

Sharing synchronized events helps us feel closer to strangers

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(Medical Xpress) -- Psychologists at Royal Holloway, University of London have discovered that sharing a synchronized experience with another person may change the perception we have of ourselves and make strangers appear more familiar and similar to ourselves.

The researchers from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway created an experimental situation that resembles the experience of looking at yourself in the mirror, but they replaced the 'mirror reflection' of the person's own face with that of a stranger.

The participant then observed the face of the unfamiliar other being touched with a cotton bud, while the experimenter touched them on their own face in complete synchrony over a period of time.

The researchers found that feeling touch on one's own face and seeing touch applied to the face of an unknown person changed the participant's ability to recognise their own face.

Dr. Ana Tajadura-Jiménez, one of the researchers, explains:

"Specifically, when asked to recognise a picture of their own face from a sequence of morphed pictures of their own face and the face of the other person they previously saw being touched, the picture that people chose included features of the other person. Importantly, this change occurred only when the two [faces](#) were touched in synchrony, but not when there was a small delay between the felt and seen touch."

She added: "This reinforces the view that synchronized events between individuals might act as a form of social glue that makes people feel closer and more similar to each other."

The researchers point out that several of our everyday social interactions involve synchronised events, including walking alongside people where we tend to synchronise our steps and the power of dance, sports and rituals seems to rely, at least in part, in synchronised sensory experiences. "Our participants shared a simple sensory experience with another unfamiliar person, and yet we show how this experience changed their representation of how they look, and made this other person appear more similar to themselves. This finding shows how the sense of who we are, our sense of identity, is given to us by our interactions with others, and is, eventually, reflected back to others," says lead researcher Dr. Manos Tsakiris.

The study, 'The other in me: Interpersonal multisensory stimulation

changes the mental representation of the self,' published in the journal [PLoS ONE](#), also highlights the power of shared multisensory experiences with a virtual character, an 'avatar', in computer games which may lead to the personalisation of this avatar and to augment users' engagement in games and virtual applications.

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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