

Mag/Min: The Sequel

Primer (2018)

Thomas J. Schur

Why write a sequel to my book Mag or Min: Which Are You?: Two Patterns of Decision-making That Make You Who You Are? There are two reasons: 1) the need to further develop the concept of Differentiation in Bowen theory; and 2) the need to further develop my framework of Mag/Min.

Differentiation of Self in Bowen theory

Bowen described differentiation in terms of levels, from high to low, which he scaled by the extent of self vs other focus. Individuals at higher levels are able to focus on self more than the other, which allows them to control automatic responses to the anxiety in the system, and operate on principle. People at lower levels operate with less reflection, and therefore more reactivity to anxiety in the system.

So, if the level of differentiation is scaled by the extent to which an individual operates on principle, what are the parameters of this scale of operating on principle? He did not describe that further. That is exactly what I propose to do in this next book.

Magnification/Minification

My framework of Mag/Min is based squarely on Bowen theory and Differentiation of Self, but it incorporates language as a core construct. As presented in the original book, language opens up major pathways for the development of Bowen theory. However, since the publication of that book, I have come to realize that there is an important component of the process of Magnification and Minification that was left undeveloped. Completing the development of that component simultaneously completes the missing parameters of the scaling of principles missing from Bowen theory.

This undeveloped component from Mag/Min is the dynamic of Assumptions that underlies the Magnification/Minification process. In the original book, Magnification and Minification are presented as processes on a continuum that define high and low functioning by the extent to which a person's Home position lies away from the Middle and toward the outer ends of the continuum. While the book and the charts describe the characteristics of decision-making as a Mag or a Min, they do not elaborate on the assumptions behind a person's decision-making as a

Magnifier or a Minifier, beyond general expressions like Mags think problems will work out somehow while Mins think they will not. However, they do not scale those assumptions congruently with the points on the continuum.

Principles derive from a language process. Because the Mag/Min framework is based explicitly in language, while Bowen theory is not, it is possible to develop a scale of operating on principle using parameters from language, which then can allow that scale to be transposed to use in developing a scale of operating on principle in Bowen theory, further developing the core idea of Differentiation of Self.

Core Rationale

While Bowen proposed the idea that higher level functioning is correlated with operating on principle, he did not propose what defined lower level of functioning on the same scale as principle. So I have proposed a new umbrella term under which principle is subsumed as one end of a continuum of level of functioning, with a lower end on the same continuum. I have proposed to name this overall category “Core Rationale” which is scaled from principle at the higher end to “Opinion” at the lower end. One could think of it as a set of assumptions behind the decision-making process.

Core Rationale then is a language process, which I define as:

“a construct in language in which a position is taken as an explanation for past behavior, and as a basis for decisions about action to be taken in the future.”

For example: “I took that risk because you will never achieve your goals if you don’t embrace challenges” (Magnifier); or, “I declined that opportunity because you need to be careful and not take unnecessary risks that will undermine achieving your goals” (Minifier).

Benefits of this new conceptualization of Core Rationale – Theoretical and Practical

Theoretical

For Bowen theory

- It creates the ability to operationalize Bowen’s idea of principle by broadening it so it can function as an additional and more specific way to determine level of differentiation.
- It supports my contention that including language as major concept in Bowen theory is important, by providing this practical and concrete use of language in supporting the core concept of differentiation of self.

For Mag/Min

- This scale of Core Rationale from Opinion to Principle, fits seamlessly onto the template of my basic Mag/Min charts, which validates the congruence of this new idea of Core Rationale with the Mag/Min continuum, and thereby enhances the usefulness of the charts overall. (See attached chart.)

- The ability to scale the extent to which a person is operating more toward the higher or lower end of functioning on the Mag/Min continuum, by the extent to which their core rationales are more opinions or more principles, adds another useful and important tool for determining the Home position and for measuring changes over time.

Practical

The Individual

- This new ability to assess the assumptions behind decisions as more opinion or more principle on the CR continuum, provides a structure for the practice of experimentation, which is the fundamental process for developing the self through changing the patterns of decision-making.

From a focus on self, a person can reflect on why they made a particular decision. Was it more from a need to relieve anxiety by yielding to a familiar, reactive pattern, so that the justification is less sound, less able to withstand internal and external scrutiny if honestly examined? Or was it more from a need to be consistent with a deeper belief, tolerating the anxiety, so that the justification can hold up to internal and external challenge.

This assessment can then serve as a guide for experimenting with making future decisions on a sounder basis, less on opinion and more on principle.

This guide for decision-making takes the form of rules specific to that person. These rules then become reliable because they are not external ones that a person adopts, but instead are internal, in the sense that they have developed out of the person's own experiences. In addition, with continual experimentation, they become refined and even more reliable as they continue to be validated by the outcomes of one's decisions.

Generally the rules for Magnifiers will involve allowing for the awareness of possible limitations that need to be accepted, and for Minifiers, they will involve allowing for the awareness of possibilities that need to be acted on.

The System

- Change of self is always part of systemic dynamics in both Bowen theory and Mag/Min. CR provides a grounding for managing the self within the forces of systems like families, organizations and communities that press toward homeostasis. The more an individual makes

decisions based on opinion, the more the person is yielding self to the forces and patterns of those systems, and the more the decisions are based on principle, the more self is conserved within the system. Then, as a consequence, the more a person changes self to operate more on principle, the greater the possibility for relationships to change and the system to operate at a higher level of differentiation.

In addition to internal reflection about the bases for one's decisions, there is the person's awareness of the external context of the systemic patterns. How much is any justification for one's decisions determined by his or her perception of how others respond to that justification? The more a person can be aware of the reaction of others to their justifications and take positions based on those justifications, while staying open to others but grounded in one's own beliefs, the greater the possibility of others' changing self, and raising their level of differentiation as well as that of the larger system.

This reflection on the interactions with others in one's systems further validates their Core Rationales as reliable, because a person can trust that their CR's are less determined by the system, and more by the results of their own experimentation in these interactions. A person can learn to distinguish a Core Rationale that is more of an opinion as it is too much of an automatic fit with the reactive pattern of the system, from what is more of a principle that conserves the self and beliefs of that person as they continue to engage others in their system

Summary

This Primer presents a comprehensive summary of the basic ideas of this next book. It is not written yet, but the following draft is a chapter-by-chapter outline of it.

Mag/Min: The Sequel

Introduction - Why a sequel?

Chapter 1 - Summary of the basic framework of Magnification and Minification

Chapter 2 - Comprehensive presentation and development of the new framework of Core Rationale, and its congruence with Differentiation of self in Bowen theory and Mag/Min

Chapter 3 - Change of Self: from Opinion to Principle

Chapter 4 - Foundation of the Core Rationale framework in language and neuroscience

Chapter 5 - Practical ways to employ the Core Rationale framework in self-work using Mag/Min

Chapter 6: - Changes in Larger Systems as Leaders Operate More on Principle.