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Authors

Morita, Junya
Kano, Yuna

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Effect of self-experience on empathic helping to virtual agents

Junya Morita

Shizuoka University, Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan

Yuna Kano

Shizuoka University, Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan

Abstract

What factors induce empathy for virtual agents? To explore this question, we examine the relationship between humans and agents in the inverted cyberball task where a participant chose to help an ostracised agent. This study especially controls experience in the preparation task from self-involvement as the base of empathy. In the one condition, participants have induced the same experience as the ostracised agent, while in the other condition, participants observed ostracising relations between two agents. As a result, self-involvement in the preparation task does not influence the helping behavior of the ostracised agent. The factor relating to the helping behavior is whether the participants noticed the relation. This notice was also associated with empathy trait. From these results, we can conclude that empathy can acquire others' perspectives even when they have no experience with the pain of ostracism.