

University of Maryland

Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Seminar

I am because we are: Dynamic and Embodied Brain-to-Brain coupling as a new framework for social interaction between people

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The Ubuntu/Botho view of “a person is a person through other persons” can both illuminate the best as well as expose the dark side of humanity. Our research investigates how the brain responses of individuals are shaped by their interaction with other brains. We test how the brain responses of listeners, during verbal communication, are shaped to match the brain responses of the speaker. Our studies indicate that during successful communication the speaker’s and listener’s brains exhibit joint, temporally coupled, response patterns. High coupling suggests strong alignment across people mental representations of sounds and meanings, while low coupling indicates communication failure. The ability to be coupled with other people allows us to communicate and be connected to all individuals, and thus expose the humanistic nature of “us” as persons. However, we also find that interactions with other people can create exclusions and divisions, between “us” and “others,” which enhances the coupling between the brains of people within our group, while decreasing the coupling between our brains and those of out-group members. Such neural decoupling can propagate tension, conflicts and violence among groups and cultures. Exposing the underlying neural forces which operate across brains may open new ways to understand how people’s thought and actions are being shaped and manipulated by the thoughts and actions of others which in turn influences those others.

Friday, October 20, 2017

10:15am, Room 1103 Bioscience Research Building

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