

Wild, J., Hackmann, A., & Clark, D.M. (2007). When the present visits the past: updating traumatic memories in social phobia. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 38*, 386-401.

Research suggests that distorted images of the self are common in social phobia and play a role in maintaining the disorder. The images are often linked in thematic and sensory detail to distressing memories that are clustered around the onset or worsening of the disorder. This has led to speculation about the likely benefit of working directly with these memories to improve symptoms of social phobia. In this exploratory study, we describe a process of cognitive restructuring followed by imagery rescripting to update the meanings of distressing memories and images in social phobia. We first present illustrative clinical examples and then data of 14 patients with social phobia, on whom we developed this approach. Patients attended an imagery rescripting session in which a semi-structured interview was used to identify their recurrent images, the associated memories and their meanings. Next the identified memory was evoked and elaborated. We updated the meaning of the memory by first using cognitive restructuring to arrive at new perspectives and then linking these perspectives with the memory using imagery techniques. The procedure resulted in significant within session change in beliefs, and in image and memory distress and vividness. One week later significant change was seen in social phobia cognitions and a self-report measure of social anxiety. Rescripting distressing memories in social phobia appears to be an effective way of modifying maladaptive beliefs linked to recurrent negative imagery. This paper presents our exploratory investigation of how to work with the memories and encourages more rigorous investigation in this area.