

BUD

I want to discover how we form connections with others, objects, and ourselves. I uncovered theories that explain attachment to people or things, the perception and recognition of experience, and the way we assign meanings that are unique from those created by others.

To represent the interaction between two individuals, I constructed a tree - a form of life that relies on both internal and external factors in order to sustain itself. Though largely barren, the tree also has eighty plaster pods, simulating growths, filled with objects that can be assigned meaning based off of the memory or perception associated with this object by the viewer. After picking a pod off the tree, the viewer is then meant to drop and break it to reveal an item that they choose to either keep or leave as part of the sculpture.

No viewer will have the same perception of the object inside the pod or of the connection they have to the tree as another, just as an individual will not have the same meaning and sense of importance towards an object as another, as described in the object relations theory. This work is a simulation of how mental processes engage a psychological connection to a subject in an external environment.

Celia

In May, I learned of my father's early cancer. In July, I was told of my dog's unexpected death. In light of these recent events, I became increasingly more focused on how I value the relationships I have with the things around me. Everything I was surrounded by became more important, as if my eyes had been opened to the possibility of even greater loss. Suddenly, I needed to understand why I felt such closeness to all things around me. Having previously researched how we are all connected through genetics and evolution, I decided to research the mentality and psychology of growth of human development to better understand how the brain deals with internal and external environments.

THE BRAIN

The brain is the most complex organ in the human body, consisting of three functional parts: cognitive, conative, and affective. The cognitive section consists of all mental abilities and processes related to knowledge, attention, memory and working memory, judgment and evaluation, reasoning and computation, problem solving and decision-making, comprehension, and production of language. Essentially, the cognitive part of the brain measures intelligence. The conative section produces natural tendencies, impulses, and a striving or directed effort. This part of the brain regulates how one acts. The affective section of the brain deals with emotions. These components all contribute to the function of that being, acting as key parts in understanding mental perceptions and physical interactions. How are we able to form connections to others, objects, and ourselves?

DEVELOPMENT

Proceeding in my initial research, the concept of psychoanalysis came to my attention. Psychoanalysis has been described as a theory of mind, and traditionally it seeks to explain human relationships on the basis of mental processes. A large part of psychoanalysis includes theories of objects, the development of "self", emotions, and behavior. The basis behind these theories involves the early development of the human brain from birth, to infancy, and beyond. Childhood experience influences adult mental functioning, due to the fact that the human personality is subject to and evolves from the individual in interaction with the environment, according to Daniel N. Stern in his book, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. These past experiences are vital to a maturing personality because they provide the individual with a way to grow and learn from previous events. They also create "behavior patterns that change to maintain attachment to others." Although the individual may not recognize significance in some experiences, the brain acts consciously and unconsciously to understand these interactions between body and brain and process them into emotions and behaviors. This process parallels the theory of object relations, a person or thing that becomes psychologically important, affecting that individual's emotions and behaviors, while also developing a "sense of self." My research aims to identify how the brain creates meaning and importance for the different objects, people, or presences in one's life. Using emotions as a focal point, I intend to understand the specific feelings directed towards these different things. Through my research, I hope to expose the intricate neural processes that affect how we interact with our environment and ourselves.

Psychoanalysis revolves around the many relationships an individual has with their surroundings, being both mental and physical. In *Psychoanalysis: The Major Concepts*, all forms of growth pass through the conscious and unconscious mind. The brain relies upon "thought, perception, memory, and experience" to understand an individual's surroundings and certain sym-

bolic references in an environment. Symbols have been described as indirect representations of hidden ideas, and those ideas correspond with different emotions. These symbols have perceptual and sensory roots, meaning they can be both seen and felt. When an individual goes through an experience or is immersed in an environment, they physically see things, and then mentally perceive them. Sigmund Freud notes that “symbols always indirectly represent disguised ideas and associated affects.” This relates to the complex system of consciousness noted by Gerald M. Edelman in his book, *Wider than the Sky*, in which the “first person experience is distinctly different from the third person description of that experience.” Edelman means that living through, or seeing and being in an environment, is unlike the remembering, or perceiving, of that same situation or environment after it has happened. Our brain’s ability to grasp one’s feelings in relation to a perceived object proves that we have the potential to establish an infinite amount of connections to other things.

The most obvious relationships, the ones with other people, are incredibly influential in the development of our internal self, influencing our personality, emotions, and desires. As soon as we are born, we are presented with a maternal bond; connecting to our mother through breastfeeding, we establish the first firm relationship with another person. Infants actively seek out and anticipate the exchange of dialogue, which is why an infant has such a strong attachment to a maternal figure, according to Stern. The mother becomes the most important love object, establishing a certain “oneness” between themselves and their child. The infant’s gaze and smile are also symbols of communication; their brains learn about behavior and show responses to maintenance and enrichment from the mother, gaining the dialogue that they seek.

Advancing into the four to five month age of infancy, the child gains an interest and awareness in the external world surrounding them. They gain basic hand, eye, and mouth coordination, and still rely on the mother for a sense of safety and well-being. As the child grows and ages, they show an even greater interest in the outside world, also developing a sense of self-awareness and identity. Because family relationships are usually the first that a child encounters, they are one of the most important. Family relationships, as said by Robert L. Tyson, M.D., and Phyllis Tyson, are the nurturing interactions that greatly influence a child. Children who don’t develop these crucial bonds are known as “feral children”. Feral children are individuals who live in isolation from human contact from a very young age, or have little or no experience of human care, behavior, or human language. Feral children often cannot communicate and have developmental disabilities. As children develop attachments in relationships, their behaviors change in order to sustain them.

The behaviors toward a specific person are fueled by the significance or importance of them in the individual’s mind. As we develop from infancy on, our behaviors become less explosive and more differentiated and controlled. Behaviors are also influenced by feeling and emotion, or affect, which are associated with, but are not the same as, the idea, person, or thing that evokes or accompanies it. Contrary to this, every idea, person, or thing does evoke an accompanying affect. This theory is called object relations, and can be used to understand all relationships in connection with the significance of them in an individual’s mind. Not only does this theory help to uncover the importance of other people in one’s life, but it also deals with the emotional connections that one has to items and psychologically significant entities. For example, I once watched a video of blooming flowers that was accompanied by classical music when I was sitting with my dog. I now associate blooming flowers and classical music with my dog, which evoke feelings of loss and recollection. Behaviors allow us to accurately react to the outside

world while being able to better understand ourselves through the emotions that accompany them.

PERCEPTION

Another theory, known as “qualia”, explores the interaction and perception of an experience based off of an individual’s perspective rather than multiple perspectives. Qualia, as explained by Edelman, are “high-order distinctions, scenes of consciousness,” that are specific to each individual. For example, if five people all witnessed the same performance, they would each have a different perspective. Or, if one person witnessed a performance, they would not be able to accurately communicate their experience to others because they have perceived it in a way that no one else can grasp in the same way. Essentially, there are no possible comparisons of qualia, because each individual recognizes situations differently. Professor John Gibbons writes in his scientific journal, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, that qualia includes properties that explain the way things “seem”. The way things seem to someone is basically their opinion and emotions towards the subject.

While qualia focuses on seeing, the theory of “unconscious phantasy”, coined by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, focuses on reacting. Jacob A. Arlow, M.D., describes in his contributing chapter of *Psychoanalysis: The Major Concepts*, that unconscious phantasy is an “articulation of the dynamic unconscious conflicts that mold the individual’s life... represents a variation of the function of day-dreaming.” Unconscious phantasy is the bridge between perceiving and understanding. In a way, unconscious phantasy is the response to conflict, and includes the instinctual drives that we all have as a part of our functioning brain. For example, as an infant develops, they use unconscious phantasy to understand what they are viewing is reality. Without unconscious phantasy and qualia, we would be unable to comprehend the outside world and internalize it to sustain our own growth. These theories in connection with psychoanalysis help to explore the relationships we have with our internal and external environments.

The object relations theory has been defined as “the internalizations of the evolving self, meaning the emphasis of personality organization has been shifted to a study of self in relation to object as the basic organizing unit,” by Otto F. Kemberg in his scientific journal, *Object Relations Theory and Clinical Psychoanalysis*. In more basic terms, the object relations theory refers to the attachment to and the significance of an object in one’s mind. This object may be a symbol of a certain influential event, or a memory of a past experience. Whatever the reasoning behind the choice of object, an individual can assign meaning to it based on its emotional captivation or ability to connect with the individual in some way. The object relations theory explains how something that is outside an organism becomes an integral part of the mind of that organism. By placing value on certain items, an individual creates an attitude or behavior associated with it. For example, if someone got a necklace they liked for their birthday, they would associate that necklace with a positive emotion and any other feelings they had during the experience of their birthday. The theory exposes how the human mind subconsciously or consciously creates meaning for an item of interest to the individual. This item is now seen as a reminder, or symbol, of an emotion or event that provoked the assigned meaning.

The external environment surrounding an individual is not only an influential factor in the object relations theory, but is also the subject for establishing qualia, perception, and the concept of a “phenomenal object”. A phenomenal object is one of the ways that something not of the mind becomes a part of the mind. Also called a perceptual object, the item of choice is internalized into a psychological object rather than a purely physical one. For example, the way someone

sees an apple is distinctly different from the way someone else sees the same apple. The apple is a phenomenal object; when viewing the apple, the individual perceives it, making it known to the mind. The way others perceive things also affects the individual; one's perception of a subject becomes their personal memory, signifying an object that represents an instinctual drive.

However, the most important component of the object relations theory is not necessarily the object, but instead the internal self. In order to appreciate an object, one must understand their own mind first. When dealing with an object in relation to human behavior, an individual must practice ambivalence by keeping an open mind to what is being seen. All intense relationships are based off of ambivalence, or the mixed feelings and attitudes directed towards someone or something. There are also concepts of object choice, choosing an item based on desire, and object love and object loss, sustaining or losing something or someone. The object relations theory is a vital contribution to a developing ego and unveils the way consciousness works. The perception of objects act both consciously and unconsciously in one's mind to enable the growth of the individual and learning of factors in the outside world.

All theories of psychoanalysis are synonymous with the development of self. Centered around the mind, an individual's consciousness is tied to the body, brain, and their history, according to Edelman. Consciousness, or a sense of self, appears when the developing infant realizes they can be autonomous and independent. This usually appears after the recognition of the regulation of bodily functions, within the first few months of infancy. Although now, individuals don't acknowledge the early forms of consciousness, which include homeostasis and motor development. The newfound ability to be self-sufficient directly influences one's self affects, or feelings and emotions. Edelman states that an individual can have both conscious and unconscious experiences of affects, which occur and can be related to both the internal and external body. Human experience consists of feeling, an associated idea or set of ideas, and an accompanying somatic change. For example, on a hike, one might feel exhausted, be thinking about what the scenery will look like when they reach the top of a hill, and may recognize that their feet are hurting them. An affect serves as a communicative signal; it shows how an individual reacts to an event and establishes their internal drives. An internal drive is essentially an individual's wants and needs, and are revealed in response to an experience. Responses become less explosive and instead more differentiated and controlled over time.

Past experiences help to shape an individual, they aid in better mental functioning as a personality matures. According to Richard S. and Bernice N. Lazarus in their book, *Passion and Reason*, this relies upon emotion, and emotion is based on six influences. Those influences include: fate of personal goals, self or ego, appraisals, personal meanings, provocations, and action tendencies. There are two motivational factors necessary to arousing emotion. Ultimately, an event must transform a routine encounter into one that involves personal harm or benefit. The way we judge the fate of the event, whether actual or potential, determines whether the emotion will be positive, for benefit, or negative, for harm. The self is subject to so much influence from the external world, that the process of internalization of these events is often slow. This, in turn, alters our memories and experiences; many things may be seen and taken in subconsciously without thought or notion for the reality of what is being perceived.

We tend to have a strong reliance on others even after the distancing from the maternal bond. The attachment theory relies on the behavior one evokes in response to the affection they feel towards another. Richard S. and Bernice N. Lazarus describe attachment to include characteristics of proximity, comfort, safety, and separation distress. In order to create a better sense of ourselves, we get influences from the external world, such as the observations of others and

communication. These influences not only form a more complex personality, but they contribute to better relationships and ties to others.

These past few months haven't exactly been easy. I became engrossed by my research after learning why I was feeling the way I was. The early memories I had with my father had been assigned new, scared emotions. I remembered when my grandparents came to visit one weekend and were patiently helping my father go up and down the stairs. What I felt now was incredibly different from what I felt when I was young and unknowing. The feelings not only deepened, but they got worse. I was away from home when my Mom came to tell me the news in person. She stopped and pulled me aside, her eyes avoiding mine. I didn't believe what she said, and yet I was starting to feel tears clinging to my cheeks. When I returned home, everything I saw reminded me of my dog. The spot in the corner that she used to sit in, the scratches from her claws on the leather couch, and the hole in the bushes outside where she used to peek into the neighbor's yard. Everything was there, but the feelings I had were replaced with heartache and grief. After learning about psychoanalysis, I am finally able to understand why my feelings changed; my mind is able to assign new values and emotions to what I remembered and saw.

Psychoanalysis proves our emotions are revealed through experience. It clearly explains why we feel things, how we interact with others, and what we do in certain situations. In order to mature and grow not only as an individual, but as a contributor to the environment around you, we must understand how our emotions and relationships affect our mind. Psychoanalysis, and the theories surrounding it, including object relations, attachment, unconscious phantasy, and qualia, investigate how the human mind reacts to internal and external environments. We must acknowledge our internal processes before dealing with external processes, because they are what influence and change the outside world. Without the appreciation for feeling and human interaction, we would not be able to make strong connections to others, objects, and ourselves. I have discovered a newfound admiration for the things and people in my life because of my research in psychoanalysis. My recognition of myself and my actions has changed to become a higher prominence in my life. Through inquiry of the brain's psychoanalytic processes, I have realized the ways in which my mind plays an active role in my life, and allows me to respect and place value on the things, or people, that are important to me.

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