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 break down, 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:
Researcher’s Contacts:

Dr. Jason J Braithwaite
Reader in Brain Science
Fylde College
Lancaster University
LA1 4YF
UK
Tel: 01524 594335
Email: j.j.braithwaite@lancaster.ac.uk