

Object Relations Theory

Freud proposed “Instincts have four basic characteristics:

- (1) a *source* in some bodily deficit [sexual deprivation]
- (2) an *aim*—gratification of the need [i.e., release of sexual energy]
- (3) an *impetus* that propels the person to act
- (4) an *object* through which the instinct achieves its aim.

Melanie Klein

Object means another person (can mean other things too but let’s not get into that)

Mental representation: is the internal, mental representation of an object

External Object: an actual person in the world that a person has invested with emotional energy

Internal Object: a person’s representation of another such as a reflection of a child’s way of relating to the mother.

Self: An internal image. Conscious and unconscious mental representations of oneself.

Self-representation: A person's inner representation of himself or herself as experienced in relation to significant others.

W.R.D. Fairbairn

Concerned with the **relationships between people** than with the “**drives**” within them.

Early relationships with parents shapes the emotional life of the child and determines the emotional experiences that the child will have later in life, because the early libidinal objects become the prototypes for all later experience of connection with others.

Introject (i.e., mentally take in)

Splitting

“Rjected object”

“Ideal Mother object”

“Central self.”

Otto Kernberg and Margaret Mahler

[Object relationship is associated to a range of] clinical psychopathological phenomena, on what Anna Freud has called developmental disturbances, which the developmental flux of energy may even out during later development, or which, in certain instances, may be precursors of infantile neurosis or middle range pathology. In rare cases, in which the subphase development was severely disordered or unsuccessful, we found, as did others such as Frijling-Schreuder, Kernberg, and G and R Blanck, that borderline phenomena or borderlines states, and even psychosis may result. Mahler, 1975

Borderline Personalities

1. A pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self image, and affect
2. Marked impulsivity
3. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment

“...observations are interpreted with psychodynamic constructs including the “...confluence of prevalent

conflicts deriving from separation-individuation factors with those deriving from the following oedipal period” (Kernberg, 1980, p. 112)

Primitive Ego Defense Mechanisms

“... protect the ego from conflicts by means of dissociating or actively keeping apart contradictory experiences of the self and of significant others” (Kernberg, 1980, p. 6).

Mahler uses “identity to refer to the earliest awareness of a sense of being, of entity—a feeling that includes in part, we believe, a cathexis of the body with libidinal energy. **It is not a sense of *who* I am but *that* I am.**”
Mahler, 1975

Separation or Separateness

“The psychological birth of the human infant.”

The Normal Autistic Phase

0 to 3 Months

Self undifferentiated

Normal Symbiotic Phase

3 to 4 Months

Symbiosis

Differentiation Phase

(4 to 6 Months)

“Hatching from mother-infant symbiotic common orbit”

Splitting is a primitive defense mechanism whereby the positive and negative memories are kept separate and

Practicing Phase

(5 to 16 Months)

Rapprochement Phase

(15 to 22 Months and Beyond)

Toddler phase

separation anxiety

Object Constancy

