I can't take care of him. Why should I have the right to carry a baby if I can't take care of it? 'Cause the child didn't ask to be brought in this world."

This birthmother realizes that loving her baby is not enough to give him a happy childhood. She feels that she must also provide for her child's material needs in order to be a good mother.

Birthmothers are often concerned that if their children are raised in single-parent households, they will not have an ideal childhood. Instead, they will be burdened with fears and anxieties about their lack of material goods. One birthmother expresses this concern:

"I can't support a kid. I work a part time job. I barely have enough money to pay for what I have to do. I didn't want to stop and have a kid. Everyone has (a baby) never came back (to work)... Never came back, seemed poor. They always complained about what diapers cost. I always had a plan for what to give my kids. When I grew up I had a backyard and went to private school. I couldn't have done anything for the kid.... They needed stability. I remember how much fun I had a kid. We didn't worry about what we did or didn't have. It's not their problem, not worry about if the lights will get cut off. Not their problem. They're supposed to be a kid playing on the jungle gym."

This birthmother wants her child to enjoy being a kid, without being burdened by financial woes. She wants him to have the best childhood possible – free from adult fears and anxieties. She knows that she cannot possibly provide an environment for him.

BIRTHMOTHERS FEARS REGARDING THEIR ABILITY TO EMOTIONALLY NURTURE THEIR CHILDREN

Some birthmothers worry that they will not be emotionally stable enough to care for their babies. They feel overwhelmed by the thought of being single mothers. One respondent says,

"I couldn't risk putting the child through all I'd been through. I didn't trust myself. I was so overwhelmed with the responsibility. I had health problems and temper...slight doubt that I could pull it together. I doubt outweighs the assurance."

Another birthmother expresses the same fear: *"I didn't think I'd be a good parent. I would have been a screamer like my mother."* This birthmother is that she would have been stressed for maintaining a job and handling the challenges of single parenting. She fears that her child would suffer from her emotional instability.

Some birthmothers are concerned that the stress from single parenting would be so great that they could become abusive and physically harmful to their children. One birthmothers says,

"I told her (the counselor) I prayed all the time for an epiphany. After counseling sessions I would listen to news reports. They had arrested a mother for beating a five-year-old. Or a 17-year-old threw a child onto the 'L' tracks. They killed their children. I did not know if it was sign but it happened every time I had an appointment. Every single time...There is a moment when you just know that is the right thing to do to give him up. Something says, 'This is it.' She is pushing me to pay attention to what I'm feeling inside. Reinforces it is up to me. And no matter what is in my heart, I remember thinking that my sign is the news."

This birthmother fears that she would be like abusive mothers she heard about in the news. She does not trust her ability to control her emotions and feels it would be best not to parent her child.

BIRTHMOTHERS' FEARS ABOUT THEIR IDENTITIES AND ABOUT THE FUTURE

Birthmothers fear that single parenting will change their identities and their futures. They fear that choosing to parent their children would make it difficult to become an accomplished person who can make a difference in the world. By choosing parenting birthmothers fear that they would become unwed, teenage mothers or dependent, single mothers. One respondent says,

"People have instilled in me that I can make a difference.... Those plans could easily crumble right there because I could not see how I could finish my education.... I'm not what I want to be. I'm a pregnant teenager."

Before she became pregnant, the birthmother had high hopes for herself and her future. She saw herself as a maturing, responsible, and industrious person who could make an impact on the world. However, when she thinks about being single parent, she fears that she will not be able to accomplish her educational and career goals.

Instead, she will probably have to take a low-wage paying job, perhaps working on a degree little at a time. She knows she would have to put her dreams and plans aside, because her child must come first.

BIRTHMOTHERS FEARS ABOUT WHAT THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND OTHERS WILL THINK OF THEM IF THEY CHOOSE TO PARENT THEIR CHILDREN

Birthmothers fear that if they parent their child, their families, friends and communities will be judgmental and condemning. They're worried about disappointing their parents. They're afraid they will be rejected because they have brought shame to their families. In addition, they fear that their church members and communities will judge them for their moral lapse in having children outside of marriage. They assume that people gossip about them:

"I know that people are going to talk about me. Going to see I'm pregnant and know I'm not married. Can I go to church anymore?"

She believes her fears of rejection are well-founded, because she has seen how other unwed mothers are treated:

"There was a girl in town that got pregnant and came back. I remember how the town treated her. It was horrible – all I can picture in my mind with that that was how I was going to be treated."

This birthmother fears ostracism from the community. She imagined that she will be shunned like other unwed mothers were. She said that others will judge her for being a irresponsible and failure because she did not prevent the pregnancy. If she chooses to parent, the presence of her child will be a constant reminder to others of her "mistake."

4. BIRTHMOTHERS' RESOLVED FEELING AND BELIEFS ABOUT ADOPTION THAT ENABLED THEM TO CHOOSE ADOPTION

After working through their fears and conflicts, birthmothers choose adoption because they believe it is best for their children. They realized that adoption is not abandonment; it is a loving, responsible act. By choosing what is best for their children, birthmothers see themselves as good mothers. Instead of feeling like bad mothers who were abandoning their children or "giving them away," now they begin to see that placing their children with loving couples is what it means for them to be good mothers. They redeem themselves, transforming their mistake into positive outcomes. They see themselves as heroines in their own stories. In their minds they are heroic because they make a supreme sacrifice which in turn makes up for their mistakes. In their story, adoption carries them from failure and despair to heroic achievement. Adoption allows them to recover their self-esteem, restore their identity and renew their dreams and goals. Believing that that decision means that they are good mothers, birthmothers are able to feel right about the decision and have confidence in it, even when pain or regret arise. The support of family and friends in the decision adds to the birthmothers' resolve about choosing adoption.

BIRTHMOTHERS; BELIEF THAT ADOPTION IS BEST FOR THEIR CHILDREN

As they work through their conflicts, birthmothers eventually come to see that adoption is best for their children. They begin to see that adoption can provide joy and security of family life for their children that they cannot. One birthmother expresses her desire for this:

"I am alone in my room on the floor reading all these adoption pamphlets. Maybe I don't know all the answers. I focus on this picture on the cover – a picture of the family – a mom, a dad, a child. Something I wanted for my child that I couldn't provide. My child deserves a family to thrive the best. Safety, security. It's love. It's family. It's a structure and it brings a foundation. ..It's important because without the foundation everything else can topple."

This birthmother believes that mature, stable, adoptive parents will give her child the love, security and attention he deserves. She feels that her child will be less likely to experience emotional deprivation, insecurity and instability if he is with the right adoptive parents. She believes that adoption will provide her child the kind of family life that will enable him to flourish in to receive a strong foundation for the future.

Birthmothers also believe that adoption is best for their children, because it will provide them with both a mother and a father. Birthmothers know they could not be both mother and father to their children. One birthmother says,

"I am thanking God for the life he is making inside me; for the wonderful gift I'm going to give my unborn child. And looking at the life he was going to have, the house he would live in; a mom and dad together – happily married. He always has loving people... I couldn't be mother and father. I'm glad some parents are out there – some adoptive parents who just wanted a baby. I'm glad I thought about providing a better life (for my baby), providing a better life for the adoptive parents, providing a better life for me. It's love and devotion; knowing how happy he'll be."

Birthmothers expressed gratitude that their children experience the love of both mother and father. They believe that both mothers and fathers have unique and irreplaceable roles in parenting and that their children will benefit from being raised by married parents.

In order for birthmothers to decide what is best for their babies, they must first see that their decisions are not just about them; they are also deciding what is best for their babies. One birthmother described how she began to think about the baby as well as herself:

"I have to figure out what I'm going to do. Abortion? I'm more concerned about myself. Now I'm feeling bad about feeling selfish. I realized it wasn't just about me. I'm afraid. Too many variables, too big of a decision... Whatever decision you make is forever. You think about what you were taught in school, church, by your parents. Either I have an abortion and wrestle with that guilt or to tell my parents who would be extremely disappointed... or tell the father and wreck his life. None of those are real appealing choices. The matter what I decide it affects all people important (to me) and an unborn child. Hopefully everyone would consider all parties involved. This baby is a person with a soul, it's not just that you."

This birthmother comes to see the baby as an individual person who deserves to be loved. Birthmothers must be able to separate their children in their minds from themselves in order to arrive at a decision about what is best for their children. When birthmothers are able to see their baby as unique persons with their own rights, desires, needs and possibilities, they are better able to determine what is best for them.

BIRTHMOTHERS BELIEF THAT FOR THEM, CHOOSING ADOPTION IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GOOD MOTHERS

Birthmothers want to do the right things for their babies. They want to be good mothers. They realize that good mothers do what is best for their babies, even though it may be very difficult for them. As birthmothers come to believing that choosing adoption is best for their children, they find resolution in seeing themselves as loving and responsible others:

"As I'm making this list I start noticing the reasons for parenting are all about me. The list for placing for adoption is about the baby. At that moment I knew what my decision needs to be. I decided at that moment it would be more important to think about my child than myself. I decided at that moment I'm being a true mother. That's the epitome of motherhood, is to think about your child, not yourself, no matter what. I could be the best mother by making sure my child was given what I want for them, no matter what."

Nothing is more important to this birthmother's identity than seeing herself as a good mother. Providing her child the best possible foundation in life, through adoption, enables this birthmother, like all of the others who choose adoption really, to see herself as a good mother. This rationalization provide her a sense of rightness and resolution about her decision, even when she's also experiencing the pain of relinquishment and regrets concerning "what might have been."

At the onset of the pregnancy birthmothers see the fetus, baby or child as an extension of themselves. That means the fetus does not yet have a separate entity in their minds. Adoption is not yet an option for them, because they are still in the denial, even if they have rejected abortion. As time goes on, and the denial begins to break down, and particularly as they start to feel the heartbeat and that "kicking," they began to differentiate themselves from the fetus as having a separate identity.

As a result, the birthmothers begin to see the future a little more clearly, and as they do, they begin to consider alternatives of keeping the child versus placing for adoption. They vacillate back and forth, riddled with conflict, often taking many months to decide – some even making the final decision after the baby is born. Once the process of differentiating themselves from the baby begins, birthmothers are able to see outcomes for themselves that are different from the possible outcomes for their babies.

When birthmothers are able to make this differentiation, they can begin to see that adoption may even be the best decision for their children, even as they may not feel it is best for them. So, what started as amorphous undifferentiated picture of themselves as pregnant with a fetus inside them has now been transformed into human two beings whom the birthmother can begin to see in a different light.

But there is a conflict and agony because they are now contemplating separation. First, they feel that adoption might be best for their babies, but not for themselves. Then, there is a short step to a complete reorganization of belief, perception and emotion, when they begin to differentiate between a mother who gave birth to her child and a mother who raises her child.

When they can differentiate in this manner, it becomes possible for them to realize that through adoption they could be good mothers, even though they will not be raising their children. Then, the whole mental and emotional process moves to another level: where there had been differentiation, there is now a move toward integrating the perceptions and feelings into a new whole, whereby they start to think and feel that in the long run adoption may be best for themselves as well as for their children, albeit in different ways.

In choosing adoption they can now see themselves as good mothers, the highest form of motherhood – the mother who chooses what is best for her child regardless of sacrifice it requires of her. In doing what is best for her child, she fulfills her need to see herself as a good mother and accept the pain of relinquishment. In this way, she transforms agony of the entire story into a redemptive experience where she becomes a heroine in her own eyes and in the eyes of others.

BIRTHMOTHERS' BELIEF THAT CHOOSING ADOPTION IS REDEMPTIVE, TRANSFORMING THEIR MISTAKES INTO POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Choosing adoption enables birthmothers to see themselves in compassionate, noble and heroic terms, righting the wrong and correcting the mistake of their unplanned pregnancies. When the following birthmother first discovered she was pregnant, she lost self-esteem and self-respect, feeling like a "bad girl" – stupid and moral. She says,

"You just got caught – you got pregnant before you are married. I got knocked up and disgrace the family. Good girls aren't supposed to get pregnant before they're married. I feel bad girl deserves whatever she gets."

Through adoption, this birthmother heaves herself as redeeming her mistake, transforming it into positive outcomes for everyone. She restores her self-respect by acting as unselfishly, even heroically, out of love for her child.

One birthmother reflecting on her adoption decision says,

"It feels good knowing that he's better off – just knowing I made the right decision and I would never change my decision. It's the right thing for everybody. Just so I could go on with my life knowing he can go on with his... knowing he's going to have a happy life."

This birthmother sees that adoption is right, because it will benefit everyone. Her child will be raised in a stable home and will be loved by both a mother and a father. She can forego single motherhood and have a family when she is married and finished with school. Another birthmother says that she was "proud of herself" for not being selfish and this has helped her self-esteem. She sees herself as a good mother who did what was best for her child and so was able to view herself more positively again.

In transforming their mistakes through adoption, birthmothers have confidence that they're doing the right thing:

"I just knew it was the right thing to do... It was almost like an odd calmness. It was that two or three deep breaths you take when you finally nod off and go to sleep... Just there, I was at peace with myself again... Is this the right thing to do? All the pieces. I came to the summation, that yes, this is the right thing to do. This is what I'm going to do. This is what I want to do. Then there was the calm."

She feels a sense of peace because she feels that her decision is the best thing for her baby, and it is the right thing to do. She transforms her mistakes into heroic achievements.

Birthmothers also see redemption and heroism in the help they give to the adoptive parents, who desire so strongly to form a family. As one birthmother says,

"I made a mistake, and I'm not ready for child about there are people out there who are set up in their lives for a child. I can give them what they always wanted. It makes me very proud; I made a mistake, but made the best of it."

She is proud of herself for helping to satisfy the adoptive parents longing for a child. She sees herself as a heroine, because she helped the couple who was unable to have children:

"That is what helped me get through every day, knowing I would complete their family... I am proud to know I sacrifice my own feelings, put my feeling aside to help complete strangers. I was like a hero."

This birthmother is able to overcome her fears and anguish over relinquishing her baby, because she sees herself as a hero who is helping a loving couple realize their dream of having a baby.

BIRTHMOTHERS' BELIEF THAT ADOPTION ALLOWS THEM TO REGAIN CONTROL OF THEIR IDENTITY AND FUTURE

Birthmothers who are not already parent children see that by choosing adoption they avoid becoming single mothers who are unprepared for and overwhelmed by the responsibilities of parenting. They do not have to worry about living in poverty and working while going to school or developing their careers. As one birthmother says,

"I can go on with my life. Being so young I don't want to become – not necessarily an adult, but a parent. I wasn't ready to have my life revolved completely around somebody else's. I can go out and take care of something else. I was such independent (person) before. I didn't want someone else to dependant on me...I can go back to school and not have to worry. It is over. I can start back over. Spend time with friends."

Move out on my own, be there for myself. I can meet that guy that will soon become my husband. I can be me and not have to worry about taking care of anyone else."

This birthmother knows that she is not ready to have a child who is completely dependent on her. She wants to wait until she is married before she raises a child. In addition, she wants to accomplish her educational and career goals. Graduating from school and working in a fulfilling job are very important to her.

Birthmothers who are already parenting feel that their lives would go out of control, or further out of control, if they bring another child into their homes. They see adoption as the way they can at least maintain their present level of control and keep their goals for the future on track.

BIRTHMOTHERS' POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

When birthmothers realize that they can influence the selection of the adoptive parents, they are much more open to adoption. As birthmothers get to know prospective adoptive parent, through files and perhaps meetings, they feel more confident about their ability to love their children and that they are making the right decision. One birthmother describes her joy in being able to choose the adoptive parents:

"I could pick it out for her. People in castles, with a million kinds of opportunities... To choose a family for her.. I feel very excited and glad the opportunity."

She wants to choose the parent so that she can make sure her child is placed with loving, responsible family. She may try to choose a family that has the same traits as her.

Birthmothers want to see the adoptive parent as extensions of themselves. They often choose adoptive parents who are similar to them, which reassures them that their children will be loved by their parents as much as they, birthmothers, love them. As one birthmother says,

"We all read the profile and all ranked this family number one. They were so much like me. The mother looks like me. I believe she is me, so if the mother is like me they would probably be able to relate better. If mother's like me, her family like mine, there is no big confusion for her."

When this birthmother says, "I believe she (the adoptive mother) is me," she indicates that she perceives the adoptive mother to be an extension of herself. Feeling this way reassures the birthmother that the adoptive mother will love the child as she would.

As the process moves along, birthmothers begin to see their babies as belonging to the adoptive parents and not them. Birthmothers tend to distance themselves emotionally from their pregnancies. As one birthmother describes,

"I am separating from the pregnancy. I fool myself into believing that this is not my baby... I tell myself the baby is not mine. I never thought about baby's name. I never went shopping for baby clothes or equipment. I do not need it. This baby is not for me. I did not daydream. I removed myself from it. I am not excited to have a new baby. It is going to go. I thought more about the couple and what they would think about when I gave them the baby. I have a toddler running around me. From the moment you have your first kid you don't think about yourself."

This birth mother did not even want to entertain thoughts of parenting her baby, because she feared that she would become too attached to place her baby for adoption. To cope with the pain of relinquishing the baby, this birthmother removes herself emotionally from the pregnancy.

BIRTHMOTHERS' BELIEFS THAT GOD IS AT WORK IN THEIR LIVES AND IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

For many birthmothers, faith plays an important role in the decision to choose adoption. Their faith allows them to believe that God is in control of the events surrounding the adoption. They believe that God allowed them to make a mistake, so that it could be transformed into the gift of a child for a couple who has been praying for one. Birthmothers feel that same God who is guiding and is also listening to the prayer of the adoptive couple. Birthmothers often look for and believed they see signs of God's guidance. One birthmother says,

"I believe it is divine intervention. We believe there is a reason for everything. I feel excited. Maybe we have found a couple we are looking for."

This birthmother sees her child is a gift from God to a childless couple.

Birthmothers faith also allows them to feel reassured about their adoption decisions. One birthmother describes how her faith comforted her:

"Families are important God's plan. Biologically he is my son; spiritually he is God's child. The decision I made was right. This is what God wanted me to do. It is more important to do what God wants. It's a sacrifice. With obedience comes sacrifice... She was able to touch me in a part of my core, to see clearly what I needed to do. As opposed to all the confusion, when one comes to a decision, the right decision, God confirms that with peace... I was directed to these experiences"

This birthmother attributes her feelings of peace to the fact that she is following God's plan. She believed that God comforts her because she did the right thing.

BIRTHMOTHER'S BELIEF THAT ADOPTION OVERCOMES THE PROBLEMS OF WHAT OTHERS THINK IN THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Birthmothers believe that adoption allows them to make amends with their families and communities. Placing their children for adoption gives birthmothers second chance and allows them to show that they are mature enough to take responsibility for their actions. One birthmother says,

"What it's doing for me is giving me a second chance...It is important for me to give me a second chance from my mistake to go back to school; do not be tied down. A second chance to have my family's love and support again."

This birthmother sees adoption as a way to restore herself as a member of her family and community. She believes that they will accept her and give her for mistake. In addition, she feels that adoption allows her to protect herself as well as her family from the shame of single parenting.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM TO REINFORCE THE ADOPTION DECISION

The support of the birthmothers' family and friends is an important factor in reinforcing her adoption decision. For example, birthmothers who have had a family member or close friend with had a positive adoption experience are more open to adoption. When they feel supported by their family and friends, they find it easier to place their children for adoption. As one birthmother says,

"My parents supported me and my friends supported me. It's a hard thing to go through... I had to have my family and friends. It makes all the difference of the world. I could go through the pregnancy on my own but it's nice to have someone there to give you a hug."

This birthmother is especially influenced by how her parents view her adoption decision. She knows that they were disappointed by her unwed pregnancy, so it is important to her that they support her adoption plan. She wants them to affirm that she is doing the right thing.

Birthmothers also find it easier to place their children for adoption when they feel supported by the adoption agency and counselor. One birthmother describes how comfortable she feels at the adoption agency:

"(The adoption agency is) a wonderful place. It makes you feel comfortable. Not pushy. Help you go through your decision what you want to do... Very comforting... Like someone you don't know and you're walking down the street and you think you're lost and they asked you if you need help. It's like that. You're wanted. You're not a terrible person for wanting to give your child away."

This birthmother likes the adoption agency because she feels accepted and affirmed that it adoption counselor. In addition, she appreciates that the counselor supports her while letting her freely decide on adoption.

THE ROLE OF ABORTION IN THE BIRTHMOTHERS' DECISION

Consistent with the findings in "The Missing Piece," most of the birthmothers in this study first dealt with the issue of abortion versus carrying to term, before seriously considering adoption. Either because they opposed abortion generally and in principle, or because they felt it was not right for them personally, abortion was not a viable option for the birthmothers. Many of them considered abortion briefly when they first discovered that they were pregnant, but it was only a passing thought. They generally made a rather immediate decision to carry their children to term, and at some point thereafter, while pondering their own and their children's futures, eventually although not immediately began to consider adoption.

The idea of seeing themselves as "good mothers" had a profound influence on the birthmothers' ability to choose adoption confidently, and to live peacefully with that decision in the years to come. When the question "What would a good mother do?" penetrates the denial and agonizing experience of the birthmother it has a transcendent, positive affect in enabling them to begin to give adoption serious thought. It is possible that women with unplanned pregnancies, who might otherwise choose abortion, maybe influence profoundly by exposure to this question. The concept of "good mother" is powerful and universal. Using it in the early stages of counseling may enable some additional women to consider and choose adoption who otherwise would not.

5. COUNSELING AND COMMUNICATING THE BIRTHMOTHER AS GOOD MOTHER

The interviews yielded three types of information: what is already known, what comes as new understanding or revelation and what is known on an intuitive level but has really been expressed or articulated in words. Pregnancy counselor and adoption professionals will recognize many of the findings here from their own experiences. Some are already well known and confirmed here, such as the view, almost universal among birthmothers who voluntarily choose adoption, that they do so because they believe adoption to be best for their children and because they want their children to have both a mother and a father. Others, such as the birthmothers' need to "own" their decision, the threat that they feel to their identity and the future posed by the pregnancy and the prospect of parenting, and their belief that God is guiding their steps, are very familiar to counselors, perhaps not commonly expressed. The most valuable, improved understanding is the finding that the most resolved and confident birthmothers see her choice of adoption as an act of a good mother and that by choosing adoption she redeems herself, transforming her "mistake" into a positive outcome.

Based on the findings from this research the following strategies may enable women with unplanned pregnancies to consider adoption more freely through counseling and communications.

COUNSELING

- Help potential birthmothers see that choosing adoption can what it means to be the best mother possible, for them, given their circumstances. Encourage them to consider their babies needs and their own desire to do what is best for their babies.
- Make sure that potential birthmothers understand the extensive screening procedures that are followed in selecting adoptive parents so they will believe that their babies will be cared for. Communicate to birthmothers that their babies will ultimately understand and appreciate their sacrifices.
- Help potential birthmothers break through their denial by actively imagining their lives both with and without their babies. Encourage them to act out those lives in their minds including the long hours and came up with colicky children only to be followed by even longer hours at work or school. Assign birthmothers the task of keeping a week-long diary recording their life as a mother of six week old baby.
- Encourage birthmothers to write their own stories. These stories can be placed adoptive parents and/or agencies to be given to their babies later in life. Adoptive parents can pass these stories on to the children when they feel they should have been.
- Continue reassuring birthmothers by putting together a book of interviews with birthmothers and how they worked through emotional minefield of facing in unplanned pregnancy. Some respondents said they felt better just sitting in the waiting room with other birthmothers, even though they did not know them. For these women, it just feels good knowing they are not alone.
- Let birthmothers know that they can still parent children one day. Encourage birthmothers to adopt children.
- Work to encourage birthmothers to be actively involved in selecting the adoptive parents, whether or not identifying information is exchanged.
- Provide birthmothers with lifetime access to counseling.

- Help adoption counselors develop techniques for asking questions that will clarify the following concerns regarding their clients:
 - Their immediate and long-term goals in life
 - How they will fund college or other schooling if further education in their plan
 - How important it is for them to finish school
 - What their relationship is like with the father of the baby
 - What their support structure is like
 - What their relationship is like with their parents and the parents of the father
 - Whether there is anyone in the family who would be interested in adopting the child
 - What kind of emotional support and financial support they have in their lives
 - What their thoughts are regarding marriage and family
 - What they believe it would be like to be a single mother raising a child on their own
 - What they think a single mother's life is like
 - What they know about single mom.. if they knew any personally
 - How they think they would feel if they were to find a wonderful home for their child
 - How they would change things for them in their current situation
 - How mature and ready parent they are
 - How ready they are to make major decisions for their lives
 - What they believe their child's life would be like being raised by a single mother
 - How they believe it would be different if the child was raised by a mother and a father in the intact family
 - Who cares about them
 - Who is there in their lives to help them make wise decisions
 - Who is there in their lives to help them recognize that they have the right to be concerned with their own well-being as well as with their babies

Clarifying these concerns helps clients gain insight into their own beliefs and needs, and helps counselors assist their clients' readiness to act wisely in preparing for the birth of their babies.

Communications

- Deliver the message through birthmothers that sometimes choosing adoption is what it means to be a good mother. Using the media and public relations to help potential birthmothers understand adoption in advance of unplanned pregnancy. Use article placements to establish adoption as a viable option if an unwanted/unplanned pregnancy occurs.
- All communication materials should be sensitive to birthmothers' concerns and include their side of the equation. When birthmothers see warm, glowing advertising praising adoptive parents or happy adoptive children, with no mention of the birthmothers' crucial role in making it happen, they feel it is a slap in the face. They are also reminded of their feeling that they are failures who were not good enough to raise their own children. Birthmothers choose adoption more for their babies than for themselves; therefore, they need and want to hear their contribution to acknowledge and praised.
- Include birthmothers in messaging by having them speak directly to pregnant women considering adoption. Show women who have gone on in their lives and become successful, both professionally and personally. This message will assure potential respondents that they can choose a personal path that ends in success and happiness for everyone, including them.

- Educate potential birthmothers supporters such as family members and friends. Challenge the assumption that all women should want to keep unplanned babies and /or want to parent. This strategy prepares the way for pregnant girls to choose adoption and not be judged as bad women. Show potential supporters that choosing adoption is a demonstration of maturity and love.
- Put together a book of meditations for pregnant women who have decided to place babies for adoption. These books could include a variety of birthmother stories that reassure women with unplanned pregnancies that adoption was right for many other women with similar circumstances in me right for them.
- Work to include adoption in sex education classes. If young women are aware of adoption, they are more likely to consider it as an option when they find themselves facing the emotional turmoil of unplanned pregnancy.
- Educate adults who work with people. Make them aware that adoption is a positive option for women with unplanned pregnancies.
- Respect and honor birthmothers after adoption using media. Reassure them that they are good mothers who made a loving, responsible decisions in the best interests of their child. Reassure birthmothers that their babies will appreciate their sacrifices.
- Have events for birthmothers to keep them in touch with other birthmothers. Organize the various national and local events, meetings, and forums to help birthmothers get together and provide support for each other.

CONCLUSION

Birthmothers who make adoption plans in the best interest of their children are indeed good mothers. It is high time for the insight to be common understanding in America, so that women with unplanned pregnancies can freely consider the adoption option, and birthmothers can have the respect they deserve. Hopefully the findings from this research will contribute to pregnancy counseling and public communications that honor birthmothers and their loving, thoughtful choice of adoption.