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ESTRANGED FROM ONESELF, ESTRANGED FROM THE OTHERS: INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF DEPERSONALISATION ON SELF-OTHER MIRRORING

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Background: The sense of self lies at the heart of conscious experience, anchoring our disparate perceptions, emotions, thoughts and actions into a unitary whole. There is a growing consensus that sensory information about the body plays a central role in structuring this basic sense of self. Depersonalisation (DP) is an intriguing form of altered subjective experience in which people report feelings of unreality and detachment from their sense of self.

Aims: Our project brings together interdisciplinary resources from philosophy, cognitive neuroscience and psychophysiology in order to explore the relationship between the experience of DP and sensorimotor processing of self and other.

Method: The current study used the Visual Remapping of Touch (VRT) paradigm to explore self-bias in visual tactile integration in non-clinical participants reporting high and low levels of depersonalisation experiences. 63 participants (17 male) with a mean age of 24 ± 4 participated in this study.

Results: Due to the alterations in self-experience that characterise DP, we predicted that participants in our high DP group would show a reduced overall VRT effect regardless of the observed face (H1) and fail to show the self-bias VRT effect previously reported in other studies (H2). Our results offered support for H2 by showing that amount of anomalous body experiences reported by participants was negatively correlated with the size of their VRT self-bias. However contrary to H1 we found evidence for increased overall VRT effect in the high DP group compared to the low DP group.

Conclusions: Our findings revealed that participants high in DP showed an increased overall VRT effect but a no self-face bias, instead showing a greater VRT effect when observing the face of another person. In addition, across all participants, self-bias was negatively predicted by score on the anomalous body experiences subscale suggesting that this effect was specifically linked to disruptions in the perception of the bodily self. These results provide evidence for disrupted integration of tactile and visual representations of the bodily self in those experiencing DP and provide a greater understanding of how disruptions in sensory perception of the self may underlie the phenomenology of depersonalisation.

Keywords: Depersonalisation, Self, Visual remapping of touch, Touch, Social cognition

Publications:

Farmer et al. (under review). The Detached Self: Investigating the Effect of Depersonalisation on Self-Bias in the Visual Remapping of Touch.

Ciaunica, A., Charlton, J., Farmer, H. (forthcoming). When the Window Cracks – Transparency and the Loss of the Sense of Self in Depersonalisation and Meditation, *Frontiers in Theoretical Psychology*.

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