

Brain sync studies could lead to better connections between patients and therapists

A growing cadre of neuroscientists is using sophisticated technology ... to capture what happens in one brain, two brains, or even 12 or 15 at a time when their owners are engaged in eye contact, storytelling, joint attention focused on a topic or object, or any other activity that requires social give and take. [T]he hope remains that identifying the neural underpinnings of real social exchange will change our basic understanding of communication and ultimately improve education or inform treatment of the many psychiatric disorders that involve social impairments.

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Beyond the practical challenges of interactive neuroscience, a more philosophical question has circulated as to whether the neural information obtained from measuring people during social interaction is significantly different from scans taken when people are alone or acting simply as observers. ...

Yes, apparently there is. The evidence is growing, says psychiatrist and social neuroscientist Leonhard Schilbach of the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich, that “social cognition is fundamentally different when you’re directly engaged with another person as opposed to observing another person.”

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Schilbach believes interactive neuroscience has real-life applications in psychiatry as well. It could make it possible to predict which therapist will work best with which patient, for example.

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