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Eingereicht durch: Fraunfelter, Laura-Ashley (*Universität Mannheim*), **Gerdes, Antje B. M.** (*Universität Mannheim*)

Fear and anxiety: From the lab to clinical implications

Research on fear and anxiety has applied study designs reflecting high ecological validity. This symposium aims at pointing out clinical implications from current laboratory research on fear learning, fear generalization, and avoidance behavior. Specifically, one study investigates the peak-end memory bias in an instructed fear paradigm (Ulrich Müller). Another talk will present an ecologically valid approach-avoidance task to measure avoidance behavior in spider-fearful individuals (Eni Becker). Furthermore, the role of explicit and implicit evaluation of emotional faces is considered in regard of social anxiety and psychopathic tendencies (Anna Dapprich). Finally, one talk focuses on different patterns of fear generalization associated with anxiety traits (Yannik Stegmann), whereas another elucidates the clinical correlates of generalized fear in specific phobia (Laura Fraunfelter). Importantly, diagnostic and therapeutic implications will be drawn from the study results.

Unterbeitrag 1:

Do not fear the ending: Peak-end memory bias for anxiety by threat of shock

Ulrich W. D. Müller, PD Dr. Antje B. M. Gerdes, Laura-Ashley Fraunfelter, Prof. Dr. Georg W. Alpers (*Universität Mannheim*)

It was recently shown that the peak-end memory bias, which is particular well-established in research about pain, also applies to the domain of anxiety. This means that retrospective evaluations of a terrifying experience are disproportionally determined by the level of anxiety at the worst and at the final moments. Here we set out to conceptually replicate and extend these findings with a threat of shock anxiety induction. We induced two different levels of anxiety by varying the intensity of the threatening electric shocks. 60 participants underwent a moderate anxiety phase and a high anxiety phase, consecutively. For half of the participants the order of the phases was reversed. Later on participants rated the global anxiety and ranked the experience relative to other aversive experiences. In addition, Orbicularis-EMG to auditory startle probes and electrodermal activity were recorded during the experiment. Analyses of the physiological data confirmed the manipulation. Furthermore, results show that participants that ended with the high anxiety phase, retrospectively reported more anxiety and tended to rank the experience as more aversive compared to other experiences than participants that ended with the moderate anxiety phase. This study overcomes previous limitations, in particular it documents that the peak-end bias in anxiety is not conditional on a specific form of anxiety induction. The peak-end bias needs to be explored in clinical settings because it potentially yields important implications for the structure of exposure therapy sessions.

Unterbeitrag 2:

Don't Touch! Measuring avoidance of spiders with a touchscreen task

Prof. Eni S. Becker¹, Anna L. Dapprich¹, Prof. Dr. Jens Blechert², Prof. Dr. Mike Rinck¹ (¹ *Radboud University*, ² *Universität Salzburg*)

The evaluation of stimuli as positive or negative is an immediate and automatic process that initiates an automatic behavioral tendency to approach positive stimuli and avoid negative ones. This can