

**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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