

## Effects of Worry and Progressive Relaxation on the Reduction of Fear in Speech Phobia: An Investigation of Situational Exposure

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Previous research has demonstrated the facilitative effects of relaxation and inhibitory effects of worry on the emotional processing of imaginal fear exposures. The present study was designed to determine whether these same effects occur in the emotional processing of in vivo exposures to feared stimuli. Forty-two speech-anxious college students were randomly assigned to one of three experimental induction conditions. Participants engaged in either progressive muscle relaxation, a neutral control procedure, or worry immediately before each of five repeated speech presentations while heart period and self-reported fear were monitored. Relative to the relaxation condition, the worry group demonstrated greater subjective anxiety across exposures, despite the fact that all three groups displayed strong and equivalent cardiovascular response to the first speech presentation and showed equivalent heart rate decreases across the repeated presentations. The role of parasympathetic activity in fear reduction was also documented, with decreased parasympathetic activity occurring during initial fear exposure and increased activity across repeated presentations. Implications for the role of relaxation and worry during real-life exposure to feared social situations are discussed.

Theoretical and empirical work suggests that effective exposure treatments for anxiety result from sufficient emotional processing of the feared material (Foa & Kozak, 1986). According to Foa and Kozak's model of emotional processing, anxiety is reduced by repeated exposure to a phobic stimulus when

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two necessary conditions are met. First, there must be an "activation of the fear structure," in which fear-relevant information is available in a form sufficient to activate the fear memory. Such fear-relevant information can consist of internal information coming from within the individual as well as external information in the environment. Second, new information incompatible with elements of the original fear structure must then be presented and processed in order to change the threat-related meanings contained within the fear structure. As a result, new cognitive, affective, physiological, and environmental information becomes integrated into memory, and this, hypothetically, leads to emotional change.

Although this processing of information occurs and can be measured across physiological, subjective report, and overt behavioral domains within an individual, Foa and Kozak (1986) emphasized that a fear structure includes a program for escape or avoidance. Therefore, its activation occurs after preparatory physiological changes. This suggestion led them to focus primarily on the measurement of physiological reactions to verify the complete accessing and processing of fearful information. The combination of initial physiological reaction and decline with repetition was taken in their model as evidence for the successful activation of a fear structure and the incorporation of new and more adaptive information over repeated trials.

Exposure techniques are important in the treatment of social phobia. Early treatment outcome research showed that exposure to feared social situations resulted in significant reductions in social anxiety, appearing more effective than relaxation alone (Al-Kubaisy et al., 1992; Alström, Nordlund, Persson, Hårding, & Ljungqvist, 1984) and various control conditions (Alström et al.; Biran, Augusto, & Wilson, 1981; Butler, Cullington, Munby, Amies, & Gelder, 1984). Current cognitive-behavioral treatment packages for social phobia are highly effective and include situational exposure as an active treatment ingredient. For example, cognitive-behavioral group therapy for social phobia (CBGT) led to significant clinical improvements in 81% of patients at 6-month follow-up, and this treatment was superior to an educational supportive group therapy comparison condition (Heimberg et al., 1990).

Specific psychological states may either facilitate or inhibit the emotional processing of social fear when repeated exposures to speech-related phobic images are presented. Early research indicated that the presence of a deeply relaxed state can enhance the efficacy of imaginal exposure treatments when compared to imaginal exposure conducted in a neutral state (Borkovec & Sides, 1979). In addition, successful fear reduction was associated with both stronger cardiovascular reaction to initial scene presentations and greater decline with repetition (Borkovec & Sides). Clinical benefits of relaxation training paired with exposure have been reported in the social phobia treatment literature. Early studies of systematic desensitization showed that this treatment led to reductions in social anxiety (Shaw, 1979; Trower, Yardley, Bryant, & Shaw, 1978). Applied relaxation (AR), a technique in which patients learn to apply progressive relaxation in response to the anxiety expe-

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