
Citation for published version:

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Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Social Cognition in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Validation of the Edinburgh Social Cognition Test (ESCoT)

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Current Project
Current neuropsychological tools used to assess social cognition have:
1) Limited use in clinical settings.
2) Do not assess the different aspects of social cognition within the same test.

The objective of this project was to validate a novel measure of social cognitive functioning called the Edinburgh Social Cognition Test (ESCoT) using adults with ASD.

The ESCoT consists of ten dynamic, animated scenarios that are all self-contained narratives that depict an array of interactions.

It measures Cognitive Theory of Mind (ToM) and Affective ToM[1] and Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Understanding of Social Norms.

Results
A MANOVA was used to compare performance on each of the four components of the ESCoT.

The multivariate result was significant, V = 0.40, F(4, 52) = 8.97, p < .001, ηp2 = 0.408, indicating differential performance on the ESCoT between the two groups.

Bayesian analyses
Due to the relatively small sample size of the ASD group, Bayesian analyses were conducted to examine the evidence for the alternative hypotheses. The neurotypical group were predicted to perform significantly better than the ASD group in all components of the ESCoT.

The analyses used the default effect size prior of 0.707.

| Component                        | BF10  | Error % (±) | p(H1|D) (%) |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------|-----------|
| Cognitive ToM                    | 834.476 | 2.722e-7 | 99.88     |
| Affective ToM                    | 10.677  | 3.982e-6 | 91.43     |
| Interpersonal Understanding of   | 608.396 | 1.553e-7 | 99.83     |
| Social Norms                     | 4.452   | 3.015e-7 | 81.65     |
| Intrapersonal Understanding of    | 47788.078 | 9.386e-11 | 99.99     |
| Social Norms (Self-Reference)    | 49 (0.10) | 0.9090     |

Discussion
The results demonstrated that the ASD group were impaired in all components of the ESCoT compared to neurotypicals.

Bayesian analysis indicated that there is extreme evidence for the alternative hypotheses in the Cognitive ToM and Interpersonal Understanding of Social Norms components.

Evidence for a significant difference between the groups in Affective ToM was strong and moderate for Intrapersonal Understanding of Social Norms.

These results suggest that the ESCoT is a sensitive measure of social cognition. It is hoped that the ESCoT will be used as a tool to assess social abilities in healthy and clinical populations.

References

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