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SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW I-POSITIONS: EMOTIONS AND SELF-DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT

From a Dialogical Self Theory perspective, this paper focuses on the role played by life experiences that draw out strong emotions and may engender actions that generate powerful affect-laden feelings and emotions altogether leading to the emergence of significant new I-positions that rearrange the DS. Our aim is to analyze the complexities of meaning construction processes, as affective fields change into new configurations along co-constructive processes of interpretation, meaning creation, and value constructions that guide individuals' actions within culturally structured contexts. To provide evidence for the argument that emotions, values and self-construction processes are closely related to each other, we present and discuss two different cases: the story of a man with AIDS and his family, the way he deals with his disease and familial distress, such as the drug addiction condition of his older son, as well as the story of a homosexual woman whose strong Catholic values entail a psychological dilemma that ultimately leads to the emergence of a creative new I-position.

Key words: Dialogical Self Theory, emotions, self development, values, affective fields

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dialogical Self theory (e.g. Hermans, 2004; Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) conceives of the self as a self-system, which coordinates multiple I-positions that dynamically and continuously interact with social others, different aspects of the context, and with each other. Hence, DS theory takes a developmental perspective, providing

us with both diversity and dynamic hierarchical organization, therefore having a potential of compatibility with the contemporary systemic approach increasingly adopted by developmental psychology (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 2007). For a sociocultural constructivist theory it is essential to take a dialogical perspective on self-construction and self-development, and such framework may certainly open new and productive venues to make sense of the multiple constitutive relationships between culture and individual. The conceptual notion of a self-system can be inferred from George Mead's work about the self (1934), and it is compatible with a dialogical perspective linking together different I-positions. The concept is useful to understand the complexities involved as multiple and interdependent dialogues are co-constructed along the individual life-span, with different people in different contexts and time, intertwined with inner dialogues among different I-positions.

The study of family systems offers many examples of the dynamic nature of mutual co-constructive processes of self-development. Moreover, self-development dynamics encompasses psychological phenomena such as social roles and identities, which are permanently being co-constructed within the context of sociocultural practices, all those aspects significantly contributing to the emergence and systemic organization of different I-positions (e.g. Hermans, 2001). From a Dialogical Self perspective, we claim that life experiences that draw out strong emotions may engender actions that generate powerful affect-laden feelings and emotions, altogether leading to important subjective re-definitions and re-definitions of the relationships (Branco & Branco, 2006; Branco & Madureira, 2004; Madureira & Branco, 2006).

In this paper, we will emphasize the complexities of meaning construction processes and their role in the reciprocal constitution of culture and individual self-systems. We intend to highlight the important part played by motivation and affective fields in such co-constructive processes of interpretation, creation of meaning, and the resulting values that guide individuals' actions within culturally structured contexts. To provide evidence for the argument that emotions, values and self-construction are intimately related to each other, we first analyze the story of Pedro and his family, as they face his disease and the familial distress, which includes the older son getting addicted to drugs (Branco & Branco, 2006). Then we present the story of Rosane, a homosexual woman holding strong Catholic values that entail a psychological dilemma leading to the emergence of a creative I-position (Madureira & Branco, 2006). Both cases are particularly suitable to demonstrate the centrality of emotions for the emergence of new values and, consequently, new I-positions, which start playing a dominant role within the self-system.

2. PEDRO'S STORY

Pedro's (fictitious name) story helps us to understand the power of emotions, especially those elicited by strong, life-threatening events and experiences that may occur in the course of human ontogeny. Pedro, a 37-year-old man,

had AIDS. At the time he was interviewed within the context of a research project on drugs and its impact on family systems (A.L. Branco, 2005; Branco & Branco, 2006) he had some complications due to his illness, such as walking difficulties. The interview took place five years after his diagnosis, at a public Health Center in Brasilia (Brazil), designed to help troubled adolescents and their families. He had already attended the program for two years. The group sessions were oriented to give support to parents to better deal with adolescents' drug-addiction problems, ideally guiding them to help their children out of their addiction.

Pedro mentioned the major reason that led him to that specific Health Center – it concerned his own health treatment, rather than his son's problem. He was having trouble with his 14-year-old kid getting out-of-control. According to Pedro, his physician suggested him to go there, because Luis' (fictitious name) drug-related behaviors, such as aggressivity, and attempts to drop out of school, were driving him crazy, and were definitely interfering with his treatment.

During weekly group meetings, parents were instructed on how to behave and interact with their troubled kids, and were encouraged to share and discuss their life dramas and experiences under the supervision of a well-trained psychologist. Anna, Pedro's wife, attended the sessions just a couple of times, but he persisted for already two years.

The changes narrated by Pedro concerning his I-positions are very interesting, particularly the emergence of a "Father I-Position" never experienced before. Along with the family group sessions, he also attended AIDS patients' support group in a different public institution. According to his narrative, the Father-Position emerged after he started to receive professional support, as he struggled to face the overwhelming emotions relative to his own distress, and a growing awareness of his son's suffering. It is noteworthy how he dealt with his pain, and how, by sharing problems within the contexts of supportive groups, composed by individuals in need of coping with serious problems and a therapist, he became highly motivated to devote his life to his kids. In his words, that was a role that was absolutely alien to him before everything, i.e. AIDS and his kid's drug-addiction, happened. In other words, meaning re-construction processes, mobilized by strong emotions under the guidance of professional social suggestions, seemed to have significantly contributed to the emergence of a new I-position, which hierarchically assumed priority over previous ones.

Pedro's family included father, mother, two younger daughters and Luis, the 14-year-old son. Three other older kids lived with them, two boys and one girl, but they were staying for just a short period of time, and Pedro did not mention them as family members. Luis has already been involved in drug consumption for two years. Pedro said that by the time of the interview Luis had probably overcome the problem, but he was not sure. Luis' drug of choice was a popular and cheap mix of cocaine with other toxic ingredients.

The issue of “death” and “loss” seemed to impregnate the flow of interactions within the family context, even though Pedro’s wife did not want to tell the kids the truth about his AIDS condition. He himself was very ambivalent about this, and many times, in his narrative, he referred to his kids’ worries and fears concerning the loss of their dad. He mentioned that “They speak a lot about loss, ‘because I am afraid daddy will die, I’m afraid of being alone...’”. The kids are aware of the amount of medicines he takes on a daily basis, and ask about it, but neither he, nor his wife, are explicit about “that” (the forbidden word). The kids often listen to them fighting over “that”. When Luis asks Pedro what “that” means, though, he answers: “You won’t be able to understand it, I’ll tell you when you turn fifteen”. The word “that” is continuously used by Pedro along the narrative, particularly when he gives examples of his conversations with both wife and kids: “That”, we understand, means the unspeakable, terrible taboo word “AIDS”.

It seems that the major problem is how Pedro was contaminated: throughout the interview he offered several hints suggesting he got AIDS through out-of-wedlock sexual intercourse (he mentioned he hadn’t cared for using condoms). It seems that such fact profoundly and negatively affected his marital relationship, and consequently, the family relationship. He regrets what happened, and reports using daily opportunities to explain to his kids the importance of using condoms to prevent all kinds of sexual diseases and pregnancy. He says: “They need to know now the necessity of using them [condoms], (...) the blessed [condom] that prevents me from infecting other people, and which, had I known before, would had prevented me from contamination”.

He also reports that he and Anna (fictitious name), his wife, live through a continuous fierce battle over almost everything. According to him, she is too resentful, and does not want to tell the truth. She insists on putting him down in front of the kids, accusing him of being too liberal with them, and particularly, unfaithful to her. He refers to her remarks, “(...) because you got this problem, and I don’t have this problem, I should have it too, but I don’t!” His fear and preoccupation concerning his kids’ sexual behavior can also be detected all along the interview.

Pedro pictures himself as being light-spirited, charming and endowed with an excellent sense of humor. In part, he attributes to such characteristics the specific trajectories of his self-development.

”I’m like this, I enjoy telling jokes, I enjoy laughing, dancing...(...) I feel very much at ease with everybody, at home, with the doctors, with people on the street, with neighbors...I make people laugh, I have a strong sense of humor, I enjoy telling jokes, saying bad words when I feel like...

If I’m fighting with my wife, with a relative, and someone comes to visit, I go ‘Hello, good morning! Would you like a coffee... ‘Wow, is this the same man that was right there now?! [He laughs as he says it]”

He also mentions their role in helping him to change the quality of his relationship with the kids. His laugh, however, sounds more like a nervous laugh, and is strategically inserted in his narrative at this point. However, to keep the “secret” from his children makes him extremely uncomfortable. That led him to explanations like the above mentioned he gave to Luis, “Look, when you are fifteen I’ll tell you what is happening!”. In other words, he does not want to admit they already know about his condition, despite all the evidence. Even aware of Luis’ major troubles with drugs - a problem Luis does not disclose to the family either - Pedro’s shame seems too unbearable to allow him to address the issue with his kids.

When asked what he thinks would be Luis’ bigger complaint about the family, Pedro is quick to answer: “The continuous struggle between my wife and I”. They fight all the time over how Pedro was infected with AIDS (or with “that”). His reference to such permanent struggle suggests that he also does not openly tell his wife the truth about his sexual affairs. Shame, here, may be a big issue to him. Pedro accuses his wife of lying too much about him to the kids (“...your father only likes rich and blonde women...”), and also insists she is not at all tolerant and understanding with Luis.

According to Pedro, Anna still physically punishes Luis for his wrongdoings, and her relationship with the boy is pretty bad and complicated. Pedro thinks Anna is definitely not doing a good job with their children education, particularly Luis’. Too much rejection and no caring. He blames her “She does not give the example, she does not teach them not to lie, to always tell the truth, to speak frankly and honestly about everything.”, suggesting he would rather speak out the truth about his AIDS condition. He seems very adamant about this: “I hate lies, I hate being dishonest with people”. However, as it was said before, it is very likely that he is blaming his wife without being aware of his own ambiguity concerning this issue:

“(…) until today I did not have the guts to tell them ...about this truth, (..) I am just preventing problems he [Luis] might have at school, you know, discrimination. It’s not I’m a coward, but I don’t want him to be discriminated...”

All along the interview it was possible to infer the existence of a violent pattern of family communication: the wife beats up the children, and Pedro dropped hints that may have led to the idea that he, as well, beat up his wife. In short, Pedro’s family dynamics seems to be impregnated with experiences that cannot be put into words, experiences related to betrayal, illness, and violence.

AIDS and Luis’ problems, however, seemed to have acted as catalysts for the emergence of Pedro’s new father-position. Concerning Luis’ problems, he said he noticed the boy was becoming increasingly aggressive, did not eat or sleep well, and reported seeing weird things. He also observed Luis had a sort of attack, with strong headaches and foaming getting out of his mouth. His wife did not believe Luis had any drugs problem, and first they decided to take the boy to a neurologist,

who concluded the boy was healthy. The parents did not mention to the doctor the possibility that Luis used drugs. The adolescent continued out of control, showing violent behavior, sleep and eating disorders, and finally giving up school. According to Pedro, "(...) the first thing were his bouts of aggression, beating up the girls, pushing them violently against the wall, trying to kind of strangle them!"

After talking with his own doctor, Pedro decided to go look for help at the previously mentioned public health institution. There, he was instructed and oriented to change his attitude towards the adolescent, and to construct a new, affective and positive pattern for communicating with his kids, particularly with Luis. When asked why he thought Luis first got involved with illicit drugs, Pedro's answer was immediate:

"I'm sure! From my point of view, I think, first of all, it was due to lack of love, and we didn't know what that was, lack of care, and even despise. For he was too aggressive with us, he called us with names, names we didn't accept, he cursed at us; we gave up, and let it just go like that... "Look, I will beat you up, I'll do that and that with you...". Then, what happens? His mother washed her hands, she told me, look, he can do whatever he wants with his life. He can be whatever he wants to be. She said he was responsible to decide what he wanted to be, a drug-addict, a bum, if so he wanted. Then he said, 'Mom, I want to be a bum!'"

Following the Center's instruction, the first thing he started doing was taking every opportunity to tell Luis how much he loved him, making the effort to separate the son from drugs and their effects on the kid. He was also instructed to physically embrace the boy to demonstrate affect, and he started doing that to all his kids. He reports that, as a consequence of performing such actions and doing the mental exercises he was told to practice, the quality of his relationship with Luis got exceptionally better. Pedro's anguish, shame and love for his kids ended up motivating him to completely change his relationships with them. He particularly concentrated on rescuing Luis from bad life and put him on track, back to school. Pedro went to school together with Luis, and stayed there while the boy was in class. He talked a lot with Luis why he was doing that, and decided to accompany him everywhere:

"Dad, I'll go there." , "Oh then I'm going too!", "Dad, I'll go to the grocery store!", "I'll go with you!", "You don't need to go, dad!", "Yes, I do. What are you going to do there?", "Nothing!", "Ok, then I'll also go with you, I'm not doing anything, anyway..."

For example, after Luis said he would go to a party on a rainy day, Pedro, despite a terrible pneumonia, took his coat and umbrella to go with his son. Luis then said: "Are you crazy?" and Pedro answered "Crazy for a very good reason. And if I die history will tell, dead lies a crazy Dad, crazy with love and care, for such reason I'm happy to die!". The result, according to him, was touching: Luis gave

up the party to stay with the father. All along such daily experiences, the brand new Father-Position emerged and developed.

He says that thanks to his experiences of participating in groups with other AIDS patients and drug-addicts, he can understand their suffering. Their stories leave him with a “broken heart”:

”In those sessions we learn what a drug-addict is, what they go through, how much they suffer. When they use it, when they want to stop, when the drug is there, when it is not. When I learned about the reality of those people, I said, ‘Now I have to take care of my son’. If I didn’t take care of my son, that would also fall very hard upon me...(…) That actually emotionally moved me a lot, that motivated me a lot to take care of him.”

Pedro referred to his awareness of the emergence of his new Father I-position:

”Today I know I am a father, my kids are mine, I have responsibilities concerning them, I have a commitment to them, they are my children! I changed my behavior so they could change their behavior as well. In the past there was not that kind of respect between father and child, mother and son, no one could tell who the father was, who the mother was (...). Nobody could tell, ‘Is this boy my son?’ I’m not even sure I’ve ever been a father before....”

He also reflects upon his life story and family processes that contributed to his own previous family dynamics:

”We were raised that way, therefore we accepted it [absence of affection etc.]. This embrace, kiss thing, tender touching, how to give affection, everything was too different. So, we didn’t learn anything about that at home, and after we became adults, we knew nothing about it [affection etc.]. Only now, almost elders (he laughs), we are learning that!”

The first time he reached them for an embrace, they all ran away from him, one kid even hiding under the table, he jokes. Today they come to him asking for it. Now, he says, he wants to be remembered as a caring and loving father: “Then when they have kids they will say ‘My dad used to do like this with me, my dad said he loved me, that I was the kid he wanted, he took care of me!’”.

Together with his Father-position, Pedro developed a sense of reciprocity, concerning mutual respect in relation to his kids. He reports how he feels happy when Luis asks him for his blessing before leaving the house:

“When he leaves in the morning, he asks for my blessing, he goes ‘Your blessing, Dad!’, ‘God bless you! And what about my hug?’, we hug each other and he goes, when he comes back, he comes straight to me and hugs

me again. When he goes to school, around mid-day, he gives me another hug!”

Pedro story is a neat example of how powerful, painful emotions, together with well-conducted social practices, transform into significant values that have a strong impact on self dynamics, giving rise to a new I-position, the Father I-position, that ultimately dominates the self-System.

3. ROSANE'S STORY

Rosane (fictitious name) was 25 years old, and defined herself as homosexual. She held I-positions that apparently seemed impossible to conciliate: she was very religious (Catholic), valued her very traditional-like family, and she had a stable romantic relationship with a 22-year-old girlfriend, despite still living with her parents and one brother. Along her narrative (she was interviewed within the context of a broader study: Madureira, 2000; Madureira & Branco, 2007), Rosane made explicit her traditional values concerning cultural norms, social expectations and family values (she referred to the importance of “well-structured families”, for instance). Catholicism is a cornerstone in her life, and plays an essential, constitutive role in helping her to coordinate distinct I-positions.

In Figure 1 we depict Rosane's three most important I-positions, following Hermans' model (2001, p. 253): (1) The Catholic I-Position; (2) The Daughter I-Position; and (3) The Homosexual I-Position. All positions are intrinsically related as part of a whole system, and the labels are used for analytical purpose only, for the positions are open to continuous interactions and re-arrangements as the system “person-in-contexts” moves through successive life experiences.

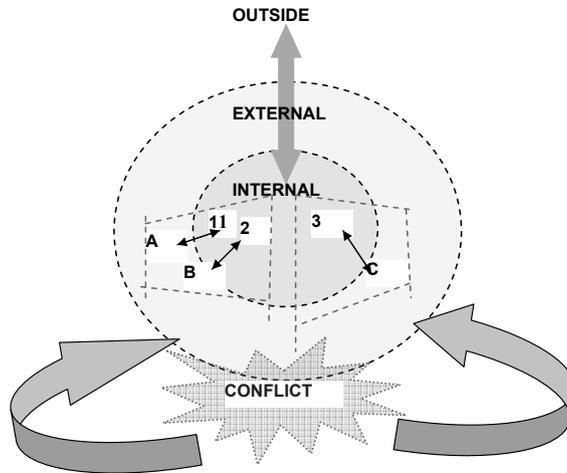


Figure 1 – Rosane's I-positions (after Hermans, 2001)

INTERNAL	EXTERNAL	OUTSIDE
(1) Catholic I-position (2) Daughter I-position (3) Homosexual I-position	(A) Priests, Church people (B) Parents, brother, relatives (C) Girlfriend & people that hang out at gay clubs etc.	Collective Culture: beyond face-to-face interactions (cultural-historical practices, values, and beliefs).

The fields [1-A], [2-B] and [3-C] form three different clusters that interact with each other in completely different ways. [1-A] and [2-B] can be integrated, but neither of these two fields immediately integrates with [3-C], due to basic historical-cultural moral contradictions. As a result, we can observe two major orientations: the Catholic daughter versus the homosexual woman.

Our major point in presenting Rosane's story is to identify and analyze the strikingly interesting strategies she used to weave a relative self-integration out of re-constructions of apparently opposite beliefs and values. Such re-constructions of meanings enabled a curious conciliation between the contradictions found in her two apparently clear-cut different worlds: the traditional old-fashioned society, and the gay community.

3.1. THE CATHOLIC I-POSITION AND THE DAUGHTER I-POSITION

Rosane's narrative is fundamental to illustrate the analyses that allowed us to identify the strategic processes, that help conciliating two seemingly incompatible, different I-positions:

"Everyone asks me: Rosane, how do you manage to... you being homosexual, how can you participate, be a member of the Church? Then I said: because if I were out of the Church it would be much worse! You can see that...in this context, it is very difficult, you see, ... people coming from a structured family,

usually, parents are divorced, usually the family has ...like ... a brother in jail, he's cut off the family... that is, the person doesn't speak with Dad or Mom ... you know... and I don't have any of those problems (...) My Dad doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, he... only works, just work, my mother stays at home all the time and she's wonderful, my brother... his only vice is the cigarette (...). Our family is totally structured ... the parents are not divorced."

Rosane argues that in gay and lesbian groups people usually come from "problematic" families, while she is an exception to this rule. She explains why she goes to Church despite her homosexuality: "If I were out of the Church, it would be much worse!". Her family is "totally" and very "well-structured". But that means the absence of divorce, drugs, and problems with the police. That also means a family where father works and mother stays at home, a traditional well-structured family - despite the lack of affective, positive communication among its members.

"Yeah...with my brother and my father as well... it's the same thing, we... there's a barrier between us, no dialogue between us, I guess this ... I think... this is the only problem we have at home, I mean like having the freedom to go and... to go and embrace my Mom, I feel a huge barrier right there..."

Actually, in her family communication is poor ("no deep dialogues"), and non-verbal expressions of affection are not encouraged - or made impossible - by a perceived, generalized cold distancing. At the beginning of the interview, Rosane defines herself as a family person, but as the interview proceeds she mentions the numerous ways she finds to avoid being at home. Tension, strain, and frustrated expectations actually fill the air within the family context. The traditional "structure" completely hides the family dynamics, and Rosane does not directly mention her family rigidity. During the interview, she only presented some clues that express the inflexible structure of her family.

About her religious beliefs she says the following:

"I have already told a priest about my orientation and everything, but he said ... he asked a lot of questions, you know, ... like, why I was hanging out with those people and that and that ... this sort of thing. Then, I started to think like: ... Well, am I doing any harm to anyone? That's OK the Church has its dogmas, its laws, if you want to be part of it you have to observe them... But ... I told myself: yes,... in Church... like, God says you have to give love, to receive love, that is, that tender thing, you know?... You are with somebody, you don't wish to do any harm, you are giving love when the person needs it ... that is, needs someone... you are there, to help, you don't mean to do any harm. Why is that wrong?... You see? And... well... that's the way I see it, that's the way I understand things. Then I started to think like: I go to Church ... to strengthen my spiritual side, because I miss, I need it, if this part of me is feeling bad, I feel bad..."

Rosane is aware of the Church's position concerning homosexuality. However, when she adds "But... I told myself (...)", she constructs very interesting arguments to justify herself as a good Catholic homosexual, elaborating a personal theology where a merge of religious values and her private, personal life turns out to be possible. Christian virtues like generosity, help and kindness are contextualized within relationships where the other person is actually in need of love and support. Making sure her homosexual orientation does not become publicly known in Church, she finds in such religious virtues the material she needs to bridge the gap between those so-called incompatible worlds.

3.2. THE HOMOSEXUAL I-POSITION

Rosane's narrative often reveals a very judgmental view of the "gay world":

"I try to show this side, that I just talked about... just to people that know me and know it ...that... all right, there aren't many people who know that, that I am, got it? But I, I try to show this side ... that is... that I am but... I try to show them that I am like that just behind the walls, nobody has anything to do with it, just me and the person I am with...other than that, I am doing...I am a normal person."

According to her, most people from "gay world" are envious, unhappy, "lost" in their life, but she goes on hanging out with them. Her Homosexual I-position, at first glance, seems to be very difficult to integrate with other significant positions, as she tries to isolate it as much as possible: "... you have to know ... how to manage things and keep things separate", and the like. She argues that, after all, those who are not "normal" should not "shock" society. Rosane continuously apologizes for her sexual orientation, stressing the other, "normal" or positive sides of her life. For instance, she says "(...)I am [homosexual] but (...)"; and goes "I try to show them that I am like that just behind the walls (...)". Rosane recurrently associates homosexuality with deviant behavior: "other than that, I am doing...I am a normal person (...)". Along her narrative, when referring to openness about homosexuality in other cultural contexts, she says "I don't see things like that, to be able, like, what happens in the USA, this overt behavior, liberation, I don't think things [should be] like that (...)".

In sum, Rosane's narrative accepts and legitimizes social discrimination and prejudice concerning what she considers to be "abnormal". Nevertheless, as she moves along her narrative, she re-signifies, re-constructs specific meanings concerning herself, and finds a Christian reason to participate in the gay world. Her narrative reveals in diverse ways the emergence of another I-position, the Missionary I-position, that brings together those two seemingly opposite worlds.

3.3. THE MISSIONARY I-POSITION

Rosane's narrative suggests that the cultural-historical traditional family and religious values prevail, and these values seem to help her keep the sense of self-continuity. At the end of the interview, when questioned about her perceptions regarding the occurrence of any changes in relation to her concept or identity, Rosane expresses her sense of continuity, "No, it's the same thing...". Christian and traditional values seem to be the solid ground that helps her finding ways to re-interpret fields of meanings which are, in principle, contradictory, overcrowded with tension and psychic suffering.

The issue of power also needs to be examined and highlighted. As Hermans (2004) points out, the multiple I-positions relate to each other in asymmetrical ways, namely, some I-positions dominate others. So, strategic processes within the self-system need to bridge the gap and interconnect the socially opposing I-position fields in order to warrant a significant coherence and consistency entwined with the power of dominant positions. In Rosane's case, that is only made possible by a dialogue between positions in the construction of a missionary role. Now Rosane is a Christian woman who helps the forsaken and lost souls that live aimless, non-structured lives in a difficult world. The major strategies she employed seem to include: (1) a dissociation between the Daughter & Catholic I-positions, on the one hand, and Homosexual position, on the other (practices and experiences in those two domains must be separated); and (2) a secrecy concerning her sexuality, only exposed within the context of her private life. People belonging to groups other than the gay community must be kept completely apart and ignorant of her sexual orientation.

The use of such strategies (both intentional and non-intentional) makes possible the emergence of a missionary, virtuous role (the Missionary-I). Being gay allows her to help those poor and lost souls living pointless, troublesome lives. She has now found an excellent sphere to practice charity. Her religious values are not only put in practice, but gain a new, welcome meaning. Her mission may help people to think about their lives, and change to better fit Christian and traditional values, practices and beliefs.

In her words,

"Look, ...I am that kind of person that put a big value on human beings, I mean, (...) how the person is doing, feeling ... Family, for instance, I consider it to be very important... If there is ...there is someone, even if I don't know the person, but if I feel she is feeling bad, I try to help in any ... possible way. Yeah, I don't know, I think like, we are in this world to give ourselves to other people, that's the way I see it..."

"Our family is a structured family... no divorced parents... Well, that's what I... hum... and something else, I also try to help, when I am with someone... kind of... we, like, if I am seeing someone... I even avoid... going... to the person's place, 'cause I start...I can't... I see things, like, this way... see... for example, an ex-girlfriend of mine, she didn't talk to her brother, she

furiously hated him... Then, I went, it's not like that, you know... You... well... then, I took her to Church, like, you know how to deal, you cannot force the person, push the person, she goes if she wants to, but you know how to deal with things like that. Until one day, she bought a gift for her brother, you know, she came to me and said, Rosane, I bought a shirt to my brother. Like, that was the way she showed me she was doing something for him, see? Then, you know, you start to ...want to help people, because in such groups ... there are a lot of people that are there just for *oba-oba** (...)" ("*oba-oba*" in Portuguese means something like "meaningless fashion" or "silly fun")

"Then... I go, like, I approach and start talking with the person, and she starts telling me that she has this and that kind of problem, problems, ...it's kind of curious, you can count on your fingers people that... belong to this group, and don't have any problems with something. Ok...Let's say that... anywhere you go there is ...But those problems are, like, as I told you, about structure in their families, ... things like that, there are many, many people, not just a few! Then you feel that people are not ... happy, let's say that... This is something I question a lot, (...) sometimes there are people that are searching...there are people that are there because they are lost! I see it this way..."

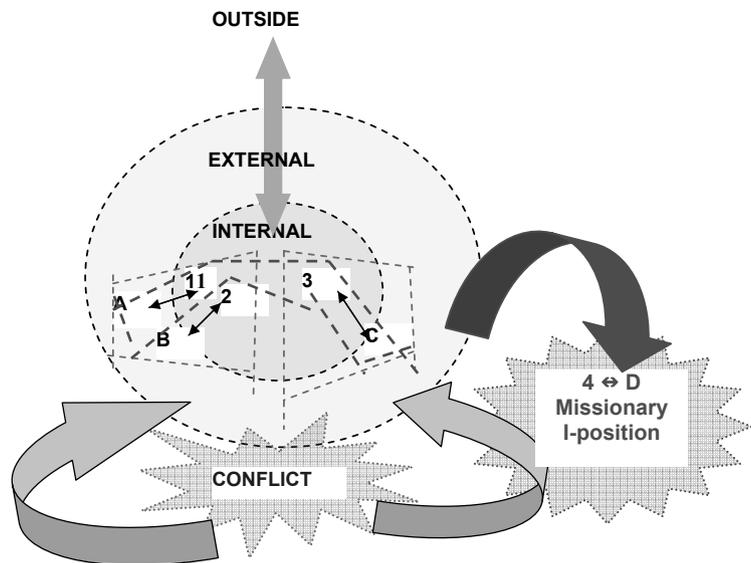


Figure 2 - The emergence of the Missionary I-position

Rosane's deepest values concerning "doing good", in accordance with the prescriptions of Christianity, seem to hold a dominant position in the

hierarchy of her self-system. Those are the values that guide her to see herself as a missionary. By constraining her kind-of-ingrained homophobic attitudes (gays conceived of as “lost souls” to be rescued and guided), she finds a good reason, an explanation to her presence in the gay community. In short, it seems that most people make use of strategic processes that help them to deal with overtly and/or subtle potentially conflicting I-positions, while keeping a relative sense of integrity and coherence. As they do so, new I-positions emerge in the process.

4. CONCLUSION: THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONS ON SELF-DYNAMICS

We have argued that theoretical links between Dialogical Self Theory and sociocultural developmental psychology may represent a fruitful venue for investigating self-development. Pedro, along his narrative, clearly demonstrated the strong impact of a serious, life-threatening disease on the re-construction of the individual’s self-dynamics system, allowing for the emergence of a new I-Position (Father-Position) that had not been constituted before (“I don’t know if I have ever been a father...”).

However, just being infected with HIV and developing AIDS was not enough to actually change the family dynamics: only when Luis’ drugs problem had seriously disturbing consequences for the daily life routine, Pedro woke up to the possibility of actively looking for professional help. His group experiences with deeply troubled and suffering individuals also played a significant role in the emergence of the new I-position. According to Pedro, he had always been a high-spirited person. However, before the traumatic event involving him and his older son, it looks like family life was just flowing, although badly, impregnated by accusations, resentments, shame and regrets, and those painful, conflicting emotions were not, according to Pedro, being positive to anyone. After being sensitized by the actual suffering of other people, though, Pedro seemed to be able to experience an affective and cognitive decentration (Hoffman, XXX; Piaget, 1956), namely, he became more capable of perceiving and being aware of other people’s problems and difficulties. Those experiences enabled him to “see the others”, that is, to recognize the others’ needs, qualities, difficulties, in short, their subjectivities. In his specific case, the “other” was his son, whose behavior was actually a cry for help. The “others” then extended to his children. However, his wife was not included, most likely due to her deep emotional revolt and resentment for being cheated by Pedro, and also to her lack of sensitiveness, egocentrism, and inability to deal with an overwhelming situation.

In Rosane’s case, there is a need to analyze the sociocultural and historical aspects of her suffering, because she perceived herself as being “different” from most people due to her non-hegemonic sexual orientation. As most societies in today’s globalized world, Brazilian culture lives through a fast and intense transformation in terms of values, mainly those concerning democratic openness and diversity acceptance. These latter conflict with the old, socio-historical prejudices and discrimination. Such historical sociocultural complexities

create serious dilemmas, which, in their own way, create deep and powerful emotional instability, fear, and pain in those who do not follow the mainstream. Society's contradictions certainly entail the re-structuring of social norms and rules, personal values and morality. However, it takes time for long-ingrained and affective-laden values to change in significant degree. Meanwhile, those who do not behave according to rules are discriminated against, experience self-esteem problems, doubts and lots of distress.

Hence individuals need to find their own ways to deal with the multiple moral contradictions, incoherence, and emotional confrontations at both social and subjective levels. Rosane, as she co-constructs her own way to deal with such complexities, ends up partially solving her particular dilemma by creating a new I-position guided by her seemingly strongest values and consisting on her helping and rescuing those at risk of having their souls lost. Such psychological strategy, most likely occurring at different levels of awareness, allows her to see continuity in her self-system up to the point when she affirms, as mentioned before, "No, [I don't feel myself as different, or changed], it's the same thing...".

Self-dynamics, therefore, comprises tendencies for stability and change, which can be pinpointed in both Pedro's and Rosane's life experiences. What is significant, though, is the amazing set of psychological resources and complex processes that emerge in certain situations, helping the person to grow and develop when they have to deal with powerful emotional subjective turmoils and edgy-like personological disasters. In Pedro's words,

"I ended up learning a lot of things. The HIV brought me many benefits, even though it is still a disease that can't be healed. But I'm also pretty sure that I won't die of AIDS. This faith I always had."

When we focus on the role of deep affective values contributing to self system development, we should not disregard, though, that they have their roots in historico-cultural context. According to the theoretical model of the semiotic regulatory system proposed by Valsiner (2003, 2005, 2007), human beings are semiotically mediated, and cognition, affect and action form a complex and unified whole. In this model, "the role of language-mediated relating with the world is not the highest level in the semiotic mediation hierarchy – but an intermediate one" (Valsiner, 2003, p. 156). There are dynamic connections among the different levels presented in his model. The highest level (Level 4), the hyper-generalized affective field, includes duties, values and prejudices, and at this level verbal referencing disappears. This level regulates the other levels, including the physiological level (Level 0), in the flow of personal experiences.

In this sense, Valsiner (2005) claims that the hyper-generalized affective field (Level 4) is often the major goal of the cultural "channeling" efforts set in motion by diverse social institutions. Thus, through the action of complex and intricate processes, values end up playing a central role in the maintenance

of stability related not just to the self-system, but also to collective culture development. However, it is essential to stress that we consider the deep affective values as an important principle of stability directing the flow of experiences, and not as a static structure (Branco & Madureira, 2004).

Values have an important role in the maintenance of relative stability of both self system and collective culture. The collective cultural channeling of affects is an embodiment process with deep affective roots. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to affirm that the individuals feel (also at their physiological level (Level 0)) the traces of the cultural and institutional practices throughout their lives. In sum: faith, values, affection and emotional-charged self-awareness, therefore, do exert a powerful impact on the trajectories of self development, which are simultaneously affected by cultural channeling processes and the active, constructive role of each individual.

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