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## Self Psychology

### The Self and Its Vicissitudes Within a Relational Matrix

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A well-documented shift from a one-person to a two-person psychology (Rickman, 1957; Balint, 1968; Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; Modell, 1984; Mitchell, 1988; Ghent, 1989) cuts across a number of psychoanalytic theoretical developments, including the British school of object relations, self psychology, interpersonal psychoanalysis, and currents within Freudian ego psychology. Because of its pervasiveness, it has led to the use of the term "relational perspectives" (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; Mitchell, 1988), the subject matter of this book. This shift from an intrapsychic to a field perspective can be likened to the Copernican revolution, in that the individual, like planet earth, does not exist alone but can be understood only in relation to the "gravitational forces" of the universe at large.

#### SHIFT IN OBSERVATIONAL STANCES

Fundamental shifts in theoretical perspectives within the domain of science often entail basic changes in both observational and conceptual stances. The shift from an intrapsychic to a field model within psychoanalysis is in part based on the on-going, far-reaching change from the positivistic science of the 19th century, wherein so-called "facts" were "objectively" observed, to the relativistic science of the 20th century, marked by Heisenberg's Uncertainty

Principle, wherein the "observed" is recognized as always shaped by the observer.<sup>1</sup>

The shift from positivistic to relativistic (or perspectivist) science is apparent in the psychoanalytic observational stances of the "objective" observer versus the subsequent formulation of the "empathic mode of observation." A breakthrough in Freud's work was his investigation of the patient's intrapsychic world, implicitly using the yet unformulated empathic mode of observation. The positivistic science of the day, however, significantly influenced the investigation of the patient's inner life. The analyst's observations and interpretations tended to be, and often still are (particularly in clinical discussions), viewed as "objective."<sup>2</sup> Recognizing from a relativistic scientific position that the analyst always affects what is observed, Kohut (1959, 1982) clarified and proposed the *consistent* use of the empathic mode of observation namely, to attempt to understand from *within* the vantage point of the analysand. Placing the analysand's perspective and experience in the foreground *militates* against imposing the analyst's point of view onto the analysand. Although this listening stance is designed "to hear" as well as possible from within the vantage point of the analysand, this is clearly a relative matter, for what is heard is always *variably* shaped by the analyst.<sup>3</sup> To refer to this

<sup>1</sup>This shift to a relativistic science is both reflected and further developed in Piaget's theory of constructionism.

<sup>2</sup>We can surmise that Freud did not formulate the "empathic mode of observation" principally because of the positivistic science of the day. Although he seldom used the term empathy, Freud (1921) did address its fundamental importance in referring to it as "the mechanism by means of which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life" (p. 110). Empathy has generally referred to affective resonance with the other (see Greenson, 1960). As a data-gathering stance (Kohut, 1959), empathy enables us to feel into and to "vicariously introspect" about the other's subjective experience—a complex affective and cognitive process (see Lichtenberg, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>In his critical assessment of self psychology, Bromberg (1989) erroneously links the empathic mode of observation with "dedication to full empathic responsiveness" (p. 282). Kohut (1959, 1982) conceptualized the empathic mode of observation as a data-gathering stance, distinct from ensuing interventions. The confusion may partially emanate from Kohut's (1982) noting that this data-gathering activity of the analyst (which the patient experiences as a response from the analyst) in itself may be experienced by the patient as "empathic" and "therapeutic" and his use of the word "empathy" also to refer to a "powerful emotional bond between people." Referring to the *responses* of the analyst based on empathically-gathered data, Kohut (1977) also noted the need for an "average empathic responsiveness" (p. 253). Contrasting empathic responsiveness with the "neutrality" of the classical stance, Kohut used the term to address the requisite affective involvement of the analyst. What is meant by empathic responsiveness is a far too complex subject to approach here, but it is to be differentiated from the empathic mode of observation.

listening stance as a mode of "observation" reflects the ongoing shift from positivistic to relativistic science, for "observation" conveys a sense of an "outside" observer. A more relativistic description is to identify this mode as the empathic mode of *perception*, referring to the analyst's perceptual process (Lichtenberg, 1981, for example, uses this latter term). The analyst's perceptions, understandings, and explanations are subsequently offered to the analysand for his or her experiential assessment (Schwaber, 1984, has further delineated this stance).

When the analyst's observations and interpretations are no longer viewed as "objective" facts but as "subjective" organizations, the analytic field shifts immeasurably as the analyst is "dethroned" from the position of the "objective" observer and becomes a coparticipant in perceiving and constructing the analytic process. The perceptual-affective-cognitive organizing principles or schemas of the analyst variably shape the analyst's experience and reading of the analysand's experience, just as the analysand's schemas variably shape his or her experience of the analyst. This fundamental shift from positivistic to relativistic science and paradigmatic change in observational stances underscores that the *analytic arena* involves an interaction between two persons (and their respective subjectivities) and, therein, is a relational or intersubjective field.<sup>4</sup>

### ONE-PERSON AND TWO-PERSON PSYCHOLOGIES: A NEW SYNTHESIS

In understanding a person (personality theory), a one-person psychology model emphasizes biologically determined developmental unfolding and conflictual experience and views psychopathology as primarily intrapsychically generated. A two-person psychology model emphasizes development and conflict emergent within a relational field and views psychopathology primarily as emergent

<sup>4</sup>The terms relational (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983) and intersubjective (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984) are used here interchangeably. The term relational directly refers to (internal and external) relationships and is easily recognizable and also broadly applicable outside the analytic context; the term intersubjective, in emphasizing the interaction of two subjective worlds (to be distinguished from Stern's (1985) use of the term intersubjective, which refers to a distinctive form of relatedness), includes more easily, when applied to the analytic arena, the full range of self experience in which the relational dimension shifts between foreground and background. Both terms refer to a field model in which the individual is viewed as developing and living within a relational matrix.

within and generated by the relational field. Because these theories of development and pathogenesis reflect an intrapsychic and relational emphasis respectively, a one-person psychology model *applied* to the analytic arena tends to support the classical view of transference as a displacement and projection onto the blank screen of the analyst wherein the contribution of the analyst is considered minimal, that is, transference as distortion (for a review, see Fosshage, 1990a). Interpretation and insight, and not the relational experience, tend to be viewed as the central agents of therapeutic action. Correspondingly, a two-person psychology model supports the view that both patient and analyst variably contribute to the transference (for a review, see Fosshage, 1990a). Conceptualizing the analytic scene as a two-person psychology opens the door to including, if not emphasizing, the new relational experience, in addition to interpretation and insight, as important agents in therapeutic action.

As Modell (1984) and Mitchell (1988) point out, considerable overlap exists between these two theoretical perspectives. The one-person perspective is not "naively solipsistic" and the two-person perspective is not "naively environmental" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 4). Environmental influences are included within a one-person perspective, but the *action* in development, pathogenesis, transference, and therapy tends to be intrapsychic. Conversely, biological determinants are included within a two-person perspective (for example, primary motivations in all psychoanalytic theories are biologically anchored or prewired), but the *action* in development, pathogenesis, transference and therapy tends to be relational. All theories have elements of both, although most theories emphasize, as evidenced in interpretive constructions, one side or the other. Moreover, the elements in the various monadic and dyadic models significantly vary in *content*. For example, all theories of primary motivation assume that motivation is inherent to the organism, but differ as to what the specific motivational strivings are.

Although Freud (1896) in his seduction theory began with a two-person emphasis, his theory evolved primarily into an intrapsychic model. The reemergence of a field perspective in psychoanalysis, the Hegelian "antithesis," has prepared the way, initially, for the use of complementary models (Modell, 1984) and, now, for a possible new synthesis through the integration of the one-person and two-person perspectives (Modell, 1984; Chent, 1989).<sup>5</sup> As Chent (1989)

<sup>5</sup>Similarly, the developmental arrest (self) theory was initially juxtaposed with the conflict/defense model (Kohut, 1971) as a complementary model in the 1970s and early 80s (see Stolorow and Lachmann, 1980). As the theory evolved a new synthesis

points out, one emergent synthesis, guided by the overlapping work of Winnicott, Guntrip, and Kohut, involves the concept of the self "as the center of activity of the psyche," within a relational field.<sup>6</sup>

With the central focus on the development, consolidation, and maintenance of the self, self psychology is viewed by some advocates (for example, Goldberg, 1986, and Wolf, 1988) and critics (for example, Bromberg, 1989, and, as relating to transference, Hoffman, 1983, and Mitchell, 1988, 1990) as fundamentally a one-person psychology. This assessment, I believe, is based principally on Kohut's initial separation of the narcissistic and object relational lines of development, a separation that he never fully resolved, and on his early notion of merger between self and object when the object serves archaic selfobject functions. To separate conceptually two lines of development implies erroneously that self-development does not occur within a relational field, a theoretical contradiction (to be developed) in the light of the emphasis on the self-selfobject matrix. This separation also erroneously implies that the state of the self does not affect one's object relations and that one's object relations, in turn, do not affect the sense of self. Although Kohut legitimized self-concerns by focusing on the development of the self (in contrast to classical theory wherein the developmental pathway is from infantile narcissism to object relatedness), initially he inadvertently repeated the error in classical theory of dichotomizing self and object relational concerns. Although Kohut (1984) never fully extricated himself from this dichotomization, his description of "self-selfobject relationships" became more relational in that it typically involved two separate persons (see pp. 49-52). Subsequently, other authors (for example, Modell, 1984; Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood, 1987; Bacal, 1990; Bacal and Newman, 1990; Fosshage, 1990c) have more forcefully set forth that the self-selfobject matrix is a relational matrix; they, therefore, consider self psychology, in part, to be fundamentally a two-person field model.

My thesis is that the evolving theory of self psychology, a direction Kohut (1984) provided especially in his last book, newly synthesizes monadic and dyadic features and that a new synthesis is required to

emerged in an overarching self psychological theory in which conflict was readily included through a redefinition of the primary ingredients of conflict. A primary model of conflict, in Stolorow's (1985) words, is that "conflict states often arise when central strivings and affective qualities of the person are believed to be inimical to the maintenance of an important selfobject bond" (p. 200). (This model corresponds with Winnicott's, 1960, notion of the formation of "a false self on a compliant basis.")

<sup>6</sup>The concept of self as a guiding center was also central for Jung (1953), but without a corresponding emphasis on the relational field.