

Handout 10.3: Thinking Errors That Contribute to Guilt

Thinking error that contributes to faulty conclusions about knowledge possessed before outcomes were known (distorted beliefs about *foreseeability* and *preventability*)

HB: Hindsight-biased thinking

Thinking errors that contribute to faulty conclusions about *justification*, or the validity of reasons for acting as one did

- J1: Weighing the merits of actions taken against idealized options that didn't exist
 - J2: Weighing the merits of actions taken against options that only came to mind later
 - J3: Focusing only on positive things that might have happened had an alternative action been taken
 - J4: Tending to overlook benefits associated with actions taken
 - J5: Failing to compare available options in terms of their perceived probability of success before outcomes were known
 - J6: Failing to realize that acting on speculative hunches rarely pays off and that occurrence of a low-probability event is not evidence that one should have counted on this outcome before it occurred
 - J7: Failing to recognize that different decision-making "rules" apply when time is precious than in situations which allow extended contemplation of options
 - J8: Failing to recognize that in heightened states of negative arousal one's ability to think clearly and make logical decisions is impaired
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Thinking errors that contribute to faulty conclusions about degree of *responsibility* for causing negative outcomes

- R1: Hindsight-biased thinking
- R2: Being oblivious to the totality of forces that cause traumatic events
- R3: Equating a belief that one could have done something to prevent the traumatic event with a belief that one caused the event

- R4: Confusing responsibility as accountability (for example, “my job”) with responsibility as having the power to cause or control outcomes
 - R5: Existential beliefs about accountability and the need to accept the consequences of one’s actions—beliefs that fail to take into account the causal power of situational forces
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Thinking errors that contribute to faulty conclusions about *wrongdoing* or violation of values

- W1: Tending to conclude wrongdoing on the basis of outcome rather than on the basis of one’s intentions before the outcome was known
 - W2: Failing to realize that strong emotional reactions are not under voluntary control (not a matter of choice or willpower)
 - W3: Tending to inflate the seriousness of a minor moral violation when the minor violation leads unforeseeably to a traumatic outcome
 - W4: Failing to recognize that when all available choices or courses of action have negative outcomes, the least bad choice is a highly moral choice
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Thinking error that contributes to all of the faulty conclusions

- ALL1: Believing that an emotional reaction to an idea provides evidence for the idea’s validity
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