

Racial and Ethnic Matching in Adoption

In recent years, several controversies have arisen over racial and ethnic matching between parents and children in adoptions. For example, in June 2017, a British Sikh couple was denied by an adoption agency on the grounds that only white children were in need of adoption, so white applicants would be given preference.¹ The couple, Sandeep and Reena Mander, said that they would be happy to adopt a child from any racial or ethnic background. However, they were told by the agency, Adopt Berkshire, that they could not put their names down as potential adopters.

Britain's Equality and Human Rights Commission noted in a letter to the agency that this appears to violate the country's Children and Families Act of 2014, which prohibits policies that match adoptees only to parents of the same race or ethnicity.² However, though such policies are now prohibited, recent polls have found that many in Britain think that ideally, children should be adopted by parents of the same racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.³ Similar issues arise in the United States, where it has been illegal since 1996 to consider race in facilitating adoptions.⁴

Despite the fact that laws often prohibit such racial and ethnic matching on the grounds that it is discriminatory, supporters of matching continue to argue that adopted children are better off when placed with parents from the same racial or ethnic background. Supporters of matching contend that adopted children will feel a stronger sense of belonging when adopted by parents of the same race or ethnicity, and that being adopted into a family of a different race or ethnicity might exacerbate adopted children's lack of a sense of belonging, or lead to parents who cannot understand their children. Even if adoption agencies shouldn't be allowed to match adoptees *only* to parents of the same race or ethnicity, they argue, race and ethnicity should be taken into account.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How might having a parent who doesn't "look like" them affect the life of an adopted child? How, if at all, does this compare to children who have parents who are from a different race or ethnicity than the other?
2. What rights do would-be parents have when it comes to adopting children? Does matching adoptees and would-be parents on the basis of race conflict with those rights?
3. What say should children have in choosing their adoptive parents? Should children who are up for adoption and of a certain age be allowed to choose the race of their parents?

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jun/27/british-sikh-couple-take-legal-action-after-being-advised-not-to-adopt>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jun/27/council-berkshire-refusal-british-sikh-couple-adopt-white-child-sandeep-reena-mander>

³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9767506/Racial-matching-in-adoption-a-white-obsession-poll-shows.html>

⁴ <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809722,00.html>

