Title: Attentional Biases for Emotional Faces in Social Anxiety: Evidence for Vigilance and Avoidance.

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterised by the fear of social interactions, with fear of negative evaluation (FNE) being a core component. It is widely accepted that socially anxious individuals display an attentional bias in the presence of threat-related social cues. Specifically, research has shown that faces expressing anger seem to be especially pertinent in SAD. It is also thought that disgust faces may also act as anxiety-provoking trigger in SAD. Despite the general consensus of there being an attentional bias, there is still a dispute with regards to the nature of this bias, which may be attributed to methodological differences.

This empirical study utilised an adapted novel paradigm, designed to assess the time course of attentional bias present in individuals with high normative levels of social anxiety and FNE. Using a repeated measures design, this study examined participants’ saccade deviations in the presence of facial expressions (angry, disgust, happy and neutral), presented extrafoveally. This study also attempted to replicate the negativity bias affect observed in McSorley and van Reekums (2013) study. Results obtained in response to angry faces support the vigilance-avoidance theory, as individuals with normally high levels of social anxiety and FNE displayed an early vigilance towards angry faces, but then avoided them. With regards to the disgust faces, it was found that only individuals with high FNE levels selectively attended to them. Although this study proved to be successful in investigating attentional bias in social anxiety, it did not manage to replicate the negativity bias affect.

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