

NAME: Treachery of Images

INTENTION: This exercise includes several ways to illustrate fusion and de-fusion. Group leaders should understand that understanding de-fusion conceptually is not the goal. Achieving the experience of de-fusion from difficult thoughts is what we are shooting for. These ideas can be useful in framing the goal in a non-threatening way.

MATERIALS:

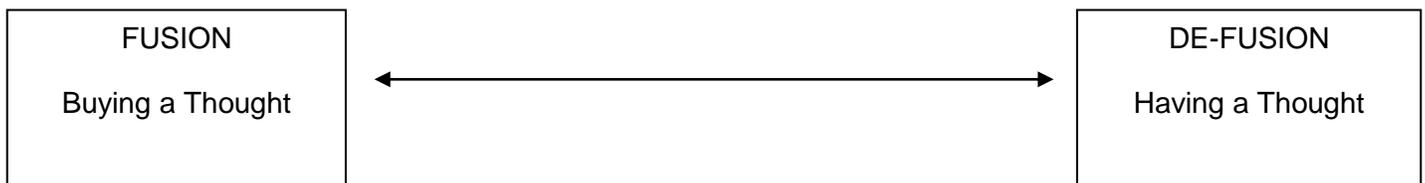
1. Illustrations
 - a. There are an endless variety of optical illusions and other paintings, many by Magritte, that can be used I include a couple of my favorite below.
2. Whiteboard

SCRIPT: (Written instructions for Group Leader)

Everyone is familiar with having thoughts they would rather not have. Our brains often think very critical, harsh, and judgmental things about how we are and what we do. How many of you have ever tried to change a thought you didn't like? Very often, efforts to change thoughts get us stuck in those thoughts, don't work, or even make matters worse in the long run.

I want to suggest a different approach. I want to suggest that your thought is not the problem, but the degree to which you buy into the ideas your thoughts are selling.

Draw illustration on white board



Sometimes our thoughts are very influential and sometimes we might have a thought but not take it that seriously – it's just a thought. The difference is often how much distance we have from what our brain is telling us. Sometimes we can step back and just notice that our thoughts are an old pattern of thinking or just a temporary experience. We don't buy into them. We just have them.

Today we are going to explore how our brain has a tendency to automatically buy in to thoughts about the world, even when these thoughts are clearly false. It's important to notice that this kind of "distorted thinking" is not pathological, but a perfectly natural part of the thinking process.

Use Magritte painting (Treachery of Images) to demonstrate our natural tendency to identify 2 things with no formal or functional similarity (a picture and a pipe) as the same thing. You cannot use the picture to smoke tobacco for example. Explore how we commonly confuse thoughts about ourselves with realities about ourselves in the same way.

Use Shepard's Table to demonstrate that even when we are able to confirm the "truth" (that the table tops are exactly the same size and shape) though measurement, our brain will continue to tell us something that we "know" isn't true. Similarly we cannot change our self-perception through logic or evidence, instead we can learn to accept that our thoughts & perceptions are thoughts and perceptions, with no formal relationship to who or what we are, and often (always?) distorted & partial representations; not truth.

STEPPING BACK FROM THOUGHTS

We do not have to get rid of stressful thoughts or change them to “positive” thoughts. In fact, usually the more we try to get rid of thoughts the more we focus on them. When we try to make them “positive” we often increase our struggle rather than escaping it.

All we need to do is to step back and notice that **our thoughts are thoughts**.

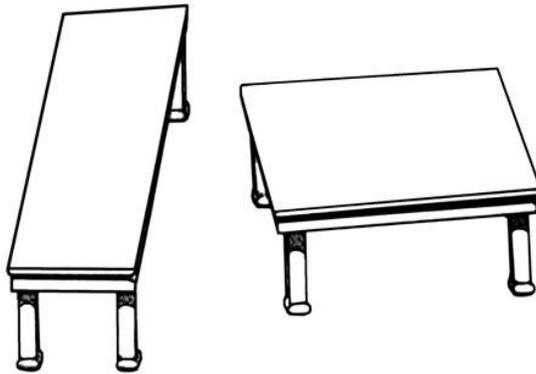
Thoughts are just thoughts. We give thoughts power when we mistake thoughts for the things they represent.

Humans are not good at noticing the difference between symbols and the reality they represent. A fact that Magritte illustrated in his famous painting (right).

This is not a pipe. It is a picture; not the same thing as a pipe at all.



Stepping back from thoughts can be difficult. When something appears to be real, we naturally fall into the illusion that it is real (It is what it appears to be). Below is a classic optical illusion called Shepard's Table. Most people see the table at the left as long and skinny and the table at the right as almost square. If you measure the top surface of each table you will discover that in reality they are the same size and shape. Even after verifying this fact, most people still “see” the tables as different shapes and sizes.



Sometimes when we believe strongly in a stressful thought, it is useful to remember that thoughts are just thoughts, life is not always what it appears to be, and our perceptions usually change with time.

Don't always believe what you believe.