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Shifts of Facial Attention Distribution in Trait Anxiety Participants

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Abstract: To determine if trait anxiety affects the distribution of facial attention, 40 NMSU undergraduates participated in three one-hour sessions wherein an experimenter wearing 4 L.E.D lights (left-cheek, chin, right-cheek, forehead) realistically presented, per session, 40 narratives, each divided into six segments, in one of five negative (afraid, angry, embarrassed, frightened, sad) styles. During each narrative section either none or one of four lights fired for 5ms.

Accompanying their significant reduction in trait anxiety scores ($t = 4.147$, $df = 19$, $p = .001$, $\alpha = .05$), high anxiety participants also increased their distribution of facial attention, with significant improvement in detecting left-cheek lights ($t = 3.589$, $df = 4$, $p = .015$) and nearly significant improvement ($t = 2.460$, $df = 4$, $p = .063$) for right-cheek lights. Low anxiety participants did not exhibit any significant results.

Our data suggests that high trait anxiety participants redistribute their facial attention over time: even in response to overwhelmingly negative stimuli.