

THEORETIC REFLECTIONS ON SUBPERSONALITIES AND COMPONENTS OF THE SELF: AN INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: This paper has been created due to the need of bringing the concept of “subpersonality” into an integrative psychotherapeutic framework, starting from considering the Self as an epicentre for internal and external manifestations as well as a precursor of certain tendencies that can manifest within human development. Thus, the objective has been to correlate different approaches of the Self, subpersonalities and the relations between them and also to merge them into a model compatible with the strategic model of the Self. The hypothesis that the theories related to Self subpersonalities can be integrated into a single model that would include them entirely, has been demonstrated.

KEYWORDS: Self, Ego, integrative, subpersonalities

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Buber, there is no real possibility of perceiving the world always as “YOU”. Real human relations are rather a process of oscillation between two extremes. This means that each “you” must become an “I” in a direct relationship, but once the relationship has left its natural course or have been interposed various obstacles, “YOU” becomes an object among other objects. The human being who so far has been unique and devoid of qualities, again becomes a He or a She, an aggregate of qualities, a quantum with a form (Buber, 1992).

This paper has started from the hypothesis that there is at least one integrated model of the Self-concept, covering both theories of classical psychotherapy that assume there is only one permanent and immutable Self which we are born and we die with, and modern theories where there can be identified a Self consisting of several components that have specific relationships between them. This theory is reflected in the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self, described by the authors Vişcu and Popescu. Thus, the goal of this paper is to identify dimensions of the Self as components of personality, based on current theories and related research findings.

The excessive separation of the subpersonalities is an issue that has been discussed in numerous published

works and the general sense is that the classification of subpersonalities with different names, totally different identities and exclusive memories, is not intended. This paper has the role to explain the term “subpersonality” and how much the main personality differs from its subcomponents.

The memory of an individual on a situation, for example when he is at work, can be quite different from his memory related to the same situation when he is at home, because memory is largely a constructive process. Memories are built with “raw materials” offered by the mind to serve for specific purposes, so that different subpersonalities have distinct purposes and therefore separate memories.

Referring to the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self, its authors state that the Self is co-created within relationships, and subjective experiences are all interrelated. The existence of the Self can be considered only in the context of relationships with others, and within the psychotherapeutic relationship, two people bring their own inner experience in the present context and influence each other. Thus, therapy has to be focused on the internal life of the client in the context of a therapeutic relationship which holds potential healing experiences (Popescu and Vişcu, 2016).

2. INTEGRATIVE NOTIONS ON SUBPERSONALITIES

The concept of “subpersonality” has become popular in psychotherapeutic circles since the end of the last century (Rowan, 2005). There are techniques that consist of “letting someone’s subpersonalities talk” in order to make a better contact with the individual’s subpersonalities, which are usually approached separately during therapy. A woman may have a subpersonality describing a “scared or shy girl”, a man may have a “bully” subpersonality, a sober lady may have a hidden subpersonality of an “easy woman”, all these being expressions of denial of certain impulses from adolescence. Integrative

therapy focuses on subpersonalities as having a completely individual basis: the client must discover, with the help of the therapist, which are his subpersonalities and what impact they have on individual functioning.

Markus and Nurius (1986) see the possible personalities as an Ideal Self that someone would want, representing what the individual might become or what he is afraid of becoming. They also state that the possible subpersonalities can be seen as the cognitive manifestation of goals, fears, needs and threats that provide the connection between the concept of Self and intrinsic motivation. In addition, Markus and Nurius present their view on certain phenomena such as the mismatch between the concept of Self and others' perceptions, individual behaviours, as well as changes that occur over the course of existential experience. They also suggest there is a direct link between reasons and specific actions due to these divisions of personality (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Erikson, cited by Rowan, takes over and develops the idea of possible personalities, and by clarifying the concept he suggests that the Possible Self may represent self-conceptions of the future, including (at least to some extent) the experience of being an agent participating in a future situation. Subpersonalities obtain vital parts of their meaning from the interaction with the concept of Self, which in turn is moderated by the cultural and social context (Erikson, cited by Rowan, 2005).

The concept of Self is the individual's perspective of himself, represented by the person he has been before, the person he is now and what he can become in the future, this concept including social roles and group memberships. A proper functioning of the concept of Self makes it easier to live in the present, in the "here and now", to manifest positive feelings and thoughts about oneself and to create positive goals or predictions about the future. Forward-looking contents (goals with a motivational role) seen as components of the concept of Self have been named "possible subpersonalities" (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These represent what one believes he can become in the near or more distant future, and are important in establishing action strategies (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Subpersonalities have two antithetical dimensions, each individual having positive images about how he would like to become, and also negative images about certain situations that he wants to avoid on the course of his development.

While the concept of Actual Self focuses on what is "now", subpersonalities (focusing on the future) have a role in self-realization, malleability, adaptability,

personal development and planning. They offer a chance to experiment and try out various projects or opportunities at a psychic level in order to be processed and validated ("Maybe I'll be an engineer or maybe I'll be a nurse.", "How will I be in the position of an engineer or a nurse? What are the steps and obstacles that may appear on the way?"). The future is designed, in part, by the amount of implications regarding present individual efforts, and solving homework during school or manifesting a sanogenous behaviour also represent directions in view of future achievements. As noted by Oyserman, to do one's homework on time or not to do it during daylight because one has not had enough time or hasn't been interested and he rather does it at night, it really does not produce an immediate effect, but if one sets to do homework every night because during the day he wants to play, then there may appear health implications. If someone eats or does not eat a piece of chocolate at lunch or a full bowl of cereal for breakfast, does not increase the likelihood of being overweight, but over time each of these choices adds extra kilograms. In a similar way, actual behaviours are considered based on the beliefs of individuals with regard to their future consequences, thus raising motivation to reduce the temporal gap between the positive Self from the present and the one from the future, and creating a greater delay between their possible negative Self from the present and the one from the future.

The dimensions of subpersonalities are being exercised upon by both individual and contextual factors, which can later serve as models and anti-models with an ambivalent meaning, either positive or negative. These factors may be represented by certain people that an individual has a close or representative relationship with, or they may simply be determined by the general feeling on the individual's ability to perform an activity that he considers important (eg, identifying with the work he performs).

Past experiences of someone's existence, either those which have turned out successful or those being considered as failures in a specific field, determine the individual's beliefs about the relevance of a possible efficiency regarding his subpersonalities, but also about the capacity to formulate subsequent strategies that can be used when working on the Self. Past failures can make him integrate harder both what seems to be a success in a certain area, and the ways that are more likely to be effective. Previous successes may help the individual to design and to imagine how a successful situation looks like and what measures are necessary to achieve a possible

target. For example, young people with a long history of juvenile delinquency and school failure are less likely to project themselves into a future job or into a strict environment (academic or professional) where they should follow certain principles and have a certain conduct. This is similar to the context where students from low-income families are less liable to generate strategies that help them achieve subpersonalities focused on school success like getting good grades (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

The content of subpersonalities reflects relevant tasks of development. During the years of study, these tasks focus on being competent and performing in school, being connected with others and developing a feeling of self-confidence. Together with the psychosomatic development, the center of these tasks is evolving, making students and young adults to be focused on the dominant subpersonality regarding the professional, educational and interpersonal area, while the family and parents subpersonalities are becoming increasingly important in adults. As adults get older, the work-oriented subpersonality precedes possible cases of damaging their physical or mental health, this leading to the subpersonality of an ill person.

Subpersonalities are influenced also by others' expectations and by historical, cultural, religious and sociopolitical contexts. Certain social contexts offer easy access to models and focus on study and personal development, while other contexts do not offer these opportunities. For example, rural youth is assumed to be less able to imagine a future situation based on school education or to support the associated energy of these subpersonalities, because they live in an environment that is not congruent with the academic environment. Research has shown that if there is no desire to go to college since elementary school, students have the tendency to give up college in the first year or they may not attend classes at all although they have been admitted to the exam (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

The future is an important component of the concept of Self, and to perform and to integrate into school are a common element of future subpersonalities (Oyserman, Fryberg, 2006). In his study, Oyserman links the projective existence of subpersonalities to a reduced risk of substance use and sexual activity. Thus, a student from the 9th grade with fewer positive components of the Self is more likely to experience smoking and drinking alcohol throughout high school, and the students from the 8th grade whose Self may have focused on being a popular student rather than on academic success, present a

high risk of smoking and drinking alcohol in the ninth grade.

However, the concept of Possible Self does not always support the existence of self-adjustment measures, but still manages to focus on some degree of effort when it is linked to behavioural strategies, young people feeling congruent with important social identities (Oyserman et al. 2006).

3. HELPFUL STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING THE POSSIBLE SELF

Imagining a possible future for an individual can lead to increasing his optimism, but this thing alone is not enough to produce a sustained effort and a change in his behaviour. In order for the existence of a positive future to happen, the possible Self must be linked to specific strategies and working models (Oyserman et al., 2006). Strategies are those concrete behaviours such as consistent study, maintaining a constant activity or even setting an alarm on the phone to not be late for work. Aid strategies focus therefore on targets chosen to be followed, while anticipating and preparing for failures may result in a planning disruption. In a study that has been developed from the start of the school year until the end of it, students whose possible Self has been concentrated on the academic environment has included detailed strategies related to the feeling of being more effective. The results have not been limited only to positive feelings related to planning, but they have also shown that the students with previously prepared strategies have achieved better grades than those without (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Although the psychotherapeutic theories have emphasised in the beginning that there is only one "you" inside the mind, research from several branches of science suggests that this is actually an illusion. "You" - the one who takes a seemingly rational and self-oriented decision, the one who interrupts a relationship with a friend who fails to respond more often to phone calls, the one who borrows thousands of dollars and no longer gives them back, this "you" is not the same, it actually represents several subpersonalities that manifest in different occasions.

It has been four decades since a cognitivist named Colin Martindale has advanced the idea that each of us has several subcomponents of the Self, tying his idea to the emerging theories in cognitive science from that time. At the centre of Martindale's thesis have been some fairly simple ideas which have been verified by many studies, such as selective attention, lateral inhibition, memory dependent status and cognitive dissociation. Although all the neurons of

the brain work all the time, we would not be able to put one foot before the other if we couldn't consciously ignore almost all the abundant parallel processes in the background that are flooding the conscious part. When someone walks down the street, there are thousands of stimuli that continue to act on the brain which has already been overworked - hundreds of different people of different ages, with different accents, different hair colours, different clothes, different ways of walking, different gestures, not to mention all the bright ads, curbs, potholes or cars on the road, with all their noise. Therefore, attention is very selective. The nervous system performs some of this selectivity based on the strong principle of lateral inhibition - a group of neurons that suppress the activity of other neurons which could interfere with an important message that activates the next level of processing (Martindale, 1980).

Regarding the eyes, lateral inhibition helps us observe the potentially dangerous potholes that are almost ubiquitous in Romania. Retinal cells stimulated by bright areas send activity suppression messages to the neighboring neurons, producing a swelling perceived as brightness which is surrounded by darkness near the edge. Several of these "edge detectors" combine themselves at a higher level in order to produce "shape detectors" - which allow us to discriminate a "b" from a "d" and a "p". More shape detectors combine to allow us discriminate words, at a higher level to discriminate phrases, and then at another level to place these phrases in a context (an example of this kind of discrimination is the statement: "Hello, how are you today?", which can be a flirt or a verbal "prelude" intended by the shop assistant, followed by saying the amount you have to pay at the cash register).

Martindale has stated that, at the highest level, all these alternate processes of inhibition and dissociation lead to dissociative disorder. In other words, all individuals have a number of secondary components of the executive Self, the only way to succeed in accomplishing anything constructive in life is by allowing only a single sub-Self to become aware and to manifest itself at a certain moment.

Martindale had also developed the concept of "executive parts of the Self" before evolutionary psychology approaches have become prominent, and the idea becomes particularly valid if the cognitive model of Martindale is combined with the idea of functional modularity. Based on the findings according to which animals and people use more and very different mental processes to learn different things, the evolutionist psychologists have suggested that there is not a single processing organ that uses

and integrates information, but rather multiple exchange systems that coexist in order to solve various problems related to environment adjusting difficulties. As a consequence, instead of having a random and idiosyncratic type of components of the Self, each individual has a set of specific functional components - one dedicated to spending time with family, with friends, one dedicated to protecting oneself during crisis situations, another one dedicated to the leadership position, one used for discovering his partner, a different one for maintaining the relationship with his partner (which implies a very different set of problems) and another set for care, education, protection and growth of his offspring (Martindale, 1980).

Thinking about the mind as being composed of several components of the Self, which are adaptable and functionally independent, it helps people understand many of the inconsistencies and irrationalities of human behaviour, for example, why a decision that seems to be "rational" referring to a certain situation seems extremely irrational when it is taken in a different situation having common elements with the first circumstance.

4. SELF-CONCEPTION AS A MODEL OF FUTURE BEHAVIOUR

Although the individual often thinks about the Self as a "thing", there is also the case when he can refer to the Self as a model of conduct related to the chronological time. From this point of view, "I" is synonymous with what the individual feels, thinks and does in a limited temporary framework. When considering things from this perspective, it can be interpreted the fact that there are several states that may depend on the "time" factor, meaning that people do very different things throughout life, motivation and goals are different depending on the stages of development. This deeper understanding of the concept of Self in a more dynamic way, as opposed to trying to characterize it as a fixed and unchangeable object, offers other perspectives connected to the reality of the therapeutic process (Rowan, 1990).

Seeing the Self as a model of behaviour that is influenced by the temporal factor, indicates that the plurality of states regarding the Self represents a behaviour which is largely dependent on a particular situation. This should not be surprising, but it is easy to lose sight of especially in therapy where the client and therapist discuss the current situation. It is also worthy to consider how the Self is defined by the roles that society has built. There are certain expectations for someone as a husband that are

different from the ones he would expect from a friend, or from the leader of a doctoral program in psychology. And on top of that, the sense of Self is shaped deeply by others: citing James Mark Baldwin (an American philosopher and psychologist, one of the pioneers of human development psychology), the Ego and Alter-Ego are born together, which means that the concept of Self is shaped both by others see the individual and how he sees himself in relation to others (Baldwin cited by Rowan, 1990). This cognitive model starts with older attachments when the fundamental sense of security is shaped by how well the loved ones have been connected to the needs and vulnerabilities of the individual as a child, so he comes to relate his personal experience through the eyes of others.

In addition, the system of self-consciousness has been shaped to provide a social side. This means that the “internal narrator” first begins to explain to others why the individual does a certain action, indicating that the concept of Self is made up largely by the public. Regarding the multitude of subpersonalities, the concept of Self is deeply influenced by the same “public”, therefore by changing the public, the Self can change, too. This is partly what William James has intended to say in his works (James, cited by Rowan, 1990).

An excellent example of this approach has been found in a classic social psychology experiment on attractiveness. In the experiment conducted in the 1970s, men and women who have never met receive the task to engage in a telephone conversation. Men are given a picture of the woman with whom they need to speak. The image represents in fact, either a very attractive woman or a woman much less attractive than the real one (representing an experimental manipulation, it has not been really an image of the woman on the phone). Transcripts of the conversation are taken and then removed the parts related to masculinity. Independent evaluators consequently analyze the female conversation on the degree of friendship, commitment and how much the woman has been liked. It is then observed that women talking to men who have thought they have been speaking with a beautiful woman, have been rated as more positive regarding socially desirable qualities (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Therefore, the essence of an individual is profoundly shaped by others and how others see him.

The center of the Self is organized by reasons and emotions, which fluctuate depending on the time and situation. Self experiential forms compose the organised core of the Self, which in turn is organised of emotions that are linked to objectives. As it has

been noted in this paper, the motivational and emotional perception system changes based on things like biorhythms (time of day, month, year) and what objectives or needs have been met (eg, hunger, sex, sleep) or are still active. Subpersonalities have evolved and the experiences specific to motivational systems have given rise to a multitude of independent states. The literature claims there are seven major states of evolutionary objectives that have shaped psychology; as such, the individual should indeed be considered as a collection of “subpersonalities” which have different perceptual, motivational and emotional structures designed to solve adjustment problems such as: 1) self-protection and avoiding injury; 2) preventing disease; 3) membership; 4) careerism; 5) finding a partner; 6) keeping the partner and 7) caring for relatives. It is very important to emphasise the following idea: due to the fact that these distinct subpersonalities have different objectives, they may often lead to conflicting situations and will be activated in different ways (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

5. ACTUAL SELF VERSUS FUTURE SELF

One of the most common conflicts between the subpersonalities of the Self is the battle between the present Self and future subpersonalities. Almost everyone can experience similar situations to the following ones: the actual Self wants a piece of chocolate, but the future Self wants to have a normal body index; or the present Self wants to be relaxed while drinking alcohol and smoking, but the future Self does not want to suffer from lung cancer or cirrhosis. The human mind, seen as a recipient of the Self, is a selection of actions which consist of several subsystems that operate on different specific levels (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Analysing the situation from a basal level, there can be mentioned the reflex system that works almost instantly. Another rapid action of the response system is the emotional-Pavlovian response system, but however, there is a conscious deliberative system that extends over time and simulates some future situations, analysing the correspondent costs and benefits. Because these systems process and select different actions, this leads to different awareness of conflict experimentation between subpersonalities (Oyserman et al, 2006).

The meaning of Self continuity over the existential period is dependent on the mnesic system, because memory systems interconnect the actual Ego with the past Self. Anyone who has worked with an amnesiac, with an old man suffering from dementia or a patient suffering from chronic alcoholism, has noted that if

the mnesic system is damaged, the actual Self is compromised. As it has been previously mentioned in this paper, the individual has multiple memory systems that are relevant on short and long term (represented by the procedural, episodic and semantic memory). It is essential to note that these memory systems are influenced by many different things, that's why an individual has so many different subpersonalities. For example, the memories are coded by emotional states: if an individual is happy, he remembers positive events; in contrast, when he is in a negative mood, the result is that he rewrites at a psychic level certain disappointments and failures. Additionally, the memory system "systematises" events based on certain themes and is strongly shaped by their importance, by recent experience and the main objective. Because memories are encoded at an emotional level, trauma can lead to representative changes, so for some people memories can be blocked completely, and for others they can cause chronic activation of painful events. Posttraumatic stress occurs in some individuals due to the inability of the memory system to get used to and integrate trauma, which can then lead to dramatic changes in the Self.

6. THE CONCEPT OF SELF AND ITS CONNECTION WITH PERSONALITY

Regarding the contemporary development of society, the concept of Self among young people is precarious. Most students have a distorted perception of themselves and because of this, they are so passive and negative that it affects their family roles and academic achievements. According to Dunkel and Kerpelman, it is essential that teachers offer positive examples of behaviours to students, either related to academic or non-academic behavioural issues. The task to solve this problem is not a simple matter, because the parents have high expectations, they want their children to achieve academic excellence and to have a family and social status as high as possible. Thus, the process of "building" the next generation should focus on the idea of becoming an individual who possesses various qualities, who has a winner personality and a high self-image to help him track and achieve success entirely (Dunkel, & Kerpelman, 2006).

According to Gadeyne, Ghesquiere and Onghena (2004), in order to develop a positive self-concept in a student, parents must ensure a harmonious and protective family environment with adequate satisfaction of his needs, both at the emotional and material level. At the same time, teachers should provide a learning environment based on the

individual and should be more sensitive to the psychological needs of their students. According to Leung, K., Lau, S., & Lam, W. (1998), the influence of school is very important in the development of student's personality, and the process of socialising and social affiliation begun at home must be conducted and developed also at school.

From another point of view, teachers have a direct influence on a student's feelings, on his inspirations, attitudes and behaviour, influencing his academic achievement or failure. It has been showed that the way one tends to behave depends primarily on his concept of himself, what he thinks about himself, including his power, limits, weaknesses and personality. The individual will use his self-concept while judging whether he succeeds or fails in the sustained effort to achieve a goal, thus influencing his expectations, dreams and actions (Dunkel, & Kerpelman, 2006).

According to the studies listed above, everyone has their own image or perception about themselves. This includes appearance, emotional lability, health, intellectual and physical capacities, weaknesses or displayed behaviour. The concept of Self is also defined as the way an individual assesses himself, which may be positively or negatively. Another way to treat the concept of Self is related to how someone describes himself as an individual with a set of unique or special features. In addition, the self-concept can be classified in two major types: the positive self-concept and the negative self-concept. A positive self-concept implies that an individual is confident and sure of himself, has realistic expectations, has good interests, is able to think objectively, is empathetic and not too sensitive. This individual can positively accept criticism from others and he is able to offer valid views and opinions when circumstances are not logical or rational. On the other hand, a negative self-concept is when a person has subjective judgment which describes himself as inferior to others, lacking qualities, weak and insignificant (Dunkel, & Kerpelman, 2006).

Studies show that there is a strong relationship between self-concept and academic achievements. According to Baumrind (1971), people who have high academic achievements are more responsible, both in school and in the non-academic environment, rarely breaking the rules and regulations and having a strong aversion to the idea of circumventing the law. According to Rowan, the concept itself is important in determining the personality, emphasising three important components in the formation of the concept of Self: self-awareness, self-acceptance, mutual

feelings between the individual and others, as well as the perception upon accepting others (Rowan, 1990).

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been written in the attempt to show the importance of self-awareness as a multitude of components linked together in a dynamic and consistent way. From the point of view of the integrative strategic psychotherapy, information resulting from the comparison between the studies and paradigms listed above are particularly relevant and helpful in the therapeutic technique. All the techniques of working with the states of the Ego listed in the Manual for Integrative Psychotherapy (the “inner child” technique, the “theater viewing” technique, the developmental strategy of satisfying the needs, and “age regression”) are based on and include theoretical considerations that have been stated in this paper. Moreover, the division of psychological structures of the Self in six psychological axes (a specific method of the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self) has the role to psychotherapeutically classify and manage the occurring phenomena, most structures of the core Self and therefore the subpersonalities being influenced by cognitions and emotions. The internal working models of the proto-Self, as well as the non-verbal schemes of the six psychological axes is finalized by strengthening various neural circuits that form the so-called second-order neural maps. In other words, the core Self contains complex preferential neural maps that determine certain ways of structuring information by the individual, which explains why this concept is crucial in figuring out the reason for having so many different potential subpersonalities (Popescu and Vișcu, 2016).

As a consequence, subpersonalities provide both positive images of oneself to achieve future targets, and negative images that show the failure to achieve these goals (including fear of what the individual would become if the goal was missed), these being an integral part of a well-functioning multi-dynamic concept of Self. Focusing on the future, subpersonalities can improve life satisfaction and optimism about what follows next in life. Things may not function as the current expectations, but a

possible Self represented by a subpersonality suggests the promise of change for the better. At the same time, the existence of these subpersonalities can improve one's self-control, adaptability and self-regulation because it is possible to help an individual focus on his objectives, reducing the distraction influence of the social environment. Regarding self-regulation, subpersonalities can improve it when they are prominent and related to strategies for the future, having the role of integrating the Self.

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