

Metacognitive Therapy



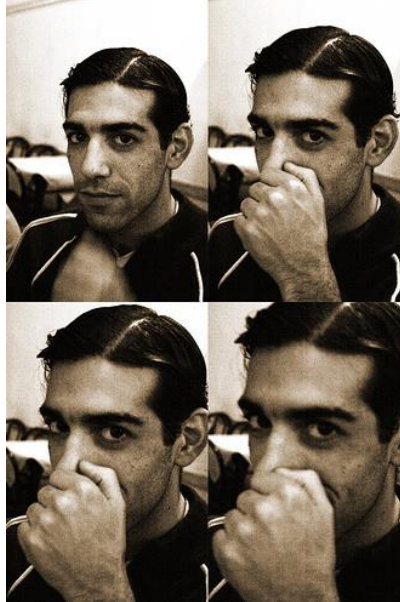
THERAPY UNIT 7: EMPATHIZING

Facial expressions and behavior are often ambiguous!

Example: A person is scratching his/her nose.

Why? Itchy nose, derogative gesture (in some cultures), indicates lying or embarrassment?

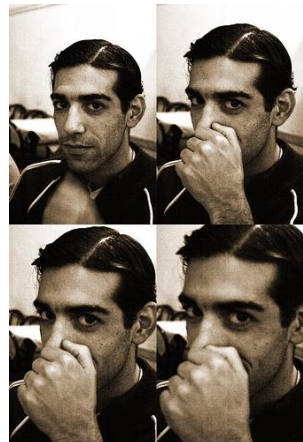
What may help to answer the question?



Facial expressions and behavior are often ambiguous!

What may help to answer the question?

- Knowledge about the person → e.g.: Does the person have a cold?
- Considering the situation → e.g.: Does this person have an allergy and is there any pollen in the air?
- Self-observation → In what situation do I touch my own nose? (Caution! You can't always infer from yourself to others!)
- Facial expression → Does the person look irritated, embarrassed, etc.?



Why are we doing this?

Studies show that many (but not all!) people with psychiatric concerns (especially psychosis):

- have difficulties detecting and evaluating the facial expressions of others (e.g. whether someone feels sad or happy).
- have difficulties deducing motives of other people from their ongoing behavior.
- tend to be overly certain of false conclusions (e.g. that someone on the train is watching them in a hostile manner).

How problems recognizing emotions promote misinterpretations (e.g. during psychosis) – examples

The feeling of constantly being in danger leads to distorted perceptions of other people:

- A friend's sad facial expression is misinterpreted as feigned sympathy.
- A friend hectically checking her watch during a conversation is interpreted as clearly indicating her indifference.
- At a store, a salesman offering his help is taken as proof that you are suspected of being a thief.



→ worksheet 7.1

Please name some basic human emotions

???

Please name some basic human emotions

- o joy
- o surprise
- o fear
- o sadness/mourning
- o anger
- o disgust
- o guilt/shame

Sometimes it is easy to tell how someone feels, especially if you know the context...

???



???



???



???



???



???



Sometimes it is easy to tell how someone feels, especially if you know the context...

disgust



joy



fear



surprise



sadness



anger



(f.l.t.r.: top: "That's as close as I could get it to my mouth for the photo." by ericskiff; "happy couple" by kthypryn; "July wasn't really scared..." by OctopusHat;
bottom: "Now that's what I call a gift!" by billaday; "Danilo's Wake" by emilio labrador; "angry chinese people in piazza navona" by cking)

It is more difficult when you only see a face but do not know the person or the circumstances!



Joy ?

Surprise ?

Disgust ?

Fear ?

Surprise and fear can easily be confused:
Eyes are wide open

Can we make inferences about a person's character or profession based on their appearance alone?

Which of these 4 gentlemen is an actor, an athlete, a psychologist or a serial killer?



Can we make inferences about a person's character or profession based on their appearance alone?

Often, stereotypes dominate our first impressions. For example, not all actors are attractive and not all murderers look brutal etc.!

John Wayne Gacy:
Serial killer
businessman who
frequently performed as
a clown – does not
correspond with our
image of a *Monster*



Thorsten Voß:
Athlete



Sven Nagel:
Actor



Stefan Behrens:
Psychologist
frequent but wrong
answer: serial killer,
due to hostile facial
expression and pose
(in his free time,
Mr. Behrens is the
singer of a rock
band)



Task 1

In the following, you will see a picture (or part of a picture).

Please try to find out what is going on with the person or persons in the picture.

How certain are you about your judgement?

What is shown in the picture? How certain are you?

cutout!



1. Winner at the award ceremony
2. After jail release
3. Focused photographer
4. Man listens to his opponent at a debate

First impressions can deceive...

Often it is not until considering additional information that we can deduce what is going on with another person.

concentration!



1. Winner at the award ceremony
2. After jail release
- 3. Focused photographer**
4. Man listens to his opponent at a debate

What is shown in the picture? How certain are you?

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1. After the verdict
2. Cook during a tasting
3. Boy is being teased
4. Businessman at a conference

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concentration!



1. After the verdict
- 2. Cook during a tasting**
3. Boy is being teased
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How do you feel when looking at the man in this picture?
Would you feel the same if you were in a good mood, sad, or anxious?

Our mood influences our perception and appraisal!

situation:



your own mood:



happy



sad



suspicious

possible appraisal:

???

???

???

Our mood influences our perception and appraisal!

situation:



your own mood:



happy



sad



suspicious

possible appraisal:

... he looks nice, would like to chat to him...

... someone like him would certainly think I'm boring...

... he's probably gossiping about me...

Our mood influences our perception and appraisal!

- Feelings don't always have to be "true"!
 - Just because I am scared, doesn't mean that there is real danger.
 - Therefore, feelings can't always be trusted!
- People with psychiatric concerns often tend to give "emotional evidence", i.e. they presume that negative feelings accurately reflect what is really happening ("I feel offended – so you must have insulted me!").

The impact of external factors on mental states and thoughts

The following factors may easily promote misjudgment:

1. Stress/exposure: When stressed out, we often experience small issues as being greatly annoying or offensive (e.g. long queue at the supermarket counter)!
2. Sleeplessness/drugs/coffee: We often misinterpret the origin of our own physical tension and mistakenly ascribe it to other causes (e.g. annoying colleague)!
3. Music/noise: Certain music or noise may agitate us, leading us to make misinterpretations more easily!

The impact of external factors on mental states and thoughts



Therapy Unit 7: Empathizing

Worksheet 7.2 The impact of external factors on mental states and thoughts

Factors	Impact? Do I become aggressive, sad, nervous, cheerful, etc.? Other possible reactions...? (e.g.: "When I don't sleep enough I'm often agitated or nervous the next day")
Stress	
Alcohol	
Drugs	
Weather/light	
Medication	
Sleep deprivation	

worksheet



→ worksheet 7.2

First summary

- It's not always possible to clearly interpret facial expressions and gestures!
- **Caution:** Many people – naturally or due to medical conditions (e.g. Parkinson's) – hardly show distinctive facial expressions, which prevents us from deducing their emotions.
- Further information (situation, knowledge about the person, direct enquiry) should be considered, before facial expressions and gestures of other people can be reliably interpreted.
- **Caution:** Factors like stress, emotions (fear, sadness) and alcohol/drugs may impact our perception and thus lead to misinterpretation.

Empathy/evaluation of a person

When you meet someone, where do you look first? How reliable are these cues?



Empathy/evaluation of a person

When you meet someone, where do you look first? How reliable are these cues?



Empathy/evaluation of a person

When you meet someone, where do you look first? How reliable are these cues?

- prior knowledge about the person (hearsay): e.g., a friend's remark
- prior knowledge on similar persons/groups: e.g., hippy, rapper
- "gut feeling"/intuition
- something written: e.g., emails, internet chats



... none of these cues (e.g. language, body language, gut feeling, etc.) can be completely trusted on their own!

As many aspects as possible should be considered!

In combination, they help with reliably judging a complex situation...

Task 2

- In the following, you will be presented with a picture. Please consider what the characters in the story may think about each other.

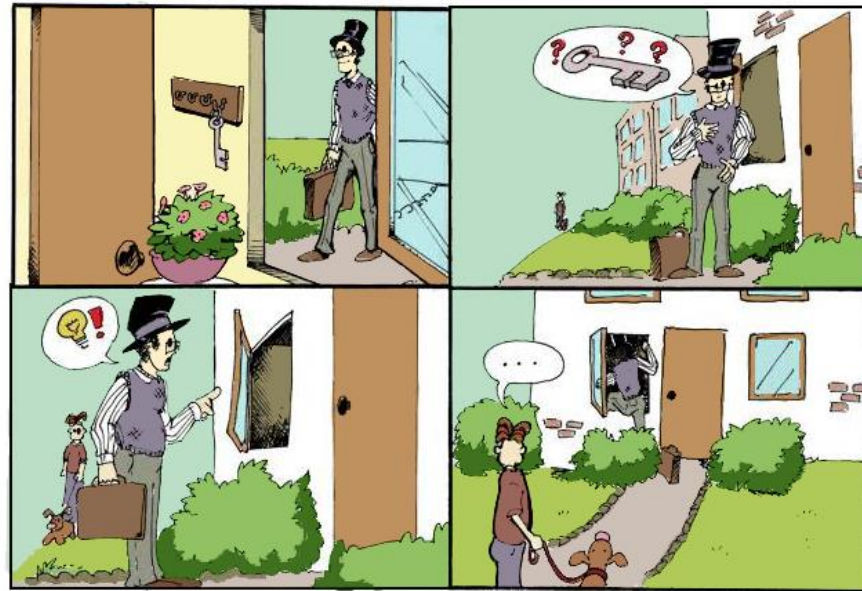
Important:

- You have to distinguish between information available to you and information the characters have about one another.
- Consider what additional information is needed to provide a definite answer.



What might the man walking the dog think?

What might the man walking the dog think?



Likely (but wrong): The man with the hat is a burglar!

Seems unlikely – but is correct: The man forgot the key to his house and is climbing through an open window to get it.

Additionally: It is not clear if the dog-walker knows the man – if this is not the case, he probably thinks that the man is breaking into the house.

Change of perspective



Not all people have the same knowledge or feel the same way. This may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts!

Therefore it is important:

- to take other people's perspectives into account, in order to understand why they act in their own particular way.
- to communicate, in order to make the reasons for our own behavior comprehensible to others.

Change of perspective

Imagine the following situation:

You are tired and on your way home from work. You stop to do some quick grocery shopping and the supermarket is packed. You've got everything in your cart and you are waiting in line. Right in front of you, an elderly man brings his groceries to the register, insecurely and very slowly. When the cashier tells him the price, the elderly man searches his bag for a long time, as he cannot find his wallet. While searching, he accidentally pushes a bottle of oil off the till. The bottle breaks on the floor.



→ worksheet 7.3

Change of perspective

What do you think/feel in this situation?	Example: It makes me angry as I am very tired and exhausted and want to finally get home. Or: I feel compassion and sympathy for the elderly man.
What does the cashier think/feel?	Example: She is annoyed because the queue is getting longer and longer and she will now have to take care of the broken bottle on top of that. Or: She feels sympathy because she knows this elderly man.
What does the elderly man think/feel?	Example: He is ashamed and angry with himself. He feels embarrassed.
What may help you to take the perspective of the elderly man?	Example: I think of my grandparents and reflect on them becoming slower and more insecure with age, possibly leading to similar problems. Or: I wonder how I would feel if I had accidentally broken a bottle. Maybe a similar thing has happened to me once and I remember how bad it made me feel at the time.

What makes a good conversation partner?

???

What makes a good conversation partner?

- Listening, letting others finish speaking
- Asking questions
- Keeping eye contact but not staring
- Respecting different opinions
- Showing interest for the other person
- Avoiding speaking constantly about oneself
- Appropriate openness throughout the conversation (no divulging/telling intimate details in the first conversation, not being too reserved towards an old friend)
- Expressing criticism in an appropriate way, avoiding insults (e.g. instead of “Your new hairstyle looks awful!”, rather “I liked our hair better before”).



What makes a good conversation partner?

- Being appreciative but also honest and natural (e.g. you don't need to burst out laughing if you didn't think the joke was funny).
- Gossiping about absent people often seems distasteful and does not foster trust.



What makes a good conversation partner?

Especially when first getting to know each other:

- Proceed slowly and step by step, do not ask questions that are too personal right away, no insisting/pushing
- Do not divulge issues that are too intimate when first getting to know each other (e.g. telling story of one's life, strokes of fate)
- Be aware of non-verbal signals (e.g. if someone turns away or checks his/her watch all the time, he/she might not be interested in the conversation or might have forgotten something), however, do not overrate such behavior!
- Keep appropriate distance, do not be too touchy/clingy – especially when meeting someone for the first time (e.g. shake hands but do not embrace)

Implicit social laws

???

Implicit social laws

- Be on time
- Address older people or people you do not know in a formal way
- Courtesy: say “please”, “thank you”, “excuse me” etc. where appropriate
- Adapt the tone and volume of your voice to the situation/place, do not talk too loudly (or too softly)



Implicit social laws

- Dress appropriately for situation/occasion (e.g. not wearing tracksuit pants/sneakers to a funeral or job interview)
- Take care of personal hygiene (e.g. regular showering, no stained clothes)



Implicit social laws

“good manners”, e.g.:

- No belching in public – otherwise, excuse yourself
- Putting your hand before your mouth when yawning
- Turning away from other person/table when blowing your nose
- No smoking while others are eating
- No talking with a full mouth
- No spitting on the floor
- No swearing



"From the therapy room into daily life"



Therapy Unit 7: Empathizing

Worksheet 7.5. Exercise "Social Situations"

I want to practice/try the following social situations (e.g. start a conversation with the new neighbor; arrange a catch-up with a friend; job interview; tell someone that something bothers me; etc.)

Doing that, what do I want to pay special attention to? (e.g. also therapy slides "What makes a good conversation partner" and "Implicit social laws")

What apprehensions do I have concerning the exercise?

After the exercise: Did my apprehensions come true? If not, how can I explain this?
What was the experience like – and what can I learn from it for next time?



→ worksheet 7.5

Learning objectives:

- You should only draw firm conclusions about another person if you know the person well or if you have watched the person closely.
- Facial expression and gestures are important clues for what a person feels, but can be misleading sometimes!
- When evaluating complex situations or other people's behavior, it is crucial to consider all available information.

Caution: Our current state of mood influences how we perceive our environment (e.g. how you assess a person).

- When interacting with other people, there are many (implicit) social rules which should be attended to.

Learning objectives:

- Make it a habit to always consider at least 2-3 explanations when you feel confused, irritated, or stressed by other people's behavior.
- Also consider the other person's lifestyle, e.g. is someone an early bird or a night owl – or the circumstances a person currently deals with. If someone makes a nasty comment, he or she is not necessarily evil or mad but maybe just thoughtless. No one reacts fairly and appropriately at all times.
Be honest: you are not always able to be fair and appropriate either.

What does this have to do with psychosis?

During psychosis, people tend to misinterpret or over-interpret facial expressions and actions of others.

Many things are in the eye of the beholder. Our mood affects our perception of our environment (e.g. feelings of suspicion when anxious; feelings of determination and fate when euphoric).

What aspects of the therapy unit do I find particularly useful or helpful?

When and in what specific situation could I apply what I learned in the near future? What could it help me with (e.g. to feel less tense)?



→ worksheet 7.6

What does this have to do with psychosis?

Example: Daniel avoids using busses or the underground.

Background: Daniel repeatedly felt convinced that passengers on public transport were looking at him disapprovingly or even laughed at him.

But!: During and after his last psychosis Daniel was feeling very insecure. He paid a lot of attention to other people's reactions. For example, when other passengers were absorbed in their newspapers, he interpreted their facial expressions as hostile or rejecting. Some passengers actually did stare at him; however, this was a reaction to his unusual behavior (looking around nervously, wearing sunglasses in winter etc.).