



11 Reasons To Reconsider Adoption #Flipthescript

November 14th, 2014

It's National Adoption Month. Oftentimes, this is a month of celebrating adoption and encouraging individuals to consider adopting a child. It is a month when we see smiling family photos, touching videos of families meeting their child for the first time, and adoptive parent and adoption agency blogs describing the positive side of adoption. And don't get me wrong. There can definitely be a positive side – I'd argue that I'm living proof of that.

The problem is that the other side of adoption is so rarely heard it is as if it doesn't exist. The even bigger problem is that this is the most important side, because it is spoken from the adoptees' perspectives. I find it so strange. If you want to know what it's like to be an astronaut, do you ask the astronaut's mother? So why would you ask an adoptee's parent what it's like to be an adoptee? Why is it that the adoptive parent voice is privileged in the adoption world?

Is there a fear of the truth adoptees will speak? Is it so difficult to accept that success and struggle can coexist? That with an adoptee's love for their adoptive family, heartbreak and grief for the loss of a birth family can still occur? That with acceptance of one family, there can still be longing for another? That contentedness with one's life and identity does not erase the curiosity about a "ghost life" not given the opportunity to manifest? That asking the "what if's" is not a sign of unhappiness, only a sign of being human? This is the truth many adoptees live every second of every day.

So, instead of the all-too-common National Adoption Month blog featuring the pom-poms-rah-rah-you-can-do-it-too side of adoption, and in honor of the #flipthescript movement, which encourages and empowers the voices of adoptees this month, I think it is important to share what the other side of adoption means to me. And in doing so, I admit that I am slightly terrified, because I know my views

will be unpopular with many adoptive parents and agencies. I fear the potential fallout for my private practice, and worry that it will limit my ability to share my message with the people who need to hear it. But I have to be able to look at myself in the mirror at the end of the day. I want to speak for those who are too young or oppressed to speak for themselves. And that means I have to speak my truth as an adoptee.

The other side of encouraging adoption is, of course, discouraging it. I am aware of the number of children throughout the U.S. and world who are in need of a loving family and safe home, and I believe adoption is a valuable and viable option. It worked well for me as a child. I just don't believe that every person is meant to be an adoptive parent. I have seen certain traits and beliefs hinder one's ability to be an effective adoptive parent. Just because you are deemed physically safe to raise an adoptive child, does not mean that you are prepared for the emotional and psychological aspects of raising an adoptive child. It is beyond necessary to consider what adoption truly means to a child in need – and to consider your motivations for wanting to adopt a child. As a psychologist who specializes in adoption and trauma work with families, I hear this phrase all too often: “I mean, I figure I'm better than nothing, right? It's better for me to adopt a child than for them to be left in an orphanage or group home or foster care, isn't it?”

And as an adoptee, every time I hear this, I feel as though I've been punched in the stomach. Is that truly what people believe adoption should be: “Better than nothing?” Settling for a last resort? A life dependent upon a whim? They could not be more wrong. Every child deserves unconditional love, the commitment of a safe family, and the necessities to survive. And adoptive children need even more. If you are not ready to go above and beyond, I strongly urge you to reconsider adoption as an avenue for building your family.

This blog is for those of you who are starting to experience strong emotions this month as you hear about all of the children in need a family. Those of you who hold adoption as a thought in the back of your mind as a “maybe” for the future. Those of you who are currently in the process of adopting or have adopted. And for those of you who figure you're “better than nothing.” Here are 11 reasons you should reconsider adoption (or at the very least, these are major problems you need to resolve with the support of a professional who specializes in adoption before you start or continue the process).

1. **You don't think it's important to tell children they are adopted.** No. Just no. This is wrong on so many levels and for so many reasons that I don't even know where to begin. When I hear adoptive parents say this, I literally feel as though I could throw up – I'm not being facetious, I'm telling you I have a genuine visceral reaction. Your child is actually the only one (other than the people who are a part of the actual adoption process) who has the right to know this. It is a part of her identity and an experience that will live on inside of her throughout her lifetime, if nothing else on a cellular, sensory, and psychological level that most human beings cannot even begin to grasp. She will know, and if you don't start talking with her about it from the second she enters your care, you are the problem. Figure out why it is you feel that adoption is something secretive, something to be ashamed or embarrassed about, or something that is

“less than” when defining a family, so you do not pass this harmful message along to your child.

2. **You think adoption is about “saving” a child.** You are not saving children. You are providing them with what every child anywhere deserves. Adoption is not a rescue operation, not a situation where children are obligated to feel grateful or fortunate, and not a reason for anyone to consider you a saint.
3. **Your church, community, family or friends encourage it.** Don't even get me started on “Orphan Sunday” and the number of adoptive parents I've talked to who said their church leaders strongly encouraged adoption. You do not adopt a child to fit in or gain others' approval. If the first time adoption has ever truly entered your mind as a serious consideration is because someone else suggested it, think about why that is and what that might mean. Serious introspection is necessary on your part before you even consider adopting. Peer pressure is not a reason to adopt – just say no.
4. **You feel pity and guilt.** No one likes it when other people feel sorry for them, no matter what age they are or what they've experienced. When you adopt a child, he does not need your pity – he needs your unconditional love and support and commitment. If you believe that pity is an appropriate starting point for any of these things, you need to do your own emotional work. Likewise, if you feel guilty about your privileges and good fortune and believe you should be giving back somehow, try donating to a charitable cause – children are not a charitable cause, they are human beings, and they are not meant to alleviate your guilt. Adopting a child is not a badge of honor or proof of your compassion and morality. See above, and do your own emotional work.
5. **You are expecting a perfect fit.** Adopting will fit perfectly into your life plan. You figure you can specify the exact gender, age, race, and health conditions of the child you adopt. The timeline to adopt meshes well with the date you expect to get a job promotion and move across the country. And your biological child really needs a sibling and friend, especially if you're going to move across the country. Yep, an adoptive child is just the right way to meet your needs in the most convenient way possible. If you read this paragraph without a sarcastic tone and eye roll, please promise me you will never, ever, EVER adopt a child.
6. **Adopting a child will allow you to heal.** Last I checked children were not specialists in any type of medical or mental health field. It is not their job to fill the role of the child you could not have due to infertility, the child you lost due to miscarriage, or be the mini-me you've always wanted a second chance to do right by. Healing occurs within each individual, by each individual, and for each individual. Do not place that burden or responsibility on a child who has their own healing to do. Resolve your own issues first, and be aware that if you ever start a sentence with, “I'll figure out how I feel about it once our child is home...” you are not in a good emotional space to adopt.
7. **You're excited to share your child's story.** Your child's story belongs to your child and your child alone. It doesn't even belong to you as their adoptive parent, because none of us can truly and accurately understand another person's experience, and therefore we have no right to share it. Remember that visceral reaction I mentioned above? Yeah, it happens in this scenario, too. When I see adoptive parents blogging about their children's experiences (no, your 7-year-old

cannot consent to you writing about her – is she old enough to legally consent to anything else!)

, posting their pictures to promote adoption, or using their children’s stories as a tactic to sell their own products or agenda (“Celebrating _____’s very first birthday in the U.S., and saving you 11% on all Mary Kay purchases this month in honor of her turning 11!”). On an emotional and psychological level, it is exploitative and a blatant violation of privacy. How would you feel if the experiences you hold closest to your heart were on display for the world to see from another person’s perspective? Would you want your partner to take a picture of the moment you were diagnosed with cancer to post on Facebook for Cancer Awareness Month? Your high school best friend to write a blog about when you lost your virginity to promote her beliefs about sex before marriage? Your lawyer to go public with the conversation that led to your divorce to promote her services? Your biological child to post the video of you giving birth to him on YouTube as he describes your experience of pregnancy and labor? Adopting a child is not a gimmick or a way to place yourself in the spotlight, and it is not your right as a parent to hack into your child’s personal story and put in on public display.

8. **You are uncomfortable with the thought of adopting an entire family.** It doesn’t matter if your adoption is open, closed, domestic, international, or from foster care. You are adopting a child from another family, and that family is a part of your child’s identity regardless of the type of adoption you choose. If you ask most adult adoptees, they’ll tell you they wished for any sort of contact with their birth family members. Not to mention, with social media access nowadays, true closed adoption is becoming a thing of the past. If you are not willing to open your heart to all of the people who share DNA with your child, you are not ready to unconditionally love that child, because you are denying a part of her identity. And if you cannot support the search for a birth family member by your adoptive child due to your own insecurities, you are not ready to adopt. Once again, do your own emotional work first.
9. **You believe “fair” means treating everyone exactly the same.** The world is not black and white, and adoption is the grayest of areas when it comes to how to raise a child. If you are not flexible enough to recognize and adjust to the unique nuances and needs of each individual person around you, you do not have what it takes to raise an adoptive child (or probably any child).
10. **You think spanking, physical punishment, and temporary removal of items necessary for survival are effective and appropriate behavioral management tools.** Hitting a child, keeping them from meals, inappropriately exposing them to the elements, locking them up, humiliating them – none of these things teach a child a lesson, they just reinforce that you’re not fit to have an American Girl doll, let alone parent a real child. No one should ever place a child under your care, EVER, and you should just turn yourself in to your nearest local prison right now.
11. **You have any doubt at all about the permanency of adoption.** If you have ever started any of your thoughts about adoption with, “If it doesn’t work out…” you are not meant to adopt. Adoption is permanent. There is no “if” scenario. It will work out, even if that means you are visiting your child at a mental health inpatient unit every day because they are experiencing such severe emotional and behavioral struggles that you cannot manage them at home. Children are not commodities, they cannot be returned or exchanged at Target if their

behavior or personality are not what you expected. This thought should not ever enter your mind, because as soon as “if” becomes an option, you have already let your child down.

If you are reading this, and made it through to the end without becoming offended, you are probably an adoptee or an amazing prospective or adoptive parent. If you did become offended, I strongly encourage you reconsider your own motivations to adopt, because they probably have much more to do with your own needs than the needs of your prospective adoptive child, and much work is needed on your part before you are ready to parent. Reflect on whether you’d consider my words more seriously if they were being written by an adoptive parent, instead of an adoptee trying to #flipthescript during National Adoption Month. If so, guess what? It’s your lucky day! I’m also an adoptive parent.

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