Self-other distinction refers to the ability to distinguish between our own and other people’s physical and mental states (actions, perceptions, emotions etc.). Both the right temporo-parietal junction and brain areas associated with the human mirror neuron system are likely to critically influence this process, given their respective contributions to theory of mind and embodied empathy. The degree of appropriate self-other distinction will vary according to the exact social situation, and how helpful it is to feel into, or remain detached from, another person’s mental state. Indeed, the emotional resonance that we can share with others affords the gift of empathy, but over-sharing may pose a downside, leading to a range of difficulties from personal distress to paranoia, and perhaps even motor tics and compulsions. Evidence from behavioural and neurophysiological studies supports a role for problems with self-other distinction in a range of psychiatric symptoms spanning the emotional, cognitive and motor domains. The various manifestations of impaired self-other distinction comprise both adaptive and maladaptive responses to dysfunction within a common underlying neuropsychological mechanism, compelling the adoption of more holistic transdiagnostic therapeutic approaches within Psychiatry.

Dr. Clare M. Eddy  
Senior Research Fellow  
National Centre for Mental Health (BSMHFT) and University of Birmingham

This colloquium lecture takes place online!  
Thursday, December 9, 2021; 3 pm