

The dissociated self: An investigation of emotional responses to a new body-threat task in those predisposed to anomalous body experiences, dissociation and disembodiment

ABSTRACT:

Background

Neurocognitive processes underlying stable embodiment can breakdown, leading to striking aberrations in self-consciousness. These striking experiences are providing crucial insights not only into the nature of anomalous self-experience (and those prone to it), but into the more fundamental aspects of human self-consciousness per-se. As such, investigating anomalous aberrant experiences can be a potent method for examining previously ignored aspects of human behaviour and conscious experience.

Aims

The project developed a new computer-based task for quantifying biases in body-representations and self-consciousness in those prone to different forms of aberrant conscious experience. The new task consists of dynamic movie clips and still photographic images.

Method

This new task was examined with event-related psychophysiology (skin conductance responses: SCRs) to provide an index of autonomic emotional reactivity and a series of behavioural ratings. Part of the project was directed at establishing this new measure (now termed the Body-Threat-Assessment Battery: BTAB) and another part directed at exploring its use with groups predisposed to dissociative hallucinatory experiences. The BTAB involves threats to real human limbs from different perspectives.

Results & Conclusions

Initial findings have revealed the normative data for the BTAB measure. The BTAB has shown itself to be very effective at eliciting emotional responses (relative to non-body based baseline stimuli) in terms of both skin conductance responses and behavioural ratings. The manipulation of perspective has not revealed any reliable differences.

Keywords

Dissociation, Emotion, Skin conductance responses, Disorders of consciousness

Published Work:

Dewe, H., Watson, D., & Braithwaite, J. J. (2016). Uncomfortably numb: new evidence for suppressed emotional reactivity in response to body-threats in those predisposed to sub-clinical dissociative experiences. *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry*, 377-401. doi: /10.1080/13546805.2016.1212703

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