

# 2012

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## [RE-MARKETING ADOPTION]

On a foundation of good intentions and corruption, domestic infant adoption has rebranded itself through strategic public relations moves, market research and a well funded legislative lobby. While the public thinks sweet thoughts about adopting all those "unwanted children", the adoption industry creates a product and cashes in on a billion dollar business.



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## INTRODUCTION

One of the things that I love about my former "marketing" stint was that I really had the opportunity to understand the way business see the public and use marketing for their own needs. This does not happen organically, but through a series of calculated moves, designed to appeal to the targeted end users, and reached a desired outcome that benefits the business.

It really helps to understand adoption as an industry when you apply the lenses of a marketer.

To begin, let's just remove the idea that adoption is here for some altruistic reason like "proving homes to children that need them" in some vein of social services or community outreach or as part of the mental health field or anything like that.

**We need to look at adoption like it is; a business that has supply and demand and profits and losses.**

## ADOPTION: APPLYING THE BUSINESS MODEL

An adoption agency pays its bills through the acquisition of "**fees**". These adoption fees are paid for by the prospective adoptive couple for the services rendered by the adoption agency. These are various application fees, home study, counseling, court and legal fees, attorneys, paper filings, plus the hospital and doctors fees, travel costs, and various other "birthmother expenses".

We know that the US average "cost" for a voluntary domestic infant adoption runs anywhere from 10 to 60K. At the end of the day, a "successful" adoption results in a baby being relinquished by one family and handed over to another family who pays the "fees" for this service to be rendered.

In business terms, that makes the adoptive parent the **customers or end consumer** who pay for the service of transferring over the parental rights of a baby. The now up-for-grabs parental rights, are, in turn, the **product**.

*( Note: yes, we can also say very easily that the adoptee is the final product, but I know they don't like to be treated like that, so I am not going to call them that for this purpose)*

Bottom line, without the adoptive parents being willing to pay this money for these services to buy the product, the agencies would not have a business, so they **MUST** make adoption appealing to the final consumer, the adoptive parents.

Now the agencies cannot transfer over the parental rights of nothing, and they can't manufacture children, so they have to get them from somewhere, so they recruit women to become birthmothers. Hence the mothers become the **producers**.

Now we know that under their own version of reality, the adoption agencies supply their birthmother producers with services that they need such as the counseling, medical visits, living expenses, and even possible college scholarships. However, the moms and original families are NOT really the end consumer, so these services are really more like **expenses**.

These expenses are needed for the acquisition of the final product, the transfer of the parental rights of the child. If these expenses were not paid, if adoption was not appealing in some way, then the manufacturer would find another avenue for their product. The adoption agencies are more like smart middle men who pass on the **cost of goods being sold to the end consumers**. This is a common service based business model: you pass on the expense of creating the products, plus your mark up, for the expertise of your services to the final customer.

So the supply comes from the birthmother producers, the demand comes from the potential adoption parents and then profit and loss comes to the adoption agency who must keep their expenses lower than their fees so they can stay in business. It doesn't matter WHY you think adoption does or does not need to be here, this is the way it WORKS.

End of Story.

Now, the next step is to apply these concepts to the timeline of adoption history in the USA. It's a pretty generic overview and does not touch at all on the many different aspects that have fed into current adoption practices, but it gives a foundational picture.

## THE ORPHANS TRAINS

While Massachusetts's [1851 Adoption of Children Act](#) outlines the legal aspects of adopting in the US in rather familiar terms, one of the influential force paving adoption practices were Orphan Trains.

As many as 250,000 children from New York and other Eastern cities were sent by train to towns in Midwestern and western states, as well as Canada and Mexico between 1854 and 1929. Families interested in the orphans showed up to look them over when they were placed on display in local train stations, and placements were frequently made with little or no investigation or oversight. However historians studied the records and have concluded that the largest number of orphan train children were temporarily transferred or shared, not given up for adoption in the legal sense outlined by the 1851 Massachusetts Act.

While numbers were large with over a quarter of a million, there was essentially no "products"; parents weren't "giving up" their parental rights, but sending their children out to work and live on a farm where they could have food and lodging under better circumstances until they were able to provide it themselves. We see the same sort of understanding and use of a system now in international adoptions; a family in Ethiopia might use a mission run orphanage for their children's well being, but never have intentions of relinquishing their rights to parent their child. Not only were the "manufactures" not on board,

but the end consumers, the adoptive parents, saw the children often as temporary workers, not one of their own brood.

## BABY FARMS: A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF REALITY

"Baby farming" refers to placing-out infants for money. Unwed mothers, prostitutes, and destitute or deserted wives who needed help with their children while they worked for wages had no options for day care and the baby farms were often the only choice. The economic situations of the time created a large number of possible producers, even if they were unwilling. Of course, human nature found a way to make a profit and baby farming sometimes morphed into black market adoptions where children were bought and sold, so there was a market growing for the children and babies. Baby farmers profited on both ends of the adoption transaction, first extracting fees from desperate mothers and then demanding large sums from adoptive parents. Maternity homes and lying-in hospitals where doctors and midwives worked as for-profit adoption brokers were also contributed as recruiters at this time.

From the mid nineteenth century until about 1920, adoption showed it's true nature as a for profit business, but there was public outcry. Stories about baby farming in newspapers and magazines were reported in lurid detail that called upon crude gender, racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes. Overall, it must have been a public relations nightmare and gave adoption a bad name though some people, such as Georgia Tann, were able to continue with outright abusive practices.

## INTRODUCING SOCIAL WORK INTO THE ADOPTION INDUSTRY

While the baby farms were selling, the public backlash saw the need for growing support for child welfare regulation, including minimum standards such as state licensing, certification of child-placers, and investigation of foster homes. During the same period, there is the introduction of social work and the application of these studies to child placement outcomes. The first laws regarding child placement and oversight were created as well as the first model adoption agencies.

Enter the "professionals" and their means of services, the fee. Unlike the baby farmers, they are not "selling babies" but placing them in quality homes. Granted the intention here is probably good as the child mortality rates of the baby farms, even when used as day care, were high, so the idea of a loving home was an improvement. However, if we squint our eyes, we can begin to see the model of adoptive homes as "better" coming to head.

It's a subtle shift in the messaging.

## EUGENICS, GENETICS AND CHOICE

While social work was getting it's foothold, there are a few core foundations of today's adoption that come into play during this time.

## **Eugenics:**

Before Hitler made eugenics about racism and genocide, American's were weren't so happy to take in other people's children due to worries about "bad blood". Henry Chapin, husband of Alice Chapin of the Spence Chapin Adoption Agency that still exists today, claimed that the "*divergent fertility rates of rich and poor were fueling the demand for adoptable babies because citizens with better genetic endowment were more likely to suffer from infertility*". For Chapin, eugenic factors always mattered in adoption. "*Not babies merely, but better babies, are wanted.*"

Before WWII, eugenics had a great impact upon adoption. Adoption professionals believed that it was a "social crime" to place inferior children with parents who expected—and deserved—normal children. Unwed mothers were seen as "feeble minded" for getting pregnant in the first place, and their children were at risk of inheriting the feeblemindedness. Agencies sometimes required parents to return children if and when abnormal characteristics appeared and laws, such as the [Minnesota Adoption Law of 1917](#), treated feeble-mindedness as cause for an adoption's annulment.

Post World War II, references to eugenics dropped out of the adoption conversations in an overt way. Again, the message was controlled and the bits that could now offend folks wanting to adopt were left out of the conversations about adoption.

## **Nature verses Nurture:**

While John Locke coined the tabula rasa ("blank slate") in back in 1689, it didn't gain favor until post eugenics. As early ideas of eugenics correlated strongly with social class, the idea that blood determined a person's character became regarded as racist post World War II, and tabula rasa fit the morals of the current society.

The "Blank Slate" theory proposes that humans develop from only environmental influences rather than biological parentage. Of course, modern research has only begun to prove just how much genetics really do influence us, but for its day, the blank slate theory, was overwhelmingly accepted. This fit nicely into adoption lore as removing the child of the "feeble minded" and surround them with "better" parents, will produce a "better child". In terms of marketing, the adoption industry was able to use tabula rasa to make children more adoptable to the end users, the adoptive parents.

## **The Chosen Child:**

In 1939, Valentina P. Wasson introduced the *The Chosen Baby* as a picture book that could be used to tell children that they were adopted. What this introducers to the adoption story is the idea that the adoptee is chosen and greatly wanted by the adoptive parents who waited for a long time for their perfect child. In the bigger picture, it introduces the concept of "choice" in adoption rather than the earlier concepts of necessity. It helped move the adoption arrow from "children needing homes" to "choosing adoption" as a way to build a family and was quite timely. In addition, this story help introduce the concept that all adoptive parents were patient and longed for a child above all else to make their dreams come true. It's puts the adoptive parents in a sympathetic light.

The Chosen Child, tabula rasa and the unpopularity of eugenics came together at the end of WWII in an almost perfect storm. After the war, everyone wanted to return to the American dream: a house, a college education, a car, a job and the needed 2.3 children. On top of that, there was there was social pressure supported by anti communism propaganda encouraging people to have children as the USA needed to outnumber the communist babies. Complicating THAT was a rise in infertility as service men returned

home from war either disabled and unable to father children, or both sexes, separated by the conflict, suffered the consequences of venereal diseases spread through their activities during wartime. These all contributed to an increase in demand for adoptable infants.

## THE HEYDAY OF THE BABY SCOOP ERA

The demand was there in GIs and middle class wanting to fit into societal views. The system of child welfare was in place and the workers had 'professional' status with social work giving them their 'expertise'. With the influence of the social workers, the homes for unwed mothers, which had previous focuses on teaching the mother's skills while helping them parent, had morphed into maternity homes and human nature provided the third necessary ingredient; people have sex and that makes babies.

The industry had no need to even market anything anymore, it was a perfectly well oiled adoption machine: if you were middle class and had sex, then chances are, you were sent away and your child was taken away from you "for your own good" whether you wanted to relinquish or not. Adoptions reached their century-long statistical peak at approximately 175,000 per year in 1970.

Many people use the 1973 ruling of Roe versus Wade to signify the end of the Baby Scoop Era, but the ability of the industry to force adoptions still continued and we have documented forced adoptions in current times. Roe v Wade did reduce the numbers of unplanned children born and the adoption industry saw a drastic reduction in the numbers of possible producers; in other words, the birthmothers dried up.

Beyond Roe verse Wade, the adoption industry had other problems on their hands.

## THE 1970'S BRINGS US UNREST IN ADOPTIONLAND

In 1971, Florence Fisher founded the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association ( ALMA) to abolish the existing practice of sealed records in adoption. Betty Jean Lifton's *Twice Born, Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* was published in 1975. International Soundex Reunion Registry, the world's largest and most successful reunion registry, established by Emma Mae Villardi in Carson City, NV in 1975. Concerned United Birthparents was founded in 1976 giving mothers who relinquished a place to voice their stories.. Indian Child Welfare Act was passed by Congress and the American Adoption Congress was founded in 1978. Lorraine Dusky's *Birthmark* was published in 1979.

The adoptees were growing up and the birthmothers of the Baby Scoop Era were not "getting over it".

Here, we have a bon fide crisis in adoption. The demand for adoptable children is higher than ever as fertility has decreased, yet there is an influx of people discussing the negative aspects of adoption- specifically the adult adoptees wanted to access their birth records and , increasingly, they wanted to know about their original families, too. Would the adoption industry listen to what their "producers" and the true end products of their business want?

No. In fact, not even a simple NO, they effectively slammed the door in the faces of the demanders and added insult to injury.

## THE DEATH OF THE DRAFT MODEL STATE ADOPTION ACT ; THE BIRTH OF THE NCFA

Under the direction of President Carter, a panel of independent experts in the field of child welfare were asked to address the issue of "special needs" adoption and to draft some model state legislation. They came up with a Model State Adoption Act that would **open records to adult adoptees and instruct adoption agencies to serve as intermediaries in searches by birth parents for their adult relinquished children.**

I have been searching for a copy of this first draft, but it seems to have been very deeply buried by the adoption industry because to say the HATED it, would be an understatement.

The original Draft Model State Adoption Act (DMSAA) would have radically changed adoption practices in the United States by saying *"...that there can be no legally protected interest in keeping one's identity secret from one's biological offspring; parent and child are considered co-owners of the information regarding the event of birth."*

In it, there was Title V that would have given adult adoptees, at age 18, unqualified right of access to their records. One of the sections of Title V, §504 (f) (2) states:

*"It shall not be a violation of the privacy of a parent whose rights were terminated, for a record to reveal the identity of such parent to his adult son or daughter."*

And then section 507 stated:

*"The rights of access to records established by this Title shall have retroactive effect, and shall not be limited by reason of prior law or of assurances of confidentiality not required by this Act."*

These statements, recommended by various adoption professionals at the time, would have if made into national policy, would allow adoptees to know their true stories of their adoptions. By allowing the adopted person possible contact with their original families and history, the truth of the manner of their relinquishment would have come to light.

Under the threat of allowing adult adoptee access to their original birth records, Ruby Lee Piester, Executive Director of the Edna Gladney Home and a member of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) completely freaked out and went to war against the Draft Model State Adoption Act (DMSAA).

Ruby Lee Piester wanted the CWLA to join her in organizing national resistance to the DMSAA, but could find no takers. At a Senate hearing, she met William L. Pierce and together they formed the National Committee For Adoption (NCFA) which by 1980 became our beloved National Council For Adoption. It's important to note that the **NCFA was created based on the threat that adoptees could find their true identities.**

Now if Bill Pierce said that **if the DMSAA were to become law, domestic infant adoption would be snuffed out** and the purpose of the NCFA, a lobby group for adoption agencies and other professionals, was to keep the status quo in adoption and allow the secrecy to continue, we have to think about why the level of secrecy was so vital to the business of adoption.

On one hand, Bill Pierce who was the face of the NCFA for decades, always insisted that without confidentiality, the poor birthmothers would be betrayed. If we look at face value, we could say that the adoption industry was wanting to protect the producers / manufacture kind of like a union would, but the ACTIONS of the mothers who have begun to speak out in the 1970's spoke otherwise. The mothers didn't ask for this protection and, in fact, they never did want this protection and have increasingly been vocal about it.

Yet, the adoption industry, now spearheaded by the NCFA, launched national public relations camping against the DMSAA. Gladney organized adoptive parents to with a massive letter-writing campaign while Pierce creating a fear of increasing abortion among Congress and National Right to Life activists. The final result was the Draft Model State Adoption Act had all references of restored original identity access to adoptees removed and set the stage for major key points in the current practices of the adoption industry:

- Birthmothers needed protection and confidentiality.
- Mutual consent registries are the "best" and only way of restoring lost contact in adoption.

Again, it must be emphasized: **what were they so afraid of adoptees finding out?**

## THE FAIRY TALE ADOPTION STORYLINE: TRUTH OF FICTION?

The accepted "adoption storyline" of the BSE is so typical:

"Your mother was so young, She was just starting/ just graduated high school /college. Your father left her when he found out you were coming/ or still had to finish school and could not provide for you/ left for the war/ she didn't tell him. She wanted you to have more than she was able to give, so she gave you a better life. She loved you so much, she gave you away."

The same feel good adoption story was also provided to many adoptive parents in some version or another (often with the release of identifying information about said mothers) and that help assure the adoptive parents that they were receiving the child of a "nice, middle class girl and a nice educated boy" and made the child much more acceptable as well.

Anecdotal evidence from the women who lived through relinquishment in the Baby Scoop Era tells a very different story of forced adoptions, abuse by the very institutions that proposed to "help" them, of being isolated from their babies fathers, and family members, often being interred by their own family members who refused to accept the child, lies of stillbirths and moneys owed, separation of siblings, and forged / forced signatures on relinquishment papers. All practices that stem from the early days of baby farming, black market adoptions, and religious witch hunts.

In addition, Georgia Tann, the most successful baby seller, black market adoptionist in history, was extremely influential in political circles and is often credited for using her influence to have states seal their adoption records in order to hide the truth of her crimes. Indeed, in New York State, Governor Lehman who sealed the NYS adoption records in 1935 was an adoptive father whose two children came from Georgia Tann. The adoption industry is sometimes too quick to put all the blame of sealed records on Tann or the need of society to "protect the children from the legacy of illegitimacy". With Tann convicted and passed on, and illegitimacy no longer a threat, why would the truth be such a cause for alarm?

What every business fears most are bad reviews and unhappy customers. What they fear even more are having to return moneys paid or lawsuits. Again, if we look at the business of adoption, then the end consumers are the adoptive parents. They paid good money for the successful product, the parental rights of a child free and clear. On top of that, they then built their whole lives, their families, their identities as parents, on that successful transactions under the guise that they were doing something "positive" to choose a child and save him from a harsh life. What if THEY had been sold a false set of goods?

We have to ask again, why was the industry was so aghast at the DMSAA wanting to restore the access of adult adoptees over the age of 18 to their original birth records including the identity of the people that gave birth to them? Why was THAT issue so threatening to the very existence of adoption in the USA? How much money was at stake that Gladney seeded the NCFA with \$50,000 and the other agencies and professionals were quick to support the NCFA. Why would an industry created to "help find homes for children without families" be so against recommendations that the very people they claim to be helping clearly wanted?

The adoption industry had a huge problem indeed. It was called the truth and it almost squeaked out until Bill Pierce and the NCFA came to its rescue. Forced back into the dark, the adoption industry had more public relations to deal with, Luckily for them, the NCFA white horse would now pull the industry together into one huge, perfectly executed, strategic marketing plan.

## RE-MARKETING THE CONCEPT OF CHOICE

After nullifying the original threat of adoptees knowing their true identities and the truth of their relinquishment stories, the adoption industry still suffered from the decreased numbers of women "choosing" adoption. The adoption industry had to find a way to appeal to those disenfranchised and pregnant. We begin to enter the "kinder", more gentle face of adoption and one of the most insidious marketing campaigns yet.

First off the adoption industry really had to remove any and all possible hints of force. In the past, women only did so out of complete desperation, or because they were lied to or they were forced to by their parents. The 1970's had brought out the newly "empowered" woman and by the 1980's even if we still didn't actually hold that power, we really like to think we did.

Luckily, the NCFA's self appointed job was to promote the positive impacts of adoption and that they did. As the "professionals" the media and news organizations usually go to the NCFA or an agency director first for information, and of course, they put adoption in a positive light, therefore the general public is

taught to view adoption that way. It's also a known fact that many individuals in power in the media also happen to be adoptive parents, so they too, only tend to see the positive aspect of what they gained, rather than what others lost.

## INTRODUCING POSITIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

In 1979, Marietta Spencer, wrote "The Terminology of Adoption" for The Child Welfare League of America saying that "Choosing emotionally-correct words is especially important in adoption **transactions.**" .

This influenced [Pat Johnston's](#) "Positive Adoption Language" (PAL) and "Respectful Adoption Language" (RAL) which carried on and expanded the same themes:

*"The use of this vocabulary acknowledges those involved in adoption as **thoughtful and responsible** people, reassigns them **authority and responsibility for their actions**, and, by eliminating the emotionally-charged words which sometimes lead to a subconscious feeling of competition or conflict, helps to promote understanding among members of the adoption circle."*

It's all in the remarketing:

*"In describing the **decision-making process birthparents** go through in **considering adoption** as an **option** for an untimely pregnancy, it is preferred to use terms which acknowledge them to be **responsible and in control of their own decisions.***

*In **the past**, it is true, birthparents often had little choice about the outcome of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. In earlier times they did indeed surrender, relinquish, give up and even sometimes abandon their children. These emotion-laden terms, conjuring up images of babies torn from the arms of unwilling parents, are no longer valid except in those unusual cases in which a birthparent's rights are involuntarily terminated by court action after abuse or neglect."*<sup>1</sup>

At this point, adoption has managed to complete disassociate itself from its past and to use language as method of convincing people that it is something that it is not. The change of language makes mothers "choose" adoption, therefore making them responsible for the act itself. The industry removed itself as having any untold influences and puts them in the light of being the kind professionals who are just "helping" the mothers "make a loving adoption plan". IE the industry does what the producers want.

Along with reducing the role of mothers importance in adoption by removing the popular and legal usage of the terms "real" and "natural" with the introduction of the word "birthmother", they also change the status of a birthmother from anything negative. She no longer "gives up" or "surrenders" a child, but becomes "selfless" and "creates a family". This spin job effectively gives the industry a tool to use against expectant mothers by making the relinquishment seem like a good thing, rather than at all negative.

A similar use of language can be seen in the Pro-Life movement. Notice they do not call themselves anti abortion, but pro-life. This is wisely done, for any lawmaker who would possibly vote no to a "pro -life" bill might find themselves in the headlines as being "against life".

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tapestrybooks.com/downloads/Speaking%20Positively.pdf>

## MARKET RESEARCH: WHAT WOULD MAKE ADOPTION LOOK MORE APPEALING?

Armed with the message of how they *wanted adoption to sound*, they conducted market research. In 1997, The Family Research Council,<sup>2</sup> another national lobby group that promotes right wing "Christian values" and anti-choice women's reproductive rights issues, conducted a study to assess the "effectiveness of pregnancy resource center in helping women with unwanted pregnancies". (Curtis J Young, 2000)

What they found was that women felt "negative" about adoption:<sup>3</sup>

1. Adoption = Abandonment
2. Adoption = The Big Lie
3. Adoption = An Unbearable Sacrifice

In over 30 pages, the study goes forth to describe how to counteract those feelings that women naturally have and to train the pregnancy counselors *"to give women sound reasons that will counter the desire to keep their babies. One example is to reinforce the notion that it takes a strong, mature woman to place a child for adoption....(they) must communicate that adoption can be an heroic, responsible choice and the child benefits tremendously"*.

This study, combined with the 2007 FRC and NCFA joint publication "BirthMother, GoodMother"<sup>4</sup> pretty much outlines how the adoption industry wants us to view adoption in order to CHOOSE it. In other words, they asked women why they didn't like the idea of adoption, listen to the answers, and then, not only, went forth to change the public view on adoption, but used the same answers to reconstruct adoption and convince women it was not how they thought under the guise of "education".

Think about the recent ad campaigns out for corn syrup. "You know what they say? No.. sugar is sugar, your body doesn't know the difference". It's not a real public service announcement. It's advertising to the public to provide a desire message and outcome; people will keep buying products with corn sugar. Why? Because it's the same as sugar? No, because there is a massive amount of money in the food industry tied to corn syrup.

## OPEN ADOPTION: REVAMP, REPACKAGE, AND RENEW

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.frc.org/about-frc>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.frc.org/content/the-missing-piece-adoption-counseling-in-pregnancy-resource-centers>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/infant-adoption/publications.html>

What the market research also showed was that women really feared making the choice to relinquish because it was such a big decision and they were fearful of getting it "wrong".

*"Respondents talk about how to improve the adoption process by working on the fear of the unknown, as follows 'It would be easier to give the child up knowing that they are loving and decent people'...most women would welcome anything that could be done to reassure them over time that their children are well cared for."*

The "Missing Piece" study only hammered in what had been slowly and quietly happening with private adoption lawyers, mothers considering adoption were demanding to know something about where their children were going. Was this a natural outreach of women's empowerment or was the concept seeded? There is very little on record that seems truthful. My personal guess is that it was started quietly on a trial run to see how effective the open adoption model was. In any case, the adoption agencies that did offer some degree of openness had higher adoption rates and more business than the ones that stayed with a traditional closed model. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out which way the industry was going to go. Open adoption became the "new and improved" version of relinquishment. Even people who had poor past experiences could now be dismissed since it was "different" now.

Unfortunately, even open adoption has some of the same issues that old fashioned adoptions did. For the parent separated from their child; that separation is still painful and still hurt. While in the BSE days a mother was told to "forget about it" and "move on", today's new birthmothers are expected to be happy and grateful with whatever tidbits of information, fuzzy pictures, Facebook updates, or, if they are lucky, real visits made annually with their children and their new families. Promoted as a cure for the pain of separation, open adoptions don't mitigate the loss, but instead make it impossible for a mother to get any distance from it. On top of that, the "open" aspect of adoption is promoted as "better" for the child. Since that is the main reasoning of many placements, the needs to the child's "best" treatment, the relinquishing mother feels the additional guilt if they shy away from the grief that visits evoke.

On top of that, many agencies promote "open adoptions" as something provided for the mother's peace of mind and the "degree" of openness is something she decides. They negate to provide the facts that most open adoption agreements are not legally enforceable and should the adoptive family choose to cut off contact, she has little to no recourse.

Reassured, that open adoption is the best for their child, approximately 14,000 mothers a year make a loving adoption plan for their unborn children.

## EXPAND YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE: TAKING THE MESSAGE ON THE ROAD

One of the things we use to say all the time about internet marketing was that you have to "expand your target audience and think out of the box". The adoption industry did just that. At this point adoption had a new language, a new strategic model and a new branding, so now they had to cast a wide net and spread the word. They did this through the NCFSA sponsored **Infant Adoption Training Initiative**.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.infantadopt.org/>

Basically, the IAAT program was federally funded by millions of tax dollars with *"the primary purpose of the program was to train pregnancy and health counselors in federally funded clinics to present adoption as an option to women with unintended pregnancies."*

In other words, not enough women were calling up adoption agencies or had found the "positive" views of adoption on their own during the times when they might need to hear it ( like during a crisis pregnancy). So the adoption industry trained other professionals who might come in contact with these vulnerable women in order to present them with the positive adoption options. Notice how everyone on the following deals with women who might be at risk in some way and in a less than favorable situation:

- State and County Health Department professionals
- School nurses
- Crisis Pregnancy Centers
- State Department of Social Services professionals
- Hospital nurses
- Title X Clinics
- Family Planning Clinics
- Migrant Health Services
- Staff from OB/GYN Clinics
- Staff from Primary Care Clinics
- Indian Health Services staff
- Urban Indian Health staff
- Abstinence programs
- Health Care staff from youth and adult correctional facilities
- Health Care staff from group care facilities & residential treatment centers
- Planned Parenthood
- Military Health Services
- Foster Care
- Public Housing
- College Campus Health Services
- Rape and Domestic Violence Crisis Centers
- Domestic Violence Shelters

Per the IAAT website, over 17,665 individuals<sup>6</sup>, who previously had with little or no experience in adoption are now pushing this organized message of how adoption is empowering and super cool; that strong, selfless women choose adoption because they love their babies so much.

## FINDING THE BRAND AMBASSADORS

In marketing, everyone knows that word of mouth is the strongest form of recommendation. While the rule of thumb used be that for everyone one person who says something good, there are nine people that have a negative thing to say. Brands and business have always tried to encourage positive reviews and

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.infantadopt.org/about.php>

rewarded the good loyal customers. The advent of social media has greatly encourage the regular Joe to voice their opinions and to share them. The Adoption industry has followed these business models as well.

Again, the Missing Piece, explains it perfectly:

*"Respondents ant counselors with whom they can identify with on an emotional level. These women need counselors who will be able to understand and offer meaningful advice and recommendations"*

Who better to be the perfect brand ambassador for adoption then the newly relinquished mother in her sympathetic, but still heroic high?

Adoption agencies across the board now include in their publication letters from previous manufacturing mothers telling the tales of bittersweet joy about their relinquishment experience as evidence of "testimony". They frequently hire previous "birthmothers" as counselors or ask them to speak to other expectant mothers considering adoption. They invite their "birthmothers" to speak to groups of perspective adoptive parents, and to blog about their experiences. Perhaps the most damning of all practices, adoption agencies frequently send post relinquishment mothers to high schools to explain the heroic choices of adoption to young girls so that should they experience an unplanned pregnancy, they already have the approved adoption message in their vocabulary.

On top of the using freshly relinquished mothers to promote adoption to the unsuspecting, the agencies also retard the natural grief process in their women. By keeping them in the pro adoption environment, the mother has the same positive massage reinforced over and over again in the controlled environment effectively turning her into a promotional machine. If she leaves the safe environment, she is frequently met with less than positive views that question her newly taught belief system.

Since this belief systems has been created to go against her natural tendencies, her dependency on it is paramount. To question her beliefs, she questions the very act that she cannot undo; there are usually no ways to undo the relinquishment and that reality is just too painful to bare. Hence the newly relinquished birthmother become the perfect recruitment tool to find and convince other women to join the ranks. On top of that, by helping other women see the "positive value" of adoption, the mother justifies her own decision again and again, making it a never ending cycle or dependency, promotion, and justification built upon a false ideal.

## ADOPTION: THE PERFECT BUSINESS MODEL

Now wrapped all up all pretty and tied with a bow, adoption has everything in place to keep the industry sound and productive. Even if the supply becomes smaller than the demand, the industry benefits by raising the cost of the "fees" therefore increasing their profits.

On top of that, by making adoption all about the "birthmother's control" the agencies do not have to guarantee the successful completion of a parenting transfer in order to begin to collect the fees. They have the perfect scapegoat when something goes wrong, and she is the perfect scapegoat when everything goes right because it's "her choice".

At this point the adoption model has even learned to nullify the familiar opposition of a mother considering relinquishment. Her parents, the boyfriend, anyone who questions her choice is "not supportive" and trying to "control her", thereby making the adoption agency and often the adoptive parents, the only people who "get it".

When the mother doesn't follow the "plan" and doesn't continue to stay fixated on the positive view adoption, then she often internalizes that inability to maintain the positive thoughts as a personal failure, rather than see that the system failed her.

## CONCLUSION - ADOPTION'S ACHILLES' HEEL: THE TRUTH

The one thing that no amount of marketing can really sway is the truth.

The biggest threat to the adoption industry are simple facts and figures that cannot be rebutted. The greater portion of the adoption industry has been created upon a foundation of corruption. The approved messages of adoption were researched in the blood and tears of the mothers. The whole industry is committed to keeping the secrecy and lies buried deeply under the camouflage of a controlled, carefully constructed marketing message.

**Message:** Adoption is a loving option where a woman chooses to give her child a better life because she is wise and selfless and loves her child so much. The adoptee and adoptive parents will forever be grateful and happy.

**Truth:** Adoption is a billion dollar industry that transfers the parental rights of those lacking support and resources to those who have the money to pay for the privilege of parenting. The foundation of all adoptions is loss which has the risk of harming both the relinquishing mother and the adoptee for life.

The question is: will you continue to believe in the hype?