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# Adoption in New Orleans: what agencies are doing to promote it

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ADOPTION IN NEW ORLEANS:  
WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING TO PROMOTE IT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Unplanned and unwanted pregnancies are a national concern in the United States. In addition, many people exist who would like to become parents, but cannot or do not reproduce biologically. While adoption could offer a solution to this problem, the actual number of adoptions that take place is very small.

This study examined what adoption agencies in the New Orleans area are doing to promote themselves to women with unwanted pregnancies. In-depth interviews were conducted with five adoption agencies. Three of the five agencies reported using various methods of targeting women with unwanted pregnancies. These methods included public posters, flyers distributed in various public places, feature stories in newspapers, radio spots, and television commercials. Two agencies did not target women at all because they did not have a need to do so.

In addition to providing information on their methods of targeting, the respondents were also able to provide useful ideas and information on aspects such as competition among adoption agencies, demographics of birth and adoptive parents, adoption and the media, limitations agencies face, and ethical considerations in adoption. The majority of the adoption agencies did engage in methods of targeting. Yet, they felt that more could be done if the financial resources were available.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Unplanned and unwanted pregnancies are a national concern in the United States. In addition, many couples exist who do not or cannot reproduce biologically and wish to be parents. Adoption provides a solution to both problems. However, the number of unplanned babies that is put up for adoption is extremely small. Less than two out of 100 women with unwanted pregnancies choose to place their child for adoption (Olasky, 1997; Waldman & Caplan, 1994). Knowing this, it is important to find out what adoption agencies in Louisiana are doing to reach out or promote themselves to these pregnant women, and how well it is working. If adoption agencies are not doing anything at all, it is necessary to find out why, as well as what they would like to do to increase their adoption pool. This study is important to adoption agencies that want to promote their services or that want to use or improve media campaigns to target women with unwanted pregnancies.

Many potential parents exist who would like to adopt a child. In addition, there are many women who are faced with an unplanned pregnancy. Adoption agencies exist to bring these two parties together. They provide support to women who face unwanted pregnancies and to individuals who can only become parents through adoption. They also promote the choice of adoption, as well as make adoption placements. This study may provide ideas on what some adoption agencies are doing to promote their services, and thus may be important to agencies that strive to do the same. If agencies hope to administer relevant information to women with unwanted pregnancies, including what the agency offers, presenting the option of adoption, and information on adoption placements, then perhaps this study can help these adoption agencies reach their goal.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### History of Adoption

Adopting children has been evident since ancient times and in all human cultures (Herman, 2004). According to Reitz and Watson (1992), mythology and folklore presented adoption as a way to rescue a child from harm, for example the story of Moses. Moses' mother put him in a basket and sent him down the Nile River to save him from being killed by the Pharaoh. He was found and raised by the Pharaoh's daughter who was childless. Adoption was also presented as a way to protect a child from parents who would harm the child, such as the story of Oedipus. It was prophesized that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother, so his parents left the baby to die. He was found by a shepherd and given to the King and Queen of Corinth to be raised.

Until the 1800s, the idea of adoption as it is known today did not exist. There were no established legal processes, no court records, birth certificates, adoption case records, no social workers, and no standards for determining what was in the best interest of the child or who would make adequate parents (Carp, 1998).

In the past, people wanted to adopt children for many reasons. Over time adoption has served a variety of functions, from providing an heir to a royal family, to adding helping hands to make a family more financially self-sufficient, to emptying orphanages to save community dollars (Reitz & Watson, 1992). The main difference between old adoption practices and modern adoption is that past adoptions were not based on the welfare of a child, but rather on the needs of the adopting adults (Carp, 1998). The idea that children should be adopted to create a family and to provide a chance for infertile or reproductively challenged couples to have children is a relatively new idea (Herman, 2004; Reitz & Watson, 1992).

It was not until 1851 that Massachusetts passed the first modern adoption law that recognized adoption to be an operation based on the child's welfare instead of the best interest of the adult. The "best interest of the child" doctrine had been evolving in custody cases since the early 1800s. The Adoption of Children Act was a milestone in the history of adoption because it made the adopted child the primary beneficiary of the proceeding and because it required judges to evaluate adoptive parents to ensure that the adoption was "fit" and "proper" (Carp, 1998; Herman, 2004).

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century also brought about the operation of "orphan trains." Between the years of 1854 and 1929, as many as 150,000 to 250,000 children from New York and other eastern cities were sent by orphan trains to towns in the Midwest and West (Cook, 1995). This was done as a solution to the growing poverty class in urban cities (Hold, 1992). The project was organized by the New York Children's Aid Society in order to rescue children from these poverty-stricken urban areas and transport them to Anglo-Protestant farming families. Families who were interested in adopting children came to the local train stations, yet little investigation of the placements was made. Applicants hoping to adopt children were required to be screened by businessmen, ministers, or physicians, though these screenings were lenient, as was the monitoring of placements (O'Connor, 2001). Though the intent was to relocate the children far away from their original environment, most children were not permanently separated from their homes. Many poor parents took advantage of this situation and allowed their children to be taken by middle class families during periods of economic crisis. In fact, historians have concluded that the largest number of orphan train children were temporarily transferred or shared, not given up permanently (Herman, 2004).

During the twentieth century the number of adoptions that took place increased dramatically. The first specialized adoption agencies were founded between 1910 and 1930 by several elite and philanthropic women, Louise Waterman, Clara Spence, Alice Chapin, and Florence Walrath. These adoption agencies differed from child welfare agencies of the time in that they did not recognize unmarried women and their children to be a family, thus they did not try to keep them together. It was during these years that adoption became the solution for unmarried mothers, illegitimate children, and infertile couples (Herman, 2004).

Also during this time period, from about 1912 to 1921, “baby farming” was a common practice. This referred to placing infants for money and selling them for a profit. Most clients were unwed mothers, prostitutes, and poverty-stricken wives who needed child care while they worked. Baby farming, though it amounted to what is now called day care, developed a terrible reputation when exposés uncovered cases of abuse and death. Babies were often victims of serious diseases and unsanitary conditions and usually died there (Herman, 2004).

Baby farming was a business in which children were sold as commodities. Baby farmers profited from extracting fees from birth mothers and then from demanding large sums of money from the adoptive parents. It was reported by a survey conducted by the Chicago Juvenile Protective Association that children were sold for up to \$100 in the 1900s, with a percentage of the cost as the down payment and the remainder being paid through monthly installments. No questions were asked of the adoptive parents. The scandals that were later uncovered helped to initiate minimum standard state licensing, the certification of those involved with placing children for adoption, and political support for child welfare regulation (Herman, 2004).

It was around this period of “baby farming” that the U.S. Children’s Bureau was developed by Congress to investigate all matters pertaining to the welfare of children. The USCB

encouraged reforms in state adoption laws, performed original research, and sponsored conferences on child placement issues. It worked closely with the Child Welfare League of America, founded in 1921, to extend the power of the government over the adoption process. In 1938, the Child Welfare League of America established minimum standards for permanent and temporary placements. In the 1950s it produced the most empirical survey of adoption agency practice, including a landmark study involving the adoption of special needs children. And, it organized a national conference in 1955 that brought together social workers, adoption researchers, and leading figures in other scientific fields (Herman, 2004).

In 1970 the number of adoptions reached its peak at approximately 175,000. In recent years, the number of adoptions completed has dropped to about 125,000 per year (Herman, 2004). The practice of adoption today is a result of these events and milestones that have occurred and the adoption laws that have been put into place over the past 150 years.

### **The Adoption Process**

Adoption is a legal proceeding where the parental rights of the birth parents are terminated and the adopting parent becomes the legal parent. While the adoption experience may differ for every family, there are basically two ways in which to adopt a child. One may choose to adopt through an agency or one may choose to adopt independently through a lawyer, if the state allows it (Martin, 1993).

An adoption agency may be public or private. Public agencies exist through a state-sponsored public child-welfare agency. On the other hand, private agencies are not run by the state and thus are private non-profit organizations. In either type, the agency may educate the prospective parent(s) on the adoption process, and the parent is then able to fill out an

application. The next major step of the adoption process is a home study in which the ability to meet the needs of a child and the parenting strengths are assessed.

Within a public agency, many of the children have been neglected or abused. The main advantage of adopting through a public agency is that it is basically free. Private agencies tend to work with the birth parents that come to them to make arrangements for an adoption. Thus, newborns are more easily found through private adoption agencies. Many of these adoptions are very open, in that the birth parents and the adoptive parents can communicate with each other. Because the cost of a private adoption often covers the birth mother's medical needs during her pregnancy, the expense of a private adoption is much greater than working with a public adoption agency (Martin, 1993).

If one does not want to work with any type of agency, one may choose an independent adoption in which a lawyer is used. The advantage of an independent adoption is that while a home study is still a requirement, an agency does not have to approve the adoptive parents. Thus, agency requirements regarding age, marital status, and sexual orientation are bypassed. However, prospective parents have the responsibility of finding an available child to adopt. When a birth mother is found, the adoptive party is responsible for her medical expenses and all the legal fees (Martin, 1993).

### **Adoption in Louisiana**

In the state of Louisiana there are three types of adoption, agency, independent, and intrafamily (West's Louisiana Statutes, 2004). Agency adoptions are handled by either public or private agencies. Public agencies are operated by the state and they are financially supported by taxes. Private agencies are privately operated and licensed by the state and supported mostly by adoption fees that are paid by adoptive parents. The cost for adoptive parents to adopt through a

private agency in Louisiana is usually between \$25,000 and \$35,000. These costs include services to the birth parents and legal fees (Tebo & Vargas, 2003).

Independent adoptions, also called private adoptions, are mainly handled by attorneys. A separate attorney is required for birth parents and adoptive parents. Attorney fees in independent adoptions range from \$2,500 to \$5,500. Additionally, however, in Louisiana the adoptive family is responsible for all medical, counseling, legal, and living expenses for the birth mother. Thus, total adoption costs will vary depending on the situation of the birth mother, but \$25,000 is the average cost to adopt independently (Tebo & Vargas, 2003).

Intrafamily adoptions involve the adoption of a child by another family member. Those who may petition for intrafamily adoption include a stepparent, stepgrandparent, great-grandparent, grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, sibling, or first cousin. The petitioner must be related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity through a parent who is recognized as having parental rights. Also, the petitioner must have had legal or physical custody of the child for a minimum of six months before filing a petition to adopt (West's Louisiana Statutes, 2004).

For a person adopting independently or through an agency, a home study is required by the state. This is a report prepared by an adoption agency or an independent social worker that gives an individual or a couple the approval to adopt a child. The cost of a home study can range from \$800 to \$1,400, and it is good for two years (Tebo & Vargas, 2003). A home study is not required for an intrafamily adoption, however the court may sometimes request one (West's Louisiana Statutes, 2004).

A single person, eighteen years or older, or a married couple jointly may petition to adopt a child in Louisiana (West's Louisiana Statutes, 2004). Public and private agency adoptions may

have additional requirements regarding length of marriage, religious preference, number of children in the home, age limit, income, and health. In Louisiana the law is silent on the issue of same-sex couple adoption. However, two unmarried persons cannot jointly adopt in the state, thus only one member of a same-sex couple can adopt as a single parent (Tebo & Vargas, 2003).

### **Single Mothers and Birth Control**

Fewer than two out of every 100 unmarried pregnant women choose adoption (Olasky, 1997; Waldman & Caplan, 1994). Three specific situations in the past 50 years may explain why adoption in Louisiana and across the nation has decreased. In the 1950s many babies were placed for adoption so that their unwed mothers could avoid the shame of giving birth out of wedlock and to protect the children from the stigma of illegitimacy (Waldman & Caplan, 1994). Today, however, the negativity associated with single, unwed mothers has more or less been removed. “Single parenthood carries less stigma today than in the past” (Klerman, 1983, p.1159). Pollitt (1996) explains that in the 1950s and 1960s, young, unwed girls did not necessarily more readily choose adoption, but rather they were coerced into giving their babies up for adoption. The sexual double standard and stigma of unwed mothers contributed to the number of relinquishments (Pollitt, 1996).

McKay (1999) reports that though the United States has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the developed world, the teen pregnancy rate dropped during the 1990s. Between 1988 and 1995, the pregnancy rate among 15- to 19- year-olds declined from 111 to 101 per 1,000. Three possible factors may have resulted in the decrease of pregnancy: a decrease in the frequency of intercourse, an increase in the use of contraceptives, and an increase in the use of more effective contraceptive methods among these teenagers (McKay, 1999). In another study it was reported that the current levels of contraceptive use averted up to 1.65 million

pregnancies among 15-19-year-old women in the United States in 1995 (Kahn, Brindis, & Gleib, 1999). While these conclusions may not directly affect adoption rates, decreasing unwanted pregnancies lessens the number of children that could potentially be available for adoption. As all these studies suggest, circumstances today have changed regarding single motherhood and birth control use, which could be why child adoptions have decreased.

### **Infertility**

While the number of adoptions seems to be decreasing, the number of infertile couples seems to have increased. Women are getting married later and delaying childbearing to focus on their careers, which may explain why infertility has become an issue in recent years (Canape, 1986). Approximately 17% of couples face infertility. Over half of these achieve success through fertility treatments, which leaves about 30% to 40% to contemplate adoption (Daniluk & Hurtig, 2003). In fact, Canape (1986) reported that the majority of adoptive parents are infertile couples. Muldoon (2004) and Cudmore (2005) agree that most adoptive parents first face infertility before deciding to adopt a child.

### **Tribulations in Adoption**

Some authors have suggested that adolescents who were adopted as infants are as well-adjusted as adolescents who were born and raised by their biological parents, but many critics of adoption still claim that babies who were put up for adoption have suffered an emotional wound. The media, especially, has not always painted a positive picture of adoption (Olasky, 1997; Tebo & Vargas, 2003). Many talk shows feature teary and depressed birth mothers who have regretted putting a child up for adoption, or teens who are desperately trying to find their birth parents. While adoptions usually work out well for all parties involved, these shows leave the impression that children will be miserable if placed for adoption, or that birth mothers will change their

minds, causing battles between families. It is these impressions that have placed such a negative stigma on adoption (Olasky, 1997).

Most attempts to promote the adoption of older children in the foster care system have not been successful. While National Adoption Month and National Adoption Week have provided human-interest articles and some attention, it has not significantly raised the number of children adopted. Also, adoption fairs that depict unfortunate children who are in foster care have succeeded in finding several children homes, yet this too has not proved to significantly alter the number of adoptions for older children (Olasky, 1997).

In the past decade the number of children who are in need of adoptive homes has been increasing, yet the number of prospective adoptive parents has been decreasing. An estimated 500,000 children are currently in foster care. Of these, African-American children are the largest racial group who are in the foster care system, making up about 47% of the foster care population. Hispanic children make up another 14% of those who are in need of permanent adoptive homes. Recruitment efforts to find homes for these children have not shown adequate results (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001).

### **Media Campaigns and Adoption**

Tyebjee (2003) explains that only by understanding the attitudes and needs of the public can adoption agencies begin to develop adequate media campaigns to recruit adoptive parents for children without homes of their own. Misconceptions about adoption and the adoptive family have influenced the way the public thinks about adoption (Olasky, 1997; Tyebjee, 2003).

Limited exposure and understanding of adoption has given it negative connotations. Half of Americans say that adopting a child is not as good as having one biologically (Tyebjee, 2003).

Thus, it is important to assess the public's attitude toward adoption in order to better enable agencies to target potential adopters.

Tyebjee's (2003) study addresses what factors influence attitudes toward adoption and foster care, what factors influence people's willingness to adopt and foster, and what motivates people to adopt and foster children. Three patterns of adoption attitudes were found in the study. First, nonwhite, ethnic populations and immigrants were less likely to have favorable views of adoption. The second pattern that was found involved levels of education among respondents. The more educated the individual was, the more favorable he or she viewed adoption. Thirdly, the study showed that personal experiences with adoption initiated the most positive attitudes. If the respondent knew someone who was an adoptive parent he or she had a much more favorable attitude toward adoption. The most common reasons people had for adopting all involved motivations that focused on the child. Explanations included a willingness to make a difference in the life of a child, to provide a child with a family, or because there are so many children without homes. The second most common reasons involved the affect it would have on the adults. These included adding meaning to the life of an adult, fulfilling religious beliefs about helping children in need, or becoming a parent. The least common reasons were having enough financial resources to adopt and not being able to bear one's own children (Tyebjee, 2003). These motivations give further insight regarding who to target for media campaigns and how to implement the campaign.

Tyebjee (2003) concludes that media messages that focus on the children will be the most useful for increasing the success of media campaigns. However, the desire to help a child is sometimes dependent on people's life situations. Thus, testimonials of people in different life cycles and economic situations who had positive adoption experiences could be helpful in

persuading others to adopt and foster children. The study shows that overall, the public has a generally positive view of adoption.

Miall (1996) agrees that personal adoption stories should be shared and that adoptive parents should be used to provide positive testimony of the success of their adoptive experiences. In addition, she said that positive evaluations of adoption should be provided to birth parents who are contemplating putting their child up for adoption. Most importantly, community awareness of the positive aspects of adoption should be communicated to help debunk the myths of and negative connotations associated with adoption. Family life educators, primary school educators, physicians, family planning counselors, and guidance counselors should all help to promote adoption (Miall, 1996).

The Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recently devised a media campaign of its own, and has implemented this plan to get more children who are in need of homes visible to the public. It has funded a web site, AdoptUsKids, which includes photographs and biographies of over 3,000 children who are in need of homes. The National Adoption Center in Philadelphia developed the site and is managing it. The children who are depicted on AdoptUsKids are school age children who are awaiting adoption through public adoption agencies. Many have physical, emotional, or intellectual handicaps. Some of the children are part of a large sibling group, and many others are minorities (Elias, 2002).

The web site offers an array of information to prospective adoptive parents. It provides information on disabilities some of the children may have, and it offers online courses to parents who are planning on adopting a child. The site also features weekly moderated chats, message boards, and support groups for adoptive parents. A section for social workers will send replies to

interested parents and it will allow adoption managers to monitor these responses. Health and Human services spent \$1.6 million to set up AdoptUsKids, and it costs more than \$2 million to operate the site. The site is expensive, but the Children's Bureau feel that because children spend an average of four years in foster care before being adopted, something must be done to lessen that figure and find permanent homes for these children (Elias, 2002). As the slogan for the web site states, "There are no unwanted children...just unfound families" (Elias, 2002, p.9).

In 2001 the Province of New Brunswick launched a public awareness campaign to find adoptive homes for older children, children with special needs, and sibling groups who were in the care of the Department of Family & Community Services. The campaign started when the government learned that over 600 children were in the care of the department. The campaign slogan that was used was, "Kids Can't Wait to Have a Family." In conjunction with the public awareness program, the New Brunswick Adoption Foundation was founded. This was a non-profit organization that raised public awareness about the number of children up for adoption, as well as provided private sector, community groups, foundations, and individuals the chance to donate services and funding to support the campaign. The Foundation's efforts included colorful 30-second television advertisements, showing happy and healthy children playing outdoors. While the vice-chairperson of the Foundation insists that children must be used to promote adoption, he explains that children are never forced to participate in the commercials, and that some of them even find the experience therapeutic. Luckily, people responded positively to the advertisement. Within 19 months, 265 children were adopted, which was a 375% increase from previous adoption levels (Leblanc, 2004).

## **Adoption, Marketing, and Ethics**

Two changes have occurred in the past several decades that have affected the number of adoptions that have taken place. There have been improvements in birth control (McKay, 1999) and a greater acceptance of single parenthood (Klerman, 1983), both of which have contributed to the decline in the number of babies available for adoption. This decrease in available, healthy, white infants has now pushed adoption to involve hundreds of children who are considered by many agencies hard to place. Finding homes for these children has proven difficult, thus additional efforts have been implemented (Higgins & Smith, 2002).

However, the ethical implications of adoption must be considered. For example, Higgins and Smith (2002) indicate strong concerns “about the possible erosion of the traditional child centered orientation of the child adoption service as marketing ‘techniques’ are increasingly used” (Higgins & Smith, 2002). While marketing child adoption may help to increase the number of children adopted, Higgins and Smith (2002) warn that in an area as sensitive as adoption there must be a moral sensitivity employed by marketers and the public alike.

In order to attract a pool of potential adoptive parents, the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) offers advice and coordination of adoptive services. At the local levels, promotional techniques such as newspaper advertisements, forums, leaflets in public places, and advertisements in the Yellow Pages help to advertise the idea of adoption. However, the difficulty in finding homes for some children has led to more drastic measures of advertising. The BAAF has utilized a bi-monthly publication entitled *Be My Parent* which the authors deem “Child Specific Advertising.” It contains profiles and photographs of waiting children. A photograph is included, as well as a profile of the child. Information such as social behavior, level of affection, interests, learning skills, genetic diseases, disabilities, type of care that they

have received, racial requirements of prospective parents, and the degree of contact with birth parents are included in each child's description. The researchers claim that this type of advertising repackages the child and re-represents him or her to be a product. This expansion from techniques of the commercial to the non-commercial situations is what makes the researchers question the ethics in child adoption advertising (Higgins & Smith, 2002).

In order to assess the attitudes of others regarding child adoption and advertising, the authors conducted research within a social service department. The participants included social workers, managers, and prospective adoptive parents. This research found that while many people wanted to know how successful marketing is within adoption, most parties considered marketing to be inappropriate means of achieving child adoption and were uncomfortable with it (Higgins & Smith, 2002).

Within child adoption, Higgins and Smith (2002) stress that social marketing practitioners need to ensure that the marketing tool used to advertise children who are available for adoption is significantly distanced from the message and the children themselves. Thus, children who are available for adoption should not be depicted in an advertisement. "As an increasing number of social cause organizations employ techniques from the commercial sector, marketers need to employ a broader appreciation of social marketing that acknowledges the moral sensitivity that society will demand of it" (Higgins & Smith, 2002, p.852).

### **Social Marketing Theory**

The broader theory to which this project is related is social marketing theory. This theory is defined as one that is concerned with promoting socially valuable information (Baran & Davis, 2003). Through manipulation of societal and psychological factors, this theory represents the hope to increase the effectiveness of mass media-based information campaigns. This theory

involves seven specific methods. The first method is to induce audience awareness of specific media campaigns. The second method involves targeting specific audience segment that are most receptive to the message. Third, it includes methods for reinforcing messages within targeted segments and for encouraging people to influence others. Fourth, it also includes methods for cultivating images and impressions of people, products, or services. Fifth, the theory includes methods for stimulating interest in an audience. Sixth, it includes methods for inducing desired decision-making once people are informed. And seventh, it includes methods for activating audience segments, especially those which have been targeted by the campaign (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Social marketing theory is often used when targeting population groups when there is a desire to change a society's attitude or behavior toward something. Some concepts of the theory can be relevant to basic public health initiatives. The theory has been used to initiate social change around the world, and it is one of the most widely used theories in health communication campaigns (Svenkerud & Singhal, 1998). "Social marketing theory is derived from for-profit marketing principles and strategies involving design, implementation, and management of programs aimed at increasing the acceptability of socially desirable ideas among targeted adopters," (Svenkerud & Singhal, 1998, p.4).

Social marketing theory has often been used to design public health outreach efforts in developing countries (Svenkerud & Singhal, 1998). Svenkerud and Singhal (1998) examined outreach efforts directed at groups in Bangkok, Thailand at high risk for HIV and AIDS. Three concepts of the theory were used in this study, including audience segmentation, resource management, and program development. Audience segmentation is the identification of specialized subgroups within the target population. For example, this study tried to reach young,

female commercial sex workers because they are the most at risk for HIV and AIDS. As the theory states, this method targets messages at specific audience segments that are most receptive to the messages (Baran & Davis, 2003). Resource management is the process of controlling a program's personnel, materials, and overhead. This is a way to reinforce messages within targeted segments and for encouraging these people to influence others (Baran & Davis, 2003). The final concept, program development, is the mixture of the product, price, place, and promotion of the issue that is being promoted. Thus, the sixth method of social marketing theory was implemented, inducing desired decision-making through media messages.

This study has implications that are directed at those who strive to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among unique population groups. The researchers found that programs must be directed toward unique populations, not generally targeted populations. They insist that other practitioners should take into account the age, gender, and social factors of the groups, as well as learn what the best channels of communication are for that particular group. The researchers also found that the program managers and outreach workers benefited from formal training of the social marketing theory and its framework (Svenkerud & Singhal, 1998).

Ludwig, Buchholz, and Clarke (2005) used social marketing theory to increase the use of bicycle helmets on a university campus. They employed three methods of the theory, the first one being to target messages at specific audience segments that are most receptive to the messages (Baran & Davis, 2003). In this case, the researchers targeted student bicycle riders. The study also used methods for reinforcing messages within targeted segments and for encouraging these people to influence others (Baran & Davis, 2003). They employed student bicyclists who already wore helmets as peer agents to provide bicycle helmet information and to

sign a pledge card to wear a helmet. The study also used methods for inducing desired-decision-making by distributing free helmets to bicycle riders (Baran & Davis, 2003; Ludwig et al., 2005).

Young, Anderson, Beckstrom, Bellows, and Johnson (2004) used social marketing theory to promote healthful food choices among low-income Colorado residents. The first method they used was to target messages at a specific audience segment (Baran & Davis, 2003). The group chosen was preschool-aged children from three to five years-old. Focus groups allowed the researchers to determine that this was the most likely stage for a child to experience food neophobia, the fear of new foods. Methods for cultivating images and impressions of people, products, or services were also implemented, an important step when there is difficulty in arousing audience interest, such as with young children (Baran & Davis, 2003). They used Food Friend Characters that children could emulate as the central campaign concept. And finally, methods for inducing desired decision-making were employed by involving parents and the Head Start center. Teachers would incorporate nutrition education within their weekly schedules, and would also serve nutritional foods in the classroom.

### **Grounded Theory**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that utilizing grounded theory is a way of arriving at a theory suited to its supposed uses. Corbin and Strauss (1990) describe the importance of using grounded theory by saying, “The procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study” (p. 5).

Corbin and Strauss (1990) provide a specific set of criteria for evaluating studies that follow grounded theory. First, analysis of the data must begin when the first piece of data is collected. Second, incidents, events, and occurrences must be named and conceptualized. Third,

these concepts are divided into related categories. Fourth, it is important to note that in grounded theory, concepts must be represented, not people. Fifth, concepts are constantly compared to identify similarities and differences. Sixth, not only should patterns be accounted for, but variations in these patterns should also be recognized. Seventh, processes for breaking down a phenomenon into steps or the process of noting changes must be integrated into grounded theory. Eighth, memos and notes should be kept when analyzing the data to better keep track of all information. Ninth, hypotheses should constantly be developed and verified throughout the research process. Tenth, collaborating with colleagues about hypotheses, concepts, and results is an important endeavor to guard against researcher bias. And eleventh, broader conditions should also be analyzed, not simply the conditions that apply to the research at hand.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) emphasize that while these criteria are important to consider when conducting research that encompasses grounded theory, the criteria are not rules that must be followed. Sometimes the guidelines may need to be modified to adhere to the circumstances involved. Also, when using the procedures of grounded theory, the researcher must also report his or her specific procedural steps taken to produce the results found. This is done in order for the project to be more easily duplicated by other researchers (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

These two theories provided a basis for the following study. Many childless people could become parents through adoption. Likewise, many women who have been presented with an unwanted pregnancy exist. It was the purpose of this paper to identify what adoption agencies in New Orleans are doing to promote their services to pregnant women. With the use of qualitative research, grounded theory must be included to better outline the process for conducting and examining the results from the interviews that were conducted for this project.

Based on this literature, the following research questions were generated:

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What are adoption agencies in New Orleans doing to attract women with unwanted pregnancies.

**RQ2:** If adoption agencies are doing nothing to attract women with unwanted pregnancies, why not?

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD

### Methodology

The method of study for this research project is qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews with adoption agencies in New Orleans. Six local, private adoption agencies were contacted for this study. The subjects for this study were the program directors from five agencies that were able to be reached and that agreed to be interviewed (see Appendix A for contact information). The sixth adoption agency could not be reached, and therefore an interview could not be scheduled with their program director. Public adoption agencies were not included in this study because they usually involve the adoption of older children who were not relinquished at birth. Appointments were made with the following adoption agencies in order to conduct personal interviews: Children's Bureau, Caring Alternatives, Adoption Solutions, ACCESS to Life, and a private attorney who specializes in adoption and happens to be the Legal Counsel for American Adoptions of Louisiana.

Within each agency, the researcher requested an interview with the program director or the equivalent to that position in order to ensure a fair and uniform comparison among agencies. The interviewees were asked approximately eighteen questions and were allowed to broaden on their answers as much as they desired. Sometimes extra questions were included in an interview only if they were needed to clarify an answer that was given. The interviews were recorded and notes were also taken.

The interview with each adoption agency was analyzed by using a transcript-based analysis. Tapes of the interviews were transcribed and then sent back to the interviewees in case clarifications needed to be made by the interviewees. These final transcripts, along with the field notes, provided the data to be analyzed by employing the procedures of grounded theory (Corbin

and Strauss, 1990). After the interviews were conducted and the findings analyzed, the results were organized around themes that had developed (Krueger, 1998).

### **Descriptions of Adoption Agencies**

The following descriptions are based on information found in each agency's printed material and indicate how the agencies describe themselves.

1. Children's Bureau was founded in 1892 and is a United Way partner agency. In addition to being a state-licensed adoption agency, it also offers a variety of services to children and families. These include counseling services, as well as an educational outreach program to various groups in the community, which emphasizes the importance of a child's right to a happy and healthy youth. The adoption agency at Children's Bureau is accredited by the National Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children. The program recruits, screens, and approves adoptive families for infants whose birth parents have chosen to place their children for adoption. It also has a contract with Hold International Children's Services where international adoption is available with South America, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

The respondent for this agency was a Caucasian female. She will be known as Respondent A.

2. Caring Alternatives, Volunteers of America's Maternity and Adoption Program, is an entity of the national Volunteers of America, which was founded in 1896. Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans is a human service charity. The program places special emphasis on serving the elderly, children, families, and people with disabilities. Caring Alternatives is a fully licensed adoption agency that has been around since 1942. It educates and counsels women with crisis pregnancies, as well as works with infertile couples waiting to adopt. It completes interviews, home studies, and investigations of personal references of prospective

adoptive parents. It considers itself highly progressive in that it emphasizes the importance of an open adoption. In an open adoption, the birth mothers choose the couple who will adopt their baby and all parties involved in the adoption have access to information that at one time was kept confidential.

The respondent for this agency was a Caucasian female. She will be known as Respondent B.

3. Jewish Family Service, a United Way agency, is an agency that has provided many social services to the community for the past fifty years. The agency offers counseling for individuals, children, and families, psychotherapy, mental health education, teen suicide prevention, and Homemaker and Lifeline services for the elderly. It is also a licensed adoption agency, Adoption Solutions, and can provide national and international adoption services, home studies, and follow-up supervision.

The respondent for this agency was a Caucasian female. She will be known as Respondent C.

4. Catholic Charities Adoption Services, or ACCESS to Life, offers birth parent and adoptive family services, and is also a United Way agency. It provides counseling for women experiencing unplanned pregnancies and assists them with their decision to parent or place their child for adoption. Birth parents are educated about the adoption process, as well as open or closed adoption. It also interviews and screens prospective adoptive families and requires them to attend educational classes to prepare them for the adoption process. Catholic Charities provides international adoption services for children from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Parents must choose an international agency, with Catholic Charities providing home study and post placement services.

The respondent for this agency was a Caucasian female. She will be known as Respondent D.

5. The last respondent is a private attorney who has practiced in the New Orleans area since 1978. However, since 1987, he has dedicated his practice to adoption law. He is a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and the National Council for Adoption. Though he is a private attorney and not an agency, this attorney is the General Counsel for American Adoptions, a national adoption agency, which is why he is included in the study. The interview with him reflects processes, opinions, and occurrences of his own private practice. The majority of his firm's adoption placements occur within the state of Louisiana, though he does work with birth parents and adoptive parents from many states. His practice emphasizes the importance for the birth and adoptive parents to fully understand the legal requirements of their adoption plan. Concern is particularly given to ensure that all legal, medical, and financial risks are understood by all parties involved. He is also concerned with adequate prenatal care. Medical releases are obtained from the biological mothers so that doctor and hospital records are a part of a child's permanent medical history. His services are accompanied by those of a licensed social worker who provides home studies, birth parent counseling, and consultations.

This respondent is the only for-profit entity included in this study. The respondent for this agency was a Caucasian male. He will be known as Respondent E.

The following results apply to these five adoption agencies only and cannot be generalized to other adoption agencies.

## **CHAPTER 4 RESULTS**

### **Adoption Agencies' Environments**

All five agencies had waiting rooms with a very quiet, private atmosphere and comfortable couches on which to sit. In all of the agencies the interviewer was the only one waiting in the waiting rooms. The greatest amount of time the interviewer had to wait to meet with the respondent was about five minutes. All of the agencies had informational pamphlets in the waiting area that depicted either pictures of families or children and explained the agency's philosophy and services. The majority of the agencies had pictures of infants that had been successfully placed for adoption or pictures of families that had been created displayed in the hallways or in the respondents' offices. Each office also had the respondent's credentials hanging on the wall.

While the five adoption agencies differ slightly in their philosophies and services, they all have a common goal, which is to facilitate adoption placements and create families. This common goal among the agencies was visible within the environment of each agency. All of the respondents, either through their words or their tone of voice, indicated a deep commitment to their job and a sincere hope to create loving families and to make the lives of children and parents better through their work.

### **Findings**

For this study the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What are adoption agencies in New Orleans doing to attract women with unwanted pregnancies?

RQ2: If adoption agencies are doing nothing to attract women with unwanted pregnancies, why not?

Out of the five adoption agencies that were included in the study, three of them actively targeted women through means of advertising and public relations. The three agencies used flyers, brochures, posters, newspapers, radio spots, and television commercials to target women with unwanted pregnancies. One agency began a coalition of licensed adoption agencies in Louisiana to provide information on adoption, and they participated in a national program to educate professionals about how to present adoption as a viable option to an unwanted pregnancy. However, two of the adoption agencies did not target women at all.

Each informant described what their targeting efforts included. If the agency did not have targeting methods, the informants instead were asked why they did not target women with unwanted pregnancies. Questions were also asked about the success of the targeting efforts in getting the attention of women with unwanted pregnancies and how the agencies measured this success (See Appendix B).

Informants' descriptions of their targeting efforts were divided into three categories. If the agency had four or more methods of targeting women with unwanted pregnancies, it was rated as having Extensive Efforts. If the agency had one to three methods, it was rated as having Moderate Efforts. And, if the agency engaged in no method of targeting, it was rated as having Zero Efforts.

The analysis that follows these three categories includes six additional categories that explain and categorize the respondents' explanations of additional interview questions.

### **Extensive Efforts**

The two agencies that engaged in extensive targeting efforts reported using public posters, flyers distributed in public places, feature stories in newspapers, radio spots, and television commercials to promote their agency. Both also do community outreach at schools

and other community organizations. Respondent D said, “We just spent a day at Brother Martin High School...we got to speak to all of the eighth grade and all of the freshmen.”

Respondent B explained that at these visits the agency not only talks about adoption, but it also typically brings birth parents along with them. “We talk about benefits of adoption and how our programs can help. We have birth moms who have placed children talk positively about adoption.” Respondent D agreed that it is these personal testimonies given by others who have experienced placing a child for adoption that most students are interested in and will remember. She explained that during their visits they use incentives to get the students involved in their presentation. “We do quizzes and give away candy to get them talking...they ask a lot of questions. I think for them it’s a safe environment because their parents aren’t there.”

Both agencies reported that their targeting efforts were successful in getting women with unwanted pregnancies to use their services. Though the agencies do not keep track of how many inquiries they receive by women with unwanted pregnancies, Respondent B said that her agency measures the success of their targeting methods by asking birth mothers when they call how they heard about them. However, every person who calls does not necessarily decide to make an adoption placement. Respondent D reported that the agency measures its success by the number of adoption placements it makes. She reported that before the agency began advertising itself it “was basically sort of existing, whereas now we have active cases. We’re very busy.”

### **Moderate Efforts**

One adoption agency engaged in moderate efforts of targeting. Respondent A reported that the agency uses flyers to advertise their services. She also said that the agency tried to educate people about the choice of adoption by beginning “a coalition of licensed adoption agencies in the state of Louisiana...the purpose of that was to promote ethical standards of

adoption and also to provide information to the public about adoption.” The agency was one of the founding members of the Louisiana Coalition for Adoption, which the respondent reported is not as active as it used to be, but does still exist. From 2002-2004 the agency also participated in a program with the National Counsel for Adoption in Washington D.C., who had gotten a grant to go out to clinics, hospitals, and school counselors to educate them on how to present adoption as an option to an unwanted pregnancy. One of the social workers in her program participated in this and went to Washington D.C. She reported that they are still waiting to see the effects of the training.

Respondent A reported that she did not know how successful the agency’s methods were in targeting women with unwanted pregnancies.

### **Zero Efforts**

Two adoption agencies reported zero efforts of targeting women with unwanted pregnancies. Respondent C explained that her agency only did home studies and did not work with birth mothers to do placements, therefore targeting these women was not necessary. “So no, we do no marketing. We do no promotion. The only thing that I have done is led a group here for couples struggling with infertility.”

Respondent E reported that he also does not use targeting methods to gain the attention of pregnant women. “If I was like my old classmate [a local personal injury lawyer] I could put an advertisement saying ‘I Want Your Baby’ or something like that! I don’t think it would be the most tasteful thing in the world...” However, the respondent also reported that because his practice has been around for eighteen years, he does not find it necessary to use methods to target women. He explained, “I would say that my primary referral source is other birth mothers and word of mouth.”

## **Agency Competition**

Adoption agencies are non-profit organizations. Therefore, competition among the agencies is not profit-driven. However, the desire to make clients happy and to form families results in the agencies competing for adoption placements. All five agencies agreed that competition to complete the most adoptions does exist between the adoption agencies in the New Orleans area. Respondent D illustrates this by saying, “A lot of the agencies don’t communicate about that, it’s sort of an unknown. No one really wants to say what they’re doing so you know there’s that underlying competition of getting babies for the families they’re working with.”

All agencies reported that competition to make adoption placements does exist. On one hand, some respondents said that there was competition to find birth parents that would place a child for adoption. Respondent D replied that the competition existed “more so who can recruit more birth parents.”

On the other hand, some respondents said there was competition to find adoptive parents to adopt a child. As Respondent C explained, “I think there’s more in looking for competition maybe not so much for the children, but for the adoptive parents.”

## **Demographics of Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents**

All five adoption agencies reported nearly identical answers about the demographics of birth parents that place children for adoption. Respondent B described, “Women in their mid-twenties, they usually have at least one child, they have little education and low-wage jobs, if employed at all, and very little social support. These women have had experience and know how hard raising a child is and usually have other little children running around.” Respondent D agreed and explained that many of their birth mothers are “probably parenting another child already and they know what it means to be a parent.”

The agencies also reported that teenagers were the least likely people to make an adoption placement for an unplanned pregnancy. Respondent B explained, “People usually picture teenagers as most likely to place a child. But teenagers don’t think in the long term and they make impulsive decisions.” Respondent A agreed and explained that “The person who is least likely to make a voluntary adoption plan, frankly in my opinion, is still the thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen year-old. They don’t have the life experience to understand how hard that’s going to be.” Though the agencies will work with teenagers, and anyone else who may be faced with an unplanned pregnancy, it is rare that teenagers will make adoption plans for their child.

All five agencies also agreed on the demographics that make up adoptive parents who adopt children through their agencies, with four out of the five agencies explicitly saying that nearly all of their adoptive parents struggled with infertility. Respondent D answered, “Because of the expense of adoption it’s typically families that got married later in life, they’re probably in their late thirties to early forties, they’ve pursued quite a bit of fertility treatment, and they probably don’t have children.” Respondent E declared, “Ah! One word permeates through everything—infertility.”

The agencies reported that young couples are the least likely people to adopt a child. Respondent E explained that “Young couples in their twenties are very very rare because they can probably still have children.” Respondent D agreed, “It’s very unusual to have someone in that early part of their twenties, even the later part of their twenties partly because of the fertility treatments... We’ve had younger adoptive parents, but it’s very unusual.”

Only Respondent A mentioned race as part of the demographic profile. In fact, she explained that the agency mostly dealt with African-American families. “In our case, the

domestic program is overwhelmingly African-American. Since we've always had an ability to recruit and continue to have African-American families, we've had plenty of families for the kids." The respondent, however, did not know exactly why her agency deals mainly with African-Americans while other adoption agencies do not. "I can't put my finger on why we know how to do what we do...This agency's history of working in the African-American community—it's a comfort level that I think other agencies don't have with African-American families."

### **Media Portrayal of Adoption**

Four out of five adoption agencies reported that the popular media and the mass media generally portray adoption in a negative way because it is the negative stories that get the most audience attention. Talk shows often feature children who are desperately trying to find their birth parents. Movies depict birth parents that must make adoption placements and later regret it. Respondent B exclaimed that the way the media portray adoption is "Terrible, shameful, sinful. The stories the media portray are rare in reality, but people like to watch it." Respondent E admitted, "But I really don't blame the media that much because, you know, the media is there for ratings...if it's ugly, if it's salacious, controversial, people watch." To exemplify this media phenomenon, Respondent A said, "Like if somebody murders his parents and he happens to have been adopted, the story would be Adopted Son Murders His Parents."

The four respondents that thought the media portrayed adoption negatively also agreed that if the media did begin to portray adoption more positively, it would increase the number of adoptions that take place. Respondent B believed "Positive media would increase adoption. There needs to be more attention on how it really works and how healthy adoption can be."

Respondent D explained that “When I meet with birth parents they’ll say, well I saw this movie and this happened. And I tell adoptive families all the time, stop watching those movies!”

Only Respondent C reported that the media currently portray adoption in a positive light. “I think it’s much more positive now, much more positive, and there are articles in the newspapers, there are magazines, and the Internet. It’s everywhere now, and very positive.”

### **Limitations**

If adoption agencies had more financial resources, their advertising abilities could be enhanced. They could increase the methods they were currently engaging in, or even employ new methods of advertising. Respondents B and D reported that their agency faced financial limitations that prevented them from targeting women. Respondent B said, “We would love to advertise more. I’d love to have a huge presence, but it’s really expensive. Nothing is free.”

Three out of the five respondents reported that their agency had never been faced with any limitations that would prevent it from targeting women with unwanted pregnancies. Respondent E explained, “The law has no penalties, no enforcement capabilities at this point. I really have no limitations, per se.” Respondent A clarified the question by answering, “Not limitations on us, but things that we would not do. For instance...to offer inducements to a birth mother, financial inducements or other inducements.”

### **Ethical Concerns**

Four of the respondents indicated underlying ethical concerns with components of adoption at various points during the interviews. Therefore, this theme must be regarded as an independent category.

Four out of the five adoption agencies made specific mentions of ethics or taste, or implied these concerns through their answers. For example, Respondent A stated, “The social

work profession has a very strict code of ethics that guides our behavior, our professional behavior, and it's a very different type of code of ethics than a legal code of ethics is, for instance." Interestingly, Respondent E who is a lawyer did indicate ethical concerns within his practice. He explained that if he wanted, he would legally be allowed to make a commercial with him saying "I want your baby!" However, he of course did not believe this to be an ethical way to advertise his services.

Language and how it is used to ethically refer to different aspects of adoption and the people involved with adoption was a concern with one respondent. Language frames the underlying tone of a conversation. When the interviewer asked the question, "Who is most likely to give a child up for adoption?" Respondent B replied, "We usually say 'place' not 'give up.' It's negative and not exactly accurate."

Respondent D indicated ethical limitations as far as what the agency can do to target women with unwanted pregnancies. She said, "Cost is probably the biggest issue. And for some people [targeting] is a controversial issue. That sort of limits some things as well." The respondent said nothing further about this topic, nor did she give any examples of how targeting was controversial.

### **Uncomfortable Elements of the Interview**

At specific points during the interviews, respondents were reluctant to answer questions or provided incomplete responses to the questions. However, their reluctance and their lack of responses indicate an area that might be worthy of additional exploration by future researchers.

### **Comparing Louisiana to Other States**

Three of the agencies reported that they did not know how Louisiana compared to other states regarding adoption. Two respondents reported that Louisiana was comparable to other

states. Respondent E said that “At one time Louisiana was probably one of the best states to do adoptions. They were on the cutting edge with many far-reaching, cutting edge policies....What has happened is that the rest of the country has caught up...” Respondent D also said, “I think with regard to numbers, it’s probably very similar to other states.”

### Quantifying Successful Adoptions

Though all five respondents reported how many adoptions their agency completed in 2004, the numbers were not related to whether or not the agency targeted women with unwanted pregnancies or the types of targeting methods the agency used. The inquiry regarding how many adoptions the agency completed made Respondent A uneasy. She asked, “What’s the significance of that question?” However, she reluctantly answered that the agency had completed 10 adoptions. Respondent B reported 13 completed adoptions. Respondent C reported that the agency had assisted with six adoptions. Respondent D reported 30 adoptions, and Respondent E reported 25 to 30 adoptions in 2004.

### Children Featured in Promotional Material

Respondents A and D indicated that they were undecided as to whether or not children who are available for adoption should be featured in newspapers and Internet profiles. They are uncomfortable with the idea that children are adopted because of what they look like or because of their background, but both admitted it might help find families for children without them. Respondent A explained that if a family could be found for “that child because of using some of the Internet profiles and all that, then I would think yes.” Respondent D agreed that “if that child is not in the paper, no one is ever going to see him.” Taking the question a different way, respondents B, C, and E reported that they support using the image of a child in an agency’s promotional material. Respondent C explained, “It is powerful to show a waiting child, it

humanizes adoption.” Respondent B agreed that “we use children’s images because we work with children here at the agency...our business is based on families so we use that image a lot.”

#### Additional Comments by Respondents

During the interview three of the respondents added that adoption is a difficult process with some factors today that make it even more difficult. Respondent C explained that “it’s a very lengthy process for individuals seeking to adopt. It’s very much a legal process and the rules and documentations are very strict.” Respondent E also explained, “Trying to determine the intent and the sincerity of the birth mother is becoming more and more difficult.” Two respondents had no additional comments to add during the interview.

#### Respondents’ Referrals

Each respondent referred the interviewer to adoption agencies that were already included in the study. Several respondents suggested other adoption agencies that were not in the New Orleans area, and therefore could not be used.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### **Social Marketing Theory Among Adoption Agencies**

The broader theory to which this project relates is social marketing theory. The Baran & Davis (2003) textbook definition of social marketing theory is one that is involved with promoting information that is deemed socially valuable. This theory represents the desire to increase the effectiveness of mass media-based information campaigns through the manipulation of societal and psychological factors (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Whether or not they are aware of it, three of the five adoption agencies are actively using social marketing theory within the practices of their agency. Through various means they are trying to induce a specific message to a specific audience in the hopes of promoting information that is socially valuable. The broad message that each agency is attempting to promote to their audience of women with unwanted pregnancies, is that adoption is a positive choice for an unwanted pregnancy. To do this, the agencies employ methods of social marketing theory. Two methods were the most prevalent in this study. One method involves targeting specific audience segments that are most receptive to the message (Baran & Davis, 2003). The three agencies are using this method when targeting women with unwanted pregnancies, their specific audience segment. Through pamphlets, television, radio, and newspapers the agencies target this audience. Another method includes reinforcing messages within targeted segments and encouraging people to influence others (Baran & Davis, 2003). The two agencies that have birth mothers give personal testimonies to others about their adoption experiences engage in this method. The agencies encourage birth mothers to influence others by sharing their positive experiences with adoption.

Not only do the adoption agencies hope to promote adoption as a viable option for an unwanted pregnancy, but this message is evident through the pamphlets, brochures, television commercials, radio spots, and newspaper articles that the three agencies use to target women with unwanted pregnancies. In fact, it can be assumed that the agencies' existence depends on the desire to promote the idea of adoption for women with unwanted pregnancies over all other options. The existence of the other two agencies does not depend on targeting women with unwanted pregnancies. One receives its birth parents by word of mouth and the other only performs home studies and does not make adoption placements. So, while all five agencies have deemed adoption to be a positive option for an unwanted pregnancy, and thus to be socially valuable information, only three actively strive to promote it to their audience.

## **Discussion**

Although adoption is a viable option to an unplanned pregnancy, it is not a popular choice. Therefore, asking what adoption agencies are doing to help promote themselves to women with unwanted pregnancies is an important endeavor for other adoption agencies striving to do the same. While adoption can seem like an easy solution to an unwanted pregnancy or infertility, both birth parents and adoptive parents may experience a plethora of decisions when involving themselves with an adoption. For this reason, presenting the idea of adoption must involve great consideration.

Historically adoption has been a rather taboo subject. Until recently, open adoptions were almost unheard of and little was known about the specific circumstances in which adoptions took place. Even now, in order to increase the numbers of adoptions, additional research is needed on adoption itself to better determine who is most likely to place a child for adoption and who is most likely to adopt. This information can assist with media campaigns to

better target likely audiences and help to relieve the fear, misconceptions, and negativity about adoption.

By comparing the findings of this project to previous findings, some similarities and some differences can be determined, which may provide more information as to what areas in this field need to be further researched. Consistent with Olasky (1997) and Tebo & Vargas (2003), four of the five adoption agencies agree that the media portray adoption negatively.

These four agencies also said that if the media portrayed adoption in a more positive light, the number of adoptions that take place would increase. This thinking follows cultivation analysis, a theory developed by George Gerbner during the 1970s and 1980s. The theory states that television creates a world view, though a possibly inaccurate world view, that becomes the reality because people believe it to be true (Baran & Davis, 2003). This happens because television is a centralized, mass-produced set of messages viewed by most of the population. The result is the cultivation of shared concepts of reality among otherwise diverse populations (Gerbner, 1998). Therefore, the respondents believe that if the media depict positive aspects of adoption, people would begin to think it is a positive option, and would then act on that belief.

Only one agency thought that the media do currently portray adoption positively. This respondent was more trusting of the media than the other respondents and believed the media served as a positive supporter of adoption.

Findings by Tyebjee (2003) and Miall (1996) are also similar to this project's findings. Tyebjee (2003) showed that if a respondent knew someone who was an adoptive parent, he or she would have a more favorable view about adopting. Likewise, Miall (1996) agrees that adoptive parents should be used to share their positive experiences with adoption, and these positive evaluations should also be shared with birth parents who are contemplating an adoption

placement. Consistent with these authors, two respondents reported that their agencies bring along birth parents and adoptive parents to share their positive stories and testimonies of adoption when the agencies educate the community about the choice of adoption. One respondent even indicated that it is these stories that people listen to and relate to when deciding on adoption, and she felt they are more effective than having the adoption specialist simply talking about adoption. Miall (1996) also noted the importance of community awareness in debunking the myths and stereotypes of adoption. She felt that counselors, physicians, and educators should all help contribute to this awareness. As another respondent indicated, her agency did this by participating in a national program to educate clinics, hospitals, and counselors on how to present the idea of adoption to women seeking their services.

Four of the five adoption agencies specifically mentioned their concern with ethics and adoption. Respondents were concerned with the code of ethics and the moral behavior of social workers, language used within adoption, and ethical limitations when targeting women with unwanted pregnancies. Because adoption involves children and because it is accompanied with the strong emotions of all parties involved, the importance of ethics must be stressed. Thus, like the adoption agencies in this study that have ethical considerations involving adoption, Higgins and Smith (2002) warn that in an area as sensitive as adoption, moral sensitivity is needed by everyone involved with it, especially those involved with marketing adoption.

Some of the findings of the five adoption agencies in this sample did not comply with previous findings or partially complied with previous findings, and thus may indicate a need for further research in these areas. Though the study did not specifically address this phenomenon, a common adoption belief reported by Brooks & Goldberg (2001) and Tybejee (2003) is that minorities, specifically African-Americans, often do not have favorable attitudes toward

adoption. The tremendous variation in opinion of this phenomenon between these two authors and a respondent in this study was particularly interesting, and therefore must be noted. Brooks & Goldberg (2001) have found that recruitment efforts to find homes for children of color are especially difficult. In addition, Tybejee (2003) reports that nonwhite, ethnic populations and immigrants were less likely to have favorable views of adoption. To the contrary, one respondent explained that the majority of families that they work with are African-American. She claimed that they have always been able to recruit families for minority children. The interviewee felt that the reason for this is perhaps because they have a history of working with the African-American community and they have a comfort level there. The interviewee feels that the idea that minority families do not view adoption favorably is a stereotype. She also believed that perhaps many agencies simply do not know how to recruit in the African-American community, so that eventually translated into the idea that African-Americans did not want to adopt.

Four out of the five agencies specifically state that infertile couples make up an overwhelming majority of people who choose to adopt. Canape (1996), Muldoon (2004), and Cudmore (2005) agree that the majority of adoptive parents first struggled with infertility before deciding to adopt. Canape (1996) attributes this to the fact that women are marrying and having children later in life to focus on careers.

To the contrary, Tybejee (2003) found that one of the least common reasons people reported for adopting or fostering a child were being unable to bear one's own children. Also, the majority of the agencies report that, because of the cost of adoption, most people who adopt are financially well off and have the means to adopt. In contrast, Tybejee (2003) found that another one of the least common reasons people reported for adopting or fostering was having

the financial resources to do so. Instead, he found that the most common reasons people had for adopting or fostering involved motivations that focused on the child, such as the willingness to make a difference in a child's life.

Understanding what adoption agencies are doing to promote their services and how they can better gain the attention of women with unwanted pregnancies is the main goal of this paper. For the academic community, these results will hopefully provide a better understanding of what agencies in one area, New Orleans, are already doing to promote themselves and they provide insight into why birth parents and adoptive parents choose adoption. This paper also illustrates areas of research that are inconsistent, providing avenues for other researchers to explore. Increasing the research in the area of child adoption may produce results on how to encourage positive attitudes toward adoption, which may help adoption agencies better target women with unwanted pregnancies and increase the number of adoptions they complete.

### **Limitations**

As with any research method, qualitative interviewing has limitations (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Due to the qualitative method of this research, these results cannot be generalized to the entire population of adoption agencies. These results apply only to the five adoption agencies included in this study. In addition, other researchers may find different results if this project was duplicated because this data represents respondents' perceptions only.

Another limitation of this project is the area in which it was conducted. New Orleans and the surrounding areas have a small number of adoption agencies, therefore only a small number of subjects existed and could be used in the research. In addition, one adoption agency in the New Orleans area could not be reached at all, and therefore could not be asked to participate in the study.

Adoption has always been an area where little information could be shared with birth parents and adoptive parents alike. For example, up until recently the identities of the birth parents and adoptive parents were kept from each party in a closed adoption. As a result of this, information on the specifics of child adoptions and who is involved is scarce. While the need for closed adoptions is changing, information on what was done in the past cannot be found. Or, perhaps records were not as accurately kept as today and therefore information was not documented.

The literature on adoption, advertising, and marketing was also scarce and difficult to find. It seems that the nature of this project was a somewhat rare endeavor, which did not yield many sources of past information and research concerning this subject. Therefore, this exploratory investigation suggests a need for further research within many other avenues in this area of study.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this research, adoption agencies seeking to produce successful media campaigns may consider several things. First of all, in order to effectively target their audiences, the agencies would need to examine successful adoptions and note who was most likely to make adoption placements and who was most likely to adopt. Based on the interviews of the adoption agencies in this study, birth mothers who were most likely to make adoption plans for their child were unmarried women in their twenties with at least one other child at home. Very rarely were they teenagers. Adoptive parents were generally infertile couples in their mid-thirties to mid-forties who had the financial resources to adopt a child. Therefore, adoption agencies that may wish to target women with unwanted pregnancies should consider encompassing these demographics.

This study, as well as past research, indicates that involving those with positive personal testimonies about their experiences with adoption could prove to be a successful tactic for a media campaign. In agreement with the respondents in this study, Tybejee (2003) found that if a respondent knew someone who was an adoptive parent, he or she would have a more favorable view about adopting. Thus, Tybejee indicates that using people with positive adoption experiences as spokespeople in a media campaign could be successful.

The majority of the adoption agencies involved with this study indicated that the media do not portray adoption in a positive light. In addition, Olasky (1997) also feels that the media generally do not give optimistic portrayals of adoption stories. Four of the five agencies felt that the increase of positive media portrayal regarding adoption could possibly increase favorable attitudes toward adoption, thereby increasing the popularity of adoption and the number of adoptions that take place. With this in mind, agencies could employ opportunities to involve the media with their adoption stories and agency endeavors. For example, agencies could alert the media about community outreach projects, fundraisers, or even specific adoptions with successful outcomes. These actions could help begin shifting stories about adoption toward a more positive light.

### **Avenues for Future Research**

In order to increase the popularity of adoption, steps will need to be taken to debunk myths and negative stereotypes about adoption and to educate people about the choice of adoption and the services agencies can offer. Aside from adoption, other alternatives to dealing with an unwanted pregnancy should be researched. For example, examining those who choose to parent and why would also provide another avenue to explore.

Because this study only involved one city, another direction for future research would be to expand this project to include adoption agencies in a bigger city, regionally, or even nationally. Researching what agencies around the nation are doing to promote themselves and the choice of adoption would provide a more accurate description of media campaigns and advertising efforts that already exist. Likewise, another avenue to explore could be to compare these efforts with other agencies to assess what methods seem to be the most successful in gaining the attention of women with unwanted pregnancies.

It would also be interesting to research whether or not adoption agencies are employing public relations and/or advertising firms to help them promote and advertise their services. Private adoption agencies are typically non-profit organizations, therefore public relations firms who often take on non-profit or pro bono clients should be examined. Also, researching larger adoption agencies to examine whether or not they include their own promotional or public relations departments may also be a worthy endeavor.

## **Conclusion**

The agencies in this study were able to provide information as to what they have done to promote themselves and the option of adoption. While the majority of the agencies did engage in methods of targeting women with unwanted pregnancies, they indicated that more could be done in the realm of advertising if the financial means were available. Both agencies that reported they did not use methods of targeting women did not have a need to do so.

The in-depth personal interviews with the program directors at the agencies were able to provide useful ideas and information on aspects such as competition among adoption agencies, demographics of birth and adoptive parents, adoption and the media, limitations agencies face,

and ethical considerations in adoption. Patterns were identified in this study that could lead to more successful media campaigns for adoption agencies.

While adoption can present many difficulties for those involved, it can also be a solution to an unwanted pregnancy and to infertility. It is also a way for children who have no parents to be given families, and for families to gain children. As many people may feel, the respondents in this study believe adoption is an extremely important part of our society. They have dedicated their lives to supporting young women who have been faced with an unexpected pregnancy and they have helped many children and parents find each other. It is hoped that this research will not only be used and broadened on by agencies themselves, but also by investigators who may be have an interest in researching adoption.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **ADOPTION AGENCIES' CONTACT INFORMATION**

1. Children's Bureau  
Clinical Program Director  
210 Baronne Street, Suite 722  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112  
504-525-2366
  
2. Caring Alternatives  
Clinical Director  
3939 North Causeway Boulevard, Suite 101  
Metairie, Louisiana 70002  
504-836-8702
  
3. Adoption Solutions  
Licensed Professional Counselor  
3330 West Esplanade Avenue, Suite 600  
Metairie, Louisiana 70002  
504-831-1130
  
4. ACCESS to Life  
Adoption Program Director  
3019 North Arnoult Road  
Metairie, Louisiana 70002  
504-885-1141
  
5. Attorney and Counselor at Law  
148 North Telemachus Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119  
504-488-0200

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PLACEMENT RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Regarding adoption, how do you think Louisiana compares to other states?
2. Does the agency have targeting methods that it uses to gain the attention of pregnant women?
3. If so, what are the methods?
4. How successful have they been?
5. How are they measured?
6. How many adoptions did the agency complete in 2004?
7. Has the agency been faced with any limitations that would prevent it from targeting women with unwanted pregnancies?
8. Does the agency visit high schools, colleges, or any other places to educate people about the choice of adoption? Why or why not?
9. If so, what do these visits entail?
10. Does the agency use public relations and/or the media to promote the agency, its services, or adoption in general?
11. Is there competition among the agencies for trying to place the most children?
12. Who is most likely to give a child up for adoption?
13. Who is most likely to adopt? Does race play a role in adoption?
14. How do you think the media generally portray adoption? Only if answer is “negatively” ask: If the media portrayed adoption more positively, do you think the number of adoptions would increase?
15. Do you support showing actual children in promotional materials?

16. Is there anything else I should know or anything else you'd like to add?
17. Do you have any material I can take with me?
18. I am trying to interview as many adoption agencies in the New Orleans area as possible. Are there any others you can refer me to that would be willing to be interviewed for my project?

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT FORM**

1. Study Title: Adoption in New Orleans: What Agencies are Doing to Promote it.
2. Performance Site: Adoption agencies' location.
3. Investigators: For questions about this study contact Emily Rivers at 985-674-2518 or Dr. Lori Boyer at 225-578-3488.
4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to find out what adoption agencies in New Orleans are doing to promote the choice of adoption to women with unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.
5. Subject Inclusion: Private adoption agencies in the New Orleans area.
6. Number of Subjects: This will depend on which agencies will participate. Approximately seven will be asked. The sample will consist of a snowball sample and agencies will be asked to refer other agencies that could participate.
7. Study Procedures: In-depth interviews with adoption agencies will be conducted for this study. Approximately eighteen questions will be asked. The interviews will be taped, transcribed, and analyzed.
8. Benefits: None.
9. Risks: None.
10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.
11. Privacy: Results and names of the adoption agencies will be published, but the names of the individuals being interviewed will not be included in the publication.
12. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

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Signature of Subject

Date

## VITA

Emily Barbara Rivers is a twenty-four year-old graduate student at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She was born and raised in the New Orleans area and continues to reside there. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi.