

Unpopular People: Difficult People: The distinction between them and the influence of the Maternal-Infant Bonding Process

(The Maternal-Infant) Bonding Process is the evolved neuro-chemical foundation for human social behaviour. Through initial nurturing by the mother, it programmes infants to 'need' to be liked and to be accepted by all the people that they will encounter throughout their lives. When this is established, the pleasure that is generated when these needs are met, and the distress when they are not met become the main motivators of altruistic and co-operative behaviour for life.

With this intrinsic foundation, children then have to 'learn' all the social skills that will ensure that they gain enough self-esteem and self-confidence to be able to interact successfully with, and be accepted by individuals and groups of others.

Back in time, when humans first roamed the planet, they established themselves in nomadic tribes. Individuals would have had no chance of surviving predators or of finding sufficient nourishment, but together, in hunter-gatherer groups they flourished on the planet for millions of years, and the Bonding Process achieved its evolutionary purpose of ensuring the safety and well-being of all and the continuation of the tribe.

To ensure the integrity of the Bonding, two alerting reflexes were incorporated in the Bonding Process, which ensured that individuals who failed to cooperate or who were unable to participate fully were ejected from the tribe.

Some 40,000 years ago there was a population 'explosion' and, possibly because of changes on the planet, the nomads found they could settle in one place. This gave them spare time in the day and they used their brains to devise ways of improving nature and their hunting skills for readily available food, and for enjoying the cultural activities. One of the effects of this was a large population increase, and this put pressure on the socially cohesive, but restraining power, of the Bonding Process, because it would be easier to go against taboos and restrictions without being noticed. Also the threat of being excluded from the tribe decreased because survival would be easier, especially with some friends along. Over many thousands of years, the constraints of the Bonding Process have increasingly failed to control selfish behaviours. Mankind has, in many different ways, tried to devise strategies through religions, laws and policies, to replace the effective constraints of the small tribal groups, but greed, pride and envy are increasingly influencing behaviour worldwide.

Society is made up of groups of increasing size. The basic group is the family, and it is within families that every baby that is born and nurtured has had the Bonding Process initiated, and then needs approval and acceptance from all the people with whom he interacts for the rest of his life.

Families exist within, and are dependent on a community, then the nation and ultimately the world. It is within families that the bonding process exerts its cohesive strength most fully but never completely in modern times. The family can not be independent and its individual members have to interact with many others for safety and nourishment. Thus individuals become members of many groups in their communities, for shorter or longer times and, whether they be for work (formal) or play (informal), the bonding process in every individual will be

constantly monitoring the extent to which they are liked and acceptable. In modern society it is possible to be a member of a group, but to be an outsider within it and this generates many problems.

In informal leisure groups individuals are free to come and go, and if they do not feel in accord, or if the group indicates that they are not acceptable, they will leave and find something more suitable.

However, in formal groups if any individual fails to obey the rules and cooperate, the others will feel threatened with failure to meet the overall aims. This triggers the reflex rejecting behaviour, and in modern society the individual can not leave easily and the group members can not throw him out. Instead they use teasing and petty unkindness to indicate the person needs to change, but if he is unable to change, reflex attention seeking behaviours will ensue and he will be labelled as **'difficult'** and ignored or **'punished'** as much as possible.

Sometimes within formal groups several members can feel that their Social Needs are not being met. With implicit, subconscious agreement they find themselves behaving together in ways which flout the norms and rules of the overall group, and the friendship and sharing does meet their Social Needs and a **'deviant subculture' group/gang** is formed. In this situation the rewards of approval and belonging always outweigh the pains of punishment that is meant to change their ways.

All groups have norms and rules that loosely bind and define the members, and these will include a stated or implicit accord about who is suitable to join. In hunter-gatherer days everyone was born into, and was accepted by the group, but there is a mechanism as part of the Bonding Process that recognises impaired individuals and generates an aversive rejection that was intended to lead to their death.

In modern times, most societies recognise that there are people who are different from the majority in any number of ways. This may be because of physical deformities; personality failings, which include mental illness, or because they are seen as different from the majority in some other way. These factors, which are called stigmas, still trigger the aversive reflex response of our forebears, and the people who trigger them are termed **'unpopular'**. However they are not the danger to survival that they were in hunter gatherer times, and it is now considered uncivilised and immoral to reject the stigmatised, and many societies have become much more inclusive for them, and say they should be treated with sympathy and kindness.

It is a difficulty and a sadness that the reflex aversion to the stigmatised is very difficult to overrule. The head can want to offer kindness and friendship, but often the evolved reflexes do not, and this can lead to what is called **'patronising'** behaviour (where the donor gains more pleasure from what they are doing than the recipient) and fail to meet the Social Needs that are lacking.

Fortunately there are remedies. Inside every 'difficult' person, there is a frightened, lonely, but ordinary person, needing and longing to be rescued and find fun and friendship: Inside every 'stigmatised' person there is a sad, lonely, but ordinary person needing and longing to be rescued and find fun and friendship.

These negative aspects of social behaviour evolved in order to protect the integrity of the positive ones that ensure the safety and pleasures of daily life through friendly relationships, ie, the mutual meeting of Social Needs. Groups

and societies are built from the organisation of individual interactions. These have innumerable 'currencies of exchange', eg, ideas, information, gratitude, etc. but all need the common denominator of each individual's time and attention. Because it is lack of these currencies that lead to people being difficult and unpopular, the remedy has to begin with recognising the initial reflex aversion they cause in oneself, and then overcoming it by approaching the person with a smile and comfortable eye contact, and the body language that indicates 'I have a bit of time to share, and I would like to spend it with you' and opening with the sort of chat that you might make to someone in a long checkout queue. Then with a listening ear, pick up what they want to talk about.

There are, of course, many, many people who know from experience, that when you are friends, and lovers with the stigmatised, their 'differences' become completely irrelevant, and they can feel happy.

There are some, but not so many, who know that, in the early stages, it only takes social generosity from a few people, to change difficult people into friendly ones.

Sadly there are still far too many of these needy people still among us, and the world will be a much better place if everyone everywhere were to recognise their reflex prejudices and find mutual rewards in changing their ways in these positive directions.