

## Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions

In most modern languages, there is an archaic word that precisely designates raw inner experiences that one feels emotionally "deep within oneself." In English, this word is "**feeling**." Derived from the verb "to feel", feeling has long referred to bodily sensations and deep internal emotional states, before taking on, in modern usage, more cognitive or emotional connotations – being often used interchangeably with emotion.

Yet, across [the 82 scientifically recognised models of human behaviour](#) referenced throughout the many different models of emotion in contemporary affective neuroscience — **none** treat the words “feelings” and “emotions” as synonyms, as interchangeable, or as mere semantic variations around the same concept. The distinction is not pedantic. It is foundational! [Feelings\\* are the raw, bodily, interoceptive sensory experiences](#) — tension, pressure, heaviness, warmth, contraction, trembling — that arise from within, from internal states.

**Emotions** are the constructed, categorical (distinct) experiences the brain builds when it interprets those feelings\* through memory, context, learning, and meaning. This architecture is consistently supported by the Theory of Constructed Emotion (Barrett, 2017), the somatic marker hypothesis (Damasio, 1994), interoception research (Craig, 2002), and the transdiagnostic convergence mapped by Nolen-Hoeksema and Watkins (2011).

However in everyday conversation, personal psychology, self-help literature, media, and much of mainstream therapeutic conversation, the two terms are routinely used as if they described the same thing. This is one of the most widespread and unquestioned misconceptions in our Western culture — **a popular false belief** that feels intuitively obvious precisely because it has been culturally reinforced for generations. How did this gap between scientific reality and everyday understanding arise, and why has it proven so stubbornly resistant to correction?

## **The linguistic and cultural transition that created the confusion**

The webpage *Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions* published at [www.new-hypnotherapy.com/about-emotions/](http://www.new-hypnotherapy.com/about-emotions/) traces the historical shift with clarity. During the 19th century, under the pressures of secularisation and the professionalisation of psychiatry and psychology, the older term “feelings” — which had long denoted concrete, sensory, bodily experiences — gradually became “emotional feelings” and, more recently, simply “emotions.”

Meantime, the “Psychiatry” (from the Greek *psyche* = soul/spirit + *iatry* = treatment) and psychology (*psyche* + *logos* = study) moved away from earlier feelings and heart-centred understandings of human experience and toward brain-centred, consciousness-focused models. In Somatic Hypnotherapy we preserve the older, biologically grounded usage: “feelings\*” and “emotional feelings” are used interchangeably to refer to sensory experiences perceived onto or “within” the body — assessed, interpreted, and integrated through interoception and conceptualised by the rational mind as “emotions.” This usage aligns with traditional, biological, and medical, science-backed meanings and differs considerably from the merged usage common in many intellect / consciousness-focused approaches.

## **Why the misconception persists**

The persistence of this belief is not accidental. It reflects a gradual shaping of the therapeutic narrative by brain-focused and intelligence-centred strategies that became the dominant, scalable, and marketable models in Western practice. Once these intellect and consciousness-focused approaches took centre stage, the language naturally followed. Talk therapy, positive thinking, affirmations, and intellectual reframing all rest on the appealing premise that changing thoughts will change how one feels.

Such approaches are far easier to standardise, teach, certify, and offer to the general public than the more personalised, precise, feelings / body-

centred work of resolving somatic patterns at their root. The business environment naturally rewards interventions that sound empowering and intellectually accessible, such as: “change your thoughts, change your life.” The uncomfortable scientific reality — that thoughts do not arise in a vacuum, that they are interpretive companions to feeling states, and that **strong negative affect disables the very mechanisms needed for top-down regulation** — is far less commercially convenient.

The dynamic and the scale of this shift has a strong cultural specificity. In Eastern European countries, prior to the fall of communism in 1990, intellect and consciousness-based therapeutic models were formally discouraged, marginalized, ridiculed, and largely unavailable. Psychiatry, and traditional healing practices — Bajalica, Vrač, Znakhar, and other ancestral forms rooted in heart-centred, feelings-first wisdom — remained the primary response to emotional and spiritual distress.

These living traditions operated on the same reversed paradigm that Somatic Hypnotherapy revives today: feeling differently leads to thinking and reacting differently. The body’s signals were attended to directly. The rapid importation of Western brain-centred models after 1990 therefore represented more of a cultural displacement through epistemic capture than a scientific advancement— one that brought with it the linguistic merger of “feelings” and “emotions” as a seemingly self-evident truth.

### **The gap between real-life experience and everyday understanding**

Most people sense the distinction intuitively — “I know I shouldn’t feel this way, but I still do” — yet the dominant narrative encourages them to keep trying to think their way out of it. The misconception survives because it is reinforced daily: in books, podcasts, social media, workplace wellness programs, and many therapeutic conversations. Everyday language, shaped by more than a century of secular pressure and decades of emphasis on intellectual strategies, has simply merged the two terms: feelings and emotions.

Yet [the 82 scientifically recognised models of human](#) behaviour referenced throughout different models of emotion in contemporary affective neuroscience, the interoception literature, Damasio's somatic markers, Barrett's constructionist framework, and the entire predictive-processing and allostasis paradigm all point in the opposite direction. However, popular belief remains rooted in the traditional secular narrative, centered on intellect and cognition – a more convenient and self-enhancing version of reality. The result is a widespread cultural blind spot.

### **The quiet power of conceptual clarity**

This is precisely why Somatic Hypnotherapy's approach is so effective. By maintaining the clear conceptual distinction between thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and working directly with feelings at the somatic level — rather than debating or reframing at the level of thoughts — we by-pass cultural misconception. In the hypnotic state of access, deep bodily relaxation combined with focused attention allows unresolved feelings\* to surface safely and resolve at their root - where they actually manifest. When the somatic substrate (feelings) changes, emotions spontaneously reorganize themselves, because they have no existence independent of the feelings that give them life.

The gap between scientific reality and popular belief is therefore not merely linguistic. It is philosophical and historical — a century-long drift away from embodied wisdom toward more marketable, brain-centred models of change. Contemporary neuroscience has now caught up with what ancestral traditions and decades of clinical observation always revealed: feelings\* are the primary drivers. Emotions follow. And authentic resolution does not come from re-labeling the experience at the mental level, but from its dissolution at the level of lived and felt experiences within.

When the body no longer reacts as if the past is repeating itself, thoughts and behaviors naturally follow. Physiology calms, the system reorganises, and life itself feels different — not conceptually, but

tangibly. This is the difference between temporary relief and lasting resolution.

The distinction is not semantic. It underlines the reversed paradigm in action. And it is the reason Somatic Hypnotherapy continues to offer results where other approaches so often fall short.

**Resources supporting the above claims** (Contemporary neuroscience now confirms what ancestral wisdom and clinical observation have long revealed):

- PubMed — Interoceptive awareness and affective experience (2019). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31125635/>
- Barrett, L.F. (2017). The theory of constructed emotion. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5691871/>
- Damasio, A.R. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. [https://ahandfulofleaves.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/descartes-error\\_antonio-damasio.pdf](https://ahandfulofleaves.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/descartes-error_antonio-damasio.pdf)
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S. & Watkins, E.R. (2011). A heuristic for developing transdiagnostic models of psychopathology. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4566873/>
- Craig, A.D. (2002). How do you feel? Interoception: the sense of the physiological condition of the body. <https://www.nature.com/articles/nrn894>
- Ecker, B., Ticic, R., & Hulley, L. (2012). *Unlocking the Emotional Brain: Eliminating Symptoms at Their Roots Through Memory Reconsolidation*.
- Kleckner, I.R. et al. (2017). Evidence for a large-scale brain system supporting allostasis and interoception. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-017-0069>
- LeDoux, J.E. (2000). Emotion circuits in the brain. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10845062/>
- Spiegel, D. et al. (2016). Mechanisms of hypnotic analgesia. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27316551/>
- Nummenmaa, L. et al. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1321664111>
- New Hypnotherapy — Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions. <https://www.new-hypnotherapy.com/about-emotions/>

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