

**FAIRBAIRN'S
INTENSE
ATTACHMENT
TO THE
"BAD OBJECT"**

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IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE WHAT FUELS THE
INTENSITY WITH WHICH RELENTLESS PATIENTS
PURSUE THEIR OBJECTS, WE TURN TO

W R D FAIRBAIRN (1963)

**"A BAD OBJECT IS INFINITELY BETTER
THAN NO OBJECT AT ALL"**

A CONCEPT THAT ACCOUNTS IN LARGE PART FOR THE
RELENTLESSNESS OF THE PATIENT'S PURSUIT

BOTH THE RELENTLESSNESS OF HER HOPE
AND THE RELENTLESSNESS OF HER OUTRAGE
IN THE FACE OF BEING THWARTED

MANY HAVE WRITTEN ABOUT INTERNAL BAD OBJECTS
TO WHICH THE PATIENT IS INTENSELY ATTACHED
BUT FEW HAVE ADDRESSED THE CRITICAL ISSUE OF WHAT
EXACTLY FUELS THESE ADDICTIVE ATTACHMENTS

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SO IT IS TO FAIRBAIRN THAT WE LOOK IN ORDER
TO APPRECIATE THE ACTUAL NATURE OF THE PATIENT'S
ATTACHMENT TO HER INTERNAL BAD OBJECTS

AN ATTACHMENT THAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR HER TO
SEPARATE FROM THE - NOW INTROJECTED - "BAD" INFANTILE
OBJECT AND THEREFORE TO EXTRICATE HERSELF FROM
HER RELENTLESS PURSUITS AND HER COMPULSIVE REPETITIONS

TO BEGIN

WHAT DOES FAIRBAIRN SAY ABOUT HOW "BAD"
EXPERIENCES AT THE HANDS OF THE INFANTILE OBJECT
ARE INTERNALLY RECORDED AND STRUCTURALIZED?

WHEN A CHILD'S NEED FOR CONTACT IS FRUSTRATED
BY HER MOTHER, THE CHILD DEALS - DEFENSIVELY - WITH
HER FRUSTRATION BY "INTROJECTING THE BAD MOTHER"

IT IS AS IF THE CHILD FINDS IT INTOLERABLY PAINFUL TO
BE DISAPPOINTED BY HER MOTHER AND SO, TO PROTECT
HERSELF AGAINST THE PAIN OF HAVING TO KNOW JUST HOW
BAD HER MOTHER REALLY IS, INTROJECTS HER MOTHER'S
BADNESS - IN THE FORM OF AN INTERNAL BAD OBJECT

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THIS HAPPENS ALL THE TIME IN SITUATIONS OF ABUSE
 THE PATIENT WILL RECOUNT EPISODES OF OUTRAGEOUS ABUSE
 AT THE HANDS OF HER MOTHER – OR HER FATHER – AND WILL
 THEN SAY THAT SHE FEELS NOT ANGRY BUT GUILTY

AFTER ALL
 EASIER TO EXPERIENCE HERSELF AS BAD (AND UNLOVABLE)
 THAN TO EXPERIENCE THE PARENT AS BAD (AND UNLOVING)

EASIER TO EXPERIENCE HERSELF AS HAVING DESERVED THE
 ABUSE THAN TO CONFRONT THE INTOLERABLY PAINFUL REALITY
 THAT THE PARENT SHOULD NEVER HAVE DONE WHAT SHE DID

IN OTHER WORDS
 A CHILD WHOSE HEART HAS BEEN BROKEN
 BY HER PARENT WILL DEFEND HERSELF
 AGAINST THE PAIN OF HER GRIEF BY TAKING
 ON THE PARENT'S BADNESS AS HER OWN
 THEREBY ENABLING HER TO PRESERVE THE
 ILLUSION OF HER PARENT AS GOOD AND
 AS ULTIMATELY FORTHCOMING IF
 SHE – THE CHILD – COULD BUT GET IT RIGHT

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IN ESSENCE
 BY INTROJECTING THE BAD PARENT,
 THE CHILD IS ABLE TO MAINTAIN AN ATTACHMENT
 TO HER ACTUAL PARENT AND THEREFORE
 ABLE TO HOLD ON TO HER HOPE THAT
 PERHAPS SOMEDAY, SOMEHOW, SOME WAY,
 WERE SHE BUT ABLE TO BE GOOD ENOUGH,
 TRY HARD ENOUGH, SUFFER LONG ENOUGH,
 SHE MIGHT YET BE ABLE TO COMPEL
 THE PARENT TO CHANGE

AND SO IT IS THAT THE CHILD REMAINS
 INTENSELY ATTACHED TO
 THE – NOW INTROJECTED – BAD OBJECT

AS FAIRBAIRN OBSERVES, A RELATIONSHIP WITH A BAD
 OBJECT IS INFINITELY BETTER THAN NO RELATIONSHIP AT ALL

BECAUSE, ALTHOUGH THE OBJECT IS BAD,
 THE CHILD CAN AT LEAST STILL HOPE
 THAT THE OBJECT MIGHT SOMEDAY BE GOOD

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INTROJECTION IS THEREFORE
 THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE
 THE CHILD WHO HAS BEN FAILED BY HER MOTHER
 TAKING THE "BURDEN OF THE MOTHER'S BADNESS"
 UPON HERSELF

TO REVIEW
 ACCORDING TO FAIRBAIRN, A "BAD" MOTHER IS A MOTHER
 WHO FRUSTRATES HER CHILD'S LONGING FOR CONTACT

BUT, SAYS FAIRBAIRN, A "SEDUCTIVE" MOTHER,
 – WHO FIRST SAYS "YES" AND THEN SAYS "NO" –
 IS A "VERY BAD" MOTHER

FAIRBAIRN'S INTEREST IS IN THESE "VERY BAD" MOTHERS
 – THESE "SEDUCTIVE" MOTHERS –

AND SO, WHEN THE CHILD HAS BEEN FAILED BY A
 MOTHER WHO IS SEDUCTIVE, THE CHILD INTROJECTS
 THIS "EXCITING BUT ULTIMATELY REJECTING" MOTHER

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SPLITTING IS THE SECOND LINE OF DEFENSE

ONCE THE BAD OBJECT IS INSIDE,
IT IS SPLIT INTO TWO PARTS

THE EXCITING OBJECT THAT OFFERS THE
ENTICING PROMISE OF RELATEDNESS

AND THE REJECTING OBJECT THAT
ULTIMATELY FAILS TO DELIVER

TWO QUESTIONS

**IS THE REJECTING – DEPRIVING – OBJECT
A GOOD OBJECT OR A BAD OBJECT?
(BAD)**

**IS THE EXCITING – ENTICING – OBJECT
A GOOD OBJECT OR A BAD OBJECT?
(ALSO BAD)**

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FAIRBAIRN'S (1963) CONCEPT OF SPLITTING
IS TO BE DISTINGUISHED FROM
KERNBERG'S (1995) CONCEPT OF "BORDERLINE SPLITTING"

IN WHICH AN OBJECT IS PRE-AMBIVALENTLY EXPERIENCED AS
EITHER "ALL GOOD"

- AND THEREFORE LIBIDINALLY CATHECTED -
OR "ALL BAD"

- AND THEREFORE AGGRESSIVELY CATHECTED -

PARENTHETICALLY

KERNBERG'S CONCEPT OF SPLITTING EXPLAINS
THE BORDERLINE'S TENUOUSLY ESTABLISHED
"LIBIDINAL OBJECT CONSTANCY"

- aka "EVOCATIVE MEMORY CAPACITY" -
AND NOTORIOUSLY DEFECTIVE
CAPACITY TO "INTERNALIZE GOOD"

MORE SPECIFICALLY

BECAUSE THE BORDERLINE CANNOT
- IN THE FACE OF DISAPPOINTMENT -
EVOKE THE MEMORY OF THE
"GOOD THAT HAD BEEN PRIOR TO THE FAILURE,"
SHE CANNOT ADAPTIVELY "TAKE IN THE GOOD"

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"SPLITTING OF THE EGO" GOES HAND IN
HAND WITH "SPLITTING OF THE OBJECT"

THE LIBIDINAL EGO
ATTACHES ITSELF TO THE EXCITING
OBJECT AND LONGS FOR CONTACT
HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT
THE OBJECT WILL COME THROUGH

THE ANTLIBIDINAL EGO
WHICH IS A REPOSITORY FOR ALL THE HATRED
AND DESTRUCTIVENESS THAT HAVE ACCUMULATED
AS A RESULT OF FRUSTRATED LONGING
ATTACHES ITSELF TO THE REJECTING
OBJECT AND RAGES AGAINST IT

PLEASE NOTE THAT FOR FAIRBAIRN
THERE IS NO ID – ONLY AN EGO
A DYNAMIC STRUCTURE WITH ITS OWN RESERVOIR OF
ID – LIBIDINAL AND AGGRESSIVE – ENERGY

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SO, AGAIN, WHAT IS THE
 "ACTUAL NATURE" OF THE PATIENT'S
 ATTACHMENT TO THE BAD OBJECT?
 IT IS, OF COURSE, "AMBIVALENT"
 IT IS BOTH LIBIDINAL AND
 ANTILIBIDINAL IN NATURE
 THE BAD OBJECT IS
 BOTH NEEDED
 BECAUSE IT EXCITES
 AND HATED
 BECAUSE IT REJECTS

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A STORY THAT GUNTRIP (1969) RECOUNTS
 IS THAT FAIRBAIRN HAD ONCE ASKED A CHILD
 WHOSE MOTHER WOULD BEAT HER CRUELLY
 "WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO FIND YOU A NEW, KIND MOMMY?"
 TO WHICH THE CHILD HAD IMMEDIATELY RESPONDED WITH
 "NO, I WANT MY OWN MOMMY!"
 FAIRBAIRN INTERPRETED THE CHILD'S RESPONSE AS SPEAKING TO
 THE INTENSITY OF NOT ONLY THE ANTILIBIDINAL (OR AGGRESSIVE)
 TIE TO THE BAD OBJECT BUT ALSO THE LIBIDINAL TIE TO IT
 THE IDEA BEING THAT THE DEVIL YOU KNOW
 IS BETTER THAN THE DEVIL YOU DON'T KNOW
 AND CERTAINLY BETTER THAN NO DEVIL AT ALL!
 AGAIN
 WHEREAS KERNBERG'S (PRE - AMBIVALENT) "BAD OBJECT"
 IS AGGRESSIVELY CATHECTED,
 FAIRBAIRN'S (AMBIVALENT) "BAD OBJECT" IS
 BOTH LIBIDINALLY AND AGGRESSIVELY CATHECTED

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IN ANY EVENT
 REPRESSION IS THE THIRD LINE OF DEFENSE
 REPRESSION OF THE EGO'S ATTACHMENT
 TO THE "EXCITING / REJECTING" OBJECT
 ACCORDING TO FAIRBAIRN, THEN, AT THE CORE
 OF THE REPRESSED IS NOT AN IMPULSE,
 NOT A TRAUMA, NOT A MEMORY
 RATHER, AT THE CORE OF THE REPRESSED IS A
 "FORBIDDEN RELATIONSHIP"
 AN INTENSELY CONFLICTED RELATIONSHIP WITH A
 BAD OBJECT THAT IS BOTH LOVED AND HATED
 SUCH A RELATIONSHIP INVOLVES BOTH
 LONGING AND AVERSION, DESIRE AND REVULSION -
 ALTHOUGH BECAUSE THE ATTACHMENT IS REPRESSED,
 THE PATIENT MAY BE UNAWARE THAT BOTH SIDES EXIST

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WHAT THIS MEANS CLINICALLY
IS THAT PATIENTS WHO ARE
RELENTLESS IN THEIR PURSUIT
OF THE BAD OBJECT MUST
ULTIMATELY ACKNOWLEDGE
BOTH THEIR LONGING FOR
THE OBJECT AND THE PAIN OF
THEIR UPSET AND OUTRAGE
IN THE FACE OF THE OBJECT'S
FAILURE / REJECTION OF THEM

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