

FORMING and GROWING the ESSENTIAL SELF

by

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INTERNALIZATION: all the processes of taking in the external world (relationships, characteristics, interactions, and forms of regulation) for the purpose of building up the psychic structure and internal world of the self

Internalization helps develop three capacities:

Incorporation

- an instinctual activity of the *earliest* phases of life during which the infant takes in the mother (object) through their symbiotic union, prior to any differentiation for the infant between self and other
- because differentiation has not yet developed, this union is such that the external object becomes part of the self to the degree that the object loses its function as an object – this is representative of Winnicott’s notion: The more the baby has of the mother, the more the baby has of itself.
- this activity is foundational – it becomes the precursor and prototype of later, more mature identifications

Introjection

- a dynamic process in which an external object (parental figure) becomes an inner presence
- while an introject becomes a structural component of the child’s psychic system, it never becomes a part of the inner core of the self, but exists in active relationship to the self, organizing the self’s inner world and exerting influence on the self’s inner state, self-image, and behavior

- the introject retains its character even as it becomes part of the self's inner world

Identification

- is *not* a mechanism, but is a fact, and results from the taking in of attributes, values, beliefs, and attitudes of an object, *motivated* by attachment to that object
- is *not* imitation, which is the acquisition of a behavioral pattern from a social object, *without any attachment to that object*
- *is* necessary to the formation and growth of the self
- *is* developmental in that the infant/child assimilates and appropriates as her/his own qualities of the maternal (and other significant) object(s), establishing permanent personality characteristics
- *is* the original form of emotional tie with another (object)
- can arise with new perceptions of qualities with another person, and if successful, represent the beginning of a new tie