

Introduction

Nurturing is a universal human need.

Issues related to nurturing are at the core of being a regressive adult baby. Unmet needs for nurturing in early childhood are arguably what created the identity. The absence of self-nurturing fuels the destructive internal turmoil of a conflicted regressive adult baby. Self-acceptance of this AB identity allows self-nurturing and creates a virtuous healing cycle between these two attributes – the inner adult and inner child.

Being a regressive adult baby is a psychologically healthy personal identity, principally because it nurtures the adult baby's wounded inner child. That supports the ability to love and be loved. Without that healing, the unmet needs for nurturing, deadens the heart and the spirit of the regressive adult baby and drives compulsive and behaviours, some of which can be destructive.

The above are bold assertions. They are true of my experience as a regressive adult baby, however, I believe they are likely to be true for many regressive adult babies and anecdotal evidence certainly supports that conclusions. They may not be true for others though and I do not intend to disparage others if their experiences are different from mine.

This article is about regressive adult babies who are the predominant group in the Adult Baby/Diaper Lover (ABDL) community. That's the term used by Rosalie and Michael Bent, pioneers in identifying and understanding this identity. It describes adult babies who have a baby persona with feelings and needs that *must be recognized* and met for the AB to live happily, and without disruption and distress.

This article builds on thinking in two previous pieces – the book 'Becoming Me – the Journey of Self-Acceptance: a guide for adult babies traversing life' and the article 'Adult Baby – Healthy Identity or Psychosexual Disorder'.

In a previous article (*Adult Baby – Healthy Personal Identity or Psychosexual Disorder?*), I stated that being a regressive adult baby was a *healthy* personal identity, if internal conflicts were resolved. I defined 'healthy' as "*an identity compatible with being a responsible, loving and creative adult able to sustain positive personal relationships, met personal and social obligations, work, play and express personal creativity.*" This definition is valid, but not fully complete.

'Compatible with' could be construed to mean that being a regressive AB doesn't impede these positive attributes, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is necessarily or intrinsically positive. More information is needed.

For me, the adult baby identity is intrinsically healthy. But why? One of the key reasons is how being AB relates to nurturing. Nurturing is love and care.

'Nurturing' commonly refers to love and care of the young or very young. In this context, it means love and care for a regressive adult baby's Inner Child / baby persona.

Insecure Attachment Between Mother and Child

It is believed that the unmet need for nurturing in early childhood is central to why we became regressive adult babies in the first place. In support of this proposition, the following summarises the relevant information in the book and article referred to above.

Nurturing and the Adult Baby

It is conceivable that as infants or toddlers, regressive ABs had an *insecure attachment* with their mothers. The term 'insecure attachment' is derived from Attachment Theory, a widely accepted and empirically based theory of childhood development.

An insecure attachment arises where a mother is not attuned to the needs of their child. This can span the gamut from abuse and neglect at one end of the spectrum to more usually, at the other end of the spectrum, simply a mismatch between the mother's care or sensitivity and the feelings and needs of the child. The latter can occur for many common and simple reasons. The key point is that the child learns at very young age that they cannot completely rely on their mother to meet their needs for safety and comfort. This may include the child learning that their displays of fear or rage are rejected or ignored; that they reduce the prospects of their mother meeting their needs. In essence the child learns to mistrust themselves and others.

There is no empirical proof that regressive AB's had an insecure attachment as children. However, consider that empirical observations, replicated in different countries, indicate that around one third of children have an insecure attachment. Of any possible unusual or exceptional personal identity, the adult baby identity uniquely keeps the symbols of infancy and its unmet needs, nappies, baby clothes, stuffed toys, dummies etcetera, very much in view. It isn't unreasonable to consider that regressive adult babies are a subset of the much larger population who had an insecure attachment as a child.

Why do only a few of the many children with insecure attachments go on to have an adult baby identity? I don't know.

There is a possible explanation in that the exact configuration of the internal working model by which a child internalizes their attachment pattern is a highly individual matter – mediated by the perceptions and unconscious choices of each individual. It is also possible that there are other elements at work here that because of the age of the child, is difficult or impossible to identify.

The insecure attachment likely occurred when the regressive adult baby was a baby or a toddler. The studies observing mother-child separations and reunions which identified children's attachment types were undertaken with children who were between 9 and 18 months old. This is consistent with key understandings identified by Rosalie and Michael Bent -

- 1) the source of the AB's baby persona lies in very early childhood – this was initially thought to be before three years of age – Rosalie subsequently refined this to be very early in infancy
- 2) that it will drive an ongoing need to regress to the stage where the identity had its beginnings, manifested in a deep need for regressive adult babies to have their baby persona recognized as real, and *very significantly*, 'to be in a parent/child relationship to some degree'

It is credible that regressive adult babies are returning to the point in their early life when the secure attachment with their mother did not occur. An important part of the development of our personalities 'froze' at this point. Psychologists call this *fixation or arrested development*. When nurturing is not received, growth stops or is significantly impaired.

This returning to an earlier time of psychological development also explains regressive adult babies' proclivity for submission and humiliation fantasies. Those fantasies are another aspect of seeking to regress and create an attachment with a parent-like figure.

Why?

But what is the purpose of the regression?

It is to seek nurturing of the unmet needs that created the regressive adult baby identity.

The needs are for comfort and safety. These needs are felt at a deep, infantile level. The comfort sought has a strongly tactile dimension - the enveloping softness or snug wetness of a nappy, the feel of a dummy or teat in the mouth, soft clothes, the fuzzy feel of a stuffed toy on the cheek. The safety is psychological safety – to feel protected and ‘held’, to return to a time when the worries and dangers of the world were held at bay beyond the cot or nursery by the protecting presence of mother or a transitional/comfort object like a beloved stuffed toy. These are not needs that can be satisfied in an adult way with a nice warm beverage and a biscuit in a comfy armchair.

As we grow up, we learn to be embarrassed or ashamed about a need for nurturing – it’s being childish, or indulgent. ‘Grow up and get over it’. ‘Suck it up princess’. These are the admonishing voices we hear in our minds. These messages are WRONG!

No one should never be ashamed or embarrassed about needing nurturing. We all need it, not just adult babies. We all have an Inner child. Many good marriages involve mutual nurturing between partners – what else is it when one partner falls ill and is cared for tenderly by the other? Some years later the situation may be reversed. Nurturing is a human need and many ills of the world would be solved if those needs were met. At its heart, it is an innocent need, a child-like (not childish) need.

Needs for nurturing that go unmet for a long time can deaden the spirit and the heart. It constricts the emotions, inhibiting our ability to love and to experience the love of others. It can make us more susceptible to anxiety and depression and even physical illness. At its’ worst it feels like living in a lifeless desert. Denying our need for nurturing can drive us to compulsive behaviours as we try to escape the deadness enveloping our spirit and desperately try to feel alive again.

Self-Nurturing

First and foremost, being a regressive adult baby is a declaration and a challenge to ourselves about our need for nurturing.

Learning to recognize, accept and meet our own need for nurturing is key to a healthy sustainable identity as a regressive adult baby. Don’t get me wrong, it’s lovely to experience the nurturing care of a loving partner, but if we are to be psychologically healthy, that can only be a complement or adjunct to our own capacity to meet the nurturing needs of our baby persona.

A non-conflicted regressive adult baby fulfils their need for nurturing every time they have ‘baby time’. But how? Why is a wet nappy so comforting? Why is a favourite soft toy so calming? Or favourite baby clothes? Or a dummy? Or a bottle? After all, a wet nappy or any of these are not intrinsically comforting for most adults – most would find them annoying, if not downright discomfoting. They ARE however, deeply comforting and calming for regressive adult babies because of a psychological mechanism that we all accessed as very young children. That mechanism still works for our baby persona because they are subjectively – in our psyche - a real baby.

That psychological mechanism is something called ‘transitional objects’ (also called comfort objects). A Transitional object can be almost anything – but is typically a soft toy or comfort blanket – which is invested with special significance in the ‘magical’ thinking of a very young child. A transitional object ‘stands in for’ a very young child’s mother. It becomes a psychological substitute

Nurturing and the Adult Baby

for her when she isn't there. A baby creates transitional objects out of everyday things when they become aware of their separateness from the mother and can experience a sense of loss when she isn't present. This is typically between 4 and 12 months of age.

The concept of transitional objects was developed by Donald Winnicott (b. 1896 d. 1971), an English pediatrician and psychotherapist. Along with John Bowlby, Winnicott pioneered an understanding of child development and the relationship between mother and child that is now so widely disseminated and accepted that it is understood as common wisdom, detached from the theoretical expositions from which it is derived. As at November 2018 there is a useful article on Wikipedia titled 'Donald Winnicott' and a short article titled 'comfort object'. There is a chapter on 'Objects of the Adult Baby Universe' in the book 'Adult Babies: Principles and Practices' by Michael Bent (www.abdiscovery.com 2015).

I believe that the baby persona of regressive adult babies creates a nurturing experience by using transitional/comfort objects to unconsciously recreate the presence of mother. These transitional objects almost always include our nappy, but also includes many other forms – teddy bears, dolls etcetera. We are recreating the circumstances of the original insecure attachment with our mother with the unconscious purpose of changing that to a positive outcome. In the unconscious mind, this time, we will be loved and mothered as we needed to be. And we will be - because in a healthy regressive adult baby it is our nurturing Inner Parent who meets our baby persona when we have 'baby time'. *(Or if you have a faith in a personal God or Savior, it is a loving God as our father).*

For the purposes of understanding the inner life of a regressive adult baby, I use the concept of a dialogue between our Inner Parent, Inner Adult and Inner Child (see 'Becoming Me' cited above). The idea of a dialogue within our psyche is a key feature of psychotherapy and is applicable to everyone (not just adult babies). In a healthy, non-conflicted, regressive adult baby, all the three parts of our identity (Parent, Child and Adult) are 'pointing' in the same direction to see that our baby persona's need for nurturing is met.

- The Inner Child, our baby persona, is confident they are loved, and their needs will be met. As a result, they are mostly happy, and playful or calm – and readily comforted
- The Inner Parent is a nurturing, protecting parent – attentive to the needs of our baby persona
- Our adult-self safeguards our adult baby identity, ensuring that there is space for our Inner Parent to nurture our baby persona

For the non-conflicted regressive AB, 'baby time' is a happy, soothing, nurturing experience. When we return to being our adult selves, we are calmed, refreshed – grounded in our true selves – better adults, as well as better babies.

Nurturing doesn't only take the form of 'dressing up' and behaving as babies. There is also 'passive nurturing'. I can give an example from my own life. My wife has decorated my bedroom as though it were a guest bedroom for the grandkids. There are piles of fluffy toys in several corners, a white wooden bed in a style that wouldn't look out of place as a baby's cot, and bed linen in soft pastel colours, again not out of place in a nursery. My baby persona is nurtured to wake up and go to sleep in a space that recognizes and accepts her as real, as having genuine needs. Every time I take a quiet moment, that passive nurturing is there. I know I'm not alone. How many times on youtube or twitter have you seen a nursery style backdrop to an adult baby's selfie? The reasoning is the same.

Nurturing and the Adult Baby

Why does the need for nurturing never go away? Why isn't the whole adult baby 'thing' healed by all this nurturing, and disappear? I don't know for sure. I do know that the adult baby identity and the ongoing need for nurturing will always be there. As regressive adult babies, we have baby personas that are hard wired into our psyche. Like any baby, their needs can be satisfied for the time being, but that doesn't mean they won't have the same needs tomorrow, or the day after. That's just babies. We have to get used to it.

The Conflicted Adult Baby

Understanding the central need for nurturing, allows us a deeper insight into the conflicted regressive adult baby. They have an internal conflict deep in their psyche. The three actors are at war with each other.

- The Inner Parent is brutally critical and punishing toward the Inner Child
- The Inner Child is wounded - hurt, angry, greedy, selfish and rebellious
- The Inner Adult is weak, like an ineffective umpire in a very rough sporting match. It is unable to stop the critical Inner Parent abusing the wounded Inner Child or stop the latter from rebelling and throwing tantrums

The punitive Inner Parent doesn't accept the baby persona as real or healthy. This is the kernel of the internal conflict. It is a denial by one part of the psyche of another part – in effect of a denial of the regressive adult baby's own identity. As a result, the wounded Inner Child re-experiences the original wound created in the insecure attachment. And it gets worse.

The punitive Inner Parent denies any need for nurturing. They say 'Pull yourself together! You're a grown up!' The Inner Child/baby persona's genuine needs are not met, and they feel hurt, alone and abandoned.

With the need for nurturing brutally denied, the regressive adult baby feels their heart and spirit deadened. To recapture a sense of being alive they are driven to compulsive masturbation. Their adult baby identity is largely expressed as a sexual fetish. Though they put on a nappy to masturbate and perhaps have other baby clothes or paraphernalia, these are not much more than sexual 'props'. Masturbation temporarily relieves the tension of the savage internal conflict, but it is a compulsive anxious space which precludes taking any deep comfort from 'baby time'. The wounded Inner Child greedily grabs at any chance of 'baby time', but they are mistrusting and desperate – hardly in a space to experience comfort. The need for nurturing goes unmet.

Compulsive masturbation episodically takes control of and tyrannizes the lives of conflicted regressive adult babies. In turn, we feel remorse for our lack of self-control, which intensifies the internal conflict. Eventually, this builds to a peak of the 'binge and purge' cycle, specifically the pre-purge crescendo. The continuing denial of the need for nurturing is further deadening the spirit. Increasingly desperate to feel alive, the conflicted adult baby resorts to the 'high' of psychologically unsafe fantasies or behaviors or risks unsafe exposure. The emotional 'let down' after the final peak of orgasm can be intensely painful. The disgust, remorse and self-loathing are scourging and gut wrenching. The punitive Inner Parent, triumphant, effectively locks the wounded Inner Child in the closet and throws away the key. They emphatically deny any need for nurturing. After the transitory false 'high' of thinking themselves cleansed, the regressive adult baby again feels their heart and spirit being deadened. Eventually they will binge and the cycle will start all over again.

Nurturing and the Adult Baby

The genuine need for nurturing is real and innocent. It is not indulgent. It is not sexual. This is how it is experienced by non-conflicted regressive adult babies. That doesn't stop non-conflicted regressive adult babies being sexual (without being compulsive). However, it is important to recognize that in the life of a conflicted adult baby, the need for nurturing is likely to be overlaid, or even completely masked by, other factors such as compulsive masturbation. The genuine need for nurturing can also be overlaid by demanding, manipulative or indulgent behaviors driven by the greedy, selfish, mistrusting, angry and fearful wounded Inner Child / baby persona. This overlay or masking interferes with, or even prevents, the need for nurturing being met, either by the regressive adult baby themselves, and perhaps by others, like partners. This is part of the self-sabotage created by the internal conflict.

Self-acceptance – accepting our adult baby identity, and our adult baby persona as real, permanent and healthy - is the only way out of the cycle.

What keeps us healthy and from relapsing into the internal conflict is nurturing our baby persona.

Different and the Same

In understanding ourselves as regressive adult babies, we are trying to understand what makes us different from others. It is important to remember that in fundamental ways we are the same as everyone else. All of us have a need for nurturing through our lives. We all suffer if those needs are not met, either as children or as adults. All children have comfort / transitional objects. These commonly continue in different forms into adulthood. For example, for smokers, cigarettes are commonly a transitional object. Many people other than adult babies have regressive impulses, and act on these, in both functional and dysfunctional ways. Everybody can be thought of as having an internal dialogue between their Inner Parent, Inner Child and Adult self. Many, many people have a conflict between these internal actors, and for some of these that conflict drives compulsive behaviours. We all have a true self and a false self. Many people struggle with self-acceptance. As regressive adult babies, we are so different from others, yet in other very important ways we are the same. Sometimes, it is not so different to be different.

A healthy identity

So, what's healthy about being a regressive adult baby?

Being a non-conflicted AB is a conscious recognition and acceptance of a genuine need for nurturing by our wounded Inner Child. Those unmet needs for nurturing deeply wounded our psyche. For want of a positive response, they could define who we are in the most harmful ways. Not turning away from the genuine and innocent need for nurturing, despite the seemingly bizarre and confronting way those needs presented themselves, is courageous.

Remember that a child with an insecure attachment learned to suppress their needs - and their displays of fear and anger at having those unmet needs. Being a regressive adult baby courageously flouts that suppression. It is a declaration of those unmet needs, and a challenge to our identity to find a positive way to meet them.

Contrast the self-medicating behavior of an alcoholic or drug addict. That self-medicating is harmful, because it masks and denies the wounds to the psyche that give rise to the addiction in the first place. It is true that the behavior of a conflicted regressive adult baby is similar – the internal conflict denies the need for nurturing and drives compulsive behavior, but when the adult baby

Nurturing and the Adult Baby

identity is accepted as real, permanent and healthy that changes. Self-acceptance allows self-nurturing which in turn, strengthens self-acceptance in a virtuous cycle. The original wounds to the psyche are unmasked and healed. The identity and the need for nurturing don't go away, but we can live with them comfortably and safely. The acceptance of our identity enhances our confidence, resilience and creativity.

A denial of our need for nurturing, deadens the heart and the spirit and this is true for anyone. It is particularly true for regressive adult babies whose identity is so conspicuously rooted in the unmet childhood need for nurturing. Conversely, recognizing and meeting the need for nurturing is a healing, enlivening action. As a regressive adult baby, I have lived these two states. I know in intimate awareness what they feel like and I am sure many other regressive adult babies do likewise. The difference between the two, calls to mind the distinction between the false self and the true self. These were concepts developed by the same Donald Winnicott who developed the concept of transitional objects.

The Wikipedia article 'True self and false self' describes the difference between these two states –

Winnicott used 'true self' to describe a sense of self, based on spontaneous authentic experience, and a feeling of being alive, having a real self. The false self, by contrast, Winnicott saw as a defensive façade – one which in extreme cases could leave its holders lacking spontaneity and feeling dead and empty, behind a mere appearance of being real.

For me, my true self is my healthy adult baby identity, comprising my adult baby persona, my nurturing Inner Parent and my strong, responsible and compassionate adult-self. It is an identity free to love and be loved, to be confident, resilient and creative – in short fully alive.

My false self is when I was conflicted about being an adult baby – denying the existence of my adult baby persona, and the persona's genuine need for nurturing. It is anxious, uptight, tyrannized by compulsive behaviours and marked by shame and self-loathing. The difference between the two states is the difference between the presence and the absence of nurturing (and self-acceptance).

Our adult baby identity has found a way of meeting our original unmet infantile need for comfort and safety. We have found a way to 'scratch the itch'.

Being an adult baby can be difficult, but maybe – just maybe -, if we resolve our internal conflict, it's a gift. How much more difficult might it be to have an itch that you could never scratch?

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