

Love, Bonding Phenomenon, and the Healthy Narcissism

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It is common psychoanalytic knowledge that the influence deriving from childhood experiences carries well on into adulthood. This article's main objective is to disclose the survival motive behind the influence of childhood experiences throughout life. The survival motive seems to relate to the Healthy Narcissism Processing [1-3], a process metaphorically scrutinized to an Emotional immune system. Memory traces of childhood experiences, such as intimacy with the object or Separation Anxiety, etc., reverberate all along life through the processing of Healthy Narcissism. Accordingly, the sense of the Familiar Self may be preserved, immunized and assisted. Likewise, the "Me" and its belongings (like its objects and love relations) are recognized as familiar, stimulated to be restored, revived and recharged in present experiences according to past involvements. Re-finding the familiar senses in present events, according to the models of past experiences, facilitates adaptation to daily relationships and to almost familiar occurrences. Moreover, echoes of memory traces of love, bonding phenomenon and happiness enables the immune individual's Self to carry on love by "... binding together considerable numbers of people...and create[s] new bonds with people who before were strangers" as Freud [4] said (p. 101). The Healthy Narcissism thus preserves not only the sense of the Familiar True Self and its original object but also its new objects' love, its affiliation to the family, to society and to the world. In this respect, the innate Healthy Narcissistic and its function as immune processing might be considered as a survival mechanism, in the service of life instinct. As Freud [4] claimed - "The love which founded the family continues to operate in civilization..." (p. 101).

Keywords: Love; Happiness; Narcissism; Healthy Narcissism; Attachment; Bonding; Immune System; Emotional Immune System; Object Relations; Bonding; Emotional Resilience

Introduction

Both positive and negative childhood experiences impact adulthood, as Freud claimed, this became a common psychoanalytic knowledge. That poses the question - how and why is it so?

The main idea which will be discussed in this article relates to the survival motive behind the need, stressed by Freud [5], for "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (p.147).

When speaking about survival, one would be quick to think about the biological immune system, a network of cells and tissues that function together to defend the body. It's interesting that the

immunologists described it also as defending the Self from Non-Self [6].

The Healthy Narcissism processing is elaborated throughout a borrowed metaphor from the biological immune processing [7,8]. In this regard, the Healthy Narcissism is processed as an Emotional Immune System [1,3] it reflects, metaphorically speaking, the biological immune processing: Its main goal is to preserve the familiar true Self, the Self-love, the love objects, the "Me" and its belongings (like its objects), from the invasion of the Non-Self/stranger. Another goal is to restore [9] the sense of the true Self following narcissistic injuries.

Many years ago, it was Freud [10] again who related Narcissism to "self-love [that] works for the preservation of the individual" (p.114). Moreover, Freud [11] has stressed the differences in the responses to familiar, slightly altered ("minor differences from the familiar" [4 p.114], and completely different experiences. Recognition of the familiar induces pleasure [12], the slightly-altered familiar may induce feelings of strangeness uncanny [13] and even anger, while "greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance" claimed Freud [14 p.114] and possibly racism [4,7]. Furthermore, Freud [15] asserted that man wishes to repeat the familiar narcissistic perfection that he experienced in his childhood.

Narcissism, having been mentioned, is generally related to pathological aspects, while this article will attempt to argue the case for the need to revive love, bonding and happiness [16] as the healthy aspects of narcissism, processing as an emotional immune system. When the emotional immune system works properly, such healthy aspects of narcissism represent the one end of the continuum of the narcissistic Immune processing, as Pathological narcissism represents the other end of the continuum.

The narcissistic wishes to be loved, to be hugged and thus fueled by love and bonding, being in pleasurable attachment [17] with the object [18] seems to be one of these crucial preservations of the familiar Self and its belongings, throughout one's entire life.

Love and bonding phenomenon

Freud's assertions [19] that "There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy...." (p. 138) triggered association to the wonder of this continuity linked to the biological and immunological processing that takes place during pregnancy; The fetus is like a Non-Self stranger's body in his mother's womb and yet is welcomed like a familiar body and receives all he needs for his development and survival. One might ask how the biological immune system is capable, in some circumstances, of tolerating the unfamiliar body? Is it the fetus who secretes hormones so as to avoid being identified as a Non-Self within his mother's body? Or is it the mother's womb, who secretes camouflage hormones? The researchers Robertson, Petroff and Hunt [20] described so well this biological and emotional problem "The principal role of the immune system is to monitor and defend the integrity of the organism. Immune cells act to recognize and usually repel inva-

ders of all types, from microorganisms to tumors and artificial tissue transplants, so as to prevent disease and contamination of host genetic material..... The embryo and the gestational tissues formed after implantation express "foreign" antigens, including some encoded by major histocompatibility (MHC) genes derived from the disparate maternal and paternal chromosomes" (p. 1835).

Ziemba-Goldfarb, A. [21] another researcher wrote: "The mystery of why a mother does not reject her fetus, as she would reject any other foreign object, is the focus of much research and academic debate...., indicating that there is a specific mechanism which must protect the fetus. One suggested mechanism is that the fetus secretes IDO enzyme which inhibits a maternal amino acid, tryptophan, which supports the T cells of the immune system. This forces the maternal immune system to tolerize the fetus" (p. 60). Hsu and Heinrich [22] added that "Within this mucosal surface, the various maternal innate and adaptive immune cells must work together to ensure tolerance toward invading fetal cells and foreign fetal antigens" (p. 125).

In my view, this immunological paradox represents a biological and emotional immunological paradox all along life. How can we tolerate the otherness of our dearests? Along the pregnancy, while the mother's body carries her Non-Self stranger fetus, she emotionally assets the fetus to herself, sensing it as belonging to her body, leading her to cherish it. This is demonstrated in times as early as a mother placing her hands on her belly, often becoming elated with its movements inside her.

The fetus hears and familiarizes with the continual rhythmic heartbeats and habitual voices, and even senses the mother's hands on him. Likely, the fetus even absorbs hormones flooding his mother's brain (maybe also his brain), such as Oxytocin and Dopamine, that are released in these moments of love and bonding (as shown recent research and will be mentioned later).

After a mere 9 months pregnancy the fetus is expelled out of the uterus, and the birth process starts. Is the biological immunological process identifies the fetus as an otherness to the mother's body?; Is it because the fetus has become too big, no longer having enough space in the womb, is it more autonomous and elicits sensations of otherness? Or is it the mother's body who can't hold the large fetus any longer?

Since the fetus' Narcissistic immune system was already processing in the womb, after birth, the newborn baby clings to familiar sensory memory traces, like sounds, being hugged and held etc. These archaic sensorial memory traces are familiar to him from his intrauterine life and remembering them serves him with a model for the re-finding of his familiar "Me", his familiar sense of being embodied in his familiar space - that was his mother's womb.

Gradually, he becomes acquainted with and befriends, every day, new aspects of his "Me" and his belonging, which enriches his narcissistic Immune networking with new memory traces. He differentiates his father's voice from his mother's voice and familiarizes with their new characteristics. Thus, he is gradually attracted to each of them separately, to the familiar intimacy with each of them, allowing him to relax easily when recognizing them. The parents feel good for they succeeded in comforting their newborn. They are bonding with him with more confidence and cheer. It is amazing that he does not confuse between the two. While sensing intimacy, the newborn baby has probably sensed/experienced once again that he's been accepted as he is, belonged and bonded.

Researchers, like Maiello [23] and Piontelli [24,25] discovered, via ultrasound observations, and through current neonatal research, that very often babies continue to behave in ways that echo their behavior in the womb including expressions of acceptance, love or withdrawing from any touch. The development of the baby's lovable expressions, like eye contact and smiling, keep encouraging the parent to take care of their offspring. He attracts them to attach in order to recognize his "Me" and his objects according to reverberations of memory traces that began from his intrauterine life. The parent also feels the prerequisite to take care of his offspring, to hold him in his arms and to bond together according to his own healthy narcissism Immune processing.

Will the parent's phantasm about his child before his birth and the real newborn be familiar enough?

Separateness, otherness and bonding phenomenon

Most parents who take constant care of the baby (Winnicott PMP) [26], are at some point narcissistically infatuated with him; they sniff his smell, are elated and feel as their baby is the most perfect being in the world, they don't notice any hints of otherness, reminding them of the time during pregnancy. Other times, on the contrary, they sense their child as an other [27] as a stranger and

wonder if he is their offspring and how they would manage to nurture him and love him. Familiarity and strangeness [2,28-32] can easily interchange between them.

Each individual has other subjective continuity of childhood experiences, while some of them are narcissistically assured that their way is the right and the ideal way of coping. Parent bond with the newborn baby, according to his ideal familiar childhood model and his feelings of what happens [33].

Since birth, we are separate individuals from the protective uterus and from our beloved objects. From now on both baby and parent are sheltered in their own familiar Me-Self-shell-space of separateness. The individual will emerge a bit out of this familiar Me-Self-shell-space [34] - to re-find his almost familiar objects, secured by his healthy narcissistic Self immunization that resonates with his familiar childhood memory traces. In a shared-space for the time being, where each individual re-finds his match object, each wishes to be refueled by love and hugged according to his subjective model of bonding, coined in his immune system, and each wishes to be recognized, to belong and be accepted as he is by his new-almost-familiar "Not-Me" objects [35-39].

Having scrutinized the emotional development of the baby and its impact on adulthood [1,3] for many years, it is fascinating to observe the urgent need of toddlers to be refueled by love, to be hugged. Toddlers are quick to stop their game where they enjoyed their separateness and rush to the parent to ask for a hug, to seek love [40], to experience their bonding right before jumping back to their game, this time expressing they have been refueled, being happy. The refueling of the parent, synchronized with the refueling of his infant, is amplified by the re-finding of the parents own familiar narcissistic "Me" and his own original love object beside the otherness and the strangeness of the toddler. The infant senses his refueling is amplified also by his object's emotional delight and by his re-finding senses of acceptance and belonging.

Both will unconsciously embed accumulated memory traces of these shared blissful moments in the healthy narcissism networking from which the familiar true Self, of each, will be narcissistically immunized and consolidated. Reverberations of these memory traces in present occurrences aspire the individual's attraction to his almost familiar object which might refuel him by love that lead to the re-finding of their bonding in happiness.

We may notice that love binds individuals together as Freud [4] asserted and “create[s] new bonds with people who before were strangers” (p. 103). Happiness emerges from the phenomenon of bonding that elicits senses as if boundaries are temporarily blurred between their separateness.

The question yet stands, how can attachment [41-43] between separate individuals who are momentarily joined together result in such a phenomenon of bonding? Why, along the state of being in love, are the boundaries between ones’ self and other as if broken down temporarily and elicit such elation and happiness? [44,45].

In given moments, moments of focusing and sharing a common issue, the bonding seems so real, so powerful, as if separateness boundaries of the individuals with whom we share the phenomenon are temporarily un-perceived, as if there is no otherness or strangeness that might threaten our blissful moments. Does this remind us of the tolerance of the stranger body of the fetus along pregnancy? The phenomenon of bonding might represent one of the transitional phenomena [46] that mediates between separateness.

Furthermore, eye gazing, refueling by love, smiling, hugging, kissing or showing any kind of affection, provides a magical clue that may cement temporarily between separate individuals up to the phenomenon of bonding. According to neuroscience research [47,48], this magic trigger hormone secretion in the brain, which is followed by happiness.

“Under the influence of joy, of ‘happiness’, we find that our whole body blossoms out and shows signs of a renewal of youth” - asserted Freud [49 p. 287]

Researchers [47,48] indicate that the blossoming appears already when a parent plays with his baby, sharing eye contact. During these moments behavioral synchronization is created between them; In both brains, an enlightening is activated in the same brain areas, on the same wave, at the same time; the same hormones Oxytocin and Dopamine are secreted in both, and their heart rate is synchronized. It is possible that this synchronization provides the momentary phenomenon of blurring boundaries between separateness of the individuals.

Neuroscientific research [51] even tells us that Oxytocin, known as the “love hormone”, is released during eye contact, sex,

breastfeeding, and a variety of social activities. Oxytocin deepens feelings of attachment and makes couples feel closer to one another and even provokes feelings of contentment, calmness, and security. Pleasure, on the other hand, is boosted from Dopamine, the so-called “pleasure chemical”, helping make love a pleasurable experience in ways like the euphoria associated with the use of cocaine or alcohol.

Furthermore, babies who lacked the experience of being frequently hugged, seem to be at risk of having difficulty at creating meaningful relationships in their future [46]. Blood tests of those individuals indicate the weakness of their biological immune system and a chronically high level of stress [46].

So important, are love, hugs and affection for all of us!

Dopamine and Oxytocin secretion, along the attraction to the familiar, supports the Healthy Narcissistic Immune processing. It might almost be a need to remember, repeat and re-find the archaic objects. Gordon’s research [51] contributes that “Love plays the biggest role in forming values that guide life choices and lifestyles ... and the importance of childhood experiences in the quality of life” (p. 5).

A group of adults who share a common interest, such as singing in a choirs for example, may also experience the phenomenon of bonding. The attachment between these separate individuals requires each to emerge slightly out of his comfort zone, from his familiar “Me”-Self-Shell-Space of separateness, and become part of a whole in this shared space of interaction. Along these moments of focusing on their interests and sharing ideas, people might experience a phenomenon of bonding, while separateness and otherness between them is as if temporarily blurred. They may feel elated as hormones could begin being released in synchronization. The identity of their attachment unity might then be evaluated with a unique sense of affiliation, acceptance and belonging.

This phenomenon of bonding engenders intense bliss [52] and arises happiness. Happiness reflects, “...(preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon”. (Freud [4 p.76]). It arises moments of self-object merger [53], and “involves emotions of bliss that are so powerful as to overwhelm the ordinary ego functions of reason, motility, and clear conscious-

ness" Akhtar. [54 p. 230]. Unconsciously they also feel that this episodic phenomenon of bonding does not reflect a physical bonding of people into one unity. Furthermore, along these moments of bonding phenomenon, the healthy narcissism unconsciously immunizes so much so that the individual feels self-security that after these cherished moments, he will re-find his boundaries of separateness again, his own Me-Self-Shell-space. Following separation, each one might disclose in his partner some personality characteristics that risk injuring his sense of familiarity, arise sense of his being a stranger and that he didn't notice along their shared bonding phenomenon. These characteristics represent their separateness and otherness.

We may suppose that in continuing intrauterine life, clusters of sensational memory traces of the bonding phenomenon that includes Oxytocin and Dopamine secretion following by the painful disclosing of the otherness of our partner, of attachment and separation, of love and narcissistic injuries - are all accumulated on the Narcissistic immunological networking memory followed by all others memory traces along life. These accumulations, over years - create links and associations among these memory traces. Clusters and links are ready to reverberate as associative remembrance and repeating in similar present occurrences.

The healthy narcissistic immunization of positives memory traces of love, bonding phenomenon, happiness and separateness consolidate the sense of the familiar true Self, of the Self-esteem, Self-love and love for the objects. These reverberations help the individual become aware of and tolerate his partners' separateness and otherness in order to enjoy intimacy, to create and maintain love relations [26,55] and to revive bonding and happiness other than narcissistic injuries. They enrich the Self-possession and belongings of the "me" so much that they feel the familiar "Not-Me"-Objects, e.g. their children or spouse, therapist or even childhood narratives as their narcissistic belongings.

As previously highlighted by Freud [56] these links allow for the survival of the self, and possibly for the life instinct itself.

Whenever encountering a stranger who evokes a sense of familiarity in us, a sense of being accepted, belonging and embodied, he might trigger dominant attractions toward him, the need to connect with him, and to revive love experiences, each one according to his Narcissistic Immune system. This craving for a bond will arise

even though he is a stranger to us. Thus, we "continues to... create[s] new bonds with people who before were strangers" (p. 103) - as said Freud [4].

The Healthy Narcissism, beginning its duty back in the uterus, is processed by attraction to the familiar, alertness and resisting the strangeness. This immune processing may enable the individual to recognize and defend his "Me" and its belongings, against stranger Not-Me that might injure the familiar Self or flood the Self by stranger anxiety. Concomitantly, it facilitates the individual's familiarization with Not-Me-objects that evolve the "re-finding of the object" [57] and elicit blissful moments, differentiating them from the threatening Not-Me-stranger. Especially this narcissistic preservation targets to never forgo "the narcissistic perfection of his childhood" Freud [15 p.94].

Thus, we unconsciously load our familiar and subjective childhood meaning on to the current experience, hoping to feel a sense of familiarity, of déjà vu, of owning the event and recognizing how to cope with it. Hence, despite the time gaps and the physical distance, both current and future experiences are based on a subjective immune model from the past.

How can we love and bond with our loved object who triggers familiarities and also sensations of otherness?

Although we are familiar and dear to each other in loving relationships, we easily find the sense of otherness in each other, the sense of our being separated and becoming strangers. Acknowledging this otherness introduces threats of invasion into the familiarity and leaves the subject on rocky ground. Hence, tolerance to the otherness is mostly difficult and generally evokes aggression as an unconscious defense against the strange invasion. The more one feels close to his object, and has love-based relationships that benefit him, the more his otherness might be injuring the "Me" and would develop hate toward him, as if he spoiled his familiarity and became a threatening stranger. This is also due to our Narcissistic immune system that processing by attraction to the familiar and rejecting strangeness invasion.

Given this, how can we bond with our loved object who triggers familiarities and also sensations of otherness? This is the universal story of attachment. Any strangeness/otherness that one may feel in his familiar body, Self, or familiar objects, is bound to be experienced in a negative manner and hurt his sense of the familiar Self.

Anything else that could potentially attack the familiar true Self or its belongings, like criticism, traumatic experience or disability, might shake the sense of familiarity or trigger narcissistic injury they may lead to anxiety over object loss or stranger anxiety. The impulse to reject the threatening stranger overcomes the connection that could have been made with him\her. Rejection of the loss of the object can sometimes lead to many outcomes, ranging from attacks against oneself and massive self-destruction, to depression that might be considered metaphorically as an emotional autoimmune disease [55] which would be function like a psychic autoimmune disease against the self.

Will the healthy narcissism immune processing of attraction to the familiar, tolerance to the otherness and the need for bonding, for refueling by love, overcome the need to reject the strangeness? The narcissism immune system may be extremely vulnerable to any offense, criticism or shaming expressed by the otherness of the familiar objects. This otherness might threaten to shake the familiarity of the true Self and Self-esteem as well as to undermine the familiar bonding with the dearest objects.

All memory traces of such injuries, including traumatic events, will continue to reverberate and resurrect all throughout life, as they are the familiar ones, even if these events are negative or destructive narcissistic attributes. At times it could lead to the processing of what we define as a pathological narcissism. It is important to stress that everyone has been injured by their love objects' separateness and otherness, and everyone has experienced positive and negative love based relationships throughout childhood. Moreover, this article focuses merely on narcissistic immune processing, while the Ego, Superego and object relations, etc., take part in our emotional life as well. Thus, our familiar Self represents all our experiences, both positive and negative, creative and destructive, bonding and rejecting, and in different moments some memory traces overcome others. All these memory traces reverberate in us throughout the day, while the question of which of them reverberates in us more frequently, the positives/creative or the negatives/destructives, remains.

Sometimes the Narcissism process plays as healthy immunization - enabling us to feel love and happiness among other positive attributes - and in other times, it deviates toward pathological narcissism - following injuries and rage against the otherness while becoming ready to destroy everything, even bonding relationships

that would be incredibly difficult to re-establish once been destroyed [3]. People whose Healthy Narcissism is more often predominant in their life over the pathological narcissism reverberations, will reflect their capacities to recognize and assert their True Self, their separateness as well as their love for their dearests.

Conclusion

From Freudian times onward, our psychoanalytic common knowledge is that positive and negative childhood experiences have an impact on adulthood. The survival motive behind the influence of childhood experiences throughout life seems to be the processing of the Healthy Narcissism, by using the metaphor of an Emotional Immune System [1,3] for the preservation of the "Me", of a familiar true Self and its belongings. It is also the survival motive behind the need for "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" Freud [5. p.147]. The Healthy Narcissism immunization is processed by attraction to familiar and resisting toward strangeness, reverberations of positive or creative memory traces from childhood experiences, like love relations, bonding and happiness, all while echoing also familiar negative or destructive memory traces.

This article may conclude that as much as people are able to cherish and protect the happy moments they have in life, despite other moments of narcissistic injuries of their beloved one, they may have more possibilities to enjoy their true Self, their belongings and the bonding phenomenon. People who more often, but not exclusively, reverberate positive and creative memories may achieve the qualities of life mentioned by the Neuroscience researchers [49,59], these qualities aligning with the capacities of happy people: "They are healthier, live longer, are in fulfilling marriages and maintain love relationships, higher incomes, superior work performance and community involvement besides their self-realization, self-esteem, creativeness, self-promotion and self-assertion". Even after narcissistic injury, their healthy narcissism is still motivated to recover the Self. This recovery process would be thorough, and would increase the chances to revive and repeat associations of bonding phenomenon and to maintain love based relationships, and could be as minor seeming as asking for a hug after an argument.

To conclude, asserting, strengthening and reviving positive experiences of refueling by love, of bonding, sharing common interests and activities, harmonizing and coordinating gazes and

smiles, and simply laughing together will help people to overcome frustrations and narcissistic injuries and even possibly provide reconciliation with ones' dearest; it will elicit secretions of hormones, beside the anger, and often encourages experience the phenomenon of bonding together, thus creating blissful moments and happiness. Soon after, each one will separate once again from the attachment to his familiar Me-self-shell-space, and will enjoy his separateness- space, knowing that soon enough will rise another opportunity to bond again in happiness.

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