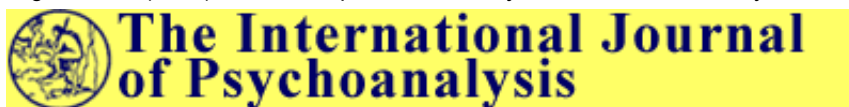


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The Concept of Internal Object Relations

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Object relations theory, although often erroneously thought to be an exclusively interpersonal theory that diverts attention from the unconscious, is in fact fundamentally a theory of unconscious internal¹ object relations in dynamic interplay with current interpersonal experience. The analysis of internal object relations centres upon the exploration of the relationship between internal objects and the ways in which the patient resists altering these unconscious internal object relations in the face of current experience. Classical theory does not include a concept of internal objects. Instead there are related and in part overlapping concepts of memory traces, mental representations of self and object, introjects, identifications, and psychic structures.

It is the thesis of the present paper that the 'internalization' of an object relationship necessarily involves a splitting of the ego² into parts that when repressed constitute internal objects which stand in a particular unconscious relationship to one another. This internal relationship is shaped by the nature of the original object relationship, but does not by any means bear a one-to-one correspondence with it, and is in addition potentially modifiable by subsequent experience. The internal object relationship may be later re-externalized by means of projection and projective identification in an interpersonal setting thus generating the transference and countertransference phenomena of analysis and all other interpersonal interactions.

It will further be proposed that internal objects be thought of as dynamically unconscious suborganizations of the ego capable of generating meaning and experience, i.e. capable of thought, feeling and perception. These suborganizations stand in unconscious relationships to one another and include (1) self-suborganizations of ego, i.e. aspects of the ego in which the person more fully experiences his ideas and feelings as his own, and (2) object suborganizations of ego through which meanings are generated in a mode based upon an identification of an aspect of the ego with the object. This identification with the object is so thorough that one's original sense of self is almost entirely lost. This conception of internal object relations goes well beyond the classical notion of self and object mental representations (cf. Hartmann, 1964); (Jacobson, 1964); (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962). What is being proposed here is the idea that the ego is split into parts each capable of generating experience and that some of these subdivisions of ego generate experience in a mode modelled after one's sense of an object in an early object relationship while others generate experience in a mode that remains fixed in a pattern congruent with one's experience of oneself in the same early object relationship. The two parts of the ego remain linked and when repressed constitute an unconscious internal object relationship.

This conceptualization of internal object relations is an outgrowth of the work of Freud, Abraham, Melanie Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott and Bion. Although there are significant theoretical differences amongst this group of analysts, the concept of internal objects has been handled by each of them in such a way as to lay the groundwork for the next in what together constitutes in my view the central line of thought of object relations theory. The contribution of

¹ In this paper, the term *internal* will be used to refer not to a geographic locale, but to an intrapersonal event, (i.e. involving a single personality system) as opposed to an interpersonal interaction involving two or more different people.

² The term *ego* will be used to refer to an aspect of personality capable of generating conscious and unconscious psychological meanings including perceptual meanings, cognitive meanings, emotional meanings, etc. As development proceeds, this aspect of personality becomes increasingly capable not only of organizing and linking individual meanings in the process of thinking, remembering, loving, hating, etc., but also of regulating to some extent the relationship between suborganizations of ego that have been split off from the original whole.

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each of these analysts to the concept of internal object relationships will be discussed. On the basis of the mutually enhancing contributions of these analysts, an integrated conception of the nature of internal object relations will be presented. It will then be shown how an understanding of the clinical phenomena of transference, countertransference and resistance is enriched when viewed from the perspective of the theory of internal objects proposed in this paper.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY OF INTERNAL OBJECTS

Freud neither used the term *internal objects* nor did he generate a conceptualization equivalent to that which will be discussed as an object relations conception of internal objects. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he referred to unconscious memory traces and implied that they had the power to perpetuate the feelings involved in the forgotten early experience, to attract attention to themselves in the course of dream and symptom formation and to press for conscious expression, dream representation and symbolic representation in symptomatic behaviour and character pathology. In 1914, Freud introduced the idea that unconscious fantasies about objects may under certain circumstances take the place of actual relationships with people.

In 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917), identification is focused on as the means by which one not only remembers, but in part emotionally replaces, a lost external object with an aspect of oneself that has been modelled after the lost external object. Freud described how in melancholia a relationship with an external object is 'transformed ... into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification' (p. 249). In other words, an external relationship is replaced by an internal one that involves an interplay of two *active* aspects of the person that have resulted from a splitting of the ego.

In 1923, Freud extended the notion of identification to include not only a modelling of oneself after the external object, but as in the case of superego formation, a process by which the functions of the external object are instated within the psyche. Freud (1940a) at the end of his life summarized his theory of structure formation by which a new active agency is generated: 'A portion of the external world has, at least partially, been abandoned as an object and has instead, by identification, been taken into the ego and thus become an integral part of the internal world. This new psychical agency continues to carry on the functions which have hitherto been performed by the people [the abandoned objects] in the external world: it observes the ego, gives it orders, judges it and threatens it with punishments, exactly like the parents whose place it has taken' (p. 205). Freud is in this line of thought proposing a model wherein an external object is 'by identification ... taken into the ego'. He goes on to explain that taking the object into the ego involves establishing 'a new psychical agency', i.e. an aspect of personality that has the capacity to carry on functions in the internal world that have previously been performed in the external world by the object. This new agency stands in relation to the ego and can perceive, think, respond and initiate activity. Further, it has its own system of motivations: 'it observes the ego, gives it orders, judges it and threatens it with punishments'. Freud is here describing a normal developmental sequence wherein the child, in the context of his relations with external objects, establishes a suborganization of ego that has the capacity for independent motivation and carries on an object relationship with other aspects of the ego.

Freud's 'Fetishism' (1927) and 'Splitting of the ego in the process of defence' (1940b) papers invoke the concept of a split in the ego³ to account for the way in which one can know and not know at the same time. In other words, the ego can be defensively divided so as to operate on the basis of different types of understanding of reality. This represents both a clarification of the process of ego splitting involved in superego formation and an extension of the idea to account for internal division within the personality other than that involved in superego formation.

³ Bettelheim (1981) has pointed out that 'ego' is an incorrect translation of '*das ich*' which is more accurately translated as 'the I'. The phrase 'splitting of the I' better captures the notion of a subdivision of the person's capacity to think, perceive and create experience than does the more impersonal term, 'splitting of the ego'.

Freud's concept of psychic structures or 'agencies' operating in an 'internal world' that is developed in the context of one's early relations with external objects constitutes the theoretical framework within which all succeeding contributions to object-relations theory were developed. Karl Abraham's work played a pivotal role in the development of the object-relations branch of psychoanalytic theory and in particular provided the foundation upon which both Klein and Fairbairn developed their ideas. Working within the framework of Freud's sexual instinct theory, Abraham (1924) placed more importance than did Freud on the role of the object in libidinal development and placed more emphasis on the place of unconscious fantasy in psychological life. Abraham's division of early development into pre-ambivalent, ambivalent and post-ambivalent phases was the forerunner of Klein's and Fairbairn's schizoid⁴ and depressive levels of early psychological organization. Inherent in Abraham's conception of different forms of ambivalence toward objects was the notion of a variety of forms of psychological conflict over the experience of self-object differentiation.

While Abraham's contributions to object-relations theory consisted largely in his shift of emphasis within the conceptual framework provided by Freud, Melanie Klein (1975), by making the role of unconscious internal object relationships primary, introduced a new perspective from which to organize clinical and metapsychological thinking. Klein (1946), (1958) conceived of the infant at birth as functioning with a primitive, loosely organized, but whole ego in relation to an object that is experienced as whole. Under the pressure of the intolerable anxiety of impending annihilation produced by the death instinct, the infant defensively attempts to distance himself from his sense of his own destructiveness by splitting both the ego and the object into more manageable (because separate) good and bad facets of object-related experience. Stated in less mechanical terms, the infant

simplifies, makes more manageable, an unmanageably complicated relationship with the mother (including the coexistence of hating and loving feelings felt toward and experienced from the mother) by treating the relationship as if it were many relationships between unmistakably loving and unmistakably malevolent conceptions of self and object. These aspects of the infant's relationship with the object are kept separate by means of projective and introjective fantasies. The infant's splitting of his experience of his relationships with objects allows him to create a psychological sanctuary (safe from hostile and destructive feelings) within which he can safely feed, safely take in what he needs from his mother.

This theory of early development established a conception of psychological life based upon an internal organization derived from the relationship of split-off aspects of the ego to associated internal objects. There are considerable shortcomings in Klein's theory of internal object relations. Most fundamentally, Klein is not clear whether she views internal object relations as fantasies or as relationships between active agencies capable of feeling, thinking, perceiving, etc. In fact, she says both and often mixes the two by formulating clinical phenomena in terms of relationships between an active agency and a thought (cf. Mackay, 1981). This involves a confusion of levels of abstraction analogous to saying that a thought is contained in a neuron.

The fallacy of establishing direct relations between active agencies and ideas permeates Klein's writing. For example, in describing the development of early psychological life, Klein writes, 'The splitting off of persecutory figures which go to form part of the unconscious is bound up with splitting off idealized figures as well. Idealized figures are developed to protect the ego against the terrifying ones' (1958p. 241). Classical analysts point out that the notion of idealized figures protecting the ego against terrifying ones is tantamount to proposing that there are internal friendly and hostile 'demons' operating within the mind. 'A multitude of minds is introduced into a single psychic apparatus ... the person is being envisaged as a container of innumerable, independent microorganizations that are also microdynamisms' (Schafer, 1968p. 62). Kleinians have replied that these figures are not demons, but unconscious fantasies: 'Internal objects are not "objects" situated in the body or

⁴ Klein initially used the term *paranoid position*, but under the influence of Fairbairn's work, adopted the term *paranoid-schizoid position* in 1952 (Klein, 1975p. 2n).

the psyche: like Freud [in his theory of the superego] Melanie Klein is describing unconscious phantasies which people have about what they contain' (Segal, 1964p. 12). However, despite this clarification on the part of the Kleinians, it must be remembered that an unconscious fantasy (the product of 'fantasy-thinking', Isaacs, 1952p. 108) is after all a thought as are the figures within the fantasy. If internal objects are thoughts as Segal and Isaacs conceptualize them to be, then they cannot themselves think, perceive or feel, nor can they protect or attack the ego. Even to the present, Kleinian theorists have not been able to disentangle themselves from the Scylla of demonology and the Charybdis of mixing incompatible levels of abstraction (i.e. active agencies and thoughts).

It was this Kleinian theory of internal object relations with its unsatisfactory mixture of fantasy and dynamism, together with Freud's theory of the origin of the superego that formed the background for Fairbairn's contributions to object-relations theory. Fairbairn (1940), (1944), like Klein, viewed the infantile ego as whole at birth and capable of relating to whole external objects. To the extent that the 'fit' between mother and infant is lacking, the infant experiences an intolerable feeling of disconnectedness and defends himself by means of splitting off the aspects of the ego which were felt to be unacceptable to the mother. These split-off portions of ego remain fixed in a relationship with the unsatisfactory aspects of the object. This part-object relationship (split-off ego in relation to an emotionally absent or rejecting object) is repressed in order to master the feelings involved and in an effort to change the object into a satisfactory object. The ego and frustrating object undergo further subdivisions along lines of cleavage determined by different affective qualities of the unsatisfactory object relationship. For example, the tantalizing qualities of the relationship and the rejecting qualities of the relationship become separated from one another in the infant's internal world. A significant aspect of the ego (the central ego) retains a relationship with the accepting and accepted qualities of the object (the 'good enough' mother [Winnicott, 1951] as opposed to the defensively idealized mother). The central ego is in part the conscious ego, but also includes dynamically unconscious facets, e.g. its defensive efforts to make itself unaware of the unsatisfactory aspects of object-related experience.

Fairbairn, although working within a Freudian psychoanalytic framework, was struggling against what he felt were shortcomings of both the Freudian and the Kleinian theories. Fairbairn (1946) pointed out that Freud conceived of the id as energy without structure (Freud, 1933) and the ego as structure without energy. That is, the id was seen as 'instinctual cathexes seeking discharge—that in our view is all there is in the id' (Freud, 1933p. 74) while the ego was seen as organized into functions but without its own source of energy. Fairbairn (1944), (1946) replaced the Freudian dichotomy of ego and id, structure and energy, with a notion of 'dynamic structures'. These dynamic structures are conceived of as aspects of the mind capable of acting as independent agencies with their own motivational systems. In energetic terms one would say that they have their own power source. In psychological terms, Fairbairn is saying that these aspects of the person have the capacity to think and to wish according to their own system of generating meaning. According to this theory, each bit of ego (aspect of the personality) defensively split off in the course of development, functions as an entity in relation to internal objects and in relation to other subdivisions of the ego.

With regard to the important question of the theoretical status of internal objects, Fairbairn states that 'in the interests of consistency, I must now draw the logical conclusion of my theory of dynamic structure and acknowledge that, since internal objects are structures, they must necessarily be, in some measure at least, dynamic. In drawing this conclusion and making this acknowledgment, I shall not only be here following the precedent of Freud, but also, it would seem, conforming to the demands of such psychological facts as are revealed, e.g. in dreams and in the phenomena of paranoia ... It must be recognized, however, that, in practice, it is very difficult to differentiate between the activity of internalized objects and the activity of the ego structures with which they are associated; and, with a view to avoiding any appearance of demonology, it seems wise to err, if anything, on the side of overweighting the activity of the ego structures rather than otherwise. It remains true, nevertheless, that under certain conditions internalized objects may acquire a dynamic independence

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which cannot be ignored. It is doubtless in this direction that we must look for an explanation of the fundamental animism of human beings, which is none the less persistent under the surface ...' (1944p. 132).

Fairbairn's conclusion that not only ego suborganizations, but also internal objects, must be considered 'in some measure at least' to be dynamic structures, fully establishes the concept of internal object relations between active semiautonomous agencies within a single personality.

It is evident from the above quotation that Fairbairn experienced some hesitancy in drawing this conclusion, in large part because it seemed overly close to Klein's formulations which he considered demonologic. There are a number of incompletely thought-out aspects of Fairbairn's theory which may have contributed to his misgivings about this facet of his thinking. In studying Fairbairn's work, one searches in vain for definitions of the terms structure and dynamic. (One also is unable to find a definition of the concept of psychic structure in Freud's writing.) I infer from Fairbairn's use of the term structure that he is thinking of a stable set of ideas or mental representations. These conscious and unconscious ideas are consistent beliefs in terms of which one plans and measures one's behaviour and one's responses to new experience, but do not themselves think, respond, perceive, etc. It is the capacity for the latter forms of psychological activity (i.e. thinking, feeling, perceiving) that is the basis for the determination that an aspect of the personality is dynamic. When Fairbairn says that internal objects are not 'mere objects' but dynamic structures, he seems to mean that, at least in part, internal figures are not simply mental representations of objects, but are active agencies whose activity is perceived by itself and by other dynamic structures to have specific characteristics which are then organized and registered as stable mental representations. It is possible for there to be structure without dynamism (stable sets of ideas or convictions), but it is not possible for there to be dynamism without structure. For Fairbairn, the concept of id as energy reservoir is replaced by a notion of an unconscious set of ego and object structures each capable of psychological activity of varying degrees of primitivity.

It remains unclear in Fairbairn's thinking what relationship the concept of ego bears to the concept of dynamic internal objects. Can there be dynamic structure (e.g. an internal object) that is distinct from ego? This appears to be what Fairbairn is saying and, as will be discussed later, may be the reason for his hesitancy about fully acknowledging the dynamic nature of internal objects.

Donald Winnicott's major contribution to the development of a theory of internal object relations was his theory of multiple self-organizations functioning in relation to one another within the personality system. Winnicott (1951), (1952), (1954), (1960) envisioned the infant as born with the potential for unique individuality of personality (termed a True Self personality organization) which can develop in the context of a responsive holding environment provided by a good enough mother. However, when a mother substitutes something of herself for the infant's spontaneous gesture, (e.g. her own anxiety over separateness for the infant's curious exploration), the infant experiences traumatic disruption of his developing sense of self. When such 'impingements' are a central feature of the early mother-child relationship, the infant will attempt to defend himself by developing a second (reactive) personality organization (the False Self organization). This False Self vigilantly monitors and adapts to the conscious and unconscious needs of the mother and in so doing provides a protective exterior behind which the True Self is afforded the privacy that it requires to maintain its integrity.

The False Self is not conceived of as malevolent; on the contrary it is a caretaker self (1954) that energetically 'manages' life so that an inner self might not experience the threat of annihilation resulting from excessive pressure on it to develop according to the internal logic of another person (the mother). The dread of annihilation experienced by the True Self results in a feeling of utter dependence on the False Self personality organization. This makes it extremely difficult for a person to diminish his reliance on this False Self mode of functioning despite an awareness of the emptiness of life that devolves from such functioning. Functioning in this mode can frequently lead to academic, vocational, and social success, but over time, the person increasingly experiences himself as bored, 'going through the motions', detached, mechanical, and lacking spontaneity (cf. Ogden, 1976).

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The theoretical status of the object is not discussed by Winnicott, but his writing makes it clear that he treats internal objects as mental representations. Both Fairbairn's theory of dynamic structure and Winnicott's conception of the True and False Self

represent steps in the development of an object-relations theory in which unconscious aspects of the person, each with the capacity to generate meanings according to its own patterns of linkage, engage in internal relationships with one another. Implicit in Fairbairn's and Winnicott's thinking is the idea that conceptualizing intrapsychic conflict as an unconscious fantasy of opposing internal forces does not adequately capture the way in which a person engaged in internal conflicts is in fact feeling, thinking, perceiving, and behaving in two ways at once and is not simply imagining himself to be doing so. According to Fairbairn and Winnicott, it is more accurate to say that the person is behaving as two people at once than to say he is thinking about being two people at odds with one another.

With the unsettled issue of the theoretical status of internal objects in mind, a consideration of aspects of the work of Wilfred Bion becomes particularly pertinent. Bion at first described projective identification as an interpersonal process in which one finds oneself 'being manipulated so as to be playing a part, no matter how difficult to recognize, in somebody else's phantasy' (1952p. 149). In the interpersonal setting, the person projectively identifying engages in an unconscious fantasy of ejecting an unwanted or endangered aspect of himself and of depositing that part of himself in another person in a controlling way. There is accompanying, real interpersonal pressure exerted on the 'recipient' of the projective identification that is unconsciously designed to coerce him into experiencing himself and behaving in a way that is congruent with the unconscious projective fantasy. Under optimal circumstances, the recipient 'contains' (Bion, 1962) or 'processes' (i.e. maturely handles) the evoked feelings and ideas, and thus makes available for re-internalization by the projector, a more manageable and integrable version of that which had been projected. (See Ogden, 1979), (1981), (1982b for more detailed discussions of projective identification.)

Bion (1957) later made clear that he viewed projective identification not only as an interpersonal process but as an intrapersonal process as well. This is a reasonable extension of the theory if one conceives of the individual as composed of multiple personality suborganizations each capable of functioning semiautonomously, and thus capable of processing one another's projective identifications. As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, this view of the personality system is an outgrowth of Klein's, Fairbairn's and Winnicott's contributions to object-relations theory.

For Bion (1956), (1957) projective identification involves the splitting of the personality (not simply a splitting of self-representations) and an ejection of the resulting suborganization into an internal object. The schizophrenic, due to an almost complete incapacity to tolerate reality, replaces perception with an extreme form of projective identification. By fragmenting his perceptual functions into isolated component parts and then projecting these functions (still experienced to some extent as self) into the object, the schizophrenic creates a type of internal object termed a 'bizarre object'. The object is then experienced as having life of its own: 'In the patient's phantasy the expelled particles of ego lead an independent and uncontrollable existence outside the personality, but either containing or contained by external objects' (1956p. 39). An example given is the projection of the visual function into a gramophone (more accurately the psychological representation of the gramophone) thus producing a bizarre object that is felt to be capable of spying upon the patient. It is as if a part of the personality 'has become a thing' (1957p. 48). This type of defensive fragmentation and projection of the mind into an object (representation) is the hallmark of the psychotic personality.

Bion stresses the role of fantasy in the process of generating bizarre objects. However, I feel that in so doing, he overlooks the way in which the process of fragmentation of the mental apparatus is more than a fantasy. I feel that one must understand the formation of bizarre objects as involving two different sorts of mental operations. One facet of the process is simply a fantasy—a gramophone is a mental representation that is imagined to be capable of perception. However, this fantasy is a thought generated by a part of

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the mind that has in fact been split off from the 'non-psychotic' mind and is actually functioning as an active, separate suborganization of the personality that experiences itself as a thing (cf. Ogden 1980), (1982a). I would understand the gramophone image to be equivalent to a self-representation of this aspect of the personality.

Grotstein (1980a), (1980b), (1981) has built upon Bion's theory of the simultaneous functioning of psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the personality to construct a 'dual track model' of the mind in which experience is no longer conceived of as unitary, but as an overlapping of two or more separate experiences generated by autonomous suborganizations of the personality. Only through integration of various experiential perspectives is the illusion of unitary experience created, much as an integrated visual field with visual depth is achieved through an integration of slightly different visual images perceived by each eye. Grotstein's proposal represents an important rediscovery of Freud's most fundamental contribution to psychology. Freud proposed that we view the human mind as consisting of two facets, the conscious and the unconscious mind. Although these two aspects of mind function in different modes (primary and secondary process modes), they operate concurrently, and together contribute to the generation of experience that feels unitary to the subject. This sense of unity of experience is achieved despite the fact that the conscious and unconscious aspects of mind are operating semi-autonomously.

Before presenting an integration of the foregoing contributions to a theory of internal objects, I will briefly recapitulate the critical turning points in the development of this aspect of psychoanalytic theory. Melanie Klein was the first to establish a

conception of an internal object world organized around internal object relationships consisting of an unconscious split-off aspect of ego in relation to an internal object. Her theory suffered from an unsatisfactory formulation of the theoretical status of internal objects which were conceived of as unconscious fantasies, but were at the same time thought of as capable of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and responding. Fairbairn clarified the matter by stating that neither objects nor object representations are internalized; rather, that which is internalized is an object relationship consisting of a split off part of the ego in relation to an object which is itself, at least in part, a dynamic structure. The split-off aspect of the ego retains the capacity to function as an active psychological agency, albeit functioning in a primitive mode due to its relative isolation from other aspects of the developing personality. Fairbairn, although designating internal objects dynamic structures, did not explain how an internal object (presumably originally a thought) achieves its dynamism. Winnicott extended the notion of splitting of the ego to include subdivisions of the experience of self, but did not contribute to a clarification of the concept of internal objects.

Bion's theory of the pathological formation of bizarre objects provided an important insight into the formation of all internal objects. He envisioned a defensive splitting of the mind into parts that include active suborganizations of the mind which then experience themselves as having become things. Thus, the formation of a bizarre object is a process by which a suborganization of the mind engages in a specific object-related fantasy involving feelings of merger with, or entrapment by, the object.

On the basis of these contributions to object-relations theory, I shall now attempt to clarify the theoretical status of internal objects in a way that will facilitate clinical thinking with regard to various transference and resistance phenomena. An internal object relationship necessarily involves an interaction between two subdivisions of the personality each capable of serving as an active psychological agency. Otherwise one's theory must posit either (1) a direct relationship between non-equivalent levels of abstraction, e.g. the ego (a structure) in a relationship with an object representation (a thought), or (2) a relationship between two thoughts which would necessarily empower thoughts with the capacity to think. Freud's recognition of the fact that two active agencies are required for an internal object relationship is reflected in his theory of superego formation wherein the ego is conceived of as split into two active organizations which become involved in an internal relationship with one another.

Fairbairn's insight that it is object relationships and not objects that are internalized opened the way to thinking of both the self- and the object-components of the internal relationship as

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active agencies, 'dynamic structures'. The self-component was understood as a split-off aspect of the ego, thus accounting for its capacity to think, perceive, respond, etc. However, as stated above, although Fairbairn recognized that theoretical consistency demanded that the object-component of the internal object relationship also be considered a dynamic structure, he did not offer an explanation for the source of the dynamism of the internal object. Applying Bion's theory of the formation of pathological bizarre objects to the problem of the formation of internal objects in general, one can conceptualize internal objects as split-off aspects of the ego which have been 'projected into' mental representations of objects. That is, an aspect of ego is split off and becomes profoundly identified with an object representation. Since the ego suborganization is itself capable of generating meanings, its identifying with an object representation results in a shift in the way in which that aspect of the person thinks of himself. That which was originally an object representation becomes experientially equivalent to a self-representation of one of the split-off facets of ego.

In this light, I would suggest that the internalization of an object relationship be thought of as necessarily involving a dual subdivision of the ego. *Such a dual split would result in the formation of two new suborganizations of the ego, one identified with the self in the external object relationship and the other thoroughly identified with the object.* This formulation accounts for the dynamic nature of the internal object and also defines the relationship between the concept of ego and the concept of internal objects. In brief, internal objects are subdivisions of the ego that are heavily identified with an object representation while maintaining the capacities of the whole ego for thought, perception, feeling, etc. It must be reiterated here that such a proposal goes no further in the direction of demonology than did Freud in describing the formation of the superego.

The logical extension of Fairbairn's notion of dynamic structure is the idea that the ego is the only source of dynamism and that further dynamic structures are formed only by means of a subdivision of the ego. The dynamism of an internal object must in every case reflect the fact that an aspect of the ego has been split off and is at the core of the new structure. The fact that this structure (the internal object) is experienced as non-self is accounted for by means of its profound identification with the object. Internalization requiring a splitting of the ego occurs only in early development and as a result, the identification with the object is of a poorly differentiated nature, i.e. the experiential quality of the identification is one of 'becoming the object' as opposed to 'feeling like' the object. Adult 'internalizations' are built upon existing splits in the ego and do not involve the creation of new ones.

TRANSFERENCE, COUNTERTRANSFERENCE, AND PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

From the perspective of the view of internal object relations presented above, transference and countertransference can now be understood as the interpersonal externalization (**'actualization', Ogden, 1980), (1982a)**) of an internal object relationship.

Transference can be thought of as taking one of two forms depending on whether it is the role of the object or that of the self in the internal object relationship that is assigned to another person in the externalization process. When it is the role of the internal object that is projected, the patient experiences another person as he has unconsciously experienced that internal object (an unconscious split-off part of the ego identified with the object). In such a case, countertransference involves the therapists unconsciously identifying with the aspect of the patient's ego identified with the object (**Racker's 'complementary identification', 1957**). Projective identification involves *in addition* an interpersonal pressure on the therapist to engage in an identification of this sort. The 'recipient' (e.g. the therapist) is coerced into seeing himself only as the object is represented in the internal object relationship. More accurately, there is an attempt to make the recipient's experience congruent with the way in which the internal object (aspect of the ego) *experiences itself* and perceives the self-component of the internal relationship. This is accompanied by an unconscious fantasy on the part of the subject of ejecting part of himself and entering into the object in a controlling way.

This form of externalization in which another

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person is treated as if he were the object-component of an internal object relationship is the psychological process that is generally referred to when we speak of transference. For example, a 20-year-old patient maintained a fearful, but defiant internal relationship in which one aspect of ego was locked in battle with another split-off aspect of ego that was identified with a bullying father representation. This patient was preoccupied with his anxiety concerning a particular male teacher whom he experienced as extremely intimidating. Nevertheless, the patient would struggle against unconscious wishes to undermine and 'show up' the teacher in class. Such a transference relationship (based on the externalization of the object-component of the internal relationship) became a projective identification as the patient began to imagine being able to 'push the buttons' of the teacher in an omnipotent way and would in reality provoke the teacher into a bullying stance.

The other of the two forms of transference described above, involves the patient's experiencing another person (e.g. the therapist) the way the internal object (split-off portion of ego identified with the object) in a given internal object relationship experiences the aspect of the ego identified with self. The countertransference in this case consists of the therapist's identification with the self-component of the patient's internal object relationship (Racker's 'concordant identification'). Projective identification would in this case involve, in addition, an unconscious fantasy of projecting the self-component into the external object together with interpersonal pressure on the object for compliance with this fantasy, i.e. pressure on the external object to experience himself only as the internal object experiences the self in the internal object relationship.

The externalization of the self-component of an internal object relationship was exemplified by a psychotic adolescent who was continually tormented by intrusive obsessional thoughts, accusatory auditory hallucinations, and feelings that his mind was being controlled. He felt that he could not find a single moment of reprieve from these internal emotional assaults. The patient was seen in intensive individual psychotherapy in a long-term psychiatric hospital. In the course of this work, the patient's current experience came to be understood as an internal version of his experience of his relationship with his mother who had regularly, secretly observed him for hours at nursery school, had given him placebo medication for his 'nerves', and had tape recorded his dinner conversation and temper tantrums to play back to him for 'study' later. He had been sent to a family friend for 'therapy'. Following each session, the 'therapist' would report to the parents about what had transpired.

In the psychotherapy occurring during the patient's hospitalization, the patient subjected the therapist to a continual verbal and sensory barrage. In a relentless, loud, whiney, highly pressured tone of voice, he would make incessant demands of the therapist. When not gratified, the patient would call the therapist a string of mocking names that were repeated so often and so loudly that a fifty-minute session felt to the therapist like being subjected to the din of a jack hammer for hours. The therapist not only felt angry, but also experienced feelings of disorganization and utter helplessness that at times reached the point that he felt a panicky feeling that he was drowning. The patient described these sessions as 'negative mind control games', a term which referred to the idea that efforts at controlling his mind were 'jammed' and the jamming in turn had the effect of sending the mind control back to its source.

In this example, the self-component of an internal object relationship (in which the patient experienced himself as violently intruded upon by his mother) was projected into the therapist. The fantasy of negative mind control was accompanied by an interpersonal interaction that served to induce in the therapist the experience of the self in the internal object relationship. The fantasy, the interpersonal pressure, and the therapist's resonant response together constituted a projective identification.

The following is a second example of the type of transference involving the externalization of the self-component of the internal object relationship. Robert, a 20-year-old schizophrenic patient seen in intensive psychotherapy, unconsciously engaged in a painful internal object relationship in which he felt 'contaminated' by a mother who would insinuate herself into every facet of his body and mind. In an extended period of therapy, the patient refused to bathe and as time went on the therapist became preoccupied with the patient's

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odour which filled the office long after the patient had left. The therapist's office chair absorbed the patient's odour and became a symbol of the patient's entry into the therapist's life outside of the therapy hours. Thus, the therapist felt as if he himself had become inescapably suffused by the patient. In this case, the therapist had unwittingly been coerced into experiencing himself as the self-component of the internal relationship to the contaminating mother (an aspect of the patient's ego identified with this representation of the mother). **(See Ogden, 1982a, for an in depth discussion of this case.)**

It is my experience that projective identification is a universal feature of the externalization of an internal object relationship, i.e. of transference. What is variable is the degree to which the external object is enlisted as a participant in the externalization of the internal object relationship. In other words, there is always a component of the therapist's response to the patient's transferences that represents an induced identification with an aspect of the patient's ego that is locked in a particular unconscious internal object relationship. This identification on the part of the therapist represents a form of understanding of the patient that can be acquired in no other way. In my opinion, it is not possible to analyse the transference without making oneself available to participate to some degree in this form of identification. However, it is by no means sufficient to have become a participant in the externalization of an internal relationship. One must, in addition, be able to understand that which one is experiencing as a reflection of a need on the part of the patient to reduce the therapist to the status of a surrogate for a part of the patient's ego. The therapist must himself be aware that the patient is selectively excluding all aspects of the therapist's personality that do not correspond to the features of the split-off ego with which the therapist is being identified. There is considerable psychological work involved in the therapist's consciously and unconsciously integrating the roles imposed upon him with his larger, more reality-based sense of himself (in particular his role as therapist).

RESISTANCE

From the perspective of the conception of internal objects proposed in this paper, resistance is understood in terms of the difficulty the patient has in giving up the pathological attachments involved in his unconscious internal object relationships. Fairbairn (1944), (1958) was the first to understand resistance in this way. He placed particular emphasis on the tie to the bad internal object. This tie is based on one's need to change the bad object into the kind of person one wishes the object were.

Fairbairn (1944) described two forms of the attachment to the frustrating internal object. One type of tie to a bad internal object is the attachment of the craving self to the tantalizing object. The nature of this tie to the object is that of the addict for the addicting agent and is extremely difficult to relinquish. **(See Ogden, 1974, for a description of a psychotherapy in which the central resistance was derived from this type of internal object tie.)**

The second category of bond to a bad internal object described by Fairbairn is the tie of the wronged and spoiling self to the unloving, rejecting object. This often takes the form of a crusade to expose the unfairness of, coldness of, or other forms of wrongdoing on the part of the internal object.

Fairbairn (1940) presented graphic clinical data demonstrating the phenomenon of loyalty to the bad internal object that is fuelled by the unconscious conviction that a bad object is far preferable to no object at all. Fairbairn's thinking stems from the idea that a human being's sanity and survival depend on object-relatedness, and a person experiences the terror of impending annihilation when he feels that all external and internal object ties are being severed. Therefore, he clings desperately to any object tie (external or internal), even ones that are experienced as bad, when that is all that is available.

Fairbairn, because of his incomplete formulation of the nature of internal objects, focused exclusively on resistances derived from the experience of the self-component of the internal object relationship. As discussed earlier, Fairbairn only hesitantly accepted the idea that internal objects are dynamic structures and was not able to delineate the relationship between the concept of internal objects and the concept of ego. As a result, he restricted himself to studying ways in which the loyalty of the self to the internal object functions as a resistance to therapeutic work.

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Other forms of resistance become recognizable from the perspective of a theory that more fully recognizes internal object relations as involving two active agencies each capable of generating experience. Not only does one encounter resistance stemming from the loyalty of the self to the bad object, one regularly encounters resistance based on the object's need for the self. This is not to introduce a conception of an inner world occupied by internal objects flying about one's mind on their own steam. From the perspective of the present paper, these internal objects are understood as aspects of the ego identified with objects, and as such can enter into a tormenting, tantalizing, humiliating, dependent or any other form of relatedness to other aspects of the ego. Freud himself used such words to describe the relationship of the superego to the ego. Resistance to giving up internal object ties can then be seen to stem both from those aspects of ego experienced as self and from the aspects of ego identified with objects. The latter set of resistances have not been nearly as well recognized nor elucidated.

Heretofore, almost exclusive focus has been placed on the experience of the self in relation to objects in internal object relations. This has been so largely because the object component has been conceptualized primarily as a mental representation (an idea), and therefore, it would not make sense to talk about the way in which a thought experiences a change in an internal object

relationship. However, from the perspective of the object as suborganization of the ego, one is in a position to think about the following aspects of resistance stemming from the unwillingness of the object to relinquish its tie to other aspects of the ego involved in internal object relationships.

1. The ego suborganization identified with the object is under constant pressure from the self-component of the relationship to be transformed into a good object. Such a transformation is strenuously resisted by the object-component because this type of massive shift in identity would be experienced as an annihilation of an aspect of the ego⁵. The internal object relationship is vigorously defended from two directions: the self-component is unwilling to risk annihilation resulting from absence of object relatedness and instead strives to change the bad object into a good one; at the same time, the object-component fends off annihilation that would result from being transformed into a new entity (the good object). It is this latter motivation that accounts for the often encountered moment in therapy when the patient pleadingly looks at the therapist and says, 'I know that what I am doing is self-defeating, but to stop thinking and acting in that way would require that I become somebody else and I can't do that. I wouldn't recognize myself when I look in the mirror'.

In work with borderline and schizophrenic patients, this form of resistance often underlies the patient's intensely conflicted feelings about accepting the therapist's interpretations. Frequently the transference relationship in such circumstances involves an externalization of an internal object relationship of the following type: the analyst is experienced as the self-component of the internal relationship in which the self is intent on changing the object-component at the cost of annihilating that aspect of the patient. For example, a schizophrenic patient over many years of therapy would periodically become psychotic and profoundly regressed to the point of entering an almost totally mute, immobile state that would last for many months. These regressions occurred just as the patient began to 'get better'. 'Improvement' was experienced by the patient as literally becoming the therapist and in so doing losing himself entirely. Stubborn passivity evidenced by the patient at such points was an unconscious assertion that the therapist could not induce, seduce, manipulate, or coerce the patient into changing into the person that the therapist 'wanted' or 'needed' the patient to be. 'Getting better' meant being transformed into somebody else and no longer existing as the person he felt himself to be.

Interpretations are regularly experienced by schizophrenic and borderline patients as placing the patient in a terrible dilemma: to listen (in fantasy to 'take in') is to risk becoming changed into the therapist; not to listen (in fantasy to 'refuse to take in') is experienced as risking losing all connexion with the therapist and as a result floating off into absolute 'outerspace-like' isolation. Either way, the patient's existence is

⁵ I am grateful to Dr Michael Bader for discussing portions of his clinical work with me that have helped to illustrate this aspect of object-relations theory.

threatened. The danger of losing one's self as a result of being transformed into a 'good' object is the danger experienced by the object-component of the internal relationship; the risk of absolute isolation resulting from loss of the connexion with the internal object is the danger experienced by the self-component of the internal object relationship. It is as important for the object-component of ego in the internal relationship to resist being changed by the self-component as it is for the self-component to attempt to change the bad object into a good one.

2. The suborganization of ego identified with the object experiences as much need for object relatedness as the self-component of the internal object relationship. The object-component frequently maintains internal object ties by means of attempting to exert control over its object (i.e. control over the self-component of the internal relationship). The object-component may taunt, shame, threaten, lord-over, or induce guilt in its object (the self-component of the internal relationship) in order to maintain connectedness with the self-component. These efforts at control over the self-component become greatly intensified when there is a danger of the bond being threatened, e.g. by a more mature form of relatedness to the therapist that would make this internal, more primitive form of relatedness less necessary.⁶

An obsessional patient in intensive psychotherapy would regularly disrupt her rare periods of genuinely self-analytic free association with 'outbreaks' of obsessional self-torment. For instance, while insightfully discussing an interchange with a boyfriend, she interrupted her train of thoughts to ruminate self-critically about her weight, a subject with which she was chronically preoccupied. As the ruminations continued she then became anxious that the therapist would terminate therapy because of her endless and fruitless obsessional thinking. The patient was at this point in therapy aware of the connexion between her self-torment and the way in which she had continually felt belittled and tormented by her mother. The patient's mother in addition to tirelessly pointing out her disdain for the patient, regularly threatened to send her away to live with relatives. (It must be emphasized that this was the patient's

experience of her mother and it is this experience of the mother and not an objective depiction of the mother that is preserved in the internal object relationship.)

The internal object relationship upon which the transference was modelled consisted of a mutually dependent mother-child relationship in which the child was willing and eager to be masochistic if that would help solidify the tie to a sadistic mother who was felt to be always on the verge of abandoning her. The internal object (suborganization of the ego) experienced the ability of other aspects of the patient to engage in free association in the therapeutic setting as dangerous evidence of an enhanced capacity of those other aspects of the ego to engage in a more mature form of relatedness to the therapist than had been previously possible. The fear of this more mature form of object tie resulted from the object's conviction that such relatedness would make the self-component of the internal object relationship less dependent on the object-component. In the clinical sequence described, the object (suborganization of ego) then redoubled its efforts at subjecting the masochistic self to sadistic torment in the form of guilt-inducing taunts about being overweight. There can be no mistaking that the nature of the ultimate threat made by the object-component is that of abandoning the self-component of the internal relationship. In the clinical sequence the threat of abandonment is projected on to the therapist and is experienced as a threat made by the therapist to abandon the patient if she does not behave as he demands.

In this clinical material, the resistance (the disruption of the free association) arose from the fear of giving up a particular internal object relationship. This fear is predominantly that of the object (ego suborganization) which upon sensing decreasing dependency on the part of the self-component, reintensified its efforts at control by raising the spectre of abandonment. In the

⁶ The unconscious self and object suborganizations of the ego are affected to some extent by current experience. Self suborganizations of the ego are influenced by experience, particularly as the current experience involves issues of goals, ambitions and autonomy. Object suborganizations are influenced by current relations with external objects particularly with regard to issues of idealization, denigration, jealousy, envy, etc. One measure of psychological health is the degree to which internal object relations can be modified in the light of current experience.

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context of an internal object relationship, any independent activity on the part of one party of the relationship is experienced as an impending dissolution of the relationship which is based on mutual dependence. From the perspective of the patient's unconscious psychic reality, it is as essential for the object-component of ego in an internal relationship to maintain its tie to the self-component as it is for the self-component to tirelessly pursue and attempt to hold on to the internal object.

3. Envious feelings experienced by the object-component and directed at the self-component of an internal object relationship, constitute another type of internal object relatedness that can serve as the basis for resistance. Not infrequently we hear patients expressing envy toward others at points when it does not make immediate sense in terms of the patient's current situation. For example, a borderline patient who had been in intensive psychotherapy for four years was able for the first time in a decade to return to school and to relate to her second husband in a way that she was taking some pride in. She had abandoned her latency-aged children when she left her first husband fifteen years previously. In her current therapy meetings, in addition to discussing the enhanced feelings of self-worth, she reported having written an extremely angry letter to her children. As she talked about this, she said that she had been a much better mother to them than her own mother (who had committed suicide when she was 10-years-old) had been to her. It became abundantly clear to the patient that she was feeling intensely envious of her children. From the point of view of the self in an internal object relationship with a deeply depressed, rejecting mother, envy is not a feeling one would expect at a time when the patient is experiencing enhanced self-esteem. However, from the point of view of the object (the patient's ego suborganization identified with her mother), not only is control over the self-component threatened by enhanced feelings of self-esteem, the object also feels envious of the self for this newly acquired set of feelings. The object-component, in order to maintain a tie (based on control) over the self-component, wished to sap the feelings of well-being from its object (the self) and make those feelings its own. It is vitally important for the object to maintain connectedness with the self. Signs of diminished dependence on the part of the self will be enviously attacked as the object (suborganization of ego) begins to fear being left behind.

Searles (1979) vividly describes similar clinical data in which the patient unconsciously functions as multiple people, one of whom may become jealous of the other. He gives detailed accounts of the way in which such internal splitting may be externalized as a countertransference experience in which one aspect of the therapist feels jealous of the another aspect of himself that is currently felt to be more desirable to the patient. Searles (1979) concurs with Fairbairn that although such internal divisions are more apparent in borderline and schizoid individuals, 'it would take a bold man to claim that his ego was so perfectly integrated as

to be incapable of revealing any evidence of splitting at the deepest levels, or that such evidence of splitting of the ego could in no circumstances declare itself at more superficial levels, even under conditions of extreme suffering or hardship or deprivation' (Fairbairn, 1940p. 8).

Searles focuses entirely on jealousy of the self for another aspect of self. The theoretical framework of the present paper allows us to supplement Searles' ideas with a way of thinking about types of resistance based on jealousy or envy of an internal object for the self.

SUMMARY

The development of the concept of internal object relations is traced through the work of Freud, Abraham, Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott and Bion. I have proposed that the establishment of an internal object relationship requires a dual splitting of the ego into a pair of dynamically unconscious suborganizations of personality, one identified with the self and the other with the object in the original early object relationship. These aspects of ego stand in a particular relationship to one another the nature of which is determined by the infant's subjective experience of the early relationship. Since both the self- and the object-component of the internal object relationship are aspects of the ego, each has the capacity to generate experience (e.g. to think, feel, and perceive) semi-autonomously and yet in relation to one another.

Resistance is understood as the difficulty a patient has in relinquishing pathological attachments involved in unconscious internal object relationships. The view of internal objects proposed in this paper brings into focus types of resistance heretofore only partially understood. These types of resistance are based on the need of the internal object (suborganization of ego) not to be changed by the self (suborganization of ego), the dependency of the internal object on the self, and the envy and jealousy of the internal object for the self-component of the internal object relationship.

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