



**ÇAĞ UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY of ARTS &  
SCIENCES  
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
PSY 313 FUNDAMENTAL  
CONCEPTS IN  
PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY  
COURSE  
WEEK 11**

# **Melanie Klein and Object Relations Theory**

# Melanie Klein and Contemporary Kleinian Theory

Melanie Klein (1882-1960) has had more impact on contemporary psychoanalysis than any other psychoanalytic writer since Freud. While her intent was to validate and extend Freud's hypotheses through direct observation and clinical work with children, her discoveries led to a strikingly different vision of mind.

Klein's early adulthood in Vienna was dominated by a suffocating relationship with her mother and a troubled marriage. Suffering severe depressions, she discovered Freud's work in 1914, which intellectually and emotionally satisfied her. She began psychoanalysis with Sandor Ferenczi in Budapest and started writing papers based on observations of children.

Her work captured the interest of Karl Abraham, who invited her to Berlin. In 1926, Ernest Jones invited Klein to England, where she lived and worked until her death in 1960.

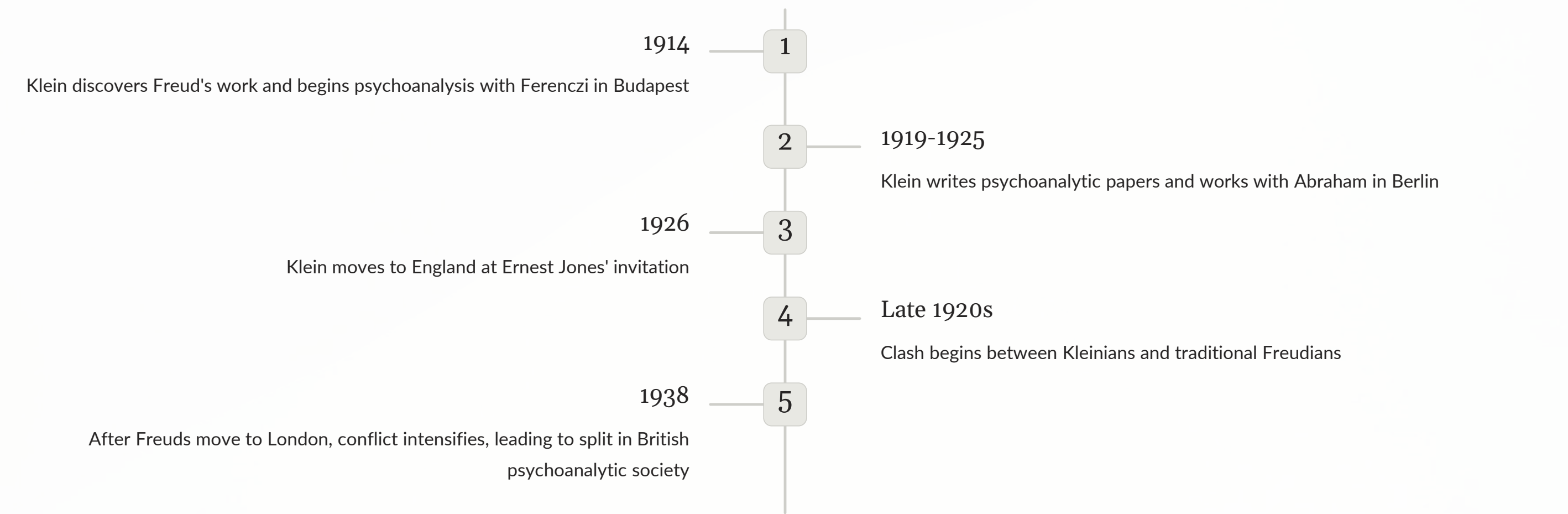


# The Klein-Freud Theoretical Divide

By the late 1920s, Klein and her followers had begun to clash with traditional Freudians, dividing the psychoanalytic world into the "London school" and the "Viennese school." Initially, Klein and Anna Freud differed on technical problems regarding analyzing children.

Klein believed children were analyzable like adults if their play was interpreted as an adult's free associations. Anna Freud argued small children weren't analyzable because their weak ego couldn't handle deep interpretations of instinctual conflict, recommending a quasi-educational approach instead.

After Sigmund and Anna Freud moved to London in 1938, the battle raised discussions within the British psychoanalytic society, resulting in a split into different groups that still exist today. This separation broadened into a deep gap within the international psychoanalytic community.



# Klein's Revolutionary Vision of Mind

Political loyalties and common terminology can obscure how fundamentally different Klein's understanding of mind is from Freud's. While Freud saw neurotic conflict as concerned with secrets and self-deceptions formed during the oedipal phase (ages 5-6), Klein became interested in earlier processes.

Klein found evidence that Freud's hypotheses could apply to much younger children (2-3 years) and even infants. She argued that fantasies of incestuous union and terrifying self-punishments are present from a very young age, though in more "primitive," frightening forms.

## Freud's Vision

Psyche shaped through oedipal conflict into stable, coherent structures

Mind with hidden recesses (niche) and illicit designs

Struggles with bestial wishes, fears of retribution (revenge), and guilt

Focused on neurotic patients with coherent but conflictual lives

Considered psychosis inaccessible to analytic treatment

## Klein's Vision

Mind as continually shifting, kaleidoscopic stream of primitive fantasies and terrors

Psyche remains unstable, fluid, constantly fending off (avoid) psychotic anxieties

Struggles with deep terrors of annihilation (destruction) and abandonment

Worked with disturbed children and later psychotic adults

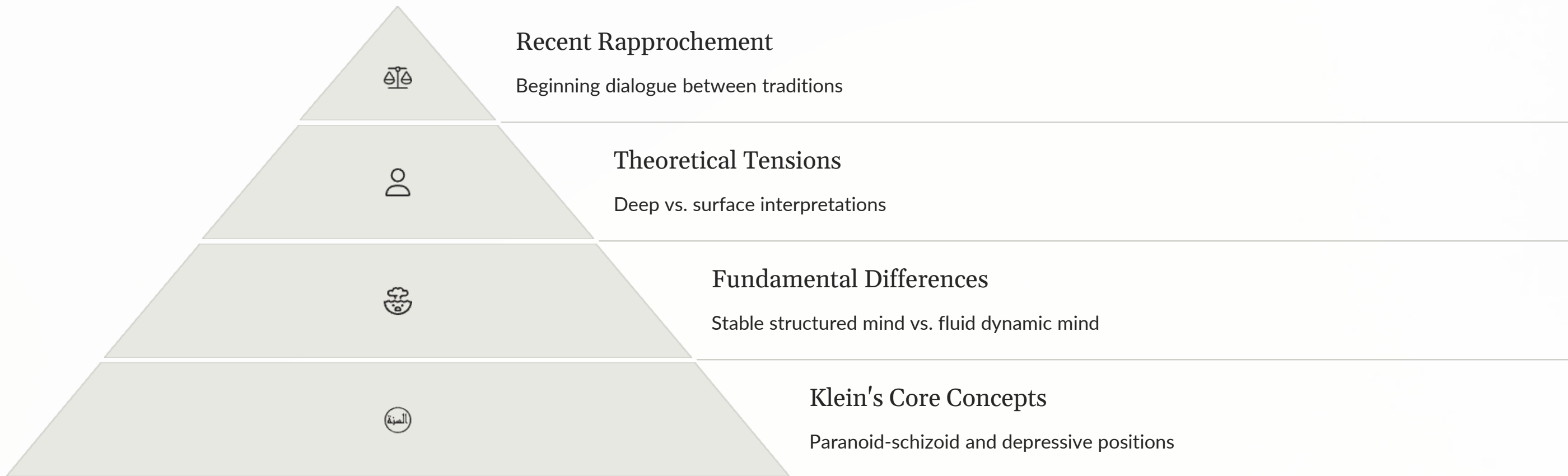
Applied techniques from work with children to understand psychosis

# The Paranoid-Schizoid and Depressive Positions

Klein's most important contribution to psychoanalytic thought was her depiction of the "paranoid-schizoid" and "depressive" positions. These concepts reflect her understanding of the mind as beset (surrounded) with deep, psychotic-like terrors, unstable, dynamic, and fluid.

This theoretical approach created lasting divergence between Kleinians and ego psychologists. Klein regarded the adult mind as similar to the child's - responsive to "deep" analytic interpretations. Ego psychologists viewed the adult mind as highly structured and stable, requiring layer-by-layer interpretive work.

Ego psychologists tend to view Kleinians as wildly interpretive, overwhelming patients with concepts they cannot understand. Kleinians tend to view ego psychology as concerned with shallow dimensions of emotional life. Only recently has a rapprochement begun between contemporary Kleinian authors and some American writers from the ego psychology tradition.





# The Paranoid-Schizoid Position

After several years in analysis, Rachel, a waitress in her mid-twenties, recalled with great vividness an experience, not thought about for years, that had dominated both her waking and dream life as a child. As far back as she could remember, she had felt tormented by two vivid and intense images and their relationship to each other. She couldn't remember whether these images had begun as parts of a dream and then had been taken up in her waking fantasy, or whether they had begun as a daydream and infiltrated her dream life. The first image was of tiny, extremely delicate flowers. The second image was of enormous humanlike figures, menacing, without features, composed entirely of feces. The two images were bound together in a way she did not understand but felt compelled somehow to resolve. She would think of the flowers and then the shit people, then the flowers, then the shit people.



# Rachel's Dual Imagery



## Delicate Flowers

Represented moments of warmth, connection, and beauty in Rachel's life.



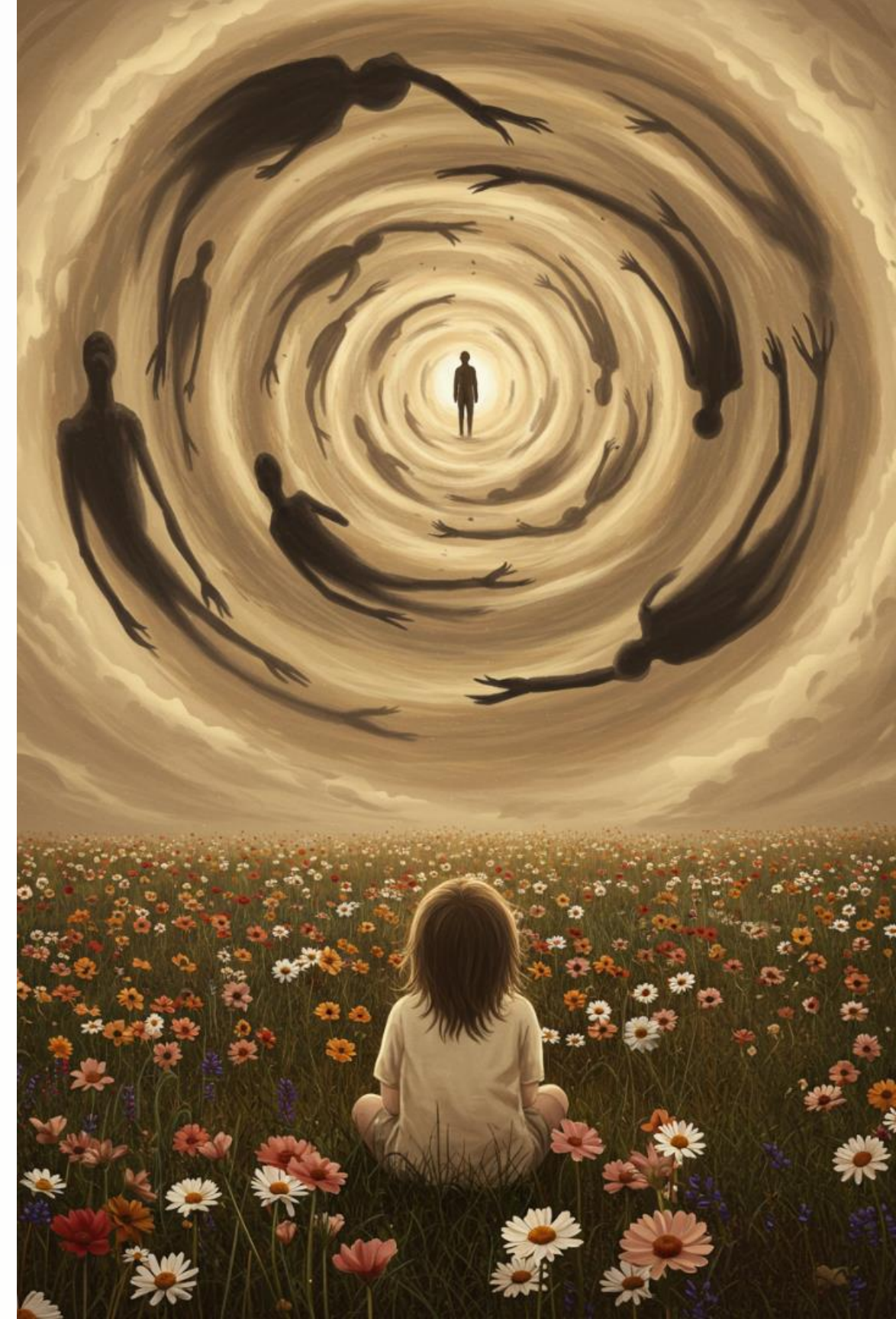
## Fecal Figures

Symbolized darkness, menace (threat), and destructive elements in her experience.



## Magnetic Tension

Rachel felt compelled to integrate these opposing images yet feared destroying the good.





# Rachel's Childhood Environment



## Father's Death

Rachel lost her father during her first year of life.



## Mother's Decline

Her mother became physically and mentally unable to care for her.



## Surrogate (Proxy) Care

Raised by mother's cousin who showed inconsistent behavior, likely schizophrenic.



## Alcoholic Figure

Surrogate's husband was sometimes caring but often absent or remote.





# Two Experiential Worlds

## The "Shit World"

Dark, ominous (threatening) heaviness infused Rachel's perception of herself and others.

She felt filled with destructive hatred that could destroy everything.

Others seemed menacing and hateful toward her.

## The "Flower World"

Brief moments of warmth and connection occurred with acquaintances (relatives).

Music and poetry provided reliable positive experiences.

These experiences felt dangerous to anticipate or try to create.

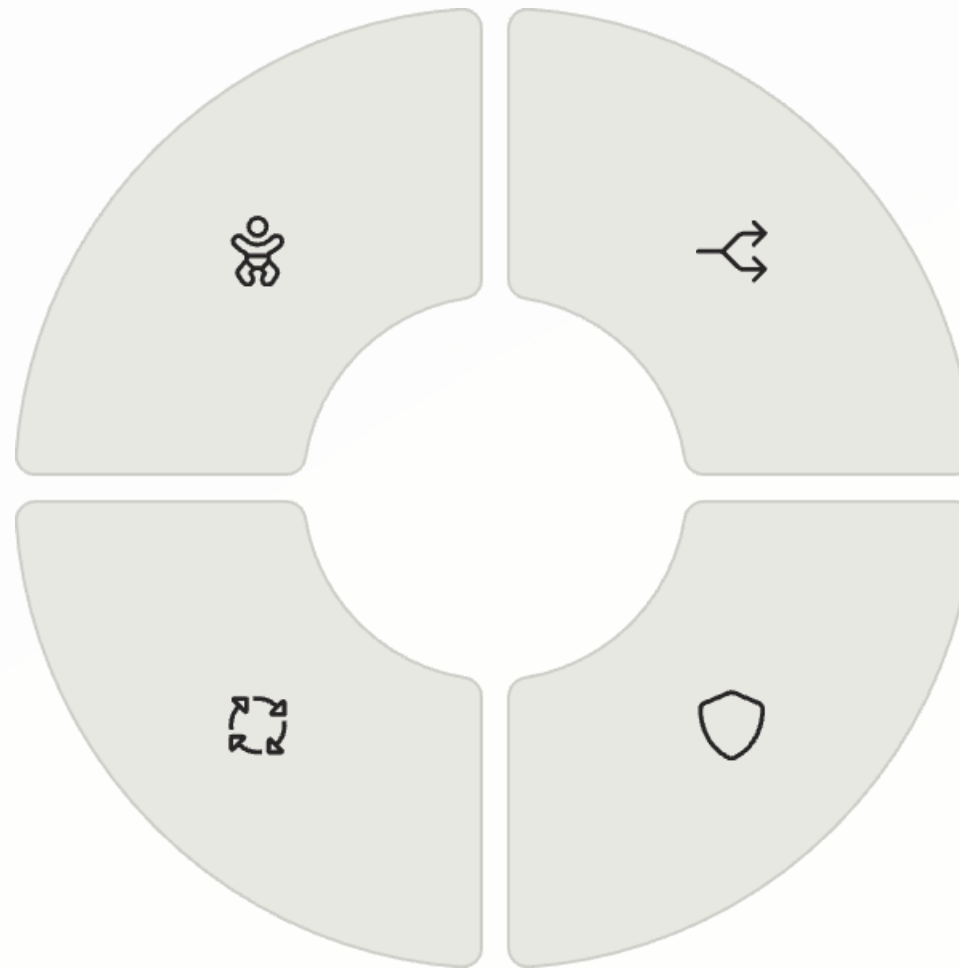
# The Paranoid-Schizoid Position

## Universal Experience

Klein identified this organization as universal in early development.

## Lifelong Pattern

This position isn't just a phase but recurs throughout life.



## Splitting Defense

Good and bad experiences are kept separate to protect the good.

## Paranoid Anxiety

Fear of invasive malevolence coming from outside threatens goodness.



# Klein's Departure from Freud

Klein derived her understanding of the ways experiences become organized from Freud's formulations, particularly his concept of instinctual drive and the dual instinct theory, but she applied Freud's concepts in her own fashion.

## From Impulses to Relationships

Klein shifted focus from discrete tensions to entire ways of experiencing oneself and others.

## Objects Built Into Experience

The object of desire is implicit in the experience of desire itself.

## Discontinuous Ego

Klein saw a vacillating (ambivalent) ego rather than Freud's cohesive, integrated one.



# The Infant's Polarized Experience



## "Good Breast" Experience

Infant feels bathed with love and protective caring.

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## "Bad Breast" Experience

Infant feels persecuted, abandoned, and filled with retaliatory (punitive) fantasies.

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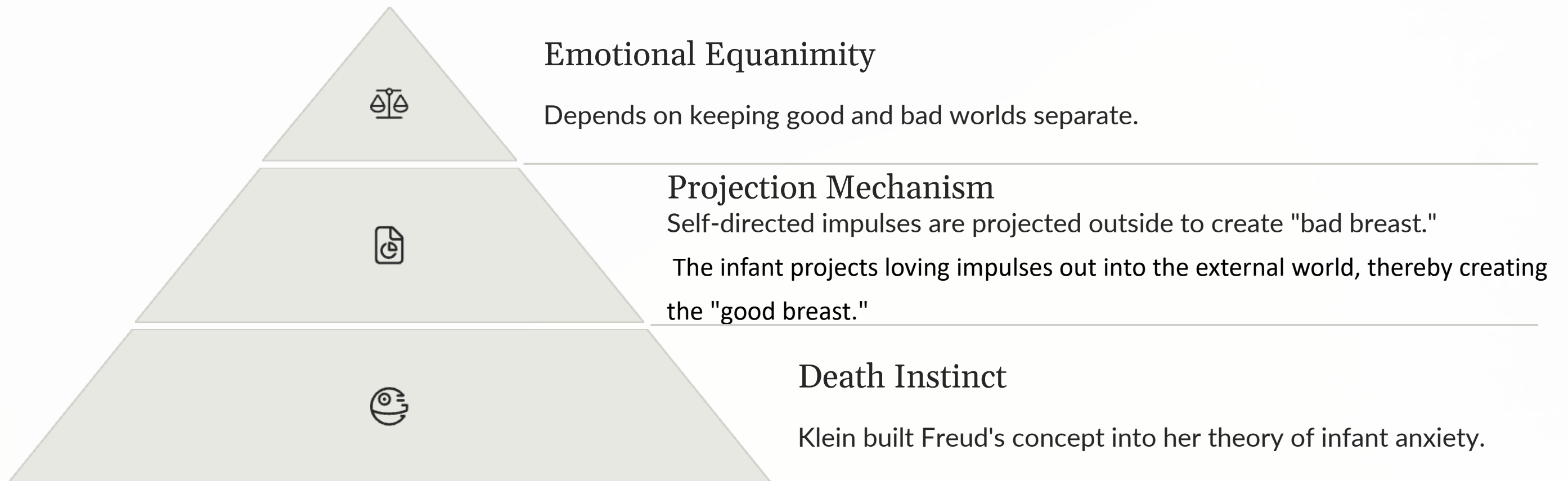


## Omnipotent (almighty) Fantasies

Infant believes both loving and hateful fantasies have real impact.

# Origins of the Paranoid-Schizoid Position

Paranoid refers to the central persecutory anxiety, the fear of invasive malevolence, coming from the outside. The shit people threaten to overrun and contaminate all goodness, both in the flowers and in Rachel's love for the flowers. Schizoid refers to the central defense: splitting, the vigilant separation of the loving and loved good breast from the hating and hated bad breast. It is urgently necessary for Rachel to keep the flowers clear of the shit people and to segregate her hatred, directed toward the latter, from her love, protectively preserving the flowers.



# The Depressive Position: Understanding Human Destructiveness

Humans integrate love and hate toward whole objects.

Love object is neither all good nor all bad, but sometimes good and sometimes bad.

The whole object (both the external mother and the corresponding internal whole object)

In the paranoid-schizoid position, the problem of inherent human destructiveness is resolved through projection, resulting in a threatening sense of persecution, danger from others.

In the (more developmentally advanced) depressive position, human destructiveness creates a terror on the child (Klein portrayed destruction toward the frustrating mother as one of deep remorse). The frustrating whole object is also the loved object. Out of that love and concern, reparative fantasies (deriving from libidinal instincts) are generated, in a desperate effort to heal the damage, to make the mother whole once again.





# From Split to Whole Objects

## Paranoid-Schizoid Position

Infant splits experiences into "all good" or "all bad"

Protects good experiences from contamination

Creates paranoid anxiety about persecution

## Movement to Integration

Natural tendency toward integration emerges

Child begins seeing others as complex wholes

Recognizes mother has her own subjectivity

## Benefits of Integration

Paranoid anxiety diminishes

Pain attributed to fallibility, not malevolence

Child experiences greater durability

# The Terror of Ambivalence



## The Central Problem

Managing and containing aggression becomes life's central challenge



## New Terrors Emerge

Whole objects can be destroyed by rage



## Depressive Anxiety

Terror that one's rage will destroy loved objects



## Reparative Fantasies

Love generates efforts to repair damage done by rage



# Coping with Depressive Anxiety



This cycle repeats throughout life. Mental health requires belief that love can overcome destructiveness.





# Retreats from Integration

1

## Depressive Position Strain

Irreplaceability of whole objects creates painful dependence

Destructiveness threatens to wipe out entire object world

2

## Retreat (withdrawal) to Paranoid-Schizoid

Splitting returns for temporary security

Good objects protected from destructiveness

3

## Manic Defense

Denies uniqueness of loved objects

Reduces painful dependence

4

## Continual Movement

Mental health involves positions continually lost and regained

Not a developmental plateau but ongoing process

# The Fish Tank Dream

A middleaged man had been married for over a decade to a woman he idolized and never fought with, although he had constant battles with bosses and other figures in his life he felt were malevolent and out to get him. He idealized his analyst as well; occasional flare-ups of intense rage, precipitated by some sense of betrayal by the analyst, were quickly forgotten, and the analyst was reestablished as a wholly benign and wonderful figure.

I am wandering around in an old house that has a great sense of familiarity about it. I notice a room hidden between two floors that I realize I haven't been in for a long, long time. As I enter I notice a large fish tank with beautiful and exotic tropical fish. I remember that I had set up and stocked this tank many years before, but had forgotten about it. Amazingly, the fish had survived and actually flourished. I was very excited and thought that they must be very hungry after all these years. I reached for what I took to be a box of fish food on a shelf nearby and began sprinkling it into the water. The fish suddenly started looking sick. I looked closely at the box and realized that it was a box of salt crystals. These were freshwater fish, and the salt was deadly for them. I began frantically running around trying to do something to save them. I saw another tank with water nearby. I began scooping the fish up and transferring them to the other tank. Some of them looked dead; some of them looked like they might survive. It was hard to tell how it would turn out, and I awoke in a state of great anxiety.

# The Fish Tank Dream: Integration in Action



## Forgotten Whole Objects

Fish represent complex relationships hidden between "floors" of split experience

This dream illustrates the anxiety of integrating love and hate. Will destructiveness overwhelm love, or can reparation save relationships?



## Fear of Destructiveness

Salt represents unintended destructiveness toward loved objects



## Reparative Efforts

Desperate attempt to save relationships through love and repair



# Freud vs. Klein: Perspectives on Sexuality

Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein developed contrasting frameworks of human sexuality. Their theories reveal fundamentally different understandings of human motivation and relationships.

This presentation explores their key differences and implications for understanding human psychology.







# Freud's Sexual Framework



## Pleasure-Centered

Sexuality revolves around pleasure, power, and fear.



## Compensation Theory

Women seek intercourse to compensate for "castration."

Men prove potency through intercourse.



## Rivalry Focus

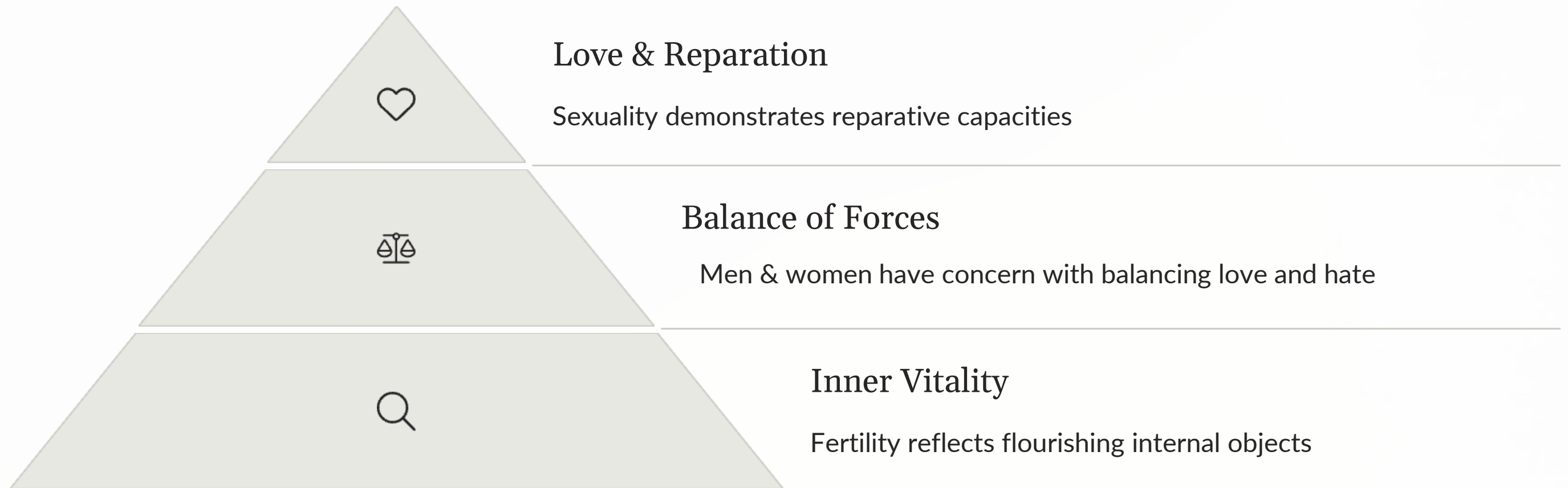
Women triumph over mother-rivals. Men triumph over father-rivals.



## Creative Sublimation

Artistic creativity represents sublimated bodily pleasures.

# Klein's Sexual Framework



Klein viewed sexual intercourse as a dramatic arena. It reveals one's impact on others and inner essence. Fertility suggests vitality, while infertility raises fears of inner deadness.

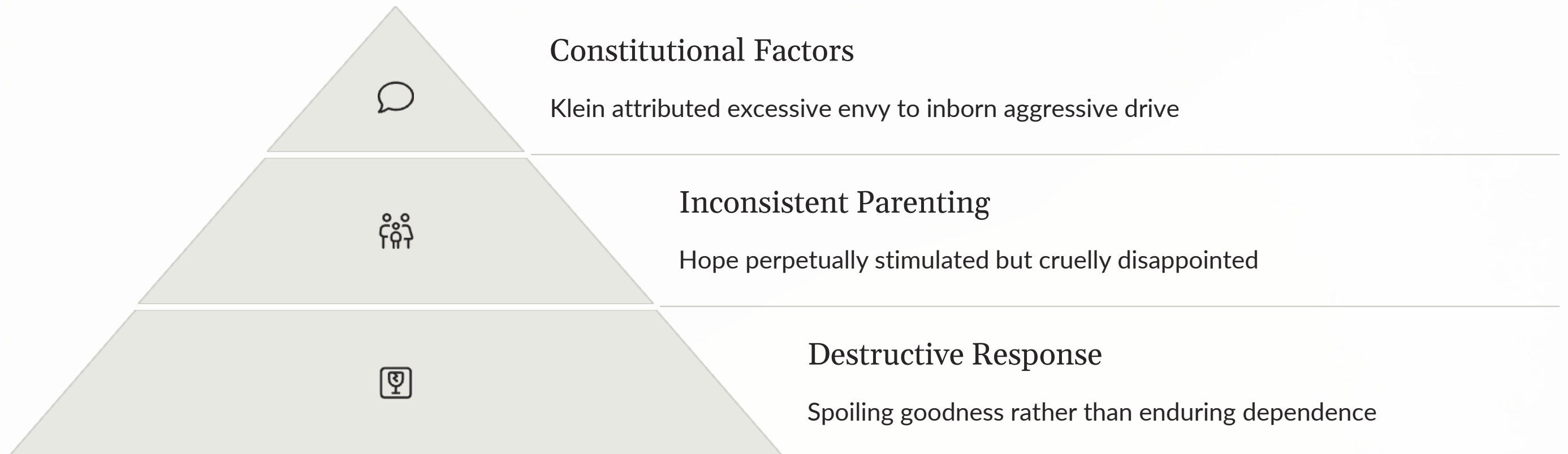
# Understanding Kleinian Envy: The Destructive Force Within

Melanie Klein's concept of envy, introduced late in her life, became a cornerstone of Kleinian thought. Unlike other psychological concepts, envy in Klein's framework is uniquely destructive because it targets not what frustrates us, but what nourishes us.

Klein's theories often used the infant-breast relationship as a prototype. While greed seeks to possess and control the good breast (like the farmer who killed the goose that laid golden eggs), envy aims to spoil and destroy it. The envious infant cannot tolerate depending on something so powerful yet outside its control.

This destructive impulse makes envy particularly devastating - it attacks the very sources of love and nourishment, contaminating what should be a refuge and ultimately destroying hope itself.

# The Origins and Manifestations of Envy



Klein believed envy stemmed from an unusually strong inborn aggressive drive. However, her depiction can also be understood as a response to dramatically inconsistent parenting, where hope for love is repeatedly stimulated but disappointed.

Unlike other primitive mental processes where splitting protects the good breast as a refuge, envy uniquely crosses this divide. It contaminates the purest sources of love by attacking not the frustrating "bad breast" but the gratifying "good breast." This makes envy particularly devastating to psychological development.



# Envy in Clinical Practice



## Negative Therapeutic Reaction

Patient gets worse rather than better through analysis



## Envious Helplessness

Cannot tolerate that analyst possesses something desperately needed



## Destruction of Value

Devaluation or superficial agreement without real impact



## Clinical Recognition

Understanding envy helps treat severe psychopathology

Jane, who sought psychoanalysis for help with bulimia, among other troublesome symptoms, described her considerable anxiety after a session in which she felt important contact had been made and something useful given her by the analyst. The discomfort she felt led her to buy a giant bag of cookies, which she devoured eagerly and then induced herself to vomit. Her experience was of burying what the analyst had given her under the gooey mess of cookies and then expelling the entire contents. The interpretations were spoiled and voided. It was only with the experience of a clean and empty inside that the anxiety generated by the session was alleviated.

Klein's concept of envy became a powerful clinical tool for understanding patients with severe psychopathology who struggle to utilize psychoanalysis. While Freud attributed the "negative therapeutic reaction" to oedipal guilt, Klein located its roots in the envious destruction of the good breast.

These patients, though longing for help, cannot tolerate the possibility that an analyst might possess something so important to them. To avoid feeling helplessly dependent, they destroy the value of what's offered, especially interpretations. This ranges from direct devaluation to superficial agreement without real consideration, as dramatically illustrated in the case of Jane, a bulimic patient who literally "spoiled and voided" helpful interpretations.

# Understanding Projective Identification

Projective identification is a key concept introduced by Melanie Klein late in her life that became central to subsequent Kleinian theory. While Freud used projection to describe the fantasied removal of unwanted impulses, Klein extended this concept in a characteristic way.

In projective identification, what is projected is not simply discrete impulses, but a part of the self. Since the projected content is a segment of the self, a connection to the removed part is maintained through an unconscious identification. The projected psychic content is not simply gone; the person struggles to keep some connection to and control over that content.

This psychological mechanism goes beyond simple projection, creating a complex relationship between the self and the rejected aspects of personality that are perceived in others.



# Common Examples of Projective Identification

## The Moral Crusader

The person who feels modern society is full with sexuality, and devotes her life to the detection and annihilation of obscenity and the ferreting out and control of the promiscuous.

## The Anti-Violence Campaigner

The person who feels that violence in movies is the greatest plague in contemporary life, and cannot stop talking, often in bloodthirsty terms, about those who spread this defect.

## The Perpetual Helper

The person who is enormously attuned to the sufferings and needfulness of others and devotes his life to the relief of others' sufferings.

These examples illustrate Klein's concept of projective identification. A piece of experience, not simply an impulse but a generic dimension of human relatedness, doesn't register within the boundaries of oneself. Instead, it is experienced in a dramatically highlighted fashion in others, where it becomes an object of great focus, concern, and efforts at control.

# Wilfred Bion and Contemporary Kleinian Thought

Klein's ideas have had an enormous impact on psychoanalytic theory, forming the basis of various object relations theories and influencing many innovations in contemporary psychoanalytic thought. However, through the contributions of Wilfred Bion, Klein's concepts have been so fundamentally extended that contemporary Kleinian thought is more accurately designated Kleinian/Bionic.

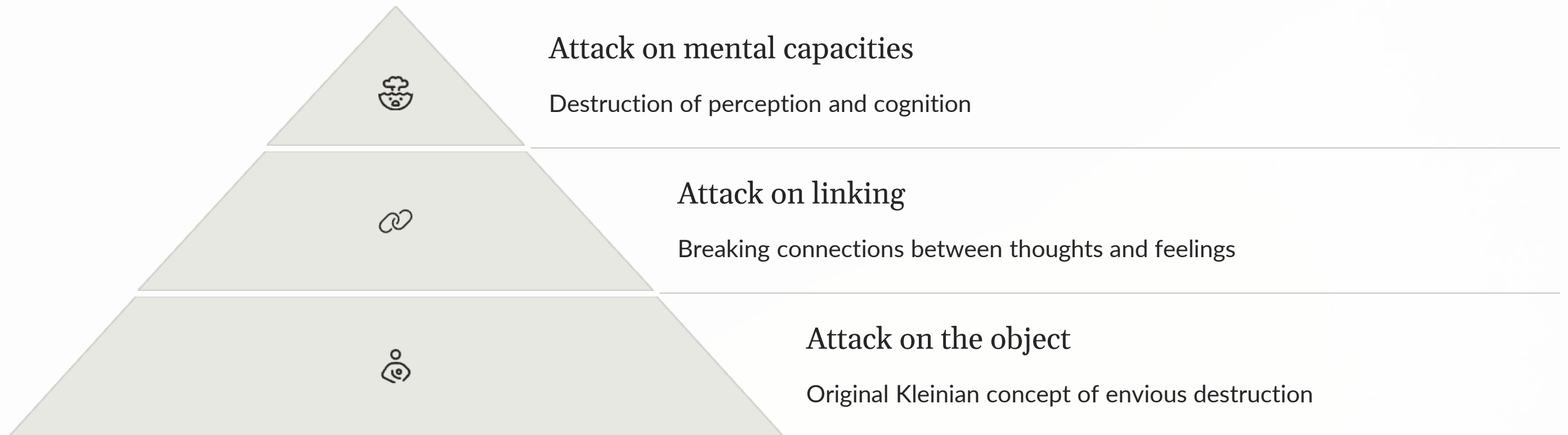
Bion (1897-1979) was Klein's analysand and student whose seminal concepts were shaped by his work with schizophrenic patients. Raised in colonial India and a veteran of World War II, Bion lived mostly in England before moving to the United States in his later years. He became dissatisfied with formulistic applications of psychoanalytic concepts and focused on exploring the dense texture and elusiveness of experience.

Though Bion's writings are notoriously non-transparent and unclear, his extensions of Klein's theories on envy and projective identification have had broad impact on contemporary Kleinian thinking.





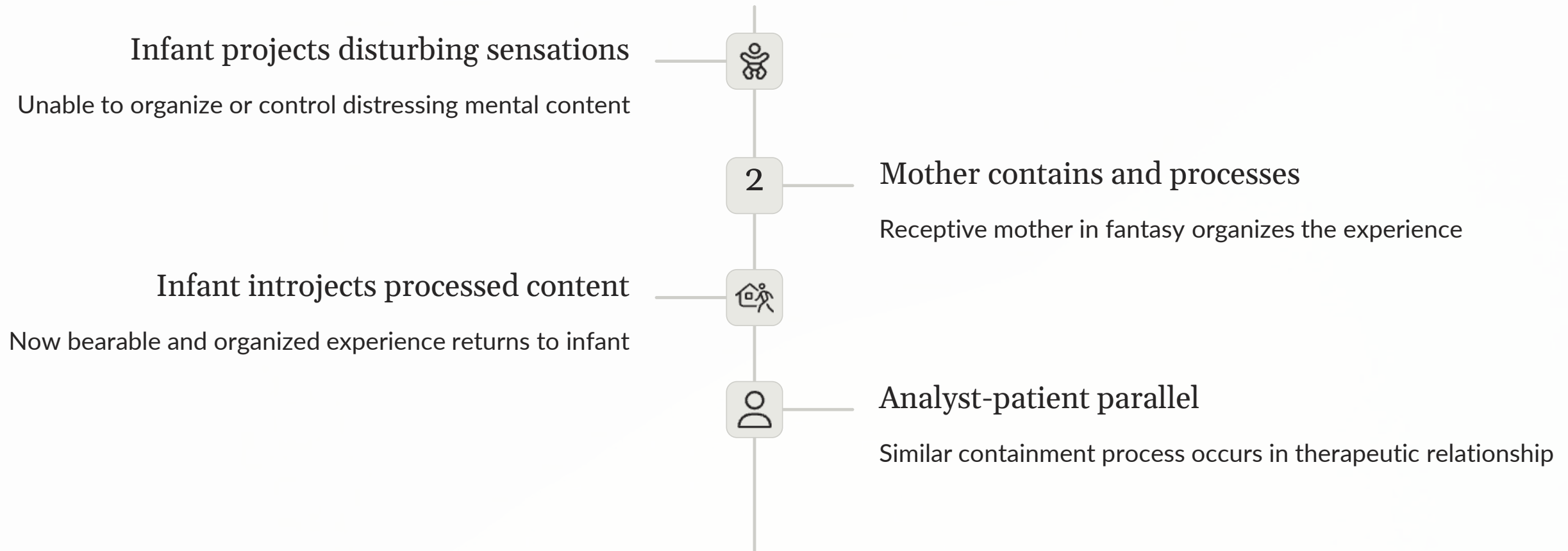
# Bion's Theory of Envy and Mental Attacks



Bion expanded Klein's formulation of envy beyond the attack on an object (like the infant destroying the breast) to include attacks on the mind itself. He theorized that the envious infant experiences the connection to the object as unbearably painful, attacking not just the breast but their own mental capacities that connect them to reality.

This becomes a kind of psychological autoimmunological disorder—an attack by the mind on itself. Bion described one central mechanism as "attacks on linking," where connections among thoughts, feelings, and people are broken. Clinical examples include patients who experience themselves as damaged, unable to think effectively, or who register events without assigning meaning to them.

# Projective Identification as Interpersonal Process



Bion extended Klein's concept of projective identification from a fantasy in one person's mind to a complex relational event between two people. He theorized that the infant, filled with disturbing sensations, projects disorganized mental content onto the mother to escape its effects. The attuned mother, in a state of reverie, contains and processes this content, returning it to the infant in a bearable form.

This understanding connects to phenomena of intuition and affective contagion. Affects are naturally contagious—one person's emotional state can influence others, particularly between mothers and infants. The mother who picks up on her infant's distress has resources for processing it, soothing both herself and the child. Over time, the infant identifies with these organizational capacities.



# The Analytic Situation: From Freud to Klein and Beyond

This presentation explores the evolution of psychoanalytic theory from Freud's classical approach to Klein's revolutionary perspective and its modern extensions by Bion, Racker, and Ogden.



# Freud's Classical Approach



## Patient Role

Free association to reveal links to crucial memories.



## Analyst Role

Detached observer providing informational interpretations.



## Relationship

Clear separation between patient and analyst experiences.



## Transference

Viewed as resistance to memory work.



# Klein's Revolutionary Perspective

## Enmeshed (entangled) Relationship

Patient and analyst fundamentally connected rather than separate.  
Transference is inevitable, not just resistance.

## Primitive Object Relations

Analyst experienced as "good breast" (nurturing) or "bad breast" (destructive).  
Interpretations seen as milk or poison.

## Intense Experience

Patient brings profound hopes and dreads to the analytic situation through unconscious organizations of experience.

# Bion's Interpersonal Extensions



## Projective Identification

Analyst resonates with and contains patient's intense anxieties.



## Analytic Discipline

Approach each session with "neither memory nor desire."



## Attacks on Linking

Patient actively destroys meaning and connection.



## Containment

Analyst transforms patient's tortured states into meaningful experience.

# Racker and Ogden: The Dyadic Relationship



The Argentinian psychoanalyst Heinrich Racker portrayed the analyst (like everyone else) as struggling with dynamics similar to those of the patient: persecutory and depressive anxieties and a need to make reparation. The American psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden illustrated that the patient's intrapsychic fantasy becomes a form of interpersonal transaction that stimulates intense experiences in the analyst, whose countertransference offers clues to the patient's unconscious fantasies.

# Betty Joseph's Technical Innovations

## Less Active Analyst

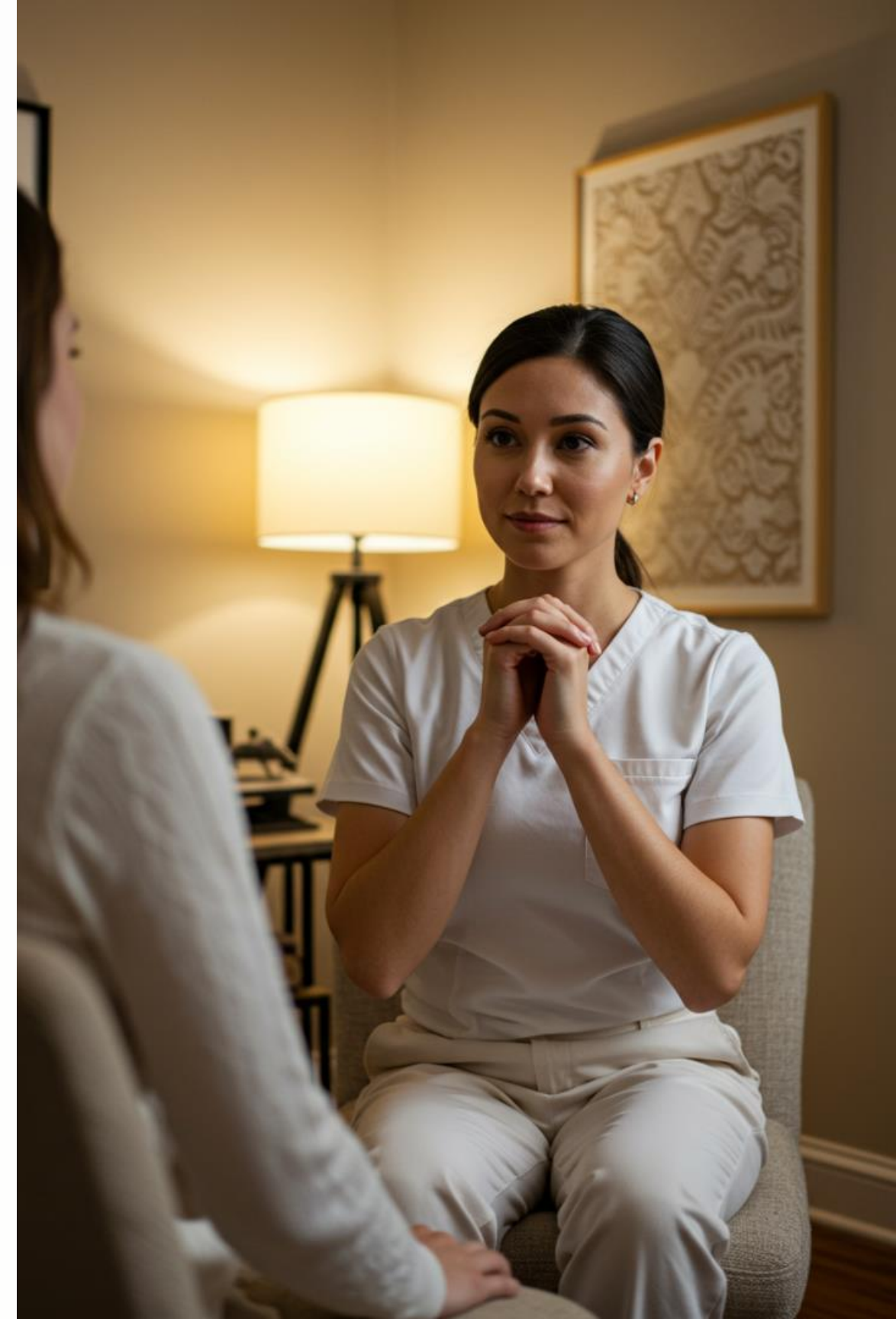
Struggle longer with confusion before interpreting. Avoid immediate "primitive" interpretations.

## Present-Focused

Emphasize here-and-now connection rather than past reconstruction.

## Patient-Centered Language

Use language close to patient's experience, not technical jargon.





# Clinical Case: George



## Presenting Problem

Extremely detached middle-aged man with no intimate relationships.



## Analyst's Experience

Overwhelming exhaustion, feeling caught "in a sea of glue."



## Patient's Dream

Large apartment with beautiful unused rooms; living in small back room.

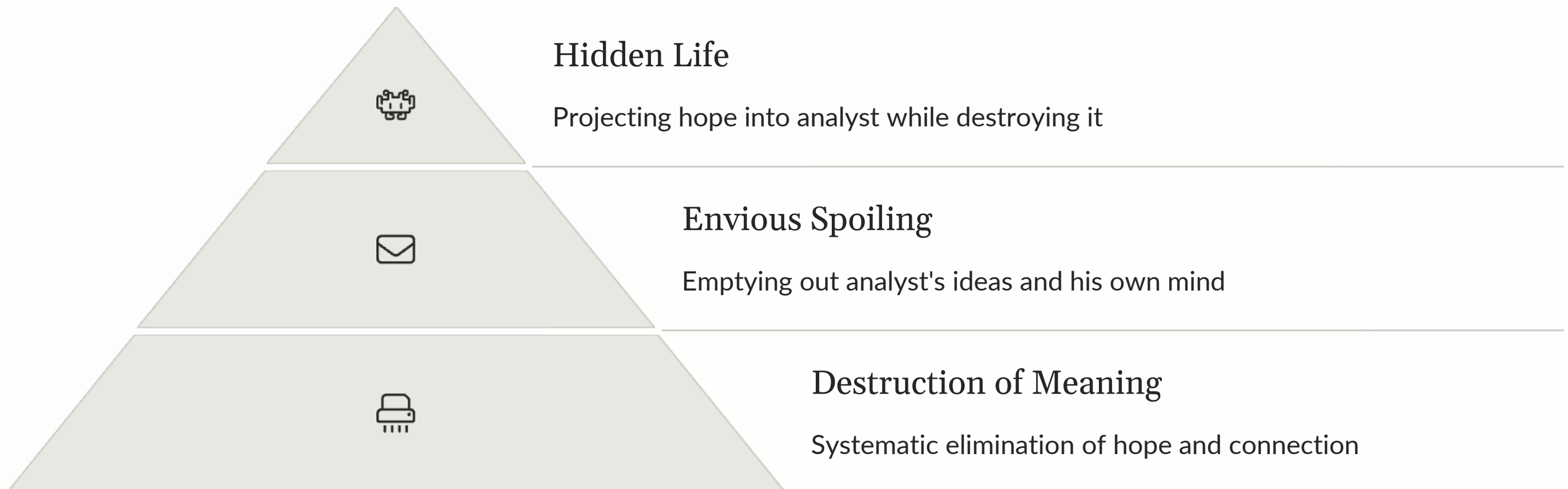


## Patient's Insight

"I never retain what we talk about. I just turn down the volume."



# Kleinian Interpretation of George



# Contemporary Convergence



## Rapprochement

Modern Kleinian approach moving closer to ego psychology and interpersonal traditions.



## Postmodern Themes

Klein's fluid, fractured vision of mind aligns with contemporary cultural themes.



## Extended Symbolism

Klein expanded psychoanalytic symbols beyond sexuality to themes of life, death, internality, and externality.