

10:00:09:05 - 10:00:17:05

HEATHER

Welcome to Braaaains, a podcast exploring the inner workings of our brains and how film and television portray them. Hosted by me, writer/director Heather Taylor,

10:00:17:07 - 10:00:34:22

SARAH

And by me, the television editor Sara Taylor. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge that the lens from which we recorded this podcast, and from where you are listening, are part of territories that have long served as a gathering place for diverse indigenous peoples. And we are thankful, as guests on this land to be able to live, work and gather here together.

10:00:35:00 - 10:00:40:07

SARAH

We continue to learn about the history that came before us, and we encourage you to do the same.

10:00:40:09 - 10:01:11:06

HEATHER

Today we're talking with Gretchen Sisson, a research sociologist with Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health at the University of California, San Francisco. She is the author of *Relinquished: the Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood*, a critical ten year examination of domestic adoption centering the stories of relinquishing mothers. The book chronicles America's refusal to care for families at the most basic level, and instead allow cultural and political ideas of adoption to advance an individual, private solution to large scale social problems.

10:01:11:08 - 10:01:31:22

SARAH

Our conversation critically considers the function adoption has in our society and who it serves, who it fails, and who lives with the trauma as the result. We also discuss adoption representation in shows like *This Is Us* and *16 and pregnant*, and how women who Gretchen spoke with feel that *The Handmaid's Tale* is the closest representation to their experience of relinquishing their child.

10:01:32:00 - 10:01:50:04

HEATHER

A quick reminder to our listeners that this interview should not be taken as medical advice, and it is for informational purposes only, because everyone's brain is different. Please consult your health care professional if you have any questions. And now, Gretchen.

10:01:50:06 - 10:01:52:07

SARAH

Gretchen. Welcome to Braaaains.

10:01:52:08 - 10:01:53:21

GRETCHEN

Thank you guys for having me back.

10:01:53:23 - 10:01:59:23

SARAH

I know, I'm so excited. You're our first, second time guest. And I'm thrilled that you're here.

10:02:00:01 - 10:02:04:01

GRETCHEN

But it's a great honor. And I'm thrilled to be back in chatting with you all. Thanks for having.

10:02:04:04 - 10:02:07:14

SARAH

Well, to refresh our listeners minds, tell us a little bit about yourself.

10:02:07:17 - 10:02:32:01

GRETCHEN

So I'm a sociologist. I'm with Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, which is a research group at the University of California in San Francisco. And last time I was on the show, I was with my colleague Stephanie Herold, talking about our research around abortion and abortion storytelling in our popular culture. Today, I am back talking about my new book called Relinquished the Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood.

10:02:32:03 - 10:02:52:08

GRETCHEN

so broadly, my work is looking at abortion and adoption in American culture. So this is a slightly different area than we talked about last time. Much heavier emphasis on my adoption research. But there's plenty of pop culture stuff in there, too, that I think you can take away because I can't help myself from talking about TV when when I get the opportunity.

10:02:52:08 - 10:03:08:21

HEATHER

So it's fantastic because that's exactly what we love to talk about. So we're really glad we've come together for our melding of minds with your expertise, and are just love of film and television. Just to sort of what inspired you to write this book? And as you talk about that, what are the most surprising takeaways that you've had from your research?

10:03:09:03 - 10:03:46:22

GRETCHEN

That's a big question. Two big questions. I'll start and I'll give the TV answer, which is it started

with 16 and pregnant on MTV back in the summer of 2009, 2009, 2010, when I when the show first airing on MTV and at the time I was, I was working with an organization called The Alliance on Teen Pregnancy in Boston, and I was doing a lot with pregnant teens and young mothers who were doing a lot of advocacy around lobbying the Boston City Council, lobbying the Massachusetts state legislature for what they needed to support their families, their children.

10:03:46:22 - 10:04:13:08

GRETCHEN

And I was really inspired by them and really struck by the incredible divergence between our cultural ideas about what teen pregnancy and young parenthood look like and what the actual lives of these young women looks like. And then 16 and Pregnant comes out on MTV. And of course, the young mothers that I was working with were really interested in in watching this show that was supposed to be telling stories about their lives, people like them.

10:04:13:10 - 10:04:34:23

GRETCHEN

And on that first season, there was a couple, Caitlin and Tyler, who relinquished their daughter for adoption. And the whole framing of the story, the the arc over the season was really that Caitlin and Tyler were better parents by virtue of relinquishing their daughter, right? They were more mature. They were more loving. They were better parents. By being able to recognize that they couldn't actually raise their child.

10:04:35:00 - 10:04:55:15

GRETCHEN

And you look at this in comparison to the other women on the show who were struggling and a lot of ways and had really thin support. And we're trying to figure out how to make it work. And this show was so stigmatizing of them and their decisions. and it really, again, just struck me the ways that adoption was viewed as this panacea.

10:04:55:17 - 10:05:15:01

GRETCHEN

Right? That we don't need to support young families, we don't need to look at what the actual lives of young people are like. We can just say like, oh, they should just give away their children. Like, problem solved. And I was also volunteering at the abortion fund at the time. And, and this idea of adoption as a solution obviously recurs and within abortion politics.

10:05:15:01 - 10:05:38:04

GRETCHEN

And those conversations. And so it just sort of really struck me, and I wanted to understand the ways that adoption was actually lived out for the women who are most impacted by it and their children over time. But so I started doing interviews with mothers who have relinquished children in 2010. and then I did ten year follow up interviews with them in 2020 from that.

10:05:38:04 - 10:05:40:00

HEATHER

What was what surprised you the most?

10:05:40:00 - 10:06:03:21

GRETCHEN

I mean, what surprised me the most, I think, is really how poorly served the women were by adoption over time. Right? We have this idea that adoption is beautiful and easy and maybe sad, but like ultimately offers this better life for everyone involved. And it was so much more complicated than that, which wasn't. That part wasn't surprising. Things were always more complicated.

10:06:03:21 - 10:06:21:04

GRETCHEN

And then the political rhetoric conveys them to be. But what was surprising was the extent to which almost all of the mothers ended up in a pretty cynical, critical place over time, and very few of them really felt good about the decisions that they had made.

10:06:21:05 - 10:06:28:13

SARAH

When you asked earlier question mothers about the portrayals that resonated with them on film and TV, or what were some of the good examples?

10:06:28:18 - 10:06:44:17

GRETCHEN

There's everything. Good examples, I think, and examples that actually resonated with them. Right. So like they hated Juno, they hated Juno, right? They had deep concerns about, you know, she just gave birth while she riding a bike. We have concerns, right. Like fair enough.

10:06:44:18 - 10:06:49:23

SARAH

Oh my gosh. I haven't watched it since I gave birth. Oh my god. Yeah.

10:06:50:01 - 10:07:13:09

GRETCHEN

So yeah, you know, like, this is legitimate. This is a legitimate question that that they had we had a lot of criticism about Glee, a couple depictions on Gray's Anatomy. They like This Is Us in some parts more than others. the complexity of transracial adoption, a lot of that resonated with them. They did not like the adoption story at the end of this series, you know?

10:07:13:09 - 10:07:54:14

GRETCHEN

So it was a lot of give and take. But one of the stories that they actually connected with the most

was the story of *The Handmaid's Tale*. And this idea of women who were effectively being used to create children for a ruling class of people. Within this patriarchal genomic state. Right. And I think that the fact that that was the one that they most saw themselves in gives you pretty keen insight into how they're experiencing their decisions, the context in which their decisions were made, the amount of constraint that they felt, the social factors that were shaping their lives at the time.

10:07:54:14 - 10:07:57:02

GRETCHEN

And so I thought that was really powerful.

10:07:57:04 - 10:07:58:13

SARAH

Yeah. Wow.

10:07:58:15 - 10:08:12:12

HEATHER

So, you know, with these kind of examples you gave of these different shows that they maybe didn't find themselves in, you know, what are some of those tropes and stereotypes that have been reinforced by this, like modern adoption stories in TV and film?

10:08:12:14 - 10:08:35:00

GRETCHEN

Yeah. So usually when you see stories about birth mothers or first mothers on TV, it's 1 or 2 things. One, the mother is like kind of entirely uninterested in her child, right? If it was on, she doesn't want to have contact. She's happy with her life like she had a baby. On to the next thing, right? That reflected no one's experience that I that I talked to.

10:08:35:01 - 10:08:56:16

GRETCHEN

Then on the other side, in most cases where you have stories about birth mothers, they're viewed as a threat to the adoptive family, right? So if they do have any interest in a child, if they do want to be connected, it is it's threatening other. They're like straightforwardly like I'm trying to regain custody of my child. That's not a legal possibility in most cases.

10:08:56:16 - 10:09:27:03

GRETCHEN

Right. But like or they're interfering or they're dangerous or they're riskier. They want to steal the child. Like what is missing is a model for a birth mother who wants to stay engaged and involved in her child's life, and isn't viewed as a threat to the family for that desire. That's what was missing from a lot of these stories, because that's what almost all of the mothers I spoke with that were they were they wanted to have contact, they wanted to have more contact than they did, but most of them had a lot of respect for their child's adoptive parents.

10:09:27:09 - 10:09:43:09

GRETCHEN

And even if they were really frustrated, even if they were really upset with their child's adoptive parents, they recognized that they were not going to be regaining custody of their child. Right? They didn't. They recognize they didn't actually have any power in this situation to do that. They just wanted to know their kid as they were growing up.

10:09:43:11 - 10:10:07:06

GRETCHEN

And I think that this part of the challenge with open adoption and with navigating open adoptions is that even though that's the norm, with an adoption, like 95% of adoptions today are open in some way. But part of the reason why those relationships are hard to navigate long term is because they kind of remain a cultural oddity. Like most people who are outside of the adoption, communities don't have an understanding of why a birth mother would want to be there.

10:10:07:06 - 10:10:13:23

GRETCHEN

We don't see those stories told popular culture. And so I think that that that is what's missing the most.

10:10:14:00 - 10:10:22:04

HEATHER

Yeah. Just to follow that up, like, why is there this focus on adoptive parents desires versus the desires or the wants of the relinquishing mother?

10:10:22:09 - 10:10:43:20

GRETCHEN

Yeah, well, adoption is always the transfer of children from families with with less power to families with more. Right. That's why the children are up for adoption in the first place. So that can be about resources. You know, it can be, but it's usually about resources, but it can be about other things as well. Race. It can be about gender ideas of who gets to be a parent on what terms.

10:10:43:21 - 10:11:08:07

GRETCHEN

Certainly usually again, to middle class families, mostly white, largely heteronormative white families. And who has the power to tell stories in our culture, right? Who are the policy makers? Who are this screenwriters? Right. And and I will say, like when we hear these refrains of like, adoption is beautiful, adoption is family building. Like that's the adoptive family perspective, right?

10:11:08:07 - 10:11:17:18

GRETCHEN

And we decided the fact that for every family that is formed, an adoption, a family is separated. Make that adoption possible. And those are the stories that we are missing.

10:11:17:18 - 10:11:31:14

SARAH

How does this pop culture narrative about, you know, relinquished mothers shape people's biases, and how do they shape the social and political narratives of that dictate the US policies or any government policy around family and adoption?

10:11:31:14 - 10:11:51:02

GRETCHEN

We as a country, as a society, believe so many things about adoption that just aren't really true. Right? And I think a lot of them come back to a lot of these stories that we tell about adoption. So we have this persistent belief that there are a lot of babies in need of homes, right? That adopting an infant is an altruistic thing to do, that we need more families to do that we don't.

10:11:51:02 - 10:12:20:06

GRETCHEN

We have between 10 and 45 waiting families for every infant. That's available. Right? So there's a huge, huge, huge demand for infants. There is almost no supply. Right. And when you have that system within a market based economy, you know, then the facilitators are going to be incentivized to generate more supply. And again, we're talking about human beings when we're talking about this supply.

10:12:20:06 - 10:12:54:03

GRETCHEN

Right. And I think when we focus on stories that are about adoptive families, right, we are losing sight of that dynamic that that is encouraging family separation. So I think that that is a really important myth that we have about adoption. But it also plays into this continual idea that people who are poor are incapable parents. Right. And I don't want to dismiss the challenges of parenting and poverty, but I also want to acknowledge that millions of American families do that every day.

10:12:54:05 - 10:13:21:07

GRETCHEN

Right? And when we look down on poor parents, then we feel increasingly justified in surveilling them, questioning the decisions that they're making for their children, questioning their right to parent under certain circumstances, questioning their worthiness. and then that's when we get more comfortable separating families and we don't see a necessity or a benefit to trying to keep families together.

10:13:21:09 - 10:13:29:12

GRETCHEN

Yeah. So we see a lot I think we see a lot of stories that kind of reflect both of those dimensions. And yeah, I think it's important to recognize where that comes from.

10:13:29:14 - 10:13:31:14

HEATHER

Who. That really makes me feel emotional.

10:13:31:14 - 10:13:51:12

SARAH

Yeah. Like I feel shitty right now because I never like, I've been so invested, I guess, in the narrative I've seen my whole life that, yeah, we're making families, and I never really took the time to think about the families that are being taken apart. And like, that's really heartbreaking. We don't need to feel shitty. What I mean.

10:13:51:14 - 10:13:53:08

GRETCHEN

I do think that we should think about it more.

10:13:53:10 - 10:13:55:07

SARAH

Yeah. No, I think we should think about it for sure.

10:13:55:09 - 10:14:21:08

GRETCHEN

Yeah. Well, and because I think that this isn't just a reflection of privilege. Yeah. Right. And it's who you see in your communities. And I will also say, because the stories of birth and first mothers are silenced and erased in a lot of different ways, both because they have less power to get traction. But like in some fairly straightforward ways, like a lot of the mothers I interviewed who were said, they're like, are you going to change my name?

10:14:21:08 - 10:14:43:23

GRETCHEN

Yes, of course. Are you going to change my child's name? Are you going to say, are you going to remove these? Like, yes, yes, I'm committed to protecting your identity to the extent that I can. Right. One of the reasons they are so concerned is because if they are in an open adoption, and again, most of them were to some extent, if they anger their child's adoptive parents, they can have their contact with their child limited.

10:14:44:00 - 10:15:13:02

GRETCHEN

Right. If their child was over 18, they were generally more comfortable sharing their stories. Their child was under 18. And that relationship was still contingent on the cooperation of the

adoptive parents. They were much more hesitant to share their stories. And then for mothers who were in a really critical place, you know, there have been adoption agencies that have sent cease and desist letters for birth mothers who have, like written blogs that were really critical of the adoption system or accusing the agencies of manipulating or coercing them.

10:15:13:06 - 10:15:37:09

GRETCHEN

Adoption agencies have had lawsuits against birth mothers, and it doesn't take a lot. Right. And you have one lawsuit against one birth mother. Soon a lot of people are going to know about that, and they're going to they're going to pull back in how they share their stories. Again, not only is there's kind of this cultural silencing because of a lack of power, but there's also like really intentional efforts to try to keep some of these stories from being told.

10:15:37:11 - 10:15:48:04

GRETCHEN

And so a lot of times they'll be in areas and people be like, well, I never met a birth mother, I never talked to a birth mother. And I was like, well, you don't know that you did. But like, maybe you do, right? Which is the same thing I say people like, I don't know many people who've had abortions.

10:15:48:04 - 10:16:05:00

GRETCHEN

I was like, oh, you are 100% right. It's less likely that, you know, birth and that you know someone who had an abortion because adoption is comparatively so rare and abortion is so incredibly common. But, you know, since I started doing this research, a woman I knew in college, she's like, oh, I relinquished my son before we started college.

10:16:05:00 - 10:16:26:03

GRETCHEN

I never knew that I knew this woman for years. Right. And and she share that with me, or, you know, a friend who's like, oh, my sister relinquished her baby, ruined her life, right? This 40 years ago. Or a friend of mine who, you know, was playing around on 23 of me last summer and discovers a brother that you never know she had and her mother had had passed a couple of years ago.

10:16:26:03 - 10:16:34:11

GRETCHEN

And so she's discovered this brother that her own mother relinquished. Right. This these stories are all around us. We just don't see them. They aren't allowed to be visible to us.

10:16:34:12 - 10:17:00:10

HEATHER

I got a little teary because, like of our background, like growing up in poverty and growing up

with a parent, with mental illness and being scared and having her being sued for custody of one of our siblings. And it's just like it's it's scary because the idea that she was seen as less than and like, yeah, a lot of people that power dynamic and you just saying the power dynamic that stays throughout the entire relationship until that child turns 18.

10:17:00:12 - 10:17:05:16

HEATHER

What a burden that is for that mother that they want to be so careful. Right. They just I mean.

10:17:05:16 - 10:17:28:05

GRETCHEN

A lot of others talked about it almost like a sentence, right? Like my child is nine. I'm halfway there, right? Like so many of them are counting down to their child's 18th birthday until they can feel like they can have more of a connection. That's not all of them, right? A lot of their, you know, and there are intermediate milestones, like a huge milestone was when their children got their first their own phone.

10:17:28:06 - 10:17:48:17

GRETCHEN

Right. They could text they, their kid could text them when they needed to. And they know that. Oh data of parents are like checking their text messages. And you know, they're aware these conversations are happening. But just the idea that their child protects them whenever they wanted, like that was really satisfying to a lot of them that not every communication needed to, like initially go through the adoptive parents.

10:17:48:17 - 10:18:07:03

GRETCHEN

Right? So I don't want to make it sound like every adoptive parent is completely cutting it off. Some of them did, but there are plenty of really well-meaning adoptive parents who do want to include the birth parents in their child's life, but there was still a constant anxiety there for a lot of them. One of the best examples was when I interviewed her in 2010.

10:18:07:03 - 10:18:30:13

GRETCHEN

She was feeling really good about her adoption, and she talked about when she babysat her child for a weekend, his adoptive parents were going to a wedding and and so she babysat him for a weekend. And she felt great about this at the time. And ten years later, I was like, do you remember when you told me this story about when you you got to babysit your son and she said, oh yeah, did I, did I tell you that he fell off the bed?

10:18:30:17 - 10:18:48:01

GRETCHEN

And I was like, no, you know, but at this point I had three kids. Every single one of them fell off

the bed right when they were at that age. Right. They learned a role. And of course, I learned a role. When you've walked away from this edge of the bed for a minute, and that's how that got her anxiety around him rolling off the bed.

10:18:48:03 - 10:19:07:19

GRETCHEN

As a one year old, she talked about setting an alarm on her phone for every five minutes overnight and like, staying next to the crib to make sure that he was okay because she was so worried that if he got hurt, his adoptive parents would never would cut off contact. I mean, these were never parents who trusted her, right?

10:19:07:20 - 10:19:27:07

GRETCHEN

They can they left their their child with his birth mother like for the weekend. Right. Like that's a tremendous show of trust and faith and connection. But that anxiety was still there. That worry was still there. The whole time that she got him, she was worried if I take him to the hospital, is, you know, are they going to forgive me?

10:19:27:07 - 10:19:44:14

GRETCHEN

Right. And I think that in the I mean, she was telling me this story like eight years or two over ten years after it happened. Right. And and it was still you could still hear the anxiety in her voice as she spoke about it. So, yeah, I think that there's there is that power differential that really never goes away.

10:19:44:16 - 10:19:56:18

HEATHER

Yeah. So why? okay. I just like big questions here. why is modern adoption so complex? And what has changed, if anything, from pre-roe adoption?

10:19:56:21 - 10:20:15:09

GRETCHEN

Okay, that is a lot of question. Let me I'm going to start with the second one. I'm going to start with this one. And what was it. So before Roe v Wade. And really for a while after Roe v Wade private adoption was predominantly a white system. So it was really white women that were participating in the private adoption system almost exclusively.

10:20:15:09 - 10:20:45:00

GRETCHEN

There are a couple of reasons for that, but mostly because there was a market for white babies that there wasn't for children of color. I don't want to make it sound like those families were protected from family separation. They weren't, but it wasn't they. They weren't separated for the benefit of the private adoption market. There were also, like longer histories of single

motherhood within black communities, of kinship care, within Black and Latino and tribal communities that were very real.

10:20:45:00 - 10:21:07:18

GRETCHEN

So mostly pre-roe we look at private adoption, it was young white girls and young women whose own parents said, you are not allowed to have a child before you're married. We're going to send you a maternity home. This is a way of delaying motherhood until you are married. This is the first chart, right? And like that's how this is going to be handled.

10:21:07:19 - 10:21:42:12

GRETCHEN

Because the stigma and shame of non marital pregnancy and premarital parenthood was too much. And in sort of this like very conformist post-World War Two society in these white communities. Right. And so that was what private adoption looked like. Then on the other hand, whereas communities of color didn't face that same market demand or those same pressures in the same way, the child welfare system, the family regulation system was also used as a way of separating, particularly black families.

10:21:42:12 - 10:22:12:06

GRETCHEN

And of course, the boarding school tradition in, you know, used against Native American communities. And then the, you know, the adoption project that followed that into the 1970s, these communities were still separated from their children in a lot of ways. But it wasn't to make children available for private adoption. Right. I still think that those narratives inform how we think about which families get support for which reasons, which parents have a right to their children and and what that looks like.

10:22:12:06 - 10:22:33:19

GRETCHEN

So it's not independent, right? They're not separate issues, but they're they're separate systems that are working in parallel ways. After Roe v Wade, domestic adoption drops pretty quickly and surprisingly slowly. You see the introduction of open adoption at that point. That's a way to encourage more women to participate in the private adoption system. If they have more control.

10:22:34:00 - 10:22:53:11

GRETCHEN

You can pick the parents, you can get pictures. That was sort of like the extent of what openness looks like when we look at like the 80s, early 90s, you also start to see a huge increase in transnational international adoption at the time. Right? So I was in elementary school in the 90s, like my classmates that I knew who were adopted.

10:22:53:11 - 10:23:21:01

GRETCHEN

They were all international adoptees, right? They were from Korea, South and Central America, China, for sure. That is where the majority of adoption came from. In the 90s, kind of through early 2000. And that I accomplished a couple things. One is it established that there was a market among white adoptive families for children of color, right. And two, it alleviated the demand on the domestic adoption space.

10:23:21:03 - 10:23:43:10

GRETCHEN

But once the international adoption market crashed, as countries sort of stabilized geopolitically or economically, they stop exporting their children. A lot of research in that international kind of have it all at once. In the early 2000, then there became this issue of, well, now where are we going to source children? and that is when you see a lot more work happening.

10:23:43:10 - 10:24:10:03

GRETCHEN

And it started in the early 90s of fast tracking adoptions from the foster care system for permanent adoption and terminating parental rights more quickly, and then also increasing openness within the private adoption system even further to make it even more appealing. And this framing of adoption as a empowered choice, right, that this is a pregnancy option. You can choose this instead of having an abortion.

10:24:10:05 - 10:24:30:20

GRETCHEN

And this is where you see a lot of the really adoptive adoption promoted rhetoric that we see coming out there. That was an incredibly complicated history that I just tried to do some amount of justice to in like three, four minutes. so, you know, I'm, I'm glossing over a lot of important detail, but that is sort of the general arc.

10:24:30:22 - 10:24:58:23

GRETCHEN

Right? that we've seen and that sort of shapes the contours of, of what domestic private adoption looks like today, where it is really entangled with the family policing child welfare system. You continue to have really high demand for all children, especially all healthy babies, even as you have relatively low supply. And so I think that that that has all led to the factor that contributes most relinquishment being poverty across the board.

10:24:59:01 - 10:25:10:20

GRETCHEN

So most of the women that I interviewed for this book wanted to parent their children. They continued their pregnancies with the intention of parenting, but they did not have the resources to have the capacity to raise another child.

10:25:11:00 - 10:25:30:12

HEATHER

Yeah. So, you know, I think you touched on our next question about like, what types of motherhood and children and families are most valued by our society. I feel like that answer some of that question, but how does that belief of who is valued and who isn't valued? How does it impact politics and policies?

10:25:30:12 - 10:25:59:00

GRETCHEN

Right. So we spent a lot of money on adoption in the United States. We put a lot of private money into adoption. We put a lot of philanthropic money into adoption, promoting adoption, supporting nonprofit agencies. And we put a lot of public money into adoption. And I don't just mean through the family regulation system, right? We give tax subsidies to adoptive parents from the private adoption system as well.

10:25:59:04 - 10:26:06:18

GRETCHEN

On the federal level, it's the \$16,000 tax credit right now for an adoption to cover the cost of the adoption. Really? Yes.

10:26:06:23 - 10:26:09:10

HEATHER

How much does an adoption cost? Just as sort of a side note.

10:26:09:11 - 10:26:10:21

SARAH

Well, so this is.

10:26:10:23 - 10:26:46:16

GRETCHEN

Yeah, I mean, it's look, they're expensive. They can go from like 20 to 40, \$50,000 depending on where you are. They the argument is that we need to subsidize adoption because adoption is so expensive. My argument is that adoption is so expensive because you subsidize it. Yeah. so when you look at adoption agencies. Right, really, really, really high demand, really, really low supply, if they're going to facilitate adoptions, they need to go out and market and find vulnerable pregnant people to sell the idea of relinquishment too.

10:26:46:18 - 10:27:09:20

GRETCHEN

Right. So the number one expense for a lot of adoptions is not legal fees. It is not support for the birth parent. It is marketing. It is Google ads. Right. And so you're putting a ton, a ton of money into subsidizing the costs of an adoption, whereas a lot of the cost, the adoption is convincing someone that an adoption needs to take place.

10:27:09:20 - 10:27:30:13

GRETCHEN

If you took a fraction of that and use it to keep families together, you wouldn't need to have the adoption happening in the first place. Right? And if you devoted those taxpayer dollars and it's not just the tax credits, it's for the tax breaks for the non profit agencies, the subsidizing crisis pregnancy centers that work closely with adoption agencies, right.

10:27:30:13 - 10:27:35:22

GRETCHEN

All of all of that money, in addition to the philanthropic money that goes into the adoption space.

10:27:36:02 - 10:27:49:06

SARAH

What are some of the circumstances that lead to adoption? I think you've touched on some of that stuff. A lot of that stuff. But what consequences does it have for those who have relinquished their children and the children who have been relinquished, like, what's the actual impact and the kinds of trauma that they might have?

10:27:49:07 - 10:28:16:23

GRETCHEN

So most of the mothers, almost really all the mothers that I interviewed did go through this initial grief process after the adoption. This is the loss they have to mourn. It as a loss. And that is real for some of them. A lot of them, after they get through that initial grief period, there is a period that a lot of them called, like their adoption honeymoon or, you know, the the sunshine and rainbows period or whatever, you want to frame it.

10:28:16:23 - 10:28:37:14

GRETCHEN

Right. And that was a space where they were usually feeling really optimistic about the adoption. Right. This is they're they're usually in a similar place to where they were at the time of the adoption. They're not that far out. They still have a great relationship with their child's adoptive parents. The kid is a baby. Adoption seems to be working well for all of them.

10:28:37:19 - 10:28:55:03

GRETCHEN

They're super optimistic about how this is going to go. Things are great, and this is when adoption agencies invite them back to speak to prospective adoptive parents. They have them write blog posts. They have them do videos. Right. Like I always say, it's not that hard to find a happy birth mother using to like it's just a temporal thing rather than doing it right.

10:28:55:04 - 10:29:03:20

GRETCHEN

Yeah, yeah, just find them right in that window. and, you know, I spoke with one woman, actually. Maybe. Maybe I'll read a bit.

10:29:03:22 - 10:29:05:01

SARAH

Yeah. Yes.

10:29:05:03 - 10:29:05:21

HEATHER

Please do.

10:29:05:23 - 10:29:22:10

GRETCHEN

So, Leah, this is Leah. When we first spoke, just over a year after the adoption, Leah was candid that she was still grieving. But she did feel that the intensity of her mourning was starting to ease up a bit. Other birth mothers had prepared her by saying that the first year would be the worst, so she'd expected it, and it felt like she was emerging on the other side.

10:29:22:12 - 10:29:39:15

GRETCHEN

Leah's candid feelings about her adoption were complicated, but she focused on how hard life would have been if she'd been parenting and how much better she believed the adoption was for her son. Her hopefulness was earnest, and when I asked her what she thought adoption should look like, she said, mine. I think every adoption should look like mine.

10:29:39:17 - 10:30:03:02

GRETCHEN

You know, mine wouldn't work for everybody, and not every birth mom will be comfortable. It's very hard for birth parents to feel confident in that relationship and to feel like they're bringing something to the table. I think society still considers open adoption as something that's done for the birth parents. I think it's really important if the birth mom starts to pull away for adoptive parents to remind her that they want her to be involved, that they think she does bring something to the table that they value, are all of those things.

10:30:03:04 - 10:30:19:08

GRETCHEN

Caleb is one now. He recognizes me. He's very comfortable with me. There are times when he won't go to his grandparents, but he'll come to me. He's aware of who I am, and when they talk about me, they say birth mom. When Jacqueline talks him in at night, it's mommy loves you. Daddy loves you. Leah loved you. There are pictures of me in their house.

10:30:19:08 - 10:30:36:15

GRETCHEN

It's like I'm part of their family. It feels like an actual relationship. We never really, really had a contract. It wasn't like that. The relationship will go as it is, but it's never going to be less than this. I feel like we've put a lot of work into it when I have other children, when I get married, all of those things that will change any family relationship.

10:30:36:15 - 10:30:53:18

GRETCHEN

But I feel like this base level of love and respect for one another will help us carry through the times when there's not so much contact. Leah's excitement about adoption was sincere and buoyant, so it was no surprise that she was eagerly working as a peer counselor at the agency that had facilitated her adoption. They couldn't have asked for a better ambassador.

10:30:53:22 - 10:31:12:11

GRETCHEN

So that was in 2010. I spoke with Leah again in 2020, she was still living in the same city with Ryan, Jacklyn and Caleb, just a short 30 minute drive away. She hadn't had any more children, but she'd been happily married for just over seven years. She was working at a job she seemed to like, and had a fair amount of stability and comfort in her own life.

10:31:12:13 - 10:31:33:13

GRETCHEN

When I interviewed you in 2010, I began, you told me that you thought every adoption should look like yours. She sighed. Oh yeah, that sounds like something I would have said, she continued. I personally feel a whole lot different about adoption now, with the benefit of hindsight and some time and space and counseling and all that, I realized how much of my own trauma led to the adoption.

10:31:33:15 - 10:31:59:10

GRETCHEN

I see it now is really unnecessary, unfortunately. But you know, we are, we are, and we've been making the most of where we are and where we stand. Reflecting back on her relinquishment, Leah felt during her pregnancy that she had nothing to offer Caleb so he wouldn't suffer from losing her. He could only gain the biggest thing that was never discussed anywhere in any space I was in while I was pregnant, and I tried to do a lot of research, like I really tried to was adoption trauma for adoptees.

10:31:59:10 - 10:32:18:12

GRETCHEN

She now felt like she had failed her son by the choices she'd made. And it goes on. And she's still in contact with Caleb. She hadn't been cut off. She saw him fairly regularly. They were still local to one another. But you can see sort of this shift right where early on she feels really confident that they have this good base.

10:32:18:12 - 10:32:46:23

GRETCHEN

Everything's going to go well. This is the right decision and it's time passed on. She came to have a much more critical evaluation of what she'd been told during her pregnancy. The options that had been available to her, what she believed she was going to accomplish for her son through the adoption. And I think that this gets to the second part of your question, Sarah, which is that adoption is viewed as sort of there's only this net gain, only this door to a better life for adopted people.

10:32:47:00 - 10:33:08:10

GRETCHEN

And it is far more complicated than that. So many adoptees are struggling with trauma around their adoption or simply struggling with, you know, not having a connection to their birth family, not having a strong connection. This is particularly palpable for transracial adoptees. And I'm always clear my research is not on adopted people. Right. I hope my research is accountable to them.

10:33:08:15 - 10:33:38:10

GRETCHEN

You know, I hope that they that these stories are meaningful for them. I cite a lot of adoptee memoirists and scholars in this book. That was a priority for me, you know, but I haven't researched adoptee trauma. What I will say is that a lot of what changed how birth mothers felt about their adoption was seeing the ways that adoption did not accomplish for their children what they had hoped it would write, that their child is struggling in some way.

10:33:38:10 - 10:34:00:06

GRETCHEN

They have a lot of questions or simple. I mean, not simple, but more straightforward things like I relinquished my child because I was single at the time, and I really strongly believe that my kid needed to have a two parent family, and within four years, the adoptive parents are divorced and the birth mother is married and parenting her own kids with her new spouse.

10:34:00:08 - 10:34:27:05

GRETCHEN

Right. And like, why did I make this decision, this lifelong decision off of the circumstances that were likely to change, that in fact, did change dramatically, you know, and so I think that there was a lot of that of seeing that whatever they had believed, they were giving their child through the adoption, that promise did not materialize or never fully delivered to the extent that agencies had said that it would.

10:34:27:07 - 10:34:34:14

HEATHER

How does being an adoptee impact how people understand their own pregnancy and the impact

of relinquishing a child?

10:34:34:16 - 10:35:01:19

GRETCHEN

Yes, and that's a great question, because adoptees are overrepresented among birth mothers. Right. And the one thing that I want to express in that regard is it's not because they were so happy with their adoptions that that made sense. Right? When adoptees have unplanned pregnancies, they have complicated feelings, right? Because so much public conversation about adoptees is like, you've been saved from abortion, right?

10:35:01:19 - 10:35:20:01

GRETCHEN

If you're unhappy in your adoption, like, would you rather have been aborted or left in a dumpster? Like, adoptees hear this bullshit all the time. And like, you know, I see it on social media because I'm connected to a lot of adopted people there, I see it. It's disgusting. It's constant, and I don't know how they deal with it, other than the fact that they have no choice.

10:35:20:03 - 10:35:40:01

GRETCHEN

But all of this conversation means that when adoptees have unplanned pregnancies, it's complicated for them. It's complicated for them to consider abortion and what abortion means in their lives. Plenty of adoptive people do have abortions. I don't want to make it like more adoptees have abortions than relinquish, for sure. Again, because adoption is rare and abortion is so common.

10:35:40:05 - 10:36:05:15

GRETCHEN

But for the for the adoptees who did relinquish that was a factor. Also, if they were young, right? They were still really heavily influenced by their own adoptive parents. And if the adoptive parents perceive that the adoption was really successful and happy and easy, even if the adoptee has complicated feelings about it, probably the adoptive parents are going to be encouraging the adoption.

10:36:05:17 - 10:36:06:15

SARAH

Right?

10:36:06:17 - 10:36:28:17

GRETCHEN

And that came up frequently as well. So again, none of them were like, well, I was adopted. And it was so wonderful that that's what I wanted to get my child. But just the salience of adoption in their own lives, I think, made them consider it earlier, more fully in their pregnancies, made them have more complicated feelings about deciding not to have an abortion.

10:36:28:17 - 10:36:50:13

GRETCHEN

For adoptees of color, it was particularly fraught, especially adoptees of color who were raised by white parents. Right? When they you know, there's one woman I interviewed who was a trans national adoptee, issues from Central America. So she's Latina and she was raised by white parents. And she's like, look, I didn't know who my child's adoptive parents were going to be, but they were not going to be white.

10:36:50:13 - 10:37:18:18

GRETCHEN

Like, that was. My number one priority was that she felt so alienated, surrounded by whiteness growing up, that she really wanted her child to be with a family of color. The only family of color that the agency offered her is an Asian-American family. And so that's what she chose. That's what she went with. Right. And so you have these, like, various dislocation of racial and ethnic identity of heritage, you know, and she said that she's in an open adoption.

10:37:18:20 - 10:37:43:09

GRETCHEN

Her daughter is Latina. But as she said, I can't share that culture with her. Like I was raised in a white household. We would have to learn this together. If she needs help navigating that, I can't give her that. Or adoptees in transracial adoptions who are biracial and only have a connection with their white mother, right? And so even if they are connected to their family of origin, they're still not connected to their black family.

10:37:43:09 - 10:37:54:20

GRETCHEN

Maybe. Right. And so this is getting a little bit further afield from your original question, I think that it just brings up all of the ways that people's identities in these spaces are really complicated.

10:37:54:20 - 10:38:05:03

SARAH

And so now what's the connection between adoption and reproductive justice? And how did the nationwide legal right to abortion in the U.S. start with an adoption? Yeah.

10:38:05:08 - 10:38:23:06

GRETCHEN

Well, you know, Norm McCorvey, who was Jane Rowe, never had an abortion. And people get confused about this, right? Of course she had an abortion. No, she the case takes way too long. You know, she was pregnant at the time they filed it. The decision come down for three years to normal. So we actually relinquished three children over the course of her life.

10:38:23:08 - 10:38:48:04

GRETCHEN

And, like, I want to be clear, and I hope I am clear in this section where I talk about Norma, Norma was like, not a reliable witness for her own life. She had a lot of trauma that happened. She was highly motivate. You know, she sort of established this identity as as Jane Rowe, as a pro-choice advocate, felt really alienated from the pro-choice movement, largely because she wasn't polished.

10:38:48:04 - 10:39:10:07

GRETCHEN

She didn't fit in with, like, this, this repro rights professionalized, lawyerly set. They looked down on her a lot. I mean, like, she had legitimate grievances there. So then she's like, well, moved to the pro-life side. She became this badass pro-life advocate. She wrote two different memoirs. They're almost entirely reconcilable. you know, and I think she was highly motivated by money, by attention.

10:39:10:09 - 10:39:36:12

GRETCHEN

I'm not making any excuses for Norma here, but I do think that when I read her stories and accounts as a birth mother, I see someone who's been through a lot of trauma by virtue of those relinquishment in those separations whose motherhood was never validated within the, you know, pro-choice side of the movement as person was never validated within that movement.

10:39:36:12 - 10:39:58:08

GRETCHEN

Whereas the anti-abortion movement was always willing to see her as a mother, was always willing to acknowledge her as a mother and make space for that. Right. And so I think that she's I think she's a really interesting character. I don't want to draw too many conclusions from her story because, again, I she's a deeply untrustworthy person and really recounting anything.

10:39:58:14 - 10:40:25:23

GRETCHEN

But I have had more sympathy for her by understanding the other, the stories of other birth mothers and what what she went through. But the reason why I make, why I include that in the book, is to say that this moment of ro, of Roe versus Wade, this this establishment of legal abortion across the country, it was rooted on the constraint choices that Norma really reflected through her own story.

10:40:26:04 - 10:40:53:04

GRETCHEN

We're beyond that now. We're beyond that in a couple ways. Ro has gone first of all, but we're also beyond and should be beyond this pro-choice, pro-life dichotomy here, right? Yeah. And this is where I think feminists, the pro-choice movement, have consistently misunderstood

adoption because they have always said, well, adoption is a choice. We are pro-choice. You can choose adoption, you can choose abortion, you can choose to parent like 1 to 3 choices.

10:40:53:04 - 10:41:32:21

GRETCHEN

Great, right? But what that has never been able to recognize are the conditions under which women relinquish the constraints that are put on them, that bring them to the point of relinquishment. And that's what reproductive justice offers, right? And reproductive justice has always been about as a counterpoint to the pro-choice movement. Right. As this theory and movement building that came there was founded by a black woman that came out as a response to the pro-choice movement of saying, no, we need to be accountable to the conditions under which people are choosing to have children, under the options that are available to them.

10:41:32:21 - 10:42:00:18

GRETCHEN

What real access look like and what their communities look like, and whether they're safe to have families in. Yeah. And so I think that reproductive justice is a natural philosophical home for adoption. The question of incorporating adoption into the reproductive justice movement as a basis for organizing and change making, that is trickier, building is always trickier, and bridge building is always trickier.

10:42:00:18 - 10:42:29:21

GRETCHEN

And the the historical whiteness of private adoption makes it hard to make some of those connections. And so the work of bringing the conversations around adoption into the reproductive justice movement has largely fallen on not birth mothers, but on adopted people. And, and of course, on, on really adopted women of color who have come out of that, who are already occupying space in the reproductive justice movement and are now saying, let's bring adoption into this conversation.

10:42:30:00 - 10:42:52:05

HEATHER

It's so interesting because adoption is often seen as mutually agreeable, common ground. Yeah, politically. And it's also this cultural narrative. It's just praises adoption. Where is this coming from? Like, how do we bridge that belief with, you know, where we are now with reproductive justice to help us like fold that in and to say that this is part of a bigger narrative?

10:42:52:05 - 10:43:11:15

GRETCHEN

Yeah. I mean, look, conservatives obviously love adoption. They love it as it gives a counterpoint to abortion. That's great. But it also means that they don't have to invest in vulnerable families, right? They don't need to find broader social solutions to the things that

make people more likely to relinquish. So that's great for as far as they're concerned.

10:43:11:19 - 10:43:35:10

GRETCHEN

Our side likes adoption because we love this idea for nontraditional family building. That love makes the family right. A lot of obviously a lot of gay and queer families adopt, and that's an important constituency on the political left. But I also but I think it's actually not that I think we have just largely conceded adoption as the ground of, of the right wing.

10:43:35:12 - 10:43:56:12

GRETCHEN

Right. And we have just said this is an easy thing that we can compromise on because we don't understand it. So. Right. We'll just we'll just say like, oh, this is pro-choice. You can choose any of these things. And we're going to promote adoption. We're going to make adoption more accessible. We're going to subsidize adoption, right. Because again, policymakers have never considered what that actually means.

10:43:56:14 - 10:44:12:12

GRETCHEN

and I'm not I'm not like letting them off the hook. Right. They should they should be doing that. Right. But I think as a, as a movement as it like the the abortion rights movement has, has never done a good job of incorporating it. And that's there's no one that's holding them accountable with any power in this space.

10:44:12:18 - 10:44:22:05

SARAH

Right. The biggest thing is like we don't know how it works. Like just like the fact that we don't know how adoption works. Like it's just like, oh, that's an easy option. Sure. Yeah. It's a choice.

10:44:22:05 - 10:44:42:09

GRETCHEN

You just. Yeah. Look, people are saying, what do you want to accomplish with this book? And I'm like, I would just let people think about it a little bit more like, I think a lot of this just comes from not critically considering the function that adoption has in our society and who it serves and who it fails. And I think that that's really important.

10:44:42:09 - 10:45:02:20

GRETCHEN

And if my book can just get people to kind of question some of these premises that they see in our political conversations and our popular culture, I mean, that's what I'm trying to accomplish. You know, I get to a pretty radical place by the end of the book because that's where my research took me. Right? I didn't start there, but that's where the stories went for me.

10:45:02:22 - 10:45:10:17

GRETCHEN

And if I can do some handholding and help people along on this journey of understanding how this works, that's what I want the book to accomplish.

10:45:10:20 - 10:45:20:07

HEATHER

And speaking of pop culture, like what can pop culture do better? What stories would you love to see in film and television that can help us maybe shape some of this narrative in a better way?

10:45:20:11 - 10:45:46:12

GRETCHEN

This show that I love, that I actually feel speaks most directly to this work is made based on Stephanie Land's book because it shows the reality of parenting and poverty, what it takes to make it work. And then, you know, at the beginning of this show where she's involved in the custody battle with her ex and like, having her parenting surveilled put under scrutiny, like, I think that's really valuable.

10:45:46:12 - 10:46:07:02

GRETCHEN

Like, that is the story of a family preservation. As far as I'm like from my adoption perspective, this is the story that we need to see to show what parenting and poverty actually looks like so that we can understand why these families are worth investing in. Right. That's that is, to me, like has nothing to do with adoption, but has everything to do with adoption, has everything to do with who we understand is worth being a parent.

10:46:07:02 - 10:46:28:01

GRETCHEN

And I think that's really valuable. You know, I think we need you know, Rebecca Nagle did incredible reporting with this land and her reporting on the Indian Child Welfare Act. I think there is huge opportunity for storytelling there around the ways that we have policed and separated Native American families and tribes, the child welfare system, family policing there.

10:46:28:01 - 10:47:01:07

GRETCHEN

I think that there is a there are a lot of stories to be told. And I do think that there are stories to be told about private adoption, too. You know, I think that and this is why I chose to, to include so many first person accounts in the book, like extended first person accounts, because anything that I can say as a scholar is going to be less persuasive than just understanding how all of these various historical, socio cultural forces come together in one person's life and lead them to view adoption as the lifeline.

10:47:01:09 - 10:47:21:00

GRETCHEN

Right? And that's that's what I think is important and that's good storytelling. You can tell a story about that. Right. And I think that, you know, I'm hoping that we'll see more of these stories again. And they don't need to be overtly about adoption. They just need to be about the work and struggle of parenting for so many families today.

10:47:21:02 - 10:47:25:21

SARAH

Yeah. Well, can you tell us tell our listeners where they can find your book?

10:47:25:22 - 10:47:47:19

GRETCHEN

You can find it anywhere. Anywhere you buy books. It'll be on bookshop, it'll be at your local bookstore, it'll be on Amazon, it will be on audiobook for people who prefer to read that way. I'm actually really excited about the audiobook. We're going to have a cast of authors readings for the different stories, so it was really important to me that it include different voices, because the book quite literally includes different voices.

10:47:47:19 - 10:47:52:10

GRETCHEN

And so we will have that out. And no, I'm excited for it to be in front of people after all this time.

10:47:52:12 - 10:47:54:12

SARAH

And can you say the name of your book one more time?

10:47:54:15 - 10:48:00:01

GRETCHEN

Yes, it is relinquished the politics of adoption and the privilege of American Motherhood.

10:48:00:03 - 10:48:01:03

HEATHER

Oh, amazing.

10:48:01:03 - 10:48:03:23

SARAH

Gretchen, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today.

10:48:04:00 - 10:48:08:08

GRETCHEN

And of course, thank you, Sarah and Heather for having me. I appreciate getting the chance to chat with you.

10:48:08:08 - 10:48:11:06

HEATHER

It was a pleasure.

10:48:11:08 - 10:48:31:12

SARAH

I realize and talking with Gretchen that I didn't really ever think about the whole world of adoption. I had the movie lens on the like, happy family lens on. It was really impactful listening to her talk about her book and, and like the research she's done. And I thought it really shifted my, my mindset. Yeah. Made me think of things in a way, different way.

10:48:31:14 - 10:48:54:14

HEATHER

I think the key point of it is that it's not to take away from, yes, it is making families, but in making families it is also pulling apart families. And so I think there is that dichotomy there. And with pulling apart a family, you are also creating trauma. And so it just becomes such a complex issue. And I think a lot of people don't think about it.

10:48:54:14 - 10:49:18:12

HEATHER

And that's kind of what you said. You have to critically think about this and who is benefiting. And what stories are you painting of who and whom and and it just made me think, yeah, that is something that's just so prevalent in our society and in our politics and in our laws and in everything that it's important to really consider and think about.

10:49:18:14 - 10:49:22:07

SARAH

Yeah, it made me made me do a lot of thinking. So thank you, Gretchen.

10:49:22:09 - 10:49:43:02

HEATHER

And thank you to everyone who was able to share their story to whatever capacity they were able to at the time, and understanding that that was a hard thing to do, both emotionally, psychologically, but also in some cases could have impacted their ability to have a relationship with their child. So yeah, I think just thank you to everyone who took part.

10:49:43:04 - 10:49:59:02

HEATHER

I'm going to move us 180 degrees away from the conversation that we've had with Gretchen, which is so impactful to say something that has been impactful for me. There's this app called Finch. There's a lot of these apps are like, create a to do list and then do the things in the day. And it's so boring and I don't know why.

10:49:59:02 - 10:50:00:07

HEATHER

And I've never wanted to do it.

10:50:00:09 - 10:50:04:07

SARAH

I have one that's on my phone that I've started. I never use because I got boring. So yes, tell me more.

10:50:04:12 - 10:50:21:18

HEATHER

So I have Finch, and in Finch you basically set your goals and you can do just easy goals. So mine is brush my teeth twice a day, wash my face twice a day. And I'm going to say that it can be difficult for people to do that. And I am one like at night I don't want to.

10:50:21:18 - 10:50:22:09

SARAH

Yeah, I don't do it.

10:50:22:09 - 10:50:38:08

HEATHER

And I hate doing it at night because I'm tired. But it's one of my goals in my thing that make my bed leave the house once a day. Because after I tell my therapist it sometimes and I'll leave the house for three days, she said, you should leave the house every day. Fine. Do three minutes of exercise that I enjoy.

10:50:38:08 - 10:50:51:01

HEATHER

And then I put some things around sleeping and you can have. There's a free version and a paid version and I use the free version. And so every day you do these tasks and you send your little bird. So it's Finch. So you have a little bird.

10:50:51:02 - 10:50:52:06

SARAH

Oh, it's a bird. Okay. You name.

10:50:52:06 - 10:51:11:16

HEATHER

Your bird. My bird is named Bluey after Bluey. So it's called baby Bluey. And now it's toddler Bluey because I've been using it for a while, so it grew up. So your bird grows up and you teach it things, so it goes on an adventure and it says, for instance, one of them was like, I saw a black cat and everyone tells me that they can be scary.

10:51:11:16 - 10:51:24:17

HEATHER

What should I do? And then one answer is, you could just stay, you know, away from it, or you can stay away from it and watch it and see if it's really true, if it's scary. And then when you click that one, you get your bird grows and curiosity. See.

10:51:24:19 - 10:51:26:11

SARAH

That's about curiosity. Yes yes.

10:51:26:12 - 10:51:44:18

HEATHER

Yes. So I think like it's so interesting. And then what you can do is like so blue goes on an adventure every day. Once you do a few tasks. So you have to at least like four little tasks and you get points. And then you can get you earn these crystals and you can buy new clothes for your bird.

10:51:44:18 - 10:52:03:23

HEATHER

You can buy furniture to help them, like make their place nice. So and you earn all these things by doing real world tasks. and it's so good because I have for the last nine, ten days that I've been using this, I have brush my teeth in the morning and at night, and I have to so I can get my points with Bluey.

10:52:03:23 - 10:52:05:16

SARAH

So it's good for you because it's a game.

10:52:05:16 - 10:52:06:16

HEATHER

It's a game.

10:52:06:16 - 10:52:07:13

SARAH

Yes, it's a.

10:52:07:13 - 10:52:21:20

HEATHER

Game. And that's the that's part of it. And it is a fun game. And then throughout the day it does check ins and it's like Bluey has something to say. And like my last one that just came up when Sarah was here was and they're all affirmation based. And this one was so my thing I'm allowed to take up space.

10:52:21:23 - 10:52:23:17

SARAH

Yeah, that's the best one.

10:52:23:18 - 10:52:42:02

HEATHER

And so there's like all these ones are daily affirmations. They pop up and then you do a check in to see how you're feeling. And then if you say so, you have five have really bad kind of bad neutral kind of happy, very happy. And I've had a couple of times like I have really bad period. It was really bad and I picked bad.

10:52:42:02 - 10:53:04:15

HEATHER

And it says you can go to the first aid kit and it gives you things to help you. So whether it's like seeing the things in your environment, whether it's like breathing exercises or there's even in the corner a helpline so you can call for help. So I really love this. It's like it's an independently created app. I've had I've already recommend to two friends of mine with ADHD who are now using it.

10:53:04:17 - 10:53:27:23

HEATHER

So it was digging before we started recording and it was my friend actually wanted to come and be friends with me, so brought her and her pet. Her little came over. So I have a micro pet because what I what happened is Bluey went for a walk which he has every day, and he brought back an egg. And what you do is you tie the egg to one of the goals that you have the most difficulty achieving.

10:53:28:01 - 10:53:49:15

HEATHER

Mine is drinking water. So I tied it to drinking water because I want that egg to open and it takes seven days of doing the task. Wow. Not in a row. Just seven days. Yeah, well, I did it in a row because I want this egg to open. So I did seven days in a row of drinking. I say like five water five times.

10:53:49:15 - 10:54:06:06

HEATHER

So I drink like half my water bottle. And I got subwoofer. The Corgi is what it's from the egg and he loves he subwoofer becomes one with music to overcome anxious thoughts. Some may find him dancing in the least expected moments and that is my dance.

10:54:06:06 - 10:54:10:00

SARAH

Adorable! Are you able to play any of the sounds that I just heard? Because I feel like people need to hear them.

10:54:10:05 - 10:54:31:23

HEATHER

I'll press drinking water. oh wait, it's me. Bluey came back, so he says the mountains here are he. Oh. I sent him to the Alps because eventually, when he's old enough, you can send him places. So he's a toddler, so I'm allowed to send them on themselves. The mountains here are so big. Keep seeing the mountains here.

10:54:31:23 - 10:54:47:22

HEATHER

Feels so different than seeing them from the airplane. So then there's two options I can pick. Or I can make my own response. But the two options are. It'll be exciting to see what you discover at the Alps, or you get a better sense of how tall the mountains are when you're at ground level.

10:54:48:00 - 10:54:48:20

SARAH

I'm trying to get a pick.

10:54:48:20 - 10:54:56:21

HEATHER

Well, I'd like to think it's exciting to see what you discover. The Alps, which will be more like curiosity. Which one do you think we should pick? You get better sense of how tall they are now that you're on the ground.

10:54:57:02 - 10:54:58:03

SARAH

I kind of like that.

10:54:58:03 - 10:54:59:05

HEATHER

Okay, we're pick that one for you.

10:54:59:06 - 10:55:02:07

SARAH

Yeah. He commented on how it's a tall guy. Yeah.

10:55:02:09 - 10:55:12:20

HEATHER

So he gained curiosity. Yeah. And then you can reflect on the story. You can send other people like good Feelings and that kind of thing.

10:55:12:23 - 10:55:16:22

SARAH

Well, I think I'm going to download this for myself and I think I'll download this for Charlotte.

10:55:17:00 - 10:55:30:12

HEATHER

Yeah. So he's hanging out. He has fairy wings and an old man's cap. That's I dressed him in and his corgi is like hanging with him. And when he's sleeping and you click on him, he snores. So. Oh, that's really adorable.

10:55:30:18 - 10:55:48:17

SARAH

Oh, well that's great okay. Yeah. Going to download that. I just wanted to because you named your your Finch. Bluey. there is a new episode of Bluey that came out that's like they they're calling it the Blue movie. It's 20 minutes versus ten minutes. It's so good. So everybody go watch it. I haven't actually watched the whole thing.

10:55:48:17 - 10:56:02:14

SARAH

Charlotte made me watch the last five minutes. She's like, mum, I'm watching Bluey and it made me cry. I was like, oh, what happens? You have to see. And so then I watch it with her and then I cried and it's good. So we love you Bluey.

10:56:02:16 - 10:56:05:22

HEATHER

I've heard so many good things. I love Bluey. That's why I named my bird Bluey.

10:56:06:01 - 10:56:14:06

SARAH

Go watch Bluey. And thank you all for listening to today's episode of Braaaains. Braaaains is hosted and produced by Heather and Sarah Taylor, and our theme song is by our little brother, Deppisch.

10:56:14:08 - 10:56:33:06

HEATHER

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10:56:33:11 - 10:56:35:09

HEATHER

Until next time, I'm your host, Heather.

10:56:35:09 - 10:56:38:12

SARAH

And I'm your host, Sarah. Bye.