

Seeing the Void: Supplementary Materials 2 – Codebook

Code System

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2.1 Visual Absence	20
2.1.1 General Visual Absence	20
2.1.2 Visually Unclear/indistinct	16
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*P = Total number of participants giving first-person report (max = 20). Number in brackets is total number of participants giving the report type, excluding sub-sets.

Code Definitions

1 Sense of Self / Awareness

Definition: General sense of self. Includes: self-location (eg., seem to be pointing at self), a sense of self, and sense of having a personality or sense of being aware. Explicitly mention sense of self or answer affirmatively to 'do you seem to be pointing at yourself?'

Exclusions: When they say they feel person-like or human-like, unless also mention sense of self. When they describe themselves as being a pure observer or consciousness.

2 Perceptual Absence

Definition: An absence of perceptually perceived parts, properties or boundaries (e.g., visual, somatic and auditory absences).

2.1 Visual Absence

Definition: An absence of visually experienced parts, properties or boundaries.

2.1.1 General Visual Absence

Definition: An absence of perceptible visual properties (e.g., colours) or parts (e.g., 'I can't see my face', 'I don't see any colour', 'I'm not experiencing anything visually'). Includes use of the term 'transparent' or participant agrees that it is transparent, or a reference to 'looking right through'.

Exclusions: General absence (void, emptiness etc.) is not categorised as a visual absence, unless also described as a lack of visual experience. If a process of losing visual perception is described, then it is categorised as Visually Disappear rather than Visual Absence.

2.1.2 Visually Unclear/indistinct

Definition: Visually unclear, blurred, indistinct or ambiguous. Includes low detail visual experiences. (i.e., absence of details).

Exclusions: Absence of parts such as face, eyes.

2.1.3 Visually Disappear

Definition: Something disappears from vision, is gone, drops away etc. A process by which a visual sensation of a thing or part disappears/ceases to be present.

2.1.4 Lack of Visual Boundary

Definition: A lack of visual boundary, including between viewer and objects or a sense of being open to the scene.

2.1.5 Visual Field Unbounded

Definition: The sense that the visual field has no boundary or that there is nothing outside of it.

2.1.6 Non-Thing-Like or like a Hole

Definition: Described where they are looking from as non-thing-like or agree with question 'it's not-thing-like?' Uses term 'hole' or 'gap' or agrees with this description.

Exclusions: General absence (unless) also mention or agree that it's not thing-like or like hole.

2.2 Somatic Absence

Definition: An absence of felt bodily parts (e.g., toes, legs, ears, etc.) properties (e.g., shape or other bodily details) or boundaries (e.g., not feeling bounded by body).

2.2.1 Low Bodily Detail

Definition: The sense that the body as a whole is experienced with low detail or that parts are indistinct or that bodily experience is ambiguous. Included descriptors that suggested a general lack of detail such as being 'faint' or 'blobby' or 'cloudy'.

Exclusions: Reference to parts not being experienced was coded as the subset Absence of Body Parts. When the missing details were specified as shape, this was coded as subset Body or Face Shapeless. Some instances referred to both a lack of shape and a lack of details (superset).

2.2.1.1 Body or Face Shapeless

Definition: The sense that the shape of the body, face or body parts cannot be felt or only very vaguely.

2.2.1.2 Absence of Body Parts

Definition: The absence of body parts in somatic experience, includes body parts disappearing.

Exclusions: The sense that the body as a whole was absent was coded as Not Person-Like or Human-Like. If participant specified that feeling body parts depends upon moving them or touching things then the response was coded as Feeling Body Depends Upon Movement / Touching Things (subset of Absence of Body Parts). If it was specified that parts were felt one at a time then the response was coded as Piecemeal Experience of Body or Feeling Body Depends Upon Attention (below).

2.2.1.2.1 Piecemeal Experience of Body or Feeling Depends Upon Attention

Definition: Seeming to experience body parts or sensations only one at a time either through touch or by attending to them.

2.2.1.2.2 Feeling Body Depends Upon Movement or Touching Things

Definition: Feeling the body or body parts depends upon moving those parts or the parts being in contact with things.

2.2.2 Low or Absence of Bodily Boundaries

Definition: Feeling of not being bounded by or 'in' body, no inner-outer division, or being non-solid/insubstantial.

2.2.2.1 Not Person-Like or Human-Like

Definition: Reference to not experiencing themselves as having personal or human characteristics (e.g., name, age, gender, human body) or feeling dissociated from body.

Exclusions: The sense that the observer lacks all characteristics or the sense of being 'just' an awareness or consciousness was categorized as Awareness Itself or Featureless Observer.

2.2.2.1.1 Borderline Awareness Itself or Featureless Observer

Definition: The self or the observer is characterised as lacking properties, but not necessarily all properties (e.g., it could still be thing-like or a body). Includes references to 'Just looking' (a bare sense of just looking or sensing).

2.2.2.1.2 Awareness Itself or Featureless Observer

Definition: The sense of being a pure observer or just an awareness or consciousness without personal or physical characteristics. The sense that the observer lacks personal or physical characteristics.

Exclusions: Just a reference to not experiencing personal characteristics (i.e., without also mentioning that it is the observer, or awareness /consciousness) was coded as Not-Person-Like or Human-Like.

2.3 General Absence

Definition: Use of general terms or phrases that suggest a general lack or absence such as 'emptiness', 'void', 'nothing', 'not anything'.

Exclusions: Use of term 'emptiness' in the Buddhist/Zen sense of the word. Reference to absence of a part (e.g., face) or absence of a particular perceptual experience (e.g., 'not seeing anything' was coded as a General Visual Absence).

3 Somatic Presence

Definition: The sense of being 'in' one's body / embodied or the sense of being able to feel the body or body parts or face, or their shape and other bodily details.

3.1 Can Feel Bodily Details or Parts

Definition: The sense of being able to feel the body or body parts or face, or their shape and other bodily details.

3.1.1 Can Feel Body or Face Shape

Definition: The sense of being able to feel the shape of the body, body parts or face or face parts.

3.1.2 Can Feel Body Parts

Definition: A response that describes feeling body parts.

Exclusions: If in response to 'How many toes can you feel?' participants responded by saying a few (e.g., 2 or 3), this was counted as Absence of Body Parts.

3.2 Bounded by Body

Definition: The sense of being 'in' one's body or there being an inside-outside division (e.g., hearing sounds as outside or thoughts seeming to be in the head) or a sense of separation between the body and things.

3.2.1 Person-Like or Human-Like

Definition: The sense of being person-like or human-like with a body and/or with personal characteristics such as name, age and gender. Includes the sense of feeling embodied or alive.

Exclusions: If the participant refers to a sense of self, but above were not mentioned or affirmed then the response was coded as more general Sense of Self / Awareness. The sense of having a personality was also coded a Sense of Self / Awareness.

4 Depersonalization

Definition: Feeling of not owning or identifying with the face in the mirror or a body part (as seen from the outside). E.g., seemed to be someone else's face in the mirror.

Exclusions: Not feeling attached to present bodily feelings or not feeling body at all (i.e., from the inside) was coded as Not Person-Like or Human-Like.

5 Assorted Experiences

5.1 Structure of Consciousness

5.1.1 Single/Unified Field of Experience

Definition: Explicitly mention or affirm that their experience is single, one or unified - e.g., one field, one view, one field of experience.

Exclusions: When emphasizing both the unity and distinctness of experience this was coded as Unified, Yet Distinct Experiences.

5.1.2 Looking Out of One Eye

Definition: Reporting or affirming the sense of having one single eye.

5.1.3 Unified, Yet Distinct Experiences

Definition: An emphasis on both the unity and distinctness/separateness of multi-modal experiences.

5.1.4 Space-Like

Definition: Reference to (or assenting to) where they are looking from as being space-like (e.g., an empty or open space).

5.2 Visual Presence

Definition: A reference to being able to see things such as the nose blur, colours with eyes closed, things in the periphery etc.

5.3 Miscellaneous Bodily Experience

5.3.1 External Sensations

Definition: The feeling of touching something or being in contact with something; other external sensations such as the temperature of things.

Exclusions: Instances of touching where it describes how they know a body part coded as Feeling Body Depends upon Movement or Touching Things.

5.3.2 Internal Sensations

Definition: 'Inner' bodily sensations such as heat and tingling in body or limbs, tension in body or face etc.

Exclusions: 'Outer' sensations of objects were coded as Touch Sensations. An emphasis on feeling a body part (rather than a sensation in the part) was coded as Can Feel Body Parts (some segments were coded in both categories).

5.4 Bounded Assorted

Definition: The sense of being enclosed, something being closed, or that the visual field is bounded.

Exclusions: The sense of being bounded by one's body was coded as Bounded by Body.

5.4.1 Closed or Enclosed

Definition: A sense of being closed (e.g., their end of the tube) or being enclosed (e.g., by the tube or the card).

5.4.2 Visual Field is Bounded

Definition: The sense that the visual field has a boundary or is bounded.

5.5 Opening or Expanding Visual Perspective

Definition: The sense that the visual field or perspective is opening up or expanding.

5.6 Not Like a Hole

Definition: Disagrees with where they are looking from being like a hole or gap, or mentions not being able to see the gap.

Exclusions: If respondent disagrees with the hole-like description, but later changes mind, then categorised as Like a Hole or Gap.

5.7 Two Eyes

Definition: The sense that one is looking out of two eyes.

5.8 No Sense of Awareness

Definition: The explicit denial of a sense of awareness or of being aware or awake.

6 Thinking and Imagining

6.1 Lack of knowledge

6.1.1 Don't know

Definition: A report of now knowing, not being certain or being confused, E.g., participant uses the phrase 'I don't know' or 'I can't tell'.

6.1.2 Can't describe

Definition: Respondent reports not being able to describe experience or not being able to say.

6.2 Knowledge

6.2.1 Knowing, Conceptualizing or Intuition

Definition: A reference to knowing something (e.g., that they have a face), their concepts or an intuition of something.

Exclusions: A reference to memory or imagination was coded as Imagining Body or Imagining Unseen Objects. A reference to trying to not using concepts was coded as Method or Meditation Practice (e.g., if also mention trying not to be influenced by Zen or their meditation practice).

6.2.2 Intellectualizing or Talking Off Topic

Definition: Talking about theories, general ideas or past experiences.

Exclusions: Relating the experience to mediation practice was coded as Meditation Practice.

6.3 Meta-thinking

6.3.1 Method

Definition: A reference to the method of the study – e.g., trying to go by sensory experience rather than imagination or belief and trying not to intellectualize.

6.3.2 Meditation Practice

Definition: Relating their experience or the exercises to their meditation practice.

6.4 Imagination

6.4.1 Imagining Body

Definition: A report of or assenting to relying upon imagination or memory to know about the body or a body part.

6.4.2 Imagining unseen objects

Definition: A report of or assenting to imagining unseen objects.

Exclusions: If the unseen object was the body or a body part then it was coded as Imagining Body.

7 Positive Emotion

7.1 Humor

Definition: The expression of humor such as a joke or a response that involves laughing.

7.2 Wonder, curiosity or interest

Definition: Expressions of wonder, curiosity or interest.

7.3 Feels Freeing

Definition: A feeling of freedom or of a freeing.

7.4 Relaxed

Definition: A feeling of relaxation or calm.

7.5 Pleasant or Enjoyable

Definition: Participant describes doing an exercise or exercises as pleasant or enjoyable.

8 Weird, Odd or Strange

Definition: Participant describes an experience as weird, odd or strange.

9 Negative emotion

Definition: Feeling a negative emotion such as anxiety, agitation or feeling unsettled.

10 Other

Definition: A description of experience that does not fit into any of the other categories.