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## **Cognitive Distortions and Anxiety: All or Nothing Thinking**

Often anxiety and panic attack sufferers think in extremes. This form of thinking comprises a cognitive distortion known as “all or nothing”

Remember the Cognitive Distortions?

Well if you think about it, most people, when making an argument, do so in very “black and white” terms (all or nothing).

You’ll frequently see all or nothing thinking employed in political debates or often when different individuals provide varying opinions on issues.

I’ll use an example that is easy that everyone can somehow relate to.

Let’s look at an example of two political commentators debating a topic on television, each representing a different political party. Generally whenever one of them makes a point they will do so by focusing on all the information that favours their point but not focus on anything contrary.

This behaviour is a classic example of a cognitive distortion because things are typically not as black and white as they are being presented by each political commentator (or again when people with differing opinions debate each other). This of course is a form of thinking in extremes called “all or nothing thinking”.

If you spend some time researching things, you’ll discover that most things in the world are not nearly as black and white as they seem. I must say this is one of the life lessons that I have come to learn. Often when we get emotional or want to make a point we will simplify things into black and white terms when likely things don’t neatly fit into such extremes.

How does this relate to anxiety and panic attacks?

Because anxiety and panic attack sufferers’ thoughts are very often “all or nothing” thinking.

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It could be something like “If I don’t get over my panic attacks then I’ll never be successful”

Or alternatively, “my panic attacks make me a completely inadequate person.”

“Something really bad is going to happen someday when I have a panic attack.

Of course these things are untrue and you may not think these things explicitly but I would think that in some sense these might be assumptions that are operating in the background of your mind.

So the key is recognizing that reality is not black and white therefore it is unrealistic to impose standards on yourself like these things I’ve just stated.

If you have a hard time believing this just do some research on any topic and see how things do not fit neatly into boxes in real life.

If I could make a suggestion it would be look around you, whether it be through television or other forms of media, (I might suggest reading a newspaper or online new story which you can slow down to your own preferences so you can go back and forth) and really examine the issues.

Alternatively you can objectively look at issues by putting your own personal opinions aside as much as possible and see where the evidence leads you.

I think that this exercise can be very helpful for developing more realistic thinking.

And, being more realistic can be very helpful in reframing the thoughts that are driving your anxiety and panic.

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