Dialogical Self Theory and the Increasing Multiplicity of I-Positions in a Globalizing Society: An Introduction

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Abstract

Dialogical Self Theory is a recent development in the social sciences, based on a conception of the self as a society of mind. In this conception, the self is considered as extended to significant others in the environment, who populate the self as a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions between which dialogical or monological relationships may emerge. While from a spatial perspective the self is engaged in a process of positioning and counterpositioning in a globalizing society, from a temporal point of view the self is part of a process of positioning and repositioning in collective history and personal development. Some phenomena that are necessary for the understanding of the dialogical self are discussed: dominance and social power, the processes of globalization and localization, the experience of uncertainty and possible reactions to uncertainty in a globalizing world. Finally, the different contributions of this special issue are placed in the context of the presented conceptual framework. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
William James’s (1890) prolific chapter on the self had a great impact on the emergence of Dialogical Self Theory (DST). One of his many ideas, the extension of the self, was of particular importance for the development of the theory. James argued that the self is not simply located inside the skin but extended to the environment. Therefore, not only do one’s thoughts and feelings (Me) belong to the self but also that which the person calls his or her own (Mine)—like my body, my mother, my father, my children, and even my opponent—belongs to the self in a broadened sense of the term. The notion of the extended self can be seen as a great step forward in the social sciences, as it went beyond the Cartesian dualistic conception that considered the self (res cogitans) and the environment (res extensa), including the other person, as separate entities (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992).

I elaborated on the notion of the extended self by reading Bakhtin’s (1929/1973) book on Dostoyevsky, in which he introduced the intriguing metaphor of the polyphonic novel. Such a novel is composed of a number of independent and mutually opposing perspectives embodied by characters involved in dialogical relationships. Each of the characters is seen as “ideologically authoritative and independent,” that is, each of them is perceived as the author of his or her own view of the world, rather than an object of Dostoyevsky’s all-encompassing artistic vision. The characters are not standing below their creator but beside him, disagreeing with the author, even rebelling against him. As part of this polyphonic construction, Dostoyevsky creates a multiplicity of viewpoints 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). Apparently, the characters are not subordinated to Dostoyevsky’s view but have their own voice and tell their own story. This development in the novelistic literature marks a revolution against the traditional idea of the “omniscient narrator” (Spencer, 1971).

My colleagues and I noticed that in the metaphor of the polyphonic novel there are two elements that go beyond James’s conception of the extended self: the independence of the characters and the fact that they have a voice. While in James’s view the other is “appropriated” to the self as “mine,” the polyphonic novel metaphor allows the other to have an existence on his/her own, rather than being “appropriated” or “owned” as part of the self. Moreover, the other, as somebody with an independent voice, has the opportunity to speak about his or her own experiences from a specific and original point of view. The idea of a self as dialogically extended to an independent other seemed to be a fertile road to go in formulating a new theory. In this theory the self as a “society of mind” is seen as a promising metaphor as it has the potential of extending the self to a broader societal and historical context (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

I will start with a discussion of the society of mind metaphor and then delineate the conception of a dialogical self in the context of dominance.
and social power, its place in the context of globalization, the resulting experience of uncertainty, and the self’s reactions to this experience.

Self as a Society of Mind

The notion of the self as society of mind was introduced by computer scientist Minsky (1985) who noticed that already in the 1950s and 1960s, excellent computer programs were being created for “expert skills,” for example, for solving hard problems in mathematical logic and college-level problems in calculus. It was not until the 1970s that computer scientists were able to construct robot programs for arranging children’s building blocks into simple towers and playhouses. The main reason for this delay was that a specialized expert needs a large amount of a relatively few types of knowledge. In contrast, a seemingly simple task, like building a tower with blocks, requires that the program be able to see, perform, and coordinate well enough to make the construction. What is a simple task for a child requires complicated management systems for a computer program. Apparently, simple, common-sense tasks involve a large variety of types of knowledge rather than highly specialized expert systems.

As an answer to the complicated management problem, Minsky (1985) proposed a model that considered the mind as a hierarchically organized network of interconnected parts that together function as a society. In this model, the mind of the child is imagined to contain a host of smaller minds, called agents. At a high level of organization, an agent called Builder is specialized in making towers from blocks. However, building a tower is too difficult a job for any single, simple agent. To do the complicated job, Builder has to involve several other agents, which operate at the next lower level of organization: Begin (who selects a place to start the tower), Add (who adds another block to the tower), and End (who decides whether it is high enough). In this way, the agents cooperate, like in a bureaucracy, to make the self function as an organized whole.

In Minsky’s model, agents may be involved in direct communication. As an example, he described a conflict between Builder and another agent such as Wrecker, who functions at the same level of organization but is only interested in breaking down what Builder has achieved. The agencies responsible for Building and Wrecking might become involved in a process of negotiation by offering support for one another’s goals. “Please, Wrecker, wait a moment more till Builder adds just one more block: it’s worth it for a louder crash!” (Minsky, 1985, p. 33).

Dialogical Self Theory (DST) goes a decisive step further than Minsky’s model of the society of mind. The self does not only function as a mini-society but is, at the same time, an intrinsic part of macro-society. In
this view, the self is not simply surrounded by society, which functions as an external determinant, but functions itself as a society of mind. At the same time, society is not a social structure that is studied in separation of the selves of its individual participants, but rather a society-of-selves to which the selves of individual agents give their original contribution, as Mead (1934) already proposed in his classic work Mind, Self and Society. An important consequence of this view is that changes and developments in the self lead to changes and developments in society at large and, reversed, changes in society have immediate implications for changes in the self. It also means that when society is becoming more complex as a result of the process of globalization (Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011), the self also becomes more complex. In other words, the self is society-inclusive and, in its turn, society is self-inclusive (Hermans, 2001). The advantage of this view is that it avoids the pitfalls of treating the self as a self-contained entity (Sampson, 1985; Valsiner, 2002), and society and culture as abstract and self-less (Shweder, 1991).

### Dominance and Social Power in the Self

The notion of social dominance or power, so obvious in societal structures, seems to be absent in many contemporary theories of the self, particularly in those that put a strong emphasis on unity. As a consequence, they lack insight into the intense interplay between power relations in the society at large and dominance relations in the “mini-society” of the self. In a critical review of the psychological literature on the self, sociologist Callero (2003) listed a number of concepts that play a central role in mainstream psychology: self-enhancement, self-consistency, self-presentation, self-efficacy, self-verification, self-knowledge, self-regulation, self-monitoring, self-control, self-handicapping, and self-deception. Commenting on these concepts, he raised the issue of social power:

> ... the self that is socially constructed is never a bounded quality of the individual or a simple expression of psychological characteristics; it is a fundamentally social phenomenon, where concepts, images, and understandings are deeply determined by relations of power. Where these principles are ignored or rejected, the self is often conceptualized as a vessel for storing all the particulars of the person.

(Callero, 2003, p. 127) [See also Sampson’s (1985) criticism of “self-contained individualism” in psychological theories of the self in the West.]

An example of power relationships as reflected in hierarchically structured selves, can be found in religious movements. In a study of Jewish orthodoxy, Kaufman (1991) was interested in women who grew up
in secular Jewish homes in the United States but had the feeling that the secular values of their education did not suffice to give them a meaningful life. Despite the limitations that orthodox beliefs put on women, they converted, in their teens or twenties, to orthodox Judaism. The women made this step in the conviction that an orthodox religious system offered them a foundation in their lives and made them feel rooted in a stable and enduring tradition. In a discussion of Kaufman’s study, Arnett (2002) referred to the emergence of fundamentalist movements in both Western and non-Western societies and argued that many of these movements came up in the late 20th century as a reaction to the process of globalization. For a considerable part, the emergence of such movements can be seen as localizing reactions to the uncertainties evoked by the process of globalization. The instability, change, and flux of globalizing tendencies are countered by a stabilized religious position in the self that is based on a belief in a sacred past, a social hierarchy of authority of men over women, adults over children, and God over all (Marty and Appleby, 1993; Arnett, 2002).

Kaufman’s study is an example of a strong hierarchical structure in the self. This is not to claim that hierarchy is typical of the selves of people who adhere to traditional or orthodox value systems only. The selves of most people show a hierarchical structure. Social opposites, like man versus woman, young versus old, or black versus white, refer to social distinctions in society, which are, in one way or another, reflected in the hierarchical organization of the self. Specific for DST is not that the self is nonhierarchical, but that the self is giving an answer to opposites that are reigning the relationships among people of a particular society. This answer may vary from conformity to nonconformity and from agreement to disagreement. Hierarchical structures in society are not only reflected in the self but also answered and addressed both in external and internal dialogues.

**Dominance and Social Power in Dialogical Relationships**

Social dominance is not extrinsic but rather intrinsic to dialogical relationships. In an investigation of participants involved in conversation, Linell (1990) observed that asymmetry exists between the speakers and listeners in turn-taking behavior. Speakers can only communicate in comprehensible ways if they alternate the roles of speaker, in which they are more dominating, and listener, in which they are less dominating in determining the content and course of the conversation. The participants have the possibility to control the “territory” of the communication in a variety of ways. As Linell shows, one of the parties can be more dominant by just speaking more and longer than the other party (amount of talk), or taking the most initiatory moves (interactional dominance), introducing topics
and new perspectives on topics (topic dominance), or making the most strategic moves (strategic dominance). Apparently, relative dominance is an intrinsic quality of turn-taking behavior and not something that is in contradiction with dialogue. Relative dominance is indispensible for well-ordered and explicit verbal dialogue.

One of the starting points of DST is that dialogues can take place between different people engaged in communication but also between different parts or “positions” in the self. As Blachowitz (1999) has argued, dialogues in the self take place in the form of “proposals” and “disposals.” I can ask myself if I really want to do this or that (proposal). After shorter or longer time, I may find the answer in myself (disposal). Typically, I present my thoughts to myself by expressing them in some perceptual medium, such as an inner voice, short notes, written texts, drawings, a diary, and so forth. When I do so in a systematic way, I’m able to hold on to them more completely and with more certainty. For example, when I’m planning to buy a piece of furniture and want to give it a place in my house, I make a preliminary sketch of it and ask myself whether this is what I want. When I’m not happy with what I see on paper, I reject it. The party who made the first sketch is doing the proposing, whereas the rejecting party is doing the disposing. The same happens when I’m writing a letter, a poem, or an e-mail. As soon as I have given something its first shape, then the first try functions as the proposing party that then meets the evaluation of the disposing party.

As long as there is a fluent and reciprocal process of proposal and disposal in the self, there is a rather symmetrical process of internal dialogue (with slight asymmetries as typical of turn-taking). However, when one part of the self is not doing a proposal but giving a command (e.g., “I forbid myself to take any cigarette for the rest of my life”), one part of the self becomes so dominant that the other part becomes suppressed or silenced. In such a case, there is no inner dialogue but rather inner monologue.

In the comparison of internal and external (with other people) dialogues, we should take into account that internal dialogues are often less systematic, less organized, more abbreviated, and more impulsive than external dialogues. As Wiley (2006) has observed, inner speech is both more simple and more complex than outer speech. Both its semantics and syntax are more simple, and fewer words and fewer parts of speech are used. On the other hand, inner speech incorporates many extralinguistic elements, such as visual imagery, tactile sensations, kinesthetics, smells, tastes, and sounds, which makes it more complex than outer speech. Despite the significant differences between internal and external dialogues, voices play a central role in both forms of communication. Relative dominance is typical of both forms of communication, as one voice is stronger, louder, and more influential than another. Like external voices, internal ones may be silenced, suppressed, or marginalized. When the one voice dominates the other so strongly that the latter voice does not have
an opportunity to express itself from its own particular point of view, dialogue changes into monologue. When the self becomes hierarchically organized to a degree that one supreme voice dominates all other ones, the self may become monological, not only in relation to other voices in the self but also to members of out-groups (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Collective Voices in the Self

Voices in the self are not purely individual constructions, as they reflect the collective voices of the society to which they may answer in individual or collective ways. As Bakhtin (1986) argued, the utterance of an individual speaker is not simply coming from an isolated, decontextualized voice speaking in a neutral space. Rather, individual voices are deeply infiltrated by the culture of groups and institutions in which they participate, including their power differences. Collective voices are expressed in professional jargon, sociopolitical ideologies, dialects, national languages, and social circles, and to a considerable degree they constitute what the speaker’s individual voice is saying. In terms of DST, power differences between the collective voices in a particular community are reflected as power differences or power struggles between positions in the self and, at the same time, are responded to by counterpositions in the self, which may agree or disagree, conform or not conform to these collective influences.

An illustrative example of power struggles between collective voices in the self and their response by counterpositions is provided by the postcolonialist writer Edward Said (1999). He was born as a Palestinian, educated in an English school in Egypt, and later immigrated to the United States (for a more extensive discussion, see Bhatia, 2002). The colonial school in Egypt where Said was a pupil was run entirely by British staff who viewed the Arab boys as delinquents who were, in their view, in need of discipline and punishment. The teachers used a handbook with rules that were intended to make Arab students behave like the British. Said told how the boys resisted the colonial rules of the handbook by invoking their Arab position:

Rule 1 stated categorically: “English is the language of the school. Anyone caught speaking other languages will be severely punished.” So Arabic became our haven, a criminalized discourse where we took refuge from the world of masters and complicit prefects and anglicized older boys who lorded it over us as enforcers of the hierarchy and its rules. Because of Rule 1 we spoke more, rather than less, Arabic, as an act of defiance against what seemed then, and seems even more so now, an arbitrary, ludicrously gratuitous symbol of their power.

(Bhatia, 2002, p. 68)
As this excerpt shows, power differences and struggles between collective voices on the level of the community have an impact on the dialogues between the members of a minority group. At the same time, they evoke dialogical relationships between opposing positions in the self (I as born as an Arabic versus I as educated in an English school). The Arab position in the self of the boys was not simply repressed but rather emphasized as a counterposition that had to be maintained for its own value.

For another example of power differences between collective voices and their influence in the dialogical self see van Meijl’s (2006) discussion of Maori youngsters. See also his contribution in the present issue. For discussion of collective voices as reflected in family cultures (the culture of father’s family versus the culture of mother’s family) and their power differences in the self of the children, see Hermans (2004).

What Is a Dialogical Self?

On the basis of the preceding considerations, we have proposed the composite concept of dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Two notions, self and dialogue, are brought together in the composite term dialogical self. Typically, the two notions are seen as stemming from different psychological or philosophical traditions. The self has strong historical roots in American pragmatism, represented by theorists like William James and George H. Mead, while dialogue is of central concern in the writings of influential figures in European traditions, like Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber.

The dialogical self can be conceived of as a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the society of mind. As a “mini-society,” the self emerges from an intense interconnection with the (social) environment and is intrinsically bound to particular positions in time and space. As spatially located, the embodied I has the possibility to move from one position to another in a process of positioning and counterpositioning. As a temporal process, the self is involved in processes of positioning and repositioning. As a spatio-temporal process the I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions (both within the self and between self and perceived, remembered, or imagined others) and these positions are involved in relationships of dominance and social power. As part of sign-mediated social relationships, I-positions can be voiced so that dialogical relations among them develop. The voices interact like characters in a story or movie, involved in processes of question and answer, agreement and disagreement, conflict and struggle, negotiation and integration. The voices have a story to tell about their own experiences from their own specific point of view. As different voices, the I-positions exchange knowledge and information about their respective Me’s, creating a complex, multivoiced, narratively structured self.

The theory’s central notion, I-position, is introduced because it acknowledges both the multiplicity of the self and its coherence and unity.
Certainly in our postmodern era, the self is subjected to an increasing flux of events, contacts, information, and experiences. As a result of many discontinuous and unpredictable changes in time and space, the self is intrinsically involved in a process of positioning, repositioning, and counterpositioning. As distributed by a wide variety of existing, new, and possible positions, the self is subjected to a process of decentralization, as poetically phrased by William B. Yeats’s famous dictum “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” The decentering movements in the self are reflected by a highly dynamic multiplicity of I-positions that are evoked by ever-changing situations. At the same time, the I “appropriates” some of the positions and rejects others (see also James, 1890) and in this way is involved in a process of organizing positions as parts of a coherent structure. The organizing capacity of the self reflects its tendency to centralize positions as “owned” by one and the same I. Even when a person feels “reborn,” this does not refute the fact that it is the “same” I that goes through an experience of renovation. Multiplicity and unity are not mutually exclusive but inclusive (for the same argument, see also Falmagne, 2004). Along these lines, we have argued that the dialogical self is a bridging theory including elements from a postmodern model of the self while at the same time acknowledging its unity and coherence as central in a modern model of the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Internal and External Positions in the Self

As extended to the environment (James, 1890), the dialogical self includes not only internal positions (e.g., I as a working mother, I as a dedicated professional, I as a lover of classical music) but also external positions (e.g., my children, my trustworthy colleague, my stubborn opponent). From a theoretical point of view, it is relevant to emphasize that not only internal but also external positions can have the quality of I-positions, that is, the other conceived as “another I.” This point of view is 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-fl edged ‘I’” (p. 51). Indeed, 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”). This identification can reach the point that the other is seen as part of an extended I.

In the presented view, it is important to note that the I is not a self-contained, individualistic I, so typical of the modern model of the self (Sampson, 1985), but rather an I that transcends the boundaries of the self and is more than an isolated entity that is encapsulated in itself. The extended I, as contextualized, is never alone but is always together with an actual, remembered, imagined, or anticipated other: the hero of a book or
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film, a deceased parent, one or more of your friends in whom you recognize yourself, or a person you met only briefly but who made an indelible impression on you. For an exceptionally strong personality, such as a Buddha, Christ, or the Dalai Lama, even an enemy can be seen as an accepted and even valued aspect of the extending I. The dialogical self transcends the restrictive borders between I and you, as demonstrated by the notion of the other-in-the-self and by the definition of the other as “another I” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Not only is the other part of the extended self, but also dialogical relationships are part of an extended self. For example, self-agreement, self-consultancy, self-conflicts, and self-criticism take place not only in the internal domain of the self (“As a father I’m often in conflict with myself as a hardworking professional”), but also in the external domain (e.g. “I witnessed a discussion between two of my friends who disagreed with each other about a political issue”) and between the internal and external domain (e.g., “When I feel powerless in solving a problem, I’m used to consulting the wise teacher in myself, who often helps me to find a direction”). In other words, not only the other is part of the extended self, but also dialogical relationships are extended to real, remembered, imagined, or anticipated interchanges. The (social) environment is an intrinsic part of the dialogical self.

As I will argue in the following section, the extended self is a globalizing self. In our contemporary era of hyperconnection and crossing boundaries of nations and cultures, the self is increasingly colored and even deeply influenced by the process of globalization and its counterpart localization (see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, for review). How are these processes related to each other and in which way do they influence the dialogical self?

Globalization and Localization: Two Sides of the Same Coin

In the early debate about globalization, two main contestants can be distinguished: homogenizers, who consider globalization as a consequence of modernity, and heterogenizers, who see it as an attribute of postmodernity (Featherstone and Lash, 1995). Whereas homogenizers are primarily interested in the presence of universals, heterogenizers question the existence of a unified world system and are critical of the validity of universal truth. What seems to be “universal” or “general” at first sight is often no more than the dominance of one culture over another culture (e.g., the West over “the Rest”) or as the dominance of one locality over another.

In accordance with the heterogenizer perspective, the process of globalization can only properly be understood when its counterpart, localization, is taken into account. As a result of the process of globalization, different local cultures, with their own histories, traditions, and value
systems, are meeting each other on global interfaces and, as a consequence, become involved in a variety of relationships, including power relationships. As Foucault’s work (1980) has demonstrated, heterogenizers see truth not as something objective, which can be discovered by a detached observer, but as “defined truth,” with a particular individual, group, or institution having the power to define what is “true” and to impose it on others. A typical example of a process that takes place in a heterogeneous world laden with power relationships between different cultures is immigration. In many cases, this process challenges the newcomers to maintain, defend, or redefine their original culture against the dominant definitions of the host culture.

**A Transactional Definition of Globalization.** The intrinsic interconnectedness of the global and the local is also apparent in discussions of the process of civilization. As Wilkinson (1995) argued, there is on Earth only one civilization: a single, global one that includes a diversity of local cultures. This civilization started about 1500 BCE in the Near East when Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations collided and fused. Since then the original civilization has expanded over the entire planet and absorbed all other previously independent civilizations (e.g., Japanese, Chinese, and the West). Elaborating on this idea, Wilkinson proposes a transactional definition of civilization by considering connectedness rather than uniformity as the main criterion for linking the global and the local. When individuals and groups interact intensely, significantly, and continuously, he reasons, they belong to the same civilization, “even if their cultures are very dissimilar and their interactions mostly hostile” (1995, p. 47). Indeed, in a situation of conflict, hostility, and even warfare, it is impossible for the contestants and opponents to live longer in total isolation. The phenomenon of antagonistic bonding can be observed in many social conflicts and is even expressed in language itself. Words like *disagreement, dissonance, contradiction, argument, drama, collision, war,* and *social power,* assume the existence of entities that are involved in oppositions but, at the same time, belong to each other: “Israel and Judah, the Homeric pantheon, Congress, counterraiding tribes, the two-party system, the Seven Against Thebes, a Punch and Judy show, and the Hitler–Stalin pact are all antagonistic couples and collections of separate entities commonly recognized as internally antagonistic unities” (1995, pp. 48–49). In terms of DST, such antagonistic unities develop as continuous processes of positioning and counterpositioning in relationships in which contact and social power are fused.

**Globalization and Dialogue.** When we consider globalization and civilization as processes that increasingly take place at contact zones where differences meet each other (Hermans & Kempen, 1998), there are at least two far-reaching implications. First, functioning increasingly on global *contact* zones as a result of growing international contacts; the existence of transnational institutions; and developments in modern technology, media,
and transportation; different individuals and groups can no longer avoid the necessity of dialogue. In an intensely interconnected world system, a form of interaction is needed that enables individuals and groups to deal with their differences, conflicts, and misunderstandings. Second, in the global-local dynamics we have to face the important role of social power, as exemplified by economic exploitation of the natural resources of local communities, discrimination of immigrant groups, and the emergence of dual economies and digital divides. In such situations the less powerful groups are treated as inferior or serviceable with the implication that their voices are neglected or even silenced. In situations of strong inequality, suppression, and injustice, the less-privileged individuals and groups are placed in social positions that prevent them from expressing their experiences from their own specific point of view and from contributing to productive dialogical relationships. In cases of strong power differences between participants, dialogical relationships are reduced to monological ones, with one party ignoring or silencing the voice of the other party.

Given the starting point of the dialogical self as a society of mind, it should be noticed that dialogical and monological relationships not only exist between people but also within the (extended) self of the individual person. The mutual inclusion of self and society implies that productive inner dialogues and fertile external dialogues are cross-fertilizing each other. In reverse, when significant voices are blocked in the organization of the self, it is difficult or even impossible to express these voices in external dialogues so that their influence and further development may be blocked. This would mean that in these cases internal and external dialogues have only a limited opportunity to profit from each other in productive ways.

In summary, a theory of dialogue or dialogical self is in need of a positioning theory (Raggatt, 2012). The social and personal positions in which people place themselves or are placed by others can allow dialogue or constrain it. Depending on the ways people position others and themselves, individuals and groups can receive the space to express themselves from their own original point of view and become involved in an interchange that stimulates a learning process at both sides; alternately, the positioning process can lead to monologue in which one voice is overly dominant and the other silenced, with the implication that co-constructive learning is hampered or even blocked. The main necessity for dialogical relationships is openness to experience. From a personality perspective, Oles and Puchalska-Wasyl (2012) provided empirical support for this statement. They correlated a questionnaire for assessing internal dialogue with a questionnaire for measuring the so-called big five personality traits in different groups of respondents. They found that internal dialogue showed the highest correlations with the trait openness.

Some Features of a Globalizing Position Repertoire. What are the implications of globalization and localization for the organization of the
position repertoire? As far as the dialogical self is open to the globalizing society, its position repertoire has some specific features: (a) It is faced with an unprecedented density of positions (internal and external ones), which may lead to a “cacophony of voices” (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2012); (b) When the individual is increasingly participating in a diversity of local groups and cultures on a global scale, the position repertoire becomes more complex and heterogeneous, laden as it is with differences, oppositions, and contradictions (Falmagne, 2004; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011); (c) Given the speed and unpredictability of global changes, the repertoire receives more visits by unexpected positions; and finally, (d) As a consequence of the increasing range of possible positions, there are more and larger position leaps—that is, moving from one position to another, the individual has to make more and larger “mental jumps” given the relatively large psychological distance between the positions (e.g., immigration to another country, marrying a partner from another culture, cooperation with colleagues from different cultures, or being confronted by the needs of people at the other end of the world who are facing extreme poverty or suffering from a disaster; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; see also van Meijl’s contribution in this issue that discusses the position repertoire of Maori and Tongan youngsters who are living in a field of tension between traditional and postmodern value systems).

Globalization and the Experience of Uncertainty

The increasing density, complexity, heterogeneity, and dynamism of the position repertoire results in a heightened level of uncertainty, typical of a globalizing society. As we have detailed previously (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), the experience of uncertainty has four characteristics: (a) complexity, referring to a great number of positions of the self, with an increased number of possible relations; (b) ambiguity, referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one position is determined by the flux and variation of the other ones; (c) deficit knowledge, referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that can resolve the contradictions between the positions; and (d) unpredictability, implying a lack of control of future developments in the content and organization of the position repertoire.

For a proper understanding of the experience of uncertainty, it is important to note that it is not necessarily a negative experience, as there are many situations in which it is associated with more positive than negative feelings. It may allow an increase of possible actions, adventures, and explorations of the unknown (e.g., traveling, international contacts, forms of international and intercultural cooperation). Moreover, the recognition of uncertainty helps to question the pretentions of absolute truth as
typical of the ideologies of those political and religious institutions that restrict or even block the development of an autonomous self. However, when the experience of uncertainty generalizes to many life areas or when one’s survival is at stake, as international terrorism demonstrates, the uncertainty may be intensified to a degree that it changes into an experience of insecurity or anxiety. The latter experience prompts people to find local niches where they can find security, safety, and certainty (Adams, 2004). As these considerations suggest, the experience of uncertainty is a gift, as it opens a broad range of new and challenging possibilities, but it can be a burden when it leads to confusion and anxiety.

The experience of confusion is particularly relevant to the lives of young people. Focusing on the psychology of adolescence, Arnett (2002) discussed the experience of uncertainty in the context of globalization. He observed that in contemporary society, people are confronted with the challenge of adapting not only to their local culture but also to the global world. He also referred to the increase of “identity confusion” particularly among young people in non-Western cultures. Some of them feel themselves at home in neither their local situation nor the global situation (see also van Meijl, 2006).

Additional support for the thesis of increasing uncertainty in relation to globalization is provided by Blossfeld (2007; see also Mills & Blossfeld, 2003), who summarized the results from the first phase of the international research project GLOBALIFE. Youth in all thirteen countries under investigation are clearly exposed to uncertainty as a result of globalization. Yet uncertainty is not equal at different societal levels. Particularly those at the bottom of society are subjected to risk. Moreover, the results of this study suggest that high levels of uncertainty have an impact on family formation. Those in more precarious situations are more likely to postpone or even forgo partnership and parenthood.

Reactions to Uncertainty. An important question is how people respond to a heightened level of uncertainty as associated with a highly dense, heterogeneous, complex, and highly dynamic position repertoire. In a previous publication (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), we have discussed five different reactions, which we discuss here briefly.

Uncertainty can be diminished by reducing the number, heterogeneity, and complexity of positions in the repertoire. People who are, for a long time, fully engaged in frequent social contacts may retreat eventually to a simple form of life or decide to live at a quiet place to find peace of mind. Gradually increasing feelings of discomfort and doubts about the meaning of all the distracting activities have urged them to give a decisive turn to their lives. Sometimes this change comes quite suddenly and even unexpectedly. As James (1902/2004) demonstrated in his study of conversions, a growing dissatisfaction with one’s life may gradually emerge, but it does not reach the level of sharp awareness, suppressed as it is by an overdose of activities and duties. Suddenly, however, as if an invisible hand is
touching one’s shoulder, a sudden conversion takes place, whereby hitherto neglected or suppressed emotions or desires come to the surface and lead to dramatic changes in one’s self. In the context of DST, such conversions are described as “dominance reversals” in the position repertoire (Hermans, 1996).

Uncertainty can be reduced by conforming to a powerful external position to which one’s own position repertoire is subordinated. When people are faced with divergent and contradictory positions and have to give an answer to a variety of complex situations, they may feel the need to transfer responsibility to some authority, guru, strong leader, or “godfather” who reduces the burden of uncertainty. This reaction can be observed in cases of religious orthodoxy or political fundamentalism, as adherents feel the need to simplify their lives by realizing a strong hierarchical organization of their repertoire, with one or a few positions at the top that are allowed to dominate all other positions.

Uncertainty can be minimized by sharpening the boundaries between oneself and the other and between in-group and out-group. It can be observed in the political preferences of the supporters of political parties that take an extreme and radical stance on issues of immigration and closure of national boundaries for newcomers. Often this reaction has the function to maintain or defend one’s identity in situations of increasing global change. As Hall (1991) noticed, identity is a construction that achieves its positive by the narrow eye of the negative. This results from the production of a Manichean set of opposites (e.g., we versus they) with a sharpening of the boundaries between in-group and out-group and by seeing one’s own group as superior. In this way, an identity is constructed that augments positive feelings toward one’s in-group with the simultaneous increase of negative feelings toward the other group as abject.

A paradoxical reaction to uncertainty can be observed when individuals add, rather than diminish, the number of positions in the self. Maybe it is paradoxical when somebody tries to reduce uncertainty by increasing the number of positions that was originally the cause of uncertainty. However, this reaction becomes more comprehensible when we realize that the additional position is expected to give the solace, rest, structure, pleasure, or prospect that other positions lack. For example, somebody may hope that a new job will give the “real” satisfaction that earlier jobs could not provide; or the relationship with a new partner is expected to give the warmth and stability that earlier contacts lacked; or moving to another place in the world is expected to solve the uncertainties that pervaded one’s life in the old place. New or additional positions are expected to give a hold in the otherwise fleeting and transient process of positioning.

In line with the argument presented in this chapter, a dialogical reaction to uncertainty is possible. The specific nature of this reaction is going into uncertainty rather than avoiding it. For the sake of understanding this
option, it is relevant to note that uncertainty is a central feature of dialogue itself. A dialogical relationship can emerge only if the participants are open to a range of possibilities that are not fixed at the beginning but remain flexible and susceptible to new and unexpected input during the process itself. During this open-ended and broadly ranged interchange, the initial positions of the participants do not remain the same, but are influenced or changed, marginally or radically, by the encounter itself. A certain degree of uncertainty is unavoidable, because during a dialogue one is exposed to an ambiguous other (actual remembered or imagined) with the simultaneous absence of a pre-existing and superordinate knowledge system that guarantees a final answer.

As we argued earlier in this chapter, relative dominance is not alien but rather intrinsic to dialogue. That is, during the interchange some positions become more dominant than others, or different positions are combined and integrated in a new coalition that emerges as common to the participants and may become part of creative decision making. This is what happens in a productive meeting where participants are able to listen to themselves and each other and elaborate on the other’s input in such a way that a creative and workable problem solving becomes possible. This is typical of a productive interchange between friends or colleagues and in meetings with new people, particularly when institutionalized power differences are not so large that some voices are not able to express themselves from their own specific point of view or are otherwise suppressed or silenced by the more powerful one. In a dialogue, participants are able to construct a common dialogical space in which they permit themselves, in an atmosphere of openness and freedom, to be influenced by the other participants and actively contribute to each other’s points of view (see also Morioka, 2012, who discussed this “in-between space” as an aspect of dialogue in Japanese culture).

In other words, dialogue can be seen as a “travel into uncertainty” with the possibility of uncertainty-reducing outcomes. A dialogical reaction is able to reach postdialogical certainty, whereas the preceding reactions (conforming to a powerful external position, and the like) aim often at predialogical forms of certainty. Dialogue, both with oneself and with others, is a way to cope with uncertainty and even to make productive use of it. This capacity is not something that is simply given, but can be learned as part of developing a dialogical self and as an adequate way of dealing with emotions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, Chapters 4 and 5).

**How to Cope with Uncertainty?** Being in a situation of uncertainty is not always attractive, particularly when it is associated with an increase of negative emotions. Moreover, when one moves into uncertainty, as part of a dialogical relationship, one or more cherished positions (“I as convinced about . . .”) or “We as believing that . . .”) become questioned. Dialogue implies identity costs when one is challenged to open and widen a fixed and closed
identity that is based on a strong belief in the superiority of one’s positions over those of others. As a consequence, self-esteem, as closely associated with one’s cherished identity, may be threatened or reduced. What then motivates people to tolerate uncertainty when it is negatively experienced and when it is not clear what compensates for the identity costs?

Uncertainty tolerance is particularly difficult when it becomes strongly intensified or when it generalizes over all or most positions of the self. It also becomes problematic when core positions (central positions that organize a certain variety of other, more peripheral, positions in the self) are questioned. Apparently, going into uncertainty is only possible when there are some other places in the self where there is some degree of certainty that compensates for the lack of certainty. Some stability is needed to cope effectively with instability. A certain organization in the self is necessary for productively coping with destabilizing events. One of the ideas proposed by DST is that uncertainty tolerance and development of dialogical relationships can be stimulated and facilitated by the development of promoter positions, as they have the potential of giving the “certainty of inspiration” while, at the same time, opening the self to new input from other positions in oneself and others.

The Social and Personal Relevance of Promoter Positions. A special feature of a promoter position is that it stimulates the development of a broader range of more specific internal and external positions of the self and moves them to a higher level of integration (Valsiner, 2004; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The integration of the position repertoire is of utmost importance as a necessary counter-force to the growing distribution as reflected by the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and complexity of the position repertoire involved in a globalizing society.

As superordinate positions in the organization of the self, promoter positions are crucial for one’s social and personal development. In the external domain of the self, we find such positions in leaders who functioned and may still function as inspiring models. Examples are heroes like Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Pope John Paul II. Such historical giants function as sources of inspiration, even for people beyond the cultures from which they originate (therefore, knowledge of the history, also of other cultures and communities, is so important for education!).

However, we can find promoter positions in our own environment. In my own work as a psychotherapist (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995), I was impressed by the finding that many clients, telling their life stories, often referred to a particular person who gave them something precious, a thought, insight, memory, or skill, that they fostered as a precious gift. They typically referred to an influential teacher, a good friend, a father, a mother, a sibling, a colleague, or a character in a novel or film or an artistic or spiritual other who contributed something of lasting value to their personal development.
What many of these models have in common is that they *inspire*. Inspiration, certainly deep and long-term inspiration, is able to function as a compensation for the identity costs associated with the experience of dialogical uncertainty. When their influence is strong enough, inspiring persons, figures, or characters can be established as promoter positions in the external domain of the dialogical self. They become entrenched as *others-in-the-self* who give us a sense of direction, particularly in situations in which fluidity, unpredicted change, increasing ambiguity, and cacophonous voices are pervasive in the self. At the same time, they are sufficiently open to the dialogical contributions of positions from other people and from one’s own self. Promoter positions are very different from what I earlier described as “conforming to a powerful external position,” which induces one to give up one’s own responsibility. On the contrary, in the case of a promoter position, the self remains *response-able* in spite of, or better, thanks to being “occupied” by a particular social, artistic, ethical, political, or spiritual person, group, or being. When a sense-giving and integrative promoter position is finding its place in the external domain of the self, it has the possibility to evoke an *answer* by developing promoter positions in the *internal* domain of the self (e.g., “I as engaged in . . .,” “I as persisting to realize . . .,” “I as developing my capacities in the service of . . .”). By including the promoter as an other-in-the-self and by developing internal promoters as a response, the self is socialized and individualized at the same time.

Such internal promoter positions are not necessarily evoked by external promoter positions. Some people may profit significantly from *blockers*, which, as opposite to promoters, impede the development of the self. Depending on available personal and social resources, one is able to “fight back” in such a way that the initial obnoxious influences to which a person is subjected (e.g., physical or psychological violence or sexual abuse) are counteracted by promoters in the further development of the self (e.g., “I as a fighter” or “I as determined to educate my children in a very different way”). In other words, dependent on available personal resources and situational facilitators, internal promoters may be an adaptive answer to external blockers.

**Place of the Several Contributions in the Presented Framework**

The several contributions to this special issue elaborate on some of the central topics as addressed in the present introductory chapter. While they all take DST as a starting point, they focus on different parts of the theory. In this final section, I place each of the contributions in the presented theoretical framework.

In their chapter, Stone, DeKoeyer-Laros, and Fogel concentrate on the difference between dialogical and monological relationships in the embodied relationship between mother and infant. They do so by presenting a
detailed analysis of two cases, one as a typical example of a flexible dialogical relationship, the other as an interaction of a rather monological kind. Whereas in the dialogical case, the movements of mother and infant are finely co-regulated via pushing, pulling, and yielding movements; in the monological example, mother and infant are involved in a disrupting co-regulation. We see a persistent pushing and pulling until, in the end, the infant yields to his mother's dominant push, losing his I-position in the interaction. In this contribution, we see not only the distinction between dialogical and monological co-regulation, but also the developmental importance of early nonverbal interaction in the genesis of a dialogical self. Finally, we learn from this chapter how the infant feels the difference between mouthing her mother's hand and mouthing her own hand, adding to the process of creating an “own” self via differential experiences.

From a cultural-anthropological point of view, van Meijl presents an in-depth discussion of the processes of globalization and localization that are central in his analysis of the identity development of adolescents growing up in multicultural societies. He shows how the rapid cultural changes resulting from the process of globalization are counteracted by a large-scale revival of cultural traditions at local levels. The experience of uncertainty receives a central place in van Meijl's contribution when he analyzes the frequent cultural dilemmas that the youngsters have to face, given the diversity of cultural circumstances in which they grow up. In this analysis, the author uses the metaphor of the dialogical self as a society of mind, which helps him to understand the dilemmas of tradition and postmodernity and of localization and globalization within the selves of the youngsters. Sometimes these dilemmas lead to identity confusion, while at other times they result in hybrid levels of integration.

In her contribution, Chaudhary uses DST in her analysis of a recent mass movement in India instigated by Anna Hazare, who, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, decided to start an indefinite fasting as a protest to the widespread corruption in political circles. Elaborating on the metaphor of the society of mind, Chaudhary makes productive use of the distinction between internal and external positions. This distinction is particularly insightful when one tries to understand the fact that some Indian people reacted to Hazare's initiative primarily in a collectivistic way, while others preferred to respond from a more individualistic perspective. In a further elaboration of DST, the author makes a distinction between four kinds of dynamics: intrapersonal (self-reflection), interpersonal (on the interface with others), within-group (membership and coherence within a group), and between-group dynamics (on the interface with other groups). Moreover, she shows how the slogan “I'm Anna” functioned as a collective promoter position that instigated a series of actions that finally led to the successful acceptance of the Lokpal (people's ombudsman) bill by the Indian parliament. The Hazare movement demonstrates how the self functions in a field of tension between social power and (nonviolent) counter-power.
The final contribution is presented by Lene Arnett Jensen. In her commentary, she reflects on the special issue as a whole.

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