THE SEPARATION -ADAPTATION RESPONSE TO TEMPORARY OBJECT LOSS

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SONNET 143

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feather'd creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift dispatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent:
So run'st thou after that which flies from thee,
Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;
But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind;
So will I pray that thou mayst have thy will,
If thou turn back and my loud crying still.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Nearly every analyst's practice includes a number of patients whose main presenting symptoms are severe anxiety, depression or fear of loss of control. Once the transference relationship has been established these analysands become very dependent upon the analyst and separations due to illness or vacation are anxiety-ridden. The re-

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actions of most patients to these separations, usually disguised, denied, or projected, include depressive reactions, jealousy, and anger at the analyst, fear of desertion, self-destructive behavior, illness, accidents, acting out (marriage, extramarital affairs, divorce), increase in symptomatology or flight into health.[1]

These events can be seen as adaptations to separation, loss, and possibly a return of the repressed wish or fear of the wish for reunion. Such responses are based on the capacity for object relationships and reflect childhood separation experiences or emotional deprivations.

Our attention was drawn to the origin and significance of separation phenomena by the frequency with which they are discussed informally among analysts and by children's reactions to the separations that take place in everyday life revealing a similar gamut of separation-adaptation responses. The onset of nursery school provides an opportunity to view the separation process *in statu nascendi*. In every instance some separation anxiety is experienced. One third of the children manifest anxiety or its derivatives well beyond the anticipated initial period of familiarization and in a form sufficiently intense to interfere temporarily with the expansion of object relationships and a smooth transition from the anxieties of separation to a comfortable sense of separateness.[2]

The value of direct observations to supplement reconstructional data from analyses has been amply demonstrated in the various forms of early separation anxiety visible in residential institutions and hospitals. No such systematic observations are available regarding effects of minor rather than major separations involving temporary absences of the parents in the everyday life of the child. The acute separation anxiety when a preschool child is removed from his mother and the ensuing exacerbation of clinging upon reunion are so universal that they are dismissed as inevitable or ascribed to maternal overprotection (Spock, 1966).

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[1] Jackel (1966) reported the wish for a baby in connection with separation from the analyst.

[2] Levin's (1967) evaluation of student nurses away from home for the first time closely parallels our findings.

Are we right in assuming that these separations are of minor significance to the child? What are the internal meanings of separations? How do they affect the child's self-esteem, the development of his personality, and his capacity for object relationships? Do these experiences constitute a stimulus toward growth; are they helpful to the separation-individuation process (Mahler and Furer, 1963); or do they interfere and have a potentially pathogenic effect? Should these reactions be ignored or acknowledged by parent and school? All these questions center around the subject of this paper, the brief, daily separations from the mother in the context of what has become a seemingly useful, reasonable, and entirely acceptable institution, namely, the nursery school. While fully cognizant of the multiple factors in the life of the child, we will attempt to focus on separation phenomena demonstrated at the onset of nursery school with further assessment during the total preschool period.

Parents are encouraged to start their children in nursery school between two and three regardless of the child's maturational attainments, to provide a suitable environment for physical and societal development. The isolation of children in middle-class neighborhoods, the increase in numbers of employed mothers, the difficulties encountered in raising children in an urban environment, and the efforts to expose culturally deprived children to education at an earlier age, have all led to nursery schools playing a major role in our child-rearing practices. A similar mixture of necessity and philosophy had dictated the development of the Kibbutzim in Israel, a part of the child-rearing system now being studied by Neubauer (1965) and others.

Literature

The importance of separation and loss in mourning and depression was clearly established by Freud (1917) and Abraham (1924). Freud (1926) acknowledged the fundamental significance of maintained object relationships when he speculated that the ontogenetic prototype of all traumatic experiences is birth and the separation from the mother, and that all deprivations and frustrations include a basic element of loss of the self. Freud further postulated that the

intensity of the cathexis to the mother and the inability of the child to cope with longing are based upon his difficulty to master tension. Anxiety "as a signal" is the response of the ego to the threat of the occurrence of a traumatic situation. Such a threat constitutes a danger. These internal dangers change with the period of life, but they have a common characteristic, namely, that they involve separation from or loss of a loved object or a loss of its love (Bibring, 1951, 1953; Lewin, 1961) leading to an accumulation of unsatisfied desires and so to a situation of helplessness. The relation of object loss to psychiatric and psychosomatic disease has been increasingly emphasized (Engel, 1962; Schmale, 1962; Adamson and Schmale, 1965; van Leeuwen, 1964a, 1964b).

Much research was based on observations of mothers and children. The reassuring effect of the mother's presence during air raids was noted by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham (1942). The attachment of the small child to his mother was independent of her personal qualities and education. Young children separated from their mothers in special War Nurseries experienced anger, confusion, and desperation. Upon reunion many did not appear to recognize the mother, though they remembered inanimate objects. Spitz's (1945, 1946, 1950) concepts of anaclitic depression in infants represented another major contribution. The health and development of infants reared in a nursery for unwed mothers and attended by them compared favorably with infants brought up in the sterile, clinical environment of a foundling home where they were deprived of emotional stimulation. Stranger anxiety, a term coined by Spitz, was ascribed to the child's beginning ability at age eight months to distinguish between a familiar and unfamiliar face. Children's adverse reactions to hospitalization were described by Robertson and Bowlby (1952), Robertson (1953a, 1953b), Edelston (1943), and Heinicke (1956). In a later study Heinicke and Westheimer (1965) reported that if the separation extended beyond a two-week period, it was more difficult to offset the effects of institutionalization, regression, and lack of affectionate response to the mother. Engel and Reichsman (1956) showed the profound deleterious effect of deprivation of mothering upon psychological and physical health. Surveys of separation reactions in children were made by Kennell and Bergen (1966) and Warakomska-Grzycka (1967).

Bowlby (1958, 1960, 1961), impressed by animal studies, postulated that separation anxiety was a primary anxiety rather than merely a warning signal. Children are born with a capacity for attachment essential to survival of the species. Infants and young children look to their mothers for security when they are afraid, and if they fail to find her, they experience fright and anxiety. Bowlby observed that when children are removed from their mothers for hospitalization, they go through three phases of separation anxiety: protest, despair (grief and mourning), and detachment (defense).

The organizing effect of the mother's presence has been pointed out by Benjamin (1961). The more definitive the organization of the libidinal investment in the mother, the earlier is the distinction made between the I and the non-I, and the greater is the capacity of the child's ego to anticipate and predict. Ainsworth (1964), studying Ganda mother-infant pairs, noted that protest, when following was frustrated, became more insistent as the attachment between mother and infant grew. Jacobson (1964) emphasized the constructive influence of frustrating experiences on the discovery of and distinction between the self and the love object. Induced by repeated unpleasurable experiences of frustration and separation from the love object, fantasies of total incorporation of the gratifying object begin to arise, expressive of wishes to re-establish the lost unit. In Jacobson's view, these earliest wishful fantasies of merging with the mother (breast) are the foundation on which all object relations as well as future types of identification are built. Mahler (1963) emphasized the mother's role in promoting or interfering with the separation-individuation process taking place during the second year of life. She was impressed with the infant's capacity to adapt to the needs, emotions, and demands of the mother. Mothers vary in their interpretation of cues and a concomitant separation occurs in mother and child.

Hendin's (1964) contribution from a study of suicide rates in the Scandinavian countries throws further light on the importance of child-rearing practices. Prolonged dependence permitted by the Danish mother results in closeness of family life and acknowledgment of dependency needs without shame on the part of the adult. The Swedish mother, generally less involved in child care, returns to work three months after the birth of her baby, who has to over-

come the resulting narcissistic injury. Boys in particular tend to find emotional relations burdensome. The far smaller suicide rate of the Norwegians was ascribed to the lack of pressure on the child, his freedom to explore, and his ready access to the mother.

All during life our self-representation can be strengthened or threatened by such changes in object relations as are involved in going to school, leaving home, falling in love, and even succeeding financially in our culture (Schmale, 1962). The self-concept, at first based on identification with immediate objects in the environment, begins to expand by age three. Brown (1959) in emphasizing the relationship between separation anxiety and death wishes stressed that "a child loves the mother so much that he feels separation from her as death." This incapacity to accept separation activates the morbid wish to die, the wish to regress to the prenatal state before life (and separation) began.

Ethological studies of attachment behavior by Lorenz (1967), Harlow and Zimmerman (1958), and Kaufman and Rosenblum (1967) indicate an instinctive need for companionship in animals which is independent of feeding. Schneirla (1950) demonstrated that contact in the first few days of life is essential to the development of the mothering instinct of birds. Without this contact, the young bird does not develop an object need. Rollman-Branch (1960) poses the question of a primary object need, an inborn instinct existing also in man that is secondary to need satisfaction for food, warmth, and equilibrium.

Very few case reports are available on children starting nursery school. Pappenheim and Sweeney (1952) describe a three-year-old boy who found it impossible to let go of his obsessive-compulsive mother. Therapy helped to resolve the mother's anxiety and the child's fear in response to this. Kuhmerker (1954), a nursery school teacher, followed eighteen children. Some were casual, others reacted markedly to nursery school entry. Those who were overprotected and indulged had difficulties in acclimatization, but made excellent progress with some help. The majority of rejected children accepted the break with little or no difficulty. Another nursery school teacher (Janis, 1960) reported that a two-year-old girl responded to the separation with much clinging, increased compulsiveness, bedwetting, and identification with an older sister.

A perusal of cases in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* revealed that major or several minor separations (including starting nursery school) may trigger a variety of pathological responses. They include, to mention a few, destructive and antisocial behavior (Friedlander, 1945), sleep disturbances (Nagera, 1966), school phobia (Sperling, 1967), fetishism (Spiegel, 1967), anorexia nervosa (Sylvester, 1945), developmental retardation (Ack, 1966), and attempts at reparation of object loss (Pavenstedt and Andersen, 1945; Scharl, 1961).

General Considerations

A pilot study was initiated at a small urban nursery school designed to observe and collect information on how children deal with the transition from home to school, from one group to the next, and from nursery school to kindergarten. The data consisted of casual observations, with as inconspicuous as possible involvement of the psychoanalyst.[3] Teachers added their impressions and knowledge of the children. Charts were kept[4] on 100 children to determine the number of days it took the child to release the mother voluntarily at the beginning of school. Information was gathered on the mother's reaction to the separation.

The children were divided into four groups with the youngest age two and a half. The children moved up a grade every six months. They attended school mornings, five days a week. Cognizant of the overt manifestations of separation anxiety the teachers asked the mother to remain with the child for the first few days, then encouraged her to leave gradually, concomitant with the child's capacity to tolerate the separation.

All children observed reacted to the onset of school with some anxiety. Attempts at adaptation were made at different rates and in different ways. Some began to investigate the new environment immediately, but most first explored it visually, then guardedly engaged in various activities. They periodically returned to or looked for their mothers. Some children demanded that she remain close for several weeks. Of the 100 children 80 were able to release their

[3] Kato van Leeuwen, M.D.
[4] Jane Miller (1966).

TABLE I

		Number of days that mother remained in school			
nber of children	*Age*	*5 days or less*	*2 weeks or less*	*2-4 weeks*	*4 weeks – 5 months*
56	2½ – 3 years	21 (37½%)	21 (37½%)	9	5
24	3 – 3½ years	14 (60%)	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	
7	3½ – 4 years	3 (43%)	4 (57%)		
7	4 – 4½ years	7 (100%)			
6	4½ – 5 years	6 (100%)			
al 100		51	30	14	5

mothers within a fortnight. The remaining 20 took much longer; 5 of them, all under three, required over a month. None of the children over four took more than a few days.

The presence of the mother in the beginning was important to all the children. If she tried to leave before the child was ready, signs of panic ensued, and there was crying or clinging. Some children did not openly communicate anxiety but appeared sad, tearful, forlorn, or restless, aggressive, and hyperactive. Thumb sucking was also seen, as was refusal to use the toilet, withholding, wetting and soiling. Mothers reported excessive irritability, fatiguability, and clinging dependency at home, as well as restlessness at night including pavor nocturnus. Long farewell rituals and stalling techniques when the child was coaxed into the carpool indicated hesitancy about going to school. The incidence of separation problems was the same in both sexes. No child was immune. Second and third children were not found to have an easier time.

Separation difficulties often stemmed from excessive shyness of the child, inability to cope with anger and frustration, past or recent traumatic separations, and unfavorable circumstances surrounding the onset of school accentuating the sense of object loss. Concomitant birth of a sibling, mother taking a job, serious marital discord, parental separation or divorce—any of these increased the child's school separation anxiety. Less obvious but just as significant were relatively minor events, such as being a target for aggression from the other nursery school children, concurrent increase of the mother's social life, changes in household help, and minor illnesses of the child. Attempts to rush the separation almost invariably resulted in a prolongation of the process and often precipitated a battle over control. Most important was the emotional or physical unavailability of the mothers at home. In certain instances the separation reaction was delayed or did not become manifest until the child was promoted.

Factors contributing to ease of separation included signs of maturation in the child, his ability to tolerate anger and frustration, and relaxed firmness on the part of the mother in dealing with the anxiety of the child. Moreover, evidence of trust in the mother who could be counted on to be on time, her avoidance of additional demands on the child, her permissiveness and understanding of the

child's initial regression, and a meeting of his increased need for mothering reduced the anxiety.

Furthermore, in the school itself there were many opportunities for mastery of anxiety through further familiarization with the environment. These included farewell rituals, the use of transitional objects, provision of the teacher's attention and indulgence, regularly organized activities, and dramatic play in which the child acted the role of parent or baby.

The mothers were involved in a separation process as well and tended to be communicative about their feelings at this time, but, interestingly, the majority later repressed and forgot the vicissitudes encountered. A few mothers were unable to accept the separation or were disappointed at the apparent ease of transition. They felt rejected by the child and reacted by withdrawal even though the child showed signs of needing more mothering. But the majority of mothers were sensitive to the cues they perceived as to whether the child needed them to remain or not.

As the study progressed the nursery school staff, who at first were visibly inconvenienced by extended or repetitiously difficult separations, became more tolerant. A deeper awareness of the significance of object ties was also spontaneously reflected in changes in administrative procedures. Home visits, staggered admissions, careful consideration of promotions, familiarization with the new group, and return visits to the previous teacher were initiated.

Four Mother-Child Pairs

To illustrate further separation phenomena selected data from interviews and observations of four mother-child pairs follow. These limited findings viewed psychoanalytically led us to the theories and formulations in the discussion of this paper.

An example of transition with minimal separation problems and demonstrable adaptational as well as other ego skills was three-and-a-half-year-old Elizabeth, a precocious only child. She explored the school environment by eagerly investigating the contents of closets, toys and yard equipment, leaving the mother's side without hesitation. On her second day of school she was slightly injured in a fight

with one of the children, became briefly hesitant to return, but responded to reassurance. Elizabeth willingly let her mother leave on the fourth day, showing that she enjoyed school and playing with the children. No difficulties were encountered when she changed teachers or later when she started Kindergarten. Her relationship with each teacher in turn was characteristically friendly and relatively unambivalent. Mischievous or hostile behavior was readily controlled when she was cautioned to exercise care. She showed great interest in play with animals such as rabbits and kittens, feeding and cuddling them with maternal concern. She participated in imaginative dramatic games, sharing readily but quickly assuming leadership roles when they were available.

Elizabeth's parents displayed considerable warmth and competence in meeting her needs. They lavished attention on her and enjoyed her wide-eyed curiosity, her questions, and her facility for learning. She was breast-fed until she was eight months old, ate well, and had no food fads. She walked and talked early. There were no sleeping disturbances, and toilet training had been established without much difficulty. She was happily exhibitionistic and liked to dance and sing. The mother spent most of her time with Elizabeth and an occasional weekend away from home was taken in stride. Elizabeth always accompanied her parents on longer vacations.

It was evident that Elizabeth showed a degree of phase-adequate ego maturation which provided her with the necessary ability to cope with the everyday vicissitudes of school and home. Her capacity to deal with significant objects in her life was well developed due to prior satisfying relationships within her family. Subsequent follow-up throughout her school career demonstrated a continued ability in meeting new challenges.

Three-year-old Bryan had a more difficult time when he started school. Observations made a week prior to entry showed an active, alert, moderately vigorous boy visibly delighted with the use of the jungle gym and riding a tricycle. He was friendly to the observer and paid little attention to his mother until the end of the hour-long visit when he became fretful and clinging, angrily pulling at her to go home. The first days of school Bryan participated in organized activities, or watched the children with curiosity, then cautiously

entered their play, imitating them. When the children responded he became more courageous and pleased with their signs of friendship. He repeatedly looked at his mother to share his delight, then ran to her, briefly cradling his head in her lap before returning to his activities. Bryan was content as long as mother remained. When she attempted to leave he protested; or if she went quietly, he interrupted his play and searched for her. His mother, who expected him to release her as easily as he did at home, became increasingly restless and annoyed at his reluctance, yet she remained at school for three weeks. Dramatic play during this time showed marked preoccupation with objects moving through open or closed tunnels and dinosaurs biting his buttocks. Though his development had been smooth, he resisted efforts at toilet training. He still wet and soiled and totally retained feces when in the homes of strangers.

During observations after school on the schoolgrounds one month after entry, Bryan persistently attempted to involve mother in his activities, by trying to get her to help him. This was in contrast to his previous wish only to share his pleasure.

The youngest of four children, Bryan received fairly consistent maternal care. Slight impatience on the part of the mother, an active pleasant woman, came through in her remark that he refused to hold the bottle when she discontinued the breast feeding at two months of age. He was a quiet baby until he became ambulant.

Bryan now played independently, joined the older children in the neighborhood, and angrily ran home to his mother when excluded. He also showed considerable anger when he was unable to accomplish a task.

His mother was casual in the way she treated him, affectionate, sensitive to his needs, but did not put herself out unless she thought she had to. Bryan's father was more outgoing and demonstrative, picking him up with a big swoop when he visited Bryan in school. The mother spent most of her time at home with the children and Bryan took her occasional absences in his stride.

In studying this child we saw how the mother's presence at school facilitated Bryan's adjustment. Anxiety aroused by the fear of being left in a strange environment, with which he familiarized himself yet had only begun to cathect, caused him to seek refuge with mother as he had in the past when coping with anxiety or frustration. His dramatic play showed attempts at mastery of sphincter control and his conflict about releasing his mother. His problems of separation from mother seemed to parallel his anxiety about giving up his excreta.

Separation reactions are not always easily discernible in school, masked as they are by hyperactivity, denial or suppression. Elsie, a cheerful active girl of nearly three, immediately began to play with a child whom she knew. She paid no attention to her mother. Though she showed no anxiety when the mother left, restlessness at night increased markedly during the first three weeks of school. Six months later, while on vacation, Elsie was left with a strange baby sitter. She protested mildly but after three hours Elsie began to ask for her mother and when she could not be found immediately, Elsie wept. This incident increased nocturnal anxiety to such an extent that Elsie started coming to her mother's bed at night, a practice which persisted several years.

Suppression and denial of anxiety during the day had their precursors. Due to the strenuous demands of her family, coupled with frequent changes in household help, the mother had not always been able to give Elsie adequate attention. During the first six months she was left several times with a new housekeeper or nurse for a weekend. Upon the mother's return Elsie refused the breast and had to be coaxed back. Later the child developed a tendency to be restless and she withdrew from demonstrative overtures. In response her mother set out to meet Elsie's need for narcissistic supplies by playing more with her and was rewarded by affection and gratitude. Elsie's tendency to turn away from the love object and her pattern of denial and repression of emotional dependency made the adaptation to nursery school and subsequent grade school pressures appear easy, obscuring the anxiety experienced.

A more detailed *longitudinal study* from birth through third grade is now presented to illustrate the significance of separation reactions to personality development. Ann had been an easy baby to care for. Her parents enjoyed her, were sensitive to her needs, allowed an appropriate amount of independence, and set sensible limits. She was a contented responsive baby who ate and slept well. When there was irritable crying, someone would rock her until she

was comfortable. When Ann was left for a weekend with the housekeeper, she nursed eagerly upon her mother's return (in an attempt to reunite with the love object, breast). Later in the first year Ann was noted to look longingly whenever the mother left. This reaction turned into vocal protest when she was older, but she expressed no distress when other members of the family or the housekeeper departed. As her ego matured she attempted active mastery by vigorously waving good-bye. Ann showed early evidence of a capacity for empathy. At fourteen months she reassured her older sister that their parents would soon return, indicative of denial of her own anxiety and identification with the aggressor sister (who often hit or teased her), a mechanism she also used in her later attempts to master anxiety upon entry into nursery school.

A separation reaction bordering on panic occurred when Ann was one and a half years old, during a vacation to another city, when she was left with relatives on the second day of her visit. For the remainder of the trip she clung to her mother, refused to be left with anyone else, and had severe sleeping disturbances. The year and a half before starting school was uneventful. Once when after waking up from a nap Ann was confronted with a room full of strangers, she became very shy. She tolerated short separations well and enjoyed playing with other children.

Ann started nursery school just before her third birthday. All went well for the first few days. She imitated other children's behavior and insisted on sitting in the same seat each day at juice time. When on the third day the school building was flooded, confusion reigned, and Ann became more anxious. On the fifth day she reluctantly permitted her mother to go on an errand. She bit her nails that night for the first (and last) time. Upon returning to school after the weekend she was exceedingly shy and fearful, and it took nearly four weeks for her to release her mother completely. Participation in a carpool two weeks later precipitated renewed anxiety and increased aggression directed at younger children. Anxiety about injury and death occupied her verbalized fantasies and it was three months before she expressed a liking of school and began to make new friends. Her attendance at nursery school was fairly routine after its difficult beginning, except for recurrence of separation anxiety manifestations after vacations and changing teachers.

The pattern of increased hostility toward a strange environment and turning to the mother for help can easily be seen in her dealings with new and difficult situations. When starting kindergarten, again the first few days were easy, but the initial attempt to conform was followed by anxiety and reluctance to attend school. In the first grade these attitudes were repeated in Ann's considerable resistance to learning. That the public school was not as tolerant of her hostile aggression may have contributed to aggression being turned inward, resulting in self-destructive tendencies. Only gradually were these attitudes mitigated by the mother's attempts to meet her daughter's increased dependency demands at times of stress while at the same time insisting that the child master new tasks in spite of her anxiety. Her easily offended sense of self-esteem was built up by the gratification she derived from developing new skills. Her distress over disruptions of object ties gradually decreased and, as she put it, "When I first get a new teacher, I hate her; then later when I get another new one, I want to go back."

Ann's reactions were phase-adequate and appropriate, but was she subjected to school too early, before her ego could integrate what separation from her mother entailed? Did the unevenly developed, early, and difficult-to-handle hostile aggression occur because of the separation, setting in motion mechanisms of defense rather than adaptive measures? Did the earlier separation traumata predispose her? Did her strong identification with her sister put her under strain of anticipated pleasure at starting school with subsequent disappointment?

Discussion

Children display a broad spectrum of individual reactions when first subjected to nursery school experiences. The daily peer group contact with gradual separation from the mother commensurate with the child's state of ego development provides an opportunity for maturational thrust, social and intellectual expansion. This first major out-of-the-home experience provides a new world to conquer, requiring mastery, early or belated. The majority of children successfully work through the repeated separations. Others have considerable difficulties contrary to our social expectations. Between these extremes are found all grades of adaptational coping mech-

anisms, many of them in the same child over the course of his total nursery school experience.

The data suggest that these responses, coming as they do during the formative preoedipal years, contribute a great deal to ultimate personality development, ego capacities, and defenses. In a small but significant percentage of the children, observations clearly demonstrate that separation responses and their attendant symptomatology reflect the importance of careful scrutiny of the circumstances surrounding the starting of school. The concept of phase-adequacy for separation processes rather than chronological decision-making might need to be introduced. Presently there are no criteria to determine when entry becomes minimally traumatic.[5] On the other hand, Anna Freud (1965) worked out criteria for the assessment of a child's readiness to enter nursery school in terms of her concept of developmental lines (1963).

Contributing to variations in ease of separation are a number of interrelated elements. The many sources of anxiety which reinforce the nuclear separation anxiety include the new physical and social environment, different standards of tolerated conduct, sharing of the teacher, dealing with instinctual tensions, and the necessity to master one's own and other children's aggression without the adjunctive ego support the mother might provide. Previous traumatic or concurrent separation experiences, frustration and conflicts within the family further accentuate the sense of deprivation children experience. Concern about body integrity is reinforced by the separation.

The extent of mastery of basic adaptational skills (Murphy, 1964) varies considerably in the children of the age group studied. This was seen in the coping mechanisms they utilized to deal with the vicissitudes of everyday life. Perceptual orientation and ability for familiarization with a new environment, the beginning concepts of time and space, motor skills for self-help, satisfying exploration and use of the environment; communication skills, using speech and nonverbal expression of feelings; the capacity for attachment, love and anger toward major objects in the environment; internalization of the mother as a love object—all these enter into the ability to deal with new experiences.

Distress and conflicts resulting from disruption of phase-specific

[5] This period might range from the time that object constancy is established to the stage where libidinal attachment to the parents is transferred to the community.

developmental processes are revealed by the manifestations elicited by separation. The connection between control over elimination and stable object ties is amply demonstrated in the many changes occurring in this area. The necessity to renounce mother's assistance with the many functions she previously attended results in increased independence in children who are ready to release her, but it may also lead to increased demands and regression in those who are not. Children whose dependency needs have not been met sufficiently in the past are particularly sensitive in this area. Tolerance of moderate frustration is an asset, though in some instances, when additional demands are made, delayed separation problems occur. It is possible that some of the more protracted bewilderment, aimless behavior, and confusion observed stem from the threat to the child's self-concept that is still closely tied to his identification with significant love objects in his environment (Schmale, 1962).

The most frustrating accompaniment of starting nursery school is giving up the initiative over separating from and reuniting with the mother. Children at this age thrive on free access to the mother and her presence facilitates making contact with new love objects. Even independent children in venturing to a neighbor's house find mother's accessibility reassuring. Toddlers as well as older children enjoy a sense of well-being in their mother's company. As long as the child feels in control he can master anxiety about moving away from her. In attending nursery school, he repeatedly no longer has free access to his mother.

The similarities and differences between our observations and Bowlby's (1961) can be explained by the quantitative and qualitative factors involved. The degree of anxiety experienced during recurrent daily separations, though considerably smaller, is nonetheless significant. Clinging when the mother leaves and returns, crying out in protest or despair, depressed affect, loneliness and detachment as a defense occur in both groups. The shorter period of separation and the daily restoration of the mother-child relationship permit the expression of affect, and a greater variety of adaptive and defensive responses are possible. The mother is there to cling to, and the child can regress in his relationship to her, providing an opportunity for mitigation of the effects of the separation.

The various separation phenomena include anxiety, grief, anger, and the attendant coping mechanisms. Manifest anxiety is clearly

expressed in crying or clinging as a refusal of the mother-child detachment. More disguised unconscious holding mechanisms are seen in the use of transitional objects, illness, or regressive infantile dependent behavior. Compliant and seductive conduct toward the teachers, obsessive-compulsive overcontrol are seen in those children with precocious superego development which does not permit direct instinctual expression. The anxiety may be repressed, displaced, or denied, and become evident in restlessness, hyperactivity, pavor nocturnus, and other sleep disturbances.

A child who misses his mother often is solemn, sad, and reluctant to participate. He feels helpless and unable to deal with the separation. Playing mother or baby in identification with the temporarily lost, ambivalently-related-to, object facilitates mastery. Being left in school may be experienced as a rejection or retaliation for sexual and hostile impulses. Preoedipal possessiveness and early oedipal strivings accentuated by the birth of a sibling aggravate the sense of object loss. It takes time to conceptualize that the disappearing, seemingly lost mother will reappear. Libidinization of the new environment takes place slowly.

These mechanisms have an adaptational and potentially defensive quality which may be incorporated in the character structure. Which of these mechanisms will be used is determined by the child's previous manner of coping with loss, the mother's earlier response (or lack of response) to his needs, his response in turn to cues in the mother's behavior, the stage of psychosexual development, and the disruption of phase-specific developmental processes.

It appears that this phenomenology is recapitulated in varying degrees and modifications; and that the responses may become symptom-specific to stress situations and vicissitudes of everyday life. To validate this concept and to further our understanding of such responses will require time but would greatly increase our comprehension of such problems as depression, successful and unsuccessful defenses against depression and affect, severe regression phenomena, and debilitating psychological symptomatology, i.e., the gamut of separation phenomena.[6]

[6] In our original attempt to conceptualize the implications of the defense-adaptation-individuation-separation phenomenon and the manner in which it was repeatedly utilized, we termed this the "signature" of the child. Objections were raised that this was already encompassed under the rubric "character."

Conclusions

The onset of nursery school provides a unique opportunity for the observation of separation phenomena without intruding into the home. Separation anxiety, one of the more visible and therefore accessible facets of the subtle processes involved in the evolvement of object cathexis, can be followed developmentally. Separation anxiety is not merely a specific reaction at a specific time to a specific event but belongs to a chain of events and situations taking place within the relationship between parents and child. Separation reactions are expressed in relation to the physical and emotional unavailability of the mother.

Separation experiences are of nuclear importance whether prolonged or brief and not only during the first few years but throughout life. Basically involved are internal psychological events surrounding the relationship to the first love object, and the manner in which separation at any given point causes or exacerbates anxiety. Separations and the defenses utilized to deal with them set the stage for separation-adaptation processes later in life.

The cathexis of the original love object and its disruptions have a profound effect on personality development. To equate the experience of major signs of separation anxiety as undesirable evidence of maternal overprotection is doing an injustice and tends to perpetuate a psychological myth. On the contrary, it may well be that manifest separation anxiety at the onset of nursery school is a phase-adequate expression of the child confronted with irrevocable daily separations from his mother. Thus viewed the management of this phenomenon loses much of its aura of pathology, and, with appropriate techniques utilized by parents and teachers, this period can be worked through and can further the maturational processes of the child.

Follow-up studies of these children would offer us insights into what, for example, may have effectively contributed to a child who has shown poor adaptational mechanisms and separation problems in nursery school and who later demonstrates obvious ability in dealing with object relationships, learning opportunities, etc. Conversely, when a child has demonstrated effective coping with his nursery school and later demonstrates significant problems in grammar school, studies may allow us to pinpoint how this has come about.

sures, to be introduced in the child's extrafamilial life. Early identification of children who will have difficulty in school, in learning situations, in interpersonal relations, will be of great importance to those who are responsible for their later schooling. Control studies should include observations of children who do not attend nursery school.

Parents out of necessity or under social pressures may thrust their preoedipal or early oedipal children into a nursery school with accelerated demands for separation. While cognizant of the opportunities for emotional growth in most children under better circumstances than at home, there appears to be evidence that some children are traumatized, that their attempts at belated mastery fail. But for a considerable number of children the child-care centers provide a significant, accepting mothering experience. This too needs examination.

Does the overemphasis on early independency in our culture contribute to quasi-independency on the part of the child? Does it affect his current and future capacity for object relationships because of unfulfilled object and dependency needs at a time when they should be met appropriately? Are we correct in our educational procedures when we ask the child to separate from his mother at the height of his cathexis to her? Do we contribute to his easier acceptance of societal demands for conformity, mobility, and ease of separation by affecting estrangement of emotions to the detriment of family relationships? Does our increasingly mechanistic society, with its high admiration of classified skilled jobs, contribute to the mother's willingness to abdicate her role to more highly trained people with concomitant self-depreciation and dissatisfaction?

Our findings raise more questions than they answer and so indicate the need to examine more closely historical data relating to separations, prolonged or short, present and past, reactions in the transference to separation, evaluation of the capacity for object cathexis from the separation history and behavior of the patient, more careful management of separations in the everyday life of the child.

Summary

Longitudinal and cross-sectional observations of children strongly suggest that insufficient significance has been attached to the impact of recurrent temporary separations of mother and child. Separation is a prerequisite to growth and maturation, but there are scars after separation if it occurs prematurely, or concurrently with other traumatic events, if it disrupts phase-specific processes, and if the coping mechanisms are inadequate.

Approximately one third of 100 children followed in a psychiatrically oriented nursery school, serving a middle-class group, showed prolonged, repeated anxiety interfering with the expansion of object cathexis for considerable periods of time beyond the transitory overt and covert manifestations. These reactions were repeated when renewed separations took place, in some instances setting the stage for future attitudes toward school and learning. Beyond this, the starting of school and the way mother and child dealt with the separation pointed up significant aspects of the mother-child relationship.

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