

Emotional significance of a construct © 2006 Stephen Ewart and Peter Weinreich

Structural pressures (SPs) on a construct representing cognitive-affective compatibilities (*positive pressures*) and incompatibilities (*negative pressures*) are together indicants of the strength of affect associated with the person's use of the construct, where the construct in question may range from representing a core evaluative dimension of identity to a conflicted one. High net SPs represent core evaluative dimensions of identity, that is, they are highly evaluative in a manner that is in keeping with the person's aspirations, which are not themselves conflicted and are stable for the time being.

Low net SPs may result when the person's use of the constructs in question are simply unevaluative and without affective associations. However, more often than not low net SPs represent conflicted evaluative dimensions of identity that are associated with contradictory affect, and cognitive-affective incompatibilities (dissonances) when appraising the social world. In these instances the evaluative connotations of the discourses used are unstable and will vacillate through time and depend on context. The person's aspirations as expressed in such discourses will be uncertain, being, at times, towards the one goal and, at other times, towards a contrasting direction. The extent of the destabilising incompatible appraisals in respect of the construct in question is given by the negative SP that undermines the positive SP for that dimension. In the one case of low net SP (unevaluative) on a construct, the person's use of the construct during appraisals of the social world is of little emotional significance, whereas in the other (conflicted), it is of considerable emotional significance. The parameter of *emotional significance of a construct* enables the differing instances to be distinguished, and also provides for comparison across all constructs.

Definition of emotional significance of a construct:

The emotional significance of a construct used by one during appraisal of one's social world is defined as the strength of affect associated with the expression of the construct.

The emotional significance of the construct, a *quantitative* parameter, is represented by the summated affect (the cognitions being the denotative *qualitative* meanings of the discourses), where the expressions Ω_j^+ and Ω_j^- are the positive and negative SPs respectively [Link to: *Structural Pressure on a Construct*]:

$$\text{Emotional significance of construct } j \quad O_j = \Omega_j^+ + |\Omega_j^-|$$

Standardised emotional significance of construct } j:

$$\hat{O}_j = \frac{\Omega_j^+ + |\Omega_j^-|}{\max(\Omega^+ + |\Omega^-|)} \times 10$$

scaled from: 0.00 (no emotional significance for the person) to 10.00 (maximum for the person).

In the context of appraisals delimited by an identity instrument, the relative emotional significance of conflicted and core evaluative dimensions of identity may thereby be assessed. For example, the high emotional significance of a conflicted dimension of identity (and the associated stress) may be on a par with the emotional significance of a core evaluative dimension.

Note that the 'internal standardisation' procedure enables the degree of 'emotional significance' of the constructs featuring in an identity instrument, as they are used by the individual to appraise the social world, to range from zero to maximum for the person in question, and likewise for any other person. Hence, in the sense given here, the assessments are comparable across individuals on a well-defined scale. The question as to whether the maximal emotional significance for one person is the same emotional intensity as the maximal for another person is a philosophical issue that is open for debate. Likewise, when using psychometric scales, the assumption that the same scalar measure means the same intensity across individuals also needs to be subjected to debate.