SELF PSYCHOLOGY AND EGO PSYCHOLOGY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: This paper takes a historical perspective as to the current debate between ego psychologists and self psychologists. By looking at the psychological functions of the self, the ego, and the superego, one can see substantial areas of overlap between the theories. The two theories are described and compared along the lines of these psychological functions. They are then applied to six clinical issues; primary developmental crisis, transference variations, conflict and deficit, modifications in technique, developmental lines, and the relationship between the ego and the self. The conclusion is drawn that a more comprehensive understanding of the theories as they apply to clinical phenomena needs to be developed before a determination can be made as to their compatibility.

INTRODUCTION

This paper takes a historical viewpoint on the current debate as to the compatibility of self and ego psychological theories. Prior to Kohut's contributions, psychoanalysis did not have a separate theory of the self. However ego psychological theory does discuss psychological functions which are components of Kohut's bi-polar self. In The Analysis of the Self (1971), Kohut developed these functions into a separate concept of the self. This concept is integrated into the tripartite structure. In The Restoration of the Self (1977), he elaborated this concept of the self into a theory of personality in which the self has primacy over the ego. While Kohut's theory of the self is based on a different conception of human motivation from that of ego psychology, it is noteworthy that he did not make major changes in his conception of the development and psychological functions of the self in The Restoration of the Self.

Kohut's departure from both the drive theory and the structural model has raised a number of issues as to the compatibility of both theories. Because these two concepts are so central to classical psychoanalysis and to ego psychology, it is easy to claim that the theories are incompatible.
A deep schism is developing within psychoanalysis over these issues. Self psychology is criticized as being incomplete as a free standing theory of personality in that it has divorced itself from drive motivation and psychic structure. One result of this criticism is that self psychologists like Basch (1983) in a recent presentation, seem to be trying to link self psychology with non psychoanalytic theories such as General Systems Theory.

On the other hand, those, like Wallerstein (1980), who reject Kohut's contributions as having nothing new to offer psychoanalytic theory may be guilty of rejecting large bodies of clinical and developmental evidence and the theories which explain them most cogently.

Such criticisms raise serious questions as to the compatibility of these theories. However, the two bodies of theory do have substantial areas of overlap. This comes into particularly clear focus if one examines specific functions of the ego and of the self as they have developed within psychoanalytic theory over the last 75 years.

Taking a historical perspective on the development of theory permits sidestepping the controversy over motivation. This, in turn, provides an opportunity to re-examine the question of compatibility of the two theories from the point of view of the psychological functions performed by the self and the ego. By examining how these two theories explain similar psychological functions, the issue of areas of compatibility between the theories can be discussed in a less divisive atmosphere.

This paper will compare how these psychological functions have been described in both ego and self psychological theories. The two theories will then be applied to six clinical and theoretical issues. The question of areas of compatibility will be discussed in terms of these issues.

HEINZ KOHUT'S BI-POLAR SELF

Kohut defines the Self as the end product of the developmental line of narcissism. It results from the transformation of the child's narcissism into a permanent internal psychic structure whose psychological function is to provide an integral center of personal initiative.

"This structure is the basis for our sense of being an independent center of initiative and perception, integrated with our most central ambitions and ideals and with the experience that our body and mind form a unit in space and a continuum in time" (Kohut 1977, pp. 177).

The origins of the self are in the child's reaction to the loss of its exaggerated sense of grandeur which is typical of early development. According to Kohut the narcissistic perfection of early infancy gives way to ineq-