



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

Dipartimento di Psicologia
e Scienze Cognitive

Department of Psychology and Cognitive Science

SEMINARY DiPSCo

Feeling others' minds

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Abstract:

Empathy is a multifaceted process; it encompasses the ability to mirror (i.e. experience sharing) and to explicitly infer others' inner states (i.e. mentalizing). Neuroimaging evidence showed that these aspects of empathy are subserved by clear anatomical and functional dissociation. Over the last decade, the field has focused on the characteristics, be they of the perceiver, i.e. the person who experiences an emotion in first-hand, or of the observer, i.e. the person who experiences empathy, that influence the neural response associated with the empathic processes. More recent evidence supports the idea that our past experiences (i.e., autobiographical memories) also play a role when building a representation of others' inner states. I will first present event-related potential studies that investigated the functional dissociation of experience sharing and mentalizing and the characteristics, either of the perceiver or of the observer, that influence the neural response associated to these processes. I will then describe the results of my most recent EEG study that showed direct evidence of a reactivation of autobiographical memories when participants empathize with others' inner states. To address this research question, participants were required to perform an empathy task and a retrieval task. I have used an innovative approach, a Linear Discriminant Analysis (i.e., LDA) classifier, on the EEG data to identify the EEG pattern associated to autobiographical and non-autobiographical episodes. I found evidence of the online reactivation of a brain pattern linked to autobiographical memories in preparation for an explicit empathy judgement. I conclude that shared experiences are also involved in shaping empathy.

Contacts

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