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# Breaking the Seal

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## Taking Adoption Issues to the Academic and Professional Communities

*RAFAEL A. JAVIER*

St. John's University

*AMANDA L. BADEN*

Montclair State University

*FRANK BIAFORA*

St. John's University

*ALINA CAMACHO-GINGERICH*

St. John's University

*DOUGLAS B. HENDERSON*

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

**A**doption has a long history in human civilization, with clear reference to its existence as far back as biblical time. The adoption triad, which consists of birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted persons, can be readily identified within

these biblical stories. For example, one is reminded of the story of Moses who was adopted by the Pharaoh and almost became the heir to the throne until he abdicated to return to the people he came from and felt greatest affinity to, the Hebrews. His was technically a closed adoption, since there was no reference to his awareness, while growing up, of his biological family until later in life when he decided to search for his birth identity and birth family. His search was precipitated by his unexplained feelings of empathy when seeing a Hebrew woman about to be crushed by one of the block-columns that was being positioned for the construction of the temple. His decision to search for his birth identity resulted in his losing the connection with and protection of his adoptive parents and set the stage for the showdown between him and his adoptive brother, Ramsey.

The most famous and complicated biblical adoption story is the one of Jesus, who was adopted by Joseph the Carpenter after having been conceived mysteriously in the body of a virgin, Mary. In the eyes of many, Joseph was the biological father and the legal husband of Mary, although Joseph knew that Jesus was not his creation and was his adopted child (Gardner, 1995). Joseph's son was known as Jesus of Nazareth so that the issue of the last name was bypassed. That was not the case, however, for many during the Romans' time, in which the issue of the preservation of the family's name was the primary reason for adoption. In fact, adoption was used as an effective way to ensure the continuation of the family's name in families of the nobility when they were unable to engender a progenitor or their sons were unfit to inherit (Encyclopedia of Adoption, 2006). This practice extended to the emperors, resulting in a number of Roman emperors and high officials who were adopted during their adolescence or adulthood. Children from less well-to-do families were adopted into families with better means, immediately acquiring the new family's name with full right of heritage. It was expected that all family ties with birth families were to be permanently severed. This was not unique to the Romans, as this practice was also found in the Chinese Qing Dynasty, India, and Hawaiian royal families (Chinese Qing Dynasty, 2006; Hawaiian Royal Families, 2006; India Princely States, 2006).

Adoptions have taken place throughout history in various forms, where children end up being raised at some point in their lives by people other than their birth parents. It was even present at the very beginning of the birth of the United States as a nation. In fact, many adopted triad members have led notable and illustrious lives. Well-known and admired adoptees include leaders (e.g., Catherine I, Crazy Horse, John Hancock, William Jefferson Clinton), artists (e.g., Gian Giacomo Caprotti), performers (e.g., John Lennon, Ella Fitzgerald, Faith Hill, Willie Nelson), writers (e.g., Truman Capote, Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Dickens), actors (e.g., Jack Nicholson, Ray Liotta, Gary Coleman, Ingrid Bergman), athletes (e.g., Greg Louganis, Scott Hamilton, Dan O'Brien), and business owners (e.g., Dave Thomas, Steven Jobs) (Dever & Dever, 1992; Freedman, 1996; Goldman, 1996; Longworth, 1973; Petre, 1991; Plimpton, 1997; Terrill, 1994; Tyler, 1998).

The list above includes famous people from the adoption triad (birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees). Those listed led prominent lives in history and were largely powerful and accomplished in their lives. However, other stories and representations of adopted persons also exist—those for whom their adoption may have been used as a partial explanation for their criminal and pathological behavior. For example, Lyle and Erik Menendez were adoptees who became infamous for killing their adoptive parents and reinforcing Kirschner's (1990) "adopted child syndrome" that has reinforced the stigma surrounding adoption. In fact, Kirschner built his theory in his 1978 paper on David Berkowitz, the serial killer known as the Son of Sam, who was adopted as an infant. These and similar stories have contributed to both a glorification and a condemnation of adoption, leaving many without any clear picture of the true nature of adoption. The stigmatization of adoption has created a society of people who may end up having a stereotypical view of adoption, in which each part of the triad reenacts the scenes from history, and each is infused with attributes that reflect their role. For example, the birth parents who died tragically or were unknown or uncaring, the damaged and wounded adoptees whose bad luck and bad birth will reveal themselves in some unwanted way, and the heroic and suffering adoptive

parents who sought to rescue unwanted children. With these images and with the roles already ingrained in the consciousness of society, how can we adequately begin to understand and address the needs of the adoption triad? In particular, how will clinicians, whose role it is to intervene and assist those affected by adoption, be prepared to help, and be effective and competent in their treatment?

To begin to assist the adoption triad, these tainted images and ideas of adoption and the stigma that accompanies them must be unraveled and replaced with accurate, unbiased, and useful knowledge that both acknowledges the potential issues and tolerates the ambiguity of differing outcomes within this population. It is our hope that this *Handbook* will assist triad members, their families, clinicians, laypeople, and anyone interested in adoption in their efforts to approach the members of the adoption triad with the respect and understanding that they deserve, while simultaneously recognizing the complexity of the experiences that adopted people and their two sets of parents have in this world that operates on assumptions of a genetic and biological heritage.

The questions regarding the forces responsible for creating the necessary conditions to have children available for adoption are complex and multifaceted, as are the consequences. This has been clearly delineated in the different parts included in this book. The book has been divided into nine parts specifically designed to cover critical issues in the adoption experience, from a review of the major theoretical, historical, and research issues to specific discussions on assessment and treatment issues with members of the adoption triad. The first part is meant as a foundation to address historical and theoretical issues to provide the reader with a comprehensive review of the adoption landscape from past to present and to set the stage for the other parts in the book. Thus, chapters by Esposito and Biafora (Chapter 2), Biafora and Esposito (Chapter 3), and Freundlich (Chapter 4) provide excellent discussions on the history of adoption in general and, particularly, in North America. They also place special emphasis on identifying the social, political, and economic forces that have accompanied the adoption experience throughout history and resulted in the enactment of the many laws influencing adoption practice. These are considered foundation chapters because they provide readers with important information to help them understand the state of adoption in today's society and gain the necessary appreciation of the complexity of the adoption experience and the historical antecedents to the current historical, political, and legal forces that are guiding the current debate on the adoption experience. As discussed further below, other parts include discussions on issues pertaining to transracial adoption, special issues in adoption (i.e., foster care, single parents, special needs, etc.), training and education issues, relevant research findings in adoption, assessment and treatment issues, and finally, samples of how the adoption experience can provide unique dynamism to the creative process. Each part has a part-specific introduction (or preface) in which a series of learning goals are listed to guide the reading of the different chapters in that part. A list of resources covering topics discussed in the book is included at the end of the book. You will also find in most of the chapters a list of reflection questions that can be used, by those using the book as a textbook, to guide the learning of the subject. Thus, readers are strongly encouraged to use the reflection questions to guide their reading of the different chapters. They are also encouraged to look at the preface of each part where specific learning goals are listed and the resource list at the end of the book, if they are interested in additional information about the topic.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

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Given the longevity of adoption throughout history, including North American history, and the prevalence of adoption in the United States and other parts of the world, how are we to understand that adoption issues still remain largely unaddressed and off the radar in

terms of interest to the professional and academic disciplines? How is it possible that training programs that prepare professionals for human services do not systematically include discussions on adoption issues, as suggested by Post (2000) and Henderson (2000)? It is, indeed, truly perplexing that even after so many generations of families have been directly or indirectly involved with and affected by the adoption experience, our understanding remains so rudimentary. The fact that many adoptive triad members still feel that the complexities of adoption are not fully understood by the professional community not only is unfortunate but leaves many adoptees and their families at a loss as to where to go to address unanswered questions. This ignorance may be responsible for the lack of systematic research on the issues in behavioral science and the lack of clear and useful training and treatment guidelines for those involved in the evaluation and treatment of adoptive triad members.

## FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES IN ADOPTION

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### *Attachment Issues and Identity Formation*

There are a number of fundamental issues that are in need of more systematic attention from behavioral scientists and practitioners alike. Children are adopted at different stages in their developmental trajectory, and yet an empirically validated and comprehensive model documenting the psychosocial life span development of adoptees does not yet exist. How do these children develop bonding and attachment, their self-identities, their views of the world, their relationships with others, their sense of belonging, and so on, in the context of their adoption experience, are questions that have largely eluded the scientific community. We know from the work of Freud (1896, 1905), Sullivan (1953), Piaget (1995), Erickson (1950, 1982), Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975), and Stern (1985) that individuals' basic identity, personality, values, and belief systems, their assumptions concerning causality, time, space, and human nature, as well as culturally specific styles of relating and moral standing are developed during the formative years and in relationship with their human and ecological environments (Dana, 1993; Javier, 1996; Javier & Rendon, 1995; Javier & Yusef, 1998). For adoptees, this environment includes birth parents, membership in an extended family system, geographical and environmental landscapes, genetic and familial heritage, culture, traditions, customs, and language. These authors provide a vivid description of this development where the child is initially in a totally dependent relationship with those he or she relies on for care and comfort. As the child's brain capacity grows more sophisticated, the child's ability to organize its experience with itself and others also becomes more sophisticated. It is in this context that the child learns to handle tension and anxiety, develops a language to communicate, develops categories of emotions, and develops "a relatively enduring pattern of experience of the self as a unique, coherent, entity over time" (Moore & Fine, 1991, as cited in Herron, 1998, p. 321). This sense of self-identity becomes consolidated later in life during the critical adolescent period (Erickson, 1950, 1982) when the child normally challenges and questions many of the assumptions that have guided his or her belief system and values, and that up to that point were accepted without much question. Because of the vulnerability of the child's cognitive and emotional condition during the formative years, this development could be derailed by obstacles in the child's environment. When adoption enters this developmental trajectory, what happens to the child's sense of identity when removed from his or her birth environment early in life and adopted into another environment? And what happens when this new environment also involves different cultural norms, race relationships, and language? What happens to the sense of identity when adoption occurs later in development, during the adolescent years, or when the adopted adolescent who was adopted in childhood is unable to reconcile the discrepancy of race/cultural

differences with the adoptive family or the information made available about his or her origin? These are just some of the incredibly complex questions ably addressed in Part II of this book by McGinn (Chapter 5), Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, and Lash Esau (Chapter 6), and Baden and Steward (Chapter 7).

Beginning with the work of Spitz (1946) investigating the deaths of many of the British infants raised in institutions in World War II, and accelerating in the 1980s, psychologists have studied the concepts of attachment and bonding as they relate to several aspects of the developing child. Our understanding of the sensory and cognitive capabilities of the infant has expanded rapidly and now includes knowledge of these processes in the fetus as well. With this new knowledge, we have reevaluated the effects of adoption, especially in terms of the environment of the prenatal child. It has been suggested that adoption affects the experience of separation from the birth mother and the early postnatal environment, including possible foster or institutional placements prior to adoption (Henderson, 2000).

Nydam (1999), Verrier (1993), and Verny and Kelly (1981) are but three of the many authors who have written about how the infant destined to be adopted, experiences pre- and postnatal life differently than the infant who will remain with the birth family. Emphasizing the importance of early attachment and bonding, Nydam (1999) calls for specific and separate discussions of the relinquishment experience and of its effects on adoption triad members.

McGinn's contribution in Chapter 5 is particularly relevant in this context because it includes a comprehensive discussion of attachment and "attachment derailment" and the consequences of these issues throughout the adoptee's life span, including their effect on adoptees' capacity to develop meaningful relationships. Anchoring his chapter in the work of John Bowlby, Erik Erickson, and Margaret Mahler, McGinn provides an informative discussion on some of the potential obstacles and challenges for adopted persons in the context of their developmental trajectory.

In the final analysis, a self-identity that emerges as a result of all these different cultural, racial, and ethnic influences can only result in the development of what Herron (1998) referred to as "ethnic identity," which goes through the same basic four stages of development (i.e., identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and finally identity achieved). Only when the individual reaches the stage of "identity achieved" is a secure sense of self assumed to have developed. The work of Grotevant et al. in Chapter 6 provides relevant empirical support to the crucial importance of an identity formation for the adoptees that includes the adoption experience, or what they referred to as "adoptive identity." These authors emphasize the iterative and integrative nature of the identity development process for the adoptee rather than a linear one. According to these authors, the major task of identity development in the context of the adoption experience "involves 'coming to terms' with oneself in the context of the family and culture into which one has been adopted." This is the case because most aspects of adoption include things that the adopted person has not chosen. The process of coming to terms is a progressive one and includes *unexamined identity*, *limited identity*, *unsettled identity*, and *integrated identity*. Thus, the highest level of identity formation will be one where the individual has managed to integrate all his or her experiences as an adoptive person in ways that promote sound mental health and a good level of functional adaptation.

Baden and Steward in Chapter 7 take the issue of identity to the next level by suggesting a comprehensive model that explains a variety of possible identities when dealing with trans-racial adoption. According to their model, 16 different identities are possible depending on the degrees to which the adoptee has "knowledge of, awareness of, competence within, and comfort with their own racial group's culture, their parents' racial group's culture, and multiple cultures." These authors highlight other models of identity formation found in the literature, such as Helms's People of Color Racial Identity Model, and make a convincing argument as to how these models are insufficient in explaining the full experience of the adopted person. Theirs, although still largely a theoretical model, is the first Cultural-Racial Identity Model to recognize and separate cultural identity and racial identity as two different and interrelated identities, making different and, at times, competing demands on the individual's identity formation.

Although these chapters are challenging to absorb, given the advanced theoretical assumptions they use, we encourage the reader to become familiar with the work of these important authors since they provide the most comprehensive explanation of the different challenges likely to affect adoptees in various ways.

### *Impact of Transracial Adoption on Triad Members*

What is clear, however, is that throughout history there have been recurrent forces around the world, precipitated by war conflicts, natural disasters, and socioeconomic and political forces, that have forced the displacement of many individuals from their families and countries (Holt, 2006; Rippley, 2005), leaving many without any family ties. Most recently, we see this in the Middle East conflicts, the genocides in many African nations, the continuous slaughter of innocent people in the Darfur region of Sudan, Africa AIDS epidemics, the Southeast Asia Tsunami disaster, and the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans (Gibbs, 2005; Holt, 2006; Sachs, 2005), which have left many children without birth parents, abandoned, in the care of other family members, or in orphanages. In terms of sociopolitical forces having a direct impact on adoption, particularly international adoption, we see also how poverty, governmental policies restricting the number of children within families (e.g., China), and gender preferences based on Confucian principles (e.g., China and India) can lead to abortions, abandonments, and relinquishments, as discussed by Baden in Chapter 8 of Part III of this volume.

Thus, it is clear that adoption has permeated and continues to permeate and penetrate our history and society. Indeed, one is now highly likely to encounter someone who is an adoptive triad member, whether an adoptee, an adoptive parent, or a birth parent. According to some estimates, between 40 million (Henderson, 2000) and 100 million ([www.adoptioninformationinstitute.org](http://www.adoptioninformationinstitute.org)) Americans are directly affected by adoption in very fundamental ways. And these adoptees come from many parts of the world, particularly from several countries in South and Central America, Korea, China, and Russia, as discussed by Baden (Chapter 8), Camacho-Gingerich, Branco-Rodriguez, Pitteri and Javier (Chapter 10), and McGinnis (Chapter 11). Thus, questions such as what are the psychological, socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and legal challenges facing adopted persons, birth parents, and adoptive parents become even more complex when considering the different cultural, racial, sociopolitical, ecological, and linguistic backgrounds that triad members may bring to the adoption equation. The ramifications of these factors cannot be underestimated considering that approximately 8% of all adoptions are transracial and that the numbers of international adoptions have more than doubled from 1992 to 1999 (Baden, 2002).

Thus, we decided to dedicate a whole part (Part III) to the exploration of issues related to transracial and cross-cultural adoptions. In this context, we include a contribution from Baden (Chapter 8), who provides an important discussion of the Chinese American experience for Chinese adoptees and examines the attitudes toward domestic versus international adoption in China, governmental policies affecting a gender differential, and attitudes with regard to who ends up being placed in adoption. The resulting stigmatization in both China and the host country, in this case the United States, continues to be a challenge for adoptive families and adopted persons. The clinical implications of these attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and their impact on adoptees are also seriously examined.

Roorda's contribution in Chapter 9 adds another crucial component to the discussion, by focusing on the challenges normally faced by African American and biracial children adopted by White parents. These types of adoptions have a long history of controversy here in the United States, with clear opposition by the National Association of Black Social Workers Associations. She examined research findings that attempted to study the effect of these types of adoptions on these children's self-esteem, identity formation, and racial group identity. The author concluded that under the right conditions, transracial adoption can be a good thing.

The contributions by Camacho-Gingerich et al. (Chapter 10) and McGinnis (Chapter 11) examine the experience of two other cultural/linguistic groups with a solid representation in adoption triads. We are referring to adoptions from Latin America and Korea. What comes across from these chapters is the need to look at these different cultural adoption groups as unique and as representing unique adjustment challenges. The fact that adoptees coming from these groups present clearly distinguishable phenotype features and skin color, and that the groups from which they come have their own unique values, cultures, customs, worldviews, and languages, creates the necessary conditions for identity, cultural, and linguistic clashes when these children are adopted by families from other racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. These clashes become particularly evident during the adolescent years. These are the issues extensively addressed by Camacho-Gingerich, Branco-Rodriguez, Pitteri, and Javier, who examine the political and socioeconomic conditions of a Latin American group (Argentinean) that tend to influence the extent to which national (domestic) and international adoptions are encouraged. Using a group of Colombian adoptees, these authors also examine the kind of adjustment challenges that Latin American adoptees are likely to face once adopted internationally. McGinnis, on the other hand, offers an excellent historical review of the Korean experience over the last 50 years with emphasis on the kinds of issues still affecting these adoptees today. Of great importance to consider with regard to the Argentinian situation is the fact that that country is not a signature to the Hague Convention and thus making irrelevant to the Argentinian children and parents a series of rules and procedures that have been established to ensure proper protection of children for adoption in the international arena. Although we appreciate the rationale as to the Argentina's reluctance to be part of the Hague Convention agreement, mostly based on the serious abuses committed during the military regime with regard to children being snatched from families (who were later killed) to be given to members of the ruling class that were unable to conceive, the fact is that by not being part of the international efforts to protect children that are adopted, it may encourage adoptions of Argentinian children through informal and, perhaps, illegal means. At the end, it provides Argentinian children being adopted and their families less legal protection and oversight, which is paradoxically what Argentina is attempted to avoid by refusing to sign on to the Hague Convention.

#### *Consequences of Open or Closed Adoption*

The consequences of open or closed adoption and the interrelated subject of "search" and "reunion" issues, as related to adoptive triad members or children in permanent foster care, have yet to be empirically and systematically examined, and few models have been presented or agreed on by the adoption community. For the three sides of the adoption triad, the process of adoption has been viewed by many as a "win-win-win" situation. The birth parents "won" by being freed of child care responsibilities for which they were told they were unprepared. Adoptees "won" by being placed in a better home than the one their birth family could have provided, and adoptees were also sheltered from the negative stereotype of illegitimacy. Adoptive parents "won" by being able to raise the child. The story of an adoption was believed to end with the phrase "and the baby was adopted," much as other stories end with the phrase "and they lived happily ever after." In the traditional view, adoptions did end with everyone involved living happily ever after and never looking back. The adoptee and adoptive parents were believed to have spent their lives as a family indistinguishable from any other family, and the birth mother (and birth father if he was involved) were assumed to have returned to pick up their lives again.

The more contemporary and realistic view of adoption, however, is that every adoption represents both gains and losses, and that adoption is a multigenerational and ongoing process, which only begins with the discovery of an unplanned pregnancy and which permanently affects the lives of all involved. We know that the story of an adoption does not "end" the day the parents and their new child walk out of court as a legal family and the birth parents become legally childless.

A similar process occurs in the foster care triad (birth parents, foster care parents, and foster care child) where the child is removed from the home environment to protect him or her from emotional and physical danger, “for the best interest of the child.” But members of the triad are then confronted with a series of challenges, particularly when the child begins to ask serious questions, such as “Why was I taken from my home?” “Why don’t my parents love me enough to stop taking drugs?” “Why can’t I be with family members?” “Was it something about me?” The complication for an untrained eye is that these questions are not always verbalized in this manner, but they are present in the form of behavioral difficulties at school and at home, learning problems, substance abuse, gang involvement, and so on.

Adoptive and foster care children and parents are at a tremendous disadvantage when they are not provided with much information (as in closed adoption) about the physical health of the child and family medical history, especially when dealing with a child with special needs. The consequences for the integrity of the reconstituted family and the physical and emotional health of the child cannot be overemphasized. Sooner or later, adopted or foster care children demand (especially during adolescence) to know, “Where did I come from?” “Why am I living here?” “Why is my skin color different from that of my adoptive parents?” “Why do I feel different from my adoptive siblings?” and a host of other questions. The extent to which answers to these questions are forthcoming will provide the necessary ingredient for children to come to terms with their past and look to the future with a strong and integrated sense of self.

Driven by the need to address these types of questions more specifically, the editors of this volume decided to dedicate a part to special issues in adoption (Part IV). The part begins with a chapter by McRoy, Grotevant, Ayers-Lopez, and Henney (Chapter 12) in which the authors address issues surrounding open adoptions. Using data from a longitudinal outcome study, these authors engaged in a critical discussion regarding the benefits and complications of open adoption. According to these authors, it is a complex dance in which the roles and needs of the participants change over time. It requires that each member of the triad redefine the boundary of what constitutes family and the self within that family. At some point, a balance has to be struck that allows the adoptive or foster family to develop its own identity separate and apart from the birth parent’s identity. It is this dance and a description of the consequences of different kinds of communications possible among the members of the triad that is the main subject of this chapter.

The chapter by Pakizegi (Chapter 13) addresses the poignant issue of single parents by choice who become involved in adoption and foster care. She suggests that delays in preparation for child rearing and increases in infertility are two reasons why single adoptive parents should be examined given the increase in their numbers. The personal struggle facing these individuals (women and men), including the stigma associated with the assumption that these individuals were unable to find suitable partners and/or unable to conceive, could prove to be quite challenging to each member of these newly constituted families. Pakizegi calls for a more systematic study of what distinguishes these single individuals who decide to adopt from single women and men who decide not to adopt. Similarly, she calls for more research on how single-parents in adoptive families manage to navigate their lives successfully in the midst of the stigma and on what distinguishes those who decide to adopt one child versus those who decide to adopt more than one. It is clear that these alternative family structures are challenging the notions of the traditional family, and Pakizegi invites the reader to wrestle with the issue head-on because this is an increasing reality in the adoption community.

In the next chapter (Chapter 14), Keagy and Rall address an important topic often associated with anxiety and concern for adoptive families and adoption professionals: children with “special needs.” Adoptable children who, due to medical issues or other special circumstances at the time of adoption (i.e., children previously abused and neglected, with attachment difficulties and serious behavioral problems, or with genetically based physical illness), are in need of more intense professional interventions are a population that must be considered when working with the adoption triad. They are considered children with special needs because they require special attention. But the parents may be ill-prepared for the time, emotional, and financial commitments required of them to appropriately care for a child with special needs.



The authors place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of open communication about the child's condition and the need to offer preparatory programs for these parents and for postadoption services. It is their contention that the greatest obstacle in being able to address the special needs of an adopted child is the kinds of expectations the adoptive family have due to the lack of information they received about the true condition of the child. Thus, adequate preparation, education, establishing appropriate expectations, the need of continuing to monitor parental stress, availability of counseling for members of the triad, and availability of respite care and support groups for the parents are some of the major mechanisms proposed by these authors to ensure positive adoption outcomes in these situations.

The question of the special challenges that gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) adoptive families have to face in many parts of society is aptly addressed by Boyer in Chapter 15 on the double stigma GLB adoptive family members face. The fact that these individuals belong to an already stigmatized group, with implicit and explicit negative social attitudes, leaves these individuals with inconsistent legal protection at best or, at worst, totally absent protection. Despite the shortcomings in the law and in response to increased opportunities for adopting domestically and internationally, GLB adoptive families are testing the "adoption waters" and demanding to be counted as legitimate families. The implications of these types of adoptions are enormous not only with regard to the redefinition of what constitutes a family, as addressed by Pakizegi in Chapter 13, but also with regard to the issues addressed in Chapters 5 through 7 in this book pertaining to identity formation, self-definition, view of the world, view of relationships, and the like. Much needs to be known about the mechanisms that may be needed to help members of these types of families, already suffering the burden of being stigmatized by society, to be able to successfully negotiate the hostile environment so as to encourage a psychologically healthy outcome for those involved. The challenge is for the professional community that is often called on to address issues affecting these individuals to overcome their own prejudice. The author addresses this and other related treatment issues well in the chapter. Finally, the author provides an excellent examination of the many issues likely to arise in gay and lesbian adoptions and invites the readers to become familiar with them and actively involved in changing the stigmatization and discrimination prevailing in the current environment.

The chapter by Doyle (Chapter 16) is an important one because it forces the reader to recognize the similarities between issues in the traditional adoption experience and the foster care situation. The differences, however, are evident, particularly with regard to the impact of lack of permanency in the foster care home environment. Nevertheless, foster children and foster parents are forced to confront crucial questions pertaining to identity, self-definition, sense of security, and self-esteem in the context of the foster environment. The possibility for emotional derailment partly precipitated by the instability of the home environment is clearly described by Doyle in the various case presentations she offers throughout her chapter. Also discussed in the chapter are the challenges associated with situations where there are cultural and ethnic differences between the foster child and the foster family. Finally, her discussion of the history and governmental policies that guide this practice is very instructive even for those with professional experience with this population of children.

Many of the central questions that we have covered in the previous chapters, related to identity formation, self-esteem, worldview, issues of attachment and separation, development of meaningful relations, and so on, take center stage in the school setting. It is in this context that many of the most crucial personal battles are fought, because curiosity from peers about their looks, skin color, ethnic makeup, and so on may elicit confusion, frustration, and isolation, which, according to Fishman and Harrington (Chapter 17), "can turn into increased aggression, oppositional behavior, uncommunicativeness, depression, and self-image problems." Once the adopted child is in this whirlwind of emotion, school performance is likely to suffer, and so too the general attitude about school; hence, our decision to dedicate a chapter to address school issues more directly. This struggle may become more intense and emotionally debilitating in cases where the child's adoption experience is characterized by secrecy or paucity of information (as in closed adoption), thereby leaving the adoptee unable to find

answers to his or her many questions. The authors take particular care to address the various ways in which school lessons and assignments can be redesigned such that they could be more sensitive to adoptees' experiences. Specific recommendations are provided in this regard.

## CHALLENGES TO THE ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

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It is clear from our discussion that the adoption experience affects every member of the triad in very fundamental ways, from attachment and identity development, to the concept of family, to relationships with peers and romantic relations. Different stages of development call for the consolidation and resolution of these various challenges (as discussed in previous chapters); and to the extent to which each member of the triad is able to find an acceptable solution to the various challenges, a cohesive and integrated self-definition for the adopted child and the adoptive and birth families will be possible. But one of the greatest obstacles in finding solutions to these dilemmas is the level of awareness the academic and professional communities have about issues of adoption and how adoption affects the triad members in fundamental ways, as amply discussed in Chapters 19 and 20 in Part V, 21 through 24 in Part VI, and 25 through 31 in Part VII of this volume. According to Porch (Chapter 19), Sass and Henderson (Chapter 20), and Henderson (Chapter 25), the current state of affairs is such that many adoptive families have to see up to 10 therapists before finding one who understands their unique circumstances, if they find one at all, or these families find themselves in the position of teaching the therapist about the most basic issues of adoption (Casey Family Services, 2002; Sass, Webster, & Henderson, 2000).

These authors provide a comprehensive examination of this issue, presenting data recently collected, and discuss some of the attempts made by the professional community to bridge the gap. In this context, Henderson, Sass, and Carlson (Chapter 24) present data on how the paucity of information received by both the adoptees and adoptive parents at placement, and the lack of information given to the birth mothers and adoptees about the nature of the postadoption experiences that they are more likely to endure, render the members of the triad ill-prepared to face the intensity of feelings associated with the adoption experience. They found that 55% of adoptees and 86% of birth parents in their sample experienced mental health or emotional problems related to adoption. With the tremendous consequences to the psychological survival of individuals, why are we still in such a state of affairs where secrecy or paucity of information is more the norm than the exception when it comes to adoption issues? Henderson (Chapter 25) provides an excellent discussion of the possible reasons for the current state of affairs in that regard and examines the various obstacles that need to be overcome to change the present course. Pavao's chapter (Chapter 18) is also particularly relevant in this regard, in that it provides a treatment model (Pavao's brief long-term therapy model) that allows for the kinds of issues discussed by Henderson et al. (Chapter 24), Henderson (Chapter 25), Freundlich (Chapter 21), Carr (Chapter 22), Baden (Chapter 23), and others to be addressed. It has been found to be very effective in addressing the complexity of adoption issues with members of the triad. It is an inclusive, intergenerational, developmental, and systemic approach that seeks to normalize the stages of development. It includes many extended family members (including birth parents and grandparents) because this model is particularly sensitive to the complexity and multilayer aspects of the kind of influences the adopted child is likely to experience. Finally, the model is based on a comprehensive examination of the adoption experience and the need to maintain an open discussion of issues of relinquishment, loss, grief, search, and reunion, as well as the need to institute psychoeducational interventions in potential adoptive families. It is clear, however, that only when the academic community takes up the issue of adoption as a systematic focus of academic endeavor will more comprehensive treatment and assessment models be

possible. The call for a more systematic inclusion of adoption-related issues in the curriculum as an essential part of the training of future professionals is clearly evident in these and other chapters in this book.

Freundlich's critical examination of the emerging research contributions in Chapter 21 provides important suggestions to guide future research initiatives. She acknowledges the importance of the increasing amount of research on issues such as the impact of relinquishment, search and reunion, and open versus closed adoption on birth mothers, adopted children, and adoptive families (see McRoy et al., in Chapter 12 of this volume), particularly of middle-class and White women. (See Carr's contribution in this regard, in Chapter 22 of this volume, where she discusses the factors that tend to influence the extent to which Caucasian birth mothers will develop a personally fulfilling life, postrelinquishment.) Unfortunately, not much is known about the effects of the psychological and social ramifications of these issues on birth mothers in other countries and from different social and cultural backgrounds.

According to Freundlich (Chapter 21), what is also missing from the current research literature is an examination of the role of birth fathers in the adoption experience. Birth fathers have suffered from a number of stereotypical assumptions (e.g., that they are uninvolved and uninterested in the adoption experience, including search and reunion, loss, grieving, etc.). Leaving the birth fathers out of the adoption equation paints a very incomplete picture of the adoption experience, with major consequences for the psychological lives of many adoptees. Freundlich points out the need to focus more research attention on the impact of adoption on children adopted at older ages, the impact of the adoption qualification process on the adoption experience, and the determination of who should or should not be permitted to adopt. According to Porch (Chapter 19), it is more likely that children adopted from foster care are older, from racial minority populations, and adopted by parents with lower socioeconomic means. An examination of the reason(s) for this phenomenon could provide important information to help us develop better models that address the issue of foster care adoption more effectively in the future. According to Freundlich, the fact that so little is known about foster care adoption, and the impact of openness on the members of the adoption foster care triad, reflects the overarching need for greater research emphasis on the adoption of older children with histories of abuse and/or neglect.

The important work of Baden (Chapter 23) on issues related to identity and psychological adjustment within the context of culture and race and the work of Henderson et al. (Chapter 24) are two good examples of how research data can assist us in understanding the complexity of the adoption experience. Using the Cultural-Racial Identity Model discussed by Baden and Steward in Chapter 7, the authors were able to examine variations in the potential cultural-racial identities that transracial adoptees are able to report. By refining more carefully the different ways in which adoptees may be affected by their cultural and ethnic backgrounds and the different and multiple identities that may be formed, a more refined approach to intervention for these individuals may be possible.

### *Assessing the Mental Health Needs of Triad Members*

Considering the multiplicity of emotional challenges members of the triad go through from the time the birth mothers consider relinquishing the child for adoption and the adoptive parents consider the creation of their family through adoption, to the developmental questions adopted children have to face as they go through the different stages of their lives from infancy (with questions about bonding and attachment issues) to adolescence (with questions about identity development, self-definition, and self-esteem) to adulthood (with questions about the ability to develop meaningful and romantic relationship with others), these individuals have to come to terms with these challenges and develop a cohesive and integrated sense of themselves as individuals and as adoptive families or relinquishing parents. Much is at stake as the adoption experience reverberates throughout their lives and influences them and the people they come into contact with in very fundamental ways.

Because of these inherent challenges, questions have been raised as to whether adoptees and other members of the triad are more prone to mental illnesses and to psychological and behavioral problems. Are adoptees more likely to suffer from attachment disorders and have difficulty developing relationships? What are the central treatment issues professionals should keep in mind in assessing and treating members of the triad? At what point is it appropriate to search for and reunite with the birth parents? These are some of the questions that have been addressed by a number of prominent scholars and clinicians over the last few years, including B. J. Lifton, Ron Nydam, Joyce Pavao, David Brodzinsky, Ruth McRoy, Harold Grotevant, Nancy Verrier, Doug Henderson, Christopher Deeg, Amanda Baden, and Rene Hoksbergen, to name a few. We have included the contributions of many of these individuals in Part VII of this book, because they have provided important answers to these questions, enriched our understanding, and substantially increased our knowledge of issues affecting the adoption community. What comes across from the work of these authors is that it is important to recognize that although the issues raised before, such as bonding and attachment problems, issues of loss, grief, and identity, and self-esteem problems, are central and fundamental issues to be addressed in assessing and treating adoptees, this does not suggest that adoption, in and of itself, is toxic to one's mental health. What is toxic, these authors argue, is the veil of secrecy and the paucity of information given to triad members about the challenges likely to emerge in the adoption experience. Such a practice has deprived the adoptee of the necessary information to come to terms with his or her unique situation of having been relinquished by one family and adopted by another, of having to process two family histories into his or her personal narrative, and, in the case of international adoption, to come to terms with two or more cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the reader is encouraged to examine the work by Henderson (Chapter 25), who addresses the issue "Why has the mental health community been silent on adoption issues?" and the chapter by Lifton (Chapter 26), which provides an excellent discussion on the concept of cumulative and multiple adoption traumas adoptees need to work through in their process of self-identity development. Hoksbergen and Laak's contribution (Chapter 30) provides important empirical data on the extent to which adoptees are more likely to suffer from reactive attachment disorders, including in adulthood. Baden and Wiley's contribution (Chapter 27) pays particular attention to the clinical symptoms birth parents are likely to experience, including unresolved grief related to the relinquishing experience, isolation, difficulty with future relations, and trauma. Concerned with the long-term reverberations of the issue of relinquishment and loss in the psychological development of adoptees, Nydam (Chapter 28) uses psychoanalytic formulations to provide a vivid description of the intense internal struggle of the adoptees and offers recommendations to clinicians that will help ensure that these issues are not overlooked in their clinical practice. Thus, issues of mourning the loss of the birth parents, the common struggles that adoptees have with identity, the challenges of bonding when early trust is broken, challenges with sustaining intimacy often faced by many adult adoptees, the resolution of the fantasies about birth parents and birth families, are some of the issues discussed in this chapter. Also using a psychoanalytic framework, Deeg's (Chapter 29) and Zuckerman and Buchsbaum's (Chapter 31) chapters provide further descriptions of the inner world of the adoptee, including the different parental representations (biological and adoptive parents) that adopted persons need to reconcile. Deeg places particular emphasis on presenting a theoretical model to explain the genesis of these representations and the various defensive constellations that tend to show up in the treatment situation. In this context, he discusses various transference/countertransference dyads that echo the adoptee's unique intrapsychic exigencies. He also explores the relation of the adopted self with the biological parents and how that relation is a critical determinant in the development of meaningful relationships with self and others (object relations) and the formation of identity. A central challenge to clinicians is how to help adoptees come to terms with transference material that incorporates two sets of self/parent representations. Zuckerman and Buchsbaum's chapter not only provides additional theoretical discussions on the clinical issues affecting adoptees but also presents a clinical situation to bring the point home more poignantly.

## CONCLUSION

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An emerging theme in the work of all these authors is that adoptees are no more likely to suffer from mental disorders than are others; rather, the psychological challenges they face are enormous, which requires the scientific and professional communities to be more involved in providing answers to these questions. As demonstrated by the chapter on poetic reflections and other creative processes (Chapter 32), with the work of poets Penny Partridge and Christian Langworthy, and writer Sarah Saffian, we recognize that adoption could have a wonderful and powerful effect on the creative process. That these writers are able to flourish and become different kinds of writers as a result of their adoption experience and of coming to terms with the many challenges associated with being adopted is eloquently and ably discussed by Alina Camacho-Gingerich in her preface. In this context, Camacho-Gingerich delineates, in her convincing presentation, the subtle and profound ways in which adoption issues appear in the different writings included in this book. How the creative process can become derailed when the creative person is saddled with emotional turmoil and unresolved self-identity questions is amply described in the psychoanalytic literature (Kavaler-Adler, 1993).

Thus, we are left with the question of where we can go from here and what the future of adoption is. These questions are addressed more directly in the concluding chapter (Chapter 33), where we make some suggestions and recommendations in this regard. What is clear is that we need to break the seal of secrecy such that open and frank discussions of issues likely to affect the triad members are possible so as to give fair opportunities to adopted individuals to come to terms with their various challenges. It is the purpose of this book to offer readers a wide range of topics about the adoption experience today and to bring together the most influential voices in the adoption experience so as to provide a foundation for further discussions. Let this book serve as an invitation to come with us on a journey where, at the end of the day, our understanding of all facets of the adoption experience is improved and new models of research and treatment emerge in this context.

Good luck and happy trails!

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