

MSc Dissertation in Child & Adolescent Psychotherapy at Trinity College Dublin

Ines Muller, May 2013

Developing a Sense of Self as an Adopted Person: A Psychoanalytic Perspective

Abstract

In this dissertation the author attempts to delineate particular issues and dilemmas that arise for adopted persons in the process of developing a coherent sense of self. The adoptee must include two sets of parents within his representational world, and also must integrate into his self-representation the fact that he was 'given up' by his first parents. The paper explores the complexity of the adoptee's internal world, the cumulative nature of the trauma of repeated separations, some oedipal problems and the dual experience and discontinuity inherent to adoption. The adoptee's cognitive knowledge that other parents exist creates a hole that needs to be filled by a mental representation of the lost parents. However, since there is a lack of conscious memories the building of such mental representations is complicated. The physical changes in puberty and adolescence make adoption more 'visible' in families because of real perceived differences in physical appearance, abilities and personality, which appears to reinforce the two fundamental questions asked by adoptees: '*Who* were my first parents, what were they like? *Why* did they give me up?' The adolescent adoptee wonders 'Who am I?' For adopted persons knowing and understanding one's origins and early history previous to being adopted seems vital to the formation of a coherent sense of self.

Ines Muller, MSc, MA, MIFCAPP, MICP

Mobile: 087 924 19 36

Email: info@child-psychotherapy.com