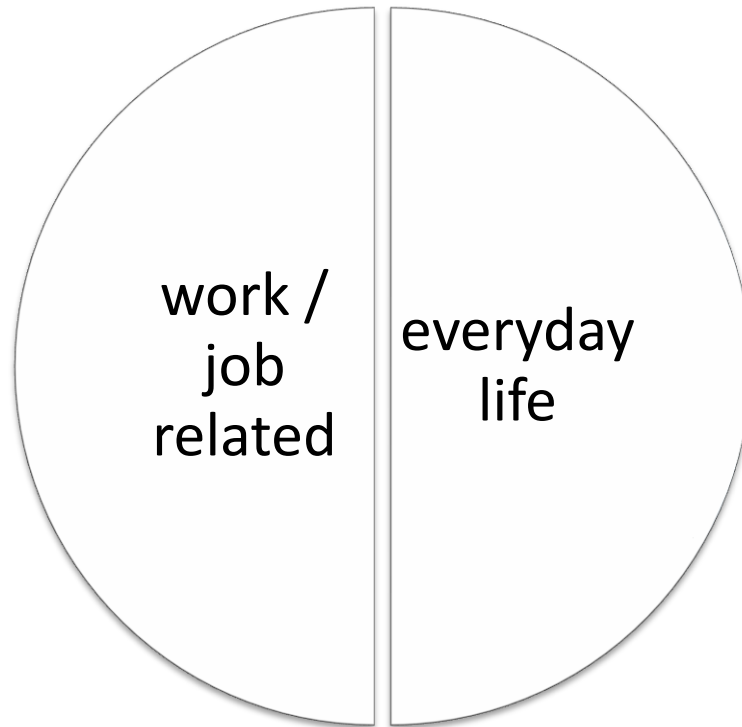


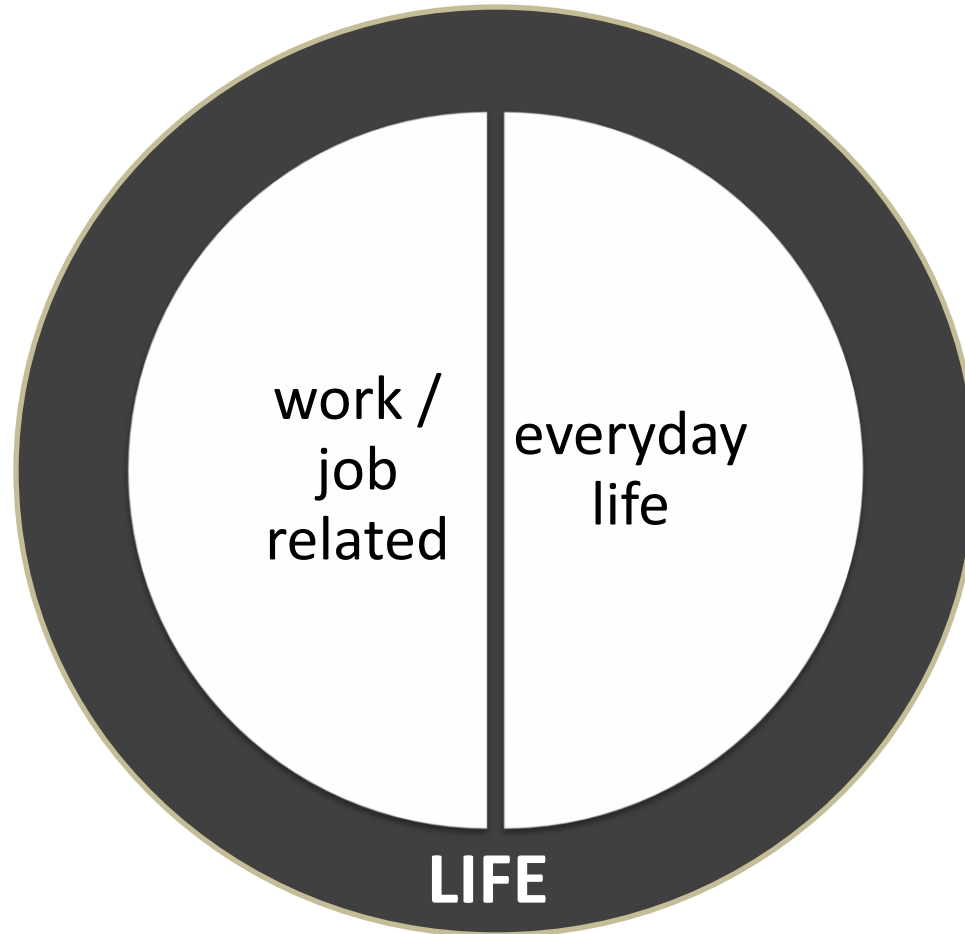
beyond everyday life:  
information seeking behavior in  
deeply meaningful and profoundly personal contexts

rachael clemens & Amber L. Cushing

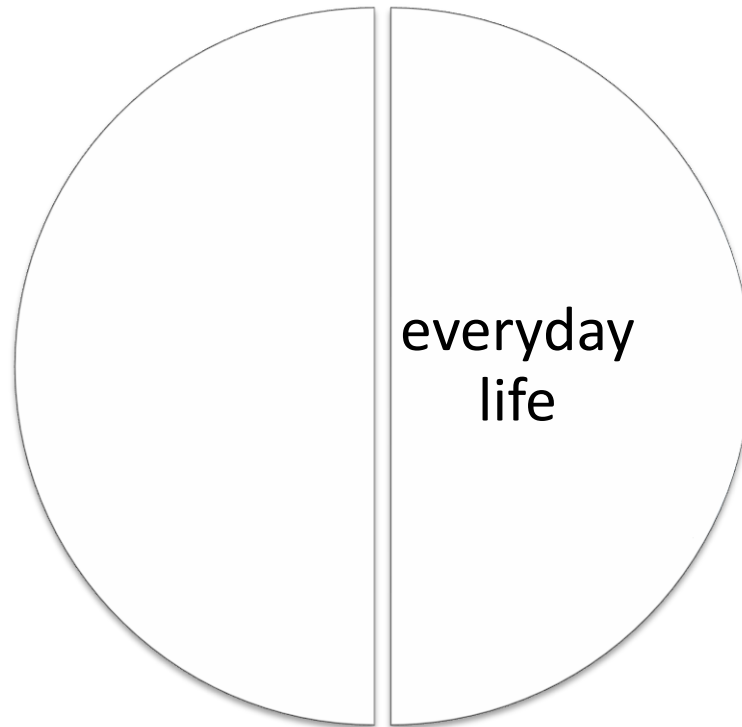
# information behavior research



# information behavior research



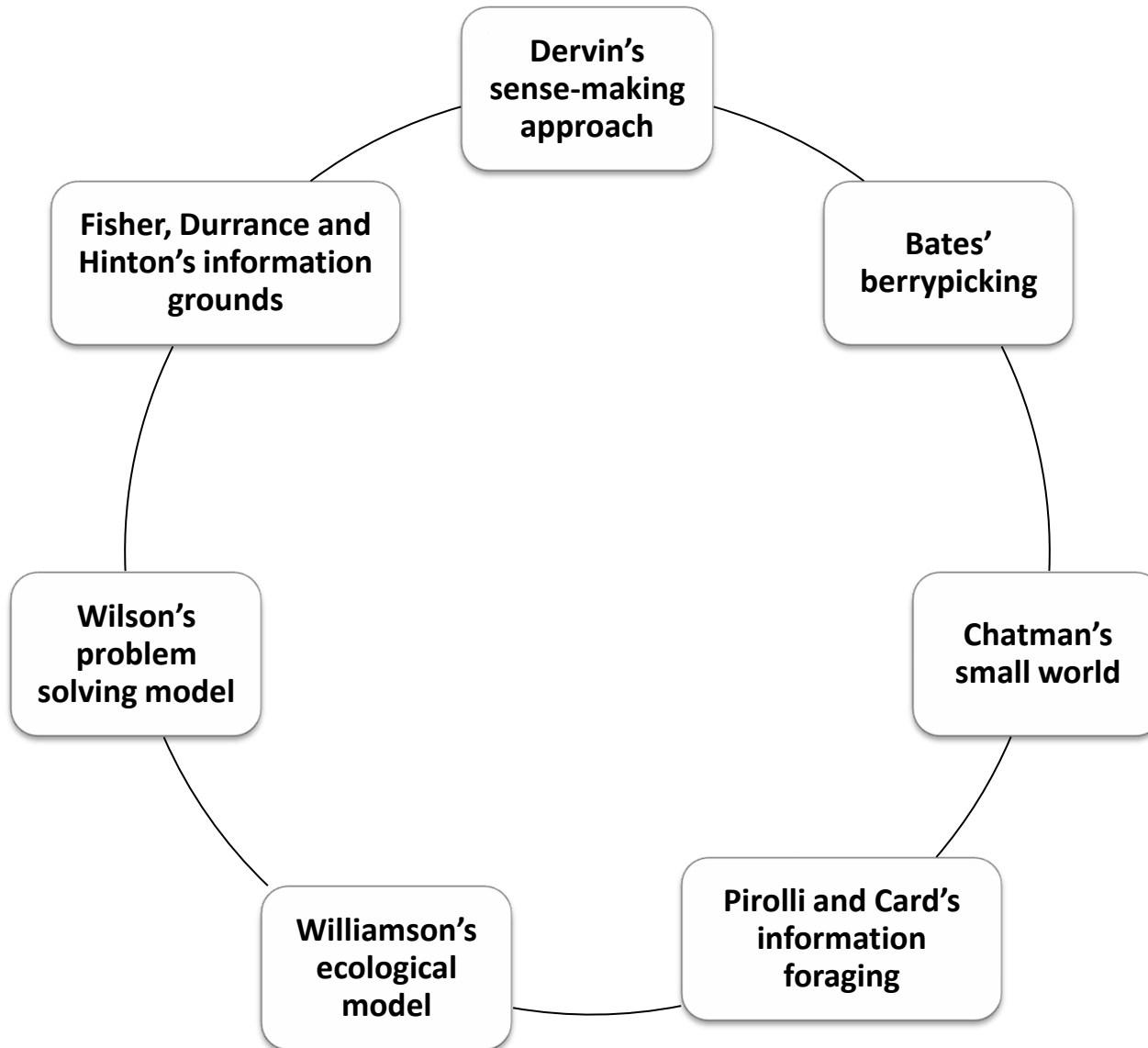
# information behavior research



The key word is everyday life, which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine.

The key word is everyday life, which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine.

# everyday life information seeking (ELIS)



The key word is everyday life, which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine.



The key word is everyday life, which refers to a set of attributes characterizing relatively stable and recurrent qualities of both work and free time activities. The most central attributes of everyday life are familiar, ordinary, and routine

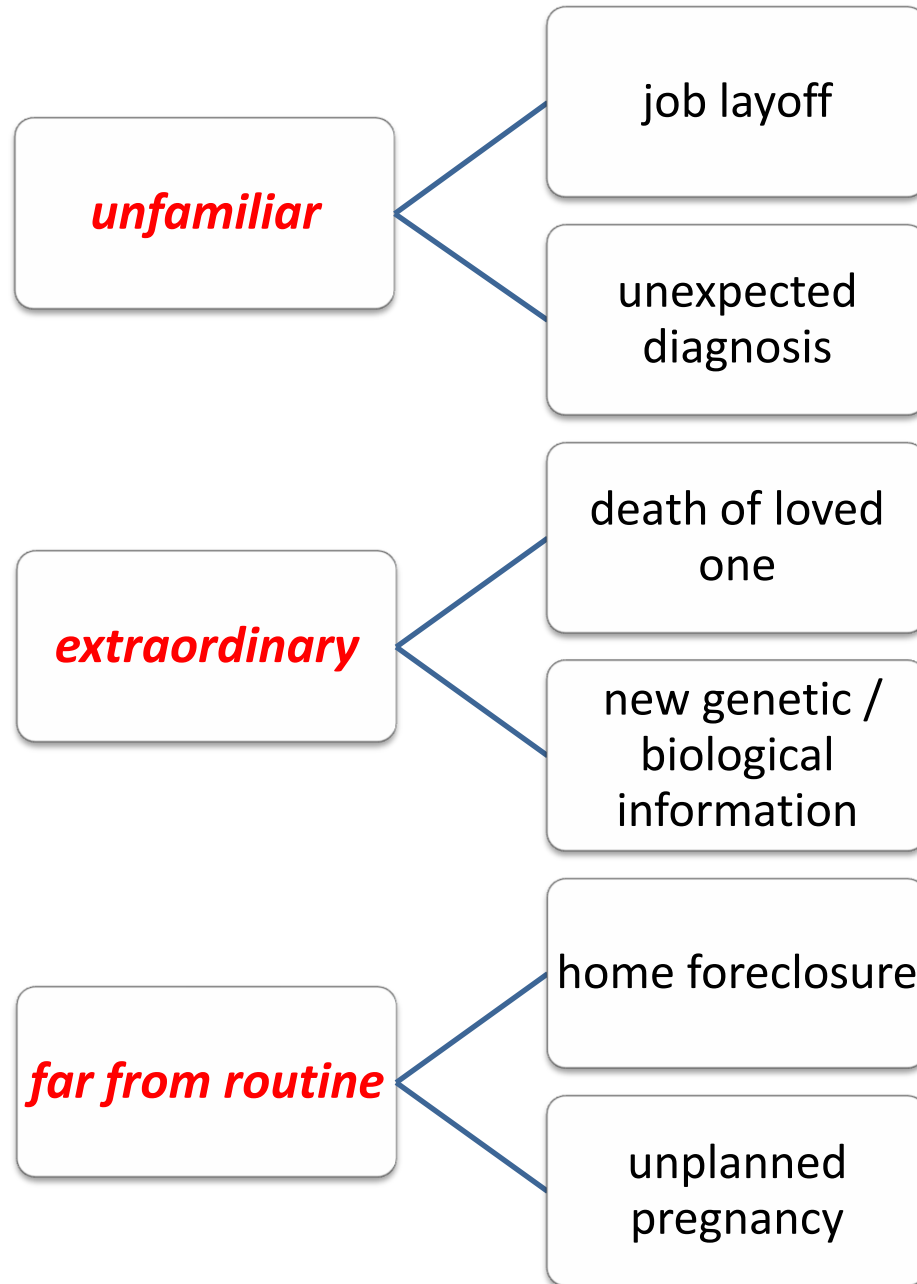
**extremely unfamiliar**

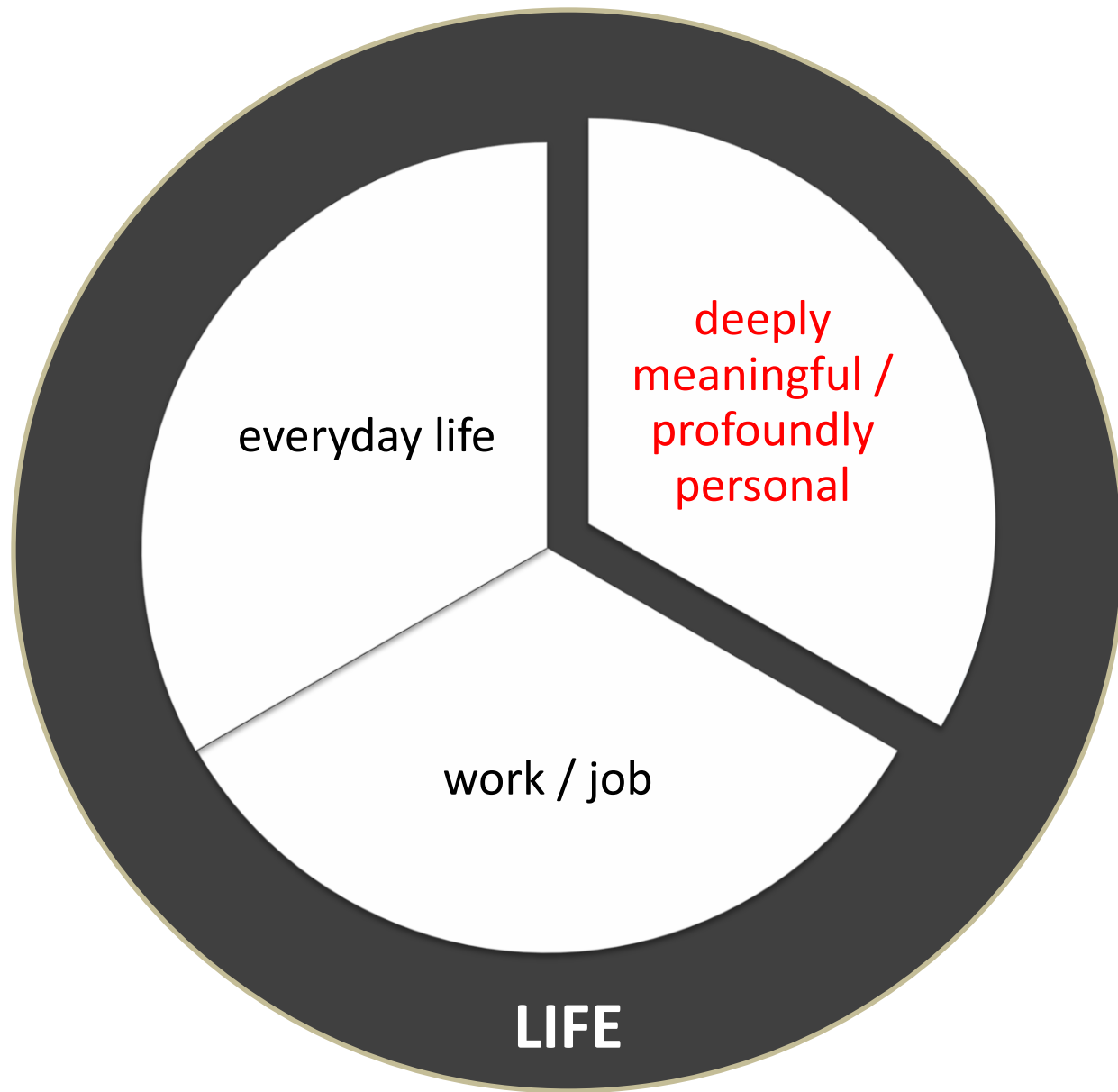
**extraordinary**

**far from routine**

**profoundly personal**

**deeply meaningful**





# OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

what are the characteristics of these deeply meaningful and profoundly personal situations that make it challenging to place within existing ELIS frameworks?

how do these contexts influence the search behaviors?

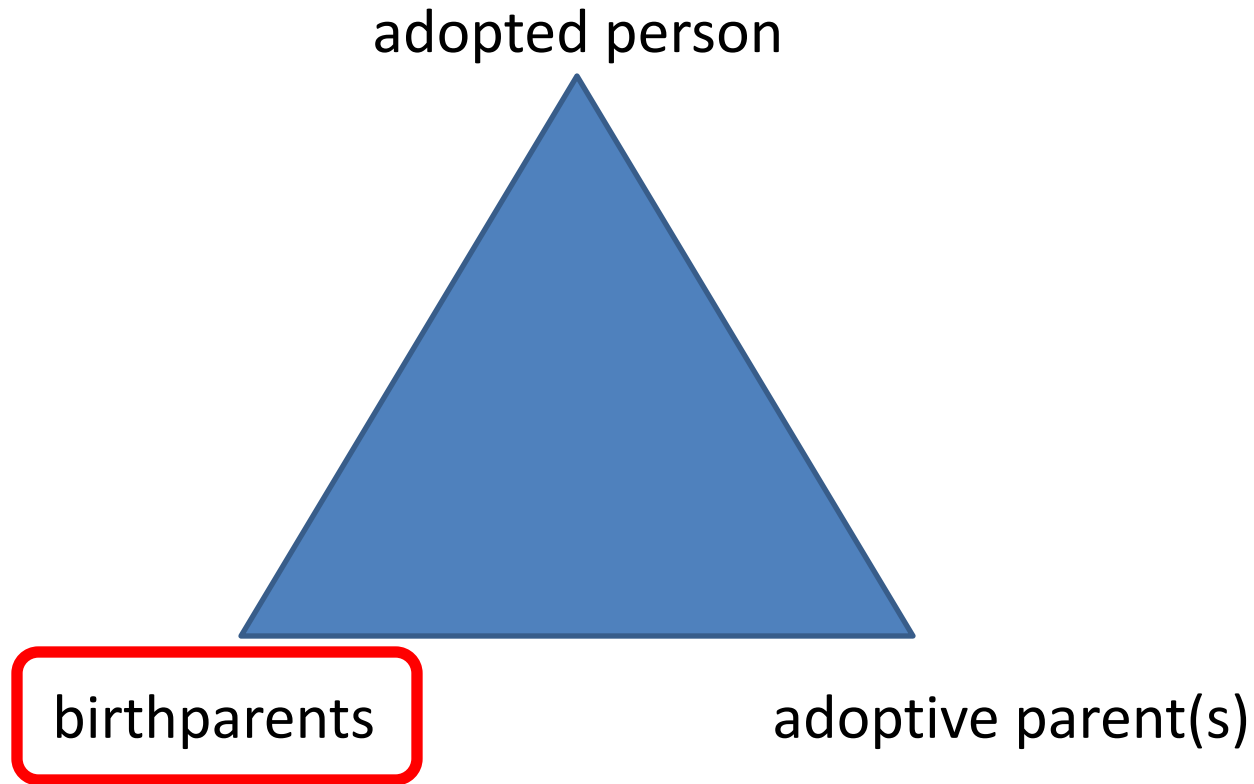
**EXPLORATORY STUDIES BASED ON LIVED EXPERIENCE**

# parallel studies

information behavior of  
women deciding to  
relinquish a child for  
adoption

information behavior of  
sperm donor offspring  
trying to uncover donor  
identity

**adoption is...** permanent legal transfer of full parental rights from one parent or set of parents to another parent or set of parents



# GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- what are the information needs and search pathways of women considering placing a child (born or unborn) for adoption?
- how do stress, emotion, secrecy, and shame surrounding the decision process affect a woman's information seeking behavior?

## birthmother participants n=5

---

|   |   |
|---|---|
| age at interview                              | early 30's – 60 years   |
| age at child relinquishment                   | 17-30 years   |
| relinquished child now                        | 12-40 years   |
| geographic location at time of relinquishment | 4 different U.S. states                                       |
| reunion status with child                     | no = 2<br>yes = 3*  |
|   | *one birthmother participant<br>successfully revoked adoption |
| type of adoption                              | closed = 3<br>open = 2  |

---



## adoption professional participants n=5

---

time working in adoption

10-31 years

experience providing support  
to girls/women considering  
child relinquishment

10 – over 100 birthmothers

profession

4 licensed clinical social  
workers

1 licensed counselor

---

## data collection

---

|                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| semi-structured interviews    | 60-90 minutes |
| (9 face-to-face, 1 telephone) |               |

recorded, field notes,  
transcription

---

---

|                                   |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| initial familiarity with adoption | only as a concept, knew adoptees and adoptive parents, social work class field trip to adoption agency, media  |  |
| sources of information            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• books about adoption</li><li>• Yellow Pages entries under 'adoption'</li><li>• social worker at adoption agency</li><li>• public library</li><li>• therapist</li><li>• adoption lawyer</li><li>• family physician</li><li>• friends</li><li>• peers at home for unwed mothers</li><li>• staff at home for unwed mothers</li><li>• shepherding home</li><li>• adoption support group</li><li>• author of <i>The Primal Wound</i></li><li>• psychics</li></ul> |  |
| sources of support                | parents, sister, social worker, friends, dorm mates, counselor, birthfather  |  |
| emotions experienced              | panic, denial, extreme sadness, excitement, confusion  |  |

---

## BIRTHMOTHER RESPONSES

---

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| influences                    | parents, birth father, social norms and stigmas, religious upbringing  |
| coping strategies             | denial, information gathering and planning, desire to understand and anticipate grief, prayer, religious/spiritual faith, desire to know every angle – no surprises                                    |
| missing / unknown information | legal information about adoption, types of adoption – spectrum of open to closed adoption, things that might go wrong, no enforcement or recourse for broken promises, how closed “closed adoption” is |
| barriers to information       | abbreviated and incomplete information about adoption options, feelings were contrary to what the information told her, court clerk  |

---

---

recommended information for  
people considering adoption

- talk with other birthmother(s)
  - talk with someone who experienced a similar crisis pregnancy and decided to parent instead of place
  - talk to adoptee(s)
  - require copies of all paperwork
  - take time to get to know adoptive family to develop level of trust
  - volunteer at a day care facility to come face-to-face with reality of parenting
-

**Margaret, Birthmother:** *I never considered suicide or anything like that, it was just **call daddy and what are we gonna do about this [pregnancy]**. So he came and he had talked to his doctor friend and his doctor friend had given him some advice and where I was going to school at that time they had what they called home for unwed mothers. So basically he and the doctor made arrangements so that when I would have been ordinarily going back to school, instead both my mother and my father took me back as if I was going to school because it was all very hush hush, I mean nobody knew. **No one was to know.** So daddy did everything.*

**Lillian, Birthmother:** *I wanted to know absolutely every angle that I could...I didn't want to be surprised after I placed him with the emotions I was going through...I didn't read a lot of books...I don't think there was a lot of books at that time and we didn't have the internet then but that's why I think the counseling was so important...I picked it apart every little thing...I would show up every week and think there was nothing left to talk about and then the week would go by and I'd have other things to ask about. **I'm definitely not a blunter...I looked in every nook and cranny I could and tried to find out answers***

**Lillian, Birthmother:** *I wish I would have known how **shrouded in secrecy** everything was...they don't necessarily lie to you, they just don't tell you the truth.*

**Angela, Birthmother:** *The social worker asked us [herself and adoptive family] to make a list of expectations for the open adoption over the years. But they didn't hold up their end of the deal. **There's no legal...no matter how much we sit there and talk about it they aren't required...***



***Sarah, Birthmother:*** *When I met the adoptive parents with the social worker I said specifically that I would like pictures of my daughter at least once a year for the first five years and I thought they agreed. I had to call the agency after her first birthday to see if the pictures were in the mail – and she [social worker] said she was sending two photos but the adoptive mother wasn't comfortable sending any more. That was actually the most excruciating moment of the entire process – I was so traumatized that I could never call back – how could they break their promise – that was all I asked for.*

***I had no idea that any agreements from the adoptive family are not binding whatsoever. Why didn't they tell me that?***

---

observations about information seeking behavior of women deciding to place child for adoption

information overload, trust social worker / adoption agency to provide all the information they need

what resources, people or places do women consult for information during the decision process?

peers, parents, birthfather, fear of foster care system, misinformation about adoption

observed emotional state and level of stress

distraught, confused, frustrated, sad, angry, denial

types of questions and information sought

adoption process mechanics, information about prospective adoptive parents, what to expect, does adoption scar a child for life

---

---

perceptions about what “information” ultimately helps a woman make and cope with a decision

knowing what to expect in terms of the letting go process

understanding that none of the answers/options are really right for her but trying to choose the best under the circumstances

making a connection of trust with the adoptive family

finding support from their families

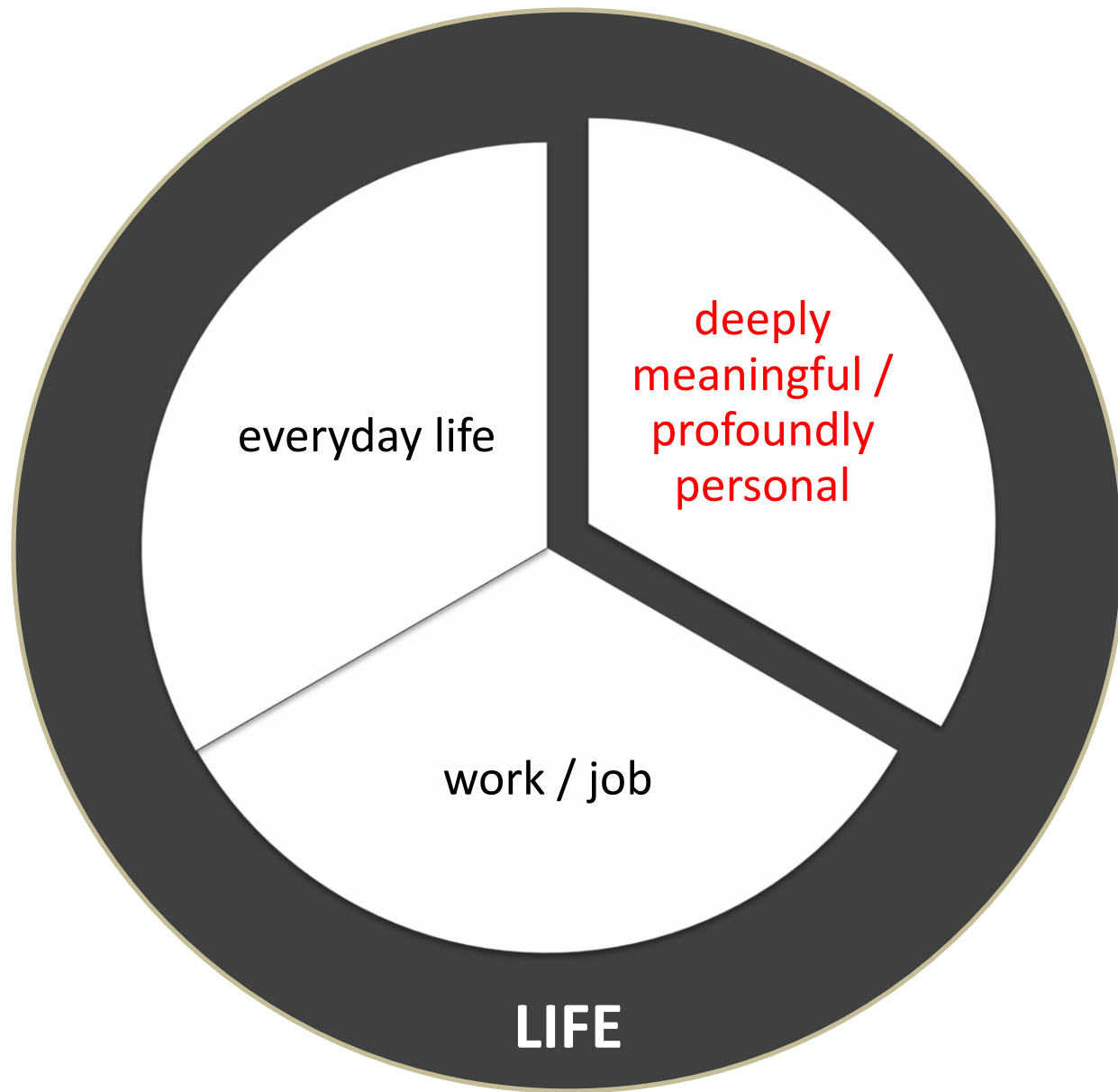
understanding the grieving process

---

**Alex, Professional:** *Most of them don't know the adoption options available to them and when I try to educate them some really all of a sudden want more, want more and some "I don't even want to talk about it, my mind is already made up, I just want to get it over and done with."*

*So there's that two schools – **some want more more info** and I've had...usually the ones that want more and more information then will become more and more demanding about getting their needs met. They will turn around and go back to their agency [adoption] and say "You know, wait a minute, I know I can do this and I want this. This is how it's going to be."*

*And then they are more empowered. But then there are others that I try to educate and they don't even want to go there. They're the **ones that really need to close off in order to be able to do this process [relinquish child for adoption].***



---

artificial insemination

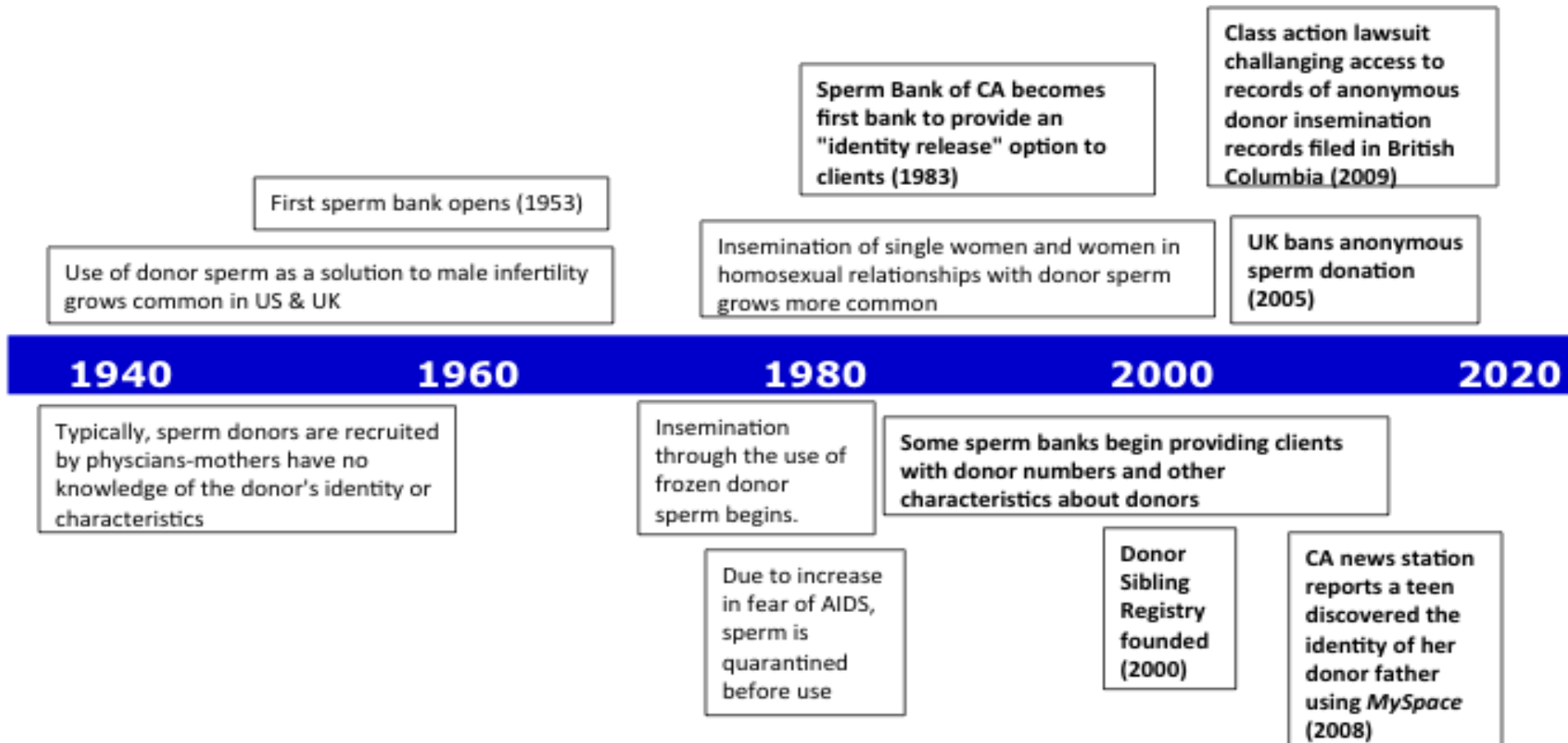
“the introduction of semen into the vagina or cervix by artificial means” (Jensen, 1982)

donor insemination

artificial insemination, with the use of donor sperm

---

# DONOR INSEMINATION TIMELINE



(Lorbach, 2003; Mulvihill, 2008; Mahlstedt, LaBounty & Kennedy, 2009)

# U.S. DONOR INFORMATION RELEASE

- Client given no information about the donor
- Client given non-identifying information about the donor
- Client given non-identifying information about the donor and a **donor number**
- Client chooses a donor who agrees to have his identity revealed to offspring after offspring's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday



## anonymous donor insemination banned:

Austria

Finland

The Netherlands

New Zealand

Norway

Sweden

Switzerland

United Kingdom

Australian states of: Western  
Australia, Victoria, New  
South Wales

# DONOR OFFSPRING

- How many exist in the US?
- Many never told of their donor conceived status
- Some search, some do not
- Many found to suffer from *genetic bewilderment*  
psychologists recommend search (Turner & Coyle, 2000)

## GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do sperm donor offspring search for information about their donors and their genetic origins?

What commonalities and differences exist between the characteristics of donor offspring searches for information about their donors and their genetic origins?

# METHODS

- PCVAI listserv
- An announcement forwarded by the director of a non-profit organization specializing in infertility and donor conception
- Word of mouth

# METHODS

- Hour long, semi-structured interviews
- Specific questions about the search experience
- Transcription completed using pseudonyms
- Extended report of data in Cushing (2010)

# FINDINGS

n=16

| Name    | Current age | Age when discovered donor conceived | How long after discovery did you begin searching? | Search period           |
|---------|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Marie   | 59          | 46                                  | immediately                                       | 1996-1998               |
| Paul    | 46          | 44                                  | immediately                                       | 1997-present            |
| Joy     | 44          | 44                                  | right away  | 2009-present            |
| Erin    | 51          | 39                                  | immediately                                       | 1997-2003               |
| Emma    | 50          | 35                                  | a few years                                       | 1994-1996, 2008-present |
| Kate    | 39          | 33                                  | right away  | 2003-present            |
| Tiffany | 32          | 32                                  | less than a day                                   | 2009-present            |
| Amy     | 35          | 29                                  | right away  | 2003-2004               |
| Sam     | 54          | 28                                  | a few days  | 1983-1991               |
| Tina    | 26          | 25                                  | 2 years   | 2007-present            |
| Anne    | 27          | 19                                  | 6 months  | 2001-2003, 2009-present |
| Kelly*  | 25          | 8                                   | 15 years  | 2006 (2 weeks)          |
| Rose    | 27          | 8                                   | 8 years   | 1998-2008               |
| Kim*    | 22          | 4                                   | 15 years  | 2006 (2 weeks)          |
| Cindy   | 31          | 4                                   | 6 years   | 1988-1994               |
| Lucy**  | 24          | as early as I could remember        | age 18  | 2003-present            |

\*Sisters, interviewed separately

\*\*Unlike all other participants, Lucy was not raised originally thinking a social father was her biological father. The age at which all other participants were told that they were donor conceived (column 3) was also when they discovered they were not biologically related to their fathers.

**Tina:** *I think 2 years passed before I even tried to do any sort of Internet searching. I didn't even know the words. I didn't even know "donor conceived." So I had to start from the basics, "what is this?"*

**Tiffany:** *...told was a friend that I'd known since I was 8 or 9 and she's actually an OB [obstetrician] so I told her because I needed her help in figuring out what kind of doctor my mom would have seen.*

**Cindy:** *The only reason I wanted to know if there were yearbooks was because I was in Junior High at the time and there were yearbooks. So I thought...you know?*

**Amy:** *I have some image of the bowels of the hospital somewhere where maybe there are some files that they're just not telling me.*

**Cindy:** *I kind of made up a little bit of a story. I said hey I'm looking for a Doctor I think it may be Dr. Smith or whoever, can you kind of just give me his physical description, how tall is he, what eye color does he have?*



***Tina:*** Beyond the online community, I have no community of other people like me.

***Anne:*** I first, well my mom explained it to me as artificial insemination...and I just felt like it was so surreal, this doesn't happen to real people, like a made for TV movie or something.

***Tina:*** *I think its just the process itself and not really knowing what to do next is frustrating and the fact that the records aren't kept and my mother can't access her records either, its very frustrating. Also just that I think I get into a belief about my rights that I don't have the right to this information, even though its about me. I don't get my own information about my genes.*

*Lucy: I feel I've done as much as I feel I could have done, at this time to find those answers and to find siblings and I think that's why I devote a lot of my blog to giving advice and giving ideas to other people because I feel like, you know, I want to pay it forward...*

## The Anonymous Us Project

[Stories](#) [Gallery](#) [Podcasts](#) [About](#) [Contact](#) [Links](#) [Subscribe](#)

### Donor Conceived Stories

#### Beginnings And Ends ~ A Matter of Parental Choice

One of my earliest memories is of lying in my pram.

Few people would believe that, as many adults have difficulty remembering their first day at school, let alone anything that happened when they were only a toddler, but remember it I do!

I was probably a little over a year old at the time and lying down in my pram because I was strapped firmly in place by my harness. I was supposed to be taking an afternoon nap while my mother was busy elsewhere but I was bored and not at all tired. I wanted to be up and

READ STORIES FROM:

[Donor Conceived](#)

[Adoptee](#)

[Donor/Surrogate](#)

[Fertility Industry Professional](#)

[Parent](#)

[Submit a Story](#)

# HIGHLY EMOTIONAL, DEEPLY MEANINGFUL, PROFOUNDLY PERSONAL

**Lucy:** ...I think it's a very, very vulnerable position to be in and its very emotionally draining.

**Kate:** I'm not just searching for answers in my career or my love life, but now I'm searching for answers in my own identity.

nobody can  
understand what  
I'm going through  
  
I have no idea where  
to start

*unfamiliar*

I don't know  
anybody else who's  
been through this

why does this have  
to be such a  
mystery?

*extraordinary*

life-long impact

how am I going to  
move on?

why can't I get the  
whole truth?

*far from routine*

no traditional  
information  
pathways

