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## | SIGNIFICANT ARTICLE |

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### **Systems That Echo Rehumanization:** *Mapping the Self-scape Across Body, Mind, and Environment*

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I have come to understand human experience less as a set of symptoms, and more as patterns emerging across systems. van der Kolk's (2006) article on the clinical implications of neuroscience research in PTSD aligns with this perspective, reframing trauma symptoms not as pathology, but as adaptive, embodied responses to overwhelming experiences. This lens resonates with a framework that continues to shape my development as a counselor: rehumanization. People who have been misunderstood, mislabeled, or reduced often find themselves at the edge of dehumanization, where their complexity is flattened into diagnosis or deficit. van der Kolk's work offers a perspective that honors the intelligence of the nervous system. As I consider, I find myself drawing connections across the broader landscape of my learning: the language of emotion and restoration of complexity in Atlas of the Heart (Brown, 2021), the reframing of ADHD as a nervous system difference in ADHD 2.0 (Hallowell & Ratey, 2021), and the work of Richard Schwartz in Internal Family Systems, which understands the internal system as composed of protective parts rather than pathology (Schwartz, 2021). Similarly, trauma-informed approaches such as EMDR (Shapiro, 2018), along with concepts of legacy burdens and emerging understandings of epigenetics (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018), further illustrate how experience is carried across time and expressed through the body. Unmasking Autism deepens this perspective by highlighting the tension between lived experience and systems that pathologize difference (Price, 2022). Through my own framework, Maps of the Self-scape (Dyer, 2026), I have begun to understand these experiences not only as internal states, but as patterns that emerge across layered systems, body, mind, relationships, and environment. These patterns echo Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, unfolding over time and context, and often repeating across situations as adaptive responses rather than dysfunction. What stood out most to me in van der Kolk's (2006) work is the reframing of trauma responses as intelligent adaptations of the nervous system rather than signs of dysfunction. This shift feels particularly valuable in my development as a counselor, as it supports a more compassionate, depathologizing approach that aligns with both trauma-informed care and neurodivergent-affirming practice. As I sift through these frameworks, I find myself increasingly drawn toward a non-pathologizing, humanizing approach to counseling, one that sees symptoms not as problems to eliminate, but as signals that can be mapped, understood, and related to within the broader context of a person's life, body, and story.

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