

Class 1: Self Psychology: Definitions

1. **Self Psychology:** elaboration and development by Kohut and colleagues of the psychoanalytic concepts of narcissism and the self. Characterized by emphasis on the vicissitudes of the structure of the self and of the associated subjective conscious and unconscious experience of selfhood. The fundamental essence of human psychology is the individual's need to:
 - a. Organize experience into a cohesive configuration (the self)
 - b. Establish self-sustaining relationships that have the function to evoke, maintain and strengthen the structural coherence, vigor and balanced harmony among the constituents of the self.
 - c. The self cannot exist as a cohesive structure apart from the contextual surround of appropriate selfobject experiences, even in adulthood.
2. **Self:** depth psychological concept that refers to the core of the personality, which is made up of various constituents that emerge into a coherent and enduring configuration, during the interplay of genetic and environmental factors (the child's experience of its earliest selfobjects). It makes its presence known by providing one with a healthy sense of self, self-esteem and well-being. It is an enduring structure which contains: the center of initiative, recipient of impressions, repository of nuclear ambitions, ideals, talents and skills. Constituents of the self:
 - a. Pole from which emanate the basic strivings for power, recognition and ambition (*pole of the grandiose self*);
 - b. Pole that maintains the guiding ideals (*pole of the omnipotent object*);
 - c. Arc of tension between the two poles which activates the basic talents and skills.
3. **Types of Self States:**
 - a. *Virtual self:* image of the neonate that resides in the parents minds and determines how the parents relate to the infant's unformed self potential. In doing so, they shape the potential, so that when the self emerges as a cohesive structure, it is termed the *nuclear self*
 - b. *Cohesive self:* coherent structure of normal, healthy self
 - c. *Grandiose self:* early infantile exhibitionistic self, that experiences itself as the omnipotent center of all existence
 - d. *Fragmented self:* lessened coherence of the self resulting from faulty selfobject responses or other regressive conditions; can be experienced from mild anxiety to panic of total loss of the self structure
 - e. *Empty self:* loss of vigor and depression resulting from depletion of self's energies, from lack of joyful responses to its existence and assertiveness
 - f. *Overburdened self:* deficient in self-soothing capacity because not provided with opportunity to merge with the calmness of an omnipotent selfobject
 - g. *Overstimulated self:* prone to recurrent states of excessive emotionality or excitement as result of unempathically excessive or phase-inappropriate responses from selfobjects
 - h. *Imbalanced self:* maintains its precarious cohesion by overemphasis on one of the major constituents of the self, to the expense of the other two
 - i. psychopathically ambitious: without guidance from pole of values

- ii. guilt-ridden: overly constrained by strong pole of values
 - iii. weak poles with excessive emphasis on tension arc between the poles: technical specialist dedicated to perfectionism without regards for issues of personal ambition or ethical values
- 4. **Selfobject:** neither self or object, but the *subjective aspect* of a self-sustaining function performed by a relationship of self to objects, who by their presence evoke and maintain the self and the experience of selfhood; refers to an *intrapsychic experience*. Types of selfobjects:
 - a. *Infantile:* sustain the self of early infancy. When needed during adulthood are referred to as *archaic* selfobjects
 - b. *Mirroring:* provide the experience of acceptance and confirmation of the self in its grandness, goodness and wholeness
 - c. *Idealizable:* allow self the experience of merger with calmness, power, wisdom and goodness of idealized selfobject
 - d. *Alter-ego:* provide experience of essential likeness of another self
 - e. *Adversarial:* provide experience of being a center of imitative through permitting nondestructive oppositional self-assertiveness
- 5. **Selfobject Transference:** displacement on therapist of needs for responsive, selfobject matrix; derived from both archaic selfobject needs and current age-appropriate needs. Types:
 - a. *Merger:* re-establishment of identity with selfobject through extension of the self to include the therapist
 - b. *Mirror:* re-establishment of early need for acceptance, confirmation of the self through recognition, admiration
 - c. *Alter-ego:* re-establishment of latency need to see and understand, and to be seen and understood by someone like the self. Manifests to be like therapist in appearance, manner, outlook, etc.
 - d. *Idealizing:* need for merger with calm, strong, wise and good selfobject. Manifest in admiration of therapist or depreciative defenses against idealization.
 - e. *Transference of creativity:* transient need of creative personalities for merger while engaged in taxing creative tasks (e.g., Freud and Fliess)
- 6. **Self Disorders:**
 - a. *Psychosis:* serious damage to self is permanent or protracted, without defensive structures; inherent biological tendency
 - b. *Borderline:* serious damage to self, but defects are covered by complex defenses
 - c. *Narcissistic behavior disorders:* damage to self is repairable through psychoanalytic treatment; symptoms express an alloplastic attempt to force the environment to yield needed selfobject experiences via behavioral maneuvers (addictions, perversions, delinquency, etc.)
 - d. *Narcissistic personality disorder:* disorders associated with autoplasic attempts to restore functioning (hypochondria, depression, hypersensitivity, lack of zest, etc.).
 - e. *Depression* (three types):
 - i. preverbal: apathy, deadness, diffuse rage related to trauma

- ii. *empty*: depletion of self-esteem, vitality related to lack of joyful selfobject responses, leading world of unmirrored ambitions or lack of ideals
 - iii. *guilty*: heightened self-rejection and self-blame related to deprivation of repeated experience of participating with calm, idealized adult (lack of merger with idealized selfobject)
- 7. **Fragmentation**: aspects of one's self-experience seem no longer coordinated or fitting together. Regression of the self towards lessened cohesion, more permeable boundaries, diminished energy and vitality, disturbed and disharmonious balance.
 - a. Symptomatically appears as anxiety, panic, hypochondriacal fears, disorganization, depression, worthlessness, some kind of subjective discomfort.
 - b. Various mechanisms are used to reverse the process: self-stimulation, acting out, perversions, addictions, frantic lifestyles.
- 8. **Empathy**: synonymous with vicarious introspection; process of gaining access to another's psychological state by feeling oneself into the other's experience; not to be confused with sympathy or kindness. It is a means of data collection, defines the depth psychological field and is a self-sustaining experience for the patient.
- 9. **Neutrality**: therapist maintains sufficient emotional distance to keep his judgment from being clouded by his feelings. It does not exclude friendliness, nor should the therapist hesitate to see things from the patient's side or biased point of view.
- 10. **Narcissistic rage**: form of potentially violent aggression that aims to destroy an offending selfobject, when the selfobject is experienced as threatening the continued cohesion or existence of the self, particularly when the threat takes the form of imposing helplessness on the self.
- 11. **Splitting**:
 - a. horizontal: painful ideational material kept out of consciousness through repression
 - b. vertical: percepts of external reality are disavowed or denied
- 12. **Transmuting Internalization**: process of structure formation in which aspects of the function of self-selfobject transaction are internalized under the pressure generated by optimal frustration.