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**Staff & Faculty Consultation Center**

**Common Cognitive Distortions**

**All-or-Nothing Thinking** – You see things in black-and-white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it (or yourself) as a total failure.

**Overgeneralization** – You see a negative event as an endless pattern of defeat.

**Mental Filter** – You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.

**Disqualifying the Positive** – You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count.” If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn’t good enough or that anyone could have done as well.

**Jumping to Conclusions** – You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion.

1. **Mind Reading** – You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you and you don’t bother to check this out
2. **The Fortune Teller Error** – You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact

**Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization** – You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else’s achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person’s imperfections). This is also called the “binocular trick.”

**Emotional Reasoning** – You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”

**Should Statements** – You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. “Musts” and “ought’s” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct “should” statements towards others, you feel anger, frustration and resentment.

**Labeling and Mislabeling** – Labeling is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” Or, you attach a negative label to someone else’s behavior: “He’s a jerk.”

**Personalization** – Personalization occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn’t entirely under your control.

*Adapted from the work of Aaron T. Beck*

**For more information or to schedule an appointment please call the Staff and Faculty Center at (626) 395-8360 or email** [sfcc@caltech.edu](mailto:sfcc@caltech.edu)