



Trauma, drug misuse and transforming identities: a life story approach

Kim Etherington

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This stimulating book shows how children construct their identities from their experiences, how trauma disrupts this development and how drug misuse can become the way they adapt to extreme situations. It also shows how drug misusers have used their own experiences and resources to eventually form healthy identities.

Etherington writes a professional work aimed at professional workers but her narrative approach is essentially warm and human and draws the reader into the core of the participants' lives. She whets our appetites with 'Hannah's story' – wanting the reader to concentrate on the 'whys' of drug misuse and hear ex-drug users make sense of their own lives themselves. Several comment that

by participating in the research and reflecting on their own narratives, they saw clearly, and for the first time, the connection between their life experiences and their drug use.

In chapter two she looks at the impact of trauma on identity, citing the work of experts from Bowlby to Batmanghelidjh and asking the reader to remember their work with an open mind as we listen to the stories. These stories form the book's heart and show varied routes to drug misuse: from the balance for one individual being tipped when an understanding teacher leaves the school, to a trauma in adolescence when another individual finds her family is not her family. But what becomes evident is that the substance users

were all trying to meet healthy needs – love, trust, peace of mind – and were traumatised through neglect, physical and sexual abuse, often by their own parents. This book normalises them, making us realise the logic of their chosen paths, thus engendering our compassion.

Through the context of the stories, Etherington clarifies how family, culture and societal pressures mould the developing identity. Storyteller George says, 'Each time I reflect on the narrative of my life, it subtly changes.' Levi says, 'It's something about telling it.' I want to record my thanks to the storytellers for contributing so much to my understanding. Essential reading.

Cicely Gill
Counsellor