The structure of sexual abuse and sexual trauma: What is present and what is absent?

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Abstract

In cases of child sexual abuse and child sexual trauma there seems to be a societal focus on the content of these cases – what signs and symptoms can present the objective truth behind our suspicions and thus free us from the discomfort they create in us? We are driven by an insistent search for a generalizable truth explaining correlations between events and expressions, although all we have access to is something not yet understood or represented as a memory. In this paper I argue that we must open ourselves for the specificity suspicions of child sexual abuse hold by looking carefully for the particularity of each case and by listening to the noises they create in us, one by one. And despite the singularity of each case, they might reveal something general that is of a structural nature rather than one of content.

By means of the theories of Laplanche and Lacan and with the Oedipus complex as an example of the structure of sexual abuse and trauma I argue that child sexual abuse mainly expresses itself through an absence of meaning. Like Oedipus, the child moves between what has happened and what is going to happen. And the child doesn’t know where he or she presently stands, what this place looks like or consists of, what founds his or her existence of past and future. And this place between past and future is the place of analysis.