

Exploring Stockholm Syndrome in Belle's Character in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017): A Psychological Analysis Using Attachment and Trauma Bonding Theories

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between Belle and the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), often discussed in psychological literature in terms of Stockholm Syndrome. Utilizing John Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Patrick Carnes' Trauma Bonding Theory, this research analyzes the emotional dynamics between Belle and the Beast to assess whether their bond reflects psychological trauma or genuine love. The analysis focuses on key scenes that depict emotional dependence, power imbalance, and fluctuating affection, revealing a complex relationship that blends elements of trauma bonding and healthy attachment. This paper suggests that while the relationship demonstrates characteristics of Stockholm Syndrome, it also reflects mutual emotional growth and trust, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of psychological attachment in popular media. The study provides new insights into how these dynamics are represented in film, offering a nuanced view of relationships marked by power imbalance and emotional transformation.

Keywords: Stockholm Syndrome, Attachment Theory, Trauma Bonding, Belle, *Beauty and the Beast*, Psychological Analysis, Emotional Development, Power Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The 2017 live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Bill Condon, reimagines the beloved Disney classic from 1991, providing a fresh, visually stunning take on the age-old fairy tale. At its core, the story tells of Belle, a young woman who finds herself imprisoned in a grand castle by a mysterious and seemingly cruel Beast. As the story unfolds, Belle's relationship with the Beast evolves from fear and resistance to an emotional bond marked by mutual affection and understanding. While the film has been praised for its enchanting storytelling and captivating performances, particularly Emma Watson's portrayal of Belle, it has also sparked significant psychological debate regarding the nature of the relationship between Belle and the Beast.

The central question that arises from their interaction is whether their relationship can be considered a genuine love story or if it reflects the disturbing psychological dynamics of Stockholm syndrome. Stockholm syndrome is a psychological phenomenon where victims of kidnapping or abuse begin to develop positive feelings for their captors, even defending them or forming an emotional attachment. This condition, which has been widely studied in the context of hostage situations and abusive relationships, involves a paradoxical bond that can seem illogical from an outside perspective, but which serves as a survival mechanism for the victim.

Belle's relationship with the Beast, particularly her emotional evolution, seems to mirror the characteristics of Stockholm syndrome. At first, Belle is understandably frightened and repelled by the Beast's menacing presence and his controlling nature.

However, as the narrative progresses, there are key moments where she begins to see the Beast's softer side, such as when he shares his vast library with her or when he risks his life to protect her from a pack of wolves. These instances of kindness complicate her initial fear, leading to a complex emotional attachment. Belle's emotional journey—from captivity to comfort, from fear to trust—creates a psychological complexity that invites a deeper analysis of the underlying dynamics at play in their relationship.

The controversy surrounding this relationship is not merely a debate about the classification of their bond; it is a question about how emotional connections are formed under extreme and unequal circumstances. Can genuine affection blossom in such a fraught situation, or is it the product of psychological manipulation, fear, and dependency? Is Belle's transformation a result of Stockholm syndrome, or does it reflect an evolving emotional growth that could be characterized as love?

This study aims to delve into these questions by applying psychological theories to the film's portrayal of Belle and the Beast's relationship. Specifically, the research uses Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and Trauma Bonding Theory by Patrick Carnes to explore the psychological aspects of their bond. Attachment Theory, which examines how early emotional bonds form between individuals, provides a framework for understanding the development of trust and affection between Belle and the Beast. It is through this theory that we can explore how Belle's emotional responses evolve from fear and avoidance to trust and affection.

On the other hand, Trauma Bonding Theory examines the emotional connections that develop in abusive or exploitative relationships, where the victim becomes emotionally dependent on the abuser. Carnes (1997) emphasizes that these bonds often arise in relationships characterized by cycles of abuse and affection. This theory will help illuminate the extent to which the Beast's fluctuating behavior—alternating between aggression and moments of tenderness—may contribute to the psychological dependency that Belle forms, complicating the possibility of a healthy emotional connection.

The significance of this study lies in the opportunity to analyze a popular and beloved film through a psychological lens, offering a fresh perspective on how narratives in mainstream media portray the complexities of human relationships. By examining Belle's character and her emotional journey using psychological frameworks, this research aims to add depth to our understanding of attachment dynamics and the development of emotional bonds in contexts marked by power imbalances, emotional manipulation, and trauma.

While much of the discourse surrounding *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) has focused on its fairy-tale qualities, this study seeks to unpack the psychological depth of the characters' relationship, highlighting the ways in which Belle's emotional growth might reflect elements of both healthy attachment and trauma bonding. The ultimate goal of this research is not to definitively categorize the relationship between Belle and the Beast but to explore the multifaceted nature of their emotional connection, drawing on both psychological theories and film analysis to provide a nuanced interpretation of the events.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research draws upon two psychological frameworks to analyze the relationship between Belle and the Beast: Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and Trauma Bonding Theory by Patrick Carnes. This section will focus primarily on Attachment Theory, which offers a comprehensive understanding of how emotional bonds develop, particularly under circumstances of emotional distress or fear.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory, first introduced by British psychologist John Bowlby in the mid-20th century, has become one of the most influential theories in the field of developmental psychology. Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as the emotional bond that forms between an infant and their primary caregiver, which serves as a foundational framework for understanding later relationships. According to Bowlby, these early attachment experiences shape an individual's emotional responses and interpersonal relationships throughout life. The theory suggests that attachment is a biological necessity, with the primary function being to ensure safety, protection, and the development of secure social relationships.

Bowlby's pioneering work emphasized that attachment behaviors are not merely social behaviors, but innate psychological needs. He stated, "Attachment is not merely a social behavior but an innate psychological need" (Bowlby, 1969). He posited that this bond is essential for survival, as it provides the security needed for exploration and emotional regulation. The nature of the attachment—whether it is secure or insecure—has a profound influence on how an individual interacts with others, particularly in romantic or interpersonal contexts later in life.

Attachment Theory suggests that there are distinct attachment styles that develop based on the consistency and reliability of the caregiver's responses. These styles include:

1. **Secure Attachment:** Individuals with secure attachment styles tend to have healthy, trusting relationships, characterized by emotional openness, mutual support, and effective communication. They believe that their needs will be met by others, which allows them to engage in close, intimate relationships without excessive fear or anxiety.
2. **Insecure Attachment:** This category is further divided into anxious/ambivalent attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment.
 - a. Anxious attachment occurs when individuals are uncertain about their caregiver's availability, leading to clinginess, fear of abandonment, and emotional dependency.
 - b. Avoidant attachment develops when caregivers are consistently unresponsive, leading to emotional detachment and self-reliance.
 - c. Disorganized attachment arises when the caregiver is both a source of comfort and fear, often resulting in erratic emotional responses in relationships.

Bowlby's (1973) Internal Working Model (IWM) is a central concept in Attachment Theory, proposing that early attachment experiences create mental representations of self and others. These models shape how individuals approach and interpret future relationships. According to Bowlby, "The child's attachment behavior, particularly toward the mother, is organized by the internal working models of the self and the other." These models influence how an individual perceives their worthiness of love and the trustworthiness of others. For example, a child who experiences consistent care and warmth from their caregiver will develop a positive IWM, where they believe they are deserving of love and that others can be trusted.

In the case of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), Belle's emotional development can be analyzed through the lens of Attachment Theory. Initially, Belle's attachment to the Beast is characterized by fear, isolation, and avoidance—elements typically associated with insecure attachment. Belle's reaction to the Beast is, in many ways, indicative of an anxious or avoidant attachment. She is isolated in the castle, away from her family and her familiar surroundings, and her initial interactions with the Beast are often marked by conflict, intimidation, and emotional distance. This dynamic reflects the power imbalance typical in insecure attachment, where one party has the upper hand and the other feels vulnerable.

However, as the narrative progresses, Belle's relationship with the Beast begins to evolve. She starts to notice the Beast's softer side and gradually experiences moments of

emotional safety. This shift represents the potential development of a secure attachment between Belle and the Beast. Bowlby's theory emphasizes the transformative power of attachment, where emotional bonds, even those initially formed in insecure circumstances, can develop into healthy, trusting relationships with consistent nurturing and mutual understanding.

In a secure attachment, the individual feels emotionally safe and confident in their relationship, and this security fosters the ability to share affection and trust freely. For Belle, this shift is seen when she begins to empathize with the Beast and recognizes his own emotional vulnerabilities. Their relationship evolves from one of fear and conflict to one of understanding and emotional intimacy. As Bowlby (1969) stated, "Secure attachment allows for the development of autonomy and exploration, while knowing that the individual is safe and protected." Belle's growing comfort and emotional exploration within the Beast's castle symbolize this shift toward secure attachment.

Moreover, the development of secure attachment between Belle and the Beast is also reflected in the concept of co-regulation, a key principle in Attachment Theory. Co-regulation refers to the mutual emotional influence between partners that helps both individuals regulate their emotions and behaviors. In their interactions, Belle and the Beast begin to provide emotional support for each other, especially during moments of vulnerability. For example, when the Beast rescues Belle from the wolves, his protective behavior marks the beginning of emotional interdependence, where both characters start to depend on each other for emotional support.

Criticism and Evolution of Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory has been widely accepted and influential, but it has also faced criticism and further evolution over time. Critics have argued that the theory places too much emphasis on early childhood experiences and does not adequately account for cultural or social factors that may influence attachment. Furthermore, critics suggest that Bowlby's focus on the mother-child bond may overlook the complexities of attachment in other relationships, such as those formed in adulthood or in non-parental contexts.

However, subsequent scholars have expanded Attachment Theory to address these concerns. Researchers like Mary Ainsworth (1978) further refined Bowlby's ideas by identifying different types of attachment through the Strange Situation Procedure, a controlled observation of infant attachment behaviors. Ainsworth's work underscored the importance of the caregiver's responsiveness to the child's needs in shaping attachment patterns.

Moreover, the work of Philip Shaver and Cindy Hazan (1987) extended Attachment Theory into adult romantic relationships. They posited that the attachment styles developed in childhood continue to influence adult behaviors in relationships, including romantic and intimate partnerships. According to Shaver and Hazan (1987), "Romantic love, like infant-caregiver attachment, is a fundamental emotional bond that influences behavior, emotions, and perceptions." This extension of Attachment Theory is particularly relevant when analyzing Belle and the Beast's evolving relationship, as it highlights how early attachment patterns can influence adult emotional bonds, even in relationships marked by dramatic shifts from conflict to intimacy.

Application of Attachment Theory to Belle and the Beast

In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle's emotional development from fear to trust can be interpreted through the attachment lens, reflecting the complex dynamics of developing a secure attachment in an initially threatening environment. Initially, the Beast represents a

figure of power and fear, which might trigger insecure attachment responses such as avoidance or anxious dependency. As Belle spends more time with the Beast and experiences his moments of kindness and vulnerability, these elements align with the development of secure attachment, where trust and empathy are built over time.

By analyzing Belle's journey through the principles of Attachment Theory, we can see that despite the power imbalance and initial emotional turmoil, her relationship with the Beast can be viewed as an evolving emotional bond. This bond, though initially forged under duress, transitions into a more secure attachment, where both characters demonstrate mutual respect, care, and affection. This shift is emblematic of the possibility of emotional transformation through consistent and responsive emotional exchanges, even in situations initially marked by tension and fear.

Trauma Bonding Theory

This research explores the emotional dynamics between Belle and the Beast through the lens of two psychological theories: Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and Trauma Bonding Theory by Patrick Carnes. This section will focus specifically on Trauma Bonding Theory, which offers insights into how emotional attachments form in abusive or power-imbalanced relationships.

Trauma Bonding Theory was developed by Patrick Carnes (1997) and is primarily used to explain the emotional attachment that can develop between victims and abusers, particularly in relationships marked by cycles of abuse and affection. Trauma bonding occurs when the victim becomes psychologically dependent on the abuser, often in situations where emotional manipulation, control, and abuse are interspersed with occasional affection or acts of kindness. This creates a cycle in which the victim becomes emotionally attached to their abuser despite the harm they endure.

Carnes (1997) defines trauma bonding as “dysfunctional attachments that occur in the presence of danger, shame, or exploitation,” where the victim forms an emotional connection to an abuser who alternates between periods of emotional warmth and aggression. The cycle of intermittent reinforcement, where positive reinforcement (affection) is followed by negative reinforcement (abuse), leads to psychological confusion, making it difficult for the victim to break free from the bond.

The Process of Trauma Bonding:

Carnes (1997) outlines several key components in the development of trauma bonding, which can help explain how Belle and the Beast's relationship evolve throughout the film:

1. **Power Imbalance:** The abuser typically holds all the power, and the victim feels emotionally and physically dependent on the abuser. In the case of Belle and the Beast, the Beast holds all the power by imprisoning Belle and restricting her freedom. Initially, Belle is entirely dependent on the Beast for her safety and survival, reinforcing the power imbalance.
2. **Intermittent Reinforcement:** This refers to the cycle of abuse followed by moments of kindness. In the Beast's case, he initially treats Belle harshly but later exhibits kindness and vulnerability, such as when he gives her the library or saves her from the wolves. This alternating pattern creates confusion, making Belle associate the Beast's acts of kindness with emotional safety, despite his previous cruelty. As Carnes (1997) states, “The emotional confusion created by the cycle of abuse and affection often makes the victim believe that the abuser is capable of change, fostering an unhealthy attachment.”

3. Denial of Abuse: Victims often rationalize or minimize the abusive behavior of the perpetrator, thinking that the abuse is temporary or that the abuser will change. Belle, for instance, may initially rationalize the Beast's aggressive behavior as stemming from his curse or past trauma. Over time, she may begin to internalize the belief that she is responsible for his emotional well-being, further entrenching the emotional attachment.
4. Psychological Dependency: The victim becomes emotionally dependent on the abuser, often justifying their loyalty despite harm. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle's emotional dependency on the Beast grows as she experiences moments of vulnerability and kindness, making it difficult for her to leave him. She comes to believe that only the Beast can offer her the emotional connection she seeks, even though his behavior remains inconsistent.
5. Isolation: Victims of trauma bonding are often isolated from outside support systems, which increase their reliance on the abuser. While Belle's initial isolation in the Beast's castle is physical, the isolation extends to emotional boundaries, as she feels increasingly detached from the outside world, particularly when her father is no longer part of the picture. This isolation exacerbates her emotional attachment to the Beast.

Key Components of Trauma Bonding Theory

Carnes (1997) identified that trauma bonding is not merely an attachment but a distorted bond that forms in abusive relationships. The cycle of abuse and intermittent affection leads the victim to misinterpret or distort the abuser's intentions and behavior. This psychological manipulation results in the victim feeling emotionally captive to the abuser, even when the victim realizes the harmful nature of the relationship.

As Carnes (1997) states, "In trauma bonding, the emotional bond becomes a form of psychological captivity. The victim, despite recognizing the abuse, finds it extremely difficult to break free from the attachment." This dynamic mirrors Belle's relationship with the Beast, particularly when she begins to show concern for his well-being, despite his earlier abusive and intimidating actions.

The key aspects of trauma bonding—intermittent reinforcement, power imbalance, emotional confusion, and psychological dependency—are essential for understanding the relationship between Belle and the Beast. Their bond evolves through this confusing pattern, with moments of kindness and affection intertwined with aggression and power struggles. These emotional oscillations result in Belle's growing attachment to the Beast, despite the harm he causes.

Psychological Mechanisms in Trauma Bonding

There are several psychological mechanisms that contribute to the formation and persistence of trauma bonds. These mechanisms include cognitive dissonance, emotional manipulation, and intermittent reinforcement, all of which are present in Belle and the Beast's relationship.

1. Cognitive Dissonance: This occurs when there is a conflict between one's actions and beliefs, causing psychological discomfort. Belle experiences cognitive dissonance when she feels affection for the Beast, despite his earlier cruelty. She may attempt to justify his behavior by rationalizing that he is misunderstood or cursed, which reduces the psychological tension created by the inconsistency in his behavior. As Carnes (1997) explains, "Cognitive dissonance arises when the victim's emotional attachment to the abuser conflicts with their logical understanding of the abuse."
2. Emotional Manipulation: The Beast, in various scenes, manipulates Belle emotionally, creating feelings of fear and dependency. In the scene where he locks her in her room

after an argument, he creates feelings of isolation and helplessness, which are exacerbated when he later shows signs of remorse and kindness. This pattern increases Belle's emotional dependence on the Beast, leading to a distorted sense of love and loyalty.

3. Intermittent Reinforcement: The Beast's alternating behavior between aggression and kindness creates a psychological condition where Belle is rewarded intermittently for her compliance or emotional attachment. This unpredictability leads to a stronger bond, as Belle begins to associate his moments of affection with emotional safety. Carnes (1997) notes, "Intermittent reinforcement strengthens the bond between victim and abuser, as the emotional rewards are unpredictable, yet highly reinforcing."

Trauma Bonding in Belle and the Beast

The emotional dynamics between Belle and the Beast follow the trajectory described by Trauma Bonding Theory. Initially, Belle experiences fear, isolation, and a lack of control, as she is a prisoner in the Beast's castle. However, as she spends more time with the Beast, moments of kindness—such as the Beast's saving her from wolves or giving her access to the library—begin to create emotional attachment, despite his earlier acts of aggression. This inconsistent behavior, wherein the Beast swings between kindness and cruelty, mirrors the cycle of intermittent reinforcement described by Carnes (1997). Each moment of affection from the Beast, following an instance of aggression, strengthens Belle's emotional dependency on him.

Carnes (1997) explains that trauma bonds become so powerful because the victim's emotional dependency becomes intertwined with moments of perceived affection. Belle's decision to care for the Beast, even after he has been harsh and manipulative, is a clear example of trauma bonding. She may begin to justify his behavior as a result of his curse, not fully recognizing the cycle of emotional manipulation and control at play. This emotional confusion keeps her in the bond, unable to fully break free.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the emotional and psychological dynamics between Belle and the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). The study aims to analyze the evolution of their relationship through the lenses of Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and Trauma Bonding Theory by Patrick Carnes. By focusing on specific scenes from the film, the research will examine key emotional developments, power imbalances, and the psychological factors that influence the formation of attachment between Belle and the Beast. Below are the key components of the research methodology: research design, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was chosen for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex emotional and psychological dynamics in a fictional relationship. This design is appropriate because the research focuses on understanding the underlying psychological processes at play within the narrative, rather than testing a hypothesis or quantifying data. The aim is to provide a detailed interpretation of how emotional attachment develops between Belle and the Beast, guided by psychological theories.

As the study aims to examine the psychological evolution of Belle's relationship with the Beast, it does not attempt to diagnose or classify their relationship within strict clinical

boundaries (e.g., Stockholm Syndrome). Instead, it focuses on how the dynamics of attachment and trauma bonding manifest in their interactions, using Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory as conceptual tools to analyze the relationship's psychological underpinnings.

Data Collection

The data for this study are collected through narrative analysis of selected scenes from *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), focusing on the interactions between Belle and the Beast. The scenes were chosen because they highlight key moments in the relationship where emotional transformation, conflict, and attachment dynamics are most apparent. The goal is to capture the changes in Belle's emotional development and attachment toward the Beast, as well as the shifting power dynamics between them. These scenes are rich in emotional content and provide insight into the development of attachment and emotional dependence.

These are the scenes selected which are being analyzed:

1. Belle's Initial Imprisonment (Belle's decision to stay in the castle and replace her father as the Beast's prisoner).
2. The Library Scene (The Beast's gift of the library to Belle and her subsequent emotional response).
3. The Garden Walk (The moment Belle and the Beast share a walk and engage in light-hearted conversation).
4. The Wolves Attack Scene (The Beast saves Belle from a pack of wolves, and Belle cares for him afterward).
5. The Dinner Scene (The Beast and Belle share a meal, signaling the growth of their bond).

Each of these scenes represents a turning point in the evolving emotional attachment between Belle and the Beast. They illustrate the key psychological processes outlined in Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory, such as emotional dependency, intermittent reinforcement, power imbalance, and the development of trust.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted using a narrative analysis method, which is particularly well-suited for exploring the structure and themes of the film's story. Narrative analysis allows the researcher to identify the emotional and psychological arcs of the characters, as well as the broader themes of attachment, power, and dependency that emerge in the film. This method involves closely examining the dialogue, behavior, and interactions of Belle and the Beast within the selected scenes to identify key emotional shifts and attachment behaviors.

Steps in Data Analysis

1. Scene Selection and Review: The chosen scenes are carefully reviewed multiple times to capture the nuances of the characters' emotional responses, dialogue, and actions. Key moments where attachment and emotional dependency are highlighted are identified and transcribed for detailed examination.
2. Coding and Theme Identification: Through a detailed coding process, the researcher identifies significant themes, behaviors, and patterns in the characters' interactions. Themes include emotional isolation, fear and trust, power imbalance,

empathy and care, and reciprocal affection. Each theme is linked to specific psychological theories (Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory).

3. **Application of Theories:** The identified themes are analyzed in the context of Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory. The researcher applies Bowlby's concepts of secure attachment, anxious attachment, and attachment behaviors to analyze Belle's evolving emotional responses. Meanwhile, Carnes' principles of intermittent reinforcement, psychological dependency, and power dynamics are applied to the scenes where the Beast's behavior alternates between affection and aggression.
4. **Interpretation of Findings:** Once the themes and patterns are identified, the researcher synthesizes the data to interpret how the emotional attachment between Belle and the Beast evolves over time. The analysis explores whether the relationship leans more toward genuine affection (as per Attachment Theory) or is rooted in psychological trauma (as per Trauma Bonding Theory).
5. **Narrative Construction:** The final step involves constructing a cohesive narrative that ties together the psychological analysis of Belle and the Beast's relationship, supported by relevant scenes, psychological theories, and scholarly references. This narrative provides a comprehensive understanding of how their emotional bond develops and the psychological forces at play.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study involves analyzing a fictional film, ethical considerations are still important to ensure that the analysis remains respectful and mindful of the psychological theories applied. The primary ethical concern here is the responsibility to accurately represent the psychological theories without over-interpretation or misapplication.

1. **Informed Consent**

While the film itself does not involve real participants, the study acknowledges the ethical responsibility of researchers to accurately portray psychological theories and their application to fictional characters.

2. **Cultural Sensitivity**

The analysis acknowledges the cultural significance of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) as a global media product. The interpretations offered in the study are intended to enhance understanding of the psychological dynamics within the film, not to criticize the narrative or the characters. The goal is to provide a scholarly interpretation, not a moral judgment of the film's content.

3. **Limitations**

The research methodology is inherently limited by the subjective nature of narrative analysis. Different viewers may interpret the scenes and characters in various ways, which could lead to alternative interpretations of the psychological dynamics. This study aims to offer one interpretation based on established psychological theories, but recognizes the validity of other possible readings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the emotional dynamics between Belle and the Beast through the lens of Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory. Each scene from the film is analyzed to demonstrate how these psychological theories are reflected in their relationship, exploring the psychological processes of emotional growth, dependency, trust-building, and manipulation.

Attachment Theory Analysis

Attachment Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the emotional evolution of Belle's relationship with the Beast. Early in the film, Belle's attachment to the Beast can be categorized as insecure, marked by fear, isolation, and emotional distance. However, as the narrative progresses, Belle's trust in the Beast increases, reflecting the development of a secure attachment. The following scenes highlight key moments in their emotional transformation:

Scene 1: Belle's Emotional Transformation

In this pivotal scene, the Beast gifts Belle access to his magnificent library, which becomes a symbolic gesture of emotional connection. This act of empathy and appreciation is a turning point in the relationship, as it acknowledges Belle's intellectual curiosity and shows the Beast's desire to cater to her needs beyond basic survival or captivity. Bowlby's Attachment Theory posits that attachment behaviors are driven by the need to establish security and trust. In this context, the Beast's gesture can be seen as an attempt to create a secure attachment by offering Belle something meaningful to her.

Belle's reaction to the library gift reveals her emotional shift from fear to admiration. Initially, she stands in awe, clearly fascinated by the vast collection of books. As she explores the library, her admiration for the Beast grows, and she begins to express genuine joy, even laughing at the beauty of the library. Bowlby (1969) notes that "attachment bonds grow through positive experiences of comfort, empathy, and responsiveness." In this moment, the Beast demonstrates these qualities, and Belle responds with an emotional shift from initial anxiety and discomfort to comfort and fascination.

The shift in Belle's emotional state signals a gradual transition from insecure to secure attachment. Early in the film, Belle exhibits signs of anxious attachment, such as fear of the Beast and discomfort with her circumstances. As the narrative progresses, however, this anxiety is replaced by trust and affection, marking a psychological transformation towards a more secure emotional connection. Her growing sense of comfort in the Beast's presence, coupled with her ability to laugh and enjoy moments of mutual understanding, reflects the development of a secure attachment. Bowlby (1973) asserts that secure attachment is characterized by "the ability to form stable, trusting relationships", and this scene reflects Belle's increasing ability to trust the Beast, setting the stage for deeper emotional intimacy.

Scene 2: Belle and the Beast's Garden Walk

Another important scene that exemplifies Attachment Theory occurs when Belle and the Beast take a walk together in the garden. This scene is particularly significant because it marks a moment of emotional openness and mutual respect. As they walk through the lush garden, Belle reads aloud a fairy tale, and the Beast, for the first time, expresses awe at the beauty of the world. This marks the beginning of their emotional connection beyond the initial fear-based attachment.

The absence of tension in this scene is particularly noteworthy. Unlike earlier interactions, which were often fraught with emotional conflict and power struggles, this scene is characterized by comfort and ease. The Beast no longer appears as an intimidating figure; instead, he is portrayed as emotionally vulnerable, admiring the beauty of the garden and engaging in a lighthearted conversation with Belle. This emotional openness and the shared experience of wonder signal the transition toward a healthier, secure attachment. Belle's ability to smile, laugh, and openly engage with the Beast without fear or hesitation

is a strong indication of her emotional development. Bowlby (1979) emphasized that secure attachment “enables individuals to engage in emotional exploration, knowing that they have a reliable figure to return to for emotional support.” In this scene, both characters demonstrate emotional security, as they share a moment of connection without fear or insecurity, further cementing their growing bond.

This scene also represents the emotional co-regulation that develops between Belle and the Beast. Co-regulation is the process through which individuals in secure relationships help each other regulate emotions, providing emotional support and balance. Bowlby (1988) highlighted the importance of co-regulation in secure attachment, asserting that it enables individuals to manage emotional fluctuations and challenges in a relationship. In this context, the Beast’s willingness to engage in a vulnerable moment with Belle—expressing awe and appreciation—serves as an example of emotional support that strengthens their attachment bond.

Trauma Bonding Theory Analysis:

While Belle and the Beast’s relationship evolves toward a secure attachment, Trauma Bonding Theory provides an additional layer of complexity, particularly in the earlier stages of their relationship. Trauma Bonding Theory explains how emotional dependency can form in situations where the victim is exposed to cycles of abuse and intermittent affection, which are essential components of trauma bonding. Carnes (1997) describes trauma bonding as “the emotional attachment that develops between a victim and their abuser in the context of ongoing cycles of abuse and intermittent kindness”. This dynamic is evident in several key scenes:

Scene 1: Belle’s Self-Sacrifice

At the beginning of the film, Belle willingly takes her father’s place as the Beast’s prisoner, despite the Beast’s intimidating behavior and threats of violence. This moment is marked by emotional manipulation and psychological tension, which reflect the early stages of trauma bonding. Carnes (1997) notes that trauma bonding often begins with “power imbalance and emotional manipulation”, and this scene exemplifies those characteristics. Belle’s decision to sacrifice her freedom for her father’s safety, despite the Beast’s threats, illustrates the psychological dependence that develops in trauma bonding. She is not only physically isolated but also emotionally tied to the Beast, who holds all the power in the situation.

This act of self-sacrifice—done out of love for her father—leads to emotional confusion, as Belle is torn between her fear of the Beast and her desire to protect her father. The power imbalance between them is stark: the Beast has the control, while Belle is left vulnerable and dependent on him for her safety. Carnes (1997) explains that “victims of trauma bonding often feel psychologically and emotionally dependent on their abusers, believing that they can’t survive without them”. This dynamic is at play here, as Belle’s emotional attachment begins to form not out of love for the Beast, but out of fear, dependence, and the overwhelming desire to care for others—a theme that will continue throughout the film.

Scene 2: The Beast’s Rescue of Belle

A pivotal moment in the relationship comes when the Beast saves Belle from a pack of wolves. After Belle is injured, the Beast risks his life to rescue her, and despite earlier cruelty, Belle decides to return to him, showing concern for his well-being. This act of self-sacrifice by the Beast creates a psychological shift in Belle’s attachment. The cycle of abuse

and affection, as described in Trauma Bonding Theory, is evident here: the Beast's aggression and cruelty are temporarily forgiven because of his protective action.

Carnes (1997) suggests that trauma bonding "reinforces emotional attachment by alternating between aggression and protection, making it difficult for the victim to break free from the bond." In this scene, Belle's emotional attachment to the Beast is strengthened by his act of protection. Despite the Beast's earlier actions, the display of kindness causes Belle to overlook past cruelty, deepening her emotional dependence on him. Her willingness to care for the Beast—even after the emotional harm he caused—reflects the distorted bond formed through trauma bonding. Carnes (1997) states that "trauma bonds make victims feel compelled to care for and protect their abusers, even if it means self-sacrifice."

CONCLUSION

This study examined the complex emotional dynamics between Belle and the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) through the lens of Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory. By analyzing key scenes from the film, we explored how Belle's relationship with the Beast evolves from fear and isolation to trust and affection, reflecting the psychological principles underlying attachment and emotional dependency.

Through the framework of Attachment Theory, we observed Belle's emotional development from an insecure attachment to a more secure attachment over the course of the film. Early in the story, Belle is fearful and distrustful of the Beast, reflecting an insecure attachment characterized by anxiety and avoidance. However, as the Beast begins to show kindness and empathy, particularly through the library gift and their garden walk, Belle's emotional state shifts. These gestures of emotional security and comfort foster the development of trust and mutual respect, which are key features of a secure attachment. The growing emotional openness between Belle and the Beast, particularly in moments of shared vulnerability, demonstrates how secure attachment can form even in initially challenging and fearful circumstances.

At the same time, Trauma Bonding Theory illuminated the manipulative and emotionally dependent aspects of Belle and the Beast's relationship, particularly in the early stages. The power imbalance between them, as seen in Belle's self-sacrifice—taking her father's place as the Beast's prisoner—sets the stage for the development of trauma bonding. Intermittent reinforcement, where the Beast oscillates between aggression and affection, creates emotional confusion, reinforcing the bond between them despite the power and emotional manipulation. The scene where the Beast saves Belle from the wolves exemplifies the cycle of trauma bonding, where protection temporarily replaces the earlier harm caused by his cruelty. Belle's decision to stay with the Beast and care for him after his earlier acts of aggression deepens her emotional attachment, illustrating the psychological complexity of trauma bonding.

The interplay between Attachment Theory and Trauma Bonding Theory in this film highlights the multifaceted nature of emotional attachment. On one hand, Belle's emotional growth can be understood through the principles of Attachment Theory, with her evolving from a state of insecurity to one of emotional safety and trust. On the other hand, elements of Trauma Bonding Theory provide insight into how manipulation, emotional dependency, and intermittent reinforcement can complicate the nature of their bond, especially early in the film. The Beast's alternating behavior—switching from cruelty to kindness—creates a psychologically confusing environment for Belle, where the emotional highs and lows reinforce her attachment to him, despite the power imbalance and earlier abuse.

Ultimately, Belle's emotional journey represents a dynamic process of transformation. Her initial fear and dependence give way to mutual respect and affection, signaling the potential for emotional healing and growth. However, the trauma bonding dynamics that are present complicate the interpretation of their relationship, suggesting that while emotional growth is possible, it is not without psychological manipulation and emotional confusion. The film thus portrays a complex emotional narrative, where love and dependency intertwine with emotional distress and psychological power struggles.

In conclusion, the relationship between Belle and the Beast is a nuanced portrayal of emotional attachment, where both secure attachment and trauma bonding dynamics coexist. The film provides a rich psychological landscape that can be interpreted through these theories, offering valuable insights into how emotional connections can evolve in power-imbalanced and emotionally charged relationships. This analysis encourages a deeper understanding of attachment behaviors and trauma bonds, which are central to many complex emotional relationships in both fiction and real life. By examining these dynamics, we gain a greater appreciation for the psychological depth of *Beauty and the Beast* and the multidimensional nature of love, dependence, and emotional growth.

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