LATENT INHIBITION AND PSYCHOMETRICALLY DEFINED SCHIZOTYPY: AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2003

Abstract

The thesis adopted a personality-based approach to experimental psychopathology testing alternative interpretations of latent inhibition deficits as a function of psychotic-like features in non-clinical participants. Chapter 1 reviews the evidence on the continuity of psychotic-like experiences, describes the historical origins of dimensional views of psychosis, and discusses methodological advantages and pitfalls in schizotypy research. Chapter 2 reviews different sources of evidence on a link between disruption of latent inhibition and the schizophrenia continuum, as well different theories of latent inhibition, and discusses methodological issues in terms of the existing latent inhibition paradigms. The review suggests that the interpretation of the disruption of latent inhibition within the schizophrenia continuum remains elusive due to a number of methodological and theoretical problems. In Chapter 3, a preliminary evaluation of self-report psychotic-like experiences was examined in terms of the capacity of different psychometric scales to predict perceptual and decision biases, akin to those observed in schizophrenia, when searching for fast moving words. Additionally, this chapter examined whether various schizotypy traits were associated with the ability to identify fast moving words, prior to the development of this paradigm as a latent inhibition procedure (Experiments 1 & 2). In Chapter 4, a novel latent inhibition paradigm was introduced. Visual search of fast moving words was examined as a function of target preexposure, amount of pre-exposure, and schizotypy (STA), without the target/ distractor reversal employed in most past investigations of latent inhibition in humans, and without including a masking task (Experiment 3 & 4). Latent inhibition was found to be relatively disrupted in high-schizotypy scores, but intact in their low-schizotypy

counterparts. In Chapter 5, latent inhibition was examined in relation to schizotypy after procedural changes were introduced to address possible confounds in the previous experiments. In addition, in effort to evaluate attentional accounts, performance after stimulus preexposure was examined under individual testing (Experiment 5) and group testing (Experiment 6) conditions. In Chapter 6, in order to evaluate context effects on latent inhibition, and test predictions derived from opposing accounts, latent inhibition was assessed in high- and low-schizotypy scorers within a stable context (Experiment 7), and after a context change (Experiment 8). In Chapter 7, in order to evaluate whether the latent inhibition deficits are due to enhanced stimulus salience (related to a putative heightened perceptual awareness in high-schizotypy scorers), participants were conjointly tested in terms of latent inhibition and their ability to discriminate between different levels of stimulus salience, as assessed by a visual pop-out task (Experiments 9 & 10). In Chapter 8, a compound-stimulus discrimination paradigm was developed (Experiment 11), in order to test target/distractor shift-learning in different schizotypy dimensions (Experiment 12). In Chapter 9, a theoretical integration of the findings is proposed. The data obtained are discussed in terms of a two-component (attentional + associative) model of latent inhibition deficits.

Acknowledgments

To my supervisor, Professor Phil Reed, I extend sincere thanks for continuous support, encouragement and professional advice. Many thanks also to many anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions during the peer-reviewing process of papers submitted along the way. Special thanks are due to Professor Robert Lubow for his helpful suggestions at the early stage of the development of the novel latent inhibition paradigm.

I would like also to thank the many people who helped to make possible this research. I am grateful to the people that gave freely their time to participate in this research, and, most importantly, to the people who helped with the recruitment and testing of the participants: Robert Hart, Joanne Hadfield, Sara Nyame, Jeremy Wyatt, Andrea Lafourara, Angela Livaditis, Loredana Minini, Dino Petrides, Nick Sevdalis, Marriane Soh, Wing Yi Cheng, Chin Chin Esther Chan, Wing Chi Mak, Michelle Yip, Katy Robjant, Rory Trawber, Michael Ciarleglio, Helena Drury, Mayko Fukui, Lee Jones, Candice Siu, and Line Sverdrup-Thygenson for their valuable help with the data collection. Many thanks also are due to the people that provided me technical assistance: John McCarthy, Glyn Gowe, and Andrew King for their help with programming.

The research was financially supported by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) of the Greek government.

Publications arising from the present thesis:

Chapter 3

Tsakanikos, E., Sverdrup-Thygenson, L., & Reed, P. (2003). Latent inhibition and psychosis-proneness: visual search as a function of pre-exposure to the target and schizotypy level. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *34*(1), 575-589.

Chapter 4

Tsakanikos, E. (2001; November). "Seeing" words that are not there: word detection biases in psychometric schizotypy. Paper presented at the *5th European Meeting of Experimental Analysis of Behaviour*, Venice, Italy.

Chapter 6

Tsakanikos, E., & Reed, P. (in press). Latent inhibition and context change in schizotypy. *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Chapter 8

Tsakanikos, E., & Reed, P. (submitted). Compound-stimulus discrimination as a function of reversal shift and different dimensions of schizotypy.

Table of contents

Abstract…….. ii

Acknowledgements…….. iv

Table of contents…….. vi

Index of tables…..…… xi

Index of figures..…… xiii

Appendices……..…… xv

CHAPTER 1 Schizotypy: a review of basic concepts and evidence…….. 1

1.1 The continuity of psychotic experiences……. 1

1.2 Genetic and longitudinal studies…….. 5

1.3 Historical origins of dimensional views of psychosis……. 8

1.4 Psychoticism, schizotypy and shizotaxia…….. 11

1.5 Fully dimensional versus taxonometric views of schizotypy……. 15

1.6 The measurement of psychotic-like traits…….. 21

1.7 Evidence of the ‘attentional distractibility’ in schizophrenia and schizotypy…….. 24

1.8 Summary of the schizotypy view……. 29

CHAPTER 2 The disruption of latent inhibition in schizophrenia and schizotypy…….. 31

2.1 Latent inhibition…….. 31

2.2 Theories of latent inhibition…….. 33

2.2.1 Attentional theories……. 33

2.2.2 Associative theories…….. 36

2.2.3 Network models……. 41

2.3 Latent inhibition and schizophrenia……. 42

2.4 Experimental paradigms of latent inhibition: conceptual and methodological limitations…..…….. 46

2.5 Interpretations of latent inhibition deficits…… 53

2.6 Conclusions from the review……. 60

2.7 Outline/logical sequence of the empirical studies…….. 61

CHAPTER 3 Visual search of fast moving words as a function of different schizotypy dimensions…. 64

3.1 Introduction …….. 64

3.2 Decision biases in positive symptomatology of schizophrenia……. 65

3.3 Can psychotic-like features predict perceptual and decision biases?……... 66

3.4 Experiment 1……. 68

3.4.1 Method……. 69

3.4.2 Results……. 73

3.5 Experiment 2……. 77

3.5.1 Method……. 78

3.5.2 Results……. 78

3.6 Discussion…….. 83

CHAPTER 4 Introducing a novel latent inhibition paradigm: visual search as a function of target preexposure and schizotypy level……. 87

4.1 Introduction…….. 87

4.2 The problem of comparability between human and non-human paradigms…… 89

4.3 Experiment 3…… 92

4.3.1 Method…… 94

4.3.2 Results…… 96

4.4 Experiment 4…… 101

4.4.1 Method…… 102

4.4.2 Results…… 102

4.5 Combined analysis…….. 105

4.6 Discussion…….. 107

CHAPTER 5 **Schizotypy and properties of stimulus preexposure under crowded and uncrowded conditions**…… **113**

5.1 Introduction…… 113

5.2 Properties of stimulus preexposure and alternative interpretations of latent inhibition deficits……... 114

5.3 Experiment 5…… 120

5.3.1 Method…… 121

5.3.2 Results…… 122

5.4 Experiment 6…… 126

5.4.1 Method…… 127

5.4.2 Results…… 128

5.5 Discussion…… 130

CHAPTER 6 **Latent inhibition and context change in schizotypy…… 136**

6.1 Introduction…… 136

6.2 Experiment 7…… 142

6.2.1 Method…… 144

6.2.1 Results…… 146

6.3 Experiment 8…… 149

6.3.1 Method…… 151

6.3.2 Results…… 152

6.4 Discussion…… 155

CHAPTER 7 **Latent inhibition and visual-pop out as a function of different schizotypy dimensions…. 159**

7.1 Introduction…… 159

7.2 Dimensions of schizotypy and latent inhibition deficits…… 160

7.3 Experiment 9…… 162

7.3.1 Method…… 162

7.3.2 Results…… 163

7.4 Is the disruption of latent inhibition a result of enhanced stimulus salience?…… 169

7.5 Experiment 10…… 172

7.5.1 Method…… 173

7.5.2 Results…… 175

7.6 Discussion…… 179

7.6.1 Latent inhibition, visual pop-out and schizotypy….. 179

7.6.2 Latent inhibition deficits in different schizotypy dimensions…… 182

CHAPTER 8 Stimulus discrimination following set shifting in schizotypy……. 185

8.1 Introduction……. 185

8.2 Shift learning deficits with the schizophrenia spectrum……. 186

8.3 Experiment 11……... 189

8.3.1 Method……. 190

8.3.2 Results……. 192

8.4 Experiment 12……... 194

8.4.1 Method……. 194

8.4.2 Results……. 195

8.5 Discussion…….. 201

CHAPTER 9 Conclusions…….. 205

9.1 Introduction……. 205

9.2 Cognitive biases a function of psychotic-like traits: implications……. 206

9.3 The role of the masking task in latent inhibition deficits……. 211

9.4 Evaluating the evidence for memory and attentional-based explanations of latent inhibition deficits……. 216

9.5 One or more sources of latent inhibition deficits?…. 220

9.6 Summary……. 224

References ……... 226

Appendices……..... 270

Index of tables

Table 3.1 Experiment 1. Descriptive statistics for the O-LIFE scales, and their inter-correlations……. **73**

Table 3.2 Experiment 1. The O-LIFE scales as predictor variables for the number of incorrect 'yes' responses… **74**

Table 3.3 Experiment 2. Descriptive statistics for the O-LIFE scales, and their inter-correlations……. **79**

Table 3.4 Experiment 2. The O-LIFE scales as predictor variables for the number of falsely reported words in non-word trials…….. **80**

Table 4.1 Experiment 3. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **97**

Table 4.2 Experiment 4. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **103**

Table 5.1 Experiment 5. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **123**

Table 5.2 Experiment 6. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **128**

Table 6.1 Experiment 7. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **147**

Table 6.2 Experiment 8. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **153**

Table 7.1 Experiments 9 and 10. Descriptive statistics of age and STA scores, and number of participants by experimental condition (PE = preexposed condition; NPE = non-preexposed condition) and schizotypy level……. **163**

Table 7.2 Experiments 9 and 10. Descriptive statistics for the O-LIFE scales, and their inter-correlations…….. **166**

Table 7.3 Excluded and included predictor variables in the stepwise model. Independent variable = total number of correct responses in the PE condition…….. **168**

Table 8.1 Experiment 12. Descriptive statistics for the O-LIFE scales, and their inter-correlations……..……. **195**

Table 8.2 Experiment 12. The O-LIFE scales as predictor variables for the number of correct words in Phase II (reversal)……. **198**

Index of figures

Figure 1.1 The usage of the term 'schizotypy' in empirical papers published in the last 10 years in peer-reviewed journals……. **15**

Figure 3.1 Experiment 1. Accuracy (panel A) and false alarms (panel B) as a function of schizotypy (STA) level….. **76**

Figure 3.2 Experiment 2. Correctly reported words (panel A), incorrectly reported words in the absence of a real word (panel B), and incorrectly reported words in the presence of a real word (panel C) as a function of schizotypy (STA) level……... **82**

Figure 4.1 Experiment 3. Mean number of correct words for high- and low-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of trials……. **98**

Figure 4.2 Experiment 4. Mean number of correct words for high- and low-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of trials……. **104**

Figure 5.1 Experiment 5. Mean number of correct words for high- and low-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of trials……. **124**

Figure 5.2 Experiment 6. Mean number of correct words for high- and low-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of trials……. **129**

Figure 6.1 Experiment 7. Mean number of correct responses for low- and high-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of eight trials…….. **148**

Figure 6.2 Experiment 8. Mean number of correct responses for low- and high-schizotypy scorers (STA level), for preexposed (PE) and non-preexposed (NPE) condition across four blocks of eight trials…….. **154**

Figure 7.1 Experiment 9 (latent Inhibition). Accuracy as a function of target preexposure (condition) and schizotypy level (STA)……... **164**

Figure 7.2 Experiment 10 (visual pop-out). Accuracy as a function of target salience and schizotypy level (STA). Levels of target salience: high (target salient/ distractor non-salient), medium (target non-salient/ distractor non-salient), and low (target non-salient/ distractor salient)…….. **176**

Figure 8.1 Experiment 11. Mean number of correct responses as a function of learning phase (Phase I versus Phase II) and block of trials…….. **193**

Figure 8.2 Experiment 12. Mean number of correct responses as a function of learning phase (Phase I versus Phase II) and block of trials…….. **196**

Appendices

Appendix 1 Items of the schizotypal personality scale (STA)….. **270**

Appendix 2 The Oxford-Liverpool Inventory of Feelings and Experiences (O-LIFE) scales……. **271**

Appendix 3 An example of a single animated image as viewed from successive frames in Experiments 1 and 2…... **275**

Appendix 4 Examples of animated images from Experiments 3 and 4……. **276**

Appendix 5 Examples of animated images of empty blocks and testing trials in Experiments 7 and 9……. **277**

Appendix 6 Examples of animated images of empty blocks and testing trials in Experiment 8…….. **278**

Appendix 7 Examples of trials of the letter detection paradigm in experiment 10……. **279**

Appendix 8 An example of four successive trials of the compound stimulus discrimination paradigm in Experiments 11 and 12……. **280**