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# A Population Of Selves: A Therapeutic Exploration Of Personal Diversity

ERVING POLSTER, PH.D.



**A Population  
of Selves**



## Synopsis

Erving Polster--coauthor of the landmark work "Gestalt Therapy Integrated" -- greatly expands the knowledge and thinking on the development of self. A Population of Selves offers therapists new ways of thinking about the self as well as specific procedures to help patients realize a powerful and healthy sense of self: a goal at the very heart of the therapeutic process. In an innovative expansion of therapeutic theory, Polster shows how the human reflex to summarize and animate experiences serves as a natural springboard for the formation of selves. He enlarges the therapeutic aim of synthesizing alienated aspects of a person by offering a construct of heterogeneous characters within, each with its own place and voice. Every person is host to a population of selves: the infantile, the cunning, the rebellious, the lover. Using case examples from his own therapeutic practice, Polster illustrates eight major pathways for therapists to elicit new selves and to help their patients renew neglected or misunderstood selves. His approach ties self theory more closely than ever to actual therapeutic practice. He shows how to evoke selves through the use of story, and he explains how to tighten up therapy sessions to encourage the emergence of selves. Polster also suggests techniques aimed at improving contact among various selves, as well as between therapist and patient, and then augmenting strong contact with the powerful complementary use of empathy. Finally, he demonstrates how to guide patients through their alienated selves and, without robbing each of its identity, link these selves to create a greater sense of personal identity.

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