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Acquisition of visual priors and induced hallucinations in chronic schizophrenia

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Prominent theories suggest that symptoms of schizophrenia stem from learning deficiencies resulting in distorted internal models of the world. To test these theories further, we used a visual statistical learning task known to induce rapid implicit learning of the stimulus statistics. In this task, participants are presented with a field of coherently moving dots and are asked to report the presented direction of the dots (estimation task), and whether they saw any dots or not (detection task). Two of the directions were more frequently presented than the others. In controls, the implicit acquisition of the stimuli statistics influences their perception in two ways: (i) motion directions are perceived as being more similar to the most frequently presented directions than they really are (estimation biases); and (ii) in the absence of stimuli, participants sometimes report perceiving the most frequently presented directions (a form of hallucinations). Such behaviour is consistent with probabilistic inference, i.e. combining learnt perceptual priors with sensory evidence. We investigated whether patients with chronic, stable, treated schizophrenia ($n = 20$) differ from controls ($n = 23$) in the acquisition of the perceptual priors and/or their influence on perception. We found that although patients were slower than controls, they showed comparable acquisition of perceptual priors, approximating the stimulus statistics. This suggests that patients have no statistical learning deficits in our task. This may reflect our patients' relative wellbeing on anti-psychotic medication. Intriguingly, however, patients experienced significantly fewer ($P = 0.016$) hallucinations of the most frequently presented directions than controls when the stimulus was absent or when it was very weak (prior-based lapse estimations). This suggests that prior expectations had less influence on patients' perception than on controls when stimuli were absent or below perceptual threshold.

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Abbreviations: MD = mean difference; PANSS = Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale

Introduction

An increasingly popular idea in neuroscience is that perception and decision-making can be well described in terms of probabilistic inference processes (Knill and Pouget, 2004; Fiser *et al.*, 2010; Friston, 2010, 2012). For example, statistical and perceptual learning studies show that the perceptual systems continuously extract and learn statistical regularities of the environment (for a review on visual perception, see Seriès and Seitz, 2013). This learning results in the construction of internal models of the environment, or expectations, which are used automatically and unconsciously to predict and disambiguate perceptual inputs in situations of uncertainty and to guide decisions.

In this context, it has been proposed that psychiatric disorders in general, and schizophrenia in particular, might be explained in terms of deficits in probabilistic inference (Friston, 2005; Frith and Friston, 2012; Adams *et al.*, 2013; Jardri and Denève, 2013, for reviews see: Friston *et al.*, 2016; Valton *et al.*, 2017; Sterzer *et al.*, 2018). Impaired statistical learning and/or inference deficits would lead to distorted internal models of the world, which could then explain the existence of abnormal beliefs or delusions experienced by patients with schizophrenia, as well as their hallucinations.

Two different lines of research support this general idea. First, a number of studies using explicit probabilistic learning tasks, such as the ‘beads task’ report that patients with schizophrenia show a deficit in integrating probabilistic information resulting in faster responses than control subjects, an effect called the ‘jumping-to-conclusions’ bias (Huq *et al.*, 1988; Speechley *et al.*, 2010; Averbeck *et al.*, 2011; Evans *et al.*, 2012). Interestingly, patients with stronger delusional symptoms fare worse at the task than those who do not (Huq *et al.*, 1988; Speechley *et al.*, 2010), and control subjects displaying delusional ideation also show similar impairments at the task (Freeman *et al.*, 2008), suggesting a link between delusions and probabilistic inference (Garety *et al.*, 2013; Garety and Freeman, 2013). Second, patients with schizophrenia do not experience visual illusions in the same way as controls do. For example, patients are less susceptible to certain visual illusions such as the hollow-mask illusion (Dima *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Keane *et al.*, 2013; for review see: Silverstein and Keane 2011a, b; Notredame *et al.*, 2014). This suggests that they either have different implicit expectations about the environment (i.e. they would not have such a strong expectation that faces are convex) or that these expectations do not affect patients’ perception in the same way as observed in controls.

A few studies have recently tried to test the impaired Bayesian inference hypothesis more directly, but the findings are mixed. Teufel *et al.* (2015) found that early psychosis and schizotypal traits were associated with an increased influence of prior knowledge when disambiguating two-tone images. Powers *et al.* (2017) also reported an

increased perceptual prior influence in experimentally-induced hallucinations in both patients and controls with higher propensity to hallucinatory experiences. Interestingly, however, a series of studies by Schmack *et al.* (2013, 2015, 2017) found an increased influence of cognitive priors on the perception of bi-stable stimuli in participants with schizotypal traits and clinical schizophrenia, but showed on the contrary a decreased influence of perceptual priors, suggesting that the level at which the prior operates in the inference hierarchy might lead to differential effects. Finally, Jardri *et al.* (2017) investigated probabilistic reasoning and found schizophrenia patients to be over-counting sensory evidence and under-weighting priors, which they described using a so-called ‘circular inference’ model. Together these findings paint a complicated picture of Bayesian inference in schizophrenia where priors can have either increased or decreased influence depending on the task, the stimulus, the type of priors involved (e.g. low-level perceptual prior versus high-level cognitive prior) or depend on particular symptom characteristics (e.g. whether patients experience hallucinations versus delusions; Stephan *et al.*, 2016; Sterzer *et al.*, 2018).

A general limitation of these studies, however, is that it is typically unclear to what extent the effects are driven by deficits in statistical learning (i.e. forming and updating the priors) or impaired inference *per se*. Moreover, past studies usually only qualitatively compared the behavioural results they collected with the proposed Bayesian theories.

To address these issues, we simultaneously investigated the implicit acquisition of perceptual priors, how these priors are integrated with sensory information, and the influence they have on perception when stimulus is absent (i.e. experimentally induced hallucinations) in patients with schizophrenia. We used a previously-developed statistical learning task (Chalk *et al.*, 2010; Gekas *et al.*, 2013; Karvelis *et al.*, 2018) that is known to induce the rapid acquisition of the statistics of motion stimuli. In this task, participants need to report the direction of motion of a cloud of dots (estimation task) and whether they have perceived the dots or not (detection task; on some trials no stimulus is presented). Unbeknown to the participants, two directions of motion are more frequently presented than others. Participants implicitly and unconsciously learn those stimulus statistics. This learning influences perception such that: (i) motion stimuli are perceived as being more similar to the most frequently presented stimuli than they really are (i.e. estimation biases); and (ii) participants sometimes report perceiving the most frequently presented stimuli in absence of visual stimuli (a form of hallucination). In previous work (Chalk *et al.*, 2010; Karvelis *et al.*, 2018), we showed that Bayesian modelling could be applied to individual participants’ performances to quantitatively monitor their acquisition and use of the statistics of the stimuli (perceptual prior). We applied the same techniques in the current study to compare the perceptual priors acquired by patients with schizophrenia to those of controls.

Materials and methods

Participants

A sample of 25 (22 male) individuals with psychosis (diagnosed with either DSM-IV schizophrenia, $n = 21$; or schizoaffective disorder, $n = 4$), and 23 (13 male) controls with normal or corrected-to-normal vision were recruited. Patients were recruited from inpatient and outpatient adult mental health services across NHS Lothian. Diagnoses were determined using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV (SCID-I; First *et al.*, 2002). None of the control participants met DSM-IV criteria for a psychotic disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizotypal or schizoid personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Symptom severity was measured with the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) (Kay *et al.*, 1987), current IQ with the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI; Wechsler, 1999) and pre-morbid IQ with the National Adult Reading Test (NART; Nelson and Willison, 1991). All patients were medicated (85% on second generation antipsychotics, 50% of these were also on mood stabilizers). The study was conducted in accordance with the national and international ethical standards for human experimentation and research (World Medical Association, 2013; International Conference of Harmonization (ICH), 2014). All participants provided fully-informed written consent. The study received ethical approval from the South East Scotland Research Ethics Committee 01 and NHS Lothian Research and Development. Following previous studies using the same paradigm (Chalk *et al.*, 2010), we determined that 20 participants per group would give us $\geq 80\%$ power to detect the correct acquisition of the prior and significance between groups (see power calculations in the Supplementary material). We thus aimed to recruit between 20 and 25 participants per group to account for possible exclusions because of poor performance at the task.

Twenty patients and 23 controls successfully performed the task (see below and Supplementary Fig. 1 for exclusion criteria based on performance). The demographic details of the included participants are shown in Table 1. Note that the patients all had relatively low levels of symptoms on the PANSS, but ongoing functional impairment. Most were assigned a PANSS positive rating of 1 (absent), 2 (minimal/questionable) or 3 (mild) for delusions, hallucinatory behaviour, suspiciousness/persecution, and unusual thought content, suggesting that they were clinically stabilized and relatively homogenous in their current symptoms (see detailed symptoms demographics in Supplementary Table 1 and Supplementary Fig. 6).

Apparatus, stimuli and procedure

The setup for this study was similar to that used by Chalk *et al.* (2010). Motion stimuli consisted of a field of dots with a density of 2 dots/deg², moving coherently (100%) at a speed of 9°/s.

Each trial was composed of two tasks arranged as follows (Fig. 1A): First, participants were presented with a fixation point (0.5° diameter) for 400 ms. With the fixation point still on-screen, the motion stimulus (field of dots) was displayed along with a red bar extending from this fixation point. During the presentation of the field of dots, participants

were required to estimate the direction of motion by aligning the red bar into the perceived direction of motion ('estimation task'). The angle of this bar was randomized on each trial and participants were instructed to focus their gaze on the fixation point throughout the estimation task. The display then cleared when either the participant clicked the mouse to validate their choice (estimation) or 3000 ms had elapsed. After the estimation, a 200-ms delay was enforced before the detection screen was presented. The new screen was divided in two equal areas reading 'Dots' and 'No Dots', giving the participants a two-alternative forced choice. Participants were required to move the cursor to the right or the left to indicate whether they detected dots or not, and click to validate their choice ('detection task'). The cursor then flashed green or red for correct or incorrect responses respectively. No time-outs were enforced during the detection task. Finally, the screen was cleared for 400 ms before a new trial began. Every 20 trials, participants were presented with feedback on their estimation performance in terms of average estimation error (in degrees).

Design

Participants completed 567 trials (i.e. lasting approximately 40 min versus 850 trials lasting 60 min in Chalk *et al.*, 2010) with opportunities for breaks every 170 trials to prevent fatigue. Stimuli were presented at four different randomly interleaved contrast levels. The highest contrast level was 1.7 cd/m² above the 5.2 cd/m² background. There were 167 trials at zero contrast (no stimulus condition) and 67 trials at high contrast. Contrasts of other stimuli were determined using a descending 4/1 and an ascending 2/1 staircase on detection performance. Throughout the experiment, there were 90 trials with the 2/1 staircase and 243 trials with the 4/1 staircase. The use of the 2/1 and 4/1 contrast staircases ensures that individual detection performances converge to contrast thresholds corresponding to 70.4% and 84.1% correct responses, respectively (Levitt, 1971; García-Pérez, 1998), thus being comparable between participants. From the point of view of the observer, this meant that stimulus contrasts converged and remained around the limit of visibility, hence creating a lot of uncertainty in the stimulus (its presence and its direction). We had more trials in the descending staircase so as to facilitate acquisition of the prior. On a given trial, the direction of motion for the two staircased contrast levels could either be 0°, $\pm 16^\circ$, $\pm 32^\circ$, $\pm 48^\circ$, and $\pm 64^\circ$ with respect to a central reference angle. This central reference angle was randomized for each participant.

Unbeknown to participants, we manipulated their expectations about which motion directions were most likely to occur by presenting stimuli moving at $\pm 32^\circ$ more frequently (resulting in a bimodal distribution, Fig. 1B). At the highest contrast level, 50% of trials were at $\pm 32^\circ$ and 50% remaining trials at random directions (i.e. not just the predetermined directions).

Behavioural data analysis

Performance on high contrast trials was used as an indicator of whether participants were performing the task adequately. Detection accuracy of at least 70% and estimation root mean square error (RMSE) of $< 30^\circ$ were the minimum criteria. All 23 controls met these criteria, while 5 of 25 patients

Table 1 Participants' demographics

Characteristics	Controls <i>n</i> = 23	Patients with schizophrenia <i>n</i> = 20	Significance level <i>P</i> -value
Gender, males, <i>n</i>	13	17	0.04
Age, years	33.86 (12.08)	39.40 (9.43)	0.07
Premorbid IQ	115.55 (4.41)	113.18 (8.76)	0.58
Current IQ	117.45 (7.28)	111.15 (10.70)	0.06
PANSS Positive Scale	8.86 (2.29)	12.55 (5.01)	<0.01
PANSS Negative Scale	8.41 (2.24)	12.20 (5.05)	<0.01
PANSS General Scale	22.27 (6.48)	26.10 (8.35)	0.12
PANSS Total	39.55 (9.22)	50.85 (15.86)	<0.01
GAF	74.81 (11.42)	54.75 (14.36)	<0.001
OLZ eq., mg/day	–	12.61 (6.24)	N/A
Illness duration, years	–	13.33 (9.01)	N/A

Values indicate mean and (standard deviation). For the PANSS, lower score is better, and for Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) higher score is better. For gender, group comparisons were done using χ^2 test, for all other measures, two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum test was used. See Supplementary Table 1 and Supplementary Fig. 6 for a more detailed description of the clinical characteristics.

N/A = not applicable; OLZ eq. = olanzapine equivalent dosage.

did not meet at least one of the criteria and thus were excluded from further data analysis (Supplementary Fig. 1).

The main data analysis was performed on 2/1 and 4/1 staircased contrast levels and only on confirmed trials (i.e. trials where participants validated their choice with a click within 3000 ms in the estimation task and reported seeing dots in the subsequent detection task). The first 100 trials were excluded from the analysis to allow the staircases to converge to stable contrast levels (Supplementary Fig. 2). After removing these trials, the luminance levels achieved by the 2/1 and 4/1 staircases were found to be overlapping (Supplementary Fig. 2), thus they were combined for all further analysis. Finally, since the distribution of presented directions was symmetrical around a central reference angle, the behavioural measures at equal absolute distance from the reference angle were averaged together.

In the estimation task, the variance of participants' direction estimates was large. As in previous work (Chalk *et al.*, 2010; Gekas *et al.*, 2013), we hypothesized that this variability resulted from a proportion of estimations being made randomly. To account for this, we fitted the individual estimation responses for each stimulus direction to the following distribution:

$$(1 - \alpha) \cdot V(\mu, \sigma) + \alpha/2\pi \quad (1)$$

where $V(\mu, \sigma)$ is the circular normal (i.e. von Mises; Mardia, 1972) distribution with mean μ and width σ and α corresponds to the proportion of lapse estimations (i.e. seemingly random responses). The estimation bias is then defined as the difference between the estimated mean of this circular normal distribution μ and the true motion direction, while the estimation variability corresponds to the standard deviation σ of that distribution. The lapse rate α enables us to capture the proportion of estimation responses that appear random, unrelated to the true motion direction. As a first approximation, these are here parameterized as being uniformly distributed between $\pm 180^\circ$.

In trials where no stimulus was presented, we reconstructed the probability distributions of participants' responses over motion directions using kernel density estimation (Silverman, 1986; Wand and Jones 1994). The kernel density estimation is

a non-parametric method used to estimate the probability density function from discrete measures of a continuous variable. To do so, a kernel that defines the form of the probability density function (e.g. von Mises kernel) was placed at each of the observed measurement. Then, all the individual kernels were summed to create the probability density function of the random variable (motion direction).

To assess the effects of the acquired expectations in both groups and to simultaneously determine whether patients differed from controls, we performed 2-way mixed ANOVA with motion direction as a within-subjects factor and group as a between-subjects factor. We ran Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons to determine which motion directions were driving the effects. To control for possible deviations from normality, we also ran non-parametric tests to confirm the parametric 2-way ANOVA findings (Supplementary material). All analyses were done using SPSS version 24. To determine the strength of the evidence for the null hypothesis (i.e. finding no group difference versus finding evidence that the groups are similar) we also report Bayes factors using the Bayesian statistical software package JASP. We report Kendall correlation coefficients whenever the data are ordinal with rank ties and/or strong outliers.

Modelling

To test for individual variability in the underlying perceptual inference and to obtain more direct measurements of the acquired expectations, we fitted a range of models to our data. The first class of models assumed that the biases were of a perceptual nature, as conceived in the Bayesian framework: sensory information is combined with a learned prior of the stimulus statistics in a probabilistic way. The simple 'BAYES' model assumed that the likelihood precision was constrained to be the same across all presented motion directions (corresponding to the hypothesis that there was no learning in the likelihood due to the distribution of the motion directions). An additional variant of the BAYES model tested the hypothesis that the lapse estimations were not uniformly distributed but instead were sampled from the acquired prior expectations. We call these responses 'prior-based lapses' (Fig. 2).

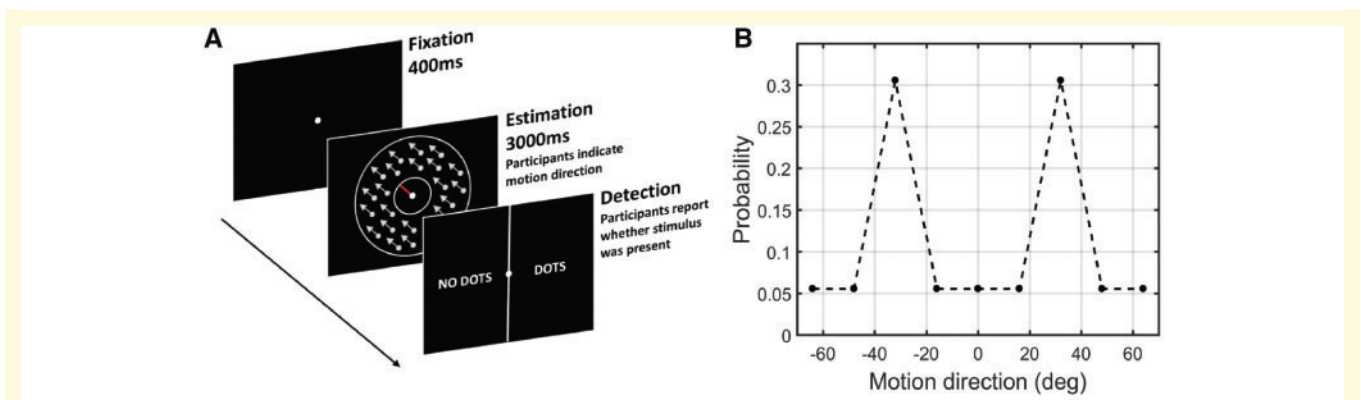


Figure 1 The Moving Dots task. (A) Experimental procedure. Participants were presented with a fixation point followed by the motion stimulus and a response bar (red bar) that they were instructed to align to the perceived motion-direction. The screen was cleared either when participants clicked to validate their estimation or 3000 ms had elapsed. A new screen appeared with a two-alternative forced choice task (2-AFC), requiring participants to indicate whether they perceived the dots during the estimation task. (B) Probability distribution of the motion directions. Unbeknown to participants, the distribution of motion direction was bimodal (i.e. stimuli appeared most often at $\pm 32^\circ$ from a central direction). The central direction was randomized for each participant.

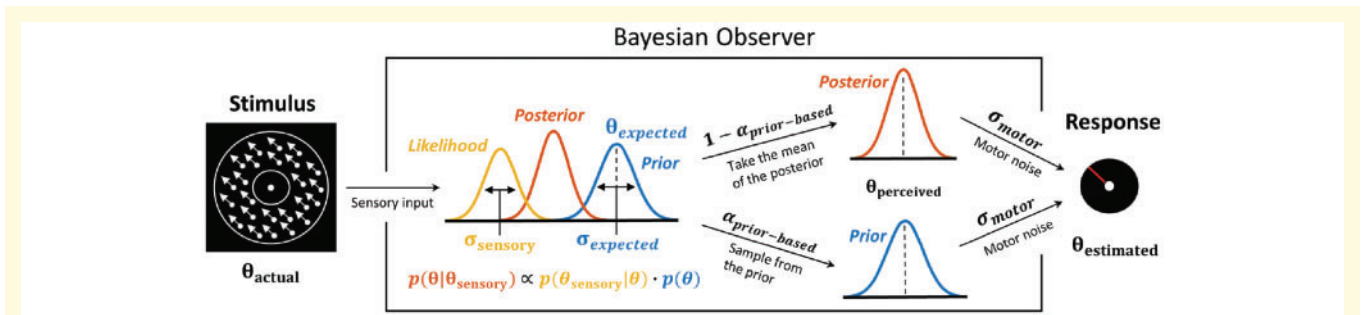


Figure 2 Bayesian model of estimation response for a single trial. The actual motion direction (θ_{actual}) is corrupted by sensory uncertainty (σ_{sensory}), and then combined with prior expectations (mean θ_{expected} and uncertainty σ_{expected}) to form a posterior distribution. The perceived motion direction ($\theta_{\text{perceived}}$) then corresponds to the mean of the posterior distribution. However, on a fraction of trials, determined by the lapse rate ($\alpha_{\text{prior-based}}$), the perceived motion direction is sampled from the prior. Finally, in both cases, the response ($\theta_{\text{estimated}}$) is made by perturbing $\theta_{\text{perceived}}$ with motor noise (σ_{motor}). This results in four free model parameters: σ_{sensory} , σ_{expected} , θ_{expected} and $\alpha_{\text{prior-based}}$. The motor noise (σ_{motor}) is estimated from high contrast trials and is used as a fixed parameter.

This model was termed ‘BAYES_P’ and was otherwise equivalent to ‘BAYES’.

Another class of models assumed that task performance could be explained by response strategies that do not involve Bayesian integration (heuristic models). According to these models, on any given trial participants responses were based solely on either the prior expectations or sensory information. We considered four variations of response strategy models (see above and Supplementary material for details). Below we present the Bayesian models as they provided a better explanation to the data (see Fig. 5, model comparison).

Bayesian model

Following the Bayesian framework, we assumed that participants combined sensory information (likelihood) with their expectations about the motion direction (prior) on every

trial. The sensory likelihood of the observed motion direction (θ_{sensory}) was parameterized as a von Mises circular normal distribution with variance σ_{sensory} :

$$P_{\text{likelihood}}(\theta_{\text{sensory}}|\theta) = V(\theta, \sigma_{\text{sensory}}) \quad (2)$$

The mean of this distribution depended on the actual presented motion direction (θ_{actual}), but to account for trial-to-trial variability it was sampled from another von Mises distribution centred on θ_{actual} with variance σ_{sensory} [i.e. $V(\theta_{\text{actual}}, \sigma_{\text{sensory}})$]. This is necessary because on any given trial the observer does not have direct access to the true motion direction. Therefore, the likelihood cannot be centred on the true motion direction, but instead has to be centred on a noisy estimate of it (Stocker and Simoncelli, 2006; Körding *et al.*, 2007).

We then hypothesized that participants acquire an approximation of the ‘true’ prior from experience (P_{prior}), representing the participants’ expectations of motion directions. The acquired priors were parameterized as the sum of two von

Mises circular normal distributions, centred on motion directions θ_{expected} and $-\theta_{\text{expected}}$, each with variance σ_{expected} :

$$P_{\text{prior}}(\theta) = \frac{1}{2} [V(-\theta_{\text{expected}}, \sigma_{\text{expected}}) + V(\theta_{\text{expected}}, \sigma_{\text{expected}})] \quad (3)$$

Combining the prior and the likelihood gives us the posterior probability that the stimulus is moving in a direction θ :

$$P_{\text{posterior}}(\theta|\theta_{\text{sensory}}) \propto P_{\text{likelihood}}(\theta_{\text{sensory}}|\theta) \cdot P_{\text{prior}}(\theta) \quad (4)$$

The perceived direction, $\theta_{\text{perceived}}$, was taken to be the mean of the posterior distribution (almost identical results would be obtained by using the maximum instead).

Finally, we accounted for motor noise (related to aligning and clicking the mouse) and lapse estimations, such that:

$$P(\theta_{\text{estimate}}|\theta_{\text{perceived}}) = (1 - \alpha_{\text{prior-based}}) \cdot V(\theta_{\text{perceived}}, \sigma_{\text{motor}}) + \alpha_{\text{prior-based}} \cdot P_{\text{prior}}(\theta) \quad (5)$$

where σ_{motor} is the motor noise and $\alpha_{\text{prior-based}}$ describes the chance of making an estimation response that appears random in that it is unrelated to the actual stimulus. In the model that we call ‘Bayes_P’ for ‘Bayes with prior-based lapse estimations’, we assume that these random estimations are drawn from the participants’ acquired expectations— $P_{\text{prior}}(\theta)$. The motivation for this model came from observing: (i) that the lapse responses were found not to be uniformly distributed in the data; and (ii) that if such random responses are effectively made when the stimulus is below detection threshold (a common occurrence since contrasts hover around threshold), and thus become invisible for the observer, those responses are formally equivalent to what we describe as hallucinations, which seem to be sampled from the prior [see also Laquitaine and Gardner (2018) for a related model].

Finally, we also tested variants of this model, where lapse estimations were uniformly distributed, rather than following the participants’ expectations (model ‘BAYES’), or that because of increased exposure to stimuli at specific angles, sensory uncertainty σ_{sensory} could vary across angles (0° , $\pm 16^\circ$, $\pm 32^\circ$, $\pm 48^\circ$, $\pm 64^\circ$; model ‘BAYES_var’), or that sensory uncertainty varied only at the most presented directions (model ‘BAYES_varmin’; see above and Supplementary material for details).

Data availability

Derived data and source code supporting the findings of this study are available at <https://osf.io/v6spe> (DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/V6SPE).

Results

Detection performances and contrast levels

Contrast staircases converged to stable luminance levels after about 100 trials for both groups (Supplementary Fig. 2); controls converged to 0.41 cd/m^2 (± 0.03) for the 2/1 staircase and 0.46 cd/m^2 (± 0.03) for the 4/1 staircase, while patients converged to 0.57 cd/m^2 (± 0.04) for the 2/1

staircase and 0.62 cd/m^2 (± 0.05) for the 4/1 staircase. These results confirm previous findings (Skottun and Skoyles, 2007) suggesting that patients with schizophrenia display significantly poorer contrast-sensitivity in comparison to controls (2/1 staircase: $Z = 3.15$, $P = 0.002$; 4/1 staircase: $Z = 2.90$, $P = 0.004$, two-tailed rank-sum test).

Statistical learning

First, we investigated whether participants acquired the statistics of the stimulus. To do so, we looked at patterns suggestive of statistical learning in each group, namely attractive biases towards the most frequent directions, decreased reaction times and improved detection performance for the most frequent directions (Fig. 3).

Estimation performance

In the analysis of the estimation task, we looked only at the staircase contrasts stimulus trials where participants both reported seeing a stimulus and clicked on the mouse during stimulus presentation to indicate their estimate of motion direction.

To investigate whether the participants’ perceived motion-directions were biased, we measured the difference between the true motion direction and the motion direction reported by the participants. Figure 3A displays the average estimation bias plotted against the true motion direction for each group. Overall, there was a significant effect of motion direction on the estimation bias [$F(2.45, 100.52) = 15.37$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.273$, Greenhouse-Geisser correction $\varepsilon = 0.613$], but no differences between the groups [group main effect: $F(1, 41) = 0.83$, $P = 0.369$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$; with positive evidence for the null hypothesis, $\text{BF}_{01} = 3.99$; and no group \times angle interaction $F(2.45, 100.52) = 1.64$, $P = 0.193$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$]. Pairwise comparisons (with Bonferroni correction) revealed that there was an attractive bias towards $\pm 32^\circ$ at $\pm 48^\circ$ and $\pm 64^\circ$ [mean difference (MD) = 4.858, $P = 0.002$; and MD = 14.395, $P < 0.001$, respectively]; but not at $\pm 16^\circ$ (MD = 1.818, $P = 0.955$). Together, these results confirm that both patients and controls were biased towards perceiving motion directions as being more similar to the most frequently presented directions than they really were, consistent with having acquired the priors that approximate the statistics of the stimulus.

We also investigated whether the effects of acquired prior expectations were reflected in the variability of estimations, namely a decrease of variability for the expected directions (Fig. 3B). We found a significant main effect of motion direction [$F(3.07, 125.69) = 5.18$, $P = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.112$, Greenhouse-Geisser correction $\varepsilon = 0.766$], but no differences between the groups [main effect of group: $F(1, 41) = 0.02$, $P = 0.880$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$; with positive evidence for the null hypothesis, $\text{BF}_{01} = 3.74$; and no group-angle interaction $F(3.07, 125.69) = 1.58$, $P = 0.196$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.037$]. Pairwise comparisons showed that variability at 0° stood out the most, being significantly larger than at $\pm 32^\circ$ and $\pm 48^\circ$ (MD = 4.680, $P = 0.012$; and MD = 4.733,

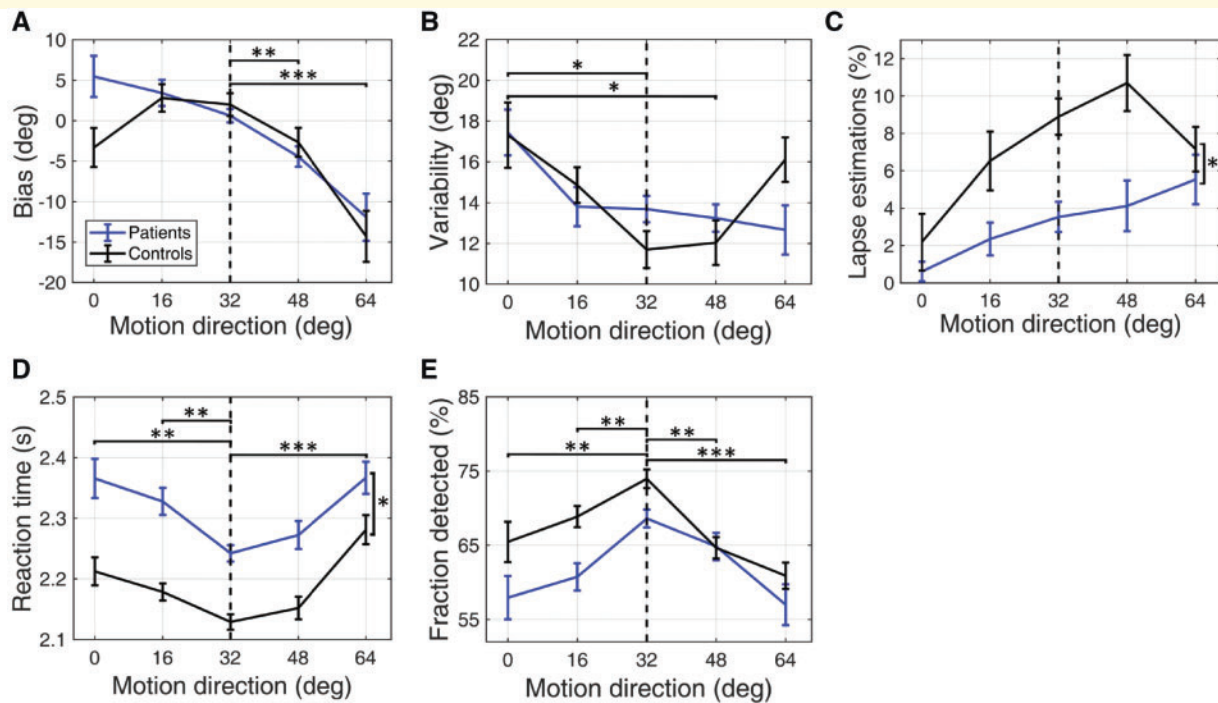


Figure 3 Performance on low contrast trials by patients (blue lines) and controls (black lines). **(A)** Mean estimation bias as a function of the true motion direction. **(B)** Estimation standard deviation (i.e. variability) as a function of the presented of motion direction. **(C)** Lapse estimations as a function of motion direction, estimated using (Equation 1). **(D)** Reaction times during the estimation task as a function of motion direction. **(E)** The fraction of trials in which the stimulus was detected as a function of the presented motion direction. The error bars represent within-subject standard error. The vertical dashed lines correspond to the most frequently presented motion directions (i.e. $\pm 32^\circ$). Significance levels are * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$. These results are not affected by any violation of normality assumption (Supplementary material).

$P = 0.025$, respectively), although not different than at $\pm 16^\circ$ and $\pm 64^\circ$ ($MD = 3.044$, $P = 0.239$ and $MD = 2.990$, $P = 0.541$). The increased variability in the region between the two modes reflects their conflicting influence on the percepts in this region.

Finally, we analysed lapse estimations, which were captured by the ‘ α ’ term in Equation 1 and which were assumed to arise from random responses on some of the trials (Fig. 3C). We found both motion direction and group main effects to be significant [$F(4,164) = 5.76$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.123$ and $F(1,41) = 6.41$, $P = 0.015$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.135$, respectively], with patients exhibiting fewer lapse estimations. Pairwise comparisons revealed that lapse rate at 0° was significantly smaller than at all other directions ($\pm 32^\circ$, $MD = 4.814$, $P = 0.001$; $\pm 48^\circ$, $MD = 6.010$, $P = 0.007$; $\pm 64^\circ$, $MD = 4.951$, $P = 0.003$), except for $\pm 16^\circ$ ($MD = 3.043$, $P = 0.393$). The finding that the estimated lapses would depend on the presented motion direction was surprising, since it suggests these lapses are not made completely randomly. Below, we show that these seemingly random responses can be best described as being sampled from the acquired prior distribution (see ‘Modelling results’ section).

Reaction times and detection performance

Next, we examined how participants’ acquired expectations influenced reaction times and the detection of stimulus. The estimation reaction times (Fig. 3D) show a significant main effect of motion direction [$F(2.73,111.76) = 10.80$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.209$, Greenhouse-Geisser correction $\varepsilon = 0.681$]. This was driven by decreased reaction times at the most frequent directions as revealed by pairwise comparisons: reaction time at $\pm 32^\circ$ was significantly shorter than at all other directions (0° , $MD = 0.104$, $P = 0.001$; $\pm 16^\circ$, $MD = 0.068$, $P = 0.004$; $\pm 64^\circ$, $MD = 0.139$, $P < 0.001$), except for $\pm 48^\circ$ ($MD = 0.027$, $P = 1.000$). Furthermore, patients were found to also be significantly slower than controls [$F(1,41) = 4.11$, $P = 0.049$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.091$], but we found no interaction between group and motion direction [$F(2.73, 111.76) = 0.66$, $P = 0.563$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.016$]. Slow reaction time is a hallmark of schizophrenia that has been documented thoroughly in the literature in simple reaction-time tasks using visual and/or auditory stimuli (Nuechterlein, 1977; Fioravanti *et al.*, 2012).

An even more direct way of assessing how the acquired expectations influenced the detection of stimulus is to

analyse the fraction of trials where participants explicitly report seeing or not seeing the stimulus (Fig. 3E). We found that the detection of stimulus was greatly affected by the presented motion direction [$F(2.36,96.64) = 8.51$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.172$, Greenhouse-Geisser correction $\epsilon = 0.589$], with stimulus at $\pm 32^\circ$ being the most frequently detected direction as shown by pairwise comparisons: detection at $\pm 32^\circ$ was significantly better than at all other directions (0° , MD = 9.59, $P = 0.004$; $\pm 16^\circ$, MD = 6.48, $P = 0.001$; $\pm 48^\circ$, MD = 6.54, $P = 0.001$; $\pm 64^\circ$, MD = 12.35, $P < 0.001$). However, the groups were not found to be different [main group effect: $F(1,41) = 3.62$, $P = 0.064$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.081$; although there was no evidence for the null hypothesis either, $BF_{01} = 0.97$; group \times motion direction interaction was also non-significant $F(2.36,96.64) = 1.11$, $P = 0.340$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.026$].

Overall, these results indicate that, in terms of detection responses (hit rates and reaction-time), similar benefits of statistical learning were present in both patient and control groups. Overall, behavioural measures suggest that prior effects (e.g. bias, reaction time, and hit rate) became significant as early as within first ~ 100 trials for both patients and controls (Supplementary Figs 3 and 4).

Perceived motion in absence of visual stimuli (hallucinations)

Finally, we investigated whether the acquired statistics about the motion stimulus affected the participants' perception on trials where no stimulus was presented, but where participants reported both a motion direction and seeing a stimulus. We refer to this effect as hallucinations. These hallucinations in our perceptual task are of course different in terms of content and complexity from the visual hallucinations observed in psychosis. However, the underlying mechanisms might be informative to the understanding of illusions and hallucinations in schizophrenia (Silverstein and Keane 2011a, b; Notredame *et al.*, 2014).

To quantify the probability ratio that participants made estimates that were closer to the most frequently presented motion directions relative to other directions, we multiplied the probability that participants estimated within 16° of these motion-directions by the total number of 32° bins:

$$P_{ratio} = P(\theta_{estimate} = \pm 32(\pm 16)^\circ) \cdot N_{bins} \quad (6)$$

This probability would be equal to 1 if participants were equally likely to estimate within 16° of $\pm 32^\circ$ as they are to estimate within the other 16° bins.

We found that the median value of ' P_{ratio} ' was significantly greater than 1 for both patients and controls [median(P_{ratio}) = 2.88, $P = 0.003$ and median(P_{ratio}) = 2.75, $P < 0.001$, respectively; two-tailed signed-rank test], indicating that both patients and controls were much more likely to hallucinate the most frequent motion directions as opposed to all other directions (Fig. 4A and B). Bayesian statistical analysis provided positive evidence for

the groups being the same in this measure ($BF_{01} = 3.32$). Finally, hallucinations of the most frequent directions (i.e. hallucinations at $\pm 32^\circ \pm 16^\circ$) were quick to develop during the course of the experiment: they became significant after only 150 trials for both controls ($P = 0.036$, one-tailed signed-rank test; Supplementary Fig. 3D) and patients ($P = 0.035$, one-tailed signed-rank test; Supplementary Fig. 4D).

While both patients and controls hallucinated predominantly towards the most frequently presented directions (i.e. prior-based hallucinations), patients exhibited fewer of such hallucinations (Fig. 4D; hallucinations within $\pm 16^\circ$ of $\pm 32^\circ$; $P = 0.016$, two-sided rank-sum test), and also exhibited less hallucinations overall (Fig. 4C; $P = 0.004$, two-sided rank-sum test). We wanted to know whether the severity of the symptoms was predictive of the magnitude of this effect. However, we found no correlations between the number of hallucinations and the PANSS positive, negative, general or total scores nor duration of illness, or between the daily-dosage of anti-psychotics (olanzapine equivalent; Andreasen *et al.*, 2010; Leucht *et al.*, 2015) and the total number of hallucinations.

We also investigated the distribution of responses when participants estimated the direction of motion but reported not seeing any dots. Interestingly, in this subset of trials, and unlike in our previous work (Chalk *et al.*, 2010), estimations were also more likely than chance to be made around the most frequent motion directions by both patients and controls [median(P_{ratio}) = 1.24, $P = 0.002$ and median(P_{ratio}) = 1.41, $P = 0.045$, respectively; two-sided signed rank test]. One explanation for this might be habitual effects—when the bar is moved towards the most frequent directions out of motor habit. Another possible explanation is that participants might have hallucinated stimuli in the expected prior directions, but their confidence about their percept being very low, they sometimes chose to report not seeing any dots in the hope to give the correct answer (each detection response was followed by immediate feedback).

Modelling results

We fitted the models to the behavioural data and computed the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) for each participant, which quantifies goodness of fit while penalizing for extra model complexity (preventing overfitting). We found that the BAYES_P model had the smallest BIC for both patients and controls (Fig. 5)—indicating best performance, with a difference in BIC between the winning model (BAYES_P) and the second best model (BAYES) being > 10 . This is equivalent to a log Bayes factor > 10 , and is considered to be very strong or 'decisive' evidence in favour of the winning model (Kaas and Raftery, 1995). Model fits also showed that BAYES_P was much better at fitting lapse estimations, confirming that such estimations were sampled from the acquired prior distribution instead of being uniformly distributed (Fig. 6C and G). We also ran

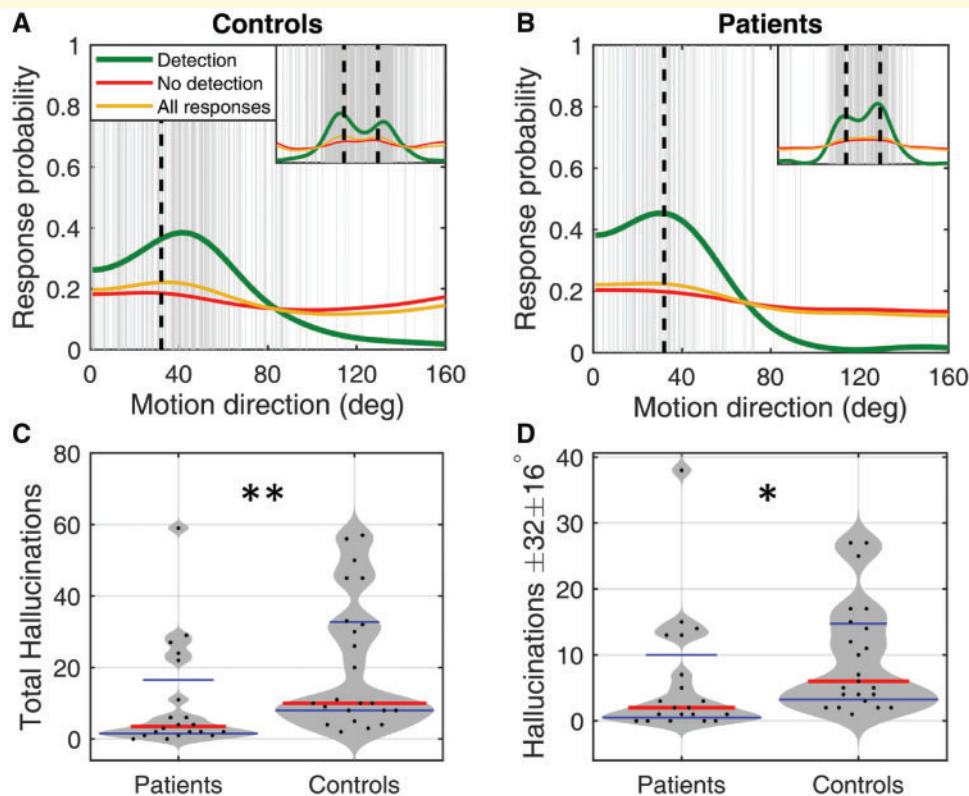


Figure 4 Estimation responses in the absence of stimulus. (**A** and **B**) Distribution of the estimation responses by patients and controls, respectively. The vertical grey lines represent reported motion directions when no stimulus was present (i.e. hallucinations) pooled across each group. The green line denotes the probability distribution of these hallucinations, which was produced using kernel density estimation. The red line denotes probability distribution of responses that were followed by participants' reporting seeing no stimulus. The orange line denotes all estimations regardless of the detection response. In the main plots the data are averaged across the central motion direction, while the insets show the corresponding distributions across the full range. (**C** and **D**) Comparison of patients and controls by (**C**) the total number of hallucinations ($P = 0.004$, two-sided rank-sum test) and (**D**) the number of hallucinations around the most frequently presented motion directions (within $\pm 16^\circ$ of $\pm 32^\circ$; $P = 0.016$, two-sided rank-sum test). Red horizontal lines denote median values; blue horizontal lines denote 25th and 75th percentiles. Black dots denote individual participants, grey areas represent density of the data points. Significance levels at $*P < 0.05$ and $**P < 0.01$ respectively.

a random effect Bayesian model selection analysis (Daunizeau *et al.*, 2014; Rigoux *et al.*, 2014) to ensure that the favoured model was not being selected due to a subset of participants in each group. The analysis confirmed that BAYES_P was best at describing behaviour for both groups (Fig. 5C and D). Moreover, we found a strong correlation between the participant's prior-based lapse rate parameter recovered via BAYES_P and their number of hallucinations ($\tau_b = 0.657$, $P < 0.001$; Kendall's correlation; Fig. 7B). This suggests that prior-based lapses [in the presence of a (very weak) stimulus] and hallucinations (in absence of a stimulus) originate from the same mechanism (Fig. 7A).

Finally, we compared patients and controls on the basis of BAYES_P parameter estimates (Fig. 6I–L). Consistent with the behavioural data analysis, we found no differences in the acquired prior expectations (Fig. 6I and J; the mean of acquired prior: $P = 0.874$, $BF_{01} = 3.32$; and the uncertainty in the acquired prior: $P = 0.401$; two-tailed rank-

sum test; $BF_{01} = 2.95$). There were no differences in the precision of sensory likelihood (Fig. 6K, $P = 0.742$, two-tailed rank-sum test; $BF_{01} = 2.96$). Lastly, just as in the behavioural data, we found that patients made less prior-based lapse estimations (Fig. 6L, $\alpha_{\text{prior-based}}$: $P = 0.024$, two-tailed rank-sum test), suggesting that patients were less likely to perceive a sample from their prior in the presence of a weak (possibly subthreshold) stimulus.

Parameter recovery for model BAYES_P

To gauge the reliability of our modelling results, we performed parameter recovery for the winning BAYES_P model. Parameter recovery consists of simulating synthetic data with different sets of known parameter values ('true parameters') for a given model and then fitting the same model to the synthetic data to estimate and recover these parameters ('recovered parameters'). The strength of correlation between the actual and recovered parameters measures the reliability of modelling results. Parameter recovery,

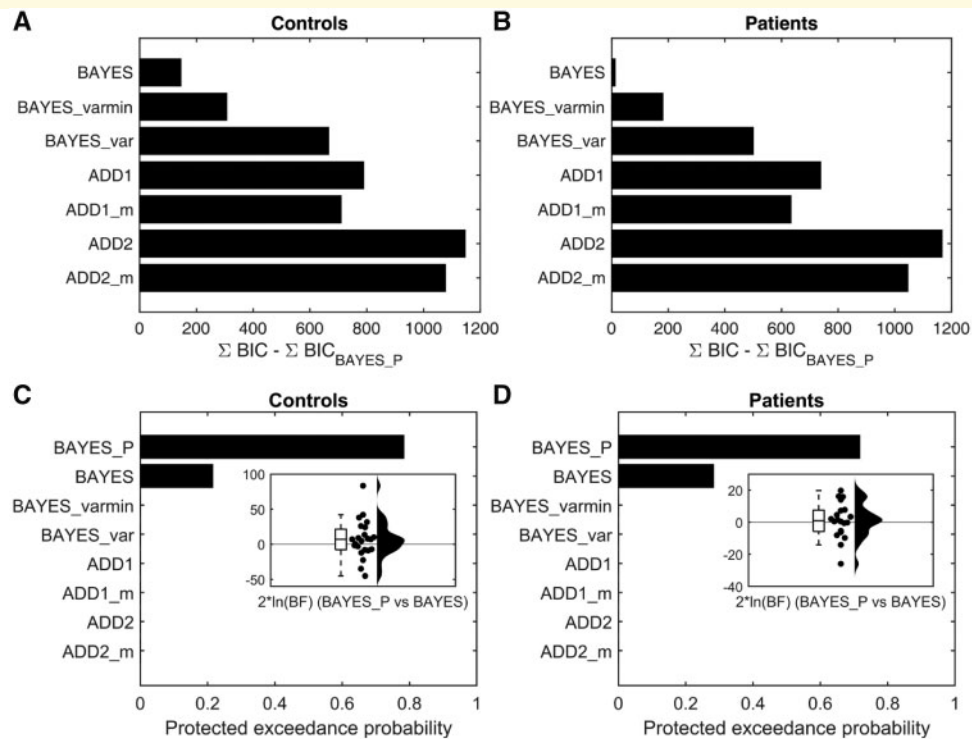


Figure 5 Model comparison and selection. (A and B) Fixed effects model selection using Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) for (A) controls and (B) patients. X-axis measures the relative difference between BIC of each model (as indicated on y-axis) and BIC of BAYES_P (winning model) summed across participants. Smaller BIC indicate a better model fit while penalizing for added model complexity. For both patients and controls BAYES_P provided the best model evidence, 12 BIC units better than BAYES for patients and 146 BIC than BAYES for controls. (C and D) Random effect Bayesian model selection for (C) controls and (D) patients. Higher protected exceedance probability indicates a model having a higher likelihood of being more frequent among the subjects. For both patients and controls BAYES_P was the most likely model. Insets show the distribution of Bayesian Factor for BAYES_P versus BAYES summarized by a box plot, jittered data scatter and a probability density that was estimated using a normal kernel.

just as the parameter estimation from behavioural data, is sensitive to any correlations that might be present among the model parameters, to the choice of parameter estimation methods and also to the amount of data used for model fitting. Therefore, parameter recovery serves as a crucial step in validating the reliability of the modelling results (Palminteri *et al.*, 2017).

We found that the winning BAYES_P model recovered parameters very well, which was reflected in the coefficient of determination (R^2) for all recovered parameters being $R^2 \geq 0.84$ (Supplementary Fig. 9).

Discussion

We were interested in testing the emerging model of schizophrenia proposing that the disorder could stem from deficits in Bayesian inference (Corlett *et al.*, 2009a, b; Fletcher and Frith, 2009; Adams *et al.*, 2013; Schmack *et al.*, 2013, 2015, 2017; Teufel *et al.*, 2015; Jardri *et al.*, 2017; Powers *et al.*, 2017). The experimental paradigm we chose is well suited to quantitatively assess the acquisition of sensory priors, how these priors are used in perception, as well as

to quantify interindividual variability in the learning and inference process (Chalk *et al.*, 2010; Karvelis *et al.*, 2018).

Acquisition of visual prior expectations

We found that both the control and patient groups implicitly learned the statistics of the motion stimuli and that those expectations modified their perception, consistent with them acquiring a Bayesian prior of the stimulus statistics and combining it with sensory evidence, replicating our previous results (Chalk *et al.*, 2010). This was reflected by attractive estimation biases towards the frequently presented directions, faster reaction times and higher detection rates at these directions, as well as hallucinated motion directions in the absence of stimulus predominantly following the most frequent directions.

Patients with schizophrenia were not qualitatively, nor quantitatively different from controls in the measures used to assess learning of the task statistics. This suggests that while there are clearly domain-specific perceptual (e.g. hallucinations) and learning deficits in schizophrenia (e.g.

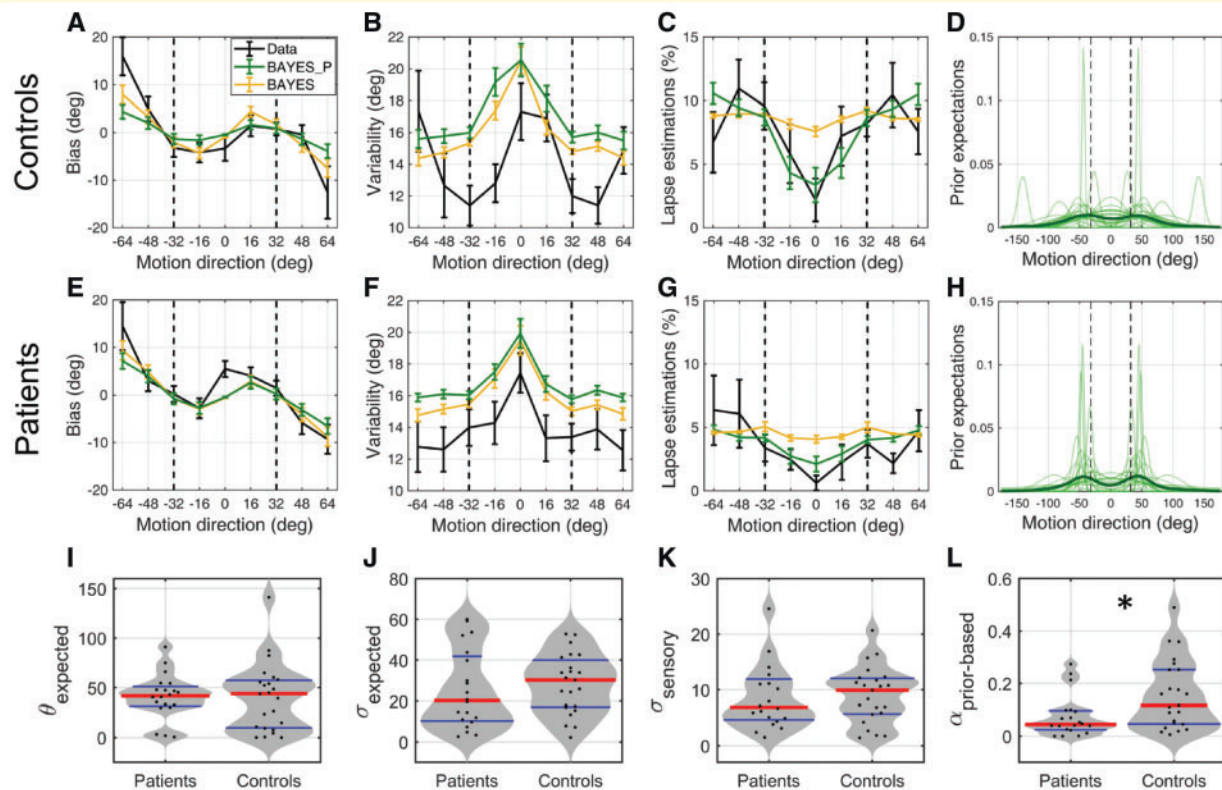


Figure 6 Model fits and parameter estimates. (A–H) Model fits for the best fitting model BAYES_P (green) and the second best model BAYES (yellow), to the behavioural data (black). (A–D) controls and (E–H) patients. (A and E) estimation bias, (B and F) estimation variability, (C and G) estimation lapse rate, (D and H) prior expectations of each individual (transparent green) and group average (thick green) as estimated via BAYES_P model. The vertical dashed lines correspond to the most frequently presented motion directions (i.e. $\pm 32^\circ$). The error bars represent within-subject standard error. (I–L) Comparison of BAYES_P model parameter estimates of patients and controls. (I) θ_{expected} = the mean of acquired prior ($P = 0.874$, two-tailed rank-sum test; $\text{BF}_{01} = 3.32$), (J) σ_{expected} = the uncertainty in the acquired prior ($P = 0.401$, two-tailed rank-sum test; $\text{BF}_{01} = 2.95$), (K) σ_{sensory} = the uncertainty of sensory likelihood ($P = 0.742$, two-tailed rank-sum test; $\text{BF}_{01} = 2.96$), (L) $\alpha_{\text{prior-based}}$ = prior-based lapse rate ($P = 0.024$, two-tailed rank-sum test). Red horizontal lines denote median values; blue horizontal lines denote 25th and 75th percentiles. Black dots denote individual participants, grey areas represent density of the data points. Significance level * $P < 0.05$. See Supplementary Figs 7 and 8 for the model fits of individual biases.

jumping to conclusions), our study demonstrates that these deficits are not due to a domain-general impairment in the acquisition and/or utilization of statistical information in the environment. That is, we find that patients with chronic schizophrenia do not appear to be impaired in the acquisition of visual statistical priors in our task.

These results are consistent with studies finding no deficit in implicit learning in schizophrenia (Kéri *et al.*, 2000; Danion *et al.*, 2001; Marvel *et al.*, 2005; for a review see Gold *et al.*, 2009). In contrast with studies that assay explicit statistical learning and inference using more cognitive tasks (i.e. usually believed to involve frontal cortical regions), here we measured implicit statistical learning of visual stimuli that could be embodied in visual processing areas rather than frontal cortices (Kok *et al.*, 2013). In fact, patients with schizophrenia appear relatively spared in implicit learning tasks that do not require integrating feedback after each trial (Gold *et al.*, 2009). These results are also consistent with our previous study using the same

paradigm showing intact statistical learning in participants with high schizotypal traits (Karvelis *et al.*, 2018).

Impact of acquired visual prior expectations

We found no difference between patients and controls as to the influence of the acquired expectations on their performance regarding estimation of the motion directions. They were not more or less biased towards the most frequent directions, nor more or less variable in those estimations.

However, patients were found to differ from controls in three ways: first, patients with schizophrenia displayed significantly poorer contrast discrimination thresholds and slower reactions times, as documented in previous studies. Second, and more interestingly, patients reported significantly fewer hallucinations at all directions and fewer hallucinations of the most frequently presented motion directions. Third, patients exhibited fewer prior-based

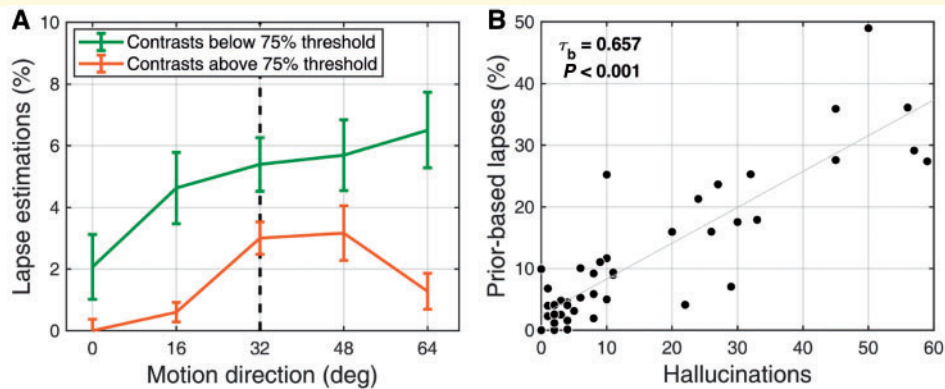


Figure 7 Relationship between lapse estimations and hallucinations. (A) The amount of lapse estimations at different stimulus contrast levels. Contrast staircase trials were split into two subsets along the 75% detection threshold, which was determined for each individual from their psychometric curves. The data then was pooled across both patient and control groups. We found that the number of lapse estimations depended on the presented contrast level with more lapse estimations being made at lower contrasts [$F(1,84) = 12.61, P < 0.001$]. This supports our interpretation that these estimations can be interpreted, at least partly, as hallucinations on trials when the stimulus was too weak to be visible. The error bars represent within-subject errors. (B) Prior-based lapses and hallucinations. A strong positive correlation between prior-based lapse rate parameter (recovered via BAYES_P model) on low contrast trials and number of hallucinations on no-stimulus trials ($\tau_b = 0.657, P < 0.001$; Kendall's correlation) provided further support that the two phenomena are driven by the same mechanism (i.e. sampling from the prior).

lapse estimations than controls on low contrast trials. We argue that prior-based lapses (defined for low contrast trials) and hallucinations (defined for no-stimulus trials) are underlined by the same mechanism. Because of the convergence of the contrast staircases, contrast levels in our task hover around the detection threshold, which means that on a significant number of trials the stimulus contrast falls below the participants' threshold of perception, effectively becoming invisible and equivalent to trials with no stimulus. If participants experience hallucinations on these trials (and thus report that they have perceived a stimulus), these will be expressed in our results as prior-based lapse estimations. In support for this interpretation, we found that there were significantly more lapse estimations made on trials when the stimulus contrast was below the participants' 75% detection threshold (based on their individual psychometric curve) than when it was above [$F(1,84) = 12.61, P < 0.001$; Fig. 7A] and we found a strong correlation between prior-based lapse rate on threshold contrast trials and number of hallucinations on no-stimulus trials (Fig. 7B). Together, this suggests that although patients appear to acquire the same prior as controls, they tend to hallucinate this prior less often than controls when there is no stimulus, or when the stimulus is below detection threshold.

Interestingly, this diminished impact of prior expectations in the detection task was not observed in our previous work in participants with high schizotypal traits (Karvelis *et al.*, 2018), suggesting that it might be characteristic of the chronic state of schizophrenia.

The fact that patients exhibit fewer prior-based lapses and hallucinations suggests that their perception is less influenced by their learned prior expectations than control

participants. This is consistent with previously reported findings suggesting that patients with chronic schizophrenia are less sensitive to expectation-driven illusions (e.g. the hollow-mask illusion) than controls (Tschacher *et al.*, 2006; Dima *et al.*, 2009; Crawford *et al.*, 2010; Horton and Silverstein, 2011; Keane *et al.*, 2013, Notredame *et al.*, 2014). This finding is also in line with results from Schmack *et al.* (2013, 2015), reporting a decreased influence of induced expectations (priors) on perception.

It is intriguing, however, that the influence of prior expectations is weaker in the detection task, but similar to that of controls for the estimation task. This may reflect the fact that conscious detection and estimation may depend on different processing stages, with possibly different representations for the prior distributions, or involve different mappings between representations and responses (Petzschner *et al.*, 2015). In future work we will aim to address the possible neural substrate for the effects we describe, by modelling how prior distributions could modulate visual responses or their read-out (Seriès *et al.*, 2009) to explain differential biases in different dimensions.

Other factors might contribute to the absence of differences in the estimation bias. One factor might be that few of our patients reported clinically significant levels of hallucinations (PANSS items > 3), and that this propensity might be more pertinent than the diagnosis of schizophrenia *per se* (Powers *et al.*, 2017). We found some evidence supporting the fact that patients who express fewer or weaker positive symptoms differ more from controls in our task than patients who express more or stronger positive symptoms: PANSS Positive symptom score and prior-based lapses (estimated via BAYES_P) were close to being negatively correlated ($\tau_b = -0.314, P = 0.063$; Kendall's

correlation; Supplementary Fig. 5A); this relationship was also backed up by a much stronger correlation for when lapse estimations were estimated directly from the behavioural data using Equation 1 ($\tau_b = -0.465$, $P = 0.006$; Kendall's correlation; Supplementary Fig. 5B). However, it should be noted that no correlation was found between the PANSS Positive symptom score and the number of hallucinations exhibited on no-stimulus trials.

Similarly, the absence of stronger effects might be related to illness duration: weaker estimation biases may be characteristic of earlier stages of the illness but may not be detectable anymore in our patients as they have been generally ill for a long time, due to medication or compensatory mechanisms. We find some support for this idea with a significant correlation between duration of illness and magnitude of estimation bias ($\tau_b = 0.523$, $P = 0.003$; Kendall's correlation; Supplementary Fig. 5C).

Finally, since the differences appear only for the detection part of the task, it might be that chronic patients have simply developed an increased perceptual threshold. Following this idea, patients would require stronger evidence (i.e. sharper posterior) in order to perceive a stimulus or to make a decision about the presence of a stimulus. This is consistent with the fact that patients required higher stimulus contrasts and integrated information over longer periods of time before responding (slower reaction times during the estimation task). We therefore hypothesize that it is a possible adaptation strategy used by patients over time to minimize responses to stimuli that were not truly present (i.e. their psychotic hallucinations).

Taken together, our results suggest that statistical learning is intact in relatively well patients with chronic schizophrenia on stable doses of second generation antipsychotic medication. The impact of their acquired priors is also the same as that of controls in the estimation task, but weaker in the detection task. These results are surprising in view of the current prominent theories proposing that schizophrenia is a disorder of predictive processing or Bayesian inference, and suggest ways in which these accounts need to be nuanced. The similarity of controls and patients' performance in our task may however be related to the success of treatment or some other adaptive process related to illness duration. Future work will aim at testing participants at earlier stages of the illness, and ideally before pharmacological treatment has begun.

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Competing interests

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Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *Brain* online.

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