

Can Individuals be Trained to Imagine Musical Imagery? A Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

Background

Psychologists have studied imagery-based therapy for anxiety, but with a strong emphasis on visual imagery rather than imagery for other modalities (e.g. auditory imagery). Based on the evidence that anxiety is influenced by negative thoughts (Rood, Roelofs, Bögels & Alloy, 2010), voluntary musical imagery could be offered as an alternative. To test this idea, it is important to look at which methods would be best at training people to imagine music and assessing their abilities at doing so. Thus this study seeks to investigate these methods.

Aims

To examine the feasibility of training individuals to imagine music.

Method

Three stages of the study take place over five days; training, practising and testing. During training, the participants learn to imagine music (self-selected pieces) using a volume fader task. Participants listen to their pieces, then lower the fader as soon as they are able to continue the music in their minds, raising it as necessary to check their mental image. Next, the participants practice imagining music in response to six text message prompts from the experimenter (sent periodically throughout the day), and additionally complete experience sampling method diary entries after each attempt. Finally, the participants' ability to imagine music is assessed using a spot task, involving exposure to their self-selected pieces interpolated with silent gaps. During the silent gaps, the participants imagine what they believe would be heard, then decide whether the piece was reintroduced at the correct position.

Results

Indices of success in imagining music will be analysed, including beat tapping accuracy and spot task scores.

Conclusions

This study will determine the possibility of training people to imagine music. If positive significant results are produced, this method can be tested as therapy for anxiety.

Keywords

voluntary musical imagery; anxiety

REFERENCES

- Rood, L., Roelofs, J., Bögels, S. M., & Alloy, L. B. (2010). Dimensions of Negative Thinking and the Relations with Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety in Children and Adolescents. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 34(4), 333-342.