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I Am Your Mirror: Mirror Neurons and Empathy

Matteo Rizzato
Davide Donelli
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Science, psychology, and sociology merge to explain the theory of the biology of empathy.

Who hasn't watched someone laugh and felt the need to laugh? In fact, humans often mirror one another's emotions, and Matteo Rizzato and Davide Donelli's *I Am Your Mirror* explains how mirror neurons work. If people were more aware of their influence, they could become more positive, unite humankind, and build a brighter world.

Using layman's terms, Rizzato and Donelli are able to break down mirror neurons into easy-to-understand language. At their most basic, the brain's mirror neurons respond to all emotion: both one's own emotions and those of the people around them. Seeing people yawn makes another person yawn in return. Everyone is a mirror. This means that individuals have a lot of power and influence on their environment, whether it be school, work, or a public place. Someone who leaves the house depressed and angry can poison a community.

The authors divide the book into four main chapters. The first section dives into mirror neuron science. Next, it is time for people to reflect on their experiences, their own expressions, and the history of imitation. The third section discusses observation and group dynamics, and the final chapter dives into the nuances of sincerity and genuine emotion. Diagrams and illustrations back up key concepts. For example, the authors explain mass-production processes by showing a cartoon of a boy identifying a doughnut (the stimulus), processing this data, and producing a related action (i.e., eating the doughnut). This makes it easy to understand how the brain deciphers information.

These key concepts explain the context within which people not only form meaningful relationships but also succeed at work. For example, a cashier's expressions and sincerity can translate to good business or a poor image. Rizzato and Donelli write how sales staff, receptionists, or cashiers are the "best advert" for a business because they "offer an opportunity to reach a state of mind." Positivity breeds positivity. Customers are negatively affected by unmotivated staff, which is why businesses need to focus on morale.

A person's state of mind affects everyone he or she comes into contact with. This book helps people better understand their emotions, and this can lead to better community and better quality of life. Along with our actions, unspoken emotions can unite and inspire the people around us. According to *I Am Your Mirror*, the future of human relations rests on a better understanding of the rapid-fire contagion of mirror neurons.

LISA BOWER (Spring 2014)

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