

Experiences of American Families Who Have Adopted Children  
from Bulgarian Orphanages

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## **Abstract**

In this study, 26 families who had adopted children from Bulgarian orphanages were surveyed about their adoption experiences. Families were asked about (a) their child's time in an orphanage, (b) their child's pre- and post-adoption diagnoses and behavior, and (c) their family's transition, relationships, and support. Families' responses were compared to one another and to those in Groza et al. (2008). There was not a significant relationship between time spent in orphanage, age of child at adoption, and children's attachment. Overall, the pre- and post-adoption diagnoses were not different. The level of support from friends/family or support groups and transition into family was not related. There were, however, similarities in the experiences of families in this study and to those in Groza et al. Also, there was a significant negative relationship between child behavior disruption and the parent-child relationship. Implications of these results will be discussed.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

International adoptions in the United States peaked in 2004 with 22,989 adoptions; however, the number of international adoptions has steadily decreased since then, and only 4,058 children were adopted in 2018 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). There are various reasons for this decline, including stricter adoption policies and requirements. For instance, some countries, such as Russia and Ethiopia, are completely shutting down international adoption. According to the U.S. Department of State (2020), in 2012, the top three countries from which Americans adopted were China, Ethiopia, and Russia; however, this has since changed, and China is now the only one of the three that is still open. On December 28, 2012, Russia put a ban on U.S. citizens adopting children from their country (U.S. Citizenship, 2018b), and as of January 9, 2018, the Ethiopian government stopped any foreign adoptions unless they were filed before February 14, 2018 (U.S. Citizenship, 2018a). As some of these countries close their adoption programs to the United States, there will be an increase in Americans adopting children from other countries in the future.

The number of children from Bulgaria who were adopted into U.S. families has increased over the past 10 years. According to the U.S. Department of State (2020), in 2007, there were only 20 children adopted from Bulgaria. Adoptions peaked in 2016 with 201 adoptions. The most recent statistic in 2018 shows a decrease to 134 adoptions (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

According to Rainbow Kids (2020), the Eastern European countries from which children can currently be adopted are Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. Comparing these 14 countries to the 2018 statistics by the U.S. Department of State (2020) shows that Bulgaria is the second most popular Eastern European country for American adoptions (134 children), with Ukraine being the most popular (248 children). The third most popular country is Latvia with 79 adoptions (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

According to the U.S. Department of State (2014), the adoption process for Bulgaria starts when children are officially abandoned or relinquished by their parents. The country will first give Bulgarian families a chance to adopt a child, but after six months, the child is listed on the international adoption registry. Rarely, a biological parent may regain custody after their child is listed in the registry if the parent is found capable (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Clearly, the Bulgarian government prefers for children to be adopted by the people of its own nation, but Bulgaria seems open to intercountry adoptions as well.

There is a major problem with promoting adoptions within country, however, as many of the orphans in Bulgaria are Roma. The Roma people are a nomadic group, and they reside in countries across Eastern Europe. According to Dimitrova et al. (2017), in a 2011 census, the Roma in Bulgaria comprised anywhere between 325,343 and 800,000 people of the almost 7 million people who lived in Bulgaria at the time. Tanner (2005) points out that accurate statistics are hard to come by because the Roma people are



nomadic, data is not collected regularly, and individuals are often afraid to claim Roma as their heritage because they do not want to be looked down upon. Frequently, this minority group has high unemployment and discrimination; Roma people do not have good health care services, housing, or educational services for their children (Tanner, 2005). As a consequence, it is extremely hard to find a clear statistic of how many Roma children are in orphanages and how many of them are adopted internationally. One statistic from All God's Children International (2020) estimates that 50% of orphans in Bulgaria are Roma. Last year, Bulgarians were polled on their opinions of the Roma people, and Wike et al. (2019) found that 68% of Bulgarians reported that they viewed the Roma population as "unfavorable." Even though there is a need for children to be adopted in their country, non-Roma Bulgarian families may be hesitant to adopt a child of Roma descent, and Roma families generally cannot afford to adopt. Because of their heritage, Roma children may spend a longer time in an orphanage since they are less likely to be adopted in country. In addition, they may be placed in an orphanage at a younger age due to the poor economic circumstances that the Roma people face.

It is well known that orphanages are not healthy places to raise children. As Groark and McCall (2011) address in their article, children in these environments are in places that are very different from a normal family home. For instance, a typical attribute of orphanages in many different countries is that there are 9 to 16 children in each ward, with each caregiver in charge of 6 to 8 children, although this number can be even higher. Because of high caregiver turnover and children moving to different rooms or locations when certain milestones are met, it is estimated that during the first 19+ months of

abandonment, a child could be taken care of by 60 to 100 different caregivers. Often, the caregivers are not trained in the “behavioral care of young children” (Groark & McCall, 2011, p. 510). A combination of these factors may lead to difficulties as the children age. Children may be developmentally delayed (physically and behaviorally), and they may struggle with unsuitable social-emotional behavior that can include being “indiscriminately friendly, running up and hugging strangers, and 65-85% may have disorganized attachment relationships with caregivers...” (Groark & McCall, 2011, p. 511).

Little research has been done with families after they have adopted a child from Bulgaria, although there are some studies on children adopted from Romania, such as one by Groza et al. (2008) on executive cognitive functioning. The researchers studied 123 children who were adopted from Romania; two-thirds of the group had spent time in an institution for different lengths of time, and one-third of the children had never been institutionalized. The researchers surveyed adoptive families; the survey included a section to be completed by the child’s teacher. Groza et al. (2008) found that “the best predictor of parental perception of current executive functioning was parent perception of the current parent-child relationship and not preadoptive history” (p. 185).

A study by Hiles Howard et al. (2017) used family drawings to evaluate “post-institutionalized adopted children thought to be at risk for attachment disturbances” (para. 1). Here, the researchers recruited both individuals who had adopted children from Eastern Europe who had spent time in institutional settings and families with biological children who had some learning difficulties. The children were instructed to draw

pictures of their families, and the parents completed a behavior rating inventory of executive function questionnaire. The researchers found that even though the two groups had comparable executive functioning, their drawings were dissimilar. The children who were adopted tended to leave themselves and their mothers out of the family picture. If mothers were included, they were drawn with less detail and a further distance away from the family. It was found that this system is a helpful tool for evaluating adopted children at risk for attachment disorders. According to Hiles Howard et al. (2017), theirs was the first study of family drawings that specifically used a population of children who had been adopted out of institutional settings. Children who have spent time in an orphanage are often without consistent caregivers; this can lead to attachment problems with their adoptive families. Children adopted from orphanages in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria included, will often display attachment disturbances (Hiles Howard et al., 2017).

A study by Cohen et al. (2013) took mice and added stressors that would imitate the early-life stresses that children might experience if they were raised in an orphanage from around the globe. This research provided “evidence of both early and persistent alterations in amygdala circuitry and function following early-life stress,” suggesting that there are likely neurobiological changes, as well as physical and behavioral changes, that can occur when children are raised in an orphanage (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 18274). Cohen et al.’s (2013) findings imply that the earlier children are adopted, the better it is for them, because even though the children are removed from the stressful situation, there may still be permanent changes to the prefrontal regulatory regions of their brains. These changes can cause children to be unable to “suppress attention toward potentially

threatening information in favor of goal-directed behavior...,” making it difficult for them to adapt to family life and succeed in life (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 18276).

It appears that Bulgarian officials have realized the impact that orphanage settings can have on children, as they have recently started making progress towards deinstitutionalizing Bulgarian children. A review written by the United Nations Children’s Fund (2014) details the country’s plan to place children in “other types of formal care, family-type placement centres, and especially foster care...” (p. 2). Officials plan to continue working to close 118 homes (which include infant homes, children’s homes, and disability institutions) and to prevent the initial separation of children from their families. According to this article, the plan is that “by 2020 no more than 2000 children [are] left in institutional care; reduction by 30% of children in formal care by 2025” (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2014, p. 17). This may be in part why there has been a recent decrease in adoptions from Bulgaria. The National Network for Children (2017) provides a 2016 update showing there were then 47 institutions in Bulgaria with 1495 children. Almost half of the children in institutions in 2016 were between 0-3 years old, which are critical years for development (National Network for Children, 2017). The United Nation’s deinstitutionalization program is designed to prevent family separation and work toward non-institutional settings for orphans. As Bulgaria moves away from the orphanage-type setting for raising children, more and more children adopted from there will be from foster care or similar environments. Although the transition away from institutions will be extremely beneficial for the children in the long run, at this current point in time, this change can create more trauma for the children as they may be

experiencing another transition from an orphanage to foster care. Children adopted now (especially older children) will likely have spent at least part of their lives in an orphanage, and if children are of Roma heritage, it is likely that they will have spent even more time in an orphanage setting than children who are of non Roma heritage.

### **Rationale**

These recent changes make it essential to research the effects of an orphanage setting and/or foster care on children in Bulgaria as they transition to family life. There is also some vagueness and question as to what the Bulgarian alternative to foster care is and whether these new living situations are similar to an orphanage or institutional setting in children's outcomes. It is important to continue research on Bulgarian populations of children because Bulgaria is the second most popular Eastern European country for American adoptions.

For the present study, American families who had adopted children from Bulgarian orphanages were recruited to complete a questionnaire that consisted of questions adapted from Groza et al. (2008) with Romanian adoptees, as well as questions developed from the author's own personal experience with adoption. The purpose of this study was to compare families' results qualitatively, by highlighting the similarities, differences, and circumstances of each child who was adopted. In addition, overall findings regarding Bulgarian adoptees were compared to those of Groza et al. (2008) on Romanian adoptees.

## **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were made: (1) There will be a negative relationship between the amount of time children spent in the orphanage and the age of children at adoption and their level of attachment to the parent. (2) Children's pre-adoption diagnosis of special needs, medical conditions, etc. (by the Bulgarian agency) will be different from their post-adoption diagnosis. (3) The results will be similar between those from the study on Romanian adoptions by Groza et al. (2008) and families' responses about their Bulgarian adoptions. (4) There will be a positive relationship between the level of support from a support group or friends/family and ratings of transition into family life. (5) There will be a relationship between a diagnosis of an attachment disorder and ratings of parent to child trust, communication, and closeness. (6) There will be similar results among families who have adopted Bulgarian children.

## CHAPTER II

### Method

#### Participants

The participants were 26 American families who had adopted children from a Bulgarian orphanage. All participants were part of an online social media group consisting solely of parents of children adopted from Bulgaria. Those who completed the questionnaire had the option of entering into a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card. All participants, except for one who declined to answer, were female. Seven participants were ages 25 to 34, nine participants were ages 35 to 44, eight participants were ages 45 to 54, one participant was 55 to 64, and one participant was age 65 or older. Four participants were single and never married, 21 participants were married or in a domestic partnership, and 1 participant was divorced. Twenty-five of the 26 participants were white. An additional 25 individuals were excluded from the sample for various reasons; nine responses were removed because participants did not progress past the preview page, and 15 responses were removed because their surveys were largely incomplete. Table 1 shows additional demographics of adoptive families.

#### Materials

The questionnaire was partly adapted from a similar study by Groza et al. (2008) on Romanian adoptions. There are 57 questions on the questionnaire, with 7 of those questions adapted from Groza et al. Most of the questions that are modified from Groza et al. are related to the relationship between the adoptive parent and the adopted child.

**Table 1***Adoptive Family Demographics*

Highest Level of Education (that you have received)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than high school diploma	0	0%	0%
High school degree (or equivalent)	1	3.8%	3.8%
Some college credit, no degree	1	3.8%	7.6%
Associate degree	2	7.7%	15.4%
Bachelor's degree	10	38.5%	53.9%
Master's degree	9	34.6%	88.5%
Doctorate	3	11.5%	100%
Other	0	0%	100%
<hr/>			
Household Income Level			
Less than \$20,000	0	0%	0%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	1	3.8%	3.8%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	1	3.8%	7.6%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	8	30.8%	38.4%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	4	15.4%	53.8%
\$100,000 and over	12	46.2%	100%

The Groza et al. scale that ranged from 1 (very poorly, poor, or no) to 4 (very well, excellent, yes) was modified to a 7-point Likert-type scale in the present study.

Questions fall into five categories: (a) demographic questions about the parent



completing the survey; (b) questions about the Bulgarian adoption; (c) questions about family and marriage dynamics; (d) questions about Bulgarian culture; and (e) questions about adoption support. All questions are either open-ended or Likert-type. The entire survey can be found in Appendix A. Questions adapted from Groza et al. are identified by an asterisk.

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through a post on the online private Facebook group called Bulgarian Post-Adoption Group for Parents. The post asked parents to complete the survey and included a link for the questionnaire. Once the participants clicked on the link, it took them to the informed consent. Participants were asked to read the informed consent, confirm that research procedures were clear, that they had read it, and that they were 18 or older, aware of potential risks, and agreed that they freely chose to participate and could withdraw at any time. In addition, parents were asked if they wanted to be entered into a drawing for a gift card. They were also asked to answer the questions based on their most recent adoption from a Bulgarian orphanage (if they had adopted multiple children). On average, the questionnaire took less than 30 minutes to complete.

## CHAPTER III

### Results

The 26 sets of responses were coded and analyzed using correlations, t-tests, and qualitative comparisons. Correlations were used to assess hypotheses 1, 2, 4, and 5. Qualitative comparisons were made for hypotheses 3 and 6.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis that there would be a negative relationship between the amount of time children spent in the orphanage or the age of children at adoption and parental ratings of their level of attachment to the parent was not supported. Parental ratings of attachment and child's age when adopted were not significantly correlated but were in the expected direction,  $r(26) = -.252, p = .061$ . Also, parental ratings of attachment and amount of time the child spent in the orphanage were not significantly correlated but were in the expected direction,  $r(26) = -.141, p > .05$ .

#### **Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis was that children's pre-adoption diagnosis of special needs, medical conditions, etc. (by the Bulgarian agency) would be different from their post-adoption diagnosis. Out of 26 total participant responses, 23 children were diagnosed with special needs, medical conditions, psychological conditions, developmental delays, etc., before being adopted, and 3 were not. After adoption, 21 children received a diagnosis, and 4 did not; one parent did not answer the question. Thus, contrary to the hypothesis, the majority of parents did receive their children's diagnoses prior to the adoption.

The participants were then asked an open-ended question of whether their child's file was accurate. Three participants rated the file as accurate, 14 rated the file as mostly or somewhat accurate, and 8 participants reported the file was not accurate. All told, the majority of parents reported receiving a diagnosis prior to adoption and that this diagnosis (the child's file) was at least mostly accurate; therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 3**

To test the prediction that there would be similar results between those from the study on Romanian adoptions by Groza et al. (2008) and families' responses about their Bulgarian adoptions, participants' responses to certain questions on this questionnaire were compared to those reported and asked in Groza et al. (2008). The majority of the questions used for this comparison were about relationships within the family, specifically sibling relationships and parent-child relationships. Ratings of sibling relationships, parent-child relationships, parent-child communication, parent-child closeness, parent-child trust, and contact with other adoptive families were compared with the data from Groza et al. (2008).

First, participants in the present study rated the relationship of their child who was adopted with his/her siblings. Responses were then compared to data from Groza et al. (2008). (See Table 2.) In Groza et al., participants reported that their adopted child got along *very well* or *fairly well* with their siblings 91.9% of the time, whereas in the present study, participants rated the relationship as *extremely*, *moderately*, or *slightly positive*

**Table 2***Parent Reported Quality of Sibling Relationship: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Please rate your child's relationship with siblings.	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Does this child get along with his/her siblings?	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely positive relationship	13.6%	13.6%	Very well	50.4%	50.4%
Moderately positive relationship	36.4%	50.0%			
Slightly positive relationship	13.6%	63.6%	Fairly well	41.5%	91.9%
Neither	13.6%	77.2%			
Slightly negative relationship	22.7%	100%	Not so well	6.5%	98.4%
Moderately negative relationship	0%	100%			
Extremely negative relationship	0%	100%	Very poorly	1.6%	100%

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

only 63.6% of the time. Overall, it seems that parents in the Groza et al. study reported that Romanian adoptees had a better relationship with their siblings than parents in the present study reported about Bulgarian adoptees' sibling relationships.

Next, families were asked about their relationship with their child. Participants in the present study rated their parent-child relationship as *extremely positive*, *moderately positive*, or *slightly positive* 87.5% of the time (i.e., more positive than negative). On a similar question in Groza et al., (2008), families with Romanian adoptees rated their relationship as *very well* or *fairly well* 96.8% of the time. (See Table 3.) Both groups were generally positive in their rated positiveness of the parent-child relationship although parents of Romanian adoptees reported having a very positive relationship (e.g., *very well*) more often (73.2%) than did parents of Bulgarian adoptees (20.8%).

To compare the quality of parent-child communication, parents of Bulgarian adoptees were asked to rate their communication with their child, and results were then compared to data from Groza et al. (2008). The results from the two studies were similar in that most parental ratings were on the positive side. (See Table 4.) It should be noted, however, that three of the four options in Groza et al. for rating communication were on the positive side. Parents of Bulgarian adoptees rated communication as *extremely positive* 16.0% of the time, whereas parents of Romanian adoptees rated communication as *excellent* 52.8% of the time. Thus, a higher percentage of parents of Romanian adoptees were very positive about their parent-child communication.

Participants in both studies were also asked about the level of closeness with their adopted child. (See Table 5.) Overall, families with children adopted from Romania rated

**Table 3***Parental Relationship with Adopted Child: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Rate your relationship with your child.	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Get Along	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely positive relationship	20.8%	20.8%	Very well	73.2%	73.2%
Moderately positive relationship	62.5%	83.3%			
Slightly positive relationship	4.2%	87.5%	Fairly well	23.6%	96.8%
Neither	4.2%	91.7%			
Slightly negative relationship	4.2%	95.9%	Not so well	3.3%	100%
Moderately negative relationship	0%	95.9%			
Extremely negative relationship	4.2%	100%	Very poorly	0%	100%

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

**Table 4***Parent Communication with Adopted Child: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Rate your communication with your child.	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Communication	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely positive communication	16.0%	16.0%	Excellent	52.8%	52.8%
Moderately positive communication	40.0%	56.0%	Good	32.5%	85.3%
Slightly positive communication	28.0%	84.0%	Fair	11.4%	96.7%
Neither	12.0%	96.0%			
Slightly negative communication	0%	96.0%	Poor	3.3%	100%
Moderately negative communication	4.0%	100%			
Extremely negative communication	0%	100%			

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

**Table 5***Ratings of Parent-Child Closeness: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Rate how close you and your child are.	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Close	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely close	30.8%	30.8%	Yes, very much so	69.9%	69.9%
Moderately close	38.4%	69.2%	Yes, for the most part	22.0%	91.9%
Slightly close	19.2%	88.4%			
Neither	7.7%	96.1%	Not sure	12.2%	104.1%*
Slightly distant	0%	96.1%			
Moderately distant	3.8%	100%	No	3.3%	107.4%*
Extremely distant	0%	100%			

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

\*Cumulative percent came to higher than 100% on the original study (Groza et al., 2008).

levels of closeness higher than families who adopted children from Bulgaria. Participants with Bulgarian children rated their relationship as *extremely close* 30.8% of the time, whereas participants with Romanian children rated their closeness as *yes, very much so* 69.9% of the time (Groza et al., 2008).

Parental reports of parent-child trust in both Bulgarian adoptions and Romanian adoptions were compared. (See Table 6.) Parents of Bulgarian children rated their level of trust as *extremely trusting* or *moderately trusting* 57.7% of the time, whereas parents



**Table 6***Parent and Adopted Child Trust: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Rate the level of trust between you and your child	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Trust	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely trusting	15.4%	15.4%	Yes, very much so	49.6%	49.6%
Moderately trusting	42.3%	57.7%	Yes, for the most part	33.3%	82.9%
Slightly trusting	15.4%	73.1%			
Neither	3.8%	76.9%	Not sure	8.1%	91.0%
Slightly distrusting	3.8%	80.7%			
Moderately distrusting	15.4%	96.1%	No	8.9%	100%
Extremely distrusting	3.8%	100%			

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

of Romanian children rated their trust as *yes, very much so* or *yes, for the most part* 82.9% of the time (Groza et al., 2008). Thus, the levels of parent-child trust were lower for parents of Bulgarian adoptees than for parents of Romania adoptees.

Finally, participants were asked if they had contact with other adoptive families. (See Table 7.) All of the families in the present study have contact with other adoptive families, whereas 95.1% of families in the Groza et al. study did. It should be noted, however, that this is not a representative sample of Bulgarian adoptive families because

**Table 7***Contact with Other Adoptive Families: A Comparison*

Bulgarian Adoptions Q. Do you have contact with other adoptive families?	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Romanian Adoptions Q. Contact with other adoptive parents?	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	100%	100%	Yes	95.1%	95.1%
No	0%	100%	No	4.9%	100%
Q. How helpful has this been?			Q. If yes, was it helpful?		
Extremely helpful	48.0%	48.0%	Very	56.1%	56.1%
Moderately helpful	32.0%	80.0%			
Slightly helpful	16.0%	96.0%	Somewhat	34.1%	90.2%
Neither	4.0%	100%			
Slightly unhelpful	0%	100%	Not really	9.8%	100%
Moderately unhelpful	0%	100%			
Extremely unhelpful	0%	100%			

*Note.* Data from Romanian study was taken from Groza et al. (2008).

the families in the present study were recruited for the survey on a Facebook group for adoptive families. The vast majority (96%) of participants with children from Bulgaria rated this contact as helpful (i.e., *slightly helpful*, *moderately helpful*, or *extremely helpful*). The majority of families with Romanian adoptees also rated this kind of contact helpful (i.e., *very helpful* or *somewhat helpful*) 90.2% of the time (Groza et al., 2008).

Overall, this hypothesis was partially supported. The ratings of sibling relationships and contact with adoptive families/helpfulness of that were very similar; however, responses on the other five questions were less similar between the two groups.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

The hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between reports of the level of support from a support group or friends/family and ratings of transition into family life was not supported. Difficulty of transition was not significantly related to perceived helpfulness of the support group,  $r(20) = .053, p > .05$ .

#### **Hypothesis 5**

The fifth hypothesis was that there would be a relationship between a diagnosis of an attachment disorder and ratings of parent-child trust, communication, and closeness; however, because only three participants reported that their child had an attachment disorder, parental ratings of behavior disruption on family life were used for these analyses instead of the presence of an attachment disorder. Sixteen of the 26 participants reported *yes* to their child having behavior problems and then rated the disruptiveness of those behaviors. Further support for using behavioral disruption in place of a diagnosed attachment disorder came from finding that parental ratings of the level of parent-child attachment was negatively correlated with ratings of behavior disruption in family life,  $r(16) = -.50, p = .024$ . That is, as the level of parent-child attachment increased, the child's level of behavior disruption in family life decreased. Behavioral disruption can negatively impact attachments and relationships because of the stress it causes on normal family functioning.

Ratings of behavior disruption were significantly negatively correlated with ratings of parent-child trust,  $r(16) = -.43, p = .049$ , parent-child closeness,  $r(16) = -.47, p = .034$ , and parent-child relationship,  $r(16) = -.45, p = .039$ . That is, as the child's level of behavior disruption increased, trust, closeness, and quality of the relationship with the parent decreased. Correlations of behavior disruption with ratings of parent-child communication,  $r(15) = -.35, p = .101$ , and ratings of sibling relationships,  $r(14) = -.40, p = .077$ , however, were not statistically significant although they were in the expected direction. Therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported.

### **Hypothesis 6**

The last hypothesis was that there would be similar responses among the families who participated; that is, that families that had adopted children from Bulgaria in the present study would report having many of the same experiences with the adoption process and with their adopted children. This hypothesis was assessed by comparing families' responses on 15 questions.

As expected, a number of similarities were identified. (See Table 8.) First, more than 80% of respondents indicated that they had adopted a child of Roma heritage, and 65.4% chose a waiting child. The majority of participants had adopted children who spent three or more years in an orphanage. Families were also similar in indicating that they had experienced some degree of difficulty (i.e., at least moderate difficulty) with the transition into family life post-adoption; the majority (about 42%) rated the transition as *moderately difficult*, and about 35% reported the transition as *extremely difficult*. In addition, the majority of families had at least two children.

**Table 8***Family Similarities*

Roma Heritage	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	21	80.8%	80.8%
No	5	19.2%	100%
Don't Know	0	0%	100%
<hr/>			
Traditional Referral or Waiting Child			
Traditional	8	30.8%	30.8
Waiting	17	65.4%	96.2%
Did Not Answer	1	3.8%	100%
<hr/>			
Time Spent in Orphanage			
Less than 6 months	0	0%	0%
6 - 11 months	0	0%	0%
1 -2 years	6	23.1%	23.1%
3 – 4 years	10	38.5%	61.6%
5+ years	10	38.5%	100%
<hr/>			
Difficulty of transition into family life post- adoption			
Extremely difficult	9	34.6%	34.6%
Moderately difficult	11	42.3%	76.9%
Slightly difficult	3	11.5%	88.4%
Neither	0	0%	88.4%
Slightly easy	1	3.8%	92.2%
Moderately easy	1	3.8%	96.0%
Extremely easy	1	3.8%	100%

Total Number of Children	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 child	4	15.4%	15.4%
2 children	10	38.5%	53.9%
3 children	5	19.2%	73.1%
4 children	1	3.8%	76.9%
5 + children	6	23.1%	100%

Families were also similar in their familiarity with and willingness to embrace Bulgarian culture. More than 75% of participants reported some familiarity with Bulgarian culture. When asked if they had kept any form of Bulgarian culture alive in their family/child, 65.4% of participants said yes. In addition, 73.1% of parents kept some form of their child's Bulgarian name. Just over half (53.8%) of participants reported celebrating Bulgarian holidays. (See Table 9.) Just over 61% of participants said their adoption agency informed them of resources to assist their family post adoption. Slightly more than half of the participants (52.0%) had not been to counseling for adoption-related concerns. The ratings of the actual adoption process (paperwork, expenses, travel, etc.) were highest for being *slightly difficult* (46.2%) and or *moderately difficult* (19.2%). The majority of participants (80.8%) reported that they did have a support group or friends/family who helped them in difficult times. In addition, 100% of participants said they have contact with other adoptive families, and 48% rated that as extremely helpful. (See Table 10.) In conclusion, hypothesis 6 was supported by the data.

**Table 9***Familiarity with Bulgaria*

How familiar are you with Bulgaria and the culture?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely familiar	2	7.7%	7.7%
Moderately familiar	11	42.3%	50.0%
Slightly familiar	9	34.6%	84.6%
Neither	1	3.8%	88.4%
Slightly unfamiliar	1	3.8%	92.2%
Moderately unfamiliar	1	3.8%	96.0%
Extremely unfamiliar	1	3.8%	100%
Kept any form of Bulgarian culture?			
Yes	17	65.4%	
No	9	34.6%	
Kept any form of Bulgarian name?			
Yes	19	73.1%	
No	7	26.9%	
Celebrate any Bulgarian holidays?			
Yes	14	53.8%	
No	12	46.2%	

**Table 10***Adoption Support Similarities*

Actual Adoption Process	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely difficult	4	15.4%	15.4%
Moderately difficult	5	19.2%	34.6%
Slightly difficult	12	46.2%	80.8%
Neither easy nor difficult	2	7.7%	88.5%
Slightly easy	2	7.7%	96.2%
Moderately easy	1	3.8%	100%
Extremely easy	0	0%	100%
<b>Informed of Resources</b>			
Yes	16	61.5%	61.5%
No	10	38.5%	100%
<b>Gone to Counseling</b>			
Yes	12	48.0%	48.0%
No	13	52.0%	100%
<b>Support Group</b>			
Yes	21	80.8%	80.8%
No	5	19.2%	100%
<b>Contact with Adoptive Families</b>			
Yes	25	100%	100%
No	0	100%	100%
How helpful?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely helpful	12	48.0%	48.0%
Moderately helpful	8	32.0%	80.0%
Slightly helpful	4	16.0%	96.0%
Neither	1	4.0%	100%
Slightly unhelpful	0	0%	100%
Moderately unhelpful	0	0%	100%



## **Summary of Results**

In summary, parental ratings of attachment were not significantly correlated with the amount of time the child spent in the orphanage, but in the expected direction. In general, the children's pre-adoption diagnosis was not different from their post-adoption diagnosis. Also, there were similar results between the present study and the study on Romanian adoptions (Groza et al., 2008). The most similar ratings were between sibling relationship and contact with adoptive families/helpfulness of the contact. There was not a significant relationship between levels of support from a support group or friends/family and ratings of transition into family life, but there was a significant correlation between ratings of behavior disruption and parent-child trust, communication, and closeness. Similarities among families in this study included that the majority of participants adopted a waiting child who was of Roma heritage, most had adopted a child who had spent three or more years in the orphanage, many reported they kept some form of their child's Bulgarian name and celebrated Bulgarian holidays, most reported having a support group, and all of them reported having contact with other adoptive families.

## CHAPTER IV

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to highlight and identify the similarities, differences, and circumstances of families' Bulgarian adoptions. The findings regarding Bulgarian adoptees were also compared to those from a study on Romanian adoptees by Groza et al. (2008) to determine whether the circumstances regarding international adoption and transition to family life were similar.

The first hypothesis that there would be a negative relationship between the amount of time children spent in the orphanage and the age of children at adoption and their level of attachment to the parent was not supported by the results, although the correlations were in the expected direction. One explanation for why this hypothesis was not supported is that there were too few participants for this correlation to be significant, but there also could be a lack of variability in the age of the child, time spent in the orphanage, and parents' ratings. Another reason could be that parents overestimated their child's attachment to them. According to Groark and McCall (2011), 65-85% of children who spent time in an orphanage have disorganized attachment style; however, in the present study, about 73% of participants rated their child as *extremely* or *moderately attached*, and only three children had a diagnosed attachment disorder. In the present study, some parents may have overestimated their child's attachment (or even viewed clinginess as a sign of a healthy attachment) or their children may not have had the opportunity to be diagnosed because clinicians who specialize in attachment disorder are rare (M. Boyer-Pennington, personal communication, October 16, 2020). Given the

behavioral disruption reported by most families in the present study, it is very likely that parents were not equating healthy attachment with *extremely attached* ratings. Finally, it also is possible that the self-selection bias may have been playing a factor, as parents with children with poor attachment styles may not have completed the survey. Parents who have more difficult children may not have the time or energy to complete a survey, and parents with higher functioning children and families may be more willing and able to complete a survey.

The second hypothesis that children's pre-adoption diagnosis of special needs, medical conditions, etc. (by the Bulgarian agency) would be different from their post-adoption diagnosis was not supported by the data, as only eight participants reported their child's file from Bulgaria was inaccurate regarding their child's diagnosis, and most parents had received their child's diagnosis prior to the adoption. Most participants had an accurate file and diagnosis; however, qualitative responses on the survey indicate that although the parents may have known the diagnoses, they did not expect the trauma that can come with a child who is adopted. As one parent commented "I just didn't realize how much trauma re-wired a child's brain. You can't love them into healing." Thus, the bigger issue here may be that parents are not aware of the trauma that their adoptive child has experienced, even if they know their child's diagnosis ahead of time. Cohen et al. (2013) explain that living in an orphanage may alter the amygdala which can lead to children having a hard time adapting to family life. In the present study, 16 of the 26 participants reported that their child had behavior problems.

All but four participants had two or more children. Some parents may struggle to parent their adoptive child differently than they did with their other children. As one participant stated, “Having bio children and adopted children are different – [a]nd that’s OK!” Children who are adopted may need to be parented differently than their siblings, and this may take awhile for parents to figure out. In the meantime, they may be struggling with behavior disruptions. One participant describing their child’s behavior says, “when upset, she can scream, throw things, break stuff, hurt others,” while another stated “our child self destructs when he’s angry.” These types of behaviors can bring chaos and stress into the home, which can lead to poor ratings of relationships.

The third hypothesis that there would be similar results between those from the study on Romanian adoptions by Groza et al. (2008) and families’ responses about their Bulgarian adoptions was only partially supported. Ratings of sibling relationships, contact with adoptive families, and the helpfulness of that contact were similar for both Bulgarian and Romanian adoptive families. Overall, however, the families in Groza et al. were more positive in their ratings. This could be partly explained because, in Groza et al., “almost 19% of adopted children never spent any time in an institutional setting” (p. 193); however, in the present study, all the children had been adopted out of an orphanage setting in Bulgaria where they had spent some amount of time (sometimes as much as 5+ years). Because they spent time in an orphanage, they may have been more likely to have relationship problems stemming from attachment. Cohen et al. (2013) explain that stressful situations (like spending time in an orphanage) can cause permanent changes to the prefrontal regulatory regions of the brain, and children may have a

difficult time adapting to family life. This is one explanation for why the participants with children from Bulgaria may have rated their relationships more poorly. One participant even described the child's orphanage as "very sterile, seemed to have a lot of toys but not sure how much time they actually spent with the children," whereas another participant stated that the orphanage was "cold, dirty, prison like in appearance. Very institutional and run down. Very dirty. No heat. Caregivers were not engaged and allowed kids to do whatever they wanted including not going to school." Although this may be a more extreme case, another participant described the orphanage as having "physical and emotional abuse, poison ivy rubbed on skin as punishment, older children beat younger children to keep them in line. Orphanage Director stole kids' possessions and gifts." Clearly, these orphanages are not healthy places to raise children and can cause permanent changes in brain structure which may lead to challenges in relationships throughout the child's life.

The fourth hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between the level of support received from a support group or friends/family and participants' ratings of the transition into family life was not supported. It may be that involvement in a support group and the adoptee's transition into family life happened at separate times. In addition, it depends on the type of support being given. Support through a Facebook group is likely not as effective and meaningful as a physical, in-person support group or supportive family members who can assist with care or provide respite. When asked what services and resources they wished they had, one participant stated, "local parent/or family adoption groups to talk about what we are going through." Additionally, a support

group or supportive family members may not be effective if family members do not feel free to share openly or to ask for help. It was noted earlier that only half of participants reported utilizing some form of counseling.

The fifth hypothesis that there would be a relationship between a child's diagnosis of an attachment disorder and participants' ratings of parent-child trust, communication, and closeness was supported, using ratings of behavior disruption in family life. As noted earlier, only three participants reported that their child had been diagnosed with an attachment disorder, so it was not possible to compare experiences using this variable. Higher disruptive ratings of their child's behavior problems were related to lower ratings of parent-child trust, closeness, and relationship. In addition, as parents' ratings of their child's attachment increased, their ratings of their child's disruptive behavior problems decreased. This is not surprising, as Groark and McCall (2011) explain that being raised in an orphanage can lead to children being developmentally delayed and struggling with social-emotional behavior. Orphanages are not healthy places for children to be raised and that is played out in adoptive family relationships later. Interestingly, correlations between parent-child communication, sibling relationships, and behavior disruption were not significant, although both were in the expected direction. The children in the present study seemed to struggle more with parental relationships than with sibling relationships.

Other research on attachment also has shown issues with attachment to parents. A study by Hiles Howard et al. (2017) had children draw family pictures to assess attachment. Often, the children would leave themselves and their mothers out of the family picture. In the present study, one of the participants reported "our daughter

constantly ‘mommy shops’ when we go out. Her attachment to us is superficial at best.” Such difficulties follow, because while in the orphanage, the children would have most consistently interacted with each other. Therefore, after adoption, they may get along better with their siblings than a parent.

The final hypothesis that there would be similar results among families who have adopted Bulgarian children was supported. One of the similarities among the families in the present study is that more than 80% of the participants adopted a child of Roma heritage. This makes sense because the Roma people are often discriminated against in Bulgaria, and an estimated 50% of orphans in Bulgaria are Roma (All God’s Children International, 2020; Tanner, 2005). Also, children of Roma heritage may spend a longer time in an orphanage because the Bulgarian people may be hesitant to adopt them.

In addition, most participants had adopted children who spent three or more years in an orphanage. Ten participants stated that their child had been in an orphanage for 3 to 4 years, and 10 participants had children who had spent 5+ years in an orphanage. The longer children spend in an orphanage, the more detrimental it is for them, as there can be permanent changes to the prefrontal regulatory regions of the brain (Cohen et al., 2013). In addition, Groark and McCall (2011) explain that in some orphanages, it is estimated that during the first 19+ months of being abandoned, children could have 60 to 100 different caregivers. As discussed previously, this can lead to attachment and behavior problems. Even though Bulgaria is attempting to remove children from non-institutional settings and place them in different care environments, clearly there are still children

(especially older ones) who have spent time in orphanages (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014).

Another similarity is that 100% of participants said that they have contact with other adoptive families. Because this questionnaire was posted on an adoption support Facebook page, it makes sense that all the families have contact with adoptive families.

Finally, just over 80% of participants reported having a support group or friends/family who help them during difficult times, and 61.5% reported that their adoption agency informed them of post-adoption resources. Although these are high statistics, they could still be improved upon. For instance, some easy steps would be for the adoption agency to provide families with a list of services that they may qualify for, to facilitate support groups, and to provide materials (books, movies, etc.) for further research and information, particularly regarding behavioral problems and attachment behaviors. One participant said she wished she had "professional agency social workers with actual adoption experience checking in regularly." This may be especially helpful to families after the honeymoon period of the initial adoption transition is over, and they may begin to experience some real struggles.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to this research and to the conclusions that can be made. One limitation of this study is the small sample size, due to the qualitative nature of participants' responses. Small sample sizes, however, can make quantitative analyses more difficult to conduct. In addition, there was self-selection bias for the participant sample. About half of the submitted responses were not complete and were therefore



removed from the data set. It is likely that families with less disruptive children were more likely to complete the survey, whereas those with more disruptive children were not able to complete it.

In the beginning of this study, it was not anticipated that a direct comparison would be made between Groza et al. (2008) and the gathered data. The scale that Groza et al. (2008) used was not a continuous scale, so there was not a perfect comparison between that and the present study. In the present study, the questionnaire could have included more quantitative rating scale questions, such as how long ago the child was adopted, the perceived preparedness of the parent to adopt, and the level of support that the adoption agency provided following the adoption.

A final limitation is that the participants were all from the same Facebook group. Although this does limit the variability in participants, there are many strict requirements on adoptive families, so there are a lot of similarities between the families.

### **Future Research**

Future research could include increasing the sample size. This could be done by recruiting more participants from different sources, such as another Facebook adoption group or adoption agencies. Also, research could look at families who completed the adoption process at different time points by asking families how long ago they adopted and how long their child spent in the orphanage. The data could be compared to see if differences appear when the children have been in their adoptive families for varying amounts of time. Participants could also be asked about the quality of the orphanages and that information could be compared to their ratings on parent-child relationships.

Future research also could compare participants' responses for adoptions from Bulgaria to those of other countries. Perhaps data could be collected to determine if children stay in orphanages longer in Bulgaria or if the orphanage conditions are poorer in this country. In addition, a longitudinal study could be done to follow the adoptive children and their families for a longer period of time to identify changes that might occur. Finally, another study could administer questionnaires to siblings of the adoptive children to assess their perspective of the process.

In conclusion, the results provided needed information about families who have adopted children from Bulgarian orphanages. The results suggest that there are (a) similarities in the experiences of the families who adopted children from Bulgaria and families who adopted from Romania, (b) similarities among families in the present study who adopted from Bulgaria, and (c) relationships between the child's behavior disruption and parent-child trust, communication, and closeness. Further implications include the fact that parents may not be aware of trauma that comes with an adopted child and that agencies may need to provide more resources and information to adoptive families, even post adoption. Adoption is a difficult and hard process. The stakes are high for the adoptive parents but even higher for a child left in an orphanage. As one participant stated, "it was all still worth it!"

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Questions of Responding Parent:

1. Age
  - 1) 18-24
  - 2) 25-34
  - 3) 35-44
  - 4) 45-54
  - 5) 55-64
  - 6) 65+
2. Gender
  - 1) Male
  - 2) Female
  - 3) Prefer not to say
3. Current Relationship Status
  - 1) Single (never married)
  - 2) Married or domestic partnership
  - 3) Widowed
  - 4) Divorced
  - 5) Separated
4. Highest Level of Education (that you have received)
  - 1) Less than high school diploma
  - 2) High school degree (or equivalent)
  - 3) Some college credit, no degree
  - 4) Associate degree
  - 5) Bachelor's degree
  - 6) Master's degree
  - 7) Doctorate
  - 8) Other
5. Household Income Level
  - 1) Less than \$20,000
  - 2) \$20,000 to \$34,999
  - 3) \$35,000 to \$49,999
  - 4) \$50,000 to \$74,999
  - 5) \$75,000 to \$99,999
  - 6) \$100,000 and over

6. Race/Ethnicity
  - 1) *White*
  - 2) *Hispanic or Latino*
  - 3) *Black or African American*
  - 4) *Native American or American Indian*
  - 5) *Asian/Pacific Islander*
  - 6) *Other*

**Bulgarian Adoption Questions:**

1. Why did you choose to adopt a child from Bulgaria? *[open ended]*
2. Did you receive a traditional referral or did you choose a waiting child?  
*[Traditional/Waiting Child]*
3. What orphanage and/or part of Bulgaria is your child from? *[open ended]*
4. Is your child of Roma heritage? *[Yes/No/Don't Know]*
5. What adoption agencies were the most up front with you? Which one did you end up using? Why? *[open ended]*
6. How many total children do you have? Please list ages, gender and whether they are biological or adopted (indicate which child is from Bulgaria) *[open ended]*
7. How old was your child when they were adopted? *[open ended]*
8. How long did they spend in the orphanage before adoption?
  - a. *Less than 6 months*
  - b. *6 to 11 months*
  - c. *1-2 years*
  - d. *3-4 years*
  - e. *5+ years*
9. Describe what you know about the orphanage. *[open ended]*
10. Was your child diagnosed with any special needs, medical conditions, psychological conditions, developmental delays, etc. before adoption? If so, please detail. *[open ended]*
11. Were any of these conditions treated pre-adoption? *[open ended]*
12. Has your child been diagnosed with any special needs, medical conditions, psychological conditions, developmental delays, etc. after coming home? If so, please detail. *[open ended]*
13. Were these diagnoses different or in addition to what you were told originally? Was your child's file accurate? *[open ended]*
14. What is your child's current educational environment?
  - 1) *Public School*
  - 2) *Private School*
  - 3) *Homeschool*
  - 4) *Other*

15. Have there been accommodations made for the child? Is there an IEP or 504 plan?  
*[open ended]*
16. Has your child received any form of therapy since the adoption? *[Yes/No]*
- a. If yes, which forms of therapy has your child received? (check all that apply)
- 1) *Occupational Therapy*
  - 2) *Physical Therapy*
  - 3) *Speech Therapy*
  - 4) *Feeding Therapy*
  - 5) *Other: [open ended]*
- b. How long has your child received each service?
- 1) *Occupational Therapy: [open ended]*
  - 2) *Physical Therapy: [open ended]*
  - 3) *Speech Therapy: [open ended]*
  - 4) *Feeding Therapy: [open ended]*
  - 5) *Other: [open ended]*
- c. Which ones have been helpful? *[open ended]*
17. Does your child have any behavior problems? *[Yes/No]*
- a. If yes, please explain. *[open ended]*
- b. How disruptive these problems are to your family life? *[rate 1-7]*
- 1) *Extremely nondisruptive*
  - 2) *Moderately nondisruptive*
  - 3) *Slightly nondisruptive*
  - 4) *Neither disruptive nor nondisruptive*
  - 5) *Slightly disruptive*
  - 6) *Moderately disruptive*
  - 7) *Extremely disruptive*
18. Has your child been diagnosed with an attachment disorder? *[Yes/No]*
- a. If yes, please explain. *[open ended]*

**Family/Marriage Dynamics:**

1. Rate your marriage before this adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
- 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*



2. Rate your marriage 3 months post-adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
3. Rate your marriage 1-year post-adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
4. Rate your marriage 3 years post-adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
5. Rate your family dynamics before this adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*

6. Rate your family dynamics 3 months post adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
7. Rate your family dynamics 1-year post adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
8. Rate your family dynamics 3 years post adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unhealthy*
  - 2) *Moderately unhealthy*
  - 3) *Slightly unhealthy*
  - 4) *Neither healthy nor unhealthy*
  - 5) *Slightly healthy*
  - 6) *Moderately healthy*
  - 7) *Extremely healthy*
  - 8) *NOT APPLICABLE*
9. Did any stress associated with the adoption strengthen or weaken your marriage?
  - 1) *Extremely weaken*
  - 2) *Moderately weaken*
  - 3) *Slightly weaken*
  - 4) *Neither strengthen nor weaken*
  - 5) *Slightly strengthen*
  - 6) *Moderately strengthen*
  - 7) *Extremely strengthen*

10. Did any stress associated with the adoption strengthen or weaken your family unit?
- 1) *Extremely weaken*
  - 2) *Moderately weaken*
  - 3) *Slightly weaken*
  - 4) *Neither strengthen nor weaken*
  - 5) *Slightly strengthen*
  - 6) *Moderately strengthen*
  - 7) *Extremely strengthen*
11. How have your family dynamics changed post-adoption? *[open ended]*
12. Rate how well your child from Bulgaria gets along with their siblings. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely negative relationship*
  - 2) *Moderately negative relationship*
  - 3) *Slightly negative relationship*
  - 4) *Neither positive relationship nor negative relationship*
  - 5) *Slightly positive relationship*
  - 6) *Moderately positive relationship*
  - 7) *Extremely positive relationship*
13. Rate your relationship with your child. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely negative relationship*
  - 2) *Moderately negative relationship*
  - 3) *Slightly negative relationship*
  - 4) *Neither positive relationship nor negative relationship*
  - 5) *Slightly positive relationship*
  - 6) *Moderately positive relationship*
  - 7) *Extremely positive relationship*
14. Rate your communication with your child. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely poor communication*
  - 2) *Moderately poor communication*
  - 3) *Slightly poor communication*
  - 4) *Neither good communication nor poor communication*
  - 5) *Slightly good communication*
  - 6) *Moderately good communication*
  - 7) *Extremely good communication*

15. Rate how close you and your child are. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely distant*
  - 2) *Moderately distant*
  - 3) *Slightly distant*
  - 4) *Neither close nor distant*
  - 5) *Slightly close*
  - 6) *Moderately close*
  - 7) *Extremely close*
16. Rate the level of trust between you and your child. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely distrusting*
  - 2) *Moderately distrusting*
  - 3) *Slightly distrusting*
  - 4) *Neither trusting nor distrusting*
  - 5) *Slightly trusting*
  - 6) *Moderately trusting*
  - 7) *Extremely trusting*
17. Rate the actual adoption process (paperwork, expenses, travel, etc.) from start to finish. *[rate 1-7]\**
- 1) *Extremely difficult*
  - 2) *Moderately difficult*
  - 3) *Slightly difficult*
  - 4) *Neither difficult nor easy*
  - 5) *Slightly easy*
  - 6) *Moderately easy*
  - 7) *Extremely easy*
18. Rate the difficulty of the transition into family life post-adoption. *[rate 1-7]*
- 1) *Extremely difficult*
  - 2) *Moderately difficult*
  - 3) *Slightly difficult*
  - 4) *About what I expected*
  - 5) *Slightly easy*
  - 6) *Moderately easy*
  - 7) *Extremely easy*
19. Rate your child's attachment to you as the parent. *[rate 1-7]*
- 1) *Extremely detached*
  - 2) *Moderately detached*
  - 3) *Slightly detached*
  - 4) *Neither attached nor detached*
  - 5) *Slightly attached*
  - 6) *Moderately attached*
  - 7) *Extremely attached*

### **Bulgarian Culture**

1. Rate how familiar are you with Bulgaria and the culture. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely unfamiliar*
  - 2) *Moderately unfamiliar*
  - 3) *Slightly unfamiliar*
  - 4) *Neither familiar nor unfamiliar*
  - 5) *Slightly familiar*
  - 6) *Moderately familiar*
  - 7) *Extremely familiar*
2. Have you kept any form of Bulgarian culture alive in your family/child? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, explain. *[open ended]*
3. Have you kept any form of their Bulgarian name? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, explain. *[open ended]*
4. Do you celebrate any Bulgarian holidays? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, explain. *[open ended]*
5. Rate how open you are with your child about their prior history. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely closed*
  - 2) *Moderately closed*
  - 3) *Slightly closed*
  - 4) *Neither open nor closed*
  - 5) *Slightly open*
  - 6) *Moderately open*
  - 7) *Extremely open*

### **Adoption Support:**

1. Were you informed of any resources to assist you and your family post-adoption from your adoption agency? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, which ones? *[open ended]*
2. What services and resources have been most helpful? *[open ended]*
3. What services and resources do you wish you had? *[open ended]*
4. Do you have a support group or friends/family that helps you in difficult times? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, rate how helpful this has been. *[rate 1-7]*
    - 1) *Extremely unhelpful*
    - 2) *Moderately unhelpful*
    - 3) *Slightly unhelpful*
    - 4) *Neither helpful nor unhelpful*
    - 5) *Slightly helpful*
    - 6) *Moderately helpful*
    - 7) *Extremely helpful*

5. Rate how open you can be with friends and family about adoption related struggles. *[rate 1-7]*
  - 1) *Extremely closed*
  - 2) *Moderately closed*
  - 3) *Slightly closed*
  - 4) *Neither open nor closed*
  - 5) *Slightly open*
  - 6) *Moderately open*
  - 7) *Extremely open*
6. Do you have contact with other adoptive families? *[Yes/No]\**
  - a. If yes, rate how helpful this has been. *[rate 1-7]*
    - 1) *Extremely unhelpful*
    - 2) *Moderately unhelpful*
    - 3) *Slightly unhelpful*
    - 4) *Neither helpful nor unhelpful*
    - 5) *Slightly helpful*
    - 6) *Moderately helpful*
    - 7) *Extremely helpful*
7. Have any members of your family been to counseling for adoption related concerns? *[Yes/No]*
  - a. If yes, for how long?
    - 1) *less than 6 months*
    - 2) *6 months-11 months*
    - 3) *1-2 years*
    - 4) *3-4 years*
    - 5) *5+ years*
  - b. If yes, rate how helpful counseling has been. *[rate 1-7]*
    - 1) *Extremely unhelpful*
    - 2) *Moderately unhelpful*
    - 3) *Slightly unhelpful*
    - 4) *Neither helpful nor unhelpful*
    - 5) *Slightly helpful*
    - 6) *Moderately helpful*
    - 7) *Extremely helpful*
8. What is one thing you wished you had known about adoption before that you know now? *[open ended]*
9. Please note any additional things you would like the researcher to know. *[open ended]*

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\* These questions are adapted from a study done by Groza et al. (2008).

**IRB**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
 Office of Research Compliance,  
 010A Sam Ingram Building,  
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd  
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



**IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE**

Thursday, April 23, 2020

Principal Investigator **Abigail McArthy (Student)**  
 Faculty Advisor **Michelle Boyer-Pennington**  
 Co-Investigators **NONE**  
 Investigator Email(s) **ajm2aa@mtmail.mtsu.edu; michelle.boyer-pennington@mtsu.edu**  
 Department **Psychology**

Protocol Title ***Experiences of American Families who have Adopted Children from Bulgarian Orphanages***  
 Protocol ID **20-1174**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (2) *Educational Tests*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	<b>EXEMPT from further IRB review***</b>	Date	<b>4/23/20</b>
Date of Expiration	<b>4/30/2024</b>		
Sample Size	<b>50 (FIFTY)</b>		
Participant Pool	<b>Healthy adults (18 or older) - Adult parents of Bulgarian Adoptees</b>		
Exceptions	Online consent followed by internet-based survey using Qualtrics is permitted (Qualtrics links on file)		
Mandatory Restrictions	1. Participants must be 18 years or older 2. Informed consent must be obtained from the participants 3. Identifying information must not be collected		
Restrictions	<b>1. All restrictions for exemption apply. 2. Mandatory active informed consent with age-verification. 3. NOT approved for in-person data collection.</b>		
Approved IRB Templates	IRB Templates: Online Informed Consent Non-IRB template: Recruitment script		
Funding	<b>NONE</b>		
Comments	Reer to the Post-Approval section for important COVID-19 instructions		

\*\*\*Although this exemption determination allows above defined protocol from further IRB review, such as continuing review, MTSU IRB will continue to give regulatory oversight to ensure compliance.