

A stenography of empathy: Toward a new approach of the empathic process

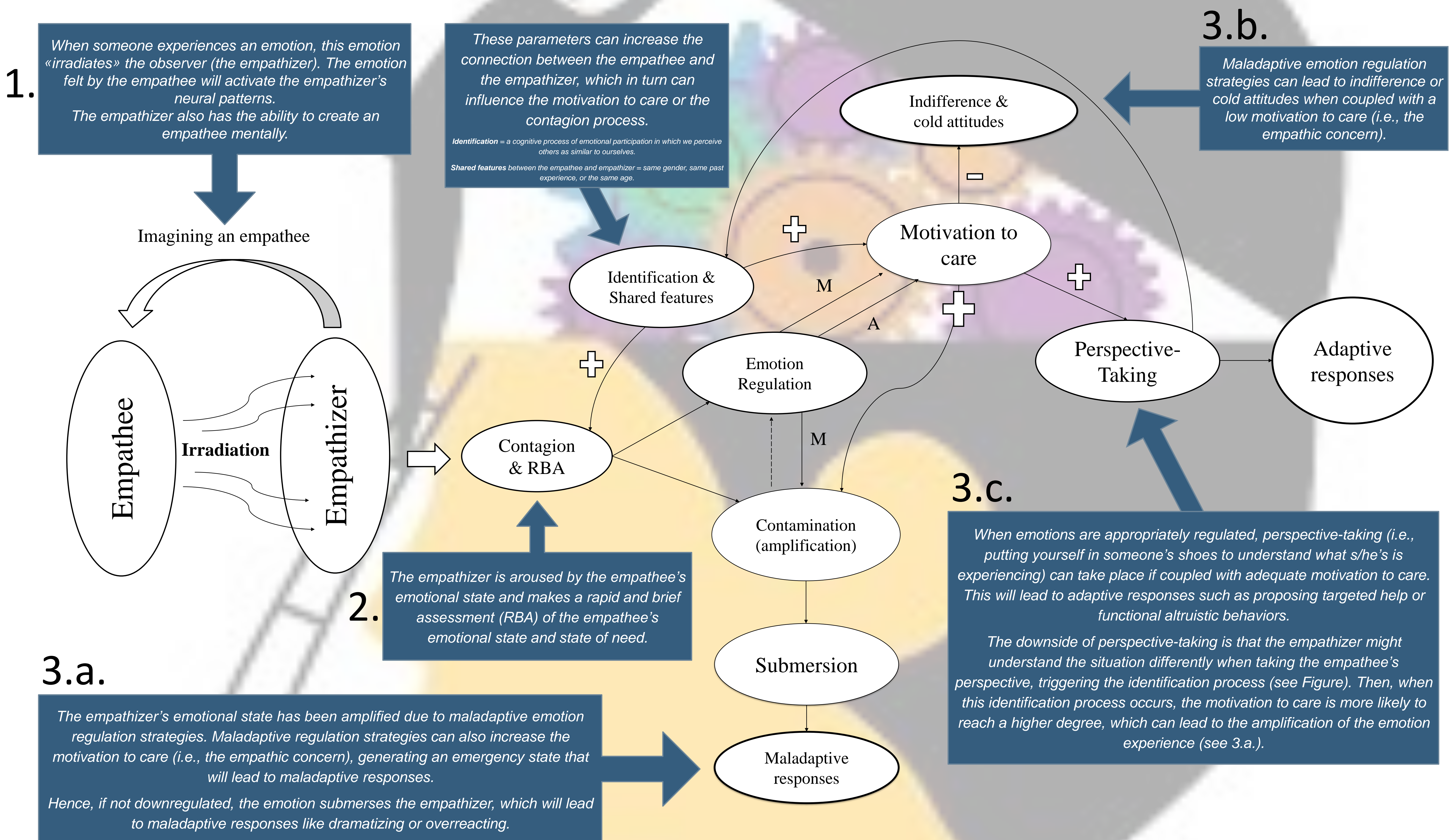
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Background

During the past decade, empathy has gained popularity in the scientific world, and several researchers recommend promoting empathy skills in several fields of education. A recent systematic review identified 43 definitions of empathy [1], showing the large variability of the authors' theoretical approaches. Here, we proposed a condensate approach of several authors to display how the empathic process works. The model has been developed following de Waal and Preston's theory [2], Decety's conception of empathy [3], Davis' approach [4], and Batson's theory [5]. However, contrary to previous approaches, this model is a person-centered model where several parameters interact with each other. Indeed, this model involves an empathizer (i.e., a target) and an empathizer (i.e., an observer), and is centered on the empathizer. We explain how the empathizer's emotional experience follows different paths, leading to adaptive (e.g., proper identification of empathizer's needs, proposing targeted help, or functional altruistic behaviors) and maladaptive responses (e.g., psychological distress, dramatizing, or overreacting).



Conclusion

The current model advocates stopping to use total empathy scores in experimental studies because, as displayed, cognitive and affective domains (and subdomains, like fantasy and perspective-taking) are different facets interacting together. In addition, there is a strong necessity to reform the undifferentiated promotion of empathy skills. Indeed, healthcare professionals, researchers, and professionals from other disciplines need to focus on tailored interventions to promote empathy skills and, for this purpose, we requires dynamic and sequential models explaining how empathy works. Finally, this new approach is also able to explain how empathy interacts with several psychopathologies like burnout, psychopathy, and borderline personality disorders.

Références

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