

Adoption: The Primal Wound

Effects of Separation from the Birthmother on Adopted Children

by Nancy Verrier, M.A.

Thanks to Ms. Verrier for allowing us to share this paper with you!

"There is no such thing as a baby...." When Donald Winnicott said those words, what he meant was that there is instead a mother/baby--an emotional, psychological, spiritual unit--where knowing comes from intuition and where energy is exchanged. The baby and the mother, although separated physiologically, are still psychologically one. Needless to say, for the child separated from his mother at birth or soon after, such an idea has tremendous importance. But has anyone been paying attention to this?

If anyone had told me, when we brought home our three-day-old daughter on Christmas Eve, 1969, that rearing an adopted child would be different from rearing one's biological child, I, like many new and enthusiastic adoptive parents, would have laughed at them and said, "Of course it won't be different! What can a tiny baby know? We will love her and give her a wonderful home." My belief was that love would conquer all. What I was not prepared for was that it was easier for us to give her love than it was for her to accept it.

For love to be freely accepted there must be trust, and despite the love and security our daughter has been given, she has suffered the anxiety of wondering if she would again be rejected. For her this anxiety manifested itself in typical testing-out behavior. At the same time that she tried to provoke the very rejection that she feared, there was a reaction on her part to reject before she was rejected. It seemed that allowing herself to love and be loved was too dangerous; she couldn't trust that she would not again be abandoned.

I was to discover during the ten years of my research that hers was one of two diametrically opposed responses to having been abandoned; the other being a tendency toward acquiescence, compliance and withdrawal. Although living with a testing-out child may be more difficult than living with a compliant child, I am thankful that she acted in such a way so as to bring her pain to our attention. We were able, after years of trying to deal with it ourselves, to get help for her. This was the beginning of a journey which was to change all our lives.

I had no idea at the outset of her therapy that adoption had anything to do with what was going on with my daughter. Despite the fact that I had been considered a highly successful teacher with a deep, caring and intuitive understanding of my students (as well as the biological parent of a younger daughter who was not having these difficulties), I believed that I must somehow be at fault. What was I doing wrong? Why was my daughter acting so hostile and angry toward me at home, yet close and loving when in public? Why was she so strong-willed and dramatic? Why did she feel the desperate need to be in complete control of every situation? Why could she not accept the love I had and wanted to give her? For most of the acting out was directed at me, her mother. James Mahfeld, a Bay Area therapist, put it this way, "All the hoopla is the child trying to connect with the mother." At the same time, this attempt at bonding was sabotaged by outrageous, destructive behavior on her part as she tested and retested our love and commitment.

Paul Brinich said that because the child is rejected by his biological parents, it is not surprising that he repeatedly tests the commitment of his adoptive parents. The problem is that in so doing he does not relieve his anxiety. Instead, he increases his demands for acceptance by engaging in behavior which is more and more destructive and less and less acceptable until he brings about the very outcome which he feared in the first place.

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Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg



Adoption The Primal Wound Effects Of Separation From The:

The Primal Wound Nancy Newton Verrier, 1993 *The Primal Wound* is a book which is revolutionizing the way we think about adoption. In its application of information about pre and perinatal psychology, attachment, bonding, and loss, it clarifies the effects of separation from the birth mother on adopted children. In addition, it gives those children whose pain has long been unacknowledged or misunderstood validation for their feelings as well as explanations for their behavior. Since its original publication in 1993, *The Primal Wound* has become a classic in adoption literature and is considered the adoptees' bible. The insight which is brought to the experiences of abandonment and loss will contribute not only to the healing of adoptees, adoptive families, and birth parents but will bring understanding and encouragement to anyone who has ever felt abandoned.

Adoption Reckonings Gonda Van Steen, 2025-08-12 This book presents a new theater play *For Three Refrigerators and a Washing Machine* along with a thorough introduction that provides historical context and theoretical framing. The play with the enigmatic title tells the poignant and forgotten stories of international child adoptions from Greece in the 1950s and the 1960s. It offers an in-depth exploration of the first postwar mass international adoption movement, unveiling the emotional and even existential challenges faced by those involved. Based on an authentic playscript, the book creates awareness about what has not been said, should be said, but still cannot be said about the losses involved in the permanent uprooting of children and teenagers. It tackles the primal questions of "Where do I come from?" and "What happened to the child I relinquished for adoption abroad?" And why did nobody foresee that adopted children become adopted adults who ask critical questions about origins, procedures, and aftercare? Thus, the book boldly reflects on the complexities and profound losses associated with displacing children and perpetuating taboos. Also, it reveals multiple connections to similar adoption movements worldwide, which include countries and histories of origin such as Ireland, South Korea, Vietnam, and several states in Central and South America. This thought-provoking book poses critical questions about identity and belonging that far exceed the Greek setting and continue to be relevant today.

Handbook of Adoption Rafael A. Javier, 2007 *Handbook of Adoption* addresses topics in adoption that reflect the many dimensions of theory, research, development, race, adjustment, and clinical practice, which can affect adoption triad members.

Handbook on the Clinical Treatment of Adopted Adolescents and Young Adults Doris Bertocci, Christopher Deeg, Linda A. Mayers, 2023-08-11 This collection bridges the voices of international scholars and adopted persons to share knowledge about clinical practice with adopted people in adolescence and early adulthood. Coming at a time when countries are beginning to focus on adoption reform, this handbook is the first to address not only the external systemic contributions to their developmental complexities but also the underlying internal meanings of being adopted as children become adolescents and mature into adulthood. It explains how adopted clients differ from those not adopted and emphasizes the need for clinical research on adopted people in this older age group. Exploring how clinicians can understand their clients' clinical needs, it offers specific protocols and frameworks for

assessment and necessary modifications in language and treatment With a foreword by Miriam Steele chapters examine the legal and sociopolitical cultures policies and practices in which adoption is embedded calling for broad systemic change Embracing theoretical conceptual and global perspectives this handbook is written for clinicians in all disciplines at all tiers of practice administration and training identifying the key roles they can potentially play in expanding and better focusing our understanding of the psychology of being adopted Silent Sorrows: Let's Talk About Abortion, Reproductive Technologies, and Adoption Katherine Breckenridge, 2024-05-15 Today's self-indulgent society is one in which satisfying one's desires at the expense of others prevails This mindset is particularly common in areas of procreation such as abortion and various assisted reproductive technologies Through a lens that combines Christianity natural law and scientific reason this book discusses how the breakdown of man woman marriage biological connection the destruction and disregard for human life and the objectification and commodification of women and children manufactures trauma in not only adults but in children This trauma is evidenced by the stories of adult children who are victims of society's current cultural trends as well as evidenced by the research of various psychologists sociologists and other professionals For too long adults have been asking children to conform to their ways of living assuming children will just get over it and children are now starting to speak out about the harms of their upbringings It's essential to illuminate their voices as these familial breakdowns have become so normal that we currently can't talk about any of their negative aspects with any degree of common sense

Creative Arts Therapies Approaches in Adoption and Foster Care Donna J. Betts, 2003 Creative arts therapists and others who work with children in counseling nursing teaching and related fields will find insights on the use of creative arts therapy with adopted children and children in foster care here Theoretical perspectives and psychological constructs of adoption and foster care are described and approaches to treatment including art drama music play and sand therapies are presented in case study format An entire section is devoted to transcultural and transracial issues Annotation c 2003 Book News Inc Portland OR booknews com **Forthcoming Books** Rose Arny, 2002-02 **Adoption, Memory, and Cold War Greece** Gonda Van Steen, 2021-07-12 Reveals the history of how 3 000 Greek children were shipped to the United States for adoption in the postwar period **Adoption and the Jewish Family** Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg, 1998 An indispensable resource to those families considering or affected by adoption this book takes an informed look at adoption from a Jewish perspective and will prepare readers for the many unforeseen challenges that may arise *Strangers and Kin* Barbara MELOSH, Barbara Melosh, 2009-06-30 *Strangers and Kin* is the history of adoption An adoptive mother herself Barbara Melosh tells the story of how married couples without children sought to care for and nurture other people's children as their own Taking this history into the early twenty-first century Melosh offers unflinching insight to the contemporary debates that swirl around adoption the challenges to adoption secrecy the ethics and geopolitics of international adoption and the conflicts over transracial adoption

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