Weill Cornell Medicine
Psychiatry

Psychology Grad Rounds

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Thursday, January 23rd, 2025
12:00pm-1:00pm

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Financial Disclosure: Dr. Craske has no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose and DOES NOT INTEND to discuss off-label or investigational use of products or services.

Michelle G. Craske, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor of Psychology, and of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, Kevin Love Fund Centennial Chair, Director of the Anxiety and Depression Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is also co-director of the UCLA Depression Grand Challenge. She has published extensively in the area of fear, anxiety and depression, and is on the Web of Science Most Highly Cited Researcher List. She has been the recipient of extramural funding since 1993 for research projects pertaining to risk factors for anxiety and depression among children and adolescents, neural mediators of emotion regulation and behavioral treatments for anxiety disorders, fear extinction translational models for optimizing exposure therapy, and novel behavioral therapies targeting reward sensitivity and anhedonia. Further, she developed scalable treatment models for underserved populations, including the STAND program for screening and treating anxiety and depression, which is currently the focus of aP50 Center grant that Dr. Craske leads. Finally, she is Editor-in-Chief for Behaviour Research and Therapy and holds the position of Officer of the Order of Australia.

REWARD PROCESSING AS A TREATMENT TARGET FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

ABSTRACT

Threat and reward sensitivity are fundamental processes that become dysregulated in the context of vulnerability to, or expression of, anxiety and depression. Treatments have traditionally targeted reductions in threat sensitivity with limited effects upon reward mechanisms. I will present our latest findings regarding neural, behavioral and subjective features of reward hyposensitivity that correlate with and predict anxiety, depression and anhedonia. These findings led us to develop a treatment that specifically targets reward hyposensitivity, termed Positive Affect Treatment, which we have shown to be more effective than cognitive behavioral therapy that specifically targets negative affect and threat sensitivity. I will present our replication study in anxious, depressed and extremely low positive affect individuals, where the symptomatic outcomes occur in parallel with changes in target measures of reward anticipation-motivation and attainment. I will also present findings from virtual reality technologies for delivering aspects of Positive Affect Treatment. I will conclude with evidence for reward-related mechanisms within the context of exposure therapy for fears and anxiety, and potential methods for targeting such mechanisms.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the role of reward processing in anhedonia, depression, and anxiety.
2. Summarize the evidence supporting the efficacy of Positive Affect Treatment for addressing anhedonia.
3. Identify therapeutic strategies that directly target reward sensitivity and evaluate the use of virtual reality technologies to enhance these interventions.
4. Explain how targeting reward mechanisms can improve the efficacy of exposure therapy for fears and phobias.

REFERENCES

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2. Craske, M. G., Meuret, A. E., Echiverri-Cohen, A., Rosenfield, D., & Ritz, T. (2023). Positive affect treatment targets reward sensitivity: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *91*(6), 350–366. https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000805
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