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ADOPTION And Its Sociological Trends

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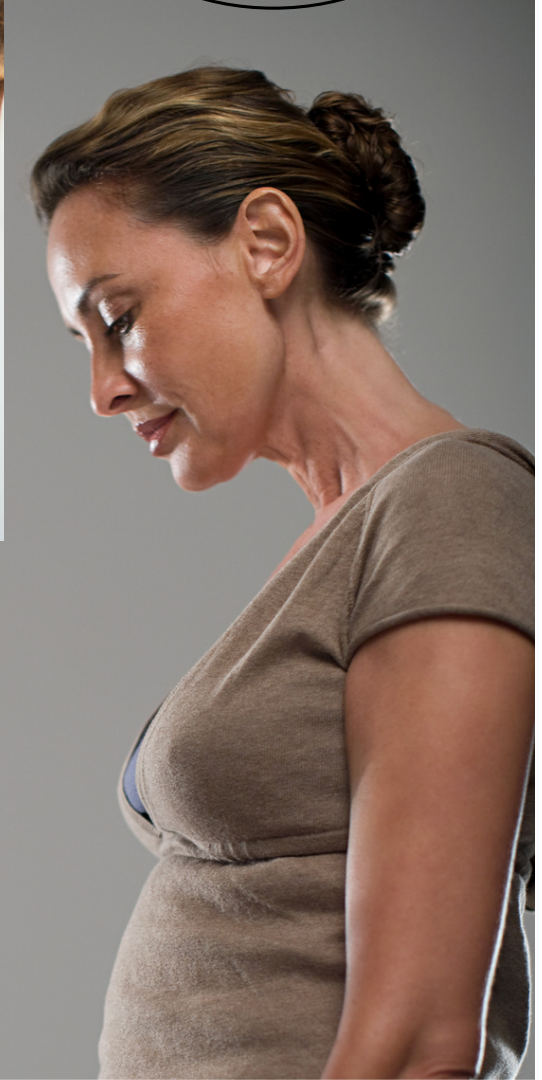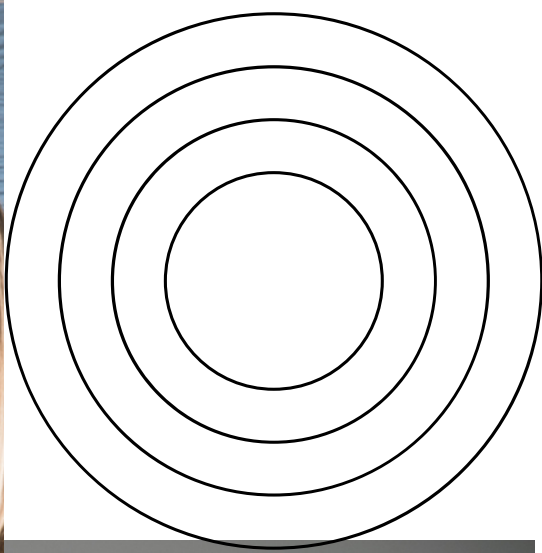
ADOPTION
And Its Sociological Trends

Presented by Nhat Le

Adoption Trends in the US

SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY OF ADOPTION IN THE US

While the history of adoption is weakly documented, existing information shows that adoption increased considerably during the World War II era, rising from 16,000 annually in 1937, to 55,000 by 1945 and peaking at 173,000 around 1970 (Kahan 52). Many signs point towards Rev. Charles Loring Brace being the main contribution to child-welfare movements starting in 1853.

SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECT ON THE ADOPTION TRIAD

The adoption triad is the representative triangle symbol that demonstrates the three groups of people whose lives are joined as immediate members within an adoption family story. The group consists of the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the child placed for adoption. The adoption triangle describes the three-sided relationship, and all members experience the psychological effects of adoption.

LACK OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Despite adoption being a very common occurance in the US with estimates that 4% of Americans are adopted, and a national survey of 1416 Americans showed that 64% responded that they had a personal experience with adoption (meaning someone in their family, or close friends had been adopted, had adopted a child, or placed a child on adoption), sociological research is remarkably limited on the subject.

Background of the Rise of Adoption in US

An American philanthropist named Charles Loring Brace began his well-known work with the Children's Aid Society in New York on curtailing the child welfare movement in the US with his 1872 book, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, which raised public awareness of destitute children. By 1929, his Orphan Trains program had moved as many as 150,000 children from the slums of New York to homes in the mid-west and the west (DellaCava, et al. 142). Many of the child-welfare reforms that began in the 1900's were the direct result of Brace's Orphan Trains program (Kahan 56).

This practice was reproduced in other cities with large immigrant populations. By 1929, all 48 states had statutes governing adoption which pushed the federal government to institute adoption policies. Adoption policies have been seen as highly controversial but have put adoption as a sociological issue into the spotlight.


Charles Loring Brace, considered the father of modern foster care and renowned for starting the Orphan Train Movement, and for founding the Children's Aid Society.

Adoption Triad Sociology

Within the adoption triad are the three main groups: the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adoptee. For most of the 20th century, society expected parenting to be raising one's own biological child. This led to more secretive and closed adoption practices in order to protect all three parties of the adoption triad. These practices are believed to protect adopted children from social bullying, and protect adoptive parents from the humiliation of infertility (Ge, et al.). However, since the 1970's, societal views and practices on parenting has shifted towards open adoption where the adoptee receives contact and communication between both birth and adoptive parents. Based on various studies, the degree of openness and communication such as letters, phone calls, and face-to-face visits varies widely. Some theories also have developed on this topic from sociologists such as Ronald Fairbairn's theory that modern society has interrupted the mother-infant bond and caused a deprivation in society (Sweeney, 12).
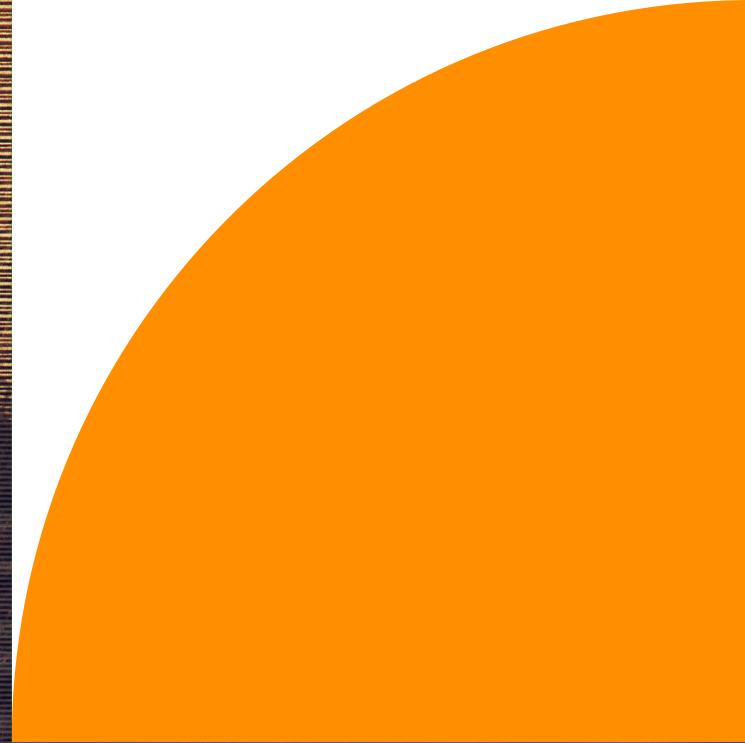
Lack of Sociological Research

Despite adoption being so common, it receives hardly any attention from sociologists. For example, college textbooks on the topic of family invest limited content on adoption; fluctuating from a mean of 2 pages per text in the 1960's to only 1.1 pages per text from 1988-1993 (Fisher 335). This represents a lack of understanding on the topic of adoption, and deserves further research to fill the many knowledge gaps. Many of the gaps in sociological research on adoption can be attributed to case records of adoption in history being sealed, so historians do not have access to primary sources. Furthermore, adoption policy implementation in the last century has been rare or incomplete, and researchers have focused on the legal history on state laws for adoption (Kahan 52). Further research must be done on this subject to promote the understanding of the dynamics of the adoption process. In turn, this data can help more resources go towards influencing policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (Stolley 40).

Annotated Bibliography

DellaCava, F.A., Phillips, N., & Engel, M. (2004). Adoption in the U.S.: The Emergence of a Social Movement. Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 31, 141-160.
This article documents the history of adoption as a social movement and the sociopolitical events that influenced adoption.

Kahan, Michelle (2006) ""Put Up" on Platforms: A History of Twentieth Century Adoption Policy in the United States," The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare: Vol. 33 : Iss. 3 , Article 4. Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol33/iss3/4
This article further dives into the history and work of Charles Loring Brace and his influence on the rise of adoption in the US.

Freundlich, M. Adoption Research: An Assessment of Empirical Contributions to the Advancement of Adoption Practice. Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless 11, 143–166 (2002). https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014363901799
This article examines the sociological effect of adoption on each member of the adoption triad.

Ge, X., Natsuaki, M. N., Martin, D. M., Leve, L. D., Neiderhiser, J. M., Shaw, D. S., Villareal, G., Scaramella, L., Reid, J. B., & Reiss, D. (2008). Bridging the divide: openness in adoption and postadoption psychosocial adjustment among birth and adoptive parents. Journal of family psychology : JFP : journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43), 22(4), 529–540. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012817
This study examines the the degree of adoption openness (contact between adoption triad) shortly after adoption placement.

Sweeney, Maureen, "The nature of relationships within the open adoption triad : a project based on independent investigation" (2010). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA. https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1107
This article further examines the degree of adoption openness and finds adoptive mothers being the key role in maintaining communication between the adoptive family and the birth family.

Annotated Bibliography (Cont.)

Julian, M. M., & McCall, R. B. (2016). Social Skills in Children Adopted from Socially-Emotionally Depriving Institutions. Adoption quarterly, 19(1), 44–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2015.1088106
This study assessed the social skills and behavior developed in children that become adopted.

Bramlett, M. D., & Radel, L. F. (2017). Factors Associated with Adoption and Adoption Intentions of Nonparental Caregivers. Adoption quarterly, 20(1), 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2016.1149534
This study analyzes data to determine factors that associate with influencing people to adopt.

Fisher, A. (2003). Still "Not Quite as Good as Having Your Own"? Toward a Sociology of Adoption. Annual Review of Sociology, 29, 335-361. Retrieved December 5, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036971
This article details the lack of sociological research on adoption despite adoption being a major sociological issue.

Perry, Samuel. (2013). Adoption in the United States: A Critical Synthesis of Literature and Directions for Sociological Research. 10.13140/RG.2.2.12929.25448/1.
This article further argues that adoption is the most neglected family relationship in the sociology of the family.

Stolley, K. (1993). Statistics on Adoption in the United States. The Future of Children, 3(1), 26-42. doi:10.2307/1602400
This article addresses our current understanding of adoption and what we don't know, and highlights what we need to expand on researching the statistics of adoption.