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# The Dynamics of Adoption

## Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Insights from The Routledge *Handbook of Adoption*

### Az örökbefogadás dinamikája

Az örökbefogadás Routledge kézikönyve: Elméleti perspektívák és gyakorlati meglátások

*Adoption research is multifaceted, bridging disciplines such as sociology, psychology and policy studies. While it is not rigid or impossible to cross the lines, separating research traditions, adoption research has often taken two parallel paths, each driven by distinct interests and methodologies. One primary focus is the exploration of best policies and practices for child placement aimed at ensuring stable adoptions and fostering the well-being of all family members. Researchers examine how children and adoptive parents are matched, the satisfaction levels of adoptive families with services, and how these factors influence the length and success of placements. Another significant area of adoption research is developmental psychology. This branch delves into the mental health of adoption minors, their developmental progress after adoption from institutional settings, and their adoption following foster care placements. Since 2000, much of the research has shifted toward understanding the underlying processes affecting adoption outcomes. This includes examining how adoptive parents react to and navigate their roles, as well as the diversity in their communication styles, which profoundly impact adoptees' adoption and identity formation. Recognising individual differences in adaptation and their root causes is vital for advancing adoption practices. This paper offers a theoretical overview of adoption-related theories and research, as presented in the comprehensive Routledge Handbook of Adoption (2021).*

**Keywords:** adoption, adoptive families, child, family, parents

*Az örökbefogadás témája összetett kutatási terület, amely áthidalja a szociológia, a pszichológia és a szakpolitikai tanulmányok közötti határvonalakat. Bár a tudományágak közötti átjárás nem lehetetlen, az örökbefogadással kapcsolatos kutatások jellemzően két párhuzamos irányvonal mentén haladtak, amelyeket különböző kutatói szempontok*

és módszertanok határoztak meg. Az egyik meghatározó fókusz a gyermekek elhelyezésére vonatkozó legjobb szakpolitikai és gyakorlati megoldások feltérképezésére irányul, amelyek célja a stabil örökbefogadások biztosítása és az örökbefogadó család minden tagja jóllétének elősegítése. A kutatók elemzik, hogyan történik a gyermekek és az örökbefogadó szülők közötti párosítás, mennyire elégedettek az örökbefogadó családok a nyújtott szolgáltatásokkal, valamint hogy ezek a tényezők milyen hatással vannak az elhelyezés időtartamára és sikerességére. A másik jelentős kutatási irány a fejlődés-  
lélektanhoz kapcsolódik. Ez a megközelítés az örökbefogadott gyermekek mentális egészségére, intézményi elhelyezés utáni fejlődésére, illetve a nevelőszülői háttérből történő örökbefogadásra összpontosít. A 2000-es évektől kezdődően a kutatások egyre inkább az örökbefogadási eredményeket befolyásoló folyamatok megértésére irányulnak, beleértve az örökbefogadó szülők szerepértelmezését és kommunikációs stílusának sokféleségét, amely nagyban hat az örökbefogadott gyermekek identitásfejlődésére. Az örökbefogadás egyéni különbségeinek feltárása, valamint ezek okainak azonosítása nélkülözhetetlen az örökbefogadási gyakorlatok fejlesztéséhez. Jelen tanulmány áttekintést nyújt az örökbefogadással kapcsolatos elméletekről és kutatásokról, a *Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (2021) alapján.

**Kulcsszavak:** örökbefogadás, örökbefogadó családok, gyermek, család, szülők

## 1. Introduction

*The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (2021), edited by Gretchen Miller Wrobel, PhD, Emily Helder, Ph.D. and Elisha Marr, Ph.D., fills a niche in the social science discipline. After reviewing most of the literature on the topic, I concluded that no handbook was written before Routledge's 2021 edition addressing the diversity of adoption issues with the care, research and theoretical background that characterises this work. The authors of this volume highlight several crucial aspects of adoption as a solution and option for starting a family, as well as presenting a myriad of unique challenges of the process. Before this handbook, several studies have argued that adoptive families face many unique challenges and problems (Kirk 1964; Brodzinsky 1987; Schoenberg 1974; Stein-Hoopes 1985). Reading this book will quickly make the reader realise how many groups worldwide are affected by this form of family formation.

## 2. Book contextualisation

The professional involvement of the three editors is strongly felt in the editing and structure of the volume. As such, the main themes of the handbook are the role of communication in adoptive families in terms of information seeking and curiosity, the impact of early experiences of adopted children on their later development and language, and the impact of child abuse, neglect and early deprivation on their experiences. Furthermore, it touches on the topics of cross-racial adoption, trends in

adoption rates, the experiences of cross-racial adoptees and adoptive parents, and the racial preferences of adoptive parents. Following the content structure of the book, this paper presents the emerging theoretical approaches and practices in these five main content sections.

The editors have divided the book into five main content areas to focus readers' attention on "the context of adoption", "diversity in adoption", "lived experience", "outcomes" and "adoption competence". The five significant chapters will include a minimum of five and a maximum of eight sub-chapters. At the end of each sub-chapter is a paragraph entitled "Implications for Policy and Practice", which contextualises the topic.

### 3. Adoption in context

#### 3.1. Context of history

Introduces the history of adoption in the United States from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 2000s. The origins of adoption and foster care in the U.S. can be dated from the 1930s to the 1960s (Brodzinsky 2011; Higdon 2008; Marr et al. 2021). Following the Second World War, white couples living in the USA were allowed to adopt children from other countries; this gave rise to international adoption, which was characterised by phenotype matching, or same-race adoption, which meant that children were allocated to families who were as similar as possible in external characteristics to the adoptive parents (Marr et al. 2021; Ward Gailey 2010). In the U.S., adoption occurs in three ways: through private agencies, public mediation, or private adoption. In public adoptions, governments are responsible for the adoption, placement and management of children who have been removed from birth-parent families by child welfare agencies. The difference between private adoptions and adoptions through private agencies is that the former are not facilitated by public adoption agencies or lawyers but are handled by the birth parents themselves (Biafora-Esposito 2007; Wallin-Miller 2011). The 1970s saw several changes in adoption, with white parents beginning to adopt children of colour, the increased use of contraceptives, the availability of abortion and the acceptance of single parenthood (Fisher 2003; Simon-Altstein 2000; Patton 2000; Ward Gailey 2010). The following changes occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, with three main aspects: an increase in inter-racial and international adoptions (Marr et al. 2021; Biafora-Esposito 2007; Simon-Altstein 2000) and finally, the development of open adoption, where the parties could get to know each other and thus have more information about the child's past, rather than the closed adoption between adoptees and birth parents that had been typical until then, with little or no contact between the parties (Grotevant-McRoy 1998). In the 1990s, the number of inter-racial adoptions increased from 10.8% to 15% per year (Marr et al. 2021; Hansen-Simon 2004), the majority of children adopted through international adoption were Korean (Beck 1992), and then the political situation in the world changed this proportion, with Romanian women handing over thousands of children to orphanages after the fall of the Soviet Union. All welcomed the spread of open adoption. They believed that the availability of

information about their children's adoption positively affected their satisfaction with their adoption, so that contact between families became commonplace and was seen as being in the children's best interests (Siegel-Smith 2012). The change of the 2000s is reflected in the fact that lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people have also become adopters. The first gay couples could adopt in 1979 (Mombian 2017). In 2013, an estimated 27,000 same-sex couples fostered 58,000 adopted and foster children in the U.S. (Gates 2015).

The first part of the Handbook emphasises adoption across racial lines and international matters of adoption, including several agreements between nations, such as the Hague Convention of 1993. Under this convention, standards have been established to regulate intercountry adoptions, to safeguard the rights and interests of children and their parents, and to prevent child trafficking and other abuses. The authors also analyse the cultural and racial aspects of the development and practice of adoption policy, concluding that adoption often intersects cultural and racial issues. Still, a detailed discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper.

The handbook includes representative studies that help the reader understand the complexity of the relationship between the adopted child and the adoptive parents, such as The American Community Survey. The Early Growth and Development Study sheds light on the development of adoptive and birth families over time and the contributions of heritable and environmental processes to child development. Perfectly related to this is the life course perspective of family theory, which considers the life course perspective of family members, i.e. individuals and families change and evolve.

### 3.2. Context of adoption life course perspective

The search for identity is something that all people go through, but for adoptees, it is a more complex process. For most of the twentieth century, adoption was characterised by confidentiality and secrecy based on conformity. The child should be as similar as possible in their appearance to the adoptive parents – the 1964 work of H. David Kirk's *Shared Fate* theory challenged this view and argued that adoptive parents should acknowledge the differences inherent in adoption. This theory was later developed in 1987 by David M. Brodzinsky, which resulted in practitioners advising children to share their adoption stories as early as possible. "The development of adoptive identity cannot be understood without placing it in the context of social attitudes towards kinship" (Grotevant et al. 2000: 381). How an individual develops meaning about their adoption indicates how their adoptive identity evolves. Drawing on Erikson's (1959, 1968) theory of identity, the literature identifies three main aspects that are strongly dominant: self-definition, personality coherence and a sense of continuity over time (Grotevant 1993). Self-definition includes the identities by which an individual defines him/herself and by which others identify him/her in a given social and historical context. Coherence of identity refers to a subjective sense of how the different aspects of an individual's identity fit together harmoniously. Finally, a sense of identity continuity over time is the sense that connects the individual's past, present and future while also being expressed in different places, contexts and relationships (Cooper 2013). Identity

is, therefore, a complex concept that encompasses the internal dimensions of personality, subjective awareness, the network of relationships and the effects of the external context. Consequently, the essence of identity can be captured in the “self context”.

To understand identity development in a more integrated way, researchers (Grotevant 1993; McAdams 1988) have used a narrative approach to focus on meaning-making, focusing on how the adopted child makes meaning through the story of his or her adoption. The development of the adoption narrative develops in parallel with the development of the adoptee’s identity (Grotevant et al. 2000). This kind of identity is formed and discussed in the context of relationships within the family. Finally, the type and openness of adoption have a significant impact on identity and intra-family dynamics, as the amount of information available to openly adopted children and families is much greater than that available to closed adopters.

#### 4. Diversity in Adoption

The second part of the handbook is entitled ‘Diversity in Adoption’ and contains eight sections. The diversity mentioned in the title refers to the unique opportunities of adoption included in the sections, such as the strengths and challenges of families, which came to be through international adoption the characteristics of the adoption of disabled children, or chances for adoption in the case of LGBTQ families. The authors present the parents’ preferences from the United States – gender, race and age group – based on separate research data in each section. Furthermore, the paragraphs elaborate on the forms and constraints of adoption, such as political climate, various local and federal politics, rules and regulations regarding adoption. The second part, therefore, provides an excellent insight into policy and practical options.

Spain has the second highest number of adoptions in the world after the United States, with 45,000 children adopted in 2004, of which 5,541 were adopted in Spain. The children were mainly from China (2,389), Russia (1,618), Ukraine (349), Colombia (256) and Ethiopia (220) (Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare 2019).

#### 5. Diversity in international adoption

##### 5.1. Diversity of attachment and communication

The diversity of intercountry adoptions can be seen, among other things, in how families deal with the information and challenges of a child’s ethnic and cultural background. The uniqueness of these adoptions is that emotional attachments are created and developed independently of heritage and cultural or ethnic origin. For adoptees, finding similarity and belonging is a particularly challenging task, which is also linked to the integration of their new identity (Reinoso 2021). In the case of internationally adopted families, it is also true that the adoptive parents’ attachment histories determine the attachment relationships within the family. These include the losses they

go through to become adoptive parents, such as infertility, miscarriages, and dealing with grief at not being able to become a biological family.

Adoption communication in adoptive families is an interactional process in which openness and honesty are essential (Adámi 2023b). Regardless of the child's origin, parents control the communication about this, what topics are discussed, how much information about the child's past is shared with their child, and when (Adámi 2023a; Wrobel et al. 2004; Freeark et al. 2008). However, an essential aspect of international adoptive families is that in these interactions, racial and physical differences are less often discussed than the reasons for adoption and birth parents. At this point, it is worth separating communication about parentage from communication about adoption. The former involves accepting and managing differences in the adoptive relationship (Reinoso 2021). Understanding and experiences related to origins align with developmental stages and the specific tasks encountered within each stage (see Brodzinsky–Brodzinsky 1992). Adoptive parents face similar challenges as they work to support their children's adjustment and acceptance of their adoption. A critical aspect of this ongoing adaptation process is reconciling the duality of abandonment and adoption, a realisation that adopted children often begin to comfort during middle childhood.

## 5.2. Diversity of adoptive families

In what follows, the focus returns to cultural and racial theories from the perspective of the family, in particular adoptive families. In the tenth sub-chapter, Elizabeth Raleigh and Rose M. Kreider discuss the cultural and racial aspects of adoption policy and the adoption trends of black and white children and argue that most prospective adoptive parents prefer to adopt white children even though the process is more expensive and time-consuming. Few studies have looked at black children adopted by black parents. Still, a 2010 study by Vandivere and McKlindon found that black parents are more likely to adopt from foster care, the reason being that international adoption is often more costly. Most of this literature, however, has looked at black adoptive parents from a social work perspective and is mainly based on convenience samples.

The authors articulate that adoption has positive characteristics and could be approached critically, describing how adoption has racial and ethnic risk factors, for instance, in the case of Korean American adopted children. Bronfenbrenner developed ecological systems theory in 1994, often associated with the evolution of human and family dynamics. Understanding the relationships between the environmental factors that influence an individual is fundamental to studying human development. Ecological systems theory takes an interactionist view of individual development, focusing on the interactions between individuals and environmental systems. The present theory can provide a comprehensive framework for studying environmental influences on the developmental processes of adopted children and families in the adoption context and practice. At the *microsystem level*, the relationship between adoptive parents and their child plays a crucial role in the child's emotional and psychological development, as a supportive and secure family environment allows for bonding and can also

strengthen their self-esteem. At the *mesosystem level*, the literature understands the relationship between school, community and health systems and how the consistency experienced in these systems affects the child's adjustment. At the *macrosystem level*, the impact of norms and cultural attitudes on the acceptability of adoption, influenced by both legal and political frameworks, is at the forefront and thus extends to family dynamics and the adopted child's identity. At the level of the chronological system, we can talk about the temporal changes that occur at significant events in a child's life cycle, such as the search for identity in adolescence or meeting biological parents, which can be critical changes in a child's development (Kreider–Raleigh 2016). Overall, Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights that the success of adoptive families is highly dependent on the support and coherence of these systems. Indeed, understanding the dynamic interactions between family and environment can provide a basis for helping adoptive families and prompting children's development. In the second half of the chapter, the authors discuss diversity as an opportunity for countries affected by natural disasters (e.g. the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, World War II, the Korean War, or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti).

## 6. The Living Experience

### 6.1. Feminist perspectives on birth mothers: Challenges of adoption

The third chapter, 'The Living Experience,' contains seven sub-chapters. The perspective of birth mothers on adoption as an option and the main reasons for child abandonment in the U.S. are depicted here. The feminist theory on adoption is a branch of theory that deals with the intersection of adoption and issues related to gender, family and social dynamics. Several disciplines contribute to developing a feminist perspective on adoption, focusing on how adoption intersects gender roles, reproductive rights, motherhood, and the experiences of adoptive and birth mothers and adoptees. The study of biological mothers is a highly sensitive area of research. Sub-chapter 16 of this handbook presents some main findings that summarise their lives and experiences. Biological mothers are also referred to in the literature as crisis mothers (Lapidus et al. 2023) who are in crisis or experiencing an unwanted pregnancy. They often have to decide to adopt without access to appropriate services and support during the decision-making process.

It is worth mentioning Carol Smart's 1989 book *Feminism and the Power of Law*, Professor Emirata Lorraine Radford, whose research specialisation is the prevention of gender-based violence, abuse and sexual exploitation towards women, children and young people, and last but not least, Professor Christine Ward Gailey, who has been analysing and theorising crucial and complex issues for feminist scholars and activists from the resurgence of feminist theories and practices in the early 1970s to the present day. The authors draw a picture of the methodology and results of DAI's Options Counseling Study research. The study examined women who voluntarily relinquished their children after 1989. The results show that the birth mothers' family members exerted the most significant pressure to give up the child for adoption; the second



most common reason was the financial situation, and the third most common reason was housing problems. They point out that the United States does not have a uniform system of laws, legislation, information and support in all states, making the decision for birth mothers extremely difficult.

## **6.2. Adoption openness and attachment through intra-family communication**

Lindsey J. Thomas and Kristina M. Scharp, in sub-chapter 18 on the role of intra-family communication in adoptive families argue that intra-family communication can be defined as a factor that positively influences the adjustment and attachment of adopted youth, and therefore, families need communication support. The Family Adoption Communication Model (FAC) summarises the three phases of adoption communication, which can be understood as an ever-changing process, as the adoption discourse is not a one-off event but a process that affects the whole family environment (Adámi 2023b; Thomas–Scharp 2017; Wrobel et al. 2004). The information sharing of adoptees is not time-bound under the FAC model, but in the first and second phases, the adoptive parents control the information sharing. In the first phase, the parents share information themselves with the child; in the second phase, the parents answer the child's questions – the child is already involved in the information-gathering process and can shape it with their questions – while in the third phase, the child is usually seeking information on their own at adulthood. This can be done by contacting an adoption NGO in Hungary or an agency abroad involved in the adoption process when the child was young or by contacting the biological parents if the genealogy search is successful. In the context of the family adoption communication model and family communication patterns theory, adoptees must have an ongoing dialogue about their adoption, and the family must have honest, open communication in which the topic can be raised at any time, not just in response to the child's questions. Like the FAC model, family communication patterns theory focuses on developing communication within the family and the environment. It defines four distinct family communication climates of conformity and conversational orientations. In families with high conversational orientations, family members are engaged in communication, are open to discussing anything, and encourage free communication. In families with a high conformity orientation, family members with an authoritative role (parents) bring the topics, beliefs and attitudes that they expect from family members (Koerner–Fitzpatrick 2002). Horstman and colleagues found in their 2016 work that in adoptive families where conversation orientation is high, there is openness to adoption.

## **7. Challenges and dynamics in transracial adoptions**

Danielle Godon-Decoteau and Patricia Ramsey introduce the reader to the forms and difficulties of racist manifestations towards transracial adoptees with TRAs, the coping strategies of children and the reasons for the process, and the normative criteria and motivations for seeking out birth parents.



Readers can learn that open adoption dates back to the 1980s. It has the advantage of being more easily and quickly available than closed adoptions, thus positively affecting children's development.

Finally, in further subsections, the authors discuss the role of religiosity in adoptions, the role of adoptive parents as parents, research on microaggressions in adoptive relationships and its results, and the emergence of child maltreatment in biological, adoptive, foster and institutional settings.

## 8. Outcomes

### *8.1. Language and emotional outcomes in adopted children*

The fourth chapter – with seven sub-chapters – is entitled 'Outcomes'. This title is a broad description of what the sub-chapters tell us about the effects of the outcome of adoption, both on the adoptive parents and the adoptee, whether the result is negative or positive. Speech and language development are described regarding the specificity of language learning in international children, where children adopted through international adoption learn a new language after the critical periods for language learning have passed. Their brains process the new language as a second language (Language 1, Language 2), but in most cases, they eventually develop language skills that meet normal expectations for their age. The theory of the critical period of language development (Lenneberg 1967) may help explain why internationally adopted children experience language learning difficulties after the critical period (the critical period is defined as the adoption process). Language learning results from a combination of inherited genetic and environmental traits, but these two factors vary in how they affect language learning over time. In infancy and early childhood, the environment plays a more significant role, and as the child ages, genetic influences increase (Hayiou-Thomas 2008). Lenneberg theorised that there is an ideal time in every person's development when the brain has a much harder time learning language. According to the hypothesis, the critical period is the first few years of life, when language learning and development are essential. The critical period in SLA (second language acquisition) is between the ages of 2 and 13 (Lenneberg 1967). Concerning genetic studies, Hardy-Brown and Plomin found in 1985 that verbal ability and school performance correlate more strongly with biological parents than with adoptive parents. The duration of institutionalisation is also correlated with lower verbal IQ scores.

Sub-chapter two shows the behavioural and emotional adjustment, its challenges and how adoptees struggle with them. The authors argue this might be explained by the fact that adoption itself is an intervention that lifts children out of early disadvantage who have already come to adoption with emotional trauma, which in turn affects their behaviour. The rest of the chapter explains the role of early socialisation deprivation in children in institutional care. The authors sum up how high caregiver ratios and frequent changes of caregivers often prevent children from developing selective attachment, with lasting developmental consequences. In sub-chapter 27, we learn more about the adjustment and competence of internationally adopted children

compared to their non-adopted peers. The role of the adoptive environment is to neutralise the risks posed by international adoption by facilitating children's adjustment in the early stages of adoption and helping them to develop social relationships and recover from deprivation (Chapter 4, p. 381) (Stams et al. 2002). The emotional adjustment and behavioural problems of adopted children are explained by several mechanisms: poor prenatal or birth conditions, genetic inheritance of the child, developmental disorders, abuse and traumatic disruption of attachment (Stams et al. 2002). Post-adoption, parenting style, family relationships and interactions, children's acceptance into the family and their understanding, and adoption communication are major contributors to their development (Palacios–Brodzinsky 2010). Other research has also shown that the emotional intelligence of adopted children lags behind that of their non-adopted peers (Vorraia et al. 2006; Wismer Fries – Pollak 2004). It is hypothesised that difficulties in emotional understanding may partly be explained by the fact that orphanage environments provide limited opportunities for emotional learning, as they lack the socio-emotional conditions necessary for acquiring proficiency in emotional processing (Wismer Fries – Pollak 2004).

Sub-chapter 28 deals with the research on the academic and adjustment differences of internationally adopted children in Norway, compared to their non-adopted peers (Dalen–Theie 2014), which shows that adopted children are characterised by hyperactivity, which strongly influences their academic success beyond their age at adoption. As for sub-chapter 29, the three authors describe parental stress in adoptive families, from which readers learn that the adoption family life cycle is unstable and that the unique challenges in each life cycle place parents under constant stress, which can also affect the child. A study conducted by Judge (2004) on adoptive parents of Eastern European children revealed that adoptive parents are more likely to attribute parental stress to child-related factors rather than parental characteristics. The findings showed that reports of behavioural problems in adopted children were associated with increased stress levels in both mothers and fathers. Thus, parental stress is correlated with the child's attachment style and attitude to adoption, and negative parenting styles and parental stress together contribute to children's behavioural problems and emotional negativity.

## 8.2. Adoption Competence

'Adoption Competence', the book's fifth chapter, is divided into five sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter draws attention to the importance of adoption competence, first in the clinical and then in the institutional environment, including pedagogical and educational sectors. It describes the steps the CASE (Center for Adoption Support and Education) organisation took to become a site for the TAC (Training for Adoption Competency) program. In the chapter, the author clarifies the critical need for health services and curriculum development with adoption competency. Also articulated in the chapter is the need to integrate adopted children into education.

The second half of the chapter describes post-adoption services by type of adoption and outlines the challenges involved. Such services include emotional support, family

counselling, outreach and financial assistance. These can be accessed by adoptive families either formally through agencies or informally. The final sub-chapter of the book discusses adoption-specific curricula in higher education. The authors describe several post-graduate training programs focusing on adoption, but the pre-requisite or location and time often influence the real success of these courses. Based on the curriculum study presented in this sub-chapter, the authors conclude that there is a need to incorporate the implications of the high impact of the internet on adoptions into the curriculum material for adoption.

In summary, each chapter of the book integrates different family theories to provide the reader with a comprehensive picture of the impact of adoption on family dynamics, relationships and individual identity. These theories include family system theory, attachment theory, life course perspective, social constructivist theory, ecological system theory, cultural and racial theories, and feminist theory. Still, they also describe several family-related psychological, sociological and communication theories. It explores how adoption interacts with and is influenced by these theoretical frameworks, making it a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners and those interested in adoption studies.

## 9. Critiques

*The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* is a comprehensive and interdisciplinary work that explores the social, psychological and legal issues of adoption from a variety of perspectives. A particular strength of the volume is that it draws on a wide range of theoretical backgrounds and empirical research to support the issues presented. However, it is worth noting that some chapters of the book do not always reflect critically on the globalisation of adoption processes and the cultural differences that this entails.

While the importance of the search for identity and the life narratives of adopted people is reflected in several places in the book, there is less discussion of the new challenges that the search for information in the online space poses for adopted children. Today, it is becoming increasingly common for adopted young people to use social media and DNA databases to trace their birth families, raising serious psychological and ethical questions. The book only touches on these issues, although such a chapter would be a helpful addition.

In addition, although the book clearly describes the motivations of adoptive parents and the steps involved in preparing for adoption, it places less emphasis on the need to support adoptive parents in their long-term parenting role. Studies that examine the mental health and long-term adjustment strategies of adoptive parents could complement the generally positive narrative of the volume, providing a more balanced picture of the complexities of adoption.

### **9.1. Prior knowledge and glossary**

Several times during the book's reading, the authors assumed prior knowledge that the reader might not have. It is stated that the book is intended for professionals working in the field of adoption, people interested in adoption, people with experience in the social field, professionals in the psychological field, people working in medicine, professionals in family science, and researchers and professionals in the field of education and demography. The target audience is so broadly defined that it is difficult to determine whom the book is intended for and what it is aimed at in terms of academic and expert literacy in the field. Consequently, the volume expects the reader to have knowledge of so many disciplines that it makes some sections difficult to understand and read. It would be helpful to the reader if there were a glossary at the end of the book listing the terms, abbreviations and primary research used. This would be very useful, as many theories, specific abbreviations (e.g. transracial adoptees) and international research are described.

### **9.2. Where are the views of adoptees? What is the role of the Internet and media?**

The volume does not adequately cover two significant topics. One of them is the role and influence of stakeholders in the adoption process, which would warrant a separate sub-chapter. Adoption is not solely a matter between adoptive parents and the child; it involves a range of actors, including child protection agencies, psychologists, legal professionals and social workers. These stakeholders play a crucial role in shaping adoption outcomes and influence the diverse legal frameworks and practical adoption processes across different countries. A more detailed analysis of their contributions would have helped provide a clearer understanding of the broader institutional and societal context of adoption.

The second underrepresented topic is the influence of media, the internet, films and television series on adoption, along with the issue of sharenting. In recent years, adoption narratives have gained significant representation in popular media. These portrayals play a vital role in shaping public attitudes toward adoption and the perception of adoptive families. A dedicated section analysing how adoption is framed in media and how these portrayals impact societal views would have been a valuable addition to the volume.

The internet and digital platforms have become the primary sources of information, encompassing news media, social media and online forums. Media does not only influence public perception of adoption but also poses risks to the online safety of adopted children. One particularly relevant aspect in this regard is sharenting (a combination of "parenting" and "sharing"), referring to the content that adoptive parents share about their children on social media.

Sharenting is a sensitive issue in the context of adoption, as the digital footprint of adopted children can have long-term consequences. Adoptive parents often do not realise that sharing seemingly harmless updates or personal details on social media – even with good intentions, such as seeking support – can be retrieved, misused and

impact their child's identity formation later in life. Additionally, some adopted children may use online resources to search for their biological families, which introduces both psychological challenges and data privacy concerns.

A more in-depth examination of sharenting, online identity protection and media literacy would have been highly relevant for this volume, particularly in helping adoptive parents navigate the complexities of safeguarding their child's personal information in the digital space. As the role of digital content and social media in shaping adoption narratives grows, these issues are becoming increasingly critical in the discourse on adoption.

## 10. Conclusion

*The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* is a unique, helpful resource and a pioneering volume in the field of adoption for many reasons. First, it provides comprehensive coverage of the adoption study, including psychological, social, legal, cultural and ethical aspects. This broad coverage ensures that readers gain a comprehensive view of adoption as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

It also provides an interdisciplinary approach unprecedented in previous studies, volumes and articles on adoption. It draws on contributions from various experts in psychology, sociology, social work, law, anthropology and others. This interdisciplinary approach provides a variety of perspectives and insights, making the book valuable for a broad audience. It also includes the latest research, trends and best practices in the field of adoption. This is particularly essential in a developing area such as adoption, where research and practice constantly evolve.

It is particularly appreciated that the volume does not shy away from discussing controversial and challenging aspects of adoption, such as issues related to inter-racial adoption, open adoption, or the impact on birth parents. Still, each chapter is tough enough for the reader to engage with complex and sensitive issues.

## 11. Relevance

The book provides insight into adoption policies and practices, making it relevant for professionals working in the field of adoption, including social workers, counsellors and legal practitioners. It can help inform and guide their work.

The book is a crucial resource for undergraduate and graduate students studying adoption, family science, child development, psychology and related fields. It can be used as a textbook or as supplementary reading for courses. For researchers and academics, the handbook is a rich source of references, theories and research findings to use in their research projects in the field of adoption. It also contains practical insights and case studies that can help adoptive parents, birth parents and individuals considering adoption to make informed decisions and understand the complex issues involved. Another great advantage of this volume is that it includes contributions from different countries, giving readers an insight into adoption practices and policies in

various cultural and legal contexts. It may also be helpful for policymakers and government agencies, as it can be used as a primary resource for developing and reviewing policies and regulations on adoption. Finally, it allows for a deeper understanding of the impact of adoption on individuals and families, helping society to become more empathetic and supportive of adoptive families and adoptees.

*The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* is a valuable and helpful resource for its comprehensive coverage, interdisciplinary approach, up-to-date information, educational value and ability to inform practice, policy and research in adoption studies. It is a valuable tool for a wide range of audiences, including students, educators, practitioners, researchers, policymakers and anyone with an interest in the topic of adoption.

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