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Anticlimax Dampening Concept: It Does Exist

Концепция Anticlimax Dampening: она работает

Key words: anticlimax dampening, examiner conclusion

In recent years some examiners have tried to change the basic concepts of polygraphy by introducing questionable changes. I am still unsure whether these changes have any scientific grounds or simply served as an attempt to challenge the theories of our pioneers and in doing so to enter the hall of polygraph fame. One of these concepts was a psychological set which received a new name of “salience.” Many years ago the issue of the name versus its meaning was addressed by Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2 scene 2 “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Among issues related to the theory of psychological set we can find the concept of Anticlimax Dampening. The knowledge of this concept may force some examiners change their opinion about the results they reported to clients. I often see reports on multiple issue or multifaceted tests wherein the examinee is deceptive to one question and truthful to others. If such a result is reached after running only a single CQT (Comparison Question Test), this is a mistake!

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Let's us review what this concept says:

Anticlimax Dampening Concept

In a PV examination, the examinee's psychological set will be drawn to the test question holding the *greatest threat or interest* to his/her general well-being thus engaging the *selective attention* which may *tune out* test questions posing a lesser threat, hence causing an *anticlimax dampening effect* on all questions except that which gained the examinee's selective attention. Therefore, when two distinctly separate crimes are included in the same test, the suspect who is guilty of both of them may respond only to the crime that he/she feels to be the greatest threat to his/her well-being. Furthermore, the relevant question offering the greatest threat to the guilty examinee will cause partial or complete dampening of control question reactions, thus an anticlimax [1].

This theory proposed by Cleve Backster is based on the principle of the "psychological set". A theory that holds that a person's fear, anxieties, and apprehensions will be directed towards the situation which holds the greatest threat or interest for his/her well-being or self-preservation at that moment in time. In a polygraph examination, a guilty examinee's concern over an intense relevant question may result in a full or partial dampening of responses to other relevant questions about deception, as well as to comparison questions. (Backster 1963) [2].

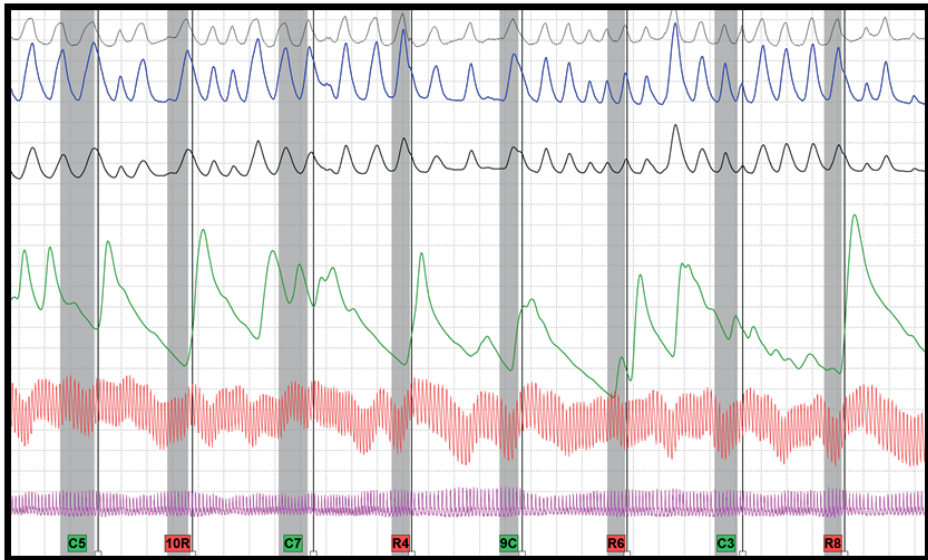
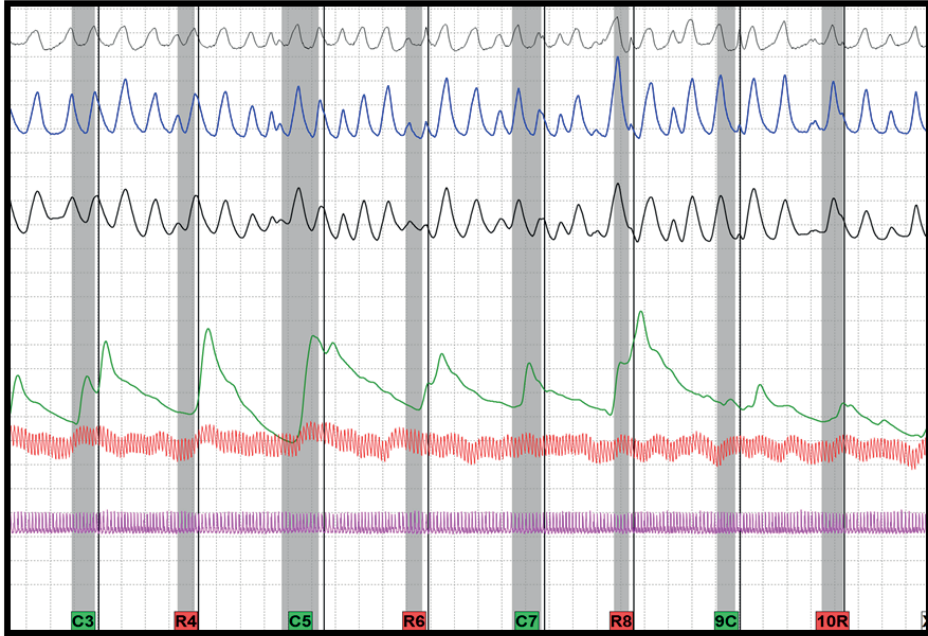
Let's review a case that clearly demonstrates this theory. During a basic course in polygraph, we playacted a mock crime. There were three participants: two active and one passive. Two of the students were asked to steal an item: Student A stole a cell-phone and Student B – a laptop.

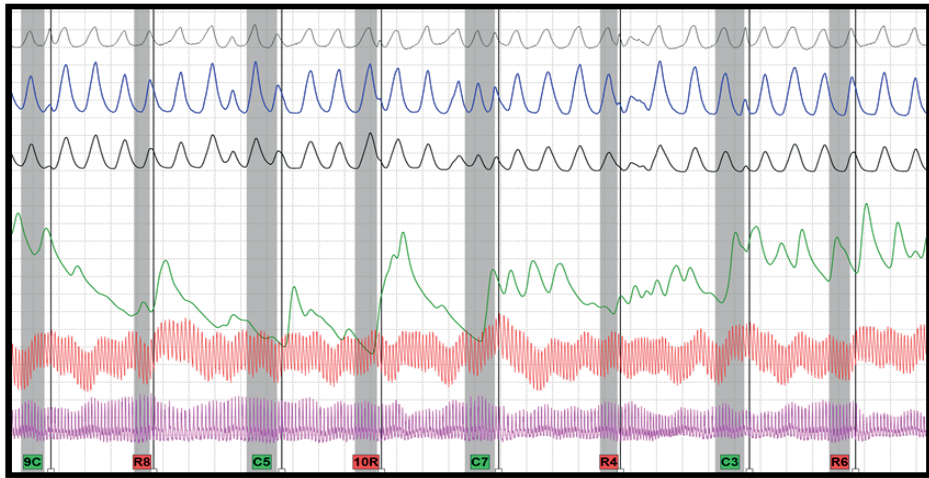
Student A was also asked to take a knife from the kitchen and, with the help of student B, lock student C (a female) in a small closet. This was done while student C was not present. When student C entered the room the two students asked her to enter into the closet and she did. Student B held the knife in his hand behind her back. Later on student C stated that she never felt threatened nor saw the knife.

After completing the mock crime roleplay, all students underwent a test. The examiner of student A decided to run an AFMGQT with 4 relevant question as follows:

- (R4) Did you cause the disappearance of the missing laptop?
- (R6) Did you cause the disappearance of the missing mobile phone?
- (R8) Did you point a knife at student C's back today?
- (R10) While pushing Student C into the closet, did you have a knife in your hand?

The following data was collected:





I evaluated the test manually using a 3-point scale (the charts were not condensed) to obtain the following results:

	R	4	R	6	R	8	R	10
CHART 1								
PNEUMO2		0	PNEUMO2	1	PNEUMO2	1	PNEUMO2	-1
PNEUMO1		0	PNEUMO1	-1	PNEUMO1	1	PNEUMO1	-1
EDA		1	EDA	1	EDA	-1	EDA	1
CARDIO		1	CARDIO	1	CARDIO	-1	CARDIO	1
SUBTOTAL		2.0	SUBTOTAL	2.0	SUBTOTAL	-1.0	SUBTOTAL	1.0
CHART 2								
PNEUMO2		-1	PNEUMO2	0	PNEUMO2	-1	PNEUMO2	1
PNEUMO1		-1	PNEUMO1	0	PNEUMO1	-1	PNEUMO1	1
EDA		-1	EDA	-1	EDA	-1	EDA	-1
CARDIO		-1	CARDIO	1	CARDIO	-1	CARDIO	1
SUBTOTAL		-3.0	SUBTOTAL	0.0	SUBTOTAL	-3.0	SUBTOTAL	1.0
CHART 3								
PNEUMO2		-1	PNEUMO2	1	PNEUMO2	-1	PNEUMO2	1
PNEUMO1		-1	PNEUMO1	1	PNEUMO1	-1	PNEUMO1	1
EDA		1	EDA	1	EDA	-1	EDA	-1
CARDIO		1	CARDIO	1	CARDIO	1	CARDIO	0
SUBTOTAL		1.0	SUBTOTAL	3.0	SUBTOTAL	-1.0	SUBTOTAL	0.0
3 CHARTS SUBTOTAL		0		5		-5		2

Conclusion

What we see is that the examinee is clearly focusing on R8 (Did you point a knife at student C's back today?). This occurred even though he had the stolen phone in his possession throughout whole test. Still, he focused his psychological set on a 2-minute incident, even though he was lying to the relevant question concerning the article that was still in his possession. We can also see that the examinee accumulated the negative points in all three collected charts.

This short example demonstrated at a training emphasises the importance of the Anticlimax Dampening Concept and the danger of failing to pay attention to it. When in a multi-issue or multifaceted tests an examinee is deceptive to one of the relevant questions yet lacks reactions to other ones, considering the latter question(s) "truthful" contradicts the concept of Anticlimax Dampening, and can clearly result in erroneous examiner conclusions.

References

- [1] J.A. Matte, *Forensic Psychophysiology using the Polygraph*, 1996, 323.
- [2] D. Krapohl, S. Sturm, *Terminology Reference for the Science of Psychophysiological Detection of Deception*, Polygraph 2002, 31 (3).