

# 09 - Object relations theory

## Object relations theory

© SPMM Course this by presenting himself as the moving object, the goslings imprinted by Lorenz followed him and refused to follow mother goose. Imprinting is particularly resistant to change. Innate releasing mechanism (IRM) refers to the sensory mechanism selectively responsive to a specific external stimulus and responsible for triggering the stereotyped motor response. Fixed action pattern (FAP) is an inherent pattern of behaviour initiated by specific stimuli. It consists of species-specific, stereotyped movements e.g. following behaviour in goslings. Object relations theory According to object relations theory - the ego exists only in relation to other objects, which may be external or internal. 'Object' refers to both living persons and non-living concepts. Melanie Klein was a major proponent of what came to be known as Object relation theory later. Other prominent theorists include Fairbairn, Kernberg, Guntrip, Winnicott and Balint. Kleinian theory: □ Play interpretation was the major technique employed □ Maintained that oedipal development occurred earlier than what Freud envisaged □ According to Klein, an infant possessed instinctual knowledge of the body. □ Weaning is symbolically equivalent to castration □ Klein's stages are not age specific - but the PSP and DP are said to occur between 0-3 months (very early) □ Kleinian defenses - SIPDOG i.e. Splitting, introjection, projective identification, Denial, omnipotence and grandiosity Winnicott's concepts: □ Children's psychological development occurs in a zone between reality and fantasy called transitional zone. Play is an important aspect of development of a child. □ Transitional object refers to a soft toy, towel or any such objects that help in transition from ideal objects of fantasy to real objects which are not as reliable as those in fantasy. These serve as buffers against the loss, get invested with primary object's qualities e.g. mother's contact but remain under the control of the child. □ Good enough mother concept refers to the fact that a mother need not be perfect - but good enough to provide growth sustaining environment (holding). □ Parental control and impositions can lead to the development of a false self-different from the real self (theory of multiple self-organizations).

© SPMM Course A flowchart describing Kleinian theory of infant's ('object-') relationship with the mother Soon after birth, fear of annihilation is present. This cannot be tolerated by the child and projects this destructive impulse to external objects.

Projection of both bad and good impulses occurs followed by splitting of the external world into good and bad. Cannot unify these elements into one. Bad objects include nongratifying bad breasts (parts). This leads to persecutory anxiety, and the child is said to be in Paranoid -schizoid position.

Later the child realizes that both good and bad things emanate from the unified single object (whole). At same time weaning occurs - perceived as a loss. Subsequent guilt develops for having

destructive impulses against the mother. Depressive position – fear of loss of the love of object.

Reparation phase – creativity emanates as an attempt to repair damage done by ‘destructive impulse’. Continues lifelong. In the absence of reparation, a maladaptive defense called manic defense can emerge characterized by denial of reality (refusal to take guilt), omnipotence and grandiosity.

---

Revision #1

Created 2026-01-04 20:02:21 UTC by Omar Ayman

Updated 2026-01-04 20:02:21 UTC by Omar Ayman