

August 2019
A CBBRe Symposium Presentation on...

CALMING NEUROTIC LOOPS: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

*Grounded in a new
Theory of Knowledge and
Unified Theory of Psychology*

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OVERVIEW

- Part I: The Theory of Knowledge “Backdrop”
- Part II: The College Student Mental Health Crisis
- Part III: Neurotic Loop Model of Anxiety and Depression
- Part IV: CALM MO: A reflective attitude that is Curious, Accepting, Loving-compassionate, and Motivated toward valued states of being



A decorative vertical bar on the left side of the slide, featuring a gradient from light purple to white, with several thin vertical lines and a cluster of five solid purple circles of varying sizes.

**PART I:
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE
UNIFIED FRAMEWORK**

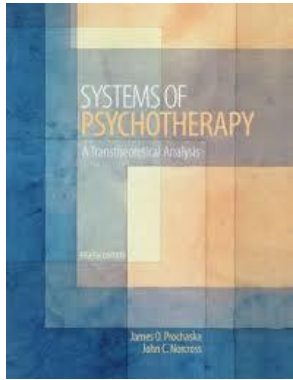


In graduate school, a “dream” emerged to develop a general approach to psychotherapy grounded in a coherent science of psychology.

Unfortunately, this is very far from the current state of affairs...



THE REALITY IS THAT PSYCHOTHERAPY IS A “JUNGLE PLACE”...



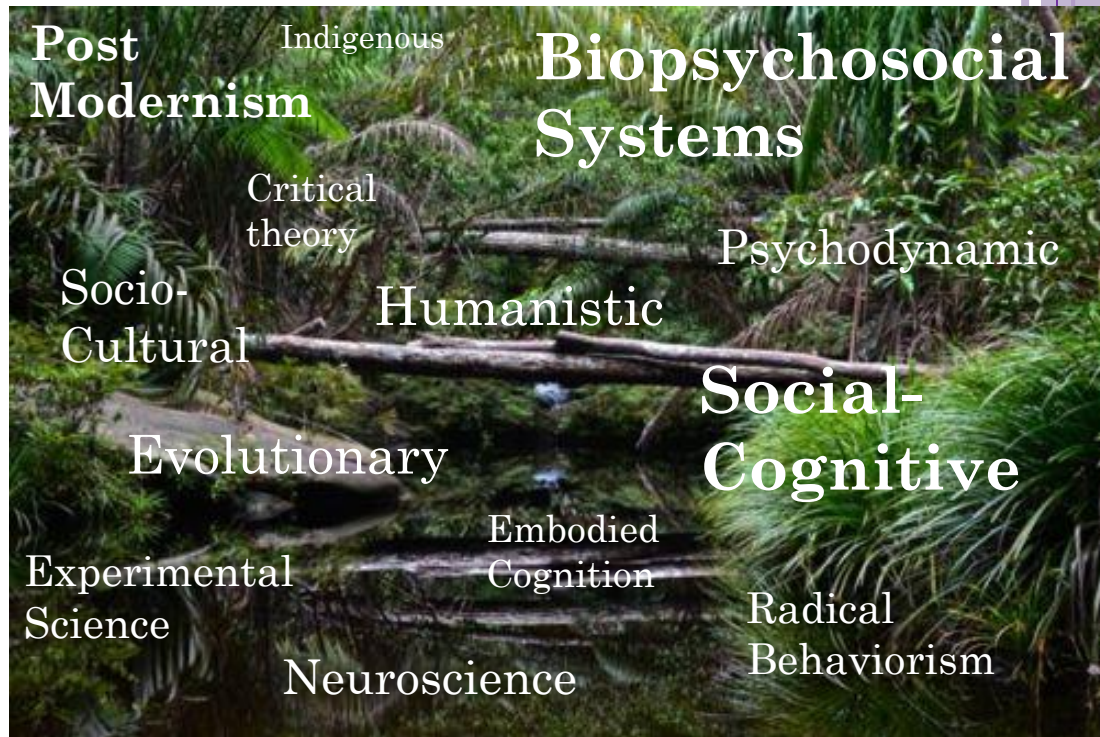
- The field of psychotherapy is enormously fragmented and staggered by over-choice.
- In 1959, 36 distinct systems
- In 1976, 130
- Today, over 500 (Prochaska & Norcross, 2014)



AS IS THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY IN GENERAL

Psychology

- Lacks a clear definition
- Lacks a clearly defined subject matter
- Struggles with its fundamentally identity (natural versus social science; science versus profession)
- Consists of many overlapping, competing mid-level paradigms that, when put together, generate a buzzing mass of confusion



AFTER STEPPING BACK AND TAKING A
BROAD LOOK AT THE FIELD, I REALIZED:

*NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THE @#.\$!
PSYCHOLOGY IS!*



MY TIME LINE

- 1993-1996 Became aware that psychotherapy and psychology were “fragmented”; began search for a more “unified” approach
- 1997-1998 Developed the “Tree of Knowledge System,” which mapped the universe into four different dimensions of behavioral complexity
- 1999-2003 Worked with A. T. Beck at Penn studying how to help folks who made a recent suicide attempt
- 2003 Published first major work on theory and came to JMU’s Combined-Integrated Clinical and School Doctoral Program
- 2005-2017 Directed JMU’s C-I Doc Program. Developed “UTUA Framework” as a meta-language system for psychology and psychotherapy
- 2011-present Psychology Today Blog called *Theory of Knowledge*
- 2018-present Founded Theory of Knowledge Society.
Exploring “Metamodernism” as next wave of thought.



The ToK/UTUA Framework

- The **ToK/UTUA Framework** is scientific humanistic philosophy for the 21st Century. The ToK stands for the **Tree of Knowledge System**; **UTUA** is a combination of the “**Unified Theory**” of psychology (**UT**) and “**Unified Approach**” (**UA**) to psychotherapy
- It is the first and only knowledge system that clearly spells out and then solves [*the problem of psychology*](#).
- It achieves this solution in part via the recognition of four different dimensions of behavioral complexity (or planes of existence): 1) Matter; 2) Life; 3) Mind; and 4) Culture.
- It provides a “meta-language system” that is consilient across the following domains: (a) objective behavioral science; (b) subjective phenomenological lifeworld/lifequest; and (c) an intersubjective moral universal vision for living the good life.

The UTUA Framework Consists of 8 Key Ideas

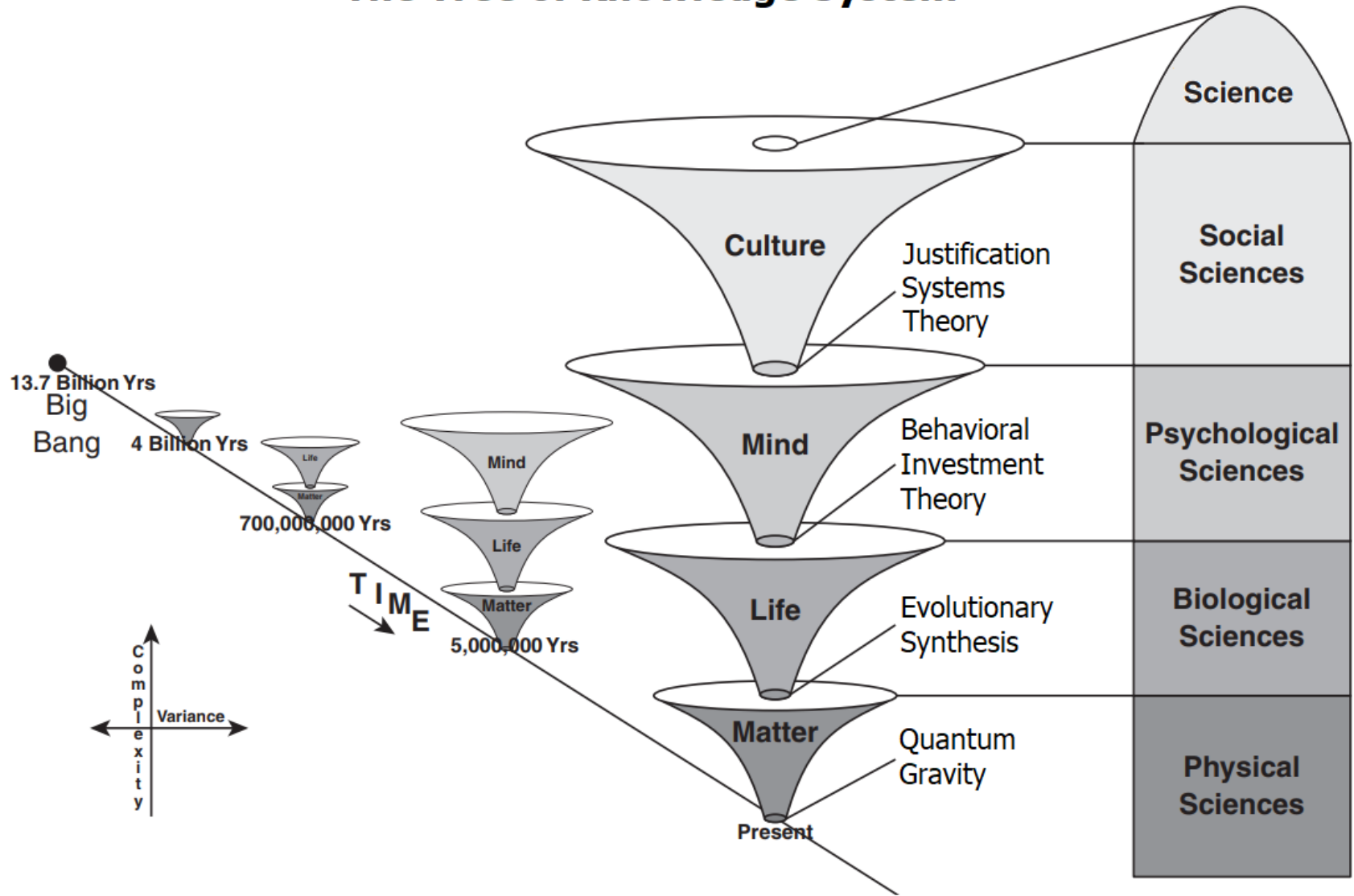
Unified Theory of Psychology

- Tree of Knowledge System
- Justification Systems Theory
- Behavioral Investment Theory
- The Influence Matrix

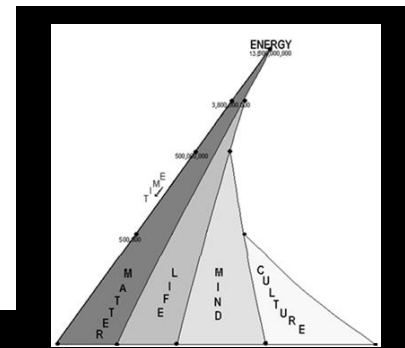
Unified Approach to Psychotherapy

- CAST
- Character Wheel
- Nested Model of Well-Being
- CALM MO

The Tree of Knowledge System



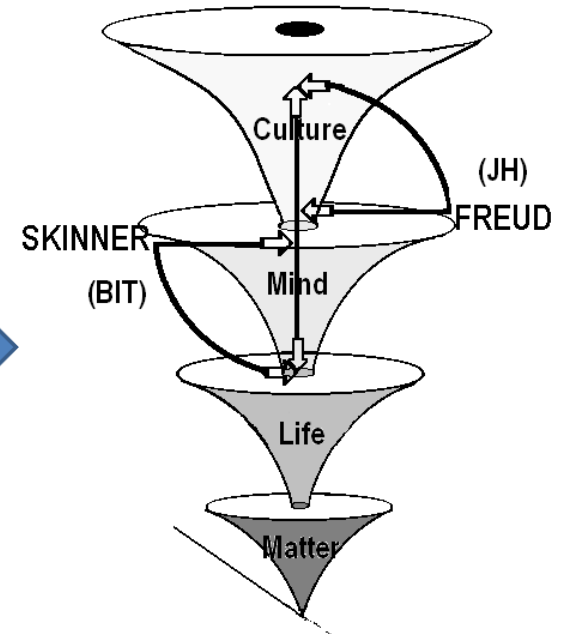
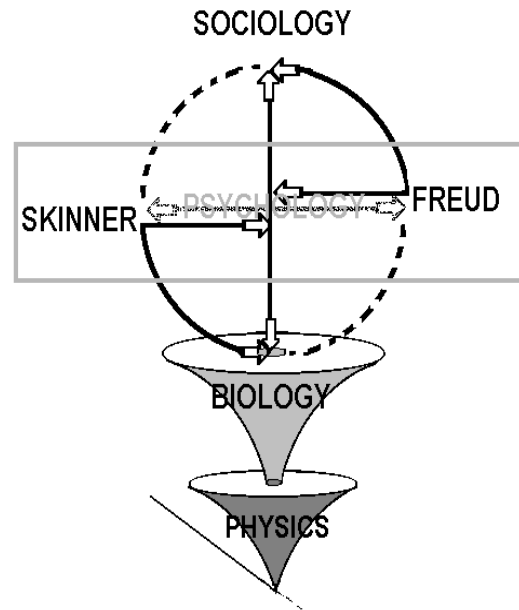
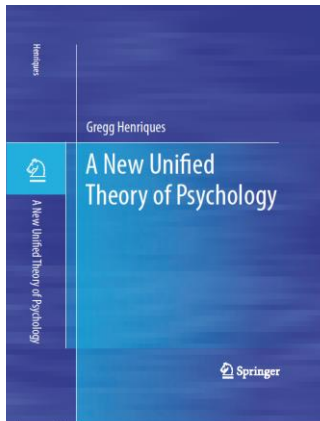
The Periodic Table of Behavior maps the evolution of behavioral complexity studied by the sciences on a “Levels x Dimensions” Taxonomy using the logic of the Tree of Knowledge System



The Periodic Table of Behavior

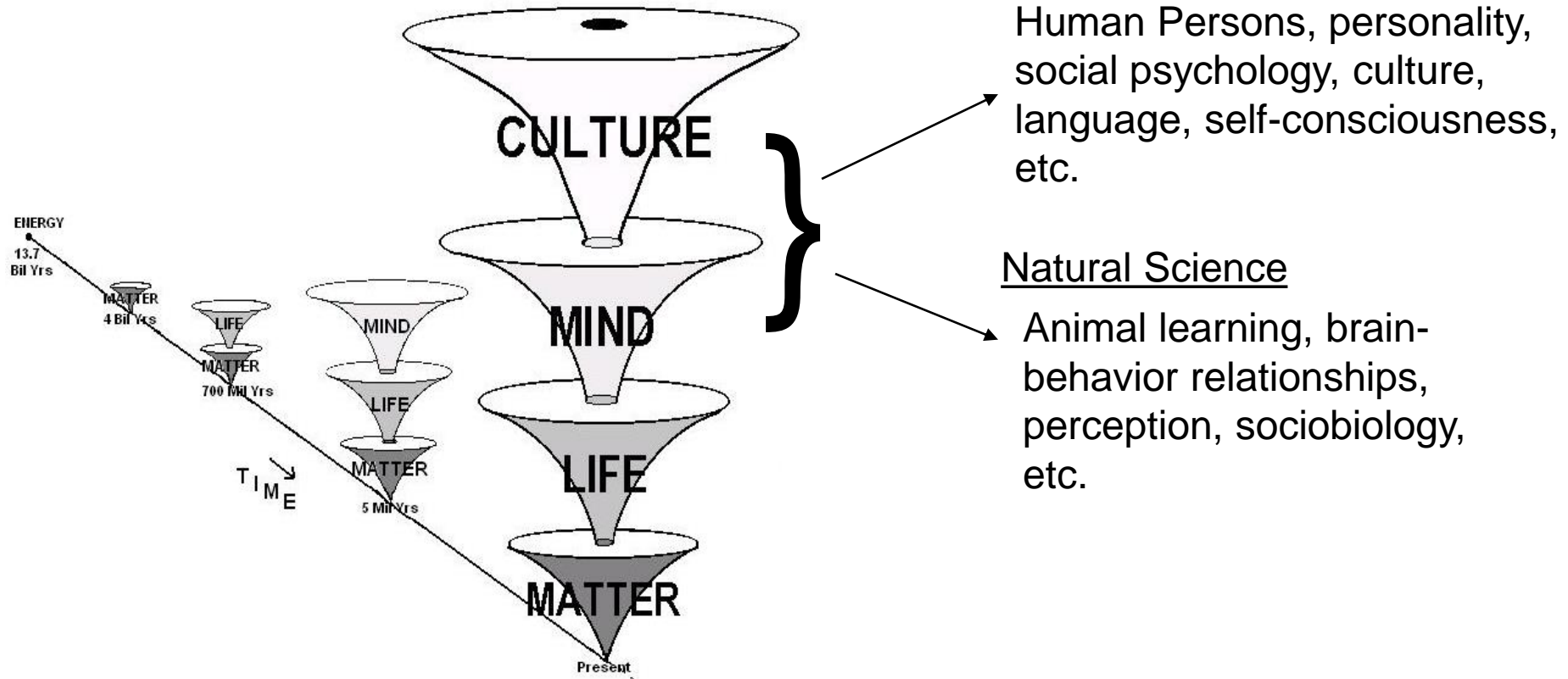
		Dimensions of Complexity			
		MATTER	LIFE	MIND	CULTURE
		Physical	Biological	Psychological	Social
Object-Field Relations	Context of Behavior	Field	Ecology	Environment	Society
	Behavioral Entity	Object	Organism	Animal	Human Person
Three Primary Levels of Object Complexity (Part, Whole, Group)	Groups of Wholes	Molecule	Multicell/Colony	Family-Group	Family-Community-Nation
	Fundamental Whole	Atom	Cell	Mind-Brain System	Self-Consciousness System
	Fundamental Part	Particle	Gene	Neural Network	Symbolic Justification

The Unified Theory of Psychology

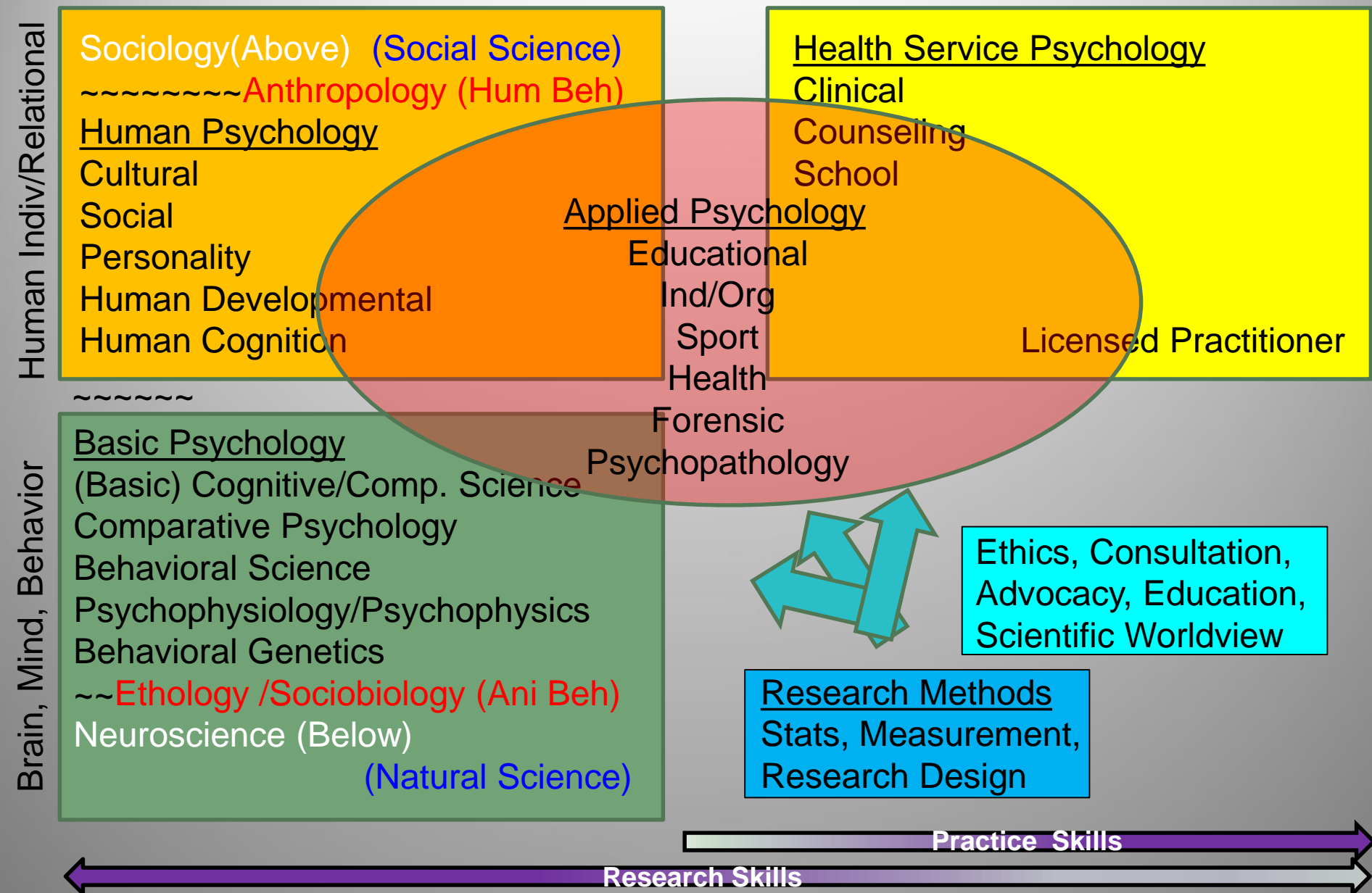


The ToK System, JUST, BIT and the IM provide a way to solve the heretofore unsolvable problem of psychology and forge a consilient link between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

Psychology's Puzzle: Two Subject Matters, One Science

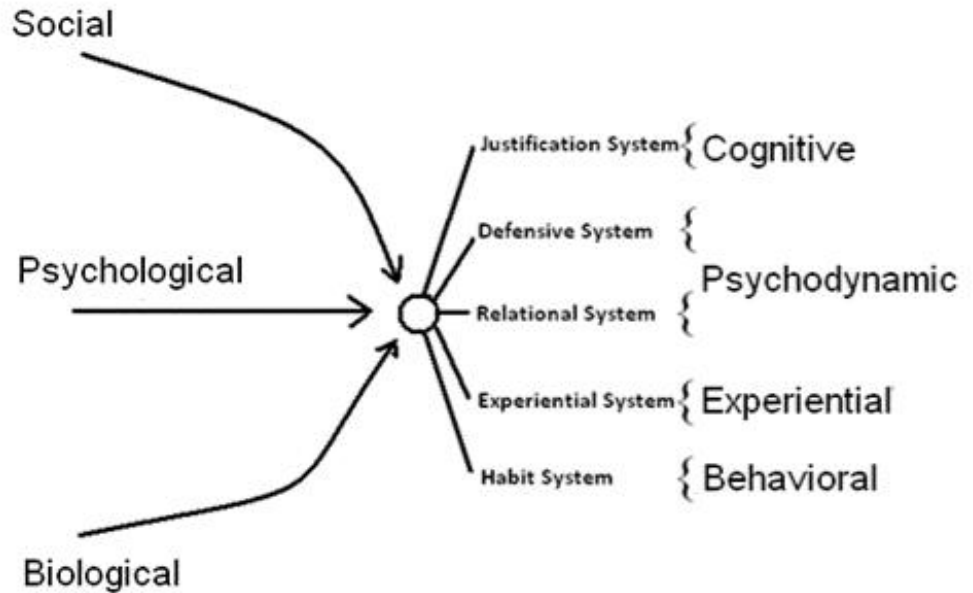


A Map of Psychology



The Unified Approach to Psychotherapy

The Unified Approach (UA) shifts the focus from psychology to psychotherapy. It utilizes the Unified Theory (UT) to generate a morally grounded integrative conception of human character and well-being that enables the comprehensive assessment of functioning and guidance in fostering change toward more adaptive and valued states of being.



CALM MO

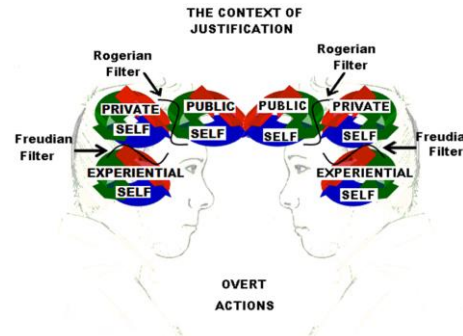
CALM MO is an integrative approach to psychological mindfulness that guides individuals to cultivate a responsive, reflective attitude toward conflict and distressing emotions.

CALM MO represents a significant advance in psychological mindfulness because it is grounded in a comprehensive model of human consciousness and relationships that guides individuals in understanding why mindfulness is hard, why it helps, and the domains of consciousness to focus on.

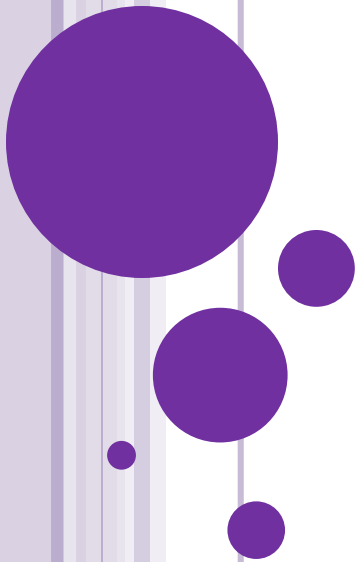


Meta-cognitive Observer

- Curious
- Accepting
- Loving/Compassionate
- Motivated to learn and grow toward valued states of being



**PART II:
THE COLLEGE STUDENT
(OR YOUTH)
MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**



FOUR GREAT CRISES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

1. The Techno-Environmental Crisis

Climate change, resource depletion and mass extinction, and weapons of mass destruction

2. The Digital-Globalization Crisis

The digital world is changing everything

3. The Meaning Crisis

We are deeply confused and conflicted about what is real and good

4. The Mental Health Crisis

We are seeing increases in mental health problems, especially in our youth



s://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/ser James Madison University -... x

Future Students | Current Students | Parents | Alumni | Faculty & Staff | Community | A-Z Index | Campus Directory | Maps

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY | About | Academics | Admissions | News | Connect | Give

Services for Students

JMU Home / Counseling Center / Services for Students

- Counseling Center
 - Services for Students
 - Make An Appointment
 - Treatment Programs
 - Individual Counseling
 - Group Counseling
 - Crisis Assistance
 - Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program (STEP)
 - Psychiatric Services
 - Consultation Services
 - Outreach Services

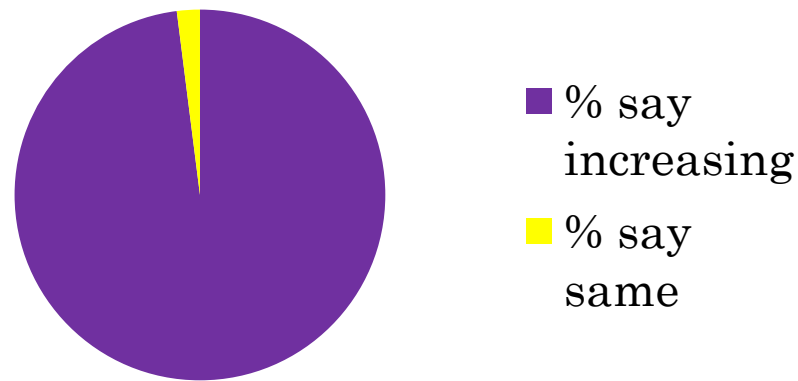


JMU's Counseling Center requested funds to expand because they had seen a dramatic increase in demand, up almost 200% over the last decade.



**95-98% OF COLLEGE COUNSELING DIRECTORS
SAY THE DEMAND FOR SERVICES AT THEIR
CENTER HAS INCREASED OVER THE PAST 10
YEARS**

Increasing



- They report that more students have difficulty coping with everyday stressors
- They report increases in the severity of the problems (i.e., more severe mental illness and personality disorders)



HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS

- The American Freshman annual survey in 2015 survey found the fewest numbers of freshmen describing themselves as emotionally healthy. **For the first time ever, LESS THAN HALF described themselves as being emotionally healthy and not needing or interested in receiving help.**
- 34% of college freshmen report feeling frequently overwhelmed by stress. The number of women reporting this was 42.5%, more than double the levels when the question was first asked in 1985 (18%).

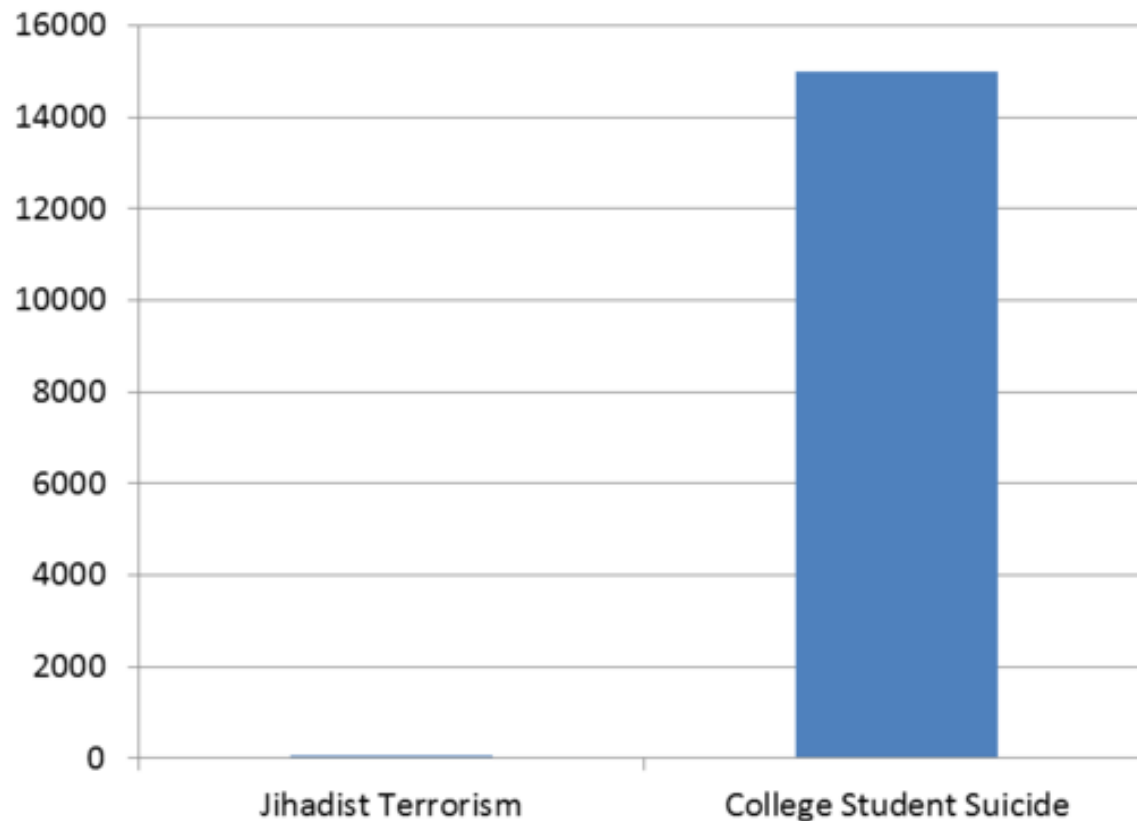


INCREASING LEVELS OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR

- According to the American College Health Association (ACHA) the suicide rate among young adults, ages 15-24, has tripled since the 1950s and suicide is currently the second most common cause of death among college students. That study also found **9.4% of students reported seriously considering attempted suicide** at least once in a 12 month period, a marked increase from several decades ago.
- **More than 1,000 college students commit suicide each year**

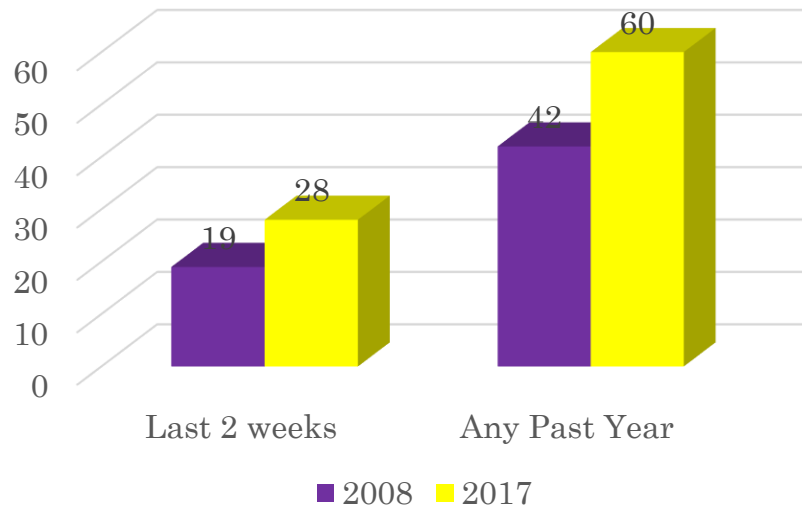


MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: NUMBER OF DEATHS ON US SOIL BETWEEN 2002 AND 2015

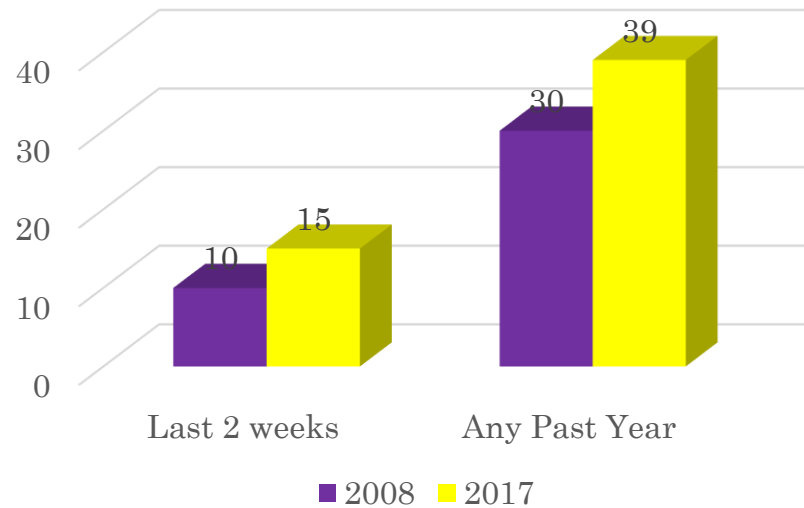


Comparing College Students: 2008 to 2017

% Experiencing Overwhelming Anxiety

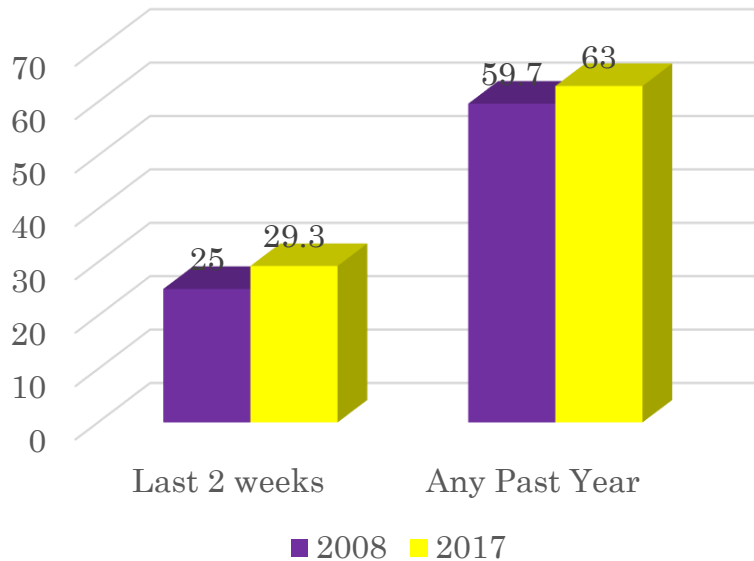


% Experiencing Depression Such it is Difficult to Function

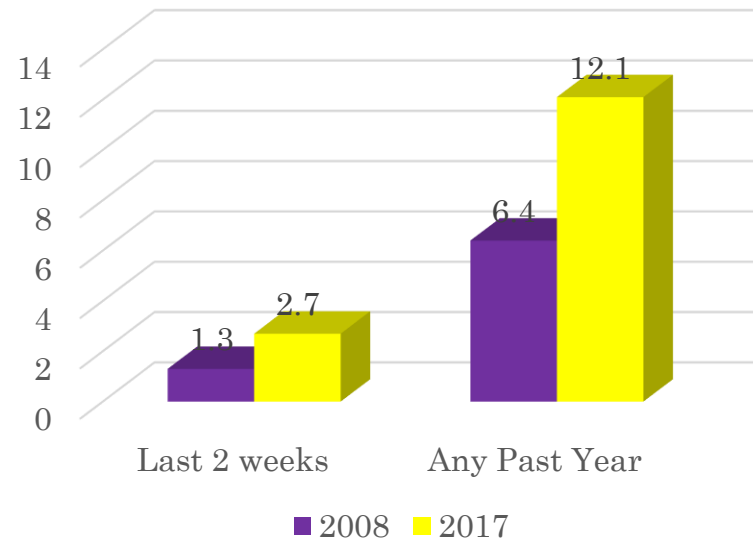


COMPARING COLLEGE STUDENTS: 2008 TO 2017

% Very Lonely



% Considering Suicide



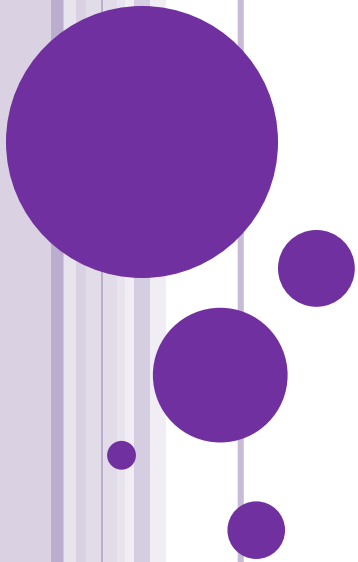
IN SUMMARY THE DATA POINT TO A...

*COLLEGE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH
CRISIS*

WHEREAS IN THE 1970S OR 1980S, **MAYBE**
1 IN 10 STUDENTS HAD “**CLINICALLY**
SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS”, NOW THE NUMBER
IS **1 IN 3**.

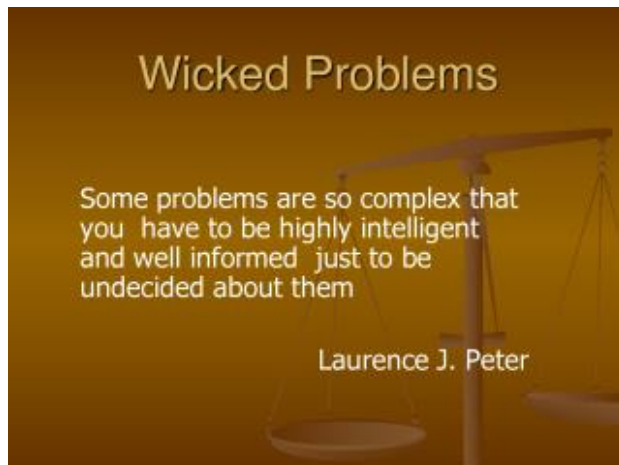


*WHAT MIGHT BE CAUSING THE
COLLEGE STUDENT MENTAL
HEALTH CRISIS?*



THE CSMHC IS LIKELY A “WICKED PROBLEM”

- Wicked problems have multiple causes, with many variables and many interrelated feedback loops



Here is a collection of possible causes and related issues...



PART OF THE CHANGE IS A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE!

- Decrease in stigma
- Increase in openness to talk about distress
- Increase in awareness
- Increase in willingness and desire to obtain mental health services

Some argue that *attitude change is all it is:*

- [The Big Myth About Teenage Anxiety](#)
 - NY Times
- [The Non-Existent “Epidemic” of Mental Illness in the U.S.](#)
 - Robert Pies



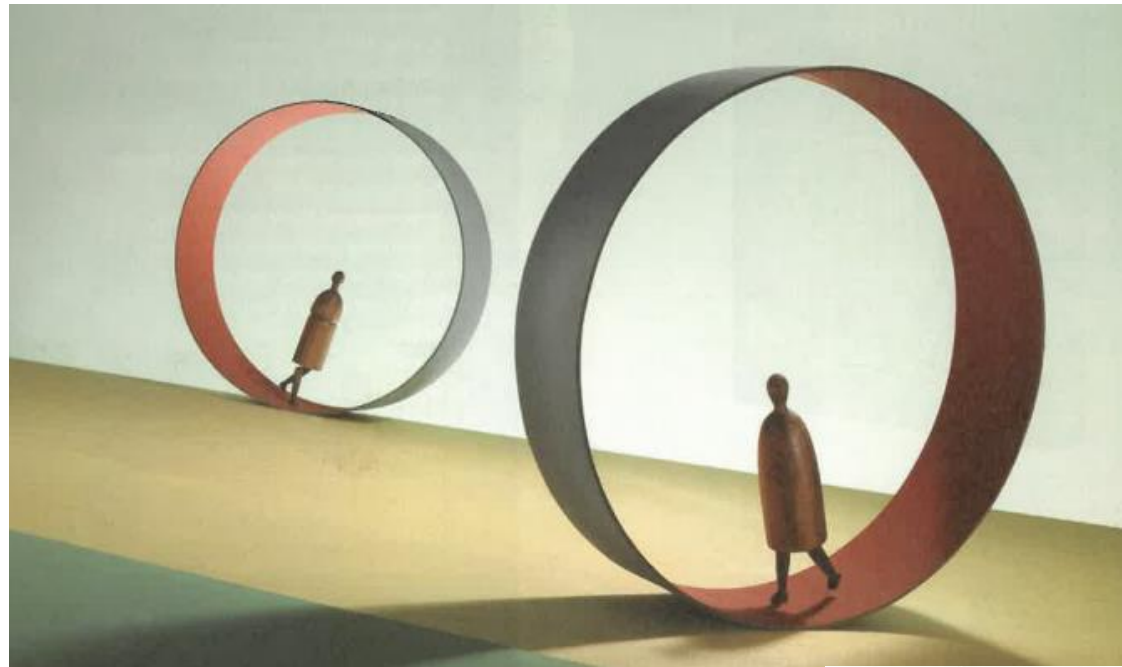
FOUR LIKELY REASONS FOR THE INCREASE

1. An increase in “safteyism” and harm avoidance
2. A decrease in larger moral visions for character building and shared positive values
3. Social fracturing and loneliness
4. Lifestyle changes associated with technology and social media



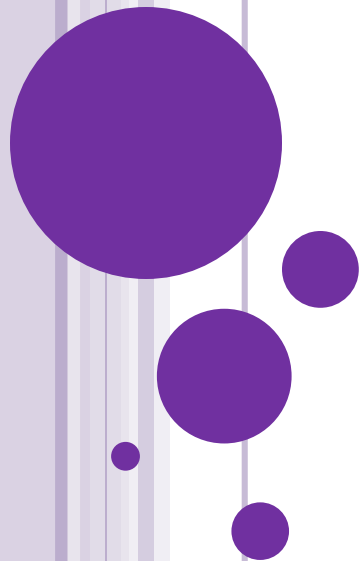
PART III: NEUROTIC LOOPS

Negative reactions to negative feelings




The Root of Suffering

How to fight the neurotic
loop of negative reactions to
negative feelings. **BY GREGG
HENRIQUES, PH.D.**



NEUROTIC CONDITIONS

- Struggling with their psychological well-being and are feeling more stress and distress than desired.
 - Typically, there are problems in the following areas:
 - (1) heightened feelings of negative emotion, especially anxiety and/or depression, and often other emotions, such as shame, guilt or anger;
 - (2) low or lowered life satisfaction;
 - (3) stressful lives and difficulty coping with stress; and
 - (4) they have problems with their **identity** (low self-esteem, high self-criticism, confusion about self) and **relationships** (poor relationship quality, high dependency or enmeshment, loneliness or isolation, alienation).
- 

COMMON DSM DIAGNOSES (OFTEN CALLED INTERNALIZING CONDITIONS)

- Clients in the neurotic cluster would typically receive a diagnosis (or combination) of:
 - Adjustment Disorder, with various specifications
 - An Unspecified Anxiety or Depressive Disorder
 - An Anxiety Disorder, such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder or Social Anxiety, mild to moderate severity
 - A Major Depressive Disorder, mild to moderate severity

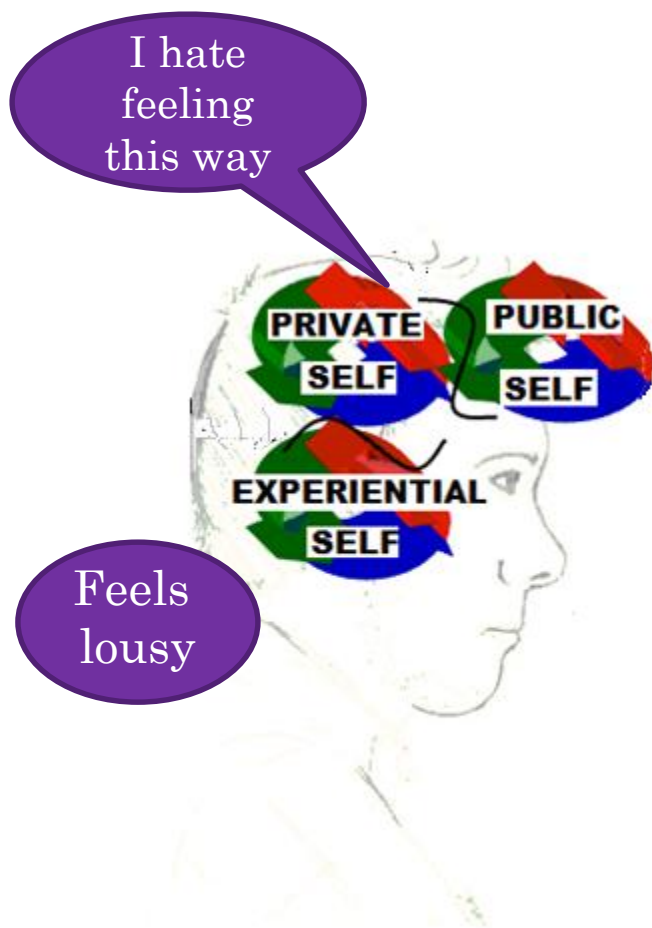


KEY ELEMENTS THAT GO INTO NEUROTIC CONDITIONS

- Trait Neuroticism (and biopsychological temperament and predisposition)
- Adverse childhood experiences and traumatic psychological injuries
- Excessive stressors in current environment
- Limited psychosocial nourishment
- Life skill deficits
- Poor coping with negative emotions and relationships



NEUROTIC LOOPS



Neurotic loops involve a conflicted relationship between the experiential self and the private narrator regarding feelings.

The narrator attempts to avoid, critique or control the experiential system to drive the feelings away.

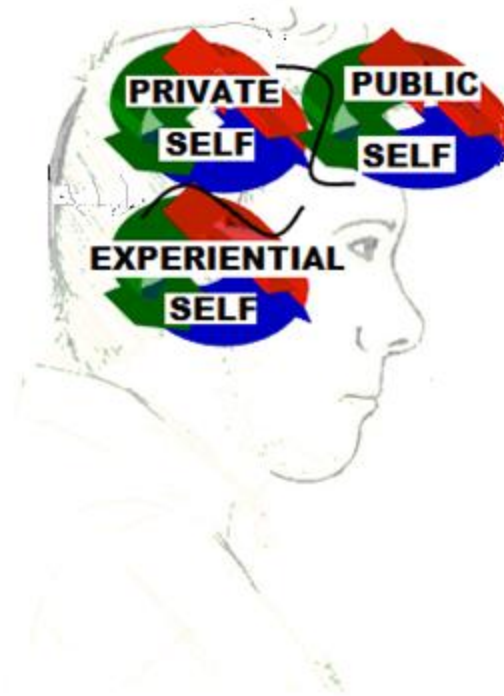
This results in an inner struggle, a failure to integrate and learn from the feelings and a vicious feedback loop of increasing distress.



THE UPDATED “TRIPARTITE MODEL” OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

DOMAINS

- 1) The **Experiential Self**
- 2) The **Private Self**
- 3) The **Public Self**



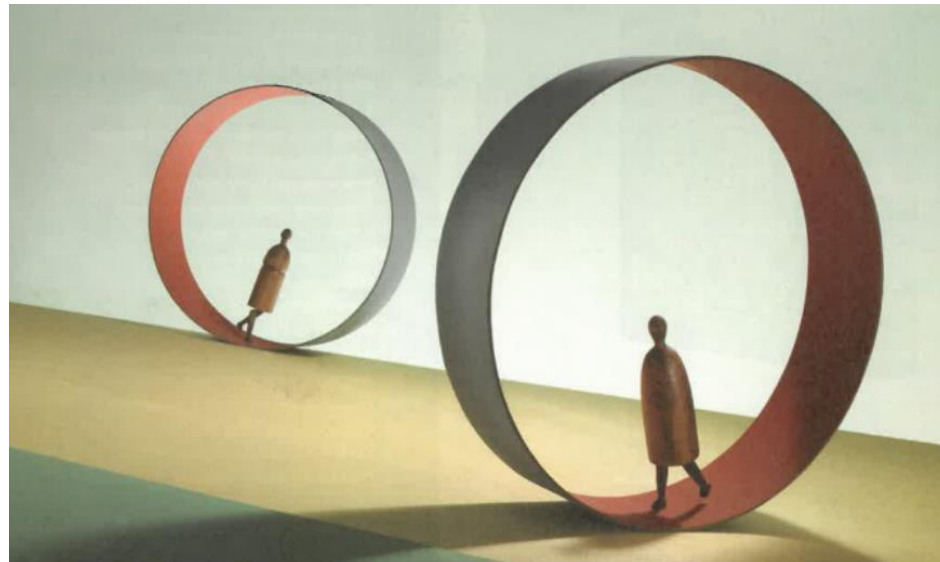
NEUROTIC LOOPS

- Stress or psychosocial injury activates significant negative emotion (especially in high TN folks) and the individual does not have the resiliency skills to adaptively adjust.
- Instead, the individual attempts to cope with the negative feelings via escape (avoids, blocks, distracts) or via active critical self-conscious control (the individual gets perfectionistic, rigid, self-critical, defensive). These attempts to adapt fail to address the problem, but instead create more problems, resulting in a vicious cycle.



NEUROTIC LOOPS

- In short, negative reactivity to negative feelings (triggered by negative situations that the individual is particularly reactive or sensitive to) is the central neurotic loop process that drives folks into distressing conditions in which they feel trapped.



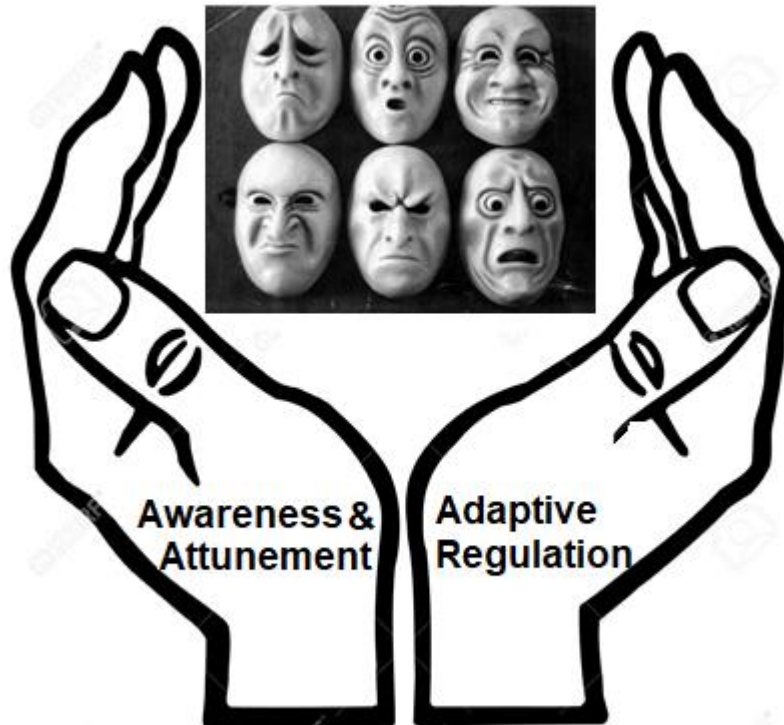
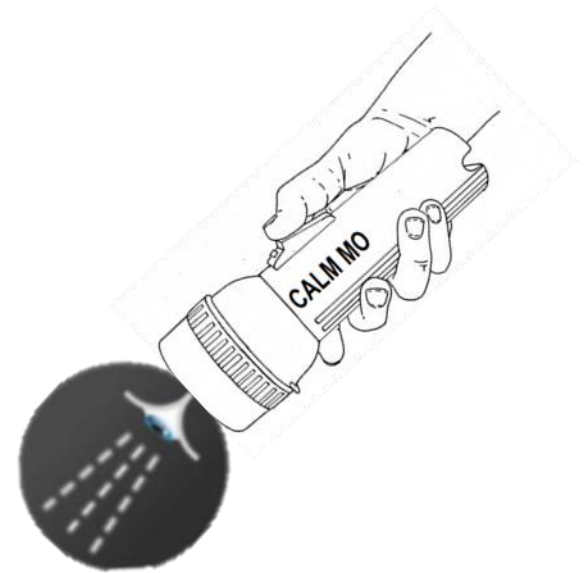
THE NEUROTIC LOOP MODEL OF EMOTIONAL CONTROL AND AVOIDANCE

An inner critic that has negative attitudes about negative feelings and tries to escape them

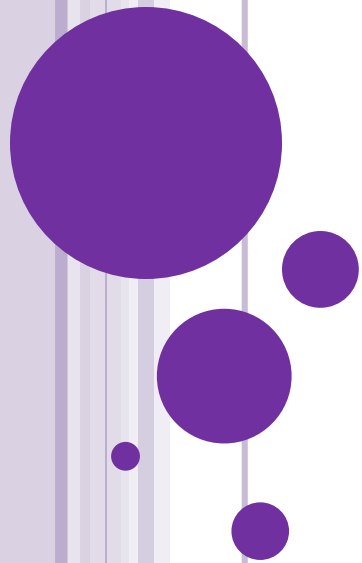
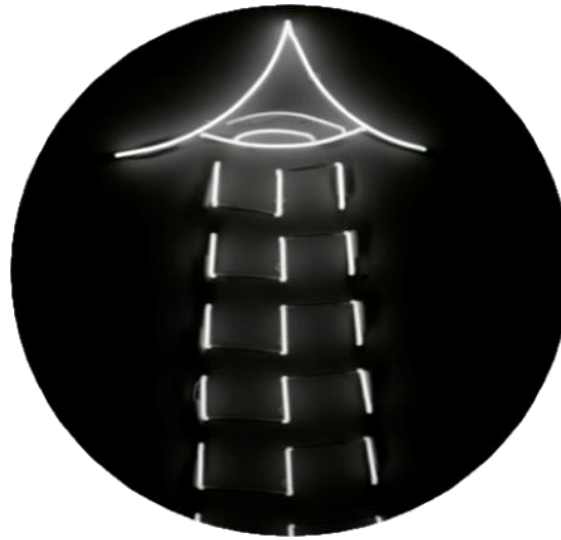


THE EMOTIONAL SWEET SPOT

**An attitude that is curious,
accepting, loving/compassionate,
and motivated toward valued
states of being**



PART IV: CULTIVATING A CALM MO



THE BASICS OF CALM MO

- Mindfulness is one of the most important developments in (Western) mental health practice in the last two decades. It has captured the attention of many mental health professionals from across the different paradigms (e.g., CBT, positive psych, interpersonal neurobiology, psychodynamic, emotion focused)



WHAT ARE THE CENTRAL INGREDIENTS TO MINDFULNESS?

- Awareness of one's inner experiences (thoughts, images, feelings, sensations etc.)
- A nonjudgmental acceptance

Skills move individuals from mindless reactivity to a mindful responsiveness to the situation

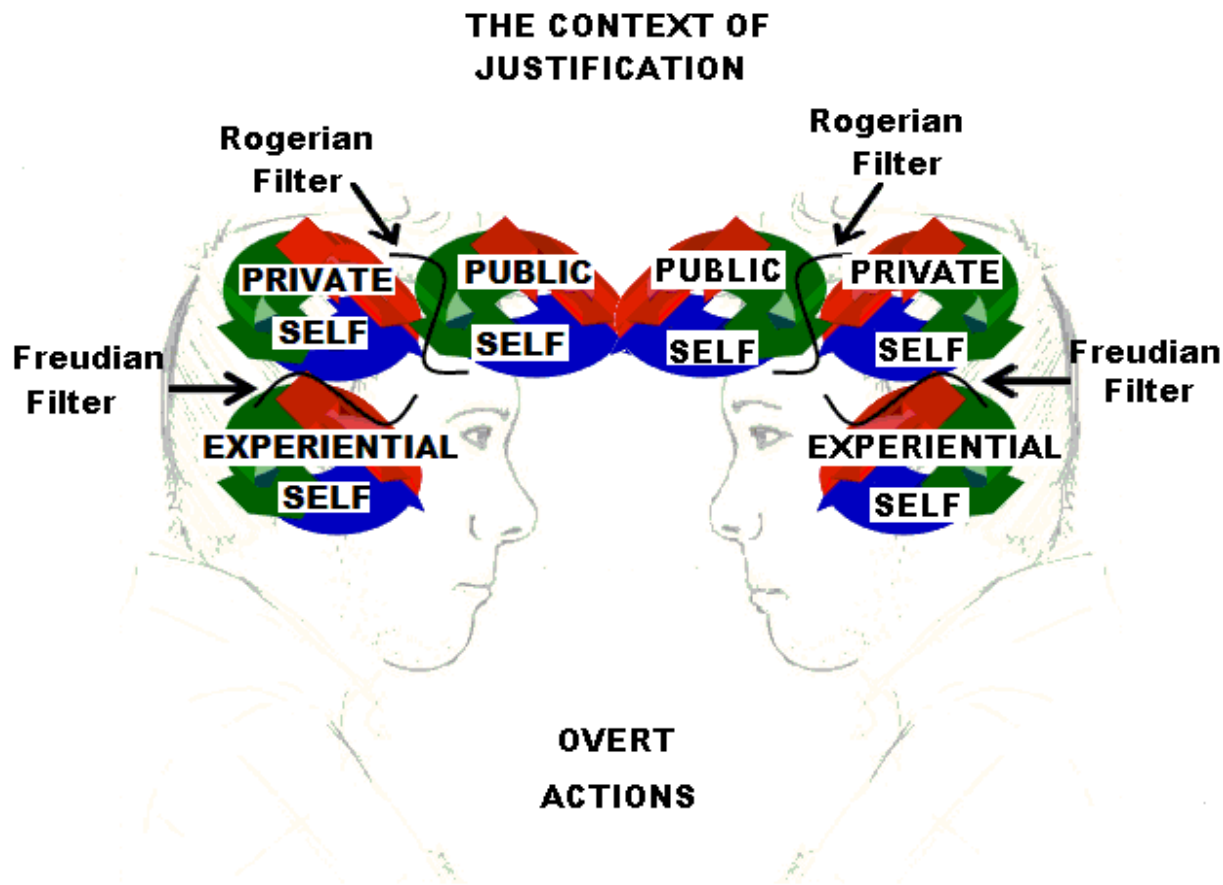


WHAT IS MISSING FROM MANY MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS?

- A clear articulation of human consciousness, which provides an explanation for why humans are so often not mindful and why a mindful attitude, in the right context, can be helpful.



THE UNIFIED APPROACH PROVIDES A CLEAR **TRIPARTITE MAP OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS**



DOMAINS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

PRIVATE

The private self-talk which is narrating or scripting what the experiences mean and



“PUBLIC”

The imagined audience that might be witnessing what is happening



The feelings, images or thoughts that are “backstage”



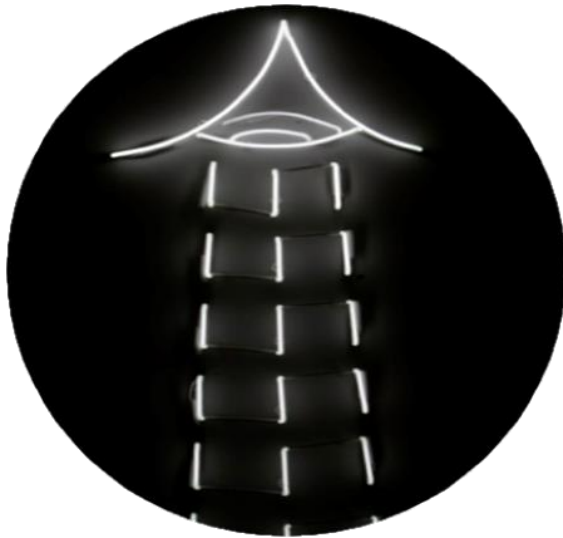
The immediate experience of perceptions, urges, emotions, images

EXPERIENTIAL



CALM MO provides that, links it to a broader model of psychology and cuts across the key ingredients into an easy to remember and teach acronym.

A C.A.L.M. ATTITUDE FOR THE M. O.



- Curious
- Accepting
- Loving/Compassionate
- Motivated toward Valued States of Being

Meta-cognitive Observer
(also useful is Modus Operandi)



THE C STANDS FOR CURIOSITY

Curiosity is the desire to know more. It means taking the stance of wondering, and seeking understanding. This means that an individual adopts a questioning attitude, first and foremost. Thus, the curious portion of the M.O. asks “what, where, how, when, why” questions about the key domains of one’s psyche. The stance of curiosity sets the stage for awareness and attunement to what is actually happening. Many folks short circuit this process by impulsively reacting negatively and attempt to control and escape from feelings prior to understanding them at all.



THE A STANDS FOR ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance refers to the ability to be with the pain and the awkwardness without freaking out and without harsh judgment. This is hard, but with practice it can be done. It is connected to Buddhist insights regarding suffering. The first principle in Buddhism is Life is Suffering. The Buddha realized that to run from suffering, to pretend it is not there, to try and jam it “back stage,” or to control it in other ways does not lead to escape but leads instead to more suffering.



THE L STANDS FOR LOVING COMPASSION

The “L”, which stands for *Loving Compassion* toward self and others. It recognizes the basic wisdom that people have dignity and are worthy of respect, and that this is a starting point for constructing in a just world. It also means adopting the stance of hoping that people flourish and have high well-being. And we feel compassion or sympathy for those who are genuinely suffering. The attitude is cultivated because most people at their core are generally (with only a few exceptions) doing the best they can.



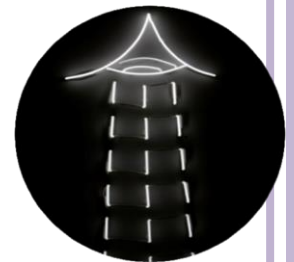
THE **M** STANDS FOR MOTIVATED TO LEARN AND GROW TOWARD VALUED STATES OF BEING

The “M” which stands for *Motivated to learn and grow* toward valued states of being. This refers to the deliberative, self-conscious values individuals have about who they want to be over the long term (i.e., kind, courageous, secure). This element allows individuals to separate their feelings from the impulsive, reactive instincts and orient toward activity that will be adaptive over the long term.

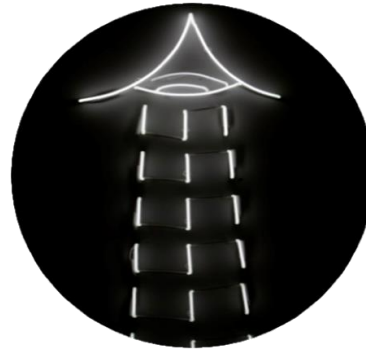


LEARNING TO ACTIVATE AN “M O”

- Like most mindfulness approaches, CALM MO teaches clients about the meta-cognitive stance.
- Clients learn to “activate their MO,” which means to step outside their streams of experience, narration, and activity and to reflect on the process of what is happening from a more distant-observer stance.
- This is a skill that takes time and development. It can be particularly hard to do during times of strong negative feelings and conflict. However, these are the times that activating a CALM MO can be most important.
- The CALM MO symbol shown in the corner is of a mind’s eye that is looking down over the situation from above and observing what is happening.



A META-COGNITIVE VIEW ON THE TRIPARTITE SYSTEMS



This is your
Meta-cognitive Observer

What am I
narrating?



What am I
imagining others
might think?



What am I
experiencing?



STEPS TOWARD DEVELOPING A CALM MO

1

Teach individuals about the various domains of conscious experience and explain conflict

2

Help articulate how to cultivate a meta-cognitive observer

3

Learn the CALM Acronym, while holding the MO

4

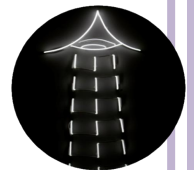
Begin to develop key questions or statements to cultivate curiosity, acceptance, loving compassion and values

5

Learn from examples and role play possible situations and practice in minorly stressful real life conflicts

6

Be able to automatically enter space in day to day living, learn to activate even in times of intense conflict



THE PATH TO CALMLY REVERSING NEUROTIC LOOPS

- Develop a rich understanding of the individuals' history (key moments, injuries), current situation, temperament, coping, strengths, and valued states of being.
- Put those pieces together to envision a path toward adaptive living
- Identify problems that can be addressed. Most commonly, the dynamics pertain to negative emotions and the meaning of those emotions in the context of relationships and past key events.
- CALM MO provides the guide for the healthy metabolizing of negative feelings. Must practice so that it becomes the person's "M O" when experiencing distress



IN SUMMARY...

- We need new metatheoretical frameworks for the 21st Century as we are facing a unique set of problems that require global changes
- One such problem is our mental health, especially the mental health of our youth
- We are not cultivating mentally strong tendencies and neurotic loops drive much anxiety and depression
- CALM MO is a component of a new unified theory of psychology that provides an easy-to-learn model that integrates the best principles of adaptive living and emotional functioning



LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO FOSTER WELL-BEING AND MINDFUL SOLUTIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



Questions?