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SYMBOLIC EQUATION Freud uses this term to indicate the different responses of the young girl and the boy in confronting conflicts in oedipal love. Where the boy experiences only the 'logical shock' of *castration, the girl responds to the threat of loss of primary love by moving 'along the line of a symbolic equation'. The equation might be 'penis = baby', or 'opening and shutting door = parent's legs'. Ferenczi took up the term from the German child-psychologist Ernst Meumann, and introduced the term into psychoanalysis. Melanie *Klein developed the term in her construction of a theory of symbol formation. It was further developed by *Segal to describe primitive modes of object association and symbolisation, that in pathological states imply concretisation of thought processes. In a number of early works, particularly 'The importance of symbol-formation in the development of the ego' of 1930, Klein suggests that as primary objects become affectively saturated, substitutes are developed through identification that may be used more freely, although as these in turn become objects of anxiety new symbolic equations are required. Klein argues that such symbolism is the basis of internal and external relatedness.

Drawing on this, Segal emphasises that, as well as anxiety about one's objects fuelling symbol-formation, the differentiation between ego and object (as well as between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions) is reflected in that between the symbol and the object symbolised, the signifier and the signified. Stressing the triadic relation between the symbol, the thing-in-itself that is symbolised and the person within whose mind the one represents the other, Segal is able to distinguish between mature triadic symbol-formation characteristic of the depressive position (as well as of sublimation) and more primitive variants within the paranoid-schizoid

position (and in symptom formation) where there is a failure to adequately differentiate the symbol and object symbolised, underlying which is an active conflation of ego and object. The latter process Segal terms a 'symbolic equation', which concept she uses to clarify the concrete thinking common to the psychoses.

While initially conceptualised in terms of *projective identification, Segal later described symbolic equation with reference to Bion's concepts of normal and pathological projective identification, container-contained, and the transformation of beta into alpha elements. Finally, Segal sees the attainment of triangular oedipal relations as linked with the development of mental space within which symbol-formation germinates, the disruption of such 'thinking' space in its nascent stages predisposing the infant to later thought disorder, psychopathology and further symbolic equations.

Ferenczi, S. (1916). 'The Ontogenesis of Symbols' in R. Badger (ed.) *Six in Psychoanalysis*. Boston, MA: Gorham Press.

Segal, H. [1957] (1981) 'Notes on symbol formation' in *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 49-65.

B. B. / R. Wil.