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BACKGROUND

Epidemiological data suggest that several mental illnesses spread within social networks (Bastiampillai, Allison, & Chan, 2013; Haeffel & Hames, 2014), but we lack experimental paradigms that can probe the mechanisms underlying this contagion.

Evidence shows that i) people learn that stimuli are threatening by observing others reacting fearfully to them, ii) this learning is mediated by feelings of empathy, and iii) vivid mental imagery amplifies the emotional impact of situations (Holmes & Mathews, 2005; Olsson et al., 2016; Shu et al., 2017).

As such, do these basic social/affective processes explain the contagious spread of worries (repetitive negative thoughts about potentially threatening situations)?

Research Questions

1. Can an experimental paradigm induce contagious worries?

Do empathy and/or mental imagery drive worry 2. contagion?

METHODS													
Study 1	• Amazon Mechanical Turk Ps ($N = 165$) told they would see negative images that might make them very upset and could cause "flashbacks."												
 Ps provided pre-exposure anxiety ratings (average of how distressed, upset, scared, nervous, 													
afraid, anx	 arraid, anxious, and worried they tell on / -point scales) Ps wrote their thoughts and feelings about the uncoming study for 60s. Linguistic Inquiry and 												
• PS wrote tr Word Cour	neir the nt (I IW)	C' Penn	ebaker e	ings ac t al 200)1) used t	o quantify the	ay ior air ore	exposition	iguistic u re anx	inquiry	anu ad. anc	ł	
anger wor	rd use.	e , i eini										-	
 Ps then sa 	w emo	tion rat	ings and	d text c	ostensibly	r from anothei	^r parti	cipant.	These	were ac	tually		
manipulate	ed acro	ss subj •	ects to	assign	them to o	one of two co	nditio	ns:		4			
		Ne	eutra	l par	tner								
1	Not at all	A little	Noderately	Quite a bit	Extremely	N	ot at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely		
Distressed	0	0	0	•	0	Distressed		0	0	0	0		
Upset	0	0	0	•	0	Scared		0	0	0	0		
Nervous	0	0	0	0		Nervous		õ	õ	õ	õ		
Afraid	0	0	0	0		Afraid		0	õ	õ	0		
Anxious	0	0	0	0		Anxious	•	0	0	0	0		
Worried	0	0	0	0	•	Worried	•	0	0	0	0		
"Tbh I'm f going to ha kind of pict me out. I r intense, and to have th long time. I I bet it wou feel bad	"Tbh I'm happen ne pictures I'r hope the think I'll H head. I'm r that's on m	feelir ext. I n gon HIT v nave f really ny mir	ig fine a don't re na see b vill be in t he pict just thin id and l' that	about w ally knc out I'm terestin ures ge king ab m feelin "	hat's go w what ok with g, and l out typi ng fine a	oing to kind of h that. I don't c in my ical stuf about a	: 						
 Ps then pr thoughts a Ps then in 	rovided and fee formed	post-e lings to that no	exposul o quanti o image	fy post s would	ety rating -exposul d be show	gs using same re anxious, sa wn and were o	e scal a d, ar debrie	e as abo nd ange efed on o	ove and e r word decepti	l again v use . on.	wrote tr	יר -	
Study 2 • A separate set of mTurk Ps ($N = 218$) completed the same methods above. Ps then answered questions assessing:													
 <i>Empathy</i> in response to the partner: Personal distress, empathic concern, and perspective takin <i>Mental imagery</i> (i.e., how frequently and how vividly they imagined "in their mind's eye" the negative images they thought they would see during the study 													

see your fears: The role of empathy and mental imagery in contagious worries

Studies 1 & 2 **Exposure to the worried** partner increased Ps' self-reported anxiety about upcoming task Results replicated in Study 2 **Exposure to the worried** partner also increased Ps' use of anxious language but not sadness or anger language Result not replicated in Study 2 US N ЭSU 0.3 -DION 0.2 No σ σ Worried Neutral Partner Partner

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Haeffel, G. J., & Hames, J. L. (2014). Cognitive vulnerability to depression can be contagious. *Clinical* Psychological Science, 2(1), 75–85.

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