

Mirror neurons reflect emotions

PEOPLE who are good at interpreting facial expressions have more active mirror neurons. The discovery adds weight to the idea that these brain cells help us figure out how others are feeling.

Mirror neurons fire both when you do something and when you watch someone else do the same thing, allowing us to mimic others. This tendency to map the actions of others onto our own bodies is thought to play a role in our ability to understand others' intentions and emotions and to boost empathy.

Now Peter Enticott at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and colleagues have found evidence supporting this theory. They asked 20 volunteers to look at pairs of images. In one task, they had to decide if paired images of faces were the same person, in another to say whether two faces were showing the same emotion. Then the researchers monitored the mirror neuron activity in the volunteers as they watched videos of thumb movement.

Those who scored highest in the facial emotion task had more active mirror neurons in the thumb task, but high scores in the facial recognition task did not correspond to increased mirror neuron activity, they found (*Neuropsychologia*, DOI: 10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2008.04.022). This suggests that the mirror neuron activity that helps us understand actions and intentions in others is also involved in understanding emotions.

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