

**DIALOGICALITY IN FOCUS:  
CHALLENGES TO THEORY,  
METHOD AND APPLICATION**

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*Chapter 8*

**INNOVATIVE MOMENTS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY:  
DIALOGICAL PROCESSES IN DEVELOPING  
NARRATIVES**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents an overview of the research programme that is being developed in our research centre addressing narrative change processes in psychotherapy. Our departing point was the narrative metaphor of psychotherapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Bruner, 2004; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995; White & Epston, 1990) and the emphasis on the narrative construction and re-construction of the self (Bruner, 1986, McAdams, 1993, Sarbin, 1986), which assumes that clients transform themselves through the stories they tell – to themselves and to others. We also proceed from the idea that self-narratives entail particular dialogical processes that can become visible or be enhanced in the psychotherapeutic setting. Furthermore, by adopting this dialogical and narrative standpoint, therapists and clients can use this inner multiplicity as an opportunity for identity changes.

While this general metaphor of ‘clients as storytellers’ has framed our work in psychotherapy research, the re-authoring model of White and Epston’s (1990; see also White, 2007) and the dialogical perspective of Hermans and collaborators (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004) have been shaping our conceptual lenses in the study of change in therapy.

In this chapter we elaborate upon a central concept of our research: the concept of *innovative moments* (IMs, also named as *i-moments* in previous publications), drawn from White and Epston’s (1990) notion of ‘unique outcome’ and discuss the dialogical dynamics that are involved in IMs emergence and development in therapy.

## CHANGE AS NARRATIVE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF

Over the last decades, several authors within the narrative and dialogical fields have been acknowledging the centrality of ‘telling stories’ in human lives (e.g., Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 1993). Self-narratives are the result of the human effort to create meaning from our experience in the world and to have our perspectives validated by others, to whom we are dialogically intertwined (Gonçalves, Matos & Santos, 2009). The construction of meaning through self-narratives involves a process of interpretation, selection and synthesis of life experiences (McAdams, 1993). Complex elements of episodic memory, personal and social expectations, emotional and interpersonal experiences are selected and integrated into a personal account in the form of a story. The story is performed to others in the specific act of telling it, simultaneously projecting a certain present view into the future. The segments of the experience that are integrated in our self-narrative frames are shaped by our prior salient and more familiar experiences, both with social others and with ourselves. Additionally, the stories we tell are also constrained by the interlocutor and the context (for example, our self-narratives vary according to the social role we are assigned in a given context).

Therefore, given the multivocal nature of these sources of narrative production (see Hermans, 1996), self-narratives involve processes of dialogical negotiation, disagreement and conciliation between self and other (this ‘other’ can be specific social others, broader cultural messages and prescriptions, or even other parts of oneself).

Hence, the process of narrating a story pictures the self, as narrator, in dimensions that go beyond the narrated content. Self-narratives present the possibility of simultaneously revealing our authorship – by the way we view ourselves – and disclosing our position in the world – by the way we present ourselves to others (Wortham, 2001). As Hermans (1996) claims, this means that the self is simultaneously embedded in the content of the story and the act of telling it to another person. According to some authors (Hermans, 1996; see also Sarbin, 1986), this dual feature of agency and positioning of the self – both as an author/narrator and a social actor – is critically embedded in the unfolding narrative process, and it is through this process that self can be transformed.

According to the re-authoring model of White and Epston (1990), clients frequently seek therapeutic help when the self has lost its ability to flexibly interpret the world, becoming trapped within redundant forms of meaning-making that are no longer capable of incorporating the diversity and multiplicity of lived experience. Clients become entrapped in ‘problem-saturated stories’ (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) – that is, narratives that dominate and minimize the possibilities of creative and flexible meaning, and thus become problematic.

These all-encompassing stories usually favour one perspective over multiple others (being more monological than dialogical; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995), and tend to be fixed around a single dominant problematic theme (see Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella, 2006; Santos & Gonçalves, 2009). As a consequence they constrict personal adaptability and undermine other possibilities for thinking and acting (Gonçalves et al., 2009). For example, a client seeking therapy in order to deal with daily anxiety and panic attacks, may narrate several stories in the session that illustrate how he or she is too afraid to engage independently in everyday life activities, always needing to be taken care of by other members of the family.

In this case, fear is the theme of the problematic self-narrative and avoidance behaviours appear as compliance with the problem's rule.

Congruently, therapy can be an opportunity for gaining awareness of the constraining power of these problematic self-narratives and developing alternative, more flexible ones. Following White and Epston (1990):

“when persons experience problems for which they seek therapy, (a) the narratives in which they are storying their experience and/or in which they are having their experience storied by others do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and (b), in these circumstances, there will be significant and vital aspects of their lived experience that contradict these dominant narratives.” (p. 40)

Thus, with the acknowledgement that there are always details of lived experience not assimilated by the problematic self-narrative, the therapist's action in re-authoring therapy should lead to the search for these opposing aspects or 'unique outcomes' in the client's life. According to White and Epston (1990), the concept of unique outcome refers to all details outside the problematic self-narrative that appear as exceptions to the problem's prescriptions and an attentive therapist would be listening to them within the stories brought by their clients. In the above example, our client that is currently consumed with panic attacks can remember a situation in the past when he or she was able to leave home alone and did not experience any panic attack as predicted (i.e., a unique outcome towards fear). White and Epston (1990) have argued that:

“As unique outcomes are identified, persons can be encouraged to engage in performances of new meaning in relation to these. Success with this requires that the unique outcome be plotted into an alternative story about the person's life.” (p. 41)

Along these lines, by bringing the client's awareness to these exceptional moments opposing the power of the problem, therapy can introduce novelty in meaning-making and, thus, create opportunities for the emergence of new self-narratives (White, 2007). Social validation (by the self, the therapist, meaningful social others) is essential in the development of the new self-narratives since narratives are always performative acts and, as such, produce relational results and new lived realities to which, in turn, we must reinterpret and adapt to.

When we began our research project, we directly took the notion of 'unique outcome' to analyse data but our terminology evolved along with our findings (Gonçalves et al., 2009). We now prefer the notion of IMs for two main reasons: first of all, 'unique' might convey the misleading idea – for readers unfamiliar with the re-authoring model – of rare experiences appearing outside the problematic rule; however, these exceptions occur quite frequently in therapy, even in unsuccessful cases. Secondly, the term 'outcomes' stresses results or outputs and, as we shall argue, these innovations reflect a developmental process building up towards a given outcome at the termination of therapy (that traditionally is classified into good or poor outcome). It is because we are more interested in the developing nature of narrative transformations in therapy that we favour the notion of IMs over unique outcomes.

## INNOVATIVE MOMENTS AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

In our initial studies of re-authoring therapy with a sample of women who were victims of domestic violence (Matos, Santos, Gonçalves & Martins, 2009), we inductively identified five categories of IMs: ‘action’, ‘reflection’, ‘protest’, ‘re-conceptualisation’ and ‘performing change’ IMs (Gonçalves et al., 2009). We will now present these categories, illustrating them with clinical vignettes. In each example, an IM is identified according to the problematic self-narrative specific to the case<sup>1</sup>.

*Action IMs* are events when the person acted in a way that is contrary to the problematic self-narrative.

Clinical vignette 1 (problematic narrative: agoraphobia)

Therapist: Was it difficult for you to take this step (not accepting the rules of “fear” and going out)?

Client: Yes, it was a huge step. For the last several months I barely went out. Even coming to therapy was a major challenge. I felt really powerless going out. I have to prepare myself really well to be able to do this.

*Reflection IMs* refer to new understandings or thoughts that undermine the dominance of the problematic self-narrative, sometimes involving a cognitive challenge to the problem or cultural norms and practices that sustain it. In this sense, reflection IMs frequently assume the form of new perspectives or insights of the self, somehow contradicting the problematic self-narrative.

Clinical vignette 2 (problematic self-narrative: depression)

Client: I’m starting to wonder about what my life will be like if I keep feeding my depression.

Therapist: It’s becoming clear that depression has a hidden agenda for your life?

Client: Yes, sure.

Therapist: What is it that depression wants from you?

Client: It wants to rule my whole life and in the end it wants to steal my life from me.

*Protest IMs* involve moments of critique, confrontation or antagonism towards the problem (directed at others or at oneself), its specifications and implications or people that support it. Opposition of this sort can either take the form of actions (achieved or planned), thoughts or emotions, but it necessarily implies an active form of resistance, repositioning the client in a more proactive confrontation to the problem (which does not happen in the previous action and reflection IMs). Thus, in this type of IMs we can always distinguish two positions in the self (implicit or explicit): one that supports the problematic self-narrative and other that challenges it; in these moments the second position acquires more power than the first.

Clinical vignette 3 (Problematic self-narrative: feeling rejected and judged by her parents)

Client: I talked about it just to demonstrate what I’ve been doing until now, fighting for it.

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<sup>1</sup> These clinical vignettes were based on Gonçalves et al. (2009).

Therapist: Fighting against the idea that you should do what your parents thought was good for you?

Client: I was trying to change myself all the time, to please them. But now I'm getting tired, I am realising that it doesn't make any sense to make this effort.

Therapist: That effort keeps you in a position of changing yourself all the time, the way you feel and think.

Client: Yes, sure. And I'm really tired of that, I can't stand it anymore. After all, parents are supposed to love their children and not judge them all the time.

*Re-conceptualisation IMs* are closer to stories due to their time sequencing nature. In these types of narratives there is a personal recognition of a contrast between the past and the present in terms of change, and also the personal ability to describe the processes that lead to that transformation. It is because the person is capable of describing the processes underneath the achieved changes – through a meta-reflective level – that these IMs go further than action, reflection and protest. Not only is the client capable of noticing something new, but he or she is also capable of recognizing him or herself as different when compared with a past condition, due to a transformation process that happened in between. Thus, they always involve two dimensions: a) a description of the shift between two positions (past and present) and b) the transformation process that underlies this shift.

Clinical vignette 4 (Problematic self-narrative: domestic violence and its effects)

Client: I think I started enjoying myself again. I had a time...<sup>2</sup> I think I've stopped in time. I've always been a person that liked myself. There was a time... maybe because of my attitude, because of all that was happening, I think there was a time that I was not respecting myself... despite the effort to show that I wasn't feeling... so well with myself... I couldn't feel that joy of living that I recovered now... and now I keep thinking "you have to move on and get your life back".

Therapist: This position of "you have to move on" has been decisive?

Client: That was important. I felt so weak in the beginning! I hated feeling like that... Today I think "I'm not weak". In fact, maybe I am very strong, because of all that happened to me, I can still see the good side of people and I don't think I'm being naïve... Now, when I look at myself, I think "no, you can really make a difference, and you have value as a person". For a while I couldn't have this dialogue with myself, I couldn't say "you can do it" nor even think "I am good at this or that".

The final category is *performing change IMs*. They refer to new aims, projects, activities or experiences – anticipated or acted – that become possible because of the acquired changes. Clients may apply new abilities and resources to daily life or retrieve old plans or intentions postponed due to the dominance of the problem.

Clinical vignette 5 (Problematic self-narrative: domestic violence and its effects)

Therapist: You seem to have so many projects for the future now!

Client: Yes, you're right. I want to do all the things that were impossible for me to do while I was dominated by fear. I want to work again and to have the time to enjoy my life with my children. I want to have friends again. The loss of all the friendships of the past is something that still hurts me really deeply. I want to have friends again, to have people to talk to, to share experiences and to feel the complicity of others in my life again.

<sup>2</sup>“...” - stands for a pause in the conversation.

According to Bruner (1986), narratives always imply two landscapes: on the one hand, there is the ‘landscape of action’ that refers to who the actors are, what actions are taking place, and what setting or scenario is framing the development of the plot. On the other hand, there is the ‘landscape of consciousness’ that refers to what the actors know, feel, think, value or plan. If we take Bruner’s two dimensions, we could clearly say that action IMs belong to the ‘landscape of action’ while reflection IMs belong to the ‘landscape of consciousness’, each being “pure” representatives of that particular dimension. Protest IMs, in turn, can occur in one landscape or the other, or even have elements from both; likewise, performing change can be situated at both landscapes, since they can refer to new feelings or thoughts (‘consciousness’) and also actions and plans (‘action’) triggered by change. Re-conceptualisation IMs, as they involve a meta-reflective level, usually combine elements from both landscapes, integrating them.

### **Levels of Development in Narrative Innovation**

In recent works (Ribeiro, Bento, Salgado, Stiles, & Gonçalves, in press; Ribeiro, Bento, Gonçalves, & Salgado, 2010), we have been trying to understand the possible role of IMs in therapeutic development with the notion of change as a multilevel process. This is inspired in the work of Fogel, Garvey, Hsu and West-Stroming (2006) that use this idea in the study of early dyadic mother and child interaction. These authors depart from the notion of ‘frame’ as their observation unit. Frames are “segments of co-action that have a coherent theme, that take place within a particular location (in space or in time), and that involve particular forms of mutual co-orientation between participants” (Fogel, Garvey, Hsu & West-Stroming, 2006, p. 3). These authors distinguished two typical frames: the ‘guided object frame’ (when the mother is guiding the play with the child through the use of objects) and ‘the non-guided object frame’ (when the child picks the toy and starts playing with it autonomously, without the adult’s help). When studying the mother and child interaction, they noticed changes at three levels, each with different implications. A ‘level 1 change’ relates to a “natural” variability in the way mother and child play (on one day mother and baby can be playing with a ball and on the next day with a doll, but the ‘guided object frame’ is similar, since they maintain identical gestures and games towards the object). A ‘level 2 change’ happens when an innovation appears within the segment (within the ‘guided object frame’, the child, for the first time, throws the object to the ground and the mother picks it up). Finally, a *level 3 change* implies a clear developmental change (this can occur if, following our example, the child starts playing a new game of throwing and reaching a toy, this time without the help of the adult, repeating it over time and stabilizing a ‘non-guided object frame’).

Applying these three levels to psychotherapeutic change, we could say that, clients enter therapy with problematic self-narratives (White & Epston, 1990), in which a redundant theme is repeated over and over again, despite the possibility of telling and storying different events or situations (a “natural” variability equated to level 1 changes). For example, in depression, there is an enduring theme of hopelessness and helplessness in the client’s problematic self-narratives, while in anxiety disorders, danger and avoidance constitutes the rule or the plot connecting the stories together. Once in a while, something different emerges in the stories told during therapy as an exception to the problematic rule; that is, an IM (paralleled to level 2 changes). For example, the client has a different emotional experience that was not



congruent with her or his expectations concerning the problem or plans, something divergent from the boundaries and power limitations set by her or his difficulties. If these innovations are noticed, elaborated and valued as something “interesting” and “worthwhile” by therapist and, more importantly, by client, they can lead to enduring developmental transformations (level 3 changes). We parallel level 3 changes in psychotherapy to the development of a new self-narrative, through the elaboration of IMs that emerge. We will later also discuss the processes that allow the elaboration of changes from level 2 to level 3 and also how this process can be undermined, leading to the maintenance of the problematic narrative.

## DESCRIBING THE INNOVATIVE MOMENT CODING SYSTEM

The five types of IMs presented above were systematised in the *Innovative Moments Coding System* (IMCS; Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Matos, Santos & Mendes, in press), a qualitative method applicable to various research projects, from single cases to samples from different therapeutic models and even interviews about problems outside psychotherapy. The application of the IMCS requires at least two trained coders. Their training requires the familiarisation with the relevant theoretical notions and coding procedures, through several training exercises. We have structured the training in order to develop the various skills required for the methodological application of IMCS.

Then, these two coders engage independently in an initial reading/listening/visualisation of the materials (sessions or interviews) in order to be familiarized with the problems under analysis and their development. Afterwards, the coders meet in order to discuss and agree in terms of what the problematic self-narrative is and the different dimensions that it involves (personal, interpersonal, professional, etc). A list of problems is, then, consensually elaborated in close approximation to the client’s self-narrative (in terms of words, expressions, metaphors). The following independent identification of IMs departs from this first step. IMs are always identified in their relation to the previously/initially identified problematic self-narrative and it takes into consideration the specificity of the problem: for example, the act of “*walking away from the situation*” can be regarded as an IM in relation to a problem of domestic violence; alternatively, in a different case, it can be part of the avoidant behaviour that sustains a panic disorder.

Each session is analysed independently by each coder, according to three steps that result in three IM indexes (for further details, see Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Matos et al., in press):

1. Identifying IMs and defining their onset and offset in the session. The *temporal salience* of IMs is then, computed, as the percentage of time (in seconds) occupied by each IM. We consider that the duration is a preferred measure to the frequency of IMs since it reflects more closely their narrative elaboration. Several indexes of IM temporal salience can be computed: we can have an interest in computing the temporal salience of each type of IM in each session or the IM temporal salience for the entire case (as the mean score of IMs’ temporal salience in all sessions).
2. Categorizing IMs in terms of the five types (Action, Reflection, Protest, Re-conceptualisation and Performing Change).

3. Identifying who elicited IMs, i.e., who was responsible for their *emergence*. There are mainly three possibilities: a) the IM was explicitly produced by the therapist (through a question or commentary about the client), being accepted and further elaborated by the client; b) the therapist implicitly triggers or facilitates a client's subsequent IM, through an indirect form (asking, for example: *What have you learned from this experience?*); or c) the IM emerges spontaneously from the client, without therapeutic guidance. The decision of which of these three possibilities applies to each IM is performed after the other two indexes are addressed.

## MAJOR FINDINGS OF IMS' RESEARCH PROJECT

Since the coding of IMs involves the analysis of each session in a therapy case, second by second, we have been working with relatively small samples (contrasting successful and unsuccessful cases) or conducting intensive case-studies. Up until now, our major findings derive from one sample of narrative therapy with women who were victims of domestic violence (N=10 participants; Matos et al., 2009), emotion-focused therapy (EFT) with depressed clients (N=6 participants; Mendes, Ribeiro, Angus, Greenberg, & Gonçalves, in press) and client centred-therapy also with depressed clients (Gonçalves et al., in preparation). Additionally, several case-studies from different therapeutic orientations have also been studied at a more microanalytic level (Gonçalves, Mendes, Ribeiro, Angus, & Greenberg, in press; Ribeiro, Gonçalves & Ribeiro, 2009; Ribeiro, Gonçalves & Santos, in press; Santos, Gonçalves, Matos, & Salvatore, 2009; Santos, Gonçalves, & Matos, 2010).

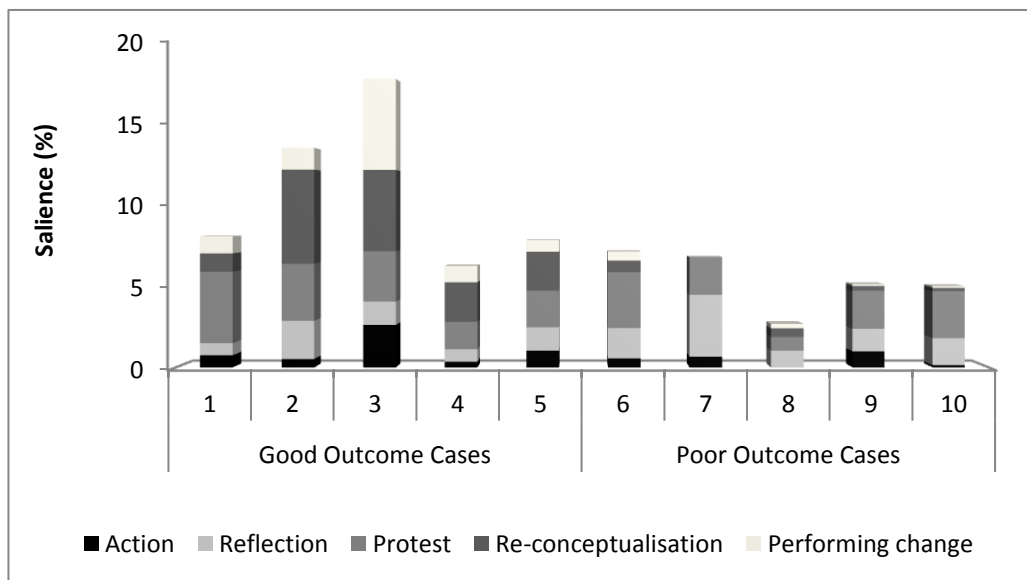


Figure 1. Successful and unsuccessful cases in narrative therapy.

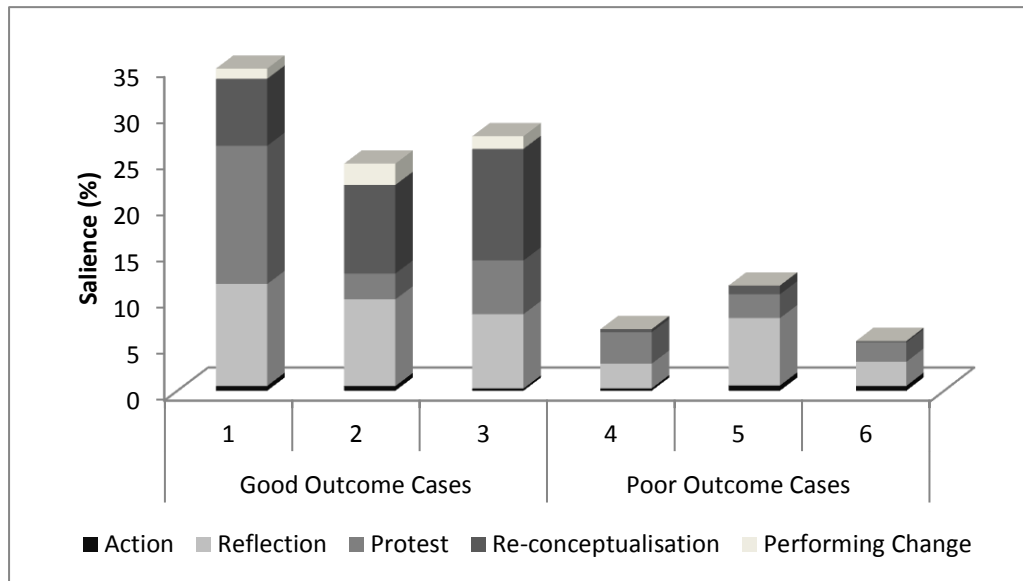


Figure 2. Successful and unsuccessful cases in EFT.

We will proceed now to an overview presentation of the EFT and domestic violence samples findings, which are also congruent with what we have found in several case-studies (Gonçalves, Mendes, Ribeiro, Angus & Greenberg, in press; Ribeiro et al., 2009; Ribeiro, Bento et al., in press; Santos et al., 2010; Santos et al., 2009). These studies contrasted groups with differential therapeutic outcomes - successful or unsuccessful - distinguished through the assessment of symptoms carried out at the beginning and end of therapy. The following figures illustrate our main findings in the narrative sample (in Figure 1) and in the EFT sample (in Figure 2).

A first look at these figures shows that the overall temporal salience of IMs is higher in successful cases when compared to unsuccessful ones. Nevertheless, IMs also appear in unsuccessful cases. A closer look shows us that re-conceptualisation and performing change IMs, while present in the successful groups, are almost absent in the unsuccessful samples (in EFT performing change IMs are completely absent). These findings led us to enquire about the processes that generate these different outcomes and the role that re-conceptualisation and performing change seems to play in this development. We will later return to this issue.

We will now focus on a more process-oriented view through the analysis of two contrasting cases of narrative therapy, presented in Figures 3 and 4, which represent prototypical cases of successful and unsuccessful therapy. These figures display the evolution of the several types of IMs in therapy, on a session-by-session basis (plus the follow-up interview at 6 months after the end of treatment).

In Figure 3, which represents a depiction of IM development in a successful case, we can observe an increasing tendency of IMs temporal salience that appears from the beginning of therapy. If we look at session two, in particular, we already see ‘action’, ‘reflection’ and ‘protest’ IMs; furthermore, in session 4, all the five types emerge, continuing to increase their presence until the end (see Santos et al., 2009, for an elaborated account upon this specific case-study).

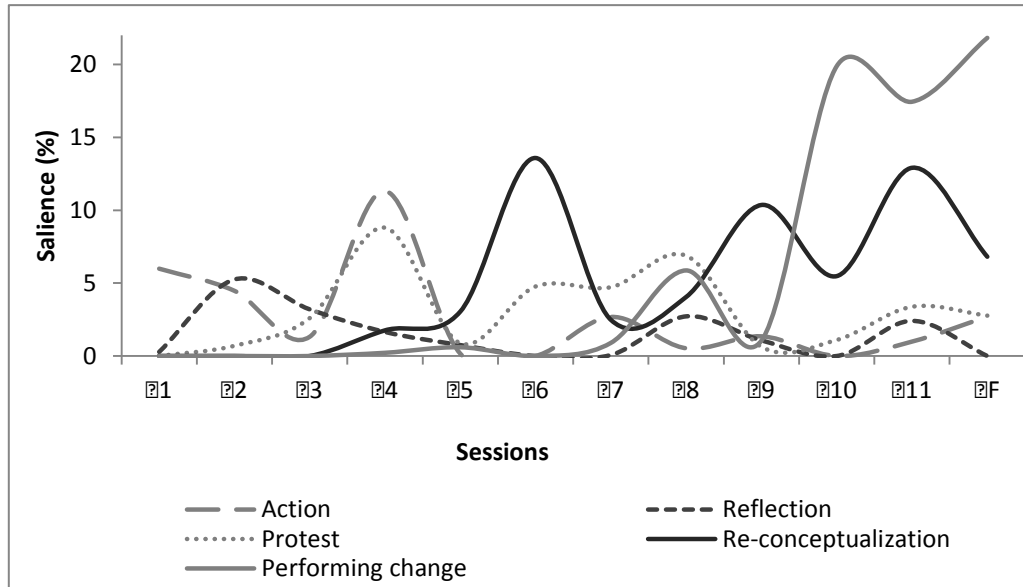


Figure 3. A successful case in narrative therapy (11 sessions plus follow-up).

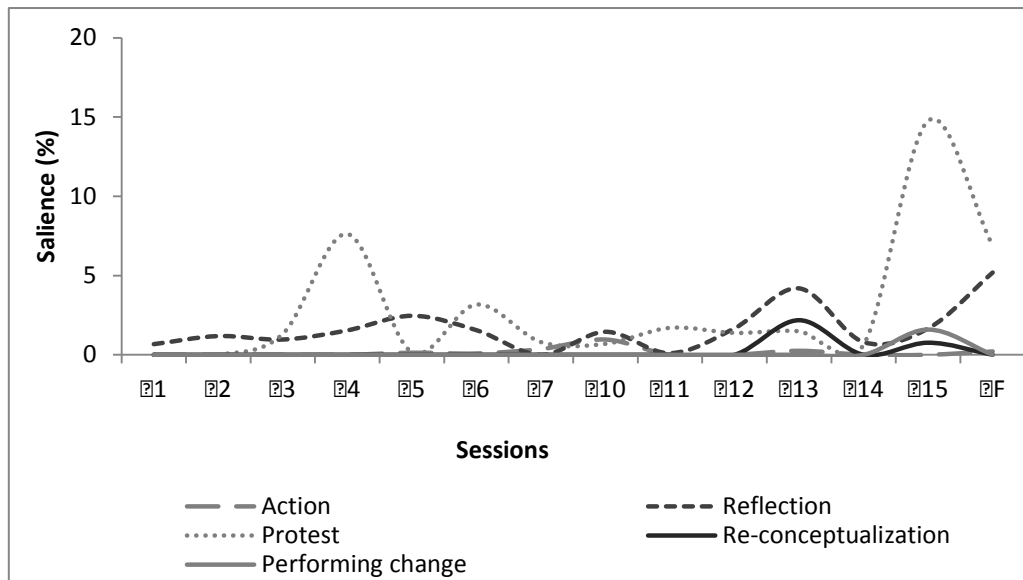


Figure 4. An unsuccessful case in narrative therapy (15 sessions plus follow-up).

Contrastingly, in an unsuccessful case, not only is the temporal salience of IMs lower, but its diversity is also much more restricted. As we can see in Figure 4, which represents the development of IMs in an unsuccessful case, reflection and protest IMs are present but they are not followed by re-conceptualisation and performing change IMs, as we see appearing and increasing in successful cases from the middle stage until the end of therapy. In other words, most of the time, action, reflection and protest IMs are present in unsuccessful cases from the beginning until the end of therapy (and can even slightly increase their temporal salience) but

the differences in terms of overall temporal salience are clear as far as successful cases are concerned.

To summarize our global findings in terms of IMs' emergence and evolution in therapy, we can say that successful cases are typically characterized by a progressive tendency in the diversity and temporal salience of IMs from session to session. In the beginning of therapy, action, reflection and protest IMs start emerging and becoming more prominent as the treatment progresses. These IMs are then followed by re-conceptualisation that emerges in the middle of the process and continues increasing until the end. Performing change IMs tend to appear after re-conceptualisation. In turn, unsuccessful cases are typically characterized by a lower diversity and temporal salience of IMs, with action, reflection and protest being the main IMs, most of the time without a clear trend to increase from the beginning until the end of treatment. Re-conceptualisation and performing change IMs do not appear typically or have a very low temporal salience.

An interesting commonality between both groups is, to us, the presence of IMs from the first session until the end, regardless of the therapeutic outcome. This means that, if we took the terminology of Fogel and collaborators (2006), level 2 changes appear in therapy even when the final outcome is poor. In other words, even when the problematic narrative dominates in the beginning and keeps its power balance unchanged until the end, there are always novelties appearing and opportunities for new narratives to be developed, even if they are ignored, trivialized or dismissed after their emergence.

According to our studies, these results in the context of psychotherapy were also replicated in daily life changes (i.e., changes related to personal problems, transitions and processes of adaptation to life events that occur outside the therapeutic context). Cruz and Gonçalves (in press) conducted an exploratory study based on interviews with a non-clinical population that asked participants (N=27) to identify three types of difficulties in their lives: past (and solved) difficulties, current difficulties (in the moment of the interview) and persistent difficulties (present for more than 6 months). In this study the presence of re-conceptualisation IMs was the characteristic that distinguished solved from present difficulties (with statistically significant results). Furthermore, a similar study by Meira (2009; see also Meira, Gonçalves, Salgado & Cunha, 2009) on non-therapeutic change with a longitudinal design replicated the same findings about 're-conceptualisation (17 participants were interviewed about a personal problem every couple of weeks, for four months).

The consistency of these findings within and outside the therapeutic context suggests that re-conceptualisation is a key factor for sustaining narrative changes and the construction of new self-narratives. In the next section, we will elaborate upon a model of narrative change, supported by the several findings presented above and other case-studies that systematically pointed to the same results.

## **A MODEL OF NARRATIVE CHANGE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

In our view, narrative change implies not only diversity of IMs but also specific interrelations between them. Due to the complexity of self-changes, it is unlikely that sustained changes could develop from a specific type of IM (Gonçalves et al., 2009). So, according to our findings, change starts with IM diversity, namely in the form of 'action' and

'reflection' IMs. These are more elementary forms of innovation that appear as early forms of opposing the problematic self-narrative (being level 2 changes). Nevertheless, these IMs are vital since, if recognized by the self and validated by others, they become the first signs that something new is taking place and that change is on its way. These novel actions, thoughts or intentions, either triggered by the therapist's questions or spontaneously recognised by the client, defy the dominant problematic themes that prescribe redundant behaviour. The way these innovations appear can be quite idiosyncratic to the person or situation: sometimes they appear through new actions that lead to new thoughts and intentions, other times through new insights about the problem's maintenance that feed new actions. We have also noticed protest IMs present from the first session on, in some cases. This can be due to the fact that not all clients enter therapy at the same stage of change (see Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992). Some seek therapy already engaged in an active state, while others are still very contemplative and ambivalent and may take more time reflecting and exploring the problem before they gather enough motivation to enter in more active stages (Prochaska et al., 1992; see also Gonçalves, Ribeiro, et al., in press). We consider protest IMs an interesting type of innovation since they trigger a strong attitudinal movement against the problem and entail new positioning of the self in relation to the surrounding world.

Independent of the starting point, the idea is that these three forms of IMs keep feeding each other and amplifying their occurrence. For example, as the person starts recognising that the avoidance of certain activities only maintains the problem of fear, she might decide and plan to start doing small things that defy the problem (reflection IM) and actually starts re-experimenting in his or her daily life with previously abandoned activities (action IMs) while at the same time protesting frequently in therapy towards the problem's assumptions (protest IMs).

At a certain point of therapy (usually in the middle of the process) re-conceptualisation IMs start to appear. We contend that these IMs are very important to the consolidation of further narrative changes, given that unsuccessful therapeutic processes and non-resolved personal problems usually do not exhibit them.

Since re-conceptualisation IMs are grounded in two important features: a) the contrast between present and past and b) a meta-level narration of the processes that made this transformation possible, they seem to be a type of narrative which is more complex than the previous IMs. As we have argued before, not only is its structure closer to the structure of a story (given its sequencing of events and higher narrative coherence), but it also gives a meta-level view of the agent in a story about change. In this sense, it pictures the actor in a given path towards self-transformation and, at the same time, frames the story in a new narrative perspective from the author (the person positions him or herself as different). Furthermore, these IMs also foster other action, reflection and protest IMs, acting like a meaning-making gravitational field towards future production of meanings and experiences. Since the person – as a changed narrator – assumes a different authoring position towards the self and the world, his or her narratives give coherence to the several types of novelties, acting as a meaning bridge (Osatuke & Stiles, 2006) between the old and new versions of the self. Thus, re-conceptualisation has the power of integrating old patterns into new ones, through a synthesis process (Santos & Gonçalves, 2009).

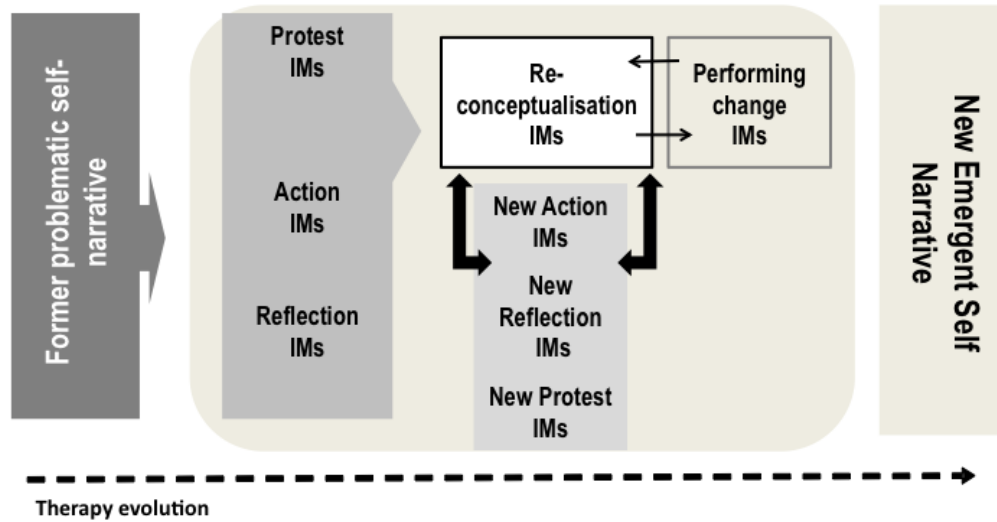


Figure 5. A heuristic model of successful psychotherapy.

Finally, performing change IMs emerge and represent the expansion of the change process into the future, as new experiences, projects and intentions emerge due to the transformations achieved. The future projection of a story is vital for an expansion of new self-narratives: as several authors suggest (Crites, 1986; Omer & Alon, 1997; Slusky, 1998), new stories need to have a future. Figure 5 illustrates the processes described above in successful psychotherapy.

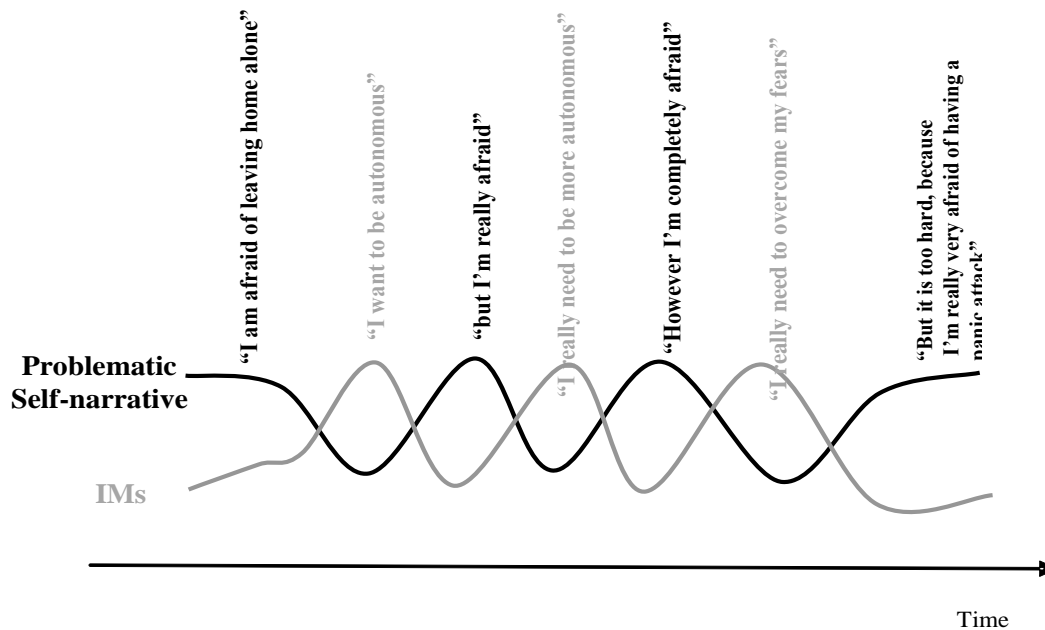


Figure 6. Mutual in-feeding producing a dynamic stability between opposing voices.

We consider that all the variability that occurs within the problematic self-narrative (dark rectangle at the left of figure 5) is related to level 1 change that obeys the usual “rules” of the problem (for example, when the client narrates being vulnerable to the fear over and over again, despite the differences in events and situations). The emergence of IMs, in the middle section between the double braces, represents level 2 changes: something novel that is emerging and being noticed by the participating agents. Nevertheless, we think that the emergence of re-conceptualisation IMs is the starting point of a flow of processes that lead to level 3 changes: the development of a new self-narrative (pictured at the right of the figure above). This is the distinguishing feature between successful cases and unsuccessful ones. So, the next logical question is to enquire about what processes occur in unsuccessful cases that do not trigger developmental changes. Or, more specifically: What processes interrupt the emergence of re-conceptualisation IMs in unsuccessful cases?

## A MODEL OF NARRATIVE STABILITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

If we compare the initial stages of successful and unsuccessful cases, they seem quite identical: action, reflection and protest IMs are present (although in some unsuccessful cases the temporal salience of these IMs is lower from the beginning). Clearer differences reside in the middle of therapy when, in the absence of re-conceptualisation, the potential power to foster change of the three previous IMs, is not built upon and amplified. Thus, despite some innovations, the person returns to the same narrative, not being able to challenge its dominance.

Exploring the processes that prevent the emergence of re-conceptualisation and, thus, facilitate the dominance of the problematic self-narrative, involves taking into account IMs potential to challenge a client’s usual way of understanding and experiencing, generating uncertainty. IMs can be easily understood as episodes of self-discontinuity and, thus, uncertainty (Gonçalves & Ribeiro, in press; Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2010). We have argued that the development of IMs into a new self-narrative depends on the way people manage the emergence of uncertainty. Ignoring or avoiding uncertainty, by returning to the problematic self-narrative and, thus, attenuating IMs’ meaning, in order to promote a sense of continuity or coherence, may sustain the maintenance of the problematic self-narrative. The following example shows how, although the client elaborates an IM, its meaning is soon attenuated by a return to the problematic self-narrative that restores self-continuity (i.e., reinstates the power of the problematic self-narrative):

### *Clinical vignette 6*

Client: **Sometimes, I feel able to face my fears... I feel this strength inside me** [Reflection IM], **but then it suddenly disappears, as if my fears return and takeover!** [Continuity restoration by returning to the problematic self-narrative]

When uncertainty is not overcome during the therapeutic process, the problematic self-narrative and IMs may establish a cyclical relation that blocks the development of the self. This process is akin to what Valsiner (2002) described as ‘mutual in-feeding’: a dynamic balance between two contrasting voices in the dialogical self (e.g., voice A: “life is good”, voice B: “life is bad”) that feed each other in a perpetual movement back and forth. The



voices seem to be moving and quite unstable, but the dynamics actually remain the same as time goes by. It is a case of stability through a very dynamic process in the dialogical self. In our clinical example of a person with panic disorder, in the first sessions he or she could express a voice A that says “I am afraid of leaving home alone” and voice B that says “I must overcome my fears in order to become more autonomous”. According to the IMs coding system, voice A is an expression of the problematic self-narrative, while voice B expresses a reflection IM. Despite the novelty, they could be feeding each other infinitely, in a redundant back and forth movement that keeps the person within the same vicious cycle (see Figure 6).

Furthermore, this back and forth movement between voice A and voice B can even lead to a more striking polarization of meanings, in what Valsiner (2002) calls ‘mutual escalating’ of voices. The most interesting thing is that, despite the small variability gained through the oscillation between the voices as time passes, the relationship between them remains the same as it was in the beginning.

The process of mutual in-feeding has been addressed by other authors in different theoretical perspectives. In personal construct theory, it is sometimes referred to as ‘slot rattling’ (Kelly, 1955), a dance between two poles of the same construct. In strategic therapy, it is related to the ‘ironic process’ (Shoham & Rohrbaugh, 2002) of first order changes that only lead to an escalation of the problem (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). And in the assimilation model of Stiles and collaborators (Brinegar, Salvi, Stiles & Greenberg, 2006) this is paralleled with a ‘rapid crossfire’ between two divergent voices.

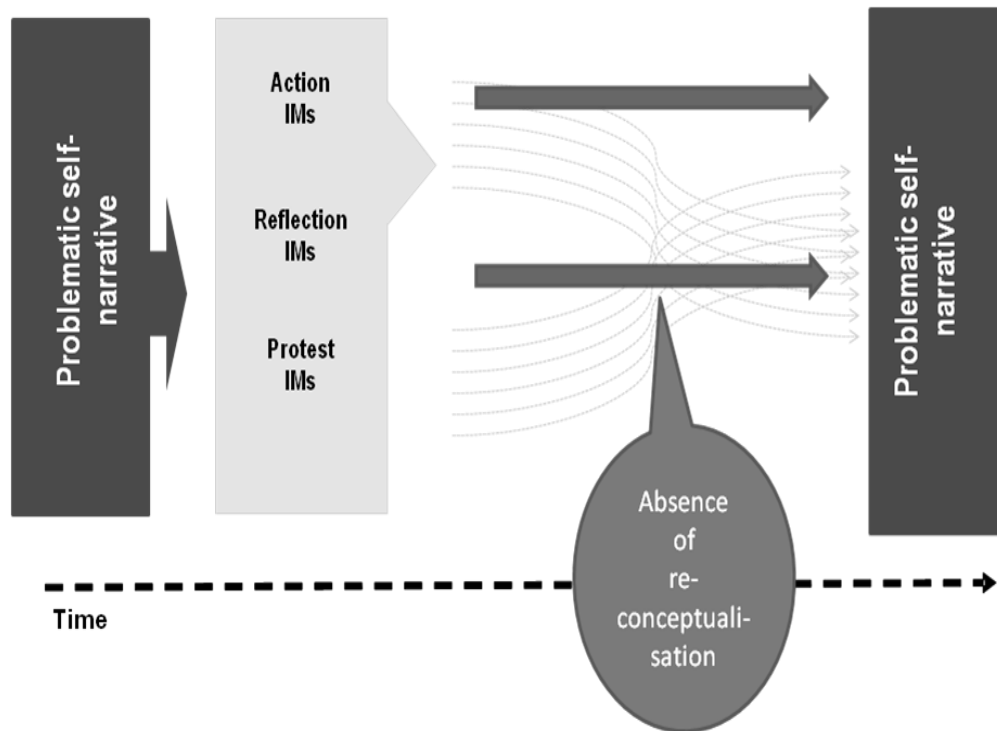


Figure 7. A heuristic model of unsuccessful cases.

We have been empirically observing the phenomenon of ‘mutual in-feeding’, by analysing whether IMs present ‘Return-to-the-Problem Markers’, as in the following example:

*Clinical vignette 7*

Client: **“This week I decided to face some of my fears as we agreed in the last session ... I decided to go to the mall [Reflection IM], but when I was on my way to the mall, I was suddenly caught by an incredible agitation. I felt I couldn’t breathe, as if I had a cramp, but I could do nothing. [RPM]**

A study recently conducted by our team with the sample of women who were victims of domestic violence contrasted the successful group with the unsuccessful group to explore whether there would be significant differences in terms of the percentage of IMs with RPMs. As we suspected from the argument presented before, our results in this sample indicate that the unsuccessful group had a significantly higher percentage of IMs followed by RPMs (namely action, reflection and protest).

Our results also suggest that the presence of mutual in-feeding is rare in re-conceptualisation. One possible reason for this is that these IMs already dialectically integrate both opposites (past and present or, in other words, problematic voice and innovative one), making it difficult for an oscillation between them. Performing change IMs also escape this process of mutual in-feeding because they tend to emerge only after re-conceptualisation, being more characteristic of later stages of therapy. Moreover, according to the definition of performing change IM, they are the anticipation or planning of new experiences and projects. Since these projects and new experiences appear as a generalisation of the change process into other life domains and into the future, it is likely that they are not involved in a return to the problem. Figure 7 summarizes the processes that occur in unsuccessful cases.

We initially tried to understand mutual in-feeding mainly through the analysis of unsuccessful cases, but we concluded, later on, that this vicious cycle, although typical of unsuccessful cases (Santos et al., 2010), is not exclusive to them (Ribeiro, Bento et al., in press). Thus, it is important to note that successful cases also presented signs of mutual in-feeding that are surpassed as therapy progresses. The dialogical processes that allow evolution from mutual in-feeding to another type of dialogical relation and the role of the therapist in it are important dimensions that still need to be studied.

In this sense, we are now directing our research efforts to the exploration of the role of the therapist in these two specific situations: a) in the promotion of IMs – particularly in the facilitation of re-conceptualisation, and b) in the surpassing of mutual in-feeding. Up until now, we only have analysed data from case-studies (Cunha, Mendes, Gonçalves, Angus & Greenberg, 2009; Ribeiro, Loura, Gonçalves, Ribeiro, & Stiles, in preparation). These preliminary findings indicate that the promotion of IMs is usually associated with the previous use of more directive interventions from the therapist (namely, direct guidance in therapeutic in the midst of therapeutic tasks or open questions to facilitate self-awareness). Focusing now on the therapist’s response to mutual in-feeding, preliminary findings indicate that mutual in-feeding tend to persist during therapy when the therapist respond to it by understanding predominantly the innovative voice (by amplifying it), instead of understanding the problematic voice (trying to explore what it is in the client’s experience that prevents change). In such cases, clients might feel that the therapists do not understand

them, invoking a “strong reactance on the part of the client, often hardening the client’s stuck position” (Engle & Arkovitz, 2008, p.390). Instead, surpassing of mutual in-feeding, involves empathic understanding not only for innovative voice(s) but also for problematic one(s) (Stiles & Glick, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

Although at this point we cannot infer a causal relationship between mutual in-feeding and re-conceptualisation, our data suggests that the emergence of re-conceptualisation is strongly associated with a decreasing in the mutual in-feeding.

This integrative power of re-conceptualisation tends to give coherence to the meaning of other IMs and gives directionality to the change process, thus beginning to dissipate the redundancy of the problem in clients’ daily lives. The recognition of oneself as different and the awareness of exceptions to the problem can start a ‘domino effect’ (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974) that leads to a level 3 (developmental) change and to successful psychotherapy. Furthermore, since re-conceptualisation implies the contrast between past and present, and aggregates the old self with the transformed self, it achieves a new sense of unity in the dialogical self, surpassing the former dualities and ambivalence usually inherent to a mutual in-feeding process between opposing voices. The self’s multiplicity of experiences and perspectives become integrated in a more flexible way, with new resources at its disposal to deal with difficulties and a future-oriented view that triggers and amplifies new performances of change.

One of the powerful processes entailed by re-conceptualisation that, in our view, is responsible for this, is the development of a meta-position, allowing for a self-observation process. Through self-observation, new insights are created and new connections are established (see Castonguay & Hill, 2006 for a comprehensive discussion of insight in psychotherapy). This facilitates the development of a new sense of personal agency and the commitment to a new way of life where, through repetition, the novelties become familiar.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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*Chapter 9*

**EMPATHY AND EMOTION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY**

*Thorsten Gieser and Hubert Hermans*

**INTRODUCTION**

Empathy has a long history in psychology and philosophy, and rightly so. It has been described as a phenomenon in its own right, as an ability, as a state of mind, as an emotional state. But it is more than that. It is what enables us to transcend our self, to acknowledge and understand other people as experiencing subjects like ourselves. Ultimately, it is even the attempt to putatively experience what someone else is experiencing. In this sense, empathy is a fundamental aspect of human relationships, of two selves in communication. We can see now why empathy is so important for understanding the dialogical self. Not only does it provide us insights into how a self can go 'beyond the skin' of the individual; it also tells us something about dialogical relationships, which rely on our ability to assume exterior positions, to experience them as I-positions, and to give them a 'voice'.

To illustrate these points we look at empathy in the psychotherapeutic context, where so much depends on conversations and a developing 'spiral of understanding' between client and therapist. To start with, we present a brief history of the concept of empathy followed by a first interpretation in terms of dialogical self theory. We then move on to introduce a case study drawn from Alfred Margulies' classic work *The Empathic Imagination* (1989). Our discussion of the material starts by showing how spoken words, as evocative sounds, can create perceptual and emotional imaginary landscapes that can be experienced by both client and therapist. What is more, the therapist might even feel into this landscape *as if* it were his own, thereby sharing the client's perceptions and emotions to a degree. We argue that a state of 'first-order phenomenology' (Lambie & Marcel, 2002), an experience of emotional immersion, is necessary for empathy to develop and that it is the 'secondary-order awareness' of emotion which transforms this process of 'feeling-into' into a process of distancing. Both processes, so we propose, are essential for the therapeutic success. To complicate the matter, we then demonstrate that a closer look at the emotions involved in our case study reveals that

shared perceptions do not necessarily result in the same shared emotion. Through a detailed description of the empathetic process in terms of dialogical self theory we explicate how different parts of the therapist's and client's selves, both interior and exterior, relate to each other and to different levels of emotion, especially 'primary' and 'secondary' emotions (Greenberg, 2002). Distancing ourselves from the confinement of the case study, we conclude this chapter with an elaboration on the importance of empathy for dialogicality and the dialogical self in general.

## EMPATHY AS SHARED PERCEPTION

The term empathy is the translation of the German word *Einfühlung* ('feeling-into'). Titchener (1909) created the word from the Greek *en pathos* ('in suffering/passion') by analogy with the word 'sympathy' (see Wispé 1986 and 1991 for elaborations on the sympathy/empathy distinction). The concept of *Einfühlung* was first used by psychologists within the field of aesthetics and form perception in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They understood that aesthetic appreciation demands a projection of the self into the object of beauty (Wispé, 1990, p. 18). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept was transferred from the context of subject-object relationships to that of subject-subject relationships, i.e., to the question of how we know others (e.g., Lipps, 1903; 1905). According to Lipps, we can feel into the emotions of others by seeing shame in the blushing, anger in the clenched fist, or joy in the radiant smile (Stein, 1964, p. 70). It was in this sense that the concept of empathy was subsequently employed in various psychological sub-fields like personality theory, social psychology, developmental psychology, and – most importantly for this paper – in psychotherapy (see Duan & Hill, 1996; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990 for reviews).

The definitions employed to date describe empathy in various related ways that may be translated as sympathizing with someone, feeling with/for someone, responding to someone, understanding, participating, being sensitive to someone, or taking the role of the other. Carl Rogers, one of the advocates of empathy in inter-personal relationships, defines it in terms of:

*“Entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive [...] to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person... It means temporarily living in his/her life [...] It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive [...] To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another world without prejudice.”* (1975, p. 4, our emphases)

More recently, empathy has been understood as a complex multidimensional phenomenon that includes both cognitive and affective components and control systems, and that varies in degree with personality factors, relational factors and situational context (see e.g., Vreeke & van der Mark, 2003 or Preston & de Waal, 2002 for recent elaborations). It is not our intention here, however, to analyse empathy in all of its aspects in any detail. Following in Carl Rogers' footsteps, our concern is rather with an interpretation of empathy as a mode of shared perception and emotion.



## EMPATHY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

We assume that empathy is both a dialogical and a self-related phenomenon. A dialogical perspective is needed in order to understand the relationship between people as involved in a process of cognitive and affective interchange. A self-perspective is required to understand how dialogical processes *between* people are intimately related with dialogical processes *within* the selves of the participants. Therefore, “dialogical self theories” in which the notion of self and dialogue are conceptually combined, are useful to analyze how people involved in empathetic communication establish meaningful relationships not only between each other but also between *different* aspects of their multifaceted selves. In their first inception of dialogical self theory, Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon (1992) criticized the assumption that the self is organized around *one* centre or core. Rather than conceptualizing the self as organized from a centralized headquarter, they proposed a (partly) decentralized self that is extended to the world with the social other as not purely outside but also inside the self. Instead of considering the self as a centralized agent with a unifying view on the world, the authors conceived the self in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous ‘I-positions’ that are organized in an imaginal landscape. In this conception, the I is always bound to particular positions in time and space but has the possibility to move from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. In this process of positioning and repositioning, the I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can develop that renew and innovate positions involved. Such dialogical relationships are contrasted with monological relationship in which one or a few positions are dominant in the self, with the result that other positions are silenced or suppressed or otherwise not allowed to speak from their own specific point of view.

In order to understand empathy from the perspective of dialogical self theory, it is necessary to make a distinction between two kinds of I-positions (a) internal ones that refer to personal and social aspects of the self (e.g., I as a professional, I as a perfectionist, I as vulnerable) and (b) external positions that refer to people or aspects of the environment that are felt as belonging to the self (e.g., my father, my colleague, my friends, my house). In other words, I-positions are not only aspects of the self that are located “inside the skin” but also aspects that are, in the sense of James (1890), constituents of the self as *extended* to the world. An empathetic person has the capacity to understand the internal and external positions of the other and of oneself in their differences, addressivity, responsiveness, and power dynamics. A person who is empathetic is building up a new landscape in his own self in which both the internal and external positions of the other are constructed and reconstructed in their mutual dynamic relationships, *as if* he is the other. When empathy develops, the internal and external position repertoire of the other becomes increasingly familiar to the empathic person both in its content and organization. Empathy becomes really dialogical when the empathic person is able to *respond* to the other by developing a new space in his extended self in which the position repertoire of the other is interiorized and reconstructed, but also able to *address* the other in such a way that the position repertoire of the other receives a new developmental and integrative impulse. As part of this process the empathetic person develops a feeling for the *power dynamics* in the position repertoire and gains insight in the organization of the repertoire in which some positions are dominated or even suppressed by other ones. As a

result of the addressivity, responsiveness, and insight in the power dynamics on the part of the empathetic person, the other feels not only understood but also liberated and renewed.

### THE CASE EXAMPLE: A NIGHTMARE

The case example used here is drawn from Alfred Margulies' classic work *The Empathic Imagination* (1989). In this book, Margulies presents a phenomenological account of empathy in his everyday clinical practice. One of his examples deals with the nightmare of a client:

“My son and I were going to a park, just for a walk. We were separated – no, he ran ahead and I started to go up into town, [...], and I started to go up the road between two buildings. There was a feedmill [sic] and a bridge or a walkway connecting two buildings and there were men hanging from the walkway and grabbing people as they walked that way. And my son was ahead of me and I went another way and I got to the park. And there was this row of doors, and I kept opening the door to see if my son was there and he wasn't – and I was absolutely terrified and then I woke up. And I kept thinking something had happened to him and he wasn't there. And I thought I wasn't there and if he cried out I wouldn't be there.

The other part of the dream that stands out is the road that was around the feed mill – it was full of ruts and like covered with shit and very slippery and difficult to walk on. And I remember looking down at it and I was surprised and I just kept walking...” (Margulies, 1989, p. 55)

At this point, the client begins to associate and leaves the immediacy of her dream and Margulies brings her back, asking her to describe the scene further:

“It was surprising to me. It was sort of [...] the thing was, it was slippery and full of ruts. And I didn't want to fall down. It was like I thought I wouldn't get out – but I did. I remember there being a building and the road coming down out of the building and down the hill and when I was on the hill, that's when I realized what it was. It was full of ruts, and not soft, but hard and I was sinking into it and I was sliding over it, afraid I'd fall [...] There wasn't a smell. It was sort of like coming upon it and being surprised and when I realized what it was, but rather than being caught up, I had to get where I was going, I had to get to the park. Being more scared kept me from being bogged down.” (Margulies, 1989, p. 55)

As the client describes this dream in more detail, Margulies has an unexpected empathic experience:

“Throughout this narrative I had been forming another impression that was like a *deja vu* to me. I had experienced it before, though it felt strange and uncanny to me, a compound sensory image that she had once described with vivid and distressing affect. The mental representation I had was strong with a slippery feeling, a tactile and kinesthetic sensation that was not part of her original description of the event or even how I recalled it as told by her, but that now seemed integral. I hesitated to comment, wondering if this image were my projection onto her dream [...] Awkwardly I decided to go with my hunch, 'I am not sure of its relevance, but it reminds me of the scene you once described of being a little girl and watching the pigs being slaughtered – I don't know if it's the slippery part of the image that seems a part of it, though you hadn't described it that way.'

'It's funny,' she reflected, 'That was sort of blood and guts, and slippery. There was a barn there – a *red* barn. Its [sic] like when you hang a pig up after you slaughter it; it's like those men hanging in the dream ... just suspended there...'

'Like slaughtered pigs?' I say.

'Yeah, the way they were suspended. The feed mill in the dream was old and painted red too. Last night I went outside in the garden to plant holly hocks... they were blossoming. My neighbour grew them.'

I think holly hocks, ham hocks. 'The neighbour who had the pig slaughter?'

'Yes!' she laughs, 'I also remember once sliding down her walkway during a light snow and I ran right into her husband and knocked him down.' He was the one who slaughtered the pigs." (Margulies, 1989, p. 56)

This session ended and Margulies took up some of its loose threads later on. Together with his client, he explored the role of violent men in her life and tried to reconnect compartmentalized episodes of violence that she had witnessed and dreamt of.

## DISCUSSION

Now, to make explicit the empathetic processes involved in this case a model of the self is needed that is capable of showing the organisation of positions and the dynamics of positioning on which empathy relies. In dialogical self theory one of the best models is that of the Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) (see Hermans, 2001), a matrix of external and internal positions that makes up one's 'society of the self'. By describing and interpreting empathy in terms of a PPR we are able to access complex patterns of dialogical relationships and follow the dynamics of movement between positions; not only within one self (the client or the therapist) but also between selves. What we mean by that will become clear shortly.

At the start of the therapy we can assume that Margulies introduced his client as a new external position in his (PPR). This new position is still quite 'hollow': with a face, a name, perhaps a few snap judgements about her general appearance but without an awareness of her life history, her character traits, her significant others or the power dynamics that govern her relationships. During the course of the next therapeutic sessions, he gradually elaborated her one position into a full set of internal and external positions (a full external PPR). And here we go beyond the original formulation of the PPR as conceived nearly a decade ago. Other people are rarely present in the PPR as one solidified external position; they are usually present as complex patterns of their internal and external positions as we know them. Simplified, yes, we relate to others from an internal position to an external position. But more realistically, this external position is made up of many facets and constitutes a whole PPR within ours. In Margulies's case, he heard more and more about her life, more and more people were introduced to him, and the client became invested with personal, individual traits and stories. For example, the client told him about her career, the family finances, her marriage, her son, her father's obsession with hunting, her fascination for violent men, and so on. These narratives not only introduced 'significant others' as external positions to the therapist, but also gave insights into her internal positions (e.g., the mother, wife, the anxious, etc.), together with their relationships and power dynamics in her life.

At the same time, something else is going on. Within the PPR of the therapist, the newly formed positions of his client are simultaneously linked not only within the network of the client's other positions but also with the past experiences of the therapist himself. In Margulies' own words:

“As I become engaged with the inner life of another, I experience a growing sense of familiarity with a built-up internal landscape. Oftentimes this is not so conscious to me. I enter a private world constructed from associations and images stimulated by my patient and drawn from my own personal past experience.” (1989, p. 53)

Thus we learn more about the process by which positions are created. As soon as they 'enter the stage' (to use a metaphor Hermans, 2001, used in describing the PPR), positions are exposed to the 'pulling power' of already established positions that resonate with them in some way. There must be 'recognition', in some sense, of the other in me, that draws the new position towards the old. It is as if the established positions gaze at a simulacrum appearing and tentatively probe into it, trying to discern whether this simulacrum is a mirror of themselves or a new external position in its own right. From the quote above we may conclude that the more 'associations' one finds the greater the pull and recognition.

But before we elaborate on the importance of this pull and recognition of positions for empathy let us briefly explore why and how positions can appear as simulacrams, especially in the therapeutic context. It is important to remember here that narratives, especially in the therapeutic context, are not simply descriptive reports but re-lived experiences (see Jackson, 1998). Put differently, “stories are lived before they are told” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 212). The words of narratives bring to life once again the sensual experiences of a more or less distant past: the sight of the son running away from her, a slippery road full of ruts and covered in excrements, the feeling of her sinking into and sliding over the ruts, the marvellous absence of any smell in this situation. These words re-create, in both telling client and listening therapist, the world of the 'dreamscape', and with each new sentence, with each new piece of sensory information, this dreamscape becomes more real and experience-able. But it is not only the words of the story told that enrich the dreamscape. The remembered sensual experiences themselves open up a whole world of other emotions and memories, as so pointedly remarked by Marcel Proust who once lost himself in memories when he tasted a *madeleine*:

“But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, ... the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.” (2006, p. 210)

Likewise, the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, p. 409) argued that “*words gather their meaning from the relational properties of the world itself*. Every word is a compressed and compacted history”. Margulies remembered a particular instance in his work that illustrates this point clearly:

“As I gain greater familiarity with the world of the other, I then have a Proustian echo of recollection. With one patient, for example, I recall a farm in my mind's eye, the fields, the

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roads, the old lady who fed the patient/me ginger snaps and bananas – all experiences I have lived empathically through her. I do not recall in my own life whether I have ever even had ginger snaps and bananas together, but I can almost taste them on my mind's tongue. Moreover, I sometimes recollect such empathic sensations more readily than does the patient from whom I have learned them!" (1989, p. 54)

These recollections are again more than re-lived sensual experiences; they are filled with emotional experiences as well. According to Antonio Damasio (1999), each perceived (social and natural) environmental stimuli becomes associated with particular body signals (the emotion) and are thereby 'marked' with positive (e.g., happiness or pride) or negative values (e.g., fear or disgust); values that make us either approach or retreat from the stimulus. Emotions are hence understood only in their relationship between individuals and the world they live in and perceive. To 'speak' about a past experience evokes the same relationships that became associated with the emotions in the first place.

Two consequences arise from the above: First, when the client's dialogical self within the PPR of the therapist crystallizes, it does so with certain emotional values attached. Her emotional reactions are either being verbally expressed; being expressed by changes in tone of spoken words; or being visible in facial expressions, gestures and body posture (see Ekman, 1999). Second, when we follow Damasio's hypothesis, listening to the client's emotional accounts (and watching her bodily emotional expressions) create an emotional response in the therapist as well. In this context, Ingold (2000, p. 21) argued: "To show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced". Analogously, to tell somebody something is to cause it to be heard or otherwise experienced. As almost every perception is accompanied by emotion, to draw attention to something is not only a statement of *what it is* but also of *how it is*. It is a statement not just of a word but also of a relationship between narrator, the words and the world that they denote. To follow someone's pointing finger, or words in this case, is therefore to become involved in a relationship, or, in other words, *to feel into* a relationship.

The therapist feels into the client's relationships by attending to her in a sympathetic mode in order to establish rapport. He is therefore likely to respond to her emotional expression with a similar one, perhaps accompanied by a compassionate feeling. When hearing about something the therapist is also familiar with (e.g., having a son, problems in a relationship), his past emotional reactions will become associated, too. Margulies remarks:

"It is not merely my reaching into resonant experience from my own life (for example, that I have, parallel to the patient, fond boyhood memories of eating cookies and feeling happy and secure). It is more: I now have memories empathically derived and elaborated into a relatively coherent form from someone else's experience... I reach deep down into my internalized inscape of the other." (1989, p. 54-55)

The emotions felt now establish a link to the client such that both focus their attention on the same aspects of her inner landscape, sensually as well as emotionally. Margulies was dwelling in his client's inner landscape, which he built up in his own PPR. But not merely as an observer. He perceived this landscape from the client's position, hence as a *déjà vu*. In terms of the dialogical self, this means that one of his inner positions (e.g., his feeling of strangeness) related to the external positions of the client (e.g., her son who disappeared). However, these external positions should normally be related to the client self positions, not

to the therapist self positions. Two things must have happened. First, the boundaries between client self positions and therapist self positions must have loosened so that her positions can be experienced as belonging to the sphere of the therapist self positions. Second, the client self positions must have been silenced in order for the therapist to have a first-person experience of the dream and not simply an observation of what the client is doing in the dream story.

How is it possible that the therapist experiences the memories of his client as his own in these moments? We have already mentioned two aspects of the answer. First, the telling of the client's narratives has created an emotional link between the emotional values the client attached to the characters of her stories and the emotional response of the therapist that arose while he listened to her. Second, in the empathic moment the client's narratives evoked a detailed, meaningful, inner landscape both in herself and the therapist. We shall finally point to a last answer to this question by bringing in an analogy with the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's concept of *duplicité*, that is the phenomenon of 'touching and being touched'.

When we shake hands, for example, we can either feel our hand shaking another person's hand or our hand being shaken by somebody else. We can voluntarily switch our focus of attention to either feeling, knowing that the other feeling is never out of reach. Similarly, we can use our right hand to touch, for instance, a table, with our left hand being passive. Again, we always know that the passive hand can become active if we wished so. On the basis of these realisations, a 'transfer of sense' can take place which allows us to perceive the hand of another person in a similar way as we perceive our own passive hand. We are able to *feel into* the experience of another person's hand because of its similarity to our own hand. We have experienced our hands as both perceiving subject and perceived object (often with one hand being part of the background of the active hand that is in our focus of attention). As we experience the other's hand as object in the same background, we may experience the other's passive hand then like we experience our own passive hand." (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 223 and 225)

We argue that a similar bodily logic is at work when we empathize through speaking and listening. Whenever we speak, we simultaneously hear our voice. We may be so involved in our speaking that we merely hear our voice while in other instances we may actively listen to what we are saying. Our voice can hence be understood either in our 'hearing background' or 'listening focus' (Ingold, 2000). Whenever we have a conversation, we hear our own voice and the voice of the other. Moreover, in a friendly conversation we also tend to adjust our use of words or phrases, pronunciation and intonation to our fellow conversant. This enables us to feel into the experience of another person's voice because of its similarity to our own voice. What further contributes to this empathy is that, in the course of a conversation, we experience a continual switching of attentional focus, between our voice either in the background or in focus and the other's voice either in the background (e.g., when both of us speak simultaneously) or in focus. In either case, our voices become linked in one experiential *Gestalt* and hence we may feel into another person's narratives *as if they were our own*.

However, the thus created sensory and emotional bond does not lead the client and the therapist to have identical emotions. If we recall, the client said she felt "afraid" and "scared" for her son. We can also infer from her statements about the slippery road surface - full of excrements, and the fact that she was trying to avoid falling into this mess - that she felt disgusted. Now Margulies, on the other hand, did not share her concern for the son but

instead felt something “strange” and “uncanny” in connection with a “tactile” and “kinaesthetic” feeling of slippery-ness. It seems like Margulies was – sensorily – in the narrated dreamscape, together with her, but the world opened up to him through these sensations was different from hers. For her, the feeling of being disgusted by the slippery road surface was a compound sensory and emotional image linked up with being scared for her son. For him, the tactile and kinesthetic feeling of slippery-ness was linked with a feeling of slippery-ness from another episode of the client's life, namely her memory of a pig slaughter scene. It was the inconsistency or discrepancy between his and her experience of the relevance of this perception (of slippery-ness and what it meant) that led to his strange and uncanny feeling.

Margulies mentions that his client once told him about the “blood, squealing and slaughter” of this memory with “vivid and distressing affect”. We could describe this original affect as the client's *primary emotion* (Greenberg, 2002), the initial response to a concrete stimulus situation. In her dream, the slippery surface and the red barn are drawn from this original experience and should have brought up the primary emotion once again. Yet it was obscured by a new situational *secondary emotion* of being scared (for her son). According to Greenberg (2002), secondary emotions often cover a deeper emotion which a person might be afraid to acknowledge. Consequently, the client focused her attention on the feeling for her son rather than the distressing memory of slaughter and violence.

In a way, Margulies expected unconsciously for the primary emotion to come up in the client and his empathetic bond to her loosened when he realised that his and her experience of the scene differed (he suddenly had a “strange” and “uncanny” feeling). Listening to her story, he re-lived the dream with her in a state of what Lambie and Marcel (2002) call *first-order phenomenology*. In this state, one *lives* the emotion without being aware of the fact that one *has* an emotion or what nature this emotion is. Margulies' sudden feeling triggered his attention which led to a *second-order awareness* (Lambie & Marcel, 2002) of the emotions that he and his client shared empathetically a moment ago. As we have previously argued, when Margulies empathetically relived the story of his client (in a state of first-order phenomenology) he experienced her external positions as his own while the boundaries between his and her PPR must have become highly permeable. Second-order awareness, then, re-establishes the boundaries between their PPRs, introduces some distance between the therapist's and the client's positions, and thereby leads to a renewed acknowledgement of the client's interior positions by the therapist. From Margulies' perspective, we could say that the distance between the reflective *I* and *my* emotion generates a perceived distance between *I* and *You*. Awareness of the shared emotion, then, breaks the empathetic link and re-introduces the distinction between me and the other which was meaningless a moment ago. It opens up a 'space for dialogue' that enables the recognition of multi-perspectivity, multi-positionality, as well as positional history and context (see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Yet the question remains how the therapist could empathetically share his client's perceptions and emotions in a state of first-order phenomenology and then suddenly have a different perceptual and emotional experience in their shared narrated dreamscape. We suggest the answer to this question lies in the fact that the client's PPR in the therapist's PPR developed primarily through listening to her stories. But whereas the client's own PPR in her dialogical self is intimately linked with *her* positional histories and contexts, the therapist creates a client's PPR in his dialogical self that relates to other positions in the client's stories and *his* personal positional histories and contexts. In other words, his own perceptions,

memories and conceived meanings influence his experience of her inner landscape. Yet because Margulies acquires only a condensed version of her positional histories through the stories, in some respects his experience of her PPR may be more condensed or focused than hers. Silencing his own histories, he focuses on her without being easily distracted by associations that would lead her away from the current experience. Hence he might have a strong 'tactile' and 'kinesthetic' experience of the slippery surface that she did not have. Her PPR was far too diversified to pay attention to such a small detail. Furthermore, her secondary emotion led her to focus her attention on the son rather than on the situation which might have led to recognize her primary emotion linked to the slaughter memory.

So it was a differing sensory perception (together with its emotional tone) that made Margulies feel something 'strange' and 'uncanny', which – in turn – let him recognize that there are actually two *I*-positions in the narrated dreamscape: he is only accompanying his client there; it is not his dreamscape. Nevertheless, he recognized something important that she did not. Once he realized this, his task was to make her perceive what he had perceived; in other words, to make her perceive her dreamscape from a different *I*-position: not her as in *I-am-scared-for-my-son*, but her as in *I-am distressed- by-this-slaughter-imagery*. In this way, she could acknowledge that she was present as two *I*-positions in her dream and then start a dialogical relationship between her two positions. Thereby she might access the message the primary emotion holds for her (about the role of violence and violent men in her life).

As we see at the end of the dialogue presented in the first part of this chapter, the reflective process triggered by the therapist (as a 'promoter-position' in the self of the client, so to say) led her to explore various aspects of her primary emotion which eventually result in her laughing. We may interpret that as the start of a 'counter emotion', a helpful response to an initial emotion (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010), developing which might have a positive influence on her ongoing therapy and a repositioning of herself in her PPR.

## CONCLUSION

We may ask, what purpose has empathy then for the therapeutic process as a whole? Margulies' answer to this question is that it starts a 'spiral of understanding' where client and therapist sensually explore the now shared inner landscape and thereby uncover more and more meaningful aspects in the client's life history.

"In an edge-of-consciousness way I entered my patient's separate experiences, which then remained *in my mind* with their own intense sensory traces, ready to come to life. Despite the ultimate unknowability of the other, there was a coherence of world view that I could approximate from within my own distinctive world view. Moreover, this coherence extended into the shadows of her inscape, into its dormant possibilities. That is to say, *the inscape of this other person had its heretofore unelaborated absence-in-presence that became articulated in my own mental representation of her experience*. It was through the **empathic dialectic** that I then brought into consciousness my experience of her inscape, which was then affirmed in her connecting to my connections, pushing the spiral of understanding further. We explored reflected inscapes together, me blind and imagining, her frightened and recoiling." (1989, p. 57, our emphasis in bold print)



The last sentence highlights that these moments of shared experience are not only empathic in nature. They are but moments, accompanied by other moments where the therapist only guides the client through her inscape, or has to distance himself even more from her in order to reflect on what he was told. The psychotherapeutic process described in this chapter is therefore a dynamic process of distancing and feeling into, of emotional reflection and emotional immersion. But we would also like to take it a step further and argue that empathy, broadly conceived, is more than a complex psychological phenomenon; it is the ontological basis of dialogue and dialogical relationships as such. Too often we tend to narrow down the notion of dialogue to an interplay of words (see Gieser, 2008 for an alternative embodied approach). Yet this case study has shown that what makes dialogue possible in the first place is an ability to feel into someone else's positions, perceptually and emotionally. The 'spiral of (cognitive) understanding', that is the dialectic aspect of dialogicality, does not only rely on the recognition of distance between positions, a fundamental distinction between I and Thou alone. Dialogue needs also the merging of positions, the overcoming of distance. Without empathy we would not know how to assume another position - internal or external – and thus would not be able to 'connect to connections', as Margulies put it.

That the latter point is essential to the dialogical self has most recently been pointed out by Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) who described the dialogicality of emotion as follows:

“We assume that an emotion is dialogical when it meets a real, remembered, imagined or anticipated position in the other or the self and is influenced, renewed, understood, consoled or, in the broadest sense, influenced by that position in a way that the emotion, and the self more in general, is developing to some higher level of integration.”. (p. 29)

The key word here is “integration”. To integrate means to open oneself, to allow oneself to be affected and touched (the Latin *tangere* in 'integration'), to affect and touch others, and to draw this experience together to form a whole that is an extension of the self, a dialogical self. If we thus speak of dialogicality we mean this continuous *movement* between positions, of feeling into and distancing, alongside the static turn-taking *points* of a dialogue. As we have seen, just to listen to someone draws us into their world and them into ours. A dialogue is not only a linguistic phenomenon; it is a perceptual and emotional basis for empathy.

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*Chapter 10*

**GENDER, EMBODIMENT, AND POSITIONING  
IN THE DIALOGICAL SELF:  
DO MEN AND WOMEN SEE EYE TO EYE?**

*Peter Raggatt*

**INTRODUCTION**

“...the self experiences his external body (the one the Other sees) as a series of disparate fragments, dangling on the string of his inner sensation.” (Ann Jefferson, 1989, p. 154)

“No matter how much you think you’re making sense they’re still looking at your boobs.”

*Melissa Madden Gray, 2008, p. 7*

These quotes point in different ways to the phenomenology of our embodied social relations. In sharing experience there is always a spatial and experiential ‘gap’ to be negotiated, suggesting that dialogue will always be constrained by our different positions. Our bodies are an important part of this dialogical (dis)engagement. The quote from Jefferson evokes the quandaries of the mirroring experience – the image we see of ourselves in the mirror is always incomplete and can never match the view that others see. We can only make a guess about the other’s view. The second quote, from a popular Australian feminist comic, is also rich in signification. It parodies the gender wars; implies a predatory sexuality in men; and references the ‘objectification’ of women’s bodies. But the joke can also be read as giving a social (gendered) context to the same disengagement between self and other proposed in Jefferson’s more dispassionate phenomenological description.

Notwithstanding these observations the topic of ‘embodiment’ has received only limited attention in discussions of the dialogical self, perhaps because notions of dialogue and ‘dialogism’ invoke the spoken word as primary medium. In this chapter I will address aspects of embodiment as a form of positioning within a dialogical self theory (DST) framework. I will also report some findings from a survey of positioning and embodiment amongst midlife adults. Taking the lead from Gray’s observation, I will focus specifically on the interaction of

gender with body image representations, and consider how these relate to positioning in a DST framework. The findings point to problems of cross-gender communication and conflict that can be illuminated using DST. I will conclude with an alternative dialogical interpretation for Gray's wry observation about men looking at her boobs.

## DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

I begin with an overview of DST and consider some specific extensions of the theory that are a part of the research approach taken here. Drawing originally on James (1890), Bakhtin (1981, 1929/1984), and Mead (1934), Hermans (2001; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) has defined the dialogical self as a dynamic multiplicity of several 'I-positions' in the landscape of the mind, each position voicing a different view of the self in an ongoing dialogue with the world. I think several key principles underpin this theoretical linkage of self with dialogue, summarized here in point form:

- (i) First there is really no transcendental, core, or super-ordinate self in a dialogical approach. The theory posits different voices *positioned* in the person as well as between persons. The self emerges in this field of dialogue (Raggatt, 2010).
- (ii) Second, different I-positions are emergent 'in' and 'over' time (the synchronic and diachronic dimensions are both important). I-positions, thus constituted, have both local specific action patterns and extended historical/narrative coherence and continuity (see Raggatt, 2006).
- (iii) A corollary of (ii) is that positioning implies change, but also continuity. I-positions suggest oscillations of the self in time, but the concept of 'storied voice' implies continuity through time as well.
- (iv) Finally, I-positions are frequently described by individuals in terms of paired opposites (see e.g., Raggatt, 2000, 2002, 2006). I have argued that the coordinates of these oppositions can be explained by both intra-personal (reflexive) and inter-personal (social) positioning (Raggatt, 2007).

In the present approach the way persons construe conflict is viewed as crucial to positioning and hence to the formation of the self. It follows then that a theory of positioning will require further elaboration in the future if a dialogical approach to the self is to prosper. In the next section I address this topic briefly, before turning to a discussion of gender and embodiment in relation to positioning.

## POSITIONING THEORY

Looking 'inside' individuals, positioning implies oppositions and tensions between voiced locations. Here I focus on the task of analysing opposed I-positions in a person's *narrative* accounts of self, as distinct from a positioning analysis of specific micro-social happenings. This distinction suggests that positioning theory has a range of different applications and proponents. The social constructionists have focussed on the flux of

positioning in settings ranging from micro-social dyadic encounters to diplomatic exchanges between nation states (e.g., Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Hollway, 1984; Gergen, 1991). Constructivist and narrative-based approaches, on the other hand, began by focussing on positioning processes in personality and in individual development across time (e.g., Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Raggatt, 2006, 2007). The concept of positioning therefore has a wide range of convenience. It can be applied to what happens in conversations; it is constructed in relationships; it shapes the stories we tell; and it is often imposed by the political and social order (Raggatt, 2007). With this scope and flexibility in mind the approach taken here acknowledges the necessity to understand positioning in terms of both individual and social coordinates.

The approach that I use to code positioning processes is derived from a classificatory scheme developed in earlier work (Raggatt, 2007). In that work positioning was classified in three domains: (i) mode of expression, (ii) reflexive (or personal) forms, and (iii) socially constituted forms (Raggatt, 2007). Table 1 summarizes this classificatory scheme. No claims are made that the scheme is universal or comprehensive. It should be considered a ‘work-in-progress’ model. Referring to Table 1, in panel (a) under modes of expression are included the *Narrative/Discursive*, which is the medium of storytelling (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Freeman, 1993; Raggatt, 2010); the *Performative/Expressive*, which incorporates role play, stagecraft, and scripting; and the *Embodied*, which incorporates body image, non-verbal expression, and body adornment. Aspects of these elements can be coded in life history data (discussed later). The codes for reflexive positioning, shown in panel (b), were derived from the broad literature on ‘intra-psychic’ conflict in the person: *Esteem* – to maximize positive self-evaluations and minimize negative ones<sup>1</sup>; *Affective* – to maximize pleasure and minimize pain; *Agentic* – to act in the world as an independent being; and *Communion-Oriented* – to find intimacy, attachment and connection in the world (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. Socially constituted positioning (the last panel of Table 1) may take many forms. I have focussed here on the effects of power in social settings involving hierarchies. At least three forms meet this criterion: occupational/status conflict, gender conflict, and social class conflict. Their inclusion recognizes that social positioning is sanctioned by power differences which give rise to uncertainties and to tensions in various social settings<sup>3</sup>. Gender conflicts are, of course, one important arena for these tensions, and it is to this topic that I now turn. In the next section I address the question of how differences between the sexes might be expressed within a positioning framework.

<sup>1</sup> Modern notions of self esteem are linked to the much older idea of ‘moral career’ and to the problem of how to lead a good life (McIntyre, 1981). These concerns are reflected culturally in Campbell’s (1956) monomyth of the hero fighting dark forces (on the inside as well as outside), and in Propp’s (1928/1968) classic analysis of folk tales, in which plot resolves down to a confrontation between a hero and a villain. Hence, from the perspective of reflexive positioning of the self, we may each be the containers for internalized heroes and villains.

<sup>2</sup> The dynamic force behind agency is an existential need: By what consuming project or set of projects can my life take on special meaning (Sartre, 1965)? How is power to be exercised? Communion, on the other hand, addresses the problem of how to find love and companionship in the world. Who can one care for and who can one trust? The dialectical tension between agency and communion is widely recognized in the psychological literature. For example, the psycho-analytic (Bakan, 1966; Freud, 1920/1955), personological (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1985) and social psychological traditions have all been concerned with agency and communion as sources of psychological conflict (Wiggins, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See Raggatt (2007) for an extended discussion of all these positioning forms. Space restrictions do not allow further treatment here.

**Table 1. Forms of positioning in the dialogical self**

<b>(a) Medium of Expression</b>	
Narrative/Discursive	storied self; autobiography; narrative voice
Performative/Expressive	role play; scripts; rituals
Embodied	body image, costume
<b>(b) Reflexive</b>	
Esteem Conflict	good self vs. bad self
Agency Conflict	strong self vs. weak self
Communion Conflict	intimacy vs. separation
Affect	happy self vs. sad self
<b>(c) Social</b>	
Occupation/status Conflict	boss vs. subordinate
Social Class Conflict	higher vs. lower
Cross-Gender Conflict	patriarchy; masculinity vs. femininity

Note: Criteria for coding forms of positioning based on this classification system are:

1. Narrative presence of narrative accounts linking opposed positions;
2. Performative presence of role play (e.g., work roles) linking opposed positions;
3. Embodied presence of body image links among opposed positions;
4. Esteem presence of good self/bad self positions;
5. Agency presence of strong self/weak self positions;
6. Communion presence of intimacy vs. separation-related positions;
7. Affect presence of happy self/sad self positions;
8. Occupation presence of power differential arising from work/status conflict;
9. Cross-Gender presence of power differential arising from cross-gender conflict ;
10. Social Class presence of power differential arising from social class conflict.

## **POSITIONING, GENDER, AND EMBODIMENT**

There has been little systematic empirical inquiry into positioning as a feature of the dialogical self in individuals, let alone a consideration of how important social categories such as gender might interact with these processes (Raggatt, 2008). Concerning the interface between gender and positioning, there is an extensive empirical literature inquiring into gender differences from which to draw some direction. It is not my intention to review that literature here. Instead, we can draw from it some pointers to gender differences in positioning. For example, in a real-world event-sampling study conducted in a large organization, Moskowitz, Jung Suh & Desaulniers (1994) found that females were more attuned to intimacy and affiliation needs in randomly sampled work situations *regardless* of status-relevant context (interactions with supervisors versus co-workers). Males, on the other hand, were more sensitive to the status-relevant context. These findings were significant because the researchers sampled everyday events as they happened, rather than relying on retrospective recall or on reports of attitudes and beliefs. More generally in research on social motives the literature suggests that females are typically more attuned to verbal communication and intimacy concerns, while males are more individualistic and concerned

with status (e.g., Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1989, 1993; McAdams et al., 1988; Stewart & Chester, 1982).

Assuming that these differences between the sexes are real<sup>4</sup>, they can be evaluated by examining positioning in the context of how males and females construe the dialogical self. First, in the domain of reflexive positioning (Table 1), if females have more ‘relational’ selves (Josselson, 1994) they should prioritize intimacy and connection vs. its absence in opposing I-positions. Hence we would predict gender differences in communion-oriented positioning with this being more apparent in the self-positioning of women. On the other hand, if males are more concerned with social dominance (or its lack), then we would expect them to construe more agency concerns in their positioning conflicts. Second, from the perspective of social positioning (see Table 1), if females are positioned as less dominant and more “compliant”, it could be predicted that gender-related interpersonal conflicts will be more salient for women.

Another domain in which differences have featured strongly in research findings involving gender is body image. The object relations theorists have used a broad definition for body image which is closest to the usage intended here. Feldman (1975) defines body image as “the sum of the attitudes, feelings, memories and experiences an individual has towards his own body – both as an integrated whole, and in respect of its component parts” (p. 317). Hence, ‘body image’ can be unpacked so that it is not in the ordinary sense a singular image so much as a collection of images<sup>5</sup>. Previous research suggests that women experience greater body image distortions than men, and they have repeatedly been found to have lower body image satisfaction (e.g., Cash & Henry, 1995; Penkal & Kirdek, 2007; Sondhaus, Kurtz & Strube, 2001; Tiggemann, 2004). How might such body image differences be reflected in gendered positioning? Since the method of evaluating the DS to be described here includes body image measures, and since the conceptualization of positioning used here includes ‘embodiment’ as one mode of expression, we can address this question here.

In terms of existing theory linking gender, embodiment, and positioning, Frederickson and Roberts (1997) have attempted to explain gender-specific body image differences using ‘objectification theory’. The theory holds that women, more than do men, learn to assess their own value as a function of how they believe their bodies are viewed by others, particularly men – in other words, they ‘self-objectify’. Hence, the body becomes the sight of imperfections imagined to be on display for others. Frederickson and Roberts propose that Western women in particular, when compared to men, learn to assess their own value as a function of body image (dis)satisfaction. The result is a heightened focus on grooming and other (body) image-enhancing behaviours for women relative to men, greater anxiety about appearance in women, and, some theorists argue, a diminished confidence in other evaluative contexts unrelated to appearance (e.g., Davis, Dionne and Shuster, 2001).

Assuming that female self-objectification is widespread in Western cultures one might expect greater salience for body image in the positioning conflicts of women compared to men. For example, one might predict that for females esteem conflicts (reflexive positioning)

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<sup>4</sup> I will not address at this point the question of whether these differences can be explained by gender stereotypes.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the eyes can symbolize or represent friendliness, openness or sociability, the shoulders may represent ‘strength of character’, while the belly may stand for more negative attributes, such as laziness. It is a short step from there to conceptualize body image constituents as an important potential source of self-representations.

will interact with body image concerns (embodied positioning), and that women would generally hold more negative perceptions of their bodies.

In what follows, interactions between gender, positioning and body image are explored empirically. Two general propositions will be examined: (i) that there will be gender differences in positioning, and (ii) that measures of body image, gender and positioning will show interactions.

## **A SURVEY OF THE DIALOGICAL SELF: METHODS**

The findings to be reported here form part of a larger ongoing project that examines the DS using life narrative methods. The data comes from 109 adults who were enrolled as mature age students in undergraduate courses at James Cook University in Australia (mean age was 31 years). They were predominantly white and middle class, and females were over-represented relative to males (33 males, 76 females). To investigate the dialogical self I use a life narrative-based assessment method (or more correctly, set of methods) that is designed to ‘map’ I-positions in the individual. The assessment procedure is called the Personality Web Protocol (PWP). It has been described in detail elsewhere (Raggatt, 2000, 2006) and so here I will confine my description to an abbreviated synopsis. The method can be combined with in depth semi-structured interviewing to yield detailed case studies (e.g., Raggatt, 2000, 2002, 2006). Alternatively, it can be adapted, as in the approach described here, to a pen and paper version in the form of a battery of instruments eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data. The procedure can be summarized as follows:

1. Informants list and describe 24 life history constituents or ‘attachments’. The list must include 6 significant people, 6 life events, 8 objects and places, and 4 body part constituents. Liked and disliked, or positive and negative exemplars of each component type are elicited<sup>6</sup>.
2. Informants sort their constituents into typically between 2 and 4 associated groups or clusters that define different self-relevant life themes and narratives.
3. Informants label each cluster with a self-relevant identifier (e.g., creative self, spiritual self, victim).
4. Informants are interviewed about their life history constituents and thematic clusters, or alternatively, they write commentaries on them.

For present purposes, as noted the data analyzed comes from a survey battery version of the PWP in which participants listed, sorted thematically, and labelled life history constituents and then wrote commentaries on the product of this exercise. Figure 1 shows a conceptual model for examining ‘oppositions’ in the life history thematic clusters derived using the PWP methodology. In Figure 1, the data collection and analytic process is summarized in the form of a flowchart. Life history constituents (people, events, etc.) are listed first. They are then

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<sup>6</sup> The list of material generated included: two liked associates, two disliked associates, and a liked and disliked public figure; peak (happy) and nadir (sad) experiences described from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; valued possessions, important places, and influential books or works of art; and four body part constituents (e.g., the eyes) that were respectively ‘liked’, ‘disliked’, ‘strong’, and ‘weak’.



sorted into associated groupings as defined by the informant (using the broad criterion of “self-relevant themes in thinking, feeling and experiencing”). The informant then provides a self-relevant label for each cluster. It is these clusters, their formation and particularly their opposition, that are the focus here. In the final phase of the analytic process, opposing clusters in the informants’ protocols are coded for positioning. For this analysis the positioning classification system outlined previously and shown in Table 1 was used.

**Table 2. Sample protocol: I-position clusters, descriptions and commentary from a female participant, aged 29**

<b>1. Positive Self</b>	“Brings together the positive, good and inspiring things in my life”
Mother	“she has always supported me in regard to traveling and learning”.
First plane flight	(aged 8) “with my mother”; (excitement, joy)
Joining RAAF	“I learnt lots of good things about myself” (excitement, pride)
Travel to Europe	With partner; “a dream come true”; (happiness)
Going to Uni.	“I feel more confident”; (happiness, eagerness)
<b>2. Negative Self</b>	“I have a negative self ...my childhood experiences with my father have been a dominating factor.”
Father	“put-downs coupled with drunken behavior and emotional abuse.” (anger)
Dispute - father	“father was drunk and was trying to load a gun. Mum took the gun”. (fear)
Lost bicycle	“my father abused me and told me how bad it was and that I deserved it.”
End Relationship	“huge self-doubt and lack of self-worth. I felt that I couldn’t trust anyone.”
My thighs	“I have cellulite, surface veins and stretch marks.” (insecurity)
Sweaty hands/feet	“I have hyperhidrosis (a medical condition) which is where there is an over-reaction of sweat glands. It worsens with anxiety.” (embarrassed)
<b>3. Artistic Self</b>	“I have always loved theatre, art and creativity. I feel that even though I haven’t pursued theatre, it really is my calling.”
Cate Blanchett	“I like the roles she plays. I admire her devotion to her husband and life.”
Sir Peter Ustinov	“I enjoy watching his character and the distinct sound of his voice.”
Fancy dress	“I have fun when I portray a character and watch people’s reaction.”
Painting	“Special because it is old...fine and delicate”; (creativity)
<b>4. Feminine Self</b>	“I love being a woman – an equal woman. I accept the differences with men and I enjoy these differences. I love being a feminine shape.”
Tailored suit	“It makes me feel professional and important, as well smart and beautiful.”
Sexy dress	“I enjoy wearing this dress. It shows my womanly curves.”
My calves	“I have always liked my calves as they look strong, athletic, and sexy.”
My body	“My body is all intact and I have ‘normal functioning’..”

Figure 1.

### **Coding the Protocols for Positioning**

Two independent judges with postgraduate training were used to code for positioning. The task required the judges to indicate the presence vs. absence of the expressive, reflexive, and social forms of positioning listed in Table 1. The coders were instructed to read synopses of the data provided by each informant. Table 2 shows a sample protocol from a 29 year old female participant. The protocol is typical of the sample in key respects. There is a pair of opposing I-positions she has called simply a “positive self” and a “negative self”, and two other positions defined as “artistic” and “feminine”. Note that the embodied mode of expression is important to both the “negative” and “feminine” positions. It was these protocols that were used to code for positioning.

The coders made judgments in two phases. In the first phase, the presence of opposing I-positions in the protocols was coded. It emerged that for 95 (86%) of the sample there was at least one pair of opposing I-positions. The coefficient of inter-judge reliability for this task was 0.94. In the second phase of coding, the pairs of opposing I-positions were marked, separately, for the presence/absence of first the expressive, then the reflexive, and finally the social forms of positioning. The mean co-efficient of inter-judge reliability for the second phase of the coding procedure was 0.88, and disagreements were resolved or the code entry was not scored.

## Computation of Body Image Indices

In order to analyze the body image data in relation to positioning and gender, a series of body zone indices were constructed from the body part constituents reported on the PWP<sup>7</sup>. This was necessary because the frequencies for individual body part references on the PWP-Q, e.g., to the legs, nose, or hands, were relatively low (a notable exception was the eyes). To address this problem, indices based on body zones or regions were compiled. Four zones were identified from the PWP-Q data: the *face* (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth, hair), *torso* (shoulders, chest, stomach, back), *lower body* (butt, legs, thighs, calves, etc.) and *body organs* (brain, heart). Separate indices for positive references ('liked' and 'strong' body parts), and negative references ('disliked' and 'weak' body parts) were computed for each of these four body zones. Thus, for interpretation purposes, dichotomous (presence-absence) variables were created depending on whether participants had reported *any one* of the body constituents comprising each zone, and both positively and negatively loaded indices were created.

## SURVEY FINDINGS: INTERACTIONS OF GENDER WITH POSITIONING AND EMBODIMENT

Table 3 shows frequencies (in %) broken down by gender, for the positioning codes [panel (a)] and the body image measures [panel (b)]. Since both the positioning codes and the embodiment measures were dichotomous,  $\chi^2$  (Chi-Squared) tests were computed to look at patterns of association with gender, and these are also reported in Table 3. With regard first to frequencies for the positioning codes in the sample as whole, frequencies for two of the codes -- the Narrative/Discursive and the Social Class Conflict codes -- were severely skewed and so no meaningful  $\chi^2$  comparisons on gender could be reported for these measures. Among the reflexive positioning codes, Communion and Esteem conflicts were the most frequently coded (45% and 38% of the total sample respectively). Among the social positioning codes, Cross-Gender Conflict was coded most frequently (39% of the sample). In the embodiment data, references to parts of the face (71% of the sample) and the torso (58% of the sample) were the most frequently reported.

Looking now at the frequencies broken down by gender and at the  $\chi^2$  tests for sex differences on the positioning codes [panel (a) of Table 3], first, there were no differences between the sexes on the *expressive* positioning codes. Notably, embodied expression was coded as frequently in the opposed I-positions of males as females (about 42% of protocols for both sexes). Hence the prediction of greater embodied conflict for females was not supported. However, there were marked gender differences in the results for both the *reflexive* and *social* forms of positioning, and these were largely in accord with predictions. Female protocols were coded for both Communion and Cross-Gender conflicts at significantly higher frequencies than for males, as had been predicted. Female protocols were also coded for Esteem conflicts (Good Self/Bad Self I-positions) at twice the frequency of males, and this was also statistically significant. Males, on the other hand, were nearly twice as likely to represent internal conflicts in terms of Agency themes, a difference that was also statistically

<sup>7</sup> Recall that informants were required to list and comment on a 'liked', 'disliked', 'strong', and 'weak' body part.

significant. With the possible exception of the differences on the code for Esteem, these gender effects are consistent with the research literature on social motives reviewed earlier. Further, the differences in reporting Cross-Gender conflicts may reflect real gender-based power differentials in the community sampled. This finding reinforces the importance of social positioning factors for identity conflicts, factors that may be outside individual agency or control.

Panel (b) of Table 3 shows the results of tests for gender differences on the body image indices. Here there are some intriguing interactions. The  $\chi^2$  tests reveal gender differences on the face, torso, and lower body indices. Females in the sample made significantly more *positive* references to the face on the PWP-Q (59% of females), and this was at nearly twice the rate of males (31%). Males, on the other hand, made significantly more *negative* references to the face (35%), at more than twice the rate of females (13%). For this sample then, it would appear that *positive* I-positions are signified in facial features for females only, while the males did the reverse, signifying *negative* I-positions in facial features. As expected, females were more negative than males in construing their torsos and lower bodies. Males produced significantly more positive references to their torsos in the protocols ( $\chi^2 = 3.56$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), while females made significantly more negative references to their lower bodies ( $\chi^2 = 4.05$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

In summary the females in the sample construed their faces positively and their lower bodies negatively in the context of their I-positions, while the males construed their faces negatively and their torsos positively. These findings suggest that there are different processes of embodying the self in men and women. More light may be shed on this by looking at higher-order (three-way) interactions between gender, the positioning codes, and the body image measures. Since gender co-varies with both the positioning and body image data, the possibility of higher-order interactions can be explored. For example, since there were strong gender differences in the way the face was represented (positively by females, negatively by males) we might explore whether such patterns of difference interact with positioning. To address this question Log-Linear Analyses (based on  $\chi^2$ ) were performed to search for three-way interactions between gender, the positioning codes and the body zone indices. Two contrasting effects were detected. First, there was a significant three-way interaction between gender (being female), Esteem conflicts, and the positive Face index ( $\chi^2 = 5.08$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Second, there was a significant three-way interaction between gender (being male), Esteem conflicts, and the positive Torso index ( $\chi^2 = 3.44$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). I think we can interpret these interactions within the framework of dialogical self theory in terms of two distinct patterns.

The women *embodied* healthy esteem through their faces while the men did this through their torsos. In short, in females conflicts involving esteem, communion, and cross-gender conflicts were more important than for males, the face was the sight of positive I-positions, and 'disliked' and 'weak' body parts were focussed in the lower body. In males, conflicts over agency (strong-weak I-positions) were more salient, the face was construed negatively rather than positively, and positive I-positions were given embodied expression through the torso.

**Table 3. Gender comparisons on the positioning and body image measures**

		Frequency		df	Phi	$\chi^2$
		Males	Females			
<i>(a) Gender x Positioning</i>						
Narrative		85.2	88.4			
Performative		27.3	17.1	1	-.12	1.48
Embodied		42.4	42.1	1	.01	0.01
Esteem		21.2	<b>40.8</b>	1	.19	<b>3.88*</b>
Agency		<b>39.4</b>	22.4	1	-.18	<b>3.34*</b>
Communion		24.2	<b>48.7</b>	1	.23	<b>5.67**</b>
Affect		21.2	26.3	1	.05	0.32
Occupation/Status Conflict		21.2	11.8	1	-.12	1.61
Cross-Gender Interpersonal Conflict		21.2	<b>46.1</b>	1	.24	<b>5.99**</b>
Social Class Conflict		10.1	11.7			
<i>(b) Gender x Body Image Indices</i>						
Face Index	positive	31.0	<b>59.4</b>	1	.26	<b>6.74**</b>
	negative	<b>34.5</b>	13.5	1	-.24	<b>5.85**</b>
Torso Index	positive	<b>37.9</b>	20.2	1	-.19	<b>3.64*</b>
	negative	37.9	31.0	1	-.07	0.44
Lower Body Index	positive	21.0	20.8	1	-.01	0.01
	negative	6.9	<b>24.3</b>	1	.20	<b>4.05*</b>
Body Organ Index	positive	20.6	30.0	1	.09	0.86
	negative	6.9	16.2	1	.12	1.54

N = 109.

\* p&lt;0.05, \*\* p&lt;0.01.

### IMPLICATIONS: DO MEN AND WOMEN SEE EYE TO EYE?

Here I want to make some observations about embodied communication, particularly keeping in mind the quotes from Jefferson and Gray with which I began this chapter. We might ask for example whether any new understandings about embodied processes of positioning can be gleaned from the findings described here. First, it needs to be reiterated that there will always be *uncertainty* about our own embodied expression in the world. This is because of a fundamental disengagement from the other's view. As Jefferson (1989, p. 154) observes, the image we see of ourselves in the mirror is but one "disparate fragment, dangling on the string of [our] inner sensation". Perhaps this fundamental uncertainty is implicated in the disengagement between the genders over issues of embodiment, even when accounting for the effects of patriarchy and gendered oppression? Certainly, a feminist interpretation can not be discounted because the findings presented here are in some respects consistent with Frederickson and Roberts (1997) 'objectification theory'. The females in the sample were more negative about their lower bodies than were the males. One possible resolution is to read the conflicts between the sexes over the body as arising out of *two* positioning processes, one based on the 'objectification' of women through *social* positioning, and the other arising out of uncertainties about self-embodied expression that we all share, but which the sexes perhaps

handle differently (reflexive positioning). To put this another way, differences between the sexes in self-embodied representations arise not just out of conditions of patriarchy and gendered oppression, but also out of our fundamental blind-sightedness to the other's view of our bodies. Males and females may handle this problem quite differently.

Returning now to Melissa Madden Gray's (2008) wry observation that "No matter how much you think you're making sense, they're still looking at your boobs" (p. 7) -- notice that the gendered disjunction observed in the present findings is captured nicely in this jibe. That is to say, while Gray is 'speaking her mind' (and thinking she is making sense) her interlocutors are staring at her breasts. Putting aside for the moment the allusions to male lust and sexual aggression, on the one hand, and female 'honour' and opprobrium directed at men, on the other -- the sub-texts in the joke -- perhaps we can re-interpret the disengagement here in terms of fractured dialogues and failures of embodied communication across gender boundaries? That is to say, perhaps there is a deep *disengagement* between the sexes with respect to the way the body maps onto conceptions of the self? A disengagement that can not be fully explained in terms of gender wars over the 'objectification' of female bodies. Hence, while the male gaze may drop to a girl's torso and lower body, as it does in the joke, the male can be positioned as 'looking out' - *speaking* - from his own torso. That is, he *prefers* to speak with his good self from a site with an embodied focus in his own torso (not his head or face). Women, on the other hand, resist this kind of 'objectification' because they are looking out -- *speaking* -- from their faces. The female preference is for embodying desired selves in the face, not parts of the lower body. The findings reported here suggest that males do not share this preference. In consequence this dialogical disjunction becomes grist for the mill of sexual confusions, sexual politics, and feminist jokes.

Is there any evidence in the literature on body image that is congruent with the findings here? Several studies describe a similar pattern of findings. When Sondhaus, Kurtz and Strube (2001) examined body satisfaction in relation to self-esteem in a large sample of college students, they found that academic success was positively related to body satisfaction only in males. In the females, academic success was related to body *dissatisfaction*. It is not clear that this result can be explained fully in terms of patriarchy or Objectification Theory. When Feldman (1975) asked anorexic women to rate satisfaction with a range of body parts (including the face, hands, breasts, belly, and buttocks), the pattern of findings matched the present ones for females, but in an amplified way. That is, the anorexic women expressed an intense dislike for their lower body parts, but liked their faces a great deal. Since the beauty of a woman's face might also be the subject of objectification, it is not clear that objectification theory can account for the way females embody esteem through the face.

Perhaps the focus on *communion* themes in the positioning efforts of the women in this study is salient here? In the females, positive I-positions were linked to the face *as the focus for social interaction*. For example, many women in the sample described their eyes as embodying strength and honesty in the context of esteem concerns and relationship conflicts. The males in the sample positioned themselves very differently in embodied terms. As we have seen, they construed esteem through their torsos. Thus, when the pattern of embodied disengagement between the sexes is coupled with the more communion-oriented focus on conflict in the women, compared to the more individual (agentic) concerns of the men, a picture emerges of female sociality with positive I-positions embodied in the face, and male physicality, with positive I-positions embodied in the torso. Embodied positioning in men and women, therefore, is a source of important differences not just because of female

objectification (social positioning), but because the dialogical self is embodied differently by men and women (reflexive positioning). Problems emerge, then, because males and females use quite different modes of embodying self-expression.

So, do men and women have trouble seeing eye to eye, as Gray (2008) asserts in her joke? The present analysis seems to confirm that a problem exists! Perhaps differences in embodying the self across the sexes are a natural concomitant of differences in the way conflict is construed by men and women. Should we accept then the canonical narrative of male lust and so blame the man for his wandering gaze? – the message behind Gray’s joke. It is possible that males just can’t help it; it being a curious outgrowth and consequence of the way men position *themselves* in embodied terms.

## CONCLUSION

With reference finally to the development of positioning theory more generally, I have tried to illustrate how the approach taken here has the potential to provide a generative framework for studying the dialogical self in its social and cultural context. A principle purpose here was to demonstrate how the approach can account for the complexity of the self’s constitution, *both* in individual-reflexive and social terms. The model of positioning used here assumes that both agentic/reflexive and socially constituted influences operate together in the formation of psychic conflict. In terms of dialogical self theory, it is noteworthy that the kinds of sex differences illustrated here may only become visible by conceptualising the self as a multiplicity of conflicting positions. Using this strategy, a picture of underlying tensions in the organisation of the self becomes apparent, and these tensions can be interpreted for specific individuals or for groups, in harness with positioning theory.

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*Chapter 11*

**DIALOGICALITY AND THE (DE)SECURITISATION OF  
SELF: GLOBALISATION, MIGRATION AND  
MULTICULTURAL POLITICS**

*Catarina Kinnvall and Sarah Scuzzarello*

**INTRODUCTION**

The idea that multiculturalism is in crisis is a predominant feature of the 21st century. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, and London this idea has become a pronounced aspect of public debate across Western Europe. Glazer's optimistic statement that "We're All Multiculturalists Now!" (1997, book title) seems to have lost its resonance among both politicians and the public at large. A commonly shared narrative of crisis has emerged among the public and policy makers who perceive previous policies, which emphasised difference over communality and cultural particularity over social cohesion, as a kind of failed experimentation.

Several academic studies have demonstrated a 'retreat' of multiculturalism in Europe and their replacement by policies of civic integration (Joppke, 2004). By way of example, several countries traditionally labelled 'multicultural' (e.g., Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands) have introduced citizenship rituals, while others have made language and national culture tests a precondition for naturalisation (e.g., Britain and Denmark). Furthermore, politicians and policy-makers increasingly use a rhetoric which emphasises the need to develop a sense of belonging and identity (Home Office, 2002). A number of studies have argued that migration is increasingly being presented as a danger to the public order and a threat to European society. Drawing upon critical security studies, Weaver et al. (1993) argue, for instance, that migration has increasingly become constructed as a threat to cultural, economic but also physical security (see also den Boer, 1995; Huysmans, 1995, 2000; Kinnvall, 2004; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a critique and a development of this approach, see Boswell (2007).

In this context Tariq Modood (2005, 2007), among others, has argued that Muslims in Europe have become the main scapegoats of the critics of multiculturalism. Young male Muslims are often depicted as increasingly radicalized and urban areas, densely populated by Muslims, are often seen as a fertile breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalism. Women and the veiling issue in particular, has also become an easy target well beyond France, where the debate started in the late 1980s. The veil, in all its shapes and lengths, often stands for the most visible illustration of patriarchal, religious oppression of Muslim women<sup>2</sup>. In this context several European countries have decided to ban (or attempted to do so) the use of headscarves in the public domain. Sceptical voices concerning the possibilities to live in a multicultural, non-antagonistic society have also been augmented among minorities. Research shows that events like rallies in support of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 could be the expression of sceptical voices among minority groups regarding the possibilities of living in a multicultural society (Akhtar, 2005).

In this chapter we argue that in an increasingly globalised and culturally diverse world, majority and minority communities may perceive migration and increased diversity as threats in relation to the survival of the community and the preservation of culture and heritage. They are securitised, i.e., presented as an existential threat<sup>3</sup>, thus justifying actions outside the common bounds of political procedure (Buzan et al., 1998). These perceived threats are likely to lead to ‘monological closures’, to use Bakhtin’s terminology (1979/1986), which refers to the attempts made by a single authority to monopolise meaning to the exclusion of all competing voices<sup>4</sup>. A range of threats to identity and beliefs prompt communities to seek socio-cultural and religious refuge in a series of ‘born again’ adoptions of religious, national, ethno-racial, or gendered signifiers (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010). This resort to essentialism is what we label the ‘securitisation of subjectivity’ (Kinnvall, 2004, 2006), as discussed later. As Akhtar (2005) demonstrates, young Muslims’ increased adherence to religion can be explained not only in structural terms (e.g., their economic and social exclusion) but also in psychological terms. The “return to religion” is a phenomenon “that offers individuals who feel in some ways constrained by their circumstances an alternative ideology, a sense of belonging, solidarity and a means of political mobilization” (Akhtar, 2005, p. 165).

Yet globalisation and diversity need not only prompt closure and securitisation. The late-modern world also brings with it an empowering and transformative potential as people have the possibility of organising themselves against different kinds of oppression (Nesbitt-Larking, 2009). The multitude of daily encounters at work, in schools, or through associations, for instance, provide several opportunities for challenging one’s mores and traditions, for questioning those taken-for-granted narratives about society, its members and their “proper” behaviour (i.e., desecuritisation). We argue that the processes of securitisation and desecuritisation can be better understood and analyzed by reference to dialogical approaches to research in social psychology. In the field of international relations (IR), where the concept of ‘securitisation’ was originally developed, there is a tendency to focus on social

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<sup>2</sup> For recent works on the veiling issue see, among others Mahmood (2005), Scott (2007), Roy (2007), Joppke (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Here we rely on Anthony Giddens’ (1991) discussion of existential as being concerned with existence itself, the external world and human life, the existence of the other, and what self-identity actually is. An existential threat is perceived as a threat against all these aspects of being.

<sup>4</sup> See also Gillespie (2008) for a similar argument.

and cognitive relations at the macro level, while devoting less attention to how securitisation processes affect people's lives. Coming from a research tradition in IR, we see a need to complement this body of work with analytical tools borrowed from social psychology to better understand how macro phenomena, such as the construction of social representations, impact on the micro level of individual identification.

We argue that a dialogical conceptualisation of the self as proposed by, among others, Hermans and associates (1992) contributes significantly to the understanding of the dynamics of identity construction in the context of globalised and diverse societies. We identify two reasons for this. First, it provides a perspective on the self that enables researchers to better understand the mechanisms that may lead to monological closures and the securitisation of subjectivity. At the same time, a dialogical understanding of the self challenges the practices and discourses which tend to portray identity as static and reified. Second, a dialogical approach provides a number of critical theoretical and analytical tools for challenging the consequences of monological closures. As Hermans and Dimaggio emphasize "one of the central features of dialogical relationships is that they have the potential of innovating the self" (2007, p. 53). In the context of globalisation and increased migration flows a person could develop new personal stories which create new affiliations and forms of identification with the 'other'. In this way she could change her antagonistic psychological orientations towards the 'other' and thus promote social courage, pro-social behaviour, tolerance and care in a global world.

We proceed by presenting the work on dialogical self (Hermans et al., 1992; Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) and clarify the theoretical linkages between this body of literature and critical security studies as developed in IR (Buzan et al., 1998). Second, in addressing some of the shortcomings of dialogical self theory we demonstrate how positioning theories (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) can strengthen a conception of dialogical self. Here we draw upon Marková's (2003a; 2003b; 2006) concept of dialogicality, i.e., "the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of the 'Alter'" (i.e., of otherness) (2003b, p. 249) as well as Raggatt's understanding of positioning (2007; 2010; this volume) and argue that both examine personal and social constructions of self and that they therefore force us to think of self and identity in terms of both change and continuity. Finally, we present some of the implications of dialogicality, positioning and the (de)securitisation of subjectivity for ethics and politics in the context of globalisation and increased migration flows. In conclusion, we argue in favour of a dialogically constituted critical self that is capable distancing itself from other symbolic orders. This can lead to a heightened degree of reflexivity.

## **DIALOGICAL SELF, POSITIONING AND GLOBALISATION**

The Russian literary theorist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1979/1986; 1994) stressed that the characters in Dostoevsky's works were created in a dialogue of intersecting voices. Bakhtin called this sort of novel polyphonic. The concept of polyphony has implications for how the self is re-conceptualized in terms of continuous interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues and has recently inspired social psychologists and personality psychologists. One of

the strands of literature inspired by a Bakhtinian understanding of the self as polyphonic is dialogical self theory (Hermans et al. 1992; Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

Hermans and colleagues define the dialogical self as “a dynamic of multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in an imaginal landscape” (1992, p. 28). The self is constituted by a polyphony of voices in constant dialogue with each other and with the outer world. One voice is emphasized over others in accordance with changes in time and space. These voices are not necessarily harmonious, but can rather express different and even opposed narratives about the self (Hermans et al., 1992; Hermans, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. The metaphor of voices within the self is commonly translated in terms of “a dynamic multiplicity of positions” (Hermans, 2001, p. 258), in which the individual is involved in an active process of positioning depending on the particular situation at hand. Thus conceived, the dialogical self is dynamic in that the ‘I’ can occupy different positions depending on the context in which it acts. It is ‘social’, not so much in the sense that a self-contained individual enters into social interactions with others, but in the sense that the self is constituted by a multiplicity of internal and external positions (Hermans, 2001). Internal positions refer to those conceived of as parts of one’s self (e.g., I as a mother), while external positions are used to describe people and objects that are part of the external environment and relevant from the perspective of one or more of the internal positions (e.g., my child) (Hermans, 2001). These positions interact with each other, and also with a third zone, the outside world. Hermans (2001) argues that a person is not necessarily aware of all aspects of these positions (e.g., a person may be positioned as a migrant despite the fact that he or she may be a citizen in a country and not feel like a migrant), but they may become part of their internal and external positions later in life (for instance when entering the job market, he or she may be unable to get a job because of their particular migrant positioning). The distinction between the ‘outside world’ and ‘external/internal positions’ is problematic, however, if the relation between them, i.e., the dynamics of positioning<sup>6</sup>, is not studied and understood. Taking the work of Hermans and colleagues as a case in point, it remains unclear how broader social positions affect the development of the self unless we also take seriously the discursive and structural aspects of positioning. This is particularly important as we discuss how a dialogical approach can actually be helpful for changing the often marginalized positions of migrants in Western societies.

In contrast to dialogical self scholars, Harré and van Langenhove (1991; 1999), in their original definition of positioning theory, emphasize the social and discursive aspects of positioning at the cost of the personal. Positioning, according to Harré and van Langenhove, indicates the relational cluster of generic personal attributes which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup and even intrapersonal action. Positioning takes place within a moral order as people are positioned in various ways; dominant or submissive, dependent or independent, masculine or feminine, and so on. Such dichotomies reflect current power relationships and have consequences for how others are conceived. Outsiders

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<sup>5</sup> Valsiner (2005) argues that Hermans’ and associates’ conception of different I-positions as alternating between internal and external positions, is an implementation of George Herbert Mead’s original view of the ongoing relation between I and ME. This line of thinking is not new, he argues. Rather, psychological theorising has long been concerned with counter-positioning, such as: ego and non-ego, narrative and counter-narrative, voice and non-voice, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Positioning was originally defined by Harré and van Langenhove as “the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations” (1992, p. 395).

(immigrants, minorities, strangers) are commonly perceived as a homogenous category of others even when being insiders to a social, economic and political system. However, the level of 'foreignhood', or 'strangeness', given to the other is contextual. It is dependent upon the type of situation in which the other is observed as well as the hierarchical position of the other (Oommen, 1994).

This line of reasoning can be illustrated by looking at the situation in Italy, while recognizing that these developments are not limited to Italy alone. Since the early 1990s, Italian immigration policies have defined migrants as *extracomunitari* (extracommunitarians), which denotes their origins outside the European Community, now the European Union. In public discourse, the term also positions them in a permanent status of non-belonging to the Italian nation and it underlines not only an ethno-cultural distance, but also a material one. The *extracomunitario* is a person who has emigrated because she/he is poor (Schmidt, 2004; Scuzzarello, 2010). Interestingly, while the definition of migrants as *extracomunitari* is unavoidably homogenizing, the national groups that have been included in this definition by the media and the public have varied depending on a range of socio-political processes that have affected the country. In the 1990s, when Italy was experiencing significant migration flows from Albania, people coming from that part of the world were not positioned mainly as *extracomunitari*, but rather as Albanesi. This image depicted Albanian migrants as particularly prone to criminality and violence (Mai, 2002). Since the increased migration flows from Eastern Europe during the early 2000s, the public's attention has turned away from Albanians, who are now usually labelled *extracomunitari*. Romanians have instead become the new target of public attention and have recently been positioned by the media and in the political debates as violent and criminals<sup>7</sup>.

The psychological impact of such positioning on migrants may be difficult to grasp, however, unless we move towards a more complex approach to positioning. Raggatt (2007), in criticizing Harré's and Langenhove's definition of positioning for prioritizing the discursive aspects of positioning at the cost of the personal, suggests that the relation between the social and the personal cannot be conceived of as independent processes: "the self embodies the personal and the social simultaneously, just as it also embodies change and permanence" (Raggatt, 2007, p. 359). Positioning, he argues, captures the dynamics (movement) in polyphonic conceptions of the self from both a personal-dynamic perspective and a social-discursive perspective. The classification he suggests is based on three distinctions: (1) indicating medium or mode of expression of positioning (narrative/discursive, performative/expressive and embodied), (2) personal positioning identifying conflict within a person, and (3) social positioning involving social and cultural constructions (conversational/discursive, institutional roles/rituals, political/hierarchical). The advantage of Raggatt's classification, which is explored further in the concluding section of this chapter, lies in its focus on both personal and social constructions of self which implies that self and identity are understood in terms of both change and continuity. In this sense, as Raggatt points out, self is embodied and biological as well as social and cultural and must, as a consequence, be examined in both senses to understand of it.

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<sup>7</sup> This depiction of Romanians has become increasingly vicious following the sexual assault and murder of an Italian woman in Rome by a Romanian man at the end of October 2007 and a series of other assaults and crimes allegedly conducted by Romanians (*La Repubblica* 31 October, 2007)

The conceptualisation of the self presented thus far, i.e., as constituted by a dynamic multiplicity of interrelated personal and social positions, highlights the processual and relational character of the processes of self and collective identity formations. Our examples of young Muslims in Western Europe can illustrate this further. The fact that Islam, in response to legacies of colonialisation, modernity, globalisation and current discourses on terror, has become increasingly politicized and is depicted by some members of the majority societies as a security threat, has sharpened identity issues among many young Muslims. This entails that they may experience the need to constantly negotiate with the rest of the society what it means to be a Muslim. As young Muslims inhabiting societies where Islam is continuously being discussed and questioned, not least in media, they see themselves as being stereotypically defined in religious terms. Despite the fact that these young European Muslims are often legal citizens of the societies in which they reside, they find themselves under strong pressures to take a stand in the perceived conflict between various notions of European secularism and Islamic religion (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010).

In an increasingly globalised world, individuals become subject to meetings with other forms of identifications expressed in ethnic, cultural and religious terms. Dialogical self theory, with its emphasis on dialogues, turns the researcher's attention to the dynamics of positioning among voices, and enables us to understand the self as processual, multiple and relational. In fact, the interactions between social and personal positions and the meetings with actual others affect one's sense of the self. The other "questions, challenges and changes existing positions in the self, and is able to introduce new ones" (Hermans, 2001, p. 255, emphasis added). To conceive of the dialogical self as being open to an ambiguous other and in flux toward a future that is largely unknown therefore leaves space for creativity and innovation. At the same time, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) contend that there are both biological and social limits to this intrinsic openness and fluidity. People are apparently in need of an environment stable enough to feel at home and to experience a feeling of security and safety in a rapidly changing world. This is similar to Valsiner's (2003) discussion of 'enabling constraints' in response to macro-level cultural restrictions. Such 'constraints' consist of a set of semiotic mediators to cope with bounded indeterminacy which allow the person to transcend the here-and-now setting through intra-psychological distancing. Increasing interconnections between cultural groups may pose pressures on the dialogical capacity of the self to integrate an increasing number of voices. As a result, negative feelings of uncertainty caused by growing complexity, ambiguity, deficit knowledge and unpredictability could be released and evoke defensive strategies such as the "monological domination by only one voice (e.g., nationalism, fundamentalism, sexism, or terrorism)" (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007, p. 50). In the following two sections we address first the issue of closure and uncertainty by linking it to theories of securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998). Second, drawing from Ivana Marková's understanding of dialogue and dialogicality (2003a, 2003b), we explore the opportunities for change in psychological orientations of self and other.



## DIALOGICAL SELF AND DESECURITISATION

We agree with Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) as far as the problematic aspects and effects of globalisation are concerned, i.e., feelings of uncertainty and the increased risk for monological closure. However, their attempt to bring together neurobiological and socio-emotional factors to explain monological closure (2007) could benefit from further clarification and from the insights of discursive and narrative approaches to security, thus addressing the structural and psychological mechanisms that lead to monologue. Proceeding from work in international relations (Buzan et al., 1998), we understand 'security' as being about survival (of the state, the community, the culture, and/or the sense of self). It is a discursive move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Thus 'securitisation' refers to the politicization of certain phenomena that enables the use of extraordinary means in the name of security. Securitisation studies aims to understand "who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent object), why, with what results, and not least, under what conditions" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 32). It can therefore be interpreted as the process of labelling a particular referent object (e.g., migration or cultural and religious change) as an existential threat, which implies that an individual's or a collective's sense of the self is perceived as threatened (Buzan et al., 1998)<sup>8</sup>. Securitisation is important for conceptualizing the dynamics of positioning in terms of reducing the heterogeneity of positions and silencing other personal and social positions. Indeed, a process of innovation of the individual and collective self that is able to move away from confrontational self-other relations can be promoted only when people are made aware of the dynamics resulting in closure and antagonism and when the discursive and material structures change to become inclusive rather than exclusive. This latter process is referred to as desecuritisation, i.e., the shifting of issues out of emergency mode into an area of accommodation and dialogical understanding that reduce feelings of insecurity.

Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) argue that the uncertainties and instabilities caused by increased globalisation trigger individuals' desire for stability and satisfaction of basic biological needs. When these needs for a stable enough environment are threatened, the authors argue, people tend to respond with anxiety, hate and anger. The explanations they provide for increased anxiety in response to threatened universal biological needs are both biological and emotional. Their conclusion is worth mentioning at length.

"Evolutionary-based motives that grant survival and fitness and the need for safety, protection, and stability lead to establishing a set of positions that create a split between in-group and out-group in the service of confirming the identities of individuals and groups. The neurologically based tendency to return to ordinary and familiar positions [...] have the advantage that people can use an economical set of stereotypical or abbreviated dialogues (Lyra, 1999), but they do not permit the individual to move easily beyond the constraints of traditional or familiar interactions. The socially based emotion rules, on the other hand, help individuals and groups to interact in ways that are shared and appreciated by the community

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<sup>8</sup> Not everything can become a security issue. Securitisation theory presents a list of three necessary steps - the completion of which guarantees a successful securitisation. These are: (1) identification of existential threats; (2) emergency action; and (3) effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 6).

to which they belong, but they restrict the range of positions and limit the openness of dialogical relationships with people outside the community.” (2007, p. 47-48)

We find their conclusion problematic in two ways. First, the biological explanation they provide whereby a specific part of the brain “favors emotionally based monological responses” (2007, p. 44), reduces closures and their effects (e.g., stereotypes, exclusion, devaluation) to biological deficiencies rather than knowledge structures that contain beliefs and expectations about social groups. Second, while we are not questioning the existence of basic human needs (see Winnicot, 1965; Staub, 2003), we argue that Hermans and Dimaggio overlook the interaction between the social and the personal, focusing mainly on the latter. Their attention to emotions as the main expressions of the social and the societal is certainly interesting. However, it is insufficient to explain the social mechanisms that lead to monological closures in some cases, while not in others, and to the perception of certain needs as being more important than others, and therefore more important to protect if threatened. What, in other words, is the role of social norms in changing the significance of those positions in the self that are constructed as “exclusively important” (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007, p. 43)? And how can “emotion rules” (p. 47), understood as the collective and individual ethic and morality, be changed to become more inclusive and open to other groups and individuals? While the psychological mechanisms underlying a need for stability can be seen as essential to human beings, their focus on evolutionary-based motives and personal positions at the expense of a contextual interrogation of what is needed to feel secure, weaken their general conclusions. As a result we prefer to interpret threatened needs and the search for solutions, not only as an individual process, but also as an outcome of social processes. In this way we emphasise the dialogical relation between the social and the personal, as discussed previously in the chapter. In particular, we maintain that the social process of presenting an issue as a threat to one’s sense of the individual and/or collective self, i.e., securitising it, affects the personal positioning of an individual.

Securitisation theory was originally formulated within international relations theory, as noted above (see Buzan et al., 1998). Of importance is how security issues are produced by actors who interpret a problem as an existential threat and therefore claim the right to use extraordinary measures to defend (and defeat) that problem. The perspective entails a shift from regarding security, and the lack thereof, as a fact, to see it as the outcome of a specific speech act, i.e., the process of securitisation (Waeber, 1995). As Sheehan (2005) has noted:

“European politicians in the early 1990s allowed migration to come to be seen as an issue that could threaten domestic social and political cohesion, and subsequent political developments such as the Gulf wars and Al-Qaida terrorist attacks made it comparatively easy to manipulate sentiments and securitize the migration issue in a negative manner.” (p. 95)

This conceptualisation of security as an outcome of a speech act is not only a political statement. Scholars should understand securitisation as having political as well as ontological and emotional implications in order to understand that the definition of a security issue is not just a fact, but also a discursive construction that taps on people’s feelings (Kinnvall, 2004).

Securitising subjectivity may be manifested in forms of totalistic modes of reasoning, black and white thinking, religious or secular fundamentalism, and other manifestations of psychic rigidity, such as intolerance of ambiguity, or a rejection of the artistic or the

expressive. Securitising subjectivity thus secures coherence in a world that is otherwise fragmented and threatening. Familiar symbols and tropes, such as those of nation, gender, and religion, are used to anchor the self, often through a retreat to a mythical past. In the process, identity becomes essentialised as meaning is appropriated in the establishment of a privileged interpretation of certain discourses and texts, preventing further explorations of meaning. This process is likely to take place regardless of the multiple and instable character of subjectivity (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001; Kinnvall, 2004, 2006; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010). This can be illustrated by reference to multicultural Western European societies. As local cultures are challenged and changed as a result of globalisation, some people find themselves adrift: at home neither in the local context nor in the global situation. As vividly expressed by Janusz Bakrawi in an interview shown in the documentary; *Mit Danmark* (“My Denmark”, Final Cut Film Production, DR 1, February 4, 2007):

“I was born in Denmark, here in Virum. [...]. My mother is Polish and my father Palestinian. As a child and a teenager I never saw myself as being different. I was Danish and my friends were called Mikael and Jakob. Slowly I discovered however, that people saw something different. A stranger, an immigrant – somebody allowed visiting. The only immigrants I had known were my mother and father. I didn’t even know that they were immigrants. It is strange to discover that you are suddenly a guest.”

During a walk through the city Bakrawi talks about the anger and frustration of not belonging. He talks about how he has tried to fit in; tried to be a “real” Arab, tried to laugh with the Danes when they made jokes about immigrants, but all this just made him angrier. In response he finds himself asking questions about his identity: Who am I? How do I define myself? Where do I belong? Am I an Arab, a Pole or Danish? Who do you think I am?

In response to such questions, young (first or second-generation) migrants may search for alternative answers in mythologized traditions, fundamentalist religions or far-away nationalisms (Brubaker, 2002; Vertovec 2000). These answers are often provided by so-called hegemonic traditionalists (Hansson & Kinnvall, 2004), who tend to construct a range of essentialist readings of past, present, and future in which Islamic authority is made prominent. For instance, in 2006 nearly 30 British Islamic groups, including the Muslim Council of Britain which is one of the largest Muslim organizations in the country, issued a statement on the use of the veil by Muslim women. The statement urged:

“All members of the Muslim community to show solidarity against criticising the veil or any other Islamic practice as this might prove to be a stepping-stone towards further restrictions. Today the veil, tomorrow it could be the beard, jilbab and thereafter the head-scarf! Such a strategy, unfortunately, has been widely used by many European countries.”

It called on the “Muslim community” [sic!] to “remain united regardless of its differences and opinions about the veil” because:

“The unexpected and ruthless reaction of the media over the past few weeks on this issue gives an indication that there is a political agenda behind this campaign. [...] This becomes

more apparent when observing the already tense climate facing Muslims, which is contributing towards creating hostility in the wider society against the Muslim community<sup>9</sup>.”

These quotes construct a particular notion of crisis, by depicting Muslims as ruthlessly and disrespectfully treated by segments of the majority society. Statements like these, even if not shared by the vast majority of Muslims, are likely to resonate with feelings of structural exclusion and psychological vulnerability. Hence, they may trigger the development of what Jovchelovitch (2008) calls ‘non-dialogical encounters’, i.e., encounters characterized by the lack of mutual recognition and by the attempt to impose one system of meaning and knowledge to the least powerful group. They may thus affect some young Muslims in their search for an embracing identity.

These young Muslims’ condition is clearly existential in a dialogical sense, related to their youth, context and the way they are perceived by parts of the majority society – structurally as well as psychologically. In the words of Ivana Marková (2003a), their identities are ‘co-authored’ by the other, i.e., the society in which they live and the people whom they meet. This implies that the solution to their situation cannot be focused on these young people alone, but must involve the majority society as well, including the norms and values that inform and shape it. Here the advantages of adopting a dialogical approach which incorporates the insights of securitisation theory in understanding monological closures are evident. On the one hand this approach acknowledges the deeply rooted need for safety and stability in life circumstances, strongly emphasised by object relation theorists (e.g., Winnicott, 1965; 1975). On the other hand it provides the analytical tools for understanding the contextual and socially constructed character of those phenomena that may threaten one’s sense of safety and stability. Referring to the example above, this approach provides scholars with the theoretical tools for understanding young Muslims’ search for a stable and “true” sense of the self. At the same time it emphasizes the importance of investigating how young Muslims are positioned as security threats by parts of the majority society as well as by hegemonic traditionalists who use monological closure to depict the West as a threat to Muslims. When the dialogue between personal and social positions, as well as between imposed and adopted ones is well understood, scholars will be able to suggest ways to introduce changes in psychological orientations that challenge antagonistic relations.

## **DIALOGICALITY AND CHANGE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS**

So far we have argued that a dialogical understanding of the self coupled with an approach that sees threats as socially constructed, thus affecting individuals’ personal sense of security, provide interesting insights for understanding the emergence of “monological domination by only one voice” (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007, p. 50) in increasingly globalised and diverse societies. In this section we want to argue for a second important advantage in adopting a dialogical understanding of the self. A direct consequence deriving from a dialogical approach is that it conceives of the self in non-static terms and is therefore

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<sup>9</sup> The quotes come from the statement “Important advice to the Muslim community in light of the debate over the veil”. Issued on October 15, 2006. Available at [http://www.islam21c.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=18282&Itemid=18](http://www.islam21c.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18282&Itemid=18) . Accessed on March 14, 2010.

able to account for change (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). This does not mean that the self is constantly in flux because individuals tend to search for a sense of continuity of their identities. Rather, it entails a challenge to monological and antagonistic group relations and non-dialogical encounters (Jovchelovitch, 2008) as it provides the opportunity for the development of a transformative multicultural theory.

In Marková's interpretation (e.g., 2003b), dialogue is not only important at the intrapersonal level (between different I positions), but also at the interpersonal one – between the self and the other, the 'Ego' and the 'Alter'. In Marková's work, dialogicality, i.e., the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities (2003b), sets the foundations for a conception of ontology which sees the self and the other not only as interrelated but as equally engaged in an interdependent relation (Marková, 2006). This means that the "dialogicality of the Ego-Alter is of ontological nature. In and through communication the Ego-Alter intersubjectively co-constitutes one another: one does not exist without the other" (Marková, 2006, p. 126). A dialogical understanding of self-other relations is important in the context of multiculturalism as it challenges the assumptions that group relations are only antagonistic in nature (self versus other). The other, be it an individual or a collective, is fundamental to the self's identity and vice-versa. The self has to struggle and come to terms with the strangeness of the other not by fusing him or herself with the other but by recognizing the strangeness of the other (Marková, 2003a). Total consensus is impossible to achieve in the dialogue between self and other (Marková, 2003a). Given the impossibility of reaching total consensus, the dialogical principle cannot be reduced to intersubjectivity, reciprocity and mutuality, but must be open to difference and conflict that allow for innovation and creativity. Hence, if we accept that the dialogical relation is an existential relation then, according to Marková, our social psychological questions will be different than those asked in non-dialogical approaches. They should not involve individuals and groups as separate entities. Instead, they should involve varieties of Ego-Alter relations which cannot be anything but communicative (Marková 2003; for an extended discussion see Kinnvall & Lindén, in press). Thus, when investigating minorities, for example, they should be viewed as mutually interdependent with majorities. The interdependence of Ego-Alter thus constitutes a point of departure in social inquiry.

What are the practical implications of a dialogical understanding of self-other relations in the context of multiculturalism? By what means can we attempt to innovate the self in order to desecuritize subjectivity and transform antagonistic relationships between groups to relationships that acknowledge the dialogicality of the Ego-Alter? Hermans and Dimaggio suggest that the most straightforward way in which the self can be innovated is when new forms of identification and new positions (I as a mother; I as a worker; I as a Muslim; I as a Briton) are introduced "that lead to the reorganization of the repertoire in such a way that the self becomes more adaptive and flexible in a variety of circumstances" (2007, p. 53). The concept of 'transformative dialogue' (Gergen et al., 2001; McNamee & Gergen, 1999) is useful to understand this.

## TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

The aim of transformative dialogue is to develop dialogues with members of allegedly antagonistic groups (e.g., pro-life activists with supporters of abortion rights; members of the majority society with migrants). Some may want to draw parallels to the idea of intercultural dialogue introduced by several multicultural theorists (e.g., Taylor, 1994; Parekh, 2000). While we agree on the importance of dialogue for the development of diverse societies, we read intercultural dialogue to be based on certain antagonisms between two parties where one party disapproves of the other's practices<sup>10</sup>. As a result, intercultural dialogue tends to construct the other as an object (sometimes even an object of contempt) and is therefore likely to lead to alienation. Indeed if intercultural dialogue is not successful, "incomprehension, intransigence, irreconcilable differences" (Parekh, 2000, p. 272), will arise.

In contrast, transformative dialogue emerges when the speaker and the respondent recognize the perspective of the other and, further, when they are able and willing to revise and change their initial standpoints by taking the preceding utterances of the other into account (Gergen et al., 2001; Jovchelovitch, 2008; Scuzzarello, 2010). Gergen et al. (2001) argue that in engaging in a transformative dialogue with others, and by acknowledging our relatedness to them, we are not necessarily aiming at consensus. Rather, we aim at opening up the possibility for the development of new forms of self and collective identification. Given the impossibility of total consensus, as Marková suggests, it is therefore necessary for all concerned – minorities as well as majorities – to avoid a reduction of dialogical principle to intersubjectivity, reciprocity and mutuality and, instead, strive to secure openness to difference and conflict that allows for innovation and creativity (see also Jovchelovitch, 2008).

This is different from Parekh's notion of intercultural dialogue which does not necessarily aim at developing a new sense of community and loyalty. In contrast, a transformative dialogue leads to an understanding of what it means to belong to a community and therefore goes beyond a formal contract between the state and its citizens. This is important for the establishment of a multicultural society devoid of tension and conflict, as a transformative dialogue recognises the emotional bonds embedded in the construction of a citizen. Thus, in the context of multicultural citizenship debates, we would argue that while it is important to guarantee minorities' equal access to rights, a dialogue should be established between the recipient society and minority communities in order to develop psychological and emotional bonds that can provide a deeper meaning to societal membership. In this way, minority communities can be provided with the tools for experiencing a stronger commitment and responsibility to their country of settlement.

How can a transformative dialogue be achieved? This type of dialogue requires that we are attentive to the viewpoints of others and to their needs. This means that in the course of the dialogue ample opportunity is given to self-expression, that each part can make its voice heard (Gergen et al., 2001). Transformative dialogue also requires that we are responsive to the other part in the dialogue. This does not mean that we should try to put ourselves in the situation of the other. As Young (1997) points out this would obscure the social positions of

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<sup>10</sup> Intercultural dialogue proceeds in three stages (Parekh 2000). The minority defends the practice in question in terms of its cultural authority; its community-sustaining role; and by looking for moral similarities in the majority society's culture.

the parties, thus neglecting the different positions in the distributions of power. Instead we should retain an asymmetrical understanding of reciprocity through a communicative interaction that acknowledges the specificity of positions of those involved and their unique life histories and psychological constitution.

Scuzzarello (2008), for instance, notes that projects aimed at integration (e.g., Britain or Sweden) or assimilation (e.g., France or Denmark) of immigrants into the host society often focus on the need to help these immigrants out of oppressive traditions. Many people engaged in these policies are clearly doing this out of a sense of moral responsibility. However, the wish to help immigrants to integrate into the recipient society is related to conceptions of what is held to be morally right and normal to do. Hence despite good intentions, the normative boundaries of the majority are often reproduced and strengthened in relation to representations of the other as socially less apt. The way immigrants are perceived and dealt with becomes, in other words, a matter of performing within the parameters of cultural and structural conditions. Integration policies are not created in a vacuum but are conceptualized, implicitly or explicitly, through a relationship with those to whom they are directed: the immigrants. Similarly, cultural closing down or the securitisation of subjectivity among many migrants and members of minority populations is performed in relation to such policies as well as in relation to the social world which they have left behind and now wish to recreate.

A transformative dialogue intends to move away from such one-dimensional strategies. Hence, to engage in a transformative dialogue entails that both parties manage to move beyond the rhetoric of group blame and begin to assume the responsibility for each other's identified needs and claims. For instance, if two cultural groups were to engage in a transformative dialogue, they would try to understand what has caused the other group's defensive position rather than blaming one another for destroying cultures and traditions as blame only deepens antagonisms. In line with transformative dialogue, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) demonstrate that in clinical experimental studies, communication with real others and engagement with other people's narratives supply means for overcoming the fears and uncertainties of contemporary Western societies. Although important as a first step, one should note that the presupposition that greater knowledge of the other is enough to prevent discrimination, conflict or violent acts, is not entirely consistent with empirical research (Todorov, 1982; Kinnvall, 2006). Rather than being a reality, greater knowledge, mutual respect and tolerance often remain moral ideals. Instead the contextual relationship between groups that are perceived as different from each other is frequently characterised by prejudice, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism.

Hence, looking at the reality of many communities in Europe, majority and minority societies tend to live parallel lives. Real others are not always easily accessible. This is characteristic for many major cities in Europe. Birmingham in the UK, for instance, has long been characterized by strong urban segregation. Areas such as Handsworth, Soho and Sparkbrook have a residential concentration of black and minority ethnic communities of more than 66 percent with a strong domination of one or a few ethnic groups in each neighbourhood (Cangiano, 2007). Similar patterns of urban segregation along ethnic lines can be found across Europe. Many of the areas densely populated by migrant minorities are also affected by high levels of social deprivation and low educational levels. Such areas often constitute zones of exclusion, heavily policed and frequently characterized by violence as a way of ruling by provocation. As most members of the majority society never visit these areas, they are indeed alien communities (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010). Thus, instead

of being based on real encounters, people's fears are often dominated by rumours, media images, and meta-narratives dividing worlds into neat essentialised categories. How can these images and narratives be countered through the use of real or imaginary others?

Gergen's work does not provide a clear answer to this. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007; Hermans, 1996), in contrast, describe a number of clinical experiments conducted by them and others that are aimed towards establishing a dialogue with an imagined other. In the context of globalisation, they argue, experiments could be run with participants instructed to believe that they communicate with people from groups of diverse cultural origins. According to Hermans and Dimaggio, such experiments could examine under which conditions participants, positioned as members of a particular cultural group, would learn from interlocutors positioned as members of another cultural group. A particularly relevant question, they maintain, would be whether participants are able or willing to modify their selves, taking the strangeness of the interlocutor into account. Hermans and Dimaggio do not provide explicit examples of actually conducted experiments with members of particular groups but, based on experiments with student populations instructed to take different positions (in their case as laymen or experts) which, they argue, influenced their ways of behaving and conceptions of the other, this could plausibly be a useful methodology.

Yet these studies do not deal specifically with how we can overcome stereotypical conceptions of other individuals or groups in increasingly multicultural societies. Furthermore, Hermans and Dimaggio's approach has significant problems in addressing real structural inequalities. Being able to envision yourself using alternative narratives, real or imagined, is only a temporary solution to structural discrimination. At the end of the day those who experience themselves as disadvantaged will return to their real material reality and structural inclusion or exclusion. As their lives run parallel to that of the majority society, it matters little how much they understand others' life worlds as their life chances are still inhibited compared to those who share the majority narrative (Kinnvall & Lindén, in press). If a transformative dialogue aims at opening up the possibility for the development of new forms of self and collective identification, then it should appeal to a potential sense of belonging to the physical space in which individuals live. Local communities may be particularly suitable for this scope. They constitute the main sites where immigrants and recipient society meet and confront one another; where the questions of how to come to terms with diversity are concretely felt; and where people's stereotypes and fears for each other are played out (Penninx & Martiniello, 2004). If local communities can be re-imagined to be devoid of segregated spaces, they are plausibly the best places where dialogues with real others can be established. Such communities may provide an important basis on which to construct a new sense of belonging devoid of negative images and stereotypical representations of the other<sup>11</sup> (Marshall, 1950/1992; Amin, 2006).

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to acknowledge however that not all migrants intend to stay in the recipient country for an extended period of time. This is particularly true of migrant workers whose patterns of migration are significantly different from, for example, asylum seekers and refugees. Indeed, a recent report issued by the West Midlands Regional Observatory (2007) shows that the median duration of stay for migrant workers in the UK was 17 months. This has important, but often unexplored, consequences for the debates on cohesion and belonging.



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## SEARCHING FOR DESECURITISING SOLUTIONS TO INSECURITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

Building on work by Kinnvall and Lindén (in press) and by Kinnvall et al. (2009), we envisage a number of ways in which negative images and narratives of real or imaginary others can be countered. Changing negative images of the other requires that we address the structural and psychological order in which these images are formed. This, in turn, means revisiting the construction of this order at all three levels of analysis as suggested by Raggatt (2007, 2010, 2011): mode of expression, personal positioning and social positioning. At the first level it involves changing the narratives that shape our performance as social and embodied actors. This requires a change in strategies at the leadership level to avoid the promotion of scapegoating and divisive ideologies. Instead, in order to create a shared understanding of future life, leaders must engender a vision of the future and realistic plans that are able to include all groups (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). Changing narratives affect personal positioning, as value positions are embodied in countless forms, according to our personal histories, the social context and our collections of personal constructs. Reorienting moral space in the direction of transformative dialogue and inclusion is thus a fundamental task for practitioners involved in changing hostile attitudes and images between majority and minority populations.

This is particularly relevant for the post-migration generation of young Muslims in Europe as many of them have become increasingly dissatisfied with low status, social exclusion, and discrimination. Both in France and the Netherlands, for instance, Muslim youth have been particularly vocal in demanding broader public support for their new-found Muslim demands. In the Netherlands, as in other European countries, many Moroccan and Turkish youth living segregated lives do not feel empowered to affect the Dutch society and thus feel inhibited from developing a Dutch identity. The relatively low economic status of many Moroccan and Turkish youth has further contributed to their search for secure religious identities (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2010)<sup>12</sup>. However, it is important to stress that Moroccan youth has also played an important role in countering the current polarization in societal climate by engaging in activities that promote dialogue. As a result of the need for young Muslims to respond to hostility or prejudice at school or at work, Islamic youth organizations have initiated public discussion meetings (e.g. the foundation “Ben je bang voor mij?” [are you afraid of me?]), in order to raise awareness of Islam and the positions of Muslim youth (ter Val, 2005).

Addressing change in narratives and structural positioning is not enough, however; we also need to take structural change into account. Creating narrative change in moral conceptions of self and others thus requires that structural change is initiated, such as changes in the economic situation of a particular group. As both Ferguson (2009) and Lowe, Muldoon and Schmid (2009) show in the case of Northern Ireland, greater economic opportunities and the greater material well-being of the Catholic minority has contributed to the possibilities of peace. Improving the life of less-privileged groups in society, as well as reducing inequalities, is thus a critical, albeit practically complex, aspect of reducing conflict. However, changes in

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<sup>12</sup> Young Muslims throughout Europe experience a higher level of unemployment than other groups (Pêdziwiatr, 2007).

structural positioning must occur at all three dimensions outlined by Raggatt: the conversational/discursive form, which involves the micro encounters of daily life, whether at work, in the home or in the street; the positioning in terms of institutional roles involving prevailing stereotypes, such as gender roles, parental roles, age roles, class behaviour etc., and the positioning arising from the effects of power in various social and political hierarchies. This is obviously difficult in practice as such changes involve both structural mechanisms (legal and institutional changes) and psychological reorientations (changes in beliefs, perceptions and values). However, some steps in this direction can be suggested.

Political programs need to be designed that address all these dimensions. Education is crucial in this regard, as it involves fostering an understanding of the roots of structural, psychological and physical violence among both youth and adults (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). It is also dialogical as it requires participation of all involved (majorities, minorities, perpetrator, victims, and bystanders) in order to promote positive attitudes toward people in general and towards other groups in society (migrants, strangers, enemies). Organized in such a way, these programs embrace a dialogical understanding of self-other relations, as discussed by Ivana Marková (2003a; 2003b). Both the 'Ego' and the 'Alter' must be aware of the importance of the other part in 'co-authoring' life.

In conclusion, a dialogical approach emphasizes the need to understand that we are not autonomous, independent individuals (as often presumed in liberal accounts), but are rather ontologically related to one another. This affects the ways in which we understand relations with those whom we identify as others. As a result a dialogically constituted critical self must be envisioned. Although always situated and positioned, this critical self is nonetheless capable of distancing itself from other symbolic orders. This can lead to a heightened degree of reflexivity. This self is neither a fully conscious self understanding a transparent background nor a self run by forces beyond the conscious control of the individual (e.g., being, language or power structures) (Kinnvall & Lindén, in press). One important consequence of this approach is evident. This perspective calls for the preservation of the other within the interpretation. This can be helpful for individuals but also for institutions in avoiding the danger of ethnocentrism and of being locked in either the epistemic overpowering of the other, or in historicism, individualization and concealment of power structures and practices.

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**COMMENTARY TO PART III:  
COORDINATING POSITIONS TO ARRIVE AT CHANGE:  
CREATIVE TENSIONS WITHIN  
THE DIALOGICAL SELF FRAMEWORK**

*Jaan Valsiner*

The chapters in this section do not form a coherent whole – which is precisely what is needed for a dialogically open discourse about the dialogical self. They thus reflect the status of the dialogical self research field – a sufficiently open field with variety of ideas and no theoretical monologisation anywhere in sight. This is crucial for keeping the research direction open for innovation – especially as interdisciplinary cooperation is the name of the game. The critical orientations visible among the four contributions, is a fitting testimony to the rapid development of ideas. While Kinnvall and Scuzzarello (2011) criticise Hermans' original version of the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) for overlooking the implications of the social power that creates the ambience for the self (mostly relying upon as recent a text as Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007), Hermans himself has developed his theoretical ideas in a new direction (Gieser & Hermans, 2011; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) that leaves at least some of Kinnvall and Scuzzarello's critique as a fish thrown out by dynamic waves of the ocean to the beach to become prey to seagulls. True – Gieser and Hermans take their advancement of the DST in this volume in a direction opposite to what Kinnvall and Scuzzarello would want to see developed. Yet it is not their role to fill in all the existing gaps in DST – it is precisely the role of the critiques to transcend the existing theoretical system and transform it into a more thorough version. In my view this transformation has not (yet) happened – the social power context of DST and its implications for the dynamic functioning of the dialogical self remains without sufficient theoretical elaboration. The problem is sighted – but its solution is not created.

## FROM DECONSTRUCTION TO RECONSTRUCTION

The latter problem – critique without constructive innovation – is of course a wider issue in the social sciences at large. The deconstructionist fashion – building on the easy opportunity to look smart in the post-modern era by fighting all kinds of dualism, or positivism, or any other ‘-ism’ (behaviourism, cognitivism, etc.) – has left a profound mark on the thinking of new generations of social scientists who often even label their perspectives ‘critical X’ (‘critical psychology’ is but one example). The discourses around DST are about to – but have not yet – overcome the confines of the deconstructionist ethos and move into the reconstruction path. This is partly due to the researcher’s closeness to the phenomena (self dialogues, inside the mind or between them), and to the connection with one particular area where these phenomena are especially accentuated. This area is the study of psychotherapy processes – as discussed by two of the four contributions in this section (Gieser & Hermans, 2011; Gonçalves et al., 2011) Psychotherapy is a context of human activity that is particularly suited for DST as it entails the slowed-down (or temporarily arrested) flow of the operation of the dialogical self. The client – as well as the therapist – spend many sessions having intense dialogues in order to arrive at a single – and often reversible – innovative moment in the course of their thinking (and feeling – see Gonçalves et al., 2011). Hence the phenomena of new, emerging forms within the dialogical self are more discernible and accessible than in the flow of ordinary dialogues. Psychotherapy is a kind of a microscope for the purposes of DST. The ‘father of microbiology’ Antoni van Leeuwenhoek and the ‘father of DST’ Hubert Hermans thus have something in common – besides being Dutch – that is of relevance for biology and psychology – the means for how to look and the directions in which to look.

### RECONSTRUCTION NEEDS THEORETICAL CREATIVITY: TENSIONS AND TRANSITIONS

However, sciences do not develop by data. They develop by ideas. Psychology at large has accumulated empirical evidence on almost every possible common-sense problem of the mind. Yet it fails to produce coherent knowledge that is elegant in its abstract form and applicable in the myriads of social contexts.

The four chapters in this section of the book point to three themes – the need to view the dialogical self within its social power context (*structured environment*), recognition of the affective dynamics of the I-positions (*dynamic change*), and the *coordination* of the networks of I-positions and their structured contexts. While widening the scope of the study of the self by turning the concept from unitary self to multiple I-positions, the dialogical self perspective has reached a state in which these issues cannot be ignored. The contributions to this section offer fresh recipes for theoretical innovation: linking empathy with the DST as Gieser and Hermans do; looking at the moments of breakthrough in the self-negotiation processes, using the notion of re-conceptualisation as Gonçalves and his colleagues propose in their chapter; and pointing to the real social power structures that guide the dialogical selves of immigrants as Kinnvall and Scuzzarello show in their chapter. Raggatt’s focus on the dialogical self creating different arenas of embodiment for men and women allows the reader to see the



immediacy of the starting point of dialogical encounters. We can outline a number of tensions the reader might feel while encountering discourses in the social sciences.

### **Tension in the Methods<>Theory Relations**

It is usual in the social sciences that there are discrepancies between the theories and methods used in empirical work. Or – theories may be fitted to the methods, rather than the other way around. On the side of empirical research techniques in DST we do not see the kind of heterogeneity that is evident in the theoretical ideas in the four chapters in this section. The use of statistical inference based on accumulating coded units still continues to be a part of the researchers' empirical strategies. To borrow Kinnvall and Scuzzarello's notion of *securitising* from the domain of social regulation of immigrants' conduct, we could think of the demands of the social sciences as an institution for limiting the creativity of methods construction in the past decades (Toomela & Valsiner, 2010). This is a form of securitisation – ensuring that whatever the social scientists may talk about, their actual empirical data pass the phenomena under consideration by. The result has been a conceptual confusion (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 232).

A newly conceptually liberated field, such as the dialogical self perspective, needs a corresponding liberating focus in methods. Here we see different directions – Gieser and Hermans move in the direction of dynamic analysis of processes in their look at empathy, and Gonçalves and his colleagues demonstrate the unique events of *Innovating Moments* in their meticulous analysis of psychotherapy processes. At the same time, Raggatt investigates the dialogical self by way of a life narrative-based *assessment* method, designed to 'map' I-positions within the individual (Personality Web Protocol). Theoretically Raggatt emphasises that I-positions – which are frequently described by individuals in terms of paired opposites – can be explained by both intra-personal (reflexive) and inter-personal (social) positioning. The relatedness of these positions is implicated – but not studied. The results that are reported do not show how the different I-positions are being coordinated – but merely end in a claim about a basic gender difference in what constitutes the “embodiment arena” for males (torso) and females (face). This evidence is undoubtedly useful – but not directly relevant for the development of DST.

The very notion of *assessment* may guide researchers towards overlooking the coordinative dynamics of the relations between I-positions – thus securitizing the empirical domain of dialogical self research for the purposes of social desirability of the normal science of psychology. Such *monological closure of methodology* is a social constraint on the path of an innovative set of ideas becoming productive in arriving at new knowledge. To live up to the focus on coordination – as a process – the methods of the study of dialogical self need to go beyond repertoires of static representations of I-positions and – after locating such positions in space and time – make their mutual interweaving explicit.

### **Tension between Monologising Institutions and Dialogical Selves**

Kinnvall and Scuzzarello criticise the DST for overlooking the moves by social institutions to guide human selves towards 'monological closures' – attempts made by a

single authority to monopolise meaning to the exclusion of all competing voices. It is true that from its outset the different versions of the DST have prioritised the self in amidst other selves. After all, the revolution in understanding the self that Hermans introduced – seeing the double system of unity of A and its opposite (counter-A) in the same whole – has been the main focus of enquiry. While the social context of the self has not been denied – it has also not been the target of specific attention. The important step in DST is to examine personal (dialogical) and social (monologizing) constructions of the self – so the tension in the self/other relation should lead the field to think of self and identity in terms of *both* change and continuity. This amounts to assuming the developmental perspective and moving the DST out of its original birthplace (personality theory) to the wide and tumultuous waters of developmental science (Cairns, Elder & Costello, 1996). Again the need to study the dynamics of positioning becomes evident:

“...a dialogically constituted critical self must be envisioned. Although always situated and positioned, this critical self is nonetheless capable of distancing itself from other symbolic orders. This can lead to a heightened degree of reflexivity. This self is neither a fully conscious self understanding a transparent background nor a self run by forces beyond the conscious control of the individual (e.g., being, language or power structures).” (Kinnvall & Scuzzarello, 2011, p. 341)

This theoretical direction needs to lead to a developmental research programme where the coordination of uniform demands and multiform versions of dialogical self is being studied. The unifying loyalty demands (“you must be X”) are targets of dialogical resistance (I-position of X <> I-position of non-X) that is further coordinated with the role of others (“my mother insists I should be X... I am X but I am happier as non-X”). It is here that the notion of empathy enters (Gieser & Hermans, 2011). Yet merely importing the notion of empathy – feeling into the other – to the dialogical self is no solution. The empathic process needs to be located within the transforming kaleidoscope of I-positions – which are guided by monologising social imperatives. The impact of the ‘ten commandments’ for one’s dialogical relating with oneself is not to be overlooked in the European Reformation/Counter-Reformation era, just as the Kali/Durga myth may be the social guide for understanding gender relations in the Indian context.

### **Tension between Myself-oriented-to-the-other and Myself-oriented-towards-Myself**

All external dialogues are *de facto* triologies – aside from the interlocutor *out there*, there exists a basic duality within the self right in the very act of speaking. As Gieser and Hermans emphasise,

“Whenever we have a conversation, we hear our own voice and the voice of the other. Moreover, in a friendly conversation we also tend to adjust our use of words or phrases, pronunciation and intonation to our fellow conversant. This enables us to feel into the experience of another person’s voice because of its similarity to our own voice. What further contributes to this empathy is that, in the course of a conversation, we experience a continual switching of attentional focus, between our voice either in the background or in focus and the

other's voice either in the background (e.g., when both of us speak simultaneously) or in focus. In either case, our voices become linked in one experiential *Gestalt* and hence we may feel into another person's narratives *as if they were our own.*" (Gieser & Hermans, 2011, MS p. 293, original emphasis)

The point of *feeling as-if-the other* is crucial here – without such feeling-in no relating between the interacting I-positions – be those interacting persons or interacting I-positions within the dialogical self – would be possible.

The innovative moment here is the notion of *experiential Gestalt* – a term that needs further elaboration. *Gestalt* is of course a term well known for psychologists from their usually monologised education about the history of their discipline. It is a whole – but here the problems begin. Which kind of whole? A static one? A dynamic field? How do "voices become linked" in a whole? By simple merging, or by mutual resonating? These are questions that the new direction charted out by Gieser and Hermans needs to address.

### **Tension between *Distancing* and *Feeling-in*: The Basis for Re-Conceptualisation**

Of all the four in this section, the chapter by the Minho Group (Gonçalves et al.) addresses these issues of development most directly. The key is the notion of the transition from *mutual in-feeding* processes to re-conceptualisation (and further to irreversible change). As they remark,

"...re-conceptualisation implies the contrast between past and present, and aggregates the old self with the transformed self, it achieves a new sense of unity in the dialogical self, surpassing the former dualities and ambivalence usually inherent to a mutual in-feeding process between opposing voices." (Goncalves et al., 2011, MS p. 269)

The focus on re-conceptualisation brings the process orientation of the DST to the need to conceptualise dialectical synthesis. Psychology has had an ambivalent history of relations with the notion of dialectics – striving towards it, yet dismissing it near the point of new solutions to old problems. It is here where the focus on feeling-in (*Einführung*) fits as a process mechanism. As Gieser and Hermans point out, the process of psychotherapy is

"...a dynamic process of distancing and feeling into, of emotional reflection and emotional immersion. But we would also like to take it a step further and argue that empathy, broadly conceived, is more than a complex psychological phenomenon; it is the ontological basis of dialogue and dialogical relationships as such. Too often we tend to narrow down the notion of dialogue to an interplay of words." (Gieser & Hermans, 2011, MS p. 296)

Thus, **distancing together with simultaneous feeling-in** is the mechanism that leads to re-conceptualisation and change. In order to arrive at change the person needs to empathise with oneself – at first moving part of the self to a distance from where the given I-position can feel in with the other one. As described by Gonçalves et al.,

“...preliminary findings indicate that mutual in-feeding tend to persist during therapy when the therapist respond to it by understanding predominantly the innovative voice (by amplifying it), instead of understanding the problematic voice (trying to explore what it is in the client’s experience that prevents change).” (MS p. 268)

Amplification of the innovative voice – ‘pushing’ the psychological system beyond its limits (and preventing the return to the previous equilibrium) – seems to be the pathway to qualitative breakthrough. If we consider the therapist to be one of the social monologisation agents – after all, the role of the therapist is that of a social power – we can consider amplification of monologisation by the therapist as a **distancing device** (for example, client: “I feel X and non-X” → therapist: “but it seems X is *really* what you feel” → client: “oh yes, I *really* feel X... thank you... and I suddenly feel confused as I now feel Y and non-Y”). *By suggesting a monologised moment the therapist attempts – basically forces – the client to overcome the previous dialogical state.* This move on the therapist’s behalf is possible through emulating – feeling into, but **not** becoming identical with – the client’s current dialogical state. The suggested monologised moment is distanced from the previous (hyper)dialogical state of the client – and thanks to that distance makes it possible to develop into a new dialogical state. In general – the dialogical self works through constant efforts towards monologisation that – when it succeeds – may lead to a qualitatively new state of the dialogical self. If this is so – it is not Mikhail Bakhtin’s but Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel’s forgotten and retrospectively distorted theoretical legacy that the DST might need. Time will tell.

## CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING OPEN

Theoretical innovations go through a set of phases where at first they open the thinking of researchers to new possibilities of enquiry, then constitute the arena for such enquiry in practice, and – finally – reach a plateau where no new exciting issues seem possible. DST opened the field of self/personality research in the 1990s to the possibility of enquiring the processes behind categorical statements about the self. The contributions to this book as a whole – and the four contributions that have been the focus of this commentary – show that the DST discourses are in the intermediate state of active but somewhat parallel lines of enquiry. Such multivoicedness – if maintained both in theoretical and empirical efforts – should save the field from reaching the final state of monologised ‘expertise’ status. Coordination – rather than assimilation – of perspectives remains the key to such intellectual longevity.

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## IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

### IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE

This book has placed dialogicality at the centre of understanding human mind and interaction. In their sometimes complimentary, sometimes divergent ways all the chapters in this volume have been concerned with the maintenance of a dialogical conceptualisation in unpacking the complexities of human sense-making, communication and inter-group relations. The contributions by Haye and Larrain, by Raggatt, and by Lonchuk and Rosa have all engaged with the question, how to best conceptualise and analyse our dialogical engagement with the world through which our knowledge – including the knowledge about ourselves – becomes constructed. Likewise, Joerchel's contribution, in forcing us to start our investigations by looking at the resonance of two individuals (instead of one), deals with the question of how intersubjectivity and the possibility for communication emerges. Moving from the abstract to the concrete, the chapters by the Minho group and by Gieser and Hermans consider what this dialogical engagement means for the organisation and development of the individual self. Moving beyond the individual level, Kinnvall and Scuzzarello tackle the issue of dialogicality in the society, trying to explore how and why people sometimes do and sometimes do not want to dialogue with each other.

Importantly though, this book has also placed dialogicality at the centre of understanding the phenomenon of 'research'. Many of the authors in this book have touched upon the issue of maintaining and encouraging dialogue in the conduct and presentation of research, and reflected upon the pressures and constraints in the research world that close down possible dialogues and avenues for discussion. The authors have been concerned with how commonly employed methods may lose the phenomenon in movement and thus eclipse its dialogicality (*inter alia* Valsiner, Shotter, Akkerman & Niessen, Murakami). Others have talked about ways of resisting reification and monologisation in writing (e.g., Billig), about encouraging multivocality in analysis, in the presentation of research and in academic collaboration (e.g., Wagoner et al.), and raised concerns about the lack of dialogue between researchers and research participants (e.g., Hviid & Beckstead). In response, this book attempts to promote dialogue between authors through adopting the format of target articles and commentaries, thus focusing not on the monologues of individual authors, but on dialogues between several authors. In this way, it endeavours to foreground the responsive nature of acts of discourse, as highlighted by Haye and Larrain: the chapters represent active responses both to pre-existing

and anticipated acts of discourse by others. We can thus only hope that the book will be read as an invitation to continue the dialogue presented in these pages.

It is obvious that some of these concerns about the conduct and presentation of research are related to the need to be ‘true’ to the underlying assumptions of the dialogical perspective. That is, to take ideas about orientation to the other, contextualism, interactionalism and the emphasis on semiotic mediation (Linell, 2009) seriously when doing research. They thus bring to mind the old dilemma of the turtle and Achilles, with Achilles as practice never really catching up with the theory-turtle. Yet the convergence of these diverse voices in raising the need to leave behind conventional ways of conceptualising, conducting and presenting academic research and welcoming a new, dialogical alternative seems to work also as an identity project for dialogists. It functions as an effort to create a ‘we’ in relation to ‘they’ – the monologists – where ‘we’ is distinctly different, but also (and importantly) better than ‘they’. Yet is it better?

## DIALOGUE AND TRANSFORMATION

In their contribution, Gieser and Hermans suggest that difference and distance are essential to dialogue. Likewise, Marková notes in her commentary: “The fundamental feature of dialogue is a clash of ideas, their tension and transformation through their confrontation” (MS p. 111). However, as authors in this volume emphasise, dialogue – or dialogical engagement with the other – does not necessarily lead to transformation, change or innovation of the self or ‘ideas’. Nor does it necessarily lead to a ‘resolution of discord’, as Marková asserts. Assuming this would be to impose a normative interpretation on the meaning of dialogue or dialogical, as Linell (2009) has highlighted (see also Akkerman and Niessen in this book). It is in this sense then, as Gillespie points out in his foreword, that a dialogical perspective allows us to understand human interaction as intersubjective, symbolic, cultural, but importantly also conflictual *and* potentially transformative.

While the clash of divergent perspectives is fundamental, dialogue or encounters with the other that lead to some kind of transformation – a ‘transformative’ dialogue<sup>1</sup> – also require the effort to overcome distance and difference. We may think of Gieser and Hermans’ discussion of ‘feeling into’ the other, or Bakhtin’s notion of ‘active empathising’ (1986/1993; as quoted by Marková, 2003, p. 103) for describing this kind of dialogical engagement. It is an ongoing struggle of relating to the other which is the starting point for transformation, rather than the retention of distance or ‘pure emphasising’ (ibid.) that eliminates or submerges the strangeness of the other. It leads to the creation of a new perspective, which moves beyond the ones out of which it has emerged.

Yet how can we achieve such transformation in research? How can different voices, meanings or ideas come together in a new configuration that goes beyond their differences? How can dialogism become a ‘better’ science than monologism that makes sense and, dare we say, makes a difference, to others? This is an age old question that concerns us not only as a community of researchers, but as members of a heterogeneous society.

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<sup>1</sup> In our discussion about ‘transformative dialogue’ we draw on Freire’s (2003/1973) notion of ‘critical dialogue’ and Jovchelovitch’s (2007) discussion about ‘dialogical encounters’. See also Aveling (2010) for further discussion.



By asking this question we refer, on the one hand, to the situation where both parties consider their own points of views too precious to let go of. This is the A *versus* B situation that Kinnvall and Scuzzarello tackle in their discussion about ‘securitization’ in the face of existential threat; a situation where tensions between perspectives are too substantial for dialogue to occur. In the research context, this might refer to the impossibility of having a transformative dialogue between dialogists and monologists, to use Billig’s language. Yet we also, on the other hand, refer to the situation that Gonçalves and his colleagues refer to as mutual in-feeding: a process of continuing dialogue between mutually re-affirming ideas A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>3</sub> etc., which does not lead to any productive outcome or significant change. This latter situation seems to be characterised by abundance of dialogue, yet with equally fruitless results. These then are the friendly dialogues between like-minded dialogists, where the ‘problem is sighted, but its solution is not created’, as Valsiner explains in his commentary (MS p. 349). The question thus remains – how do we surpass the unproductive mutual in-feeding within the dialogical perspective?

In our attempt to answer this question we return to Billig’s call in the opening chapter of this book. Billig reminds us that arguing, including academic debate, is contextual and relational. That is, in order to understand an argument and maintain its relevance, we need to know what it is argued against and need to continuously renew that relationship to the outside context. In Billig’s version then, dialogism needs to encourage transformative dialogue not only amongst the like-minded dialogical researchers, but also continuously re-negotiate its relation to the other ‘external’ perspectives in contemporary social sciences, such as mainstream cognitive psychology.

Paying attention to the ground to better define and develop the figure – in this case dialogism – is obviously in accordance with the principles and assumptions of dialogical science. Having an idea how the ground is moving and evolving, in order to continuously re-define and refine the figure is important for maintaining the relevance of the dialogue. However, leaving the dialogical aspirations aside, it is not immediately clear how a return to mutual in-feeding – that neither surpasses essential differences nor fuels innovation – is to be avoided. Because at the end of the day it is not about dialogical dreams, but about the ‘real stuff’ that matters in research, such as publications, grant funding, jobs, acknowledgment, recognition etc., which preferably should be given to ‘us’ and not to ‘them’.

We agree with Billig that in order to break out of such mutual in-feeding within research a little help from others, who can function as catalysts of change, is needed. However, we would suggest that rival theoretical perspectives are not the only significant others who need to be (implicitly or explicitly) invited to take part in the dialogue. We would suggest that the invitation to participate should be extended also to those who are researched – that is, to the members of communities, organisations and groups of people that we do research with and, some would argue, do it for.

## CHANGING PRACTICES

Who is social research meant for? Who should benefit from it? These questions about the purpose of social research are difficult and complex, with no easy and obvious answers. The impact of social research cannot be efficiently measured through the number of published

articles, conference presentations and other dissemination activities. As Gillespie points out in his foreward, an alternative measure of the ‘health’ of a field might be to ask the pragmatist question. Yet, as the current wealth of academic and political interest in ‘closing the gap’ between research and practice would indicate, translating research into policies and practices which make immediate and direct differences to people’s lives is difficult to achieve. The pragmatist’s ‘So what?’ question is thus an important, albeit difficult one to answer and engage with.

In their chapter, Hviid and Beckstead call for “a solution based on the establishment of communities of researchers and research-participants, where the objectives and the direction of the research as well as the intervention in practice outside the empirical ‘zone of research’ is constituted and created as a shared agenda with importance to both parties” (MS p. 237). On a more abstract level, Shotter too calls for research that *works from within*, with the aim “of resolving specific confusions, disquiets, bewilderments, perplexities, etc., within [practices]” (MS p. 152). We find these calls to be important ones. If taken seriously and turned into research practice they have the potential to make dialogical research conceptually solid, academically competitive and socially relevant.

Together with these and other authors (see for example Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005) we envisage a research practice where researchers move away from their tradition of thinking through their theoretical position, deciding about the research questions and choosing the methodologies *before* engaging with the research participants. Instead we suggest proposing researcher projects, which are not only open-ended, but where also the starting point is approximate and up for negotiation. Again building on Shotter’s ideas, we imagine research where researchers let go of their ordinary practice of knowing their way about, and instead are willing to take on a journey and find their way together with others, in an unfolding activity in which they are equally immersed as participants. For as Shotter argues in this book, only by allowing oneself to resonate with the others in the unfolding activity, only by listening to one’s own ambiguities, doubts and hesitations can one become aware of the ‘determining surroundings’ and thus be able to exhibit ‘the responsive understandings [the others] expect’ (MS p. 153).

Yet there is more at stake than just our ability to understand things in the making, which can only happen if we work from within. Drawing on Levinas’s ideas, Marková in her commentary reminds us that our engagement with the world is above all engagement with others. Thus our being is fundamentally ethical, for by being part of the social world we have a responsibility to the other. She writes: “The self has no right to question what the other requires from him: his obligations and generosity to others is unlimited” (MS p. 112). Similarly, Ellis and Stam (2010), drawing this time on Ricoeur, argue: “an I is *accountable* for its actions in front of an other, as the other is *counting on* the I to perform them” (p. 429, original emphasis). The responsibility to the other is thus central to the dialogical conceptualisation of human interaction, and our responsibility as researchers in “aiming at the ‘good life’, with and for others, in just institutions” (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 172; as quoted by Ellis & Stam, 2010, p. 429) is central to our practices.

It is through such a conceptualisation that the approach we envision is also essentially transformative. It is about difference between the viewpoints of researchers and participants; yet equally it is about emergence, about coming together in another way, for another reason. As Jovchelovitch (2007) has argued in the context of relations between intervention practitioners and the beneficiaries of intervention, what is required is an approach

characterised by the effort to take into account the perspective of the other and recognise it as legitimate. But beyond an ethical imperative, what reason could motivate the struggle to recognise the other – a struggle that has historically proven so difficult to overcome (Foucault, 1980)? The lack of a ‘reason’ or mutually relevant common goal may be the main difficulty of working within and between the different schools of thought. It is difficult to envisage a significant change, a move away from mutual in-feeding, without an external common goal. That is, it is not immediately obvious, how C can suddenly emerge from a friendly dialogue between A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>3</sub> etc. Likewise, it is difficult to envisage finding a common goal that goes beyond the rivalry for scarce resources between different schools of thought, without it coming from somewhere else. That is, it is difficult to imagine how the fight between A and B can suddenly turn into a striving towards C, unless the common goal is introduced by those who do not necessarily care about the inter- and intra-disciplinary power struggles and simply want their lives to be improved.

However, in envisioning this alternative we do not want to emphasise the importance of community engagement at the expense of theoretical innovation and conceptual development. On the contrary. Theory is the contribution of the researchers to the common activity of doing research. It is the tool that moves beyond the common-sense language, opening up solutions and ways of seeing the world that turns the everyday particular matters into generalized knowledge where what was previously tacit, becomes visible and intelligible. It is the researchers’ task to make it usable (Valsiner, 2009) for the common project, just as it is the research-participants’ task to ‘show’ the researchers where their concepts and methods fail and new tools need to be invented. In Freire’s (2003/1973) sense, researchers and participants should be *co-agents*. And as noted before, as humans living in the social world we have a responsibility to each other. Ideally then novelty emerges for the lived practices of the research participants and equally for the practices of researchers.

Doing things differently is difficult. It takes time and energy and requires us to abandon our comfort zone for something unpredictable. Yet the ‘So what?’ questions do matter. And perhaps the unpredictable will not be that uncomfortable after all. Perhaps it will even turn out to be rewarding.

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