



## GSA: The Hidden Risk in Adoptive Reunions

Adoptive reunions put people at risk for Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA). GSA is an attraction that develops when biological family members meet as adults after having little to no previous contact. It is characterized by feelings of longing and desire. People who are at risk for Genetic sexual attraction include; adoptees, donor children, orphaned children, children raised with one parent but abandoned by the other parent, children who have been separated at a young age because of divorce, and all their biological relatives including full and half siblings, aunts,

uncles, nieces, nephews, biological mother and father.

If the attraction results in sexual contact, the relationship is classified as Genetic Sexual Attraction-Incest or GSAi. At any time during the reunion phase, the experience of GSA can lead to a sexual encounter. GSAi can be avoided with proper education, support, and boundaries.

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### What causes GSA?

Romantic love and erotic arousal are a delayed by-product of missed bonding that would have normally taken place between a parent and their newborn infant, or between siblings had they not been separated by adoption. It is difficult to know how many reunions this phenomenon affects because of the taboo nature of incest in society.

When early bonding is interrupted through separation and/or abandonment, the feelings, sensations and desires to deeply connect go dormant inside the individual. When reunion occurs, the need to bond and secure the original connection resurfaces with renewed intensity.

People have theorized that GSA only affects those individuals that did not properly bond with their adoptive family members, but circumstantial evidence suggests that even those with happy and healthy childhoods can be at risk for GSA.

### The Westermarck Effect

Psychologists and behaviorists have studied the development of the incest taboo within families. During crucial childhood years, children who grow up in close proximity with one another develop a reverse sexual imprinting or desire to avoid sexual relations with their parent or siblings. The theory called the Westermarck Effect, works to suppress sexual desire so inbreeding does not occur. Families created through adoption also develop the Westermarck Effect. If traditional child-incest abuse is part of any family system, this is an entirely different set of circumstances. Abusers purposely confuse and manipulate their victims. Childhood abuse is predatory and reveals a strong dysfunction in the family unit.

Without the safeguard of the Westermarck Effect, relatives separated for years may grow up, reunite, and find their kin highly attractive. This



*I latina, 2011*

can happen with siblings, parents and children. The biological process where kin members become repulsed to the idea of sexual relationships within the nuclear family unit was not available due to early separation, especially the period of birth to six years of age.

When two biological family members reunite as adults, they are both sexually mature and the desire to bond joined with the absence of the Westermarck Effect makes them susceptible

to GSA. In addition, individuals are biologically hardwired to be attracted to humans that carry similar characteristics, smell, and features. The combination creates a situation prime for attraction.

*El grito del viento, 2010*



### Why does GSA occur?

No one chooses to have feelings of attraction towards a reunited family member. Oftentimes, the attraction hits one or both individuals almost instantly. The unsuspecting reunited family members are overwhelmed and unprepared for the feelings.

The need to bond as nature originally intended ignites an almost obsessive need to make up for the bond that has been inactive. The two recently reunited family members experiencing GSA feel the biological and psychological pull to bond as they originally should have but without any of the safeguards that normally take years to decades to develop.

GSA can begin at the onset of a reunion or anytime thereafter. Reports of instant attraction are as common as a slow developing of arousal, much like a typical love relationship.

It is difficult to predict how a given person will react to a reunion and



*La chèvre, 2012*

if genetic sexual attraction will occur. More comprehensive studies need to be completed to gain clearer answers of why this phenomenon happens and who is most vulnerable.



## What are the symptoms of GSA?

Symptoms of GSA are a mixture of seemingly contradictory and ungovernable mood states. When someone is experiencing GSA, individuals describe odd combinations of pleasure and pain, elation and grief, ecstasy and disappointment, profound connection and abandonment. When something like GSA feels inescapable and unsought for- acknowledging its pow-

*Est, 2011*



er, understanding its processes, and being aware of its effect on the mind may provide some protection against the torment and misery commonly described by those who have endured and survived GSA.

Many of the physical symptoms of GSA are reportedly similar to the natural process of falling in love:

- Highly distractible
- Heightened awareness of the other person
- Daydreams and fantasies
- Obsessive desire to be with the other person
- Lots of touching, talking, and sharing with one another
- Isolation from other relationships to pursue the love interest

## How do people react to GSA?

Oftentimes, GSA happens so unexpectedly that it easily overwhelms an individual's ability to cope. The natural boundaries created by individual morals and ethics, plus governmental laws



*Salute, 2011*

and religious sanctions that once were easily followed, are now tested and questioned.

The individual experiencing GSA must deal with a profound upheaval to his or her daily life. If the other person in the relationship feels GSA as well, it becomes incredibly difficult to resist the pull of physical contact. Many of these relationships develop into GSAi.

When GSAi occurs, it affects other relationships including marriages, relationships with children, close friends, work colleagues, and their relationship with God. Most find GSA and GSAi impacts every aspect of who they are and how they function.

Throughout the whole GSA or GSAi experience, the individual becomes isolated. Who can they talk to about

what they are experiencing? Very few people know or have experience with this phenomenon. As a result, the two individuals continue to find solace and comfort in one another, until the relationship crumbles under the weight of deceit and secrecy.

### **How to Prevent GSA From Resulting in GSAi**

GSA has a direct effect on the whole family system and so it is recommended that those who are witnessing signs of GSA or experiencing it themselves get help immediately. Anyone who is connected to adoption in some way must educate himself or herself about GSA. Adoption agencies, therapists, lawyers, clergy, law enforcers, and adoptees have been in the dark far too long as well as the rest of society. And yet, it is estimated that GSA affects 50% of reunions. That number is shockingly high.

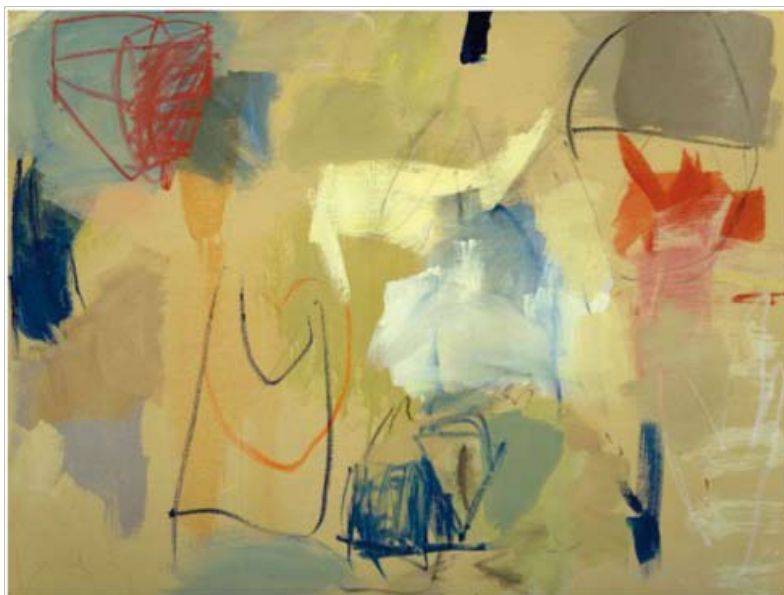
Communicating about the intensity of GSA to others who can respond with help and support can help release some of the stress. However, finding others—even therapists who can be supportive is difficult. The emotional trauma then becomes more compounded when individuals feel helpless by their situation and thus withdraw from others because of GSA.

Arming people with the knowledge of GSA will increase the opportunity for positive reunions that support the whole family system and decrease devastation and heartache that is common in GSA reunions.

### **Preventing GSA from the beginning**

The incidence of GSA raises the question of closed adoptions and the risk of separating biological family members until they reunite as adults. Whenever possible, it is best to provide an open adoption arrangement that gives both family members the chance to grow

*Fishy, 2011*



and bond at a normal developmental rate. This allows for the incest taboo to develop and prevent the individuals from feeling GSA later on.

When siblings are being placed for adoption, it is recommended that they either be adopted into the same home or have the availability to bond and connect throughout their childhood. This may be difficult depending on the number of children placed for adoption from the same kin and because of adopted families that are transient. However it will better serve siblings put up for adoption or foster care placement, to have some sort of connection with each other. This would help prevent GSA and GSAi from developing when these siblings search and find one another in adulthood.

### Conclusion

The effect of genetic sexual attraction is profound. It changes the way



*Contracorriente, 2010*

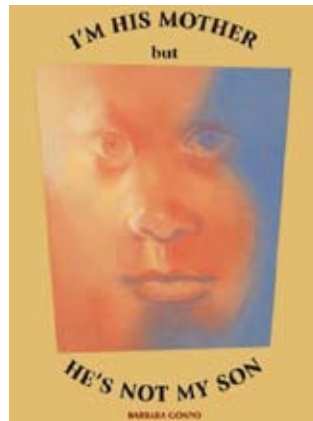
people think and behave. GSA is audacious, overwhelming, reckless, and unpredictable. GSAi is the usual result of GSA, causing destruction, distress, and even jail time for family members. Education and awareness are the two primary tools to safeguard against this difficult psychological phenomenon.



## FURTHER READING



[Wanted:  
A Memoir](#)  
DeNeen, J.  
2012.  
EE.UU.:  
Kindle Ed.



[I'm His Mother  
But He's Not  
My Son](#)  
Gonyo, B.  
2011.  
EE.UU.: Kindle  
Edition.

Julie reconnected with her father after many years of separation. This book tells her story. In her own words, "What started out as a fantasy, quickly turned into a nightmare as an unusual and little known phenomenon called genetic sexual attraction took hold of our relationship. What child looking for their parent imagines a situation in which the roles of lover and father get mixed up?"

At 16 Barbara was forced to give up her first born son for adoption. At age 42, when he was 26, she searched for and found him and developed a relationship that was wonderful and frightening. It came to be called Genetic Sexual Attraction. Now, many years later she is able to tell her story and that of others who also became reunited with a relative that they were not allowed to know.

## FURTHER VIEWING

[Oldboy](#)

Directed by Chan-wook Park.  
South Korea. 2003. 120 min.

Oh Dae-Su is a Korean businessman who one day is kidnapped and confined for 15 years in a cell in which there is only one television. Prisoner, the character only thinks of revenge on who has locked there. One day, without any explanation is liberated with a mobile phone and a wallet full of money. Someone tells him that have five days to find his jailer. Film as violent as fascinating is the second installment of the trilogy about the revenge of Chan-wook Park.

[Incendies](#)

Directed by Denis Villeneuve.  
Canada. 2010. 130 min.

A mother's last wishes send twins Jeanne and Simon on a journey to Middle East in search of their tangled roots. Adapted from Wajdi Mouawad's acclaimed play, Incendies tells the powerful and moving tale of two young adults' voyage to the core of deep-rooted hatred, never-ending wars and enduring love.

## LINKS

[www.geneticsexualattraction.com](http://www.geneticsexualattraction.com)

[www.carlysullens.com](http://www.carlysullens.com)

[www.geneticsexualattraction.org](http://www.geneticsexualattraction.org)

[ABC News Article on GSA](#)

## VII AFIN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Pontevedra  
November, 23-24**

We will soon publish the program of the VII AFIN International Conference: "Ten years after the *adoption boom*: opening new perspectives".

This edition will be held, with the cooperation of the association Manaia, in Pontevedra, on 23th and 24th November.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Carly Sullens

has a master's degree in psychology in the field of art therapy and has extensively studied attachment theory and reunions. Along with her clinical skills, she personally experienced GSA. She is the co-owner of the Genetic Sexual Attraction website, blog and forum. She has been on the Dr. Drew show on HLN, CTV News in Canada, and ABC News. She has also spoken nationally at adoption conferences regarding GSA. She is currently known as one of the leading genetic sexual attraction experts.

E-mail: [carlysullens@gmail.com](mailto:carlysullens@gmail.com)

### Julie DeNeen

is the author of *WANTED: A MEMOIR*, a book about her adoptive reunion with her father and subsequent GSA. She is a full-time freelance writer and blogger with an undergraduate degree in Clinical Psychology. She co-owns the Genetic Sexual Attraction website, blog, and forum. She's been featured on Dr. Drew twice and ABC news regarding her experience with GSA.

E-mail: [jddeneen413@gmail.com](mailto:jddeneen413@gmail.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

### Eduardo Vega de Seoane

became painter through his own personal search. Born in Madrid, begins ICADE career, and then left it to go to study cinema outside Spain. He toured several countries including Sweden and the Netherlands exploring different fields such as cinema, theater, photography and painting; on his return to Madrid decided to train as a painter.

Seoane speaks of his painting as a painting that seeks to transmit energy, the titles refer to the air, land, wind, mountain, talk about writing, to navigate, to dream. It is a painting to let us go, to dream and participate in the creation. They are open scenarios that invite you into giving them our own reading, there isn't a single meaning, they are pictures that are open to our imagination.



## FUTURE EVENTS

## CONFERENCES

[\*Changing Destinies. Early Interventions with Autistic Behaviours.\*](#) Venice, Italy, 1 - 2 July 2013.

[\*'Reimagining Birth. An International Research Symposium on the Visual Culture/Art/History/Design of Childbirth in the 21st century.\*](#) University College Dublin, 2 - 3 July 2013.

[\*Infancia y espacio público: un diálogo entre arte, educación y espacio urbano.\*](#) Cosmocaixa, Barcelona, Spain, 6-7 July 2013.

[\*Children and Childhoods Conference.\*](#) Ipswich, Great Britain, 8th July 2013.

[\*4ICAR. Four International Conference on Adoption Research.\*](#) Bilbao, Spain. 7 - 11 July del 2013.

[\*Children and Childhoods Conference.\*](#) Ipswich, Gran Bretaña, 8 de Julio de 2013.

[\*2nd Journal Conference on Social Science and Humanity \(JCSSH 2013 2nd\).\*](#) 1 - 2 September 2013. Beijing, China.

[\*Periferias, fronteras y diálogos. XIII Congreso de Antropología de la FAAEE.\*](#) Tarragona, Spain, 2-5 September 2014.

[\*Imperfect Children.\*](#) Leicester, Great Britain, 5 -7 September 2013.

[\*Family life in the age of migration and mobility. Theory, policy and practice.\*](#) Norrköping, Sweden, 16 - 20 September.

[\*Body and construction of age categories: from childhood to adolescence.\*](#) Strasbourg-Meltz, France, 18 - 20 September 2013.

[\*Produire du savoir, gouverner des populations.\*](#) Lyon, France, 10 - 13 September 2013.

[\*Sexuality and morality. Summer course.\*](#) Lisbon, Portugal. 16 - 21 September 2013.

[\*Corps et catégories d'âge: sortir de l'enfance, entrer dans l'adolescence.\*](#) Strasbourg, France, 18 - 19 September and Metz, France 20th September.

[\*Economy, morality and materiality. International Workshop.\*](#) Venue, Txec Republic. 26 - 27 September.

[\*Taller d'Antropologia i Innovació.\*](#) ACPA, Barcelona, Spain. 2, 5, 9, 12 and 19 July. Shedule: 15.00 a 18.00 h.

[\*Taller d'Antropologia i Consultoria de les Organitzacions.\*](#) ACPA, Barcelona, Spain. 3, 10, 17, 24 - 31 October. Shedule: 16.00h a 19.00h

[\*12th Conference 'European Culture': encounters with difference in European borderlands.\*](#) Barcelona. Spain. 24 - 26 October 2013.

[\*3rd International Conference on Humanities, Society and Culture.\*](#) (ICHSC 2013). 19 - 20 October 2013. Jeju, South Korea.

[\*SEG Jahrestagung – Colloque annuel de la SSE Annual Meeting of the SEG-SSE\*](#) Sierre, Switzerland. 7 – 9 November 2013.

[\*2013 Conference of the National Women's Studies Association \(NWSA\). Negotiating Points of Encounter.\*](#) Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. 7 - 10 November.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

*Panel LD36: Ethnographic perspectives on 'global mental health'.* 17th World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). University of Manchester. UK, 5-10 August 2013. Conveners: Sumeet Jain (University of Edinburgh), Email: [sumeet.jain@ed.ac.uk](mailto:sumeet.jain@ed.ac.uk); David Orr (University of Sussex), Email: [d.orr@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:d.orr@sussex.ac.uk). Deadline: 13th July 2013.

*The Second Major Conference of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association: Decolonizing Future Intellectual Legacies and Activist Practices.* Illinois University, Chicago, EUA. 9-22 September 2013. Submission Deadline: 1st September 2013. Contact: [cesaconference@gmail.com](mailto:cesaconference@gmail.com)

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

*Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures.* Special number dedicated to different interpretations of consumption and its meanings in relation with youth cultures. Deadline: 15th December 2013. Contact: Larissa Wodtke, Managing Editor: [Lwodtke@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:Lwodtke@uwinnipeg.ca)

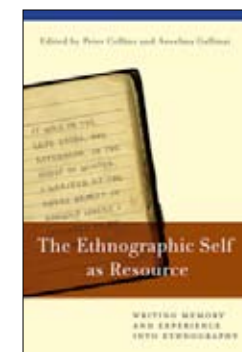
*Mothers Under Fire: Mothering in Conflict Areas.* Editors: Dr. Tatjana Takseva and Dr. Arlene Sgoutas. Deadline for abstracts: July 31st 2013.

*Revista Electrónica "Temas de Antropología y Migración."* Research group in Anthropology and Migration Process. Instituto de Ciencias - Universidad de Buenos Aires.

## NEW BOOKS



Collins, P.; Gallinat, A. (2013)  
[\*The Ethnographic Self as Resource - Writing Memory and Experience into Ethnography\*](#)  
 Berghahn Books



Faircloth, Ch.; Hoffman, D.M.; Layne, L.L. (2013)  
[\*Parenting in Global Perspective: Negotiating Ideologies of Kinship, Self and Politics\*](#)  
 Routledge

It is commonly acknowledged that anthropologists use personal experiences to inform their writing. However, it is often assumed that only fieldwork experiences are relevant and that the personal appears only in the form of self-reflexivity. This book takes a step beyond anthropology at home and auto-ethnography and shows how anthropologists can include their memories and experiences as ethnographic data in their writing. It discusses issues such as authenticity, translation and ethics in relation to the self, and offers a new perspective on doing ethnographic fieldwork.

This book features contributions from a range of anthropologists and sociologists working in Euro-American settings as well as Turkey, Chile, Brazil and beyond to look at how an expertise, skill-based approach to parenting has been accommodated, rejected or revised. It presents a critical perspective, which positions parenting as a global ideology that intersects in a variety of ways with the political, social, cultural and economic positions of parents and families. Particular themes include the structural constraints to 'good parenting' (both in terms of class, immigration and reproductive technologies), the relationships between intimate family life, policy making and nationhood, and parenting and/ as adult 'identity work'.



Faircloth, Ch. (2013)  
[Militant Lactivism?](#)  
[Attachment](#)  
[Parenting](#)  
[and Intensive](#)  
[Motherhood in the](#)  
[UK and France](#)  
 Berghahn Books

This book is based on a research with 'attachment' mothers in London and Paris, exploring their accounts of long-term breastfeeding. These mothers talk about their decision to continue breastfeeding, sometimes for periods of several years, as the "natural thing to do": "evolutionarily appropriate," "scientifically best," and "what feels right in their hearts." Through a theoretical focus on knowledge claims and accountability, the text frames these accounts within a wider context of "intensive parenting," arguing that parenting practices – infant feeding in particular – have become a highly moralized affair for mothers, practices which they feel are a critical aspect of their "identity work." The book investigates why, how, and with what implications some of these mothers describe themselves as "militant lactivists" as well as reflecting on wider parenting culture in the UK and France.

## AFIN NEWS

### FASD Research

The research "Trastornos del Espectro Alcohólico Fetal en menores procedentes de adopción internacional" is being carried out within the AFIN research group, being part of the Proyecto Coordinado I+D CSO2012-39593-C02-00 "Adoptions and fosterages in Spain: tracing challenges, opportunities and problems in social and family lives of children and adolescents", funded by Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of the Spanish Government.

It has mainly taken place in the Hospital Sant Joan de Déu in Barcelona and, at the same time, an exploration in different cities of the Spanish territory has begun in Zaragoza. Thanks to the cooperation of [AFADA](#) and the community workers at the Adoption Team of the Instituto Aragonés de Servicios Sociales – Maribel Oliver, Marisol Betés and Manuel

Santiago (Provincial Management in Zaragoza and Supervision of Childhood Protection and Tutelage) the evaluation of 29 families was organised on the 6, 7 and 8 June 2013, by Dr. Diana Marre, Dr. Natalia Bracons and Dr. Gonzalo Herráiz.

### Third School of the Red de Posgrados en Infancia y Juventud

Beatriz San Román participated as a teacher in the Third School of the Red de Posgrados en Infancia y Juventud (CLACSO/OEI), which brought together researchers, postgraduate students and agents working in the implementation of public policies and other intervention programs. This year, the School was held in La Paz (Bolivia) in May 2013. The theme of this edition was "Democracy, human rights and citizenship: childhood and youth in Latin America and the Caribbean."

### "Mega" Motherhood Conference

Bruna Alvarez will attend the next 24th and 26th June 2013 a congress under the title "Mega Motherhood Conference: academic motherhood, mothers and work", where she will present two papers: the first one, "Work life balance in Spain" will show statistics proving that there seems to be a structural infertility in Spain caused by labour market conditions and the lack of public policies of family responsibility; the second one, "High culture's narratives on Motherhood in Spain" will present a prospective work on the narratives of the Spanish feminism about maternity.

### AFIN Seminars are postponed

Due to reasons beyond the organisation's control, the AFIN SEMINARS in June and July have been postponed until September.