

## SOCIOLOGY

# Adoption Agencies Grow Up

Couples are finding it easier to adopt babies today, thanks to liberalized agency standards and the narrowing gap between applicants and available children.

By JUDITH VIORST

► IF YOU WANT to adopt a baby, now is the time.

Requirements for adoption are more liberal than they have been in years, child welfare experts agree.

Couples who once said bitterly of adoption agencies, "I wouldn't tell anybody to go through that hell," are greatly encouraged about today's prospects for adoptive parents.

No longer out of the running is the couple whose excellent qualifications were once irrevocably marred by the fact that they were over 40. The average age maximums of 32 to 35 for a woman, perhaps 39 for her husband, have jumped about 10 years.

"Agencies are much more concerned with good parenting for children now than with imposing rigid age limits on the people who want to adopt," said Mrs. Katherine Oettinger, chief of the Federal Government's Children's Bureau, Washington, D. C.

Deafness, diabetes, a previous cancer operation, a past history of tuberculosis—once insurmountable liabilities—do not inevitably prevent couples from winning a child today. Agencies maintain that they are far less interested in the condition itself than in a medical evaluation of the way in which it is being handled.

## Mixed Marriage

In the past, partners in a religiously mixed marriage were not usually considered eligible to adopt children. Today, according to Miss Ursula Gallagher, consultant on adoptions for the Children's Bureau, "the main emphasis is on the serenity of the situation—on how they've worked it out."

A previous divorce, said Miss Gallagher, "would not disqualify a couple." Nor would a term of psychotherapy, she said, if the result seemed to be increased self-knowledge.

Income hurdles have lately become less troublesome to adoptive couples, although Miss Gallagher maintains that "agencies were never as rigid as some people claimed." The emphasis today, she said, is not on the owned home and the sizable savings account, but on "enough income to care for a child adequately without feeling him as an extra burden."

Couples who already have an adopted child can now hope to increase their families through the agencies. Parents of a natural child, unable to have any more babies of their own, are now considered eligible applicants for adoption.

Working wives and couples without formal religious affiliation continue to have

some difficulties. But even these have eased. All things being equal, agencies concede, the working wife will invariably lose out to the lady who plans to stay at home with her adopted baby. But a career woman who is qualified for motherhood and has devised a reasonable home care plan certainly has a chance to adopt today.

So does the non-church-going couple, some agencies say, as long as they plan to expose their child to religious principles.

## Basic Standards the Same

The basic standards for adoptive parents remain the same—that they love and enjoy children, that their marriage is sound, that they are mature and flexible. Nor will agencies sanction adoption for the purpose of salvaging a doomed marriage or assuaging feelings of guilt or permitting a fearful woman to avoid the normal birth process.

Once these ground rules have been established, however, a great deal of flexibility remains. This flexibility is apparent today not only in less arbitrary standards for adoptive parents, but in many adoption procedures.

The most significant of these procedural improvements, according to Mrs. Oettinger,

"is earlier placement of children for adoption without a long waiting period while psychological tests are taken and studied."

This modification reflects the findings of psychologists that maternal deprivation, even at a very early age, can cause serious damage.

Most agencies no longer match physical types, or take two years to bring together prospective parents and parentless children, or pop in on unannounced home visits during the 6-to-12-month interval between receipt of the baby and the final adoption.

The waiting period between the first application and the arrival of a child has been cut down to under a year. Many states have exchange agreements so that couples in areas with insufficient adoption facilities can turn elsewhere.

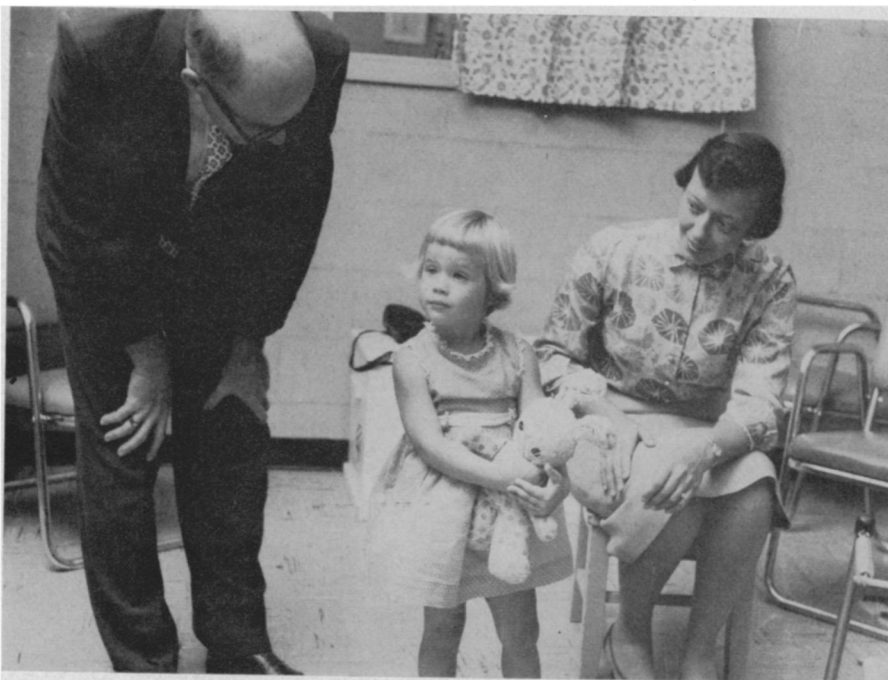
Changes in agency standards, most experts believe, are due to the decreased ratio of prospective parents to available children. No longer are ten couples clamoring for every healthy, white, adoptable infant.

## Narrowing 'Parent Gap'

There are many reasons for this narrowing of the "parent gap."

The number of couples applying for babies has declined, partly because of improved treatment for sterility, partly because the low birth rate of the depression years has inevitably resulted in fewer 25-to-35-year-olds.

More babies are born out of wedlock today than ten years ago.



Children's Bureau

**THE NEW FAMILY**—The youthful couple with babe in arms is not the only look in adoptive families. Here a new set of parents, who might once have been ruled out as over-age, begin the getting-to-know-you process with their 3-year-old adopted daughter.

More children are being put up for adoption, including the offspring of young married couples who feel financially or emotionally unprepared.

Agencies have also broadened their concept of what constitutes an adoptable child. They are now gently directing the attention of applicants to the boy with a clubfoot, or the girl whose handicap is being school age instead of newborn, interracial instead of white.

If parents do not insist on the medically sound, 100% white, brand-new infant, agencies say, the opportunities to adopt improve dramatically.

Despite the narrowed parent gay, there are enough eager couples available for the "perfect babies." But the competition thins around the physically, mentally, racially or chronologically handicapped child.

### Black and Gray Markets

An important result of these more realistic, less arbitrary standards has been a decline in the black and gray markets.

Agencies supervised 52% of nonrelative adoptions in 1951, 64% in 1962. This is a 12% drop in the number of couples buying infants for cash from unscrupulous "baby brokers," or acquiring them without undue compensation through the well meaning but frequently risky intercession of a doctor or lawyer.

"As these changes become more widely known to adoptive parents seeking children," said Mrs. Oettinger, commenting on the greater flexibility in adoption procedures, "we believe and hope there will be an even more striking increase in the number of prospective adoptive parents who seek the protection of social agencies."

• Science News Letter, 86:362 December 5, 1964

### MEDICINE

## Fingerprints of Newborn Could Aid Disease Study

► THE FINGERPRINTS of newborn babies, now taken in hospitals for identification purposes, may be studied in the future as a means of early detection of neurological abnormalities.

There is already evidence that Mongolism is associated with palm and fingerprint abnormalities, and studies are being made to find out if wider application can be made with this new diagnosis.

In Virginia, palm and fingerprints of about 5,000 patients in the Lynchburg Training School and Hospital, the Petersburg Training School and the Central State Hospital, also in Petersburg, are being taken to determine how the patterns of these prints differ among those with no known abnormality and others with different kinds.

The study is being undertaken by the U.S. Public Health Service's Neurological and Sensory Disease Service Program. Dr. Fred Rosner, program epidemiologist, says unusual patterns already have been reported in the medical literature in patients with organic brain syndrome, neuroses, schizophrenia and other conditions.

• Science News Letter, 86:363 December 5, 1964

## Nature Note

### Soybeans

► CONSIDERED one of the most important pod-bearing crops of the world, the erect, bushy-branched soybean has a long history.

It was cultivated for over 4,000 years in Japan and China, where it was often called "the cow of China" because it took the place of milk in the Chinese diet.

Also known as "soja bean" or "soya bean," this plant was first introduced into the United States by a Yankee ship's captain, and grown in Pennsylvania in 1804.

The Perry expedition to Japan in 1854 brought back two more varieties of this hardy bean, which was then also named the Japan pea.

In the last 50 years, cultivation of this high-protein, high-oil plant has gradually increased until it has become one of the leading cash seed crops in the United States and Canada—a phenomenal development, unequaled in American agriculture.

The plant is an erect bean, growing from one to six feet high, with many green leaves. From one to five seeds, shaped like large peas, form in the long pods. These seeds may be yellow, green, brown, black or combinations of all these colors. They are rich in protein and oil, which is used in shortening, margarine, salad oil, paints, soaps, adhesives, paper, rubber floor tile, textiles, gasoline, candy bars, cereals and even Christmas tree decorations.

The meal left after oil extraction makes feed for hogs, dairy and beef cattle, sheep, poultry, dogs, foxes and furbearing animals. The stalks are often used for hay and forage, although they are also plowed under the soil where they add valuable nutrients.

The bean grows in nearly all types of soil where it has adequate water, but it does especially well on fertile or sandy loams.

• Science News Letter, 86:263 December 5, 1964


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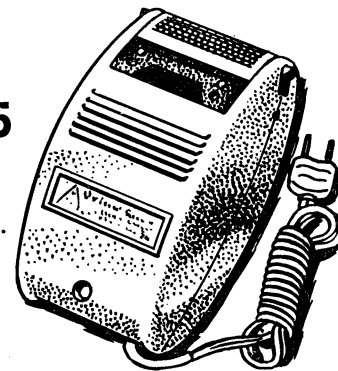
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