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Trends. Self, Security, and the Twenty-First Century

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Many social observers are suggesting that our era of globalization and an ever-greater access to convenient, efficient, comprehensive, and quick telecommunications are incontrovertibly facilitating the construction of a new homogeneous self. These observers suggest that people throughout the world are becoming more and more alike as to beliefs, opinions, and attitudes--ultimately to the very content, structure, function, and process of the self. As this continues to occur, we truly are becoming the world, a global community, a family that through a sense of kinship can finally jettison violent means of conflict resolution for consultation, negotiation, and peaceful resolution of remaining differences. Nothing could be farther from the truth than this hypothesis of a psychological and soporific McDonaldization.

Phenomena such as a growing number of ethnocentric, nationalistic, and civil wars, the fragmentation of nation-states, and serial, mass, and seemingly arbitrary murder suggest that for many in today's world the 20th century self is under attack. It may be fighting back through an insistence on ever-finer distinctions of heterogeneity. In psychological terms, the it may be rendering self-other boundaries ever more impermeable, as opposed to allowing such boundaries to approach an extreme permeability bearing on nonexistence. In-groups and out-groups may be increasingly constructed beyond the constraints of physical geography via cyberspace yielding an ever-increasing chaotic patchwork of psychological turfs.

Even the most sanguine view of the next century must posit a technology-facilitated world of Goods and Evils--plus ca change. (See Auerbach, J.S., & Blatt, S.J. (1997). Impairment of self-representation in schizophrenia: The roles of boundary articulation and self-reflexivity. Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, 61, 297-315; Davies, J.M. (1999). Getting cold feet, defining "safe enough" borders: Dissociation, multiplicity, and integration in the analyst's experience. Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 68, 184-208; Huntington, S.P. (December 16, 1999). A local front of a global war. The New York Times, p. A31; Seiffge-Krenke, I. (1997). "One body for two": The problem of boundaries between chronically ill adolescents and their mothers. Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 52, 340-355; Shane, E., & Shane, M. (1997). Intimacy, boundaries, and countertransference in the analytic relationship. Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 17, 69-89; Shaw, C.L.M. (1997). Personal narrative: Revealing self and reflecting other. Human Communication Research, 24, 302-319.) (Keywords: Globalization, Self.)