

CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: JANINE BAER

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Jews and Adoption

by Sherry Rosen

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Jews in the Adoption Triangle

Jewish couples may well exemplify the modern American problem that writer Shirley Frank calls "the new infertility." Typically delaying marriage and child-bearing for education and career-building, they later become among the most active in seeking babies for adoption. Some report relative disadvantage in an adoption market in which agencies and birth mothers often talk about finding "good Christian homes"; others suggest that Jewish couples actually have an adoption advantage in that they are likelier to tap into networks of doctors or lawyers, and also because some birth mothers respond positively to the stereotype of Jews as successful professionals who can give a child material and educational advantages.

There is no evidence of greater infertility among American Jews; in fact, infertility occurs most commonly among black couples with low levels of education. It is possible, however, that infertility imposes a special burden on Jews, for whom parenthood is often viewed as "a ticket of admission to the Jewish community." For such people, according to Boston psychiatrist Miriam Mazor, infertility becomes a "biblical stress test for faith." Whatever the reason, many Jews are involved in activist adoptive-parent organizations, often as founders, and their intense motivation to establish families is often deeply rooted in Jewish values.

Jews figure prominently in all corners of the adoption triangle. Contrary to popular belief, there are Jewish birth mothers who place babies for adoption, and even more Jewish birth fathers. Jewish women are visible in the leadership ranks of birth mother advocacy and counseling groups, speaking out publicly and publishing books and magazine articles presenting the birth mothers' point of view. Similarly, adult Jewish adoptees are active in adoptee advocacy and support groups, and have authored books and articles describing their personal odysseys and debating the issues surrounding open and closed records, reunions with biological parents, and profiles of adoptees in therapy. Last but not least, individual Jews are also active as adoption lawyers and as doctors helping birth parents and adoptive parents to find one another.

Judaic Perspectives

Judaism itself offers a perspective that can be highly supportive of adoption initiatives. The rabbinic response to infertility is to urge couples to pursue all means possible within Jewish law to overcome obstacles to their observance of the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply." While adoption as we know it today is not formally mentioned in the Bible or Talmud, Rabbi Michael Gold's book *And Hannah Wept: Infertility, Adoption and the Jewish Couple* cites many de facto instances of adoption in biblical literature, including Abraham's "adoption" of his servant Eliezer and Michal's "adoption" of her sister Meirav's five sons. Furthermore, the concept of guardianship is implied in Jewish law, and is reinforced in the Midrash that states: "The one who brings up a child is to be called its parent, not the one who gave birth" (Sanhedrin 19).

Write or Call Now To Support California Bill for Open Records

If you are a Californian, please call or write your own district's state assembly member as soon as possible (late June/early July 1990). Ask whether he or she plans to vote in favor of the open adoption records bill, Assembly Bill 3907. When you get a yes or no response, Kate Burke (president of American Adoption Congress) would like to know the results; you can phone her at (415) 673-3921. This bill was introduced by Assembly Member Quackenbush March 1 and is expected to be voted on in the Assembly very soon. It would provide for licensed adoption agencies or the State Department of Social Services (for independent adoptions) to furnish the names of birthparents to adoptees who reach 18 years of age. Adoptive parents could get that information for their children prior to age 18. And birthparents could obtain the names of their relinquished adult-children on request. To help it pass, reformers agreed to "revenue neutral" legislation, which means applicants for the information (and not tax-payers) would have to pay about \$70. for their birth certificate or child's name.

When the bill passed out of the House Judiciary Committee 7-1, it had been amended to give time for birthparents or adoptees to **block** access to their names during one year prior to the opening of records, which would make it very much like the New Zealand law that allows adoptees and birthparents to "veto" access to their names. If AB 3907 passes the Assembly, it still has to go through the State Senate. Stay tuned for more information on how you can help open records in California. ▲



The rabbinic response to infertility is to urge couples to pursue all means possible within Jewish law to overcome obstacles to their observance of the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply."

At the same time, Rabbi Gold -- himself an adoptive father -- acknowledges that Jewish law, unlike civil law, places great importance on bloodlines. Thus he counsels Jewish adoptive parents of the need for formal conversion of adoptees into the Jewish community. He also acknowledges such technicalities as the nontransmission of priestly or Levitical status through adoption, the converted child's right to reject Judaism at age 12 or 13, and the Orthodox recommendation against adopting born-Jewish babies so as to preclude situations in which some adult adoptees may have questionable marital status within the Jewish community. In general, couples are urged to consult with their rabbis about conversion procedures.

(over)

At this time, however, rabbis of all movements do not necessarily agree on what is required to bring an adopted child into the fold. While some Reform rabbis quote Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof's 1956 ruling that adoption itself constitutes full membership into the Jewish family and the Jewish community, others urge congregants to pursue Orthodox conversions for their adopted children so as to guarantee their full acceptance into all branches of the faith. However, Orthodox practices in this area vary considerably; some rabbis will provide Orthodox conversions for all adoptees, while others insist on family commitments of increased observance. Still other families manage to avoid facing this issue altogether at the time of adoption, but as bar or bat mitzvah approaches, they are distraught to learn that their child's Jewish status is in question.

Within the Jewish Community

Beyond establishing and upholding rules regarding conversion, American rabbis and the synagogues they represent are generally not formally involved in the adoption concerns of their congregants. Few rabbis are trained to counsel birth parents or adoptive parents, and there are few reports of rabbis who are programmatically engaged in efforts to absorb the growing numbers of foreign-born adoptees into the congregational family. Some rabbis are informally active, however, in underground networking efforts to match adoptable infants with prospective families, as evidenced by occasional printed announcements in CCAR rabbinic newsletters.

Jewish Family Service agencies, once deeply involved in adoption services, moved away from this activity in the 1960s. Nevertheless, according to an August 1988 report from the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, some 34 agencies across the country (out of a total of 139) report that they provide some adoption services. These can range from information and referral services through doing home studies and networking all the way to actual adoption placements, domestic and international. Others organize support groups and seminars. Agency involvement, which varies from place to place, is now growing rapidly.

At the informal level of grass-roots communal involvement, there is a burgeoning of Jewish self-help support groups under the name "Stars of David." With no formal ties to any Jewish organization or denomination, the autonomous chapters provide a social network for Jewish and partly Jewish adoptive families. Approximately half the families served have foreign-born adopted children. Chapters gather for Jewish holiday celebrations and information sharing and maintain some contact through a national newsletter. Founded in 1984 by Phyllis Nissen and Rabbi Susan Abramson of Temple Shalom Emeth in Burlington, Massachusetts, Stars of David has grown to the point where its co-founders claim not to know how many chapters exist. (Reliable estimates suggest there are at least 35 involving more than a thousand families.)

Interviews and meetings with Jewish adoptive parents around the country suggest several areas in which the Jewish community could be doing more to meet their needs. Perhaps foremost is the concern that rabbis of all movements agree on a joint set of requirements regarding conversion of adoptees, and that this information be readily accessible to adoptive families. Families are mixed in their desire for greater involvement of rabbis and synagogues: some would prefer greater programmatic activity within the synagogue community, while others prefer to pursue full participation without the stigmatized "adoptive family" label.

There is greater consensus on other kinds of communal supports adoptive families wish to receive. With increased funding as the common link, families ask for more postadoption services and greater centralization of services, perhaps on a national level. Others request more specifically Jewish content in the communal

services that are currently offered. Some would like to see the Jewish community reestablish functioning adoption agencies, while others prefer to receive professional assistance from the Jewish community in their individual pursuit of private adoption.

It is harder to get information about what Jewish support services birth parents and adoptees themselves need, but surely greater counseling before and after adoption would rank high on any list. Some urge Jewish communal involvement in legislation about adoption records, while others suggest that communal intervention to support young pregnant women is needed to prevent what they believe is the breakup of a fragile new Jewish family.

Facing the Future

For the long term, the Jewish community must begin to address some very deep issues that adoption raises:

- As adoption activist Abby Ruder notes, in acknowledging the multiple heritage of race and ethnicity borne by many adoptees, Jews are also addressing complexities of race and ethnicity within the Jewish community itself. For Jewish adoptees, conversion need not necessarily wipe out the past; the Jewish community and even Jewish identity can be enriched by the incorporation of other cultural backgrounds. As non-European Jews in Israel and elsewhere already know, the tag line "Funny, you don't look Jewish" can be more an expression of ignorance and insularity than of genuine humor.

- As the scramble for adoptable infants from the third world continues, Jews as a people must face difficult ethical concerns about the large-scale adoption of deprived members of one cultural community by privileged members of another. Journalist (and adoptive father) Lawrence Bush writes, "We who adopt are exercising a certain privilege of class or nationality. If we exercise that privilege without a heightened sense of responsibility, we are participating in oppression, however innocently What, then, am I asking of adoptive parents. . . ? Only that they be conscious of the privilege that has gained for them the ability to overcome the infertility curse, and that they channel that consciousness into a sense of *tikkun olam* [repair of the world] that includes, but goes beyond, the loving attention they give to their adopted children. Our world is terribly imbalanced when whole nations are unable to hold on to their younger generations. Reckoning with that imbalance involves more than the uplifting of individual kids -- notwithstanding the Jewish teaching that saving a single life is like saving the whole world. Saving the world begins with the saving of a single life; it doesn't end there" (*Genesis 2*, Winter 1987/1988).

For the Jewish community, adoption means change: change in how families are formed, change in how we define ourselves in terms of race and ethnicity, and change in how we relate to other cultures and nationalities with whom we interact. How we respond as a community to the adoptees among us, as well as to the adoptive parents and birth parents, will in part determine the strength and vitality of Jewish family life into the twenty-first century.

Sherry Rosen is a family sociologist and the editor of the newsletter of the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022. ▲



REUNIONS: THE MAGAZINE

This attractive and upbeat magazine was inspired in part by an adoptee-birthmother reunion, but covers all kinds of reunions. Send \$22. (prepaid, U.S., for 4 issues) to: Reunions, the magazine, Inc., P.O. Box 11727, Milwaukee, WI 53211-0727. ▲

Editorial: Guide to This Issue

It may not be obvious why I've chosen the articles I did for this issue, so here is an explanation. The Jews and Adoption article follows my goal to explore multicultural views of adoption. Most mainstream articles about Jews and adoption focus primarily on the needs of adoptive parents; one claimed that adopted Reform Jews need not and should not know the names of their birthparents. So I was happy to see an article that acknowledged (at least a little) the needs of all triad members, the existence of pro and con views about open records, the political implications of transnational adoption, and the need for rabbis to better serve triad members in their congregations.

Since so much of the justification for adoption focuses on the need of children to have two parents, the finding that girls have *better* self esteem when raised in "one-parent" (presumably female-headed) families turns that rationale on its head. My guess is that girls in these families don't have to see their mothers in subordinate roles to men on a daily basis, which improves their self-esteem as female.

As you read the excerpt by Eric Rofes about Gay and Lesbian Youth, see how many potential triad members you can find. The organization GLASS offers another way for people to nurture the next generation without being parents. Other articles on pages 4 and 5 show that the courts generally don't like gay and lesbian parents, but exemplary individuals who fight to have the same rights and obligations as heterosexuals can sometimes win. The outcome of the New York case, however, is appalling, with only one judge thinking clearly and fairly. And the decision that some known donors can go to court to claim a role in a child's life shows double standards in the court's treatment of heterosexuals versus lesbians who use donor insemination: if a married woman were in the same position, her donor would not have a chance at winning paternity rights because a woman's husband is considered the legal father. Contrast this with the opposite treatment of adoptees and birthparents, who cannot make legal claim to each other -- or even find each other for that matter! When it comes to the rights of most adoptees and birthparents, biology means nothing to our courts. When parents are lesbians who have used donor insemination, these same courts are suddenly very interested in giving rights to the biological missing link. ▲

Adoption Records May Open Soon in Quebec Province

In Quebec Province, Canada, there has been a law since 1983 that allows adoptees and birthparents to meet if both indicate their interest. A 1985 attempt by adoptive parents to reverse this law was unsuccessful. Adoption activists in Quebec are currently fighting for fully open records, and Cecile Comeau, an adoptee and activist, believes they will succeed in winning this law, known as the Access to Information Act, by the fall. She is optimistic because of the political climate in Quebec and believes both parties vying for power there will support open records.

Comeau said that one family in six in Quebec is affected by adoption. Since World War II, there have been 200,000 adoptions in the province, which has a population of over 6 million.

Meanwhile, Arlene Sioui, an English-speaking adoptee, writes in "Frustrated in Quebec" (*Parent Finders* newsletter, Ottawa, May 1990) that there is no English-speaking adoptee support group in Montreal. The French-speaking group, *Mouvement Retrouvailles*, has been active for three years, but has not responded to Ms. Sioui's letters. (Perhaps she can start her own group of Anglophones?)

If Cecile Comeau is correct and open records become a reality in Quebec, both she and Arlene Sioui may soon succeed in their quests. ▲

Ronda Slater's touching, funny one-woman play about her reunion with her daughter



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Lower Self-Concepts of Girls in Two-Parent Families

"Contrary to popular belief, a child's self-concept may not be greatly affected by whether he or she lives with one parent or two, suggests a small comparative study by researchers at Central Michigan University.

"The researchers paired 38 third graders, half of whom lived with two parents, half with one parent. One surprising revelation: in general, children have lower self-esteem than parents and teachers think they do, no matter who their family members are.

"Another unexpected finding: girls from two-parent households had the lowest self-concepts of all."

-- NEA Today, A Newspaper for Members of the National Education Association, April 1990.



"Origins" Offers Thoughtful Articles by Birthmothers

The newsletter of Origins, "an organization for women who have lost children to adoption," always contains interesting articles. Their March/April 1990 newsletter was particularly engaging, with opinions from many birthmothers on the topic of "Abandonment: Did We Or Didn't We?" It's a hot debate, originally sparked by the speech by Carol Gustavson (see *Chain of Life*, Issue 6) that supported Lisa Steinberg's birthmother and protested that relinquishment is not the same as abandonment. Mary Anne Cohen then wrote an article stating that adoption is abandonment; that however unintended that outcome may have been, we should all face this stark reality.

One of the many interesting letter/articles in that issue is by a birthmother who describes a dialogue she has had with her reunited daughter, and how they dealt with this issue. Her daughter *felt* abandoned, even though this had not been the mother's intention. Talking about this helped the two women reach a new level of understanding in their relationship.

I recommend that interested readers subscribe to the Origins newsletter, and/or see if you can obtain their March/April 1990 issue. A sub is \$15. to Origins, P.O. Box 444, E. Brunswick, New Jersey 08816. ▲

Gay Man Can Adopt 8-Year-Old Boy in Ohio

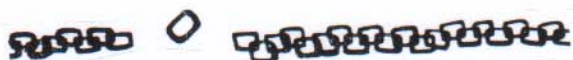
In March, the Ohio Supreme Court voted 6 to 1 in favor of Melvin Lee Balsler, a psychological counselor and gay man, in his attempt to adopt a boy whose early life indicated a history of neglect and abuse. (Charles B. has leukemia in remission, learning disabilities, and possibly fetal alcohol syndrome.)

The decision said, "The evidence presented showed that (Balsler) has been the one consistent and caring person in the life of Charles B." Balsler met Charles in 1986 under contract with the county to provide counseling for him, and "the professional relationship developed into a personal and close relationship."

The court reversed an Ohio Court of Appeals ruling that forbade the adoption because Balsler is gay. Balsler has been trying to adopt the boy since 1988. Charles has had five different foster parents since 1985, when his parents surrendered custody.

Persons wanting to contribute to Balsler's legal fund, which totals over \$20,000., can make checks payable to the Charlie B. Adoption Fund, 50 West Broad St., Suite 2720, Columbus, OH 43215.

Information from Stonewall Union, April 1990 (Columbus) and Columbus Dispatch, March 29, 1990, sent by a CoL reader. ▲



LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD: RISK FOR DEPRESSION?

"The presence of young children in the home is a major risk factor [for depression] for heterosexual women, due to the stress of child-rearing and the fact that women tend to have most of the responsibility for childcare (c.f., Rothblum, 1983, for a review of this literature). Since lesbians are less likely to have children than are heterosexual women and since lesbian couples tend to share housework and childcare, mothering may be less of a risk factor for lesbians. However, several issues confront lesbian parents that are not as frequently concerns for heterosexual parents: custody battles over competency to rear children, homophobic remarks made by others to the children, lesbian partners relating to the children, rearing male children, and coming out to children. Most of all, lesbian mothers do not fit the family mold presented by our society. Lesbian mothers lose 80% of all custody battles in lower courts. Thus, for lesbians who do have young children, the stress may be significant."

-- Esther D. Rothblum, "Depression Among Lesbians: An Invisible and Unresearched Phenomenon," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1990. The Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904. ▲

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GAY and LESBIAN YOUTH

"Street outreach workers in urban centers throughout the nation know that a large proportion of street kids are gay and lesbian youth who have been kicked out of family homes or who have fled abusive family situations -- yet academic research on this population rarely acknowledges or probes the needs of gay and lesbian youth. Social workers counseling pregnant teenage women regularly come across young women who have attempted to deny their lesbianism by having a baby -- yet few programs exist that are prepared to assist these women in coming to terms with their lesbian identities. AIDS prevention counselors working with teenagers in the schools frequently find themselves educating young people about how to remain uninfected, yet without giving any training or materials to deal with the issue of male-to-male sexual activity among youth."

-- Eric Rofes, *Opening Up the Classroom Closet: Responding to the Educational Needs of Gay and Lesbian Youth*, November 1989, Harvard Education Review.

What is GLASS?

Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services is a non-profit organization that provides gay and lesbian high risk youth between 13 and 18 with long-term residential treatment, counseling, job training, AIDS prevention education, family reunification, and preparation for emancipation from minor status. GLASS provides the following programs:

- **Gay Big Brother and Lesbian Big Sister Programs** provide for the growth of these young people by introducing them to aspects of the culture they would otherwise not experience.
- **Triangle Project** offers suitable gay and lesbian adults the opportunity to be foster parents to youngsters whose families have abandoned them or are unable to care for them.
- **Three operational residences** that are safe harbors to guide youth away from drugs, alcohol, and the behavior that puts these youngsters at very high risk for AIDS. In addition, GLASS's Mobile Outreach Unit to High Risk Youth (MOHRY) makes contact with youngsters on the streets.
- **A 10-bed facility** will provide housing for youngsters who are HIV-positive or who have been diagnosed with AIDS. Current statistics indicate that the number of such teenagers will greatly increase in the coming years.

With your help, GLASS can continue to expand its services, as well as care for growing numbers of youngsters who become AIDS victims. For more information, write to GLASS, 8235 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 214, West Hollywood, CA 90046. ▲

Gay Adopted Men Wanted for Research

The Family Studies Laboratory of Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois) is seeking gay or bisexual men who have been raised with genetically unrelated brothers, for a 2-hour interview. The purpose of the research is to attempt to sort out genetic versus non-inherited "causes" of homosexuality. If you fit in this category and are interested in the study, you can phone them collect at: (708) 491-3620. ▲

New York Ruling Against Lesbian Co-Parent Visitation

In March 1990, New York Appellate Court judges ruled 3 to 1 against allowing a non-biological mother to be able to visit a child she and her ex-lover had planned and raised.

The two women lovers had agreed to become parents together in 1980. In 1981 a child was born by donor insemination. Both women shared the responsibility of raising the child for two years. Then their relationship ended and the non-biological mother moved out, but visited the child a few times a week until 1986. When the co-mother moved to Ireland in 1987, the biological mother cut off all visitation.

A majority opinion in the March 9th *New York Law Journal* explains the judges' reasoning: being neither a biological mother nor an adoptive mother, the co-parent had no legal relationship to the child and therefore no right to visitation. This was a ruling that offered a lesbian no way to gain visitation. In contrast, Judge Kooper's dissenting argument included the following thoughts:

Although, to be sure, a parent's right to determine with whom a child may associate is superior to that of all others, that right is by no means absolute. Parental rights are not akin to property rights, but rather, may be aptly analogized to a trust over which the courts exercise their authority, albeit reluctantly, to intervene when the best interests of the child so require. This is such a case. Here, the petitioner, while not biologically related to the child, has alleged that with the prior consent of the biological mother, she assumed the status of parent, and through the faithful performance of parental duties, established an emotional bond with the child. Under those circumstances, the courts should not hesitate to inquire into the relationship between the child and the petitioner in order to determine whether continued visitation will further his best interests.

Kooper continued by pointing out the analogy to cases involving divorced step-parents, who have a parental relationship but no biological connection to a child: "Certainly, to describe the petitioner as stranger under the circumstances presented neither accords with reality nor furthers the best interests of the child." Thanks to William Gage for sending this information.▲

Two Mothers Allowed in Washington State

In 1989, after a one-and-a-half year battle, the court found that a child can have two mothers under Washington law. In 1987, a lesbian couple, Lynn and Lisa, petitioned the Washington Court to permit Lynn, the non-biological parent, to adopt their two-year-old daughter. Lynn and Lisa are now both her legal parents and are listed on the birth certificate.

In their one-day trial, expert testimony was given by Dr. Pepper Schwartz, co-author of *American Couples*, who testified that there is no discernable difference in children brought up in lesbian as opposed to heterosexual households. Ironically Lynn, the adopting parent, is also certified by the courts to do adoption home studies, and has done a number of them.

They made the effort to fight for this adoption to ensure, in the event of Lisa's death, that their child could stay with Lynn. Further, the adoption guarantees their daughter to receive social security benefits, inheritance, life insurance, medical insurance, and child support through Lynn, along with "numerous other financial and psychological benefits resulting from the adoption which were described in detail in our briefs to the court."

Lynn and Lisa, who is an attorney, sent this information to *Off Our Backs* (August/September 1989) so that other gay and lesbian parents would know about and benefit from their experience.▲

Donors May Be Fathers Says Supreme Court

In April, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a challenge by a California man who had donated sperm to an Oregon lesbian friend. The woman had a child in 1986, and claims she did not agree that the donor would play an active role in the child's life; the man says they had agreed to his involvement.

First the Oregon Supreme Court and then the U.S. Supreme Court refused to disturb this ruling, thereby allowing the man to have a hearing to attempt to prove that he and the mother agreed he would have an ongoing paternal role.

There is an Oregon law on artificial insemination that protects recipients from claims of paternity. But the donor's attorney said the law "was intended to deal with anonymous donors. . . it was not intended to deal with a situation where two unmarried people get together and agree to have a child."

A 1986 California ruling continues to protect from paternity claims those mothers whose use of donated sperm was under the supervision of a doctor. If a doctor is not involved, the donor may attempt to prove paternity in court.

-- Information from the *Los Angeles Times* via the *San Francisco Chronicle*

New Interpretation of Teen Motherhood

This information was summarized from an article by Charles Petit, *San Francisco Chronicle* staff writer, Feb. 17, 1990.

Sociologist Arline T. Geronimus, assistant professor of public health policy at the University of Michigan, offered insights to teen pregnancy during a session called, "Teenage Pregnancy, Myth or Epidemic?" at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. "Teen childbearing has many economic advantages for the poor" and acts as "a form of insurance against severe income shortage" according to Professor Geronimus.

In addition to welfare benefits, these advantages include the willingness of friends and relatives to provide loans and gifts; attention from their own mothers and other relatives who help raise the baby; and for poor black women, improved job prospects in their mid-twenties as compared to their teenage years. Geronimus did not "suggest teenage pregnancy is a good thing generally," but that "the specific arguments against it do not hold up."

For example, panelist Ray O'Brian of The Children's Defense League said teenage pregnancy and motherhood lock poor women into poverty and poor academic performance. But Geronimus disagreed, citing studies of sisters from poor, mostly African American inner-city families that show that those who had babies as teenagers did somewhat better than those who waited, perhaps because the teen years of low-income mothers tend to be their healthiest years. In their twenties they are still poor, but may be less healthy.

Two other speakers found that graduation rates of teenage girls of all races were not directly affected by having babies, as long as the girls stayed in school while raising their children.

Though there were actually 125,000 fewer teenage pregnancies in the United States in 1986 than in 1960, more of the mothers today are unmarried -- two-thirds (90 percent among African American teenagers) as compared to less than one-third 20 years ago. This results largely from economic changes: young couples in the 1960s could make enough money to live on but cannot today, according to Karen Johnson Pittman, director of adolescent pregnancy prevention for the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C. Teen motherhood for many low income women "is rational on the part of that young woman. It is not rational for our country to look at this situation and say it is OK," Pittman said. ▲

▲ CHAIN LETTERS ▲



April 1990

Thank you once again.

The part encircled on the following photocopy represents a viewpoint that I have championed elsewhere. In my phrasing, I've been holding that a reunification belongs solely to its participants, and it is the participants' fundamental right to determine who will be included in or excluded from the process. On that basis, I have only reluctantly accepted voluntary intermediation, and then only on the freedom of choice issue. And I have vehemently opposed any drift toward mandatory intermediation, which has unfortunately become the official position in three states now.

As has frequently happened with my insistences, I've met with a lot of resistance to this idea, most of it coming, naturally, from people making money off of intermediation services. So, to be frank, it is an occasion always marked by a huge sigh of relief when I spot a sign of a kindred spirit. Feels good.

Hal Aigner
California

There is evidence from practice that the initial contact itself is the most powerful, therapeutic and healing experience between the parties involved. Social workers, acting as mediators, can never convey or recapture that moment of that first reaction when contact is made to the applicant. To deny applicants this experience seems to detract from the experience as a whole which belongs to the two parties concerned.

-- Mary Iwanek

... I discovered your existence in *The Adoption Connection* newsletter here in Massachusetts, which is a great group. I finally located my birth mother with the help of my lover and the Goddesses. Now I wait for her to change her mind and talk to me and tell me the truth.

I am so glad to know of your work and hope to contribute more money when finances improve. . . .

Keep on keeping on.
Love, light and life,

Jeannette
Massachusetts

I received your newsletter a few weeks ago. It has had a very emotional impact on me and I find that I am still processing its effect. I have never read anything on the subject of adoptees. I knew that they existed, but it was very cathartic to read a newsletter devoted to an issue that has always been, for me, unspeakably painful.

Growing up lesbian in the Midwest of Christian parents, I had to bear the pain of society's judgement on me. Growing up as a foreign-born Asian adopted into a German/ Danish family in Iowa, I have borne a great deal of internal pain. Your newsletter was such a sign of relief -- finally, there are words and voices to the pain and isolation I have felt.

It has always been difficult to articulate to others what it is like to be adopted, much less adopted into an interracial family in a foreign land. I was seven when I was adopted, so I have vivid memories of my past. In my mind's eyes my past and present lives are worlds apart, yet in my heart and soul, the two worlds reside, forever linked.

I have much more to hear from others with similar experiences, and most likely more to say. It is almost as if through your newsletter I have finally found a voice and ear to years of silence.

Please find enclosed \$15. for my subscription and three back issues. Thank you, Janine (and Anne), for breathing fresh air into the silence in my soul.

Most Sincerely,

A California adoptee
(name withheld on request)

May 1990

I'm so glad to see your publication with a feminist outlook. . . . I'm enclosing a commentary I wrote for Vancouver's feminist paper, *Kinesis*, addressing adoption in relation to the abortion issue. I am angered that both sides of the issue are uninformed about the realities of adoption. If adoption and abortion are a woman's options, that is clearly NOT choice.

I look forward to receiving your back issues and future issues of *Chain of Life*.

Sincerely,

Millie Strom
Vancouver, B.C.

ABORTION NOT AS STRESSFUL AS SOME HAVE CLAIMED

The following information is from an article by Elaine Herscher, *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 1990.

Most women who receive abortions early in their pregnancies do not suffer short-term psychological damage, a panel of psychologists reported.

The six experts, under the auspices of the American Psychological Association, were led by Nancy E. Adler, director of the University of California at San Francisco health psychology program. The findings were published April 5 in the journal *Science*.

"Although there may be sensations of regret, sadness or guilt, the weight of the evidence. . . indicates that legal abortion of an unwanted pregnancy in the first trimester does not pose a psychological hazard for most women," the panel concluded.

The finding is based on 20 scientific studies, some dating back to the 1970s. The studies examined the psychological effects of abortion on hundreds of women for up to two years after the abortion was performed.

The panel's conclusions contradict a major contention of anti-abortion groups: that women who end their pregnancies suffer severe emotional harm.

After first trimester abortions, women most frequently report feeling relief, the panel said. In one study, 76 percent reported feeling relieved, while the most common negative emotion, guilt, was reported by only 17 percent. However, women seeking abortions later in pregnancy had a harder time emotionally.

▲ Announcement ▲

BIRTH MOTHERS: *MayDay! Quarterly* is a healing forum for women suffering from traumas of child relinquishment. MAYDAY is also a holiday to honor women who have lost children to adoption. Join us in "Reclaiming Our Voices." Your annual membership of \$20. supports the healing of birth mothers and the education of mainstream society about the traumas of relinquishment, and includes all of MAYDAY's 1990 publications.