

The Early Affective Bond

An Outlook from the existential perspective

Introduction

Humans¹ are social beings, therefore, it is essential to allude of the bonds that unite them affectively, that immerse them in a culture and that allow their subsistence and further development. These ties are the bonds, those "knots" that root them to life and give them a meaning to go through every crisis.

Of particular attention is the mother-and-child bond, or rather, the child and whoever fulfills the maternal function. Undoubtedly, the fact of having that support, even before birth, is of vital importance for the structuring of the psychic dimension of every person.

During pregnancy, the birth of her baby and the puerperium, the woman undergoes major changes in her body and hormones, therefore, it is very necessary to pay attention to maternal mental health, and to favor the process of bonding with her baby. The first moments together (mother-child), will serve to get to know each other and adapt to each other. The environment must provide the necessary shelter and support for such an encounter to take place.

A healthy early bond will generally give rise to a healthy psyche, and will more easily promote the subsequent autonomy of the child. In this sense, from an existential perspective, a place of relevance is assigned to the parents' acceptance of this child, considering it an act of freedom, of taking a stand. This "feeling accepted by another" allows the unfolding of fundamental trust, and, therefore, has repercussions on each of the Fundamental Motivations of Existence. On the contrary, if what is present is rejection, there remains a trace of emotional pain, lack of existential support and insecurity.

Throughout this work we will seek to delve into the importance of early bonds, while bringing them closer together from an existential perspective.

Bonding...a word that says a lot

The word bonding, "Vínculo" in Spanish, comes from the Latin *vinculum*, and it refers to a union, relationship or bonding of one person or thing with another. That is, two bonded persons or objects are, in a certain way, united, related or tied, either physically or symbolically (Pérez Porto and Merino, 2010). Blaustein (2020) reports that it is a *"stable link constituted by, and constituent of, the subjects that conforms it, and that gives them a feeling of belonging"*.

Therefore, contemplating that in this "link" the affective is put into play, one can think of the **affective bond** as the relationship between two people with the character of union and perpetuity in love. Here is the importance and weight of this word, which invites us to rethink relationships, seeing the **other** from another place, that **other** that 'needs' me, and which 'I need', housing it to be able *"to-be"*, discovering that the encounter formed is not an *"in"* but, rather a *"between"*.

¹ Translators note: In this article I choose "they/them" pronouns to preserve a gender-neutral presentation, especially in concepts like "child", "human being", "human", "other", "person", etc.

Mother-child bond

Early bonds have important functions, such as ensuring and guaranteeing survival by meeting the primary needs of the child and acting as a basis and source of security on which to rely. These will serve as a basis for future bonds. But, in addition, they play a primary role in the mental health of the person, considering of utmost importance that these are satisfactory, that is, solid, stable and durable.

Of fundamental importance is the affective bond mother – child, since in it, each one defines and gives meaning to the life of the other. During the process, which goes from the time when the baby is planned - in the best case scenario - through pregnancy and birth, to the puerperium; the woman has undergone major changes at the hormonal, bodily and psychological levels. She prepares, anticipates, conjectures about what can happen. She goes through fears, anxieties, insecurities, joys, frustrations, etc., that affect how she will approach the encounter with that baby, who, although she feels it in her being, is unknown to her, and to whom she must adapt and get used to, learning along the way.

Immediate postpartum is a very important stage for the formation of the mother-child bond. It is a "sensitive" period, in which the mother is receptive, in which there is a synchrony between the mother's cadenced language, and the movements of the child (Pinto Lazo, 2001 cited in Lalli, 2006). This allows to strengthen the unique and unrepeatable relationship between the mother and her child, that is, this bond that is developing between them must be understood as a continuation and growth of the one formed during pregnancy (Orsini, 2009). It is at this time, where it is recommended to leave the parents with their child in a private space, to favor the interaction.

In turn, the child learns to wait for the presence of their mother and to enjoy their first interpersonal relationship. The closer, deeper and mutually satisfying the first mother-child contact is, the easier and more natural the progressive subsequent autonomy will be, for both of them. The maternal breast is a place of safety and a protective encountering that gives the child much of the confidence in themselves and in the external world, which favors a greater future independence. While it is necessary that it initially passes through a symbiotic dependency stage, it will gradually give way to an independence of the bond.

From the existential perspective

Freedom and responsibility: two sides of one coin

Human freedom is a potency constantly updated through consciousness and decision. This freedom is finite, it has limits, because the human being is conditioned by the biological, the psychological and the social. Before all this, they must give an answer, thus becoming responsible beings. This response to conditioning does not involve freeing oneself from them, but assuming an attitude *in front of them*, in search for a meaning that enriches life, *despite* the conditioning. The relevant factor lies in the person's attitude towards their life circumstances, in their "here and now". Hence, freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin (Frankl, 2002 cited in Solomon, 2017).

Precisely, the responsibility must be in the "here and now" of a concrete situation for a specific person (Frankl, 2004 cited in Solomon, 2017), in this case, the parents towards their baby. Freedom is actualized in the present to face what is happening.

From the specific analytical-existential perspective, it is important to take into account the anthropological vision that this mother-woman has of herself. How are its three dimensions: the biological dimension, the psychic and the spiritual or noetic one that constitutes the dimension

specifically human. The acceptance by the parents, especially the mother, is an **act of freedom**, it entails taking a stand.

The Importance of “Being Accepted”

Delving into the Fundamental Motivations of Existence, posed by Alfried Längle (2002), we grasp the importance of being received and accepted by another. It is in the psyche that the typical experiences of being in the world will be "stored". It is considered that the first bonding experiences leave an imprint that will be projected into our lives with singular strength.

The physical contact between mother and child is very important, it allows the child to feel ‘one’ with their mother and provides the deep enrichment of the bond that they will later use as a model for future relationships. If the child feels loved and accepted unconditionally, the foundations of the value of their own life and the meaning of their existence will be affirmed in them. If, on the contrary, rejection appears, the more intense it is, the more difficult and painful consequences, both for the bond in general and for the child in particular. The initial affective deficit leaves an imprint of emotional pain, a lack of existential support and insecurity.

Circumstances may arise in which the mother is “un-affective” towards her child. In situations such as these, providing support, help, containment, and support is indicated, so she can know, understand and correct what, through rejection or other negative attitudes, can be generated in that child. It can take time for the mother to understand and assimilate this new role, and the need to adapt to this little person who depends on her 24 hours a day; feelings of loneliness, sadness, lack of confidence, along with tenderness, love and joy may appear. Therefore, it is essential that she feels accompanied and understood throughout this time.

Acceptance is a **act of freedom**, **taking a position** towards the child who has been begotten and brought into the world. It is extremely important to find shelter and refuge within human relationships, to be received and accepted by another. It is the basis on which the **fundamental trust** will be built, one's life will be discovered as a **fundamental value**, the person will feel that they can **be themselves**, that they are allowed to be as they are and that it is good that they exist, that their life have **meaning**.

First Great Crisis of Meaning

Castellá (2006) postulates that human beings are carriers of a double inheritance: a genetic one, transmitted by genes, and a cultural one, which is transferred especially through the mother. In its biological dimension, human beings are determined by their genetic inheritance. Their psychic dimension is strongly conditioned by the cultural inheritance. Because of their spiritual dimension, they are free and responsible beings who adhere to a world of values.

In addition, he postulates that there is a first great crisis of meaning, which occurs at birth, at the time of separation from their mother. From there, the child begins to grow as an individual existence. They overcome this "birth trauma" by acquiring "basic confidence" in life. At this time, the maternal function is essential, since it will be the one that will sustain the child in their growth (Castellá, 2006).

In the beginning, the meaning of a child's life arises basically from the biological dimension, since initially the child needs other people to satisfy their vital needs. As they develop and mature, they will learn to walk and eat alone, among other things. Gradually they will take existence into their own hands.

In this first stage the Meaning of life is **to trust in life**, to surrender to it. It could be said, that the child *drinks* the meaning of life from their parents, apprehending it and taking it within. If, on the other hand, the child drinks the "meaningless of life", it is expected that they will become apathetic, sad, depressive. It is essential then that parents are convinced and do not doubt their task as such, thus creating an adequate and necessary psycho-spiritual environment. This makes it possible to have confidence in oneself and, therefore, in one's own possibilities.

Conclusion.

It is important to highlight the fundamental place of healthy early affective bonds, since they lay the foundations for future bonding processes, providing support and promoting the development of fundamental trust, which allows evolving in the adult world autonomously. On the contrary, if these links are deficient or pathological, they can trigger in the person certain behaviors such as apathy, excessive dependence, depression, grief, insecurity, etc.

One of the tasks within the world of psychology, must be to encourage that the early bonds, especially that of mother-child, or whoever acts as that maternal function, is developed fully by providing tools and building knowledge together with the person and / or family that needs an intervention. The effectiveness of the action will come from the hand of an interdisciplinary teamwork that allows to act in the appropriate way (prevention, diagnosis, intervention) and whose purpose is that the people involved acquire notion about the importance of these links for the psychic health of that child.

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