This is a submitted version of the chapter for book:
The Cambridge Handbook of Identity
Online ISBN: 9781108755146 – To be released in October 2021
Edited by Michael Bamberg, Carolin Demuth, Meike Watzlawik

NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS: There are some discrepancies and changes in the final, accepted chapter version, which is to be found in the actual book.

Chapther Title: Positioning Microanalysis: A method for the study of the dialogical self-dynamics

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Abstract:

From a dialogical and Bakhtinian theoretical stance, self-identity is seen a process and a product of the tensional relation between multiple perspectives or positions. Even in the midst of different dialogical approaches to self, there is an overarching consensus that the dialogical dynamics established by these different positions are a core element for understanding how identity works. One of the main problems of the field has been the development of empirical methods enabling the study of such dynamics. Positioning Microanalysis is a method based in a dialogical approach, which aims the systematic tracing by trained observers of the dialogical dynamics of self-positions as they unfold over time. This method assumes a genetic-developmental perspective, allowing

the study of self-positions taking place in the here-and-now in a moment-by-moment basis. The main unit of analysis is the emergent self-position, which is characterized by a basic triadic relation (I-Other-Object). This method, on a first level of analysis, depicts the microgenetic movements of self-positions from moment to moment, but is also allows for more macrolevels of analysis, by descrining stable sequences or cycles of positions. Thus, it be used as a tool for the study of identity in a given historical moment of the person regarding specific themes or relevant “objects”. This method will be illustrated by its application to the first session of a psychotherapy case.

This chapter will present Positioning Microanalysis as a methodological proposal to study self and identity according to a dialogical framework, namely through the lens of the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans 1996, 2001, 2003), inspired by Bakhtinian dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981). Our focus is mainly on the self, but as we will explain, identity here is considered as highly dependent on selfhood processes, at least from the point of view of a dialogical approach.

The notion of identity has been subjected to different interpretations in psychology and in common sense. Nevertheless, and regardless that diversity, it is usually considered that a sense of identity is vital for living "a good life". The Delphic advice "*to know thyself*" still stands among our contemporary life, and by knowing who you are, you come to know your identity. At a general outlook, identity entails assuming a set of values, interests, vocations and pursuits that remain among the variations of daily life, while building an overarching self-narrative uniting the trajectory throughout life (McAdams, 2020). By doing that, a sense of identity is achieved. However, this also happens moment by moment and, ever since John Locke created the riddle of identity (*how can a person be considered the same in two distinct moments in time?*), the answer relies heavily on self-reflective processes (Locke, 1689/1975). This means that a sense of identity is created through a constant observation and relation with oneself, along the ongoing relation with the world. Thus, it is our conviction that a theory about the self, as the dialogical self-theory (in which Positioning Microanalysis is rooted) is beneficial to the understanding of identity.

In this chapter, we will initially provide an overview of the dialogical approach, emphasizing its contributions to understanding and studying human

identity, change and development. We will highlight several characteristics of the dialogical self – usually conceived as multiple, multifaceted, and multivoiced – while also drawing attention to some challenging theoretical and empirical questions in this domain, especially as a specific perspective to conceive and study identity. Then, we will elaborate upon the Positioning Microanalysis method, which we have developed, emphasizing how it can be applied to study identity and change processes and, through the study of segments of a first session of psychotherapy, illustrate its analytic steps and potential findings.

The Dialogical Self and the notion of position

The Dialogical Self Theory, proposed by Hermans and colleagues (see Hermans 1996, 2001, 2003; Hermans, & Kempen, 1993), has been an alternative and engaging perspective for the study of self and identity within social sciences (see Hermans & Gieser, 2011; Konopka, Hermans, & Gonçalves, 2018; Wijsen & Hermans, 2020). It has lead to prolific applications in the fields of counselling, clinical psychology and psychotherapy (e.g. Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004; Konopka, Hermans, & Gonçalves, 2019; Neimeyer, 2006), developmental psychology and education (e.g. Bertau, 2004; Meijers & Hermans, 2018), as well as social and cultural psychology (e.g. Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Marsico & Valsiner, 2018) and political sciences (e.g. Hermans, 2018; Wijsen & Hermans, 2020).

Together, these authors share the idea of the dialogical self as “a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I positions […] The I has the possibility to move, as in a space, from one position to the other in accordance

with changes in situation and time" (as proposed by Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992, p. 28). Therefore, the dialogical self is conceived as a tensional multiplicity of positions in the self (or I-positions), each expressing different perspectives (sometimes metaphorically addressed as "voices" in the self), as they relate to distinct experiences (in time or place), specific existential points of view or multiple social roles occupied by a person (Holquist, 1990). This notion of I-position allows to surpass a self-enclosed, solipsistic notion of the mind by making use of the Bakhtinian "law of placement" (Holquist, 1990): Everything that a human agent says or does is placed within a certain social and historical context (a specific "chronotope", a notion created by Bakthin; see Raggatt, 2010). This also implies a spatial metaphor: every human act is performed according to the social background and surroundings of the person, while it is also directed at someone or something else. We will later further elaborate this notion, but for now we will illustrate what we mean by "position" with an example.

Imagine a man expressing to his father how angry he still feels about how he felt neglected in a specific period of their relationship. At this moment, his position can be termed as "regretful", since the agent (the "I") assumes this feeling toward a specific interlocutor (his father) about an object (their past relationship). At the same time, this position is intermediated by some inner audiences that modulate his expressions (for example, some inner voice may be saying something like "Don't shout to your father!"). Thus, a position implies a relationship with social others and the material world. That happens even when positions emerge without the presence of someone else. Imagine this same man expressing the same feeling about the situation, but in a written form

in his private diary. The position may be termed in a similar way (“regretful”), since the agent is expressing the same feeling regarding the same object, but in this case there is no real interlocutor. However, from a dialogical point of view, there is a virtual other addressed by the written words – which may be his father, if he is addressing him in some form of direct speech (as if talking to or writing a letter to him), someone that may listen and understand his pain, someone opposing his expression, and so on. Thus, every position implies an addressee, which makes it always socially rooted. Therefore, we prefer to use the term position, instead of Hermans’ wording (“I-position”), just to highlight the contextuality and addressivity of the self: the I emerges always within a social background and addressing specific audiences, and the sense of self is based on this socialized process (Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012; Cunha & Salgado, 2017).

At the same time, the self is always in a *process of positioning*, which accompanies the flow of irreversible time and experience (Simão, Guimarães, & Valsiner, 2015; Valsiner, 2002). Thus, the self is always on the move from one moment to the next, in a process of repositioning, and a chain of successive positions unfolds over time. As Hermans et al. (1992, p. 28) observes: “The I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions.” Within this multiplicity, several positions can enter into a dialogue, opposing each other, succeeding each other as distinct and independent voices in a conversation, and creating an intense, internal dialogical space, that fades the frontiers between the self and society (Cunha & Salgado, 2017).

In addition, the dialogical self brings tension, alterity and otherness into the core of the self (Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012). This perspective

conceives the self as “a society of the mind” (Hermans, 2001), a radically different perspective from the classic antinomies which contrast the I vs. Other, the Individual vs. Society/Culture, conceiving the self as rooted precisely in a socio-cultural milieu from which one may struggle to become independent or distant, yet is forever embedded into (Bertau 2004; Cunha & Salgado, 2017; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). When we are expressing a position, even when we are alone, there is always a virtual other, as well as other inner audiences (Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012; Salgado & Cunha, 2018) A dialogical stance configures an approach to human psychological phenomena in an attempt to integrate three levels simultaneously in a coherent way: the experiential (i.e. what I perceive and feel in the flow of experiencing), the socio-relational (i.e. how I and others relate to my experiences) and the semiotic-linguistic elements of the human mind (i.e. how I make sense of them and given them meaning; see Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012; Salgado & Cunha, 2018).

Such tensions bring forth an interplay of centripetal (attraction) and centrifugal (distancing) forces that mediate the flow between self-positions. Hence, different self-positions may oppose each other, enter into conflict and disagree, ignore or silence each other, becoming dominating, oppressive or dismissive (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992; Valsiner, 2002).

The triadic structure of a dialogical position

The notion of position stands out as a main element for several dialogical proposals (Hermans, 2001, Leiman, 2011, Salgado & Valsiner, 2010). Thus, we claim that at each and every moment a human agent is in relation with the world, and this relation is framed according to social and semiotic tools that are

brought to the moment by the person, but also by the social contexts at stake (Cunha & Salgado, 2017; Salgado & Cunha, 2018).

The notion of position, in the way we have been developing it (Salgado & Valsiner, 2010; Salgado & Cunha, 2018), entails combining the phenomenological experience of being-in-the-world with the dialogical framework we adopted. Following this view, at every moment, human experience entails a position. This rule may have some exceptions, such as states of altered self-awareness (e.g., during some phases of sleep), but it applies to the majority of the moments of our psychological awake life. Thus, position and experience are coexistent – every position is a response to a lived phenomenogical experience (Holquist, 1990). If I am sitting in the banks of a river, observing attentively its flow and sound, that river is my focal object of awareness in the present moment. I have a phenomenological experience, but this also entails a response to that experience – it entails a position. The river becomes the center of my phenomenological field, mainly constituted by the river and the feelings it brings to me. This goes along with an inner feeling of serenity and thoughts around it ("how relaxing this is"). This situation inherently convokes also some virtual other that is able to hear and understand this position. I also have some other inner audiences that modulate the present moment: past experiences and relationships that shape or modulate my present position. All these co-relative elements (the agent, the object, the addressees) are constitutive elements of the position at that moment – that can be termed as something like "I as relaxing while observing the flow of the river" or just simply "relaxed".

Thus, we may attribute a triadic structure to any position. It entails an (1) agent, who purposeful responds within a specific situation (2) to a present or virtual addresses (3) about specific objects. We have been discussing this structure in more detail elsewhere (Salgado & Cunha, 2018; Salgado & Valsiner, 2010). In those elaborations, we claim that this triadic relation is mediated by signs of varied degrees of abstraction. As a dialogical or socialized relationship, this triangle implies some form of articulation with real or virtual others, and that is achieved with semiotic means. A sign is something that stands for something else, that substitutes the material object with some abstract form, and this varies between more rudimentary forms (or proto-signs), such as sensations or feelings, to words and complex verbal linguistic systems (Valsiner, 2007).

As we previously said, a position is always on the move, it is constantly changing from moment to moment. For example, while sitted in riverbanks, thoughts may come to the foreground (e.g., a memory from childhood), some other objects that remain in the periphery of that field (e.g. the sunlight reflected in the trees), or even some inner reaction to this situation ("you should do this more often"). New positions are constantly emerging, in a process of constant repositioning.

Looking at identity through the lens of the Dialogical Self

The notion of self and identity are quite overlapping and dependent. The APA online dictionary (American Psychological Association, 2018), for instance,

defines identity as “an individual’s sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity …”. In other words, identity is rooted in the sense of self. At the same, it is closely related to what makes a particular person unique and singular, but also associated, as argued centuries ago by John Locke (1689/1975), to how a person remains the same in two temporally different moments.

Following that stance, in this work we are assuming identity as a sense of continuity across time, but also as a mark of distinctiveness. It involves self-reflective processes: the knowledge and feeling of who I am across time (sameness), and how I am different and unique (difference). As a matter of self-reflexivity, identity becomes dependent on selfhood processes. Following a dialogical approach, we will assume that each emerging position of the self is always embodied and entailing a dialogical relationship with inner audiences that constrain, observe and respond to the position at stake. Within this view, self-reflection and self-awareness always involve a tensional and dialogical relationship with oneself, from which a sense of continuity is achieved – in other words, a sense of identity. On the other hand, since this process is inherently dialogical and socialized, it is also rooted in worldly manifestations – every position is a response to a social and material world, and it involves life preferences and goals that may acquire some stability across time (Bento, Cunha & Salgado, 2012).

Given that alterity, tension and otherness are crucial features of the dialogical self, at first glance, the contrast and divergence between positions can look like a disorganized cacophony (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992). Yet, how the person deals with this inner (and outer) multiplicity that continually unfolds throughout life is a crucial aspect for the construction of one's identity, the maintenance of temporal stability. Also, it is from this tension and contrast that there may be room for self-innovation and personal change .

Thus, in the domain of the dialogical self-theory we face two major challenges: to explain how novelty emerges, but also how stability is maintained. We would affirm that stability, which is more commonly associated with "identity", has to do with this second part of the problem – the organization of some coherence and continuity across time. However, stability and change are part of the same generic process of self-organization. For example, in some sense a person that keeps being attracted to new challenges and novelties will have this feature as part of his or her own stability and identity, which characterizes him or her.

From a dialogical point of view, both stability and change need to be understood within the process of a dialogical interplay between different positions. And since the multifaceted and narrative nature of identity is recognized, identity needs to be understood as the product of dialogue between several positions (Cunha, 2007). We also need to add that stability and change need to take into consideration the time frame of observation. The previous examples in this chapter always referred to very quick changes, in a moment-to-moment observation of positions. We can claim that these are microanalytic

observations: as Leiman (2011) has argued, we were observing the basic unit of analysis of a dialogical perspective, namely, a position. Nevertheless, other time frames are possible and important. Following the general terminology coming from Vygotskian tradition and developed by Valsiner (e.g. Valsiner, 2007), the emergence of positions can be observed according to three distinct frames: microgenetic, mesogenetic and macrogenetic. Thus, we can frame the observation of positions in different ways – from seconds to lifetime periods. In terms of dynamics, we expect the person to be microgenetically very unstable, with high fluctuation between positions, but macrogenetically the tendency will be to observe a low level of fluctuation.

According to these different ways to frame our observations, we propose here a distinction between micropositions, mesopositions, and macropositions. A macroposition will be a general, but observable, position of the person, typically composed by different mesopositions, and a mesoposition will be a generic aggregation of micropositions. For example, if a person assumes a position of being “sad” regarding the results of the Parliament election, and then discriminates this as being “disappointed,” and later on affirms to be “really frustrated,” these three positions could be understood as micropositions, but also as parts of the same sort of mesoposition, which could be labeled as “I as frustrated with these elections.” At a higher hierarchical level, and governing this mesoposition, we can have a global general position, for example, “I as a Labour Party supporter.” Theoretically, this implies an assumption: that different levels of positions cohere somehow in their content and contribute to the same sort of global stance and action towards a segment of the world; at the same time, some positions can have hierarchical power over others, governing or

influencing them. For example, positions connected with strong values tend to be very generalized, and at the same time, very influential in terms of self-identity.

Methodologically this implies the crafting of tools that enable the study of how identity is achieved throughout time, based on the interplay between different positions, while considering specific different levels of observation and generalization.

Positioning Microanalysis: A methodological proposal to study the dynamics of the dialogical self

Different methods have been developed to study the dialogical self. In our view, the most well-known ones are the Self-Confrontation Method, developed by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1993), and the Personal Position Repertoire, developed by Hermans (2000), which we have reviewed elsewhere, highlighting their potentialities and constraints (Cunha, Salgado, & Gonçalves, 2012; Salgado, Cunha, & Bento, 2013). Yet, one of the main problems of the field has been the lack of empirical methods dedicated to the study of selfhood dynamics as they unfold throughout time.

More specifically, we felt the need for the development of a method: a) to capture the natural dynamics of positioning in the self, for the purpose of understanding microanalytically the on-going flow of positions in time; b) to allow for a naturalistic observation of life events or research material, such as clinical sessions or open interviews; and c) which could be a methodological

proposal that, would not rely completely on participant's explicit self-reflexivity (i.e. not departing from an initial, explicit recognition by the person of his or her own relevant positions, as the previous methods usually do). This would allow us to caracterize the dynamics of the self in movement and, also, enable other possibilities, such as capturing non-recognized positions by the own person, as a means to study change, development and self-organization.

As a result of this ambition, we have been developing the Positioning Microanalysis method (Salgado, Cunha, & Bento, 2013), a methodological proposal based on a dialogical approach, which aims the systematic tracing by trained observers of the dialogical dynamics of positions as they unfold over time. This proposal had various phases of development (see Cunha et al., 2012 for a review): the method was originally developed by Cunha (2007, under the name of Dialogical-Discursive Microgenetic Analysis) to study the self-organization processes of positioning during interviews exploring participant's personal problems. This work layed the ground to the contribution of Salgado, Cunha and Bento (2013), who established the basic aims and conceptual tools of the method, while renaming it as Positioning Micronalysis (henceforth PM). Later on, Salgado, Cunha and Bento (2013) developed and refined it to make it more systematic and flexible into its current form. Up to the moment, it has been developed and refined to make it more systematic and flexible and applicable in the field of psychotherapy process research, through the study of psychotherapy transcripts and videos aimed at exploring change processes. The studies on psychotherapy were originally devoted to individual sessions (e.g. Salgado & Cunha, 2012), but more recently it has been applied to couples therapy (Cunha, Figueiredo, & Salgado, 2020). Nevetheless, we consider it can

be applied to other kinds of research material, such as interviews, focus groups or potentially any other verbatim data.

The main unit of analysis of PM is the emergent position, which is characterized by a basic triadic relation (I-Other-Object). This method, on a first level of analysis, depicts the microgenetic movements of positions from moment to moment, but it also allows for meso and macrolevels of analysis, by describing stable sequences or cycles of positions. Thus, it makes it possible to study selfhood dynamics of stability and change in a given historical moment of the person regarding specific themes or relevant “objects”. This method will now be detailed, step by step, and illustrated by its application to the initial sessions of a psychotherapy case.

Phases of Analysis

There are five different phases in the Positioning Microanalysis:

(1) Preliminary work;

(2) Division of verbatim data into units of analysis (unitizing);

(3) Aggregation of units into themes;

(4) Labeling of positions;

(5) Interpretative developmental analysis.

Along with the characterization of each of these steps, we will use illustrative segments of a clinical case, with the pseudonym of “Lisa”.

Lisa was clinically depressed when she participated in a randomized clinical trial (York I study; Greenberg & Watson, 1998). She received 16 sessions of Emotion-Focused Therapy to treat her diagnosis of Major Depression depressive and the final outcome of psychotherapy was considered sucessful, with full recovery of symptoms. This is a well-known case in the psychotherapy literature, and it became the object of analysis of different research teams with several previous publications (see Angus, Goldman, & Mergenthaler, 2008). Likewise, we were also granted access to the transcripts of all the sessions. Here, we will use PM to describe and understand the sequences of positions around the main clinical problems that this client brought to therapy.

Phase 1. Preliminary work

There is some work to be done before starting the analysis itself. First, the object, dataset, and purpose of the study need to be defined. The method *per se* does not define the specific research questions to be addressed, even if it constrains the potential findings. Thus, these decisions must be done previously. For example, we may frame the study around the positioning processes that maintain stability and identity across time. After those decisions are made, judges need to become familiariarized with the theory and be trained in the procedures. Then, judges need to read the transcripts, and whenever possible, watch the videos.

Research questions and data selection. The research problems can be varied, and they will guide the process of selecting data that will be necessary to run the analysis. Since PM can be highly time-consuming, it is

advisable to focus on specific questions and then select specific extracts to avoid analysis of material that will be irrelevant in the end. The selection of data can be determined in varied ways. For example, after determining that the main goal is to describe the sequence of positions emerging while talking about the main clinical issue in a first session of therapy, a senior researcher and a clinician can individually read the transcripts, and decide in a joint meeting what is the major clinical issue and which are the relevant passages to be analysed subsequently.

Training. Judges start by reading the PM manual we have developed, explaining the basic conceptual tools and methodological procedures (Salgado et al., 2013). After that, judges perform practical exercises with workbooks, each devoted to a specific phase of analysis: unitizing, identification of themes, characterization and labelling of self-positions, and interpretative final work. After concluding each workbook, a group discussion takes place, in which judges receive feedback about their results. Whenever needed, additional exercises may be introduced to increase the effectiveness of the training. After an effective training is completed, judges start focusing on the material under analysis (e.g. selecting relevant excepts and dividing them into units).

Illustration of phase 1: Exploring and understanding sequences of positions around clinical problems in the case of Lisa*.*

As stated previously, the client “Lisa” was suffering from major depression and all the illustrations will based on an analysis of the first session of psychotherapy. We approached this case with the overall goal of studying the global process of change (Salgado, Lourenço, Barbosa, Santos, Greenberg, &

Angus, 2011). The project had several parts, and the initial part was concerned with the dialogical understanding of Lisa´s main clinical problems, with a special interest in the following question: how was stability around these problems achieved and maintained in terms of positioning dynamics? In this illustration we will use segments of that initial part of the project.

This specific aim set the criteria for selecting relevant passages of session 1. Then, since we (the authors) are simultaneously researchers and therapists, we discussed and selected passages that are relevant to address the following question: what are the main clinical problems presented by Lisa in the first session? After reaching an agreement, through discussion, the relevant passages were later analysed involving other judges. These judges were two master students who were trained (by two senior researchers) in all the procedures until they acquired the necessary skills to be independent judges and perform their tasks autonomously. The two senior researchers acted as trainers in that training period, and later on, audited the process of analysis.

Phase 2: Dividing the transcript in response units (unitizing)

This step involves dividing the verbatim transcripts into small units of analysis. Each unit is considered in this method as an observed microposition. In order to detect these units of analysis, we have adopted Hill's (2009) procedures for unitizing transcripts. These are based on the notion of "response unit", which is defined as an independent unit of meaning. Thus, judges need to read the transcripts and divide it into independent units of meaning, each of them expressing a different perspective.

We recommend using at least two judges to perform this task autonomously and then allow the possibility of calculating inter-rater agreement (see Hill, 2009, for further details). A degree of 90% of agreement is recommended in this phase. Remaining disagreements can be solved through consensus after discussion. An auditor guides and reviews all the process.

Illustration of phase 2*.* The selected passages were given to the two previously trained judges and then Lisa's transcripts (turn-takings) were divided into response units (unitizing audited by a senior researcher). To illustrate how response units are distinguished, take the following small passage, in which the therapist is asking her about the negative feelings that she tries to avoid and ignore. A slash indicates the division of a response unit:

T: mm-hm. mm-hm, so it's like even if you try to ignore them they just, they're there

C: /they're always there, yeah/

T: uh-huh

C: /the sadness/ and um I guess resentment still there/

T: resentment towards?

Lisa: /um - oh it would be my family (Therapist: uh-huh)/ and my husband/

The therapist initially is just mirroring what Lisa said previously (that she tries to suppress negative feelings without success). After that, five units are present, each of them expressing a specific perspective:

1. "they're always there, yeah", i.e, the feelings do not go away, they are there, in spite of her attempts to suppress them;

2. “the sadness”, i. e., she feels sad;

3. “and um I guess resentment still there”, i.e., she feels resented;

4. “um - oh it would be my family”, i.e., she feels resented towards her family (later on in the session, we will understand that this regards her upbringing, so she is referring to her father and mother);

5. “and my husband”, i.e., she resents her husband.

In this phase, we are not yet labeling positions, even though these very small units are the basic building blocks that will allow finding positions. Thus, each unit will constitute a microposition, according to this method, since they express a specific attitude perspective or attitude towards an object.

Phase 3: Aggregating Units into Thematic Objects

This phase consists in detecting the object that is at stake in every response unit, and, after that, to aggregate those objects into themes. We define theme as a generic domain or macrostructure (Stinson, Milbrath, Reidbord, & Bucci, 1994), around which segments of a conversation revolve around. A theme can be something like “my marriage” or “my upbringing”. The procedure is based on answering the following questions:

1. What is the referential object of this response unit?

2. Is this referential object similar to another one expressed in other response units?

The first question identifies the object, the second concerns the aggregation in larger thematic units.

Illustration of phase 3. We will use again the previous excerpt. Regarding the first question (what is the referential unit in this response unit), we see that Lisa was describing her negative feelings, in all the first 3 responses to her therapist: in the first one, they are referred generally ("they're always there, yeah"); in the second, she identifies sadness, and in the third, she identifies resentment. So, we may distinguish 3 objects: negative feelings, sadness, and resentment. Nevertheless, they all refer to a global topic: "my negative feelings". Thus, we can group them under this same more generic theme. Notice that in the following 2 response units, guided by the therapist question ("resentment towards?"), the object becomes the recipient of this resentment, which are her family of origin (response 4) and her husband (response 5). They both can be grouped as a more generic theme, like "My family".

The two judges performed this phase. The global procedures that we will describe are similar to the next phases. They started by autonomously reading and identifying the referential object of each response unit, and then they discussed their findings. This discussion is always aimed at reaching a consensus regarding each unit and the themes found. After reaching consensus, the judges' results were discussed with the auditor, until a final consensus was reached.

Phase 4: Characterization and Labeling of Positions

This phase consists in analysing each response unit in two steps. First, we need to identify the I and the Others involved in each response unit. This implies the following distinctions:

- The agent: who is speaking? The most frequent situation is when agent and the speaking person coincide. Nevertheless, there are exceptions. If a person is voicing someone else's perspective (e.g., "and then he said to me: '*you are wrong*!'), the agent is this other person (in italics). It can also happen situations in which the person voices a collective standpoint (e.g., a representative of a panel of assessment saying "*we all appreciated very much your work*"), in which all the agents need to be accounted for (in this example, the panel).

- The addressee: to whom is the agent speaking? The addressee is the focal person or group addressed in the unit. We are aiming here at disclosing the symbolic addressee, and not the real interlocutor (in our case, Lisa's therapist). It coincides with the recipient disclosed in the content of the message. For example, by saying "I love her", this person is addressing the loved one. Thus, it does not coincide with the interlocutor. The addressee can be vague and in some situations it will be impossible to code (e.g., "What a beautiful river this is", here it will not be possible to code this parameter, given that we may not know to whom the agent is speaking).

- Inner audiences: Who are all the others involved in this response unit? When specifying these others, we have two more frequent situations: the interlocutor, whenever he of she is not the addressee; and other people referred in the discourse. Imagine a man saying to the therapist: "My parents are quite homophobic, so I was very, very anxious in my first date with a man" The final response ("I was very anxious in my first date") has this date as the addressee, but his parents are still there as inner audiences. It should be noticed that in several situations, it is impossible to determine these audiences. Yet, there is a

final remark. The own person is always working as an inner audience, since all the responses are open to self-reflection; however, since this self-referential act is a constant, we consider that there is no need to code the self as an inner audience.

As a second step of this phase, and based on the previous steps (finding the “what”, “who”, and “to whom” of all response units), judges need to label each unit as a whole. This label will identify a specific microposition. The rule is to find a label that stays as close as possible to the phenomenological content of the response. So, if a person says, “I felt awkward”, the label can be “I as awkward”.

We have developed a set of specific guidelines to help in this process (see Salgado et al., 2013, for a more detailed account), and we will briefly describe the most important here:

- As said before, the rule is to stick with a label that captures the global perspective or attitude towards the referential object;

- When using synonyms (e.g., frightened and scared), the same label should be applied to these different units;

- If the same unit contains different internal states, this unit needs to be divided into different positions (e.g. “It’s sad and scary” should be labeled as “I as sad” and “I as scared”).

- When the person who speaks does not coincide with the speaker, we name these positions as “counterpositions”, just to distinguish them from all other regular positions. These counterpositions may be quite relevant for the analysis of inner dialogical dynamics.

- Throughout the sequence of labeling, judges go through a process of systematic comparison, quite similar to content analysis (Fassinger, 2005), in which some labels are aggregated in wider categorizations. This implies going back and forth relabeling previously assigned labels.

Illustration of phase 4. We will illustrate this phase again with the previous passage. However, right now we will analyse the turn-taking that took place just before. So, that passage starts with:

T: you're saying that the merry go round speaks something of your depression

C: /yeah, feelings are um well they recur,/ they haven't gone away,/,they're just more suppressed than all of them

T: mm-hm. mm-hm, so it's like even if you try to ignore them they just, they're there [and then the conversation follows with the previous extract]

In this sequence the main parameters remain the same: the object is her negative feelings, the agent is Lisa, the addressee is the therapist, and it is not possible to code any inner audiences. The next step consisted in labeling these positions. Initially, these were coded as “I as having recurrent feelings”, “I as having feelings that do not go away”, and “I as suppressing feelings”. As it happens in the beginning, these labels tend to be extensive and quite close to the original words. However, even before this passage, she already had defined her state as depressive (also confirmed by her inclusion in this trial), and it became clear that all these micropositions were part of her description of her depressive state. So, these micropositions were then grouped under a

mesoposition called “I as depressed”. Thus, this more general position termed “I as depressed” could be described micronalytically as a loop between “I as feeling bad” (which can be subdivided in feeling sad, resentful, angry, among others), leading to “I as suppressing bad feelings”, leading again to “I as feeling bad”, and so on. This kind of sequencing is already part of the next phase, but while doing this relabeling these sequences are frequently already becoming clear to the coders, and they should bookmark them for future steps of the analysis.

Phase 5: Finding Patterns of Positioning through Interpretative Analysis

The global result of the previous phase is a very detailed micronanalytic description of positions emerging moment-by-moment. This new phase aims at building a more generic description, by detailing more generalized sequences of positions. In other words, this phase creates a macrolevel description of the positioning process, in articulation with the more microlevel and mesolevel descriptions obtained in the previous phase.

After concluding the labeling of positions, researchers can now observe repetitive sequences and sudden changes in those patterns. Thus, for example, we may witness a regular and repetive movement between positions such as *p1: I as afraid – p2: I as avoidant – p3: I as frustrated*. We may also witness variations in this sequences (e.g., *p1 – p1 – p3*); oscilations in this pattern by the emergence of new positions (e.g, *p1: I as afraid – p4: I as courageous – p2: I as avoidant*). These observations can be used to draw a diagram of these sequences or cycles of positioning. At the same, these can be used to compare

the change in these sequences or cycles throughout time. For example, if *p1 – p2 – p3* was the initial problematic pattern in therapy; later on, in a good outcome case, we may find a different pattern, such as: *p2: I as courageous – p3: I as not afraid anymore – p4 :I as free*. At this stage of the analysis, we can only describe the changes in positions, and thereby we cannot explain how changes happened. Nevertheless, we can then dive again into the data in order to look for moments in which novelties occurred, and look in detail into what happened before, informed by a microgenetic and interpretive perspective (Valsiner, 2007).

Although statistical analysis can be used for detecting sequences, we have been using only this more interpretive mode of analysis, which involves the careful reading of the transcripts and labeling of positions, with special attention to repetitions. We have developed some following guidelines for this (Salgado & Cunha, 2012; Salgado, Cunha, & Bento, 2013):

1. *Highly frequent positions*. A very frequent position is a recurrent one, and therefore it must be involved in some form of regular pattern. This can be a good starting-point for detecting sequences, proceeding then to observing the preceding and proceeding positions.

2. *Themes and their regularity*. More frequent themes are more likely to involve regularities. Moreover, positions are usually organized around some specific thematic objects.

3. *Adjacent occurrences, sudden shifts, and semantic justifications*. These devices can help in the process of detecting and specifying the sequence. If we see that position 2 follows position 1, p2 is “adjacent” to p1. If this happens regularly, then we have a good trace of a possible pattern.

Sudden shifts of position and/or theme are also important, because they can highlight the presence of a pattern (e.g., if *p1: I as afraid* leads frequently to *p2: I as hard worker*, this may indicate not only a pattern, but also sudden changes in the referential object, which may be relevant). Shifts towards the opposite positions (e.g. *I as courageous* leading to *I as afraid*) can also be frequent and important to look in detail. We also need to consider explicit descriptions by the person. For example, a passage like "…since I am always thinking pessimistically, I am always anxious" suggests explicitly a small sequence that should be taken into account.

4. *Disappearance of positions and emergence of new ones: Variations and alternative patterns*. Whenever a new position emerges, this is can be taken as an index of potential variations and change on the usual sequences. The same is true whenever one positions disappears or become less frequent in a certain sequence.

These guidelines can be used, but this phase of work is largely "discovery-oriented". The sequences are described and whenever a particular sequence repeats itself or is considered important for some particular reason (e.g., the client has a strong emotional reaction), the judges produce a description of this pattern. This acts as a working hypothesis, that needs to be refined through successive corrections. The same applies to variations to those patterns. This process only ends when the researchers have achieved a satisfactory description of patterns and their variations. We have been calling these patterns "cycles of positions", and can be represented in a narrative format and/or through a diagram displaying the most relevant positions and their sequencing.

The combination of these three last phases produces a multilayered description of the emerging positions, from microgenetic descriptions of positions, to the intermediate level in which some patterns and regularities are abstracted, to the proposal of the main cycles of positions. These cycles have necessarily stability throughout time and are directly involved in the creation of an identity. When applied to human change processes, in psychotherapy or in other contexts, this method can also be used as tool for the detection of modifications in those patterns.

Illustration of Phase 5: Finding Patterns of Positioning through Interpretative Analysis. We will now flesh out this last phase by describing some of the more central parts of the analysis conducted around Lisa's definition of her own clinical problems. We will not give a full description of the analysis, since our goal is to illustrate this final step.

As we have seen previously, Lisa associated her state of depression with feelings of resentment towards her parents and her husband. After disclosing this feeling of resentment, the session continues as follows (in square brackets we will add the positions as they were identified):

T: uh-huh, you can feel that (Lisa: um); like right now is that what's kind of, what's present

Lisa: /yes, yeah it's present, /it's clear (sniff)/ it's there [*I as resented] - [I as resented] -* [*I as resented]*

Therapist: uh huh

Lisa: /not that I um, well I-I don't want to hate them/ *[I as forgiving]*

T: yeah, so there's another part of you that doesn't want to feel really strong hatred

Lisa: /that's right, yeah*/ [I as forgiving]*

T: and yet you do have resentment

Lisa: /yes I do, yeah - - / but I-I'm willing to forgive*/[I as forgiving]*

T: uh-huh, do you feel sad when you say that

Lisa: /um, to forgive?/ *[I as asking for a clarification]*

Therapist: yes

Lisa: /um yes, yeah I - - - /well I-I under, I think I understand and you know, why it happened/ *[I as sad] - [I as forgiving]*

T: uh-huh, your parents or your husband as well

Lisa: /yeah, my parents and my husband/ *[I as forgiving]*

T: it's like you can almost step into their shoes and see (/Lisa: yeah/); how it is that they were like that (/Lisa: that's right/); and why they did what they did towards you *[I as forgiving] - [I as forgiving]*

Lisa: /yeah, it-it's more of um, I understand it/ but then, you know, the anger and the resentment is still there/ *[I as forgiving]* - [*I as resented]*

In this excerpt, we witness the development of an interplay between two main and somewhat contradictory positions: I as resented and I as forgiving. Actually, I as forgiving is a mesoposition composed by some other micropositions such as I as understanding (e.g., “well I-I under, I think I understand and you know, why it happened”) and I as avoiding hatred feelings (e.g., “well I-I don't want to hate them”). This can be illustrated through a diagram (figure 1). These positions, besides some self-referential own feeding

(e.g., “I as resented” feeding on itself 3 times, on the first turn-taking), they also feed each other, even if they are quite opposite. So, they maintain a sort of dynamic and also, a tensional stability between the positions of resentment and forgiving and understanding. This cycle is repeated several times in this session.

Insert figure 1 around here

A few moments later, after disclosing that her husband has a serious gambling problem and how that makes her feel rejected [I as rejected becomes the prevalent position in that phase], we observe another relevant sequence:

Therapist: so it-it's like the feeling of being kind of locked in

Lisa: /yeah, /more as uh, isolated/ [I as locked in] – [I as isolated]

Therapist: uh-huh

Lisa: /you know I can't do anything about it, it's happening but I/ [I as helpless]

Therapist: so you start almost feeling helpless

Lisa: /that's right,/ I'm um, I'm helpless about it, /I can't do anything/ [I as helpless] - [I as helpless] - [I as helpless]

Thus, we witness a gradual differentiation of the resented position into a more specific complaint about feeling rejected, which later feeds into this feeling of helplessness. Then, two turn-takings later we observe this:

T: because you still end up feeling hurt inside

C: /yeah, the feelings are-are very much there/ even though I understand (laugh) the disease and the character in him/ [I as rejected] – [I as forgiving]

Thus, the position “I as rejected” gives place to the position of “I as forgiving, maintaining this cycle in a dynamic stability. This cycle not only is described several times in the session, as it is also portrayed as something happening frequently in her daily life. We may say that this is part of her identity, at the moment, even though she is doing now a strong effort to find a way out of this situation. We are leaving outside this analysis some other elements that also feed this dynamic stability (like her fear of neglecting her kids, or her values), but the main cycle of positioning that we obtained is the one depicted above.

Final remarks

PM aims to be a useful tool to study the dynamism of the self, and therefore, also useful to study identity, in its dynamics of stability and change. Based on a dialogical approach, PM studies the moment-by-moment change of the self in its process of positioning and analyses each position in a microanalytic way. At the same, it also combines this microanalysis with meso- and macrolevel of descritiption, with increasing levels of generalizability.

In itself, it does not answer the question concerning how one person remains the same in different moments of life, and how change and stability are matched. Nevertheless, by remaining close to the lived phenomena of psychic life, it allows to study the positions of the self as they naturally unfold; and the final description matches different levels of generalization. Therefore, we

believe that PM could be a starting point for other forms of dynamic analysis of self and identity throughout time.

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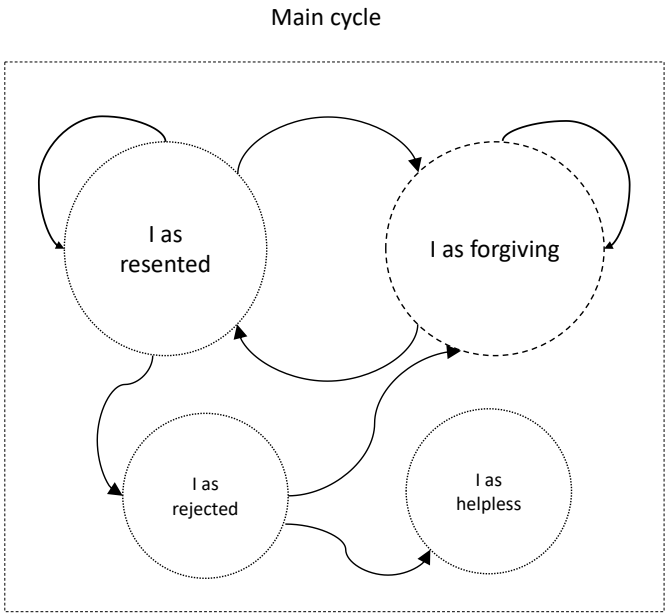
Figure 1. The main cycle of positioning around which Lisa's clinical problems revolved around



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