

Depression and Cognitive Characteristics of Stressful Life-Event Types

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Stressful life events as well as individual appraisals have been hypothesized as important antecedents of depression. However, the examination of characteristics of life events has been a relatively neglected topic. The present study investigated depression and life-event characteristics by applying an event classification scheme proposed by Fairbank and Hough (1979). Cognitive appraisal properties of event types were also examined to shed light on event qualities. Four hundred undergraduates completed the Beck Depression Inventory, a Life Events Inventory, and an Attribution Questionnaire. The results indicated that the event classification scheme was successful in separating types of events by their degree of association with depression. Also, event types were associated with shared cognitive appraisals. Thus, event types differed in depression associated with them as well as in cognitions associated with them. Theoretical implications of the results are discussed, with a particular focus on the implications for current psychological theories of depression.

A link between the occurrence of stressful life events and depression has been reasonably well established for clinical depressions as well as for depressive moods in the general population (reviewed in Lloyd, 1980). However, various methodological problems, fairly low or modest correlations, and lack of a conceptual basis for specifying depressive rather than other psychological or physical complaints are among the problems that limit firm conclusions.

One attack on such problems would be a focused study of the characteristics of stressful events themselves, as urged by Rabkin and Struening (1976), Lloyd (1980), and Paykel (1979). Although research in the field of life stress covers the entire gamut of positions between relatively extreme situationism (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) and relatively extreme individual focus (Beck, 1967), probably the majority of investigators have come to reject simple notions of event occurrence and event magnitude ("life change units") in predicting depression. Instead,

qualitative aspects of events, especially those reflecting individual perceptions and interpretations, are hypothesized to be crucial. For instance, Mueller, Edwards, and Yarvis (1977) and Sarason, Johnson, and Siegel (1978) have found that subjective upset ratings are preferable to change units in predicting symptomatology. Paykel and his colleagues (reviewed in Paykel, 1979) found that content classification of events into simple themes, such as social exit versus entrance or desirable versus undesirable, improved predictability of clinical depression. Brown and Harris (1978) attempted to assess level of "contextual threat" surrounding stressful events and determined that more threatening events were associated with greater depression. Such efforts represent a beginning step in delineating crucial qualities of stressful events, but further work is clearly needed.

Meanwhile, on another research front, contemporary theories of depression such as those of Beck (1967, 1976) and Seligman (1975; Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) have also emphasized depression as a response to interpretations of negative events. These researchers and their colleagues share the view that idiosyncratic interpretations of the causes of negative events

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that emphasize or exaggerate self-blame and hopelessness may lead to depressive reactions.

It appears that many depression and stressful-life-events researchers thus share a perspective hypothesizing that the appraisal of events rather than their mere occurrence shapes the nature and intensity of dysfunctional reactions. However, most of the empirical and theoretical work on cognitive theories of depression has been characterized by an almost exclusive focus on individual differences in appraisal. The result has been a neglect of the influence of contextual factors on the appraisal process itself and a failure to develop the Person \times Situation account of depression that appears to be a fundamental but implicit assumption of theories. As Hammen (Note 1) has argued, much of the inadequacy of the current attributional reformulations of depression could be seen to stem from disregard of situational factors and contextual parameters that may themselves affect a person's causal analyses. In the only studies located that compared person and situation determinants of cognitions (anticipation and control), Dohrenwend reported intriguing suggestive evidence that life-stress situations themselves are relatively stronger determinants of perceptions (Dohrenwend, 1977; Dohrenwend & Martin, 1979).

In view of a potential rapprochement between contemporary life-stress and cognitive theories of depression, the purpose of the present study was twofold. First, a stressful life-event typology that captures dimensions of theoretical relevance to current theories of depression was explored for its association with depression. Second, the question of contextual determinants of cognitions was explored; if individual factors are the principal sources of perceptions of events, then no significant differences in appraisals of personal stressful events falling within type categories would be observed. Alternatively, if significant differences in cognitive parameters associated with event types are observed, we gain a clearer notion of properties of events as typically construed by most people in the sample. Taken together, these two results may help shed light

on which event types are most associated with depression and why (in terms of the cognitions associated with them). We should note at the outset that although a mediational framework implicitly guides the research, the actual design is correlational, precluding true tests of direction of cause and effect. The present study is to be viewed as preliminary and exploratory.

The event typology to be investigated was originally proposed by Fairbank and Hough (1979) for the purpose of dealing with methodological problems raised by Dohrenwend (1974), among others, regarding the confounding of certain life events as causes or consequences of depression. Following Dohrenwend's suggestion Fairbank and Hough proposed that events be classified according to whether the person would be considered at least partly responsible for the event or would be considered not responsible for the event and whether the events are desirable or undesirable. These categories permit judgments about whether the events imply superior or inferior functioning independent of illness outcome. The system was adopted for the present study because of the theoretical relevance to depression of the concept of "responsibility."

The cognitive appraisal dimensions on which individuals' personal recent life stresses were to be evaluated were drawn from several theoretical sources. The theory of causal attributions, for example, has led to recent formulations relevant to depression (Abramson et al., 1978; Weiner & Litman-Adizes, 1980) and contributed the dimensions of perceived control, locus of causality, stability, globality, and intentionality. Additional cognitive constructs such as expectation (anticipation), degree of uncertainty caused by the event, and likelihood of its recurrence have been discussed by various researchers, including Dohrenwend (1977), Dohrenwend and Martin (1979), Lazarus and Launier (1978), Wortman and Dintzer (1978), and Averill (1973).

In this preliminary study of depression and cognitions associated with types of stressful events, we predicted on the basis of current cognitive theory (Beck, 1976, and the Abramson et al., 1978, emphasis on in-

ternal and stable causal attributions) that most depression would be associated with events falling in the category of undesirable events for which the person would be judged to be at least partly responsible. A competing prediction based on Seligman's (1975) original learned helplessness model of depression and on data cited by Paykel (1979 review) and Grant, Sweetwood, Yager, and Gerst (1981) is that most depression would be associated with negative events judged to be beyond the person's responsibility (uncontrollable). We further predicted significant differences between event categories in the cognitions associated with them, differences that would reflect main effects of situations in determining cognitions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Four hundred freshmen in introductory psychology courses completed the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), a self-report measure of the affective, behavioral, cognitive, and somatic symptoms of depression. The measure has been shown to correlate highly in college students with psychiatrist-rated depression (Bumberry, Oliver, & McClure, 1978) and with interview-based Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression scores (Hammen, 1980). The overall mean BDI score for the group was 6.9 ($SD = 5.7$).

All students were also given a Life Events Inventory comprising 66 items especially relevant to college students, adapted from Cochrane and Robertson (1973). Students indicated which events had occurred in the previous 6 months. The mean number of events reported was 6.4 ($SD = 3.2$).

For each of up to five most personally upsetting items indicated on the Life Events Inventory, participants completed an Attribution Questionnaire, which consisted of the following items rated on 7-point scales:

- How upsetting was the event for you? (Upset)
- How much control over the occurrence of this event did you have? (Control)
- Did this event occur primarily because of something about *you* (such as personality, effort)—or was it primarily due to something about the situation or another person or persons? (Locus of causality)
- Did this event occur because of something that changes readily (such as mood, effort, luck, or fate)—or because of something relatively unchanging (e.g., ability, unchanging qualities of a situation or person)? (Stability)
- To what extent do the *causes* of this event affect other areas of your life? (Globality)
- How likely do you feel that a similar event will occur in your life in the next 3 years? (Try to give an

estimate based on your personal feelings rather than based on a rational judgment). (Recurrence)
 If this event occurred primarily because of something about *you*, to what extent did you intend for this event to happen? (Intentionality)

Or, if this event occurred primarily because of something about the *situation* or *person*, to what extent did the other person or persons intentionally cause this event to happen to you? (Intentionality)

How much had you expected this event to occur? (Expectation)

How much uncertainty have you experienced in your life as a result of this event? (Uncertainty)

Information on the reliability of these scales is provided from several sources. Hammen, Krantz, and Cochran (Note 2) found significant mean test-retest reliability correlations over 2 months, ranging from .59 for perceived control to .38 for stability. These figures are lower but comparable to the briefer 7-week test-retest values for the six hypothetical negative situations of the Attribution Style questionnaire reported in Metalsky and Abramson (1981). Also, Gong-Guy and Hammen (1980) reported significant kappa coefficients of agreement for all scales except Intentionality between patients' self-report on the scales and independent judges' ratings based on unstructured clinical interview discussions of personal life events. Taken together, these data suggest that these single-item cognition scales have sufficient reliability to warrant use as research tools.

Classification of Events

Ten psychology graduate students who were unaware of the hypotheses under study were asked to classify each event according to the following instructions, based on Fairbank and Hough (1979):

Type A. Positive events for which the person may be responsible, possibly indicating superior psychological functioning. (Examples given: increased responsibility at work, increased income, decreased or stopped smoking or alcohol consumption.)

Type B. Negative events for which the person may be responsible, possibly indicating inferior functioning. (Examples given: trouble with boss, divorce, increased alcohol consumption.)

Type C. Events that would usually be completely out of the respondent's control, which were generally socially undesirable. (Examples given: spouse seriously ill, death of close relative, serious personal illness.)

Type D. Ambiguous events. Events for which the subject's responsibility was judged to be ambiguous and which were ambiguous with respect to the quality of the person's functioning. (Examples given: substantial debt owed, family member leaving home, change in living conditions.)

The overall percentage of agreement between all judges was .85. Items that received below 70% agreement were rated by two additional judges who agreed with the majority in all but two cases. The additional ratings usually resulted in placing an item in the Type D (ambiguous) category. The two items not agreed on were omitted from the final analysis. Table 1 presents the events and their classification.

Results

Data from 69 subjects had to be omitted from the analyses when their events chosen

for analyses of effects of event typology were from the category "other: describe" on the Life Events Inventory and were therefore not classifiable into Type A, B, C, or D cate-

Table 1
Events From Adapted Cochrane and Robertson (1973) Life Events Schedule Categorized by Type

Type A (Desirable-responsible)	Type B (Undesirable-responsible)	Type C (Undesirable-not responsible)	Type D (Ambiguous)
New job in new line of work	Unemployment	Serious physical illness or injury (requiring hospital treatment)	New job, same line of work
Reentering school	Work dissatisfaction		Change in hours or conditions of job
Graduating from school	Fired or layed off	Prolonged ill health (treatment by own doctor)	Promotion or change of responsibilities at work
Marital reconciliation	Problems finding or choosing appropriate work	Sudden serious impairment of hearing or vision	Abortion
Beginning dating	Dropping out of school	Miscarriage	Moved or changed address
Engagement	Academic problems	Immediate family member or very close friend starts drinking heavily, attempts suicide, or is sent to prison	Gain of new member in immediate family
Marriage (or beginning to live with someone)	Income decreased substantially		Infidelity of partner
Planned pregnancy	Getting into debt beyond means of repayment	Death of immediate family member	Extramarital sexual affair
	Unwanted pregnancy	Death of close friend	Breakup of affair
	Quarrel with neighbor or roommate	Immediate family member seriously ill	Partner beginning or stopping work outside of home
	Serious restriction of social life	Death of partner	Breaking off engagement
	Trouble with relatives (e.g., parents, in-laws)	Victim of accident (auto, work, home, etc.)	Son or daughter left home
	Breakup with steady boy- or girlfriend	Victim of natural disaster	Children in care of others
	Increase in arguments with partner	Victim of criminal act	
	Marital separation		
	Sexual difficulties		
	Divorce		
	Trouble or behavior problems in own children		
	Increase in number of arguments with own children		
	Conviction for minor law violation (e.g., speeding)		
	Jail sentence		
	Involvement in fight		

gories. In other analyses sample sizes and degrees of freedom may vary slightly as the result of missing data.

Because each individual reported multiple recent stressful events and indicated that the events differed in the degree of upset they occasioned, several ways of analyzing the data are required to permit simplicity and to illustrate control for the effects of degree of upset and total number of life stresses. First, correlations between severity of depression and number of events per category are presented, with stress level (total number of recent events) partialled out statistically. Next, planned comparisons on depression level by event categories were conducted in two ways. In one a single event was randomly selected from among the (up to) five given by each individual to represent a "typical event." In the other, categories were based on each individual's most upsetting event. These are events rated as 6 or 7 on the 7-point upset scale; where two or more items received the same rating, one event was randomly chosen. About one third of the sample had not experienced such a highly upsetting recent life event and were omitted from these analyses, reducing sample size as indicated. Owing to chance about 25% of the "most upsetting event" sample was also in the "typical" sample. The overlap was unavoidable lest the typical-events analyses systematically exclude highly upsetting events.

Partial Correlations Between Depression and Life Events

Partial correlations were computed between depression level and number of events reported, classified by type, with total number of reported recent events statistically controlled. Thus, the partial correlations represent the association between events as classified and depression over and above the effect due to the simple correlation ($r = .21$, $p < .001$) between overall stress level and depression. Desirable-responsible (Type A) and ambiguous events (Type D) were negatively associated with depression ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$; $r = -.15$, $p < .01$, respectively; N s for all correlations = 400), whereas depression was directly associated with undesirable-responsible events (Type B) ($r = .18$,

$p < .001$), and Type C events were unrelated to depression ($r = -.03$, *ns*).

Comparisons Between Typologies: Typical Events

Hotelling's multivariate T^2 analyses were computed for the differences in BDI scores and attributional cognitions between Type A and Type B groups and between Type B and Type C groups. For the first comparison the overall difference between groups was highly significant, $T^2(10, 221) = 294.5$, $p < .0001$. Specific univariate comparisons indicated that the groups did not differ in depression level, although the Type B events were seen as significantly more upsetting, $t(231) = 10.2$, $p < .0001$. Type A events were seen as significantly more controllable, $t(231) = 4.91$, $p < .0001$; more internal, $t(231) = 7.10$, $p < .0001$; more intended, $t(231) = 10.25$, $p < .0001$; more expected, $t(231) = 4.66$, $p < .0001$; more stable, $t(231) = 4.03$, $p < .0001$; and more global, $t(231) = 6.17$, $p < .0001$. The groups did not differ on the level of uncertainty and likely recurrence of their events.

The theoretically important comparison between Type B and Type C events also yielded highly significant differences, $T^2(10, 157) = 101.1$, $p < .0001$. As predicted, the univariate analyses indicated that the Type B group was significantly more depressed, $t(166) = 2.13$, $p < .05$. Type B events were also seen as significantly less upsetting, $t(167) = 3.51$, $p < .001$; more controllable, $t(167) = 6.20$, $p < .0001$; more internally caused, $t(167) = 4.84$, $p < .0001$; more intended, $t(167) = 4.67$, $p < .0001$; more expected, $t(167) = 7.88$, $p < .0001$; and more likely to recur, $t(167) = 2.64$, $p < .009$. The groups did not differ on stability, globality, and uncertainty.

The means and standard deviations of the scores for the groups are presented in Table 2.

Comparisons Between Typologies: Most Upsetting Events

The overall difference between Type A and Type B groups was significant, $T^2(10, 117) = 31.3$, $p < .003$, although it should be noted that only nine subjects indicated that their most upsetting event actually fell in the Type A category. The groups did not differ

Table 2
Mean Depression and Cognition Scores by Event Type for Individuals' Typical Event

Cognitive dimension ^a	Event category			
	A: Desirable- responsible	B: Undesirable- responsible	C: Undesirable- not responsible	D: Ambiguous
<i>n</i>	105	128	41	57
BDI	6.7 (5.7)	7.4 (6.0)	5.3 (4.3)	6.8 (6.2)
Upset	2.3 (1.6)	4.6 (1.9)	5.8 (1.7)	3.2 (2.3)
Control	5.7 (2.0)	4.3 (2.8)	1.9 (1.7)	5.1 (2.1)
Locus	2.2 (2.1)	4.3 (2.4)	6.3 (1.8)	4.2 (2.5)
Intentionality	1.9 (2.1)	4.9 (2.2)	6.7 (1.7)	2.9 (2.4)
Expectation	5.8 (2.0)	4.6 (2.2)	1.7 (1.5)	5.8 (1.7)
Stability	5.3 (2.3)	4.1 (2.4)	3.7 (2.7)	4.9 (2.4)
Globality	5.6 (1.9)	4.0 (2.1)	3.4 (2.1)	5.1 (2.1)
Uncertainty	4.8 (2.0)	4.9 (1.9)	4.9 (1.6)	4.4 (2.2)
Recurrence	4.9 (2.5)	4.8 (1.9)	3.9 (1.7)	5.2 (2.3)

Note. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

^a Higher means indicate greater upset, higher controllability, external locus of causality, unintended, expected, stable causes, globality, low uncertainty, and likelihood of recurrence.

on depression level, degree of upset, controllability, locus, globality, uncertainty, or recurrence. Type B events were seen as significantly more upsetting, $t(126) = 2.39$, $p < .02$; more unintended, $t(126) = 2.91$, $p < .004$; less expected, $t(126) = 2.35$, $p < .02$; and less stable, $t(126) = 2.66$, $p < .01$.

The important Type B versus Type C comparison was highly significant overall, $T^2(10, 184) = 126.7$, $p < .0001$. As predicted, Type B events were associated with significantly more depression, $t(193) = 2.74$, $p < .01$, even though they were less upsetting than Type C events, $t(193) = 2.22$, $p < .03$. Type B events were viewed as significantly more controllable, $t(193) = 6.97$, $p < .0001$; internally caused, $t(193) = 7.20$, $p < .0001$; more intended, $t(193) = 3.70$, $p < .0001$; more expected, $t(193) = 5.87$, $p < .0001$; more global, $t(193) = 2.83$, $p < .005$; and more likely to recur, $t(193) = 2.57$, $p < .01$. The groups did not differ on perceptions of stability and uncertainty.

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

Discussion

This exploratory study attempted to address a topic commonly neglected by current cognitive theories of depression: situational factors that may themselves be determinants

of cognitive appraisals. The results indicated that a simple psychological classification system for stressful life events yields categories that are significantly differentially associated with depressive symptomatology, above and beyond mere frequency of life stressors. Most noteworthy, however, was the finding that cognitive appraisals of events within the categories also showed distinctive patterns, suggesting that the events elicit commonly shared appraisals. These results held for both individuals' randomly selected typical recent stressful event and for individuals' most upsetting event. The patterns of the appraisals for the different event types may have potential significance for helping to clarify why certain stressful events may be more depression related than are others.

Before addressing the theoretical implications of the event-related cognitions, it is necessary to discuss the link between event type and depression. First, study of such linkages is by no means novel to this investigation. Paykel and his colleagues (e.g., review by Paykel, 1979) previously noted the utility of drawing distinctions between exit versus entrance and desirable versus undesirable events. Exits and undesirable events were especially associated with depression. The present Fairbank and Hough (1979) typology for Type B events overlaps greatly

Table 3
Mean Depression and Cognition Scores by Event Type for Individuals' Most Upsetting Event

Cognitive dimension ^a	Event category			
	A: Desirable-responsible	B: Undesirable-responsible	C: Undesirable-not responsible	D: Ambiguous
<i>n</i>	9	119	76	20
BDI	11.4 (6.1)	8.2 (5.9)	6.0 (4.9)	7.8 (6.2)
Upset	6.6 (.5)	6.9 (.4)	7.0 (.3)	6.9 (.3)
Control	4.1 (2.5)	3.7 (2.2)	1.7 (1.5)	4.3 (2.6)
Locus	5.4 (2.5)	4.2 (2.4)	6.4 (1.5)	4.7 (2.6)
Intentionality	2.8 (2.7)	5.1 (2.3)	6.2 (1.9)	3.5 (2.7)
Expectation	5.6 (2.4)	3.8 (2.2)	2.0 (1.8)	5.1 (1.8)
Stability	5.6 (2.0)	3.4 (2.4)	3.3 (2.6)	5.1 (2.1)
Globality	5.6 (1.9)	4.9 (2.0)	4.1 (2.1)	5.4 (1.8)
Uncertainty	2.8 (2.2)	4.0 (2.3)	4.4 (1.8)	3.2 (1.7)
Recurrence	4.9 (2.7)	4.5 (2.2)	3.7 (1.9)	4.8 (2.3)

Note. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

^a Higher means indicate greater upset, higher controllability, external locus of causality, unintended, expected, stable causes, globality, low uncertainty, and likelihood of recurrence.

with exit and undesirable events. It may be of interest to note that when the present data were analyzed using Paykel's categories, correlations that partialled out the effect of sheer number of recent personal events suggested that Type B events were somewhat more strongly associated with depression than were exit events (partial $r = .18$ for the former, $.11$ for the latter) and about the same for undesirable events (partial $r = .16$). The potential advantage of the typology is its theoretical relevance to current depression theories.

Ironically, items in the Type B category (undesirable-responsible) are those that researchers such as Fairbank and Hough (1979), Dohrenwend (1974), and others concerned with event "independence" would exclude from event-illness etiological studies because they possibly obscure direction of effect. However, many current theories of the etiology of depression that emphasize cognitions of self-blame (Beck, 1967, 1976) and interpersonal difficulties in the origin of depression (Coates & Wortman, 1980; Coyne, 1973; Lewinsohn, 1974; Weissman & Paykel, 1974) make it obvious that the Type B events are especially important to study. Because the present usage of the typology is merely a crude and exploratory one, more refined and sensitive analyses of event properties need to be pursued, espe-

cially those that help clarify common properties of the various Type B events. In this regard it cannot be claimed that the cognition dimensions investigated in this work completely or uniquely capture the important depression-related attributes of Type B events. Other cognitions not yet identified might be involved, or other qualities such as effects on self-esteem or specific content may be crucial. For instance, many of the Type B items are interpersonal in nature, and whether such events have stressor qualities unique for depression is one of many questions for further exploration.

The reader should note that although Type A events (desirable-responsible) were significantly negatively correlated with depression level, for a few students they were highly upsetting, leading to the greatest depression for all categories for the "most highly upsetting event" comparisons. An intriguing possibility to explore further is that events that are "supposed to be positive" (as seen by most persons) but are not may be especially depression related for this group.

Of interest to life-stress researchers is the finding that Type C (undesirable-not responsible) events that were seen as uncontrollable, externally caused, unintended, and unexpected were least associated with depression. This result runs counter to ear-

lier work in depression and learned helplessness that predicted greater depression associated with uncontrollable outcomes (Grant et al., 1981; Seligman, 1975; Paykel, McGuiness, & Gomez, 1976) as well as counter to the predictions of theorists of more general responses to stress not specifically related to depression (Averill, 1973; Dohrenwend & Martin, 1979). We approached this apparent inconsistency in two ways. First, in an effort to ensure that the result of the present analysis was reliable, an independent analysis of depression associated with most upsetting life-event types was undertaken. Data drawn from a separate sample of college students previously investigated for different purposes (Hammen, Krantz, & Cochran, 1981) yielded a similar significant excess of depression for persons whose most upsetting event was a Type B (mean BDI = 7.2, $SD = 5.5$) compared to a Type C sample (mean BDI = 5.3, $SD = 32.6$), $t(66) = 1.96, p < .05$. Thus, for college samples, it appears to be a replicable finding that certain kinds of events that are seen as uncontrollable, externally caused, unexpected, and unintended, though highly upsetting, are less likely to be associated with depression. The possibility that such events are associated instead with other kinds of affective or physical reactions would be interesting to pursue.

A second approach to understanding the results of low depression associated with the least controllable, externally caused, and most unexpected negative outcomes is to consider definitional and methodological differences with prior studies. For instance, it is apparent that major complexities arise in the definition of *controllability* (e.g., Hammen, Note 1). Paykel et al. (1976) use a definition that clearly ignores personal agency and confounds unintended and unwanted with uncontrollable, whereas our present usage of the undesirable-responsible category assumes personal agency but permits separate assessment of controllability and intentionality. Grant et al. (1981) appear to confound uncontrollability with undesirability in that their controllable events are mostly positive, and the uncontrollable events may also be confounded with patient status.

Also consistent with the present results are findings by Fairbank and Hough (1979) and Dohrenwend (1974) that greater psychological distress is associated with undesirable events that are at least partly within the subject's control. Results open to similar interpretation have also been recently reported by Costello (in press). Also, recent attributional formulations suggest that depression is sometimes associated with greater perceived control of responsibility and that depressives may be accurate in their judgments of control (e.g., Abramson et al., 1978; Alloy & Abramson, Note 3). Thus, a growing body of research challenges the initial position that uncontrollable events are the ones most associated with depressive symptoms, although the possibility of a helpless-uncontrollable-event depression subtype is by no means ruled out.

The actual cognitions that were associated with the event types may help shed some light on why certain events are more "depressing" than others. The most depression-related (Type B) events compared to Type C events were seen as relatively controllable, internally caused, intended, expected, and likely to recur. These appraisals lend some support to current theories of Abramson and Seligman (Abramson et al., 1978) and Beck (1976) that emphasize self-blame as a possible antecedent to depression. On the other hand, the data clearly suggest that perceived uncontrollability is not uniquely associated with depression, indicating that "helplessness" is not a feature of the depression for most of the present sample. Also in contrast to Seligman, Abramson, and Beck, the current results do not suggest that self-blaming ascriptions are necessarily depressive distortions or arise from depressive attributional styles. Instead, they at least hint that for certain negative outcomes self-blaming ascriptions may be normative and appropriate to the situation. An exclusive emphasis on idiosyncratic perceptions may ignore the actual role of events in shaping the cognitions.

Nevertheless, the current results in no way discredit the potential role of idiosyncratic cognitions in eliciting depression. Possible interactions of individual differences (depressive interpretive tendencies) and events may lead to predictions of different forms

of life-event depression linkages: A depressive person interprets any negative outcome in a negativistic, self-deprecating way; a typically nondepressive person experiences one or more undesirable-responsible (Type B) events interpreted normatively; a depressive person experiences one or more undesirable-responsible events interpreted even more negatively than as normative. It may be that the duration and intensity of depression in the latter case will be most severe. Hammen (1978) reported data on life stress and depressive cognitive bias in college students suggestive of at least two pathways to depression involving event-cognition interactions, resembling the first two hypothesized linkages.

Finally, it is also important to note limitations in the present investigation and analysis. The study was correlational only, and although interpreted in a theoretically causal framework that views cognitions as mediators of depression, the form of the analysis does not permit ruling out the hypothesis that depression was the cause of the cognitions obtained. Longitudinal and prospective methodologies are required to test causal hypotheses in the context of naturally occurring stressful situations.

As noted earlier, the cognitive aspects of the events that were studied by no means exhaust the possibilities of event characteristics that could be investigated for their role in causing depression. The present study did not fully assess cognitions about consequences of events that are vital in fully predicting depression (Hammen & Cochran, 1981; Hammen, Note 1). Also, the actual coping requirements of stressful events have been a neglected topic; it may be that depression is also strongly linked to the adaptive requirements and coping resources surrounding the event. Moreover, like most life-event research, the present work is only generalizable to episodic stressors and not to more enduring or chronic conditions. Finally, the current work is based on the perceptions of young adult college students, most of whom are nondepressed, although some of whose depressions are potentially comparable to clinical cases (Hammen, 1980). Nonetheless, this group may perceive stressful events somewhat differently than

do older adults. The cognitions associated with the most depressing events in this study are highly similar to the cognitions about stressful events observed by Gong-Guy and Hammen (1980) in depressed nonstudent adult outpatients. On the other hand, there is some evidence that older adults may see health-related events as more depressing than did persons in the present study (Dohrenwend, 1974; Teri, Backus, Lewinsohn, Sundberg, & Hoberman, Note 4). Thus, population parameters need to be explored further in considering effects of events and event-related cognitions on depression.

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