

BRACE™ for Fantasy

Definition: *Fantasy is an active cognitive process in which memories, which are ultimately rooted in sensory systems, are reconstructed and cultivated in order to covertly act-out positively and/or negatively reinforcing experiences in the domain of the imagination.*

Beliefs: Fantasies reflect beliefs about related aspects of life and living, ranging from values and motivations to expectations and overt behaviors. Beliefs are the primordial foundation and life source of fantasies.

Values: Values make up the raw material of fantasies. Values is another term for reinforcers. People “work” for and against things according to the value they attribute to them --- i.e., positively reinforcing value (work for) or negatively reinforcing value (work against). Values are operational and functional in both the covert and overt domains of the individual, but one’s values may be more or less apparent to others, and that may be more or less by intent. Values are learned. Values also change according to experience and circumstance. All cultivated thoughts and all volitional behaviors involve value judgments. Value judgments is another term for decision-making, which is a cost-benefit analysis of related values, from the perspective of the individual in question, weighing this against that, to do against not to do, or perhaps, to be against not to be.

Motivation or Function: All fantasy activity is motivated for reinforcement, positive and/or negative. That is, “fantasy has function”: 1) to acquire and/or maintain positively reinforcing experiences (i.e., pleasure/comfort) and/or 2) to escape, decrease, delay or avoid the onset of pain/discomfort.

Content: There are no time, space, or reality constraints and limitations in the domain of the imagination, except for the capacity of the individual to efficiently abstract and perceive complexity. And, legal and moral constraints are optional, but the principles of learning have their full and usual effects in the domain of the imagination. Fantasies, cultivated and acted-out covertly and/or overtly, involve real learning processes, which strengthen and weaken related thoughts and emotions, as well as the objects of desire and related behaviors.

Fantasies may be fleeting or prolonged, approach or avoidant, active or passive, mild or intense, adaptive or maladaptive, rationale or irrational, engrossing or tangential, desirable or undesirable, etc., Fantasies may be more or less reality based, more or less legal or moral, more or less constructive or destructive, more or less physical or psychological, etc.,

Focus: Fantasies may be past, present, or future oriented. Past oriented fantasies range from efforts to imagine (construct or reconstruct) a childhood experience to conceptualizing alternatives to what one did or did not do --- i.e., what one should or could have done or not done instead. Present oriented fantasies are related to perceived immediate opportunities or possibilities based on current context and present situational

stimuli. Future oriented fantasies are based on anticipated situations or events, or constructed situations into which one projects one's self.

Behavior: Covert fantasies and overt behavior obey the same laws of the universe. Thoughts function as units of behavior and there are always overt indexes of cultivated covert fantasies --- i.e., rehearsed covert behavior and related cultivated experiences. Such "overt indicators" may be more or less subtle, more or less idiosyncratic, and more or less adaptive, but always present. On the surface, behavior is measurable and observable. Related beliefs, values, motivation and expectation are not. Behavior (as well as thoughts) has form and function.

Consequences:

Each time a fantasy is "cultivated," it changes, differentially reinforcing the perceptions, emotions and behavioral predispositions of which it consists. Fantasies are dynamic, never static.

Thought and behavior consistent with a fantasy reinforces the fantasy dynamics. When people put themselves in situations in which the elements of a fantasy are perceived as existing, they are creating opportunities for the fantasy to reach fruition. Such thought and behavior strengthen all related component parts of the fantasy, some sensitization and some desensitization, some thresholds raised, some lowered. Fantasy activity always consists of things that are strengthened and things that are weakened, reinforced or punished, and you can not have one without the other. All things in a cognitive, behavioral, or motivational class are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. There is a summation of effects, and consequences are cumulative.

Bottom line is, fantasies are cultivated, and what is cultivated reflects who one is and determines who one is becoming. The domain of the imagination is the stage for self-creation.

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