

Effects of Adoptive Status on Evaluations of Children

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ABSTRACT. The authors examined whether being adopted or semi-adopted (born of artificial insemination with donor sperm and genetically linked to the mother but not to the social father) is a stigmatizing attribute affecting evaluations made of a child, and whether the gender of the rater moderates the effects of adoptive status on evaluations of children. Participants included 129 undergraduate students from the United States who were presented with written scenarios describing a child's adoptive status. They were asked to evaluate the child on a number of attributes. Results showed that adoptive status did not affect evaluations of children, although rater gender moderated the effects of adoptive status.

MODERN MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY is causing changes in family structure. With the help of assisted reproduction techniques, previously infertile couples now have the opportunity to give birth to genetically linked children. In the past, adoption was the only avenue such couples had to create a family. As a result of medical advances, a child may be genetically linked to social parents in varying degrees. A child may be *nonadopted* (genetically related to both parents), *semi-adopted* (born via artificial insemination by donor sperm and genetically related to the mother but not to the social father), or *adopted* (genetically unrelated to either social parent).

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One facet of adoption that researchers have not thoroughly investigated is the question of how adopted children are perceived. It is unknown whether they are viewed as second best or as having bad blood as some researchers have postulated (Miall, 1987). It is also unknown whether judgments made about adopted children are based on, or influenced by, their adoptive status. Even less research has been conducted on semi-adopted children. This void is particularly recognizable because artificial insemination by donor (AID) has been a widely implemented treatment for male infertility for over a century.

Introduction

Infertility is typically defined as the inability to conceive after a year of unprotected intercourse or the inability to carry a pregnancy to term (Shapiro, 1988). It is a widespread problem estimated to affect between 10% and 17% of couples of childbearing age in the United States (Shiloh, Larom, & Ben-Rafael, 1991; Waltzer, 1982). Childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary, is seen in Western cultures as a form of deviant conduct because it is statistically uncommon and violates the prevailing norms of acceptable masculine and feminine behavior (Lampman & Dowling-Guyer, 1995; Miall, 1986). As a result, it is viewed as a discrediting or stigmatizing attribute (Miall, 1985, 1986, 1987; Veevers, 1972).

Infertility can be a result of either male or female reproductive failure. Just as society holds strong cultural expectations of motherhood, it also places perhaps an even stronger emphasis on male virility. Consequently, male infertility may represent a greater crisis for an infertile couple. In fact, some evidence suggests that male infertility has a more negative impact on an infertile couple than female infertility (Connolly, Edelmann, & Cooke, 1987). Although it is clear that biological relatedness to offspring is valued by both men and women, some evidence suggests that it may be most important for men (Williams, 1992). On the basis of many women's openness to adoption as an alternate means to achieve motherhood, Crowe (1985) ascertained that social motherhood is more important to in vitro fertilization patients than biological motherhood. However, some women reported that their husbands preferred to remain childless rather than adopt. Crowe concluded that although "women may be able to relinquish definitions (of parenthood) based on biological relationships, men may not be willing to do so" (p. 549).

Adoption

Adoption has long been the traditional route used by infertile couples to create a family, although it is most often the last resort. It is estimated that approximately 1% of the population of the United States is adopted and that 3% to 4% of children under age 18 are adopted (MacIntyre, 1990; Miall, 1987).

Miall (1987) found that there is a perceived negative attitude toward adoption. She found that the majority of adoptive parents and involuntarily childless women referred to the perceived societal belief that adopted children are somehow inferior to biological children, primarily because of their suspect genetic backgrounds. In her study, respondents claimed that there is a perception that adoption is a second choice, and that if a couple is capable of bearing biological children they would surely do so. Moreover, because the biological heritage of an adopted child is frequently unknown, participants in her study felt that society viewed adopted children as "not quite measuring up" or as having "bad blood" (p. 37).

Other researchers have also referred to society's negative attitudes toward adoption. However, there is only anecdotal information suggesting a stigma of adoption. For instance, Brodzinsky (1984) discussed adoption revelation in terms of "protecting the child from the stigma which society attaches to adoption" (p. 105).

Artificial Insemination by Donor

AID has been used for over a century and is perhaps the most widely practiced treatment for male infertility in the United States (Sanschagrin, Humber, Speirs, & Duder, 1993; Waltzer, 1982). AID is a relatively simple procedure, consisting of injecting semen from an anonymous donor into the genital tract of a woman.

AID carries a high degree of secrecy (Holbrook, 1990; Rowland, 1985; Sanschagrin et al., 1993; Sparks & Hamilton, 1991). The medical profession has assumed this secrecy to protect the three parties involved in the AID procedure: (a) the couple utilizing the procedure, (b) the offspring, and (c) the anonymous donor.

Male infertility has been denied, hidden, or remedied to a greater extent than female infertility. Research has shown that men may distance themselves emotionally from their physiological problems and may be reluctant to start infertility treatment (Lorber & Bandlamudi, 1993). AID is typically shrouded in secrecy and deception to the extent that, in most places in the United States, birth certificates for children born of this technique inaccurately list the husband as the child's biological father. Couples using this technique are often advised not to disclose the child's true origin, thus allowing the couple to keep the husband's infertility a secret (Holbrook, 1990; Rowland, 1985).

As with adoption, researchers have referred to the perceived negative social attitudes and stigmas toward artificial insemination and the children born of AID (Herz, 1989; Rowland, 1985; Sparks & Hamilton, 1991). However, as with adoption, this evidence is mainly anecdotal. In addition, the few studies that have measured general social attitudes toward AID have yielded mixed results. A somewhat dated survey of female college students' attitudes toward infertility treatments, including AID, revealed a neutral attitude toward AID (Matterson & Terranova, 1967). Another study found that only between 14.4%

and 23% of college-age students in the United States considered AID to be an acceptable method of dealing with infertility (Dunn, Ryan, & O'Brien, 1988).

Hypotheses

It is well documented in social psychology and social cognition literature that people evaluate others on the basis of various social-related characteristics (Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, & Tedeschi, 1994; Nesler, Aguinis, Quigley, & Tedeschi, 1993). For instance, attractive people are considered to be more poised, interesting, sociable, independent, dominant, exciting, sexual, intelligent, well adjusted, socially skilled, and successful than those who are unattractive (Moore, Graziano, & Millar, 1987). Moreover, Dion (1972) ascertained that adults displayed differential treatment toward attractive and unattractive children in situations in which the children's behaviors were identical, indicating that adults make attributional inferences or judgments about children solely as a function of their attractiveness. In Dion's study, the evaluators inferred that the attractive children possessed positive qualities such as honesty and pleasantness, even though there was no actual evidence regarding these traits. Conversely, evaluators inferred that unattractive children possessed negative traits such as dishonesty and unpleasantness, in the absence of evidence regarding these traits.

These aforementioned attributions and perceptions reported by Dion (1972) were tied to attractiveness. No research has been conducted to determine whether a similar effect may exist with respect to a child's adoptive status. If adoptive status is a stigmatizing attribute, then it may lead to negative perceptions or attributions. This is a consequential area of applied social psychology because people's evaluations and attributional inferences are related to other people's expectations of them (Chapman & McCauley, 1993; Jamieson, Lydon, Stewart, & Zanna, 1987). Furthermore, expectations lead to behavior, as in the case of self-fulfilling prophecies (Eden, 1992). Because expectations can play a crucial role in the development of a child, it is imperative that factors that may color people's evaluations of a child be identified and better understood. Thus, we postulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. On the basis of the genetically related continuum (adopted, semi-adopted, and nonadopted) and because of the value society places on biological kinship, children who are adopted or semi-adopted will be evaluated more negatively than children who are nonadopted, even in situations in which their behaviors are identical.

Hypothesis 2. Because of the differences between the way men and women react to infertility (i.e., male infertility has a greater socially negative value than female infertility) as well as reactions to the various means to remedy childlessness (i.e., men seem to be more favorable to AID because it conceals infertility and public discreditation), rater gender will moderate the effects of adoptive status on evaluations of children.

Method

Students in a U.S. university received written information describing a transgression supposedly committed by a 7-year-old child. The participants' task was to make attributional inferences regarding the child. We tested the hypotheses using a 3×2 full factorial design in which the independent variables were the adoptive status of the child (adopted vs. semi-adopted vs. nonadopted) and the gender of the rater. The dependent variables were ratings on 10 attribute traits and attributional inferences regarding (a) why the child committed the harmful act, (b) how the child behaves on a typical day, (c) the likelihood the child had committed a similar act in the past, and (d) the likelihood the child will commit a similar act in the future.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 129 students (70 men and 59 women) from introductory psychology classes in a large midwestern university participated in our study. Participants took part in the experiment in partial fulfillment of a class requirement.

After greeting and seating a group of participants, the experimenter administered a large envelope containing stimulus materials corresponding to one of the six experimental conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

Participants received a verbal introduction to the study. They were told that the investigation dealt with perceptions and evaluations, particularly adults' evaluations of children's behavior. The behavioral descriptions that were provided for their evaluations were alleged to have been randomly selected from teachers' daily journal reports in which various types of classroom and playground disturbances were routinely described. Thus, the scenarios were described as having been formulated by people who were present when the behavior occurred.

Furthermore, as a rationale for the evaluation procedure, participants were told that some researchers hypothesize that observers who are actually immersed in real-life situations tend to give "richer judgments of the behavior segments observed." Alternatively, it was explained that other researchers hypothesize that those not present when the behavior segments actually take place "tend to gain a perspective that adds an extra dimension to their judgments." Accordingly, participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to "determine the dimensions along which judgments in these two situations (i.e., direct observation of a behavior segment vs. written information about a behavior segment) are likely to differ." Participants were told that they were taking part in the written information condition.

Following this introduction, participants were instructed to remove the behavioral description page from the envelope, read it once, and then place it back in the envelope. They were told that this procedure simulates real-life obser-

vation of events, in which the instant replay of behavior segments is not possible. The behavioral description page included, in addition to the written description of the child's behavior, the child's name, age, a small photo, and a brief paragraph describing the child's background. Participants were told that this page included all the "information the participants would likely have had they actually been present when the act occurred."

We used photographs of a 7-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl. The pictures were fully crossed with adoptive status. Both children were Caucasian and did not have any overt physical defects or deformities. Neither wore glasses. The paragraph describing the child's background stated that the child was an only child who lived in a fairly typical two-parent, middle-class household in which both parents worked outside the home. We also stated that the child was either (a) adopted at birth, (b) conceived through artificial insemination with anonymous donor sperm, or (c) the natural, biological child of the parents. In all three cases, participants were told that the family struggled with infertility before the child joined the family. The only item that varied among the conditions (other than the child's gender) was the child's adoptive status.

The behavioral description consisted of a very brief written account of a child's transgression originally used by Dion (1972). It was identical for all conditions. The account depicted a situation in which the child was said to have packed a sharp piece of ice into a snowball and thrown it at another child's head, resulting in a deep, bleeding cut. The behavior was depicted as intentional and unjustified. This specific negative situation was purposely chosen to elicit any negative evaluations that may exist regarding adopted and semi-adopted children.

Dependent Variables

After they returned the stimulus materials to the envelope, the participants were instructed to complete the response questionnaire. The response questionnaire contained 14 one-item, 18-point scales, with anchor words at each end. We selected a number of items likely to be relevant to an adult's evaluation of a child's misbehavior (Dion, 1972; Sharma, 1987) a priori for analysis. These items included *pleasant-unpleasant*, *honest-dishonest*, *selfish-unselfish*, *good-bad*, *gentle-rough*, *even tempered-hot tempered*, *aggressive-not aggressive*, *awful-nice*, *friendly-unfriendly*, and *kind-mean*. The others (*intelligent-unintelligent*, *creative-uncreative*, *trusting-not trusting*, and *gloomy-cheerful*) served as filler items. Except for the attributes *selfish-unselfish*, *gentle-rough*, *even tempered-hot tempered*, and *friendly-unfriendly*, all the items were obtained from Dion (1972). Ratings on these attributes provided measures of various facets of favorability or unfavorability. Because the dependent variables were conceptually similar, a composite variable was also computed to be the mean of the scores on these 10 scales. This composite variable (global rating) provided a measure of the overall affective

reaction to the child. On each of these 18-point scales, a high score indicated a favorable rating and a low score indicated an unfavorable rating.

We used two additional questions to assess the following attributional inferences: (a) the likelihood that the child had committed a similar harmful act in the past (answers ranged from *very unlikely* to *very likely*) and (b) the probability that the child would commit a similar act in the future (answers ranged from *very improbable* to *very probable*). These questions were also obtained from Dion (1972).

Finally, we used two open-ended questions obtained from Dion (1972) to assess the reasons the child had committed the harmful act and how the child usually behaved on a typical day. Participants' responses to these questions were classified by two independent coders. Participants' attributional responses to the question asking why the child had committed the harmful act were coded as *primarily situational*, *primarily dispositional*, *mixed*, or *no response*. For the question asking how the child usually behaved on a typical day, responses were coded as *primarily prosocially*, *primarily antisocially*, *mixed*, or *no response*. The few instances in which the coders disagreed on the appropriate category for a given response were resolved by consensus.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants were asked to rate the child as *attractive*, *unattractive*, or *plain-looking* to ensure that the physical appearance of the boy and girl depicted in the scenarios was not a confounding variable. We performed a 2×3 chi-square analysis to test the null hypothesis that the child's gender and attractiveness rating were independent of each other. Results indicated no significant relationship between the gender of the child and the attractiveness rating assigned by the rater, $\chi^2(2, N = 129) = .66, p > .05$. The girl was rated as attractive by 47.7% of the participants, plain by 50.8% of the participants, and unattractive by 1.5% of the participants. The boy was rated as attractive by 42.2% of the participants, plain by 54.7% of the participants, and unattractive by 3.1% of the participants. Thus, both the boy and the girl were not perceived differently regarding overall physical attractiveness.

Effects of Adoptive Status

We performed a series of 3×2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to examine the effects of adoptive status (adopted, semi-adopted, or nonadopted) and rater gender on evaluations of the children.

An examination of the global rating yielded a nonsignificant main effect for adoptive status, $F(2, 123) = 1.21, p > .05$. Similarly, an examination of the 10

individual trait ratings as well as the estimates of past and future behavior yielded a nonsignificant main effect of adoptive status. There was also a nonsignificant main effect of rater gender on the global rating, the 10 individual trait ratings, and estimates of future and past behavior.

We performed a 3×2 chi-square analysis using the three categories of adoptive status (adopted, semi-adopted, and nonadopted) and two categories of rater (male and female) to examine the effect of adoptive status on attributions regarding why the child had committed the harmful act and how the child behaved on a typical day. For the question of why the child had committed the act, our results indicated that there was no association between adoptive status and attributional inferences, $\chi^2(6, N = 129) = 5.43, p > .05$. Similarly, for the question of how the child behaved on a typical day, results indicated that there was no association between adoptive status and the estimates made of typical behavior, $\chi^2(6, N = 129) = 3.15, p > .05$.

Moderating Effects of Rater Gender on the Effects of Adoptive Status on Evaluations of Children

Our second hypothesis (that rater gender would moderate the effect of adoptive status on evaluations) was supported. We found a significant interaction between adoptive status and rater gender for the global rating, $F(2, 123) = 3.47, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$, as well as for the Pleasantness scale, $F(2, 123) = 3.99, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$; Niceness scale, $F(2, 123) = 3.40, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$; Friendliness scale, $F(2, 123) = 4.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$; and Kindness scale, $F(2, 123) = 3.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$. A trend toward statistical significance was noted for the Honesty scale, $F(2, 123) = 2.46, p = .09, \eta^2 = .04$; Gentleness scale, $F(2, 123) = 2.47, p = .09, \eta^2 = .04$; and Temper scale, $F(2, 123) = 2.66, p = .07, \eta^2 = .04$. Table 1 includes the means for the global rating as well as the 10 attribute ratings for all adoptive status and rater gender conditions.

The magnitude of the statistically significant effects, as estimated by eta-squared, shows that adoptive status accounted for between 5% and 7% of the variance in the global rating and ratings of pleasantness, niceness, friendliness, and kindness. These values constitute medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). There was a statistically nonsignificant interaction effect with respect to the estimates of future and past behavior.

The Nature of the Moderating Effect of Rater Gender

We conducted a simple main effect analysis to interpret the aforementioned statistically significant interaction effects. The effect of adoptive status among female raters was statistically significant for the global rating, $F(2, 124) = 3.81, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$; Pleasantness scale, $F(2, 124) = 4.96, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$; Honesty scale, $F(2, 124) = 4.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$; Temper scale, $F(2, 124) = 3.64,$

$p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$; Niceness scale, $F(2, 124) = 5.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$; and Friendliness scale, $F(2, 124) = 3.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. A trend toward statistical significance was noted for the Goodness scale, $F(2, 124) = 2.73$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and the Kindness scale, $F(2, 124) = 2.54$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The effect sizes estimates indicate that, among female raters, adoptive status accounted for between 6% and 8% of the variance in ratings on the global ratings as well as on the Pleasantness, Honesty, Temper, Niceness, and Friendliness scales. These values represent medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1 shows that female raters tended to evaluate nonadopted children most favorably and semi-adopted children least favorably. Further examination of simple comparisons indicated that significant differences on the global rating,

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Attribute Ratings for All Adoptive Status and Rater Gender Conditions

Attribute	Adopted			Semi-adopted			Nonadopted		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Female raters</i>									
Global	9.27	2.16	21	7.91	1.96	19	9.76	1.60	19
Pleasant	11.67	3.40	21	9.11	2.94	19	12.11	2.45	19
Honest	11.24	3.51	21	8.79	2.80	19	11.16	2.19	19
Unselfish	6.52	3.12	21	6.16	2.91	19	5.90	2.31	19
Good	9.43	2.64	21	8.53	2.76	19	10.74	2.45	19
Gentle	9.10	3.55	21	7.58	2.87	19	9.32	2.69	19
Even-tempered	8.81	3.88	21	6.58	2.04	19	9.16	3.34	19
Not-aggressive	6.38	3.17	21	7.74	2.79	19	7.79	3.05	19
Nice	10.00	2.37	21	8.32	2.47	19	10.95	2.92	19
Friendly	10.33	3.10	21	8.37	2.19	19	10.68	2.52	19
Kind	9.19	2.42	21	7.90	1.94	19	9.84	1.83	19
<i>Male raters</i>									
Global	8.36	1.96	23	9.00	2.57	25	8.61	2.43	22
Pleasant	9.96	2.72	23	10.64	3.76	25	10.14	3.52	22
Honest	9.74	2.63	23	9.88	3.09	25	9.77	3.77	22
Unselfish	6.91	2.23	23	6.68	3.09	25	7.23	3.60	22
Good	8.35	2.23	23	9.40	3.45	25	9.23	3.61	22
Gentle	7.78	2.88	23	8.96	3.68	25	7.82	4.07	22
Even-tempered	7.96	3.07	23	8.04	3.23	25	7.50	3.46	22
Not-aggressive	6.30	2.70	23	6.84	3.16	25	6.86	2.70	22
Nice	9.26	2.20	23	9.84	2.81	25	9.73	2.73	22
Friendly	9.13	2.30	23	10.16	3.31	25	8.86	3.17	22
Kind	8.17	2.27	23	9.52	3.50	25	8.96	3.54	22

Pleasantness, Honesty, Goodness, Temper, Niceness, Friendliness, and Kindness scales existed between the semi-adopted and nonadopted children (all $ps < .05$) rather than between the adopted and nonadopted children.

The effect of adoptive status among male raters was not statistically significant for the global rating, $F(2, 124) = .51, p > .05$, or for any of the 10 individual attributes or estimates of future and past behavior (all $ps > .05$).

Discussion

Results of this study show that, even in situations in which behavior was identical, children were evaluated differently as a function of their adoptive status and the gender of the evaluator. Results indicate the existence of a moderating effect of rater gender on the effects of adoptive status on evaluations of children.

In Hypothesis 1, we posited a main effect of adoptive status. However, no statistically significant differences existed between the ratings of adopted versus nonadopted children, either by male or female raters. Consequently, our study provides quantitative evidence to challenge some of the existing anecdotal evidence indicating that adoption is stigmatizing (Brodzinsky, 1984; Miall, 1987). Some previous studies (Brodzinsky, 1984; Miall, 1987) did not directly measure attitudes toward adopted children; they investigated possible challenges and stresses faced by adopted children as well as the psychological and behavioral outcomes that these children experience. One contribution of our study is that we used an experimental design to directly measure perceptions of children with various adoptive statuses (adopted, semi-adopted, or nonadopted). Our results suggest that adoptive status did not affect evaluations of children.

The fact that being adopted did not result in negative attributions was unexpected and contrary to our first hypothesis. A lack of sufficient statistical power to detect the effect can be eliminated. We did find support for our second hypothesis because the detection of moderating effects requires greater statistical power than the detection of main effects (Aguinis, 1995; Aguinis & Pierce, 1998; Aguinis, Pierce, & Stone-Romero, 1994; Aguinis & Stone-Romero, 1997). Thus, given that the moderating effect was detected, the main effect would have also been detected.

We are inclined to offer two substantive explanations for the lack of support for Hypothesis 1. First, despite contrary anecdotal evidence, there may be no negative stereotype of adopted children. People may not think of adopted children as being second rate, having bad blood, or having a suspect genetic background (Miall, 1987). It may not be true that people expect more problematic behavior from adopted children in comparison with nonadopted children (Kirk, 1981). Actually, this line of reasoning is consistent with previous research that ascertained that adoptive status did not affect evaluations made by mental health professionals about hypothetical adopted and nonadopted adolescent clients

(Weiss, 1987). Likewise, adoptive status may not be a stigmatizing attribute among populations of college students in the United States or better educated samples, although this stigma may exist among other populations.

It is also possible that the processes of adoption or AID may be perceived negatively but that this negative perception does not extend to the children who are adopted or born of AID. This explanation is consistent with Miall's (1987) contention that the process of adoption may stigmatize only the adoptive parents (because it makes their infertility public).

Our second hypothesis, that rater gender would moderate the effect of adoptive status on evaluations of children, was supported. Among female raters, adoptive status can be considered a negative attribute. Semi-adopted children were rated less favorably than nonadopted children. However, among male raters, adopted status did not influence evaluations of children.

A child's semi-adopted status led to more negative perceptions in cases in which the rater was female. The finding that women rated semi-adopted children more negatively than nonadopted children partially supports anecdotal evidence suggesting negative social attitudes toward the process of artificial insemination or the children born of AID (Dunn, Ryan, & O'Brien, 1988; Herz, 1989; McWhinnie, 1992; Rowland, 1985; Sparks & Hamilton, 1991). One contribution of our research is that we replicated previous anecdotal studies in a quantitative fashion, using an experimental design.

Although we did not directly assess the specific reasons for these gender-based differences, our review of infertility and artificial insemination literature clarifies possible reasons underlying this finding. First, the process of artificial insemination with donor sperm does not appeal to some women as a remedy for male infertility. Some evidence suggests that women are not particularly attracted to artificial insemination by donor because they want to avoid the negative ramifications of the procedure, such as the sense of guilt, indecency, and taboo (Rowland, 1985). Second, women may fear the potential power differential that could develop in a relationship as a result of the fact that the wife is biologically linked to the child and the husband is not (Rowland, 1985). Third, women may find the idea of creating a child with anonymous sperm to be repugnant and somewhat adulterous.

The question then arises as to why men and women view semi-adopted children differently. Men do not view semi-adopted children differently than non-adopted children. Our review of the literature indicates that men approve of the process of artificial insemination because it enables the concealment of infertility and thus protects them from public discreditation and shame as a result of their infertility. Although male raters were not reacting to their own children and therefore had nothing to gain on a personal level from the child's status as semi-adopted, the process of artificial insemination may be favored by men because it protects the collective virility of manhood from being discredited and shamed.

The fact that women perceived semi-adopted children more negatively than

nonadopted children can have serious societal implications. This finding is particularly relevant given that the vast majority of preschool and elementary school teachers are female. Negative perceptions of semi-adopted children could lead to negative or low expectations of them, which could, in turn, affect their behavior. Past research has demonstrated marked changes in student achievement due to teacher expectations and corresponding favorable treatment in the classroom (Jamieson et al., 1987). Thus, future traditional as well as action-oriented research (Aguinis, 1993) should attempt to mitigate negative female perceptions of semi-adopted children.

A potential limitation of our study is that only a negative context (i.e., a child misbehaving) was used to evaluate reactions to children on the basis of their adoptive status. The vignette we used consisted of a brief, written account of a child's transgression and was identical for all conditions. On the basis of research by Dion (1972), we chose this specific negative situation to elicit any negative evaluations regarding adopted and semi-adopted children. However, because of the transgressive features of the scenarios, the negative attributional effects we noted cannot be assumed to exist in more positive situations. It is unknown whether similar results would be found if the context used was neutral or positive. Therefore, future research should investigate whether adoptive status and rater gender affect evaluations in other contexts.

Another potential limitation is that the sample we used was fairly homogeneous and consisted entirely of college students (largely psychology majors) from an affluent, primarily Caucasian community in the United States. Most of the participants were single and nonadopted. Because this sample is not representative of the U.S. population, the generalizability of these findings cannot be assumed. Accordingly, future research should investigate the generalizability of these findings to populations other than college students in the United States. Nevertheless, the fact that these results were obtained even among such a sample lends even more importance to the findings. Because many of the future teachers, counselors, and professionals come from a population such as the sample we used, the finding that women from such a sample may see a child's semi-adopted status as a negative attribute could have detrimental consequences for these children.

We hope these results will stimulate further research on perceptions of adopted and semi-adopted children, especially in light of today's medical reproductive technological advances that continuously lead to novel insemination and procreation techniques. Results from such research have the potential to help mitigate stigmas and negative expectations that may lead to children's poor educational performance, emotional instability, and overall unhappiness.

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