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Virtual reality for intimate partner violence rehabilitation: brain circuits involved and empathy enhancement

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This talk discusses the behavioral and neural impact of embodying intimate partner violence perpetrators in the first-person perspective (1PP) of a virtual victim in immersive Virtual Reality (VR). We show a series of studies where we have found that embodiment of male offenders in the body of a female victim, leads to changes in emotion recognition, that seem to be mediated by the Default Mode Network (DMN). More specifically, the talk will discuss studies where we have found that experiencing a virtual abuse situation from the 1PP of a victim enhances fear recognition and modulates the subsequent processing of emotional expressions in several DMN regions when processing emotional morphs. Altogether, these results provide further evidence that embodiment in VR might influence socio-cognitive processing and also highlights the potential use of VR to improve current rehabilitation programs for domestic violence.

Biography

Sofia Seinfeld is a lecturer and researcher in the Image Processing and Multimedia Technology Center at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. Previously she worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bayreuth. She has a bachelor's degree in Psychology (2011) and master's degree in Clinical and Health Psychology (2015) from the University of Barcelona (2011). Sofia earned a PhD in Virtual Reality and Psychology (2017) from the University of Barcelona, as part of the Investigaciones Biomédicas August Pi i Sunyer (IDIBAPS). She has published papers on topics such as the use of virtual reality to improve the treatment of psychological disorders, specially focused on domestic violence.

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