



The Garden Of Self

About Me:

Roselle P. O'Brien,

LMHC, REAT, REACE, ICAT, LPN

Education:

- PhD in Psychology specializing in Mast Cell Activation Issues & Disorders---Current Candidate
- MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling
- MA in Education
- MFA in Creative Writing
- BA in Art/Fine Arts, Education
- Diploma Nursing

Licenses/Certification:

- Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)
- Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor (LCMHC)
- Licensed Nurse
- Licensed Educator
- Intermodal Creative Arts Therapist (ICAT)
- Intermodal Creative Arts Facilitator (ICAF)

About Me: (cont'd)

Licenses/Certification (cont'd):

- Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT)
- Registered Expressive Arts Consultant/Educator (REACE)
- Certified Life Coach
- Certified Health & Nutrition Life Coach
- Certified Therapeutic Arts Life Coach

Certificates:

- Eco-Health Support: Medical Professional
- Eco-Health Support: Therapist

The Eco-Health Certificate Programs are for understanding and working with people who have Mast Cell Disorders (MCD) such as Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS), Post-/Long-COVID, being sensitive to multiple chemicals, chronic fatigue, brainfog, EDS, fibromyalgia, and more.

For more information: <https://celacareonline.us>

The Work I Do:

Roselle P. O'Brien,

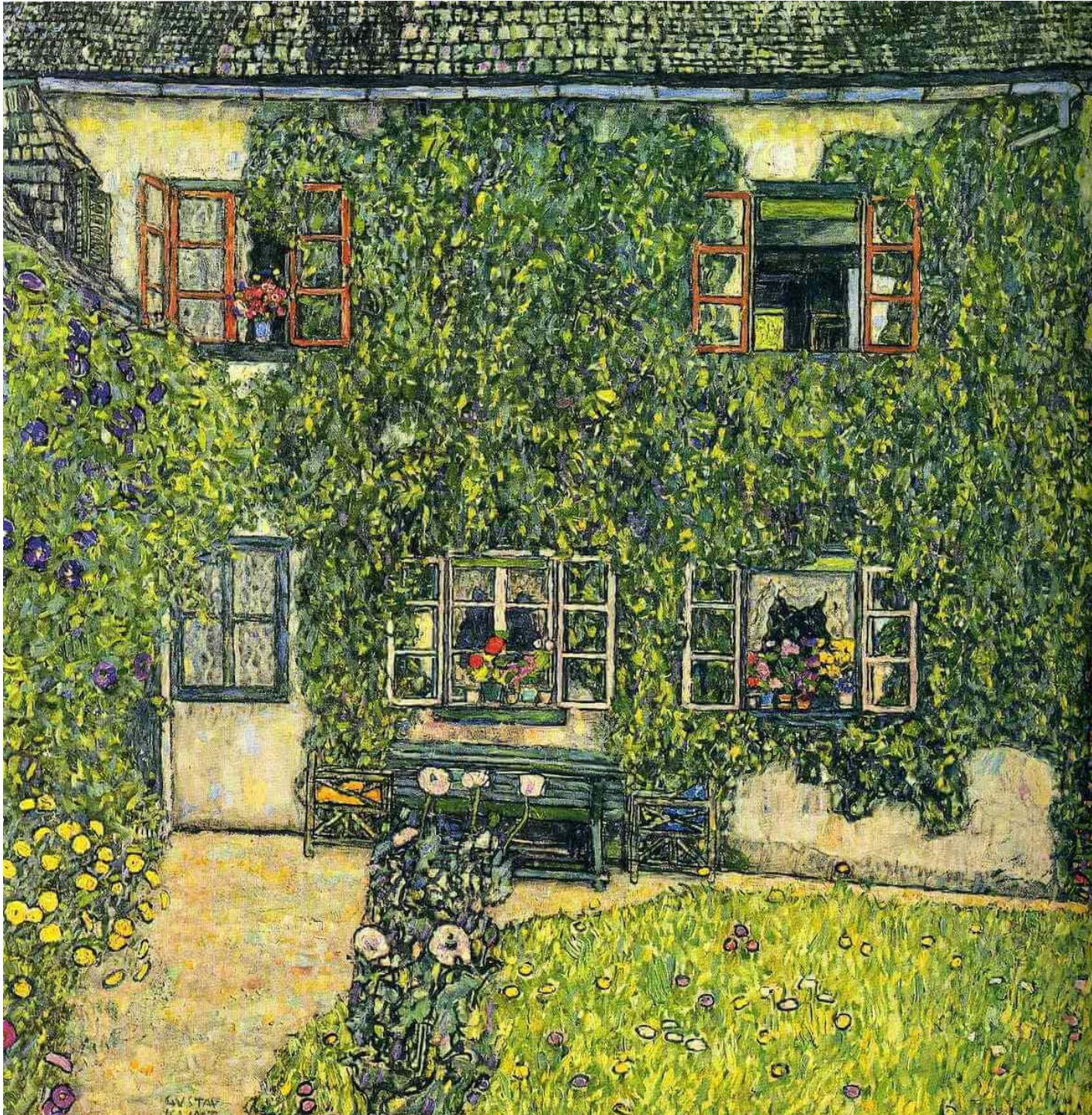
LMHC, REAT, REACE, ICAT, LPN

Health & Wellness – Therapy – Life Coach Creative Arts for Health & Healing – Supporting you!

I am a mast cell specialist with over 13 years of experience working with and supporting individuals with MCAS and other mast cell activation related issues and disorders. Visit the website and learn more:

CELACare Eco-Health, Inc.

<https://celacareonline.us>



*"The love of
gardening is a
seed once sown
that never
dies."*

*-- Gertrude
Jekyll*

RoadMap:

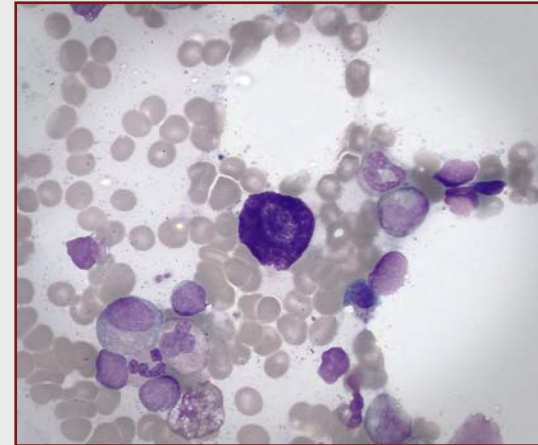
- Mast Cells: What they are and what they do
- The Language that Defines us
- Communication, Language, Memory & the Brain
- The Challenge
- Self & Hardscape
- On Chinese Gardens
- Self-compassion Meditation



Mast Cells

Mast cells are:

- White blood cells
- Located in the connective tissue throughout the entire body
- In every organ system including the brain
- Part of the body's immune response
- Part of the body's inflammatory response
- The body's 1st responders to perceived dangers and threats



Mast Cells

What they do:

- **Body's 1st line of defense** against viruses, bacteria, foreign substances, pathogens (our immune response)
- **Help protect** the body against things like bacteria, viruses—it “adapts” to the specific danger it encounters (adaptive immune response)
- **Regulate** blood pressure and heart function
- **Regulate** wound healing
- **Regulate** the body's inflammatory response
- **Regulate** most hormones in the GI tract influencing weight gain and loss
- **Directly activate** pain nerve fibers; induce pain; headache; chronic pain
- **& much, much more**

Mast Cells

Mast cell activation in 4 steps:

Step 1: Activation

The mast cells have encountered what they perceive as a threat or possible danger. First, they're *sensitized* then—bang!—they're activated;

Step 2: Degranulate

The activated mast cells degranulate, they crumble;

Step 3: Mediators

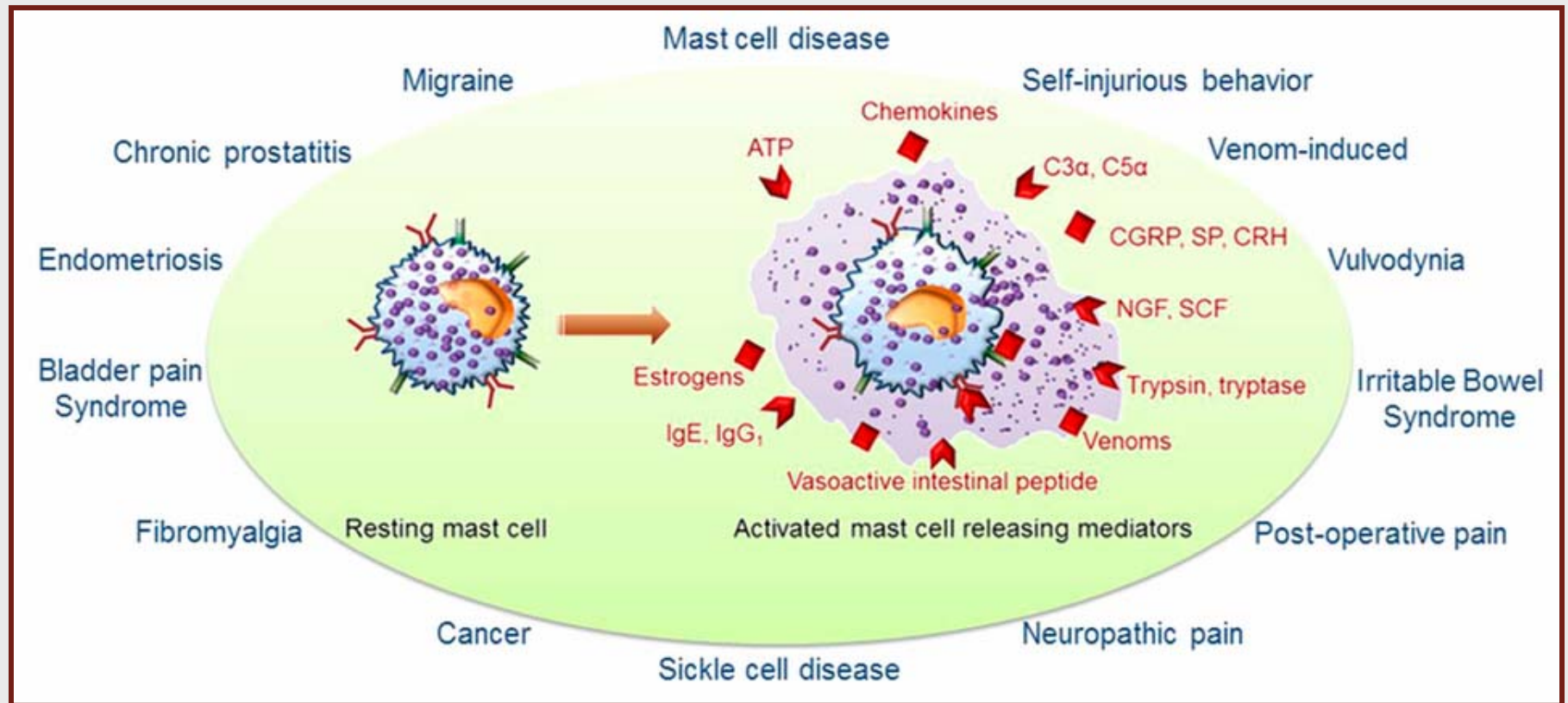
The degranulating mast cells pump out hundred of mediators (chemicals) into the body. These mediators flood the body;

Step 4: Receptors

When mast cell-specific mediators hit their mast cell receptors (“doors”) those substances get in and interact with the body.

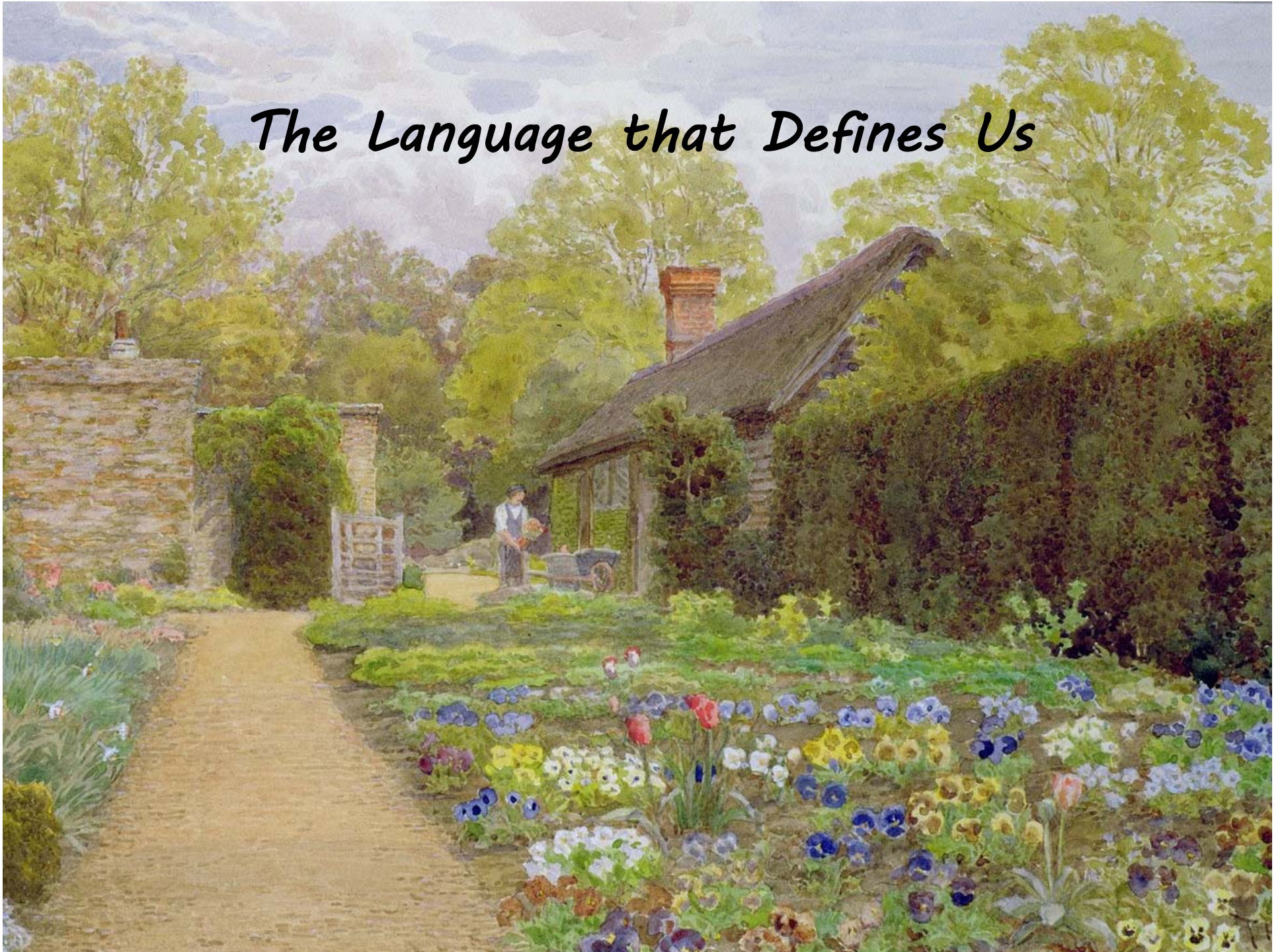
Mast Cells

A partial list of mast cell activation related issues and disorders includes:



Mas Anupam Aich, Lawrence B. Afrin, Kalpna Gupta
Int. J. Mol. Sci. 2015, 16(12), 29069-29092;
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms161226151>

The Language that Defines Us



Communication

Communication in our bodies happens at multiple levels through various routes: through our auditory senses (hearing); through our vision; through cell-to-cell communication; through touch and taste.

There is language—written, spoken, sung—that we use aloud and that also runs silently as dialogue in our heads all the time.

Our brain is the processing hub. It is in a constant state of reception; receiving information from inside our bodies, from all of our senses, and from our external environment.

It is a vastly complex system of meaning-making that involves in-the-moment data as well as memories and associations.

Memory & the Brain

Types of Memory:

- **Short-term:** temporary storage space that holds information from seconds to minutes. It is easily accessible
- **Long-term:** mostly permanent storage space. Hold information here for years. No limit on how much info you can store
- **Sensory:** memory ability with each of our senses (echoic memory is hearing; haptic memory is touch; gustatory memory is taste; iconic memory is vision; olfactory memory is smell)
- **Episodic:** consciously recall facts and details based on first-hand experience
- **Semantic:** facts about the world

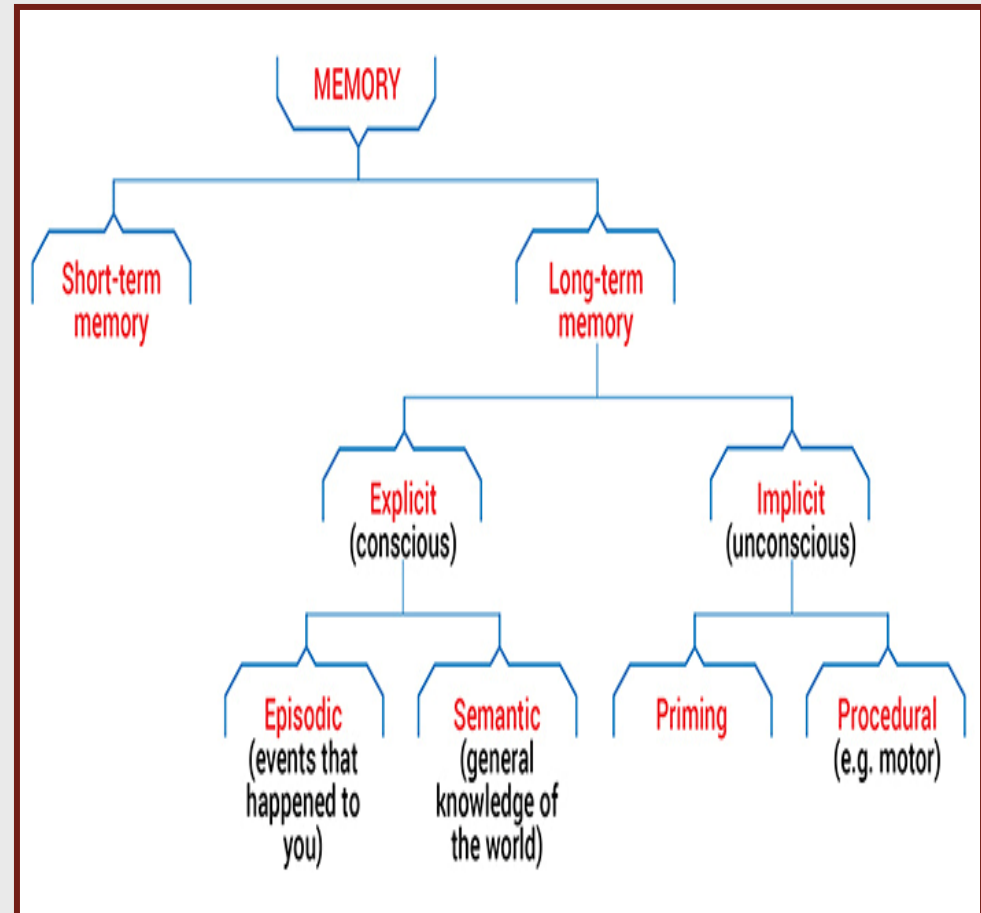
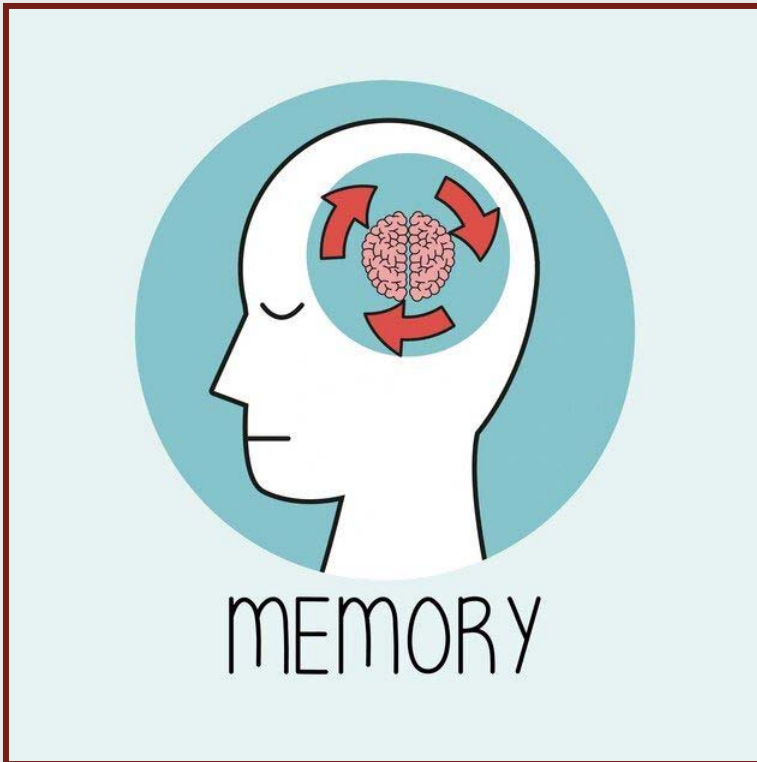


Image credit: Queensland Brain Institute

Memory & the Brain



Memory Types (cont'd):

- **Procedural:** type of long-term memory that helps you automatically remember how to do things you've learned. Don't need to think because brain is already trained to do it (for example, riding a bike)
- **Prospective:** ability to remember something in the future (e.g., an appointment you have scheduled for tomorrow)

Memory & the Brain

Memory Types (cont'd):

Associative Memory

The ability to remember relationships between concepts, such as how two words are related or recognizing an object and its alternate name, and is mediated by the temporal lobe of the brain.

Plays a crucial role in the connection between language and our thinking. It enables the integration of concepts and facilitates our understanding of them.

Allows us to form connections between different things, different elements, such as words, images, and experiences.

Priming Memory

Exposure to a stimulus (a “prime”) influences the way a person responds to a subsequent related stimulus, often without conscious awareness. It affects behavior and thoughts.

Example, briefly seeing an image of a cat then later responding to a similarly shaped image as if it were a cat even if it isn't actually a cat. Can occur without conscious awareness which means we might not realize our response is being influenced by a previous stimuli.

Memory & the Brain

Mast Cells, Memory, & Neuroplasticity

Emerging research shows that mast cells can exhibit a form of memory, meaning their responses to subsequent challenges can be shaped by prior exposure.

Mast cells have been shown to interact with the brain environment.

Mast cells play a significant role in the brain, interact with the nervous system, and influence neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to change and adapt.

The relationship between mast cells, memory, and neuroplasticity is complex. It involves interactions with many different cells of the body as well as the release of various mediators that can influence brain function.

Mast cells have the ability to retain a memory of past exposures to different stimuli, leading to a heightened or altered response to subsequent exposures. This memory can be long-lasting, meaning that their stabilization process the subsequent increased sensitivity is retained—remembered—even after the initial trigger is gone.

Recent studies point to mast cells in the brain contributing to memory and to cognitive function (see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211124723011531#:~:text=Mast%20cell%20deficiency%20improves%20contextual%20fear%20conditioning,memory%20deficits%20in%20an%20AD%20mouse%20model>).

Language & the Brain

What is language?

The brain learns and remembers in order to communicate successfully. At the foundation of communicating are: understanding and meaning-making.

Language is a multifaceted tool. It is used to communicate, to make meaning, and to understand – everything.

We train our brains—plasticity—in what our experiences mean, about our emotional landscape, how to understand the sensory input regarding our external environment, and to assign, understand, and make-meaning regarding all aspects of our internal world of health, wellness, illness, and change.

Language relies on memory for the storage and retrieval of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Memory benefits from language as a tool for organizing and recalling information.

Language & the Brain

We teach our brains what meaning to make of our experiences.

We teach our brains how to respond and react.

We communicate with our body at the cellular level.

All cells in the body communicate.

Mast cells communicate.





*Why does
Any of
This
Matter?*

How we Live

Two Relationships:

We live in a relationship with ourselves.

We live in a relationship with our mast cell issues and disorders;
with our chronic illness.



Friendship

Ingredients for Friendship with Self:

Self-acceptance: accepting and embracing yourself, including perceived flaws and imperfections, regrets, mistakes in order to allow for a space of honesty within.

Self-care: involves setting boundaries, taking care of your physical and emotional needs, making decisions that are in one's own best interest.

Intentional time alone: such as through journaling, meditation, spending time in nature helps in getting to know yourself better and deepening the friendship with yourself.

Self-compassion: being kind to yourself and treating yourself with the same compassion and understanding you would offer a friend – a vital ingredient in developing a positive, supportive, caring friendship with yourself.

The Roles of Chronic Illness

“Our culture gives us our labels for sickness and forms our explanations of illnesses and diseases, while providing us with our beliefs, the social roles we adopt, and the economic constraints that influence our health-seeking behaviors.”

--- excerpt from Brown and Barrett,
Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology

The Roles Regarding Sickness:

- The sick person/patient
- The healer
- The supportive friend or family member

Everyone is expected to know what to do according to their role:

- The sick person must get better
- The healer must have the all answers and tell the sick person what to do to get better
- The supportive person must support the sick person in getting better

Negative Self-talk & Chronic Illness

The Inner Dialogue:

Attitudes & Thinking:

- Emotional reasoning – “I caused it” or “I’m making it worse”
- Overgeneralizing – “I’ll never be able to [fill in the blank]”
- Self-blame – “I should be able to handle this better”

Vocabulary of Chronic Illness & Negative Self-talk:

- Malingering
- Lazy
- Selfish

The Challenge

Every day, think of yourself as a garden. Think in the terminology used for gardens and gardening. *Be* the garden; be its friend.

When you look at a garden, what do you see? There's a space that's yours to make green and lush, where birds and small animals can nest and be safe. We're not critical or judgmental.

We look at what is and think about the plantings (perhaps the one to the right that looks tired and bit spent) in terms of what we can do to nurture it, to give it the energy and strength it needs, to support its health so that it will bloom and grow.

If it needs more sun, we'll move it; more shade, we'll accommodate. Better nutrition and what's necessary for it's singular, individual make-up? We'll educate ourselves so that we can provide these things with understanding, and insight, and compassion.

Every day, think of yourself as a garden. Take a step back and look and see what you need for strength; to bloom and grow.



Garden of Self

In Motion and Stillness

(repose resides in motion and motion stems from repose)

Everything must be planned out in detail before one can take full advantage of the terrain.

The key to garden designing is the relationship between in-motion and in-stillness garden viewings.

To a person sitting in a pavilion, the racing clouds and flowing water, the flying birds and falling petals are things in motion.

To a strolling person, the hills, rocks, trees, and woods are all things at a standstill.

Swimming fish in calm water is an example of the interaction of motion and repose, and beauty naturally results.

Great garden scenes come from alternating angles of viewing, between mobility and stability.

--- Professor Chen Congzhou,
excerpt from *On Chinese Gardens*

The New Language of Self



New Labels | New Descriptors

Living Landscape: "Softscape"

- Flowers
- Grass
- Trees

Non-living Landscape: "Hardscape"

- Pathways, walkways
- Stone walls
- Structures made from brick, wood, stone
- A bench, a seat
- Planters
- Gazebo
- Rockeries
- Ponds

Vocabulary:

- Growing season
- Transplant shock
- Aeration
- Dethatching

The New Language of Self

Permaculture – the 12 Principles:

1. Observe and Interact.

By taking time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.

2. Catch and Store Energy.

By developing systems that collect resources when they are abundant, we can use them in times of need.

3. Obtain a Yield.

Ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the work that you are doing.

4. Apply Self-regulation & Accept Feedback.

We need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well.

5. Use & Value Renewable Resources & Services.

Make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our consumptive behaviour and dependence on non-renewable resources.

6. Produce No Waste.

By valuing and making use of all of the resources available to us, nothing goes to waste.

<https://permacultureprinciples.com/>

The New Language of Self

Permaculture – the 12 Principles: (cont'd)

7. Design from Patterns to Details.

By stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. These can form the backbone of our designs, with the details filled in as we go.

8. Integrate Rather than Segregate.

By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between them and they support each other.

9. Use Small & Slow Solutions.

Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and producing more sustainable outcomes.

10. Use and Value Diversity.

Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.

11. Use Edges & Value the Marginal.

The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse, and productive elements in the system.

12. Creatively Use & Respond to Change.

We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time.

"Let no one be discouraged by the thought of how much there is to learn... the first steps are steps into a delightful unknown... and a garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all, it teaches entire trust"

--- Gertrude Jekyll, excerpt from *The Gardener's Essential Gertrude Jekyll*



Self-Compassion Meditation

Loving Kindness Self-Compassion Meditation

Begin by finding a comfortable and upright position. See if you can find a posture that portrays both dignity and strength, but let go of striving or tightness.

Focus on the feeling of each breath you breathe, noticing if you're caught up in thoughts or emotions with a sense of kindness and patience.

Loving kindness practice typically focuses on phrases that remind us of our best intentions. We're not forcing ourselves to feel anything in particular or striving to change what we feel. So bring to mind a person, a child, or even an animal or a pet for whom you have unambiguous feelings. Picturing this other person or being, shift your awareness to a series of phrases that capture your wish that this person be free of suffering. That this person live a life of ease. Those phrases are often summarized as: may you feel happy, may you feel healthy, may you feel safe, and may you live your life with ease.

There may be nothing you can actually do to change that person or being's experience right now, but with an open heart, continue wishing them well: may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you feel safe, may you live your life with ease.

Now shift your awareness to yourself, recognize how much stress you're under, how much you may feel out of your control right now, and also how much criticism we have for ourselves. Quite often, we may judge ourselves differently than the people we most care for. And see if you can bring the same care you did for the other child or being, or pet, or whoever came to mind for yourself right now---you deserve the same:

Self-Compassion Meditation

Loving Kindness Self-Compassion Meditation (cont'd)

may I feel happy, may I feel healthy, may I feel safe, may I live my life with ease.

Not wishing yourself better than anyone else in your life, but also not wishing yourself less. And if it feels like that's easy right now, continuing on with wishes for yourself.

And then, if you like, instead bring to mind a good friend. Again, they could be anywhere in the world. There may be nothing literally you can do for them right now. But you can offer them the same wishes you just wished for yourself, wherever you are: may you be happy, may you feel healthy, may you feel safe, may you live your life with ease.

You can move your awareness next to someone we often refer to as a stranger or a neutral person. Somebody who works in your neighborhood or across town, or someone you might see once in a while. Bring that person, that being, to mind, and see if you can offer them the same wishes you did for a friend. Recognizing, whoever this person is, they have their own struggles. They have their own fears, their own need for safety, for food, for ease. So picturing the stranger, offer them the same well-wishes: may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you feel safe, and may you live your life with ease.

Self-Compassion Meditation

Loving Kindness Self-Compassion Meditation (cont'd)

Now bring to mind a difficult person. It's not the *most difficult* person that comes to mind for you, but someone challenging---you may not see eye to eye. Noting those wishes you had just now for someone you hardly know at all, see if you can wish the same for this challenging person. It doesn't mean condoning anything they've done. It doesn't mean you won't take proactive action to take care of what needs to get taken care of in the world. But as you do, recognize that all beings need to and have the drive to be free from suffering: may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you feel safe, may you live your life with ease.

Often, for this part of the practice, it may be easier to include yourself at the same time: may we both be happy, may we both be healthy, may we both feel safe, may we both live our lives with ease.

If ever this part of the practice becomes overwhelming or too stressful, it's okay to come back to the breath or wishes for yourself.

For the last two minutes, expand your awareness out to all beings everywhere – to ourselves, to our friends and family, to strangers, to difficult people: may all beings everywhere be happy, may all beings everywhere be healthy, may all beings everywhere feel safe, may all beings everywhere live their lives with ease.

When you're ready, you can open your eyes if they've been closed. Take a moment and then, with a sense of intention, choose when to get up and continue on with the rest of your day.



"If you take any flower you please and look it over and turn it about and smell it and feel it and try to find out all its little secrets, not of flower only but of leaf, bud, and stem as well, you will discover many wonderful things. This is how you make friends with plants, and very good friends you will find them to the end of our lives."

---Gertrude Jekyll

References:

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MEMORY, LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION:

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THE BRAIN:

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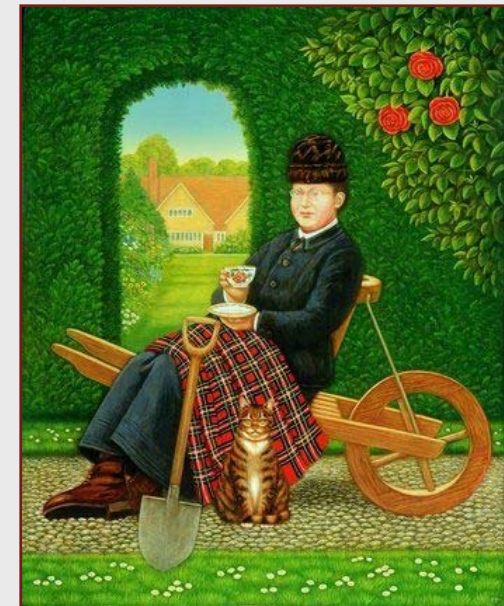
BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8228195>

<https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221362683/scientists-are-using-new-technology-to-study-the-cells-behind-language-comprehen>



Gertrude Jekyll's gardening boots by Nicholson





Artwork & Artist:

John William Waterhouse - slides 1, 20, 26, 29, 33

Gustav Klimt – slides 5, 24

Ida O’Keeffe – slide 6

Helen Allingham – slide 11

Gardenersdesire.tumblr.com – slides 18, 19

Sir William Nicholson, *Miss Jekyll’s Gardening Boots*, slide 34

Frances Broomfield, *Gertrude Jekyll the Queen of Spades*, slide 34

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema – slide 35