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Social Distance Influences the Outcome Evaluation of Cooperation and Conflict: Evidence from Event-Related Potentials

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Highlights

- The FRN and P300 were affected by a game opponent's choice to cooperate or compete.
- Feedback that an opponent would cooperate elicited a smaller FRN and a larger P300.
- However, social distance mainly affected the P300 of the outcome evaluation process.
- P300 of participants choosing cooperation was larger if the opponent was a stranger.

Abstract Previous research shows that social distance plays an important role in promoting cooperation and that subtle cues that reduce social distance increase the tendency to cooperate. However, it is unclear how social distance influences our outcome evaluation of cooperative and conflict feedback. The present study investigated the influence of social distance on cooperative and conflict behavior and the evaluation process of the cooperative and conflict outcomes, using the event-related potentials (ERPs) technique. We recorded ERPs from 14 normal adults playing a social game task against a friend and a stranger. The results showed that the FRN (Feedback Related Negativity) and P300 were affected by the opponent's choice to cooperate or compete; however, only the P300 was affected by social distance. Specifically, when the opponent chose to cooperate, the feedback elicited a smaller FRN and a larger P300 amplitude; and compared with playing against friends, the P300 had a larger amplitude when participants gaming with strangers. Our results indicate that at the early stage of the evaluation of cooperation and conflict outcomes, individuals may initially and quickly encode the valence of outcomes, judging whether an outcome is consistent with their expectations. However, at the late stage, which involves a top-down cognitive appraisal process, some social factors, such as social distance, may moderate processing of attention resource allocation of feedback about outcomes, and of higher-level motivation/affective appraisal.

Keywords: Social distance; cooperation; conflict; FRN; P300

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