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Can an ingroup be an internal object?

A case for a new construct

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The concept of "ingroup" is not typically used in psychoanalysis. It is more familiar in social psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Similarly, "internal object" is not a concept that is utilized in those disciplines. Yet, if these two terms can be integrated across disciplines, the result of conceptually enriching each may become apparent. The limitation has persisted because one term refers to intergroup behavior, while the other term applies to unconscious processes in the context of interpersonal behavior. This chapter examines how identity groups are internalized and function unconsciously in the minds of individuals. It addresses the psychological transformation of the individual operating in an interpersonal context into an identity group member functioning in an intergroup context. The capacity to understand more about this complicated experience requires a construct that usefully explains how an identity group is internalized and thereby functions intrapsychically to influence behavior. The construct of a social object representation is discussed to clarify how an ingroup can be an internal object and how it can influence both self-experience and intergroup behavior.

"Ingroup" refers to an identity group in society to which an individual has an actual and psychological-emotional attachment. The ingroup contributes to our conception of ourselves, our self-concept. Related to the ingroup, the concept of "outgroups" refers to identity groups that we do not belong to and at times outgroups can be in conflict with our ingroup. It is clear that ingroups have a significant impact on human lives. In order to understand whether ingroups can become internal objects, we need to clarify what internal objects represent.

In this chapter, "internal object" refers to the internalization of an external object with which one has a significant relationship. Although there is no consensus about what constitutes an internal object across varying psychoanalytic models, most of the time when we speak about objects we are referring to other people. "Internal object" refers to the internalized representation of an affective connection between the self and an other (Kernberg, 1976). Importantly, it can also pertain to the relationship of the self with an animate or inanimate object, which is satisfying or unsatisfying (good or bad).

The pioneers of psychoanalysis had to formulate concepts that articulate what is happening when experiences of relationships are internalized and become dynamically influential in the course of a human life. Abraham (1911), Ferenczi (1909),

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and Freud (1917) introduced three constructs associated with internalization. Taken together, they describe psychic maturation of internalization processes. *Incorporation* and *introjection* are more primitive forms of internalization. In these two psychologically early forms of internalizing an external object, distinct self-other differentiation is not complete. These processes are building blocks for psychically associating with the external world. They provide a means for the self to take in or "internalize" experiential dimensions of the relationship with the object (initially the mothering person). As self-other differentiation develops, new experiences of relating can be internalized. The process of *identification* facilitates a more mature form of relationship with an object. Freud (1921) suggested that identification is "the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person" (p. 105), at which point distinct self-other differentiation is present. This comment foreshadowed an object relations perspective in which the experience of oneself is interdependent with the object. Internal objects are important in clinical psychoanalysis because they provide a conceptual basis for understanding how external experience can be internalized, allowing the mind thereby to influence behavior, pathology in particular.

The concept of internal object relations was described by many theorists throughout the twentieth century, each having his or her particular emphasis (Director, 2018). (For a thorough overview of the evolution of ideas regarding internal objects see Ogden [1983].) The focus of this chapter is on an unconventional use of the concept of internal object. The emphasis will be on how large groups (specifically identity groups) influence the development of mind, perception of self and other, and, most important, groups of others. Fairbairn's (1952) ideas about internal objects are well suited for this purpose. A core tenet of Fairbairn's perspective is that libido is object seeking. In other words, individuals are oriented toward other people from the beginning. He believed that human motivation is oriented toward facilitating satisfying and cooperative relationships. However, given the inevitable imperfection of relating, he believed that we internalize the unsatisfying experiences of relationships with our first significant others (parental figures). This happens as a way to manage the anxiety aroused by dependence upon these unsatisfying but significant external others. The fact that these experiences are negative leads to their repression, and this establishes the first internal objects. Fairbairn's internal objects are completely dependent upon the behavior of the external object (individuals).

Internal objects are pathological in Fairbairn's unique metapsychology. This is logical if the definition of internal objects is that they are established through repression of "bad" experiences with external objects. Fairbairn did not see any reason for a satisfying relationship (a good object) to be repressed. Therefore, only bad objects, which cannot be tolerated consciously, are internalized and then repressed, becoming internal objects. The internal object is a defensive effort to deal with a frustrating and unsatisfying external object. Fairbairn suggested that at a very early time in development the infant establishes internal objects to make up for not having a satisfying external object (1952, p. 34). The self is dependent upon the external object from the beginning. From a developmental perspective,

pathology is an outcome of what Fairbairn called infantile dependence persisting into adulthood. In this mode Fairbairn writes, "the object with which the individual is identified becomes equivalent to an incorporated object, or to put it in more arresting fashion, the object in which the individual is incorporated is incorporated in the individual" (1952, pp. 42–43). If this is true, it explains how a significant external object can have a place in the mind.

The self is unavoidably, to varying degrees, intertwined with external objects. When the inevitable unsatisfying aspects of a relationship upon which one is dependent become intolerable, they are repressed. This results in everyone having some degree of identification with an object, because parenting is never perfect. In other words, each person internalizes some aspects of the negative relationship with a significant other. People have internal objects because of the imperfection of human relations. This is why Fairbairn wrote that our identifications become our experience of ourselves (1952, p. 47). But, unlike Freud's use of identification as a tie to a differentiated object, for Fairbairn it is a basis for human interdependence. If this is an acceptable way to think about internal objects, could this suggest how ingroups (if they become significant objects upon which we depend) can have a place in the mind? And can it then explain how ingroups can thereby affect the way we behave and experience ourselves?

The first social group

In an early paper, Fairbairn (1935) articulated how the family context is associated with progressive "sociological" group formations. Extrapolating from there, we can say that this paper implies that an ingroup can have a place in the mind alongside internal objects that are associated with individuals of historical significance. Conceptually, the family is a holding environment for the individual caregivers. These significant individuals are the ones who become the original internal objects. Therefore, the family context influences these internal objects. In his paper, Fairbairn examined the evolution of social groups beginning with the family as the first social group. He described how the family is a fundamental component of subsequent larger groups such as clans, tribes, and nations. Fairbairn's description of the family as the first social group and how it is interrelated with larger social groups is an early psychoanalytic articulation of the formation of ingroups. Unacknowledged is the fact that the individuals who represent the first internalized objects in the mind operate within the larger group structure of the family. We tend to overlook the potential of the family and, possibly, the social groups that stem from it as internal objects (Aviram, 2014).

In dialectical fashion, individuals influence the family atmosphere, while the family atmosphere affects the individuals. Fairbairn believed that each person's loyalty to the family can be extended to identity groups, which become his or her ingroups. We can understand this to be an extension of his premise that libido is object seeking, now applied to important identity structures in society. So long as the groups do not seek to replace the family ties by demanding complete allegiance, he thought, individuals need and seek ingroup affiliations. Only pathological large

groups like the fascist and communist movements in Fairbairn's time and passively, radical Islamic organizations such as ISIS in our time try to replace family bonds by demanding loyalty to the large group instead. They insist on becoming the individual's new family. These pathological ingroups try to eliminate the need for the family of origin. Fairbairn correctly predicted that those kinds of large groups would ultimately fail, because the family seems to be a core component of self that is rarely given up. In fact, it is likely that only the most internally fragile are willing to reject their association with the original family group. This perhaps offers a way to predict what will happen with the current destructive large groups in our epoch. Those familiar with Fairbairn's work will recognize the parallel between this description of the importance of the individual's tie to the family and his discovery that children do not relinquish ties with parents even if they are abusive. Here we have a parallel with another important concept in social psychology, called ingroup favoritism. It is a common finding that people favor their ingroup over outgroups (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). The internalized family provides a psychodynamic basis for the occurrence of this phenomenon in society. Most people do not seek out other families to replace their own. Fairbairn believed that the difficulty of rejecting poor caregivers was a reflection of the internalization and repression of the negative elements of the relationship. In adulthood, these internal "bad" objects continuously shape the course of life and perception of interpersonal relationships. They limit psychological growth and the potential for consciously engaged, mature interdependent relationships. In other words, unconscious processes, such as transference, shape relating.

Can a large group to which an individual belongs also become internalized in a way that can psychologically have an impact how that individual feels about himself or herself and influence perception and behavior? This would be similar to but not identical with how internal objects associated with individuals shape interpersonal relationships. If the family is the first social group, what happens to our early experience of this group? How is it represented in the mind? The influence of the family atmosphere is an important lasting emotional memory for most, if not all, individuals. The family, like a significant individual caregiver, is an early context upon which we are unconditionally dependent. The family can provide an additional layer of satisfaction and safety to the one offered by the interpersonal relationship with each caregiver. Both offer a context that meets physical and psychological needs. As the child and young adult emerge into the world beyond the atmosphere of the family, many of the identity groups that continue to meet our sometimes physical but certainly the emotional needs that began in the family also promote emotional well-being and can at times determine survivability.

At the same time, there are dissatisfactions with the family, in parallel to the individual caregivers. Clearly some family environments are emotionally and physically safer than others. Recall that Fairbairn believed that we internalize and repress "bad" or unsatisfying objects. If the family, the first social group, is "bad" and all families are to some extent, is it not possible that the family will also become a potential object for internalization? In that case, the bad aspects of the family are split off and repressed as bad objects. Fairbairn believed that

our unconditional dependence upon the early environment is the ultimate cause of internalization and repression (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 66). Unconditional dependence is what makes "badness" intolerable in consciousness, in that survival is dependent upon this individual/family. Repression of the split-off bad aspects of the family allow one to continue to function in that context. As Fairbairn (1952) put it, "the sense of outer security resulting from this process of internalization is, however, liable to be seriously compromised by the resulting presence within [the person] of internalized bad objects. Outer security is thus purchased at the price of inner insecurity" (p. 65).

The social object representation

I have called this kind of internal object a *social object representation* (Aviram, 2005). The construct is needed in order to differentiate the social object representation from internal objects associated with interpersonal relationships of historical significance. It represents a place in the mind for the earliest experience of oneself as a family/group member. It lays the foundation in the mind for all subsequent associations with identity groups. The social object becomes the unconscious representation for our potential relationship with ingroups, society's extensions of early family experience, which, however, is not a substitute for the actual parents. These identity groups function as the external context through which to engage the dynamics associated with the human need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This may be expressed by children when they feel insecure about their place in the family or how welcome they feel in peer groups. An example of this is the frequent report of having fantasized about being adopted. Another is a child "running away from home" by hiding in the bushes to see if someone will come to look for him. Later in development, teenagers wrestle with these feelings as they traverse high school territory with its large number of cliques.

Fairbairn's "endopsychic mind" was originally conceived to reflect interpersonal relations with individual caregivers. The first external object is the mother. The world is brought to the infant by this important first object. A developmental process unfolds with the first experiences dependent upon one other person. There has been precedent for considering that the object world can be multidimensional beyond a two-person relationship. For example, Scharff and Scharff (1987) introduced the representation of the internal couple that we carry of our parent's relationship. The internal representation of the parental couple influences subsequent marital relationships with needs for love and defenses against rejection.

In early life, the meaning of family also emerges to become the first social group. The family is greater than the sum of its parts. Experientially, the family offers something in addition to experiences provided by the mothering figures (and possibly siblings) in the infant's life. If the parents offer acceptance, the family can offer belonging. It is important to note that the family is not a parental substitution. This suggests that the family and subsequent large groups with which we affiliate can have independent effects on minds of individuals that cannot be anticipated as an outcome of interpersonal histories. If that is so, then we

need a construct to represent the social groups with which we are all interdependent. I have commented before (Aviram, 2014), just as there is no baby without a mother (Winnicott, 1965), there is no adult without an identity group (nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, age cohort, profession, and so on).

Belonging is the experience of love that the group provides, alongside the caregiver's love, associated with acceptance and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951). The dynamics of belonging play out on a continuum, from feeling like an outsider to being an insider. It is relatively common in psychoanalytic psychotherapy to discover the patient's underlying and long-standing experience of feeling like an outsider. This makes sense: if the maturational intent is to relate, then the struggle to belong takes shape in feeling like an outsider. Are feelings of being an outsider an indication of the "return of the badness" of the repressed social object? Initially, the dynamics of belonging occur within the family, but obviously it is relevant for identifications with one's clan, tribe, and nation — or any other identity group to which we develop an attachment as we go through life. To wish to belong is a common desire. It makes sense that if individuals struggle to establish meaningful, cooperative, and satisfying interpersonal relationships, at the group level they can struggle with similar feelings associated with belonging. If the family is as important as individual parents are, then libido continues to seek similar group affiliations. Regarding the social object, the seeking pertains to an atmosphere of belonging that was uniquely experienced with the family and is a continuation of our object-seeking nature.

A third internal object

In keeping with Fairbairn's notion of a dynamic endopsychic mind, the social object becomes a third "bad" object with which the libidinal and antilibidinal ego/selves engage under certain conditions. As an internal object that can influence our relationships with societal identity structures, the social object operates alongside Fairbairn's exciting and rejecting objects, which reflect interpersonal relations. Most of the time this third internal object is dormant. A majority of people do not participate in society with a constant awareness of their group identities. The social object representation, however, has the capacity to become a suprazordinate internal object. What I mean by this is that any individual can be overwhelmed by societal conditions that are associated with identity groups. The most obvious examples are wars and societal stressors that manifest in prejudices, but it also operates in more common situations. For example, the social object may be activated when a police officer engages an African American in the United States. When young adults find their way into gangs, or cults, or the Boy Scouts, or armies, perhaps the social object is activated and influencing perceptions of oneself and others as group members. For sure, when sports fans from rival teams riot, it is unconsciously motivated; otherwise, why would such destructive behavior occur over such a trivial matter? Although appearing trivial, the significance of group belonging is the motivator. What about when men and women interact in a context with power differentials? At those moments, there is a psychological shift in which individuals perceive themselves and others as ingroup and outgroup

members. For brief moments, they are not individuals; they are identity group members. Social psychologists have reported on this for a long time. They have found that when group identity is salient, individuals perceive themselves and others as group members rather than individuals (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Group membership and the social object

The implications for intergroup behavior are significant. When an individual psychologically transforms into a group member, the social object overrides the rejecting and exciting internal bad objects associated with interpersonal relations. When this occurs, there is a subtle experience of outsider or insider, inferior or superior, depending on the historical relationship one has had with group membership. The social object representation is the unconscious template for group belonging. At those moments, the social object influences behavior as a group member, rather than as an individual. For brief moments, and for some people for extended periods, relations with other people become intergroup relations. The social world has shifted into perceptions of group belonging and the unconscious need to establish safety. The threat can range from mild anxiety to annihilation anxiety. Anxiety initiates behavior that can be destructive in an effort to establish psychological safety. Individuals can be overwhelmed by social forces that turn them into group members (or create the perception of exclusion from the group). For example, during periods of economic hardship, otherwise tolerant people can become rejecting of outgroup members (immigrants, minorities, people with lower or higher socio-economic status). Stressful societal atmospheres can activate ingroup status as an avenue for emotional safety. To be part of a group offers safety in numbers, whereas the lone individual is more vulnerable. All individuals can be affected by these societal conditions. Therefore, all individuals are susceptible to the "return of bad social objects." Fairbairn explained, "an unconscious situation involving internalized bad objects is liable to be activated by any situation in outer reality conforming to a pattern which renders it emotionally significant in the light of the unconscious situation" (1952, p. 76). Furthermore, "when such bad objects are released, the world around the patient becomes peopled with devils which are too terrifying for him to face" (p. 69). Fairbairn dealt with the problem of a return of bad objects from the standpoint of interpersonal relationships. He suggested that when a person breaks down, it is a failure of repression that releases the bad object in the form of a malevolent mother or father.

When we encounter behavior connected to identity group status, it is not so much a malevolent mother or father emerging out of repression as much as activation of primitive associations with belonging. The implication of a failure of repression of the "bad social object" is that identity groups begin to represent survival in such a way that belonging is a matter of life and death. To be outside the ingroup is to be in a vulnerable situation, and the most extreme behaviors are likely to be associated with the earliest fearful perceptions of unconditional dependence upon the family. At that earliest period, as well as in adulthood, vulnerability and survival are interdependent with belonging to the family/ingroup.

The need to maintain an attachment to the family/ingroup becomes paramount when anxieties activate the repressed unconscious social object. Self-protective defenses begin to influence perception. This relies on the defense of splitting that simplifies the world. The axis of belonging that engages the continuum from being a lonely outsider to being a desperate insider will determine how splitting will operate. This defensive stance is maintained so firmly because, as Fairbairn put it, it is literally a matter of life and death (1952, p. 67). In a context of competing identity groups, individuals who manifest the dynamic of the insider are at higher risk for destructive intergroup behavior than the outsider. For the insider, the ingroup is used defensively to provide safety and self-esteem. Under more threatening conditions, how he or she treats the outgroup is a function of many variables and is especially dependent upon societal norms, deterrents, and ingroup leaders' messages about the outgroup. Societies have developed ways to contain the risks of this destructive process most of the time. The degree to which a person identifies with his or her ingroup is an outcome of several variables. If societal conditions are threatening (e.g., war), most people will be strongly identified with the ingroup/nation. When conditions are less threatening in society, the influence of the unconscious will operate to determine the degree of identification with the ingroup. The person overidentified with his ingroup reflects libidinal needs at a group level that manifest in a feeling of superiority. In contrast, the outsider struggles with vulnerability of isolation but is often passive, looking on, feeling excluded or inferior.

Consider an example I observed of this in society. A Caucasian man stepped in front of a woman of color on a line for a rest room. The woman did not accept his slight and informed the man that she was waiting on the line, requesting that he return to his place behind her. He seemed to have made an assumption that she was not a customer in the shop because he told her that the rest room was only for customers. She explained that she would be buying something after she used the bathroom. At that point he increased his hostility and told her to "go back to where [she] came from." I am sure he did not mean "outside the store"! In that context, it was understandable that he was referring to some far-off native land. She understood that he was attacking her with prejudice. She remained composed and told him that he would be going after her, as she stepped in front of him and calmly held her place on line.

We can understand such incidents by recognizing that this man was overidentified with his ingroups of white, male, and American, implying that the woman was not an equal as an outgroup member. His behavior was dismissive of her as a person. At that moment, her social object was activated as a foreigner, a woman of color. Our hypothesis regarding this event is that the man was overidentified with an ingroup, which activated an entitled superiority in relation to the woman outgroup member. He perceived her not as an individual but rather as a member of an outgroup. The woman herself appeared to have maintained an optimal balance between being a group member and being an individual, all indicative of psychological health. The capacity to function effectively as both an individual and a member of a group even when ingroup status is activated is healthy. If this were

not the case, it is likely that this event would have escalated as the two individuals became group members, each representing the outgroup for the other. When the threat becomes too great, optimal balance dissolves for most people.

The psychodynamics of the social object

A person within an optimal range balances autonomy as an individual with functional group belonging. This healthy balance permits the social object to function as a dominant third internal object, while the person participates in society with other individuals interpersonally. Balance of autonomy as an individual with functional ingroup attachments assists the overall functional wholeness of the self. This helps the group dimension of human life to enhance and strengthen one's existence. Individuals who fall beyond the outsider-to-insider optimal range, at the extremes of the Bell curve, manifest difficulties that show up in the way they feel about group belonging. For these individuals, the social object is activated in a way that overshadows internal objects of interpersonal relations (rejecting and exciting "bad" objects in Fairbairn's scheme).

Experientially, the outsider (beyond the optimal range) struggles with his or her perception of rejection from the group. These individuals can recognize feelings of resentment and jealousy. They may look at what others seem to have together or how happy they seem to be, and yet they do not feel that they can be part of the group. Outsiders feel fragile in society. They look on and perceive that other people feel connected with each other in a way that eludes them. If they do participate in a group it tends to offer a transient sense of belonging. Their group identity is precarious, and they do not feel secure in their experience of belonging. Such individuals are likely to come for psychotherapy when their sense of being outsiders becomes unbearable in the form of detachments from others. They then report an inability to form lasting relationships or a feeling that what they have is not good enough or their ongoing insecurity in trusting whether someone does or could love them. If you ask, they are likely to report that they have always felt like outsiders. Their family histories will indicate something about this experience. These individuals live out Fairbairn's recognition that internal bad objects provide external security at the cost of internal insecurity. They bring this into the world of social groups. They perceive the ingroups from which they are excluded as all good, while they themselves are bad.

The insiders (those outside the optimal range) tend to overidentify with the ingroup. These individuals need the group to feel secure. They probably have a history of seeking a variety of groups to shore up their self-esteem. The ingroup can play that role so long as it does not disappoint. The overzealous soldiers that Fairbairn (1943) wrote about who were sidelined and then had breakdowns represent this group. These are also the prejudiced individuals in a society. As a result of the overidentification with the ingroup, these individuals tend to perceive all others as either ingroup or outgroup members. They tend to function at a group level, rather than the interpersonal level. This manifests in idealization of the ingroup and disparagement and hate of the outgroup. The overidentification reveals the

underlying pathology of the social object. For these individuals, the self and the ingroup have merged. These individuals try to reverse Fairbairn's notion about external security at the expense of internal insecurity. For the insider, a semblance of internal security is achieved with the merger of the self and ingroup. In this case, splitting operates to maintain the ingroup/self as all good and superior, thereby making them individually superior. This comes at the cost of external insecurity with outgroups that constantly feel threatening. These individuals are not likely to come to psychotherapy for their intergroup attitudes. However, addressing interpersonal crises with other ingroup members and enhancing personal self-worth can shift the overidentification with ingroups by initiating more secure autonomy as an individual.

Effects of psychotherapy on the social object

In an interpersonal relationship, which the psychotherapy context offers, the identity group is not often highlighted. In therapy, the two individuals form a bond that is interpersonal. That does not mean that the identity group dimension of the relationship is not noticed or talked about. Therapists can check with patients regarding historical experiences that pertain to belonging as a way to give voice to the part of mind associated with the social object.

The pathology of the social object is an aberration of our relational needs, expressed in terms of the need to belong that groups provide. It is built on the developmentally preceding interpersonal experiences one has had with caregivers. Even though individual pathology associated with the interpersonal world can be present, a pathology of group belonging can also affect the course of life. The social object implies that individuals seek affiliation with identity groups in similar ways to early family group experiences.

The good social object

Fairbairn was criticized for not making room in his endopsychic model for a good object to also be an internal object. His logic did not permit him to equate the two experiences in the unconscious. Repression was strictly for bad, intolerable experiences. This also made sense when considering that Fairbairn believed that infants are born whole with an unsplit, "pristine central ego." The infant is innately oriented to seek positive, cooperative, and satisfying relations with its external objects from the beginning. It implies that the infant starts life with a whole good object. It is only after the inevitable dissatisfactions become chronically experienced that repression of the split-off, intolerable rejecting or exciting but unsatisfying aspects of the relationship with the external object happens.

Fairbairn (1958) understood that the personal relationship with an analyst offers to correct distorted internalized relationships with bad objects. This anticipates the view that a relationship with a good object provides multiple new configurations within the self system (Skolnick, 2014). This implies that subsequent

positive relationships can heal pathology and bring one closer to the original potential of the self that starts out whole and good before bad experiences occur. A new positive relationship with an analyst offers a working-through process and simultaneously provides a real relationship that does not have to be repressed. Instead, it is experiential and functions in both conscious and preconscious fashions. An outcome of the relationship with the good external object reinstates the original object-seeking potential that can operate anew with less unconscious negative influence. Patients engage external good objects in healthier ways, and that implies more consciousness. The internalized but not repressed aspects of our historical experiences with good objects, as well as new experiences, can also be thought of as becoming suffused throughout the personality, as J. D. Sutherland, a colleague of Fairbairn, commented (Personal Communication, D. Scharff).

All this applies to relations with identity groups. People are conscious of their identity group affiliations. The group's values contribute to self-esteem. Some individuals struggle with belonging and cannot integrate the ingroup as a good object. For others, the possibility of using the ingroup as a compensation for a fragile self is useful but promotes other difficulties with outgroups. In these cases, the ingroup functions as an external good object. For these individuals, identification with the ingroup tends to become an overidentification. In Fairbairn's terms, primary identification has eliminated any differentiation between the self and the large group, and this is an indication of pathology. The social object represents the repression of difficulties with group affiliation that began with the first social group, the family. If and when new and positive relationships are engaged, the potential to rebalance the capacity to function as a person and a group member simultaneously can be instated.

Conclusion

In an otherwise healthy individual, the ingroup functions alongside the family, and the family operates as a support for the individual who engages interpersonally with others. The healthy individual is able to interact with a diverse set of individuals with little attention to the large-group membership of the other. Identity groups are important resources for people in society, complementing their interpersonal relationships. They exist as unavoidable categories of identity that extend developmentally outward from the original family. Identity groups represent the group dimension of our innate object-seeking nature. They function alongside our interpersonal relations, rather than taking over as an object upon which the person is fully dependent. The social object that is a bad internal object functionally engages with the external identity group in a way that shows how the need to belong is intertwined with survival and growth. In the pathologies of social objects, individuals struggle with either feeling like outsiders or merging with ingroups as overcompensation for their need to belong. Most people function within an optimal range. However, societal conditions can activate the social object with preference for outsider or insider dynamics for all people.

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7 Beyond subject and object, or why object-usage is not a good idea

Juan Tubert-Oklander

Classical psychoanalysis has had an anti-environmental bias. There were some personal determinants of this on Freud's part, but also various psycho-social factors and many of his philosophical and epistemological assumptions led him to hope that the discipline he had created would become just another natural science. This led to a theory-building strategy based on an individual paradigm, the primacy of the past (which seemed to fit quite nicely with causal explanations), an the focus on the intrapsychic. There have been many attempts to transcend this bias, from both a relational and a social and political perspective, which led to the development of group analysis. There have been various attempts to integrate the individual and the collective perspectives, and I believe there is an urgent need for a new paradigm of the human being, developed along these lines, based on an transcending both psychoanalysis and group analysis.

Nonetheless, the very nature of Freud's discovery of the procedure he devised for the treatment of and inquiry into neurotic afflictions and the experiences that emerge from it was of quite a different nature from the impersonal objective facts that characterize the natural sciences. Although he never openly acknowledged it, his work was more akin to the humanities than to the reductionist natural science he had received from his teachers. Yet he was also aware that his subject matter was imposing on him something different from what he had intended. In his case story of Elizabeth von R., in *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud, 1895d), he writes the following caveat:

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, *they lack the serious stamp of science*. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own.

(p. 160, italics added.)

Hence, he was afraid of losing “the serious stamp of science,” perhaps because he was afraid that his discoveries and ideas might be rejected by the scientific and academic establishments he so passionately yearned to be a part of. But this:

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