

THE DONALDSON

adoptioninstitute

**Rethinking Adoption in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**  
New Realities Require New Policies and Practices

CWLA – April 15, 2013

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# Adoption Institute Mission

The Donaldson Adoption Institute's mission is to provide leadership that improves laws, policies, and practices – through sound research, education and advocacy – in order to better the lives of everyone touched by adoption.

## Our Principles and Values

- Every child needs and deserves a permanent family.
- Adoption is a natural, beneficial way to form a family.
- Everyone's needs in the Extended Family of Adoption must be respected.
- Openness and honesty are critical; deception and coercion are undermining.
- Practices must adhere to high ethical standards and be free from profiteering.

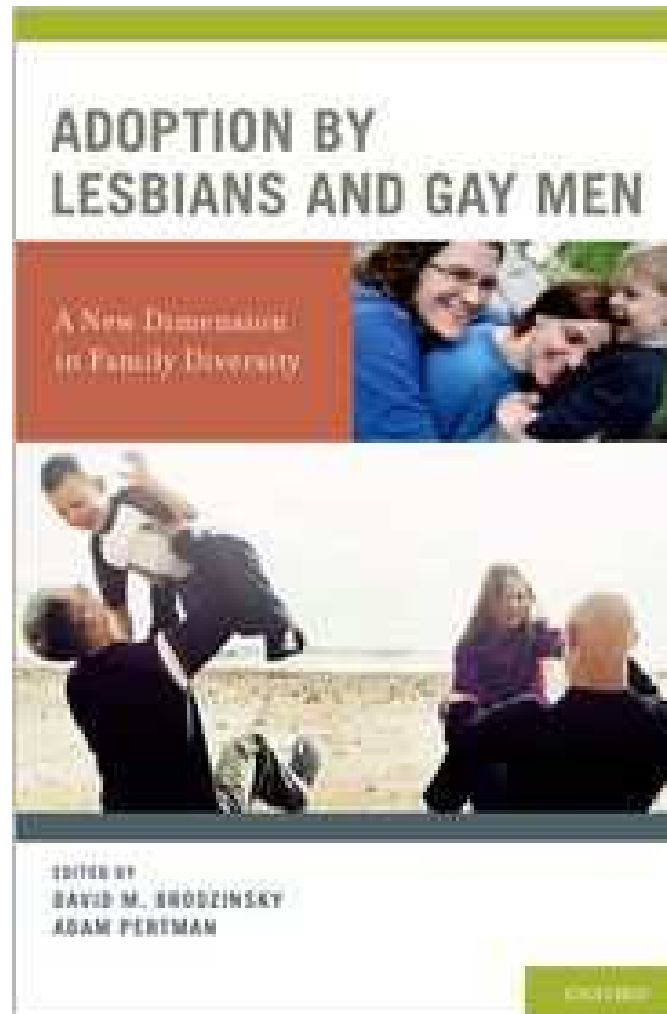
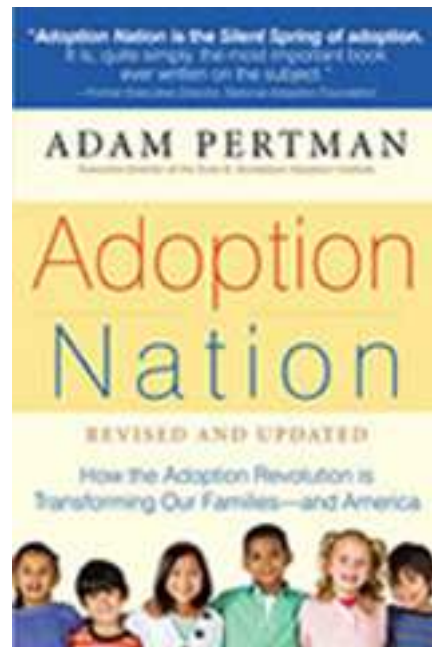
# A Sampling of Our Projects, Initiatives

- **Untangling the Web: Internet's Transformative Impact on Adoption**
- Adoption Openness: Secrecy & Stigma to Knowledge & Connections
- Never Too Old: Permanency and Connections for Older Youth
- **Keeping the Promise: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services**
- For the Records I and II: Restoring a Legal Right to Adopted Adults
- Expanding Resources for Children I, II and III: Gay/Lesbian Adoption
- Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity in Adoption
- **Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of First/Birth Parents**
- Old Lessons for a New World: Adoption's Lessons for ART
- Adoptive Parent Prep: Meeting Children's Mental Health Needs
- Improving Policy & Practice in Transracial Adoptions from Care
- Adoption in the Schools: A Lot to Learn
- Adoption in the News and Entertainment Media

# And Working on These New Ones . . .

- The Lynn Franklin Fund will support: Safeguarding Birthparents II, Unintended Consequences II, For the Records III . . . and More
- Hague Assessment and Best Practices for International Adoption
- Three Nations' Best Practices on Placing Children from Foster Care
- Report on the Need for Adoption-Competent Therapists
- Keeping the Promise II: National Initiative on Post-Adoption
- Curriculum on Open Adoption for Parents and Professionals
- Curriculum for Continuum of Family Education and Supports
- Promoting Positive Identity for Adoptees: Curriculum for Summer Camp, Adoption Clubhouse, a Book . . . and More
- Adoption in Schools II: Educating Educators, Creating Curricula
- Media Matters: Impact of Journalists, Entertainment Industry
- Conferences, Legislation, Advocacy, Trainings ... and More

# A Few Books by Our Authors



# What We Know . . . About Everyone

“In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage, to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning; no matter what our attainments in life, there is the most disquieting loneliness.”

– Alex Haley in *Roots*

# What We Know . . . About Adoption

- How many children are adopted in or into the United States each year?  
a). 85,000 b). 130,000 c). 175,000
- Of the three “categories” of adoption in the U.S., which one occurs most?  
a). International b) Foster care c). Domestic infants
- How many people in our country have adoption in their immediate families?  
a). 45 million b). 85 million c). 100 million

# Adoption in America: A Brief History

- For generations, “formal adoption” meant unwed mothers, white babies, white married couples
- Secrecy, stigma and shame characterized the process and all of its participants
- Acceptance of single mothers, legalization of abortion, birth control instigate major changes
- World events fill the gap, most notably Soviet Union dissolves and China imposes a one-child policy
- Paradigm in foster care shifts to “best interests of the child” as defined by permanency



# So . . . What Has Changed?



# A Shift in Understanding and Practice

## 1950s . . . and . . . Today

- Secrecy “protects” members of the triad
- Birthparents told to go on with their lives as if nothing happened
- Adoptive parents feel entitlement and are protected from intrusion
- Adoptees assumed not to have adoption-related issues, so nothing to do
- More openness & honesty in adoptions (infant adoptions usually open to some extent)
- First/Birth parents want and are helped by openness
- Adoptive parents feel more entitlement and less fear
- Adopted persons benefit from knowing birth families
- **Now what does ethical practice entail?**

# Fitting a Square Peg into a Round Hole

## Then . . . and . . . Now

- Denial of difference between adoptive, bio families
- Match for race, physical traits > adoption undetectable
- “Chosen child” – it was a “win-win” for all parties!
- Agencies did not “interfere” after finalization
- Minimize importance of adoption in child’s identity
- Searching viewed as a sign of maladjustment
- Acknowledgement of difference is healthy
- Diversity in families makes adoption conspicuous
- Focus on helping deal with loss and other issues
- Support can be vital
- Adoption is part of identity
- Desire for information and connection seen as normal
- **Now what does ethical practice entail?**

# A Result of the Adoption's Greater Openness & Honesty: More Complexity

- When do we tell our child she's adopted?
- Who are the members of your family?
- Remember: Only adoptive families are complicated and have issues – as opposed to say ... step-families, divorced families, grandparent-led families, single-parent families, families with two dads or two moms, families with children who have special needs ...
- To get the answer you're seeking, you need to ask the right question; it's about reality – and ethics.

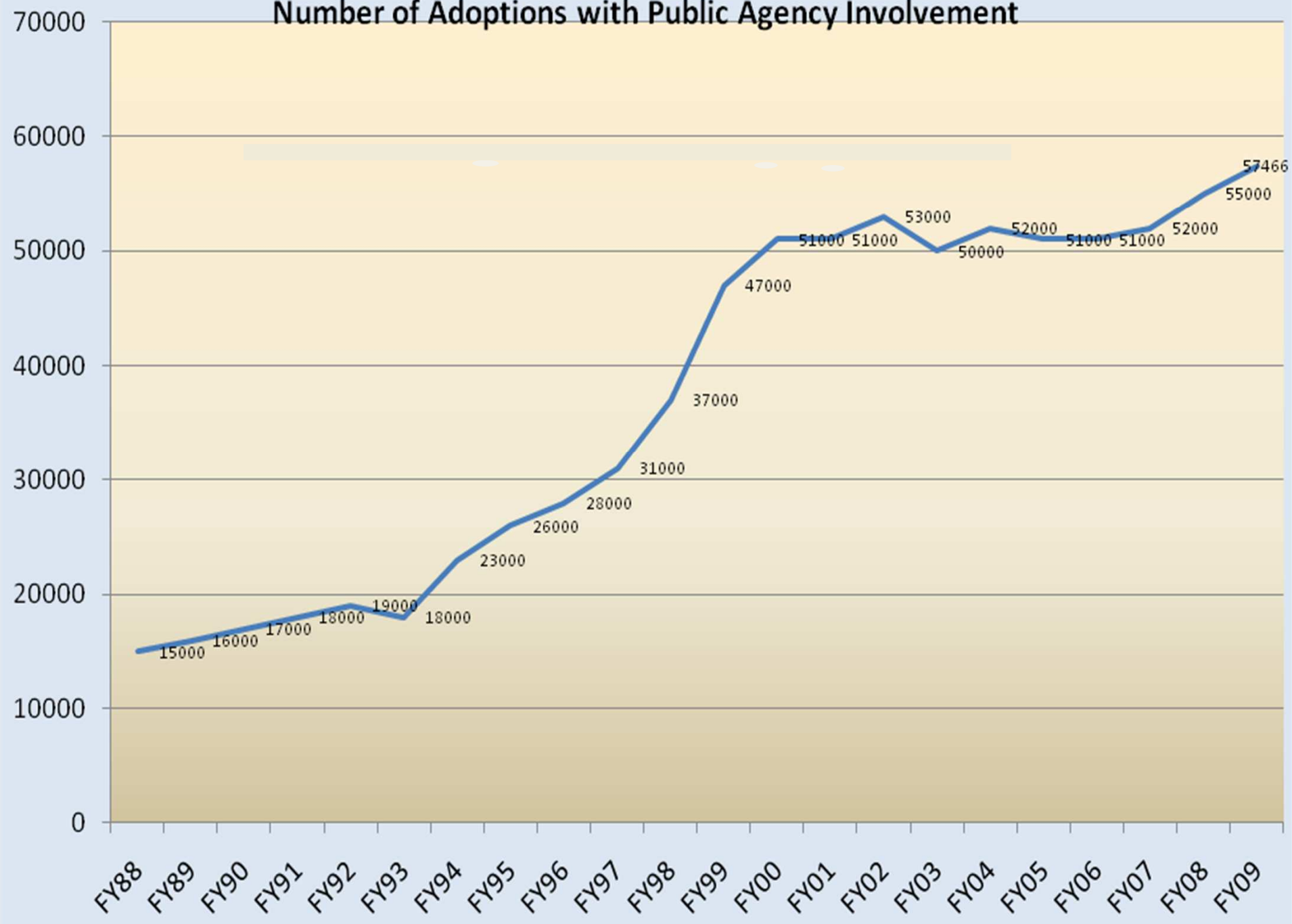
# Where We Are Today

- Fewer than 1% of single women voluntarily place their children for adoption, and most become their parents.
- Stigma, secrets, embarrassment and shame are lifting; we're not there yet, but move is to greater openness and honesty.
- Laws, policies, practices and attitudes shifting; we're not there yet, but improving as we learn about adoption's realities.
- Adoption today is still commonly understood as child placement – so most people still don't know much about the people involved (especially birthmothers), their needs, etc.
- The adults adopting today are straight and gay, come in all colors, are married and cohabitating and single, young and old – and most children being adopted are not white infants.

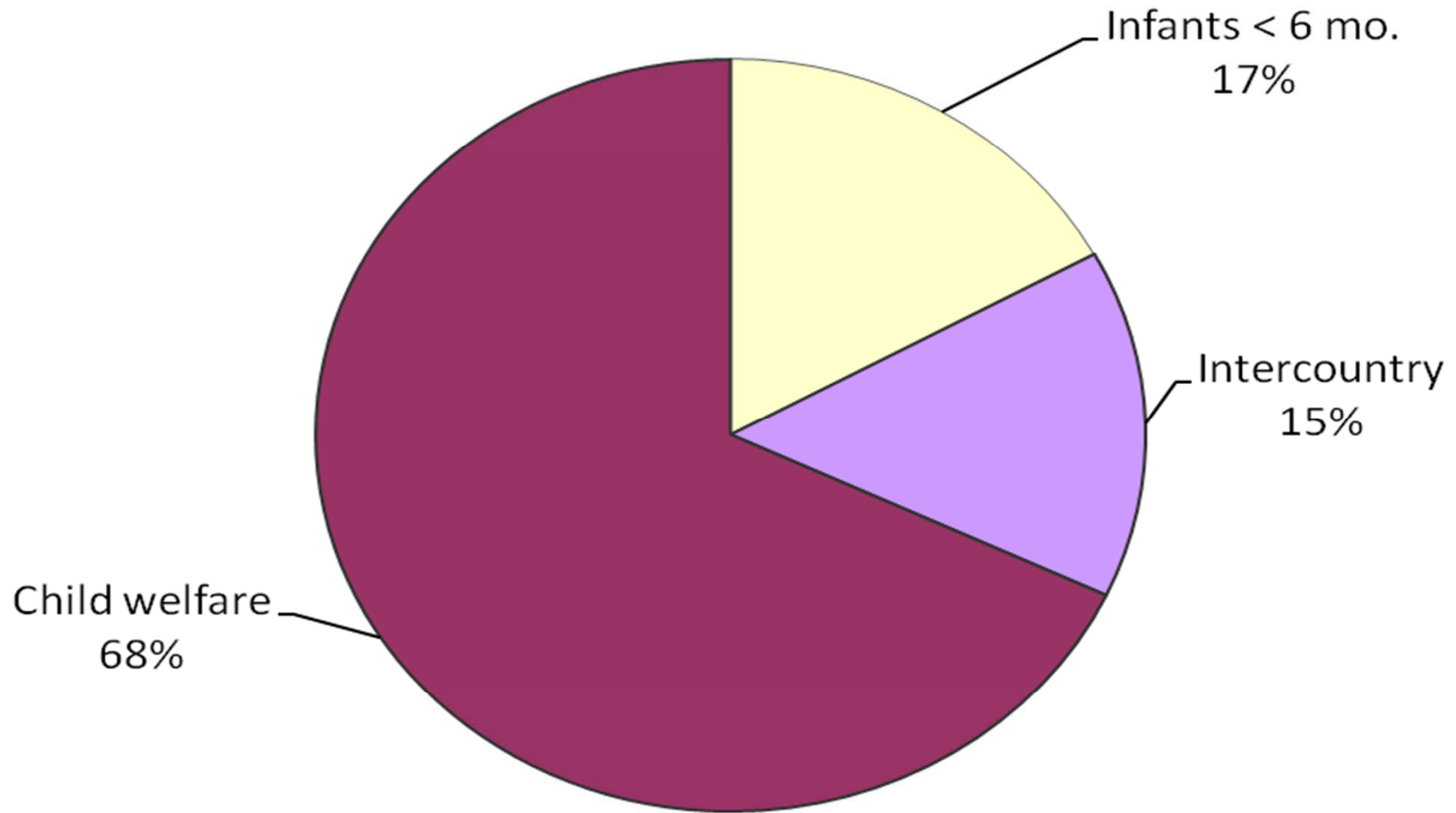
## International Adoptions into U.S.



### Number of Adoptions with Public Agency Involvement



# Non-stepparent U.S. Adoptions by Type





# What Do the Families Look Like?

The children being adopted – and all their parents – have changed over the decades; here's what they look like today:

- About 15,000 babies, many of color, placed each year with mainly white couples by mostly not-young or single mothers; an unknown, rising number are adopted by gay men/lesbians
- Almost 10,000 girls and boys, mostly children of color who are not babies, are born in other countries and overwhelmingly are adopted from orphanages by white couples
- About 53,000 children and older youth, who had been in foster care – a disproportionate number of color – are adopted alone or with siblings by gay, straight, single, married and cohabitating adults and couples of every age/race/ethnicity.

# Historic Shifts, Systemic Impact

- About 135,000 adoptions in U.S. a year.
  - \* About 40% stepparent adoptions
  - \* 55,000 child welfare adoptions
  - \* 10,000 international adoptions (fell dramatically in last few years)
  - \* 15,000 domestic infants (decreased tenfold since 1970)
- **The real numbers: a far bigger population**
- Overall, 40% of adoptions in U.S. are trans-racial/ethnic .
  - \* 28 percent from foster care
  - \* 21 percent of domestic infants
  - \* 84 percent from other nations
- Reality on ground (records, LGBT, etc.) outpacing law, policy.
- And now ... the internet is changing everything

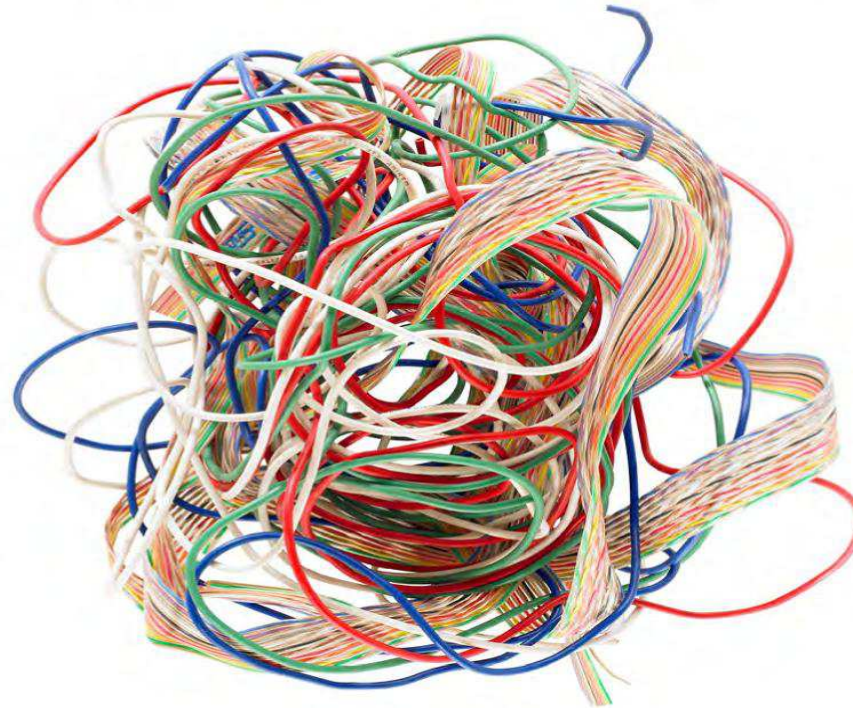


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32%

# UNTANGLING THE WEB

THE INTERNET'S TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON ADOPTION



POLICY & PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

December 2012

Jeanne A. Howard, Ph.D.

EVAN B. DONALDSON

**adoptioninstitute**

## Caveats and Context

- The internet's greatest impact to date is on infant adoption, where the most money is at stake.
- A lot of good, thoughtful, ethical practice occurring.
- Dubious/unethical/illegal activities have always gone on, but now the opportunities are far greater.
- Search "birth mothers," 135 million hits; "child adoption," 91 million; "foster adoption," 10 million.
- Our goals: generate a national discussion on impact, regulation and protections – and instigate change.

# For Now, More Questions than Answers

- Adoption Practice: What's the impact on ethical professionals when internet providers promise babies quickly and incentives to pregnant women?
- Search and Reunion: What should professionals tell clients? What should parents tell their kids? What guidance, support, resources does everyone need?
- Law and Policy: How do we address possibly unsafe or traumatizing contacts for children? Do legal obstacles to acquiring information make sense?
- More and More: How do we best utilize all the new opportunities, resources, research and supports?

# So . . . How Profound Is the Internet's Impact?



"This is a secret family recipe. Speaking of family secrets, you were adopted."

# A Lay of the Land: Principal Findings in Year One

- There's a growing “commodification” of adoption and a shift away from the perspective that its primary purpose is to find families for children; it's especially the case in infant adoption.
- Finding birth relatives is becoming increasingly easy and commonplace, with significant institutional and personal implications.
  - Likely end of the era of “closed” adoption.
  - Growth in relationships between families.

## Principal Findings (cont.)

- A growing number of minors have contact and/or relationships with birth relatives, often without guidance, preparation or parents' knowledge.
- A rising number of sites that improve the prospects of adoption for “waiting” children, notably including those with special needs.
- More and more places to get information, education, networking, services and resources.
- Additional benefits such as greater opportunities for affiliation, support and information-sharing.



# The Good (Benefits)

- Internet is immediate, efficient and private
- In foster realm, better recruitment and placement
- Resources, research, support more available than ever: Rudd, Adoption Institute, ALP, Gateway, etc.
- Expectant/first/birth parents: affiliation, options info, cautions, connections to others like them
- Pre-adoptive/adoptive parents: guidance, specific knowledge (ex., LGBT), post-adopt services
- Adopted persons: exploration on adoption/selves, affiliation, search and reunion, advocacy

## The Bad and the Ugly (Risks)

- Internet is immediate, efficient and not-so-private.
- Commerce/profits over child (and adult) welfare, including aggressive and extensive marketing.
- Sometimes-singular focus on doing it quickly rather than thoughtfully, ethically and well.
- Exorbitant fees, babies who don't exist or go to the highest bidder, inability to identify red flags.
- Lack of options counseling/guidance for expectant mothers; instead, recruitment and inducements.
- Who will keep the records for the future?

# A Prism for Assessment: Accepted Ethical/Best Practices

- Preparation, counseling and representation of prospective parents and expectant mothers/fathers
- Education, resources about openness/relationships
- Transparency regarding payments and services
- Non-coercive (including financial) procedures
- Access to post-adoption resources for all parties
- Supervision and boundaries for children's safety when adopted from foster care

# What is Happening with Infant Adoption on the Internet?

“Complete your domestic adoption, on average, within 3-12 months.”

“We connect with states where birth parents cannot revoke consent.”

- \* Learn more about the safe alternative to abortion... adoption.
- \* Financial assistance is available. \* FREE housing is available.



# Advertising and Recruitment

- Agency A: “Most couples were selected in less than FOUR months [as a result of] marketing & extensive Nationwide Internet advertising specifically targeting suitable Birthparents knowing the Internet is the most widely used medium of this demographic. ... We spend millions yearly advertising to pregnant women using aggressive grassroots marketing and outreach programs.”
- Agency B “aggressively reaches out to more Birthmothers. Unlike many state-regulated agencies B is not confined by state-mandated budget restrictions. B spends over \$1m in advertising for Birthmothers annually. As a result of these extensive advertising and outreach efforts, most matches are made in less than 9 months. With a track record like that, it is no wonder hundreds of families turn to B each year to realize their dreams.”

# Nondirective Options?

- Site X offers help to pregnant women in crisis, explaining that they have a range of options, then (accompanying photos of affluent, happy couples in their lovely homes) asks questions including:
  - \* Can I provide financially for my child?
  - \* Will my child have a father figure in his life?
  - \* Will I have time to properly care for a child?
- Another section of the site offers “Facts and Myths” about abortion, adoption and parenting.
  - \* Fact on abortion: “Over 70% of women have negative feelings.”
  - \* Fact on parenting: “You cannot rely on family members to help.”

# Search and Reunion: How Hard is it To Find Someone?

**OmniTrace** *The People Search Experts*  
Find Your Birth Parents  
or Adopted Child Today!



Birth Parents  
 Birth Siblings  
 Adoptee

Free Quote  
by top search professionals

Search

- Search Type -

**Find My Family**  
Reuniting Adoptees  
With Birth Family Members

[www.FindMyFamily.org](http://www.FindMyFamily.org)

**KINSOLVING**  
*investigations*

### Specializing in Adoption Searches

Kinsolving Investigations is a "No Find-No Fee Agency" owned and operated by a reunited Birthmother and Private Investigator. We will provide you with the current name and address of the person you are seeking. All of our searches are guaranteed. Licensed-Bonded-Insured private investigators and member of the Better Business Bureau. Kinsolving continues to be the PREMIER search company. Please visit our website today at [www.kinsolving.com](http://www.kinsolving.com) to obtain a free quote.

### Testimonial

I'm so glad for having made the contact. I think this will be one of the most amazing experiences of my life – and hers, too. Even though sometimes it has been painful to relive the past, it has also been very healing for her ... and that has been the ultimate reward!

Many, many thanks.  
TBS/MN

### Kinsolving Investigations

P.O. Box 1917  
Matthews, NC 28106  
Phone: 704-537-5919 or  
Toll-free: 800-527-8698  
Fax: 704-846-5123

E-mail: [kinsolving@aol.com](mailto:kinsolving@aol.com)

Join us on Facebook - just search  
for Kinsolving Investigations.

## Story after Story Like These


“I read a story in Time in which Mr. Pertman talked about the phenomenon of [search] through social media. Last night, my 12-year-old daughter’s birth family contacted her through Facebook. We are devastated. She wants very much to meet them. ... What advice and literature can you provide us to deal with this? It is living hell.”

*“I had been looking for my mother and siblings, if I had them, for years ... Finally, with Facebook, I found them and they have added immeasurable joy to my life. My adoptive family is still my `real’ family but now I have more.”*



# A Tiny Glimpse at the New World

I am looking for my birth parents, I was born in Akron Ohio on or around 4-14-1965 and adopted by two loving parents in Toledo Ohio. .... *I am searching for my niece and nephew. My nephew was born May 4, 1993 and my niece was born June 21, 1994. Their names were ...* I am searching for my adopted brother, born 1/11/1960 at the Florence Crittenton home in Sioux city Iowa [and] adopted out at birth in Woodbury County/Sioux City Iowa ... *I'm looking for my biological grandparents. My Mother, Angela was born December 30 1969. She says she was told she was adopted from Warren County N.C. She says she thinks her first name was "Gwendolyn" ...*



I AM Looking for  
my DAUGHTER

Born Shirleen Ann

MARCH 30, 1966

ST MARY'S HOSPITAL

SYRACUSE NY



my name is latoya i was placed in fostercare in missouri birth place is greene county i think springfield i have a brother named joe and james and cecil we were all placed in fostercare and adopted i dont know my mother or fathers names but heard that i have a sister named tamika I was born jan 11th 1984

# In a Nutshell, What's Happening Out There . . .

- There are more reunions and more relationships, giving people what they've wanted and needed for too long. But some searchers are children without counseling, supervision or, sometimes, even parental knowledge.
- There are more resources, more opportunities for permanency for children with special needs and older youth. But there also are practices that are dubious at best, untrained practitioners, antiquated laws, etc.
- Some children's safety – emotional, psychological and perhaps physical – may be put at risk.
- **What else?**

# How Big a Deal is Internet's Impact?

- Traditional adoption practice is probably at risk.
- Era of secrecy/closure is probably near its end.
- Extended Family of Adoption is coming fast.

## What Do We Need?

- Research for knowledge, tools, best practices.
- Info and training for professionals and parents.
- Updated laws, policies, practices.

# Practice Recommendations

- Key organizations, experts should convene to devise best practice and identify needed guidance/materials.
- Education, training programs by and for professionals should be developed, then provided to all clients.
- Professional curricula, training should be revised to reflect reality many/most adoptions will be “open” to some extent, then give clients commensurate info.
- Practitioners should get training, devise materials that enable them to better assist growing number of triad members coming to them for search/reunion help.

# Policy and Law Recommendations

- State and federal policymakers should commission research, hold hearings and implement legal/policy changes to minimize risks and offer protections.
- Policy and law-enforcement officials should monitor internet activity and take action against exploitation, fraud and other illegal and unethical practices.
- Social media and internet companies should conduct and enable research and implement appropriate policies and practices on issues raised in this report.
- Laws that impede or prevent parties to adoption from gaining important information should be repealed.

# Conclusion

The list of positive, negative and complicated changes occurring in the world of adoption as a result of the Internet goes on and on, with many already in place and others still evolving. The common denominator among them is that they are not best practices derived from lessons learned from research and experience; rather, overwhelmingly, they are transformations that are happening simply because new technology enables them to happen.

**Write to us:** [InternetProjectAI@gmail.com](mailto:InternetProjectAI@gmail.com)



# Openness in Adoption: From Secrecy and Stigma to Knowledge and Connections

EVAN B. DONALDSON

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# Principal Findings for Infant Adoptions

- Only 5% are closed; 95% of agencies offer open.
- In vast majority, expectant mothers (and fathers) meet and pick the adoptive parents.
- Greater openness is associated with more satisfaction by all parties with adoption process.
- First/Birth mothers: less grief, more peace of mind (but also more opportunity for exploitation).
- Adoptive parents: positive experience, comfort.
- Adoptees: biggest beneficiaries, and teens with contact are most satisfied with level of openness.

# Important Factors for Achieving Success

- Shared understanding by birth, adoptive parents about open adoption's realities/ complexities.
- Foundational relationship qualities and values are ideals for the parties in open relationships.
- Ability to exercise self-determination in choosing and shaping open relationships.
- “Collaborative” communication to plan contact, convey needs; also, post-adoption services.

# Primary Recommendations

- All parents should get counseling and training.
- Decision-making embedded in ethical practice to maximize self-determination, full disclosure.
- All parents should be offered post-adoption services for openness-related challenges.
- Additional research to better understand factors that promote successful open adoptions and ways practitioners can support them.

# Keeping the Promise: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services



# Background and Context

- Adoption is commonly understood as placement.
- Vast majority adjust well; high family satisfaction.
- These children were maltreated **before** adoption.
- Vast majority meet “special needs” criteria.
- Children’s issues often don’t manifest until school.
- Many parents do not get preparation, resources.

# The Good News from Parents

- Only 15% report relationship with children more difficult than expected. (National Survey of A-Parents)
- Over 90% in any type of adoption are satisfied with their experience. (Howard & Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Rosenthal & Groze, 1994)
- Most feel very close to children: 83% CW, 87-90% biological, int'l, infant. (Howard, Smith & Ryan, 2004)

# The Challenges

- Utilization of clinical services by adoptive families is triple rate reported by birth families.
- Over 1/3 of adopted children receive at least one type of counseling or mental health service. (National Survey of Adoptive Parents)
- Behavior problems for many of these children and youth are chronic.
- Underlying emotional issues drive behaviors.



# Principal Findings

- Most adoptees come to families with higher risks for a variety of challenges/problems.
- Adoptive families utilize clinical services at a very high rate. **Is that a bad thing?**
- The layers of issues and dynamics are often not understood by parents, professionals.
- Adoption-competent therapy is most-often sought, but – like other services -- is lacking.

# The Right Thing for the Many Reasons

We should be helping these children and families . . . well, because it's the ethical and moral thing to do in a civilized society . . . but here are other arguments:

- Each adoption from care saves governments an average of \$143k. (Barth, et al, 2006)
- Successful adoptions from care save money in human services and reduced crime, totaling \$302,418 per adoption. (Hansen, 2007)

## Primary Recommendations

- National task force for post-adoption services.
- Private/ public partnerships (including dedicated federal funding) to maximize services and access.
- Public policy, child welfare officials use budgets, resources to focus on helping families succeed, with PA services part of the picture at all levels.
- Funded research should increase significantly.
- Curricula for professionals working with families.

# For the Records: Restoring a Legal Right

*Certificate of Birth*

It is hereby certified and solemnly attested that  
**JNTHN MCKLRY**

was born at  
Torrance Memorial Medical Center

at **2:26 P.** m. this **26th** day of **MARCH**, 19 **99**

*Authorized under the hand and seal of*  
*Leo H. Graham*  
President  
*Gregory S. ... M.D.*  
Obstetric Physician  
Torrance Memorial Medical Center

 **TORRANCE MEMORIAL  
MEDICAL CENTER**  
2040 Loma Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90501-5073

This is not a legal document.

## Principal Findings

- Adopted persons: only class in U.S. not routinely permitted to access own original birth certificates.
- Denial of information on background has potentially serious consequences for physical, mental health.
- No evidence of negative consequences in states where birth certificates have been unsealed.
- Few vetoes or “do not contact” forms filed in states where those opportunities are provided.
- Abortions don’t increase, adoptions don’t decrease.
- Scant evidence (if any) that pregnant women were legally promised lifelong anonymity – or wanted it.

# For the Records: Recommendations

- Amend state laws to restore unrestricted access for adult adopted persons to OBC's.
- Within three years' of enactment, revisit state laws that permit only limited access.
- Conduct research to expand understanding of experiences of all affected parties.
- Build on experiences of states that permit access to expand adopted people's rights to learn more from agency and court records.
- Develop education programs, focus more public and policy attention on state and national levels.

# Random Thoughts and Conclusions

- Adopted people are not stalkers, ingrates or children in search of new mommies and daddies.
- Most laws are predicated on the underlying concern (or belief) something bad will happen.
- No one wants to live forever with decisions at 17.
- Sealing OBC's is a negative signal from the start.
- **Bottom line: Restoring access to OBCs is not just about curiosity, search, reunion or medical information; it's a matter of human dignity and social justice. So what's ethical practice/behavior?**

# Safeguarding the Rights & Well-Being of Birth/First Parents in Adoption

A close-up photograph of a woman with reddish-brown hair, seen from the side, gently kissing a newborn baby. The baby is wrapped in a light-colored blanket and is resting its head against the woman's chest. The background is dark and out of focus.

It's your birth.  
KNOW ALL YOUR OPTIONS

Attend Our Free Class



# Major Findings

- Approximately 15,000 infant adoptions a year
- Birth/first mothers: very diverse group; only about 1/4 are teens, biggest segment in their 20s
- Recent research only on teen who relinquish
- Very few “closed” adoptions today
- Birth/first fathers involved in minority of adoptions
- Better outcomes related to not feeling pressured to relinquish, ability to choose the adoptive family, ongoing contact/ knowledge of child’s well-being

## Major Findings (cont.)

- Counseling is not required in most states
- Parents need time after birth to reconsider adoption and time after relinquishment to reflect on decision
- In half of states, irrevocable consent can be established in 4 days after birth or less; 17 states have a revocation period
- Women with highest grief levels placed children expecting information or contact that was cut off
- 13 states have laws to enforce post-adoption contact agreements in infant adoptions

# Critical Needs and Rights

- To be fully informed from the start about all options, rights and resources
- To make decisions throughout the process free from coercion or pressure
- To receive nondirective counseling and separate legal representation
- To be able to change her mind at any point before consent becomes legally binding
- To be legally assured that agreements to information or contact are adhered to

# Primary Recommendations

- Establish legally enforceable post-adoption contact agreements & permit access to records
- Require document defining birth/first parent rights
- Require at least two counseling sessions
- Modify laws to have waiting period of 4 to 7 days before signing, plus substantial revocation period
- More aggressive protection of fathers' rights
- Further research to identify first/birth parents' needs and services/laws to address them
- Develop and provide post-adoption services

# Beyond Culture Camp: Shaping Positive Identity in Adoption



## Key Findings re: Adopted People

- Adoption is increasingly significant aspect of identity as they age, including as adults.
- Race/ethnicity is increasingly significant aspect of identity in adoption across color/culture.
- Coping with discrimination is important in coming to terms with racial/ethnic identity.
- Discrimination based on adoption is a reality, but more so Whites (i.e., race trumps adoption).

## Key Findings (cont.)

- Most transracial adoptees considered themselves White or wanted to be White as children.
- Positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by “lived” experiences.
- White respondents: contact with birth relatives is most helpful factor for positive adoptive identity.
- Transracial adoptees: travel to home country, is most helpful factor for achieving positive identity.

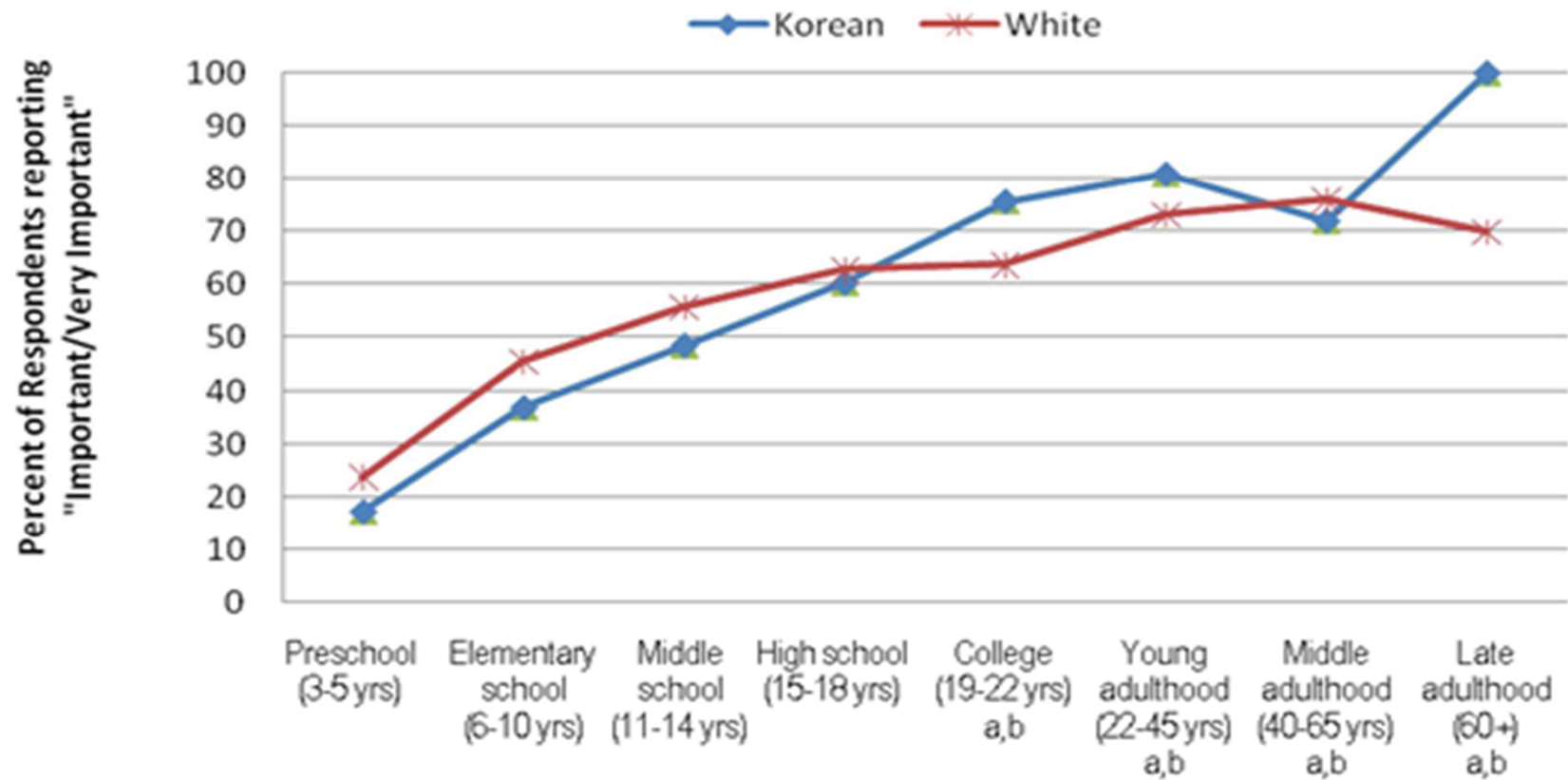
# Sources of Discrimination

Source	Korean/Transracial Adoptees N=179		White Adoptees N=156	
	ADOPTION	RACE/ETHNCITY	ADOPTION	RACE/ETHNCITY
	Sometimes/ Fairly often/Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/Very often
	%	%	%	%
Childhood friends	15	<b>48</b>	<b>28</b>	8
Childhood friend's parents	11	38	24	5
Classmates	<b>25</b>	<b>75</b>	9	7
Teachers	13	39	21	8
Partner (s)	8	22	12	3
Parent partner(s)	16	30	19	6
Coworkers	11	33	10	3
Employers	7	33	8	5
Extended family	<b>21</b>	33	<b>40</b>	6
Stranger	<b>31</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>24</b>	10



# Importance of Adoptive Identity at Different Life Stages

**Fig. 1. Importance of Identity as an Adopted Person at Different Life Stages**

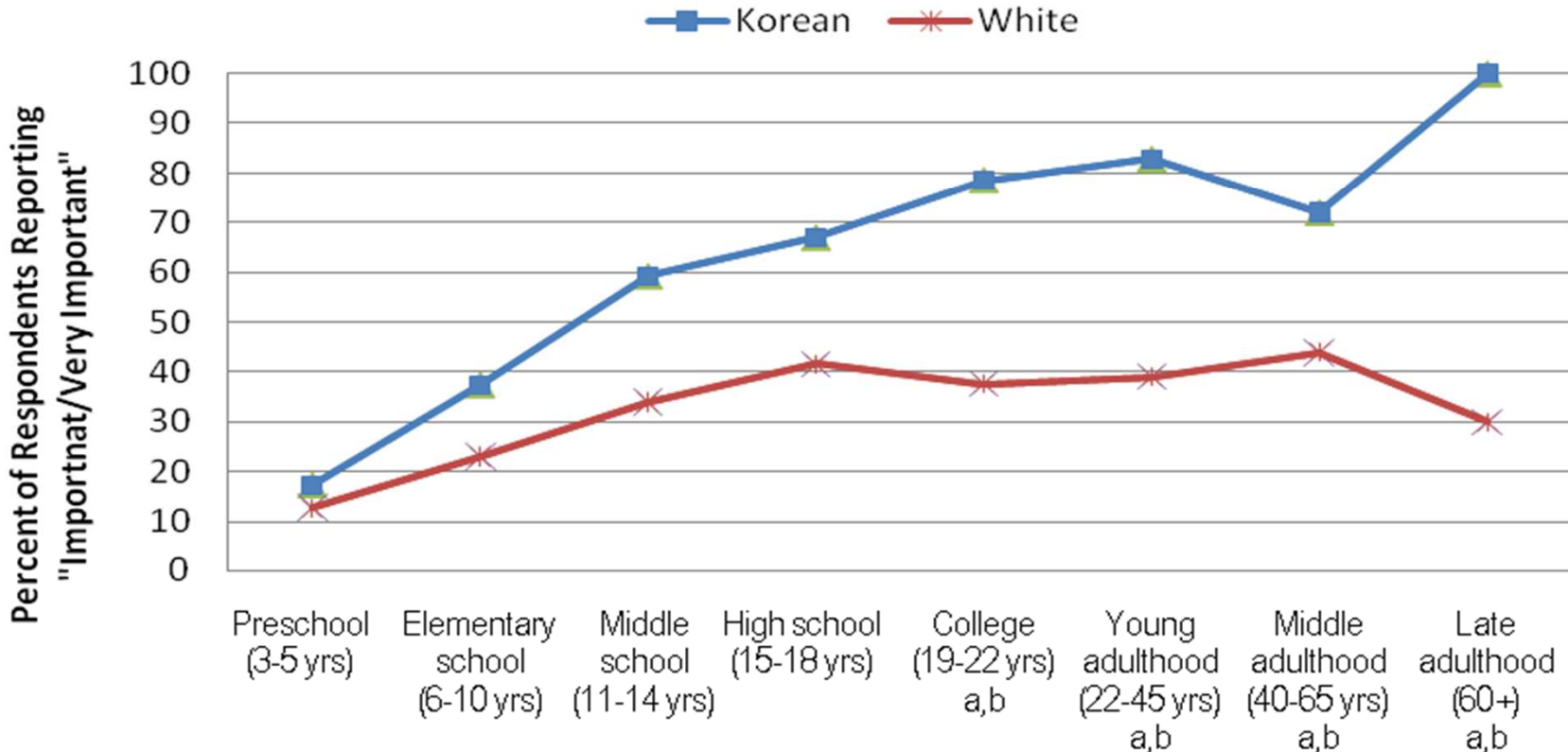


a. Use of valid percents. Whites: College (N=154); Young adulthood (N=153); Middle adulthood (N=100); Late adulthood (N=10).

b. Use of valid percents. Koreans: College (N=173); Young adulthood (N=146); Middle adulthood (N=25); Late adulthood (N=1).

# Importance of Racial/Ethnic Identity at Different Life Stages

**Fig. 2. Importance of Racial/Ethnic Identity  
at Different Life Stages**



<sup>a</sup>. Use of valid percents. Whites: College (N=154); Young adulthood (N=153); Middle adulthood (N=100); Late adulthood (N=10).  
<sup>b</sup>. Use of valid percents. Koreans: College (N=173); Young adulthood (N=146); Middle adulthood (N=25); Late adulthood (N=1).

# Experiences and Services Utilized, Perceived as Helpful in Forming Identity

Source	Korean Adoptees		White Adoptees	
	% Utilized	% Helpful	% Utilized	% Helpful
Travel to birth country <sup>b</sup>	62	74	57	45
Attend racially diverse schools <sup>a,b</sup>	65	73	51	42
Having child care providers, teachers, adult role models same race/ethnicity	41	73	65	58
Family travel to culturally significant places <sup>b</sup>	53	72	53	54
Read information from Internet <sup>b</sup>	79	71	75	62
Live in racially diverse neighborhood <sup>a,b</sup>	65	70	44	53
Books/Articles on adoption <sup>b</sup>	73	68	75	66
Cook food or dine at restaurants <sup>b</sup>	84	68	77	54
Regular contact with people of same race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	74	67	75	51
Exposure to multi-cultural entertainment	68	64	70	55
Take classes learn history/culture of birth country <sup>b</sup>	49	64	46	30
Having siblings <sup>a</sup>	80	63	70	68
Events by adult adoptees/adult adoptee organizations <sup>a,b</sup>	62	63	42	47
Support group for adoptees <sup>b</sup>	51	62	46	50
Involve ethnically diverse religious, social groups/activities <sup>b</sup>	59	62	54	40
Culture camp <sup>a,b</sup>	48	61	12	15
Study birth language <sup>a,b</sup>	56	59	44	43
Events sponsored by own ethnic group <sup>a,b</sup>	62	55	31	28
Have traditional objects (dolls etc.) from birth country <sup>a,b</sup>	72	49	55	37
Having contact with birth relatives <sup>a,b</sup>	30	47	45	72
Study martial art, traditional dance etc.	41	38	51	31

## In their own voices

“Never having my family acknowledge that I was different made it difficult to come to terms with understanding/ accepting I really was NOT white.”

*“I felt like a banana most of my life. In other words, racially Chinese due to my skin. But in terms of my inner values and cultural identity I felt very much Caucasian due to my upbringing within my adoptive family. I still feel this way.”*

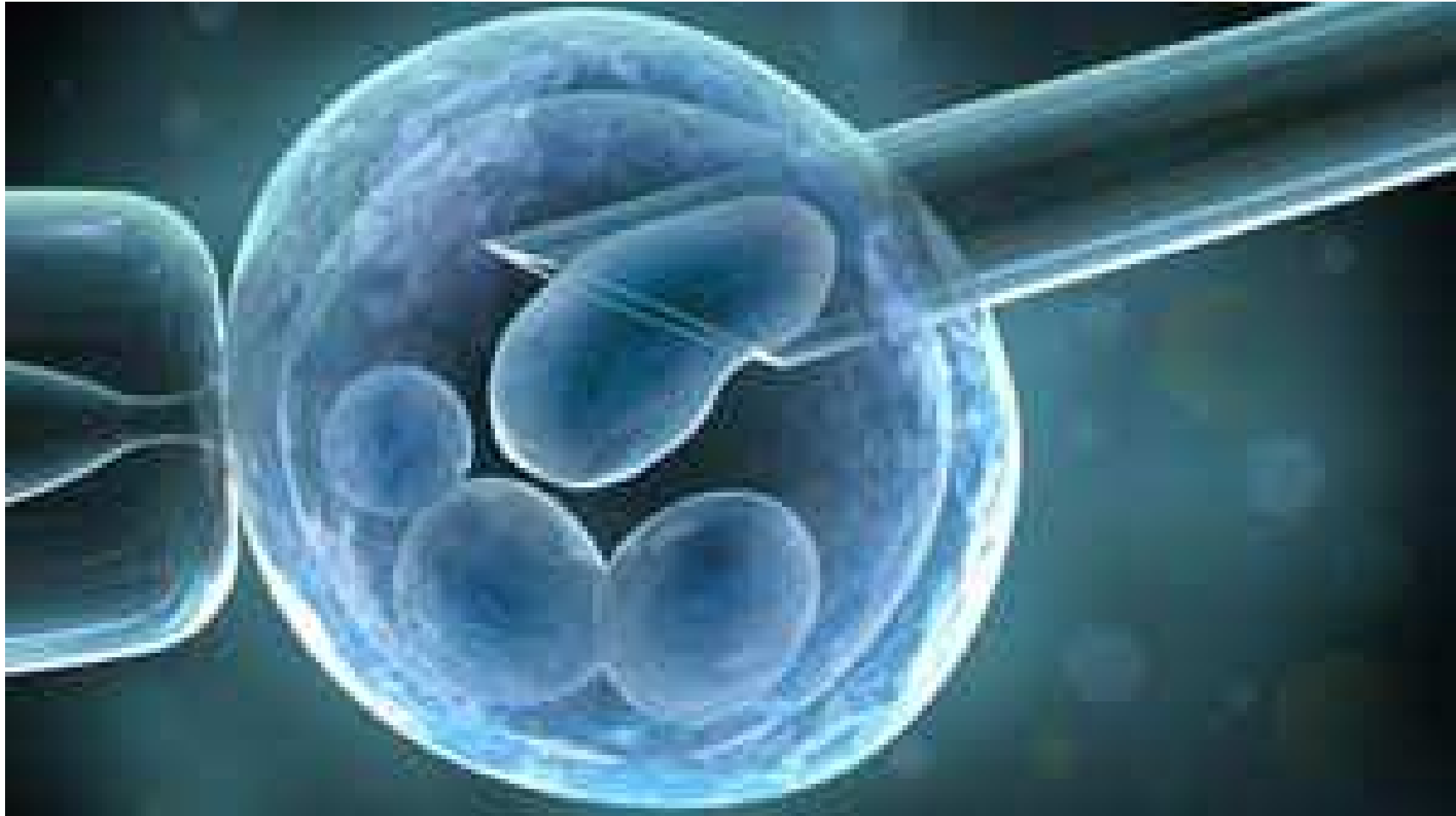
## **Related/Relevant Findings (Safeguarding Birthparents and Beyond Culture Camp)**

- Primary factor for first/birth mothers' peace of mind is knowledge about children's well-being.
- Vast majority of mothers want info about or contact with children they relinquished.
- Medical, cultural, adoption, etc. information can be critically important to positive identity.
- Such info is the raw material to fill missing pieces of life and derive integrated sense of self.

# Recommendations

- Expand parental preparation and post-placement support for those adopting across race/ culture.
- Develop empirically based practices, resources to prepare TRA youth to cope with racial bias.
- Promote laws, policies, practices that facilitate access to information for adopted individuals.
- Educate teachers, docs, practitioners, media, etc.
- Increase research on risk and protective factors.

# Old Lessons for a New World: Applying Adoption Research and Experience to ART



# Background and Context

- Adoption and assisted reproductive technology (ART) have much in common, most notably that both are used to form families in which a child is not genetically related to one or both parents.
- Similarly, adoption and ART policy and practice sometimes must balance the competing rights and interests of the parties involved.
- Adoption has a far longer history as a means of family formation, so it is informed by more research and experience – and has evolved accordingly.
- Most policies in ART derive from “because we can.”



## Principal Findings

- Secrecy and the withholding of information in adoption caused problems for all parties – and continue to do so.
- Those problems, and the ways they have been addressed, offer insights for ART policy and practice related to circumstances of offspring conception, disclosure of medical/other information, and the identities of those involved.
- Adoption's child-centered focus provides vital perspective for placing greater attention on children conceived through ART.

## Principal Findings (continued)

- Adoption has knowledge to share regarding creation of “nontraditional” families, especially as more single, gay and lesbian adults use ART.
- ART and adoption can benefit from examining the impact of market forces (including costs of services and potential commodification of those involved) on the ethics and quality of services provided.
- Legal and regulatory framework for adoption provides a model that ART can utilize to inform its standards and procedures – and maybe even laws.

# Primary Recommendations

## ➤ *Access to Information, Maintenance of Records*

- \* U.S. should mandate access to information at 18; practice should support this so ART children can get birth and medical background.
- \* Establish national database for gamete providers to routinely update medical, historical, other information given at time of “donation.”

## ➤ *Develop Greater Understanding, Best Practices*

- \* Conduct further research on ART-adoption similarities/differences to enhance professional and personal knowledge and to shape policies and practices serving everyone’s interests, especially children.
- \* Provide counseling akin to best-practice adoptions, including better informed-consent procedures and post-birth counseling.
- \* Conduct research to determine extent to which ART services are available to adults – including single and gay – wishing to utilize them.

# Primary Recommendations (continued)

## ➤ *Assess the Impact of Market Forces*

- . \* Analyze market forces – supply, demand, costs, income – to better understand influence on decision-making by gamete providers, birthparents, recipient families and prospective adoptive families.
- \* Utilizing this knowledge, create and implement more constructive, ethical practices that better serve all parties.

## ➤ *Develop Legal Frameworks*

- . \* States should enact legal and regulatory frameworks for ART, based on model legislation and research, as well as on the experiences of other states and nations.
- \* Goal should be to promote ethical practices and provide protections for gamete providers, intended parents and offspring.

# Expanding Resources for Children



# The Need

- Over 100,000 children legally free to be adopted from foster care.
- Most are older, disproportionately minorities and have been in care for a long time.
- The population of waiting children far exceeds that of parental applicants.
- Children who “age out” without permanency face multiple, serious challenges.

# Expanding the Pool

- Studies indicate positive outcomes for children with gay/lesbian parents.
- These potential parents are more likely to adopt children with special needs.
- Few bans, but laws and practices often ignore or discourage this potential resource.

# Recommendations

- End legal and de facto restrictions.
- Expand co- and second-parent adoption.
- Revise agency policies and practices.
- Be welcoming, end “don’t ask, don’t tell.”
- Raise awareness of bias among personnel.
- Develop policies, outreach to LGBT communities.
- Affirm the value of gay/lesbian-headed families.
- Conduct research on resources, training, etc.
- Include children in decision-making.



# Some Bottom Lines

- There's greater/growing openness and honesty in all types of adoption. Do we know how to do it?
- Adoption has contributed to historic changes in perceptions/understandings of what families are, how they are formed, what they look like, etc.
- **The vast majority of adoptions are now of children who were abused, neglected or institutionalized before adoption (see the pie chart).**
- Most laws, policies and practices still in place today were created for a world that no longer exists. What does that mean for “competency” and ethics?

# Final Thoughts

- To truly “normalize,” need to understand adoption mainly as a way of forming a family, not a means of solving a problem.
- Best practices should entail not only forming families, but also helping them succeed.
- Professionals/policymakers need to re-conceptualize goals to include a continuum of education, services and supports.
- Education/ training must incorporate realities of internet.
- Everyone’s rights, needs must be respected and included.
- Parents should be educated to understand that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.
- Policy-makers, media, public must be educated on today’s realities to facilitate ethical best practices, laws and policies.

## Final Thoughts (Cont.)

- Words matter, so how about if we introduce “successful” into our descriptions?
- Mental-health professionals, teachers and others who deal with adoption’s participants need education and training.
- Further research needs to be conducted into meeting needs, what works and what doesn’t, etc.
- Pre- and post-adoption services should be developed and provided for all parents and families.
- A continuum of education, supports, services should be part of the adoption process from the start . . . because it’s not just about forming families.
- We can do this.



*"Oh, I'm sorry. . . You couldn't adopt?"*