Counseling and Psychotherapy Theory

Week 4. Psychodynamic Approach II: Object Relations/Attachment Theory
Contents

1 Major Concepts and Propositions
   1 Relationship Needs
   2 Objects and Object Relations
   3 Splitting and Integration
   4 Defense (Protection) mechanisms

2 Change Mechanisms & Intervention Methods
   1 Moving from the Problem State to the Changed State
   2 Strategies and Techniques

3 Theory’s Current State and Prospect
   1 Current State and Prospect
   2 Implications
1. Major Concepts and Propositions

1. Relationship Needs
   1. Relationship Needs
   2. Fear in Relationships
### Freud vs. Object Relations/Attachment Theories

#### Commonalities
- Both acknowledge the unconsciousness.
- Both considered past childhood experiences as deterministic.

#### Difference
- Emphasized **sexual needs**  
  - Interested in experiences after age 3  
    - Triad relationship
- Emphasized **relationship needs**  
  - Interested in experiences before age 3  
    - Dual relationship
Meaning

- Drive / Needs

: biological and psychological energy that pursues certain purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freud’s Psychoanalysis</th>
<th>Object Relations/Attachment Theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Biological drive</td>
<td>• Relational drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual needs</td>
<td>• Relationship needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fairbairn (1952): “Libido pursues objects, not pleasure.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Klein, Winnicott, Bowlby, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **Meaning**
  
  • A desire to experience *‘a good attachment object’*

    - An experience of being consistently connected *(attachment)*
    - An experience of individuality being accepted *(individualization)*

  • A desire to *‘experience an object that is always constantly there’*

    - does not reject (intrude, devalue) me regardless of my state - whether I am "good" or "bad", “same” or “different”
Fear in Relationships

Meaning

- fear of losing a good (attachment) object experience

  - ‘fear of rejection (abandonment)’
  
  - ‘fear of engulfment’
Fear in Relationships

Meaning

- Fear of losing the relationship with self
  - ‘fear of emptiness’
Relationship Needs

Summary

• People have the energy to pursue something.
  - Fear of losing a good relationship: the energy to maintain the relationship
  - Fear of losing independence: the energy to maintain individuality
• Object relations theory and attachment theory both consider relationship needs as the most important.

Points to learn

• When we understand human drive and needs, we can better comprehend the meaning behind specific behaviors.
• Once the hidden meaning behind seemingly contradictory behaviors is revealed, then we are able to understand the person in a more integrated way.
1. Major Concepts and Propositions

2. Objects and Object Relations
   1. Objects
   2. Object Relations
Meaning

- It's the answer to the question, "Who are you?"
- A conscious, unconscious, mental representation related to 'me'
- I may have a good or bad relationship with myself.
- Self representation is a personal concept.
- Self is different from 'ego' (function).
Meaning

- A person, place, thing or fantasy to which our emotional energy or shade has been injected (love or hate).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good object</th>
<th>Bad object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object that gives good feeling/satisfaction</td>
<td>Object that gives bad feeling/distress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typically, a person who is close and important to us

- In the early childhood stage, parents or guardians are critical figures.
### Part object vs. whole object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part object</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td>the representation about a <strong>specific part</strong> of an object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical</strong></td>
<td>mother's <strong>breasts, hands, or shouting mouth</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological</strong></td>
<td>parts that give me <strong>pleasure</strong> or <strong>displeasure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Whole object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>the whole <em>mother</em>, the whole <em>person</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>the existence of an object as is, as something that can give both pleasure and displeasure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meaning

- something that is neither internally or externally a real object
  - teddy bears, dolls, or blankets, etc.

Note

- Children form strong attachment to these objects.
- We need to acknowledge children's right to these transitional objects.
- There are times when children damage these objects.
- Transitional objects should be able to withstand strong aggression.
Selfobject

Meaning

- Self-object ➔ selfobject
- An object that vicariously takes on the functioning of the mental structure in childhood - the functioning that a child eventually takes on herself as she matures.

Main functions

- Mirroring selfobject
- Idealized selfobject
- Twin selfobject

Mental oxygen
### Object Relations

#### Meaning
- A relationship that an individual makes with an object via particular emotions or methods.
  - Other vs. self
  - Love vs. hate
  - Whole object vs. part object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>• You have your shortcomings, but I still like you.</td>
<td>• I have my shortcomings, but I'm still an all right person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part</td>
<td>• I like you when you show your good sides. I hope you leave your bad</td>
<td>• I cannot accept myself if I cannot get rid of my shortcomings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sides behind when you meet me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Object Relations

Summary

- Object relations is a relationship we exert our emotional energy into.
- Fulfilling the relationship need between an individual and object is important for mental health.
- We need to pursue a good relationship with whole objects instead of part objects.

Points to learn

- When our object relations are threatened, we experience fear or anxiety.
I. Major Concepts and Propositions

3. Splitting and Integration
   1. Splitting and Integration of Object Relations
   2. Object Representation and Working Model
Splitting and Integration

Splitting of object relations

Good

Bad
Splitting and Integration

- **Splitting of object relations**
  - Happens when we take a rigid attitude about ‘good’ and ‘bad’

  - ‘I can never tolerate your (my) ‘bad’ sides.’
  - ‘Unless you get rid of your ‘bad’ sides, we will never be able to form (or maintain) our relationship.’
  - ‘In order to form (maintain) a relationship between us, you must get rid of the ‘bad’ parts of your personality.'
Splitting and Integration

Integration of object relations

Good

Bad
Integration of object relations

- Happens when we focus more on the **whole person** instead of part ‘good’ or ‘bad’

  - ‘You have ‘bad’ sides, but (since all humans are like that) it's tolerable.’
  - ‘It would be nice if your (my) ‘bad’ parts are reduced, but even if that doesn't happen, the relationship can still continue.’
  - ‘In order to form (maintain) our relationship, it would be nice if your (my) ‘bad’ parts are reduced but it's not that we must get rid of them. It’s not even possible…’
Object Representation / Working Model

Meaning

- **A model or framework** about an object or object relations.

- An internal, psychological frame used or run when forming, maintaining, or managing relationships.
- It determines our emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses in specific relationship situations.

- **Traces or learning results** from previously repeated object relations experiences.
Summary

- Objects can be divided into part object and whole object.
- People tend to engage in splitting as a defense mechanism so that they won't lose a good relationship.
- And after the splitting, they tend to block, deny, or criticize the bad object.

Points to learn

- When fear is triggered, we can split our objects as a defense mechanism.
- Working model or representation is formed or maintained as a result of learning.
I. Major Concepts and Propositions

4 Defense (Protection) Mechanisms
1 Meaning & Function
2 Types
Meaning

• Mechanisms that are developed to deal with fear experienced in relationships with objects

- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of engulfment (loss of individuality, control)
- Fear of emptiness (due to loss of relationship with self)
Functions

- Desperate and unconscious attempts at not experiencing rejection, engulfment or emptiness.
- When we use defense mechanisms, we *don't have to confront* the fear triggered in specific situations.
- But when used too often, a pathological pattern of avoidance in real relationships is formed.
- *Avoiding fearful situations or trying to reduce anxiety* to certain degree is actually a good thing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splitting</td>
<td>• Clearly discerning the good and bad parts of an object that triggers satisfaction and distress: ignores, criticizes, attacks the <strong>bad part to stop it from getting revealed.</strong></td>
<td>• A client blatantly criticizing the counselor who disappointed him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection</td>
<td>• <strong>Passing on</strong> one’s excessive fear onto another object</td>
<td>• ‘Dr. Kim. I know you don’t like me. You wish that I wouldn’t come to counseling, right?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In other words, when you have fear of rejection, you feel that the object is trying to reject you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projective Identification</td>
<td>• Going one step further from projection, it involves trying to <strong>manipulate others to behave in the projected way</strong></td>
<td>• A repeatedly says, ‘You don’t like me, right? I know…’ to friend B: B denies it at first, but gets tired later and actually abandons A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive control</td>
<td>• Excessively controlling object or situation in order to avoid experiencing inner sense of rejection and emptiness.</td>
<td>• Messaging your boyfriend repeatedly when he does not respond to your calls or messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive blocking</td>
<td>• Blocking a relationship from forming from the very beginning by saying that relationships are not important, in order to avoid feeling inner sense of rejection and emptiness.</td>
<td>• Inside, relationship formation is important. But on the outside you pretend that you are not interested in forming relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defense (Protection) Mechanisms

Summary

• Defense (protection) mechanisms are triggered in order to deal with fears experienced in relationships with objects.

Points to learn

• The way you process internal fear (anxiety) triggers defense (protection) mechanisms
• Fixated defense (protection) mechanisms are maintained to the present point in time
• They are maintained even in the future through client’s working model/representation.
I I. Change Mechanisms & Intervention Methods

1. Moving from the Problem State to the Changed State
   1. Problem State vs. Changed State
   2. Change Facilitating Factor
From the unconscious domain
Rejected (abandoned) by the object
Feeling worthless, as if one will disappear

(negotric) anxiety occurs

(to deal with fear) defense (protection) mechanism is activated automatically/unconsciously
activated defense mechanism becomes rigid (formation of problematic personality)
Previous way (inadequate in current situation) is maintained, even though the situation has changed
Problem State vs. Changed State

**Changed State**

- A state in which unnecessary fear occurs *less frequently*
- A state in which defense (protection) mechanisms are triggered *less automatically*
- A state in which rigidified defense (protection) mechanisms are triggered *selectively*
- Changes in problem behavior, relationship style, and symptoms
Change Facilitating Factor

- Provide “corrective object (attachment) relations”
  - Provide interpretation and insights about unconscious processes
  - Directly meet clients’ object (attachment) needs
  - Contain the fear client experiences when needs are not met

- **Awareness** about unconscious contents and processes ➔ **insight**
  - Awareness about unconscious fear
  - Awareness about the process of defense (protection) mechanisms forming and becoming rigid unconsciously
Change Facilitating Factor

- Directly satisfy frustrated object relations (or attachment) needs
  - Counselor directly provides client’s deficient relationship (attachment) needs
  - Because the counselor will eventually frustrate the client as well

- Experience/become aware of the fear that rejection will be repeated
  - Experience the fear being contained
  - Experience the acting out behavior caused by fear being held
Experience of a constant object

- Constantly remaining in one’s position without reacting to the two types of client efforts shown below

- Overly trying (to show only the good sides in order) to maintain (attract, seduce) the relationship
- Overly trying to avoid forming any relationship (because she is afraid of relationship loss)
Change Facilitating Factor

- The objective of every strategy or skill
  - Help client endure the fear of (expected) rejection
    - Make unconscious contents and processes conscious
    - Directly fulfill deficient object (attachment) needs
    - Hold and contain client’s emotional, behavioral reactions
    - Not react to client’s seduction or rejection
II. Change Mechanisms & Intervention Methods

2. Strategies and Techniques
   1. Characteristics of Strategies and Techniques
   2. Types of Strategies and Techniques
Characteristics

- The distinction between providing corrective relationship and counseling skills isn't very clear.
- Difficult to apply packaged techniques
- It’s a lot like counselor’s attitude
## Types of Strategies and Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Strategies and Techniques</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Empathic Relationship             | - Empathize pain and frustration due to deficiency  
- Does not directly fulfill |
| Holding                           | - Not retaliating against various (seductive, hostile) reactions clients engage in in order to deal with relationship loss |
| Containing                        | - Containing and empathizing with intense emotional reactions clients show in their process of dealing with relationship loss |
| Providing permanent object        | - Being present with client without reacting to or retaliating against the seductive or aggressive reactions clients engage in in order to prevent relationship loss |
III. Theory’s Current State and Prospect

1. Current State and Prospect
   1. Current State and Prospect
   2. Implications
Implications

- **Relationship needs** are more important than sexual desire
- (Rather than anxiety) ‘fear’ triggers **automatic reactions**

“The Emotional Brain”

“Synaptic Self”
Implications

Past me

Present me
People have drives. 

- The most intense drive is **relationship needs**.
- It’s possible to understand the **hidden meaning** behind client behavior around his relationship needs.
- Once we understand the drive, we can also understand seemingly opposite behaviors.
Implications

Possibility of relationship loss sometimes triggers fear

- When abandoned in relationship or individuality is lost, fear is triggered
- Fear triggers defense mechanisms
- Defense mechanisms creates problems.

Defense Mechanisms

- The most representative one is splitting.
- Once created defense mechanisms continue.
- The factor contributing to the maintenance is working model / representation.
**Implications**

It’s important to not overly use splitting.

- Experience relationship that doesn’t require splitting
- Ways to manage/process excessive fear
  - Become aware of defense mechanism, various thoughts & behaviors
  - **Provide corrective relationship**: constant object
- Need to discover and implement a new and appropriate way to manage fear
  - Bearing with fear
  - Non engaging in excessive reactions
Implications

Past me

Present me
THANK YOU