

Short-Term Effects of the Empathic Talk: The Role of Perceived Empathy, Interpersonal Dispositions, and Vagal Tone on Experiencing Depth

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Resumen

The present study examines the immediate impact of empathic attitudes on the receiver, by comparing an empathic conversation (EC) with a neutral one (NC) on experiencing depth (EXP), perceived empathy and vagal tone. We also evaluate if empathy effects depend on personality dispositions relevant to interpersonal functioning. An experimental, counterbalanced, within-subject design was implemented wherein participants ($n = 27$, age $M = 22.6$, $SD = 4.0$, 52% females) talked about a personal, meaningful topic for 20 minutes under both the EC and NC conditions. At the group level, main results indicated that the EC was more effective than the NC in promoting increases in EXP over time ($F(1, 25) = 21.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2(p) = .457$) and perceived empathy in women ($F(1, 25) = 9.42$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2(p) = .264$). At the individual level, the NC particularly precluded EXP gains in people expressing a better interpersonal functioning ($\beta s < -.46$, $ps < .05$ for attachment security and empathy and $\beta = .38$, $p < .05$ for aggression), and who also inhibited their vagal tone throughout this very condition ($\beta = .40$, $p = .024$). We conclude that the empathic context has an immediate positive impact on healthy psychological variables, whereas a more impersonal setting would drive people away from this positive effect. Those results are discussed in the light of the role of interpersonal proximity (being empathic to another's experience and the lack of this attitude) in psychotherapy and healthy functioning.

Palabras clave

Palabras clave de autor: [experiential level](#); [perceived empathy](#); [respiratory sinus arrhythmia](#); [social adjustment](#)

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