

that movement/motion reflex would be left unsatisfied. It would be unused and therefore still 'waiting' and not inhibited (developing to 'redundancy') with higher neurological development occurring.

'In adult behaviour, the results of this can look and feel very frustrating. It can be disabling, negative and difficult for the person – and others – to understand. Understanding and honouring this fuller reality is the first step towards practising change.'


### **Bonding and neurological development**

This has already impacted on adoption procedures. Beverley says, 'Looking at bonding and neurological development together is commonplace now. In the adoption field there is a lot of understanding around this. People are learning about the physicality of brain development and bringing this knowledge into the context of understanding the adoption experience and therapy.'

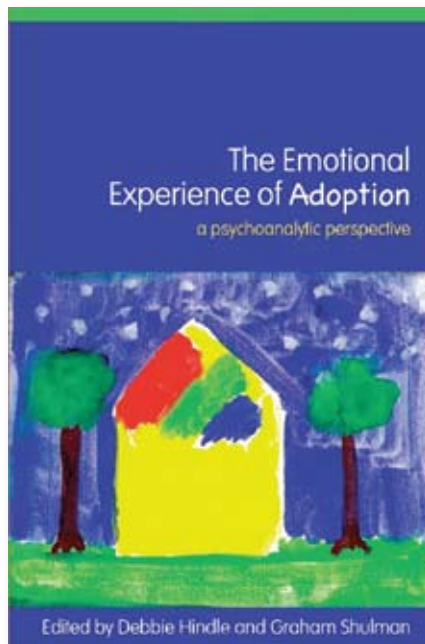
Beverley is excited by the idea that 'many personal challenges and hurdles that adoptees experience can start to be understood in neurological developmental terms'. If you're a therapist wondering what kind of signs you could be looking out for, she suggests that you 'relate (which most therapists do anyway) challenges adoptees might bring to the context of their early days. In this way, some of the real flavour or nature of that person's 'story' or experience is likely to emerge. With adoption, you're looking at the reality of separation and attachment issues rather than neurosis.'

### **Going back to the beginning**

Beverley says: 'As therapists, we need to understand and honour this real hurdle that might be neurological as well. As it's due to an underdeveloped and immature reflex, going back to the beginning is a helpful start. It can be developed in a practical way with small steps.'

'The workshop showed how to work with children with learning difficulties. They take them through the earliest reflexes using exercises supported with a story. They do not move on to the next movement until they've really got it. I think this 'therapy' could be adapted to work with adults, even using or combining yoga or Pilates.' 

## Book reviews



### **The Emotional Experience of Adoption: A Psychoanalytic Perspective**

**Edited by Debbie Hindle and Graham Shulman (London: Routledge, 2008)**  
**280 pages**  
**ISBN 978-0-415-37276-3**

John Simmonds writes (chapter 10, page 28):

*Adoption changes everything. Whatever the child brings into their adoptive home – their genetic inheritance, their personality, their pre-birth and pre-placement experiences, their class, ethnicity, language, culture and family history – it will be changed by the people, circumstances and opportunities that make up their new world. And the adoptive home – the people, circumstances and opportunities – will also be changed by the child and what they bring to the placement. It is a therapeutic intervention of the most monumental kind and like all interventions, it is intended to change things for the better.*

Sadly, the outcome for both child and

“The authors aim to ‘promote not a particular way of working but a way of thinking’ ”

new family may be far removed from the benign intentions of well-meaning and often naively optimistic adoption brokers. So a book like this one is invaluable, in that it realistically considers the incremental and sometimes mutually damaging impact of adoption on the child and new family, as well as the kinds of therapeutic support needed by both to prepare for and alleviate such unintended effects.

### **A way of thinking**

The authors aim to 'promote not a particular way of working but a way of thinking' (page 4). They draw skilfully on psychoanalytic concepts, attachment theory and neuroscience research, as well as fiction, to reflect on the added complexities of adoption and loss issues when working with traumatised children and their new families.

### **Adoption in fiction**

The value to struggling adoptive families of being 'held' emotionally through such thinking is richly and sensitively illustrated in clinical material throughout the book. This is in stark contrast to two well-known stories of adoption where no such reflective support was available to the adoptee or new family. John Simmonds provides a harrowing critique (pages 34–39) of Hans Christian Andersen's tale of Thumbelina, who suffers successive traumas and terror after being abducted from her naïve adoptive mother. In 'A cautionary tale of adoption: fictional lives and living fictions', chapter 17, Graham Shulman examines through a psychoanalytic lens the 'narrative of an informal adoption' in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (pages 253–263). In this classic 'romance', the father, Mr Earnshaw, adopts a 'foreign' child whom he has found abandoned in far-off Liverpool and literally carries

home on his back. He names this stranger child 'Heathcliff', in memory of his dead son, and unthinkingly sets up enmity between him and his other birth children, with long-lasting and disastrous consequences for the family. Louis Shengold's concept of 'soul murder' comes to mind here, since Heathcliff's 'soul' was destroyed probably long before his adoption; his subsequent abuse and neglect served to reinforce his tragic early childhood experiences.

## Neuroscience research

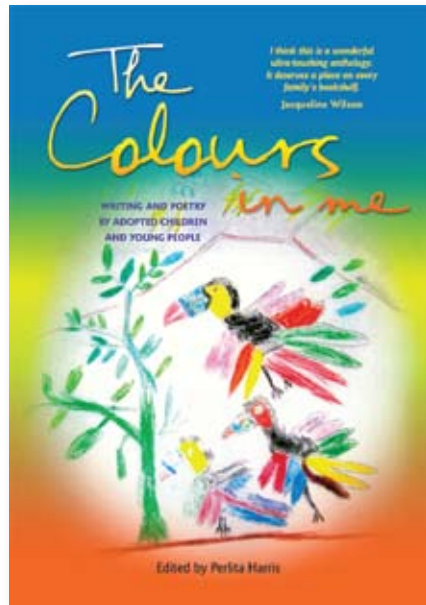
In chapter 2, 'Why is early development important?', Sally Wassell provides a very clear explanation from neuroscience research of how the normal development of affect-regulating pathways in an infant's brain can be inhibited through parental neglect or distorted through abuse. Both are deeply traumatising experiences for the child, resulting in chaotic and confused thinking, feeling and behaviours destructive to self and others. These, in a new placement, can lead to secondary traumatic stress for the unsuspecting foster or adoptive family, who are nevertheless expected to provide 'therapeutic re-parenting' to help the child heal (Kate Cairns, chapter 5). Subsequent chapters by other contributors elaborate on this theme, drawing on clinical material.

## Children in transition

I am particularly interested in the learning by child and adult psychotherapists through working collaboratively in order to 'hold' more effectively such traumatised children and their new parents. Monica Lanyado (chapter 9, 'Playing out, not acting out') describes how her own practice evolved out of necessity to provide a rare psychotherapy service for 'children in transition'. This includes the offer of a 'holding environment' for the 'team' of current foster carers, prospective adopters and the professionals involved, to minimise the risk of splitting and acting out within the network, and so to model for the child the 'both-ness', and not the 'either-or-ness' of old and new families.

The book is rich in such learning and sharing, and will be of special interest to childcare and adoption social work practitioners and therapists.

**Alexandra Maeja Raicar**



## The Colours in Me: Writing and Poetry by Adopted Children and Young People

**Edited by Perlita Harris (London: BAAF, 2009), 203 pages.  
ISBN 978 1 905664 59 7**

This book is completely captivating. It brings together the writing, poetry, artwork and oral testimony of over 100 adopted children and young people living in England, Wales and Ireland. In addition to scores of individual accounts, there is a contribution from a group of three brothers and a collective piece of writing by several young people who attended a conference for young adoptees.

What makes this collection so captivating? Many things. The words of the adopted young people – theirs, not ours. The artwork, hugely concrete and poignant, which 'speaks' the adopted children's stories. The accessibility of the accounts, for both children and adults. On being adopted, Ellie (age 6) writes: 'I was nervous because it was my first time being adopted'; KB (age 9), on being apart, writes: 'I find it hard because I'm sad. I'm sad because I miss my birth mum. Sometimes I wonder if my birth mum knew me. That I am in England? One day

“This book is a 'must have' for psychotherapists working with all parties to adoption”

I would like to go back to China and look at my orphanage. It's sad when you be adopted':

*Adoption is nice*

*Adoption is sad*

*Adoption makes me glad*

*And sometimes it makes me mad.*

The book is divided into six sections. Section 1 looks at 'Adoption life stories'. It is about memories: memories of living with a birth family, of being in foster or institutional care and of moving to an adoptive family. The stories speak of the children's beginnings, including neglect, physical abuse, drugs and alcohol and death in their birth family, and about their feelings.

Section 2, 'On being adopted', is very powerful, highlighting a wide range of feelings, experiences and questions about adoption and about the adoptee's birth family. Issues include racism, being placed with a sibling and the experience of being told that you are adopted, to name a few. The next section, 'On being apart', focuses on loss, particularly feelings about the loss of the mother who gave birth. In section 4, 'Staying in touch', the contributors write and draw their experiences of contact through visits, letters and telephone calls.

The impact of visiting the country of birth is the focus of section 5: 'Revisiting my birth place'. In some instances, adoptees meet birth family members for the first time and reflect upon this experience. 'Messages' is the theme of the final section. The messages are mostly for adopted children and young people, but there are also messages for social workers, adoptive parents and psychotherapists.

The words of those affected by the adoption experience speak volumes. This book is a 'must have' for psychotherapists working with all parties to adoption.

**Maggie Rogers**