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SENSE OF AGENCY IN THE OUIJA BOARD EXPERIENCE

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Background: For over 100 years, the Ouija board has been used as a way to communicate with spirits. Players hold a heart shaped “planchette” over a board marked with letters and numbers, while taking turns to ask questions. Despite being attributed to spirits, the movement of the Ouija board stems from small movements of the players. However, as these movements may be initiated unconsciously, and because several people are holding the board, they do not feel a sense of agency for these movements.

Aims: The aim of the current project is to determine the mechanisms by which people feel a reduced sense of agency in the Ouija board, despite the movement of the planchette always being initiated by one of the players. The first experiment aims to assess the role of action-effect anticipation in a Ouija board game. More specifically, it tests the idea that reduced agency in the joint action context of a Ouija board, comes about by reduced anticipation of the predicted action outcome. The second experiment assess the role of physiological arousal in the sense of agency during Ouija board use. Here, we will assess the degree to which agency experienced is influenced by emotional arousal during Ouija board usage.

Method: Experiment 1 uses EEG to assess action-effect processing in the Oijua board context. The task involves 2 participants holding a computer mouse, while looking at a computer screen with a “view hole” to a Ouija board. As the participants move around, they can view a small portion of the Ouija board though a stationary view hole. In this study, we are measuring the degree to which action outcomes during Ouija board use are subject to sensory attenuation. This refers to the fact that auditory action-outcomes show a smaller N1 (the EEG component reflecting activity in the primary auditory cortex) for self-triggered versus externally triggered events. Here we tested the extent to which sensory attenuation might be reduced in a Ouija board context, and the degree to which this correlates with the experience of agency. Study 2 will use the same experimental task, but will manipulate emotional arousal in the Ouija board context, and relate these physiological measures to subjective agency experience.

Data Collection: After piloting the paradigm, we are currently collecting data for study 1, which is expected to be completed in March. Data analysis of study 1 will be conducted alongside testing for experiment 2.

Keywords: Ouija Board, Sense of Agency, Sensory Attenuation, Electroencephalography, Emotional Arousal

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