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**THE CONCEPT OF «SEPARATION – INDIVIDUATION»
BY MARGARET MAHLER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR
PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY****КОНЦЕПЦІЯ «СЕПАРАЦІЇ – ІНДИВІДУАЦІЇ» МАРГАРЕТ МАЛЕР І
ЇЇ ЗНАЧЕННЯ ДЛЯ ПСИХОАНАЛІТИЧНОЇ ПЕДАГОГІКИ**

The article explains Margaret Mahler's psychoanalytic concept of early child development, which is of fundamental importance for pedagogy in general and for psychoanalytic pedagogy in particular in the context of the theory of normal and abnormal development of children. M. Mahler studied the emotional ties between the baby and the mother and considered the relationship in the «mother-child» dyad as a dynamic unity of opposite tendencies – the child's need for attachment to the mother, on the one hand, and the child's desire for his own autonomy through establishing clear boundaries of one's «Ego»/«Self» in this relationship – on the other. The quality of the existing relationship between a mother and a child determines the success of the integration of these conflicting tendencies and shapes the child's ability to independence and autonomy. A stable object relationship between a mother and a child is considered as a resource support for the child and a reliable basis for his further development. This interactive process, which contributes to overcoming the internal conflict of multidirectional development trends, was called the process of «separation – individuation».

The stages, phases, and subphases of this process are analyzed in detail, namely: the first stage, the phase of «normal autism» and the phase of «normal symbiosis»; the second stage: the differentiation subphase, or «hatching», the practice subphase, or «omnipotence», the rapprochement subphase, or «reunion», the object's permanence (constancy) formation subphase. It is shown that children who have a positive experience of early object relations want and can establish and maintain relations with loved ones, peers, and adults, demonstrating their socio-psychological adaptation. The negative experience of relations in the «mother-child» dyad leads to serious violations of object relations in adulthood and increases the risk of personal psychopathology.

Key words: child development, object relations, separation, individuation, identity, «Ego»/«Self».

У статті експліковано психоаналітичну концепцію раннього розвитку дитини Маргарет Малер, яка має фундаментальне значення для педагогіки загалом та для психоаналітичної педагогіки зокрема в контексті теорії нормального та аномального розвитку дітей. М. Малер вивчала емоційні зв'язки між немовлям і матір'ю та розглядала відносини в діаді «мати – дитина» як динамічну єдність протилежних тенденцій – потребу дитини в прив'язаності до матері, з одного боку, та прагнення дитини до власної автономії через установлення чітких меж свого «Его»/«Я» в цих відносинах, – з іншого. Якість існуючих відносин між матір'ю та дитиною визначає успішність інтеграції цих суперечливих тенденцій і формує здатність дитини до самостійності, автономії. Стабільні об'єктні відносини матері й дитини розглядаються як ресурсна підтримка для дитини та надійна база для її подальшого розвитку. Цей інтерактивний процес, що сприяє подоланню внутрішнього конфлікту різноспрямованих тенденцій розвитку, отримав назву процесу «сепарації – індивідуації».

Докладно проаналізовано етапи, фази та субфази цього процесу, а саме: перший етап: фаза «нормального аутизму» та фаза «нормального симбіозу»; другий етап: субфаза диференціації, або «вилуплювання», субфаза практики, або «всемогутності», субфаза зближення, або «возз'єднання», субфаза формування постійності (константності) об'єкта. Показано, що діти, які мають позитивний досвід ранніх об'єктних відносин, хочуть і можуть установлювати й підтримувати відносини з близькими людьми, однолітками, дорослими, демонструючи свою соціально-психологічну адаптацію. Негативний досвід відносин у діаді «мати – дитина» призводить до серйозних порушень об'єктних відносин у дорослому віці та збільшує ризик особистісної психопатології.

Ключові слова: розвиток дитини, об'єктні відносини, сепарація, індивідуація, ідентичність, «Его»/«Я».

Problem statement. The process of formation of the «mother-child» dyad is explained in the psychoanalytic concept of «separation-individuation» by Margaret Mahler (1897–1985).

The methodological basis, which includes: the hypothesis about the phases of separation-individuation processes, research methods and specifics of intervention (in case of problems in the

development of children) are described in detail in the work «The psychological birth of the human infant: symbiosis and individuation» [17].

M. Mahler studied normal babies and normal mothers in the natural environment of the playroom, observing the emergence of object relations in the first three years of life. The data obtained as a result of research led M. Mahler and her colleagues to consider the stages of development of object relations in terms of what she called the process of separation – individuation [4]. Separation is a process in which the infant gradually develops an intrapsychic sense of being able to function independently of the mother. Individuation is the infant's attempts to form his own unique identity, to perceive his own individual characteristics [18].

Separation and individuation are two intertwining lines of development that enable the child to function independently of the mother and at the same time form successful relationships with other people, understand and perceive themselves [1]. Separation should be considered as a process of rebuilding (reformatting) relations, and the concept of individuation as a process of developing self-awareness. The process of separation – individuation consists of several phases, the change of which is caused by the restructuring of the mother-child interaction. It ends with the formation of stable representations of the maternal image and its functions in the mental world of the child during the third year of life (achievement of object constancy). Object relations theorists believe that the main ways of dealing with anxiety and, in general, the type of character of a person largely depend on the experience of passing through each phase of the process of separation – individuation [19; 22].

The purpose of the article is to explain M. Mahler's concept of early child development, to reveal the peculiarities of the relationship in the «mother-child» structure, to characterize the peculiarities of the separation-individuation process and its significance for psychoanalytic pedagogy.

Methodology. The research used methods of disciplinary, general scientific and philosophical levels. The methodological basis of research is a systemic interdisciplinary approach. When using authentic texts by M. Mahler, we applied general scientific methods; analysis and synthesis, induction, deduction and analogy, abstraction, generalization, idealization, formalization.

Analysis of relevant research. The most general basis for the study of the theoretical foundations of a child's early emotional development in the context of psychoanalytic pedagogy are the works of A. Freud (1962), M. Klein

(1975), D. Winnicott (1965). The general methodological, clinical and psychological aspects of M. Mahler's psychoanalysis are explained in the scientific works of G. Bahn (2021), A. Bergman (2000), M. Furer (1963), G. Gergely (2000), B. J. Gosliner (1955), K. La Perriere (1965), H. Loewald (1984), J. B. McDevitt (1982), F. Pine (2004), A. M. Sandler, (1976), B. Wolfs (2022). The problem of the study is that, despite the wide popularity of M. Mahler, the general methodological and clinical aspects of her psychoanalytic concept of early child development are mostly explained in the scientific discourse, and the pedagogical aspects, unfortunately, remain neglected. The article presents in a structured manner not only general methodological explanations of the concept of separation – individuation, but also promising lines of personality development in case of violations of the stage sequence of passing this process by the child.

Main material. *The first stage.* The first stage of the process of separation – individuation includes two phases: the phase of «normal autism» (from birth to the manifestation of the revitalization complex, i.e., up to 1-2 months of the child's life) and the phase of «normal symbiosis» (starting with the revitalization complex up to 4-5 months) [3].

1. The first phase of «normal autism». In the phase of normal autism, the child achieves homeostasis with the help of physiological mechanisms, and forms of affective and motor discharge (for example, screaming) become a signal that requires the mother to satisfy his needs. Care from the mother protects the newborn child from an excess of internal and external stimuli that would cause a state of organismic distress, which is analogous to a panic reaction at a later age. The mother performs the functions of the external «Ego»/«Self».

General characteristics of the phase of normal autism:

1. The outside world simply does not exist for a child.

2. A newborn child in this period can be called somatically oriented, since all his reactions and desires are aimed at maintaining a comfortable feeling in his own body.

3. The mother contributes to this: the child's inner feeling of security and peace depends on his mother's sensitivity, ability to react correctly, understand the baby's wishes, withstand anxiety.

4. This is the phase when fusion (confluence) engulfs all space, when there is no mother, no child, no world.

5. In the consciousness of the newborn child there is only one single system that satisfies or fulfills the needs of his organism [6].

If the phase of normal autism was unsuccessful:

1. In this case, the complete lack of proper care, attention, and emotional response to the baby can lead to either deep psychotic disorders (autistic psychosis) or rejection of life (death) [5].

2. In this case, the child's death cannot be explained by any physiological data. This is a direct protest of a little person who recently appeared in the world – against coldness, contempt, lack of love.

3. This is a reaction to severe traumatization. It is easier for a child's psyche to cope with his own body, directing all its anger at the world at it, than with an adult who has never felt a connection with his child [8].

II. The second phase of «normal symbiosis». This phase comes after the revitalization complex, when the child begins to actively respond to the mother, to influence her. Gradually, she learns to distinguish between «pleasant»/«good» and «painful»/«bad» experiences. The comfortable and uncomfortable stimuli associated with the holistic image of maternal care together form the child's specific primary psychophysiological «Ego»/«Self». At the same time, the child develops an «expectation» that if something threatens him, the maintenance or restoration of homeostasis depends on the intervention of the mother [12].

During the first year of life, developmental processes and maternal care contribute to the strengthening of the child's sensory perception of the periphery of his body and the outside world. The mother, without realizing it, activates those potential opportunities of the child that best meet her own personal needs. It conveys to the child in various ways something similar to the «mirror image of the coordinate system» to which the child's primitive «Ego»/«Self» adjusts. If the «primary maternal anxiety» is unstable, anxious or aggressive in nature, and her self-confidence as a mother is insufficient, then the child, whose individuality is just beginning to form, will not receive a reliable coordinate system from the symbiotic partner (mother) [21]. The result of this will be a violation of the primitive «sense of self», which usually arises from a comfortable and safe state of symbiosis, which should not be abruptly and prematurely interrupted [20].

Thus, the normal symbiotic phase is a prerequisite for the separation of the child from the mother in the next phase of separation – individuation and an important step in the formation of the bodily «Ego»/«Self».

General characteristics of the normal symbiosis phase:

1. The inner life of the child acquires certain outlines – there is a place for the very first relationship – with the mother.

2. The mother represents the whole world for the child, and it is she who becomes his first and most important object of love and attachment, but she is not perceived by him as a separate subject.

3. The child and the mother are one whole, there are no boundaries between them, in the child's mind they are together in a world of blissful comfort and peace.

4. The feeling of omnipotence and the ability to achieve what is desired are important for the infant, because they create a balance in the feelings of satisfaction/dissatisfaction and allow to cope with the intense anxiety and fears that the child feels every time he loses omnipotent control over the mother.

5. Gradually, the child comes face to face with reality, with the fact that the mother is outside of him (a separate object) and he cannot always control her.

6. If we talk about fusion (confluence), it is at this phase that both the mother and the baby feel comfortable and safe, without feeling the need for anyone else.

7. Most often, it is at this phase that the main drama of further development takes place: the baby must gradually separate and get to know the world, while the mother can feel extreme concern and anxiety from the independence of the growing baby, thereby unconsciously inhibiting the moment of his separation [10].

If the normal symbiosis phase was unsuccessful:

1. Violations lead to the loss of the ability to separate from the mother, the child forever freezes at the level of psychotic functioning, never being able to separate himself from the object of attachment [14].

2. A person who has received a serious injury at this stage of development, as it were, forever remains the same child who seeks to be one whole with someone.

3. In adulthood, a person may have a tendency towards dependent relationships and have various types of addictions: alcohol, drugs, gaming, etc.

4. In an easier version, such a person, having managed to partially separate himself and significant objects, will be subjected to the strongest attacks of fear and anxiety, which will be practically impossible to cope with on his own – he will constantly return to the state of helplessness, which is characteristic of the early stages of development [2].

Next, the stage of development begins, when the child takes the first steps towards his own identity, towards realizing himself as a separate entity from the mother, a complete subject.

The second stage is actually the process of separation – individuation, represented by four phases that are dialectically related to each other [7].

III. The third phase of «separation – individuation».

1. Subphase of differentiation, or «hatching» (from 4-5 to 9-10 months). The child begins to focus on the outside world and actively influence it; his behavioral manifestations include tugging at his mother's hair, ears, nose, turning his body back away from her to get a better look at her, and looking at what is behind her. The child begins to like games like «koo-koo», which are initiated by the mother; later they will be actively initiated by the child himself. Unlike the previous complete dependence on the mother and sitting passively in her arms, the child begins to enjoy using his body.

The main characteristics of the differentiation subphase, or «hatching»:

1. The child notices the world: he begins to explore it, feeling extreme curiosity and interest.

2. The mother remains the most significant, important object for the child, but the child begins to notice that the mother is only a part of the world.

3. Being distracted by exploring the world, the child needs emotional contact with her, the feeling that she is nearby.

4. At this subphase, the mother is the guarantor of safety for the child.

5. If the mother leaves the child too often or, on the contrary, limits her activity and research interest too much, then this gives rise to a strong anxiety of losing the mother and the emergence of a number of fears related to the danger of the surrounding world, in the first case or a return to fusion (confluence), after unsuccessful attempts to explore the world, in the second.

If the subphase of differentiation, or «hatching» was unsuccessful:

1. The difficulties of passing through this subphase will turn into a person's strong tension and anxiety in moments of separation from significant people in adult life.

2. Two options are possible: either a person will be able to cope with this anxiety, however, being in its power (he will be prone to strong panic attacks, extremely restless), or every attempt to show activity will eventually lead to giving it up (a person will be unable to withstand the flow of fear and tension that he has buried, and therefore will refuse to realize his own desires for autonomy).

2. The subphase of practice, or «omnipotence» (from 10 to 15 months), begins with the appearance in children of the ability to physically move away from the mother (crawling, moving with the help of hands) and continues with free walking. Children of this age are tireless in exploring everything that comes their way, more and more of the surrounding world becomes available for their study. They tend to avoid their mother with little concern for her whereabouts. Probably at this time they do not yet realize that the mother is not a part of them: falling or bumping, they look in all directions, surprised that the mother is not there to help. The specifics of this phase depends on both innate factors and the mother's attitude to the child: some mothers encourage his independence and self-reliance, while others, on the contrary, restrain him, preferring to maintain close relationships [13].

The main characteristics of the practice subphase, or «omnipotence»:

1. Exploration of the world is most active in this subphase: the child begins to crawl and walk.

2. The child becomes even more independent, discovers new possibilities of his body and is in a kind of euphoria, overflowing with his own emotions and feelings about his own omnipotence.

3. This is the most painful stage for the mother, because the child's fear of losing the object of his attachment is reduced to a minimum, it is practically excluded from the range of children's feelings and experiences.

4. The possibility of independence and control allows the child to form in his psyche the image of the mother to whom he will return and turn, including during her absence (in his fantasies) [15].

If the sub-phase of practice, or «omnipotence» was unsuccessful:

1. The state of absence of feelings, or the complete loss of the object of attachment.

2. The long absence of the mother leads to the formation of psychopathological features of the child's character: when he grows up, such a person will either be completely unable to communicate with his emotions and feelings, or will not be able to form a prosperous (constructive) relationship, refusing to accept a partner as an «object of his love».

3. A possible option when there will be a lot of such objects (as a result, the complete destruction of any uniqueness of each of them leads to a depreciation of their significance).

4. Having experienced a negative reaction to his own activity, in adulthood such a person will be quite passive, withdrawn, without clear life goals and interests.

3. *Subphase of rapprochement, or «reunion»* (16 to 24 months). At the beginning of this phase, the child seems to discover his separation from the mother: he moves away from her, and after a while he seems to remember her, turns and walks next to her like a «tail». Some children seem anxious if their mother is always around.

Differences between one's own and the mother's intentions, the mother's displeasure when the child does not fulfill her demands make conflicts between them more and more frequent and lead to anxiety about the loss of parental love and closeness. At this age stage, the child is «torn» between the desire to stay with the mother and at the same time expand the sphere of his independence, the desire to bring her joy and aggression directed at her. At this time, periods of inexplicable whims and dissatisfaction, fear of strangers, sleep disturbances and depressive tendencies are observed. Ambivalence and hostility towards the mother provoke the ripening of a relationship crisis (the crisis of the third year of life). The child's feeling of separation from the mother and the limitation of his own capabilities creates the conditions for the destruction of the illusion of her omnipotence [9].

The theorists of the psychoanalytic theory of object relations believe that the main ways of dealing with the anxiety of getting close to the mother and moving away from her largely depend on the experience of going through the reunion subphase, when the child is aware of the difference between his and the mother's desires and is forced to somehow cope with this fact. Two basic fears (fear of denial, loneliness and fear of absorption, fusion) and ways to overcome them are peculiar traces of passing through the reunion phase, which form the emotional foundation of the individual and are always revealed in subsequent interpersonal relationships [11].

The symbiosis phase, the rapprochement subphase, or «reunion» and the achievement of object constancy are considered important for understanding personality psychopathology. M. Mahler's concept shows the vulnerability of certain places of fixation: the autism phase and the symbiotic phase – for psychotic diseases, and the reunification subphase – for narcissistic and borderline personality disorders [8].

The main characteristics of the rapprochement, or «reunion» subphase:

1. The child becomes more confident in his body, in his ability to be independent, he enjoys exploring the world. In this subphase, the child receives not only a positive experience of his omnipotence: he is aware of his weakness, dependence and insecurity.

2. The child wants to be one whole with the mother again, but he cannot return to the initial state of complete fusion, because the feeling of independence is no less important and pleasant for him than being in a safe space of relations with the mother.

3. Polar emotional-volitional reactions are characteristic: sometimes running away, then again «sticking» to the mother, the child is «torn» between his need for her love for him and the desire to completely control her, forcing her to fulfill all his wishes.

4. A symbolic game appears, thanks to which the child expresses his dual experiences.

5. The child gradually becomes completely separate in his inner world (his «Ego»/«Self» is now separated from the «Ego»/«Self» of other people, including the mother), the child defends the boundaries of his own «Ego»/«Self».

6. Constant whims and frequent mood swings can cause a wide range of feelings, but it is important to accept the child's feelings, ambivalence and inner struggle.

If the rapprochement, or «reunion» subphase is unsuccessful:

1. The mother's inability to help the child in this subphase can lead to the child's inability to understand and feel his boundaries when building relationships with other people.

2. As an adult, it will be incredibly difficult for such a person to understand and distinguish his desires, often replacing them with the desires and needs of significant objects. If a person can (in very rare cases) realize his desire, it will be incredibly difficult for him, he will fear that his desires will again cause aggression and rejection of the mother (or a significant object).

4. *The subphase of forming the permanence (constancy) of the object* (up to three years). Completion of the last subphase means the ability of the «Ego»/«Self» to function independently due to the fact that the object (the image of the mother and ways of meeting the child's needs) maintains its place in the child's mental world: regardless of whether the mother is present in the real world or no, whether it satisfies the needs or not, in the psyche of the child it retains features of support (permanence of the object). Establishing the constancy of the object takes interpersonal relations to a higher level of development, since the child can now simultaneously maintain both unity with the mother and independence from her, therefore, psychologically it separates from the mother, taking another step in the process of separation.

The relations in the «mother-child» dyad before the age of three lay the foundation

for future interpersonal relations, and it is in them that the basic personal structures and the first identifications are formed. The mother (a close adult) provides the conditions for the bodily, physical development of the child and the process of his personalization. The formation of the child's «Ego»/«Self» goes from absolute dependence to relative independence and autonomy. The mechanism of the development of autonomy at this stage is the process of the child realizing his own desires, which ensures the experience of the subjectivity of actions, and primary aggression in the relationship with the mother. Understanding the nature of a child's aggressiveness and a lenient attitude towards it, support and satisfaction of its basic needs, contribute to the development of the child's independent activity [16].

The main characteristics of the permanence (constancy) subphase of the object:

1. A mother for a child is a complete object to which the child can display various feelings without anxiety and fear.

2. The child is able to cope with the absence of the mother.

3. Such relationships can be called stable, having the form of mature relationships between two individuals who respect each other's feelings.

If the object's permanence (constancy) subphase failed:

1. The difficulties that lie in wait for the child during this period are found in the combination of «bad» and «good» object into a single image of his own mother.

2. Having grown up, such a person will conditionally classify all people as «good» and «bad».

3. Not being able to withstand his negative feelings about his mother, the child transfers them to other objects.

4. Having not learned to cope with the positive and negative sides of the mother figure, in adult life a person will idealize important people for him: being fascinated by them, he will not notice any flaws.

Conclusions.

1. M. Mahler emphasized that the baby perceives the external reality fragmentarily. Gradually, a complete image of one's own mother is formed, and later a unique and stable image of one's own «Ego»/«Self», which differs from the image of the primary object of love (the mother or the person who replaces her). M. Mahler pointed out that the formation of the «Ego»/«Self» representation is based on the peculiarities of the child's relationship with various objects. She determined the stage sequence and dynamics of the process of development of these relations.

2. The development and unfolding of the «Ego»/«Self» structure was explained by M. Mahler in the original concept, which was called «separation – individuation». Separation refers to the process of formation of the internal image of the «Ego»/«Self», which gradually changes and begins to differ from the maternal image. Separation is not a break in relations with the mother – not a spatial (physical) distance from the mother or the person who substitutes her, but a process of identity formation, an attempt to perceive one's own «Ego»/«Self».

3. M. Mahler conceptually expanded the psychoanalytic theory of object relations. The main leitmotif of M. Mahler's concept is that the basis of the child's normal development and the formation of mental structures that will contribute to independent emotional functioning are: the emotional connection between a mother and a child and the equal openness of a mother.

4. M. Mahler, one of the first in the psychoanalytic tradition, conducted long-term observations of children in natural conditions, which stimulated further research in the field of early development of children and the emergence of new concepts. Scientific achievements of M. Mahler do not lose their relevance even today. M. Mahler explained the logically constructed concept of early object relations into the scientific discourse, which makes it possible to build a holistic theory of child development in the context of psychoanalytic pedagogy.

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