Empathy = core component of adaptive personality functioning

Helps maintain satisfying relationships & navigate everyday interactions.
Empathic impairments = core component of personality dysfunction

Contributes to difficulties in relationships & in navigating everyday interactions.
Empathic impairment

- lower compassion
- worse emotion recognition
- less accurate inferences of other’s intentions

? 

Personality pathology

- higher trait empathy
- better emotion recognition
- no differences in empathic accuracy
Empathy

+ greater emotional satisfaction
+ more positive affect
+ altruism, trust, cooperation, support

Adaptive, affiliative function

+ distress
+ neuroticism
+ interpersonal distance
+ used to gain status
+ used to manipulate
Empathy

adaptive AND maladaptive functioning

affiliative AND non-affiliative behavior
Methodological limitations?

1. **Trait measures** of empathy do not account for **situational factors** (within-person variability)

2. **Experimental research** on the role of situations lack ecological validity
Matching method to construct: ecological momentary assessment (EMA)

- Captures variation from situation-to-situation.
- Assess empathy in real-life relationships in naturalistic contexts.
Affect (adaptivity)

Interpersonal behavior (affiliative function)
Current study

Clarify empathy’s normative function by characterizing typical patterns of affect, behavior, and empathy in everyday interpersonal situations.
Hypothesis:

Empathy is functions to satisfy needs for affiliation

(+). Positive affect and (+). Warmth
Methods
Participants & Procedures

Exploratory student sample (N = 330) + pre-registered replication in community sample (N = 342)

10-day EMA protocol

5-7 randomly-initiated surveys per day

\[ n_{\text{student}} = 7,636; \]
\[ n_{\text{community}} = 10,174 \text{ interpersonal interactions} \]
Measures

Positive/Negative Affect

Interpersonal behavior/perception

Empathy
Positive affect

- Happy, Excited, Relaxed

Negative affect

- Nervous, Sad, Angry
Interpersonal behavior/perception

**Dominance** (serves agentic functions)

Accommodating/Submissive/Timid to Assertive/Dominant/Controlling

**Warmth** (serves affiliative functions)

Cold/Distant/Hostile to Warm/Friendly/Caring
Empathy

**cognitive**
- I considered what the person I interacted with was thinking.

**affective**
- I considered what the person I interacted with was feeling.
- When the person I interacted with showed emotions, I felt their emotions inside of me.
Analytic Plan: Multi-level SEM

Between-Person (Average, trait level)

Observed Variable

Within-Person (Fluctuation from trait level during an interaction)
Between-Person
(Average, trait level)

Within-Person
(Fluctuation from trait level during an interaction)
Warmth/Positive Affect

Diagram:

- Positive Affect
- Other Warmth
- Empathy
- Self Behavior

Arrows indicate relationships between the components.
Warmth/Positive Affect

Other Warmth\textsubscript{it} → Empathy\textsubscript{it} with a coefficient of .13*
Warmth/Positive Affect

- Other Warmth<sub>it</sub>
- Self Warmth<sub>it</sub>
- Empathy<sub>it</sub>
- Positive affect<sub>it</sub>

Correlation Coefficients:
- Other Warmth<sub>it</sub> to Empathy<sub>it</sub>: 0.13*
- Self Warmth<sub>it</sub> to Empathy<sub>it</sub>: 0.12*
Warmth/Positive Affect

- Other Warmth\(_{it}\) to Positive affect\(_{it}\) with a correlation of 0.32*
- Self Warmth\(_{it}\) to Positive affect\(_{it}\) with a correlation of 0.12*
- Other Warmth\(_{it}\) to Empathy\(_{it}\) with a correlation of 0.13*
- Self Warmth\(_{it}\) to Empathy\(_{it}\) with a correlation of 0.12*
Dominance?

Other Dom_{it} → Empathy_{it} (0.01)
Self Dom_{it} → Empathy_{it} (0.00)
Negative affect?

Other Behavior $\text{Behavior}_i$

Self Behavior $\text{Behavior}_i$

Empathy $\text{Empathy}_i$

Negative Affect $\text{Affect}_i$

$\text{00/ -13}^*$
Exploratory analyses:

Do people’s dispositions (average interpersonal behavior, affect) predict what situations they are more empathetic in?
Self Behavior

Average, trait-like behavior/affect (random intercept)

Affect

Empathy

Strength of association between situation factors (random slope)
Empathy

Positive Affect

Positive Affect

Empathy

$+ 0.17^*$

$B = 0.38^{**}$
Discussion
Empathy

- adaptive
- affiliative
- maladaptive functioning
- non-affiliative behavior
Using EMA to understand empathic dysfunction

Antisocial personality pathology – using empathy to manipulate (self-serving function)
Using EMA to understand empathic dysfunction

Borderline personality pathology – role of emotion dysregulation and attachment relationships
Interpersonal context and function

Empathic impairment = maladaptive processes
Thank you!

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