Failed recognition of otherness in cases
of disruptions in late adoptions

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Abstract: This study derives from a broader investigation on the experience of unsuccessful adoptions of children and adolescents from the adopters' perspective. Based on a qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 independent subjects (nine women and two men), living in different states of Brazil, who experienced unsuccessful adoptions. The research investigates the failure in recognizing the child's alterity, experienced during the cohabitation stage, in cases of disruptions. Common among the participants was the search for a psychopathological explanation for the child/adolescent's supposed bad behaviors. Results show the need for greater emotional-affective investment in the initial periods of establishing the parent-child bond, to welcome the child/adolescent in their totality and individuality.

Keywords: disruption, affiliation, parent-child bond, late adoption, unsuccessful adoption.

Introduction

Adoption represents the possibility of building parent-child bonds between individuals who have no biological bonds. It is an encounter between those who want to become a mother/father through adoption and the child/adolescent who, for various reasons, could not remain in their family of origin. This encounter initiates the path of building the parent-child bond that will occur in a unique manner, considering each case, in addition to representing the main way of repairing the circumstantial failures that may have existed in the past history of the child/adolescent.

However, the process of establishing the bond does not always occur in the best possible way and the difficulty in dealing with the conflicts that stem from living together can result in the child/adolescent being returned to the guardian institution. The coexistence stage is a period that requires adaptation from both parties (Bicca & Grzybowski, 2014; Costa & Rosseti-Ferreira, 2007; Fernandes & Santos, 2019). The intensification of conflicts stemming from coexistence and the new family's inability to handle situations related to the child's behavior can lead to a weakening in the establishment of the bond and, consequently, to the return of the child/adolescent (Ghirardi, 2015).

Returns in adoptions have been increasingly recurrent and this subject is still little discussed (Lino, 2020). Adopters who return children are showing the difficulties in the process of constituting parenthood, hence the importance of focusing on the issue of conflicts involving adoption. The literature has pointed out that the main reasons for returning the adopted child or adolescent are related to the parents' difficulties in adapting to the child/adolescent and to the inscription of the child in the parents' psyche (Ghirardi, 2015; Ladvocat, 2018; Oliveira, 2010). Thus, adopting parents usually end up placing the responsibility for the return on the child/adolescent's bad behavior (Ghirardi, 2015). Parents idealize the adoption, imagining that it will occur in the best possible way and may, therefore, disregard the obstacles on the path toward establishing the parent-child bond.

Generally, returns occur in cases of adoptions of older children, also called late adoptions, when the child comes to the new home with a level of independence greater than that of a baby and with the ability to assume a more autonomous position in the relationship (Vargas, 1998/2013). Although we know that the baby also carries a burden from their past history, it is worth noting that the adaptation in the adoption of older children has specificities that deserve greater attention, especially due to the necessary assimilations regarding the child/adolescent's life history (Levy, Pinho, & Faria, 2009). The child will bring with them ways of life, personal, social and cultural characteristics that will point directly to different worlds that will meet in the pursuit of building parent-child bonds.

We highlight, in this process, the confrontation with the recognition of the child's alterity, which starts to be evidenced from the period living together, at the beginning of the adoption process. The recognition of otherness includes confronting similarities and differences, closeness and distance (Coelho & Figueiredo, 2004).

The term *recognition* has in its meaning two important aspects. The first would be related to the rational

and objective recognition of particular characteristics, such as when someone is recognized in a photograph, for example. The second aspect denotes recognition in terms of the feeling of honor, admiration. Recognition of otherness includes these two dimensions, with validation of individual characteristics and discernment as to the uniqueness of the other in subjective terms, involving familiarity and respect for the other. Thus, recognition requires a certain degree of conscious maturation in an ethical dimension of relationships. Otherwise, one can invade the other with truths assumed as absolute (Machado, 2012).

The experience of recognizing otherness requires the subject to be able to deal with differences and similarities, closeness and distance, so the psychic contours of the individuality of the other are respected. When the limits of the other's space of autonomy are invaded, this encounter, instead of providing recognition of singularities, becomes a means of colonization, making the spaces for exchange, learning and maturation impossible. What predominates, then, is a relationship of subordination (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003).

According to Frosh and Baraitser (2003), the recognition of otherness would not be something exclusively related to cognitive abilities or to a mirroring of the characteristics of the other. However, it takes us to a sacred place that refers to the autonomy and uniqueness of the internal space of this other. According to the authors, allowing the difference and appreciating the similarity would be the dimension of recognition that would prevent this other from being colonized. Thus, understanding the other as different would not be enough; it could function as a defense against recognition. It is necessary to notice and experience the similarity of the human experience. With regard to late adoptions, the non-recognition of the child/adolescent's otherness implies a colonization of the other, an attempt to erase or partially disregard their own subjectivity. When meeting the child, it is common to emphasize the search for similarities, while the encounter with the differences points to the strange elements in the relationship, what is not recognized and, for this reason, can become unbearable, resulting in the return of the child/adolescent.

Living the experience of alterity represents the existing work between coexistence and transformation that permeates the encounter with the other. Therefore, understanding the experience of subjectivation only by assimilating the equal would represent the refusal to recognize the alterity and the intersubjective experience. The encounter with the other implies the inevitable shock of full non-adaptation, that is, the impossibility of adequacy (Coelho & Figueiredo, 2004).

The concept of alterity is characterized by the dimensions of the process of intersubjectivity and its vicissitudes as a recent field of study and research in Psychology. Coelho and Figueiredo (2004) present four matrices of the studies on intersubjectivity. The authors trace a path from the most philosophical

discussions, including the intersubjectivity marked by the traumatic in E. Lévinas, social pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, and reaching the contributions of Psychoanalysis in the subjective constitution of the Self, through an intrapsychic intersubjectivity. These matrices indicate dimensions of alterity that should be thought of as simultaneous processes in the subjective development and constitution.

Psychoanalysis provides important contributions to comprehend the subjective constitution by means of the primordial relations with the other and, therefore, we highlight the centrality of the concept of alterity to discuss this constitution. Human babies are characterized by the need for another one to care for them to ensure their survival. Thus, the recognition of the other in their alterity can be thought of from the beginning of our psychic constitution, when we need another one to survive, in every way, including affective aspects. Put another way, in order to exist, human beings need an other that recognizes them.

Santos and Fortes (2011) point out that, in the process of subjective constitution, the double face of the other is always operating in the relationship with the baby, sometimes supporting and containing, and, at other times, forsaking and missing. These two aspects would be inherent to alterity. The other is determinant in the psychic constitution of the baby, as it builds a libidinal bond between them, providing destination and containment to the original drive excess. Thus, the presence of the other is necessarily inscribed in the Freudian model of psyche.

We can say that the recognition of alterity evidences the ethical dimension in relations, a theme addressed in depth by Lévinas (1997). According to the author, alterity can contribute to a more humane form of living in society, since each one has responsibility for others. The author proposes ethics as the first philosophy, considering alterity as a principle of human relationship. In this sense, alterity represents an essential element in the constitution of subjectivity and, to understand this process, the concept of intersubjectivity is presented in the author's work. According to Lévinas, intersubjectivity implies the displacement or modification of subjective experience in its inevitable openness to the other. Thus, alterity will always exceed the ability to receive, accept and understand this phenomenon (Coelho & Figueiredo 2004).

Baraitser (2008) provides some important contributions to think about maternal ethics beyond the logic of care, predisposition, attention and accessing the mother-baby metaphor through the way alterity structures and affects human subjectivity. According to the author, alterity is considered as a basic element to comprehend motherhood, in any way it is constituted: biology, adoption, community, members of an extended family, or friendship group.

The notion provided by Baraitser (2008) is also based on Lévinas' theory and understands that subjectivity is not a given, that is, there would be no

describable human subject as an ontological individual prior to the responsibility towards others. What would exist is the Other, in which subjectivity is seen to emerge from alterity. Thus, there is no Self before or beyond the Other (Costa & Caetano 2014).

According to Baraitser (2008), parenthood would be a subjective category that is characterized by the condition of being – at the same time – singular and multiple. Therefore, it depends on the recognition of the child radically as an Other, that is, fundamentally a stranger, distinct from the parents. This applies to all types of bond. However, in the case of late adoptions, it should be noted that, in addition to the recognition of the updated alterity of the mother-baby dynamics, there is also the alterity referred to sociocultural issues of the previous experiences of the child/adolescent.

Even in relation to late adoption, the assumptions of the recognition of the other in its beginnings are essential to understand the recognition of the otherness of the child/adolescent in the new family. The baby of yesterday will be updated in the construction of the new parent-child bond, requiring support and sustenance from this other that needs to be available to the needs of the child. However, the point is not only the recognition of the baby's otherness, but the otherness from a psychic constitution that already carries with it preferences and customs that bring out sociocultural aspects that can be quite different from the reality of the new family.

Ghirardi (2015) defends the recognition of otherness as a psychic process necessary for the good progress of the adoptions. According to the author, identification is fundamental in the process of building parenthood, since it opens space for the inscription of the child in the imagination through the attribution of similarities. As Baraitser (2008) recalls, this identification cannot come without space for the recognition of otherness.

Among the difficulties that permeate the recognition of the child's otherness, there is the interference of some myths and prejudices about adoption that lead parents to be afraid of the relationship with the child. Otuka, Scorsolini-Comin and Santos (2009) underscore that the main fears of adoptive parents are: fear of not being loved by the child, fear that the child's relationship with the family does not have good quality, concern about the feelings of the extended family towards the child, and fear of bad habits that the child may already have.

These fears are based on the need to recognize the otherness that marks the relationship. In this process, while recognizing the differences in individual characteristics, it is possible to discern the singularity of the other in subjective terms (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003). The familial bond becomes possible when the new environment is able to survive the turbulences of the path inherent to the relationship, while providing the child/adolescent with the possibility of subjective constitution by recognizing their otherness and singularity. Thus, this study aims to investigate the failures in the recognition of the child's alterity, experienced in the period of the stage of living together, in cases of return in adoption.

Method

Subjective experiences about return in the period of the stage of coexistence or provisional custody were investigated using qualitative methodology, through an exploratory field study.

Participants

Eleven independent subjects – nine women and two men, living in different states of Brazil, one from Ceará, one from Maranhão, one from Minas Gerais, five from Rio de Janeiro, two from Rio Grande do Sul and one from São Paulo – who underwent unsuccessful adoption attempts were interviewed. Regarding the family configuration, six participants configured monoparental adoption; four, heteroparental adoption; and one, homoparental adoption. All participants had higher education and age ranging from 34 to 56 years.

The time living together with the child ranged from one month to two years and four months. The children and adolescents received by families were aged between four and fifteen years, representing the so-called late adoptions. Most families had provisional custody and/or were in the stage of living together with the child/adolescent. Only one subject reported having opted out still in the period of meeting and becoming acquainted.

Among the reasons reported for non-adoption, nine were related to the child/adolescent's behavior and two research participants were disabled during the coexistence stage without wanting to opt out. In the presentation of the results, fictitious names were assigned. Table 1 presents the participants' data.

Table 1. Participants' data

Adopter	Age	Occupation	State	Family configuration	Reason for return	Child/adolescent age	Time of coexistence
Catarina	49	Unemployed	RS	heteroparental	disabled	Siblings: 5 y; 6 y; 8 y; 10 y	4 m
Clara	36	Psychologist	MG	homoparental	disabled	Siblings: 4 y; 6 y; 8 y	1 y and 2 m

continues...

Table 1. Continuation

Adopter	Age	Occupation	State	Family configuration	Reason for return	Child/adolescent age	Time of coexistence
Eduarda	40	Political scientist	RJ	monoparental	behavior	10 y	2 m
Fernando	42	Consultant	MA	heteroparental	behavior	7 y	1 y
Heloísa	37	Accountant	RJ	monoparental	behavior	10 y	3 m
Isabel	55	Programmer	CE	heteroparental	behavior	4 y	2 y and 4 m
Lucia	59	Teacher	RJ	monoparental	behavior	14 y	4 m
Marina	54	Retired social worker	RS	monoparental	behavior	10 y	1 m
Neuza	55	Retired teacher	RJ	monoparental	behavior	8 y	6 m
Patrícia	34	Psychologist	SP	heteroparental	behavior	Siblings: 12 y and 6 y	2 m
Pedro	56	Physician	RJ	monoparental	behavior	Siblings: 11 y and 15 y	5 m

Instrument

As a research instrument, an individual interview was conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire, containing open questions, composed of the following thematic axes: Experience of adoptive parenting; intensification of conflicts in the relationship; mourning for the imagined son; rupture of parent-child bond in adoptions.

Procedures

After approval of the research project by the Research Ethics Chamber of the university where it was developed (protocol number 07/2019), the participants were recruited through contact with psychologist professionals who work directly or indirectly with the subject of adoption and also by formal contacts in different social networks of the researcher. The interviews were conducted in person with the five participants from the state of Rio de Janeiro and via Skype with the others. They were recorded in audio, with the proper authorization of the participants, by signing a Free and Informed Consent Form, and lasted an average of one and a half hour.

The material was transcribed and submitted to the content analysis method, in its thematic category, with the purpose of investigating, based on the discourse material, the significances attributed by the interviewees to the phenomena (Bardin, 2011). Through the category technique, thematic categories were highlighted, organized based on the similarity between the elements contained in the collected material. To this end, a "hovering reading" was carried out, grouping significant data, identifying and relating them, until the categories of analysis stand out. The saturation point considered the repetition of the themes that led to the categories; thus, with new information not emerging and the cycle of data collection and analysis being interrupted.

This work is part of a broader research, whose general objective was to investigate the experience of the process of returning children/adolescents from the perspective of adopting parents. Through this investigation, seven categories of the participants' accounts emerged. To achieve the objectives of the study, we will discuss the categories: *Failures in the recognition of alterity and Prosthesis-child.* The other categories were discussed in other studies.

Results and discussion

The results of the analysis of the categories Failures in the recognition of alterityandprosthesis-child are presented and discussed below.

Failures in the recognition of alterity

This category evidences difficulties of applicants to adoption of recognizing the history of the child/adolescent, as well as the individuality and the social, cultural and customs differences that come with their life's baggage. Such difficulty was evidenced in the accounts that emphasized the rejection of habits and tastes of the child/adolescent; rejection of the child in their entirety, including positive and negative aspects; the frustration of expectations upon receiving a child that is different from what had been imagined. In addition, seeking psychological or psychiatric diagnosis emerged as the main defense mechanism to deal with aspects related to the recognition of the child's alterity. The following accounts illustrate the difficulty of receiving the habits and preferences related to the previous history of the child/adolescent:

> *She accessed the internet, she listened to the songs she wanted and she liked Pabllo Vittar. So I would listen to the song, then I'd start to ask her: Bruna, do you think the lyrics of this Pablo Vittar song are nice? "Oh, I like it!" But he's teaching people how to be prostitutes. Have you paid attention to the lyrics of his song? "Oh, but it's no big deal!" I said, yes, it is. So I was always questioning the values of everything she listened to, that she listened to in the shelter.* (Lucia)

> *I took him to the biennial, he was extremely annoyed there in the biennial, because he does not like books: "I don't like book, I don't like to read, I don't know why you brought me here." So I said: But, Lucas, let's stay a little longer! "No! I want to go away. I want to go away!" I said: No, let's stay a little longer, because I also want to see the books. My mother was there on that day: Your grandmother also wants to see the books, let's try to stay right here. But no. Then he'd stay away, he didn't try to interact.* (Heloísa)

Lucia's account illustrates the difficulty related to the adolescent's preferences and these tastes referred directly to the experiences related to her previous experiences. Heloísa's account indicates her difficulty with the outings: according to her, all the places where Lucas was taken seemed uninteresting to him. Lucas lived in another state before coming for adoption, and Heloísa's choices would not seem to suit Lucas's tastes.

Recognizing alterity means saying about being able to look at the other in their entirety and particularity, validating their individual characteristics, in addition to discerning the other in subjective terms in a respectful

way (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003; Machado, 2012). Therefore, we can think that, in adoption, recognizing alterity is equivalent to respecting the time for establishing a bond, as well as respecting the history of the child/adolescent.

In addition, the failures in the recognition of alterity emerged in the interviewees' accounts marked by surprise when contacting the child of reality. Some interviewees show difficulties in recognizing the differences marked by the breaking of expectations, evidenced in the moments when the child/adolescent "shows who they really are":

> *In the first days, we managed to go out more, but, as Luana gradually showed who she was, anyway, as she was showing dissatisfaction as to being here, we wouldn't leave the house anymore.* (Patrícia)

> *But really, that day he showed a side of him that was very strong, which until then he hadn't shown, because, I don't know! He was trying to win me over, he wanted to be nice, he wanted to be accepted, I don't know. But that day he couldn't and showed this side of him that's a reality.* (Eduarda)

The child/adolescent who comes to a new family in a process of adoption awakens a multitude of feelings, images and impressions that relate to the encounter of subjectivities, and this can be noticed in the initial attitudes, during the stage of coexistence, when all these feelings are manifested directly in the relationship.

It is worth remembering that parental organization commences in the beginning of the psychic life of each parent (Houzel, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the role of the fantasies underlying the experience of parenthood to understand their repercussions in the encounter with the child of reality. This encounter is marked by a shock of idealizations and expectations in the day-to-day relationship, which are fundamental for the recognition of alterity.

By resorting to claiming that this is the moment when the child/adolescent shows who they really are, in general, the adopters are referring to situations in which the child/adolescent's behavior is characterized by aggressiveness. It is, therefore, aggressive and, at the same time, regressive behavior, which can be part of the adaptation process in late adoptions (Vargas, 2013). What the child/adolescent needs at this moment is the containment of these emotions, which may have the opportunity to be developed through the new relationship. These attacks on the new parents can be understood both as an attack on the parental figure who abandoned them and as a way to confirm that the new environment will be able to survive and will remain, differently from what the previous experience exemplifies.

The initial motivations for adoption show the search for a child who may be different than that found in reality. The shock in idealization is structuring of all parental experience, whether biological or adoptive. However,

when the expectations for the ideal child crystallize, the encounter with the child of reality and the establishment of the bond can transpire in a conflicting manner (Combier & Binkowski, 2017). In these initial interactions that characterizes the stage of coexistence, experiencing the encounter with the child's alterity can culminate in the breaking of the idealizations and expectations of parenthood that were built by the applicants to adoption. Considering the above, we observed in the interviewees' accounts the frustration due to the adoption process not happening as expected:

> *I really expected it would work, Ana too, because we wanted to have a larger family, you know. Travelling on vacation, strolling around, I expected all of that. That's a good expectation, right, you know, to think that she would in fact become integrated.* (Marina)

> *My life really changed, and that's not what I expected. I was hoping for a relationship with her, that we could become a real family, but that's not what happened.* (Neuza)

There is a risk that some parents will become frustrated in the face of the difficulties that arise with living together. In biological parenthood, this break in expectation finds support in the generational legacy, while in adoptive parenthood, idealizations and illusions can lead to disastrous consequences for both parties (Gomes, Marques, & Ishara, 2018). The possibility of return seems to loom constantly, since all the characteristics of the child/adolescent that are disapproved by the adopter would point to their origin.

Thus, the establishment of the bond is impaired by the non-possibility of recognizing the alterity, as if it pointed at all times to the child's non-belonging to that family dynamics, in addition to the difficulty in tolerating the cultural abyss that the child/adolescent can bring through their habits and customs. The recognition of the other has as its starting point two types of fundamental experiences: objective experience, identifying individual characteristics; and subjective experience, which involves familiarity and respect for the other (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003).

That which is not tolerated in the adopted child refers to the uncanny, as proposed by Freud (1919/1969), when discussing the *German term Unheimlich*, referring to that which should remain hidden, but came to light, was revealed. In this case, the uncanny comes carried by ghosts in a frightening way, causing fear and horror, while it is something known, intimate, familiar.

In the context of adoption, the uncanny refers to the ghost of the family of origin. This other that exists or existed, but needs to be rejected, since it is experienced by adopting parents as a possibility of attack on their parental place (Queiroz, 2004). Alterity evidences, therefore, a certain type of duplicity regarding the parental imago, referred to biological parents and adopting parents, and the child begins to represent the uncanny every time they do not behave according to the expectations of the adopters.

With this, the break of idealizations that occurs through the period of coexistence indicates the need for a work of mourning for the imagined child. The expectations built thus far need to make way for the child of reality and it will be in this process of mourning that parents will find the ways to invest in the child (Ghirardi, 2015). It is worth mentioning that giving up the imagined child represents the task of following a long path of psychic assimilations and developments. Throughout this path, the parents will come into contact with the most diverse types of conflicts and anxieties (Riede & Sartori, 2013), which refer to their own history, as illustrated in the following account:

> *I've always thought about two boys because I'm an only child, so I never liked thinking of only one child at home, because I never liked this situation. I never wanted a young child, because I wanted someone with autonomy, who could provide me with the opportunity to work, to be useful, to do something and, as I am alone, to have the ability to take care.* (Pedro)

Pedro's expectations refer directly to his experience as a son and to the attempt to repair aspects of his history through adoption. Thus, he builds expectations about the relationship between siblings and suffers when the fights between them become increasingly intense. Moreover, he seeks reciprocity of affection and care on the part of the children, without the temporality inherent to the construction of the parent-child bond being respected. He idealizes that in late adoption it will not be necessary to deal with the demands of a baby, when what is perceived is that adoption works as a possibility for reparations in the history of the child/adolescent and that, for this, the baby that comes incorporated in an older child needs to be cared for in their most primitive needs (Sampaio, Magalhães, & Machado, 2020).

To deal with these difficulties, some interviewees showed the attempt to identify psychopathological behaviors of the child/adolescent as a form of defense:

> *People were already starting to complain: take her to a doctor. That even I think, today, that she must be, like, a little… Because they said, "Is this child autistic?" To me, autistic children were those who lived only in their closed world. Because of that, I also started reading about autism and everything, and you see that it isn't that, right. It's behavior, right. And that really, sometimes, everything was fine and suddenly she changed.* (Isabel)

> *And the child I chose was a child who had serious psychological problems and that I wasn't informed of that as well. Could I adopt a child with psychological problems? Yes, i could. But I needed to know if I had the structure to live with this problem that this child showed to me, and it was omitted from me. Because*

only after I sought to learn about this history of the child did I see that the issue of this child was much greater than they had told me. (Neuza)

It can be observed, in the accounts presented, the need to understand the difficulties through a psychological diagnosis, disregarding the child/adolescent' previous history, which may have been marked by ruptures and neglects of various types, and that will require space and care to be dealt with in the new family. Late adoption implies receiving a child with their past that may have left marks in different ways. Accordingly, the adoption will represent the possibility of reparation, provided the adopter is able to be available for this comprehension and to produce, with the child, the necessary developments towards the construction of a new possible history (Otuka et al., 2012).

One of the central points in return cases is the tendency to hold the child/adolescent accountable for the failure of the adoption process. Following this logic, the attribution of some psychic disorder works as a defense in which the adopters distance themselves even more from the responsibility in the process, since the impossibility for the construction of the bond begins to be explained by a psychic dysfunction or disorder of the child/adolescent. Thus, they blame not only the child, but the entire technical team for indicating a child/adolescent considered problematic by them (Pinho, 2014).

It is worth noting that the adopters, during the stage of coexistence, were assimilating and adapting to the parental function and, for the majority of the interviewees (eight participants), it was their first child. Given the anxieties of this period, something that is expected according to the notion of what being a mother/father represents is the capacity to provide the necessary care as to the health of the child (Peixoto, Giacomozzi, Bousfield, Berri, & Fiorott, 2019). Thus, the pathologization of the child/adolescent can be understood as reactive formation that, through excessive care, masks anxieties in the process of constituting oneself in the parental function.

Therefore, it is extremely important to distinguish between what is presented as health-related needs and behaviors that permeate the adoption process and that can serve as a form of communication of the child/adolescent, such as aggressive behaviors directed to the new environment. This is a crucial and extremely complex period for all involved (Costa & Rosseti-Ferreira, 2007; Levy, Pinho, & Faria, 2009) and the sensitivity to be available in the construction of the bond – allowing the confrontation with the alterity of the child – will make it possible to approach these difficulties through the way of care.

Prosthesis-child

The *prosthesis-child* category concerns the place that is designated to the child as one that tamponades some type of narcissistic fault. The participants' accounts pointed to a desire for the child/adolescent to be fit into the family environment at any cost, disregarding their alterity, their history, their culture, their desires and even the singular temporality for the construction of the bond. In the interviewees' statements, what evidenced the prosthesis-child were the desire to receive affection and be loved by the children, to be called mother/father instantly and for the child/adolescent to be grateful for the adoption.

Below, Lucia's account illustrates the prosthesis-child representing the need for the adolescent to adapt to the format expected by her:

After she was done, I said, "Bruna, do you want to go back to the shelter? Because you said you're unhappy here, you have to choose. Or you stay with me and try to adapt, we try to reach a good agreement, to be my daughter, you have to decide what you want. What we can't do is keep fighting like this! And you attacking me, you're attacking me!". (Lucia)

It is observed, through Lucia's account, that the adoption process was understood, above all, as the need for adaptation by the adolescent. This mechanism can lead to the child/adolescent being blamed for the failure of the adoption, as the adopters assign the decision on the direction of the adoption to the child/adolescent. Thus, the environment is not seen as able to receive and understand the difficulties and specificities of the establishment of a bond, thus prevailing the frustration for the breaks of expectations.

For an adoption to be considered good enough, it is necessary that parents and children transform themselves along a path characterized by mutual recognition. The new family must be able to deal with and contain the old anxieties, as well as the destructive fantasies of the child, so it becomes possible to build the parent-child bond (Otuka et al., 2012). The interviewees mentioned the desire to be loved, to receive affection back as a basis for the experience of parenting and for the conception of family:

He's the father we have to give something back to, and it's not happening like that. Were they loving children? They were loving children. But, like, I was a stranger that they treated like any other stranger too. (Pedro)

I kept waiting, holding on as much as possible to see if she would come to me, look me in the eyes and say like: I love you mom. I've been waiting for this opportunity. I was hoping it would happen, but it didn't. (Lucia)

Evidently, the expectations of adopters about the process of building parenthood extrapolated the reality of adoption. According to Oliveira, Souto and Silva (2017), it is common that applicants express idealizations related to the desire for completeness through adoption, based on the notion of a perfect family, in which a well-cared child would become a good caregiver of parents in old age. In addition, idealizations linked to obedience,

good educational performance, and reciprocation of the affection offered as parents are common.

The pursuit of the adoptive child's demonstration of affection seems to denote the need to tamponade a narcissistic wound through the experience of parenthood. The parental project is narcissistic par excellence, which means that it is necessary to dream, imagine the child and, thus, invest aspirations, renunciations and frustrations. Nevertheless, the moment the child/adolescent begins to occupy the place of salvation for such frustrations, the process of building the parent-child bond can be compromised (Combier & Binkowski 2017). The expectation to receive something in return in the relationship emerged in the interviewees' statements as the desire to be called mother/father:

> I'll open up to you, I felt used, I felt like a caregiver. I didn't feel like a father. From the first moment, I've always told them: this is your house. You're my kids. But I was never called father. Does it bother? It does. Is it essential? No, I even understand it. They've never had a father figure, they have to assimilate the idea, they're kids, okay. But there was never that transmission of paternal affection. (Pedro)

> She had a hard time calling me mom. She'd start calling me aunt and I'd say, "Lara, I'd like you to call me mom, because I'm not your aunt, right? When I'm in this adoption process, if all goes well you're going to stay, I'm going to be your mom. So let's start practicing that now, right." (Marina)

When the parents are addressed as mother and father by the child, that is one of the milestones in the process of building parenthood. In the case of parenting initiated by the biological means, parents experience the initial stages with their baby and yearn for the first moment when the child will address them as mom and dad. However, adoptive parents who receive an older child – already speaking – may deny the temporality of the specificities that involve the adoption process, eagerly seeking to anticipate the moment of being addressed as mother/father, without the construction of the bond being sufficiently experienced. Moreover, this pursuit would be another mark of the rejection of the child/adolescent's history through distinct parental imagos (Queiroz, 2004).

According to Vargas (2013), the moment of being called mother/father may cause some anxiety and this delay begins to be defined as a consequence of cognitive deficits, disregarding that it may be due to affective aspects of the relationship. The author points out that motherhood and fatherhood are a function and relationship and, for this reason, the child/adolescent must first experience and recognize it before being able to name it.

Another indicator of the prosthesis-child that emerged in the interviewees' statements was the expectation that the child/adolescent would be grateful for the adoption:

> Even the person, like, from the forum, from the guardian institution where she was, in the first month, when it was difficult. I even took Lara there and she talked to Lara, she explained, you know, that Lara had to really appreciate all this, because her mother was not coming back. That her mother had really had very bad attitude towards her. (Marina)

The justification of returning the child due to bad behavior is usually recurrent in cases of return (Ghirardi, 2015). There is the conception that this would be one of the main reasons for the non-possibility of parent-child bonding and that returning the child would be justifiable in cases of disobedience and rebellion (Weber, 2011). This practice confirms the idea that the child should be grateful for the adoption and adapt their behavior to please the adopters (Pinho, 2014).

This notion contains historical and legal remnants. In the Civil Code of 1916, the adoptive linkage was not considered definitive, entitling both the adoptee and adopter to opt out. In its art. 373, it allowed the dissolution of the linkage by the adoptee in the immediate year in which the interdiction or minority ended. In turn, the adopter could dissolve the linkage at any time if the adoptee committed ingratitude against them (Lino, 2020). This concept has been opposed by the new culture of adoption and, mainly, by efforts in the work of adoption support groups.

Final considerations

Late adoption necessarily involves caring for the child/adolescent and dealing with their history, marks, pains and ruptures that they have experienced. The child comes with their own habits and preferences that are not always accepted or supported by new parents. This rejection implies difficulties in recognizing the child's alterity, especially with regard to the particular and individual aspects of the child/adolescent related to features of their origin. Dealing with the recognition of the child's alterity that emerges during the stage of coexistence requires a certain openness to deal with the history of the child/adolescent. Being able to tolerate the differences and accept the needs of the child presupposes the breaking of idealizations and expectations in a process of recognition of the other and not just the attempt to adapt the child to the new reality by discarding their past.

We know that an adoption involves psychic mobilizations of different orders and that parenthood is built through a complex process. The differences that permeate the self-other relationship are evidenced

in the parental relationship through the existence of a previous history that needs to find space in the new history to be built. However, it is very common that new parents see themselves faced with the double parental reference and start to compete imaginarily with the family of origin. Some parents' difficulty in dealing with situations that can be natural of every child/adolescent, such as bad behavior, is now justified by "bad blood," in other words, that which comes from the other and cannot be recognized. Thus, the possibility of building the parent-child bond is impaired and returning the child may occur to them as the only possible recourse.

We observed that the attempt to comprehend the behaviors and attitudes of the child/adolescent can be a factor that causes anxiety in parents, leading them to seek psychological or psychiatric diagnoses. Seeking a psychopathological explanation for the child/adolescent's bad behavior becomes a point of protection to build significance for the difficulties that stem from coexistence. Thus, the child/adolescent is now responsible for the failure in adoption, as if they had a deficit that would prevent the bonding. Therefore, we highlight the need for the technical team to have greater attention in helping adopters understand the behaviors of the child/adolescent as a form of communication, and not only as a reflection of a psychological or psychiatric disorder.

The difficulty in dealing with the differences that characterize the forms of subjectivation built from the previous history of the child/adolescent can lead adopters to seek the the adjustment, at any cost, to the child that was imagined. Adopting is being able to integrate histories, creating new possibilities for both parties on the path of discovering themselves as family. We emphasize the need for attention to the preparation process that involves pre- and post-adoption aspects for both adopters and children/adolescents, so they all are supported in this process, which will always be unique and permeated by specificities.

Therefore, the encounter between parents and children in adoption, based on the relationship of recognition of alterity, presupposes the adopters' capacity to integrate differences and similarities with closeness and distancing, while ensuring that psychic contours are maintained and not threatened in this process of building parenthood. What comes into play is respect for the other in their alterity, so it is possible to establish connections, without the internal space being colonized.

Falhas no reconhecimento da alteridade nos casos de devolução em adoções tardias

Resumo: Este estudo é parte de uma ampla investigação sobre vivência do processo de adoção malsucedida de crianças e adolescentes sob a perspectiva dos adotantes. Foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa, com base em entrevistas semiestruturadas com 11 sujeitos independentes, nove mulheres e dois homens, moradores de diferentes estados do Brasil, que passaram por adoções malsucedidas. Neste trabalho, buscamos investigar as falhas no reconhecimento da alteridade do filho, vivenciadas no período do estágio de convivência, nos casos de devolução na adoção. Foi comum, entre os participantes, a busca por uma explicação psicopatológica para os comportamentos considerados ruins da criança/adolescente. Ficou evidente a necessidade de maior investimento afetivo-emocional nos períodos iniciais do estabelecimento do vínculo parento-filial, para o acolhimento da criança/adolescente em sua totalidade e individualidade.

Palavras-chave: devolução, filiação, vínculo parento-filial, adoção tardia, adoção malsucedida.

La non-reconnaissance de l'altérité dans les cas d'interruption en adoption tardive

Résumé : Cette étude découle d'une recherche approfondie sur l'expérience des adoptions infructueuses d'enfants et d'adolescents du point de vue des adoptants. Axé sur une approche qualitative, on a mené des entretiens semi-structurés avec 11 sujets indépendants (neuf femmes et deux hommes), habitant dans différents États du Brésil, qui ont vécu des adoptions infructueuses. La recherche s'intéresse à l'échec de la reconnaissance de l'altérité de l'enfant, vécues pendant la phase de coexistence, dans les cas d'interruption de l'adoption. Il était courant, chez les participants, la recherche d'une explication psychopathologique aux comportements dit mauvais de l'enfant/adolescent. Les résultats montrent la nécessité d'un plus grand investissement émotionnel-affectif dans les périodes initiales d'établissement du lien parent-enfant, pour accueillir l'enfant/adolescent dans son intégralité et son individualité.

Mots-clés : interruption, affiliation, lien parent-enfant, adoption tardive, adoption infructueuse.

No reconocer la alteridad en casos de interrupción en adopciones tardías

Resumen: El presente estudio es parte de una extensa investigación sobre la experiencia del proceso fallido de adopción de niños, niñas y adolescentes desde la perspectiva de los adoptantes. Se realizó una investigación cualitativa, basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas con 11 sujetos independientes, nueve mujeres y dos hombres, residentes en diferentes estados de Brasil, que tuvieron adopciones fallidas. En este trabajo se busca investigar las fallas en el reconocimiento de la alteridad del niño, vividas durante el período de la etapa de convivencia, en los casos de devolución en adopción. Entre los participantes, fue común la búsqueda de una explicación psicopatológica de los comportamientos considerados malos por el niño / adolescente. Era evidente la necesidad de una mayor inversión afectivo-emocional en los períodos iniciales de establecimiento del vínculo pariente-hijo, para acoger al niño / adolescente en su totalidad e individualidad.

Palabras-clave: devolución, afiliación, vínculo pariente-hijo, adopción tardía, adopción fallida.

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