

COMMENTARY ON COMMENTARIES: A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AMONG DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

In this commentary we discuss our reactions towards the six contributions on our article “The psychotherapist’s social role under a dialogical perspective: A study of the personal construction of «I as psychotherapist»” (in this issue). These commentaries discuss a multiplicity of problems and potentials, providing us with a meaningful space for dialogue among our multiple and sometimes discrepant perspectives. We have organized our reaction around three issues: (1) the importance of context influence on the process of being a psychotherapist; (2) the use of the motives as a tool to organize the psychotherapists’ diversity; and (3) the methodology for studying the dialogical processes.

Keywords: psychotherapist; dialogical theory; dialogical methodologies.

The six comments on our article suggest several different paths to expand this research on the way psychotherapists integrate clients’ positions in their own self and profession, but also the theoretical ideas that support it.

In our view, despite considerable differences between the contributors, there are three common points that we would like to emphasize from the comments.

The first one is the way the contexts influence the construction of the professional role of therapists. Montesarchio and Venuleo (this issue) are perhaps the ones that discuss this point more intensively, from their psychodynamic and socio-constructivist perspective. According to them the therapeutic

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relationship is “super-individual” and it is shaped from different ecological niches, from the institutional one to the specific interview itself. The other comments on the article develop similar arguments, from other perspectives (e.g., Stratton, this issue, makes the same point from a systemic perspective). We also believe that Sugiman (this issue) work around the notion of a “third body” is also somehow connected with this supraindividual nature of the relationships between people. We certainly agree that the focus on the representations about clients (one positive and one negative) implies a narrowing process, only used to make the research possible. We also agree that it would have been interesting to focus in the regular client (as it is suggested by Ligorio, this issue). We were however interested in studying the way clients enter therapist’s lives and our guess was that two extreme client’s representation would elicit a richer interview. Furthermore, we agree that this is a limitation of this research that intends to be nothing more than an exploratory one, trying to bring to this field the contribution of the dialogical theory.

The second important critique is clearly made by Rio and Molina (this issue) and regards the way the therapists are categorized. Rio and Molina suggest that we have transformed a process (emphasis in the other or in the self) into two categories. This seems to us a very important point and we did not intend to offer what we think would be an empty categorization of therapists to be used in future researches. We do not believe that there are S, O or other types of therapists, nor we think that this way of thinking is useful. However, we think that the fluidity or processes that are pointed out by Rio and Molina can at a particular moment in time loose their fluidity to become a concept that organizes the way the therapist conceives his or her experience.

Rio and Molina cleverly have shown that what we saw in the foreground (the other) they can see the opposite in the background (the I) and vice-versa. This exercise, however, only shows, in our view, the dual nature of symbols, being every one constructed by drawing oppositions with others (see Valsiner, in press). We do not think that these therapists are always centred in the same motive (S or O), but certainly they are in a continuous change as they face different clients and experiences. Perhaps, as it was suggested by Ligorio (this issue), if we asked the therapist to think of a common client the polarization was less clear. Maybe this relates to the suggestion made by Rio and Molina that the good therapist is the one that avoids polarizations. From our experience in clinical practice and supervision we would say that when too much communion is emphasized it loses the “difference that makes a difference” in

the therapeutic interview (to use the famous idea from Bateson, 1972/2000) and when too much power is stressed the therapists is at risk of being the victim of a monological desire to magically change the client (see Gonçalves & Guilfoyle, 2006).

The third point that we want to stress is the critique clearly done by Stratton (this issue) and by Josephs (this issue), but also implied in others comments, regarding the methodology used. We strongly agree that the methodology used has problems that need to be overcome in future research. For instance, the list of affects from Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) is a very static measure of the phenomena under study, which is highly dynamical. Moreover, as Josephs argues, some kind of temporal framing is necessary in order to accomplish all theoretical assumptions we assume – otherwise we will lose the dynamism of the phenomena under study. Thus, dialogical theory, in our view, faces a challenge that needs to be overcome: the theory is much richer than its methods (see also Gonçalves & Salgado, 2001). We are trying to develop more dynamic methodologies to study the organization of the dialogical self (see Duarte, Rosa & Gonçalves, 2006), but we feel that this is an ongoing process of trials and errors. These 6 contributions are certainly a help in this construction process and some suggestions are really inspiring.

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BIOSKETCHES

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