INTRODUCTION
Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is characterized by persistent fear of humiliation and judgment from one’s peers in one or more social situations (American Psychiatric Association [DSM-V], 2013). Prominent models of social anxiety suggest that social anxiety is a result, in part, of biased facial perception. Previous studies have shown that people with high social anxiety identify affectively neutral faces more negatively than non-socially anxious controls (e.g. Yoon & Zinbarg, 2008, Lange, W., Allart, E. et al., 2012). Therefore, the social anxiety associated symptoms may be maintained by the negatively biased facial perception.

In order to further investigate the mechanisms behind this hyper-sensitivity, we have implemented face adaptation paradigms. Adapting to a given feature or dimension of a face can alter the perceptual experience of the face. For example, adapting to a happy face will bias one’s perception of an neutral face to appear more angry (Rutherford et al, 2008). Adapting to a given feature or dimension of a face can alter the perceptual experience of the face. For example, adapting to a happy face will bias one’s perception of an neutral face to appear more angry (Rutherford et al, 2008).

In this study, (1) we confirm baseline biases in processing emotion and (2) we quantify the magnitude of adaptation to emotion, happy and angry, in face processing in LSA vs. HSA individuals.

METHODS: FACE ADAPTATION
Participants viewed a series of morphed faces along an emotional continuum (happy to neutral to angry), and rated faces as happy or angry using a two alternative forced choice bottom-up paradigm. Based on these responses, we established each participant’s baseline point of subjective equality (PSE), where they perceive the face as equally happy and angry. Then participants were adapted to a series of either 100% happy faces. Following adaptation, participants viewed and rated the same morphed faces and we quantified the change in PSE. The order of faces presented was randomized within and between participants.

Stimuli
Face stimuli were selected from the NimStim database (Tottenham et al., 2009). Adaptation included 30 unique faces (15 female) adapted to a series of either 100% happy faces. Following adaptation, participants viewed and rated the same morphed faces and we quantified the change in PSE. The order of faces presented was randomized within and between participants.

Participants
12 participants, 5 HSA & 7 LSA, participated in this study. Participants were screened into LSA and HSA groups based on the BFNE-S. Participants were screened into LSA and HSA groups based on the BFNE-S. Participants with a DASS Depression Subscale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) score >17 were excluded.

REFERENCES


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