BOOK REVIEWS

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AN INVITATION TO READERS

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> *Imagine That: Studies in Imagined Interaction,* edited by James M. Honeycutt, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2010.

Everyone experiences Imagined Interactions (II). They are universal and time immemorial. In fact, the tendency to engage in IIs is so natural that its process often eludes us! Honeycutt and his colleagues have ambitiously plunged into our inner worlds with scientific lenses. They have discerned the importance of IIs

and are now set to decipher its language and use in a variety of contexts. The authors have inverted our focus on the external to the internal, surfacing IIs to the forefront of their scientific investigation. By doing so, Honeycutt and his colleagues pay much deserved attention to the importance and potential residing in our inner processes. *Imagine that* explores the many uses of IIs through a unique blend of studies and analyses, setting a foundation for IIs in the field of Psychology.

Theoretically understood from symbolic interactionism and script theory, IIs are mental events, a type of daydreaming involving the imagining of potential, or revising of previous interactions for multiple reasons. IIs contain eight definitive characteristics: Frequency, Proactivity (preparing for potential interactions), Retroactivity (revising interactions that have occurred), Variety (range of subjects/people), Discrepancy (level of incongruence between imagined and reality), Self Dominance (focus), Valence (array of emotions that emerge in the context of a specific II) and Specificity (quality of visual/verbal imagery). There are also six functions of II including: relational maintenance (preservation and development of relationships), managing conflict (maintenance and resolution), compensation (in the absence of actual interaction), rehearsal (for future interactions), catharsis (mitigating tension) and self-understanding (clarification of thoughts and feelings).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on one of the more prominent functions of IIs, managing conflict. In the first chapter of part one, Honeycutt presents IIs conflict linkage theory. Conflict appears in many forms, though it all begins at an individual level. Intrapersonal activity may occur in the form of Retro or Proactive IIs. Proactive IIs, emerging from previous trial/error experiences, can generate expectancy, possibly leading to the actualization of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If so, people may stagnate in rumination, looping between self-dominant IIs and negative feelings. Research has found that more rumination leads to a higher degree of discrepancy, depression, hopelessness and lack of motivation. On the other hand, a reduction of rumination has been related to forgiveness. In a complementary study, Honeycutt explores conflict rumination in association to personality preference.

In chapter two of part one, Allen and Berkos sought to understand the content and frequency of IIs in relation to conflict. After examining journal entries of participants within a 16-week span, they found that 41% of IIs in their journal entries were conflictual in nature, with 33% of these conflicts being linked with one another over time. This finding supports conflict-linkage theory. IIs appear to be used to keep conflict alive in interpersonal relationships. They also seem to have the tendency to deal with interpersonal norms, values and attitudes. Other intriguing questions were covered such as: Who are the most commonly occurring interaction partners in conflictual IIs? What percentages of these IIs are verbally aggressive or physically violent?

In chapter three of part one, Honeycutt examines the relationship between Physiology and Imagined interactions. Certain characteristics of IIs lend themselves to be objectively measured. One such characteristic is valence, which can be understood as the degree of an emotional experience accompanying specific IIs. Another is alleviating anxieties through its function of catharsis and managing conflict. The detection of physiological arousal in both imagined and actual settings within the context of pleasant and unpleasant conversations were examined. Are there measurable differences in heart rate or mean arterial pressure between an actual conversation and imagined? If so, what? Immediately after an actual conversation, significant results were found for heart rate and mean arterial pressure, which increased with catharsis and conflict linkage. Immediately after an imaginary conversation, a significant find was only discovered for catharsis in relation to mean arterial pressure. The question then arises: How do these results shed light on the specific characteristics or functions of IIs?

In chapter four of part two; IIs are studied in relation to Bereavement. Ford specifically discusses the role of retroactive IIs and the function of compensation. She first describes identity reconstruction as a salient process in spousal bereavement. Role identity theory posits that individuals are composed of hierarchically ordered role identities that result from the 'reciprocal relationship between self and others'. The loss of a spouse would be a loss of a significant role. In effect, the subject is hurled into the process of identity reconstruction. But what is identity? In order to satisfy a more comprehensive scope, Ford used Hecht's communication theory of identity (CTI). CTI considers communication and identity as one in the same. It is a multidimensional model in which all levels are permeable and interdependent. Hecht viewed CTI as an incomplete theory, requiring further development. Ford gathered that IIs were a possible route for further analysis of identity. In her study, she found that the better one adjusted to a death, the lower discrepancy was for IIs. She also found a negative correlation between adjustment and the use of IIs to understand ones attitude and values. IIs of self-understanding were negatively correlated to adjustment for the unemployed. The employed had few IIs, possible due to having a stronger social support. The unemployed were also associated with having few IIs, possibly due to a smaller social network.

In chapter five, Eidenmuller and Honeycutt compare the characteristics and functions of IIs and prayer. The authors used a summarized version of Baeslers (1997, 1999, 2003) definition "as a form of spiritual communication between a human and Divine Other" (p. 84). They noted that interpersonal communication and prayer shared a common ground in that they both are: "1) a dyadic relationship; b) developed through time; c) involving intentional choice to communicate; d) speaking and listening process; and e) the perceived effects of the communication activity"(p. 85). The most significant difference between IIs and prayer is the interpersonal Other (God) in prayer. The question comes into being whether

prayer is inter or intrapersonal. How are IIs and Prayer similar? Dissimilar? From the scope of IIs, what function does prayer have? The main difference appears to exist in the functions of relational maintenance and catharsis, which seems to be exclusive to IIs. Prayer also had an additional factor labeled God Understanding. Are IIs and Prayer related? The study suggested a sequential relation, in that IIs were actually used as a catalyst for prayer.

Part three views IIs in various contexts. In Chapter six, Croghan and Croghan target imagined interactions in an Organizational environment. They review past research, discuss the importance of current research and suggest possible avenues for the future. Specific organizational settings were targeted including: Employee Counseling, Performance Evaluations, Job Interviews and Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness. Research has revealed that higher levels of experience are related to the use more IIs in counseling sessions. In fact, managers at this level, retain an array of IIs that are often used during employee counseling sessions. Other pertinent questions are answered such as: Do IIs affect self-confidence? What functions of IIs can lead to less discrepancy in the workplace? How is experience related to discrepancy? The authors end by providing a table on how the use of IIs may propel good/bad communicative strategies in the workplace.

In chapter seven, Berkos explores the role of IIs in online communication. The average person uses the Internet about 3 hours a day. Time can be broken up into two general categories: Work and communication. In comparison to face-face interactions, previous research has actually revealed that individuals are more likely to conform to social pressures in an online interaction! Berkos investigated the questions: What are the most commonly occurring topics and partners (involving IIs)? How often are messages altered as a result of an II? And in such a context, what roles do IIs play? The unique qualities of online communication were identified and five categories were generated based on the effects of IIs in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), including—emotion management, communication improvement, proactive/rehearsal communication, situation management and professional conduct.

In chapter eight, Allen, Edwards, Hayoe and Leach explored the use of IIs in relation to college students and their parents when discussing topics involving spending and credit. The two main characteristics being explored were valence and credit. What are attitudes towards money? How does this affect the use of IIs and decision-making? Students with credit cards tend to experience more pleasant IIs, feelings of autonomy and control! Why is this so? Ultimately this study found that "IIs reflect attitudes toward money and appear to be shaped by how our families talk about and manages money, the coalitions existing within the family and dialectical tensions we feel between independence-dependence and openness- privacy" (p. 142).

Concluding part three, in chapter nine, Bryan discusses IIs in relation to Plastic Surgery, particularly the content and quality of IIs occurring before and

after the surgery. Plastic surgery is conceptualized as a process including the redefinition of self. Further theoretical understandings underlying the purpose of Plastic surgery are explored. One such theory, which found support by Bryan's research, is Burks (1985) Self-Consistency Theory (SCT). In SCT, surgery is prompted by an incongruence perceived in the individuals' whole self and body part. Other than the body part, the individuals' self-esteem seems normal. Surgery then, at least in some cases, serves to temper this undesirable tension. Many fascinating questions are addressed such as the relationship between IIs and satisfaction level or whether there are differences between II functions/characteristics due to different surgical procedures (i.e. breast reduction vs. abdominoplasty). Bryan's research found that by and large IIs were serving the function of rehearsal, as responses to critiques from others, assist in self-understanding and potential conflict management.

With the ever growing research on IIs, Treat suggests that II research has reached a point to which it must extend its theoretical boundaries. Specifically, considering Ernest Bormanns Fantasy Themed Analysis (FTA). FTA is a method of examining stories created from a collective whole. These fantasies emerged as conglomeration of efforts from various members of a group in order to make sense of common experiences they all faced, thus forging group identity and consciousness. II can be seen to function at the Individual level and FTA to the group. He also recommends addressing the psychodynamic processes underlying IIs and FTA. In an engaging inquiry, Freudian and Lacanian principles are examined and discussed in relation to fantasy. Implications are addressed and other potential directions are suggested.

Honeycutt ends the compilation with a comparison between dialogue theory and IIs. He elucidates Martin Buber's I-thou relationship through a collectivistic lens. With these theoretical underpinnings, how then is dialogue influenced by IIs? Bubers inner dialogue is contrasted with his current working definition of II. Conflict linkage theory is elaborated. At its most basic level, II research has "revealed the perspective taking may be enhanced by imagining how a conflict episode may unfold compared to not mentally preparing..IIs facilitate thinking about others messages rather than being egocentric" (p. 202).

The authors genuinely address the weaknesses of their research, and accurately assess for future studies that may build off of their results. There were but a few instances in which, as a reader, one felt compelled to comment on. Though much information was covered, it would seem vital to be aware of the proportion of IIs that were automatic, as opposed to being consciously brought up for usage. Understanding the differences and similarities between the norm and people who tend to consciously manipulate IIs for productive reasons, would be a fluid transition into applied research. This could have perhaps been added on to the descriptive values encountered by Allen and Berkos.

In chapter three, dealing with physiology in relation to IIs, there seemed to be a lack of integration of other research regarding differences found between an

imagined event, and the actual event manifesting in brain activity. A hypothetical experiment of crucial interest would be one comparing the neurophysiological differences occurring between using the rehearsal function of an II versus practicing the action live. Specifically, an experiment could be designed in order to establish the effects of having an II on actual performance, as compared to the effects of simply practicing. Not only would such investigation shed light on IIs effects on performance, but also on the underlying mind/brain-body relationships. Understandably brain scans were not used in Honeycutt's study, which may have been the reason for exemption.

Finally, in relation to Treats suggestions, Jung would appear to be a strong contender to consider in addition to Freud and Lacan. For example: Active Imagination is pivotal in Analytical Psychology and is directly related to IIs. Throughout the years there has also been a steady influx of research on Archetypes from a variety of disciplines that may prove to be of great value in understanding the nature of IIs. It would be wise to consider the contributions from other giants and pioneers of inner life. These considerations would open up new avenues for experimentation, understanding, and application, yielding a more comprehensive, if not inclusive picture.

On a personal level, the mental imprints left behind after reading the book cycled between curiosity and empowerment. Curiosity towards psychological processes and the degree they play in everyday life. The resultant awareness of IIs opens up the opportunity for one to consciously engage in processes once considered automatic. This development alone is empowering, enabling the possibility for one to progress from IIs that previously lead to stagnation and negativity. In effect, there is a maturation of reflective space as previous nonconscious elements have been integrated. Alternatives emerge, giving way for new possible relationships with our symbolic stream of consciousness. Furthermore, the book is a great source of 'revving the engine' of creativity. The unique subject at hand and the variety of topics have the effect of catalyzing the reader on the trajectory of divergent thinking.

Overall, *Imagine that: Studies in Imagined Interactions* is an excellent source for anyone interested in learning about the cutting edge research in II. The book provides a background and survey for what is out there and being done. Although the reader is at times left wanting more, the authors acknowledge that through their suggestions of future research. A basis must be established for all topics of research before more complex levels of understanding can be potentiated. Though a compilation of studies, the authors are effective in conveying their material without the use of esoteric terms and overly drawn out concepts. The authors have struck a balance appropriate for both layman and researcher alike!

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