



Wheilem Reich, considered the 'father' of somatic or body psychotherapy, wrote his first book in 1933, called 'Character Analysis'. A colleague of Sigmund Freud (the father of psychoanalysis), he based his psychoanalytic theories on Freud's work and eventually added the aspect of including the body through understanding its physical character structure. Numerous forms of body psychotherapy emerged from Reich's original explorations over the next several decades, one of which was Bioenergetics that was founded by Alexander Lowen and his partner John Pierrakos (who subsequently left Bioenergetics to create another form of body psychotherapy, called Core Energetics, that included a spiritual component through the work of his wife Eva Pierrakos).

Today, Bioenergetics also goes beyond the original Freudian basis of an ego based psychology with the libido as a primary cause of neurosis or with the analyst as an invisible being that has no therapeutic impact or effect on the client. Bioenergetics training now includes a more relational approach to therapy. Based on an Object-Relations model of psychodynamic theory, it includes the relationship with the therapist as forming a healthier model of attachment and seeks to understand and heal the effects of primary family relationships as part of the initial developmental wounding.

The 'object' in Object-Relations Theory is the person that is a primary relationship for the client. Often this is between a mother and child and sometimes it can be with another person like a grandparent or father if the mother was not available. The relational component is based on the interpersonal relationships with others that have an effect on the present life of the client.

There are several people whose work influenced an object-relations psychodynamic model; Ferenczi, the Balents, Klein, Fairbairn, Guntrip, Jacobson, Winnicott, Mahler, Boszormenyi-Nagy, Kernburg, Kohut and Bowlby. I will discuss very briefly only some of the aspects that resonate the most with my work. I will observe how well a client holds object constancy with internal or external object relationships and if splitting or part object relations may occur. I also explore their inherent narcissism in regards to the self-psychology approach and how they see relationship objects as part of the image of self or as performing an essential function for the self.

Klein developed Freud's somewhat contradictory theories of the early bonding relationship with the mother and a psychosexual instinctual basis, feeling that people are more object seeking for a mother to be in relationship with or a search for others, rather than mostly pleasure seeking from only a libido impulse. Klein saw the object as primary in the first few months of a baby's life as the mother's breast for milk and comfort as an important good or positive primary relationship and a hostile or negative relationship when the breast or milk was denied or not satisfying the baby's needs or desires. After this initial stage of ego development, she felt that the oedipal conflict was more observable in the first year of life, during the oral stage of development.

Winnicott discovered the use of transitional objects as a helpful to reduce the stress of separation from the mother which can become transitional phenomena through self-soothing behaviours like holding a stuffed animal (the mother object), rocking or fantasy stories. I encourage the use of self-soothing behaviours with clients that appear to not have healthy object relational models within themselves or others.

I have also found Margaret Mahler's seminal work on the 4 stages of separation-individuation to be extremely helpful in being able to identify the earlier stage of development a client may be developmentally wounded in. I also feel that Mahler's theory that physical holding in the first years of life to be essential for the psychological health and confidence of the baby as it matures into adulthood. This includes holding 'space' psychologically for the child in ways that are not too tight or smothering and not too little which can be very stressful if it occurs too soon when the child is not ready. Children need to feel safe, protected and secure by their mothers (as well as fathers) through object constancy.

And finally, Kohut's theories on Self Psychology places the primary emphasis of object relations theory on the issues of narcissism and how they are both healthy and non-healthy, which is often a theme that I will explore with my clients.