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Review of *A Sealed and Sacred Kinship: The Culture of Policies and Practices in American Adoption*. Judith S. Modell. Reviewed by Dorinda N. Noble.

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without emphasis placed on the criteria of participants likelihood of success. Her analysis illustrates how a proposed good idea in policy language becomes tarnished as it is implemented.

Quaid's study is an important one for exposing many of the myths about welfare to work programs. By using implementation analysis to show 'good ideas' fail to be translated into effective social policies, her book makes an important contribution. It also provides helpful insights into understanding how policy relates to practice. Although the case studies are somewhat detailed, her book is instructive in showing how policy relates to practice and how it is implemented in the real world. It deserves to be widely read.

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Judith S. Modell, *A Sealed and Sacred Kinship: The Culture of Policies and Practices in American Adoption*. New York: Berghahn, 2002. \$49.95 hardcover.

A Sealed and Secret Kinship by Judith Modell, provides an intriguing, highly-readable overview of American attitudes toward adoption, foster care, and parenting in general. Such a discussion is relevant for a nation with approximately 500,000 children in out-of-home care, a statistic no policy maker or child advocate finds acceptable. The public is dismayed by tales of children in a world of hurt, such as the recent horrific story of three New Jersey children, one of them dead, locked in a small room for months—and the responsible party was a "foster" parent who was overseeing the children while their mother was incarcerated.

Modell's asserts that some societies assume corporate responsibility for children. In traditional Hawaiian culture, parents "gift" their children to others, and neither birth parents, substitute parents, or children experience social recriminations. That is not the case in mainstream American society, where foster parents are paid child care staff (assumed by many to be motivated by money), and foster children are perceived to be waifs or "bad kids" dressed in cast-off clothes and probably on their way to prison or other unfortunate ends.

The backdrop for this discussion is Modell's analysis of the secrets of parenthood, particularly adoption. Adoption, historically a private, secretive arrangement, has been buffeted by waves of social change in which birth parents and adult adoptees have demanded access to adoption records, those pieces of paper that offer another dimension to personal identity. Though the open records arguments ostensibly center on individual rights and needs, they really speak to our cultural definitions of being a parent and being a child. American society sees relinquishment of a child for adoption as a shameful abdication of duty, and sees the mother (more so than the father) who is unable to effectively parent as a failure at her most important job.

Modell's contention is that the more we can blame individuals for the woes of our children, the less we have to blame society for not providing the supports individuals need to be effective parents. Our adoption and foster care policies are built on the premise that parenting is an intensely personal endeavor. Even when society through the child welfare apparatus of each state has to care for a child, that situation is seen as temporary until the family can be rehabilitated (even though states tend to offer few resources for rehabilitation), or the child can be moved into a permanent arrangement (typically adoption and often adoption by strangers).

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 obliquely admitted that our society's child welfare system is bankrupt. Its provision that all children in state care must have a permanent plan for their care within 12 months of being removed from their homes begs the question that many of these children come from family situations marked by such economic, educational, moral, and health deprivation that 12 months of intervention can hardly make a dent. The option that ASFA encourages is adoption. ASFA, by advocating the "open arms" of adoption as an answer for abused and neglected children, has shifted adoption from a personal option of adding members to the family, to a rescue mission for hurting children, a struggling child welfare system, and a desperate society. Through offering federal financial rewards to states that increase their adoption rates, the government signals it is willing to pay to have individuals take this problem of dependent children off society's hands. The law

sanctions subsidies and tax breaks for people who adopt dependent children, particularly special needs children, but states are left in control of distributing these subsidies. In the current belt-tightening atmosphere, those subsidies have all but disappeared in some states.

ASFA also deepened the prevailing perception that foster care is bad. Foster parents are paid to care for children. American society frowns upon exchanging money for children; our mythology is that we care for children because we love them. Agencies, however, train foster parents to maintain emotional distance from their foster children and to expect sudden, draconian disruptions in the placement. In essence, foster parents are trained to act like caretakers, not loving parents. ASFA increased the possibilities of allowing foster parents to adopt—known as fostadopt—but many foster parents who care for special needs children must have the continuing financial support of the state to meet their children's needs. Without subsidies, that continuing support is not possible in adoption; this reality mitigates against adoption for many children.

Modell points out that adoption is increasingly a market-driven enterprise in which adoptive parents must be able to part with tens of thousands of dollars to acquire a child. And many adoptive parents are not opening their arms to the needy children of American, but are instead turning to the international adoption market. Many are also using the Internet to advertise their homes and to find announcements of available children. We have moved from secret, hidden records to generally-worded Internet announcements hawking potential adoptions to the world.

Modell emphasizes the remarkable paradoxes of American adoption: it is a confidential matter which is publicly debated; it is a process which assumes that a child's identity can be totally transformed, even though it never entirely relinquishes the importance of genetics; it is an arrangement that often centers more on the fitness of the adoptive parents than the needs of the child; it is a highly individualized event which is also a mechanism for social and cultural control. This book offers a thought-provoking exposition of the ironies of adoption, and by extension, the inconsistencies of our social attitudes toward parenting in general.

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