International Journal for Dialogical Science
Fall 2017 Vol. 10, No. 2, 85-105

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A SEMIOTIC-DIALOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL ACCOUNT OF SUICIDE

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Abstract. Research in suicidology has focused on the analysis of interindividual differences and has neglected the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of human experience. Suicidal behaviour must be understood in the complex convergence between personal, interpersonal, social and cultural elements. Every human action (e.g., suicidal behaviour) should be placed and conceived in continuity with the sociocultural world. Both societal discourses and personal meanings are constitutive elements of such experience. The representational systems shared by communities or groups are multiple resulting in diverse representations of suicide. In a dialogical self-system these social representations of suicide are personified by collective identity positions. Whenever an experiential moment activates the self-system dynamics, these sociocultural positions take their place in the intrapersonal dialogues constraining the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. In this sense, we suggest a semiotic-dialogical and sociocultural model of suicide, grounded on the dialogical self theory and the social representation theory.

Keywords: suicide, dialogical self, social representations, collective identity positions

In modern Western thinking, identity is conceived as an autonomous entity (i.e., stable centre of experience), independent (i.e., distinguished from Others) and endogenous (i.e., internal to the person) (Gonçalves, 1995, 2003). This perspective emphasizes the "exclusive separation" (vs. inclusive, see Valsiner, 1998, 2007) between the identity and the social surroundings, assuming a person's independence, self-determination, as well as the privacy of mental phenomena. Such exclusive separation

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means that either the environment is believed to unilaterally influences the individual or the individual is believed to unilaterally influence the environment.

Studying the individual person within this paradigm implies its isolation from relational context and its definition through its stable, unique and definite characteristics (Quartilho, 2006). Problems of the *psyche* are understood as pre-existing and therefore the aim of the research is usually to identify and categorize the discovered problems into a set of fixed categories or locate them in a coordinate system of stable dimensions (Walton, 2010). Following this line of thought, research on suicide has been dedicated, mostly, to the exploration of causality between a discrete entity (located in the suicidal person) and its behaviour. It has tried to identify demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education level, religion) and clinical variables (e.g., depression, anxiety, abuse of substances, traumatic events) common to individuals at risk for suicide to predict their behaviour (Everall, 2000). This analysis assumes a reversible conception of time and focuses on inter-individual differences, looking to suicidal behaviour as a linear manifestation of a demographic or psychological variable (or the interaction of these factors), but disconnected from their immediate contexts. Despite the relevance of identifying these factors or generalized patterns, a considerable and diverse group of authors has been alerting to the need to study and investigate the suicide in alternative ways to the dominant biomedical model (Fitzpatrick, 2011**;** Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010; Sarchiapone & D'Aulerio, 2015; White, 2012). The paradox between a long tradition in suicide research and the increasing incidence of this phenomenon seems to appeal to the development of different perspectives to understand and study suicidal behaviour (Arthi, 2008).

The postmodern movement has changed the way human phenomena are conceptualized and studied generating alternative conceptual frameworks. Its influence in psychology resulted in the development of new paradigms of which we highlight the social constructionism and the narrative perspective. Social constructionism posits that the understanding of psychological phenomena is not contained in the minds of individuals, but rather in the social processes, that is, in the relationships established between people through discursive practices (the focus shifted from the individual to the relationship). In this sense, the psychological processes can only be understood if they are contextualized and analysed in the light of the context and the relationships that the person is part of (historical and cultural positioning). There is no external and unique reality, pre-existent to the individual; instead the subjects themselves negotiate and actively co-construct the realities (i.e., meanings) to which they respond (relational construction of meaning). Central to this approach is then the process of assigning meaning to the experience. More than portray the "reality," assign meaning is a relational construction in which, through language, experience becomes intelligible to oneself and Others. The language is not restricted to a communication vehicle of a pre-

linguistic reality, rather is seen as constitutive of human experience (i.e., the words do things), as a joint action through which people create and experience the meaning of their social and psychological realities (Botella, 2001; Brockmeier & Harré, 2001; Gergen, 2000, 2009).

According to the narrative perspective, rather than a fixed and unchanging entity to be discovered, each person is like a story that is being told. It is through the narrative, as a product of storytelling about us and the Others and for us and for Others, that we construct and make sense of our experience(s) and ourselves—the identity as a narrative phenomenon (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001; Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sandelowski, 1991). This self-narrative is understood as a highly interactive phenomenon and as a dialogical co-construction between narrators and listeners (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). This reading emphasizes the active role of the individual in the construction of meaning for his or her personal existence, within a conversational relationship with Others. In this sense, several authors (e.g., Botella, 2001; Hermans, 2003; Ho, Chan, Peng, & Ng, 2001; Josephs & Valsiner, 1998; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007; Valsiner, 2004) argue that the minimum unit of psychological conceptualization is not the person as an isolated entity but the person-in-relationship.

In line with this, the concept of social representation, positioned at the interface between the psychological and the social, is of particular instrumental value. The study of social representations allows us to access the appropriation of external reality by the subject and simultaneously the process of psychological elaboration of social reality. The social representation of suicide, as a representation of the phenomenon (object) and of someone (subject), is a process of symbolization, interpretation and construction of meanings. These meanings result from an activity that turns the representation in a construction and an expression of the subject (Jodelet, 1989).

In this article, we integrate the dialogical self theory (DST) and the social representations theory (SRT) to suggest a semiotic-dialogical and sociocultural model of suicide, which assumes that human phenomena, such as suicide, consist of an active and intense relational co-construction of meanings (Gergen, 2000, 2009). The emphasis on interdependence (not to be confused with fusion) of the individual and social dimensions of subjective life, and on the central role of the person towards its ongoing (re)construction is, in our opinion, the greatest potential of this approach.

Research in suicidology has been somehow "entrapped" by theoretical and methodological constraints, leading to the neglect of the subjective and intersubjective elements of the human experience (Bell, Stanley, Mallon, & Manthorpe, 2015). Several authors argue for the need to change the way of studying or "making suicide" and recognize this change as a shift from explanation to understanding the phenomenon

(Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010; Lester, 2013). We will use the phenomena of suicide for the purposes of integrating DST and SRT.

Dialogical Self: Self as Multiple, Social and Contextual

DST conceives identity as a highly dynamic multiplicity of identity positions (*I*-positions), each representing a perspective or a voice on the current experience. Therefore, various narratives can emerge from different voices about the same experiential phenomenon. In this context, the notion of voice goes beyond the expression of a particular point of view on certain personal experiences (i.e., content) but also reflects, in every moment, the positioning of the person towards an audience. These different *I*-positions negotiate meanings (through dialogue) to make sense of the experiential flow, in an always unfinished process marked by novelty and need for change.

According to Hermans (2001*a*, 2001*b*, 2003), the dialogical self (DS), as a repertoire of multiple positions, comprises internal positions (i.e., those that are perceived as parts of the person, usually introduced by the personal pronoun ‘‘I’’) and external (i.e., those that are felt to be aspects of environment, but that the person identifies as belonging to him or herself, usually preceded by the possessive pronoun “*Mine*,” “*My*”). The subjective meaning of internal and external *I*-positions emerges from mutual reference; it is created in the dynamic interactions they establish over time with one another through dialogue. Thus, external *I*-positions consist of environmental aspects that are relevant to the individual from the perspective of one or more internal positions (e.g., “my son,” “my client”); likewise, the internal positions acquire their meaning through their relationship with one or more external position (e.g., ‘‘I as a mother,’’ ‘‘I as a psychiatrist,’’ respectively). Not only significant Others take place in the identity, but also the social groups to which the individual belongs (e.g., professional, political, religious, age, nationality, gender). Hermans and Kempen (1993) postulate that social communities have their own voice (i.e., a collective voice) that is able to tell stories that reflect the perspective of the community members on a wide variety of subjects from everyday life.

The human ways of *being*—living as divided between different contexts (sociocultural and temporal) and multiplied by the plurality of experiences in each context inevitably leads to the question: how are individuals able to orchestrate their “crowd” of voices to generate in every moment new and functional meanings, maintaining a sense of personal continuity? As an alternative to individualistic and static tradition, in which human psychological functions are understood as “given” or predetermined, in a dialogical perspective these functions refer to dynamic self-organized and self-innovative processes (Valsiner, 2002). These dynamic properties of psychological processes allow the person to make sense of the phenomenological variety (sensory, perceptual, emotional and cognitive) of his or her “here and now”

experience and simultaneously enable the person to adapt to changes in life situation (in terms of time and space), while maintaining a sense of personal consistency. Valsiner (2002, 2004) even claims that the structural flexibility of the DS (i.e., the permanent construction and reconstruction of relations between different I-positions) is its central quality, more than its multivocal and polyphonic character.

Identity is designed as a process of interaction between several voices, each one defending a particular point of view, but having the ability to change or develop when considering another voice(s)' perspective(s) (Hermans, 1996; 2001*b*; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). The construction of meaning about a life event is thus a negotiated narration process, a negotiation that takes place between the various perspectives presented as relevant to the phenomenon—in a narrate, appropriate and (re)narrate cycle (or positioning, counter-positioning and repositioning). In this sense, meanings are not preexisting, but emerge from a dynamic field of forces and counter-forces (e.g., tensions, oppositions, conflicts, integrations, creations) generated by—and acted on — dialogues between *I*-positions. These dynamics allow maintaining and updating the sense of personal identity (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Valsiner, 2002).

The DS operates not only through the construction of dialogical relations between different *I*-positions, but also through the continuous organization (i.e., construction and reconstruction) of the structure of the *I*-position repertoire (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Valsiner, 2002, 2004). The dialogical exchanges between different *I*-positions (and the consequent emergence of meaning) are made possible by the self-organization of these positions in a power structure, in which some positions have a temporary most influential status over the Others. The domain (or power), as intrinsic characteristic of the dialogue (i.e., when a voice, or a coalition of voices, talk, the other voices are temporarily silenced), works as an organizer of the plurality of meanings generated about the same experience. The prevalence of a meaning necessarily implies the neglect (although temporary) of alternative ones. To remain functional, this hierarchical system must be highly dynamic, and permanently subject and available for updates: dominant positions in a given time can easily migrate to a secondary role, and positions previously no significant can assume a more central and leadership role (Hermans, 1996).

Valsiner (2004, 2007) complements this approach by theorizing that the *I*-positions that prevail over the Others personify perspectives or voices that communicate meta-meanings or promoter signs (i.e., meanings with a high level of generalization). This means that the temporary domain of these *I*-positions' voice is associated with the fact that the meanings they construct when they dialogue with other I-positions —that we designate as argument, are the most relevant to the current experience. Also, according to Valsiner (2004, 2007), the process of synthesis and hierarchy of meanings (mediated by signs and guided by meta-meanings) regulates the flow of the vertical structure of *I*-positions (i.e., the positioning and repositioning) and provides integrity to

identity. Therefore, the structural flexibility of this plurality of *I*-positions is regulated by the existence of dominance dialogical relations, based on the confrontation between more or less relevant arguments, communicated by the positions, in relation to the current moment.

Collective voices take part in these dialogues and catalyse the construction of meaning in the deepest levels of self-narratives. These voices do not replace the creativity of the speaker (i.e., motivations, values, interests and individual points of view), but shape the words and the discourses produced by colouring the subjectively elaborated meanings, dialogically committing them with past, present and future audiences. At every moment, the set of possible identity positions (i.e., the polyphony) depends on the linguistic resources available in the sociocultural world in which the individual is located. It is the diversity of discourses, norms and practices offered by the different cultural voices—a *heteroglossic* world in Bakhtin's terminology (1981)—that allows the appropriation of different perspectives. As the individual is guided by culturally available meanings (e.g., transmitted by collective voices), sometimes his or her personal speech may resemble the more familiar or socially dominant voices. However, the mere reproduction of these meanings is highly unlikely, precisely because of the heteroglossia manifested in various social languages.

According to Hermans (2001*b*; Hermans & Kempen, 1993), these voices or collective *I*-positions form coalitions with personal voices colouring the meanings constructed in their relations. Therefore, even the said personal meanings are not built in the absence of social, historical and cultural constraints; on the contrary, these personal meanings are not only influenced, but may even be invalidated and suppressed by the collective voices that represent the social groups to which the individual belongs. Still, we (re)emphasize that the influence of collective voices in identity should not be understood as deterministic. The meanings are actively constructed and reconstructed by the author or actor of the narrative from a particular position (e.g., opposition, challenge, agreement, disagreement with the dominant collective perspective). From this position he or she enters into dialogue, and addresses or responds to the Others and the world (Skinner, Valsiner, & Holland, 2001).

Social Representations: Shared Semiotic Processes

According to SRT, we can only truly understand the way people think and act about a segment of reality (e.g., object, phenomenon, experience) if we take into account the dynamic relationship between the individual cognition and the knowledge shared by social groups of belonging (e.g., beliefs, values, ideas, practices). Unlike more traditional models in psychology, based on individualistic methodologies and in an epistemology that functionally separates the subject from the object, in this approach "there is no break between the outer world and the inner world of the individual, the subject and object are not essentially different" (Moscovici, 1969, p. 9).

A social representation is, by definition, "a form of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, with a practical objective, that contributes to the construction of a common reality for a social group" (Jodelet, 1989, p. 36). The representation is socially constructed and shared, through interactions and communication phenomena within a social group, justifying its social character. Its practical nature results from its role in regulating interactions, communication and social behaviour, thus taking a status of practical and social theory (Jodelet, 1989). SRT focuses on the analysis of the construction and transformation of social knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 1998; Marková, 2000). Social representations are: a) relational and dynamic organizations of knowledge and language shared by a group of individuals (Marková, 2000); b) dynamic sets that aim to guide behaviours and social interactions; c) both product and process: as product, they are the content (structure) that circulates as the real version, impregnating the speeches, images, opinions and attitudes; as process, they refer to the psychological and social mechanisms that underlie the formation, organization and processing of such content and their social functions and effectiveness.

Social representations can be found in the cognitive and symbolic activity of a group. They do not represent accurate copies of objects, but emerge from a process through which the individual not only reconstructs, but also creates and innovates shared knowledge, presenting the same reality in a new way (social, cultural and historically). The two processes that are at the origin of social representations—anchoring and objectification—highlight the interdependence between psychological activity and social conditions. In objectification, concepts are associated with images, making concrete previously abstract notions. Objectification is the process by which a representation crystallizes: abstract notions are converted into images whose inner content forms a figurative nucleus (through decontextualization) that transforms the images into elements of reality seen as natural (Moscovici, 2000). Anchoring is the process by which what is strange is turned into something familiar, that is, the unknown is anchored on existing representations. Thus, the new object of representation acquires sense, becomes known; what is new becomes an integral part. This representation, in turn, becomes part of the integrational system of the individual in the social world, because what is common to a group allows its members to share communication and influence the action (Moscovici, 2000). Objectification and anchoring are two deeply intertwined processes, concomitantly developed to give meaning to social representations.

Social representations perform two basic functions: a normative function of cognitive integration of novelty and interpretation of reality and a prescriptive function of guidance of the behaviour and social relationships (Moscovici, 2000). On the one hand, social representations transform what is strange in familiar, by adding novelty to existing knowledge structures endowed with some stability. This way, events of social life are classified in a grid or template of common interpretation, allowing members of a

group to act in accordance. This means that social representations constitute a consensual reality for the members of a group. On the other hand, they rule and guide the way people interact with the world and with Others, organizing the behaviour and the communication exchanges (Jodelet, 1989). It can be said that the social representations help individuals to orient themselves in their material and social universe, justifying their behaviour in relation to social norms as well as their integration into the social context (Abric, 1994; Vala, 1997).

According to Valsiner's (2003) semiotic-cultural perspective on social representations, they belong to the category of pre-adaptive means; they are semiotic mediating tools that guide the construction of meaning about everyday life events. This means that social representations are meaning complexes (macro-level) that function as cultural constraints of human conduct in its present—future temporal path. These macro-level meanings, or promoter signs, generate micro-level constraints that guide the thoughts, feelings and action processes of individuals (Tavares, Salgado, & Gonçalves, 2006; Valsiner, 2003). As they exist both in the communication system of the society and in the individual minds (as *I*-positions), they constitute themselves a link between the social and personal worlds (Valsiner, 2001, 2007). If we consider that suicide is intensely personal yet socioculturally situated, this emphasis on the confluence of individual and social elements conveyed by SRT makes it adequate for guiding the investigation of the cultural meanings of suicide (Arthi, 2008). Furthermore, such a reading of suicide, as a border phenomenon between the subject and the sociocultural and historical context, between the subjective and intersubjective, appeals to a dialogical perspective: the construction of meaning for suicide happens through the dialogues between I-positions located in the internal and external domains of the self-system.

A Semiotic-Dialogial and Sociocultural Model of Suicide

Identity is seen as historically and culturally constructed, which is not a property of individuals, but rather is constructed in discourse, shaped by a range of social, cultural and historical forces (Prokopiou, Cline, & Abreu, 2012, p. 496).

The self-organization of the self-system is based on a hierarchical operating system. In every experiential moment, a position (or a set of positions) occupies the "stage of the self-system" and brings arguments of relevance to the operational centre, which are gradually organized in arguments of higher abstraction order. These macro-level arguments, promoter signs in Valsiner's (2004), have properties of self-evaluation and self-regulation that ensure the stability of the current self-system structure until a new one is required. This organization is not the result of a commanding voice from a static and permanent higher order structure; it is a property that emerges from the combined dialogue between different *I*-positions. The functional character of this self-

organizing capacity is tested in moments that require a restructuring of the identity system and it is influenced by personal and contextual variables.

Assuming that human experiences have a dynamic and multifaceted nature, suicide can be thought of as a dialogical process of social and semiotic negotiation resulting from the continuous dialogues within the individual and between individuals. The understanding of what drives a person to assume an identity position, in this case ‘‘*I* as suicidal,’’ will have to be explored in these dialogues. To become ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ is what happens to us, or what we are, when this personal dimension takes the stage of dynamic interactions with the Others. This position emerges as a way of “making yourself” according to a particular constellation of positions at a given time in a personal space. It is a personal reality created under the influence of social prescriptions, based on a network of intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup relations. If we analyse suicide from this self-organization perspective, this behaviour emerges as an intentional and conscious act (contrary to neutral role that has been linked to the individual) that requires a previous work of projective imagination and narrative ownership (Hustvedt, 2013; Kaiser & Renberg, 2012). This work is based on the dialogues (relational dynamics) and arguments (personal, social, and cultural content) around the ‘‘*I* as suicidal.’’ We will now detail a proposal about the path that can lead the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ to a commanding voice of the self-system (Figure 1).

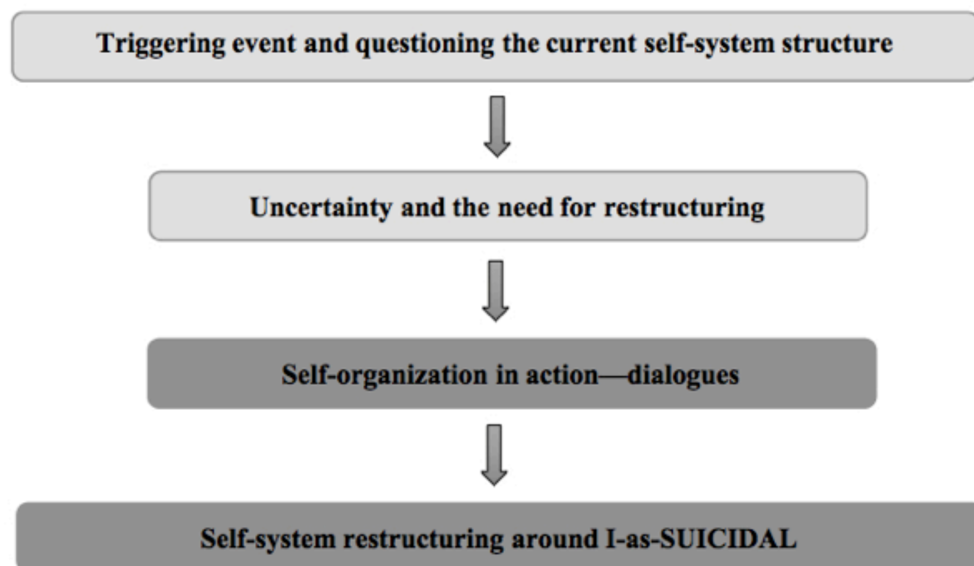

Figure 1. Schematic Summary of the Semiotic-Dialogical and Sociocultural Model of Suicide

We suggest that when a subject fails to make sense of an event, resorting to the set of meanings constructed by its present self-system, this event will challenge this systems' structure. The rupture in the temporary stability of the self-system will demand the construction of a new organization. To do so, the different *I*-positions enter dialogue and end up being reorganized around the ''*I* as Suicidal''.

Triggering Event and Questioning the Current Self-System Structure

A stressful situation, an unexpected or too demanding event with negative character that challenges our perceptions and expectations about ourselves, Others or the world, can become a triggering event (Rogers, Bromley, McNally, & Lester, 2007). Momentarily, this experience threatens the organization so far achieved, questioning the degree of adaptation of the existing identity structure. For example, let us think in a situation of unemployment as triggering event. In contemporary society, the position ''*I* as professional'' occupies a prominent place in the self-system (elaborated in Rosa, 2009). In this sense, a situation of unemployment will activate arguments around the loss of standards, security and stability and positions like ''*I* as incompetent,'' ''*I* as marginalized'' and ''I as excluded'' can emerge. Therefore, a previously central and functional *I*-position loses its main arguments and other arguments that emerge can push this position out of the central zone and lead it to a secondary role or a state of "hibernation" (Prokopiou, Cline, & Abreu, 2012).

This concept of hibernation reinforces the idea mentioned above that the positions that are not active (in a given time in the construction of self-meaning) do not disappear. They just leave the stage or the centre of the self-system and will now be "behind the curtains," but always remain available. In the example of unemployment, when the ''*I* as professional'' (a previously central *I*-position) undergoes a negative change, it becomes a hibernated *I*-position as a coordinated strategy to protect the system as a whole. Interestingly, when this hibernated *I*-position returns to the active centre, it is able to have a reused utility (Prokopiou, Cline, & Abreu, 2012).

Uncertainty and the Need for Restructuring

This threat to the previous identity structure and its organizational capacity will increase the levels of uncertainty and ambivalence, leaving the system vulnerable to surrounding information. Uncertainty is not in itself a negative experience. In fact, it is the permanent alternation between different levels of uncertainty (absence to maximum) that enables and feeds the meaning-making process (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010). However, when unresolved and sustained, it generates anxiety and insecurity (Hermans, 2007), because "the human being does not tolerate the uncertainty towards the future and searches for stability" (Rosa, Duarte, & Gonçalves, 2008, p. 166). In order to survive, the self-system has to risk leaving the actual unstable structure and look for a more viable and adaptive solution. To resolve uncertainty, to restore a functional

organization and to find a new structure that guarantees identity continuity, the system activates the dialogues between *I*-positions (Abbey, 2002; Hermans, 2001).

Self-Organization in Action—Dialogues

The meanings constructed in every experience of the individual are part of the DS in the form of arguments voiced by different *I*-positions. Throughout life we are exposed to different meanings related to suicide, which become part of the field of argumentative possibilities for *I*-positions to use. Each and all the meanings that we face have the potential to be aggregated in an identity dimension (in this case, ‘‘I as suicidal’’) (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). In different social and cultural contexts, and even at different times in history, these meanings can be more frequent, more dominant in the shared meanings' repertoire. According to Marbe's law there is a "direct relation between the frequency of an associative response and the speed of its utterance" (Dany, Urdapilleta, & Lo Monaco, 2014, p. 5), so the words that appear at first in our mind are more cognitively available. Therefore, a particular experience (i.e., a triggering event) can generate (in some people more than Others) suicidal thoughts, or in other words, can put in the "self-system's stage" *I*-positions that come into dialogue with the ‘‘I as suicidal.’’ In these dialogic and semiotic dynamics of self-organization, sociocultural *I*-positions, which personify social representations, play a central role.

Next, we will reinterpret a range of factors that have been identified as protective or as risk in relation to suicidal behaviour. According to the model presented here, these factors will be analysed in the dialogues (and arguments) between the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ and sociocultural *I*-positions, such as ‘‘I as religious’’ and ‘‘*My* Religion,’’ ‘‘*I* as member’’ of a community and ‘‘*My* community’’ (friends, neighbours), ‘‘*I* as cultural’’ and ‘‘*My* Culture’’ (dominant or minority) and the values of *My* Culture. It is important to note that the complexity and contextual dependence of these *I*-positions make it possible that the same position (in a different context) may convey arguments to try to silence (protective), or give voice (risk) to, the position ‘‘*I* as suicidal.’’ We decided to divide these arguments into two types, which overlap with two dimensions highlighted by other authors: type 1 - regulation (Durkheim, 1897) or social practice (Abric, 2001; Moliner, 2001) and type 2 - integration (Durkheim, 1897)[1] or social influence (Galand & Salès-Wuillemin, 2009). The first relates to the content, standards and societal habits that shape a person's relationship (through the desires and emotions) with the object of representation, in this case with suicide. The second refers to the relationship, since the self-referential meanings are constructed in interaction with Others, to which we are linked through social networks. Both positions that oppose or support the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ may employ arguments of type 1 and/or type 2 (Figure 2).

[1] Regulation is associated with an external constraining of the person by the societal norms; it has to do with obligations and responsibilities. Integration is related to the support or the feeling of support that a person receives from its social groups; it has to do with feelings of comfort and affiliation.

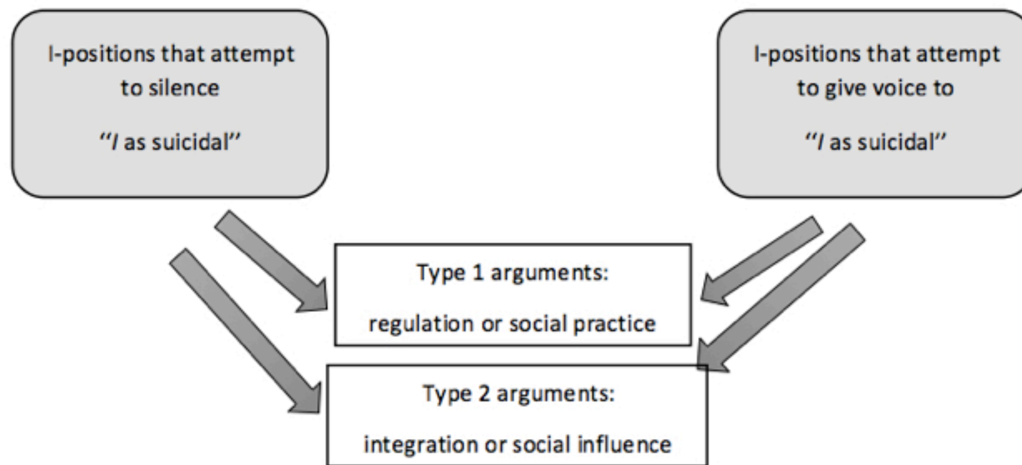

Figure 2. Types of Arguments Used by the Collective *I*-Positions

We will start with examples of type 1 arguments seeking to silence the ''*I* as suicidal'' (protective factors). In a person with an active religious involvement, the positions ''*I* as religious'' and ''*My* Religion'' will surely enter into a dialogue with the ''*I* as suicidal.'' In Christian doctrine (we are considering the Catholic religion for its emphasis in the Portuguese culture), human life is a central topic and suicide represents a violation of that principle. Therefore, these positions will use the argument of commitment towards certain central religious beliefs, which consist of meanings like "do not kill," "only God has the power to give and take life," "suicide is prohibited, it is a sin" (Dervic et al., 2004; Goldston et al., 2008; Nelson, Hanna, Houri, & Klimes-Dougan, 2012). Another group of positions that can verbalize such arguments are ''*I* as cultural'' and the values of *My* Culture. For example, in some cultures, these positions can activate the argument of the "shame" value, which consists of a sense of failure and disappointment in the face of expectations of Self and Others (individuals or society/culture as a whole). This argument may involve meanings as "the shame caused to the family, shame for being a coward or shame for having given up" (Goldston et al., 2008; Sarchiapone & D'Aulerio, 2015).

Also in relation to arguments that seek to silence the ''*I* as suicidal,'' we will now analyse type 2. The positions ''*I* as religious'' and ''*My* Religion'' may use the argument of the benefits for being an active element of the formal activities or religious rituals—broader social networks, more favourable perceptions of the quality of their support networks and a greater sense of belonging (Dervic et al., 2004; Goldston et al., 2008; Koenig, George, & Titus, 2004; Moxey, McEvoy, Bowe, & Attia, 2011; Nelson, Hanna, Houri, & Klimes-Dougan, 2012; Pescosolido & Georgianna, 1989; Robins &

Fiske, 2009; Stack & Lester, 1991). Along the same lines, the positions ‘‘*I* as member’’ of a community and ‘‘*My* community’’ may bring to arguments like “you are part of who we are,” “without you the group will not be complete,” “you’re not alone,” seeking to satisfy the basic need for belonging and social support (Durkheim, 1951; Heikkinen, Aro, & Lonnqvist, 1993; Joiner, 2005; Lester, 2001; Maimon & Kuhl, 2008; Trout, 1980; Van Orden et al., 2010). The same argument can be used by the ‘‘*I* as cultural’’ and the values of ‘‘*My* Culture’’ through, for example, the value of “collectivism” (Goldston et al., 2008; Sarchiapone & D’Aulerio, 2015).

We will now focus on the opposite pole, which includes the arguments used by other positions to give voice to the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ (risk factors), primarily through type 1 arguments. In certain cultural contexts, the ‘‘I as cultural’’ and ‘‘My Minority Culture’’ present powerful symbolic meanings such as “make your voice heard; manifest yourself; fight for the rights of disadvantaged,” which legitimize and promote the voice of the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ (Counts, 1988). We cannot ignore that we now live in a time of suicide bombers, murder-suicide, self-immolation. A break of continuity in culture, as a common element in the experience of suicide, might also validate the script of ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ as a dominant voice (Lakeman & Fitzgerald, 2008). The experience of emigration (acculturation) or belonging to a micro-culture of the country of origin (enculturation), represents the challenge of building a functional balance between the assimilation of the dominant culture and the retention of cultural specificity (Goldston et al., 2008). In this situation, the ‘‘*I* as cultural’’ and ‘‘*My* dominant culture’’ or ‘‘*My* minority culture’’ verbalize arguments that evidence its vagueness such as “I no longer know who I am,” “I need to redefine myself,” “I have to make sense.” In this sense, another position can assume the centrality of the system and the ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’ emerges as an option as valid as any other (Ball & Chandler, 1989; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, 2008; Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003).

Finally, we refer to the arguments of type 2 that give voice to the ‘‘*I* as suicidal.’’ Social groups (‘‘*I* as a member’’ of a community and ‘‘*My* community’’) and cultural groups (‘‘*I* as cultural’’ and ‘‘*My* culture’’) may, contrary to what was previously described, exert a regressive and oppressive function (Quartilho, 2006). The argument around the value “collectivism” can arouse to the awareness of racial oppression and discrimination, meaning non-integration (Goldston et al., 2008; Sarchiapone & D’Aulerio, 2015). On the other hand, when belonging to a group requires levels too high of commitment and loyalty, the person becomes unable to make decisions in crisis situations (positions refuse to dialogue) and merely follows predefined options (Quartilho, 2006).

Self-System Restructuring Around ‘‘*I* as suicidal’’

We argue that, as a result of these identity meetings, a new structure is developed around the ‘‘*I* as suicidal,’’ which now occupies a central role in the self-system. Suicide becomes a viable option, or ‘‘*I* as suicidal,’’ has voice and power, when the identity system is exposed to a triggering event that questions the adaptive nature of the current structure and thus activates self-organization strategies (Lester, 2013). The new structure enables to restore the narrative coherence and the temporal direction, that is, the continuity of identity (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Therefore, “the suicide [it is constructed as] a form […] of taking charge of his narrative and ending it” (Hustvedt, 2003).

Conclusion

The socioconstructionist perspective that promotes a holistic view of human experience and existence is directed to the search for interactions and meaning. It is important to note that this view does not reject the analysis of individual characteristics, but argues that they should be read in terms of their personal and social meaning. Accordingly, suicide does not seem reducible to the effect of certain attributes. Personal attributes and behaviour are permeated with meanings not decipherable from its mere measurement (e.g., effect size, proportion of variance). It is by understanding these meanings that human experience can be understood.

Suicide is now widely recognized as a phenomenon multi-determined by individual, psychological and sociocultural factors (e.g., Roy, 1985; Roy, Nielsen, Rylander & Sarchiapone, 2000). These factors have, however, deserved a distinct attention from the scientific community, with a greater emphasis on individual and psychological factors, either alone or taken in relation (Sarchiapone & D’Aulerio, 2015). It seems to us particularly important that research on suicide contemplates the active role that the Self can play in the decision to die by suicide, considering the identity multiplicity and relating it to the sociocultural influences that shape it. We believe that the conceptual framework presented here allows for some conceptual movement between the individual and social levels of analysis of human behaviour by integrating subjective and intersubjective dimensions. The future direction of our research line is to develop studies to study how the meaning of suicide is constructed. We intend to explore the meaning-making processes in the story of those who have already appropriated of suicide (suicide attempts), analysing the meanings (attitudes, values) conveyed by different sociocultural agents. This will be the starting point for the development of prevention and intervention strategies that consider the cultural specificities.

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