Call for Papers
Adoption: Secret Histories, Public Policies
3rd International Conference on Adoption and Culture
Organized by the Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture

Conference date: April 29 - May 2, 2010
At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139
Proposal deadline: Sept. 1, 2009

Adoption has often, though not always, involved secrecy. How has secrecy or openness affected the history, experience and representations of adoption?

• How have literature and film portrayed the impact of secrecy and disclosure on adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents? What is the impact of recent revelations of secret histories in memoir, books such as The Girls Who Went Away, documentaries such as First Person Plural?

• How and why did adoption secrecy, and the practices it hides, develop differently in different cultures, countries, and even different states? Where are alternatives to secrecy practiced and how do they work? How has increasing openness in domestic adoption changed the experience of adoption? Why do laws sealing birth records have such staying power in the US?

• What public policies do our current adoption practices promote and what should they promote? What are the effects of secrecy and openness on the health and well-being of adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents? What are the ethical implications of genetic testing for adoption practices? How can analysis of secrecy practice in adoption be applied to assisted reproduction?

• How should we distinguish secrecy, privacy, and confidentiality in relation to adoption? How does secrecy in adoption relate to race, economics, and sexual orientation? How does it work differently in transnational adoption, in adopting waiting children, children in foster care, and children with special needs?

How can literary and film critics, philosophers, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, legal scholars, activists, creative writers, culture studies scholars, and others enrich our understanding of these issues?

Papers should discuss representations of adoption (including representations of birthparents) in literature, film, and other arts, and/or interactions between adoption practices and culture(s) in fields such as those listed. We are also interested in readings of memoir, poetry, and fiction dealing with adoption, and will consider musicians and performance artists.

Confirmed keynote speakers are:
Anita Allen, Henry R. Silverman Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania Law School.
Lynn Lauber, author of White Girls (1990), 21 Sugar Street (1993); currently writing a memoir on her experience as a birthmother and her reunion.
DeAnn Borshay Liem, filmmaker of First Person Plural.
Other invited speakers include Naomi Cahn, Elizabeth Samuels, Meredith Hall, Karen McElmurray, Kate Livingston, Lisa Marie Rollins, Craig Hickman, Marla Brettschneider, Sarah Tobias.

Please send 200-word proposals for papers or samples of creative work (of less than 10 pages) dealing with adoption, with a brief CV, to asac2010@mit.edu. Conference website: http://web.me.com/shaslang/ASAC_2010_Conference/