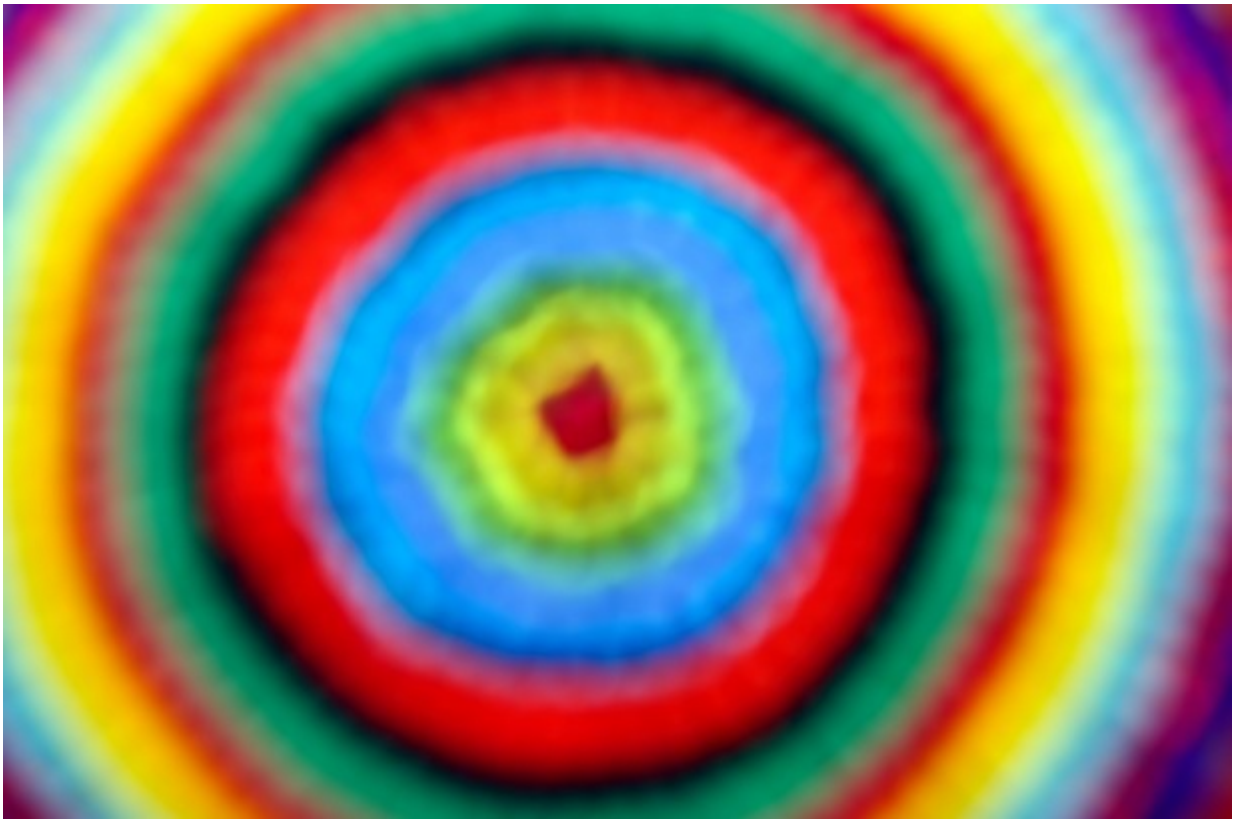


## Study shows staring into someone's eyes for a long time can cause hallucinations

August 20 2015, by Bob Yirka

---



Credit: Marina Shemesh/public domain

(Medical Xpress)—Italian psychologist Giovanni Caputo has conducted a study with human volunteers where it was revealed that when two people stare into one another's eyes for a long period of time, both can

experience disassociation symptoms and hallucinations. In his paper published in the journal *Psychiatry Research*, Caputo describes the experiment he carried out and the results he found and offers some theories to explain what was observed.

Prior research has found that people tend to experience odd sensations when staring at things for a long period of time—people staring at dots on a wall for example, have reported feelings of disassociation, and those staring at their own faces in a mirror reported minor [hallucinations](#). Wondering what might happen if two people stared into each other's eyes for a long period of time, he enlisted the assistance of 40 healthy young volunteers. The volunteers were divided into two groups; one served as the control and was asked to stare at a wall for ten minutes in a dimly lit room. The other group was paired up and the pairs were asked to stare, emotionless, into each others' eyes for ten minutes, also in a dimly lit room, to enhance [facial features](#). Neither group was told the nature of the experiment. Afterwards, all of the volunteers from both groups were given questionnaires which they were asked to fill out.

In looking at the answers, Caputo found that the people in the paired groups reported more disassociation symptoms than those in the control group, such as a loss of connection with reality, and changes in sound or [color perception](#) and complained of time dragging on. More interesting were the answers given regarding hallucinations—90 percent of the paired volunteers reported seeing changes to the face of the person they were staring at, deformations that led to morphing—in many instances into images of a monster, their own face, or even the face of a relative.

Caputo is not able to explain why the hallucinations occurred, but suggests it was likely due to sensory deprivation—he believes it is possible that they might happen as the brain snaps back to reality after zoning out and the mind projects subconscious thoughts onto the face of the other person.

**More information:** Dissociation and hallucinations in dyads engaged through interpersonal gazing, *Psychiatry Research*, August 30, 2015. Volume 228, Issue 3, Pages 659–663.

[dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2015.04.050](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2015.04.050)

## Abstract

Interpersonal gazing in dyads, when the two individuals in the dyad stare at each other in the eyes, is investigated in 20 healthy young individuals at low illumination for 10-min. Results indicate dissociative symptoms, dysmorphic face perceptions, and hallucination-like strange-face apparitions. Dissociative symptoms and face dysmorphia were correlated. Strange-face apparitions were non-correlated with dissociation and dysmorphia. These results indicate that dissociative symptoms and hallucinatory phenomena during interpersonal-gazing under low illumination can involve different processes. Strange-face apparitions may characterize the rebound to "reality" (perceptual reality caused by external stimulus and hallucinatory reality caused by internal input) from a dissociative state induced by sensory deprivation. These phenomena may explain psychodynamic projections of the subject's unconscious meanings into the other's face. The results indicate that interpersonal gazing in dyads can be an effective tool for studying experimentally-induced dissociative symptoms and hallucinatory-like apparitions.

© 2015 Medical Xpress

Citation: Study shows staring into someone's eyes for a long time can cause hallucinations (2015, August 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-eyes-hallucinations.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.