QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE PRESENTATION OF THE HOPELESSNESS THEORY OF DEPRESSION

Overview

The hopelessness theory comes from a long line of research beginning with Seligman's learned helplessness theory of depression (1967). The original theory was revised by Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale in 1978 (referred to as the reformulated helplessness theory of depression). The hopelessness theory (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989) represents a revision of the reformulated helplessness theory. By the years of publication, you can see that the reformulated hopelessness theory appeared 11 years after Seligman's original theory, and the hopelessness theory appeared 11 after that, spanning 22 years of work. Some might take this as an indication of problems with this area of investigation (e.g., "why were so many revisions needed?"). I take it as a sign of progress, reflecting on ongoing interplay between empirical research and theoretical refinement. Of course, it would be nice to hit the bull's-eye right off the bat. Unfortunately, science typically does not proceed in this manner.

Students typically have many questions after reading through the hopelessness theory of depression (e.g., "what's the difference between a negative inferential style about the self and making a negative inference about the self given the presence of a negative life event?"; "what do you mean by a 'theory-based' subtype of depression?"; "don't all depressives exhibit hopelessness?").

Questions

1. I do not plan on presenting the hopelessness theory to you—that would take too much time and merely would be a repeat of the reading. Instead, I want to give you an opportunity to clarify any questions you may have about the theory. I also want to make sure you all are up to speed with regard to the theory's central postulates. Therefore, before class and as you read through the theory, prepare questions you'd like to raise and discuss. Sample questions appear at the end of the second paragraph (above) but don't limit yourselves to these questions.

2. How would you go about testing the hopelessness theory? Think about specific questions or predictions that need to be tested and how you would go about testing these predictions, including how you'd determine whether or not hopelessness depression maps onto any of the subtypes we've covered in class.

COME TO CLASS PREPARED TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES.