
National Adoption Attitudes Survey

Research Report

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1.0 Executive Summary

In America today, more than 134,000 children wait in foster care for adoptive homes. That is more than enough children to fill any stadium in the country. It's a mid-sized town of children. These children have many characteristics – most are older than five, some have brothers and sisters who need to be adopted together and some have physical or behavioral challenges.

In 2001, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption developed a three-year strategic plan to enhance the national initiative to find permanent adoptive homes for children waiting in foster care. However, a major issue emerged – a lack of solid, accurate and actionable data on how people view adoption in this country, particularly foster care adoption.

How can public attitudes about adoption be changed if we don't know what they are today? How can we educate the general public when we don't know what they already know? How can policymakers create laws if they don't know about Americans' concerns and perceived needs? How can adoption advocates and agencies enhance their practices without knowledge about adoption perceptions?

Now, with the results of this landmark study focusing on adoption attitudes, concerns, opinions and perceptions, answers to these questions are becoming clearer. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption sponsored the study in cooperation with The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute to provide a wealth of information about how Americans think and feel about adoption.

The research has uncovered many new and exciting findings. The most significant finding is one of hope. About four in ten Americans have considered adopting a child at one time in their lives. This equates to about 81.5 million adults. Considering there are 134,000 children in foster care waiting for families, these children would all have a home today if just 0.2% (1 in 500) of these adults actually pursued and completed the adoption process. Unfortunately, children available for adoption still languish in the foster care system because not enough families who consider adoption do it. A goal of this study is to help identify why this is happening and to help change it.

The survey results highlight another key finding: Americans have a favorable opinion of adoption, and the proportion has increased during the past five years. Sixty-five percent of Americans have experience with adoption either through their own family or through close friends. Personal experience with adoption has also increased over the past five years. Additionally, nearly all Americans have extremely positive views about adoptive parents and support employers adding adoption benefits to match maternity and paternity benefits. So why don't those who think so favorably of it – or are touched so directly by it, pursue adoption more often? Why are so many American children facing a possible future without a permanent family?

The adoption community may find particularly useful some of the data about demographic differences of those most likely to adopt. According to the survey, Hispanic populations are more likely to consider adoption than African-American and White populations – though

African-American populations are most likely to consider adopting a child who has been in foster care. Income and education are not major factors in considering adopting. Almost half of those between the ages of 35 and 54 indicated they have considered adopting. Females are more likely to consider adoption than males. The detailed information identified in the survey about willingness to adopt should be invaluable to adoption professionals in enhancing efforts to recruit adoptive parents based on a child's needs.

The study also revealed that the mental and physical health of a child is far more of a factor in an adult's desire to adopt that child than race, age, time in foster care or even the income needed to raise the child. The study clearly shows many Americans have some misperceptions about children available for adoption in foster care (and adopted children in general). For example, most perceive adopted children as more likely to have drug problems and more problems in school than biological children. Although adopted children undergo an adjustment period, the reality is that the majority of adopted children have similar long-term outcomes as biological children.

Some other misperceptions are revealed in the study. The most common is a fear by 82% of Americans that the birth parents would try to regain a child once the adoption is complete – something that statistics show rarely happens (and often sensationalized in media coverage). The cost of adoption is also a concern, though foster care adoption is generally inexpensive and frequently includes government subsidies.

Many other issues, such as international adoption, inter-racial adoption and open adoption, are explored and offer insight into American views about these increasingly common trends in adoption.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption commissioned this study in cooperation with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute to find specific ways to encourage the adoption of the growing number of children in the United States' foster care system who are waiting for permanent homes and loving families. The Foundation and the Adoption Institute designed and managed the study, as well as analyzed the results with Harris Interactivesm, publisher of *The Harris Poll*[®]. The study is the most comprehensive ever completed that measures the factors associated with consideration of adoption. The findings are designed to assist the Foundation, the Adoption Institute, adoption agencies and policymakers to move children from foster care into permanent homes and loving families – Dave Thomas' lifetime vision.

The primary goal of the research was to provide information necessary to impact public policies, enhance adoption practices and inform the media and public about adoption so more Americans will consider adopting the many children who want and need permanent homes and loving families – particularly those waiting in foster care. Now we have critical information upon which we can act.

1.1 Background and Objectives

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute initiated this research to better understand what Americans think about adoption and, in particular, what might influence them to or deter them from adopting children in need of families. The results of this study will be used to increase the number of waiting children who are adopted in this country. This unique and detailed profile of American attitudes about adoption should enhance adoption agency practices and impact government policies on adoption issues.

Among the specific objectives of the study were the following:

- Understand Americans' attitudes about and perceptions of adoption including key differences based on race, gender, age, and other relevant factors.
- Learn about Americans' relative interest in and perceived obstacles to adoption.
- Understand Americans' information about and perceptions of children available from the foster care system.
- Provide the public, adoption triad members (birth parents, adoptive parents and adopted persons), practitioners and the media with factual, accurate information concerning the attitudes of Americans towards adoption in the United States today.

1.2 Summary of Findings

Many Americans consider adopting children, yet thousands of children still remain in foster care.

Nearly four in ten Americans (39%), or about 81.5 million adults, have considered adopting at some time in their lives. This is up from 36% uncovered in 1997. With 134,000 children in foster care waiting for permanent families, these children would all have a home today if less than 1% of adults who have considered adoption pursued adopting these children.

Unfortunately, tens of thousands of boys and girls still languish in foster care because not enough adults who consider adopting actually do it.

Americans overwhelmingly support and are familiar with adoption.

The National Adoption Attitudes Survey found that two-thirds of Americans have a favorable opinion about adoption, and two-thirds have a personal experience with adoption. Favorable opinions about adoption are prevalent among all social groups in the United States. Even among groups with the least favorable opinions overall – the very young (18-24), those 65 or older, African-Americans and the least educated – a majority have very favorable opinions about adoption.

Positive opinion of and familiarity with adoption have grown significantly in the last five years. In 1997, 56% of Americans had a very favorable opinion about adoption – today, 63% do. Similarly, 58% had experienced adoption within their family or among close friends in 1997, compared to 64% now.

Other indicators of strong support for adoption include:

- 78% of Americans think the country should be doing more to encourage adoption.
- 95% think that adoptive parents should receive the same maternity and paternity benefits from employers as biological parents.
- Three-fourths (75%) of Americans believe adoptive parents are very likely to love their adoptive children as much as children born to them.
- Over 80% think that parents get as much or more satisfaction from raising adoptive children as from raising biological children.
- Americans also have very positive opinions about adoptive parents. They are seen as lucky by 94% of Americans.

Health and behavioral issues of the child are the primary concerns for Americans when considering adopting a foster child – more so than race or age.

This research explored Americans’ willingness to consider adopting children with several different characteristics prevalent among the 134,000 children in the United States foster care system who are available for adoption. These characteristics include different ages, races, mental or physical health problems, and length of time they’ve been in foster care. When Americans consider adoption, the characteristics of available children prove to be a key factor in their decision.

One of the critical findings is that most Americans reported that they were willing to consider adopting older children and/or children from foster care who were older and/or of a different race. Children with physical and/or behavioral issues raised the most concerns for Americans in considering adoption.

In fact, over three-fourths of Americans say they would be very (40%) or somewhat (37%) likely to consider adopting a child who is of a different race. Similarly, when asked about their concerns when adopting children out of foster care, only 18% said that race was a major concern and only 27% indicated that age was a major concern. Respondents had similar views when specifically asked about adopting older children or children of a race different from them. The survey revealed, however, that Americans had major concerns about the physical and mental health status of children available for adoption in general and from the foster care system in particular, regardless of the age or race of the child.

- Fewer than half of Americans would be very likely (11%) or somewhat likely (36%) to consider adopting a child with behavioral problems.
- Slightly more than half of Americans would be very likely to consider (14%) or somewhat likely to consider (42%) adopting a child with medical problems.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans (63%) say that the mental health of the child would be a major concern when adopting out of foster care, and over half (53%) reported that the physical health of the child would be a major concern.
- African-Americans and Hispanics are more willing than Whites to considering adopting children with characteristics that may concern prospective parents. This is true across a wide range of situations including adopting a child out of foster care, a child of a different race, or a child with medical or behavioral problems.

Race, age, gender and marital status are associated with propensity to adopt. Income and education are not factors.

As stated earlier, 39% of all Americans have “very” or “somewhat” seriously considered adopting a child at some time in their lives. The following shows some demographic details:

- The single most compelling demographic difference is that Hispanic populations have a far greater likelihood to consider adopting (54%) than African-American (45%) and White (36%) populations. Those indicating they have “very seriously considered” adopting are – Hispanic (32%), African-American (23%), White (16%).
- Age is also of a factor in considering adoption. The highest percentage of individuals who have considered adopting are those aged 35-44 (48%) and 45-54 (45%). Those least likely to have considered adopting are those aged 65 and older (21%) and 55-64 (34%).
- Married couples are more likely to have considered adopting (43%) than singles (35%) and the previously married individuals (34%).
- Females are more likely to have considered adopting than males, 42% to 35%, respectively.
- There are no significant differences between different income ranges – thus income is not an indicator on whether someone considers adopting.
- Education is also not a determinant, as those with a high school diploma have the same propensity to consider adopting as those with a college degree. However, those with a graduate degree are slightly more likely to consider adopting (46%).

Americans believe that adopted children, particularly those from the foster care system, are more likely to have social and behavioral problems than biological children.

Despite overwhelmingly positive views about adoption and generally positive views of the foster care system, Americans are concerned about the outcomes for adopted children. Forty-one percent of Americans think adopted children in general and almost two-thirds (62%) think children adopted out of foster care are more likely than others to have problems at school. A similar proportion--45% and 68% --think adopted children in general and adopted foster children in particular--are more likely to have behavioral problems. A third (32%) believe adopted children in general and more than half (53%) believe children adopted out of foster care are less likely to be well-adjusted.

The concerns that Americans have about adopting children out of foster care are reflected in the services that they say are most important to them in deciding whether to adopt a child from foster care:

- Over three-fourths (77%) wanted health insurance for pre-existing conditions.
- Over two-thirds (69%) say access to a variety of educational and informational materials would be critical.
- More than half (57%) ask for support groups for the child.
- Half say counseling services for the adoptive parent (50%) and support groups for parents (49%) are needed.

The perceived importance of receiving these support services does not vary based on the age and race of the child.

Americans have some concerns about adopting that, in part, reflect misperceptions about how adoption works and the supportive resources available.

Americans have other concerns about adoption that must be addressed in order to increase the numbers who will consider adopting children. The survey found that four out of five Americans (82%) would be concerned that the birth parents might take the child back, though such instances are extremely rare after a finalized adoption. Also, despite a \$10,000 federal adoption tax credit, low to no-cost foster care adoptions and subsidies for adopted foster care children, one in two (50%) Americans say that the cost of adoption is a major concern. Cost concerns almost half of middle income Americans (45%) (those earning from \$25,000 to \$99,000) who comprise the majority of American households, as well as over half (52%) of lower income Americans.

Other significant concerns that Americans have about adoption include having the time to raise a child (a major concern for 49%) and dealing with unexpected genetic or medical problems that emerge after adoption (a major concern for 44%).

With regard to adoption out of foster care, concerns that were mentioned by at least a third of those surveyed, in addition to the mental and physical health of the child, include:

- Having the financial resources needed to raise the child (a major concern for 49%). It is interesting to note, however, that only 35% say financial assistance would be a very important service to them when thinking about whether to adopt a child out of foster care.
- Having the parenting skills needed to raise the child (a major concern for 45%).
- The amount of time the child has been in foster care (a major concern for 37%).

Americans believe that the motivation for adopting young children is fundamentally different from the reason people adopt older and foster care children.

The survey documents a key perceived difference in why people adopt children of different ages. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Americans think adults adopt young children primarily to create a family for themselves, and only 20% think most adults adopt young children to provide a good home for children who need one. In other words, the decision to adopt young children is perceived to be driven by the needs of the adults.

The results are just the reverse when Americans think about why people adopt children out of foster care: the same proportion (64%) think it is mainly to provide a good home for children and only 25% think it is to create a family for themselves. The perceptions are the same for the adoption of older children: 67% think parents adopt to provide a good home and 22% think parents adopt to create a family. In short, when asked to consider adopting older and foster children who are currently available for adoption in large numbers, Americans believe that the decision is primarily altruistic and not based on the adults' needs.

American attitudes about emerging changes in adoption practices – open adoption, international adoption and inter-racial adoption – are divided.

Over the last decade, adoption has undergone significant change. One significant change is the growth of “open adoption,” where birth parents, adoptive parents and adopted children have ongoing contact from the beginning of the adoption. Among individuals adopted when contact with birth families was not sanctioned, there are increasing numbers of reports about adopted people seeking out and finding their birth families. Most Americans think it is usually a good thing for the adopted child (68%) and for the adoptive parents (60%) when the child seeks out his or her birth parents. A plurality (49%) also think it is a good idea for the birth parents.

Americans are more divided about “open-adoption.” A fifth (21%) think it is a good idea in most cases, about half (47%) think it is a good idea in some cases, a fifth (21%) think it is a good idea in only a very few cases, and 10% think it is never a good idea. Americans who think that open adoption is a good idea in at least a few cases recognize the benefits it provides to the participants in adoption. Two-thirds (67%) think it is a good idea because it helps children know about their family background; 60% think it is a good idea because it helps the child and their

adoptive parents get needed health information; and 73% think it helps the child know that their birth parents care about them.

The survey also sought to understand some of the factors that might have contributed to a three-fold increase in the number of international adoptions in the past decade. Americans think that international adoptions are easier to complete than domestic adoptions by a 50% to 38% margin, with the balance unsure. However, by a 47% to 40% plurality, with the balance undecided, Americans think that a child who is internationally adopted is more likely than a domestically adopted child to have significant medical or emotional problems.

Finally, changes to federal law in the 1990's require states to remove barriers to adoption of foster children by willing families, even families of a different race or ethnic background than the children. The survey explored Americans' perceptions about social barriers to inter-racial adoption involving African-Americans and Whites, finding that more people perceive more disapproval than approval of inter-racial adoption. This is true whether the child is African-American or White and whether the adoptive parents are African-American or White. An interesting finding is that Whites perceive higher levels of disapproval of inter-racial adoption in the African-American community than African-Americans do. African-Americans, however, tend to perceive the same level of disapproval among Whites as Whites themselves do.

Community organizations and personal contacts play a key role in providing adoption information.

When Americans are asked where they would go for information or advice about adopting, more than half would turn to foster care agencies and to social welfare agencies in their communities. Almost half (48%) say they would go to their place of worship and four out of ten would go to friends and neighbors. The Internet would be a source for 29%, primarily younger Americans, and 17% would turn to newspapers, magazines or television.

When asked about their major sources of information about adoption today (as opposed to where they would turn for information if they were thinking about adopting), most Americans say their main sources of information are families and friends and the news media.

Americans tend to view the media as mirroring their own positive perspectives of adoption. They believe that media coverage of adoption is either very (19%) or somewhat (53%) favorable. Only a fifth think that coverage is somewhat (15%) or very (6%) unfavorable, with the balance unsure.

Different races and ages have some key differences and some critical similarities in their attitudes about adoption.

Regardless of their racial or ethnic background, Americans are supportive of adoption. Differences in opinion about adoption or about children available for adoption, however noticeable and important, should not obscure this basic and critical fact. Nevertheless, some of these differences, such as the somewhat lower support for adoption among African-Americans than among Hispanics or Whites, and the greater willingness among African-Americans and Hispanics to consider adopting children with behavioral or health issues, were discussed earlier in this summary.

Some other key differences observed include the following:

- African-Americans (51%) and Hispanics (48%) are less likely to have experience with adoption than Whites (69%). At the same time, as mentioned earlier, more African-Americans (23%) and Hispanics (32%) than Whites (16%) report that they have **very** seriously considered adopting a child.
- Whites are more likely than African-Americans or Hispanics to believe children available for adoption from foster care will have problems. For instance, 64% of Whites think children available for adoption out of foster care are more likely than others to have problems in school as compared to 56% of African-Americans and 46% of Hispanics. Whites are also more likely than African-Americans or Hispanics to perceive a sizable difference in likely outcomes between children adopted out of foster care and adopted children in general.
- African-Americans and Hispanics are also more likely than Whites to consider it important to have support services available to them when considering adopting a child out of foster care. The differences were most significant for financial assistance, support groups for the adoptive child, and access to childcare.

The survey also examined how Americans of different ages view adoption. In general, age is not a critical factor affecting attitudes towards adoption. There are somewhat lower levels of support for and experience with adoption among 18-24 year olds and those 65 and older than among other Americans, but both groups are, overall, quite supportive of adoption. As might be expected, 18-24 year olds are much less likely to have considered adopting (7%) than any other age group.

The age of respondents did not significantly influence their views about the problems that adoptive children might face in life, concerns about the adoption process, or willingness to consider adopting children with specific characteristics. Additionally, age is not a major factor influencing opinions about open adoption or international adoption.

1.3 Research Outcomes

Both the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute will (and encourage others to) use the survey findings to:

- Educate Americans about the large numbers of children in the United States who need permanent families and the diverse composition of American families who are adopting them.
- Support adoption practitioners and professionals in developing more effective, culturally sensitive recruitment and retention initiatives, based on new knowledge about American attitudes about adoption.
- Inform government and private organizations' public education campaigns in order to more effectively recruit prospective adoptive parents.
- Encourage federal and state policymakers to better address the long-term needs of adoptive families with sick and at-risk children by providing effective, affordable and accessible health and mental health services and support, and needed financial assistance.
- Urge employers to include financial support for adoption costs and paid leave for adoptive parents as standard employee benefits.

1.4 How the Study was Conducted

The survey was developed following a series of six focus groups, including groups with only African-American and only Hispanic participants, conducted in October 2001. The groups provided an opportunity to listen to diverse groups of Americans talk about adoption with minimal prompting or agenda setting by researchers.

The focus groups revealed that adoption was not a topic that Americans thought about a great deal in their daily lives and that they did not have a lot of detailed information about the adoption process. However, the groups revealed that Americans generally had a strongly positive attitude towards adoption. The groups also revealed a wide range of opinions about the characteristics of children available for adoption and the types of obstacles that potential adoptive parents might face.

Findings from these focus groups were used to help create a questionnaire for the study.

The survey was conducted by telephone by Harris Interactivesm, publisher of *The Harris Poll*[®]. The sample used Random Digit Dial (RDD) sampling to reach and interview a total of 1,416 Americans 18 and older. Interviews were conducted from January 10 to January 31, 2002. The sample includes more than 250 interviews with African-Americans and more than 250 interviews with Hispanics to ensure adequate representation of minority opinions. Hispanic respondents were offered the option of being interviewed in Spanish.

The raw survey results were weighted to census targets for age, race, gender, income, region, and number of telephone lines to ensure that the sample represented all Americans. The sampling and weighting methods are the same as those used for The Harris Poll.

Given the sample sizes for this study, the margin of error for percentages near 50% is plus or minus 3 points for the entire sample. The margin of error for sub-groups varies depending on the size of the sub-group:

Sample Size	Margin of Error
800	+/- 3.5%
600	+/- 4.0%
400	+/- 5.0%
270	+/- 6.0%
200	+/- 7.0%
150	+/- 8.0%
100	+/- 9.0%

Some of the key questions included in this survey were first used in the 1997 Benchmark Adoption Survey sponsored by The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, thereby enabling the researchers to measure trends in attitudes over the past five years. The Benchmark Study consisted of telephone interviews with 1,554 adults aged 18 and older and was conducted in the summer of 1997 by Princeton Survey Research Associates.

1.5 Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding the results, methodology or distribution of this survey, please contact the organizations that are proudly sponsoring this research in order to find permanent homes and loving families for waiting children:

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
1-800-ASK-DTFA (1-800-275-3832)
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Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute
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2.0 Detailed Findings

2.1 Americans and Adoption: Support, Experience and Consideration

Support of adoption in the United States is strong and growing:

- Almost two-thirds of Americans (63%) have a very favorable opinion about adoption, up from 56% in the 1997 Benchmark survey. Another third (31%) have a somewhat favorable opinion and only 5% have an unfavorable opinion, with the balance undecided.
- 78% think the country should be doing more to encourage adoption.
- Nearly all (95%) think that adoptive parents should receive the same maternity and paternity employee benefits as biological parents.

Compared to five years ago, more Americans also have personal experience with adoption. Nearly two-thirds (64%) report that someone in their family or among their close friends has been adopted, has adopted, or has placed a child for adoption -- a significant increase from 58% in 1997.

On the other hand, the percentage of Americans considering adopting a child has not increased as much as support for adoption or experience with it. In 2002, 39% said they had very or somewhat seriously considered adopting a child at some point in their life, compared to 36% in 1997.

Support of, experience with, and consideration of adoption are moderately correlated. For instance, among those with experience, 69% have a very favorable opinion, while among those without experience, only 51% have a very favorable opinion. Similarly, nearly half (46%) of those with a very favorable opinion about adoption have very or somewhat seriously considered adopting, as compared to less than 30% of those with an unfavorable opinion.

As Table 1 shows, however, there are many exceptions to this tendency. Many Americans who are very supportive of adoption do not have experience with it (29% of those with a very favorable opinion) or have not seriously considered adopting (over half of those with a very favorable opinion). Similarly, having considered adopting does not automatically mean that one is very supportive.

Table 1: The Relationship Among Support, Experience, and Consideration of Adoption

(All Results are Percentaged Across) Note: Don't Know and Not Sure responses not included											
	Opinion About Adoption				Adoption Experience		Consideration of Adoption				
	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	Yes	No	Very Seriously	Somewhat Seriously	Not Too Seriously	Not At All Seriously	
Opinion About Adoption											
Very Favorable	--	--	--	--	71%	29%	22%	24%	18%	35%	
Somewhat Favorable	--	--	--	--	54%	46%	12%	17%	17%	54%	
Unfavorable	--	--	--	--	54%	46%	10%	18%	15%	58%	
Adoption Experience											
Yes	69%	26%	3%	2%	--	--	20%	22%	19%	39%	
No	51%	40%	4%	3%	--	--	14%	19%	15%	51%	
Consideration of Adoption											
Very Seriously	76%	20%	2%	0%	71%	27%	--	--	--	--	
Somewhat Seriously	70%	25%	2%	2%	67%	32%	--	--	--	--	
Not Too Seriously	66%	30%	2%	3%	70%	30%	--	--	--	--	
Not At All Seriously	52%	39%	4%	3%	58%	42%	--	--	--	--	

One reason that support, experience and consideration are not always related is that the measures assessing them cover different time periods. The study measures support and experience based on what people think today, but measures consideration based on a lifetime of experience. Some respondents, for instance, may have considered adopting 10 years ago. As a practical matter, as individuals age beyond childbearing years, the chances they will seriously consider adoption are likely to decline.

These differences also help to explain why consideration has increased at a slower rate over the last five years. A measure such as consideration, that both sums up a lifetime of experience and is unlikely to be answered differently by individuals once they reach a given age, will almost always change more slowly than a measure that focuses on a current situation.

There are likely other factors that may help explain why support for and experience with adoption have changed at different rates. Have infertility rates changed? Have reproductive technologies improved? Have demographic trends and/or marital rates affected consideration? Has media coverage become more favorable? These may be contributing factors.

These questions are beyond the scope of this survey, which is analyzing public attitudes about adoption in order to find adoptive homes for children, in particular foster care children. Consequently, the study explores concerns Americans have about adoption and adopted children and how those concerns relate to support for, experience with and consideration of adoption. By understanding these concerns, policy makers and adoption professionals can more effectively help children find permanent homes. The survey also adds to what is known about people who support, have experience with and have considered adoption.

Social Bases of Support, Experience, and Consideration

Support for adoption is prevalent among all social groups in the United States, as Table 2 shows. Even among the groups that are least supportive overall – those 18-24, those 65 or older, the less educated and African-Americans – a majority has very favorable opinions about adoption.

Likelihood of experience with adoption is correlated with the same social factors as more favorable attitudes towards adoption. For instance, while 69% of White respondents report experience with adoption, only 48% of Hispanics and 51% of African-Americans report experience. Similarly, among those with a graduate school education, 77% report experience as compared to only 56% of those with no formal education beyond a high school diploma.

Perhaps one reason that may explain why African-American and Hispanic support for and experience with adoption is somewhat lower than Whites is that African-Americans and Hispanic populations traditionally are more engaged in “kinship care,” as the focus groups and past research identified. Kinship care is an arrangement in which relatives other than parents are raising children without legally adopting them. There are about 2.1 million children in America being raised by non-parental relatives.

In contrast, consideration of adoption is only weakly correlated to the social demographics that affect support and experience (see Table 1). Income and education, for instance, are not associated with consideration, though they are with support and experience. In addition, Hispanics and African-Americans are more likely than Whites to say they have seriously considered adopting a child – even though they have less experience with and lower levels of support for adoption.

Consideration of adoption is somewhat related to gender, with women slightly more likely than men to have seriously considered adopting. Consideration of adoption is more closely tied to marital status -- married respondents are significantly more likely to have considered adopting than singles. It is nevertheless striking that 12% of singles report serious consideration.

The data seem to suggest that support of, experience with, and overall attitudes towards adoption are shaped by demographics. The chance that Americans will consider adopting a child, however, is considerably less dependent on socioeconomics.

Table 2: Social Bases of Support for, Experience with, and Consideration of Adoption

(All Results are Percentaged Across)
Note: Don't Know and Not Sure responses not included

	Support of Adoption				Adoption Experience		Consideration of Adoption			
	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	Yes	No	Very Seriously	Somewhat Seriously	Not Too Seriously	Not At All Seriously
Education										
High School or Less	58%	34%	4%	3%	56%	44%	18%	22%	14%	47%
Some College	66%	29%	2%	1%	70%	29%	18%	21%	21%	40%
College Graduate	67%	29%	2%	1%	74%	26%	20%	19%	20%	34%
Graduate School	71%	25%	1%	2%	77%	23%	22%	24%	21%	34%
Income										
Under \$25,000	56%	36%	3%	2%	51%	49%	19%	20%	15%	46%
\$25,000- \$49,999	66%	30%	3%	1%	66%	33%	16%	25%	18%	41%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	67%	27%	3%	2%	69%	30%	20%	21%	16%	43%
\$100,000 or more	68%	25%	4%	3%	77%	23%	20%	20%	26%	34%
Age										
18-24	52%	38%	6%	3%	58%	42%	7%	33%	18%	41%
25-34	66%	30%	1%	2%	68%	31%	19%	22%	21%	38%
35-44	63%	31%	3%	1%	61%	38%	23%	25%	17%	35%
45-54	70%	25%	3%	2%	70%	30%	22%	23%	19%	37%
55-64	72%	23%	1%	3%	68%	31%	18%	16%	21%	45%
65+	53%	37%	3%	3%	62%	38%	18%	3%	8%	72%
Marital Status										
Married	67%	28%	2%	1%	70%	30%	22%	21%	20%	38%
Single, Never Married	56%	35%	4%	3%	56%	43%	12%	23%	16%	49%
Divorced/Separated/ Widowed	54%	38%	3%	3%	53%	47%	16%	18%	12%	54%
Race										
African-American	54%	36%	6%	3%	51%	48%	23%	22%	17%	38%
Hispanic	65%	29%	4%	2%	48%	51%	32%	22%	13%	32%
Whites	63%	31%	3%	2%	69%	31%	16%	20%	18%	45%
Gender										
Female	67%	27%	3%	2%	72%	28%	19%	23%	17%	40%
Male	57%	35%	3%	2%	57%	43%	17%	18%	18%	47%

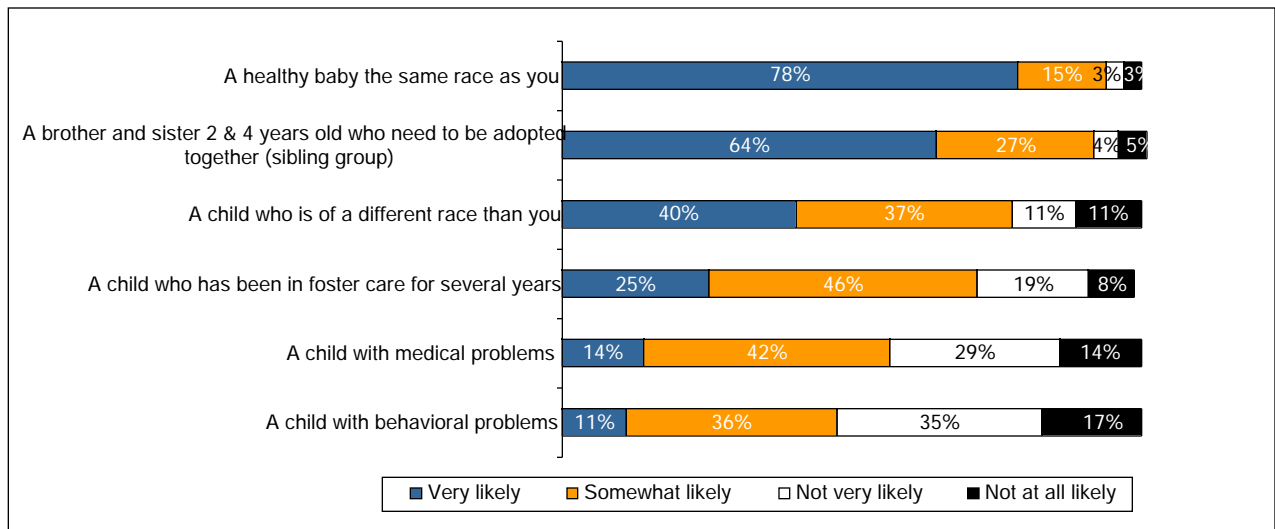
2.2 Adopting Children: Concerns and Considerations

2.2.1 How do adoptable children’s characteristics affect Americans’ consideration of adoption?

The survey explored whether a variety of characteristics—age, race, time in foster care, health status and other factors—affect people’s consideration of adoption. Through a range of questions, the survey probed the willingness of Americans to adopt children with different characteristics in order to gain insight into the child-related characteristics that influence adoption.

As expected, Americans are most likely to consider adopting a healthy baby of the same race; four out of five Americans would be very likely to consider adopting such a child. More surprising, an overwhelming majority of Americans would consider adopting children with a variety of characteristics that are sometimes viewed as lessening a child’s likelihood of being adopted—children of a different race, who are older and who are part of a sibling group. These results are shown in Chart 1, below.

Chart 1: Willingness to Consider Adopting Children with Various Characteristics



For each situation, please tell me whether you would be very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely to consider adopting a child in each of the following situations?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Medical and behavioral problems are the concerns most likely to deter people from considering adopting a child. Adopting children from foster care is also a major concern, though a quarter (25%) would be very likely to consider adopting a child who has been in foster care for several

years. By comparison, the race of the child is of lesser importance, and belonging to a sibling group is of even less importance.

The obstacles to adopting children with medical and behavioral problems are even more apparent when examining some of the factors expected to reduce resistance to adopting a child. One might expect, for instance, that having a favorable opinion about adoption would make one more willing to adopt, but favorability does not translate into willingness when children have medical or behavioral issues:

- Only 16% of those with a very favorable view about adoption would be very likely to adopt a child with a medical issue. This compares to 10% of those with a somewhat favorable view and 14% of those with an unfavorable view.
- Similarly, only 12% of those with a very favorable view about adoption would be very likely to adopt a child with a behavioral issue, as compared to 10% of those with somewhat favorable or unfavorable views about adoption.

By contrast, a favorable attitude about adoption makes more of a difference in other situations:

- Among those with a favorable view about adoption, 28% would be very likely to adopt a child out of foster care as compared to 19% of those with a somewhat favorable view and 18% of those with an unfavorable view.
- Similarly, 47% of those with a favorable view about adoption would be very likely to adopt a child of a different race, compared to 31% of those with a somewhat favorable view, and 23% of those with an unfavorable view.

African-American and Hispanic respondents appear more open than Whites to adopting children with characteristics that may concern prospective parents. For instance, 47% of African-Americans, 51% of Hispanics, and only 38% of Whites say they would be very likely to adopt a child of a different race. Similarly, higher percentages of African-Americans and Hispanics than Whites state they are very likely to adopt a child with characteristics sometimes viewed as decreasing their chances of adoption:

- **Sibling Group:** 73% of African-Americans, 64% of Hispanics, and 62% of Whites.
- **Foster Care:** 35% of African-Americans, 33% of Hispanics, and 23% of Whites.
- **Medical Problems:** 22% of African-Americans and Hispanics, 11% of Whites.
- **Behavioral Problems:** 15% of African-Americans, 20% of Hispanics, and 9% of Whites.
- **Healthy Baby of Same Race:** 80% of African-Americans, 83% of Hispanics, and 78% of Whites.

These results indicate that for many Americans, adopting a child who has been in foster care for a significant amount of time, is a large concern, but not the largest. Medical and behavioral problems are more likely to lead to lack of consideration than any other characteristic.

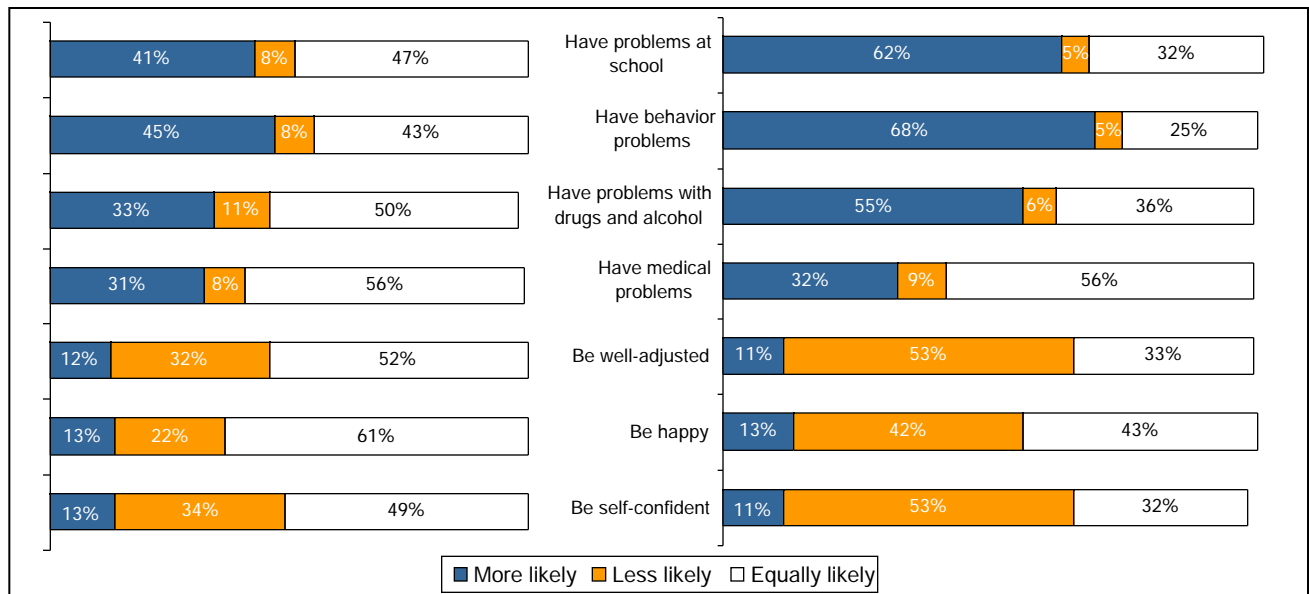
2.2.2 Concerns about Outcomes for Adopted Children

The study analyzed what Americans think about the likelihood that adopted children in general, and children adopted from foster care in particular, will encounter a variety of medical and behavioral problems. This analysis explores whether Americans think it is likely that they will encounter the kinds of issues that most concern them when considering adoption.

Generally, Americans believe adopted children are more likely to encounter medical and behavioral problems than biological children (see Chart 2). In addition, Americans view children who are adopted out of foster care as significantly more likely to experience problems than adopted children in general. Only in the case of medical problems is there no difference in the perceived likelihood of problems for children adopted out of foster care and adopted children in general -- just under a third feel that both are more likely to experience medical problems than other children.

Responses indicate that Americans think behavioral problems—the characteristic that is of most concern when considering a child for adoption—are more likely to occur among adopted children in general (45%) and especially among children adopted out of foster care (68%) than among other children.

Chart 2: Concerns About Outcomes for Adopted Children in General and Children Adopted Out of Foster Care in Particular



Do you think adopted children are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to...?

Do you think children **adopted out of foster care** are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

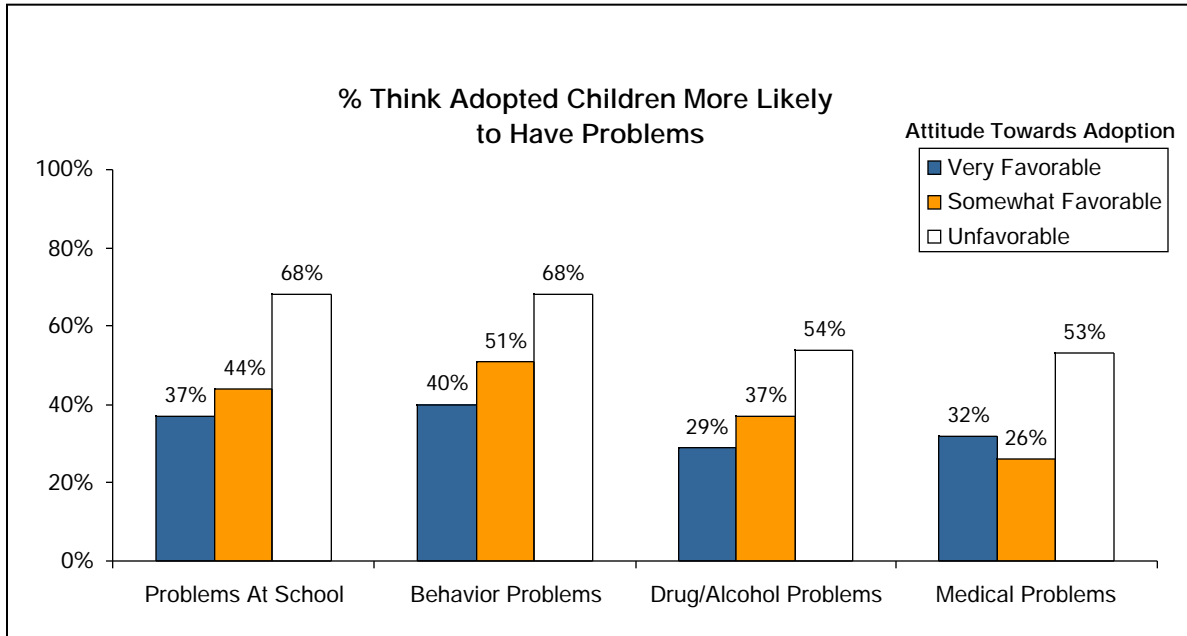
Adoption Views and Expected Outcomes

Americans with very favorable opinions about adoption are much less likely to think that outcomes for adopted children will be unsatisfactory compared to those with only somewhat favorable or unfavorable opinions (see Chart 3). For instance, 37% of those with very favorable opinions about adoption think adopted children in general are more likely than other children to have problems in school. This percentage increases to 44% among those with somewhat favorable opinions and sharply increases to 68% among those with unfavorable opinions about adoption.

The story is somewhat different with respondents' views about children adopted out of foster care (see Chart 4). Americans with unfavorable opinions about adoption are still more pessimistic, but the differences between them and those with more favorable views are sharply reduced. When it comes to problems at school, for instance, 63% of those with very favorable, 58% of those with somewhat favorable, and 67% of those with unfavorable views think children adopted out of foster care will have more problems than other children. In only two areas—likelihood of drug/alcohol problems and likelihood of medical problems—do those with unfavorable views about adoption anticipate significantly more problems for foster care children than those with favorable views.

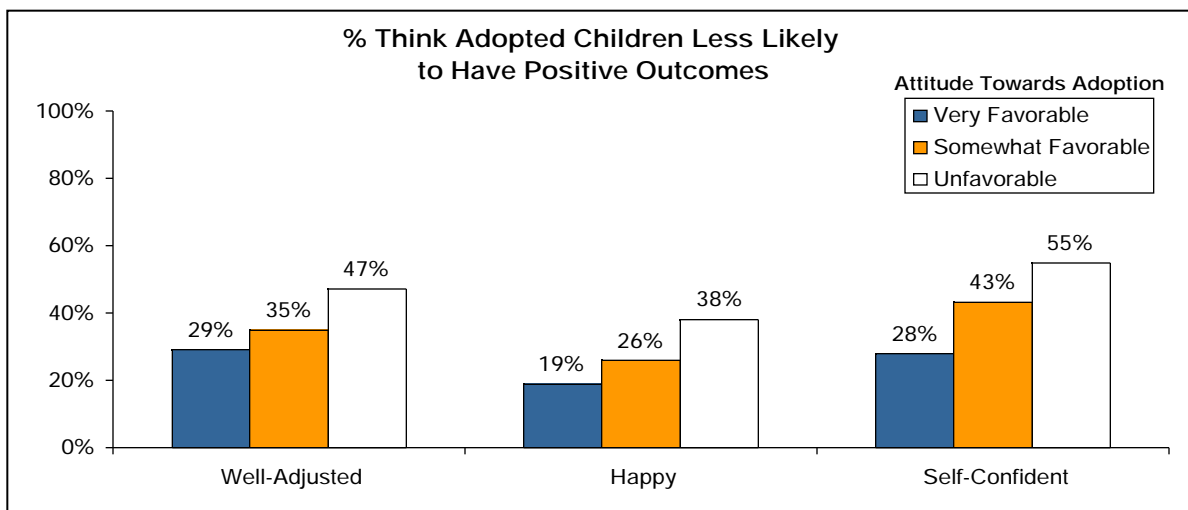


Chart 3: Americans Who Support Adoption are More Optimistic About Outcomes for Adopted Children in General



Do you think adopted children are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to have...?

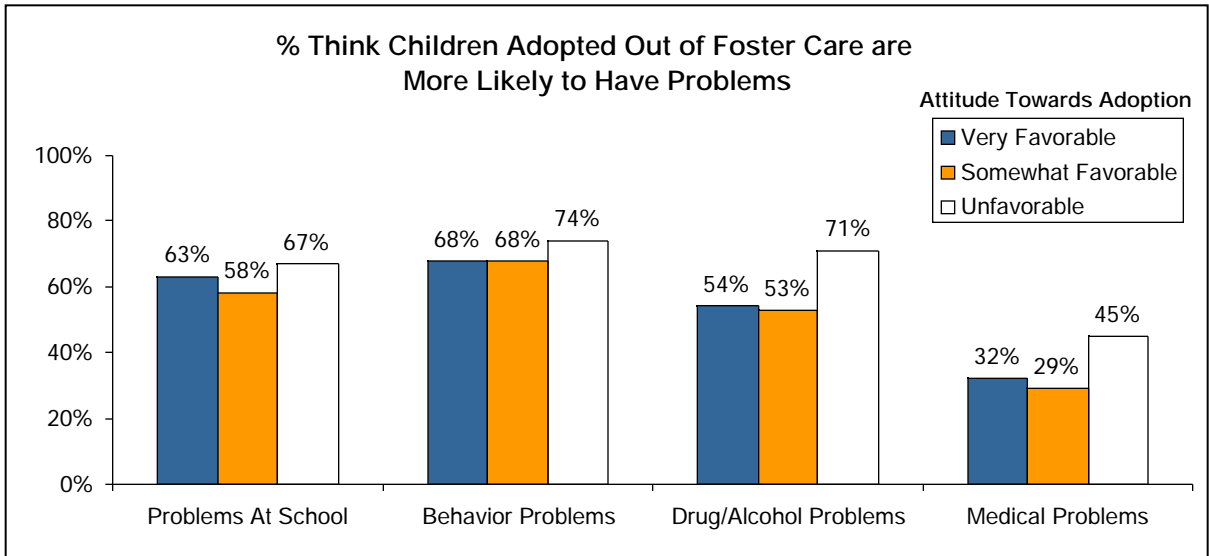
Base: All respondents (n=1,416)



Do you think adopted children are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to be...?

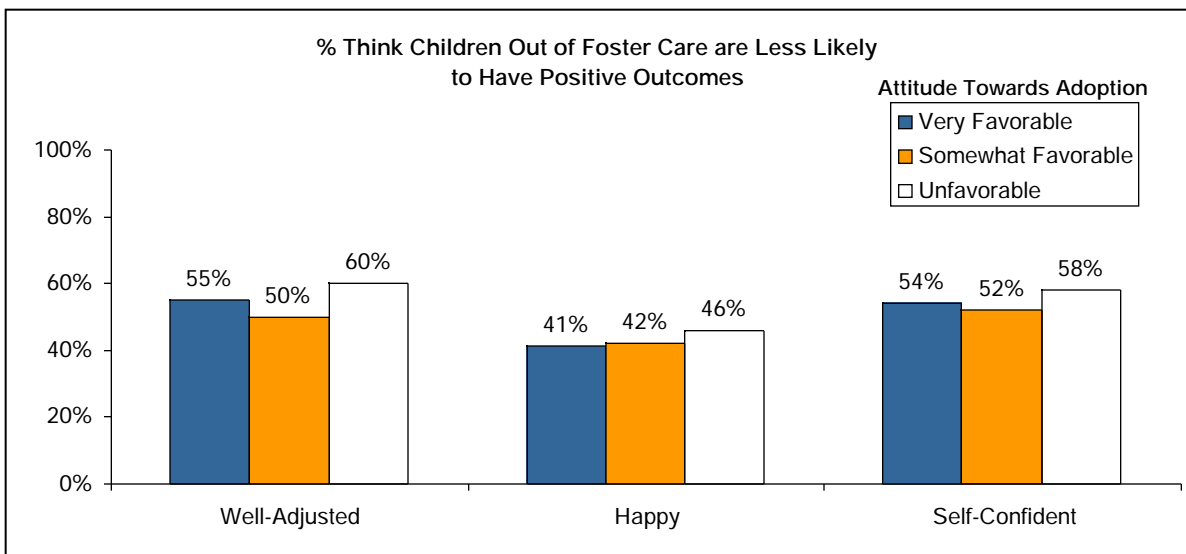
Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Chart 4: Support for Adoption Leads to Slightly More Optimism About Outcomes for Children Adopted Out of Foster Care



Do you think children adopted out of foster care are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to have...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)



Do you think children adopted out of foster care are equally likely, more likely, or less likely than other children to be...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)



The higher level of concern about outcomes for children adopted from foster care compared to adopted children in general may be due to a variety of reasons. Concerns about the outcomes for adopted foster care children, however, do not result from a generally negative impression about the foster care system. Overall, 53% of Americans have a positive opinion about the foster care system in their community, and only 24% have a negative opinion, with the balance unsure. Moreover, while having a positive opinion about the foster care system increases overall optimism about the children’s outcomes, it does not eliminate concerns. For instance, among those with a positive attitude about the foster care system, 57% think that children adopted out of foster care are more likely than other children to have problems in school.

Perceived Reasons Why Children are in Foster Care

The heightened concern about foster care children’s outcomes may be due in part to the view that their biological parents mistreated them. The reasons that respondents give for why a foster care child may be available for adoption support this view (see Table 3). When Americans think about adoptable children in general, they tend to select explanations for their availability that emphasize decisions by the birth parents. When they think about foster children available for adoption, they overwhelmingly assume that the child was taken away because of mistreatment.

Table 3: Why Are Children Placed for Adoption or in Foster Care?

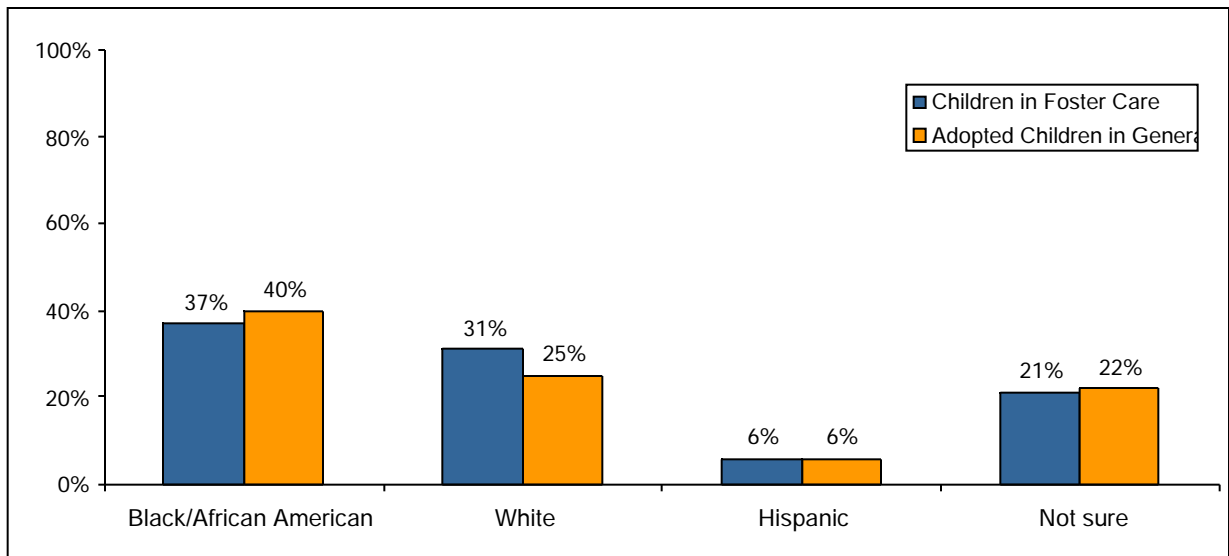
	Adopted Children in General	Children Available for Adoption Out of Foster Care
The children were taken away from parents because of mistreatment	30%	71%
The birth parents decided they were ready to be parents	42%	13%
The birth parents decided they could not afford to raise the child	20%	8%
The parents of the child died	4%	2%

The views of African-Americans and Hispanics in this regard are different from those of Whites, particularly when it comes to why children in general are available for adoption. Forty-one percent of African-Americans, 36% of Hispanics, and only 27% of Whites believe that mistreatment is the main reason children are available for adoption in general. When the focus shifts to children in foster care, increased percentages of all three groups -- 69% of African-Americans, 62% of Hispanics, and 74% of Whites -- view mistreatment as the most common reason that children are available. The percentages clearly jump for all three groups and clearly jump the most for Whites.

Perceived Characteristics of Foster Children Available for Adoption

The survey results indicate that children’s race does not cause the heightened concern about children available for adoption out of foster care. Americans do **not** think children who are available for adoption out of foster care are more likely to be African-American or Hispanic than children available for adoption in general (see Chart 5), though they understand that there is an over-representation of African-Americans in the foster care system. Moreover, results in Section 2.2.4, below, illustrate that race is a secondary factor in considering adoption from foster care.

Chart 5: Perceived Race and Ethnicity of Children Available for Adoption



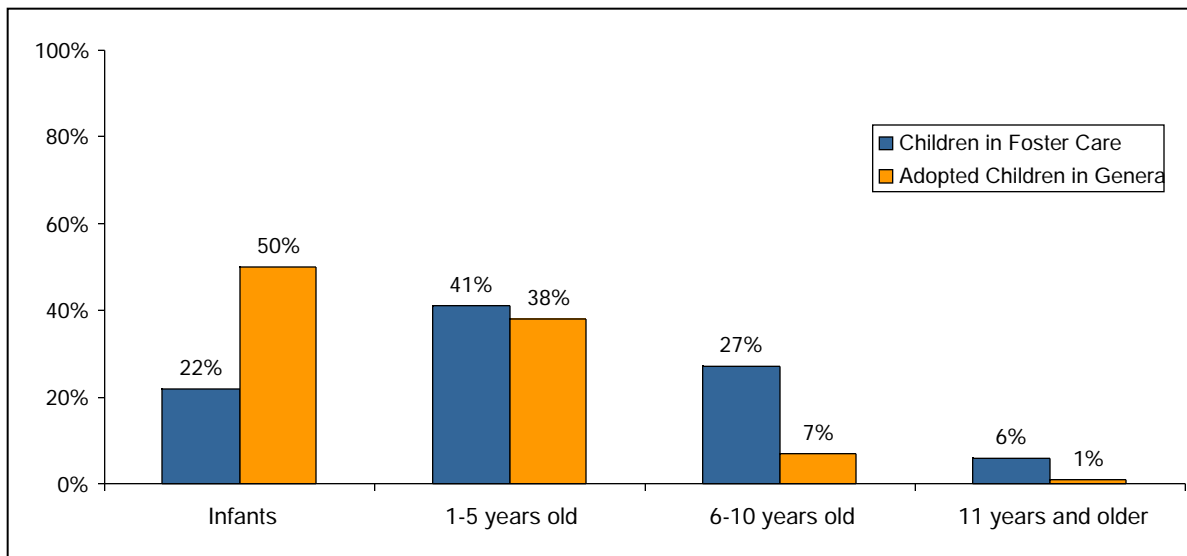
*Do you think most of the children available for adoption today **out of foster care** are...?*

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)



Americans correctly believe that children available for adoption out of foster care are substantially older than children available for adoption in general (see Chart 6). This understanding may contribute to the greater concern that Americans show about the outcomes for children adopted from foster care. Results in Section 2.2.4, below, indicate that though age may be a concern, it is most likely a secondary factor affecting consideration of foster care adoption.

Chart 6: Perceived Age of Children Available for Adoption



Based on what you have heard, seen or read, would you say that most of the children who are adopted *out of foster care* in the United States today are adopted when they are...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Race/Ethnicity and Concerns about Outcomes for Children

Whites are more likely than African-Americans or Hispanics to believe that children available for adoption out of foster care will have problems. As Table 4 shows, Whites are also more likely to perceive a sizable difference in likely outcomes between children adopted out of foster care and adopted children in general.



Table 4: Perceptions of Outcomes for Adopted Children in General and Children Adopted Out of Foster Care by Race of Respondent

Adopted Children Are:		African-Americans	Hispanics	Whites
Adopted Children	More Likely to Have:			
	Problems at School	51%	43%	39%
	Behavior Problems	53%	47%	44%
	Drug/Alcohol Problems	40%	35%	33%
	Medical Problems	36%	31%	31%
	Less Likely to Be:			
	Well-Adjusted	39%	31%	29%
Happy	38%	23%	18%	
Self-Confident	37%	34%	33%	
Foster Care Children	More Likely to Have:			
	School Problems	56%	46%	64%
	Behavior Problems	61%	53%	71%
	Drug/Alcohol Problems	47%	41%	57%
	Medical Problems	34%	30%	31%
	Less Likely to Be:			
	Well-Adjusted	48%	38%	54%
Happy	41%	31%	42%	
Self-Confident	45%	37%	57%	

Experience with and Consideration of Adoption and Concerns about Outcomes for Children

Overall, relationships among adoption experience, consideration of adoption and perceived outcomes for adopted children are much weaker than between **support** for adoption and perceived outcomes for children, discussed above. Respondents with adoption experience are somewhat more optimistic about outcomes than those with no experience. Consideration of adoption appears unrelated to perceptions about problems that children might encounter.

Perceptions about the likelihood that adopted children in general will have problems in school illustrate this pattern. Among those with adoption experience, 38% say that it is more likely that adopted children will encounter problems in school compared to other children. Among those without adoption experience, 46% say that it is more likely that adopted children will have problems in school. The results for consideration are essentially flat: 38% for those who have very seriously considered adopting, 42% for those who have somewhat seriously considered

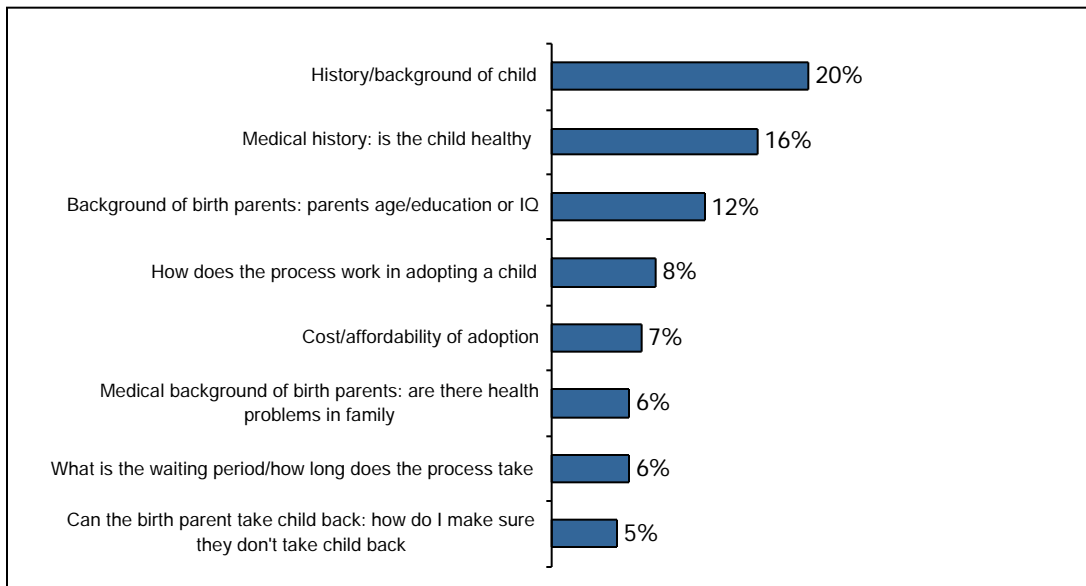
adoption, 38% for those who have not too seriously considered adopting, and 43% for those who have not seriously considered adopting at all.

2.2.3 Understanding Potential Concerns About Adoption

The survey also explored what Americans think about the adoption process in general and about adoption out of foster care in particular, including the role that children’s characteristics play in shaping concerns, and also other concerns, such as cost and birth parents.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to indicate one or two things they would ask about adoption if they had the opportunity to talk with someone knowledgeable about it. Chart 7, below, shows the topics mentioned most often. It is important to note that about one-fourth of those interviewed (23%) did not give any comments and that there were numerous topics mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents. The responses demonstrate the importance of the child’s background – with general background (20%), medical history (16%), and birth parents’ background (12%) being the most mentioned. Although not mentioned as often, process issues—such as waiting periods (6%), cost (7%), and whether birth parents can take back the adopted child (5%)—were questions that would be asked by a few.

Chart 7: What Americans Would Ask About Adoption



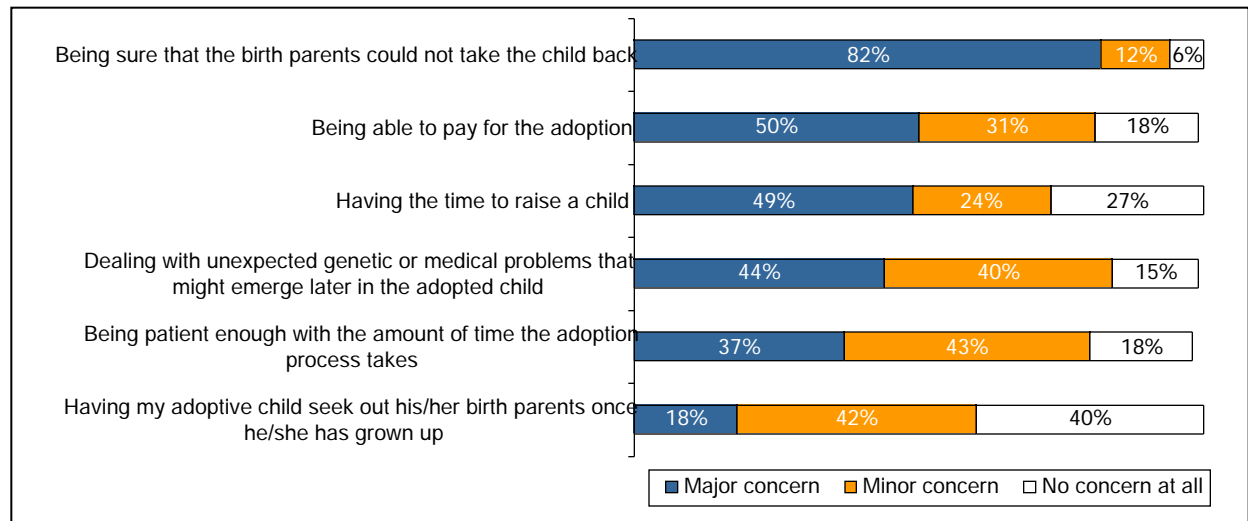
What would be one or two things you would ask about adoption if you had the opportunity to talk with someone who knew a lot about adoption?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

These results give a feel for what Americans want to know about adoption and a sense of their overall concerns about adoption. Respondents were then asked to indicate how much of a

concern—major, minor, or no concern at all—each of six potential concerns would be to them if they were thinking about whether or not to adopt a child. These concerns were chosen to expose respondents to a wide range of possible concerns that often arise in discussions of adoption. It is important to note that at this point in the interview, the topic of foster care had not been introduced. The results are shown in Chart 8, below.

Chart 8: Concerns About Adoption



For each of the following, please tell me whether it would be a major concern, minor concern, or no concern at all for you in thinking about whether to adopt a child.

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

These results illustrate some interesting findings. First, ensuring that birth parents could not reclaim the child would be of most concern to respondents, with 82% saying it would be a major concern to them in considering whether to adopt. In contrast, only 5% mentioned this issue when asked what they would most want to know about adoption. This large difference is likely due, at least in part, to differences in question formats (i.e. answering an open-ended question versus selecting from a list of issues) and question context (i.e. being asked about adoption issues in general versus being asked about issues in the context of considering adoption). But it also suggests that an issue that is not an initial concern may become highly important as individuals learn about possible adoption outcomes.

Second, the cost of adoption concerns most respondents regardless of income. Among those earning \$25,000-\$49,999 annually, 52% say paying for an adoption would be a major concern as do 45% of those earning \$50,000-\$99,999. Since these two groups comprise the majority of American households, additional help from government, employers, and charities, as well as public education about available help, may remove this barrier to adoption and increase the number of Americans who adopt.

Third, among those in the prime ages for adopting and raising children—25-44 year olds—having time to raise a child was a major concern for 39% of those 25-34 and for 47% of those 35-44. This concern, however, is likely not specific to adoption, but applies to child-rearing in general.

Fourth, it is important to note that though children’s existing medical conditions had not been asked about at this point in the survey, nearly half of those surveyed expressed concerns about future, unknown medical or genetic problems. This and previously mentioned responses underscore the concern about medical issues related to children available for adoption.

Finally, relatively few Americans worry about an adult adoptee seeking out their birth parents. This finding and others about open adoption and search described later in this report indicate that Americans understand the need for adopted people to have information about their origins.

Concerns About Adoption and Support for, Experience with, and Consideration of Adoption

The relationship between general attitudes towards adoption and specific concerns about adoption varies considerably. Levels of concern about cost, birth parents taking the child back, the adoption process, and the time needed to raise a child are either unrelated or at most very weakly related to general attitudes towards adoption.

Concern about future genetic problems, however, is strongly related to support for, experience with, and consideration of adoption. Among those with an unfavorable opinion about adoption, 67% say this would be a major concern, as compared to only 41% of those with a very favorable opinion. Similarly, 51% of those with no experience with adoption say this would be a major concern, as compared to 40% of those with experience. Finally, 50% of those who have not at all seriously considered adopting say this would be a major issue, as compared to only 40% of those who have seriously considered adopting.

Concern that adoptive children might seek out their birth parents is much higher among those with unfavorable opinions about adoption (34% consider it a major concern) than among those with somewhat favorable (21%), or very favorable (15%) opinions about adoption. Americans with no experience with adoption are also more likely to have major concerns about this (25%) compared to those with experience (14%). Interestingly, considering adopting does not have a correlation with this issue.

2.2.4 Adopting Out of Foster Care: Considerations and Needs

The survey had three goals in exploring Americans' concerns about adopting out of foster care:

1. Relative Importance of Potential Concerns About Adoption out of Foster Care. The survey measured the importance of the below-listed potential concerns using the same scale as for adoption in general (Major, Minor, and No Concern).

- Physical Health of the Child
- Mental Health of the Child
- Having the Parenting Skills Needed to Raise the Child
- Having the Financial Resources Needed to Raise the Child
- The Amount of Time the Child Spent in Foster Care
- Race of the Child
- Age of the Child

2. Perceived Importance of Several Types of Support Services for Foster Care Adoptions. The survey measured the importance of the following support services using a four-point word scale ranging from Very Important to Not At All Important.

- Financial Assistance
- Counseling Services for Parents
- Support Groups for Parents
- Support Groups for the Child
- Access to Education/Information
- Access to Childcare
- Health Insurance for Pre-Existing Conditions

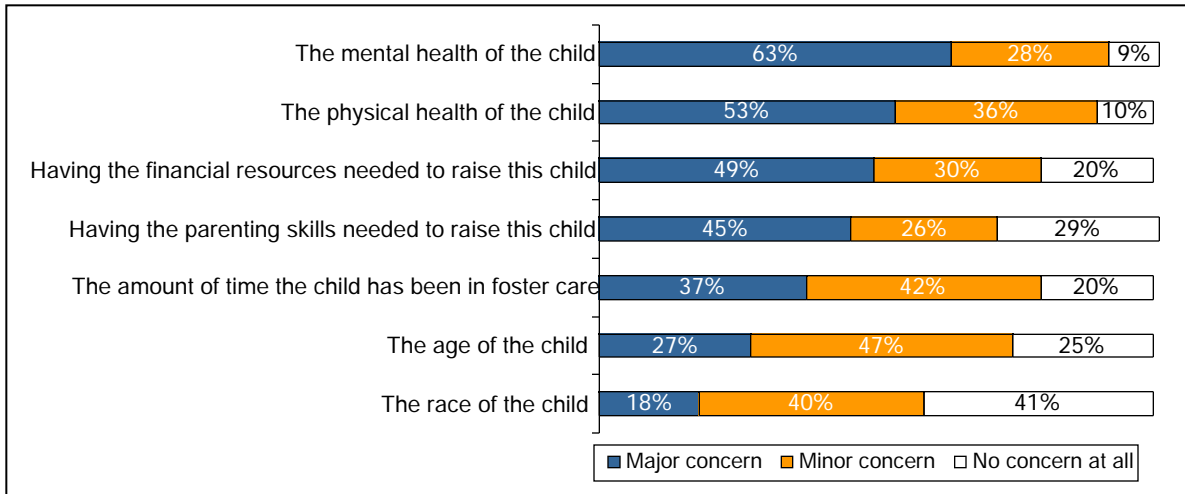
3. Ways in Which the Importance of Concerns and Services Varied with the Race or Age of the Adopted Foster Care Child.

The survey used experimental design methods to assess the importance of concerns and services for various races and ages of children. Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of six groups – according to characteristics of the child's age and race. They were not told that they were participating in an experimental design. Each group was asked about their concerns and needs if they were to adopt a child from the group they were assigned:

- African-American Infant or Toddler
- African-American Elementary School Age Child
- African-American Teenager
- White Infant or Toddler
- White Elementary School Age Child
- White Teenager

The results of this “potential concerns” analysis are clear and striking (See Chart 9). First, the ranking of relative importance of potential concerns about foster care adoption is clear. The mental and physical health of the child is of most importance, followed by having the financial resources and parenting skills needed. Other characteristics of the child -- how long he or she had spent in foster care, age, and race -- were of distinctly secondary importance.

Chart 9: Concerns About Adopting a Child Out of Foster Care



For each of the following, please tell me whether it would be a major concern, minor concern, or no concern at all for you in thinking about whether to adopt a child.

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Of equal interest, the major concerns of respondents are essentially the same regardless of a child’s age or race (Table 5). Respondents say that the race of the child is not a major concern compared to the physical health of the child, and they say this whether they were asked about a White or African-American child. Similarly, whether the child was an infant/toddler, elementary school age, or a teenager does not have a significant impact on the relative importance of concerns related to foster care adoption.

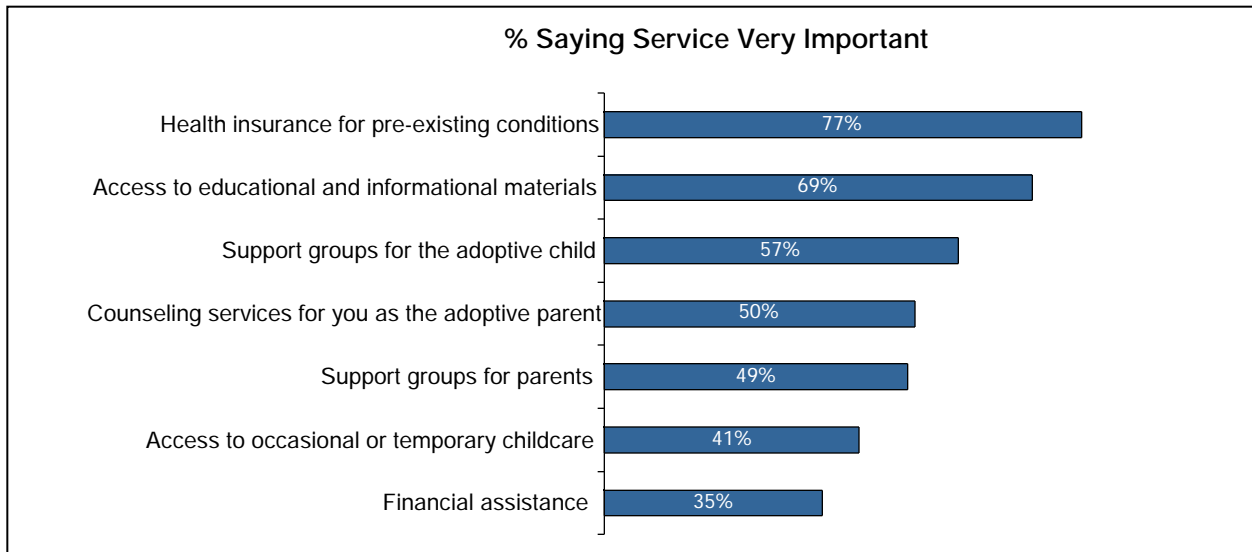
Table 5: Perceived Concerns About Foster Care Adoption Do Not Depend On The Age Or Race Of The Child Being Adopted

Adopted Children Are:	African-American Infant	White Infant/Toddler	African-American Elementary School	White Elementary School	African-American Teenager	White Teenager
% Saying "Major" Concern						
Physical health	55%	53%	53%	60%	48%	48%
Mental health	61%	58%	63%	70%	63%	63%
Parenting skills	45%	43%	45%	47%	44%	46%
Financial resources	49%	44%	50%	57%	50%	47%
Time in foster care	31%	33%	39%	37%	40%	38%
Race of child	18%	17%	19%	22%	20%	13%
Age of child	30%	24%	28%	22%	34%	25%

Base: (n=223 to 253) depending on characteristic of child

Americans have a very strong sense of the support they would need if they adopted a child out of foster care. Health insurance for pre-existing conditions is clearly the most important, followed by access to educational and informational materials (see Chart 10). Access to various types of support and counseling services are also seen as highly desirable, while access to childcare and financial assistance are seen as less important. The importance Americans place on health insurance is highly consistent with their major concern about the mental and physical health of the child.

Chart 10: Importance of Support Services When Adopting a Child Out of Foster Care



For each of the following, please tell me whether it would be very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important for you in thinking about whether to adopt a child.

Base: Randomly selected 1/2 sample of all respondents (n=722)

As the survey did for concerns about adoption, it looked at how the importance of these services might vary with the age and race of children (Table 6), finding that the child's characteristics made little difference in the perceived need for services.

Table 6: Support Importance Not Dependant On Child's Age Or Race

Adopted Children Are:	African-American Infant	White Infant/Toddler	African – Elementary School	White Elementary School	African – Teenager	White Teenager
% saying "very Important"						
Financial	39%	24%	28%	43%	35%	37%
Counseling services for parents	51%	43%	49%	58%	45%	55%
Support groups for parents	49%	44%	46%	51%	54%	50%
Support groups for child	56%	48%	57%	60%	62%	60%
Access to education/information	69%	64%	68%	65%	68%	78%
Access to childcare	41%	33%	44%	50%	37%	43%
Health insurance for pre-existing condition	85%	74%	75%	81%	73%	74%

Base: (n=111 to 127) depending on characteristic of child

Race of Survey Participants and Views About Foster Care Adoption

Since this series of questions asked about the race of the child, a key question is whether the race of respondents affected the concerns they had about foster care adoption. In fact, respondents' race had little impact overall on their concerns. African-Americans and Hispanics express slightly more concern about the physical health of the child, their own financial resources, and the age of the child than do Whites. In addition, Hispanics express more concern than African-Americans or Whites about having the parenting skills needed to raise foster children.

African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely than Whites to consider each of the support services very important. The differences are most significant for financial assistance, support groups for the adoptive child and access to childcare. The differences are least significant for health insurance for pre-existing conditions.

Views About Foster Care Adoption and Adoption Support, Experience, and Consideration

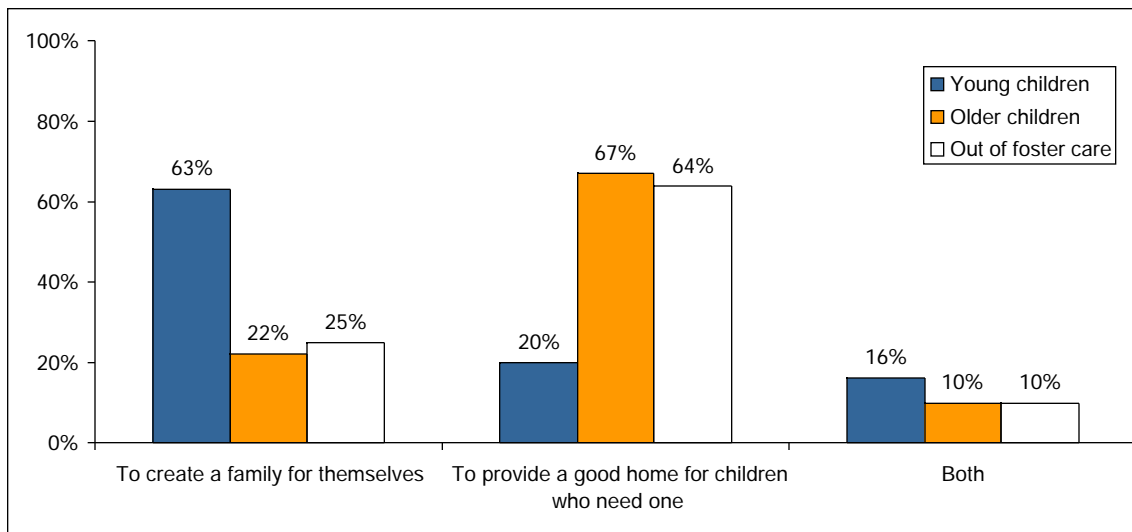
In general, the concerns that respondents have about foster care adoption and the importance they ascribe to various services are not strongly related to their overall views about adoption. The few relationships in the data that were statistically significant were small and not substantively compelling. The mental health concerns findings are typical of the kinds of relationships in the data. Among those who have never considered adopting a child, 69% say that the mental health of the child is a major concern, compared to 61% of those who have very seriously considered adopting. But substantively, both groups consider mental health a major concern.

2.3 Adoptive Parents: Motivations and Perceptions

2.3.1 Motivations for Adopting

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Americans think most parents adopt young children primarily to create a family for themselves (see Chart 11), and only 20% think most parents adopt young children to provide a good home for children who need one. The results are reversed when Americans think about why people adopt children out of foster care: 64% think it is mainly to provide a good home for children and only 25% think it is to create a family for themselves. The motivations of parents who adopt older children are seen as essentially the same as for parents who adopt children out of foster care: 67% say it is to provide a good home for children.

Chart 11: Building a Family and Caring for Children As Motivations for Adopting Children



Which do you think is the more important reason why most parents adopt...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

African-Americans are more likely than Whites or Hispanics to view adopting a young child as providing a good home. Among African-Americans, 34% indicate that this is the most important motivation as compared to only 20% of Hispanics and 18% of Whites.

General views about adoption are not strongly associated with views about motivations for adopting. However, 41% of Americans who have an unfavorable opinion about adoption think people who adopt children out of foster care do so to create a family for themselves as compared to only 24% of those with very or somewhat favorable opinions about adoption.

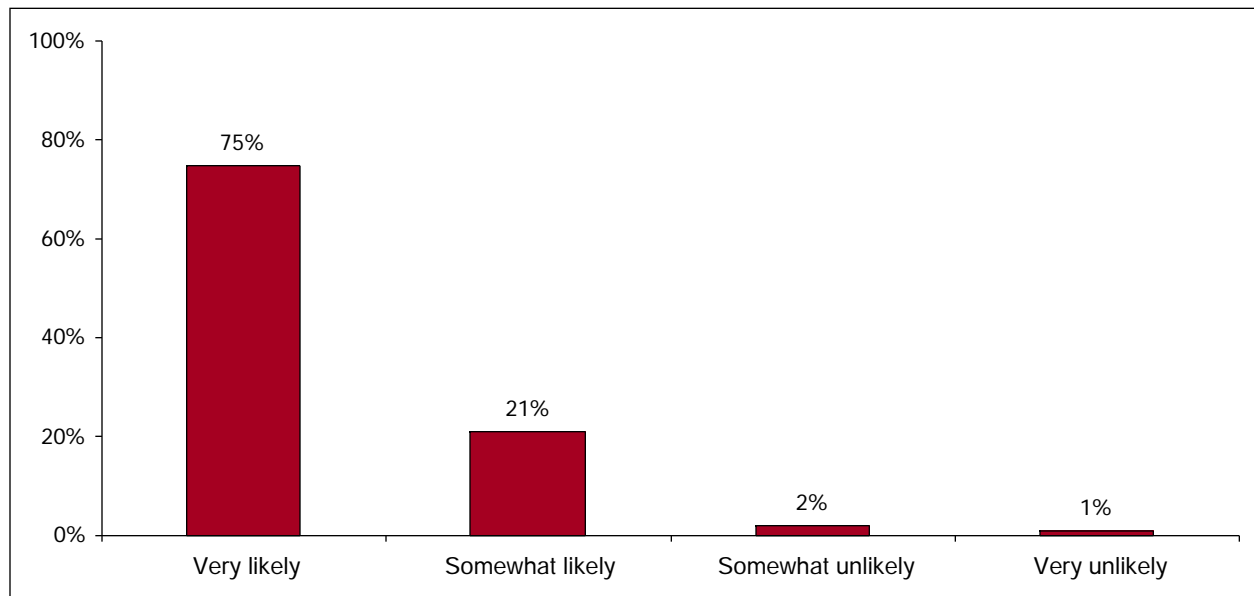
2.3.2 Love for Adopted Children and Satisfaction of Parenting Adopted Children

Overall, 75% of Americans believe that adoptive parents are very likely to love their adoptive children as much as children born to them (see Chart 12). They also think that raising adoptive children is satisfying: 57% think parents get the same satisfaction from raising adopted children as they would from raising a child born to them and 29% think they get more satisfaction (see Chart 13).

Americans who have an unfavorable view of adoption dissent from this viewpoint to a certain degree. Only 50% think it is very likely that adoptive parents love their children as much as children born to them, compared to 66% of those with a somewhat favorable opinion and 83% of those with a very favorable opinion. Similarly, 71% of those with a very unfavorable opinion about adoption think parents get the same or more satisfaction out of raising their adoptive children, as compared to 80% of those with a somewhat favorable view and 90% of those with a very favorable opinion.

Experience with adoption is associated with a more positive view of adoptive parenting. Among those with experience, 80% think it is very likely that parents love their adoptive children as much as children born to them, as compared to 67% of those with no experience. Similarly, 89% of those with experience say parents get the same or more satisfaction out of raising their adoptive children, as compared to 79% of those with no experience.

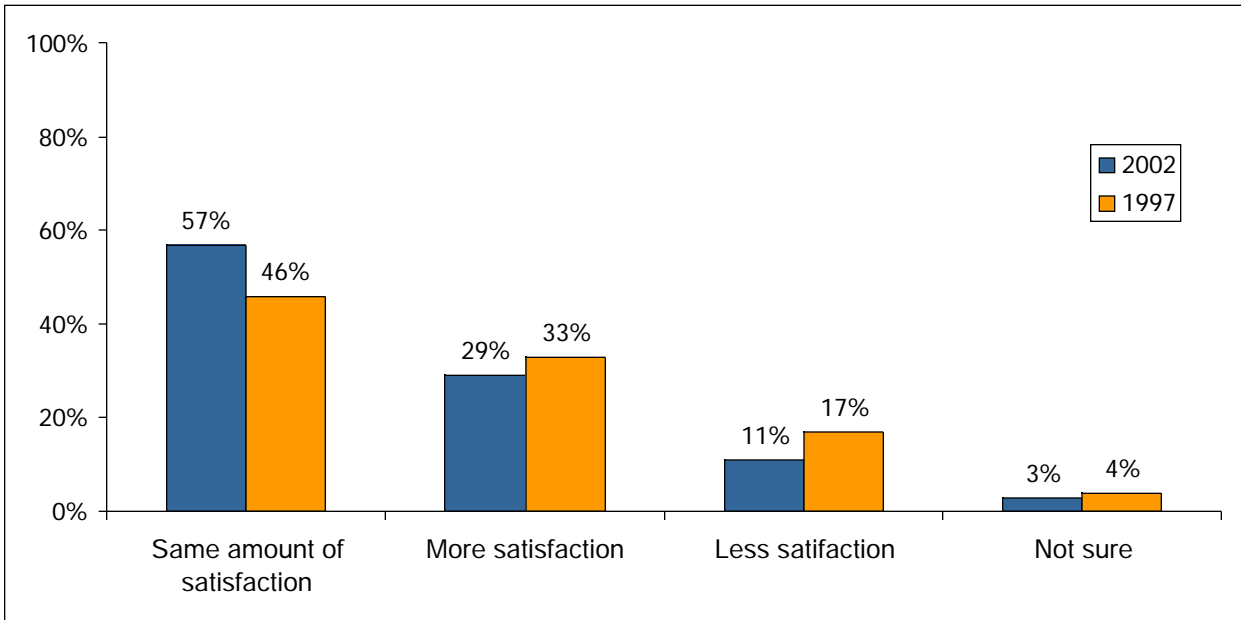
Chart 12: Americans Think Adoptive Parents Love Their Adopted Children As Much As Biological Children



How likely is it that parents who adopt children will love them as much as they would have loved children they gave birth to? Is it...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Chart 13: Americans Think Raising An Adopted Child Is Satisfying



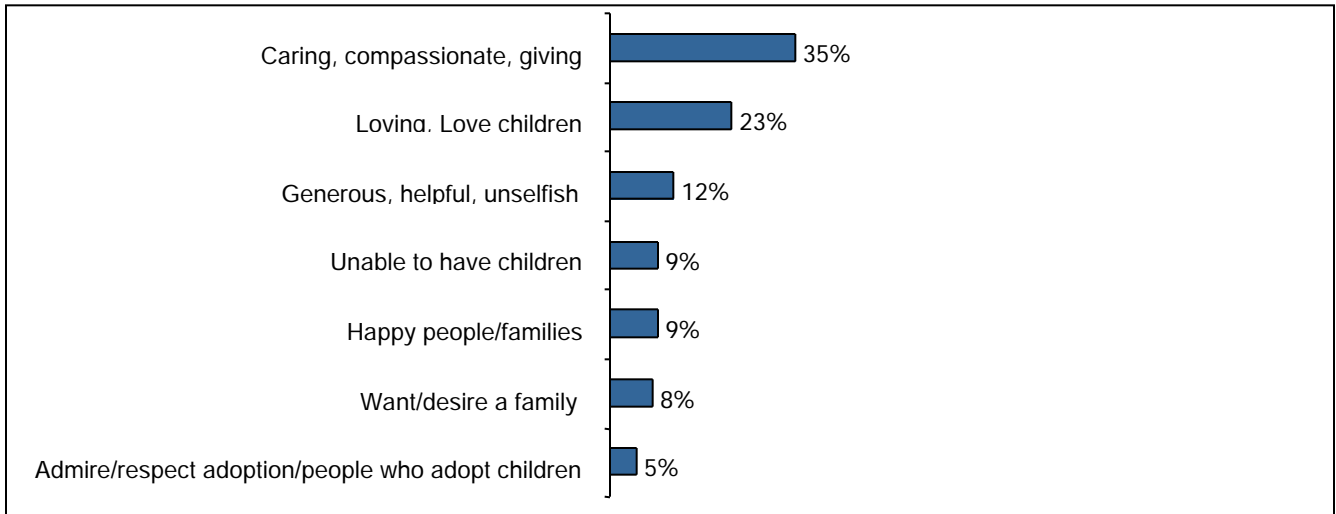
Do you think parents get the same amount of satisfaction out of raising an adopted child as raising a child born to them, more satisfaction, or less satisfaction?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

2.3.3 Perceptions of Adoptive Parents

Americans see adoptive parents as caring, compassionate, loving and generous. They also see them as lucky, advantaged, and unselfish (see Charts 14 and 15). The latter perceptions are unchanged since the 1997 Benchmark Survey. These views are essentially shared by all Americans, regardless of their views about or experience with adoption.

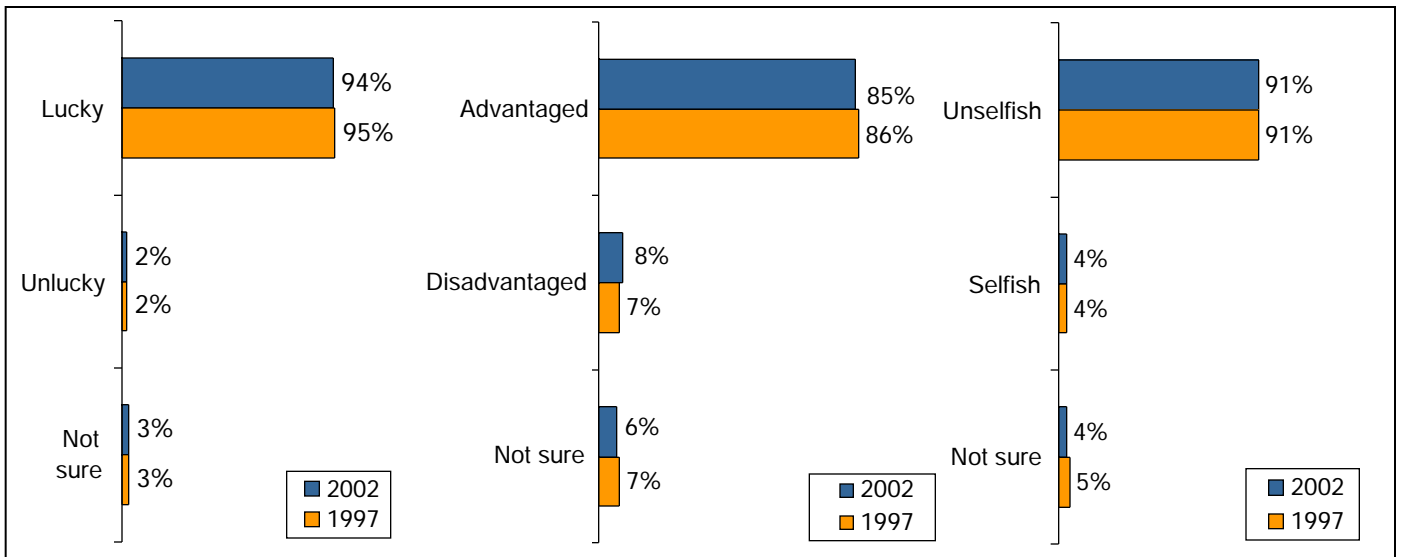
Chart 14: Americans Have Positive Perceptions of Adoptive Parents



When you think of people who have adopted children, what comes to mind first?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Chart 15: Adoptive Parents are Seen as Lucky, Advantaged, and Unselfish



In your opinion, when parents adopt a child, are the parents...?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

2.4 Emerging Changes in Adoption Practices

In the last decade, adoption has undergone significant change. Adoptive children are more likely to seek out their birth parents, and there are more birth and adoptive parents arranging “open” adoptions (on-going contact and/or information exchanged between adoptive and birth families). International adoptions and inter-racial adoptions have substantially increased in number.

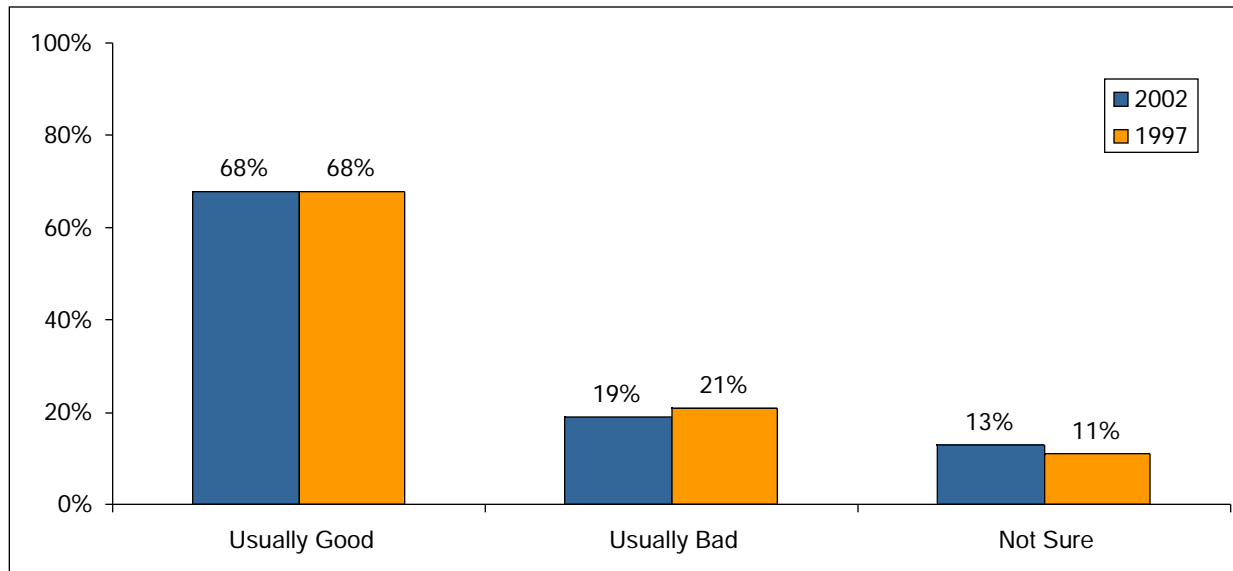
2.4.1 Openness in Adoption

Views About Adopted Children Seeking Out Birth Parents

Most (68%) Americans think it is usually a good thing for the adopted child and, increasingly, for the adoptive parents (60%), when children seek out their birth parents. Opinion is more divided on whether this is good for birth parents, although a clear plurality (49%) think it is a good idea (see Charts 16-18).

Americans who have an unfavorable opinion about adoption are less likely (55%) to think it is usually a good thing for the adopted child when they seek out their birth parents than are those with somewhat (66%) or very (70%) favorable opinions about adoption. They are also less likely to think it is usually a good thing for the birth parents (36%) than are those with somewhat (45%) or very (52%) favorable opinions about adoption. Surprisingly, support for adoption has no relationship to opinions about whether a child seeking out their birth parents is good for adoptive parents.

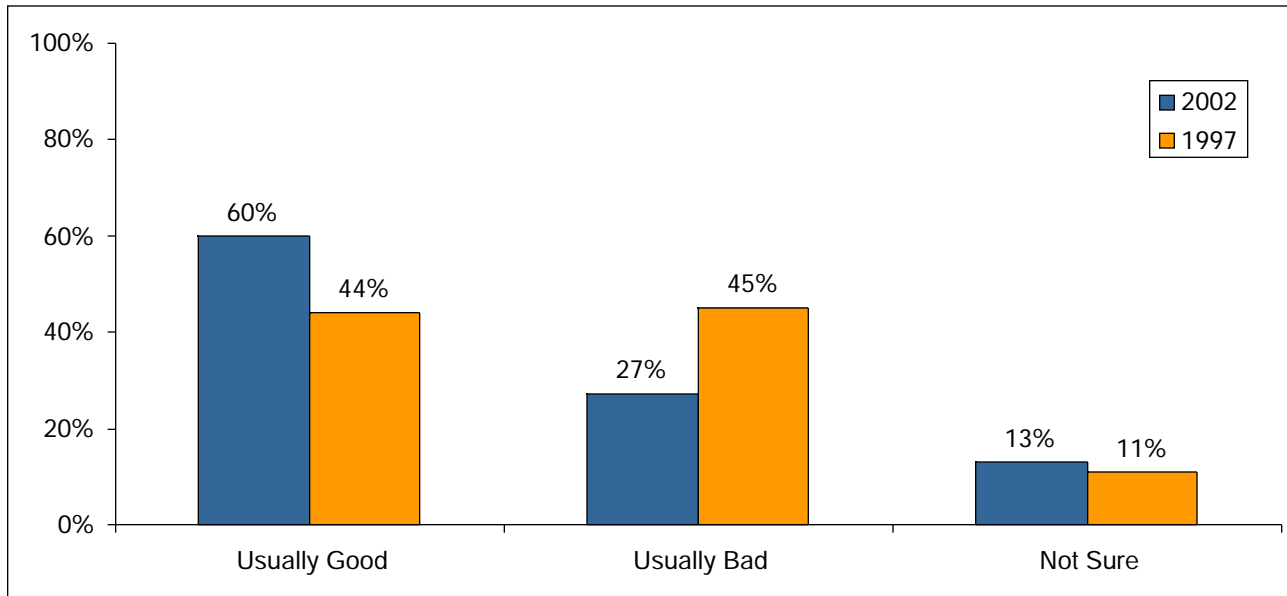
Chart 16: Americans Think It Is Usually Good for the Child When They Look For and Find Their Birth Parents



Sometimes people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who placed them for adoption. When this happens, is this usually a good thing or bad thing for the adopted person?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

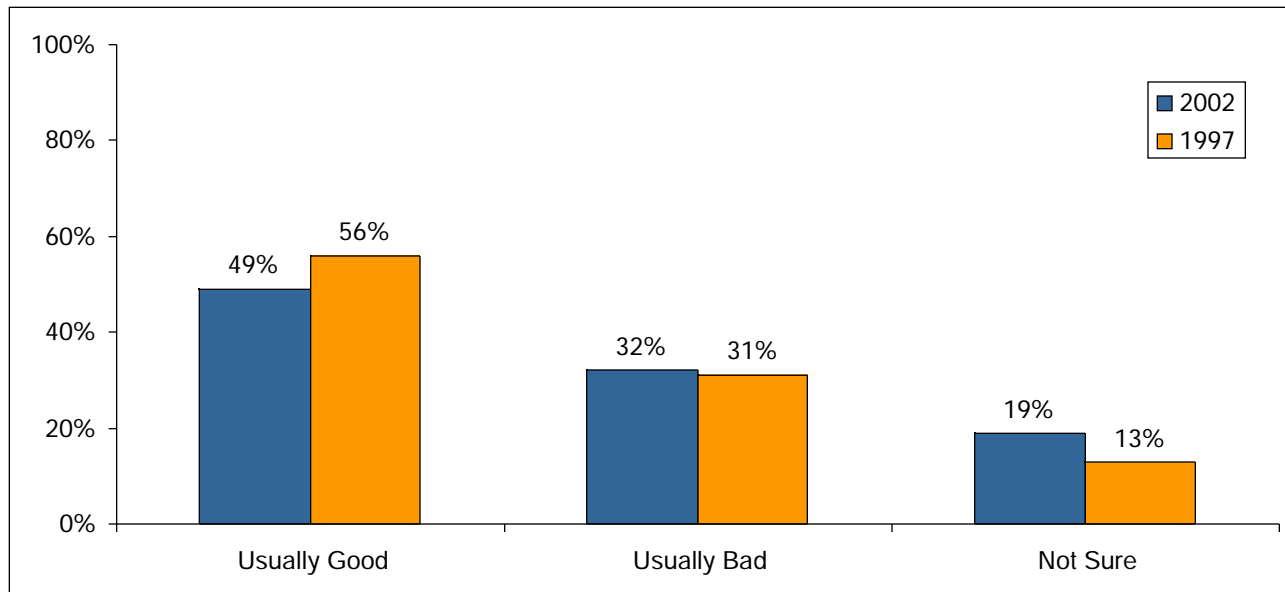
Chart 17: Searching For Birth Parents: Impact on Adoptive Parents



Sometimes people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who placed them for adoption. When this happens, is this usually a good thing or bad thing for the parents who adopted them?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

Chart 18: Searching For Birth Parents: Impact on Birth Parents



Sometimes people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who placed them for adoption. When this happens, is this usually a good thing or bad thing for the parents who placed them for adoption?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

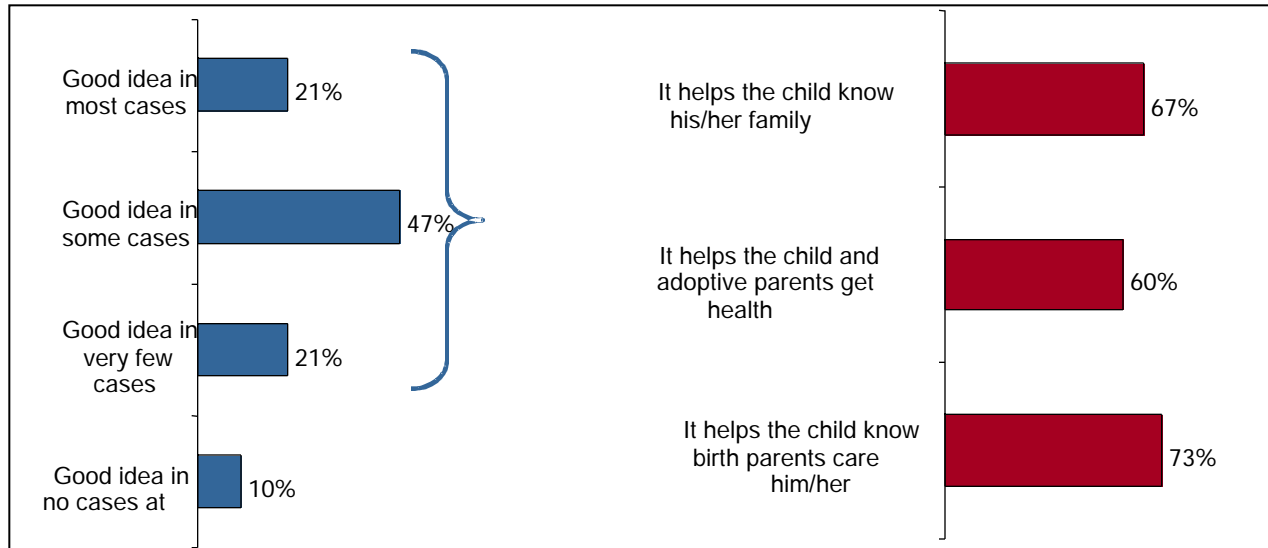


Views About “Open-Adoption”

Open adoptions, in which the adoptive parents, birth parents, and the child are in direct contact have become more common in recent years. Americans are divided in their opinions about open adoption. About a fifth (21%) think it is a good idea in most cases, nearly half (47%) think it is a good idea in some cases, another fifth (21%) think it is a good idea in only a very few cases, and 10% think it is never a good idea (see Chart 19).

Americans who think that open adoption is a good idea in at least a few cases recognize the emotional, health and informational benefits that birth parents, adoptive parents, and the adopted child might receive from an open adoption.

Chart 19: Attitudes about “Open Adoption”



Do you think this is a good idea in most cases, in some cases, in very few cases, or in no cases at all?

Do you think this is a good idea because...?

Base: All respondents (n=1,416 for open adoption a good idea; and 1,244 for why it is a good idea)

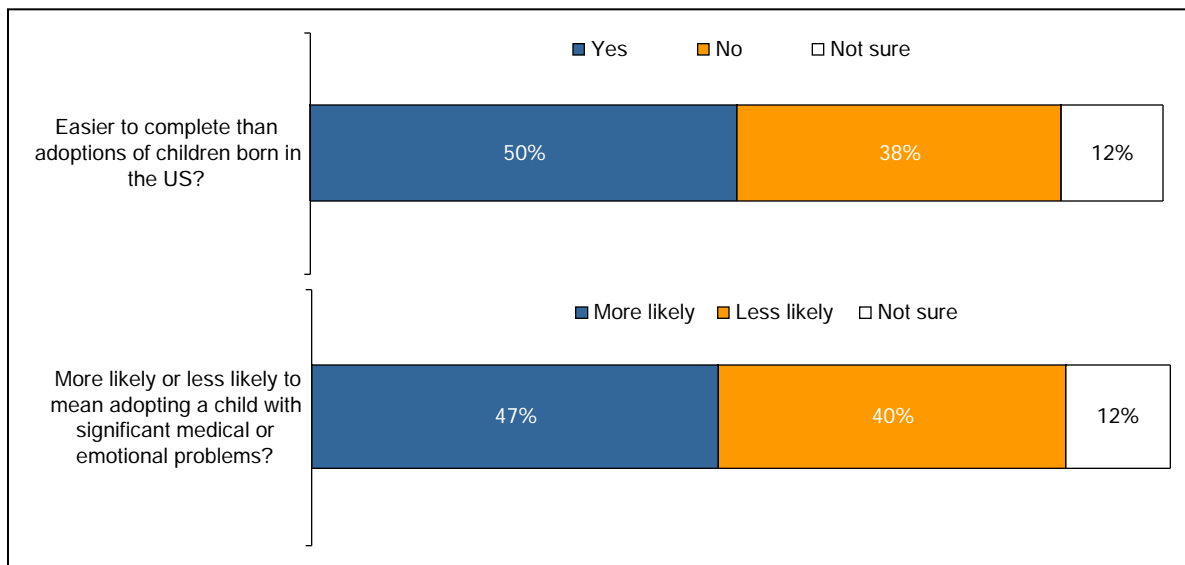
2.4.2 International Adoption

The focus of this study was on domestic adoption, but included a few questions on international adoption to provide some perspective. As Chart 20 shows, on balance more Americans think that international adoption is easier to complete than domestic adoption.

The survey also found that 47% of Americans think that an internationally adopted child is more likely to have significant medical or emotional problems than a domestically adopted child. This finding should be considered in light of the fact that a major concern Americans have about adopting a child out of foster care is the chance that the child will have significant medical or emotional problems.

Given Americans' concerns about health and behavioral issues, it is interesting to note that both international adoptions and adoptions out of foster care have increased substantially over the last several years. International adoptions increased from just over 11,000 in 1996 to over 19,000 in 2001 and foster care adoptions increased from 28,000 in 1996 to 50,000 in 2000.

Chart 20: International Adoption: Perceived Easier Than Domestic But More Risk of Medical or Emotional Problems



We've been talking a lot about adopting children born in the United States. Some children born in other countries are sometimes adopted by Americans and brought to the United States. Based on what you read, heard or seen, would you say that such international adoptions are...?

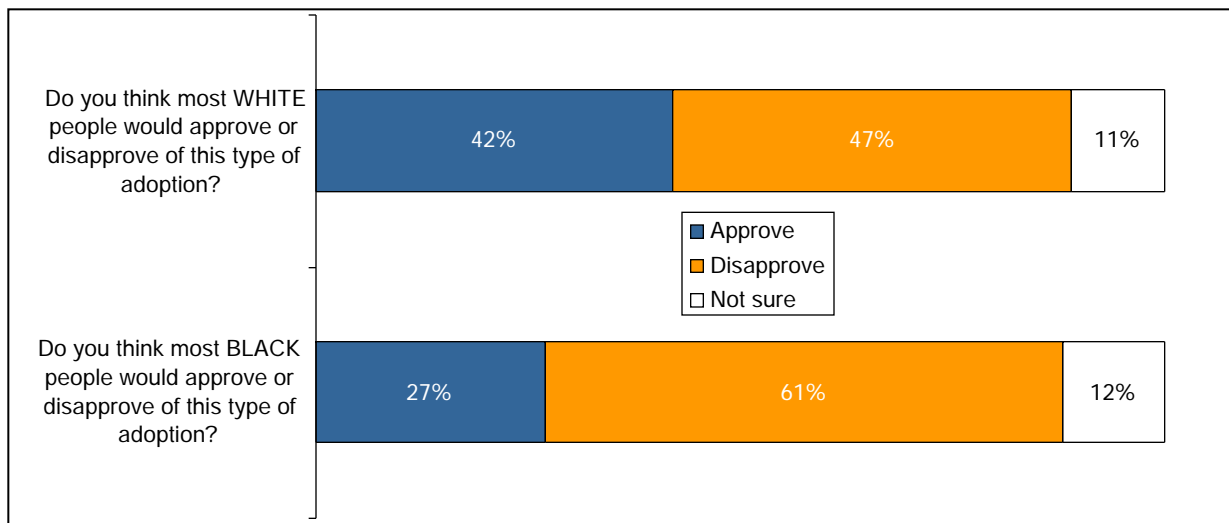
Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

2.4.3 Inter-racial Adoption: Perceptions of Approval and Disapproval

The survey’s approach on how individuals perceive opinion about inter-racial adoption and the impact of those perceptions on their willingness to consider adopting a child of a different race than themselves is exploratory and tentative, but reveals some useful findings. The subject was pursued because views expressed in the focus groups suggested that there would be significant disapproval of inter-racial adoption.

Americans believe that there is substantial opposition to inter-racial adoption among both African-Americans and Whites, with the perceived opposition somewhat higher among African-Americans (see Charts 21 and 22). The perception of opposition is highest among those 55 and older. Assuming that this represents real generational change, a significant decrease in perceived disapproval over the next 15-20 years might be expected.

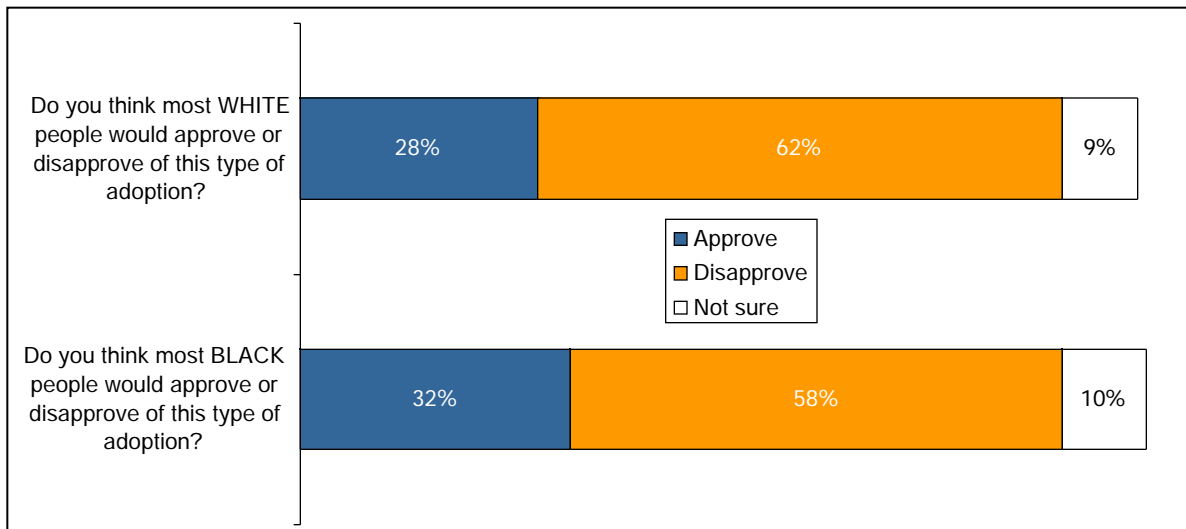
Chart 21: Perceived Approval and Disapproval of Inter-Racial Adoption When the Parents Are White and the Child is African-American



Now I'd like you to think about adoptions where the adoptive parents are **white** and the adopted child is **black**.

Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Chart 22: Perceived Approval and Disapproval of Inter-Racial Adoption When the Parents Are African-American and the Child is White



Now I'd like you to think about adoptions where the adoptive parents are **black** and the adopted child is **white**.

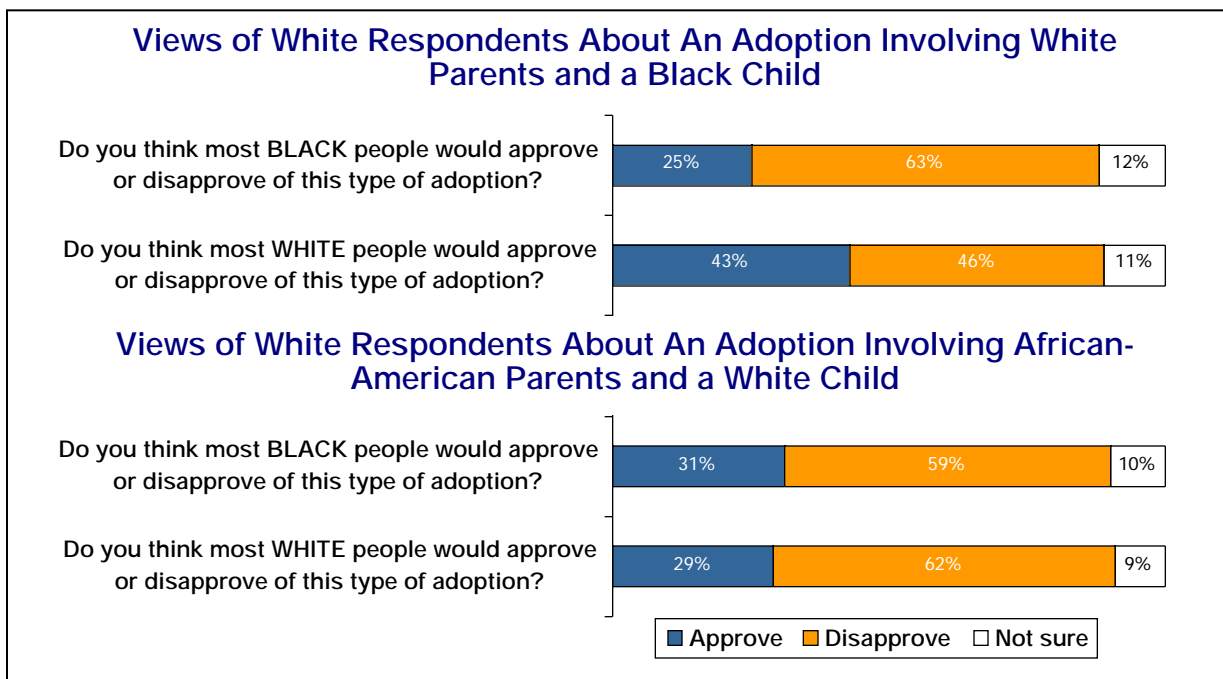
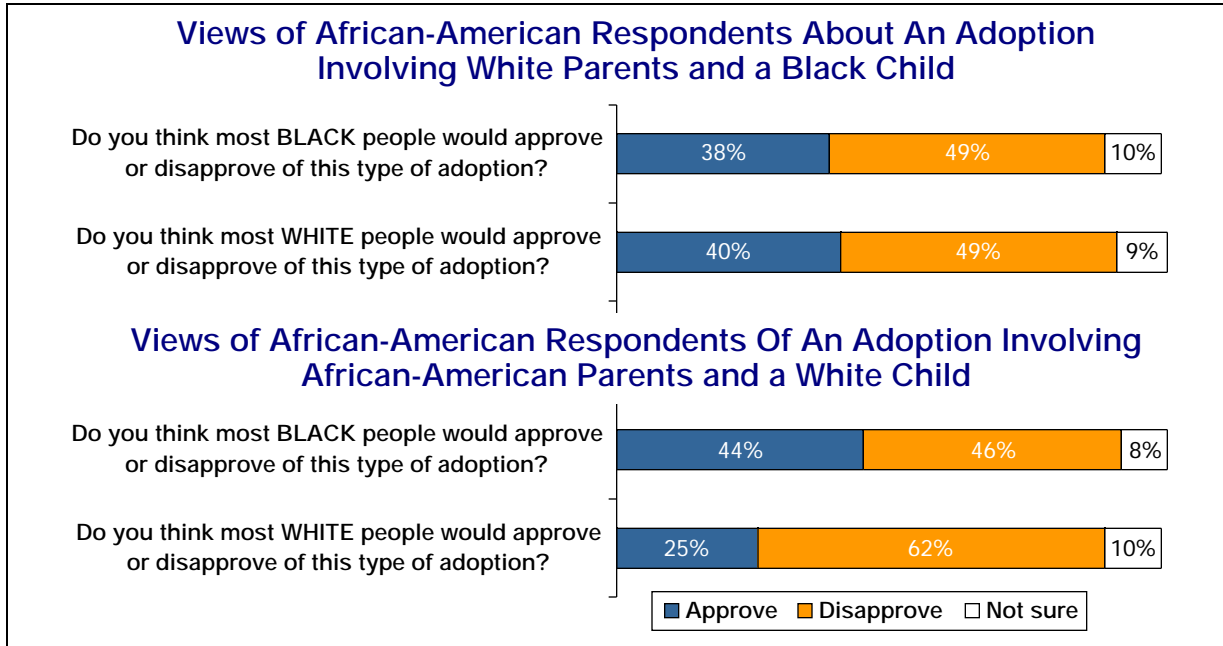
Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

When the results were examined by the race of the respondent (see Chart 23), it was found that Whites tend to perceive higher levels of disapproval of inter-racial adoption in the African-American community than African-Americans do. African-Americans tend to perceive about the same level of disapproval among Whites as Whites themselves do.

This finding suggests that Whites over-estimate the level of opposition to inter-racial adoption in the African-American community. This perception of opposition may have an overall inhibiting impact on the willingness of some Whites to consider adopting an African-American child. That is, some Whites may decide not to adopt an African-American child because they are concerned about how that child (and they as the child's parents) might be perceived by the African-American community. The same logic would also apply to African-Americans considering adopting a White child.

The survey results support this line of reasoning. Respondents, whether African-American or White, who think that inter-racial adoption is disapproved of by either African-Americans or Whites are less likely to be willing to adopt a child of a different race than themselves. Changing what people perceive as the climate of opinion about inter-racial adoption therefore would likely lead to an increase in inter-racial adoption.

Chart 23: Perceptions About Inter-Racial Adoptions Among Whites and African-Americans

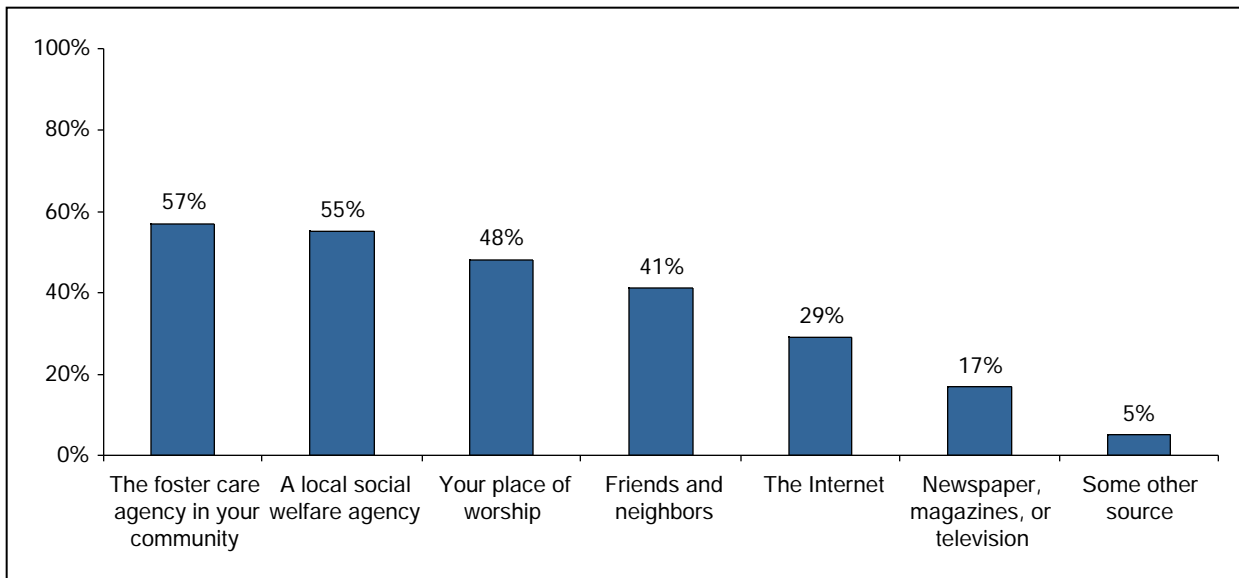


2.5 How Americans Learn About Adoption

Knowing people who have adopted or been adopted, whether friends or family, is one important way in which people learn about adoption. But there are other potential sources of information. Government agencies, social welfare organizations, churches, the media, and the Internet all have potential roles to play. Survey results that can help the adoption community understand how Americans use resources are presented in this section.

When they think about where to turn for information or advice about adoption, Americans tend to think first of foster care or social welfare agencies in their communities and of their place of worship. Friends and neighbors and the Internet are also important to significant numbers of Americans. Traditional news sources such as newspapers or magazines are least important (see Chart 24).

Chart 24: Potential Sources for Information or Advice About Adoption



Suppose you wanted to adopt a child. Which of the following would you turn to for information or advice on how to go about it?

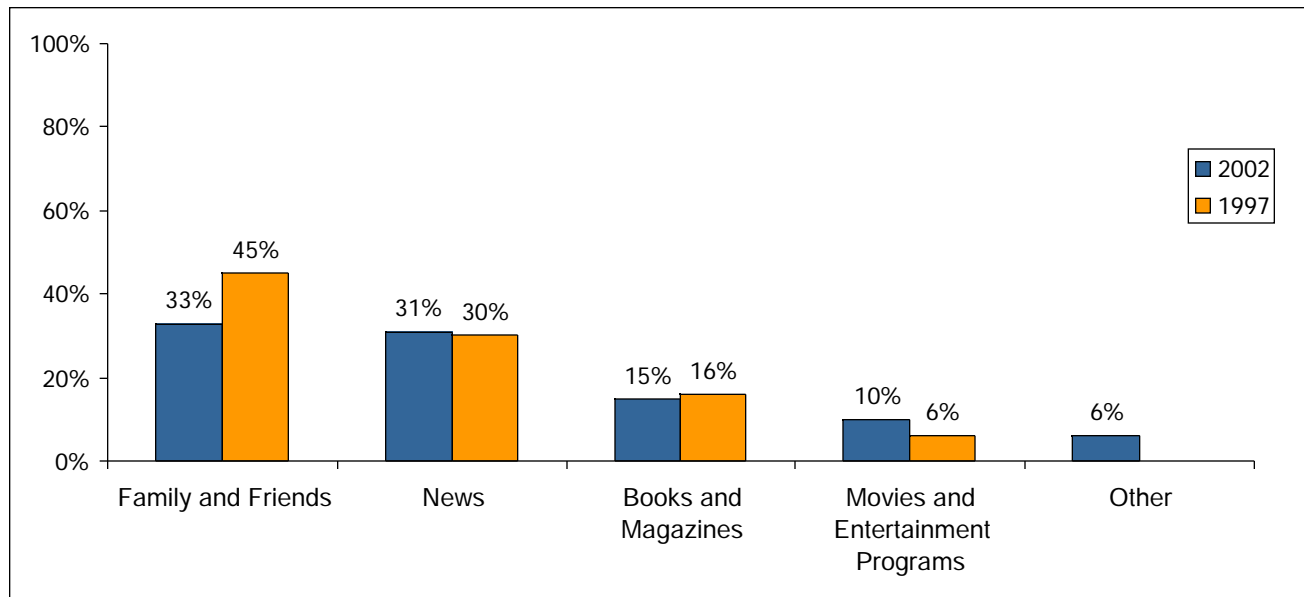
Base: All respondents (n=1,416)

Public information campaigns should take into account some important findings about the information-seeking behavior of key sub-groups in this study:

- 18-34 year olds place as much emphasis on the Internet as they do on places of worship (40% for both sources).
- Married Americans think of places of worship (52%) as often as they do foster care or social welfare agencies. Among singles (never married) only 39% think of places of worship, as compared to 56% who think of social welfare agencies, 66% who think of foster care agencies, and 34% who think of the Internet.
- African-Americans think of social welfare agencies (64%) more often than do Whites (55%) or Hispanics (46%).

Americans' main sources of information about adoption today are families and friends and the news media, with books and magazines, and movies and entertainment less important. As can be seen from Chart 26 below, the relative importance of family and friends has declined since the 1997 Benchmark Study, while the importance of movies and entertainment has grown slightly.

Chart 25: Main Source of Adoption Information Today



What is your MAIN source of information about adoption? Do you get most of your information about adoption from the news, movies and entertainment programs, books and magazines, or family and friends?

Base: All respondents (2002: n=1,416); (1997: n=1,554)

Americans believe that media coverage of adoption is either very (19%) or somewhat (53%) favorable. Only a fifth think it is either somewhat (15%) or very (6%) unfavorable, with the balance unsure.



3.0 Conclusion

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute will seek national and local partners to translate this critical knowledge into action. We will seek to engage adoption professionals, public officials, journalists, employers and – most important – the American public – in a concerted effort to find permanent homes and loving families for adoptable children and to effectively support the families who adopt them.

If you have any questions regarding the results, methodology or distribution of this survey, please contact the organizations that are proudly sponsoring this research in order to find permanent homes and loving families for waiting children:

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