



LOG ID	BOOK REFERENCE	RCT FILTER	CONFIDENCE TIER
SEC 8.1.3	CHAPTER 8: COGNITIVE DOWNCLOCK (10 Bits vs. 1 Billion)	OFF	CONSENSUS

AUDITED CLAIM

PREDICTIVE RENDERING ENGINE (FRITH'S PATCH)

SYSTEMS MODEL — AS STATED IN THE BOOK

Clinically, a history of psychological trauma fundamentally alters the brain's **predictive processing frameworks**, causing the system to over-weight **danger priors**, fail to update from safety cues, and misclassify neutral signals as hostile threats.

VALIDATION QUERY

Does a history of psychological trauma alter predictive processing frameworks in the brain, leading to the perception of non-existent interpersonal threats?

EMPIRICAL FINDING

Computational threat-learning models demonstrate that psychological trauma profoundly alters predictive processing frameworks, causing the system to over-weight danger priors and exhibit distinct resistance when updating safety beliefs. In interpersonal contexts, this computational bias frequently manifests as hostile attribution.

PRIMARY ANCHORS

- Leone et al., 2022, Nature Communications
- McLaughlin et al., 2020, Mechanisms Linking Childhood Trauma Exposure and Psychopathology

ABOUT THIS RECORD

Each claim in the book is decompiled from its IT metaphor into a naked, falsifiable scientific claim, then anchored to a **primary peer-reviewed source**. Claim and anchor are queried against the Consensus academic database (200M+ papers) under a fixed protocol — top-tier **Q1/Q2 journals only**, preprints excluded, human studies only. If a hypothesis fails the audit, the build is rejected: the AI generates the syntax; the peer-reviewed grid validates the physics.

CONFIDENCE TIERS

- CONSENSUS** — **this log** — broadly established, highly replicated mechanics.
- EMERGING** — plausible, actively researched; no universal consensus yet.
- EXPERIMENTAL** — contested, extrapolated, or purely theoretical.

RCT FILTER — Controlled Studies is ON for interventions (a forced action must beat a control) and OFF for mechanisms (so foundational neuroscience isn't blocked).

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Yes, psychological trauma alters predictive processing and often biases threat perception, especially in interpersonal contexts.

1. Introduction

Psychological trauma appears to alter predictive processing frameworks in ways that increase expectation of danger, reduce updating from safety information, and bias attention toward threat-related cues. In PTSD, this pattern is expressed computationally as exaggerated threat predictions, altered prediction-error weighting, impaired context processing, and resistance to revising danger beliefs when new evidence suggests safety (■ Leone et al., 2022; ■ Homan et al., 2019; ■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024; ■ Liberzon & Abelson, 2016). In trauma-exposed people without necessarily having PTSD, related but usually less severe alterations appear in social information processing, including hostile attribution bias, distrust, negative interpretations of ambiguous social cues, and difficulty distinguishing threat from non-threat facial signals (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Hepp et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2016; ■ Schmitz et al., 2023).

The strongest support concerns altered threat learning and interpersonal threat bias, not a blanket claim that trauma makes people literally perceive threats that do not exist in every setting. Trauma-exposed children and adults often misclassify neutral or ambiguous cues as threatening, fail to separate safety from danger cues, or maintain threat-focused attention longer than controls (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ McLaughlin et al., 2016; Lazarov et al., 2018; ■ Seitz et al., 2021). Evidence is strongest in PTSD and childhood maltreatment, moderate in broader trauma exposure, and more mixed for early automatic threat detection than for later appraisal, sustained attention, and belief updating (■ Stevens & Jovanović, 2018; ■ Hepp et al., 2021; Shenberger et al., 2021).

Does a history of psychological trauma alter predictive processing frameworks in the brain, leading to the perception of non-existent interpersonal threats?

N = 31

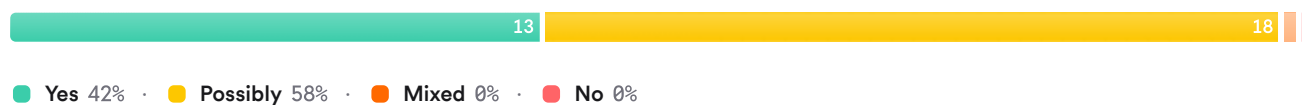


FIGURE 1 Consensus on trauma altering threat predictive processing

The literature supports a clear yes for biased threat prediction and interpersonal threat sensitivity, but a narrower yes for outright false interpersonal threat perception. The best-supported mechanism is over-weighted danger priors plus weak updating from safety evidence, especially in PTSD and childhood trauma (■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024; ■ Hepp et al., 2021).

2. Methods

The search ran across more than 170 million research papers indexed by Consensus, including Semantic Scholar, PubMed, and other sources. The workflow identified 240 candidate papers through direct search, citation crawling, and targeted synonym expansion around predictive processing, Bayesian threat learning, trauma, hypervigilance, and social cognition. After machine-learning relevance screening, 127 papers were retained as eligible, and the 50 most relevant human studies and reviews were included for synthesis.

Search Strategy

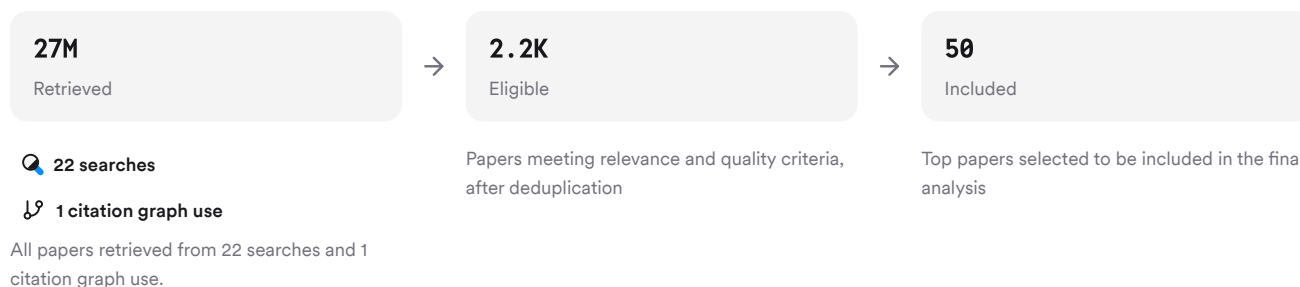


FIGURE 2 Paper screening and inclusion workflow

The strategy combined predictive-processing terms with trauma, PTSD, threat perception, social cognition, paranoia, and fear-learning mechanisms.

3. Results

3.1 Key Papers

A small set of papers anchors the literature because they directly connect trauma to predictive or associative threat computations, belief updating, and interpersonal threat bias. The most central are the computational PTSD studies on prediction and learning, the child maltreatment studies on distrust and hostile attribution, and the context-processing model that explains why safe cues are misread as dangerous (■ Leone et al., 2022; ■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Liberzon & Abelson, 2016).

Paper	Summary
(■ Liberzon & Abelson, 2016)	Exaggerated predictive control in PTSD (■ Leone et al., 2022)
(■ McLaughlin et al., 2016)	Altered threat value and associability (■ Homan et al., 2019)
(■ Leone et al., 2022)	Maltreatment linked to distrust and threat bias (■ Hepp et al., 2021)

FIGURE 3 Foundational papers in this trauma corpus

3.2 Predictive And Learning Mechanisms

Trauma-related PTSD is linked to exaggerated predictive control over memory states and weak reactive correction when predictions fail, suggesting that top-down threat expectations can dominate incoming evidence (■ Leone et al., 2022). Combat-related PTSD is also associated with increased sensitivity to aversive prediction errors and decreased striatal tracking of associability, indicating altered computational updating of threat value (■ Homan et al., 2019).

A scenario-based predictive-processing study found that higher PTSD symptoms were associated with reduced updating of danger beliefs after disconfirmatory evidence, although effect sizes were small to medium and preregistered analyses were initially null (■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024). A separate naturalistic prediction study showed that higher PTSD severity was associated with worse explicit and implicit prediction even for neutral ongoing events, implying that trauma-related predictive disruption is not limited to overt threat stimuli (■ Eisenberg et al., 2023).

3.3 Interpersonal Threat Perception

Dimension	Childhood Maltreatment	PTSD	Borderline/PTSD-Related Samples	Citations
Distrust of others	Increased	Common in trauma models	Elevated with comorbid PTSD	(■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ Schmitz et al., 2023; ■ Kaiser et al., 2020)
Neutral cue misread as threat	More negative face ratings	Threat-primed neutral ratings	Neutral faces misclassified as angry	(■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ Hayes et al., 2012; ■ Seitz et al., 2021)
Ambiguous social interpretation	Hostile attribution bias	Impaired social cognition	Anger bias linked to adversity	(■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; Couette et al., 2019; ■ Seitz et al., 2021)
Affect sensitivity	Negative affect amplifies distrust	Hypervigilance sustains threat focus	Difficult disengagement from angry faces	(■ Schmitz et al., 2023; Lazarov et al., 2018; ■ Kaiser et al., 2020)

FIGURE 4 Interpersonal threat processing across trauma-related populations

Across studies, the core interpersonal effect is not hallucinating social danger, but overinterpreting ambiguous or neutral interpersonal cues as potentially threatening. That pattern appears in maltreatment, PTSD, and trauma-related personality pathology, with the clearest evidence in face-perception, trust, and hostile-attribution tasks (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Stevens & Jovanović, 2018).

3.4 Threat-Safety Discrimination

Childhood maltreatment is repeatedly associated with poor discrimination between threat and safety cues. In one conditioning study, maltreated children showed blunted responses to threat cues and failed to differentiate threat from safety early in learning, consistent with fear generalization or impaired associative learning (■ McLaughlin et al., 2016). A later longitudinal study found the opposite physiological direction—greater early SCR to threat versus safety—but the same broader conclusion that trauma alters fear learning and that this predicts later PTSD symptoms (■ Machlin et al., 2024).

PTSD also shows concept-based fear overgeneralization beyond perceptual similarity, with stronger neural responses to semantically related safe items and slower behavioral separation of threat from safety categories (Morey et al., 2020). Context-processing models argue that dysregulated hippocampal-prefrontal-thalamic circuitry makes it harder to use situational information to disambiguate safe from dangerous cues (■ Liberzon & Abelson, 2016).

Results Timeline

Trauma research has moved from attention-bias observations to computational models of prediction and belief updating.

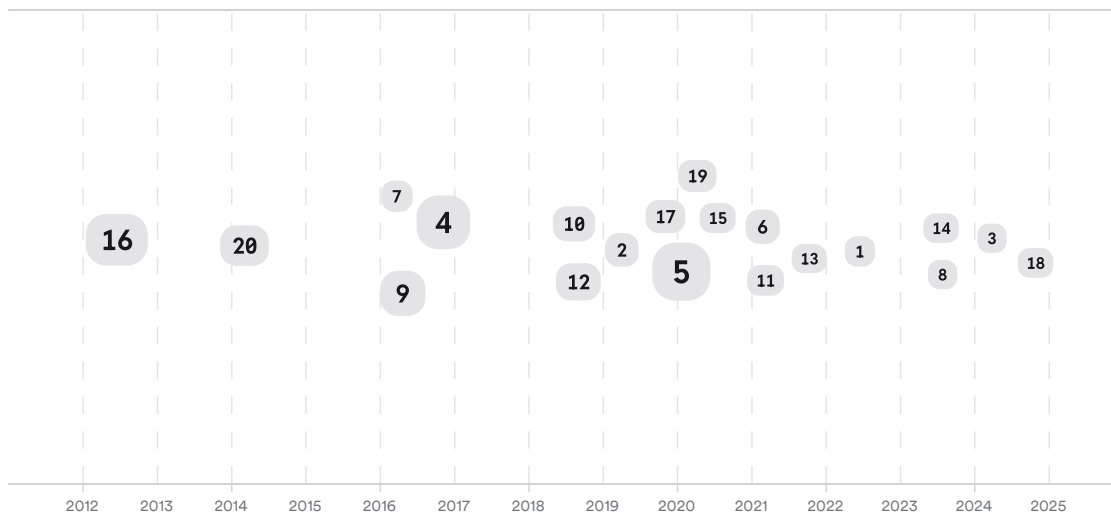


FIGURE 5 Timeline of trauma threat-processing findings, larger markers indicate more citations

The arc shows early emphasis on attention and fear conditioning, followed by neurocircuit and computational accounts that formalize how danger priors, prediction errors, and context processing may sustain symptoms. Recent work increasingly tests social, interpersonal, and belief-updating mechanisms directly (■ Iacoviello et al., 2014; ■ Homan et al., 2019; ■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024).

Top Contributors

Type	Name	Papers
Author	K. McLaughlin	[229c87793d6b5088949983e877746f92][6a09bc72e92f52ceb56876337b7783ff] [58c5304953ea57adb4ec61924288d7bc][3521c43568f35bc9b6182c7a2cbe323f]
Author	J. Stevens	[4515c2d3428b55a78f28ab44276a86be][15a2b96ab4045bf6a3f10d597e8af77c] [55ca9b7af7ee560ea603068ef6214350][cd27ddb1fe0b5fdaa69faadfe26398a]
Author	J. Cisler	[3eb7ff310d535e03b0ecf27f2bdb11d8][4c9a451dbef15a108d4321ae6384777b] [b81cf072975c504c9257038b4c6b6b10][04e538adfbac55af8eb2bbe7b161d3b7]
Journal	<i>Psychological Medicine</i>	[de7b646566425941b6133eda5933c200][c6d4e1d445c75d99979feceb662e1d44] [3521c43568f35bc9b6182c7a2cbe323f][9137dfe709ec51e1979aa166d10eb56f]
Journal	<i>Neuropsychopharmacology</i>	[4b863f2a45a55f94b89e1e8235ce6855][6a09bc72e92f52ceb56876337b7783ff] [55ca9b7af7ee560ea603068ef6214350][04e538adfbac55af8eb2bbe7b161d3b7]
Journal	<i>Journal of Psychiatric Research</i>	[a29ae111d8e95d43a1b9ea33cba0853c][4c9a451dbef15a108d4321ae6384777b]

FIGURE 6 Authors and journals most frequent in included papers

4. Discussion

The corpus supports the idea that trauma alters predictive processing, but the mechanism is better established for PTSD and childhood maltreatment than for trauma exposure in general. Several studies directly implicate expectation updating, prediction errors, and model-based learning, while reviews place these within broader threat-learning and decision-making frameworks (■ Leone et al., 2022; ■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024; Hiser et al., 2023; Levy & Schiller, 2020).

The evidence is strongest where different methods converge: behavioral distrust and hostile-attribution tasks, eye tracking, fear conditioning, fMRI, and computational modeling all indicate that trauma can bias the system toward threat priors and away from flexible use of safety information (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; Lazarov et al., 2018; ■ DeCross et al., 2020; ■ Homan et al., 2019). Longitudinal and prospective work strengthens this case by showing that altered threat processing predicts later symptoms or recovery trajectories (■ Machlin et al., 2024; Roeckner et al., 2025; ■ McCrory et al., 2017).

Important limitations remain. Findings on fear learning are not uniform, with some trauma-exposed youth showing blunted discrimination and others heightened differential responding, suggesting developmental stage, trauma type, and task design matter (■ McLaughlin et al., 2016; ■ Machlin et al., 2024). Evidence for early automatic threat detection is mixed, whereas later sustained attention and belief updating are more consistent targets (Lazarov et al., 2018; Shenberger et al., 2021). And some apparently “false” threat perceptions may reflect realistic adaptation to dangerous environments rather than simple distortion (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Jaffe et al., 2019).

The interpersonal part of the question is especially well supported. Childhood maltreatment and interpersonal violence are associated with distrust, negative ratings of social cues, and hostile attribution in ambiguous interactions, which plausibly operationalize perception of non-existent interpersonal threat (■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Schmitz et al., 2023). But the literature usually measures bias, overgeneralization, and misclassification rather than outright delusional threat perception, so that final claim should stay narrow (Couette et al., 2019; ■ Krkovic et al., 2018).

Claim	Evidence Strength	Reasoning	Papers
Trauma alters threat learning and predictive computations in PTSD.	 Strong	Multiple computational, neural, and review papers converge.	(■ Leone et al., 2022; ■ Homan et al., 2019; Levy & Schiller, 2020)
Childhood trauma increases interpersonal distrust and threat-biased social perception.	 Strong	Large behavioral and review evidence across maltreatment studies.	(■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Schmitz et al., 2023)
Trauma impairs updating of danger beliefs from safety evidence.	 Moderate	Direct support exists, but effects are preliminary and modest.	(■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024)
Trauma causes perception of non-existent interpersonal threats in general populations.	 Moderate	Supported indirectly through misclassification and hostile attribution, not direct clinical proof.	(■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; Chu et al., 2016; ■ Seitz et al., 2021)
Early automatic threat detection is consistently heightened after trauma.	 Weak	Results are mixed, especially for masked early-attention paradigms.	(Lazarov et al., 2018; Shenberger et al., 2021)

FIGURE 7 Key claims and supporting evidence strengths

5. Conclusion

Across this literature, a history of psychological trauma does appear to alter predictive processing frameworks in the brain. The most consistent pattern is stronger danger priors, poorer threat-safety discrimination, sustained attention to threat, and weaker updating from disconfirming safety information, especially in PTSD and childhood maltreatment (■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024; ■ Liberzon & Abelson, 2016).

For the specific question about perceiving non-existent interpersonal threats, the evidence supports a qualified yes: trauma is associated with distrust, hostile attribution, and interpreting neutral or ambiguous social cues as more threatening than they are. But the literature more often shows biased appraisal and overgeneralization than literal false perception in everyday social settings (■ McLaughlin et al., 2020; ■ Hepp et al., 2021; ■ Hayes et al., 2012).

Research Gaps

The biggest gap is direct, longitudinal testing of predictive-processing models specifically in interpersonal contexts rather than generic threat tasks. Current coverage is stronger for PTSD and fear learning than for real-world social prediction, adolescent development, and mechanistic treatment change (Cisler & Herringa, 2020; ■ Haim-Nachum et al., 2024).

Topic/Outcome	Prediction Updating	Interpersonal Tasks	Longitudinal Data	Treatment Change
PTSD danger beliefs	4	3	2	1
Childhood maltreatment distrust	2	6	2	1
Fear-safety discrimination	7	1	4	GAP
Adolescent PTSD neurodevelopment	1	1	3	GAP
Real-world false social threat perception	1	2	1	GAP

Open Research Questions

Future work needs to test when threat-biased prediction is adaptive calibration to danger versus maladaptive overgeneralization to safe interpersonal contexts.

Question	Why
Do trauma-focused treatments reduce interpersonal threat prediction errors by improving safety belief updating?	This would directly test whether predictive-processing change is a mechanism of recovery rather than a correlate.
Which trauma types most strongly bias perception of neutral faces and ambiguous social intentions?	Trauma type likely matters, especially for interpersonal versus nonrelational threat, but direct comparative data remain sparse.
When does realistic vigilance in dangerous environments become maladaptive false interpersonal threat perception?	This distinction is clinically and theoretically central, and current studies rarely separate ecological accuracy from bias.

In sum, trauma does alter predictive processing in ways that can promote perception of interpersonal threat where objective danger is low or absent, but the evidence is strongest for biased inference and overgeneralization rather than wholesale false perception.

These search results were found and analyzed using Consensus, an AI-powered search engine for research. Try it at <https://consensus.app>. © 2026 Consensus NLP, Inc. Personal, non-commercial use only; redistribution requires copyright holders' consent.

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