A question of control: can our differences be explained by our capacity for attention control?

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Abstract

Attention control and specifically distractor suppression is a fundamental process that is called upon in a variety of scenarios. However, we are not all equally able to efficiently suppress irrelevant information. One example is following brain damage as patients can sometimes be completely unable to ignore distraction. Interestingly, differences in our ability to suppress distractors are not unique to cases of brain trauma and are also visible as we age and even in relation to expression of specific traits such as Autism or Psychosis tendencies. In this talk I will present findings looking at individual and group differences in our capacity for attention control, and how it is linked to other cognitive tasks – such as motor control. These findings support the notion that individual differences in distractor suppression may have an overarching effect on behaviour and also point to the potential benefit training attention can have in certain syndromes.

Biosketch

Carmel completed his undergraduate degree in psychology and computer sciences at Tel Aviv University, Israel. He later moved on to develop a computerised assessment and training batteries for children and adults with ADHD (together with Professor Yehoshua Tsal and Professor Lilach Shalev) following which he arrived at Birmingham to study for a Ph.D. with Professor Glyn Humphreys looking at mechanisms of salience-based selection. He then continued his training in cognitive neuroscience methods in a couple of post-doc positions (ESRC, MRC) before taking up a lectureship position in 2010. Carmel is leading the Cognitive Neuroscience of Atypical Attention Lab and is a member of the Centre for Human Brain Health.