HARM TO CHILD

It is common sense that to deprive children of their mother and their history/herstory is not in their interests. How could such a policy come about?

Adoption facilitates separation from parents

In the mid 1800s, Charles Brace in the USA initiated the Orphan Trains, the biggest child migration effort in history. Children from poor Catholic and Jewish immigrants, generally not orphans, were moved by train from New York to upstanding Anglo-Protestant farming families. Brace outlined, in his book *The Best Method of Disposing of our Pauper and Vagrant Children*, how secrecy would prevent children returning to or being reclaimed by their parents, or the farming family being harassed or blackmailed by the real mother. The push for secrecy, to ensure the exclusion of the real mother, went on to become an underpinning of adoption. Even today, the birth record does not become sealed at the time of consent signing, but rather at the time of the court order/decree, meaning that it is the details of the adoptive rather than natural mother that need to be secret. It should be noted however, that many European countries did not see the need for secrecy.[i] The USA had borrowed English philosophy and so did Australia.

Adoption promotes lies about identity

Cost to the State was the primary motive

In 1881 the NSW government passed the State Children Relief Act which set up the State Children's Relief Board who had the authority to remove destitute children and to place or board them with approved persons. They were also able to approve persons applying to adopt children, as well as to restore any child to their parents. The Act referred to 'adoptions', but did not outline any process for effecting an adoption. Previous practice, it appears, had been to make written application to the Governor to adopt a child, usually accompanied by a recommendation from a clergyman or another prominent citizen. Prospective adopters were usually distant relatives or known to the parents of the child. The arrangement was relatively impermanent as the mother (if alive) or the Board could remove the child at any time. Until 1923, adoption was effected by a written agreement signed by the adopters. However, adoptions were relatively few.

Adoption provided child labourers

The main focus of the Board was the boarding out program, which was initially aimed at children under 12 (later extended to those under 14). When children reached 12, they were apprenticed and the Board's payments ceased. The significant difference between boarding and apprenticeship, apart from age, was financial. While a small allowance was paid to those who boarded children, those who accepted apprentices had to pay for the child's services. It was a common practice for people to ask for children of age 8 to board them and work them for 4 years before needing to pay the apprenticing indentures when they turned 12. In 1884, the Board

had restricted adoption to children under 8 as a way to lessen the risk of young children being put out to work.

World War I had a traumatic effect on Australian society. Hundreds of children lost their fathers, and thousands more found themselves impoverished. The result was an increased demand for government welfare services. Additionally, there were abuses of baby selling and unofficial traffic in fostering and adoption, often of Aboriginal children by white families.

Adoption a service to couples not children

In 1923, the New South Wales Child Welfare Department came into existence and so too did the *Child Welfare Act.* The Act amended previous Acts relating to child welfare and consolidated them into a single body of legislation. It contained new provisions relating to care establishments, mentally disabled children, maintenance of children by their relatives, discipline in institutions and the transfer of children from prison to an institution. Adoption could be pursued only if the child's parents or guardian consented, however the Court could dispense with consent if of the opinion that the parent or guardian had deserted or abandoned the child. The Child Welfare (Amendment) Act 1924 allowed the court to dispense with consent in any special circumstances where it deems it expedient to do so.

Adoption targets the poor

More revisions to the Act in 1939 included an expanded definition of a neglected child as one not attending school regularly, clearly impacting on Aboriginal children. An adoption order could be made if it promoted the welfare and interests of child. Parents or guardians had to consent to adoption but consent could be dispensed with where the court deemed it just and reasonable to do so.

Adoption broke up Aboriginal families

Adoption was originally practiced by philanthropic amateurs, generally the wives of the colonial elite. These women had grown up with the model of the English 19th century "friendly visitor". These elite women were frequently motivated to locate babies for well-off friends and acquaintances. Their belief that unwed mothers and their babies were not complete family units and did not need to be kept together anticipated the pro-adoption ethos of the post-World War II years. These private adoptions, where the parties made the arrangements themselves, usually with assistance from an intermediary such as a doctor, a matron of a hospital, a minister of religion or a solicitor, were extremely common under the 1923 Child Welfare Act. By 1961 private arrangements represented 48% of the total number of orders made by the Supreme Court.

Adoption was a service for friends not children

The emergence of social work and adoption social work as a profession was in stark contrast to the tradition of "friendly visiting," which defined visiting as a voluntary role for women. By the mid-

Adoption encouraged separation

1920s, professionals began to espouse that not just anyone should arrange adoptions. Social work professionals were advocating that the child and unwed mother remain together, while the amateurs considered this burdensome to the women, if not actually harmful, and thus advocated putting these children up for adoption. In 1923, the New England Home for Little Wanderers, a leading regional agency known for its commitment to scientific child study (a key platform used to professionalize social work), announced "we do not care to be known as an agency for the transfer of illegitimate children from their mothers to waiting families."

Child at mercy of turf warfare

Professionals fought to dominate adoption. Marshall Field, President of the Child Welfare League of America, in an address to the National Conference on Adoptions in 1955 stated that "agency placement is the only sound way of adoption."

Child's mother was considered unstable if unmarried

As the Freudian world view started to take hold, women who became pregnant outside of marriage were considered deeply troubled and filled with unconscious hostility. Whether they knew it or not, they were pregnant on purpose. The theory that non-marital pregnancy originated in the twisted psyches of unwed mothers helped to turn the dogma of social work's founding generation on its head: babies had to be given away rather than kept. Adoption became "the best solution" rather than the last resort. In 1939, social worker Mary Brisley declared that babies born to unwed mothers were automatically "deprived." Their resentful mothers were plagued by guilt and "an unconscious wish to eliminate the child altogether." Without benefit of placement in a normal family headed by a married couple, the child of an unwed mother was "practically foredoomed ... to become one of the neurotic personalities of our time." Two years later, psychiatrist Florence Clothier flatly stated that "unmarried mothers, with rare exception, are incapable of providing sustained care and security for their illegitimate babies."

If unwed mothers were trapped in unresolved oedipal and pre-oedipal developmental dramas of their own, if they had become unstable, neurotic, hysterical, narcissistic, or even psychotic, then their emotional confusions threatened their own as well as their children's prospects for psychological health. Once children's interests were refigured as more secure away from their mothers, adoption emerged as a positive good, that is, "in the best interests of the child".

Repressing the known harm to the child

Some social workers wrote about their concerns with adoption, and certainly by the 1950s, social workers knew from the work of Bowlby that solving a temporary crisis by separating mother and child in a way that is permanent and irrevocable was not in the best interests of the child and would probably cause harm. Bowlby identified infant separation from the mother as causally connected to a variety of psychiatric disorders in

adulthood ranging from anxiety and depression to psychopathic personality.

Most social workers promoted it however, using the phrase "best interests of the child" due to the increased demand for babies, evident since the mid 1940s. Marshall Field in 1955 spoke of the "great gap between the numbers of available children and the couples seeking to adopt them". Clark Vincent in 1961 stated that "if the demand for adoptable babies continues to exceed the supply then it is quite possible that, in the near future, unwed mothers will be "punished" by having their children taken from them right after birth. A policy like this would not be executed nor labelled explicitly as "punishment." Rather, it would be implemented through such pressures and labels as "scientific findings," "the best interests of the child," "rehabilitation of the unwed mother," and "the stability of the family and society. In the early 1950s, even poor black families, who rarely relinquished, were targeted for adoption to meet demand.

Adoption as a service for couples not children

The best interests phrase arose from the belief that unwed motherhood was an illness and separation was best. Social workers now saw unwed mothers as mothers in name only and unfit to raise their own children. The child welfare worker Svanhuit Josie in 1955 asked "how much harm does the relinquishment do to the mother?" and "is the adoptive child as happy with his adoptive parents as he would be with his own mother and relatives?" She was immediately rebutted by the supervisor of the Unmarried Parents Department of the Toronto Children's Aid Society who asserted that most mothers keeping their children were emotionally sick people. If the mother is considered abnormal then of course it follows that she is not fit to raise her own child and it becomes in the best interests of the child to be separated from her.

Repressing the known harm to the child

Leyendecker noted in 1958 that social agencies would assist an unmarried mother to surrender a normal baby but expect her to be responsible for the planning for and insofar as possible the support of a defective baby who is unadoptable. A mother could be unfit and incompetent to raise her own child but was competent to sign an agreement to give away her child to an unknown fate with strangers while in a crisis.

No concern for non-perfect children

For the Commonwealth to legislate in favour of this erroneous foundation (for separation, for secrecy, for lack of follow-up), when cautions from errant social workers since the 20s and Bowlby in the 50s was unconscionable. Examples of cautions follow.

> Who has to answer for this heedless profanation of the sacredness of human life? Is it the unhappy mother, who, hoping against hope, is too often driven by sheer necessity to

Repressing the known harm to the

abandon her foremost duty as the only alternative against starvation? Or is it society who refuses her the means of earning a pittance, however hard, while her babe is still clinging to her breast, who tacitly gives her to understand that her only chance of winning back a position of 'respectability' is to get rid of such an objectionable encumbrance and who, when its ruthless scorn on the one hand and its indirect encouragement on the other, have led to the destruction of a life, complacently folds its hands in gratulation over so happy a release, and impiously commends the decrees to beneficent Providence that 'orders all things for the best?' No doubt it is for the best in individual cases. But why? Because the harsh judgement of Society offers so cruel an alternative. Because it decrees that in a woman to be an unpardonable crime, not to be expiated for twenty years of pure and Christian living, which in a man is but a venial offence, forgotten in a week. And lastly because cowardly men, to cloak their own past evil doings, encourage and intensify the shriek of shuddering detestation which immaculate virtue too often raises as the spectacle of a weak and erring sister. As I said before, to remedy these things we must revolutionise society. But in the meantime why should we not try to save the lives of these poor little ones instead of offering them up, as we do, a sacrifice to the Moloch of propriety? How many such lives do you suppose we thus destroy every year in this under-populated country?
Crabthorn on baby-farming in the Register on 15 April 1873

child

Separation from the mother at a very early age is a common experience among children born out of wedlock. . . Often separation occurs when it might have been prevented, and when it is contrary to the best interests of the child and the mother... Of increasing interest is the question as to whether in being separated from the mother, the child is not deprived of something that society cannot replace even with the best care it can provide, and whether this most important consideration may not outweigh all others.
Emma Lundberg and Katharine Lenroot: Illegitimacy as a child welfare problem. U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1920

Repressing the known harm to the child

In most instances I should prefer to see the children left with their parents ... the system of dealing with the parents should be improved in order that they might keep their children.... government administrations are forcibly removing children because it is cheaper than providing the same system of support which operates for neglected white children.
Bessie Rischbieth, Evidence to the Royal Commission into the

Repressing the known harm to the child

conditions of Aborigines, early 1930s

Motherhood, and the love and care of the baby, strengthens the character of every girl who has the mentality to grasp it. As to the child: psychologists and social workers have learned that no material advantage can make up for the loss of its own mother. Better a poor home, with mother love, they say, than an adopted home in luxury. The public conscience is gradually coming to demand an equal chance for the child born out of wedlock.
Brochure for Florence Crittenton Home, Washington, D.C.,1942

Repressing the known harm to the child

The child who is placed with adoptive parents at or soon after birth misses the mutual and deeply satisfying mother and child relationship...it is to be doubted whether the relationship of the child to its post partum mother, in its subtler effects, can be replaced by even the best of substitute mothers.
F Clothier MD, Psychology of the Adopted Child, 1943

Repressing the known harm to the child

Adopted children are 100 times more likely than their non-adopted counterparts to show up in clinical populations. Adoptive kinship may itself be a risk factor for mental disturbance and illness.
Marshall Schechter MD, 1960

Repressing the known harm to the child

The test of whether social workers and legislators were actually concerned with the best interests of the child, is whether they investigated unsuitable "matches" and recommended that a judge not issue a decree but instead cancel the adoption. Did this happen?

They would have followed up placements to ensure that the family was indeed "in the child's best interests". Did this happen? A 1960 report in Ontario confirmed that services were discontinued following signed release or court proceedings. In Australia, adoption legislation had no safeguards to ensure the child was followed up after placement. Governments/departments instead wiped their hands of both the natural mother and the child.

Lack of placement follow-up or evaluation

Because the best interests of the child, to their own parents, to their history, were not correctly determined by the model Act of the early 1960s, the mistakes continued into the new child procurement methods of surrogacy, donor insemination, in vitro fertilisation and overseas adoption.

Harm to children born of new technologies

The legacy of the Commonwealth model adoption legislation is extensive.

[i] 1921 - ONTARIO, CANADA In the First Adoption Act in Ontario, there was no mention of sealed records.
1925 – FINLAND All adoption documents were made available to all parties in an adoption with the provision that they be open and honest with each other.
1930 – SCOTLAND Adult adoptees had access to their birth records. Counselling is optional.
1956 – HOLLAND By age 12, the adoptee and his/her adoptive parents had access to full adoption records. Contact with birth parents was arranged at the adoptee's request.
1960 – ISRAEL Adult adoptees could access their birth certificate subject to counselling and a 45 day waiting period; the adoptee had the choice to either meet or not meet her/his birth parents.
1960 – FRANCE As original birth certificates were not amended in France, the birth-name of the adoptee was not a secret.
1960 – SWEDEN All parties in an adoption had access to information. As in Finland, no adoption restrictions existed within the Freedom of Information laws.
http://cuckoografik.org/trained_tales/orp_pages/station2.html)