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Contents

Inter-Country Adoption of Children Born in the United States

Madeline H. Engel[a], Norma K. Phillips[b], and Frances A. Della Cava[c]

Abstract

Inter-country adoption of children from the United States has been going on for decades; however it had not been broadly recognized by adoption professionals. Prior to 2008, when the USA contracted with The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, no protective legislation aimed at monitoring these adoptions existed, offering no protection from abuses that have been associated with inter-country adoption. Even after the policy change in 2008, the USA has had no requirements for reporting all inter-country adoptions. Historically, inter-country adoptions from the USA have involved children of racial minorities. This practice raises social justice issues and questions of protection of the rights of all children.

Keywords

International adoption, inter-country adoption of U.S.-born children, Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption, racism in adoption, transracial adoption, child protective policies in adoption.

Although many people know that the United States of America has been among the top receiving countries for inter-country adoption, what is less commonly known is that for years children born in the USA have been adopted by individuals and families in Europe and Canada. This article examines the extent of this practice: where the children come from, where they go, and demographic characteristics of the children and adoptive families. The role of the federal government in providing oversight intended to protect children adopted through inter-country adoption is discussed, both before and after 2008, when the USA implemented its contract with The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption. While some problems related to adoption of children from the USA were resolved after 2008, other serious problems were created.

It is hoped that this article will raise awareness and stimulate a dialogue in academic, political, and professional communities regarding inter-country adoption from the USA, especially vis-à-vis maintaining the standard of "best interests of the child" and protection of children's rights.

[a]Department of Sociology, Lehman College, City University of New York, USA

[b]Department of Social Work, Lehman College, City University of New York, USA

[c]Department of Sociology, Lehman College, City University of New York, USA

Corresponding author:
Madeline H Engel, Department of Sociology,
Lehman College, City University of New York,
250 Bedford Park Blvd West,
Bronx, NY 10468 USA.
Email: madeline.moran@lehman.cuny.edu

EXTENT OF INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION FROM THE USA PRIOR TO 2008

Unlike protections required by many countries of origin for children brought into the USA through inter-country adoption, prior to 2008 the federal government did not offer or require protections for any adoptees from the USA, leaving room for possible abuses. Starting in the mid-1990s, journalists attempted to call attention to the phenomenon of adoption of children from the USA (Corley 2005; Davenport 2004; Glaser 2004; *60 Minutes* 2005; Smiley 2004; Smolowe 1994; *World News Tonight* 2005). However, with the exception of studies done by Freundlich (2000) and by Lieberthal (1999), few scholars chose to study or even recognize that such adoptions were happening, and professionals in the adoption community appeared unaware of this aspect of international adoption (*60 Minutes* 2005; O'Neill, Fowler and Arias 2005).

Carefully documented data kept by the U.S. Department of State on visas issued to incoming children adopted through inter-country adoption by residents of the USA reveal that approximately 7000 children entered the USA in 1990; the number doubled by 1998 and tripled by 2003. Such adoptions peaked at 22,990 in 2004 and then began to decline. In 2013, the U.S. Department of State reported only 7092 inter-country adoptions of children entering the USA. At the same time that these inter-country adoptions into the USA were occurring, some children who were born to U. S. mothers requesting adoption for their children were adopted abroad. The only source of data about these adoptions was from private agencies in the USA that arranged the adoptions. In addition, official figures were published by some of the receiving countries. Journalists in Canada and Europe published articles and commentaries focused on individual case histories. Anecdotal evidence at best led to small snowball samples as one adoptive family referred reporters to another family with a similar experience. Thus, little can be said about precise numbers of cases, children, or agencies; even trends are somewhat vague. More importantly, little is known about the outcomes of these adoptions.

According to data from adoption agencies in the USA, from the early 1990s until 2005, between 200 and 800 children born in the USA were adopted each year internationally. Lieberthal (1999) reported that children born in the USA who were adopted abroad were usually African-American or of mixed racial heritage. Most of the children leaving the USA were adopted in Canada, perhaps not only because of Canada's proximity to the USA but because Canada's adoption policy at that time prohibited the adoption of healthy Canadian infants by unmarried people. According to the Adoption Council of Canada (2004), each year Canadians adopted 1800 to 2200 children through inter-country adoption, and by 2002 the USA ranked sixth or higher out of the top 14 sources for these adoptions. Glaser (2004) reported that between 1995 and 2004 there were a total of 600 USA-born children adopted by Canadians, with the numbers increasing each year. For example, in 2002, 53 children were from the USA, and by 2009 the number had increased to 253 (Hilborn 2010). Almost all were under age five when they were adopted; most were Black or bi-racial and lived in Ontario or British Columbia (Canada Adopts 2006). Others went to families in Western Europe, particularly Belgium, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. Most of the receiving countries also did not document these adoptions carefully. Figures that do exist include 21 children adopted in Sweden from the USA between 2000 and 2005 (Statistika Centralbyran 2005). A reporter for *Time* (Smolowe 1994) discovered that although the British Department of Health listed only one American adoption for 1993, the cover story of a London magazine described the USA as one of the most accessible countries for inter-country adoption. Similarly, Smolowe (1994) found that although the Dutch government reported only one or two USA adoptions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, within a week she identified six such adoptions that had taken place during the previous four years.

The Route to Adoption from the USA

According to a 1999 policy paper authored by the Donaldson Institute staff, international adoptions of U.S.-born children were completed through private lawyers or private agencies (Lieberthal). Several agencies serving as sources for children from the USA were identified by journalists, and *Family Helper*, a Canadian magazine, published a list of such agencies on the internet (Hilborn 2007). Most private agencies were founded in the late 1980s or early 1990s when open adoption was becoming common in the USA. Agencies tended to be located in the South or in Northern urban areas. While most placed children of all races for domestic adoptions, the agencies

concentrated on inter-country adoption for African American and biracial babies. Some agencies were motivated to elect inter-country adoption for financial reasons. The CEO of ROOTS Adoption Agency in Atlanta, Georgia, identified economic incentives for inter-country adoption, stating that "agencies [that arrange inter-country adoptions] look for families that can pay their fees" (Davenport 2004).

Policies Governing Inter-Country Adoption of Children from the USA Prior to Implementation of the Hague Convention

Government regulation of adoption is critical for the protection of adopted children; inter-country adoptions into the USA have been carefully documented since the late 1940s and domestic adoptions within in the USA have been increasingly regulated, especially since the 1980s. However, before 2008, children adopted internationally from the USA were not afforded such protections, either before or after they left the country; consequently the process was without accountability. Though the application for a passport issued by the U.S. Department of State asked about intended destinations when a person left the country, the answer "as needed" sufficed to have one's papers processed. Unlike other sending countries which required post-placement home studies to inform them of adoption outcomes, no follow-up studies of children adopted from the USA were required. Consequently it was not possible to track the outcome of the adoption (Lieberthal 1999). As the executive director of Adoptive Families of America stated, "It's shameful that we don't know how many there are, much less who they're going to and under what circumstances they're being adopted" (Smolowe 1994).

Efforts to protect children adopted internationally have been made by both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption. Both the United Nations and The Hague documents reflect serious concerns about trafficking and abuse of children. Within the USA, the Inter-country Adoption Act of 2000, which was to be the implementing legislation for The Hague Convention, did not become fully operant until 2008. In a discussion of the Act of 2000, the *Federal Register* (2000: 9853) stated that the rule requires only "extremely limited reporting requirements for outgoing cases." Therefore, although some tracking

information became available, the legislation did not impose enforceable requirements for investigation of adoptive parents, or for post-placement supervision to protect the well-being of the child once adopted. This is in sharp contrast to countries, such as China, that historically had extensive pre-adoption and post-placement reporting requirements spanning several years, documenting the home, safety, education, and health conditions of the children adopted from their countries. Given the absence of such reporting requirements for children adopted from the USA, one is led to wonder about their post-adoption experiences. This lack of protective policies raises question about possible discriminatory practices within the USA as so many adoptees leaving the USA are African-American or biracial children.

ATTITUDES IMPEDING TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION WITHIN THE USA

In spite of federal policies, including the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the 1996 Inter-Ethnic Placement Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act, which make it illegal to consider ethno-racial affiliation as a criterion for the placement of children, controversy over transracial adoption in the USA persists. According to Hollingsworth (2000), attitudes towards transracial adoption in the USA differ by gender and age, with women and those under the age of 60 being more supportive of it than men and those over age 60.

Within the African American community controversy over transracial adoption also continues. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supports it, but other organizations, such as the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), has historically opposed it. In 1972, NABSW articulated its position statement, likening transracial adoption to "cultural genocide" (Clemetson and Nixon 2006). Following the lead of the NABSW, some in the African American community sought to have transracial adoptions involving African American children eliminated or at least limited, as they anticipated adjustment problems and, though acculturated to the white world, they held the position that transracially adopted children would never be socially assimilated or fully accepted in it. Further, the children would be deprived of their cultural pride and heritage and left ill-equipped to deal with racism.

In 1994, NABSW stopped using the term "cultural genocide;" however, the organization continues to strongly prefer in-racial adoption (Clemetson and Nixon 2006).

According to Hollingsworth (2002, 2003), both transracial and inter-country adoptions pose social justice challenges, as they set the stage for discrimination, identity problems, and the risk of children losing their cultural heritage. Hollingsworth (1997, 1999) contends that the uniqueness of the African American cultural group presents opportunities through which the socialization of the African American child takes place and the definitions of self and identity develop. For her, it is within this context that the child's African roots and African self-consciousness must be balanced with the goals and values of the larger society. Similarly, Melosh (2002: 176) identified pressure for racial matching in adoption as reflective of "embattled communities that saw adoption as theft of their most precious resource – the children who constituted their legacy and their future." She noted that some African Americans saw transracial adoption as "yet another assault on communities struggling to survive in white America. They responded by emphatically reclaiming these children as their own" (Melosh 2002: 176). Townsend (1995) went on to argue that black parents had to teach their children survival skills that whites could not teach. Philip Bertelson, a black man who had been adopted by white parents, explored transracial adoption and its impact on a child's sense of cultural identity in a 2001 documentary film, *Outside Looking In*. He argues that being completely colorblind can be dangerous and damaging as it leaves a child unprepared for what he finds outside his protective home. Furthermore, he says, "when you ignore my race or my ethnicity, you are essentially taking away a part of who I am" (*WABC World News Tonight* 5/5/2005).

If one assumes that transracial adoptions provide children with opportunities not otherwise available to them, one can then make an argument in support of such adoptions. The pro side of the transracial debate is supported by many outcome studies (Brooks and Barth 1999; Judge 2003; Weitzman 2003). For example, a longitudinal study of black children adopted as infants by white couples showed them to be well-adjusted teens with good or very good self-esteem (Vroegh 1997). Similarly, a longitudinal study of transracial adoptions from 1971 to 1984 showed that although some families were having problems with their children, most children were aware of and comfortable with their racial

identity. The adoptive parents believed that arguments against transracial adoption were racist and contrary to the best interests of the child (Simon 1994).

Biographical postings on the web and other writings, some by adoptees themselves, others by clinicians and social workers, support NABSW's view that, while transracial adoption is certainly viewed as better than foster care or remaining in an institution, it should be a last resort. Adoptees do not feel white parents are equipped to expose them to a diverse cultural perspective and certainly cannot tell them what it is like to repeatedly face racism (Raible, 2004). They lack resources to draw on what can only be provided by a community of color (Raible 1990). Though white adoptive parents may not be prejudiced or discriminating, Noerdlinger (2008) notes "colorblindness is a luxury young black children aren't afforded by this world." Unless the adoptive parents are proactive and sensitive to cultural differences, their adopted children may grow up unexposed to anything but a white view (Noerdlinger 2008; Garrett 1999). Some adoptees become alienated from their adoptive families as they seek their black roots, and may also be conflicted (Raible 1990).

Clearly, racism has serious consequences for the child welfare system (Testa, Poertner and Derezotes 2004); for transracially-adopted children (DeBerry, Scarr and Weinberg 1996; McRoy and Grape 1999; Tieman, van der Ende and Verhulst 2005); for their adoptive families (Brooks and James, 2003); for potential adoptive parents in the African American community (Chestang 1972; Hollingsworth 1998; Mosley-Braun 1995; NABSW 2006); and for adoption agencies (Carter-Black 2002).

Impact of Racial Stereotyping on Adoption in the USA

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2003:14), about one-sixth (17.1 percent) of all adoptions in the USA, including domestic and inter-country adoptions, were transracial, including thousands adopted from Asia each year. However, this Census Report does not provide information about the race of adoptive parents, nor how many white families in the USA transracially- adopted a non-white foreign-born child as opposed to an American-born child. Despite the decline in discriminatory behavior since the Civil Rights era (Marden, Meyer and Engel 1992; Anderson and Massey 2001; Schaefer 2005; Roby and Shaw 2006),

white prejudice and discriminatory practices persist in the USA. Racial stereotyping was often fueled by sensationalism in the media. For example, although it is well-known that addicted babies are born to women of all races, media attention to addicted infants born to African American women, as well as other health concerns, served to reinforce fears of adopting African American babies, driving many people to seek foreign-born children (Glaser 2004; Roby and Shaw 2006).

Racism in USA Adoption Agencies: Barriers to Adoption

Racism also affects the number of African American families who become adoptive parents in the USA. Chestang's (1972, p. 104) view that the number of African American children remaining in institutions and foster care reflected "discrimination and other societal impediments" by African Americans, not their unwillingness to adopt. This view was echoed 26 years later by Hollingsworth (1998), who maintained that same-race parents are ready to adopt but ethno-racial discrimination in child welfare services interfered. During the mid-1980's a National Urban League study found that only one percent of 800 potential African American parents were selected or approved; the national average for white parents at the time was 10 percent (Mosley-Braun 1995).

Impact of Racism on Birth Parents in the USA

A small percentage of birth mothers of African American or biracial children who requested adoption preferred inter-country placement for their babies for idiosyncratic reasons, such as the desire to remove the child from the path of an abusive partner, or to avoid the scrutiny of the adoption because the birth mother was undocumented (Smolowe 1994). However, many more who requested inter-country adoption were motivated by fear of the impact that American racism would have on their children (*World News Tonight* 2006; Brown 2013) and believed that an African American child or child of mixed heritage would face fewer obstacles abroad. This attitude was encouraged by personnel at some adoption agencies (Davenport 2004; O'Neill, et al. 2005; Smolowe 1994). In one adoption agency, where only 10 percent of African American birth mothers insisted on a same race family for their children, the executive reportedly told birth mothers that in his agency's experience there was less racial prejudice in Canada than in the USA. He has been quoted as saying, "Especially in Canada, people are just color blind" (*60 Minutes* 2005).

Transracial Adoption from the USA

By 2005, at least 300 black adoptees from the USA lived in an area of British Columbia where blacks comprise less than one percent of the population (*60 Minutes* 2005). According to an adoption worker there, adoptive families who sought USA-born infants were "not ignoring the race issue, but they don't think, like the Americans, that the less black the better" (Davenport 2004). Between 1993 and 2005, Adoption-Link, an agency specializing in adoption of African American, biracial, and multiracial children, placed one-third (74) of its children with white Canadians and others in Western Europe (O'Neill, et al. 2005). While that agency supported same-race placements, it also facilitated transracial placements and attempted to prepare families for transracial adoptions. The agency stressed that a child's "heritage must be acknowledged and celebrated" and it required that non-African American families anticipating a transracial adoption participate in a course designed to heighten racial sensitivity (Adoption-Link 2006; Bridge Communications, Inc. 2015, Homepage). In efforts to maintain the children's cultural roots and minimize adjustment problems, some Canadians who adopted children from the USA formed self-help groups, took courses dealing with race, and organized seminars about black heritage, black history and racial issues. They bought artifacts reflective of their children's heritage; thus African drums and paintings of Harlem in the 1920s might be found in a home in Vancouver (Glaser 2004). Some sent their children to all-black summer camps (*60 Minutes* 2005). These parents tried to strike a balance between "celebrating a culture and inviting stereotypes" (Glaser 2004). Some of the children saw few black adults and initially were even fearful of them. One was confused and asked his adoptive father, "At what age do I become white, like you?" (Glaser 2004). Therefore, the parents tried to build a community inclusive of black friends (*World News Tonight* 2005), actively seeking African American role models in popular culture and Afro-Canadian models in their neighborhoods (O'Neill et al.

2005). Some families moved from the suburbs to more diverse downtown areas in Vancouver and became active in the Afro-Canadian Adoption Network in British Columbia. Their efforts were aided by members of Vancouver's small and diverse black community, whom they recruited as mentors for their children, especially their adolescents. Mentors respected that the families did not try to avoid issues associated with race, but rather confronted them (O'Neill et al. 2005). While infants and girls may have experienced fewer problems, teenagers, and especially boys, faced stereotyping and bigotry (Glaser 2004; O'Neill et al. 2005). Some children reported being teased, while others were stereotyped as having musical talent or being good basketball players.

A similar process was seen in Europe. Adoptive parents in the Netherlands realized their children would face prejudice; this was fanned as many blacks from previously Dutch colonies now living in the Netherlands were viewed by some as competitors for jobs. Dutch families wanting to adopt a newborn whose medical records were available, had facility in the English language, and favored open adoption turned to the USA (Brown 2013; Davenport 2004). As occurred in Canada and also Germany (Davenport 2004), adoptive parents in the Netherlands formed support groups for themselves, and also groups to help their children develop a positive self-image.

THE HAGUE ADOPTION CONVENTION

Formally entitled The Hague Adoption Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoptions, the Convention is an international agreement designed to safeguard the adoption triad, including birth parents, adoptive parents, and children involved in inter-country adoptions. The Convention seeks to eliminate trafficking in children, their sale, abduction and abuse, including sexual abuse, by making the process transparent and having a uniform set of standards guiding inter-country adoptions. Its overriding goals are "the best interests of children" and protection of their rights. The outgoing country must be able to establish that the child is actually an orphan or that there is no other family available to take permanent responsibility for his/her care and upbringing. Hence the Convention is opposed to infant adoption and favors that of older children and children who, because of physical, mental or emotional challenges, have

not had successful placements. The Convention also mandates data collection on children who are adopted or are being considered for it, including home visits, interviews with adoptive parents and pre-adoption training for them, as they will face cross-cultural and perhaps transracial issues when bringing the child to their country. The Convention seeks to ensure that the birth mother has a minimum of several weeks to make a final decision about adoption. It is opposed to private adoptions and adoptions with countries that have not implemented the Convention.

In 1993, when the Convention was first circulated, 51 countries ratified it almost immediately, making its terms legally binding. There were an additional 30 accessions, that is non-member nations agreeing to the Convention's terms, and three signatories who supported the principles but whose governments had not yet ratified the Convention. Due to pressure from people in the USA seeking to adopt from other countries and from agencies whose economic survival depended on inter-country adoptions, the USA did not fully implement the Convention until mid-year in 2008, despite signing it well over a decade earlier. By 2010, there were 83 contracting countries and four signatories.

Out-Going Adoption since the Hague Convention

Official statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security are sent to the U.S. Department of State for inclusion in its annual report to Congress (See Tables 1 and 2). As stated, The Hague Convention requires a diligent effort to find suitable adoptive parents in the USA before an outgoing adoption can be approved. However, this number does not give a full picture as, prior to July 2014, with the implementation of the Inter-Country Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012, approval was not required when birth parents located adoptive parents outside the country without the help of a licensed agency. Hence there was a disparity between the official and unofficial statistics reported.

Although still small, the number of unofficial international adoptions consistently increased through 2013, with both a growing number of states participating and a growing number of countries seeking children for potential adoptive families. Unofficial data include adoptions from state foster care systems and privately arranged adoptions which were not reported by the U.S. Department of State (Brown 2013). A British expert

who serves as a statistical advisor to the United Nations notes there were 319 outgoing adoptions from the U.S. in 2009, though only 27 were reported by the State Department in that year. Similarly, 2010 data from only five receiving countries – Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Ireland -- reported 205 adoptions of children born in the USA, while the State Department reported only 43 were sent to all receiving countries (Brown 2013). Smolin (2013) notes that some state laws in the USA are punitive towards birth parents because of short revocation periods. Further, "bait and switch tactics" may be used by some adoption agencies to induce families to relinquish custody. On the other hand, counseling of birth parents, many of whom are young and vulnerable, may put adoption agencies' financial interests above the families'.

Through 2013, a preponderance of inter-country adoptions covered by The Hague Convention continued to come from Florida, which headquarters four of the 21 agencies and individuals licensed by the federal government to handle outgoing adoptions. To a lesser extent South Carolina and New Jersey were also sources of such adoptions, with only occasional adoptions originating in other states. **Table 1** provides numerical and percentage data showing the receiving countries to which U. S.-born children have been sent for adoption. As **Table 1** indicates, 80% of these children were adopted by residents of two countries: the Netherlands and Canada (See Table 1). **Table 2** provides numerical and percentage data showing the states from which the adoptions originated. As **Table 2** shows, the majority (62%) of these children came from the state of Florida. Next in rank of sending states are New Jersey and South Carolina. Although both are considerably behind Florida in rank, these two states each account for nine percent of the outgoing adoptees. (See Table 2).

There are no data available in the USA regarding the child's age, gender, or race. The requirement of The Hague Convention curtailing infant adoption suggests older child adoptions among the official statistics. The large number of infants adopted from the USA in the Netherlands in 2009, shortly after the USA implemented The Hague Convention, created a furor in the Netherlands. Dutch authorities reasoned these infants could have been adopted in the USA and instituted limitations on adoption to include only children older than 10 years; young children facing physical or mental challenges; or children who are part of a sibling group (van Hooff 2010).

Gay couples in the Netherlands were estimated to account for close to 20% of adoptive parents (Smolin 2013). Although gay people may be able to adopt within their own country, the number of children available for domestic adoption cannot keep pace with the over 3000 families seeking adoption. Passage of the Social Assistance Act, increasing acceptance of single motherhood and increased availability of both contraception and legalized abortion, combined to reduce the number of infants for adoption. Domestic adoptions dropped sharply from 1209 in 1970 to 259 in 1980 and declined to 50 in 2000 (van Hooff 2010). By 2009 the number of domestic adoptions in the Netherlands was only 25. At the same time, international adoption in the Netherlands rose, peaking to 1307 in 2004. This was followed by a decline and, in 2006, only 816 children were adopted from other countries. By 2008, that number dropped to 756, due largely to a decline in the number of children who could be adopted from China, which was the largest source. Adoption of children from Haiti and the USA then became increasingly more common. In 2008, 56 children were adopted in the Netherlands from the USA, most of whom were placed before April of that year when The Hague Convention became operant (van Hooff, 2010). According to Illien International Adoptions, Inc. (2011), a Hague-accredited Inter-country Adoption Agency located in Atlanta, Georgia, similar measures limiting infant adoption were approved by France and Italy in 2011. Also in 2011, a delegation from the Adoption Authority of Ireland came to the USA to discuss inter-country adoption of American-born children, resulting in a temporary rise a year later in the number of children from the USA adopted in Ireland (U.S. Department of State 2013).

Although data regarding age and gender of children adopted by Hague Convention participants were not submitted to Congress in the USA, these data were provided to The Hague by the U.S. Department of State. Of the six cases of inter-country adoption reported in 2008, there were three boys and three girls; all were under the age of one year. One went to Canada, two to Germany and three to the Netherlands. The following year the number of official cases increased to 30, including 22 boys and eight girls; all but five were under the age of one year, and of the five all were between one and four years old. Most (19) went to the Netherlands, seven to Canada, two to the United Kingdom and one each to Austria and Switzerland (Hague Conference on Private International Law 2010: 3).

Table 1   Receiving Countries for U. S.-Born Outgoing Adoptees[a]

RECEIVING COUNTRY	2008[b]	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	
							N	%
Australia		1	1	1			3	0.9
Austria					5	1	6	1.7
Canada	1	5	19	31	41	35	132	37.6
Curacao				1			1	0.3
Germany	2	2	2	2			8	2.3
Ireland				5	14	5	24	6.8
Mexico				1	1		2	0.6
Netherlands	21	17	18	27	28	38	149	42.5
South Africa			1				1	0.3
Spain				1			1	0.3
Switzerland				2	4	2	8	2.3
Tanzania						1	1	0.3
United Kingdom	1	2	2	2	6	2	15	4.3
Total	25	27	43	73	99	84	351	100.2%

[a]These data were compiled by the authors from statistics provided by the U.S. Department of State for 2008-2013. To view the 2013 statistics, go to: http://adoption.state.gov/content/pdf/fy2013_annual_report.pdf

[b]Includes statistics for April 1, 2008-September 30, 2008.

Table 2   States Sending U. S.-Born Outgoing Adoptees Abroad[a]

STATE	2008[b]	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total N	%
Alabama					1		1	0.3
Arkansas					1		1	0.3
California	2	1	2	3	6	3	17	4.8
Colorado					1		1	0.3
Florida	17	16	27	49	64	45	218	62.1
Hawaii					1	1	2	0.6
Illinois					2		2	0.6
Indiana	2	1				1	4	1.1
Kansas				1	1	2	4	1.1
Louisiana					1		1	0.3
Maine					1	1	2	0.6
Minnesota						1	1	0.3
Missouri					1	2	3	0.9
Nevada		1	1	1	1		4	1.1
New Jersey		2	4	4	5	18	33	9.4
New York	2	3	3		1	2	11	3.1
Ohio					1		1	0.3
Pennsylvania	2			1	3		6	1.7
South Carolina		2	5	12	7	6	32	9.1
Texas			1	2	1	1	5	1.4
Utah		1				1	2	0.6
Total	25	27	43	73	99	84	351	100%

[a]These data were compiled by the authors from statistics provided by the U.S. Department of State for 2008-2013. To view the 2013 statistics, go to: http://adoption.state.gov/content/pdf/fy2013_annual_report.pdf

[b]Includes statistics for April 1, 2008-September 30, 2008.

There is little comparability of data reported by the U.S. Department of State to the U.S. Congress and that reported to The Hague. Furthermore, while data collected in the Netherlands included open adoptions arranged privately between birth and adoptive families, data collected in the USA did not include these adoptions. Part of the statistical dilemma should be remedied by the Inter-country Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012, which took effect July 2014. This Act requires that all inter-country adoptions comply with the same accreditation standards as Convention adoption cases.

Naughton's (2012) exploratory study of a small number of Canadian and USA adoption professionals revealed that Canadians preferred an open adoption of an infant with accessible health records, and favored the geographical proximity. In 2009 the Canadian government reported 253 adoptions from the USA, making it the second largest source of adoptees (Hilborn 2010). Similar to the pre-Hague years, most of the adoptees lived in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta or Ontario; the USA ranked first for international adoption in British Columbia and Alberta. However, in the same year the USA reported a total of only 26 Canadian adoptions to The Hague, raising the question of lack of oversight for this large number of unofficial adoptions.

As increasing numbers of countries that have contracted with The Hague are becoming sensitive to policies in adoptions involving infants, more are turning to the foster care system for older children in the USA. These countries include France, Italy, and Switzerland. Illien Adoptions International, for example, established its program in 2011 in order to facilitate these adoptions. As African American and Hispanic children are disproportionately represented in foster care systems in almost all states (NCJFCJ, 2012: 3), including states where outgoing adoption is most prevalent, it is likely that not only infants, but also older children adopted from the USA, will be transracially-adopted (Avitan 2007).

Studies have shown that older adoptees have a difficult time generally, and those who must experience a transition to another country have a particularly difficult adjustment. Children over the age of 5, and especially those older than 10 years, who have been acculturated in the USA, learned English or Spanish and formed ethno-racial identities within the USA, who are taken to countries to live with families of different cultures, most of whom are white, are particularly challenged. Numerous studies have shown children who are dealing not only with dislocation but also the immigration experience to be the most likely of all children and adolescents to have problems in school, and to develop numerous other problems, including difficulties with social adjustment, substance abuse, and psychiatric illness (Hjern. Lindblad and Vinnerljung, 2002; Lindblad, Hjern and Vinnerljung 2003; von Borczyskowski et al. 2006). Furthermore, the Donaldson Institute's review of the professional literature on the impact of age on adoptees' adjustment – both age at adoption and age at which the child's adjustment is assessed – shows that problems not only grow and peak in the pre-teen and teen years, but may remain throughout the adult years (McGinness et al. 2009: 29-41).

DISCUSSION

Activity within the USA around The Hague Convention tightened the oversight for the 351 children reported by the Department of State as leaving the USA for inter-country adoption between 2008 and 2013 under the auspices of the Convention (See Table 1). However, at least until the implementation of the most recent federal legislation, the Inter-Country Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012, which took effect in July 2014, statistics reported by the U.S. Department of State to Congress and The Hague have significantly under-reported the total number of outgoing adoptions. Children were still being placed internationally for adoption with no requirement by the federal government for supervision of the adoption, leaving children who were adopted outside the purview of The Hague Convention at risk. Thus there is a need for the professions to take a proactive role in ensuring full compliance with this protective legislation. As Smolin (2013:151) notes, there is a need for the professional community to champion adoption law reform – "it is a matter of clarity of vision, and political will." In addition, as greater numbers of older children are adopted transracially, as well as inter-nationally from the United States, monitoring and assessing the outcomes of these adoptions will be very important.

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About the Authors: Madeline H. Engel, MA and PhD, Fordham University, is Professor of Sociology, Lehman College, City University of New York. She is the author of books and scholarly articles in the fields of minorities, adoption, and criminology.

Norma K. Phillips, MSW, Hunter College School of Social Work; DSW, Yeshiva University, is Professor, Social Work Dept, Lehman College, City University of New York. She is the author of books and scholarly articles on adoption, urban children, urban social work, and mass violence.

Frances A. Della Cava, MA, Counseling, Teachers' College, Columbia University; PhD, Sociology, Fordham University, is Assistant Professor Emerita of Sociology and former Director, Adult Degree Program, Lehman College, City University of New York. She is the author of books and scholarly articles in women's studies, adoption, sociology of religion, and adult education.

Adopting Children from U. S. Public Foster Care: A Sociological Analysis with Practical Implications

Josephine A. Ruggiero[a]

Abstract

Adoption has increased in importance as both an exit goal and exit outcome for 20-25% of children in public foster care. Although reunification with parents or another biological relative retains primacy as the first option for permanency planning, the percentage of children actually reunified with a biological family member has decreased by nine percent from 60% to 51%. The author uses data collected by the federal government and reported in AFCARS Reports collected over 16 fiscal years to analyze the principal demographic characteristics of children in U. S. public foster care; examine adoption and reunification as exit goals and outcomes for children in foster care; and link patterns and trends in the data with innovative strategies aimed at improving the effectiveness of the public foster care system in regard to permanency planning and post-placement family wellbeing. Although the AFCARS data analyzed indicate that the U. S. public foster care system has improved in a number of areas, the author takes the position that more can be done both to prevent family disruptions and to support positive permanency planning outcomes. She also advocates improving some existing policies along with developing new proactive strategies.

Keywords: U. S. foster care system; adoption or reunification as foster care exit outcomes; proactive versus reactive foster care policies; improving the wellbeing of reunified and post-adoptive families in need of services or support.

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists in the U. S. became interested in the field of family studies after World War II. However, despite all that sociologists have researched and written about families since then, with some notable exceptions, sociologists and sociology journals have generally neglected the topic of adoption.

More than 60 years ago H. David Kirk began to study and write about the role of adoption in building families. Kirk's (1984) book, *Shared Fate: A Theory and Method of Adoptive Relationships*, first published in 1964, remains a classic both in regard to theory and methodology. An adoptive father himself, Kirk directed the Adoption Research Project at McGill University in

Canada from 1951 to 1961. This project compiled data about the attitudes and experiences of 2000 adoptive families in Canada and the United States. Most of the families were headed by infertile couples. In *Shared Fate*, Kirk talked about the "role handicap" which characterized the experience of adoptive parents as well as infertility being stigmatized and infertile couples experiencing discrimination. In analyzing the adoptive families he studied Kirk observed and introduced the important concepts of "rejection-of-difference" and "acknowledgment-of-difference." Parents who rejected the difference claimed to be no different than biological parents and did not discuss the adoption while the latter accepted that they were different and did acknowledge

[a]Professor Emerita of Sociology, Providence College

their child/ren were adopted. The following quote sums up the importance of Kirk's book to the field of adoption research:

> *Shared Fate* was important for two reasons. First, it analyzed adoption as an important social institution rather than as an arrangement made by individuals seeking to solve a range of personal problems. Second, it promoted a decisive shift in the world of adoption away from simulation and toward diversity as the foundation for family-making. (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/sharedfate.htm)

Unfortunately, Kirk's book was not widely acclaimed by sociologists and, therefore, it did not break the so-called "adoption invisibility barrier."

Other sociologists have written books about adoption. Some books have been written solely by sociologists; others have been written in conjunction with authors in related fields-- for example, Feigelman and Silverstein 1983; Simon and Altstein, 1990, 1992; Simon, Alstein and Melli 1994; Simon and Roorda 2000; Tessler, Gamache and Liu 1999; Momin 2008; and Ruggiero 2007.

Sociologists also have published their work on adoption in social work, adoption, or psychology journals-- for example, Feigelman (1997); Feigelman et al. (1998); Ruggiero and Johnson, 2009; Tessler and Gamache 2012; Ruggiero 2014; and Park and Wonch Hill 2014.

Articles written by sociologists on adoption have appeared in a few sociology journals. Goldberg's (1997; 2001) work on adoption from Romania was published in *Marriage and Family Review* and in the *International Review of Sociology*. Canadian sociologist Miall (1987, 1996) published two papers on adoption: "The Stigma of Adoptive Parent Status" and "Community Constructs of Involuntary Childlessness: Sympathy,

Stigma, and Social Support" which both appeared in the journal, *Family Relations*. In 1994, Miall also published "Community Constructs of Involuntary Childlessness: Sympathy, Stigma, and Social Support" which appeared in the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*. In 2000, March and Miall published "Adoption as a Family Form" in the journal, *Family Relations*. Fisher's (2003a) critique of the portrayal of adoption in college texts and readers on families also appeared in *Family Relations*.

Fisher (2003b) must be credited with finally breaking the "adoption invisibility barrier" when his article, "Still 'Not Quite as Good as Having Your Own'? Toward a Sociology of Adoption," appeared in the volume 29 of the prestigious sociology journal, *Annual Review of Sociology*. In 2014, Wildeman and Waldfogel's article, "Somebody's Children or Nobody's Children? How the Sociological Perspective Could Enliven Research on Foster Care," appeared in volume 40 of *Annual Review of Sociology*. Wildeman and Waldfogel raised awareness of a second area that sociologists have long neglected: children in foster care. Wildeman and Waldfogel (2014)[1] make a solid argument for how the sociological perspective and the use of multiple methodologies can contribute significantly to social scientists' understanding of children in the U. S. foster care system. They talk about how children get into foster care and the effects of being in the foster system, especially long term.

Since the permanency planning goal for a sizeable minority of children in foster care may involve their being adopted rather than being reunified with their biological family, the topics of adoption and foster care are related. This paper has three objectives: 1) to use national-level data collected by the U. S. Department

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[1]Wildeman is a sociologist with a specialty in demography and Waldfogel has graduate degrees in public policy and education. Readers interested in a comprehensive historical overview of the U. S. foster care system are directed to Wildman and Waldfogel (2014: 602-605).

of Health and Human Services (Children's Bureau) and reported in Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) collected over 16 fiscal years to examine patterns in the demographic characteristics of children in U. S. public foster care over time; 2) to examine AFCARS data on adoption versus reunification as exit goals and outcomes; and 3) to link the patterns and trends observed in the empirical sections of this paper with proactive strategies aimed at improving the effectiveness of the public foster care system in regard to permanency planning and pre- and post-placement family wellbeing.

Research Plan

The empirical component of this paper is based on secondary analysis by the author of AFCARS data for fiscal years 1998 through 2013. AFCARS data are reported by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (Children's Bureau) in Reports 10-21. The federal government began to report statistics on children in the U. S. foster care system in FY 1998. At this writing, AFCARS Reports are available through FY 2013.[2] Appendix A discusses the strengths and limitations of using AFCARS data.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN THE POPULATION OF CHILDREN IN U. S. PUBLIC FOSTER CARE, FY 1998-FY 2013[3]

The analysis of AFCARS data reveals several interesting demographic trends. **First, the number of children in public foster care in the U. S. dropped by more than 150,000 children from FY 1998 through FY 2013**. In FY 2013, however, the pattern of decline was reversed, showing an increase of more than five thousand children (see Table 1 in Appendix B). The questions of whether the jump in the number of children in public foster care for FY 2013 is an anomaly

or will reflect a reversal of the downward direction of the numbers reported between FY 2002-2012 awaits future data. If this figure begins a reversal of direction, then analysts need to pay attention to the factors that may be involved.

Second, the average age of children in foster care has declined. The median age of children in public foster care was 9.6 years old in FY 1998. This figure reached a high of 10.9 years in FY 2003, then declined steadily to 8.2 years in FY 2013. The pattern for mean age of children in foster care was similar but showed less variation. The mean age of 9.6 years for children in foster care reported for FY 1998 reached a high of 10.2 years in FY 2002. Subsequently, the mean age of children in the U, S. foster care system declined to a low of 8.9 years in FY 2013 (see Table 2 in Appendix B).

As Table 3 shows, the percentages of children under 12 months of age in foster care *increased* by less than two percent. Those aged 1-2 years *increased* by less than five percent. Children aged 3-4 years *increased* only slightly. Children aged 5-9 and 10 years and older both showed modest *declines* overall (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

Third, the race-ethnic composition of children in foster care has changed in important ways. First, the percentage of African-American children in foster care *declined* consistently by one fifth. Once comprising

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[2]A fiscal year is different from a calendar year. The U. S. federal government defines a fiscal year as beginning on October 1 of a given year and ending on September 30 of the following year. For example, FY 1998 began on October 1, 1997 and ended on September 20, 1998.

[3]Demographic data for the variables described in this section are presented in Tables 1- 3 in Appendix B at the end of this paper. The author includes all tables relevant to the text of this paper in Appendix B for two reasons: 1. that sociologists and other social scientists interested in AFCARS data have a launching point from which to do further research on children in the U. S. foster care system, and 2. that readers of this paper who wish to look at the specific data on which the empirical component of this paper is based may do that.

37% of all children in foster care,[4] in FY 2013, African-American children comprised 22% of the foster care population. Second, White Non-Hispanic children in foster care increased by 10% over time. Third, the percentage of Hispanic children in care increased from a low of 15% (in FY 1998) to a high of 25% (in FY 2003). Subsequently, the percentage of Hispanic children in foster care hovered at 20-21% (see Table 4 in Appendix B).

Fourth, males consistently outnumbered females in public foster care by 4-5% (see Table 5 in Appendix B). Unfortunately, the reasons for this gender disparity are not addressed in AFCARS Reports. One hypothesis is that boys are more likely than girls to engage in violent or disruptive behavior. Because if their unmanageable behavior they are more likely to end up in foster care. A second hypothesis is that physical abuse is often more apparent with boys than girls. Although both boys and girls may be sexually abused by a parent or other caretaker, sexual abuse in families is more likely to involve female children who are victimized by an older male relative. Also, sexual abuse can be more easily hidden from public scrutiny than physical abuse. Therefore, it may go on for years before it is discovered.

Fifth, over time, the data show positive changes in the *average length* of stay of children in foster care. Both the median and the mean stay in care declined over time. In FY 1998, for example, the median stay in care was 20.5 months and the mean stay, 32.6 months. In FY 2013, these averages dropped to 12.8 years and 21.8 years respectively (see Table 6 in Appendix B). **Sixth, when specific lengths of stay in foster care are examined, only two time frame categories show the greatest percentage of change**. The most dramatic movement out of foster care was for children who had been in care for three or more years. The percentage of children who had spent at least 36 months in foster care category *declined* by 18% over time. The other positive change is that children moving through the foster care

system in less than 12 months increased by 11%-- from 35% in FY 1998 to 46% in FY 2013. The two middle length of time in foster care categories, 12-23 months in care and 24-35 months in care, showed very little or virtually no change respectively over time. Positive changes in the two extreme categories of stay in care-- under 12 months and 36 months or longer, show that at least some of the children have moved through the foster care system more quickly in recent fiscal years (see Table 7 in Appendix B).

WAYS to EXIT the PUBLIC FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Children may exit the system officially by being reunified with a parent or other biological relative, through adoption, emancipation, or guardianship. The principal exit strategy for children is reunification. When the goal of reunification is unlikely and after parental rights have been terminated, the case goal for waiting children becomes adoption. Since the late 1990s, adoption has gotten increased attention at both federal and state levels as an option for exiting foster care. Each fiscal year since AFCARS data have been reported, at least one in five children left state care because they were adopted by a non-relative. Financial incentives to states and adoptive families may be involved in encouraging adoptions of children from the U. S. public foster care system.

CHANGES IN FEDERAL LEGISLATION: FROM REUNIFICATION TO GREATER OPENNESS TO ADOPTION

Pre-1997, federal legislation focused primarily on child abuse prevention, treatment, and family re-unification with adoption viewed as a last-ditch effort.

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[4]Reported in Recent Demographic Trends in Foster Care, Data Brief 2013-1. ACYF Office of Data, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation, September, 2013, Discussion: p. 5.

In 1997, with the **Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)**, adoption was given a more central role in permanency planning for children unlikely to be re-unified with biological parents.

Since the **ASFA of 1997**, the goal of adoption for children in foster care who will not be reunited with their biological parents has become more important. A number of changes have been developed at the federal level to increase the number and reduce the time frame in foster or other state care for children in state custody who are deemed free for adoption. The historical time line in Appendix C (at the end of this paper) shows the federal government's involvement, through major legislation, to better regulate and change the actions of states relative to children in state custody because of parental abuse and/or neglect. This timeline includes legislation put in place between 1974 and 2011. The **ASFA:**

1. required states to have a permanency plan for a child in state care *within one year;*

2. required *termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months of their lives OR whose parents have killed or seriously injured another child in the family;* and

3. *offered financial incentives to states that increase adoptions of children from foster care over the previous year's total.* The federal government offered financial incentives to states of up to $4,000 per adoption and $6,000 in cases of special needs adoptions.[5]

In 2003, the **Adoption Promotion Act (APA)** came into effect. This U. S. federal statute, signed into law by then President George W. Bush, re-authorized $43 million per year in funds for performance-based adoption incentives to states which increased the number of children adopted from foster care. These incentive payments were drawn from Part E of Title IV of the Social Security Act.

This act added a new type of bonus to the Adoption Incentive Payments Program for adoptions of children *ages 9 or older*. In 2004, the **Children's Bureau Discretionary Grant Program's** priorities included permanency for older children as a special emphasis. The **Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) added an *award category* for adoptions of older children called the Adoption Excellence Awards; and the **Collaboration to AdoptUSKids** launched a *national multimedia adoptive family recruitment campaign* and has been studying the factors that contribute to successful special needs adoptions, primarily adoptions of older children, and barriers to adoption from foster care. In 2008, **The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act** became federal law.[6] The 2008 Act amended parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security. The goals were "to connect and support relative caregivers, improve outcomes for children in foster care, provide for tribal foster care and adoption access, improve incentives for adoption, and for other purposes."

The creation of these federal acts and initiatives implied that there would be concomitant annual increases in federal funding and financial resources to states to support them. Unfortunately, the federal sequester of January, 2013 and subsequent financial constraints have drastically reduced the amount of money available to states for social welfare goals, including providing financial incentives to promote domestic adoption of teens and older youth still in the public foster care system.

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[5] Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, P.L. 105-89, pdf available at: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=105_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ89.105.pdf.

[6] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/congress_adopt.pdf(retrieved on 8-9-13)

TRENDS in PERMANENCY PLANNING for CHILDREN in PUBLIC FOSTER CARE: REUNIFICATION or ADOPTION

AFCARS data for fiscal years 1998-2013 report that the percentage of children for whom reunification was the goal *increased* by 14% over time from 39% to 53% (see Table 8 in Appendix B). However, during the same time frame, the percentage of children for whom reunification was the Exit Plan *Outcome* (e.g., actually happened) *declined* by 9%, from a high of 60% to a low of 51% (see Table 9 in Appendix B.). These data suggest that, in the most recent fiscal years, only about half of the children for whom reunification was the targeted goal actually were reunified with a parent or other biological relative. This inconsistency in the Exit Plan Outcome versus Goal of reunification implies that the Exit Strategy Goal for some of the children who did not get reunified changed to adoption.

The AFCARS data analyzed in this paper show that between 20-25% of the children in public foster care had adoption as their Exit Plan *Goal* (see Table 10 in Appendix B). However, when the percentage of children *actually adopted* is calculated on the base of the number of children *waiting to be adopted* in a given fiscal year, this percentage increased fairly consistently over time, from nearly three in 10 (31%) of the waiting children to almost 5 in 10 (49%) (see Table 11 in Appendix B). As a measure of the success of adoption as an Exit *Outcome*, the increase in adoptions over time is a hopeful sign for giving adoption priority as a permanency planning decision for waiting children for whom family reunification was not feasible.

However, in every fiscal year, more children were waiting to be adopted than were actually adopted (see the last column of Table 12). The "numbers gap" varied from a high of almost 17,000 children in FY 2000 to a low of about 8,500 children in FY 2012. There are several plausible hypotheses for this numbers gap. One

is that some children for whom the goal of reunification initially planned had their Exit Goal changed by the court to adoption. The second hypothesis is that some children may not have had an Exit Outcome Goal set until later in their foster care stay, at which time their Exit Goal became adoption. A third hypothesis is that the process of exiting foster care moved too slowly for thousands of children.

Unfortunately, despite legislation created at the federal level, the time that foster children may wait for a permanent family can vary from months to years. The process of termination of parental rights depends, in part, on the courts whose caseload may be very large. Second, if parental rights are terminated, children must wait in foster or group homes for an adoptive placement to be found. Unless a foster parent or relative steps up to adopt them, delays may drag on. Once placed in a pre-adoptive home, the children must wait for the legal process of adoption to be completed.

Some children either remained in the foster care for the long term *or* did not have case goals in place. For example, in FY 1998, 7% of the children in care were identified as being in long-term foster care and 22% as not yet having a case plan goal established. By FY 2013, the percentages of children in long-term care had dropped slightly from 7 to 5%. Perhaps more importantly, the percentages of children who did not have a case goal in place dropped markedly, from 22% to 7%.

Regarding the ages of the children who get adopted, in general, younger children were likely to be adopted in the greatest numbers. The data on the age ranges of children when their adoption was finalized are organized into six age ranges in Table 13: <1 year, 1-5 years, 6-9 years, 10-14 years, 15-17 years, and 18-20 years. These data show a consistent 9% *increase* in the percentages of children under age five who were adopted from public foster care over time. For children

aged 10-14 years, the data showed a percentage *decrease* of nearly six percent overall in their adoptions. When children in foster care reach the age of 15 and older, the likelihood of their being adopted is slim (see Table 13 in Appendix B). The patterns of adoption of younger children raises the question of what happens to older teens who do not get adopted? The likely answer is that they age out of the foster care system and became homeless.

The data in Table 14 show that, prior to their being adopted, the majority of the children in foster care lived in foster family settings, typically with foster parents who were **not** biological relatives. The practice of placing foster children with non-relatives varied from approximately 52-59%. In contrast, the percentages of relative pre-adoptive foster placements were much smaller, varying between 16% and 24%. Only 10-17% of children targeted for adoption lived in their pre-adoptive homes (see Table 14 in Appendix B). These data raise questions about the connection between reunification, adoption, and pre-adoptive placement settings. If more children were placed initially with biological relatives would their prospects of reunification with a family member be better and take place sooner? Also, why has the percentage of children living in a "trial home setting" been so small over time-- one percent or less?

With the data reported in Table 14 regarding pre-adoptive placement settings in mind, it is not surprising that the majority of children who become available for adoption are adopted by their foster parents. Foster parent adoptions ranged from a high of 64% to a low of 53%.[7] The data also how a consistent *increase* in "other relative" adoptions of children in public foster care over time and, except for FY 2013, a *concomitant decrease* of non-relative adoptions (see Table 15 in Appendix B). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that foster parents and other relatives got the first opportunity to interact with and adopt the youngest, less troubled adoptees; whereas, in general, older, more troubled adoptees

wait longer in the foster care system to be adopted by unrelated others.[8]

Regarding the family structures which adoptees join, at least two thirds entered married couple families. The next largest adopter category was single women. The percentages of single women adoptive parents remained relatively consistent over time, varying between a high of 31% in FY 1999 and 2000 to a low of 26% in FY 2006. AFCARS data show that only two to three percent of single men adopted from the foster care system. The unmarried couples category of adopters was also in the single digits and showed only a two percent increase over time (see Table 16 in Appendix B).

RISKS to CHILDREN, POTENTIAL ADOPTERS, and SOCIETY of CHILDREN WAITING TOO LONG in FOSTER CARE

Based on his analysis of AFCARS data for FY 2009, Zill (2011) concluded that nearly 50,000 children will stay in foster care for five or more years and 30,000 will remain there until to be adopted from the foster care system in a *given year*. Part of Zill's (2011) conclusion was they reach adulthood.[9] He also stated that fewer than 15% of the children in foster care are likely based on the risks and delays of adopting from public foster

[7]The AFCARS reporting system changed how it calculated this variable for 2013. For FY 1998-2012, relatives who were also foster parents were classified in these data *only* as relatives. In FY 2013, states were encouraged to classify adoptive parents into all the categories that applied to them. Therefore, foster parents could also classify themselves as relatives, non-relatives, or either. Of the children adopted by a foster parent in 2013, 2,535 (8.6%) were identified as also being a relative of the child; 7,032 (24 %) were identified as being a non-relative, and 19,861(67.4%) did not identify whether the foster parent was a relative or a non-relative. Because the categories are not mutually exclusive, the total for this variable for FY 2013 adds up to 120% rather than 100%.
[8]The term unrelated others is used to refer to adopters who are neither biological relatives nor a child's foster parents.
[9]Zill, N. May, 2011. Report entitled "Adoption from Foster Care: Aiding Children While Saving Public Money."
http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/05/adoption-foster-care-zill

care. In FY 2009, a peak year for adoptions of children in state custody, Zill (2011) reported that just over twice as many children had a case goal of adoption *and* had parents whose rights had been legally terminated by the courts—that is, were available to be adopted. Both the private and public costs of youth having no family on which to rely are heavy.

For potential adoptive parents, Zill (2011) identified three legitimate areas of concern: the long-term effects of adopting a child who has experienced early pre-adoption traumas, the unknown genetic risk factors a child may carry in his/her DNA, and the delays in foster care adoption.

The public costs of removing abused and severely neglected children from their birth families and caring for them in foster families, group homes, or institutions are substantial. Zill (2011) reported that state and federal expenditures for public foster care *yearly* amount to more than $9 billion under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act *alone*. Does it make sense to use Social Security funds for this purpose? The Social Security system was intended to provide basic support for senior citizens. Clearly, Social Security is already an over-burdened fund. Therefore, at the federal level, the decision to use Social Security funds to provide financial assistance to waiting foster children and adoptive families should be re-examined. Necessary funding to assist waiting foster children and adoptive families should come from other sources.

"Although exact amounts are difficult to disentangle, even more money is spent for publicly-subsidized medical care for foster children and food stamps, cash welfare, and child care payments to the families that care for them."[10]

In addition to dollars spent, one must also include the longer-term costs that society incurs from developmental risks associated with child maltreatment and family disruption. Zill (2011) pointed out

that children in the U.S. foster care system are a disproportionate number of their share in the general population of young people who encounter problems with authority (i.e., have serious disciplinary problems in schools and drop out of high school). They are also more likely to be unemployed, homeless, produce children while unmarried teenagers, abuse drugs and alcohol, commit crimes and be over-represented in state and federal prison populations. According to Zill (2011),

"in 2004 there were almost 190,000 inmates of state and federal prisons in the U.S. who had a history of foster care during their childhood or adolescence. These foster care alumni represented nearly 15 percent of the inmates of state prisons and almost 8 percent of the inmates of federal prisons. The cost of incarcerating former foster youth was approximately $5.1 billion per year."[11]

In a 2007 report, California, the state which has the largest number of children in public foster care in the U.S., reported the following statistics about foster children who aged out of the system via emancipation-- that is without having a family on which to rely:

- 63% left care without a place to live;

- 51% had no job;

- Emancipated females were four times as likely to be on public assistance than was the general population;

- Fewer than three percent went to college.

- Although foster children made up less than one percent of California's population, they accounted for 40% of those living in homeless shelters and were represented disproportionately in that state's prison

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[10]Zill, 2011.
[11]Zill, 2011.

population.[12]

If these statistics are even reasonably accurate, then, in situations where reunification with a biological parent or relative is impossible, adoption should be promoted as a timely, first-choice option for waiting children to become part of stable families. Unfortunately, adoption still seems to have a public stigma attached to it. The stigma of "being less than the real thing" is attached, in some people's minds, to both adopters and adoptees. This belief can affect the actions of professionals who make decisions about permanency planning, people considering adoption, others. Adoptive parents and adoptees may also encounter prejudice and discrimination in their day-to-day interactions in the school system and possibly elsewhere in their communities.

LINKING AFCARS TRENDS TO PROACTIVE PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Since U.S. adoption policies are controlled by state governments and are affected by both formal and informal practices, innovative adoption strategies need to be directed at both the state and federal levels. The AFSCARS data analyzed and reported earlier in this paper show that the number of children in the U.S. foster care system declined by more than 150,000 children between fiscal years 1998 and 2013. However, in FY 2013, more than 400,000 children were still in foster care. Regarding race-ethnicity, the percentage of Black and African American children in care *declined* significantly over time. The percentage of Hispanic children declined, peaked at 25%, then *stabilized* at 20-21%. The percentage of children of "other" and mixed race *increased* as did the percentage of Non-Hispanic White children in foster care.

AFCARS data trends also show, in general, that children are moving through the system faster. Second, regarding projected Exit Goal Outcomes, reunification

is taking place but has declined by nine percent. Third, the percentage of adoptees among those children waiting to be adopted has also increased. However, this third trend is more likely to reflect the permanency plan experience of younger than older children in foster care. Specifically, the data show that, even after changes in federal laws and acts, foster children ages 15-17 years and especially those 18 years and older have a very small to dismal chance of being adopted respectively.

Unfortunately, changes in the federal acts and initiatives discussed earlier in this paper do not necessarily compel or reflect uniform changes in the behavior of foster care case workers, DCYF supervisors, family court judges, and others connected with making decisions about the futures of children in foster care across states. A data brief released by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) in September, 2013 reported the contributions of specific states and counties to the changing patterns of children in U. S. public foster care.[13] According to data presented in Figure 2 of this ACYF report, 10 states accounted for more than 90% of the *decline* in the foster care population between 2002 and 2012,[14] and three of these states for more than 50% of the *decline* of children in the public foster care.[15] In contrast, 10 states showed "some increase" in children in their foster care systems[16] and two states accounted for "relatively large increases."[17] Therefore, it is clear that some states have been more successful in reducing the number of children in foster care than others. Child welfare policy analysts need to

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[12]California Progress Report. January 17, 2007. " Expanding Transitional Services for Emancipated Foster Youth: An Investment in California's Tomorrow." The Children's Advocacy Institute. http://www.childrenuniting nations.org/who-we-are/foster-care-statistics/

[13]Recent Demographic Trends in Foster Care, Data Brief 2013-1. ACYF Office of Data, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation, September, 2013, Table 2, p. 4.

[14]CA, NY, FL, OH, IL, MD, PA, MI, GA, and NJ.

[15]CA, NY, and FL.

[16]WY, KY, OK, UT, AR, MS, IA, WV, NV, and IN.

[17]TX and AZ.

look to the successful states for models of what works best in the interest of children and families whose lives get connected with the foster care system.

The proactive strategies that follow are intended to add to the list of ways to bring about positive change in the foster care system and to assist and maintain the wellbeing of troubled biological and adoptive families.

Develop More and Better Pro-Active Strategies

In line with the shift to a pro-active agenda, changes in current practice models must include pro-active strategies to provide better support to at-risk families before their child/ren are removed from their parents' care and experience the trauma of family disruption and state involvement. Important recommendations for pro-active changes should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. identifying families at risk of child abuse and neglect as early as possible at the community/neighborhood level and doing that without stigmatizing or alienating these families;

2. working with/through churches and faith-based groups across religious denominations, and other volunteer organizations to help provide for families' and children's basic needs like low- or no-cost access to healthy food, health screenings, etc.;

3. providing easy access to, and transportation for, parent training during the pre- and post-natal stages for interested, low-income parents in at-risk populations;

4. developing models for "best practices" community outreach pilot programs;

5. identifying private and public funding sources and working with skilled grant writers to apply for and secure funds to support best-practices pilot programs.

6. allocating state funds to test the effectiveness of each alternative during and after best practice programs are put in place; and

7. changing the culture of public child welfare system in states that support "doing business as usual" instead of developing innovative policies and practices that work in the best interests of children and families;

Sociologists are experts at understanding social structures and culture. Social structures refer to the ways that people and groups relate to one another and which both directs and sets limits on human behavior (Henslin 2012). People create a culture to sustain and reinforce the values, beliefs, norms, and practices which a given social structure supports. Moreover, since cultures are passed on from generation to generation without much, if any, critical thinking by people socialized into that culture may restrict members' thinking and behavior to a business as usual model rather one that raise questions about best practices-- innovative ways of thinking and behaving.

The U. S. public foster care system is a social structure which has created a powerful culture that sustains it. Core components of this culture are often hidden to outsiders and, therefore, are extremely difficult to challenge and, as with many organizations, very resistant to change. However, additional positive change is possible.

Such changes may come about through initiating brain storming sessions which include diverse stake holders, broader discussion of best-practice models that are being used in some states and communities, and incorporating research results from high quality studies into testing out new policy strategies.

Revise the Reactive Practices and Policies Currently in Place Regarding Allegations of Child Abuse:

1. When investigating allegations of child abuse or neglect:

    a. Institute standardized practices across states to provide due process evaluations/assessments of the "evidence." The evidence should be reviewed by trained medical and other professionals, not by case workers.

    b. Avoid stigmatizing the parents who are accused of abuse or neglect. This is especially important in investigations of child abuse or neglect that are found to be *unsubstantiated.*

    c. Look first for qualified relatives or neighbors rather than strangers with whom to place the child during the review process. Compensate them appropriately while they are caring for the child/children.

2. When a claim of child abuse is substantiated, to minimize disruption of school and community for the child, look for, train and license responsible relatives (or family friends) as foster parents and place the child with them.

3. Standardize policies across states for the maximum time frame in which a parent of a child in foster care must make the necessary life changes for reunification to proceed.

Strengthen Strategies Which Expedite Adoptions:

Sometimes the wheels of the foster care system move too slowly. When it is in the best interest of the child and prospective adopter(s), the following are suggested as ways to expedite the process.

1. Offer more consistent incentives to prospective adopters:

    a. Financial: More dollars to increase the numbers of adoptions, especially of older children in foster care. Adoption incentives should be based on cost of living and will vary by region and state.

    b. Respite Services: Train more and better respite workers with whom adoptive parents can leave their child/ren for at least a few hours or overnight, as needed. Provide adoptive parents with a list of trained and bonded respite workers in the area where they live and vouchers for respite care;

    c. Provide more transparency (accountability) by states regarding:

        1. the length of time children spend in foster care before they are adopted;

        2. the number and type of settings in which the child/ren have lived prior to being referred to pre-adoptive parents;

        3. the priority that home finders/caseworkers give to specific adopter characteristics (e.g., age, race-ethnicity, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, etc.); and

        4. the process through which adoptive families are identified; and

        5. a reasonable time frame for moving waiting child/ren to pre-adoptive homes;

2. Expand the parameters of who is considered eligible to adopt an older child from the foster care system. Consider, for example, single women, empty nesters in their fifties and single men who can provide good role models for older male children. Eliminate age and racial requirements as criteria preventing a child's placement with a prospective adoptive parent or family. Regarding transracial placements, the children's *desire* and *need* for a permanent, loving parent/family should take precedence over race-ethnicity.

3. Do more effective outreach to locate potential adopters.

a. make finding adoptive parents for older waiting U. S. children a priority;

b. provide better preparation for life in their new family both to pre-adoptive parents and to pre-adoptees ages three and older;

c. provide financial support for post-adoptive counseling in positive relationship building in adoptive families and other services to families who need them.

Emancipated Youth

In situations where adoptive families cannot be found for older children who are getting close to aging out of foster care, the foster care system should recruit and train resource families to act in the capacity of surrogate parents or grandparents in regard to the former foster child's needs like finding work and housing and answering other questions that may arise. Ideally, emancipated teens would have the opportunity to spend time on holidays and other occasions with the resource family. It should be the obligation of all parties to develop a contract regarding the behavior expected of the surrogate family and emancipated youth. A case worker should meet with the exiting teen and the surrogate(s) to understand what is expected of each and the boundaries of their relationship. Depending on their circumstances, the length of involvement and boundaries might vary for surrogates and exiting youth.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Changing economic opportunities and conditions along with greater geographic distances from kin have adversely affected many contemporary families. With declining job opportunities for adults with less than a high school education and few or no marketable skills, the demise of job security for many middle and working-class jobs, and the lack of social supports provided by relatives in times of need, today's families have become more fragile. The shift from communal/traditional to post-modern societies and beyond has affected families in both negative and positive ways. The decline of community has affected biological and adoptive families negatively, especially families with special needs children. Because these families can become overwhelmed easily, they will need a variety of social supports and wrap-around services close to where they live-- services which continue to be available at low or no cost after reunification or adoption takes place. A village-like model of interdependent housing for families, including adoptive families, can be developed in cities, suburban communities, or in semi-rural settings.[18] Subsidies for housing and services may be paid, in part, by funding from states and the federal government as well as through grants from philanthropic organizations, private donations, and community organizations, including churches and other faith-based groups.

Future sociological research should focus on evaluating these program and policy changes. On the organizational level, a major question to answer is whether, and under what circumstances, existing child welfare policies are beneficial to children in foster care and their families? What policies or practices need to modified and in what specific ways? On the interpersonal level, sociologists can play an important role in studying the long-term success of reunification as well as older-child adoptions from foster care. These research foci would require collecting primary data at the macro (organizational) and micro (family) levels.

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[18]See the model is based on STIL, Stockholm Cooperative for Independent Living, developed by Adolf Ratska in 1996 and the Swedish in-home assistance programs of the 1980's. www.independentliving.org/docs-ratzka199605.html

Are sociologists willing to take on the many challenges of undertaking such research? Evaluation research is costly, time-consuming, and unpopular among those who wield the power in organizations which rest on flawed policies that produce negative, unintended outcomes. However, having these data and analyses would be well worth the effort because they could lead to better informed foster care policies which genuinely put the wellbeing of vulnerable children and their families first.

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APPENDIX A: Strength and Limitations of Using AFCARS Data

AFCARS Reports have the principal strength that the federal government has the resources for compiling statistics on children in U. S. foster care at the national, state or territory, and county levels. Therefore, these reports provide a singularly important source of data about children in U. S. foster care.

Unfortunately, AFCARS data are not user-friendly to researchers outside of AFCARS statisticians. First, the aggregated form in which these data are available to interested researchers presents a major challenge to the secondary analyst. The most important limitation centers on the limited type and level of analysis researchers can do with these data. By reporting only single-variable statistics in AFCARS Reports, secondary analysts who work with AFCARS data cannot use them to do more sophisticated bi-variate and multivariate analyses.

There is no one in authority to answer questions. The NRC-CWDT which apparently used to provide some assistance to researchers working with AFCARS data closed operation on September 30, 2014. I contacted the designated person at the Regional Office in May, 2015 with my questions and concerns but did not receive any response.

Second, researchers usually wish to get access to, and use, the most current and accurate statistics for each fiscal year in a timely fashion. Unfortunately, AFCARS data estimates may be designated as Preliminary, Interim, or Final. For example, the data reported in AFCARS Report 12 for FY 1998 through FY 2002 inclusive are designated as *Final* estimates. This report is dated October, 2006. In contrast, the data presented in AFCARS Report 10 for FY 2003, reported in June, 2006, are designated as Interim. AFCARS Reports 11, 13-19 and 21 contain data designated as Preliminary. Report

20 contains data estimated at two points: in July and November of 2013. So there may be time differences in a given fiscal year about when reports are compiled.

A third major challenge is inconsistencies in numbers and the lack of number totals for any variable distributions included in AFCARS Reports. For example, in FY 2013, 50,608 children were reported in care but the total number of children for whom age at adoption was available as calculated by the author was 50,603 children. There are also some inconsistencies in totals across AFCARS Reports.

A fourth challenge is that the majority of AFCARS Reports provide Preliminary estimates for a given fiscal year; however, these statistics may be collected or reported in June, July, or November of the next calendar year. There is no explanation for why numbers reported for some fiscal years vary in the month in which they are reported.

A fifth issue is the lengthy time lag in reporting Final estimates data for a given set of fiscal years, as noted in Footnote 2 of this paper.

Finally, since national-level statistics are compiled from data reported by individual states and U. S. territories, the risk of potential errors may occur at any reporting point along the way in collecting national-level AFCARS data. Despite these limitations, AFCARS Reports provide one of the few, if not the only, opportunity for sociologists to examine a number of demographic variables about children who enter the foster care system, how long they remain in foster care and the circumstances under which they leave.

APPENDIX B: Tables 1-16

Table 1. Number of Children in Public Foster Care in the U. S., Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Number of Children in Public Foster Care[b]
1998	559,000
1999	567,000
2000	552,000
2001	545,000
2002	533,000
2003	520,000
2004	517,000
2005	513,000
2006	510,000
2007	491,000
2008	463,000
2009[b]	423,773
2010	408,425
2011	400,540
2012	399,546
2013	402,378

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year. For example, FY 1998 began on October 1, 1997 and ended on September 30, 1998.

[b]Totals reported for FYs 2009-2013 are from AFCARS Report 21, estimates as of July, 2014, page 1.

Table 2.   Average Age of Children in U. S. Public Foster Care, FY 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Median Years Old	Mean Years Old	Total Number of Children in Care[b]
1998	9.6	9.6	(559,000)
1999	10.1	9.9	(567,000)
2000	10.4	10.0	(552,000)
2001	10.6	10.1	(545,000)
2002	10.8	10.2	(533,000)
2003	10.9	10.2	(520,000)
2004	10.9	10.1	(517,000)
2005	10.6	10.0	(513,000)
2006	10.2	9.8	(510,000)
2007	9.9	9.7	(491,000)
2008	9.8	9.7	(463,792)
2009	9.7	9.6	(416,672)
2010	9.2	9.4	(408,425)
2011	8.8	9.3	(404,878)
2012	8.5	9.1	(396,827)
2013	8.2	8.9	(402,378)

Source: Compiled by the author from data provided in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]Statisticians appear to have rounded the number of children in foster care in AFCARS Reports for FY 1998-2007 to the nearest thousand. Beginning in FY 2008, exact counts/estimates appear to be reported.

Table 3. Age Ranges of Children in U. S. Public Foster Care in Percentages, FY 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	% Under 12 Months Old	% 1-2 Years Old	% 3-4 Years Old	% 5-9 Years Old	% 10 and Older Years	Total %
1998	5.1	10.1	10.4	27.1	47.3	100
1999	4.1	10.2	9.8	25.5	50.4	100
2000	4.1	10.5	9.4	24.0	52.0	100
2001	4.3	10.5	9.4	22.6	53.2	100
2002	4.4	10.7	9.6	23.3	52.0	100
2003	4.9	11.1	9.5	20.6	53.9	100
2004	5.2	11.4	9.7	20.3	53.4	100
2005	5.7	12.1	10.0	20.2	52.0	100
2006	6.0	12.7	10.1	20.5	50.7	100
2007	6.0	13.3	10.4	20.7	49.6	100
2008	5.8	13.7	10.5	20.5	49.5	100
2009	5.9	14.3	11.0	21.0	47.8	100
2010	6.0	14.5	11.5	20.8	47.2	100
2011	6.0	14.4	12.0	21.3	46.3	100
2012	6.4	14.7	12.4	22.6	43.9	100
2013	6.6	14.9	12.1	23.4	43.0	100

Source: Compiled by the author from data provided in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

Table 4. Race-Ethnicity of Children in U. S. Public Foster Care in Percentages, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	% White Non-Hispanic	% Black or African American	% Hispanic of Any Race	% Other[b]	Total %[c]
1998	35	43	15	7	100
1999	35	38	17	10	100
2000	38	39	15	8	100
2001	38	38	17	8	101
2002	39	37	17	8	101
2003	39	35	25	1	100
2004	40	34	18	7	99
2005	41	32	18	8	99
2006	40	32	19	9	100
2007	40	31	20	9	100
2008	40	31	20	10	101
2009	40	30	20	10	100
2010	41	29	21	10	101
2011	41	27	21	10	99
2012	45	22	21	13	101
2013	45	22	21	12	100

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]This category includes children of AI/AN Non-Hispanic, Asian Non-Hispanic, Asian/PI Non-Hispanic. Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic, two or more races and of unknown/undetermined race-ethnicity.

[c]Data on age as reported on September 30 of the FY. Totals of less or more than 100% are likely because of rounding by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb.

Table 5. Gender of Children in U. S. Public Foster Care, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Males		Females	
	%	N	%	N
1998	52	(289,544)	48	(269,456)
1999	52	(296,793)	48	(270,204)
2000	52	(289,187)	48	(262,813)
2001	52	(285,505)	48	(259,495)
2002	52	(279,457)	48	(253,543)
2003	53	(273,138)	47	(246,862)
2004	53	(271,780)	47	(245,220)
2005	52	(269,036)	48	(243,964)
2006	52	(267,027)	48	(242,973)
2007	52	(256,438)	48	(233,562)
2008	53	(243,740)	47	(219,260)
2009	53	(222,685)	47	(200,999)
2010	52	(214,354)	48	(193,998)
2011	52	(209,532)	48	(190,932)
2012[b]	52	(209,131)	48	(190,355)
2013	52	(210,738)	48	(191,608)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]AFCARS Reports provide two different numbers for FY 2012, one number estimated in July and the other estimated in November. The number of males and females the author reported in Table 5 is number of males and females reported in July of that fiscal year. The alternate numbers are 207, 947 for males and 189, 113 for females reported for FY 2012 in November of that fiscal year.

Table 6.   Children's Average Length of Stay in U. S. Public Foster Care, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Median Months	Mean Months	Number of Children in Care[b]
1998	20.5	32.6	(559,000)
1999	19.8	31.8	(567,000)
2000	19.8	32.3	(552,000)
2001	19.2	32.5	(545,000)
2002	18.1	31.7	(533,000)
2003	17.6	31.2	(520,000)
2004	16.5	30.0	(517,000)
2005	15.5	28.6	(513,000)
2006	15.5	28.3	(510,000)
2007	15.5	27.5	(491,000)
2008	15.8	27.2	(463,792)
2009	15.4	26.7	(416,672)
2010	14.0	25.3	(408,425)
2011	13.5	23.9	(404,878)
2012	13.1	22.7	(396,827)
2013	12.8	21.8	(402,378)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]This number refers to how many children were in foster care on September 30 of a given fiscal year.

Table 7. Children's Length of Stay in U. S. Public Foster Care by Time Frame, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Child's Length of Stay in Foster Care

Fiscal Year[a]	% Under 12 Months	% 12-23 Months	% 24-35 Months	% 36 Months or Longer	Number of Children in Care[b]
1998	35	20	12	32	(559,000)
1999	35	20	14	30	(567,000)
2000	35	21	13	32	(552,000)
2001	36	19	12	31	(545,000)
2002	38	20	12	29	(533,000)
2003	38	21	12	28	(520,000)
2004	40	21	12	27	(517,000)
2005	42	21	12	25	(513,000)
2006	42	22	12	24	(510,000)
2007	41	22	12	23	(491,000)
2008	42	23	12	24	(463,792)
2009	42	22	12	23	(416,672)
2010	45	22	12	22	(408,425)
2011	45	23	11	20	(404,878)
2012	47	23	12	18	(396,827)
2013	46	27	13	14	(402,378)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]This number refers to how many children were in foster care on September 30 of a given fiscal year.

Table 8. Percentages and Numbers of Children in Public Foster Care for Whom Reunification Was the Exit Plan *Goal,* Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[b]	Number of Children in Foster Care[a]	Children for Whom Reunification was the Exit Plan GOAL	
		%[c]	N
1998	559,000	39	(220,428)
1999	567,000	42	(239,006)
2000	552,000	41	(228,932)
2001	545,000	43	(235,432)
2002	533,000	46	(244,796)
2003	520,000	48	(249,549)
2004	517,000	49	(255,280)
2005	513,000	51	(262,706)
2006	510,000	49	(248,054)
2007	491,000	48	(235,655)
2008	463,000	49	(226,867)
2009	423,773	49	(202,065)
2010	408,425	51	(202,389)
2011	400,540	52	(199,123)
2012	399,546	53	(202,894)
2013	402,378	53	(204,621)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Totals reported here for the FY 2009 -FY 2013 are from AFCARS Report 21, estimates as of July, 2014, page 1.

[b]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[c]Percentages in this column were calculated by dividing the number of children for whom reunification was the Exit Plan Goal (numerator) by the total number of children in foster care in a given fiscal year (denominator).

Table 9. Percentages and Numbers of Children in Public Foster Care for Whom Reunification Was the Exit Plan *Outcome*, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[b]	Number of Children Exiting Foster Care in Each Fiscal Year[a]	Children for Whom Reunification was the Exit Plan OUTCOME	
		%	N
1998	(257,000)	60	(155,267)
1999	(250,100)	58	(145,341)
2000	(272,000)	57	(156,050)
2001	(269,000)	57	(154,645)
2002	(282,000)	56	(158,597)
2003	(282,000)	55	(155,499)
2004	(283,000)	54	(151,648)
2005	(287,000)	54	(150,608)
2006	(303,000)	53	(154,103)
2007	(293,000)	53	(153,868)
2008	(273,000)	52	(148,340)
2009	(277,606)	51	(140,061)
2010	(257,906)	51	(128,913)
2011	(246,438)	52	(125,908)
2012	(240,936)	51	(122,173)
2013	(238,280)	51	(121,334)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Numbers are estimated on September 30 of each fiscal year.

[b]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year. For example, FY 1998 began on October 1, 1997 and ended on September 30, 1998.

Table 10. Percentages and Numbers of Children in Public Foster Care for Whom Adoption Was the Exit Plan *Goal*, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Number of Children in Foster Care in Each Fiscal Year[b]	Children in Foster Care with Adoption as the Exit Plan GOAL	
		%	N
1998	559,000	20%	(114,448)
1999	567,000	20%	(114,213)
2000	552,000	21%	(114,125)
2001	545,000	22%	(117,818)
2002	533,000	21%	(110,983)
2003	520,000	20%	(105,171)
2004	517,000	20%	(102,777)
2005	513,000	20%	(100,949)
2006	510,000	23%	(117,380)
2007	491,000	24%	(118,867)
2008	463,000	24%	(111,225)
2009	423,773	25%	(102,615)
2010	408,425	25%	(96,772)
2011	400,540	25%	(94,629)
2012	399,546	24%	(93,165)
2013	402,378	24%	(91,694)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]Numbers are estimated by AFCARS for September 30 of each fiscal year.

Table 11. Percentages and Numbers of Children Actually Adopted from U. S. Public Foster Care in Relation to the Number of Children Waiting to be Adopted, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[a]	Children Actually Adopted		Number of Children Waiting to be Adopted[c]
	%[b]	N	
1998	30.6	38,221	125,000
1999	32.1	41,692	130,000
2000	35.9	47.040	131,000
2001	36.3	46,778	129,000
2002	41.2	51,124	124,000
2003	42.0	50,355	120,000
2004	43.6	51,413	118,000
2005	45.0	51,323	114,000
2006	39.1	50,379	129,000
2007	39.6	52,235	132,000
2008	44.1	54,284	123,000
2009	48.6	55,684	114,556
2010	48.9	52,340	107,011
2011	47.8	49,866	104,236
2012	50.4	51,229	101,719
2013	49.4	50,281	101,840

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[b]The author calculated the percentages in this column based on the number of children waiting to be adopted in a given fiscal year.

[c]AFCARS defines "waiting children" as those who have a case goal of adoption and/or whose birth parents' rights have been terminated. This definition does not include children 16 and older whose parents' rights have been terminated and who have a case goal of emancipation. See AFCARS REPORT 6 for FY 1999, available at: http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/june2001.htm

Table 12. Children in Public Foster Care for Whom Adoption Was the Exit Plan *Goal*, Children Waiting to Be Adopted, and the Gap between the Numbers, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[b]	Children with Adoption as Their Exit Plan Goal N	Children Waiting to be Adopted N	Gap[a] between between the Two Numbers N
1998	114,448	125,000	+10,552
1999	114,213	130,000	+15,787
2000	114,125	131,000	+16,875
2001	117,818	129,000	+11,182
2002	110,983	124,000	+13,017
2003	105,171	120,000	+14,829
2004	102,777	118,000	+15,223
2005	100,949	114,000	+13,051
2006	117,380	129,000	+11,620
2007	118,867	132,000	+13,133
2008	111,225	123,000	+11,775
2009	102,615	114,556	+11,941
2010	96,772	107,011	+10,239
2011	94,629	104,236	+9,607
2012	93,165	101,719	+8,554
2013	91,694	101,840	+10,146

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]The positive (+) number shows the gap (difference) between children waiting to be adopted and those for whom adoption was the Exit Plan Goal in a given fiscal year. That is, in every fiscal year more children were available for adoption from the foster care system than originally had the Case Goal of adoption.

[b]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

Table 13. Age Ranges of Children at Adoption from the U. S. Public Foster Care System in Percentages, Fiscal Years 1998-2013[a]

Fiscal Year[b]	% <1 Year	% 1-5 Years	% 6-9 Years	% 10-14 Years	% 15-17 Years	% 18 Plus	Total %[c]
1998	1.7	45.5	31.0	18.4	3.1	0.3	100
1999	1.8	45.0	30.2	19.3	3.4	0.3	100
2000	1.8	45.4	29.2	19.8	3.5	0.3	100
2001	1.9	46.0	27.8	20.1	3.9	0.3	100
2002	1.9	46.1	26.3	21.3	4.1	0.3	100
2003	1.9	47.2	25.0	21.0	4.6	0.4	100
2004	1.8	48.8	23.7	20.5	4.9	0.35	100
2005	2.2	50.5	27.9	14.1	5.1	0.3	100
2006	2.2	52.0	23.0	17.5	5.0	0.3	100
2007	2.1	53.7	22.7	16.4	4.8	0.3	100
2008	2.0	54.0	22.7	15.9	5.0	0.4	100
2009	2.0	54.3	22.8	15.9	4.7	0.3	100
2010	2.1	53.7	22.8	16.2	4.8	0.4	100
2011	2.1	54.3	22.2	16.2	4.9	0.3	100
2012	2.1	55.0	23.0	16.0	5.0	0.3	100
2013	2.3	54.8	22.5	15.4	4.6	0.4	100

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10-#21.

[a]Data on age was reported on September 30 of each fiscal year.

[b]Each Fiscal Year (FY) begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[c]To be consistent with most of the total percentages which add up to 100%, the total percentages for three fiscal years are either rounded up to 100% from 99.9% (FY 2012) or down to 100% from 100.1% (FY 2003, 2005).

Table 14. Children's Pre-Adoption Placement Settings, Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[b]	Foster Family Home Setting		Pre-Adoptive Visit Setting	Trial Home Setting	Other Settings[a]	Total of All Settings	
	Relative	Non-Relative					
	%	%	%	%	%	%	N
1998	24.0	58	10.0	1.0	7.1	101.1	(125,000)
1999	20.0	59	13.0	0.3	8.1	101.1	(130,000)
2000	19.4	58	13.4	0.3	8.9	100	(131,000)
2001	18.8	58.5	13.0	0.3	9.4	100	(129,000)
2002	16.6	55.6	16.6	0.3	10.9	100	(124,000)
2003	16.3	54.6	16.6	0.4	12.0	99.9	(120,001)
2004	17.4	55.4	14.5	0.4	12.3	100	(117,999)
2005	18.5	55.5	12.9	0.6	12.5	100	(114,002)
2006	17.6	57.1	13.1	0.7	11.5	100	(123,000)
2007	23.6	52.2	13.0	0.7	10.4	99.9	(132,000)
2008	23.0	53.4	12.7	0.6	10.2	99.9	(123,000)
2009	22.1	53.8	13.8	0.6	9.7	100	(114,086)
2010	22.2	54.9	12.7	0.6	9.6	100	(106,881)
2011	23.2	54.3	12.5	0.6	9.5	100	(104,059)
2012	24.0	53.2	12.8	0.7	9.3	100	(101,545)
2013	24.1	53.2	13.0	0.6	9.1	100	(109,475)

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10 - #21.

[a]Other settings include group homes, institutions, supervised independent living, and unknown (e.g., runaways).

[b]Each Fiscal Year (FY) begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

Table 15. Prior Relationship of Adoptees to Adoptive Parents,[a] Fiscal Years 1998-2013

Fiscal Year[b]	Foster Parent %	Relative %	Non-Relative %	Total %	N[b]
1998	64	16	21	101	(37,001)
1999	64	16	20	100	(47,001)
2000	61	16	18	100	(51,001)
2001	59	24	17	100	(50,010)
2002	61	24	15	100	(56,000)
2003	62	23	15	100	(49,924)
2004	59	24	16	100	(51,999)
2005	60	25	15	100	(51,000)
2006	59	26	15	100	(51,000)
2007	57	28	15	100	(52,000)
2008	54	30	16	100	(55,000)
2009	54	32	14	100	(51,474)
2010	53	32	15	100	(49,454)
2011	54	31	15	100	(47,268)
2012	56	30	14	100	(49,341)
2013[c]	61	27	12	100	(48,472)

Source: Compiled by the author from AFCARS Reports #10 - #21.

[a]For FY 1998-2012, AFCARS classified relatives who were also foster parents only as relatives. Between FY 2004-2014, 393 children were adopted by step parents; data on relationship to child was missing for 2,471 children in FY, 2013.

[b]Each Fiscal Year (FY) begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

[c]In FY 2013, AFCARS encouraged states to classify adoptive parents into all of the categories that applied to them. Therefore, foster parents who adopted could also classify themselves as relatives or non-relatives. The author re-calculated the percentages and numbers to remove the overlap in categories and to make the data for FY 2013 consistent with the way AFCARS calculated these data in previous fiscal years.

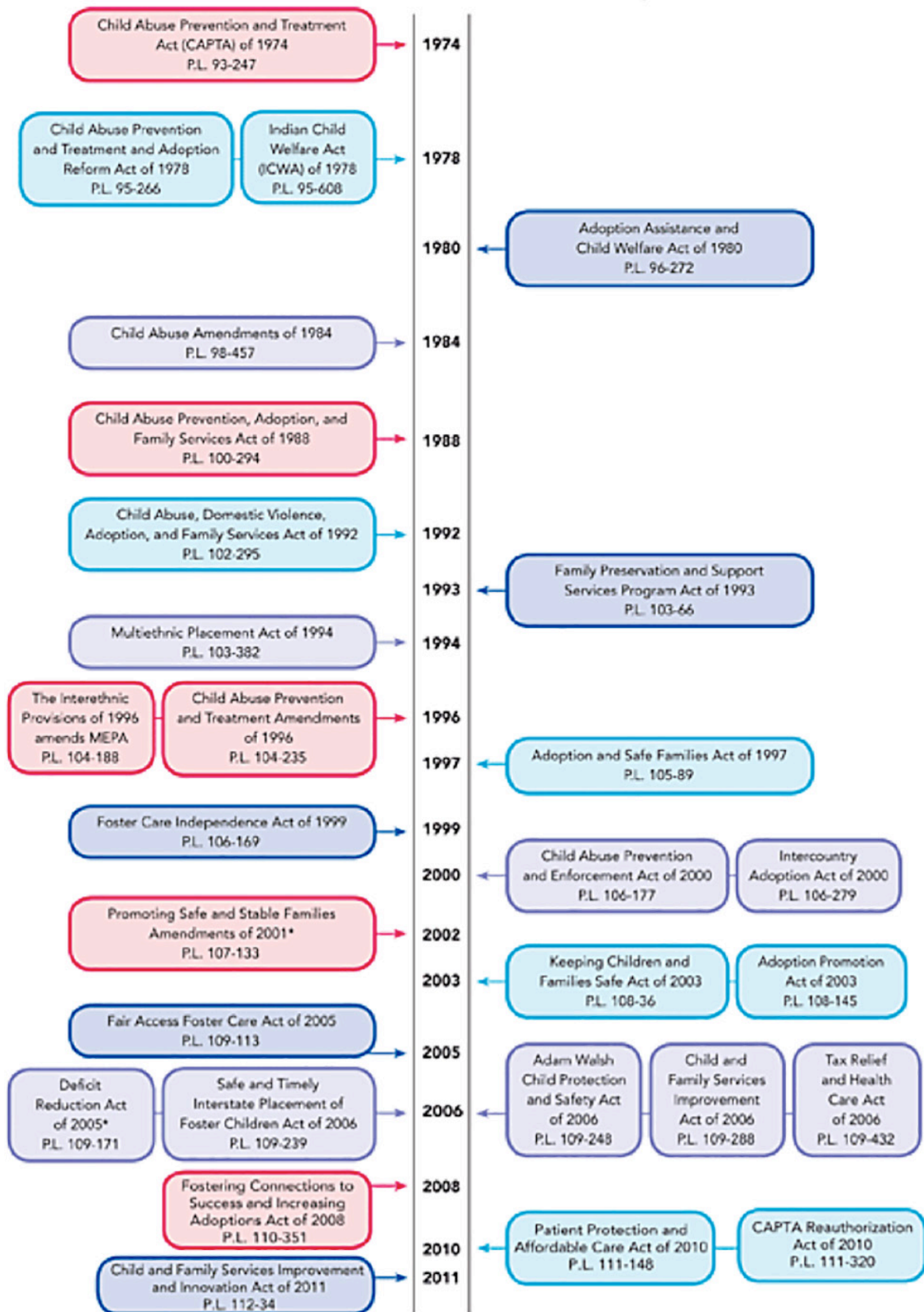**Table 16. Family Structures into Which Adoptees Were Placed, Fiscal Years 1998-2013**

Fiscal Year[a]	% Married Couple	% Single Female	% Single Male	% Unmarried Couple
1998	67	30	2	1
1999	66	31	2	1
2000	66	31	2	1
2001	67	30	2	1
2002	66	30	2	2
2003	67	28	3	2
2004	68	27	3	2
2005	68	27	3	2
2006	69	26	3	2
2007	68	27	3	2
2008	69	28	3	2
2009	66	28	3	2
2010	67	28	3	2
2011	68	27	3	2
2012	68	27	3	2
2013	67	27	3	3

Source: Compiled by the author from data in AFCARS Reports #10 - #21.

[a]Fiscal year (FY) refers to the federal government Fiscal Year which begins on October 1 of a given year and ends on September 30 of the following year. For example, FY 1998 began on October 1, 1997 and ended on September 30, 1998.

APPENDIX C

Timeline of Major Federal Legislation Concerned With Child Protection, Child Welfare, and Adoption

	Year	
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 P.L. 93-247	1974	
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978 P.L. 95-266 / Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 P.L. 95-608	1978	
	1980	Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 P.L. 96-272
Child Abuse Amendments of 1984 P.L. 98-457	1984	
Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988 P.L. 100-294	1988	
Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1992 P.L. 102-295	1992	
	1993	Family Preservation and Support Services Program Act of 1993 P.L. 103-66
Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 P.L. 103-382	1994	
The Interethnic Provisions of 1996 amends MEPA P.L. 104-188 / Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Amendments of 1996 P.L. 104-235	1996	
	1997	Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 P.L. 105-89
Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 P.L. 106-169	1999	
	2000	Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act of 2000 P.L. 106-177 / Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 P.L. 106-279
Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001* P.L. 107-133	2002	
	2003	Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 P.L. 108-36 / Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 P.L. 108-145
Fair Access Foster Care Act of 2005 P.L. 109-113	2005	
Deficit Reduction Act of 2005* P.L. 109-171 / Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 P.L. 109-239	2006	Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 P.L. 109-248 / Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 P.L. 109-288 / Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 P.L. 109-432
Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 P.L. 110-351	2008	
Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011 P.L. 112-34	2010 / 2011	Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 P.L. 111-148 / CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010 P.L. 111-320

*Some acts were enacted the year following their introduction in Congress.

About the Author: Josephine A. Ruggiero is an applied sociologist who has extensive research, publications, and personal experience in adoption. She earned her MA and Ph.D in sociology at Fordham University in the Bronx, NY. Trained and licensed both to adopt and to be foster parents in the state of Rhode Island, the author and her husband had experiences that familiarized them with the culture of foster care and who gets to adopt children from the foster care system. Ruggiero and her husband are the adoptive parents of three biological siblings born in Russia.

Book Review
of
Adopting Older Children: A Practical Guide to Adopting and Parenting Children Over Age Four

By

Janice G. Schuster

Adopting Older Children: A Practical Guide to Adopting and Parenting Children Over Age Four (Stephanie Bosco-Ruggiero, Gloria Russo Wassell, and Victor Groza. New Horizon Press, 2014) addresses issues that can arise when adopting children who are older when they come to their forever family. Research indicates that prospective families are willing to adopt an infant either domestically or internationally but are hesitant to adopt an older child due to "misinformation and fear regarding older child adoption." (p. xiii.) At the same time, more families are considering older child adoption due to several factors, including a dearth of infants available for adoption since single parenthood no longer carries the stigma that it once did, and the domestic policies of countries that are limiting the number of infants available to adopt internationally. *Adopting Older Children* is intended to bridge the literature gap and to serve as a resource for older child adoption and parenting.

This book is organized into four parts: I. The Adoption Process (Chapters 1-5); II. Adoptive Families (Chapters 6-10); III. Understanding Your Child (Chapters 11-18); and IV. Adoptive Parents' Problems. This book also includes an Appendix of recommended adoption resources organized by chapter. I focus my specific comments on eight chapters: 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16 and 17.

Chapter 3 covers adopting within the United States. Bosco-Ruggiero *et al* recommend that prospective parents become familiar with the foster care system, since a child placed with them will most likely have spent time in foster care. This was the case with both of our sons. Our younger son had lived with five foster families before he became our son. So I can attest personally to how important it is to understand the foster care system and how multiple moves can affect a child. However, the authors omit an important factor here: in some states, an adoption can be finalized only after a child has lived in the pre-adoptive home, as a foster child, for a certain amount of time. In the case of Massachusetts, it is six months. I'm surprised that the authors didn't mention this in their section on foster care adoption. The description of "special needs adoptions" was especially interesting to me. Our older son was considered special needs solely because he is bi-racial. He also had an individualized education plan (IEP) solely because he had been in foster care. My husband and I were told that many children in foster care are given IEPs because being in foster care creates educational delays and special needs.

I read Chapter 5: Post-Adoption Services eagerly, expecting to find more helpful information than was

available to us years ago after our sons' adoptions were finalized. I was disappointed. Although the authors quote an adoption professional as saying that "…there is a lot of support out there for adoptive families now." (p. 55), they provide few specific details to support that quote in this chapter, which is only 3 1/2 pages long. Also, some of the information in this chapter seems to be common sense: Did the authors need to mention that families living in rural areas might have less access to services than those living in urban areas? That seems obvious to me. Overall, this chapter was disappointing, and I don't think it will be useful to adoptive parents.

I found Chapter 9, on sibling relationships, interesting since our older son was almost 5 years old when we adopted our younger son in 1998. The book's advice is simple and straightforward: explain to children who are already in the family about the needs of the newly-adopted child; make time for the existing child and listen carefully to any concerns that he or she expresses about the adoption. Our older son was very happy to have a younger brother and even bought a small ball with his own money to give to our younger son at our first visit with him. Our sons continue to have a close relationship.

Chapter 10, "Navigating Biological Family Relationships," details post-adoption contact between adopted children and their biological families. Depending on family history, it may or may not be in the best interest of the child to have a relationship with her or his biological family. Both of my sons contacted their birth families years after their adoptions were finalized, and they, my husband and I currently have good relationships with their birth families. However, one of our sons experienced deep feelings of responsibility for his birth mother after he reconciled with her, to the point where he even felt financially responsible for her. We thought this was a heavy and unreasonable burden for a teenager. It put us in the awkward position of wanting to support his relationship with his birth mother while

at the same time needing to make him aware that he was not financially or emotionally responsible for her. The book's nonjudgmental discussion of the pros and cons of contact with birth families will be useful to adoptive and pre-adoptive families.

Chapter 11 covers traumatic experiences and how they might (but don't necessarily) cause traumatic stress in an older adopted child. The authors list behavioral symptoms that may indicate traumatic stress, including: moodiness; frustration; intense fear; temper tantrums; regression; and defiance. The list corresponds to my family's experience with our younger son, who had lived with five foster families before he became our son and who experienced serious temper tantrums until he was 6 or 7 years old. The authors recommend counseling or other professional help as well as therapeutic parenting for a traumatized child and include a list of questions to ask a prospective counselor. However, they do not offer specific characteristics of a good counselor, which, in addition to the list of questions to ask, would have been helpful to the book's audience. In my experience, the most important characteristics of a good counselor or therapist include an understanding of the adoption process and its effects on both the adoptive parents and the adopted child, and a respect for the losses that adoptive children have experienced. This comes at least partially from a negative experience that my family had with a counselor to whom we were referred for our older son. He formed a close relationship with the counselor, but the counselor was experiencing difficulties in his personal life and often had to cancel or reschedule our son's appointments. The counselor, even though he supposedly was familiar with adoption issues, did not seem to understand how the disappointment of canceled or postponed appointments affected our son and accentuated the losses that he had already experienced in his young life.

In Chapter 13, "Attachment and Adoption," there is a section on "Getting professional help for

attachment problems." The section lists recommended interventions but includes no details or definitions of those interventions. I expected to find more details in the recommended resources list for that chapter but instead found a list of "Possible therapies for attachment problems" that also provided no details or definitions of the therapies and no suggestions for further resources.

In Chapter 16, the authors emphasize the importance of obtaining a medical record that is as complete as possible. We had problems with this when we adopted our older son. I had a lot of difficulty getting his medical records from the pediatrician while he was in foster care. I finally drove to the doctor's office and was able to get the records in person. We learned a lot from the medical records that had not been shared with us before, including that our son had had a sixth toe removed when he was an infant.

In Chapter 17, covering development and learning, the authors advise that developmental age is frequently not the same as chronological age in adopted children who have experienced trauma. When we adopted our younger son at age two, his developmental age was much younger than his chronological age. We believe this was due, at least in part, to his many foster care placements before he became our son. The authors also argue that, in obtaining services to address developmental and/or learning delays, parents must serve as their child's advocate. We experienced this with our older son, as I describe in my essay. In the first few weeks of his being our son, I insisted that the local school find a spot for him in their early intervention program, even though the teacher's first reaction was that she did not have space for him. We learned early that it was our responsibility, as his parents, to be his voice and to make sure that he received everything to which he was entitled.

In conclusion, *Adopting Older Children* is a welcome addition to the literature on adoption. The authors include information and resources for diverse family structures--single, LGBT, and older adoptive parents as well as for more traditional couples. Their writing style is clear and their word choices are sensitive to the many types of potential adoptive families.

This book will be most useful to readers who are preparing for, or are thinking about, the journey of adopting an older child. Its sections cover all aspects of the process of preparing to adopt an older child as well as the homecoming and subsequent finalization. The book's conclusion offers a good summary, which includes a useful section on the benefits of older child adoption.

However, the book will be less useful for readers who have already adopted and are experiencing challenging issues from their child's pre-adoption years. The chapter on post-adoption services is disappointing because the authors list services that may be available to families who need services but do not provide details about how to access them.

About the Reviewer: Janice G. Schuster is the adoptive parent of two sons that she and her husband adopted from the state of Massachusetts foster care system in the late 1990s. Their older son was 3 1/2 years old when they adopted him, placing him in the category of an "older" child and giving her the lens through which she reviewed this book. She is Associate Professor and Commons Librarian for Research, Education, and Collections, at Providence College's Phillips Memorial Library. Schuster received a B.A. degree in German and an M.L.S. degree, both from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. She can be reached at jschuster@providence.edu

Book Review
of

The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Girls Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades before Roe v. Wade

By

Josephine A. Ruggiero

The Girls Who Went Away (Penguin Press, 2006) by Ann Fessler is based on oral histories of unmarried girls who were pressured by parents, and indirectly by the social mores of the time, to surrender their babies for adoption. Fessler began to collect these oral histories in 2002, with a visual project in mind as her goal, not writing a book. Although she ended up doing both, her book appeared first. Fessler's documentary*, **A Girl Like Her**,* also based, in part, on her interviewees' oral histories, followed in 2012.

Ann Fessler, is a photographer not a sociologist. However, ***The Girls Who Went Away*** contains so many sociological concepts that I was compelled to write this review for Volume One of **Sociology between the Gaps** which focuses on the theme of *Adoption and Families*. These sociological concepts include gender; the emphasis placed on female virginity in the 1950s; denial of being pregnant; deviance from social norms; labeling the unmarried pregnant woman as a "bad girl" and the effect this label on her sense of self; blaming the victim; stigma; marginalization; loss of the birth mother's agency/voice; social control by society, parents and peers; racial and social class differences; lack of sex education in schools, both public and private; the roles and failures of various social institutions in society (e.g., the family, religion, the legal and medical establishments, and media); and the social construction of adoption, parenthood, and kinship ties.[1]

Based on interviews with 100 women in the U. S. who went through the heart-wrenching experience of giving up a child in the decades before the pill was available or abortion became legal in the U. S., Ann Fessler sets out to tell their stories. She does this with profound empathy. In her forthright and devastatingly powerful book, Fessler shares the real-life stories of single, vulnerable girls whose unplanned and unexpected pregnancies were hidden in the shadows and only whispered about in those days. For the fortunate girls who became pregnant and were in a committed relationship, they had the option of getting married and keeping their child. Most girls, however, were not so fortunate. The majority of girls who became pregnant were forced by one or both parents to leave town for about six months, give birth in secret, and relinquish their child for adoption. The expectation was that, subsequently, these girls would come home, resume their lives as though nothing important had happened while they were "away", and get past the experience of giving up their child for adoption by strangers.

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[1]The author wishes to thank sociologist Kathy Stolley for her assistance in identifying many of the sociological concepts in Fessler's book.

Chapter 1 of **The Girls Who Went Away** begins with Fessler's acknowledgement that she was adopted as an infant. Her adoptive mother was herself adopted. Growing up, Ann knew that she was adopted. However, her grandmother never told Ann's mother that she was adopted. Her mother discovered that fact herself one day when she found her original birth certificate taped to the back of a painting at her aunt's house.

In chapters 2-10, the author recounts the stories of 18 of the women she had interviewed for her project. She begins each of these chapters with a short narrative by one of the two women whose stories she tells. Each introductory narrative introduces the reader to the theme discussed in the chapter and provides the socio-cultural context for the stories Fessler includes in that chapter. Fessler also weaves birthmothers' stories with additional statements they make in their interviews.

There is a clear chronology to chapters 2-9 as signified by the chapter titles. "Breaking the Silence" (chapter 2) involves breaking the veil of secrecy about the pregnancy. "Good Girls v. Bad Girls" (chapter 3) involves the imposition of the label of "bad girl" on the pregnant girl. Chapters 4-8 cover issues of discovery of, and shame about, the pregnancy (chapter 4), family fears (chapter 5), going away and waiting for the baby to be born (chapter 6), giving birth (chapter 7), and relinquishing the baby (chapter 8). Chapter 9 describes the search and meeting of two birthmothers with the children they relinquished. In Chapter 10, "Talking and Listening" Fessler uses emails she received from birth mothers, siblings of the relinquished child, other birth family members, and adoptive parents to reinforce the importance of starting a non-judgmental conversation about what transpired, listening and accepting the difficult decisions that unmarried, pregnant girls and their parents felt pressured by social norms and their own life circumstances to make at that time. In Chapter 11, Fessler concludes this book by telling readers about her decision to contact her own birth mother

and about the impact her written and visual work on adoption had on her decision to reach out to her and its timing. Fessler did not seek out contact with her birth mother for more than a decade after she found out she was adopted. In this chapter, the author expresses in honest terms the fears and reasons children adopted as newborns or as young infants have for hesitating to search for their birth mothers. Fessler can relate because she experienced these same fears and concerns herself.

Much about adoption was secret up though the 1960s, longer in some parts of the U. S. than in others. Social class, the religiosity of the girl's family, as well as their religious affiliation, came into play. Into the 1950s, babies were born at home and their mothers were often attended in childbirth by midwives, even in areas in or close to cities. Since a child's birth could be registered at some point after the actual birth took place, a child born of one woman could be adopted informally by a married relative in more advantageous circumstances. For example, the birth certificate of a child born to an unmarried daughter or son could state that the child was born to the unmarried individual's parents, the child's biological grandparents. They typically never disclosed the secret and, if the infant's birth registration listed them as her or his parents, there was no paper trail of the informal adoption to contradict their claim.

Not surprisingly, none of the women that Fessler interviewed forgot, or successfully moved past, being forced to give up her child. No longer silent and hidden, their thoughts and feelings come through loud and clear in this award-winning book. The women talk about the change in their family's and society's perception of them from nice girls to flawed, bad girls once they became pregnant. The burden of being pregnant was placed entirely on them. The boys who got them pregnant were typically exempt from the disgrace heaped on the girls and got to walk away from their responsibility in producing a child. At a time when sex education in schools did not exist, most parents did not talk to their

children about sex, and teenagers' information about sex was based on largely on what they heard from age mates or on trial and error, the situation was rife for a boom in pregnancies. Myths and false information about pregnancy were common in the culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

While adoption may be a joyful experience for those who cannot have biological children, adoption is not without its share of sorrow and struggle even for them. Infertility was, and may still be viewed as a stigma, the woman's fault. The shameful deficiency of being barren could not be shed. Successful reproduction was, and still is, a woman's duty to her husband. Infertility, miscarriages, and still births were among the private troubles and losses women carried in their hearts and were not topics of conversation even among close kin.

The Girls Who Went Away portrays the heartbreak and lingering sadness experienced by women who relinquished a child for adoption because they had no other socially-acceptable option or social supports which would allow them to raise their child. Not surprisingly, they mourned the loss of their child to the unknown and wondered about his or her wellbeing. Had the child been adopted? Did she or he have loving parents? Was life really better for that child than if the biological mother had fought to keep him or her? What will the child think about the biological mother and why the child was given up? These heart-wrenching questions provide a good counterbalance to many of the myths about adoption itself to which both adoptive parents and adoptees are exposed. The sad reality is that the social and other forces which impact on individuals' lives often outweigh their personal desires and access to the resources necessary to fulfill those desires.

Fessler's book is definitely not one that women who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s can read from start to finish in one sitting. Many women of that era knew a classmate who was pregnant at high school graduation

or had a family member who disappeared for several months for a fabricated reason, then returned home slimmer. Others struggled with infertility issues experienced by their parents- the personal loss of siblings who died before they were born and the grief of parents who wanted more children but could not have them in the traditional way. At that time and subsequently, adoption was a hidden phenomenon, viewed by many as a second choice to giving birth to one's "own" child.

This book and Fessler's documentary, *A Girl Like Her* (2012), are excellent companion pieces to the film, *Philomena*, which is also reviewed in this volume of *Sociology between the Gaps*. How many women in the traumatic situation of having their child wrenched from them raised the question of how it was possible to forget a part of yourself, your first child, and move on? The answer was hidden in the veil of secrecy of the times and the culture, both in the United States and in other countries until the women who experienced these losses found the courage to tear down the veil of secrecy and trusted authors like Ann Fessler to tell their stories.

About the Reviewer: Josephine A. Ruggiero is Professor Emerita of Sociology at Providence College and Editor-in-Chief of *Sociology between the Gaps: Forgotten and Neglected Topics*. Ruggiero's areas of research and publication include gender roles, adoption, and changing families. She and her husband are adoptive parents of three biological siblings born in Russia and adopted simultaneously when the children were 4 1/2, 3 1/2 and two years old.

Philomena: A Film Review

By

Emily Stier Adler

Philomena, the critically acclaimed and controversial 2013 film, is based on the true story of Philomena Lee, a then unmarried Irish woman whose son was taken from her and placed for adoption with an American couple. Philomena's story began in Ireland in the 1950s. The two main characters in the film, Philomena, and Martin Sixsmith, the journalist who told her story are played by British actors, Judi Dench and Steve Coogan. This film was co-produced in the United Kingdom and the United States.

We meet Philomena when she is a 70 year old woman living in the UK. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that Philomena was forced to give up her out-of-wedlock son, Anthony, when she was a teenager. We also learn that she has been searching for him since then. Philomena states that she thinks of her son every day and wonders if he ever thought about her. We meet Martin Sixsmith, a London journalist, when he is at a crossroad in his professional life. He recently lost his job and is contemplating writing a book on Russian history. Sixsmith makes it clear that he is not-at-all interested in writing a human interest story. Yet, this unlikely pair, brought together by Philomena's adult daughter who approaches Sixsmith at a cocktail party, embarks on a journey that takes them to Ireland, the United States and back to Ireland in their search for Anthony. We learn

that Philomena's daughter had only recently discovered the existence of her brother and the story her mother had kept secret for five decades.

This poignant film combines excellent acting and enough small lighthearted moments to keep it from being a tearjerker. Lee and Sixsmith could not be more different. Lee is a working class woman and still a devout Catholic. Her character is relatable, level-headed, empathetic and determined. In contrast, Sixsmith is a sophisticated, business-like, upper class male, an investigative journalist who has no time for secrets or lies. He is an iconoclastic atheist who, once committed, is driven to get at the truth of Philomena's story and what happened to Anthony. Based on Sixsmith's 2009 book, *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee,* this film hits all the right notes of empathy and compassion too long denied to Philomena. Although the screenplay changed many details, the broad outlines of Philomena's and Anthony's story are factual.

This film raises discussion of many sociological concepts. First, it is important to place Philomena's experiences in the context of the societal and cultural views that valued female chastity until marriage. These views were prevalent in the mid 20th century Ireland and in catholic settings in other countries. Second, there was (and still is) a clear double standard of male and female

sexual behavior in which women are blamed and men get to walk away from their responsibility in producing a child. Related to this second point is the stigma of being labeled as a "bad girl" that was assigned to unmarried women who became pregnant during that era. Sex education was not available to teenagers in Ireland at that time. Along with the stigma of unwed pregnancy came the isolation and punitive treatment of pregnant young women who were cared for in convents. Finally, to have a woman's child taken away from her without her knowledge and consent was the final indignity.

The following is the story line of the movie: When teenaged Philomena Lee becomes pregnant after an encounter with a handsome young man at a local fair in 1951, her father, a widower, disowns her and sends her to Sean Ross Abbey in Tipperary, Ireland. In an especially distressing scene, we see Philomena denied pain relief medication during the breech birth delivery of her son because, as one nun states, Philomena should suffer the pain as a way to atone for her "indecent" behavior. With no way to obtain the £100 she owed the nuns for her care, Philomena becomes "indentured" at the convent for four years to "work off" her bill at the convent laundry.

Like the other young women at the convent, Philomena is allowed to visit with her child for only one hour each week. It is clear that her visits with Anthony are the highlight of Philomena's week. Then comes the day when, at age 3 ½ years old and with no warning, Anthony is given for adoption to an American couple. The couple had originally planned to adopt Mary, the three-year old daughter of Philomena's friend who also gave birth and lived at the convent. Anthony is so attached to Mary that he will not let her leave without him. So, the couple agrees to adopt Anthony at the same time and leaves Ireland with both children. Anthony and other children of mothers in this situation at that time were apparently among hundreds allowed to be adopted in exchange for a $1,000 donation for

each to the Catholic Church. Philomena keeps silent about her pregnancy and Anthony's birth for almost five decades because she believes the Church's view that she behaved in a shameful manner. When she decides that she needs to know what happened to Anthony, she tells her adult daughter about the past and with the help of Martin Sixsmith, begins her search for Anthony.

Major stumbling blocks to finding him include the Catholic Church's policies and Ireland's laws about adoption. Visiting Sean Ross Abbey, Philomena and Martin are served tea and cake while being told by the nuns that they have no information to offer about Anthony because a fire had destroyed the adoption records. At a later visit, however, the nuns produce a document signed by Philomena when she was living at the Abbey, saying that she relinquished her son and promised not to try to find him. Apparently, Philomena thinks that she had no choice except to sign the document. The film makes it clear that she believes there are no other options for her or her baby.

Sixsmith's research which ultimately identifies Anthony as Michael Hess leads to the heartbreaking revelation that Hess died of AIDS in 1995. Philomena and Sixsmith eventually learn that Hess had journeyed to Ireland twice to try to find his mother but was also stymied by the nuns. However, at Hess's request, his ashes were buried in a section of the Abbey cemetery with the hope that his mother would return to try to find him. The camera shows a grave overgrown with weeds and a headstone inscribed "Michael Hess, a man of two nations and many talents. 'Born July 5, 1952, Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea. Died August 15, 1995, Washington DC."

The film presents some of the highlights of Michael Hess's life and implies comparisons between the Catholic Church's treatment of female transgressors like Philomena and gay men like her son. A successful lawyer, Hess became a rising star in politics. He worked

for Ronald Regan and the Republican Party for more than a decade and ultimately served as Chief Legal Counsel for George H.W. Bush. Comments by colleagues and his partner make it clear that Hess often needed to hide his sexuality and was upset by the Republican Party's attitudes towards gay people and its blocking of funds for AIDS research.

A significant milestone for the rights of adoptees and biological mothers of adopted children in Ireland was launched as a result of this film. After Philomena and her daughter heard from so many people who were sympathetic to her search, in 2014, they launched the Philomena Project to bring about legislative change in Ireland so that access to 60,000 Irish adoption records will be granted to adoptees and their families.

About the Reviewer: Emily Stier Adler, Ph.D. is Professor Emerita of Sociology at Rhode Island College in Providence, RI. Her areas of sociological interest include the sociology of aging, retirement, grandparenting, family, and qualitative sociology.

Leap of Faith: Adopting our Sons through the State of Massachusetts

By

Janice G. Schuster

This essay is about my family's experiences adopting our two sons through the state of Massachusetts. The application process, the MAPP parenting training, the home study, the placement of our sons with us and the finalization of their adoptions all contributed to a very positive experience for us. I encourage anyone who is thinking about adoption to seriously consider exploring adopting a child or children through the state foster care system.

In 1996, after twelve years of marriage spent concentrating on finishing our educations and establishing ourselves in our careers, my husband, Tim Southern, and I felt that God was leading us to start a family. At that time, we had no idea what God had in mind for us. After a year or so, we realized that God's plan did not include biological children. We agreed that adoption was a good option for us. We both felt that we would have no problem loving and welcoming into our family a child who was not biologically related to us.

We researched applying for a placement through a private agency and also thought about adopting internationally. Neither of those options seemed right to us, though. We came to the conclusion that, since there were children in the Massachusetts foster care system needing families, we should adopt through the state. We began the process by filling out an application to adopt a child who was waiting for a forever family. We also were required to provide physical, mental health, and character references. Our doctor signed a statement that we were physically healthy, and the minister at our church as well as our four closest friends wrote character references for us.

The state assigned a social worker to us for our home study. Tim and I spoke with her separately by phone, and she made several visits to our house to complete the home study. She met with us both separately and together and asked us detailed questions about our reasons for adopting; gender and age preferences; our relationship; how we resolved differences in our marriage; how we communicated; had either of us experienced any violence in the home; etc.

In the summer of 1996, we completed the required Massachusetts Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) training. From the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange site: http://www.mareinc.org/Steps-in-the-Adoption-Process.html

"…MAPP training is typically held one night per week for ten weeks…The course is designed to help families determine what child they can best parent and also serves as a self-screening function…This training will include discussions about the children who are waiting to be adopted and what behaviors they might exhibit as well as information about resources and support available to you as an adoptive family."

Tim and I found the MAPP training to be extremely useful. We learned both big-picture and small-picture aspects of parenting an adopted child. For example, we learned the importance of not communicating negative things about or badmouthing a child's birth parents, partially because the child has the right to a positive view of his or her birth parent, and partially because the child will think that, if the adoptive parent is rejecting the birth parent, the adoptive parent is also rejecting the child. Another example, that I will mention in more depth later in this essay, is the importance of keeping the child's birth name whenever possible. This became an issue for us when we adopted our older son, Kirk; more details on that later in this essay. When we told friends with biological children about the MAPP training, they commented that they wished that they had had some of that parenting training. The training prepared us not only for what to expect from adopting a child but also what it means to be a parent.

We completed the MAPP training in the fall of 1996, and began waiting for the state to match a child with our profile and application. A few months later, our social worker called us about a potential match. I think our short waiting time was due to the fact that we had not indicated a preference for a baby or infant, since such a

preference often means a longer wait for a match.

Finding Kirk: Our social worker gave us information about Kirk, a 3 1/2 year old who had been in foster care with the same foster family since age one. His birth father was in prison, and his birth mother lived in the nearby city where Kirk was born in 1993. He was in foster care because his birth mother was young, had serious addiction problems, and could not take care of him. Fortunately, Kirk was healthy and did not seem to have suffered abuse. Kirk's foster mother described him as a well-adjusted child who had made firm attachments with her and other members of her family. We prayed about it and agreed to take the next step and meet Kirk.

In early 1997, we went with our social worker to meet Kirk at his foster home. We brought a Barney doll to that first visit, since his foster mother had told us that Kirk liked Barney. He still has that Barney doll. Kirk was open to meeting us, seemed excited about getting to know us, and was very verbal. Over the next month or so, we picked Kirk up at his foster family's house and took him on various outings like eating at Friendly's and to the park.

After a few weeks of visiting Kirk in the town where he lived, we brought him to our house for the weekend. The weekend was a big success and Kirk seemed to adjust well to being with us. However, when we were getting ready to take him back to his foster home, he fell down our stairs and sustained a noticeable black eye. Tim and I were both afraid that Kirk's foster mother would not believe that he had fallen down the stairs, that she would instead think that we had done something to him and that we would not be allowed to continue with his adoption. That would have been devastating for us, since we already loved Kirk and felt very attached to him. We felt that he was developing an attachment to us as well. Fortunately, his foster mother believed us when we said he had fallen down the stairs. This incident illustrates the tightrope that pre-adoptive and adoptive

parents walk. Falling down the stairs, which can happen to birth children with no serious consequences, is very different when it happens to a foster child going through the adoption process, or to an adopted child; it could mean a state investigation. We are thankful that Kirk's foster mother believed us.

Kirk's Birth Name: MAPP training stated that it is better to keep a child's birth name, if possible. That made sense but it also presented a problem for us. Kirk was named Kurky, his birth father's nickname. We felt that he would be teased by other children if he kept a name that rhymes with "turkey." We discussed with our social worker the idea of modifying his name to "Kirk." She thought it would be fine. His foster mother willingly started calling him "Kirk" instead of "Kurky." He did not seem to mind one way or the other, so Kirk became his new name. We were happy that we were able to keep his name close enough to honor his birth heritage while also protecting him from unnecessary teasing and other possible problems later. We love the name Kirk; it is unusual enough that there aren't too many others with that name but it is not so unusual that it causes problems for him.

Kirk moved in with us and became our son on February 14, 1997. What a happy day! We drove down to his foster home to pick him up. As we were getting ready to leave with Kirk, his foster mother proved once again how much she loved him. She had tears in her eyes, and Kirk mentioned that she was crying. She told him that she was crying because she was happy for him. I am still moved by her putting a positive spin on the situation for his sake when, in reality, I know she was heartbroken to see him leave.

Since then, I have thought a lot about the frequently unrewarded and unrecognized but vital role that devoted foster families play. Kirk's foster mother gave him such wonderful stability during his 2.5 years with her. I am convinced that he is a well-adjusted young

man today in part because of the foundation that she provided for him during those early years. I remain grateful for everything she did for him.

I was granted adoption leave from my position as a library faculty member at Providence College. So, I was home with Kirk until mid-May of 1997. Tim and I loved having Kirk, but having a 3-year-old in the house was also a big adjustment. We also realized early that it was our responsibility to be Kirk's advocate, which sometimes meant pushing for the services he deserved and was entitled to get. For example, Kirk had an IEP and attended a pre-school in the community where he was in foster care. When he became our son, I looked into getting him into a similar pre-school program run by the public school system in our hometown. I took him to an evaluation session. The director of the program agreed that he needed services but said that she didn't have any openings in her program. Her answer did not sit well with me. I thought she was not taking Kirk's needs seriously. I contacted her the next day and told her that I wanted Kirk in the program and that it was up to her to find space for him. She immediately found a slot and he started the program the next week. I found out later that she was obligated by law to find a space for him. I have wondered if she told me initially that there wasn't space for him in hopes that I would just go away after her first refusal. This is one example of how Tim and I came to know that it was our responsibility, as Kirk's parents, to be his advocates and to insist that he receive the services to which he was entitled. If we did not advocate for him, who would? That experience was one of the many times I realized what a huge responsibility God had entrusted to us when we adopted Kirk. We were responsible for the health and well being of this small person. I know the majority of birth parents feel this same way. However, I was surprised at how strong the same feeling was in us as newly-adoptive parents.

Kirk had no *attachment* issues, probably because he had had great stability with the foster family for 2 1/2

years. We were grateful for that. We had learned during the MAPP training that it is common for adopted children to have attachment issues, because often they have been moved to and from multiple foster placements. He did, however, have some *emotional issues*. For example, for the first few months after he became our son, he insisted on keeping ALL of his possessions on his bed (toys, books, most of his clothes, etc.) Because we felt some insecurity was understandable in a new situation, we went along. After three months or so, he no longer needed to keep his possessions on his bed. Kirk also had some food insecurities during the first few months he was with us. We frequently found jars of peanut butter in his room. There certainly was no problem with having enough food in his foster family, and he knew that there was plenty of food at our house. I wonder if there had been some problems with food in his birth family? Most likely, having control over some food when he wanted it was his safety blanket. I say that because his need to keep food in his room diminished after he had been with us for several months.

Lack of Post-Adoption Services: We were disappointed in the post-adoption services available to us. There were few services to begin with, and the ones that were available were not helpful. For example, we attended several meetings of an adoption support group but didn't find it terribly helpful. Most of the other families in the group were experiencing serious behavioral and/or emotional problems in their adopted children. The issues we were experiencing with Kirk were subtler, such as his problems with focusing and his hyperactivity. We needed coping mechanisms for ourselves and, more importantly, we needed advice on how to help Kirk settle down and focus, but the support group never provided that. We also did not have any luck with the counselors that the state referred us to (more on that later.)

We took Kirk to the events sponsored by the state so that he could be with other adopted/foster care children

and we could talk to the other adoptive parents. Unfortunately, he did not form a connection with any of those children, most likely because the events took place infrequently, and it was often different children at the various events. The events didn't benefit us, either, since the parents dropped the kids off and didn't interact with the other parents. I think the state could have done a better job of connecting the adopted/foster kids as well as the adoptive/foster parents.

Kirk saw a counselor for a few years because we felt it was important for him to have someone other than us to talk to about potential issues with the adoption, etc. He formed a therapeutic relationship with one counselor, but that counselor experienced personal difficulties and often cancelled or rescheduled Kirk's appointments. After about a year of being disappointed every time the counselor had canceled or rescheduled, we decided that continual disappointment was not helping Kirk, so we stopped taking him to that counselor. This experience was another example that the state post-adoption services were inadequate.

In August of 1997, when Kirk had been our foster son for the required six months, we began the process of finalizing his adoption. Part of the process was for us to indicate what Kirk's new name would be. On March 31, 1997, about one year after Kirk had become our foster son, the judge finalized the adoption, and Kirk officially became Kirk Schuster-Southern. We received a new, revised birth certificate as a result of the finalization, which indicated that Tim and I are Kirk's parents. We kept the copy of his original birth certificate, since we knew that he would want to see it in the future.

In early 2012, Kirk told us that he had contacted his birth family and was planning to meet them. We thought this was wonderful, but we also wanted to make sure that they would be a good influence on him and that he would be safe with them. Before we would agree to let him spend the night with them, we wanted to meet his

birth mother, Liz, and her family. We explained to Kirk that we understood their importance as his birth family, but that to us, they were strangers, and that we needed assurance that he would be in a good environment with them. Kirk seemed to understand this and, in March of 2012, he arranged for us to meet them at a nearby city. Somehow it seemed right that he had gotten in touch with his birth mother and that we would be meeting her and her family. She was, after all, the woman who had given him life, and we would always be grateful to her that she had done so. I did not, and still do not, feel threatened by her at all. I was excited about meeting her and the rest of her family.

The meeting with Liz went very well. We took her and her family out for pizza and spent some time getting to know them and their stories. Kirk's birth mother told us that she had tried to keep him but that she didn't have any support, either from her family or from the state; that she was only 18 when he was born, and she didn't know how to raise a child. It was very interesting to talk to her and to realize what a wonderful woman she is. She obviously loves Kirk very much but could not raise him or his birth siblings. We have seen her several times since the initial meeting in 2012 and have a good relationship with her. She and Kirk also have a good relationship, which we encourage. It has been very positive for Kirk and for us to be in touch with his birth family. I firmly believe that the more people who love Kirk, the better. In the fall, Kirk will begin his senior year at Plymouth State University, majoring in Marketing. His essay also appears in this issue of SBG. Tim and I are very proud of the young man he has become.

When we originally applied to adopt, we indicated on the application that we were interested in adopting two children. Both Tim and I had grown up with siblings, so we knew that we wanted to adopt at least two children. The process for adopting Jordan was easier and less time consuming than it had been for Kirk, since our application was still considered complete and current.

Kirk had been our son for approximately eighteen months and was five years old in August of 1998 when we received a call that there was another child who was potential match for us.

Finding Jordan: Jordan's social worker had received our home study from our social worker, and she felt that Jordan, who was 23 months old, would be a good fit for our family. During our subsequent conversations with her, we learned that Jordan was the youngest of four birth siblings: two birth brothers and one birth sister. His birth father had not been involved in his life and his birth mother was unable to care for him due to her having some serious issues. He had been placed with five foster families in his young life. I think that, given that the state had too few foster families and that Jordan had been moved around so much, his social worker decided that the best thing for Jordan was to place him with a pre-adoptive family. At this point, his birth mother's parental rights had not yet been terminated.

We contacted Jordan's foster mother, who told us that he liked books and mechanical toys, that he was slow in speech, and that he had tantrums easily. This slightly negative information did not deter us, and we decided to meet Jordan.

But before we could meet him, we needed to prepare Kirk for the addition of another child to our family. We explained to him that we had the opportunity to adopt another child who, if all went well, would become Kirk's little brother. I remember thinking how wonderful Kirk's response was. He was very excited about the possibility of having a little brother. He did not seem to care that another child would take some of our attention away from him. His reaction showed us that he felt secure in our family and was not threatened by the addition of another child. His reaction also supported our view that Kirk's self esteem was very high. Kirk even used some of his own birthday money to buy a small red ball to give to Jordan at our first visit.

In mid-September of 1998, Tim, Kirk, and I went to meet Jordan at his foster family's home. Kirk gave Jordan the red ball that he had bought for him. Jordan held onto that ball during our entire visit and seemed to understand, even though he was not quite two years old at the time, that it was from his big brother. From that moment on, Jordan has looked up to and respected Kirk, and Kirk obviously loves Jordan very much. During that first visit, Jordan and Kirk played with the ball. They formed a strong bond with each other that has strengthened over the years.

On September 25, 1998, his Family Day, Jordan moved in with us and became our son. Tim and I were excited to add another son to our family, and the boys seemed to get along very well together. Kirk had just started kindergarten, so it was an exciting and busy time. I was fortunate to be able to take a second adoption leave from my library faculty position at Providence College, which was especially important because Jordan had many medical appointments, including visits with speech therapists due to his delayed speech.

Jordan bonded quickly with Kirk, Tim, and me. We were concerned that Jordan would have bonding/attachment issues since he had lived with so many families since birth. We were pleasantly surprised to find that he had few such issues. Jordan also showed us very early that he is extremely intelligent. He understood things very easily and quickly caught up to age-appropriate speech. I think that the stability of living with Kirk, Tim, and me created an environment that allowed him to catch up. However, there were negative effects of the instability he experienced early in life. He had serious issues making transitions and had major tantrums when it was time to move from one activity to the next. For the first few years, we frequently had to leave stores and restaurants due to his tantrums and meltdowns. We removed him from the situation, sat in our van and waited for him to calm down enough to buckle him into his car seat. Tim and I understood the reasons for the tantrums and tried very hard to be patient with Jordan during these outbursts. Jordan's tantrums did not stop until he was 6 or 7 years old.

Our lack of preparation for his outbursts was another example of our not receiving the post-adoption services that we needed. We asked our social worker for a referral to a counselor who might be able to help us give Jordan the support that he needed to handle his frustration in a more productive way than the tantrums. The counselor to whom we were referred, allegedly experienced in adoption issues, was not helpful at all. We had made it clear to her that we had sought her out for help in dealing with Jordan's tantrums and other behavior issues. However, during a visit with her where Jordan was present, he had one of his meltdowns in her office. Instead of using that incident to help us to learn how to deal with his tantrums, the counselor chastised me saying that I had not reacted properly to his behavior. Obviously, we did not return to that counselor. Jordan eventually outgrew the meltdowns and tantrums. However, I still feel that appropriate counseling would have helped all of us handle his behavior better.

In late 1998, when Jordan had been our son for a few months, the court terminated his birth mother's, Michele's, parental rights. The state decided that he needed to have a final visit with her. Tim and I were very concerned about this. Jordan was only two years old, and we were not at all sure what the benefit would be for him to meet with her for a final time. We talked with our social worker and told her that we didn't think that a final visit with Michele would be in Jordan's best interest. At that point we realized the tenuous situation we were in. Massachusetts has a requirement that a child live in a pre-adoptive home as a foster child for at least six months before an adoption can be finalized. Jordan was our foster child at this point, not officially our son. As such, we had very little say in what he did or did not do. The state controlled everything. As Jordan's foster parents, we had no legal right to refuse a final visit with

his birth mother, or to assert our wishes about anything else in opposition to what the state wanted. Being in this limbo-type situation was painful because we loved Jordan already and felt as responsible for him as we did for Kirk. The end result was that the state required that Jordan have the final visit with his birth mother. They did not require that Tim and I be there for the visit, but, of course, we wanted to be there if Jordan had to be there.

In early 1999, the social worker arranged for us to meet Michele in a neutral environment. To our surprise and happiness, the visit was a wonderful experience for all of us. It was truly a blessing for Tim and me to meet her and to get to know her a bit. We spent several hours with her. She gave Jordan a Blues Clues toy which he still has. We took many pictures of Jordan with her, with us, and with all of us together. We came out of the meeting with a profound appreciation for how much Michele loved Jordan and also with a much better understanding of how heartbreaking it was for her to not be able to raise him. We felt a closeness to, and respect for, her that we would not have known if we had not met her. She gave us letters that she and Jordan's oldest birth sibling, Jessica, had written, for us to give to him when he was older. The letters were full of both love for Jordan and regret for the fact that his birth mother had serious issues which prevented her from raising him. Years later, Jordan used these letters to locate and reunite with his birth mother and the rest of his birth family. Tim and I met her again at that time and found her to still be very devoted to him and to his birth siblings. We were all shocked and saddened by her untimely death in early 2015. Jordan continues to have a very good relationship with his birth sister and his two birth brothers. They are a blessing to all of us.

We finalized Jordan's adoption on June 23, 1999, only nine months after he had moved in with us, and he officially became Jordan Schuster-Southern. The judge who finalized his adoption drafted a document, separate

from the adoption certificate, declaring that Jordan was now an official part of our family, which all of us signed. At the judge's request, Kirk signed the certificate for Jordan, since Jordan was only two years old at the time. I remember thinking how wonderful it was that the judge took the time to make the adoption ceremony special for all of us by creating a wonderful certificate and to give a special job to Kirk, to sign the certificate for Jordan. We celebrate Jordan's Naming Day on June 23 every year. As with Kirk's adoption, we received a revised birth certificate for Jordan indicating that we are his parents. We kept his original birth certificate since it is an important part of Jordan's life history.

This year, Jordan will graduate from high school. In the fall, he is planning to attend Universal Technical Institute in Norwood, Massachusetts. He has a solid work ethic. I know he will be successful in a technical career. We are proud of how he has overcome many losses in his young life to become a wonderful, caring young man.

Family and Naming Days: Each year since we finalized the adoptions, we celebrate two adoption-related anniversaries: Family Day, when the boys moved in and became our sons, and Naming Day, when the judge finalized the adoptions and gave the boys our hyphenated last name. These are two very important anniversaries for us. We give the boys gifts on those days and do something special together as a family. We have always felt it was important for the boys to see their adoptions as a positive thing, as we always have. Celebrating their Family and Naming Days is a big part of that.

CONCLUSION: Our experiences adopting our sons through the state of Massachusetts were very positive. The application and MAPP training; Kirk's and Jordan's placements with us as our foster sons; and the finalization of both adoptions were all positive experiences for us. However, the post-adoption services that we received

were not ideal. I especially regret that we were not able to find a counselor who could assist us in helping Jordan to handle his frustration in a more productive way than the tantrums to which he was prone.

I firmly believe that God's plan for Tim and me was to raise Kirk and Jordan, boys who needed loving adoptive parents. Although their birth parents loved them very much, they were not able to raise them. Kirk and Jordan are not biologically our sons but are our sons in every other sense. They have been and continue to be huge blessings to us. I cannot imagine what our lives would be like now if we had not taken the leap of faith to adopt them.

About the Author: Janice G. Schuster, Associate Professor, is Commons Librarian for Research, Education, and Collections, at Providence College's Phillips Memorial Library. She received a B.A. degree in German and an M.L.S. degree, both from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. She can be reached at:jschuster@providence.edu

Completing the Puzzle of My Early Life

By

Kirk Schuster-Southern

The assignment was to pick a moment in my life that helped shape me into the person I am. I was stumped. My first thought was that it was hard to choose one defining life moment that was more memorable than any other. My mind raced in different directions. After 15 stressful minutes of brain storming, I realized that one experience did have more influence on my life than any other. Since I was adopted when I was three years old, I decided to write about the first weekend I spent with my biological family. That weekend took place when I was 18 years old.

Before that weekend, my life had seemed like a huge puzzle missing an essential corner piece. I could see the beautiful picture that the pieces I already had showed; but without that one small corner piece, I felt the puzzle would never truly be complete. The day I met my birth family, the missing puzzle piece fell into place. Meeting members of my biological family provided answers to many questions.

I began my search for my biological family by looking at the original birth certificate my very loving, supportive adoptive parents gave me. When my adoption was finalized, a new birth certificate was issued identifying my adoptive parents as my parents. Fortunately, they had a copy of my original birth certificate, listing the names of my birth mother and birth father. I searched for my birth parents' names on every social networking webpage available. After hours of desperate search, I found a match for my biological father's name on *Facebook*. At first I wanted to message him. However, I thought to myself, "What if he's scared to talk to me?" "What if this man isn't even him?" "What if it is and, just like when I was a young child, he wants nothing to do with me?" These thoughts overwhelmed me and, because I did not want to be disappointed by the answers, I held off messaging him. Finally, I decided to reach out and hope for the best.

After I sent the message, I checked my *Facebook* daily for a reply. What I saw was an empty inbox folder. Then, after one week of excruciating anticipation, I finally had a reply from him. I was nervous. I could

feel beads of sweat forming on my brow. My hands moistened the computer mouse with perspiration. When I opened his message it was exactly what I was afraid it would be: This man cared nothing for me at all. Immediately, he tried to convince me that my adoption was entirely my birth mother's fault. He also elaborated on how she was a terrible woman and that he was not even my "real" father. He used every excuse possible to place the blame on anyone but himself. He did not seem to understand that I was not blaming anyone for anything. I was just searching for answers. This childish man only provided me with two things: a newfound appreciation for my loving Dad who, along with my Mom, had raised me from the age of three and the fact that I have two birth sisters. Since that conversation, I have never been in contact with my birth father, and I never will. He will always be irrelevant to my life.

Although contact with my supposed biological father was a huge letdown, I was determined to find a member of my biological family who might actually care about me. Armed with the information that I had birth sisters, my search continued. I looked for them on *Facebook* and, by God's grace, I found one of them. Although I was a little hesitant to message her because my attempt to contact my biological father had been such a demoralizing failure, I did it anyway. This time I found the satisfaction for which I had been looking.

Almost immediately, my sister responded to my message. The day I messaged her, January 4th, happened to be her 15th birthday. When she got my message, she exclaimed that I gave her the best birthday present she could ever ask for. Just from hearing those first few sentences, my lips began to spread across my face as if each end was trying to bite my earlobes. I had an overwhelming sense of happiness and my eyes were streaming tears of joy. We talked for hours and she informed me of everything my deceiving birth father hadn't. She told me that my birth mother always wanted to keep me but couldn't because of my abusive birth

father and her addiction to heroin. She fought to keep me but couldn't because of the unstable circumstances of her life. I was taken from her and placed in a foster home. My birth sister then asked me about my adoptive family. I told her I was the luckiest child on earth. I truly have been blessed with such a loving and caring family that supports me in every aspect of my life. I couldn't ask for a better family and wouldn't trade them for the world. After a few hours of talking with my birth sister, I discovered that my biological family lived in a nearby city. Immediately, I arranged to visit them the following weekend.

Anticipating this visit was the most nerve-racking experience of my life. I finally arrived at the local family bar and nightclub where I would find the corner piece of my puzzle. I felt like I was walking into a haunted house. I was scared and had absolutely no idea what to expect. As soon as I opened the door, I scanned the bar and immediately everyone stopped and stared. Right away a short woman who resembled me ran over and embraced me with the tightest bear hug I've ever felt. As she wrapped her hands around me I could feel her eyes dampening my shirt. My own tears of joy threatened to pour down my face. Immediately, I felt an overwhelming sense of belonging. I knew this woman was my biological mother.

After being bombarded with kisses, my biological mother finally let go of me. She introduced me to the others present-- aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, family friends and, most importantly, my two biological sisters. They all pampered me with love and made me feel welcome. You would have thought I had just come home from a long deployment at war. We all hung out for a while happily shooting pool, dancing to reggae music and eating Portuguese food. People said: "I remember when I used to play with you when you were a cute little baby! You look so much like your mother now!" Then they told me stories about when I was a baby or a asked questions about my fifteen years apart

from them. I was the center of attention and, of course, I liked it.

My biological mother's car was an extremely old, beat-up Volvo with missing windows and a creaky door that didn't quite open all the way. Her car looked like it had been on a golf course where oversized golf balls hit its sides and top. I could feel the car's loud humming. My seat vibrated and with every bump I expected to hear the loud crash of the rear bumper falling off. Riding in her car made me realize and appreciate the three perfectly-running cars in my driveway at home, one of which was mine. After that car ride, I never again complained about my little blue 2003 Corolla. I started treating it like the blessing it truly was.

When I arrived at my biological mother's apartment, I stared in disbelief. Upon entering, the odor of cigarettes filled my nostrils and clogged my throat. My eyes instantly began to water. It was hard to keep from coughing. Her attic apartment was not heated. I felt a chill as the cold air nipped at my skin. Her apartment wasn't much bigger than my own living room and kitchen combined. The place barely qualified as an apartment. Its white walls were smudged with dirt and holes were clearly visible in corners. The heavily-stained rug on the floor was beyond washable. Except for a few pieces of old, beat-up furniture scattered in different rooms, the apartment was pretty empty. There was only one small television with less than twenty channels in her closet-size bedroom. The small bathroom in the apartment smelled like a sewer. In order to enter and shut the bathroom door, a person had to step into the cracked, dirt-stained bathtub. At that moment I realized just how poor my birth mother really was. It came as a huge shock to me because, during the hours at the bar, she seemed so happy and carefree. If I had never gone back to her apartment, I would have never known that she was barely surviving.

That whole weekend my biological mother wouldn't stop offering me things I knew she didn't have to give. At night she would ask: "Kirk, are you hungry? I know you're a growing boy. Mommy wants to feed her son." I graciously lied and said no because I knew that small fridge in the barely-functional kitchen was nearly empty. I also suspected that she was a lot hungrier than I was. Still, she emptied her cabinets to make me a plate of food and waited until I had finished it. I felt awful eating. It touched me immensely to see someone with almost nothing be so quick to share. Seeing my birth mother in such a horrible living situation, yet with a smile on her face and generosity in her heart, truly changed me that weekend.

Since that weekend, I have gone to visit my biological mother frequently. To this day I have not once heard her complain about the way she is forced to live. I can truly say that after the first weekend I spent with my birth mother, I have a better appreciation of all the little things in life with which I have been blessed. Food has tasted a little better. I have come to appreciate everything my loving parents have provided for me. I no longer argue with them when they ask me to do things like cleaning my room or folding clothes. I am thankful to have a room to clean and clothes to be washed. When I drive my car, I now treat it with respect and no longer complain about putting gas in it. I'm relieved I don't have to choose between buying gas and eating that night. I no longer look at school as a torturous place to be; but instead I see it as a way to make sure I don't ever have to struggle for a meal at night. This experience had affected me so much that it is almost impossible for me to walk by a homeless person without dropping a few coins in their cup or buying him meals from McDonald's.

In conclusion, meeting my biological mother was the most life-changing, humbling experience I've had. That experience lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. Although it may sound like a cliché, my heart could

finally be at ease. In many ways, that experience helped to shape me into the person I am. It also provided me with a strong sense of appreciation for the blessings I have in my life. Those unforgettable moments with my biological mother allowed me to complete the puzzle of my first three years of life.

About the Author: Kirk Schuster-Southern, 21, is a junior at Plymouth State University in Plymouth, NH. A Marketing major, with a concentration in Sales, Kirk is also a member of the PSU Rugby team. Kirk wrote the original version of this essay during his freshman year at PSU. In 2013, while attending PSU full time, he began working for the Vector Corporation as a sales representative. He was promoted to branch manager within one year, and is currently a senior branch manager. Kirk can be reached at kschustersouthern@ gmail.com.

Elizabeth Borges: A Birth Mother's Story of Loss and Gain

By

Janice G. Schuster[1]

This essay is about my life experiences as a birth mother whose son, Kirk, was put into Massachusetts state care at age one and who was adopted by Janice Schuster and Tim Southern when Kirk was 3 1/2 years old. I pray that my story will be useful to other birth parents who were not able to raise their biological children, despite loving them very much and wanting only the best for them.

I was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1975, the oldest of three children of very young parents. My mother had just turned 17 when I was born. During my childhood, I was responsible for my two younger siblings because our parents had drug problems. Because our parents were both drug addicts, my siblings and I did *not* have a normal family life. While my parents spent their days getting high, I took care of my younger sister and brother. I did the best I could in this role. Unfortunately, I had no model as to what a family should do or how family members should act toward each other. I now know that normal family life involves doing things together like parents reading to their children. In addition, throughout my childhood, I suffered physical, mental, and sexual abuse.

When I was in elementary school, I told a teacher that I was being sexually abused. A social worker interviewed my parents and me. My parents would not

let me press charges against the family member who had raped me; so no justice was ever done about my being raped. I'm not sure why the state did not press charges on its own.

Due to the abuse I was experiencing at home, I was placed in foster care at age 10. From then, until I was about 15, at times I lived at home with my family and at times I lived with foster families. When I was 15, I ended up in a group home, where I lived until I was 17.

At age 17, soon after I left the group home, I became pregnant with Kirk. His birth father and I broke up soon after. I then began a relationship with a man who would later become the birth father of my two daughters. When Kirk was born in August of 1993, I was 18 years old. My boyfriend willingly put his name on Kirk's birth certificate as his birth father, even though he knew that Kirk was not biologically his child. In June of 1995, I had a daughter with this same man and, in early 1997, I gave birth to a second daughter with him.

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[1] Elizabeth (Liz) Borges' story was written by Janice Schuster based on meetings with Liz on 7/2/15 and 7/7/15. Janice and her husband, Tim Southern, feel blessed to have a very good, close relationship with Liz, their son Kirk's birth mother. When Janice wrote her Point of View essay for Volume One of SBG about her experiences as an adoptive mother, she asked Liz if she was interested in writing about her experiences as a birth mother whose son was placed in foster care and subsequently adopted. Liz replied with an enthusiastic yes. Upon further discussion, Janice and Liz agreed that Liz would tell her story to Janice and that Janice would write Liz's story. Janice drafted this essay and discussed it with Liz who stated that this essay accurately conveys her story. Janice can be reached at jschuster@providence.edu

My boyfriend abused me physically. Someone reported the abuse to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS, now the Department of Children and Families). Due to our unstable living conditions, DSS removed Kirk, who was one year old at the time, from my care and placed him in foster care. One of the staff members in the group home where I lived while I was in foster care became my social worker when Kirk was taken from me and placed into foster care.

After Kirk went into foster care, my life really began to unravel. I was angry, both at the world and at myself. I felt that I needed guidance on how to be a mother to Kirk and my daughters, but no one was willing or able to give me that guidance or help. Since my childhood was not normal, and I had no role models about how to be a good parent, I did not know how to provide a normal childhood for my children. I still feel that if someone had been willing to teach me and give me the guidance I needed, I would have been able to raise Kirk, and he would not have been placed in foster care.

When DSS took Kirk from me, I felt that they would take my daughters as well. I had no one to turn to for help. As it turned out, DSS placed my daughters in foster care with a family friend. My friend wanted to take Kirk also, but DSS decided that she already had the maximum number of foster children, so they placed Kirk in an outside foster home instead.

Finally I was able to end my relationship with the birth father of my daughters. Soon after, I met a man who gave me the stability and love that I had been lacking. He cared about the girls and me and treated us well. He became the birth father of my two younger sons, who were born in 2000 and 2001. We had a good, stable family life for a while. I was devastated when, in November of 2002, I returned home to find my boyfriend dead of an overdose in our apartment.

At that point, I wanted to give up. I didn't see the point in living. Due to my unstable mental state, my younger sons went to live with their birth father's sister in New York. After ten years, their aunt said she was having problems with them and brought them back to me. With no warning whatsoever, they appeared on my doorstep. DSS found out that they were with me and decided that I could not provide them with a stable living environment, so they placed them in the care of my younger brother, Jose G. Borges, Jr., his wife, Erlinda Borges, and their family in late 2012.

Kirk, my oldest child, was in foster care for 2 ½ years. During that time, before Janice and Tim adopted him, the foster mother with whom he lived for the entire 2 ½ years, was very good to me. DSS had given me a schedule for visiting Kirk. Sometimes, however, his foster mother let me visit him outside of the schedule. I felt that she was trying to help me and that she understood how much I loved Kirk. When DSS terminated my parental rights and placed Kirk with Janice and Tim as their foster son, his foster mother assured me that Kirk had been placed with a good couple. Since I trusted her and knew she was on my side, I believed her. This belief alleviated some of my worry I had about him.

After Kirk was placed with Janice and Tim in early 1997, I frequently asked my social worker if I could have contact with him. She encouraged me to write him a letter. I did not know what I would say in a letter. I did not think that I could communicate to him what I needed to say in a letter. So, although I never wrote to him, I thought about him all the time. I also prayed that someday he would search for me and find me. I was miserable not knowing where Kirk was or how he was doing. Despite his foster mother's assurance that good people, i.e. Janice and Tim, had adopted him, I worried about whether he was being abused (probably due to my own history of abuse), whether he was getting enough to eat and whether he was happy.

I spent 15 long years not knowing where Kirk was, how he was doing, or anything about him. I prayed every

day that he was healthy and happy and that he was doing well. In early 2012, God answered my prayers. Kirk used Facebook to find the man who was listed on his birth certificate as his birth father and contacted him. He, of course, was not Kirk's birth father and wanted to have nothing to do with him. He did, however, give Kirk the names of my daughters, Kirk's sisters, who were this man's biological daughters. Kirk contacted one of them via Facebook and that led to Kirk's finding me.

I was very nervous before my first meeting with Kirk, in March of 2012. We had arranged to meet at my sister's house in New Bedford, and, due to how nervous I was about meeting him again after so many years, I hid behind the front door that I knew Kirk would come through. I worried about how he would react to seeing me again. Would he be angry that I could not raise him? Would he yell at me? I worried and was very nervous about all of these things.

Finally, Kirk walked through the door. He immediately recognized me and gave me a big hug. He introduced himself very politely and respectfully, which helped me tremendously because I knew at that moment that he had been brought up very well. We talked about his playing football and that he had great parents. I was so relieved that he was not angry with me and that he wanted to get to know me.

Soon after I was reunited with Kirk, I met Janice and Tim for the first time. My heart was changed dramatically at this point, because I knew that great people had adopted him. Not having to worry about what kind of people adopted him changed my heart tremendously. A huge burden had been lifted from me.

I am thrilled to have a good relationship with Kirk now. He is busy with college and working for Vector Corporation selling Cutco knives (during the academic year) and managing a branch office for Vector (during the summer). I don't see him as often as I would like, but we keep in touch through texting and Facebook.

I feel that Kirk does not like to visit New Bedford, though, since I think he realizes that my family life is not normal. I believe he sees how my family members treat me and does not like it. I am currently living in Fall River, so I'm hoping that he will be more willing to visit me than he was when I lived in New Bedford, where my parents still live. I am relieved beyond words to know that he was raised in a loving family that cared for him and gave him all the things I could not. I am also grateful to have a good relationship with Janice, Tim, and Kirk's brother, Jordan. God has truly answered my prayers.

About the Author: Janice G. Schuster, Associate Professor, is Commons Librarian for Research, Education, and Collections, at Providence College's Phillips Memorial Library. She received a B.A. degree in German and an M.L.S. degree, both from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. She can be reached at:jschuster@providence.edu

An International Adoptee and Her Father Speak

By

Wendy Clark and Roger Clark

On January 14, 2015, Maggie Jones, an adoptive mother of two children, one internationally, published "Why a Generation of Adoptees is Returning to South Korea" in the *New York Times* magazine section. Jones found adult Korean-American adoptees who were dissatisfied with their own experiences, as well as that of their birth mothers who had occasionally felt forced to give up their children for international adoption. Some of these children were now leading a movement to ban international adoption, at least from relatively wealthy nations like South Korea. She also found adult adoptees who were much more positive about international adoption, but still wished to live in their birth country for one reason or another. Jones' thoughtful piece led Wendy, an adult adoptee from South Korea, and her adoptive father, Roger, to reflect on issues raised by Jones' article. Here are some of their reflections.

Issues of racism. One of the problems expressed by Jones' respondents is that, growing up, they had experienced subtle and overt forms of racism that their adoptive parents, protected or blinded by some version of white privilege, couldn't adequately anticipate, identify with or help them strategize about. These are issues that could arise, of course, in all inter-racial adoptions, whether international or not.

Wendy: Adoption is a wonderful opportunity for those who want but can't have birth children. It's also a fine way for people to have children even if they can have biological children. I'm a twenty-four year old South Korean female. My adoptive parents are white. I've lived in Rhode Island since I was about four months old. I view my being an international adoptee as a never-ending journey.

I grew up in a nice neighborhood in Providence. During my elementary school years, I wasn't as aware of how different I was from other children around me. Most of my friends were also of a different race from the white majority. For middle and high school, I ended up in a private school. More than half of the students around me were white. My parents wanted me to receive the best possible education. At the time, education meant nothing to me; it was all about fitting in.

I became more aware of my race and my adoption. I would receive taunting and racist comments from boys at summer camp. Students in my school would tease me for the shape of my eyes. "Can you even read the board?" they would ask while motioning to their eyes to make them 'slanty,' like mine.

My high school years were a terrible time. I struggled the most during this time with fitting in while also trying to figure out my true identity. I wasn't accepting of my

adoption. I didn't accept my parents. They embarrassed me. I was embarrassed by my own self. At the time, I wanted to be an average white American. I wanted blonde hair with blue eyes. I wanted to do everything the other white kids in my school were doing. I HAD to fit in. I distanced myself from non-whites as much as possible.

One day, during my sophomore year, my English teacher was showing the class a video about a poet we were studying. He fast-forwarded through part of the video in which an Asian-American man was reading poetry. A student asked why he was fast-forwarding, and my teacher replied, "Because I hate Asians. Especially Wendy." He looked right at me with a smirk on his face as the class broke out in an awkward laughter. I didn't find his comments amusing or comical. I told one of my friends that I was hurt and didn't know what to do. She was African-American and found no humor in this situation either. She told me to go to the head of the school and report what had happened because it was extremely inappropriate. Another one of my classmates overheard us talking and told me our teacher was "just joking. He's a cool dude." This student was white. I ended up reporting the incident and the teacher had to apologize to me. But this didn't help much.

About halfway through my sophomore year, I began to face severe depression and anxiety. I missed almost half the school year as a senior. I hated myself. I didn't care if I graduated from high school. My only question was what my purpose in life was. I started to see a therapist. Coincidentally, he had adopted one of his daughters from China. We worked together for years and dug deep into the root of my depression. It all stemmed from my adoption and being abandoned right after I was born. I still see the same therapist today, but along with my life experiences and keying in on my sadness, he's helped me shape and grow into a happier person, more accepting of myself.

Roger: As Wendy suggests, my wife Bev, Wendy's mother, and I (both European-Americans) do indeed feel fortunate to have been able to adopt Wendy and her older brother, Adam, from Korea. Adam arrived as an infant, in 1986; Wendy, also as an infant, in 1991. My father was still alive to greet both of them, with us, at Logan Airport in Boston. He was 75 when Adam arrived and very soon was telling us how, after Adam, all European-American children seemed "undercooked" by comparison, implying that Adam's slightly darker color was just right. I've often wondered whether there wasn't some racism underlying this clear effort at reverse-racism. But it felt so welcoming of Adam, and eventually Wendy, and so accepting of Bev and me, that I hardly cared. He was acknowledging the differences within our family and embracing them.

My father, an old-fashioned liberal who professed the equality of all human beings, wasn't blind to socially-defined differences like race and gender. He saw very early, however, that Wendy was a smart and athletic child and saw in her someone who was very similar to my mother, his wife, who had died seven years before Wendy's arrival. Again, my father was embracing our children, trying to make them a seamless part of our family. As a professional sociologist, I knew that he was unusual in his capacity to appreciate and accept difference, and recognize a common humanity. As a human being, I had more difficulty keeping in mind the differences that distinguished me from my adopted children than perhaps he did. I was a little too like one of the least attractive adoptive parents mentioned in Jones' article, a man who claimed he didn't see color, insofar as I tended to ignore color . . . until others made color relevant. In retrospect, I wish I'd taken a more proactive stance, one that might have helped Wendy anticipate some of the unkind cuts she describes.

And it wasn't as if others didn't offer foreshadowing, even before Wendy started sharing the news. Bev and I were often approached in the supermarket or

drugstore and asked, "Are they your children?" And, "Are they brother and sister?" I tended to offer simple 'yeses' in my responses, failing to take advantage of these teachable moments, partly out of the fear of emphasizing differences to my children. Bev, on the other hand, tended to give fuller answers ("Yes. They're our adopted children from Korea." "Yes. Now they are.")

I could have taken a more proactive stance and told both Wendy and Adam that they could anticipate hurtful comments based on physical difference. If I had done that, they then might have felt they had more of an invitation to tell us about unwanted comments. Wendy did let us know when the high school English teacher made the "I hate Asians" remark and we helped her contact the school administration and make clear how painful that had been and seek a resolution. But Wendy was less likely to tell us of the barbs from fellow students and so had to deal with those largely on her own (Adam never did tell us of such barbs, though he now admits they came his way). Bev and I had been grateful to find a good, racially diverse elementary school for Wendy. But when the trade-off was between racial diversity and schools with excellent educational reputations in middle school and high school, we chose the latter. In retrospect, I regret this decision, one that we might have undone later if I'd opened the channels of communication about possible racist remarks and behaviors earlier. I wish I'd done a little more of what my father had done: that is, explicitly acknowledged differences, while also embracing them. So, if one of the implications of Jones' piece is that European-American parents of Korean-American adopted children have not always been perfectly prepared to deal with the racial prejudice their children encountered, I plead guilty. I guess the question is, "Have there been any compensations for Wendy and Adam for this shortcoming on my part?"

Issue of Returning to Korea. Although exact numbers are hard to come by, Jones estimates that 300 to 500 Korean-American international adoptees had returned to live in Korea by 2015. While this number is small compared to the over 200,000 that had been adopted into families in more than 15 countries since the 1950s, the vast majority, like Wendy, living in the United States, it may be indicative of a more widespread desire to return. Or it may not.

Wendy: I wonder almost every day if I'll ever visit Korea in the future. I think about it a lot when I'm asked if I ever want to go back. I don't have a high interest in going there anytime soon, or ever really. To me, visiting Korea would be like taking a vacation to any other country in this world. I'd be interested in the culture, the architecture, and the food, but I'd look for those things in any place new to me. I have no urge or desperation to figure out my family ties and history, though I was sometimes more interested, when I was a teenager and working on my identity, in possibly meeting my birth mother. Today I remain curious as to what my birth mother looks like, but I have no desire to try and seek her out.

Roger: Bev and I offered to bring Wendy and Adam, as children, to Korea on vacations, but they never took us up on the offer. Throughout his adolescence, Adam's *sine qua non* for any vacation spot was that it have a basketball court nearby, and he wasn't sure he could count on courts everywhere we might travel in Korea. Wendy was somewhat more culturally flexible, but she never jumped at the chance either. Given our desire to create family vacations that accommodated everyone's interests, we never pushed them to visit Korea.

When Wendy and Adam were growing up, we did encourage their taking an interest in Korean culture in a variety of ways. Rhode Island had an organization aimed at getting adopted children from Korea together while exploring certain aspects of Korean culture, like Korean

food and clothing. Another group provided Korean language lessons that Wendy took for a while. Adam found a needed source of self-discipline, he has observed, by taking, and eventually giving, once he'd earned his black belt, lessons in *Tae Kwon Do,* the Korean martial art he studied from ages 9 to 15. Bev's Korean chicken and beef remain favorites at family gatherings, perhaps especially for Adam's wife, Kristina, who, though European-American, always chooses the beef for her birthday dinner. Bev says she wishes we'd pushed Adam and Wendy harder to explore Korean culture, that we'd taken the decision-making about this out of their hands. But I'm not so sure. Neither Wendy nor Adam has yet decided to put Korea on their lists of travel destinations as independent adults. And that's okay with me too.

As social scientists are well aware, lives may generally follow relatively predictable courses, but any individual life course will be set by contingent attitudes, opportunities and behaviors that are much less predictable. A very small percentage of Korean adoptees, Jones points out, have chosen to live at least some of their lives in Korea. Some of their stories made Jones' piece fascinating reading. Adam and Wendy may be representative of a larger group of Korean adoptees for whom such a choice, so far, has been less compelling.

Issue of Ending or Curbing International Adoption from Korea. *Some returning adoptees, Jones reports, helped to enact 2012 Korean legislation that has probably curbed international adoption, by making women receive counseling and wait seven days before placing a child for adoption. All adoption now must be registered through the courts, giving adoptees a way of tracing the history later in life, if they choose to. The effort of returning adoptees to curb international adoption may be an indication of a more widespread wish by adoptees that international adoption be stopped. Or it may not.*

Wendy: The issue of ending or curbing international adoption from Korea is new to me. I'd never thought about such a thing until reading Jones' article. The more I think about it, the more I see some value in setting limits on international adoption. I'm all for adoption and giving adults an opportunity to be parents, but I believe it should occur, as much as possible, within racial, if not national, boundaries. When thinking about my own experiences, I think one hard thing was that I looked so different from my parents. This led to questions, and looks, from friends and strangers that were sometimes uncomfortable, though over time I've come to roll with those punches. On the other hand, Adam never seemed to be as put off by such inquiries (and looks) as I was, so I believe the discomfort created by apparent racial differences with one's parents may itself depend on differences in personal experience and personality.

Roger: I too had my eyes opened by Jones' reports of returned Korean adoptees trying to legally curb international adoption from Korea. I certainly see advantages to giving adoptees an avenue for tracing their biological family histories, as the new law does by registering adoptions through the courts. I was not aware of the history of unwed mothers being cared for during their pregnancies by adoption agencies that sometimes told them they'd be selfish if they kept their children. To the degree that the new laws inhibit such practices, they are clearly justified.

I also see potential advantages to keeping mothers from frivolously giving children up for adoption, but I find it hard to believe this is common practice. The new hurdles, to the degree that they attempt to compel women to keep children they don't want, remind me of legal efforts, by Pro-Life advocates, to mandate counseling before abortion in the United States to make women feel self-conscious and uncomfortable about their decision. But, unlike Pro-Life advocates, the new legislation's advocates cannot guarantee a viable adoption market in Korea itself, since, as Jones

notes, "Koreans are generally not comfortable 'raising another's child,' as Koreans [themselves] say." And so they seem to be saying to the birth mothers, "Please keep your birth children, whatever your circumstances."

Bev is less skeptical about efforts to curb international adoption than I am. At some point, she became aware that one interpretation of international adoption is that it is comparable to US exploitation of other countries' natural resources. Her self-justification was that children born out of wedlock in Korea received considerable stigma and were not readily welcomed into existing families, whether through adoption or otherwise. Nevertheless, she had a nagging sense that international adoption made it easier for South Koreans to avoid facing the problem and finding ways to incorporate such children into their birth cultures. I'm not so sure.

I am aware that my skepticism about curbing international adoptions is born of something like a self-justifying rationalization. We adopted Adam after Bev and I discovered we were infertile and that, because of our age, a domestic adoption could take years. Adopting Adam, and then Wendy, met our deeply-felt desires to nurture and love children. Stakeholders in the Korean political system, I recognize, are not and should not be obliged to consider such wishes. And so I will watch this political process play out with interest but no great certainty that my skepticism is justified. Jones has done me a service by pointing it out.

About the Authors: Wendy J. Clark grew up in Providence, Rhode Island. She works at a hardware store in Providence and attends college part-time. Wendy enjoys feeding wild animals.

Roger Clark is a professor of sociology at Rhode Island College where he now teaches courses mainly in research methods and the sociology of gender. He is the coauthor, with Emily Stier Adler, of An Invitation to Social Research, currently in its fifth edition, and, with Lori Kenschaft and Desiree Ciambrone, of Gender in Our Changing World.

The Parallels between International Adoption and Slavery

By

Peter F. Dodds

"There is no greater sorrow on Earth than the loss of one's native land."[1]

International adoption is a type of adoption in which parents adopt a child who is a national of a different country. Since 1990, close to a quarter million foreign children have been brought to the United States on orphan visas for the purposes of adoption. This is the greatest relocation of children in America since the Orphan Trains of 1855-1929.

My position in writing this essay is that international adoption is cruel and immoral. Specifically, international adoption is a system filled with documented and on-going patterns of baby stealing, child trafficking, adoption agency corruption, re-homing, coercion of natural parents into giving up their child and legal violations. Corruption and abuse are so vast that, between 1995-2008, nearly half the 40 countries listed by the U.S. State Department as the top sources for international adoption temporarily halted adoptions or were prevented from sending children to the United States (Graff 2008).

Daniel Ibn Zayd was born in Lebanon and adopted by Americans. In *The New Abolition: Ending Adoption in Our Time* (2012), he summarizes the political, economic and social immoralities embedded in international adoption saying that:

"Adoption is, in and of itself, a violence based in inequality. It is candy-coated, marketed, and packaged to seemingly concerned families and children, but it is an economically and politically incentivized crime. It stems culturally and historically from the "peculiar institution" of Anglo-Saxon indentured servitude and not family creation. It is not universal and is not considered valid by most communal cultures. It is a treating of symptoms and not of disease. It is a negation of families and an annihilation of communities not imbued with any notion of humanity due to the adoptive culture's inscribed bias concerning race, class, and human relevancy."

Children in orphanages are highly likely to have one or even both parents alive. Many of these children -- 80 percent or more in some countries -- have at least one surviving parent (Global Facts About Orphanages 2009). Removing a child from their homeland via international adoption results in the breakup of

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[1] Euripides, *Meda*, v. 650-651.

families and communities, inflicting profound grief and suffering on the adopted child, her mother and father, brothers and sisters.

International adoption creates a set of irretraceable harms, particularly the tragic problem of children who suffer the loss of being separated not only from their natural parent(s), but also being separated from their ancestral homeland, culture, and language -- their entire heritage. So Yung Kim who was adopted into the U.S. from her native Korea writes, "In my experience international adoption is one of the most thorough and brutal forms of forced assimilation" (Kim 2009). Attachment disorder and identity struggles are but two of the long lasting side-effects that haunt foreign-born adoptees.

"International adoption has many parallels to the Atlantic slave trade. Both are driven by insatiable consumer demand, utilize a system of pricing and dependent on intermediaries in the form of slave hunters and adoption agencies," states Dr. Tobias Hubinette (2006) who was exported from Korea to Sweden via the adoption market.

Both systems exchange human beings for cash. The Dark Continent birthed the African who was snatched by the slave trader, marketed on the auction block then sold to an eager slave owner. Today, a natural mother in a distant land births a child who is snatched by an adoption agency, marketed on the Internet then sold to eager adopting parents. Today's adoption agency is yesterday's slave trader.

Today, many people consider international adoption to be a "normal social institution" just as many southerners in the 18th and 19th centuries considered slavery a "normal social institution." From America's beginnings the institution of slavery was woven into its social fabric. Slavery was protected with ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1788 and, its legal status upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1857

Dred Scott Decision. Between 1801 and 1861, only president opposed slavery--John Quincy Adams. In the book *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery*, the antebellum attorney Thomas Cobb wrote that slavery was a positive good for blacks because slavery advanced the negro race (Finkelman 2003: 143). In 1837, Senator John C. Calhoun spoke on the floor of the U.S. Senate saying slavery was, "good—a positive good," for slave, master, and civilization (Finkelman 2003: 59). An essay defending slavery published in the September 1850 issue of De Bow's Review stated that slavery is, "good and moral" (Finkelman 2003: 113).

Those who took part in the legal institution of slavery believed they were doing good works and saving blacks from an inferior culture, filling the need for labor and acting according to Biblical principle. As with the supporters of international adoption, supporters of slavery responded to the cultural and religious forces of their time, callous of the emotional and psychological suffering they inflicted upon others.

The parallels between slavery and international adoption are disturbingly similar and nowhere is this comparison more striking than in the duplicate justifications employed by each institutions' defenders. The institutions share three identical arguments:

1. Both are responses to a need.

2. The slave and foreign-born adoptee are better off as compared to those left behind.

3. God ordained both slavery and international adoption. Yesterday's Christian was called to save the African; today's Christian is called to save the foreign child.

1. Filling a Need

Slavery existed to fill the need for labor. Slaves provided the muscle needed to operate the South's cotton economy while the North's textile industry was dependent on Southern plantations and its slave

laborers. International adoption exists to fill the needs of prospective parents who desire to create or build a family, fulfill a savior\rescuer role or fulfill their need to comply with Biblical directive.

Blacks were commodities during slavery. Today, international adoption agencies turn children into articles of trade to be consumed on a commercial market. The African Child Policy Forum was created in response to baby stealing, child trafficking and agency corruption. This independent, not-for-profit, pan-African institution consists of Africa's leading scholars, child welfare experts and government officials. The report, *Intercountry Adoption: An African Perception* (2012), states its anti-international adoption stance in the following quote: "Children (*are turned*) into commodities in the graying and increasingly amoral world of intercountry adoption."

Profit motives of adoption agencies are an embedded problem. The UNICEF position on intercountry adoption, "… lack of regulation and oversight coupled with the potential for financial gain, has spurred the growth of an industry around adoption, where profit, rather than the best interests of children, takes centre stage. Abuses include the sale and abduction of children, coercion of parents, and bribery" (UNICEF Guidance Note on Intercountry Adoption in the CEE/CIS Region 2009).

Like slave traders of the past, adoption agencies reel-in huge sums of cash. In Romania, 30,000 children were adopted internationally from 1989-2000 representing $900 million in business transactions (Schuler 2010). Most of the children adopted were not orphans, they were placed for intercountry adoption to meet adult demand, from legitimate adopters to paedophiles (See, for example, Post, Koelewijn, et al 2007).

The natural mother is victimized and exploited in international adoption. Poverty is a leading reason mothers relinquish their children and adoption agencies

prey on these destitute, vulnerable women. In 2011, the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs reported adoption agencies charged prospective parents up to $64,357 for processing an intercountry adoption (*Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption* 2011). In Ethiopia, the total monthly outgoings which would allow a mother and child to stay together as a family were $15 per month (William-Harrop 2012).

Holt International Children's Services is one of the largest international adoption agencies. The agency used this slogan in a marketing effort aimed at prospective adopting parents, "Holt believes finances should not stop a child from having a loving family" (*Adoption Fees Overview* 2012). Meanwhile, poverty forces natural mothers around the world to give up their children (William-Harrop 2012).

2. Both the Slave and Foreign Adoptee are Better Off than those Left Behind

Although international adoption exists to meet the needs of prospective parents, it is marketed as a system that improves the lives of foreign children. From the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs, "…intercountry adoption opens another pathway to children to receive the care, security, and love that a permanent family can provide" (*Why Adoption* 2013). International adopters believe they are doing good, rescuing a child and providing a better life with more opportunity than they would know in their homeland.

Likewise, Southerner slave owners believed they did good and improved the lives of their slaves. They took on the burden of caring for the interests of their slaves, seeing that they were fed, clothed and given religious instruction. They believed their slaves were better off than blacks in Africa per this line from the poem *The Hireling and the Slave*, "In this new home, whate'er the negro's fate --- More bless'd his life than in his native state!" (Finkelman 2003: 177). In *Sociology for the South*, George Fitzhugh wrote in 1854, "Slavery relieves him

from a far more cruel slavery in Africa, or from idolatry or cannibalism, and every brutal vice and crime that can disgrace humanity; and it Christianizes, protects and civilizes him" (Finkelman 2003:190).

3. A Common Christian Calling

Christianity became one of the most important tools for defending slavery and Christianity has become one of the most important tools for justifying international adoption. Slavery defenders used quotes from Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus and Paul's Epistle's to demonstrate Old and New Testament support for slavery. Similarly, international adopters quote the Bible to support their trade. Both claim God ordains their work. In *The Duties of Christian Masters*, Reverend A.T. Holmes wrote that the Bible supports slavery, slavery is a vehicle for bringing the Gospel to blacks and slave owners should be praised for their devotion to religion and their fulfillment of their Christian duty (Finkelman 2003:97). Thornton Stringfellow was a Baptist minister and his *The Bible Argument: Or, Slavery in the Light of Divine Revelation* reveals his belief that the slave owner was called, as a Christian duty, to convert and baptize his slaves (Finkelman 2003: 123-128).

Echoing yesterday's slave defending clergy, today's Evangelical Christian Orphan Movement employs similar religious arguments to support international adoption. Dan Cruver, a leader in the evangelical adoption movement, wrote in his 2012 book, *Reclaiming Adoption,* "The ultimate purpose of human adoption by Christians, is not to give orphans parents, as important as that is. It is to place them in a Christian home so they are positioned to receive the gospel" (15). Lifeline Children's Services is a Christian international adoption agency whose 2014 Annual Report states that they've been called by God to adopt orphans into families where they can experience the love of Christ and be taught the Gospel.

Racism and Nationalism

Pro-slavery arguments were ultimately based on racism, the belief whites were superior to blacks, and this cemented the arguments of slavery defenders. Pro-international adoption arguments are ultimately based on nationalism, a sense of national consciousness exalting the United States above all others. Nationalism binds the arguments of international adoption defenders. American nationalism provides a moral justification for a system that extracts children from their homelands, places them on the adoption market where they are sold to American parents and raised under the Christian banner. In my opinion, White Supremacy has given way to Adoption Imperialism.

Africa the New Frontier of Intercountry Adoption (2012) is a report that states, "Intercountry adoption as one of the significant responses to addressing the problem of children deprived of their family environments is neither sustainable nor feasible" (vii). There is little evidence demonstrating intercountry adoption significantly enhances the development of child welfare services in sending nations. It is not in the best interest of the totality of children in these countries and works to the detriment of the many U.S. foster care children available for adoption.

The parallels between international adoption and slavery are lengthy and disturbing. Both enjoy legal status. Large swaths of the American populace consider each institution a normal and "good" part of the social fabric. Each system is an industry where human beings are extracted them from their native lands, commodified, put to market and sold. Supporters employ three identical arguments to justify international adoption and slavery.

In conclusion, it is my hope there will be one additional parallel—that international adoption meets the identical fate as slavery in the United States and is abolished. As with the successful Abolition movement

to end slavery, growing numbers of people are speaking out against the practice of removing children from their homelands for the purpose of adoption. Human rights activists, foreign adoptees, social workers, mental health providers, natural families, government officials and others understand the harms of the system and are taking action to reform or abolition international adoption. Time will tell.

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right."

Martin Luther King, Jr. (February 6, 1968).[2]

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About the Author: Peter F. Dodds was adopted from a German orphanage, one of 10,000 German children adopted by United States citizens during the Cold War. His memoir, *Outer Search Inner Journey* (1997), is the first book written by a foreign-born adoptee on the subject of international adoption. As a leader in the growing movement to abolish international adoption, he has delivered keynote addresses at adoption conferences in New Zealand and Canada and been interviewed on television, radio and the Internet. Peter's served as an Army officer and was an elite Ranger, directed an international program for the United States Olympic Committee and worked on a legislative staff. He earned a B.A. from Auburn University, an M.P.A. from the Evergreen State College and is a graduate of the International Olympic Academy located in Greece. Peter has completed a screenplay adapting *Outer Search Inner Journey* to film and is working to have the book made into a movie. He can be reached at: aphpub@hotmail.com or through his website www.peterfdodds.com