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Mary Ann Davis

Children for Families or Families for Children

The Demography of Adoption Behavior
in the U.S.

 Springer

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ISSN 1389-6784

ISBN 978-90-481-8971-7

e-ISBN 978-90-481-8972-4

DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-8972-4

Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011932729

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Printed on acid-free paper

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Preface

My initial interest in adoption began when I was a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington, School of Social Work, which offered an internship at the Edna Gladney Maternity home. During this period the revolution of single women keeping their children and raising them as single parents was beginning along with the transition from secret to open adoptions. This was also the era when fellow Texan Sara Weddington was the winning attorney in the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision. The legality of abortions (along with the availability of improved contraception and the increased social acceptance of single parenthood) ended the maternity home movement. Almost immediately, the abundance of healthy White infants available for adoption ended and the acceptable adoptee in the adoption triad morphed into any child of any age, race, ethnicity, health, or ability for which an adoptive family could be located.

My first professional social worker position was as an adoption worker for the State of Texas, working to place the hard to place child including minorities, sibling groups, and children who had emotional and physical scars of abuse. Prior to the early 1970s these children would have been considered unadoptable. The majority of adoption seekers continued to be the married, infertile or sub-fecund, essentially the same population who in the past would have adopted from maternity homes. Although they would have preferred a healthy White infant had these children been available, the cultural and legal changes that drove a narrower scope of availability led to a broader acceptance of who they would adopt. So my special area of interest is in studying the changes in who is adoptable and the adoptions of foster children and hard-to-place children. Later, I was a clinical social worker in a state psychiatric facility with psychologically and behaviorally impaired juveniles, many of whom had been adopted as younger children. Now, as a demographer, I rely on my clinical social work background to direct my research in adoption issues.

Although adoptions represent a small portion of family growth, from a demographer's point of view it is significant. The United Nations (2009, p. xv) estimates that approximately 260,000 children are adopted each year; of these in 2001 the United States (U. S.) adopted 127,000 children; next in frequency is China, with 46,000 adoptions and the Russian Federation, with 23,000 adoptions. The 2000 United States census data are that in the United States in 2000, there were 2.1 million adopted children, about 2.5 percent by age group, with an additional 4.4 million,

about five percent, stepchildren in households (Kreider, 2003, p. 2). Adopted children were 7.7 percent or 6,443,496 of the 84 million household children; 257,792 were foreign born adoptees (Kreider, 2003, p. 12).

Second, there are changes in all three aspects of the adoptive triad: the adopter, the adopted child and the family members who relinquish the child for adoptive placement. Social acceptance of racial and ethnic groups, along with physical and emotional challenges, has changed dramatically in the past 100 years. These changes affect the frequency of child adoptions, the types of adoptions and variables related to the children who are adopted such as their age, race, ethnicity, physical and emotional health and country of adoption). Since the early 1970s adoptive parents are no longer White, middle to upper class, financially secure, married couples. Increasingly racial minorities; those with lower incomes; older ages; relatives, including grandparents; and the single, divorced and cohabiting as well as the married adopt. Data from the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Persons (NSAP) in [Chapter 1](#) describe the demographic characteristics of the adoptive parents by the types of adoptions. Next, [Chapter 4](#) uses the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to present current demographic analyses detailing the characteristics of those who adopt. [Chapter 6](#) addresses gay and lesbian adopters who are increasingly adopting, but are difficult to study due to data issues.

The children who are considered available for adoption and those who are actually adopted have changed dramatically in the last half of a century. Criteria that once, during the post World War II adoption boom, selected only certain young, healthy, infants for adoption have expanded into thriving foster care adoption programs for hard- to-place children. The current perspective of the Child Welfare League of America is that adoption of all children, including sibling groups, is only limited by the ability to recruit families who meet the specific child's needs. Demographers report on both trends and outliers. [Chapter 1](#), addresses who is the preferred child, through data from the National Survey of Adoptive Parents, which describes who is adopted by the three types of adopters (Intercountry, Foster Care and Domestic Private). Next, data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System provides a picture of the foster children adopted in 2004 and 2005. This discourse continues in [Chapter 2](#), a historical perspective of social norms of which children were preferred for adoption. [Chapters 6, 7 and 8](#) give an international perspective on the adopted child. These changing norms are evident in a major film directed by Hancock (2009) *The Blind Side*, which tells the fictionalized but true story of a wealthy White Christian family adopting an African American, inner city, homeless teen, who became a professional football player.

Who adopts? Adoptive parent(s) have changed since the early 1970s. They are no longer White, middle to upper class, financially secure, married couples. Increasingly they are racial minorities; those with lower incomes; of older age; relatives, including grandparents; the single, divorced and cohabiting as well as those who are married. In [Chapter 4](#), Christine Guarneri collaborates with this author to present a demographic analysis of those who adopt using the NSFG Cycle 6.

Characteristics of placing and relinquishing families are also changing. Dual issues of protecting families from dissolution in times of financial stress and

protecting the rights of parents are addressed along with the recognition that the psychological and developmental needs of children are negatively affected by lengthy periods awaiting legal clearance for adoption. [Chapter 2](#) provides a historical perspective; [Chapters 6](#) through [9](#) an international perspective.

Third, we are on the cusp of significant changes in the availability of having sufficient data pertaining to adoptions for demographic analysis. Data issues are explored in [Chapter 3](#). Unfortunately, accurate statistics regarding twentieth-century adoptions are almost impossible to locate. A national reporting system existed for only 30 years (from 1945 to 1975) and even during this period, data were supplied by states and territories on a purely voluntary basis (Adoption History Project (2008)). This social demography of adoption in the United States will address the need for compiling current available data, while continuing to address data needs; in [Chapters 3](#) and [9](#).

These justifications for the relevancy of a social demography of adoptions led to a compilation of social demographic topics pertaining to the changing face of adoption. What is the history of adoption in the U.S.? What data are available for demographic analysis? Who are the adopters, the adoptees, and those who place their children for adoption (e.g. the adoption triad)? What are the criteria for being adoptees or adopters? Why do persons adopt? How many children do they adopt, their ages, race and ethnicity, physical and psychological health, country of origins, relationship to the adopter? Internationally, who sends and who receives adoptees? Why are intercountry adoptees available for adoption and how does this vary by country of origin? How do adoptions vary within the types of adoption (formal versus informal adoptions; the adoption of related versus unrelated children; domestic versus intercountry adoptions; and private versus foster child adoptions)?

The response to this list of questions was refined into three parts. The first part, Overview: [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#), provides a brief overview of the adoption of orphaned, abandoned, or voluntarily placed children and the laws regulating those adoptions. [Chapter 1](#), “Adoption as a Support System for Orphaned, Abandoned, or Voluntarily Placed Children”, discusses who adopts and justifies the relevancy of adoption as a support system for orphaned, abandoned, or voluntarily placed children using data from the first national survey of adoptive families, the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents. This chapter also addresses adoption of “hard to place” children using administrative data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. [Chapter 2](#), ‘History: The Changing Face of Adoption’, provides a historical background of adoption practices in the United States beginning with the pre colonial Era through the present.

The next part, A Demographic Analysis of Adoptions in the United States: [Chapters 3](#), [4](#) and [5](#), presents a demographic analysis of adoptions. [Chapter 3](#): “Sources of Adoption Data”, addresses both the sources and limitations of adoption data. International data for adoption analyses are primarily from The Hague Convention statistical reports; U. S. data are primarily from United States Census and the state Department’s immigration statistical reports and two National Center for Health Statistics surveys (the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Survey of Adoptive Parents). [Chapter 4](#), Adoption Behavior of

United States Women, continues the data discourse by analyzing adoptions using Cycle 6 of the National Survey of Family Growth (Refer to Groves et al., 2005 and [Chapter 3](#) for additional information about the National Survey of Family Growth). This chapter (first author Christine Guarneri) uses the female respondent files to analyze the demographic characteristics of adopters such as age, race and ethnicity, education level, income level and marital status. [Chapter 5](#), “Demographic and Social Issues of Same-Sex Adoptions”, addresses the special issues related to gay and lesbian adoptions. This chapter that provides both a discussion of the background and legal issues surrounding gay and lesbian adoptions with limited data analysis using United States Census data, the 2000 IPUMS 5 percent sample, and an attitudinal survey question from Cycle 6 of the National Survey of Family Growth to explore same sex adoptions.

Part III, Intercountry Adoptions: [Chapters 6, 7 and 8](#), explores intercountry adoptions. [Chapter 6](#): “Intercountry Adoption to the United States” sets the stage for a demographic analysis of intercountry adoptions to the United States by providing a social historical perspective. This chapter provides review of the historical trends in intercountry adoption, through four waves of intercountry adoptions beginning with World War II. I examine historical immigration data from the United States State Department to explore intercountry adoption from World War II to date. In [Chapter 7](#), “Intercountry Adoption to the United States: A Quantitative Analysis” provides an analysis of immigration data of these intercountry adoptions, questioning whether demographic variables used in other migration research can be used to predict the flow of intercountry adoptions (ICAs) to the United States. [Chapter 8](#), “Global Intercountry Adoptions”, expands this intercountry analysis to a global analysis of intercountry adoptions, using United Nations data from the Hague Convention countries to analyze global intercountry adoptions.

[Chapter 9](#), “Conclusion and Implications”, integrates information from earlier chapters to conceptualize an overall framework for the future of the demographic analysis of adoptions addressing the policy and research implications.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the encouragement of Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Christine Guarneri for the inspiration and stimulus to author this book. The conception began with a discussion at a conference among Dudley L. Poston, Jr., Christine Guarneri and me, Mary Ann Davis, about changes in adoption during the National Survey of Family Growth Surveys. Dr. Poston and colleague Ruth Cullen investigated the demography of adoptions using the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) in the 1980s. They found that adopters were significantly unchanged from the peak years of adoptions which occurred along with the baby boom immediately following World War II. White, middle class women, at zero parity, with higher socioeconomic status, and higher education were more likely to adopt. However, harbingers of changes in adoptions were also evident in relative adoptions among blacks, the poor and those with lower education while unrelated adoptions were more common among Whites, and the well-educated with higher incomes. Dr. Poston learned that Dr. Guarneri and I had begun to independently study the current 2002 NSFG Cycle 6; he strongly encouraged our research. The collaboration with Dr. Guarneri is presented in [Chapter 4](#); she is the first author of [Chapter 4](#).

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank my husband Ronald Davis and his ongoing assistance and editing. This book has been years in the making and I could not have completed it without his support. I also want to thank my colleagues at Sam Houston State University for their ongoing encouragement, including Karen Husband who assisted in earlier edits of [Chapter 2](#).

Huntsville, TX

Mary Ann Davis

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