

# Counterresponse to Mark Kuras

*By Soren Ekstrom, Ph.D.*

Mark Kuras's response to my paper opens up many worthy areas of discussion and will hopefully encourage further dialogue in our community. So I am not going to agree or disagree with his well-stated views. Although we approach the issues of analytic technique, the meaning of neutrality, and the value of research from a different starting point, in the end we may very well agree much more than we disagree.

I would at this point like to clarify a few statements in my article that may have led to misinterpretation. Mark advocates for theory, theory that is anchored in depth psychology. I am not denying the value of theory-building. What I am saying has to do with what theory is based on: to be meaningful, it needs to refer as much as possible to the available research data. Depth psychology, be it in the shape of Jung's theory of archetypes or Freud's drive theory, was an interpretation of the data available at the time. (Jung did in fact criticize Freud for relying on old or insufficient data.) Much has happened since. When we articulate theory today, we need to include as much of the new data as possible, and we need to be willing to abandon theoretical stances that no longer seem to be supported by our own common observations and by research that may shed different light on them. Today's understanding of psychotherapeutic action and the functioning of the human brain is by no means seamless, but there is far more data available about memory and neural networks than when Freud, Jung, or Klein made their formulations.

This also means that we look at some data, like the results from numerous outcome studies, that do not address the specifics of analytic formulations. If this research refutes claims we have made by showing us that the results do not support them, we may want to take notice. I was not implying that the studies I mentioned in my article address the value of analytic formulations or describe the specifics of what happens in treatments. They do not.

There is, however, a difference between data that come from clinical experience and data that come from carefully designed research. I think it is fair to say that we have much more of the latter kind today than when the main tenets of depth psychology were formulated. In fact, I am suggesting that our clinical formulations, when contradicted by neurophysiological research data, find themselves on very thin ice and easily become exercises in fruitless and doctrinaire arguments.

The problem, then, is how to articulate the experience of several generations of analytic practitioners in the light of what we now know about human memory—and to do so without losing the essence of what has been learned by both analysts and patients. It is a daunting task, but I think we have contributions to make, even if they are modest, towards a fuller understanding of how healing occurs and the analyst's role in it.

Sometimes this task is complicated by what rivaling fields of study claim. Take, for instance, the idea of the self (or Self, as most Jungians prefer). For

the longest time and under the influence of attitudinal studies in social psychology, the self was assumed to be a conscious entity and the basis for a person's socially reinforced self-esteem (Hamachek, 1987). Many personality theories, including the theories of Carl Rogers (1959), were no doubt influenced by the then-prevailing ideas. And the fact that ego psychology became the focus among our Freudian colleagues fits into the same trend of ignoring further study of the unconscious.

The experience of generations of Jungian analysts contradicted this idea. Our observations indicated that a person's total cognitive resources were much greater than the person's actual consciousness or ego. As it turns out, many cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists now agree with us. I quote Joseph LeDoux (2002), of New York University's Center for Neural Sciences, in his most recent publication, *Synaptic Self*:

*Things we consciously know about who we are make up the **explicit** aspects of the self. These are what we refer to by the term **self-aware** and constitute what we call our self-concept; they are what the self psychologists [not to be confused with Heinz Kohut's formulations; a better characterization would be to refer to social psychology—SE] are interested in. The **implicit** aspects of the self, by contrast, are all other aspects of who we are that are not immediately available to consciousness, either*

*because they are by nature inaccessible, or because they are accessible but not being accessed at the moment. (pp. 27-28)*

Our data about an unconscious self, the Self, may have been less convincing, since it came from clinical experience and was intimately tied to the dyadic processes that occur in analysis. The observations were nevertheless repeated by many analytical psychologists. If our insistence on them is what Mark equates with "rigidity," we are in full agreement. In this instance, it appears that social psychologists overreached in their conclusions, and we had to wait for a long time to have our understanding confirmed.

However, cases like this one tell us very little about the value of particular analytic techniques, and I hope that in insisting that certain observations of ours are valid, we do not stop being interested in what is happening in research, both when it confirms our views and when it questions them.

## References

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