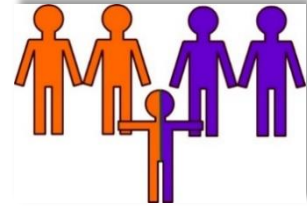# Aspects of adoption

*This is a very sensitive subject,
and these are our reflections*
Penny Walters, Marie Cappart, Jonny Perl

Background to adoption - Dr Penny Walters www.searchmypast.co.uk @DrPennyW (Twitter)

Children born outside marriage
Children whose parents weren't married when they were born have been labelled *'baseborn,'* *'illegitimate,'* or *'bastard,'* which distinguish between a child born within or outside a marriage. This used to be important because of inheritance laws, but these old terms can feel offensive now. A modern term, *'adoptee'* still gives the adopted person a label. I prefer to say that I am a *'person who was adopted.'*

Why do people from so many cultures make young girls give up their babies?
Many cultures have the presumption that an unmarried mother will not be able to care for the child 'properly.' Some families consider it sinful to have had sex before marriage, and it becomes the girl's 'fault' if she 'got herself' pregnant. Some girls/ women report that they were coerced into giving up their baby. The book/ film 'Philomena' reflects the situation of 'baby scooping.' Before adoption was legalised, many girls and women who felt that they couldn't keep their baby would secretly give their baby to a relative, maybe an aunt, sister, grandmother or neighbour; some would abandon the baby, usually leaving the baby where someone could hopefully find him/ her (termed 'foundling'); or, in desperation, even take the baby's life. When the baby was kept in the family, the mother would have to 'watch from the outside.'

The 'altruistic' world of adoption
Because there are professionals involved, people assume that everything must have been done 'correctly,' and that it is a wonderful solution for everyone: adoptive parents receive a baby/ child, the baby/ child gets a loving family, and the biological mother may feel that the baby has gone to a 'good' family. *'Love will conquer all.'*

Mental health issues
The separation of a baby and mother is a trauma that *can* have lifelong consequences for the biological mother (parents) and child. Some women never recover from the injustice of having their baby taken from them. Some adopted people *can* feel that their biological mother 'rejected' them; *'she gave me away'* or *'she didn't want me enough,'* and can 'feel abandoned' and can feel not 'good enough' to have been kept. Some adoptive parents feel second best. These issues can *sometimes* develop into relationship problems, or self-esteem issues. However, many people in the 'adoption triangle' are not affected by these issues.

"Have you ever found your 'real' family?"
Whilst faced with that somewhat awkward question, if you choose to look for your birth parent/s, then there can be a lot of bureaucratic paperwork; or you may find that the records are sealed and withheld. The process can be emotionally draining. Simply deciding to search can be very empowering.

The **1851 Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act** is widely considered the first 'modern' adoption law.

UK

- It was made **legal** to adopt in 1926 in England; in Scotland in 1930; in Northern Ireland in 1931, Republic of Ireland in 1953.
- **Adopted Children Register**: GRO maintains the Adopted Children Register (ACR) which contains the particulars of adoptions authorised by order of a court in England or Wales on or after 1 January 1927. Adopted adults (at least 18 years of age) can apply for the access to the information relating to their original birth entry, and potentially a certified certificated copy of a birth entry. **Adoption Contact Register** is a linking mechanism between an adopted person and their birth relatives, where both parties so wish. **Abandoned Children Register**: since 1977, the births of abandoned babies, within England and Wales, whose parentage is unknown, are recorded. **Thomas Coram Register**: A list held of children given into the care of the Foundling Hospital between the years 1853 and 1948.
- **Ireland**: The Adoption Authority of Ireland
- **Scotland**: Scottish Adoption

New York

- **Legislation** signed on 14 November 2019 allowed adopted people for to receive a certified copy of their birth certificate when they turn 18 years of age. This measure (S3419/A5494) helps ensure that all adult New York adopted people will have the same unimpeded right to information about their birth and biological parents. Birth certificates for adopted people born in 1 of the 5 **boroughs of New York City**: The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island - requested through NYC Health. Birth certificates for adopted people born in the rest of **New York State** - requested through Obtaining Original (Pre-Adoption) Birth Certificate for Adoptees - New York State Department of Health (ny.gov) Birth certificates for **Foundling adopted people** born outside of New York State may be requested via New York Foundling Records Department. **New York State DoH** Adoption Information Registry

New Jersey

- Legislation in **2014** included a three-year waiting period, in order to give birth parents the opportunity to request anonymity. From 1 January **2017**, individuals authorized by state law may obtain an **uncertified longform copy** of an original birth record established prior to an adoption via form REG-41, without first obtaining a Superior Court Order. A person 18 years or older who can establish him/herself as 1 of the following: the adopted person; a direct descendant, sibling or spouse of the adopted person; an adoptive parent, legal guardian or other legal representative of the adopted person; an agency of the State or federal government for official purposes. A Contact Preference document can also be submitted.

Utah

- A **2020** bill (HB0345) allows an adult adopted person to access their original birth certificate in certain circumstances

Massachusetts

- effective 3 November, 2022, restored the unrestricted right of all adult adopted people to request and obtain their own original birth certificates
- became the 12th state in the US to affirm or restore the unrestricted right of all adult adopted people to request and obtain their own original birth certificates
- Read further

France

- number of people wishing to adopt a child in France is increasing
- number of children available for domestic adoption is in decline

- 9/10 adoption candidates are couples; average age of adoptive mother is 39
- many families adopt children from other countries
  - Haiti - mainly male
  - China - mainly female
  - Russia - mainly male

410-A (ined.fr)

The bureaucracy potentially means that many adopted people will never get a copy of their original birth certificate. DNA testing may therefore help identify biological relatives. It doesn't mean living relatives or new information *will definitely* be found, but it offers a chance.

Utilising DNA testing - Jonny Perl jonny@dnapainter.com **@dnapainter (Twitter)**

DNA testing
DNA testing can be gold dust for adopted people because you don't need any genealogical information up front. Your DNA test results provide you with:
- an estimate of your ancestral background (also known as an "ethnicity estimate"): countries and regions that your DNA seems to originate from
- a match list consisting of people who share DNA with you

Both these aspects of your test can be illuminating. But it's your match list that will be most helpful in identifying family trees to which you are genetically linked. Once you have these trees, there are various techniques and tools you can use to narrow down where you could fit in.

Fishing in all pools
In order to maximise your chances of success, it makes sense to be in as many testing databases as possible. AncestryDNA and 23andMe are major sites where you have to take their test in order to get into the database. MyHeritage, FamilyTreeDNA, Gedmatch, LivingDNA and Geneanet all accept uploads of existing tests.

Connecting yourself
Broadly speaking, the process for connecting yourself to biological family using DNA consists of three key tasks. None of these are easy, but exactly how hard they are will depend on luck and your ancestral background:

1. Create genetic networks (also known as 'clustering')
This involves dividing the people towards the top of your match list into groups of interrelated people who share DNA with each other. These groups will then represent different branches of your biological family.
- a popular and intuitive way of doing this is the Leeds method
- tools that can partially automate this process- geneticaffairs.com and www.dnagedcom.com

2. Tree building
Once you have the clusters, you need to identify genealogical connections between people within these groups. Depending on luck and your ancestral background, this may be quite challenging. Sometimes you may find matches who are willing and able to collaborate with you, while at other times you may need to do the crucial research and tree building yourself.
- important - tread carefully and consider the impact messages may have on DNA matches
- keep initial messages short and pleasant
- accept that not everyone will reply
- online forums and social media groups can provide advice and encouragement

3. Use the amounts of DNA shared with those in the tree to figure out how you're likely to fit in
This is where you use the genetic evidence from your DNA test to identify possible ways you could connect with matches in the tree. This part can be overwhelming, but there are lots of places you can turn for help (see below). Your experience will vary depending on the amounts of DNA you share with your closest matches. Several tools exist to help you navigate shared centimorgan (cM) amounts and get to grips with what your different matches mean in combination with each other.

Two free tools that can help:
1. The Shared cM Project https://dnapainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4
This was created by genealogist Blaine Bettinger to crowd-source information about the amounts of DNA that are typically shared between people who have various different relationships. An online tool at dnapainter.com lets you access this data in an interactive way. If you enter the number of cMs you share with a match, the tool will show you the most likely genealogical relationships you are likely to share with that match based on this amount of shared DNA.

2. What are the Odds? (WATO) https://dnapainter.com/tools/probability
A more advanced tool that lets you build or import the tree and enter the amounts of DNA you share with the different people in the tree. It can then help you see which possible places in the tree fit with the amounts of DNA shared. As you close in on the answer, it can also help you identify other potential testers who could help clarify information.

Learning and support
- https://dnaadoption.org/
- https://www.facebook.com/groups/DNADetectives
- https://www.facebook.com/groups/237902130006828

Tools
- https://dnapainter.com/
- https://www.dnagedcom.com/
- https://geneticaffairs.com/

Testing companies and databases
- https://www.23andme.com/
- https://www.ancestry.com/dna/
- https://familytreedna.com/
- https://www.gedmatch.com/
- https://en.geneanet.org/dna/
- https://livingdna.com/
- https://www.myheritage.com/dna

Ethical dilemmas
- new biological relatives - strangers
- bio mother/ father may not want to be found **but** often easy to find people via social media
- cousin matches can expose bio family's secret

See *Ethical Dilemmas in Genealogy* (Amazon) and *The Psychology of Searching* (Amazon)

Key takeaways:
1. show understanding to people within adoption triangle
2. undertake the correct paperwork in your country to obtain birth records
3. take a DNA test; explore the suggested DNA tools
4. look after yourself; stay positive