

Birth Parents & Openness with Adoptive Families: An Examination of Actual Contact & Satisfaction with Contact

Amy L. Whitesel¹, Jody M. Ganiban¹, Leslie D. Leve², Daniel S. Shaw³, Misaki N. Natsuaki⁴, David Reiss⁵, Jenae M. Neiderhiser⁶



INTRODUCTION

- Nationally, there is a trend towards greater openness & contact between Birth Parents (BPs) and Adoptive Parents (APs) in domestic adoption
- Greater openness has been shown as beneficial for adopted children (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998)
- The limited research with BPs regarding openness tends to show benefits in their post adoption adjustment (Ge et al., 2008; Henney et al., 2007)

Objective

- Explore associations between adoption openness and birth parent adjustment over time

METHODS

Participants

- 554 Birth Mothers (BM) & 173 Birth Fathers (BF) in the Early Growth & Development Study
- BPs are part of a “yoked” unit, which includes the APs & child (561 total yokes)
- Completed a domestic infant adoption between 2003-2009
- Recruited from 33 adoption agencies in 47 states

Birth Parent Demographics

	Birth Mothers	Birth Fathers
Age (mean)	24.85 Range 14-44; SD 6.03	27.01 Range 15-59, SD 7.96
Education (mean)	High School	High School
Income (median)	\$>15,000	\$15-25,000
Race: Caucasian	70%	70%
Af. American	13	12
Hispanic/Lat	7	9
Multirace	5	5
Other/Unk	5	4

Procedures

- BPs were assessed at: 9 months (T1), 18 months (T2), & 4 yrs (T3) post placement
- Openness at T1 & T2:
 - Openness contact (OC)*: frequency of contact ranging from no contact to phone /email communication to regular visits
 - Openness satisfaction (OS)*: items assess how satisfied w/ level of openness, knowledge of APs
- Adjustment outcomes at T1, T2 & T3:
 - Depression* (Beck & Steer, 1993)
 - General Life Satisfaction (GLS)* (Crnic et al., 1983)

Data Analysis

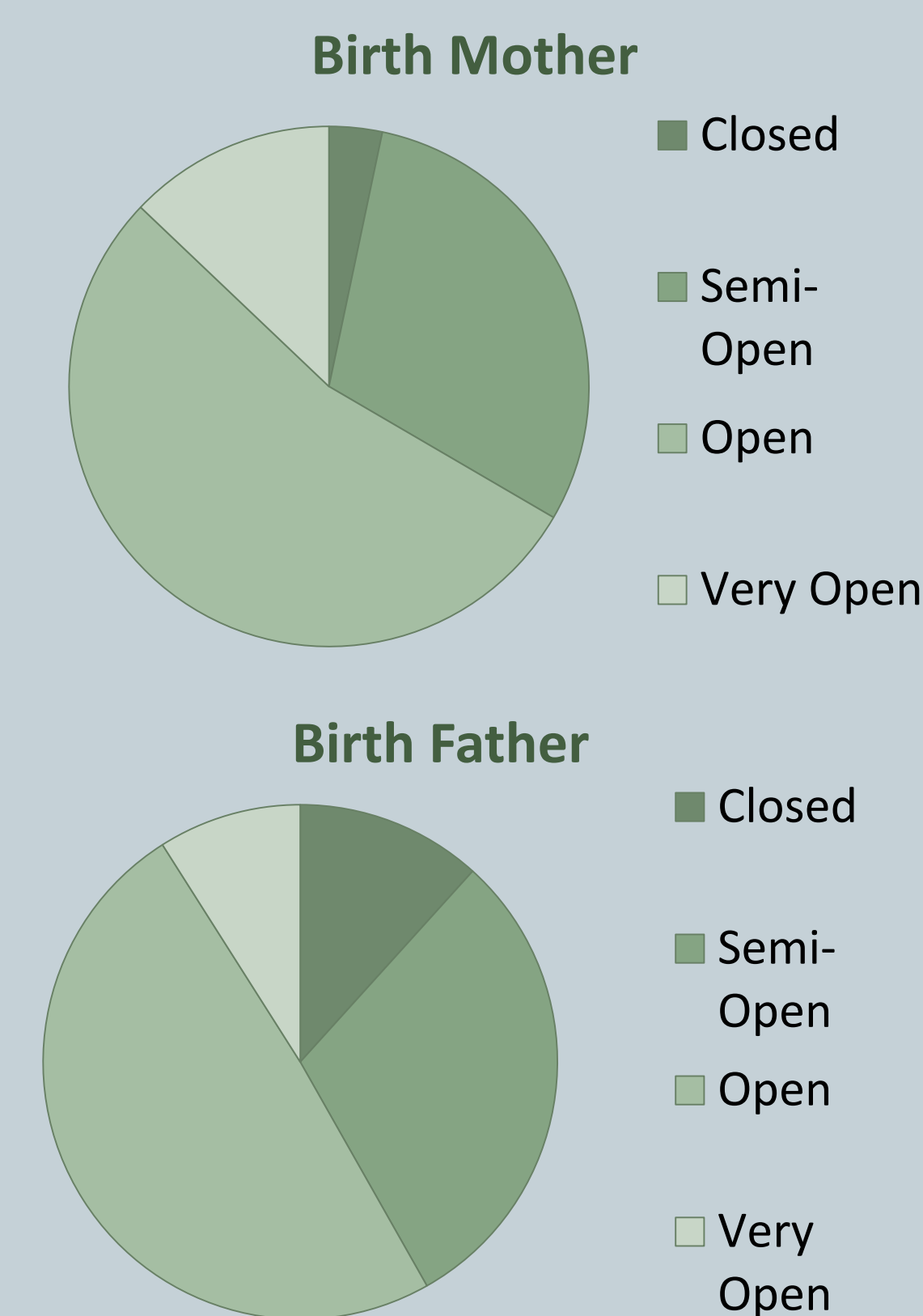
- Pearson correlations were computed to assess stability of constructs over time. OC & OS (T1 to T2) r's range from .72 to .78 and .69 to .79
Depression & GLS (T1 to T3) r's range from .26 to .65 and .37 to .46
- Pearson correlations were computed to assess associations between OS and BM and BF adjustment (Depression, GLS)
 - Only OS was significantly associated w/ outcomes (r's range from .12 to .21)
- Multiple regression analyses examined relationships between OS and BM and BF outcomes

RESULTS

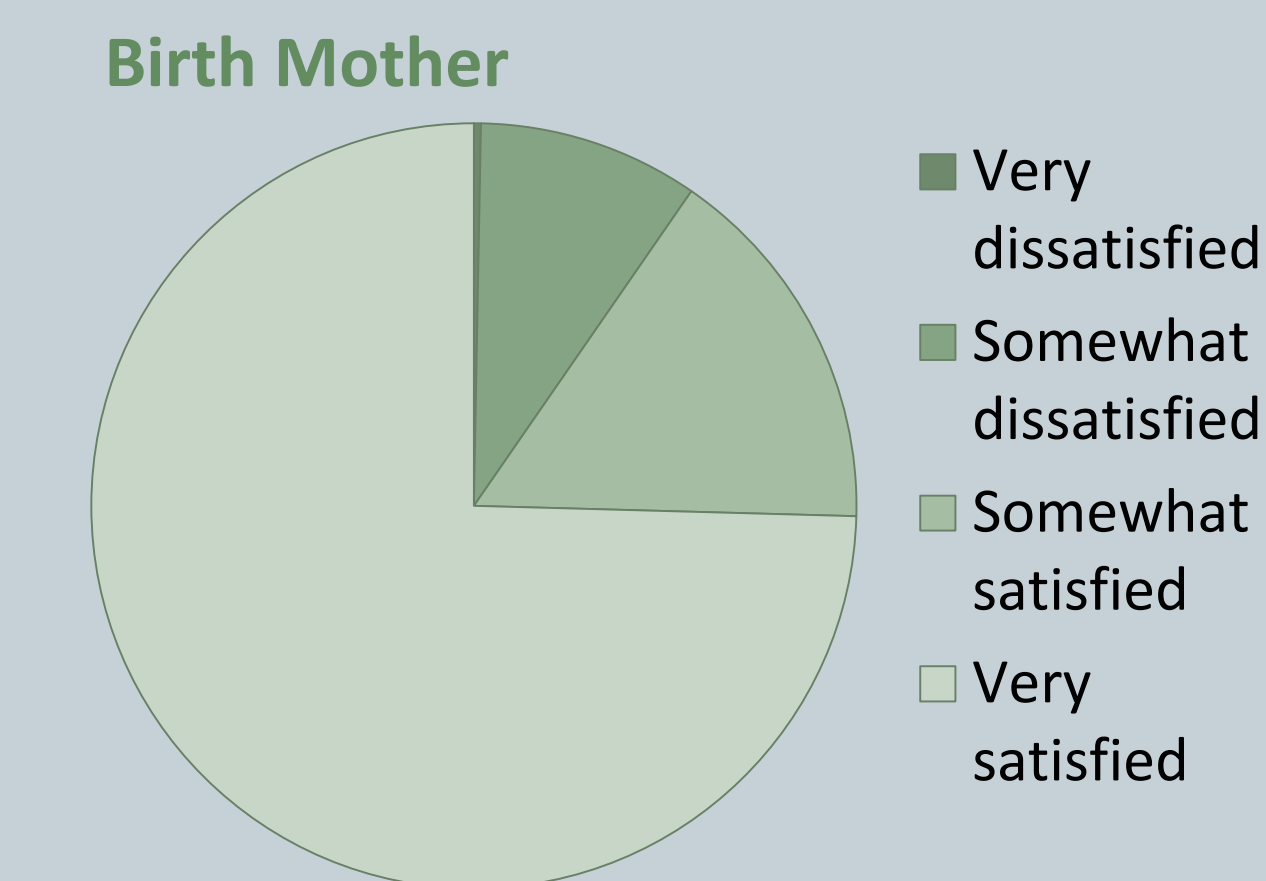
Openness Contact*

Closed - Little to no info about or contact w/APs
Semi-Open – Communicate via agency or some direct contact, but no in person contact
Open – Visit more than 1x a year, communicate semi-regularly
Very open – Visits and/or communication at least once a month

* The original seven categories were combined to create those listed above. These charts represent the average contact in T1 & T2.



Openness Satisfaction



- Depression:** Regression models indicate that OS predicts BM depression over time, while changes in OS partially explain changes in depression from T1 to T2. BF OS at T1 predicts changes in depression at T2.
- General Life Satisfaction (GLS):** BM OS independently predicts GLS at T2, even when controlling for T1 OS and T1 GLS.

Regression of Depression & GLS on BP Openness Satisfaction

Variable	β	SE	p	Model R ²
DV: BM Depression (T2)				
Depression (T1)	.59	.03	<.0001	.38
Openness satisfaction (T1)	.00	.18	ns	
Openness satisfaction (T2)	-.10	.17	.04	
DV: BF Depression (T2)				
Depression (T1)	.64	.06	<.0001	.43
Openness Satisfaction (T1)	-.13	.14	.03	
DV: BM General Life Satisfaction (T2)				
General Life Satisfaction (T1)	.45	.04		.23
Openness Satisfaction (T1)	-.02	.01	ns	
Openness Satisfaction (T2)	.16	.01	.004	
DV: BF General Life Satisfaction (T2)				
General Life Satisfaction (T1)	.39	.07	<.0001	.19
Openness satisfaction (T1)	.14	.01	.06	
DV = Dependent Variable				

CONCLUSIONS

- Contact between APs & BPs is relatively open
- Depression, GLS, OC and OS all show stability over time
- Satisfaction with openness has a greater contribution to post adoption adjustment than actual amount of contact
- The effect of openness satisfaction predicting GLS tends to persist longer for BMs than for BFs

References & Early Growth & Development Study Information

Author contact information:

Amy L. Whitesel, Ph.D., LCSW-C
The George Washington University
1922 F St. NW, Suite 414
Washington, DC 20052
(202) 994-3805
cfalw@gwu.edu

References

Ge, X., Natsuaki, M.N., Martin, D., Leve, L., Neiderhiser, J., Shaw, D., Villareal, G., Scaramella, L., Reid, J. and Reiss, David. (2008). Bridging the Divide: Openness in Adoption and Post-adoption Psychosocial Adjustment among Birth and Adoptive Parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22, 4, 529-540.

Grotevant, H.D. and McRoy, R.G. (1998). *Openness in Adoption: Exploring Family Connections*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Henney, S.M., Ayers-Lopez, S., McRoy, R.G., Grotevant, H.D. (2007). Evolution and Resolution: Birthmothers' Experience of Grief and Loss at Different Levels of Openness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24, 875-889.

For more information about the Early Growth & Development Study:

Visit our website at <https://www.egdstudy.org>

EGDS Publications (partial list)

In press

Laurent, H. K., Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Natsuaki, M. N., Shaw, D. S., Harold, G. T., & Reiss, D. (in press). Effects of birth and adoptive parent depressive symptoms on child HPA regulation: Independent and moderated influences. *Developmental Psychology*.

Leve, L. D., DeGarmo, D. S., Bridgett, D. J., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. J., Harold, G. T., Natsuaki, M., & Reiss, D. (in press). Using an adoption design to separate genetic, prenatal, and temperament influences on toddler's executive function. *Developmental Psychology*.

Natsuaki, M. N., Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Scaramella, L. V., Ge, X., & Reiss, D. (in press). Intergenerational transmission of risk for social inhibition: The interplay between parental responsiveness and genetic influences. *Development and Psychopathology*.

2012

Rhoades, K. A., Leve, L. D., Harold, G. T., Mannerling, A. M., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Natsuaki, M. N., & Reiss, D. (2012). Marital hostility and parent-reported child sleep problems in early childhood: Indirect associations via hostile parenting and genetic moderation. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26, 488-498.

Massey, S. H., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Leve, L. D., Ganiban, J. M., & Reiss, D. (2012). Maternal Self Concept as a Provider and Cessation of Substance Use During Pregnancy. *Addictive Behaviors*, 37, 956–961.

Stover, C. S., Connell, C., Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Scaramella, L. V., Conger, R., & Reiss, D. (2012). Fathering and mothering in the family system: Linking marital hostility and aggression in adopted toddlers. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53, 401–409. PMC: 3279589

2011

Martin, D. M., Leve, L. D., Natsuaki, M. N., Neiderhiser, J. M., & Ge, X. (2011). Toward a greater understanding of openness: A report from the Early Growth and Development Study. *National Council of Adoption's Factbook V*, 471–477.

Massey, S. H., Lieberman, D. Z., Reiss, D., Leve, L. D., Shaw, D., Neiderhiser, J. M. (2011). Association of clinical characteristics and cessation of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use during pregnancy. *American Journal on Addictions*, 20, 143–150. PMC: 3052631

Reiss, D. & Neiderhiser, J. M. (2011). Marital dynamics and child proaction: Genetics takes a second look at developmental theory. In K. Dodge & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Gene-Environment Interactions in Developmental Psychopathology*. The Guildford Press: NY.

2010

Leve, L. D., Kerr, D., Shaw, D., Ge, X., Neiderhiser, J. M., Reid, J. B., Scaramella, L., Conger, R., & Reiss, D. (2010). Infant pathways to externalizing behavior: Evidence of Genotype x Environment interaction. *Child Development*, 81, 340–356. PMC: 2845990

Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Scaramella, L. V., & Reiss, D (2010). The Early Growth and Development Study: Using the prospective adoption design to examine genotype-environment interplay. [Special section] *Behavior Genetics*, 40, 306–314. (Reprinted from 2008 *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 40, 1106–1115. PMC: 20358398.

Natsuaki, M. N., Ge, X., Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Conger, R. D., Scaramella, L. V., Reid, J., & Reiss, D. (2010). Genetic liability, environment, and the development of fussiness in toddlers: The roles of maternal depression and parental responsiveness. *Developmental Psychology*, 46, 1147–1158. PMC: 2936717.

Reiss, D. (2010). Genetic thinking in the study of social relationships: Five points of entry. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(5), 502-515.

2009

Reiss, D., Leve, L. D., & Whitesel, A. (2009). Understanding links between birth parents and the child they have placed for adoption: Clues for assisting adopting families and for reducing genetic risk. In G. M. Wrobel & E. Neil (Eds.), *International advances in adoption research for practice* (pp. 119–146). New York: John Wiley.

2008

Ganiban, J. M., Leve, L. D., Moore, G., & Neiderhiser, J. M. (2008). Strategies for understanding the mechanisms of mothering and fathering. In R. S. Bridges (Ed.), *Neurobiology of the parental brain* (pp. 391–403). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier.

Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Scaramella, L. V., & Reiss, D (2008). The Early Growth and Development Study: Using the prospective adoption design to examine genotype-environment interplay. *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 40, 1106–1115. PMC: 2674795

2007

Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Ge, X., Scaramella, L. V., Conger, R. D., Reid, J. B., Shaw, D. S., & Reiss, D. (2007). The Early Growth and Development Study: A prospective adoption design. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 1, 84–95. PMC: 2674795

Reiss, D. & Leve, L. D. (2007). Genetic expression outside the skin: Clues to mechanisms of Genotype x Environment Interaction. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19, 1005–1027. PMC: 2144738

2003

Hollenstein, T., Leve, L. D., Scaramella, L., Milfort, R. & Neiderhiser, J. (2003). Openness in adoption, knowledge of birthparent health history, and adoptive family adjustment. *Adoption Quarterly*, 7(1), 43–52.

2001

Leve, L. D., Scaramella, L., & Fagot, B. I. (2001). Infant temperament, pleasure in parenting, and marital happiness in adoptive families. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 22, 545–558.