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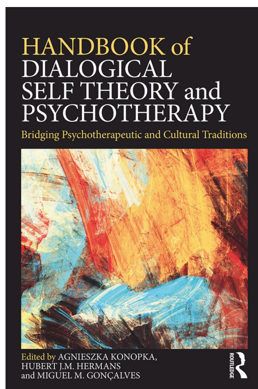

Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory and Psychotherapy
Bridging Psychotherapeutic and Cultural Traditions

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15 North American indigenous concepts of the dialogical self

Lewis Mehl-Madrona and Barbara Mainguy

The world's indigenous psychologies are rich and varied and rarely considered by academic psychology. In this chapter, we present a North American vision of self and mind that is similar to the dialogical self of Hubert Hermans and colleagues. We highlight the similarities and the differences with Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and therapy.

DST (Hermans & Gieser, 2012) locates the self and identity in space and time. Relationships exist between a person and other people in their world, but also with additional characters, who are not visible, and are intrapsychic forces. The dialogical self has been defined as a "complex narratively structured self with many '*I*- positions' that can be occupied by the same person, a multi-voiced self that includes internal dialogues and expands the possibilities for experience with others" (Maria & Largoza, 2008, p. 57). Hermans' dialogical self deconstructs the idea of a core self, the central "I" to a perspective of multiple positions of self in relationship. The self is a "society of mind" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The indigenous North American concept of the self is equivalently dialogical, predating Bakhtin, Bruner, and others.

Foundational concepts

Understanding the North American indigenous concepts of self and mind requires some underlying philosophy. Lakota philosopher Viola Cordova (2007) described the universe as an interconnected field of energy in motion. Occasional "pooling" occurs to create "'events': being, peopling, mountaining, and so on" (p. 117). Self is not static, but part of a flow, iterating in space and time, depending on the forces that construct it at a given moment. These forces have ontological validity and exist as beings. The self resides "in a highly personalized universe that includes the world of plants, animals, insects, fish, stones, the earth, fire, air, water, wind, and spirit entities" (Voss et al., 1999, p. 239). Existence is nested in the cosmological structure of the four directions, which have their own identities and energetic shape (Burkhart, 2016) and that serve as meta-positions in the terms of DST. We come to know and understand self and others through dialectic engagement in iterative and occasional contacts sometimes involving community counsel (Fixico, 2003). Health arises in the balanced co-creation of

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self by these elements. Self can emerge in a balance with the energies that create it, or out of balance, requiring adjustment or healing.

The *nagi* as a community of *I*-positions

This sense of a constructed mind that is interactive and "in play" in a torrent of forces, resembles the community of *I*-positions found in Hermans' dialogical self. The Lakota call this community *nagi*. It contains aspects of all the forces that shape us as human beings. These forces are often presented in storied form, causing some to describe the *nagi* as the swarm of stories surrounding a body that inform the being who occupies that body how to be in the world. Stories are purposive and relational, for they require an audience to be told. Some stories in the *nagi* are invisible, lying outside our conscious awareness. They are discovered in dialogue, particularly with others who are different from us. These stories exist in a community of storytellers, which are equivalents of the *I*-positions of Hermans. The community of stories and storytellers is anchored to the body, but is distinctly non-local. It can extend far afield from the body.

The *nagi* parallels Bakhtin's vision of mind as a polyphonous, cacophonous concatenation of disparate voices, each struggling to achieve dominance – collaborating, defecting, and cooperating with each other to gain control (Bakhtin, 1929/1984, p. 63). Bakhtin's idea of mind consists of a collection of voices that are attempting to achieve dominance over the mind. Within the concept of the *nagi*, we would refer to these voices as storytellers or avatars or characters. Hermans calls them *I*-positions.

The forces that create mind act through the stories they tell. The *I*-position is the storyteller, who exists in the vicinity of the body in constant interaction and creates new instantiations as the stories shift. As in Hermans' conception, members of this community negotiate. They criticize each other or themselves, they consult each other, they love or hate each other (Hermans, 2013). People form relationships with other human beings who can be seen and touched but also with invisible beings, who cannot be seen and touched. The stories exist in layers, from the small stories that parts of our body can tell, to the stories told by extended family, to the cultural stories that form the tribal psyche, to the political and global stories that are part of everyone's consciousness and the environmental stories that are spoken by the rocks, trees, and rivers. Being is a verb, and the self is thrown into this tumult of stories by virtue of existence in space and time. Consistent with the Lakota language in which verbs are more important than nouns (and more plentiful), what matters is the relationship with the storyteller and the story. The body itself is conceived as an occasional instantiation, one of Cordova's incidences of "pooling" (Cordova, 2007), a physical object that allows us to be located in space and time. Some characters (voices, parts, avatars, etc.) are closer to the body than others. Some are our internal avatars, some are spirits, and the spirits can be ancestors, elements of nature, mythological beings, or helpful strangers. Any character can argue with any other character. Identity is maintained through a continued dialogue among the beings

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within us who are grounded in the physical world and the beings who speak to us from the spirit world. This philosophy lacks an ego that organizes meaning and identity. Cordova (2007) tells us that consciousness in the form of awareness exists as a matrix supporting the dialogue among the elements of the *nagi*.

Native American philosophy and scholarship are conceptualized by writers as "holistic, contextualized, relational, personal, concrete, and We-centered" (Waters, 2004, p. xv). Implicit in the North American aboriginal perspective is the embeddedness of the person in the group. The integration of the individual and the collective, the particular and the general is part of the very nature of the universe and goes to the very heart of being human (Burkhart, 2016). The being or spirit of a human is both an individual essence and a universality. In Lakota philosophy, human beings have two existential positions: the small and the specific and the large and the universal (Deloria, 1999, p. 229). We dialogue back and forth between the individual and the collective, seeking balance (*wicozani*) for health, harmony, and well-being.

Hermans described each person as a polyphonic society (Hermans, 2002). This is consistent with the *nagi*. Each of these storytellers (or avatars) is a relatively independent being, attempting to negotiate its relationships with other beings in the swarm. Salgado and Hermans (2005) emphasize the dialogical nature of the self over its many voices. North American thought emphasizes both – that there are many storytellers and many conversations among those storytellers. Others (Lewis & Todd, 2004; Salgado and Hermans, 2005) have wondered if the many metaphors (parts, schema, internal objects) that exist for the components of the self, have any value of one over any other. We think of these metaphors in the same manner that our elder, Uncle Albert, spoke of story. He said that over 500 creation stories exist, and all are true. They are true for the people who tell them in the place where they are told. The North American version grants full ontological validity to each of these storytellers, avoiding the question as to what is internal and what is external, what is real or what is imagined. In this perspective all is real.

The work to be done is to engage in meaningful dialogue with the positions, voices, or characters. Konopka and Van Beers (2014) call this work "Compositionwork" (p. 194), and it is elsewhere evoked as a discussion of "parts" therapy (Hunter, 2015), ego work (Frederick & McNeal, 2013), internal family systems therapy (IFST) (Schwartz, 1995), and voice dialogue (Stone & Stone, 1998). Differences inhere in the way the positions are constituted and in the structure and philosophy of the dialogical engagement. Compositionwork, for example, engages clients with linguistic and sensory representations through the use of stones as externalizing elements. Both indigenous North Americans and Europeans share with these therapies the recognition of the multiplicity of the components of self, but, as Rowan (2012) recognized, any entity or construct with which one can dialogue can become an *I*-position, even spirits and ghosts, which he considers an essential advantage above other therapies. *I*-positions are dynamic, flexible, and contextual. They help us avoid reification and permit a fluid self that is ever changing. *I*-positions can be personified and explored

through dialogue. Rowan says that something or someone becomes an *I*-position in a dynamic way, in a particular moment and situation, so that an *I*-position changes or even disappears, depending on the situation, opening new possibilities of enriching, innovating, and broadening one's self, as new voices together with affective qualities can be included in the self and contribute to its content and organization. The dialogical self is not a fixed and isolated entity; it opens itself to the world, creating possibilities of traveling through unknown experiential spaces. For example, we often work with the "voices" that people hear as ontologically valid "*I*-positions," which begs the question of whether or not they are real. Everything is real in the dialogue.

The North American approach facilitates a dialogue among the "*I*-positions" or storytellers similar to the negotiational self method of Nir (2012), who describes the creation of a dialogical space in which conflicting *I*-positions can negotiate. Similar to Nir's approach, traditional healers identify the beings or storytellers who have a stake in a decision about which there is conflict. They encourage all these beings to tell their origin story as well as any other story to justify their position. They dialogue with these beings to learn their needs, beliefs, desires, and intentions. Healers pose questions such as, "How did you come to learn that?" Gradually the details emerge and shared interests are identified, which leads to a negotiated coalition of beings or storytellers who can move forward in the face of conflict. Sometimes a coalition forms to achieve dominance over a strident, minority voice or to render some voices/beings ineffective or unable to participate in the actions involved in deciding and carrying out a decision. The elders recognize that campaigning by *I*-positions or storytellers is continuous. Each being is interviewed in dialogue with external others and the others within the *nagi*. Some members of the swarm are always trying to convert other members to their points of view. When a sufficiently strong consensus coalition arises, a decision can occur and be enacted. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) argue that "strong coalitions produce strong motivation" (p. 337) and traditional elders would agree. Each time we hear a story, the story enters into our *nagi* along with a spark of the storyteller. As they say, "we live in an era in which the self is 'visited' by an increasing number and heterogeneity of positions or voices, leading to an increase of possible contradictions and conflicts within the self." This is similar to what Hermans (2001b) calls multivoicedness. The *nagi* is the space in which the negotiations occur.

The four directions dialectic

The Four Winds present the perspectives of mythological beings, sacred beings, who have a meta-perspective rendering them capable to act as narrators. Maintaining a dialogue with these beings supports balance and harmony. The east is associated with spirituality and guidance and direction from the spirit world. The south is associated with emotions and relationships (especially love and family) and the virtues of kindness, compassion, and generosity. The west is associated with courage and the physical body. The north is associated with wisdom, the

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community, strength, and endurance. These Four Directions always imply three more – upwards, which is associated with the sky spirits and protection; downwards, which is associated with the earth, who gives us healing, sustenance, and nurturing; and the center, which is the place from which we connect to everything around us. The balanced human relates equally to these directions in a dialogical manner, speaking to the beings that inhabit these directions (the Four Sons of the Wind). The personalization of these beings allows them to incorporate into one's *nagi*. While some general guidelines exist, the relationship of anyone to these directions is dynamic and interactive, not static.

According to Hermans (2001a), the term meta-position, "creates a certain distance toward the other positions; it provides an overarching view; it enables the participants to interrelate the positions as part of their personal history; it provides an opportunity for evaluating the several positions and their organization" (p. 354). The culture encourages ongoing dialogues with these beings through conversations and also, for cosmological and spiritual consultancies, through ceremony and songs. People are encouraged to incorporate the meta-perspectives of these beings to see themselves from different perspectives.

The incorporations of these meta-positions into the ongoing dialogical negotiations provide a source of wisdom that can be quite psychotherapeutic. While relationships with these beings are generally immediate and don't require an intermediary, some messages can be baffling on an individual level and are brought to elders for a community validation process. This moderates individualism and prevents extremism, ensuring that thought serves the whole.

The relational nature of the self

Cordova (2007) argues that human beings are fundamentally in relation, bound in the energetic fabric of the cosmological energy field. Humans, she insists, are *in* the system, and no part of the system stands outside, including no spiritual being. The complex notion of simultaneous independence and interdependence is intrinsic to the Native American perspective in which individuals are always in dialogue within a community. Consider the "talking circle" procedure, which was used to create consensus in communities, to create tribal consciousness, and in healing work (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). In this procedure, people sit in a circle. The person convening the circle introduces the question while holding a decorated staff, called a "talking stick" when translated into English. Once the convener has phrased the question or concern, he or she passes the stick to the left and that person talks as long as he or she wishes without interruption. Importantly, the speaker does not speak to anyone in the group, but to the center of the circle. No one in the circle responds to the speaker with noises, words, or micro-expressions. Responses are only appropriate when the stick comes to a person. The process continues until the group comes to a consensus and no one has anything further to say. Never does anyone speak directly to another person or respond immediately to what another person says. The process itself is necessarily dialogical, an exchange of ideas that is shaped by the members of

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the circle as the stick is passed. The circle is both decentering in that the stick moves to the individual apeakers and centering in that speakers address the center of the circle, moving toward consensus. The de-centered voices on the periphery instantiate the central "collective" energetic pool of voices and speakers. The whole moves forward in time. Circle processes are an integral part of North American indigenous healing practices, and are used with the multiple *I*-positions within the self, as well. Circle processes also presage the democratization of organizations in involving all stakeholders in a process in the dialogue.

From a North American indigenous perspective, the self is ever changing as more stories and tellers of stories are added to the *nagi*. In DST terms, the self is a dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions. In North American indigenous philosophy, the self can change by expanding what DST calls the *I*-position repertoire. We routinely do this therapeutically when we tell stories that introduce new characters for the person to incorporate. Elders frequently teach lessons through telling such stories and the characters can be internalized as new *I*-positions. Change occurs through expanding the *I*-position repertoire of the person.

Traditional stories expand this *I*-position repertoire. In one, an evil spirit has taken over the dominant mountain to the west and hoards all the rain. The village is dying. The people have fallen into despair and lost their will. Only one young man and one young woman are left who have the capacity to go on a quest to vanquish the evil spirit. As they climb the path to the mountain, they encounter a demon guardian who forbids their passage and seems determined to eat them. The young man prepares to battle the demon. The young woman immediately realizes that he cannot win and prays to the thunderspirits (*wakinyan*) for intervention. They come, and their lightening arrows destroy the evil creature. They alight in their classic, visible form of the Swallow, and proceed to chide the young man for not following the guidance of the woman and for not asking for help, for having the arrogance to think that he doesn't need help. The first lesson, they say, is that help is not provided unless it is requested. The result is the incorporation of the *wakinyan* into the repertoire of the self as an external *I*-position.

Norton-Smith (2010) writes that human beings are not essentially persons, but spirits instantiated in a human body who can become persons "by virtue of their participation in social and moral relationships with other persons" (p. 86). Norton-Smith (2010, pp. 82–83) uses a Lakota story to illustrate this morality. In the story, Coyote gives *Inyan* (the Rock) his thick, wool blanket, only to steal it back when he feels cold. Outraged, *Inyan* chases Coyote and rolls over him, flattening him in true Wiley Coyote style, and then delivering the moral principle: once something is given, it cannot be taken back. This personalizes mythological beings and integrates them into the repertoire of the self. The incorporation provides a moral position. The incorporation of such positions in the form of mythological beings (the *wakinyan*, for example) is a strong centering movement that counters the decentering influences of contemporary post-modern culture, or, in the indigenous concept, the European invasion and imposition of epistemologies and value systems alien to North America.

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Native American relational healing

Native American healing is fundamentally relational since we are formed through the dialogue of the constituent beings who occupy our *nagi*. The concepts of the individual and of privacy are relatively foreign to these practices for the community exists around us and within us. Psychotherapy does not exist apart from body therapies, spiritual therapies, and community therapies, for the mind does not exist apart from body, spirit, and community. The word "treatment" has no counterpart in the North American Native world, because one person does not fix another. Healing results from interaction and is an emergent property arising from that interaction among people and non-people. It occurs when mind, body, spirit, and community are balanced. It can occur in ordinary-appearing interactions among people or in highly scripted ceremonies.

Traditional healers operating within indigenous communities would not necessarily have had the English language skills to describe their healing activities (Mehl-Madrona, 2004; Mehl-Madrona & Kennedy, 2009). Indigenous healers working within their communities are progressively becoming more educated and cognizant of other techniques (Mehl-Madrona, 2010; Mehl-Madrona & Kennedy, 2015). They are incorporating an eclectic range of practices into their work (Linklater, 2014).

Community focus

Much of traditional healing takes place in community. Rarely do healers work alone. Centering and decentering occurs in the context of the dialogues among the personal, interpersonal, and the universal, which takes place in ceremony. Healers tell traditional stories, engaging in metaphors that are relevant in the life of the client. Relationships are formed with sacred beings through these practices and these sacred beings become storytellers (avatars, *I*-positions) within the *nagi* (in DST, the multiplicity of the dialogical self). Sophisticated communication occurs under the rubric of prayer, when people pray, one after the other, in a circle format. Again, the interaction between the personal and the universal creates communication, this time with the "divine." The *nagili* is translated as "that which arises from communication with the divine." In this way, the ineffable is bound to the *nagi*, with its acknowledgment of respect and acceptance of the forces of the "great mysteries," the spirits who engage with humans.

Traditional elders tell stories that emphasize fulfilling one's duties to the community, accepting a degree of pain and suffering for the benefit of others, and honoring one's relationships. Counseling often takes the form of storytelling and sometimes direct instructions for how to behave.

Circles are considered sacred among indigenous North American cultures. The tribal consciousness that arises through a talking circle process instantiates the collective consciousness. We could say that the community is a larger relational self, for it is formed from all of our relations. The circle provides a healing crucible to contain the collective creation of a new relational order. Common

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practice is to routinely ask people to bring all those they know to the talking circle process, in this way inviting external *I*-positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) into a dialogue. This includes all the stakeholders in a problem. This circle represents an externalization of the dialogue that is already occurring within the person and allows for an enrichment of the other. The person's internal *I*-position or representation (or avatar) for the other becomes more accurate through engaging in the talking circle process. The dialogical process invites relationships to form in this created community setting. The circle "center" becomes a location for the creation of a new relationship, a healing *nagi*, a physical and psychic space into which are invited the participating beings, including the embodied spirits (humans) involved and the invited entities (*I*-positions) entailed in the question, as well as other spirits and ancestors who may wish to comment or contribute. The contributions from the circle literally create a new reality.

Listening

Burkhart (2016) writes that, "Native American philosophy . . . opens up a space . . . to find meaning and understanding but does not make or declare truth or meaning" (p. 231). The elders would agree with the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1988), who taught that the greatest gift we can give another is to listen deeply without judgment or interpretation. Some of our most profound experiences have occurred while being heard by an elder. They have heard everything. They accept everything. Nothing produces micro-expressions, eye-rolling, or dismissive gestures. Respect and dignity pervades their interactions. When a question is presented to an elder for consideration, rarely does the elder respond immediately, which is different from the mainstream world. Typically, the elder holds the question for four days or more. Responding to a question involves prayer, discussions with other elders, and contemplation. Answers come when they come and in dialogue with the entire universe potentially (or at least those portions of it that condescend to interact with we instantiated humans). Indigenous Native American healing begins with this creation of a deeply respectful, radically accepting relationship, whether with an elder or a more contemporary practitioner.

Two-eyed seeing

Contemporary psychology is firmly ensconced in positivism, which refuses to acknowledge the existence of perspectives that contradict its fundamental assumptions (Martin, 2012). Positivism assumes that there is only one reality, which can be discovered through scientific procedure. Anything that falls outside of scientific reasoning is disregarded as inconclusive and ideological (Marker, 2003). Thus, studies that cannot be replicated, which use tools or methods that have not been standardized or verified, or that reach conclusions that veer away from the questions asked are dismissed as unscientific and lacking in credibility. Within health research specifically, certain "types" and styles of research are viewed as

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having more credibility than others (e.g. the randomized controlled trial continues to be the gold standard of Western health research, whereas storytelling may be interpreted as anecdotal and lacking in evidence) (Marker, 2003).

Indigenous approaches to knowledge are more dialogical, slower, and admit multiple perspectives, leading to what Nova Scotia M'iqmaq elder, Albert Marshall, has called "two eyed seeing," expressed by the word *etuaptmumk* in his language. These approaches to knowledge parallel approaches to healing. Two-eyed seeing welcomes multiple perspectives and knowledges and promotes explanatory pluralism. Multiple levels of explanation are accepted and each need not be logical to the other.

Two-eyed seeing allows both explanations to be true without one being privileged over the other. This is the spirit in which the elders approach people who are suffering. A multiplicity of stories exist to explain the suffering and all have validity. All have characters who tell the stories, who have stories themselves. The task of healing is to reveal these many storytellers and their own stories so that more healthy coalitions can be formed for less friction for living in the world. Through dialogue, the person gains a better understanding of the many voices/characters commenting on his or her problem and can be more selective about which ones to accept. The elder or therapist provides a meta-position for the person to incorporate that helps him or her to see the situations and the stories from a greater distance and perspective.

Moving and meditation

Meditative techniques similar to mindfulness exist in the making of prayer ties (*chanli pata*), which are strings of colored fabric containing small pinches of tobacco into which prayers are placed; sitting in nature for varied lengths of time (the *hanblechiya)*, singing, and walking meditations. One Lakota elder, Carol Iron Rope-Herrera, told us that tracking an animal is meditation. Dancing is meditation. Praying is meditation. She resented outsiders coming onto the reservation and telling her that she had to learn mindfulness meditation, since that was evidence-based, unlike the local practices. Carol told us that most aspects of Lakota life are moving meditations. Hunting, for instance, requires learning all the stories about the animal one plans to hunt, so that the animal and the many storytellers who speak about the animal become incorporated as *I*-positions for the hunter. Hunters are supposed to follow an animal for a year to develop a story for how it lives through the four seasons before actually killing the animal. The Lakota sundance involves four days of dancing without food or water, which is highly trance inducing. The goal is to come as close to the spirit world as is humanly possible so as to give thanks for someone's life being saved or to pray for someone to be saved. The mythological characters in the sundance also become *I*-positions that are incorporated into the community's *nagi*, as well as that of the individual dancer. These moving meditations all involve symbolic enactment of historical *I*-positions in relation to others enacting other *I*-positions

that creates a dramatic tableau for the negotiation of perspectives and for healing to occur, which happens regularly at a sundance.

Story is central

At an *inipikaga* ceremony,[1] hot stones are brought into a covered shelter, to create a portal for communication with spirits and for praying. In such a ceremony held in a Canadian prison, Lewis overheard an inmate saying he would be released soon, and that the doctors had told him he would return to prison quickly. He was diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder, conduct disorder, bipolar disorder, and antisocial personality disorder. The elder shrugged off this pronouncement. “You don’t have any of those things,” he said.

> You just grew up with bad stories. You come spend time with us (referring to the extended community of his helpers and relatives), and we’ll give you good stories to replace those bad stories. We’ll keep you out of here.

A number of his helpers present at the ceremony had been in that prison and proceeded to attest to the success of this elder’s approach, for it had kept them from returning. The elder illustrated the broad principle of surrounding the person with community, hearing the “bad” stories that were living through the person, and replacing those bad stories with “good” stories, meaning stories more compatible with a healthy, friction-free, self-world interface. I have heard elders talking with people to learn the stories in which they grew up and telling them healthier stories for living to compete with those less healthy stories.

The elders would say that we manage the relationships among our avatars (*I*-positions) through the stories they tell to influence each other. To understand the dynamics of our internal world, we must hear the stories that the characters are telling and sometimes incorporate new stories (new *I*-positions into our repertoire). DST would describe this as the person repositioning him or herself through absorbing these new stories leading to the incorporation of new *I*-positions that allows the person to take new and different positions in relation to a personal problem.

We focus on the stories that live through the person. We identify the stories that shaped the person’s childhood and early family life. We look at the pervasive stories abounding in the culture. We look at the contemporary stories that are being performed in the world by the person. We make maps (drawings, collages, etc.) of the beings who told or are telling those stories. We identify the coalitions of avatars or storytellers who are working for or against greater ease of function and less suffering in the world. We create interactive dialogues with these storytellers/avatars and began to reshape the map of the person’s world. We describe this in more detail in *Remapping Your Mind* (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2015).

Manual medicine or bodywork plays an important role in eliciting the stories held in the body. This accompanies some degree of what is being called energy psychology. The bodywork that Lewis learned came from Cherokee people who

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taught him in the traditional manner. Later, we learned that this method of hands-on healing was common to all the tribes of Missouri and Kansas in the time period from 1850–1880 and became the inspiration and the foundation for American Osteopathy as developed by Andrew Taylor Still, who is considered the founder of osteopathic medicine, and lived with these tribes during that period, learning their methods of healing, as he developed osteopathy (Mainguy et al., 2017)

Our primary focus is to create dialogue among the characters or avatars who populate the person's *nagi*, to become aware of the stories they are telling, to selectively evaluate what stories are working and what stories are not, and to create new coalitions within the *nagi* to improve function and reduce suffering.

I observed an elder speaking to a young woman who had been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. He asked her to speak about the part of her who thought she was fat. She named it Toni. He asked if a part of her thought she was thin. She called that part Tommie. He said he wanted to get to know both of them. He burned sage and blessed her with the smoke. He sang and asked her to pray for Toni and Tommie. He invited sacred beings to join the efforts for healing thereby reminding Toni of previously neglected *I*-positions who could be strengthened. Later that week, he asked Toni what made her think she was fat. She talked about her father sexually abusing her for six years while her mother ignored it all. The elder just listened. He invited her to name that wounded young woman who lived within her and felt betrayed. Then he spoke to that young woman, and encouraged the others to join in the discussion. Eventually, he brought together everyone involved in her suffering for a talking circle and then an *inipikaga* ceremony in which the ancestors were consulted, and everyone prayed for her healing. Over time, she gained weight and began to live comfortably in her community.

Narrative therapy

Narrative therapy is considered indigenous-friendly and is more accepted by indigenous people than conventional, mainstream psychotherapies. Narrative therapy focuses upon the stories we tell ourselves and others about who we are and how the world functions. An abundance of negative stories leads people to overly identify with problematic life narratives (White & Epston, 1990). When we change these stories, we change and our relationship to the world changes. Narrative therapy may or may not include a dialogical self. Elders naturally do narrative therapy without being taught.

In narrative therapy, storytellers construct new meaning through creating opposi-tional stories, focusing upon stories of positive outcomes instead of problem-saturated stories like those told by conventional medicine that render people equal to their diagnosis (White & Epston, 1990; Morgan, 2000). Contemporary indigen-ous people identify with the resistive, liberational element of narrative therapy, which can be utilized to empower people to separate from the dominant culture saturated story of indigenous people (rarely positive) and find counter-stories that lead toward health and wellness despite ongoing oppression and injustice (Freeman et al., 1997). People are encouraged to live their stories of strength and success as

opposed to their stories of weakness and disability (Drewery & Winslade, 1997). One can appreciate the overlap of indigenous theories of mind with narrative approaches. Both are storied, and both use stories as teaching tools and as therapeutic devices. Both listen and tell stories. However, classic narrative therapy does not ask who tells the negative and disabling stories lived by the person but focuses instead on finding new stories rather than locating new storytellers. Classic narrative therapy can miss the greater depth of possibility available from within the indigenous model of mind (similar to DST and therapy).

Conclusions

North American indigenous thinking about self and others is remarkably similar to DST. The results of working in this format are exciting (Mehl-Madrona et al., 2014) and point toward many future studies on efficacy and outcome. The North American indigenous perspective makes psychotherapy accessible to those people in the world who find conventional Western methods of psychotherapy unappealing. The approach minimizes stigmatizing diagnoses in favor of creating a topology of characters (called *I*-positions by Hermans) who dwell within the *nagi* (mind), interacting, coalescing, collaborating, and defecting just as described by Bakhtin, and can be reorganized to function more effectively on behalf of the body to whom these beings are attached. The approach is fundamentally embedded in community, which for the *nagi* is a reflection of the exterior world, and new stories must be enacted in community and accepted and approved by one's community in order to become stable. The approach is fundamentally relational, emphasizing the manner in which dialogue creates the human world. The consideration of spirit allows the voice of unknown and unknowable to be present, accounting for the mystery of those things we cannot comprehend, except in a sense of the impact of their energy in the shaping of the self. As we have presented in this chapter, DST walks alongside these indigenous ideas.

Note

1 The *inipikaga* is a circle process that takes place in darkness and heat created by hot stones upon which water is poured. It is a considered a portal between the human and the spirit worlds.

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