

# A cognitive model of pathological worry.

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### **Abstract**

We present an evidence-based model of pathological worry in which worry arises from an interaction between involuntary (bottom-up) processes, such as habitual biases in attention and interpretation favouring threat content, and voluntary (top-down) processes, such as attentional control. At a pre-conscious level, these processes influence the competition between mental representations when some correspond to the intended focus of attention and others to threat distracters. Processing biases influence the probability of threat representations initially intruding into awareness as negative thoughts. Worry in predominantly verbal form then develops, influenced by conscious processes such as attempts to resolve the perceived threat and the redirection of attentional control resources to worry content, as well as the continuing influence of habitual processing biases. After describing this model, we present evidence for each component process and for their causal role in pathological worry, together with implications for new directions in the treatment of pathological worry.

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