

# **35 YEARS WITH INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS**

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**Abstracts**



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# **Romanian Research Project**

**Celia Beckett**

**Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Research Centre, Institute of Psychiatry,  
London**

The fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania in 1989 was followed by extensive media coverage in the UK of the dreadful plight of the children in the institutions and this in turn led many couples to apply to adopt children from the orphanages. The English and Romanian Adoptees Study Team has studied the development of 165 children adopted from Romania before the age of 42 months and 52 non-deprived English children adopted within the UK before the age of six months. The progress of most of the children was assessed at four and all of the children were assessed at age six. A follow-up study has begun, that assesses the children as they turn eleven.

- ◆ At the time of entry into the UK, most of the Romanian children were severely malnourished and over half were developmentally in the retarded range. By the age of four years, the group as a whole was, with a few exceptions, functioning within the normal range. This progress was maintained over the next two years.
- ◆ The extent of recovery showed substantial individual variation but the strongest predictor of cognitive outcome was the length of time that the child spent in the institution. Although most of the children had made considerable progress, it was generally found that the older the children were at entry into the adoptive home, the greater their chances of remaining cognitively and psychologically behind other children of their age.
- ◆ In the 1980s, it was generally believed that any cognitive catch-up took place in the first few months after deprivation. However, in our study, gains often continued over as long as two to two and a half years and in the case of children who still had deficits, more modest gains seemed possible over an even longer time.
- ◆ The psychological privation suffered by children in the institutions had an effect on their cognitive attainment at age six years. The lack of individualised care had a particularly marked effect.
- ◆ In the Romanian orphanages the children were often confined to cots and had no toys to play with. Our findings show that the within-UK adoptees engaged more in pretend and social role play than the Romanian adoptees, even some of those adopted under six months had impairments. Shared pretend and social role-play is a key feature of young children's friendships so there are serious implications for children's social relations with peers.
- ◆ One in sixteen of the Romanian children showed autistic-like features and a further one in sixteen showed milder symptoms. However, unlike in 'ordinary' autism there were improvements in the condition between four and six and the children showed greater flexibility in their use of limited communication skills.
- ◆ About one in four of the Romanian children showed attachment problems compared with one in twenty of the UK adoptees. These children were indiscriminately friendly and showed a lack of adequate social boundaries.

- ◆ About a third of the children who came to the UK over the age of six months showed patterns of inattention and impulsivity accompanied by restless overactivity. Compared to ordinary attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, the hyperactivity seems to be less striking and the inattention and impulsivity more marked. There is also a link with attachment disorders.
- ◆ To analyse the number of children without problems, the children's functioning was quantified in relation to seven domains (attachment, peer relationships, attention/hyperactivity, conduct, emotions, cognition and autistic features). About 80% of the UK adoptees, 70% of the Romanians adopted under six months, nearly 50% of those adopted between 6 and 24 months and just over 20 % of those adopted above two years showed no impairment on any of the domains.
- ◆ Many adopters experienced considerable difficulties when applying to local authority social services to adopt. As a result, half of the applicants turned to private agencies but then had to return to the local authority. Many felt that they received very little help from social services when they brought the children home. Those parents who were assessed by local authority adoption specialists were more aware of the importance of the child's Romanian identity.
- ◆ Despite the very considerable challenges that were presented to the families, by the age of six years, only two out of 165 adoptions had broken down and the level of parental satisfaction was very high. The main factors significantly correlated with parental negative evaluation were child behaviour problems, in particular hyperactivity. Families with birth children close in age (less than 36 months older or younger) to the newly adopted child reported higher levels of negative evaluation at age four, though this had declined by age six.

For further information on the work of the English and Romanian Adoptees Study Team please contact

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## **INTERNATIONALLY ADOPTED CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS – LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL COMPETENCE**

**Professor Monica Dalen and Associated Professor Anne-Lise Rygvold, Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Norway**

The presentation is built upon a longitudinal study of adoptee's school competence, which started in 1997 and is followed up in 2001. The study has a two-folded purpose, to compare the school competence and social skills between internationally and Norwegian-born children and to study within-group variation. The study carried out in 1997 included 193 children adopted from Colombia and Korea matched with 193 Norwegian born children on gender, age school grades and geographical location.

The children were between age 11-16 representing 4th to 9th grades at the elementary and middle school level. Information on the children's school performances was collected by means of mailed questionnaires to the main teacher.

The follow-up study was carried out in 2001 and the sample consists of 60 adoptees still joining middle and secondary school. Questionnaires were sent to the main teachers who once again compared the adoptees' school performances and social skills with a matched Norwegian-born group. The adoptees themselves also gave information on their school competence.

The results from the 1997 study showed that most of the children, both adopted and non-adopted, are doing well in school. The variability within the adopted group's performances was; however, very large compared to the Norwegian-born group. Most of the variability was explained by the adopted children's language skill, especially the ability to use the language at a higher cognitive level (school language) and the high frequency of hyperactive behavior. Age of adoption did not, however, play a crucial role in explaining the variance.

In the presentation we will focus on how the results from the 1997 study are documented in the follow-up study. Is the variation in the adopted group's school performances still larger than in the Norwegian-born group and in what way do the two group's performances differ? A special interest is put on the command of both oral and written language and how the language performances have developed from elementary through middle and secondary school. Is the adopted group still struggling with the school language and what kind of help have the school been offering them. Is the frequency of hyperactive still high among the adopted group and in what way does this kind behavior interfere with their learning process in school? The follow-up study will also focus on how the adoptees themselves are judging their performances and social skills compared to the teacher's opinions.

The internationally adopted children and young adults present a challenge to education in general and especially to special needs education, not only because of their special start in life, but also because of the change of language experienced by all of them.

## **Adopted children as schoolbeginners**

**Lars von der Lieth**

*University of Copenhagen & DanAdopt*

At this lecture I shall try to describe the difficulties that some adopted children experiences when they begin in the school system. The description is based on the clinical study of 50 children, who all arrived in Denmark after their 3rd years birthday. The parents of this children have asked me to advise them, which I have been doing after having conducted a psychological test on each child. Apart from making counselling of each child/family my investigations have given me a lot of more general informations on the lifesituation for adopted children coming to Denmark from an orphanage somewhere in the world (children from a dozen countries are registred in the study) at a time when they have already learned some of the language in their country of origin.

## **The educational attainment of children adopted from abroad: Swedish evidence**

**Katarina Richardson, Anders Björklund, Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University**

We investigate the educational attainment of children adopted from abroad by Swedish parents. We use a rich administrative data set that contains information on education of a large sample of the Swedish population born 1962-1973. The data set also includes information on the individuals' adoptive siblings and parents. Our results show that adoptive children reach the same educational achievement as the mean person born in Sweden. There seems to be a small negative effect of being adopted after the first year of life, which increases with age at adoption. We also find that adoptees, on average, have approximately two years less schooling than their siblings who are biological children to the parents. This differential is due to the fact that adoptive parents tend to have high income and to be highly educated, and that adoptive children's education are less correlated with the parents' education and income than the parents' biological children.

**Results are still preliminary. Please do not cite without permission from the author.**

### **"The significance attributed to place of origins and "roots" amongst adoption "experts" and transnationally adopted people."**

**Signe Howell, University of Oslo**

Specific places seem to emerge as important in many people's sense of identity and their orientation in the world. I wish to explore some aspects of how transnationally adopted people may construct their thoughts concerning their place of origin and the place where they grew up and live. This will be linked to their ideas about kinship, sociality and relatedness. To what extent can a place devoid of significant others (family, kin, friends) become a place of deep significance? I wish to examine adoptees' understanding of place of origin and "roots" in relation to the increasing importance being attached to these concepts by people engaged in adoption work as well as by adoptive parents. What changes can we find in expert thinking on these matters? And what effects are these changes having on the adoptees? becomes important questions. The dramatic increase in "return visits" that is occurring in Norway, indicates that place of origin is becoming increasingly important. The question that needs to be asked is "important for whom and why?"

# **Psychosocial Adjustment and Mental Health of Intercountry and Domestic Adopted Teenagers in Finland**

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**AIM:** The study compared the psychosocial adjustment and mental health of adopted teenagers and young adults in Finland. Participants (N=161) included groups of domestic and intercountry adoptees and Finnish non-adoptees.

**METHOD:** Male (N=71) and female (N=90) participants (mean age 17.5) were studied by interviews and self-report questionnaires. Adoptive and biological parents completed the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist and The Symptom List (Cederblad & Höök, 1984). The children completed the SCL-90 (Derogatis et al, 1974), The Way I Am (Ouvinen-Birgenstam, 1984), The Piers-Harris Children`s Self-Concept Scale (Piers-Harris, 1969), and the Buss-Durkee Hostility-Guilt Inventory (Buss & Durkee, 1957).

**RESULTS:** Parent ratings (CBCL) suggested that the intercountry adopted boys were significantly more immature, hostile-withdrawn, delinquent, aggressive and hyperactive than the domestic non-adoptee boys. Parent ratings also indicated that the intercountry adopted girls were significantly more immature-hyperactive, and delinquent than their controls. In addition they received significantly higher scores on the cruelty and schizoid subscales. According to parent ratings (SL) the domestically adopted boys were more overly careful and shy, and suffered from loss of appetite. The intercountry adopted girls were described as more hyperactive and less concentrated than the Finnish non-adoptee control children. There were fewer differences in terms of the self-report SCL-90. Compared to the non-adoptee control groups, the intercountry adopted boys scored higher on phobic anxiety; all girl adoptees scored higher on paranoid ideation. Concerning self-reported aggression and self-concept, there were very few differences between the groups.

## **Changes in interest in biological and ethnic origin, from adolescence to adulthood, in a group of Swedish adoptees born abroad.**

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A main part in the formation of the personal identity is the possibility to tell your history and reflect on who you are in relation to your origin. Children who have been adopted from abroad into Swedish families neither share the biological, nor the ethnic roots with their adoptive parents. What does their origin mean to them when they grow up, and in adulthood? What meaning do social contexts and personal characteristics such as mental health, self-esteem, sex and age of the adoptees, have for their way of relating to their origin? These were the main questions in a Swedish interview-study of 181 adoptees and their adoptive parents, where the majority of the adoptees came from Asia and Latin America and were between 13 and 27 years old when interviewed (*M* 16 years).

In a follow-up study the 48 who were 18 years and older in the first study, now between 25 and 34 years (*M* 28 years), were interviewed with the purpose to investigate changes in identity development and psychological adjustment over time. In the follow-up study attachment styles were also investigated and compared in relation to different ways to relate to the origin.

Six of the adoptees were unable to reach or denied to a new interview so the follow-up group finally consisted of 42 individuals. As in the first study women were over-represented (26 women versus 16 men)

To study identity issues and measure psychological adjustment the same interview questions and instruments were used as in the first study. Regarding self-esteem a new version for adults were used in the follow-up. As the relationship between attachment styles and identity strategies has been discussed in the literature, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), together with three different questionnaires for assessing attachment styles, was used in the follow-up study. The identity interview consisted of two main themes:

- The biological family, focusing the adoptees thoughts about and interest in searching more information about the biological family, and the meaning of their own biological parenthood.
- The ethnic origin, focusing the adoptees ethnic self- identity, interest in ethnic origin, and situations where they were apprehended as immigrants.

Data have been analysed both with statistical and qualitative analyses. The qualitative analyse is continuing. The comparison over time is made within the follow-up group, and the result from the first study is, in this group, in accordance with the result in the total group of 181 adoptees.

The results from the follow-up shows that half of the adoptees now were married or lived together with a partner, and 16 (11 women and 5 men) had got biological children. No one had adopted a child. Most of them got their first child when they were in the middle of their twentieth. The qualitative analyse of the meaning of having a biological child showed that this in general had meant something very special for the adoptees. The child had filled that room of emptiness that they often experienced in their own history. Following the child's development had helped them to create pictures of their first time in life, which they often had missed. The child was in the same time a link to the past and a link to the future, as it confirmed the biological relationship with the adoptees.

The part who thought of their biological family was as great as in the first study (about 70%) but some had started to think of their biological family after the last interview and some had stopped to think about it, and in general they didn't think that frequently.

In the first study women more often thought of their biological family than men, this was of no significance in the follow-up study. Sex-differences seem to be shaded out over time. Own biological children were of no importance for the result.

The interest for searching information of the biological family had decreased dramatically at the follow-up. Hardly a fifth, of those in the first study that had a search interest, were still interested in more information about their biological family. About another fifth who had not shown any search interest in the first study were now interested. In the first study the divorce of the adoptive parents, and the adoptive parents contact with the child's origin, were related to the adoptees interest in searching for information about their biological family. Now these were of no significance. However the group who wanted to search for more information about their biological family showed a less degree of psychic wellbeing. This was of no importance in the first study. It is of interest to notice that only one of them who had own children wanted to search for more information about their biological family.

Interest in ethnic origin had changed a lot over time. Half of them who in the first study didn't show an interest in their ethnic origin had developed an interest in the follow-up study, and 40% of those who had an interest had dropped it. In the first study the adoptive parents lack of

contact with the child's origin, were related to the adoptees interest in ethnic origin, this relationship was not confirmed in the follow-up.

There were some more adoptees with a "non-Swedish" identity in the follow-up. In accordance with the first study a "non-Swedish" self-identity was related to a less psychic wellbeing and a higher age at adoption.

It is of interest to notice that attachment styles, in the adoptive group, didn't differ from normative meta-analyses made, and was only of importance for the ethnic identity. The ones with a "non-Swedish" self-identity more often had an unsecure attachment style.

Another finding was that the ones with a secure attachment style did more often lived together with a partner.

Concerning psychological adjustment the results from the first study showed that the adoptees did not differ regarding psychological wellbeing compared to age-matched non-adopted Swedish groups, and no significant differences, according to mental health, were found between the two studies.

In sum, the importance of family-related variables to identity development, seem to decrease over time, while there is a greater stability in psychological adjustment both in general and in relation to identity development.

## **The Experience of Abandonment and Adoption, as a Child and as a Parent, in a Psychological Motivational Perspective**

**Lotta Landerholm, Stockholm, Sweden**

The seminar will come from an article published in *Int Forum Psychoanal* 10:(12-25), 2001;10:000-000

The adopted child has experiences of loss, changes of goals for attachment, and of being biologically separate in the family, which are similar to the experiences of adoptive parents who are infertile. In this paper, the correspondence of experiences between the adopted child and the infertile adoptive parents will be examined with the motivational system theory constructed by Joseph Lichtenberg. This theory is based on psychoanalytical knowledge as well as on infant research. It comprises five motivational systems, all existing from the beginning of life, which promote the fulfilment and regulation of.- 1. the need for psychic regulation of physiological requirements, 2. the need for attachment and later affiliation, 3. the need for exploration and assertion, 4. the need to react aversively through antagonism or withdrawal (or both) and 5. the need for sensual enjoyment and (later) sexual excitement. In regard to these basic needs, infertile parents have certain experiences that correspond to and correlate with those of the abandoned child. This implies a risk for the development of the adoptive family as well as a possibility for growth. The author suggests potential healing factors that may exist within an infertile couple regarding meeting and understanding an abandoned child.

Key words: adoption, infertility, abandonment, motivational theory, hearing factors  
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## Language development

Christina Lagergren

Speech and Language Pathologist

Stockholm 6 August 2001

Speech and language impairments and/or communications disorders are well known throughout the world. As a speech and language pathologist I meet these children on a daily basis.

Since about 12 years I have met, assessed, treated and, of course, thought a lot about foreign adopted children with language impairments, disorders and sometimes delays or dyslexia. Is there a difference between the disorders/impairments of "one-language" children and children who have had to change their first language and obtain a new mother tongue?

**Objective:** To get a better idea of what happens when a child starts his/her language development in one language and in another culture and then no longer is exposed to that language or that specific culture. Are language and communication disorders more common amongst our foreign adopted children? Are these disorders really different from those of children exposed to one language only? Language disorders have a habit of clustering in families, which clearly can be seen in biological families. Are there specific language disorders caused by the language change itself? Some research shows that this might be the case. This specific language impairment due to requiring your (new or second) maternal language "at the wrong time" and "in the wrong way" (by learning not by "living" - exposition) on an acquired weak linguistic basis (due to inadequate language exposition) is often talked about as the "language adoption problem". On the other hand - many a child with a hereditary language impairment may have been wrongly diagnosed, as well as children with a somewhat low "language IQ".

Of course the assessment of the child must be done by a professional, who has a thorough knowledge of speech and language development, speech and language impairments, "late" language developers and also of linguistics, neuro-psychology and who is able to form a diagnosis.

**Subjects:** A review of 56 adopted children (20 boys, 36 girls) referred to me as a speech and language pathologist for assessment. They were all referred because of suspected language disorder. The children were born in 21 different countries and had been adopted by Swedish parents (or parent, always a mother) between the age of 3 weeks and 6 years of age.

The children came from Colombia (12, 6 boys, 6 girls), Poland (7, 1 boy, 6 girls), Thailand (7, 3 boys, 4 girls), Vietnam (5, 1 boy 4 girls), China, Macao (5, all girls), Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti and Nicaragua (7, 3 boys and 4 girls), India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (4, 3 boys, 1 girl), Korea (2 girls), Bosnia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania (5, 3 boys and 2 girls), Russia (2 girls).

Are the language problems these children have different from those of language impaired children born in Sweden to Swedish parents? And if so - how?

Is it possible to detect among this lot a "specific adopted language profile"? All of the 56 adopted children were definitely qualified for a diagnosis of language impairment (more or less serious depending on the kind of difficulties) or as "late talkers", which is not a serious diagnosis. The children with the language disorders sometimes also had other problems such as hyperactivity and behavioural disorders.

There was, however, some who experienced what we call the "language-adoption-profile", children who started talking Swedish quickly and expressed themselves in long, linguistically well formed sentences. They did not, however, deeply understand what they themselves were talking about and did, of course not fully understand what they were told. These children also had learning difficulties. Very often nobody could understand why.

**Conclusion:** It seems as if there is a risk that some of the adopted children with a "normal" language capacity does not develop their new maternal language as well as could be expected. This could (and should) be assessed and correct help should be given as early as possible in order to minimize the risks of learning difficulties. Early help is crucial and correct help is crucial.

It also seems as there are more severely language impaired children among the adopted ones than what would be expected compared to Swedish children of the same age. To have a language impairment (hereditary) and not having been exposed to any great amount of language during your first life-time AND to have to change the fragments of language you have learned into a new one IS NOT a good pre-requisite for the new language development. It seems to me that the latter category gets far too little adequate support in their hard language switch.

**The paper has not yet been presented.**

## **Family secrets and identity**

**Ing-Britt Christiansen, Copenhagen 2001**

The Western literature on adoption suggest that the genetic connection with the kin continue to exert a strong pressure in the lives of adoptees even when they have been in their family since infancy. In adoption we have a separation of the biological and social aspects of kinship and many adoptees often lament their lack of biogenetic kinship ties. This is often expressed like:

*"it was as I did not belong to them or anyone or anywhere. I felt a great longing to know who I was but I was never given any answers instead I was raised in an atmosphere of family secrets".*

The family secrets they are complaining about are secrets connected to their genealogical history and their birth. Apparently those secrets makes them unable to link their genealogical past to their present sociality. Furthermore it seems that the lack of genealogical knowledge becomes constitutive of a fragmented identity as they say, they are unable to connect their past to their present. My point is, when adoptees insists on locating and meeting with birth kin, they are engaged in constructing an identity which enables them to link together their past, present, and future in their quest for wholeness.

Furthermore the meeting between adoptees and their birth kin (mother) shows that biology by itself is an insufficient base for new (kin) connections although knowing ones genealogical history seems to have a profound effect on adoptees ability to construct a coherent sense of self identity.

Based on qualitative interviews with 11 women and 6 men, conducted during March 1995 and June 1996, I am analysing narratives of kinship.

## **"And what about Me?" - The issue of disturbed communication within the adoptive family**

**Anna Elmund, Ph.D. Student, International Institute for women's and children's health, Uppsala, Sweden**

Recently the conflicts within the adoptive family has been object for media and research. Perhaps these problems aren't so aggravating. It is possible that difficulties in communicating is the origin to many misunderstandings within the adoptive families.

Since adoptive parents and the adoptant come from totally different backgrounds they often have very disperse experiences in life. Sometimes these differences of memories and experiences result in incompatible cognitive concepts and frames for interpretation. These circumstances might render difficult - even obstruct - the communication in the adoptive family. Therefore, in a situation of disagreement - in comparison with other family structures - the adoptive parents and the adoptant occasionally both act as if they are/feel victimized and unaware of both their own part in the conflict as well as of the feelings and ideas of the other. It is striking that both partys seem to say: "And what about Me?". This discourse is a more hopeful and tangible way of understanding conflicts during the adolescent years within the adoptive family.

## **SURVEY MADE BY SMÅBØRNSCENTRET (CENTER FOR CHILD COUNSELLING AND ASSISTANCE) IN ÅRHUS AND ADOPTION CENTER ÅRHUS DENMARK CONCERNING CHILDREN PLACED IN ADOPTION WITH DANISH FAMILIES THROUGH AC DENMARK IN 1992 & 1993**

**The survey was planned and evaluated by Leif Nord and Vibeke Ellegaard from Småbørnscenteret and Jørgen-Ulrich Raunskov and Margrethe Primdahl from Adoption Center.**

### **The background:**

Inspired by the public debate in Denmark at the end of the nineties concerning the development problems of adoptive children, Adoption Center chose in 1999 together with The Center for Child Counseling and Assistance in the County of Århus (Småbørnscenteret) to carry through a survey of how the children placed through Adoption Center over a period were doing years after their arrival.

The public debate in Denmark was characterized by many myths and prejudices, and many categorical and undocumented statements flew through the air. AC chose to make a survey to expose the extent of the problem within our own ranks. We felt that we had a good chance of getting a high level of response due to the positive contact that we maintain with most of our adoptive parents.

**Survey of the years 1992 & 1993** After having carried through a pilot project in 1998, we carried through a questionnaire survey in 1999 concerning all the children placed in Denmark through Adoption Center in 1992.

We chose this year, because most of the children would at the time of the survey be in the age-group 7 to 10 years and thus have started school. This was a precondition for obtaining a varied and profound evaluation of how the children were developing and to understand the extent of their possible problems.

1992 was a relatively small year for Adoption Center with only 226 children placed in adoption all together. We obtained, as we had hoped, a very high level of response = 92% of the children placed that year, i.e. not only 92% of the questionnaires sent (some of the adoptive families could no longer be located) but 92% of all children placed that year.

In year 2000 we carried through a similar survey concerning the children placed through Adoption Center in year 1993. Year 1993 consisted of totally 271 children. Again we obtained response concerning approximately 92% of all the children placed that year through our organization.

The dispersion of the children placed both in year 1992 and 1993 was very characteristic for that period for Adoption Center, with Colombia, Korea and Sri Lanka being the most important giving countries. Not until the end of the century did we see the very significant switch in the origin of the children, when every year we had fewer children adopted from Korea and Sri Lanka and more from China.

### **Categorization of the children**

The children were categorized by the psychologists at Småbørnscenteret in 3 different categories, describing their functionality now 7 years after arrival

**Category A** = children with minor or no difficulties. This category includes children with passing somatic diseases and passing behavioral problems.

**Category B** = Children with permanent, moderate difficulties. I.e. children with minor learning, concentration and attachment problems. Delayed language development, epilepsy etc.

**Category C** = Children with severe difficulties. I.e. children with permanent, considerable functional reduction, e.g. cerebral palsy, autism, general retardation, severe DAMP. All the children in this group attend special class or special school.

Especially the B-group is a very broad group, ranging from children with moderate problems, like minor learning disabilities to children with more severe problems.

### **The Overall Picture**

The overall picture for both years is very similar: 81% of the children fall within the category of group A, 13% fall within group B and 6% fall within the frames of group C.

As far as we know no similar study exists for children born in Denmark. However, we find that it is logical to assume that there is a higher risk of having a child with severe problems through adoption than through natural birth (assuming that these two ways of becoming parents could be compared). The built in risk for the children adopted at a very young age comes from the lack of nourishment and care during pregnancy and the lack of care in the neo-natal period. This explains the number of very small children with severe problems.

For the toddlers and bigger children it is true that children with severe brain damage will probably be diagnosed in the giving country, and thus we will not be able to find parents in Denmark for that child. However, there will be an increased risk that the child develops serious problems caused by deprivation and traumas.

### **Distribution according to age group**

Specified upon age group there was a very big difference between years 1992 and 1993. The survey of the 1992-group showed as a clear tendency that the older the children were upon arrival in Denmark the bigger the problems. The number of children over the age of 3 years, however, was relatively limited (16 children totally), so that just a single child could influence the statistic noticeably to one or the other side.

For the 1993-group the percentage of children in the C-group was reasonably stable for all age groups corresponding to the overall picture (approx. 6% of all children) and no increasing tendency was observed for this category with increasing age. Still the percentages were based on a reasonably limited number of children. For example the number of children in group C among children over 3 years of age placed in 1993 was only 2 children totally.

Both years showed that the older the children were upon arrival the greater the number of children in group B - increasing from around 10% of the children placed between 0 and 1 year to 35% of the children over 3 years. But again, we have to remind ourselves that there would be insecurity concerning these statistics due to the relatively limited number of children in the age group over 36 months of age upon arrival.

### **Two more years under investigation**

To obtain a greater and thus more representative material for the investigation, Småbørnscenteret and Adoption Center have decided to carry through another two surveys. In the autumn of 2001 we shall carry through a survey of the children placed in 1994 and in the autumn of 2002 another survey of the children placed in 1995. Thereby we shall reach a total number of children of around 1000 and we hope to have sufficient material to make more definite conclusions as to the question of adoptive children's problems seen in relation to their age upon arrival.

### **Assistance to adoptive families after the arrival of the child**

An issue, which has been very underrated in Denmark up to now, is the amount of offers and assistance offered to adoptive families and their children after arrival in Denmark. Our investigation showed that out of 69 families totally, who had received some kind of treatment after arrival in Denmark, only 58 of the parents were satisfied with the offers that they had received. The general criticism of the adoptive parents was that the "system" was not prepared to

cope with the special problems that adoptive children might have. We shall put further focus on this theme over the coming years.

### **Conclusion**

So far we can conclude that far most adoptive children do very well 7 years after arrival in Denmark. In about 2 years we hope, on the basis of investigations of 4 years' of adoption placements, to be able to present representative figures that will give a good impression of the difficulties of adoptive children seen in relation to the age of the child upon arrival in Denmark as well as the country of origin of the child.

AC DENMARK, August 2001

## **A D O P T I V E P A R E N T H O O D**

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In 1995 I interviewed 20 adult adoptees, 5 adoptees born in Scandinavia and 15 intercountry adoptees. The results are published in the book: *Adoptiv-liv\**

During the interviews I received information about the adoptive parents and the relationship between the adoptees and the parents. It was an important subject, but not the main purpose. During the interviews I asked myself: What would the adoptive parents have answered to this question?

Among the reactions after the book was published were three adoptive mothers, who got in touch with me, because they had lost contact with their adoptive daughters. There was no obvious reason to that should happen and the cases did not look alike.

These two questions are the reason why I am in the process of finding material to a questionnaire to adoptive parents.

The questionnaire will be very much like the one in *Adoptiv-liv*. I will get in touch with the adoptive parents through advertisements in local newspapers and Adoption & Samfund. Of obvious reasons the parents to the informants in *Adoptiv-liv* cannot be used.

My experience from the first investigation will mean, that I besides thorough interviews will ask the parents to write their adoptive story. I do not believe it will be difficult, as informants to this kind of interviews are prepared and have given the subject much thought before enrolling. Furthermore I will make room for a second interview to ensure, I cover all the aspects, I want.

The session here will cover results from my first investigation of the 20 adoptees.

\* Gerda Skovmand-Madsen: *Adoptiv-liv*, Socialpaedagogisk Bibliotek, Gyldendal, Koebenhavn 1999

## **Adoption research - what is relevant and who knows best?**

**Gideon Zlotnik, M.D.  
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Social research springs often from actual social problems. Thus the research can be influenced by socio-political interests and agenda and not so much by peripheral realities and needs. Furthermore, social research is in terms of material and methods a continuum that stretches from remote opinion polls and customer analysis to near contact and interviews. Common to all these methods is a research team that alone defines the aim, formulates the hypothesis, chooses the method and the material.

An alternative structuring technique involves focus groups (1). This method, that has its origin in marketing research and since has been applied to medical research (2), uses organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic. Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic and for gaining insights. Adoption research could benefit from working with focus groups in order for the researchers to be inspired by those that know best, namely the family!  
Adoption research should therefore be based on a preliminary investigation of -

Which questions do adopted children and their parents want an answer to?  
What are their needs? What are they seeking? What is relevant for them?  
What will be their aim in regard to adoption research?  
Furthermore - which other relevant groups should be investigated in the same way?

The main research project and its structure will then develop as a result of this analysis.

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### **"The hidden forgotten language"**

**- a pilotstudy from The University of Copenhagen on late adopted childrens  
learning difficulties**

**Lars Von Der Lieth & Robert Jonasen**

It is often seen that children who are adopted late in life experience learning difficulties during their primary school education. The present pilot study investigated the possible role of the first learned language on school performance. This first language is often given up shortly after the child arrives in Denmark and therefore we call it *the hidden forgotten language*.

The hypothesis behind this study is that the first learned language at some conscious or subconscious level is stored and then forgotten but probably hidden in the sense that it is not possible to retrieve by voluntary means. Research in this field indicates that the first learned language is represented in areas of the brain. Although it does not seem possible to retrieve the language on voluntary command, several case studies indicate that the first learned language spontaneously reappears in situations where stimuli are associated to experiences prior to the adoption and before a second language was learned.

**Method:**

In this study a group of three boys aged 11 with moderate to severe learning difficulties, but no learning disabilities (dyslexia) and an IQ-score within average was selected by extensive testing. The group met every second week over a period of seven months for a 3-hour session where a psychologist, who himself is adopted (RJ), administered various reading and writing exercises. Some of these exercises were conducted in Latin. We chose to teach the boys Latin as their language of origin was Bulgarian and Spanish and Latin somehow is the “motherlanguage” of both. Winnie the Pooh was read in both Danish and Latin. Between the academic work the boys played and enjoyed themselves.

**Results:**

After 8 months the boys were re-tested and all had improved significantly in both spelling and writing skills. It is interesting to note that the boy with the most severe learning difficulty improved the most. The results are preliminary but indicate that adopted children with learning difficulties can benefit from working with Latin and Danish in a group.

**Discussion**

But it must be noted that since this is a very small study with no control group etc. It is therefore not possible to generalise or identify precisely whether or not the boys' improvement was caused by training or other processes in the group or perhaps by other variables in their home environment. It is therefore not possible at this point to draw any final conclusions. Further research is needed to investigate more precisely what influence the forgotten hidden language has on the learning difficulties that many late-adopted children experience in school.

## **Experiences of intercountry adoption in an Australian Setting**

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My research in Australia explores the social dynamics of and interconnections between identity, relatedness and kinship. My data suggests that identity is fundamentally implicated in understandings of, conflict over and practices around relatedness and kinship. To study identity with regard to the exigencies of relatedness and kinship, I use adoption (both local and intercountry) as an ethnographic and conceptual vehicle. The cultural constructions and interplays between the biogenetic and the social in circumstances associated with adoption are both contextual and potent in relation to multifarious claims to and pursuits of identity. Identity and questions of agency are understood as sites for creative struggles by individual agents, within a matrix of competing, often contradictory

social forces, tendencies and processes. My research thus approaches and explains adoption as a contested, conflictual field of engagement.

While identity is central to relatedness and kinship in the field of adoption, the reverse also holds. A study of the predicaments, experiences, struggles and risks that embroil agents whose lives are affected by adoption reveals the centrality of contextualised understandings of gender, connectedness and agency. Refractions of familiarity and strangeness repeatedly configure and problematise social situations for agents in which identity is either ambiguous, perilously sought, or threatened. The interpretation and valuation of the biogenetic and the social provide experiential avenues for agents to reflect, not only upon their origins, but also upon their most intimate aspirations. As a prime cultural entity, the individual assumes mediatory postures in various dialectical forms and juxtapositions. My research considers connections between identity, relatedness and kinship as they are mediated by the individual and the marital couple, cast in certain contexts as a unitary cultural and social phenomenon.

Adoption constitutes a cultural site through which the ambiguities and uncertainties that permeate relatedness and kinship are rendered visible and thus accessible. In the new millennium, questions of identity are critically implicated in realms of both relatedness and kinship. While identities often go to the core of existence, identities in adoption are also precariously situated; fragile, perilous pursuits, or uncertain predicaments which cannot be evaluated or understood without invoking realms of relatedness and understandings of separateness and attachment through kinship.

My research explores and helps explain the cultural forces and practices that shape common themes in adoption. These themes include human agency, the body and cultural notions of relatedness and resemblance, time and connectedness (including the culturally significant notion of the anniversary) and the significance of and cultural basis of emotion in the field of adoption.

## **The Singularly Unique Adoptees**

### **Summary of thesis paper for Master of Science in Psychology**

**May, 1998**

**University of Copenhagen**

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**August, 2001**

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### **Introduction and Rationale**

While we know quite a bit about internationally adopted children's lives, there is little information available about their later adolescent and adult lives. We know that in their early lives, all adoptees have experienced a traumatic loss, but how has this in combination with their experiences as adoptees affected their later lives? This study attempts to answer this question,

paying particular attention to the development of the adoptees' self-perception and coping strategies. Specifically, this study aims to aid in the understanding of how adult adoptees from Korea manage in Danish society and what it means to grow up as a Korean adoptee in Denmark.

The factors relevant to investigating how adult adoptees manage in life and more specifically cope with the aspect of being adopted are: autonomy, resilience, coping strategies, self-image and the ability to build relationships with others. These factors are based on the child's earlier experiences, and in his experiences relating to significant adults in his life. For many adoptees the first period of their life includes drastic changes, which are the loss of one or more significant care providers, and the variation of residences such as orphanages, foster homes, or other institutions. Is it possible that later experiences in an adoptive family can counteract the earlier trauma? If so, how do their combined experiences influence their attitude toward life, their expectations of others, and their image of others and themselves?

### **Description**

The results of this study are based on data gathered in the form of semi-structured interviews with three women and three men. The subjects are all of Korean origin. Four of them were adopted at the age of 6 to 7 months, while the other two were 18 months and 1 year and 8 months old. At the time of the study they were aged 21 to 25.

### **Results**

In general, the subjects see themselves as Danes and do not pay attention to the fact that they are adopted; only one conceives of himself as partially Korean. Their Danish identities, however, are challenged when they come in contact with strangers as a result of questions, comments, looks and possibly even discriminatory behaviour on the part of the stranger. This type of behaviour is typically a result of their non-stereotypical Danish appearance. Even though all of the subjects feel uneasy by the strangers' behaviour, only one subject tends to react by lashing out. The majority of the subjects has become used to this sort of behaviour and respond politely. Nonetheless, these interactions do not threaten the subjects' self-perceptions and identities for several reasons: the main reason is that the adoptees do not primarily define their identities by virtue of being adopted; not much subjective meaning is attached thereto. On the contrary, their self-images rely more on their own personal traits which they consider to be characteristic of Danes. In addition, the subjects have a strong sense of self and a high self-esteem (both of which increase a person's resilience). This, in combination with the fact that they with time have become used to comments, questions and other behaviours based on their foreign appearance results in a balanced and secure self-identity.

This research has shown that although the subjects attribute little worth to their status as adoptees, it nonetheless affects their individual lives. They all imagine as a result of their adoptions that their psyches have been affected in such a way as to increase their fighter instinct, their ability to handle major crisis, as well as the tendency to reflect on aspects of their current life situations, which in their opinion biological Danes may never consider. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that being adopted has an importance. Although they all accept their fate as adoptees, this study shows another side to their conception of their status as adoptees: one, which is more complex than one would think. For instance, none of the subjects describe a meeting with another adoptee as a neutral incident. Also, when asked, they find it difficult to attribute anything positive regarding their appearance, instead referring to themselves in an unflattering manner. They hesitate when asked whether they themselves would consider adopting. One female outright refuses to do so.

In everyday life, the subjects manage well. They appear to be capable adults, who are able to set goals for themselves and fulfil them. None of them seem insecure or incapable of coming to a decision, just as they all are self-confident. In fact, they do not rely heavily on their social network when it comes time to make an important decision or deal with a problem. Such independence could be a result of their secure attachment to their adoptive parents from childhood, and current relationship with one or more significant peer. However, it could also be a result of anxious avoidance attachment patterns in the earlier years. For two of the subjects, and partially also for a third, this seems to be the case. These three describe themselves as not particularly attached to their adoptive parents, or describe incidents where they did not seek help from their adoptive parents or others where it otherwise would be expected. It cannot be maintained with certainty that their autonomy, self confidence and resilience are a result of their experiences as adoptees, however, it is likely that the foundations for their working models are laid in the adoptive families as they were adopted at such a young age.

Attachment to the adoptive parents through childhood also has an effect on their ability as adults to build and maintain intimate and close relationships; all of the subjects have friends and acquaintances, though two feel the need for a closer friend. Some doubts arise regarding two of the subjects' closeness to their friends: one only speaks with her friends roughly once a month, and sees them even less, whereas the other's advice to his friend during a time of need is simply to pull himself together, simultaneously disregarding advice to himself during a time of crisis. It is therefore reasonable to say, that four of the six interviewees have some degree of difficulty with one or more of the following: establishing and maintaining intimate and secure relationships, and/or seeking help with another, while alternately providing support as well.

The degree of acceptance of the adoptees' own status as such, the subjective meaning of their being adopted, and their willingness to share their thoughts with others is mirrored in and by their relationships with significant members of their lives. With the exception of one, all the subjects have discussed adoption issues with their adoptive parents on their parents' initiative. Two of the subjects, who discussed adoption with people other than their family members, have mostly shared their thoughts with people who have a particular understanding of their situation, specifically with others adopted from Korea. They all describe a double-faceted experience of distance and closeness to their close ones, an inner boundary in relationships to others because of a distance which could be a result of their particular situation of being adopted or maybe of a more general existential nature.

An assessment of the subjects' work and love lives generates mixed results. All of them manage their professional lives well. With the exception of one, who is following his dreams in a different direction, they are in the process of completing their higher educations, and each for himself has chosen the direction he is following. Their ambitions are not modest for what they wish to achieve professionally. Taking their ages into consideration, it is not surprising to find that only two of the subjects find themselves in long-term relationships. However, it may merit notice that both of them are women. Moreover, one of the male subjects, who has had some problems finding a girlfriend, rejects starting a family for the time being. The third female subject does not necessarily see herself establishing a family and/or having children at all. However, apart from her, all the subjects do expect a future with a partner and with children.

## **Conclusions**

The adoptees in this study differ from each other in many ways, however they are all similar in that they are singular and singularly unique. This is reflected in their fundamental life strategies, their own perception of themselves as adoptees, and the way in which they react to others perceptions of them as foreign or not Danish. The overall impression of the adoptees is that they

are doing well in Denmark. The trauma experienced early in life does not necessarily have a negative impact on the rest of their lives. The amount of influence the trauma has seems to be related to the upbringing in the adoptive family. It is important that the adoptive parents are able to establish a secure attachment with the adoptee. Thereby, the parents are able to support the child by nurturing a stable self-perception, high self-esteem, a Danish identity, which in turn prepare the adoptee for the challenges of surrounding misperceptions of him as foreign.

The conclusions drawn from this study are limited in their general applicability. Because of the limitations of the qualitative interview used in this research and the population of only six people, the data collected can only point to expected behaviour in a similar population. However this research can potentially serve as a guideline in preparing a larger study.

### **Reflection**

It is the opinion of this researcher that a broader and more in-depth study of a larger population would yield more generally applicable results of the quality of adult life for adoptees in Denmark. Such a study and its results can provide a foundation for the post adoption services, which currently leave much to be desired in Denmark. The results would provide a foundation for better directed efforts in this field. Adoptive parents would be able to seek partial guidance based on the analysis of what meaning the different conditions and relationships have on an adoptee's upbringing. It is important to note, however, that in relation to such possible conclusions, it would be necessary to consider that the number of adoptees from countries other than Korea has increased with the years, and that their conditions will not always be comparable to those of Korean adoptees. The reasons for this are partially that the surrounding society has become used to them as the number of children adopted in general has increased. Also, the number of people with a foreign appearance living in Denmark has increased, and different stereotypes and expectations are tied to these different ethnic backgrounds. It would also be essential to consider that the conditions in Denmark's donor countries are varied, and also have changed after the subjects of this study were adopted in the 1970's, when the adoption of foreign children was only its beginning stages.

## **Swedish-born adoptees situation and search**

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In Sweden the largest group of adoptees are the Swedish-born. They are about 70 000. Because of a traditional silence about the adoption they have become a quiet and invisible group. Yet no extended research has studied the adoption process from the Swedish-born adoptees point of view.

Matwejeff, S. M. (1992). Adoption from the adoptees perspective. This study contains data from a questionnaire given to 18 Swedish-born adult adoptees, twelve women and six men at the age

of 22-52. The result showed that the adoption has been a quiet experience, in childhood as well as in adulthood, for most. Some didn't even know about the adoption until adulthood. Most adoptees felt that to talk about the adoption would be a threat for the adoptive parents and for the environment as well. To search their origin has been important and most adoptees have met someone in the biological family. This was also threatening, specially for the adoptive parents.

Matwejeff, S. M. (1993). Adoptees search for their origin and identify.

This study draw upon interviews with five swedish-born adult adoptees, three women and two men at the age of 35-40. The result showed that from an existentiell point of view it has been important for these adoptees to search for and meet with biological relatives. To discover the similarity with someone in the past have been of most importance and filled with joy. Most felt that the search process was experienced as a threat to the adoptive parents and was difficult to talk about. However, for these adoptees the search and meetings was an important growth experience.

Matwejeff, S. M. Current research: A study about swedish-born adoptees search for their origin in an extended form.

### **Adopted persons from Latin-America – their conceptions of the conditions during their childhood and adolescence, of their situation in life, and of Sweden as a socialization culture**

**Katarina von Greiff, 2000, PhD Thesis from the Department of Education, Stockholm University.**

The intention of this dissertation is to provide a clarification of the life setting of adopted persons in Sweden. Four sub-studies have been made in an effort to capture some of the perspectives, implications and qualities of what being an adopted person from abroad can involve in terms of life in Sweden. One study deals with perceptions of adoptions which are reflected in the journal of Adoption Centre in Sweden, *Att adoptera*, over three decades. Nine qualitatively implemented interviews with people working on adoption issues in Colombia have been completed in order to capture some perceptions of adoptions in a contributing country. In addition, two interview studies have been completed with adopted persons from abroad, one involving twelve adopted young adults originally from Colombia, and the other with a group of nine adopted young people from abroad who originally come from Latin America, and who are in public care.

The purpose of carrying out two studies on adopted persons, who live under varying conditions, is to gain knowledge of what is involved in being adopted and changing cultures.

The results of both studies involving the adopted young people »take the pulse« of Swedish society. Their experiences and accounts indicate both opportunities and difficulties with regard to socialization into Swedish society. The adopted persons, in different forms and to differing degrees, develop strategies to master and overcome these difficulties. The material presents a complex picture of what adoption involves;

most of the young people provide accounts of periods of searching in order to understand and relate to their special frames of reference. A surprising feature of the material was that the age of individuals on arriving in Sweden was not a significant factor with regard to how the young people were socialized into Swedish society. Most of the young people express another perception of adoption, when one realises the actual extent of what one has known for some time. Their ethnic identity is complex. We know that the young people were exposed to early separations. Most of those who are now in institutional care have also previously been exposed to many different placements in Sweden, which means that some of the young people feel that they are no longer emotionally in touch with their adoptive parents. The entire Swedish adoption debate is characterised by the »searching for your roots theme«. This studie shows that this »searching« should be dealt with very cautiously, since the ways in which adopted young people perceive »searching for their roots« are highly individual. Some of the adopted persons from abroad describe how they have been exposed to discriminatory special treatment.

Key words: International adoption, socialization conditions, culture, developmental tasks, meaning, affordances, points of reference.