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Adoption in the U.S.: The Emergence of a Social Movement

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The Adoption Movement, which has been evolving in the U.S. since the late 1970s, is now fully formed. As a proactive, reformative social movement, adoption has reached the organizational, or institutional, stage. Evidence is seen in the roles assumed by government and voluntary agencies and organizations, as well as other systems in society, to support adoption, and in the extent to which adoption has been infused in the American culture, making it a part of our everyday landscape. Implications of the adoption movement for the helping professions are discussed, as is its impact on increasing cultural and racial diversity in the U.S.

Key words: *adoption; social movement; social policy*

The concept of a family accepting the biological child of other parents and caring for and raising the child as its own has been familiar throughout the ages. Recorded laws relating to the adoption of children are found throughout history in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, in Hindu and Roman Law, and in the Old and New Testaments. Given its place in early Judaeo-Christian teachings, it is not surprising that adoption was known in Europe and wherever Europeans settled. Adoption took place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the late 1600s, and in 1851 the first law focusing on considering the interests of the child in long-term planning was formulated in Massachusetts (Moe, 1998).

During the past twenty-five years, an elaborate network of efforts by the adoption community has brought about unique

and dynamic trends culminating in the emergence of adoption as a social movement—a movement that is similar to other social movements in modern America, for example the Women’s, Labor and Civil Rights Movements.

The Emergence of Social Movements

As a reform process representing a particular approach to social problems, social movements require the participation of “large numbers of people who organize to promote or resist change” (Henslin, 2004, p. 427). The issue must be recognized as a social problem, rather than an individual or private trouble (Mills, 1959). Those involved in social change commonly share both a heightened sense of moral outrage at injustices resulting from the social problem, and agreement about the direction that needs to be taken. Their views may be contrary to the status quo—consequently a sense of “we” and “they” may develop, further strengthening their identification with the cause.

Social movements emerge through a process, beginning with unrest or agitation in reaction to a social problem, followed by a mobilization of interested parties. People organize, tasks are divided, leadership emerges, the public is informed, and policy decisions begin to take shape, leading ultimately to the institutionalization of the movement. The process is not smooth and there may be a period of decline in the organization when it either dies or is revitalized in an altered form. Applying these commonly agreed-upon criteria (Henslin, 2004), adoption in the U.S. today may be viewed as a social movement.

Social movements may be either *proactive*, with a goal of social change, or *reactive*, implying resistance to change. Using Aberle’s (1966) typology, proactive movements can be classified according to both their target (the individual or society) and the amount of change sought (specific or total). Proactive movements that seek to change a specific aspect of an individual’s behavior, such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, are *alterative*; those seeking total change of individuals, such as religious fundamentalist movements, are *redemptive*. The focus of the remaining two types is societal change—those with objectives of changing a specific aspect of society, as exemplified by the labor move-

ment, are *reformative*, and those attempting to change the entire social order, such as a socio-political revolution, are *transformative* (Aberle, 1966). From this perspective, the adoption movement can be classified as proactive and reformative. Adoptive families and adoption advocates, professionals, institutions, and organizations work to advance social welfare policies, resources, and services that contribute to the solution of a commonly perceived and growing social problem: the presence in the U.S. of hundreds of thousands, and in the world millions, of children who are in need of a caring, safe and permanent home. Media and commercial interests may also serve to advance the cause, even if guided by less lofty objectives.

Historical Background:

Adoption and the Child Welfare Movement

The emergence of these social movements in the U.S. follows 150 years of efforts by social reformers, special interest groups, professionals, and politicians to establish policies that, at different times in history, have served to promote or curtail adoption. Adoption has always been considered a component of the child welfare movement in the U.S. Charles Loring Brace's well-known work with the Children's Aid Society in New York beginning in 1853, and his 1872 book, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, were significant in raising the public's consciousness regarding destitute children and sparking the child welfare movement. By its close in 1929, his innovative and controversial Orphan Trains program had moved as many as 150,000 children, ages two to sixteen—described as poor, neglected, homeless and unruly, but not necessarily orphaned—from the slums of New York to the mid-west and the west where most found permanent homes. Replicated in other cities with large immigrant populations, the number of children affected by this program was even higher. While most of the children were not legally adopted, the intention and permanency in the placements paralleled the adoption experience.

Literary writers of the Progressive Era, social workers of the Settlement House Movement, and other social reformers concerned about the welfare of children worked to shape professional

interventions directed at helping children and families and to influence national and state policies. Since 1920, the Child Welfare League of America has represented over 600 private and public agencies concerned with such issues as child labor, child abuse, out-of-home placements, and also adoption. By the 1930s the Child Welfare Movement was addressing the deplorable conditions surrounding the care of children, with priority given to the "best interests of children." While it was not until much later that adoption became a separate focus of agencies, the development of governmental policies to regulate procedures and institute standards protecting not only adoptees but also biological and adoptive families began on the state level. By 1929 all 48 states had statutes governing adoption (Moe, 1998); subsequently, the federal government instituted adoption policies. Although adoption policies have been highly controversial and in flux, coinciding with prevailing social attitudes and values, they have served to further societal awareness of adoption as an issue in its own right.

Family and Community Diversity

An important consequence of the changes in adoption policies is increased family and community diversity; this derives from both domestic and international adoptions. Diversity occurs along a variety of social dimensions including religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, race and sexual orientation.

Berebitsky (2000) argues that from the mid-1800s to the end of the 1920s adoption reflected ethnic and religious diversity. Given the demographics of the day, the children involved in the various orphan train programs were disproportionately Irish and German Catholic and the waiting families were usually Protestant—a situation which the Catholic Church and other religious organizations opposed. Also at the core of adoption was socio-economic diversity, a pattern that continues today. Often, although certainly not always, it was and continues to be the poor who turn to adoption as a means of ensuring greater opportunities for their children. Moreover, age and marital status were not barriers to adoption during this period.

In line with the conservative tone of the country after World War II and the quest for predictability and sameness, policies

aimed at racial and cultural homogeneity in adoption emerged. Adoption professionals tried to “match” adoptive parents and children for physical characteristics and religion. Non-kinship adoptions tended to be with middle-class, heterosexual couples. Procedures regarding assignment of a religion to foundlings were determined locally. For example, in New York City foundlings with no visible sign of a faith (e.g., not found clutching a holy medal in a church pew) were assigned a religion. They became Protestant, Catholic or Jewish in sequential order, with the exception that black infants were not designated Jewish.

Transracial adoption was virtually unknown before the 1950s and never exceeded more than a very small percent of adoptions in the U.S. The American Indian Movement, modeled on the Black Power Movement, led to the creation of Native American Tribal Councils, many of which opposed transracial adoption of Native American children, fearing the loss of the child’s birth culture and the development of problems of identity (Freundlich, 2000; Simon, 1994). Their concerns were in large part a reaction to the Indian Adoption Project. This project, sponsored jointly by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America, facilitated the adoption of approximately 700 Native American children by caucasians between 1958 and 1967 (Melosh, 2002). It became a repudiated social experiment; tribal concerns resulted in lobbying and protests, eventually helping to bring to fruition the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, specifying first preference in foster care and adoption be given to persons from the child’s tribe and last to those of another culture or race. This Act, together with the unique position of Native American Tribes as sovereign nations under federal law, enabled tribes to avoid transracial adoptions by making their own custody arrangements (Melosh, 2002).

A similar trend was seen in the African-American community. In 1971, 35 percent of adoptions of African American children were transracial (Hollingsworth, 2002). The emerging black pride during the Civil Rights Movement crystallized attitudes and, as early as 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers took a stand in opposition to the adoption of black children by whites, viewing it as a form of genocide. Outcries against transracial adoption and the concomitant assimilation it

implied paralleled earlier reactions by minority religious groups, especially Roman Catholics, against interreligious adoption. Data analyzing media interviews with transracial adoptees between 1986 and 1996 lend support to concerns of the Association of Black Social Workers. The adoptees interviewed experienced racial discrimination, the absence of parental role models for racial/ethnic social identity, and a failure to feel connected to their racial/ethnic community (Hollingsworth, 2002).

Yet some researchers and media reports suggested transracial and intercultural adoptions did not have deleterious effects on the child, and racial considerations should not take precedence over what they defined as concern for the best interests of the child. This argument was supported by a 1993 *New York Times Magazine* article which stressed the importance of transracial and transcultural adoption in providing socio-economic opportunities to children born abroad and adopted by Americans (Porter, 1993). By 1994 a majority of the U.S. Congress agreed with this position and legislation was passed banning discrimination solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the placement of children in both foster care and adoption.

In spite of such legislation, there is resentment in many areas towards the growing diversity associated with transracial and transcultural adoption. Causes include prejudice, often resulting from xenophobia, and reactions to the worsening economic conditions, which may make anyone who is visibly different a target of hostility. This may even lead an adoptive family to move in the hope of finding a community more open to their child.

International adoptions, which also contribute to family and community diversity, date at least as far back as the late 1940s. The 1948 Displaced Persons Act opened the doors for 3,000 orphan refugees to be adopted. In the following year, the author Pearl S. Buck established Welcome House to aid Amerasian children ready for adoption. The 1953 Refugee Relief Act allowed 4,000 orphan visas over three years, and in addition there were 500 special visas for Korean orphans to be adopted by Americans. In 1956, Holt International Children's Services was started, furthering the adoption of Korean children; that agency remains active. However, these international adoptions, which generally implied

the creation of transracial families and communities, were the exception rather than the rule.

Socio-political events of the late 1970s led to a change in attitude towards diversity in adoption, and new regulations in international as well as domestic adoption followed. Within the U.S., the co-incidence of the 1973 Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion and had a negative impact on birth rates, and the growth of the Women's Movement, which led to more single women raising their biological children, caused the number of people seeking to adopt to far exceed the number of infants who were waiting for adoption. At the same time, the 1975 Vietnam "Baby Lift" following the fall of Saigon brought thousands of Vietnamese children to the U.S. for adoption. While it was clear not all were orphans, the adoption of these children in the U.S. furthered the trend towards diversity through adoption.

That trend continues today. U.S. Department of State website data reveal that over the past 14 years there has been an almost consistent rise, and a tripling of orphan visas in the past 10 years, from under 6,500 to over 20,000 per year. The first report by the U.S. Census Bureau which profiled children under the age of 18 who were internationally adopted was released in 2003. These data, collected for the 2000 Census, showed that over one-third of the children had been born in Korea (24%) and China (11%) (Peterson, 2003, p. D7). Given that the vast majority of American parents who adopt abroad are caucasian, the diversity resulting from international adoption continues and is increasing.

But State Department figures indicate that the specific countries from which the largest numbers of orphans come change from year to year. The Department's memoranda regarding the countries of origin for visas issued to orphans coming to the U.S. highlights the importance of geo-political events; in any given year the "popular" countries of origin may shift, reflecting specific social conditions or legislation. For example, Romania, which ranked first in 1991 and 5th as recently as the year 2000, had slipped to 15th by 2002.

Also affecting diversity are population and adoption policies in China. Efforts to control the population on mainland China have intersected with the cultural devaluation of girls, making abandonment or, as of the mid-1990s, adoption of girls by foreign-

ers acceptable. The U.S. Department of State's website shows that China has gone from 17th among countries of origin for orphan visas in 1991 to first in 2000; their first place position continued to 2002, the last year for which these data are available.

A growing number of countries view adoption of their children by Americans as yet another indication of American imperialism, arrogance and exploitation: "the taking by the rich and powerful of the children born to the poor and powerless" (Batholet, 1993, p. 42 as cited in Melosh, 2002, p. 195). When interviewed about his 2003 film, "Casa de los Babys", film writer-director John Sayles said, "It's tough on the countries these kids come from that these kids are not getting adopted in their home country. These countries are ashamed of the fact that they're not able to take care of these children. For me, there's a whiff of cultural imperialism in the transaction. You don't see people from Korea coming here to adopt babies" (Fine, 2003).

This issue of cultural pride further impacts international adoption. When an American television reporter covering the 1988 Olympics in Seoul noted that the large number of international adoptions were "embarrassing, perhaps even a national shame" to some Koreans, the Korean government acted to markedly limit such adoptions (Melosh, 2002, p. 193). Further, when allegations of corruption surfaced and television exposés documented neglect in Romanian orphanages, the Romanian government took the position that international adoption was "buying" children and destroying the country's culture. This led the Romanian government to introduce residence requirements for prospective adoptive parents.

The situation for many gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender persons who wish to adopt remains problematic. While most states allow adoption by single gays, only eleven states permit adoption by same-sex couples (Thomas, 2003). Some states also permit same-sex second parent adoption. This controversy may reflect homophobia or differing interpretations of the criterion "in the best interests of the child" (Bell, 2001). Researchers have noted that the parents' sexual orientation does not have a lasting effect on their children's social development or emotional well-being (Perrin, 2002; Tye, 20003). Other research provides evidence that the parenting skills of gays are comparable to those of heterosex-

uals (Appell, 2001), and it has been found that many gay men are more nurturing than straight men (Bigner & Bozett, 1989). One can anticipate that as the Gay Pride/Gay Rights Movement gains momentum more legal challenges will be mounted in states banning adoption by gay couples.

Evidence of Adoption as a Social Movement in the U.S.

There is an abundance of evidence that adoption has emerged as a social movement in its own right within the U.S. since the late 1970s. This includes the activities of leaders, voluntary organizations and government in supporting adoption, and the extent of infusion of adoption in the American culture. Moreover, the actions of minority communities to ensure priority adoption of minority children within their own communities extends the social movement model to subgroups. While there are no federal policies specifically preventing priority adoptions, federal policies promoting inter-cultural and inter-racial adoption serve to curtail intra-cultural and intra-racial adoption.

Role of Voluntary Organizations and Government

Self-help groups have been instrumental in gaining empowerment for those involved in adoption; some also gave rise to a call for openness in adoption. The Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association (ALMA), an international organization founded in the U.S. in 1971, advocated for open adoption and worked to reunite adoptees and their birth parents. Similar work was done by the American Adoption Congress, a national umbrella organization established in 1978. Two years later, the National Council for Adoption was formed, serving as a lobby group on behalf of open adoption. Since then the number of adoptions per year has increased, as has the number of organizations for birth parents, adopted children and adoptive parents. Some function at the community level, others at the national and international level. Such groups include the Adoptive Parents' Committee, a grass roots organization of adoptive families; Latin American Parents Association, a national non-profit support group for families adopting from Latin America, (Moe, 1998); Voice for Adoption, focusing on special needs adoption; and the Evan B. Donaldson Institute, devoted to research, information, and education.

Adoption is not only increasingly common, it is also finding wider social acceptance. Leaders and others involved in the movement follow the model set by other social movements, such as the 1960s Civil Rights Movement or the Women's Movement. As in the case of leaders of all emerging social movements, they propagandize in the effort to gain recognition for the movement, utilizing the mass media to influence public opinion. Some set out to ameliorate the stigma of adoption and the prejudice toward intercultural or transracial adoptions, while others tackle the tenacious taboo of infertility. Leaders of the movement have emerged, such as Adam Pertman, adoptive parent and author of *Adoption Nation* (2001). As Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Institute in New York City, Pertman brings great visibility to the issue of adoption through interviews on television and in the press, and lectures around the country.

In 1987, the Interagency Task Force on Adoption was formed by the Reagan administration to suggest means to promote adoption. The next step in the flurry of significant legislation came during the Clinton administration. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 stated a preference for permanent kinship placements when children cannot live with their birth parents. That same year the President launched his Adoption Initiative, with the goal of doubling the number of children in foster care adopted or placed in permanent homes by 2002.

Policy efforts were focused on children who might be endangered were they to be returned from foster care to their biological families. This became a growing concern with the deaths of children in several high-profile cases. Further, child abuse referrals had dramatically increased the number of children entering foster care during the early 1990s, due in part to the crack-cocaine epidemic. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 built upon principles established in earlier legislation, including the 1988 Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption and Family Services Act, which addressed the issue of in-race adoption with initiatives to recruit minority families for the many minority children in foster care who were ready for adoption. As a result of the 1997 Act, child welfare agencies across the country also pursued kin-

ship adoption arrangements as a way of promoting permanency planning.

In spite of such efforts, however, the problem of children remaining in foster care persists. According to the August 2002 on-line report of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, by the year 2000, 556,000 children were in foster care, half of whom had been there over three years. During the year 2000, 17% (46,581) of the 275,000 children who exited foster care did so through adoption. This number reflected less than half of the cases for which adoption was the goal. Of those adopted, only about half were minority children, a figure somewhat lower than the percentage they comprised in the foster care system (58%).

Recognizing the problems presented by the lack of detailed, precise and consistent statistical reporting of domestic adoptions, in 1980 Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act suggesting, but not mandating, a national adoption reporting system. Two years later the Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) came into existence in order to further encourage uniform data collection. However, not all states choose to respond each year, not all are able to respond to every question, and inter-state variation in definitions further limit the usefulness of the report (Moe, 1998). While VCIS provides the most complete information available on foster care and adoptions from that system, neither it nor any other large scale database includes information on kinship or other types of domestic adoption.

In contrast to the difficulty tracking domestic adoptions, statistics relevant to international adoptions are readily available. As of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1961, reference to immigration of orphans to the U.S. for the purpose of adoption became a permanent part of immigration legislation. Over the years, U.S. immigration law has become more lenient vis à vis foreign orphans, culminating in the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 granting citizenship to all children adopted internationally by U.S. citizens. This Act, which was signed by President Clinton, took effect in 2001.

As noted, international adoptions have increased steadily since the 1980s (U. S. Department of State website). Conditions abroad, such as famine in parts of Africa, political unrest and

rebellion in some countries in Central America and Asia, the fall of the USSR, and epidemics such as AIDS in Africa, have left vast numbers of children orphaned. These conditions combined to provide opportunities for an increasing proportion of U.S. families seeking to adopt (Freundlich, 1998).

The international community, under the aegis of The Hague, recognizing that international adoption often degenerated into little more than the buying and selling of children who were not necessarily orphans, established a set of conventions in 1993. In the attempt to bring their policies in line with mounting world opinion, many countries began to take a careful look at their own practices and policies. While the U.S. agreed in principle with the conventions, it took until 2000 for Congress to pass the Inter-Country Adoption Law. Nonetheless, authority over adoption in the U.S. has not yet been centralized nor has the Hague convention been fully implemented.

Another sign of the growing significance of adoption can be found in the annual Presidential proclamation, beginning in 1990, of November as National Adoption Month. First proclaimed in Massachusetts in 1976, National Adoption Week eventually grew into this month-long national campaign to make the American public aware of the number of children awaiting adoption within agencies and foster care. The month also serves to increase positive media coverage of adoption. Recognition of National Adoption Month has become so widespread that *The New York Times Magazine* crossword puzzle of November 16, 2003, included it as a clue—the correct response was November. In addition, the Saturday before Thanksgiving has been designated National Adoption Day. It is celebrated with the finalization of the adoption of hundreds of children, and, since 1997, the Department of Health and Human Services has announced annual winners of the Adoption Excellence Awards on that day. The awards are given to states, organizations, businesses, families or individuals who help abandoned, neglected or abused children find permanent homes.

The high cost of private and international adoptions makes them inaccessible to the poor. In 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2.5% of the nation's 65 million children under the age of 18 were adopted. Their families' median income was \$56,138, as

compared with \$48,200 for families with biological children only and \$42,148 for all U.S. households (Peterson, 2003, p. D7). The cost of adoption derives from the network of lawyers, courts, and agencies involved, as well as required adoption homestudies and post-placement homestudies by social workers. Private domestic adoptions may involve support of the birthmothers during and immediately following the pregnancy, as well as medical costs. In the case of international adoptions there may be fees to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, country fees, contributions to orphanages, and travel expenses, which may include several trips to the country of adoption and payment for hotels, sometimes for several weeks. Private adoption becomes exclusive, which, along with access to medical care, higher education and housing, becomes one more life chance or opportunity differentially accessible to the various socio-economic classes.

Efforts to combat this exclusiveness in adoption have been seen in both the public and private sectors. Groups such as the National Coalition to End Racism in the American Child Care System, which was formed during the 1980s to address problems in the child welfare system and further policies to advance adoption, led to new policies on the federal level, including provisions for economic incentives to adoptive parents. The 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, which institutionalized the goal of permanency in child placements (Holody, 1997), clearly favored returning the child to, or keeping the child with, the biological family whenever possible. Also included in this act, were provisions for partial subsidies to those who adopted hard-to-place "special needs" children (Moe, 1998) for whom return to the biological family was not possible. States also provide partial subsidies for special needs adoptions to financially-eligible families. In addition, the 1996 Adoption Promotion and Stability Act allowed an income tax credit, which by 2003 was up to \$10,000 for eligible families who adopt. The U.S. military offers adoption subsidies too, as do many civilian employers. Some banks offer low cost adoption loans, and grants and loans may be secured through private agencies, such as God's Grace Adoption Ministry, the Hebrew Free Loan Society, A Child Waits Foundation, and the National Adoption Foundation.

According to a recent survey undertaken by the Evan B.

Donaldson Institute, "58% of Americans either know someone who has been adopted, has adopted a child, or placed a child for adoption" (Peterson, 2003, p. D7). As adoption touches so many people and has become an increasingly visible part of ordinary life in the U.S., the stigma once attached to it has diminished.

Popular Culture and Adoption

Authors, publishers and booksellers have made adoption a focus of their work. Publishing firms such as Perspectives Press and Tapestry Books focus exclusively on topics for people interested in learning about adoption. Other firms publish books and magazines that specifically target the child who is adopted or about to become the sibling of one who is, and some bookstores, such as Alphabet Soup Books in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, specialize in adoption literature. Stories of fictional children such as *Little Orphan Annie* or the ever-popular *Madeline* have been around for years and adoptive parents have found them useful in preparing older children in the family for adoption; these have found even broader audiences due to the advent of videotapes and DVDs. Of greater interest, however, are more recent books that involve contemporary true stories of children who have been adopted, including books by Banish and Jordan-Wong (1992), Koh (1993) and Kroll (1994). Often books for the very young are based on metaphor, using adopted kittens, polar bears, birds or other animals as the main characters. Authors of this type of book include Blomquist and Blomquist (1993), Brodzinsky (1996), Kasza (1992) and Keller (1995).

Similarly there is a rash of self-help guides written with the prospective adoptive parent in mind or written for the adopted person searching for his/her birth family. Among these are Adamec (1996), Hicks (1993), Johnston (1992) and Sifferman (1994).

Popular magazines, including not only those directed toward women such as *Good Housekeeping* but those with broad-based appeal like *The New York Times Magazine* feature articles on adoption. These range from articles about AIDS orphans in Ethiopia (Greene, 2002) to exposés of conditions in orphanages abroad or human-interest stories about a particular family.

Even literature that one might assume to be irrelevant to adop-

tion sometimes focuses on the topic. Mysteries featuring female sleuths are a case in point. Since 1980 several of the most famous fictional female detectives or their husbands are described as having been adopted. Other series feature characters who decided on adoption for their child or adopted a child. Still other sleuths delve into mystery plots involving adopted persons (DellaCava & Engel, 2002). Perhaps more interesting is that in long-running series in which adoption was never previously mentioned, it has been introduced in recent novels (Barnes, 2001; Cross, 2003; Scottoline, 2003).

Adoption has also become a popular theme on television, reaching from the final episodes of the sitcom "Friends" to PBS's favorite, Fred Rogers. Human interest films or holiday specials present celebrities' stories about adoption, and as recently as September 2003, the Hallmark channel began to broadcast a series of Sunday programs focused on adoption stories. In 1992, NBC introduced a special segment of its news hour called "Wednesday's Child" in the Washington, D.C. area, presenting photos of children in foster care hoping to find adoptive families. But nowhere is the emphasis more apparent than in the Discovery Health Channel's "Adoption Stories," shown several times each day as a parallel to its program, "Birth Day." The show follows the adoptive family's experiences over the course of several months, and, in the case of international adoptions, cameras follow the parents on their trip to the child's country of origin.

The internet has become one of the richest sources of information and support for adoption. DHC's website contains information for those who are considering adoption, as do many other sites representing parental groups, agencies, and governments. National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, AdoptionNetwork, and the U.S. Department of State are illustrations of such sites. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, named for the founder of Wendy's International, himself an adoptee, subsidizes a website that enables prospective parents to see pictures of children ready for adoption. People planning international adoptions find it particularly useful to connect with other families who adopted in the particular country. Many use the internet to maintain long-term contacts with families with whom they traveled.

Individuals, groups and organizations involved in adoption advertise. In 2003, Westchester County in New York announced that the media firm it had hired to recruit foster and adoptive parents would not only create ads, posters and brochures, but would also screen potential foster parents with an eye toward identifying families interested in adopting from the foster care system (Cohen, 2003). Creative recruitment strategies for foster and adoptive parents also take place in such unlikely places as minor league baseball games, as occurs in Charleston, South Carolina, where the public child welfare agency distributes kazoos and information to everyone attending the game.

Since the mid 1980s, newspaper classified ads have been popular, including ads placed by prospective individuals or couples describing themselves and the child they seek in terms of age, gender and perhaps race. More unusual are the ads placed by those who already have adopted once and publish a testimonial from the biological mother of their first child in the hope it will reassure another biological mother and encourage her to contact them. Ads can also be placed by biological mothers who are seeking an adoptive family for their child, and by adoption agencies, as may be found in the "Marketplace" section of *Newsweek* magazine (2003), alongside ads for wine and treatments for hair and feet.

The concept of adoption has been vastly broadened in the popular culture in the U.S. By the 1980s children were "adopting" Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. Animal shelters provide papers to those "adopting" pets, and individuals can "adopt" a whale. Other manifestations of adoption in today's popular culture include "births and adoptions" announcements replacing the heading "birth announcements" in some quarters, including college alumni magazines such as that from Williams College.

Manufacturers of consumer goods cater to demographic trends. Thus it is no surprise that merchandise especially designed for the adoptive family has come to the fore. Greeting cards and announcements printed by mainstream companies proclaim the arrival of the adopted child. Christopher Radko has designed a Christmas ornament celebrating international adoption. Unique personalized gifts include coffee mugs with the criss-crossed flags of the U.S. and the child's country of origin. The cards, ornaments and other items are available in ordinary stores; the personalized

gifts are available on a more limited scale from specialized on-line dealers including Adoption Shoppe.

At least one hotel in mainland China, the White Swan—also known as the “Baby Hotel” or “The White Stork”—offers adoptive parents “the most powerful symbol of Western values it could muster: a blond Barbie doll that holds in its grasp a baby that is unmistakably Chinese.” David Barboza, *the New York Times* reporter filing the story, comments that the “parents said they liked the gift” (2003, p. A4). Other companies market ethnic dolls and books to appeal to adoptive families as well as to help other American children maintain a tie to their ancestral roots.

Implications of the Adoption Movement for the Helping Professions

People whose experiences with adoption have been stigmatized and kept secret—people with problems with infertility, women who have surrendered children for adoption, families who have tried unsuccessfully to adopt, adult adoptees whose questions were never answered, and perhaps never asked—are everywhere and benefit from the unveiling of the stigma and the secrecy surrounding adoption.

However, even with the growing popularity and press of adoption, not all of the stigma has been assuaged. Children beginning school, who already are dealing with separation from parents, may be particularly troubled when an adopted child or an adopted sibling of a child enters their school or social community. At this stage they can be strongly affected by the fact or the implication that a mother would give her child away; it is not uncommon for them to worry that they too will be given away and they may need repeated assurance about this (Phillips, 2002).

There are indicators of increased responses by educators and mental health professionals. These include programs in schools, professional conferences on outcomes and interventions, specialized treatment modalities for adopted children, such as application of reactive attachment disorder theory, and recognition of the special needs of some internationally adopted children.

Professionals providing interventions for people affected by

adoption have a myriad of resources that had not been available in the past. In addition to the numerous social service agencies and programs formed to assist with the adoption process, there also are now agencies to deal specifically with treatment issues surrounding adoption, such as the Center for Family Connections, founded in 1995, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the same time there has been a growing professional adoption literature, for example Joyce Maguire Pavao's *The Family of Adoption* (1998), the journal *Adoption Quarterly*, which is devoted to adoption issues, as well as numerous articles in other journals.

With adoption a public matter rather than a family secret, numerous support groups have sprung up, including Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption, Families with Children from China, and People Need Caring. There are also support groups for single adoptive parents and gay and lesbian adoptive parents, as well as groups for adopted persons of all ages. Many international adoption agencies have ongoing support programs to assist with the lifelong issues presented by adoption.

Conclusion

The cumulative effect of the steadily increasing adoption-related activity over the past quarter century has brought adoption to the position of a social movement in the U.S. With the supports of government policies and organizations and the popularity it has achieved in the media, much of the stigma once associated with adoption has dissipated.

The adoption movement also has brought greater diversity to American families and communities, especially through international adoptions. While there is opposition to this growing diversity by a variety of individuals and groups, if the movement continues the momentum it has achieved, one can anticipate it will increase.

The increase in attention paid to adoption has broad implications for the helping professions as new approaches, agencies, policies, and literature have been developed. The need for further development of such resources is certain to continue.

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