Why are we concerned with “Thinking and Reasoning” in depression?

- Many individuals with depression process information differently.
- These depressive thought patterns are often not based on reality or tend to be very one-sided (i.e. paying attention only to your own errors or only negative details of situations, events, relationships, etc.).
- We refer to this as “distorted thinking”, which can contribute to the development or maintenance of depression.

**Thought Distortion 1: Mental Filter**

“Mental Filter” or the “Fly in the Ointment” – What do we mean by that?

- Filtering out and paying attention to only negative details.
- Perceptions of reality are clouded, like a single drop of ink that clouds an entire glass of water.

During the next week, pay attention to situations in which you perceive reality through a “mental filter” and describe an example of one of those situations on the following pages. The already completed example serves as a suggestion:

```
Example

“While you present your ideas in a work meeting, most people are listening; however, one person is playing with their phone.”
Mental Filter: “No one was listening to me – my ideas are stupid!”
```

Your situation:
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Your “mental filter”:
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What are the consequences of this mental filter; how did it influence your feelings and actions?

**Example**

“I feel stupid and less confident in myself. I probably shouldn’t bring up any new ideas in the next meeting.”

Based on your situation?

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Is this thought justified? NO! Therefore: What could be a helpful alternative thought?

**Example**

“A few people asked relevant questions, so they must have been listening. Not everyone will like my ideas. Besides, this colleague often plays on their phone during team meetings.”

Based on your situation?

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What are the consequences of this alternative thought for your feelings and actions?

**Example**

“I’m frustrated by my colleague who did not pay attention, but I handled the questions from my other colleagues well. Overall, I am satisfied with my performance and will contribute in the future to team meetings.”

Based on your situation?

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If others whom you trust were also present during this situation:
Find out how others may have perceived the situation by asking a person whom you trust if they evaluated the situation the same way.

Example

“My colleague played with her phone during my presentation. What do you think, why did she play with her phone?”

Who was present during this situation? What could you ask that person?

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What could be his/her answer? (Sometimes it’s enough to ask in one’s mind’s eye.)

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Thought Distortion 2: Overgeneralization

“Overgeneralization” – What do we mean by that?

- A single negative event is seen as part of a never-ending series of failures.
- In describing such events, words such as “always” or “never” are often used.

During the next week, pay attention to situations in which you are overgeneralizing, and try to reach a more helpful appraisal.

The following examples are meant to aid you with this task:

Example

If you forgot the birthday of a friend, instead of generalizing:
“I’m always a bad friend.”

... try to make concrete statements about a specific situation, for example:
“I forgot her birthday this year. That is somewhat embarrassing, but I can still send her a belated birthday wish!”
In what situation have you used the words “always” or “never”?  

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What would be a more concrete statement in regard to this specific situation?  

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Example

When a dish you cook does not turn out well, instead of making a negative prediction, such as:
“I will never learn how to cook properly. It’s hopeless.”

... try to remain in the here and now:
“It didn’t work today. That’s annoying, but it doesn’t mean that it won’t work the next time I try.”

In which situation do you predict a negative future (see also module 7, jumping to conclusions)?  

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In your situation, what would be a statement in the here and now?  

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Example

You aren’t able to put together a new piece of furniture. Instead of being hard on yourself and saying something, such as:
“I am a failure, I can’t do anything properly.”

... change your perspective and think about what you would tell a good friend, for example:
“Well, it’s pretty tough to put the piece together all by yourself, and the manual was very difficult to understand.”
When do you tend to be hard on yourself?

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What would you say to a good friend in the same situation?

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Example

A single negative aspect of an event overshadows all the positive.

**Situation:** You are on vacation, and it rains for one day.

You tell yourself: “The entire vacation will be a catastrophe – it’s never going to stop raining. I should have stayed at home.”

**Deliberate exaggeration:**
Imagine the scenario in an absurd or funny way. Have a little fun with your own thought distortions. This can help to gain some distance from these thoughts:

You tell everyone about the upcoming catastrophe – there will be a weeklong downpour at the resort. People begin to build an ark and evacuate. You are praised as an “oracle” and a “hero” for saving everyone from the flood.

Your own example (of a time when you used a mental filter in which all the positive was overshadowed by the negative):

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**Deliberate exaggeration:**

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**Additional Tips**

Pay attention to situations in which you succeeded right away at making a helpful appraisal, and reward yourself for it!

It’s alright if it doesn’t work on your first attempt. You can save this task for later, for example when the training is completed.

**Example**

You used a foreign word incorrectly. You could tell yourself:

“*Using one word incorrectly has nothing to do with my intelligence, it could happen to anybody.*”

Reward:

“I allow myself half an hour of rest on the balcony with a cup of my favorite tea.”

Your situation:

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Your reward:

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**Overview**

**Summary of Learning Points:**

- Pay attention to the discussed depressive appraisals (mental filter, overgeneralization) in everyday life!
- Generate more helpful appraisals, for example:
  - Make concrete statements about a specific situation in the here and now!
  - Change your perspective (“What would I say to a good friend if they experienced the same or a similar situation?”).
  - Gain distance by deliberately over exaggerating an outcome (“Make a scenario more ridiculous or funny”).
Comments
Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:
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Why are we concerned with “Memory” in depression?
- Many individuals with depression complain of having problems with concentration and memory.
- Decreased concentration may even be a possible diagnostic criteria for depression.

Is it theoretically possible to remember everything?
- **No!** The storage capacity of our memory is limited!
- On average, only about 60% of the information from a story could be actively recalled (40% could not!).
  - Advantage: Our brains are not overloaded with irrelevant information, but ...
  - Disadvantage: ... much important information is also lost (appointments, vacation memories, school knowledge etc.).

Memory & Concentration
- Our attention works like a spotlight, only one object on the stage at a time can be illuminated.
- We can only correctly remember things on which we have previously focused our attention!
- It is impossible to focus our attention on all things in our environment at the same time.
- How well we can remember something also depends on how well we can concentrate at the moment.

How do memory and concentration problems occur during depression?
- During strong ruminations circling thoughts often claim all of one’s attention.
- There is hardly any attentional capacity left that can be focused on other (more important) things in the environment. The spotlight is focused virtually “inward”.
- As a result, those affected by ruminations can later barely remember some details in their environment.

A common fear: Am I getting Alzheimer’s?
- **No!** Memory problems during depression are explainable. They are a temporary occurrence and much less pronounced than dementia (individuals remember essentially nothing).
- It is rather related to decreased information intake versus “forgetting” altogether.
- The loss of motivation, apathy and lack of energy that often occur during depression can also explain reduced information intake.
- When ruminations/depression are reduced, individuals can attend to other things again and remember them.
Do we all see and remember the same?

- **No**, everyone perceives things differently!
- In general, we focus our attention primarily on things that are personally meaningful. For example, because they fit our current mood.

**Try the following:**
Play “I spy” with friends, e.g. while in a coffee shop. You will notice, everyone pays attention to different things.

**False Memories**
- Not everything we remember really happened the way we remember it! Our memory doesn’t work like a “video camera”!
- Our brain fills in and mixes current impressions with past similar events. Many memories are supplemented via “logic” (remember the examples from the session).

**Memories and Depression**
- Depressive moods often lead to remembering more negative experiences - pleasant or neutral experiences are not so easily remembered.
- Events are experienced and remembered not through rose-colored, but rather much more often through gray-tinted glasses!
- **Example:**
  A man is coughing frequently during a concert. Afterward only the disturbance is remembered, but not the lovely music!

**False Memories and Depression**
- The emotional coloring of memories also relates to false memories!
- This can impede a realistic view of the world and encourage depressive processing (therefore, providing additional “evidence” in the sense of depressive processing).

**Does this mean, that I can no longer trust my own memories?**
- **No!** False memories are normal and affect all people.
- Keep in mind that (like everyone else) you can make errors because our memory is not a video camera.
- Consider that negative situations might be remembered through gray-tinted glasses.
- In everyday life, train yourself to remember positive events more frequently, and keep a joy-diary in which you write down every night the pleasant events that happened during that day.
What helps with memory problems in everyday life?
(1) Try to incorporate as much structure into your daily schedule as possible. The more routine your behavior is, the less risk there is of forgetting something.
(2) It is also helpful to maintain the best possible “external order”. You can find items more quickly and remember better when everything has a specific place.
(3) Post important notes in logical places (i.e., medication schedules to the refrigerator or bathroom mirror; items to remember to take with you on the front door, etc.)
(4) Use appointment calendars or other memory aids (ex: from a Smartphone or email program).
(5) Make it a habit to always carry a notebook a pen so that you can note down important things (such as To-Do lists).
(6) When you are not at home and want to remember an idea but have no way to note it down, try to anchor it by linking the idea to an object (i.e., tie a knot in your handkerchief, put a rock in your pocket).
(7) The more senses and methods used while learning, the better the retention rate. Therefore, try to use various “channels,” such as hearing, seeing, discussing and applying.

Personal follow-up:
On the following pages you will find suggestions on how to implement what you have learned in this module in everyday life. You can use the provided examples or come up with some of your own.

Concentration
What can I do to concentrate more easily?

Example
“Doing only one task at a time, e.g. turning off the television while reading.”

What I want to do and exactly when (day, time) I want to implement it:

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What can I do in order to improve my attention to pleasant things?

Example
“To specifically pay attention to the things around me while taking a walk, and try to remember the positive things in particular.”
Memory

Which (of the introduced) memory tips do I want to try out this week (see above: “What helps with memory problems in everyday life?”)?

**Example**

“Decide on a special place in the apartment for the front door key: leave the key in the lock.”

What do I want to try?

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What strategy can I utilize to remember things without a memory aid?

**Example**

“I read an interesting article, and in order to better embed the material, I will look up further information, i.e. on the internet, or I tell a friend about what I have read.”

What strategy I want to try and exactly when (day, time):

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Memory and Mood

What can I do to improve my memory of positive events?

Example

“I keep a joy-diary, in which I note down positive events every evening.”

What I want to do and **exactly** when (day, time) I want to do it:

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What preparations do I need to make for it and when exactly do I want to do this?

Example

“I need a nice notebook and a pen. I will buy both tomorrow afternoon.”

Based on your example:

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**Overview**

**Summary of learning points**

- Memory problems in depression can be explained and are attributable to other problems (ex: they occur through concentration problems; frequent rumination).
- Unlike dementia the concentration and memory problems in depression are less severe and can improve if the depression decreases.
- In general, our memory is deceptive! Our memory is prone to bias. Memory is especially dependent upon our mood.
- Make use of memory reminders (calendars; post-its) during depression and keep a joy-diary.
- Nobody’s perfect: We all forget things. This is normal and sometimes a good thing!
Comments

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with “Thinking and Reasoning” in depression?

- Many individuals with depression process information differently.
- These depressive thought patterns are often not based on reality or tend to be very one-sided (i.e. to be convinced of total failure, when something is not perfect, etc.).
- We refer to this as “distorted thinking”, which can contribute to the development or maintenance of depression.

Thought Distortion 1: “Should-Statements”

“Should-statements” or “excessively high standards that we place on ourselves” – What do we mean by that?

- Trying to push yourself by using “should”, “must” or “have to” statements.
- Setting rigid rules and standards allows little room for deviation!

Are you familiar with this? During next week, pay attention to situations in which you set overly high expectations for yourself. The example below serves as a suggestion:

Example

“I should always be on time to an appointment.”

Does this sound familiar? What overly high expectations do you set for yourself?

Why do you believe it is important to maintain that expectation?

Example

“It’s just not right to be late. It is impolite to keep people waiting. They might think they are not important to me or they could take me for someone who is unorganized and reckless.”
Why do you think it’s important to you to always maintain these expectations?

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What benefit and what cost comes with overly high expectations?

**Example**

**Benefit:**
“I am perceived as very reliable and receive recognition for it. I enjoy the fact that others feel that they can rely on me.”

**Cost:**
“I am tense, because before every appointment I have to keep a close eye on the clock. I have a bad conscience if I am late to an appointment even if my counterpart doesn’t mind.”

Based on your own expectations:

**Benefit:**

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**Cost:**

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What would be a more lenient stance / a fair standard?

**Example**

“It’s not equally important to be on time to every appointment. It would be more important to be on time for a job interview, for example, than for a private grill party. I will make an effort to be on time, if something intervenes, I can’t change that and will give notice or apologize when I get there.”
Based on your own expectations: What would be a more lenient stance / a fair standard?

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**Thought Distortion 2: “Disqualifying the Positive”**

“Disqualifying the Positive” – What is meant by that?

- “Disqualifying the positive” can be indicated by the following:
  1. Expecting negative feedback.
  2. Rejecting positive feedback (Denying positive experiences or positive experiences are regarded as exceptions).

Did you know? During the next week, pay attention to positive feedback that you were unable to accept or negative feedback that you accepted prematurely.

**(1) Rejection of positive feedback**

**Example**

You are praised for your work and think:

“The person is just trying to flatter me, he is dishonest.”

“How he thinks that.”

How did the thoughts affect your mood and self-esteem?

“I feel useless and demotivated. My self-esteem drops.”

In what situation were you unable to accept positive feedback? What were your thoughts?

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How did those thoughts affect your mood and self-esteem?

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What would you have had to accomplish or pay attention to in this situation in order to have “earned” positive feedback?

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Does it make sense to orient oneself towards that standard? Do you want that?

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Example

If you don’t want that, what could be a more constructive appraisal?
“Great, someone is appreciating my effort.”

How did the thoughts affect your mood and self-esteem?
“I am proud and feel assured in my abilities. I am motivated to continue with my work.”

Based on your situation, what would have been a more helpful appraisal?

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How would that have affected your mood and your self-esteem?

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(2) Hasty acceptance of negative feedback

Example

You are criticized and think:
“The other person has seen through me, I am worthless…”

How do these thoughts affect your mood and self-esteem?
“My self-esteem suffers, I feel worthless and rejected.”

What could be a more constructive appraisal?
“The other person might have had a bad day.”
“Can I learn something from this criticism?”

In which situation did you hastily accept negative feedback?

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How did these thoughts affect your mood and self-esteem?

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What would have been a more helpful appraisal?

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How would this have affected your mood and self-esteem?

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What kind of thoughts could help you, to learn to accept the positive, i.e. a compliment, better in the future?

**Example**

"With praise, someone wants to do something nice for me. I can be happy about that."

Do you have additional ideas for more helpful thoughts?

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What could help you to learn to deal with negative feedback better in the future?

**Example**

**Differentiate the criticism:**

"It’s not me – it’s my behavior!"

Do you have additional ideas for helpful appraisals?

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Thought Distortion 3: “Black and White Thinking”

“Black and White Thinking” – What is meant by that?
- When something is not perfect (demands are not 100% fulfilled), we are convinced of total failure!
- Like an inner critic, that only sees “black” or “white”.

What are some examples in which doing something "half way" is already a step in the right direction?

Example

Learning a language:
“A language is learned bit by bit, it's better to start with 1%, e.g. with 10 words, rather than to 100% not do it!”

Your own examples:

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Overview

Summary of learning points
- Pay attention to “Should” Statements, Black and White Thinking and Disqualifying the Positive in everyday life!
- Find the right measure for your goals – be fair to yourself so that you have the chance to meet your own demands!
- This also means forgiving yourself when you find yourself falling into one of those cognitive traps.
- Apply strategies to handle “Disqualifying the Positive” differently and practice them, for example:
  - Differentiate criticism (a specific behavior versus the entire person).
  - Find the constructive parts of the criticism.
  - View praise as a gift.
  - Enjoy praise and do not devalue it.
Comments

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with self-worth in depression?
- Many people with depression suffer from low self-worth.

People with low self-worth ...
- tend to pay attention only to the areas in which they view themselves as a “failure”
- tend to make global appraisals of self-worth (“I am worthless”)
- do not differentiate between the whole person and a behavior (something unsuccessful = failure)

Self-Worth

What exactly is self-worth?
- The value that a person attaches to him or herself
- Subjective appraisal of one’s self
- It does not have anything to do with how others experience you

What identifies people with high self-esteem?

Directly observable:
- Voice: clear, well-articulated, appropriate volume
- Mimics/Gestures: Eye contact; use gestures to emphasize main points
- Body language: straight, upright

Not directly observable:
- Confident in one’s own ability
- Accepting of error or failures (without devaluing oneself)
- Introspective, ready to learn (also from errors/failures)
- Positive attitude towards oneself, for example, praising yourself for a success

Sources of self-worth
- Self-worth is not constant; rather it can vary across different activities
- The crucial point is whether we pay attention to only our weaknesses or also our strengths and abilities

Comparing yourself with others
- Quickly and without noticing it, we compare ourselves with others. This is normal. With whom and in what areas we compare ourselves may influence our self-worth:
  - If in comparing yourself, you always “come up short” (because if the “idea” is unattainable or the comparison is unfair), then your self-worth suffers.
Remembering your strengths - How to remind yourself?

**Tips to improve mood and increase self-worth:**
- Joy Diary: Jot down things every evening that went well. Go through them in your mind.
- Accept compliments and jot them down as briefly as possible so that during difficult times you can go back to them (a reserve)! Because:
  - What is put down on paper is often more accurately perceived compared to memories, which during bad moods are not reliably available and may be inaccurate.
- Positive Activities: Do things that are good for you – if possible, with other people (Ex: see a movie, go to a café or take a walk).
- Physical activity (at least 20 minutes per day) – no torture – possibly cardio exercises such as walking or jogging.
- Listen to “feel-good” music.

**Personal follow-up**

On the following pages you will find suggestions for concrete exercises that you can implement to strengthen your self-worth.

**1) Consider your strengths:**
What do I do well? When have I received compliments from others? In what areas have I already succeeded?

*Example*

“I am good at handy work, and a good driver.”

What are your strengths?

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Imagine a concrete situation: When and where? What did I specifically do or who gave me confirmation?
Your own situation: When and where did you succeed? What did you do, concretely, or who gave you confirmation?

(2) Write down when something went well or you received compliments for it! The following may help you with that:

The story of a count ...

... he became very, very old because he was an enjoyer of life, “par excellence”. He never left his house without a handful of beans in his pocket. He did not chew the beans. No, he took them with him so that he could more consciously notice the wonderful times of the day and he could count them.

For every positive moment that he experienced throughout the day – for example, a friendly chat on the street, a laughing woman, a delicious meal, a fine cigar, a shaded place in the midday heat, a glass of good wine – for everything that pleased the senses, he moved a bean from his right jacket pocket to the left. Sometimes he moved two or three beans at one time.

In the evenings, he sat at home and counted the beans in his left jacket pocket. He celebrated these minutes. In this way, he reminded himself of how many pleasant moments he experienced that day and this made him happy. And, even on days in which he counted merely one bean, the day was successful – it was worth living for. (Unknown)

Over the next week, try to move a bean from your right pocket into your left for every little positive experience. In the evening, try to remember what those beans represent and jot it down in your diary.
(3) Imagine your self-worth as multiple shelves that are diversely filled...

- Are there shelves that you didn’t think about for a while? Fill in the shelves in the picture below according to the various aspects of your life.

- Are there any shelves that seem empty to you? Try to think if there could be another perspective.

**Example**

“My shelves are pretty empty. I only have a temporary job and I don’t earn a lot of money.”

What shelf seems to be especially empty for you?

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**Example**

What would be a more helpful/balanced perspective?

“My job doesn’t make me rich, but I receive a lot of appreciation from my co-workers and I enjoy my job.”
What would be a more helpful/balanced perspective for you?

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____________________________________________________________________________

If you feel like there is a shelf that used to be full but no longer is – do you have an idea about how to fill it up again, and what exactly you want to do to make that happen?

Example

“In the past, I enjoyed going for a run. Now, I am unable to find the motivation on my own. Tomorrow I will ask whether our sports club has a running or walking group for those with experience that I can join.”

What I want to start (again):

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(4) Avoid unfair comparisons
Pay attention to situations in which you make a comparison that could only make you look bad.

Example

“Compared with my acquaintance XY, I am a complete wimp in sports. It would be embarrassing to do sports with him.”

Your unfair comparison:

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What consequence does this comparison have for your mood and actions?
Example

“I feel incapable and am embarrassed in front of others. I will definitely decline the offer to train with him.”

Based on your comparison:

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Could you imagine a comparison in which you would fare better?

Example

“My friend XY started this sport at the same time as me. There are exercises which I do better and those that better suit her.”

Your comparison:

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What consequences does this alternative comparison have for your mood and actions?

Example

“I feel assured and see the improvements that my friend and I have made. I would gladly train with her more often.”

Based on your comparison:

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Additional implementations

It’s okay if you do not implement the following exercises immediately. You can save them for later, i.e. for after completion of D-MKT.

(1) Is there something that you always wanted to try out?
Try to improve your self-worth by continuing to fill-up your shelves:

Example

“Sunday afternoon I always have a lot of free time. Just recently I read in the newspaper that the local animal shelter is looking for people who want to spend time with dogs. Since I love dogs, I will spend my Sunday walking the dogs. It’s fun for me, and I can fill the shelf ‘leisure time’ and do a good deed at the same time.”

What would you like to try out?

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(2) Perfection – an overly high expectation? Experience with small mistakes.
Deliberately make a small mistake and compare the feared consequences with the actual ones.

Example

“I go to work with a poorly knotted tie.”

What would you like to try out?

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Example

Feared/predicted consequence:
“Everyone will notice my mistake. Everyone will laugh at time and my boss will tell me off (‘You are not a child anymore!’).”
What do you fear?

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**Example**

**Actual consequence:**
“None of my colleagues noticed, an older colleague smiled and said I reminded her of her husband.”

What is your experience?

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**Overview**

**Summary of learning points**
- Self-worth is the worth, that a person places on him or herself.
- Try to take into account your self-worth in different areas of life (work, free time, relationships, etc.) and to strengthen them!
- Search for forgotten strengths and work toward a balanced self-awareness, such as by keeping a daily joy diary.
- When you compare yourself with others, try to be fair! Do not start comparing yourself with the stars (although, as we've seen, away from the spotlight, these people may also not be perfect or always happy).
Comments
Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with “Thinking and Reasoning” in depression?

- Many individuals with depression process information differently.
- These depressive thought patterns are often not based on reality or tend to be very one-sided (i.e. always blaming yourself for failures).
- We refer to this as “distorted thinking”, which can contribute to the development or maintenance of depression.

Thought Distortion 1: “Magnification or Minimizing”

“Magnification or minimizing” What is meant by that?

- Magnification of the extent and severity of your mistakes and problems
- Minimizing your own abilities or seeing them as unimportant

During the next week, pay attention to situations in which you tend to magnify or minimize and describe an example of one of those situations on the following pages. The already completed examples serve as a suggestion:

(1) Magnification

Example

On your way to a friend that you have never visited before, you got lost and had to ask for the correct way despite the fact that you had a road map with you. You are thinking:

“I am incapable of reading a road map and I have no sense of direction. Without help I am screwed.”

Do you recognize this thought? Are there situations in which you over magnified the extent of your problems or mistakes?

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What are the consequences of those thoughts, i.e. how do they affect – also in the long-term – your mood and behavior?

Example

“I feel incapable, I am in a bad mood and annoyed with myself when I arrive at my friend’s. In the future I will be much more insecure when I am driving by myself.”

Based on your situation:

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What hints suggest that the appraisal is magnification?

Example

“There were no incidents or problems during the trip aside from the one question about directions.”

Were there any hints in your situation that suggested that your appraisal was magnification?

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Can you imagine a more helpful appraisal?

Example

“The trip took longer than expected because I had difficulties reading the road map. Thankfully I asked someone for help who is familiar with this area. Other people get lost too – there is a reason why so many people have a navigation system.”

Based on your situation: Can you imagine a more helpful appraisal?

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What would you tell a friend who is in the same situation (change of perspective)?

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(2) Minimizing

**Example**

You helped a friend change the back tire of his bicycle. He admires your ability, but you think:

“Everyone can do that. It’s meaningless.”

Do you recognize such thoughts? Do you remember a situation in which you perceived your abilities as irrelevant?

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What are the consequences of those thoughts, i.e. how do they affect your mood and behavior?

**Example**

“My self-esteem remains low. I can’t be happy about the compliment or use it in the future, as I can’t believe it to be true myself.”

Based on your situation: What are the consequences of those thoughts?

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What clues point towards minimization?

Example

“I have been told quite often that I am skilled when it comes to repairing a bicycle and I acquired a lot of technical know-how by myself. I have seen people with less expertise many times.”

Were there any clues in your situation that indicate that your appraisal was a minimization?

Could you imagine a more helpful/realistic appraisal?

Example

“I am good at repairing bicycles. Here I don’t need any help, instead I can offer my help to others. Especially rear tires are often difficult.”

Based on your situation: What could be a helpful alternative thought?

Thought Distortion 2: Attributional Style

Attributional style – What is meant by that?

- Attributions = your own explanation for the occurrence of a situation (i.e., blame)
- We often overlook that similar situations can have completely different causes. Moreover, often there are several concurrent factors involved. However, many people tend to focus solely on one-sided explanations.
Example of attributions:
- You make plans to meet a friend and they do not show up (and you can’t reach them on the telephone).

Possible attributions...

Self → “I’m not important to him.”
Others → “He’s forgetful.”
Situation → “His car has a flat tire.”

→ All are one-sided explanations!!!

How does this relate to depression?
Many individuals with depression tend to make one-sided appraisals of complex events that are attributable to many causes.
- Failures are generally attributed to oneself.
- Success is attributed to the situation/luck (others) or is viewed as unworthy (“nothing special”).

This attributional style is not particularly realistic, and can reduce self-worth and promote unhelpful behaviors!

Can you relate to this attributional style?

Pay attention to situations in your everyday life in which this happens. Avoid making global attributions:
- Consider the different possible causes for a situation (i.e., myself, others, situation)! With negative events, begin with the situation and with positive events begin with yourself!
- Try to take another perspective (What would you tell someone else in a similar situation?).
- Consider the consequences (on behavior, mood, self-esteem) of the causal attributions you make.

The already completed examples serve as a suggestion:

(1) Negative event

Example
You visit a friend and she is annoyed.

One-sided attribution:
“My presence is disturbing and I am just a burden.”
Your own situation:

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One-sided attribution:

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What consequences – also for the long-term – does this attribution have for your mood and behavior?

Example

“I feel rejected. I withdraw from my friend and other acquaintances. I have fewer social contacts and positive experiences.”

Based on your example: What consequences does this attribution have?

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Balanced attribution – oneself, others, and the situation contributed to the situation:

Example

“I might have caught her off-guard. Maybe she has a lot of things going on or it just wasn’t the right time.”
Based on your example:

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What proportion of the situation do these aspects account for? Was there maybe more than one circumstance or more than one person involved? You can illustrate that by creating a pie chart from this empty circle.

What consequences – also long-term – does such a balanced attributional style have for behavior?

**Example**

“I don’t feel rejected and keep seeing her. I ask her when a better time for a visit might be. My social contacts are maintained. I have positive experiences.”

Based on your situation: What consequences does this attribution have?

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(2) Positive event

**Example**

You cooked something for your friends and everyone is delighted by your cooking skills.

**One-sided attribution:**

“It’s just a good recipe”
Your situation:

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One-sided attribution:

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What consequences – also long-term – does this form of attribution have for behavior?

Example

“My self-esteem is not strengthened. I can't enjoy the appreciation. I don't feel encouraged to cook for my friends again or pursue this hobby any further.”

Based on your situation:

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Balanced attribution – oneself, the other person and the circumstances contributed to the situation:

Example

“I made an effort to try out the recipe beforehand. XY helped me with the preparations and the recipes are easy to understand.”
Based on your situation:

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What proportion of the situation do these aspects account for? Was there maybe more than one circumstance or more than one person involved? You can illustrate that by creating a pie chart from this empty circle.

What consequences – also long-term – does this attribution have for behavior?

Example

“My self-esteem is improved and I am in a good mood. I would really like to cook for my friends again.”

Based on your situation: What consequences does this attribution have?

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Overview

Summary of learning points

- Pay attention to magnification of your mistakes and minimization of your strengths and successes!
- Try to avoid one-sided appraisals and overgeneralizations in everyday life!
- We should try to assess everyday situations realistically: You are not always to blame when something goes wrong! Think about other factors that may have contributed to an event.
- Think about what you would tell someone else in a similar situation.
- One-sided appraisals of events may promote unhelpful behaviors and lower self-esteem.
- Before making up your mind, consider the consequences (on behavior, mood, self-esteem) of the casual attributions you make!

**Comments**

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with “Behaviors and Strategies” in depression?
- Certain behaviors (primarily rumination and withdrawal) strengthen rather than reduce depression!

Ruminating
- Many people with depression complain of endless ruminating, brooding and worrying.
- Are you familiar with brooding and worrying? What topics are usually involved?

- Does ruminating help to ...
  - ... solve problems?
  - ... avoid problems in the future?
  - ... organize things in your mind?

Ruminating is often not helpful, especially with depressive ruminating.

Typical depressive ruminations:

(1) Content
Ruminating over ...
- why? (ex: The reason for a sickness)
- past events that have already occurred
- the ruminations

(2) Type and manner
While ruminating ...
- it’s hard to find an end and we often go around in circles (propagating “endless loops”)
- there exists a risk of losing insight
- there is usually no “solution” (the difference from problem solving)
actions rarely follow (the difference from planning)
your thinking is usually more abstract, generalized and not concrete

What helps against ruminations?
... suppressing negative thoughts? – **No!**
- It is not possible to suppress unpleasant thoughts.
- To try to consciously not think about something can strengthen these thoughts (Ex: “Over the next minute do not think about an elephant!”).
- The effect is even stronger when we try to actively suppress negative thoughts about ourselves (“I’m a loser” etc.).

The following exercises are meant to help you deal with ruminating:

**(1) Practice perceiving without judging – distance yourself, e.g. appreciate your thoughts, but don’t judge them:**
- View a thought for what it is ...
- A thought! Not reality!
- An “experience” in your mind. Attempt to register the thought, but to not judge it.
- Observe the thought without interfering or devaluing yourself (“I’m an idiot, I am ruminating again”).
- Look for a fitting picture to perceive the thought and to describe it, but don’t “engage”.

**Example**

“I imagine myself at a train station. Just like trains, the thoughts come and go. I see where they are going - but I don’t board every train!”

What picture do you use as an aid?
(2) Connect the judgment-free recognition of thoughts with a three-minute breathing exercise:
Try to regularly incorporate short breathing exercises (similar to the breathing exercise in the D-MCT-session):
- Sit in an upright position and focus your attention on your breathing.
- Notice how the breath flows in and out of your nose. You perceive thoughts and sensations, but you don’t judge them.
- Increasingly expand your attention and feel the breath in your entire body.

Implementation in daily routine: When, concretely, do you plan on doing the breathing exercise?

Example
“I will do the exercise every morning after breakfast.”

When do you plan to do the breathing exercise?

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Withdrawal
In depressive phases …
- interacting with others can be difficult.
- those affected often feel misunderstood by other people (“They have it good, I would rather have their problems.”).
- the drive to do things is reduced
- interest in others (and their problems) is often reduced.

It is understandable that you want to withdraw during such phases … but is it helpful? – No!
- Withdrawal leads to a vicious cycle.
Vicious cycle

"Things aren't going well for me.
I can no longer pull myself together."

"My mood becomes
worse."

"I pull back more and
more and take on less."

- Especially during depressive phases, it is important to maintain contact with important others and to continue to participate in activities (small steps).
- Try to break this vicious cycle!

During depressive phases, what can help to break a vicious cycle of withdrawal, low motivation and bad mood?

Every start is difficult!
- But: Overcome yourself and take a small step forward.
- Important: Plan manageable activities!

Example

You planned a walk when the weather is nice but couldn’t bring yourself to go out? Take the first step by standing in front of the opened window and take in the fresh air and warmth of the sun.

What long-term activities did you intend to do?

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What could be the first step forward and when, exactly, will you take it?

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Take care of necessities ...
... but also do things that make you happy (i.e. listening to music, go for a walk). Keep it in balance!

**Example**

“Today I will take care of the shopping. That is important, but afterwards I will drink a cup of tea at my favorite café in peace.”

Your own example:

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Oppose the tendency to withdraw and give in to your low motivation and bad mood:
- Think of many concrete behaviors (small steps) and determine when exactly you will take them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get a breath of fresh air and catch some sun</td>
<td>“Enjoying the sun with a cup of tea on my balcony. If the weather stays nice, I will try this tomorrow for the first time.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H6  Module 6 – Behaviors and Strategies

Overview

Summary of learning points

- Certain behaviors (i.e., withdrawal) strengthen rather than reduce depression! Try to avoid one-sided appraisals and overgeneralizations in everyday life!
- Ruminating does not help with problem solving; rather it strengthens negative thoughts and feelings.
- Attempting to suppress ruminative thoughts leads to further intrusive thoughts and is therefore not helpful.
- **Instead:** Practice perceiving without judging (breathing exercises, relaxation exercises, yoga etc.).
- Especially during depressive phases, it is important to maintain contact with important others and to continue to participate in activities (small steps).

Comments

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with “Thinking and Reasoning” in depression?
- Many individuals with depression process information differently.
- These depressive thought patterns are often not based on reality or tend to be very one-sided (e.g., making hasty negative interpretations, etc.).
- We refer to this as “distorted thinking”, which can contribute to the development or maintenance of depression.

Thought Distortion: “Jumping to Conclusions”

“Jumping to conclusions” - What is meant by that?
- Making negative interpretations although there are no clear facts to support the conclusion.
- Typical depressive thinking strategies include mind reading and fortune telling.

Mind reading

... or: “projecting yourself onto others”
- “Reading into” or assuming negative thoughts
- Thinking that someone disapproves of you, without checking this thought

Be Careful: There is a difference between the way I see myself and the way others see me!
- Although you feel worthless, ugly, etc., others may not see you the same way.

Is it helpful to try to read the thoughts of others?

Benefit?
- If we are correct, we can adjust our behavior if necessary (i.e., stay away from “enemies”).

Danger?
- However, when wrong, this may cause unnecessary worry and stress.

Can I know what someone else thinks?
- What suggests you can and what suggests you can not?
  - When I know someone well, the probability is higher. However, I can never 100% know what someone else thinks.

During the next week, pay attention to situations in which you read the negative thoughts of others and describe an example of one of those situations on the following pages. The already completed example serves as a suggestion:
Your situation:

Assuming negative thoughts:

What are the consequences of this perspective, how does it affect your mood and your actions?

Example

“I feel incapable and fear negative feedback. My self-esteem is in the dumps. I will not present my own work again any time soon.”

Based on your situation: What are the consequences of this perspective?

Can you be a hundred percent sure, that your interpretation is correct?
No! Therefore: What alternative interpretations are there?

Example

“I can’t know what my boss is thinking. Maybe she thinks I am not well prepared; maybe she is content with my presentation; maybe she is thinking about her family or a completely different project!”

Based on your situation – what could be a helpful, alternative perspective?

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What consequences does this alternative interpretation have for your feelings and actions?

Example

“I remain calm and wait for my boss’s feedback. Since I wish I could present my work more fluently, I will think of making notes for the next time.”

Based on your situation: What are the consequences of this perspective?

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Fortune telling

What is meant by that?
• Anticipating that things won’t go well – making “gloomy” forecasts or predicting a catastrophe (“worst case scenario”).

With these thoughts you can increase your negative expectations so much that they do come true (self-fulfilling prophecy). Afterwards you tell yourself that you already knew that the negative event would take place (confirmation bias).
During next week, pay attention to situations in which you predict catastrophes prematurely and describe an example of one of those situations on the following pages. The already completed example serves as a suggestion:

**Example**

“I want to congratulate my brother with a special gift for his wedding.”

**Negative prediction:**

“Nice gifts cost a lot of money, I don’t have a lot of money to give him something that he will really be happy about. I won’t have a nice gift and will disappoint him.”

Your situation:

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Your negative prediction:

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How does this thought affect your feelings and your behavior and what kind of long-term consequences might come with it?

**Example**

**Behavior:**

“I get nervous and can only think of gifts that I can’t afford. I am certain that I will disappoint him and lose my confidence. I decide to skip the wedding altogether if I do not have a proper gift.”

**Long-term consequences:**

“The wedding is approaching. I distance myself from my brother, I can’t really be happy for my brother and only halfheartedly participate in the wedding preparations. My brother is irritated and sad because I do not come to the wedding.”
Based on your situation: What is your behavior?

________________________________________________________________________

Based on your situation: What are the consequences?

________________________________________________________________________

In this situation, what kind of prediction would be more helpful?

**Example**

“I will find a nice gift. It’s not easy, but it doesn’t always have to be expensive. Maybe he would also be very happy if I created something myself (e.g., a photo album for him or a poem). He knows that I don’t have a lot of money.”

What prediction would be more helpful in your situation?

________________________________________________________________________

How does this alternative prediction affect your behavior and what kind of long-term consequences could it have?

**Example**

**Behavior:**

“I am a bit tense, since I still want to find a nice gift for my brother. But I become more open-minded to ideas which don’t require a lot of money, but he would still enjoy.”

**Long-term consequences:**

“I find a gift. I am content with my choice and I believe it is something he will appreciate. I come to the wedding and we celebrate together.”
Based on your situation: What is your behavior?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Based on your situation: What would be the consequences?

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**Overview**

**Summary of learning points**

- Pay attention to the tendency to jump to conclusions in everyday life (mind reading, fortune telling).
- Remember, quick decisions often lead to errors (the paintings and comic strip from the session serve as an illustration).
- More information and potential explanations should be gathered. Ex: positive and neutral thoughts should also be considered instead of only negative thoughts.
- If you predict a catastrophe, try to develop alternative predictions as well.

**Comments**

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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Why are we concerned with “Perception of Feelings” in depression?
Studies show that many people with depression
- have difficulties assessing the emotional expressions of others and
- tend to judge neutral facial expressions as sad

Perception of nonverbal cues

**Example**

*A person is rubbing his temple.*

In your opinion, what could be reasons for that?

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What helps to find the answer?
- Prior knowledge about the person → Does the person suffer from migraines?
- Environment / Situation → Did the person “pull an all-nighter”? (Maybe that’s the reason they are tired)
- Self-observation → When do I touch my temple? (But: Watch out! You can’t always assume the reasons for your behaviors are the same as others!)
- Facial expressions → Does the person look tired, thoughtful, suffering, etc.?

It’s more difficult if you know neither the other person nor have any other clues/information
- Facial expression and gestures, as we saw, cannot always be clearly interpreted!
- Many people, either by nature, due to illness (e.g., Parkinson's Disease) or because of substances (e.g., Botulinumtoxin/Botox®, antipsychotics), have less pronounced expressions, so that their feelings cannot be clearly interpreted.
- Further information (situation, previous knowledge about the person, direct questions) should be consulted before facial expressions and gestures are interpreted with certainty.

Below, aspects of various facial expressions that we encounter in everyday life are listed. Write down your spontaneous interpretation as well as additional possible interpretations. The already completed example serves as a suggestion.
What could the following aspect of a facial expression be an indication for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facial expression-segment</th>
<th>Spontaneous interpretation</th>
<th>1. Additional possibility</th>
<th>2. Additional possibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frown</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Irritation</td>
<td>Concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressed lips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glassy-eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furrowed brow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrinkled-nose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downturned mouth corners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking downwards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you notice, often many different interpretations are possible! To find a more accurate interpretation, we need more information.

If you are in a situation in which you are confronted with a specific facial expression, and you are uncertain what it means, what can you do in order to become more sure?

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What are feelings actually good for?

(1) Feelings are used for communicating
- Feelings are shown in facial expressions. They often convey information faster than words; sometimes even before we can consciously realize it (“something is strange”, “gut instinct”).

Can you remember situations in which the feelings helped you to communicate?

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(2) **Emotions prepare behaviors**
- They allow us to act quickly in important situations without having to think about it.
- They lead to important bodily changes. For example, fear increases heart rate and prepares us to flee or fight. (i.e., fight or flight response).

Can you remember a situation in which your feelings made a quick response possible?

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(3) **Emotions ensure that we feel alive! Without negative feelings, there would not be any positive ones!**

**Do feelings always reflect reality?**

- **No**, feelings must not always be “correct”!
  - When I feel worthless, that does not mean I am worthless!
  - Feelings may at times be a bad advisor!
  - Often people with depression tend to use “emotional reasoning”, which means that they believe negative feelings express exactly what is really happening (“I feel offended – so, you must have insulted me!”).

- Studies show that your own mood influences how you interpret the expressions and gestures of others!
- During depression, we also often assume that others are rejecting us (see thought distortion “mind reading”).
- Facial expressions and gestures are also not seen through "rose-colored glasses", but more often they are interpreted through “gray lenses”.

Try to remember situations in which your own mood possibly influenced your appraisal of another person. Also think about how the appraisal would have been if you had been in a different mood. The already completed example serves as a suggestion.
### Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Own mood</th>
<th>Appraisal</th>
<th>Possible alternative mood</th>
<th>According new appraisal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The person sitting next to me on the train smiles at me.”</td>
<td>“depressed”</td>
<td>“He is nosy”</td>
<td>“happy”</td>
<td>“Sympathetic. Nice to see people in a good mood”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of learning points

- Behavior that accompanies feelings is very efficient. It has many functions and is important for survival.
- But feelings are not always “facts”. Just because I feel rejected does not mean that I am rejected.
- Facial expressions and gestures of others are important clues for the feelings of others. However, one can be misled!
- To assess other people, you should consider other information in addition to facial expressions (previous knowledge of someone, actual situation, etc.) or ask.
- Your own mood has a large impact on how you perceive the world around you.
Comments

Space for open questions, problems that occurred, or experiences, that you would like to report in the next meeting:

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Other comments:

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