Abstract

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders. The typical treatment for these disorders is exposure to the anxiety inducer. For this reason, many patients are reluctant to confront feared objects or situations, and therefore are left untreated. To date, studies showed that threat could be acquired without awareness, Evidence suggests that it could be modified through new learning. Extinction is one form of threat reduction through non-reinforced presentations, however, there is no conclusive evidence that threat can be extinguished unconsciously.

The current work aimed to test for unconscious extinction while assessing conscious experience of the suppressed stimuli, using two different suppression techniques: Visual Masking (VM) and Continuous Flash Suppression (CSF). The second aim of the current work was to examine whether unconscious extinction can be performed on undergraduate participants with increased symptoms of spider phobia.

בחלק הראשון והשני של העבודה ביצענו רכישה והכחדה בתנאי מעבדה בטכניקה של CFS וטכניקה של VM while awareness is properly controlled.

We found effective extinction and successful extinction retention (indexed by a skin conductance response) under both conscious and unconscious exposure conditions only under VM, while in CFS the results are inconclusive and call for further investigation.

 לאור הממצאים שהתקבלו, בחלק השלישי של העבודה בחנו את התופעה באמצעות טכניקה של VM וביצענו חשיפה לא מודעת בקרב נבדקים עם סימפטומים לפוביה מעכבישים. ממצאי הפרק הזה עולה כי חשיפה לא מודעת עשויה להשפיע על מידת ההמנעות של הנבדקים מעכבישים, בדומה לחשיפה גלויה.

These results demonstrate the effectiveness of unconscious extinction, even when strict measures of awareness are taken. Our findings bear theoretical implications for the understanding of exposure therapy and may pave a path for the potential clinical utility of unconscious extinction.