

The Adoption Constellation: Journeys in Theory and Practice



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Models of Adoption Family Life

Adoptive Triad

Adoptive Kinship Network

Adoption Constellation

Constellation Features

- Dynamic, Systemic Model
- Constellation as an Individual Social Construction
- Luminance of elements changes over time
- Emotional gravity changes over time
- Black Holes of Secrecy

Constituent Elements of the Constellation

- Birth and adoptive parents and siblings
- Extended kin: adoptive and birth grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins
- Professionals: social workers, attorneys, judges, therapists, physicians, teachers, religious leaders
- Legislators, Media

National Adoption Study of Canada

- Daly, K., and Sobol, M. P. (1993). **Adoption in Canada: Report of the National Adoption Study of Canada**. Health and Welfare Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Main Findings

- Dramatically fewer voluntary placements
- Increase in special needs, older and international adoptions
- Where records are open, abortion rates declined and adoption rates increased
- Government agencies were more conservative in their practices, particularly re openness

Main Findings

- Voluntary birth mothers chose non governmental facilitators to increase openness
- Most birth mothers approached facilitators in the third trimester
- Teens believed adoption was a good option for an unplanned pregnancy
- Teens knew little about securing an adoption for a child

Main Findings

- Need for wider coordination of placement services
- Parents required more post adoption services and subsidies
- Most provinces maintained poor adoption statistics
- Adult adoptees and birth parents had little access to identifying information

What did I learn?



Adoption Constellation

- Extended adoptive and birth families
- Extra familial family supports
- Community structures, attitudes and services
- Legislators and the law

Policy Questions Lacking Research Answers

- Following birth, how long should the delay be before consent to relinquish legal parental rights may be given?
- What is an appropriate length of time for voluntary withdrawal of consent to have one's child placed for adoption?

Policy Questions Lacking Research Answers

- What effect does **receiving a subsidy** for adoption have upon the life of an adoptive family, particularly when neither the family is in financial need nor does the child require specific services?
- Is speed of placement of a child into an adopted home always related to improved adjustment?

Key Question

- How to meet the needs of birth and adoptive families – not just adoptees?
 - New answers must be found, given the dramatic change in the age distribution of children legally able to be adopted
 - What are our goals in offering services?
 - What would constitute evidence of a successful intervention?

What is a successful adoption?

- Secure Attachment
- Positive changes in the child's cognitive, social and emotional indices
- Disruption and Dissolution Rates
- The child no longer is felt to be in need of services
- Child's behavior no longer meets diagnostic criteria

Looking Back to See the Future

- Grand, M. P. (2006). **Adoption through a retrospective lens: Implications for post adoption services.** In M. M. Dore, (Ed.), *The post adoptive experience: Adoptive families' service needs and service outcomes.* Pp 45-64. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

Factors Related to Adoptee's View of Adoption Success

- Consent to adoption
- Timing of parental roles
- Discipline
- Goodness of fit
- Quality of marriage
- Extended family relationships
- Search and reunion support

Funding Confounds Service

- Effect of requiring a diagnosis for funding of service
 - Highlights a medical model (disorder) at the expense of a systemic understanding of adoptive family relationships
 - Can focus treatment away from clinical formulation
 - Leads to a “one size fits all” service delivery model

Characteristics of Empirically Supported Therapy Studies

- Mono-symptomatic difficulty
- Optimum context to motivate clients
- Highly trained clinicians
- Detailed protocol
- Bottom line:
 - If the intervention does not work in such a setting, it most likely will be ineffective in complex adoption settings

Protocols vs Principles

- Principles of practice must be articulated
- Formulation must drive decision making, not diagnosis
- Goals must be generated by the constellation
- Therapies must match the family system
- Movement towards these goals is the marker of success

Acknowledgements

- Kerry Daly, University of Guelph
- Carol Biddle, Alison Davis Maxon, Del Stewart, and Sharon Roszia, Kinship Center, CA.

