Reviewer's report

Title: Effects of Emotion Recognition Training on Mood among Individuals with High Levels of Depressive Symptoms

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Reviewer: Barney D Dunn

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript outlines a protocol for a randomized controlled trial of a facial recognition training paradigm that has shown promise in alleviating depression symptoms. In my view this is a very well designed study on an important topic that has considerable potential to improve depression outcomes in the long term, and I have little negative to say about it. It is rare in the experimental psychopathology literature for people to advance publish trial protocols and this represents excellent practice in my view. I have only minor discretionary revisions to suggest, which the authors can choose to act on if they so wish.

1. It would be useful to more explicitly justify why a cut off of greater than 14 is being used on the BDI-II for inclusion (in my view a sensible choice, but this needs spelling out to the reader)

2. When reviewing current guidelines for managing depression, it might be useful to describe current low intensity IAPT treatments in addition to individual CBT (e.g. computerized CBT).

3. I wondered why the PANAS was being administered in a form of mood over the past day. There is likely to be day to day variability in mood that may cloud results, so an alternative approach might be to rate mood over the past week.

4. As I understand it, the study is excluding people who have used psychotropic medicines in the past five weeks. It may be useful to examine if prior psychotropic medication use outside of this five week window also influences results.

5. It was not clear to me why the behavioural measures were not also being given at baseline. This raises the possibility that group differences on these measures prior to intervention could confound results. Not having baseline measures might also weaken potential mediation analyses down the line (i.e. assessing whether changes on these behavioural measures during the intervention accounts for symptom improvement). It would perhaps be helpful to more explicitly articulate this rationale or change the design to also take them at baseline.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests