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INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY AND SOCIAL STRESS:
THE ROLE OF STATE EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

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INTRODUCTION

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE: A QUICK OVERVIEW



- Experiential avoidance
 - An unwillingness to contact aversive private events (e.g., thoughts, memories, feelings), associated with escape or avoidance of such events
 - Maintained through negative reinforcement
- Transdiagnostic process
 - Function over form
 - Dimensional vs categorical approach to psychopathology
- Conceptualized as a vulnerability factor

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Does failure feedback prevent pain avoidance?

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Abstract

Function
response
interpret
discrim
or post
on beh
havior
therap
strate

Keywords
Function

In this study an experimental report, pain tolerance affected the impact of affect, or as a moderator. 200 students were included; (1) no feedback; (2) neutral feedback; (3) neutral comparison with successful pain was tolerated. Differences between groups: no difference in affect was not found moderating the influence. remain to be answered. report and pain tolerance. © 2000 European Federation of Chapters of the International Association for the Study of Pain

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The 'Trier Social Stress Test' – A Tool for Investigating Psychobiological Stress Responses in a Laboratory Setting

Key Words

Public speaking
Mental arithmetic
Cortisol
Humans
Stress

Abstract

This paper describes a protocol for induction of moderate psychological stress in a laboratory setting and evaluates its effects on physiological responses. The 'Trier Social Stress Test' (TSST) mainly consists of an anticipation period (10 min) and a test period (10 min) in which the subjects have to deliver a free speech and perform mental arithmetic in front of an audience. In six independent studies this protocol has been found to induce considerable changes in the concentration of ACTH, cortisol (serum and saliva), GH, prolactin as well as significant increases in heart rate. As for salivary cortisol levels, the TSST reliably led to 2- to 4-fold elevations above baseline with similar peak cortisol concentrations. Studies are summarized in which TSST-induced cortisol increases elucidated some of the multiple variables contributing to the inter-individual variation in adrenocortical stress responses. The results suggest that gender, genetics and nicotine consumption can influence the individual's stress responsiveness to psychological stress while personality traits showed no correlation with cortisol responses to TSST stimulation. From these data we conclude that the TSST can serve as a tool for psychobiological research.

ASKED?

Ambiguous
prior: Empirical

ers^{1,5,6}

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THE PRESENT STUDY

Aim

- Evaluate relationships between socially and physically uncomfortable behavior analogue tasks
- Identify relevant predictors of change

Hypothesis

- Individuals that rank higher on interpersonal variables will demonstrate higher experiential avoidance in situations that involve emotional vs. physical discomfort

METHODS

PROCEDURE

Analogue measures

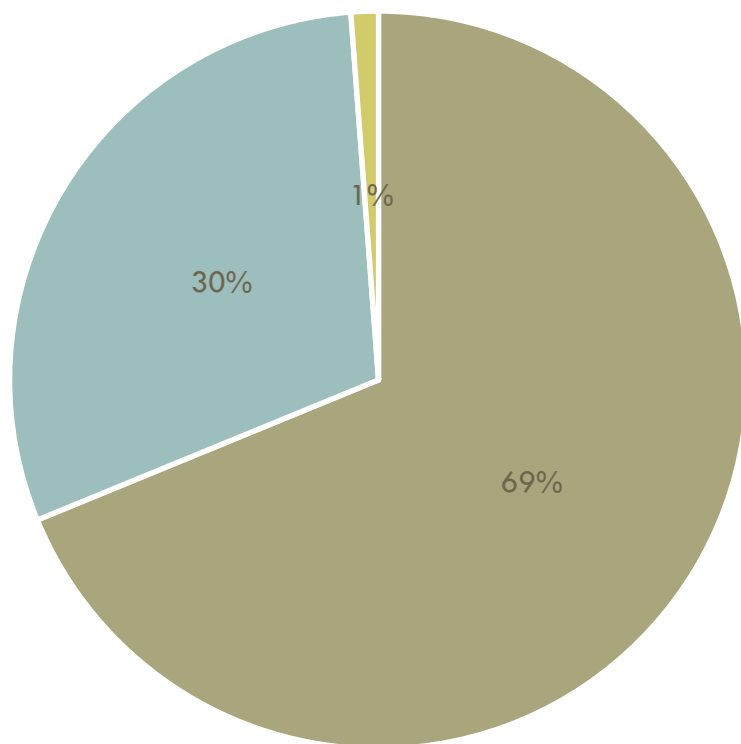
- TSST & cold pressor task (counterbalanced)
 - Threshold
 - Tolerance
 - **Endurance – conceptualized as key behavioral measure of experiential avoidance**
 - Intensity

Self-report measures

- AAQ-II
- MEAQ
- **SMEA – state experiential avoidance**
- S-DERS
- **STAI – state/trait anxiety**
- **PANAS – negative affect**
- **BFNES – fear of negative evaluations**
- **BSI – interpersonal sensitivity**
- SDS-17

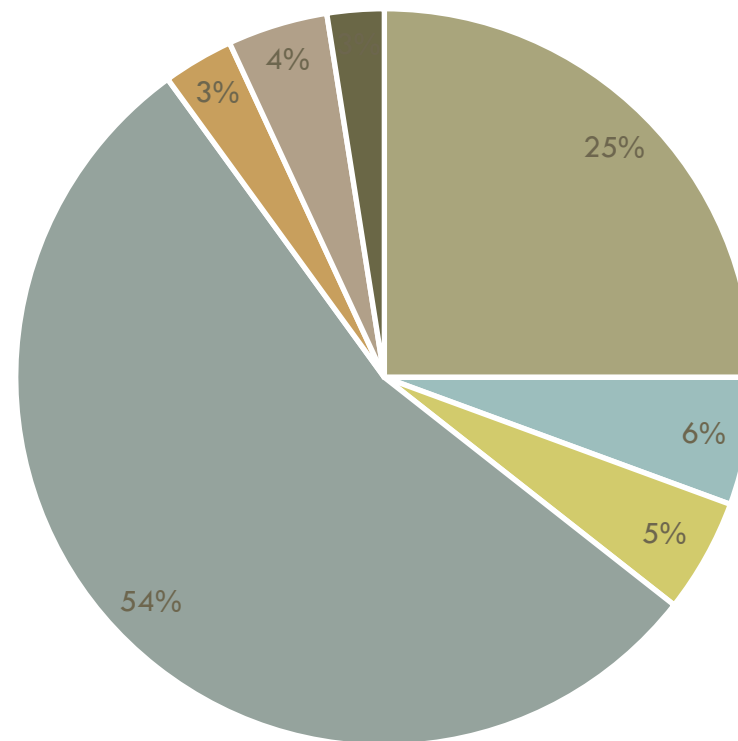
PARTICIPANTS ($N = 160$)

Gender



■ Female ■ Male ■ Transgender

Ethnicity



■ African American/Black ■ Asian or Asian American
■ Chicano/a/Latino/a/Hispanic ■ European American or White
■ Middle Eastern or Arab American ■ Mixed Heritage
■ Other

RESULTS

HIGH VS LOW INTERPERSONALLY SENSITIVE COMPARISONS

- High interpersonally sensitive participants: operationalized as above mean on interpersonal sensitivity ($n = 91$)
 - Endured speech task significantly less ($t = -2.16^*$)
 - No significant difference found related to endurance on arithmetic or cold pressor tasks
 - Had higher state experiential avoidance measure at baseline ($t = 2.05^*$)
 - No significant difference found related to state experiential avoidance post-TSST or post-cold pressor

PREDICTING STATE EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE POST-TSST

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Predicting State Experiential Avoidance Post-TSST

Block	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² Δ	<i>F</i>
1)	Interpersonal Sensitivity	-.08	.19	-.03	-.43	.08		7.37***
	Trait Anxiety	.03	.03	.10	1.06			
2)	Fear of Negative Evaluations	.11	.03	.29	2.97**	.12	.04	7.12**
3)	Speech Endurance	-.00	.00	-.13	-1.69	.14	.02	2.88

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

PREDICTING ARITHMETIC TASK ENDURANCE

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Predicting Arithmetic Task Endurance

Block	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² Δ	<i>F</i>
1)	Interpersonal Sensitivity	4.67	4.84	.08	.96	.00		.47
	Trait Anxiety	.10	.91	.01	.11			
2)	Fear of Negative Evaluations	-.07	.99	-.00	-.07	.01	.01	.74
3)	State Experiential Avoidance	-7.87	2.04	-.31	-3.85***	.09	.07	14.88***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

PREDICTING SPEECH TASK ENDURANCE

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Predicting Speech Task Endurance

Block	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² Δ	<i>F</i>
1)	Interpersonal Sensitivity	-4.71	3.70	-.11	-1.27	.05		4.71**
	Trait Anxiety	-2.25	.70	-.31	-3.21**			
2)	Fear of Negative Evaluations	2.22	.75	.29	2.93**	.09	.04	6.88**
3)	State Experiential Avoidance	-2.64	1.56	-.13	-1.69	.11	.01	2.88

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

PEARSON'S CORRELATIONS

Endurance of speech with:

- Endurance of arithmetic task ($r = .23^{**}$)
- Completing full five minutes of arithmetic task ($r = .17^*$)
- Being high vs low interpersonally sensitive ($r = .17^*$)
- But not with endurance of cold pressor task

Trait anxiety with:

- Endurance of speech ($r = -.24^{**}$)
- Being high vs low interpersonally sensitive ($r = -.396^{**}$)
- Intensity of cold pressor ($r = .212^{**}$), speech ($r = .368^{**}$) and arithmetic ($r = .259^{**}$) tasks
- Leaving the speech task ($r = -.255^{**}$)
- But not with endurance of cold pressor or arithmetic tasks

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Being high vs low interpersonally sensitive is associated with endurance on the speech task and with levels of trait anxiety
- High interpersonally sensitive endured speech task significantly less and reported higher state experiential avoidance at baseline
- Fear of negative evaluations predict state EA on the TSST and endurance of speech task
- Endurance of the speech task is also predicted by trait anxiety
- State EA on the TSST predicts arithmetic endurance
- Endurance of speech task related to endurance of and completion of arithmetic, but not cold pressor tasks
- Trait anxiety associated with rating of intensity on all three tasks and with desire to leave the speech task, but not with endurance on the cold pressor and arithmetic tasks

LIMITATIONS

Generalizability

Demand
characteristics

Self-report
methodology

Number of
analogue
contexts tested

FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Clinical sample



Cross-training applicability



Acceptance-based intervention



Test in more contexts



Behavioral measure of interpersonal sensitivity

CONCLUSIONS

1. Contextual information seems to be an essential contributor in determining the likelihood of one engaging in experiential avoidance
2. Enduring socially uncomfortable situations may be more influenced by values, rule-governance and learning history
3. More attention should be paid to the contextual factors that one has a history of avoiding when developing a treatment plan for high avoiders

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

Now please associate with our behavior in a scientific context...and ask us questions!

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