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ABSTRACT

This descriptive report covers the first phase of a 20-year longitudinal study of black children adopted under 3 years of age by black couples, white couples, and single persons. The sample of three groups of approximately equal size was selected from the adoptive placements of two private child welfare agencies between June 1970 and June 1972. The longitudinal study will be an assessment of the family's capacity to form close relationships and handle stress. The material presented in the first phase report was gathered from case records and interviews before, immediately after and two months after placement. Descriptions of the applicants, the children they adopted, and their early adjustment as a family are included. Interesting differences among the experimental groups are revealed in this report. For the most part, the children in the study have had few problems and seem to be developing well. Children and families with problems are described. Statistics on interview-item reliability are given. (ED)

ADOPTION

Three Alternatives

SINGLE PARENT

TRANSRACIAL

TRADITIONAL

ADOPTION: THREE ALTERNATIVES

A Comparative Study of Three Alternative Forms of Adoptive Placement.

Joan F. Shireman
Penny R. Johnson

FOREWARD

The publication of "Adoption: Three Alternatives" represents the first four years of an adoption research project which we hope will be extended through sixteen and possibly twenty years of the lives of the adopted children and their families who have consented to participate in this effort. Questions related to raising a child in a single parent family and in a family where the racial background of the parents differs from that of the child prompted the interest in undertaking this study. It is designed to encompass a long enough time span to measure changes that may occur as the child develops from the earlier years to young adulthood.

Children and their families from Chicago Child Care Society and from Illinois Children's Home & Aid Society have been willing and cooperative participants in the study, as have staff members from each of the agencies.

Special thanks are extended to the Chicago Community Trust whose designation of a grant from the Elizabeth McCormick Fund assisted the two agencies to move beyond speculation to formulating a project intended to cast light on a series of puzzling questions.

Marion P. Obenhaus
Executive Director
Chicago Child Care Society

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Of the many persons to whom we are indebted for their contributions to this project, it could not have been possible without the cooperation of the families who opened their homes and lives to our scrutiny. They have participated eagerly in our endeavor to learn more about children in adoptive homes.

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Data Collection was completed with the aid of Sarah Cutter and Eutetra Frances who did much of the interviewing of families. Dorothe Ernest, Beverly Kimble and Ellen Rest participated in the data analysis. Our deepest thanks to the many persons responsible for facilitating this study.

Joan F. Shireman
Penny R. Johnson

ADOPTION: THREE ALTERNATIVES
A Comparative Study of Three Alternative Forms of Adoptive Placement

For many years adoption agencies have struggled with the problem of finding homes for the "hard to place" child. True, the definition of "hard to place" has shifted over the years, but thoughtful evaluation of the homes that could be found for such children has remained a constant part of adoption practice.

In 1962, when the placement of the white toddler was difficult, Kadushin wrote of the "marginal eligibility" of the families who adopted these children. He demonstrated that families who failed to meet some of the adoption worker's criteria for ideal adoptive parents commonly received children the worker thought less desirable – primarily children beyond infancy. This concept of "marginal eligibility" has haunted adoption work ever since.

When the study reported here was undertaken, the black infant was among those for whom it was hard to find a home. Attempting to find permanent homes for as many children as possible, Chicago Child Care Society, a private multiservice child welfare agency, decided to place black infants both with white couples and with single persons, as well as with black couples. Considerable thought and careful movement into the initial placements had convinced adoption workers that these were good alternatives for children. But an uneasiness – a concern that these might be "marginally eligible" homes – prompted interest in a formal study of these homes and a long-term follow-up to determine the strengths and problems for children in such placements.

This report is essentially a description of a sample of families who adopted black[1] infants from Chicago Child Care Society and Illinois Children's Home & Aid Society between June 1970 and June 1972. The sample was selected in such a way that approximately equal numbers of black couples, white couples, and single persons are represented. Comparisons among the groups are thus facilitated, and some sense of whether any group is indeed "marginally eligible" can be formed. A description of the children placed and their initial adjustment is also part of this report. Subsequent reports as the children grow older will deal with the children and their worlds at around the ages of four, eight, twelve, sixteen, and twenty. These later reports will begin to provide some information on the suitability of these homes for the children placed.

BACKGROUND

Questions about the appropriateness of placing a black infant with either a single parent or with parents of another race are not wholly separable from the question of what validates adoption itself. The ability of white parents to create a black identity in an adopted child has been questioned (Jones, 1972;

[1] The term "black" is used for convenience in this article to refer to children with one white and one black parent, as well as to children with two black parents.

Chestang, 1972); the issue of ability of a single parent to handle the sexual identity of a child has been raised (Kadushin, 1970). As practitioners become aware of the number of adopted adults who seek their biologic parents – and as some of these searches are publicized – question is being raised about the ability of the adopted family, whatever its composition, to help the child develop his self-identity. The circumstances under which it is preferable for a child to grow up with adoptive parents, rather than with biologic parents, are being more closely examined than ever before.

Evaluation of the outcome of adoption, one facet of the "answer" to the questions posed, has been undertaken by a number of investigators. By looking at various studies it is possible now to trace the adjustment of the adoptive child growing up with two parents of his own race through early years (Fairweather, 1952; Lynch, 1955), middle childhood (Ripple, 1968; Witmer, 1963; Lawder, 1971) and young adult years (Elonen, 1969; Fanshel, 1972). All studies show about one-quarter of the adoptees to have some problems in adjustment (varyingly defined), but none focuses specifically on questions of identity. A few of the studies contain small sub-samples of black parents; findings for this group do not differ substantively.

Research on the black adoptive family has focused on the ways in which the number of applicants might be increased. There have been studies of the attitudes of black families toward adoption (Deasy and Quinn, 1962; Fowler, 1966, for example) and many reports of innovative recruitment programs. There is only one study which focuses on the characteristics of the black families who do adopt, and on experiences of the families after adoption. (Lawder, 1971)

Transracial adoption began in an era of need for homes for black children, many of whom were residing in foster homes. It was justified pragmatically as a way of obtaining a permanent home for more black (and other mixed race) children and idealistically as an expression of commitment to the racial integration of society. Today the need for white homes for black infants has lessened dramatically, and the feasibility (or desirability) of any simplistic idea of "integration" has been challenged by the black community. It seems that any study of transracial adoption should address not only the question of desirability, but also should provide indicators of the special difficulties with which such mixed racial families may have to cope.

Early curiousity about "who" were the pioneers in creating mixed families led to a number of studies of the characteristics of families who adopt transracially. There is a uniformity in their findings. In reports since 1960, the "typical" white family adopting a child of another race tends to be high in educational and occupational status with a relatively low income, to be rather distant socially and geographically from relatives, to be active in the community and idealistic in motivation to adopt, and to have an "independent" or individualistic life-style. (Falk, 1970; Kadushin, 1962; Pepper, 1966; Fanshel, 1972) There is little trace in this description of the earlier "marginally eligible" adoptive couple.

In posing the question of how these family characteristics work out for the child, a shortage of meaningful research becomes evident, though the overall picture is positive. Fanshel (1972) reports extensively on the relatively good adjustment of Indian children in white homes. Looking for matched pairs of white and black children, Simon (1973) studied 204 families in which there was a white and an adopted black child. Her report of the relatively positive attitudes toward blackness and self image of the black children in these homes is the most concrete indicator available of early healthy growth experiences provided through transracial adoption. Further follow-up is obviously needed with focus on the specific experiences of these families.

Adoption by a single applicant is another alternative form of adoption about which there has been uncertainty and controversy in recent years. Begun as recently as 1965 and used sparingly (only .007 percent of the placement in Los Angeles County, where the greatest number of placements have been made) there has been as yet little opportunity for formal study of these adoptions.

In 1969 the Los Angeles County Adoption Department reviewed the thirty-six placements made to that point to find out what kinds of people had become single parents. "They seem to share many of the characteristics and lifestyles of couples who adopt across racial lines . . . people with a relatively high level of emotional maturity, high capacity for frustration tolerance, and an ability to pursue a relatively independent course in life without being overly influenced about what other people think." (Branham, 1970, p. 104) In 1969 an analysis of the first 10 single parent placements made at Chicago Child Care Society also revealed seemingly mature, stable individuals with a range of occupations and incomes, and with a desire to parent an infant that seemed much like that of the adoptive couples traditionally served.

Lacking any material on the outcome of this new type of placement, practitioners have turned to the research on the single parent family for guidance. One review of this research (almost exclusively concerned with the fatherless family) seems to indicate that these homes adequately support the healthy growth of children. (Kadushin, 1970) Another review concluded that more evidence is needed to draw conclusions about the effects on children of fatherlessness. Other factors — socio-economic status, race, age of child, and reason for father's absence — confound the issue; more knowledge is needed about roles, interactions, and family processes. (Herzog and Sudia, 1968, p. 182)

Thus it is evident that our knowledge of the growth of children in adoptive homes is sketchy and of a general nature. Theoretical speculations about unusual problems have been neither substantiated nor disproved by empirical investigation. In general, comparisons with normative groups are missing. And specific developmental problems have not been investigated in depth.

THE RESEARCH AND THE AGENCIES

This study, the first phase of which is here reported, is a twenty-year longitudinal study of black children adopted under 3 years of age by black cou-

ples, by white couples, and by single persons.[1] At approximately four year intervals, interviewers will assess the overall development of the child, and the family's problems and rewards which appear to stem from the adoption. Focus of the study will be on the child's handling of his identity — his identification with his adoptive family and questions about his biologic family, and the special problems for some of these children of racial or sexual identity. Thus it is hoped that the study will eventually add to knowledge about this central question in adoptions.

The sample was selected from the adoptive placements of two private child welfare agencies, Chicago Child Care Society and Illinois Children's Home & Aid Society, between June 1970 and June 1972. In order to facilitate comparisons, three samples of approximately equal size were selected. All placements of black youngsters with single parents were included (31 placements) as were about half the transracial placements of black children (42 placements) and about one-third of the placements with black couples (45 placements).

The characteristics through which these families were described for the study were developed in conjunction with the adoption workers at the two agencies and reflect their central concerns. The core of the material is an assessment of the family's capacity to form close relationships and to handle stress. These concepts are measured through several items both prior to and subsequent to placement. Perhaps more interesting at this point in the longitudinal study, before "outcome" can be measured, is some simpler descriptive material on motivation and early adjustment as a family. It is from these items that the best early assessment of the potential strength of the family can be made.

Families were told of the research during the home-study process. This home-study was similar at the two agencies. All families in this sample expressed initial interest in adoption by telephone and were then interviewed by an adoption intake worker. Following intake, they were seen for a series of interviews with the caseworker assigned to implement the adoption study and the placement of a child. The median length of this process was from 3 to 6 months. Most applicants were seen for 3 to 5 interviews. All applicants expressed interest in the research study and willingness to cooperate during the home study.

For most of the families in the sample, the placement of a child in their home was handled in a straightforward and expeditious manner. After the study of the home was completed, the adoption worker selected a child who "matched" the preferences of the adopting parents.[2] The median

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1 As convenient labels, throughout the paper placements with black couples are referred to as "traditional" adoptions, placements with white couples as "transracial" adoptions, and placements with single persons as "single parent" adoptions.

2 Two families in this group were part of a demonstration project at CCCS in which applicants took greater responsibility for the timing of the study and the selection of the child. This project is reported by Joan Shireman and Kenneth Watson, "Adoption of Real Children," in *Social Work*, Volume 17, Number 4, July, 1972.

length of wait for the placement of a child after approval of the home was less than one month. The adoptive parents came to the agency where they were told about the child and his background, and any questions were answered. If the child was an infant or young toddler (as most were) the parents had a chance to get acquainted with the child in the agency, went with him through a pediatric examination, and took him home. The placement period might be extended by one or two visits for an older child, in order to give the child a chance to become comfortable with his new family.

About one month after the placement of their child, the adoptive parents were contacted by the research interviewer and an appointment was scheduled. The interviewer went to the family's home and talked with the mother, and if possible, the father together (fathers were present in about one-quarter of the interviews). In all but one or two instances the interviewers had a chance to observe and interact with the child. Parents were cooperative and interested in the study; interviewers felt they shared freely. Many families expressed enthusiasm; only 7 refused to participate in the study.[1]

About 40 percent of the families were interviewed within 2 months of placement; by the end of the third month 75 percent had been interviewed. Due to scheduling problems, two families were not interviewed for more than 4 months.

The primary purpose of the interview was to acquaint the family with the longitudinal research study, answer their questions, and enlist their cooperation. Data were gathered, however, on the early adaptation of the new adoptive family. Obviously there had been too short a time for stable patterns of parent-child interaction to have emerged, and too little time to specify any associations between parental capacity and child development. However, the description of these early adjustment patterns may provide some indicators, if only of a speculative nature, of the strengths of these homes.

The research relied heavily on the assessments of the adoption worker who studied the home for material about the applicants and children prior to placement, and on the assessments of the research interviewer for later material. Material about applicants and children prior to placement was obtained from case records, supplemented by interviews with the caseworkers.[2] The assessment of early family adjustment was made by a research interviewer after talking with one (or sometimes both) parents in their home. Almost always the interviewer also saw the child. Independent judgments were made by a second research analyst exposed to the same stimuli for 14

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1 Analysis of families who refused to participate revealed that 6 of the 7 families were adopting traditionally and the other was a single parent. Two of the couples stated they were not interested in being involved in the research and gave no further explanation. One family was angry with the agency as the child placed with them had medical problems for which they were not prepared. The other four families exhibited their resistance to becoming involved through inability to arrange an appointment time for the research interview, or through failure to keep scheduled appointments.

2 Ratings for the black families consistently indicated more questions and concerns than for white applicants. This was apparently not a function of the race of the research analyst, as ratings of the black analyst followed the same pattern.

percent of the sample (17 cases). Judges agreed in 75 percent of the assessments based on case material, but only 67 percent of the assessments based on the interviews, perhaps reflecting the more complex stimuli of the interview situation.[1]

This report of this first phase of the study addresses the description of the applicants, the children they adopted, and their early adjustment as a family.

DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICANTS

Demographic information — In descriptive characteristics, the groups of adoptive applicants differ somewhat. However, no group differs markedly from those adoptive applicants with whom agencies are accustomed to working. To facilitate comparison of the characteristics of these groups of applicants, differences have been highlighted in the writing, perhaps creating an impression of greater contrast than actually exists.

Ages of adopting parents ranged from 19 years to 50 years with a median age in the early 30's. The median age of adopting men was 32. The median age of single women was 34, of other women 29. Variability in age was greatest among black husbands, with 13 percent 40 and over.

The majority of the single parents have been married. Fifteen were divorced and three were widowed. All three male single parents were unmarried.

The white couples in the sample were the most highly educated; 88 percent of the husbands had completed college (17 with college degrees and an additional 20 with graduate degrees) as had 57 percent of their wives. The black couples had the least education, 15 percent of the husbands and 11 percent of the wives did not complete high school, though 12 husbands and 12 wives had college or advanced degrees. Of the single parents, 3 did not graduate from high school, 7 women had college degrees and an additional 4 had graduate degrees.

Diversity of occupation was great, with occupational status seeming to reflect educational opportunities. Of the single applicants, about half were engaged in professional or technical occupations, including eight teachers, four nurses, two ministers, and one mental health worker. Another six persons were involved in sales or clerical work. Two were laborers, and most of the remaining were employed in service related occupations. Almost 75 percent of the white men adopting transracially were employed in professional or technical occupations. This group included seven teachers, seven social workers, four engineers, two ministers, a psychologist, and a veterinarian, as well as nine persons employed in a scattering of technical fields such as science, electronics, advertising, etc. Another four persons were working in business, including management and sales. Also within this group of men were three students and two laborers. Only eleven black men worked in pro-

1. Reliability of individual items, as they are used in the text, is reported in Table 1.

fessional and technical fields, and of these eight were teachers. Seven were officials, managers or proprietors of small businesses, and nine men were laborers. Three men were working in sales and four were clerks. The remaining ten men were in scattered lines of work including a career serviceman, a chef, a printer's assistant, repair men, etc.

Not only the single adopting women worked outside the home. Thirty-seven of the 45 black women adopting traditionally were employed. These included nine teachers, one social worker, three nurses, a doctor, and an accountant. Another seven women were employed as clerks, and six women as secretaries. Two women were students, and the remaining eight worked on a variety of jobs including a beautician, two maids, a key punch operator, a real estate broker, two nurses aides, and a laborer. Fourteen white women adopting transracially were employed outside the home, many part-time. All but one were working in professional or technical occupations including four teachers, three social workers, four nurses, a dietician, and a commercial artist.

Income was tabulated as it was expected to be after the adoption — if the wife planned to stop work (for more than a few weeks) her income was not counted. Black and white couples reported similar incomes, ranging from $2,700[1] to $33,000 with a median of about $14,000; however, for all but 6 black families and only 16 white families this represents the income of both husband and wife. A higher proportion of black couples reported incomes at the extremes of the range, 7 couples earning less than $8,000 (as were 2 white couples) and 8 couples earning over $20,000 (as were 4 white couples). It is possible that the more highly educated husbands of the white couples had not yet reached peak earnings, due to the years spent in education, or the lower incomes may reflect the professions they have chosen. A high proportion of a single applicants reported low incomes, 13 (42 percent) earning less than $8,000 annually, and a median income of $9,000 was reported.

The family composition of the three groups of adoptive applicants looked quite different. Only three of the single parents had children, two of whom were adopted. Nine of the black couples, or 20 percent, had children, three of whom were adopted. In contrast, only seven of the white couples did not have children, and 31 percent of the children in these homes were adopted. Also of interest is the number of children in each family. The three single parents who had children and 8 of the 9 black couples with children had only one child. Twenty-two of the 35 white couples with children had 2 or more children.

Despite the small percentage of black and single parent families with children, most applicants from each group had had some experience with children. Approximately 85 percent of the white couples, and 42 percent of both the black couples and single parents have had substantial direct care of child-

[1] In addition to income, this applicant receives housing, some household and automobile expenses. The next lowest income was $4,200.

ren at some time in their adult lives. Almost one-third of the black couples, but only 13 percent of the single parents and 7 percent of the white couples, had little or no independent contact as adults with children, though many have had opportunities to observe the children of relatives or friends.

Almost half (43%) of the families in the sample anticipated needing to make supplemental child care plans after the adoptive placement. Not surprisingly, 30 out of the 31 single parents needed to make some arrangement for the child's care while they were working. One single parent planned to stay home with her child for a year after the placement. Only 3 of the 42 white couples needed to make additional child care plans. Of the black couples, 26 needed no additional child care. The figures for the black and white couples do not necessarily reflect the number of working parents in each group. Some couples had staggered working schedules which allowed them to provide their own child care.

Just as the households of transracial adopting couples are distinguished by the numbers of families with children, so the single parents are distinguished by the high proportion living with relatives. Twelve single applicants, almost 40 percent, had other relatives living in their homes, as did only 3 black couples and 3 white couples. Seven of these single applicants lived with one or both of their parents. All three male applicants were living with relatives.

Capacity to handle life experiences. — The theory on which the assessments of adoption workers have traditionally been based is that the applicant who has had a childhood in which needs for stability, affection, physical care, etc. were met will possess the inner resources to cope with stressful circumstances as an adult, and to give freely to a child. Any notable differences in the degree to which childhood needs were met, or in ability to cope with stress, might be considered danger signals in an adoptive applicant, and possible indicators of "marginal" status.

There were differences among these three groups of adoptive applicants in childhood experiences. Almost half of the traditional adoptive applicants and single applicants were from homes with two parents, while another 30 percent of both groups were from families in which one parent and/or sibling might be away at times, but the home remained fairly stable. In contrast, over three-fourths of the white applicants were from stable two-parent homes. Twenty percent of both single parents and black couples were from very disrupted homes, as were only 3 persons, less than 5 percent, of the transracial applicants. More detailed ratings on the meeting of childhood needs such as affection, appropriate dependence and independence, physical care, financial security, peer relationships, and formal education revealed that the majority of applicants in each group had these needs met to a moderate or greater degree. Needs had been least completely met among the black couples, with only 55 percent of the black women having had childhood needs met. By this traditional criterion, then, the group which might be expected to meet difficulty in raising a child would be the black couples.

Black couples and single parents report slightly more difficult adult life experiences than do white couples, but differences are not great. The percen-

tages are fairly consistent with the rate of divorce within each group (and divorce was frequently mentioned as a difficult experience). For example, almost half the single parents were thought to have had difficult experiences as adults, and 58 percent were either divorced or widowed. Less than 5 percent of the individuals in each group have had unusually difficult adult life experiences.

Current life experiences and relationships. — As part of the assessment of the applicant's ability to cope with current life situations, ratings were made about the applicant's self-image, expectations of self, health, energy level, and use of defenses. These judgments, part of traditional personality assessments, are difficult to make, but focus on traits of major importance.

On the whole the applicants possessed a positive self-image, as reflected in the attitudes and behavior which they presented to the world. Only 14 persons were thought to have a weak self-image. The greatest contrast was between the white men, 81 percent of whom were thought to have a strong self-image, and the black men adopting traditionally, only 49 percent of whom were thought to have a strong self-image.

Consistent with self-image, the applicants tended to have high expectations of themselves. That is, they expected and strove for achievement in many areas of their lives. The achievement expectations of transracial couples and single parents were higher than the expectations of black couples. Women tended to have very slightly lower standards for themselves than did men.

The sample of applicants also manifested a high degree of constructive use of defenses, most seeming to be able to adapt to the problems and stresses of life in a way which indicated successful coping. Only seven persons spread over the three adoptive groups were thought to possess a weak defensive system.

Characteristics of the marital relationship were strikingly similar for both the black and white couples. Couples were judged to have satisfying marital relationships within which expectations of the spouse were satisfactorily met; communination and emotional support were strong. There tended to be a high degree of congruence in child rearing practices (whether anticipated or in action) and the interviewers felt the presence of a child in the home would produce minimal stress on the marital relationship.

In general, single applicants did not seem to have intense or deeply satisfying relationships with other adults. Eleven single applicants were described as having a group of friends of both sexes with no single extremely important relationship. Three reported close relationships only with relatives, and two no close relationships.

These applicants seem ready to take on the physical stresses of raising a child; all but one are reported to be in good health. (This applicant has a serious heart problem.) Likewise, this is a highly energetic group. Most applicants are described as having a high energy level, being capable of vigorous and sustained activity.

Interest in adoption. — Most of the applicants were described by raters as people who were invested in having a child, would be disappointed if rejected, yet would in time be able to move on to other aspects of life. However, about 43 percent of the black couples were thought to feel life would be empty without a child (as opposed to 32 percent of the single applicants and only 18 percent of the white couples). Thirteen percent of the single applicants, a higher proportion than any other group, were described as having no intense feeling invested in adopting a child.

Generally the case analysts judged the motives of the applicants for adopting a child to be relatively uncomplicated, but there were some differences among the groups. The majority of applicants from each adoptive group were primarily interested in having a child they could nurture and care for, teach, and guide. They anticipated enjoying the process of raising a child. The black couples particularly manifested these child centered motives (80 percent of the black women and 87 percent of the black men).

In contrast, almost half the white couples were characterized as having altruistic reasons, a wish to care for a child who needed them, as their primary motive for adoption. And while 71 percent of the single applicants had child-centered motives for adopting, 8 single applicants, a higher proportion than in any other group, were thought to have narcissistic reasons, such as filling a void in their lives or perpetuating their own image as a primary motive.

A look at secondary motivations for adoption reveals much the same pattern with the majority of applicants having child centered motives. White couples again were highly invested in expressing altruism and/or in acting out concern about a situation. Fourteen single parents were thought to be attempting to fill a void in their lives as a secondary motive for adopting. A higher proportion of black couples (21 percent) were partially motivated to adopt by their desire to conform to a family model expected by relatives and society.

To assess the applicants' comfort with adoption, analysts rated the families on their plans for discussing adoption with the child. The majority of applicants from each group were quite comfortable with the idea of telling the child of his adoptive status. However, forty percent of the black women adopting traditionally and about one-fourth of the other applicants were uneasy in anticipating how they might discuss adoption. Only two single parents and two black couples hoped to avoid telling the child of the adoption. It is obviously more difficult for white couples to evade such a discussion.

Likewise, almost all single applicants and white couples were reasonably comfortable with the idea of handling the unusual aspects which each family situation presents. It will be interesting to examine the applicants' comfort with adoption as the study progresses and the necessity for dealing with the adoption and its unusual aspects becomes imminent. It is clearly more difficult to respond to a child's question than to anticipate such a discussion in the office of a caseworker.

Capacity to be a parent. — In a final set of assessments, most applicants were judged to possess a high degree of capacity for nurturing a child, an important ingredient in providing a home for a small child. A greater proportion of couples exhibited this high capacity than did single parents. The women adopting transracially were particularly strong in their capacity to nurture, with 95 percent being rated as high or very high.

Most families were also judged to manifest a high degree of sensitivity to the needs of children. They were thought to be empathic persons able to observe situations as a child sees them and interested in learning about children and their needs. Again the white couples stood out, with a very large proportion of them exhibiting a high degree of sensitivity. It is possible that because most of the white couples had children, the evidence for their capacity to be sensitive to children was more apparent.

Summary. — On the whole the sample of adoptive families emerges as a relatively low risk group of applicants. Most have experienced rather benign childhood and adult experiences. They are persons with strong self-images, and defenses which have enabled them to successfully cope with life's stresses. They are a physically and mentally healthy group of persons with substantial financial, social and personal resources. We might predict they manifest excellent potential for success in parenting as they have experienced considerable success in their own lives.

The adoptive workers also felt enthusiastic about the applicants as potential adoptive parents. Adoptive workers expected most applicants would provide good or unusually good homes for a child. Generally, workers were most enthusiastic about the white couples and least enthusiastic about single applicants. Caution about single applicants may be due to the worker's anticipation of the difficulties in raising a child alone and consequent lack of clarity about how to evaluate the single parent home.

A general assessment by the case analysts of the strengths and weaknesses of these adoptive applicants summarizes some of the similarities and differences among the three groups.

Black couples were frequently described as warm, mature, planful couples who have satisfying marital relationships. They had achieved a comfortable degree of financial security and were interested in starting a family. Their motives for adopting a child tended to be uncomplicated, that is, a desire to have a child. Analysts felt black couples most commonly had little experience with children. Because most of them were entering parenting for the first time they manifested anxiety about parenting common to most new parents. Some couples were thought to have unresolved feelings about their inability to produce their own child and, perhaps as a consequence, analysts anticipated some difficulties in the handling of adoption.

Single parents were also described as warm persons. They tended to be a bright, competent and independent group, many of whom had satisfying and successful careers. They were characterized as having a strong desire for

children and family life as were the black couples. Many had close family and/or community ties. Problems with single parents frequently centered on the applicant's limited contact with, or apparent interest in, adults of the opposite sex, or evidence of difficulties in male/female relationships. Also of concern was the strong dependence of several applicants upon their families and their inability to emancipate from their parents. Some single parents were expected to over-indulge or protect a child.

White couples were described as warm, sensitive, bright people who exhibited a social awareness or concern. Many have had child rearing experience and the motives for adopting a child were frequently altruistic. They tended to be child centered and community oriented and usually were quite independent of their families of origin. As might be expected, most problems identified within this group of applicants centered around the adoption of a black child. Analysts thought some applicants tended to deny some of the implications of raising a black child both for the child and their family. Some families had little contact with black people and were naive in presenting simplistic solutions to the racial animosity in society. Analysts also questioned the "social" motives for adopting a black child in some cases.

THE PLACEMENT OF A CHILD

Flexibility and intensity of request for a child. — Applicants were rated on their flexibility in considering a child. Flexibility ranged from those applicants who maintained very rigid ideas or expectations about the child they wished to adopt to those applicants who were primarily interested in having a child and were able to accept a child with a wide range of characteristics or problems. White couples and single parents were somewhat more flexible than black couples. Forty-two percent of the black couples were thought to be moderately or extremely flexible, as were 59 percent of the white couples and 52 percent of the single parents.

More striking is the intensity with which the applicants were invested in getting a child with specific characteristics. Sixty percent of the black couples were thought to be extremely invested in a child with specific characteristics to the point that they would refuse or be disappointed with a child who did not meet their expectations. Only 31 percent of the white couples and 39 percent of the single parents were thought to possess this high degree of intensity about the child to be placed with them.[1] Most of the remaining applicants from each group were described as being moderately intense about their request for a specific child yet they were able to alter their expectations with little difficulty. They were considered reasonably comfortable in accepting a child who differed from the child they initially requested.

The children placed. The children placed in the adoptive homes just described could also be considered a relatively low risk group of children. Most were very young and healthy when adopted, with good family histories and good

[1] This difference is statistically significant: $X^2 = 7.160$, 1 df. $p < .01$

care prior to adoption. The most problem-free children went to black couples.

The youngest group of children was placed with black couples, 78 percent of whom received an infant less than two months old. Children placed with single parents tended to be slightly older, 42 percent ranging in age from 4 to 8 months at placement. The youngest child placed was 4 days old; the oldest was 4 years.

Both boys and girls were placed with couples; single parents usually received a child of their own sex. Boys were placed with all three male single parents, and girls were placed with 23 of the 28 women. Two of the 5 women with whom boys were placed had previously adopted a girl.

The children were a healthy group. Some difficulty in the mother's pregnancy or delivery was noted for about a quarter of the children in the sample,[1] but 89 percent of these children were described by physicians as being in good or excellent condition at birth. During the months prior to placement, ten children had illnesses serious enough to require hospitalization, although six of these children had extended hospitalizations due to premature delivery or other complications at birth. All were in good health at the time of adoption.

There were few handicaps. Five children had handicaps, which could be described as remedial and/or minor, such as heart murmur.

Most of the children had only one foster home placement prior to adoption, and received good care in that home (in the judgment of the adoption worker). Twenty-eight children had more than one foster home placement, with four children having as many as three placements before going into the adoptive home. Care in the foster home was judged to be questionable for 32 children, (many of whom also had multiple placements).

The 13 children in fair or poor condition at birth are an interesting group, for they continued to have difficult experiences. None of them were placed in adoption immediately after birth. The average age at placement was almost 9 months, with the youngest child being placed at 2 months and the oldest at 16 months. Seven children had more than one placement before adoption, with two children having as many as four different placements. Two children experiencing multiple moves had been in adoptive homes which failed. Eight of these children were placed with white couples, 3 with single persons, and 2 with black couples.[2]

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[1] Premature delivery accounted for about one-third of these difficulties. Other problems included four Caesarian deliveries and two breech deliveries. One mother had edema during pregnancy and one mother was suspected of being syphilitic. Twelve additional problems related to minor difficulties during delivery such as long hard labors, induced labors, and low forceps deliveries.

[2] At the time of the research interview after placement, analysts had some question about the development of nine of these children. None of them, however, were among the most seriously disturbed group identified at follow-up.

"Matching" the child and parents. — Despite the apparent flexibility of more than half of the sample of applicants, the characteristics of the children placed matched closely the characteristics initially requested. The family who requested a little girl under 3 months with no health problems was very likely to get almost exactly this child. Eight-five percent of the black couples, 93 percent of the white couples and 81 percent of the single parents received children highly congruent with the child they requested. Few applicants received a child considerably different from the child they requested. This extremely high degree of congruence seems to indicate that adoptive workers accepted the applicants' requests for a child with specific characteristics.

EARLY ADJUSTMENT OF THE CHILDREN

All parents reported that in the weeks immediately following placement their children displayed some symptoms of disturbance or readjustment. These ranged from one or two mild and transient difficulties (displayed by 37 percent of the children) to relatively intense and prolonged problem behavior (reported for 9 percent of the children). The most commonly reported symptom of disturbance was indiscriminate friendliness — reported for so many children (64 percent) that one wonders whether the item was properly interpreted, or whether parents were simply describing friendly children. The other commonly reported difficulties were sleep disturbances (48 percent), frequent colds or minor illnesses (48 percent), and disruptions of schedule (40 percent). One third of the black couples reported feeding difficulties in their early weeks with their children; this problem was not often reported by the other new parents.

Single parents reported more difficulties right after placement than did any other group. White and black couples were similar in reporting that three-fourths of the children experienced only minor difficulties. Almost one-third of the children placed with single parents were reported to experience three or more problems of fairly severe intensity and duration of more than two weeks; this degree of problems was reported by 24 percent of the white couples and only 18 percent of the black couples.[1] Whether this is an actual reflection of increased difficulty of children in adapting to single parent homes, or whether it is an indicator of additional stress and anxiety in being a new parent solely responsible for a child, it is not possible to say.

Surprisingly, the number of problems displayed was not associated with multiple placements prior to the adoption, nor with questionable quality of care in a foster home or institution — though in many instances parents "explained" problems through reference to prior care.

THE CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT AFTER TWO MONTHS

By the time of the research interview, about two months after placement, about the same proportion of children were displaying problems in adjust-

[1] Discrepancies in percentages occur due to 3 cases in which there was not enough evidence to assess problems.

ment. They were, however, different children. Interviewers (trained to record any questions, however minor) had no question at all about the development of 64 percent of the children; 71 percent of the children of single parents were reported free of problems, as were 57 percent of the children of white parents and 64 percent of the children of black parents. Parents reported even fewer problems, 81 percent reporting no difficulties. Noting of minor lags in motor development or minor problems with eating by the research analyst accounted for most of the discrepancy. Twenty-three of the 28 children who had had serious difficulty in adjusting to placement manifested minor or no problems by the end of two months.

Nine children were identified as having medical problems at follow-up. These ranged in seriousness and included allergies, severe colic, a heart murmur, hip dysplacia, and chronic respiratory problems with recurring pneumonia. About half of these problems had been present and discussed with the parents at the time of placement.

The research interviewer reported more than one area of difficulty and/or the parent expressed concern about the development of 27 children. These were independently classified by the project director and supervisor into two categories: children exhibiting some unevenness and lags in development which were judged to be only moderately serious and probably temporary (14 children), and children who exhibited acute problems or problems in several areas of development (13 children).[1]

The most troubled children. These 13 children did indeed exhibit problems of concern. As one details them, the overall thread seems to be a lack of appropriate social responsiveness.

Five[2] of the children were three months of age. They were described as passive, anxious, unresponsive, "hard to love". In addition four were inactive babies with poor muscle tone, behind in motor development; four displayed no babbling or other vocalizations (other than crying) and three had problems with eating.

The same description fits 5 infants from 4 to 7 months of age. All were passive and unresponsive, behind in motor development and delayed in early vocalizing. Two had eating difficulties. One was described by the interviewer as "a very delicate, worried-looking child".

An 11 month old presented a picture of extreme fear of strangers, with nausea and vomiting after a stranger left. He was a fearful, sad child who resisted being alone, clinging to the mother. He had many colds and stomach upsets.

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1 There were two disagreements; in both instances the children were placed in the more serious category.

2 The number of children in this group is larger than the number of families due to a set of twins in this group.

The threads of anxiety and inhibition were also apparent in the two older children, age 3 and 4, in this problem group. Both talked little, were withdrawn, were concerned about being "good," and clung to their mothers. Both seemed retarded in motor and verbal skills.[1]

Comments made about these parents by the interviewer reflect tension and some withdrawal from the children. Though the types of adoptive families are almost equally represented among these troubled children (3 being with single parents, 4 with white couples, and 5 with black couples), the specific expression of the tension varies with the type of home. One single parent and two of the black parents were thought to be overtly anxious about child-care and uncertain how to handle the child; one single parent and one black parent were withdrawn, "depressed," and offered little stimulation. Two of the black couples reported that one spouse was having difficulty accepting the child as adopted – one mother overtly pretended the baby was a biologic child, and another mother thought of her baby as a foster child, receiving a different type of medical care, clothing, etc. than the rest of the family. Most interestingly, all three trans-racial families with troubled infants were characterized as frantically busy with many other children, community activities, and a constant procession of duties, so that there was little time for a baby, and resentment of his demands. Parental capacity to nurture an infant and capacity to meet the needs of an infant were almost uniformly ranked as only moderate or as low (with the exception of two fathers and one mother, all with spouses judged to have limited capacity). The concerns warranted by these parents were reflected in the interviewer's judgment of parental affect. Only one parent, a single woman, was judged to show satisfaction and relaxation (this was a home that offered little stimulation to a very passive small baby). Of the other mothers, 3 displayed exhilaration and excitement, 3 disappointment or uncertainty, 2 ambivalence toward the baby, and one extreme anxiety. Of the fathers, 2 displayed enjoyment of the baby and "hope," 3 exhilaration, one ambivalence, and one depression. In the 4 black families, a "positive" affect was paired with a "negative", while in all 3 trans-racial homes both parents were either "positive" or "negative"; one would guess that the former balance offers greater potential for stability and working-out of problems.

The two older troubled children seemed to be in quite different homes, where affect was positive and ability to meet the needs of a child was high. Both of these children were reported to have had poor care, and two placements, prior to the adoptive placement, and both were reported to be more responsive than they had been at placement. One might hope that at the next follow-up these children would not be among those with serious problems.

Multiple placements and/or poor care do not seem to be associated with difficulties after two months (as they were not with difficulties immediately after placement). With the exception of the two older children, all but three of

[1] This 4 year old child was included in the sample, though older, because of error in the original sample selection and the family's subsequent enthusiasm about being part of the study.

the children with serious problems had had one foster home; two were placed from the hospital and one had two foster homes. There were no hospitalizations. All had received at least adequate physical and emotional care. There is no evident source of their problems outside the adoptive home.

A general picture of the families. — The patterns displayed by these families as they adjusted to a new family member reveal something of the stresses of varying types of adoption. It is not wise to compare these items on family functioning with the child's adjustment in any statistical sense, however, for there is probably a pecularity in the interviewer's judgment process. Perceiving a troubled child, he may well look for negative parental attitudes, or perceiving modes of parenting which seem to him unsound, he may look for problems in the child.

The families expressed relatively few changes in the interval between placement and the research interview. Ninety families had had no shifts at all in their living patterns. There had been changes in employment for 8 families (5 black couples) and moves for 6 (3 white couples). No family had experienced multiple serious disruptions.

Ratings on the two major items on capacity to meet the needs of a young child — sensitivity to the needs of a child and capacity to nurture — are confounded by the large number of cases in which the interviewer did not think he had enough evidence to make a rating (almost one-third of the men and one-quarter of the women). Almost half of the couples who adopted transracially were thought to display a high degree of sensitivity to a child's needs, as were about one-third of the other adopting parents. Nine black women (20 percent) were judged to have little such sensitivity, as were only about 4 percent of the remainder of the parents. Only 4 women and 2 men were judged to have a poor capacity to nurture a child, a finding that is perhaps not surprising considering that this was a group that wanted and received very young children. The affect displayed by almost 90 percent of these new parents was predominantly positive. Clearly these parents are enjoying their children.

In general, the parents received a good deal of support from their own families. Among the single parents, positive attitudes toward the adoption were evidenced by all but one of the new grandparents. The parents of 6 black wives and 5 black husbands were ambivalent or negative about adoption. As would be expected, couples adopting transracially had to handle the most negative attitudes. Two sets of paternal grandparents had "disowned" the families, and 18 other paternal grandparents and 17 sets of maternal grandparents were ambivalent or negative. Yet even among these couples, more than 50 percent of the grandparents were supportive.

Almost all friends approved of the adoptions; only seven transracially adopting families (and 1 black family) reported friends with mixed or negative feelings. Friends of 4 black couples and 5 white couples were so enthusiastic they were themselves considering adopting. Neighbors and co-workers generally approved. Negative attitudes from neighbors were reported by 3 trans-

racial families, and 3 single parents reported some negative attitudes from their employers.

The boss need not have feared for missed days at work, however, for child care plans seem remarkably stable. Twenty-one single applicants found their original plan workable, and only 2 were currently wanting to make changes. Only 4 white couples and 19 black couples had needed regular child care, and all these plans were stable at the time of the interview.

Thus these families seemed to be, with very few exceptions, well launched on a life pattern which will provide satisfaction to the parents and a positive climate for growth for the child.

SUMMARY AND SOME SPECULATIONS

As a whole, this group of adoptive applicants could in no way be considered "marginally eligible" to adopt children. They are well educated, have good jobs and incomes. They seem to be strong, healthy, mature people, knowledgeable about and sensitive to children. They are enjoying their adopted children and doing well with them. Their "marginality" is apparent only in their different race or marital status.

The descriptive material gathered for the first phase of this study has revealed some interesting differences among these groups of applicants. Whether these are important differences, or whether they are "good" or "bad" differences, only future follow-up work with these families will reveal. At this point they are interesting to note and speculate about.

The single parents are described as mature, stable individuals, slightly older than the other parents. The independent life style which characterized the group studied in Los Angeles does not seem apparent among these parents, more than a third of whom live with relatives, and many of whom have not formed close relationships with friends. Many of these parents have a family model not unlike the one they are creating, for 50 percent did not grow up with both of their own natural parents, though childhood needs for affection and care were met for most.

Single applicants were fairly flexible in describing the type of child for whom they could care. Adoption workers were cautious in evaluating these homes; yet slightly older children with problems, usually of a developmental nature, were placed in about thirty percent of these homes.

Single parents reported more problems immediately after placement than any other group, which may have been a function of anxiety made more acute because the parents had to cope alone, and a higher proportion of the single parents received children with problems. After two months, the fewest problems with children were reported by single parents. Families had been supportive and child care plans had worked. The low incomes of single parents may be a factor limiting ability to care for some children, though adoption subsides might meet this need. Of course the answer to the suitability of these homes

for any children will come with further follow-up data, but these seem to be first indicators that single parents may be able to care for more different kinds of children.

The transracially adopting couples in this study seem much like those described in other studies: high in education and occupational status (though not in income), independent in thinking and acting, distant from relatives. Many have two or more children. They say they want to adopt because they enjoy children and because they want to help a child who "needs" them. They are altruistic and idealistic and may under-estimate the problems of a racially mixed family.

This group of parents were most flexible in describing the child they could care for. They received the highest proportion of children with medical difficulties, possibly because they could more easily accomodate medical expenses than could single parents. About half of them received no support (and much anger) from their own parental families. Yet at follow-up there was no higher proportion of problems (other than medical) among these children than was found in any other group. The question arises whether more children with special demands could have been placed in these homes.

The black couples in this study represent a comparison group of traditional adoptive families. There is no question of "marginal eligibility" for them; they are the preferred families for these children.

The characteristics of this group seem to center around a very straightforward desire to have a family that will be like other families. These parents have good incomes, stable jobs, and strong marriages. They ask for healthy, young infants and are remarkably intense in their desire for the specific child they describe. Generally receiving the children they wish, they have few overt problems at follow-up. It is interesting to note the high degree of satisfaction and fulfillment reported by these fathers.

The wives are somewhat different than the other women in the sample. More than half experienced emotionally and/or physically deprived childhoods. A high proportion work and one-third have had little direct experience with children. Forty percent admit they are uneasy about discussing adoption with a child. One cannot help but wonder about the degree to which they have dealt with their own deprivations and are capable of fulfilling a nurturing, caretaking role with their own children.

The children placed in these varied homes were for the most part young and healthy and had had good care prior to the adoptive placement. Their characteristics were highly congruent with the wishes of their adoptive parents. They have had few problems and are developing well.

The few that have had problems present a puzzling picture. There is a small group in poor condition at birth (13), a small group with multiple placements and/or poor care before adoption (15), a small group with severe problems immediately after placement (28), and a small group with serious

problems after two months in the adoptive home (13). Almost without exception, there are different children in each group. One can only speculate that good care in the foster or adoptive home compensated for prior difficulties.

This paper is the first of a series of reports which will follow these families through the growth of the children. It will be interesting to note whether these early differences remain apparent, and to discover what experiences these families have. It is only through continuing assessment of the impact of these different families on the growth of their children that we can begin to determine whether these are appropriate ways to plan for children. The overall beginning picture is of strong families and healthy children.

TABLE 1

Reliability of items referred to in the text.

Reliability is reported as percentage agreement of two independent judgments on the categories of the item reported in the text.

Item	Percentage agreement
Meeting of needs in childhood	74[a]
Self image	79[b]
Expectations of self	75
Use of defenses and adaptive mechanisms	79
Characteristics of marital relationship	91
Level of energy available	97
Investment in having a child	84
Motivation for adopting	85
Projected capacity to nurture a child	77
Projected sensitivity to needs of child	65
Flexibility in request for a child	76
Intensity of investment in specific type child	68
Child's development at follow up	67
Capacity to nurture a child	73
Sensitivity to the needs of a child	73
Parental affect displayed – full scale	53
Parental affect displayed–"Positive"–"Negative"	97

a. Agreement only 50 percent for black women
b. Agreement only 50 percent for black men

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