

BINDING ACTION AND EMOTION IN FIRST-EPIISODE SCHIZOPHRENIA

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Abstract

Background/Aims: Several components of social cognition are compromised in schizophrenia (SCZ) from the early stage of the illness. In this study we first investigated whether mirror neuron-driven embodied simulation (mnES) is altered in first-episode SCZ. Second, we tested whether emotional cues impact on the mnES in SCZ patients. **Methods:** Twenty-two SCZ patients and 22 healthy controls (HCs) observed goal-related actions in either a neutral or emotional context during functional magnetic resonance imaging scanning. **Results:** Observation of neutral action elicited a lower activity in the frontoparietal network in SCZ patients, as compared to HCs. Particularly, activation in the left inferior parietal lobule in response to the same condition negatively correlated with patients' self-experience disturbances. Moreover, observation of an action performed by an angry agent produced poorer neural activity in the right anterior insula in SCZ patients as compared to HCs. This difference was mostly due to the negative β -values shown by SCZ patients, which positively correlated with their empathy scores. No differences were found contingent upon the observation of an action performed by a happy agent. **Conclusion:** Our results show that emotional cues allow SCZ patients to partially recover mnES. However, their understanding of the emotional components of the actions of others will likely remain deficient.

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