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Emotion recognition via facial expression and affective prosody in schizophrenia: A methodological review

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Abstract

Disturbances in affect recognition may be one of the most pervasive and serious aspects of the schizophrenic patient's interpersonal problems. Interest in the decoding of emotional information in schizophrenia has focused on facial affect recognition with 29 experimental papers on that topic published since 1987. A smaller literature exists on the topic of recognition of affect in speech and there are at least seven studies, which have examined both face and voice perception in the same individuals with schizophrenia. This paper includes a comprehensive analysis of the schizophrenia facial affect recognition research over the past decade and the schizophrenia literature on affective prosody, and provides the first review of the schizophrenia literature on multichannel emotion recognition research. The weight of evidence would suggest that individuals with schizophrenia experience problems in the perception of emotional material; however, the specificity, extent, and nature of the deficits are unclear. Emotion recognition research in schizophrenia should be informed by the general literature on emotion recognition with serious attention paid to methodological issues. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Schizophrenia; Emotion; Facial expression; Prosody

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1. Introduction

It has long been recognised that disturbance of affect is one of the cardinal features of schizophrenia (Bleuler, 1950; Kraepelin, 1919). The possibility that individuals with schizophrenia may be disturbed not only in their experience and/or expression of affect, but also in their ability to perceive emotion expressed by others, has received increasing attention over the past few decades. The literature on emotion per se is needed to inform the study of emotion recognition in schizophrenia with regard to key questions and methods of inquiry. The two main modalities for receiving information regarding emotion are visual, specifically facial expressions, and auditory. A substantial literature on these two topics exists in schizophrenia research and there are significant problems with 'making sense' of the results due to serious methodological shortcomings.

Two reviews have been published concerning facial affect recognition and schizophrenia. The first review (Morrison, Bellack, & Mueser, 1988) covered the period through to 1986 and is summarised herein. The second review undertaken by Mandal, Pandey, and Prasad (1998) spans the period 1974–1996. This latter review is selective (e.g., 11 decoding studies published between 1987 and 1996 are not included), does not include multichannel reports, and observations from the literature do not adequately take into account methodological issues, which renders conclusions tenuous. The facial affect recognition literature published subsequent to 1987 has, therefore, been re-examined by the present authors. Reviews of facial affect and prosody decoding have been included in two book chapters (Hellewell & Whittaker, 1998; Knight & Valner, 1993) covering a broader domain; both reviews have limitations similar to the paper of Mandal et al. and make methodological comments covered by Morrison, Bellack, and Mueser (1988), with particular emphasis on the differential deficit issue (discussed below). There are no published review papers on multichannel research with regard to emotion recognition in schizophrenia.

This paper reviews the decoding literature in schizophrenia on facial affect, affective prosody, and multichannel communication. In each of these three domains discussion begins with an outline of issues arising from the general literature and is followed by findings from schizophrenia research. Suggestions for future research are made concerning methodology and validation. The focus throughout is on methodological issues; etiological theories are not examined.

2. Facial affect recognition

2.1. General literature

Ekman and colleagues argue that there is unambiguous evidence of universality for the expressions of *happiness*, *anger*, *disgust*, *sadness*, *fear*, and *surprise* (Ekman, 1972; Ekman & Oster, 1979). The weight of evidence supports this (Ekman, 1994; Izard, 1994), although there have been challenges (e.g., Pilowsky & Katsikitis, 1994; Russell, 1994).

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