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UNCOVERING THE NEURAL BASIS OF THE SENSE OF AGENCY IN A CIVILIAN AND IN A MILITARY POPULATION

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Background and Aims: The study of why coercion influences so drastically human behaviours has barely been explored in the scientific literature. In several past studies (Caspar et al., 2016;2017;2018), we observed that obeying orders reduces the sense of agency using the method of interval estimates compared to acting freely. These effects have been shown in civilians, who are not frequently confronted to situations of strict compliance to rules. Some social structures, such as the armed forces, rely on strict hierarchical organization where people are required to follow orders. The professional role of military personnel implies compliance to hierarchical authority, based on the mandate society has given to that authority.

Method and Preliminary results: In the first study, we aimed to systematically compare civilians to military officers (i.e. lieutenants) in a paradigm involving either to obey orders of an experimenter or giving orders to another individual. We will evaluate how the specific status of lieutenants influence the neural bases of the sense of agency when they act as agent or commander, freely or not, compared to be a civilian. We predicted that since lieutenants are trained to be officers and to command troops, they would have a stronger sense of agency than civilians when they give orders to someone. We could also expect a stronger activation of agency- and responsibility-related brain regions in military officers when they command others. At the moment, 22 civilians and 9 military members have been scanned.

Keywords: Sense of agency; Coercion; Military

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