

Emotion, Cognition, and
Social Interaction -
Information from Psychology
and New Ideas topics self
help

By:
Mark Pettinelli

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Online:
< <http://cnx.org/content/col10403/1.70/> >

C O N N E X I O N S

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Collection structure revised: March 31, 2013
PDF generated: November 2, 2013
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Psychology for Self Help¹

- People have a certain understanding of their own actions. This is true for specific, individual actions where you can understand to different degrees what you are doing and if you are conscious of what you are doing - and this is true with more complicated actions and behaviors (such as a behavior that you have to think about or reflect on in order to understand what your action was).
- People have various beliefs about themselves, about the world, about what they are doing in the present time. These beliefs can influence your actions at any time. A certain belief can be brought up consciously (recalled or a new belief initiated) or a belief could have an unconscious influence on what you are doing. For instance a belief that you forgot you had or some bias you have.
- There are only a few basic personality traits that people can have. There is their moral disposition - if they are nice or mean. There is their energy level, their nervousness, their type of intellect or way of thinking. There is their social dispositions - extroverted, agreeable, etc.
- You can try and measure emotions in social interactions. For instance the emotion of love might only be present between two people who are in love occasionally. You could also try to measure it over a longer period of time, and try to observe certain indicators that point to if that emotion is occurring.
- Furthermore, in every social interaction there are going to be various emotions interacting with each other. This is a part of the 'mood' or 'atmosphere'. For instance there could be a humorous mood or a romantic mood, or maybe those two emotions/moods are interacting with each other during the interaction.
- This brings up the point that there are various ways someone can be conscious of their emotions. Someone may have an emotion, but that doesn't mean that it is easy for them to feel or understand that it is occurring.

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m44906/1.2/>>.

- A mood or emotional state consists of a certain set of feelings (happy, sad, exciting, etc), in addition to having its own unique feeling.
- Emotion can cloud intellect. The various ways of thinking can be related to someones social disposition (if they are an introvert or an extrovert). Jung discussed the introverted type of thinking - "this kind of thinking easily gets lost in the immense truth of the subjective factor... the extraordinary impoverishment of introverted thinking is compensated by a wealth of unconscious facts." (Carl Jung, "Psychological Types".) He seemed to think that introverted thinking was defective somehow, yet more internal and possibly deeper unconsciously.
- Your thinking (conscious and unconscious) determines who you are and what you feel.

Unconscious Thinking and Feeling - And Cognitive Behavioral Therapy²

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a psychotherapeutic approach that addresses dysfunctional emotions, behaviors, and cognitions through a goal-oriented, systematic process. The name refers to behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, and to therapy based upon a combination of basic behavioral and cognitive research.³

A major aspect of CBT is to use an analysis of someones thoughts and feelings - how their feelings lead to thoughts and how their thoughts lead to feelings - as a way to help the person understand how they can change their thoughts and how this might help them change their feelings. Obviously they also analyze how thoughts and feelings relate to behavior as well.

But how much of someones thinking is unconscious? Someone can have a thought that they aren't aware of. They could have some belief, attitude, or thought process that they aren't aware of. A belief is something you are thinking that isn't a fact - which would be something you know to be true (or think you know to be true). So when I say that you might have some belief you aren't aware of that means anything you think that you aren't certain of. I would say that everything in the mind that you think is either a fact or a belief, or a more complicated thought that is more like a paragraph which would be describing something.

Surely when you are interacting with someone there is potentially a lot of unconscious beliefs and ideas you might form about the other person. You could

²This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m44928/1.2/>>.

³Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_behavioral_therapy 9/8/2012

be biased against them and not know it very easily. In fact, there might be subtle shifts in how you are biased against them many times during a conversation.

But is that what the unconscious is about - beliefs, facts, and ideas that you have that you aren't aware of? Or is it about deep motivations and powerful emotions that are influencing your feelings, thoughts and behaviors?

There is a lot of mystery behind what is happening in your mind unconsciously. That is why it might take a lot of work thinking about your own thoughts and feelings in order to change them. If you have some strong attachment or drive that needs to be changed - it is a powerful unconscious one, and you would need to do a lot of work over a long time in order to change how you feel.

I am not a licensed psychologist, but it is obvious that certain behaviors or ways of being can only be changed over a long period of time. If someone feels passionately about something, this cannot change instantly. That shows how any behavior might take a long time to change. People get used to acting a certain way and this can only be changed by showing them or practicing new ways of acting. They have deep unconscious beliefs and attitudes that are strong and reflected in many aspects of their actions. Such complicated and subtle behavior cannot change instantly because it is too complicated to change instantly - if a behavior is complicated then it is going to take a long time to change because there are many things that need to be changed about it.

You might not notice all of the things that change, however if you think about it an attitude is probably going to have many associated beliefs and unconscious drives that need to be addressed. This is what experience is. It isn't simply that an attitude is large and needs to be decreased over time - there is also a learning process.

What can be said about this? If a motivation is large, then why does it take so long to change? It seems to me that if you describe the motivation as 'unconscious' it shows that it is very large, because most of the mind is unconscious. What does the word 'unconscious' bring up anyway? Is it merely a way of saying something is more significant than you would think because you aren't aware of its full impact?

Human beings aren't aware of a lot of things about themselves, that is why saying 'unconsciously' brings up so much. Even some action you would consider to be 'conscious' is really 'unconscious' because everything you do you don't know the full implications of.

How can someone benefit from an understanding of psychology?⁴

What psychological information could someone benefit by? How does self-help or therapy work? Those two questions are similar because through many self-help or therapy exercises someone gains a greater understanding of psychology. Therapy and psychology can help someone because they reflect more on their thoughts and their emotions and this helps to change them. There isn't any advanced psychology in non-civilized populations (at least I don't think since they don't have any education system), however they also don't have the same mental health problems.

But psychological information can be used for self-improvement as well. I should say that I am not a licensed psychologist, however I have a lot of knowledge and experience related to this. Clearly people learn from thinking about their emotions. Therapy or self-help is a focus on things you find important, like your mental condition. You could say that meditation works the same way - when you focus on yourself you can benefit.

Attitudes can take a long time to change. Emotion is complicated and dynamic. If you think about it, so is experience. But an attitude is simple - it is an attitude, everyone understands what an attitude is. It is a display of some bias or opinion about something. You have an attitude about something - you are displaying how you feel about that thing. You feel strongly about something, that is an attitude.

So it would seem to me that things can go wrong mentally, resulting in a mental problem, if the feelings you have toward certain things are too large. You could

⁴This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m44930/1.2/>>.

say that the person has an 'attitude problem'. But attitudes are simple. How the mind functions is much more complex. But people don't care about how the mind functions, they only care about things that are important to them like attitudes.

It is like when someone has a psychological problem, their attitude is too large. This large attitude causes the emotions that the person is experiencing to go out of balance. Emotions need to work properly, if you are feeling too strongly about one thing this could disrupt how you feel in general.

So the important question is - how could an understanding of psychology possibly decrease a strong attitude? That doesn't seem to make any sense, it would seem like the only way to decrease an attitude would be to show the person the opposite attitude, which isn't really that deep an understanding of psychology, it is just a basic simple idea.

So then you could really call anyone that understands that 'exposure to the proper influence over time decreases dangerous attitudes and feelings' is a psychologist.

Is psychology really that simple though? I know that there are lots of subtleties, but what are these subtleties about? People can be nice or mean in the wrong way. Depending on the circumstances, there are many different ways that someone can act. Each different way of acting socially could be analyzed and the person could work on that.

It seems simple when I say it that way, but that is basically what this is about. You go through an experience of practicing exposure to the proper behavior. You need to also consider the reason the person developed the strong attitude in the first place as well, however. The person probably wants that attitude to be strong, that is why he or she developed it in the first place, you need to consider that the person doesn't want to change and likes being violent.

I am not suggesting that everyone with a mental condition is violent. Maybe they are the opposite, it is just more clear when I use violence as the example.

That is why I said before that the emotions need to be properly balanced - because something like someone getting too violent can throw how they feel out of function.

But surely there is an aspect of self-improvement that an understanding of psychology can give you. It might help you understand emotion better. The question then is, couldn't someone get an understanding of emotion naturally or by doing practically any type of other work?

By studying psychology you make your natural understanding of psychology more conscious. For instance you might notice to yourself certain points of observation when you are in the real world observing how emotion functions. You might be able to describe with words better the nature of emotion or an emotional response instead of just simply having a feeling for it.

My Theories about Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy⁵

In 1991 Barnard and Teasdale created a multilevel theory of the mind called “Interacting Cognitive Subsystems,” (ICS). The ICS model is based on Barnard and Teasdale’s theory that the mind has multiple modes that are responsible for receiving and processing new information cognitively and emotionally. Barnard and Teasdale’s (1991) theory associates an individual’s vulnerability to depression with the degree to which he/she relies on only one of the mode of mind, inadvertently blocking the other modes. The two main modes of mind include the “doing” mode and “being” mode. The “doing” mode is also known as the driven mode. This mode is very goal-oriented and is triggered when the mind develops a discrepancy between how things are versus how the mind wishes things to be.⁶ The second main mode of mind is the “being” mode. “Being” mode, is not focused on achieving specific goals, instead the emphasis is on “accepting and allowing what is,” without any immediate pressure to change it.⁷

Based on Barnard and Teasdale’s (1991) model, mental health is related to an individual’s ability to disengage from one mode or to easily move among the modes of mind. Therefore, individuals that are able to flexibly move between the modes of mind based on the conditions in the environment are in the most favorable state. The ICS model theorizes that the “being” mode is the most likely mode of mind that will lead to lasting emotional changes. Therefore for prevention of relapse in depression, cognitive therapy must promote this mode. This

⁵This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m44932/1.1/>>.

⁶Segal, Z., Teasdale, J., Williams, M. (2002). *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*. New York: Guilford Press.

⁷Segal, Z., Teasdale, J., Williams, M. (2002). *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*. New York: Guilford Press. p.73

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