Introduction

- Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is the fear of anxiety-related sensations, such as trembling, shaking, and poor concentration.
- AS is associated with having one or more anxiety disorder diagnoses, including panic disorder with and without agoraphobia, posttraumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and social phobia (Kavanagh, Auer, & Francis, 2002; McNally, 1999; Rectora, Kessler, & Linna, 2007; Schmidt, Lenox, & Jackson, 1999; Schmidt, Zolopisky, & Mancini, 2006).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate ways in which the processing of negative and threatening information may be biased in individuals with varying degrees of AS.

Materials

- **Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI)**
  - The ASI is a 16-item self-report measure that was used to assess AS.
  - The ASI has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of AS and not of other anxiety-related constructs (Miller & Reiss, 1982; McNally & Lenox, 1986; Peterson & Heilbronner, 1987; Peterson & Pihl, 1988; Peterson & Reiss, 1987; Reiss et al., 1986; Taylor, 1988; Zinbarg & Barlow, 1994).

- **Emotional Stroop task**
  - The Emotional Stroop task provides insight into cognitive processes by examining how the meaning of a word can interfere with the naming of the color it is printed in (Stroop, 1935).
  - Participants were asked to name the color of words categorized as either negative, neutral, positive, physical threat-related, or social threat-related.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via flyers posted throughout a local university or presentations in psychology classes. AS level was determined by a screening measure that was completed either over the telephone or in person. Only those categorized as having low or high AS at both initial screening and at the time of participation were included in the study.

Participants were grouped as having low AS (n = 21) or high AS (n = 21) by scores on the Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI).

- **Words were displayed in four different colors: green, blue, pink, and red.**
- **Participants were instructed to recite the color of the word as it appeared on the screen.**

- **After completion of the Stroop task and a brief demographics questionnaire, participants were given a sheet of paper and were asked to write down as many words as they could remember from the Stroop.**

Results

- **Analyses of variance were conducted and yielded significant differences between groups for the total number of recalled words (F(1,35) = 4.58, p < 0.06).**

- **A trend was discovered between groups for the recall of physical threat words (F(1,35) = 3.52, p = 0.07).**

- **There were no significant differences found between groups for the recall of social threat words (F(1,35) = 0.49, n.s.) or negative words (F(1,35) = 0.27, n.s.).**

- **The high AS group (M = 6.25, SE = 0.89) recalled fewer words compared to the low AS group (M = 4.43, SE = 0.89).**

- **The high AS group (M = 4.43, SE = 1.42) recalled fewer threat words compared to the low AS group (M = 2.23, SE = 0.89).**

Conclusions

- Unexpectedly, people with high AS recalled fewer physical threat words compared to the low AS group (p = 0.06).
- Further research is needed to investigate exactly why those with high AS may fail to encode certain types of information in an attempt to prevent anxiety.

For further information

Please contact [Cal State Fullerton Department of Psychology](mailto:pdream@fullerton.edu) for more information on this and related topics. A PDF version of this poster is available at [this link](#).