

## The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research

الطفل المتبني ورحلة بحثه عن الهوية

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Received: 25/11/2023 Accepted: 06/02/2024 Published: 03/03/2024

### Abstract:

This synthesis article aims to study and analyze the relationship between the adoption of an abandoned child and the development of his or her personal identity and the establishment of its features, which may vary from fragility to steadiness through the stability and clarity of the features.

As a summary of the article through the literature on adoption and abandonment, it becomes clear that the effects of abandonment persist in children, and may accompany them to varying degrees depending on the character of the individual: child, adolescent or adult; and according to the availability of the support that ensure a reassuring relationship that makes the child feel psychologically secure. These effects may be evident at the behavioral level and through an unclear personal-social identity, or on the contrary, the child may be able during his or her different developmental stages to adjust to the situation by activating effective psychological defense. Whatever the effects of abandonment, the idea of searching for a meaning related to his or her past and his or her existence may accompany him or her throughout his or her life. Successful adoption is one that provides the child with opportunities for secure attachment and positive identification and allows him or her to integrate the Oedipal relationship in order to optimally position himself or herself between his or her past, present and future, creating a correct distance between both his conscience and his existence.

**Keywords:** adoption, abandonment, identity, child, adoptive family.

**ملخص:**

يهدف هذا المقال التّوليّفي إلى دراسة و تحليل العلاقة بين تبنيّ الطّفل المتّخلى عنه وبين تطوّر هويّته الشّخصيّة و إرساء معالمها، التي قد تتباين من الهشاشة إلى الاستقرار من خلال ثبات المعالم و وضوحها.

في حوصلةٍ للمقال من خلال الأدبيّات الخاصّة بالتّبنيّ و التّخلي يظهر جلياً أنّ آثار التّخليّ مستمرّة عند الأطفال ،قد تُلازمهم بدرجات تختلف حسب طبع الفرد: طفلاً، مراهقاً كان أو راشداً ; وحسب مدى توقّر السّند الذي يتكلّف ضمان علاقة مُطمئنّة تُشعر الطّفل بالأمن التّفسي. قد تكون هذه الآثار واضحة على المستوى السّلوكي ومن خلال هويّة شخصيّة-إجتماعية غير واضحة المعالم، أو على النّقيض من ذلك قد يستطيع الطّفل خلال مراحله التطوريّة المختلفة من الإنسجام مع الوضع بتفعيل دفاعيّة نفسيّة فعّالة. مهما كانت آثار التّخليّ، إلّا أنّ فكرة البحث عن معنى يعلّق بماضيه و بوجوده قد تلازمه طوال حياته. التّبنيّ الناجح هو الذي يُتيح للطفل فرصَ التّعلّق الآمن و التّماهي الإيجابي و يسمح له بإدماج العلاقة الأوديبيّة من أجل التّموّقع الأمثل بين ماضيه ، حاضره و مستقبله، مُوجّداً مسافة صحيحة بين كلّ من وجدانيّته و وجوده.

كلمات مفتاحية: التّبنيّ، التّخليّ، الهويّة، الطّفل، العائلة المتبنّاة.

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## **1. Introduction**

The meaning of adoption in law is to attach the child's lineage to the adoptive family that is a change in lineage; adoption particularly affects children of unknown parentage. As for foster care (family care) in law always it means taking care of the child and his or her needs by a sponsoring family without attaching his or her lineage to it.

## **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

From a psychological perspective, foster care and adoption share in considering the child as a psychological-existential project in the fulfillment of a deep desire for motherhood and fatherhood. Adoption is, in essence, an extension of the adoptive parents through their child. The latter represents a restorative element for the adoptive family: a correction of a lack of fertility in the woman, a weakness in the man, or other considerations affecting both in connection with the relationship (choice of partner). It is a psychological-relational investment in the full sense of the term.

In this article, we will address an analytical description of the adopted child's life experience, limiting ourselves to the psychological meaning of foster care and adoption for the child who was abandoned after receiving him into an adoptive family, whether attached to the lineage or not, we will discuss the different situations that adoptive families may take and the reactions of the adopted child to this with the effects that may result in the formation of his or her personality and the establishment of the features of his or her identity.

### **2.The child between abandonment and adoption**

The term "adoption" takes up an important space in the psychological literature for study, researching and theorizing. Its importance has made it the focus of attention of policies, laws, and even the media, but despite this, we find that the number of adopted children is stagnant (stabilizing), as the difference between the number of orphans or abandoned children and the number of adopted children is increasing (in all countries of the world). Difficult circumstances around the world in various fields: economically, socially and security-wise, have made abandoned children experience the pain of abandonment and the difficulty of existential circumstances, in addition to the unequal opportunities between them in terms of the chance of being adopted (Gaspari-Carrière, 1989, p. 56)

As a social phenomenon, adoption can sometimes be seen as a positive trend, and sometimes as a sign of an undeclared social-family rupture. Adoption does not represent a psychopathological phenomenon in itself, but it

is the circumstances of adoption that can bear a pathological nature that affects the future of the adopted child and the development of his or her personality; Adoptive parents attribute all the problems and difficulties of their adopted child to adoption itself, despite the fact that psychopathology makes it clear that children's problems, such as anxiety and behavioral disorder, do not concern only adopted children, but all children are exposed to this by degrees and according to circumstances (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 96). On the other hand, we find that the psychological and relational stakes that govern the relationship between the child and the adoptive parents are the same patterns that prevail in normal (non-adoptive) families. These stakes are affected by the parents' personal history, by their conflicts and problems, by their interpersonal relationships, and by their ways and means of confronting difficult circumstances (Isabelle, 2018, p. 150)

Even if the adopted child knows his or her "difference" from other children, he or she lives the Oedipal relationship like any normal child with its integration (resolving the Oedipal conflict), building his or her narcissism by weaving a family story (an illusionistic perception of his or her own family history), achieving his or her individuality. These deep psychological interactions contribute to the formation of his or her identity and developing his or her thought. A child adopted at an early age and under appropriate circumstances can feel a sense of belonging to a lineage and feel the parental bond just like any normal child (Anne, 2001, p. 117)

Likewise, difficult circumstances in the family may allow the problematic of "adoption" to revive the problematic of "abandonment" in the child; the latter may be affected by psycho-emotional disturbances related to his or her biological roots as an abandoned child. Children may experience this crisis with varying degrees of intensity,

### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

during which they feel anxious about any relationship for fear of repeating the experience of abandonment, which explains the emergence of aggressive behavior that may be directed either towards self or towards others, depending on the nature of each child (Jean-Vital, 2016, p. 126). The adopted child's attachment process is determined by the degree of his or her willingness and openness to new relationships through his or her "new" parents (or one of them) and by the type of emotional relationship that these latter two provide (Jean-Pierre, Dunezat, Prouff, & Le Dez-Alexandre, 1995, p. 220). These relational difficulties are experienced and vary in degree and intensity according to the psychological nature of each child, and their intensity increases especially during adolescence, where psychological arrangements are restored; this adolescence period is characterized by the emergence of questions related to identity, as they can be the cause of an identity crisis that translates at a level of psychological disorders as well as at the behavioral level.

#### **3.The child's identity question**

Many questions arise regarding the relationship between adoption and identity or personality disorder; does an adopted child inevitably develop identity or personality disorders? Does an adopted child who searches for his or her past suffer more psychologically and emotionally than an adopted child who experiences a rupture with his or her past related to abandonment? In this regard, research indicates that disorders may arise if the child experiences abandonment as a traumatic event (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 110).

The adopted child raises questions about his or her history, affiliation and identity; he or she tries to find satisfactory answers, which in many cases may be the beginning of a balanced identity process that represents a rebirth and reconciliation with self and the past and allows

finding the lost self-confidence in order to continue to develop on the personality level.

On the contrary, a child or adolescent may not find satisfactory answers to his or her questions about his or her past and identity, and may find himself or herself alone facing a painful, mysterious past; the child then lives difficult periods in which his or her narcissistic wound deepens instead of recovering from a deep problem, the mere digging (researching) of the child's personal past related to his or her origins can in no way be a cure for the trauma of abandonment, unless there is a particularly relational bond (Moutassem-Mimouni, 2001, p. 20).

#### **4. Abandonment between hope and pain**

An adopted child has greater chances of developing and building a balanced psychological structure compared to the non-adopted child who lives in an emergency care childhood institution, the latter finds it difficult to plan for his or her future and to form a future image of himself or herself, and also finds it difficult to find positive role models of development. The abandoned child who lives in a care providing institution tries to reconstruct his or her family story (family novel), using sometimes consistent role models, but often unsuccessful. He or she seeks, through behaviors governed mostly by psychopathological mechanisms (engaging into action in its various forms) to heal his or her fragile narcissism due to his or her early deprivation (Newton-Verrier, 2008, pp. 22-27).

This child sometimes seeks to find a trace of his or her origin, looking for higher role models, but often fails to do so and tends to abandon the idea of belonging by originally moving away from the idea that he or she has parents (genitors).

The reasons for giving up the child are numerous, so that the latter finds himself or herself oppressed in difficult living conditions, then he seeks to compensate for the idea

### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

of his regret of being the son or the daughter of these two abandoning parents and no other ones, so he or she self-represents other parents to symbolically live a different and acceptable destiny; here phantasm (as defense mechanism) serves as compensation for a painful past with a more acceptable, if not less, less painful reality) Claudette(2015 ‘.

The reactions of abandoning parents may vary between those who feel guilty, negligent and those who are indifferent and live a new life; between theses and those, the majority of abandoning parents live in the hope of seeing their son or daughter one day in better condition as a form of alleviating the burden of conscience, and there are those who try to correct their mistake by searching for their son or daughter, even if that happens and the child is found adopted by a family or placed in a care providing institution, this does not necessarily allow his or her parents to revive the parental relationship with their son or daughter, because he or she is either under the protection of government institutions authorized to protect and care for children or under the direct guardianship jurisdiction of his or her family of adoption.

Adopted or abandoned children usually suffer from secrecy, and the adoptive family hides from them secrets related to their origins and the reasons for this abandonment; the more these secrets or taboos (unannounced) are found, the more complicated their situation becomes, the more suffering is for the adoptive parents and the more difficult is for them to control matters. And the more the child's lineage is unclear or unknown, the more his or her identity base is shaken (Johanne, 2013, p. 446).

#### **5. Adoption stakes**

Hiding the child's lineage and making it a secret that is covered up is not in the child's interest, telling him or her the complete and accurate truth at an early age makes his or

her acceptance of the matter smooth and possible, on the contrary to this, the adoptive parents doubting and fearing that they will be rejected by the child, and then will put his identity at stake in the discovering that all his or her fantasies (ideas and perceptions) related to his lineage do not match reality (Pierre, 1994, p. 151)

Children's reactions to that may differ, so parents must give the matter the importance it deserves and answer honestly and rationally all the questions that the child has in mind, and seek the help of a specialist as an assistant in counseling if necessary.

Adoptive parents may refuse to explain the truth to their adopted child, considering that he or she is the child who came to correct and restore their history. Therefore, they see adoption as reconciliation with their history and an alleviation of the remorse of conscience associated with it. Their concealment of the truth is merely a form of not allowing the feeling of guilt to appear. The fears of adoptive parents of revealing the truth to their adopted child can be understood with an unconscious desire for protection, revealing the deep meaning of this child's status for them (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 113).

The conscious and unconscious desire to hide the truth from the child may indicate a pathological process represented by the denial of sexuality and the desire or need for procreation. The child's early knowledge of the truth regarding the secret of adoption and abandonment may allow him or her to have balanced psychological development and may alleviate the trauma related to his or her original fantasies, as we mentioned above.



## **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

The role that an adopted child represents in the family imaginational concept affects the way he or she is invested through his or her adoptive parents as well as the position he or she occupies in relation to them. This is reflected in their representation of him or her, whether as an investment subject or a persecuted subject that arouses in them the pain and frustration related to their infertility or the infertility of one of them (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 103), the adoptive mother lives adoption as taking or kidnapping another woman's child and expressing her experience of her lack of fertility as a shock, while the father lives the experience with illusions of weakness and as a kind of castration anxiety. Infertility is experienced by both sides as a kind of stagnation and inability to extend narcissism, which may be a cause of the emergence of cases of depression, feelings of inferiority and grumbling, with having in a child the living desire taking a form of mourning (Arnaud, 2004, pp. 65-75).

### **6.Identity Problem**

The fact is that many adopted children are desirable children for many reasons, that without a direct and inevitable relationship between adoption and the desire for the adopted child. Theoretically, there is a relationship between adoption and the identity and personality problems of the adopted person, the exaggerated attention of the parents on this point and the way in which the adopted child (child or adolescent) perceives that this interest may often cause him or her to experience psycho-affective and identity problems through his sensitivity to excessive compassion derived from the surroundings or from the family (Maurice, 1967, pp. 29-32).

Many specialists in the field of adoption agree that many adopted people suffer from psychological problems, the more the adopted child finds himself or herself in a comfortable living within an adoptive family, the more his or her loss of his or her natural family (their abandonment of him or her) represents a none permanent traumatic symbol that may accompany him or her. However, as adoption is not considered as a trauma in itself, but rather its circumstances and the circumstances of abandonment are what make the experience difficult in relation to the emergence of identity and personality disorders (Skandrani & Harf, 2022, pp. 52-62).

### **7. Adoption, Attachment and Identification**

The question of identity is fundamental matter, on which the development of any person is built; a fundamental issue for children who live in an adoptive family and know nothing about their natural families and for those children who live in an adoptive family and have a background about their natural families (Métral, 2016).

Adoptive parents are concerned with their children's physical and psychological health, they also care about their psychological well-being and pay some attention to the view of others towards their children, and to the nature of the relationship as perceived by the child in his or her attachment process and the extent of his or her feeling of belonging to them. Regardless of all that, parents must actively take care of the personal and identity aspect of their child, by acting to enhance his or her positive feelings and belonging to his family, his community, and his or her actual culture.

### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

Adoption is seen as a matter of attachment, identification and more specifically encounter and affection. The adopted child often comes after a long wait, just as parents wait for their baby after a long pregnancy, the child adoption itself is a project of the adoptive family, as a relational (psychological) and social investment; After his or her arrival, it takes effort to adapt to the new situation, whether from the parents or from the child, which is often not without problems and difficulties.

The period following adoption is a sensitive period that makes both parties experience challenges. Correcting some ideas related to adoption among some researchers is important, as some of them believe that attachment occurs during the first meeting and that the first child that comes towards them is the expected or ideal child, and these ideas may often be wrong because attachment is not built on mere sensations, but rather takes the qualitative relationship as a basis. Just like childbirth, adoption is a relationship between two or more people, each of whom needs the other, during this relationship, a number of difficulties and a rearrangement of perceptions and calculations are to be expected (Le Run, 2005, pp. 6-10).

Many adoptive parents admit that they face many difficulties in creating a strong and stable relationship with their adopted children compared to their biological children. An adopted child may come from a different cultural milieu, different culture, different in the nature of relationships and in the internal atmosphere of the family and even physical variables related to sounds and smells....etc., so the child will find himself or herself required to adapt to different

landmarks than those he or she was familiar with. He or she first tries to find traces of his or her recent past and then uses his or her psychological energy in an attempt to coexist with this estrangement, ignoring that he or she will live with new people who did not exist in his or her life before and that he will continue with them the rest of his or her life. The child can experience this as a kind of emotional stress that may accompany him for years. This situation of the child pushes the new parents to put a lot of effort in an attempt to help him build a clear identity, and for this they can seek the advice of specialists in the matter (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 96).

The ethnic roots of the adopted child, for their part, play a fundamental role in attachment and identification processes, a phenomenon that Algeria may not have witnessed yet, which is the phenomenon of "international adoption", a phenomenon that has evolved with the development and intertwining of cultures, like children from different continents are adopted by European families. Specialists in the field of adoption point out that the adaptation of "international" children is similar in form and factors to the adaptation of children with families from the same culture and geographical area, especially if the adoption process occurs at an early age in childhood. The problem of difference here rises in the difference in color and shape, which opens the door wide to segregation and racism. Allergies don't appear when a child is young, but the outlook becomes more severe as he or she grows older (Marie-Françoise, 1991).

### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

As they grow older, ethnically different children are exposed to the contemptuous look of inferiority of other children (especially in the school) putting their relationship with their families and their past to the test, thus reviving the problems of abandonment and adoption. It is very important in this situation that the child knows about his original culture and to allow him or her to learn something from his mother tongue so that he does not think that this is a taboo (Marie-Françoise, 1991).

An ethnically different child finds himself or herself facing a double challenge: positioning him or her in the most correct position between his or her origins and his or her current situation and as well as strengthening his or her relationship with his or her adoptive parents. Parents, for their part, find themselves facing a double challenge: accompanying their child towards balanced growth and qualitative openness to the world and in addition to the need for them to accept that they differ from the child ethnically, and that the possibility of the widening gap between them always exists (Marie-Françoise, 1991).

The adopted child, given his or her life story, is portrayed as a survivor of early traumatic events. Between his or her birth and abandonment until his or her current situation, he or she feels deep inside a difficult life experience full of pain and narcissistic wounds. From a psychological point of view, it is important to work on diagnosing and understanding some of the specific symptoms of this child's psychological situational living and parents have a duty to support the child in reducing those symptoms severity. Putting aside the child's cultural

aspect, building and strengthening his or her personal competencies is the most important basis for a clearly defined identity (Yves-Hiram, 2016, p. 110)

Speaking of identity, an adopted child, regardless of his or her race, needs to be considered as an independent entity worthy of appreciation and living in a family that neglects nothing of his or her present or history. Therefore, any behavior and attitude that leads the child and the parents alike to adopt an extremist position should be avoided, such as having a tendency to live according to the child's ethnic culture while neglecting their original culture, or on the contrary, purposely aiming to erase the child's culture, which may suggest for the child that he or she is a child to be pitied in the first situation, and that he or she as a child and also his or her past are not wanted in the second situation. During both of the previous positions that maybe taken with good intentions by the parents, it is noted that the child's cultural background is under scrutiny, and it is more correct for the parents to adopt a middle position that makes the child feel that he or she has the right to choose the reference that suits him or her according to his or her own needs, not theirs, he or she has the right to feel that his or her belonging is dual and that he or she is a child of the adoptive family and of another family at the same time.

### **8.Identity's conflict and Search for a Meaning**

A number of children search for their natural families when they reach adulthood; some of them search openly using legal and administrative methods, and some of them endure searching on their own. After an effort that oscillates between easy and strenuous, the adopted person may go

### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

through psychological states during this searching process that range from complicated to complex and unexpected to painful, especially when the person finds himself or herself under the label "Anonymous", without surname. The deception then has an impact, blocking all the paths leading to his or her origin and history, and the wound becomes deeper (Anne, 2001, p. 132).

During adolescence or adulthood, many adopters express their desire and eagerness and even their hope to find traces and signs that lead them to their origins and history, and it is not excluded that that a profound disturbance may appear during adolescence in particular and even afterward, which makes it difficult for him or her to find a meaning for himself or herself, which prompts him or her to re-ask old questions related to his or her lineage and origins and increases his or her desire to reach the truth.

The adopted person's search for his or her natural family is a search for the meaning of his or her existence in life, a search for his or her history and his or her value as an entity, this process of search that is often unsuccessful leaves the person between two directions, in a struggle to turn the page on the past and between knowing his or her history, which is considered as a mystery to him or to her. This difficult situation makes him or her feel as if he or she is experiencing the first early trauma every day. This searching process is exhausting on the psychological level, as it may lead to self-disintegration and therefore, ensuring psychological and social accompaniment for him or for her is a real support against disorder on the existential and identity levels. Through his or her search for his or her

identity, the child tries to understand the reasons behind his or her abandonment, and to mitigate its impact he constantly tries to convince himself or herself of the ideal image of the parents, despite that is conflicting with reality.

Some people discover the truth about their adoption at a later age, by coincidence or through another party, and the rift widens and a violent identity crisis erupts. No matter how many reasons for abandonment, understanding them remains a mystery that must be solved and understood as the first step towards consolidating the idea of belonging, and as reconciliation between the mistake of the past and the necessity of loyalty (Albert & Werner, 2007, pp. 61-63).

### **9. Between Identity and Lineage**

The adopted child's refusal to trace his or her origins and not insisting to do so is a psychopathological indicator. It is noted that when parents deliberately hide everything related to the child's history and make it a secret, they expose the relationship between them and the child to cracking, believing that clarifying the truth might make the child abandon them; In fact, the opposite is likely to happen, as meeting the biological parents in itself is a revival of the early trauma, the shock of abandonment. (Braconnier, 2005, p. 54).

The child wonders about his or her identity, about his or her origin - and he or she has every right to do so - and may come to terms with his or her past and show gratitude to his or her adoptive parents if he or she asks them to participate in his or her search journey. A kinship relationship may extend beyond just a relationship of blood to include adoptive parents. A healthy relationship between



### **The Adopted Child, and his Journey of Identity Research**

the child and his or her adopters results in the openness of his personal horizons, facilitates his or her integration into the Oedipal relationship and establishes a lineage bond experienced by both parties.

#### **10.conclusion**

Adoption after abandonment is not synonymous with collapse, as many adopted children adapt to reality, adopting social support and avoiding psychopathology, appreciating the issue of living between adoptive parents and are aware of their luck in that. A number of children may search for their natural families while their problem of abandonment persists as a basic existential problem, and a large number of children in parallel do not care much about their past and search for origins as long as the bond is available, living their existence in a different way. This may be explained by the processes of identification and attachment that enhance the sense of belonging in these children, so they consider the adoptive family to be a family of choice, not a family of luck.

The child's outlook and the interest he or she gives to the issue of abandonment may change, over time his or her psychological and cognitive maturity increases and he or she becomes able to understanding and abstraction. Adopters should not ignore the mourning that the child will experience at any developmental stage of his or her life, considering the aspect related to psychological development and attachment as a process, we find that the adopted child does not differ from the natural child of biological parents, living in a family that may not bear its name and carries with him or her a double historical (family) reference, one

of which is a current living, and the other is a vague inheritance.

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