



Thinking Styles



Thinking styles are formally known as schemas, they are basically a short cut for our brains to process a lot of information, it works in the same way when you walk into a restaurant (a script) or when you identify an object (this appears to be a chair... but is it?). Within Cognitive Therapy, it is helpful to identify these on a regular basis, this is because they become unconsciously habitual and occasionally problematic (like walking into a café and mistakenly waiting to be seated).

Have you ever heard of 'rose tinted glasses'? Well these are different, we are looking at typical styles of thinking that are common amongst people who suffer from negative/problematic mood states.



On the next two sheets are a selection of common styles of thinking:

Selective Abstraction/Mental Filter

Selective Abstraction/Mental Filter: This describes the tendency to inflate the importance of a particular aspect of a situation to the extent that it obscures the bigger picture. For example: Should a friend make a comment on your appearance "You look amazing, where did you get those shoes from!?", "I brought a pair from there, I didn't like them" (consequently interpreting yourself as poorly dressed and perhaps even unattractive).

All or Nothing Thinking

(this can also be known as 'Black & White', 'dichotomous' thinking or 'polarization'): This is when we simplify the situation to one of two evaluations. For example you may see things, as "either good or bad" or see yourself as a "success or a failure".

Catastrophisation

(Also known as predicting the future or fortune telling): This is a style of thinking where a negative future is predicted. Often, no consideration is given to the likelihood of this future, the coping abilities you have or the things that will keep you safe.

Discounting the positive

When this happens, we discount or tell ourselves that particular aspects of our behaviours or experiences are not relevant. "I got a really good mark in my exam, but I'm still doing really badly on my course, it must have been pure luck".

Emotional Reasoning

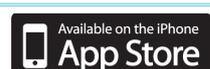
This is when we trust our emotions as enough to evaluate a situation accurately (that 'gut feeling'), despite significant evidence demonstrating the contrary. "They keep telling me I'm doing well at my job and my appraisal went very well. But I feel like I am doing badly"

Labelling

When a fixed description of yourself or other people is used. This can prejudice yourself against alternative information leading to a more reasonable assessment. "I'm just Useless" "He's a bad person"



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Mind Reading

This is we think we know what other people are thinking. "He thinks that I am a complete idiot".

Overgeneralisation

When a specific instance is the applied to a number/range of situations without sufficient evidence. For example "I didn't enjoy myself at the work do last night. This means that I cannot make friends with anyone".

Personalisation

The tendency to interpret the outcomes of situations or people's behaviour as directly relevant to you as a person; implying that it is your fault. For example: "We didn't get the contract because of me".

"Should" & "Must" Statements

(these have variously been described as imperatives by other authors). These are rules that we hold; these are often inflexible and specific expectations of ours and/or others behaviours. When these expectations are not met, there is tendency to over-emphasise the importance of this. For example: "I should be liked by everyone. If I am not, then I am a terrible person".

Tunnel Vision

(or Myopia) This is the tendency for us to narrow our attention to just the negative aspects of the situation, thereby discounting other competing relevant information. For example when reviewing your performance in a job interview "I must have done really badly because I couldn't think of enough positive qualities".

Magnification/Minimisation

In the process of considering yourself, others or situations, you may emphasise some elements and minimise others which result in the sustaining or increasing of your bad mood state. "She may have laughed at some of my jokes, but she didn't ask for my number".



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