The Self According to Allan Bloom and Charles Reich

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Invitational theory is derived from self-theory as promulgated primarily by Combs, Richards, and Richards (1988), Kelley (1962), Maslow (1968), and Rogers (1983). Two other writers, Charles Reich (1970) and Allan Bloom (1987), have contributed to the dialogue of self-theory as it is applied in our culture. Reich believed that the self was the essence of humanity and that it was being abused by the corporate state. Bloom believed the focus on the self contributed to cultural relativism that lowered standards. These views have helped to shape current social and political debates. It is our responsibility to extend self-theory to insure that its cultural role is clearly interpreted and applied.

Introduction

Invitational theory is a derivative of self-theory (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990) and invitationalists tend to trace their roots to prominent self-theorists such as Combs, Richards, and Richards (1988), Kelley (1962), Maslow (1968), and Rogers (1983). Fortunately, people outside this cluster of high profile self-theorists have written about the self and it is both interesting and informative to explore what they have had to say. Specifically, in his provocative treatise, *The Greening of America*, Reich (1970) wrote about "The Lost Self" and almost two decades later Bloom (1987) discussed "The Self" in his challenging text, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Since these two books have played significant

roles in the American conversation, it is appropriate to review the authors' comments and to glean relevant information from them.

Reich's "The Lost Self"

Reich asserted that depriving a person of her or his self begins with public school training. He declared that the object of that training was to reduce individuals to the functions they perform and, in the process, to cause them to lose sight of self as the sum of integrated thinking, questioning, feeling, and loving. He held that two main means were employed: consumer training and job training.

Consumer training prevented the formation of individual consciousness, taste, aesthetic standards, self-knowledge, and the ability to create one's own satisfactions. Solitude was not permitted and, "The child is taught to depend on the fun of cheering for the basketball team, rather than spending the same two hours searching for some individual interest" (p. 130).

Reich contended that children were taught to make a substitute self. In this process students learned a role in which they judged themselves and others by standard ways of dressing, talking, behaving, and even having fun. But most of all, students were punished for thinking. Reich wrote, ". . . in most school and college classes, thinking for oneself is penalized, and the student learns the value of repeating what he is told" (p. 131).

Authoritarian control has been the hallmark of most schools (Aspy & Roebuck, 1985). In this connection Reich(1970) commented, "The student is trained away from democracy; instead he is most elaborately trained in joining a hierarchy" (p. 132). This school environment was dominated by indoctrination which was intended to compel students to learn someone else's ideas, someone else's version of the facts.

Reich was harsh on high schools. He maintained that these institutions savaged an adolescent's developing self by depriving

it of its need for privacy and liberty. He stated, "The school is a brutal machine for destruction of the self, controlling it, heckling it, hassling it, into busy tasks, a thousand noisy groups, never giving it a moment to establish a knowledge within" (p. 137).

Reich graphically presented the pain of the loss of self. His image was that of "real" persons locked within themselves while watching their role-self interact with the world. It was as if human beings were forced to be a spectator to their own lethal charade.

The prisoner metaphor was extended by Reich's discussion of character which he defined as "the individual's personality, habits, friends, activities, politics, opinions, associations, and disciplinary and police records" (pp. 142-43). He contended that "good' character meant five things:

1. The individual was never violated, or been accused of violating, any laws, regulations, or rules of any private organization.
2. The individual is not rebellious against the Corporate State.
3. The individual is a team person.
4. The individual is emotionally reliable.
5. The individual has commended himself to his superiors (p.143).

Reich lamented that character boiled down to these few judgmental traits and closed his statement by saying, ". . . character-on-file takes on an independent existence that may have an ever more remote relationship to the real individual, assuming it ever did resemble him" (p. 144).

Reich's indignation over the loss of self is summarized in this statement:

> High school, the office, and the factory prepare bleak fate for our youth. Indeed, the saddest thing of all in America is probably the fate of most teen agers. For at sixteen or seventeen, no matter how oppressive the Corporate State,

> there is still a moment when life is within their grasp. There are a few years when they pulse to music, know beaches and the sea, value what is raunchy, wear clothes that express their bodies, flare against authority, seek new experience, know how to play, laugh, and feel, and to cherish one another. But it is a short, short road from Teensville to Squarestown; soon their sense have been dulled. (p. 156)

Thus, in the 1970s Reich viewed the American culture as deadly to the healthy development of self. One has to wonder if his assessment of the late 1990s would be different.

Bloom's "The Self"

Bloom (1987) asserted that we are unique selves and that everything we do is intended to fulfill our selves. He equated self with "me" and attributed certain characteristics to it: mysterious, ineffable, indefinable, unlimited, creative, and known only by its deeds. He noted that the self is the modern substitute for the soul and that self is more affect than cognition. Bloom offered a vivid image of how one is to get in touch with a self:

> . . . imagine how you feel when another person holds a gun to your temple and threatens to shoot you. That concentrates all of the self in a single point, tells what counts. At that moment one is real self, not a false consciousness, not alienated by opinions of the church, the state or the public. This experience helps much more to 'set priorities' than does any knowledge of the soul or any of its alleged emanations such as conscience. (p. 174)

Bloom (1987) believed that John Locke invented the true self by substituting the rational and industrious person for a virtuous one. Within that format Locke spoke of a "natural person" with enlightened selfishness or self-interest. But Locke contended that beneath the surface such people believed that their selfishness was conducive to more good than was moralism.

In Bloom's discussion, Locke's views are contrasted to those of Rousseau. He contended that Locke invented "natural people" to fit the needs of his other formulations. Bloom said, "Locke appears to have invented the self to provide unity in continuity for the ceaseless temporal succession of sense impressions that would disappear into nothingness if there were no place to hold them" (p. 177). Bloom asked, "Man is self...but what is self" (p. 178). By contrast, Bloom said that Rousseau dealt with the true complexity of humankind. He wrote, "Rousseau founded modern psychology of the self in its fullness, with an unending search for what is really underneath the surface of rationality and civility" (p 177).

Bloom summarized the effect of the invention of the term "self" by contrasting two ideas. He wrote, "The great change is that a good person used to be the one who cared for others, as opposed to the person who cared exclusively for himself. *Now*, the good person is the one who knows how to care for himself, as opposed to the person who does not" (p. 178). This stance is a thinly veiled reference to what is widely labeled the emergence of the "me generation."

Bloom offered four key propositions about self-psychology. He believed that self-psychology only distinguished between good and bad forms of selfishness and that the most revealing and delightful distinction was between inner-directed and other-directed, with the former taken to be unqualifiedly good. We are told that the healthy inner-directed person will *really* care for others. To Bloom, this contention was unbelievable.

His third concept was that the psychology of self has succeeded so well that it is now the instinct of most of us to turn for a cure for our ills back within ourselves rather than to the nature of things. Fourthly, he believed that modern psychology has self-love in common with what was always a popular opinion fathered by Machiavelli—that selfishness is somehow good. "Since humankind is self, then the self must be selfish" (p. 178).

Bloom concluded, "What is new [about psychology] is that we are told to look more completely into the self, that we assumed too easily that we knew it and have access to it" (p. 178). This statement is consistent with the notion that the construct self has been taken too lightly. One prominent psychologist seriously conjectured that self-psychologists were attracted to that construct because of their inability to comprehend the higher order cognitive machinations of psychoanalytic theorists. Certainly, self lends itself readily to simplistic explanations of complex phenomena and thus too easily becomes the language of pseudo-psychologists who prostitute its profundity. Indeed, there is a need for more depthful investigations of the self as well as more rigorous instruction about its components. If this does not happen, the self will become an interesting relic rather than a viable theoretical construct.

Summary

The self is accepted as a given by most invitationalists but it is important to look at self-theory through outsiders' eyes. One such perspective is presented by writers who use personality theories only as vehicles for communicating other ideas. They can choose any of the available personality theories to convey their message so when they select self-theory they are indicating its preferability over its competitors. In a sense, the views of such writers lend a fresh approach to the issues that are the primary concerns of psychologists and educators.

Reich (1970) wanted to spark a cultural revolution in the early 1970s and as a part of his message he needed a model of human personality that would communicate effectively with his predominantly younger audience. He selected the self and wrote about how the essence of humanity was being abused by the emerging cultural conditions engendered by the corporate state. For him, the self was a meaningful metaphor that spoke effectively to the younger generation.

On the other hand, Bloom (1987) wanted to arouse the

American college community to the danger that it was being eroded by an invasion of cultural relativism which lowered standards. To him, the self was one of the components of the invasion and while it had communicative value it was being prostituted by those who failed to understand and respect its profound dynamics and implications. In a sense, Bloom called for a reinvigoration of self-theory by those who realized its immense possibilities.

Perhaps one of the main implications of the work of both of these writers is that they paid tribute to the powerful communicability of the self by using it to speak to broad audiences. The message to current proponents of self-theory is that there is much work to do in order to take full advantage of the head start afforded by the understandability of self-theory. Many of the great issues being raised by the Information Age require metaphors that can be understood readily by extended audiences and the self appears to meet that requirement. However, as those challenges increase self-theory must be expanded both in depth and breadth to meet them. For instance, who will step forward to answer the most important question facing self-theorists: What changes will self-theory require in order to meet the opportunities afforded by the Information Age? Said differently, what will self-theory look like in 2050?

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