

Types of Cognitions in Relationships

(adapted from : Epstein, N.B., & Baucom, D.H. (2002). Enhanced cognitive-behavioral therapy for couples: A contextual approach. Washington DC: APA)

1. **Assumptions** – what each **believes** people and relationships **actually are like**; the set of characteristics typical of a partner.

Personae – set of characteristics typical of someone in the role of “husband” or “wife”, or similar roles in intimate nonmarital relationships. For example, what is typical of “husband” may include providing financially, caring, fairly nonexpressive concerning emotions, dominant in family decision making.

Scripts – about how two members of a relationship interact with one another. This includes assumptions about sequences of events that occur between partners, such as sexual initiation.

2. **Standards (or Beliefs)** -- what each **believes** people and relationships **should be like**; the characteristics that a partner *should* have.

3. **Selective Attention (perceptions)** – **what each notices** about the partner, the relationship, and the environment; what an Individual notices, depending on factors such as the individual’s emotional state, level of fatigue, prior experiences in similar situations. This “filtering” feature has been termed “selective abstraction” (Beck et al., 1979), “negative tracking” (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979), or “sentiment override” (Weiss, 1980) to describe the selective attention or bias that is commonly unaware to the partners

4. **Attributions** – causal and responsibility **explanations** for relationship events; one’s ***causal explanations*** for relationship events, which serve to increase an individual’s sense of understanding and control over complex relationship events.

Attributions can be (1) **global/specific**, (2) **stable/unstable**, or (3) **internal/external** (e.g., locus of control). Distressed partners tend to assign responsibility for marital problems to factors internal to their relationships by most often blaming their partners (even though the stress may come from features distinct from the marriage such as one individual being depressed, or one troubled by outside career difficulties). Distress tends to be higher when individuals attribute their relationship problems to negative characteristics of their partners such as negative or malicious intent, lack of love, blameworthiness, and selfish motivation.

5. **Expectancies** -- **predictions** of what will occur in the relationship in the future; **outcomes or efficacy**. Two major expectancies: (1) **outcome expectancies** – predictions that particular actions will result in particular outcomes in certain situations. These predictions take on an “if – then” form such as how one’s partner will react to one’s actions (“If I disagree I’ll be criticized”), how one will react to the partner’s actions (“If she criticizes me, I’m sure that I’ll lose my temper and yell”), or the outcome of joint actions (“arguments in front of the children will alienate them”); and (2) **efficacy expectancies** – the person estimates the probabilities that he or she will be able to carry out those actions that would produce those outcomes.