

Abstract

As understanding another's emotion entails using one's own past experiences to simulate their emotional state, one might assume that perspective shifting flexibility – a process known to increase mental alignment between self and other and enhance stimulative emotional sharing – would be associated with one's emotion ascription ability. However, prior research found no such association. Since both simulation and perspective shifting required distinction between the representation of self and other perspective, it was hypothesized that the coherence of other-representation of another's emotion would modulate the benefit of swift perspective taking in simulation. The emotions cued by facial expression and contextual information of an emotional avatar were systematically manipulated, such that when presented with incongruent emotion cued by facial expression and context, no coherent representation of the avatar's emotional state can be formed. Results showed that coherence of other-representation indeed modulated the association between flexible perspective shifting and emotion ascription accuracy, as the association was only found under no-conflict conditions, and not in the incongruent condition. The findings suggested that although in certain situations swift perspective shifting give these high-capacity individuals an edge in simulation, it may be that the features giving them the advantage limited their performance in ascribing emotions under incongruent conditions.