



# Cognitive characteristics of patients with borderline personality disorder: Development and validation of a self-report inventory

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## Abstract

Based on cognitive concepts of personality disorders as well as on the bio-social model of borderline personality disorder (BPD), a 34-item instrument, the questionnaire of thoughts and feelings (QTF) was developed for the assessment of feelings, strategic cognitions, and assumptions characteristic for BPD. In different studies, item- and factor analyses were conducted with a dataset of  $N = 646$  clinical and non-clinical participants. Cross-sectional data as well as longitudinal data are available including several other measures on personality and personality disorders: DSM-IV SCID II dimensional score, a personality inventory (PSSI), the German version of the personality disorder beliefs questionnaire (PBQ), as well as overall severity of symptoms (*GSI*) of the SCL-90-R.

Internal consistency of the scale is excellent, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.91$ . One-week test-retest reliability was also high  $r_{tt} = 0.81$ . Good convergent and discriminant validity was obtained for correlation with SCID dimensional scores and discrimination of BDP patients and other clinical and non-clinical groups. A comparison of scores in a sample of 26 patients with BPD during crisis intervention and 8 months later indicated the sensitivity of the QTF to measure

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change over time. Overall, the questionnaire appears to be a methodologically sound measure, valuable for research purposes as well as in clinical practice.

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## 1. Introduction

In cognitive models of borderline personality disorder (BPD) the role of underlying maladaptive assumptions for the development and especially the maintenance of the disorder is emphasized (Arntz, 1994, 2004; Pretzer, 1990; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). In the bio-social model developed by Linehan (1993), cognitions also play a major role for the conceptualisation and for treatment planning of this severe mental disorder. At the same time, this model stresses the importance of behavioral aspects.

Recently, two valid and reliable self-report measures have been published based on cognitive concepts of BPD (Arntz, Dietzel, & Dreesen, 1999; Beck et al., 2001). In accordance with the cognitive model, focus of these instruments is to assess the dysfunctional basic assumptions and beliefs of patients with BPD. More behavioral aspects are not included in these instruments.

A more global approach to assessment of borderline relevant symptoms and related psychopathology is described by Bohus et al. (2001). These authors constructed a questionnaire designed to measure the degree of borderline symptomatology during the last week. The authors followed current diagnostic criteria and expert ratings, as well as clinical observations and patients' statements in the construction of the inventory. Although reliability and validity estimates are satisfactory, the instrument comprising 95 items appears to be somewhat long and redundant with interview measures assessing diagnostic criteria of BPD.

The aim of the present studies was to develop an economic self-report questionnaire combining emotional aspects, assumptions, and strategic cognitions closely related to overt behaviors characteristic for BPD. Furthermore, the instrument should be applicable for treatment planning and evaluation, thus sensitive to measure change.

## 2. Method

We followed a rational method of test construction. Based on the bio-social model of BPD (Linehan, 1993), and on cognitive concepts of personality disorders (Arntz, 1994; Arntz et al., 1999; Beck et al., 1990; Young, 1990) as well as descriptions of BPD in the literature, the questionnaire on thoughts and feelings (QTF) was developed. A first version comprised 51 items assessing borderline specific feelings as well as cognitions. This 51 item-version was given to 14 experts, researchers and therapists, working with BPD patients, who rated how typical each item was for

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