

How does love grow?: attachment processes in older adoptees and foster children as illustrated by fictional stories.

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How does love grow? : attachment processes in older adoptees and foster children as illustrated by fictional stories

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Abstract:

Although there has been an abundance of research on attachment, few studies have researched the true attachment difficulties or have used qualitative methods. This study explores how older adoptive/foster children with attachment difficulties form attachments with their adoptive/foster parents. The method of inquiry is through fictional stories. I show how children in the context of new relationships with healthy attachment figures do not abandon or hurt them, modify their inferred internal constructions of attachment figures. This study is divided into four parts: In the first part, I introduce the subject of attachment and the research method of fiction. In the second part, I discuss how I came to choose fiction as the method of inquiry. I explore the matter of the ethics of research with children, including the difficulty of gaining informed consent and the inherent dangers of the relationship of counsellor-researcher. I deconstruct the authority of the Human Research Ethics Committee and explore the relationship of fiction to truth in terms of the assumptions that there is no one true set of realities or rather multiple constructed realities or "fictions". In part 3, I present 5 fictional stories, featuring complex characters: various children with attachment difficulties I have worked with as a psychotherapist. They are all children who have been able to overcome many internal barriers to attach to their parents. There is a first person account of an 11 year old adoptive child who spent his infancy in a Romanian orphanage; a radio play of a 5 year old child who spent part of his infancy in an orphanage in Haiti; a didactic-descriptive account of a foster child's relationship with an attachment figure with 4 hard-to-reach youth; a short story of a 15 year old adopted teenager who is rejected by his adoptive parents and later, returns to them; and a fairy tale depicting a lonely, distancing 8 year old girl who is not connected with her rejecting mother. Interspersed throughout these stories are my own poetry and prose which offer other perspectives on the topic of attachment. Part 4 is the discussion and interpretation of the issues raised by the text, presented in the multivocal style of a T.V. show. Topics include the adoptive child's torturous ambivalence toward the attachment figure/parent; a period of rejection of the parent; the fear and pain associated with his/her own unfulfilled longing; and the child's re-enactment of the traumas of the past.

implications for Child Welfare practice, training of child care workers and counsellors are discussed. The relevancy of these children's inner conflicts regarding attachment to our own struggles with love and individuality as a society is mentioned.

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