

When I ruled the world: adopted children's memories of early life trauma recalled in a process of meaning-making in music therapy

Joy Gravestock

Adopted children's earliest lived experiences of loss remain embedded in their deepest cell memory. Infant adoptees absorb overwhelming sensations of abandonment, whilst not yet possessing language to process and assimilate such experience (Roberts 2018). Embodied states, therefore, hold an internalized knowledge of early trauma. Unconscious pre-adoption experiences remain unknown to an adoptee, but carry an instantly recognizable present feeling tone that is often "a meld of helplessness, rage, terror and dread" (Wilkinson 2010). Memory governs problematic ways of being and behaving, manifesting in what Wilkinson describes as "the old, present", which often lead to referrals to music therapy.

Verrier (1993) describes the un-remembered loss which adoptees carry in the body as an enduring emotional wound. This is encapsulated beautifully by the Welsh word, "Hiraeth", meaning "homesickness tinged with grief, loss and yearning for a place to which you cannot return". Adopted children long for an "Hiraeth" still held in their embodied memory.

The pre-symbolic level at which music is experienced in the body has a special role in working with recollection of memory in adoption work. Children can feel grounded in their own music, whilst processing/assimilating the impact of embodied memory, because music offers, in Sutton's words, "experiences of our total selves as embodied in sound". The intrinsic sensory modality and psychophysiological effect of spontaneous improvised music-making can help develop an adopted child's narrative of being (Trevanthern 2009).

This paper will include video extracts from sessions where children become powerfully connected with what has been forgotten, and where traumatic memory recalled can be witnessed and held safely, leading to a reframing of narrative. The music of adopted children

expresses attachment communications at levels beneath conscious awareness within the dynamic intersubjective field (Robarts 2014). Music therapy therefore becomes a language for affect-laden material, making unconscious relational experience more conscious, more remembered.

References

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Biography

Joy is a violinist and music therapist who specialises in psychoanalytic, attachment-based, relational music therapy for adoptees and their families. Her PhD research, and also a forthcoming book (with Jessica Kingsley 2021), explore relational repair from trauma effects which occurs via micro-moments of attunement within an embodied musical therapeutic relationship. She sat on Nottingham /Leicester Adoption Panels as an independent member and is an identified therapist for adoptees and their families within Leicester County/City. She also works independently with national and local adoption charities. She is a PhD candidate at Sheffield University, exploring adoption, the neurobiology of attachment, and the usefulness of psychoanalytic music therapy as a reparative therapy for adoptees. She is

passionate about advocating for appropriate services and ensuring that music therapists are able to dictate adequate resources for client need.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Gravestock, J. (2018). **Attachment based, relational, psychoanalytic music therapy: The significance of musical moments of attunement with adoptees after trauma, and how this may influence broader reparation with attachments.** In the *Attachment Journal*: reference Attachment V12 N2 2018.qxp 30/10/2018 11:17 Page 147.

Gravestock, J. Chapter on attachment. In: Dunn, Coombes, Maclean, Mottram and Nugent (eds.) *Music therapy and autism across the lifespan: a spectrum of approaches.* Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London.

Gravestock, J. (2019). **Being here, being me, being with you, making connections. A long-term music therapy with an adopted girl with significant multiple disabilities.** ECARTE Conference (September, 2019)

Gravestock, J. (2019). **Resonances of the music therapist's self in intersubjective relationships: the significance of a music therapist's lived experience of adoption whilst working with adoptive families.** European Music Therapy Conference (EMTC) (June 2019)

Gravestock, J. (2108) Presentation: **Brave New Worlds: 2017 and beyond for arts therapies?** A sharing of arts therapists' philosophy and ideology as together we manage transitions into the post-Brexit world. What brave new things might emerge for our professions, but also what bravery might we need to carry through some necessary transitional objects with us? World Congress of Music Therapy (WCMT) (June 2018)