IDENTITY STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Nobody Said It Was Easy ....

The PRISM Approach
Some of the assumptions made within the PRISM approach when working with adolescents with identity problems are:

Adolescents with confused identity, either global or partial, are less well equipped to deal with their psychosocial environment.
Change is difficult if there is impaired integration of normal thinking, feeling and behaviour.
Pseudointimacy results from early problems with attachment.
Value systems put mechanisms for change into practice.

PRISM
The name PRISM (Procedural Individuation and Self Monitoring), which has been adopted for this approach, can also be seen as a metaphor:

a) A prism focuses a diffused energy.
b) When light enters a prism, a change in speed changes its angle.
c) A prism can act as a mirror.
d) A prism discovers colours.

Likewise, a person in recovery has to a) concentrate thinking b) look at things differently c) reflect upon self and others d) see the beauty within.

What PRISM is
PRISM is a theory and approach to identity exploration which can be incorporated into CAT (Cognitive Analytic), CBT (Cognitive Behavioural), IPT (Interpersonal), Systemic Family, SFT (Solution Focused) or TA (Transactional Analysis) Therapy.

What PRISM is not
PRISM is not a new form of therapy.
The PRISM Programme

Week 1      Identity Exploration  
Week 2      Dilemmas, Traps, Snags  
Week 3      Roadmaps  
Week 4      Planned Behaviours  
Week 5      Mood Diary  
Week 6      Actions and Consequences  
Week 7      Problem Targeting  
Week 8      Finding Your Place  
Week 9      Finding Others' Place  
Week 10    The Big Picture  
Week 11    Putting it All Together  
Week 12    Rapping It All Up

Some of the ground to be covered is - Knowing when and where Problems started; Rediscovering lost Confidence; Zoning in on Solutions; Understanding Moods; Selecting reasonable Goals; Being Satisfied; Dealing with Disappointment; Taking Time-out; Cooperating and Sharing; Getting to know Self; Being kind to Self.

What is Identity?
Identity is a sense of sameness and continuity of self that is construed across time. Central to that sense of identity are that it is consistent with evaluation, “how successful am I as a person?”; involvement or commitment, “how important is it for me to be who I wish to be, even at some emotional cost and effort to myself?”; and salience “how much will being a competent person define who I would like to be?”

The self is a sense of one’s own person as being separate but comparable with others. This sense of separateness yet sameness comes from a ‘core identity’ that has become crystallised. A coherent sense of self protects the person form being overwhelmed and brings a feeling of personal safety. Theories that explain identity formation look at comparison with others; how positive and negative reference groups define the self; interaction with the social environment; resolution of difference; and how to make sense of the world.

Identity Change
A person can predict from past interactions what to expect in the future. Provided she is flexible and open to change, she can be responsive to the demands, constraints and opportunities of any new or unexpected situation. If she has developed a well-formed identity, she can take up a well-thought out position in relation to even problematic entities or events and decide what in her present belief system needs to be changed or discarded. Discarding of a belief is more difficult if it supports some core aspect of identity. Otherwise, positive change can enable less conflict within the self and new energy can become available as a result of less strain. A person can choose to become ready for constructive action in line with a revised identity instead of adhering to some rigid and obsolete way of thinking and non-action.


Developmental Tasks
Shaping of identity is in response to how the person handles identity crises. If the crisis is in relation to intimacy in adolescence, this will centre on a chosen individual (a partner) with whom she might choose to share the present and the future. The Intimacy versus Isolation crisis that has to be negotiated challenges the person to approach and make contact with others or keep at a distance; stay close to others or shut herself away; take care of someone or prefer to be left alone.

The Autonomy versus Doubt crisis challenges the person to know what is best for her or to look to be told; be free and independent or be socially inept; be confined by relationships or look for reassurance. The Trust versus Mistrust crisis challenges the person to be like an open book or keep her affairs secret; expect promises to be kept or hope not to be found out.

The Identity versus Diffusion crisis challenges the person to be happy when getting attention or wish to sink into the ground; be in touch with the “real me“ or protect herself from self-discovery; rely on gut instinct or be afraid that unpleasant feelings will get out of control.

The Industry versus Inferiority crisis challenges the person to tackle problems head on or hope problems will go away; make her own decisions or yield to other’s wishes; get things done or be guided by others in what to do.

Achievement of a mature identity by late adolescence should enable further maturation of identity with each successfully negotiated crisis later in life. The person can start to decide who to be, who to affiliate with, what beliefs to adopt and what values to espouse. Each peak of change enables the person to become more mature and to learn how to react in a more intentional way rather being at the mercy of knee-jerk reactions.
Primary appraisal of a crisis confirms the presence of a personal stake in an encounter; secondary appraisal confirms that a goal has relevance to the person’s sense of identity. One of four levels of self-understanding may be reached. These are, in turn: the self is understood only in terms of her physical features; the self is understood better by comparison with others; the attractiveness of the self to others is affirmed; and the self draws meaning from moral and belief systems.

Improved self-understanding is thwarted in a person reared in a harmful environment. That person may become stuck and be less prepared to enter into a relationship of genuine attachment. A more creative, true and trusting self is best achieved if the person has been reared in an environment that was non-retaliatory, containing, soothing and mirroring.


A Balanced Identity

Zajonc has argued that 'the dynamic principle of change need not infer forces of overwhelming strength. These are more akin to preferences and there need be no anxiety when structures are in imbalance. Imbalance states are not noxious and a competing need to strive for balance should not be assumed. The implication of Zajonc’s position is that challenge is not necessarily problematic and may be a positive force for change. Even the most involved or committed individuals can undergo dramatic attitudinal shift or imbalance and a person can undergo a sudden switch to an opposite pole of opinion from that previously held.'

Heider, F. (1958). The psychology of interpersonal relations. Wiley.  

Identity Synthesis

If a person sees similarity between herself and someone she admires, this may lead to some affirmation of her identity. If a shift in identity occurs between her past and current self-image, a process of transition is in place, provided there is no indifference, denial or dismissal. The person may need to take pause before she can go forward but such ‘regression in the service of the ego’ should not last too long or it indicates aspects of the self she is failing to address or resolve.

Identity Status

Nine identity variants derive from the product of self-evaluation and identity-diffusion, where self-evaluation is a person’s overall assessment of self as measured against a value system, and diffusion is the dispersion and magnitude of a person’s conflict in identification with others.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Evaluation</th>
<th>Diffusion Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Diffuse High Self Regard</td>
<td>Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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The product of moderate degrees of identity diffusion together with moderate-to-high self-evaluation is indicative of an identity that is well synthesised. These healthy identities are called Indeterminate or Confident. An alternative system proposes four, not nine, identity statuses that are derived from the product of exploration (ego involvement) and identity diffusion. There is considerable overlap of the identity status system with an attachment system. The overlap is most evident between four-state system and the attachment status system. Both systems are based upon the self-evaluation and evaluation of others. The Identity status system replaces self-evaluation with Exploration (otherwise known as commitment or ego-involvement) but even this difference is less than it seems as Exploration is a main tenet of Attachment Theory.

Identity Statuses

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<tr>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Foreclosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Diffused</td>
<td>Moratorium</td>
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</table>

Achieved Identity and Secure Attachment are both to be found in the left upper quadrants. They can be expected to possess trust, commitment to goals and tolerance of ambivalence. The individual with these statuses will have resistance to self-esteem manipulation and be less likely to conform to social pressure. Those with Achieved identity will have life plans that are their own and are amenable to revision. They will see the future as something to be shaped and as a period of further identity synthesis rather than a time to be stuck with present standards. Capacity for autonomous attachment and genuine intimacy are most likely to be possible in the achieved identity status. The Foreclosed identity status (Defensive Self Regard identity variant) and Dismissive attachment status are to be found in the right upper quadrants. These states are expected to be characterised by overt anxiety and sensitivity and distorted censorship of the psychosocial environment to match inner needs.
There may be over-reliance on denial, exaggeration of others’ faults, projection of undesirable feelings onto others, retreat from conflict and inability to accept blame. There is less likelihood of expressed emotions such as anger and repressed emotions such as feelings of persecution, shame and guilt as these emotions are more likely to be found in other identity statuses.

**Attachment Statuses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Evaluation</th>
<th>Evaluation of Others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>Fearful</td>
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Moratorium or Defensive Identity and Preoccupied Attachment status are found in the right lower quadrants. The overlap between the two systems does not sit as neatly here as an individual with Foreclosed identity status is expected to have adopted the lifelong "game plan" set out for them by her.

As the Foreclosed individual looks to the future, she will see herself trying to live up to a prearranged set of ideals and occupational plans and her self-esteem is contingent upon the extent to that she 'fulfils' these tasks and adheres to these unreconstructed values that have been handed down to her. There will be little 'metabolism' of life-issues and these will not have been reformulated in the individual's own terms.

An individual with Preoccupied Attachment can also be expected to be rooted in the past but is likely not to be as moulded by their parents as suggested by Foreclosed Identity. The Diffused Identity and Fearful Attachment are in the lower left quadrants. The Diffused Identity is expected to have malleability of self-esteem and readiness to feel rejected as it is the least developmentally advanced status. The person is uncommitted to any definite direction in their lives and the main difference between Diffused and Foreclosed Identity sis that the person with Diffused Identity has encountered but failed to resolve Crises, whereas the Foreclosed Identity has not encountered crises as she applies ready-made solutions that are not her own.

Disposition and Self Regulation

Disposition, otherwise known as Action Tendency, is directed at an appropriate and congruent personal goal. If utilitarian, it reduces distance between present status and a desired goal. Disposition is more likely to be consensual, and not a source of conflict, if it is primed by a willingness to accept standards. Utilitarianism tells the person what would be useful to do. Any transition in identity will be governed by empathetic [‘what does it look like’] and counterfactual [‘what if’] identification with that identity. These different elements come together and, if in emotional tune, the person will feel good about her efforts.

Emerging evidence from brain-imaging has identified circuits in the brain that correspond to a ‘social brain network’. By a feedback mechanism, hippocampal memories are fine-tuned in the cerebral cortex and are related to stored memories from a person’s experiences. As a result, ‘hippocampal memories make us smart and factual, cortical memories make us wise’. The cerebellum connects emotions with their motivational equivalents, enables better impulse control and modifies behaviour.

A disposition will become an intention if the person predicts that there is a good probability she will be able to perform an intended behaviour. Such belief is realistic if accompanied by commitment to goals and increase of effort when she falls short. The product of disposition towards a target, evaluation of intended behaviour and the number of intentions formed can reliably predict an outcome. This prediction may break down if there is a lack of personal control or a compulsive habit.

A process of breaking down too challenging a goal into its’ more specific elements can make a goal more manageable. A set of rules was proposed to govern the relationship between lower order and higher order goals. These are 1) the higher in order is a goal, the more fundamental is that goal to the over-riding sense of self 2) the more a concrete goal contributes to attainment of some highly valued goal, the more important or salient is that concrete goal 3) an act that contributes to the attainment of several goals at once is more important. Ford distinguished three kinds of feedback mechanisms (a) feed-back, that involves monitoring and evaluation of progress toward a goal on the basis of a standard; b) feed-forward, that is guided by personal capabilities and context expectancies, and (c) activation of control, that is involved in adequate planning and action control to ensure continuation of progress despite competing goals and obstacles.

The process of self-monitoring may help in specifying goals as long as use of social comparisons is not coupled to fixed ability attributions, self-dissatisfaction, and defensive self-reactions. Reactive methods of self-monitoring may manage personal outcomes well enough as long as there is a parallel effort to improve goal structure, strategic planning, and the sense of personal agency. When used most effectively, reactive self-monitoring coupled to awareness of self-discrepant feedback can allow appropriate disengagement from an unachievable or inappropriate goal. Such feedback is at its most effective if it comes from a competent source, is reinforced by several people, is directly relevant to the self-concept, and is sufficiently different from the individual's self-view but without being so outrageous as to be dismissed.
Overall, necessary elements that need to be present before personal goals can be realised include goal orientation (realisation that a specific behaviour is required and not just a good intention); goal appraisal (prioritisation of goals in terms of desirability); goal setting (choosing a goal and setting a manageable target of achievement); outcome expectation (a belief that effort can lead to a result); obligation (a sense that effort is expected by others); intrinsic motivation (an inner desire that is separate from a wish to please); and compliance (a willingness to work with others towards a goal). Self-regulation can then become more practised and sophisticated over time so that the person can monitor and adjust her affective states to meet adaptive demands.

Procedural Identity Model