

THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER IN ADOPTION PREFERENCES

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Few legal scholars, however, have explored the role that the intersection of gender and race play in the adoption market. For example, although a relatively small number of whites express interest in adopting African-American boys, there is an increasing demand for African-American girls. Similarly, there is significant demand from Westerners for girls from China, Korea, and India, among others, but there is less demand for boys. This is especially puzzling given that the majority of men and women planning to have biological children prefer that their first child be a boy.

I argue that negative portrayals of African-American, Asian, Native-American, and Latino men may have influenced prospective adoptive parents' preferences for female children. The media portrays, and society perceives, African-American men as angry, dangerous, predisposed to criminal behavior, and uncontrollable. Latino men are similarly portrayed as hypermasculine and driven by passion rather than reason. In contrast, Asian men are often portrayed as weak and unmasculine. Native-American men have been portrayed as heavy drinkers, lacking a strong work ethic and as spousal abusers.

Portrayals of minority women have been somewhat more positive, but these stereotypes are just as problematic because they reinforce gender norms. For example, Latinas and Asian women are sometimes portrayed as submissive and undemanding wives whose goal is to please their husbands. African-American women, although sometimes portrayed negatively, are portrayed more positively than African-American men, as hardworking, and, surpassing African-American men in intellectual ability and ambition.

Given these negative portrayals of men of color, it is not surprising that many prospective parents, especially men, would prefer to adopt a girl. I am not suggesting that prospective adoptive parents are consciously making these determinations. Preferences for female children might be implicit, but I believe they are influenced, in part, by media representations that reinforce gender norms. My goal is to explore the role that law has played in creating and reinforcing these norms.