A Unified Approach to Conceptualizing People in Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT

In line with the central thrust of Anchin and Magnavita's (2008) claim that unification is the next wave in psychotherapy, this article advances the argument by articulating a unified approach to conceptualizing people in psychotherapy that coherently integrates a biopsychosocial view with modern research in personality and the major perspectives in individual psychotherapy (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic and humanistic).

> *[P]sychotherapists behave like members of competing tribes, with different esoteric languages and rituals. Unification assumes that we all work in the same realm with the same processes regardless of the subsystem or specific domain we emphasize and specialize in. A unified model encourages us all to be aware of the larger picture and even if domain-specific treatment is undertaken, an understanding of the system and interconnections of domains and processes keep us alert to other possibilities for further developments.*
>
> Magnavita (2008, p. 273)

A conference presentation at the 2010 meeting of the Society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integration in Florence, Italy vividly affirmed the need for a more unified approach toward conceptualizing people in psychotherapy. The presentation consisted of Drs. Leslie Greenberg and Paul Wachtel analyzing a videotape series of cognitive behavioral therapy for perfectionism conducted by Dr. Martin Antony (Wachtel & Greenberg, 2010). The patient was a motivated, attractive young woman completing a graduate degree in psychology who strove for perfection in many areas of her life. She was extremely focused on organizing, planning, and succeeding at everything she did. She also had occasional panic attacks and issues concerning her body image.

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What was striking about the presentation was how Dr. Antony focused almost exclusively on daily activities and habits and her thoughts associated with them. In contrast, her emotions, relationship processes and internal working models, and the way she defended against uncomfortable images, feelings, or impulses were essentially ignored. For example, at one point in the first session, Dr. Antony inquired about the woman's eating patterns and, with tears welling up in her eyes, she hesitantly reported that she purged about once a day. Dr. Antony made little acknowledgement of her feelings or of her pained experience sharing this information. Not surprisingly, Drs. Wachtel and Greenberg sharply criticized the way these elements were ignored in the therapy. Indeed, at one point, Dr. Greenberg commented that he did not believe that cognitive behavioral therapies treated the whole person. It is likely, however, that a cognitive behavioral therapist might retort that Emotion Focused Therapy (e.g., Greenberg, 2002), similarly does not focus on the whole person but only the emotional part. Or perhaps the individual would question the assertion by arguing that no system focused on the whole person in the manner that Greenberg implied.

In this paper we introduce an approach to conceptualizing the whole person based on a new unified theory of psychology that works to assimilate and integrate key insights from the various approaches to psychotherapy into a coherent whole (Henriques, 2003; 2004; 2008). In the psychotherapy integration literature, assimilative integration is a term coined by Messer (2001) and describes a perspective that allows one to incorporate key insights from other approaches into one's own primary therapeutic outlook. The current perspective works via assimilative integration; however, instead of operating from an existing paradigm like psychodynamic theory or behavioral science, it introduces a new unified theory of psychology that can assimilate and integrate the various findings and key insights from each of the major perspectives in psychological theory and practice. This paper is divided up into two parts, the first of which provides the reader with a brief overview of the unified theory, and the second offers a unified approach to conceptualizing based on the broad framework provided by the unified theory.

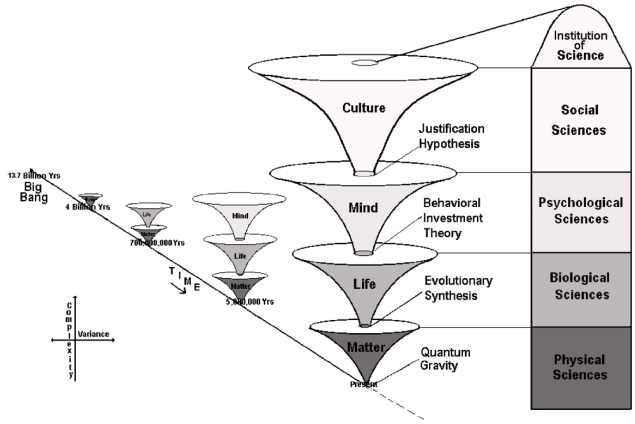
Part I: The Four Pieces that Make Up the Unified Theory

The unified theory (Henriques, in press) consists of four pieces that interlock to form a new way to view psychology as a whole. They are: 1) The Tree of Knowledge System, which provides a map of cosmic evolution as consisting of four dimensions of complexity (Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture); 2) Behavioral Investment Theory, which consolidates many existing ideas in the cognitive, behavioral, evolutionary, and neurosciences to offer a coherent natural scientific account of animal behavior in general; 3) The Influence Matrix, which is an extension of Behavioral Investment Theory to the relational domain and argues that humans have motives for power, love, and freedom that emerge out of an initial bed of dependency; and 4) The Justification Hypothesis, which is a framework for understanding of the evolution of human self-consciousness and human culture. We briefly describe each of these pieces below, and in the second part of the paper we articulate how they fit together and lead to a unified approach to conceptualizing people in psychotherapy that incorporates the biopsychosocial view, modern personality research, and key insights from each of the major paradigms in psychotherapy.

The Tree of Knowledge System

The first piece of the unified theory is the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System (Henriques, 2003; 2008), which offers a novel depiction of emergent evolution (Figure 1). As is illustrated, the ToK System makes the ontological claim that there are four distinguishable dimensions of complexity. Virtually all other broad models depict the hierarchy of nature as a single dimension of complexity that stretches from subatomic particles to molecules to organisms to human societies (e.g., Wilson, 1998). The depiction of four different dimensions of complexity is the needed change in perspective that allows one to see how scientific theories can be organized and how psychology in particular can be defined (Henriques, 2004). Why, according to the ToK System, are there different dimensions of complexity in addition to different levels of analysis? The reason is because each dimension of complexity emerges as a function of different systems of information processing: Genetic information processing gives rise to the dimension of Life, neuronal information processing gives rise to the dimension of Mind, and symbolic information processing gives rise to the dimension of Culture.

Figure 1. The Tree of Knowledge System.



These dimensions of complexity are different dimensions of causality, which is a rather profound philosophical argument. Consider, for example, that Descartes' philosophical analysis is famous for its dualism. Matter and mind were conceived by Descartes as separate spheres of substance and cause. Of course, modern scientific views have argued for a monistic position. Mind must be some form of matter because the problem of nonmaterial causality is philosophically insurmountable. However, this raises the issue of reductionism. Are minds and societies just complicated physical processes?

The issue of reductionism has been one of the most hotly debated issues in the philosophy of science, and with its pictographic representation the ToK System offers a new vantage point to explore this complicated concept. To use a common aphorism, in the case of reductionism and the ToK System a picture is worth a thousand words. Much of the debate concerning reductionism can be framed by considering the concept from two opposing, perhaps even "fear driven" points of view. The first point of view, frequently expressed physical reductionists (e.g., Churchland, 1986) is the notion that all phenomena are material. The fear here is that failure to accept this point leads to an unworkable dualism (Barendregt & Hans van Rappard, 2004). The second and opposing viewpoint protests that mental and social events are not "just" material processes and that a reductionistic materialism is greedily reductionistic (Dennett, 1995). The ToK System validates both perspectives and simultaneously debunks the fears of the natural scientists who worry that the social sciences will exist in a free float, while at the same time it addresses the fears of psychologists and social scientists in that it preserves the integrity of their dimensions of analysis. In other words, the ToK System offers a consilient frame from which to view the world simultaneously from bottom-up and top-down

perspectives. The ToK System is monistic in the sense that the higher dimensions of complexity supervene on the lower dimensions. Everything that is biological is also physical, everything that is psychological is biological, and so forth, and Energy is the ultimate common denominator. However, the ToK System is not greedily reductionistic. As is clearly depicted in the diagram, everything is not *just* energy and matter. Instead there are four theoretically separable classes of objects and causes: 1) the physical; 2) the biological; 3) the psychological and 4) the sociocultural.

How is the ToK System relevant to the psychotherapist? Consider that virtually every student of psychotherapy learns to use the biopsychosocial model as a broad heuristic tool for conceptualizing the various aspects of their patients' functioning. This model is a useful heuristic that allows a clinician to quickly identify and organize relevant information to the client's overall functioning and systemic issues (Engel, 1977). However, the generic biopsychosocial model has a number of inadequacies, including generalizations that may be too broad, a lack of resolution regarding problems of reduction and emergence, and the absence of explanations for *how* and *why* certain domains of human functioning are separate from others. In contrast, the ToK System offers a new view of the biopsychosocial model that helps to amend these deficiencies. First, it begins by segmenting reality into dimensions of complexity— Matter, Life, Mind and Culture—which results in a Physico-Bio-Psycho-Social view of human functioning (Henriques, 2003). The explicit differentiation of the physical from the biological speaks to the new way that the ToK System organizes reality and how it offers a new way to understand issues of reductionism and emergence.

Consider, for example, that most would assume that the physical is included in the biological. However, according to the ontological map provided by the ToK System, nature consists of four separate dimensions of complexity, and it is as relevant and important to separate the physical from the biological (see, e.g., Kincaid, 1990) as it is to separate the biological from the psychological and the psychological from the social. So how would we apply the lens of the ToK System to human behavior? Looking at human behavior via the prism of the ToK, it is divided into four dimensions of complexity. Each dimension of complexity can be further divided into four levels of 1) part; 2) whole; 3) group; and 4) macro-level system. As Henriques (2008) notes, the ToK System is unique in dividing nature into both levels and dimensions. The fundamental parts of the physical dimension are the particles elucidated by the Standard Model of Elementary Particle Physics, the wholes are the atoms in the Periodic Table, the groups are molecules and the system refers to physical objects in the environment. However, although we can analyze a human as consisting of physical objects like atoms and physical forces like electromagnetism and gravity, because humans are biological entities the complexity of human behavior cannot be fully explained or reduced to these forces. The biological dimension includes the gene as the fundamental part, the cell as the whole, multicellular organ systems as the group, and the ecology as the system. However, although we can analyze humans as biological objects, because humans are psychological entities, human behavior cannot be fully explained or reduced to biological processes. The psychological dimension includes the neural impulse exchanged in neural networks as the fundamental part, the animal acting in context as the whole, animal groups as the group, and animal societies in ecology as the system. However, although we can analyze humans as psychological objects, because humans are

also cultural entities, human behavior cannot be reduced to the psychological dimension. The sociocultural dimension includes the sign-symbol as its fundamental informational part, the human self-consciousness system as its whole, human groups as the group, and human societies in a multinational context as the system.

The separate dimensions of complexity in the ToK diagram are intimately connected to two of the three other pieces that make up the unified theory, Behavioral Investment Theory and the Justification Hypothesis. These ideas are what are known as "joint points" in the ToK System. Joint points are the links between the dimensions of complexity (Henriques, 2003). They provide the theoretical framework that explains how the higher dimension evolved out of the lower dimension. From the vantage point provided by the ToK System, the modern evolutionary synthesis is the joint point between Matter and Life because it is biology's unified framework and provides the basic frame for understanding the evolution of biological complexity (Mayr & Provine, 1998). Using the ToK diagram, we can then ask: Are there joint points between Life and Mind and between Mind and Culture? The short answer is yes, and Behavioral Investment Theory and the Justification Hypothesis are the respective theories.

Behavioral Investment Theory

Behavioral Investment Theory (BIT) is the joint point between Life and Mind and provides the framework for understanding the evolution of mental behavior, which is the behavior of the animal as a whole, mediated by the nervous system (Henriques, 2004). The basic idea of BIT is that the nervous system has evolved into an energy management and investment value system that computes increasingly complex and flexible behaviors. For example, crows on the west coast of Canada feed on whelks, which are a type of shellfish. The crows crack the shells of the whelks by picking them up and dropping them onto the rocks below. BIT makes the general prediction that animals will tend to spend the least amount of behavioral energy necessary predicted to achieve the motivated outcome (cf. La Cerra & Bingham, 2003), which in this case is a cracked shell that provides access to food. Researchers calculated the amount of energy required by the crows to lift the whelk to the point that optimizes the likelihood that the shell would break. If the crow does not lift the whelk high enough it will require several drops, yet flying it higher would result in the unnecessary expenditure of energy. The calculations found that the optimal expenditure of behavioral energy would be achieved by flying the shellfish to approximately five meters and this was in fact very close to the heights the birds actually dropped the whelks from (McFarland, 1985).

BIT consists of six fundamental principles that are generally well known in animal behavioral science but are often not put together in a way that is effectively communicated to professional psychologists (Henriques, in press). They are as follows:

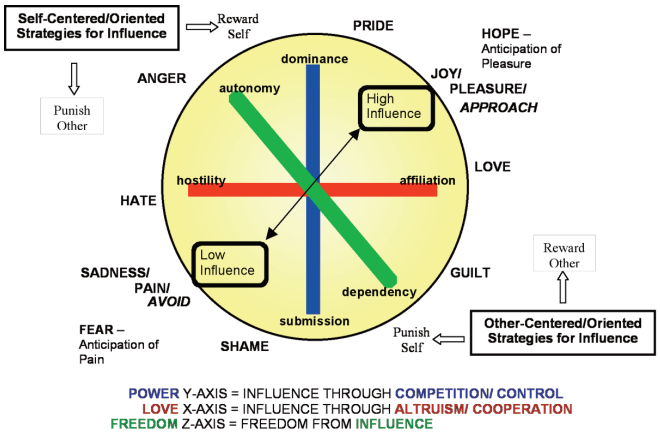
1) **The Principle of Energy Economics** is the fact that animals must, on the whole, acquire more workable energy from their behavioral investments than those behaviors cost; otherwise their complex arrangements will breakdown and eventually they will die.
2) **The Evolutionary Principle** is that inherited tendencies toward the behavioral expenditure of energy should be a function of ancestral inclusive fitness.
3) **The Principle of Behavioral Genetics** is the notion that genetic differences result in differences in behavioral investment systems.

4) **The Computational Control Principle** is the idea that the nervous system is the organ of behavior and it functions as an information processing system.
5) **The Learning Principle** is the notion that behavioral investments that effectively move the animal toward animal-environment relationships that positively covaried with ancestral inclusive fitness are selected for (i.e., are reinforced), whereas behavioral investments that fail to do so are extinguished. The learning principle incorporates both associative and operant conditioning processes.
6) **The Principle of Development** states that there are various genetically and hormonally regulated life history stages that require different behavioral investment strategies.

BIT consolidates existing theoretical perspectives and, in conjunction with the holistic vision afforded by the unified theory, allows for previously separate lines of thought and research to be coherently integrated (Henriques, 2003). Specifically, BIT allows for the assimilation and integration of major perspectives in mind, brain, and behavior, including: 1) evolutionary biology and genetics; 2) neuroscience; 3) behavioral science; 4) computational/cognitive science; and 5) developmental and dynamic systems theory. And, with its focus on investment and cost-benefit analysis, it also provides a framework for understanding animal and human behavior that is very congruent with economics. For example, Herb Gintis (2009), an economist who specializes in evolutionary biology and game theory, has argued that the central unifying principle underlying the behavioral sciences is the view that the mind is a decision making organ that calculates costs and benefits to arrive at choices, suggesting that the principle has broad application across a wide variety of different disciplines.

There are several ways that BIT is valuable to the clinician. First, it provides a conception of animal and human behavior as working to control the flow of resources, and this can guide clinicians in their functional understanding of mental behavior. Second, via the six principles, BIT grounds the clinician in basic brain and behavioral sciences and foundational concepts like associative and operant conditioning. Third, BIT provides a useful lens to look at certain disorders. For example, Henriques (2000) argued why depression could be effectively considered a state of behavioral shutdown via the lens of BIT. Specifically, BIT suggests that depression arises out of an evolved tendency to decrease behavioral expenditure in response to failing to chronically effectively control the flow of resources (i.e., in situations of prolonged danger, stress, or consistent failure to achieve one's goals it is best to shutdown rather that fruitlessly expend energy). Henriques (in press) further explained how this conception clarified when and how it was appropriate to consider depression as a normal reaction, a psychological disorder, and a biological disease. Fourth, BIT and the Justification Hypothesis (described below) give rise to a model of human consciousness that is very congruent with modern psychodynamic and experiential perspectives. Finally, the lens of BIT can be applied to human social motivation and emotion in a productive way, and this is the focus of the third piece of the unified theory.

Figure 2. The Influence Matrix.



The Influence Matrix

The Influence Matrix (IM) is an extension of BIT to human social motivation and emotion, which means that it incorporates the principles of energy economics, evolution, behavioral genetics, computational control, learning, and development. The IM is also represented in a diagram (Figure 2), one that maps the architecture underlying the way humans process social information, develop social goals, and are guided by emotions in navigating the social environment.

Looking at the diagram, the motivations are inside the circle, whereas the emotions are listed on the outside. Starting with the motivations, notice the two boxes inside the circle, one toward the upper right and the other toward the lower left, labeled high and low influence respectively. These boxes represent core motivational templates that function as reference ideals. The first foundational assumption of the IM is that social influence, defined as the capacity to get other individuals to act in accordance with one's interests, is a resource all humans are motivated to acquire. That is, like nutritious food, social influence reflects a basic, primary need and desire. It is, of course, not the only foundational motivation humans have, but it is theorized to be a central one. The second foundational assumption is that there are three conceptually distinct dimensions underlying the computation of high social influence in adults, *Power* (dominance–submission), *Love* (affiliation–hostility), and *Freedom* (autonomy–dependence). According to the IM, higher levels of social influence are associated with higher levels of power and affiliation and a healthy balance between autonomy and dependency. In contrast, lower levels of social influence are associated with hostile and submissive orientations and relative extremes of independence or dependence.

The IM posits that human relational processes can be conceptualized as a form of social exchange, whereby people are negotiating the acquisition of social influence with one another. To effectively negotiate such exchanges, individuals have motivational and emotional structures that allow for the representation one's self-interests and the interests of important others. Dominance, autonomy, and hostility, along with the emotions of pride, anger, and hate orient an individual toward promoting one's own self-interests. In contrast, the poles of affiliation, submission, and dependency, along with the emotions of shame, guilt, and love orient the individual toward the importance and validity of others' interests relative to one's own. The IM posits that in the course of engaging in social exchange, individuals will represent both their own interests and the interests of others. If the exchange is mutually beneficial, both parties will experience an increase in their sense of social influence. However, if there is conflict, both sides of the self-other dialectic become activated. Consequently, interpersonal conflict often produces a state of intrapsychic conflict, whereby individuals experience inclinations both to challenge and defy based on self interests and accommodate and defer based the other's interests. Of course, there are some individuals that tend to almost exclusively emphasize self-interests and become dominant, hostile, prideful and angry, whereas other individuals become submissive, dependent, guilty and shameful.

The IM is a useful guide for clinicians because it helps them to assimilate and integrate many lines of theory and research in social and interpersonal psychology. Montazeri (2009) reviewed how the model was congruent with many lines of research including psychodynamic relational perspectives such as

those advocated for by Karen Horney, Interpersonal Circumplex Models, attachment theory, parenting styles, sociometer theory, agency and communion, and trait theory. Stout (2010) argued that the model also lined up well with two integrative approaches in psychotherapy, Wachtel's (1993) cyclical psychodynamics and Young's (2005) schema focused therapy. The IM also directly connects to the fourth piece of the unified theory, which links language-based beliefs to social motivations and the social context.

The Justification Hypothesis

The Justification Hypothesis (JH) is the joint point between Mind and Culture on the ToK System, and provides a framework for understanding the nature of human self-consciousness and the evolution of human culture. The JH interprets both human self-consciousness and culture as *justification systems*. Justifications are the linguistic reasons we use to legitimize our claims and actions, and justification systems are interlocking networks of specific justifications that legitimize a particular version of reality (Shealy, 2005). Using the lens of the JH, we argue that processes of justification are ubiquitous in human affairs. Arguments, debates, moral dictates, rationalizations, and excuses, as well as many of the more core beliefs about the self, all involve the process of explaining why one's claims, thoughts, or actions are warranted. In virtually every form of social exchange, from warfare to politics to family struggles to science, humans are constantly justifying their behaviors to themselves and to others. Moreover, justification processes are a uniquely human phenomenon. Other animals communicate, struggle for dominance, and form alliances. But they don't justify why they do what they do. We are the justifying animal.

The JH consists of three basic postulates (Henriques, 2003). The first is that the evolution of language created a new and unique adaptive problem for our hominid ancestors, namely the problem of social justification, which is the fact that the evolution of language resulted in humans becoming the first animal in evolutionary history that had to justify why they did what they did. Effectively justifying one's actions is obviously crucial now, as can be seen in the research examining the way explanatory styles impact other people's attitudes and behaviors (Antaki, 1994). And because humans have always been intensely social creatures, there is every reason to believe that it was an essential problem to solve in our ancestral past (Barkow, 1992).

The second postulate of the JH is the claim that the human self-consciousness system functions as a justification system that constructs narratives for why one does what one does in a manner that takes into account one's social context and relative degree of social influence, and filters out unacceptable images and feelings. Henriques (2003; in press) has reviewed a large body of work in cognitive, social, developmental and neuropsychology, cognitive dissonance, self-serving biases, implicit and explicit attitudes, reason giving, and the nature of self-knowledge and showed that language-based beliefs are in fact organized in a manner that tends to facilitate social justification. For example, people tend to alter their beliefs to maintain a narrative of themselves as effective, helpful and intelligent, people will consciously maintain socially acceptable nonprejudicial attitudes, yet demonstrate subconscious biases against minorities, and people will tend to explain actions that result in favorable outcomes in terms of stable, internal causes, whereas actions that result in unfavorable outcomes are explained in terms of transient, external causes.

The third postulate is that the JH provides the basic framework for understanding cultural

levels of analyses. This is because the concept of large-scale justification systems providing the rules and patterns for acceptable behaviors is consonant with modern conceptions of culture (e.g., Shaffer, 2008). From this vantage point, laws, moral dictates, and even religious and philosophical beliefs are all seen as justification systems writ large that offer the individual roadmaps on what behaviors are socially acceptable. These large-scale cultural justification systems offer beliefs and values about what is morally right and wrong and make claims about how one should organize their personal and public lives accordingly (Henriques, in press).

A Tripartite Model of Human Consciousness. Especially relevant to the clinician is the view of adult human consciousness that emerges from the unified theory. Specifically, the logic of BIT and the JH ultimately give rise to a tripartite model of human consciousness that consists of: 1) an experiential consciousness system; 2) a private self-consciousness system; and 3) a public self-consciousness system. To understand why, the first point to be made is that the unified theory strongly supports a two domain view of the human mind, which maintains that human mental architecture that consists of two kinds of information processing systems. The first system, as framed by BIT, is a nonverbal, perceptual-motivational-emotional, parallel neuro-information processing behavioral guidance system that computes resource availability and organizes action. The second system, framed by the JH, is uniquely human and is a verbal (i.e., symbolic-syntactical), reflective, logical-analytic, sequential information processing system. Importantly from the perspective of integrating psychological theories, dual processing models of the human mind are found in work in psychotherapy (e.g., Greenberg, 2002), neuropsychology (e.g., Kolb & Wishaw, 2003), cognitive psychology (e.g., Stanovich, 2004), and social psychology (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999). In fact, so fundamental is this general conception of two broad mental domains that it has been proposed as the basis for a central dogma in human psychology (Cook, 1989).

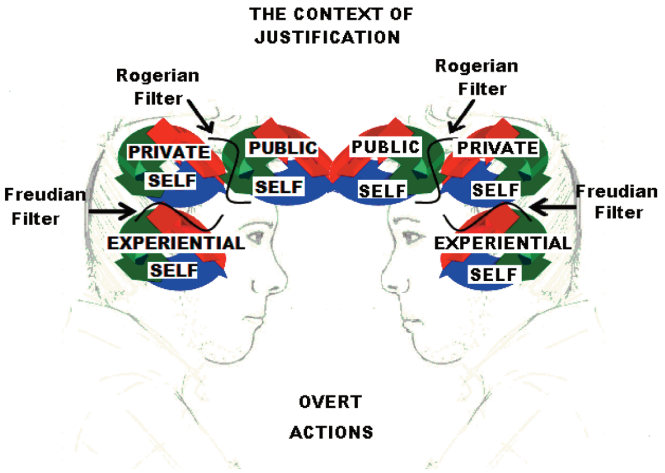
Because consciousness is a particular form of cognitive process (Henriques, in press) and because humans have two distinct cognitive processing systems, it follows that humans have two different forms of consciousness (cf. Orienstein, 1972). Many have indeed argued that there are two broad categories of mental experience, domains that can be referred to as sentience and self-consciousness (e.g., Pinker, 1997). Sentience is the term used to describe nonverbal conscious experiences, such as feeling pain, seeing red, being hungry, or imagining an event. In contrast, self-consciousness refers to the language-based, self-reflective thought. Whereas the former involves experiencing (e.g., feeling hungry), the latter involves self-awareness and meaning making about that experiencing ("Here I am, feeling hungry, and wishing that I could get home for dinner").

Epstein (1994) proposed a two domain model of the human mind and consciousness that integrates psychodynamic theory with cognitive science in a way that is very congruent with the perspective offered here. He articulated why viewing human mental processes as consisting of an experiential and a rational-analytic mode of information processing organized a vast array of empirical data. A gap in Epstein's innovative model—filled in by the JH—is a conceptual frame explaining *why* the so-called rational mind evolved in humans and *why* it exhibits the design features it does. Epstein explicitly stated his model was congruent with a modern psychodynamic perspective in that the experiential mode would influence the operations of the rational mode in ways that

the individual was often unaware. The JH enriches this picture significantly because it characterizes the second domain as a justification system that inhibits and filters out nonverbal thoughts, images, and impulses that are socially unacceptable and allows justifiable actions to be expressed. Another extension of Epstein's model derives from the JH is that, because the JH emphasizes the important role of social justification, it leads to insights about the difference between the private and public self-consciousness system.

Figure 3 depicts three broad domains of human consciousness derived from the unified theory: 1) the Experiential Self; 2) the Private Self-Consciousness System (the Private

Figure 3. The Tripartite Model of Human Consciousness.



Self for short); and 3) the Public Self. The experiential self refers to the sentient aspects of consciousness, and it is made up of the qualia or the "raw feels" of conscious experience. These experiences can be generally classified into sensations and perceptions (e.g., seeing red, touching a rock), motivational urges (e.g., hunger, sexual desire), and feelings and emotions (e.g., sadness, joy, anger), as well as imagined objects and occurrences. The two other domains of human consciousness represent the two separable domains of justification, the private and the public. The private self is the center of self-reflective awareness in adults and is made up most immediately of the internal dialogue that weaves a narrative of what is happening and why. It is a second order awareness system, one that translates and feeds back onto the experiential system. Early in the developmental sequence, the private and public justification systems are not clearly separated. As language develops, specific actions are either inhibited or allowed depending on the strength of the rule, the magnitude of the impulse, and the development of executive functioning. However, the private justification system emerges as speech and dialogue is internalized and in later childhood and certainly by early adolescence there is a distinct, private self-consciousness system that becomes the seat of reflective self-awareness in adults.

The public self is a mixture of how we want to be seen and how we imagine we are seen by others, although both may be quite different than how one's image is actually received by others. A number of seminal theorists have emphasized the importance of and dynamic tension between the public and private identity and researchers have demonstrated the validity of separating the private from public forms of self-consciousness (e.g., Fenigstein, 2009). The microsociology of Erving Goffman (1959) makes a strong case in favor of the importance of the public persona in a way that is very consistent with the JH (see Shaffer, 2005). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman describes face-to-face interactions and examined such processes through the lens of stage acting. He articulated how interpersonal interactions could be considered "performances" as actors learned to manage their impressions to others in both the structured and improvised roles of everyday life. Specifically, Goffman suggested that actors

work to convey a positive, predictable impression, so as to be perceived as justifiable in the eyes of the audience.

Above the two figures is labeled "The Context of Justification", which refers to the network of symbolically based beliefs and values that provide the interacting members a shared frame of reference for their interaction. The religious, legal, and normative systems of social convention all provide the larger context in which the specific actions and scripts of local individuals are played out. Actions are also labeled in the figure, and are fairly straight forward. These are the set of observable behaviors that the individuals engage in, and are explicitly defined as the functional changes between the individual and the environment (as opposed to changes within the individual).

Inside each of the individuals in the figure are two filters, labeled the Freudian and the Rogerian. The Freudian filter exists between the experiential self and the private self and refers to the process by which unjustifiable or painful images and impulses are filtered out and/or are reinterpreted to be consistent with the individual's conscious justification system. It is called the 'Freudian' filter because the dynamic relationship between self-conscious thoughts and subconscious feelings was (and still is) a central focus in both classical psychoanalysis and modern psychodynamic theory (McCullough Valliant, 1997).

We call the filtering that takes place between the private and the public self the Rogerian filter because, in relationship to early psychoanalytic thinking, Rogers shifted the focus from deep and largely nonconscious intrapsychic processes to more conscious thought and experiences and here-and-now interpersonal processes. He also emphasized that the root of much psychopathology was in how judgmental others would stunt the development of one's "true self". This is because, fearing judgment, individuals filter out their true desires and put on a mask—a "social self"—often to appease influential others (and, often, to deceive others). Person centered therapy is based on the premise that through forming a relationship with an empathetic, nonjudgmental other, individuals will stop the problematic stunting caused by the private to public filtering process, reinvest in their true sense of self, and return to a path of growth and fulfillment.

Why are certain impulses filtered? According to the JH, the reason is to maintain a consistent, relatively stable justification narrative of the self and to maintain a justifiable image in the eyes of others (Henriques, 2003). Swanson (1988) made exactly this point, explicitly arguing we should think of all ego defenses as "justifications that people make to themselves and others—justifications so designed that the defender, not just other people, can accept them" (p. 159). The formulation remains a hallmark feature of modern psychodynamic models and is also present in general models of personality (e.g., Mayer, 2004), social psychological research on cognitive dissonance (e.g., Tarvis & Aronson, 2007) and psychopathology (e.g., Wachtel, 1993).

An example of research into repression serves well to highlight both Freudian and Rogerian filtering processes and the dynamic interplay between the experiential self, the private self, and the public self. To explore the dynamics of sexual guilt, Morokoff (1985) divided a sample of women into "high sexual guilt" and "low sexual guilt" groups and had them watch an erotic film for twelve minutes. Each woman's arousal was measured physiologically, and they were also given self-reports. The results indicated that the high guilt women

experienced more physiological arousal but reported less arousal than the low guilt women, and this was interpreted as evidence of repression. The data from the physiological measure offered evidence that a subconscious portion of their experiential minds responded to the explicit material with relatively high levels of sexual arousal, and yet they ostensibly did not have self-conscious access to such arousal, presumably because their identity judged such arousal to be unjustifiable. If this was the case, this would be the Freudian filter at work. Of course, it could be that the women consciously recognized their arousal but did not want to publicly share that with the experimenter and thus intentionally minimized their self-reported arousal due to social demand characteristics. If so, this would be an example of the Rogerian filter at work.

Conclusion of Part I

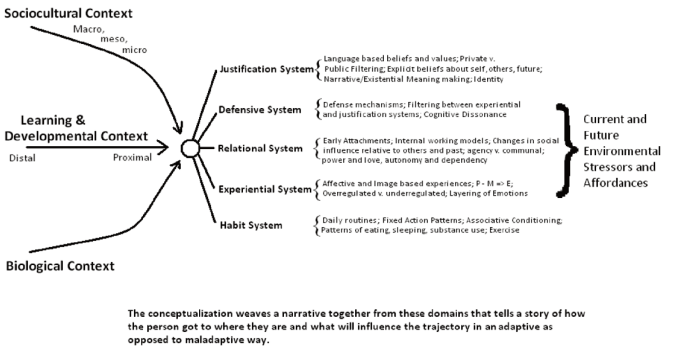
It can be readily argued that the reason psychotherapy has not been unified is because the field of psychology remains pre-paradigmatic with no overarching set of ideas that can effectively combine key insights and empirical findings in a way that leads to a useful and comprehensive picture of the human condition. The unified theory seeks to change the status quo and offers four new ideas that together allow for a new view of both the field of psychology and the human condition more generally (Henriques, in press). In the next section of this paper, we apply the unified theory to the development of a unified approach to conceptualizing people in psychotherapy.

Part II: The Unified Component Systems Approach to Conceptualizing

Magnavita (2008) argued that the pathway to unification is through the identification of various systems that range from the neurobiological through the intrapsychic to the sociocultural and that this should be combined with the recognition that various interventions target specific subsystems of this whole to effect change. Magnavita (2005) identified the intrapsychic level as being mediated by neurobiological processes and consisting of broad, interconnected domains or systems that are frequently the focus of intervention. He identified four intrapsychic subsystems, which included: 1) the attachment system, with refers to the constellation of relational needs and internal working models; 2) the affective system, which refers to the emotional feeling states of the individual; 3) the defensive system, which refers to the ways in which individuals consciously or unconsciously structure their internal experience to maintain equilibrium and comfort; and 4) the cognitive system, which refers to the schema or information processing templates that individuals have for making sense of the world. As we will see, the current approach overlaps largely with Magnavita's formulation.

Figure 4 provides a map of the unified component systems based on the unified theory, and it is a formulation that shares many similarities with Magnavita's (2005) unified component system approach. Starting with the left side of the figure, the biological, psychological, and social contexts are delineated. The arrows are drawn in a manner to indicate the

Figure 4. The Unified Component Systems Approach to Conceptualizing People in Psychotherapy.



time trajectory and the relationship between the contextual levels and the psychological level of analysis, which is the focus of the diagram. Thus the biological context represents a "bottom up" conceptualization, where as the learning and developmental context are horizontal (i.e., at the psychological level), and the sociocultural context is "top down" in the sense that one considers the society or social context as the whole and moves downward to the individual.

The circle in the middle of the diagram represents the individual in question and extending outward are the five intrapsychic systems that are derived from the unified theory, along with brief definitions describing their key elements. Consistent with modern personality research, these systems can be considered characteristic adaptational systems, which are differentiated from personality traits (e.g., Singer, 2005). Whereas traits are the most stable dimensions of personality, characteristic adaptations are mid-level personality units that "include motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality that speak to motivational, social–cognitive, and developmental concerns" (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 208). It was the trait researchers Costa and McCrae (1994) who introduced the term characteristic adaptations, a term they chose because such aspects of the personality system help the individual fit into the ever-changing social environment and make up the unique core of the individual. Although McAdams and Pals (2006) note that "there exists no definitive, Big Five–like list of these kinds of constructs" (p. 208), we offer just such a formulation here, specifying five systems of adaptation that, although interrelated, can be conceptually differentiated. Both Singer (2005) and Magnavita (2005) have pointed out that there is currently a substantial gap between modern personality theory and psychotherapy that needs to be filled in, and we want to highlight the fact that not only does the approach taken here integrate the various psychotherapy paradigms, but it also jives well with modern, broad proposals in personality research by articulating a new framework for understanding characteristic adaptations (see also Mayer, 2004).

On the right side of the diagram is a place holder to put the individual in a specific current and future environmental context that consists of both valued affordances (resources in the environment the individual might use to grow and develop or meet important needs) and stressors. Below we briefly describe each component of the diagram (three contexts and five systems) and connect it to conceptualizing individuals in the context of psychotherapy.

The Three Contexts

The Biological Context. The biological context refers to three broad domains: 1) the evolutionary history of the species; 2) the unique genetic make-up of the individual; and 3) the current functioning of the individual's physiology and anatomy. Evolutionary biology and psychology provide the lenses to consider the first element. As represented clearly by BIT, we need to understand the shared evolutionary history of the species and the phylogenetic forces that have shaped the basic human psychological architecture during the environment of evolutionary adaptation (Barkow, 1992). We must also keep in mind that behavioral genetics research has demonstrated that virtually all major categories of mental behavioral dispositions (e.g., psychological traits, intelligence, tendencies toward psychopathology like schizophrenia and depression) have a genetic component (e.g., Kendler & Prescott, 2006). Finally, all psychological processes are medi-

ated by physiological processes, and medicine (especially neurology, endocrinology, and biopsychiatry) provide the lens to consider the impact of physiological functioning on human mental behavior.

From the vantage point of conceptualizing a patient presenting in psychotherapy, the biological context is crucial. Family histories of illness and temperamental tendencies are useful to place traits and dispositions toward psychopathology in a behavioral genetic context. And allergic reactions, infections, hormonal fluctuations, diseases, and side effects from medications can all have a substantial impact on psychological functioning. It is, of course, the medical professions that have the primary charge to assess biological functioning and intervene when necessary, and if possible, it is always a good idea to have a medical consult when conducting psychotherapy, especially if there are any unusual or unexpected symptoms, symptoms that do not change with environment, or symptoms that are not readily understandable given the psychological conceptualization of the individual.

The Learning and Developmental Context. Mental behavior (Henriques, 2004) evolves through time and one can only understand the current response tendencies by placing them in a temporal context. According to the principles of BIT, we need to consider the learning history, specifically what patterns of investment have been selected for and what have been selected against, along with the life history stage or developmental context the individual is in. Noted on the diagram are the distal elements, which refers to the early learning and development that laid the foundation for growth (e.g., the attachment history), and the proximal, which are the recent events (e.g., break up, failure to get into school) contributing to current functioning.

In terms of conceptualizing people, it is crucial to think about reinforcement and punishment histories, models, and past environmental affordances and stressors. In regards to distal learning and development, early patterns of attachment, parental discipline, and emotional expressiveness, domains of success or failure (such as academics or sports), early peer relations, formative memories from childhood and adolescence, as well as major traumatic events are crucial to consider. In terms of development stages, we find Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental stage model to be particularly useful not so much in terms of the specific stages and timeframes, but as a heuristic for the kinds of developmental tasks individuals are likely to be facing. For example, as clinicians who regularly treat college students in psychotherapy know, issues pertaining to the development of identity and intimacy are frequently paramount.

The Sociocultural Context. The sociocultural context refers to the societal and relational context in which the individual is embedded and, following Bronfrenbrenner (1979), we can consider the socioecological spheres ranging from the broadest macro-level context where customs, values, roles, and norms function as the large-scale justification systems that coordinate the population, to the more intermediate range of community level influences, such as local cultural tones and socioeconomic status, to finally the micro-level relational environment consisting of the individual's family and friends.

In conceptualizing individuals, the macro-level cultural context is crucial for understanding individual identities, values, and existential narratives (cf., McAdams & Pals, 2006). Notions about healing, rites and traditions, and elements like collectivist versus individualistic cultural orientations are crucial

to take into consideration when framing the psychotherapeutic enterprise, which therapists should be aware was born in a Western individualistic culture and often carries assumptions associated with that worldview. In addition, human identities are very much formed from the dialectical tensions between self and society, and it is crucial to understand which beliefs about purpose, meaning, change, and destiny that are swirling around in the social sphere have or have not been internalized by the individual. In regards to the meso-level sphere, issues of class, social status, and quality of the living community (e.g., noise, traffic, safety, daily hassles) are enormously relevant for psychological functioning. Finally, as will be made directly apparent when we explore the nature of the characteristic adaptational systems, it is difficult to overstate the impact of the immediate relational world (Wachtel, 2008) on psychological development.

The Five Characteristic Adaptational Systems

The Habit System. Like many perspectives (e.g., MacClean, 1993; Minsky, 2006), the unified theory posits that the human nervous system is a layered system of computational control, evolving from a base of simpler more automatic sensory motor processes to behaviors that are guided by motivation and emotion, and then higher thought. In this light, the habit system corresponds to the basic levels of mental processes and consists of sensorimotor patterns and reflexes, fixed action patterns, and procedural memories that can be produced without any conscious awareness. Habitual responses are automatically initiated upon the presence of specific environmental cues and are shaped based on associations and consequences. The relatively automatic and rigid nature of habits has remained a central assumption in several contemporary areas of research analyses of human as well as animal behavior, and naturalistic studies of human behavior show habits tend to be tied to the context cues contiguous with prior performance and that they are implemented relatively independently of people's conscious goals and intentions (Neal & Wood, 2009). Whereas consciousness is activated in response to unexpected changes, routine actions conversely become engrained in the habit system, and one can informally characterize the habit system as that which involves doing without thinking.

In terms of conceptualizing people, the concept of habit is, of course, central to the behaviorists, and in that regard, the lens of the habit system corresponds to looking at an individual's daily routines, general activity levels, patterns of eating, sleeping, substance use, sexual activity and exercise, and stimuli or triggers that evoke particular kinds of response patterns. The habit system is particularly important to consider when conceptualizing addictive behavior patterns (e.g., drinking, smoking, or gambling) that a client or patient wants to alter. Indeed, many, if not most of the actions that people consciously wish they did not engage in will have a strong habitual component to them. In addition, because of its direct connection to and elicitation by environmental stimuli, thinking about the habit system opens up ways to think about how to potentially restructure the environment that might minimize the triggering of bad habits and identify stimuli that might foster the selection of more adaptive response tendencies.

The Experiential System. The experiential system refers to the nonverbal feelings, images, and sensory aspects of mental life. Examples of experiential phenomena include seeing red, being hungry, and feeling angry. The uni-

fied theory posits that such first person mental experiences are a form of cognitive process and are emergent phenomena that arise from waves of neural information processing, although how exactly such neurocognitive processes give rise to sentience, or even which animals are sentient, remain unanswered questions. The unified theory posits that the experiential system in mammals operates on a computational control formulation whereby objects and events are perceptually categorized and made meaningful and then referenced against motivational goal templates which then result in action orienting affective response tendencies (cf. La Cerra & Bingham, 2003). This formulation connects the experiencing mind to operant behavioral principles (cf. Staats, 1996). For example, hunger activates a template to approach food. The individual will then search the perceptual field and if food is perceived and a pathway to acquire it realized, the individual will feel positive, energizing affect. If, however, the pathway is blocked, the emotional response is one of frustration. In addition, the experiential system also includes imagination, fantasy, and remembered images, as it includes the capacity to simulate objects, events, and actions.

Not surprisingly, the experiential approaches to psychotherapy emphasize the functioning of the experiential system in relationship to one's overall emotional health. And because emotions play a key organizing role in the experiential system, it is probably most useful to focus first on emotions when analyzing the functioning of the experiential system. Greenberg (2002) provides very clear guidance for thinking about the nature of emotional experience and what emotional experiences tend to be adaptive and which are maladaptive. Questions for the psychotherapist to consider when conceptualizing about the experiential system include: What is the range of emotional expression and experiencing? Are there emotional states that dominate an individual's experience, as is the case in depressive and anxiety disorders? Are certain emotions are restricted, warded off, over-regulated, or inhibited? What are primary and adaptive emotional responses and which are secondary and maladaptive? Other questions pertain to the cohesion and sensibility of the individual's experiential world. Are images or feeling states constantly vying for conscious attention in conflicted ways? Are aspects of one's experiential system split-off, disconnected, or repressed in some way? In addition to emphasizing emotions, consideration of images, fantasies, and felt experiences within the body is important to get a full picture of an individual's experiential system.

The Relational System. The relational system is a specific aspect of the experiential system but it is so important to human psychological functioning that it needs particular specification. The relational system refers to the social motivations and feelings states, along with internal working models and self-other schema that guide people in their social exchanges and relationships. The IM is the framework employed to understand the relational characteristic adaptational system, and includes histories of attachments and important rejections, levels of social influence, agentic or communal orientations, social motivations such as power, love, and freedom, how self-other representations are coded, and how (real or perceived) changes in important relationships are associated with particular kinds of affective responses.

As Wachtel (2008) notes, psychodynamic theory and therapy has taken a relational turn in the past several decades and virtually all psychodynamic perspectives now emphasize the central role relationships play in mental health. The IM provides a systematic way to conceptualize people's relational system. The

first basic principle is to analyze an individual's social influence, which refers to the capacity to influence important others in accordance with one's interests. This is not meant in a Machiavellian sense of consciously manipulating others but instead is considered more in terms of the fundamental indicators of social influence, such as the amount of admiration, love, and respect, or positive relative to negative attention received from others. The amount of influence is then considered in an absolute sense (How do others view this person?) and in a relative sense, in relationship to important others (Do they have more or less influence than their friends or family members?), and in relationship to the individual's past (Have they recently lost or gained social influence?). In many instances, psychotherapy is initiated primarily because of recent changes in social influence, such as the break up and loss of a romantic relationship, humiliation at failing at school or in one's job, or the sense that one is not respected or valued either by one's family or society at large.

Second, the lens afforded by the IM also raises the question of where the individual tends to fall on the dimensions of agency and communion in most circumstances. Are they self-focused, tending to emphasize power, autonomy and self-reliance, or are they more communal, relationship centered and adopt more of a go along to get along stance? Third, we can more specifically look at their motives for power and love, and freedom and dependency, the extent to which needs are being met or not in these domains and the extent to which there is conflict between them. Fourth, we can then ask what are the individual's fears regarding loss of social influence and how does the individual tend to react to real or imagined loss of social influence (i.e., Do they tend to be more submissive and self-critical or are they hostile and blaming?). Of course, current patterns emerge in part based on schema formed in early childhood, thus it is frequently useful to draw connections between past and present relational patterns (Wachtel, 1993).

The Defensive System. The defensive system refers to the ways in which individuals manage their actions, feelings and thoughts, and shift the focus of conscious attention to maintain a state of psychic equilibrium. In more everyday terms, the defensive system can be thought of in terms of how people cope with distressing thoughts and experiences. In many regards, the defensive system is the most diffuse of the characteristic adaptational systems, in the sense that it doesn't directly correspond to a specific domain of mind or consciousness. Instead, it refers more to the interrelationships between the domains and the strategies utilized to maintain mental harmony and coherence. This is not to say that the defensive system cannot be identified or studied. Psychodynamically oriented clinicians and theorists have long documented mechanisms of defensive process. And the Freudian and Rogerian filters provide a framework within the unified theory to understand how people repress and avoid of threatening material emerging from the experiential system into self-consciousness and work to maintain particular social images. Closely related to psychodynamic conceptions of defense, social psychologists have experimentally examined defensive processes under the guise of cognitive dissonance, and have documented the enormous tendencies to arrange one's beliefs and actions in such a way as to maintain a justifiable narrative of the self (Tarvis & Aronson, 2007).

When conceptualizing people in psychotherapy, the nature of their defensive system is crucial in understanding the nature of psychopathology and the kinds of changes that

are possible and those that will be very resistant to change (McCullough-Valliant, 1997). Many different kinds of defense mechanisms have been catalogued and are indicative of various levels of psychological functioning that have clear treatment implications (e.g., McWilliams, 1994). Many psychological problems can be understood as arising from maladaptive defenses, whereby individuals perceive something—often particular feelings, images or memories—as threatening and develop ways of avoiding such experiences, but this paradoxically ends up creating more problems (see Wachtel, 1993).

The Justification System. The justification system refers to the language-based beliefs and values that an individual uses to legitimize actions and develop a meaningful worldview. Especially from the vantage point of psychotherapy, we can think about the justification system from two lenses. One is the more cognitive psychotherapy view that emphasizes the interpretations people make and the expectations they have of their environment and their ability to influence it. These are the semantic elements were characterized by Beck (1976) as automatic thoughts, which are the immediate self-talk an individual engages in during an activity or moment of reflection. Some important constructs in the social cognitive literature relating to these kinds of justifications include pessimism and optimism, self-efficacy, and an internal versus external locus of control.

The other lens that is useful is the broader and deeper lens of existential perspectives articulated by Victor Frankl and more recently narrative therapists who focus on the guiding justification narratives that people tell regarding who they are, what their purpose is, and why they are doing what they are doing in an autobiographical way. This is the level of identity and life narrative that is so central to personality that McAdams and Pals (2006) characterize it as a fully separate component of personality.

In many ways, the justification system is the most important component to conceptualizing adults in psychotherapy. One reason for this is because in the vast majority of cases of adult psychotherapy, the justification system is the most direct window into the personality structure and circumstance of the patient or client. That is, although as therapists we observe appearance and mannerisms of our patients in the consulting room, we usually get to observe only a very small slice of the patient's behavioral repertoire. And although we can certainly obtain clues and patients can verbally share their experiential world, we can never know that subjective experience directly. Thus, as therapists, what we have direct access to is the justification narrative given by patients of the problems they are facing. It is usually from that narrative that we must draw inferences about the patient's habits, experiences, relationships, and defenses. Consider, for example, the information conveyed if a person upon entering therapy is asked what brings him in and he answers, "Nothing is going my way. It doesn't matter what I do, fate clearly has dictated that I am destined to be one of the losers in life. I tried as hard as I could at my job, but was let go anyway. And even though I have not complained about it, my partner claiming I am moping around and is now threatening to separate from me. It is like I have a big 'L' tattooed on my forehead." As therapists, we can quickly identify key aspects of his justification system, such as his external locus of control, low self-efficacy, and a pessimistic worldview. However, in just this short narrative we can reasonably wonder if he has limited mastery and pleasure in his daily activities, that his experiential world is dominated by images and related feeling states of threat, loss, and failure, that interper-

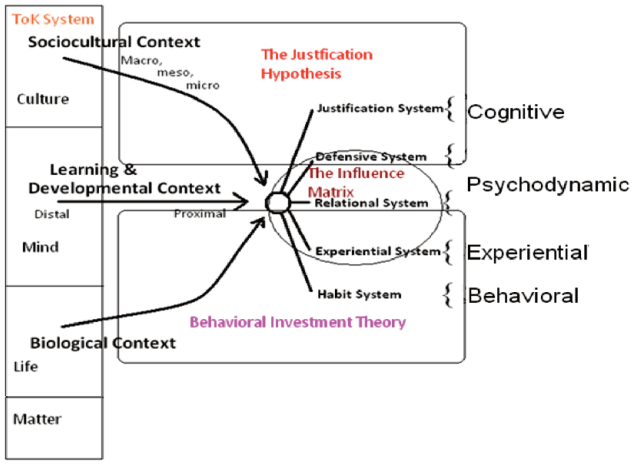
sonally he is likely to be both rejection sensitive, resentful and submissive to authority, and that he will likely be defensive, dismissive, and resistant to change.

Cognitive psychotherapy provides a useful lens to think about the nature of private self-talk and how the semantic meaning an individual constructs about themselves and events in the world can impact subsequent feelings and actions. Of course, the central guiding principle in cognitive therapy is analyzing those justifications for the degree to which they are accurate and helpful. One of Beck's lasting insights is that catastrophic automatic thoughts and negative biases in reasoning are part of the mental cycles that drive people toward anxious and depressed moods, although there are more dynamic relations and reciprocal feedback loops than traditional cognitive psychotherapy suggested. At structurally deeper levels, it is crucial to consider the depth and breadth of the individuals' justification system to consider elements like ego functioning, religious, spiritual, or existential narratives and crises, and to reflect on the individuals' normative ideals and how they actually experience themselves or the world around them.

Of course, as therapists, even we don't get full access to the justification system, only to the portion of the justification system that is not privately filtered by the client. This is in large part why the quality of the therapeutic relationship is so important. The better the relationship and the more accurate the empathy, the less the filtering between the public and the private justification systems there will be. It is in the crucial of a strong therapeutic holding environment can the filters be removed an authentic dialogue about what the client truly believes can occur.

Far more could be said about each of these characteristic adaptational systems. Indeed, the argument put forth here is that entire paradigms of psychotherapy have been built through focusing primarily on one or another characteristic adaptational system. This was made strikingly apparent in the SEPI presentation alluded to at the outset of this paper. From the vantage point offered here, Dr. Antony, a CBT therapist, focused primarily on habits and justifications. In contrast, by virtue of their respective training in psychodynamic and experiential approaches, Drs. Wachtel and Greenberg honed in on the relational, defensive, and experiential elements of her presentation. We are arguing here that a unified approach to conceptualization can be developed based on a unified theory of psychology that is congruent with a broad biopsychosocial view, corresponds well with modern personality theory, and incorporates key insights from the major psychotherapy paradigms. To further facilitate this linkage, Figure 5 maps the unified component systems approach both to the four pieces that make up the unified theory and the four major approaches to individual psychotherapy. We hope the linkages between the psychotherapy paradigms and the five characteristic adaptational systems are particularly clear. Specifically, the be-

Figure 5. Mapping the Unified Theory and Major Paradigms to the Component Systems.



havioral paradigm corresponds with the habit system, the experiential paradigm (especially Emotion Focused Therapy) corresponds to the experiential system, the psychodynamic paradigm corresponds to both the relational and defensive systems, and the cognitive paradigm corresponds to the justification system.

We hope that the relationship between the unified theory and the unified component systems view is also relatively clear. The ToK System provides the broad, overarching frame, clearly delineating what is meant by the (physical) biopsychosocial context. BIT provides the conceptual linkages between the biological context and the habit and experiential systems. The IM, as an extension of BIT, maps out the relational system. The JH links linguistic reasoning both with to social motivations mapped out by the IM and the larger sociocultural context.

Limitations and Future Directions

Given the aforementioned arguments and delineation of the four pieces of the unified theory, four dimensions of complexity, three broad contexts, and five characteristic adaptational systems, not to mention sub-principles and corollary arguments from each of the broad claims made, what is a clinician or an applied researcher to do? A skeptic of the present effort will likely point out that there are too many broad constructs introduced that must be grappled with. And when we consider their interactions, the implications are overwhelming. In addition, where are the experiments justifying the utility of the current approach? This concern was raised in response to an early article on the unified theory. The post-Skinnerian psychologist Steven Hayes wrote:

> *[L]ook at the present effort and ask, "What effective action can now be taken? Toward what goals?" Henriques does not present actual data showing that thinking of the world this way is useful in a practical or empirical sense. The only goals that are mentioned are essentially coherence goals. Thus, no new treatments are described, and no new experiments are laid out. If this analysis is practically useful why can't it be shown in a real, practical way?* (Hayes, 2004, p. 1232)

There are two criticisms of the current approach here that need to be unpacked, both of which have some degree of legitimacy, but nevertheless do not invalidate the current approach. The first issue pertains to the complexity of the unified theory. To the newly initiated, the large number of different ideas which need to be learned and the application of them in context can be daunting. The complexity makes pedagogy difficult, and it is admittedly challenging to learn the comprehensiveness and the nuances of the unified theory in the context of one or even several articles on it. Of course, this is less a specific criticism of the unified theory than is the nature of newly learning a complicated system. Whether one was tackling modern physics or psychoanalysis or anyone one of a number of complicated systems of science or philosophy, effort is needed for acquisition of the material. One other note along these lines is that, in addition to the problem of pedagogy, the number of parts seems on the surface to violate the principle of parsimony. This criticism is more based on appearances than a deep understanding of the unified theory. In actual fact, the unified theory is incredibly parsimonious, positing that the universe consists of five essences (Energy, Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture) linked by four theoretical joint points (Quantum Gravity, the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, Behavioral Investment Theory, and the Justification Hypothesis). According to the unified theory, this basic core structure provides the framework for unifying all scientific knowledge (Henriques, 2003).

The second issue pertains to practicality and empirical validity. In terms of practicality, we believe those who are looking for a basic conceptual scheme for delineating the major domains a psychotherapist must consider when treating an individual will find much use in the approach offered here. However, psychologists are taught, with good justification, to follow the data. And, yet, if we apply that criterion to the current proposal, where are the studies documenting that those who adopt a unified approach to conceptualizing are more efficient and effective at conducting psychotherapy? Without such evidence, the skeptic may interpret the current scheme as simply asking too much and offering too little guidance for the clinician to make use of it in assessment or ongoing treatment. The degree to which this argument is compelling is likely to be a function of the dispositional attitudes of the psychologist and her overall view of the field.

Machado, Lourenco, and Silva (2000) argue that one of psychology's great problems over the past 50 years has been dominated by attention to fact gathering at the expense of theoretical and conceptual analyses. These authors argue that, in their zeal to be scientific, psychologists have overemphasized the value data has in the absence of effective conceptual and theoretical frameworks. As a consequence, the discipline is producing oceans of information but little wisdom because there is lacking a big picture view that places psychological knowledge in a coherent context that allows for genuine understanding. It is this gap that the unified theory seeks to fill, and it is a gap that cannot be filled within the narrow confines of a research lab. Thus, we suppose that those clinicians and academics who do aspire toward coherence goals will gravitate toward the unified theory at this stage, whereas those who are skeptical of frameworks without specified predictions and outcomes will remain unimpressed.

The unified theory is now at a stage where the conceptual and theoretical frameworks have been laid out. We recognize that if the unified theory is to have a large and sustainable impact on the field, the concepts and formulations articulated here will have to lead to rigorous data-based research projects. Several research projects are currently underway in that regard, examining well-being, psychotherapy outcomes with both outpatients and severely mentally ill, along with cross-cultural research in personality.

Conclusion

This article began with the differences in viewpoints that Drs. Greenberg and Wachtel had with the cognitive behavioral approach taken by Dr. Antony. In line with the differences observed there, Norcross (2005) argued that fundamental differences in epistemology and ontology and the lack of a common language and background of understanding were major obstacles to achieving a more integrative or unified view. We believe that a unified framework is possible and have articulated an approach to conceptualizing people in psychotherapy that is derived from the unified theory (Henriques, in press) and Magnavita's (2008) unified component systems approach that consists of three broad contexts and five characteristic adaptational systems. It is a formulation that we argue is consistent with modern research in personality and integrates the viewpoints and insights of the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy. As such, we believe it represents an important step forward on the way to a unified psychotherapy.

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