Abstract:
When studying adoptive families throughout the life course, important benefits can be determined that demonstrate marital and adoption experiences most often recursively benefit one another in adoptive families. Specifically, exploring changes in the adoptive family’s developmental life-cycle at key transitional or nodal events reveals a magnifying effect occurs, usually benefiting both adoptive parents and children. Based on the literature and a study involving qualitative interviews with 43 adoptive couples regarding adoptive family life, this paper asserts that there is a “magnifying effect” as couples and families progress throughout the life cycle. Couples who have solid marital relationships will find the transition to parenthood will likely increase or “magnify” their family happiness with the increase of an adopted child or children. Couples with troubled marital relationships will find adding a child “magnifies” their marital and familial problems. Adoptive families that adjust well during earlier transitional stages will most likely continue to be successful in their future adjustments at other key transitional events (such as entrance to school, teenage years, and leaving home). While other factors, such as age of placement or special needs also have bearing, marital satisfaction seems to be associated with family satisfaction with adoptive experiences and adoption outcomes. Conversely, adoptive placement also seems to assist marital couples with their sense of social compatibility with others. A “leap-frogging” effect occurs whereby infertile couples describe feeling “left behind” when their social counterparts begin to have children. Adoptive placement “leap-frogs” them forward to a new stage of family development helping couples feel “caught up” with others in their social network, and placement seems to have beneficial effects for couples in this process. A comparison of social networks reveals that attitudes about marital and family self-conceptualization are heavily influenced by the social networks of the adoptive parents. Additionally, the data reveals that comparative adjustments over the life-cycle between individual adoptee development and family development indicate periods of harmony and disharmony that can be predicted in an effort to better provide counseling services to adoptive families. The study demonstrates that a developmental, family systems perspective is essential to providing support to adoptive families due to the recursive, systemic, and usually mutually beneficial nature of adoptive family life.