

Increasing emotional distancing with prism glasses: dissociated gender and adaptation direction effects on alexithymia in healthy individuals?

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Emotional processing is closely linked with spatial attention, which tends to prioritize emotional stimuli over neutral ones. The brain network responsible for directing spatial attention towards different sectors of the space also play a role in processing emotional stimuli. Recent evidence has identified a connection between the rightward shift in spatial attention, assessed through the line bisection task, and the challenges in comprehending one's own and others' emotional states—referred to as alexithymia.

Based on this evidence, this study hypothesized that alexithymia, might be affected through prismatic adaptation (PA), a standard protocol to modulate visuospatial attention.

A sample of 103 participants completed alexithymia questionnaires, Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and Perth Alexithymia Questionnaire (PAQ), in a counterbalanced order before and after a prismatic adaptation session (leftward, rightward, or neutral deviating prisms).

Results showed that leftward PA significantly increased alexithymia scores in healthy individuals, with a selective effect in women compared to men.

Our preliminary results suggest that the attentional shifts induced by leftward PA not only affect spatial tasks, but also emotional processing, particularly in how individuals perceive and interpret emotional proximity and distance. Consequently, alexithymia may be metaphorically likened to an impaired perception of emotional closeness and remoteness.

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Primary authors: FALZONE, Alessandra (Università di Messina); VICARIO, Carmelo Mario (Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies, University of Messina); LUCIFORA, Chiara (Department of Philosophy and Communication, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy); CULICETTO, Laura (Università degli Studi di Messina); Prof. MUCCIARDI, Massimo (Department of Cognitive Science, Education and Cultural Studies, University of Messina); Dr SCHINTU, Selene (Università di Trento)

Presenter: CULICETTO, Laura (Università degli Studi di Messina)

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