

### Heinz Kohut, 1913–1981



**A** *New York Times* review characterized Heinz Kohut as someone who had transformed a major tradition (1). This transformation was that of moving Freudian psychoanalysis into a new era of what many feel is a more humanistic approach. Kohut urged traditional psychoanalysis away from its preoccupation with sexual and aggressive drives along with the centrality of the Oedipus complex to a more open inquiry of the self, its goals and ambitions, and its interaction with others. Kohut's theme was the study of the self, and his writings came together into a separate area of psychoanalysis called self psychology. A true representative of American psychoanalysis and a president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Kohut was a Viennese who ran to the train station to wave goodbye to Freud as he departed for England. Kohut himself left Europe for Chicago, where he spent his entire professional life—first at the University of Chicago and then at the Institute for Psychoanalysis of Chicago. His major work was titled *The Analysis of the Self* (2), and his major focus was the study of narcissism or self-involvement. Kohut revolutionized the concept of narcissism, which had always been denigrated as self-infatuation,

and he showed how it could be and was transformed into a variety of experiences ranging from humor to creativity. More important, Kohut's ideas changed concepts in the conduct of psychoanalytic treatment and found a place in new thinking about religion. Scores of psychotherapists who were discontented with clinical Freudian analysis embraced the new ideas of Heinz Kohut. Indeed they truly seemed to spark a revolution in psychoanalysis, one that all psychiatrists should recognize and appreciate.

#### References

1. Edmondson M: I'm OK, and Then Some. *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, June 3, 2001, p 33
2. Kohut H: *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*. New York, International Universities Press, 1971

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