

Rethinking the Role of Motivation in Empathic Accuracy within Romantic Relationships

A Systematic Review

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INTRODUCTION

Empathic accuracy (= E.A.) → "The extent to which partners can accurately infer one another's unspoken thoughts and feelings as they spontaneously occur during the course of natural interactions" (Ickes, 1993, p. 588)

- Contributes positively to the overall **quality of romantic relationships** (Sened et al., 2017; Hinnekens et al., 2018)

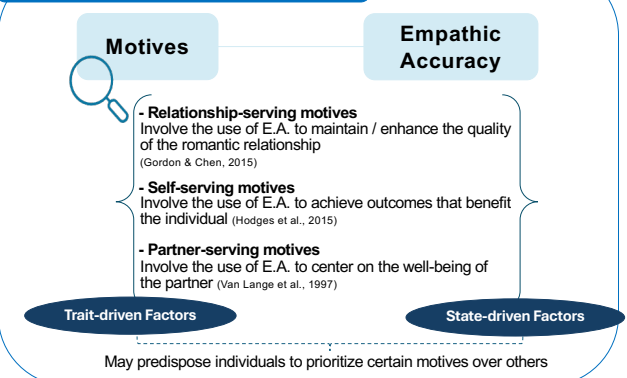
- May be better understood as a **motivational process** rather than a stable ability (Hodges et al., 2015)

Motives - the goals or reasons driving individuals to be empathically (in)accurate - may shape how partners infer each other's thoughts / feelings (Ickes, 2011)

Aims → Examine how the notion of E.A. as a motivational process has been conceptualized in the literature

- Identify the motives that drive individuals to be empathically (in)accurate in romantic relationships

EMPATHIC ACCURACY A MOTIVATIONAL PROCESS



METHODOLOGY

Eligibility Criteria

Measurement of EA in **adults** within the context of a **romantic relationship** and involve the inference of thoughts and/or feelings

Primary studies

- Research that **directly** explores what motivates romantic partners to be empathically (in)accurate
- Studies that assess motives **explicitly** in relation to E.A.

Secondary studies

- Research that investigates the link between identified variables and E.A., where motivation is **strongly implied**

Reporting

PRISMA guidelines

A flowchart will be provided to detail the number of studies included/excluded, along with reasons for exclusion

Data base

Web of Science, PubMed, Cochrane, APA PsycINFO, Scopus, ScienceDirect

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis of study characteristics

- Characteristics of studies included
- Characteristics of study samples
- Methods used to assess E.A.

Thematic categorization of motives

Primary studies → Extract + classify explicitly stated motives
Secondary studies → Identify **implicit motives** suggested in findings but not directly tested

- Self / Partner / Relationship-serving motives
- Trait / State influences on motives

EXPECTED RESULTS

Integration of findings & hypothesis building

- Synthesis of findings to create a framework for understanding how different motives shape E.A.
- Identify literature gaps
- Suggest **new hypothesis** based on patterns observed across studies
 - Relationship-serving motives**: Individuals may be motivated to be empathically accurate to foster emotional intimacy, strengthen trust, or resolve conflicts more effectively (Gordon & Chen, 2015)
 - Self-serving motives**: Individuals could engage in motivated inaccuracy to protect their own emotional well-being or to sustain a particular relational dynamic that serves their interests (Hodges et al., 2015)
 - Partner-serving motives**: individual could be motivated to be empathically accurate in order to provide effective support, validate their partner's emotions or reduce their distress (Van Lange et al., 1997)
 - Trait influences**: Individuals with a specific trait may be (de)motivated to remain empathically accurate to serve various motives
 - State influences**: In a specific context, a partner may (dis)engage in E.A. to serve various motives (Ickes & Hodges, 2013)

LIMITS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Some of the motives proposed in the literature remain **theoretically grounded** and **have not been empirically validated**
- This limitation may be particularly relevant for the **secondary studies** included
→ Motivation is often **inferred rather than directly assessed**

Future research could aim to **empirically validate the motives** identified in this review

- Some studies assess **motives and E.A. after the interaction** using **self-report questionnaires**
- These methods may introduce **biases** such as **social desirability**

Future research could implement **pre-interaction assessments** of motives and prioritize **real-time, observational methodologies**, such as the **dyadic interaction paradigm** (Ickes et al., 1993)

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