

The Role of Mirror Neurons and Empathy in the Phenomenology of Suicide

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This presentation was developed with the aim of shedding light on the phenomenology of suicide, that is, to focus on suicide as a phenomenon affecting a unique individual with unique motives for the suicidal act. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view. It can be used to ask

'What is it like to be suicidal'. To explore this topic, the author looks back at the past centuries to understand why suicide was thought to be confined to psychiatric illness and to document the bias in studies supporting this notion. In contrast, here it is argued that suicide should not be considered to be a symptom.

In order for empathy to take place it is necessary that we should have in our own experience in our own minds, some points of reference that correspond to those of the patients' experience. The reason that learning by watching others is effective is because of mirror neurons. Seeing and doing can be synonymous when it comes to empathetic responses. When people see someone doing something, they can imagine doing the same, naturally.

As for suicide, it can be argued, certainly, that people can grow desensitized to reactions like this, after being heavily 'exposed' to stimuli challenging the topic of suicide or otherwise. The author proposes the involvement of mirror neurons as a key point for understanding how to empathize with suicidal patients so to sharing the experience of psychological pain as related to suicide risk