Advertisement and Social Influence of Open Adoption: Conceptualizing the Effects Persuasion

and Culture on the Choice of Open Adoption

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Abstract

The fifteen advertising strategies used by open adoption marketing are identified and organized into Holfestede's cultural dimensions. A survey conducted of 84 birth mothers analyzes the effectiveness of each strategy as well as their cultural and demographic information. The current study intended to identify any correlations in the effectiveness of certain types of advertising on different demographics. The results showed that eleven of the fifteen advertising strategies are successful and that which ones are the most successful depends on the birth parents' demographic and cultural information. The differences in previously assessed importance of Holfstede's Cultural Dimensions to Americans is compared to the sub-culture of birth mothers. Implications for further research are addressed.

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Introduction

In 2014, 110,373 domestic (as opposed to international) adoptions occurred in the United States. Of these, 41,023 were related domestic adoptions, where placement occurred with a blood relative, and 69,350 were non-related domestic adoptions, where the child was placed with a non-blood relative. This has led some experts to estimate that 100 million Americans have been either personally involved in an adoption within their family or know someone who is adopted (National Council for Adoption, 2017). Along with the widespread effect of adoption, communication and advertising from adoption agencies is something that can have a permanent effect on the women choosing to place their children for adoption. Combining the advertising effects with the cultural aspects of a person's life that lead them to choose adoption, adoption agencies can pinpoint which advertising strategies are effective as well as which strategies they are wasting time and energy on.

Prior to 1975, the majority of adoptions were closed; meaning the birth parent and adoptive parent had no contact after the child was placed. This began changing when Annette Baran introduced the concept of open adoption at the American Orthopsychiatric Association

meeting. Baran described open adoption as "one in which the birth parents meet the adoptive parents, participate in the separation and placement process, relinquish all legal, moral, and nurturing rights to the child, but retain the right to continue contact and knowledge of the child's whereabouts and welfare" (Baran & Sorosky, 1975). In 2014, of the 110,373 adoptions that occurred, an estimated 67%, or 73,950, of these adoptions were open. Those that were closed tended to be at the request of the birth mother, not the adoptive family (American Adoptions, 2016). With open adoption being the new "normal" in the adoption community, it is shocking how much research is focused on closed adoption. Other research that has been previously conducted focuses on the relationships between the adoptive parents and their children and the effects of adoption on the children. When looking at advertising, the current research only analyses how adoptive parents are advertising themselves to birth parents. There is no research on how agencies are marketing themselves to birth parents.

Currently, there are fifteen marketing strategies being employed by adoption agencies in an attempt to persuade birth mothers to choose their agency when looking at open adoption. This research aims to test which of Hofstede's cultural dimensions can explain each strategy used in adoption advertising as well as which dimensions and strategies influence the decision of birth mothers to place with a specific agency. With the deep understanding of this information, adoption agencies can focus their marketing towards those strategies and cultural dimensions that most impact the decision to place. The purpose of obtaining this information would be to improve marketing techniques and not waste resources on those strategies that are less effective. In another practical application, it can be tested if Hofstede's cultural dimensions apply the same across subgroups of a specific country.

Literature Review and Rationale

Open Adoption

Since the introduction of open adoption, the number of open adoptions has been steadily on the rise and researchers have performed countless studies that have unanimously concluded that open adoption tends to have a better result for the birth parent, adoptive parent, and child, otherwise known as the "adoption triad." Numerous research studies on the effects of adoption on adoptees has been conducted, fewer have been conducted on the adoptive family, and only a handful have been completed about birth mother's in particular. It's a shame that the person who initiates the adoption and experiences the most emotional trauma, is the one most commonly left out. Studies on open adoption, though limited, have provided great insight into the industry that is open adoption.

One study pitted open adoption and closed adoption against each other, and compared the psychological effects, as well as the overall welfare on the adoptive children involved in both types of adoption. Their research concluded that it was in the best interest of the children, that is that their level of wellbeing was much higher, to have an open adoption instead of a closed one (Barron & Pannor, 1984). These researchers took their information a step further and submitted their findings to the Child Welfare League of America, calling for an end to all closed adoptions. Although this was an extreme request, their research began to shift the tone to a primarily open adoption focused one in both public and private adoption.

The nature of open adoptions can go from frequent communication (daily) to annual updates. There is no set one-size-fits-all open adoption model. Because of this, communication

styles and practices vary from relationship to relationship. In 1998, a longitudinal study was competed by Harold Grotevant and Ruth McRory on the effects of openness in adoptions over time. From this, they created the Family Adoption Communication Model (FAC), which "describes the dynamic process inherent in adoption-related communication". The process that occurs according to the FAC is done in three phases: Phase I- adoptive parents provide unsolicited adoption-related information to their children. Phase II- adoptive parents respond to their adopted children's curiosities and decide what and how much to answer or withhold. Phase III- adoptive children independently search for information to answer their own adoption-related questions (Wrobel et al., 2003).

This model, although helpful in analyzing how disclosure should occur to the children of open adoptions, has quite a few limitations. First, it assumes that information adoptive parents provide is based on the child's curiosity and only the adoptive parents provide information, in whatever manor they see fit, to the child. It also follows the belief that communication only occurs with account being taken towards the child's evolving developmental abilities. It does not consider communication and openness between the birth family and adoptive family at all.

Another study conducted in 2000 focused on the success in facilitation of open adoptions. This study defined success in an open adoption as "both the birth family and the adoptive family holding positive attitudes towards their adoptions." During this research it was discovered that those who held an optimistic attitude about the effects of open adoption on their children were implemented more liberal boundaries between the birth parent and adoptive family and maintained the belief that their adoption was "successful" (Sobol, Daly & Kelloway, 2000).

The main limitation to this research is that its respondents were all older, better educated, and employed birth mothers who placed through fee-charging facilitators. As this is only a small demographic of parents who decide to place their children for adoption, this study should not be said to encapsulate the whole of open adoptions. Some of the questions asked in the study could be replicated and applied to the adoption triad of all demographics.

Grotevant (2010) has continued his research with open adoption and communicative openness as open adoption has evolved. He and his colleagues (2010) was to examine the relationship of contact between the adoptive and birth family members, adoption communicative openness, and satisfaction with contact. This research also looked at if these variables influenced behavior in the adoptee during adolescence.

According to Grotevant (2010), those who had family-level satisfaction with the amount of contact they had between the adoptive and birth families did see a correlation in the behavior of the adolescent. Although the primary focus of this research was on the effects of communication and openness in the adoption on the behavior in the adoptee, the study did find that contact and communicative openness were related to each other. Although a small finding in the grand scheme of this research, the findings could prove valuable in the research of levels of disclosure and frequency of contact.

The first study to take an in depth look at the long-term relationships between the adoptive parents and the birth mother was in 1997. This study researched the nature and extent of contact between birth parents and adoptive parents between the time they met and two years after the adoption was finalized. From the research, it was noted that adoptive parents who had a relationship with the birth parent before the birth of the child had a more favorable opinion of the

birth mother as well as a more open relationship with the birth mother. This research showed that there is predominately a positive feeling from adoptive parent to birth parent (Lee & Twaite, 1997). The main limitations in this research are that it only analyzes the opinion of the adoptive parent. In addition, the people conducting the research presented the information in a way that encouraged the adoptive parents to speak positively.

A study conducted in 2003 took an in depth look at how parents who had adopted their children in infancy (before six months of age) felt about their open adoptions both at the time of adoption and seven years post adoption. This research revealed that there was mild to significant changes in openness over the seven-year span. The research placed the adoptions in four dimensions of openness varying from minimal contact to moderate contact. The primary finding of this study showed adoptive parents' enthusiasm for the openness in their adoption regardless of which dimension they fell into (Siegel, 2003). The main component missing from this research is that there was no communication with the birth parents to determine if the feelings of the adoptive parent were reciprocated in the birth parent.

Most recently, a study compiled results from practitioners who worked with adoptive parents hoping to gain insights on adoption kinship networks and on how the birth family fit into the family systems network. Since the practitioners helped facilitate these relationships but maintained an outside perspective, they were able to provide an insight unlike any previous research. This study addressed what the communicative opportunities, challenges, and considerations are that these practitioners see in open adoption.

Three specific opportunities emerged in practitioners' reports: practicing the entrance story, education and counseling, and setting clear boundaries. Practitioners saw these

opportunities as positive influences on open adoption relationships. For the purpose of this research, setting clear boundaries is important in analyzing and predicting the success of the relationship. Practitioners identified three common issues in open adoption relationships: birth-parent grief, birth-parent circumstances, and mismatched expectations. As it happens, challenges are the issues that practitioners identified as negatively influencing the success of open adoptions (Colaner & Scharp, 2016). For the purpose of this research, identifying communication tools that can help prevent mismatched expectations is important.

Adoption Advertising

One of the first studies that approached adoption and advertising was conducted in the United Kingdom (UK). In 1976, the UK required all government social services to provide child adoption facilities (Bennet & Barkensjo, 2005). When this division was first created, children were frequently adopted within a month of coming to the facility and parents were waiting to adopt. There wasn't much need for advertising the government entity as they were already struggling with too many parents and not enough children. Since 1976, this has changed. White infants are still being adopted at an alarmingly fast rate, but the number of non-white, older, and special needs children has grown to the point of overcrowding (McQuillan, 2002). This research aims to create child-specific advertisements for the agency. By looking at what attracts people to adopt and then using that information to create an advertisement for each child individually, the hope is that more children will be adopted.

The main limitation to this research is there is no information on if these specific advertisements were successful or not. There was never an analysis on whether or not adoption rates changed, or if they did, if it was due to the change in advertising techniques. This study

merely resulted in the idea of change, not in the actual actions of making change. Also, with this study being in the UK, there are cultural differences between the UK and United States that are not addressed. What works in advertising in Europe, may not be culturally appropriate for the Unite States.

In 2011, the first study on how prospective adoptive parents advertise themselves to prospective birth parents was conducted. This qualitative study looked at fifteen online letters submitted through adoption agencies as well as social media sites from people looking to adopt, directed towards birth parents. In this study, four struggles in open adoption were identified as being addressed in these letters. These for struggles are as follows: adoption as gain versus adoption as loss; adoption as desirable parenting versus parenting as last resort; the birth mother as a good parent versus bad parent; and birth mother autonomy versus interdependence in the adoption triad (Norwood & Baxter, 2011). The first three struggles were not directly stated in the letters but instead were implied through the discursive practice of the hidden polemic in which negatives are not addressed, instead only positives are brought out. For example, one letter said, "We won't think negatively of you." This is not saying someone should be thought negatively of if they are placing a child for adoption, but infers that most people do, and this family would be different. The fourth struggle was more direct in letters stating that the birth mother would be privileged with autonomy.

One of the main limitations to this study is that it only looked at fifteen letters. At any given time, one agency might have thirty letters posted on their website. This doesn't include the hundreds of people who advertise themselves as looking for a child to adopt on social media, online forums, etc. This limited selection of letters may not provide an accurate description of

what all adoptive parents do to advertise themselves to prospective adoptive parents. These letters are also written by the adoptive couples and are not necessarily a representation of what the agencies' core beliefs or values are.

A study published in the American Economic Journal focused on child adoption matching. This means that people were asked which gender and race they were partial towards when adopting. This preference was then distributed to adoption agencies to decide which children and birthparents to service in their agencies. The preferences that were shown were towards female infants, not of African American decent (Baccara et. Al, 2014). This study also concluded that if single women and same-sex couples were not allowed to adopt, the number of non-female and African American adoptions would drastically decrease.

Although knowing the preferences of those adoption is an important step in advertising, what this study fails to address is there are still male and African American children in need of a home. There are no suggestions on how agencies can better advertise these types of children. Instead it suggests agencies cater to what people want. If there isn't the supply to fill the demand, it would be more beneficial to market the supply that already exists, better.

Finally, there is the question of whether marketing the child in the adoption process is ethical at all. A paper written in 2008 analyzes the change in child adoption in the UK and Whales since 1995. The UK Government acknowledge on multiple occasions that adoption is a moral and efficient means of child care that is being underutilized (Bauman, 1995). However, the advertisement of child adoption increasing and being more active in nature, brings up concerns about the way in which adoption has been previously organized. More and more, child adoption agencies and social workers are held accountable for their services through ideas of customer

service and performance measurements. According to this study, the use of commercial techniques such as marketing is justified on utilitarian grounds (Higgins & Smith, 2008). However, the utilization of marketing techniques within the child adoption process is one that does not ensure the child's best interest is looked out for first. This study asserts that there are tensions between the humanitarian effort that is adoption, and the questioning of morality that exists by viewing the child as human 'product'.

The main limitation to this research is that, although it causes the reader to think about and consider whether adoption advertising is moral or immoral, and if it should be approached in a different way, it fails to be decisive in any way. Adoption agencies will always have a need to advertise as, at the end of the day, they are a business. This research can be used to identify whether the types of advertising being used is in the child's best interest, or in the best interest of moving children through the agency in higher numbers.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

In the humanities, it is agreed that culture is defined by a distinctive set of norms, beliefs, values and behaviors within a population. Geert Hofstede put the most well-respected research about identification and measurement of the dimensions of culture together (Dickson, Den Hartog & Mitchelson, 2003). Geert proposed six dimensions of culture. These dimensions are power distance, individualism, innovation versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. It is assessed that a relationship exists between these dimensions. For example, a negative relationship exists between power distance and innovative performance. Low power distance cultures emphasize subordinates' autonomy in decision making, promote innovation,

entrepreneurship and inventions. On the contrary, societies with high power distance cultures tend to discourage innovation and creativity (Hofstede, 2011).

Hofstede identifies the need for adaptation of branding as well as advertising strategies to the culture of the specific consumer. However, he warns that applying the model cross-culturally can be difficult as each culture places importance on different dimensions of the culture. This theory is primarily applied in cultures outside of the United States because of the "melting pot" nature of the US (Mooij & Hofstede, 2015).

Using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as applied to open adoption advertising, this research aims to answer the following questions:

Q1: Which persuasion strategies effect a birth mother's choice to place for adoption?

Q2: What cultural dimensions influence a birth mother's choice to place with an open adoption agency?

Q1: How effective are the current branding strategies frequently used in open adoption advertisement?

Method

Study Design

By visiting the websites of open adoption agencies, there are fifteen strategic communication strategies were identified. They are: *Knowing about parenting, adoption, and abortion and making the choice yourself; Feeling safe while making your decision not being coerced; Being treated with dignity and respect; High quality service from the professionals*

involved; A focus on a high-integrity, fully open adoption; Religious affiliation; Service to LGBTQ clients; Transparency and accessibility to information; Help in building a relationship with the adoptive family; Lifelong counseling services; Education and experience of the professionals involved,; Open adoption community events such as retreats, picnics, and parties; A board of directors that includes adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents; and *Your agency feeling like a partner during your journey.*

After identifying these fifteen strategies, the researcher then sorted them into the six cultural dimensions identified in Holfstede's cultural dimensions. The strategies of *no coercion, dignity and respect, and help in building a relationship* were categorized into the power distance index. This is because if someone has the ability to coerce someone else, they hold power over that person. In wanting to be treated with dignity and respect, birth mother wishes to be considered equal, or even revered for their choice by the adoptive parents and the agency. It is identified that the birth mother holds the power in the decision to place her child. Help in building a relationship looks to also keep an equal balance of power in the relationship post placement, when the birth mother no longer holds the power of choosing to place her child or not.

The strategies of *having the agency as a partner* in their adoption journey as well as *having a board of directors with experience in open adoption* are examples of the dimension Individualism vs Collectivism. There is a desire to be part of the collective group, whether that be having a board of directors that have experienced open adoption like them or being part of a "team" in the partnership the specific agency. Although both of these dimensions are used as

advertising strategies, there is no information on how the agency intends to follow through with those strategies.

The idea of masculine vs feminine as written for business by Holfstede addresses masculinity as exhibiting heroism and assertiveness. Femininity is seen more as cooperation, modesty, and caring for the weak (Holfstede, 2011). The strategies of *feeling safe, building a high integrity adoption,* and *help in building a relationship* are placed in this dimension. The feminine aspect of feeling safe and protecting the weak is the reasoning for this strategy to be placed in this dimension. The idea of a high integrity option goes toward the masculine ideal of assertiveness. When looking at help building a relationship, this is work in cooperation which is also a feminine trait.

The next dimension examined is uncertainty avoidance. In this dimension, there are the strategies of knowledge of options, transparency, education and experience of the professionals in the agency, and quality care from professionals. By *knowing all of the options* available to her, the birth mother can avoid the uncertainty of if she made the right choice. With the idea of *transparency in the adoption process*, the birth mother is included in all of the proceedings and requirements for her adoption. *Having experienced and educated professionals* in the process is designed to reassure the birth mother that this has been done before, and she can trust it to be done properly for her again. Along with this, having quality professionals allows the birth mother to be assured that the process will be completed in the correct manor.

The two strategies in the long vs short term dimension are *lifelong counseling* and *community events*. Both of these strategies aim to show the birth mother that she is not just coming in the door, handing off her baby, and walking out. It symbolizes a long-term

commitment by the agency, which attempts to be equated to the long-term decision to place and hold a relationship with the adoptive family. Whether this be by providing counseling or an accepting community, these strategies try and make the birth mother realize that this is a life-long commitment as well.

The final dimension is indulgence vs restraint. This dimension is inclusive of tolerance of both the person's behaviors and choices as well as those they are around. The two advertising strategies in this dimension are *catering to the LGBTQ community* and *religion*. Whether it be sexual identity or religious preference, people can decide whether to indulge their own opinions and the lifestyles of those around them or they can choose to restrain from associating with these behaviors and beliefs.

Once each advertising strategy was sorted into a cultural dimension, a survey was conducted to examine birth mother's reaction to open adoption advertising strategies, satisfaction levels, and the cultural dimensions and social repercussions involved with choosing open adoption.

One of the most important aspects is risk identification and mitigation. Open adoption has a different effect on every person. Many birth mothers do find this topic to be sensitive in nature, and many have some sort of trauma related to their adoption. In order to help mitigate any possible psychological risk factors, the researcher has taken many precautionary measures.

Measurement Development

The first measure was that all participation was on a voluntary basis and could be discontinued at any time. Surveys were only collected from those who have already placed for adoption. No women who were pregnant and considering open adoption were surveyed as this is a protected category. Finally, the nonprofit adoption agencies Friends in Adoption (FIA) and

Open Adoption and Family Services (OA&FS) were contacted and they offered life-long counseling to any birth parent who has placed for adoption. Within the survey, the researcher made sure to provide the information for these agencies so that participants could seek psychological counseling if they felt it was necessary. Nothing in the information collected was designed to trigger, create, or worsen any sort of trauma.

Sample and Data Analysis

Recruitment of surveys was done via an open adoption newsletter that is put out quarterly by Open Adoption and Family Services. Appendix A shows the recruitment letter as it was presented to potential participants. A total of 84 respondents contacted the researchers asking to participate in this survey. All of these respondents completed the survey after being sent a link via e-mail. This research project was approved by the internal review board at Southern Utah University and all participation was voluntary. All surveys conducted were anonymous. This does identify one of the main limitations to this study which is that all participants were from one adoption agency and all participants were willing to reach out to the researcher to participate. Other agencies may not have the same results as OA&FS. Also, participants that are willing to reach out via e-mail are more likely to be active and satisfied in their adoptions than those who might be less likely to reach out.

Once the data was collected, statistical processing software was used to input all data received from the surveys. MANOVA tests were run for correlations, patterns and inconstancies. This information was then used to draw conclusion about which advertising strategies used by adoption agencies are most effective as well as which cultural dimensions have the biggest impact on the decision to place for adoption.

Please see Appendix B for the survey questions.

Results and Discussion

In conducting this study, four of the fifteen strategies used in adoption advertising were shown to have no significant influence on those who decided to place for adoption. These are *a focus on high-integrity, fully open adoption*, *religious affiliation*, *help building a relationship with the adoptive parents*, and *transparency and accessibility had no significant impact on birth mothers' decisions to place*. Also, none of the fifteen strategies had a significant impact on a person's current satisfaction or attitude towards their open adoption. The other eleven strategies were shown as being more or less effective depending on a person's current age, age at the time of adoption, education at the time of adoption, current education, religion, and race did not have an effect on a person's attitude toward their adoption.

Table 1. MANOVA results for advertising strategy and impact on birth mother (*N*=84)

Factor	Measures	df	*F*	η^2	*P*
Knowledge of Options	Current Education**	5	3.821	.197	.004
Feeling Safe	Race*	4	3.620	.155	.009
	Religion**	4	4.623	.190	.002
No Coercion	Race*	4	3.747	.159	.008
	Current Education**	4	4.283	.178	.003

	Education at Time of Adoption*	4	2.527	.113	.047
Dignity and Respect	Race**	3	4.735	.151	.004
	Religion*	3	3.062	.103	.033
Quality Care Professionals	Race*	4	3.858	.163	.006
	Religion*	4	3.342	.145	.014
LGBTQ Community	Age at Adoption*	6	3.242	.202	.007
	Current Education*	6	2.886	.184	.014
	Education at Adoption***	6	4.384	.255	.001
	Religion*	6	2.732	.176	.018
Lifelong Counseling	Current Age*	6	2.921	.185	.013
	Education at Adoption*	6	2.852	.182	.015
	Religion**	6	3.737	.226	.003
Educated and Experienced	Education at Adoption*	4	2.730	.121	.035
	Religion at Adoption*	4	3.369	.146	.013
Community Events	Religion**	6	3.563	.217	.004
Experienced Board	Current Education*	6	3.270	.203	.006
	Race*	6	2.958	.187	.012
	Religion**	6	3.376	.208	.005
Agency as a Partner	Current Education	6	3.029	.191	.010

*Note. *p≤.05; **p<.005; ***p<.001*

Table 2. Participants' Responses in Different Advertising Strategies

		Descriptive Statists		
Advertising Strategy	**Personal Information**	**High**	**Low**	**Mean**
Knowledge of Option	Current Education	3.0690 Doctorate Degree	2.0000 High School Diploma	2.9524
Feeling Safe	Race	2.0000 Hispanic	.2162 Caucasian	.2381
	Religion	6.0000 Mormon a	1.0000 Islam	2.0714
No Coercion	Current Education	3.1429 Doctorate Degree	1.6667 Graduate Degree	2.9524
	Education at Adoption	4.0000 Less that High School	1.0000 Graduate Degree	1.6190
	Race	2.0000 Hispanic	.2286 Caucasian	.2381
Dignity and Respect	Race	2.0000 Hispanic	.2051 Caucasian	.2381
	Religion	6.0000 Jewish	1.0000 Non-Religious	2.0714

Quality Care Professionals	Race	2.0000 Hispanic	.2258 Caucasian	.2381
	Religion	6.0000 Islam	1.6774 Christian	2.0714
LGBTQ	Age at Adoption	1.7500 45-54	.6154 < 18	1.0714
	Current Education	4.0000 Some college	2.0000 High School Diploma, Graduate degree	2.9524
	Education at Adoption	3.5000 Some College	.8462 No High School Diploma	1.6190
	Religion	5.0000 Agnostic	.5000 Mormon	2.0714
Lifelong Counseling	Current Age	3.0000 45-54	1.0000 35-44	2.3095
	Education at Adoption	3.2500 High School Graduate	.7500 Graduate Degree	1.6190
	Religion	4.5000 Catholic	1.3500 Non-religious	2.0714
Educated and Experienced Professionals	Education at Adoption	4.0000 Some High School	.8333 Two-year Degree	1.6190
	Religion	4.0000 Christian	1.0000 Islam	2.0714
Community Events	Religion	3.4545 Christian	.7143 Non-Religious	2.0714
Experienced Board	Current Education	5.0000 High School Graduate	1.5000 Graduate Degree	2.9524
	Race	.6923 Caucasian	.2000 Hispanic	.2381
	Religion	3.8571 Christian	.5000 Agnostic	2.0714
Agency as a Partner	Current Education	5.0000 High School Graduate	2.3750 Doctorate	2.9524

When looking at *knowledge of options*, the primary factor that had a significant impact is their current education level ($p = .004$). Those who have e a doctorate degree stated that this affected them the most (M= 3.0690) and those with a high school diploma stated that this influenced them the least (M= 2.000) This can be explained by the thought that those who are more educated are more likely to have a decent job and stable life and are more likely to have the means to care for the child. This means that the knowledge of all of their options becomes a priority to make sure they are not choosing something they will regret later. According to response provided, those who only have a high school diploma are usually in more desperate situations where they didn't feel like they had another option, so paying attention to those other options was not as important. Other strategies that current level of education impacted are no coercion ($p =.003$), LGBTQ friendliness ($p =.014$), experienced board ($p =.006$), and agency as a partner ($p =.010$).

When looking at *no coercion*, those with a doctorate degree felt that this was the most important (M= 3.1429) whereas those with a graduate degree found this to be the least important (M= 1.6667). One of the main considerations with this is that those who have a doctorate are older (100% over the age of 35) and placed when coercion was a common practice by adoption agencies. Those with graduate degrees don't care as much because most of them placed when they already had this degree (85% placed after at least a 4-year college degree) and were in a place where adoption was not necessary, but what they still thought was best.

LGBTQ friendliness as an agency strategy had the highest impact on students with some college (M= 4.000), and the lowest impact on those with a high school diploma (M= 2.000). Most respondents reside in the north-west portion of the United States where queer peoples are

commonplace. However, those that have a college education feel they can afford to be more particular with the homes that their children go to, as opposed to high school students who feel they don't have as many options. Only 15% or respondents indicated they would prefer or be indifferent to a LGBTQ family adopting their child.

The *experienced board* advertising strategy mattered most to those with a high school education (M= 5.000), whereas those with a graduate degree showed the least interest in this strategy (M= 1.5000). Those with a high school education are less likely to have experiences of their own and are hoping that the people they are entrusting to help them through the adoption process have that experience.

When looking at the *agency as a partner*, those with a high school education were most attracted to this advertising (M= 5.000). Those with a PhD were not as interested in this strategy (M= 2.3750). In high school, you are less likely to have a support network that understand and is mature enough to help you through the process, so there is a desire for the agency to fill that void. However, those with a PhD are generally older and more mature and have others to lean on besides the agency.

Current education levels were not the only education related questions to have an effect on people's perceptions of adoption advertising. The education level at the time of adoption made a difference in the respondent's opinions on *no coercion* (*p* = .047), *LGBTQ friendliness* (*p* =.007), *lifelong counseling* (*p* =.015), *and education and experience of the professionals* (*p* =.035). The above reasoning can be applied to this information as well.

Age had a significant impact on the effectiveness of adoption advertisements. The strategies that were significantly impacted by age are the age at the time of adoption and *LGBTQ*

friendliness ($p = .007$) as well as current age and the importance of *lifelong counseling* ($p = .013$). For the strategy of *LGBTQ friendliness*, that highest impact was on those that were between the ages of 45-54 (M= 1.7500) and the lowest impact was on those under the age of 18 when they placed (M=.6154). Those who are older noted that *the LGBTQ friendliness* affected them in the opposite way than the agency intended. They cared because they didn't want an LQBTQ couple adopting their child. High school students acknowledged that they were less selective and just wanted their children to be loved and cared about regardless of their sexual orientation.

Race was one of the main demographics that had an impact on the effects of the advertising strategies. The advertising strategies race effected are *feeling safe* ($p = .009$), *no coercion* ($p = .008$), *dignity and respect* ($p = .004$), *quality care from professionals* ($p = .006$), and having an *experienced board of directors* ($p = .012$).

Surprisingly, only Hispanics and Caucasians were at the high and low ends of each advertising strategy. For the strategy of *feeling safe*, Hispanics stated that this was most important to them (M= 2.000), whereas Caucasians were the lowest with (M= .2162). In Hispanic culture there is a larger number of abuse cases (Leroy, 2015) than any other race. Many of these domestic disputes revolve around children. This is a likely reason for safety being a key influencer for those of this race. Hispanics had the highest views of no coercion as well (M= 2.000) compared to their Caucasian counterparts (M= .2162) for the same reason. The high effectiveness on Hispanics of being treated with dignity and respect (M= 2.000) can also be explained by looking at the increase of abuse in Hispanic culture. Caucasians were the lowest effected by this advertising (M= .2051)

The other two strategies that race effected were *quality care from professionals* with Hispanics with the high (M= 2.000) and Caucasian with the low (M= .2258) and an *experienced board* which had Caucasian as the high (M= .6923) and Hispanic as the low (.2000). In the northwest where all of the respondents resided at time of placement, Hispanics are 62% less likely to finish high school than their Caucasian counterparts (Oregon Education Report, 2010). This would explain why Hispanics care more about the professionals they are working with.

Religion was the most influential on the effectiveness of adoption advertising. The strategies that race was shown to affect their effectiveness on was *feeling safe* ($p = .002$), *dignity and respect* ($p = .033$), *quality care of professionals* ($p = .014$), *LGBTQ friendliness* ($p = .018$), *lifelong counseling* ($p = .003$), *education and experience of professionals* ($p = .018$), *community events* ($p = .004$), and the *experience of the board* ($p = .005$).

When looking at religion and *feeling safe*, the strongest impact was on Mormons (M= 6.000) with the lowest impact being on followers of Islam (M= 1.000). In the Mormon religion, adoption usually occurs because a member of the church becomes impregnated before they are married. This is grounds for being disavowed from the church and there is a large stigma of shame with pre-marital sex and with adoption. However, in the Islamic religion, children who are adopted keep the surname of their birth parents and are still eligible to inherit the estate of the birth parent. There is much more acknowledgement of the birth parent having rights and being an important aspect in the child's life.

In looking at the adoption strategy of being *treated with dignity and respect*, the highest influence was on Jewish respondents (M= 6.000) with the lowest influence being on those who are non-religious (M= 1.000). Part of the moral code taught in Judaism is to treat others with

dignity and respect. The agency using these particular words triggers a positive correlation between the person who is Jewish and the agency. However, those that are non-religious, don't have a religious based moral code that encourages these behaviors.

The quality and care of professionals is most impactful to those of the Islamic believe (M= 6.000) with the least amount of impact on Christian respondents (M= 1.6774). With adoption being a much more complex process in the Islamic faith, having professionals that ensure that the religious requirements are followed during their adoption. Christians however, have their church and God to fall back on when it comes to who they believe will "take care" of them. Conversely, when looking at education in particular, Islamic followers were less likely to be affected (M= 1.000) than their Christian counterparts (M= 4.000) This emphasizes the importance of quality over the level of education in the Islamic religion.

One of the obvious strategies effected by religion is *LGBTQ friendliness* with agnostics being most favorable (M= 5.000) and Mormons being least favorable (M= .5000). Homosexuality is not accepted in the Mormon faith, therefor it would make sense for *LGBTQ friendliness* to negatively impact the view of a Mormon about the agency. However, those who are agnostic do not have an organized religion and are more likely to be open to the lifestyle choices of queer peoples.

The strategy of *lifelong counseling* is most effective to those of the Catholic religion (M= 4.500) and least effective to those who are non-religious (M= 1.3500). Many Catholics are required to receive counseling from the priest regularly, whether this be confession, pre-marital counseling, or everything in between. The church's encouragement of counseling as a whole is likely for the increase in the effectiveness of this strategy on Catholic respondents.

Religion is the only demographic that was influenced by the strategy of *community events*. Those who are Christian had a more favorable response to this advertising (M= 3.4545) than those who are non-religious (M= .7143). Often time, Christians participate in community events within their church and are likely looking for a similar experience with their adoption agency.

Conclusion and Limitations

By using the findings from the current study, open adoption marketing professionals can focus on emphasizing the strategies most important to the demographic they are trying to reach. These agencies can also stop spending their time on those strategies that are not as effective.

One of the main limitations for this study is that all respondents used the same agency and are from the same geological location. Although this research can definitely be applied to that agency's advertising strategy, other geographical locations may want to conduct their own survey to see if their results mimic that of this study. Also, with each respondent being willing to reach out to the researcher individually, those who might not be as satisfied with the adoption may not have been reached.

If adoption agencies were willing to conduct this survey just after placement, instead of years after placement like this study did, they can also get a more accurate view of what is effective. People's opinions and memory of what caused them to adopt in the first place may

become muddled over time. Also, asking those that come into the agency what brought them into the agency when they first come in the door.

An important revelation of this research is that birth mothers are their own sub-culture and do not necessarily follow the norms of the American culture. Holfstede's cultural dimensions help establish this. In the United States, there is a low power index, a high desire for individualism, predominately masculine, low uncertainty avoidance, low long term, and high indulgence levels (Holfstede & Mooij, 2011). When comparing this to the strategies that are most impactful in open adoption advertising, it is almost the complete opposite. In the adoption community, the advertising strategies that accentuate a high power index such as knowledge of all options are most effective. Also, a high collectivist mentality such as the agency being a partner is more impactful. Advertising that is predominately feminine such as feeling safe has a more positive reaction. The positive responses to the experience of the professionals shows a high desire for uncertainty avoidance. Finally, the idea of lifelong counseling having a positive reaction encourages the dimension of long-term focus.

Holfstede's cultural dimensions have been around for decades. However, it has never been applied to non-profit marketing. If marketing strategies take into consideration which end of the dimensional scale their desired demographic sits, these dimensions can be used to decide what to emphasize in marketing campaigns. If these campaigns mimic the dimensional beliefs held by the intended audience, they are shown to be more effective. One limitation to this, as shown in this study, is that some sub-cultures do not hold the same beliefs in which dimensions are important as the broad culture around them. It is important that this information be

considered when creating marketing campaigns in order to make sure they are as effective as possible.

APPENDIX A

Family Photo of my son, the adoptive, and myself from September 2017.

Fellow OA&FS Families,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Alleia Kelly and I am a graduate student in the Professional Communication program at Southern Utah University. I am also a birth-mother who placed with OA&FS just over 10 years ago. (Wow, the time sure does fly by!)

I am looking for OA&FS birth and adoptive parents to participate in an interview for my graduate research project. My research focuses on communication between adoptive and birth families during the formative stages of the adoptions. I'd like to survey open adoption families in which both the birth family and adoptive family consider their open adoption to be successful and happy, and then look for communication patterns that exist within those relationships. I will be focusing on positive strategies of communication in order to create outline for future families. My research delves primarily into language used in the adoption, levels of intimacy and disclosure between the

parties involved, boundary setting, and conflict resolution strategies in successful adoptions. The end goal of this research is to present a model for successful communication in open adoptions.

I am looking for families who are at least five years into their adoptions, have communication between the adoptive and birth families, and would consider themselves happy with their adoption situation. If you fit this description and both parties would be willing to participate in interviews either over the phone, in person, or via skype, please contact me at alleiadanae@gmail.com.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Alleia Kelly

Appendix B

You are being asked to participate in a research study of what influences exist within open adoption. This study is anonymous. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey answering questions to the best of your ability. This survey should take no more than fifteen minutes of your time. You must be over the age of 18 to participate in this study.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the survey at any point during the process.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the institutional review board (IRB) at Southern Utah University. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Alleia Kelly, at alleiadanae@gmail.com. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators, you may contact Garrett Strosser, Chair of the Southern Utah University Institutional Review Board at (435) 586-7889.

By Clicking "Next", you agree to the terms stated above.

What is your age range?

Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - or Older

What was your age at the time of adoption?

Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 or older

What is your current education level?

Less than high school

High school graduate

Some college

2 year degree

4 year degree

Professional degree

Doctorate

What was your education level at the time of adoption?

Less than high school

High school graduate

Some college

2 year degree

4 year degree

Professional degree

Doctorate

What is your race or ethnic heritage?

Asian

African American

Caucasian

Hispanic/LatinX

Native American

Other (specify)

What was your religious preference at the time of adoption?

Catholic

Jewish

Protestant

Christian

Mormon

Islam

Buddhist

Nonreligious/Atheist

Agnostic

Other (Specify)

Check the family structure that best describes the family you grew up in:

Nuclear Family (mother and father present and both are parents of children in the home)

Single Mother With Children

Single Father With Children

Step-family with one or both parents

Other (please describe)

At the time of your adoption, how many days a week did you participate in social activities? (Sports teams, clubs, social gatherings, church, volunteer work, etc.)

I did not participate in any social activities

One day a week

Two days a week

Three days a week

Four Days a week

Five Days a week

Six Days a week

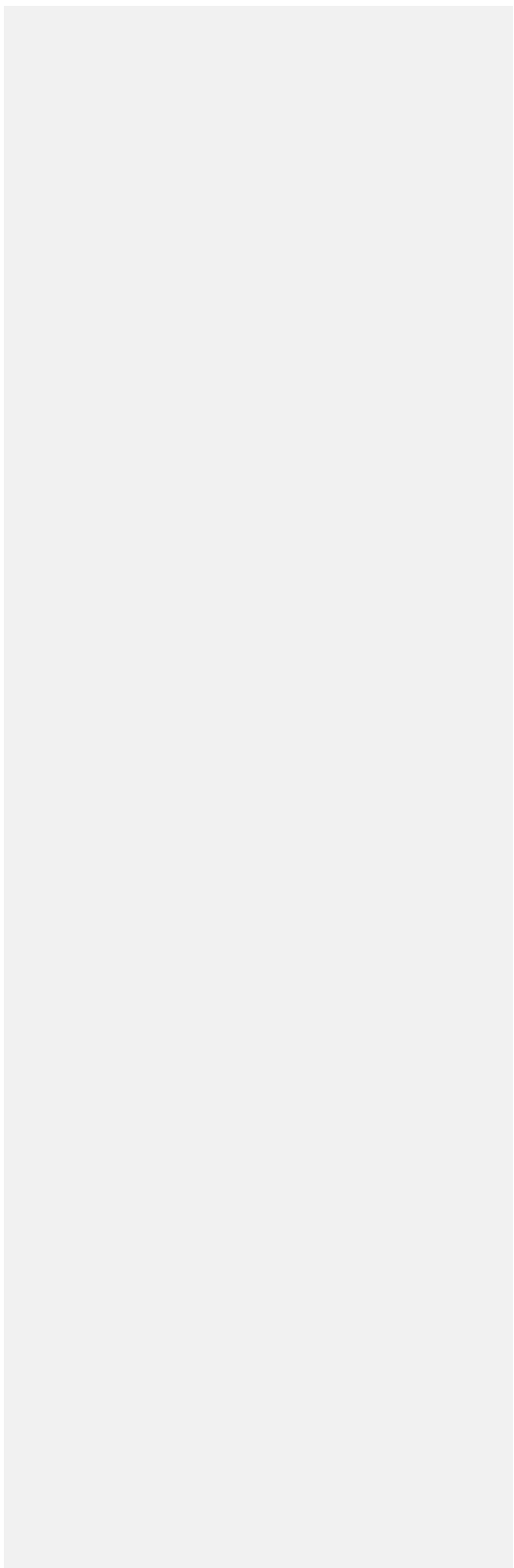Seven Days a week

Is your current adoption:

Bad	Good
Unlikable	Likable
Unfavorable	Favorable

Do you think open adoption is:

Unimportant	Important
Means Nothing	Means A Lot
Worthless	Valuable
Not Needed	Needed

When considering placing your child for adoption, how important was each of the following:

	Not at all important		Extremely Important
Knowing about parenting, adoption, and abortion and making the choice yourself			
Feeling safe while making your decision			
Not being coerced			
Being treated with dignity and respect			
High quality service from the professionals involved			
A focus on a high-integrity, fully open adoption			
Religious affiliation			
Service to LGBTQ clients			
Transparency and accessibility to information			
Help in building a relationship with the adoptive family			
Lifelong counseling services			
Education and experience of the professionals involved			
Open adoption community events such as retreats, picnics, and parties			

	Not at all important		Extremely Important
A board of directors that includes adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents			
Your agency feeling like a partner during your journey			

How satisfied are you in your current adoption?

Not at all satisfied		Extremely satisfied

What affected you the most when choosing to place for adoption?

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board 351 W. University Blvd., GC 308 Cedar City, UT 84720 (435) 586-

7889 Institutional Review Board

To: Alleia Kelly (PI) & Lijie Zhou (Faculty Supervisor)
From: Garrett Strosser, SUU IRB Chair
Date: 23 June 2018
RE: IRB Exemption Consideration of Exempt Research: Effectiveness of Non-

profit Open Adoption Advertisement on Birth Mothers and Birth Mothers' Satisfaction With Open Adoption

Your exemption request has been assessed and reviewed by the SUU Institutional Review Board and has been approved. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Please notify me immediately should any unexpected risks to the participants become evident.

(To be filled in by the IRB)

23 June 2018
_____ _____ **Full Approval Date**

PROTOCOL CONTINUING REVIEW DATE: One year from approval IRB APPROVAL
EXPIRATION DATE: One year from approval

If data collection is not completed by the expiration date, the researcher must seek IRB
approval for a continuation.

IRB APPROVAL #23-062018b

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