



Social Touch and Empathy

India MORRISON

Institute for Neuroscience and Physiology
Sahlgrenska University Hospital
Göteborg University
pspc46@bangor.ac.uk

Recent research suggests that selective nerve-brain pathways encode the type of gentle touch that occurs during affective social interactions, likely underpinning the affective perceptual correlates of directly-experienced “social touch”. These pathways may also provide the basis for vicarious representations of observed touch between other individuals. We investigated this by comparing subjects’ brain responses to “social touch” with responses to videos of others being similarly stroked. Touch and vision selectively activated a region of insula targeted by the relevant nerves. Altogether, the results suggest that cortical and psychophysical responses to observed touch are constrained by processing in pathways encoding social touch.

NOTES: