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MARGARET S. MAHLER

Symbiosis and Separation-Individuation

BEYOND FREUD

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In this chapter we will trace the development of Margaret Mahler's research, clinical works and theoretical conceptualizations. Although Mahler's concepts have always been firmly grounded in either clinical or naturalistic observations, it is interesting and in keeping with a book whose theme traces developments beyond Freud, to first look briefly at Freud's concepts of early development and to compare these concepts with Mahler's pioneering work. Although Freud did not do observational studies, he at times wrote about early development, and in our opinion this aspect of his work has been somewhat neglected.

It would also be of some importance and interest to compare the theoretical statements of various writers about early development. Certainly such a comparison might include Jacobson, Hartmann, Winnicott and perhaps other authors from the British object relations school. Mahler's work would make this comparison particularly interesting since she and her co-workers have provided both theoretical conceptions and empirical observations about early development.

Freud was frequently concerned with how the infant began to learn about

the external world. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he presents his well-known views of the infant, at first primarily or only concerned with pleasure and later, through deprivation, coming to know about the external world. This conception of how the infant turns from its primary concern (pleasure or tension reduction) to secondary concerns (the outside world) is based heavily on a tension-regulation model. Freud's later views, which are contained in large part in his papers on narcissism and his metapsychological papers (1914, 1915), are less centered on a tension-regulation or reduction model. In these and other papers, Freud put forth the guidelines of an interesting theory of early development, but in this chapter we can only sketch out some of his ideas. Freud sees the early mental development of the infant and child as taking place along three polarities —pleasure-pain, subject-object, and active-passive—an idea that has a developmental unfolding. In early life, pleasure and pain predominate, and Freud maintains that for the infant or child (we do not know the age range to which Freud referred), the external world is at first primarily a matter of indifference. This corresponds to Freud's notion of primary narcissism, in which satisfaction or pleasure, from the infant's perspective, is autoerotic. At this time, the external world is not cathected with interest (in a general sense) and is indifferent for purposes of satisfaction (Freud, 1914). Interestingly, although Mahler uses different terminology, her autistic phase bears striking resemblance to this Freudian phase.

At Freud's next step in development, we run into something of a paradox.

Freud (1915) postulates that as the infant continues to experience the external world, "it acquires objects from the external world, and, in spite of everything, it cannot avoid feeling internal instinctual stimuli for a time as unpleasurable" (p. 135). As the infant builds up perceptions of (primarily internal) stimuli as unpleasurable and (primarily external) stimuli as pleasurable, it takes into itself (or introjects) the pleasurable stimuli and casts out (or projects) the unpleasurable stimuli. At this point, Freud (1915) maintains that "the *original* 'reality-ego' which distinguished internal and external by means of sound object criterion changes into a purified pleasure-ego" (p. 136). This pleasure ego has divided the world into all that is pleasurable, which is equated with itself ("ego subject," in Freud's terms), and all that is unpleasurable, which is equated with the external world. One can attempt to equate this idea of the purified pleasure ego with some of Mahler's findings and formulations, but for the purposes of this chapter we wish to make several related points about the concepts Freud puts forth.

First, Freud pointed out that development of certain reality-ego functions may be nonmonotic. Thus, the infant at an age prior to the purified pleasure ego is considered by Freud to be, in some ways, in better contact with reality than when the pleasure ego is formed. We believe this line of reasoning is consistent with several of Freud's concepts at this time (Freud, 1915), but the main point we wish to dwell on is that at a time when the infant, according to Freud, is indifferent to the external world, it can still develop a rudimentary reality ego. Thus, Freud saw

nothing incompatible with postulating a stage of primary narcissism in which pleasure is seen as passive, internal, and autoerotic, and yet at the same time certain types of "learning" can take place. The question for Freud was not whether the infant could correctly perceive certain aspects of reality but, rather, whether or how the object was viewed in terms of the infant's pleasurable and unpleasurable experiences. This is quite a different question than whether the infant can learn to respond during its first weeks or days of life.

As a second general point, Freud (1914, 1915) begins at about this time to make use of what today are frequently called projective-introjective mechanisms. These concepts are, of course, used frequently by Mahler as well as many others, but it is of interest to see the way she has both expanded and particularized the use of these concepts.

As a third related point, we wish to emphasize how during this era Freud stresses both the gradual nature of being able to know the pleasure-giving object as a separate entity and, even more important, the very gradual nature of the development of object love. Freud (1915, 1917) discusses aspects of the development of object love, but of course Mahler is able to delineate with much greater precision concepts such as libidinal object constancy on the pathway to object love. As we will see, Mahler's concepts and observations in many ways begin to fulfill the promissory notes that Freud left us in his many brilliant papers.

In this brief introduction we have touched on a few of the concepts that Freud introduced that bear some relationship to Mahler's work. We could, of course, make a much fuller comparison, but our intention is only to point out the relationship and set the stage to show how Mahler has built on and yet gone beyond what Freud could have even anticipated. In a chapter devoted to a historical recounting of the theorists who bear some important relation to Mahler's work, one would also have to include at least aspects of the work of Hartmann, Kris, and Lowenstein and large parts of Jacobson's work. Both Mahler (1979) and Kernberg (1980) have emphasized in different ways the importance of Jacobson's developmental concepts. Many other influential authors could be named, of course, but in our opinion, Spitz and Anna Freud's pioneering empirical studies were, in general, an inspiration to psychoanalytic researchers in many ways, particularly in demonstrating that theoretical concepts could be shown to have important empirical consequences.

Although all the authors mentioned have a variety of similarities (and differences) with respect to Mahler's work, in Loewald's (1979) words: "Her clear emphasis on the fundamental importance in early development and continuing throughout life, of differentiation and separation from an encompassing psychical matrix…have had a remarkable impact on current analytic understanding of children and adults." Although Freud implied the "dual unit" or dyad, Mahler makes it the beginning and most important part of her observational and theoretical field.

We shall discuss the work of Margaret Mahler in three parts: (1) her early papers, including her work on infantile psychosis; (2) her research project on separation-individuation and her theory of subphases resulting in beginning self and object constancy; and (3) applications of separation-individuation theory to psychoanalytic theory and treatment.

EARLY PAPERS

Mahler began her career as a pediatrician and director of a well-baby clinic in Vienna. The interests she developed at the outset of her professional life have remained important throughout her career. Probably the most important of these has been her interest in the mother and baby as a dyad, or, as she later referred to it, as a dual unity within one common boundary, a symbiotic pair. Beginning with her first paper delivered in this country, entitled "Pseudoimbecility: A Magic Cap of Invisibility" (Mahler, 1942), presented in 1940 to the Psychoanalytic Institute of New York, she demonstrated her interest in the pre-oedipal era, in motility, and in the affecto-motor communication between mother and child.

> Between child and mother there exists from the beginning a close phylogenetic bond which is unique and much more exclusive than communication by words or thoughts; it is an interrelationship through the medium of affective expressions…The interrelation between the unconscious of the mother and the reception of stimulation of the sense organs of the baby is the prototype for a way of communication between child and adult which is not confined within the limited sphere of language, (p. 4)

In her psychoanalytic work, Mahler began to treat several children suffering from childhood psychosis. This culminated in her eventual formulation of the autistic and symbiotic types of childhood psychosis (Mahler, 1952). She also became interested in determining how normal infants attain a sense of separate identity in the caretaking presence of their mothers. Examination of Mahler's papers of that period (those that preceded the beginning of observational research) reveals how closely connected in her thinking were the phases of early normal development and the consideration of extreme pathology. Mahler is essentially a psychoanalyst and a clinician, and her early papers are filled with clinical vignettes from the many severely disturbed children whom she treated as a child analyst. Yet her thinking about pathology never overshadowed her interest in normal mental life and her conviction about the importance of the early mother-child relationship.

In an early paper (Mahler, Ross, & DeFries, 1949), Mahler was already dealing with the child's problem around the waning of omnipotence.

> The child gradually realizes that its power is waning. It has not only to renounce essential gratification, but must in addition lose its sense of omnipotence. The language of violent affect is rendered useless as a means of communication with the parents, and the child has to renounce them in favor of speech…It seems as if these affective outbursts at the age of 2 to 3 years are struggling attempts in the child to maintain the archaic common ground so familiar to it: the intensely pleasurable affective rapport with the parents in the child's affective domination of them. This attempt is destined, like the Oedipal strivings, to fail from the danger of loss of love and fear of castration.

> Direct affective attacks failing, the child searches for other means to regain entrance to the Garden of Eden. This coincides in time with beginning to walk and the process of taking in impressions of the outside world with all the senses, acquiring knowledge and testing reality. The child utilizes these newly gained discoveries, to share them with mother and father, and thus restore a common ground with them. The expressions of enchantment and affection, which the parents give so abundantly at the first presentations of such fact finding, bring the child a temporary restoration of the old affective and a new intellectual co-experience with the parents.

This quotation already contains descriptions of behaviors that later, during the observational study of separation and individuation, become incorporated into the careful delineation of the subphases.

Mahler's papers on child psychosis contain many references to her view on normal development. In 1952 she stated:

> The intrauterine, parasite-host relationship within the mother organism must be replaced in the postnatal period by the infant's being enveloped, as it were, in the extrauterine matrix of the mother's nursing care, a kind of social symbiosis....
>
> The turning from predominantly proprioceptive awareness to increased sensory awareness of the outer world occurs through the medium of affective rapport with the mother. The baby's libido position thus proceeds from the stage of fetal narcissism to primary body narcissism, a stage in which representation of the mother's body plays a large part....
>
> To understand the dynamics in infantile psychosis, observation and study of the most important transitory step in the adaption to reality is necessary; namely, that step in the development of the sense of reality in which the mother is gradually left outside the omnipotent orbit of the self. This step is preliminary to, and perhaps alternates with, the process of

> endowing the mother with object-libidinal cathexis. The toddler gradually delimits his own individual entity from the primal mother-infant symbiotic unit. He separates his own self (and his mental representation) from that of the mother. This stage in ego development is a very vulnerable one, particularly in children in whose early life the somatopsychic symbiosis has been pathological, (pp. 132-134)

Mahler's interest and views on childhood psychosis and normal development were still closely intertwined at this point in her work. These remarks on early development occur in the same paper in which she outlines her views of autistic and symbiotic childhood psychosis. She describes primary autistic psychosis as a syndrome in which the mother, as representative of the outside world, seems never to have been perceived emotionally by the infant. The mother, therefore, remains a part object, seemingly devoid of specific cathexis and not distinguished from inanimate objects. These, according to Mahler, are infants with an inherently defective tension-regulating apparatus, which probably cannot be adequately complemented by even the most competent mothers. The inherent ego deficiency of these infants predisposes them from the very beginning to remain alienated from reality. Mahler (1952) states:

> It would seem that autism is the basic defense attitude of these infants, for whom the beacon of emotional orientation in the outer world—the mother as primary love object—is nonexistent. Early infantile autism develops, I believe, because the infantile personality, devoid of emotional ties to the person of the mother, is unable to cope with external stimuli and inner excitations, which threaten from both sides his very existence as an entity. (p. 145)

Mahler contrasts the autistic psychosis with the symbiotic infantile

psychosis. Symbiotic psychosis often goes unnoticed during the first 2 or 3 years of the child's life. It becomes evident at a point in development when the phase-specific demands include realization of separateness.

> The mechanisms which are characteristic in the *symbiotic* infantile psychosis are the introjective, projective mechanisms and their psychotic elaboration…These mechanisms aim at a restoration of the symbiotic parasitic delusion of oneness with the mother and thus are the diametric opposites of the function of autism….It seems that the symbiotic psychosis candidates are characterized by an abnormally low tolerance for frustration, and later by a more or less evident lack of emotional separation or differentiation from the mother. Reactions set in…at those points of the physiological and psychological maturation process at which separateness from the mother must be perceived and faced…agitated, catatoniclike temper tantrums and panic-stricken behavior dominate the picture; these are followed by bizarrely distorted reality testing and hallucinatory attempts at restitution. The aim is restoration and perpetuation of the delusional omnipotence phase of the mother-infant fusion of earliest times—a period at which the mother was an ever-ready extension of the self, at the service and command of "His Majesty, the Baby." (pp. 145-6)

THE SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION PROCESS

Mahler's observational research study of normal mother-child pairs began in 1959, the findings of which have been described in the second volume of *The Selected Papers of Margaret S. Mahler* (1979) and in *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). This research was prompted by the following questions: How do normal infants, during the first three years of life attain intrapsychic self and object representations? How do they move out of the

state of dual unity or symbiosis, during which they are not aware of themselves as separate, and achieve awareness of self as separate from other? How do they attain a measure of libidinal self and object constancy? The hypothesis of the study was that the human infant begins life in a state of complete dependence on the mothering one and in a state of nondifferentiation, or dual unity. The infant then undergoes a gradual process of differentiation or hatching out, which results in intrapsychic structures of self and object. The goal of the study was to learn about the process by which the first level of identity is achieved.

A setting was created in which mothers could interact freely with their infants. This was a large playroom with many appropriate toys, divided by a low, fencelike partition from the mothers' section. There mothers could sit comfortably and chat while watching their children, who were in a stimulating and safe environment. Participant observers were present at all times, mingling freely with mothers and children while maintaining a friendly yet neutral atmosphere. The participant observers later wrote down their observations in detail, and discussions took place in staff and research meetings, where observers and investigators met at least once but more often twice a week. The research thus created did not take place in an experimental artificial setting but in a very natural one—an indoor playground, as Mahler called it, where mothers were in charge of their children.

The observations of the participant observers were checked by regular

nonparticipant observations conducted through a one-way mirror. Nonparticipant observers wrote down what they saw at the time, and thus could obtain greater objectivity and detail than participant observers. Participant observers, however, knew the mothers and children; their observations were more impressionistic and subjective, but, it was thought, more in tune with the affective tone of the mother-child pairs. The mother-child pairs were observed 3 to 4 times a week for 2½ hour-long sessions over a period of 2½ years. The frequency and length of sessions provided a large data base from which it was possible to obtain an intimate and detailed knowledge of each mother-child pair and the development of their relationship.

In addition to participant and nonparticipant observations, mother-child pairs were regularly filmed. All mothers were interviewed by senior staff members once a week. These clinical interviews provided information about the family's life at home. They also gave the mothers the opportunity to talk about any aspect of themselves or their children that they chose to discuss. Fathers were interviewed several times a year, and home visits were conducted regularly, especially during vacation periods.

Several aspects of the study were of special importance. One, as noted, was the frequency with which observations were undertaken. This provided for a measure of objectivity, since a judgment made one day could be corrected the next. Another essential aspect of the research design was that it combined data

from longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives. Each mother-child pair was observed from the time the child was about 6 months old to 3 years. At the same time, there were always several mother-child pairs being observed simultaneously. Thus, children of any given age could be compared both with each other and with himself or herself over a time period.

Another essential aspect of the study was that, although observational in method, it was guided by psychoanalytic concepts. We believe that there was a good deal of carry-over from the way psychoanalysts make inferences in the psychoanalytic setting to the way the observers used inferences in these observational studies. As Mahler has put it, in these studies the psychoanalytic eye was guided by the observations themselves, as in the psychoanalytic situation the psychoanalytic ear is led by the analysand's free associations. Thus, this research study relied heavily on the psychoanalytic acumen and empathy of the observers and investigators, who were psychoanalysts. It rested on the meaning and coherence that emerged out of many multifaceted daily observations. In the psychoanalytic situation, analyst and analysand together create the psychoanalytic life history. In the study of separation-individuation, the observers created the life history of the unfolding mother-child relationship and the unfolding sense of self of the infant.

THE SUBPHASES

It was the comparative nature of the cross-sectional aspect of the study that eventually led to the delineation of the subphases of the separation-individuation process. For example, in the first group of children observed, a 1-year old girl was seen to explore the room freely, climbing a lot. At first it seemed surprising that her mother sat calmly, staying in contact with the girl over a distance and directing her to avoid dangerous situations. It was thought at first that perhaps this mother-child pair did not like physical contact. However, over time, after observing more mother-child pairs with infants around 1 year of age, it became clear that this kind of exploration with relatively limited physical contact between mother and child was characteristic of this particular age. This eventually came to be termed the "practicing subphase." In another example, a 16-month-old boy seemed to be anxiously clinging to his mother. It was not difficult to understand this in terms of the particular mother-child relationship, since the mother had shown considerable ambivalence about her baby after he was born. But, again, after watching more mother-child pairs with children of that age, it became clear that greater concern about mother's whereabouts was a typical phenomenon of the toddler.

The subphases were delineated quite early in the study. However, the intensive study of each mother-child pair made it possible to observe and study the individual variations within the regularity of subphase specificity. Such variations involved the timing, intensity, quality, and mood that characterized each particular mother-child pair. The subphases will be described in the

following pages. This description takes into account some of the more recent findings of infant researchers which have contributed to and enriched Mahler's original conceptualizations.

FROM 0-6 MONTHS

Since Mahler undertook her research project on the normal separation-individuation process, a great deal of research has been done with infants and their caretakers for example that of Brazelton (1974, 1981); Sander (1976); and Stern (1971, 1974, 1982). This research has shown that neonates are more active and discriminating, more responsive to outside stimuli, than had ever been thought. It has even been shown that they are capable of performing complex tasks. In other words, our view of the infant has been revolutionized. Mahler (personal communication) has reconsidered and rethought her earlier formulations and has agreed that the word "autistic" does not well describe what we now know about the neonate.

A more recent formulation of what Mahler originally called the autistic phase is that it is the time during which newborns have the task of adjusting to extrauterine existence, of finding their own niche in the external world. They have to achieve physiological homeostasis, that is, adequate inner regulation in synchrony with the vocal and gestural rhythms of their caregiver. Each infant elicits his or her own mother's caregiving, and the mother responds with

coenesthetic empathy to the needs of a particular infant. She is enabled to do so by reaching the state described by Winnicott (1956) as primary maternal preoccupation. Bergman (1982) has attempted to show from the mother's side how this particular empathic state is at times reached easily and smoothly and at other times with great difficulty.

The symbiotic phase, which is reached at around 2 months of age, is of great importance for separation-individuation theory, since on it rests the idea of a gradual hatching out, a psychological birth. The findings of contemporary infant research here pointed to the importance of distinguishing the regressed merger experience of pathology from the attunement and reciprocity of the normal symbiotic phase. Pine (1981) has hypothesized that what could be referred to as normal merging occurs during certain brief periods of high drive arousal. Bergman and Chernack (1982), in a paper dealing with preverbal communication, have shown how, during the symbiotic phase, differentiation and merging go hand in hand.

Observers agree that attunement, mutual empathy, or communion between mother and infant are at their height in the period from 2 to 5 months of age. Empathy is not possible without the ability to freely evoke states of loss of self, while maintaining the ability to regain a state of full awareness. The same happens in the creative process. Where does such ability come from? We believe that the blissfulness of the symbiotic stage, which is still longed for in later life, provides us

with a reservoir of self-other experiences, which in normal development are pleasurable and creative.

McDevitt (1981) has elucidated the symbiotic phase from a more cognitive perspective. He states that by age 2 to 3 months, the infant (1) both anticipates and initiates the pleasure provided by interaction with the mother; (2) develops a sense of confidence and basic trust in the caregiver and in his or her own initiative; and (3) responds by smiling and direct eye contact. The work of infant researchers has made us more aware of the capacity of the infant not only to initiate contact but also to control it through gaze and gaze aversion. Thus, the infant's sense of self during the symbiotic phase is fed by experiences that, even at that early period, may be experienced as "his or her own," especially if the caregiving environment is responsive to the infant's more subtle signals and signs. The sense of self also receives important nutrients from the pleasure and attunement the infant experiences with the mother. Thus, from early on, there may be two strands to the infant's experience of self: self-alone and self-with-other. These should then be the forerunners or beginnings of separation-individuation. To separate, there must first be self-other and separate-self experiences. Sander (1976) has described these early experiences of self as being alone in the presence of someone, in Winnicott's sense. Thus, the symbiotic phase is the bedrock of libidinal attachment and intimacy on the one hand, and beginnings of self-alone experiences on the other. Even during the early months, for example, infants show individual preferences for color, for certain tunes, and

for varying amounts of stimulation.

SUBPHASE I-DIFFERENTIATION

The subphase of differentiation begins at the height of symbiosis, when the baby begins more active and persistent visual and tactile exploration of the surroundings. The baby begins to perceive things at a greater distance and typically scans the environment, checking back to the mother regularly. This eminently important process of shifting attention cathexis to the outside is what has also been called the hatching process. The fully hatched baby, around the age of 9 to 10 months, is alert, can easily grasp what he or she wants, sits up freely (Resch, 1979), and is characterized by a general brightening of mood. The differentiation subphase is also the time when unpleasure at the stranger and even anxiety can begin (Emde, Gaensbauer, & Harmon, 1976). The baby also shows unpleasure and sometimes cries when left by the mother, but is usually comforted fairly easily by a nonintrusive mother substitute.

Pushing away from mother and exploration of the environment are quite characteristic of the differentiation subphase. During this time, the child explores, both visually and tactilely, the faces of individuals other than the mother. The infant is also particularly attracted by appendages that can be removed, such as eyeglasses, beads, or a pencil in the pocket. All these explorations of both the animate and the inanimate, of that which can be removed and held by the infant

and that which clearly is part of the other, are important ingredients of the ongoing process of self-object differentiation.

THE PRACTICING SUBPHASE

The practicing subphase begins when the now hatched baby begins to be capable of independent locomotion. The early practicing period comprises the time of crawling, standing up, and coasting, whereas the practicing period proper begins with the mastery of upright locomotion. If we can think of symbiosis as the first blissful stage in human development, the stage of pleasure in mutuality and recognition and exploration of the mother, we can think of the practicing subphase as the second blissful period. The mastery of locomotion, at first crawling and then walking, brings with it an enormous increment of energy and pleasure. The ability to go after and get what one wants by one's own efforts, is an immense source of pleasure and satisfaction. Whereas, during differentiation, babies often cry when their mother or even others walk away from them, beginning locomotion counteracts the sense of helplessness. This is a period of rapid development, especially of locomotor and manipulative abilities. The narcissistic investment in the body and in mastery and exploration brings about a temporary lessening in the investment in the mother, who can now be taken for granted. This slight lessening of investment in the mother also protects the baby from a full realization of his or her separateness. The mother is simply assumed to be there unless she is absent for any length of time. More protracted separation

changes the practicing infant's mood of elation to one of lowkeyedness, a temporary lowering of mood which is understood to be caused by the need to hold on to the image of the mother.

Toddlers' expanding locomotor capacities widen their world; there is more to see, more to hear, and more to touch. Along with increasing awareness of the outside world goes the more highly integrated and differentiated knowledge of the body self, as the infant gains increasing mastery over body functions which become more and more intentional and goal directed. Finally, standing and eventually walking provide a whole new perspective of the world and add further to the small toddler's sense of elation and exuberance. Another important characteristic of this period is the relative hardiness of the infant, who is quite oblivious to the knocks and falls that are, of course, daily occurrences.

THE RAPPROCHEMENT SUBPHASE

The expansiveness and omnipotence characteristic of the practicing subphase wane as the toddler increasingly comes face to face with the feeling of separateness caused by frustrations that occur as explorations are curtailed by obstacles in the real world. The child also has to face the fact that mother is not always automatically at hand to smooth the way for his explorations. Indeed, there are times when she curtails them in the interest of protecting the child's safety. The infant's former relative obliviousness of the mother is now replaced by active

approaches to her.

This rapprochement subphase is again conceptualized in two parts—early rapprochement and the rapprochement crisis. During early rapprochement, the generally good mood of the practicing period still prevails as the toddlers attempt to bridge the gap that they are now beginning to perceive between themselves and their mother. Toddlers begin to want to share everything with their mother; most characteristically, they will bring things and put them in their mother's lap, but they will also seek out her active participation in their activities. The availability of the mother during this particular period is of great importance, but even under the most optimal conditions, the maturational spurt of toddlers' cognitive development makes them realize their separateness and relative helplessness. Toddlers, during rapprochement, wish to be autonomous and find all hindrances to their autonomy extremely disturbing, whether emanating from their own activities, from curtailment by adults, or from their inability to do what they would like.

The child's recognition of his or her separateness and limitation threatens his or her sense of omnipotence, which is still very closely connected with the child's self-esteem. In addition, toddlers have to come to terms with the fact that their mother's wishes and their own by no means always coincide. Toddlers still believe in the omnipotence of their parents and become very angry and sometimes desperate if the parents cannot do for them what they want. "He thinks

we can do everything," a mother of a rapprochement-age toddler said recently. Some weeks later, the same mother said, with great relief: "He's beginning to accept that somebody or something can be gone and that I cannot do anything about it." For example, that morning, when the cereal he had wanted was gone, her son agreed to eat a piece of bread and butter rather than insisting or crying for more cereal.

While wanting to be independent and autonomous, rapprochement toddlers also often want to control the whereabouts of their mother and want her to partake in all their activities. Anxious clinging or daring darting away, hoping to be caught up and brought back by the mother, are typical behaviors. The toddler at this age does not easily tolerate the mother's attention being elsewhere and is typically quite demanding.

In the course of the rapprochement subphase, the child begins to have a separate mental self. Beginning language and symbolic functioning are very important in bringing a resolution of the rapprochement crisis. Being able to know and name others and eventually being able to know and name oneself are important indicators of internal processes that take place at that time. The child begins to know "mine" (Bergman, 1980), but "mine" at that time can express a wish or demand as well as a fact. "Mine" is a precursor to naming oneself or using the personal pronoun.

If development goes reasonably well and the mother is reasonably available to the toddler, the rapprochement crisis is eventually resolved by way of identification and internalization. Successful resolution of the rapprochement crisis by no means always takes place, however. A badly resolved rapprochement crisis leads to intense ambivalence and splitting of the object world into good and bad. The maternal representation may be internalized as an unassimilated bad introject. McDevitt and Mahler (1980) cite four conditions that would lead to poor resolution of the rapprochement crisis: (1) the love object is disappointing and unavailable or excessively unreliable and intrusive; (2) the child experiences the realization of his or her helplessness too abruptly and too painfully, resulting in a too sudden deflation of the child's sense of omnipotence; (3) there has been an excess of trauma; and (4) the child experiences to an unusual degree the narcissistic hurt of the preoedipal castration reaction which accompanies the discovery of the anatomical difference. Under such conditions, rapprochement-type behaviors persist rather than giving way. Such behaviors include excessive separation anxiety, depressive mood, passivity or demandingness, coerciveness, possessiveness, envy, and temper tantrums.

ON THE WAY TO OBJECT CONSTANCY

The fourth and final subphase of separation-individuation is called "on the way to self and object constancy" and is recognized as being open-ended. In the context of separation-individuation theory, self and libidinal object constancy (the

achievement of this final subphase) is not seen as a fixed fact, but rather as an ongoing, lifelong process. Nevertheless, a child who has successfully resolved the rapprochement crisis has made an important qualitative change that is quite unmistakable to observers.

Self-constancy develops along with object constancy. In the fourth subphase, the toddler's sense of self includes actions as well as perceptions and feelings. The toddler beings to like to be admired for what he or she can do. Earlier, doing and achieving mastery were enough. Now, the participation of the "other" is an important ingredient in the pleasure of mastery. The qualitative change that comes with the resolution of the rapprochement crisis is comparable to the qualitative change that comes when hatching is accomplished.

Hatching, which means living in the outside world while taking the mother for granted, resolves the crisis of differentiation when the infant, for the first time, becomes exceedingly sensitive to separation from the mother. The infant needs to take the mother for granted-that is, to stay omnipotently at one with her, while at the same time, turning to the outside world with curiosity, pleasure, and eagerness. The rapprochement crisis is the second crisis of separation. To bring it to a satisfactory resolution, the child has to achieve a degree of internalization, which allows the lessening and eventual relinquishment of omnipotent control. The development of the symbolic function is intimately connected with the lessening of omnipotent control, as it allows the senior toddler to live out and

practice in play some of the wishes and fears that arise from the conflict over autonomy and the need or wish to still be “at one” with the powerful, good mother.

SUMMARY

The delineation of the subphases of the separation-individuation process describes the psychological birth of the human infant. Out of the union or attunement of symbiosis with the mother, the infant grows to an increasing awareness of separateness and develops his or her own unique characteristics, in part inborn, in part the result of the intimate interaction between the infant and his or her love objects, the parents. The infant also grows from a stage in which the object is only dimly perceived as outside and separate, toward the attainment of a unique attachment to the love object; the infant grows further, toward the stage of loving in which a positive image can be maintained even in the face of anger and frustration and in which the capacity for concern for the other takes the place of the demand for omnipotent control.

Each overlapping stage paves the way for the next. Thus, the solid and pleasurable period of symbiosis means that the child will be more prepared for the stage of differentiation to follow and will meet the stranger or strangeness of the outside world with greater confidence and less anxiety. Similarly, a rich practicing subphase which affords ample opportunity for exploring the outside

world while remaining in contact over distance with a supportive and admiring caregiver will provide the child with a reservoir of resources with which to withstand the onslaughts of the crisis of rapprochement.

The task for the parent changes as the separation-individuation process progresses. During practicing, the parent has to be able to follow the cue of the child who now requires more space in which to try out his or her burgeoning abilities. It is during the period of rapprochement that it becomes more difficult for the mother to remain emotionally available, as the child who has appeared more autonomous during practicing now returns to the mother often with conflicting and unfulfillable demands. Nevertheless, parents who can be playful and patient during the rapprochement period will help the child toward more favorable resolutions during the period on the way to object constancy.

While each subphase paves the way for the next, each subphase also contains a potential for repair if optimal conditions have not prevailed in the preceding period. Each subphase is also separate and discrete (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975), with its own rewards as well as its own tasks. The little child's personality is pliable and patterns are not fixed, leaving a great deal of room for adaptation. For example, a particular child whose symbiotic phase had been colored by his mother's depression during that period seemed to differentiate rather late. It seemed at first like a possible danger signal. It later seemed, however, that this child had found a way of making up for what he had missed by

remaining in the symbiotic orbit for a longer time by emerging into the outside world only slowly, as he became ready to do so. Since this particular mother could respond much better to the active child of separation-individuation, he began to catch up and developed well as time went on.

The theory of separation-individuation is a dynamic developmental theory. It leaves room for progression and regression as well as for the back-and-forth movement between needs for closeness and attachment and needs for exploration and disengagement.

An important result of the study of separation-individuation is the enrichment of knowledge on several topics which, although already familiar to psychoanalysts and developmentalists, were further illuminated during the years of the research. We would like to mention a few contributions that have dealt with psychoanalytic concepts from a developmental perspective. In an important paper on the "Development of Basic Moods," Mahler (1966) considers the tendency to depressive moods in women and ties it to conflicts arising during the rapprochement subphase. Furer (1967) writes about developmental aspects of the superego. He considers "identification with the comforter" as a forerunner of the superego and feels that this identification with the active mother "increases the child's capacity to bind its aggression and thus helps bring about the required reaction formation." In an examination of the relationship between adaptation and defense, Mahler and McDevitt (1968) say:

> The child's experiences over the course of time, on the basis of his drive and ego endowment, lead to more or less successful adaptation. His adaptive style contributes to his character traits, as do his defense behaviors. We have observed in our research the process by which these behaviors gradually become internalized as more or less successful defense mechanisms. (p. 100)

McDevitt (1982) traces the emergence of hostile aggression in the course of the separation-individuation process. Bergman (1982) describes the development of the girl during separation-individuation, with implications for later development.

We would like to mention some other important issues that have been elucidated by the developmental point of view and by the detailed scrutiny of our day-to-day observations in the study of separation-individuation. The first of these is stranger anxiety.

It was Spitz (1957) who first drew attention to stranger anxiety and considered it the second organizer at the age of 7 months. This phenomenon has attracted a great deal of attention since Spitz first described it, and the separation-individuation study has contributed to a more detailed understanding of a variety of phenomena subsumed under the concept of stranger reactions. Stranger anxiety is the most visible of a large array of phenomena with which an infant indicates increasing recognition of mother as unique as well as interest and curiosity in the world beyond mother. Thus, we prefer the term "stranger reactions" rather than "stranger anxiety." Stranger reactions can include a variety

of affects, ranging from interest and curiosity to wariness and finally anxiety and distress. Stranger reactions can even be directed, at a certain age, to the mother or father if they look different from the way they usually do. Early in the study, we heard about a little boy who, at the age of 4 months, cried when he saw his mother wearing a shower cap. We recently heard of a little girl, age 5 months, who was quite concerned when she saw her father after he had shaved his beard and mustache. These are early indications that the child is beginning to form an inner image, which is disturbed if what the child sees is suddenly very different from what she or he expects. It seems to us that the timing, the kind, and intensity of the stranger reaction is intimately connected with the mother-child relationship. For example, we recently saw a little girl who showed a marked stranger reaction, even anxiety, at the unusually early age of 3 to 4 months. She was the daughter of a young mother from a foreign country who had not yet learned the language very well. This young woman had been quite depressed after she married an American man and came to live in this country. After the birth of her daughter, her mood improved and she developed an extremely close symbiotic relationship with the girl. Mother and daughter seemed rather insulated from the rest of the world in which they lived. Thus, it seemed very interesting that this particular little girl showed such early stranger reaction and reacted to outsiders not with curiosity or interest, but with displeasure. When she was seen again at the age of 6 months, she was still rather wary but willing to engage in play with a stranger as long as her mother stayed close by.

"Customs inspection" is a term that was coined during the separation-individuation study to describe another type of stranger reaction. This is the way in which the child in the period of differentiation, around 7 to 10 months, will examine the faces of strangers, both visually and tactilely, with great interest and absorption. Not all children feel free to engage in this activity with the same amount of intensity and interest, but most will show some interest in the stranger and wish to touch and explore parts of the stranger's face or at least such appendages as beads or eyeglasses.

Yet another kind of stranger reaction was recently observed in a little boy during the differentiation subphase. This little boy seemed to enjoy attracting the interest of strangers, and he had learned that when he shouted, most people would look around and smile at him. Thus, in strange places, he would often shout at strangers and then show great pleasure when they paid attention to him. Separation-individuation studies have shown us that the outside world is not just a threat to the unique mother-child relationship, but it is also often a source of great excitement and pleasure.

It has long been known that separation from their mother is often painful to children during the first 2 to 3 years of life. Once again, the study of separation-individuation has given us a developmental view of such separation reactions. It has shown us that sensitivity to separation is very different during the different subphases of the separation-individuation process. Of course, each child's

sensitivity to separations will also be determined by the mother-child relationship and by the way the mother handles such separations. Regardless of these individual differences, however, we were able to see a developmental line of separation reactions (McDevitt, 1980b). The period of the differentiation subphase is a time when most infants first show active protest or distress at separation. This seems to be when they are on the verge of being able to move independently themselves and are trying to do so, but cannot do so yet. It is at this time that they seem to perceive their mother walking away from them and often cry. Most infants at that time accept substitutes without too much difficulty, but the period of differentiation is a sensitive one. It is as if the infant's capacities of discrimination are ahead of his or her capacity to act. The infant is acutely aware that when mother walks away he or she is not yet able to follow her or call to her. However, the infant has a beginning image of the mother and begins to look at the door through which she might have left. It is also often comforting to the infant to be taken to a window. The child seems, at this time, to have a vague feeling that mother is out there. Thus, going to the window and observing the world in which she is somehow known to be seems to ameliorate the feeling of helplessness or entrapment that might otherwise be present. One mother who was especially sensitive observed that her little boy, at a somewhat older age, would wait by the door in the late afternoon, thereby indicating to her that he was waiting for his father to come home.

By the time they reach the practicing period from about 8 to 16 months,

children are quite aware that their mother might leave and may protest her leaving as soon as she prepares to do so. On the other hand, their newly found ability to crawl, and later to walk, seems to compensate to some extent. No longer are they so dependent on a mother substitute for comfort. Children are now more able to do things for and by themselves that are enjoyable and exciting. They can also attempt to follow the mother. They can go to the door through which she left. They can be more actively engaged with substitute caretakers in the mother's absence.

Nevertheless, during the early practicing period, from about 8 to 13 months, it was observed that infants tended to become much less active when their mother was out of the room. Pleasure and cathexis in the outside world was definitely reduced, and infants began to withdraw into a state called "low-keyedness" (Mahler & McDevitt, 1968). Low-keyedness was conceptualized as a state of holding on to the image of the absent mother by reducing activity and stimulation from the outside. This withdrawal and low-keyedness can be quite dramatic. Equally dramatic is the way in which the child at this age will immediately come back to life as soon as he or she is reunited with mother.

It is during the period of practicing that the invisible bond with mother is at its height, and the infant seems to feel as if she were at one with him or her, even while at a distance. Infants at this age characteristically will play at a distance from their mother but periodically look at her and check back, apparently

receiving sustenance from the visual contact. Absence of the mother at this age, if it is too prolonged, and if no adequate substitute caretaker is available, disrupts too suddenly the illusion of oneness with the mother and thus disrupts the elation that is so characteristic of the practicing subphase. It may also lead the child to become restless and search for the mother or to get into dangerous or precipitous situations, probably with the hope of being rescued by her.

The increased sense of separateness during the period of rapprochement brings with it a sense of vulnerability, loneliness, and often helplessness. Thus, most children become much more sensitive to separation. Toddlers of the rapprochement subphase are often constantly preoccupied with their mother's whereabouts. They insist on following her through the door and will protest vigorously when separated. Phenomena such as shadowing and darting away have been described as characteristic of toddlers during this period. They can be quite insistent on their mother's exclusive attention and, if it is not easily available, attempt to get this attention by clinging and coercion. Substitutes are no longer as easily accepted, and often familiar substitute caretakers, even fathers, are angrily rejected when the mother is desired. A kind of splitting often occurs in which the absent mother is longed for and the present caretaker is rejected. Beginning feelings of ambivalence are directed toward the mother, who is often seen as interfering with the child's budding autonomy. Thus, the mother is split into the good absent mother who is longed for and the bad present one who is rejected. At the time of reunion, the mother who returns is no longer necessarily

experienced as the pleasurable, life-giving force that she was during practicing. Instead, when she returns she is sometimes avoided. The child veers away and seems angry instead of smiling at the mother's return, and it takes considerable time for a pleasurable reunion to be effected.

The beginning abilities for symbolic play and language help the toddler withstand separation from the mother. It is only with the advent of the fourth subphase however, on the way to object constancy, that mother's absence can truly be accepted and the child can be content for longer periods of time without her. By then, the child can understand quite well where mother or father is when they are not with him or her and can pleasurably anticipate their return. Symbolic play and imitation are important tools for the mastery of separations. These can be played out endlessly by children of different ages, beginning with the simple peek-a-boo of the young infant.

It is important to remember that Mahler's study of separation-individuation was designed to study the emergence of separateness, not the reaction to separation. Children were studied in the caretaking presence of their mothers. Yet, even in this setting, mothers would leave the room for brief periods for their interviews, providing some insight into the developmental reactions to separation from mother.

DISCUSSION

In the beginning of this essay, we briefly mentioned some of Freud's ideas about early development. His ideas about introjective and projective mechanisms were an early attempt to conceptualize how the infant starts to distinguish self and nonself on the basis of other than "reality-ego" considerations. We have attempted to convey a number of the pathways that Mahler and her co-workers have taken to elucidate this and many other related issues. Clearly, Mahler agrees with Freud's contention that the infant and child can normally develop structures on the basis of factors other than those that Freud referred to as reality-ego related. Mahler's conceptualization of libidinal object constancy and the phases of development that lead up to libidinal object constancy are clearly instances of factors that are not simply based on the reality ego.

We deliberately have not used the term "cognitive" in contrast to "emotional" factors, since we believe this type of dichotomy is, for the most part, not a useful one in early development. One might say, for example, that Mahler and Piaget both refer to a series of cognitive structures developed by the infant or child, but to some extent they are talking about different types of cognitive structures. Moreover, for Mahler the intermesh of the infant's and mother's affective states is often a reliable indicator or predictor of how the infant's structures will develop. Thus, Mahler maintains (as did Freud) that cognitive structures that develop in relation to the self (selves) and important object representations follow different developmental lines than other cognitive structures such as these described by Piaget. If this is the case, it raises questions

about the relationship between observations and theoretical concepts from a psychoanalytic perspective, on the one hand, and infant experiments, observations, and theoretical concepts of researchers from other perspectives (such as those of cognitive and learning theorists), on the other.

To be more concrete, let us take the example, cited earlier, in which Mahler recently altered her concept of the autistic phase because of current infant research. Clearly, contemporary studies have been striking in pointing out the early perceptual and response capabilities of the infant. Moreover, a number of psychoanalysts, such as Stern, have pointed out that these studies contradict aspects of Mahler's and Freud's thought. Even though the autistic phase is not a central concept to Freud (nor, for that matter is primary narcissism), the examination of this issue might elucidate some of the difficulties in comparing findings that are couched in psychoanalytic terms with findings from other theoretical points of view. This examination might also touch on some of the difficulties of formulating psychoanalytic concepts.

Freud's notion of primary narcissism can be interpreted in several ways, but one narrow interpretation of Freud (or Mahler) is that he was referring primarily to the building of rudimentary representations of self and object by the infant. During primary narcissism, the infant is not concerned with the object as object—not because the infant cannot discriminate the object, but rather because no accumulation of experience (in normal development) has occurred that leads the

infant to anticipate a consistent or long period of frustration of primary gratification. If such an accumulation of experience occurs very early, Freud implicitly predicts traumatic results. Freud (1915) states that even though "the ego is autoerotic [and] it has no need of the external world, in consequences of experience….it acquires objects from that world and, in spite of everything, it cannot avoid feeling internal instinctual stimuli…as unpleasurable." The purified pleasure ego, then, develops as a response to unpleasurable stimuli, and although it brings the infant closer to the object, it also causes some distortion in the infant's rudimentary sense of reality.

Freud is here making a unique type of prediction, a prediction that should differentiate to some extent his theoretical position from other positions. There are, of course, difficulties in testing these ideas. We have little idea of the time periods that Freud is postulating. It may be difficult to find ways to measure the infant's postulated split of the world into all good (inside) and all bad (outside). Freud is silent about factors that might influence (retard or advance) the development of the purified pleasure ego, nor does he tell us in detail about factors that might continue the purified pleasure ego longer than developmentally appropriate or that might lead to the dissipation of the structure earlier than might be desirable. In short, Freud tells us very little that would enable us to develop a testable theory from his writings. It is obviously difficult, therefore, to compare his account of development with other accounts. We believe, however, that even in Freud's sparse writings on early development, there are ideas rich

enough that if one rigorously applied his assumptions and tried several time sequences, it might be possible to empirically test his conceptualizations.

Why, one might ask, have we in our summary of Mahler's contributions reviewed some relatively obscure sections of Freud's writings? We have done so in part because Freud's writings are finalized and in some ways are a simpler version of an early developmental schema than are other psychoanalytic theories. In the main, however, we wish to give a brief illustration of both the difficulties and the potential of even such a seemingly "discarded" (Lichtenberg, 1982) part of Freud's writings as his metapsychological papers. In our opinion, Mahler's pioneering work has some of the same difficulties but clearly much more potential because of the richness of the observations and concepts of her work.

Let us go, therefore, to Mahler's conceptualization of the autistic phase, which we roughly equated with Freud's ideas of primary narcissism and autoeroticism. This concept is one of the few aspects of Mahler's writings that has been actively disputed. In addition, it is clearly not a central concept for her (her research has not included this phase of development), and therefore might prove useful as an illustration of the richness of her ideas.

In our opinion, the concept of the autistic phase has been translated as a phase without stable representations, or an "objectless" period. This, of course, is one possible translation, but one not necessarily in keeping with Mahler's ideas or

with Jacobson's notion of the psychophysiological self, which Mahler has utilized. The key to this notion is the definition of an "objectless" period. If one means a period where no stable perceptions or memories are retained, then the first month of life is probably not an objectless state. However, Mahler, Freud, and Jacobson all describe the state of the infant in this period with respect to gratifying and aversive experiences. They maintain that the infant is interested not in the object, but in the gratification or maintenance of homeostasis or in something other than the object itself. The fact that the infant possesses aspects of the rudimentary ego does not alter this concept. What, then, is the contradiction with other research? For if one means by "objectless" state an infant whose main interest is in gratification and who is not motivated or interested in the object, (we are of course simplifying), then there is no contradiction.

Part of the difficulty, then, may lie in the manner in which the concepts are stated. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the difficulty lies in the fact that the concepts are incompletely stated. Here Mahler has not gone beyond Freud, and all the questions we previously asked about Freud's ideas can be appropriately applied to Mahler. We believe, however, that all the conditions are present for separation-individuation concepts to be put in the form of a theory that can both do justice to the richness of psychoanalytic concepts and at the same time be empirically rigorous.

The line of thought and research that Mahler has pursued in her separation-

individuation research is probably the outstanding example in psychoanalysis of how concepts have guided research and, in turn, have themselves been enriched and expanded by the research. Given the outstanding quality and amount of this work, however, we might briefly summarize what we believe are some of the difficulties in this conceptual field. Difficulty in knowing how to conceptually coordinate separation-individuation and other aspects of psychoanalysis may in part be an empirical question. At this point, however, it is hard to know how to coordinate concepts such as psychosexual stages, drives, or other aspects of psychological structure in ego psychology. For example, one might ask if drive is a concept that is compatible with the separation-individuation theoretical framework and if so, does a concept like drive add to this framework? How does one think of psychosexual factors in relationship to processes of differentiation or individuation? Many questions such as these can be asked, and it is not a criticism but rather a comment about psychoanalytic thought that there are few substantive attempts to logically order and coordinate these concepts. Only if this is done can firm empirical consequences be derived from a theoretical position.

A similar point can be made about separation-individuation concepts even outside the context of the more general psychoanalytic concepts. It is difficult to know the logical status of certain concepts. That is, it is hard to know which concepts are absolutely essential and which are more peripheral. It is also difficult to know how to translate certain concepts into ideas that have firm empirical consequences. For example, there are many examples in the research of children

who deviated from what would seem to be expected theoretical norms, but the delimiting conditions were not often given in generalizable statements. A substantial elucidation of these difficulties is beyond the scope of this chapter, however.

We have attempted to give one example of how some of Mahler's and Freud's less-developed ideas and psychoanalytic explanations may be powerful if stated in more specific terms. When that occurs, we may see that even the concept of the autistic phase has a good deal of explanatory power.

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