

Research Project

Preferring the feared? Using (mobile) eye-tracking to study attention biases towards threat-related stimuli

Third-party funded project

Project title Preferring the feared? Using (mobile) eye-tracking to study attention biases towards threat-related stimuli

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Organisation / Research unit

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Department

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Status Completed

Theoretical background. The attention bias towards threat is defined by anxious individuals' tendency to overly attend threat-related information compared to neutral material. However, an exploration of this bias in a naturalistic setting is missing. Furthermore, albeit being observed that anxiety impairs intuition, the relationship between the bias and intuitive information processing has been neglected so far. Therefore, the project addresses the following research question: 1) Is the attention bias replicable in a naturalistic setting? 2) Do bias-related eye movement patterns differ with respect to exogenous and endogenous attention? 3) Does the intuition hindering effect of anxiety apply to threat-related material? 4) Does intuition influence the attention bias in high trait anxious?

Design and methodology of the proposed study. The project has two parts: In the naturalistic part, after a mood induction, participants will explore a museum-like room (naturalistic setting) and perform a choice task regarding posters of paintings with different valences while wearing glasses for obtaining eye movements. In the first experiment of the experimental part, after a mood manipulation, participants will perform an intuition task consisting of threat-stimuli. In the second experiment, after the induction of an intuitive vs. reflective information processing mode, participants will perform an emotional stroop task to assess the attention bias towards threat. All studies use between-subject designs and neutral stimuli as control conditions.

Significance of the proposed study. The present project lays the foundation for a planned SNSF PRIMA grant proposal on the longitudinal investigation of precursors, companions and followers of the attention bias towards threat in daily life. Findings of the proposed project will support theorizing on (a) the attention bias in a naturalistic setting, and (b) its relationship with intuitive information processing.

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