

TALK

SIGNS OF AVOIDANCE AND SYMBOLIC GENERALIZATION OF DISGUST WITH TRIPOPHOBIA STIMULI

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ABSTRACT

Symptoms associated with anxiety disorders are generalized indirectly and arbitrarily, influencing the effectiveness of their treatment. Tripophobic stimuli have sensory characteristics similar to natural signals of diseases preventable by contact. This experiment aims to provide new information about symbolic generalization with tripophobia, based on a replication of the study by Dymond, Schlund, Roche, & Whelan (2014). The role of stimulus avoidance in the generalization of conditioned disgust was explored. Ninety university participants aged 18 to 30 were conveniently selected and randomly assigned to the control or experimental group. The experimental group received reinforcement for avoidance responses to a new stimulus, while the control group did not have the opportunity to avoid the stimulus in one phase. Reaction time, causal judgment, and self-reported disgust were assessed across four phases. It began with preliminary training on categories containing equivalence-related stimuli; next, a positively conditioned stimulus with tripophobia and a neutral conditioned stimulus with a blank image were established. Finally, generalization to the other stimuli was tested. Results showed that participants in the experimental group reported higher disgust scores and shorter reaction times when avoiding tripophobic stimuli compared to the control group. The comparison of studies reflects that symbolic generalization differs in terms of the level and type of symptoms similar to anxiety disorders.