
ABSTRACT

The “unforgettable” transitional object’s psychological function in narratives of loss and encounter

SASAKI, Ayumi

Nakano Rehabilitation Center Apollo En

Transitional objects—a term introduced by Winnicott to refer to material objects to which young children develop intense attachments—are typically forgotten in childhood itself. However, certain transitional objects continue to be used, without being forgotten. This study clarifies the psychological function of transitional objects remembered beyond adolescence, especially during significant life events. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven adult men and women still using their childhood transitional objects; their responses were then thematically evaluated using narrative analysis. The results suggest that transitional objects had a significance beyond that of mere “objects” for the interviewees, particularly when they encountered loss or the appearance of a significant other, which activated the objects’ function. Furthermore, they held more meaning for the significant others, compared to traditional “objects.” In addition, this “non-object” transitional item potentially helped the interviewees in passively accepting death (which could lead to generativity). The results thus suggest that transitional objects that are not forgotten may contribute to the maintenance of users’ mental health and psychosocial development.

Key Words: transitional object, mature age, experience of loss, significant others, generativity
