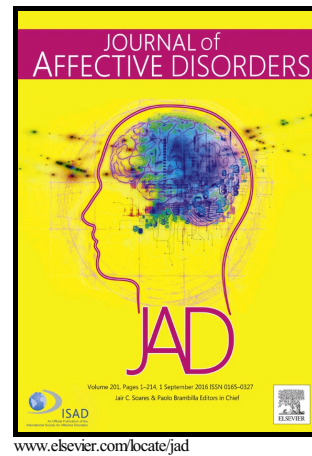


Author's Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0165-0327(16)30779-0
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.10.048>
Reference: JAD8613

To appear in: *Journal of Affective Disorders*

Received date: 9 May 2016
Revised date: 27 October 2016
Accepted date: 28 October 2016

Cite this article as: Nauder Namaky, Miranda L. Beltzer, Alexandra J. Werntz, Ann E. Lambert, Derek M. Isaacowitz and Bethany A. Teachman, Moderators of age effects on attention bias toward threat and its association with anxiety *Journal of Affective Disorders*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.10.048>

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Moderators of age effects on attention bias toward threat and its association with anxiety

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Abstract

Objective: The current study used a research domain criteria (RDoC) approach to assess age differences in multiple indicators of attention bias and its ties to anxiety, examining stimulus domain and cognitive control as moderators of older adults' oft-cited positivity effect (bias towards positive and away from negative stimuli, when compared to younger adults).

Method: 38 younger adults and 38 older adults were administered a battery of cognitive control and trait and state anxiety measures, and completed a dot-probe task to assess attention bias, during which reaction time and fixation duration (using eye-tracking) were recorded for negative and neutral social (a salient threat domain for younger adults) and physical (a salient threat domain for older adults) stimuli.

Results: Mixed-effects models demonstrated that older adults were faster to react to dot-probe trials when the probe appeared in the place of negative (vs. neutral) physical stimuli, but displayed no difference in reaction time for social stimuli. Also, older (vs. younger) adults with lower levels of cognitive control were less negatively biased in their visual fixation to social stimuli. A negative reaction time attention bias on the dot-probe task predicted greater trait anxiety among participants with low levels of cognitive control, with a more complex pattern predicting state anxiety.

Conclusion: Older adults do attend to social and physical stimuli differently. When stimuli concern a social threat, older adults do not preferentially attend to either neutral or negative stimuli. However, when stimuli concern physical threat, older adults preferentially attend to

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