Happy or Sad? The Influence of Emotional Body Cues on Facial Expression Perception in Huntington's Disease

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Happy or Sad? The Influence of Emotional Body Cues on Facial Expression Perception in Huntington's Disease

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Research Abstract
Impaired emotion recognition is common in many neuro-psychiatric disorders, adding a

devastating social toll to the already challenging symptoms. One such disorder is Huntington's disease (HD), a neurodegenerative progressive condition in which motor and cognitive symptoms are further complicated by impaired emotion recognition. Unfortunately, despite decades of research, the vast majority of work on HD studied emotion perception using artificially posed faces void of any context. Yet recent work has shown that subtle emotional body cues can completely overturn the perceived emotion in real life emotional faces. For example, in a recent report my colleagues and I demonstrated that without body context cues, perceivers cannot differentiate real-life highly intense positive and negative faces [Aviezer et al., Science, in press]. Thus, it is clear that traditional neuropsychological research on emotion perception in HD is dated and needs to be bridged with contemporary work in social psychology and social neuroscience. To this end, the current studies will take an interdisciplinary approach and examine the perceptual mechanisms of face-body interactions in HD. Study 1 will use eye scanning to examine how perceived emotional body cues alter the visual scanning of facial expressions in HD. Study 2 will use facial EMG to examine how the perceived emotional body cues influence the automatic motor mimicry to perceived facial expressions in HD. Finally, study 3, will use fMRI to examine the neural processes involved in face-body integration in HD. These ecological perceptual-emotional measures combined with genetic, neuroanatomical and functional imaging biomarkers of disease progression, will have the power to portray, for the first time, a deep understanding of the neuropsychological mechanisms underlying impaired facial expression recognition in HD.

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