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A Comparison of Attentional Bias Toward Threatening Stimuli Among Individuals with Social Anxiety Symptoms: The Role of Reassurance Seeking

Maryam Razzaghi *[1], Mohsen Dehghani [1], Mahmood Heidari [1]

[1] *Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran*

Abstract

Objective: Cognitive models link social anxiety with biased attention to social threat, but the role of reassurance seeking remains unclear. This cross-sectional, nonexperimental group-comparison study examined whether reassurance seeking was associated with positive attentional bias toward threatening facial expressions across social anxiety levels.

Method: A convenience sample of 395 adults aged 18–60 years was recruited. After withdrawals and prespecified exclusions, 267 completed questionnaires and the Dot-Probe Task. For planned comparisons, participants with a positive bias score were classified by social anxiety (LSAS 30–<60 vs. ≥60) and reassurance seeking (below vs. at or above the sample TRSS mean). Sixty participants were included in each emotion-specific analysis, with 15 per group. Separate two-way ANOVAs examined angry and disgusted faces.

Results: For angry faces, social anxiety was not significant, $F(1, 56) = 0.45$, $p = .504$, whereas reassurance seeking, $F(1, 56) = 6.88$, $p = .011$, and the social anxiety × reassurance seeking interaction, $F(1, 56) = 5.25$, $p = .026$, were significant. For disgusted faces, social anxiety, $F(1, 56) = 6.07$, $p = .017$, and reassurance seeking, $F(1, 56) = 4.48$, $p = .039$, were significant, whereas the interaction was not, $F(1, 56) = 3.82$, $p = .056$.

* Corresponding author

Email addresses: m_razzaghi@sbu.ac.ir

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Discussion: Within the selected positive-bias groups, higher reassurance seeking was associated with larger bias scores, but patterns differed by facial expression and social anxiety level. Because selection partly depended on the outcome and the study was cross-sectional, findings should be interpreted cautiously and replicated using the full bias-score distribution.

Keywords: social anxiety symptoms; attentional bias; reassurance seeking

1. Introduction

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterized by persistent fear of negative evaluation in social or performance situations and is often accompanied by avoidance of situations involving potential evaluation by others (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022). SAD is generally a chronic condition, with approximately 40–60% of affected individuals continuing to experience symptoms for up to four decades after symptom onset (Ruscio et al., 2008). Earlier onset has also been associated with greater persistence and chronicity of the disorder (Wittchen & Fehm, 2003). Therefore, identifying cognitive processes that contribute to the development and maintenance of social anxiety remains an important area of research.

Contemporary cognitive models propose that biased information processing, particularly attentional bias toward socially threatening information, plays a central role in the development and maintenance of social anxiety (Hirsch & Clark, 2004; Hofmann, 2007; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). This preferential allocation of attention toward threat-relevant information is thought to reflect limited attentional capacity being disproportionately captured by personally salient cues and has been widely investigated in anxiety-related psychopathology (Bar-Haim et al., 2007; Cisler & Koster, 2010). Consequently, attentional bias toward threatening social information has become one of the most extensively investigated cognitive mechanisms in social anxiety (Fistikci et al., 2015).

Despite substantial empirical interest, findings regarding attentional bias in social anxiety remain inconsistent. Several studies have reported attentional bias toward socially threatening information among individuals with elevated social anxiety, including threatening facial expressions and words (Gilboa-Schechtman et al., 1999; Pishyar et al., 2004). According to this perspective, preferential processing of threat has been proposed to contribute to exaggerated perceptions of danger in social situations and may thereby be associated with increased anxiety and reinforcement of maladaptive beliefs.

In contrast, other studies have found evidence for attentional avoidance of threatening social stimuli. These findings suggest that socially anxious individuals may divert attention away from external threat cues while simultaneously increasing self-focused attention and monitoring internal physiological sensations, ultimately intensifying subjective anxiety during social

interactions (Chen et al., 2002; Mansell et al., 1999). Other studies have reported no evidence of attentional bias, further highlighting the heterogeneity of findings in this literature (Neophytou & Panayiotou, 2022). Collectively, these divergent findings indicate that attentional bias in social anxiety may be influenced by additional cognitive or behavioral mechanisms that have not yet been fully identified. Thus, identifying factors that may account for these inconsistent findings has become an important focus of recent research (Dennis-Tiwary et al., 2019).

To account for these inconsistencies, researchers have increasingly examined variables that may help explain variation in attentional bias associated with social anxiety (Bradley et al., 2000; Buckner et al., 2010; Judah et al., 2013; Cisler & Koster, 2010). One explanation is that attentional processing may be shaped by individual differences in safety behaviors, which could account for variability in attentional bias among individuals with similar levels of social anxiety. Safety behaviors are thought to maintain anxiety by preventing individuals from disconfirming feared outcomes and by reinforcing threat monitoring (Evans et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022). Among these behaviors, reassurance seeking may be particularly relevant because it requires individuals to monitor others' reactions for cues of acceptance or rejection. Consequently, individuals with comparable levels of social anxiety may differ in attentional bias depending on the extent to which they rely on reassurance seeking. Despite this theoretical relevance, empirical research directly examining the association between reassurance seeking and attentional bias in social anxiety remains limited (Taylor et al., 2019).

Salkovskis (1985) defined reassurance seeking as the process of requesting information to confirm beliefs that an individual already holds. Within anxiety disorders, reassurance seeking is generally conceptualized as a safety behavior intended to reduce uncertainty and alleviate perceived threat. In the context of social anxiety, reassurance seeking behaviors typically involve attempts to obtain confirmation that one's performance has not been negatively evaluated by others (Osborne & Williams, 2013). Such behaviors may temporarily reduce distress by increasing perceived certainty and decreasing the anticipated likelihood of undesirable social outcomes (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010). However, growing evidence suggests that reliance on safety behaviors paradoxically contributes to the maintenance of anxiety disorders (Helbig-Lang & Petermann, 2010).

Several mechanisms may plausibly link reassurance seeking with attentional processing. Reassurance seeking can involve repeated monitoring of others' reactions for signs of approval, rejection, or safety, thereby consuming attentional resources and potentially altering the allocation of attention to socially relevant cues. Experimental research suggests that safety behaviors can influence fear reduction and the processing or reappraisal of threat during exposure (Sloan & Telch, 2002; Deacon & Maack, 2008). More broadly, cognitive models propose that reduced attentional control under anxiety may contribute to difficulty disengaging from threat-related information (Hirsch & Mathews, 2012). These findings provide a theoretical rationale for examining whether reassurance seeking is associated with attentional bias magnitude in social anxiety.

Empirical work directly linking reassurance seeking to attentional processing in social anxiety remains limited. Taylor et al. (2019) used a free-viewing eye-tracking paradigm and found that higher reassurance seeking was associated with reduced sustained attention to disgusted faces, a pattern interpreted as possible attentional avoidance. The present study extends this work in several respects. It uses a reaction-time-based Dot-Probe Task rather than free-viewing eye tracking, examines angry and disgusted expressions separately, and tests whether differences in attentional bias magnitude associated with reassurance seeking vary across lower and higher levels of social anxiety symptoms. These methodological and analytic differences provide an opportunity to examine whether reassurance seeking is related to threat-related attention under a different attentional paradigm and whether the pattern is consistent across distinct forms of social threat.

It was hypothesized that, among participants meeting the study's attentional bias criterion: (a) those with higher levels of social anxiety symptoms would show larger positive attentional bias scores toward threatening facial expressions than those with lower levels of social anxiety symptoms; (b) those with higher reassurance seeking would show larger positive attentional bias scores than those with lower reassurance seeking; and (c) the association between reassurance seeking and attentional bias magnitude would differ according to the level of social anxiety symptoms.

2. Method

This cross-sectional, nonexperimental group-comparison study examined group differences in the magnitude of positive attentional bias scores toward angry and disgusted facial expressions as a function of social anxiety symptoms and reassurance seeking. Separate two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for the two facial expressions using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The original study design specified a minimum of 15 participants per cell for the planned four-group comparison, yielding 60 participants for each emotion-specific analysis.

Participants

Participants were adults aged 18–60 years recruited from the general population using convenience sampling. A total of 395 individuals initially registered to participate. Of these, 76 withdrew before completing the study procedures. Among the remaining 319 individuals, 52 met one or more prespecified exclusion criteria and were not permitted to continue, leaving 267 participants with completed questionnaire and Dot-Probe data. Exclusion criteria included: (a) current or past alcohol or substance dependence; (b) a history of traumatic brain injury resulting in hospitalization or surgery; (c) uncorrected visual impairment; (d) a BDI-II score greater than 30; and (e) use of psychiatric medication within the preceding month.

Dot-Probe data were screened before group formation. Incorrect responses, reaction times below 200 ms or above 2000 ms, and within-participant reaction times more than 2.5 standard deviations from the participant's mean were removed; participants with more than 30% incorrect responses were excluded from Dot-Probe analyses. For the planned group comparisons,

participants were eligible if they showed a positive attentional bias score toward the relevant emotional facial expression and met the predefined social anxiety and reassurance seeking group criteria.

For each emotional expression, 60 eligible participants were included and classified into four groups (n = 15 per group) according to social anxiety symptoms (lower vs. higher) and reassurance seeking (lower vs. higher). When more than 15 eligible participants were available for a cell, participants were selected randomly to maintain equal group sizes. Thus, the analyses compared the magnitude of positive attentional bias scores across the four predefined groups for each facial expression.

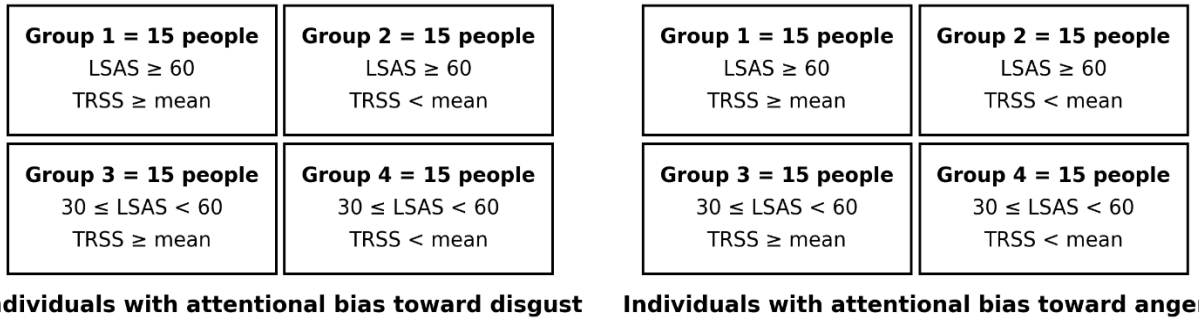


Figure 1. *Inclusion criteria and classification of participants into higher- and lower-social anxiety, higher- and lower-reassurance seeking groups*

Measures

Dot-Probe Task

Attentional bias toward threatening stimuli was assessed using the Dot-Probe Task. During each trial, two facial stimuli—one emotional and one neutral—were presented simultaneously on opposite sides of the computer screen. After 500 ms, both images disappeared and a probe appeared in the location previously occupied by one of the faces. Participants were instructed to indicate, as quickly and accurately as possible, whether the probe appeared on the right or left side of the screen. Faster responses to probes replacing emotional faces were interpreted as evidence of attentional bias toward the corresponding emotional stimulus.

Stimuli depicting angry, disgusted, and neutral facial expressions were selected from the Karolinska Directed Emotional Faces (KDEF) database (Lundqvist et al., 1998), with an equal number of male and female faces. The task consisted of 60 experimental trials. Prior to the experimental phase, participants completed practice trials using neutral-neutral face pairs. Participants were required to complete one practice block without errors before proceeding to the main task; otherwise, practice trials continued until task instructions were fully understood. The experimental trials comprised three equally sized conditions presented in random order: angry-neutral, disgust-neutral, and neutral-neutral face pairs. During each trial, images measuring 567 × 762 pixels were presented approximately 3 cm apart.

Attentional bias scores were calculated by subtracting the mean reaction time for congruent trials (i.e., probes replacing emotional faces) from the mean reaction time for incongruent trials (i.e., probes replacing neutral faces). Positive scores therefore indicated relatively faster responding when the probe appeared in the location of the emotional face, reflecting preferential attention toward the threatening stimulus. This conventional reaction-time difference score has been widely used in studies of attentional bias in social anxiety, particularly in group-comparison designs using emotional facial stimuli (Bantin et al., 2016; Molloy & Anderson, 2020). Evidence from Iranian samples has also examined the psychometric properties of Dot-Probe indices. In a study of 362 Iranian adults, Nasiry et al. (2021) evaluated internal consistency, test–retest reliability, and criterion validity of a Dot-Probe task and showed that psychometric performance varied according to the method used to calculate attentional-bias scores. More broadly, previous research suggests that the reliability of Dot-Probe indices can vary according to task parameters, scoring procedures, and the purpose for which the measure is used, with particular caution warranted when bias scores are interpreted as stable individual-difference measures (Molloy & Anderson, 2020; Nasiry et al., 2021). In the present study, the conventional bias score was used for the planned group-level comparisons of attentional allocation toward threatening facial expressions.

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)

Social anxiety symptoms were assessed using the self-report version of the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), a widely used measure of fear and avoidance across 24 social and performance situations. Each situation is rated separately for fear/anxiety and avoidance, yielding a total score reflecting social anxiety symptom severity.

For the purposes of the study's predefined grouping procedure, and informed by the LSAS-SR classification thresholds reported by Rytwinski et al. (2009), scores from 30 to <60 were categorized as the lower-social anxiety group and scores ≥60 as the higher-social anxiety group. Participants with scores below 30 were not eligible for the group-comparison analyses. The Persian version has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, including strong internal consistency and confirmed factorial validity (Hasani et al., 2017). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .96 for the total scale, .94 for the Fear subscale, and .92 for the Avoidance subscale.

Threat-Related Reassurance Seeking Scale (TRSS)

Reassurance seeking behavior was measured using the Threat-Related Reassurance Seeking Scale (TRSS; Cougle et al., 2012), an eight-item self-report measure assessing reassurance seeking behaviors across two domains: Evaluative Threat (TRSS-E) and General Threat (TRSS-G). A total score is calculated by summing responses across all items. For the group-comparison analyses, participants were classified relative to the sample mean of the TRSS total score: scores at or above the mean defined the higher-reassurance seeking group, whereas scores below the mean defined the lower-reassurance seeking group.

The original validation study reported excellent internal consistency for the total scale (α = .95), as well as for the General Threat (α = .91) and Evaluative Threat (α = .94) subscales. The Persian version demonstrated satisfactory reliability (α = .82; Razzaghi, 2021). In the present

study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .91 for the total scale, .85 for the Evaluative Threat subscale, and .91 for the General Threat subscale.

Beck Depression Inventory–II (BDI-II)

Depressive symptom severity was assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory–II (BDI-II), a 21-item self-report questionnaire developed by Beck and colleagues (1996) for individuals aged 13 years and older. Each item is rated on a four-point scale ranging from 0 to 3. In the present study, a total score greater than 30 was used as a prespecified exclusion criterion.

Previous research has demonstrated strong internal consistency and concurrent validity for the BDI-II (Storch et al., 2004). The Persian version has likewise demonstrated strong reliability and construct validity (Stefan-Dabson et al., 2007). In the current study, the BDI-II demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

3. Results

Participant Characteristics

Participants included in the reported group-comparison analyses ranged in age from 18 to 60 years (M = 25.5, SD = 7.9). Women represented 63.5% of the reported analytic participants, and men accounted for 36.5%.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for the Primary Study Variables*

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Attentional bias toward anger	27.17	21.83	0.92	0.58
Attentional bias toward disgust	32.14	24.39	0.89	-0.42
Social anxiety symptoms	58.28	18.93	0.42	-0.35
Threat-related reassurance seeking	28.36	8.80	0.52	0.20

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Attentional bias scores represent reaction-time differences (ms) on the Dot-Probe Task.

Descriptive statistics for the primary study variables are presented in Table 1. Mean attentional bias scores were 27.17 (SD = 21.83) for angry facial expressions and 32.14 (SD = 24.39) for disgusted facial expressions. Mean scores for social anxiety symptoms and threat-related reassurance seeking were 58.28 (SD = 18.93) and 28.36 (SD = 8.80), respectively.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Attentional Bias by Social Anxiety and Reassurance Seeking Groups*

Social Anxiety	Reassurance Seeking	n	Anger M	Anger SD	Disgust M	Disgust SD

High	High	15	29.80	19.38	39.72	28.71
High	Low	15	28.06	24.91	38.79	21.78
High	Combined	30	28.93	21.95	39.25	25.04
Low	High	15	38.26	23.91	36.78	24.34
Low	Low	15	12.55	8.52	13.29	10.18
Low	Combined	30	25.41	21.95	25.04	21.88
Combined	High	30	34.03	21.81	38.25	26.20
Combined	Low	30	20.31	19.92	26.04	21.14
Combined	Combined	60	27.17	21.83	32.14	24.39

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Bias scores reflect reaction-time differences (ms) on the Dot-Probe Task; positive values indicate greater attentional allocation toward the emotional (vs. neutral) face.

Table 3 *Two-Way ANOVA Results for Attentional Bias Toward Angry and Disgusted Facial Expressions*

Effect	df	Anger			Disgust		
		F	p	ηp^2	F	p	ηp^2
Social anxiety symptoms	1, 56	0.45	.504	.008	6.07	.017	.098
Reassurance seeking	1, 56	6.88	.011	.109	4.48	.039	.074
Interaction	1, 56	5.25	.026	.086	3.82	.056	.064

Note. df = degrees of freedom; F = F value from the analysis of variance; p = probability value; ηp^2 = partial eta squared

Before hypothesis testing, demographic characteristics were compared across groups. No statistically significant group differences were detected in age, sex, or educational level.

Levene's tests were not statistically significant for either analysis: angry expressions, $F(3, 56) = 2.55$, $p = .065$; disgusted expressions, $F(3, 56) = 2.54$, $p = .066$. Thus, the tests did not provide statistically significant evidence against the homogeneity-of-variance assumption, although both p values were close to .05. Descriptive statistics for the four experimental groups are presented in Table 2, and the ANOVA results are summarized in Table 3.

The main effect of social anxiety symptoms on attentional bias toward angry facial expressions was not statistically significant, $F(1, 56) = 0.45$, $p = .504$, $\eta p^2 = .008$. The main effect of reassurance seeking was significant, $F(1, 56) = 6.88$, $p = .011$, $\eta p^2 = .109$. The interaction between social anxiety symptoms and reassurance seeking was also significant, $F(1, 56) = 5.25$, $p = .026$, $\eta p^2 = .086$.

Inspection of the group means showed little difference in attentional bias scores between the higher- and lower-reassurance seeking groups among participants with higher social anxiety

symptoms. In contrast, among participants in the lower-social anxiety group, those with higher reassurance seeking had larger positive attentional bias scores toward angry facial expressions than those with lower reassurance seeking. This pattern corresponds to the significant interaction reported above.

The two-way ANOVA for attentional bias toward disgusted facial expressions showed statistically significant main effects of social anxiety symptoms, $F(1, 56) = 6.07$, $p = .017$, $\eta p^2 = .098$, and reassurance seeking, $F(1, 56) = 4.48$, $p = .039$, $\eta p^2 = .074$. Within the analyzed sample, participants in the higher-social anxiety group had larger positive bias scores toward disgusted faces than those in the lower-social anxiety group, and participants in the higher-reassurance seeking group had larger positive bias scores than those in the lower-reassurance seeking group.

The interaction between social anxiety symptoms and reassurance seeking did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 56) = 3.82$, $p = .056$, $\eta p^2 = .064$. Because the interaction was non-significant, simple effects were not formally tested; the pattern visible in the group means in Table 2 — in which the effect of reassurance seeking appeared larger among participants with lower social anxiety symptoms — should therefore be treated as descriptive and interpreted with caution rather than as a confirmed statistical effect.

Across the two analyses, reassurance seeking group membership was associated with differences in the magnitude of positive attentional bias scores. Social anxiety group membership was associated with attentional bias magnitude for disgusted, but not angry, facial expressions. The social anxiety × reassurance seeking interaction was statistically significant for angry faces, whereas the corresponding interaction for disgusted faces did not reach statistical significance. These patterns indicate that the relationship between reassurance seeking and the conventional Dot-Probe bias score may vary by facial expression and social anxiety level.

4. Discussion

The present study examined whether reassurance seeking was associated with differences in the magnitude of attentional bias toward threatening facial expressions across lower and higher levels of social anxiety symptoms. The hypotheses concerned group differences in positive attentional bias scores for angry and disgusted expressions and whether the pattern associated with reassurance seeking varied by social anxiety level.

The results were partially consistent with Hypothesis (a). The higher- and lower-social anxiety groups did not differ significantly in attentional bias scores toward angry facial expressions, whereas a significant group difference was observed for disgusted facial expressions, with larger positive bias scores in the higher-social anxiety group. This pattern is broadly compatible with studies reporting heightened attention to socially threatening information among individuals with elevated anxiety or social anxiety, while also adding to evidence that the magnitude and direction of attentional bias can vary across stimuli and paradigms (Abend et al., 2018; Koster et al., 2005; Pishyar et al., 2004; Roberts et al., 2010).

Disgusted facial expressions may be particularly relevant in social-evaluative contexts because they may be interpreted as threatening or negatively evaluative by socially anxious individuals

(Yoon & Zinbarg, 2007). One possible interpretation is therefore that participants with higher social anxiety symptoms were more sensitive to disgust-related social cues in the present task. This interpretation remains tentative because the study did not directly assess participants' appraisal of the facial expressions.

The absence of a significant social anxiety group difference for angry expressions is compatible with reports of null or inconsistent group differences in threat-related attention (Duval et al., 2020; Staugaard, 2010). Methodological features may contribute to such variation. The present study used a non-clinical, symptom-based sample, and the 500-ms presentation interval may reflect a mixture of relatively early and later attentional processes. Differences in sample characteristics, stimulus properties, task parameters, and scoring approaches should therefore be considered when comparing findings across studies.

The results were consistent with Hypothesis (b) for both facial expressions in the present analyses: the higher-reassurance seeking groups showed larger positive attentional bias scores toward angry and disgusted faces than the lower-reassurance seeking groups. Importantly, this pattern differs from Taylor et al. (2019), who used a free-viewing eye-tracking paradigm and found that greater reassurance seeking was associated with reduced sustained attention to disgusted faces, which they interpreted as possible avoidance of threat. The discrepancy may reflect differences in the attentional process captured by the two paradigms, the duration and mode of stimulus presentation, the reassurance seeking measure, and the analytic approach. Accordingly, the present findings are better viewed as extending, rather than replicating, the Taylor et al. results.

The results were consistent with Hypothesis (c) for angry but not disgusted facial expressions. For angry faces, the significant interaction indicated that the difference associated with reassurance seeking was more evident in the lower-social anxiety group, whereas attentional bias scores were similar across reassurance seeking levels in the higher-social anxiety group. One possible interpretation is that the processes associated with reassurance seeking may be more detectable when social anxiety symptoms are less pronounced; however, the present cross-sectional design does not establish the direction or mechanism of this association.

The fact that this interaction emerged for anger but not disgust also suggests that different threat expressions may engage partially different attentional processes. Anger can signal direct interpersonal hostility, whereas disgust can communicate rejection or negative social evaluation. It is therefore possible that reassurance seeking behavior relates differently to these cues. Because the present study did not directly test the perceived meaning of the expressions or the temporal components of attention, this explanation should be regarded as a hypothesis for further study rather than a confirmed mechanism.

For disgusted expressions, the interaction did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 56) = 3.82$, $p = .056$, $\eta p^2 = .064$. Although the group means showed a pattern resembling that observed for anger, the non-significant interaction should not be interpreted as evidence of moderation. Replication with larger samples would be useful for determining whether this pattern is stable.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, eligibility for the

group-comparison analyses required a positive attentional bias score for the relevant facial expression. Because the outcome variable was therefore involved in participant selection, the range of attentional bias scores was restricted, and the findings apply only to variation in the magnitude of positive bias within the selected groups; they should not be interpreted as evidence about the presence or absence of attentional bias in the broader population. Second, cell sizes were modest (n = 15 per group), which limited statistical power, particularly for interaction effects. Third, social anxiety symptoms and reassurance seeking were assessed by self-report. Fourth, the cross-sectional, non-clinical design does not permit causal conclusions about the direction of associations between reassurance seeking and attentional bias scores. In addition, the study was conducted using an online implementation of the Dot-Probe Task, and variation in participants' testing environments could not be controlled as closely as in a laboratory setting.

Clinical and Theoretical Implications

The findings suggest that reassurance seeking may be relevant to individual differences in threat-related attentional processing, although the association varied across social anxiety levels and facial expressions. If this pattern is replicated in longitudinal or experimental research, reassurance seeking could be considered alongside other safety behaviors when examining cognitive processes associated with social anxiety. At present, the results support further investigation rather than a specific clinical recommendation.

Future research should use larger, prospectively designed samples and should examine the temporal ordering of reassurance seeking, social anxiety symptoms, and attentional processing. It would also be informative to analyse the full distribution of attentional bias scores, including positive, near-zero, and negative scores, rather than focusing only on participants who meet a positive-bias criterion. Future studies may further benefit from comparing conventional reaction-time difference scores with newer response-based or trial-level indices and, where feasible, combining Dot-Probe measures with eye tracking or other attentional measures. Such designs could help determine whether the present group differences reflect stable individual differences, task-specific effects, or dynamic changes in attention over time.

5. Conclusion

In the present group-comparison analyses, higher reassurance seeking was associated with larger positive attentional bias scores toward both angry and disgusted facial expressions, whereas higher social anxiety symptoms were associated with larger bias scores only for disgusted faces. For angry faces, the association with reassurance seeking differed by social anxiety level, with a larger group difference among participants with lower social anxiety symptoms. These findings suggest that reassurance seeking may be related to variation in threat-related attention, but the pattern appears to depend on both the type of social threat and the level of social anxiety symptoms. Because the study was cross-sectional and used a conventional reaction-time bias index, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary associations that warrant replication using larger samples and complementary attentional measures.

Data Availability and Supplementary Data

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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