Article

Teething Problems in Late Adoption: Challenges for the Parent-Child Bond in Parental Perception

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Abstract

This article is part of a broader research on the parent-child bond in late adoption. The authors interviewed ten independent subjects – three men and seven women, who adopted children older than two years – and assessed the results using the content analysis method. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience of the adaptation period in late adoption, and the repercussions of the previous child history the construction of the parent-child bond. Among the main challenges reported during this period, the authors highlight the aggressive behavior of the child; trouble dealing with rules and authority; lack of legal security; school delays; and problems adapting to family routine, all of which seem to be related to the previous experiences of the child. The way in which parents embraced hardships, bridging past and present in order to rebuild the lost family environment, was reported as having critical importance in the construction and maintenance of the parent-child bond.

Keywords: Late adoption, bond, parenting.

Pedras no Caminho da Adoção Tardia: Desafios para o Vínculo Parento-Filial na Percepção dos Pais

Resumo

O presente artigo é parte de pesquisa mais ampla sobre o vínculo parento-filial nas adoções tardias. Foram entrevistados 10 sujeitos independentes, 3 homens e 7 mulheres, que adotaram crianças maiores de dois anos e as entrevistas analisadas pelo método de análise de conteúdo. O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar a vivência do período de adaptação nas adoções tardias e a repercussão do histórico pregresso da criança na construção do vínculo parento-filial. Dentre as principais dificuldades relatadas durante esse período, ressaltam-se o comportamento agressivo da criança, as dificuldades com regras e autoridade, a falta de segurança jurídica, o atraso escolar e problemas quanto à adaptação à rotina familiar, todas relacionadas às vivências passadas para a criança. A forma como os pais acolheram as dificuldades,

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integrando passado e presente, de modo a reconstruir o ambiente familiar perdido, foi relatada como de extrema importância para a construção e manutenção do vínculo parento-filial.

Palavras-chave: Adoção tardia, vínculo, parentalidade.

Piedras en el Camino de la Adopción Tardía: Retos para el Vínculo Parento-Filial en la Percepción de los Padres

Resumen

El presente artículo es parte de una investigación más amplia sobre el vínculo parento-filial en las adopciones tardías. Fueron entrevistados 10 sujetos independientes, 3 hombres y 7 mujeres, que adoptaron niños mayores de dos años. Las entrevistas fueron analizadas por el método de análisis de contenido. El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar la vivencia del periodo de adaptación en las adopciones tardías y la repercusión del histórico anterior del niño en la construcción del vínculo parento-filial. Entre las principales dificultades relatadas durante este período, resaltamos el comportamiento agresivo del niño; dificultades con reglas y autoridad; falta de seguridad jurídica; retraso en la enseñanza; y problemas de adaptación a la rutina familiar, todas estas relacionadas con las vivencias pasadas del niño. La forma como los padres acogieron las dificultades, integrando el pasado con el presente, como un modo de reconstruir el ambiente perdido, fue relatada como de extrema importancia para la construcción y mantenimiento del vínculo parento-filial.

Palabras clave: Adopción tardía, vínculo, parentalidad.

In Brazil, many children and teenagers spend part of their lives under state care. Some of them are waiting to be reinserted in their original families, while others are listed for adoption. According to the Statute for the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* [ECA]), the period a child spends in an institution is supposed to be transitory, and family living a priority (Law no. 8.069, 1990). In 2009, after 19 years, the ECA (Law no. 8.069/90) went through its first reform. The National Adoption Law (Law no. 12.010, 2009) changed 54 articles in the ECA, and also brought some innovations.

According to this law, housing institutions should adopt the policy of preserving family bonds and promoting familial reintegration. With this, we can see that the new law seeks to help the family by reestablishing the family living as soon as possible (Silva & Arpini, 2013). However, this is a scenario that is yet to be reached. Children stay too long in shelters, making adoption increasingly hard.

In many cases, due to a delayed attempt to reintegrate the family, the process of removing the power from the family of origin becomes very long and, therefore, the child becomes available for adoption at a later age. In view of this situation, most of the children that make up the waiting list are older than two years, forming the so-called "late adoptions" (Vargas, 1998/2013).

Although there are no distinctions between ways of adoption in the legal sphere, there is a separation of types of adoption, since some require special attention because they are considered especially difficult. These include adoptions of siblings, HIV positive children, interracial adoptions, children with special needs, and late adoptions (Peiter, 2011). When it comes to late adoptions, the reference itself points to the existence of singularities and specificities, among them, the history of previous experiences, the difficulties in the period of adaptation and the prerogative of the child's choice.

According to Ebrahim (2001), older children generally do not fit the preference of most suitors for adoption. For this reason, they end up being the option, in most cases, of couples who have already been through the parental experi-

ence, singles, divorced and widowed individuals who do not have the availability or desire to care for a newborn. Frequently, the preference for infants appears to be related to the difficulty in educating an older child and the search for better adaptation between parents and children without interference from previous learnings. It is an attempt to mitigate the consequences of experiences that the child may have, thus satisfying the family's desire to mimic a biological model (Morelli, Scorsolini-Comin, & Santeiro, 2015)

The consequence of the distortion between preference and available profile is seen in the disparity between the statistical numbers in the reports of the National Registrar of Adoption (*Cadastro Nacional de Adoção* [CNA]). In 2016, 35,770 suitors were available awaiting the arrival of a child, while 4,943 children and adolescents were available for adoption (CNA, 2016).

In the last 20 years, many advances have been achieved through awareness of the applicants about a child's profile, mainly due to the work done in Adoption Support Groups, non-profit organizations, usually coordinated by adoptive parents, promoting a new culture of adoption. Amim and Menandro (2007) emphasize that the work done in these groups helps to change the profile that was chosen initially during registration. According to the authors, only 4% of the applicants arrive in the group willing to adopt children older than four years and, at the end of the meetings, this number has been reaching 20%.

Despite the transformations that have occurred so far, building a new culture of adoption in Brazil, that breaks old myths and prejudices is a task that still poses many challenges. Adoption is the main solution to try to reconstruct a family environment that fits the needs of the child with a history of losses and separations. The literature has shown that the process of late adoption involves several specificities and challenges for both parents and children, especially regarding the initial period of living together (Ghirardi, 2009; Levinzon, 2000; Levy, Pinho, & Faria, 2009; Peiter, 2001).

The history of complex living with the family of origin, neighbors or acquaintances, as well as the passage through housing institutions are the main specificities of late adoption (Peiter, 2011). Thus, we can say that the construction of the parent-child bond will be permeated by previous experiences, both of the parents and of the children, in a process that requires construction from both parties, considering that the child is often able to discern what they want and understand adoption.

Breaking up family ties in early time may leave traces on the child's development. Going to an adoptive family appears as a moment of resignification of the previous separation experiences. In addition, according to Londen, Juffer and Ijzendoorn (2007), adoption plays an important role for development and may prevent delays in the child's cognitive and motor development.

Adoption can be understood as a possibility of reinvesting in objects that were once threatened by ruptured bonding experiences. However, it is important to note that adoption cannot be experienced as a magical solution to all problems. Peiter (2011) points out that this is not an alternative that, by itself, is capable of overcoming the traumas that may exist in the trajectory of these children.

Previous experiences may have left traces and marks that would influence future connections. According to Winnicott (1945/2000), traumatic experiences are, initially, experienced in the body, having no psychic representation. These and other experiences accumulate in the history of these children since the rupture with the biological family, including going through housing institutions, until arriving at the adoptive family. Understanding this pathway can help parents cope with the possible difficulties that will arise during adaptation (Morelli et al., 2015; Schettini, Amazonas, & Dias, 2006; Silva, Guimarães, & Pereira, 2014).

The arrival in an adoptive family will be embedded by the stories, marks and possible traumas experienced by the child, which is often exposed to situations of risk registered in the

psychic apparatus, such as carelessness and detachment, and which can generate challenges in creating new bonds (Zornig & Levy, 2006). In this context, when discussing the issue of adopting older children, it is fundamental to reflect on the history and experiences prior to the adoption, understanding the construction of the new bond between parent and child. Therefore, adoptive families will encounter important challenges to bonding while in the demand to rebuild a good enough environment, and also in the quest to satisfy the motivations for adoption (Gomes, 2006; Otuka, Scorsolini-Comin, & Santos, 2012).

Several researches point to the importance of legitimizing the child's past, giving space so that the history can be recounted and does not occupy a ghostly space in the family relationship (Ebrahim, 2001; Levinzon, 2000; Schettini et al., 2006; Silva et al., 2014; Zornig & Levy, 2006). Ladvocat (2001), when talking about myths involving adoptive families, emphasizes that ignorance about the history of the child's origins, in most cases, favors the emergence of the myths spread by culture. Some parents prefer to erase their child's previous life in an attempt to build a new one, above all by seeking to mimic the biological family model. However, access to the past is fundamental so that the child can fantasize, ask and elaborate its history with the adoptive family. Adoptive parents need to understand that being a parent is more important than "generating" a child.

According to Schettini et al. (2006), the history of the adopted child represents part of its identity and cannot be annulled, rather, it must be integrated with the new affective connection. Giving new meaning to the past will be part of the process of building the child's identity. For the authors, revealing the history loses its meaning, in the sense that there is no revelation, but rather a story that is lived and built day by day. Within this context, this study aimed to investigate the experience of the adaptation period in late adoptions and the repercussion of the child's past history in the construction of the parent-child bond.

Method

Participants

Ten independent subjects were interviewed, 3 men and 7 women, belonging to 3 single-parent families, 3 homoparental and 4 heteroparental, with higher education, who have provisional custody or a completed adoption process. In the case of parents with provisional custody, the dismissal of (origin) family power may or may not have been completed, despite the children being in the process of adoption. This type of situation often occurs in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Children with ages ranging from two years and six months to 11 years, were welcomed by families, making up the so-called late adoption, prior to adolescence. In addition, the adoption process, with provisional custody, had begun at least six months prior to the survey.

Instrument

As a research tool, individual interviews were led with a semi-structured script, containing open questions, composed of the following thematic axes: motivation for adoption; previous experiences, family and network; subjective experiences of parenting, experience of bond building, fantasies related to the imagined child.

Procedures

After the research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the university where it was developed, the participants were recruited at Adoption Support Groups and also by informal contacts in different social networks of the researcher. The interviews were held in a place of preference of the interviewee, recorded in audio, with the proper authorization of the participants, by signing a Term of Free and Informed Consent and had an average duration of one hour. The names of the parents throughout the work were duly replaced by fictitious names.

The material was transcribed and submitted to content analysis method, in its categorial aspect, with the purpose of investigating, in the discursive material, the meanings attributed

Table 1
Biographic Data from the Participants

Participant	Age	Profession	Familial Configuration	Child's age upon adoption	Current child's age	Process finalized	Biological children
Ana	35	Lawyer	Heteroparental	2y; 3y 6m (siblings)	4y; 5y 6m	—	—
André	47	Civil Engineer	One-parent	11y	15y	Yes	—
Mario	39	Accountant	Homoparental	11; 2y 6m, 1y 6m; 3m (siblings)	13y; 5y; 3y; 2y	Yes	—
Claudia	50	Teacher	Heteroparental	6y; 8y (siblings)	7y; 8y	—	—
Lucas	38	Designer	Homoparental	6y; 9y; 11y (siblings)	7y; 10y; 11y	—	—
Sara	44	Accountant	Heteroparental	7y	10y	—	—
Fernanda	45	College Professor	Heteroparental	4y; 10y (siblings)	5y; 11y	—	Yes
Julia	37	Beautician	One-parent	2y 6m	6y	Yes	—
Vânia	45	Lawyer	Homoparental	6m, 5y; 12y	27y; 12y; 16y	Yes	—
Laura	46	Social Worker	One-parent	9y	15y	Yes	Yes

to the phenomena by the respondents (Bardin, 2011). With the categorial technique, theme categories were highlighted, organized from the similarity between the elements contained in the material collected. For this, a "superficial reading" was carried out, grouping significant data, identifying and relating them, until the categories for analysis were found.

This paper presents part of the results of a broad research, in which the goal was to investigate the construction of the parent-child bond in late adoptions. In this broader research, seven categories of participants' narratives emerged: parenting experience, motivation for adoption, network participation, fantasies and expectations in late adoption, child's baggage, obstacles on the path of late adoption and mutual adoption.

To reach the objectives of this work, the last three categories were discussed, since they are directly related to the implications of the history in the mutual construction of the parent-child bond in adoption. The other categories were discussed in another paper.

Results and Discussion

Child's Baggage

The interviewees reported having fears about the customs and learning acquired in the child's past, which is one of the main difficulties in the initial construction of the parent-child bond.

> *Let's say, she arrived at the age of eleven, already arrived with some baggage. How are we going to deconstruct, explain this to her? Sometimes even reprimand her, but without making her go back to that place and say "ah! But before, this never*

happened to me". (Mario, homoparental family)

According to Vargas (1998/2013), although education is as important as biological nature, the fear of pathological inheritance is a subject often addressed by adoptive parents. Thus, the idea prevails that, no matter what is done, the child's personality will always be shaped by the biological "bad seed". Luz, Gelani and Amaral (2014) point to the importance of this demystification, since the belief that the child will come with bad habits can compromise both the bonding and the future development of the child.

For most respondents, the fears about what the child carries with them were deconstructed during the adoption process.

When we entered into the adoption process, we had put from zero to six years, just one, but I discovered that this profile was not really based on desire. It was based on fear and a bunch of fantasies. So as we were doing the lectures and I was talking to people, I was getting more confident about that. (Lucas, homoparental family)

In the stories of some parents, we see the fear that prejudices and stigma coming from the previously received education would undermine the parent-child bond. For Mario, the acceptance or not of homosexuality was one of the concerns when deciding on adoption.

Another major concern was the issue of gender, at the beginning we were kind of like that because I thought that because we were a gay couple, the easiest would be to get a girl, right. Because the girl would deal much better with our homosexuality and the boy would carry a biased baggage from where he came from, which are usually poorer places, and what would that be like. (Mario, homoparental family)

According to Fernández and Fuentes (2004), in western countries, when adopting older children, there is preference to adopting girls. This choice is because of certain psychological aspects, such as search for affection and support, as well as social and cultural aspects, such as valuing the aesthetic attraction, obedience and submission that are attributed to the female gender.

The difficulty with basic hygiene care appeared in the speeches of some of the interviewees as one of the difficulties related to the history marked by negligence.

So we had to start a new education, literally. Although they were ten and four, it was as if they were babies. Brushing teeth, showering every day, then, history thing, brushing teeth, showering . . . There was practically a total reeducation due to their history which was the history of neglected children. (Fernanda, heteroparental family)

Daily routines in housing institutions often do not favor the learning of essential care. The predominant assistential function, along with the lack of structure of these institutions, weakens the commitment to the development of childhood and adolescence. These institutions are unable to meet the full range of child care needed due to innumerable factors, such as reduced number of staff, high turnover, overload, unfavorable salaries and lack of specialization (Altoé & Silva, 2013).

Baptista, Soares and Henriques (2013) emphasize that the impossibility of offering satisfactory basic care in institutions is related to a low capacity to meet the individual needs of the children. The reduced number of caregivers and the constant changes in shifts make for an impossible professional stability and discourages the promotion of activities for the development of the children. These factors end up harming the establishment of reference figures, which may weaken the capacity for future attachment to the adoptive family.

All this neglect suffered in the past can have important consequences on the development. Some parents have highlighted gaps in development as part of their children's record.

She was always trapped somewhere, because she was not walking when she was a year and a half, she did not crawl, she did not talk . . . Then within two months she was already running. Then the people in the shelter said, "She does not walk, she just

runs". Then you are like, of course, right! lost a lot of time doing nothing, we have to catch up. (Julia, one-parent family)

Böing and Crepaldi (2004) point out that observations in hospitals, day-care centers, shelters in which deprivation is sometimes massive, show that the damage to the psycho-affective development appears severely in what would be termed "hospitalism". In addition, when deprivation is severe, there may be difficulty in the child's ability to forge future bonds.

The lag resulting from the lack of initial care emerged in the interviewees' statements about the difficulty with adapting the family routine.

The difficulty was this part of the adoption because they reacted in a way that each one reacts in a way, like B that cried a lot, right, L that only said yes, then the difficulty was to try to find a middle term, put them on a point, align that according to family routine. (Fernanda, heteroparental family)

The need for care to repair what was previously neglected requires transformations in the routine. According to Luz et al. (2014), the routine presents itself as an important issue in the adaptation, both for the family that will receive a new member, and for the child who, because of their background, may not accept the imposition of new rules so well. The lack of information about the child's history was also mentioned, especially in Sara's speech, when she told of her despair when she suddenly had to deal with her sick child.

And I knew nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. I said, "look, doctor, I only know his blood type because they gave me in the shelter, the rest I know nothing, nothing, I do not know any history of him, you, please help me, this child has secretion all the time, and I do not know what to do". (Sara, heteroparental family)

Gomes (2006) points out that, for the most part, the adoptive family does not have access to essential information about the child's early life, such as conditions of childbirth, history of common childhood illnesses, relevant aspects of developmental progress, among others. Given this,

they will have to get adoption-specific care to be able to repair previous flaws.

The child's insecurity was recognized by some interviewees as one of the consequences of their children's previous history. This realization helped shape the care that was needed to reestablish security.

Our first, let's put it this way, it was not a fight, but our first reprimand, right, with my most serious face, she said at the time, "are you going to abandon me?" . . . I never told her when she was being difficult on the street, like mothers do, like this: "you won't come, will you? Then I'm leaving!" I never said that, whatever it was. . . . But on the street, to say: "oh, I'm going away and you're going to stay there", I never said, because it's going to bring a suffering that is, actually for any child, right, the mother says that she's leaving, any child is already suffering. But to them it is even worse, because they have already been left, others have already left and never returned. (Júlia, one-parent family)

Throughout their histories, adopted children have experienced ruptures since the family of origin. In this way, they become insecure before the other, who could disappear at any moment. For Silva et al. (2014), these experiences make the child make a psychic effort that is too great to build new bonds. Changing the shelter, an environment already known, for the new family, totally unknown environment, brings insecurity, since, in their imagination, the family can be a dangerous place.

Although most of the children's previous experiences were recognized by the participants as having brought bad consequences to the present, the interviewees also stressed the importance of that past in their development, showing attention to the good aspects of their children and the importance of talking about the subject.

There is the side of having to break some concepts, some stories that are not always good, ok, do not bring good things, but also look for good things in the stories from the past that they all have too, right. Because

to get where they are and to be children as they are is because they have great values there, ok. (Mario, homoparental family)

Do not forbid your child from talking about the past. You have to understand what happened to him and work on it in the future with him . . . So their previous experiences are useful to understand their momentum. (Vânia, homoparental family)

When parents understand the experiences brought, a new story can be built that elaborates on what may have been experienced as traumatic and painful in the past. As pointed out by Silva et al. (2014), listening to the past enables the child to recount their story and give new meaning to it. In addition, according to Schettini et al. (2006), the child's story can tell much more about their identity than the adoptive child will admit of the supposed past.

Most of these children have attachments and important memories of living with the biological family that are often preserved. The adoptive family will have to deal with these experiences and, when welcoming their child, also gets all the history coming in that baggage. The challenges of dealing with this past and writing a new story relate to the difficulties in this path.

Obstacles in the Path of Late Adoption

The obstacles in the path of late adoption represent the main difficulties that adoptive parents face in the initial period of coexistence. Among these, the interviewees highlighted the aggressive behavior with which they had to deal in the adaptation period. In adoption, often the adopting family idealizes that the child will be grateful to the host and will not cause greater "problems". On the contrary, the child will test the environment in order to be certain that they will be accepted even with everything provocative and unsatisfactory that they may have (Levinzon, 2000) as evidenced in Fernanda's speech:

The phases. Well they warned me! When the children arrived it was not a fairy tale, this is important to talk about. Because we think the child is going to be very grateful, as of-

ten happens, but it is not always that way. . . . When B arrived, she tested us a lot. She would cry and throw tantrums... the wind changed position, she was already crying and I thought someone would be knocking at my door accusing me of mistreatment because she screamed, screamed... "B, why are you screaming?" "I don't know!" (Fernanda, heteroparental family)

According to Weber (1998), the aggressive behavior of the adopted child concerns the child's fear of repeating the experience of neglect. So, instead of showing love, they begin to test this new environment and demonstrate their hatred. To Winnicott (1947/2000), often what the child seeks is a legitimate hate, and must be able to find it, on the contrary, they will feel incapable of reaching love. In this perspective, the author mentions that children coming from broken homes live in search, even if unconsciously, of their parents. And it is the moment they find a home that they start to test the environment. This testing is part of the process of bonding and is configured as something structuring in the process of belonging and should not be understood as something destructive. Vânia's speech exemplifies this moment:

The bad part of late adoption is just that, you can't nurture, you can't cultivate love with the child, then what you need to have isn't love, it's patience, the key to late adoption, I say, it's patience, because the child won't not come to you "Mom, I love you". "Mom, you are beautiful". "Thank you, Mom". They won't, they'll screw you up, they'll mess up your whole emotional structure. (Vânia, homoparental family)

According to Levinzon (2000), parental abandonment is often linked to the fantasy of death for the child. This kind of fantasy generates an inner world full of fantasies of destruction.

For a period he had so many episodes of aggression, ok, that J, my husband, sometimes he tried to restrain him, sometimes, and he would bite, kick, I got all bruised too, because in he would be beating. . . . But it was

in some situations and he himself did not realize what he was doing. So much so that when he realized it was hurting, he would stop. (Ana, heteroparental family)
The youngest, we had a problem that he had angry outbursts, so we had to restrain him and whenever we put a limit he exploded. We had to restrain him because he was completely violent, he cursed all the names you could imagine screaming and saying that he was going to kill us, he wanted to kill us, that he wanted to go back to the shelter. (Lucas, homoparental family)

As illustrated in the reports, the child will put out all his anger toward adoptive parents. This anger must be received and contained, demonstrating that they can survive the attacks. The child will need to regain trust in the environment and relive what Winnicott (1963) called a benign cycle, made of the repeated times when the baby sees itself voraciously attacking the maternal body and experiences the feeling of guilt, but not consciously, as a consequence of the destructive aggressiveness. From this, he seeks reparation, which must be welcomed by the mother. When the mother is able to accept the destructiveness and the reparative act repeatedly, in a cyclical process, the baby becomes capable of following its constructiveness, appropriating the destructive impulses in a productive way.

The benign cycle should be resumed at adoption and foster parents should be able to offer the child the ability to appropriate their aggressiveness constructively. This experience was described by Vânia, telling how the environment was tested and the resolution of this aggressive movement:

With R it was tense, because she did not trust us, so she practiced everything she could do to be returned, ok, so it was... It was six months of hell, when I speak hell, it is hell to the last degree . . . Then on that day I was bathing her, she ran out of the bathroom and came to the room, all wet, with shampoo, screaming here, then Paula [wife] got up, got her. On that day, until that day, Paula had done nothing, she

let R do everything. Then she grabbed her arms, pulled them up, brought them to her face and said, "Pay attention, you can set the house on fire..." there she was talking about what she could do and what she could not do "And you will not be returned, this is your home, your family, accept this, it hurts less". She let go, and when she let go of the girl, the girl stopped, looked at me, "Mother, let's wash our hair?" (Vânia, homoparental family)

Another difficulty pointed out by the participants was the lack of legal certainty. Many of the adoption processes currently underway do not have the dismissal of family power and this appeared in most of the interviewees' statements. One of the prerogatives of the ECA is the restitution of family life, so the process of family dismissal often takes time to complete, until it is proven that the family of origin is not able to resume caring for the child. This results in children being placed for adoption at a later age, setting up late adoption. In addition, in some Brazilian states, including Rio de Janeiro, the child is placed in a surrogate family, under provisional custody, even before the conclusion of this process that runs in parallel with the adoption process. This creates insecurity on the adoptive parents who have a feeling of utter helplessness. This will have an implication in forming the parent-child bond.

I can still some day get a note or a phone call saying "Come with your children, they will live with their parents". Amazing! What parents? We are here all reluctant giving an education that won't traumatize, that works, ok. All worried about how to do, how to act and making mistakes and making things right, but always worried. . . . And it's a fear that we have very, very much. I don't think it's going to happen, but ... until there's our name in the certificate . . . we are cautious. (Fernanda, heteroparental family)

Most interviewees mentioned the difficulty in setting rules:

Difficulties in his case were that he had not, until today he is not, accustomed with rules,

discipline... it was this difficulty, the difficulty was getting him used to it, I think it is normal, he is reeducating with new discipline, new schedule, the school, a new life, people! (André, one-parent family)

Costa and Rossetti-Ferreira (2007) point out that the main difficulty of the adoptive parent in developing their parenting with older children is in the contesting of the rules and their place of authority. The older child arrives with the ability to oppose and argue with the parents, which reflects one of the peculiarities of this type of adoption and can be noticed in some statements.

Another difficulty mentioned by the participants was the issue of school delay. In most speeches, the challenge of dealing with the illiteracy of the children has emerged.

> *And the other was the question of education itself, of formal education. She did not know how to separate syllables, and she was in the fourth grade at the time. So we'll take her to a private school and how will she be?* (Mario, homoparental family)

Another aspect mentioned by the parents was the ambiguity between early maturity and child regression. These children had to assume a place of independence and self-care, even if precariously, very early (Altoé & Silva, 2013). Therefore, a pseudo-autonomy is observed in children who live in housing institutions, in general. However, when they feel safe in a family that offers care, there is a certain regression, assuming childish postures, as a way of *allowing care.*

> *When she arrived, she was a completely independent child for a two and a half year-old, I just won't say it was one hundred percent because she still wore a diaper. . . . Then she regressed, right, saying you help me, I don't know how to do it, I don't know what, she wasn't doing anything else alone. . . . She wanted to suck on my breast, I said: "but there is no milk! [laughs] You're not even old enough for that", "Ah, but I want to!" No use, "I let her", then she said: "it won't go" then me: there, it won't work. I said like this, "do you want to drink your milk in the cup, in this position?" "Ah, I do!"*

> *So I put her laying down, as if she were really being breastfed, but in the little cup, she didn't even drink from a bottle anymore.* (Julia, one-parent family)

All these difficulties mentioned by the interviewees were welcomed in a singular way, that favored the construction of a feeling of safety and strengthening the bond as the child realized they could be able to trust this new caregiving environment. However, for one of the interviewed mothers, dealing with her daughter's overly intense testing was, until the time of the interview, a very complex challenge even after six years of adoption. It is noted in her speech, the weakening of this link:

> *So the love to me... I don't know, something I don't know how to measure. I just know that from the moment she came into my life, she became my daughter, right. Of course, my love has been wearing away . . . So nowadays, I think is it that what I feel today is heartbreak un-love? You know what I mean? Today, with these things that I am living, is it a heartbreak? Was it none of that and I thought it was? Was it compassion? Who knows? What could it have been, right? So, today I feel a great sorrow. It's like this, someone who disappointed me enormously and so, what I wanted to get out of my chest, but I can't get out of my chest.* (Laura, one-parent family)

Mutual Adoption

The idea of mutual construction was expressed in the subjects' speeches, demonstrating how the desires, experiences and wishes of the children directly influence the construction of the parent-child bond.

> *I think I really found my son. And maybe... I tell you, it was even better than if it were my own generated child, because this one I had every chance of, in quotation marks, choose and he choose me and we are building together, a life together, with challenges, with problems, but with much affection, with much love.* (André, one-parent family)

In late adoption, there is already use of language and a previous history full of experiences

that make the child present itself not as an incomplete being, and therefore requires other ways of affective attachment. According to Costa and Rossetti-Ferreira (2007), in these adoptions, children are able to negotiate affection and the construction of filial love, positioning themselves in the relationship more actively than a baby would. This proposition was evidenced in the words of Vânia and Claudia:

> Then she asked me a question that struck me, a child of 5 years and 6 months asking this type of question, she asked, "Is it forever? all the ever?" I had never heard that kind of "forever" along with "all the ever" I said, man, what kind of question is that? Right, that's it, I stopped, I said: What do I say? (Vânia)

> But what moved me at the first moment was my daughter because she is all sweet, all seductive and she came and said "do you want to be my mother?" man! It's so strong an eight year old girl to tell you this. Then I said: I want to! Then she started calling me Mommy, at that moment. (Claudia, heteroparental family)

Some of the interviewees pointed out the importance of learning along with the child to become parents:

> So it's like that, a period of adoption both us with them and them with us. We are also learning what it is to be a parent . . . They themselves, in the same way that we show them, look, what they have to do, they also show us. . . . In a way, they know how to put us in our place because we also have to be put in the role of parents, right. In the same way that we will put them in the role of a son. (Fernanda, heteroparental family)

Some parents mentioned the illusion inherent in trying to "adjust the child to their own ways" and the need to respect the child and their history. In the following statements, Vânia compares the experience with M, adopted at six months, with the experience with the other two daughters, adopted at age five and twelve. André mentions the conflict between tastes as a specificity of late adoption:

> As we were living, it was one learning from the other. They say, "Oh, I don't want a big son because I'm not going to do it my way". There is no my way. I figured out there is not my way. Because if it were so, M would be on my terms because she has been living with me since she was born . . . So there's no such thing as making them my way. Each has its own way, what we learn is to respect each other's space or adjust some things. (Vânia, homoparental family)

> That's the difference with late adoption, because when you get a little one you teach what you like and little by little you see what they like. In this case no, they already come with a bag of likes, I need to respect that . . . An important and interesting fact, he loves horror movies, loves! And I hate horror movies and forbade him to see them. He would go there and I would turn it off, turn it off, turn it off. Then one day he said: "This is not fair! When you met me I liked horror movies, so if you don't want to watch, you go to your room and I will watch in the living room. So I can watch, can I?" So I stopped and I said he's totally right, of course you can watch. (André, one-parent family)

In this mutual process, pierced by experiences and stories, it becomes undeniable that this baggage has its effect on the construction of the parent-child bond. As pointed out by Schettini et al. (2006), understanding the past that the child brings, without denying it, may favor the construction of a new history capable of repairing what may have been faulty or even negligent. According to Dias, Silva and Fonseca (2008), when faced with difficulties, the lucidity, love and entrepreneurship of parents in the care of the child enhances the coexistence.

Final Considerations

The results of the research point to the importance of the attention given to the history of the child's experiences. Because it is about adopting older children, they will come to the new family already with a baggage of expe-

riences. For some parents, the fear of the customs brought by the child is still quite present. However, it can be seen from the interviewees' statements that these fears were based on beliefs prior to entering into the adoption process. For the most part, participation in Adoption Support Groups, lectures on the topic, and lectures with professionals helped demystify fantasies about interferences in the late adoption process.

Another important aspect mentioned by the participants was the adaptation to the routine, also associated to the history of carelessness. According to the majority of the interviewees, the negligence suffered in the family of origin and/or the time at the housing institutions, which often lack infrastructure to foster care, have contributed to the difficulty in adapting to the family routine.

In addition, the parents interviewed show an important gap in being aware of important information about the early development. In this regard, it would be interesting to develop projects that care for the child's health history from birth so that the adoptive family has access to information such as conditions of childbirth, common childhood illnesses, developmental progress, and others.

Among the main difficulties during the adaptation were the imposition of rules, aggressive behavior, lack of legal security, school delay, child regression and adaptation to the family routine. All of these challenges happened to the parents interviewed, and the way each of them welcomed and dealt with each difficulty was of fundamental importance in ensuring the strengthening of the parent-child bond.

Knowing the child's history helped assisting families in adapting to their main needs and in resignifying flaws of the often painful past, marked by ruptures and abandonments. Respect for the previous history was essential for the construction and maintenance of the parental-child bond.

Because it is a matter of adopting an older child, it is understood that this new bond will take place as a two-way street, in a reciprocal adoption capable of resignifying the past, without having to erase it, setting the possibility of

a new history together. In this way, it becomes possible to build a future capable of repairing what may have been bad and legitimizing what may have been good.

This study was carried out with a small group of participants, which does not allow generalization of the conclusions presented here. It is still necessary to develop research that addresses factors that may interfere in the construction of the parent-child bond in late adoptions, contributing with knowledge to promote the emotional health of families.

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