

FAQs

Magnification/Minification - Frequently Asked Questions

Magnifier/Minifier – can you be both?

1. Can't a person operate sometimes from one side of the continuum as a Magnifier and at other times on the other side as a Minifier, for example, one way at work and another at home?

No. While Magnification is on one side of the continuum and Minification is on the other side, it is still one continuum. Both are distortions of the probability of a favorable or unfavorable outcome, with less distortion as the Home position is closer to the middle. A person has the same reflex in all situations, though the intensity of that reflex and distortion may vary in different situations. This is a variation in the intensity of the same reflex (Mag or Min), not to be confused as a variation of the side of the continuum the Home position is on.

Also, there is the secondary reflex that operates in the social systems the person lives in. This is a dimension of Self that is determined more by the dynamics of those social systems than by the internal functioning of the Basic Self that the Home position identifies. So the secondary reflex could be the same or different from the primary one. For example, a person could be a Magnifier but operate in social situations as a Minifier. That does not mean that person vacillates between the two. The Magnification reflex is primary and will determine the functioning and decision making when there is conflict between the two, especially when there is stress in the social system, for example, when challenged about limitations. Of course, it is the same for the Minifier, who operates like a Magnifier in social situations. That person will default to minification when challenged about potential in social situations.

2. Isn't it better to have a balance between Magnification and Minification so the Home position is closer to the middle?

No. This is a misunderstanding of the continuum. The Home position is always on one side or the other. People can change their pattern of decision making and move the Home position closer to the middle by working to control the reflex that is automatic and primary for them (either Magnification or Minification) and defines the Basic Self, but not by adopting the opposite distortion to balance out the primary distortion. As a person can control this reflex, one can assess the Probability of a Favorable and Unfavorable Outcome with less distortion, which is how one moves the Home position closer to the middle, where there is less distortion.

As noted above, there is also the secondary reflex of the social Self, that can be the same or different from the primary reflex of the basic Self. If they are the same (Mag/mag or Min/min), there is no problematic confusion about operating from both sides of the continuum. However, when they are different (Mag/min or Min/mag), there is the conceptual issue of understanding that the primary reflex defines the basic Self and is what determines the Home position, not the secondary reflex of the social Self. When they are different, there is also the practical issue of having to sort out which is which, both for oneself and for understanding others. This requires deeper exploration of the person's assumptions about how he or she would or does respond when challenged internally about the Probability of a Favorable and Unfavorable Outcome, beyond how one reacts socially.

Magnifiers versus Minifiers

3.1 Aren't most Magnifiers: driven, overachieving, overbearing, impatient, always knowing the answer? (Usually said by Minifiers; the list goes on and on.)

3.2 Aren't most Minifiers: passive, underachieving, dependent, indecisive? (Usually said by Magnifiers; the list goes on and on.)

These strong negative characteristics do describe a difference between the people with the Mag reflex and those with the Min reflex. However, they depict different sides of the same coin, namely the distance from the middle of the continuum to either end. If the distance is the same and it is more extreme, overachieving and underachieving, for example, are equally dysfunctional. Closer to the middle these two characteristics reflect different styles of approaching tasks and may not be dysfunctional at all.

Also, the stronger emotionally charged, negative attributions about the opposite reflex, usually reflect a more extreme Home position for the person making the statements. At the same time, this reflects only a partial understanding of the framework, not realizing the basic dynamics of distortion about Favorable and Unfavorable Outcomes functions in the same way on both sides of the continuum.

3.3 Once you understand Magnification and Minification, and have recognized yourself as a Magnifier or Minifier, isn't it relatively easy to identify others as Mag or Min by observing their behavior?

No. While it is possible to make some good guesses that may be accurate, it is actually very difficult. This is because the same behavior may indicate a Mag or a Min, just as opposite behaviors may indicate the same pattern of Magnification or Minification. The reason for this problem is that the Home position is the position of the Basic Self, which is based on the person's assumption about the possibility of a favorable outcome for his or her decisions. When observing a person's behavior, it is difficult to know whether that behavior is determined more by the Basic Self or more by the Social Self, which is negotiable in the relationships with others. A person can have a Basic Self that is the same as the Social Self (MAG/mag or MIN/min) or a Basic Self that is different (MAG/min or MIN/mag). The only way to make an accurate assessment of whether a person is a Magnifier or Minifier is to identify the Basic Self which requires finding out what his or her assumptions are behind the behavior one observes.

4. Isn't it harder for Mags to deal with Mins and for Mins to deal with Mags, compared to dealing with people with the same reflex as you?

Yes. This is because of the way the reflex works. Mags focus on the Probability of a Favorable Outcome and block out the Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome, which is precisely what Mins evoke with their focus on the Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome. And of course it works the same way in the opposite situation, where Mags evoke just what Mins block out, which is the Probability of a Favorable Outcome.

So the challenge for Mags is to control their reactivity with Mins, with behaviors like slowing down, being more patient, allowing ambiguity, and so forth. For Mins the challenge in dealing with Mags is to be more careful, clear, and decisive. This extra effort with the opposite reflex is not a matter of being phony. It is actually the work that the person, Mag or Min, needs to do anyway to move closer to the middle. It is just that dealing with the opposite reflex in another person highlights that challenge. The more extreme the Home positions, the more effort it takes, and the closer to the middle, the less the challenge because the person is already better at regulating Self in the face of the opposite reflex.

When dealing with another person with the same reflex, the challenge is to not join with that person in protecting the Self from the anxiety about moving toward the middle. This means that Mins need to monitor their reactivity and go along with another Min about the Likelihood of an Unfavorable Outcome, ignoring the realistic Probability of a Favorable Outcome. And Mags need to monitor their reactivity and not go along with another Mag about the Likelihood of a Favorable Outcome, ignoring the realistic Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome.

5. So then, Magnifiers always focus on the Probability of a Favorable Outcome and Minifiers on an Unfavorable one.

This is accurate, but only half of the dynamic. The other half is that Magnifiers block out the Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome, and Minifiers block out the Probability of a Favorable Outcome. The two foci operate in tandem. This creates a complete perception, comprised of both figure and ground, that organizes the challenging input so a person grasps the situation and can act. For a Magnifier who assesses the probability as very favorable, having to allow concerns that it may not be that promising disrupts that perception. The Probability of a Favorable Outcome remains in the foreground (figural) and the Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome stays in the background (ground), which forms the complete perception. In the same way, for the Minifier the Probability of an Unfavorable Outcome remains in the foreground (figural) and the Probability of a Favorable Outcome stays in the background (ground), which forms the complete perception. So an essential part of seeing the probability as mostly favorable requires simultaneously excluding the problem of it not being so positive. In the same way for Minifiers, the possibility that a decision will lead to a favorable outcome disrupts the perception that it will not.

6. Is it true that Magnifiers have a good self-concept and Minifiers have a poor self-concept?

No. Magnifier/Minifier identifies the pattern of decision making for a person that defines his or her Self. Self-concept is a psychological term that defines how a person feels about his or her basic worth. To demonstrate the unrelatedness of these two, it is possible for a Magnifier to have a poor sense of his or her worth as a person while continuing to ignore the possibilities of Unfavorable Outcomes, continuing to make bad decisions, and then feeling reinforced as not worth much. Similarly, it is possible for a Minifier with a good self-concept to continue to sabotage his or her efforts by ignoring possibilities for Favorable Outcomes, settling for lower functioning, but feeling comfortable and good about that level.

7. Isn't it still better to be a Magnifier than a Minifier?

No. Magnification is just as much a distortion, a protection from anxiety, as Minification. At the extremes it is just as rigid a self-protection process as Minification. The reason this is a valid question is that Western cultures tend to support Magnification over Minification. This reflects the need for societies to manage the vulnerability that all humans share, with a protection that denies that vulnerability.

8. Aren't Magnifiers actually more successful in the world?

Sometimes, yes. The reason for this success is not because the Magnification reflex is fundamentally more functional or productive, but because the culture supports and rewards this distortion. One could argue that this distortion on a societal level leads to the same inflexibility on that level as on the individual level, for example with dictatorships, oppressive regimes, cults, and so forth.

Nature of this framework

9. Isn't this Magnifier/Minifier idea just another personality scheme?

No. Identifying a person as a Magnifier or a Minifier names his or her pattern of decision making. It does not depict a psychological profile of his or her emotional functioning like a mental health diagnosis, for example. Rather, this framework first identifies which reflex the person has, and then provides scaling for how extreme that pattern is. Next, unlike a personality profile or diagnosis, the framework itself provides a way to change the pattern, not to the opposite or something different, but to a more mature Home position, closer to the middle, which changes the person's level of functioning.

10. So this framework is basically about making better decisions, based on assessing probabilities? It sounds like a manual for developing strategies for better outcomes.

It is about making better decisions, but it is about much more than that. It is about making better decisions that change the Self. At the extreme ends of the continuum, people make decisions that distort a good assessment of the Probability of Favorable and Unfavorable Outcomes, but the reason for that distortion is anxiety. It is poor assessment process because of emotional factors. People can change the Self as they experiment with making decisions based on a better assessment of what is possible and not possible, but this requires handling that anxiety in a more mature way. So rather than being a strategy manual for dealing with the external world, changing the pattern of decision making changes the Self internally. One could think of the book as a manual, not for self-improvement strategies, but as a manual for developing a practice in living.

11. How is this framework any different from the many self-improvement books out there?

The difference is systems. This framework is based in systems theory. That essentially means that the Self is not autonomous. The Self is embedded in sets of relationships that maintain themselves with a balance that provides stability for the system as a whole and for the individuals that comprise it. Family, both nuclear and extended, is the primary system for a

person's maintenance of Self because of the genetic and emotional connections, but the same dynamics also occur in other social systems like organizations, neighborhoods, communities, and so forth.

Therefore, a person's decision making patterns and Home position are part of maintaining his or her own stability in the systems he or she lives in, and any changes in Self change the balance of those systems. This is very different from a self-improvement method that assumes a person is an autonomous individual and his or her changes can be made independently and do not change others.

12. Okay, so this framework is different because of its foundation in systems theory, but what difference does that make really?

This framework differs radically from conventional thinking about the Self. Most approaches for the Self are based in individual thinking that assumes the Self is autonomous. If some other approaches do consider the Self in the context of systems, they separate out the Self as an individual part of the system. The Mag/Min framework assumes that the Self is integral with the systems it functions in, so that the system creates and maintains the Selves of the people in it, as each person contributes to the maintenance of the balance of the system as they maintain their Selves.

This conceptual difference from conventional thinking makes for a very different way of living life using this framework. It basically requires a focus on Self as primary, versus an other-focus. With self-focus, the person orients him or herself in the dynamics and patterns of the systems he or she lives in. With the other-focus from conventional thinking, a person understands his or her world in terms of what is going on outside of one's own behaviors which affects the Self, rather than seeing how one's own behaviors affect others and then how those responses affect his or her Self in an ongoing recursion. With the Home position as a basic understanding of which reflex one has and where that Home position is generally on the continuum, a person can use that as a grounding for a focus on Self. That mode of Self-focus serves as the basis for working to change the Self as a person experiments with making different decisions in the work of moving the Home position toward the middle of the continuum.

13. Once you grasp this framework, it is very intuitive and easy to understand but a.) not that difficult to implement (Magnifier), or b.) very difficult to implement (Minifier).

Magnifiers and Minifiers will react very differently to the very idea of this framework, based precisely on each of their opposite reflexes. The framework is built on the idea that a person's Self and its stability is critical to being able to survive and function in the world. The Self must be able to manage the physical threats to staying alive, but also the psychological threats to its well-being. This is an issue of the fundamental anxiety of existence, existential anxiety. This

framework posits two different and opposite ways to do this, protecting the Self from this anxiety, Magnification and Minification. The very framework challenges Magnifiers and Minifiers precisely in these opposite ways. Magnifiers will react to this whole framework as a limitation of their potential (for example, just being defined on only one side of the continuum), and will handle this challenge by considering the framework as not that significant or the work as not that difficult. Minifiers will react to this whole framework as validation of their struggle to achieve potential (for example, just being identified as a “Minifier”), and will handle this challenge by considering the framework as accurate and the work as a life-long effort with limited results.

As both are able to move the Home position more toward the middle of the continuum, they understand the overall framework in more depth, not just from their side of the continuum.

14. Why is this book full of redundancies in always stating the particular topic for a Magnifier and then repeating it again for the Minifier, but just with the opposite wording?

It is crucial to state the topic for each side in its own terms precisely because of reactivity of people not understanding the reflex of the opposite side until they get to understand their own reflex and patterns. Only then can they understand the opposite reflex as the same but with just the opposite dynamic. So initially Magnifiers can understand Magnification on its own, but not by extrapolating from an explanation of Minification, by just thinking of it in reverse. And then (to demonstrate this exact point here), Minifiers can understand Minification on its own, but not by extrapolating from an explanation of Magnification, just by thinking of it just in reverse.

15. Isn't this just another therapist's ideas about how to help people based on what has worked in his practice?

It certainly does come from my experience of over 40 years of practice as a therapist, but it has a much broader foundation because it also comes from my experience as a college professor. My courses require the study of systems theory, neuroscience, language, and psychotherapy. Over the years, I have read a great deal and learned a great deal from the study of these fields. In addition, through this learning over the years, I have been able to understand the powerful, common ideas that intersect these fields, and have been able to synthesize them into this basic framework of Magnification/Minification. So it is a culmination of my life's work, in a broad and expansive way that allows further development by the next generations, rather than a prescriptive outline that narrows the focus to follow the framework in a set way based on my experience.

Also, this framework, based on the integration of these ideas from many great thinkers, has been tested in my classroom, as students have engaged these ideas and challenged me, as well as in my office with my clients who have worked with these ideas to improve their lives and shown me how the framework works.

Change

16. How do I precisely identify just where my Home position is on the scale of the continuum?

It is not possible to determine exact points on the continuum, because it is not designed as a measuring instrument. It is more of a graphic image to portray the concept of the reflexes of Magnification and Minification as being opposite manifestations of the same dynamic of managing the anxiety of the Probabilities of a Favorable and Unfavorable Outcome simultaneously. In addition to depicting the two opposite sides, the continuum allows for identifying in a general way how far away the Home position is from the middle, more like "a little" or "a lot."

17. Are words really enough to shift the Home position?

Yes. Language is a crucial component of the foundation of this framework. Language is how we make sense of the world and how we interact with others so that we all contribute to a shared sense of reality. An essential dimension of this process of maintaining reality is the stability of the self. One of the ways people maintain the stability of the self is through the brain process of memory. We remember who we are; others remember who we are, and we remember who they are. This memory is sequential, as it forms a narrative, a story, a person's biography. Language is the underlying process for all of this. It is important to remember that language is not just a process of the spoken word, but of thinking as well.

Thus, when a Magnifier makes a decision to act differently, for example to experiment with allowing limitation, or a Minifier to allow potential, it takes language to make that happen, as the person thinks about doing it; as they reflect on it after doing it; as they talk with others about doing it; as others think about their doing it, and talk with them about doing it. As this experimenting goes on using language, the person can change the pattern of decision making and thereby move the Home position, which is a change of self to a different point of stability.

18. Don't you need a therapist to work with this framework?

It is true that I developed this framework out of my practice as a therapist and I continue to develop it, along with many of the therapists I have taught and trained who also work with this

framework. So it is very helpful to work with a therapist, especially one who understands this framework, but I don't see this as a requirement. It is very possible to use this book as a manual for practice, not in a step-by-step way, but as a way of thinking that guides a person in making changes over the years.

It is also possible for a person to understand this framework and work with a therapist who is not familiar with it, integrating the work of changing self through changing the pattern of decision making in psychotherapy with a therapist whose approach is compatible.