Adoption: Nature Or Nurture? Essay, Research Paper

Adoption: Nature or Nurture?

By

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Are parents those who give birth to a child or those who care for a child? Does

nature or nurture make a woman a mother? As more and more heartbreaking tugs-of-war

between biological and adoptive parents surface, anyone searching for a baby has good

reason for concern(Casey 119).

Baby Jessica was raised from infancy by adoptive parents, Jan and Roberta

DeBoer. For two and a half years Jessica was at the heart of one of the most bitter

custody battles in America, caught between the parents in Michigan who reared her and

the parents in Iowa who gave birth to her and wanted her back (Ingrassia and Springen

60). Cara and Dan Schmidt took screaming baby Jessica from her home in 1993 when they

won their court battle to get her back (Casey 119). Baby Jessica is just one of the many

victims of child custody battles in America.

Jane and John Doe adopted a baby boy, Richard in March of 1991. Richard’s

biological mother, Daniela Kirchner, gave up her son while her boyfriend, Otakar, was out

of the country visiting his family. He had left Daniela just two weeks before Richard’s

birth. Daniela had heard rumors that Otakar had been cheating on her with another

woman, in Czechoslovakia, so she decided to lie to him about their baby, Richard. She

told Otakar that Richard had died just four days after his birth. In May of 1991 Otakar

returned to Chicago and the couple reconciled. Daniela told him about the adoption of

their son and how she lied to him about his death. Eighty days after Richard’s birth,

Otakar challenged the adoption. He claimed that he had no knowledge of his son until his

return to the US and now he wanted his son back desperately (Ingrassia and

McCormick 44).

The Does met in seventh grade in a suburban Chicago school but didn’t start

dating until they were in their early twenties. Married in 1979, Jane, a paralegal, and John

and a son. They say that they had not sought to adopt another child but were “bowled

over” by that first call about Richard. Never did they expect that legal briefs and litigation

would dominate their lives for the next three years (Alexander 40).

After three and a half years of court battle, baby Richard was torn away from his

adoptiveparents where he had lived since he was four days old and returned to his

biological father, who had never seen him before (Terry A1).

Wendy and Tom Yack adopted a week old baby girl, Rachael Marie, in 1980.

After five years of trying to conceive and five years of failure, Wendy and Tom broached

the subject of adoption and began to like the idea. When Rachael was only two months old

Wendy and Tom learned of Mary Beth Hazler and Robert Grimes, Rachael’s biological

parents.

Mary Beth was seventeen years old and had broken up with her boyfriend, Grimes,

when she was three months pregnant. Grimes had more than twenty arrests as a juvenile

and had once faced charges of assaulting a police officer. After the Yacks had cared for

Rachael for over two months they were informed that Mary Beth and Grimes had

reconciled and decided they wanted their child back.

Less than four months later, Wendy and Tom were served with papers ordering

them to return Rachael to her biological parents. They were filed just twenty days before

the end of a six month waiting period required by Pennsylvania law before an adoption

becomes final (Yack 98).

In June of 1981, Rachael was placed in foster care before the court reached it’s

decision. At that time the judge had concluded that the Yacks had no rights to Rachael,

but he was still deliberating whether Mary Beth and Grimes were fit parents. Four weeks

later, the judge ordered Rachel to return to the Yacks pending a final decision.

The Yacks were overjoyed but the child who came back to their home wasn’t the

same little girl. She stared at the walls. It was as if she knew. On July 10, 1981, sixteen

month old Rachael was taken from her home by Mary Beth and Grimes forever.

Wendy stated, “I feel to this day that we were used. We were caretakers, a baby

parking lot, while the birth mother got her life in order. Tom and I were falling in love

with a baby we thought was our daughter, and Mary Beth was finishing high school and

deciding whether she wanted to take care of her baby and get back together with her

boyfriend” (99).

Children learn to bond, trust and love during their first years and removing a child

from it’s home where her or she makes their first attachments can make it hard for her to

connect with others later in life. The blindness of the legal system to the child’s

psychological and emotional needs is devastating to the child (Diamant 96).

Whether we are learning, the sagas of children like Jessica and Richard rivet us, to

a degree that far out-strips their actual numbers (Ingrassia and McCormick 45). The best

interest of the child is often in the eyes of the beholder. It can be very elusive (Hegger 1B).

The pool of prospective adoptive parents has never been larger due to the baby

boom generation. Our insecurity over adoption is at an all-time high in part because

interest in adopting is also at a peak.

Kristi Carman, who works in the national headquarters of Concerned United

Birthparents (CUB) in Des Moines, believes that adoption should be avoided whenever

possible because it causes “a lifelong trauma for all involved” (Diamant 96).

In early August 1994 the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State

Laws drafted The Uniform Adoption Act. It states laws on services to birth parents,

timeperiods for revocation of consent, pre-placement evaluators of prospective adoptive

families, disclosure of medical and social background information, contact between the

children and birth parent, order of placement, transracial adoption, multiple new

requirements for state public social services agencies, records, confidentiality and access

and birth fathers.

Many people and organizations oppose the proposed Uniform Adoption Act. A

few are the Child Welfare League of America, The American Adoption Congress,

Children Awaiting Parents and The Adoption Exchange Association. Many of these

organizations feel that the Act fails to adequately protect the rights of the children, and

focuses instead on expediting the permanent separation of infants from their birth parents

in the absence of adequate counseling, exploration of alternatives and procedural

safeguards.

It was the absence of these crucial ingredients of conscientious adoption practice

that the seeds were sown for the anguish of Baby Richard and Baby Jessica: neither

birthmother had adequate , unbiased counseling, something that may have led them to

make more considered, timely choices, including to honestly disclosure the fathers’ names;

nor were they supported in exploring alternatives to adoption (Axness 1).

An adoptive mother and assistant attorney general in Montana, Kim Kradokfer,

states, “I think what the Act ultimately does is to put adoptions more at risk. I think it

makes adoptions in many cases more coercive, because the birth parents may not have had

the counseling, and may not be making a free decision. I think that this Act will cause

more of the Baby Richards and Baby Jessicas (2).

An adoption law should be drawn from the wisdom of several professionals and

consumers who are involved and impacted by adoption and should be judged upon the

following factors: It should ensure that before placement, the child is legally free; it should

require a thorough assessment of the family who would raise the child before the

placement is made; It should require post-placement services; The best interests of the

child should take precedence over any other concerns. The Uniform Adoption Act does

not provide important protections for adoptive parents, birth parents or children who are

subject to adoption (McCarty 1).

Are “parents” those who give birth to a child or those who care for a child? Does

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