

# Five Cool Mental Health Terms

written by Kathleen M. Pike, PhD  
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*Talking about our innermost thoughts and feelings can be challenging - at least in part because sometimes we can't find the words. Well, it is the start of a new school year in the northern hemisphere, so in that spirit, here are five specialized terms to expand our mental health vocabulary. Coming to us from as far back as the ancient western world to today's millennials, some have infiltrated popular speech, but others not so much.*



[Photo Credit](#)

*Finding just the right word to express what is whirling around in our heads is an enormously satisfying experience, and peppering your everyday parlance with these super cool words promises to make you sound super smart, too.*

**1. Anomie.** Popularized by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his 1897 book [Suicide](#), anomie describes apathy, alienation, and personal distress resulting from the loss of standards, structures and values previously shared by a society. At the core of much sociological theory a century ago, sociologists have passed the discourse of anomie along to social psychologists and mental health professionals. We have good reason to link rising rates of depression, anxiety and suicide to the debilitating and annihilating experience of anomie in today's world that can leave people feeling simultaneously hyper-connected and profoundly emotionally disconnected.

**2. Cathexis.** We can thank Herr Professor Doktor Sigmund Freud for bringing cathexis to our mental health vocabulary. Cathexis refers to the attachment, conscious or unconscious, of intense emotional feeling and significance to an idea, an object, or a person. According to Freud it is when we "cathect" to ideas, objects and people that we form real attachments and lasting memories. One of the goals of psychoanalysis is to uncover these attachments and understand how they work. In the process of therapy, if we come to see that such emotional investment and attachments are self-destructive or self-defeating, we aim to help patients "de-cathect" from such investments. And so, begins the work of "letting go."

**3. Conation.** Thanks to millennial entrepreneurs this peppery piece of vocabulary is gaining [a new life](#). From

the Latin, conation is not a new term, but it is popping up more and more in the context of search for meaning. Millennial entrepreneurs equate conation with purposeful striving. The act of conation involves channeling one's desires and energies to a single-minded pursuit of a goal, which ultimately contributes to constructing a meaningful and mentally healthy and successful life. A modern take on the old adage "1% inspiration, 99% perspiration."

**4. Interoceptive Awareness.** Am I aware of when I am tense? Can I describe the butterflies in my stomach when I am anxious? Do I know when I am hungry or full? This is what interoceptive awareness is – literally having "interior perception" so that we "see" and can describe what is going on inside. Interoceptive awareness of internal sensations in the body connects the mind with the nervous system. Hilde Bruch described the essential importance of developing one's interoceptive awareness in her 1978 book, [The Golden Cage](#), which captures the healing power for individuals with anorexia nervosa. For all of us, developing this intimately personal way of better knowing what our bodies are telling us is a good thing.

**5. Melancholia.** From the ancient Greeks, melancholia is one of those poetic terms that was employed in literature, philosophy and medicine long before the emergence of psychiatry and psychology. In the ancient world, if you were feeling depressed, or melancholic, it was due to an overload of black bile. In fact the roots of melancholia stem from the ancient Greek words melas kholē, which literally mean "black bile." The term melancholia has mostly fallen out of use in modern psychiatry and psychology, though it is sometimes still described with admiration as a deep sense of loss or existential grief that motivates artists.

*In the spirit of seventh grade English exercises that required us to demonstrate understanding by putting into use our new vocabulary words, here is my Five on Friday homage to Freud, Durkheim and Bruch, the Greeks and the Millennials:*

*Releasing my clenched jaws and inhaling slowly to deepen my shallow breath, this **interoceptive awareness** helps me re-center. With hundreds of emails and text messages awaiting my attention, I need to focus my energies so that the technologies of today help me truly connect lest I run the risk of falling into a state of **anomie**. And in so doing, I may find that I have to decathect from particular ideas and people in whom I am profoundly invested because such **cathexis** is not healthy for me today. And if I get this work just right, I will avert falling into a state of **melancholia**. Millennials, I shall take heed of your advice and will aspire to develop the proper **conation** to help me be a force for mental health understanding and healing in the world.*