

Issues and Perspectives in Adoption: Then and Now

Adoption Issue	Then	Now
Adoption Viewed as an Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption was seen as a single event that occurred at a point in time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption is seen as a life-long process. • Adoption is viewed as impacting the lives of birth parents, adoptive parents, the adoptee and future generations of all of the above.
Adoption as a Legal Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the 1850s adoption was usually an informal process. • Children were viewed as property and formal or legal adoptions were not considered necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption is viewed as a legal process regulated by state and federal laws. • Statues vary from state to state.
Informed Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth mothers were often coerced into placing a child with someone else due to financial situations and/or other social factors. • Birth fathers were not required to consent to an adoption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More help is available to prepare and support birth mothers throughout the process. • Birth fathers are required to consent to adoption or have rights terminated. • Court oversight is required to ensure that birth parent decisions are informed and voluntary.
Full Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies kept vital information about the child’s history from adopting parents. • Many wrongful adoption suits were filed against agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most states now specify what non-identifying information (medical psycho-social) must be shared with adopting parents. • Most agencies provide full disclosure of required information. Agencies require adopting parents to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of the required information and, in some cases, a waiver absolving the agency of liability for information received after the adoption.
Physical Matching and Adopting Family Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary concern was given to matching physical attributes of the child with those of the adoptive parents. • Adoptions of unmatched children were delayed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families adopt children from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. • Emphasis is on meeting the needs and best interests of the child.
Types of Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoptions were primarily for healthy white infants. • All formal adoptions were legally sealed “closed.” • Usually done by licensed adoption agencies and/or courts. 	<p>In Michigan legal types of adoption placements are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Consent - birth parent(s) selects adopting parents. An attorney or agency assists in processing the required legal documents. • Agency Placement – Birth parent releases to agency or court commits to agency. Agency selects adopting parents and consents to the adoption. • Relative or Stepparent Placement – the birth

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		parent(s) directly consents to the adoption of the child by a person related to them.
Secrecy and Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrecy, anonymity and sealing adoption records were the rule. • Infertile couples often feigned a pregnancy when adopting a baby. • Individuals were often not told they were adopted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At minimum, adopters and adoptees receive non-identifying information including medical histories of the birth parents. • In direct consent placements, birth parents must select the adoptive parents. • It is possible to have an open adoption, where a birth parent(s) maintains an ongoing relationship with the adoptive family and child. • Adoption practice supports adopters to tell the adopted child that he/she is adopted.
Search and Reunion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption records were closed “forever.” • Birth parents who released their children and adoptees were discouraged from any future contact. • Birth parents and adoptive parents were promised that they did not have to “worry” about any future contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many birth parents and adoptees look for and are reunited with each other. Most states have laws/legal procedures for facilitating this process. • Current Michigan law provides that birth parents can file a statement that prohibits the release or provides for release of identifying information now or in the future. • Some adoption agencies have set up programs to specifically help all parties in the search. • Some adopting families engage in a search before the adopted child is 18 to obtain more history and/or for therapeutic reasons.
Adoptable Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the most part, formal adoptions dealt with healthy white infants. • Unhealthy or potentially unhealthy infants or children of color were not offered for adoption. 	<p>Children adopted now include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants of all races, ethnic origins and disabilities. • Older children who have experienced life in the child welfare system and/or have other special needs. • Children from other countries in need of adoption.
Who Can Adopt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle class, two parent, childless white couples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families of all races, ethnicities, and religions adopt. • People of all ages who are married or single may adopt, including those with children. • Most children in the child welfare system are adopted by foster parents or relatives. • Stepparents who adopt their stepchildren make up another significant number of adoptions.
Supply and Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the 1960s supply of healthy white infants was high enough to meet the demand of infertile couples wanting to adopt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the change in social mores occurring in the 1960s and early 1970s, more unmarried birth mothers decided to retain custody of their babies. • More women entering the work force, delayed having children. This contributed to a rise in infertility rates and in couples seeking adoption as a way to build a family.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the demand for children increased, the supply of healthy white infants decreased. • More couples seek inter-country adoption as an alternative to domestic infant adoption.
Fees Paid by Adoptive Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no regulation of this practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most states, including Michigan, allow adopting parents to pay “reasonable” fees that are connected specifically with the cost of the adoption service such as, the legal or social services, home study and/or the birth mother’s expenses during pregnancy and up to 6 weeks after delivery. • Michigan law requires that an accounting of all fees charged and paid be filed with and approved by the courts. There still exists potential to exploit birth parent(s) through offering incentives “under the table” and through misleading advertising and internet practices.
Trans-racial Adoptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began in the 1950s with inter-country adoption of Asian children and with a federal initiative to place Native American children into the cities. • By the 1960s and 70s, more children of color were being placed in white families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant federal legislation was passed recognizing the sovereign rights of Indian tribes to plan for Native American Children. • In 1996, federal legislation was enacted that prohibits denying or delaying individuals the right to foster and/or adopt a child on the basis of race. • Federal legislation prohibits delaying a child’s adoption on the basis of race of the child or the foster/adoptive parent. • Increased focus on recruitment of families of color for children waiting for adoption. • Despite the increase of minority families fostering and adopting, there are a disproportionate number of children of color growing up in foster care.