



**ÇAĞ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY of ARTS &
SCIENCES
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
PSY 313 FUNDAMENTAL
CONCEPTS IN
PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY
COURSE
WEEK 12**

Fairbairn & Winnicott British Object Relation Theorists

The British Object Relations School: Fairbairn & Winnicott

The British Object Relations School, focuses on the groundbreaking work of W.R.D. Fairbairn and D.W. Winnicott. These theorists fundamentally transformed psychoanalytic thinking by moving away from Freud's drive-based model toward one centered on human relationships.

Their revolutionary ideas about how we develop through our earliest relationships continue to influence modern psychology, psychotherapy, and our understanding of human development. We will examine their key concepts and the profound implications for how we understand the human mind.



From Freud to Object Relations: A Paradigm Shift

1

Freudian View

Humans born at odds with environment

Pleasure-seeking drives need socialization

2

Melanie Klein

Bridge to object relations

Redefined drives to include built-in human objects

3

British Object Relations

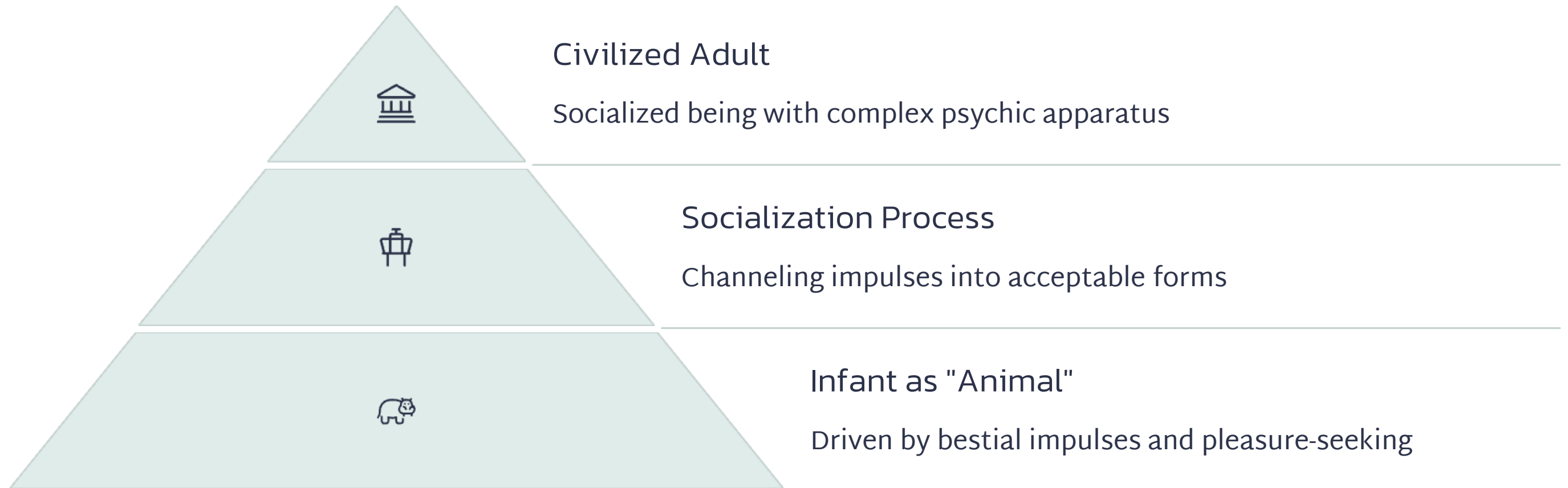
Infant wired for human interaction

Focus on relationships rather than drives



O B J E C T R E L A T I O N

Freud's Developmental Model



Freud envisioned human development as a passage from animal to person. In his Hobbesian view, infants begin life with ruthless, pleasure-seeking impulses that must be tamed through socialization. The individual's pursuit of egoistic satisfactions endangers others, necessitating control by society.



Melanie Klein: The Bridge to Object Relations

Instinctual Knowledge

Klein's infant is born with instinctive knowledge of human objects like the breast, not learning through "accidental" association

Good and Bad Objects

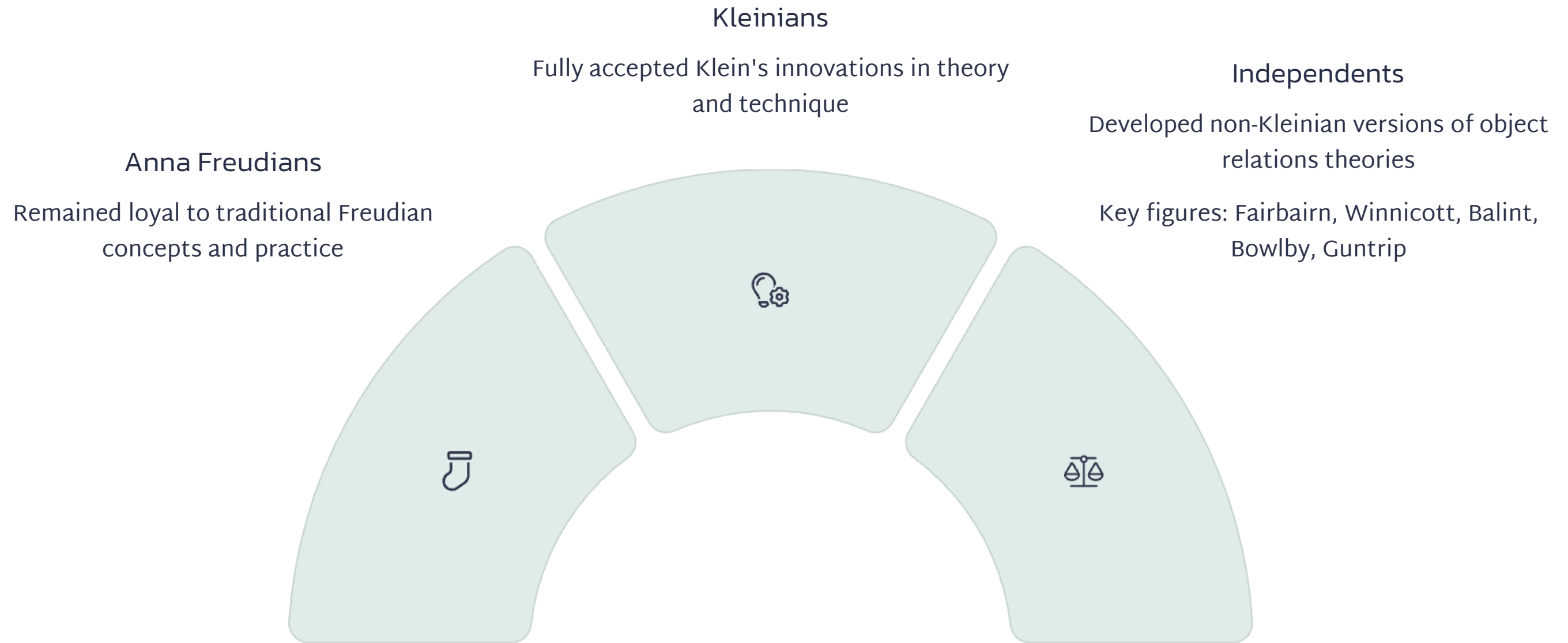
Infant organizes comfort into images of "good" Others and discomfort into "bad" Others

Psychotic Anxieties

Infancy is fragmented and terrifying; sanity becomes a developmental achievement

Klein fundamentally altered psychoanalytic theory by portraying a distinctly human infant from birth. Unlike Freud's pleasure-seeking animal, Klein's baby is prewired for human interaction but experiences the world through fragmented, intense emotions that must be contained through good parenting.

The British Psychoanalytic Society Split



In the early 1940s, after decades of acrimonious debate, the British Psychoanalytic Society split into three distinct groups. The "Independent" middle group built on Klein's vision of an infant wired for human interaction while rejecting her premise of constitutional aggression, instead proposing an infant thwarted (disappointed) by inadequate parenting.

Bowlby's Turning Point

"But there is such a thing as a bad mother."

Kleinian Dominance

Belief in the aggressive, destructive baby predominated in early British Psychoanalytic Society discussions

Bowlby's Challenge

Rose to assert the role of inadequate parenting rather than innate aggression

New Direction

This statement announced the development of post-Kleinian British object relations theories

John Bowlby's defiant statement marked a milestone in the emergence of his independent line of thought. This simple yet powerful assertion shifted focus from the child's innate destructiveness to the impact of parental failure, fundamentally altering the trajectory of object relations theory.



Freud's Clinical Paradox

Hedonic Theory

Freud's motivational framework posited that people seek pleasure and avoid pain

- Pleasure principle guides behavior
- Libido is malleable, using interchangeable objects

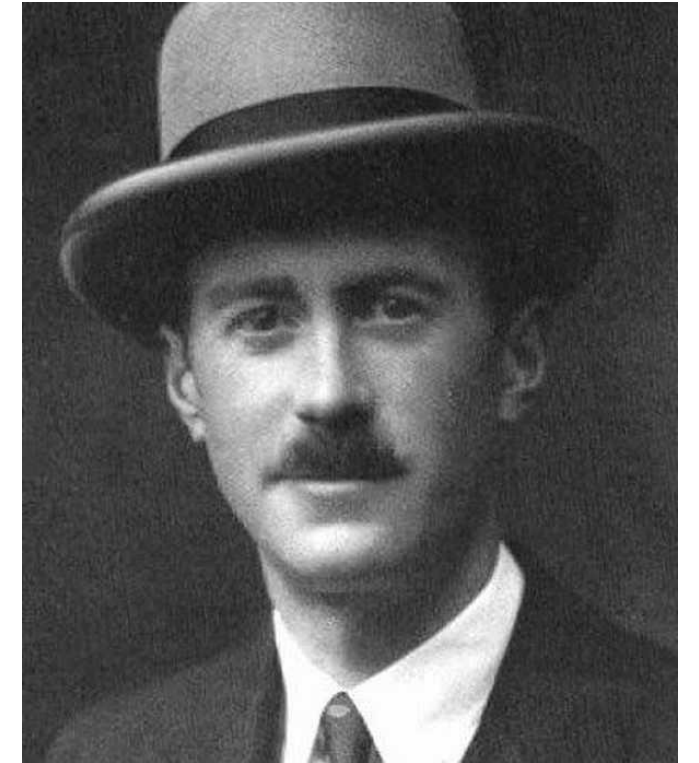
Clinical Observations

Yet Freud observed people systematically making themselves unhappy

- Symptom neurosis
- Character neurosis
- Fate neurosis
- Depression

Freud struggled to reconcile (align) his pleasure principle with the clinical reality of the repetition compulsion—people's tendency to regenerate distress through painful symptoms, behaviors, and relationships. If people seek pleasure, why are they so extraordinarily competent at keeping themselves unhappy?

W.R.D. Fairbairn: Life and Influence



William Ronald Dodds Fairbairn (1899-1964) trained in the British Psychoanalytic Society in the 1930s when Klein's theories were predominant. He returned to Edinburgh and spent the rest of his life there, in virtual isolation from the battles in London between competing psychoanalytic factions (groups).

This peripheral (outer) position allowed Fairbairn to develop a radical critique of Freudian theory, beginning with a series of papers in the 1940s that fundamentally challenged psychoanalytic orthodoxy (tradition).

Fairbairn's Revolutionary Premise: Object-Seeking Libido



Connection as primary goal
Relationships as an end in themselves



Pleasure as secondary
One form of connection, not the primary motivation



Attachment patterns
Early relationships become lifelong patterns

Fairbairn questioned Freud's premise that the fundamental motivation in life is pleasure and proposed a revolutionary alternative: Libido is not pleasure-seeking, but object-seeking. The fundamental motivational push in human experience is not gratification and tension reduction, but connections with others as an end (goal) in itself.

The Case of Sam: Seeking Connection Through Pain



Family Ideology

Parents felt resigned and crushed by life
Depression served as family value system



Relationship Pattern

History of unhappy entanglements (love affairs) with depressed women
Confusion about repeating this pattern



Therapeutic Insight

Believed meaningful connection only possible through shared pain
Crying together seen as deeper than laughing together

Sam's case illustrates Fairbairn's principle that children seek from others the kinds of contact they experienced early in development. Despite his conscious desire for happier relationships, Sam systematically shaped his connections around depressive ties, believing that sharing unhappiness was the deepest form of intimacy.



Fairbairn vs. Klein: Internal Objects



Klein's View

Internal objects are natural and inevitable features of mental life, accompanying all experience through projective and introjective fantasies



Fairbairn's View

Internal objects are compensatory substitutes for real relationships, resulting from inadequate parenting and unmet dependency needs



Healthy Development

For Fairbairn, healthy parenting results in outward orientation toward real people rather than internal fantasy objects

While both theorists used similar terminology, their understanding of internal objects differed dramatically. Fairbairn saw internal objects not as inevitable accompaniments to experience but as pathological substitutes created when real relationships fail to meet a child's needs.



The Case of Charles: Internalizing the Unresponsive



Charles's case illustrates how a child internalizes unresponsive aspects of parents that cannot be reached in actuality. His episodic depressions preserved fragile emotional connections to his parents' hidden emotional lives, which he could not access through actual interactions.



Fairbairn's View of Repression



Freud's View

Repression centers on forbidden impulses and associated memories

Repressor is alliance between ego and superego



Fairbairn's View

Repression centers on relationships, not impulses

Both repressed and repressor are internal relationships



Clinical Implication

Conflict occurs between conscious and unconscious relationships

Dangerous object ties are what must be kept from consciousness

Fairbairn reconceptualized repression as centered on relationships rather than impulses or memories. The repressed consists of ties to features of parents that cannot be integrated, while the repressor consists of ties to more accessible features of parents. This fundamentally relational view of mind transformed psychoanalytic understanding of defense mechanisms.

The Case of Zachary: Repressed Relationships



Maternal Relationship

Mother from wealthy family who remarried someone from her social class known for integrity and virtue
Shaped Zachary's conscious identity and idealistic notions of love



Paternal Relationship

Father was ambitious, charming, from poor background
Banished (exile) after discovery of infidelities (unfaithfulness) when Zachary was three
Became an exiled, dark character with limited access



Therapeutic Discovery

Uncovered dreaded aspect of self modeled on identification with father
Feared and longed to be like him—sexual, promiscuous, irresponsible
Real danger was in the libidinal attachment to father

Key Takeaways: The Legacy of British Object Relations

1

Paradigm Shift

Movement from drive theory to relationship-based understanding of human development

2

Object-Seeking

Fairbairn's revolutionary premise that libido seeks connection, not pleasure

3

Internal Objects

Reconceptualized as compensatory substitutes for failed real relationships

4

Relational Repression

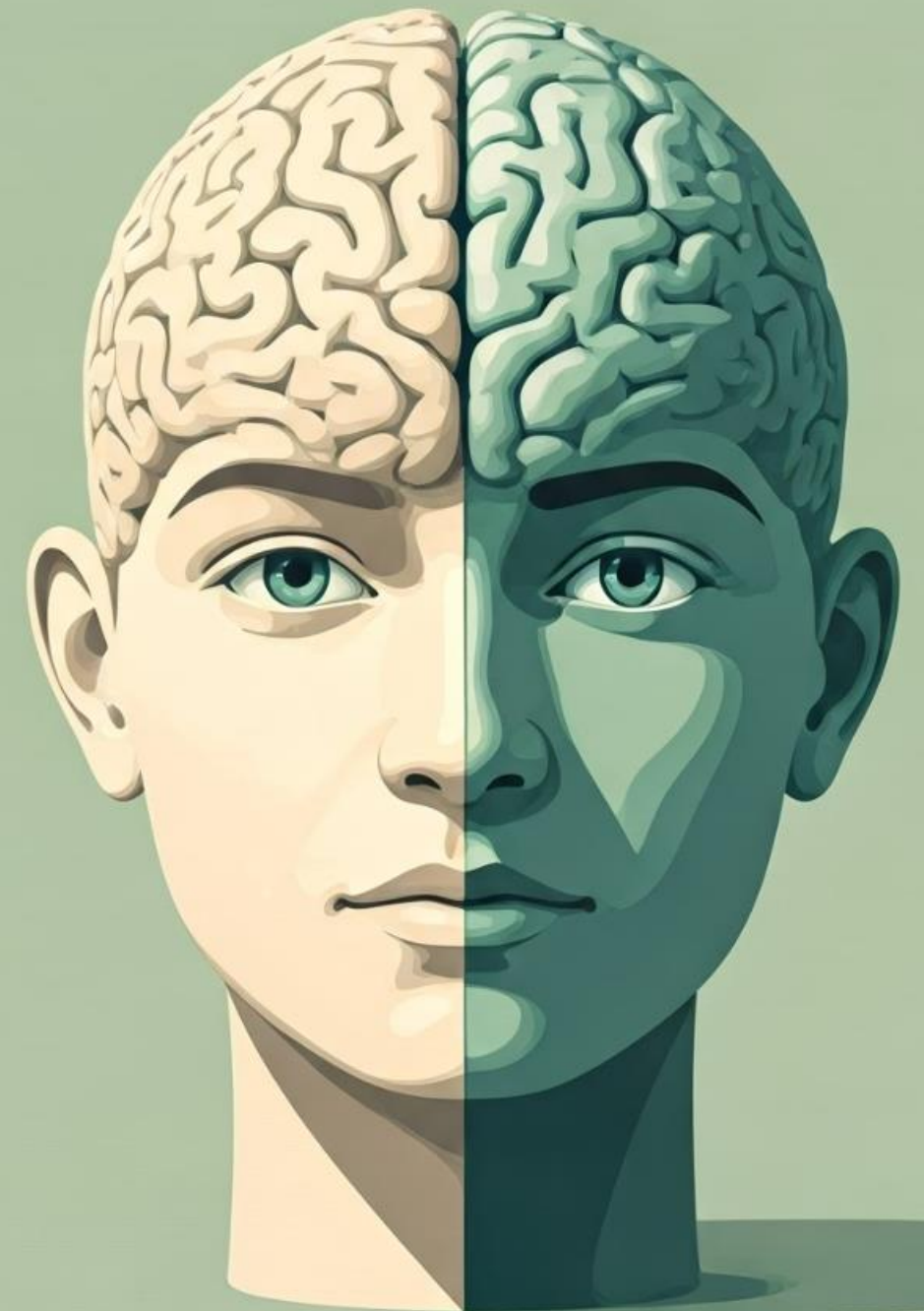
Understanding defense mechanisms as operating between relationship configurations

The British Object Relations School fundamentally transformed psychoanalytic thinking by placing relationships at the center of human development and psychopathology. Fairbairn's contributions continue to influence contemporary relational psychoanalysis, attachment theory, and our understanding of how early relationships shape lifelong patterns of connection.

The Splitting of the Ego: Understanding Psychological Development

This is an exploration of psychological development through the theories of Fairbairn and Winnicott; and how early childhood experiences shape our internal worlds, creating patterns that persist into adulthood.

We'll discover how the mind adapts to less-than-ideal parenting, creating internal splits that affect our relationships and sense of self. We'll also explore therapeutic approaches that can help heal these divisions.



The Universal Split Within



Internalizing Parental Traits

A child with depressed, detached, or narcissistically absorbed parents often internalizes these same qualities. This internalization creates a connection to otherwise inaccessible parts of the parents' personalities.



Creating Internal Divisions

Fairbairn presumes a universal splitting of the ego resulting from less-than-ideal parenting. The child becomes like the unresponsive features of the parents to maintain connection.

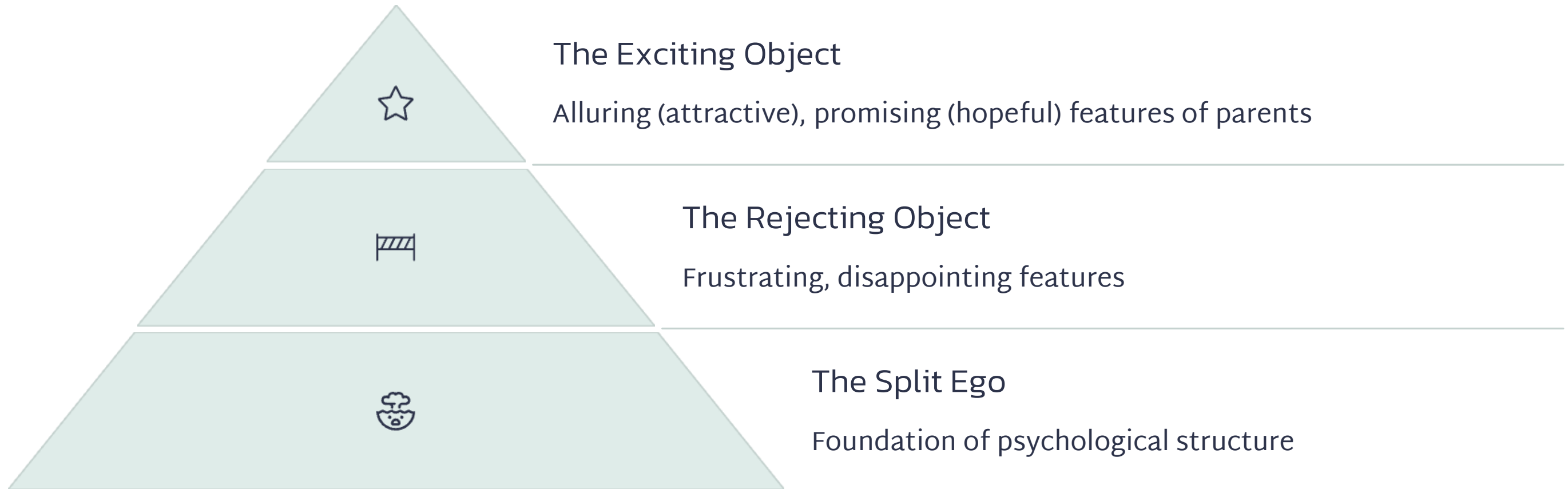


Seeking Real Responses

Part of the self remains directed toward the real parents in the external world, while another part redirects toward internalized parental objects to which it becomes bound.



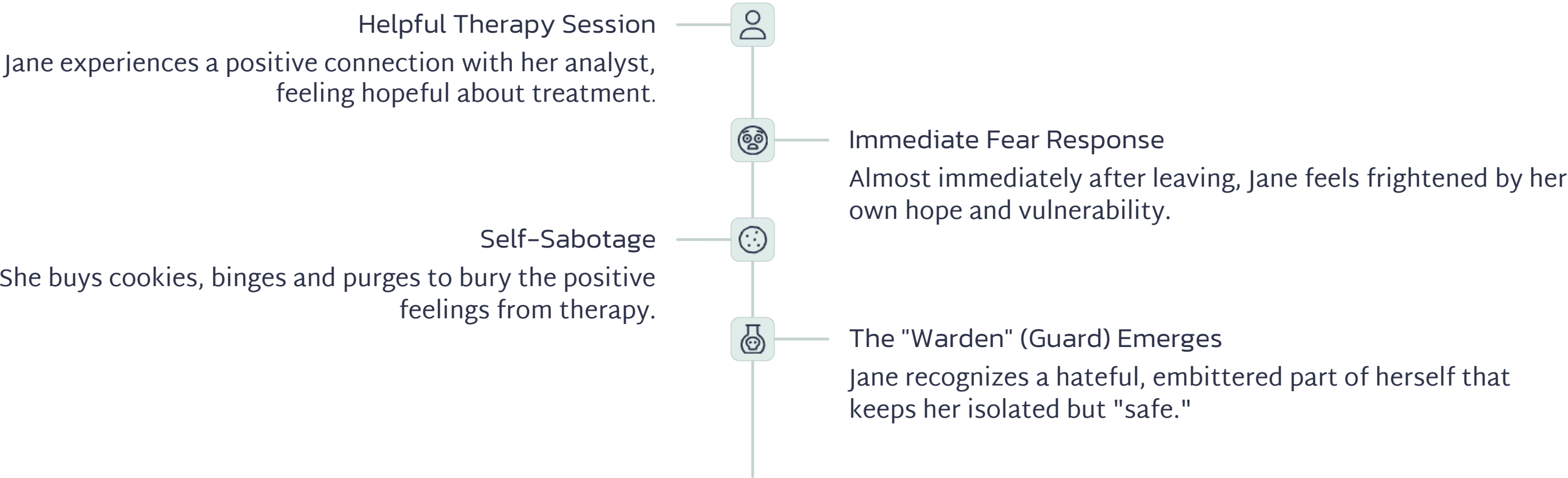
The Further Split of Internal Objects



Once parental experiences are internalized, Fairbairn believed a further split occurs between the alluring aspects of parents (the exciting object) and their frustrating aspects (the rejecting object). The ego becomes correspondingly split between the "libidinal ego" bound to the exciting object, experiencing perpetual longing, and the "anti-libidinal ego" identified with the rejecting object, despising (contempt) vulnerability and need.



Jane's Internal Conflict: A Case Study



Jane's case illustrates the internal conflict between her libidinal ego (the hopeful, vulnerable part) and her anti-libidinal ego (the "warden"). The warden knows she is "safer" in isolation, protecting her from the disappointment and rejection she expects from others.

The Cyclical Nature of Relationship Patterns



Each of us shapes relationships according to patterns internalized from our earliest significant relationships. These modes of connection become our preferred ways of relating to new people. We project our internal object relationships onto new situations, often unconsciously recreating familiar dynamics even when they're painful.



Fairbairn's View of Psychoanalysis



The Search for Something New

The patient enters analysis hoping for change but inevitably experiences the analyst through old patterns.



Beyond Insight

Unlike Freud, Fairbairn believed insight alone is insufficient. The patient can't imagine being herself without her neurotic patterns.



New Relational Possibilities

The patient must begin to believe in new, less constrained patterns of relatedness before giving up old ones.



Changed Capacity for Relatedness

Analytic change occurs through a new ability to connect with the analyst in ways that break old patterns.

Paula's Case: The Cage of Familiar Patterns



Unexpected Success

Paula discovers she earned more money than expected



Depression Response

She quickly plummets (fall down) into familiar depression



The Open Cage

She later describes herself as a jungle cat in a cage with an open door

Paula, a middle-aged woman from a family with rigid gender roles, used relationships for ritual humiliation. When she discovered unexpected financial success, she briefly felt good before plunging into depression about taxes. In therapy, she realized that competence made her feel isolated and unprotected, while depression felt more connected and safe.

Toward the end of analysis, Paula described herself as a caged jungle cat with an open door - seeing freedom but hesitant to leave the familiar safety of her cage until she could believe in new ways of relating.



D.W. Winnicott: A Fresh Perspective

Pediatric Foundation

Winnicott was a pediatrician before becoming a psychoanalyst, bringing unique observational insights about mothers and babies to his theories.

Kleinian Beginnings

Though initially trained in the Kleinian tradition, Winnicott developed his own distinctive vision of psychodynamics and development.

Focus on Subjective Experience

Unlike traditional psychoanalysts focused on symptoms or behaviors, Winnicott was concerned with the quality of subjective experience and sense of personal meaning.

Mother-Infant Relationship

"A baby can be fed without love, but lovelessness as impersonal management cannot succeed in producing a new autonomous human child."

False Self Disorder

The Core Concept

Winnicott was fascinated by patients who functioned normally but didn't feel like real persons inside. He termed this "false self disorder" - a fundamental disorder in selfhood and the quality of personhood.

Unlike Freud who traced neurosis to the oedipal phase or Klein who focused on later infancy, Winnicott connected these disorders to subtle variations in mother-infant interactions from the very beginning of life.

Environmental Origins

What mattered most was not gross abuse or neglect, but something in the quality of the mother's responsiveness - her "management" of the baby's needs and her attunement to the "personal" features of the infant's experience.

Winnicott viewed false self disorders as "environmental deficiency diseases" rather than the result of internal conflicts. The mother's ability to provide the right environment determined the outcome.



The Good-Enough Mother



Primary Maternal Preoccupation

A biological state of deep absorption with the baby, preparing the mother to provide the necessary environment.



Holding Environment

A physical and psychical space where the infant is protected without knowing they're protected.



Responsive Adaptation

The mother intuits and fulfills the child's desires quickly, creating an experience of "subjective omnipotence."



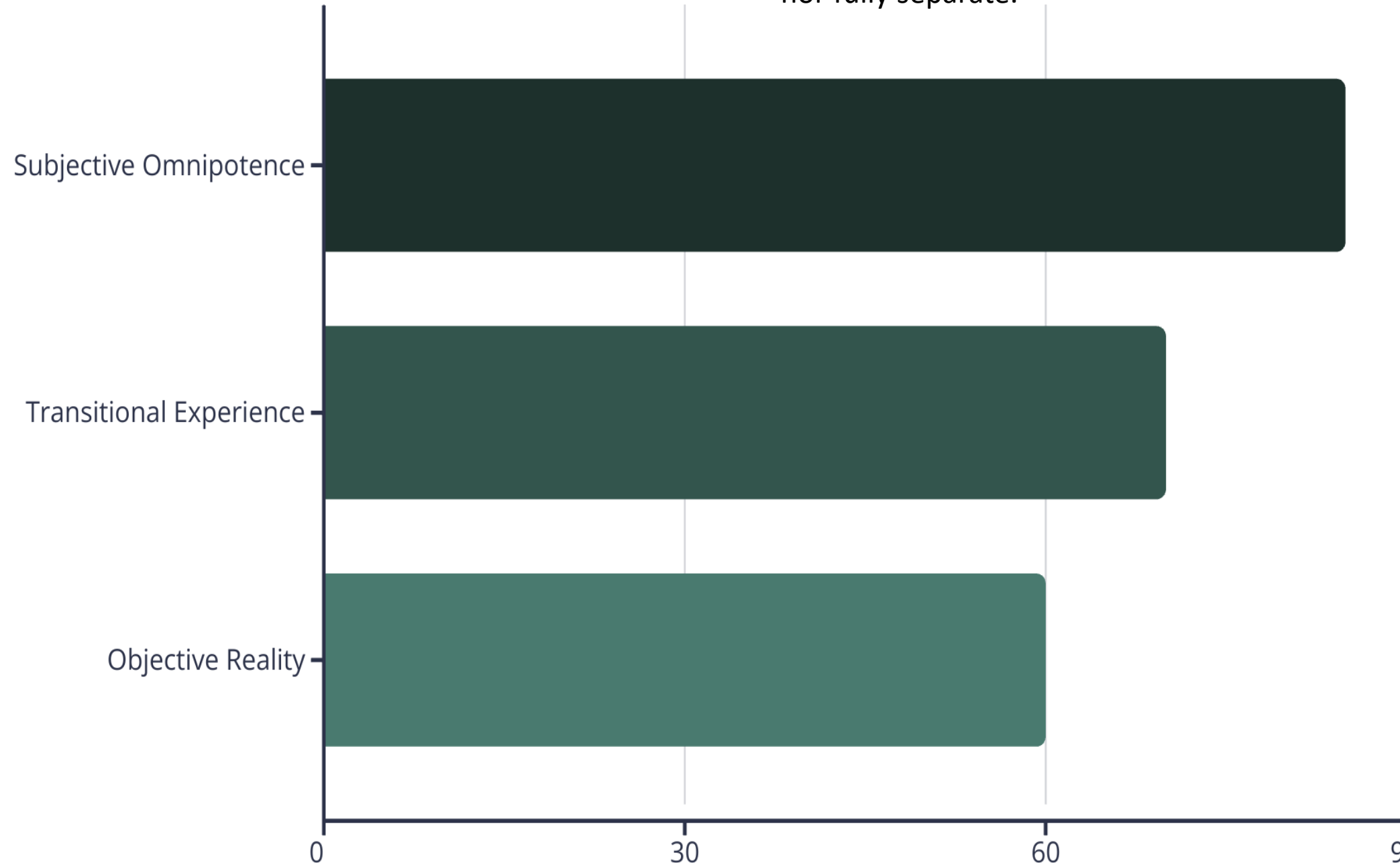
Gradual Failure

The mother slowly emerges from her preoccupation, creating necessary gaps between desire and satisfaction.

The Development of Selfhood

Winnicott described three forms of experience essential for healthy development:

1. In subjective omnipotence, the infant feels they create and control desired objects.
2. In objective reality, they recognize objects as separate and beyond their control.
3. Between these lies transitional experience, where objects are neither fully created nor fully separate.



- Importantly, development isn't linear - each mode of experience remains valuable throughout life.
- A person living entirely in objective reality becomes a false self without a subjective center, while someone stuck in subjective omnipotence becomes self-absorbed and disconnected.

Transitional Objects and Experience



The Special Teddy Bear

The transitional object (like a teddy bear) exists in an ambiguous space - neither fully created by the child nor fully separate. Parents intuitively respect this ambiguity, never challenging the object's special status.



Creative Play Space

Transitional experience expands beyond childhood into a vision of mental health and creativity. It becomes the protected realm where the creative self operates and plays - the source of art and culture.



Adult Relationships

Adult love involves periodic mutual "object usage" where each partner can surrender to their own desires without worrying about the other's survivability. The durability of the other makes intense connection with one's passions possible.



When Mothering Fails: Impingement

0

Psychological Development

When the mother can't provide a good-enough environment, psychological development essentially ceases

2

Forms of Impingement

Child experiences ignored desires or forced focus on external demands

1

Core Split

Radical division between true self and compliant false self

When mothering fails, the child experiences "impingement" rather than holding. This occurs when desires aren't fulfilled or when the child is forced to focus prematurely on external demands. The child must adapt to the world too early, which impedes the development of authentic subjectivity.

This creates a radical split between the genuine wellsprings (fountain) of desire (true self) and a compliant self (false self) fashioned out of the premature necessity for dealing with the external world.



Peter's Case: The Search for Holding

Presenting Problem

Peter, an engineer skilled at fixing machinery, felt removed from life with constant mental "noise." He had an inexplicable anxiety attack when attempting to take gliding lessons.

Physical Metaphors

He was drawn to experiences of being suspended and supported - gliding, swimming, scuba diving. His anxiety emerged when that support seemed to disappear.

Childhood Origins

His parents were chronically arguing and deeply depressed. His enthusiasm was met with dampening responses. He became prematurely logical to stabilize an explosive environment.

Adult Patterns

Peter's adult life became a search for missed experiences - the holding environment he never had. He longed to surrender vigilance yet feared dependence on others.

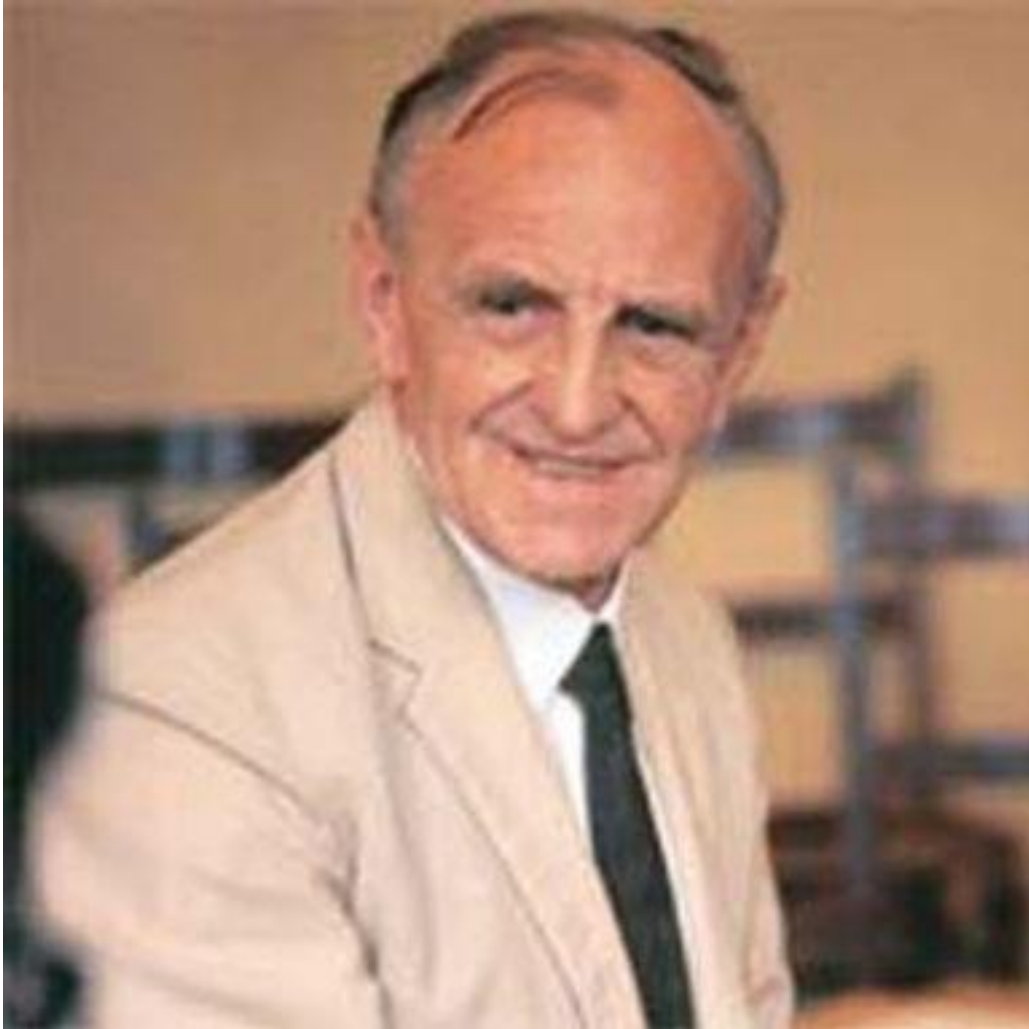
Doris's Case: The Melting Baby



Doris sought analysis for clinging dependency and difficulty being alone. She spoke rapidly, feared silences, and constantly prepared for sessions. She believed the analyst's mind was frightening and that her attention saved him from her own demons.

Her parents showed signs of precarious (insecure) mental balance and inappropriate intrusiveness. Doris never had an environment to explore her own subjectivity. She reported a dream of a wax baby head that would melt - symbolizing how she had to disconnect her mind from authentic experience to adapt to external demands.

In Winnicott's view, the child with an inadequate holding environment must shape a false self to deal with the external world while sheltering the seeds of genuine experience until a more suitable environment is found.



Winnicott and the Independent Group: Reshaping Psychoanalysis

The Independent Group of the British Psychoanalytic Society transformed our understanding of the analytic situation. Moving beyond Freud's focus on uncovering repressed desires, these innovators—Winnicott, Balint, Bowlby, and Guntrip—shifted emphasis to the relationship between analyst and patient, and how this relationship could heal developmental wounds.

Their revolutionary approaches reconceptualized psychoanalysis as providing what was missed in early development rather than merely interpreting unconscious conflicts. They made unique contributions and they collectively reshaped psychoanalytic theory and practice.



Winnicott's Analytic Situation

The Good-Enough Analyst

For Winnicott, the analytic situation mirrors the mother-infant relationship. The analyst, like the good-enough mother, provides an environment where their own subjectivity is on hold (waiting), allowing the patient's true self to emerge.

Unlike Freud's focus on uncovering secrets and memories, Winnicott saw the patient's difficulties stemming from internal divisions that removed the sources of personal experience. The problem wasn't specific desires or conflicts, but how experience itself was generated.

Self-Restoration

Winnicott viewed patients as powerfully self-restorative, shaping the analytic situation to provide environmental features missed in childhood. Content and interpretations were nearly irrelevant; what mattered was experiencing the self in relation to the other.

With disturbed patients, Winnicott shaped treatment around spontaneously arising needs, sometimes providing sessions on demand, allowing patients to feel they had created him, enabling them to rediscover their capacity to generate meaningful experience.

From Freud to Winnicott: A Paradigm Shift

Freud's Approach



Focused on uncovering secrets and gaps in memory

Used free association to reveal internal resistances

Transitional Thinking



Shift from drives to relationships

Greater emphasis on early development

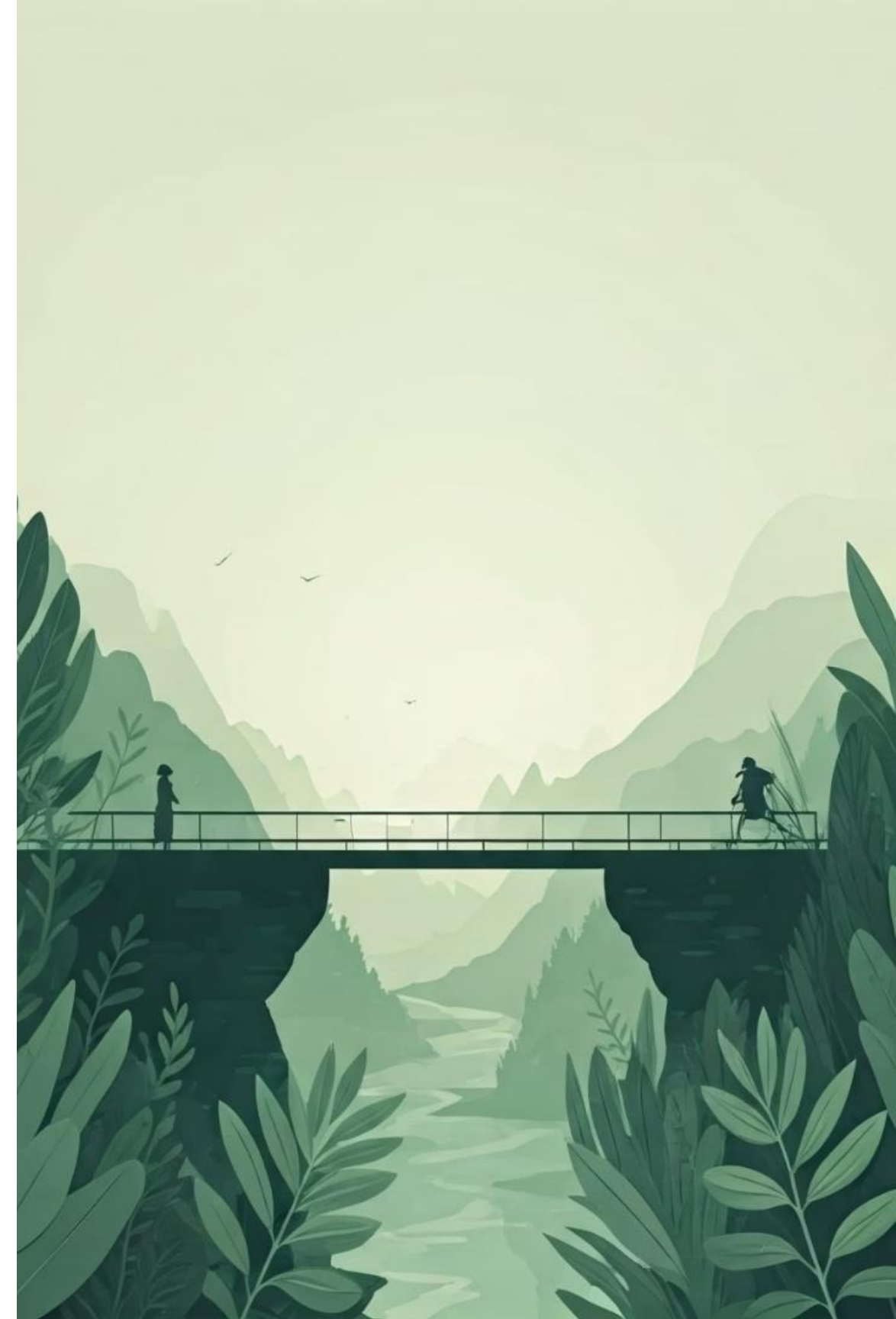
Winnicott's Innovation



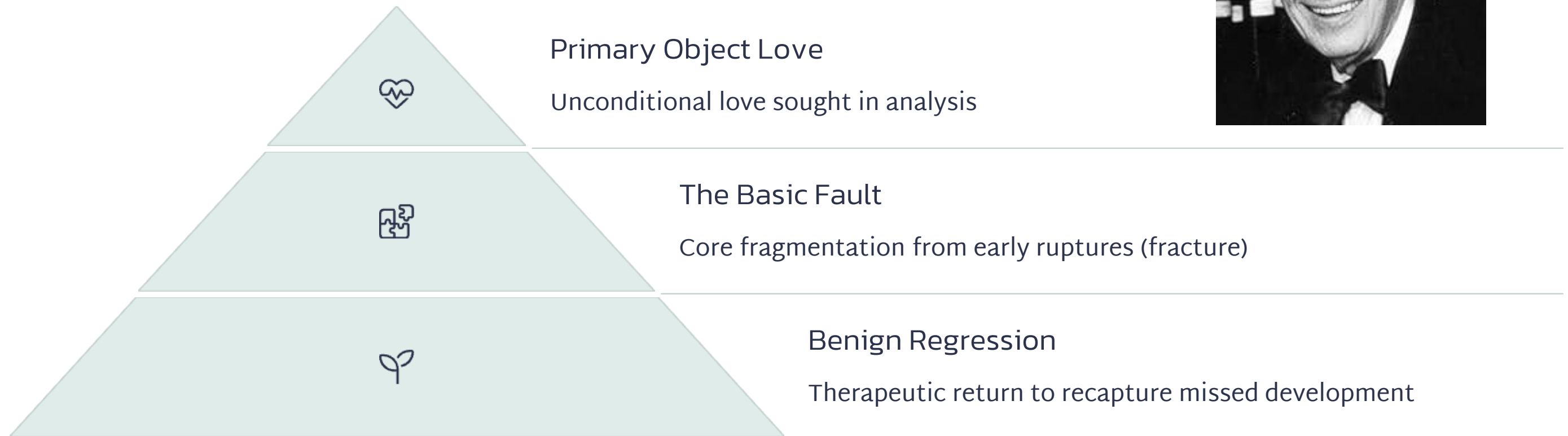
Created holding environment for self-development

Emphasized experience over interpretation

This fundamental shift in psychoanalytic thinking moved from viewing patients as struggling with forbidden desires to seeing them as seeking missed developmental experiences. The analyst's role transformed from interpreter to provider of a facilitating environment where the true self could emerge and develop.



Michael Balint: The Basic Fault



Michael Balint, analyzed by Sandor Ferenczi, extended his mentor's innovations by arguing that patients seek not gratification of infantile wishes but an unconditional "primary object love" they were deprived of in childhood. Unlike Fairbairn, Balint never rejected Freud's drive theory, yet maintained that object relations are present from the beginning of life.

Balint described the earliest mother-child relationship as a "harmonious, interpenetrating mix-up" of "primary substances." Rupture in this relationship creates "the basic fault," a fragmentation at the core of the self that patients unconsciously seek to heal through analysis.

John Bowlby: Attachment Theory



Attachment as Primary

Bowlby argued that the child's tie to the mother is instinctual and primary, not derivative of need-gratification. This attachment enhances survival through five instinctive responses: sucking, smiling, clinging, crying, and following.



Evolutionary Perspective

Unlike Freud's view of instincts as unruly (uncontrollable) and asocial, Bowlby saw them as preadapted to the human environment, honed (fine-tuned) by natural selection for survival. His Darwinism was distinctly twentieth-century, focused on adaptation rather than our animal origins.



Security and Anxiety

Emotional security reflects confidence in the availability of attachment figures. Different kinds of anxiety are rooted in separation concerns, while anger functions as protest against separation. Detachment serves as a defense against attachment needs.

Bowlby's work had enormous impact beyond psychoanalysis, influencing biology, anthropology, ethology, and research on children and families. His concepts have shaped popular attitudes toward parent-infant bonding and influenced both private lives and public policy.

Harry Guntrip: The Regressed Ego



Defensive layers

Surface protections requiring analysis



Schizoid withdrawal

Underlying all psychopathology



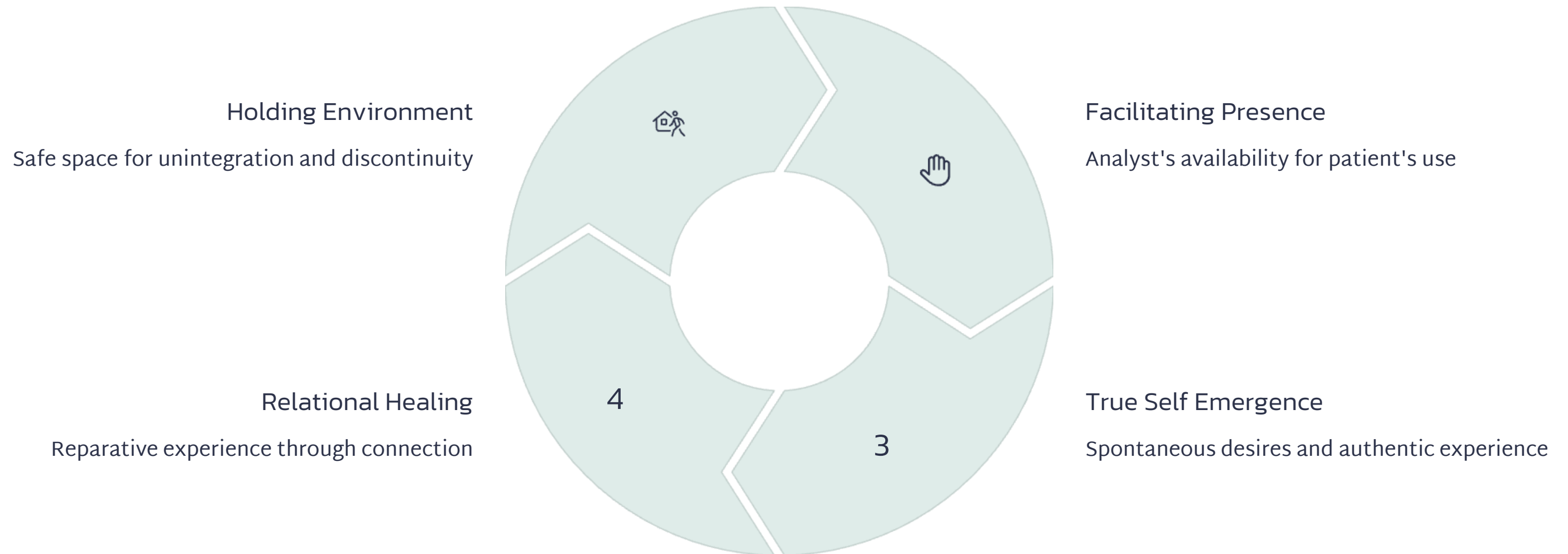
Regressed ego

Deep hidden isolation seeking rebirth

Harry Guntrip, analyzed by both Fairbairn and Winnicott, integrated their contributions while characterizing psychoanalysis as a "replacement therapy" where the analyst operates "in loco parentis" (acting in the role of a parent). He viewed the nurturing analytic relationship as the vehicle for cure.

Extending Fairbairn's work on schizoid phenomena, Guntrip proposed that in severe deprivation, part of the ego renounces (give up) object-seeking altogether, withdrawing into deep isolation. This "regressed ego" manifests as profound helplessness and hopelessness, representing both the self fleeing frustrating objects and aspects never actualized due to inadequate maternal environment.

The Therapeutic Relationship Reimagined



The Independent Group revolutionized the concept of the therapeutic relationship. Rather than a hierarchical arrangement where the analyst dispenses interpretations to a passive patient, they proposed a deeply personal, nurturing relationship that provides missed developmental experiences.

This approach emphasizes the analyst's emotional availability and authentic presence. The therapeutic space becomes a "holding environment" where patients can safely explore unintegrated aspects of themselves and experience the kind of attunement that fosters genuine self-development.

From Drive Theory to Object Relations

Theoretical Dimension	Drive Theory (Freud)	Object Relations (Independent Group)
Primary Motivation	Pleasure-seeking, tension reduction	Connection-seeking, relationship-oriented
View of Objects	Secondary to drives, need-gratifying	Primary, sought for themselves
Developmental Focus	Psychosexual stages, conflict resolution	Early mother-infant relationship, self-formation
Therapeutic Aim	Insight through interpretation	New relational experience, developmental repair
Analyst's Role	Neutral interpreter of unconscious	Facilitating environment, developmental object

The Independent Group's shift from drive theory to object relations represented a fundamental reorientation of psychoanalytic thinking. While Freud saw humans as primarily driven by pleasure-seeking instincts that secondarily become attached to objects, these theorists viewed humans as inherently relationship-seeking, with drives emerging within an interpersonal context.

This theoretical shift had profound implications for clinical practice, moving from an emphasis on interpretation and insight to providing new relational experiences that facilitate developmental repair and self-integration.

Legacy and Contemporary Influence



Relational Psychoanalysis

The Independent Group's work laid the foundation for contemporary relational psychoanalysis, which integrates object relations theory with interpersonal approaches. Their emphasis on the two-person nature of the analytic relationship continues to shape current practice.

The Independent Group's collective contribution has extended far beyond psychoanalysis proper, influencing child development research, parenting practices, educational approaches, and various psychotherapy modalities. Their humanistic vision of development and healing continues to inspire clinicians and researchers seeking to understand the fundamental human need for authentic connection and recognition.



Attachment Research

Bowlby's attachment theory resulted in productive research programs that have validated and extended his insights. This work has influenced developmental psychology, neuroscience, and our understanding of trauma and resilience.



Clinical Innovation

Winnicott's evocative concepts like the "holding environment" and "good-enough mother" have become powerful metaphors for therapeutic work across various modalities, influencing approaches to trauma, personality disorders, and developmental repair.