

How Inducing Empathy Affects Metaphoric Speech and Emotions



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Background

Empathy and perspective taking are important factors in building interpersonal relationships. As such, if metaphor use is a tool for expressing such emotions, then the use of metaphors likely plays a role in relationship maintenance and satisfaction. It is unclear whether metaphor usage is the result of empathy and perspective taking attempts or leads to these processes. We think both. Because people rely on metaphors to think and talk about their own emotions, they likely do so to think about the emotional and cognitive experiences of others [1]. On the other hand, if metaphors are helpful for understanding the emotional qualia and cognitive experience of others, then metaphors likely enhance the experience of empathic concern and perspective taking. Of course, these are empirical questions, which we will investigate in the current program of research.

Methods

Participants

- N=197 (97 female, 96 male, 3 nonbinary, 1 agender) from U.S. (\$2.38 payment)
 - Empathy Condition: N = 99; Neutral Condition: N = 98
 - Age: Empathy condition: M= 31.82 , SD= 10.11 ; Neutral condition: M= 32.36, SD=10.78

Measures and Procedure

- 4 Minute Writing Task:
 - Empathy condition: received instructions to “imagine how Maggie feels” and to “visualize clearly and vividly her emotions in this situation” [2].
 - Neutral: condition received instructions to pay attention to the quality of the video by noting grammatical errors and sound quality [2].
- Empathic Concern Measurement [3]
 - 10 items (ex: concerned, touched, moved, etc.); 5-point scale (“Not at all” – “Extremely”)
 - M= 3.6, SD= 0.92, α = 0.37
- Personal Distress Measurement [3]
 - 10 items (ex: distressed, alarmed, disturbed, etc.); 5-point scale (“Not at all” – “Extremely”)
 - M= 3.3, SD= 1.04, α = 0.41
- Donation
 - 2 items (Would or Would Not Donate); 7-point scale (“Strongly Disagree” - “Strongly Agree”)
 - M= 4.9, SD= 1.45, α = 0.47
- Metaphor Usage Measure – Revised (MUM-R)
 - 6 items (ex: “On a daily basis, how often do you use metaphors or think metaphorically?”); 5-point scale (“Never” – “All of the time”)
 - M=3.5, SD= 0.67, α = 0.62



Results

Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Empathic Concern				
2. Personal Distress	.64**			
3. Willingness to Donate	.49**	.37**		
4. Amount of Donation	.14	.16*	.16*	
5. MUMR	.10	.15*	.06	.00

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

ANOVAs	F Value	P Value	Partial Eta Square	Confidence Interval (95%)
Effect of Condition on Empathic Concern	(1, 193) = .704	.402	3.64E-03	[0, .04]
Effect of Condition on Personal Distress	(1, 193) = .508	.477	2.62E-03	[0, .04]
Effect of Condition on Willingness to Donate	(1, 193) = 1.457	.229	7.49E-03	[0, .05]
Effect of Condition on Amount of Donation	(1, 191) = .042	.838	2.21E-04	[0, .02]
***Interaction of Effect of Condition X MUM-R on Empathic Concern	(1, 193) = 5.317	.022*	.03	[0, .09]
Interaction of Effect of Condition X MUM-R on Personal Distress	(1, 193) = 2.455	.119	.01	[0, .06]
Interaction of Effect of Condition X MUM-R on Willingness to Donate	(1, 193) = 1.457	.229	.01	[0, .06]
Interaction of Effect of Condition X MUM-R on Amount of Donation	(1, 191) = 1.135	.288	5.91E-03	[0, .05]

Note: * = $p < .05$; *** = See Figure 1

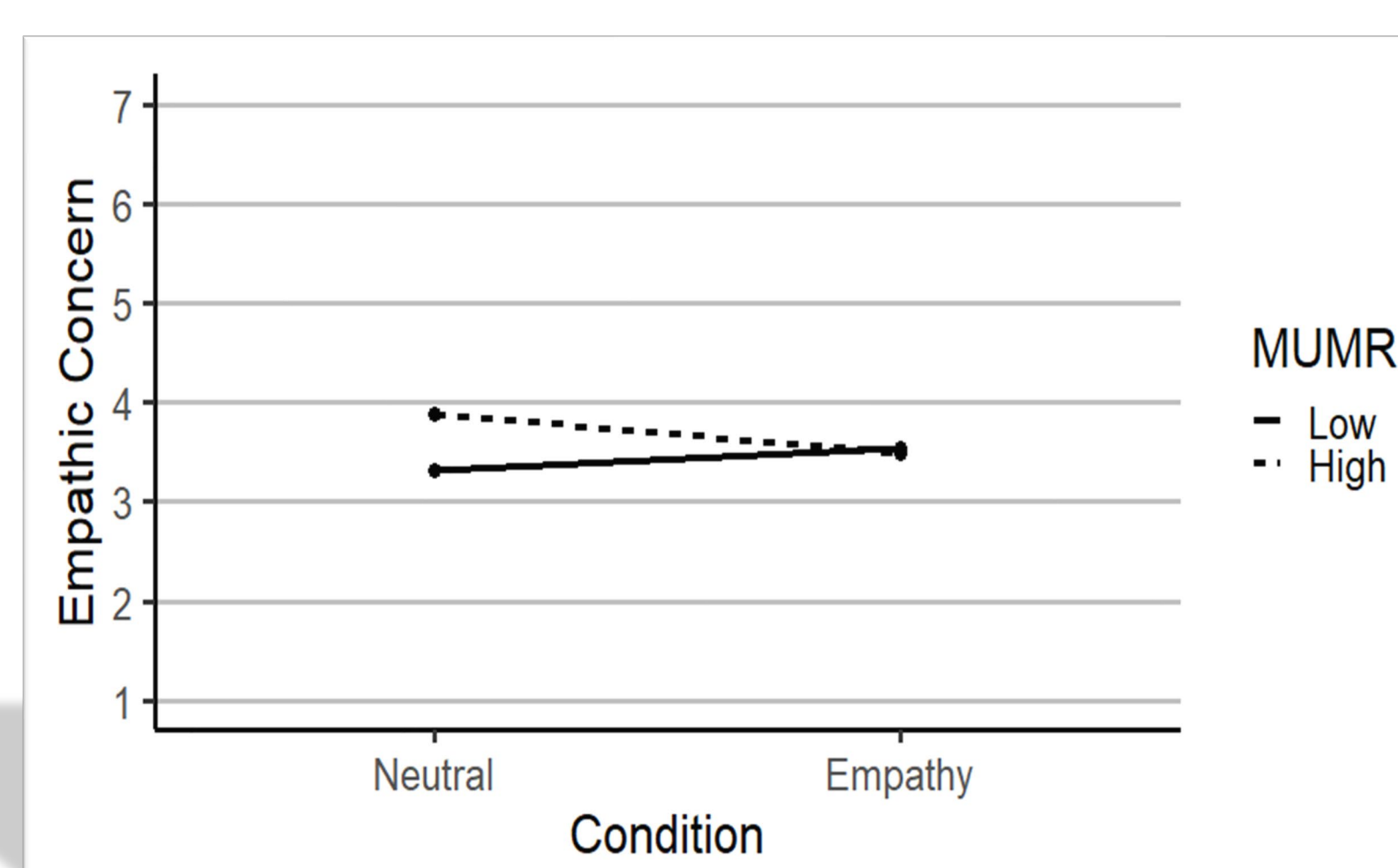


Figure 1

Conclusion

Overall Findings:

- The condition has no effect on empathic concern
- The neutral condition scored higher on levels of empathic concern than the empathy condition, and the MUM-R measure positively predicts empathic concern within the neutral condition.
- There were not any significant results within the empathy condition.

Additional Considerations and Future Directions:

- Repeating the instructions for both the empathy and neutral conditions within the survey could possibly yield more accurate results regarding empathy induction being a significant factor for empathic concern and perspective taking by reminding each condition as to what they should be looking for within the video.
- Ensuring that the group being advertised within the video and/or graphic in the study is not religiously affiliated could help be sure the personal beliefs (that are not relevant to the study) of participants will not persuade their answers.

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References

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