

Empathy in the Service of Intra- and Interpersonal Peace



Carlos Hoyt

Introduction

What is empathy? What is its relation and relevance to peace psychology? How can we understand and apply empathy in ways that are most conducive to peaceful intra- and interpersonal dynamics? This chapter provides accessible and practical answers to these questions in hopes that the reader will gain new or deepened knowledge and skills with which to make the world a more peaceful place.

Two Perspectives on Humanity

I urge you to beware the temptation...of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides [United States and Soviet Union] equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil...[The Soviet Leaders] are the focus of evil in the modern world (Reagan, 1983, pp. 363–364).

Christie, Wagner, and Winter (2008), in their *Introduction to Peace Psychology*, remind us of Ronald Reagan's representation of the dynamic between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The world-threatening hostility between two nations that characterized the Cold War catalyzed the emergence of peace psychology.

Pursuing ways to deescalate and defuse hostilities between forces that had come to see each other as alien and irremediably antagonistic through the insights and practices of psychology was a virtuous response to a vicious situation. Reagan's

C. Hoyt (✉)

Director of Equity & Inclusion, Belmont Day School, Belmont, MA, USA

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vituperative characterization of the Soviet Union, and his determination that the conflict between the Super Powers was not resolvable by seeking improved mutual understanding, but was instead a struggle between good and evil, represented a foreclosure on the value and power of empathy.

In contrast, the following quote by Richard Rorty epitomized the basis of empathy and the key to the successful pursuit of peace between people—whether at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, or geopolitical level: “Our common susceptibility to humiliation is the only social bond that is needed” (Rorty, 2009, p. 91)

The Evolution of Empathy and the Definition Most Conducive to Achieving Peace

In *The Selfish Gene* (1976), Richard Dawkins coined the term “meme” to serve as the cultural analog for the biological units of replication: DNA or genes. By birthing into human language the term and concept, “meme,” Dawkins revealed by explanation and by example the paradoxically dual nature of language. Language is both organic and a product of human craft, arising in the minds of humans, often mutating amongst minds from context to context and time period to time period, and frequently deliberately appropriated and reengineered for special purposes. In fact, this has happened to Dawkins’s term. *Meme* has come to mean something in this age of viral videos and easily transmissible quips that Dawkins never could have foreseen. A word is planted in the soil of human imagination and parlance, like a cultivar. Its original properties are then liable to change in response to environmental pressures. It might diverge into two or more strains of the original. It might become its opposite in the minds and meanings of some who wield it. It might go extinct.

As it is with many words, so it is with “empathy.” Having its roots in a term coined in the context of the Germanic discourse on aesthetics, scholars attribute its original coinage to German philosopher, Rober Vischer, who in 1873 sought to denote the phenomenon of the projection of subjective sensibilities into natural objects (Depew, 2005). In Vischer’s view, art does or does not have beauty depending on the beholder’s imbuement of beauty into the object. With time and variable usage and interpretation (by German psychologists including Theodore Lipps and E. B. Tichener), Vischer’s original term, *Einfühlung*, the literal translation of which is “feeling into,” evolved into the English term *empathy* and gained a meaning that transposed the original (Depew, 2005). Instead of applying to the experience of understanding into an object of art, empathy came to connote the phenomenon of feeling into the emotional state and psychological worldview of other persons.

American psychologist, Carl Rogers, was influential in establishing empathy as an essential element of the therapeutic process.

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes

thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this “as if” quality is lost, then the state is one of identification (Rogers, 1995, p. 140).

While there has been some variation on how empathy is conceptualized in the realm of psychotherapy, Rogers’ definition and description provide the core of what empathy means and also what it does not mean. As stated by Bohart and Greenberg (1997), psychotherapists following Rodgers provided useful elaborations of his construction of empathy.

The therapist attempts to imaginatively enter the client’s experience of struggling to articulate, share, and dialogue with the therapist, as well as to try to grasp the content of what the client is striving to communicate. To quote Brodley (1996), client-centered empathy responses emphasize “the client’s perceptions and the ways in which the client as a self is an agency or an active force and source of meanings, reactions and other experiences” (p. 23). Raskin (1974) defines empathy as “an understanding of what the client is aware of and trying to convey to the therapist, so if the latter is accurate in his empathic endeavor, the client will feel and may say, ‘Yes, that’s it! That’s how I feel! That’s what I meant!’” (p. 11) (Bohart & Greenberg, 1997, p. 7).

Further clarifying what empathy is, Bohart and Greenberg provide explicit differentiation between it and *sympathy*, a concept with which empathy is very frequently confused and conflated.

Whereas empathy means to feel *as if* one were in the worldview and motivational state of another (the “em” prefix meaning *in* or *into*), sympathy means to share the same feeling, to not merely walk as if in the same shoes as someone else, but to actually co-own the shoes, and to have no other shoes that are distinctly one’s own and in which one walks through one’s separate and autonomous life (the prefix “sym” meaning *together* or *with*). Sympathy is identification *with* another person’s feelings and views, as illustrated in the statement: “I feel the same way you do. We share sensibilities, convictions, a worldview, motivation, and intentions.” Empathy is the accurate identification *of* another person’s feelings and views (e.g., “I do not necessarily feel the same way you do but, regardless, I am aware of your sensibilities, convictions, worldview, motivation, and intention, and I understand how they factor into who you are and how you are in the world”).

Bohart and Greenberg (1997) explicate that while coincidentally the therapist and client might share a feeling or perspective, doing so is not the goal of empathy, and in fact it could be problematic.

To feel the same feelings, in fact, might be dangerous. It could lead to the therapist’s emotionally over-identifying with the client. This could lead to counterproductive attempts to “rescue” the client or to a failure to differentiate the client’s experience from that of the therapist, with the therapist imposing her view of the situation on the client. In this regard, both client-centered and psychodynamic therapists...draw a sharp distinction between empathy and sympathy, usually explicitly cautioning the therapist against adopting a sympathetic stance (Bohart & Greenberg, 1997, p. 25).

Empathy has a well-established definition in the realm of psychotherapy as the effort to decenter from one’s own mores, beliefs, motives, values, and modus operandi in order to nonjudgmentally and neutrally understand another person’s

perspective and predicament. Beyond the field of psychotherapy, however, the term has been inconsistently defined, deployed, and deconstructed. An analysis of a recent consideration of the concept will demonstrate how easy it is to misconstrue empathy, and provide a corrective understanding of what empathy actually is.

In *Against empathy: The case for rational compassion*, Paul Bloom (2016) denounces empathy. “I am against empathy, and one of the goals of this book is to persuade you to be against empathy too” (Bloom, 2016, p. 3). Bloom states this at the start of his treatise, and for the remainder of the book he mounts a case against the general consensus that empathy is a useful concept and practice. Bloom’s objections to empathy include that empathy blinds us and leads us, paradoxically, to act immorally, or at best sub-optimally morally because it “causes us to overrate present costs and underrate future costs” (p. 55) and it focuses our concerns and efforts myopically and preferentially on the concerns of one or a very few people versus the scores of people who might share the plight and need equal care and help.

If, however, one were to replace the term “empathy” with “sympathy,” all of Bloom’s (2016) concerns would become moot, or at least they would be reassigned to a legitimate target. In other words, Bloom’s thesis is predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding of what empathy is. For reasons that are not clear in his writing, Bloom purveys a definition of empathy that is actually a definition of sympathy.

Bloom (2016) defines empathy as “*the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does*” (p. 16, italics in original), stating (without any supporting data) that this is “the most typical” definition (p. 16). Notably, Bloom seems well aware that he is conflating empathy with sympathy, yet he seems to choose to ignore the distinctions between empathy and sympathy so well explicated in the realm of psychotherapy in order to mount his “attack” (p. 54) on the concept. Referring to his preferred definition, Bloom supports it by stating that philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment shared his sense of the meaning of empathy, “though they called it ‘sympathy’ (p. 16)”. He then cites Adam Smith’s and John Updike’s constructions of empathy with apparent awareness that they too were referring to sympathy. Bloom creates two subspecies of empathy, one that he refers to as *emotional* empathy, basically sympathy by another name; and the other, which he refers to as *cognitive* empathy. In describing cognitive empathy, Bloom makes it clear that he, in fact, has a very good grasp of empathy as distinct from sympathy.

...there is another sense of empathy or, to put it differently, another facet of empathy. There is the capacity to understand what’s going on in other people’s heads, to know what makes them tick, what gives them joy and pain, what they see as humiliating or ennobling. We’re not talking here about me feeling your pain but rather about me understanding that you are in pain without necessarily experiencing any of it myself. Am I against this sort of “cognitive empathy” as well? I couldn’t be (Bloom, 2016, p. 36).

Bloom goes on to acknowledge that being a good moral agent requires an understanding of “how people work” (p. 36). He notes that making people happy, avoiding harm, and being a good judge all require what he calls cognitive empathic awareness. Bloom also makes it clear that what he refers to as cognitive empathy can actually be employed for negative and malicious ends. He describes cognitive empathy as “amoral” (p. 37), meaning that it can be deployed neutrally or with benevolent or malicious intent.

Cognitive empathy is a useful tool, then—a necessary one for anyone who wishes to be a good person—but it is morally neutral. I believe the capacity for emotional empathy, described as “sympathy” by philosophers such as Adam Smith and David Hume, often simply known as “empathy” and defended by so many scholars, theologians, and politicians, is actually morally corrosive (Bloom, 2016, p. 39).

Of course, Bloom is right about what he has termed “emotional empathy.” He is wrong, however, to have fused sympathy and empathy into this needlessly unwieldy, obtuse, and almost oxymoronic concept. Bloom’s *emotional empathy* is simply *sympathy*. He is right that many people do not understand or maintain the clear distinction between the two crucial concepts, but he would have been more intellectually precise and provided a more useful consideration of the topic had he made it clear that what he is against is sympathy, not empathy. Instead, he conjured a straw man, the attack upon and burning of which left the genuine article under undue suspicion.

As a better alternative to empathy, Bloom (2016) promotes *compassion*. Whereas, in his construal, empathy is feeling *with*, compassion is feeling *for* another person (i.e., feeling “warmth, concern and care for the other, as well as strong motivation to improve the other’s well-being,” p. 138). The promotion of compassion as a useful factor in positive moral behavior is uncontroversial. It is also unrelated to empathy properly understood. As explicated in the realm of psychotherapy and as stated by Bloom himself in his definition of cognitive empathy, the concept is about knowing and understanding; it is not about feeling one way or another. Empathy is a mode of inquiry that results, if successful, in information upon which to base one’s actions, should one choose to act at all. Whether or not the acquisition of empathic awareness is or is not attended by feelings of sympathy, compassion, enmity, or indifference are beside the point insofar as a clear understanding and application of empathy are concerned.

Bloom (2016) ends his attack on empathy by reiterating that he is only against empathy (actually sympathy) when it comes to morality. In his concern about empathy as a factor in moral behavior, Bloom shares the spirit of peace psychology. How can our capacity to know the interior landscape of another person be used to foster positive social action and interaction? From Bloom’s perspective, we must be careful to not overly identify with others lest we find ourselves judging myopically and acting based on parochial bias. Fair enough, but with a corrected understanding of empathy we need not be concerned that it is a faulty tool in the pursuit of positive social interaction. In fact, with an accurate understanding of empathy we can see how to apply it to overcome the terrible fear, feeling, or conviction that we cannot understand, relate to, or live positively with others.

I have regularly encountered graduate students in my clinical skills courses who come into a discussion of empathy with varying degrees of confusion about how or whether to distinguish it from sympathy. This is not unusual, and it is always gratifying to see the students gain a sense of clarity and empowerment upon adding the differences between *em-* and *sym-* and *with* to their funds of knowledge. “*I get it now! It’s like diving into someone else’s existential ocean, but with your wetsuit on. You’re in it, but you’re not of it!*” a student once exclaimed in an epiphanic moment.

Some believe that empathy is a capacity that either one has or does not have, similar to the ability to carry a tune. The fact is that understanding and applying empathy is more like learning to read music than being able to carry a tune. Anyone can learn to read music. It is true that after that some will be better than others at singing or playing the tune indicated, but even then, practice invariably leads to improvement. Empathy can be taught (Chiaet, 2013; University of British Columbia, 2017); empathy can be learned; and the application of empathy can make the world a more peaceful place. As demonstrated in the previous section, empathy can also be misunderstood and misconstrued. The next part of this chapter will solidify a clear and applicable understanding of empathy and introduce a method for achieving and using empathic awareness to constructively navigate real or perceived dissonance.

Empathy in Action

For a number of years I worked as supervising clinician at a school for children with learning and/or behavioral challenges. These students, ages 7–16, were referred to my school after their local public schools found that they had insufficient resources to meet their needs. Each student had suffered a combination of life circumstances that required the development of adaptive strategies that, though they served to preserve their ability to move one way or another from one day and into the next, proved to be maladaptive in environments that were not characterized by instability, abuse, neglect, drug and alcohol use, and impoverishment. Some lived with their biological parents, some with extended family, some at foster or group homes, and some lived in residential treatment centers. Each had learned ways to cope with extremely adverse situations: talk loudly and threaten in order to not be ignored; say as little as possible in hopes that attention (too often brutal and/or exploitative) would not be paid to you; hit, kick, bite, and scream even in the absence of a real threat because a real threat could come any minute (called a counter phobic response); exaggerate, prevaricate, and create fictions about one's background and current life circumstance because the reality of one's world is too bleak and menacing to be confessed. My school provided these children with small class sizes; an abundance of adult presence and support; a thoughtful, consistent, and educative behavior management system; and individual, group, and family counseling.

The mere presence of these resources did not, of course, trigger an immediate cessation of maladaptive behaviors by the students. To the contrary, the students took full advantage of the safe holding environment to present the full range of their concerns and coping strategies. On any given school day, students "acted out" their traumas, confusion, anger, depression, or anxiety by running away, breaking items, speaking to other students and staff in extremely offensive ways, and being violent towards others and/or themselves, including suicidal gestures that sometime required emergency hospitalization.

This meant that at the end of any given school day, the staff would have to gather to review the difficult day that one or more students had and determine what the best response would be. In the case, for example, that a student attacked another student, causing injury, should that student stay out of school for a day or would it be better for the student to come to school the next day to have a conflict resolution meeting? When a student who had been repeatedly self-injurious actually threatened suicide, should an attempt have to be made to arrange an inpatient psychiatric observation and evaluation? In discussing a student who bit a teacher so severely that blood was drawn, what was the right decision for the student, the staff, and the other students in the milieu? There was always a range of strong feelings among the staff to such situations. Some would feel that the student was too unsafe to remain at the school. Some would be sympathetic to the combination of stressors that led to the student's behavior. Some would feel that there was no excuse for the student's behavior.

It was in such discussions that I came to realize the power and utility of empathy as a means by which to bring everyone into a common, unbiased understanding of the factors that may have contributed to the challenges presented by the student—as well as the factors that may be contributing to how each staff member was feeling about it all. As a psychotherapist, I was accustomed to trying to help clients ascertain underlying dynamics at play in challenging interactions with others and within their own selves.

“Why in the world does my partner have to act like that?” “The way my boss treats people is just crazy! What would drive a person to be such a jerk?” “I just find myself either getting angry or shutting down or both when my partner requests ‘space.’ If she loves me so much, why should she need space from me?” “My black colleague told me I should ‘check my privilege’ when I was telling folks at lunch about the promotion I just got. She said we should all look around and notice who gets promoted and who doesn’t. She called it racism. So now I’m a racist? Now I didn’t earn the things I’ve worked my butt off for?” We are all prone to experience-vexing instances of failure to understand the interior state and motivation of others.

Years of facilitating processes by which clients could gain an understanding of the universal human needs and vulnerabilities that dispose us all to acting in ways that are defensive, avoidant, and even combative led me to derive a method of empathically assessing the underlying dynamics of challenging human behavior. I refer to that methodology as the Empathic Inquiry Method (EIM).

The Empathic Inquiry Method

Psychologist, Michael Basch defines empathy as “the ability to feel, or, more accurately, to find one’s way into another’s experience” (Basch, 1990, p. 145). Similarly, psychologist, Martha Stark explains, “Empathy is about understanding, and an empathic response is one that conveys to the [person] that understanding” (Stark, 1999, p. 182)

But exactly how does one accomplish this? How does one decenter from one’s own subjectivity and effectively enter another person’s subjectivity? How does one step out of one’s own shoes and step into another person’s shoes to get the clearest sense possible of how that person walks through the world? This section provides a detailed guide to conducting an empathic inquiry.

Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of the EIM. For decades now I have relied on it in my professional and personal life, I have taught it in clinical and anti-bias teaching and training contexts, and I have lent it to friends facing challenges

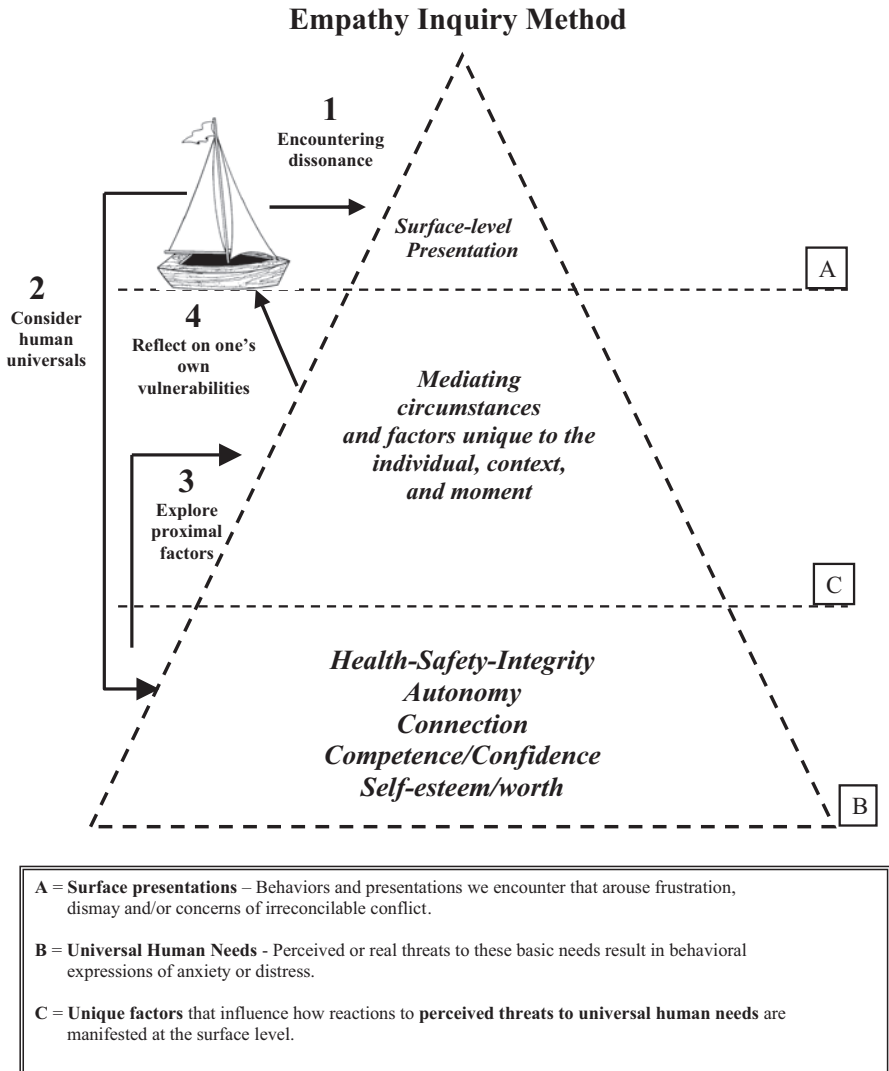


Fig. 1 Empathy inquiry method

in relationships with partners, family, bosses, and any human beings (including themselves) whose behavior takes them aback, leaves them feeling alienated, angry, or mistreated. Invariably, it has enabled and empowered those who employ it to conduct a detached, nonjudgmental exploration and analysis of complex behavioral dynamics and to then act in ways that are unclouded by emotion, bias, or misunderstanding. As noted in the preceding discussion of empathy, the EIM does not necessarily result in sanctioning of the behavior at issue or accommodating the agent of the concerning behaviors. In fact, as was the case sometimes at my school, the method might result in the levying of consequences.

A proper empathic inquiry simply and effectively affords a clear view of the subjectivity of another person and of oneself so that one's responses can be based on an understanding of the full range of factors that might have contributed to the challenge. One might think of an empathic inquiry as the psychological analog to an X-ray or a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. Whereas X-rays, using radiation, and MRI, using magnetic fields to provide accurate views of the subcutaneous structures and functioning of bones, tissue, and organs, an effective empathic inquiry reveals the interior emotional and motivational constitution and workings of a person—and without having to resort to the use of radiation or magnetic fields! As with X-ray and MRI, which provide information that serves as the basis for deciding how to respond, but do not in and of themselves dictate treatment, so to an empathic assessment yields accurate information that can serve as the basis for determining appropriate responses.

As with its physical-medical analogs which require knowledge of how to operate the technology, so an empathic inquiry is optimized by knowing what one is looking for and knowing how to most efficaciously conduct the exploration of another person's feelings and motivations.

Figure 1 illustrates a four-step procedure by which to apperceive the factors and circumstances that contribute to the challenging presentations and behaviors or others. The method includes a means by which to gain insight into one's own reactivity when confronted with challenges, as well.

Elements of the Empathic Inquiry Method

The triangular frame at the center of the illustration represents an iceberg, the significance of which lies in the fact that about 90% of an iceberg's volume and mass lie beneath the water's surface. Had the Titanic's encounter with its lethal iceberg been a collision with only the portion that floated visibly above the waterline, the steamship would have easily brushed aside that amount of mass. The problem was the nearly eight times more of ponderous ice lurking under the surface and rendering the visible portion too formidable an object to plow through.

The EIM presents a sailboat to stand for the individual who runs into the iceberg-like challenge of trying to understand and effectively navigate the interior psychological terrain of another person. As explicated in the box at the bottom of

the illustration, what one perceives when one runs into problematic presentations and behaviors is merely the surface-level manifestation of what is likely a far larger and complex dynamic. Step one is the encounter with and reaction to the challenge (section “A” of the triangle/iceberg).

Step two (section “B” of the triangle/iceberg) calls for a shift in perspective from the rather myopic reactivity to the obstacle of unwelcome behavior by another person to the realization that whatever is being manifested in surface behavior is likely rooted in and triggered by a real or perceived threat to one or a combination of universal human needs. Drawing on the incisive writing on human motivation of psychologist, Edward Deci (1995), the EIM posits five universal human needs which, if perceived to be under threat, will likely lead any person to express anxiety, upset, fear, sorrow, anger, or other concomitant emotions. The EIM describes the triggers of our common susceptibility to humiliation—and the problematic behaviors associated with feeling so vulnerable.

Health-Safety-Integrity is the most basic human universal. When we perceive a threat to our bodies, to our basic way of thinking or to our core values, we quite naturally and strenuously resist the source of the threat.

Autonomy is defined by Deci (1995) as self-governance; acting in accordance with one's aims and drives—feeling free and volitional in one's actions. When feeling controlled or coerced by external forces, people act without a sense of personal endorsement, and are likely to instinctively resist the resulting feeling of alienation from their authentic self (Deci, 1995).

Connection: When critical attachments seem on the verge of rupture or dissolution, reactions to repair, defy, or deny that prospect can manifest in emotionally charged and aggressive behavior or in withdrawal as a counter phobic coping strategy.

Competence: “Decades ago,” writes Deci, “the psychologist Robert White...argued that people yearn so strongly to feel competent or effective in dealing with their environment that competence could be thought of as a fundamental human need” (1995, p. 65). Each of us has the need to feel capable of accomplishing crucial tasks. When we perceive that we are ineffectual in critical ways, we are bound to express the feelings associated with that perception (anxiety, frustration, anger, etc.).

Self-esteem/worth: Our own self-appraisal is often influenced by how we feel others evaluate us. It is also the case that our sense of self-worth can be indifferent to what others think of us. In either case, a sufficiently positive sense of worth is necessary to feeling entitled to self-assert, participate equally with others, and expect fair treatment from others. When one feels that one's self-worth is being estimated below one's own baseline of sufficiency, it is likely that defensiveness, despair, flight, or other reactions will be expressed.

Even if we are not always sure which need or needs are felt to be under threat, we can rest assured that expressions of defensiveness, resistance, hostility, evasion, or avoidance are rooted in the categories of need at the base of the iceberg.

Exploring the Context of Behavior

Step three (section “C” of the triangle/iceberg) directs us to investigate the immediate, contextual factors that might influence how reactions to perceived threats to universal human needs are manifested at the surface level. In my work at the school for children struggling with learning and behavioral challenges, we sometimes determined that a child who attacked another child without provocation was expressing a counter phobic coping strategy to protect themselves from perceived—though not also real—threat of harm. However, knowing that the student did not always act that way when faced with similar stimuli, we would be left to wonder why the challenging behavior occurred at the time and in the place it did. This crucial contextual aspect of understanding the subjective perspective and motivations of another person requires seeking the proximal conditions of their life that mediate their reactions to perceived threats to universal human needs. If, for example, the student’s typically fragile home environment was upended the night before because a family member became intoxicated, erratic, and perhaps violent, that might be a very likely cause for the student’s counter phobia to be more easily triggered than on other days when things at home were more or less stable.

Many possible factors can influence how a person expresses the discomfort or distresses that are manifested in behavior. Cultural, environmental, and/or personal idiosyncratic factors might all play a part. Some of us become belligerent and bellicose; some of us withdraw or become passive-aggressive. A given person might be reacting out of fear of losing their position in a hierarchy. Another person may be displacing negative feelings associated with personal relationship issues or other psychological burdens. To the extent that we can detect and identify why the presentation or behavior take the form they do, we are in a better position to understand them and respond in a thoughtful way.

The final step in the EIM, step four, takes one back to one’s self. After seeking to recognize what is at play for the person presenting the challenge, the question remains: why does this challenge leave one feeling frustrated by, alienated from, and/or hostile towards the person presenting it?

With step four we see that the EIM is not only about understanding others but also about exploring oneself in the face of conflict. When applied to the self, the method prompts us to recognize that we can get in our own way when our own negative reaction becomes an obstacle in and of itself. When that happens, the self as its own obstacle can best be understood by going through the same steps used to understand another person.

Harkening back to the meeting about the student at my former school, the EIM would be useful not only to gain a sense of the internal landscape of the student, but also for the teacher who feels strongly that the student should be simply forgiven and not sent away from school, at one end of the response spectrum, and for the teacher who insists that the child is too dangerous to remain at the school, at the other end. For the first teacher, perhaps their connection to the child along with the great value they place on loyalty and commitment to relationships might trigger a

strongly felt threat when the prospect of separating from the student is raised (the universal human need for connection). Without taking account of this powerful underlying perspective and need, this teacher might mount an argument for excusing the child's behavior that is actually rooted more in their own needs than what might be best for the student and the school community. On the other side, a teacher who perhaps was once injured by this child, or even another child, and has high sensitivity to their bodily integrity—perhaps along with a strong social justice ethic about protecting people from violence, might argue vehemently about safety, liability, and ethical concerns that stand in the way of maintaining the student as a member of the community. This teacher, if unaware of their own perceived threat to a human universal need (for safety and integrity), might see no other option than to separate the student from the school, even when a short-term intervention (such as an brief residential treatment intervention or medication evaluation) might be in order.

Conclusion

Empathy is a mode of inquiry that, if conducted properly, results in a clear understanding of the internal psychological and motivational dynamics of another person, and of oneself. An empathic understanding of another person's perspective and behaviors is a strong prophylaxis against reactions that are driven by reflexive negativity or even hostility. While an empathic inquiry will not necessarily lead to a stance that endorses another person's views or actions, it can lead to a response that is fully and dispassionately informed. Since all human dynamics turn in the perceptions, perspectives, and actions of the individuals involved, the EIM can serve as a useful tool across all variations of challenging human affairs. Even, for example, when the focus of examination and intervention of conflict is community (versus individuals *per se*), empathy and the EIM can be critical to understanding, preventing, and alleviating difficulties.

The field of Community Psychology is a case in point. As explained by Jason et al. (2016), Community Psychology emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century with the aims of combining “a scientific orientation with collaborative social action in order to empower members of some community of interest and to help them improve their lives (p. 7),” and understanding “the ways that altering specific human contexts (and perhaps the relationships between people and their contexts) alleviates suffering (p. 7).” Even with its focus on the virtuous goal of community empowerment, Community Psychology recognizes that any community comprises autonomous individuals, each of whom inhabits multiple existential contexts relevant to the community conditions they face (e.g., race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and worldview). Every community's general character, strengths, and challenges are, in effect, a kaleidoscopic representation of the individual perspectives, predicaments and potential of each community member.

Perceived or real threats to the *Health-Safety-Integrity, Autonomy, Connection, Competence/Confidence, and Self-esteem/worth* of every individual manifest at the community level. Therefore, employing a method, such as the EIM is requisite to a thorough assessment and optimal empowerment at the community level.

While there have been and likely will continue to be constructions of empathy that diverge from its purest and most useful definition, readers are encouraged to think practically and parsimoniously about this essential concept. Micro (individual/intrapersonal), mezzo (interpersonal and community/group), and macro (structural, institutional, and geopolitical) conflict are progressively challenging and complex. It would be simplistic to suggest that had President Reagan employed empathy in his inquiry into the dynamics of Cold War tensions, the world might be a more peaceful place today, but it is crucial to recognize the potential good that might have resulted had empathy been thoughtfully applied. When interpersonal dynamics—at any level—veer towards enmity, alienation, and hostility, availing ourselves of all possible tools in the service of de-escalation, reconciliation, and peace makes incontrovertible sense. Understood and applied as a way to ascertain the perspectives and motivations that factor into interpersonal dynamics, empathy can be an invaluable tool in the service of intra- and interpersonal peace.

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