

COMPLEXITY AND MODULARITY

Frank R. Morris

"A human is complex and there are many modules that can be cathected (i.e. turned on) in the head of each person."

The problem is the way our brains work.

In order to survive through the eons of evolution, the brain needed to make quick judgments. Some of the judgments were simply ways to move through the world as our brain processed data with the who's, why's, where's, when's, what's and how's. Snap decisions had to be made in thousands of ways as a person walked from place to place and went from experience to experience. A rock was a rock, a person a person, and an event straightforward.

No human, prior to the Twentieth Century knew much about the intricacies of chemistry, the profundities of astronomy, the particularities of quantum mechanics, the implications of psychoanalysis, the puzzles of genetics, or the marvels possible through electronics. In fact, this century introduced such complexity that a professional in one field has tremendous difficulty communicating to a professional in a different field simply because of the mass of particular information.

I think of the time when a founder of Transactional Analysis was talking to an astronomer at a cocktail party. Upon finding out what the analyst did, the astronomer said: Oh, I know all about T.A.: Parent, Adult, Child. The analyst, upon finding out what the other man did said: Oh, yes. I know all about astronomy: Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Professional fields are complex. No one can learn about them rapidly, and, to continue the old evolutionary reflex, non-professionals learn only bits and pieces of the historic disciplines. We live in an era when thinking has become like a collage with paste-up sound bite bits pasted around in a haphazard fashion.

People, too, are complex. Still, it is popular to make simple generalizations - usually on the basis of good/bad, nice/rude, smart/dumb, conservative/liberal, pretty/ugly or other easy dualism's. The brain makes snap judgments and categorizes people with enormous rapidity. If one is to grasp modern psychology it is necessary to cease the simple approach of rapid dualism's and be prepared for complexity.

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And, why not? After all, the brain is the most complex phenomenon in the cosmos. It has a vast evolutionary development of millions of years that still has consequences. In addition, there are over one hundred million neurons connected in trillions of ways, a complexity that leaves even professional mathematicians astounded. Scans taken during the brain's operation reveals lightning flash portrayals of neuronal explosions that are enormously difficult to map.

Still, most people see Mary as Mary. And, if she does something erratic, Mary becomes Erratic Mary in their minds, so much so that they begin to unwittingly relate to her in such a presuppositional manner that, eventually, she fulfills their anticipations and shows more and more of Erratic Mary.

Is there not a better way?

As the Twenty-First Century begins, a clear way is emerging. It has the funny term modularity attached to it. In regard to neuroscience this means that the brain operates out of units. In terms of psychotherapy, modularity means that there are typical neuronal explosions that move from the brain to thinking, feeling, and acting in certain ways.

An illustration is in order. Imagine a young girl who is systematically sexually and physically abused by grandfather, father, and brothers. In other words, her experience around men is horrendous. To defend herself when a man approaches, her brain has a given neuronal explosion that elicits a typical tight thinking, scared feeling, and defensive actional pattern in less than a second. That is a module. In the context of quietly and privately playing with her cat, there is a different mental gestalt that, in turn brings forth cuddly thoughts, loose feelings, and a relaxed body. So, now we have Male Module and Cat Module. If she gets married, her husband may, after awhile, inherit the Male Module (though it would be better for him if he knew how to turn on her Cat Module to him!).

Now we are understanding the title of this piece: complexity and modularity. A human is complex and there are many modules that can be cathected (i.e. turned on) in the head of each person. To deepen our grasp of this difficult subject, it is critical to realize that each person contains many modules shaped during childhood. Those childlike modules (T.A. calls them ego states) can be quite bothersome in grown-up situations because the early ones, while being time and situation appropriate back then, are seldom appropriate in the present. There are developmental

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traumas, specific traumas and childhood era traumas that leave strong modules that are triggered in the present time in almost unpredictable ways.

Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis, made an important point when he distinguished between exclusion and contamination. Putting that within the LibPsych context, exclusion means that a person is almost fully lost in a given module, almost because another part that is analytical does keep track of what is going on. An example is a fat person eating an entire cake even as they know that this is bad for himself. Contamination refers to being strongly influenced by a module while another part has center stage. An example is a person taking a test at college while turning on a magical three to six year old developmental age and wishing through some questions.

Complexity. Modularity. The contention of Liberation Psychotherapy is that attempts at understanding humans or being therapeutic with humans without accepting modularity are doomed to failure. They lead to simple psychiatric formulas of sick or well, or simple theological formulas of sinful or pure. When, however, an awareness of complexity and modularity are in place, true therapy can begin.