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The grouping of affect terms according to the situations that elicit them: A test of a cognitive theory of emotion

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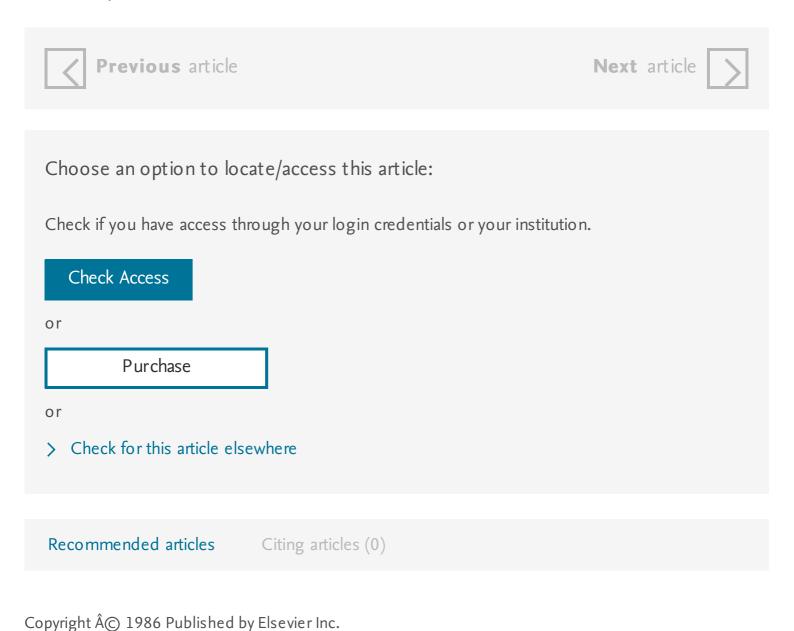
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## **Abstract**

A central assumption of a cognitive theory of emotion is that affect terms contain a large amount of information about the kinds of situations that elicited them. To the extent that various situations elicit the same feelings in everyone, reactions to situations that arouse the same emotion should be described by affect terms that are more or less synonymous: groups of affect terms should be defined by the fact that terms within each group are used in response to some situations and not in response to others. To test this hypothesis, 81 subjects were presented with 170 imaginary situations, and asked to describe (using one term of their own choosing) how most people would feel as the central character in that situation, and to describe how they themselves would feel. Similarity coefficients between all pairs of 197 affect terms were computed, using situations as N. Factor analysis of the variance-covariance matrix of similarity coefficients

yielded 32 (out of 32) semantically coherent clusters of affect terms. The results were interpreted to mean that affects normatively have situational (and therefore cognitive) antecedents as well as connotative meanings, modes of bodily expression, and consequences for action. It is further suggested that the situational meanings of affect terms are important if one wishes to use a subject's feelings about a situation to predict his subsequent behavior.



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