

Intrapsychic Activation Model (IPAM)

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Abstract

Our experience of reality is comprised of data from both the external and the internal environments. These inputs are mediated, structured, and reframed via constructs which activate introjects to produce automatic thoughts. These thoughts affect behaviors intended to modify the environment to conform to a self-state, buttress, and validate it. Constructs also select memories in order to prevent dissonance and anxiety between recall and self-state. They dissociate memories, alter their emotional content and correlates via attribution and reframing, and impose selectivity. The construct organizes the output from the introjects according to an algorithm ("identity") which provides, for each specific environment, selection criteria of self-states and corresponding introjects.

Keywords: cognitive impairments, executive functions, psychiatric symptoms, long covid

Summary

A scientifically rigorous psychology should start with the external environment: stimuli conveyed to the brain via *sensa*, the ecosystem of information, 95% of which remains unconscious.

The internal environment is comprised of reactions to the external environment and interactions between processes such as cognitions and emotions.

The idea of an immutable core identity is, therefore, counterfactual: no fixed entity can efficaciously cope with a shapeshifting and ever-transforming reality.

Instead of a unitary lifespan-long Self, in the footsteps of the likes of Philip Bromberg, I propose an ensemble of self-states, each one of which is optimized for a specific environment.

The self-states are automatically triggered. The one best adapted to the exigencies and demands of an idiosyncratic milieu becomes dominant while the others are rendered latent and dormant.

The self-states are not dissociated. They share resources and assets such as the individual's intelligence and memories.

Some autonomous or continuous background mental processes might conflict with the self-state. To avoid

dissonance and the ensuing anxiety, they are silenced with the aid of constructs. Each construct is unique to a specified self-state.

The constructs are stable organizing and hermeneutic-exegetic (interpretative) principles. Constructs mediate, structure, and filter external reality (experience) by reframing it while also regulating the internal environment.

Constructs make sense and impose a meaningful narrative on raw *sensa* as well as on internal data. They are like theories: they yield predictions. But all the output is censored to conform to the self-state (cognitively and emotionally distorted).

The ego and the persona are instances of constructs. Like defense mechanisms, constructs impair reality testing in order to buttress the self-state and maintain its coherence and cohesion. Like membranes, constructs selectively suppress any input that challenges the self-state or undermines it.

Constructs, therefore, ensure ego congruency and ego syntony by generating a database of information that is both relevant to the self-state and supportive of it.

Constructs also tackle memories that vitiate or

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contradict the self-state and thus engender dissonance and anxiety.

The construct either silences such memories or reframes them into compatibility with the self-state.

It accomplishes this feat in one of three ways: 1. By dissociating the memories; 2. By altering the emotional content and correlates of the memory to conform to that of the self-state; and 3. By weighing memories differently and selectively (selective memory).

To accomplish the reconciliation of the self-state to both the external and the internal environments, the constructs call upon (interpellate) introjects (internalized voices of meaningful others, such as parents, teachers, peers, and society at large). The conscience is an example of a cluster of introjects that is often made use of by constructs.

In order to avoid dissonance and anxiety, we make peace with our introjects by misidentifying them as our own authentic voices (attribution error).

The introjects generate automatic thoughts, both positive and negative. They are always on standby. They interfere with daily functioning once they are triggered.

The constructs organize the introjects's output according to a set of selection criteria and principles ("identity").

"Identity" is an algorithm which maps self-states and their attendant constructs to specific environments. It determines which introjects are activated. It is a set of principles and operating routines which regulate the emergence and submergence of self-states.

Identity changes only slowly and so gives the illusory impression of stability and continuity.

The "personality" is comprised of the selection criteria (aforementioned algorithm) combined with the resultant self-states.

The individual is cathected (emotionally invested) in the self-state. S/he wants to validate it and thus preserve the comfort zone.

One of the functions of the automatic thoughts is to drown out the processes which negate the self-state or conflict with it. The other function is to affect and modify behaviors.

Some behaviors are inhibited or negatively reinforced by the construct, using the automatic thoughts spewed out by the introjects. Other actions are positively reinforced.

This way, the construct induces or fosters only

behaviors whose consequences modify the environment to fit the self-state even as it suppresses all other forms of conduct.

The construct is goal-oriented. The choice of behaviors is secondary and rationalized. Self-efficacy is the overriding aim. The construct leverages external inputs to regulate the internal landscape.

The construct creates a paracosm, a virtual reality to fit and uphold the self-state. It is a harmonizing central authority.

This model sheds new light on basic concepts in psychology.

"Defense mechanisms" render palatable the outcomes of positively reinforced behaviors and prevent secondary anxiety, shame, and guilt.

"Mental illness" occurs when the self-states are mutually exclusive or oppositional or incompatible and the transition from one self-state to another is disrupted for a variety of reasons (mainly when the self-state is suboptimal).

The principle of non-contradiction in the repertory of self-states and the smooth transmission of power between self-states are the bedrocks of mental health. Conflicting self-states coupled with constructs compete for resources in a host of mental health disorders.

With every new environment, the algorithm selects an optimal self-state which takes over the individual. There is a momentary disorientation in the dissociative gaps between consecutive self-states.

In other words: the continuity of memory, identity, and personality is a myth or, at best, a convenient and idealized abstraction.

Self-states are anxiolytic and therapy is anxiogenic. But gradually, therapy helps the client evolve a new algorithm which selects for self-states which are less self-defeating or self-destructive and more functional.

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