

Biases in thinking

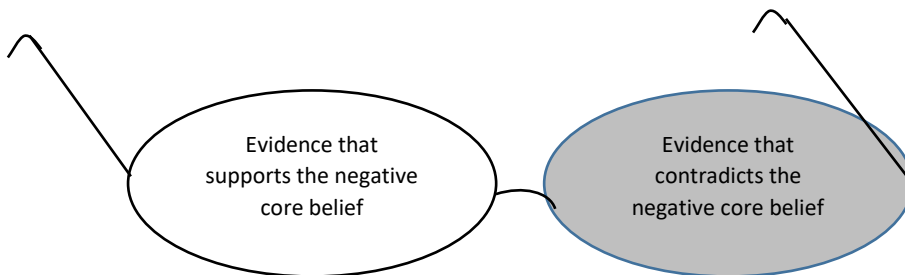
Two biases in thinking contribute to keeping your Bottom Line Core Belief alive and active. These are:

1. a bias in how you perceive yourself (biased perception)
2. a bias in what you make of what you see (biased interpretation).

1. Biased perception

Low self-esteem sets you up to notice anything that is consistent with your negative ideas about yourself. You are swift to spot anything about yourself that you are unhappy about or do not like. This may mean aspects of your physical appearance (e.g. your eyes are too small), your character (e.g. you are not outgoing enough) or simply mistakes that you make ('Not again. How *could* I be so stupid?') or ways in which you fall short of some standard or ideal (e.g. not performing 110 per cent on an assignment). All your shortcomings, flaws and weaknesses jump out and hit you in the face.

In contrast, you automatically screen out anything that is not consistent with your prevailing view of yourself. It is difficult for you to get a clear view of your strengths, qualities, assets and skills. The end result is that your main focus as you move through life is on what you do wrong, not on what you do right.



2. Biased interpretation

Low self-esteem not only skews your perception of yourself, but also distorts the meanings you attach to what you see. If something does not go well, you are likely to use this as the basis for a global, overgeneralised judgement of yourself — typical, you always get it wrong, etc. So even quite trivial mistakes and failings may seem to you to reflect your worth as a person, and so have (in your eyes) major implications for the future. Neutral and even positive experiences may be distorted to fit the prevailing view of yourself. If, for example, someone compliments you on looking well, you may privately conclude that you must have been looking pretty bad up till now or discount the compliment altogether (the exception proves the rule, they were only being kind, etc.). Your thinking is consistently biased in favour of self-criticism, rather than encouragement, appreciation, acceptance or praise.



The end result

These biases operate together to keep low self-esteem in place. Because your basic beliefs about yourself are negative, you anticipate that events will turn out badly. The anticipation makes you sensitive to any sign that things are indeed turning out as you predicted. In addition, no matter how things turn out, you are likely to put a negative spin on events. Consequently, your stored memories of what happened will also be biased in a negative direction. This will strengthen your negative beliefs about yourself, and make you more likely to predict the worst in the future.

Biases in your thinking about yourself (prejudices against yourself) keep your negative views in place, make you anxious and unhappy, restrict your life and prevent you from searching out a kinder, more compassionate, more balanced, accepting and accurate view of the person you really are.