

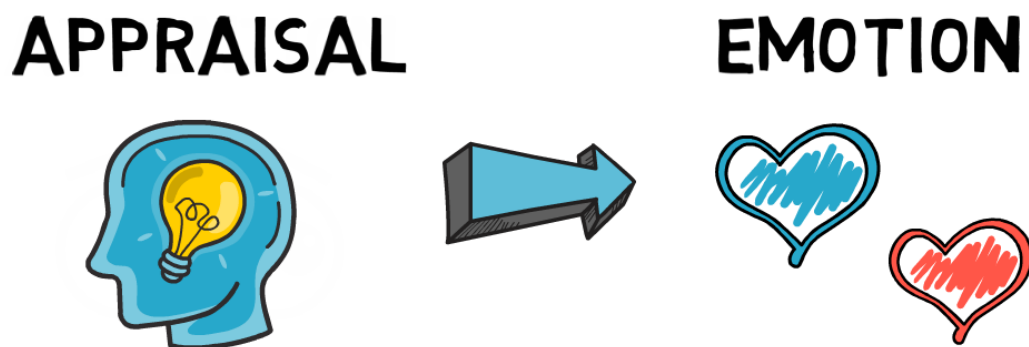
MODULE 3 | HOW WE THINK IS HOW WE FEEL

WELCOME BACK

Welcome back to *Managing Emotion*!

Last session we talked about the relationship between attention and emotion, and specifically how changing the way we attend to things can change the way we feel. We discussed that when we feel distressed, focusing extensively on our bodily symptoms of distress and the negative things around us can often be unhelpful, as it can make our distress worse. For times like these, it can often be more helpful to remind ourselves to refocus our attention to the task at hand or towards the positive things around us.

In this module, we will be having a closer look at thoughts, and how the way in which we appraise a situation can influence our experience of emotion.



A CLOSER LOOK AT THOUGHTS

If we look back to the model of emotion described in Module 1, the experience of emotion can be thought of as a situation or stimulus, which is attended to and appraised, which leads to a response - both in terms of bodily responses and / or other actions we may make as a result. Thoughts, or appraisals, are very much a part of our experience of emotion.



As a simple example, let's say you are walking along an alleyway late at night and out jumps an 1890's criminal with a gun. Your body will no doubt jump into fight or flight mode via a number of bodily responses. However, you may also have a variety of thoughts which come to mind, such as "he's going to take all my money!" or "I'm about to get shot!" or "I don't want to die!" We refer to these as appraisals, as they provide an interpretation of the given situation. In turn, the way we appraise a given situation often affects how we feel.



ONE SITUATION, ALTERNATE EMOTIONS

Interestingly, one given situation can actually evoke multiple different emotions, and it's likely that you may have come across this in day to day life. Let's take annoyed and excited as an example. A single situation could potentially evoke either of these two alternate emotions if you ask enough people.

Say, the thunderous sound of a Harley motorcycle riding by...



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Or how a certain TV series ended...



EXCITED



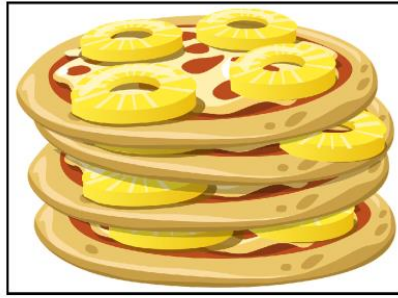
ANNOYED



Or putting pineapple on pizza...



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Importantly, it's typically the differences in appraisal styles which determine which of these two alternate emotions we feel. Using these examples, we can think of alternate types of appraisals which will likely lead to either feeling excited or annoyed.

**"OH YEAH!
SO MUCH GRUNT!"**



EXCITED



**"EHH.. SO MUCH
NOISE POLLUTION!"**



ANNOYED

**"EPIC! I DIDN'T
SEE THAT ONE COMING!"**



EXCITED



**"A POORLY DIRECTED AND
UNSATISFYING ENDING!"**



ANNOYED



"I LIKE HOW THE SWEET AND SAVOURY MIX."



EXCITED



"IT'S AN ABOMINATION TO PIZZA..."



ANNOYED

Putting this together, we can see how one situation can give rise to alternate appraisals, and in turn, alternate emotional responses:

**HELPFUL
EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE**



**HELPFUL
APPRAISAL**



SITUATION

**UNHELPFUL
EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE**



**UNHELPFUL
APPRAISAL**



**"HELPFUL" APPRAISALS
AND RESPONSES
HELP SUPPORT US TO
ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.**

**"UNHELPFUL" APPRAISALS
AND RESPONSES
HINDER OUR GOALS.**

You may have noticed that we've called one side "helpful" and the other "unhelpful". The reason why we do this is because for many important situations we find ourselves in, there are often "helpful" ways of thinking and responding which will help support us in achieving our goals. At the same time, there's often also "unhelpful" ways of thinking and responding which simply won't help us and may even make things worse. This simple concept can be very useful to keep in mind for when you find yourself in an important situation and need to manage your emotions.



SWIPE LEFT SWIPE RIGHT

Let's consider this example:

This is Henry. Henry is on a first date after matching with someone on a new dating app. Let's call it a Binder date.

It's their first in-person meet-up after a week of fairly solid texting back and forth on the app. Lauren, his match, seems nice. While it's always hard to tell what the other person is going to be like in real life, Henry has high hopes for this one. Lauren seems smart, funny and the two seem to have a whole bunch of stuff in common. They decided to meet up for a drink at one of his favourite small bars. Fancy, but not too fancy. And also the option for small bites and share plates if the night progresses well.

Henry is waiting at the bar. They had arranged to meet at 7pm and it had just ticked over to 7:10pm. Henry thinks, "I'll just send her a quick text to let her know I'm here." He sends this and orders a drink. Minutes pass but no reply. He checks his phone again. It's now 7:20pm.





Take a minute to consider what Henry might be thinking right now...

Now have a look at these appraisals.

1. "Maybe she got into a bad car crash on the way here."
2. "She's ditched me. She must have found something better to do."
3. "She probably never liked me. I'm pretty useless like that."

Now consider what kind of emotional responses may likely accompany these appraisals? Based on these appraisals it's likely that Henry may be feeling concerned, angry, rejected or sad. If we think of these responses in terms of how helpful they are, if Henry's goal is to have a successful first date, these appraisals and consequent negative feelings seem rather unhelpful.

Now consider these alternate appraisals:

1. "We've had good chats this whole week. She's most likely just running a bit late."
2. "Parking is really difficult around here. She's probably just having trouble finding a park."
3. "Worst case – she doesn't show up. Ah well, I have other mates out tonight I can hang out with instead. It's always good times with them."

In contrast, these appraisals are much more likely to lead to a more composed, collected or unfazed emotional response. In the context of a first date, we can consider these as a more helpful set of appraisals and responses.

COMMON UNHELPFUL APPRAISALS

It's pretty common to experience unhelpful types of thoughts, particularly when we find ourselves in overwhelming or stressful situations. In fact, there are many different types of unhelpful thoughts which can often leave you digging yourself into a deeper hole. Unhelpful appraisals often tend to be unduly negative and may not be very realistic.

Here's a list of common unhelpful appraisal styles and an example of how it may apply to Henry while he is waiting for Lauren on their Binder date. Also summarised are a number of ways in which we can challenge these unhelpful appraisals with more helpful alternatives. Here's how it would apply to Henry:



TEN COMMON UNHELPFUL APPRAISAL STYLES



AND HOW
TO
CHALLENGE
THEM!

Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
<p>1. Mental Filter</p> <p>Only focusing on part of the situation and ignoring the rest. This can often be focusing on the negative parts and ignoring the positive parts.</p>	<p><i>"She's late... she's not coming."</i></p>	<p>Consider the whole picture:</p> <p><i>"Wait, she also readily texted with me over the whole week. She seemed pretty keen to meet."</i></p>
<p>2. Jumping to Conclusions</p> <p>When we assume that we know what someone else is thinking ("mindreading") and jump to conclusions about what might happen next.</p>	<p><i>"She's late... I bet she couldn't care less about me."</i></p>	<p>Ask yourself how you know this:</p> <p><i>"Wait, how do I know this? All I know is that she's a bit late. I don't yet know why she is late."</i></p>
<p>3. Personalisation</p> <p>Blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong.</p>	<p><i>"It's my fault she's not coming. I'm just not an interesting person."</i></p>	<p>Find all the causes:</p> <p><i>"Maybe it has nothing to do with me. Maybe Apple Maps just sent her the wrong way."</i></p>



Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
4. Catastrophising Blowing negative things out of proportion.	<i>"I'm waiting here like an idiot. This is the worst thing ever."</i>	Put it in perspective by considering all possible outcomes: <i>"Well... it's not ideal but it could be worse."</i>
5. Black and White Thinking Only seeing one extreme or the other, while ignoring the shades of grey in between.	<i>"Being late is inconsiderate, full stop."</i>	Find the shades of grey in between: <i>"Ok, maybe being late isn't always because they're inconsiderate. Sometimes you can't help it."</i>
6. Shoulding and Musting Putting unreasonable expectations on yourself with "I should..." and "I must..." statements. These statements are not always unhelpful, but they can often create unrealistic expectations.	<i>"I should have picked a better bar to meet. I must be more charismatic with women."</i>	Be flexible: <i>"No one's perfect. I guess I picked a decent place, and she kept replying to my messages so I couldn't be that uncharismatic."</i>
7. Overgeneralisation Taking one instance and applying it to all present, past or future situations.	<i>"No one wants to date me. I'll always be alone."</i>	Be specific: <i>"Right now I'm single, waiting for a date. That doesn't mean it will always be like this."</i>
8. Labelling Making global statements based on behaviour in specific situations. This can often lead to ignoring things which do not fit with the "label" we have given it.	<i>"Only a selfish person would be late like this."</i>	Consider the whole picture: <i>"Just because you're late doesn't necessarily mean you're selfish. Sometimes it can't be helped."</i>



Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
9. Emotional Reasoning Basing your appraisals of a situation on how you feel.	<i>"I felt a bit weird and jittery before leaving the house for this date. I knew this was my body telling me that something bad like this would happen."</i>	Consider the evidence of the situation regardless of how you feel: <i>"It's ok. I felt a bit anxious before, but there was no reason to expect that this date will end badly."</i>
10. Magnification and Minimisation Magnifying the positive attributes of other people and minimising your own positive attributes.	<i>"She was so funny and smart when we were talking earlier. I barely had anything interesting to contribute."</i>	Consider your positives: <i>"Sure, I'm no Ryan Gosling eating his cereal, but then, who is? I'm interesting enough to have been messaging her back and forth over the last week. Even made her lol a bunch."</i>

HELPFUL OR UNHELPFUL: IT DEPENDS ON YOUR GOALS

You may have noticed that up until now, we have tended to label positive ways of thinking as being "helpful" and negative ways of thinking as being "unhelpful." Often, this might be the case. However, it's important to remember that ultimately a helpful response is a response which helps you towards your goals, and an unhelpful response is something that hinders your goals.



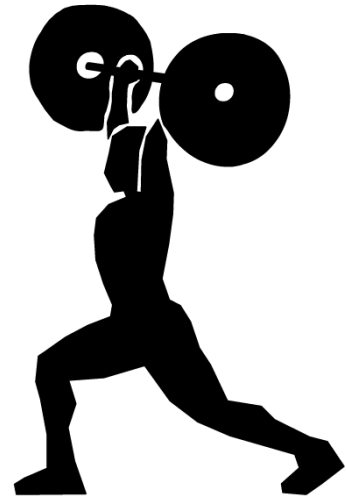
In practice, when we find ourselves in a stressful situation, the helpful ways of thinking are often somewhat positive in nature. However, there are situations where the opposite may apply. For instance, if you are a competitive weightlifter about to hit a max lift, it's likely that the most helpful thoughts will be those which increase anger and put you into fight mode.



The same goes for other situations requiring an intense state of vigilance, such as making a game-saving tackle during a football match, or quite literally preparing to fight.



In these situations, we can think of the helpful appraisals as being the appraisals which upregulate aggression and arousal. In contrast, if we bring back



Henry's Binder date, the helpful appraisals here would be the one which downregulate feelings of anxiety or rejection, and upregulate a sense of composure or calmness.

Taken together, helpful appraisals lead to emotions which support your goals within a given situation, while unhelpful appraisals lead to emotions which hinder your goals.



HELPFUL APPRAISALS LEAD TO EMOTIONS WHICH SUPPORT YOUR GOALS

UNHELPFUL APPRAISALS LEAD TO EMOTIONS WHICH HINDER YOUR GOALS

KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ Emotions are changeable, as the way in which we appraise a given situation impacts how we feel
- ✓ Appraisal can be thought of as being helpful or unhelpful depending on whether they lead to emotions which support or hinder our goals in a given situation.
- ✓ Unhelpful appraisals can be challenged by considering alternate explanations, available evidence, and balancing the positive with the negative.