

'It takes 2 to know 1': Shared experiences change self-recognition

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Looking at yourself in the mirror every morning, you never think to question whether the person you see is actually you. You feel familiar—at home with your own unique self image. After all, you have been sporting the same old face for years. An innovative study published December 24, 2008 in the online, open-access, peer-reviewed journal *PLoS ONE*, by Dr Manos Tsakiris, Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, challenges this common-sense notion about our own self image. The study shows for the first time that the image we hold of our own face can actually change through shared experiences with other people's faces.

The study reveals that recognition of our own face is not as consistent as we might think. The participants' ability to recognise their own face changed when they watched the face of another person being touched at the same time as their own face was touched, as though they were looking in a mirror. Specifically, when asked to recognize a picture of their own face, the picture that people chose included features of the other person they had previously seen. This did not happen when the two faces were touched out of synchrony.

Sharing an experience with another person may change the perception we have of our own self, such as the recognition of our own face. "As a result of shared experiences, we tend to perceive other people as being more similar to us, and this applies also to the recognition of our own face. This process may be at the root of constructing a self-identity in a social context," says Dr Tsakiris who led the study funded by the

Economic and Social Research Council, UK.

The findings imply that shared experiences may influence the way we perceive ourselves and possibly the way we interact with others. Dr Tsakiris explains, "If I feel that you are more like me, I might then behave to you in a different way. We now test whether shared experiences can make us stereotype others less, or change our attitudes towards people of different social groups, race or gender."

Research on self-recognition may also have a significant impact in understanding and helping people with appearance-related concerns. Shared sensory experiences may ease such concerns and provide insights into the mechanisms that cause them.

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