

The background of the slide features an abstract design of overlapping, semi-transparent blue triangles and polygons in various shades of light blue and dark blue, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

# Cognitive Theory Project

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## What Is Cognitive Theory?

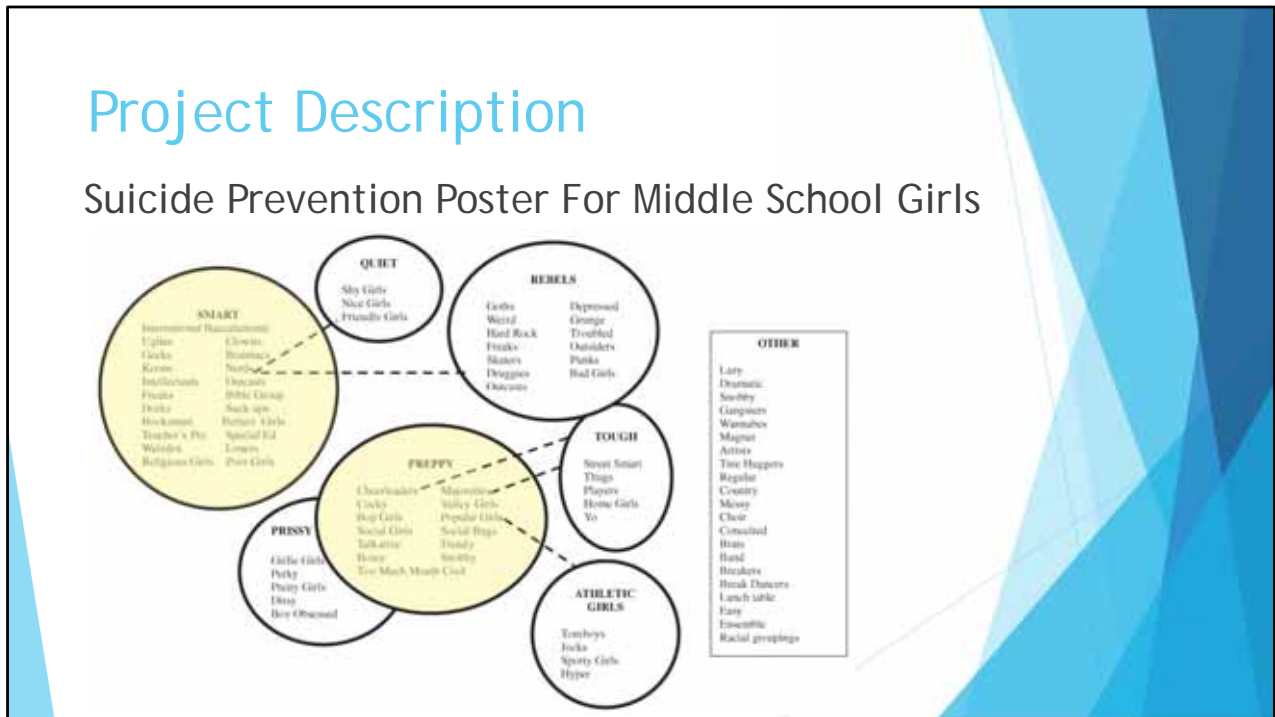
“What is going on in a viewer’s mind is just as important as the images that can be seen” (Lester 68)

According to Paul Lester, Cognitive Theory explains what is going on in a person’s mind is just as important as what can be seen. The brain will focus its attention on a visual element, such as an advertisement, but it can be distracted from the primary objective of that advertisement by other components.

I will explain the mental processes and several mental activities that make up cognitive theory and how I applied them to my project.

# Project Description

## Suicide Prevention Poster For Middle School Girls



My cognitive theory project is a suicide prevention poster geared towards middle school girls in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade that lives in the United States. Reviewing the research conducted by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, I narrowed the target audience to girls in the Smart and Preppy categories as highlighted on this diagram.

## Project Description

Suicide Prevention Poster For Middle School Girls

### Message:

You have a choice besides Suicide -  
Ask For Help

My message is to persuade my target audience that help is available when you feel unhappy, and suicide is not the answer to your problems. I will incorporate information from the Girls On The Run middle school program called Heart & Sole as an additional source. Other sources will include the local Suicide helpline, school counselors, etc.

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Process

- ▶ Memory
  - ▶ How to connect the visuals with the memories of my target audience.
- ▶ Recognition
  - ▶ What recognizable elements will be used to draw the attention of my target audience?

For the research and development of my project, I used the following mental processes:

**Memory asks how will I connect the visuals on the poster with the memories of my target audiences?**

I plan on connecting my visuals with memories the girls associate with negative thoughts. I want my target audience to see the hurtful words and remember when they felt like those words. I also want them to remember if they talked to a friend who felt the same way.

**Recognition asks what recognizable elements will be used to draw the attention of my target audience?**

The company I am going to use is Girls On The Run (GOTR), specifically targeting the middle school program called Heart & Sole. I teamed with the GOTR Piedmont district director and received guidance on how they will approach this topic during the fall season. I used the Heart & Sole logo and a suggestion to enroll so they can

learn how to turn negative thoughts into positive thoughts.

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Process

- ▶ Comparison
  - ▶ To what will the target audience compare this advertisement? How will this be accomplished?
- ▶ Salience/Relevance
  - ▶ What visual and textual plans are in place to make the project relevant to the target audience?

**Comparison asks what the target audience will compare this poster to and how will it be accomplished.**

I want my target audience to compare the words on the poster to the feelings they encounter when the use of social media leads to cyberbullying. To accomplish this, I will use a picture of a girl looking at an iPhone, the predominant brand of a cell phone used by my target audience. There is a picture of her brain with the social media app icons as a base with hurtful words floating in her mind.

**Salience/Relevance asks what visual and textual plans are in place to make the project relevant to the target audience?**

I plan on making this poster relevant by using a picture of a real iPhone. Studies explain that girls in middle school are always on their cell phones and this will draw their attention to the poster. I will also use icons of favorite social media apps.

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Process

- ▶ Association
  - ▶ How will the poster be associated with an event or activity?
- ▶ Analysis
  - ▶ What distinct elements do you want your target audience to identify?
- ▶ Interpretation
  - ▶ How are you trying to persuade the audience?

### **Association asks how will the poster be associated with an event or activity?**

I will use the logo of the after-school program called Heart & Sole. This program is currently in several schools in the Piedmont area and will be available to more middle schools in the future.

### **Analysis asks what distinct elements do you want your target audience to identify?**

I want my target audience to identify with both the cell phone and the social media apps. The Heart & Sole logo will be recognizable, too.

### **Interpretation asks how are you trying to persuade the audience?**

My goal is to have the bully-type words connect with the target audience. Studies show girls in middle school are exposed to cyberbullying more than ever. I want those girls that are having thoughts of suicide to reach out to someone, using the information on the poster to get help.



## Cognitive Theory: Mental Activities

### ▶ Projection

- ▶ When the brain sees recognizable forms in everyday objects such as clouds or inkblots.



Example of Rorschach inkblot test

Image courtesy of Wikipedia

The following slides explain the mental *activities* used in the cognitive theory:

**Projection** is when the brain sees recognizable forms in everyday objects such as clouds. A great example is the Rorschach inkblot test as seen in this picture. Paul Lester explains that Swiss Freudian psychologist Hermann Rorschach believed that individuals reveal personality traits by assigning meaning to the strange shapes.

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Activities

- ▶ **Expectation**
  - ▶ When the brain has a preconceived notion of how a scene should appear.
- ▶ **Selectivity**
  - ▶ When viewing a complex visual element, the brain can not process everything at one time, so it will select what is most important.

**Expectation** is when the brain has a preconceived notion of how a scene should appear. This notion can lead to false or missed information. An example of this is when a person watches a football game, the brain cannot concentrate on the action on the field, watch the cheerleaders, and watch the scoreboard at the same time. The brain must ignore parts of the action otherwise it will become overwhelmed.

**Selectivity** is when you are viewing a complex visual element, the brain cannot process everything at one time, so it will select what is most important. An example is meeting a friend at the football game. Walking up the bleachers, all the unknown faces in the crowd will have little meaning to you. When you find your friend, your brain will lock onto that person and block out others.

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Activities

- ▶ **Dissonance**
  - ▶ The mind tends to concentrate on only one activity at a time.
- ▶ **Culture**
  - ▶ The way people act, talk, dress, behave socially, and their religious beliefs.

For **dissonance**, the mind tends to concentrate on one thing at a time. When trying to focus on something and there are other distractions such as a television, a radio, or the temperature of the room is too hot or cold, the brain will become distracted. Dissonance can occur in a visual image if there are too many things trying to capture the viewer's eyes and there is not a visual flow to the picture.

Lester describes **culture** as “the manifestation of the way people act, talk, dress, eat, drink, behave socially, and practice their religious beliefs, cultural influences have a tremendous impact on visual perception.”

## Cognitive Theory: Mental Activities

- ▶ **Habituation**
  - ▶ Occurs when the brain ignores visual elements that are a part of everyday life.
- ▶ **Salience**
  - ▶ The brain will attach more meaning to a visual element if there is meaning behind that object.
- ▶ **Words**
  - ▶ The eyes will see a visual element, but the brain thinks in words.

For my project, I focused on the following mental activities:

**Habituation** occurs when the brain ignores visual elements that are a part of everyday life. When you drive by the same object daily, you can easily not see the object and even forget it is there. You can fight habituation by consciously looking for a familiar item in your daily journeys.

For this project, when girls are walking the halls of a middle school, posters and pictures on the walls are of happy people and fun events. This picture of a crying girl will be out of the ordinary and will draw their attention even if it's for a handful of times. In this situation, what is more, important is knowing where to find that information when needed.

**Salience** is when the brain attaches more meaning to a visual element if there is meaning behind that object. An example is when you see a movie you know a friend likes, you think of that person. If your friend likes Italian food and you pass a pizza parlor, you may think of that person again.

After looking at the poster in my project, if my target audience or their friends have experienced any of the emotions floating in the girl's mind, they can either remember the phone number or know who they can approach to find help.

**Words:** The eyes will see a visual element, but the brain thinks in words. Lester explains that like memory and culture, words affect our understanding and long-term recall of images.

The words I used in the brain of the crying girl are words taken by an informal survey of local middle school girls. I am counting on those words to be an effective way to draw on the emotions of my target audience.

## Cognitive Theory: Concept Development



Search for information on subject

My development process started with searching the internet for suicide prevention posters created by other people not only for inspiration but proper wording for such a delicate subject. Brad Bryan created the last poster. His website states “the posters incorporate messaging developed by a counselor-led student action group at North Port High School that tells teens “the only choice is to be the voice,” or they must speak up if there is concern that a friend might be suicidal.” The poster included my original ideas on cyberbullying labels, and I loved the text about helping a friend in crisis. If this poster is used outside the classroom, I will contact North Port High School and Mr. Bryan to seek their approval for non-profit use of their text.

## Cognitive Theory: Concept Development



Create Mock-Ups

My next step was to sketch a few layouts with mock text. My original design was for a poster 11" x 17", but I felt the visual flow was awkward. The visual flow is much better in landscape mode, and there is more room for all the information I want to include.

## Cognitive Theory: Concept Development



Gather visual elements

My final step in development was to either draw or find the visual elements needed. I was able to acquire most of the components through Google searches, and I believe they are all royalty free. Using Photoshop, I imported my images and started creating the final product. I used several new fonts and a brain-like texture. To make sure I met my expectations, I asked for opinions from several people. I went through 4 versions, changing wording, text colors, and fonts.





This is my final product. If printed, this will produce a poster 17 inches wide by 11 inches tall.



I showed this poster to five people. I watched their eye movement, and everyone looked at the area with the girl first.

**Don't Let Labels Turn To**  
**Suicide**  
***You Have A Choice***  
**Help Is Available 24/7**  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

Then their eyes darted to the Suicide section. I made the word “Suicide” large and red to draw attention to it. The white telephone number on the green background was used to create recognition of the national suicide hotline. Once my viewers processed this information, their eyes immediately went back to the girl to look at her more closely and view each of the elements.



In this section, I am trying to draw the viewers eyes from the cell phone up towards the words floating in her mind. I tried to skew the cell phone outward toward the viewer. From the phone, the viewer sees the sad eyes, then the social media icons and finally the words. Even if the viewer first notices the words and works downwards, the message that hurtful words are coming from social media apps on a cell phone is still received.

**If you think a friend is in crisis:**

**STOP:** Your friend needs all your attention.

**LISTEN:** This is serious. Gather Information.

**GET HELP:** No secrets or promises. Your friend needs help now.

**AT SCHOOL:** Any teacher or staff, counselor, school nurse, administrator, or resource officer.

**AT HOME:** Parent or trusted adult

**heart & sole**

Join Heart & Sole to learn how to turn negative thoughts into positive thoughts

Finally, the viewer's eyes read down to the bottom section with the friend-in-crisis information and the heart & sole logo.

I think I have achieved my goal to persuade my audience that there is help when you feel unhappy, and suicide is not the answer to your problems.

## Works Cited

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- Staten, Lisa K. et al. "A Typology of Middle School Girls: Audience Segmentation Related to Physical Activity." *Health education & behavior: the official publication of the Society for Public Health Education* 33.1 (2006): 66-80. *PMC*. Web. 29 July 2018.