

Ethics of human sensory enhancement and substitution

David Eagleman's work in sensory enhancement and substitution shows a lot of promise for many fields. Human beings that are born with or develop sensory impairments can continue to perceive their world the same by using different sensory organs. Sensory enhancement would increase the speed and quantity at which we perceive and process stimuli in our environments. During his Ted talk, we see the sensory back piece uses data from twitter to help him gauge the emotions of his audience. Despite the benefits of sensory enhancement, what are the negative implications?

Sensory overload as seen with people with anxiety or ADHD is possible. Humans can only perceive visible light and nothing else on the spectrum using naked vision, this is because our survival depends on this section of the spectrum. If we could perceive the whole spectrum, we could see ultra-violet rays, infra-red rays and so on. According to Lindenmuth, J (1980), "Sensory overload is a marked increase in the intensity of stimuli over the normal level. This disrupts the cerebral processing of information and decreases the meaningfulness of the environment."

Another possible negative implication is poor policies to govern this advancement. Having sensory enhancement would give people a competitive edge against peers, for example, in education and sports. Due to the coercive nature of peer pressure, it is possible that we could become dependent on these enhancements to better our lives. Miah, A (2011), "In an economy where having exceptional talents or capabilities is required in order to flourish, the eventual outcome of a society where everyone has access to enhancements is akin to a zero-sum game, where there is little change to the overall, relative fortunes that people enjoy."

In conclusion, more research needs to go into the individual, social, and political implications of enhancements in different fields.

References:

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