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LIVING IN A BAD DREAM – EXAMINING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DEPERSONALISATION TRAITS AND THE BODILY SELF IN WAKING AND DREAMING

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Grant 115/22

Background: Depersonalisation (DP) is characterized by fundamental alterations to the sense of self that include feelings of detachment and estrangement from one's body. The majority of previous research on DP has focused on atypical bodily self-consciousness during wakefulness. However, little is known about dream experiences in people with DP. This is surprising because many of the individuals with DP describe their daily waking experiences as being “dream-like”, and not feeling fully present or real (25, 6, 26). The relationship between dream and waking experience in individuals with DP is so far unclear.

Aims: We investigated dreams in people experiencing DP symptoms to help us understand whether the dream state is a ‘spared space’ where people can temporarily ‘retrieve’ their sense of self and sense of bodily presence.

Method: We conducted an online study in healthy participants (n=514) with DP traits to investigate and quantify the subjective experience of body and self during waking and dreaming, as the vast majority of previous studies focused on waking experience only.

Preliminary results: We found that higher DP traits - i.e. higher scores on the Cambridge Depersonalisation Scale (CDS) - were associated with more frequent dream experiences from an outside observer perspective ($r = .28$) and more frequent dream experiences of distinct bodily sensations ($r = .23$). We also found that people with higher CDS scores had more frequent dream experiences of altered bodily perception ($r = .24$), more frequent nightmares ($r = .33$) and higher dream recall ($r = .17$). CDS scores were negatively correlated with body boundary scores ($r = -.31$) in waking states and there was a negative association between CDS scores and the degree of trust in interoceptive signals ($r = -.52$). Our study elucidates the complex phenomenology of DP in relation to bodily selfhood during waking and dreaming.

Keywords: Depersonalisation, Dreaming, Self, Body perception, Interoception

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