

Causal-attribution studies

Task 1

Instructions:

Welcome to the study!

For this study, we will ask you to **imagine yourself in various different everyday situations**.



For each situation, we will ask you to choose *which of several possible explanations for what happened you think is the most likely*.

Although we know that events can have many different causes, we would like you to choose which explanation you think would be the **main reason** the event happened, **if it actually happened to you**.

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What do I need to do?

In order to do this, we will ask you to **first read the sentence at the top of each page**.

Picture the situation described as clearly as you can, as if the events were happening to you right now.



Your job is then to **click on one of the 'thought clouds'** below each statement, selecting which you think **best** describes why the situation or event happened.

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Before you continue to the main part of the study, we will ask you to **answer some quick questions**. This is in order to make sure we have explained all the previous information clearly enough.



If you don't get all the questions right the first time, you will be routed back to the start of the instructions to try again. This helps us make sure everything is completely clear before we get started!

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1. The point of the study is to...

- A** Answer each question according to how you think most people would explain the causes of different events
- B** Answer each question according to what you think would be the main cause behind an event, if it actually happened to you
- C** Answer each question completely at random, in order to generate unusable data

*

A B C

2. Events usually have multiple reasons behind them. For this study, I should...

- A** Select the main reason I think explains the events, from the options available
- B** Select all of the reasons I think are relevant to the event
- C** Type in my own answers

*

A B C

Main task:

You find out that someone you consider a friend has talked about you negatively behind your back



Everyone has bad things said about them sometimes

Deep down, my friends don't really like me

My friend was probably just in a bad mood and letting off steam

I probably did something recently to annoy them

Someone from work invites you out for a cup of coffee



I've made a particular effort to talk to this person recently

People usually like to include me in things

People at work generally reach out from time to time

This person is probably trying to make a good impression for some reason

Intervention (restructuring condition)

Learning time!

Before you move on to the final part of the study, we would like you to give you some background information.

We hope that you will find this interesting.

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Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Some psychologists think that it is often the way people *interpret* events, rather than the events themselves, that leads to upsetting thoughts and feelings.

For example, if a person has the belief "I'm a failure", they may interpret all negative things that happen to them as somehow resulting from their own actions, regardless of the actual reasons behind events.

This idea is helpful, because it explains why people experiencing the same event can react in different ways.



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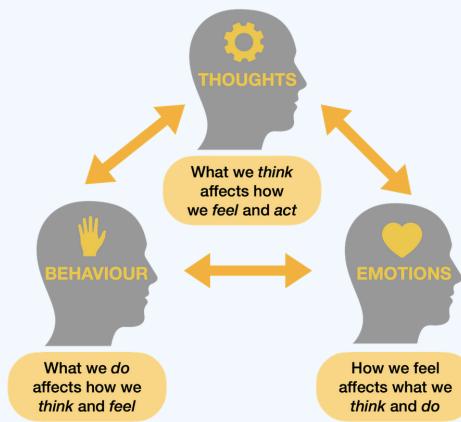
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Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Over time, people who tend to interpret events in an unhelpful way may become more vulnerable to feeling low. This is because the upsetting thoughts and feelings may trigger a negative cycle of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

For example, a person who believes they are a failure may give up trying to take part in activities that might lead to positive feelings (talking with friends or doing something they enjoy), as they already assume it will end up badly.

In cognitive therapy, this relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours is known as the **cognitive triangle**.



Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

One of the core ideas behind cognitive therapy is that it is possible to *identify* and then *challenge* unhelpful thoughts and beliefs.

Cognitive therapists believe that challenging unhelpful thoughts can change the way we interpret events, and therefore **change our emotional reactions to them**.



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Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Let's walk through some examples to see how this might work in practice.

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Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Example one

Imagine a friend walks past you without acknowledging you

Below are two different ways you could think about this event.

Interpretation 1

"I must have done
something to upset
them"

Interpretation 2

"They probably just
didn't see me"

What kind of feelings do you think you might experience if you thought interpretation 1 was true?

- worried tense relaxed unconcerned

What kind of feelings do you think you might experience if you thought interpretation 2 was true?

- worried tense relaxed unconcerned

Which interpretation do you think is the most helpful to think about?

Choose...

continue

Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Example two

Imagine your boss tells you they have decided to offer you a promotion

Below are two different ways you could think about this event.

Interpretation 1

"I've worked hard and must have done well this year"

Interpretation 2

"They probably feel they have to offer this to everyone after a certain amount of time"

What kind of feelings do you think you might experience if you thought interpretation 1 was true?

- proud excited neutral nervous

What kind of feelings do you think you might experience if you thought interpretation 2 was true?

- proud excited neutral nervous

Which interpretation do you think is the most helpful to think about?

Choose...

continue

Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Your turn!

Think of something *negative* that happened to you recently. For example, something that didn't go the way you would have liked it to at work, or in a social situation. What was going through your mind in that moment?

Briefly, summarise your first thoughts about why this event happened

Now, try and come up with an alternative interpretation. Is there another way of seeing things?

Consider how you would feel after thinking about each of the two different interpretations. Which explanation do you think is the most helpful to think about?

Choose...

Which explanation do you think would be more likely to be true if this event happened to a colleague or friend of yours?

Choose...

If you were looking back on this event from 20 years in the future, which interpretation do you think you would be likely to choose then?

Choose...

continue

Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Your turn!

Now, think of something *positive* that happened to you recently. For example, something that went well at work, socially, or when taking part in another activity. What was going through your mind in that moment?

Briefly, summarise your first thoughts about why this event happened

Now, try and come up with an alternative interpretation. Is there another way of seeing things?

Consider how you would feel after thinking about each of the two different interpretations. Which explanation do you think is the most helpful to think about?

Choose...

Which explanation do you think would be more likely to be true if this event happened to a colleague or friend of yours?

Choose...

If you were looking back on this event from 20 years in the future, which interpretation do you think you would be likely to choose then?

Choose...

continue

Thoughts affect feelings: A core idea behind cognitive therapy

Putting it all together

To finish up this part of the study, we'd like to ask you some questions about the information you've just read.

Please note, these questions are just to try and understand how clearly we have explained the material - your answers will not affect the chance of your submission being approved, and you will continue on to the final main part of the study at the end, whichever options you choose.

For each group of sentences below, which best summarises the information you just read?

1

- Thoughts are facts. The way we think about and interpret events is always correct.
- People can vary in their interpretations of the same events.
- People always interpret negative events in negative ways

2

- What we think doesn't make any difference to how we feel and act.
- Different people experiencing the same events always experience the same feelings.
- How we interpret events can affect our emotional responses to them.

3

- Whatever we think about events, we will always feel generally the same in the future as we do now.
- If we can learn to challenge unhelpful thoughts about events, over time we may come to experience less upsetting reactions to them.

continue

Intervention (control condition)

Learning time!

Before you move on to the final part of the study, we would like you to give you some background information.

We hope that you will find this interesting.

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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Emotions are one of the most complex biological processes in the human body.

The term dates back to the 1500s and comes from the French word *emouvoir*, which means "to stir up".

Emotions are powerful experiences. They can be both positive and negative, and both positive and negative emotions are experienced by all of us in our daily lives. Despite - or perhaps because of - this, many psychologists believe that emotions are an essential aspect of being human.

Emotion-focused therapy centers the role of emotions in human behaviour. Emotion-focused therapists believe that emotions function both to tell people *what the problem is*, and keep them motivated to *do something about it*.



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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

In particular, emotion-focused therapists argue that emotions are *signals*. They offer messages that you are in danger, that your boundaries are being crossed, that a safe and familiar person is absent, or that you are close to someone safe and familiar.

Emotion-focused therapy argues that rather than attempting to control, interrupt, change, or avoid the experience of emotions, people need to learn to live in harmony with them.



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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

People can start to incorporate an emotion-focused approach into their daily lives by attending to their bodies and learning to recognize and **label** what they feel. They can first acknowledge these labels to themselves, and then, when appropriate, to others.

Having acknowledged and labelled their emotions, people can then begin to **understand** these feelings. To do this, people have to 'use their heads' to make sense of their experiences, by working out what their feelings and emotions might be trying to signal to them.



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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Let's walk through some examples to see how this might work in practice.

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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Example one

Imagine you are away on a trip and your partner tells you they are enjoying the time alone

A reasonable response to hearing this may be to initially withdraw into yourself and think "I know they mean well, but hearing this makes me feel rejected."

From an emotion-focused perspective, the first step with dealing with this situation would be to **recognise and label the emotions you are experiencing.**

Which of the following do you think you might feel in this situation?

- sad lonely embarrassed relieved

What signal or message do you think these feelings might be trying to convey?

- you are in physical danger
 an important relationship may be at risk
 you are close to someone safe and familiar

How do you think you might be likely to respond to this signal?

- hang up the phone and leave the room
 say to your partner "When you sound so enthusiastic about me being away, I feel pushed away"
 say to your partner "I'm also really happy right now"

continue

Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Example one

Imagine you receive a message from a close friend saying that they are thinking of you

Which of the following do you think you might feel at this point in time?

- angry upset content secure

What signal or message do you think these feelings might be trying to convey?

- your boundaries are being crossed
 an important relationship may be at risk
 you are close to someone safe and familiar

How do you think you might respond to this signal?

- put down your phone and don't respond
 reply to your friend "I'm feeling rejected right now"
 reply to your friend "When you message, I feel close to you"

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Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Your turn!

Bring to mind a challenge that you are facing at the moment, perhaps at work or at home.

Observe any emotions or bodily sensations that come to mind when thinking about this particular challenge.

Briefly describe these feelings below.

What do you think these emotions might be trying to signal to you?

Is it easy to understand the message behind these feelings?

Choose...

[continue](#)

Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Your turn!

Now, bring to mind something you think is going well in your life at the moment - perhaps at work, in a relationship, or a hobby you enjoy.

Observe any emotions or bodily sensations that come to mind when thinking about this particular situation.

Briefly describe these feelings below.

What do you think these emotions might be trying to signal to you?

Is it easy to understand the message behind these feelings?

Choose...

continue

Emotions as signals: a core idea behind emotion-focused therapy

Putting it all together

To finish up this part of the study, we'd like to ask you some questions about the information you've just read.

Please note, these questions are just to try and understand how clearly we have explained the material - your answers will not affect the chance of your submission being approved, and you will continue on to the final main part of the study at the end, whichever options you choose.

For each group of sentences below, which best summarises the information you just read?

1

- The first step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to recognise and then discount whatever emotions you are feeling.
- The first step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to recognise and label what emotions you are feeling.
- The first step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to ignore whatever emotions you are feeling.

2

- The second step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to walk away from the situation to take a breath.
- The second step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to dive straight into whatever your gut tells you to do.
- The second step of an emotionally-informed response to a situation is to try and work out what signal these feelings are trying to convey.

3

- In general, emotions and feelings can get in the way when trying to make sense of our experiences, so we should try to change or control them.
- In general, the messages or signals conveyed by emotions are important, so we should try to learn to live in harmony with them.

continue

Task 2

Last main part of the study!

For the final main part of the study, we would like you to ask you to think about a **new set of events**. (This is the last time we will ask you do this!)

Like the first part of the study, we would like you to read the description of each event, then **select the main reason you think that event would have happened, if it actually happened to you.**

For this part of the study, there are **no right or wrong answers**. All we ask is that you try and choose the answer that *most accurately reflects the main reason you think would be behind the event, if it happened to you right now.*

We will again ask you to think about 32 different events. Like the first part of the study, we will let you know when you are half-way through, and you can take a short break then if you like.

Please press the **continue** button when you are ready to start!

continue

A colleague tells you they like your company



Colleagues tend to be polite about their co-workers

This particular colleague probably wants me to do something for them

I seem to click well with this particular person

I'm a fun person to be around

You discover that you haven't been invited to an after-work social event



I haven't shown any interest in work events recently

Everyone forgets to include someone sometimes

My colleagues probably thought I was too busy at the time

I'm not enjoyable to have around