

Abstract

The current study examines whether trait anxiety affects participants' ability to recognize facial emotions. Past research has found that high levels of anxiety may result in an inaccurate recognition of emotion. Specifically, possibly through mechanisms such as the Facial Feedback Hypothesis, Embodied Emotion Simulation, and the role that the amygdala and medial prefrontal cortex play in attending to threatening information, past research has suggested that individuals with anxiety are more likely to misclassify nonthreatening emotions as threatening. However, few studies have examined this relationship with the added factor of ambiguity created by surgical masks. In this study, college students completed a trait anxiety measure and judged the expression shown in masked and unmasked photographs of Black and White males and females who expressed anger, fear, disgust, happiness, calm, sadness, or neutrality. Three hypotheses were tested: Participants with higher trait anxiety would be less accurate at identifying masked and unmasked emotions than participants with lower trait anxiety overall; Participants with high trait anxiety would misclassify non-threatening masked and unmasked emotions (happy, calm, neutral) as threatening emotions (anger, disgust, fear, sadness) more often than participants with low trait-anxiety; and participants with high and with low trait anxiety would perform more accurately in assessing unmasked emotions than in assessing masked emotions. There was no significant correlation between trait anxiety and overall accuracy of emotion recognition nor was there a significant correlation between trait anxiety and the attribution of non-threatening to threatening emotions. There was a significant difference between accuracy in emotion recognition of unmasked vs. masked faces.

Honors College
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306