

Schachter-Singer Two-Factor Theory

How Physiological Arousal + Cognitive Interpretation Create Emotion

THE CORE FORMULA

EMOTION = AROUSAL + COGNITIVE LABEL

Both factors are required for full emotional experience!

How It Works: The Sequence



💡 **KEY INSIGHT:** Same arousal can become **DIFFERENT** emotions based on interpretation!

Racing heart after exercise + seeing attractive person = Attraction (not just tired!)
Racing heart in dark alley + hearing footsteps = Fear

The Two Factors Explained

FACTOR 1: Physiological Arousal

Body's automatic response to stimuli

Symptoms:

- Increased heart rate • Faster breathing
- Sweating • Muscle tension • Adrenaline

Important: Arousal is NON-SPECIFIC

Same physical feeling for different emotions!

FACTOR 2: Cognitive Label

Mental interpretation of arousal

Process:

1. Notice you're aroused ("My heart is racing")
2. Look at context ("What's happening?")
3. Apply label ("This must be fear/joy/anger")

Context determines which emotion you feel!

Famous Studies Proving the Theory

Schachter-Singer Experiment (1962)

Gave people adrenaline (arousal) → Some told why, others not → People without explanation adopted emotions from others around them (happy or angry)!

Bridge Study (Dutton & Aron, 1974)

Men crossed scary vs. stable bridge → Met attractive woman → Men from scary bridge more attracted! (Misattributed fear arousal as attraction)

Real-Life Examples

🎡 Dating

Roller coasters & scary movies enhance attraction (arousal misattributed to your date!)

🎤 Performance

Reframe "I'm nervous" as "I'm excited!" Same arousal, different emotion, better outcome

☕ Caffeine

Coffee creates arousal → Might label it as "anxiety" instead of recognizing caffeine!

✅ KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Emotions aren't automatic - they require BOTH arousal AND interpretation
- ✓ Same physical arousal = different emotions depending on context
- ✓ You can change emotions by changing how you interpret arousal
- ✓ Misattribution happens - we can be wrong about our emotions!

⚠️ **Criticism:** Arousal isn't always non-specific; some emotions feel different physically

Not all emotions require cognitive labeling - some (like fear from snakes) are immediate and automatic