

Individuals with Varying Levels of Anxiety Sensitivity Do Not Differ in Intrusion Words Recalled



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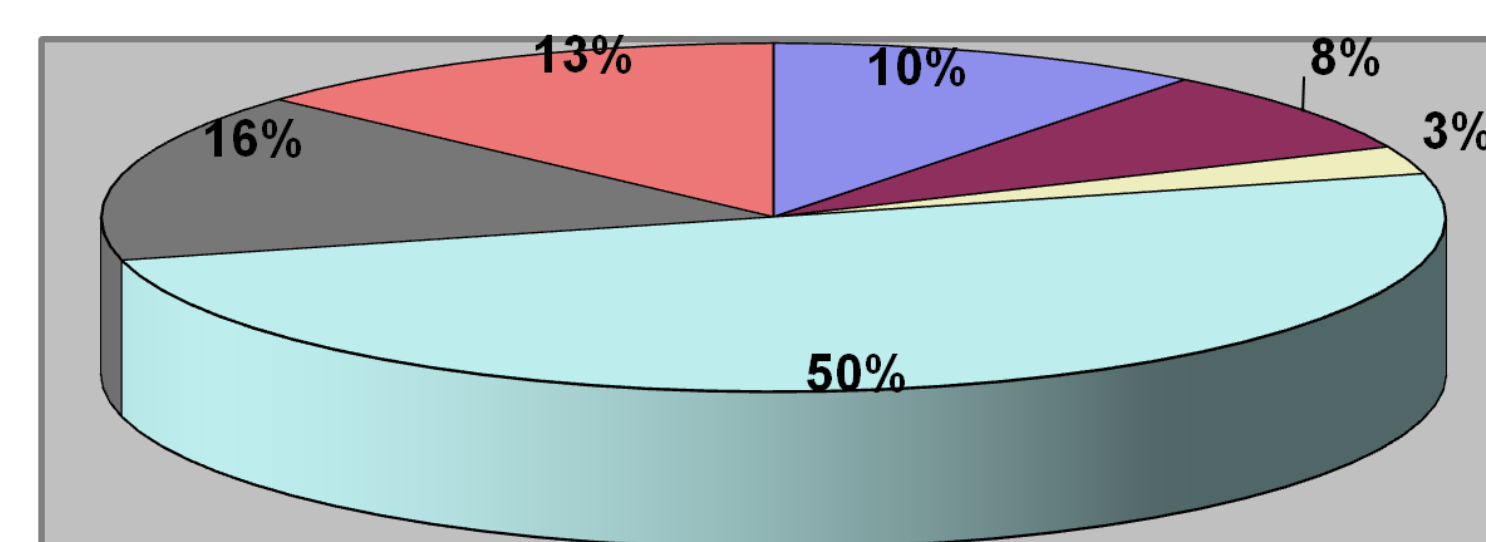


Introduction

- Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is the fear of anxiety-related sensations, for example, 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 (Keogh, Ayers, & Francis, 2002; Rectora, Szacun-Shimizua, & Leybmana, 2007; Schmidt, Lerew, & Jackson, 1999; Schmidt, Zvolensky, & Manera, 2006; Taylor, Koch, & McNally, 1992).
- Information processing may be one way in which AS can confer risk for developing anxiety disorders (McNally, 1999).
- For example, those with high AS may be more likely to recall anxiety-related information because intrusive information interrupts accurate information processing (Peters et al., 2008).
- However, the relationship between AS and processing of intrusive information has not been extensively researched.
- Therefore, the current study investigated word intrusions recalled by people with varying AS.
- It was hypothesized that people with high AS, compared to people with low AS, would recall greater numbers of intrusions overall as well as greater numbers of negative, social threat-related, and physical threat-related intrusions.

Participants

- Thirty eight students participated; 79% ($n=30$) were female.
- Participants were grouped as having low AS ($n=16$) or high AS ($n=22$) by scores on the Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI).
- Approximately one half of the participants identified as White.



Black or African American
 Asian
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 White
 Other
 Two or more races

Procedure

Participants were recruited by either flyers posted throughout a local university or presentations in psychology classes. AS level was determined by a screening 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. Financial compensation or course credit was given to those who participated.

Measures

Anxiety Sensitivity Index

(ASI; Reiss, Peterson, Gursky, & McNally, 1986)

- The ASI is a 16-item self-report measure that was used to assess AS.
- Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each item using a 5-point Likert scale, from "very little" to "very much." Total ASI scores range from 0 to 64.
- For this study, AS level was based on the mean of a large general population sample (Peterson & Plehn, 1999); scores \leq one standard deviation beyond the mean were considered low (i.e., ≤ 9), whereas scores \geq one standard deviation beyond the mean were considered high (i.e., ≥ 29).

Emotional Stroop task

- The Emotional Stroop task provides insight into cognitive processes by examining how word meanings can interfere with the naming of the color that the word is printed in (Stroop, 1935).



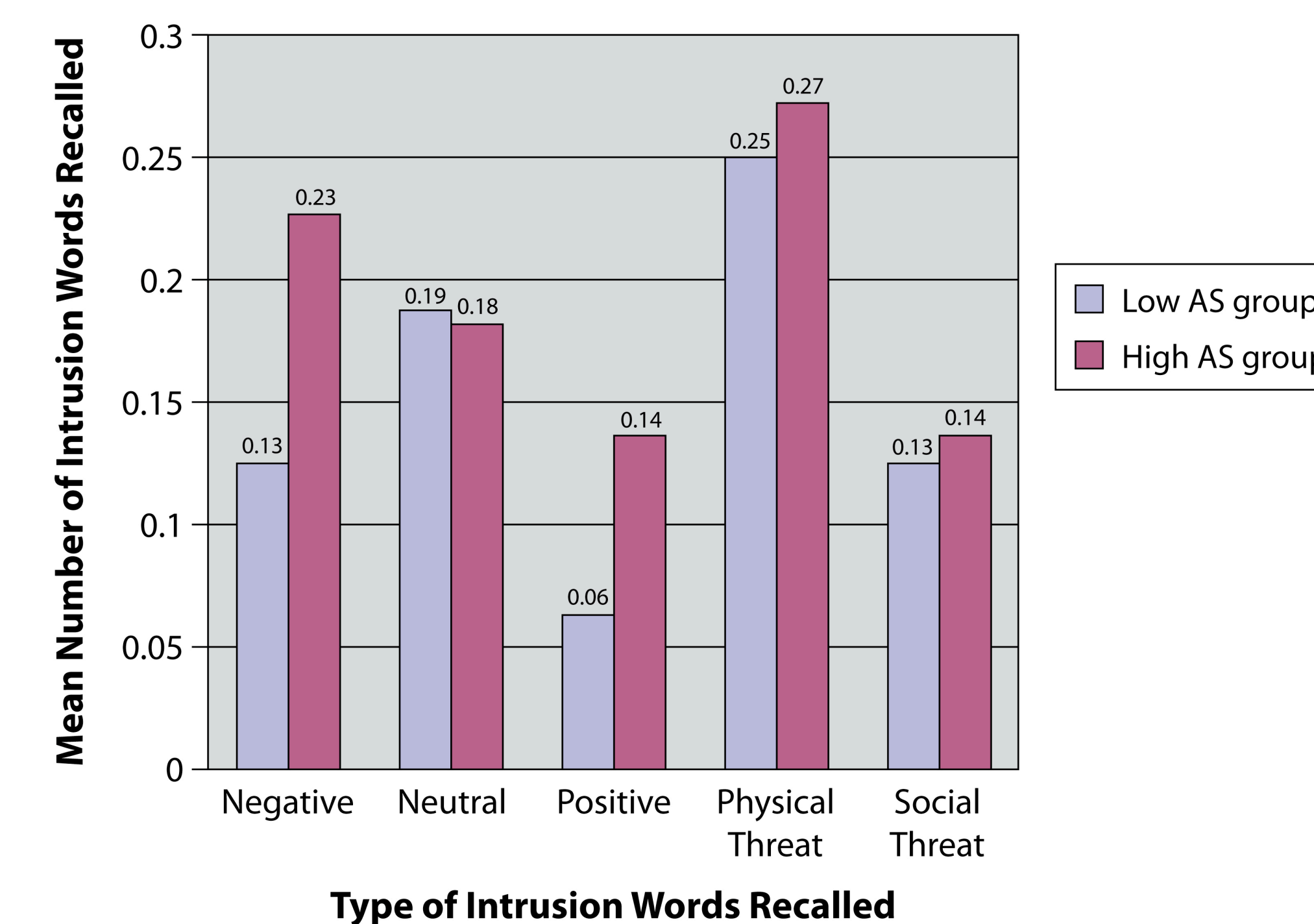
- Participants sat 50cm from a monitor that individually displayed 150 words categorized as either negative, neutral, positive, physical threat-related, or social threat-related.
- Words were displayed in four different colors: green, blue, pink, and red. Participants were instructed to recite the color of the word as it appeared on the screen.

Free Recall task

- 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 from the task as they could remember.

Results

- Analyses of variance indicated no significant difference between groups for the total number of intrusion words recalled ($F(1,36)=0.85, n.s.$; high AS $M=0.91, SD=1.11$; low AS group $M=0.63, SD=0.62$).
- Moreover, there were no significant differences found between groups for recall of negative, physical threatening, or social threatening intrusion words.



Conclusions

- Unexpectedly, people with high AS did not recall a greater number of intrusions overall or a greater number of negative, social threat-related, or physical threat-related intrusions compared to people with low AS.
- Thus, intrusions may not be responsible for biased information processing sometimes found among high AS individuals (Lundh, Czyzykow, & Öst, 1997; McCabe, 1999; Teachman, 2005).
- However, the relatively small sample size may have contributed to an underestimation of AS's influence on the recall of intrusion words.
- Future research should utilize larger sample sizes as well as additional paradigms (e.g., recognition paradigms, stimulus identification, and word-stem completion paradigms) to assess intrusions (Mitte, 2008).

For further information or PDF-version

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