

Face Perception Predicts Affective Theory of Mind in Autism Spectrum Disorder but Not Schizophrenia or Typical Development

Link: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34180705/>

People with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and people with schizophrenia spectrum disorder (SCZ) often describe having difficulty understanding social situations. In this study, we wanted to improve our scientific understanding of how people with ASD, people with SCZ, and typically developing (TD) people process social information. To do this, we gave adults with ASD, adults with SCZ, and TD adults the Benton Facial Recognition Test, which measures how well individuals can recognize faces, and the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET), which measures how well individuals can recognize other people's emotions. We found that adults with either ASD or SCZ performed similarly on the RMET, and both groups had more difficulty recognizing emotions than TD adults. However, adults with ASD who had better facial recognition abilities were better able to recognize emotions, indicating a connection between facial recognition and emotion recognition that we did not find in other adult groups. This finding suggests that helping people improve their facial recognition skills may reduce social difficulties experienced by people with ASD, but not for people with SCZ. This is important because understanding the different reasons that people have difficulty with social interactions can help clinicians choose the best treatment targets for each patient's situation.