

Reaching New Heights:

Comparing Interpretation Bias Modification to
Exposure Therapy for Acrophobia

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Height Fear

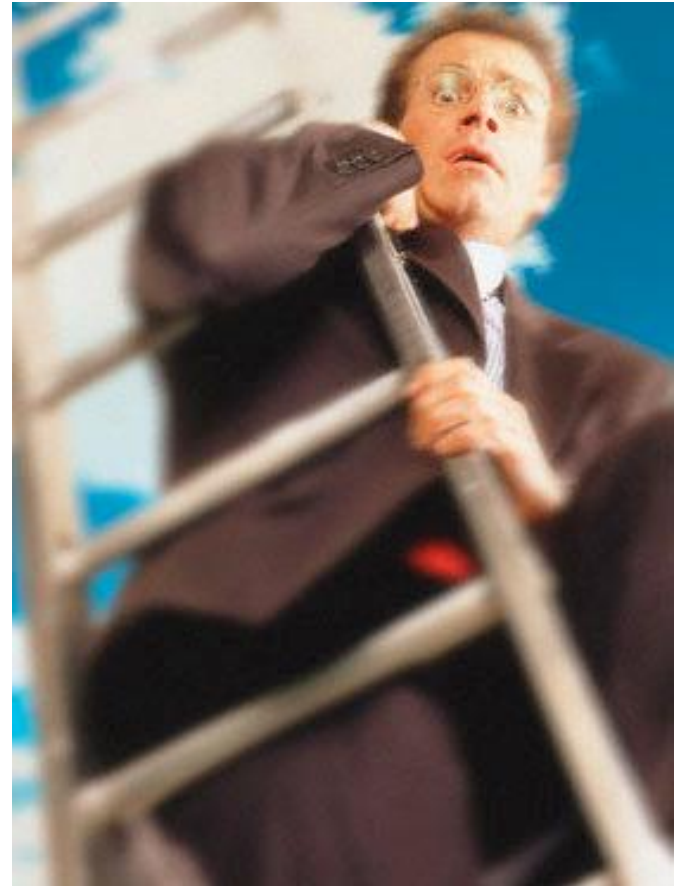


- Very common
- 3-5% of population have acrophobia
- Limitations of current gold standard treatment

Biased Interpretations

- Overestimate Danger
- Doubt ability to cope

- Predicts Fear and Avoidance on Heights



Theory

- Test causal premise

Participants

- $N = 101$
- 77% female
- Mean age: 24 (*SD*: 11.81, range 18-67)
- > 45.45 on Acrophobia Questionnaire
- Met sub-threshold or threshold SCID criteria for acrophobia

Conditions

Interpretation
Only

- $n = 25$





Screening





Interpretation Training: Scenario Training

- *You are standing on the edge of a balcony of a ten-story building. You realize the railings are shorter than they are on most balconies. The chances of you falling are still minimal.*

Are you likely to fall off the balcony? NO

(modified from Mathews
& Mackintosh, 2000)



Interpretation Training: Interpretation Modification Paradigm

Dangerous OR

Secure

- *“While standing on a chair to reach a book on a high shelf, you are startled by a loud noise.”*
- Are the word and the sentence related?

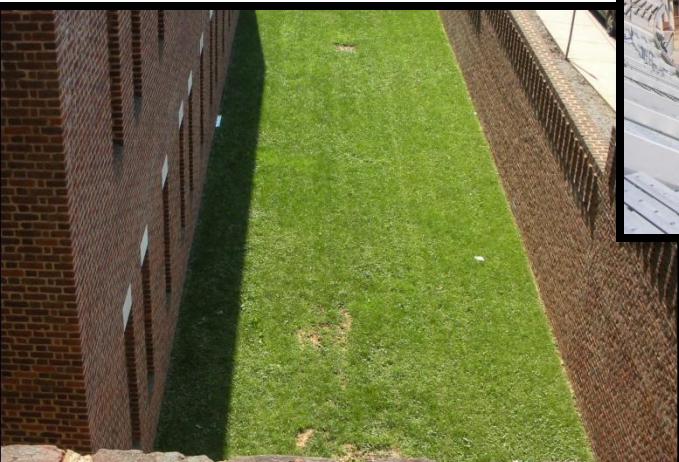


(modified from Beard & Amir, 2008)



Exposure Therapy

- Half of the participants completed two sessions of exposures with trained therapists



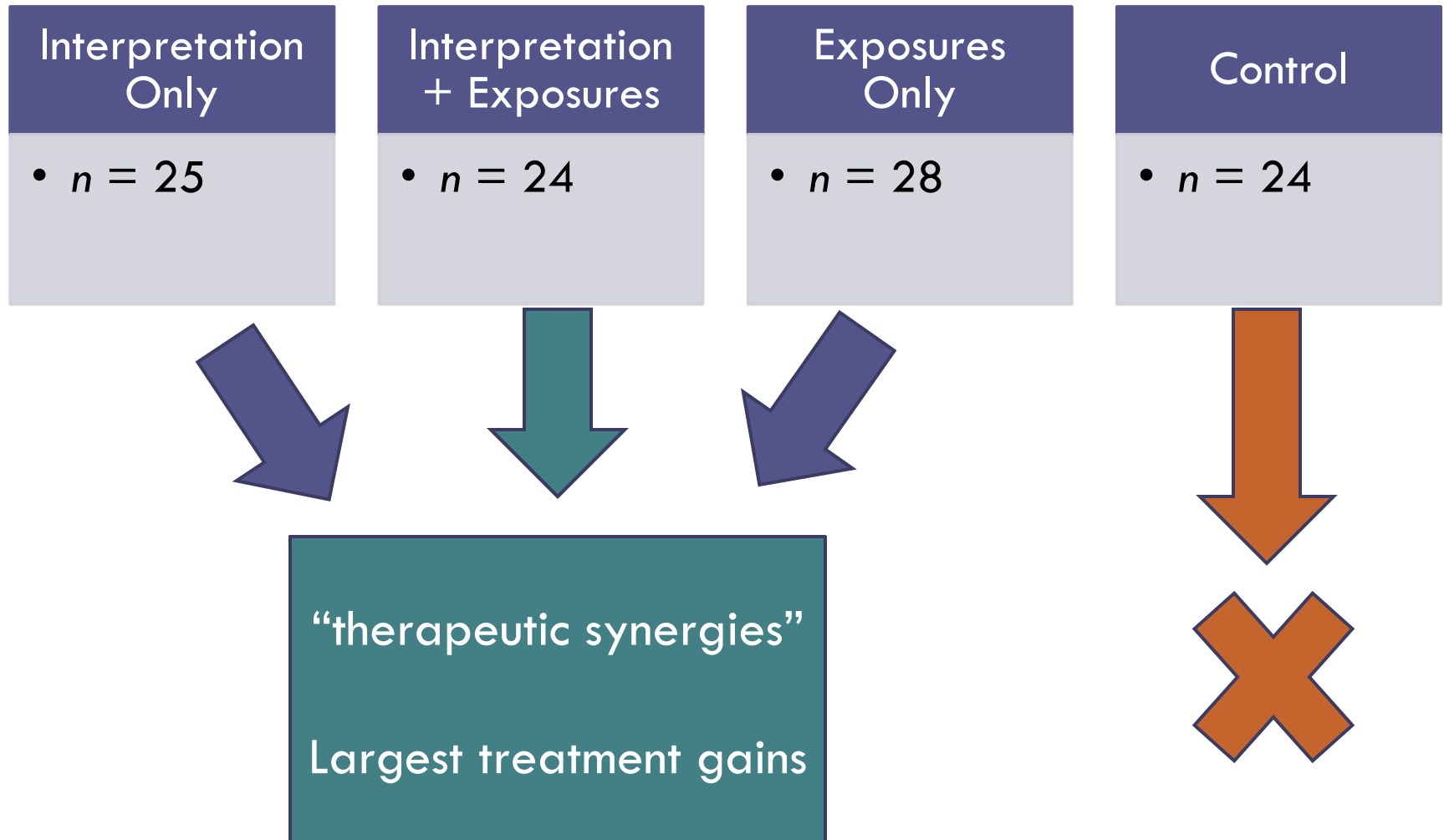


Control

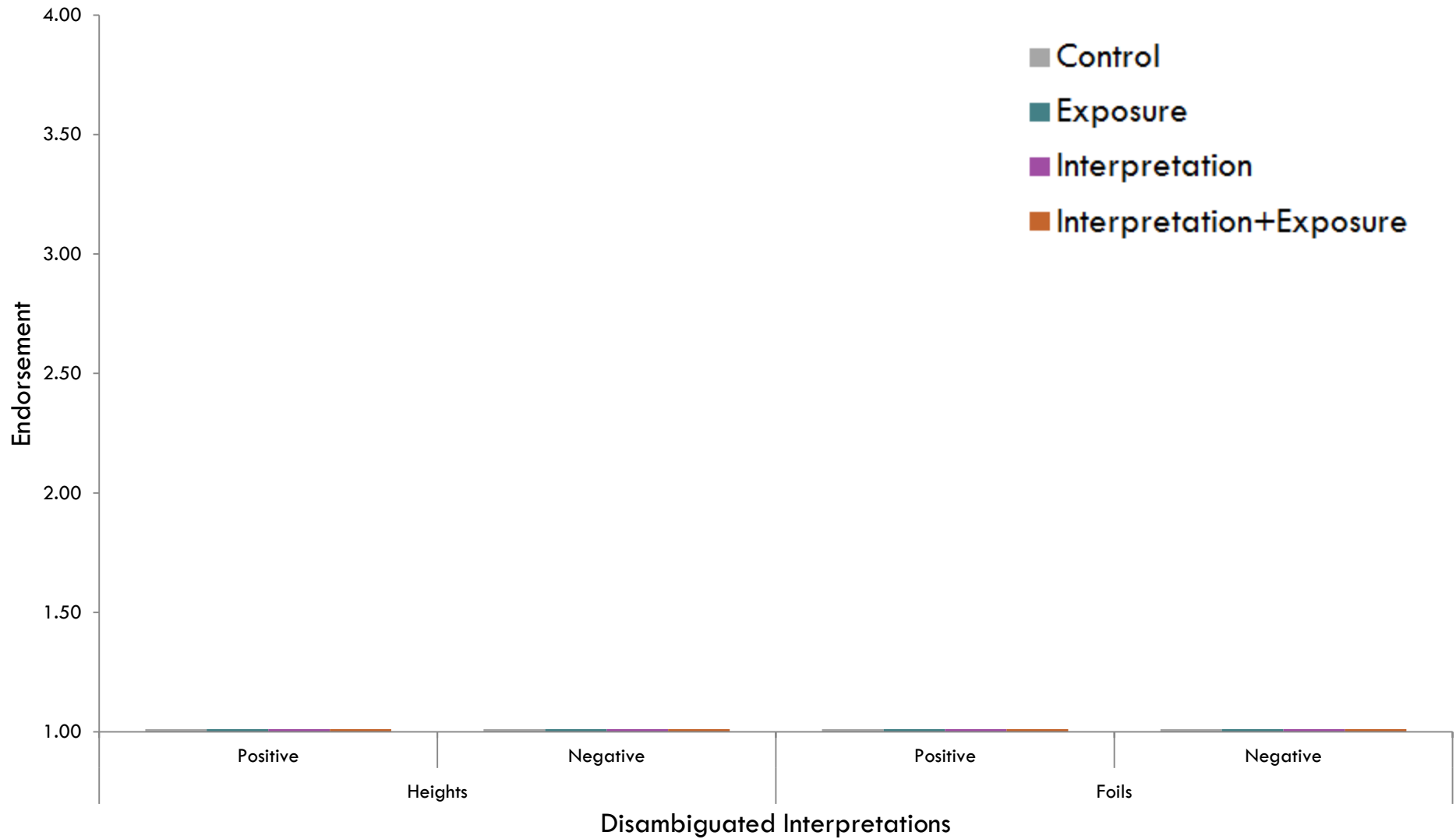
- You are reading one night when you come across a word that you do not know. You decide to look up the word. You go get your dictionary.
- Do you look up a definition? *YES*

(modified from Mathews
& Mackintosh, 2000)

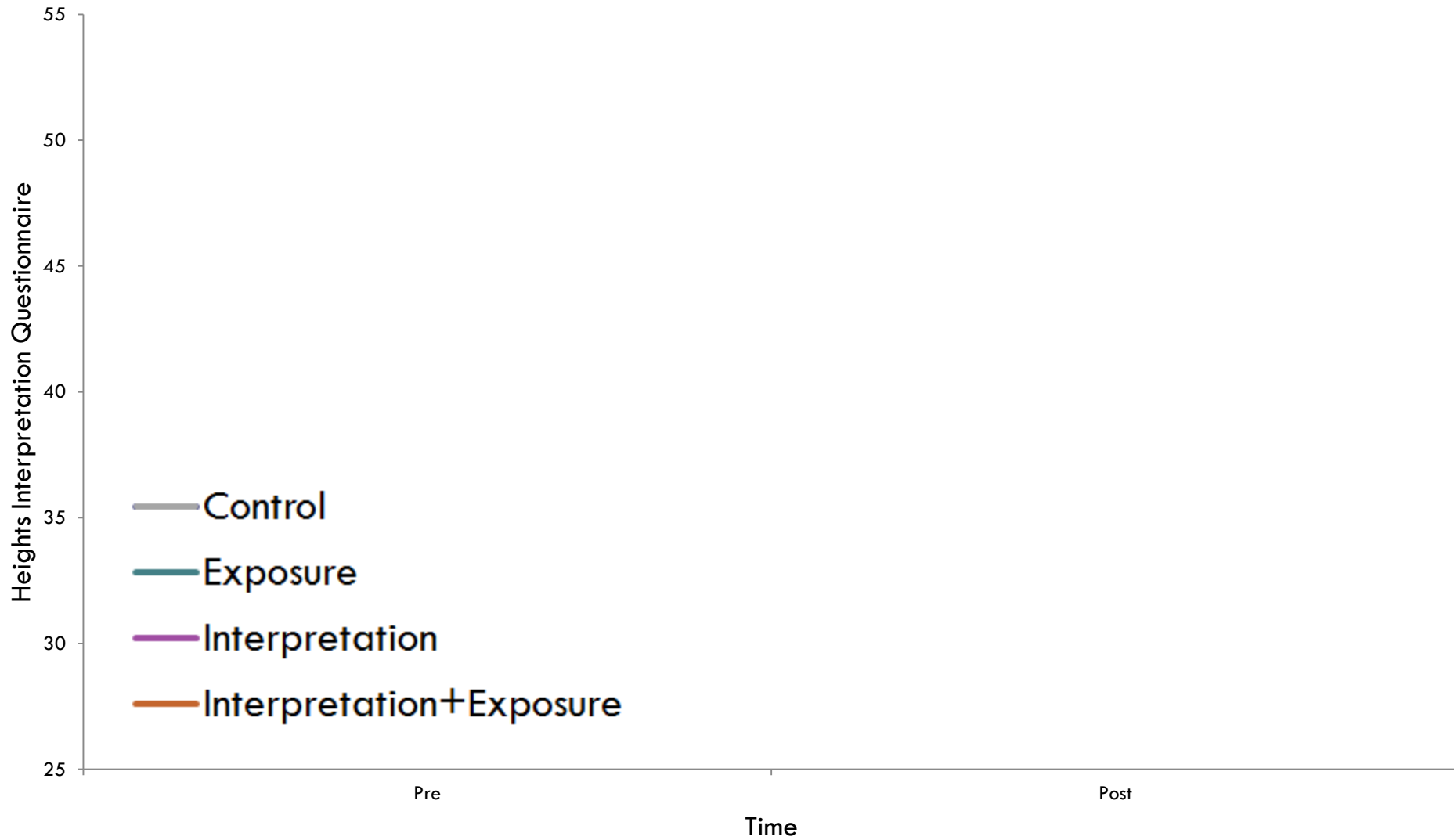
Hypotheses



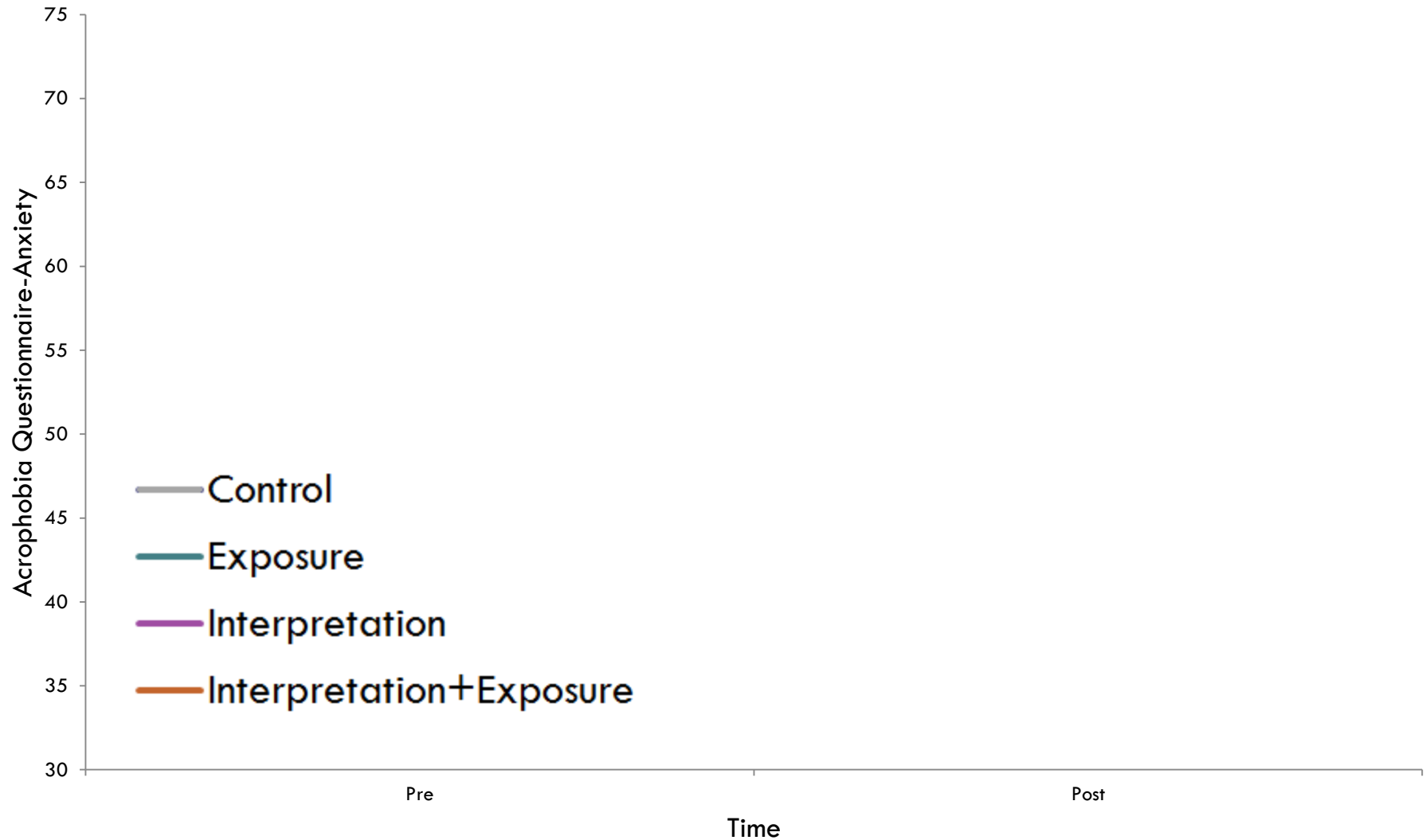
Interpretations: Novel Scenarios



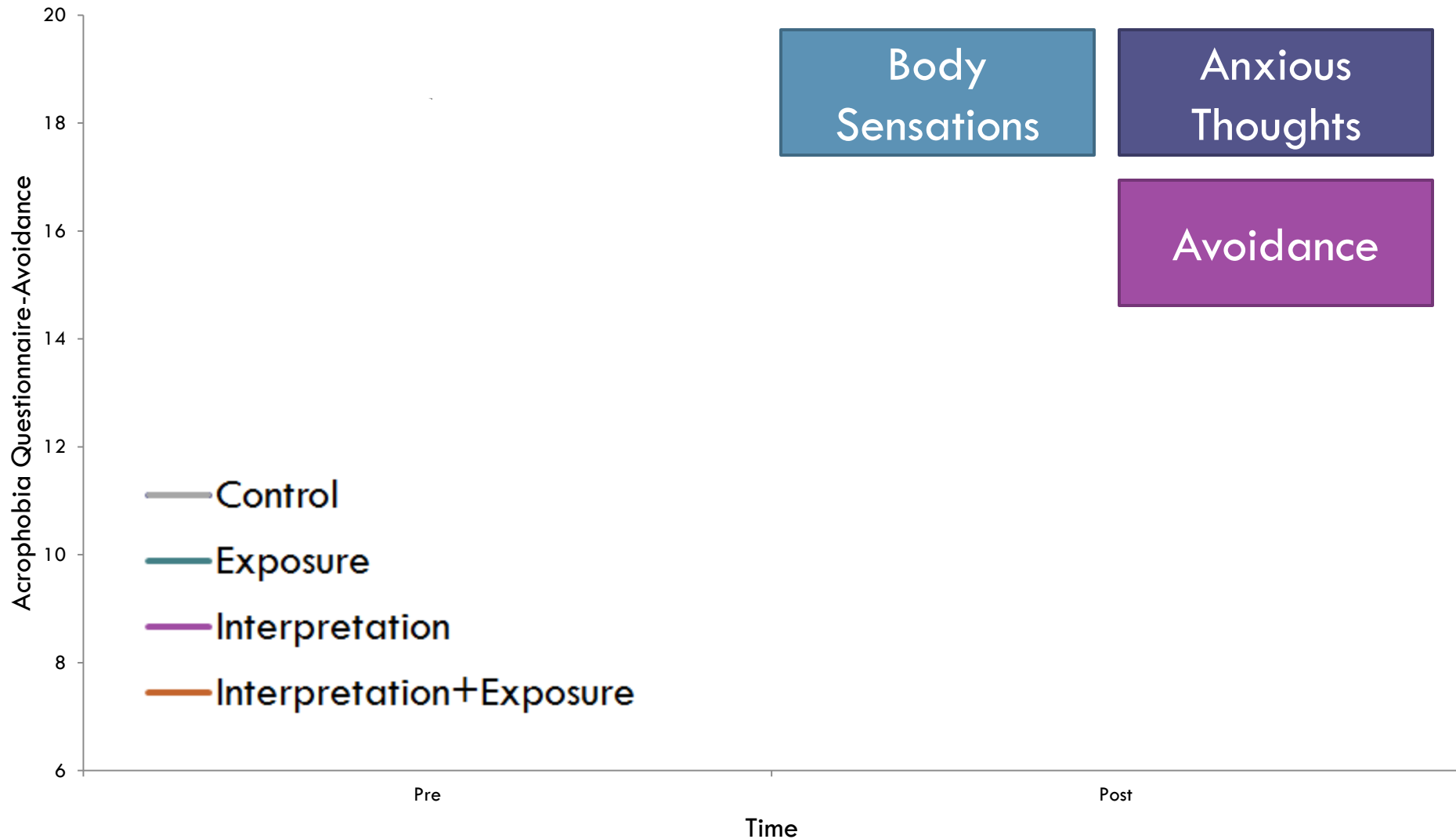
Interpretations: Heights Interpretation Questionnaire



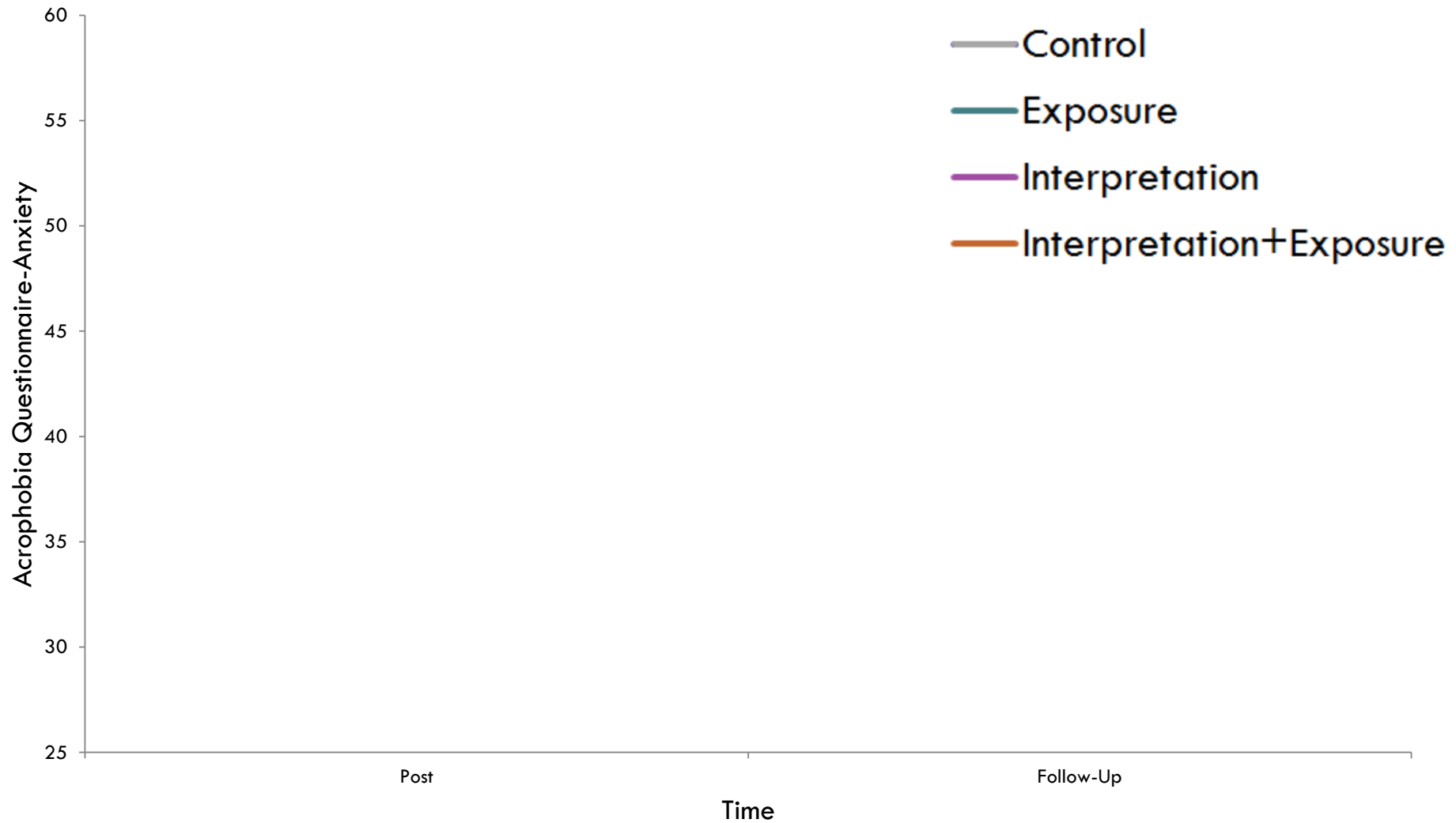
Symptoms: AQ-Anxiety



Height Fear Symptoms: AQ-Avoidance

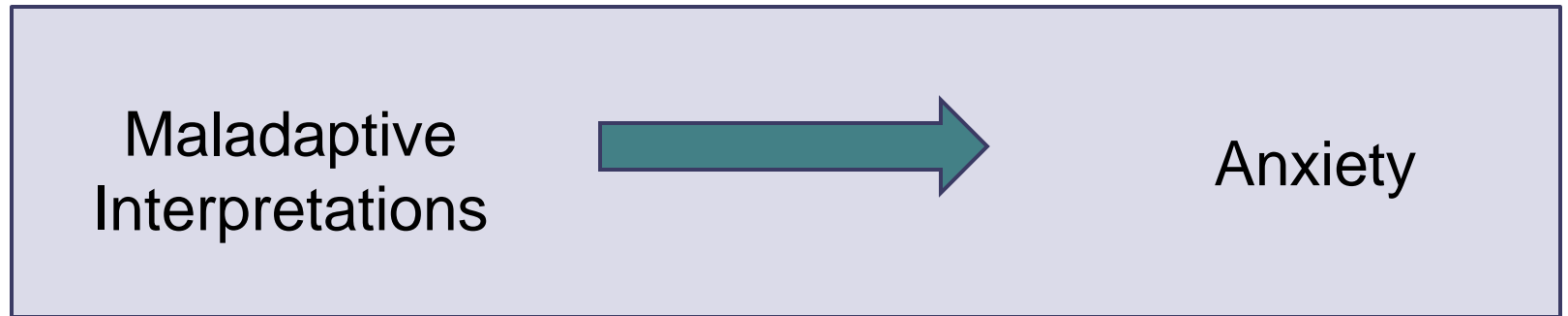


Maintenance of Gains



- Interpretations
- Symptoms
- Emotional Vulnerability

Implications



- More palatable
- Inexpensive
- Done at home
- Reach more people

Thank You

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