

Mental Imagery as a Cognitive Predictor of Academic Anxiety

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Academic anxiety is characterized by excessive uneasiness and worry surrounding academic performance. It has become a big issue in postsecondary schools and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Anxiety surrounding academics can lead to procrastination, self-degrading thoughts, task-generated interference and decreased academic achievement.

Understanding academic anxiety can lead to the innovation of tools and therapies that will allow students to succeed in an academic environment. One way to understand a disorder is to investigate its predictors. Mental disorders have multiple predictors, some of which are cognitive and are related to deficits and biases in information processing. Imagery deficits have been identified as cognitive predictors of multiple mental disorders such as depression and PTSD. In this study, we focused on mental imagery as a cognitive predictor of academic anxiety. We investigated intrusive negative imagery, impoverished positive imagery, and reduced levels of vividness through a survey. We recruited 32 participants from the Carleton University student population to complete 4 questionnaires pertaining to vividness of visual imagery, academic anxiety, intrusive negative imagery, and prospective imagery. We discuss the results in relation to what is known about academic anxiety and potential novel coping strategies.