Online validation of a measure of social cognition through the manipulation of close-up shots in film

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Introduction

Fictional narratives can powerfully activate social cognition (SC), motivating the attribution of mental states to fictional characters (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Wood, Stoltz, Van Ness & Taylor, 2018). For this reason, they can be used to assess and measure SC as part of a test battery. But (1) this needs to be validated and (2) we are not sure if it can work remotely - with online testing. The aim of this study is to test references to mental states through manipulation of shot scale (close-ups) in a film and compare the results to existing standardised tests of SC, namely the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste & Plumb, 2001), a revised version of the Frith-Happé Animations (White, Coniston, Rogers & Frith, 2011), the Faux Pas Recognition Test (Baron-Cohen, O'Riordan, Jones, Stone & Plaisted, 1999), the Interpersonal Reacitivity Index (Davis, 1983), and the Autism Spectrum Quotient-Short (Hoekstra et al., 2011). This will allow the study to see if SC can be assessed online. Furthermore, previous research has shown that close-up shots can prompt social cognition. This manipulation serves as a check of the sensitivity of the measures to this effect when tested online.

Methodology

137 participants were recruited using Prolific and the study was conducted online using Qualtrics. A between-groups, experimental design was used. Participants completed a sociodemographic questionnaire before being randomly assigned to watch either the original film or a version with close-up shots of the character. Participants responded to two open-ended questions that quantitatively coded mental state references and then completed standardised SC measures and a self-report measure of autistic traits.
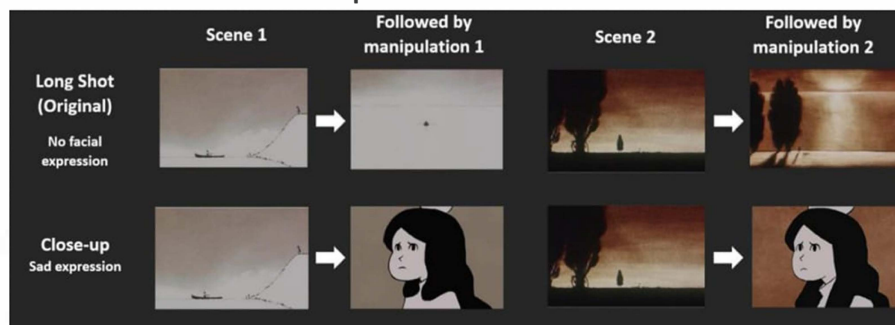
Analysis plan

Analysis is currently ongoing. Means and standard deviations for scores on SC measures will be calculated. Poisson regression will be used to assess the relationship between references to mental states in the open-ended questions and standardised SC measures.

Conclusion

We hypothesise that the total score on the open-ended questions will be positevely correlated with the scores on standardised SC measures and negatively correlated with autistic traits scores. Special attention will be given to the issue of collecting qualitative data online. In the current study, qualitative data are collected via Qualtrics on Prolific. In addition to their role as an outcome variable, these data can serve as attention checks to ensure data quality.