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Authors

Hetrick, WP
Smith, DA
Spruiell, E
[et al.](#)

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THE PUTATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF SENSORY GATING: FACTOR ANALYSES AND A SELF-REPORT RATING SCALE

W.P. Hetrick*, D.A. Smith, E. Spruiell, C.A. Sandman,
W.E. Bunney, Jr.

*Departments of Psychology and Psychiatry, 1885 Townshend
Hall Rm 245, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210
and Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, University
of California, Irvine, 92717, USA*

Clinical descriptions of perceptual and attentional abnormalities in schizophrenia demonstrate that important phenomenological features of the disorder include perceptions of being flooded, or inundated, by sensory stimuli. Sensory 'gating' deficits are hypothesized to underlie these symptoms. McGhie and Chapman (1961) and Venables (1964) rationally catalogued a variety of clinically observed attentional and perceptual aberrations, including distractibility by external sensory stimuli, heightened awareness of background noises, and perceived increase in stimulus intensity. However, no empirical analysis of these clinical phenomena has been made, nor has the connection between these self-reported phenomena and the putative psychophysiological substrate (e.g., P50/PPI deficits) been tested. The purpose of this investigation was to (1) empirically map the major dimensions of perceptual and attentional phenomenology, (2) identify the dimensions most pertinent to the sensory gating approach to the study of schizophrenia, and (3) develop a self-report rating scale to quantify the identified phenomenology. A pool of 137 items measuring the putative phenomenological correlates of sensory gating was administered to over 200 subjects. Factor analyses revealed one primary factor that appeared to encompass a broad range of perceptual phenomenology, including heightened awareness of sensory stimuli, distractibility, and experiences associated with fatigue and stress. A self-report 'gating' scale was developed to quantify these phenomena.