Requests by Married Parents for Adoption Placement of their Children: An Analysis of a Research Study, with Some Observations on the Relevance of the Study for Social Work Practice

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REQUESTS BY MARRIED PARENTS FOR ADOPTION

PLACEMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN

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with some Observations on the Relevance
of the Study for Social Work Practice

A Research Essay

Submitted to The Graduate School of Social Work

Waterloo Lutheran University

By

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Social Work

April 1969
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INTRODUCTION

The present study has been undertaken as a result of the reviewer's interest in the problem of married parents requesting adoption placement of their children, based on her experience in giving service to a small group of these parents at the Children's Aid Society for the County of Waterloo.

An analysis of the research project of Evelyn McCorkell is the focus of this study. Her project appears to have marked the beginning of an examination of the problem.

Since her study was completed in 1957, there has been additional examination of the problem in the literature, indicating its relevance for social work practice. A review of this literature is included in the present study.
CHAPTER I

CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The Project

"Are there married parents who voluntarily ask to give up their own children? Why do they make this request? What kind of people are they? Are they living together? Does the Children's Aid Society offer them service and plan with them for the adoption placement of their children? Should the Society offer this service?"¹

These are the questions raised by Evelyn McCorkell as she introduces her study of twenty-nine cases of married parents who voluntarily came to the Children's Aid and Infants' Homes of Toronto requesting adoption placement of their own children. She states that "the study intends, by the presentation of factual data and of detailed case material, to answer some of the above questions and to suggest possible answers to others."²

The twenty-nine cases studied were opened and closed during the period July 15, 1952 to May 31, 1956. Twenty-five of the requests were made by the parents before the birth of the child and four in the first year of the child's life. Eighteen of the parents ultimately decided to keep their children and eleven ultimately decided to place.

²Ibid.
The Purpose

The purpose of the study is stated as three-fold:

1. To describe the parents making voluntary request for adoption placement of their child in terms of social and psychological characteristics.

2. To compare, as far as possible, these parents to the protection family, using the studies of the Canadian Welfare Council and Dr. Bowlby as descriptive of the latter.¹

3. To consider these parents separately in two groups (those who ultimately kept their child and those who ultimately placed) and to try to isolate the reasons for ultimate placement.²

Related Considerations

After asking the questions noted at the beginning, the author states that "these are the questions with which the public generally reacts to the sudden realisation that some married parents do freely express the wish to relinquish permanently their own children to others for adoption."

She further states that the public reaction "is in sequence disbelief, then disapproval and condemnation, and, finally, concern and anxiety. Essentially it is a negative reaction, intensely felt."³

The author does not state the sources of her statements about the public reaction, but proceeds to discuss possible reasons for it. These she sees as some continuing social resistance to adoption in spite of its growing acceptance, and that requesting placement symbolizes failure of the parents to carry out what is culturally considered their responsibility.

¹The studies referred to are:

²McCorkell, p. 42.

³Ibid., p. 1.
She also presents at some length the theoretical background of child protection and adoption services, the role and responsibility of the child-placing agency, and the child welfare legislation.

In presenting the theoretical background, especially in regard to emotional and maternal deprivation, and family breakdown, she quotes Lauretta Bender, John Bowlby, Hyman S. Lippman and Anna Freud. This will be elaborated on in a later review of the literature.

In discussing the role of the child-placing agency, she states:

The agency recognises the importance and value of a child's own home in his struggle towards maturity. At the same time, research studies unmistakably show the seriousness of emotional deprivation particularly in early childhood. In order to preserve both the rights of parents and the rights of children, a child must not be deprived of his first right, the right to stay with his own parents, without every effort first being made to strengthen his family life and to help his parents to care adequately for him. This is the child-placing agency's first concern in working with the family which is neglecting its children. However, when everything possible has been done in this direction without avail, then, since the child-placing agency's "first concern is the welfare of the child, ... it is the agency's obligation to help the parents arrive at a plan in the child's best interests." 1

The legislation discussed is The Child Welfare Act, 1954, Province of Ontario, 2 which provides for the carrying out of protection, unmarried parent, and adoption services by the Children's Aid Societies of Ontario. Several problems created by the Act in relation to a Society's offering service to parents such as those studied in the project are noted.

The Act makes no specific provision for casework services to parents of a child born in wedlock before the child is born. Presumably, in order


to receive protective services, the child of married parents must be in a state of actual or potential neglect. If, after the birth of the child, the case is brought before the court in order to obtain wardship of the child and to establish municipal responsibility for maintenance, it has been found difficult to prove neglect in these situations as defined in the Act. If the case is not brought before the court and the child is accepted by the Society on a non-ward basis, there may be problems of maintenance and the possibility that the parents, although having signed adoption consents, may at a later date reverse their decision and request return of the child. In the non-ward situation, guardianship remains with the parents until the adoption is finalised by a court order at the end of the probationary period.

At the time the study was undertaken, the Children's Aid and Infants' Homes of Toronto was giving service to these parents and children without taking the cases to court, although earlier the Agency had done so.

**Extent and Significance of the Problem**

In commenting on the extent and significance of the problem of married parents requesting adoption of their children, the author states it is difficult to make any reliable judgment of its incidence among the population at large, "because undoubtedly there are parents who place their children voluntarily without using the services of an authorised agency."¹ She had pointed out earlier that none of the provinces of Canada, except Quebec, put any legal restrictions on the adoption placement of legitimate children. She states: "In Canada, with this one

¹McCorkell, p. 32.
exception, it is possible for any natural parent to arrange an adoption independently by signing the proper adoption consents and having instituted the prescribed judicial proceeding to finalise an adoption order.\(^1\)

Her comment in the above statement about the incidence would seem to be supported by the following figures she gives:

In Ontario during the year 1955 there were 4,073 adoptions completed. Of these, 3,262 were placements made through Children’s Aid Societies and 811 were private placements. Among the Society placements, 2,469 were children of unmarried parents and 803 were children of married parents; in other words, children of married parents were involved in 25% of the adoption placements completed and arranged through Children’s Aid Societies during 1955. Among the private placements, there were 486 unmarried parent cases and 325 married parents; that is, 40% of the private placements proceeding to completed adoption in 1955 involved children of married parents.\(^2\)

It is suggested that while nothing conclusive can be said on the basis of these figures, the higher ratio of children among private placements may be significant. The author recognises that this group is likely to include "a certain number of children placed voluntarily with relatives and because of this may not be comparable with the group who voluntarily requests placement through a Children’s Aid Society." She further recognises that the number of placements of children of married parents through Children’s Aid Societies would include many children "from the usual protection families, where placements were probably

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 4

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 32-33. Figures quoted were supplied by Mr. W.H. Bury, Director of Child Welfare, Province of Ontario. Figures for 1968, supplied to this reviewer in a letter dated January 29, 1969 from Miss Betty C. Graham, present Director of Child Welfare, are: number of adoptions completed in Ontario, 7,157, 5,848 of these being Children’s Aid Society placements and 1,309 private placements; of the Society placements, 4,621 were children of unmarried parents and 1,027 of married parents; of the private placements, 621 were children of unmarried parents and 888 of married parents.
not voluntary in the same sense as those of married parents who placed
privately."1

1Ibid., p. 33.
CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Lack of Research on the Subject

McCorkell found that perusal of the literature failed to reveal any research undertaken in the field of her study.

This reviewer, from her investigation, can confirm that there is a paucity of information on the subject of married parents requesting adoption placement of their children, even to this date. Much has been written about the unmarried mother and appropriate services for her and her child. Much has also been written about adoption placement, but generally it seems to be assumed that the children for whom adoption needs to be considered are born out of wedlock. However, adoption statistics reveal that a good number of children of married parents are among those placed for adoption. The figures for Ontario for 1965 and 1968 have been given above.¹

Michael Schapiro notes that in 1965, of the total number of children placed for adoption in the United States, approximately 50 percent were born in wedlock. Of these 26 percent were placed with non-relatives and 72 percent with relatives. Of the children born in wedlock, 25 percent had both parents living together.² Louise Raymond, in her book on

¹Supra, p. 6.

adoption published in 1955, estimates that "probably not more than half of the babies available for adoption are born out of marriage."¹

Having failed to find in the literature any reports of research carried out on the subject of her study, and "accepting the assumption that such parents are potentially neglectful," McCorkell felt that any research undertaken in the field of child protection would have application to this problem.² Accordingly, she incorporates material from this field in her study.

**Studies in the Field of Child Protection and Family Breakdown**

McCorkell notes that many studies have been done on the problem of family failure. Considering "perhaps classic among these," that of Bowlby, she uses this study to provide some of the "theoretical background" for her project. In addition, she uses material from a Canadian Welfare Council publication on child protection in Canada.³ While this reviewer would have no quarrel with the researcher's use of the work of Bowlby, because it has been widely accepted as a significant, well documented study, she does question the use, for comparative purposes in the research study, of the material provided in the pamphlet of the Canadian Welfare Council.


²McCorkell, pp. 56-37.

³Ibid., p. 57. See also Supra, p. 3, including footnote re the above studies.
The pamphlet referred to, *Child Protection in Canada*, "grew out of the desire of many professional workers to examine philosophy, principles, and practice in Canadian protection work."\(^1\) While the pamphlet is a useful, informative one, actually only a small part of it is devoted to reporting a survey. This was of 147 protection families in British Columbia, of whom one third were analysed intensively. With one exception, the material used by McCorkell is from this part of the pamphlet. But of the survey, the authors state:

The study was too subjective (the fallibility of the workers who completed the schedules \([two\ pages]\) cannot be overlooked) and too limited in volume to be truly scientific from a research standpoint. It did, however, act as a guide to an examination of casework in child protection; it gave a general idea of policies and procedures, showed up gaps in existing resources, and also provided valuable information about the services families received.

Because the survey showed certain characteristics among "protection families" which distinguish them from our estimate of the average population, the Protection Committee felt there was value in listing such findings as an aid to diagnosis.\(^2\)

Of particular significance, insofar as this analysis is concerned, are the statements "too subjective," and "too limited in volume to be truly scientific from a research standpoint."

Perhaps McCorkell chose to use this material because it related to the Canadian scene and the pamphlet was a recent publication. But the choice was a poor one from the standpoint of its validity for research purposes, in this reviewer's opinion. It should be noted that McCorkell, in her study, also draws attention to the limitations of the survey, for her purposes.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Canadian Welfare Council, p. 10.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 11-12.

\(^3\) McCorkell, p. 50.
In the introductory part of her study, the author, in discussing the function of the family and factors in family breakdown, makes good use of an article by Hyman S. Lippman on "Emotional Factors in Family Breakdown."

In it, describing the function of the family as defined for the St. Paul, Minnesota research project, he states:

The family is regarded as a social institution, the purposes of which are to perpetuate the race and to develop the individual well-being and social usefulness of its members. This it does by (1) bearing children and protecting them during the period of helplessness, (2) enabling its members to develop emotional stability and grow to emotional maturity, (3) assuring the socialization of its members to the end that they meet their major responsibilities to society, and (4) providing the essential physical and social necessities which nurture for healthful living and make for personal satisfaction.

After quoting the above, McCorkell states that "this definition emphasizes the vital role which the family plays in society and in a large measure explains why the public generally reacts with concern and anxiety to any indication of threat to this sacred institution." This statement seems valid to this reviewer.

Of significance, too, is McCorkell's statement that "there are many indications that for most parents the relinquishment of their own child symbolizes failure" and that "failure in the parental role has the deepest significance and in most cases is accompanied by guilt, self-devaluation, and anxiety. It is perhaps the last of a long series of failures, providing unmistakable confirmation of the unworthiness the parent has always felt."

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2 Ibid., p. 448.

3 McCorkell, p. 5.

4 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
In support of her statement, she quotes Dorothy Hutchinson as follows:

Most parents are driven to great lengths before they can ask for placement [of their children] and practically all have to be helped with a decision that so violently contradicts their own code of behavior and that of society. Placing one's child, even with the best and most benevolent of reasons, is injurious to one's self-esteem and a blow to the conscience.¹

This reviewer, from her own experience in working with a small number of these parents, also supports the above statement. Hutchinson's article is a thoughtful, sensitive presentation of the implications of child placement for the parent, the child, and the worker. She concludes her article by saying:

The request for placement is as individual as people are individual. Behind this request lies the life story of men, women, and children. To understand the implications of placement, to read its meaning in each case, is the responsibility of the case-worker as well as her opportunity for more effective helping. The gist of separation and of placement is psychological and emotional. A recognition of this fact is the first step in being able to do anything about it, for we cannot treat problems we do not see, nor can we help people we do not understand. Child placement always has to do with people in need. Surely they have a right to a worker's best diagnostic understanding, for out of this comes the key to helping them.²

In discussing the meaning of adoption placement to the child, McCorkell refers to Jean M. Paton's book, The Adopted Break Silence,³ which, she states, attests "to the hypothesis that the adopted child is always a child with a problem, the problem of being adopted, of being transplanted from the soil which has greatest personal and psychological meaning for him to alien ground which may be either fertile or sterile."⁴

¹Dorothy Hutchinson, "The Request for Placement Has Meaning," The Family, (June 1944), p. 188.
²Ibid., p. 182.
⁴McCorkell, p. 7.
A quotation from the Preface of a more recent book on adoption, Shared Fate, seems to this reviewer to be appropriate here. It is a "poignant statement from an eleven-year-old adopted boy: 'The child who is born into his family is like a boy that's nailed down from the start. But the adopted child, him the parents have to nail down, otherwise he is like a loose board in mid-air.'"¹

Other examples of her use of Lippman's article are in reference to her discussion of the effects on children of emotional deprivation.² In this discussion she also quotes Lauretta Bender and Anna Freud in support of her view, as follows:

Children who have spent their first months or years in so-called broken homes or homes in which human relationships are badly distorted, themselves come out with crippled personalities.³

The ability to love, like other human faculties, has to be learned and practised. Wherever, through the absence or the interruption of personal ties, this opportunity is missing in childhood, all later relationships will develop weakly, will remain shallow. The opposite of this ability to love is not hate but egoism. The feelings which should go to outside objects remain inside the individual and are made up in self-love.⁴


²McCorkell quotes Lippman on pages 12-14 of her study.


The Legislation

McCorkell shows good knowledge of the pertinent legislation and uses it appropriately in her discussion of the field of child welfare and adoption. She quotes from the Quebec legislation¹ regarding restrictions placed on the adoption of legitimate children in that province. She discusses the provisions of various parts of The Child Welfare Act, 1964, Province of Ontario, and some problems that arise from these provisions insofar as providing service to the group of parents and children that form the basis of her study is concerned.²

¹McCorkell, p. 4. The legislation is Province of Quebec, Loi Concernant L'Adoption, R.S.Q., 1941, Chapitre 324, Sec. 6.

²McCorkell, pp. 16-28. It should be noted that The Child Welfare Act, 1954, has been replaced by The Child Welfare Act, 1985, which should be consulted because various changes have been made, including a different method of financing, provision for preventive as well as protective services on behalf of children, and safeguards around the signing and revoking of adoption consents.
Recent Literature

In her search of the literature, this reviewer found that some attention has been given to the subject of this study since the McCorkell project was undertaken.

H. Gordon MacKay\(^1\) did some research by inquiring of twenty-six Child Welfare League member agencies in the United States involved in adoption about their experience with such requests. He asked for information about community attitudes, agency practices and philosophies, workers' attitudes, and any case material the agencies felt might be pertinent for discussion in an institute on the subject that was being planned.

In his report he states that the "most dramatic element" in the mass of material received, was the "crying out in the dark" of the adoption agencies at that time.\(^2\)

He noted inconsistencies in attitudes and convictions among the agencies, and felt that "each agency, in its own way, seemed to be striving for a satisfactory and 'conscience-free' stand to take on this obviously controversial set of clients."\(^3\)

Several agencies felt they had been doing a disservice to both parents and children by retaining the idealistic hope that all parents could, with casework help, be expected to assume responsibility for their children. "These agencies stressed their belief that some parents are pleading to be relieved of parental responsibilities, and that, when

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\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 18-19.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 19.
helped with their guilt, they can often function more adequately as indi-
viduals, and sometimes as parents to children born to them at a later
time.\(^1\)

On the other hand, some agencies emphasized they were unable to
accept married couples who request adoption for their children. These
agencies stressed the need to work desperately to try to rehabilitate
and reestablish the family. They also stressed the "violent community
reactions to agencies accepting the decision of married parents to place
their children on adoption."\(^2\)

Referring to community reaction, MacKay reminds us that, years ago,
communities and agencies were facing a similar controversy with the unwed
parent client as they seem to be facing now with the married client.
MacKay suggests that perhaps the most logical first step is to "acknow-
ledge that such disintegrating family units do exist and then attempt to
gain some understanding of them as clients in need of the adoption agency's
professional services, which may or may not lead to ultimate adoption
placement of their children."\(^3\)

MacKay draws attention to the conflicts that are likely to be aroused
in the social worker when faced by parents making such a request. He
suggests that the social worker who has not himself considered his own
attitudes toward parent-child separation "may feel an almost overwhelming
sense of frustration and confusion." He suggests that if the worker can
recognize that the request for placement may be a single symptom of dis-
location in the family that may be resolved in a number of ways, only one

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
of which is adoption placement, he can approach the problem with a "proper and constructive perspective."\(^1\)

In his article attention is also drawn to the need for the worker to realize "the implications of the tremendous guilt this person feels, both in his attitude toward his mate by saying that the marriage is no longer 'perfect,' and also recognizing that he is planning to 'give away' his child." It is pointed out that in some marital situations the marriage may work superficially well until pregnancy or the presence of a child, when unresolved parental ties in one or both of the parents' own life take over, often making the individual unable to act as a parent to his own child.\(^2\)

While considerable attention is given in this article to understanding and working with these parents, and the importance of understanding the various aspects of family breakdown, the child is not forgotten. MacKay suggests that, if the process of disintegration has reached a point where it is impossible to reestablish a secure family unit, the social worker has to help these parents and children separate in the most constructive way possible.

MacKay states that "if the parents can feel they are actually giving the child something by providing him with a secure future in adoption, they are able to leave this experience with less damaging guilt." And when the child becomes aware in later life that there was another set of parents in his background, he "is far better able to adjust to the new

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 20.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 21.
realisation if he can feel that he was not 'thrown away,' or 'left on a doorstep,' but rather that he was planned for with a sense of concern.\(^1\)

Mackey concludes his article by saying that the social work profession must not only admit that there are such clients in their communities, but that these clients "feel dire need of assistance and for the sake of their children they should have it." Also, "agencies can be more child-centered if they "aggressively interpret to their communities the need for action in providing services to such families."\(^2\)

Dr. Bernard, in a pamphlet on adoption, expresses the view that if married parents request adoption placement primarily because of external factors such as severe financial reverses, or illness of either parent, the agency would be expected to make every effort to mobilise community resources, including temporary foster care if necessary, to try to keep the family together. However, unless the family are motivated to remain as a unit, Dr. Bernard adds, the very reaching of the decision to place their child, by a married couple, "is usually found to indicate serious unwillingness or inability to provide a homelife for their child that would not endanger his healthy emotional development."\(^3\)

Much of the concern of Mackey was the importance of seeing married parents who request adoption placement of their children as persons in need of, and entitled to, professional services from appropriate agencies.

This concern is also voiced by Elsie Heller, who noted what appeared to be an increasing number of requests from such married couples to the

\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp. 21-22.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 22.

adoption agency where she was employed. She states that "the actual numbers are small, but we believe that because of the questions and challenges they present, they require our careful consideration and a review of our thinking, as well as our policies, in order that we may determine how they may best be served."¹

In commenting on the situation she states:

We are immediately aware of a complex of reactions in response to this [request], which we must view initially in the context of strongly entrenched community mores. The sanctity of the family and the general support of parental rights are facts that we all recognize...

We are cognizant that the general attitude in our culture is one that favors the protection and preservation of the family.²

Heller notes a difference in community attitudes with reference to children surrendered at a later point, in contrast to those for whom consideration of adoption occurs during the prenatal period. She suggests that society seems more ready to accept the validity of adoption placement for the child of married parents at the point, for example, of severe family deterioration. But, Heller adds, "it is unfortunate, indeed, that some situations need to wait that long." Earlier recognition of the inability of some parents to fulfill their roles might have avoided "unnecessary tragedy and enormous deprivation for the child."³

Heller discusses, as did MacKay, the need for the caseworker to examine his or her own feelings about the request for placement. She


²Ibid., pp. 404-405.

³Ibid., p. 405.
notes that, if "the worker approaches this request with misgiving and uncertainty, if she is judgmental in her attitude, or if she is uncomfortable and distressed about this couple's seeking to give up a child, she surely will be unable to serve them with the kind of objectivity and directed help that is so essential for them and the agency." She suggests that it is necessary for the worker to begin with an attitude of acceptance of the parents' right to wish to give up a child, and then to be supportive to the extent of communicating to them willingness and ability to serve them. With this approach, the worker and the parents together "can arrive at a decision that is meaningful and purposively directed."1

A study was done in the agency of 45 cases where married parents requested adoption placement of their children. Out of the 45, only 15 actually surrendered the child. The other 30 either withdrew their request, decided to keep the child, or made some other plan that was not shared with the agency.2

It is pointed out that in none of these situations was the matter of financial pressure or economic urgency the reason for the surrender of the child. In a few cases it was felt that job instability or limited resources may have contributed to the decision, but if so, this was considered an incidental rather than a determining factor.

It was found that, of the 15 couples, only two had been married for some years, and in both of these cases there were several other children. With many of these young couples, pregnancy occurred before marriage.

1Ibid., pp. 406-407.
2Ibid., p. 406.
Uniformly, these parents found themselves unprepared for parental responsibilities. In some cases, the marriage was one of convenience only, 'to give the baby a name,' with the decision already made to obtain a divorce or annulment. Some of these parents were already living apart when they made their request to the agency.¹

Among the group who initially sought the agency's services and then withdrew their request for placement, a wide range of situations was found with reference to age, length of marriage, number of children, and so on. Found also was a considerable amount of pathology and severe marital problems.²

Several agencies were canvassed by the author to learn what their experience had been with this client group. She states that their comments reflected many of the questions and conclusions she has tried to indicate in her article. Many agencies reported an increase in the number of requests from parents considering adoption placement, but they also indicated that only a small percentage of those who come actually make a decision to surrender their child. A number of replies indicated their agencies saw this group as a very specialized one, "whom they approach with some wariness." Others commented that these requests for service are assigned to only the most experienced and skilful workers. It was also noted that this client group "frequently requires the most intensive and sustained help."³

Heller concludes by stating that there appears to be general agreement that these parents constitute a client group that needs to be served,

¹Ibid., p. 407.
²Ibid., p. 408.
³Ibid., p. 409.
and that constructive help must begin with a "basic acceptance and an attitude that will allow for a dynamic exploration of the parents' feelings. Only in this way, can they arrive together at a point of decision that they can sustain."

Rosemarie Doty and Richard K. Merwin, in a very recent article, report on agency service to a more select group of these parents, limited to those whose request is to relinquish rights to first-born legitimate children.

As McCorkell, MacKay and Heller have done before them, so these authors point out community reaction, and, in addition, the reaction encountered from professional people with whom these parents have contact. The authors comment that, "although community reaction has not been tested on a controlled basis, there often seems to be a feeling that the decision these parents have reached is morally wrong and that they have a responsibility to care for the child."

The approach of their agency has been to accept the request of these parents for service, to indicate interest in their problems and in how they arrived at this decision, and to explain what problems they will face as a result of their decision. The parents' resources and those available in the community are reviewed. But, these authors point out, "review of resources and motives seldom has produced a change in the decision to relinquish parental rights."

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1 Ibid., p. 409.
3 Ibid., p. 101.
4 Ibid.
Eight of these couples were selected for study. The average age of the men was found to be 22.7, with a range from 19 to 26, and of the women 19.9, with a range from 18 to 23. In all cases but one the child had been conceived before a definite decision to marry was made, but none of these women had felt she needed to be married just because she was pregnant. With the exception of the family where the child was conceived subsequent to marriage, the parents were in agreement about plans for the child. In six families both contacted the agency before the birth of the child, asking for adoption placement. In one case the baby was found abandoned shortly after birth. The authors state that apparently all of the families had considered abortion at one time or another but were fearful of the consequences. All planned to practice family planning in the future. As a result of agency contacts, two out of the eight families kept their children.¹

Summarizing the couples studied, it was found that most of them were college- and goal-directed. Where grandparents had college education there was more acceptance of their children's decisions than where they did not have this background. Most couples had made a firm decision about placement before contacting the agency, and, as indicated earlier, agency service seldom altered their decision. Psychologically these parents were considered to be "for the most part well, intact people who were, however, immature and self-centered. Marriage itself satisfied mutual dependency and gratification of needs, but the added responsibilities of

¹Ibid., pp. 101-103.
making a home and providing for a family were beyond their present capacity.¹

From this and the preceding accounts of agencies' experiences with these parents, it will be seen that the problem is a complex one, and important for consideration, since it strikes at the heart of deeply rooted cultural values.

This study will now continue with an analysis of the McCorkell research project.

¹Ibid., pp. 103, 111.
CHAPTER III

PROBLEM FORMULATION AND HYPOTHESES

Problem Formulation

In the beginning of her study, as noted earlier, McCorkell addresses the problem by asking several questions, and then stating that the study intends to answer some of these questions and to suggest possible answers to others.¹

The first question, "Are there married parents who voluntarily ask to give up their own children?", is answered in the introductory chapters of the study, and the fact that there are such parents provides the basis for the study. The last two questions, "Does the Children's Aid Society offer them service and plan with them for the adoption placement of their children?" and "Should the Society offer this service?", are also answered in the introductory chapters, insofar as the Children's Aid and Infants' Homes of Toronto are concerned. The research itself is not focused on the service. The other three questions, "Why do they make this request?", "What kind of people are they?" and "Are they living together?" are addressed in the research project.

In the study, the first three chapters are devoted to acquainting the reader with various considerations related to the problem. Although the amount of space given to this presentation is considerable, it probably

¹Supra, p. 1.
has been necessary for adequate understanding of the problem. As Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook state, "Enough background should be given to make clear to the reader why the problem was considered worth investigating."¹

At the beginning of Chapter IV, McCorkell states that "consideration of the problem opened up several possible areas of concentration which the study might pursue," but "obviously the study could not hope to explore the problem fully." Therefore it was "decided to concentrate on an analysis of the group as a whole, to isolate some of the factors which differentiated those parents who ultimately kept their child from those who ultimately placed, and to attempt a comparison with the family receiving protection service from a Children's Aid Society."²

There is no question that the study undertaken could not explore the problem fully. In the area decided upon for concentration, the method of analysis, in this reviewer's view, did not achieve the apparent intention of presenting the group as a whole. In isolating the various factors, insufficient attention seems to have been given to associations and relationships among the various factors. Although considerable material is presented about the parents, they remain quite fragmented, with the result that this reviewer found it difficult to get a picture of the parents as individuals and couples, except in a few instances where quite full descriptive material was provided.

As for the attempt to compare these parents with the protection family, this reviewer has earlier indicated her view that use of the Canadian Welfare Council survey for this purpose was inappropriate.³

²McCorkell, p. 36.
³Supra, pp. 9-10.
Timeliness and Appropriateness of the Study

Although, as stated previously, adoption statistics reveal that a good number of children placed on adoption have married parents, no previous research appears to have been done on any aspect of this problem, insofar as this reviewer has been able to determine. Hence the McCorkell study seems very timely and appropriate. Although confined to only a small number of cases and thus probably limited in its usefulness, the study does mark a beginning at examining a problem which has deep significance, not only for the parents and children involved, and the agencies serving them, but also for society in general, since the problem concerns our basic social unit, the family.

Mention has been made earlier of the attention given to this subject in the literature since the research under analysis was carried out. The MacKay article reports the results of inquiries made of twenty-six agencies concerning their experiences with, and attitudes towards, this "controversial set of clients." As stated before, this article draws attention to the "crying out in the dark" of these agencies, and to the differences in attitudes and convictions among the agencies. It suggests that each agency, in its own way, was striving for a satisfactory and "conscience-free" stand to take with these parents.¹

The above inquiries were made in 1957 and indicate the issue was of considerable concern at that time. MacKay's findings and those of others writing about the problem since support the view that there is need for research into various aspects of the problem.

¹Supra, p. 15.
Hypotheses

Hypotheses are not explicitly formulated in the study. One statement that comes closest is:

On the basis of Dr. Bowlby's findings, it seemed reasonable to postulate that the parents who eventually placed their children for adoption would be characterized by more serious emotional disturbance, greater instability in personal relationships, more extensive deprivation in their own family backgrounds, and inaccessibility to help from their own parents.¹

While reference is made to Bowlby, no attempts are made to generate hypotheses. It would appear that some attention might have been given to consideration of variables, and then a decision made as to whether some hypotheses might be generated which would address the relationships among the various factors and the ultimate decision about the child.

¹McCorkell, p. 42.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Definition of Major Variables

Definitions of variables are rather limited in this study. For certain criteria and definitions, the reader is referred to Appendices A, B, and C of the study.

Appendix A is the "Reading Schedule." It covers the following items: age and time factors (birth date, age at application, at marriage, date of marriage, pregnancy occurring before or after marriage [time]), broken home, socio-economic status, other children, availability of grandparents, illness, intelligence, personality, relationships (immediate family, and man and woman to their parents), and nationality.

Appendix B is entitled "Basis for Judgments of Factual Material Collected on Reading Schedule." It defines nationality, economic status (dependent and self-supporting), broken home, intelligence, illness, and availability of grandparents. The definition for nationality is considered incomplete, since it defines only Canadian. Greek, German and English persons were included in the group of parents. The criteria developed for judging intelligence were drawn principally from the thesis of Elaine Eno¹ who quoted G. E. Meyers.

Appendix C defines the "Occupational Classifications Used as Basis for Judgment of Social Status." Defined are: dependents, day labour, semi-skilled labour, skilled labour, lower white collar group, upper white collar group, professional group, business executive group, and extremely wealthy group. The definitions here are also those used by Eno. These seem to be clear and adequate.

The criteria and definitions that are given seem appropriate to the research.

Research Design

McCorkell states that after considering the findings and conclusions of the Canadian Welfare Council and Bowlby studies, "it seemed that essentially they were descriptive of two sets of characteristics of the protection family which, broadly speaking, might be termed social and psychological." Using this material as a basis, she decided to attempt a diagnostic analysis of the cases making up the study. Elaborating on this she states:

While the analysis would try to isolate the relevant social characteristics, this would be done principally for descriptive purposes. The focus of the study would be primarily on psychological factors, an analysis of which would presumably provide some understanding of the underlying motives precipitating the request for adoption placement, as well as those governing the ultimate decision.

As stated earlier in this analysis, McCorkell saw the purpose of the study as threefold: (1) to describe the parents in terms of social and psychological characteristics; (2) to compare these parents to the protection family; and (3) to consider these parents in two groups, those who

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1 Ibid., pp. 33-36.
2 McCorkell, p. 41.
3 Ibid.
ultimately kept their child and those who ultimately placed, and to attempt to isolate the reasons for ultimate placement.

As far as comparison of these parents to the protection family is concerned, she recognizes that this "would necessarily be relatively superficial and related more to social rather than psychological factors due to the lack of detailed information for comparative purposes."¹

As for the first purpose, McCorkell attempts, in the study, an examination of the social and psychological characteristics of the parents, but in a limited way, and without much validity. While the factual material might be presumed to have validity, the psychological would not, since judgments are made on the basis of the case records. There is no mention of psychological testing, hence it is assumed that, generally, only the caseworker's judgment as recorded was used by the researcher, who in turn made subjective judgments from the descriptive and qualitative material. McCorkell mentions that some of the parents were interviewed by the Agency's consultant psychiatrist, hence some of the records may have contained his evaluation also.

It is noted that McCorkell recognizes the probability of bias, and the subjective nature of the judgments made, particularly of the qualitative material. Hence, in her presentation, considerable descriptive material is provided for the purpose, she states, of allowing the reader to make independent judgments.² However, the reader's judgment may be biased also.

¹Ibid., p. 42.
²Ibid., p. 46.
Regarding the second purpose, this reviewer suggests that including a comparison of these parents with the protection family has served to complicate the study unnecessarily. Besides this, the method of comparison is questioned. For a useful comparison, this reviewer suggests that the data for both types should have been obtained in the same way. Since the research study was undertaken in an agency serving many protection families, an abundance of case material would have been available, and 29 families selected from the latter group might have been studied along with the 29 used in the research. It is recognized, of course, that this would have required considerable additional time for obtaining data, and tabulating and analyzing it.

In the presentation, frequent reference is made to the Canadian Welfare Council survey, but little mention is made of the Bowlby study, although McCorkell had stated her intention to use both.

McCorkell considers the third purpose the core of her study, and it is apparent considerable time and effort was utilized in examining the case material with a view to isolating the factors which might be predictive of the ultimate decision of the parents.

Three chapters are devoted to presenting illustrative material from the case records and analyzing it, and in the subsequent chapter three tables, with appropriate comments, are presented.

Because of the limited knowledge base on the subject, this reviewer suggests that another type of study might have been more suitable than the one undertaken.

In her view, a formulative-exploratory study of the parents would have been more appropriate, since, apparently, no previous research had
been done in this field. The study aim then could have been to derive insights and develop hypotheses, which in turn could be tested in a further study, perhaps of a diagnostic-descriptive nature.

Alternately, rather than a study of the parents, an exploratory study of the services provided to such parents by the various Children's Aid Societies in Ontario, or a representative sample of them, might have been a useful approach to an examination of the problem. For this, data could have been collected by means of questionnaires.

**Sampling**

The researcher states that the problem of sampling was not a difficult one since the cases were few in number. At first she intended to study all the cases opened during the period July 15, 1952 to May 31, 1956, but, "as interest in the problem developed and the decision was made to do a close diagnostic study, it became apparent that the number of cases would have to be limited." Accordingly, she decided to restrict the cases to those opened and closed between July 15, 1952 and May 31, 1956. Thus, the sample used was a specific universe: "all the cases opened and closed by the Agency in which parents voluntarily requested adoption of their legitimate children during the period specified." The actual number of cases was 33, but four were eliminated for various reasons, which are explained.¹

Regarding the sample, while McCorkell recognizes that "any sample is necessarily restricted in its representativeness by limitations of time and place," she suggests that, since her sample included all closed

¹Ibid., pp. 43-44.
cases within a certain period, it should be highly representative of all such parents seeking service of that particular agency. She therefore considers that any conclusions drawn in her project may be expected to have validity for other parents who apply to that agency.¹

This reviewer suggests that a comparative study of a further group or groups of such parents in the agency would be necessary before conclusions drawn might be considered to have general validity, because of the number of possible variables, and the small size of the sample.

Ann Shyne, in a discussion of sampling and statistics, draws attention to the fallacy of making generalizations from one study, even within an agency.²

Data Collection Methods

The "method of case analysis and the technique of record reading" was used for the study. McCorkell comments that "various writers have emphasized some of the limitations inherent in collecting data from records," and that "principally, exception seems to be taken to the subjective nature of some of the material used."³ Quoting Kimball Young, she writes:

"'Records are open to errors of perception, memory, judgment, and unconscious bias with a tendency to overemphasize unusual events.' However, 'To a great extent the same tendency may be present whatever other method we may use.'"⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 44-45.
³McCorkell, p. 45.
The above suggests that she recognized the limitations inherent in collecting data from records for research purposes. She also recognized the possibility of bias, and the way this may affect both reliability and validity. But, commenting on this, she states that the quality of the records, and the amount of detail in them to substantiate the worker's judgments, might be considered largely to eliminate this. It would have been advisable for the researcher to have tested this assumption for validity by having a few independent readers analyse a sample of the records, using the same criteria as she did, and then comparing the results with her own.

For a valid psychological analysis, this reviewer suggests that projective and other psychological tests on the parents should have been available to the researcher.

For collecting the data, a reading schedule (Appendix A) was developed, as indicated earlier. This was compiled after studying the relevant theoretical background (the Canadian Welfare Council and Bowlby studies), talking with agency personnel familiar with the problem and reading approximately ten records. Since she was attempting a diagnostic study, it was necessary to collect a great deal of qualitative material.

After reading the 29 records and collecting the material on the reading schedules, the factual information was tabulated and organized. The qualitative material, which she considered more descriptive of the psychological factors, was organized under the headings used in Chapters VII to IX. Chapter VII is entitled "Marital Relationships of Parents."

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1McCorkell, p. 46.

2Ibid., pp. 45-46.
Chapters VIII and IX were organized for the men and women individually under the headings "Relationships of Mothers and Fathers to Children," (with reference to the children for whom adoption is requested), and "Family Background and Relationships of Mothers and Fathers to their Own Parents." She did this so that, for example, all the material about the relationships of the father to the child could be considered as a whole.

This method of organizing the material is an illustration of the lack of sufficient consideration, in the study, of the associations among the various factors, and their effect on one another, for both the individuals and couples.

Details of the tabulation and organization of the material are not given in the study.

**Analysis of the Data**

**Introduction to Case Material**

The factual information was analysed and presented in Chapter VI as an introduction to the case material, to provide a background for the discussion of the more detailed case material in the following chapters. Statistics are given for age, nationality, socio-economic status (occupations of the fathers and whether the parents were dependent or self-supporting), broken homes, intelligence, illness, other children, time of pregnancy, date of marriage, forced marriage, age of child at application, and availability of grandparents.

A comparison of the above characteristics found among the group studied is attempted with those described in the Canadian Welfare Council survey. It is noted that McCorkell recognizes the limitations of such a
comparison, because the basis for some of the judgments made in the latter were not known to her.¹

For each of the factors discussed in the chapter, statistics are also provided in regard to ultimate decisions made about the child. A table (Table 1) is used to present the statistics on levels of intelligence of the parents but not for any of the other factors.

Change from 29 to 26 Cases

From this point on in the analysis of the data only 26 cases are involved instead of 29, because of lack of sufficient information in the records to support the type of analysis that was undertaken.²

Marital Relationship of Parents

In approaching the study of marital relationships, McCorkell encountered several problems because of the immense diversity of factors and circumstances associated with the individual cases. Because of this, problems of classification and terminology arose. Her decision was to classify marital relationships as positive, negative changing to positive, and negative. She does not define these terms explicitly. She indicates the classifications are not meant to convey any absolute judgment concerning the relationship but rather to indicate its "general tone and dominant direction."³

While considering the marital relationship in terms of the request for placement of a child, the judgment attempted of the relationship is

¹Ibid., p. 50.
²Ibid., p. 67.
³Ibid., p. 68.
broader in that it involves consideration of the parents' behaviour towards each other and their experiences together prior to the pregnancy which precipitated the request.

To illustrate the criteria used to classify the marital relationships, considerable descriptive case material is presented. This is intended to give the reader an impression of the quality of the relationship and to present a picture of the cases as a whole to provide the framework for further discussion of the cases.

The cases are subdivided to illustrate marital relationships where the child was kept and where the child was placed. Much of the material relates to feelings about, and plans for, the child, so that, with a few exceptions, this reviewer did not get the full picture of the marital relationship that the researcher seemed to have intended to convey.

Relationships of Fathers and Mothers to Children

What is apparently intended in this analysis is a classification of the attitudes, feelings and behaviour of the fathers and mothers towards the expected child. Again there are examples, but sometimes several different parents illustrating similar characteristics are combined in one paragraph; for example, Mrs. E., Mrs. N., Mrs. O., Mrs. H., and Mrs. I.. This reader had some difficulty sorting them out.

In this analysis the mothers and fathers are treated separately, as indicated earlier; hence it is difficult to get a picture of the parents as couples.
Accepting the premise of Jean Charnley that neglectful parents were unloved children themselves, McCorkell concluded that an analysis of the family background of the parents in the study would be of help in evaluating the quality of their psychological adjustments and in understanding the reasons for their request for placement and ultimate decision.

On the basis of relevant theory, it seemed reasonable to her to hypothesize that there would be a relationship between the extent and duration of deprivation in the parent's own childhood and his present psychological adjustment, and also that more serious psychological maladjustment would be present among the parents who ultimately placed their child than among those who kept.

In the analysis presented, there are two areas of concentration: (1) the family background, with the study concentrating on a judgment of the relationship of these parents to their own parents, and (2) the past and present behaviour of these parents and the duration and extent of any maladjusted behaviour.

All the case material in support of both the judgments about family relationships and psychological adjustment is presented as a whole. The material is classified under three headings: good relationships, dependency relationships, and distorted relationships, and the classifications are defined by the use of descriptive material. Case illustrations follow.


2McCorkell, p. 95.
under each category, with these in turn subdivided into cases where the child was kept and those where the child was placed.

In this analysis she saw these parents as falling roughly into three distinct sub-groups: those having dependency relationships to their own parents; those having more serious problems, with their backgrounds characterized by deprivation and distorted relationships, but within this background having developed considerable strength; and those with either deprived backgrounds and very distorted family relationships or a pattern of behaviour that had shown serious psychological maladjustment for an extended period.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 110-113.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

McCorkell concludes each of the chapters in which she analyses her data with general observations. These seem generally to follow from the data, but attention has previously been drawn to the limitations of the data in regard to validity and reliability.

The above chapters are succeeded by two in which the findings are summarized, further judgments made, and conclusions drawn. Material from these, with comments, follows.

At the beginning of the chapter summarizing her findings, McCorkell draws attention to three subsequent tables, compiled to summarize the judgments made in the previous three chapters. The tables are:

Table 2. Marital Relationships and Relationships to Child of Parents Who Request Adoption Placement of Their Legitimate Children.

Table 3. Relationships to Own Parents of Mothers and Fathers Who Request Adoption Placement of Their Legitimate Children.

Table 4. Judgments of Serious Psychological Maladjustment Among Parents Who Request Adoption Placement of Their Legitimate Children.

Within each table there are two subdivisions, one giving the positive and negative judgments for the group of parents who kept their child and the other for those who placed. Of the 26 cases, 16 kept and 10 placed their children.
It is apparent from the tables that the negative judgments among the group who eventually placed were much higher than among those who kept their child.

Referring to Table 2, MoCorkell comments that, while it was not possible to draw out a consistent pattern of judgments among the group who kept their children because of the many variables, in every case where there were two positive judgments at closing, out of a possible three, the child was kept. But this group only totalled ten cases. In the other six where the child was kept, one positive and two negative judgments were made.

From her analysis of the cases, MoCorkell concluded that each of the ten cases in the former group were successfully resolved and four in the latter. In the other two cases, MoCorkell found an "excessively dominant-submissive relationship between the parents." They were considered difficult to work with, and in one case the child went home "as the result of a chance circumstance which upset the casework plan."\(^1\)

With reference to Table 3, MoCorkell analyses it by calculating percentages. She found among the group who kept their child 9 percent with good relationships to their own parents, 40 percent with dependency relationships, 28 percent with distorted relationships, and 23 percent about whom no judgment could be made because of insufficient information. Among the group who placed their child she found no good or dependency relationships, but 65 percent distorted, and 35 percent about whom no judgment could be made. She comments that these figures "bring out forcefully the

\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp. 116-117.
high incidence of difficulty, in some degree at least, in the family background of almost all the parents in which relationships could be studied.\textsuperscript{1}

It will be noted from the title of Table 4 that, in this, judgments are made regarding the extent of serious psychological maladjustment among the parents studied. These are based on the material already presented in Tables 2 and 3, but in addition, McCorkell states, "on the duration and extent of maladjusted patterns of behaviour and the individual's way of reacting throughout the Agency contact." Recognizing that these judgments are all subjective, she nevertheless gives them in Table 4, "in order to present some over-all evaluation of the individual cases without intending to suggest any absolute validity."\textsuperscript{2}

Based on her subjective judgment, McCorkell found that in 27 percent of the cases where the child was kept there was serious psychological maladjustment, compared to at least 80 percent in the cases where the child was placed. She states that no judgments could be made in two of the ten cases in the latter group. On the basis of the judgments made in the study, it seemed to her that "the essential reason for the decision of permanent placement among these parents was serious psychological maladjustment which, in most cases, had its roots in the individual's early family life."\textsuperscript{3}

Again the matter of validity and reliability needs to be considered in evaluating these findings.

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 119-121.
In her concluding chapter, McCorkell refers back to the three-fold purpose of the study, and summarizes her conclusions in each of the areas from the data collected and analysed.

She describes the parents as young, recently married, and cut off from support of their families. They have average or higher intelligence, generally, but most are in financial need and belong to lower social status groups. Forced marriages and broken homes are frequent.

Regarding the above description, this reviewer would qualify this by drawing attention to the actual age range among the applicants. This was 18 to 53, although the average age of the women was 24 and the men 25.\(^1\) Also, while most of the parents were recently married, a few were married for several years and had other children. Six families had 1, 3 had 2, 1 had 4, and 1 had 8 other children.\(^2\)

In her comparison of these parents to the protection family, McCorkell considered them to be most similar with respect to financial need, social status, incidence of broken homes with their attendant social ills, high incidence of "emotional immaturity," and poor marital relationships. She saw them as probably differing most in age, intelligence, the time they come to the Agency in relation to marriage, and the fact that they request adoption placement, in most cases, of a child yet unborn.\(^3\)

Earlier in this reviewer's analysis she suggested that, for comparative purposes, a more useful approach would have been to study protection families in the Agency rather than to use the Canadian Welfare Council and Bowlby studies.

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 50.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 60.

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 122-124.
In this concluding chapter, McCorkell comments that the comparison to the protection family undertaken in the study was "necessarily superficial." She then suggests that a detailed study of the protection family be undertaken, involving cases from each of three classifications which she lists, for comparison with the three sub-groups she identified among the parents in her study.¹

She suggests that such a study might focus essentially on the psychological factors, with the object of comparing the findings with those emerging from her study. While the suggestion for the study seems a good one, the same limitations regarding validity and reliability would be encountered as in the McCorkell study, unless more precise instruments were used for collecting and analysing the data.

Commenting further on the parents in her study, she suggests that they are unlike the protection family in certain ways. For example, she makes the judgment that they do not neglect their children, based on the fact that in the 18 situations (out of the total of 29 cases) where the child went home, not one remained open in the Agency as a protection case. Unlike many protection parents, these parents come voluntarily to the Agency, and McCorkell postulates that they come with their request because of some recognition of their own inadequacies, and the possibility of becoming neglectful parents unless they are helped with their problem.

In evaluating the ability of parents such as those in her study to be adequate parents, she suggests the following areas be considered:

¹Ibid., pp. 124-125.
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a) Marital relationship.
b) Parental relationships to the child.
c) Own family background and particularly relationships to own parents.
d) Duration and extent of maladjusted behaviour.
e) Terms in which the request is made and the reasons given.
f) Attitudes expressed towards children generally and specifically.
g) Degree of ambivalence in relation to the child.
h) Degree of ambivalence in relation to final decision.
i) Use of the agency experience.¹

This reviewer concurs that all the above factors are important ones to consider in working with these parents, but also concurs with McCorkell that there is danger in making premature judgments about the potential for growth and change in these parents. Generally, when the above factors were evaluated positively, the parents were likely to keep their child, and, when evaluated negatively, the parents were likely to place. However, McCorkell notes, in a number of cases in the study where negative factors seemed to loom large at the beginning of contact, the parents resolved their difficulties and planned adequately for themselves and their child. She adds that these cases serve to illustrate the importance of the worker's being aware of the more subtle factors in all areas of experience.² This reviewer wholeheartedly agrees.

The material in this concluding chapter suggests thoughtful reflection by the researcher on the implications of the research study for practice. This subject will be the concern of this reviewer in the following chapter.

However, before going on to this discussion, a few general comments about the quality of the writing and organization of the McCorkell study seem in order.

¹Ibid., p. 128.
²Ibid., p. 129.
The study is written in good literary style, with the language appropriate and the meaning generally apparent. The study is well organized, with sentences, paragraphs, and sections following one another logically. More use might have been made of tables.

While there is some weakness in the methodology, it is evident that the researcher applied herself diligently to examining a very complex problem. This reviewer sees the introductory chapters and the concluding one as particularly well formulated and expressed, with the material very relevant to any consideration of the problem of the study.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Implications For Social Work Practice

It will be obvious from the foregoing chapters that married parents who request adoption placement of their children are a client group who need to be served, and understood. As Heller states:

We must neither close our doors, nor try to push them into alternative plans that may result in compounding the guilt that must already be present. Refusal of agency services may only complicate their problems and postpone a decision, which they have a right to make and which may be best for all concerned.¹

From her study, as previously stated, McCorkell postulates that these parents come with their request because of some recognition of their own inadequacies, and the possibility of becoming neglectful parents unless they are helped with their problem.² The observations of MacKay and Heller seem to support this view. MacKay states these clients feel dire need of assistance.³

McCorkell points out that, in each of the twenty-nine cases in her study, a "unique set of circumstances, subtly and intricately interwoven," made up the whole, which was different from any other.⁴ Although the

²See Supra, p. 45.
³See Supra, p. 18.
⁴McCorkell, p. 49.
requests from these parents were similar, the circumstances that precipitated the request varied widely, and also the life experiences of the persons involved. A few examples drawn from the McCorkell study will illustrate this:

Young Mrs. A., who was pregnant before marriage and said she married for the sake of the baby, came alone to the agency initially and represented herself as an unmarried mother. Later she wrote a letter, giving the true circumstances, and then both she and her husband came to the agency. Mrs. A., shy, timid, and apprehensive, was pushing for placement because of a fear of possible physical deformity in the child. The fear seemed to be related to an experience she had as a child and also to the fact her husband had a slight deformity of one hand. Mr. A. openly expressed the desire to keep the expected child, but had an understanding of his wife's fear and said he would go along with giving up the child if that was her wish. When the child was born normal, Mrs. A. was ready to accept the child.¹

Mr. E. became irrationally suspicious of his wife shortly after conception, and said the child was not his. He failed to support her, did not visit her in hospital after the birth of the child, nor show any interest in the baby. Mr. and Mrs. E. separated permanently, but Mrs. E., with support and help from her own family, was able to keep the child.²

Mr. F. applied to the agency after the birth of the child. Tense and nervous, he said the baby would have to be given up because he and his wife had been quarrelling constantly since the child was brought home from the hospital. Mrs. F. was equally upset. The trouble apparently had arisen because Mrs. F. was spending all her time on the baby, to the neglect of her husband. When the problem was dealt with and a better balance achieved, there was no question about keeping the child.³

¹McCorkell, p. 70.
²Ibid., pp. 76, 92, 100.
³Ibid., pp. 72-3, 86.
Mr. and Mrs. T. never lived together. Mrs. T. was said to have practically forced Mr. T. into marrying her for the purpose, she said, of giving the baby a name, and supposedly believing she could have the marriage annulled immediately following the baby's birth. She was an attractive, pleasant, talented person, "who charmed and controlled every situation." Mr. T. was younger, rather dependent and easily led. Mr. T. had genuine feeling for his wife and acted responsibly toward her. After the confinement they decided to see each other regularly in an attempt to work out their marriage. However, Mrs. T. developed nausea every time she was to see Mr. T. and eventually she experienced a revulsion of feeling for him. Mrs. T. decided on adoption placement without apparent conflict. Mr. T. showed a good deal of feeling for the baby, but was unable or unready to make independent plans, so the child was placed.¹

From these examples it is evident that each situation is different and that all of these parents have problems and need help. It seems obvious that child welfare agencies have a responsibility to serve them. Moreover, as McCorkell points out² and other authors writing about the problem since have indicated, there is convincing evidence that, generally, these parents want and seem able to use help.

In her concluding remarks, McCorkell refers back to questions asked at the beginning of her study about the appropriateness of Children's Aid Societies offering service to these parents. She sees the service as both appropriate and necessary, and this reviewer supports this view. As McCorkell states, the Children's Aid Society "is uniquely capable of providing the specialized, complete, and complex service which this type of request demands." However, she points out limitations in the ability of at least some Children's Aid Societies to offer this service "because

¹Ibid., p. 78.
²Ibid., p. 131.
of financial difficulties and problems resulting from social prejudice.\textsuperscript{1}

Since The Child Welfare Act 1966 includes provision for preventive as well as protective services on behalf of children, and a different method of financing services is in effect, some of the limitations she suggests should not apply at present, but social prejudice and adverse community reaction to such requests are continuing problems.

The McCorkell study indicates the need for skilled casework services to these parents, and this is supported by MacKay and Heller, and implied by Bernard, Doty and Merwin. But along with the skills, it is most important for the worker to be aware of his or her own feelings about the request. The initial reaction is likely to be negative.

This reviewer would suggest that, from her own experience, and from talking with, and reading about, others who have dealt with these situations, the social worker's initial reaction is not dissimilar to that of the general public: married parents should not make this request; they should themselves take responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children; children have a right to be brought up in their own homes.

It also becomes apparent, in working with these parents, that generally they share these views, and hence much guilt is felt by them in requesting placement. It may be that this prevents some parents from approaching agencies about such a plan, for fear they will not be accepted and understood, and instead they make private plans, which may not be in the child's best interests. It may also be that, if some parents would feel able to approach agencies with their problems earlier, which may or

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 130-131.
may not result in placement, many tragedies of children such as those described by Leontine Young in her book on child neglect and abuse would be avoided.

In support of this, an illustration from Heller's discussion of the problem seems appropriate. She describes Mr. and Mrs. C., aged 26 and 17, who were already the parents of two children, aged 1 and 2. When they applied to the agency Mrs. C. was seven months pregnant, and had been referred by her doctor. Heller comments that the understanding and acceptance of the doctor was an important factor in their working through of a plan for this third child, which was surrendered. Of the situation and their work with these parents, Heller writes:

Mrs. C. had been married at an early age "with parental consent." Although she was described as extremely immature, in the course of our subsequent contacts with her and her husband, we found that they were managing, though perhaps minimally. Mr. C. had had fairly steady employment; their household was neat, clean, and well managed; the two children seemed to be loved and well cared for. Mrs. C. was tearful and disturbed about the new baby, but she and her husband were both convinced that surrender for adoption was the only solution. Our work with both of them in the prenatal period gave us all a chance to explore together their attitude about this decision and to consider possible alternatives. They did not change their mind, and the baby was surrendered a short time after birth.2

In commenting further on their work with Mr. and Mrs. C. and the ultimate decision, Heller states that they recognized the need for the caseworker to be comfortable in accepting the decision Mr. and Mrs. C. "worked out for themselves." She adds that their "evaluation of the total


2Heller, p. 407.

3Ibid., pp. 407-408.
situation gave every indication that a refusal to offer service in adoptive planning for this new baby might be just enough to precipitate this couple into a serious crisis that might jeopardize their marriage and their ability to function as adequate parents to the two children already in their home. "1

Mention is made in the Doty and Merwin article that all the couples about whom they wrote planned to practice family planning in the future. As birth control methods become more widely accepted and practiced, it may be that fewer parents in the future will be encountering the problems of unplanned children and hence that the picture will be altered.

Repeatedly in this study reference has been made to community reaction to the knowledge that some parents actually request adoption placement of their in wedlock children. MacKay states that agencies can be more child-centred if they aggressively interpret to their communities the need for action in providing service to these parents. 2

It is apparent that interpretation by agencies to the public is necessary. The public need to be made aware of the varied circumstances precipitating such requests, and reminded of the fact that biological parenthood is not always accompanied by readiness or ability for adequate, responsible parenting. But in their interpretation to the public, the agencies need also to emphasize their recognition of the importance of maintaining and strengthening the family unit, and press for the development of adequate community resources to aid in promoting these ends.

1Ibid., p. 408.
Implications for Social Work Knowledge

In the study undertaken by McCorkell, she attempted to determine what kind of individuals married persons are who request adoption placement of their children. She also attempted to compare them to the protection family, and to determine the underlying factors influencing their ultimate decision.

Unfortunately, however, because of the small sample and the lack of precise instruments in collecting and analysing the data, the findings have limited value from a research standpoint, and thus fail to provide necessarily reliable insights.

The study does illustrate, however, that these parents are in our communities, and that they are in need of and can use help. Although the focus of the McCorkell study was on an analysis and description of the parents, she does, in the introductory part of her study, and again in the concluding part, stress the importance of giving appropriate, skilled service to these parents. The results of her study, and the investigations carried out by MacKay, Heller, Doty and Merwin, give convincing evidence that many of these parents can be helped in such a way that the children can remain with them. And conversely, in some situations where the ultimate decision is surrender, there is convincing evidence that this decision is the right one, as illustrated by the C case.

From the various findings, it is apparent that married parents request placement of their children for a variety of reasons, including unwanted pregnancies, unreadiness or felt inability to take on parental responsibilities, financial pressures, educational and material goals, and separation of the parents. From what has been reported, it does not seem
that any pattern of predictability of outcome can be identified, with the possible exception of the select group of eight studied by Doty and Merwin.

The various findings also show variety in respect of financial circumstances and degree of pathology. For example, McCorkell found financial pressure frequent among her group, but Heller did not. McCorkell judged there was serious psychological maladjustment in most of the cases where the child was placed, while Doty and Merwin did not find evidence of "grossly abnormal personality structure" in any of the eight couples they studied, although six of these placed.¹

Several possible areas of further research are suggested by the study. A useful one might be a study of the services provided to these parents by the Children's Aid Societies, and the problems encountered in providing the services. A follow-up study might be attempted of the eighteen children who were kept by their parents in the McCorkell study, to see how the children developed. A study might concentrate on the initial request for placement, how it was arrived at, when, and what were the circumstances. Or a study focus might be on the ultimate decision, and the factors influencing that. To be of value, these studies should include representative samples of cases from several agencies.

In reflecting on the issues raised and discussed by McCorkell and the more recent investigators of the subject, it seems apparent that the heart of the problem of these parents is that their request runs counter to deeply rooted, generally held, cultural values. It is expected that

¹ Doty and Merwin, "Parents Relinquishing Rights," p. 103.
married parents will love and cherish their children and take responsibility for their care and upbringing. When they do not, society reacts with disapproval, concern and anxiety, and this is understandable, viewed in the above context.

But there are individual situations where factors operate that prevent some parents from carrying out the responsibilities of parenthood. These must be recognized and acted upon in such a way that the parents may be helped with their problem and the children planned for responsibly, whether this is ultimately at home with their natural parents, or with adoptive parents who can provide the nurture and environment that the natural parents have been unable to give the child.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


