PIII-11: Maternal Relaxation Response and Skin-to-Skin Contact

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Abstract:
Introduction: Skin-to-skin contact (SSC) facilitates maternal satisfaction, breastfeeding success rate, and mother-infant relationship. Mothers also say they feel relaxed during SSC (e.g., Burkhammer, Anderson, & Chiu, 2003; Gray et al., 2002). Researchers have sensed/observed that mothers became relaxed during SSC (Gray et al., 2002; Johnston et al., 2008, 2009). Despite growing consensus that relaxation occurs during SSC, this phenomenon has not been objectively documented. The purpose of this pilot study is to explore ways to accurately and objectively measure relaxation in healthy mothers who experience SSC with their healthy newborn infants during early postpartum. Research Questions are: 1) Does maternal relaxation occur? 2) Does it occur in all mothers? 3) How long does it take for the mother to relax?

Method(s): One-group repeated measures design. The sample consists of consenting mothers who gave birth vaginally to healthy fullterm infants. Each mother-infant dyad experiences SSC for 30 minutes, during which maternal muscle tension, electrodermal response, heart rate, and
skin temperature are recorded using bioinstrumentation (proComp+, Thought Technology system). Mothers provide subjective data with self-report of onset (documented with a stop watch) and degree of relaxation and anxiety (documented with visual analogue scales).

**Results:** Ten mothers were enrolled. Findings indicated that mothers relaxed about 5 minutes into SSC as measured by decreased skin conductance and increased skin temperature in the fingertips. All but one mother reported being more relaxed at the end of the SSC session, and this was congruent with researcher’s observations of mothers’ behaviors (e.g., shoulders lowered, dozing off, and kissing/caressing infants).

**Discussion & Conclusions:** Results reveal that a majority of the mothers relaxed when experiencing SSC with their infants. Skin conductance and skin temperature show signs of reduced activity of the sympathetic nervous system. Despite small sample size, results are promising because with quiet environment and comfortable sitting arrangement, mothers who experience SSC can be relaxed in about 5 minutes.

**Abstract History:**
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