



Empathy, Reflection, Resilience

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Presentation goals

- Define empathy
- Differentiate empathy, compassion, sympathy
- Describe the empathic process
- Discuss empathy and reflection
- Discuss how empathy builds resilience

Basic Listening Skills

Open-ended questions, paraphrasing, reflecting implied and expressed feelings

- Mirror thoughts and feelings for clarity
- Echo experience for acknowledgement
- Create a holding space for discharge of emotion

Basic listening skills = *SUPERSTAR! MD!*



But.. EMPATHY is the Holy Grail of listening skills



Empathy

Advanced listening skill

Mastering empathy is an aspirational goal

Empathic responses...

Clarify the “felt-meaning” of another’s experience

Make use of non-disruptive, in the flow, interpretation

Leave the recipient feeling deeply understood

Allow for moving on...

Empathy in medicine

Loosely defined

Putting yourself in someone else's shoes

No clear empathic process is articulated

If I put *myself* in your shoes...



Will I know how *you* feel?

My feet are the greatest distraction from understanding you in your shoes...



How do we learn to be empathic?

How does one *enter in* to another person's experience?

How does one *interpret* what he or she observes in that experience?

Empathy is more like...
walking in another's shoes
as if
you had her feet.

“As if” requires separating self from other



Self-awareness is essential to separation

I listen to you talk about the situation and the feelings and meanings you attribute to the situation

I open my mind to all possible reactions to such an experience. I listen without judgement or expectation

I identify how I might feel if I were you and put that aside

I attempt to offer a clear interpretation of the “felt meaning” of your experience

Empathy also requires

Humility

Positive regard

Occasionally, a kind of courage

- To be open to the unthinkable
- Say the unsayable
- Acknowledge the enviable
- Feel the revolting
- Share, for a moment in time, the unbearable



Holocaust Memorial Budapest on the Danube

Empathy is more head than heart

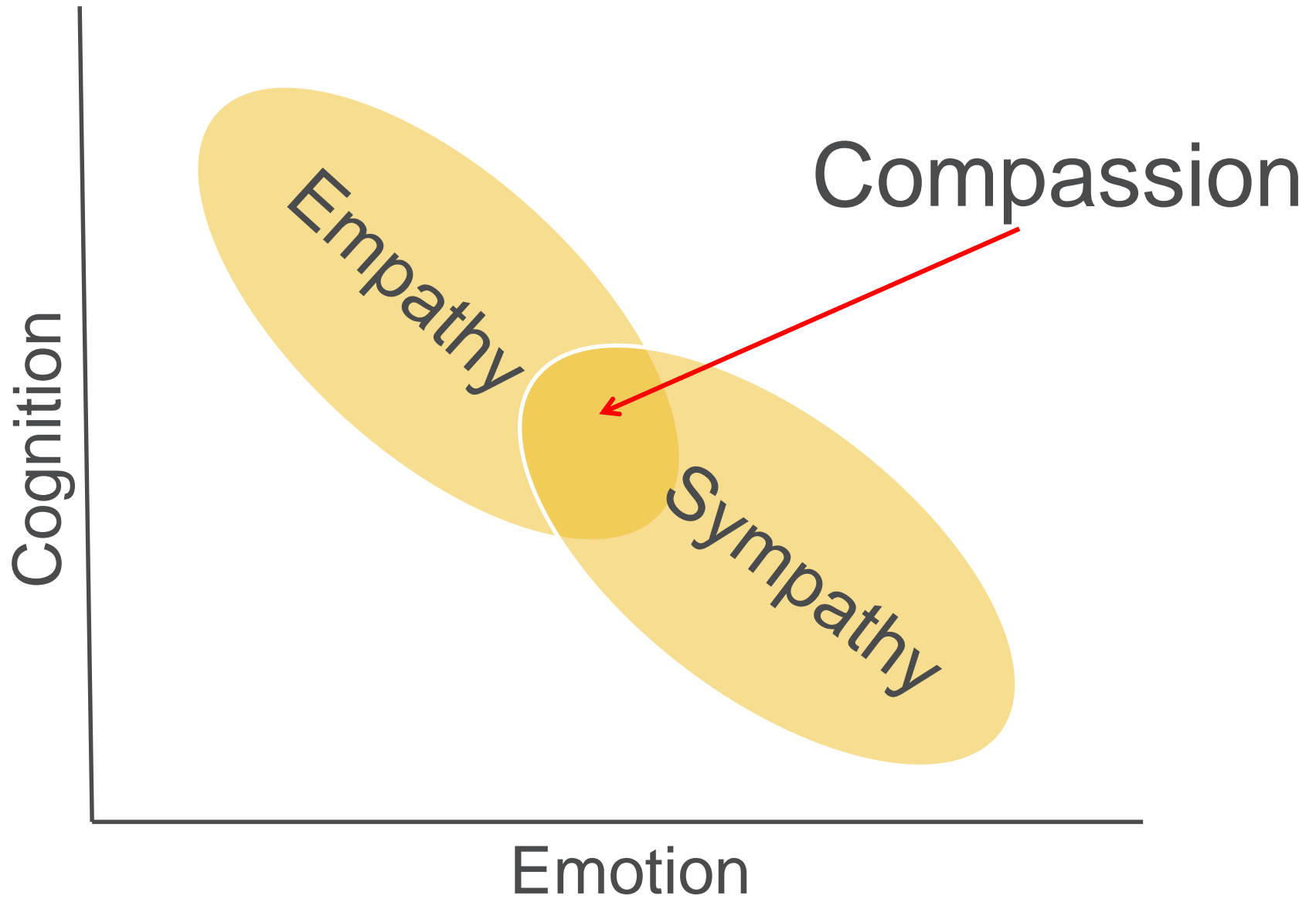
Sympathy is an **emotional** process

- A self-disclosure about how I feel about you
 - *I am so sorry to hear about...*

Compassion is an **intellectual & emotional** process

- The heart that trembles in the face of suffering
- A motivation to act

Empathy is predominantly an **intellectual** process



One tells a patient what the patient ***almost*** sees for himself and one tells him in such a way that the patient- not the analyst- takes the 'credit' for the discovery.

Karl Menninger, 1958

[Empathy] involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the *changing felt meanings* which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it ***delicately*** without making judgments, ***sensing meanings*** of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening.

Carl Rogers, 1975

Example 1: Going blind

Pt: I can't be going blind yet. I've made quilts for every one of my grandchildren except for one. I have to finish it!

- Sloppy Empathy: It's difficult for you.
- Inaccurate Empathy: It's so hard to lose the independence that eyesight offers us.
- Accurate Empathy: You feel cheated out of completing your legacy to your grandkids.

Example 2: HIV diagnosis

Pt: I have sex with men, rarely, but it's definitely not who I am. Now I have to tell my wife and then everyone is going to know.

- Sloppy Empathy: It's terribly upsetting.
- Inaccurate Empathy: HIV is a tough diagnosis and you're concerned about telling your wife.
- Accurate Empathy: You're afraid everyone will think that you're gay.

Example 3: Unwanted Pregnancy

Pt: I waited until I was 20. He wore a condom! No way this is happening to me. I am the last person this should be happening to.

- *Sloppy Empathy:* This is really hard.
- *Inaccurate Empathy:* You weren't planning on having a child so this is upsetting.
- *Accurate Empathy:* It feels horribly unfair. You've been so much more careful than most people.

Empathy is taught by

Teaching basic listening skills, as a foundation

Engaging in reflective activities

- Reading literature (prose and poetry)
- Engaging in reflective writing (narrative medicine)

DasGupta S, Charon R. Personal Illness Narratives: Using reflective writing to teach empathy. *Academic Medicine*. 2004;79(4):351-356.

Empathy and reflection are closely related



Reflection

1. Revisiting of an experience, usually, one that feels wrong or off
2. “Elaborating” or “interrogating” the experience with the aim of working it through
3. This process requires complicated mental effort, a pouring over of an issue for which there is no obvious solution

Wear, D, et al. Reflection in/and Writing: Pedagogy and Practice in Medical Education. *Academic Med.* 2010;87(5):603-609.

Reflection

Make sense out of morally ambiguous, complex situations

- Life is rarely additive. If life were as simple as addition, reflection would not be necessary

Ward off cynicism and disillusionment

- Via working through emotions rather than letting them stagnate

Shapiro, J. Narrative Medicine and Narrative Writing. *Family Med.* 2012;44(5):309-311.

Empathy

Reflection

is a meaning-making process that moves learners from one experience into the next, each time with a deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible.

John Dewey as Quoted In: Rodgers C. Defining reflection: Another look at John Dewey and reflective thinking. Teach Coll Rec. 2006;104:842-866.

Two sides of a coin

- Reflection is a requirement of empathy
 - To untie self from other
 - To make sense of the other's complex experience
- Empathy is a requirement of reflection
 - To be non-judgmental toward self
 - To be fearless in exploration of feelings and meanings

Hojat, M. Empathy in Patient Care, 2010; Shapiro, J. Narrative Medicine and Narrative Writing. Family Med. 2012;44(5):309-311.

Shared rewards

Both are associated with reduced burnout

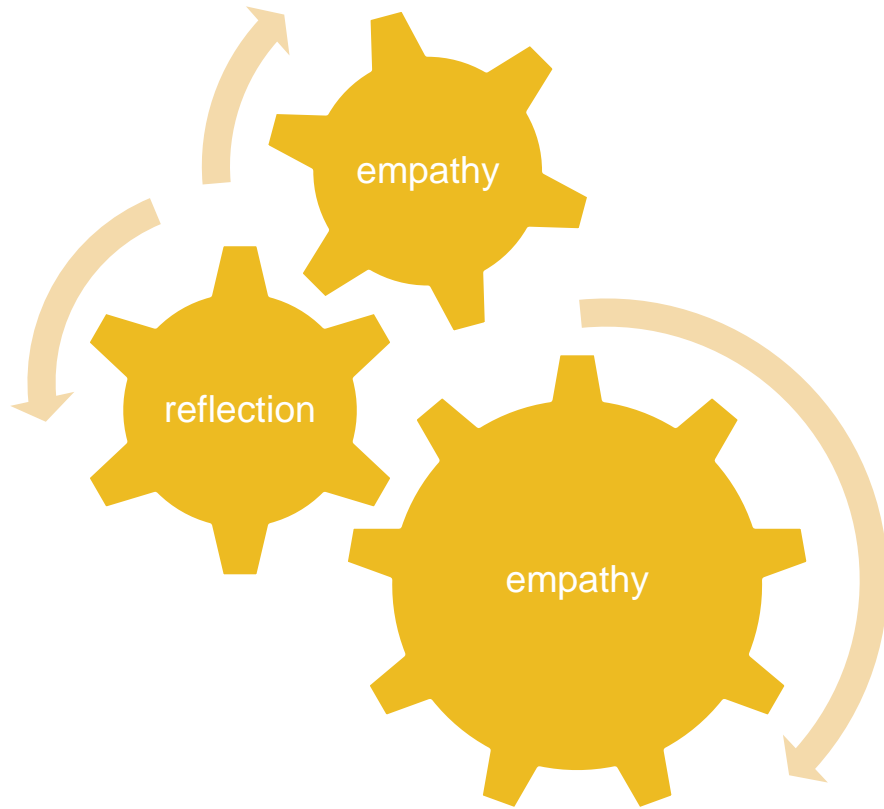
- Perhaps due to its being a primarily cognitive function
- Perhaps due to the separation of self from other
 - Being with, without being
 - Understanding without absorbing
 - Visiting, but not living in the other's world

Hojat, M. Empathy in Patient Care, 2010; Shapiro, J. Narrative Medicine and Narrative Writing. Family Med. 2012;44(5):309-311.

Move us forward

Rethinking an experience alters the experience

- Think Heisenberg Principle
 - New feelings are created by revisiting the experience
 - Those new feelings are more positive when the experience is subject to positive regard



Here's my spin on it...

Some experiences are like black ice. You can't see them, and they can cause you to slip and fall.

Empathy melts black ice experiences.

Reflection deconstructs complex experiences into bits of feeling and thought making them visible, available, communicable, comparable and alterable.

Reflection and empathy are much the same.

In fact...

Reflection is self-directed empathy.

Empathy relies on careful self-reflection but also is simply another kind of reflection, one in which another's experience is the focus of the exploration.



Be strong,
Be
empathic!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION