

Latent Mechanisms of Attention Bias Modification in Individuals with Sub-Clinical Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Roles of Facilitated Engagement and Difficulty Disengagement

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Accumulating evidence suggests the existence of attentional bias toward threatening stimuli in patients with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). We examined whether disengagement difficulty is a major component of attentional bias in GAD, and tested the causality of disengagement difficulty before and after attention bias modification (ABM). In this study, we used the diagnostic interview schedule to screen subclinical GAD participants ($n = 42$) and normal control participants ($n = 47$); each group was randomly assigned to three distinct ABM programs. The results revealed that (1) the subclinical GAD participants exhibited difficulty in disengagement from threatening stimuli; and (2) the extent of difficulty in disengagement was reduced in the subclinical GAD participants who were trained to focus on neutral stimuli. These results support the assumptions that the prominent characteristic of attentional bias in GAD might be difficulty in disengagement, and ABM can reduce the extent of difficulty in disengagement.

Keywords: *attentional bias, attention bias modification, generalized anxiety disorder, worry, dot probe*