



ESTSS2019 Rotterdam flashtalk abstract book

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Saturday 15 June 2019

Day #2

Parallel session #3 – Flashtalk session F3

8:30–9:45

F3.1**Devaluation of aversive memories does not reduce intrusions**

Elze Landkroon and Iris M. Engelhard

Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Track: Intervention Research & Clinical Studies

Background: Neutral stimuli associated with traumatic memory can trigger fear and intrusive memories. Contemporary fear conditioning theory posits that not only extinction learning, but also weakening the intensity of traumatic memory attenuates associated fear and intrusive memories. *Objective:* This laboratory experiment tested whether weakening the intensity of aversive memory would reduce conditioned fear and intrusions. Two interventions were compared to a ‘no intervention’ control condition (C). These were laboratory models of imaginal exposure (IE) and the dual-task (DT) procedure used in EMDR (e.g. recalling the traumatic memory and simultaneously making eye movements). *Method:* A trauma film paradigm (James et al., 2016) was combined with a fear conditioning task in undergraduate students ($N = 76$). On day 1, fear acquisition took place in context A with an aversive film. Afterwards, participants were randomly assigned to C, DT or IE. Then, extinction took place in context B. Participants kept an intrusion diary for 48-hours. On day 3, they were presented with context A again to trigger fear. *Results:* Fear acquisition and extinction were successful. DT and IE decreased unpleasantness of aversive memory compared to C, $F(2, 73) = 4.18, p = .02, \eta^2 = .10$, but not frequency and quality of intrusions or conditioned fear. *Conclusions:* Unpleasantness of aversive memory decreased similarly after DT and IE, which suggests that eye movements did not contribute over and above mere recall. However, this did not affect conditioned fear or intrusions. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings will be discussed.

F3.2**The effects of moral injury appraisals on psychological outcomes: a novel experimental paradigm**

Joel Hoffman and Angela Nickerson

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Track: Intervention Research & Clinical Studies

Background: Cognitive models of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have proposed that the way a traumatic event is appraised has an important role in PTSD symptoms. There is evidence that negative appraisals about events violating moral expectations (i.e. moral injury) may contribute to reactions that do not always fit traditional post-traumatic profiles. However, the causal relationship between these appraisals and symptoms is not well understood. *Objective:* To investigate the causal relationship between moral injury appraisals and psychological outcomes in an analogue sample. *Method:* Participants were 123 undergraduate students for the University of New South Wales. Participants listened to an audio scenario involving a car crash, and then viewed distressing images related to the scenario. Before the recording, they were randomly assigned into one of three conditions, and primed to focus on aspects of the scenario regarding moral violations by: (1) themselves (MI-Self), (2) others (MI-Others) or (3) no one (No-MI). Emotions, physiological responses (heart rate, blood pressure, skin conductance) and intrusions were recorded as outcome variables. *Results:* Results indicated significant interaction effects (experimental group \times anxiety) on outcomes. Specifically, those with lower anxiety in the MI-Self group experienced more guilt, sadness and intrusions compared to the No-MI group. Those with high anxiety in the MI-Self group also had less intrusions compared to the No-MI group. *Conclusions:* To our knowledge, this is the first study to show the causal relationship between moral injury appraisals and psychological outcomes in an analogue sample. Therefore, these appraisals may provide important targets for treatment.