



# Politics in Movement Within and Between Cultures

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## Abstract

This article is a response to the insightful pieces written about my beginning attempt of defining and elaborating on a cultural political psychology (Carriere, 2022), of which there were four - Beckstead and Jordan (2023); Busch-Jensen and Røn-Larsen (2023); Mazur (2023a); and Rutherford (2023). Their commentaries were varied in their expansions and thoughts on the work, and each provided a unique perspective on the future of a cultural political psychology. Here, I expand on the points made by each of the authors and synthesize their expansions to look forward to further theoretical elaborations within a cultural political psychology.

**Keywords** Political psychology · Cultural political psychology · Hypogeneralization · Transitional spaces · Transformative activist stance · Complexity

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## Mazur - Hypogeneraliation and *The Victim*

Mazur (2023a) discusses my notion of hypogeneralization - when a singular entity (person, object, event) becomes generalized into the prototype for a singular understanding of a complex issue (Carriere, 2022). The notion of hypogeneralization comes in contrast to Valsiner's notion of hypergeneralized semiotic fields, where things like values, prejudices, and other affective notions are so large and ambiguous that they cannot necessarily be described on exactly 'what' it is, but are so general that they drive the interpretation of meaning for the individual. While hypergeneralization can be seen in something such as loyalty or nationalism as a value (seen clear in "Make America Great Again" - while the supporters struggle to define what it means to become great again), hypogeneralization would be the inverse - taking a citizen onto a stage in order to say "Suzy here represents the American people, and they are struggling".

Mazur takes the concept and applies it to his expansion of Simmel's social types, *The Victim* (Mazur, 2023a, b). Social types are sets of forms and discourses that emerge within social interactions with others, and presents with various kinds of non-conflicting dichotomies. For Mazur, *The Victim* presents a variety of non-conflicting dichotomies, including of weakness <> strength and sameness <> difference. He argues that such a social type has become more present for a variety of reasons including the emergence of victimhood culture and hyperpositivity (Mazur, 2023b).

Mazur analyzes the presentation of the victim through the Academy Awards 50 year-old public apology to Sacheen Littlefeather and its commitment to indigenous voices, reflecting on the refusal of Best Actor award in 1973 by Marlon Brando who was protesting the portrayal of indigenous Americans by the film industry. Littlefeather presented the statement on behalf of Marlon, but fifty years later, the Academy focuses on Littlefeather as the victim, turning the conversation away from Brando. He notes how the process of ascribing Littlefeather as the author and voice of the statement is in part due to the hypogeneralization process of embodying *The Victim*, even though later work has determined she was not geneologically indigenous herself. The power in Mazur's analysis comes to fruition at the end, when he reflects that "The institutionalization of the apology, etc., can sustain their value even in light of the news that Littlefeather was not Native American" (Mazur, 2023a, p. 1472).

To me, this signals the performative nature of *The Victim*. *The Victim* is both used as a single of change to come - but also exists as its own barrier for change to truly emerge. In many ways, it reflects much of what current research is showing. For example, individual-level misperceptions of organizational racial progress were related to higher beliefs in the effectiveness of empirically proven symbolic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies (Torrez et al., 2023). DEI policies, and the movement to improve them, is a highly complex and difficult task for organizations to achieve. But it is through this complexity that our misunderstandings of the slow gains of DEI initiatives lead us to sustain the value of programs, even when they are unhelpful and detrimental to true progress.

What Mazur has done is expanded on the process of hypogeneralization to exhibit its significant power in driving future meanings. Through hypogeneralization of Littlefeather as *The Victim*, we are caught at the border of apology and the unforgivable.

It permits us to acknowledge a single wrong while at the same time, seeking forgiveness of hundreds of years of systemic and irreparable wrongs. When the Academy stated that they are committed to ensuring indigenous voices are respected, they have hypogeneralized Littlefeather into the larger group of all indigenous voices. This has serious intergroup consequences, as it has been shown that framing individual victims as part of the larger, global community can lead to increased forgiveness and decreased motivation to engage in collective action to improve their currently disadvantaged position (Vollhardt & Twali, 2016). The hypogeneralization of Littlefeather provides both a symbolic, ineffective action for the Academy to point towards in its quest to right historic wrongs, but also serves as a way to reduce the intergroup conflict and placate those whose rights continue to be wronged due to systemic discriminations.

### Beckstead & Jordan & Transitional Spaces

*The Victim* can be elaborated through Beckstead & Jordan's (2023) discussion of the peripheral participation of transitional spaces of the street. In their commentary, Beckstead and Jordan elaborate on the in-between space of the street. We can identify that in-betweenness in Mazur's discussion of the duality of Simmel's social types - that the Victim is both weak and strong. It exists in-between strong and weak, acting as both and neither at the same time. It is within the in-betweenness that the social type is able to exist and exert its power. Their notion of peripheral participation is extremely interesting and fruitful for further discussion in terms of measurement, perspective, and movement.

Political participation and collective action intentions generally measure individuals' willingness to engage in a variety of activities in order to make change - generally actions such as signing petitions, contacting politicians, and voting. Yet, no scale directly measures what Beckstead and Jordan would call peripheral participation - putting up lawn signs, having a bumper sticker, honking a car horn as one drives by the protest. It is not that these actions have no resource impact - bumper stickers can cause damage to the car paint and reduce its resale value. In considering peripheral participation, it provides a wider breadth of actions we should consider as participatory.

Beckstead and Jordan reflect on political signage on lawns and on streets, and they note "the person creating or displaying the political message or sign... must consider the perspective of the passerby and therefore reflect on where to place their message best suited for viewing by those moving quickly" (2023, p. 1449). I would take this one step further by considering how the person displaying the sign considers not just the passerby, but also their opponents as well. While living in Pennsylvania, it was common to drive by one house with a pro-Republican sign, and then the next house would have a slightly larger pro-Democrat sign. As the weeks went on, the signs grew in their size - but the angle towards the street remains the same. The 'lawn-sign war', as we came to call it, was an arms race to not just the passerby - but the adjacent plot of land next to it.

Peripheral participation also provides the consideration of power dynamics in terms of movement. Beckstead and Jordan note that the question of who controls

the between-space - who owns the road, what are the regulations for permitted signage on the road, and even something such as the ‘Road sponsored by...’ - all are regulated by the hypergeneralized feeling fields of values. As Beckstead and Jordan note, “absence of political and personal messages on roads or streets does not mean the absence of politics” (Beckstead & Jordan, 2023, p. 1454). Exposure (and the lack thereof) is itself a participatory action, and more importantly, is something that cannot be accurately replicated within a laboratory setting (Goldstein & Ridout, 2004). It is our constant movement through and with ads - and the power of influence of those movements - that can inform and exhibit peripheral participation.

Their discussion of the road is reflected in Foucault’s notion of heterotopias - of a space that is transitory, that is open and closed, that are public and private, are functioned through a timeslice (of traveling through it). Space is not simply physical - but it is psychological space that is moved through as we traverse the physical. It could be argued that politics is most alive in the heterotopic space of the street. Its function as a go-between of starting point and ending goal serves as almost a between-time, of ‘not quite there yet’ - and its political signs - old signs never picked up, new signs placed too early - keep a quizzical relation of time in constant flux of past and future.

## Rutherford & Complexity

Rutherford (2023) assists with this analysis of the values of peripheral participation by focusing on *complexity* as the frame of reference. He correctly notes that the cultural senses (‘We’ and ‘Us’) in comparison to the personal senses (‘I’ and ‘Me’) are underdeveloped in the book. He highlights how sociocultural organization is experienced both *within* (individual - I, culture - We) and *between* (individual - Me, culture - Us) (Rutherford, 2022). In doing so, he elaborates a four-stage level of analysis of an individual considering the value orientation of a given policy - personal values (I), interpersonal values (Me), cultural values (We), and inter-cultural values (Us). This elaboration permits a broader cross-cultural view to policy analysis by accommodating research that would argue differences in policy perspectives by binary groupings of collectivistic and individualistic.

Such discussions were critical in the past few years with the globe facing the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research showed that cultures that were ‘tight’ - having strong social norms, high on threat, and low tolerance for deviant behavior - were more likely to avoid crowds, reduce face-to-face contact with others, leave the house less, and increased support in mandatory quarantines (Schumpe et al., 2022). These cultural nuances, as Rutherford notes, are critical in understanding his perspective of complexity. It is not simply the personal values at play in determining the success of pandemic policy, but an interaction of personal values within a cultural system.

Beyond this, the complexity framework is an immediate expansion of the stem-concept presented by Valsiner (Valsiner, 2014, p. 19). The stem-concept (I-AM, I-NEED, I-WANT) functions as a self-reflective maintenance of one’s identity across time by adding descriptors (I-AM... a citizen) which generate specific actions (...and so I shall vote). Valsiner noted four basic stem concepts (am, want, need, and will), but

I have suggested that there are many others, including (I-IMAGINE, I-REMEMBER, I-WISH) (Carriere, 2021a) and that such stems need to center in the larger group's voice through an individual (WE-AM) (Carriere, 2021b). Rutherford's framework takes this further by noting that it is not simply 'the group' as an amorphous floating blob, but a lived system of values both within and between groups that informs our development of both individual and group identity.

His discussion expands on my assertion of moving towards "We-AM" voices of understanding political speech (Carriere, 2021b, 2022). Political statements have frequently been analyzed as one of the individuals giving the speech (it is no surprise to see Mazur's discussion of the attribution of Brando's words to the speechgiver, Littlefeather), but fails to consider the collective culture of the staff that crafted the speech, that edited the words, that determined the message of the day. Rutherford pushes us to consider how the values of such a political statement and, critically, require consideration not just of the signifier (the speech-giver), but also of the referent (the resource, target and/or audience). This double-dyadic analysis emphasizes the complexity (quantity) of relationships and perspectives as well as the dynamicity (movement) of relationships and perspectives.

## Busch-Jensen & Røn-Larsen & TAS

Busch-Jensen & Røn-Larsen provide an important critical perspective on the work, noting that the work leaves the reader many times "with a number of unanswered questions and sense of missed opportunities for interesting discussions" (2023, p. 1459). Their commentary is incisive and sincerely appreciated. They note that the discussed work could have been further elaborated by engaging with philosophers such as Foucault and Arendt and theoretical constructs such as the Transformative Activist Stance (Røn-Larsen, 2024; Stetsenko, 2008) (TAS). Their commentary serves as a fantastic resource for individuals looking to get into more of philosophical perspective of these topics, and could itself be a prime reader to an introduction to an upper-level undergraduate seminar exploring the interplay of philosophy, politics, and critical psychology.

Their commentary drew two particularly interesting points to my eye - first, their discussion of TAS (Stetsenko, 2008) seems to line very well up with the complexity framework of Rutherford (2022, 2023). In so far as Rutherford considers the importance of both *within-* and *between-*, TAS argues that individuals come to know themselves both *in-* and *through-* collaborative, goal-directed meaning-making behavior. The differences are subtle - Stetsenko (2008) more explicitly focuses on the continual co-construction of the world through the active transformation of the environment, while Rutherford (2022) focuses more on the driving forces of that active engagement - is the goal one of I, one of Me, of Us, or We. This is critical, since while Stetsenko (2008) notes a rooting in social justice, it is not clear *whose* social justice, nor if searching for a common humanity would be an effective solution for social justice. Indeed, when individuals are asked if they would rather support a celebration of differences, or a celebration of similarities, it is the majority group supports the celebration of commonality, and the minority group that seeks the celebration of dif-

ferences (Moghaddam & Breckenridge, 2010). Rutherford's examination of the four levels of values supports us in this discussion - basic intergroup contact will fail if the community does not support the contact (Wright et al., 1997).

Their second point that was particularly important was their note of other kinds of democracy and the presence (and absence) of voices. They write:

Could it not be more direct, bottom-up or decentralized in the first place? Where does this particular organizational setup come from and what does it mean for how one can study politics and for how politics and psychology are entangled in one's study? Carriere does not ask these questions. As a result, he explores the people, stories, processes and voices he encounters without asking what stories and who's experiences might not be there, and maybe even conspicuously absent or silent. Could there be something absent in the present, which might be central for a political psychology to address? (Busch-Jensen & Røn-Larsen, 2023, p. 1461).

The silencing of voices is particularly critical for political psychology. Such voices are silenced both on purpose (the lack of identity and voice of the staff, having been hypergeneralized into a representation of 'The Office of the Congressperson') and many times, by design. For example, in the United States, poverty is estimated based on a calculation in the 1960s that does not reflect the current state of goods and services of the 2020s. While this measure could be changed (and, in fact, the government provides a 'supplemental' measure that is up-to-date), no politician wants to adjust the poverty rate and be the individual that 'created' more poverty (as fixing the poverty rate would result in around 3 million more individuals being labeled as poor). Thus, over three million individuals are restricted from accessing government resources that rely on the poverty line as its barometer of eligibility (Pimpare, 2009).

Beyond silencing individuals through office norms or arbitrary cutoffs, there also is the silence of choosing to not act, as I outline in the book (Carriere, 2022 see Chap. 4), which is frequently underappreciated within political psychology. While my original discussion of this was in terms of adjusting *towards* the environment instead of *adjusting* the environment, the active presence of the individual was central to its development. However, what they have provided is an important extension by more explicitly uniting the environment within the action of the individual. The reciprocated relation (Busch-Jensen & Røn-Larsen, 2023) of societal conditions and human communities implicates the affectivating presence and goal-directedness of the individual in even having the choice to stay silent (Cornejo et al., 2018).

## Moving Forward

Taken together, all four commentaries provide insightful expansions of the future of cultural political psychology. They underscore the multifaceted nature of political engagement and identity formation, highlighting how individual actions and societal structures are deeply interconnected in the political arena. They point towards a new cultural political psychology - one informed by feminist and critical perspectives

(Busch-Jensen & Røn-Larsen, 2023), that must acknowledge the cultural variations of the same psychological mechanism (Rutherford, 2023), that builds on philosophical work to re-center ourselves in the current day (Mazur, 2023a) while being flexible about the dynamism of where such changes and psychological activity can occur (Beckstead & Jordan, 2023).

Their commentary points to significant places worthy of further exploration. First, cultural psychology needs to amplify the voices of those who are marginalized, who are silenced, and whose values are under constant threat. But such an exploration must not examine these individuals singularly as victims, but instead, find the resilience and resistance that is present and how that informs their lives not as passive actors, suffering from a system, but agentic makers of change working to survive in spite of the system. We need theoretical explorations of hope, of wish-fulfillment, and change, including how these motives are engaged with on the periphery and outside of the standard. Who is a rule-breaker, and who defines the rules? What makes one individual a changemaker, while the other, a deviant rebel? There is a need to understand the cultural variations of phenomena - not to claim significant differences, but instead, to highlight how the same phenomenon can differ across times and contexts, and find the underlying mechanism that drives both. Finally, we must tackle the difficult question of movement - movement from freedom to surveillance, of place to place, of meaning to meaning, and of power to powerless. It is within the movement between such competing endpoints that politics - and psychology - can be found. Meaning-making is an individual activity - but that activity is informed through moving *within* and *between* cultures, and such movement needs to be made more explicit in our work.

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