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The impact of the survival rule on situation- reaction-chains to symptom – an empirical analysis

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The impact of the survival rule on situation-reaction-chains to symptom – an empirical analysis

- In 100 outpatient psychotherapy patients who were treated with strategic-behavioral therapy, an affective-cognitive behavior therapy ACBT after Woolfolk, the maladaptive complex scheme of the "dysfunctional survival rule" was individually registered at the start of the therapy. On the one hand, its influence on the emotional regulation, the social behavior and on the symptom formation was investigated. On the other hand, its change in the direction of functional behavior control was analyzed at the end of the therapy. It was also attempted to identify various typical reaction chains that lead to symptom formation (symptom paths). Both the natural primary emotion in the symptom-triggering situation as well as the resulting action stimulus was prohibited by the survival rule in more than 80 % of the patients. In almost all of the patients in the event of non-observation, this caused the loss of indispensable interpersonal references in advance so that massive anxiety was triggered. Well over 80 % of patients reacted then with secondary avoidance responses such as fainting, guilt or shame, followed by an overcompensated behavior and, ultimately, symptom formation. At the end of the therapy there was a highly significant reduction on the impact of the dysfunctional survival rule on the experience and behavior of the patient, correlating with the extent of recovery. Further detail analyses with reference to predictor characteristics are reported.
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- Key words: survival rule – reaction chain to symptom – primary emotion – secondary emotion – Affective-Cognitive Behavior Therapy ACBT – Strategic Behavior Therapy SBT

Objective

- As a complex core schema the
- "dysfunctional survival rule"
- seems to determine
- emotional,
- cognitive and
- behavioral actions of persons,
- so that this rule
- does not allow to solve interpersonal problems
- without symptoms and illness.
- The hypothesis is examined by this study.

Methods

- In 100 outpatient psychotherapy patients who were
- treated with strategic-behavioral therapy,
- an affective-cognitive behavior therapy ACBT after Woolfolk,
- the maladaptive complex scheme of
- the "dysfunctional survival rule" was individually registered at the start of the therapy.
- On the one hand, its influence on the emotional regulation, the social behavior and on the symptom formation was investigated.
- On the other hand,
- its change in the direction of functional behavior control
- was analyzed at the end of the therapy.
- It was also attempted to
- identify various typical reaction chains
- that lead to symptom formation (symptom paths).

Results

- Both the natural primary emotion in the symptom-triggering situation as well as
- the resulting action stimulus
- was prohibited by the survival rule in more than 80 % of the patients.
- In almost all of the patients in the event of non-observation, this caused the loss of indispensable interpersonal references in advance so that massive anxiety was triggered.
- Well over 80 % of patients reacted then with secondary avoidance responses such as fainting, guilt or shame, followed by an overcompensated behavior and, ultimately, symptom formation.
- At the end of the therapy there was a highly significant reduction on the impact of the dysfunctional survival rule on the experience and behavior of the patient,
- correlating with the extent of recovery.
- Further detail analyses with reference to predicator characteristics are reported.

Approaches of schema analysis

- Piaget (1995) Schema
- Beck (1979) basic assumption
- Grawe (1987), Caspar (2007) plan analysis
- Sulz (1994) survival rule
- Young et al. (2005) maladaptive schema
- Hayes et al. (2005) ACT: rule governed behavior
- Sachse et al. (2008) schema modification

Survival Rule

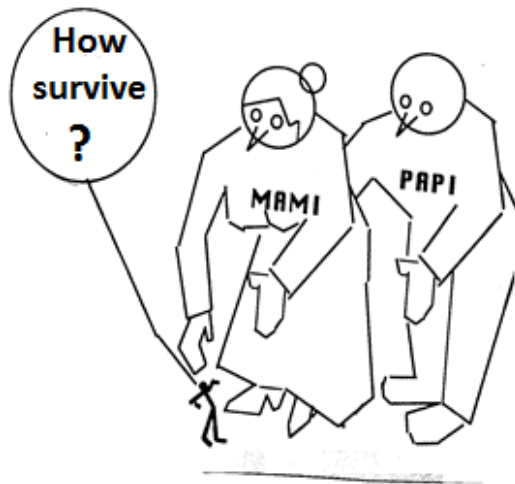
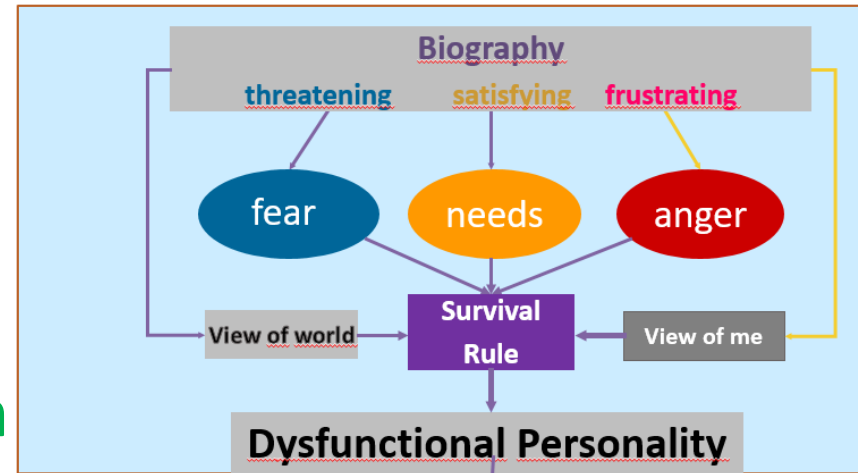
Dependent survival rule

command: Only if I always give in

prohibition: and if I never show rage

need: I can keep warmth and security

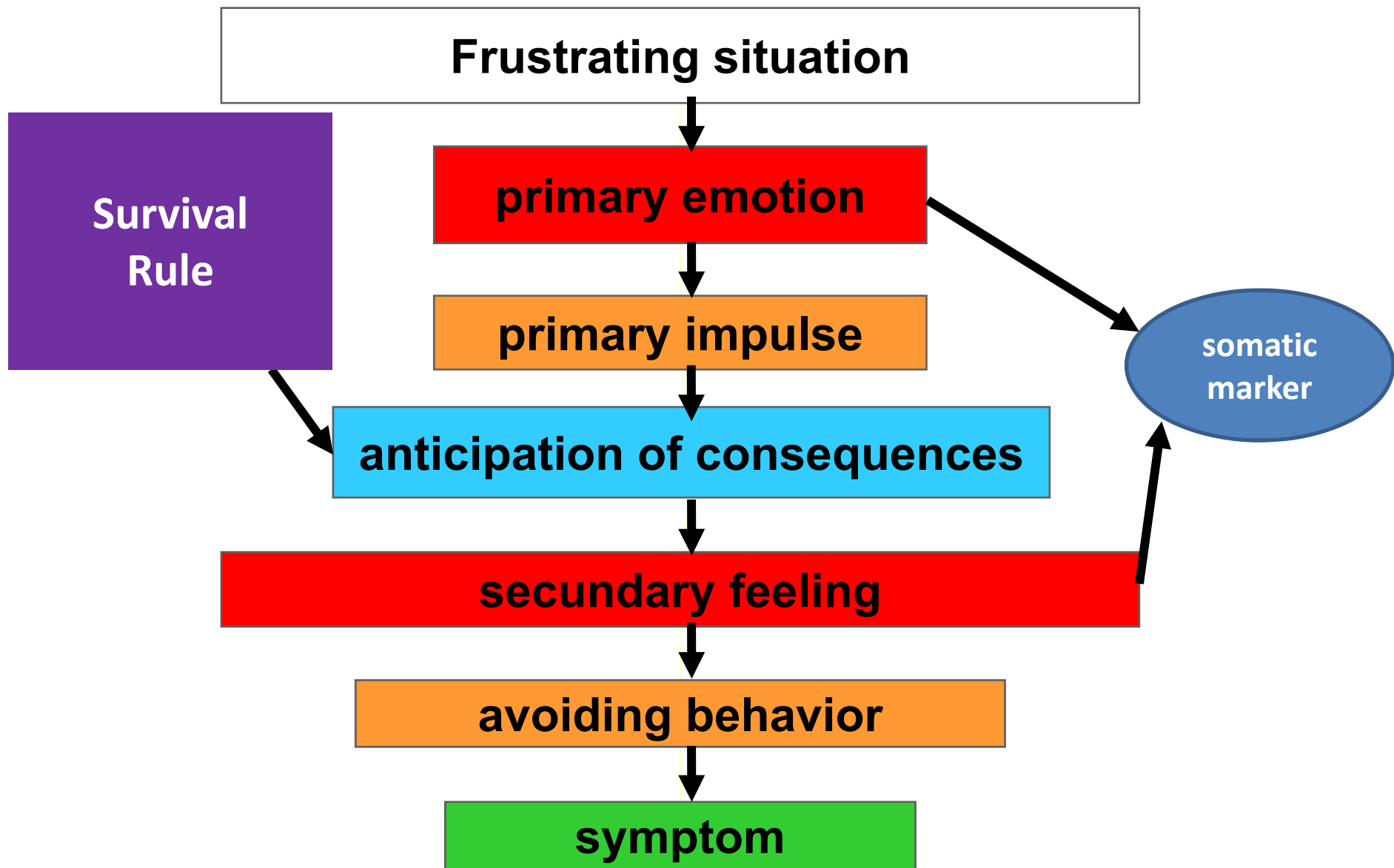
fear: and I can prevent separation an being alone

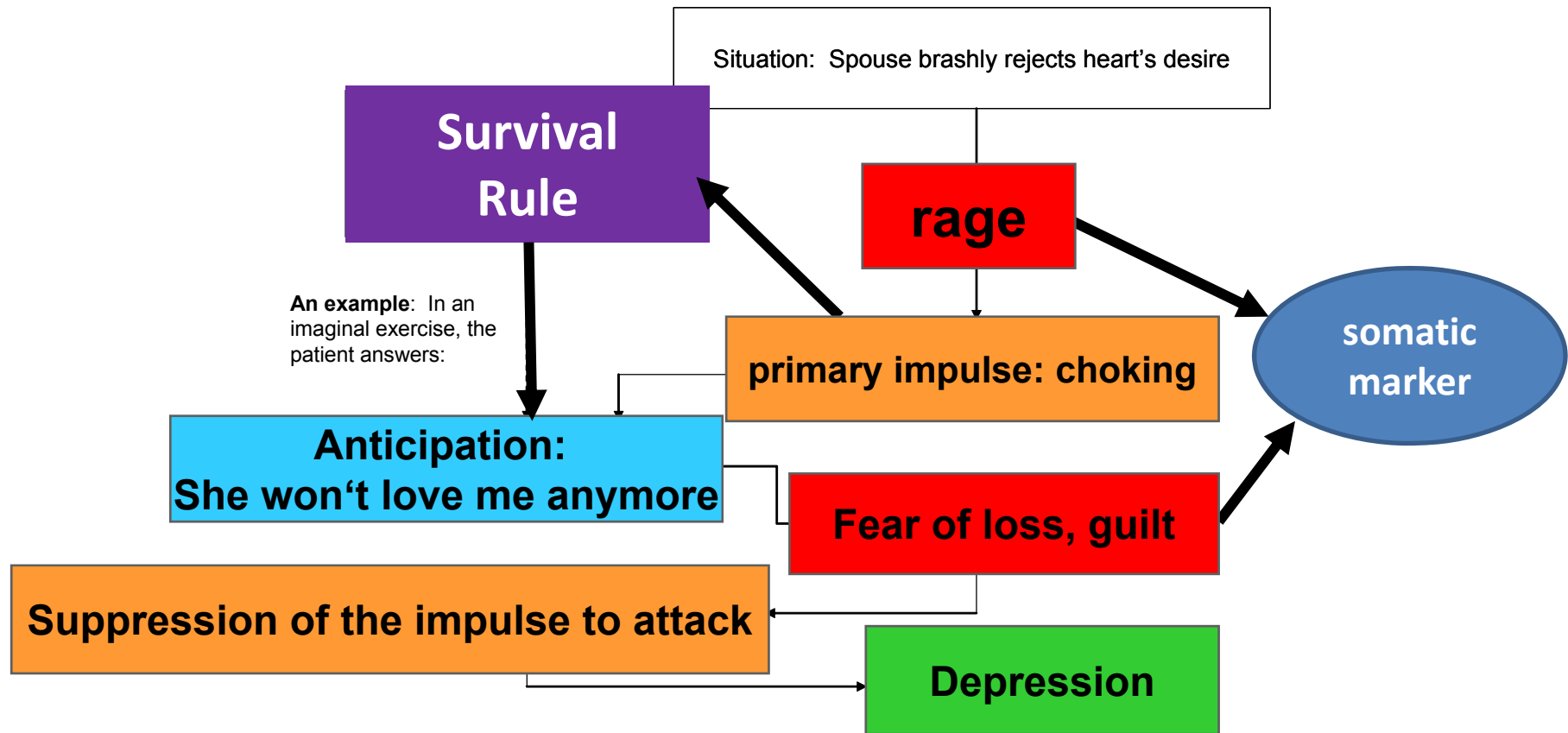


If the Patient understands the life determining meaning and significance of his dysfunctional survival rule, he is concerned and shocked.

Function analysis

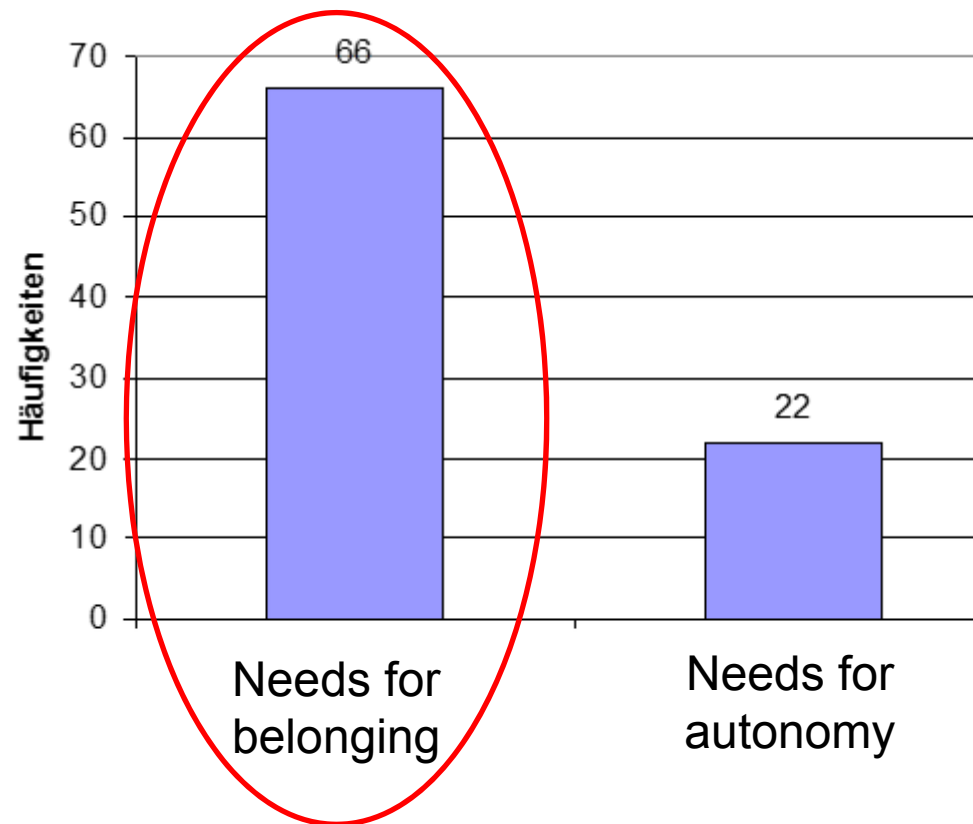
1. What is the function of the symptom for self regulation?
2. What is the function of the symptom for the social system?
3. What is the purpose of the symptom?
4. What is avoided by the symptom?



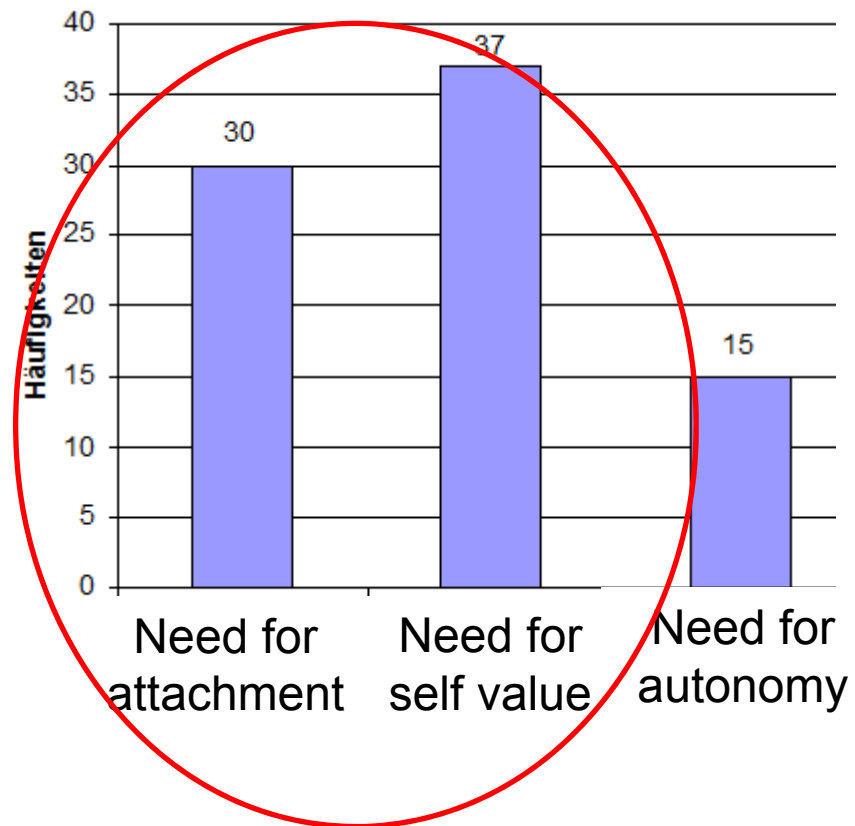


What happens in the symptom-triggering situation?

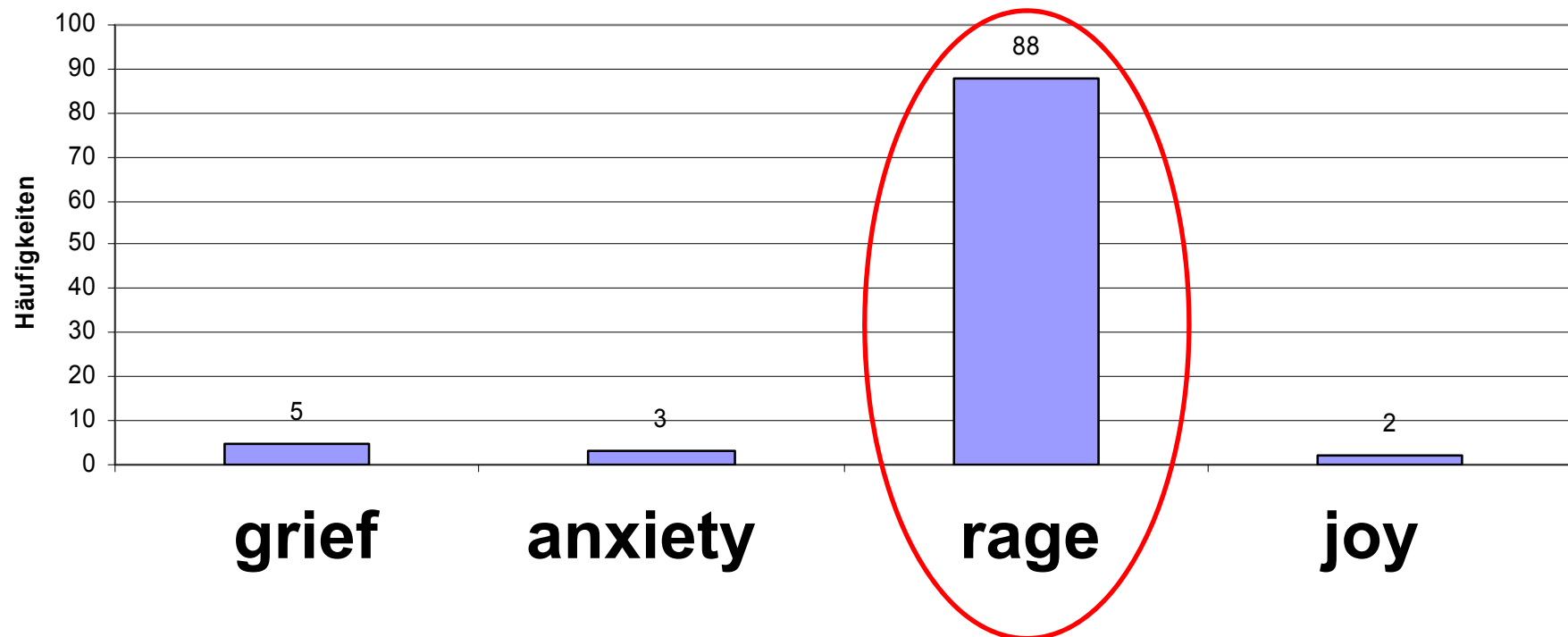
Frustration of:



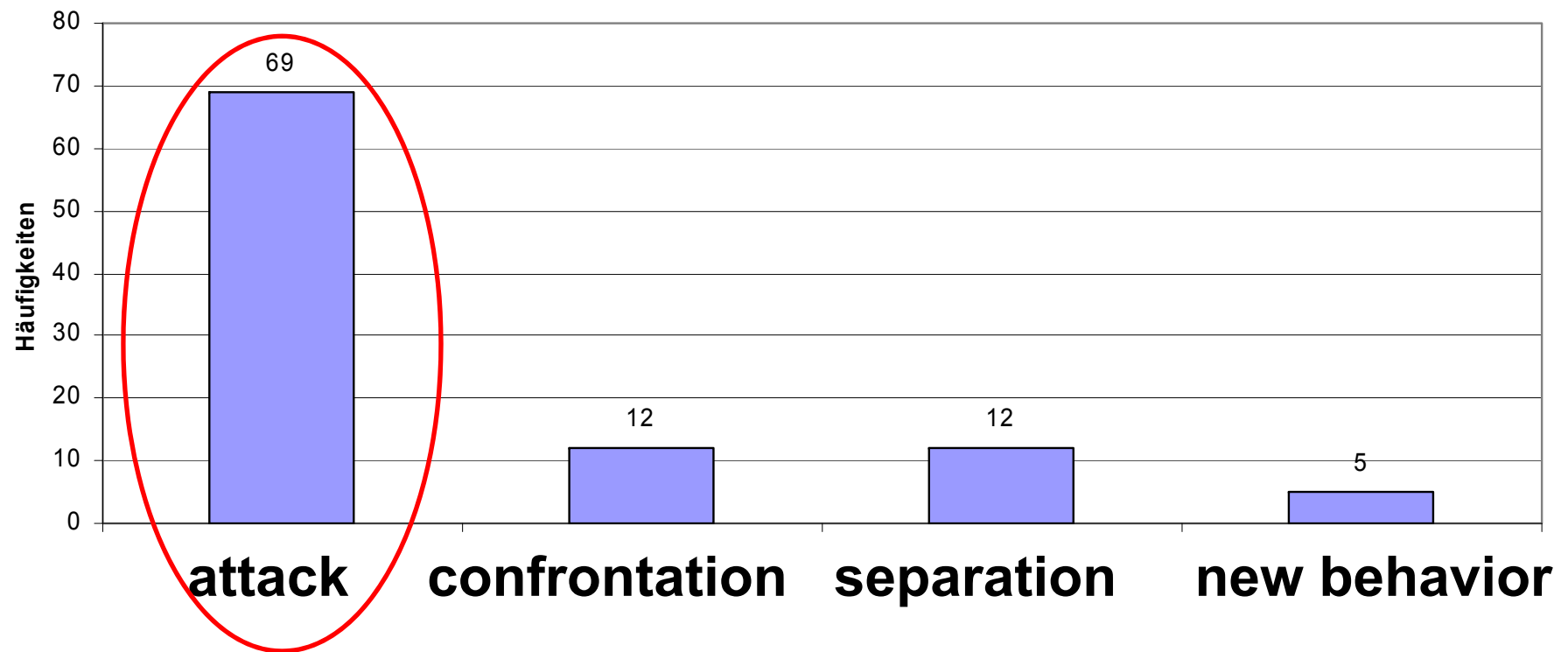
Which needs are frustrated?



What is the first emotion? (primary emotion)

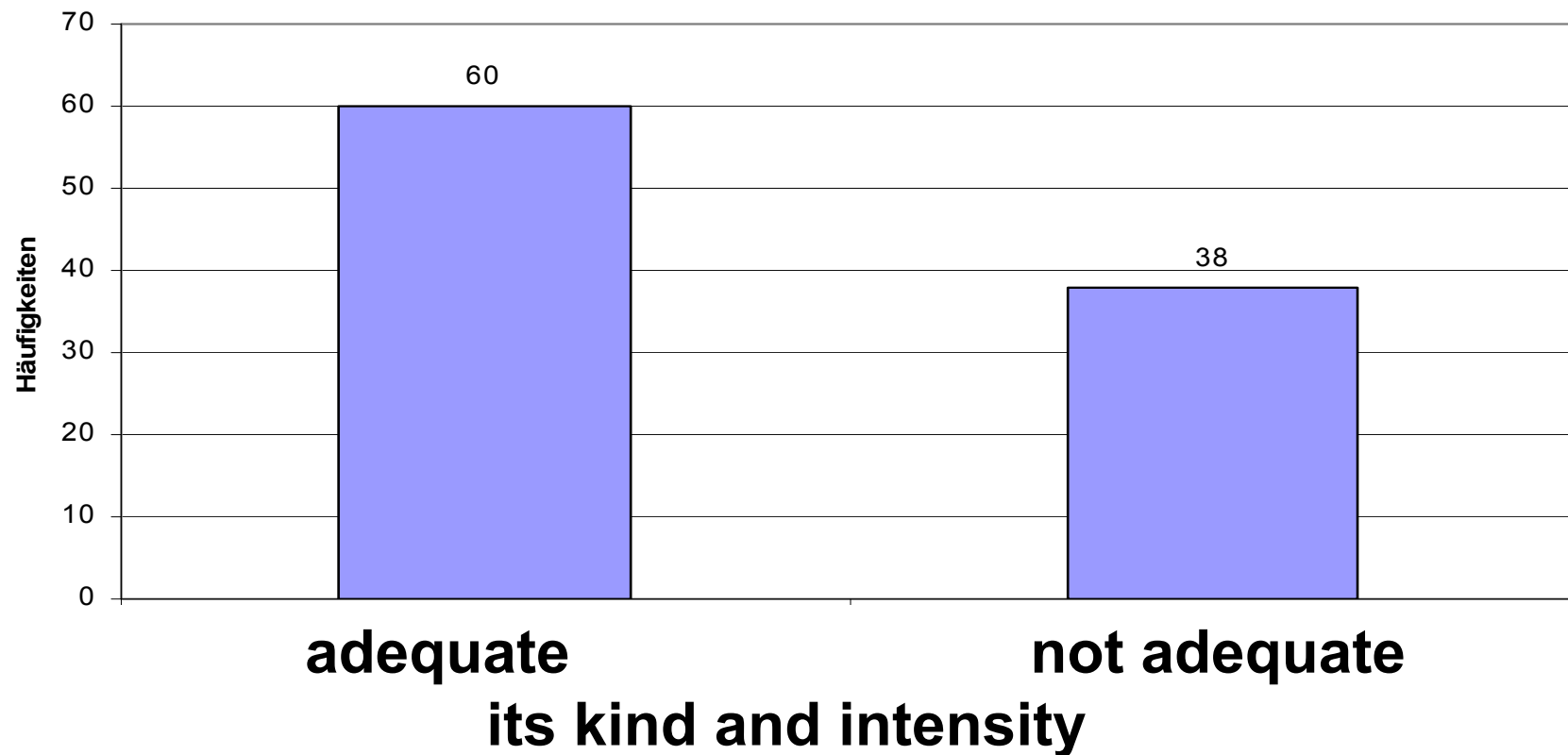


What is the first impuls? (primary impulse)

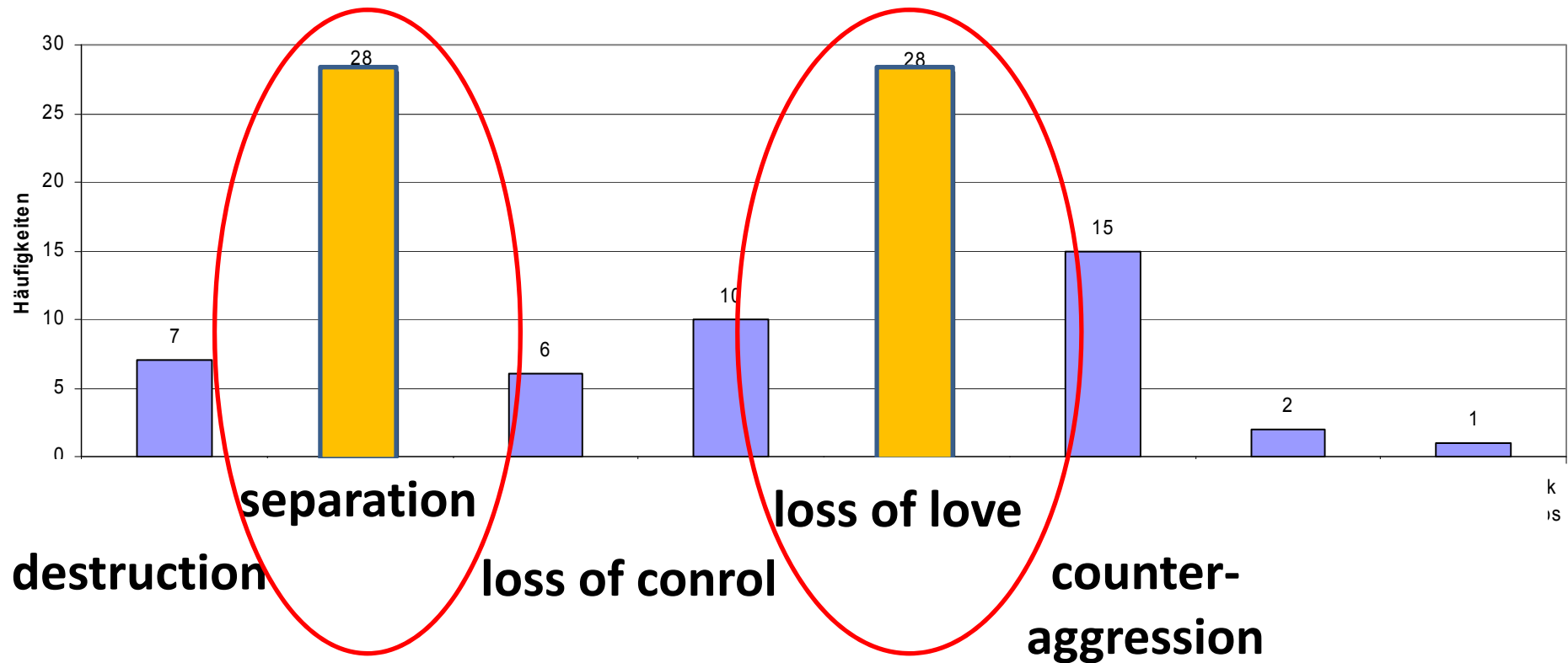


Is the primary impulse adequate and suitable?

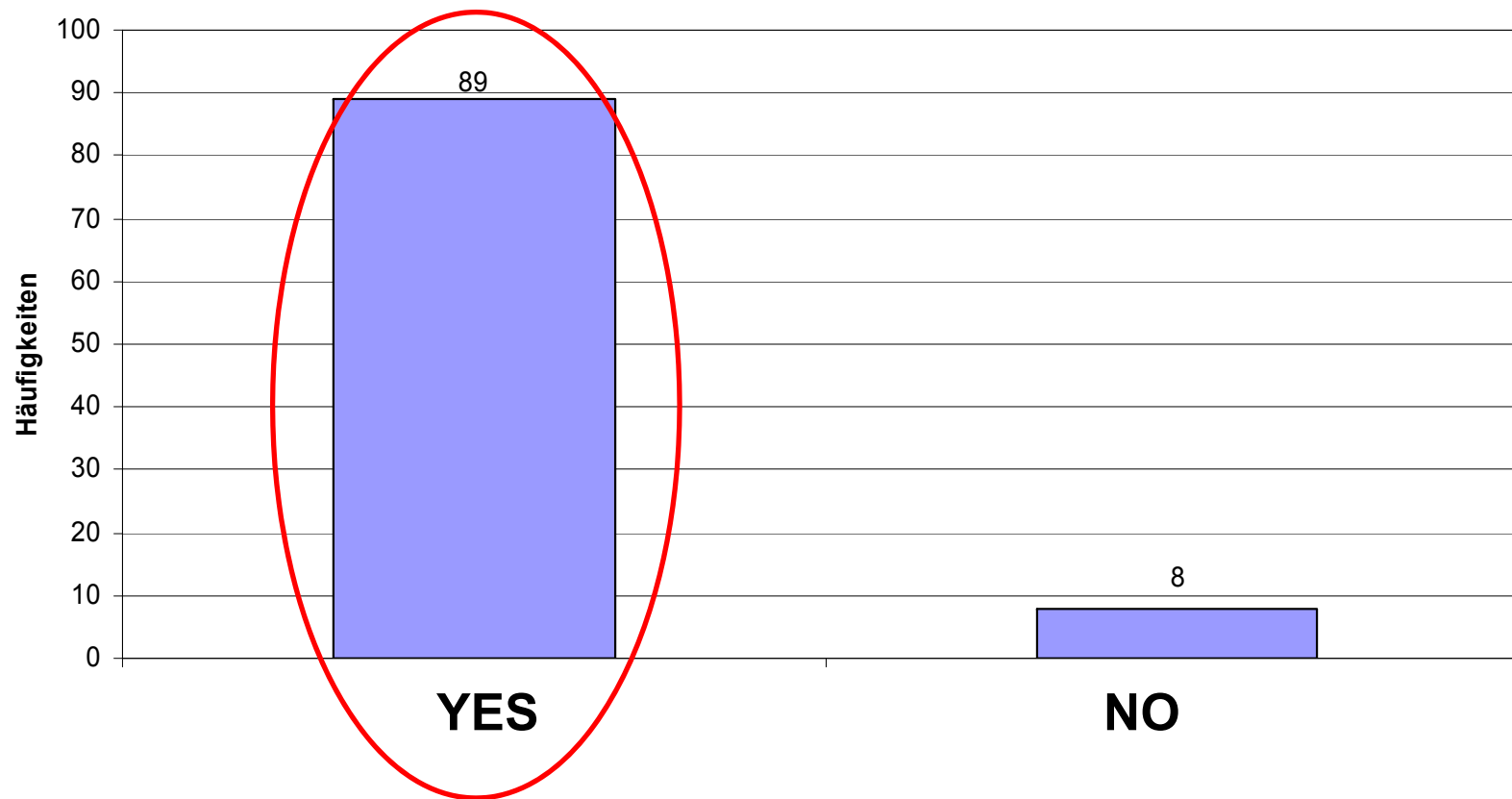
Reaction -R-: primary impulse



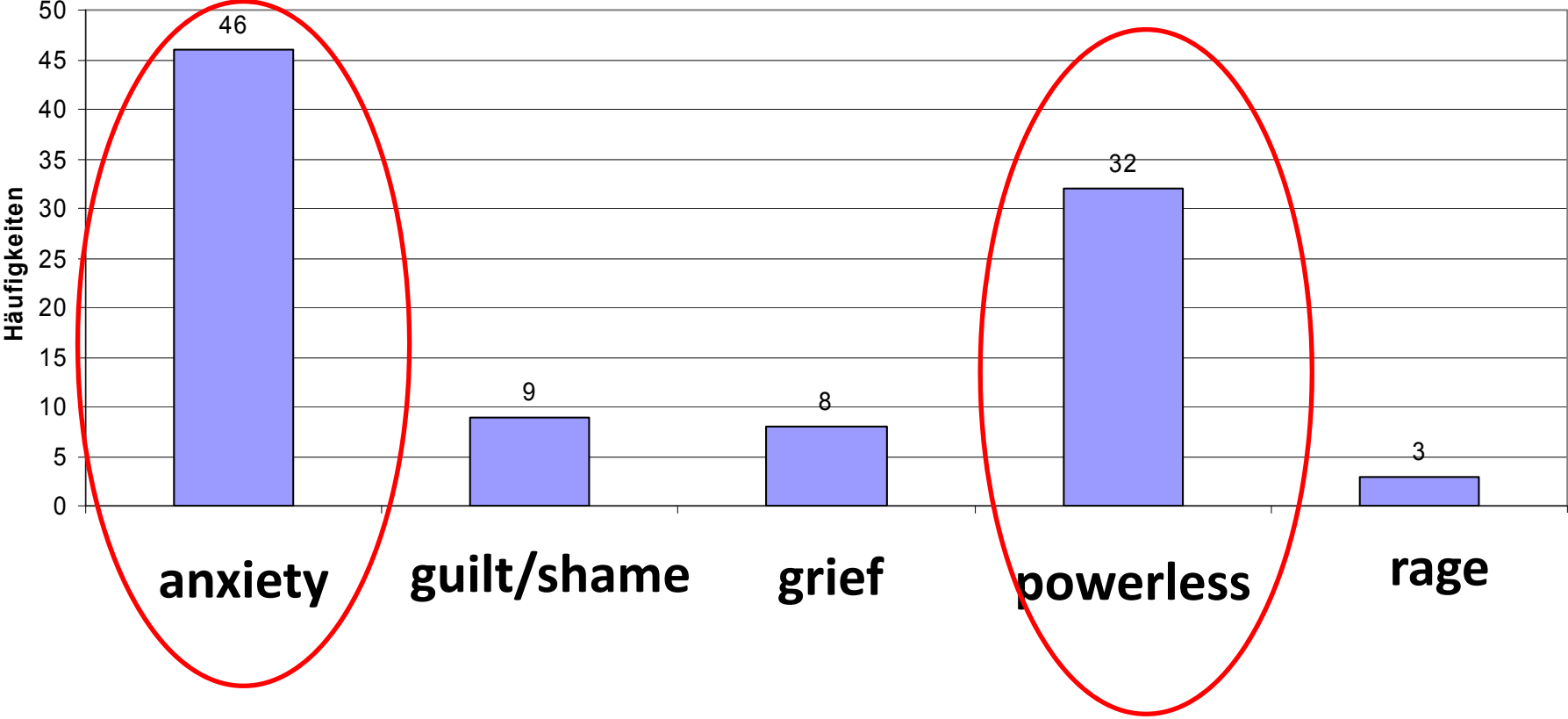
What expectation has the person, which fear?



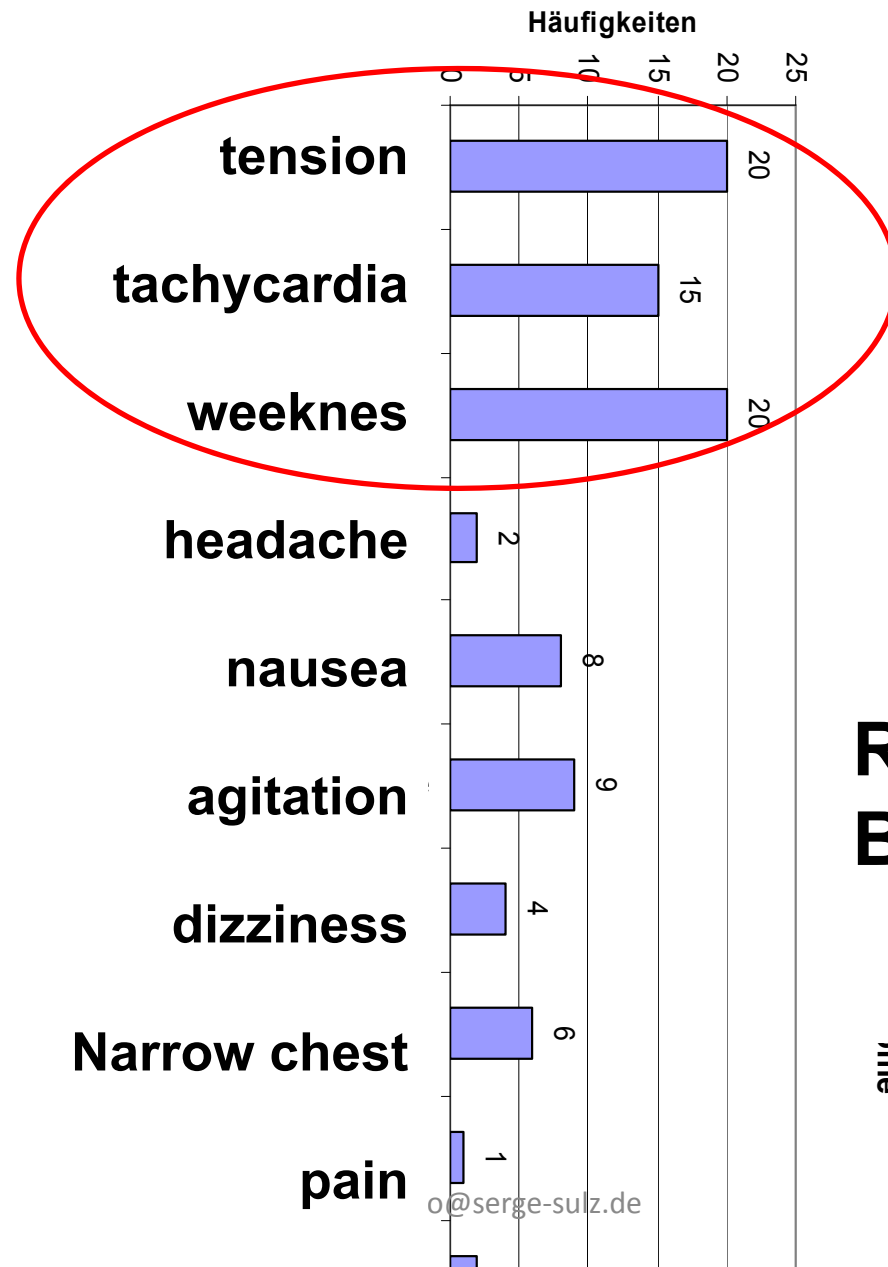
leads this fear to change of direction of behavior
in the chain of reactions?



Which feeling results from expectation and fear? (secondary feeling)



Which are the body reactions ?

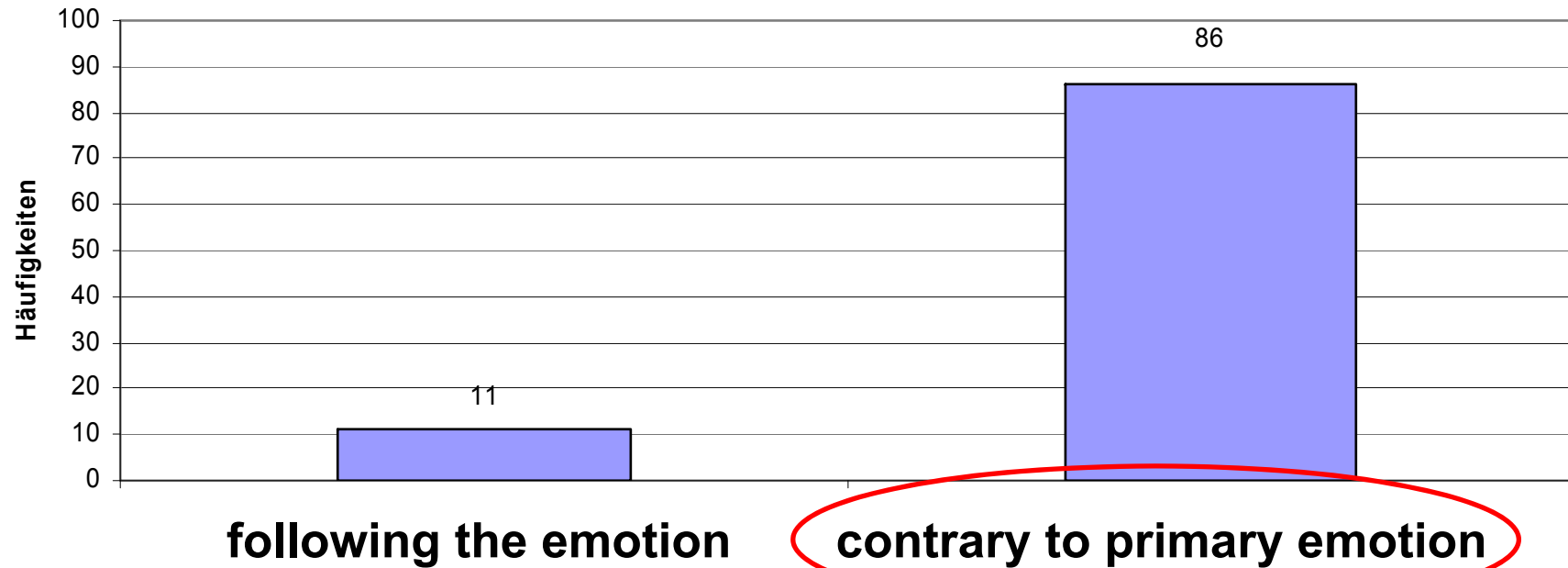


**Reaction -R-:
Body reaction**

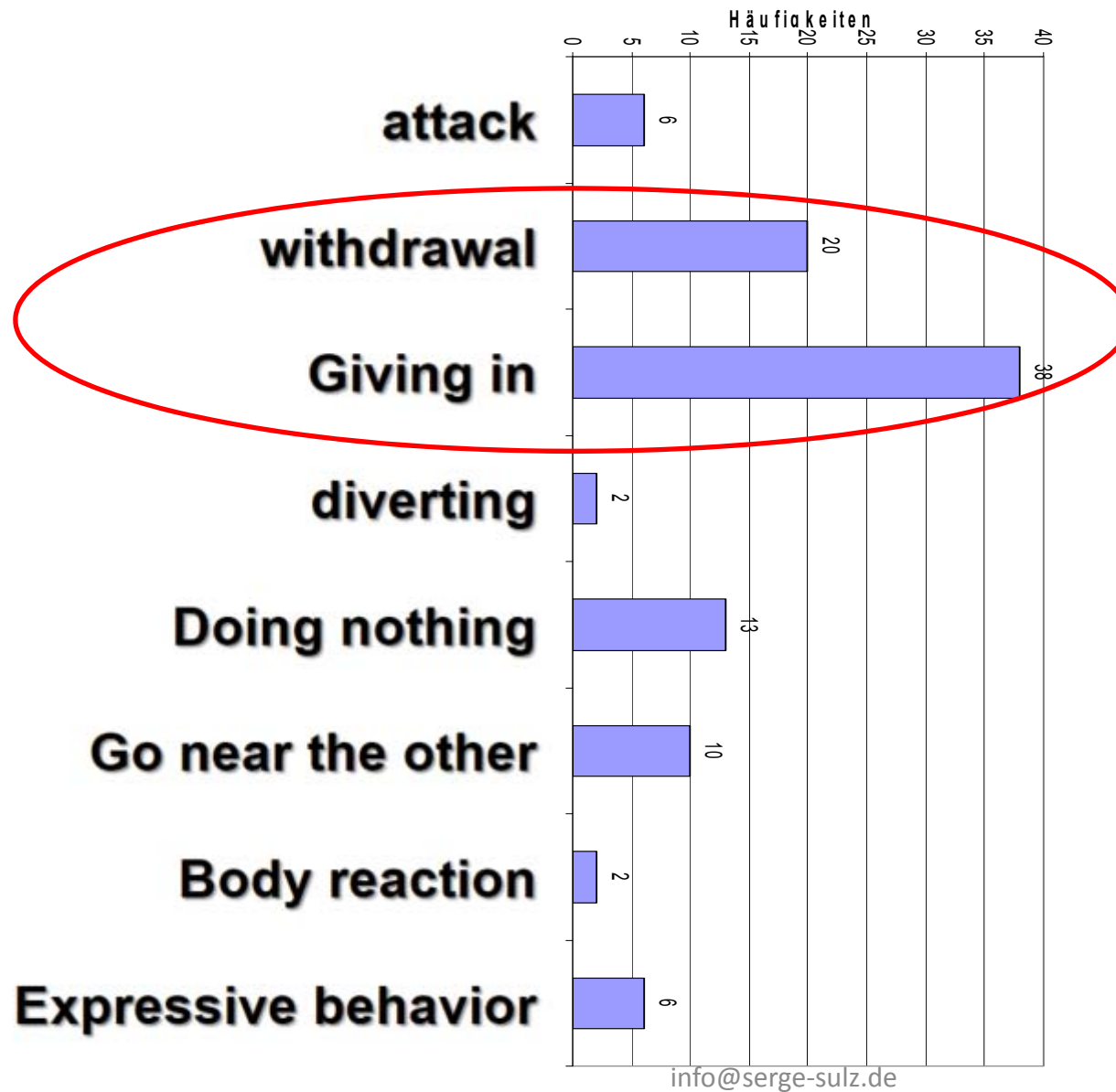
ime

Change of direction of behavior?

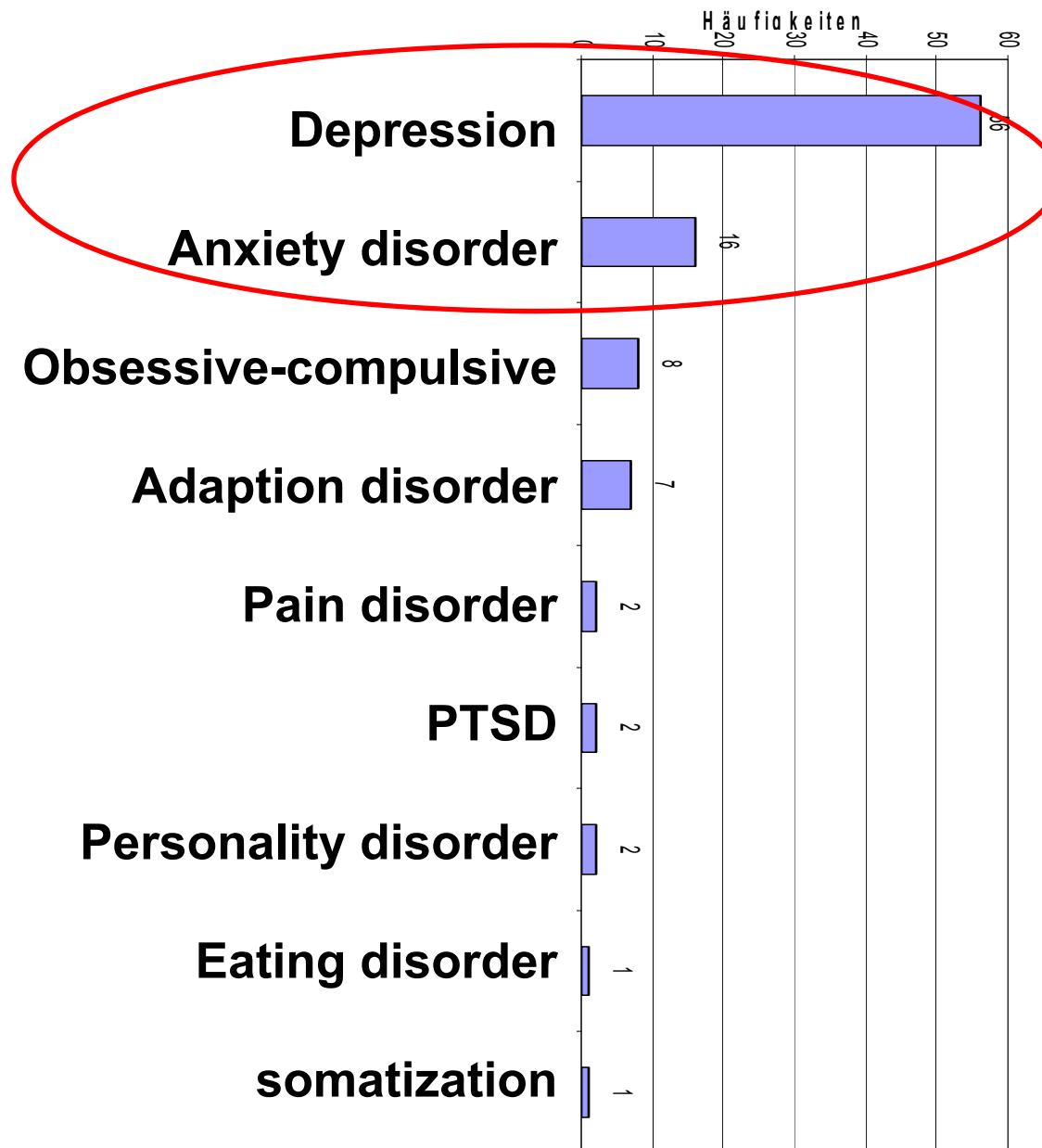
Is resulting behavior contrary to primary emotion?



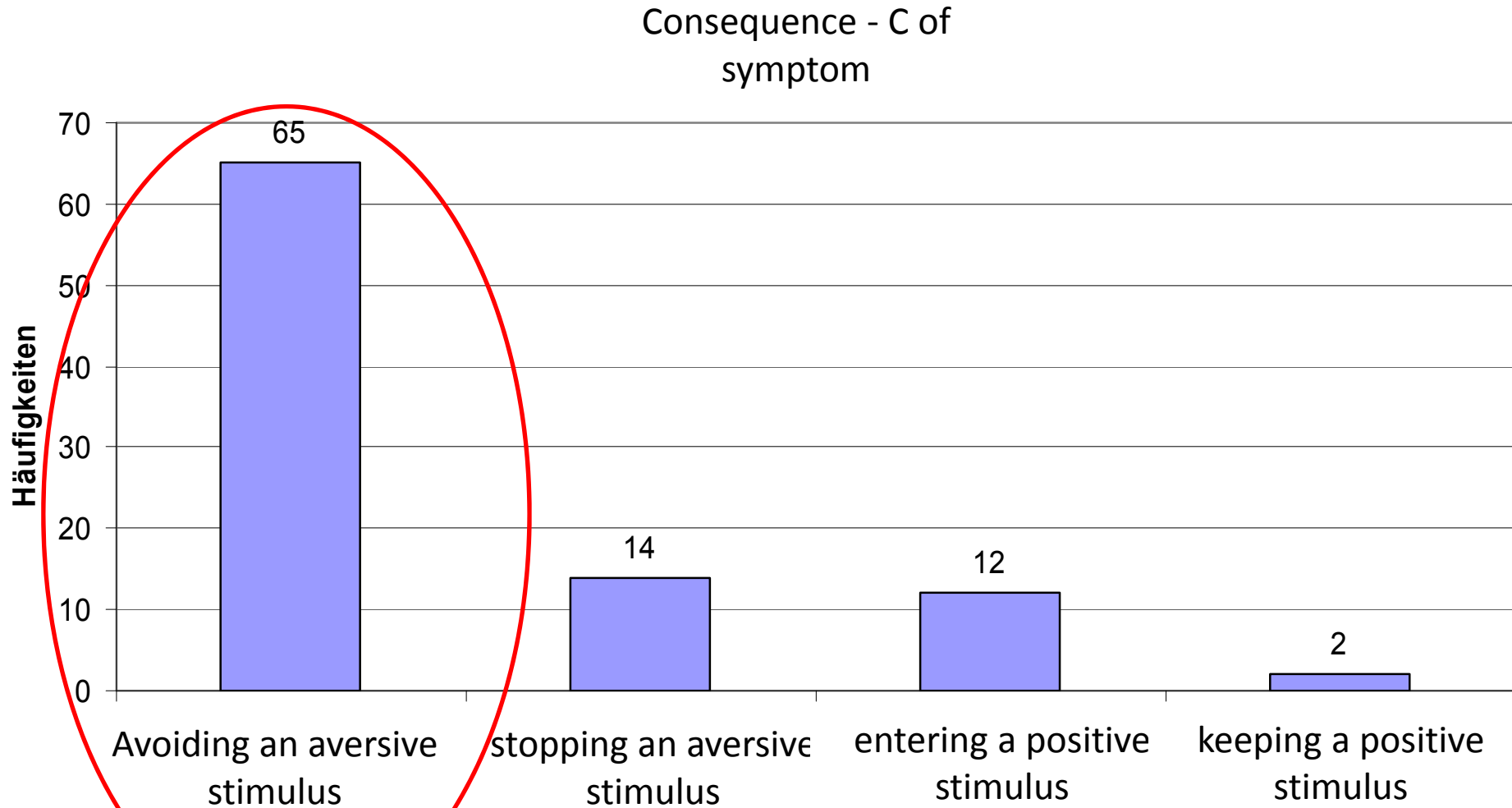
Which AVOIDING behavior results?



Which symptom results?



What is the effect of the symptom? What is the purpose of the symptom?



The impact of the survival rule

Source:

VDS35-Kognitionsanalyse: Überlebensregel

Survival rule: only if I always...



Survival rule: only if I always...

this corresponds to following dysfunctional personality traits:

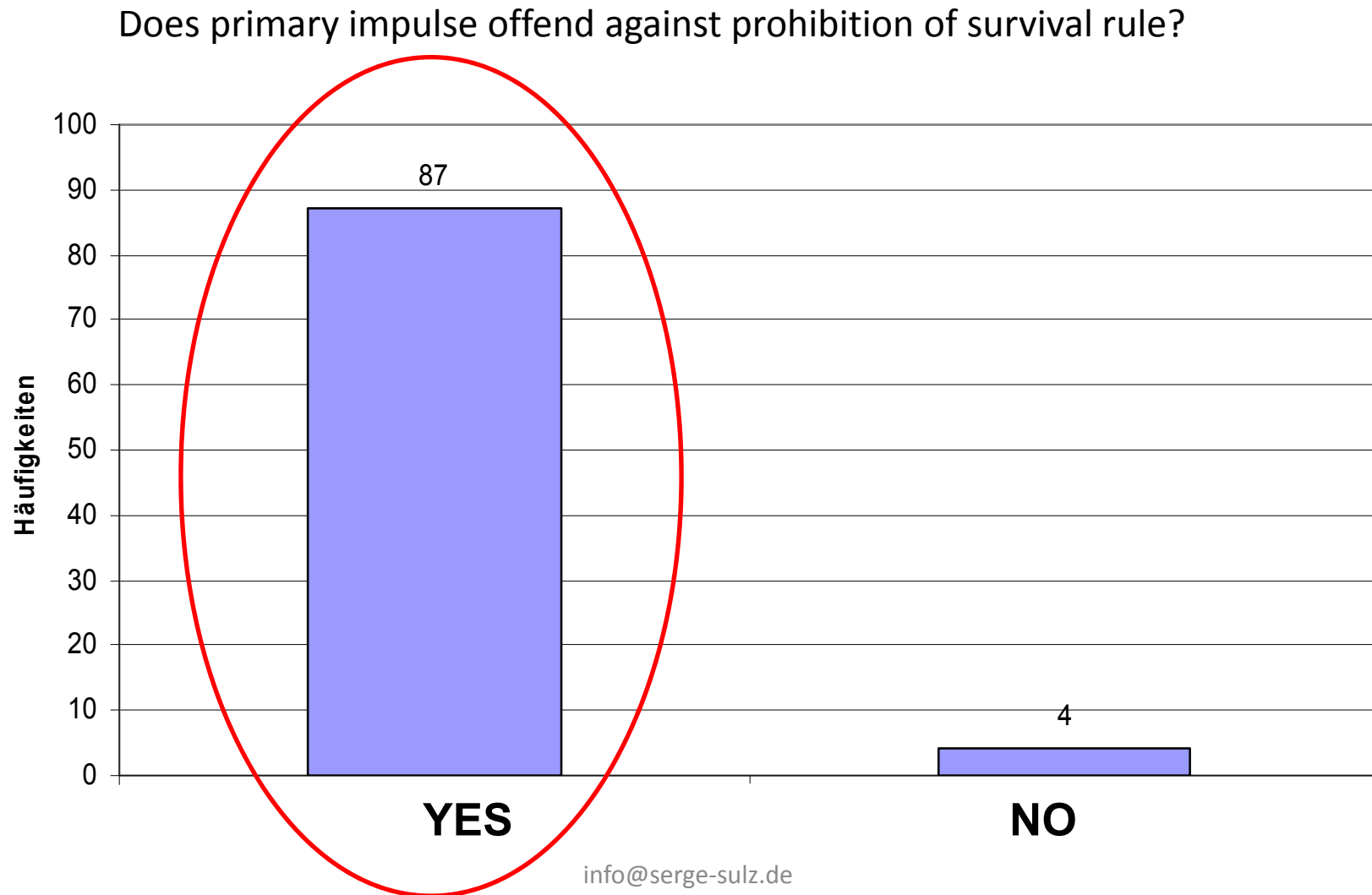
Personality trait	n
Anxious-avoidant	40
Histrionic	35
Dependent	29
anancastic	29

Survival rule: only if I always...

Patients formulated the following prohibitions:

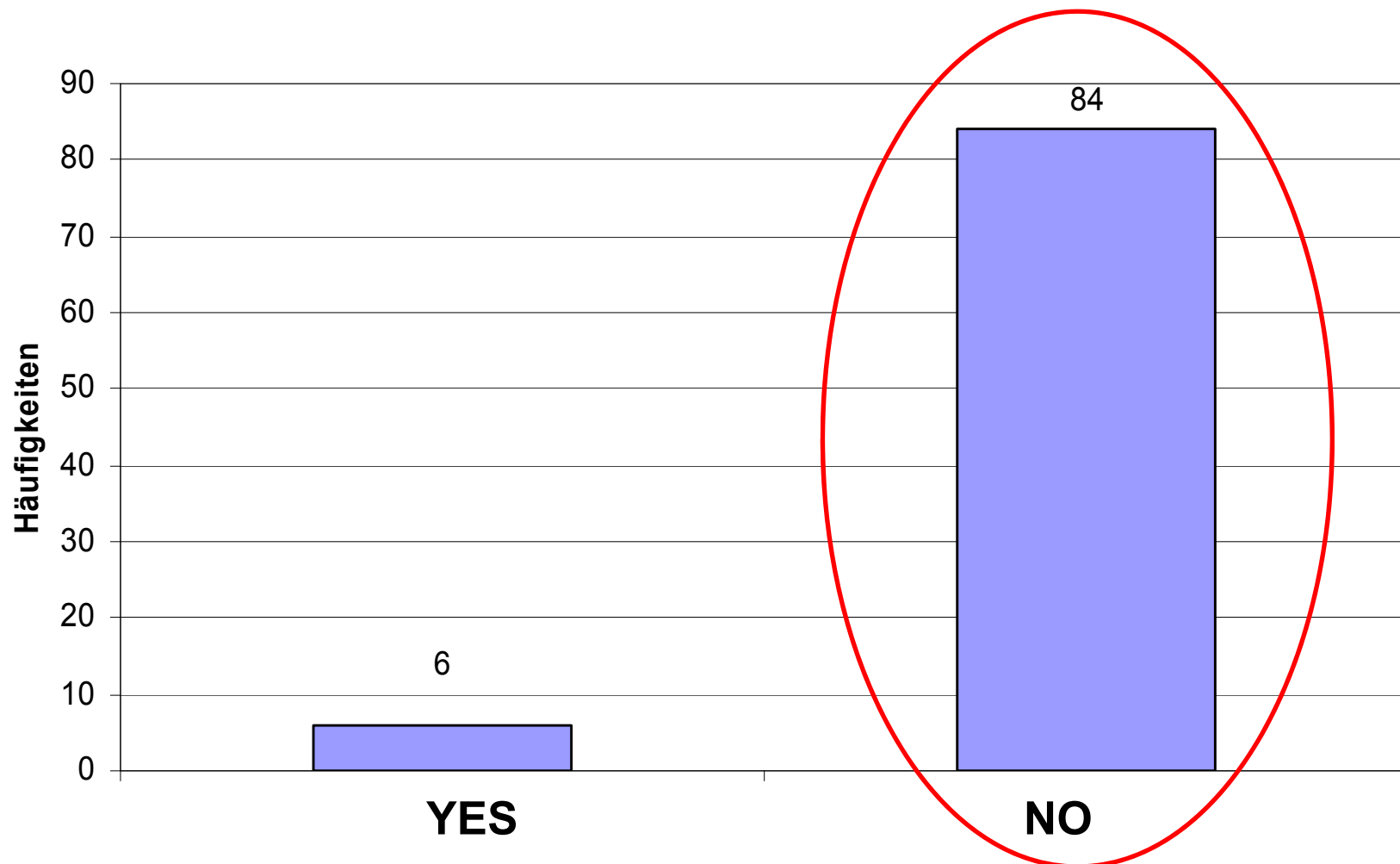
Prohibition of survival rule	n
To have feelings	2
To have needs	13
To have rage	7
To show feelings	18
To show needs	38
To show rage	33

Does primary impulse violate the survival rule?



Does real behavior violate the survival rule?

Does real behavior offend the order of survival rule?



Survival rule: ... **keeping need satisfaction**

Following needs were formulated:

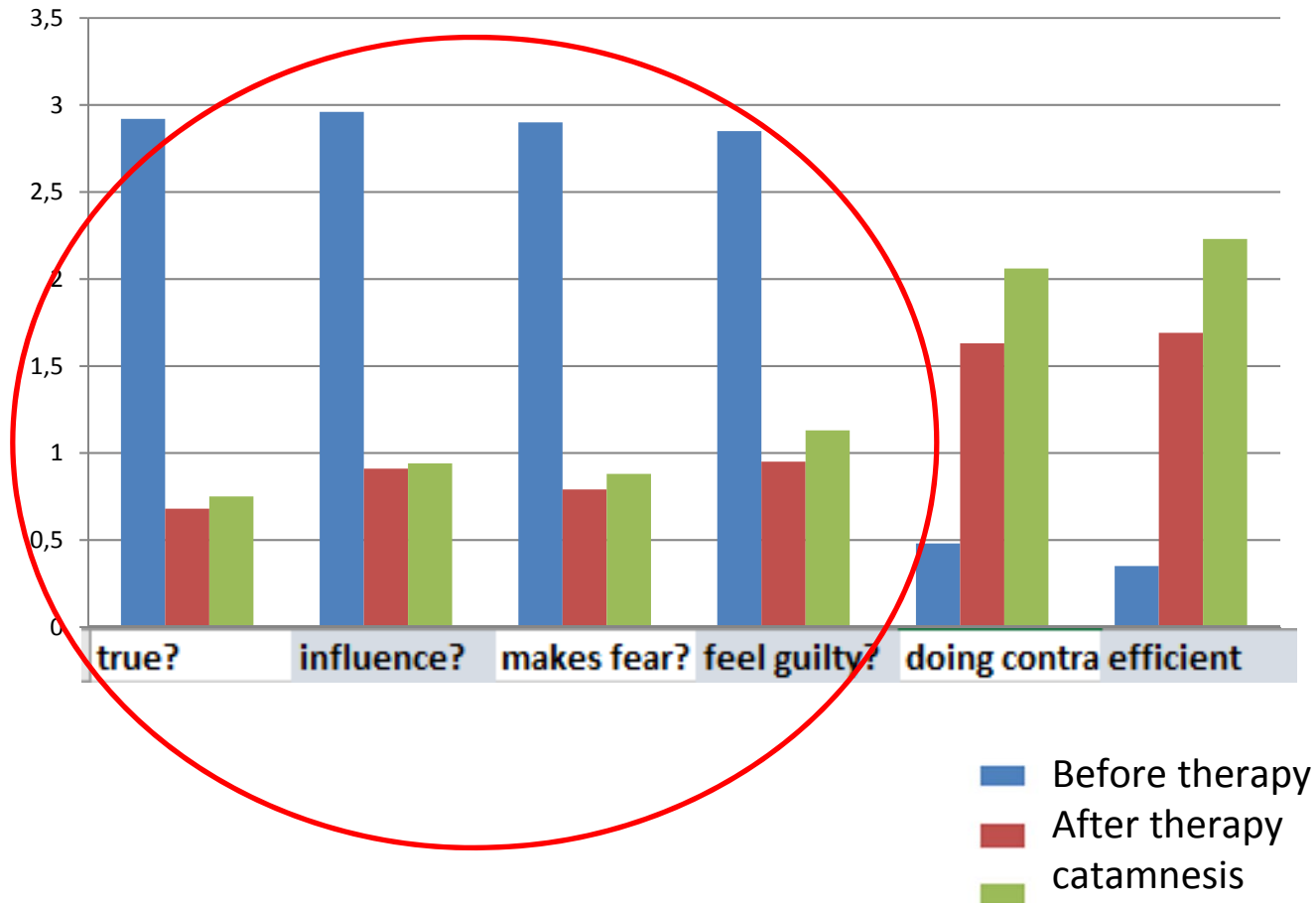
Basic need – positive reinforcement	n
security	28
love	27
validation	24
warmth	20
feeling welcome	15
attention	8
self-determination	4
sympathy	3

Survival rule: ... **preventing threat**
Following threats were formulated:

Basic fear – negative reinforcement	n
Loss of love	57
separation	53
Counter-aggression	18
Losing self-control	10
destruction	5
Losing control over others	3

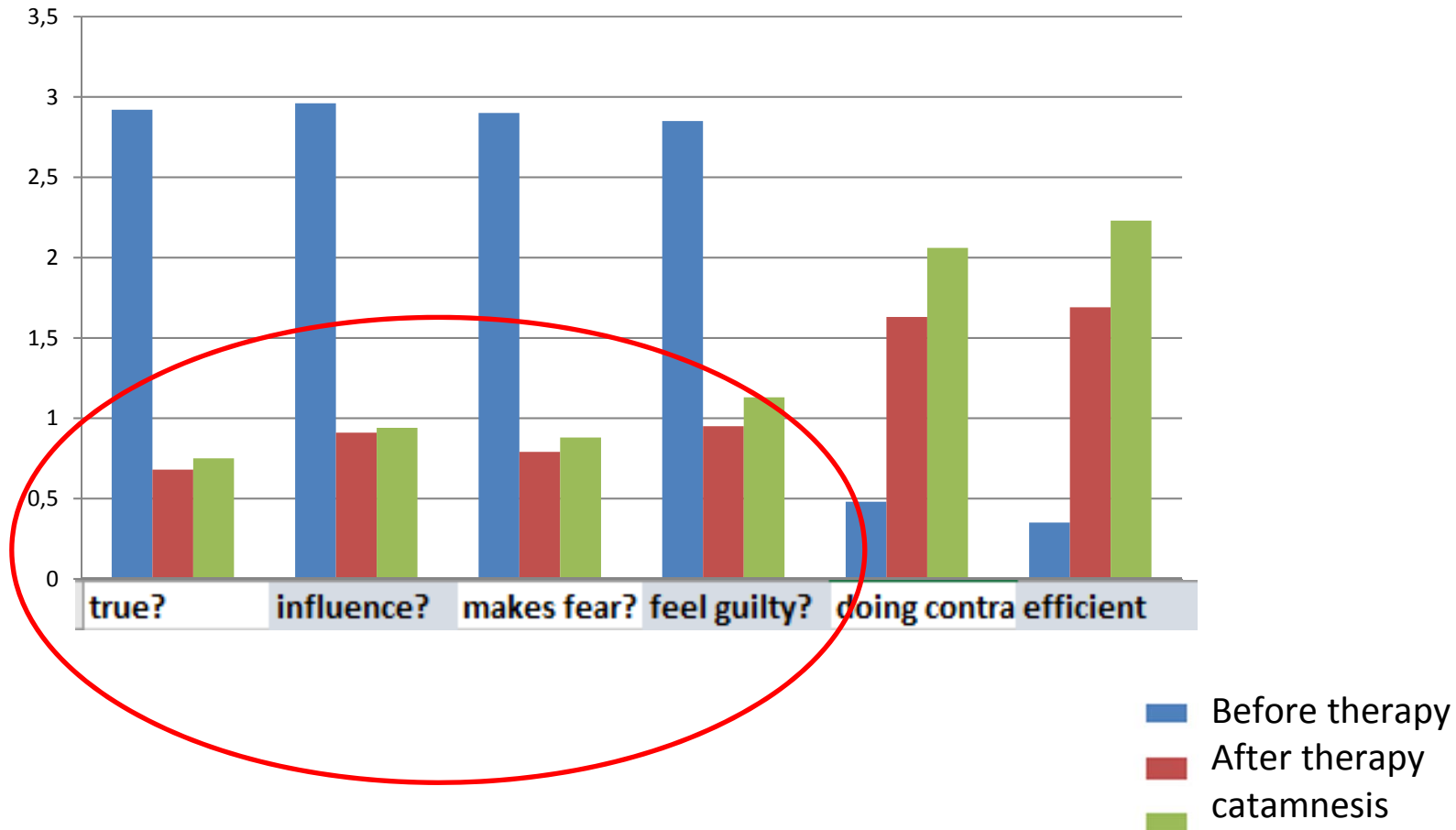
Impact of survival rule **before therapy** ...

(t-Test: highly sign (***) . High power g: 0,9 bis 1,45)



Impact of survival rule **after therapy** ...

(t-Test: highly sign (***) . High power g: 0,9 bis 1,45)



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