Political representations of adoption in Australia, 1977 to 2007.

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In Australia in 2005 Tony Abbott, Minister for Health in the conservative Howard government and a major spokesman for the anti-abortionist cause, publicly embraced a son he had given up for adoption in 1977. Abbott and his supporters have often linked the shame of abortion to the sorrow of childless couples seeking to adopt. In early 2007 Abbott sought to involve anti-abortion groups in setting up a national pregnancy counseling service which would give 'equal weight' to the option of adoption.

The last three decades of the twentieth century saw dramatic changes in the representation of adoption in Australia, from its role as the maker of happy (social) families to the destroyer of true (biological) families. This paper will trace the political representations of adoption by Australian politicians and lobbyists across this period, and the contested definitions of family which they have propagated.

The position of the moral conservatives as the current defenders of adoption is interestingly complex, essential zing motherhood while denying birth mothers. Fatherhood can also be complex: DNA testing has revealed that Abbott was not after all the father of the son he claimed.

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