

## Playsongs and lullabies: features of emotional communication and developing mother-infant attachment

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Early experiences of emotional communication contribute to mother-infant attachment and impact upon an infant's social, emotional and neurological development. Understanding emotional communication is paramount to encourage, support and promote healthy mother-infant relationships and infant health. Research has shown that playsongs and lullabies facilitate emotional communication and positively contribute to mother-infant attachment in the first year of life. However, little is understood about how or why this is the case.

#### Aims

This study aimed to examine multiple aspects of live mother-infant singing to better understand how playsongs and lullabies facilitate emotional communication and contribute to the mother-infant relationship. Specific aims were to examine (1) the mother's subjective experience of the use of playsongs and lullabies, as well as the impact of this experience of attachment, (2) the quality of interaction during the live use of playsongs and lullabies, and (3) the musical and behavioral features of synchronous or optimal mother-infant interaction.

#### Method

A mixed methods approach was employed to holistically examine the multi-faceted nature of live mother-infant singing as emotional communication. Twenty three typical, healthy mother-infant dyads were videoed either singing songs or playing with toys. Four video cameras were used to capture infant's front view, mother and infants side views and overall bird's eye view of mother-infant interaction in a dedicated room in the infant laboratory. Mothers were also interviewed about their experience of singing and interacting with their infant.

#### Results

The experience of singing playsongs and lullabies contributes to the mother-infant relationship by positively impacting upon 3 (of 4) attachment-specific mental constructs (Condon & Corkindale, 1998) including: pleasure in proximity, need gratification and tolerance/acceptance. The experience of toy-based (non-singing) interaction also positively impacts upon 3 (of 4) attachment-specific mental constructs (Condon & Corkindale, 1998) including: pleasure in proximity, need gratification and knowledge acquisition. Additionally, when compared to the experience of non-singing interaction, many of the emotional and mental states associated to the attachment constructs were unique to the experience of singing.

However, the act of singing songs does not necessarily facilitate optimal or synchronous dyadic emotional communication. What is important is the way in which mothers use the songs. A transcriptional analysis of the singing interactions explored the musical and behavioral features involved with emotional communication. Findings reveal that mothers manipulate a wide range of musical elements (e.g. pitch, rhythm, tempo, structure and expressive techniques) to achieve varying degrees of optimal emotional communication.

#### Conclusions

Findings suggest that engaging in both singing and non-singing interactions enables a mother to experience the full range of positive impacts to all four attachment constructs. The findings also expand the current understanding of the dimensions involved in experiencing optimal and non-optimal singing interactions. Overall new insights into the processes involved in mother-infant singing interactions deepen our understanding of how singing playsongs and lullabies positively contribute to the mother-infant relationship in the first year of life.

#### Keywords

Music therapy, music, well-being, mother-infant, singing.

#### REFERENCES (if needed)

- Condon, J. T. & Corkindale, C. J. (1998). The assessment of parent-to-infant attachment: development of a self-report questionnaire instrument. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 16(1), 57-76

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