

PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPATHY

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Abstract. This article provides an in-depth examination of empathy as a multifaceted psychological phenomenon. It traces the historical development of empathy, from its roots in artistic perception to its central role in modern psychology. This study reveals the psychological mechanisms of empathy and its importance in human relationships.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, social interaction, neurophysiology, autism spectrum disorders, cognitive processes, moral development, altruism, cooperation

In contemporary psychology, the ability to understand and empathize with the feelings and thoughts of others is recognized as essential for fostering strong interpersonal relationships. Such connections contribute to social equilibrium and are vital for a healthy, stable life. A particularly significant phenomenon in this context is empathy, which is defined as the capacity to grasp the inner experiences of others and to put oneself in their position. Establishing a clear scientific framework for empathy, as well as defining its role as an essential human ability, represents one of the pressing challenges in the field of psychology.

Although various theories exist about empathy and related abilities, there is no single scientific certainty. Empathy is a subject of interdisciplinary research, with contributions from psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, philosophy, and sociology aimed at determining its essence. This multidisciplinary nature of empathy research adds a layer of complexity and depth, making it a fascinating subject of study.

Contemporary scholars prefer to illuminate the concept of empathy more broadly and deeply, encompassing a positive attitude towards empathic ability, sympathy, an effort to understand, and social solidarity. It is a scientific approach to analyze this phenomenon not only from the point of view of "empathy," but also from the point of view of "empathic ability" with a broader meaning.

The ability to correctly recognize and interpret others' emotional expressions—such as their facial expressions, voice signals, and body language—forms the foundation of empathy. This skill enables us to understand the feelings of others and provides an essential foundation for responding with appropriate care and compassion. When we can read the subtle signals of emotions on another person's face, we have the opportunity to gain insight into their inner world. This emotional awareness is the key

to a genuine empathic response, allowing us to share their experience and respond with sensitivity.[7]

Autism spectrum disorders are characterized by difficulties in empathy, which can be understood as a disorder of the ability to attribute mental states to others and respond to them with related emotions. This empathic deficit is manifested in problems associated with social interaction and communication.[1]

In autism, we observe that the empathy system is not sufficiently formed, while the ability to systematize is developed or even dominant. This uneven cognitive profile helps explain why individuals with autism show promising results in understanding rule-based systems, but face difficulties in an unpredictable social world.[2]

Empathy is the highest form of human interaction, as it is the deepest way to understand another person. When we express sincere sympathy, we enter the world of others' personal perceptions and feel at home in it, deeply perceiving meanings that they themselves may not fully comprehend. A state of empathy, or being empathetic, means a state in which you perceive the inner world of another person, their emotional aspects and meanings as clearly as if you were that person. However, at the same time, you will never forget the condition "as if." In this process, you put yourself in another person's place, but you don't become that person[8].

J. Decety studied empathy mainly through neurophysiological and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), we identified a distributed network of brain regions involved in empathy, including the anterior cingulate cortex, the anterior insula, and the prefrontal cortex. These neural circuits enable the sharing of affective experiences while maintaining self-distinction [4]. Neurophysiological studies suggest that empathy relies on both automatic, bottom-up processes (e.g., emotional transmission) and controlled, top-down processes (e.g., adopting a perspective). fMRI evidence reveals clear and consistent neural networks for the affective exchange and acceptance of cognitive perspectives.[5]

In our view, empathy is a multifaceted, complex, and deeply researched phenomenon in modern psychology, which is inextricably linked with a person's social, emotional, and cognitive potential. Its understanding encompasses not only emotional perception but also a broad conceptual field, including the human brain, neuropsychological activity, upbringing, cultural context, social roles, and communicative competencies. Research has shown that empathy comprises several components, including emotional reactivity, awareness of facial expressions, facial sensitivity, neural activity, moral reflection, and social responsibility towards others. Empathy is demonstrating its broad practical significance as a means of enhancing the quality of interpersonal relationships, promoting harmony in society, fostering healthy leadership, and facilitating effective communication. The practical importance of

empathy inspires us to explore its potential in various fields, including education, healthcare, and the business sector.

The renowned expert D. Goleman connects empathy with emotional intelligence. While expressing some doubts about the origin of this concept, he considers the discrepancies between the definitions of empathy in the literature to be natural. In the psychotherapeutic approach, especially in client-oriented therapy, empathy is referred to as "specific empathy" and is defined as the ability to penetrate the patient's inner world with sensitivity [6].

The level of empathy is connected with the moral values and motivational system of each person, which expresses the psychological configuration inherent in the individual. Various scientific approaches, including the ability of empathy and the processes of its expression, are explained as a mental system associated with the internal modeling and processing of experiences perceived by a person.

In our view, empathy is a complex process of interaction of human consciousness at the emotional, cognitive, and moral levels, which is interpreted differently by different psychological schools. This phenomenon encompasses not only the ability to experience emotions but also the capacity to comprehend, assess, and generate an internal response to others. Empathy is based on a wide range of mental structures, including introspective observation, neuropsychological processes, and communicative processes. Studies show that empathy is closely related to a person's personal experiences, upbringing, moral values, and psychological defense mechanisms. This ability guides a person to "penetrate" into the inner world of others, to perceive their feelings and act accordingly. Additionally, empathy is a primary means of strengthening mutual trust, ensuring effective interpersonal communication, and promoting social harmony. Its content is not always limited to emotional sensation, but manifests itself through its understanding, analysis, and the formation of a conscious response.

Empathy serves as the primary psychological mechanism of human cooperation and social partnership. The ability to participate in joint activities with shared goals and perceptions - our unique ability for shared purposefulness - is deeply rooted in having empathetic understanding and perspective [9].

Human cooperation and sociality are based on developed psychological mechanisms of empathy and shared purposefulness. From early childhood, people demonstrate a natural tendency to cooperate in ways that require helping others, sharing resources, and understanding the perspectives and emotional states of others [10].

Empathy is the ability to perceive the pain of others, understand their perspective, and share their emotional experiences. It is a choice to connect by listening

deeply to someone's suffering and responding to them with compassion, rather than judgment. [3]

In conclusion, it is worth noting that empathy is perceived as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon across various fields of modern psychology. Researchers and specialists analyze empathy sometimes as an emotional sensation, and sometimes as conscious perception, neuropsychic activity, moral motivation, or social adaptation. At the heart of empathy lies genuine feeling, but at the same time, there is also sensitivity, formed through social, cultural, and cognitive factors. In some approaches, empathy is considered the basis of communication, language, cultural doctrine, and interaction with society, while in others, it is assessed as an evolutionary psychological strategy, a perception of the state of consciousness, or a neurobiological resonance. In addition, empathy plays a crucial role in the development of altruistic behavior and the strengthening of interpersonal trust, thereby laying the psychological foundation for social order and moral values. It is said that its excessive intensification can sometimes reduce objectivity or cause emotional fatigue. Therefore, empathy is recognized not only as a natural sensation but also as a psychological capacity that can be developed, regulated, and tailored to the situation.

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