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***"Turn and Face the
Strange:
Looked After Children
in Transition..."***

Relational Ruptures:



THE
PSYCHODYNAMICS
OF LEAVING CARE

- 
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Introduction

- ▶ Donyland Lodge
- ▶ 11 – 19 yrs olds
- ▶ Male
- ▶ 14 places
- ▶ School on site

- ▶ Multiple forms of abuse and adversity
- ▶ Life skills and transitions



For those in residential homes, therapeutic communities or foster care the experience of leaving, move to independent living or to aftercare services, means leaving known relationships and environments.

Leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar, the known for the unknown stirs up conscious and unconscious processes.

- ▶ These processes, when they go unrecognised or poorly addressed, often reopen, widen and sustain the relational ruptures that were established during their earliest years.

First what is leaving care?

I will define leaving care as a psychosocial transition from childhood in state care homes/foster care to adulthood in society.

It is characterised not by independence but by achieving...

...interdependence!

Bio-social context –

two forms of transition

- ▶ Care Leavers are adolescents
- ▶ Care leavers experience compressed and accelerated transitions into adulthood

Disadvantaged? Of course!

Whether from a children's home or a TC, all young people leaving care are, by definition, disadvantaged (Courtney and Iwaniec 2009, 31)

But some are more disadvantaged than others!

Mike Stein (2004, 2011) has devised a simple typology for care leavers related to outcomes.

Typology of care leavers

Moving on -

Had secure placements, support from family and see leaving care as a challenge

Survivors –

Left care earlier; were more troubled but able to utilise staff to support their resilience

Victims – latterly renamed *strugglers*

Suffered profound early abuse, unstable history in care, alienate their staff and leave care very early due to (placement) breakdown

Leaving Care: The Research



Of the many studies:

The most comprehensive study is by Bob Broad (2005)

Most practical and engaging are Mike Stein's (Stein 2004, Stein and Dixon 2005, Stein 2012)

Remember My Messages (Shaw, 1998) by the Who Cares Trust. Gives accounts and views by young people

Loss, Identity, Relationships: Care Stories (Granville and Miller, 2008). Tavistock and Haringey Council provides visual recordings of sensitively handled interviews with care leavers.

Care leavers were seen as...

‘...a particularly vulnerable, unhappy and dissatisfied group, feeling rejected by the system. Although they started off with high expectations of post care life, they had quickly become disillusioned.’
(Shaw, 2005, p7)

- 
- ▶ Research from the USA suggests that the ‘quality of support in the postdischarge (sic) environment is the best predictor of community adjustment’ (Courtney and Hughes-Heuring, 2009, 173).
 - ▶ In the UK there is enough evidence to suppose that what happens to care leavers in the early months of leaving care will determine outcomes for them over succeeding years (Dixon et al 2004).

What helps?

- ▶ Planning starts early, building on existing assessments and placement plan
- ▶ The young person is fully involved and empowered by the process
- ▶ The network around the young person (e.g. parents, carers, teachers, GPs etc) are fully involved
- ▶ Stability and continuity are maintained during their journey to adulthood (Stein 2004)
- ▶ 'Focal theory' (Colman and Hendry 1999)

Resilience Theory



- ▶ Forming a strong 'compensatory attachment' to a carer in a long-term placement (Stein 2004, 104-107)
- ▶ Consistent, accessible and effective support from family, friends or professionals (Stein, 2005, 161)
- ▶ Successful educational attainments (linked to placement stability)
- ▶ Positive role models of successful former care leavers (Gillian, 2005, 112)
- ▶ Social contact with non-delinquent peers (Newman 2004, 70)
- ▶ Maintaining good links with family – especially having one supportive parent
- ▶ Life skills programmes to teach skills and promote resilience

Life skills programmes



- ▶ Pass on knowledge – care leavers are not passive recipients of care
- ▶ They need to know what is likely to happen if they aren't engaging in their future
- ▶ They need to know 'what works' and what has worked for other care leavers

Many care
leavers are
poor
negotiators

In this context negotiation is can be
seen as...

...a capacity to modulate one's own
needs in relation to the needs of
another.

Negotiation is related to 'reflective
function' (Bleiberg 2001)

A capacity to negotiate is a skill for
developing...

...‘interdependency’

Why do we want 'interdependent' care leavers?

Dependent – over-reliant on services, in infantile state of mind, needy, little growth

Independent – aloof, distant, avoidant, isolated

Interdependent – collaborative, gives and takes, contributes to society, learning through relationships

Deracinated Identities

▶ **de rac i nate:**

‘to uproot; to remove somebody or something from a natural environment, especially people from their native culture’

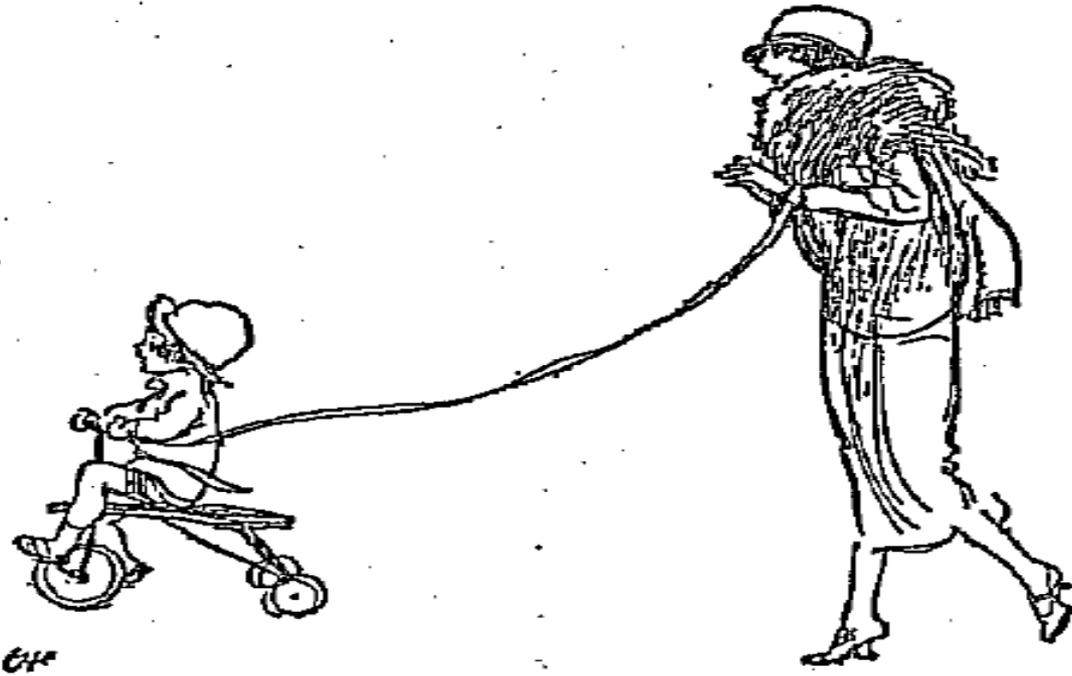
Triple Deracination



Psychologically uprooted 3 times through

1. Abuse / neglect / loss / deprivation in infancy
2. Entering care – secondary deprivation / loss
3. Moving to Leaving Care services at 16 → 18 → 21 yrs

Disobedience - By A. A. Milne





James James

Morrison Morrison

Weatherby George Dupree

Took great

Care of his Mother,

Through he was only three.

James James

Said to his Mother,

“Mother,” he said, said he;

“You must never go down to the end of the town, if
you don’t go down with me.”



James James

Morrison's Mother

Put on a golden gown,

James James

Morrison's Mother

Drove to the end of town.

James James

Morrison's Mother

Said to herself, said she:

"I can get right down to the end of the town and be
back in time for tea."



King John

Put up a notice,

“LOST or STOLEN or STRAYED!

JAMES JAMES

MORRISON’S MOTHER

SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MISLAID.

LAST SEEN

WANDERING VAGUELY:

QUITE OF HER OWN ACCORD,

SHE TRIED TO GET DOWN TO THE END OF

THE TOWN – **FORTY SHILLINGS REWARD!**

James James

Morrison Morrison

(Commonly known as Jim)

Told his

Other relations

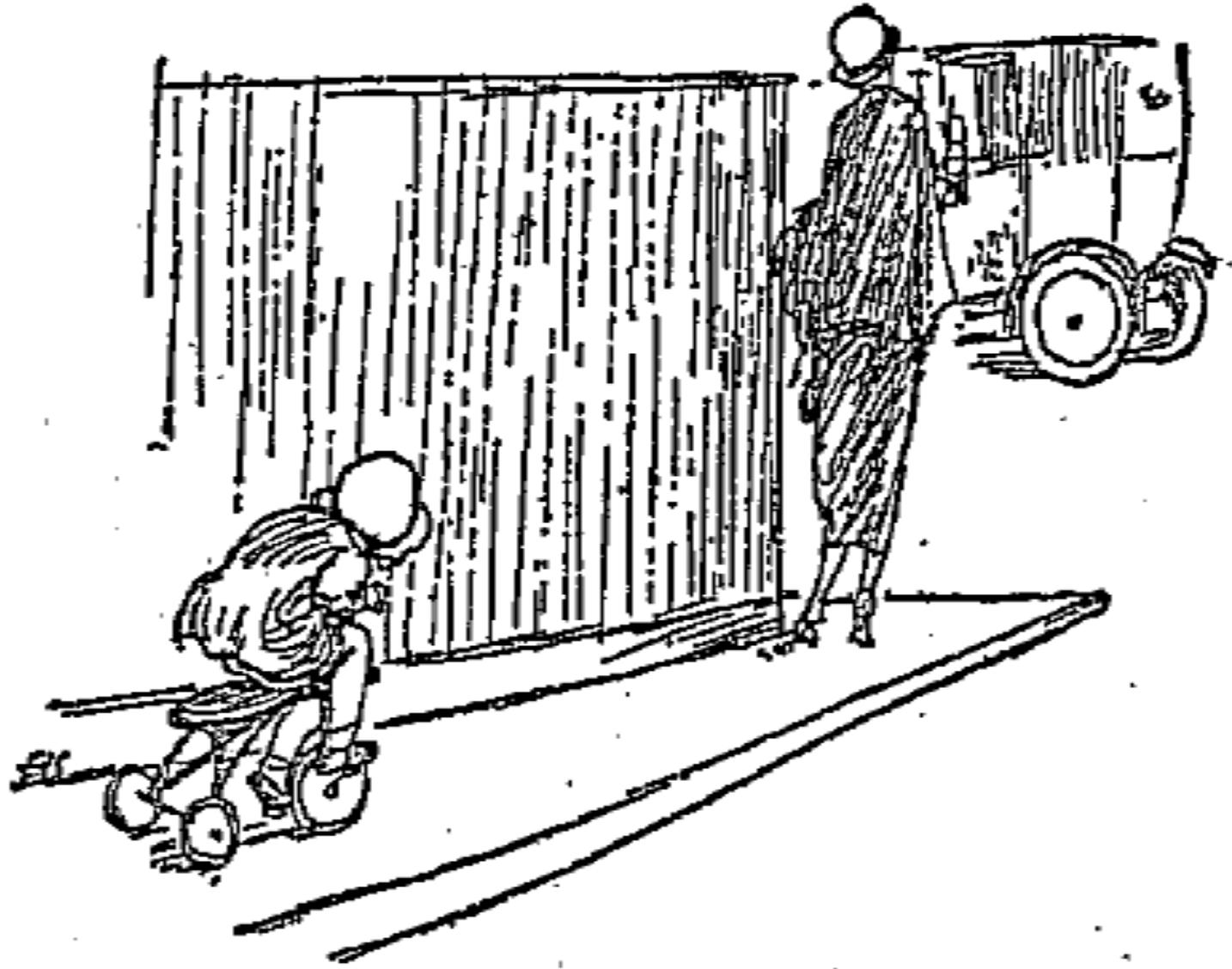
Not to go blaming *him*.

James James

Said to his Mother,

“Mother,” he said, said he:

“You must never go down to the end of the town
without consulting me”





James James

Morrison's mother

Hasn't been heard of since.

King John

Said he was sorry,

So did the Queen and Prince.

King John

(Somebody told me)

Said to a man he knew:

“If people go down to the end of the town,
well, what can *anyone do?*”



J. J.

M. M.

W. G. Du P.

Took great

C/o his M*****

Though he was only 3.

J. J.

Said to his M*****

“M*****,” he said, said he:

You-must-never-go-down-to-the-of-the-town-if

You-don't-go-down-with ME!”

'I and the other' and 'The role of toys' in Meares, R
(2005) *The Metaphor of Play*. Hove, East Sussex:
Routledge



The Metaphor
of Play

*Origin and Breakdown
of Personal Being*

THIRD EDITION

RUSSELL MEARES

FOREWORD BY PROFESSOR GLEN BARBAD



The Metaphor of Play (2005)

- ▶ Meares focuses upon a kind of 'inter-play' between mother and baby in his exploration of the quality of the early 'play space' which he equates with the gradual development of self.



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- ▶ We are not born with a self.
- ▶ The self is merely a possibility, a potentiality that will arise through an appropriate engagement of the child as “I” with the mother and other caregivers.

- 
- ▶ What evidence does he bring for this assertion?

- 
- ▶ He suggests we 'possess innate, genetically encoded patterns or repertoires of behaviour that are released by particular stimuli...
 - ▶ He assumes that hormones are released triggering relational (or attachment seeking) behaviours.
 - ▶ It is within the context of these early interactions self-hood develops

The 'proto-conversation'

Meares refers to
Travathan's 1972
description of the
'proto-conversation'

'The mother's gaze
elicits responses from the
baby, which the mother,
in turn responds to',
(24).



- ▶ In other words, Mum sort of matches her expression to the baby's own.
- ▶ It is like a dance or a performance created *between* both parties involved.



- ▶ In fact, Catherine Bateson probably discovered the proto-conversation a year before Travarthen, in 1971.



Imitation, mirroring and attunement

- ▶ Babies are seeking mirroring responses by two months
- ▶ At three months the mother extends the play by using guiding, contextualising responses
- ▶ Gradually the play space – the core of self-hood – is developed

- 
- ▶ Meares quotes Winnicott's observation that what the baby sees in its mother's gaze is itself.
 - ▶ This kind of face to face communication doesn't depend upon words, but upon 'emotions and their expressions.'

'Affects are the coinage of the proto-conversation'

Research into the proto-conversation

- ▶ Catherin Bateson – Analysed video frames
- ▶ Trevarthen – Mismatched face to face experiment – contingency
- ▶ Tronick, E., et al 1975 – Still face experiment
- ▶ <https://youtu.be/apzXGEbZht0>

Piaget 1959, 243

'The child does not ask questions and expects no answers, neither does he attempt to give any definite information to his mother who is present. He does not ask himself whether she is listening or not. He speaks for himself just as an adult does when he speaks within himself'



Being alone in the
company of someone -
Winnicott 1971, 48

This is when the child plays...

'...on the basis of the assumption
that the person who loves and who
is therefore reliable is available and
continues to be available when
remembered after being forgotten.'

- 
- ▶ Before the baby / infant has the capacity to play alone with toys it plays with its mother, and it looks regularly to her to infer the meaning of events and understand objects it encounters.
 - ▶ 'The toys and other bits of the material world are all part of a triadic relationship with the mother and the world'

- ▶ As the baby grows, nearer to 6 months, it begins show more interest in things/toys than its mother
- ▶ At this stage Meares says 'The parents tend to "transfer responsibility" for play to their toddlers'

Development of the core self

- ▶ First through inter-subjective play between mother and baby
- ▶ Later through the baby's capacity to play with toys 'alone' in the company of someone...

...the play space – the core of self-hood – is gradually developed

Missattunement

Poor mother - infant attunement damages the development of the play-space and thus constricts the sense of self.

Meares writes:

‘Where parental failure of attunement becomes chronic, the play space is never adequately or securely established’ (40)

Early Negotiations and Relational Ruptures

- ▶ Poor mother infant attachment damages the play-space and constricts the sense of self
- ▶ Prevents development of 'reflective function'
- ▶ Social exclusion for young adults is rooted in the early exclusion...

...from acknowledgement, validation
and recognition of self

Stimulus entrapment



- ▶ This can lead to ‘stimulus entrapment’ (Meares, 2005, p88), along with hypervigilance and discontinuities of attention
- ▶ Characteristics seen in ‘looked after’ children, in ADHD and Borderline Personality Disorder.

Negotiating Change



- ▶ Adolescence is a period of rapid physical and psychological growth, of neurological malleability and cognitive development (Music and Millar, 2006, 26; Heuves, 191 - 2)
- ▶ A second opportunity to correct the effects of early missattunement

- 
- ▶ Responsive care workers can help to improve the internal representations
 - ▶ But the build up to leaving care is immensely stressful for the young person and the home

Driven to explore self and identity

- ▶ Small children play in the company of parents as though they were alone
- ▶ The tendency recurs in adolescences but extends to a wider play space in which the parent's is required to have 'presence of mind' rather than be physically present
- ▶ For young people leaving care this can mean risky explorations of personal power, sexuality, substance misuse

The importance of narrative

Stories are the womb of personhood.
They make and break us. Stories
sustain us in times of trouble and
encourage us toward ends we
would not otherwise envision. (2)

Mair (1989)

Moving On (Biehal et al, 1995)

‘Leaving care was a time at which many young people were attempting to make sense of their pasts – to trace missing parents, to find continuity in their lives and a sense of belonging’ (Stein, 2004, 73).

Care leavers needed a...



....‘‘story’ of their lives that made sense, reduced their confusion about both how and why events have happened as they did and to provide a more secure platform for their futures in the adult world’

(Stein 2004, 73)

Broken stories...

- ▶ The fact is, very often these stories have not been constructed
- ▶ Long-term therapy has not been available
- ▶ Residential workers / foster carers have not been properly equipped to engage deeply enough in the histories and inner worlds of the children in their care
- ▶ See Farmer and Pollock's book on Substitute Care



Transitions into new placements, to new relationships, trigger early mental representations (Hodges *et al* 2009) and anxieties

Emotional and behavioural defences are used to manage these anxieties causing further upheaval

New carers have no congruent connection to the mind of the young person and thus struggle to contain them



Conclusion - Narrative Identity

- ▶ Transition to a new environment and new workers creates further deracination and relational ruptures damaging identity just when it should be being consolidated
- ▶ Between the residential worker and the young person a *narrative identity* is held that potentially connects and holds the often unstable parts of the care leaver together

Supporting Transitions

Transitional object (D. Winnicott's 1971)

- inanimate object invested with psychic material and held onto through child's transitions

1971

2009

Transitional participant (Kanter 2009 via C. Winnicott)

- bridging of internal and external world by the key person in the child's life who holds the fragments together

In order to manage workers need...

- ▶ An internalised knowledge of the young person – ‘mind-mindedness’
- ▶ Courage to engage with children at the deepest levels of their disturbance and difficulties
- ▶ Support of a consultant psychotherapist
- ▶ An overarching therapeutic ecology (as in TC practice)

Conclusion



- ▶ Double-deracination cannot be avoided but a third deracination – moving to a new ‘service’ at 18 - 21 yrs - can
- ▶ The transition does not appear to support good outcomes
- ▶ The hard-won narrative identity held ‘between’ workers and young people and ‘mind-mindedness’ is lost
- ▶ New professionals, however well-meaning, will struggle to establish this and painful dynamics, which I have called a ‘relational rupture’ are triggered



“Leaving care should be reclaimed by carers, for, as the research evidence clearly shows, it is they who can provide the stability and continuity young people need during their journey to adulthood.”

Mike Stein

Chris Nicholson

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Bibilography