WORKING WITH ADOPTIVE FAMILIES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: CREATING POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Diversity in educational settings exists beyond racial and cultural definitions. Family diversity is also an important concept in education. However, the needs of adoptive families have rarely been addressed in schools, and considerable research suggests that adoptive family members experience social stigma. Accordingly, this review of the literature examines attitudes toward adoption, including research revealing the perceptions of adoptive family members, as well as research on community attitudes, attitudes of students, and attitudes of professional educators. The review continues by addressing the foundations for these attitudes in American family ideology, theory and research on adoption, practices in social work, and media representations of adoption. Research on positive outcomes in adoption is also presented for a balanced view of adoptive children and families, and the plausible effects of social stigma in educational settings are explored. The study culminates with a discussion of effective educational practices for teachers and administrators to implement to effectively counter social stigma in educational settings, as well as suggestions for educator preparation programs and future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughters, Maiah and Angelia, who have taught me the meaning of *family* and are my joy in life.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Problems To Be Addressed

Adoption is one of many ways in which diversity exists in classrooms across the United

States. Current estimates indicate that approximately 2.5% of children in the United States joined

their families by adoption (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) and that 64% of individuals are personally

connected to adoption through a friend or family member (Dave Thomas Foundation for

Adoption & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute [DTFA & EBDAI], 2002). However, the

needs of adoptive families receive little attention in the field of education, and college and

university programs do not typically prepare educators for addressing issues of family diversity.

Because research suggests that adoptive families are subject to social stigma (Wegar, 2000) and

because this stigma has a significant impact on children in adoptive families (Bartholet, 1993;

Leon, 2002), it is important that educators begin to develop positive attitudes toward adoption

and engage in inclusive practices that affirm adoptive families. The problems to be addressed in

this study include the following:

1. What attitudes, beliefs, and expectations are typically held about children who joined

   their families by adoption, and what are their foundations in American society?

2. What attitudes, knowledge, and skills do educators need to possess in order to

   promote an acceptance of adoption and work effectively with adoptive families and

   their children within elementary and middle school settings?

Description of the Study

The main purpose of this paper is to inform educational practice with children in adoptive families. A total of five chapters is included, organized according to the following structure. In Chapter 1, an introduction to adoption issues in education is presented, including a statement of the problems to be addressed, a descriptive overview of the research included, a definition of the scope of the topic and related dimensions, a brief history of adoption, and a rationale for proposing adoption practice as a necessary area of importance for educators. Chapter 2 examines attitudes toward adoption, including research that documents the perceptions of adoptive family members, as well as research documenting general community attitudes, attitudes of students, and professional educator attitudes. An examination of the contextual factors that promote and maintain these attitudes occurs in Chapter 3, including issues of family ideology, theory and research in adoption, practices in social work, and the influence of the media. Chapter 4 summarizes current research on positive adoption outcomes for a balanced perspective on adoption and examines the impact of social stigma on children in adoptive families. Finally, Chapter 5 proposes recommendations for educators to implement in order to affirm adoptive families, including developing an inclusive perspective, using positive adoption language, and implementing effective instructional and organizational practices. Chapter 5 also offers a self-assessment tool for educators who work directly with students to utilize in order to guide their practices with children who joined their families through adoption.

Definitions and Dimensions of Adoption

Utilizing a working definition of adoption is an important aspect of understanding adoption attitudes and practices. Several sources exist for defining adoption, and, in modern American society, there are many different types of adoptions. Carp (1998) defines adoption as "the method of establishing by law the social relationship of parent and child between individuals who are not each other's biological parent or child" (p.3). Similarly, Melosh (2002) defines adoption as a "social transaction, a legal and cultural institution that confer[s] kinship on parents and children unrelated by blood" (p.15). Additionally, Weiss (2001) refers to the process of adoption as "taking a biologically unrelated child who needs a home into one's family through legal means, loving that child, and raising that child as one's own" (p.19). For the purposes of this study, the legal adoption of children by individuals unrelated by birth is the form of adoption to be discussed; this type of adoption is different in significant ways from adoption by extended biological family members or adoption by stepparents who are married to biological parents.

Adoptions vary along critical dimensions, and several related definitions are also important for understanding adoption research. Adoptions occur domestically, within the United States, as well as internationally, through numerous other countries abroad. In the United States, placements are accomplished through a variety of different procedures. Adoptions may occur publicly, through a state's social welfare system, or privately, through an agency that offers adoption services; private adoptions may also be arranged independently, through direct planning between birth and adoptive family members (Brooks, Simmel, Wind, & Barth, 2005). Adoptions may involve infants or children at older ages, and adoptive parents may be single, married, or cohabitating, including couples that are heterosexual, as well as gay and lesbian couples (Wegar, 2006). Contact between adoptive and birth family members also varies along a continuum from

closed to open. In closed adoptions, adoptive parents and birthparents do not maintain contact and may be entirely unknown to each other, while in open adoptions, adoptive parents and birthparents are known to each other and typically maintain some degree of contact; adoptive families and birthfamilies may have met preceding an adoption, and may maintain regular contact through letters, phone calls, or close personal interactions (Brooks et al., 2005; Siegel, 2006).

This paper is intended as a guide for educators to utilize in creating a positive academic and social climate for all types of adoptive families within elementary and middle school settings. Its purpose is not to address the special educational needs that some children in adoptive families may present as a result of preadoptive neglect or abuse (Piantanida, Anderson, & Giannotta, 1990) or early institutional care (Meese, 2002, 2005). Additionally, although foster care is a practice that can be related to adoption, this study does not address the unique educational needs of foster families or children (see Vera Institute of Justice, 2004), although many of the recommendations given may be appropriate for this family style, as well.

History of Adoption

The adoption of children is "as old as humanity itself" (Carp, 1998, p. 3), and finding children alternatives to the care of their birthfamilies has historically been an acceptable social practice (Ashby, 1997). Adoption is represented in the Babylonian *Code of Hammurabi*, which was written around 2285 B.C., and adoption was observed in the ancient cultures of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Africa, China, India, and Oceana (Carp, 1998; Weiss, 2001). However, by the 1600s, adoption had diminished in Western societies due to the influence of religious mandates to prevent fathers from adopting their sons born outside of marriage (Carp, 1998). The laws of England, which were initially reproduced in the early colonies in America, did not include

adoption, as they were structured to maintain marriage, prevent illegitimacy, and protect property rights according to the norms of society (Ashby, 1997). Adoption was, however, a practice among Native tribes in America and was particularly prominent in the laws and traditions of the Iroquois nation (Askeland, 2006b).

Several early arrangements for the care and training of children in England provide the foundation for current American adoption practices. The indenture system, developed in the 1500s by the *Elizabethan Poor Laws* and replicated in the early English colonies in America in the 1600s and 1700s, provided children with food, shelter, and training in return for work service (Ashby, 1997; Askeland, 2006b). Another practice in the early colonies was *public vendue*, in which children were auctioned by the lowest bid to individuals or families who were paid by overseers of the poor for their care and training (Ashby, 1997). Children from families of higher status were similarly apprenticed to professionals or tradesmen (Askeland, 2006b). These practices, though largely economic, sometimes led to informal adoptions, as individuals left their children in the care of unrelated families when they died, and wills passed family fortunes to indentured or apprenticed children, recognizing them as family members (Carp, 1998).

Adoption gradually developed into a formalized practice during the 1700s and 1800s, initially through name changes granted by private legislative actions in many states (Carp, 1998). During this period, changes in the American economy from home-based work to industrial employment mediated changes in the way that children were viewed and valued (Ashby, 1997). Children were gradually perceived as having social value rather than economic utility, and were desired for family relationships rather than for their work contributions (Ashby, 1997). This shift in family ideology initiated the consideration of the *best interests of the child* in child welfare decisions (Ashby, 1997) and modification to the indenture process to ensure that children were

placed with families with whom they could develop emotional attachments (Ashby, 1997). In 1850, the Children's Mission to the Children of the Destitute began the practice of *placing out* by relocating children from Boston streets to indenture them to farm families in New England, and, in 1854, the New York Children's Aid Society, under the direction of Charles Loring Brace, began the practice of *orphan trains* to place city street children with farm families in rural areas (Ashby, 1997). Although these children were not usually adopted formally, these practices supported the placement of children outside their families by birth for the primary purpose of meeting their family needs. The practice of *placing out* was also the first to permanently remove children from their birthfamilies (Wollons, 2004). Brace believed he was rescuing neglected children and hoped the children would be regarded as family members within their new placements (Carp, 1998). Brace's *orphan train* movement also initiated the development of the first general adoption statutes, as many farm families desired to formalize their relationships (Carp, 1998). These adoption statutes created procedures for legalizing adoptions in a manner similar to issuing property deeds, and they were first passed in Mississippi in 1846 and in Texas in 1850 (Carp, 1998).

During this time, adoption was also informally practiced by African Americans who were enslaved (Askeland, 2006b). The establishment of family relationships between individuals who were not biologically related occurred when adults or children died from harsh treatment or were involuntarily taken away from their families of origin to new locations (Askeland, 2006b). Socially constructed families and extended kinship networks were sustaining factors in African American communities (Askeland, 2006b).

The current type of legal statute for granting adoptions was first enacted in Massachusetts in 1851 and was entitled an *Act to Provide for the Adoption of Children* (Ashby, 1997; Kahan,

2006). Also called the *Massachusetts Adoption Act* (Carp, 1998), it provided the child by

adoption with the same status as a legitimate birthchild (Ashby, 1997). This law established

several enduring standards for adoption, including setting qualifications for adoptive parents,

ensuring the benefit of the adoption for the child in question, obtaining the consent of the child's

birthparents, and utilizing judicial proceedings to approve the adoption (Kahan, 2006). By the

1900s, similar adoption laws had been passed in almost every state, and adoption was regularly

practiced (Wollons, 2004).

      The early 1900s marked a deepening concern for the needs of children, the development

of the social work profession, and an increased supervision of adoption practices (Kahan, 2006).

Adoptions became more regulated, as states sought to ensure that children were placed in safe

environments, and many states initiated the practice of evaluating families before placing

children (Ashby, 1997). Opposition to Brace's *orphan trains* was a foundation for negative

social attitudes toward adoption (Kahan, 2006), and social workers began establishing practices

for maintaining biological families despite their difficulties (Melosh, 2002). As a result,

adoptions decreased while government aid and programs allowed more birthfamilies to remain

intact (Kahan, 2006). Around 1910, the study of eugenics further disgraced the practice of

adoption by asserting that the negative characteristics of poorly functioning birthparents were

genetically passed to their children (Carp, 1998). Children began to be subjected to intelligence

tests to protect parents from adopting a *defective* child (Carp, 1998). As a result, adoption began

to be viewed as an unacceptable alternative, and adoptive children began to be perceived as

genetically inferior (Carp, 1998; Kahan, 2006). Despite this stigma, adoptions continued to take

place through private arrangements (Melosh, 2002). In 1917, the *Children's Code of Minnesota*

became law and required extensive investigations of families seeking to adopt, six months of

placement in the adoptive home before finalization, and the confidentiality of adoption records to outside parties; this law became the precedent for the development of other states' policies (Kahan, 2006).

In the 1930s and 1940s, adoptions began to increase due to several social factors. First, the birth rate of children considered to be illegitimate increased (Kahan, 2006), as did public disapproval of the financial support given by the government to single women with children (Ashby, 1997). As a result, many babies were placed for adoption to avoid the social stigma of illegitimacy (Carp, 1998). Marriages also increased during this time, and new medical procedures began to identify couples who were unlikely to produce children biologically, making adoption a more popular option for parenthood (Kahan, 2006). During this time, although adoption practices remained largely unregulated, more states enacted legislation to guide adoption (Ashby, 1997). The social work profession also instituted more control over the adoption process through several practices that were deemed central to the success of adoptive placements (Carp, 1998). First, children were strictly screened and observed before being approved for placement in order to prevent the adoption of children with biologically inherited deficiencies (Melosh, 2002). This observation period was also important to ensure an appropriate family "match" for each child (Carp, 1998). The practice of "matching" ensured that adoptive families simulated biological families as much as possible, and children were typically placed according to their race and ethnicity, physical features, intellectual capacity, religion, and personality variables (Melosh, 2002). These practices, as well as the confidentiality of adoptions to prevent outsiders from gaining access to private information and possibly issues of illegitimacy, began to institute a sense of secrecy in adoption (Carp, 1998).

Within the period from the 1950s to 1970, adoptions continued to increase, reaching their highest recorded number of 173,000 around 1970 (Kahan, 2006). Paradoxically, during this time, adoptions within the United States became objects of extreme secrecy (Carp, 1998), while many Americans began adopting children from other countries, creating families that were multiracial (Kahan, 2006). Adoptions were not originally designed to be secret or sealed, and the confidentiality within adoptions was not initially applied to participants in the process, who were routinely granted access to their court records (Carp, 1998). However, over time, the concept of confidentiality came to be reinterpreted to represent the withholding of information from the birth and adoptive families involved in the adoption, as well as from the children, in order to protect all parties from damaging information and give adoptive families more authenticity (Carp, 1998). The remaining influence of the eugenics movement and prevailing Freudian theory, applied to birthmothers and adoptive family members, rendered adoption a deviant form of family (Carp, 1998; Kahan, 2006). Accordingly, the secrecy of social work case studies and sealing of adoption records became standard practices by the 1970s (Carp, 1998). The "direct placement" of infants as early as possible also became an established policy (Melosh, 2002). Interest in adoptions increased and social workers loosened the parameters for children considered to be adoptable, allowing the adoption of children with disabilities and placing minority children with Caucasian families (Kahan, 2006). The adoption of children abroad was also initiated. From 1948 to 1953, adoptions from Germany, Greece, and Japan developed due to concern for the welfare of children orphaned by war, and adoptions from Korea also began in 1953 (Kahan, 2006). The practice of adoption across previously established racial boundaries reflected changes in American society that prompted racial tolerance, a focus on social welfare,

and a decrease in available Caucasian children within the United States due to an increased

acceptance of single parenthood (Lancaster, 2001).

In the 1970s through the 1980s, adoptions decreased (Melosh, 2002). This change was

the culmination of several factors, many of which were related to the development of women's

rights, including the more widespread use of options for birth control, social acceptance of single

parenting, and the legalization of abortion (Kahan, 2006). Opposition to transracial adoption

practices was also a factor (Melosh, 2002). In 1972, the National Association of Black Social

Workers issued a public statement against transracial adoption, largely based on concern for the

identity development of African American children raised in Caucasian families, and most

agencies responded by terminating transracial adoption practices (Ashby, 1997; Lancaster,

2001). Many Caucasian foster parents pursued court cases to confront practices that prevented

them from adopting African American children who had been permitted to live with them

(Lancaster, 2001). Additionally, in 1978, the *Indian Child Welfare Act* created federal guidelines

that placed tribal court in control of welfare decisions involving Native American children; this

law resulted in the maintenance of these children within Native American communities (Ashby,

1997; Lancaster, 2001).

The period from the 1990s to the present brought about additional legislation and trends

to further shape adoption practice. Key issues include opposition to the practice of sealed

adoption records, the emergence of open adoption agreements, increases in transracial adoptions,

adoptions by gay and lesbian couples, and publicized custody disputes between birth and

adoptive families (Ashby, 1997; Wollons, 2004). As a growing trend, open adoption

arrangements have been embraced with satisfaction by many adoptive families and birthfamilies

(Siegel, 1993 & 2003). Legislation has also promoted adoption and strengthened adoption

practices. The *Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994* is crucial in supporting transracial adoption, as it furthers the expedient placement of children into adoptive homes and stipulates that agencies that receive federal funding may not restrict adoptive placements for children based on race or ethnicity (Askeland, 2006a; Lancaster, 2001). The *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* also promotes adoption by prioritizing the safety of children over reunification with birthfamilies; it makes terminations of parental rights easier in situations of extreme abuse and places limits on the time children can remain in foster care without efforts for permanent placements (Bartholet, 1999). International standards governing adoption were created in the *Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption*, passed by the United Nations in 1993, in order to protect the interests of children and establish consistent adoption practices between countries; the United States accepted these standards by passing the *U.S. Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000* (Askeland, 2006a). These key legislative actions continue to frame current adoption practices.

Adoptions are prevalent in American society. Most recent statistics show that approximately 51,000 children were adopted in 2005 through the Department of Public Welfare (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), and approximately 14,000 private domestic adoptions occur yearly (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2006b). International adoptions are also becoming more common. Exactly 20,679 international adoptions were completed in 2006, with China, Guatemala, Russia, Korea, and Ethiopia as the top five countries of origin (U.S. Department of State, 2007). Overall, international adoptions have increased from less than 10,000 per year in the early 1990s to about 20,000 per year in the 2000s, although the 2006 total is a decrease from the record number of 22,884 international adoptions in 2004 (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

Finally, new advances in the treatment of infertility, in fact, approach adoption. Mulcare & Aguinis (1999) utilize the term *semi-adopted* to refer to children born through artificial insemination using donor sperm. Embryo adoption, a new form of adoption in which an embryo is carried by an adoptive mother, is also becoming an established practice (Kahan, 2006). However, fertility treatments that involve donated genetic material are typically done in secrecy (Bartholet, 1993; Mulcare & Aguinis, 1999). This serves as a reminder of past practices in adoption, as well as the extent and ongoing influence of adoption stigma (Bartholet, 1993).

Rationale for the Study

Diversity is currently a major focus in education, as educators recognize the importance of creating a positive school climate for students and educating them to understand and value the uniqueness of others. Racial and cultural diversity are acknowledged and celebrated in schools across the United States. However, diversity exists beyond racial and cultural parameters. Family diversity is a concept that students also need to explore and understand. In addition to traditional two-parent biological families, many types of families are gaining acceptance within American society (Brooks et al., 2005). Single parent families, blended families, gay and lesbian families, foster families, grandparent-headed families, and adoptive families are prevalent family forms.

Adoption is one family style that deserves attention in the field of education for several important reasons. First, adoptive families regularly face issues of social stigma and misinformation about the way their families were formed, and children in adoptive families are strongly impacted by these negative attitudes and misunderstandings (Bartholet, 1993; March, 1995; Wegar, 2000). These children deserve an effective learning climate and educators who are positive and knowledgeable about adoption. It is also important for all students to understand different family styles in order to develop positive attitudes and gain the personal knowledge and

skills they need to fully engage in a diverse society. Additionally, the practice of adoption is changing, and transracial adoptions and open adoption arrangements make adoption more visible in society (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2005). As a result, it is imperative that educators demonstrate positive attitudes toward adoptive families and develop the knowledge and skills to effectively create an inclusive setting for students, mitigate the impact of negative attitudes, communicate accurate information about adoption, and provide support for students who were adopted into their families. This important need for educators to consider adoptive families in their classrooms is affirmed by a recent policy brief issued by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2006a), a leading agency in adoption research, education, and advocacy. The policy's introduction includes the following statement:

> What goes on at school has pivotal importance for children for a variety of reasons. School takes up a huge portion of their lives, and their experiences there help to shape their self-images, their peer relationships, and others' views of their competence. It is also where they learn many of their values, accumulate most of their knowledge, and develop the skills to equip them to succeed as adults. (p. 1)

Few guides exist that directly address adoption attitudes and practices from an educational perspective. Of these, many have limitations in orientation or in the scope of the information presented. Lindsay and Monserrat's *Adoption Awareness: A Guide For Teachers, Counselors, Nurses and Caring Others*, published in 1989, addresses the issue of adoption awareness only in the context of creating a positive climate for pregnant teens. Garanzini's *Child-Centered Family-Sensitive Schools: An Educator's Guide To Family Dynamics*, written in 1995, devotes a chapter to adoptive families; however, the scenarios presented, as well as the discussion of adoptive family functioning and brief recommendations given are largely based on

negative adoption theories and lack the depth of insight needed to truly understand the needs of adoptive families. Similarly, *Focus on Adoption: The Role of School Personnel In Supporting Adoptive Families* (Piantanida et al., 1990) also reveals a negative orientation to adoptive children and families. Most of the guide focuses attention on underlying behavioral, emotional, and social problems of adoptive children related to preadoptive abuse and the loss of birthfamily members. Unfortunately, such information serves to further prejudice professional educators against adoptive families and creates the expectation that most, if not all, children who were adopted by their families will exhibit these problems.

Several excellent sources of adoption information exist for educators. *An Educator's Guide To Adoption* (Institute for Adoption Information [IAI], 1999) is written specifically for education professionals in order to promote a positive view of adoption and develop inclusive classroom practices. This guide is brief and offers several fundamental recommendations for educators. Another guide for educators, published by Families Adopting In Response (FAIR), an adoption advocacy organization, is *Adoption and the Schools* (Wood and Ng, 2001). This work consists of an extensive and thorough compilation of articles that address numerous aspects of adoption for educators. Additionally, *S.A.F.E. at School: Support For Adoptive Families by Educators* (Schoettle, 2003), published by the Center for Adoption Support and Education, provides a framework for understanding the needs of children in adoptive families and meeting them in educational settings. Finally, Meese (2002) specifically addresses the educational needs of adoptive children who have previously lived in institutional environments in *Children of Intercountry Adoptions in School: A Primer for Parents and Professionals*. These adoption guides are the most comprehensive sources of practical information for educators.

This paper is a departure from previous adoption guides for educators in several respects. First, this work integrates relevant research and theory in adoption into a concise framework for educators in order to promote understanding of the many influences on adoption, as well as provoke necessary changes in educators' personal orientations. Thus, it allows educators to grasp the history, context, and impact of negative attitudes toward adoption, while providing a framework for developing new perspectives and practices. Overall, this guide seeks to provide accurate information about the contextual issues surrounding adoption, create a positive view of adoptive families, and develop essential practices in creating an inclusive and responsive elementary and middle school environment for adoptive families and their children.

CHAPTER 2. ATTITUDES TOWARD ADOPTION

Negative community attitudes are reported by many adoptive families and acknowledged by numerous adoption researchers and experts (Bartholet, 1993; Carp, 1998; Melosh, 2002; Register, 1991; Wegar, 2000). Kirk (1964), in *Shared Fate*, a theory of adoptive family functioning that has served as a foundational work for adoption theory and research, was one of the first researchers to describe negative attitudes toward adoption in the community surrounding adoptive families. His research documents a bias in American and Canadian societies in favor of families formed by birth and reveals that this bias is openly communicated to adoptive families. Although a general social acceptance of adoption has developed since the 1960s (DTFA & EBDAI, 2002), negative attitudes toward adoption continue to exist and are communicated to adoptive families both subtly and directly (Bartholet, 1993; Wegar, 2000). Melosh (2002) describes the typical interactions that demonstrate the inferior status of adoptive families. She writes:

> When we subject the adoptive family to more public scrutiny than other families, we are marking it as marginal and inferior, outside the boundaries of privacy accorded to "real" families. Probing questions posed to biological parents are widely recognized as rude and intrusive; few ask, "Was it a mistake, or did you plan this pregnancy?" "This baby doesn't look like your husband; are you sure he's the father?" "What did your obstetrician charge?" "Did you want a girl (or boy)?" "Maybe you'll have a boy (or girl) next time." Adoptive families, by contrast, are routinely subjected to intrusive questions. "Are those kids yours?" is a frequent query posed to adopters in "nonmatching" families. Adoptive parents are often asked, sometimes in earshot of their children, "Why was he put up for adoption?" "Who are his real parents?" "What did it cost?" Congratulations to

new adopters are often offered along with the comment, "Maybe you'll still have a child of your own." (pp. 285-286)

These attitudes are not always so subtly portrayed. A negative orientation to adoption is demonstrated by Robinson (2002), a social worker and former high-school educator from Australia who writes, "It is time for society to realise [*sic*] that adoption is ethically wrong and morally indefensible…. People need to be educated to see adoption for what it is, and to abandon it, in the same way that they had to be educated to denounce slavery" (pp.26-27). She also contends, "There is no justification in such cases for changing the child's identity and pretending that the child has a different mother" (pp. 30-31) and argues, "Perhaps we can now recognize that those whose lives have been affected by adoption have all been damaged by the experience and are entitled to assistance and support" (p. 31). Such clearly delineated attitudes reflect the heart of the adoption controversy. First, adoption is considered inauthentic, a poor imitation of family, and second, it is believed to cause irreparable damage to children. These beliefs form the basis for the social stigma associated with adoption and the negative attitudes toward adoption that are frequently communicated to adoptive families and their children.

The school setting is a crucial aspect of community and one that is not immune to bias or prejudice; however, few published research studies have attempted to assess the attitudes of practitioners or students within educational settings or evaluate the educational climate in term of its fitness for adoptive families. As a result, this chapter will construct an understanding of attitudes toward adoption that may exist in educational settings by examining existing attitude research. These studies may be divided into several categories based on their type and relevance to education. First, studies that assess the perceptions of adoptive family members will be presented in order to develop an overview of the issues that these families experience with the

attitudes of others. Next, studies that directly assess community attitudes toward adoption will be discussed to reveal the general attitudes of parents and professionals in educational communities. Additionally, studies that address children's attitudes will be reviewed to reveal the attitudes of most students in educational settings. Lastly, the only study that directly assesses the attitudes of professional educators will be examined in the final section.

Perceptions of Adoptive Family Members

The perceptions of adoptive parents serve as a foundation for documenting the social stigma they experience. Miall (1987) was one of the first researchers to identify the issue of negative attitudes toward adoptive families as one of paramount importance. She utilized open-ended interviews to assess the perceptions of 30 women who had recently adopted or were awaiting the completion of an adoption. Her results reveal that respondents perceive that adoptive parenthood is not as valued as biological parenthood by others in the community. A majority of respondents indicated that bonding and love with a child by adoption are not believed to be as strong as with a biological child. They also revealed that, as adoptive parents, they are not considered to be their children's real parents and that their relationships with their children are frequently devalued by extended family members, friends, and strangers. Disparaging comments, including "Oh, I could never love someone else's child" (p. 37) and "When you've been through pregnancy and the child is biologically yours, you couldn't love a child more" (p. 37), were intensely felt by participants. Overall, Miall concludes that "the emotions experienced, the value of the children, and the validity of the parenting experience within the adoptive family were all perceived by the larger society to be less authentic" (p.38).

Other researchers have reported similar results. Register (1991) documented the existence of negative community attitudes toward adoption using anecdotal accounts from 46 adoptive

family members, as well as her own experience as a transracial adoptive parent. She writes, "How many other parents are regularly approached by strangers demanding to know, 'Are those kids yours?'" (p .x). In a recent study, Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003) found, through qualitative interviews with 39 adoptive couples, that fear of social stigma and public insensitivity to adoption were among the minor themes expressed preceding and after adoption, respectively. Prior to adoption, respondents were concerned that their children would not be considered authentic family members, and they perceived that others equate adoption with charity instead of a legitimate family option. One respondent indicated, "We fully expect that if the child we end up with is Chinese, there will be people we simply will never see again - who won't want to have anything to do with us or our little 'family'" (p. 393). Similarly, after the adoptions were complete, all couples in the study indicated they had experienced demeaning attitudes toward their families, including instances in which others questioned their connection to their children or inferred that their children were not really part of their families. One respondent shared this frustration concisely by stating, "We get annoyed with people who, not out of meanness, say really hurtful things, like 'Too bad you couldn't have your own children,' or 'So you don't have any natural children?' But we do! This is our own child, and she's as natural as any other child" (p. 396).

These studies reveal that adoptive parents perceive a bias in favor of families formed by birth. As adoptive parents, their families are not considered authentic and their love for their children and ability to parent are believed to be compromised by the absence of biological connections.

Studies that include the perspectives of the individuals who were adopted also document negative community attitudes. March (1995) concluded that negative social attitudes were a

primary motivator for adults to seek their birthparents. In a study consisting of open-ended

interviews with 60 adults who had experienced recent reunions with their birthmothers, she

found that the social stigma resulting from their adoptive status motivated their desire to seek

birth relatives. She also concluded that successful reunions were not associated with continued

contact with birthfamilies, but with the information the participants obtained and their resulting

increase in social acceptance. She reports that 76% of those interviewed indicated that, although

they believe their experiences within their families are no different than the experiences of

biological children, they perceive that others in society view them as inferior because they were

adopted. One respondent summed it up by saying, "But, outside the family, it's different. They

never believe that your parents love you like their parents love them. Because you aren't

biological" (p. 656). Respondents also reported numerous instances of discrimination by their

extended family, friends, and acquaintances.

Similar results have been noted in other studies, as well. Minor findings in a study by

Ryan & Nalavany (2003) reveal that social misconstruction of adoptive families, inappropriate

comments about adoption, and fear of social stigma are significant factors that children in

adoptive families face in connecting with others. Likewise, a survey by Freundlich and

Lieberthal (2000) with 167 Korean adults who were raised in transracial adoptive families also

reveals that a majority of respondents experience social stigma. Seventy percent reported

discrimination related to their race and 28% indicated discrimination on the basis of their

adoptive status. One respondent reported, "I grew up in a small, predominantly Caucasian

middle-class town where adoption seemed, to me to be unacceptable because it was 'un-natural'

– children, more so than adults, were more unaccepting, and, at times, cruel" (p.10). Finally,

McRoy & Grape (1999), reported, from qualitative interviews with 10 adults who were adopted transracially, numerous instances of discrimination, particularly with regard to skin color.

These studies demonstrate that individuals who were adopted by their families also perceive a bias in favor of families formed by birth. Their love and sense of belonging in their families are marginalized, and they experience social stigma and discrimination as a result of their adoptive status and physical dissimilarity to their families.

Community Attitudes

Several studies directly assess general community attitudes toward adoption. Miall (1996) conducted a research study in which open-ended interviews were used to assess community attitudes toward adoption in Canada, a country that mirrors the United States with respect to social values. Although Miall reports an overall acceptance of adoption and adoptive parenting, with 85% of male respondents and 86% of female respondents viewing adoptive and biological parenting as the same, results also indicate that 39% of both male and female respondents believe that the feelings of adoptive mothers toward their children can never be as strong as the feelings of their biological mothers, 33% of males and 31% of females believe that adoptive children are at a greater risk for problems than biological children, and 95% of males and 71% of females support a birthmother raising her child over the option of adoption. Attribution research by Mulcare and Aguinas (1999) used 129 college students to offer judgments of an adopted, semi-adopted (conceived with donor sperm), or nonadopted child based on a written description of negative behavior. Although no differences were detected overall or in the ratings of male respondents, female respondents gave the most favorable attributions to nonadopted students and the least favorable to semi-adopted students, causing the

authors to conclude, "Among female raters, adoptive status can be considered a negative attribute" (p.11).

Research on attitudes toward open adoption also demonstrates a bias in favor of families with biological connections. Rompf (1993) examined community attitudes toward open adoption through a statewide telephone survey of 640 adults. Among the results are those that indicate that 52% of respondents approve of open adoption arrangements, 86% believe adoptive children would want to locate their biological parents, and 77% believe that adoptive parents should assist their children in this endeavor. These findings reflect a general belief that biological family ties are important and should be maintained. Miall & March (2005b) evaluated community attitudes toward several variations of open adoption in Canada, a country that shares social mores similar to those in the Untied States. Participants expressed that the benefits of open adoption for adoptive families include access to genetic and health information, knowledge of and access to birthfamilies, and answers for children's identity inquiries. Participants also indicated that the costs of open contact were threats to adoptive families, including identity conflicts, reduced stability, and confusion over family loyalties. These responses illustrate that respondents view contact with birthfamilies as both necessary for and destructive to the functioning of adoptive families. The birth relationship is viewed as the one of central importance, while the adoptive relationship is viewed as insufficient, as well as in jeopardy if a more legitimate family connection is available.

The most revealing, large-scale studies of community attitudes were published in 1997 and 2002 through the initiatives of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. The 1997 *Benchmark Adoption Study: Report on the Findings* (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute) was based on telephone interviews with 1,554 adults

across the United States, including Caucasian and African American respondents, while the 2002 *National Adoption Attitudes Survey* (DTFA & EBDAI) used a similar interview format to allow for comparisons across time and included telephone surveys with 1,416 adults, including Caucasian, African American and Hispanic respondents. The overall findings of both surveys reflect generally positive attitudes toward adoption with 90% of 1997 respondents and 94% of 2002 respondents indicating a "very" or "somewhat" favorable opinion of adoption.

A detailed examination of the reports, however, reveals negative findings. Only 56% of 1997 and 63% of 2002 respondents indicated a "very favorable" opinion of adoption. Of the remaining survey participants, 34% of 1997 respondents and 31% of 2002 respondents expressed a "somewhat favorable" opinion of adoption, 8 % of 1997 respondents and 5% of 2002 respondents shared an "unfavorable" opinion of adoption, and 2 % of 1997 and 1% of 2002 respondents were undecided. These findings reveal a reluctance to fully accept adoption on the part of a large number of respondents. Additionally, of the 1997 respondents, 50% expressed agreement with the statement, "Adoption is better than being childless but is not quite as good as having one's own child." Also, 23% indicated that it is harder to love an adoptive child because the child is *not flesh and blood* and 20% identified children who were adopted as *second best* (as opposed to *first rate*). Comparisons with the 2002 survey are not possible in these instances, as these questions were not repeated in the newer instrument.

These surveys also show that other aspects of public opinion about adoption are negative. The 2002 survey reveals that 41% of respondents believe that children who were adopted are more likely than children in biologically connected families to have trouble in school, 45% think they are more likely to have behavior problems, and 33% believe they are more likely to have problems with substance abuse. Notably, the number of respondents expressing these negative

opinions has increased since the 1997 survey. The 2002 survey also finds that 22% of respondents believe children in adoptive families are less likely to be happy than children in biological families, 34% believe they are less likely to be self-confident, and 32% believe they are less likely to be well-adjusted. Views on children adopted from other countries are more pessimistic. Forty-seven percent of respondents believe that international adoptions are more likely to involve children with serious psychological or health problems than adoptions within the United States. Results also reveal that 11% of respondents believe that parents receive less satisfaction in raising a child through adoption than raising a child born to them, and only 18% of respondents have ever seriously considered adoption as an option for creating their own families. A similar finding is reported by Tyebjee (2003), who determined, from a telephone survey of 1,011 California residents, that only 15% of those surveyed would be very likely to adopt a child or provide foster care. Finally, the 1997 survey reveals that 36% percent of those interviewed believe it would be better for a child to be raised by a teenage birthmother than in an adoptive family. Similarly, Miall and March (2005a), in a telephone survey of attitudes toward birthfathers, found that 76% of male respondents and 84% of female respondents believe it is better for a child to be raised by a birthfather than in an adoptive family.

Negative attitudes toward adoption are also evidenced by the parenting decisions made by couples seeking to start families. Daniels (1994), in a study of 54 couples who had created families through donor insemination in New Zealand, concluded that the majority of participants had considered and rejected adoption before pursuing fertility treatment. Although dissatisfaction with the adoption process was a major factor in their decision to pursue fertility treatment, researchers also noted that 21% of respondents cited a genetic link with their child as an important factor in their decision. This genetic bias is reflected in participants' responses; for

example, one respondent directly disparaged adoption by stating, "I wanted to experience childbirth, and not be handed someone else's unwanted child" (para. 14). Other respondents stated, "Half of the child is ours at least" (para 15), and "It was fifty percent our child" (para 15). These responses demonstrate that some respondents believe genetic families are more legitimate than families formed by adoption.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that a substantial percentage of the community population has a preference for families formed by birth, a belief that biological ties form stronger families, and an expectation that children who were adopted into their families will have significant problems.

Attitudes of Students

Few studies exist that directly assess student attitudes toward adoptive families. However, early research on perceptions of teens contemplating adoption reveals related findings. Donnelly and Voydanoff (1991), in a study of factors related to adoption placement, conducted an assessment of adoption attitudes with 177 female teens. As a subset of the study, respondents expressed their level of agreement, on a four-point scale, with six survey statements related to adoptive parents and children. The results of this aspect of the study reveal that those who placed their infants for adoption have significantly more positive attitudes toward adoption than those who elected to parent their infants, demonstrating a relationship between teen attitudes toward adoption and their parenting decisions. These findings are notable, as the number of children placed for adoption in the United States has continued to decrease since the 1970s (Daly, 1994).

Another early study also assesses teen attitudes. Kallen, Griffore, Popovich and Powell (1990) surveyed adoption attitudes of adolescent mothers and their mothers. The researchers concluded that participants held generally positive attitudes toward adoption; however, they also

noted that a detailed examination of separate survey items revealed that some respondents expressed concern about families formed by adoption. Researchers noted that two fifths of adolescents and one fifth of their mothers expressed fears that children would be affected by their adoptive status and would not accept their adoptive parents as their *real* parents. These findings suggest participants have some reservations about adoption.

Daly (1994) also conducted attitude research with 175 teens in Canada. She concluded that respondents expressed largely positive attitudes toward adoption, but were uncertain of the support of their friends or family if they made an adoption plan. Daly also noted discrepancies among participants' responses; while 43% of respondents perceived adoption as the best resolution for the pregnancy of a friend, only 6% indicated they would definitely choose adoption for resolving their own pregnancies. Additionally, 41% of respondents indicated that they were unsure of how their friends would perceive an adoption decision, and 31% were unsure of their parents' feelings about adoption. A close examination of participants' responses also reveals that, while most expressed positive attitudes, 30% questioned the emotional ties in adoptive families, 25% indicated that adoptive children are more likely to have problems than children in biological families, and 39% indicated that adoptive children could not be as happy as biological children.

Adoption attitudes are also revealed in a study with younger children. Sherrill and Pinderhughes (1999) interviewed 15 children, aged 8 to 11, who were recently adopted by their families along with a matched comparison group of 15 children in biologically connected families. Interviews centered on the children's concepts of family and understanding of adoption, and included their responses to open-ended questions, as well as their evaluations of the status of varying types of families represented by written scenarios and accompanying photographs. The

study revealed significant differences in children's understanding of families based on their family type; children in adoptive families were more accepting of diverse family styles while children in biologically connected families relied more on biological definitions for their interpretations of family. A substantial number of children in biologically connected families also inaccurately assumed that birthparents have the ability to reclaim children from adoptive families. The authors note:

> The findings that nonadopted children are less accepting of nontraditional family constellations and rely heavily on biological relatedness in their conceptions of family raise concerns about the peer context into which older adoptees enter when they join new families. Education about family constellation and adoption as a viable path into family life for some children is needed in schools, particularly when older adoptees enter new classrooms. (p. 44)

Attitudes of Educators

The only existing study to specifically assess the attitudes of professional educators is a dissertation authored by Kessler in 1987. She used a rating scale and open ended questions with 121 female preschool and elementary education teachers to assess their perceptions of adoptive and biological children, based on photographs of children and accompanying descriptions of negative social behaviors. The children presented in the study varied according to their gender, attractiveness, and adoptive or biological status, and the descriptions of their social behavior were either slightly or extremely negative. Participants' responses to children in adoptive families, compared with responses to children in birthfamilies, were significantly different but not always as expected. Children in adoptive families were rated as more attractive when committing severely negative social behavior than children in biologically connected families.

However, when committing mildly negative behavior, the children in biologically connected families were rated as more attractive. Similarly, the severely inappropriate behavior of adoptive children was rated as less aggressive than that of children in biological families. Several other findings were also confusing and contradictory. When an adoptive child was attractive, teachers determined that greater punishment was not merited for more severe behavior; however, when the child was unattractive, greater punishment was warranted for severe behavior. The author of the study interpreted these findings as reflecting a sense of pity for adoptive children. Several other interpretations are possible, particularly since the discrepancies occurred during ratings of severe misbehavior. The findings may reflect an overcorrection by participants in order to keep their attitudes covert. Teachers' responses may also reflect decreased expectations for adoptive students because they are expected to have problems.

These contradictory findings are also in sharp contrast with the results of an earlier study, also discussed in Kessler's dissertation, in which the attitudes expressed were extremely negative. Nineteen graduate students and faculty members in clinical psychology gave negative attributions when asked their impressions of adoptive children. Responses include "less-secure, different, have to try harder to belong, difficult, spoiled, lonely, traumatized, second-best, troubled, overprotected, overachievers, orally fixated, rejected, and anxious" (p. 49).

Despite the unusual results of Kessler's study, it establishes several important points. Children in adoptive families are perceived differently than children in biologically related families, and these perceptions influence the way that children in adoptive families are treated in school.

Conclusions and Implications

Results of these studies, overall, demonstrate generally positive attitudes toward the institution of adoption. It is generally recognized that adoption serves an important purpose and is beneficial to children and families. However, a thorough examination of the literature reveals that adoption is generally favored as a second choice; research demonstrates a marked preference for families formed by birth and a hesitation to completely accept adoptive families as legitimate families with the same bonding, love, and stable relationships as birthfamilies. Studies also demonstrate that children who were adopted by their families are considered more likely to have psychological, academic, and behavioral issues than nonadopted children. Finally, these attitudes are not discreet; they are openly communicated to adoptive parents and children and strongly felt by them.

Negative attitudes are likely to permeate the educational setting, as well. "These negative attitudes toward adoption in the community at large are likely to influence the way teachers think and feel about adopted children in general" (Kessler, 1987, p.23). Educators are likely to possess negative attitudes towards children in adoptive families, and these attitudes may also affect their interactions with children. Parents and students are also likely to have negative attitudes toward students in adoptive families. For the benefit of children in adoptive families, as well as the education of the community, these attitudes merit attention from professionals in education.

One encouraging finding in attitude research is that support for adoption increases with educational attainment and personal experience with adoptive families (DTFA & EBDAI, 2002; Tyebjee, 2003). This implies that educators may already possess less negative attitudes about adoption than the general public. Additionally, education and experience with adoptive families may enable educators to develop positive attitudes. An important first step in developing positive

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attitudes toward adoption and creating effective educational practices is understanding the basis

for the social stigma that characterizes adoption. Chapter 3 will address the foundation for these

attitudes in society.

CHAPTER 3. THE CONTEXT OF ADOPTION

In order to understand negative attitudes toward adoptive families, the context in which adoption occurs in society must be understood (Bartholet, 1993; Miall & March, 2006; Wegar, 2006). Many powerful influences converge to create the social stigma that is associated with adoption. A narrow sense of family ideology operates within American culture, creating a bias toward families that differ from the accepted norm; this bias is reflected in the theories and research that guide practice in adoption, as well as in the strategies and techniques recommended by professionals who work with adoptive families (Bartholet, 1993; Wegar, 2000). This bias is also evidenced by negative portrayals of adoption in the media, which falsely educate the community and further reinforce negative attitudes (Pertman, 2006). Finally, the orientation of the field of social work on family preservation further stigmatizes adoption and defines it as the option of last resort for children (Bartholet, 1999). These factors operate jointly, each exerting an influence on the other, in the formation of community attitudes toward adoption (Bartholet, 1993; Wegar, 1995).

This chapter will present and discuss these crucial influences on adoption stigma in society and attitudes toward adoption. In the first section, family ideology in American culture will be explored as the underlying framework for the development and maintenance of the remaining influences. Next, the bias in psychological theories of adoption and the research prompted and supported by these theories will be examined. The stigmatization of adoption by the field of social work and policies of social welfare will be discussed in the third section. Lastly, the powerful contributions of the media on attitudes toward adoption, including legitimate media sources such as news stories and educational publications, as well the media of entertainment, will be presented in the final section.

Family Ideology in American Culture

One of the contributing factors to the stigma associated with adoption is the concept of the ideal family (Wegar, 2000). In the field of sociology, Bernardes (1985) and Anderson (1991) have provided the theoretical foundations for the existence of a family ideal. This ideal defines legitimate families as consisting of an employed male, a female homemaker, and their biological children (Anderson, 1991; Collins, 1998). Within this ideology, the concept of *family* is ascribed to a set of biological relationships, not a set of social relationships formed by choice, as adoption entails (Bernardes, 1985). According to this ideal, the central defining aspect of family membership is biology. Miall and March (2006) write, "These blood ties have been considered indissoluble and mystical in nature, transcending legal and other kinship arrangements, and parenting has been regarded as a process of child bearing as well as child rearing" (p. 44).

The limiting aspect of this ideology is that family forms not meeting the ideal are considered abnormal or even "pathological" (Anderson, 1991, p. 239). Rothman (2006) notes that, because biological relatedness is presumed to be natural, scientific study reinforces family ideology and genetic links between parents and children are considered central to family relationships. She argues that "genetics has become more than a science and functions as an ideology, a belief system, and way of understanding life itself" (p. 19). This orientation can be observed in adoption literature. Kressier and Bryant (1996) refer to adoption as a "deviant relationship" and describe it as "less than completely authentic and legitimate" (p. 394); they also relate the adoptive relationship to other abnormal relationships, including incest and polygamy.

Another aspect of this ideology is the belief that blood ties are the foundation for strong family relationships. "Representing the genetic links among related individuals, the belief in

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blood ties naturalizes the bonds among members of kinship networks. Blood, family, and kin are so closely connected that the absence of such ties can be cause for concern (Collins, 1998, p. 69). Mothering, according to this ideology, is instinctual and the bonding that occurs before and after birth is essential to stable family relationships; thus transferring this biologically linked child to another set of parents causes irreparable harm and creates inferior relationships (B. Smith, Surrey, & Watkins, 2006). Herman (2002) sums up this perspective, writing, "Because adoption is a purely social relationship created by law, lacking the biogenetic premise that underlies American kinship ideology, it has been consistently viewed as more risky (because less real) than either kinship cemented by nature alone (which even law cannot eradicate) or kinship defined at once by nature and law" (p. 11).

A final aspect of American family ideology is a biologically linked view of identity. Rothman (2006) writes, "Through the genetic lens, what people are, essentially - in our essence - is our genes. Our genes produce us, construct our bodies, and the locus of action, the source of our essential being, is thought to lie in those genes" (p.20). According to this premise, children who are transferred to adoptive families are believed to lose their true identity, and are expected to spend a lifetime trying to recover it (Watkins, 2006). Additionally, family ideology supports the premise that a simple, uncomplicated identity is preferable and healthier for an individual than one characterized by complexity and multiple influences (B. Smith et al., 2006).

Family ideology and its impact on adoption attitudes and practices can be traced historically. The science of *matching* available children to families developed as a way to legitimize families formed by adoption by creating them "as if begotten" (Modell & Dambacher, 1997, p. 10). According to the premise that bonding and love are the result of biology, similarities between adoptive children and parents were sought to ensure that the children would

belong; matching children to families was accomplished according to numerous social, intellectual, religious, racial, and cultural parameters (Berebitsky, 2006; Melosh, 2002). Family ideology is also evident in the early assumptions that unwed mothers were likely to produce inferior children, and that adoptive parents, by virtue of their infertility, were psychologically impaired and needed expert analysis and assistance to connect with an adoptive child (Berebitsky, 2006; Carp, 1998; Herman, 2002). The practice of evaluating infants for mental disabilities and social maladjustment was deemed necessary to prevent parents from adopting children with inherited defects (Carp, 1998), and couples seeking adoption were also evaluated to ensure their parental fitness in order to protect adoptive children (Melosh, 2002).

Though notably developed since the early 1900s, family ideology continues to have a powerful impact on society. Fisher (2003b) argues that the stigma associated with adoption is evident in current adoption trends. He notes that adoption is used as a way to build families primarily by couples experiencing infertility and that adoption typically follows medical treatments to produce a biological child. He also observes that the use of adoption as an option for unplanned pregnancies has decreased. Bartholet (1993) also notes that couples favor fertility treatment despite the fact that the outcome of such treatment is often an adoptive child. She refers to this process as a *technological adoption* and notes that this process is unregulated, as well as for-profit. She writes, "The contrast to the traditional adoption world is stunning. There adoption is a grudging last-resort for already existing children, and baby-buying is strictly forbidden. Here we are using money to encourage the creation of adoptees" (p. 222).

Adoption represents only one form of the diversity that is reflected in American families; single parent families, divorced families, blended families, and gay and lesbian families have also become established family styles (Upshur & Demick, 2006). Given this reality, Anderson

(1991) argues that the two-parent biological family should no longer be considered the standard for *normal*. B. Smith et al. (2006) suggest that the commonality of adoption within the animal world supports the premise that adoption is actually a typical way to acquire family members. Eisenberg (2001) also notes that mice, rats, skunks, otters, deer, caribou, llamas, kangaroos, wallabies, seals, sea lions, bears, dogs, pigs, sheep, goats, and primates have all been known to adopt young to raise, and Leon (2002) argues that primates, in particular, have the capacity to attach to young other than their biological offspring. Additionally, Bartholet (1993) argues that adoption is perceived differently in other cultures that are not founded on the same family ideology.

According to Bernardes (1986), there are no appropriate theoretical perspectives for approaching the concept of family without developing an ideal by which to evaluate families. He proposes the theoretical concept of *developmental pathways*, the joining of life-courses together for a period of time within a society; this definition allows "the issues of 'what is family' and 'family diversity' to become matters for our subjects to define rather than matters of academic debate or opinion" (p. 607).

Theory and Research in Adoption

Guided by underlying family ideology, attempts to study the development of adoptive children and the functioning of adoptive families have been largely negative in their scope and orientation (Bartholet, 1993; Wegar, 2000). Wegar (1995) argues that adoption theory and research have been characterized by a *psychopathological bias*; adoption studies have focused on revealing the nature of problems assumed to exist and theorizing the sources of these problems within adoptive families.

Negative adoption themes, framed by Freud's psychoanalytic theory, began to characterize professional literature, beginning in the 1940s (Carp, 1998). This theory focuses on unconscious identity processes within adoptive children as they attempt to resolve inner conflicts created by basic impulses and the replacement of their biological families with their adoptive families (Brinich, 1990). Clothier (1943) theorized that the "ego of the adopted child…is called upon to compensate for the wound left by the loss of the biological mother" (p. 222), and that "it is to be doubted whether the relationship of the child to its post-partem [*sic*] mother, even in its subtler effects, can be replaced by even the best of substitute mothers" (p.223). She argued that adoption was inherently traumatic and that the artificial family relationships of adoption have a negative psychological impact on children. Similarly, Schechter (1960) noted that adoptive children were overrepresented in clinical treatment programs, and he theorized that the source of an adoptive child's emotional problems was that "the immature ego cannot cope with the knowledge of the rejection by its original parents representing a severe narcissistic injury" (p. 31). Likewise, Sants (1964) argued that adoptive children experience *genealogical bewilderment*, as differences in their appearance impede their identification with their adoptive parents and fears of committing incest with family members drive their search for biological relatives. Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor (1975), in a review of psychoanalytic adoption literature, determined that adoptive children are prone to identity issues as a result of several factors, including their loss of maternal biological bonds and inferior adoptive relationships, their inability to resolve incestuous feelings of the Oedipal complex due to their lack of biological connections, their excessive fantasies of birthparents, the trauma they experienced due to the loss of genetic ties, and their inability to develop an authentic identity.

Psychoanalytic theory also began to characterize birth and adoptive parents as disturbed. Carp (1998) notes that unmarried birthmothers were labeled as neurotic and emotionally unstable, their pregnancies were considered to be the result of attempts to gratify unresolved Oedipal fantasies, and their efforts to parent their children were interpreted as resistance to recovery. Similarly, psychological factors, particularly among adoptive mothers, were purported as a cause of infertility (Berebitsky, 2006) and dysfunctional adoptive family relationships were believed to occur as a result of their "unconscious rejection of motherhood" (B. Smith et al., 2006, p.156).

Psychoanalytic theory continues to impact professional appraisals of adoption. A more recent development within this model is Kirschner's *adopted child syndrome* (1990), a label reflecting a set of antisocial behaviors directly attributed to the adoption process. Kirschner writes:

In case after case, I observed what I have come to call the Adopted Child Syndrome, which may include pathological lying; manipulativeness; shallowness of attachment; stealing; truancy; provocation of parents and other authorities; threatened or actual running away; promiscuity; learning problems; fire setting; and increasingly serious antisocial behavior, often leading to court custody. It may include an extremely negative or grandiose self-image, low frustration tolerance, and an absence of normal guilt or anxiety. (p.94)

He further indicates that this pathological behavior is directly caused by the adoption process and that all adoptive children are at risk for its development.

The psychoanalytic perspective continues to be prominent in explaining the functioning of adoptive families (Brinich, 1990). Brinich notes that a major task for adoptive children and

their parents is mourning their respective losses; adoptive children must successfully grieve the loss of their birthparents and view of themselves as wanted, while adoptive parents must mourn the loss of the biological child they might have produced. He also notes specific problems for adoptive children include resolving their family romance fantasies and managing questions about their background, including the possibility that they were conceived through incest.

In addition to psychoanalytic theory, many other theories have been proposed to explain adjustment in adoptive children (Brooks et al., 2005). Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1980) focuses on the bonding process between children and their primary caregivers. According to this theory, a secure attachment to a primary caregiver promotes healthy development, while an insecure attachment or experience of loss causes psychological problems. Verrier (1993) notes that adjustment problems in adoptive children are the result of the loss of their connections with birthmothers and the poor substitute relationships within their adoptive families. She writes:

> Many doctors and psychologists now understand that bonding doesn't begin at birth, but is a continuum of physiological, psychological, and spiritual events which begin in utero and continue throughout the postnatal bonding period. When this natural evolution is interrupted by postnatal separation from the biological mother, the resultant experience of abandonment and loss is indelibly imprinted upon the unconscious minds of these children, causing what I call the 'primal wound.' (p. 1)

Another adoption theory is Brodzinsky's stress and coping model (1990). He proposes that there is a "psychological risk associated with adoption" (Brodzinsky, 1987, p. 26), and argues that children perceive adoption as stressful and that their adjustment is mediated by their cognitive and overt responses to manage adoption-related stress caused by the loss of birthparents and lack of emotional support for their grieving process (Brodzinsky, 1990). He writes, "Although

adoption, divorce, and death all involve loss, the extent of loss is greater in adoption"

(Brodzinsky, 1990, p.9). The biological perspective, reviewed by Cadoret (1990), proposes that

adjustment problems in adoptive children are caused by genetic or prenatal factors. Wegar

(2000) also highlights several other perspectives that have been also been used to explain

adoptive functioning, including family systems theory, attribution theory, and goodness-of-fit

theory, which attribute adjustment problems to less-then-optimal functioning within adoptive

families.

These theories are reflected in the literature dedicated to inform professional practice in

counseling and therapy. Boss (1999) writes of the concept of *ambiguous loss* and places adoptive

individuals in the same psychological category as those who have a family member with

Alzheimer's disease who can no longer remember them, those with a family member identified

by the military as missing in action, and those involved in other loss situations, including

mysterious disappearance, addiction, brain injury or, mental illness. Krueger and Hanna (1997)

note, "For the adopted individual, one of his or her earliest experiences was the pain of

abandonment and contact with the reality of isolation," (p. 199) and argue, "Each milestone in

the adoptee's life is shadowed or haunted by the knowledge that he or she has lost contact with

his or her biological parents and heritage" (p. 198).

These theories also provide the foundation for research on adoption outcomes. Major

reviews of adoption studies reveal several problematic findings in adoption research. Brodzinsky

(1987), in a comprehensive review of early research studies, suggests that adoptive children

experience more psychological and behavioral issues than nonadopted children. Similarly,

Wierzbicki (1993), in an analysis of 66 studies, also concludes that adoptive children have higher

levels of maladjustment, as well as more acting-out behaviors. Haugaard (1998), in a review of

over 30 studies, affirms that adoptive children are over-represented in the mental health population and have higher levels of psychological maladjustment and more behavior problems than nonadopted children. Current studies also support this trend in research and suggest poorer outcomes for children in adoptive families. Miller, Fan, Christensen, Grotevant, & von Dulmen, (2000) conclude that adoptive adolescents have more school problems, behavior and emotional problems, and health problems than nonadopted adolescents, and Cubito & Brandon (2000) reveal that adults raised in adoptive families have a higher than average incidence of psychological problems. Similarly, S. L. Smith, Howard, and Monroe (2000) conclude that children adopted from public agencies after infancy develop problem behaviors due to emotional issues, including grief, anger, and depression.

A specific concern for research and theory has been the identity development of adoptive children. Sorosky et al. (1975), in a literature review, propose that children in adoptive families are particularly susceptible to the development of identity problems. A current review of literature on adoptive identity by Upshur and Demick (2006) also reveals numerous identity issues believed to impact children in adoptive families, including issues of self-worth, belonging, and authenticity. Upshur and Demick also note that the identity task for children in transracial adoptive families has an added layer of complexity and that transracial adoption has been a topic of considerable controversy as a result of these concerns. Researchers and theorists have also suggested that searching for birthparents is integral to the identity of adoptive children (Carp, 1998).

Experts in the adoption field are beginning to critically evaluate these theories and the resulting scope of adoption research. Wegar (2000) and Bartholet (1993) argue that most theories begin with the assumption that adoption is abnormal and reflect a focus on identifying problems

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presupposed to exist. Wegar (1995) notes that "the search for pathological symptoms" (p.540) has dominated research efforts in adoption, producing over 150 studies. Similarly, Palacios and Sanchez-Sandoval (2005) note that researchers have placed an undue emphasis on comparing adoptive children with children in biological families, at the expense of more valid and useful research.

A number of researchers are also beginning to critically analyze the body of adoption research. Sharma, McGue, and Benson (1998) note several methodological problems in adoption research, including small sample sizes and the selection of inappropriate comparison groups. Hoksbergen (1999) suggests that the comparison of adoptive children to children raised in average biological families is invalid. Instead, he argues that the most realistic comparisons groups are institutional settings or biological families that match the circumstances children would have faced if they had not been adopted. Bartholet (1993) also notes that most adoption studies have been poorly structured and utilize substandard methodologies. She argues that samples in research studies have included children adopted in early and later childhood, confounding the results and attributing problems to the adoption process that are actually caused by preadoptive factors, including poor prenatal care, early deprivation, and abuse. Friedlander (2003) also argues that problems caused by pre-placement abuse or neglect are falsely ascribed to the adoption process, and Horner (2000) notes that structuring studies to control for confounding variables in adoption research is a major issue. Similarly, Borders, Black, & Pasley (1998) criticize the instruments used in adoption studies, noting that their reliability and validity are in question, and suggest that respondent bias on the part of parents or teachers may also contribute to negative findings. Furthermore, Grotevant (1997) suggests that there is an inadequate research base to support the accuracy of the behavioral outcomes theorized to occur

as a result of identity, and Simon and Altstein (1996) argue, "The arguments against transracial adoption have no empirical base. They are ideologically and politically driven" (p. 8). Finally, Haugaard (1998) concludes that the body of adoption research "suggests that there may be a risk of increased behavior or adjustment problems for some adopted children, or for adopted children at certain ages, but that this risk is neither high nor widespread" (p. 59).

Researchers also offer numerous explanations for the higher rates of mental health referrals that have been reported among adoptive children. Grotevant (1997) suggests that adoptive parents may seek help more readily because of their higher educational attainment than average parents or because of their previous experience in working with agencies to complete an adoption. Haugaard (1998) theorizes that adoptive parents may obtain mental health services more readily as a result of several other factors, including an increased focus on the possible development of problems, a readiness to continue treatment that was in process before an adoption, and an increased likelihood of professionals referring for mental health services as a result of knowledge of children's adoptive status. In his review of over thirty adoption studies, he also notes that most studies did not control for the possibility of effects caused by experiences prior to adoption.

Finally, researchers and theorists note that the social context of adoption is rarely considered as a possible influence in negative outcomes for families or children (Bartholet; 1993; Wegar, 2000). Wegar argues that prominent adoption theories completely ignore the social nature of adoption as a crucial factor in the identity of adopted children and the functioning of adoptive families, or they decrease its importance to one of secondary significance. Similarly, Bartholet suggests that social conditioning influences the experiences of adoptive family members, their attitudes toward adoption, and their family functioning. Miall and March (2006)

also maintain that "the social context within which members of the adoption triangle live can contribute to a sense of their being second best or less authentic than biologically based families" (p. 44). Similarly, Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, and Lash Esau (2000) assert, "Adoptive identity cannot be understood without placing it in the context of societal attitudes toward kinship" (p. 381).

Other alternative ways of understanding adoptive families and their outcomes have also been suggested. Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, and Lash Esau (2000) propose that adoptive identity development, the process by which adoptive individuals construct meaning about their adoption, includes an internal component, a family component and a social component. They offer a more positive orientation to adoption than earlier theories, and write, "Although the identity task may be more complex for adopted than non-adopted persons, this does not imply that there is anything pathological about it" (p. 382). Brooks et al. (2005) also maintain that adoption can be understood through resilience theory, by analyzing personal and social experiences and processes according to risk and protective factors that influence adoption adjustment. Similarly, Watkins (2006) and Bartholet (1993) suggest that the multiple cultures and contexts experienced by transracial adoptive families enriches their understanding of the world and their personal identities and openly challenges and expands society's current constructs of life and family.

Finally, numerous researchers report positive outcomes for adoptive families and children. Haugaard (1998) notes, in his review of research on adoption outcomes, that some studies find no evidence of problems with adoptive children. Hoksbergen (1999), in another review of outcome studies, concludes that adoption is an advantage to children and is superior to the alternate methods of care that children would have experienced, namely institutions and poorly functioning birthfamilies. Positive outcomes for children and families have also been

noted by Marquis and Detweiler (1985), Borders, Black, and Pasley (1998), and Borders, Penny, and Portnoy (2000). These studies, as well as other research revealing positive outcomes for adoptive families and children will be further explored in Chapter 4.

Social Work Influences on Adoption

The influence of the field of social work has been a significant factor in the development of adoption stigma and negative attitudes toward adoption. Both current and historical practices in social work have impacted the development of child welfare policies in the United States and have created a system in which adoption is regarded as an option of last resort for children, further stigmatizing adoption and reinforcing negative attitudes (Bartholet, 1999).

Historically, the development of the field of social work as a profession coincided with the development of adoption practices and was strongly supported by them (Herman, 2002). By 1926, sixteen universities had created programs for educating professional social workers; the emphasis of these programs was on developing solutions for social problems using scientific inquiry (Holt, 2006). Social work practitioners in adoption highlighted the merits of professional expertise in forming families and maintained the context of family ideology in creating adoptive families; they used the practice of *matching* in order to ensure stable attachments in families based on similarity and minimize the risk they felt was inherent in placing children (Melosh, 2002). Wegar concludes that the "policy of matching is intended to ensure that adoptive kinship resembles biological kinship as much as possible, yet at the same time this emphasis implies that adoptive families never can be quite as 'real' as families connected by the biological bond" (p. 367). The practice of social work also stigmatized individual adoptive family members; social workers used family ideology to justify intense investigations of potential adoptive parents, periods of observation and testing for children to judge their appropriateness for adoption, and

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ultimately, the sense of secrecy that came to accompany adoption practices (Carp, 1998; Melosh, 2002). Creagh (2006) writes, "They became powerful gatekeepers, guiding birthmothers' decisions, meticulously screening prospective parents, and selectively distributing available children" (p.38).

Additionally, after the initial onset of transracial adoption, the National Association of Black Social Workers issued a statement reproaching this practice in 1972; this action influenced agency policies and state laws and curtailed transracial adoption practices for a period of time (Ashby, 1997). The former president of the association, William T. Merritt, concisely summed up his view in 1985, stating to a Senate Committee, "We view the placement of black children in white homes as a hostile act against our community. It is a blatant form of racial and cultural genocide (as cited in Simon & Altstein, 1996, p. 6).

Bartholet (1999) and Wegar (2000) argue that these biases are enduring. Wegar (2000) documented the bias of social workers in a review of her 1998 study of the attitudes of 27 adoption workers. Twenty-three of the social workers surveyed stressed the differences between biological and adoptive families, noting that adoptive families have an inferior bond with their children, an increased possibility of problems, and more relationship issues to resolve than biological families. Only four of the workers surveyed viewed the process of adoptive parenting as essentially the same as biological parenting. Community attitudes toward adoptive families were only mentioned as a significant issue by five social workers, and were only a main focus for the one worker who was part of an adoptive family. Additionally, 22 respondents focused on the practice of matching children to their adoptive families, particularly in the area of physical appearance, to ensure successful adoption outcomes. Wegar describes one worker who discussed a case in which she placed a child who was a "fantastic match" because she "looks like she

belongs to that family" (p. 367). Kirton (1999), in a study conducted in the UK, also found that students enrolled in social work programs generally favor same-race adoptions over transracial placements.

Bartholet (1999) argues that child welfare policies and the field of social work in the United States continue to reflect a bias in favor of biological families and view adoption as an inferior option for children. She writes:

> At the core of current child welfare policies lies a powerful blood bias - the
>
> assumption that blood relationship is central to what family is all about. Parents
>
> have God-given or natural law rights to hold on to their progeny. Children's best
>
> interests can be equated with those of their parents because parents have a natural
>
> inclination to care for their young. These beliefs are deeply entrenched in our
>
> culture and our law. (p. 7)

She also notes that adoption is considered the last possible resort for children in foster care, behind reunification with biological families, most of whom have a substantiated history of abuse, and placement with other biological relatives, however little known to the child. She also argues that drug abuse is a serious problem and is one that is often ignored by the child welfare system.

Brooks et al. (2005), in a review of adoption trends in the United States, note that adoptions from foster care usually involve children who have experienced abuse or neglect, as well as multiple foster care placements, and usually occur at older ages. Currently available statistics for children in foster care in the United States reflect information for the year 2005 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). These estimates indicate that 513, 000 children are currently placed in foster care and that 37% of them have been in care for two years

or more. Only 4% of these children are currently in pre-adoptive homes and only 20% have

adoption identified as their long-term case goal. Conversely, reunification is a long-term goal for

51% of children in care. In 2005, only 18% of children who exited the foster care system were

adopted, while 65% were returned to biological parents or other family members. Of the

children waiting to be adopted, 63% have been in foster care for two years or more and another

25% have been in foster care for a year or more. Twenty-three percent of these waiting children

were removed from their families before the age of 1 year, with the majority of them (52%)

removed before the age of 5, but the majority of these waiting children (52%) are now 8 years or

older. Terminations of parental rights for children in 2005 followed an average wait of

approximately 27 months, and adoptions for children in 2005 took an average of 15 months after

termination. Overall, children spend long periods of time in foster care, reunions with

birthfamily members are the ultimate goal in most cases, adoptions are the minority option for

these children, and, when they do occur, the length of time for terminations and adoption is

significant. Lieberman (1998) quantifies the extent of the foster care crisis by indicating that

there are more new reports of child abuse each year than there are new cancers.

    Additional research also suggests that the foster system is not organized to promote

adoption. A recent survey with prospective adoptive parents reveals that 78% of individuals who

contact public agencies for information about adoption do not proceed beyond the initial phone

call and only 6% follow through with completing an adoption homestudy (Evan B. Donaldson

Adoption Institute, 2005). Problems identified by survey participants include disorganization or

unresponsiveness during their initial phone inquiry about adoption, negative information about

the adoption process or available children, insensitivity from agency personnel, confusion about

the adoption process, and concern about losing a child to birthfamily members. Tyebjee (2003)

found that support for the foster care system is negatively correlated with educational attainment, a finding in sharp contrast to attitudes toward adoption, which are positively correlated with educational attainment. He determined that "people who demonstrated the highest level of concern about problems facing children had the most negative view of foster care" (p. 700). This finding reveals that many people view the foster system as the barrier to progress rather than the solution.

Research also suggests that the foster children, themselves, do not prefer reunification with birthfamilies. In a study of family perceptions with children in foster care in Melbourne, Australia, an area with similar ideology to North America, Gardner (1996) concluded that children considered their family to be their foster family and, when given the option to create their ideal family, consistently selected their foster families over their birthfamilies. A study by Sherrill & Pinderhughes (1999) also demonstrates that children do not necessarily prefer reunification with birthfamilies. In a study of children aged 8 to 11 in newly-formed adoptive families, they found that adoptive children expressed more negative attributions toward birthparents and were more likely to identify themes of love and belonging over biological connections than children in biologically related families.

Some practitioners are beginning to advocate for changes in the foster system to promote more positive options for children through adoption. Fritz (2005), in an editorial, urges, "As mental health professionals, we must acknowledge an impossible family situation, admit our inability to magically fix things, and more quickly terminate parental rights and facilitate adoption" (p. 8). A review of the literature on adoption and foster care outcomes by Triseliotis (2002) concluded that adoption offers children more permanence, as well as "higher levels of emotional security, a stronger sense of belonging, and a more enduring psychosocial base in life"

(p.31) than long-term foster care. Brooks et al. (2005) also note that research suggests that foster care has a negative impact on children's behavioral outcomes, and Bartholet (1999) argues that outcome studies reveal that adoption promotes more positive outcomes for foster children than the reunification with birthfamilies that is promoted by the foster care system.

Media Coverage of Adoption

The media's treatment of adoption, both in informative and entertainment forms, reflects existing negative attitudes toward adoption, while simultaneously reinforcing them. This negative orientation to adoption is well documented (Kline, Karel, & Chatterjee, 2006; Pertman, 2006; Waggenspack, 1998). Pertman (2003) notes that media coverage of adoption issues is replete with negatively-charged language; he refers to stories of "baby selling," "adoption scams," "trafficking of children," and "greedy adoption agents," as well as "shady practitioners," "desperate adoptive parents," and "suspicious motives" (para.4). Waggenspack (1998) found, in an analysis of depictions of adoption in news stories, that negative portrayals of adoption outweigh positive portrayals by a two-to-one margin. She writes, "Media misrepresentations encourage myths about adoptive families, adoptees, and the adoption process. Many of these myths result from sensationalized popular media coverage of adoption issues such as the availability of adoptable infants, the 'dangers' connected with adopting a child whose genetic heritage is unknown, and the publicized searches of adoptees looking for their biological parents" (p.67). Kline et al. (2006) found similar results. They examined 292 news stories on adoption, presented by the major networks of ABC, CBS, and NBC between 2001 and 2004. A focus on problems associated with adoption, including identity, emotional, behavioral, or health problems, was present in 56% of news stories. Furthermore, 22% of stories were characterized as completely negative, while only 8% of stories presented completely positive themes. Another

related issue is the tendency of the media to focus on the adoptive status of individuals in situations when adoption has no relation to the issue covered (Pertman, 2006). When mentioned in cases of criminal behavior, adoption is unjustly connected to deviance in the minds of viewers (Waggenspack, 1998).

Much media coverage focuses on isolated problems in adoption. The Baby Jessica case in 1993, the Baby Richard case in 1995, and the story of the "Internet twins" who were simultaneously adopted by two different families in 2001 all received excessive media attention (Kline et al., 2006; Waggenspack, 1998). Waggenspack refers to this type of coverage as reflecting an "if it bleeds, it leads" orientation, not one that is balanced to promote true understanding of an issue. Pertman (2006) notes that careful investigation and structuring of news stories on the twins would have revealed that the birthmother moved them from one adoptive family to another before finalization because the first family did not follow through with their agreement to open contact with her. Additionally, she did not profit from either adoption. However, Pertman notes that this story was sensationalized to infer that inappropriate adoption practices were occurring. Pertman (2003) also observes that the media's coverage of these stories did not present the rarity of adoption disruptions by birthparents; he believes these stories are responsible for recent survey findings that 92% of respondents, if they chose adoption, would be concerned that birthparents could reclaim a child (DTFA & EBDAI, 2002).

Pertman (2006) claims that the main problem with unbalanced media coverage is that "the events they feature are aberrations" (p.62) while most viewers, with little contextual knowledge of adoption through personal experience, believe that the stories "represent larger, more universal truths" (p.62). Thus, viewers who would readily dismiss other misinformation they observe from the media lack the ability to similarly filter adoption information. He also

indicates that the problem lies with the journalists, who may have their own biases or lack sufficient knowledge of the issues they are covering.

The film industry also serves to promote negative images of adoption. Gailey (2006) highlights the following films that have contributed to current views of adoption. In particular, a 1956 movie entitled *The Bad Seed* reinforced negative views of inherited pathology and the risks associated with adopting a child of unknown genetic composition. A similar stigma was presented in the1981 film *Mommie Dearest*, which depicts an adoptive mother's abuse of her adoptive child. *Problem Child 1*, in 1990, and *Problem Child 2*, in 1991, openly connected adoption to behavioral issues in children. In a recent movie, *AI: Artificial Intelligence*, in 2001, adoption was also a prominent theme. In this film, a cyborg was created to replace a biological child and was later rejected when the child was returned to life. Gailey reports that the adoptive children she interviewed found the film particularly disturbing; one indicated, "I guess I expected a lot more from Spielberg. I get that it's about identity and how you're an individual, but I think the adopted child as a, like, android is sick, man. When are the movies going to deal with what we're really like?" (p. 84).

Similarly, television often portrays adoption negatively. Waggenspack (1998) maintains, "Soap operas could hardly survive without the out-of-wedlock pregnancies leading to shady adoptions, 'adoptive devil children,' rivalry between birth and adoptive mothers, and secret adoptions which everyone but the adoptee is aware of" (p.74). Pertman (2003) also reports on a show developed for the WB network entitled "Maybe I'm Adopted" which was renamed due to opposition from adoptive parents and advocacy groups.

Negative representations of adoption are especially problematic because the public relies on the media for adoption information. A recent survey revealed that Americans trust the media

as their primary source of information about adoption (DTFA & EBDAI, 2002). Among

respondents, 31% cited the news media, 15% cited books and magazines, and 10% cited movies

and entertainment programs as their main sources of adoption information. The survey also

revealed that, if seeking additional information about adoption, 17% of respondents would rely

on the media to further develop their knowledge. Finally, 72% of these respondents erroneously

believed that adoption is positively portrayed by the media; only 21% of respondents expressed

concern that media coverage of adoption is negatively skewed. These findings suggest that the

accuracy of adoption-related issues represented in the media of television, movies, magazines,

books, or newspapers is rarely questioned and information shared by media sources is

internalized as fact.

Even books dedicated to educate and inform future professionals are not immune to

adoption bias. Fisher (2003a) examined 21 textbooks and 16 anthologies published between the

years of 1998 and 2001 for use in college sociology courses. He found that about 19% of these

books failed to mention adoption at all, and the remaining 81% of books devoted less than 1% of

their space to the issue. Of the books that covered adoption, 10 of the 16 textbooks and 10 of the

13 anthologies provided predominantly negative discussions, highlighting issues such as

psychological and behavior problems in adoptive children, restrictions placed on adoptive

parents, poor health of available children, high costs, custody battles, social stigma, ethical

concerns, waiting periods, unknown genetic problems and preadoptive trauma, fraud, loss of

privacy in adoptive investigations, racial and ethnic concerns in transracial adoption, and the

possibility of abuse by adoptive parents. Notably, the author also observed that many of the

negative issues presented were misinformed and unsubstantiated. Fisher's work followed similar

findings by Hall and Stolley (1997) who examined 62 college textbooks devoted to marriage and family issues published from 1950 to 1987 and found more treatment of abortion than adoption.

Overall, the influence of the media is extremely negative. Pertman (2006) summarizes the media issue concisely:

> Just as black children deserve to grow up in a world in which no newspaper identifies a criminal by the color of his skin unless there is a critical reason to do so, just as girls deserve to grow up in a world in which no newscast includes sexist references or language, just as kids using wheelchairs deserve to grow up in a world in which no journalist writes about people with disabilities in a way that implies they are somehow lesser human beings, in just the same way, I want my children - and all the children like them - to grow up in a world in which they are not routinely denigrated because of who they are. (p. 69)

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter clearly suggests that attitudes toward adoption are mediated by the interaction of a variety of societal factors. The main underlying influence is family ideology; children are viewed as the natural extension of their birthparents, and genetic ties are considered essential for family functioning and belonging. Adoptive families, by contrast, are viewed as missing a crucial element, and adoptive children are viewed as though they are *on loan* to their parents. The message that is commonly given to a child in an adoptive family is that he or she belongs somewhere else and is meant to be someone other than whom he or she has grown to be. The prevailing view is that children of adoption never really know themselves and must actively seek their own identities through investigations of their *real* connections. This is profoundly

discrediting to the actual identity that adoptive children have developed, as well as their sense of belonging within their family.

The influence of family ideology is readily seen in theories of adoption, as well as the research generated by these theories. Psychoanalytic theory is strongly grounded in biological representations of the family, and accordingly, developed a poor approach to understanding adoptive families, one that is deep-seated and enduring. One can readily see the connection between psychoanalysis and the numerous theories that followed. Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) openly acknowledges the psychoanalytic influence on his theory of grief and loss. This focus on grief and loss is also a crucial aspect of Brodzinsky's (1990) stress and coping model of adoption adjustment, as well as Verrier's (1993) focus on the *primal wound*. Overall, development in understanding the factors involved in parenting children by adoption has only minimally progressed in more than forty years. One example clearly illustrates this chain of influence on current theory. Upshur and Demick (2006), addressing issues of adoptive identity, cite Hoopes (1990) for identifying four areas of difficulty for adoptive children. Hoopes, however, cites Sorosky et al. (1975) for providing these categories, and they, in turn, identify numerous theorists as the source of these ideas, including Clothier (1943), Schechter (1960), and Sants (1964); their early contributions were discussed previously in this chapter. Although numerous positive social changes have occurred in American society since the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, theories of adoption continue to be framed by past ideals.

This bias in theory is also observed within the body of research on adoption. A study by D. W. Smith and Brodzinsky (1994) serves as an example. In an effort to test Brodzinsky's stress and coping model of adoption adjustment, their study utilized a structured interview format to assess stress and feelings related to adoption with 85 adoptive children and teens, aged 6 to 17.

In their results, the researchers ignored their study's first significant finding, that adoption was indicated by the participants to be more positive than negative; they failed to mention this beyond a single sentence which seemed to downplay its significance. Their results also demonstrate that children's satisfaction with adoption decreases as they age. In response to this finding, which is consistent with theory on the effects of social bias (which are increasingly understood as children's abilities to interpret subtle social messages develop), researchers conclude:

> Young children have a limited ability to understand the reality of their family status. Because of their cognitive immaturity, they often view adoption in unrealistically positive ways. As they mature cognitively, though, they become more aware of the implications of being adopted, including the loss of biological family members, cultural and ethnic ties, and even the loss of part of themselves. (p. 96)

The researchers also indicate that because children's attitudes are more negative as they age, they are more likely to suppress thoughts and feelings about their adoption, and warn against forming a "false assumption that children who report few intrusive and ruminative thoughts about adoption have necessarily ceased thinking about this aspect of their life or reconciled their feelings regarding their family status" (p. 96). This is an example of researchers failing to see their work as supporting an alternative theory and continuing to interpret their findings in terms of biased theory and repression.

This inferior understanding of adoptive families is also reflected in the field of social work, which considers adoption a last resort for children. Not only are biological families assumed to be best, but they also assumed to be the ideal desire of all children. This notion was clearly expressed by a social worker directly to the author during a foster parent training class;

she openly stated, "Every child wants to be with their birthfamily" (personal communication, 2002). This idea was purported as an undeniable fact, despite the fact that it is has been refuted by research. The foster parent training program also warned adoptive parents not to become overly attached to their foster children and reminded them that birthfamilies are their *real* families and only have to demonstrate minimal standards to have their children returned (personal communication, 2002). These statements reflect the notion that even poorly functioning birthfamilies are believed to be better for children than highly functioning adoptive families. Research reviewed in this chapter also suggests that the child welfare system maintains a negative orientation to adoption and discourages potential adoptive parents who seek information on adoption. Although many people are interested in adoption, few move beyond their initial contact with a social services department. Overall, historical and current evidence suggest that the profession of social work has, in effect, prevented progress that may otherwise have occurred in society.

The media also frequently portrays adoption as inferior. The following scenario was recently presented on television's popular new drama, *Heroes* (Armus, Foster, & Dawson, 2007). Claire, an adoptive daughter, experiences a reunion with her birthmother. After this meeting, growing more suspicious of her adoptive father, Claire has the following exchange of words with him after she is grounded:

Claire: What? You can't do that! You have no right.

Father: I'm your father.

Claire: You're not my real father.

Father: No, I'm not. But I'm as close as you've got.

The casual disrespect of adoptive families represented by this exchange is dramatic; not only does the episode suggest that adoptive families are not real, but the show portrays the adoptive family members themselves confirming the triviality of their connection. This example is illustrative of the general manner in which adoption is presented.

Adoption is a prevalent media theme in many respects. It is portrayed in classic fairy tales, like *Tarzan*, the *Jungle Book*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White*, as well as in popular book-to-film epics, like *Anne of Green Gables*, *Annie*, and *Stuart Little*. Adoption is also prevalent among super heroes, including Superman, Robin, and the X-Men. Even Luke Skywalker's biological sister, Princess Lea, in the popular movie series *Star Wars* was adopted. Similarly to the example from *Heroes*, a common adoption theme in many of these stories involves the character's feelings of incompleteness, and his inability to fit into society until his biological identity is realized and his inherent biological characteristics or powers are discovered

This negative presentation of adoption is not limited to the media of entertainment, but is portrayed by the media dedicated to inform the public, as well. A recent news story about adoption on *Good Morning America* (Murphy, 2006) hypes the "growing list of celebrities" adopting overseas, describes Madonna's recent adoption as "fast-tracked," and poses the question, "Is baby David better off?" about her newly adopted child. In another recent broadcast appearing on the same show, a skewed focus on the birthfamily is obvious in the show's coverage of the story (Murphy, 2007). The return of Anna Mae He to her birthparents at the age of 8 years after a six-year custody battle was one of the show's featured stories. Despite the fact that she was willingly placed by her birthparents in foster care, the monologue states, "Little Anna Mae will leave the only family she knows for the family that looks like her but has been forced to be strangers." The coverage of the story did not include interviews with members of the

child's foster family, who had been trying to legally adopt her for six years, but did include one particularly salient statement by the birthfather, who was used to close the story by saying, "When she wakes up every morning and sees all the faces surrounding her just like her own face - Mom and Dad - I think she will have a permanent peaceful mind." These stories serve to reinforce the notion that the bonds of love and affection are inferior to biological and cultural ties.

Negative representations of adoption in the media are especially problematic because the media is a main source of information and a central reality for almost all Americans. The media falsely educates the community about adoption and confirms for the public the suspicions that many already have about adoptive children and families.

For educators, these contexts are particularly important to understand. Not only do these influences impact the personal attitudes of educators, but they are also likely to permeate the educational environment in numerous subtle ways. Professionals in education are likely to be acquainted with negative adoption theories and research and are unlikely to have ever examined them critically. Negative media representations of adoption are likely to carry over to educational settings, as well, through works of fiction, movies, or news stories examined in classrooms. The collective impact of these influences on adoptive children is significant and will be explored further in Chapter 4. Despite these negative foundations in society, advances in research are revealing many positive outcomes of adoption, as well as numerous strengths of adoptive families. These new perspectives for educators are also included in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4. NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR EDUCATORS

Despite pessimistic views of adoption and their foundational influences in society, attitudes toward adoption are steadily improving, and adoptive families are gaining legitimacy and acceptance (DTFA & EBDAI, 2002). As a result, the orientation of adoption research and theory is also improving. Although negative research continues to permeate the field, new research on adoption is beginning to reveal the positive outcomes of adoption for children, as well as the unique strengths and perspectives of adoptive families. Researchers and theorists are also focusing on the impact of social stigma on the functioning of adoptive children and families.

This chapter will develop an understanding of the many positive outcomes of adoption, as well as provide educators with a rationale for creating positive attitudes and practices in educational settings. It is important to note that this chapter does not imply that children in adoptive families do not experience problems; its purpose is to create balance in perspectives toward adoption by presenting positive findings of adoption research, as well as suggest that the impact of adoption stigma may be more at fault in causing issues for adoptive children than the institution of adoption itself or any inherent deficits in children or their adoptive families. The first section will discuss current research that reveals the positive impact of adoption, including favorable outcomes for children who were adopted, as well as the successful functioning of adoptive families. The final section will discuss the social nature of adoption and the impact of social attitudes on the functioning and identity of children in adoptive families in order to establish the importance of positive attitudes and practices for educators.

Research on Positive Adoption Outcomes

Several studies reveal the positive outcomes of adoption for children and their families and are pivotal in establishing the successful nature of adoption, as they demonstrate that

children form strong relationships and flourish in adoptive families. Marquis and Detweiler (1985) compared the attributional judgments of 46 adoptive adolescents and young adults to those of a matched sample of 121 respondents raised in biological families. Respondents completed surveys that included personal history and parenting questionnaires, as well as a locus of control assessment and an attribution task consisting of eight story and question sets. Borders, Black, and Pasley (1998) compared the functioning of 72 adoptive families to a matched group of 72 biologically connected families using parental assessments of physical and emotional health (scales for depression, overall happiness, overall health, and self-esteem), family attitudes (scales for acceptance of maternal employment and traditional attitudes), family values and practices (scales for desirable behaviors, discipline behaviors, and involvement with the child), and children's development (scales for children's well-being, problem behaviors, prosocial behaviors, and educational expectations). Finally, a study by Borders, Penny, and Portnoy (2000) used surveys to assess the overall functioning of 100 adults, aged 35 to 55, raised in adoptive families compared to a matched sample of 70 adults raised in biological families. These surveys utilized 12 standardized instruments and open-ended questions to assess respondents' views of life, intimacy, connectedness, emotional and psychological well-being, and risk-taking behavior.

Results of these studies, in sharp contrast to research using clinical samples, demonstrate similar functioning between adoptive and birth families. Borders, Black, and Pasley (1998) found no differences between adoptive and birth families within any area assessed by their study and conclude that adoptive children are at no greater risk for problems than children in biologically connected families. Borders, Penny and Portnoy (2000) also found similar outcomes for adult children parented in adoptive and biologically connected families. Additionally, Marquis and Detweiler (1985) found superior functioning in adoptive families.

These studies also document several unique outcomes for children in adoptive families. Respondents who joined their families by adoption rated their parents more positively than did respondents from biological families (Marquis & Detweiler, 1985) and more frequently considered their parents and spouses to be sources of life meaning (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000). These findings challenge research, theory, and general attitudes that suggest adoptive families form inferior bonds with children and jeopardize the stability of children's future relationships. Additionally, Marquis and Detweiler (1985) found that respondents in adoptive families perceive themselves as more in control of their lives and have more confidence than respondents in biologically connected families.

Studies that include adoptive children as a control group also reveal positive findings. Golombok, MacCallum, and Goodman (2001), in a study designed to assess the adjustment of children conceived by in-vitro fertilization (IVF), found no differences in social and emotional development among naturally conceived children, children conceived by IVF, and children who were adopted. This result was also demonstrated by Golombok, Cook, Bish, and Murray (1995) who found no differences in the social and emotional development of children conceived by in-vitro fertilization, children conceived by donor insemination, children conceived naturally, and children adopted by their families.

Other adoption studies with specific populations of children also reveal the positive impact of adoption. Rutter and the English and Romanian Adoptees study team (1998) documented the "spectacular" (p. 474) physical and intellectual gains in children following adoption from profoundly depriving institutional settings in Romania. Infants with initial developmental indices in the mentally disabled range demonstrated significant accelerations in health and development after adoption by families in the UK, ultimately demonstrating

developmental indices within the normal range by the age of four years. Similar improvement in children who were adopted within the United States after prenatal exposure to drugs has also been established (Barth & Needell, 1996).

Positive behavior has been documented in studies of children adopted from China. Rojewski, Shapiro, and Shapiro (2000) used parent reports to assess the behavior of Chinese children in early childhood and determined that their behavioral scores are within the average range overall, another finding in sharp contrast to established beliefs about adoptive children. Tan and Marfo (2006) also conducted a large-scale behavioral study of 695 Chinese girls from 1.5 to 11 years of age from 46 U.S. states and Canada, finding scores not only within the normal range but significantly lower on indices of problem behavior than the established normative U.S. sample.

Studies of transracial adoption also counter the notion that adoption deprives children of their cultural identity and creates identity confusion. Simon and Altstein (1996), in a review of their four-phased longitudinal study of over 100 transracial adoptive families for a period of twenty years, found that children raised in adoptive families developed positive racial identities. Similarly, Friedlander et al. (2000) found positive racial and cultural identities through qualitative interviews with internationally adopted children and adolescents, concluding that they are "faring exceptionally well" (p.196). Burrow and Finley (2004), using twelve indices of adjustment with four adoptive subgroups, including African American children adopted by African American families, African American children adopted by Caucasian families, Asian children adopted by Caucasian families, and Caucasian children adopted by Caucasian families, reveal that children adopted transracially have similar outcomes to children adopted inracially, and conclude that "transracial adoptees fare sometimes better, sometimes worse, but, on balance,

about the same as their same-race adopted counterparts" (p.581). Feigelman (2000) also compared the adjustment of four subgroups of adults adopted as children, including Caucasian respondents adopted inracially, and Asian, African American, and Latino respondents adopted transracially. He found no significant differences in adult children's sense of adjustment or family connection between the transracial and inracial groups. Simon and Altstein (1996) also noted that accepting racial attitudes and a positive awareness of race were not limited to the transracially adopted children within each family; birthchildren and same-race adoptive children in transracial adoptive families also demonstrated an understanding and acceptance of racial differences.

Other positive study outcomes include the high degree of self-esteem and satisfaction with adoption among the children themselves, contrary to views that children of adoption are plagued by feelings of personal inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their adoptive families. Studies reported high levels of self-esteem in adoptive children (Friedlander et al. 2000), adolescents (Simon & Altstein, 1996), and adults (Simon & Altstein, 1996). Additionally, most adoptive Korean adults surveyed by Freundlich and Lieberthal (2000) support adoption and characterize their family experiences as positive. Similarly, 95% of adoptive adult respondents interviewed by Simon & Altstein (1996) support adoption, and all children interviewed by Friedlander et al. (2000) expressed a positive view of adoption.

In addition to documenting the positive outcomes of adoption for children, research reveals the strength of families formed by adoption. Register (1991) found that parents with children by birth and adoption describe their satisfaction in parenting as the same and noted that parents by adoption report feeling a sense of destiny in their relationships with their children. Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, and Waters (1985) also report positive bonding between

infants and adoptive mothers in a study of infant attachment, concluding that the quality of attachment in adoptive families is similar to attachment in biological families. Friedlander et al. (2000) also found strong attachments between parents and children during qualitative interviews with families who had adopted internationally.

Other studies have noted that few differences exist in the functioning of adoptive families compared to birthfamilies. Simon and Altstein (1996) concluded that relationships in adoptive families are as integrated as those in biological families, and Golombok, MacCallum, et al. (2001) found few differences overall in the quality of the parent-child relationships among families with naturally conceived children, children conceived by in-vitro fertilization, and children who were adopted. Additionally, Golombok, Cook, et al. (1995) found that parenting in families created by adoption and assisted reproductive technology with donated genetic material was superior to that in naturally-conceived biological families. The authors conclude, "These findings suggest that genetic ties are less important for family functioning than a strong desire for parenthood" (p.296). Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, and Stewart (2004) also found that parents who had adopted were more satisfied with parenting and had more cohesive families than biological parents, causing them to conclude that adoptive parents "appeared to be at an advantage in their parental role" (p.46). Research suggests that positive functioning is not limited to traditional adoptive families; single-parent adoptive families also function effectively and create positive outcomes for children (Shireman, 1996), as do gay and lesbian adoptive families (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001).

Research also suggests that transracial adoptive parents are effective in transforming same race families into families that reflect a multicultural identity. Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, and The Minnesota International Adoption Project Team (2006) found in a large-scale

study of parenting beliefs and behaviors that the majority of transracial adoptive parents engage in practices to affirm cultural and racial awareness and identity in their children. Attention to racial diversity and effective cultural socialization practices were also documented by Friedlander et al. (2000) and Simon and Altstein (1996).

Studies of open adoption and reunion with birthfamilies also confirm the strength and legitimacy of adoptive families. Aumend and Barrett (1984), in a study of searching and non-searching adoptees, conclude that their results "do not support the belief that adoptees, in general, have low self-concepts and identity conflicts, or that adoptees need information about their biological families and reunions to resolve their identity conflicts" (p. 258). They also report that the majority of participants expressed positive views of their adoptive parents and indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of their upbringing.

Research also shows that contact with birthfamilies is not a risk to relationships within adoptive families and that adoptive parents involved in open adoptions are satisfied with their arrangements. Siegel (1993) interviewed couples involved in open adoptions and found their beliefs and feelings about openness were extremely positive; respondents cited several advantages of open adoption for their children, including access to their children's heritage and background, and none expressed regret about their decision for open involvement. Siegel (2003) also conducted a follow-up study with these parents seven years later and found that they continued to be satisfied with open adoption arrangements. She noted that parents were not threatened by contact with their children's birthparents, but found, instead, that knowledge of birthparents made adoptive parents "empowered in their parental roles" (p.417). Ninety-seven percent of respondents disagreed that knowing their children's birthparents made it harder for them to feel like their children's parents. Other studies also suggest that most parents in closed

adoptions support their children's decision to locate birthfamily members. Feast, Triseliotis, and Kyle (2005) found that 75% support their children's searching efforts. Additionally, 65% of adoptive parents reported that relationships with birthfamilies had no impact on their bond with their children and 22% indicated that their family relationships had been strengthened by the experience. One respondent summed up his son's outcome by stating "He is even more sure he is 'ours' after the experience. We are happy that he has at last met his birth mother and made a friend of her" (para.14).

These studies demonstrate that adoptive families function effectively for children and possess numerous strengths. Kleist (1998) concludes that adoption research "clearly dispels any preconceived notion that adopted children and families inherently have more problems than do biological families" (para. 48). Bartholet (1993) notes, "We should come to understand adoption as a uniquely positive form of family – not necessarily better than the biologic family, but not inherently inferior either" (p. 183).

A Social Perspective on Adoption

Another important development in the field of adoption is an increasing focus on the impact of social and cultural factors on the functioning of adoptive families and their children. Research and theory in adoption have traditionally reflected a focus on exploring individual development and family influences, largely ignoring the context in which adoption occurs as a major variable (Bartholet, 1993; Wegar, 1995, 2000). Theorists are beginning to consider the effects of social stigma on the development of children in adoptive families.

Kirk (1964) was one of the first adoption researchers to consider the social nature of adoptive family functioning. He proposed that adoptive parents experience *role handicap* due to negative community attitudes toward adoption and differences between adoptive and biological

parenting. He noted that relationships formed by adoption are marginalized by the surrounding community because of biological definitions of parenthood and argued that a major issue for adoptive families is managing societal alienation. Kirk also documented both overt and covert forms of discrimination faced by adoptive families.

Goffman's (1964) theory of social stigma is cited by March (1995) and Wegar (1995) as a model with potential for explaining adoptive family functioning and identity. This theory argues that identity is a social construction, based on the perceptions of others in society. Individuals who possess qualities or attributes that are socially objectionable are likely to be treated on the basis of this stigma, threatening their personal development and identity. According to this theory, members of the adoptive family unit are significantly affected by experiences with social discrimination.

Several theorists have argued that the functioning of adoptive families and the psychological development of children may be impacted by social stigma (Bartholet, 1993; March, 1995; Miall, 1987; Wegar, 1995, 2000). Wegar (2000) argues that a major issue in adoption research is that the social context of adoption is rarely considered as a primary factor in adoption outcomes. This criticism is also noted by Bartholet (1993), who writes:

In a world in which adoptive status is degraded, it will not feel good to be adopted…. Thus the adoption stigma necessarily shapes the experiences of birth parents who surrender their children, of adoptive parents, and of adoptees. Birth parents are conditioned to think they should feel lifelong pain as a result of their "unnatural" act of giving up their "own" child for another to raise. The infertile are conditioned to think that they should forever grieve their inability to reproduce biologically. Adoptive parents and children are conditioned to think that their family relationships are significantly inferior

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to those enjoyed by "real" families. In fact, they are instructed by the new adoption

dogma that they should experience and "acknowledge" the problematic differences

between their families and normal families. Claims to normalcy are often treated as

evidence of pathology. (p. 182)

Leon (2002) also theorizes that feelings of grief over the loss of birthparents experienced by

children adopted in infancy are prompted more by society's belief that adoption constitutes loss

rather than by any real adoption trauma. He argues that the fact that children do not typically

experiences a sense of loss until their school years is further evidence of the possibility that this

loss is a socially induced feeling rather than a naturally occurring one. Additionally, Watkins

(2006) views identity as a complex process for adoptive children and families, grounded in the

celebration of differences and struggle against the marginalization of society. She writes,

"Initially children do not manufacture their identities so much as they receive them, finding

themselves in the eyes of those around them" (p.264).

Studies of adoption also confirm that adoptive children experience significant social

stigma. In addition to the attitude research described in chapter two, several other studies reveal

experiences with social stigma and suggest that negative social experiences are particularly

problematic for adolescents adopted transracially. Friedlander et al. (2000) found that children in

transracial adoptive families struggle with a sense of being different from others and report a

negative aspect of adoption is having to constantly answer intrusive questions, particularly with

regard to their physical dissimilarity to their parents. Parents interviewed for the study also

indicated that children were affected by comments and questions from strangers and that their

children experienced prejudicial remarks about their racial features. These finding were noted

despite children's positive family relationships and personal esteem. McRoy and Grape (1999)

describe the social stigma adult adoptees experienced as children because of skin color differences within their families and its negative impact on their self-perceptions. They write, "Transracially adopted children with darker complexions will have even greater color dissimilarity to their families and will find both their race and their adoptive status to be salient, as the differences between the adoptive family and the adoptee make the adoption obvious" (p.687). The impact of social discrimination was similarly noted by Feigelman (2000) who indicates, "Higher levels of adjustment difficulties were reported when children encountered more discrimination, more negative comments about their background, and when they experienced more appearance discomfort" (p.12). The effects of discrimination are also reported in a survey of Korean adults who were raised in transracial adoptive families. Findings reveal that the majority of respondents experienced negative attitudes; 70% reported discrimination based their race and 28% reported discrimination related to their adoptive status, producing devastating and long-lasting effects. One respondent indicated, "The teasing and discrimination by other children made me deny and hate my Korean heritage" (p. 11), while another shared, "The persecution affected my personality. [I became] introverted, unhappy, and hostile" (p.11).

Further support for the stigma of adoption is found in research on reunions with birthfamily members. March (1995) found managing social stigma to be a primary motivation for reunions with birthparents. She writes, "Because they could now use this information to respond more appropriately to others' questions, they became more comfortable with their adoptive status and with social interactions in which that status emerged" (p. 658). Similarly, Mendenhall, Berge, Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy (2004) found adolescents with contact with birthfamilies were more satisfied with their contact status than those with no contact.

Research on social stigma also suggests numerous negative outcomes for individuals who are stigmatized. Link and Phelan (2001) suggest a definition of stigma within society that includes a power imbalance and a continuum of related components, including "labeling, stereotyping, separating, status loss, and discrimination" (p. 382). Zirkel (2005), in a review of studies of stigma and discrimination, maintains that stigma has debilitating effects on individuals. She notes that stigma causes individuals to internalize a low self-concept, and that evoking thoughts of stigma in stigmatized individuals impairs their performance on tasks and activities they are otherwise able to complete fluently. Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, and Lewis (2006) also found a correlation between experiences of discrimination and negative psychological outcomes in a study of the perceptions of stigma by African American adolescents. The authors also conclude that subtle discrimination is more common as well as more damaging than overt discrimination. Blatant discrimination is immediately recognized and cognitively rejected by individuals, while subtle discrimination consumes cognitive energy to evaluate and is deeply discrediting because of the degree of uncertainty involved in the interpretation of the message. Finally, Crocker (1999), in a review of research on social stigma, suggests that the impact of stigma on self-esteem is mediated by contextual and cognitive factors. Thus, stigma may affect individuals differently based on their personal beliefs and the situational aspects within which their beliefs are applied.

Additional work in theory and research is needed in order to demonstrate the impact of adoption stigma on adoptive families and children, as well as evaluate the strategies used by families to effectively cope with and manage negative experiences with others (Bartholet; 1993; Wegar, 1995, 2000). Additionally, theories of adoption that effectively incorporate the social

context of adoptive family functioning with other constructs of identity development are also

needed (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Lash Esau, 2000).

Conclusions and Implications

The outcome studies reviewed in this chapter suggest that adoptive families possess

considerable strengths and should be accepted as simply another family form, neither superior

nor inferior to biological families. Contrary to public opinion and the historical design of

adoption by practitioners, adoptive families don't love their children *as if* they are their own;

they love their children because they *really are* their own. Far from the notion of second best,

adoptive families believe their relationships are predestined, just as relationships in any other

family are perceived.

The additional research in this chapter, as well as the attitude research presented in

Chapter 2, suggests that adoptive families must routinely manage social stigma. Intrusive

questions and ignorant comments reflect misinformation about adoption and devalue the

belonging, commitment, permanency, and legitimacy of adoptive relationships. For individuals

in transracial families, this adoption stigma is further magnified by the effects of cultural and

racial biases, and resulting beliefs about group belonging and identity. A lifetime of exchanges

in which adoptive relationships are marginalized while birth relationships are prioritized can

have a serious impact on children's appraisal of their family relationships, as well as on their

sense of belonging and identity. Children in adoptive families may readily internalize social

attitudes about their family, resulting in the grief, psychological issues, and identity concerns that

have been noted in legitimate studies. Further support for this outcome in adoptive children is

found in research on stigma and discrimination, which show that social stigma negatively affects

the self-concept and performance of stigmatized individuals and that subtle stigma may be more harmful than overt stigma.

This process of stigmatization is also likely to operate within educational settings. Students from adoptive families are likely to be judged on the basis of their adoptive status by educators, as well as by other students and their parents. For educators, knowledge of a student's adoption may evoke presumptions of learning and behavior problems, grief and identity issues, and severe psychological and social impairment. Educators may also regard the adoptive child as a consolation prize to their parents, a poor substitute for the biological child they would have preferred to parent. These stereotyped expectancies and images of adoption, reinforced by family ideology, theory and research on adoption, the practice of social work, and media representations of adoption, seriously impair educators' abilities to interact effectively with adoptive families. Additionally, educators who lack the knowledge to critically evaluate their perceptions may unwittingly create problematic issues for children in classrooms because they perpetuate adoption stigma or engage in teaching practices that further alienate children in their care. These issues are also compounded by the attitudes of other students, for whom adoption may be a novelty. They may view adoptive families as inauthentic, prompting questions and comments that teachers may be unprepared to answer. The overall effect of these interactions creates a poor environment for adoptive children and guarantees a set of experiences that are deeply discrediting to their family relationships. Children are frequently in situations that require them to explain or defend their families, and they may ultimately internalize negative attributions and begin to question their identity and sense of belonging. As a result of the social nature of adoption and the possibility of harm to adoptive children, it is imperative that educators begin to

develop the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to effectively serve children in adoptive families.

Developing these competencies is the purpose of Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The previous chapters have established the paramount importance of developing an educational environment that is responsive to the needs of adoptive families and their children. In the same way that teachers have a responsibility to educate students to accept diverse cultures in the classroom, they also have a responsibility to educate students to appreciate diverse family styles, including adoptive families. This chapter will focus on practical recommendations to assist educators in addressing the needs of adoptive families and teaching about adoption in elementary and middle school classrooms.

The first section will address the importance of self-reflection and attitude development as important foundations for educators who truly seek to create inclusive environments. The importance of using positive language to describe family relationships created by adoption will be discussed in the second section. The third section will present detailed recommendations and examples for classroom educators to utilize in developing appropriate adoption knowledge and practices, while the fourth section provides an overview of organizational factors to promote these practices. Finally, the remaining sections will explore future directions for adoption research in education and review the central issues presented in this paper.

This guide is not intended to present an exhaustive discussion of adoption-related competencies, but rather to present a general framework that can be further extended by individual educators and schools through adoption literature and research. In addition to formal adoption theory and research, this chapter synthesizes the practice wisdom of professionals in adoption, expressed in adoption guides and informal adoption magazines, and the collective experiences of adoptive families and the author.

An Inclusive Perspective

The foundation for the development of adoption-friendly educational practices begins within the personal attitudes of professional educators. This entails changing the way educators view and perceive families, not simply approaching adoption as a special family style. A reorientation to concepts of family is the key to creating inclusive environments in which families are celebrated and not stigmatized.

This type of change necessitates personal reflection on deeply held assumptions, beliefs, and values about the meaning of family, as well as evaluation of routine interactions and practices with children and parents from diverse family styles. An honest appraisal of personal views also requires an evaluation of attitudes about race and culture, as adoptive families may be multiethnic, and attitudes toward other nontraditional family styles, including single parent and gay and lesbian families. Educators must confront personal biases and actively redefine their beliefs about families to initiate the development of attitudes that are accepting of adoptive families. They must come to understand that families are not defined strictly in terms of biology but are also formed through social and legal bonds. Parenting is defined by choice and commitment, and genetic connectedness is not a prerequisite for love, nor does it define belonging in families.

Positive Adoption Language

The first major practice issue for educators is using positive language to convey the ties of adoption. This language has been recommended by numerous practitioners (IAI, 1999; Meese, 2002, Schoettle, 2003) and is particularly important for educators because, "as teachers, our choice of words conveys much about what we believe and value" (Meese, 1999, para. 11). Educators are already instructed to use positive language to describe issues of race and disability

and should easily grasp the reasoning behind this endeavor. The importance of positive communication with students in adoptive families lies within the power of words to impart meaning about a student's family legitimacy and personal identity. If not used effectively, language is also likely to alienate adoptive families and immediately convey the sense that their relationships are insignificant.

The positive language in this section has been promoted in several adoption guides for educators (Hilborn, 2005; IAI, 1999; Meese, 2002; Schoettle, 2003; Wood & Ng, 2001). Educators should utilize the phrase *was adopted* instead of *is adopted* to describe a child who joined his or her family by adoption. This language will accurately convey that adoption is a discrete event that occurred in a child's past, not a permanent personal descriptor. The terms *birthmother* and *birthfather* should be used to describe the parents that a child was born to, as opposed to the terms *real mother* and *real father* or *natural mother* and *natural father*, which imply that the child's adoptive family is not real or natural. The terms *birthchild* or *biological* child should be used to describe a child born into a family, not *their own child*, because children who joined their families by adoption are also their parents' *own children*. The terms *child* and *parent* are appropriate to describe adoptive relationships; the use of the term *adoptive* as a modifier is unnecessary unless children or parents by adoption are being discussed in conjunction with birthchildren or birthparents and differentiation is needed. Additionally, children who joined their families by adoption are their parents' *real children*, the parents who adopted them are their *real parents*, and their siblings by adoption are their *real brothers* and *real sisters*. It is also inappropriate to refer to children as *put up for adoption*, as this phrase originated with the *orphan train* practice, or *given away*. The appropriate way to characterize adoption placement is that the birthparents *made an adoption plan* or *chose adoption*. Finally, it

is also important to avoid the communication of stereotypes that are often considered positive. Parents who form families by adoption are not more benevolent than parents who give birth, and children should not be referred to as lucky; these imply that adoption is an act of charity (Register, 1991). Adoptive families do not view their children's inclusion in the family as chance or accident; most view it as destiny and "meant to be." (Register, 1991).

It is important that educators not only utilize this language, but instruct others to use it as well. Modeling the correct language will often be sufficient to teach it to parents or other educators. Some adults, as well as most students in classroom settings, must be explicitly taught to use this language. Instruction may occur through individual conversations or through class discussions and lessons on adoption. Individuals who use inaccurate language should be corrected, as they would if they used demeaning language to describe race or disability.

Effective Classroom Practices

In addition to positive attitudes and the use of appropriate language, effective practices for educators in elementary and middle school settings are important in meeting the needs of adoptive children and families and teaching students about adoption. Suggestions for teachers to utilize in classrooms are explained below and are grouped according to preparation strategies, instructional strategies, assistance strategies, and family strategies.

Preparation Strategies

1. Teachers need to be prepared to accept diverse families as they are meeting them for the first time. It is best to assume that anyone accompanying a child to school is the child's parent, despite differences in anticipated race or age. Adoptive families may be multicultural and some parents who choose adoption may be older than parents in

traditional biological families. Mistaking a child's parent for a grandparent or babysitter does not offer a comfortable initiation to the school year (personal communication, 2006). Similarly, teachers need to be aware that students' names may not match expectations based on their racial features (DiTomasso, 2002; Essa and O'Neil, 2001). For example, Theresa Marinello may be an Asian student in an adoptive family.

2. Teachers should plan opportunities for families to communicate relevant information through brief conversations or written information sheets. A question such as, "Describe your family and its important qualities," will elicit information about students' families that will be important for educators to understand when interacting with them. For children in adoptive families, educators should seek to understand relevant information, including the type of adoption arrangement, the child's age at placement, and the child's current understanding of his or her adoption story. The story of each child's adoption is unique and teachers should seek to be familiar with information the child regularly shares. This practice will ensure that teachers are aware of the context of children's experiences when children share an element of their adoption story, a visit with a birthparent, a previous memory from Russia, or a celebration of a cultural holiday.

3. The privacy of adoption information is important for educators to understand and maintain. Adoption information is considered private because control of such information belongs to the child to share with others as he or she desires (Melina, 2000). Privacy is not the same concept as secrecy, nor does it imply that the private information is negative in nature (Melina, 2000). Educators who are aware of

adoption information must ensure that they do not communicate it to other parents or students to satisfy curiosity. Instead, individuals interested in adoption-related information should be referred to the child or parents, as appropriate. Educators must also understand that they are not entitled to knowledge of all circumstances of a child's adoption (Melina, 2001).

4. Teachers should actively counter any bias in their expectancies of children in adoptive families. Children should not be expected to exhibit learning or behavior problems and, if such problems are encountered, they should not immediately be attributed to adoption.

5. Educators should prepare an instructional setting that is appropriate for adoptive families. This is especially important in early elementary settings in which families may be depicted by wall art or in picture books for children to explore independently in learning centers. It is crucial that family representations contain diverse family styles, including multiracial adoptive families as well as single parent families. Classroom materials should also include crayons, markers, and paint in varying skin tones.

Instructional Strategies

1. Adoption should be mentioned frequently at contextually appropriate opportunities during instruction and class discussions (Wood & Ng, 2001). It is imperative that students in biologically connected families understand that the same love, commitment, and permanence in their families also exist in adoptive families. It is also important to acknowledge similarities and belonging within adoptive families, as well as in biological families (Register, 1991). Adoption should be briefly discussed

within each classroom early in the year, ideally within a discussion of families and in conjunction with other family types. This helps to create an effective climate for the school year.

2. A major goal in education is to encourage students to appreciate diversity; this concept should be broadened to include diverse family styles, as well. A lesson on adoption should be included as part of a unit on families or could be part of other related units on genetics, immigration, or history (IAI, 1999). Teachers may also recognize November as National Adoption month (IAI, 1999, Wood & Ng, 2001). A variety of appropriate and creative ways can be used to present adoption in a lesson. A simple strategy for presenting adoption in the early elementary grades is to read and discuss a story in which adoption is represented ("Great Back-to-School Kit," 2006; Johnston, 1999; Wood & Ng, 2001). Many children's books are available which depict a wide variety of adoption circumstances. Another instructional strategy is to facilitate an informal discussion in which parenting responsibilities are discussed and the adoption process is explained ("Great Back-to-School Kit," 2006; Klatzkin, 2001). In older elementary and middle grades, a discussion panel with adults raised in adoptive families, adoptive parents, and birthparents may be used to answer questions about adoption after a short presentation on the topic (Roth, 2003). Addressing adoption instructionally is especially important for students in middle grades, as adolescence is a time when many students reflect on the meaning of their adoption and may internalize negative information about adoption from peers or the media (Schoettle, 2003). Planning effective instruction also entails several cautions. Instruction should not single out children who were adopted or share their adoption

stories (Johnston, 1999), nor should lessons relate adoption to pet adoption (Melina, 2000), as this comparison minimizes adoption and fails to reflect the legal and permanent nature of adoptive families.

3. It is vital for educators to provide quality information about adoption that is positive in nature and suitable for students' developmental abilities (Melina, 2000; Schoettle, 2003). For young children, responses must be as concrete as possible, while older children will be able to understand and discuss the complexities involved in making an adoption plan. It is important for educators to emphasize that birthmothers care for their children and make the best plans available for them within their circumstances (Melina, 2000). Teachers should also be honest if they lack the knowledge to respond effectively to a question posed by a student; they should seek the necessary information and return to the discussion at a later time (IAI, 1999).

4. Teachers need to develop assignments that are appropriate for all students, including students in adoptive families. Traditional class projects involving family trees, birth information, autobiographies, life timelines, genetic traits, ancestors, or cultural heritage may require information that students do not possess or may place children in adoptive families in the uncomfortable position of feeling different (Gilman, 2000; "Great Back-to-School Kit," 2006; Hilborn, 2005; IAI, 1999; Meese, 2002). Children adopted at older ages may also lack photographs of themselves when they were babies, making assignments that require them impossible to complete (Gilman, 2000; IAI, 1999). These assignments should redesigned so they are able to be completed by everyone (IAI, 1999), not simply modified for students who express difficulty, as this is a stigmatizing experience, in itself. Educators should also recognize that children in

transracial adoptive families may or may not choose to identify with their birth

cultures (Meese, 2002). They may actively seek to study them for class projects or

may not exhibit any interest in learning about them (Essa & O'Neil, 2001; Gilman,

2000). It is appropriate to allow children to take the initiative in determining their

own topics of study.

5. Educators should review and evaluate classroom curricula, literature, and other

    materials carefully. Teachers must examine them for bias to ensure that they are

    appropriate for classroom use. Orphanages, abandonment, and adoption are very

    prevalent themes in children's literature, and works that portray adoptive families in

    an especially negative manner may need to be avoided. Literature with value may be

    utilized if the bias that exists is openly acknowledged by the teacher and assertively

    counteracted through class lessons and discussions. Educators should also

    intentionally seek to utilize literature that reflects positive adoption themes, as well as

    representations of transracial adoptive families. In particular, educators must critically

    evaluate materials that are intended to teach students about adoption, as they may

    reflect a psychological orientation that overtly suggests that adoptive children should

    experience grief and loss.

Assistance Strategies

1. Children in adoptive families may need assistance in managing intrusive questions or

    comments about adoption (DiTomasso, 2002). Educators should understand that

    school may be the first place children encounter adoption stigma without the

    mediating benefits of their parents. Children are frequently unaware that their families

    are considered unusual until they are informed by peers (Register, 1991). If a student

seems to be having difficulty responding to a peer or if a question or comment is derogatory, teachers must intervene and assist as they would in any other situation of discrimination (IAI,1999; Schoettle, 2003). It is important to ensure that the response of the teacher does not violate the child's privacy by revealing personal information or convey the idea that all family differences are related to adoption. When appropriate, the response should challenge the underlying basis for the question, not simply explain adoption. Consider the following question, a typical one asked by peers, "How come you don't look like your mom?" If a teacher initiates a response about adoption, such communication misses the main points that not all families look alike, regardless of adoption, and that family members do not need to resemble one another to belong together. Often, responding to a question with another question that stimulates students' thinking and assumptions is the best possible response, as in the following exchange:

Student: How can she be your mom? You don't look like her.

Teacher: Do all children look like their parents?

Student: Well…no, I guess not.

Teacher: You're right. Although many families do look alike, belonging in a
family does not depend on looks.

Often, the simplest response is the best, as well as the most normalizing. Consider this exchange, as well:

Student: Where is Micah's real mom?

Teacher: Mrs. Williams is at work. She is Micah's real mom.

Children should not be made to feel that their families continually require

justification. However, educators may revisit questions at a later time during class discussions when they observe that students need more information about adoption. This allows adoption to be discussed during a neutral time and context, aside from a student's personal experience (Kaatz, 2000). Teachers should become proficient and comfortable in discussing adoption and should consider the range of questions students may ask in advance.

2. Students may need active coaching from teachers or the school counselor to learn how to handle intrusive questions and comments fluently. Several models exist for managing these comments. Students may be taught the "TIP" model, which is an acronym for *tell*, *ignore*, or *personal* (IAI, 1999). Accordingly, children may respond to questions by telling information, ignoring the question entirely, or responding that the information is personal. Similarly, children may also be instructed in implementing the "W.I.S.E. Up" program, which stands for *walk away*, *it's private*, *share information*, or *educate others* (Schoettle, 2003). According to these options, children may ignore the question, respond that the information is private, share personal information, or explain adoption in general terms. In either case, teaching students to respond to intrusive questions must involve modeling and practice for students to be proficient.

3. Racial intolerance and discrimination may also affect children in transracial adoptive families (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; McRoy & Grape, 1999; Register, 1991). Educators must counter their own racial and cultural expectations of students, as well as actively intervene in situations of discrimination (Essa & O'Neil, 2001). Minority children in Caucasian adoptive families may be perceived negatively by peers and

may be stigmatized by both Caucasian and minority students (McRoy & Grape, 1999). In addition to negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes may also affect children in adoptive families. For example, Asian children may be expected to be high achievers or excel in math or science (Essa & O'Neil, 2001); stereotyped images of Asian girls may include the *delicate flower* or *exotic beauty* (Register, 1991). Similarly, peers may expect children born in Guatemala and adopted as infants to automatically be able to speak Spanish. It is especially important for educators to understand that children in transracial adoptive families develop complex and multifaceted identities that are a blend of the cultural socialization practices of their families and their identification with their birth culture (Watkins, 2006).

4. Teachers should not permit adoption to be used as a metaphor for characterizing school sponsorship projects (Hilborn, 2005; IAI, 1999, Wood & Ng, 2001). For example, a class or school may *sponsor* a family or *befriend* an endangered animal but they should not *adopt* them. This comparison negates the legal procedures and permanence involved in adoption.

5. Teachers also have a responsibility to educate paraeducators and parent volunteers about adoptive families. They also have a significant impact on the educational climate and must develop an understanding of classroom practices to support diversity. Educators must also advocate for students in adoptive families with other professionals or parents if the situation requires it.

Parent Strategies

1. Educators should form strong connections with parents and consider them to be experts on their children (Meese, 2002). Parents may be effective resources when

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teachers have questions about adoption, and they are likely to be willing to offer

assistance. Parents may welcome the opportunity to provide a lesson on adoption or

assist the teacher in planning or implementing one (Wood & Ng, 2001). They may

also have access to beneficial information, experts in the field of adoption, or

children's literature that may be useful for teachers. Ultimately, they will appreciate

the effort teachers put into caring for their children.

2. It is important for educators to provide regular feedback on adoption-related

    situations that arise within school settings (Wood & Ng, 2001). Even if teachers

    perceive that issues have been handled effectively for adoptive students, this practice

    is still crucial, as it provides parents with an opportunity to offer encouragement or

    additional support to their children. Students may not readily share their difficulties in

    school with their parents (Kaatz, 2000).

3. Adoptive families may celebrate the anniversary of a child's formal adoption or the

    day their child came into the family (DiTomasso, 2002). A child's *Family Day*,

    Adoption Day, or *Gotcha Day* may be celebrated similarly to a birthday, particularly

    for students in the early elementary grades. Adoptive families may also celebrate a

    variety of holidays that reflect the blend of cultures within their families (for example,

    Cinco de Mayo or Chinese New Year). Mother's Day or Father's Day celebrations

    may also acknowledge or include birthparents (DiTomasso, 2002). Because these

    celebrations may extend into school settings ("Great Back-to-School Kit," 2006), it is

    important for educators to understand their importance and offer support.

Overall, educators have a responsibility to ensure an effective learning environment and

positive educational experiences for children in adoptive families. It is essential for educators to

recognize that effective attitudes, knowledge, and skills develop gradually through a deliberate process of reflection and action. Educators should continually improve their competences by seeking information, applying new strategies, and reflecting on the outcomes for students. The competencies addressed in this section have been condensed within an informal tool for educators to utilize to guide their development. This tool is provided in Table 5.1. It is also recommended that educators expand their knowledge beyond the scope of this guide by consulting comprehensive adoption guides for educators, exploring adoption magazines and websites, and reviewing the body of adoption literature. Educators should also be reminded to critically evaluate these materials for bias and use careful judgment, as positive recommendations for practice with adoptive families may also be interwoven with inappropriate suggestions based on poorly-structured adoption research or deficit theories of adoption.

Table 5.1: A Self-Assessment Tool for Classroom Educators

1. I model and teach positive adoption language to students, parents, and other staff members.	
2. I am aware of family diversity issues when meeting families and children for the first time.	
3. I plan opportunities for adoptive families to communicate relevant information.	
4. I maintain the privacy of adoption information for students and families.	
5. I am careful to not expect students in adoptive families to have problems and to not attribute problems I observe to adoption	
6. I ensure that the instructional setting is appropriate for children in adoptive families.	
7. I take opportunities to mention and discuss adoption at contextually appropriate times during instruction.	
8. I plan lessons to teach students about diverse families, including adoptive families.	
9. I provide answers to students' questions that are accurate, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of the complexities of adoption	
10. I plan assignments that are able to completed by all students, including students in adoptive families.	
11. I evaluate school curricula, literature, and materials carefully for bias.	
12. I assist students in responding to questions and comments about adoption and intervene when discriminatory behavior occurs.	
13. I help students learn skills for self-empowerment.	
14. I assist students in managing racial stereotypes and discrimination.	
15. I stand against the use of *adoption* in school sponsorship projects.	
16. I educate paraeducators and parents who assist in my setting and advocate for students in adoptive families with staff members and parents, as necessary.	
17. I form strong connections with parents and use them as resources for adoption information and instructional planning	
18. I communicate issues with adoption that arise in school so parents may follow up with their children.	
19. I support adoptive family celebrations in school settings.	
20. I take active steps to continue my own learning and development with respect to adoption and diverse family styles.	

Directions for use: Rate yourself on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (fluent) for each competency. Total the ratings for an adoption fluency score on a 100-point scale.

Effective Organizational Practices

Organizational factors within a school are particularly important in developing successful classroom practices. At the administrative level, several key practices can contribute to an effective climate for children in adoptive families.

Establishing a school climate in which family diversity is a priority is an important responsibility for school administrators. This includes communicating the expectation that educators will develop the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for successful practice with diverse families, as well as providing the resources to support these competencies. Training and inservice opportunities for teachers are particularly important to facilitate the development of effective practices. Formal workshops or brief question-and-answer sessions may be provided by teachers, adoption professionals, or adoptive parents. School settings should also possess a variety of adoption-related materials, including adoption guides for educators to utilize for their planning and knowledge acquisition. *An Educator's Guide to Adoption* (IAI, 1999) is a brief and inexpensive resource that can easily be purchased for every staff member within a school, while more comprehensive guides, including *Adoption and the Schools* (Wood and Ng, 2001) and *S.A.F.E. at School: Support for Adoptive Families by Educators* (Schoettle, 2003), should be available for use in a school's library. The library should also contain literature for students that reflects positive adoption themes (Wood & Ng, 2001). Finally, supervision and evaluation strategies with teachers and other school staff members must also include a focus on family diversity.

School administrators can also plan effective environments for children in adoptive families by making appropriate teacher assignments and utilizing effective scheduling strategies. Because research suggests that students in adoptive families struggle with a sense of feeling

different from others, it is imperative that they have contact with children in similar families, as well as children with similar racial features. For this reason, children in adoptive families should be clustered together in common classrooms within each grade level in elementary schools or within similar teams in middle schools. Scheduling should also ensure that these children are placed in classroom with at least one other child of the same race or ethnicity. These recommendations are especially important for settings in which there are few adoptive children or few minority children overall. This practice requires minimal effort on the part of administrators, as there are few students in adoptive families compared to the general population of students. Finally, careful selection of teachers for these classes can ensure a positive experience.

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation and Future Research

This review clearly suggests that current teacher preparation programs are insufficient to prepare teachers to meet the needs of diverse families. At the college and university level, teacher education must address family diversity issues, including the needs of adoptive families. It may be possible to incorporate goals and objectives for family diversity into existing diversity courses. However, the establishment of an additional mandatory course to develop practices with diverse families is the optimal way to approach teacher education. In addition to addressing the needs of adoptive families, a course on family diversity could address the needs of single parent families, gay and lesbian families, blended families, and foster families.

This review also suggests a strong need for research on adoption issues in education. In particular, research in education must accurately assess the attitudes of education practitioners, as well as students in elementary, middle, and high schools. Research is also needed to determine the extent to which education plays a role in promoting adoption stigma and to assess the

practices of educators according to professional recommendations for adoptive children. Longitudinal research on the development of children in adoptive families should also evaluate how experiences with social stigma impact their personal identity and perceptions of their families. These research endeavors could be utilized to inform teacher education programs and develop effective school practices. A focus on adoption issues in education would also contribute to ideological and attitude change within society and improvement in the lives of adoptive families and children.

Conclusions

This review highlights the importance of creating an inclusive educational climate for adoptive children and families. Educators must, first, understand the influences that shape the experiences of adoptive families. Members of adoptive families regularly face negative social attitudes; these attitudes are supported by the influences of family ideology, adoption theory and research, the practice of social work, and the media, despite positive outcomes in adoption. The effect of these attitudes is significant social stigma that undermines the relationships in adoptive families and children's sense of belonging. These attitudes have no place in educational settings, which are central to the social, emotional, and intellectual development of children. Accordingly, educators must actively redefine their views of family and develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills to effectively meet the needs of adoptive families and educate all students to appreciate family diversity. All children deserve an environment in which they can flourish, and children in adoptive families deserve the best that education can provide.

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