

Reading Faces Can Be Tough for Bipolar Patients, Study Finds

April 16, 2013 [Articles](#)

One major challenge for individuals with a [mental disorder is functioning in social situations](#). For individuals who meet criteria for disorders like anxiety, depression or any other mental health issue, there are cognitive functions that are impaired and may significantly impact the ability to interact with others and build healthy relationships.

In some cases, the difficulty may be rooted in a function that most people are able to navigate without thinking. Reading facial expressions can greatly impact the flow of conversation and adds significantly to the interaction among people. However, when one person is unable to correctly identify the feelings expressed on another person's face, it can limit their understanding of the conversation and impact their response.

A recent study examined some of the problems people with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia have in understanding facial expressions. Both of the disorders are characterized by significant difficulty functioning in relationships with others.

Past research has shown that people with schizophrenia have issues with emotional perception. While some of the risk factors connected with schizophrenia are shared by patients with bipolar disorder, it had yet to be determined whether bipolar patients had problems with emotional perception.

In a study led by Jonathan K. Wynn, researchers at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System examined responses to facial cues among a group of patients who were diagnosed with schizophrenia and [bipolar disorder](#), as well as in a group of control individuals.

The participants were shown pictures of faces that expressed sadness, fear, anger, happiness or disgust. They were then shown faces with neutral expressions. In the first group of images, the

<https://www.recoveryranch.com/category/articles/>

participants were asked to name the emotion expressed. In the second group of photos, they were instructed to identify the gender of the face.

The researchers found that schizophrenia patients had the hardest time recognizing the facial expression. The participants with bipolar identified the emotions more accurately, but took much longer to do so. And when they did, their scores were still much lower than the control group's results.

In the second task, in which the participants were instructed to identify the gender, the bipolar and schizophrenic patients had difficulty in perceiving the correct gender.

While the schizophrenia and bipolar participants seemed to have varied levels of difficulty in identifying emotions and gender, the findings clearly provide evidence for challenges in social settings for both mental disorders.

The findings are published in a recent issue of the journal *Psychological Medicine*.