Reviewer’s report

Title: Attentional Avoidance in Peer Victimized Individuals with and without Psychiatric Disorders

Version: 1 Date: 02 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Victoria Ashley

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Review: Attentional Avoidance in Peer-Victimized Individuals with and without Psychiatric Disorders
Manuscript Number: PSYO-D-18-00153R1

Summary

In this study, the authors investigated the possibility that inconsistencies found in studies of attentional bias could have a basis in "previous experiences of relational peer victimization in clinical populations." The current study may be the first to "examine the extent to which experiences of relational peer victimization contribute to the implementation of attentional biases in subjects with and without psychiatric disorders". To do this, the study compared participants with diagnosed psychiatric disorders and healthy controls on two emotional attention tasks, and divided each group into those who were determined to be relational peer victims and those who were not. Results showed delayed response times and potential avoidance on emotional words relative to neutral words for peer-victimized subjects, but not for psychiatric disorder subjects and non-peer-victimized controls.

After reviewing the paper, I feel that it can make a positive contribution to the literature and I expect I will be able to recommend that it be accepted for publication, pending additional information, clarifications, etc., described below. I will admit that I have not had enough time to fully review the dot-probe section, so that is not included in my comments.

Broad Concerns / Questions

* Broadly, all of the sub-group data needs to be put in the form of a table so that each subgroup's full characteristics are spelled out without having to infer the information.

* Mean RTs and SDs for interference and error rates for each task should be included in the Results section and/or a table. Hard to fully evaluate without those.

* I have concerns about the statistical design of a series of planned ANOVAs. Typically, most studies conduct an omnibus ANOVA initially.
**Abstract**

- The abstract should include the numbers of participants in each group, even if they differ by task.
- Although the psychiatric group results are reported in the abstract, the HC's should be mentioned also.

**Methods**

- **Materials** - The studies referenced (pg. 9, lines 9-13) for the words appear to have used a different number of words. Having the word list properties described would be helpful, even just valence, arousal, word length and frequency for the different categories.

- **Stroop Procedure** - We know the ITI is 200 ms and that the words would stay on until the button was pressed - was there an upper limit for the presentation of the word? Was there a fixation cross? And what program was used to present the stimuli?

- **Stroop Procedure** - How many times was each word was repeated? And were the word types presented together in mixed blocks or each valence in a separate block?

**Results**

- It seems that the lack of an emotional Stroop effect in the psychiatric group might be expected. It is a mixed group with different issues, perhaps different medications, and the emotional Stroop effect is typically found for anxiety disorders, which -- except for the 2 social phobics -- were not present in the psychiatric group. Nor did the psychiatric group differ in trait anxiety from controls, apparently.

- The Results section would benefit including mean RT data in the analysis as well as the interference differences. I find the use of numerous separate ANOVAs, and four different groups, without an omnibus F ANOVA, to be a concern. Nonetheless, I think the ANOVAs of Neg and Pos should at least be in separate paragraphs for clarity, since they are two separate analyses.

**Discussion**

- This sentence in the Discussion (pg 18, lines 11-13) needed more context or clarification: "As a function of earlier peer victimization, participants' responses to negative as well as positive words compared to neutral words shifted from faster to delayed reactions."
Pg 20, lines 3-10 - This statement needs better examples of findings of attentional biases in reaction to "any emotional stimuli". The Buckley (2002) study [123] appears to refer to two types of threat stimuli (Panic and PTSD), and does not include positive. And while the Paunovic study (2002) [124] does not show significant differences of word type in the PTSD group, this study is included in Larsen, Mercer & Balota's (2006) study on lexical characteristics of words being used in emotional Stroop studies - their analysis table indicated that the Paunovic study's positive words were not balanced for frequency. Thus, it would be better to use more recent studies to support the lack of a difference seen between negative and positive emotional stimuli (I've seen some research with individuals with social anxiety that show similar responses to any valence, but generally with anxiety disorders the design of the task and the quality of the stimuli need to be examined, since those will make a difference).

The central issue of the role that the social component of adverse child experiences play in other conditions could be restated more in the discussion, along with suggestions, perhaps, for the use of the questionnaire in studies of attentional biases.

* Figures

FIGURES need to include the measurements, i.e., milliseconds.

* References

A good summary study on attentional bias inconsistencies in the dot-probe (and other measures) has come out recently (McNally, 2018). It is worth being aware of, if not mentioning.

References:

McNally, R. J. (2018). Attentional bias for threat: Crisis or opportunity?. Clinical psychology review.


Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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