Metacognitive Training (MCT)

MCT 9 B – Self-Esteem

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Self-esteem: What is it?

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- Who am I?

- What can I do?

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- Who am I?

- What can I do?

- *Subjective* value

What diminishes self-esteem?

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What diminishes self-esteem?

Biological factors:

- Strong activation of the brain structures that evoke anxiety (amygdala)

- Genes: internal and external characteristics that are inherited (e.g., certain impairments)

Social/environmental:

- Low appreciation from one's social environment (parents, schoolmates/work colleagues, etc.)

- External influences (e.g., unemployment)

Psyche:

- Certain personality traits such as shyness, anxiety
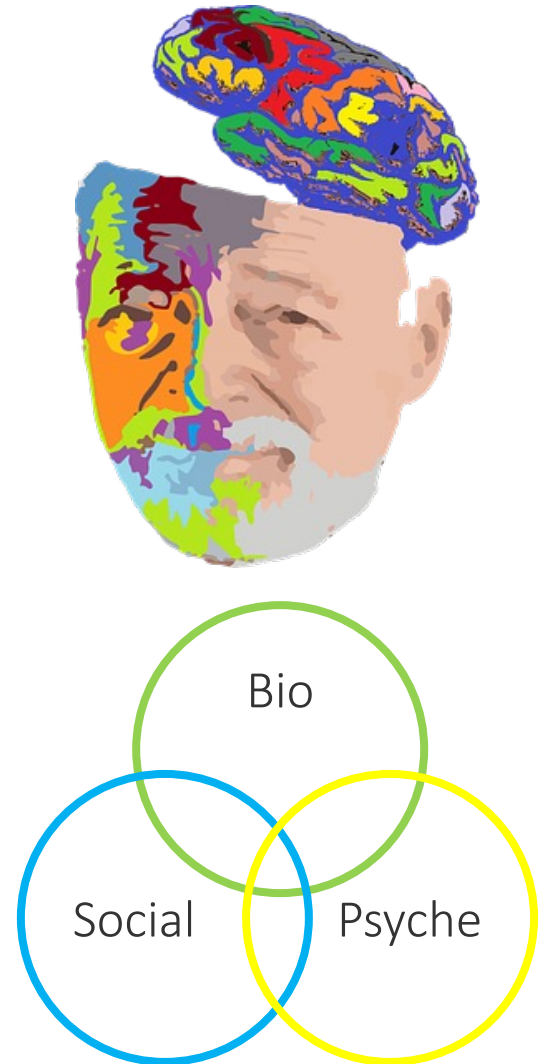
Why are we doing this?

Many (but not all!) people with psychosis have low self-esteem, often due to negative interpersonal experiences.

Improving self-esteem and other depressive symptoms increases mental stability.

This can also help to reduce psychotic symptoms.

Low self-esteem can impact our mental health

- People with mental illness often suffer from low self-esteem.

- Low self-esteem may contribute to psychological problems such as:

  - Self-doubt

  - Fear

  - Depressive symptoms

  - Loneliness

Differences between exaggerated self-esteem and healthy self-esteem

During psychosis, many of those affected (but not all) feel persecuted or compromised. This feeling can lead to reduced self-esteem.

On the other hand, some can feel increased self-esteem if they feel destined for special tasks or believe they were chosen for an important mission.

Healthy self-esteem?

CAUTION: Ideas of megalomania (e.g., the belief that you are more powerful or more important than others) have nothing to do with "healthy" self-esteem!

 This feeling won't last long

 … and it is not based on reality and actual strengths.

Healthy self-esteem

- All people have real strengths, often only waiting to be discovered.

- You can and should be proud of these strengths!

- Awareness of these strengths form the basis of your self-esteem.

"Branches" of self-esteem

- Self-esteem is not a constant value; it may be stronger or weaker in different areas of your life

"Branches" of self-esteem

- Do we focus only on our weaknesses (weak branches) or do we also appreciate our strengths (strong branches)?

Occupation

Relationships

Leisure time

Appearance

Sports

People with low self-esteem

- ... tend to focus on their weaknesses (weak branches) and tend to make negative self-judgments ("I can't do anything right").

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What are the external (visible) characteristics of healthy self-esteem?

Voice: ???

Facial expression/gestures: ???

Posture: ???

What are the external (visible) characteristics of healthy self-esteem?

Voice: clear, well-articulated, appropriate volume

Facial expression/gestures: keeping eye contact; confident appearance

Posture: upright

As with anything: don't overdo it (e.g., staring at other people, interrupting them constantly, bossing others around).

Characteristics of high self-esteem that are not directly observable

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Characteristics of high self-esteem that are not directly observable

- Confidence in one's own ability.

- Accepting one's own errors or failures (without devaluing oneself).

- Self-reflection and willingness to learn from one's own errors or failures.

- Positive attitude towards oneself, for example, congratulating oneself for a success.

Realising your strengths

Why is identifying our own strengths so difficult sometimes?

Realising your strengths

Why is identifying our own strengths so difficult sometimes?

- Unhelpful assumption: "If I praise myself, I'll become vain."

- People often don't want to reveal their own strengths due to shame or being seen as arrogant.

- Important: Try to find the "optimal balance"! Tell other people about your own strengths while also recognising and appreciating their strengths!

Exercise

- Stand up.

- Let your shoulders and your arms dangle, and arch your back a little.

- Now tilt your head downwards.

Exercise

- Slowly straighten your spine so that you are standing completely upright.

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart so that you have a firm footing.

- Let your arms hang loosely beside your body.

- Create body tension, as if someone is pulling you up by a thread.

- Keep your eyes to the front.

Exercise

How do these exercises make you feel?

Which posture makes you feel stronger?

Exercise

- You probably feel stronger in the upright posture.

- According to research, an upright, stable posture (also known as power posing) actually makes you feel stronger! (Carney et al., 2010; Ranehill et al., 2015)

Carney D. R., Cuddy A. J. C., Yap A. J. (2010). Power posing: Brief nonverbal displays affect neuroendocrine levels and risk tolerance. Psychological Science, 21, 1363–1368.

Ranehill et al. (2015). Assessing the Robustness of Power Posing. No Effect on Hormones and Risk Tolerance in a Large Sample of Men and Women. Psychological Science, 26 (5), 653-656.

Ruminating: Spinning in circles but not moving forward

- Many people with psychological symptoms suffer from endless "ruminating" or "brooding."

- Have you noticed yourself ruminating?

Problems

Ruminating is problematic for several reasons:

- The thoughts are running in circles; your problems gain more and more presence/visibility without being solved.

- Self-esteem is further undermined because useful and helpful thoughts or actions are not attended to or even noticed.

- Unlike goal-directed thinking, ruminating is characterised by the unsuccessful thoughts and self-accusations manifesting again and again.

What to do?

- The first and most important step is to acknowledge that rumination is a problem rather than a helpful strategy. Rumination clearly leads to more problems instead of solving them.

- Ruminating thoughts are just thoughts. They're not reality!

- Try to notice the thought, but do not judge it!

Anti-rumination exercise 1: Shifting attention

- Focus your attention on your surroundings not on yourself.

- Pay attention to sounds, smells, or colors.

- Try this exercise during a walk, where you can pay attention to as many details as possible without judgment.

Your problematic thoughts are not persistent because they are true but because they scare you. That's why you think about them repeatedly.

Anti-rumination exercise 2:
Letting your thoughts "float away"

- Close your eyes.

- Which unpleasant thought is the most intrusive right now?

- Let it float away—without any judgment—as if it's on a cloud!

Homework

- Smiling at others makes you happy! Try smiling at other people (on the street, at work, etc.), even if you don't really feel like it.

- You will notice that some people smile back at you. The reason why laughter can be contagious are the so-called mirror neurons in your brain!

Not everyone will return the smile. This is OK.

Laughter is contagious: The role of mirror neurons

How do mirror neurons work? (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2007)

- Mirror neurons are certain nerve cells in the brain that send out signals whenever you are observing other people's feelings or actions (e.g., fatigue, happiness, yawning, laughing) and make you feel the same or even act the same as the other person!

- So, if you observe a laughing, happy person, it is very likely that you will also laugh and be happy—and vice versa! This works especially well with yawning.

Rizzolatti, G. & Sinigaglia, C. (2007). Mirror neurons and motor intentionality. Functional Neurology, 22 (4), 205-210.

Transfer to everyday life

Learning objectives:

- Self-esteem is how we value and perceive ourselves.

- Become aware of your strengths in different areas of your life and try to improve your self-esteem using the strategies we've discussed (visible and invisible characteristics!).

- Search for forgotten strengths ("hidden treasures") by asking your friends or by keeping a daily joy diary.

- Be mindful of the positive moments that happen in your day!

What does this have to do with psychosis?

Many (but not all!) people with psychosis have low self-esteem and have negative thought patterns (e.g., a tendency to brood), which can further reduce their self-esteem.

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Example: Emma fails the practical driving test.

Evaluation: She is disappointed in herself and initially doubts that she will ever pass the driving test. Ultimately, she also devalues herself as a whole person and feels "very small." She wonders whether she will ever pass a test or whether her whole life will fall short of her potential.

But, Emma's best friend is able to build her up a little over the following days by reminding her that her driving instructor often praised her. She was also very nervous before the test, and the failure rate for the first test is quite high. Together, they think about how Emma can manage her disappointment better. However, it is also important that she is aware of her other driving successes and keeps her other strengths (e.g., at work) in mind. The driving test is important, but it says nothing about Emma as a person as a whole.

Important: Even if you fail at something, you should never ignore the things that go well in your life!

Thank you for your attention!

for trainers:

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