

Core Threat Motivations

Judges Manual

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Mar 10, 2024

This document is a manual for classifying fears by motivation. The motivation underlying a fear is the global goal that is violated by the occurrence of the threat. For example, if a person is afraid of being rejected and alone, the underlying motivations likely has to do with affiliation and social acceptance.

The core threat is the threat that will occur if the person does *not* engage in avoidance, safety behaviors, or rituals. In other words, the core threat is the motivation for *avoidance*. For example, if a person engages in hand washing, we ask what is their motivation for hand washing not just what do they fear. Thus, their core threat may be that if they do not wash their hands they will be contaminated and die, but not that they will waste their lives washing their hands and get nothing done.

When scoring fears, we assume that each fear was collected correctly: that is that there are no deeper fears underlying it. Thus, fear of being alone is associated with affiliation, and not with potential downstream outcomes such as not being able to function etc. This is a necessary assumption for scoring, in clinical settings we encourage the interviewer to keep asking until the core threat is clear.

Each fear will be classified according to its motivation(s). Table 1 describes each of these categories with relevant examples.

Motivation is complex and often multiply determined. One may avoid contamination both in order to avoid sickness and death *and* because it feels disgusting. In this study we are trying to identify the *central* motivation underlying the fear. However, when two motivations seem prominent we will record them both. If more than two motivations seem equally prominent we will consider the central motivation as undetermined (but if there are several motivations but one that is more prominent, it should be scored). This is done to account for variability in both reporting (e.g. different aspects of the threat reported on different occasions) and variability in judges (e.g. Different judges emphasize different aspects of the threat). If it is not possible to determine the motivation underlying a fear, or if more than two motivations are warranted, judges are required to classify them as undetermined.

When collecting core threats, the outcome is often formed as a chain of threats where the final link represents the core threat. Therefore, the last threat in such a chain should be treated as the core threat. However, final links that are depressive in nature are considered overshooting of the core threat and should be disregarded. For example, in “My family will be killed in a car accident and then I will be depressed” the threat is of one’s family being killed, and not of depression.

Decisions regarding attribution to a motivation are often culturally dependent. For example, fear of Cancer is likely due either to fear of death (survival) or of suffering (physical comfort). In our cultural context, it seems that cancer has more to do with survival, but general “sickness” has more to do with physical comfort and well being. However given the ambiguity, we score both Survival and Physical-comfort. In contrast fear of AIDS has even more ambiguous and we’d score it as undetermined. This is a somewhat arbitrary decision, however it fits our understanding of the cultural context of the subjects.

Category of Drives	Description	Examples of Core Threats
Affiliation	The drive to form social or interpersonal bonds and avoid rejection.	Rejection, social isolation, loneliness, being alone, social awkwardness. This covers anything from family connections to wide social acceptance
Predictability	The drive to understand and make sense of one's environment.	Confusion, uncertainty, unpredictability.
Competence	The drive for effectiveness, capability, and practical functioning.	Failure, not knowing what to do, incompetence.
Agency & Control	The drive to have agency and be in control of one's self and environment.	Losing control, doing something unintended, helplessness.
Survival	The goal of staying alive.	Death of oneself, or a close other (survival by proxy).
Physical Comfort	The goal of avoiding physical discomfort or suffering.	Pain, injury, physical harm to self or close other (physical comfort by proxy)
Self-Image	The desire to maintain a positive self-image and avoid a negative one.	Feeling worthless, evil, or guilty. Feeling that I've let myself down.
Morality	The drive to behave ethically and uphold virtues.	Harming others, violating religious beliefs or morals.
Distress (in)tolerance	The desire to avoid psychological distress or discomfort.	Disgust, Not-just-right experiences, pure psychic pain.

A motivation should be scored only when it is the identified feared outcome. For example, many fears involve losing control of a situation, however "Agency" should be scored only if the loss of control is feared outcome itself. Similarly often fears may involve implications for one's self image, however "Self-image" should be score only if the implications are the identified feared outcome. Furthermore, distress tolerance should not be score for every distress, only when in ts identified as the problem itself (e.g., nothing will happen, it will just not *feel* right).

Differential Diagnosis

Several drives are commonly confused

- **Competence** has to do with one's ability to succeed, **Agency/Control** has to do with one's ability to act in the first place. The first is contrasted by failure while the second is contrasted by helplessness or loss of freedom.
- **Morality** focuses on doing the right thing according to one's values, **Self-image** has to do with what one feels about themselves.