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Walking in or Talking with Others' Shoes: Studying the Role of Perspective Getting and Mimicry on Interlocutors' Interpersonal Accuracy and Feelings of Empathy

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Abstract

We investigated the extent to which two interventions (perspective-getting versus mimicry) affect individuals' cognitive empathy (interpersonal accuracy) and affective empathy differently. Participants were invited to a Zoom-session where they met another participant (the target) who they had never met before. Participants were instructed to assess the stranger's attitude on several topics (interpersonal accuracy) and to report their empathic feelings towards the target (affective empathy). Beforehand, participants were explicitly instructed to either (1) get the target's perspective on these topics in a five-minute discussion (perspective-getting), to (2) mimic the target's facial expressions (mimicry) while watching the target explain her general experiences with the topics, or (3) to watch the same monologue without the mimicry instructions (control). Results showed that perspective-getting increased predictors' interpersonal accuracy versus mimicry and the control. However, the mimicry instructions did not result in higher feelings of affective empathy compared to the other two conditions.