

The Red Thread Web: A Case Study of the Uses and Gratifications
Parents Adopting a Child From China Discovered in the Rumor Queen
Blog

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Flynn DanJi Cunningham.

You are the bravest, kindest, sweetest person I know. Every day I give thanks that I have the privilege to be your mother. You are my inspiration.

The Gift of Life

I didn't give you the gift of life,
But in my heart I know.
The love I feel is deep and real,
As if it had been so.

For us to have each other
Is like a dream come true!
No, I didn't give you
The gift of life,
Life gave me the gift of you.

Author: unknown

Abstract

Since 1992 thousands of U.S. families have adopted children from China. Parents wishing to adopt a Chinese child must work with the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA), which writes and enforces the regulations for domestic and international adoptions. In December 2006 the CCAA suddenly announced it would soon implement dramatic new restrictions on parents seeking to adopt a child from China. This prompted parents enrolled in China's international adoption program to actively seek sources of information about the CCAA's rule changes. Many people turned to the www.chinaadopttalk.com website—more commonly known as the Rumor Queen. This dissertation utilizes case study research strategy and employs several qualitative research methods to investigate the broad topics and themes explored in the Rumor Queen website and to specifically examine the “uses and gratifications” associated with this site.

To answer the main research questions posed in this dissertation I analyzed the 3,270 postings users created on the Rumor Queen blog in December 2006. Second, I interviewed informants who used the Rumor Queen blog during their personal adoption journeys. Third, I conducted interviews with adoption agency officials. Fourth, I conducted a search and analyzed the December 2006 mainstream media coverage of the CCAA rule changes.

The findings in this dissertation suggest the participants in the “Rumor Queen” site reflect the uses and gratifications theoretical framework in mass communication research. This theory assumes that people use media with purpose, selectively, and actively to satisfy their needs and wants.

This case study suggests implications for journalism and mass communication. 1) People will create other sources for communication and information. 2) Individuals actively seek information sources when their information needs are not being met with “traditional” media platforms. 3) The “Rumor Queen” blog helps to fill what many adoptive parents perceive as a communication void due to a lack of reporting in traditional mass media, and the reluctance of adoption officials to share information.

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Chapter One

Introduction

I hear her before I see her. She's wailing as she comes down the hallway. She is hot, tired, and traumatized. I have been waiting for this moment for almost four years. I'm seconds away from meeting my daughter for the first time and this is not the Hallmark moment I had been picturing. I'm in a very hot and humid room on the fourth floor of a hectic government building in Nanning, Guangxi, China. The building is under construction and as I enter I walk over planks and duck my head as I walk through exposed electrical wires. It's 3 o'clock in the afternoon but due to the construction the building is dark and there is no air conditioning to bring any relief from the heavy, moist July air. It is noisy. Crews are jack hammering concrete blocks and pounding nails into the walls. I see the plaster dust as it floats through the hot sunlight and taste the chalkiness on my tongue.

Adoptive families have written romanticized stories about the moment they first laid eyes on their child. They claim to hear music, see stars and have a sense of being at peace with the world. I have none of these sensations. I am hot, anxious, and concerned for my screaming little girl in the hallway.

My Chinese guide and interpreter, Hannah, assures me that my daughter is “fine” and I’ll meet her in a few minutes. She says the babies and nannies have traveled more than three hours by bus from the orphanage in Beihai. It is the first bus trip my daughter has ever taken. Hannah asks for my passport and wants me to sign some preliminary documents to prove I am the person approved to adopt the girl known as Guo DanJi. I am flustered because all I can focus on is painful cries of the girl I am about to meet.

Then she appears. She is a sweaty two-year old who is crying big tears and howling. She’s wearing a little red and white one-piece shorts jumper that is too small for her. It is meant for a baby half her age. The armbands are too tight and the buttons up the back won’t button because her neck is too big. She is wearing dirty white sandals that are very worn. The soles curl up at her toes. Her black hair is buzzed into a severe crew cut. Many orphanages cut the children’s hair as short as possible to prevent the spread of lice and to cut down on shampooing and general hair care. She is clutching the plastic photo album I sent to the orphanage a few months ago to introduce myself and other family members to my daughter. She’s adorable.

She toddles into the room and looks at me. A nanny lifts her up and hands her to me as my eyes well up with tears and my throat tightens. I

say, “Wo ai ni,”—I love you in Mandarin Chinese. She howls even louder and seems scared and confused. My heart breaks for her and I’m desperate to provide some comfort. I try to remain calm and rub her back as I slowly walk her around the hot room. For some reason she holds onto me for dear life. She does not try to reach back for her nannies. Every once in a while she cranes her neck back to take a look at me. I’m wearing a necklace a friend had made for me. It is a pendant of DanJi’s referral photo. This is the first photo I received of my daughter. She stares at this pendant and pulls on it. I tell her, “Wo shi ni mama,”--I am your mother. She looks at my face and then looks at the pendant. The full-out crying turns into a soft whimper.

The room is crowded and noisy with other families going through the same life-changing moment I am. Chinese government workers force some parents to wear blue surgical masks on their face. This is because government officials are concerned about the spread of the H-1-N-1 virus. Sporting a blue mask on your face is not the ideal look for a parent meeting their child for the first time. I’m grateful that for some reason I am spared from wearing a mask. My guide Hannah is across the room and is talking to the nannies. I can tell they’re discussing my daughter and how she is bonding with me. “They say she is an outside girl. You should walk her down the hallway,” Hannah yells.

I carefully put my traumatized daughter down on her feet. She grabs onto my finger and forcefully pulls me out of the room. She still cries softly but I feel good that she trusts me enough to stay by her side. I can tell she is trying to form an exit strategy of some sort. She walks down the hallway and pokes her head into various government offices. She is looking for someone or something. We walk up and down the hallway several times before she looks up at me with defeat in her eyes. Finally she pulls me back in the room where we met.

“Picture time!” Hannah exclaims. “The photographer is here to take the official photo of the new family. This is a very important photo. It will be affixed to all Chinese government documents. You cannot leave the country without the official red binder with your new family photo and government seals. Copies of this photo are put into your file and the Chinese government keeps it forever!”

Two government workers mildly manhandle my daughter and me onto a dirty couch. My daughter is becoming more agitated and I can't believe that in my current emotional and physical state I will have to pose for one of the most important photos I will ever take. My face is beet red from the heat and I know my hair is a sweaty mess. The workers force my daughter onto my lap and start yelling things to us in Chinese. “They want you to hold the baby closer to your face. They want you to look happier,”

Hannah commands. I try to obey. My daughter is not interested in cooperating with this photo shoot and begins her powerful howling. Big tears are flowing once again down her cheeks. In truth, I think I'm about a minute away from howling myself. The flash bulbs go off in a quick succession and we are both blinded for a bit. The Chinese workers are yelling. "Look happier! Look happier! They want a picture of a happy family," Hannah implores.

I try my best to work up a smile and to hold my wiggling, screaming daughter closer to my face. The pictures are snapped and then the photographer moves on to take the important photos of another new family. My daughter and I blink to try to get our pupils back to a normal size and once again look at each other. She is so beautiful.

I finally see my parents across the room. I'm grateful they made the trip to China to be with me. They're emotional and clutching digital cameras and stuffed animals. They are brand new grandparents. Our eyes meet and the three of us struggle to hold back the tears.

"Let's go!" Hannah bellows. She pushes us out of the hot room and into the dark hallway. We ride down in an elevator that is missing its roof and half a wall. We walk back through the maze of construction to get to the chartered mini van parked out back near some exposed wires, pipes

and a cement mixer. It's a ten-minute van ride through the crowded streets of Nanning to get back to our room at the Mingyuan Xindu Hotel.

My parents and I are smashed into the backseat of the van and my crying daughter is on my lap. It seems China does not encourage the use of child safety seats or seat belts. I cling to my daughter and hope the driver will not have to make any sudden stops or swerves. I give her sips from a water bottle to try to calm her. Between the crying and the sipping my daughter develops the hiccups. It's then that it all starts to seem real to me. I have her. After years of struggling I finally have my daughter and she is sitting on my lap hiccupping.

Waiting Families

That moment of becoming a mother in Guangxi, China began in 2005 and the journey to meet my daughter changed my personal and professional life. The seeds of this dissertation topic were planted as I gathered regularly with other adoptive parents in the "Waiting Families" support group at my adoption agency. The group met on the second Tuesday of every month and was comprised of parents waiting to be matched with children from many countries including; China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, South Korea,

Russia, and Thailand. For parents not involved in the China program the wait to meet their child typically took months. Parents, like me, in the China program, faced regulation changes, rumors, and years of delays before the dream of parenthood would be realized. When I attended my first “Waiting Families” meeting in 2005 I was told the time to be matched with a child in China was no longer than 9-to-10 months. Later the adoption agency official told the group of parents it would probably take 12-to-14 months before we would get a referral from the Chinese government. The agency official warned the process could take even longer because of the rumors that the Chinese government may change its adoption policies. The uncertainty and long wait sparked many parents in the China program to continually seek information about the process. The news from the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) program concerned many adoptive parents and this anxiousness prompted many people to look to other sources for information.

This dissertation focuses on one of the key information sources for parents seeking to adopt a child from China. The official website name is www.chinaadopttalk.com but those who use the site refer to it by the nom de plume the site moderator has chosen for herself-- “The Rumor Queen.”

To some she is a cultish figure with a forceful personality; to others she’s a source of information during a stressful, unpredictable journey.

The “Rumor Queen” fiercely maintains her anonymity in order to protect her sources. No one knows exactly who she is or where she lives in the United States. She refers to her husband as “Rumor King” and shares stories of her two daughters adopted from China while referring to them as “Glitter Girl” and “Twinkle Toes.” Her website grew as the waiting time to be matched with, and internationally adopt, a child from China slowed down after 2005.

In the “About Us” section on the main page of “The Rumor Queen” blog she writes she started the site on December 31, 2005 “to keep track of rumors and statistics” during the long wait to bring her second daughter (Twinkle Toes) home to America. “Things started slowing down after we were logged in, and in a situation where I had no control I did the one thing I could do—try to figure out when we might finally get to bring our mei mei (little sister) home,” the “Rumor Queen” writes on her blog. The heading on the site’s homepage states it is “A gathering place for families just getting started, waiting for a referral, and home with their children. “

This dissertation will investigate what people posted on the “Rumor Queen” site in December 2006 and how the audience used this online space. The “Rumor Queen” website/blog is an interesting case study to explore the “uses and gratifications” associated with this form of computer-mediated communication. The broad topics and themes of the site will be

examined using content analysis. From tips for traveling with a toddler to venting about the CCAA the “Rumor Queen” blog provides information and a communication outlet for hundreds of adoptive families. The postings on the site will be analyzed to investigate what type of information is provided for people adopting children from China.

One of the main themes to be examined in this dissertation is how blogs are used during a time of crisis. A basic definition of the word “crisis” is found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, which states, a crisis is “a time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger.” There is a relatively new and growing body of scholarly work exploring how people create and use blogs in a time of turmoil and crisis. From the terrorist attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 (Shah and Pan, 2004), to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Macias, Hilyard and Freimuth, 2009), research has shown blogs allow the audience to be active participants in the coverage and development of a story. By utilizing blogs the audience no longer has to solely rely on what “gatekeepers” in mainstream news media organizations will allow to be reported. Blogs provide a way for the audience to take on a more active information-seeking role.

Of course there are problems with using blogs as a primary source of information. For example, the people writing the posts and providing the news are not trained journalists. People are reading information on

the blogs that has not been vetted by editors trained in a journalism school. Therefore, those writing the postings may not be aware of some of the main tenets of good journalism practices such as fairness, accuracy, attribution, employing a code of ethics, etc. Some people using the site may just be readers (aka lurkers) and do not participate in posting material or communicating with the group. It is difficult to gauge the number of “lurkers” and how they use the information provided on the website.

The type of computer-mediated communication on the “Rumor Queen” site suggests implications for journalism and mass communication: 1) People will create other sources for communication and information. 2) Individuals actively seek information sources when their information needs are not being met by “traditional” media platforms.

This dissertation will explore the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main topics and themes of the “Rumor Queen” blog postings in December 2006 when the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced the rule changes to its international adoption program?
- 2) What type of information is provided to people reading the December 2006 postings on the “Rumor Queen”

(www.chinaadopttalk.com) and how is this different from the coverage found in mainstream media organizations during this time period?

- 3) The CCAA rule changes prompted a “crisis” for adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and others in December 2006. Why did people turn to the “Rumor Queen” during this crisis and what are the uses and gratifications associated with the site?

This dissertation will employ several techniques to answer the three main research questions. First, an analysis of the December 2006 Rumor Queen postings will be conducted with the assistance of the qualitative computer software program “Dedoose.” The postings (data) will be examined for emergent themes and postings will be excerpted to highlight the communication found on the site.

A brief content analysis will be conducted looking at how mainstream media organizations covered the rule changes announced by China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) in December 2006. These mainstream media organizations include *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA TODAY*, the *Washington Post*, BBC News, National Public Radio (NPR), ABC News, NBC News, and CBS News. This survey will allow for a comparison to be made between the information found on the

“Rumor Queen” and the information available from mainstream print media sources. I am defining “mainstream media” as media disseminated via large distribution channels and therefore available to the majority of media consumers.

I hypothesize that I will find a lack of mainstream media coverage concerning the CCAA’s announced rule changes and therefore, the “Rumor Queen” became a key source of information for adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and others concerned with how the rule changes would have an effect on China’s participation in international adoption. As mentioned previously, one of the hallmarks of the “uses and gratifications” theory centers on the idea that individuals actively seek information sources when their information needs are not being met with “traditional” media platforms. I believe the creation and use of the “Rumor Queen” website/blog will contribute to the scholarly body of evidence regarding the application of “uses and gratification” theory to computer-mediated communication.

An analysis of the Rumor Queen postings, interviews with several users of the site, and a conversation with adoption officials will be used to answer the third research question which focuses on why people turned to the “Rumor Queen” during the December 2006 CCAA rule change announcement. By using these primary sources of information I hope to

capture these personal stories to discover how and why people used the “Rumor Queen” during the CCAA rule change “crisis.” This research will contribute to the previously mentioned body of scholarship investigating how computer-mediated communication (blogs) is used during times of crisis and turmoil.

In Chapter 2 this dissertation includes a comprehensive look at China’s history of participating in international adoption, the government’s “one child” policy, and its efforts to curb population growth. I feel it is important to “set the scene” and provide a brief overview of China’s participation in international adoption.

China became part of the international adoption community in 1992 after the government passed a law ratifying international adoptions. Parents wishing to adopt a Chinese child must work with the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA). China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs formed the CCAA in June 1996 and it is responsible for the welfare of children living in the country’s Social Welfare Institutions (SWIs). The CCAA writes and enforces the regulations for domestic and international adoptions. It also reviews applications from parents seeking to adopt children from China, matches available children with parents, and archives all documentation for each party involved in a child’s adoption. Like the government it serves, the CCAA is powerful and often secretive. This can be a

frustrating combination of characteristics for people seeking to adopt a Chinese child.

Adoption from China reached its peak in 2005, when U.S. parents alone brought home 7,903 children. Some experts estimate that in 2007 at least 30,000 dossiers (applications to adopt children) were stored at the CCAA as families from many countries waited to be matched with children.

As mentioned previously, in December 2006 the CCAA suddenly announced it would soon implement new guidelines and restrictions on parents seeking to adopt a child from China. The new CCAA regulations were implemented on May 1, 2007 and dramatically changed the standards for who is eligible to adopt a Chinese child. These changes included no longer allowing single parents not previously logged into the CCAA to adopt a child. Married couples must essentially be in perfect health with no disabilities such as hearing loss or vision loss in one or both eyes. Prospective parents must not have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or more and cannot have a history of taking medication for depression or anxiety disorders. The required family income level was increased and the family's financial assets must be at least \$80,000 USD.

These sudden new CCAA restrictions sparked a panic for adoption agencies, social workers, and parents. It should be noted that these new

rules came as China prepared to host the Olympic games in August 2008. Some speculated Chinese government officials were trying to make adoptions more difficult so China would no longer be the number one “sending country” for internationally adopted children. Chinese government officials may have been trying to prevent the type of negative media coverage South Korea received when it hosted the Olympic games in 1988. Journalists, like NBC *Today Show* host Bryant Gumbel, reported on Korea’s so-called baby “exportation” industry and claimed Korea’s main export was “its babies” (Volkman, 2005). An April 21, 1988 *New York Times* article titled “Seoul Journal; Babies for Export: And Now the Painful Questions,” written by Susan Chira quoted critics who charged “It is time South Korea took care of its own,” and that “sending Korean children abroad robs them of their culture and spares the Government the expense of caring for them.” The article cites 1986 U.S. State Department statistics showing 6,150 South Korean children were adopted by American families and states this number represents 59 percent of all foreign children adopted in the United States in that year. This type of media coverage put pressure on South Korean government officials to take steps to change what was perceived as “the national shame of international adoption.”

According to the U.S. State Department, in 2008 Guatemala temporarily replaced China as the number one “sending country” for

international adoptions in the United States. Beginning in 2005, the Chinese government implemented several tools to curb the number of children internationally adopted from the country. First, due to better economic conditions for Chinese citizens, the government pushed domestic adoption and loosened the restrictions on its one-child policy for some families. Second, the CCAA extended the time to match dossiers (adoptive parents) with children eligible for international adoption. Third, in January 2009 China began enforcing the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. This international treaty establishes safeguards to ensure intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the children. It is also a tool to try to prevent the abduction, sale, and trafficking of children.

The standards outlined in the Hague Convention made it more difficult to get children living in China's Social Welfare Institutions (SWI) prepared for international adoption. The Hague Conventions requires prospective adoptive children to undergo a standard set of vaccinations and health screenings. These medical procedures may not be readily available in some rural Chinese SWIs. The Hague Conventions also asks orphanages to supply documentation to ensure the children are true orphans. Again, this documentation may be difficult for rural orphanages to obtain. (The United States began enforcing the Hague Conventions on

Intercountry Adoptions on April 1, 2008.) Fourth, the CCAA released smaller “batches”—meaning a smaller number of children matched with families. Fifth, as previously outlined, the Chinese government made it more difficult for parents to qualify to adopt Chinese children.

As the number of international adoptions in China decreased in 2006 the activity level and postings on the previously mentioned “Rumor Queen” website increased substantially. The month the rules were announced, December 2006, the “Rumor Queen” website had 3,270 postings. The “Rumor Queen” began her website the last day of December 2005. Therefore it is not possible to compare the December 2006 posting statistics with the numbers for December 2005. The December 2006 postings show adoptive parents all over the world turned to the “Rumor Queen” during the time of turmoil and change in the Chinese program. In December 2007 there were 751 postings on the “Rumor Queen” site. In December 2008 there were 735 postings. December of 2009 saw 706 postings and December 2010 had 403 postings. These numbers suggest the “Rumor Queen” is an active site with a large number of postings being produced by participants. The evidence shows the number of postings increases during times of rumors and uncertainty in the Chinese adoption process—a time of crisis and turmoil. A later chapter in this dissertation provides a more in-depth

analysis of how people engage in information-seeking behaviors to alleviate stress and uncertainty (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). This chapter also highlights research that finds the use of the Internet, like other forms of media, increases in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis.

Before I became an adoptive parent in July 2009, I spent my entire adult career as a working journalist. I was a newscaster, reporter, and program host for Minnesota Public Radio. I was also a graduate student at the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. When I first heard about the "Rumor Queen" in 2005 I was dubious about the site. I was wary of the dangers of people not trained as journalists reporting news and information. I regularly checked the "Rumor Queen" with skepticism and questioned the value of the site. When the CCAA announced its rule changes in 2006 I, like hundreds of other adoptive parents, hungered for information and found the "Rumor Queen" was a key source of news and provided a community of people who were as anxious as I was about being matched with and meeting my future child.

I believe my background as a journalist, my training as a scholar, and my experience as the mother of a child born in China provides me with a unique perspective to explore the research questions and issues presented in this dissertation.

Chapter Two

History of International Adoption in the United States

This dissertation is chiefly focused on communication issues concerning the adoption policies implemented in the current era (2006 to 2013) but I feel it is important to have a historical perspective surrounding adoption policies to gain a better understanding of what contributed to the shaping of the current rules and regulations pertaining to international adoptions. An objective of this dissertation chapter is to provide a clear outline of the concepts, data, and research relevant to the main topics this dissertation seeks to examine. Through a review of key literature this chapter outlines early adoption rules and regulations in the United States, an examination of adoption trends in the United States—including an increase of adoptions in the U.S. after a military action, and how the current AIDS epidemic has brought new challenges for adoption programs. This chapter also delves into China’s adoption history and its entrée into international adoption in the 1990s, China’s one-child policy, and the cultural preference for male children.

Early Adoption Rules and Regulations in the United States

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of families created by adoption in the United States. European settlers came to the New World with customs and traditions that allowed for “kinship” arrangements to transfer children between adult households. The motives for these adoptions ranged from love, labor, and inheritance (Herman, 2008). In the mid-nineteenth century states passed an assortment of adoption laws with little oversight from the federal government. Historians consider Massachusetts’s 1851 Adoption of Children Act an important turning point in U.S. adoption laws because it marked the first time judges needed to consider the welfare of the child in addition to the interests of the adopting adult when legally placing a child into a family.

This Massachusetts statute “placed the United States considerably ahead of other industrial nations,” according to Ellen Herman, author of *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States*. Herman writes, “France did not pass adoption legislation until 1923. England and Wales followed in 1926, Scotland in 1920, and Ireland not until 1952” (Herman, 2008 p. 21).

By the mid-nineteenth century, “Large-scale immigration, urbanization, and the advent of the factory system and wage labor had led

colonial America's compact, stable, agricultural communities to give way to crowded, sprawling, coastal cities," according to E. Wayne Carp, author of *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*. Carp theorizes that these cultural and economic changes in the United States pushed poverty to be an even bigger problem and increased the demand for services to care for orphaned or neglected children. Carp writes the situation meant humanitarian and religious child welfare reformers turned to large-scale institutions to "reform, rehabilitate, and educate paupers" (Carp, 2004 p. 10). Eventually these large orphanages were criticized for being too expensive, rigid, and harsh.

In the 1850's child welfare reformers began to push for children to leave institutional care and become part of a family. One of the most influential groups pushing for "home placement" was New York's Children's Aid Society (CAS) founded in 1853 by Reverend Charles Loring Brace. From 1853 to 1893 the CAS placed an estimated 250-thousand children mostly between the ages of 6 and 18 on "orphan trains." Because record keeping at the time was poor, it is difficult to get an exact number of how many children were actually placed on the "orphan trains." I found sources reporting a range from 85-thousand to 250-thousand children were part of the "orphan train" program. A majority of the sources used the number of 250-thousand children placed on the "orphan trains."

These trains stopped in 45 states through the U.S. as well as Canada and Mexico.

The federal government established the U.S. Children's Bureau (USCB) in 1912 and charged the agency with regulating adoptions. Initially the USCB promoted legislative reforms, shared research, and organized the first national conference on child welfare standards in 1919. Two years prior to this conference, in 1917, Minnesota passed the first state law mandating an investigation into whether a child was truly available for adoption and an inquiry into the suitability of the prospective adoptive parents. Minnesota was also the first state to seal adoption records. (U.S. Children's Bureau, *Adoption Laws in the United States: A Summary of the Development of Adoption Legislation and Significant Features of Adoption Statutes, With the Text of Selected Laws*, 1925). The Minnesota statute also allowed for children to have "a six-month probationary residence period in adopting parents' homes" (Carp, 2004 p.8). Child welfare reformers hailed Minnesota's Children's Code as a model law.

In the 1930s the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) grew out of the social work profession, which called for standardizing adoption rules, standards, and protocols (Herman, 2008). According to the CWLA website the organization is "the nation's oldest and largest membership-based child welfare organization...Our primary objective is...Making

Children a National Priority.”

(<http://www.cwla.org/programs/standards/history.htm>)

In 1938 the CWLA issued its first set of minimum standards focused on temporary and permanent placement of children in families. These standards required that the placement of children be approved or arranged by social work professionals. The standards supported the investigation of the adoptive parent, and required the supervision of the newly created family after placement and before the adoption was finalized. According to the CWLA, these standards were aimed at eliminating so-called “baby farmers” or other amateurs who worked to arrange the placement of children.

Post war prosperity in the U.S. and cultural pressures for couples to “produce a child” led to an increase in the number of adoption applications between 1937 and 1945. According to E. Wayne Carp, during this era adoptions had increased threefold, from about 16,000 to 50,000 annually (Carp, 2004 p.13). According to Carp, “a decade later, the number of adoptions had nearly doubled again, to 93,000, and by 1965 it climbed to 142,000, of which one-third to half were adoptions by relatives” (Carp, 2004 p.13).

Post War Adoptions

During and after World War II members of the U.S. military serving overseas were first-hand witnesses to the plight of orphaned children. Lutheran, Catholic, Jewish, and other religious organizations began forming leagues and agencies to facilitate international adoptions around 1945. Statistics from the University of Oregon's Adoption History Project report that between 1953 and 1962 Americans adopted 15,000 foreign children. (<http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/adoptionstatistics.htm>)

An overview examination of U.S State Department adoption statistics shows the number of international adoptions in the United States spikes upwards during and after the end of military conflicts overseas. For example, American families adopted a large number of Korean orphans during and after the Korean War in the 1950s and 1960s. The Korean War sparked evangelicals Henry and Bertha Holt to lobby for a special act of the U.S. Congress in 1955 to enable them to adopt Korean "war orphans." Many of these South Korean children were born to Korean women and American soldiers and were stigmatized or abandoned because of their visible ethnic differences. Judgment was often made against the biological mothers because these children were seen as "illegitimate" or born out of wedlock. The Holts helped to form one of the first international

adoption programs in the United States. Holt International Children's Services is based in Eugene, Oregon and still exists today.

As U.S. troops withdrew from Vietnam in 1975 the controversial so-called "Operation Babylift" captured the public's attention and helped Vietnamese orphans find homes with U.S. families during that military conflict. The operation was controversial because some believed it was U.S. military action that created these orphans and also because it was not clear that all of the children were indeed orphaned. The very first flight to leave Saigon on April 4, 1975 crashed several minutes after takeoff, killing 138 people. Most of those killed were Vietnamese children. It is estimated that overall "Operation Babylift" brought more than 3,300 children out of Vietnam. Critics questioned the political motivations for the program and the assumption that these Vietnamese-born children would be better off in America. The criticism notwithstanding, some have called "Operation Babylift" one of the largest humanitarian efforts of all time.

Post Cold War Adoptions

As the Soviet empire began to collapse and eventually fall in the early 1990s newly formed Eastern European countries began taking part

in international adoption programs. The fall of the Ceausecu regime in 1989 resulted in intense worldwide media coverage of the poor and abusive conditions found in many Romanian orphanages. According to U.S. State Department statistics, American adoptions of Romanian children peaked in 1991 with close to 2,600 children being placed with U.S. families. The number took a steep drop in 1992 with just 121 Romanian children adopted by American families. This sudden drop was the result of the Romanian government's temporary suspension of adoptions. In 2001 the Romanian government placed a moratorium on international adoptions and officially banned it four years later. Romanian officials cited widespread corruption in adoption practices as the reason for the ban. (<http://world.time.com/2013/03/15/painful-lessons-from-romanias-decade-old-adoption-ban/>) The Romanian program is still basically closed and U.S. State Department statistics show in 2008 U.S. citizens adopted two children from Romania.

U.S. adoptions from Russia reached a high of 5,862 in 2004 and fell to 962 in 2011. Russia tightened restrictions for prospective parents in 2005 after reports of several U.S. parents harming Russian children. In 2010 the Russian government threatened to suspend all adoptions by U.S. families after a 7-year-old boy adopted by a woman from Tennessee was sent alone on a one-way flight back to Moscow. The boy's adoptive

grandmother put him on the plane. Reports say she included a note with the boy stating he was violent and Russian orphanage officials misled the family about the boy's severe psychological problems. The case prompted the Russian government to threaten to freeze future adoptions by American parents. The situation eventually cooled off and in July 2012 Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a bilateral adoption agreement with the U.S. aimed at providing additional safeguards for children.

AIDS Crisis and Orphans

The United Nations estimates that at least 12.3 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Although only 10 percent of the world's population live in sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 80 percent of the world's AIDS orphans come from this area. (UNICEF, 2003) The authors of "The African Orphan Crisis and International Adoption," Jini L. Roby and Stacey A. Shaw state, "In traditional African culture there are 'no orphans' as parentless children were cared for with kin systems," the death of so many adults due to AIDS lead officials in the region to seek additional resources to care for the orphaned children. The United Nations, multinational organizations, and Non-governmental Organizations are involved in raising awareness and providing support for these children.

A 2001 UNICEF study by Roselyn Mutemi Wangahu found that AIDS orphans taken in by relatives “tend to be treated as second-class members of the family, discriminated against in everything from schooling to food.” The study also found many AIDS orphans are abused and forced to work. (Wangahu, 2001)

The growth in U.S families adopting children from sub-Saharan Africa can be seen in U.S. State Department statistics. The State Department breaks down the numbers by each individual country and does not have statistics by continent or region. In 2008 Ethiopia ranked fourth in the statistics outlining the “adopting countries” with 1,723 Ethiopian children adopted by U.S. parents. Ethiopia bumped up to the number two country in 2009 with 2,275 children adopted by U.S. parents and, as of 2012, it held on to the second slot.

Latin and Central America Adoptions in the U.S.

In the 1980s many Latin and Central American countries began to participate in international adoption programs. According to U.S. State Department statistics, from 1999 thru 2012 Americans have adopted 29,738 children from Guatemala. As mentioned previously, in 2008 tiny Guatemala replaced China as the number one “sending” country for

children adopted in the United States. Some adoption officials believe China did not want to be the number one “sending country” in 2008 because it did not want possible bad publicity as it hosted the Olympic games. In 2009 Guatemala fell to the number five ‘sending country” and China regained its spot as the number one “sending country” (U.S. State Department statistics, 2013). After allegations of corruption and birthmother coercion were reported Guatemala enacted a temporary ban on its adoption program around 2009. At that time adoptions in Guatemala had been processed through private children’s homes and a network of lawyers and the country did not have a central government authority overseeing international adoptions. Today Guatemala is a “Hague-compliant” country and has worked to improve safeguards in its international adoption program.

A devastating earthquake in Haiti in January 2010 killed more than 200,000 people and brought destruction to the country. UNICEF estimated more than 20,000 children lost their parents in the earthquake and its aftermath. Even before the earthquake the United Nation’s Children’s Fund estimated Haiti had more than 380,000 children living in orphanages. The powerful images of suffering children and the devastation in Haiti depicted in the media prompted an outpouring of support and a desire by many Americans to investigate adopting Haitian

orphans. Many adoption officials urged caution and the formation of an organized process to deal with children who were traumatized by the loss of their parents and by the experience of surviving an earthquake.

Haitian law does not allow for a Haitian child to travel to the United States to be adopted. Therefore, according to the U.S. State Department, prospective parents must “Obtain a full and final adoption under Haitian law before the child can immigrate to the United States.” Haiti is not a party to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.

(http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_info.php?country-select=haiti)

The Hague Convention Treaty

In 1993 66 countries approved a multilateral treaty called the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. The Hague Convention is the first agreement designed to govern the adoption process and protect children being adopted across national boundaries. The two main tenants of the Hague Convention state “Every child had the right to a permanent family, even when the family is in another country.” It also states, “Adoption of children between countries should take place via agreed-upon procedures that are ethical and orderly.”

(http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/overview.php) The agreement also includes some basic rules designed to ensure that birth parents and their children are protected against attempts to separate them. This includes a ban on using financial payments to induce the surrender of parental rights, or coercion as in kidnapping. It also required each country to create a Central Authority to implement the Convention.

The United States signed the Hague Convention in 1994 and the provisions of the agreement finally took effect in April 2008. After a great deal of negotiation, the U.S. agreed that the State Department is in charge of supervising adoption agencies and service providers.

Adoption professionals hope the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption will help to curb the commercial industry that flourished in many countries as the demand increased for international adoptions. The Hague establishes new accreditation requirements for adoption agencies and implements practices to protect children from child trafficking.

Chinese Adoptions in the U.S.

“An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but it will never break.”

(An ancient Chinese belief)

In 1992 China implemented a law enabling foreigners to adopt Chinese children. That year the U.S. State Department issued 226 immigrant visas to children adopted from Chinese orphanages. Three years later, in 1995, the number increased dramatically with the U.S State Department issuing 2,130 immigrant visas to Chinese children adopted by Americans. (U.S. State Department statistics)

In 2007 the United States State Department issued Immigrant Visas for a total of 18,748 orphaned children who were adopted that year by American parents. Orphans from Mainland China accounted for 5,453 U.S. Immigrant Visas in 2007. (U.S. Department of State) That means children from China comprised about 30% of the total international adoptions for the U.S. in 2007. According to the statistics, nearly 95% of children adopted from China are girls. Those adopted by parents in other countries brought the total to more than 100,000 Chinese children who'd left China.

As previously mentioned, China's robust international adoption program has slowed down a great deal in recent years. The most recent China statistics are grim for adoptive families. According to the United States Department of State in 2004 China placed 7,044 children with American families. That number slipped down to below half that in 2008

when China placed 3,909 children with U. S. families. The U. S. State Department graphs show that from 2004 until 2007 China was the number one source country for children adopted by U. S families. According to the New York Times, from 1991 through 2006, Americans adopted 55,000 Chinese children.

China's One-Child Policy History

When the People's Republic of China was formed in 1949 the government did little to try to control the birth rate in the country. In a 1957 speech Chairman Mao Zedong said he wished the population of China would stay at 600 million for many years. The famine of 1959 to 1961 prompted government officials to encourage Chinese citizens to use contraceptives to lower the birth rate. After the Cultural Revolution the first national Family Planning Office was established to help monitor China's population growth. In 1978 the Chinese government set a goal of zero population growth rate by 2000. This would set the target population of 1.2 billion by the year 2000. According to the China Population Information Research Center, the census of 2000 put the population at 1.27 billion.

To achieve this control on the country's birth rate "China instituted and sustained the world's first nationwide compulsory family planning

program that has lasted more than a few years” (Banister, 1987). China’s government is also the first in the world to attempt to popularize the idea of the one child policy (Banister, 1987).

When Communist party leader Deng Xiaoping instituted the one-child policy in 1979 it was introduced as a short-term measure to help control the population of China. In 1979 China was home to a quarter of the world’s population but had just 7 percent of the world’s arable land (New England Journal of Medicine, 2005). Under this policy all Chinese who live in cities, relatively wealthy suburban areas, or densely populated rural areas are limited by law to produce one child per family (Johnson, 2004). Some exceptions are made for ethnic minorities, some rural areas, or for other particular circumstances.

According to Amy Klatzkin’s introduction to Kay Ann Johnson’s book “Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China,” in the late 1980s “provinces were permitted to modify the population policy...Acknowledging parents’ desire for a son to take care of them in their old age and carry on the family name, most provinces implemented a slightly more lenient ‘one-son/two child’ policy for rural residents. Under the rule, if a couple’s first child is a boy they are restricted to only one child. If they give birth to a girl they are permitted to have a second child several years later “ (Johnson, 2004 p. xix).

With the new one-child policy in place, the Chinese government required a *Shengyu zheng*—a birth permission paper—that gave a woman official sanction to conceive and bear a child. She “was required to have a permit when she became pregnant and to take the paperwork to the hospital with her at the time of delivery” (Evans, 2008 p. 106). When a Chinese couple married they were required to sign an agreement to comply with the government’s birth quotas. Once the agreement was signed the couple could receive a Birth Planning Honor Card. This card brought the couple “preferential treatment for food, housing, health care, and education” (Evans, 2008 p. 106). Those who did not sign the agreement or did not follow the policy were subject to punishment including “fines, loss of benefits and jobs, even jail” (Evans, 2008 p. 106).

China Opens to International Adoption

The first modern adoption law in the People’s Republic of China was passed in December 1991 (Johnson, 1998). These guidelines were meant to prevent people from adopting children to become servants or wives for other children. This adoption law helped to centralize China’s adoption policies and made it easier to arrange for foreign/international adoptions. “First of all, the government has made it safer for local notarial

offices to approve foreign adoptions and to supply the legal documents required by most countries. The law also removes the previous *de facto* practice of limiting foreign adoptions to those of Chinese ancestry and those who have worked in China or have special ties to China” (Johnson, 1993 p.29-30).

The U.S Consulate in Guangzhou is responsible for issuing immigrant visas for Chinese children adopted by U.S. citizens. According to the consulate 300 visas were issued in 1992.

China opened itself up to the international adoption process around 1991—this is roughly the same period of time when the Internet started to become a communication force. According to the *New York Times*, from 1991 to 2006 Americans adopted 55,000 Chinese children. In 1994 China surpassed South Korea as the largest single “sending country” for children to be adopted by American parents. (U.S. State Department) According to the U.S. State Department adoptions to the United States make up about 80% of international adoptions from China. These numbers grew from 61 in 1991 to 5,053 in 2000. (U.S. State Department statistics in Johnson Politics of International and Domestic Adoption in China *Special Issue on Nonbiological Parenting - Papers of General Interest*)

No one, including the Chinese government, has an accurate statistic for the number of children abandoned each year.

In her article, *Politics of International and Domestic Adoption in China*, Kay Johnson investigates why China turned to international adoption in the 1990s. She argues that Chinese legal requirements, including the fact that Chinese adoptive parents had to be over 35 years-old and childless, severely limited the number of Chinese families that could legally adopt a child domestically (Johnson, 2002 p.1). Johnson states international adoption “has helped to enlarge the pool of potential adopters without disturbing birth planning priorities (Johnson, 2002 p. 1).

China’s preference for boys

In the late 1980’s Chinese orphanages began to receive an increasing number of female infants (Johnson, 1998 Population and Development Review p. 475). These increases coincided with government efforts to more strictly enforce birth planning guidelines and the one-child policy. Chinese law states it is illegal to abandon a child.

“The preference for boys has long been rooted in Chinese society,” according to Kay Johnson. Sons are permanent members of their father’s family and, since there are currently no social welfare programs for the elderly, sons are a major source of financial support for their parents.

Chinese daughters traditionally “marry away” and join their husband’s family (Johnson, 1998 p. 475).

Pressure to Change China’s One-Child Policy

The Chinese government is showing signs it will ease the country’s “one-child” policy. China’s Communist Party announced on November 15, 2013 that it is in the process of renewing itself and will abolish “re-education through labor” camps, encourage greater private participation in the country’s economy, and relax the “one-child” policy. A *New York Times* article “China to Ease Longtime Policy of 1-Child Limit” by Chris Buckley outlined the policy changes proposed by the Chinese government. The article quotes Wang Guangzhou, a demographer at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing as stating; “This is the first time that a central document has clearly proposed allowing two children when a husband or wife is an only child” (*New York Times*, November 15, 2013). Most rural Chinese families are currently allowed to have two children.

China’s vice minister of the National Health commission, Wang Pei’an, is quoted in the *New York Times* announcing “There will not be a uniform nationwide timetable for starting implementation” of the easing of

the one-child policy (*New York Times*, November 17, 2013). Chinese officials say the relaxation of the one-child policy is possible because of China's slowed population growth. Some Chinese economists say, "the country's aging population and dwindling pool of young, cheap labor are a significant factor in slowing the nation's economic growth rate" (*New York Times*, July 22, 2012).

China's one-child policy has long been criticized for widespread abuses, forced sterilizations and abortions, and unfair policies that reward or penalize local government officials for controlling the population.

Chapter Three

History of Blogging

In 2014 it is possible to have 900 million people read your innermost thoughts or most inane observations—because of blogs. Twenty years ago this communication exchange could not have happened because computer-mediated communication (CMC), or blogs, simply did not exist. In the early 1990s the Internet was home to a handful of websites that can be said to be the forerunners to today’s blog. The Internet landscape is much different today. According to NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey Company, by the end of 2011 there were more than 181 million blogs around the world. The company states only five years earlier, in 2006, there were 36 million blogs. A more detailed description outlining the difficulty of precisely counting the number of blogs will be explored later in this chapter.

Scholars do not have a standard agreed upon definition of the word “blog” but in general they agree that blogs are defined as frequently modified web pages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse chronological order. Blog posts are primarily textual but due to new and emerging technology they may contain photos, videos and multimedia

content. Most blogs provide hypertext links to other Internet sites and allow for audience/reader comments.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word “blog” as; “A website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” Blogs vary in content but many are online diaries or journals written by an individual. The scholarly literature focused on blogging is not yet extensive making it a ripe topic for research.

The founder of Salon.com, Scott Rosenberg, sees blogs as being composed of three basic elements: self-expression, novelty, and connection. The first idea, self-expression means that through blogs people can show and express themselves to the world. “Blogs are usually written in the first person, and they are very often autobiographical. The second is novelty, the ability to always be new; current. Unlike newspapers, which can only be as current as when they are delivered, blogs are being continuously delivered.” Rosenberg’s third idea of connection highlights the importance of links and the ability to connect with others of similar interest. (Rosenberg, *The St. Rose Chronicle*, October 27, 2010).

There is some dispute among scholars as to the exact start date of what we now call a “blog.” As Scott Rosenberg, writes in his book *Say*

Everything: How Blogging Began, What It's Becoming and Why it Matters,
“Efforts to identify the first blog are comical, and ultimately futile because
blogging was not invented; it evolved. “

Most scholars cite 1997 as a pivotal year for blog development. That's when Jorn Barger, the editor of the online journal, *Robot Wisdom*, coined the term “weblog” to describe the process of “logging the web” as he surfed. Barger had been collecting links to interesting sites and articles he found in the Internet. In 1999 Peter Merholz is credited with breaking Barger's word “weblog” into the phrase we blog in the sidebar of his website Peterme.com. Some trace blogging in its current form back to 1997 with Dave Winer's *Scripting News*. The site was originally described as a place for links, offhand observations and ephemera. Winer's work on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) earned him the nickname “the father of modern-day content distribution” in many mainstream news outlets. Winer's company, Userland, worked with Netscape to release one of the first blogging software tools in 1999. By 2004, the role of blogs became increasingly mainstream as news services, politicians, businesses leaders, and individuals began using them as tools for outreach and opinion.

What is a Blog?

Jill Walker Rettberg, author of the 2008 book *Blogging*, writes blogs are part of the “history of communication and literacy, and emblematic of a shift from uni-directional mass media to participatory media, where viewers and readers become creators of media (Rettberg, 2008 p.23). Rettberg states, “In addition to being a first person form of writing, blogs are social. Most blogs allow and encourage readers to leave comments, and almost all use links to link to sources and other bloggers discussing similar topics“ (Rettberg, 2008 p.46).

The Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application (JITTA) states the most prestigious journals are ignoring virtual community research and it contends there is little consensus on the definition and classification of virtual/online communities (Lee, 2003). In fact, the JITTA article provides nine popular cited working definitions for virtual community. Discrepancies occur among the nine virtual community definitions but almost all share four similar points. The first similarity is the inclusion of a reference to cyberspace and the use of computer-mediated spaces. All of the definitions state virtual communities should be on the Internet and, unlike the traditional definition of “community, ”virtual communities are not bounded by geographical location and borders.” The

second common aspect is the use of computer-based information technology to support the activities of the virtual community (Lee, 2003). The third similar point is the focus on communication and interaction. In other words, the contents in the community are formed when members communicate with each other. The final aspect is the relationships built through communication and time.

The Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application article used these four common elements to form a working definition of virtual community. The authors suggest the definition could be: “A cyberspace supported by computer-based information technology, centered upon communication and interaction of participants to generate member-driven contents, resulting in a relationship being built” (Lee, 2003).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is difficult to get an exact count of the number of blogs. In her 2010 article *Going to the Blogs: Toward the Development of a Uses and Gratifications Measurement Scale for Blogs*, Barbara Kaye states, “...most sources concede between 100 million and 133 million blogs float around in cyberspace” (Kaye, 2010, p. 194). Because new material is continually being created on the Internet it is difficult to capture an accurate number of blogs available online. Another issue when trying to capture an accurate number of blog is the

number of inactive blogs. People may create blogs and then, for a variety of reasons, abandon the blog. It is difficult to know the exact number of inactive blogs because there is no central clearing house for blogs.

Blogs and the Internet

The increase in blog creation and participation are dependent on the rise in Internet penetration. Approximately 273 million North Americans have Internet access, according to Internet World Stats figures from June 2012. This North American figure represents about 79% of the population. Approximately 2.4 billion people worldwide—or approximately 34% of the world’s population—access the Internet. (Internet World Stats, June 2012 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>)

By 2010, 22 percent of the world's population had access to computers with 1 billion Google searches every day, 300 million Internet users reading blogs, and 2 billion videos viewed daily on YouTube (Internet World Stats, June 2012).

An April 2012 survey from the Pew Research Center finds 82% of American adults use the Internet and 66% have high-speed broadband connection at home (Pew Internet, 2012). An older Pew Survey looked at the number of Internet users reading blogs. The Pew’s May 2010 survey found, “In total, 33% of internet users (the equivalent of 24% of all adults)

say they read blogs, with 11% of internet users doing so on a typical day.” The survey also found 14% of U.S adult Internet users create or work on their own online journal or blog (Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking surveys (March 2000–December 2012)).

Blogs and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

The advent of computer-mediated communication has changed the way people express and exchange ideas. It has also altered the way scholars gather information and data. In her article, *Ph.D. in Pajamas: Kicking Back and Letting the Information Come to Me*, Maryam Moayeri playfully examines how digital media has changed the scholarly research process. She revels in the fact that she can roll out of bed at 10AM, propped up on her couch with her laptop and can fulfill her Ph.D. requirements clad in flannel pajamas. Moayeri writes, “The potential of the Internet is undeniable. The computer has quickly embraced different applications and media. It has mastered the calculator and the typewriter. It has turned into a calendar, task manager and spreadsheet. It is a full library that I can hold with one hand. It is my filing cabinet, my storage space, my mailbox and my briefcase....It is proving itself to be the epitome of a multimedia space that has not even neared its potential” (Moayeri,

2010, p. 182). Moayeri's article is not specific to the world of computer-mediated communication but it is an illustration of how current scholars can take their research out of libraries and away from face-to-face interviews and bring it into their own living room.

As previously mentioned, blogging and virtual communities are relatively new forms of communication and scholarly research in this area is not yet extensive. With those limitations in mind, there is a body of scholarly work that investigates the role blogs have in society. These works have utilized several theoretical frameworks including; critical theory, social scientific theory, and mass communication theories.

Chapter Four

Theoretical Framework Uses and Gratifications

With more than 181 million blogs created since 1997 and new blogs starting around the world daily, this relatively new form of communication demands the attention of communication researchers. (NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey Company 2012) As detailed earlier in this dissertation in Chapter 3 detailing the “History of Blogging” many scholars cite 1997 as the year blogs began to gain a foothold as a method of mass communication. Due to this rather short history as a mass communication tool the potential for blogs to create social networks during a crisis has not been extensively examined in the scholarly literature. Compared to other forms of communication, (newspapers, television, radio, telephone) a full, detailed picture of how people use the Internet has not been developed and less is known about blog use and computer mediated communication.

This dissertation examines the uses and gratifications associated with a particular blog--the Rumor Queen (www.chinaadopttalk.com). To get a rich and deep understanding of how people used the blog to satisfy their needs it is essential to provide an overview of uses and gratifications theory in mass communication and to build a base of the key foundational literature. A uses and gratifications approach is helpful to explore the main

research questions posed in this dissertation because the theory includes people's psychological and social needs as well as how media can gratify needs and motives to communication (Rubin, 2009.) The Rumor Queen blog is interactive and allows users to provide content in response to a source or communication partner (Ha & James, 1998). Audience members (users) have control over the content and its use.

Although uses and gratifications theory in mass communication dates back to the 1940s, it continues to be used in recent research on the Internet to study blogging, (Chung and Kim, 2008 and Kaye, 2005) and social networking such as Twitter (Chen, 2011), Facebook (Joinson, 2008) and MySpace (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The theory provides a strong framework for the research conducted in this dissertation.

Uses and gratifications theory suggests communication behavior is goal-directed and purposeful in that people choose media based on their needs, wants, or expectations. Rubin (2009) states that a uses and gratifications perspective assumes "an active audience is at the core of this approach, although it is assumed that audience members may vary in their level of activity in a continuum from active to passive where people may make rational decisions to reject or accept particular media" (Rubin, 2009, p. 182). Uses and gratifications theory helps to explain how the active audience (user) seeks out computer-mediated communication to

gratify a need. Chapter 6 of this dissertation details how Rumor Queen blog users are active participants in the creation of material on the site.

This chapter reviews the literature examining the history behind the uses and gratifications theory in mass communication and investigates the strengths and weakness of this theory. A brief survey of the scholarly literature examining how blogs are used in a time of crisis is also included. This section considers researchers' findings focused on blog use during the terror attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 and the Hurricane Katrina crisis in August of 2005.

Uses and Gratifications Theory History

Uses and gratifications theory has its roots in the 1940s when scholars began looking at how and why people tuned in to certain radio programs such as quiz shows and soap operas. Mass communication scholars deemed it a useful tool to examine media use because it is an audience-centered approach and holds that when audience members actively seek out media, they are typically seeking it in order to gratify a need.

One of the first scholarly researchers to employ an early form of uses and gratifications theory was Austrian-American social scientist

Herta Herzog. In 1941 she interviewed soap opera fans for her book, "On Borrowed Experience: An Analysis of Listening to Daytime Sketches," and identified three types of gratifications. These three gratifications include, "Listening as an emotional release," "Listening as a means of remodeling one's drudgery," and "Listening for recipes making for adjustment."

Herzog concludes some of the listeners report they enjoy the soap operas "as a means of letting themselves go emotionally." She states other listeners appreciate the "opportunity to fill their lives with happenings which they would like to experience themselves." Herzog states finally "Others enjoy them in a more realistic way because they furnish them with formulas to bear the kind of life they are living" (Herzog, 1941).

Herzog married American sociologist and founder of Columbia University's Bureau for Applied Social Research, Paul Lazarsfeld. She joined Lazarsfeld's "Radio Project" and was part of the team that studied Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" radio program that aired in October 1938. The researchers focused on trying to understand the power and potential of radio. "The Invasion from Mars" research completed in 1940 is considered to be a classic mass communication study that explored the social and psychological factors shaping the ways audiences respond to mass media.

One of Herzog's last published scholarly articles, "Decoding Dallas" examined the 1980s prime-time U.S. television soap opera "Dallas" and compared how German and American audiences "viewed" the program, its plot, and its characters. The fifty-year span of Herzog's research contributions is notable for its breadth and significance.

Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld focused his work on audience research, consumer and voting behavior, and the influence of the media. Lazarsfeld was familiar with the work of psychoanalyst Alfred Adler and the idea that motivations for "action" (behavior) are always to some extent unconscious. In the 1930s he worked to develop methods of conducting survey research and focus groups.

In the introduction to a collection of Lazarsfeld's work, "On Social Research and Its Language," editor Raymond Boudon (1993) examines Lazarsfeld's contributions to sociology

"He (Lazarsfeld) determined that since motivations are in many circumstances unconscious, access to them cannot be guaranteed, except in some marginal cases, by asking people point blank "Why did you do that?" or "Why do you think or believe that?" In other words, to use the title of one of his articles, asking why is an *art* (1935) and apparently minor variations in the ways a question is asked can lead a subject to different answers.

For example, if a subject is asked, "Why do you buy flowers?" he tends to give stereotyped and socially acceptable answers. By contrast, when he is asked, "Why did you buy *these* flowers?" the answers are much more informative. The subject tends to mention the particular circumstances which have led him to buy flowers" (Boudon, 1993 p. 7-8).

This approach to crafting interview questions was an important consideration in this dissertation's methodology. I attempted to ask open-ended and focused questions to elicit detailed, specific responses from the informants in order to better keep in the spirit of the uses and gratifications framework.

Besides uses and gratifications theory Lazarsfeld is also known for his work developing the communication theory called the "two-step flow of communication." This theory hypothesizes that ideas from mass media are channeled to the "masses" through opinion leaders. This theory asserts opinion leaders are influential in shaping people's attitudes and behaviors. Researchers use the "two-step flow" theory to try to predict the influence of media messages on audience behavior and to help explain why certain media campaigns are successful while others fail. Lazarsfeld worked on his ideas with Elihu Katz in the 1950s and the two collaborated on the book "Personal Influence."

In 1973 Katz went on to revive Lazarsfeld's uses and gratifications theory in a *Public Opinion Quarterly* article he wrote with Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. Their central idea was that "mass communication is used by individuals to connect (or sometimes disconnect) themselves—via instrumental, affective or integrative relations—with different kinds of others (self, family friends, nation, etc.)" (Katz, 1973. p. 513). At the

conclusion of their article Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch write; “We believe it is part of our job to explore the social and individual conditions under which audiences find need or use program material aimed at changing their image of the status quo or broadening their cultural horizons” (Katz, 1973, p. 521).

According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) there are five components comprising the “uses and gratifications” theory. These components are:

1. The audience is conceived as active.
2. In the mass communication process, much initiative in linking gratification and media choice lies with the audience member.
3. The media compete with other sources of satisfaction.
4. Methodologically speaking, many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves.
5. Value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms (Katz, 1973, p. 510-511).

However, the theory of uses and gratifications was further expanded and shaped mass media scholar Denis McQuail in *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (2010). McQuail's understanding of uses and gratifications research shows the audience wants to:

1. Be informed
2. Identify with characters of the situation in the media environment
3. Be entertained
4. Enhance social interaction
5. Escape from the stresses of daily life (McQuail, 2010, p. 99)

As will be explained in Chapter 6, the textual analysis of the December 2006 Rumor Queen blog postings and interviews with informants echo many of the audience needs outlined by both Katz and McQuail. A key feature of blogs, including the Rumor Queen, is the ability of the audience (user) to interact with both the site creator and other audience members and to create content in response to the postings other audience members (users). The feature allows audience members (users) to take control over the production of content and therefore it is important to investigate the gratifications the users receive from such action. The next section further explores how uses and gratifications theory has been used to better understand phenomena related to interactive media like blogs.

Uses and Gratifications Theory in the Age of the Internet

For the past ten to fifteen years, media scholars have employed uses and gratifications theory as a framework for better understanding how audiences interact with the Internet and online content. For example, in 1998, considered to be the formative period of Internet and blog

development, researchers John Eighmey and Lola McCord employed uses and gratifications theory to investigate “the audience experience with websites” (Eighmey, 1998). The *Journal of Business Research* article titled, “Adding Value in the Information Age: Uses and Gratifications of Sites on the World Wide Web,” provided an early “Indication of the communication value being found by audience members when they visit commercial websites” (Eighmay, 1998).

Researchers looking at Internet gratifications identify many uses for the Internet that are similar to traditional media (Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Ferguson & Perse, 2000). These include “diversions of all types, including relaxation, escapism, information and social utility. As well as uses that go beyond traditional media, such as interactivity and interpersonal connectivity.”

In 2010 Barbara K. Kaye applied uses and gratifications theory in her article *Going to the Blogs: Toward the Development of a Uses and Gratification Measurement Scale for Blogs.*” Kaye’s article in the *Atlantic Journal of Communication* investigates the uses and motivations for connection to blogs. Kaye writes “the primary purposes of this study are to quantitatively analyze the reasons for accessing blogs, and to develop motivational items for further study of blogs within the uses and gratifications framework” (Kaye, p. 195).

To gather her research Kaye posted an open-question survey in the spring of 2003 asking bloggers why they used blogs. She received responses from 2,397 survey participants and condensed their responses down to 62 motivational items. More than 77% of Kaye's survey respondents were male and 89% were white with at least some college or higher. The number one motivational factor for those responding to Kaye's survey was "Convenient Information Seeking." The respondents said blogs "are a convenient way to actively seek up-to-date and in-depth information about current issues" (Kaye, 2010 p. 199). The second motivational factor was "For information I can't get from traditional media," and the third factor was "Because blogs are interesting." In the findings chapter of this dissertation the textual analysis of the December 2006 Rumor Queen blog postings and the informant interviews reveal the Rumor Queen blog users mention the three motivational factors Kaye details. The postings and informant interviews analyzed for this dissertation are particularly focused on "information not found in traditional media."

It is interesting to note that Kaye's survey respondents seem to fall into the blog reader category versus the blog writer group. Kaye's findings show an audience actively seeking out media in order to gratify a need—this is a hallmark of the "uses and gratifications" theory. It is also an

excellent example of how the theory works well in conceptualizing how audiences use certain blogs, and it provides an example for how to approach such a study. Similarly, in her January 2011 article, *Motives for Maintaining Personal Journal Blogs*,” Erin E. Hollenbaugh writes that blogs are ripe ground for inquiry using uses and gratifications and they should be differentiated from other types of Internet communication. She writes that “simply lumping all types of Internet use into one motive typology may not be helpful, considering the inherent differences between producing and consuming media” (Hollenbaugh, 2011, p. 15).

Uses and gratifications theory is applied to Facebook and Instant Messaging in Anabel Quan-Haase and Alyson L. Young’s *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* article, “Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging.” The article compares the two media and investigates how the different social media fulfill user needs. For example, Quan-Haase and Young found “Facebook is used to find out about social events, friends’ activities, and social information about peers” (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010, p. 358).

Previous research about *Facebook* suggests it is often used to maintain existing relationships and is often not utilized to form new friendships.

In 2011, Gina Masullo Chen applied uses and gratifications theory to the social networking tool Twitter. The main goal of her study was to

examine “how active users of the social network Twitter gratify a need for connection with other Twitter users “ (Chen, 2011). According to Chen, “A main finding is that spending a lot of time using Twitter over a series of months is more responsible for gratifying people’s need to connect with others on Twitter than the hours per day people spend on Twitter or the specific acts of sending messages or repeating others’ messages on Twitter. Yet, spending time on Twitter over the course of a week and actually using the medium through tweeting and sending @replies are also important if people want to gratify a need to connect with others through the social medium” (Chen, 2011). Social connection is a key issue in theorizing uses and gratifications on blogs and social media.

Ruggiero (2000) summarizes the ties between the Internet and future uses and gratifications theory research by noting that since Internet communication leaves such a traceable trail and content is so easily “observable, recorded, and copied,” the Internet becomes an important “new dominion” for uses and gratifications scholars (p. 37). In this dissertation, I plan to demonstrate how the way that users of The Rumor Queen seized upon it as an interactive, community-oriented space with content that was important to them fit into this and other interpretations of uses and gratifications theory.

Blog Use During Times of Crisis

Several studies have found the use of the Internet, like other forms of media, increases in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis. As stated previously, blogs allow the audience to be active participants in the coverage and development of a story. By utilizing blogs, the audience no longer has to solely rely on what the “gatekeepers” in a news media organization will allow to be reported. Blogs provide a way for the audience to take on a more active information-seeking role on their own. Examples of this can be seen in blogs created during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans.

In the 2004 *Journalism & Mass Communication* article “Information Seeking and Emotional Reactions to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks,” (Boyle, Schmiebach, Armstrong, McLeod, Shah, Pan) cite previous research investigating how the uses and gratifications theory helps to explain “a desire to obtain information” (2004, p. 156). They make a case for studying “topic specific” relationships to find a stronger association between information seeking and media-use patterns. This “topic specific” distinction is present in this dissertation—the specific topic of the CCAA rule changes in 2006 and the fact that most users of the Rumor Queen

blog are people involved with international adoption—may make for a stronger correlation between information seeking and media-use.

Furthermore, the researchers cite “uncertainty reduction theory” initially proposed by Berger and Calabrese. This theory argues “that individuals are uncomfortable with the uncertainty of initial interpersonal reactions, and that people engage in information-seeking behaviors to alleviate that uncertainty” (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). The interpersonal connections and information-seeking behaviors Berger and Calabrese wrote about are seen on websites, blogs, and emails written in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. Vanderbilt University professor Donna Hoffman was quoted in a September 12, 2001, *New York Times* article, saying, “The need to connect is intense...While the network TV stations blather, the Internet carries the news and connects the masses in a true interactive sob” (Harmon, 2001). Indeed, interactive media provide uses and gratifications in times of personal and cultural crises in a way that traditional media might not have been able to do with such immediacy and personal connection.

Other news organizations suggested a similar function of digital media, and blogs in particular, as important gratification during the time following September 11. Nick Denton who at the time was a reporter for *The Guardian*, wrote, “...Some of the best eyewitness accounts and

personal diaries of the (September 11th) aftermath have been published on weblogs. These stories, some laced with anecdotes of drunken binges and random flings, have a rude honesty that does not make its way through the mainstream media's good-taste filter" (Denton, 2001). He cited the more unofficial, un-professional accounts as some of the most gratifying for audiences.

In the discussion section of the 2004 *Journalism and Mass Communication* article Boyle, Schmiebach, Armstrong, McLeod, Shah, and Pan report what they characterize as "perhaps the most interesting" finding of their study: Uncertainty or a high degree of negative affectivity about a situation makes some individuals more likely to seek more information. They wrote:

"Unlike situations in which an individual looks to escape personal problems, the findings present here show people seeking to find out more about national problems that have created personal emotions" (Boyle, Schmiebach, Armstrong, McLeod, Shah and Pan, 2004, p.163).

In the 2009 *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* article, "Blog Functions as Risk and Crisis Communication During Hurricane Katrina," authors Wendy Macias, Karen Hilyard, and Vicki Freimuth

examined blog use over a two-week period in August 2005 during and after Hurricane Katrina. Reports say the Category 4 storm killed more than 1,500 people and caused at least \$100 billion in damages. Although these authors find uses and gratifications helpful in conceptualizing their research problem, they also note its limitations at the time of a massive, profound crisis, such as Hurricane Katrina: “While the application of uses and gratifications clearly applies to crisis communication blog content and serves as a useful theoretical framework, given the prevalence of information seeking, and establishing online connections/communities, an extended typology of uses and gratifications would be necessary for this specialized form of blogging to be more inclusive of all the functions found in our study and not typically included in uses and gratifications typologies (e.g, helping)” (Macias, et al, 2009). Specifically, they note the importance of an “emotive or therapeutic” function of blogs in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. “This function, in which the blogs almost fulfilled the role of psychologist or grief counselor, is distinct from the opinion-oriented thinker function,” they write. “Previously blogs have been found to have an information or social function, thinker or linker, whereas the emotive or therapeutic function found here provided a means for individuals to discuss their emotions associated with shared events, in this case a hurricane” (Macias, et al, 2009).

Although they note that the emotive or therapeutic functions of blogs were seen throughout their data, they noted a pronounced presence in the area of “providing social support and sharing life experience relevant to the hurricane.” They wrote, “This new function is most likely to be found in blogs involving shared crises (e.g., natural disasters, bombings, shootings, etc.) but may also be identified in blogs about politics or other topics that individuals tend to be passionate about” (Macias et al, 2009).

Finally blogs can be viewed by uses and gratifications scholars as not only a form of therapy but as a “relationship management tool.” In the 2007 *Public Relations Review* article titled “Communicating during crisis: Use of blogs as a relationship management tool,” authors Kaye D. Sweetser and Emily Metzgar examined people’s perception of a crisis and their use of blogs. Their findings show “the perceived state of crisis decreased as communication increased and got closer to the organization itself. Participants who received no stimulus whatsoever reported the largest “crisis” score for the company in question. Reading a personal blog decreased the perception that the company was in crisis, but the lowest perception of crisis was reported among those who read the organizational blog. That is, as one gets closer to being exposed to non-journalistic, official company statements, the perception of crisis

decreases. (edited) These findings suggest that organizations in crisis should continue to employ open communication practices during crisis situations and consider adopting blogs as another tool through which to disseminate official messages” (Sweetser and Metzgar, 2007).

A later chapter of this dissertation elaborates on the role the Rumor Queen played in the absence of “official” messages from adoption agencies. Posters on the site and informants interviewed for this dissertation report that for 8 to 14 days in December 2006 the Rumor Queen was their only source of information about the China Center of Adoption Affairs rule changes.

Criticism of Uses and Gratifications Theory

Criticisms of early uses and gratifications theory research focus on the fact that the theory relied heavily on self-reports, was unsophisticated about the social origin of the needs that audiences bring to the media, was too uncritical of the possible dysfunction both for self and society of certain kinds of audience satisfaction, and was too captivated by the inventive diversity of audiences used to pay attention to the constraints of the text (Katz, 1987). This author agrees with this assessment of early uses and gratification theory research.

In his 2000 *Mass Communication & Society* article, "Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century," author Thomas Ruggiero suggests, "Critics such as Elliott (1974), Swanson (1977), and Lometti, Reeves, and Bybee (1977) stressed that U&G (uses and gratifications) continued to be challenged by four serious conceptual problems; (a) a vague conceptual framework, (b) a lack of precision in major concepts, (c) a confused explanatory apparatus and (d) a failure to consider audiences' perceptions of media content" (Ruggiero, 2000).

These criticisms of uses and gratification theory are important cautions for researchers employing this theoretical framework. Researchers must take steps to ensure they have a strong conceptual framework, and precision in the major concepts their work investigates. It is key for researchers to have strong, focused research questions as the foundation for their work.

Thomas E. Ruggiero argues in his article "Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century," that mass communication scholars are wrong when they contend, "that uses and gratifications is not a rigorous social science theory." (Ruggiero, 2000, p.3). Ruggiero's article provides a survey of how communication scholars applied uses and gratifications theory from its development in the 1940s through the late 1990s. At the end of his article Ruggiero states, "One of the major strengths of the U&G

perspective has been its capacity to develop over time into a more sophisticated theoretical model” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 25).

In the conclusion to his article Ruggiero calls for modernizing uses and gratifications theory to keep it relevant as it is applied to new forms of communication. Ruggiero writes:

Theoretically and practically, for U&G scholars, however, the basic questions remain the same. Why do people become involved in one particular type of mediated communication or another, and what gratifications do they receive from it? Although we are likely to continue using traditional tools and typologies to answer these questions, we must also be prepared to expand our current theoretical models of U&G to include concepts such as interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality, asynchronicity, and interpersonal aspects of mediated communication. Then, if we are able to situate a “modernized” U&G theory within this new media ecology, in an evolving psychological, sociological, and cultural context, we should be able to anticipate a highly serviceable theory for the 21st century (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 29).

Summary

The scholarly literature reviewed for this chapter focused on the history of uses and gratifications theory in mass communication, the

strengths and weaknesses of the theory, and blog use during a time of crisis. The previous research clearly illustrates the idea that people use the Internet and blogs to satisfy specific needs. These needs include information, entertainment and interpersonal support. As will be detailed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation the analysis of the December 2006 postings on the Rumor Queen website and the interviews with informants using the site during their adoption journeys finds users went to the site to fulfill similar needs.

The analysis in this dissertation draws from the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications, particularly as it relates to blogs and blog users in times of crisis, to analyze both text and interviews. This theory will relate to the findings and themes, as I see them within the data, ultimately answering my research questions: What are the main topics and themes of the “Rumor Queen” blog postings during the time of the 2006 adoption rule changes, how the information in the Rumor Queen differed from the mainstream media coverage of the adoption rule changes, and how did prospective adoptees use the Rumor Queen site to gratify their need for information and support? The following chapter, Research Methodology, will explain how I will use a multi-method case study analysis to answer these research questions.

1. What are the main topics and themes of the “Rumor Queen” blog postings in December 2006 when the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced the rule changes to its program to allow Chinese children to be internationally adopted?
2. What type of information is provided to people reading the December 2006 postings on the “Rumor Queen” (www.chinaadopttalk.com) and how is this different from the coverage found in mainstream print media organizations during this time period?
3. The CCAA rule changes prompted a “crisis” for adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and others in December 2006. Why did people turn to the “Rumor Queen” website during this crisis and what are the uses and gratifications associated with the site?

Chapter Five

Methodology Case Study

A case study methodological approach is used in this dissertation for a qualitative investigation to examine the main topics and themes of the Rumor Queen blog postings in December 2006. The China Center of Adoption Affairs announced rule changes to its international adoption program during that time period and this prompted parents waiting to adopt a Chinese child to seek information about the changes. This dissertation examines how the information provided to Rumor Queen users differed from the coverage found in mainstream media organizations and investigates the uses and gratifications found on the website.

This chapter describes this dissertation's research methodology and includes an exploration of the following areas; a rationale for the selection of a case study approach, a description of the methods used to collect the research, a summary of the information needed, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

Rationale for a Case Study Approach

Many scholars cite and employ Robert K. Yin's definition of the case study research method and his assertion that "case study methods involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: *a case*" (Yin, 2003).

In the introduction to his book *Case Study Research Design and Methods* Yin states, "Case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed...and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003).

Yin suggests case study methodology is best utilized as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection and reports a case description and case-based themes. The examination of the December 2006 postings found on the Rumor Queen blog (www.chinaadopttalk.com) fit the case study criteria outlined by Yin. The postings are a bounded system over time and are an example of in-depth data collection and case-based themes are utilized to analyze the data.

Scholars, including Yin, have identified the strengths and weaknesses in using the case study method. For example, the case study is noted for its ability to "deal with a full variety of evidence—documents,

artifacts, interviews and observations—beyond what might be available in the conventional historical study“ (Yin, 2003). According to Yin, the case study “adds two sources of evidence not usually associated in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation of events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events” (Yin, 2003). A major component of the research and findings of this dissertation centers on interviews conducted with “people involved with the events” including adoption officials and parents who used the Rumor Queen website during their adoption journeys.

Educational researcher, Robert Stake, points to “particularization” as another strength of employing the case study research method. According to Stake, the “real business of case study is particularization, not 48 generalizations. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily, as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (Stake, 1995).

In their book, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, authors Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett outline what they term the “strong advantages of case study methods that make them valuable in testing hypotheses...” (George and Bennett, 2005). First, George and Bennett mention the fact that “case studies allow a researcher to achieve high levels of conceptual validity, or to identify and measure

indicators that best represent the theoretical concepts the researcher intends to measure” (George and Bennett, 2005).

The second advantage, according to George and Bennett, is the ability of the case study to identify new variables and hypotheses in the course of fieldwork. This second advantage was particularly useful to this author during the interviews with informants. A later portion of this chapter provides more details about this author’s interviews with informants. A list of questions was prepared before the interviews were conducted to ensure the informants would address the main research questions posed in this dissertation and to allow for some comparison of the answers provided. From this author’s years of experience as a working journalist I know how important it is to be organized before an interview and how even more imperative it is to listen critically to your informant and be open to new variables and streams of ideas. Finally, George and Bennett mention the case study method’s “ability to accommodate complex causal relations” (George and Bennett, 2005).

Case Study Concerns

One of the chief concerns in this method is the “lack of rigor of case study research” (Yin, 2003). A second common concern centers on the

fact that a single case study is not easily generalized and provides little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003). A third issue with case study research focuses on the threat of “bias” and what critics call the “investigator effects.” Case study research does not have experimental controls and may not provide the “scientific distance” needed to guard against the researcher’s possible biases (Stoecker, 1991). Finally, case studies are often seen as a time consuming and resource rich method of research.

The history of using case study in academic research in the U.S. dates back to the Chicago School in the 1920s. Chicago School researchers touted their case study work as being “non-quantitative, emphasizing the history and context of their cases, avoiding generalization and inductively attempting to understand social life from the perspective of the actor rather than from a deductive theoretical stance” (Stoecker, 1991).

Using case studies in academic research fell out of favor in the 1950s as the popularity of utilizing statistics, survey methods, and computer analysis began to become the preferred methods of analyzing research (Stoecker, 1991). In her article, “What Can Case Studies Do?” Jennifer Platt suggested one of the possible reasons contributing to the decline of the case study is the issue of defining “case study” as a method

at all. Platt highlights the question of “design features” and “methods of data collection” and stated, case study had been “increasingly portrayed as a method yet its practitioners specified no particular data gathering techniques other than to exempt statistical analysis, the case study fit neither category” (Platt,1988).

However, case study best describes the multi-method approach to understanding a particular phenomenon with crucial depth. Using Yin’s perspective that case study allows for a more rigorous use of a variety of artifacts and datasets, the research presented in this presentation is grounded in case study because it is the most appropriate method for answering the research questions at hand.

This dissertation uses a multi-method approach to case studies that includes interviews with persons who are connected to the Chinese adoption process in an official capacity and who have gone through the adoption process themselves combined with a textual analysis of the Rumor Queen web site.

In her 1992 *Current Sociology* article “Case Study in American Methodological Thought,” Platt includes quotes from scholars back in the 1920s and 1930s arguing that the idea that statistics are often seen as having more “scientific rigor” is naïve and an uncritical application of quantitative measurement. The article includes a quote from sociologist

Ernest Watson Burgess from the University of Chicago who states, “statistics show correlation rather than causation and deal with crude external aspects rather than the inner life” (Burgess, 1927). Burgess goes on to explain: “To enter the interview in the words of the person signifies a revolutionary change. It is a change from the interview conceived in legal terms to the interview as an opportunity to participate in the life history of the person, in his memories, in his hopes, in his attitudes, in his own plans, in his philosophy of life” (Burgess, 1928). As will be seen in the findings chapter of this dissertation, this author attempts to emulate the approach Burgess suggests and tries to capture “the life history of the person” when conducting interviews with informants.

Description of the Methods Used to Collect the Research

In its examination of the main theme of the topics posted on the Rumor Queen site in December 2006 when the Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced rule changes in its program to allow Chinese children to be internationally adopted, this dissertation considers what type of information was provided to users of the site and how that differs from coverage found in mainstream media sources during that time period. Further, this dissertation investigates what type of communication U.S

adoption officials and the Chinese government shared with parents seeking to adopt a child from China. This dissertation argues that the CCAA rule changes prompted a “crisis” for adoptive parents, adoption agencies and others in December 2006. Why did people turn to the Rumor Queen during that period of turmoil and what are the uses and gratifications associated with the site?

First, I conducted a textual analysis of the 3,270 December 2006 postings on the Rumor Queen blog (www.chinaadopttalk.com). A careful reading of the Rumor Queen blog postings reveals the themes, struggles, emotions, and support the users received from the site. This material is utilized to understand the theoretical framework of “Uses and Gratifications” associated with the Rumor Queen website.

To organize and analyze the 3,270 entries posted on the Rumor Queen blog in December 2006 I used the web-based software program “Dedoose” which is a tool for qualitative or mixed method research. “Dedoose” was built upon the 2003 EthnoNotes software program and was conceived, designed, and developed by Eli Lieber, Thomas S. Weisner and a group of academics from UCLA. The company’s website states “Dedoose” is particularly useful for market research, psychological research, social science research, ethnographic research and anthropology research. The chief reason the program is helpful is

because it easily allows researchers to manage and organize large amounts of data.

Before I used the “Dedoose” program I captured the December 2006 Rumor Queen postings into 71 separate Word documents for each posting per date. Most dates had more than one posting. For example, on December 8, December 26, and December 28 there are five separate postings on the Rumor Queen website. A posting is defined as a blog entry written by the Rumor Queen and the comments in reaction to the entry written by users of the site. The most active day for users posting information during the December 2006 time period was on December 8 with 260 separate comments written by users in response to the Rumor Queen’s five postings on that day. As will be detailed later, December 8 is the day the Rumor Queen first posts information about the CCAA’s rule changes to its international adoption program. There were no postings on December 2, December 4, December 16, and December 26. I am not aware of the specific reasons behind the Rumor Queen’s lack of a blog posting for the four days mentioned. Each of the 71 Word documents was imported into the “Dedoose” program. The 3,270 individual postings in the 71 documents were read many times and several themes began to appear. To manage the large number of postings and to be able to sift through the material for organizational purposes I developed 16 “tags” in

the “Dedoose” program. These 16 tags became apparent during my careful reading of the material and are as follows in alphabetical order: Adoption Agency Comments, CCAA, Child Matched Congratulations, Emotions and Support, Great Quotes, Lack of Information from Adoption Agency, Lack of Information from CCAA, Lack of Media Coverage, Panic, Rule Changes from the CCAA, Single Parents and Adoption, Special Needs Program (SN), Thankful for Rumor Queen, The Wait, and Travel Questions.

The “Dedoose” program allows the researcher to make excerpts of the research material—for this dissertation this author made excerpts of the postings. To make an excerpt the researcher highlights the text and then chooses which “tag” to use for the material. Excerpts may have more than one “tag.” For example, if a posting mentioned that a lack of communication from the poster’s adoption agency made them thankful for the Rumor Queen site the excerpt would be “tagged” with two categories—“Lack of Information from Adoption Agency” and “Thankful for the Rumor Queen.”

Once the tagging of the postings was completed five major topic areas emerged and the postings were subsequently organized into these five major topic areas.

According to the analysis of the excerpts coded on “Dedoose” the most common topic for a posting centered on issues concerning the long wait time to be matched with a child and a need to express emotions and seek support during the adoption journey. The second most common tag came from posters expressing the fact that they were “Thankful for the Rumor Queen.” The lack of information from the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) and confusion about the rule changes officially announced in December 2006 made up the third most common tag for the excerpts. The fourth most common theme found in the December 2006 Rumor Queen website postings came from users frustrated by their adoption agency and communication issues with adoption officials. A lack of mainstream media coverage about the adoption process in China and the rule changes from the CCAA is the fifth most common theme found in the coded excerpts.

Methodological Triangulation and Validity

I employed “Methodological Triangulation” to check and establish validity in the multiple perspectives used to analyze the data and research questions posed in this dissertation. In qualitative research “validity” refers to whether the findings of a study are true and certain—“true” in the sense

that research findings accurately reflect the situation, and “certain” in the sense that research findings are supported by the evidence” (Guion, 2011).

To achieve methodological triangulation I examined various forms of data including, informant interviews, a textual analysis of the postings found on the Rumor Queen website in December 2006, and a content analysis of mainstream media coverage of the CCAA rule changes announced in December 2006. I discovered similar conclusions when I compared the findings from the various methods. The similar results of these findings helped to ensure validity was established. Gathering data from multiple sources and using multiple methods yields a more detailed, richer picture of the main themes examined in this dissertation.

In conducting the qualitative research for this dissertation I strived to achieve “confirmability” which is the concept that there is some objectivity in the data collection and the reporting of results. The implication is that the findings are the result of research rather than an outcome of my biases and subjectivity. In the “Limitations of the Study” section found later in this chapter I tried to ensure transparency as she shares her own potential biases and background.

Summary of Data Collection

Textual Analysis and Dedoose

A qualitative approach allows for a contextual understanding, facilitates interactivity between researcher and informants, and allows for design flexibility. Since this dissertation is not a quantitative study, the research was not intended to uncover a wide breadth of data, but rather a great depth of information. Since the intention was not to analyze every posting on the Rumor Queen blog in December 2006, only a sampling of postings were used as excerpts and given tags. In some cases, this is because the postings were short responses to previous postings. For example, a user would post, "That's right." This posting would not be made into an excerpt and not tagged with a code.

I used care and ethical judgment when using the tagged excerpts. The privacy of the posters was considered and kept because I utilized the "username" the poster chose when using the Rumor Queen site. In other words, no real names were used and thus the poster's identity was protected. The excerpts were accurately transcribed, with some small changes to the wording to correct spelling and minor grammatical issues.

The raw data from the excerpts captured in "Dedoose" tells just part of the story of what Rumor Queen users were writing about and thinking in December 2006. A more in-depth examination of the postings is needed

to get a more detailed picture of how this website was utilized. It is important to delve into original material and sources to find answers to some of the main research questions this dissertation seeks to examine, including the uses and gratifications of the people who visited the Rumor Queen site.

Interviews with Rumor Queen Users

Parents who have completed adoptions or people who are in the process of adopting a child from China are the main audience and users of the Rumor Queen website. One can argue that the partnership between these users and the Rumor Queen herself resulted in the creation of content on the website. Therefore, to answer some of the key research questions posed in this dissertation and to, specifically, get a more complete picture of what type of information was provided to people reading the postings on the Rumor Queen blog before, during and after their adoption journeys it was important to speak directly to the users of the site. As will be detailed in Chapter 6 this dissertation focusing on analyzing the interviews with Rumor Queen informants, the data from these informants go beyond the December 2006 time period analyzed in the textual analysis section of this dissertation and provide a more broad and detailed picture of how people used the Rumor Queen blog. The five

informants provide a direct, personal example and description of the uses and gratifications associated with the site. These informants discuss how a lack of coverage from mainstream media organizations and a dearth of communication from their adoption agencies and Chinese adoption officials prompted them to seek out the Rumor Queen blog to satisfy their need for information. The informants also discuss how the CCAA rule changes prompted a “crisis” for adoptive parents and drove them to the “Rumor Queen” during this time of upheaval.

The five informants interviewed for this dissertation are known to me and were carefully selected to ensure a variety of adoption journeys, timing, and varying levels of usage of the Rumor Queen site. Four of the informants are single mothers who live in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Sometime in late 2005 these informants joined approximately a dozen other women to form an informal support group named SAM (Single Adoptive Mothers) during their adoption process. The majority of the members of SAM adopted their daughters from China but mothers who’ve adopted children from Russia, Guatemala, and Ethiopia are also part of the group. As of 2013 the group is still in existence and meets approximately once a month. The SAM group members share parenting advice, children’s toys and clothing, babysitting duties, and often gather to celebrate major life events and holidays. As a

member of the SAM group myself, I know the women well, but I do not believe this interferes with my ability to conduct successful interviews with them; in fact, since I already am familiar with their situations, I felt that I could ask questions that might have seemed overly-sensitive to a researcher interviewing strangers.

The fifth informant is a grandmother who lived in New Hampshire during her daughter's adoption process. She has relocated to Minneapolis to be close to her daughter and only grandchild. She is considered an "honorary" member of the SAM group.

I interviewed the five informants in October and November of 2013. These conversations were recorded on a small Sony digital recorder and subsequently transcribed into Word documents so I could accurately capture and utilize the quotes from the informants. The interviews were face-to-face, typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and generally followed a list of questions crafted to answer the main research questions proposed in this dissertation.

Ethical Considerations

In an attempt to protect the privacy of the informants and their young children I chose to use only the first names and first initials of the last names to identify the informants. The interviews detail a very

emotional experience for the informants and therefore I thought it is wise to limit and generalize the informant's identifying information.

The first informant, Annette G, is a dental assistant from Eden Prairie, Minnesota and the mother of now 8-year-old Genevieve from Hunan province in China. Annette was selected because she describes herself as an active user of the Rumor Queen site during her process and after she returned to the U.S. with her child. Annette traveled to China to meet Genevieve in November 2006 and spent about 14 months waiting from her Log in Date (LID) to her referral. Annette's adoption journey to get Genevieve took place before the December 2006 CCAA rule changes.

The second informant, Julie W., also traveled to China to meet her daughter, Tess, before the CCAA rule changes were announced in December 2006. In fact, in Chapter 6 of this dissertation Julie shares her story of finding out about the CCAA's changes while she was in Guangzhou, China on her adoption trip. Julie is a vice president with a major financial institution in Minneapolis, and was selected because she described herself as a "moderate" user of the Rumor Queen site during her adoption journey.

Jodi R. is a sales executive from Minneapolis and the mother of Amelia from Yunnan province in China. Jodi described herself as a "very light" user of the Rumor Queen site. Her adoption journey of 14 months

was slightly longer than Annette's and Julie's. Jodi traveled to China in May 2007—the month the CCAA rule changes went into effect.

The fourth informant, Kirsten M., is a technical apparel designer for a major retailer in Minneapolis. She and her mother Karen (the fifth informant) traveled to China in October 2009. Their wait to get Elizabeth from Jiangxi, China was considerably longer than the wait of the other three informants. Kirsten and Karen were at the beginning of the dramatic slowdown in the number of Chinese children being matched with parents. Kirsten reports she was initially a moderate to high user of the Rumor Queen site but her use of the site increased as her wait time lengthened. Her mother, Karen D., described herself as a very high user of the site. Karen is a retired vice president of a hospital who lived in New Hampshire during her daughter Kirsten's adoption. In Chapter 6 of this dissertation she describes her almost "neurotic" need to check the site and get the latest information.

Interviews with Adoption Officials

The textual analysis section and the interviews with informants mentioned a lack of communication from adoption agencies. I felt it was important to interview some adoption officials to research their attitudes

about the Rumor Queen and how they perceive the level of communication the agency provided to its clients.

Mass Media Background and Coverage of CCAA Rule Changes

Another key research question posed in this dissertation centers on the lack of mainstream media coverage of the CCAA rule changes announced in 2006. For the purposes of this dissertation the mainstream media are defined as media disseminated via large distribution channels and therefore available to the majority of media consumers.

I conducted various online searches of mainstream media sources to ascertain the level of coverage during the time period examined. First to get a broad overview of the material available online I did a “Google” search using the terms “China Center of Adoption Affairs December 2006.” Next, I conducted a search of the University of Minnesota library site using the terms “China Center Adoption 2006.” This search yielded only a single article from the *New York Times*. A further search of the University of Minnesota library site involved the MNCAT search tool. I used the newspaper filter using the terms “CCAA China 2006.” No articles were found in this search. I went to the BBC News and BBC World online news sites and used the terms “China Adoption 2006.” One article was retrieved that was posted on the BBC News site on December 20, 2006. I

also searched the CBS News site using the terms “China Adoption 2006” and the search did not yield any material. A search of National Public Radio, ABC News, NBC News, the *Washington Post*, *USA TODAY*, and the *Wall Street Journal* yielded one or two articles per site mentioned. A more in-depth analysis of the mainstream media coverage of this issue is detailed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. This media content analysis is not exhaustive and is a smaller part of the case study, but the information it provided was vital to understanding the concerns of both prospective adopters and adoption officials coping with policy changes.

Limitations of the Study

Even with this deliberate research path I am aware this dissertation contains limitations. For example, since this is not an exhaustive textual analysis of all the postings on the Rumor Queen site over time, I did not conduct a large data analysis that might be generalizable in a number of research settings. (However, this was not the intention of this research.) Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I tried to include a variety of informants to ensure a diversity of adoption journeys, timing, and varying levels of usage of the Rumor Queen site in the research. The fact that the informants are all single mothers living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area may limit the responses to the questions posed in the

interviews. In the future, it would be interesting to be able to include the perspectives of males/fathers and informants from other regions of the United States.

Additionally, I knew the five informants and the two Children's Home Society and Family Services officials before the research interviews were conducted. This familiarity brings benefits and challenges to the process of collecting research material. First, because there is a prior relationship between the researcher and the informants there is a potential for possible bias. This familiarity may also be beneficial because it may mean the informants are more comfortable and trusting when disclosing information to the author. The prior relationship may prompt the informants to be more candid and be willing to share some deeply personal reflections.

As disclosed in the introduction to this dissertation, I, like many of the informants, am a single parent and became a mother through China's international adoption program. This may contribute to a possibility for bias and may predispose me to being more sympathetic to the informants and their adoption journey. This personal characteristic may enrich the information available in this dissertation because I am familiar with the personal struggles of an international adoption journey and therefore am in a position to share unique insights and perspectives.

All researchers bring their own personal experiences to their work, and I believe my experience as a longtime broadcast journalist at a major public radio network with an undergraduate degree in Broadcast Journalism colors my own perspective. I am familiar with the workings of a newsroom and the responsibilities expected of a journalist, which could influence my thinking about how non-trained journalists, such as the Rumor Queen, report news. I was a graduate student in the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communication during the start of her adoption journey. My years as a working journalist and my experience immersed in the academic study of journalism made me wary of people not trained as journalists reporting news and information. I admit to some initial skepticism and a bit of questioning the value of the Rumor Queen site as I embarked on the process to adopt my daughter from China. Ultimately, I relied on my journalistic training in trying to be fair, balanced, accurate, and impartial while compiling the research material for this dissertation.

The upcoming chapter details the research findings including the data analysis of the 3, 270 December 2006 postings from the Rumor Queen blog. This textual analysis reveals the themes, struggles, emotions, and support the users received from the site and an examination of how users turned to the Rumor Queen during a time of crisis. This chapter

includes my interviews with Children's Home Society and Family Services officials, my interviews with informants who are users of the Rumor Queen site, and an analysis of the mainstream media coverage of the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) rule changes announced in December 2006.

Chapter Six

Findings, Part One: Analysis of the Rumor Queen Blog from December 2006

The joys, challenges, heartbreak, and uncertainty on the path to adopt a child from China are found in the 3,270 postings from the Rumor Queen blog in December 2006. The textual analysis of the material written by the website founder and moderator, the Rumor Queen, and postings written by parents involved in the adoption process illustrates how the mass communication theory of uses and gratifications works within this particular type of blog. The postings from parents on the Rumor Queen and the interviews with users of the site show they were prompted to search for other sources of information due to a lack of communication from adoption agency and Chinese officials, and an absence of coverage on the topic from mainstream media outlets. As the research in this dissertation reveals parents waiting to adopt a child from China in 2006 basically only had the Rumor Queen website and the community of users on the site to provide them with timely news, information, and support.

The first posting on December 1, 2006 begins with congratulatory messages to new families formed and parents describing what it's like to see the first photographs of their new children. The month ends with

broken-hearted parents marking New Year's Eve together online as they post messages of their struggles, frustrations, and despair due to the lack of information from the China Center of Adoption Affairs. Many posters wonder if they will ever be matched with a child.

As the founder, writer, moderator, and editor of the www.chinaadopttalk.com website the Rumor Queen has firm control over the content and structure of her blog. The postings are organized by date and each entry begins with an introductory paragraph written by the Rumor Queen. The subjects include, but are not limited to, a message congratulating parents who have recently been matched with their child, news of the latest rumors from the CCAA or adoption agencies, advice on how the adoption process works, bonding and behavior issues some adoptive children may have, polls and projections on when parents may be matched with a child, immigration questions, health concerns, travel tips, book and toy recommendations, and encouragement. The site allows parents to vent their frustrations about the long waiting time to adopt a child, share tips about keeping on top of the mountain of paperwork required, and to find emotional support and information. As the research in this dissertation will show, it also provides a platform to build a community for parents.

The Rumor Queen website is open for comments from the registered readers of www.chinaadopt.com and features the main blog and a forum where registered users may participate in the message boards.

The forum includes message boards for “General Discussion,” an area for “Paperchasing Discussion” (adoption related paperwork), Travel Tips, Special Needs, Special Interest Groups (Expedited/Chinese Heritage, Single Parents, Fertility Issues), and “Geographic Rooms” where people from Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway), Spain, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States may post messages about specific countries.

Registration for the main website and the forum is free and requires the user to provide an email address. According to the Rumor Queen the forum software and blog software do not use the same database. Users need to register twice to gain access to both areas. Once an email is provided a password is sent via email to the user. The Rumor Queen states she monitors each member’s first posting to help curb the number of “spammers.”

The Rumor Queen strictly enforces the rules she has made for the site and warns users to obey. As spelled out in number 16 in the “FAQ” section of her blog, the Rumor Queen does not tolerate people who do not

adhere to her rules and details what could prompt her to delete or “moderate” a posting.

“...Some people insist on naming their agency or pushing their religion, and thus they are now on moderated status...I have also started moderating people who feel the need to come to the site and lecture us about the hazards of rumors. We are adults. We know the hazards of listening to rumors. If you don’t like rumors then I’m not sure why you are here, but we certainly do not need to hear your lectures” (Rumor Queen blog, FAQ section #16).

This paper is restricted to examining the Rumor Queen blog postings and does not analyze the forum section. A number of reasons prompted me to examine the Rumor Queen blog postings and not include the material from the forum. First, the blog postings are updated almost daily and therefore are a good resource to examine the daily struggles and victories connected to adopting a child from China. This provides a window to examine the uses and gratifications associated with the Rumor Queen blog. Second, the forum area often strays off the topic of international adoption and a portion of the material posted in this area is not relevant to the issues being studied. For example, an area of the forum asks for travel tips and includes a posting asking for suggestions for “A Good Chinese Restaurant in New York.” Another area of the forum is basically an online swap site or garage sale. People can offer hand-me-

downs and used baby equipment. The forum area is updated on a haphazard basis and the topics are often not directly related to international adoption issues.

The first entry for December 2006 brings exciting news and contains 196 responses. The headline for the posting is “Pictures!!!!” The four exclamation points included by the Rumor Queen herself provide an exuberant grammatical visualization of exhilaration. At 9:19 that Friday morning the Rumor Queen posted links to 42 separate, personal blog sites of families who just received the first photos of their new child waiting for them in China. In the adoption field these pictures are called “referral photos” and are the first images adoptive parents have of their children. The families getting a referral on December 1 had a Log In Date (LID) between August 26 and September 8, 2005. This means the families had been waiting approximately 16 months on the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) waiting list. These parents eventually traveled to China in January or February 2006 to meet their children.

The emotions and gratitude some Rumor Queen blog users felt are seen in many of the postings that day. For example, Manda4lilly, states: “This site has been absolutely intoxicating these past 24 hours. The excitement and joy warms my heart and the pictures of the babies are worth 1000 words” (Rumor Queen blog posting December 1, 2006)!

Another poster, Jolenesmom, wrote, "This is my first post. I have been monitoring the site the whole time and feel like I know everyone. We got the call yesterday and are the proud parents of Guo Ping soon to be Jolene Marine. Thank you Rumor Queen and all the members for helping through this long journey. My love goes out to all of you" (Rumor Queen blog posting December 1, 2006).

The excitement about the referral news prompts many messages of congratulations and the positive responses go global. A check of the posting's time stamp is evidence that some of the posters are from outside of the United States. (Due to time zone differences the time stamp shows the posting was written before the Rumor Queen wrote the entry in the U.S.) For example, limboforlibby's timestamp is: November 30, 2006 at 2:14 pm in response to the December 1 entry. The poster writes: "Congratulations to all of you!! RQ, you must be astounded at how this blog has grown into an international phenomenon! I am loving having all of this contact and flow from all over the world. It is such a beautiful thing to be able to share with so many. Wow. Can hardly wait to see all of the pictures from everywhere" (Rumor Queen blog, December 1, 2006)!

The elation and joy expressed in the first postings on December 1 quickly changes when the Rumor Queen creates an additional post later in the day with the headline "Referrals past September 8th." In the brief

opening paragraph to her second December 1 posting she shares her discovery that, “At least three agencies received referrals for their people logged in past September 8th. People with LIDS’ of September 10th, September 12th, and September 14th received their referral. On the other hand, I know we’ve had a bunch of September 9th and 12th people on this site who do not have a referral. I really don’t know what’s going on” (Rumor Queen blog, December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

This news prompts 176 responses from users of the Rumor Queen site and fuels anxiety and confusion. To understand why the news is so emotional it is important to detail how the adoption process works in China and the significance of the so-called “LID.” The China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) is known for having an orderly adoption process and for its adherence to the rules it created for the international adoption program. American parents interested in adopting a child from China must work with an accredited adoption service provider and submit an extensive list of documents (certified birth certificates, health examinations, notarized certificates of employment and income, FBI clearance records, fingerprints, etc.). Adoptive parents must also submit an enormous amount of additional paperwork, complete home studies and criminal background checks, secure letters of reference, and adhere to U.S. immigration rules (USCIS). Once this long list is completed the accredited

adoption agency submits what is called a “dossier” to the CCAA. In the acronym-happy world of international adoption this is known as DTC—or Dossier to Country. Once you are “DTC” your file goes to the CCAA “Review Room” to make sure the file is complete and there are no issues. After the dossier is approved in the “Review Room” it usually takes about two to three months to get your Log In Date—or LID. The LID represents the date your dossier was officially entered into the CCAA system and is essentially your place on the adoption process line. All parents seeking to adopt a child from China go through the same process and the parent’s country of origin or adoption agency does not have an impact on the Log In Date. In other words, the CCAA processes files in the order it receives them and parents from Denmark, France, Spain, Canada, Great Britain, or America can all have the same Log In Date (LID). As will be detailed in another section of this dissertation, adoption officials interviewed for this dissertation feel it is the global nature of China’s LID process and the international reach of the Rumor Queen that combines to make the site a powerful tool for waiting parents. As one adoption official interviewed for this dissertation put it, “If someone in Spain has your same LID date and gets a referral—you know sitting here in America you should get a referral seven hours later.”

In response to the Rumor Queen's second blog entry on December 1, 2006 many people express concern and question the CCAA's program.

An example of this is "eli's" posting:

"I agree, RQ, that the concern here is that what was once fairly predictable has suddenly become scary if you're one of the people who got skipped. I certainly don't begrudge those who got an unexpected referral—they are and should be thrilled. It just seems very unfair to be in the group with an earlier LID who appear to be overlooked. If I was in that group, my fear would be whether or not I'd ever get a referral. I'm not saying that's the case, in fact, I'm sure it's not, but when you've been waiting for so long and your emotions are so raw, panic sets in once the rug has been pulled out from under you. I feel that way and I don't even have an LID yet. As many have stated, part of our reason for choosing China's program was the fair and predictable nature of it. My heart just breaks for those who now feel such uncertainty, but I'm equally happy for those who received an early, unexpected surprise..." (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

"Blueberry11" echoes some of the concerns of "eli" and considers whether the popularity of the Rumor Queen blog site has changed the way waiting families get information about referrals. "Blueberry11" ponders the possible reasons why the CCAA may have apparently strayed from its orderly process.

"RQ, do you think there is any chance that this has happened in the past and we just didn't know about it? And now that you have such a huge following allowing more info to be available to all waiting families, perhaps things are just more apparent now? Just a thought, but I know, not likely. I can't tell you how much I have appreciated this site—the rumors, the info about China, the support from other waiting families, and of course the happiness of the referral recent announcements—it is an invaluable resource. Thank you RQ and her loyal community" (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2)!

Poster “jmlance” vents frustration and writes;

“To me all predictability is gone...I think it’s more like you are lucky if you get a referral even though it states your LID is included...:((Not trying to be a downer or anything, but frankly, I’m just bone frustrated at this moment. I love surprises but shoot, it’s just like when you get close you feel like the rug is pulled out from underneath you again...SCREAM” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2)!

The Rumor Queen herself responds to the postings and tries to clarify the situation for her readers. She writes; “(edited)...Someone just PM’s (private messaged) me that they are just screwing with us now. Looks like several people are thinking that.” (edited) “...In one case this does appear to be fixing a LID snafu. But not in the other cases. As I can assure you that there are plenty of LID snafus that stayed mixed up and were not rectified. I have no idea why this one agency was able to ask the CCAA to fix it and the CCAA fixed it when they wouldn’t do it for other agencies” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Later in the day the Rumor Queen chimes in again and states; “(edited)...I’ve been doing this a long time now. This is the first time I’ve seen people with later LID’s get a referral when people with earlier LID’s did not” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Poster “Number Cruncher” stirs up emotions and responses later in the day with this post;

“Have any of you people ever made a mistake? I know I have. Maybe someone at the CCAA just made a mistake. Maybe its not a huge conspiracy, and not an indication of anything at all, other than the employees of CCAA are human just like us and have mixed up some dates or stacks of paper.

I have a real problem with people who talk about this “mix-up” isn’t fair. Think back for a moment to the reason why CCAA exists in the first place. It is not because the Chinese government wants to find children for families in North America. CCAA exists to find homes for abandoned Chinese infants. That is the only reason why CCAA exists, and I think we would all do well to remember that.

Our LID is Feb/06 so this issue of September people being served out-of-order seems pretty trivial to me now. When the cut-off gets closer to our LID, maybe I will be more concerned than I am now about whether or not I am being treated “fairly.” But hopefully I will remember that I was really lucky to be born in North America, and it is these little girls who are the ones who have been treated “unfairly” by being born to parents who abandoned them.

So, in the context of who is being treated “unfairly” here, I think a mix-up of a few days is pretty trivial, and I hope I will not need reminding of that if someone jumps ahead of me in the LID line-up” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Seven minutes later “Megara” posts a response to “Number Cruncher’s” entry.

“Number Cruncher: The consistency of the program has been something people can rely on. For many people here, who’ve been (on) a rollercoaster of infertility treatments and domestic adoption failures (falling through), China’s consistency has been a huge draw, something that they could almost count on. Now, we all know things happen and I doubt the CCAA is doing anything intentionally wrong, but they have a problem lately with huge mistakes being made. Like I said above, I think they’ve just been terribly disorganized since their move. Now, you say a few days shouldn’t make a difference. But those few days may mean an extra month or two of waiting, and for those who’ve been through so much

already, those extra unexpected months are unnerving! I feel for the parents here who are having to experience the uncertainty in the program at this time” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Poster “atlastamom” writes that she does not “expect perfection” from this system but does expect the CCAA workers to pay attention to the details and make a “genuine effort to do the right thing.” She is one of the people caught in the LID date confusion at the CCAA and writes;

“The most painful, no at this point “heart-wrenching” aspect of this situation was that I was waiting for “the call.” It came—and it was then that I learned that we did not receive a referral – everyone else did, but we didn’t. I wish that when I had called our agency weeks ago, about this very issue, that I had been told to prepare for the possibility of a delay. Instead, I was told that all was o.k. I believe that our agency genuinely felt all WAS ok. Whether they actually checked with the CCAA, or whether they talked to a reliable source, I’ll likely never know. We’ve waited over two years for this to happen, so no, in the grand scheme of things, a few more weeks (I hope) is inconsequential. I tell myself that we will ultimately receive the child who is meant to be in our family—and I do believe it. Unfortunately, my heart is having some difficulty grasping what my mind knows is the case. LID Sept. 7, 2005” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Poster “waitbabywait” responds to “atlastamom” and writes:

“One thing I never thought of was waiting for the call, and then getting it, only to hear there was no referral for us. I think I can wait fairly patiently as long as it takes, and if they refer up to one day before mine I can wait one more month, that sort of thing. But having them refer my date an/or past it, and only to find out that I am not in that group, that would be really upsetting. Thanks for telling your stories because it really brought it home to me. I’ll keep you in my thoughts, and wish you the best” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Parents seeking to adopt a child from China have very little control over the process and are dependent on Chinese government workers at the CCAA and social workers at their own adoption agency. As illustrated by previous postings, many people are attracted to the China program because, compared to other countries participating in international adoption, the CCAA seems to have an orderly program run by a powerful central agency connected to the federal government. Therefore, parents may panic when this previously predictable program shows evidence of not adhering to its own rules.

The first day of December 2006 was an active day on the Rumor Queen site and included thoughts from several posters expressing their gratitude for the existence of the site. These posters clearly spell out the uses and gratifications they get from reading and participating on the site. Poster “waitingforsam” states; “(edited)...Thank you RQ for this site. My agency does not post any information other than referrals received and they only post that at the end of the week. Your site gives me up-to-date information and for that I am truly grateful. This site is a wonderful support tool, when used properly...” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 posting 2).

Poster “waitingforsam” illustrates how some of the main themes discovered in the textual analysis of the Rumor Queen site appear in one

posting. In this excerpt “waitingforsam” expresses gratitude for the Rumor Queen site and issues with the lack of communication from the posters adoption agency.

Poster “matnglo” concurs and writes;

“This is my place to go for a sense of normalcy. It makes me feel comforted to hear that it is ok to have the feelings I am having. I don’t post very often, when I need to get something off my chest. I feel as though this is the only place I can do that without (it) falling on deaf ears. Also, some of the things I may feel may cause me to feel guilty and ashamed from time to time and it makes all the difference to find supportive words and know I’m not alone. Please, be gentle” (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

“Rumorslave” echoes the previous poster’s appreciation for the site and is another clear illustration of the uses and gratifications found on the Rumor Queen site. As the Uses and Gratifications theory suggests, the users of the Rumor Queen site are not passive consumers of the media and are actively helping to create content and integrate this form of media into their lives. “Rumorslave” writes:

“(edited)...I’ve always liked this group because, at least in the past, it has been OK to vent. No one I know personally gets it, including DH (dear husband). I mean friends and family are super supportive of our adoption and they try to follow along with my endless (and certainly very boring to them) discussion of LID’s and referrals and RQ—but they don’t get it!!!!

RQ I’m so glad you’re keeping this a place where people can complain (within reason) without being told they shouldn’t feel a certain way. Like I’ve told my DH at least 100 times “I just want you to listen to my problems and commiserate not try to solve them!!!!” --after only 20 years of marriage

he's starting to get it ☺" (Rumor Queen blog December 1, 2006 Posting 2).

Parents describe the adoption process as "an emotional rollercoaster." Petty political disagreements between China and the U.S, health concerns such as SARS, and natural disasters like floods, blizzards, and earthquakes can all contribute to slowdowns at the CCAA and delays in the adoption process. Parents hope they reach the "finish line" and are eventually matched with a child but the reality is the "finish line" is fluid and due to changing events it can keep moving back while you're running the race. One big event on the minds of parents in December 2006 is the international showcase of the upcoming Olympic games hosted in Beijing in 2008.

On December 3, 2006 many Rumor Queen posters share their concerns about how the Olympic games may affect the pace of work at the CCAA and the rate of Chinese children being matched with parents. This issue is examined more in-depth during the first posting on December 5. The Rumor Queen's opening paragraph seems aimed at relieving the worries of adoptive parents and to quell fears of a slowdown due to the Olympics. The Rumor Queen, in part, tells her readers the 2008 Olympic games "(are) still too far away for anyone to know for sure how it is going to work out" (Rumor Queen blog December 5, 2006 Posting 1). The fears

of these parents have some basis in previous history. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, South Korea dramatically slowed its international adoption program in 1988 due to what it deemed to be criticism and unflattering media coverage. During that time period stories in the *New York Times* highlighted the number of South Korean children adopted internationally. North Korea criticized South Korea's adoption program and claimed that South Korea's "...selling its children to Western countries was the ultimate form of capitalism." According to several sources, the South Korean government delayed the scheduled departure of adopted children before and during the Olympics. And the number of Korean children adopted by American families began to decrease, from over 6,200 in 1986 (before the 1988 Olympics) to just over 1,700 in 1993. (http://www.pbs.org/pov/firstpersonplural/history_southkorea.php)

A possible slowdown due to the Olympics is just one of the issues the Rumor Queen addresses on December 5 and she uses the balance of that entry's opening paragraph to circle back to the issue of the CCAA possibly going "out of order" and matching some families with LID dates past September 8, 2005.

"I still do not know what to think about the people with referrals past 9/8. There are several more batches of them that are being reported since the last time I talked about it. I know that at least three of the batches were for just a handful of people, so I'm working on the theory that they had an

orphanage with 3 or 4 or 5 children and they went to the next group in line with 3 or 4 or 5 families waiting to be matched. What I need from the rest of you in order to try to prove or disprove this is two things. 1) If you received a referral and your LID is past 9/9 could you let me know how many people are in your LID group and what your LID is? and 2) If you have a LID of 9/9 through 9/14 and you do not have a referral and there are less than 6 people in your LID group can you let me know how many are in your group and what your LID is, please? For both groups, if you'll let me know your agency it will help me figure out if I have two groups of 5 or one group of 5. As always, I won't share the agency name" (Rumor Queen blog December 5, 2006 Posting 1).

This entry asks the users of the site to be active participants in trying to solve the mystery of why the CCAA allegedly did not follow its usually predictable program and to discover why parents with a LID outside of the main batch were matched with children. This is an example of how the Rumor Queen asks readers to pool their resources to provide useful information not found in mainstream media sources. Again, actively participating in the creation of media content is a hallmark of the Uses and Gratifications theory of mass communication. This first posting on December 5 received 78 responses.

The inner workings of the CCAA is another area of information readers of the Rumor Queen do not find in mainstream media sources nor from their adoption agencies. The Rumor Queen taps her sources to provide her readers with information about the CCAA and readers

contribute their own tidbits of information on the Rumor Queen site. One of the most pressing and perhaps even “cosmic” questions a parent has centers on how they are matched with a specific child. On December 7 the Rumor Queen writes a lengthy entry detailing how the CCAA matching room works and shares information from her sources about how officials match parents and children.

“I’ve heard from several people who have had the opportunity to speak with someone who works in the matching room. The various conversations seem to all agree that they first look for something that stands out: a matching birthday, a baby who looks a lot like a parent, or a baby who likes music and a parent who teaches music. Several matching people have stated they match by bone structure of the baby’s face and the parent’s faces (this is why they need our passport photos, so they can compare our mug shot with the baby’s mug shot.) Some have stated that they used Chinese astrology, also” (Rumor Queen blog December 7, 2006).

This entry receives 60 responses from Rumor Queen readers.

Most of the entries include a description of the poster lamenting their terrible passport photo. (Some of the accounts are actually quite humorous.) The writers are concerned that dim lighting, sour expressions, and a bad hair day could mean they may not be matched with the child meant for their family. Some of the posters are frustrated that they were not aware of what the CCAA uses to match parents with children. Many of the posters use humor as a way to distract from the real anxiety they feel

about being matched with the child meant to be in their family. Poster

“twOH” writes;

“...(edited) I’ve told friends they try to match our babies features with ours...in the mug shot my nose looks like: -→ and you can actually see up my nose—my hair is banana yellow (from the photo, not normally) (and just to clarify the hair on my head not in my nose.) Well. I guess when someone says, we didn’t expect your baby’s hair to be banana yellow I can say...let me show you the picture they used to match us! OK! I will say I don’t care what she looks like and that’s not the point but it sure would have been nice if they’re making all the efforts to match features that our agency tells us that so we can do our part and make sure the picture looks something like us” (Rumor Queen blog December 7, 2006).

Some of the Rumor Queen posters who are going through the process for the second or third time try to alleviate these fears and share stories of how their first child from China is a “perfect fit” for their family.

Poster “mia2me” writes;

“As others have said, I would not worry about what your passport photo looks like...(mine is an exceptionally “bad hair day!”) ...and somehow, despite that photo which I would not have submitted had I known that was used for the match!...they were able to match me with a daughter who is, not only beautiful, but is a phenomenal match for my husband and I...Her personality somehow is the better parts of both me and my husband. Ever since we brought her home we have marveled at how perfect she is for us – and how special the matching process really is. It is really unbelievable...For all the frustration so many of us have with the CCAA, the matching process works so well...and really defies explanation” (Rumor Queen blog December 7, 2006).

The paragraphs about unattractive “mug shots” and stories of how parents are matched with the child meant for their family is an example of how the readers and contributors to the site can provide support for one another. These online exchanges highlight the type of emotional venting support, and information found on the Rumor Queen site. It is also an illustration of a phrase often uttered in the Chinese adoption community. “Every parent who gets on the plane after adopting a child from China thinks they’re leaving the country with the smartest and most beautiful child. They all secretly think they have the best child ever born in China.” I know I had these exact feelings when my daughter and I boarded the plane leaving China in July 2009.

December 8, 2006 marks a dramatic turning point in China’s international adoption program because it is the day word of the CCAA’s rule changes begin to surface and be reported on the Rumor Queen site. As mentioned previously, the Rumor Queen writes five separate entries on December 8 and there are 260 responses from readers that day.

The Rumor Queen’s first entry on December 8 is an analysis of “Wait Time Rumors.” The Rumor Queen states she’s heard from two agencies reporting a slowdown at the CCAA and an increase in the time to be matched with a child. Sixty-nine people write responses to the posting with the first coming from “anonymouswait” who states: “Does it even

matter what the agencies have to say at this point? For the past 10 months, I've heard nothing from my agency. Nada. Zilch. The only information we get is coming from here, RQ...." (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 1). "crazy4emily" responds to this posting and writes: "My agency isn't quite as bad as "anonymouswait's" but still. They say things like it's just over 14 months and we could see it being 15 months soon. I feel like shouting at them, thanks for the news flash! They say nothing about what will happen, could happen, expected to happen. Nothing. I'm so frustrated some days! Thank goodness for RQ. Otherwise I would be completely in the dark if I were just listening to my agency..." (Rumor Queen blog, December 8, 2006 Posting 1). Both of these postings are clear examples of how readers of the Rumor Queen site find it a valuable source of information and communication. The comments also illustrate what parents perceive as a frustrating lack of communication from their adoption agency. In their development of the Uses and Gratifications theory Katz, Gurevitch and Haas developed 35 "needs" on the social and psychological functions of mass media and put them into five categories. These "need" categories include: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release (West and Turner, 2010). It is clear the users of the Rumor Queen site are using this form of mass media to fulfill their "Cognitive Needs."

According to Katz et. al. audience members (users) fulfill their cognitive needs by acquiring information, knowledge, understanding, and tension release.

This first December 8 posting is also peppered with questions from posters seeking “any information about the big CCAA meeting.” Some people in the Rumor Queen community say they are beginning to hear rumors about drastic changes to the CCAA’s rules. These rumors receive some confirmation in the Rumor Queen’s next posting titled “The Big Meeting.” This second December 8 posting is long and the Rumor Queen outlines the CCAA’s rule changes:

“The CCAA yearly meeting with all the agencies happened last night (U.S. time). We have information out of the meeting from one agency, a reputable agency that is trustworthy. I will feel better when we have this coming from more than one agency...They state that the number of dossiers is 2 times the number of children the CCAA has to place. The wait time from LID to referral with not shorten at this time and it may get longer. They note the CCAA does not define what they mean by longer...They state that the following requirements will be in place for all dossiers accepted after May 1, 2007. Read that again – for all dossiers accepted after that date. If your dossier is in by that date then presumably you are okay under the current rules. The new rules are stated to be:

- Married couples only. No singles. Agencies may continue to submit singles dossiers within their 8% constraints until May 1, 2007 and then the CCAA will not accept any more single dossiers.
- Married couples must be married over 2 years if there are no previous marriages. If there are previous marriages then the present marriage must be over 5 years. However, no more than two previous marriages will be allowed (it is unclear if this is two per person or two per couple)

- Each parent must be 30 to 50 years old. No parent can be outside of this range. Upper limit can be 55 for a family in the waiting child program (and that “can be” kind of looks like it’s going to be on a case by case basis, not an absolute, but it’s hard to tell).
- The CCAA wants healthy parents – no infectious disease, no mental disease (including depression or anxiety), no blindness, and no serious disease or disability. There is a note about waiting to see what the CCAA’s formal notice says, which sounds to me like they hope there will be more information in the formal notice about these things. There is another note that cancer was not specifically mentioned.
- Both parents must have a BMI under 40.
- At least one parent must have a stable job. Income requirement is \$10,000 per family member including the child to be adopted.
- Family’s net assets must be over \$80,000
- Each parent must have a high school education or higher.
- No more than five children in the home including the child to be adopted. The youngest child in the home must be over 1 year old. Exceptions will be considered for the waiting child program.
- No criminal record. There is a note about the CCAA not elaborating so we will again have to wait to see what the formal notice says” (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2).

There is a wide variety of reaction in the 95 responses to “The Big Meeting” posting. Some posters are grateful to the Rumor Queen for quickly getting the information out to the community, others seem resigned to the changes, some posters express their mounting discouragement with the international adoption program, others express their heartbreak at not being able to adopt another child from China and seeing their dreams disappear.

Many posters are frustrated with a lack of information from their agencies and express gratitude for the Rumor Queen’s ability to report

information. Again, my analysis of the coded/tagged excerpts of the site finds the second most common posting is from a poster “Thankful for the Rumor Queen,” and the fourth most common coded/tagged excerpts focus on adoption agency issues. Wyofamily writes: “Thank you RQ, for the up-to-date information. I don’t know what we’d do without your savvy analyses and astute knowledge of this process. You’re amazing and we appreciate you very much. Knowledge is power, even when it’s not what we want to hear, because we can respond accordingly. Sincere gratitude beaming your way” (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2).

Poster Mercredi writes: “Wow. My agency is planning a conference call in a few weeks and I’m guessing this is going to be the discussion. I know we’re safe (LID 08/06) but knowing I’d be rejected from future adoptions makes me feel kind of ill...” (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2).

Later that afternoon poster rmccl writes an entry that stirs up many emotions and responses on the Rumor Queen site. In the posting rmccl shares some personal information—he’s a married Christian male, 43-years-old, in “extremely fit and probably in better shape than the average 30 year old,” and would “still qualify under the new CCAA adoption guidelines.” He signs his post as “Dave” and writes:

“I have just read the comments about the new rules for China and looking for increased demand worldwide, they make sense to me.

Before everyone jumps down my throat, think of it this way....YOU are giving YOUR child up for adoption and you have to choose suitable parents. Do you lean towards a married couple or single female? Do you pick the \$20k a year salesman or the \$50k a year professional? Do you pick a healthy younger couple that has an active lifestyle or an obese couple? How about the childless couple or the family with 6 kids? Think about these conditions this way and you can't be upset. They are thinking about these children and what is what we consider to be best-case scenario. It's not personal, just methodical. In the real world this may not be a best case but statistically speaking it is...(post edited to avoid duplicating identifying information)

I feel sorry for singles that have been trying to adopt. I don't necessarily agree that they should be able to but I still feel for them. I know the disappointment they must feel.

Sorry if I offended anyone, I am just stating my opinion on the subject. We are all entitled to my opinion....oops I meant your opinion! :-)

Hoping for a special batch before CNY!! (Chinese New Year) Dave (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2).

Dozens of posters respond to rmccl/Dave and state his words are not constructive and are hurtful. The Rumor Queen herself weighs in and reminds people to “not discuss whether we think the rules are right or wrong. We don't get a say in what the rules are going to be, we just have to live with what China decides...”

Poster waiting4baby is indicative of many of the responses

to rmccl and states:

“rmccl, you have got to be kidding, right? This is not the place to debate although I would very much like to! HOWEVER, If I was

giving my baby up for adoption I would be looking for the loving family (married or not) that could bring my baby up in an environment of love. I wouldn't care if they had the six figure job with the comfortable nest egg. Because believe me not all those people are happy loving people....

I would be led to believe these new rules weren't put into place because they think the people that fall into those rules make better parents, they were put into place so that the number of qualified people decreases. The fact is the average family/person adopting is a middle family income family who wants a baby...bottom line (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2)!

Rmcel responds to the criticism and writes:

I knew that I would get the loving caring single story.....all things being equal.....would you prefer a happily married family over a single? I would guess 90% of people would.....I'm not knocking singles, just being realistic. Yes there are bad married rich people and good poor fat people and so so gay people (sic) andthe list goes on.....just look at it objectively with all things being equal.....they pick what most of the population would consider as preferred "qualities". Doesn't make it right, but it seems to be the new way.

This prompts a response from amycate:

Dave, Your "insights" are not at all helpful. In fact, they are hurtful to those of us who are pretty devastated at this news. And you are not right in your assumption either. If I had a child to give up, the first 3 qualifications on my list would not be that they be rich, thin, and married. I would seek out those with a loving nature, compassion, trustworthiness, kindness, maturity, and intelligence first...(edited)

But see, China can't quantify most of those things. So they choose the things they can quantify in order to reduce the number of applicants..." (edited) (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 2).

This emotionally charged online discussion is an example of how users of the Rumor Queen vent their frustrations with China's international adoption process and seek emotional support from other posters on the site. Again, both of these topics are among the top five areas coded/tagged in the excerpts selected from the Rumor Queen site in December 2006.

The topic of single people wanting to adopt children is not only limited to the exchange among rmccl/Dave and those disagreeing with his stance. On December 15 a poster named WaitingforHelena reveals she gave up her spot as a single person adopting from China. She made this decision even though, at this date, the CCAA had yet to post the rule changes and officially announce the criteria for who is eligible to adopt a child.

"Well, I'm officially out. I just gave up my slot today. I realized with the new single rule given that I am in an area of the country where the USCIS office is slower, I would have lost a large sum of money if the office was ANY slower than their average processing time. I didn't find that realistic so I'm switching country programs to Vietnam. I hope that program works out. I'm not sure since it is just reopening and therefore doesn't have a real track record to go by" (Rumor Queen blog December 15, 2006).

A poster named ChocolateChips responds to

WaitingforHelena and states:

“Dear WaitingforHelena--I was sorry to read your post above. That must have been the hardest decision to make. As a fellow single who has also been waiting a long time to be a mom, your post really struck home for me. I wish you the best with Vietnam, and hope that you’ll be hugging your Helena very soon” (Rumor Queen blog December 15, 2006).

The balance of the Rumor Queen postings on December 15 reflects the worry and confusion about the rumored CCAA rule changes. Many posters state they’re frustrated with the lack of information coming from their adoption agency. Maisey13 writes:

“Our agency tells us virtually nothing! We won’t receive much/any information much less clarification. I specifically emailed my social worker with questions about the new regulations, as they will impact our ability to adopt in the future. The response I received was almost along the lines of “how do you know this information” and “Well, why worry about your next adoption when you haven’t completed this one”. How? The Internet, duh! Why? Because we want to build a family. Our agency “prides” itself on having a staff member in China, but what is the point if they do not share information, clarified or otherwise? They indicated they “need to evaluate the translation of the information before sharing it”. Why are they are so hesitant to share information that has been stated as fact by other agencies? I think they know they would most definitely lose potential clients...they are still telling new families that things in China are stable and the wait it 12 months! Uuuggghh! Thanks RQ and everyone for sharing what you know!!!!” (Rumor Queen blog December 15, 2006).

Others posters on the Rumor Queen report some information is trickling out from their agencies. RayinVA writes:

“We received an e-mail from our caseworker which contained notes from the meeting taken by their representative in China. They said the new rules were unofficial and thus have not posted anything about them. I will say that our agency’s notes contained nothing substantially different than what we’ve heard, except for one thing: there was one item which stated that families that participate in religions that do not allow for blood transfusions, immunizations, or other related science/medical related activity, will no longer be accepted.

Has anyone heard this one before? Probably won’t affect a large percentage of people, but it’s the first I’d heard about this particular restriction” (Rumor Queen blog December 15, 2006).

The Rumor Queen herself responds to RayinVa’s questions and states, “The thing about denying based on religions against blood transfusions is nothing new—they’ve been denying Jehovah’s Witnesses for this reason for a while” (Rumor Queen blog December 15, 2006).

The lack of information from adoption agencies, the CCAA, and mainstream media is a source of frustration and, as previously mentioned, the spark for many postings on the Rumor Queen blog. From the postings it is easy to deduce how this group is dependent on the few sources of information available to them. An example of this is seen in the thread of postings on December 9: On that date the Rumor Queen mentions the CCAA may not include an information box found on its website that contains information about the progress of the Review Room and which LID dates are next to be matched with children (the so-called “Status

Box”). This CCAA Status Box update is also included on the upper right side on the homepage of the Rumor Queen site. There is speculation from many posters lamenting the fact that the CCAA may no longer provide this information. Many posters write they are irritated this “little scrap” of information from the CCAA may disappear. Poster jmlance writes, “The CCAA taking that one thing away from parents is a sad thing...and I think a mistake. Not many agencies are forthcoming with information...I will be glad when this rollercoaster is OVER for us...it’s been soooo incredibly hard“ (Rumor Queen blog December 8, 2006 Posting 4).

A poster from the United Kingdom who uses the name “frustrated” writes,

“Well without the status update I for one would be UTTERLY lost without your site RQ...as here in the UK we don’t have an agency at all. Without you, I would be going up the wall! For those of you who complain about your agency think about this...we don’t have an agency. It is govt to govt. The respective UK govt dept has just stopped letting us call them AT ALL. We can only communicate by fax, letters or email...then they may not answer for up to 15 days. And this is in a democracy. RQ THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE” (Rumor Queen blog December 9, 2006)!

The difficulty of the long and unpredictable wait to be matched with a child is the most common topic of the excerpted postings on the Rumor Queen blog. The disappointment of an “incomplete family” seems to

increase during the holiday season. As the calendar approaches

Christmas and Hanukkah in 2006 poster [iwantmybaby](#) strikes a familiar

chord with many Rumor Queen readers:

“I am one of those early 2006 LIDers who thought FOR SURE we’d have the baby home by this Christmas. I remember sending out our Christmas cards last December and thinking “next year we’ll have the new baby in the pic!” No new baby was in our Christmas card. I became “officially” paper pregnant in Jan., then 3 members of my family got pregnant in the spring. Guess what: I’m the only one without a new baby this Christmas! Well, here’s my BEST WISHES that WE WILL have our babies next Christmas... I’m not jinxing us am I” (Rumor Queen blog December 21, 2006)???

Maranara agrees with [iwantmybaby](#) and responds:

“[iwantmybaby](#) – It’s horrible, but I guess I’m glad I wasn’t the only one with the Christmas cards thought too. It’s so hard to get all the picture cards from our friends with their cutie pie kids. With all the infertility stuff I’ve been thinking “next year I’ll get to send picture cards!” for five years. Sigh...hey Santa – all I want for Christmas is some referrals (Rumor Queen blog December 21, 2006)!

[sewhopeful22](#) chimes in:

“[iwantmybaby](#)-

I have a March LID and at one point believed we would at the very least be celebrating Christmas in China. Now I don’t have faith that we will have our daughter by next Christmas. I don’t have family giving birth in the last year, but I have had to deal with all the births of friends and family over the last 7 years. Some were easier than

others. But the strangest grief I get is during Christmas anytime the Christmas story is shown or told... the birth gets to me.

My hamsters just had triplets! I'm jealous of them too"(Rumor Queen blog December 21, 2006)!

GleasonBaby writes:

"We have expectant sisters-in-law on both sides, kids galore, and cannot believe we don't have our little one home yet (LID 9/9/05) So, we've decided to make this a "Family Free Xmas" — we're off to New York City with another couple! I cannot tell you what a relief this is! Hopefully, soon after we're home, we'll have our referral. Please" (Rumor Queen Blog December 21, 2006)?

As the previous Rumor Queen postings illustrate, becoming a parent through adoption is not the "typical" path to parenthood. Parents are embarking on a journey and life choice that may be unique in their family of origin and in their social circles. This may mean parents choosing adoption may be more likely to turn to other areas of support outside of their families and immediate social networks. Adoption officials interviewed for this dissertation agree that the nature of the adoption journey prompts waiting parents to reach outside of their circle of immediate friends and family. The adoption officials say parents often choose to not disclose much about their adoption plans to friends, family and co-workers because of the uncertain timing and the emotional rollercoaster associated with the international adoption process. As will be

detailed in another area of this dissertation, the adoption officials interviewed say parents are often looking for a “community of people” to help them mark milestones in their adoption journey and provide emotional support and information. These adoption professionals think parents find this community on the Rumor Queen website.

Rumor Queen readers anxiously await the hint of information from the CCAA and, better yet, news of referrals. A careful reading of the postings shows the anxiety level appears to be increasing as the calendar approaches the last weekend before Christmas. On Friday, December 22, 2006 the Rumor Queens titles her entry, “The Last Day,” and states, “Today is our last chance of referrals before Christmas. I think there is a chance that they will show up today. Maybe not a huge chance, but still a chance. The rumors seem to be saying the cut off will be somewhere between September 23rd and the end of the month...(edited) As for the new rules, I know there is a lot of speculation flying around, but I still say we are just going to have to wait for the official statement to know the details” (Rumor Queen blog December 22, 2006).

On the third December 18 posting the Rumor Queen shares some of the statistics from the site with her readers. She writes, “Last month (November 2006) we came close to 1.5 million page loads.” (She states, “I had absolutely no idea my little rumor blog would grow into what it has

grown into. But...(edited) I love the little community we've formed (Rumor Queen blog December 18, 2006 Posting 3).

There are many postings congratulating the Rumor Queen for these "impressive" numbers and thanking her for her work. Bloomer writes, "Impressive numbers! You've created a community of quality communication, support and friendship...truly something to be proud of. Thank you for making such a difference to our family and our journey. We're grateful!" Bornfromtheheart concurs and states, "WOW that even had impressed my husband. Now he knows that I'm not the only one who has a non-curable addiction. I don't think there's a group been formed to get us off. Maybe the agencies who a(re) non believers should have a look at how many times the web's are hit, LOL.." Theups writes, "WOW!!! I had NO idea there were THAT many people as obsessed with checking that site as I was!! LOL!!! Glad to know that I am not alone. And ever MORE glad to know that you, RQ, have done such a wonderful job keeping this running!! I'm sure it's bigger (and more work) than you ever expected, be we sure ALL appreciate you!!

Mom4tori writes, "RQ, Again, I am amazed at all you do for this group! This site has gotten me thorough some REALLY tough times in the last year while awaiting a referral. Now the agony of waiting for TA (travel appointment). What you have created is like a family full of supporters

that pulls us through the hard times and celebrates the victories. Thanks does not seem to be enough.”

The second posting on December 22 has the headline “Official CCAA Statement” and is the official word of the CCAA rule changes. Many posters that day remark about the mainstream media’s lack of coverage about international adoptions and the CCAA’s rule changes. That said, on the Rumor Queen’s blog on December 20 a few posters mention seeing a small amount of coverage of this topic. Elizabeth posts the first response on December 20 and writes, “Both CNN online and BBC have articles today commenting on the new CCAA rules.”

“Waitingforkaitlyn” writes: “There is an article on MSNBC that states someone in the CCAA confirmed that there were new regulations but refused to verify any of the details being given by the agencies. Here is that link: <http://www.msnbs.msn.com/id/16286524/>” (Rumor Queen blog December 20, 2006).

Blossombaby writes:

“On another note, whenever I read something in a newspaper I know something about, and see all the garbles, I then end up with a serious lack of confidence in everything else I read in the papers. The New York Times really messed it up. In fact, I don’t think any paper thought to mention that since the CCAA hasn’t officially announced these new rules, NO ONE knows what they will be for

sure...or that each adoption agency seems to understand them slightly differently. The Times also said there were way more China adopting parents wanting to adopt than there were babies in China orphanages to adopt (good grief), making no mention of paper ready babies or the large number of orphanages not participating in IA. Oh, and the cost of adopting from China is \$15,000. We should all wish. So..all the papers have to offer is a garbled version of what we have learned here. Therefore, thank you, RQ, that I don't have to rely on the unreliable press"
Blossombaby. (Rumor Queen blog December 20, 2006).

Several posters mention an article in the Wall Street Journal article titled "China Weighs Rules Restricting Adoptions," found on page "D1." A separate section of this dissertation analyzes the mainstream media's coverage of the CCAA rule changes.

As will be detailed in other section of this dissertation, adoption officials and Rumor Queen users interviewed for this paper reported a lack of mainstream media coverage focusing on the CCAA rule changes and few reports of detailing news about China's adoption program. I conducted a Google search using the terms "China Center for Adoption Affairs December 2006" and did not find many articles covering the subject. I also did not find much coverage during a search of the 2006 archives of *The New York Times*, the *Star Tribune*, *ABC News*, *CBS News*, *NBC News*, *National Public Radio (NPR)*, *BBC News* and *BBC World*. The few articles and stories found on the subject will be outlined in

a separate section of this dissertation examining mainstream media coverage of China's international adoption program and the CCAA's rule changes.

The hopeful and upbeat tone on the Rumor Queen blog the first day in December 2006 is in sharp contrast to the sad, stressful, and hopeless postings on the blog 30 days later as news of the CCAA changes begins to sink in and people wait for information from the CCAA and their adoption agencies. The headline for the Rumor Queen's first posting on December 31, 2006 is "An Update, But Not The One We Wanted." The Rumor Queen tells her audience that there's no way to determine if the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) is working over the New Year holiday. She also can't predict if and when people will be matched with their children.

This news prompts many posters to declare they're going to mark the New Year online with the Rumor Queen community. Several posters say they are playing the drinking game "quarters" as they sit in front of the computer screen waiting for any bit of new information on the Rumor Queen. Poster jmlance seems to be struggling with the lack of information and the waiting process. "Okay, in tears as I write this, RQ, thank you for saying what you said about 9/29 still in the running. (to be matched) I did read on our agency's site that there will be no mail running on Tues as

Pres. Bush has declared it a day of mourning for Gerald Ford's passing...does this affect FedEx, DHL too? I just want to see my baby girl....9/29 and barely hanging on...." (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2).

Poster Marythefifth attempts to lift the mood with some humor as she writes: "I just want to point out that we are all online talking about drinking (alone, at home) and not in the bathroom primping for a night of drinking on the town. What a band of losers we are! Just kidding! Thank goodness those days of New Year's partying are over. I'm thrilled to be in sweatpants tonight. Let's get this party started" (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2)!

Poster Ken writes, "Happy New Year to the world from Upstate, New York. Governments, Fed-ex, the Olympics, the weather all work in mysterious ways to make sure we are matched with the child we are destined to be with. There's nothing more special" (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2)!

Many other posters chime in with New Year's greetings and statements of support. Poster kcbovk writes, "You want to talk about pitiful. I'm in the middle of the desert in southern California at the dunes with my family and friends. I am walking around holding my phone—pda—in the air to try and get a signal to connect online. Our friends are asking

me what the H::I'm doing and I just grumble "adoption stuff." So I don't think playing quarters alone on New Years Eve with a computer is pitiful. Waving your phone around like a mad woman and talking to yourself seems a bit worse."

Poster familyforbabyfaith writes: "Happy New Year Everybody!!!! I am a little sad. Just because last year at this time I was saying "this is it, 2006, this is the year we get our baby!" And now, we are almost to 2007, and not even a referral has been given...But there is hope. (edited) So I can now say, "this is it, 2007, this is the year we bring our baby home!" And that makes me very happy! (edited) It will not be without struggles, but it will still be very sweet. Happy New Year Everybody, thank you RQ for keeping this site up all 2006 for us, you are such a blessing to us all" (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2)!!!!

Poster anxiousdad writes: "May the year be full of blessings for all of us who wait for our daughters who wait to share the love we have for them. I pray this year will see a change and that the process will speed up. But if it doesn't, I pray God will keep us in his care and give us the blessing of patience and understanding that there is a reason why! To all of you and to Rumor Queen, Happy New Year" (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2)!

Poster budababy writes; "...One of my New Year resolutions is not to think the CCAA is torturing me by withholding info...etc!!! You know what I mean??!! Realistically, I think the CCAA plows away without a thought on us. Like competent surgeons...they divorce themselves from investing emotionally in their work so they can work objectively. Imagine if they invested emotionally in their work" (Rumor Queen blog December 31, 2006 posting 2)!!!

My analysis of the 3,270 postings on the Rumor Queen site (www.chinaadopttalk.com) from December 2006 reveals how people around the United States and the world turned to the Rumor Queen site and community during a time of change in China's international adoption program.

The excerpts from the postings from those 31 days show the uses and gratifications associated with the site. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the five main topics of the excerpted postings include: issues connected with the long waiting time to be matched with a child and a need to express emotions and support during the adoption journey; expressions of gratitude for the Rumor Queen website; comments about the lack of information from the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA); frustration about adoption agencies and communication issues with

adoption officials; and disappointment in the lack of media coverage about the adoption process in China and the rule changes from the CCAA.

The textual analysis I completed is qualitative in nature and therefore it is not suitable to use the findings as the basis for a quantitative study aimed at providing information with strong statistical relevance. With that caveat in mind it is interesting to take an overall look at the topics found to be the most prevalent according to the analysis of the excerpts I coded using the “Dedoose” software program.

My analysis finds the most common topic for a posting centered on issues with the long wait time to be matched with a child and a need to express emotions and seek support during the adoption journey. There were 68 separate excerpts coded/tagged dealing with the wait time in the adoption process and emotional support. This means 52% percent of the coded excerpts from December 2006 focused on this area.

The second most common code/tag came from posters expressing the fact that they were “Thankful for the Rumor Queen.” There were 50 separate excerpts expressing this sentiment. According to the analysis on “Dedoose” 38% of the postings excerpted include mentions of being “Thankful for the Rumor Queen.”

The lack of information from the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) and confusion about the rule changes officially announced in

December 2006 made up the third most common code/tag for the excerpts. Forty-five postings or 34% of the excerpts coded focused on the CCAA.

The fourth most common theme found in the December 2006 Rumor Queen website postings came from users frustrated by their adoption agency and communication issues with adoption officials. Twenty-three postings or 18% of the excerpts coded focused on frustrations with adoption agencies.

A lack of media coverage about the adoption process in China and the rule changes from the CCAA is the fifth most common theme found in the coded excerpts. Nine postings, or 7% of the coded postings, came from Rumor Queen users disappointed in the mainstream media coverage.

The raw data from the excerpts captured in “Dedoose” tells just part of the story of what Rumor Queen users were writing about and thinking in December 2006. A more in-depth examination of the postings is needed to get a more detailed picture of how this website was utilized. Again, I caution the textual analysis is qualitative in nature and therefore the data should not be used as the basis for a quantitative study.

It is important to delve into the original material to find answers to some of the main research questions this dissertation seeks to examine, including the uses and gratifications found on the Rumor Queen site.

My analysis of the December 2006 Rumor Queen posting shows strong evidence that users of the site are active participants in the creation of the content and use the site to fill a void left by their perceived lack of communication from the CCAA and adoption officials, to provide a community of support during their adoption journey, and to satisfy other needs outlined in the Uses and Gratification Theory research by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch.

Another section of this dissertation explores how the information found on the Rumor Queen blog in December 2006 differs from the coverage found in mainstream media organizations. As previously mentioned in this chapter, many users express frustration due to the lack of mainstream media coverage of adoption related issues.

A wide range of emotions, including sadness, stress, joy, anger, frustration, and humor, are evident in the Rumor Queen postings analyzed. The writing from that period captures the complexities of becoming a parent through international adoption and serves as a way to preserve the hard-fought battles to bring a child from China home. Through the panoply of feelings the users always seem to circle back to

messages of gratitude and thankfulness for the support found on the site.

A posting from “waitingforlilygrace” is an example of this sentiment.

“RQ- I just wanted to say Thank you for all that you do! I do not know what I would do without this website. It makes everything seem real. There are moments when it feels as though the time will never come that we see our daughter and hold her for the first time. We really appreciate what you are doing” (Rumor Queen blog December 2, 2006).

Chapter 7

Findings, Part Two: Analysis of Interviews

“Desperation” is the word that is mentioned by every user of the Rumor Queen blog interviewed for this dissertation. Each informant said a lack of communication from their adoption agency and Chinese officials drove them and other waiting parents to the Rumor Queen’s www.chinaadopttalk.com website in a “desperate” attempt to find information.

The five women interviewed in October and November 2013 are all mothers or grandmothers of daughter’s adopted from China. The five informants used the Rumor Queen blog during their adoption journey and utilized the site when the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced rule changes to its international adoption program in December 2006. The informants are four single mothers living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area and adopted their daughters from China between November 2006 and November 2009. I also interviewed a grandmother who lived in New Hampshire during her daughter’s adoption journey and traveled with her to China to adopt her granddaughter in 2009.

These informants are my friends and in an attempt to protect their privacy and the privacy of their children only the first initial of their last names are used. Chapter 5, the Methods, chapter in this dissertation provides more details about how these informants were chosen and how the interviews were conducted.

The information gleaned from the five informants answers some of the key research questions posed in this dissertation. Specifically, the interviews shed light on what type of information was provided to people reading the postings on the Rumor Queen blog before, during, and after their adoption journeys. The data from the informants go beyond the December 2006 time period analyzed in the textual analysis section of this dissertation and provide a more broad and detailed picture of how people used the Rumor Queen blog. These informants discuss how a lack of coverage from mainstream media organizations and a dearth of communication from their adoption agencies and Chinese adoption officials prompted them to seek out the Rumor Queen blog to satisfy their need for information. The informants also discuss how the CCAA rule changes prompted a “crisis” for adoptive parents and drove them to the “Rumor Queen” during this time of upheaval. Finally, the five informants give a more nuanced depiction of the uses and gratifications associated with the site.

“I just felt desperate at times,” said Karen D. grandmother to now 5-year-old Elizabeth from Jiangxi province in China. Karen is a retired Vice President of a hospital who lived in New Hampshire during her daughter Kirsten’s adoption process. Karen recently moved to Minneapolis to be closer to her daughter and only grandchild. She said she was frustrated at the lack of communication from her daughter’s adoption agency and adoption officials in China. “This was something that was incredibly important to you and if you missed out on this opportunity to adopt you may not have a child in your life. I’m going to tear up about that.” Karen is emotional as she recalls the months and years of frustration as the process to adopt a child from China slowed dramatically. “As the months rolled on you were getting NOTHING. I didn’t go to waiting family meetings at Children’s Home Society (her daughter Kirsten’s adoption agency) directly but certainly my daughter did and you were getting nothing from the agency that was helpful at all. Certainly because the country you were adopting from was ‘keeping face’ and had a very secretive and closed philosophy about this. The information coming from the Rumor Queen compared to the information coming from anywhere else was so different. The other sources of information were so limited,” Karen recalled.

Annette G, a dental assistant from Eden Prairie, Minnesota and the mother of now 8-year-old Genevieve from Hunan province in China expresses similar irritations with a lack of communication about the adoption process. “You’re desperate and you’re going to look for anything,” Annette said. “People are trying to create their own source of information for tracking to see when the referrals may come. The Rumor Queen may be your only source. You may have an agency who is not giving you anything so you’re going to go to the source of information and cling to that,” Annette proclaimed.

The Rumor Queen users interviewed for this dissertation are actively seeking media to satisfy a need for information and support. This is a clear example of one of the main tenants of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in mass communication.

Kirsten M., a technical apparel designer for a major retailer in Minneapolis, said when she was in the process to adopt her daughter Elizabeth she found the Rumor Queen site was “full of information.” Kirsten said, “The Rumor Queen filled the void of the lack of information. The style of a lot of major adoption agencies was to give you what they got from China. They didn’t really want to ‘rock the boat.’ Children’s Home and other agencies were only going to release a certain amount of information so I think in the face of no information people will search for a

way they can get it. The Rumor Queen was the easiest and quickest way to get into a community and get good data. It felt comforting to be part of a community.”

Julie W., a vice president with a major financial institution in Minneapolis, said her business experience has shown her that “left with a vacuum of no information people will create their own story.” Julie is the mother of now 7-year-old Tess from Guangdong province in China, and calls herself a “fairly active” user of the Rumor Queen website when she was in her adoption process from August 2005 to December 2006. Julie said, “I read this book, ‘Crucial Conversations,’ and took a class in the theory for my job. The theory is—in the absence of information people will create their own story. If you’re not going to give me an answer I’m going to get one to make me feel better. This could be part of the reason why people go to the Rumor Queen.”

Julie used many other adoption related blogs and websites and said because her adoption agency was out of state (CCAI based in Colorado) she did not have as much direct communication with her adoption agency. Three of the other informants, Kirsten, Annette, and Jodi, used Children’s Home Society and Family Services for their adoptions and had the opportunity to attend “waiting families” meetings at the St. Paul, Minnesota-based agency.

“I would read a lot of information. All I had was my job and waiting for this adoption,” Julie said with a laugh. “So I was trying to be more connected with information. I remember working a lot of hours and then just going home and going online for at least an hour every day. I was reading blogs and I got very connected with people.”

Julie revealed as her adoption journey progressed she began to seek information from the Rumor Queen site several times a day. “The Rumor Queen had, what seemed like, updates every day. It seemed like she (the Rumor Queen) was a collector of information even if it wasn’t objective data. But you wanted to gather whatever information you could,” Julie said.

Jodi R., a sales executive from Minneapolis and the mother of now 7-year-old Amelia from Yunnan province in China, said the uncertainty of adopting a child from a foreign country brings stress and a need for information. “The opportunity with adoption is that you just don’t know. You don’t know where you stand in the process—particularly with a foreign country. You don’t know how things are going so you want to know the latest. A site like the Rumor Queen allows you to get the latest news,” Jodi said. When she was going through the process to adopt Amelia Jodi said she was “not a big user” of the Rumor Queen and mostly went to the site after one of her friends in her adoption support group

mentioned something they read on the Rumor Queen. Jodi first submitted her adoption paperwork in 2005 and traveled to China to pick-up Amelia in May 2007—just before Amelia’s first birthday. It should be noted that the CCAA rule changes for its international adoption program went into affect in May 2007, the same month Jodi traveled to China to meet her daughter.

“Overall, because I didn’t spend much time on it, my first impression of the Rumor Queen site was that it was overwhelming,” Jodi said. “That’s because I’m more of an insular person. I guess like when I was kid at Christmas I was the one who never wanted to shake a present, never wanted to touch a present. I wanted to wait until that time. It was the pent-up excitement. So I guess it was overwhelming to me. There was so much there on the site that I can’t even process it. So my reaction is almost a shut-off versus get engaged,” Jodi said.

Karen, mother to Kirsten and grandmother to Elizabeth, said the Rumor Queen was her first introduction to “the world of blogs.” Karen said, “The computer wasn’t my world back then in 2006. It wasn’t my first ‘go to’ for information. But eventually I became a pretty active user of the site. Not only was it a topic that I was very interested in—it was fascinating to see how it worked as a social network. I think both of those things drew me in.”

Karen said she initially went to the Rumor Queen “just for information.” She said she “got hooked” on the site and appreciated how people were open to sharing the joys and challenges of adoption. “I wanted to support Kirsten in this. I wanted to be the best support person I could be and this was a new world. I wanted to know the important things I needed to learn rather than just my romantic notion of adoption. I was going to China and I was going to be that support person for Kirsten. I felt that was going to be a very important, emotional and possibly stressful role so I wanted to understand how to negotiate that,” Karen said. She added she felt “extra prepared” for her trip to China with Kirsten due to the information she read on the Rumor Queen blog.

Kirsten, Karen’s daughter and mother to Elizabeth, said her first impression of the site was that it “was full of information.” She said, “I started logging onto the Rumor Queen site when the adoption process started slowing down. At the time we were being pulled into meetings at Children’s Home and they were saying ‘there is a slowdown but it probably won’t be too long.’ On Rumor Queen it was much more of a sense that there are A LOT of waiting families. It seemed like the Rumor Queen was giving the more realistic picture.”

All of the informants said their use of the Rumor Queen website increased as they got closer to the day they would receive the referral of

their child. Again, in the adoption process a “referral” is the day the adoption agency shares the first photograph of the child the CCAA has matched with a parent and includes a file of information about the child. This file usually contains background and developmental information about the child and medical records. Once a parent receives a referral for a child they have a number of days to share the file with medical professionals for an evaluation of the child before they sign a “Letter of Acceptance” (LOA). This letter is a legal document signed by parents to tell the officials in the child’s country that they intend to adopt the child.

Julie, mother of Tess and an executive at a financial institution, said as the time approached for people with her Log In Date (LID) to be the next group for a referral she checked the Rumor Queen site much more often. She reports toward the end of her adoption process there were days when she checked the site every few hours. “I looked for that box—the status box that let you know who has been matched with a child. That would be the first thing I would check,” Julie said. She added, “It seemed like with the dates—tracking the files from China and when the referrals were coming in—it seemed very reliable on the Rumor Queen site.”

Annette’s experience is similar to Julie’s. “I liked to see the Rumor Queen’s estimates of Log in Dates and referrals,” Annette said. “I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the timing of my referral. I think the closer I

got to my referral I really started going on the site much more.” Annette shared that as she got closer to her own referral she would check the Rumor Queen site “constantly.”

All of the informants interviewed for this dissertation said they were initially a bit hesitant to trust the information found on the site but over time they thought the information posted by the Rumor Queen proved to be accurate and, as a result, their trust of the material found on the site increased.

“At first when I went on the Rumor Queen site I was a bit leery about the accuracy of it,” Kirsten said. “I think because it did not exactly mirror the information from my agency—Children’s Home. What I came to realize was that you could get information faster from the Rumor Queen. She had more sources.”

Like Kirsten, many of the informants interviewed said the global reach of Rumor Queen site impressed them. As detailed in other sections of this dissertation, the Rumor Queen users and sources come from all over the United States and many countries including; Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway), Spain, France, and the United Kingdom. The Children’s Home Society and Family Services officials interviewed for a separate section of this dissertation mentioned how the use of international sources and

people posting from many countries gave the Rumor Queen blog an international perspective. Both adoption officials interviewed said their clients appreciated the global reach of the information found on the Rumor Queen and said the site was strengthened by the postings written by people living in a wide variety of countries.

Annette, a dental assistant and mother of 8-year-old Genevieve, said the international sources found on the Rumor Queen were important and helpful as she waited to be matched with her daughter. Again, China's international adoption program is very structured and referrals are based on the parent's place in line—their Log in Date (LID). European countries are about 7 hours ahead of the United States and, due to time zone differences, European parents will get their referrals "ahead" of parents in the U.S. Annette said she carefully kept track of the LID dates and referrals on the Rumor Queen for herself and for her friends in the adoption community. "There were people from Spain posting. That's sometimes how we knew for sure what the LID cut-off dates for referrals were. Or you would hear trickles of information from the Netherlands first. When those referral dates would come you would have some real information and some feedback. It was exciting."

Julie, mother of Tess and a vice president with a major financial institution in Minneapolis, said she also appreciates the global perspective

and information on the Rumor Queen. “I can remember knowing that I was going to get a referral from what I read on the Rumor Queen. I had some connections from Australia because I read the site. I called my agency and there was some comfort in knowing my referral was coming. I could sleep better at night,” Julie said with a smile.

Grandmother Karen said the global nature of the Rumor Queen was “definitely something that I latched onto. I loved when they got information early!” In fact, Karen said because she was carefully tracking referrals and LID dates on the Rumor Queen site she was able to travel from New Hampshire to Minnesota so she could be with her daughter Kirsten when she received the referral for Elizabeth. “The Rumor Queen was certainly helpful to get me out here to Minnesota for the referral. I followed things and by then I knew what the rhythm was and what you looked for, and the signs from other countries when the referrals were going to come. So I had been watching, watching, watching,” Karen said. “I knew from the Rumor Queen and the timing of things. I said, ‘I’m not waiting. I’m going to get out there to Minnesota.’ Because of the blog I knew that within the next two days we’d get a referral. If Kirsten was going to get a referral I knew when it was going to happen. That’s why I flew here so I could be with her when she got the referral. To me that was very important. If we had to rely only on the information we got from the

adoption agency I would not have been with Kirsten when she got the referral.”

The examples given by the five informants interviewed show the range of information they were seeking, how they used the Rumor Queen site, and in what way their trust of the information found on the site improved. The examples also highlight how the specific type of information they were seeking changed during their adoption journey. The informants all seemed to have a dynamic and personal relationship with the blog and the Rumor Queen herself.

Besides a lack of communication from their adoption agencies, all of the informants said one of the reasons they went to the Rumor Queen site was because they did not find the news and information they needed from mainstream media sources.

“There wasn’t much coverage at all,” Karen said. “If there was any coverage it was about trafficking. It seemed like the journalists weren’t interested in the stories connected with people adopting children. Trafficking is an upsetting issue and it’s one we had think about and talk about. But the adoption process is about so much more. I didn’t find any articles telling me about adoption stories or how to be prepared.” Karen added.

Annette was also frustrated with the lack of coverage in the mainstream media. “They really didn’t have anything. I can’t say I remember any news stories about international adoption or the slowdown. I mean, they did manage to cover the fact that Meg Ryan was in China adopting her daughter,” Annette said with a grin.

Jodi said the mainstream media coverage she encountered was “Very limited. Very limited.” She added, “When it popped up there wasn’t that much information at all. I guess maybe if you really took the time to dig for things you may find something. I didn’t really do any digging so I don’t remember much media coverage at all.”

All of the informants interviewed said they first heard about the China Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA) rule changes in December 2006 from their circle of friends and from reading the Rumor Queen blog. Their initial source of information did not come from their own adoption agencies nor did it come from any mainstream media source.

Julie reports she heard about the CCAA rule changes during her trip to China to meet her daughter Tess in December 2006. She describes the scene as she was using her laptop computer in the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou, China. In adoption circles the White Swan Hotel is nicknamed “The White Stork” because many American families stay at the hotel as they complete the paperwork necessary to secure their

newly adopted child's U.S. visa. When China first began its international adoption program in the 1990s the U.S. Consulate was within walking distance from the White Swan Hotel. The U.S. Consulate relocated to a new building in downtown Guangzhou in July 2013 and is no longer located near the hotel. In 2011 the White Swan began an extensive remodeling project and has been closed to adoptive families but when the hotel was open it served as a "home away from home" for American families for close to 20 years. Many families who have gone through China's international adoption program will tell you the White Swan has a special place in their hearts. The white, 34-story hotel sits on the banks of the Pearl River and, at the time, had a brightly colored playroom just off the main lobby for new families to relax and have fun. U.S. toy manufacturer Mattel sponsored the playroom and supplied many of the toys. When parents checked-out of the White Swan they received a "Going Home Barbie." Mattel made this toy exclusively for adoptive families who were guests in the White Swan. The blonde haired Barbie wears a special baby carrier and is accompanied by a little plastic Chinese baby. This Barbie is not for sale and is an unusual keepsake of a family's special time at the White Swan.

Julie was in her room at the White Swan using her computer to email people back home, order cute baby hats on the ecommerce website

www.etsy.com, and getting news from the Rumor Queen in December 2006. “I remember I was a new mother and I could not sleep,” Julie said. “I was ordering a bunch of things off of Etsy and then I went over to the Rumor Queen. At that point I was thinking that Tess is my first child and in a few years I would get one more child at least. I was thinking in my head that two years out I’ll get my adoption tax credit and put it in the bank so I’ll have the money for my second adoption from China,” Julie recalled. “I remember reading about the rule changes on the Rumor Queen and I was pretty angry. Later I tried to focus on being grateful that I have one child. It was very sad and hard. I remember reading the news on the Rumor Queen as I was sitting in my hotel room in the White Swan.”

Annette had just come back home from China with her daughter Genevieve on December 7, 2006 when the news of the CCAA rule changes broke on the Rumor Queen website on December 8. “Sleep was not easy for us when we came home and I was barely functioning,” Annette recalled. “I had friends still in the program waiting to adopt their children. I was very worried for them. I think people still waiting for their referral really looked to the Rumor Queen for information because they weren’t getting much from their adoption agencies. It was a stressful time,” Annette said.

Jodi said she was “two-thirds through the wait” when the CCAA rule changes were announced. She said she felt confident her adoption would go through but, like Annette, was very worried about her friends not as far along as she was in the process. “For me I was not happy about the changes and certainly they were upsetting. I knew it would obviously hurt things if I wanted to go back to China for another child,” Jodi said.

The CCAA rule changes were especially upsetting for Karen and her daughter Kirsten. Unlike Julie and Annette, in December 2006 Karen and Kirsten were still waiting for a referral and were very much caught in what is now considered the beginning of the great slowdown in the rate of referrals from China.

When all of the informants started their adoption process they were told by their agency that they should be prepared for approximately a 10 to 12 month wait from Log in Date (LID) to getting the referral of their child. Annette, Julie, and Jodi all wound up waiting more than 12 months from LID to referral and the beginning of the slowdown in China’s international adoption program was gradually becoming apparent. Annette reports her agency, Children’s Home Society and Family Services, initially told her to expect a seven to nine month wait. In actuality her total wait time from Log in Date (LID) to getting the referral of her daughter Genevieve was about 14 months. Julie had a LID of August 24, 2005 and said her actual

waiting from LID to referral was about the same—14 months. Jodi, who had a LID of October 15, 2006, two months past Julie’s LID, reports she waited about 19 months from her Log In Date (LID) to getting a referral for Amelia. As mentioned previously, China’s international adoption program began to dramatically slowdown in 2006. In 2005 the CCAA reports it placed a record 14,000 children in permanent homes. That number dramatically dropped back to about 10,000 children in 2006. As a result, the time to be matched with a child and get a referral began to increase. People involved in the adoption process—CCAA officials, U.S. immigration officials, diplomats, adoption agencies, and parents—have all speculated about the real reason behind the decrease in the number of children placed with adoptive families and the cause of the increased waiting time to be matched with a child. These speculations include; China’s recent economic growth, changing attitudes about adoption in China, the 2008 Olympics in Beijing prompting officials to decrease the number of international adoptions, a possible decrease in the number of children in China being “abandoned,” Chinese orphanages facing possible problems with adhering to the Hague Convention and international standards to get a child “ready” for the international adoption program. There are many possible reasons for the slowdown but perhaps it is almost impossible to discern the true cause that led to the situation.

Karen and her daughter Kirsten said they have no idea why the slowdown in China's adoption program happened and they both began to realize they were caught in the middle of a nerve-wracking situation and they wanted facts. They both said as the stress increased so did their need for information. Kirsten said she was not getting much information from her adoption agency, Children's Home Society and Family Services. She found this lack of communication particularly frustrating as news of the CCAA rule changes were posted on the Rumor Queen website on December 8 and official confirmation of the changes did not come until December 22. "By leaving a window of time when there was not a statement from them (CHSFS) and the data about the rule changes was on the Rumor Queen, it started to undermine my belief in the fact that Children's Home really knew what was going on," Kirsten said. "For me, because of my personality, it made me challenge Children's Home. Fourteen days of waiting is a long time when you think your life may be making a radical change. By staying silent they might have done what was best for the "company" but for me it made me value the Rumor Queen even more. Until that point I thought of the Rumor Queen as just a resource. After that point I felt like the Rumor Queen was a huge value to me," Kirsten added.

Karen shared similar frustrations and, like Kirsten, was very upset by the lack of communication from officials guiding Kirsten's adoption. "There were times when I would get up in the morning and the first thing I would do is check the Rumor Queen site. At first I was checking because I was following families on their adoption journey to China. But when the rule changes came and there was no information I checked the site to see what was going on," Karen recalled. "As the waiting got to be longer it was almost a neurotic kind of thing. I just needed to find out what was happening. The Rumor Queen site helped me deal with my focus and anxiety about the wait," Karen said.

In another section of this dissertation Children's Home Society and Family Services officials interviewed said they knew about the upcoming CCAA rule changes before the rules were posted on the Rumor Queen on December 8, 2006. The Children's Home officials said they did not inform their clients about the changes because they were working to get an accurate English translation of the new rules written in Chinese. The officials said some of the wording in the CCAA rules were "ambiguous" and they wanted to make sure they could give waiting families the most accurate translation possible.

Karen and Kirsten continued their use of the Rumor Queen blog after they brought Elizabeth home from China in November 2009. As a former nurse and vice president of a hospital Karen said she was amazed to learn the Rumor Queen could be a medical resource for people. “I would read postings when people were in China to get their children and they would write, ‘Help! My child is ill and I don’t know what to do!’ Instantly people from around the world would write in suggestions. I recall there were instances where people would write, ‘Hey, I have a friend staying in a hotel around the corner from you and they might have some medication that can help you.’ It was really remarkable. I think there was a lot of support on the site,” Karen remarked.

Kirsten said in some ways she found the Rumor Queen website was even more of a help to her personally after she came home with Elizabeth. “The one thing I found really helpful in the year after I brought Elizabeth home was when I went to get her Social Security card. I didn’t get through and get the card the first time. I couldn’t get the guy at the window to validate our paperwork,” Kirsten complained. “I searched the Rumor Queen and found many, many, many people had the same experience. Parents had the exact same experience I had and they literally walked me through what to do. I read about it on the Rumor Queen and I followed exactly what people said to do. I literally printed out

the information—the exact words they said to use and brought it with me. It worked!” Kirsten said in amazement.

Kirsten said when she initially had trouble at the Social Security office she called her social worker at Children’s Home Society. Kirsten reports her social worker was not very helpful and did not give her any advice.

“I also had trouble getting Elizabeth’s passport,” Kirsten said. “The lady at the passport place gave me a hard time. In both cases parents posted what to do and said ‘take this, use these words, bring these papers and show the Social Security and passport people how the paperwork is connected.’ I did exactly what the Rumor Queen parents said to do and it worked. In that respect the Rumor Queen site is worth its weight in gold. I might still be fighting with that guy at Social Security,” Kirsten said with a laugh.

The textual analysis section of this dissertation examining the December 2006 postings detailed how “gratitude” for the Rumor Queen’s work and the support from the users is one of the most common topics for postings found on the site. All of the informants interviewed for this dissertation expressed similar sentiments.

Annette, a dental assistant and mother to Genevieve said, “There were times when the Rumor Queen just had that information. She was

generally in the ballpark with her referral times and information. I appreciated that.”

Jodi, a sales executive and mother to Amelia said she was astonished at how people posting on the site were so devoted to the Rumor Queen and the community. “It seemed to me the Rumor Queen was like a magnet. It was like THE place to go. I found that fascinating from a marketing perspective. How word of mouth gets out and how all of a sudden people just glom onto something. For me—from a marketing and sales perspective—it’s fascinating. It’s all through connections.” She added, “I think the information found on the site gave people a little self assurance. It’s like, okay, we’re not in this alone.”

Karen said she is “tremendously grateful” she found the Rumor Queen site and added she would have been “lost” during the adoption process to meet her granddaughter, Elizabeth. “This was an unusual experience for me. It may be a once in a lifetime experience for me.” Karen said checking the Rumor Queen website and bonding with other families on their adoption journeys was “meaningful in a way I haven’t experienced before or after it. I’m very grateful for the Rumor Queen—it got me though.”

Kirsten said, “I don’t know what I would have done without it. It would have been a really hard wait if we didn’t have the Rumor Queen.

Can you imagine waiting all that time without any real information? My mom and I both agree—the Rumor Queen site is a lifesaver.”

Kirsten became emotional as she recalled another important part of the support she received from the Rumor Queen and those posting on the site. “As the wait got longer the whole process got harder,” Kirsten recalled. She said she picked China because “it was predictable and safe.” Because China’s international adoption program is centralized and run by its federal government there is an extensive amount of paperwork required and adoptive parents need to meet high standards and are scrutinized. “You had to be so careful and you couldn’t change anything about your life,” Kirsten said. “As the waiting time got longer the posts got more dismal on the Rumor Queen. I remember hearing from a man who said ‘I’m afraid to go to a friend’s house for a football game and a beer. I can’t live my life because I may lose everything if something bad happens at my friend’s house during the football game. What if I’m stopped by the police after drinking one beer or something?’ I could identify with that guy and also felt like I could not really live a normal life while I was waiting for Elizabeth,” Kirsten said. “You can’t live for three or four years and be worried about having a beer with your friend. It takes a toll on your psyche. The Rumor Queen is a space where you can go and say, ‘I’m just scared. This is how I’m living and this is how I have to live my life.’ People

on the site say ‘Yes, you’re right. This is your current reality right now.’ Other people can’t really relate to that. People not in the adoption process are not under that kind of pressure and frankly don’t understand that kind of pressure.”

Kirsten added, “As the wait got longer who could you tell? Even your own family didn’t really understand the dynamics of the situation. When you went on the Rumor Queen it allowed you to find people that kind of got it—without explaining.”

The number one question on the Rumor Queen website in October and November 2013 does not concern the timing of referrals nor the continued slowdown in China’s international adoption process. The main concern for those using the Rumor Queen site is—“Where is the Rumor Queen?”

The Rumor Queen, apparently, made her last posting to her website on September 23, 2013. The entire content of her September 23rd posting follows. It gave no indication that she was shutting down the site or taking a leave of absence:

“September 23rd, 2013

I’m hoping we see referrals this week or early next week — before the holiday, instead of after.

However, I don’t see any rumors yet.” (Rumor Queen blog September 23, 2013)

In early September 2013 I began contacting the Rumor Queen to request an interview with her for this dissertation. I sent several emails to her Gmail address and sent many messages to her directly through links on her website. Sadly, I did not receive a reply. I'm left to wonder what happened to the woman who devoted eight years of her life, countless hours, and her own personal resources to make the site an important resource for families navigating the perplexing, stressful and joyful process of adopting a child from China. I'm not alone in pondering this question.

All of the informants interviewed for this dissertation commented on the fact that that the Rumor Queen is "missing" and wondered what she was doing. The informants were stunned that the Rumor Queen just seemingly disappeared and left her online community in the dark about what is happening in her life and provided no reason for her withdrawal from the website.

The Rumor Queen has essentially shut down the blog portion of her website—this is the area examined in this dissertation. The "Forum" part of her website (an area not extensively studied for this dissertation) is still stumbling along without the Rumor Queen's leadership or guidance. One of the main topics on the Forum in November 2013 is entitled, "Where is RQ?"

On November 1, 2013 dcope1211 posted the following message in the "Where is RQ section of the Forum:

"I don't blame her for pulling back if that is indeed what is happening. Maintaining the blog was a labor of love for her but I believe at some point it became a chore. However, the fact that the forums are up and running and the site is still operational probably means that she hasn't closed up shop -- she just isn't blogging. It would be nice to hear from her, of course, as I think we have all come to care about her. As for the projections posts, I think it must be darned hard to make sense of what is happening now, given the odd referral patterns in the last few months. So maybe she is taking a breather and hoping to see if there are some new patterns she can make sense of over time. All the best to RQ." (Rumor Queen forum posting November 1, 2013).

The speculation about what happened to the Rumor Queen, concerns about her health and the well being of her family, and conjectures about the possible future of the site continued on the Forum for weeks.

On November 6, 2013 waiting4avery posts:

"I completely understand her stepping back. And if it were me, I think I would have a long time ago. It's clearly SO much work. Also, things seem to have been especially unpredictable lately. And lots of people complaining and about content/wording of blog posts, etc.

But when I was waiting I checked the site 50 million times a day and the projections and baby posts are what helped get me through the wait. So my heart goes out to those still waiting - it must be so hard not to have updated projections, rumors and updates. I would have gone out of my mind and you've all waited so long already" (Rumor Queen Forum posting November 6, 2013).

Poster fjm replies to waiting4avery just a few hours after the posting and writes:

“Ditto what waitingforavery wrote. I too checked 50 million times a day and I remember being over the top surprised when our referrals came and RQ posted reports of a phone call..... My wait was only (only!) 4 yrs 8 months. I feel for those of you still waiting and wanting news, any news. I do hope that RQ is doing well and just decided to stop and not linger. She has done so much for all of us. Does someone have the knowhow to start something new? I had no idea how RQ got her info” (Rumor Queen Forum posting November 6, 2013).

On November 9, 2013 waiting4olivia posted:

“RQ, whoever she is, has given a lot of her life to the blog and to this forum over the years. Without her and this forum, I am not sure I would even have my daughter and I wouldn't be waiting on our second daughter. For certain, I would not have made so many lifelong friends in the adoption community.

I am surprised she vanished without a word and I hope she and her family are okay” (Rumor Queen Forum posting November 9, 2013).

Later on November 9, 2012 LouiseMe posts:

“I too hope she and her family are safe. I find it worrisome that she wouldn't even post a good-bye message.

That said, this was hardly a "labor of love." Public records show significant revenue for this site, particularly a few years ago in its most popular time period, the equivalent (or greater) of an average full-time job. Even after hosting fees, the numbers show a pretty decent take-home there. Now does someone deserve to be compensated for their time? Absolutely, but that's not a labor of love, that's a job. So I think the notion of someone sitting there paying thousands out of their own pockets, volunteering their time for no other reason than to keep other people informed purely out of the kindness of their hearts is a bit of a romantic ideal that isn't quite in line with internet metrics. But did she have to do this? No,

of course not. And did she deserve to be paid for her time? Sure. But again, public records show a drastic decrease in traffic in the last couple of years, which is a drastic decrease in revenue, so at this point, her reason for stopping could be purely financial” (Rumor Queen Forum November 9, 2013).

This posting from LouiseMe sparks several responses on the Forum and a bit of friction is created. Some of the posting defend the Rumor Queen and restate how grateful they are for the site. Others agree with LouiseMe and propose that the Rumor Queen is no longer involved with the website because it is not generating any substantial income and is losing readers due to the slowdown in referrals from China.

The speculation about why the Rumor Queen is no longer participating in her website continued throughout November 2013. Some posters publicly asked that the Rumor Queen announce her retirement from the blog and “pass the torch” to a new Rumor Queen. Others suggest a team of “Rumor Princesses” be handpicked by the Rumor Queen to take over the site for a while.

On November 21, 2013 Hope 47 suggested the changes to China’s international adoption program and a focus on placing children with special needs may have led to the Rumor Queen’s disinterest in her blog. Hope 47 posted this on the Forum:

“I’m actually surprised RQ didn’t stop blogging a long time ago. She admitted about not knowing that much about the SN

(special needs) program. Since the NSN (non special needs) program is just trickling along and most of the China adoptions are SN, really someone who has a good handle on Special Needs should take over this site.

DH (Dear Husband) is on his way home from China now and he sent message before take off. Adoptive parents that waited 7 yrs on plane with him. This is so ridiculous that the NSN program has turned into such a wait! We barely held on waiting 51 mos. Just can not fathom 7 yr wait” (Rumor Queen Forum November 21, 2013).

As the wait from Log in Date (LID) to referral for a non-special needs child from China grows from 7 months in 2005 to more than 7 years in 2013 families seeking to adopt a child from China may face going through the process without the Rumor Queen. The postings analyzed in this dissertation and the expressions of gratitude from the informants interviewed are evidence of how much value parents place on the mysterious Rumor Queen. As the mother of a child adopted from China myself, I know personally that the life changing experience of adoption is filled with valleys of despair and mountains of joy. Navigating this emotional terrain is not easy and, as users of the site will tell you, may become even more difficult without the resources, information, and support found on the Rumor Queen website.

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the Rumor Queen fiercely guards her identity and fights to maintain her anonymity.

Her enigmatic nature may make it more challenging for users of the site to find out “the real story” of what happened to the Rumor Queen. It strikes me as a bit ironic that the woman who rose to prominence in the adoption community by sharing news is now creating an information vacuum for her devoted users. What source will people now seek to fulfill their information needs? A reading of the recent postings on the Rumor Queen Forum finds most of the current users have already been matched with their child and are home. As previously mentioned the blog portion of the site is currently shut down and the “post a comment” function is disabled. As of September 25, 2013 no new postings have appeared on the blog. Therefore, it is not possible to get a good gauge of how users of the blog feel about the Rumor Queen’s disappearance and the stagnant nature of the website.

The speculation about the Rumor Queen and her website’s future appears as unsettled as the future of international adoptions from China.

Analysis of Interviews with Adoption Officials

Molly Rochon, Senior Country Relations Manager and the China Program Manager since 2006 for the St. Paul, Minnesota-based adoption agency Children's Home Society and Family Services (CHSFS) says she's amazed at the sources and information the Rumor Queen is able to tap and share with the readers of her www.chinaadopttalk.com site.

Rochon and Maureen Warren, the former CEO and President of Children's Home Society and Family Services, sat down for an interview in October 2013 to discuss the Rumor Queen website. Children's Home Society and Family Services was founded in 1889. It is fully accredited by the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and is a founding member of the Child Welfare League of America. A dramatic decrease in the number of international adoptions starting in 2008 prompted Children's Home Society and Lutheran Social Services to merge in July of 2012. According to Warren, "In 2005 there were 22,734 international adoptions (in the United States) but by 2011 there were 9,319, so that's about a 60 percent decline." The merger shifted Warren's job and she is now the Chief Family Services Officer for Lutheran Social Services. Warren is also

an adoptive parent. She traveled to Vietnam in 2002 to bring her son home.

Molly Rochon said she first heard about the Rumor Queen site back in 2005 when some families in the CHSFS China program brought it to her attention. According to Rochon, “The families were saying, ‘I heard this and that on the Rumor Queen can you confirm the information?’ We were a team at that point in the China program and we all connected with each other and we were going what is this—what are they talking about? I found the site and I thought okay, something new to incorporate.”

Maureen Warren said she wishes “there was a blog like the Rumor Queen when I was going through my own adoption process.” She became aware of the Rumor Queen once she started working at Children’s Home Society and she’s been aware of other online resources for adoptive families for about eleven years. Warren said she “trolled the web” while she was waiting to adopt her son in 2002. “I found a website for families with children from Vietnam and looked at the photos. I looked at when they came home. I remember there was not much about ‘we started and the whole process took us this long.’” She said the online resources she used during her own adoption wait were “no where near as detailed or as frequently updated as the Rumor Queen blog is.”

According to Molly Rochon, 2005 was “the year the Rumor Queen really hit the scene.” She said she started working at Children’s Home Society in 2003 and back then “we were still sending a lot of things by ‘snail mail’ and we had families without e-mail addresses. We had many more phone conversations and contact with families. So things happened at a different pace. Now everybody gets electronic communication. There were families creating their own blogs and that lead to areas of concern when people would share information about a child who is not officially theirs. They were matched—but it could be problematic with the country. It all became, ‘Oh we have this to contend with and we needed to educate families on what’s appropriate and what’s risky.’”

Rochon says at first she and her co-workers at Children’s Home Society did not know exactly what to make of the Rumor Queen site or how to deal with it. She said in the spring of 2006 “everything changed” as the power of the Rumor Queen and her sources began to become apparent. “I remember, one thing that strikes me, I think it was in Spring 2006 when I was at a national conference where dozens and dozens of the China programs were meeting in a large room and it was pretty full. They were talking about things we were observing and problems with the China Central Authority that we didn’t necessarily share with the families because we were talking about them in a professional atmosphere.

Shortly after that certain pieces of information, within a day, were posted and made known on the Rumor Queen website. So many of us were thinking 'who in that room provided the information?' It's amazing that she (the Rumor Queen) had that knowledge. I don't think any of us thought she was actually in the room because she's made it very clear that she's not an adoption professional and you had to have ID and papers to show you were a professional to get in that room."

Rochon said after the information from that private meeting was posted on the Rumor Queen site she and other adoption professionals she spoke with felt a bit disturbed and surprised. "I think we thought that shoot, now we need to be careful about what we're discussing among members of this group. Sometimes we have information that we don't feel is appropriate to put out there. So that was early 2006 so that means by that time she was pretty well established. There was such a large volume of families getting children from China at the time."

Molly Rochon and Maureen Warren both talked about attempts by Children's Home Society to provide online resources for families in the process to adopt a child from an international program. Rochon said, "We started our own forums around 2005 and 2006. Korea's never took off. China's never took off, I think, because of the Rumor Queen." Both Rochon and Warren believe the Rumor Queen became the main resource

for parents adopting from China because the Rumor Queen seemed to have good, secret sources of information and her reach was global. The fact that parents in other countries were reading and creating postings on the site made the Rumor Queen stand out and become a valuable resource to the users. “China is a program that runs the same,” Rochon said. “So you have a log in date and you move along. If you are on the west coast or the east coast or no matter what agency, what-have-you—you will move at the same pace. If you’re in France and you have the same log in date you may hear they got their referral 7 hours ahead of you and you can know that your referral is coming in 7 hours. You will get yours too. So that community—it brings people together in that way. “

Besides tracking referrals and news from other countries, Rochon and Warren said there are many other reasons why parents turn to the Rumor Queen blog. Maureen Warren said from her personal adoption experience she thinks people turn to the Rumor Queen to “mark milestones” on the journey. Warren says people enjoy feeling like they are part of a group and like to see other people making progress. “They want to know that they’re moving along with everyone else. That other people are experiencing what they are experiencing.” This marking of milestones and the active communication among the Rumor Queen blog

community are part of the five components Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch explained in their 1973 article exploring uses and gratification theory.

Warren adds that for parents waiting to adopt a child, “There’s such a feeling of not controlling the process. It doesn’t necessarily mean that you don’t trust your agency. Some people might not trust their agency. But it’s that whole ‘this is so important to me I’m going to look under every rock to understand. And I’m going to try to inform myself by going to all sources possible.’ I think it’s just that insatiable need for knowledge.”

Molly Rochon said she thinks the Rumor Queen website is such a powerful resource for adoptive parents because “People are looking for a community of people. They may not be sharing their adoption process with their immediate friends because that can be difficult if you choose to hold back until things seem a little more certain. So it’s safer to trust this kind of communication where you don’t exactly know one another but you know each other’s electronic persona. You feel safer disclosing certain information.” Again, this active seeking of a community and interactive communication ties back to the major components of Uses and Gratification Theory in mass communication.

Maureen Warren agrees and thinks back to her own adoption process in 2002. “I was doing what everybody did while waiting. I chose not to tell my employer. I had a 120 people division and I just didn’t want

people asking me. It was kind of selfish. I worked for Fannie Mae out of (Washington) DC and lived in Chicago at the time. I had to tell a senior executive in DC because I needed someone to verify employment and do all of that. He was the only person I chose to tell. You do things like— ‘when will we be in review period, when is the retreat?’ You know as a senior manager you have milestones. So when I was thinking about that—usually it was calendar driven—I would be invited to be a guest speaker somewhere or I’d be asked to schedule a major work commitment and I’d be like ‘am I going to be in Vietnam then?’ I would seek out a timeline. But there wasn’t much. It’s pretty remarkable how much there is online now. “

Rochon says the parents she’s worked with at Children’s Home have differing opinions about using the Rumor Queen site. “I’ve had families who say ‘I’m an addict. I can’t not look at it.’ And I’ve had families tell me ‘I’m not even going to go there. I don’t want to know. I want to hear it from you. I know that if I get started I won’t be able to stop.’ Or ‘I tried it—it was making me crazy so I stopped.’”

Rochon also thinks the Rumor Queen site is used by families who have concerns about some adoption related issues but they may not want to bother their agency or social worker. “I think that people don’t want to necessarily call their agency. They don’t want to call 20 times a day—

although we have people that do! (laughs) We used to have a telephone hot line for that reason. We would say call the hotline. Then we turned it to a web-based hotline. That's because we were getting too many calls asking the same question. We thought let's just give it to them in one spot. But that died off—people's need for that died off. I think that's because they were finding other online resources—like the Rumor Queen.”

Molly Rochon said back in 2005 through about 2008 Children's Home Society monitored the Rumor Queen site almost daily. She said, “We used to have someone who actually did look at (the Rumor Queen) site routinely to make sure if there was anything alarming we could be prepared and expect some calls. We needed to know what to tell people and we could get on the line with China—depending on the time of day—and ask them about it.” She said there is no one at Children's Home who routinely monitors the Rumor Queen site today as part of their job.

Rochon said there are some staff members who've adopted children from China and monitor the site occasionally. She said does not monitor the Rumor Queen very closely these days. Rochon said, “It's hard logistically to find the time in the day. We know too that if there is anything shocking then China would certainly tell us.... It used to be that (the Rumor Queen) it caused fires and the phones would light up—but not any more. People

are less inclined to be looking at it. Every once in a while we'll have a family that's angry because they feel they should not have heard information from the Rumor Queen—it is a reflection on us.”

As Molly Rochon and Maureen Warren stated earlier, the power of the Rumor Queen and her blog received a lot of attention in 2006 and both recall the role the website had during the CCAA rule changes announced in December 2006. Again, the Rumor Queen posted the news of the rule changes on December 8 and Children's Home Society and Family Services officials did not tell its clients about the changes until December 18 and the CCAA did not post the actual rule changes until December 22, 2006.

Rochon said, “We had heard that the changes were coming. But we don't share that kind of information with families until we get it and see it and then we know. I think there was a lot of anxiety.” Rochon reports Children's Home notified its clients during a meeting at its St. Paul headquarters and also sent an email to people enrolled in the China program. She said Children's Home Society and Family Service has a history of being very conservative and careful when it comes to sharing information. Rochon said agency officials wanted to be sure they could share an accurate translation of the CCAA rule changes and that contributed to the delay in notifying clients. “There are certain things that

are written that if you read the Chinese translation there were things that we wanted to clarify or find out more before we announce it to our families. Because if we have questions about something our families are going to have many questions about it. We always tended to be a little more conservative when we share information. Trying to make sure we have more of a full picture before we let out a little bit of it. Because letting out just the little bit can often cause more anxiety and more confusion,” Rochon explained.

Both Rochon and Warren said they do not recall seeing many mainstream media reports about the process to adopt a child from China nor to they remember seeing any mainstream media coverage of the CCAA rule changes prior to the Children’s Home Society announcement to its clients on December 18. I surveyed the mainstream media coverage during this time period in December 2006 and discovered one of the first articles was published in the *New York Times* on December 19, 2006.

Rochon said there are differences between how adoption professionals and adoptive parents use the Rumor Queen site. She said her agency monitored the site very closely in 2005 thru 2007 when there were many more children from China being adopted by American parents. She said adoption agency officials checked the Rumor Queen blog so they would know “what they would be in for.” If there was a big

announcement or big rumor on the site Rochon said agency workers braced themselves for an increase in the volume of calls from clients. She said after the rule changes and subsequent slowdown in the number of children being adopted from China Children's Home does not monitor the site as closely.

Both Rochon and Warren said adoption agencies used the site as a way to keep up on the questions families may ask and to stay on top of any issues families may experience during their adoption process. They say this differs from the way families use the site because they suspect people are going to the site for emotional support and to help them feel "more in control of the adoption process." Rochon and Warren also said the Rumor Queen site "fulfills a need for information." As will be detailed in a later chapter, the emotional support found by users of the Rumor Queen website and the "need for information" are some of the main hallmarks of uses and gratification theory in mass communication.

Rochon said officials in China told her they monitor the Rumor Queen website. "It took them a while to admit it. We would say you might want to be aware that rumors are circulating and it was coming from that site. China took the attitude that we're not going to give it any attention. We're not going to comment on the Rumor Queen. But they are aware and they do monitor it far more often than they used to," Rochon said.

Maureen Warren confirmed that she's also heard Chinese officials read the Rumor Queen website and said "China pays much more attention to the blogosphere these days. They have to."

Children's Home Society and Family Services officials and other adoption agency professionals must navigate the delicate balancing act of providing services and information to paying clients comprised of parents enrolled in an international adoption program and the needs and demands of the government officials from the "sending country." Adoption agencies are the link between government officials from foreign countries and parents seeking to adopt a child. This middle ground means agencies are in a symbiotic relationship with both sides and the agency needs to be careful when communicating with both parties. The information the agencies share must be timely, truthful and focused to set up realistic expectations on both sides.

The reflections shared by Molly Rochon and Maureen Warren during their interview for this dissertation highlight how the Rumor Queen website ties into the main hallmarks of uses and gratification theory in mass communication. Both said families went actively sought out the Rumor Queen website to be informed, identify with people in similar life situations, be entertained, enhance their social interaction, and to help

them deal with the stresses of daily life as a person waiting to adopt a child through an international adoption program.

Analysis of Mainstream Media Coverage of CCAA Changes

The information available pertaining to the CCAA rule changes and developments in China's international adoption program in December 2006 is one of the key issues this dissertation examines. Many people posting to the Rumor Queen blog during the time period and the informants interviewed for this dissertation mentioned there was a lack of coverage about these issues from the mainstream media. I assert the limited coverage found in the mainstream media concerning China's international adoption policy changes contributed to the "uses and gratification" people obtained from the Rumor Queen blog in 2006. This dissertation also seeks to examine the differences between the information found on the Rumor Queen blog and the material available from mainstream media sources.

For the purposes of this dissertation the mainstream media are defined as media disseminated via large distribution channels and are therefore available to the majority of media consumers.

As detailed in the methodology chapter of this dissertation I conducted various online searches of mainstream media sources to ascertain the level of coverage during the time period examined. One of

the first articles discovered in this search process came from the December 19, 2006 *New York Times* with the headline “China Tightens Adoption Rules, U.S. Agencies Say.” The article, written by Jim Yardley, appeared in the online and print versions of the *New York Times*. The first two paragraphs of the article state;

“China is planning to issue new, tighter restrictions on foreign adoptions of Chinese children, which would prohibit adoptions by parents who are unmarried, who are obese or who are older than 50, according to adoption agencies in the United States.

The new regulations, which have not yet been formally announced by the state-run China Center of Adoption Affairs, are to take effect on May 1, 2007, and seem certain to slow the rapid rise in applications by foreign parents to adopt Chinese babies” (*New York Times*, December 19, 2006).

The article includes quotes from Heather Terry, a spokesperson from the Great Wall of China Adoption Agency based in Austin, Texas. She said foreign adoption agencies “learned of the new regulations at a Dec. 8 meeting in Beijing with officials” from the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA). Heather Terry added “China also wanted to slow foreign adoptions because they are opening up domestic adoptions now” (*New York Times*, December 19, 2006). The article has a brief description of reporter Jim Yardley’s efforts to obtain an interview with CCAA officials. He states, “The adoption-affairs center declined requests in recent weeks

by *The New York Times* for an interview on adoption policy. An unnamed official cited by the Associated Press confirmed that the government is considering new guidelines, but declined to discuss any specifics” (*New York Times*, December 19, 2006).

On December 20, 2006 the *New York Times* publishes a re-working of Jim Yardley’s article from the previous day and reporter Pam Belluck is included in the byline. The December 20 article has the headline: “China Tightens Adoption Rules for Foreigners.” This article fleshes out more details of the rule changes mentioned in the December 19 article and includes interviews with officials from various adoption agencies. The executive director of New Beginnings Family and Children’s services based in Mineola, New York, the chief executive of Families Thru International Adoption based in Evansville, Indiana, and Heather Terry from Great Wall of China Adoption are all quoted in the article to get their reaction to the CCAA rule changes.

The article includes a quote from Heather Terry stating that since her agency posted the new rules on its website, “we’ve had about 400 e-mails and phone calls a day.” She goes on to state; “Some families were just turned down today. One was a couple where the husband had social anxiety disorder and takes Zoloft, a violation of the new guidelines that bar

people who are taking medication for anxiety or depression” (*New York Times*, December 20, 2006).

On December 24, 2006 the *New York Times* publishes a piece by Andy Newmann and Rebecca Cathcart with the headline, “In an Adoption Hub, China’s New Rules Stir Dismay.” The article focuses on how the new rule changes announced by the CCAA had a strong affect on New York City’s Upper West Side neighborhood. The article states, “The neighborhood has the nation’s highest concentration of adopted Chinese children, according to the group Families with Children from China.” (*New York Times*, December 24, 2006) The article highlights “people racing to complete the lengthy process of filling their application dossiers before the rules change” in May 2007.

In the final paragraphs of the article it states, “Many parents dismissed the Chinese government’s explanation that not enough orphans were available to meet the demand, noting that Western researchers have conservatively estimated the population of Chinese social welfare institutions (orphanages) at over a million children. The vast majority are girls, many of them given up because of the government’s one-child policy” (*New York Times*, December 24, 2006).

The Gannett-owned newspaper, *USA TODAY*, published an article written by the Associated Press (AP) on December 19, 2006 with the

headline “China Tightens Rules on Foreign Adoption.” Like the December 19 and 20 articles in the *New York Times*, the *USA TODAY* article outlines the basic information about the new restrictions and rule changes to China’s international adoption program. The AP used quotes from Keith Wallace, head of Families Thru International Adoption Inc. and Timothy Sutfin, executive director of New Beginnings Family and Children’s Services Inc. Both men were also quoted for the *New York Times* article on December 20, 2006.

On December 21, 2006 the website for ABC News published an opinion piece by Dr. David Katz of the ABC News Medical Unit with the headline, “China Restricts Adoption Policies.” The focus of this piece centers on Dr. Katz’s opinion that the CCAA’s new polices scheduled to take effect on May 1, 2007 are “misguided, discriminatory and shameful.” (<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=2743016&page=1>) Dr. Katz later states, “Singling out obesity as a measure of health just because it happens to be detectable is neither rational, nor fair.” He later makes a very broad, and in the article unsubstantiated, claim that “The biggest reason China is imposing restrictions on adoption is because it can, I suppose. A lot of foreigners are trying to adopt Chinese babies, and the government can afford to set limits. There are far more non-Chinese adults wanting to adopt than there are Chinese babies available. In the

crudest of terms, it is a sellers market.” (ABC News website December 21, 2006) Katz does not provide any facts, figures or attribution for his statement. It is not clear how Katz comes to his conclusion about the number of “non-Chinese adults” waiting to adopt and the number of Chinese children waiting to be placed in adoptive homes. In fact, a survey of the literature finds even the Chinese government does not have a firm count of the number of children living in the country’s vast network of orphanages and Social Welfare Institutions (SWIs).

The *Washington Post* publishes an article on December 20, 2006 written by Edward Cody and Jason Ukman with the headline, “China To Tighten Adoption Rules, Foreign Parents Must be Younger, Healthy, Married.” The article provides similar information to reports from the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* and outlines the basic information about the CCAA rule changes. The *Post* article quotes the president and chief of the Joint Council on International Adoption, Tom DiFilipo. The article also includes a quote from the leader of the department that approves adoptions at the China Center of Adoption Affairs, Xing Kaimin who states the “pool of children for adoptions has not kept pace with demand for overseas.” Xing is quoted as saying, “We also have to take into consideration as a first priority the Chinese families that want to adopt” (*Washington Post*, December 20, 2006).

The *Washington Post* article includes a quote from the executive director of New Beginnings Family and Children's Services, Timothy Sutfin. He was quoted in the material found in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*.

On December 20, 2006 Madeleine Brand interviews Tom DiFilipo, from the Joint Council on International Children's Services, on the National Public Radio program "Day to Day." DiFilipo outlines the basic information about the new CCAA rule changes and says China can afford to be so choosy because "There's been a huge surge in the number of applications that the CCAA has received from American families hoping to adopt Chinese orphans." (NPR "Day to Day, December 20, 2006) The interview lasts less than 4 minutes (3:54).

The NBC News website publishes an article from the Associated Press (AP) with the headline "Agencies: China Tightens Adoption Rules, New Restrictions Said to Bar Single, Obese, Over 50-Parents from Adopting." The article attributes information to the Joint Council on International Children's Services, and the adoption agencies, New Beginnings Family and Children's Services, and Families Thru International Adoption. These three agencies are quoted in many of the articles previously analyzed. This AP report has a brief quote from an unnamed U.S. Embassy spokesman in Beijing who said the embassy was

“looking into reports of the new regulations.”

(http://www.nbcnews.com/id/16286524/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/agencies-china-tightens-adoption-rules/#.UpsxgY11H1o)

The NBC News website also includes an interview reporter Andrea Mitchell conducted with the executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, Adam Pertman. This interview is less than 2 minutes in length (1:46) and, like the other articles analyzed, focuses on the basic outline of the CCAA rule changes and how it may affect parents in the United States seeking to adopt a child from China.

BBC News posted an article on its website on December 20, 2006 with the headline, “China Rules on Foreign Adoptions.” This article quotes the executive director of Texas-based Harrar’s Adoption International Mission, Jackie Harrar, Salome Lamarche of the Indiana-based Families Thru International Adoption and an unnamed official at the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA). The article states, “China has yet to confirm the details, but several adoption agencies say they learned of the changes—to be introduced on 1 May—a few days ago. One US adoption agency said up to 25% of its clients could be affected.”

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6194477.stm>)

The *Wall Street Journal*, describes itself as an “international daily newspaper with a special emphasis on business and economic news,”

(*Wall Street Journal* website.) posted a brief article on December 20, 2006 written by Geoffrey A. Fowler and Elizabeth Bernstein. The headline of the article is “China Weighs Rules Restricting Adoptions, People Who are Single, Obese, Over 50 or Taking Psychiatric Medications Could Be Denied.” It is worth noting the *Wall Street Journal* requires a subscription to get access to its newspaper and online material. This “pay for view” access may limit the number of people who have the ability to read the material in the *Wall Street Journal*. Throughout the years the *New York Times* has instituted various subscription schemes for its material. In 2006 there was no firm subscription requirement and most of the online material in the *New York Times* was readily accessible for free.

The *Wall Street Journal* article begins by briefly outlining the new rules and requirements from the CCAA. It is similar to the other articles published in different mainstream media outlets and includes quotes from Thomas DiFilipo from the Joint Council on International Children’s Services. The *Wall Street Journal* article provides more details about the process to adopt a child internationally from China and even mentions the fact that American families picking up their newly adopted children often stay at the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou. This article quotes sources not found in other previously analyzed mainstream media material including quotes from Sun Wencan, who runs the adoption department of

the Social Welfare Division of China's Ministry of Civil Affairs. The *Wall Street Journal* article also includes quotes from the chief of the Intercountry Adoption Unit at the U.S. State Department, Christopher Lamora and information from Ann Hassan, the China adoption coordinator at the New York-based agency Spence-Chapin.

What truly makes the *Wall Street Journal* article stand apart from the other articles mentioned is the fact that the reporters actually talked to a parent affected by the CCAA rule changes. The reporters quote Chavonne Yee, a single, 41-year-old Chicago resident who learned from her adoption agency that China may bar singles. Because of the CCAA changes Yee told the reporters she decided to “consider adopting a special-needs child, which would allow her to complete the adoption more quickly before the rules kick in” (*Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2006). The quotes from Chavonne Yee are brief and comprise the final paragraph of the article.

As this survey of the mainstream media coverage reveals there was not a great deal of reporting detailing the CCAA rule changes announced in December 2006. The first news of the changes was reported in the mainstream media on December 19—eleven days after the Rumor Queen posted the CCAA rule changes on December 8. Many of the reports in the mainstream media include quotes from the same

adoption officials and therefore the coverage as a whole does not provide readers with a variety of sources and information. In fact, the lack of diversity in the sources may lead readers to wonder if the journalists were truly being resourceful and finding the best sources of information.

Journalists often deal with deadline pressures and this may lead them to place calls to “the usual suspects” when it comes to getting quotes and information from sources. Taken to an extreme level one could argue that the coverage of the CCAA rule changes may be an example of “pack journalism.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “pack journalism” as; “Journalism that is practiced by reporters in a group and that is marked by uniformity of news coverage and lack of original thought or initiative.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2013) From my experience as a journalist I would add that “pack journalism” often results in homogenous coverage and a dependency on a handful of sources for information and quotes. This type of reporting may result in coverage that does not fully examine the main issues of a story and ultimately is a disservice to a publication’s readers or a media outlet’s audience.

After reading the December 2006 mainstream media’s coverage of the CCAA rule changes I find it surprising that there is no mention of the www.chinaadopttalk.com (Rumor Queen) website. A quick “Google” search by a reporter would have resulted in this site being discovered as a

resource of information. I find it even more astounding that most of the coverage did not include any direct quotes from parents seeking to adopt a child from China. With the exception of the December 20 *Wall Street Journal* article, the fears and concerns of real parents are not present in the coverage. I contend that without the voices of people directly affected by the CCAA rule changes—parents—the mainstream media coverage is incomplete and does not give audiences the full, emotional picture of the situation. Because the mainstream media coverage lacks the stories of families and relies on quotes from “official sources” there is no opportunity for parents to share support and offer advice. A great deal of the material found on the Rumor Queen site fills this void and offers emotional support to and from parents seeking to adopt a child from China.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and Implications

Suddenly and without warning the Rumor Queen became silent on September 23, 2013. As previously outlined, the entire content of her apparent last posting gave no indication she was shutting down the site or taking a leave of absence from her moderating duties. On September 23 she wrote:

I'm hoping we see referrals this week or early next week—before the holiday instead of after.

However, I don't see any rumors yet (Rumor Queen Blog September 23, 2013).

All of the informants interviewed for this dissertation commented on the fact that the Rumor Queen is “missing” and wondered about the future of the website. The informants and the online community are stunned that the Rumor Queen disappeared and gave no information about where she was going or what she wanted for the future of her website.

Some of the informants joked that my pursuit of obtaining an interview with the Rumor Queen may have prompted her to go underground. I'm doubtful that is the case. As a former reporter I admit to being tenacious when it comes to getting people to talk to me. My

attempts to secure an interview with the Rumor Queen were persistent. I sent many messages directly through her website and sent several email requests through her Gmail account. I never received a response.

In my search to answer the question “Where is the Rumor Queen?” I discovered a lengthy posting the Rumor Queen wrote on October 9, 2012 that foreshadowed her possible withdrawal from updating her blog. Here is part of that entry:

“The header of the site says we are “*A gathering place for families just getting started, waiting for a referral, and home with their children*“. I haven’t been here solely for those waiting for a very long time. Most of those involved in adoption from China have already adopted and are now raising their children. I’m not going to forget the people still waiting, but I suppose it’s time for me to officially state the focus of the blog (when there aren’t rumors) is now on *raising* our children. The forum’s focus is all over the place, and I see a lot of conversations there about packing, bottles, formula, and the like. Those things are still more than welcome on the forum, but aren’t going to be discussed every year on the blog.

Learning about allergens and toxins, discussing video games and video game consoles, talking about race and racial identity, and sharing viewpoints on books and movies our families might view or read — these are a few of the things relevant to raising our children.

So here’s the deal: I don’t know how often I’ll be posting while I’m going back to school, but when I post it will be about things that are affecting me and my children, or about current news articles that interest me, or about life in general. I’ll still keep an eye on rumors when we hit the window, and I’ll continue to keep stats and do analysis — but the stats and analysis may not happen immediately” (Rumor Queen Blog October 9, 2012).

The Rumor Queen ends her October 9 posting by stating, “I don’t know how often I’ll be blogging in the coming months, but I’m not ready to say goodbye just yet. I hope you’ll stick around and join the conversations” (Rumor Queen blog, October 9, 2006). This sudden lack of the Rumor Queen as an information source for parents adopting a child from China is significant. As the research in this dissertation reveals parents waiting to adopt a child from China in 2006 basically only had the Rumor Queen website and the community of users on the site to provide them with timely news, information, and support. Now that source is basically gone.

Uses and gratification theory in mass communication tells us the audience is active, that audience members make specific choices about their media use, and that the media compete with other sources of satisfaction (Katz). Further, audience members make media choices to 1) be informed, 2) identify with characters of the situation in the media environment, 3) be entertained, 4) enhance social interaction, and 5) escape the stresses of life (McQuail).

The findings of this dissertation reinforce our understanding of the uses and gratification perspective. The Rumor Queen users are active in their interactions with each other, and until September 23, 2013, the users continually interacted with the Rumor Queen herself. The website allows parents to actively communicate with each other to vent frustrations and confusions. Phrases like “This is my place to go for a sense of normalcy,” or “It makes a difference to find supportive words and know I’m not alone,” and “RQ I’m so glad you’re keeping this a place where people can complain without being told they shouldn’t feel a certain way,” are indicative of how users of the site value the community and support found on the Rumor Queen site.

Audience members (users) active on the Rumor Queen website wanted to be informed about a wide variety of topics and issues. These issues included learning about the CCAA’s international adoption rules and regulations, how to cope with the longer time to be matched with a child, travel and parenting tips, and welcoming your new child.

My analysis of the December 2006 Rumor Queen blog postings finds audience members (users) fulfill their cognitive needs by acquiring information, knowledge, understanding, and tension release and is an example of the uses and gratifications elements outlined in the research by Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973).

As explored in the theoretical framework chapter of this dissertation previous scholarly research shows the use of the Internet, like other forms of media, increases in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis. During the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States (Boyle, Schmierbach, Armstrong, McLeod, Shah, and Pan, 2004) and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster (Macias, Hilyard and Freimuth, 2009) researchers found blogs provided a way for people to take on a more active role in communicating and information seeking. This is also the case for users of the Rumor Queen blog.

Like the previous research exploring blog use during a time of crisis the Rumor Queen blog contains “clear expressions of emotions” found in the posts and the informant interviews. The findings of this dissertation support the past research that reinforces the notion that people created postings or read postings as a way to connect with a community publicly and to express the challenges of dealing with an emotional crisis. This

dissertation is employing the basic definition of the word “crisis” found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, which states, a crisis is “a time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger.”

In their research on Sept. 11, 2001 Boyle, Schmierback, Armstrong, McLeod, Shah, and Pan (2004) found that faced with a sudden, dramatic change in their environment, individuals felt “uncertain about the world” and therefore engaged in “greater efforts to learn” more information.” The issues examined by the Rumor Queen blog are, of course, not as universal as those explored in the blogs focused on the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 but there are some correlations regarding blog use during a crisis. Many of the informants interviewed for this dissertation said they sought out the information on the Rumor Queen in an effort to reduce uncertainty and to curb negative emotions associated with a lack of communication about the CCAA rule changes. The active communication, support, information, and social support on the Rumor Queen site once again showcases the uses and gratifications associated with the website as users check the site not only for information but also the kind of emotive or therapeutic uses and gratifications function discussed by Macias and her co-authors (2009).

The review of the literature investigating blog use during a crisis in Chapter 4 of this dissertation highlights several studies that show the use

of the Internet, like other forms of media, increases in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis. By reading the blogs the audience no longer has to solely rely on what the “gatekeepers” allow to be reported. This is the case for parents waiting to adopt a child from China. Before the Rumor Queen and other adoption blogs began around 2005 the adoption officials could be effective “gatekeepers” and be the sole source of information. Once other sources of information began to be developed and shared the adoption agencies lost “control” of the story. The informants interviewed for this dissertation and the textual analysis of the 3,270 postings on the Rumor Queen finds people engaged in greater efforts to learn more information in an attempt to reduce stress and uncertainty.

The informants interviewed said their trust of the information found on the Rumor Queen site changed during their adoption journey. The informants reported they were initially a bit skeptical of the information found on the Rumor Queen site but their trust increased over time as the material on the website proved to be accurate. This admission from the informants highlights issues concerning “authority” and how audiences using digital communication tools, such as blogs and social media outlets, think about the credibility of the information being shared. Audiences using digital communication tools appear to be shifting their need for a certain level of authority and credibility when consuming information.

According to the informants interviewed for this dissertation and other research investigating this issue, audiences actively seek and consider material even though the source of the information is not an expert or a journalist trained in vetting information for accuracy and attribution. In addition, the users of blogs, such as the Rumor Queen, seem comfortable accepting information from other users of the site.

The informants interviewed for this dissertation all said they were disappointed and frustrated by the lack of communication from their adoption agency when news of the CCAA rule changes began to surface. I propose the information vacuum created by Children's Home Society officials remaining silent about the CCAA rule changes could prompt waiting parents to feel mistrust and resentment. The Children's Home Society officials interviewed for this dissertation admitted the agency knew about the CCAA changes before the December 8, 2006 posting on the Rumor Queen website. I submit the agency would have gained trust and respect from its clients if it quickly communicated what it knew about possible rule changes. This decision to delay communication gave waiting parents the impression that Children's Home Society was putting the needs of CCAA officials first and may make parents believe Children's Home Society was out of touch and not keeping tabs on the latest information from China.

The introduction of new digital media sources not only expands the mass communication theory of uses and gratification but it also changes the way adoption agencies provide information to its clients. I suggest Children's Home Society and Family Services did not adequately address the information needs of its clients in December 2006 and that prompted waiting parents to seek information on the Rumor Queen site. The agency knew the Rumor Queen website posted details of the China Center of Adoption Affairs rule changes for its international adoption program and yet CHSFS chose to stay silent for eight days. In her interview Molly Rochon said Children's Home delayed notifying its clients because it wanted to get an accurate translation of the CCAA's rule changes. Waiting to post the most accurate information may be a sensible choice but staying completely silent during this time of turmoil for waiting parents harmed the agency's relationship with many of its clients.

Children's Home Society officials knew waiting parents were reading and using the Rumor Queen website and yet in essence pretended that the December 8 posting announcing the CCAA rule changes did not exist. I maintain Children's Home Society should have sent brief updates to its clients to foster personal connections with clients and build trust. The agency could have addressed the information posted on the Rumor Queen directly and explained that Children's Home Society

is aware the CCAA is going to announce rule changes to its international adoption program and agency officials have read the information posted on the Rumor Queen. Children's Home could then explain that it is working to obtain an accurate translation of these rule changes so it can provide clients the most accurate information. An email or other brief communication would have helped waiting parents feel like the agency is working on their behalf and is aware of the latest news from China.

During their interview Molly Rochon and Maureen Warren said Chinese officials now pay attention to the blogosphere and monitor the postings on the Rumor Queen website. This passive monitoring is similar to the approach Children's Home Society and other adoptions agencies have regarding the Rumor Queen. Nonetheless, this passive approach is rather unproductive and it is puzzling that Chinese and American adoption officials have taken such a laissez faire attitude to a source of information used by its clients. I am not suggesting adoption officials respond to every single rumor because that would be a drain of resources and not the best use of time. Rather, the agencies should react and communicate with clients when the Rumor Queen posts information that the agencies know is fairly credible and could significantly alter the sending country's international adoption program. This timely communication helps to foster

a sense that the adoption agency is aware of this new information and is looking out for the best interests of the waiting parents.

In the “About Us” section of her website the Rumor Queen writes, “Things started slowing down after we were logged in, and in a situation where I had no control I did the one thing I could do—try to figure out when we might finally get to bring our mei mei (little sister) home” (Rumor Queen blog “About Us” section). The Rumor Queen’s creation of her website is a clear example of someone seeking to be an active communicator attempting to grant herself personal agency in a system that left her feeling powerless. She created the website to help herself and other parents become informed, to enhance social interaction and to escape the stresses connected with waiting to adopt a child from China. In other words, she was in the position of many of her site’s users—seeking to gratify her needs through not only media consumption but active media creation.

This active participation by users/audiences to create new content as part of their quest to fulfill their uses and gratifications marks a significant change in how previous research into the theory portrayed users/audiences. Previous uses and gratifications theory research (Herzog, 1941 and Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973) found the

user/audience member is active in seeking information but is essentially passive when it comes to creating information. The availability of blogs, like the Rumor Queen, and other online media outlets now allows users/audience members to create their own information and share it with a potentially large and global audience.

The introduction of digital media sources, such as blogs, has led to the expansion of the uses and gratification theory in mass communication research. This development in the theory is highlighted as users of these communication tools consume and create the content on websites and blogs. This kind of immediate interplay among users was not available previously due to the static nature of past media tools. Radio call-in programs, televised forums, and the opinion pages of newspapers allow for a small level of audience participation in message creation. People wishing to participate in these media outlets must first deal with “gatekeepers” to negotiate access to these information channels. The role of the gatekeeper is diminished or non-existent with blogs and other online media outlets. As outlined previously, the Rumor Queen did monitor her site and act as a “gatekeeper” of sorts but the postings reveal the users of the site participate in a great deal of interaction.

Implications for Mass Communication

The informants, adoption officials, and the users posting on the Rumor Queen website all concur that there was not a great deal of mainstream media reporting detailing the CCAA rule changes announced in December 2006. As described in the Methods chapter of this dissertation I conducted various online searches of mainstream media sources to assess the level of coverage during this time period and found this topic was not extensively covered in the mainstream media.

As a whole the reports available in December 2006 from the mainstream media did not include much detailed information, the reporters quoted the same adoption officials, and most media outlets did not include the voices of the people most affected by the CCAA rule changes—waiting parents. The coverage did not provide a variety of sources and may lead readers to wonder if the mainstream media journalists were truly being resourceful and finding the best sources of information.

Journalists often deal with deadline pressures and this may lead them to place calls to “the usual suspects” when it comes to getting quotes and information from sources. In my personal experience covering

breaking news for a public radio network I confess to, at times, being forced to contact sources that I knew would return my calls, provide intelligible quotes, and understand their role in helping to cover a story. As a journalist your job requires you to perform and deliver by a deadline. Sometimes a reporter resorts to shortcuts and proven methods to make sure the story is delivered on time.

The mainstream media's lack of diversity in the use of sources in the reporting of the December 2006 CCAA rule changes is a disappointment. Taken to an extreme level one could argue that the coverage may be an example of "pack journalism." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "pack journalism" as; "Journalism that is practiced by reporters in a group and that is marked by uniformity of news coverage and lack of original thought or initiative" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2013). This type of reporting may result in coverage that does not fully examine the main issues of a story and ultimately is a disservice to a publication's readers or a media outlet's audience. From my experience as a journalist I would add that "pack journalism" often results in homogenous coverage and an unhealthy dependency on a handful of sources for information and quotes.

As mentioned in a previous chapter of this dissertation, I find it surprising that the mainstream media's coverage of the CCAA rule

changes contains no mention of the www.chinaadopttalk.com (Rumor Queen) website. A quick “Google” search by a reporter would have resulted in this site being discovered as a resource of information. I find it even more astounding that most of the coverage did not include any direct quotes from parents seeking to adopt a child from China. With the exception of the previously mentioned December 20th *Wall Street Journal* article, the fears and concerns of real parents are not present in the coverage. I maintain that without the voices of people directly affected by the CCAA rule changes—parents—the mainstream media coverage is incomplete and does not give audiences the full, emotional picture of the situation. Because the mainstream media coverage lacks the stories of families and relies on quotes from “official sources” there is no opportunity for parents to share support, build community, and offer advice. Therefore the mainstream media does not adequately satisfy the uses and gratifications needs of parents seeking to adopt a child from China.

The informants interviewed for this dissertation stated they searched the Internet looking for mainstream media coverage and sources of information about China’s international adoption program. As one of the informants, Karen, commented, “There wasn’t much coverage at all. If there was any it was about trafficking. It seemed like the journalists weren’t interested in the stories connected with people adopting children.

Trafficking is an upsetting issue and it's one we had to think about and talk about. But the adoption process is about so much more.”

Another informant, Annette, said, “I can't say I remember any news stories about international adoption or the slowdown. I mean they did manage to cover the fact that Meg Ryan was in China adopting her daughter.”

All of the informants expressed their frustration with the lack of coverage from mainstream media sources and said this dearth of information made them even more grateful for the resources available on the Rumor Queen website. The informants said the mainstream media did not help them stay informed, enhance their social interactions with other adoptive parents, did not provide an escape from the stresses associated with the long wait time to be matched with a child, and did not offer any real entertainment. These characteristics are all elements found in the uses and gratifications theory of mass communication. These comments bolster the case for the importance of the Rumor Queen website in helping to satisfy the uses and gratifications of this group of parents.

This case study of the Rumor Queen blog highlights how the advent of digital media outlets, such as blogs and social media, may now mean people seeking specific information about a topic may more readily turn to “like communities” and circumvent traditional mainstream media

sources such as newspapers and magazines. In reality, the changes in China's international adoption policies may be a one or two day story for the mainstream media. That's because these mainstream media outlets are designed to cater to the information needs of a vast and varied audience. Blogs such as the Rumor Queen can cater to the information needs of a specific "like community" of people seeking information on a very specific topic.

Implications for Uses and Gratifications Theory

The findings in this dissertation contribute to a better understanding of uses and gratifications theory and help expand this mass communication theory to be relevant in the examination of blogs and other online communication tools. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, previous uses and gratifications theory research (Herzog, 1941 and Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973) found the user/audience member is active in seeking information but is essentially passive when it comes to creating information. The availability of blogs, like the Rumor Queen, and other online media outlets now allows users/audience members to create their own information and share it with a potentially large and global audience. This adjustment in audience behavior and the development of new online

communication tools necessitates changes in the uses and gratifications theory.

Users/audience members now have the ability to shape and steer the topics discussed on blogs. This allows them to be active contributors to the conversation and no longer be restricted by gatekeepers solely deciding which information is relevant. When examining the Rumor Queen blog it is evident that, in her role as the site moderator the Rumor Queen has a great deal of influence over the topics examined, and the users of the site have the ability to share their ideas and information. The users also have the “right of reply” meaning they can engage with the Rumor Queen and other users.

One of the elements found in uses and gratifications theory focuses on the audience’s desire to escape the stresses of daily life (McQuail, 2010). Past uses and gratifications research has examined how reading or listening to information can help reduce stress but it has not investigated how stress is reduced when the user/audience member has the ability to write and share their stories with others.

Blogs such as the Rumor Queen can act as a sort of personal journal and allow users to review their old postings. It can be beneficial for users to have the ability to look back and see how they handled past

issues. When users re-read this past material it may provide insights and help to alleviate stress.

Personal Reflections

As briefly outlined in the introduction, the idea for this dissertation was sparked in 2006 as I attended a Waiting Families meeting at Children's Home Society and Family Services headquarters in St. Paul, MN. Month after month I dutifully attended these meetings hoping for news that I would soon be matched with my daughter. Month after month I drove home from these meetings in emotional turmoil. I was caught up in the big adoption referral slowdown. When I attended the Waiting Family meetings I was hopeful I would hear news that I was getting closer to the date of referral. Instead, I found every month I was actually losing ground as the China Center of Adoption Affairs informed my agency that it was pushing back the date of referrals further into the future. A 12 to 14 month wait was pushed back into a 16 to 18 month wait. It soon was increased to a 20 to 24 month wait and then it stretched out to years. As I write the conclusion to this dissertation in January 2014 I would still be waiting to be matched with my daughter in China's "regular program." Yes, I would be entering my eighth year of waiting to be matched with a child.

I described the agonizing waiting process to friends this way, “Imagine you’re running the race of your life. With each mile you run the finish line gets pushed back. You’re not making any real progress yet you continue to run. Eventually you realize you may never cross the finish line. That’s when you have to take a hard look at yourself and decide if you want to press on or get out of the race.” I pressed on.

The best decision I ever made in my life was to switch to the “special needs” program to adopt what was called “A Waiting Child.” On Thursday March 19, 2009 I met with a team of Children’s Home Social Workers to discuss what it would take to switch to the special needs program. My questions were answered, reassurances given, and more paperwork completed.

I had been hesitant to enter the program because I was afraid I would be matched with a child who had a special need that was beyond my ability to care for them. As a working, single parent I had to be practical and realize my own limitations. I was worried I would be faced with the decision to not accept the referral of a child with a severe special need. I knew it would be extremely difficult for me to turn down a child. My social workers assured me that just because a child might not be right for me did not mean the child would spend the rest of its life in a Chinese orphanage. It just meant the referral was not a good match for me and the

file would be available for another family to consider for adoption. Their words made sense to me—but still.

One of the most difficult things I had to do during my adoption process was to fill out the lengthy, detailed form outlining the hundreds of potential needs a child may have and to check off which special need I was willing to accept. Other parents I've spoken to who have adopted from the special needs program also say this process is excruciating. I felt like in a way I was "playing God." A simple check off in a box could determine if a child would grow up with me as it's mother, be sent to another family, or spend its childhood in a Chinese orphanage. I admit tears were shed as I filled out this document.

I submitted this form during a meeting with the Children's Home social workers on March 19, 2006. At the end of the meeting I jokingly said, "I've been waiting more than three years in the regular program so can I quickly expect a referral now that I'm switching to the special needs program?" The social workers chuckled and said, "Yes, please keep your cell phone on at all times. We could be calling you with a referral soon."

Everything changed on Monday March 23, 2006. I spent the day working at Minnesota Public Radio, teaching at the University of Minnesota, and taking classes. When I finally got home that evening I checked my personal e-mail and found I had a short message from

Children's Home Society. I assumed the social worker was contacting me about the forms I recently submitted to switch to China's Special Needs program.

It was almost 5 o'clock and I quickly made a phone call to my social worker. She told me to go to my computer, turn it on and sit down. I did as she asked. She said, "I have a referral for you to consider and I'm going to email you her file for you to consider and I'm going to send some pictures."

I clicked on the photo file and it opened to show a beautiful, beaming, barefoot girl standing and holding on to the side of a metal crib. When I filled out the initial paperwork all those years ago I was asked to "Describe the kind of child you are looking for." My answer was, "I'm looking for a girl with a sparkle in her eyes." I found my sparkle. Guo DanJi's eyes are full of hope and I know she is the one meant for me.

As a journalist I was initially dubious about the Rumor Queen website and unsure about the quality of the information she shared. Like the informants interviewed for this dissertation I was skeptical of this mysterious woman and the community of users who seemed so devoted to her. In my professional work I had to adhere to journalistic principles and practices. A team of editors checked the facts and figures in my reporting, my information needed to be attributed, and I was required to be

transparent about my sources. Following these practices allowed my audience to evaluate my reporting and make their own decisions about the quality of the information. The Rumor Queen did not follow nor seem to be too concerned with strong journalistic principles. This does not seem to be a big issue for the hundreds of users of the Rumor Queen site.

What led me to overcome my reservations about the website and become a regular lurker on the Rumor Queen? Desperation. Yes, the same motivation the informants interviewed said was the reason why they began using the website. Like the informants and users of the site shared in this dissertation a lack of information from adoption agency officials and no real coverage of the issue in the mainstream media was the main drive to actively seek other sources of information. I needed to find an outlet for my stress, to share this experience with other people, to be entertained by the stories of children and parents finding each other and beginning their lives as a family. I needed assurance that eventually I would be matched with a child and the China Center of Adoption Affairs rule changes would not mean my dreams would be shattered. I went to the Rumor Queen site and like hundreds of other families adopting a child from China—my needs were met and I was grateful for the community I found.

Areas of Future Research

The topics examined in this dissertation lend themselves to areas for future research. The first, and most obvious, is to explore where parents adopting from China are going to satisfy their news, communication, entertainment, and support needs now that the Rumor Queen is no longer actively involved in moderating her website. As previously mentioned the “Forum” section of the Rumor Queen site is still struggling and providing users with a limited resource to satisfy the uses and gratification needs of the site’s users. The “Forum” is essentially an online bulletin board for people to post questions and information. The “Forum” is fairly active but without a leader providing regular updates and helping to shape the communication it pales in comparison to what the Rumor Queen provided for parents from 2005 to 2009.

The textual analysis in this dissertation is qualitative in nature and therefore it is not suitable to use the findings as the basis for a quantitative study aimed at providing information with strong statistical relevance. Future researchers may find it useful to conduct a quantitative study of the Rumor Queen website to gain different insights into how the site was used.

This dissertation is a case study and as Robert K. Yin suggests it examines a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection. Future research may want to examine the postings falling outside of the strict December 2006 parameters employed in this dissertation.

The uses and gratification theory in mass communication is a framework for theorizing the findings in this dissertation and assists in the speculation about the broader implications for journalism and mass communication. Future researchers may want to further investigate what websites like the Rumor Queen mean for journalists and communicators.

Final Thoughts

Becoming a family through adoption is an incredible experience and it's changed almost every aspect of my life—my priorities, my work, my family, and my future. The first steps on the path to bring my daughter Flynn and me together were walked in sadness. Her birth family made an excruciating choice. I firmly believe it was a choice made out of love and selflessness. I probably will never know the people who gave Flynn life. But I can see glimmers of them in Flynn's personality. I think of them

often and hope they can somehow know the joy their child—our child—is bringing to the world.

I believe adoption brings out the extremes in life. One family's grief is overshadowed by an adoptive mother's joy. The wait to adopt a child seems agonizingly long but once you have your child the time flies by too quickly. At times the world seems so big and other times it feels so small.

Two people who know little or nothing about each other soon form the most intimate bond of mother and daughter. How and why the two of you are joined together remains a mystery. But you are thankful every day that a higher power brought you into each other's lives. The caring and love I feel for Flynn will last beyond my lifetime. It will live on in the life Flynn chooses to lead and in the people she will touch.

Flynn lived the first two years of her life without knowing the safety of a family or a mother's love. She endured her first major surgery alone and managed to thrive in an orphanage. Despite the difficulties she faced in her first years of life she possesses an incredibly positive spirit and a tender heart. She is one of the most amazing people to grace this planet and I get to be her mother. I am so lucky.

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