Self as a Society of I-Positions: A Dialogical Approach to Counseling

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Building on James’s (1890) idea of an extended self and Bakhtin’s (1929/1973) metaphor of the polyphonic novel, a dialogical theory of counseling is exposed in which the self is considered as a minisociety of relatively autonomous I-positions that simultaneously function as part of the larger society. At the heart of the theoretical framework are two mutually complementing movements in the self-space: decentering movements that are prominent in postmodern conceptions of the self and centering movements that are at the core of the modern self. Typically, decentering movements lead to disorganization, crisis, and fragmentation in the self, although they may also be expressed in adventure and exploration of the unknown. Centering movements serve as facilitators of coherence, continuity, and unity and are needed to create some order in the self. Selected parts of a case study are used to show how decentering movements are expressed in the process of being positioned in an often unexpected diversity of confusing situations and how centering movements are articulated in the form of third positions, coalitions of positions, metapositions, and promoter positions. The theory invites the counselor to stretch the space of the self to different and opposite sides to find valuable elements that are then combined in a diversified and tension-filled, but coherent, whole.

Keywords: society, dialogical self, society, positioning, counterpositioning.

Several centuries ago, Montaigne (1580/1603) demonstrated a striking insight into human nature when he said, “We are all framed of flaps and patches, and of so shapeless and diverse a contexture, that every piece, and every moment playeth his part. And there is as much difference found between us and our selves, as there is between our selves and others” (pp. 196–197). The first part of this sentence gives expression to an observation that, in our contemporary society, is more relevant than ever before in

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human history: the emergence of a multiplicity of the self at the edges of fragmentation or even beyond.

The second part of Montaigne’s statement reflects something equally relevant for our times: the increasing difference between the several parts or facets of the self. As long as we attach to the implicit or explicit view that the self is united and coherent as it is, assuming that the self of one person is different from the selves of other people but identical to itself, we run the risk of ignoring the fact that, as part of a heterogeneous world society, the self has become more and more different from itself. For example, as a teacher at school, I am different from myself as a mother of two adopted children from Bhutan; as physically handicapped, I feel inferior when I am in a shop, but as a champion of the Paralympics I am honored and admired; or, as someone raised in a Dutch culture, I am used to responding to others in a direct and honest way, but, being married to an Iranian woman, I have learned to express respect to people. As a result of increasing technological advancements (e.g., media, transport) and intensified cultural, demographic, economical, ecological, and military interconnections, we increasingly live in a globalized world in which differences become apparent as people from a variety of social, cultural, and historical backgrounds meet each other as part of a compressed world society. Widening their horizons, individuals and groups have an increased range of identifications and disidentifications available that enlarge actual or possible differences in self and identity (for reviews, see Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Kinnvall, 2004).

THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

In his poem “The Second Coming” (1920), written in the aftermath of the First World War, William Butler Yeats expressed the sensitivity of the self to the changing society in a most succinct way: “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold.” With this dictum, Yeats suggested the existence of a space or circle with a center that, located in a field of tension, is pulled in different and even opposed directions by influential environmental forces. When we apply this dictum to the psychology of the self, we are a self that is subjected to a variety of decentering influences that put the coherence and unity of the self increasingly under stress (Hall, 1991).

When, in the next sentence of his poem, Yeats says, “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,” he seems to refer to a societal situation in which order, organization, and coherence are in jeopardy. When we translate the idea of a societal anarchy into the language of the self, it would lead to the observation that the self, as part of a changing society, is subjected to an increasing process of fragmentation, as many postmodern thinkers have observed. Societal anarchy finds its parallel in fragmentation and disorganization of the self.
However, as counselors and psychotherapists know very well, it is not only the recognition of multiplicity and diversification of the self that must be recognized and developed, but also its coherence and unity. A sufficiently strong coherence and unity is necessary to prevent the self from falling apart or breaking into unrelated pieces. Therefore, both centering (unifying, coherence-promoting, and organizing) movements and decentering (multiplying, diversifying, and disorganizing) movements are necessary for adaptation and development. The self is subjected to decentering movements when, for example, a person enters a new, confusing, or challenging learning situation or has to face disappointment, failure, or misfortune. Centering movements are most dominant when, for instance, a new balance is achieved in the self; when adaptation to a new situation succeeds; or, when in a counseling setting, a client learns how to find an adequate answer to loss of a job, marriage problems, or identity confusion.

From a historical point of view, decentering movements in the self are strongly emphasized in postmodernist conceptions of self and identity, whereas centering movements have been self-evident in modernist views, with unity and continuity as the main principles (Callero, 2003). Considering centering and decentering movements as equivalent and as mutually complementing phases that alternate with each other, it is possible to bridge modern and postmodern conceptions with the promise of developing a broader and more balanced view of self and identity.

In this article, I present a dynamic view of the self in which both decentering and centering movements are applied to counseling situations. Central to my contribution is the view that the self is an intrinsic part of the larger society. Moreover, I will argue that the self functions as a society of I-positions, which means that the self, rather than being influenced by an outside society, works itself as a minisociety, analogous to the macrosociety.

To give an impression of the theoretical basis of the concept of I-position, I start by giving a brief introduction of the theoretical forerunners of the concept and then portray more specific kinds of I-positions that are directly relevant to the interplay of centering and decentering movements in the self. I follow the procedure of first deconstructing the different parts of the self so that its basic components (I-positions) are made visible, which then leads to reconstructing them as part of an organized whole. Going through the different sections, I show how considering the self in terms of I-positions is relevant to both the assessment and the promotion of the self in counseling. One of the guiding ideas is that one has to know the parts to understand the functioning of the self as a whole (Rowan, 2012).

WILLIAM JAMES’S EXTENDED SELF

In his classic work, *The Principles of Psychology*, William James (1890) proposed an idea that is of particular relevance to the theoretical framework
exposed in the present article: the extension of the self. He argued that the self does not coincide with the skin but is extended to the environment, expressed in a gradual transition between me and mine. He observed that the empirical self is composed of all that the person can call his or her own: “not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account” (James, 1890, p. 291). A significant implication of this frequently cited quotation is that people and things in the environment, as far as they are felt as mine or as belonging to me, are considered to be properties of an extended self. As the result of a process of appropriation, not only does my mother belong to the self in the extended sense of the term, but so does my critic or my opponent.

However, James’s (1890) conception of the extended self poses the basic question: How is our relationship with the environment? The problem is that, when I consider another person to be mine, the other is reduced, or is at least at risk to be reduced, to a possession, which puts the extending self in the implicit position of owner and the other in the position of being owned. When I am the owner of something or somebody, then the other can be considered as my possession. Not accidentally, James is listing, in the above quotation, his wife in the same breath as his bank account, which could suggest that they belong, as far as they are owned, to the same category of extensions of the self.

Without any doubt, James’s (1890) notion of the extended self can be regarded as a huge step forward in thinking about the nature of self and identity. It goes beyond the Cartesian dualistic conception that considered the self (res cogitans) and the environment (res extensa) as essentially different categories, with the environment, including the other person, as located outside the self. James broadens and widens the self so that it can be thought of as going beyond the prison of the skin. It liberates the self from being conceived as a container in which all of the peculiarities of a person are stored (Callero, 2003; Sampson, 1985). However, the idea of extension, although it transcends the Cartesian dualism between self and other, poses the question (considered from the perspective of the self): What is the nature of the other person? In James’s view, at least in his famous quotation, the other is portrayed as a me or mine, not as an I. To go beyond this limitation, we must make an additional step: upgrading the other person from the object level to the subject level so that dialogical relationships become possible.

**BAKHTIN’S POLYPHONIC NOVEL: THE OTHER AS ANOTHER I**

In my view, the notion of the extended self can be further elaborated by taking into account Bakhtin (1929/1973), who introduced the intriguing metaphor of the polyphonic novel, which was inspired by extensive reading...
of Dostoyevsky’s novels. A polyphonic novel is composed of a number of independent and mutually opposing viewpoints embodied by characters involved in dialogical relationships. Each of the characters is considered to be ideologically authoritative and independent, meaning that each character is perceived as the author of his or her own perspective on the world, rather than as an object of Dostoyevsky’s all-encompassing artistic vision. Essential to understand is that the characters are not simply subordinated to their creator but are standing beside him, disagreeing with him, even rebelling against him. Entering the work, the author can incarnate himself in the form of one or even more characters, in this way becoming part of the multivoiced scene. In his construction of a polyphonic novel, Dostoyevsky created a multiplicity of perspectives by portraying characters conversing with the devil (Ivan and the devil), with their alter egos (Ivan and Smerdyakov), and even with caricatures of themselves (Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov). As part of this construction, each character has his own voice and tells his own story from his own specific point of view. The metaphor of the polyphonic novel marks a revolution against the traditional idea of the omniscient narrator (Spencer, 1971). At the same time, the novel serves as a metaphor for the retreat of the I as an omniscient knower of the self, bound as it is to its location in time and space as basic limitations to any bird’s-eye view (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The metaphor of the polyphonic novel goes beyond James’s (1890) conception of the extended self in at least two ways: the independence of the characters and the fact that they have a voice. Whereas in James’s quotation (above), the other is appropriated to the self as mine, the polyphonic novel metaphor allows the other to have an existence as an autonomous, independent being, rather than being owned as part of the self of the appropriator. Moreover, the other is portrayed as having a voice, independent enough to speak from his or her specific point of view. The view of a self as dialogically extended to an independent other (who makes the difference) seems to be a promising starting point for conceiving the self as dialogically related to its (social) environment. In this conception, the self, regarded as a society of I-positions, has the potential of allowing dialogical relationships not only between different people and groups positioned in the larger society, but also between different positions in the self of one and the same person. In this view, the other is not simply mine but rather another I (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; for the other person as another I, see also Bakhtin, 1929/1973; for the other as thou, see Buber, 1923/1970).

THE SELF AS MULTIVOICED AND DIALOGICAL

In an attempt to formulate a psychology of I-positions, two notions, self and dialogue, have been brought together in the composite term dialogical self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992). The two notions stem from different psychological and philo-
sophorical traditions. The psychology of the self finds its origin in American pragmatism, with William James (1890) and George H. Mead (1934) as the most prominent representatives, whereas dialogue has a long history in the European tradition, particularly in the writings of influential figures like Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1929/1973) and Martin Buber (1923/1970).

In its most concise formulation, the dialogical self can be conceived of as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in the society of mind. As in the larger society, these I-positions can receive a voice and address each other in a variety of ways. For example, as a son, I love my father and often look at the world like he does; however, as a politician, I tend to disagree with his conservative opinion. When I notice that I look at a social problem in the same way my father does, I disagree with myself and pose some critical questions to myself. Along these lines, I make clear to myself where I stand on a particular topic. Processes of mutual internal dialogical relationships are intensely interwoven with dialogical relationships with actual others. As in the larger society, I-positions can also be involved in relationships of social power and relative dominance. Being raised in a strictly orthodox milieu, one’s homosexuality is not only rejected by one’s social environment, but also by the self. When one I-position is in power (e.g., I as religious), the other (e.g., I as homosexual) is dominated, suppressed, or silenced. However, when one becomes a member of a gay community at some later point in time, one develops a counterposition (I as wanting to be accepted in my sexual preference) that is in support of one’s sexual nature. This may give rise to a process of internal struggle that may finally lead to the liberation of one’s inborn sexual position.

As part of the dialogical self, the I is 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 (for the concept of depositioning, as referring to states of transcendental awareness, see Hermans-Konopka, 2012). As spatially located, the embodied I moves from one position to another in a process of positioning and counterpositioning. As a temporal phenomenon, the self is involved in processes of positioning and repositioning. As a spatial process, the I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and this takes place both within the self and between the self and perceived, remembered, or imagined others. As part of sign-mediated social relationships, I-positions can be voiced so that dialogical relations among them develop, but they can also overpower each other so that monological relationships prevail. The voices interact like characters in a story or movie and are caught up in processes of question and answer, agreement and disagreement, conflict and struggle, negotiation and integration. Each of them has a story to tell about their own experiences from their own specific point of view. As different voices involved in dialogical relationships, the I-positions exchange knowledge and experiences about their respective me, creating a complex, multivoiced, narratively structured self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POSITIONS IN THE SELF: BEYOND THE SKIN

What does the idea of self as extended to an independent other mean when we apply it to the concept of I-position? As extended, the dialogical self includes not only internal positions (e.g., I as a dedicated professional, I as interested in architecture, I as a disappointed lover) but also external positions (e.g., my supporting parents, my problematic colleague, my sneaky opponent). For a proper understanding of the theory, it is relevant to note that not only internal but also external positions, as others in the self, are conceived of as I-positions, that is, the other conceived as another I, consistent with Bakhtin (1929/1973), who noticed that, “For the author the hero is not ‘he,’ and not ‘I’ but a full-valued ‘thou,’ that is another full-fledged ‘I’” (p. 51). Taking it one step further, we can identify with, or see ourselves, on a particular level, as identical with an animal or even an object (e.g., a piece of art in which I recognize myself) or with nature (e.g., I as a piece of earth that becomes aware of itself). The other as extended I does not function as a self-object, one of the central terms in object relations theory, but as a self-subject who has a voice and is able to talk back, to agree and disagree, to support and console, and with whom dialogical relationships are possible in that I can learn from the other as a voice in my extended self (e.g., an inspiring teacher; a consoling parent; or a religious or spiritual figure, such as Christ or Buddha, who is always there in myself to support me). Not only imagined or real people from the past are seen as external I-positions in the self; new actual people also may enter the open house of the self. In the present context, the counselor or psychotherapist may acquire such a position, as we will see in the next sections.

DIALOGICAL SELF AS OPEN CIRCLES

The preceding theoretical considerations can be summarized by a figure and exemplified by a case. In Figure 1, the self is depicted as two concentric circles, which allow the distinction of three areas: (a) the internal domain of self, in which personal positions (e.g., I as a lover of Jazz, I as taking revenge on injustice) or social positions (e.g., I as father, I as chairperson), are located; (b) the external domain of self, where significant other individuals or groups are placed (e.g., my son, my colleagues, my sports club, God, spirit); and (c) the larger society, which contains a huge number of individuals, organized as groups, coalitions, institutions, nations, cultures, and subcultures. Together, the internal and external domains form the minisociety of the self. Whereas the external domain of the self typically contains imagined individuals and groups, the macrosociety consists of actual individuals and groups that are in possible positions that, at some point in time, may cross the open boundaries of the self. There is a continuous, two-directional flux from the minisociety.
to the macrosociety. When a child goes to school for the first time, there is not only an actual teacher in the school, but this teacher also receives a place as part of the external domain of the child’s self. At the same time, a new position (I as a pupil) is entering the internal domain of the self and expands it. From this position, the child interacts with the teacher and with other pupils.

The teacher as actual other in society must be distinguished from the position of the teacher in the extended self. The teacher as external position in the self of the child is not simply an isolated position added to the self, as a banana to a basket. Rather, the teacher receives a position in the self of the pupil as an organized system. When the father of the child is seen as authoritarian, the teacher may be placed near the father in the associative network of positions in the child’s self. When, on the contrary, the teacher is perceived as friendly and as contrasting with the authoritarian behavior of the father, he receives a place in the self-space opposite to that of the father. Actually, the personal meaning the teacher, or any significant other, received as part of the external domain of the self of the child, is influenced from two sides: from the actual other in the larger society, and from the positions and associated needs and emotions in the internal domain of the child’s self. A change of situation resulting in the inclusion of new positions in the self demonstrates its openness.
However, it is also possible that the self becomes closed as a form of self-defense so that it becomes organized in a maladaptive way. I will now briefly discuss the case of a person with a maladaptive organization of the self (for detailed description, see Hermans, 2003) to show how the dialogical model works in counseling. I will present selected parts of this case as stepping-stones for introducing some central concepts of the theory. These concepts allow the counselor to assess some relevant personal problems of clients, to look at them in a fresh and new way, and to sketch ways for further change and development of the self as multivoiced and dialogical.

THE CASE OF RICHARD AND SOME CENTRAL CONCEPTS IN DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

A pseudonym has been used here to protect the identity of the client. Richard, a 38-year-old man, contacted a counselor/psychotherapist after many years of general dissatisfaction with his life. He complained about persistent doubts, which meant that he was not able to make any choices on important matters in his life. He suffered from intense feelings of guilt because he did not feel truly committed to his girlfriend with whom he had been living for many years. His job as a part-time administrator was totally unsatisfying for him, because he felt it was below his abilities. He considered himself a failure and was often plagued by shame, guilt, and doubt about his intellectual and social qualities and about his life as a whole.

During almost 1 year, there was cooperation between three persons: Richard as client, Els Hermans-Jansen as counselor/psychotherapist, and me as personality psychologist. Our common purpose was to explore Richard’s general dissatisfaction, the obstacles he felt in the promotion of his well-being, and possibilities to change his permanent dissatisfaction. We used the Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method (Hermans, 2001a), which enables one to study the prominence of a range of internal positions in relation to a range of external positions (e.g., To what extent do I as “shameful” come to the fore in relation with my father, mother, sibling, teacher, etc.). Typically, internal positions differ in the extent to which they are prominent in relation to a variety of external positions. For example, one of Richard’s main positions, which he had selected from a broader list as being particularly relevant to his life, I as avoidant, received high prominence ratings in relation to his partner, his father, and his grandfather, but low ratings in relation to his girlfriend’s parents and nature. These differences exemplify the contextualized nature of the process of positioning. In contrast to generalized traits, positions are specific, situation-dependent ways of placing oneself toward another person and toward oneself, and they receive their meaning as part of a broader associative and organized network of I-positions.

A significant beginning of an in-depth exploration of Richard’s position repertoire was the finding that there were two positions that were
closely related to the avoidant position, but that were not expected by Richard himself: the dreamer and the perfectionist. Here we have a phenomenon, which is typical of many counseling situations: The client implicitly knows what his or her problem is, but is not able to explicitly articulate it. However, when it is fittingly formulated by another person, clients recognize it immediately as right or true. When we asked Richard before the findings of the assessment which positions he expected to be closely related to the avoider, he selected the following positions from a more extensive list: I as ashamed, I as will-less, I as regretting, I as guilty, I as fearful, and I as a child of my parents. These positions were generally in agreement with the results of the assessment, but the assessment showed that the dreamer and the perfectionist, not estimated by Richard as relevant to the avoider, were even more closely related to the avoider than most of the positions mentioned by him as related to this position. After a short moment of surprise, he was able to give an interpretation of the connection between the dreamer and the perfectionist in this way:

I tend to see them [the perfectionist and dreamer] as a pair. The dreamer is the one who proposes things. The perfectionist then has a critical look at what has been made of it. The dreamer is the fantast, without any limitation by reality. The dreamer is very free and active. He is strongly developed. The perfectionist is more like a gatekeeper. He looks ahead: “This will be nothing.” He also looks back and sees what has come out of all those dreams. He knows how it should be done. The perfectionist looks compassionate, shakes his head.

In this quotation, we see that I-positions, rather than acting as isolated entities, are organized as coalitions. In this case, it is a maladaptive coalition, as the overly pretentious perfectionist tends to break down the unrealistic air castles built up by the dreamer. They work together in unproductive ways, inhibiting the further development of the self as a whole. However, it was not easy for Richard to acknowledge the effect of this failing coalition in his life. He was very willing to see the importance of the avoider, which functioned as a foreground position that he could easily acknowledge, but he felt some resistance when he was faced with the relevance of the dreamer and the perfectionist as background, yet powerful, positions:

The perfectionist: I approach this with much caution. I tend to make movements around this topic. I shrank from giving this a place. It is an arrogant figure, this passionate shaking his head: “This is not noteworthy.” This perfectionism has taken the form of expectations which have formed my personality for a long time. Memories are transformed into expectations. As a truck driver, I once caused an accident. There was not more than material damage. But at that moment I thought: “This is what you have made of your life.” It was something that went beyond that situation; it was an expectation. It was the feeling that I was not a person of myself. It was rather a movement by other people, some kind of melding of my parents and myself. My grandfather had very negative expectations of me, that nothing would become of me, that I had no persistence. I was afraid of his depreciation. At the same time, I’m very wary of laying the blame on my grandfather or my parents.
Here we see not only his resistance to acknowledging the devastating effect of the perfectionist as a shadow position, but, at the end of the quote, he also refers to some powerful external positions (his parents and his grandfather), which, as ghosts from the past, return in his ruminations. They strongly agree with each other that Richard is nothing, and, as a powerful coalition of shadow positions in the external domain, they tend to repeat their depreciating and undifferentiated message to the detriment of his self-worth and life satisfaction.

As a response to the devils in the external domain of his self, he developed the avoidant and, even more influential (and initially not sufficiently recognized), the dreamer and perfectionist as counterpositions. However, in this way, he arrived in a vicious circle in which he spiraled down: As a response to his depreciating father and grandfather, he developed a perfectionist, which was putting him down persistently, thereby confirming the “right voices” of his father and grandfather as always present ghosts of the past. Similarly, within the internal domain, he was not able to escape the vicious circle of the dreamer and the perfectionist: the bigger his dreams, the more disdainful his perfectionist became, which made him hide again in his dreams that served, like an addiction, as an escape from his returning failures.

INTRODUCTION OF A NEW POSITION: ACCEPTANCE AS PROMOTER

Given the dominant role of the perfectionist and his unattainable standards, the three of us started to search for more adaptive counterpositions in response to the perfectionist. We agreed that Richard would start with some “innocent” activities, which were, in the eyes of the perfectionist, scarcely noteworthy. This was done to explore a space in the self that was somewhere beyond the reach of the dictatorial perfectionist (note that each position offers not only a perspective but has also a horizon or reach, beyond which things are simply not visible). Richard’s experiences in the past suggested that these activities would give him at least some pleasure. As counselors, we encouraged him to engage in some relaxing activities like running, cycling, and watching birds with friends and share his experiences with us in his next session. The strategy was to stimulate Richard to initiate activities at a very low expectation level, without the pressure of any standard of excellence.

Two weeks later, Richard told us that his mood was somewhat improved. He explained that his involvement in the innocent activities made him feel that he was able to accept the possibilities he had: “In these activities, not much progress is needed, there is less self-blaming and there are less obstacles, and less energy is spoiled.” He continued, “By this acceptance [emphasis added] I experience somewhat more lightness in my existence. I often continue to ruminate, yet I have created some islands of well-being.”
In sharing his experiences with us, he spontaneously pointed to our roles as counselors: “You accept [emphasis added] me and that’s okay; I pick up ordinary activities and you agree with that; there is no pressure to take it very seriously. And these activities work; they provide an antidote to my self-image. I make space [emphasis added] for doing these things and also my friends give me that space. This also liberates me from isolation.”

In this short quotation, Richard brought together three things that were relevant for the counseling process: (a) the small steps were sufficiently beyond the reach of the dominant perfectionist position; (b) the small activities created spaces (“islands of well-being”) that liberated him from his permanent and generalizing feelings of oppression; and (c) these activities, linked with our position as external helpers, created a route to a new internal position that seemed to be of great importance for his future self-development: I as accepting (see Figure 1). He seemed to adopt this position as a significant and new part of his internal domain, that is, from external to internal acceptance, or from unconditional regard to unconditional self-regard, to use Rogers’ (1951) terms. As we saw it, the accepting position was particularly important for Richard (and other clients) on a long-term basis because it has the potential to give a developmental impetus to a series of other, more specific positions that receive a certain amount of integrative nutrition from it (it can even generate new positions in the future). Such a position is called a promoter position or, more briefly, a promoter (the term promoter was first proposed by Valsiner [2004] as relevant to the developmental aspects of the dialogical self). Such a position is well-equipped to function as a counterposition to the dominant coalition in which the perfectionist played the most influential role.

The following excerpt gives an impression of the way in which Richard created a link between his emerging accepting position on one hand and his dreamer and perfectionist positions on the other hand. It refers to his reflections about going to a lecture as one of his innocent activities:

This event, attending a lecture, the inspiring environment and the presentation, evoke a lot of memories about earlier times, how I hoped and wrestled, the dream to develop myself, to achieve much. I always felt the disappointment and the failure and all these things came together in a source of aversion and accusation. Now I’m sitting here and cautiously I explore the possibility of acceptance. . . . I feel relaxation, lightness very directly, a cheerful feeling almost, like in a play. Why not? Look forward, you get this for free, consider your possibilities which are available and be content with what you have. The richness of sitting here and letting you inspire, after the beautiful walk along the old buildings, by a presentation from which you may learn something. This is free.

It is noteworthy that, talking from his accepting position, Richard does not reflect about this position only. He starts with referring to his disappointments associated with the dreamer (“the dream to develop myself”) and the perfectionist (“to achieve much”) and then moves to the accepting position
(“I explore the possibility of acceptance”). Apparently, he does not isolate the three positions from each other and does not avoid them but shifts, in a rather flexible way, from one to the other, with the accepting position, as a promoter, giving a meaningful dialogical response to the perfectionist and the dreamer. Moreover, this dialogical shifting is not to be seen as a simple zapping between arbitrarily spread locations in the spaces of his mind. Rather, by moving from one to the other position in dialogical ways, their relational contrasts, oppositions, conflicts, and integrations are made visible. These linking formulations are fertile ground for the emergence of bridges of meaning (Honos-Web, Surko, Stiles, & Greenberg, 1999).

EMERGENCE OF A DIALOGICAL SPACE

What actually happened in Richard’s counseling process? One of the most significant moments was when we discovered that the perfectionist was even more important than the avoidant position and that this crucial position became gradually accessible. Both the perfectionist and the avoidant were automatically confirmed by the repetitive, stereotypical, and almost sublingual voices of the father and grandfather in the external domain, working as maladaptive coalitions with a rigid superego quality in the self-process. Another turning point was the emergence of the accepting position, first instigated by the counselors and later introduced as a promoter position in the internal domain. The counselors in his external domain and the resulting self-acceptance in his internal domain functioned as a new and more adaptive coalition that functioned as a healthy counterposition to the avoidant, dreamer, and perfectionist positions that were originally overly dominant in the self and functioned, in their combination, as antipromoters, blocking the development of a variety of other (possible) positions.

From the moment that the accepting positions were introduced and increased in prominence, the self became more dialogical in comparison with the previous period in which the automatic, monological voices of his father and grandfather controlled the external domain of the self. To understand this process better, we can take a careful look at what happens between people involved in constructive and generative communication. There is more than the simple sending of signs, which are correctly or incorrectly received by a target person. In productive communication, particularly when this communication is of a dialogical nature, there is something emerging in between, which can properly be described as a dialogical space.

A dialogical space can be described as an invisible, in-between arena that has semipermeable boundaries with its surroundings. It emerges when participants are involved in interchanges in which experiences, insights, and discoveries emerge that cannot be reduced to one or the other party, but are the result of the generative verbal and nonverbal dialogical process itself. Typically, this space is felt by participants as something that is emerging between them and linking them in invisible ways. The emergent
commonalities were not present before the dialogue started but rather were produced by the unique interchange itself. The resulting experiences, insights, and discoveries and their affective sharing, resulting from virtual movements in this common space, are felt as meaningful and as generative by the parties involved. The openness of a dialogical space (depicted as the open rectangle in Figure 1) is reflected by allowance of a broader variety of different, opposite, and contradictive I-positions from the participants to enter the dialogical space and to become meaningfully related to the other I-position included in the space. A dialogical space also functions as a fertile ground for the emergence of new I-positions in one or both parties involved in creative interchanges. In addition, silence—between persons, between words, and between different phases in the process of interchange—is part of a dialogical space. Silence is not only a facilitating factor but can also be the result of communication in this space. Silence creates room for inner recapitulation, rehearsal, and imagination in dialogical relationships (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). From a Japanese perspective, Morioka (2012) emphasized the relevance of a dialogical space in counseling and psychotherapy by discussing the concept of ma, which, in Japanese traditions, refers to the invisible in-between space not only between things but also between people involved in communication.

For a proper understanding of a dialogical self, it is relevant to realize that a dialogical space can also emerge within the self of an individual person. It can emerge between different I-positions in the self when, for example, a person is involved in contemplation, or in a life review, or in a moment of quiet self-reflection. It can also appear when a person is imagining a promoter who serves as a prudent advisor, faithful supporter, loving God, or as a spiritual being that functions as a source of wisdom. It can also be felt when writing a diary or when practicing forms of creative writing (for a dialogical methodology in career counseling, see Lengelle, Meijers, Poell, & Post, 2013). Artists, novel writers, poets, or philosophers, but also family members, loved ones, friends, and teachers are often voices with important messages and facilitators of a dialogical space in the self. As we have seen, Richard was participating in a dialogical space with his counselors and later created a similar space in his own self, when the counselors’ accepting voices were internalized in the form of self-acceptance and created a fertile ground for finding adequate answers to the perfectionist and the dreamer.

METAPOSITION: UNIFYING, EXECUTIVE, AND LIBERATING

A concept that is indispensable for counseling purposes is the metaposition. In its most typical form, the metaposition can be described as an overview of a greater variety of specific positions, including their mutual links and associated voices. Imagine a tennis player who is involved in a game. As long as he is in the heat of the game, the best he can do is to stay fully concentrated
on the task at hand. Any distraction or self-doubt would interfere with his performance. As long as he is fully engaged in his performance, he is just in the position of player. After the game, he may reflect on his own achievement and think about his position as tennis player. He is then on a second, higher level from where he can look down at his actions and reflect on them. At this level, he may give a critical evaluation of his performance, and, as a result, he may decide to follow a different strategy next time. Later, in the evening, sitting on his chair, he may move to a third, even higher, level when he poses to himself the question about his future career. Should he go on to invest his best efforts in tennis? Should he go for Wimbledon or not? Should he consider doing something completely different? At this level of self-reflection and self-dialogue, he explores the connection between his position as tennis player and some other significant positions, for example, being a father, a husband, or a student gifted in math. After he has considered a broader array of positions and possibly discussed them with a wise advisor, he feels he can make the right decision. In summary, the tennis player can be at three levels: (a) being purely in the position, (b) being above the position and reflecting on it, and (c) moving to a higher level from where a greater variety of positions become visible so that they can be considered in their interconnections. For counseling purposes, the last level is particularly useful. This is where many discussions were taking place between the counselors and Richard, when they explored questions like: What are the most relevant internal and external positions in your present life (your working self)? What are the dominant relationships between them? What do their voices have to tell? To whom are the messages addressed? Are there coalitions and vicious circles? What are the relevant counterpositions? In what ways do the different positions influence each other? Are they adaptive or maladaptive? Which of them are (possible) promoters?

A metaposition has several specific qualities: (a) it creates an optimal distance toward the other, more specific positions (although it may be attracted, both cognitively and emotionally, toward some positions more than others); (b) it provides an overarching view so that several positions can be seen simultaneously; (c) it leads to an evaluation of the various positions and their organization; (d) it enables the participants to link the positions as part of their personal history (or the collective history of their group or culture); (e) the person becomes aware of the differences in their accessibility (in Richard’s case, the perfectionist was initially at the background of his self but not accessible); (f) the direction of change and the importance of one or more positions for future development of the self become apparent (promoters); and (g) it can play a facilitating role in creating a dialogical space (e.g., the counselor functions as a dialogical metaposition in the client’s external domain with corresponding positions in the internal domain). In summary, the development of a metaposition with a broad scope and long-term perspective contributes, more than most other positions, to the integration and continuity of the self as a whole and strengthens the centering movements in the self (see also Georgaca, 2001).
A metaposition has three functions: unifying, executive, and liberating. As unifying, it brings together different and even opposed positions so that their organization and mutual linkages become clear, and it prevents the self from becoming fragmented. In its executive function, it creates a basis for decision making and choosing directions in life that take into consideration a broader array of specific positions. As liberating, it acts as a stop signal for automatic and habitual behavior produced by well-established but maladaptive patterns of positions. Considering them from the broad and long-term perspective of a metaposition increases the chances for innovation of significant parts of a dialogical self.

As a matter of distinction, metaposition and promoter are different concepts. Whereas a metaposition is a spatial concept that provides an overview of large parts of the repertoire, a promoter has temporal aims because it gives an impetus to future development. Whereas a metaposition works as a vertically ascending helicopter providing a view of the landscape from a distance, a promoter functions like a motor, pushing the machinery of the self into a particular direction at a horizontal plane.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE INCREASED DENSITY OF I-POSITIONS

There is a special reason for emphasizing the importance of developing the capacity of taking metapositions and their dialogical processing. The reason is in the increased process of globalization, which has deep implications for the self and the multivoiced dialogical self in particular. As I have argued previously (Hermans, 2001b; Hermans & Kempen, 1998), interchanges on the interface of globalization and localization, and on the contact zones of different cultures have at least four implications for the self: (a) it is populated by an increasing density of positions, which may lead to a cacophony of voices in the self and to the risk of its fragmentation; (b) because many people are participating in a diversity of local groups and cultures on a global scale, the position repertoire becomes more complex and heterogeneous and increasingly laden with differences, tensions, oppositions, and contradictions; (c) the speed and unpredictability of global changes has the consequence that the repertoire receives more visits by unexpected positions; and, finally, (d) given the increasing speed of globalization, in combination with the increasing heterogeneity of positions, there are more and larger position leaps, that is, one has to make more and larger mental jumps. Examples of such jumps are immigrating to another place in the world, marrying a partner from another culture, educating one’s children in a religion other than one’s own, or being sent out by one’s company to work in another country. Such developments may cause a higher degree of uncertainty in the self, which may innovate and enrich the self in some situations, but lead to identity crisis or confusion in other situations (Arnett, 2002).
It is precisely for this reason that I proposed, in the beginning of this article, to regard centering and decentering movements in the self as equivalent and as mutually complementing forces. To develop a multivoiced and dialogical self, a decentering of the self is required, in the sense of the capacity and the courage to move to different and opposite sides in the landscape of the self and search in its half-dark and hidden areas and corners for relevant I-positions, including shadow ones. These movements receive their justification on the basis of the assumption that one has to know the different sides of the self, including their contrasts, oppositions, and heterogeneity, to build and develop, via centering movements, a differentiated whole that is rich and multifaceted enough to give an adequate answer to a diversity of global and local situations (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

METHODS FOR INVESTIGATING AND STIMULATING THE DIALOGICAL SELF

In this section, I briefly present two methods for investigating and stimulating the multivoiced, dialogical self, giving special attention to the variety of positions that are relevant to the self at some particular point in time. In the course of time, different methods have been constructed for the investigation of the dialogical self (for an overview of different methods for studying the dialogical nature of the self, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogical_self). For the present purposes, I have selected two methods for a brief presentation: the PPR method and the Composition method. I will focus on the PPR method because it provides a systematic and verbal research procedure for examining the relations between different positions and their organization. I selected the Composition method, because, as a more artistic procedure, it is of a more nonverbal nature and therefore sensitive to the less conscious layers of the self.

PPR METHOD

The PPR method is based on a stage metaphor that can be easily explained to the client. Imagine a stage in a theatre. From the left side, some internal characters enter the stage, and, from the right side, some external ones enter. They meet each other on the stage and start to interact with each other (see Figure 2).

At the heart of the PPR method (see Hermans, 2001a, for an extensive description with case examples) is the question: Which internal positions become prominent in relation to which external positions? For this purpose, a list of internal positions and one with external ones is provided to clients, who then mark which positions they recognize as relevant to their lives. After perusing the two lists and marking the most relevant ones, clients are invited to add any internal or external positions to the list and to for-
mulate these in their own words. One of the added positions in Richard’s case was I as avoider.

In a second step, the selected and added positions are introduced into a matrix, with the rows representing the internal positions and the columns representing the external ones (see Figure 3 for a simplified example). The actual lists contain approximately 50 internal and 40 external positions. The client is asked to focus on the first internal position (e.g., I as a son or I as a daughter) and then indicates the extent to which this internal position becomes prominent in relation to the first external position (e.g., my mother). For this procedure, the client uses a 0–5 scale: 0 = not at all, 1 = very little, 2 = to some extent, 3 = quite a lot, 4 = considerably, and 5 = very considerably. The result is a matrix of internal positions (rows) and external positions (columns), with the prominence ratings in the entries. This matrix allows the calculation of a series of quantitative indices. The simplest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My mother</th>
<th>My father</th>
<th>My friend</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Sum score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I as a son</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as a friend</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as a student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as avoider</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as fearful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as dreamer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as perfectionist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I as a partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 3**

Matrix of Internal and External Positions and Prominence Ratings
ones are the sum scores of the rows and those of the columns, which give an impression of which positions are most prominent and which are least prominent of all positions introduced in the procedure.

In my experience using this method with clients, there is one aspect I have found most innovative: the correlations between the positions, because they often reveal the hidden associations between the positions involved. Remember that we invited Richard to estimate which position he expected to be most closely related to I as avoider, as the position presented to the counselors as most relevant to him. He then answered spontaneously, “I as ashamed,” as the first one that came to his mind. Actually, the correlation between avoider and ashamed was .46, whereas the correlation between avoider and perfectionist was .80 and between avoider and dreamer was .78. This suggested that the link between avoider and ashamed was more accessible to him than the more influential connection between avoider on one hand and the devilish coalition of dreamer and perfectionist on the other hand. As this example shows, the correlations permit a view into the less conscious, often inaccessible connections between the different I-positions. Apparently, Richard had marked dreamer and perfectionist as relevant to him in the first part of the PPR method, but he failed to see the significant connection between these positions and his avoidance problem. By directly connecting avoider with dreamer and perfectionist, he created new bridges of meaning. A next step would be to give one or more of the positions a voice and invite them to tell their story with the possibility that other positions give a dialogical response to these stories from their own point of view (for further information about indices and dialogical procedures of the PPR method, see Hermans, 2001a, 2003. For a bi-plot method, in which internal and external positions are graphically represented on the same plane, see Kluger, Nir, & Kluger, 2008).

COMPOSITION WORK

The Composition method (for a detailed exposition, see Konopka & van Beers, in press) is a psychological–artistic method for investigation and stimulation of the dialogical self. It is inspired by Japanese gardens, sometimes also called mindscapes (Nitschke, 1999), representing the inner landscape of mind. Some of these gardens, like Ryoan-ji, Daisen-in, and the Garden of Eight Phases in the Tofuku-ji Temple, can be seen as symbolizing basic dimensions of the self, such as the tension between unity and multiplicity, the challenge of dealing with opposites in the self, and dealing with uncertainty and finding a direction in one’s life. In this sense, the Japanese gardens are well in agreement with the dialogical self as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in the landscape of the mind (Hermans, 2001b).

In Composition Work, stones are used to represent I-positions and their dynamic relationships. A particular feature of working with stones is that they appeal to the senses. The stones can be viewed, touched, and felt;
placed side by side; located as opposites; combined in groups; and placed at a distance from other groups. The affective quality of I-positions can be expressed by the color, shape, texture, or weight of the stones as chosen by the client. As Konopka and van Beers (in press) noticed, it is striking that sometimes just looking at a stone and touching it may lead to new insights into the qualities of I-positions and associated feelings.

Composition Work is well in agreement with the embodied nature of the dialogical self as positioned in time and space. Konopka and van Beers (in press) gave the example of an Indonesian woman who emigrated to the Netherlands and picked up a rough stone, which symbolized her anxiety as she started to explore the damage of the stone. She looked at the brokenness of some parts of the stone and touched its sharp edges and, in this way, got in touch with the brokenness in herself that was associated with her anxiety. At the same time, she discovered that the holes in the stone allowed the light to shine through. So, the stone symbolized her anxiety and loss of her previous lifeworld, but, at the same time, it showed her the beginning of finding a way out. In her further exploration, she gave the stone a voice by referring to song lyrics by Leonard Cohen (1992): “Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” Using stones to represent I-positions and giving them a voice is a proper way to make a transition from the nonverbal and affective level to more explicit and verbal ways of understanding.

This method is also particularly suitable for taking into account the spaces between the stones and the relationship between the embodied positions, including their patterns. This allows for the creation of a third position, that is, a new position in which two existing conflicting positions are reconciled in such a way that the energies of conflicting positions are used in the service of the new, more integrative one (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Konopka and van Beers (in press) gave the example of a client who identified two opposite and conflicting positions in himself: I as angry (represented by a dark blue stone) and I as soft (represented by a light pink stone, see Figure 4). In the process of counseling, he found out that they could be reconciled in a new, third position: I as human (represented by a more complex, open, and multicolored stone). The new position, placed between the conflicting ones and linking them, liberated him from being stuck in an or/or situation: becoming quite angry in frustrating social situations or being overly friendly and mitigating in other situations. He described being human as allowing for “different colors of the self, even in the same relationship.” He learned to be assertive and at the same time keep a good and workable relationship with his colleagues.

The Composition method is also particularly suited for making spatial movements from one to the other position and back, and also for going into a position. Usually, clients, like people in general, are used to talking about a particular position, looking at it only from the outside. As Rowan
(2010) recommended, it is important to stimulate clients to consider a position from within, as a way of experiencing its affective quality and of seeing the world through its eyes. Going into a position is like going into a house and then looking at the outside environment through its windows. To know a position from the inside, it is often useful to enter a direct dialogue with it by asking questions such as: How old are you? or When did you meet (name of the client) for the first time? A client can give answers from a variety of positions and may learn to form new perspectives on old problems (see Konopka & van Beers [in press] for more variations of the Composition method).

In summary, I have selected two methods, the PPR method and Composition Work, because I see them as mutually complementing. Whereas the PPR method has an emphasis on the explicit, verbal, cognitive, conscious, scientific, and systematic, Composition Work allows an entrance to the implicit, nonverbal, affective, less conscious, artistic, and expressive realms of the self. The background thought of this choice is that the cognitive and explicit is, in many parts of our Western culture, overemphasized and needs a healthy counterpart. This idea is also in agreement with McGilchrist (2009), who has presented, from a neurological point of view, arguments for the necessity of creating a new balance between the workings of the left and right hemisphere of the brain and, in close connection with this, for exploring the relationship between science and art.
I-POSITIONS REVISITED

In this article, I tried to give an impression of a psychology of I-positions and their possible relevance to counseling. What then is the nature of the I in this theory? The briefest answer is that, in contradiction to Aristotelian logics, it is both multiple and unifying. As placed in a colorful society of individuals and groups who can enter the house of the self, actually or in imagination, in unpredictable ways, the I is multiplied; that is, it is pulled out of its center to an often confusing diversity of positions. I am positioned as nice by my friends and as an authoritarian boss by my coworkers, as wrong by the people who disagree with me but as right by myself, or as suspect by an official while regarding myself as innocent. For understanding the process of positioning, it is important to acknowledge that I am also decentered by myself when, for example, I notice that I am fed up with the kind of work that I am used to seeing as belonging to my identity or when I notice that I feel some hidden aversion to a particular group of people while being convinced that I am a Democrat and egalitarian who abhors any kind of discrimination. This being distracted by a diversity of social and personal positions represents the decentering or centrifugal movements in the self. This process is not always a passive one. In many cases, I want to actively explore and develop my multiplicity, when, for example, I want to delve into or show a different, hitherto neglected, side of myself or when I am usually an optimist but want to be a realistic pessimist too, or when I see myself as a pigeon, but want to be a hawk if necessary. The multiple nature of being positioned by others and by myself exemplifies the decentering nature of the positioned and positioning I, a feature that is, under the influence of the Enlightenment, often disregarded in many modern conceptions of the self (for arguments for the multiple and decentralized nature of the self from a sociological point of view, see Callero, 2003; and, from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Bromberg, 2004).

However, the I is also unifying, which was already emphasized by James (1890), when he considered the I not only as distinct from others, and as capable of volition, but also as identical through time (see also Damon & Hart, 1982). Apparently, the I wants to take, collect, and keep experiences as belonging to the same center that remains continuous over time, expressing the appropriating function of the I in James’s terms. In this context, we may refer to Allport (1955), who, thinking about the unity of the self, proposed the term proprium, which he succinctly defined in this way: “The proprium includes all aspects of personality that make for inward unity” (p. 40). So, even when I go through a process of conversion or when I feel reborn after a transforming experience, I am aware that I am still the same person as I was yesterday. The principle of unity and, in more dynamic terms, the centering movements, are indispensable in counseling and psychotherapy to keep or restore order and balance in the self.
As Rowan (2010) emphasized, we need to know the parts to become a whole. In our search for relevant materials in the different corners and remote areas in the self-space, we need a concept (I-position) that is sensitive to the variety of oppositional and contradictive parts of the self, in order to bring them together in a composite whole that continuously remains sensitive and open to new parts as the result of dialogical relationships with other people and with other parts in the self. Counseling of I-positions is comparable with gold diggers who have some idea about what and where to search for when they go deep down into the half-dark areas of the mine. When coming to full light again, they clean and polish the particles so that they can be inspected in their pure quality and then arranged as part of a meaningful composition.

The I-position is intentionally proposed as a broad and encompassing concept. Many colleagues ask the question: What is the difference between an I-position and a role? The answer is that roles are social positions (I as a psychologist, colleague, or leader), which are to be distinguished from personal positions (I as loving Mary or I as a doom thinker or I as smoking marijuana with my brothers while looking at a Charlie Chaplin film). It is realistic to bring the two kinds of positions together in a mix, because the same role can receive highly divergent personal manifestations. Some teachers want to be inspiring to their students, others want to be lighthearted and humorous; some are satisfied when they feel a warm and cooperative relationship with their students, and others feel their job as a personal calling. Typically, it is the mix of social and personal positions that constructs one’s role in society and, at the same time, contributes to one’s personal identity (for an example of the coalition of social and personal positions in student teachers, see Leijen and Kullasepp, 2013).

Rowan (2012) sees the notion of an I-position as the latest version of a long-standing idea: multiplicity of the self. He lists an impressive series of concepts that express interest in the diversified, conflicting, and contradictive nature of self or personality: ego–id–superego, complexes or archetypes, ego states, top dog versus underdog, internal objects, parent–child–adult, imaginary objects, imagoes, hidden observer, identity states, emotionally divided self, false versus true selves, energy patterns, community of self, small minds, agencies within the brain, subselves, subidentities, possible selves, self-schemas, personas, configurations of self, subpersonalities, and others.

In Rowan’s (2012) view, there are two main reasons why the nomenclature of I-positions is to be preferred above any of those just mentioned. One is that it is less liable to reification. When we succumb to the temptation of reification, Rowan reasons, we make the parts of the self overly strong, solid, and long-lasting, seeing them as permanent or at least semipermanent. I-positions, on the contrary, offer a more differentiated picture from a temporal point of view. Although there exist long-lasting and firmly established I-positions in the self, it should be acknowledged that many of them just come and go with great frequency. They are more of the moment rather than permanent in their essence.
The other advantage of I-positions that Rowan (2012) noticed is that there is no suggestion of subordination to the person as an individualized whole (e.g., subpersonalities). This allows one to think of the soul, of the spirit, or of a god becoming an I-position in the external domain of the self. The self is then not felt as a whole in itself but rather as a part-whole, participating in a reality that transcends the self as a separate and autonomous entity. This participation of the self in wider social and spiritual realms was for Hermans & Hermans-Konopka (2010) a reason to balance James’s (1890) appropriative function of the I with a receptive function. One of the implications of the receptive I is the awareness that things that are felt as meaningful in life are often received from actual or imagined beings and, therefore, may deserve a central place as a promoter in the external domain of the self. Moreover, the receptive function is indispensable for dialogical relationships, which are necessarily open to create space not only for the experiential worlds of other people but also for different positions in the self.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, Montaigne (1580/1603) remarked that there is as much difference found within us as there is between others and ourselves. This emphasis on difference led me to discuss the mutually complementary relationship between decentering movements in the self as a dynamic translation of multiplicity, and centering movements as the dynamic equivalent of unity in the self. Decentering movements, strongly emphasized in postmodern views of self and identity, are regarded as appropriate forces to actively explore the more remote and darker areas of the self, because they draw our attention, particularly when we are forced to leave, or want to leave, the comfort zone of the self (e.g., in crisis, misfortune, feeling fragmented, having a desire for adventure, longing for the unexpected, or discovering our shadow sides). In the present article, I have tried to demonstrate that the concept of being positioned, not only in the form of internal but also external positions, is sensitive to the decentering movements in the self. This multiple concept allows for exploration of different and even opposed directions in the self-space and gives attention to the conflicting and contradictive nature of the self, including unacceptable or rejected shadow positions.

Centering movements, as a dynamic translation of unity, keep divergent and disorganizing experiences together as belonging to one and the same self, which experiences itself as coherent and continuous at different moments in our lives. In the larger society, there are, despite its apparent fragmentation and frequent disorganization, unifying and centering forces at work: There are coalitions of individuals and groups; dialogical encounters; attempts to reconcile opposite or conflicting interests; committees for achieving metaviews on relevant matters; and promoters who give a significant push to the development of an organization, interest group,
or ideological association. In an analogous way, there are unifying movements in the form of coalitions, dialogical relationships, development of third positions, metapositions, and promoters in the minisociety of the self. Yeats’s (1920) phrase “the center does not hold” can be depicted as an open circle representing a self that is subjected to an increasing diversity of positions pushing it from its center to the periphery. Dialogical counseling does not work against these decentering forces, but makes active use of them to explore the diversities, conflicts, contradictions, and oppositions in the landscape of the mind, at the same time creating coalitions and unifications that are necessary not only for the larger society but also for the society of the self.

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