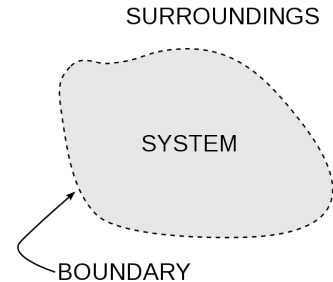
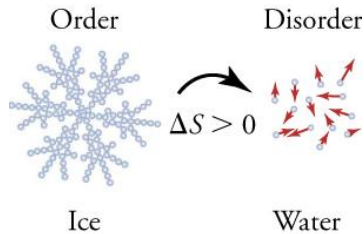

Character Structure - An Object Relations Perspective

— Homayoun Shahri, PhD, MA, —
CBT, LMFT

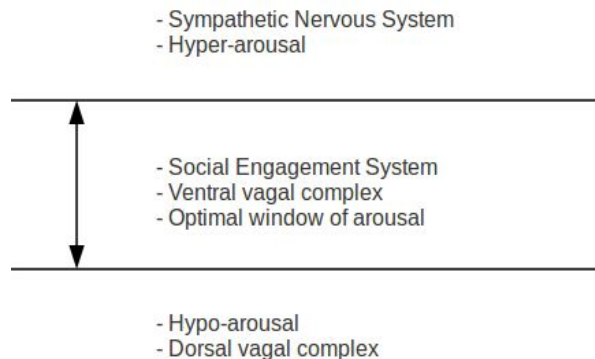
Life and Entropy

- Life feeds on negative entropy (Erwin Schrodinger - What is life)
- Entropy is a measure of uncertainty and disorder
- Entropy is always positive and always increases
- Conditions of negative entropy imply an increase in entropy elsewhere
- It is possible for an open system to reduce its entropy at the cost of increasing it elsewhere
- If soma feeds on negative entropy, so should the psyche (Shahri, 2022)



Character Structure

- Character structure is the optimal strategy for surviving the developmental trauma
- “Frustration of his desire to be loved as a person and to have his love accepted is the greatest trauma that a child can experience” (Fairbairn)



Life inside the womb

- Fetus is undifferentiated from its environment
- Primitive Central Nervous System develops late in pregnancy
- Inside the womb the negative entropy is maintained by the environment (mother)



Life Inside the Womb And Stress - Schizophrenia

- No sense of self - "I" and no sense of separateness
- Fetal exposure to maternal stress increases the risk for schizophrenia
(Fineberg AM, Ellman LM, Schaefer CA, Maxwell SD, Shen L, Chaudhury NH, Cook AL, Bresnahan MA, Susser ES, Brown AS. Fetal exposure to maternal stress and risk for schizophrenia spectrum disorders among offspring: Differential influences of fetal sex. *Psychiatry Res.* 2016 Feb 28;236:91-97. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2015.12.026. Epub 2015 Dec 18. PMID: 26753951; PMCID: PMC4767153.)
- Schizophrenic has no self, he is only a response to others, and he has no identity of his own (R.D. Laing - The divided self)

Life Inside the Womb and Schizophrenia (in search of an identity)

- Lack of self-presence reduces the awareness of being the author of one's own thoughts and actions
- An overwhelming sense of vanishing "me"
- Schizophrenic feels like the vacuum, empty - But this emptiness is him
- Fear of complete loss of self by absorption into the other person (engulfment), or complete aloneness (isolation) (R.D. Laing)
- The main defense of schizophrenic from the dread of engulfment is isolation (R.D. Laing)
- This is the schizophrenic stage of development
- Case of Steve

Life Outside the Womb - Attachment and Bonding

- When the infant is born, it leaves the world of undifferentiated existence and enters the world of undifferentiated objects in a state of shock
- He experiences everything as part of himself (Ainsworth, Object relations ...)
- Not feeling undifferentiated with his new world, the infant in order to reduce the entropy, incorporates his world - He makes the world a part of himself in order to control it (this is what the immune system does, as well as single cell life forms) and also to allay his existential fears
- The infant takes on the environmental frustration and faces his fears internally through the incorporated world of objects
- The external world is incorporated in his body in places where the infant is aware of
- Central nervous system is one of the first parts of the body that develops (0 to 8 weeks)
- The infant later becomes aware of his joints, skin (8 weeks), and digestive system (2-3 months) (Department of Health - Government of Western Australia)

Life Outside the Womb - Schizoid

- To reduce entropy, the infant attempts to control and gain mastery over the incorporated frustrating world of undifferentiated objects within himself
- He may give up the struggle or fight for mastery which may result in deadness where the outside world is incorporated - Resignation
- He may stiffen those areas of his body to control them - Fight
- In rare situations his body may mount an immune attack on the parts of his body where the external world is incorporated and his body may attack itself resulting in autoimmune disorders (fight) or if not successful, he may give up possibly resulting in cancer (resignation - Reich) in severe cases
- Case of Annie (very early trauma)
- Case of Elizabeth (early trauma)

Life Outside the Womb

- The infant gradually progresses from incorporating the world of undifferentiated objects to incorporating the world of differentiated objects which are immediately needed by him
- The mother's breast (as a part object) is one of the first such objects
- This stage coincides with the transition from the schizoid stage of development to the oral stage where the infant begins to incorporate the breast (part object) into his digestive system which at this point is within his awareness

Life Outside the Womb - Transition from incorporation to symbiosis - Early Oral

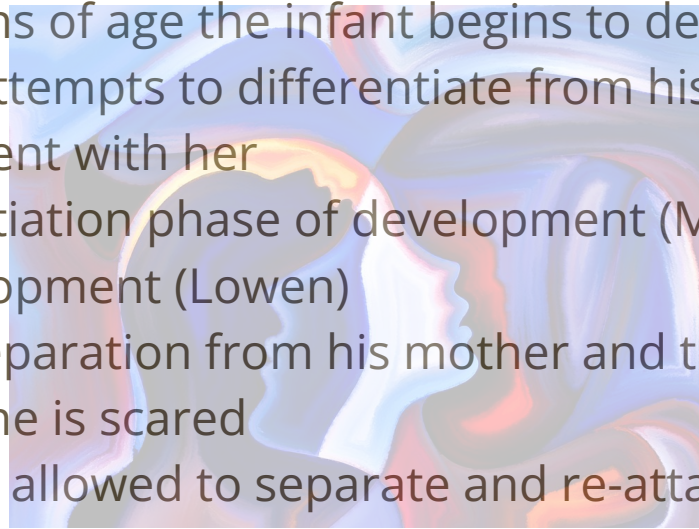
- The infant gradually begins to relate to the part object (breast) as an extension of himself
- If traumatized during this stage, the infant withdraws from the part object (breast) in search of security to the internal world as he had done before by incorporation
- He goes in and out of relationships as an adult - he is neither in nor out
- He has equally strong needs for and fears of close personal relationships (Guntrip - Schizoid phenomena)
- If traumatized at this stage, the person dreads that a close relationship will involve loss of freedom and independence and consequently withdraws to his internal world

World of Objects - Oral Stage of Development - Symbiosis

- The infant slowly transitions from relating to the breast of the mother as a part object to the mother with a breast (oral)
- This is the beginning of the symbiotic phase of development (Mahler), as well as the oral stage of development (Lowen)
- The mother with the breast now emerges as an extension of the infant
- The infant transitions slowly from experiencing the mother as an extension of himself to experiencing himself and his mother as being mutually dependent - symbiosis
- She (mother) and the infant are now symbiotically attached
- The mother must remain attuned to her infant so that the symbiosis is not interfered with

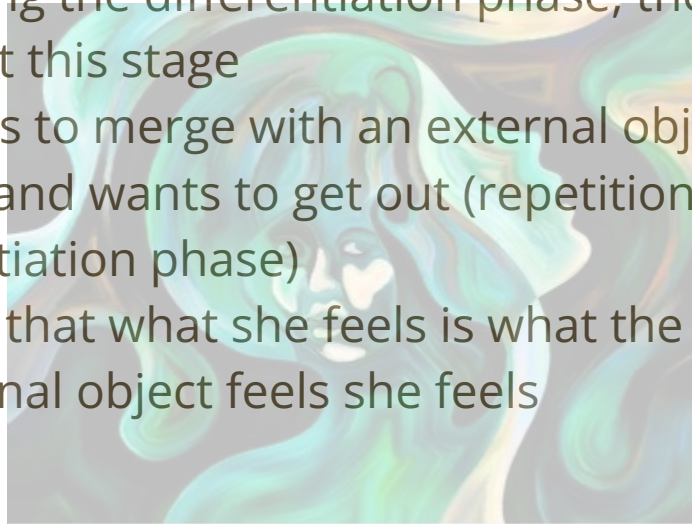
The Borderline Stage - Transition from Symbiosis to full object relations

- At about 5-6 months of age the infant begins to develop a very primitive sense of self and attempts to differentiate from his mother and the symbiotic attachment with her
- This is the differentiation phase of development (Mahler) or part of the oral stage of development (Lowen)
- The infant seeks separation from his mother and then back to symbiotic attachment when he is scared
- The infant must be allowed to separate and re-attach when he needs to
- Traumatic experiences during this period result in borderline organization



The Borderline Stage

- If traumatized during the differentiation phase, the infant (later the adult) would get fixated at this stage
- Externally she seeks to merge with an external object and once merged kicks and screams and wants to get out (repetition of her experience during the differentiation phase)
- Internally she feels that what she feels is what the external object feels and what the external object feels she feels



World of Object Relations - Self in Development

- By the end of the differentiation phase the infant has developed a primitive ego (9 months of age)
- The process of incorporation of external world and objects and the symbiotic attachment transitions slowly to separation and then internalization of external objects within the primitive psyche
- The infant now incorporates the objects in his psyche - internalization
- The infant first splits the external object (mother) into the good and the bad object. He idealizes the good object which is needed for survival and internalizes the bad object in order to control it, gain mastery over it, and predict it, thus reducing the entropy
- His brain forms neural networks that resemble those of the bad object (Neuroscience perspective into internalization)

World of Object Relations

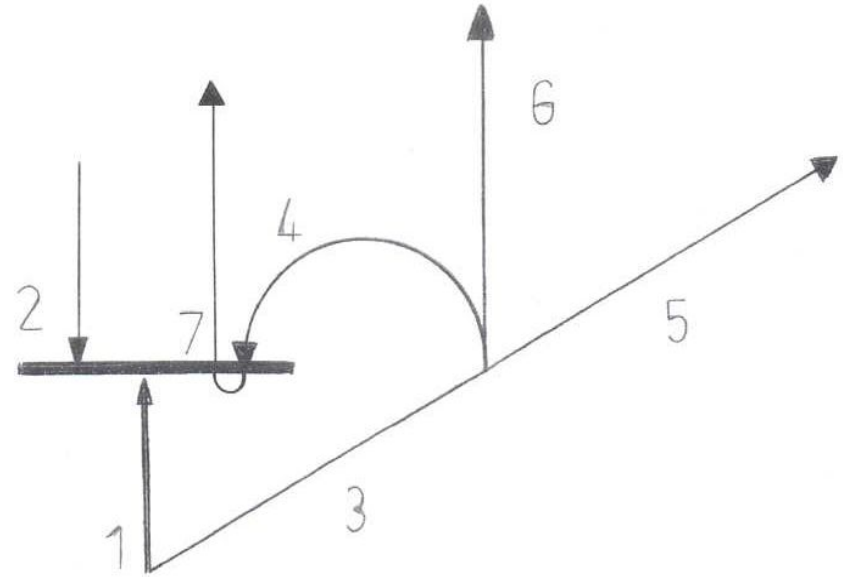
- The infant then splits the internalized bad object into two (Fairbairn)
 - A rejecting object (RO)
 - An exciting object (EO)
- The rejecting object represents the punitive and frustrating aspects of the bad object
- The exciting object represents the exciting and alluring but unsatisfying aspects of the bad object
- This split induces a split within the ego of the child - an anti-libidinal ego (related to RO), and a libidinal ego (related to EO)
- Anti-libidinal ego roughly corresponds to the superego and the libidinal ego contains aspects of the id
- Anti-libidinal ego is punitive while the libidinal ego seeks objects that are exciting but unavailable

World of Object Relations

- There is also what remains of the original ego before the split which Fairbairn calls the central ego (CE) - This is the ego of everyday life
- The central ego corresponds to the narcissistic line of development (Kohut)
- Central ego is generally weak and may come under attack by the anti-libidinal ego
- The central ego needs mirroring and idealizing self-objects to compensate for its weakness (Self-object is the experience of an object as part of the self)
- The anti-libidinal ego may also attack the libidinal ego

Object Relations - Pictorial

1. Impulse
2. Environmental negativity
3. Impulse seeks a new direction
4. Anti-libidinal ego
5. Libidinal ego
6. Central ego
7. Muscular armor

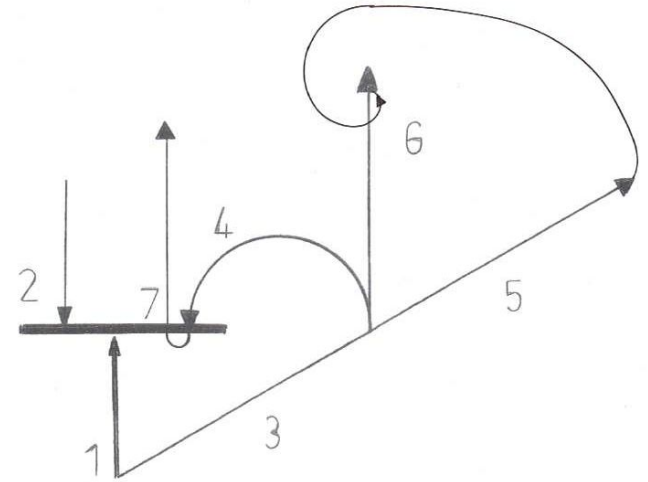


Practicing Stage - Narcissistic Stage of Development

- When the infant successfully differentiates from his mother (9+ months of age), he starts exploring his newly found world using his primitive locomotion skills
- His newly discovered abilities give him a sense of omnipotence
- He will inevitably fail and will feel shame
- If the infant's failures are not treated with sensitivity and empathy, he will be traumatized and in response attempts to rise above his shame - narcissism is the result

Narcissism

- The libidinal ego (LE) cathects the central ego (CE) as its libidinal object (Celani, 2014)
- The central ego becomes the exciting object for the libidinal ego
- The CE develops a sense of omnipotence
- The LE's energy feeds CE's omnipotence

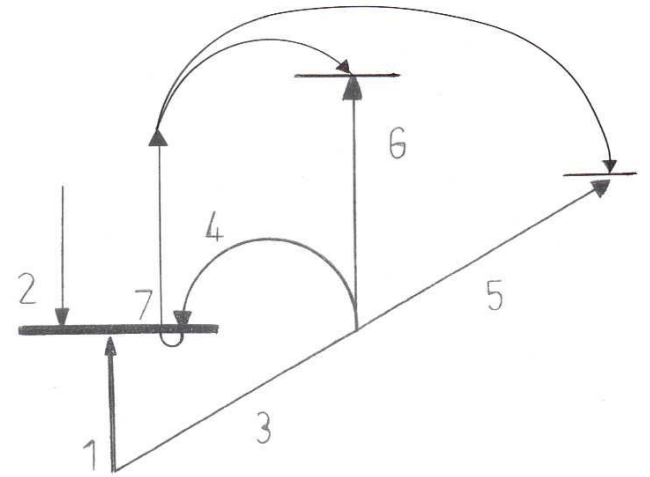


Autonomy Stage - Masochistic Stage

- If the toddler navigates through the practicing stage unscathed, he will enter the next phase where he will face many rules and regulations
- If the toddler's autonomy is not respected in that he is a person in his own right, he will be traumatized, especially when the restriction of his autonomy occurs under the guise of love
- The toddler will develop a strong anti-libidinal ego (superego)

Masochism

- The anti-libidinal ego attacks the libidinal ego and the central ego
- Libidinal strivings of the LE will be curtailed by the anti-libidinal ego and strong muscular contractions limit expression of impulses and movement
- Central ego and libidinal ego are weak
- Pleasurable experiences are limited

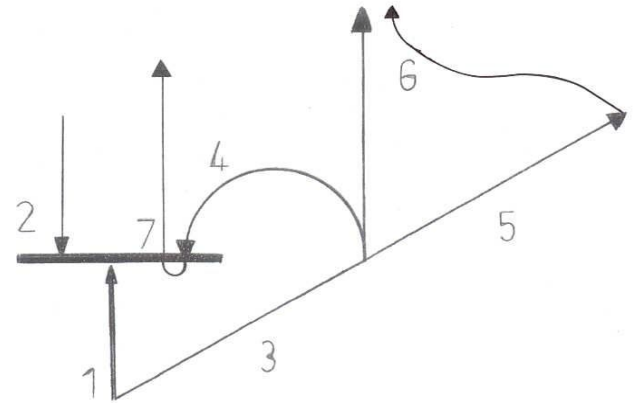


Genital phase - Self in the System

- If the toddler navigates through the autonomy stage unharmed, he will enter the Oedipal phase
- He now becomes aware of his primitive sexuality and finds himself in a triangle along with his mother and father
- He sees his opposite sex parent as a libidinal object and his same sex parent as a rival and a rejecting object
- If his newly formed sexual awareness is repressed or used by the parents the toddler will be traumatized and will respond either by becoming an achiever or a phallic narcissist/hysteric

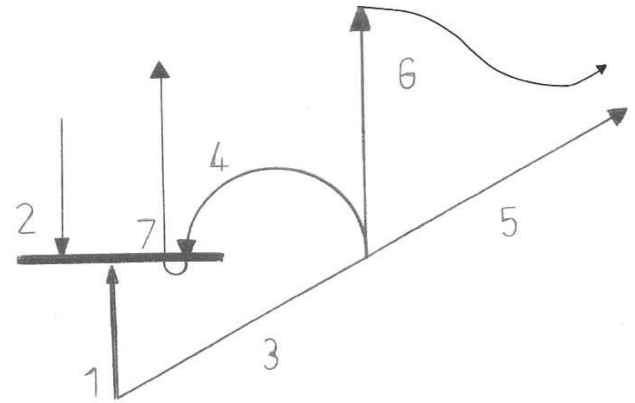
Genital or Rigid Character - Achiever

- The libidinal ego supports the central ego
- He needs to prove himself and achieve in order to gain the love/acceptance of the opposite sex parent and prevail over his same sex parent



Genital or Rigid Character - Phallic Narcissist or hysteric

- The central ego supports the aims of the libidinal ego
- He seeks the exciting objects to prove his sexual potency and to possess his opposite sex parent and prevail over his rival - the same sex parent



Treatment

- “If it is bad human relationships that make people emotionally ill, it can only be a good human relationship that can make them well again.” Guntrip - Personal Relations Therapy
- “When a limbic connection has established a neural pattern, it takes a limbic connection to revise it.” Lewis, Amini, & Lannon - A general theory of love
- “The resistance can only really be overcome when the transference situation has developed to a point at which the analyst has become such a good object to the patient that the latter is prepared to risk the release of bad objects from the unconscious.” Fairbairn - Psychoanalytic studies of personality
- The therapist must become a usable object for the client (Winnicott)

Treatment

- Schizophrenic stage - undifferentiation
 - The client lacks identity
 - The therapist must be careful not to engulf the client
 - The therapist must remain present with the client in a loving way but maintaining his separation
 - “It was terribly hard for me to stop being a schizophrenic. I knew I didn’t want to be a Smith (her family name), because then I was nothing but old Professor Smith’s granddaughter. I could not be sure as though I was your child, and I wasn’t sure of myself. The only thing I was sure of was being a ‘catatonic, paranoid and schizophrenic’. I had seen that written on my chart. That at least has substance and gave me an identity and personality. [What let you to change?] When I was sure that you would let me feel like your child and that you would care for me lovingly. If you could like the real me, then I could too. I could allow myself just to be me and didn’t need a title.” Laing - The Divided Self

Treatment

- Schizoid stage - incorporation
 - The therapist must allow himself to be incorporated by the client
 - If the therapist is able to maintain a loving presence with the client and allow incorporation, the client will let go of the need to hold together and will experience the therapist as the good object and will claim his body as his own and will integrate
 - “The experience of ‘being’ is the beginning and basis for the realization of the potentialities in our raw human nature for developing as a ‘person’ in personal relationships”. Guntrip - Schizoid phenomena, object relations and the self

Treatment

- Oral Character - Symbiotic
 - The therapist must allow symbiotic attachment and dependency by the client
 - The clients must first become dependent before they can become independent
 - "To be capable of development to full maturity, the ego must begin to differentiate out of a basic experience of full security in the mutual identification of mother and infant." Guntrip. H - Schizoid phenomena, object relations and the self

Treatment

- Borderline organization - unseparated
 - Lacking object constancy (the ability to perceive objects in an integrated way)
 - The therapist must remain as a consistent figure in client's life - that is not to be affected by client's changing perception of him - idealization and devaluation
 - The therapist must help the client to integrate the conflicting aspects of himself with the therapist providing the safe holding environment
 - "People with BPD are like people with third degree burns over 90% of their bodies. Lacking emotional skin, they feel agony at the slightest touch or movement." Linehan

Treatment

- Narcissism - Rising above the shame
 - Due to weakness of ego, the narcissist needs the empathic presence of the therapist who should become a mirroring and idealizing selfobject to him in order for his core narcissistic wounds to heal
 - "...man can no more survive psychologically in a psychological milieu that does not respond empathetically to him, than he can survive physically in an atmosphere that contains no oxygen." Kohut

Treatment

- Autonomy - Masochism
 - Strong anti-libidinal ego (super ego)
 - His defiance and defenses must be honored
 - Client's autonomy must be respected and encouraged
 - "The wounds produced by the traumas of our life may heal, but the scars remain. We cannot return to our original state of innocence. There will always be some limitation upon our being." Lowen, Fear of Life

Treatment

- Rigid - Achiever and phallic narcissist/hysteric
 - Strong central ego and libidinal ego
 - The therapist must be a good enough object for the client to feel that he is OK and he will be loved even if he fails and that he is accepted for who he is - No need to prove himself in rivalry (achieving) or in romance (hysteric or phallic narcissist)
 - “The neurotic person struggles to win over himself. In this, of course, he must fail. Failure seems to mean submission to an acceptable fate, but actually it amounts to self-acceptance, which makes change possible. To the degree that most people in Western culture are struggling to be different, they are neurotic. And since this is a fight one can't win, all who engage in this struggle will fail. Strangely, though by acceptance of failure, we become free from our neurosis.” Lowen - Fear of Life

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