

Biomedical Representations of Prospective Children at the International Adoption Clinic

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Prospective parents who are contemplating the adoption of a specific child from abroad often seek physicians input during the decision making process. Amidst the recent escalation of international adoptions, a new type of pediatric specialist has emerged within the Western medical establishment that provides pre-adoption evaluations to prospective parents. Drawing from a series of eight *pre-adoption consultations* conducted at the University of Chicago's International Adoption Clinic in the spring of 2006, this paper will demonstrate how pediatricians use virtualities – abstract, dynamic constructions of a range of possible children read from the sparse medical records – to help parents decide whether or not to pursue the adoption. By treating the child variously as a unique kin member with a personal story and as an interchangeable biocommodity with a largely statistical identity, the pre-adoption consultation highlights deep tensions within transnational adoption and clinical medicine. As the parents and physicians negotiate the ongoing interactions between specificity and generality, intimacy and detachment, and domesticity and foreignness within the virtual child, they inform actual adoption decisions, and, in so doing, exert deep effects on American families, western medical practices, and foreign orphanages.