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# Colloquium lecture by Prof. Dr. Veronika Engert

## Stressregulation in the social context: Empathic stress and empathic processes in stress reduction

Key components of social processing, such as empathy, perspective taking, and compassion, build the foundation of successful human interaction. With the growing interconnectedness of countries and people, these skills are becoming increasingly important. Despite their clear adaptive nature, some researchers argue that certain social skills, like empathy, have “a dark side”. In a context of constant confrontation with others’ suffering, it may lead to exhaustion and burnout. Empathic stress, in which a passive observer covaries with the emotional and physiological activation of a directly stressed target, is one example where empathy may go awry. Over the past years, we have examined such empathic stress in different populations, ranging from strangers, to romantic partners to mother-child dyads. These studies show the reliability of the phenomenon, and suggest a health-relevant maladaptive influence on the empathic agent. In aiming to highlight a potential resilience factor against the excessive sharing of others’ stress, we introduce the concept of compassion, which may allow empathic agents to shield themselves from the negative effects of empathic stress while staying in tune with (and caring towards) the people around them

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**This lecture takes place at Liebiggasse 5, 1010 Vienna,  
Lecture Hall G 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and will be streamed.**

Thursday, March 21, 2024; 3pm