

Disorders of the Self: A Personality-Guided Approach
Marshall L. Silverstein. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
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The field of personality disorders has had a tremendous evolution in the last years. The field itself is controversial due to problems of categorization, diagnosis and even focus of the different treatment approaches. However, it is clear for all of us that any contribution (from theoretical or clinical perspectives) is mostly welcome as personality disorders not only are a fascinating field but pose a major challenge to any clinician.

This book is a very special, innovative and fascinating contribution to the field of personality psychology and is included in the “Personality-Guided Psychology Book Series”, edited by Theodore Millon. The aim of the Series is to use personality variables as a guiding factor in all spheres of psychological studies, conceptualizing in this book personality disorders from a self psychological perspective.

The main tenet of this book is based on Kohut’s classical self psychology, which proposes that personality disorders can be considered to be *disturbances of self-cohesion*. So diverse stylistic behavior and symptom patterns of personality disorders represent deficits in self-cohesion, defined by the author as “the relatively enduring experience of the self either as integrated when it is intact or as breaking apart when it is vulnerable to fragmentation” (p. 38).

The author assumes that there are three self-cohesion deficit patterns that impede life functioning or overcoming life struggles as they interfere with patients’ attempts: a) to sustain self-esteem in the face of devitalization or depletion (i.e., a deficient mirroring), as in the case of schizoid, schizotypal and avoidant personality disorders; b) to maintain self-cohesion when the self is threatened by fragmentation (i.e., forestall fragmentation means that the self is threatened by destabilization), as in the case of paranoid, obsessive-compulsive and borderline personality disorders; and c) to preserve a buoyant self by developing partially successful compensatory structures (i.e., alternative paths for preserving a cohesive self to repair chronically injured self-cohesion deficits) as in the case of dependent, histrionic and antisocial personality disorders.

The author extends Kohut (1971, 1977) self psychology to an integrative account of personality psychopathology with neurobiology, genetics and psychometrics. In addition, he discusses self psychology concepts such as devitalization, the forestalling of fragmentation and alternative paths to secure self-cohesion as *superordinate concepts* to frame self psychological ideas such as mirroring, idealizing, and twinship self-object functions and disintegration products. Therefore, the author proposes a recharacterization of personality disorders, an alternative or parallel classification to the one found in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) based on three cluster groupings: odd-eccentric; dramatic-disorganized and anxious-fearful.

The book has five main Sections and eleven chapters (each one of them clearly introduced and with a conclusion) and follows a quite structured format. Dr. Silverstein introduces in Section I (“Theoretical Foundations”) his conceptualization of personality disorders from a self psychology perspective, while focusing specifically on the narcissistic personality disorder. This is justified because Kohut based his self psychology on the study of

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narcissism and this disorder gives the clearer illustration of Kohut's contribution to the field.

Sections II, III and IV follow a similar structure. In Section II ("Devitalization: The Unmirrored Self") schizoid, schizotypal and avoidant personality disorders are addressed. In Section III ("Forestalling Fragmentation") paranoid, obsessive-compulsive and borderline personality disorders are addressed. Section IV focuses on dependent, histrionic and antisocial personality disorders, appropriately titled, "Alternative Pathways for Preserving a Cohesive Self."

Each of these three Sections is composed of two chapters. In the first one there is a descriptive psychopathology and theoretical viewpoints of the different personality disorders and in the second one there is a description of each disorder from the self psychological viewpoint. Interestingly, these chapters include clinical cases about each disorder instead of merely clinical vignettes that show the relevance of the author's contribution from a theoretical and clinical perspective. These clinical cases about each one of the specific personality disorders addressed in the book offer prospective readers a good and clear starting point for a clinical application of the author's own perspective.

One of the major contributions of the book is that it adds to the conceptualization of certain "agreed categories of personality disorders:" the depressive personality disorders (chapter 9) that possibly will be included in a future version of DSM (APA, 1994), somatic hypo- and hyperreactivity disorders (Chapter 10) and the vertical split (disavowal, a phenomenon of mental life in which sectors of experiences are kept out of awareness; chapter 11).

Although the inclusion of these three chapters could be controversial to some authors, Dr. Silverstein emphasizes their importance because they involve a stable, ingrained configuration of aberrant personality and behavior. That is, they are consistent with the general definition of personality disorder "as a pattern of deviant inner experience and behavior that is enduring, inflexible, and pervasive and that produces clinical impairment" (page 6). The book ends with an interesting Afterword, plus References (including classical ones and updated references), Author and Subject Index, and a brief Note about the Author.

The book is clearly written and articulated and that is especially relevant due to the complexity of the field. Dr. Silverstein makes a difficult task easy and this deserves to be emphasized. A vast and updated list of references are provided that show the author's expertise in the field and sustain his theoretical account for a personality-guided approach to the treatment of personality disorders. In sum, this is a very valuable contribution to the field of personality disorders. It could be of interest to any clinical psychologist working in the field.

References

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