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Minimal humanity cues induce neural empathic reactions towards non-human entities

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Abstract

The present study tested whether the attribution of humanness by means of a minimal humanity cue is sufficient for the occurrence of empathic neural reactions towards non-human entities that are painfully stimulated. Vegetables have been used as a control condition to explore empathy towards humans' pain before. In the context of the present study, they were given a minimal humanity cue (i.e., a human name) or not (i.e., an adjective). Human associations with these different types of vegetables were measured and where either represented: pricked by a needle (painful condition) or touched by a Q-tip (touch condition) while recording electroencephalographic activity from a sample of 18 healthy students. Event-related potentials (ERP) indicated that those participants classified as high humanizers, showed an increased neural reaction when vegetables with a name

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