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AFTER THE DIALOGICAL SELF, WHAT?

The idea of the dialogical self is a large step forward in linking the self to the social environment which forms it and provides its content. However, using an empirically-based, widely-known model of social relations, I propose that the concept of the self may be an extraneous item in the toolbox of dialogical-self theorists and practitioners. Rather, since the self is created by the social milieu, it may make sense to work with that milieu directly rather than with its product. This proposal has particular import for psychotherapy and I address some specifics of this claim to therapists.

Keywords: self, dialogic self, social relations, status, power, reference groups.

Dialogical self theory proposes that the person is not a monad, requiring scientific treatment as such, but is rather embedded in a determining social matrix (Hermans, 1996, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Indeed, the self is understood to arise by an incorporation of the attitudes of others (James, 1890; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). And James (1890), branching out from this, noted that the individual has a multiplicity of selves – as many as there are other persons about whose opinion he or she cares. Further advancing the social basis of the self, Bakhtin (1981) proposed that the self exists via the voices of others speaking or “ventriloquating” through it (p. 299). We are, in Bakhtin’s (1984) term, “polyphonic” (p. 6), a composition of the perspectives of many others in our social milieu.

Here I wish to propose a next step in this theoretical design. I suggest that for certain purposes the concept of self may be extraneous and that the business being done by-and-in-the-name-of the self can be allocated to a more advanced social model along the lines of where James and Bakhtin were headed, although

they did not arrive there themselves. In making this proposal, I am not asking that anyone abandon his or her personal concept of self, nor suggesting, as certain Buddhist ontological doctrine does (see Harvey, 1995), that there is no self, an approach also taken by Hume (see Giles, 1993). My point is that if the self results from the attitudes of others, for analytical purposes we might understand the person better by investigating those attitudes directly. Not “Who am *I* and what do *I* want?” but “Who are *they* and what do *they* want?”

I will proceed by first presenting a theory of social relations that extends James’s and Bakhtin’s approach and elaborate what their work only implies. Second, I will present a derivation of the theory, to the effect that the person, represented now for many by the self, can be fruitfully understood by applying a rigorously social or relational view. Finally, I will propose what abandoning the self might imply for psychotherapy, whether dialogically oriented or not.

A STATUS-POWER THEORY OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

Many researchers now view behavior in social relationships in terms of two dimensions (see Kemper & Collins, 1990; Kemper, 2011). The first dimension reflects *voluntary compliance* with the wishes, hopes, desires, needs, interests of others through behaviors of deference, caring, attention, admiration, support, and so on. The ultimate in voluntary compliance is the relationship we ordinarily call love (Kemper, 2011). The second dimension of relationship entails behaviors that reflect *involuntary compliance*, including varying degrees of threat, force, coercion, infliction of physical or emotional pain and/or deprivation, manipulation, deception, and similar conduct designed to gain compliance when it is not voluntarily granted as status. The two dimensions are variously labeled, e.g., Likeability-Assertiveness, Affection-Control, Affection-Dominance, or Sociability-Dominance (see Kemper & Collins, 1990; Gurtman, 2009), but because of their eminently social connotation, I name them *status* and *power* respectively (Kemper, 2011).

In the status-power model of relationship each actor faces four relational issues: (1) *own status* (how to earn voluntary compliance from the other); (2) *other’s status* (how much voluntary compliance to accord to the other); (3) *own power* (whether and to what degree to coerce the other); and (4) *other’s power* (how to avoid coercion by the other). Axiomatically, having and/or gaining status is normally desirable and low status and/or status loss is normally undesirable

(Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). Having sufficient power to rebuff a threat is also desirable and having little power and being incapable of resisting threat are undesirable.¹

I call other actors in this model of relationships *reference groups*. Reference groups normally confer status when the focal actor voluntarily complies with their prescriptions for what to do, think, believe, feel, and so on. The actor complies because that is how he or she earns deference, respect, caring, and other benefits from them. Also, each time the person complies with a reference group's prescriptions, he or she is also conveying status to the reference group and managing power relations with it. In a not far-fetched example, one does arithmetic absolutely convinced that $1 + 1 = 2$. But a reference group (one's first-grade teacher?) had to transmit that understanding and insist on compliance with it. Though one does not perhaps ever think of this, each time one does arithmetic one reaps a bit of status from that early reference group and also honors (accords status to) it. Additionally, one avoids condemnation (power) for not doing the math as that reference group taught.²

In sum, relationship is enacted through giving and receiving status and through the assertion and/or avoidance of power. Crucially, just as in the case of the teacher of arithmetic, *at all times* one or another reference group governs the person's thought and behavior. We may say that in the moment of thought or action, the "I," in James's (1890) sense, is nothing more than a reference group voice in the sense of Bakhtin (1981). In this multi-vocal model of how the person is constituted through reference group voices, parents are often the voice of moral conduct, friends of manners and music, teachers of literacy and numeracy, Hume (or whoever introduced one to Hume) of doubts about God's existence, a college instructor of one's taste for high-brow art, and so forth. Reference groups, expressing themselves as Bakhtin's voices, have varying amounts of influence depending on what is at stake. I turn now to the self.

¹ The status-power model has the advantage over other approaches to relationship (such as those presented in Liotti & Gilbert, 2011) in being empirically-based (see Carter, 1954), in having cross-cultural support (White, 1980), and, nomenclature aside, in its extensive use in the social sciences (see for example, Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Thye, Willer, & Markovsky, 2008; Fournier, Moscovitz, & Zuroff, 2009; Halevy et al., 2012; Blader & Chen, 2012).

² The arithmetic teacher may long since have died, but his or her reward (status-accord) potential is still felt in the sense that one is working with the numbers "correctly."

THE SELF

Notwithstanding dialogical self theory's leading-edge approach to the self, that theory still views the self as a kind of executive officer, debating with and coordinating the diverse voices of the reference groups that contend for the individual's attention. In this, the self is roughly equated with Freud's (1962 [1923]) ego. To eliminate the self, then, will seem like a decapitation, leaving the person without a mechanism by which to integrate the varied voices that speak through him or her and account for (1) the sense of continuity or persistence in time (see Salgado & Herman, 2005); (2) the person's investment in specific positions or voices or reference groups; and (3) resistance to change. How does status-power and reference group theory deal with these challenges?

Continuity or persistence in time refers to the understanding by the person that he or she is the same person today as yesterday. This presumably gives some sense of epistemic security and, projecting the sense of continuity into the future, allows for planning ahead. The argument here is problematic. First, memory functions without a self to undergird it. The individual is not born with a self, but acquires it (Tronick, 2005, pp. 296-297). Thus there is a period during which there is no self to support a sense of continuity, but the individual functions nonetheless. The cues to continuity come from the continuity of the world outside the person, e.g., in the recurring sight and sound and smell of the caretaker and what the caretaker provides, e.g., milk, embraces, etc. Infants respond differently to familiar and unfamiliar stimuli (Soussignan & Schaal, 2005), all this without a self.

Investment in specific positions or voices means that motives are not random and can be focused to achieve particular interests. There is no evidence that a concept of self is required for this. Indeed, the focusing of aims can be understood better as a result of the focused quality of the organism's needs or drives (e.g., for food, rest, sex) and for satisfying the demands of the social environment (parents prescribe thousands of acts; teachers always expect lessons to be learned and homework to be done; friends always want you to let them play with your toys; etc.). The stability of one's motives is largely a function of the stability of the demands from the social environment that instigate conformity to those demands (see Swidler, 1986; and Lizardo & Strand, 2010, who call these social demands "scaffolding," indicating their externality to the individual). It is not necessarily inner conviction located in a self that leads to dedicated performance, but rather a relational proviso: one does what reference groups require, for example, paying taxes or driving within the speed limit, thereby gaining status and avoiding punishment (power).

Finally, is resistance to change a result of having a self? Or is it rather a function of being obedient to certain voices and not to others. There is a certain political economy when it comes to reference groups and their voices. They prescribe certain beliefs, behaviors, feelings and they are prepared to pay for compliance by means of according status and withholding power. This is true of all reference groups, but their status-power budgets, so to speak, differ. In the years up to adolescence, parents virtually always trump friends. But in adolescence, friends come more and more to govern choices because they are more allied than parents with the emergent demands of the body. Indeed, they sanction these demands because they are often co-actors in satisfying them, especially in regard to the sex drive. Later still, a spouse and supervisors and colleagues take over as dominant reference groups.

An unparalleled instance of resistance to change is resistance to new ideas. Everyone knows how fiercely individuals refuse to abandon old ideas when challenged by new ones. This resistance may be attributed to a self, but, I argue, can be better understood by the grip of existing status-power relationships. One holds on to old ideas to protect the sources of current status-conferral, to honor those who instilled those ideas and to avoid potential power imbroglios. To abandon an idea is not simply to abandon an intellectual construction, but to let go of one or more relationships. To acquire a new idea means to acquire a new relationship, with its status-power benefits. To explain this as a function of a self is to obscure the underlying relational interests. Furthermore, if the self is constructed of the voices of others, change in self means a rearrangement of the voices, which the existing voices are not likely to approve. For example, in the case of religious conversion, we can certainly speak of a change in the self. But is that not a way of saying that new reference groups and their voices have taken the place of the old ones?

That the self is something of an add-on, but problematically so, is shown in Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's (2010) definitional discussion of "meta-position." They write: "The *I* [or self] is able to leave a specific position and even a variety of positions and observe them from the *outside*, as an act of self-reflection" (p. 9, first emphasis in original, second emphasis added). This sounds much like Mead's (1934) treatment of internal dialogue, but it raises the question of where the "outside" is located. If it is accepted that the self is constituted by the voices of others, how can the self exist outside this population of voices? From the relational perspective proposed here, there is no privileged position where the person (or the self) can stand outside existing relationships as manifested in the voices. This is the crux of the difference between dialogical self theory, which

has advanced our understanding so greatly, and the present theory. For analytic purposes, I abandon the notion of self and focus entirely on the voices of which the self is constituted. This leads to the following considerations:

1) *Deliberating Without the Self*. Individuals are often confronted with dilemmas in everyday life. In the sandbox, for example, playmate A wants the individual to give the shovel to him while playmate B also wants the shovel. What to do? If an argument can be made for the self it would be at this point. The individual must choose to act; will not the chooser be the self, conceived of as coordinator of all of the competing elements applying in the moment and acting for the benefit of the person, however the reckoning of benefit may be made? Let us consider a solution here that does not require a self.

Consider a real-life committee that must reach a decision, for example, whether to buy a certain item, how to launch a program, or whether to adopt a certain policy. Committee members have varying status-power standing and also have varying information and preferences bearing on how the decision should go. Each member expresses a viewpoint. Other committee members affirm or demur or contribute additional argument. The discussion goes on until time pressure – meaning reference group demand – requires that the discussion end and a decision be made. I propose that when the person is deliberating over how to act, something like the committee meeting occurs in his or her mind or consciousness. Pertinent reference groups necessarily come to mind because they have status-power interests in the outcome, that is, the decision will affect them, and they dialogue in the mind like a real-life committee.

In the sandbox example, it could be playmate A or playmate B or, perhaps a third party, for example, mother, who almost always has something to say in matters of this kind. In this committee model, what could the self contribute that is not fully contributed by the parties, or voices, who are confronting each other in the mind? Nor is a self needed, like judges in a boxing match, to determine a winner. The winner is that reference group whose last argument is unanswerable by any other reference group, either logically – which requires reference groups of its own to sustain – or because of the array of reference-group status-and-power backing it, just as is the case in committees in real life.

The decision, when it comes, can emerge in two ways: either one or another of the persons lodged in mind may dominate and determine without noticeable argument according to that group's preference. For example, mother's voice may say, "Give the shovel to playmate A, since playmate A is always giving you things you want, while playmate B never does." Mother's voice, as retrieved from memory, has actually said this or something nearly like this in the past and

the decision is more or less immediate. Mother has a huge supply of status to give for doing as she bids; and one shows mother that one is obedient to her demand and, further, gains the benefit that she is not displeased (uses power).

The second possible type of decision format is as follows: Mother has never opined on the question at hand and playmates A and B are of more or less equal status-power. In matters of this kind, even G. H. Mead, a foremost theorist of the self, does not rely on the self. He writes that when there is an “essential problem” – one for which there is no conventional or ready answer – “there is a disintegration in [the] organization [of the self] and different tendencies appear in reflective thought as different voices in conflict with each other. . . . In a sense, the old self has disintegrated...” (1964 [1913], p. 147). For all intents and purposes, Mead is telling us that, in such moments, there is no self. Crucially, however, the voices that presumably built the self are available to be retrieved from memory. They engage in dialogue in the focal actor’s mind to resolve the sandbox question. Mother might speak first, B might answer her, A demurs from B’s statement, at which B demurs, etc. Father, who in the real life family sometimes adjudicates claims, may enter the imagined debate; or God, who in the mind of a child is omni-competent and obviously capable of such interventions; or, finally, and importantly, the organism, the entity that will carry out the decision and inherit the status-power consequences of that. What solution does the organism prefer?³ What solution will maximize benefit (status) and minimize power consequences for it?

It is important to note here that the organism, though it is not usually thought of as having a voice, in Bakhtin’s (1984) sense, enters the argument and speaks for its interests just as the playmates and the parent do (cf. Lysaker & Lysaker, 2008). I propose that early in life the organism is endowed with a voice, most likely that of the earliest nurturing parent, who has done the most to identify the organism’s needs, for example, for food, drink, dryness, sleep, activity. The nurturing parent usually vocalizes the particulars of such organismic requirements, “Oh, my little manikins is hungry (thirsty, wet, tired, etc.).” “My little darling needs her milk.” The speaker of these supportive types of vocalizations becomes the mouthpiece of the organism and represents it later in life and is likely to be the voice that gives rise to what is called “self-compassion” (Neff & Vonk, 2009),⁴ although this can be understood without a self as simply a favoring of the

³ The organism is not to be understood here as a surrogate for the self. It and its needs enter as just another voice into the debate in the reference group committee. Mead (1934, p. 139) also rejects identifying the self with the organism.

⁴ For illustrative purposes, consider the case of one mother who often told her adult child, “My poor little _____, where would you be without me?” and often referred to him as “My poor

organism's interests. (We may say, parenthetically, that some of the sexual problematics of adolescence, when libido becomes active, are due to the fact that the organism has had no prior spokesperson for this drive in its adult form.)

We may now speculate that who becomes spokesperson for the organism is one of the crucial features of development. As implied above, the original spokesperson is likely to be the mother. But, at some point, father may intervene, imposing his wishes and interests and limits on what the organism is urged or allowed to desire. Given certain cultural definitions of the male role, we would expect that a father would create a different approach to sexuality, for example, than would a mother. We might imagine a more aggressive endorsement of sexual pleasure for male offspring under father's aegis, with less attention paid to social constraints and to the particulars of women's aims and interests in sexual engagement. The organism, represented by a spokesperson, is a strong presence in the reference group committee that has been meeting in the person's consciousness and frequently drives the committee's decision.⁵

2) *The Apparent Self*. At every point in time, one or another reference group is dominant in consciousness. For James (1890) it was an "I," one of many. But with both dialogical and status-power relational theory to guide us, we can see that it is the voice of a relevant reference group. As a university professor, my actual voice⁶ is virtually always the voice of one or another of my own professors speaking through me; when I tend to my children, my voice is virtually always the voice of my mother, except, if am angry, when the voice of my father speaks through me. Though only sometimes in my awareness, when I act in any of my roles, the relevant reference groups are at hand, acting through me, with the implication that if I act according to their direction I will receive status for doing so and will also be conveying status by that very act and avoiding a power confrontation. William James's "I" is in each case the relevant reference group who arises in the moment to "ventriloquate" and effect the behavioral outcome.

3) *Moral, Ethical, and Legal Accountability*. When the individual is dowered with a self, it is easy to assess blame and moral, ethical, or legal responsibility (Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003). But without a self to take such responsibility, how is one to deal with the individual who violates community rules or

little pet." Among her last words were, "My poor little canary, what will you do without me?" Is it surprising to learn that the child in question was the actually asthmatic but also hypochondriac French novelist Marcel Proust (Albaret, 1976, p. 142)?

⁵ The organism does not always win when there is conflict between its voice and the voices of other reference groups. Consider the case of whether to continue in battle or maintain a hunger-strike or resist torture, instances in which the organism's interest is challenged by other voices.

⁶ Voice is understood here to mean behavior as well as thought, either silent or vocalized.

standards? First, let us be clear that the community does have moral, ethical, and legal rules and standards. Second, its sovereignty is legitimate, it has the right to protect itself against their violation. This right is founded on the notion that violations that go unpunished will lead to the collapse of social order and on the conviction that it has the power to enforce its rules and standards through punishment of violators. The community, represented to the individual by his or her reference groups, does not hide its sentiments in these regards. Again and again throughout the life course, it makes clear to all what the morals, ethics, and laws are and that violators will be punished.

It can be argued that the organism has the largest interest in these matters, because punishment for violation is visited on the organism. Hence the reference group speaking for the organism bears a special responsibility. Even more than other reference groups, it must be sensitive to the dire consequences ensuing from the violation of community rules and it must firmly lock the individual into conformity with such an understanding.⁷

4) *Language of the Self*. Admittedly, it is difficult to give up speaking of “I,” “me,” “my,” and other locutions that imply a self. I propose here that this is a grammatical convention and not a psychological or relational issue. We say “I,” “me,” “my,” etc. because these locate and clearly identify the subject and relevant objects that are pertinent in the given occasion of speech (see Giles, 1993, on Hume’s similar position). These references are for the benefit of the listener, not indicative of some structural property of the speaker. Thus the language of the self facilitates clarity in one sense at the cost of mystifying the social foundation of the speaker’s discourse.

5) *Who Is in the Mirror?* I look in a mirror and some would say I see *myself* (see Evans, 2005, on Lacan’s view of this). But let us consider the origin of such a thought. A reference group voice had first to point to the image and say something like, “See, it’s baby. It’s my babykins. It’s *you*,” verbally insisting on the identity of the image in the mirror with the flesh-and-blood entity often called “baby,” or “babykins,” or “you.” At some point in development and after many learning trials, the infant comes to understand that the terms “you” and “I” are equivalent, depending on who is speaking, and merely indicate the subject of the sentence. Thus, ultimately, who is in the mirror? *I* am. But this does not signify more than a grammatical convention.

6) *Identity*. Hand-and-glove with the self is the concept of identity. If losing the self is regarded as a tragedy, then the loss of identity may seem to be a catas-

⁷ The status-power relational model in which reference group voices direct thought and action necessarily makes the notions of agency and free will problematic (see Kemper, 2011, pp. 50-52).

trophe. Presumably, the individual would not be able to answer the question, “Who am I?” And, surely, this could be a loss. But let us pause to consider. James (1890) views the individual as having as many selves as there are others with whom he is involved. At any time, in interaction with one or another of those others, the individual is an “I”: a man, a social scientist, a husband, a father, etc. These designations are created not by him but by others who so regard him. Indeed, even without a self, others will still designate him as a man, a social scientist, etc. Thus, he – that is, the “I” of the moment – will be whoever the reference group of the moment is speaking as, sometimes with one identity, sometimes with another. There is no identity per se except the identity relevant in the interaction of the moment. With or without a self, the individual can always answer the question, “Who am I?” He or she is always the mouthpiece of the salient reference group.

STATUS-POWER RELATIONAL THEORY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

I have chosen the field of psychotherapy to illustrate the advantages of conceiving of the person as a locus of the voices of reference groups rather than as a possessor of self. Among the hundreds of schools and approaches in psychotherapy (Henrick, 1980), many are distinctly socially-oriented, concerned with the “other” and any parties who have or have had relationships with the client. Among them are Lacan, whose “Big Other” (Evans, 2005) is understood as the primary influence on the child; Object Relations Therapy, with its focus on early family experiences (Scharff & Scharff, 1997); Systematic Family Therapy, with its “circular questioning” as a way of getting at how different family members view the client (Brown, 1997); Relational Therapy, with its focus on the dynamics of existing relationships (Stuart, 2006); and, of course, Dialogical Self Therapy, with its interest in the dialogue between the self and its determining voices (Hermanns, 1996, 2001; Oles & Hermans, 2008; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Each of these approaches probes the role of the reference groups in the client’s life according to the slant of the particular theory.

Status-power and reference group theory in various ways overlaps these socially-oriented approaches. Notwithstanding, the therapeutic pivot of the status-power and reference group position is the assumption that whatever problematic attitude or behavior is at issue, it is supported by one or another reference group through prescription (and/or modeling) and is sustained by the associated status-

-power relations.⁸ With this in mind, I suggest that it may be therapeutically productive to limit inquiries about the self and instead elicit directly the stances of these reference groups and the individual's status-power relationship with them. Admittedly, it may take a while to elicit a coherent picture of the client's relationship with his or her reference groups. This is because relevant materials may have been instilled and relationally linked in early life, about which recollection may be hazy. Moderating this defect, we can suppose that even if the matter at issue has obscure origins in time it can only have an effect in the present if the relational conditions are still active, e.g., that threat of punishment for non-compliance is still felt as operative. In offering suggestions for the use of the status-power and reference group theory in psychotherapy, I am not proposing any kind of treatment plan. Rather, I am proposing ways in which the theory may be employed to achieve therapeutic objectives, which may differ in specific cases. How might this work?

1) *Identifying Relevant Others*. The first task is to identify the reference groups whose voices support the dysfunctional behaviors or thought-processes on the one hand and the striving toward health represented by the decision to seek help on the other. There should be both these types of reference groups, since, as proposed here, no pattern of thought or behavior exists without a reference group voice to support it. This includes behavior that is essentially a petition for consideration by the organism. As discussed above, the organism has a voice which may be claiming legitimacy for satisfactions, e.g., drugs, which are harmful. On the other hand, there are voices supporting eufunctioning. Revealing the opposed voices can bring the client to a better understanding of what is involved in changing his or her behavior.

2) *Diversification*. If a particular dysfunctional attitude or behavior is found to be supported by a particular reference group, e.g., father, whether dead or alive, demands neurotically excessive commitment to work and the client abides by this because of fear of father's disapproval, a reference group approach may be able to diminish father's influence through amplifying and diversifying the salient reference group committee. The therapist may be able to elicit or establish in the client's consciousness that there are colleagues, teachers, medical authorities, and so forth who would deplore father's overemphasis on work. Behavior singularly driven by father must now compete with alternatives from a set of

⁸ The insistence on real reference groups here, ones that are native to the individual's own thought and personality contrasts with an approach that postulates categories of reference groups such as Faithful Friend, Proud Rival, or Ambivalent Parent, as employed in Puchalska-Wasył, Chmielnicka-Kuter, & Oleś (2008).

reference groups whose interests, now importantly available in consciousness, stand for a less troubled solution to the problem of work commitment.

3) *Transference*. Applying a reference group approach in psychotherapy fundamentally supports transference. First, in the process of creating a working alliance (Greenson, 1967), the therapist necessarily becomes a salient other. From a reference group perspective, therapy could not succeed otherwise. The therapist becomes a wise counselor, able to provide sustained rational input to the reference group committee discussions that take place in consciousness. Even non-directive therapists, if such there are, provide an implicitly directive bent by their questions, vocal emphases, body language, and so forth. This function as beneficial reference group becomes possible when the therapist authentically provides status, does not use power, and is revealed as someone whom the client finds worthy of status-accord through compliance with the therapist's view of the individual's life situation.

4) *The Organism as Reference Group*. Virtually all psychotherapies ultimately get around to the organism and its needs. But with status-power relational theory in mind, the organism as a reference group is more likely to be brought to notice early. And not merely as a dumb biological apparatus. When the organism is expressing a need, that need is supported by one or more reference groups who speak for the organism. It may be especially helpful to view the organism in this socially-supported way when it comes to dealing with addiction or other physiologically linked issues. No claim is made here for special competency in such problems by status-power and reference group theory. However, it cannot but help if the organism's voice (or voices) are brought into view. Although the organism acquires a spokesperson early in life, it is not ordinarily a mystery as to who that may be. As a heuristic hypothesis, it is the first of the nurturing caretakers, usually the mother. The mother, in this case, is seen to want the comfort and good feeling of the organism. It may be counter-intuitive to see the mother as supporting an addiction, and this may be true only incidentally, but given any truth to this, the therapist has a new purchase on how to get at the sources of social support for persistent addiction problems.

5) *Narcissism*. Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a well-known DSM category, characterized by excessive concern with the self. A therapeutic approach that gets a client to focus on others – the reference groups – may lead to an enlargement of the personality horizon in this particular disorder. Indeed, one may speculate that an opportunity to focus on others may at first lead to even more exaggerated conceptions of self. But a consistent review of reference groups may also lead to some break-down of this type of defense. At least, the person with

eyes only for ego may be nudged a bit toward recognizing the existence of alters if it is part of the therapeutic process that ego, we assume willingly, entered.

6) *Self-Esteem vs. Esteem for Other*. A frequent presenting problem includes low self-esteem. Despite the fact that self-esteem is a troubled concept (Baumeister et al., 2003), it is so lodged in popular thought and in some therapeutic approaches that it obtains a place at the therapeutic table. But two different questions may be more significant. The first is whom to esteem? Is it only the self? Status-power theory examines relationships not only in terms of the status members want to receive, but also what they need to give to others. This may be a major problem for some clients and a feature of their disorder. This may be manifested in a syndrome of cynicism, skepticism and distrust, sentiments that corrode relationships. Are there reference groups that support not only getting esteem (status) but according it as well? The second question involves determining which reference groups' esteem the client would prefer to have and, correlatively, whether those reference groups can give it. Pursuing these questions directly through an examination of reference groups and their status-power potential may bring the therapy forward faster than taking an approach through the self.

CONCLUSION

I have proposed here that persons are ineluctably engaged in social relations with others and that in a widely-known model of social relations the main dimensions are status and power, involving behaviors either of voluntary compliance (support, recognition, respect, love, etc.) or involuntary compliance (threat, coercion, force, manipulation, etc). To engage in relationships with others (reference groups) requires acting so as to deserve status from them as well as conveying status to them and also mediating power relations with them. Reference groups supply the dialogical "voices" that populate the person's mind and consciousness and these voices represent the person in both eufunctional and dysfunctional behaviors or thought-processes. I propose that a useful therapeutic approach would be to identify those voices and what they want and accord status for. Approaching therapy through status-power reference group theory entails the questions: Who are *they*? What do *they* want? What have *they* to give that makes you want to honor *them* through compliance? And what can *they* do if you don't comply? In focusing on these questions and shifting attention away from the self, psychotherapy is not, I believe, impoverished but importantly enriched.

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