

# **ANXIETY SENSITIVITY AND MISINTERPRETATION OF AMBIGUOUS STIMULI: THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE DIATHESIS IN PANIC PATHOGENESIS**

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Cognitive models claim that panic episodes may be initiated by fear resulting from misinterpreting enhanced somatic sensations as personally threatening or harmful rather than resulting from direct stimulation of aberrant biochemical systems (Clark, 1986). The present study examined the role of cognition in the etiology of panickers. Specifically, the effects of anxiety sensitivity, panic history, cognitive manipulation and biological challenge on subjective and cardiac responses of Ss during the course of a biological challenge, brief hyperventilation, were examined. One hundred and twenty nonclinical subjects were chosen on the basis of level of anxiety sensitivity and panic history. They were randomly assigned to one of the three cognitive interpretation manipulation groups (twelve groups of 10 Ss). They were all subjected to a 180-sec period of voluntary hyperventilation and heart rate was measured simultaneously. An anxiety sensitivity  $\times$  panic history  $\times$  cognitive manipulation  $\times$  time mixed factorial design was performed and the interaction effects were emphasized and examined. The results showed that anxiety sensitivity might serve as an important cognitive mediator during the process of a panic attack experience. It is proposed that results of the present study could theoretically shed light on the understanding of the psychopathology of panic disorder and clinically improve the treatment of panickers. Besides, owing to the Ss being college students, the present results would also have contribution to the field of student mental health spectrum.

**Keywords:** Anxiety sensitivity, Cognitive diathesis, Panic, Catastrophic interpretation, Biological challenge test