

# Privatized Parenthood

When we think of adoption, we may think of acts of selflessness: a child with unfit, unwilling, or absent parents is taken under the wing of some generous figure(s) who raise the child as their own, preventing them from ending up alone or in the public foster care system. However, in recent years, the privatized adoption industry in the United States has undergone a major shift: more families want to adopt children than ever, but fewer mothers are giving their children up for adoption. According to some studies, between one and two million couples are waiting to adopt, but only 4% of the children born from unwanted pregnancies are placed through adoption. These trends present a problem both for couples hoping to adopt and the privatized adoption industry which depends for its profit on the influx of children into its system.

Some opponents of privatized adoption take issue with the fundamental idea of paying a company in exchange for a child. Families are often able to “shop” for certain features, by filtering children according to race, ethnicity, sex, disability, and age. Some worry that the private adoption industry is coercive or predatory towards the poor. By seeking out women of low socioeconomic status, promising funds for prenatal care, and fear mongering about the burden of childcare, adoption agencies might be creating perverse incentives for women who would prefer to keep their own children, even though they might struggle to afford to care for them.

Advocates of privatized adoption, however, point to benefits of the system. Perhaps the largest is the efficacy of it: when adoption agencies are involved in the placement of a newborn, they are able to quickly and effectively match birth mothers with potential adoptive parents. Potential adoptive parents most commonly seek young children, so, in cases where adoption is the legitimate wish of all involved parties, the quick placement and legal management of adoption agencies makes the process as quick and painless as possible for the birth mother, child, and adoptive parents.

Adoption advocates cite how public and private adoptions can allow parents to avoid the environmental impact of contributing to population growth and providing care for a child already in need of it.. Additionally, adoption is commonly used by couples who are biologically unable to conceive children for reasons including infertility, age, and sexuality. Given that many people believe that raising children is one of life's greatest joys, some celebrate adoption for removing barriers to parenthood while providing for children in need.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What regulations, if any, would help limit abuses in the adoption industry?
2. How does the for-profit nature of private adoption agencies affect the ethics of adoption? If all adoption were done through public institutions, how would this change the ethical considerations one way or another?
3. How should we balance the need to provide for expectant mothers with adoption plans and concerns that such support might be considered coercive?

