

Remote staring detected by conscious and Psychophysiological variables - Combining and improving two successful paradigms

Results:

Findings in parapsychology suggest an effect of distant intentionality.

Two laboratory set-ups explored this topic by measuring the effect of a distant intention on psychophysiological variables. The DMILS (direct mental interaction in living systems) experiments investigate the effect of various intentions on the electrodermal activity (EDA) of a remote subject. The "Remote Staring" experiments examine whether gazing by an observer (starer) covaries with the electrodermal activity of the person being observed (staree).

In two meta-analyses (Schmidt, Schneider, Utts & Walach, 2004) it became obvious that the remote staring studies had a lower overall quality than the DMILS studies. While there are some high quality DMILS studies (score over 90%) the highest quality in Remote Staring studies is 71%.

Thus there is a lack in studies with good methodology to assess the remote staring paradigm.

We conducted a remote staring study that intended to overcome methodological shortcomings of earlier studies

Fifty participants were invited to take part as starees. After completing questionnaires on mindfulness, mood, personality and paranormal belief they rested in a comfortable position in front of a video camera while their EDA was continuously monitored. The experimenter also acted as the starrer and either observed or did not observe the participant through a closed circuit television system according to a random schedule. EDA during stare and non-stare epochs was compared for significant differences.

In addition to this basic (replication) set-up two new hypotheses were tested. The participant had the possibility to press a button whenever s/he feels stared at. This added a conscious response variable without engaging into the disadvantages of the standard conscious guessing paradigm (guessing strategies, response bias etc). Furthermore the distraction of the starrer's intention during non-stare epochs was varied. In one condition s/he was mentally occupied by a cognitive task, in the other s/he was just told not to stare

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(standard condition). We hypothesized that the distraction from the target in the standard condition was too weak to avoid an unwanted intentional effect in the staree.

Overall we did not find any staring effect at all, not in the EDA data and not in the 'conscious' open response situation. The difference between the conditions where the sender was distracted or not distracted was not significant ($p = .07$) but for the condition where the starers were distracted ($N = 20$) we found a medium effect size for a staring effect according to our hypothesis of $d = .43$ ($p = .085$) for the difference between staring and non staring epochs. This exploratory finding gives support to the hypothesis that the starer's distraction of his or her attention during the non-staring epochs might be a crucial factor in the remote staring research. We suggest that this hypothesis should be followed-up on a larger sample.

Published Work:

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Müller, S., Schmidt, S., & Walach, H. (2009). The feeling of Being Stared at: A Parapsychological Classic with a Facelift. *European Journal of Parapsychology*, 24(2), 117-138.

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