Another Voice and Position: Psychoanalysis across Civilizations

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Culture Psychology 2001 7: 311
DOI: 10.1177/1354067X0173004

Abstract This paper deeply appreciates the comprehensiveness of Hermans' (2001) theory of the dialogical self, his critiquing of Western cultural assumptions that pervade psychological (and psychoanalytic) theory, his emphasizing hybridization and globalization, and his trying to move psychology toward an interdisciplinary orientation. His theory would be significantly improved if he were to adopt much more of a historical dimension in his critique of psychological theory, in the very composition of the dialogical self, and in his theory of culture and globalization. The paper also critiques how some of the very philosophical/psychological assumptions Hermans criticizes unreflectedly enter into his own theory. All of this is to add another voice and position to his theory.

Key Words culture, dialogical self, globalization, history, hybridization

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In the spirit of Hubert Hermans' dialogical self, I would like to add another voice and position: that of a psychoanalyst. I have traversed many of the same slippery slopes of self and culture over the past twenty-plus years. I have worked psychoanalytically in India and Japan, and with Indian American, Japanese, Japanese American and Chinese American patients in New York City, as well as with those from a wide variety of ethnic and national backgrounds.

I admire Hermans' (2001) effort at comprehensiveness in developing a more complex view of both self and culture. His spatial dimension of dialogism makes complete sense to me as a playwright/librettist and psychoanalytic drama critic. His including nonverbal as well as verbal communication in the dialogical self, his attention to globalization and power relationships, and his emphasizing the process in acculturation rather than end-goals such as integration are all part of a broad, encompassing perspective.

Even more important is his directly addressing and critiquing central issues: the Western psychological theory of the self-contained individual; psychological universalism—the assumption that culture

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(*London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi*)
Vol. 7(3): 311–321 [1354–067X(200109) 7:3; 311–321; 018669]

simply shapes a universal psychological template; the problem of Cartesian dualism in seeing self and culture as discrete entities; limited views on the complexity of culture, especially with the effects of globalization; and moving psychology from a unitary field into an interdisciplinary orientation. I have had to come to terms with just these issues in two books (Roland 1988, 1996).

Hermans' endeavor is well in accord with the current agenda to shift from a modernist to a postmodernist emphasis on a decentered self and culture. Its theoretical net catches a greater variety of data than do many current approaches. Nevertheless, fruitful as it is, there are major theoretical holes in it that let important issues slip through. I think Hermans' theory needs some other voices and positions to make a more closely knit mesh.

Historical Perspective

Hermans' work would be significantly improved if he were to adopt a much more historical perspective on the self, culture and psychological theory. It is interesting to note that history is one of the only relevant disciplines not mentioned in his list for an interdisciplinary orientation. And in fact, sociohistorical change may well be the most difficult dimension for psychologists, and psychoanalysts as well, to incorporate into their thinking. Very few have attempted it.

I would like to start with the historical approach to psychological and psychoanalytic theory, which has characteristically been based on the assumption of the self-contained individual interacting with other such individuals. In psychoanalysis it is called the 'myth of the isolated individual mind' (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992), or a one-body psychology (Mitchell, 1988). This is no small matter. Hermans critiques this view, but, like Stolorow and Atwood, doesn't seem to appreciate how deeply rooted and pervasive it is in modern Western thought, and how it unreflectedly enters into one or another part of their theories.

It is a philosophical assumption that only began in Northern European countries with the Reformation, then continued with Social Contract philosophers, the Jurists, Enlightenment philosophers, liberal economic theorists and Romantic philosophers and writers. The culture of individualism has permeated modern Western thought in the Northern European / North American culture belt. It is also the underlying philosophical / psychological assumption behind most Western institutions (see Roland, 1996, pp. 5–7 for a fuller discussion of this with citations). It is out of this culture of individualism that all

of our contemporary psychological and psychoanalytic theories have emerged.

Closely related to the idea of the self-contained individual are other assumptions, such as rational self-direction and self-interest, and other philosophical orientations, such as Cartesian dualism and universalism. Hermans critiques Cartesian dualism and universalism, but the latter creeps into his work, as I shall show later. It is difficult even for a postmodern psychologist to get away from his or her own culture completely.

Psychoanalysis, as well as Hermans, has tried to move to a different psychological position in a variety of ways, such as its current relational focus with an intersubjective emphasis. But underlying cultural/philosophical assumptions are so strong that it still retains various aspects of the psychology of individualism. One assumption that is unreflectedly carried over by all of the Western psychologies, including that of Hermans, is that the experiential self is an *I*-self, no matter how many voices and positions it has. Yet psychoanalytic work with Indians and Japanese shows that their experiential self is rather a *we*-self, or an *I*-self far more contextually experienced in each dialogic relationship than is typical of Northern Europeans and North Americans. Hermans' integration of James and Bakhtin may well fit persons from the Northern European/North American culture belt, and the relational part of the dialogical self is certainly highly relevant to those from Asian cultures, but the implicit *I*-ness of Hermans' theory is too universalized.

From a historical approach to theory, I would like to move now to a discussion of a historical orientation to the self, something that psychoanalysis is more at home with but which is highly relevant to Hermans' dialogical theory. In their ongoing work, psychoanalysts deal all the time with a variety of voices, positions and identities as different aspects of the self, some of which live at peace with each other, others in some kind of partial accommodation, and still others in direct conflict. A number of these conflicted voices are played over and over again in patients' minds, as if from a cassette, but are unconsciously disconnected from earlier voices experienced throughout childhood from one or another parent, sibling or elder. These earlier voices are deeply internalized within the self. A simple example is a patient's extreme self-castigation that derives from his father's repeated earlier denigrations of him, the connection to which he is currently unaware of.

From a dialogical/psychoanalytic perspective, the self has a number of voices and positions, as well as internal dialogues and interactions,

layered from different stages of development. Some of these are more powerful and influential than others, and some are more or less unconscious in terms of influences past voices have on present behavior and attitudes outside of the person's awareness. Hermans would do well to incorporate into his theory of the dialogical self a place for differing valences and saliences of various voices and positions. All are not equal. He would also have to incorporate unconscious factors in the saliences of certain voices. Otherwise, he is unreflectedly falling back on the modernist tradition of Kant's rational autonomy, the conscious ability to regulate one's life by norms of one's own devising. It would belie one hundred-plus years of psychoanalytic insight into the limited nature of the rational mind. This is again what I mean by pervasive cultural / psychological assumptions unreflectedly creeping into theory.

The layered self also, obviously, applies to immigration, or even to those born in the host country with immigrant parents. Here, the earlier experiences of familial relationships, in dialogical terms the voices and positions of family members from their indigenous culture, become an integral part of a self that is later exposed through schooling, social relationships and work to very different cultural voices and positions. Anguish, conflict and confusion can easily arise in both the immigrant and second generation if they come into a host culture radically different from their own. No wonder second-generation Indian Americans refer to themselves as ABCD, American Born Confused *Desei* (Indians). But I have also seen this same layering of the self with different voices and positions arise in second-generation Albanian and Sicilian patients where the earlier internalized cultural / familial dialogues can be quite dissonant with those of the dominant ethos of American life.

There is still another application of this historical layering of the self. A person may come from a family, especially in the United States, where parents often have two very different cultural backgrounds: for example, Scandinavian and Puerto Rican in one case, German and Eastern European Jews in another. Conflicts and inhibitions may continue in the present that are unconsciously deeply rooted in these differing cultural / psychological scenarios that are part of the patient's earlier self.

This sociohistorical layering of the self can also be highly relevant to sociohistorical change within a society. It doesn't necessarily have to come from globalization, immigration, or such. One relevant example is the Women's Movement in the United States, which started in the 1960s, which made it possible for many women to pursue careers as well as marrying and having a family, something extremely rare before

that era. Psychoanalytic work revealed that one of the main sources of women's intense guilt over leaving their children was profound identifications with traditional mothers internalized into an earlier layering of the self; whereas their heightened anxiety over not handling their careers well was due to later adolescent and young adulthood opportunities, standards and ideals, with supporting voices from peers and colleagues in their more adult self. In the dialogical framework, it was the partial clash of earlier and later voices and positions within the self. Dialogical theory can easily add this important dimension of a historical layering of the self. Without this perspective, a great deal of the meaning of modern humanity's experiences and conflicts will be missed.

Dualism and Universalism

Hermans addresses both Cartesian dualism and universalism, two philosophical positions closely associated with the culture of individualism. He rightly critiques a major universalist position of self and culture theorists that the self is basically the same in humanity although shaped and influenced by culture. The problem, of course, is that the description of such a self is invariably that of the culture of the theorist. Is the self, then, only a varied amalgam of voices and positions however ordered by a central I, an I that is also culture-bound? This is a postmodern paradigm that is oddly enough quite similar to the Buddhist position of the self having no inherent, unchanging existence.

I readily agree with Hermans that culture is inside the self as well as out there. As a psychoanalyst who has worked with persons from different civilizations, I can also testify that all layers of the psyche are deeply influenced by culture. Does this mean, however, that there are no universals? Are we saddled with an extreme relativism? From a psychoanalytic perspective, I have found many categories to have universality, such as conscience, ego boundaries, developmental phases and stages, defense mechanisms, the primary process, self–object relationships, internal objects, and many more. Although these categories come from a Western psychoanalytic framework, they are quite relevant to understanding those from an Asian background. The problem, of course, is that the content, structure and norms of these categories are profoundly tied to Northern European / North American culture, and need to be recontextualized within the framework of one or another Asian culture. Moreover, they form very different gestalts and balances in different cultures (see Roland 1996, pp. 18–20).

It is interesting to note that Takeo Doi (1973, 1986), a Japanese psychoanalyst, first did a highly contextual analysis of the Japanese *amae* relationship (intense expectations and feelings of being dependent on another) and the Japanese dual-self structure, but then observed that these are also present in Euro-Americans, albeit in a much more attenuated way. Similarly, the Asian psychology of personal destiny that can be read through astrology, palmistry, psychics, dreams, and such, which has been deemed to be pure superstition by the rational, scientific West, exists as a kind of shadow in the Western counterculture. Hermans' theory of the dialogical self is itself an attempted universalism, albeit with more bend and flexibility to it, and with far less essentialism, than most other contemporary psychological theories.

Decentering of Culture

One can certainly agree with much of the emphasis that Hermans puts on globalization, with the varied voices and positions of different cultures affecting ever larger numbers of the world's population. New integrations are being made, which Hermans refers to as a hybridization of the self, and I refer to as an expanding self. He has certainly imbibed the work of both Foucault, in his stressing the importance of power relationships both between cultures (colonialism of one type or another) and within cultures, and many contemporary anthropologists who work on the contact zones between cultures and who emphasize the heterogeneity of major cultures.

A dialogical self tied to globalization is certainly relevant to a wide variety of people, ranging from artists who have lived in radically different cultures and incorporated different traditions into their identity and work, to students who study abroad, to the large urban educated middle and upper middle classes in India, now numbering around 150,000,000. Through Western-oriented education, constant contact with relatives and friends in one or another Western country, or through the internet and television, these people have varied voices and positions from the contemporary West as well as from traditional Indian culture (see Ramanujan, 1990, for radical differences between Indian and Western thinking). These multiple voices have made for many changes in Indian urban society, not the least of which are changing forms of arranged marriage: from the traditional, where the couple had no say in the marriage, to current marriage by introduction, where the couple may see each other over an extended period of time before making up their minds.

To make his point on globalization and the dialogical self, Hermans

dismisses radical cultural or civilizational differences, downplaying the importance of core cultures. In India alone, not to mention China, there are 700,000,000 people living in rural areas who are only minimally exposed to globalizing media and who are much more oriented toward a core though complex culture. Nor can globalization account for the 40,000,000 Hindus who participated in January 2001 in the Maha Kumbha Mela, a most important pilgrimage and religious event. At most, it accounts for a few English and American celebrities who attended and the attention it received in the Western media.

Hermans asserts his agreement with Wilkinson (1995) that there is only one global civilization today that has subsumed all others. This is the weakest part of Hermans' theory, and one that partially undermines his work. (See Huntington's [1996] highly recognized work for a very different analysis of the relevance of civilizations in today's global world.)

Hermans' dismissal of the work of Markus and Kitayama (1991), Shweder and Bourne (1984), Marsella (1985), Triandis (1980) and others as too dichotomous, as being too governed by a Cartesian dualism of the 'West against the rest', is really a continuation of his agenda to flatten out radically different cultural / psychological worlds. However, inter-Asian analyses (Roland, 1988) and analyses of the self in two Muslim societies, Indonesia and Morocco, as compared to each other and to contemporary Western psychology (Geertz, 1973) have indicated that radically different cultural / psychological worlds do exist. In fact, the dialogical self in globalization cannot be really understood unless one takes these profound civilizational / psychological differences into account.

I have seen this in a number of instances, both in working with East Asian and South Asian patients, and from a monthly discussion group with Asian American Mental Health Professionals on 'Cultural Issues in Psychoanalytic Theory and Therapy'. Just the other day in this discussion group, a Japanese woman presented her thoughts on 'Japanese Implicit Communication'. She has lived in New York City for six years with her Japanese husband, speaks English relatively fluently, has completed a Masters Degree in educational psychology at New York University, is seriously taking ballet lessons, and is seeing an American psychotherapist. She is certainly an example of the hybridization of different cultural voices and positions in the self that Hermans writes about.

However, her presentation was on the profound differences in communication she has observed between herself as a Japanese and Euro-Americans. It is not simply a question of gestural nonverbal versus

verbal communication, but rather of profound differences in listening. Japanese are far more oriented toward innuendoes, toward listening to what is not being said, and toward seeing a person in his or her total interpersonal context rather than as a more discrete individual. She cited the translation of a haiku poem: 'In an old pond a frog jumped in. Then there was silence.' In Japanese, the last sentence is omitted because it is implicitly assumed, something that Euro-Americans would not be attuned to. Interestingly enough, a highly Westernized Turkish graduate clinical psychology student from Istanbul easily empathized with the presentation, citing her own negative reactions to explicit American verbal communication. You don't verbalize what is assumed or known by the other.

This simple example has important ramifications for Hermans' dialogical theory of the self. First, it is a question not only of incorporating different voices and positions into the self, but also of different ways of listening to and hearing such voices. This dimension of subjectivity seems to be missing from dialogical theory and is related to the experiential *I* and *we*-self. Second, while this Japanese woman certainly illustrates Hermans' notion of hybridization, this has to be balanced by profound civilizational/psychological differences from Euro-Americans in her way of communicating. Globalization and civilizational differences, or core cultures, are in a dialectic with each other. To ignore either side of the equation or their interactions is to understand only partially what is transpiring.

Hermans also raises important issues on acculturation. I can certainly second his critiques of universalizing the acculturation process, assuming it is the same for everyone and that everyone comes with the same psychological makeup. I can further agree that the process of acculturation with its multiple negotiations and decisions is more important than an endpoint of integration. The last has to be questioned as there is always the issue of how much of the indigenous self is kept or disavowed in relationship to a newer self in the eventual makeup of a bicultural self. This is particularly true when a person immigrates from a different civilization. Here, Hermans subtly expresses his dismissal of radical cultural differences when discussing problems Indians have in the United States, mainly citing their colonial history.

I have worked in psychoanalytic therapy with a large number of Indian men and women in the United States. While colonial/psychological issues enter into their acculturation here, much more in men than in women, the major inner conflicts revolve around the drastic

dissonances between Indians and Euro-Americans in values, communication, ways of relating, child-rearing and even ways of being. I will just cite one of a number of examples.

In Indian Americans as well as other Asian Americans, a major aspect of their indigenous self is to maintain and enhance the esteem of others, while expecting full reciprocity in their hierarchical relationships. In American work situations where there was clear evidence of exploitation from a Western contractual standpoint, these Indians, and an East Asian too, reacted with anger not out of a feeling of exploitation and inequality, as I and other Euro-Americans would have, but rather because they were not being respected. In other American hierarchical relationships, Indians and East Asians have all voiced the hurt they experience from the forthright criticism characteristic of American superiors. For Asians, issues of esteem are far more central than for Euro-Americans.

Before turning to Hermans' agenda for future research, a dialogical theory of the self must also take into account the spiritual self. For those on a spiritual path, a dialogical self is relevant to a variety of spiritual practices, particularly those oriented toward God (Rizzuto, 1979), or various gods and goddesses, as well as relationships with various spiritual teachers. On the other hand, the realization of the spiritual self transcends the dialogical self. This is expressed in the Hindu Vedantic dictum that *Atman* (the individual soul) equals *Brahman* (the Godhead), and the Buddhist experience of emptiness, a powerful ground of being.

Concerning Hermans' agenda for future research, rather than creating a dichotomy between core and contact zones where the former is dismissed, it would be much more fruitful to see them in a dialectical relationship: how the core civilizations affect the contact zones of globalization, and how globalization changes the core. Secondly, one must evaluate the globalizing influences of the internet and mass communication in terms of the valences they have with other cultural values, and again how they are both assimilated by and change the core culture (see Singer, 1972). Thirdly, in a world fraught with rapid social change, 'uncertainty' seems too mild a word. Identity conflicts and anxiety seem more to the point, as well as a self expanding from the incorporation of new voices and positions. A Turkish graduate student was surprised when her Masters thesis data showed that those college students who incorporated more Westernizing influences expressed greater inner conflict than those who remained more traditionally Turkish. She shouldn't have been.

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Biography

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