



Emerging Adult Adoptees' Perspectives on Adoption Agency Practices

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Introduction

- Amidst the growing call for adoption reform (Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2016), emerging adults have become more involved in efforts to shape adoption policy, as evidenced by growing numbers of adoptee-led advocacy organizations
- When making decisions about adoption agency policies that impact adoptees, it is important to understand the perspectives of the adoptees themselves.
- The context of emerging adulthood makes the perspectives of adoptees this age particularly informative. They may be taking over responsibility for contact with their birthmother (Farr, et al., 2013) and navigating role transitions such as becoming a parent may make emerging adult adoptees' adoption history particularly salient (Greco, et al., 2015; Pérez, Sala, & Ortega, 2015).
- Although emerging adult adoptees may not have much direct experience with adoption agencies, their perspectives on agency practices are still important to understand as they may give insight in to the long-term consequences of adoption agency practices (Kowal & Schilling, 1985).

Research Questions

- What advice do emerging adult adoptees have for the individuals who run adoption agencies?
- Are adoptees' adoption-related experiences (i.e. level of openness, satisfaction with contact, attachment to adoptive parents) associated with the content of their advice to adoption agencies?

Participants

- Participants selected from a longitudinal study of openness in adoption (MTARP; Grotevant, et al., 2013).
- Adopted as infants through private domestic adoption in to same-race families in late 1970s-early 1990s.
- The final sample for the present study included 163 target adoptees who completed all interview measures at Wave 3 of data collection ($M_{age} = 24.93$).

Measures

- Agency Advice**
- At Wave 3, participants completed an interview about their adoption.
 - As part of this interview, participants were asked the question "If you were giving advice to the people who run adoption agencies, what would you tell them?"
 - Responses were coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).
 - Participants' answers were coded for presence (1) or absence (0) of each theme (average Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.67$)
- Attachment with Adoptive Parents**
- Attachment with adoptive parents was measured using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).
 - Scores for adoptive mother and adoptive father were calculated separately.
- Level of Openness**
- Level of openness was rated on a scale of 1-4
 - 1 = No contact; 2 = Previous contact that had stopped; 3 = Current contact without face-to-face meetings; 4 = Current contact with face-to-face meetings
- Satisfaction with Contact**
- Satisfaction with contact was measured on a scale of 0 to 4 with 0 indicating "very dissatisfied" and 4 indicating "very satisfied"

Results

- Chi-square and t-tests were used to test for difference in top 3 themes on adoption-related experiences
- Screening adoptive parents was more common among men ($\chi^2(1) = 8.14, p = .005$). Providing support was more common among women ($\chi^2(1) = 8.57, p = .006$).
- Those who discussed Providing information and access to records were less satisfied with contact than those who did not ($t(161) = 2.86, p = .005$).
- Those who discussed Providing support were older than those who did not ($t(162) = -2.05, p = .04$).
- Attachment to adoptive parents was not associated with any of the top 3 themes

Selected References

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Theme	Description	Example	Frequency
Provide support	Agencies should provide to support adoptive families and birthparents in various ways. Types of support suggested include informal interpersonal interactions to more formal support groups and educational resources.	"That all three side of adoption (parents, birthparents, adoptees) are all emotionally charged aspects, please give all sides all the support they need (resources, empathy even maybe a shoulder to cry on"	37
Screening adoptive parents	Agencies should make sure that adoptive parents are qualified to be good parents either through advocating for thoroughly screening potential adoptive parents or following up with previously qualified parents	"To be very careful and selective about those they choose to be adoptive parents. These parents need to really want and love this child and be able to provide for him/her and support them."	36
Providing information and access to records	Adoption agencies should maintain and provide access to information about adoptees' birthparents. This can either be for the purpose of providing the adoptee with an understanding of their background and history or for the purposes of facilitating future contact with birthparents	"To give the adopting family as much information as is legally releasable, because the more the child can know about their biological heritage, the more comfortable they'll be with themselves."	32
Appreciation of adoption and adoption agencies	Indicates an appreciation for adoption and the work that adoption agencies do, while also acknowledging that it can be challenging work.	"I would ask the staff to remember what an important part they are playing in the child's life. I still remember all of the people that worked at my agency. It used to be a special treat for me and my sister to go visit the office."	28
Unsure	Indicates that they were unsure of what advice they would give to an adoption agency	"I don't really know. I've never dealt with an agency at all"	21
Advocating for open adoption	Open adoption is preferable	"I would say that an open adoption is a much better option for all parties involved rather than a confidential adoption, and that whenever possible they should encourage the birthfamily to choose open."	18
Obtain medical history	Agencies should obtain medical records from birthparents	"While I understand the purpose of closed adoptions, please make it mandatory that medical records be available to these children. There is so much disease, both physical and mental, that these children have the right to know about. Having access to medical records can save lives."	10
Putting child's needs first	Agencies should put the needs of the adopted child first. Also includes participants who indicate that agencies should prioritize unique experiences of adopted child	"To treat every child as a human, and not another 'case'"	7
Advocating for closed adoption	Closed adoption is preferable	"It's good to have a no information discloser [sic] for both parties because I believe a child meeting it's birthmother before they are developed could cause some severe strife for the family."	6
Support decisions of birth parents	Agencies should acknowledge that making an adoption plan is a difficult decision and support the birthmother through the decision making process without pressuring her	"Be patient, and allow the birth parents every opportunity to rethink their decision.....and be positive about the choice they make."	6
Making adoption more accessible	Adoption should be made more accessible and the process should be streamlined. This also includes specific suggestions that the cost of adoption should be lowered	"I would tell them to publicize more! Too many people blow by the possibility of adoption."	6
Respect everyone's perspectives	Agencies should acknowledge the potentially different perspectives of members of the adoption triad. A need for balancing multiple perspectives may be emphasized	"Each adoptive parent, child and birth family has different situations, so I would hope they would be empathetic/sympathetic to each person."	5
Adoption regulations & policy	Advocates for adoption policies regulated by state and federal governments (e.g., access to birth records) rather than agency-specific practices.	"I know there are certain laws in certain states but I think that an adopted child has a right to access information about their adoption including who the birth parents are whenever they want to."	5
Don't discriminate on the basis of identity	Agencies should not discriminate against potential adoptive parents on the basis of their identity (i.e., sexual orientation, race, etc.).	"Don't discriminate against gay families. They'll probably do a better job with children than some straight couples. If you can find a home for a child, please do so."	2

Frequencies of Top Themes by Gender & Openness Level

Theme	Gender		Openness Level			
	Male	Female	1	2	3	4
Provide support	12	27	13	10	5	11
Providing information and access to records	13	19	12	5	5	10
Screening adoptive parents	26	10	17	4	3	12
Total	84	80	60	30	16	58

Means of Variables of Interest of Those Who Discussed Top Themes Compared to Those Who Did Not

Theme	Satisfaction		Attachment - AM		Attachment - AF		Age	
	Present	Not Present	Present	Not Present	Present	Not Present	Present	Not Present
Provide support	2.44	2.60	104.47	104.01	100.79	102.61	25.48	24.77
Providing information and access to records	2.00	2.70	101.46	104.74	105.79	101.33	24.92	24.94
Screening adoptive parents	2.67	2.54	103.97	104.62	102.90	101.99	24.76	24.98

Discussion

- Emerging adult adoptees are able to articulate advice for those running adoption agencies that acknowledge challenges, successes, and areas of potential improvement in agency practices
- Their advice may not be solely informed by their own experiences, but may also reflect both broader conceptualizations of what works well in adoption and the direct experiences of their adoptive/birth parents
- Several participants were unsure of what advice they would give, in part because of lack of direct experience with adoption agencies

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