

***The Association between Perceived Status and Perceptual Sensitivity to Threat***  
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Low socioeconomic status (SES) has a profound influence on physical health throughout life with relations found between both disease outcomes and risk factors for disease, e.g., higher blood pressure, lower rates of physical activity (Adler et al., 1994; Anderson & Armstead, 1995; Chen, Matthews & Boyce, 2002). Recently, there has been some attention directed at the role of threat appraisals in this association. Specifically, it has been shown that low SES young adults interpret ambiguous video scenarios more negatively than their high SES counterparts (Chen, Langer, Raphaelson, & Matthews, 2004). Furthermore, this increased threat appraisal has been found to partially mediate the relationship between SES and reactivity suggesting a potential role of interpretation of life events in physical disease outcomes.

The current study will extend this prior work by examining whether differences in SES differences are associated with a perceptual sensitivity to threatening information. Specifically, we theorize that one way that individuals perceive threat from others is via the perception of negative emotion, e.g., anger, in the faces of those that they are interacting with. It is plausible then, that the individuals low in SES have a greater sensitivity to detecting threat in the faces of others. Similarly, they may be less sensitive to positive information carried on in the face.

It is also unclear whether childhood experiences associated with growing up in a lower SES family and neighborhood are responsible for sensitivity to threat, or whether this sensitivity is the result of currently perceiving oneself to be of lower status. We will therefore assess SES in two ways: 1) actual family SES measured through self-report questionnaires, as well as 2) manipulated SES.

Finally, since previous studies have shown that both state affect as well as personality dispositions influence perception of faces, we will monitor those characteristics as well since it is plausible that manipulating SES perceptions will influence mood and, similarly, that there may be stable dispositional differences between those high and low SES.