A Measure of Balanced Emotional Empathy

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Abstract

Emotional empathy is a capacity which allows an appreciation of separateness of human beings and at the same time allows them to connect by attending to and feeling the emotional experiences of others (Hanson, R., (2007). It should provide immediate, proximal feedback that discourages aggressive acts by making the perpetrator of the aggression aware and possibly sympathetic, toward the pain suffered by the victim. Thus, the present study proposes that emotional empathy builds on one’s tendency of emotional awareness. People who are characterized by trait emotional awareness, which is a tendency to attend to their own emotions, experience them clearly and are able to regulate them, are expected to be more emotionally empathic. The present study proposes that emotional empathy will mediate the link between trait emotional awareness and affiliate tendency.

Keywords: Emotional Empathy, self report, awareness, emotional intelligence.
A Measure of Balanced Emotional Empathy

History and Development

The construct of empathy refers to the ability to identify with and vicariously share the feelings and thoughts of others. This naturally occurring subjective experience of similarity between the feelings of self and others is an important aspect of building interpersonal relationships. However, there are several essential aspects of empathy: 1) an affective response to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person's emotional state (affective component); 2) a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person (cognitive component); and 3) some regulatory mechanisms that keep track of the origins of self and other feelings (Hanson, R., (2007).

Although there has been an upsurge in the number of studies investigating the construct of empathy and, although these studies are ever more theoretically and methodologically sophisticated, the basic approach for measuring empathy in the social sciences has changed little since the 1980s. Most studies have been aimed at examining adolescents’ feelings in everyday experience, and researchers have therefore typically relied on self-report questionnaires. The most frequently used questionnaires have been the Hogan Empathy Scale (HES; Hogan, 1969), the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972), and its more recent version, the Balanced Empathy Emotional Scale (BEES; Mehrabian, 1996, 1997), but mostly, the Interpersonal Reaction Index (IRI; Davis, 1980), which has been adapted to, and validated on, many different countries and cultures (Albiero, P., Matricardi, G., Speltri, D., Toso, D. 2009).
Current Scale Composition

The Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) is in a questionnaire format and is very easy to administer and score. Subjects report the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each of its 30 items using a 9-point agreement-disagreement scale. This instrument does not require the tester to be present. Sample items would include “Unhappy movie endings haunt me for hours” or “I cannot feel much sorrow for those who are responsible for their own misery”. Higher scores represent higher levels of emotional empathy. Present data indicates that the BEES has good internal consistency and test–retest reliability, $\alpha=0.87$, $r=0.77$. Similar measures of internal consistency are independently reported (Chauhana, B., Mathias, C., Critchley H. 2008).

Review of Instrument Manual

Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) was first presented in 1972 by Mehrabian and Epstein. Often referred to as BEES, is a measurement of emotional empathy. The 30-item questionnaire has a 9-step response format (+4= very strong agreement to -4= very strong agreement) to gauge empathic tendencies. This test can be administered to a group or individual, age 15 or older. Test can be done with paper and pencil or on computer; administer time is 10 minutes. Software is available for administering, scoring and interpreting. Manual contains complete scale, scoring directions and norms (Mehrabian, A.1996).

Most research thus far has focused on emotion understanding, particularly the accurate decoding of emotional state based on observable cues (also referred to as empathic accuracy). This research reveals a close connection between observing, understanding and sharing emotional response, such that, for example, observing someone else's sadness causes sadness in the observer, and this internal experience (or ‘affective representation’) of sadness, enables the observer to understand the other person's emotional experience (Hooker, C., Verosky, S.,
Additional research has also been carried out on the topic of Emotional Intelligence since its appearance in 1990 (Estrella Esturg, M., Sala-Roca, J. 2010).

**Scoring and Interpretation**

The BEES is designed to assess the emotive component of empathy (Stepien, K., & Baernstein, A. 2006). Recently windows software has become available for administering, scoring, and interpreting the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale. The software may be useful even if you plan on group administering the paper and pencil version of the BEES given in the test manual (Mehrabian, A. 1996). In that case, you can use the software to input data from each participant and have the software compute total scores and z-scores for all participants as well as averaged data for different groups of participants. The software provides (a) total score, equivalent z-score, equivalent percentile score, and interpretation of these scores for each person tested and (b) a database of scores for all individuals tested (Mehrabian, A.1996). The software is easy to use and is password protected so that the Administrator can control access to the database of results. In this way, individuals being tested cannot have access to the results, unless the Administrator chooses to report such results to them.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

Studies show that induction of negative emotions, such as anger, lead to an increase, rather than a decrease in pain perception (Rainville, 2005). Moreover, results from these studies consistently indicate that manipulation of the emotional state tends to affect mainly, if not exclusively, the affective component of pain perception, whereas in our study the differences between the two groups are evident in both the affective and sensory dimensions of pain perception (Loggia, M., Mogil, J., Bushnell, B. 2008).
Typically, the empathy construct has been separated into two types: cognitive and emotional. Cognitive empathy refers to imaginatively understanding another person’s thoughts, feelings and actions. Emotional empathy is feeling the emotion of another person, but maintaining a compassionate, other-focused perspective (Besel, L., & Yuille, J. 2010). There is indirect evidence that body-related information is required to obtain knowledge of other people’s emotional but not cognitive states both from patients with pure autonomic failure (Kalbe1, E., Grabenhorst, F., Brand, M., Kessler, J., Hilker, R., Markowitsch, H., 2007).

Application

Reason for Referral: As required by the counseling program at North Western University, Carla Harris a first year graduate student pursuing a Master of Science in School counseling met with Ms. Hawkins, LPC for an evaluation. Throughout their conversations Carla expressed difficulty with coming to terms with forgiveness, regret and a lack of awareness for others feelings as well as her own. Unlike basic emotions, regret stems from the counterfactual comparison between alternative outcomes, as when the chosen option in a gamble results in a negative outcome compared with that of the unselected alternative (Canessa N, Motterlini M, Di Dio C, Perani D, Scifo P., 2009). For this reason Ms. Hawkins associated this with some type of disconnect and felt it appropriate to administer an emotional empathy assessment known as the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES).

Background Information: Carla is a 25 year old female from Columbia, South Carolina. She is the older of two siblings (with a brother who is 22 year old). She is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in School Counseling at North Western University. Although her parents are divorced she has established an amazing relationship with both her mother and father. Her brother is a lot closer to her mom than she is and she is closer to her dad than her brother. She has always had a focus on what she wanted to do with her life, but tends to put too much
pressure on herself to be “perfect”. Two years ago she moved to Maryland to be closer to her boyfriend, James. As she prepared to enter into Graduate School James ended their 5 year relationship. Shortly after the break up her parents noticed somewhat of a change in her everyday emotion stance. Although she loves the aspect of making a difference in children’s lives through various counseling theories and techniques she has become somewhat disengaged with her emotions. She looks at her parents and sees how there relationship did not last. She then looks at all the invested time and effort she put into her relationship and feels she is to blame in both situations.

Behavioral Observations: Carla presented herself as friendly and eager to please during the testing sessions. Rapport was easily established and Carla was cooperative throughout the testing experience. Carla remained on-task and put forth effort to provide accurate responses to the prompts. She was not always aware of her mistakes and often made statements indicating whether or not she enjoyed the tasks or perceived them to be difficult. The testing conditions were acceptable and it was determined that a valid and reliable sample of her true emotional empathy was reported.

Assessment Results: Carla’s level of emotional empathy was assessed using the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale. Her assessment score was a 42 indicating she has healthy beliefs and patterns that are serving her well. She may be concerned about some energy drains that just won’t seem to go away, but should consider the possibility that she can reach all of her dreams, by working diligently to grow in emotional empathy and intelligence. The results also indicated that empathy was significantly correlated with forgiving behavior. The broad definition of empathy includes affective and cognitive components. Additionally, the emotion of regret is elicited when the individual feels a personal responsibility upon the outcome of her/his deliberate choice. Without these prerequisites, regret would be replaced by the basic emotion of
disappointment (Canessa N, Motterlini M, Di Dio C, Perani D, Scifo P., 2009). It has been defined “as accurately perceiving the internal frame of reference of another” and includes nonverbal communication Moore asserted that empathy is “an organizer and regulator of a variety of behaviors” and Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow said empathy is central to what it means to be fully human.

Narrative

Ms. Hawkins: “Hi Carla, come on in and have a seat... its good to see you.”

Carla: “Hi Ms. Hawkins... it’s good to be seen.” (As she smiles slightly)

Ms. Hawkins: “So how have things been over the last week or so? I know you mentioned attending a friend’s wedding in our last session.”

Carla: “Yeah, it was back in my hometown. It was really nice and gave me a chance to see my mom too. I’ll admit I was feeling a little jealous like that should be me and James.”

Ms. Hawkins: “Well I’m glad you enjoyed yourself. I’m sure you’ll be standing at the isle with the man of your dreams in no time. So first thing first I know in our session I administered the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale Assessment just based upon some things that were discussed in the session prior. So what I want to do today is talk to you a little about the test, a breakdown of the scoring and then we can discuss what your next step is. Does that sound good?”

Carla: “Yes Ma’am.”

Ms. Hawkins: “Ok, great. And if you have any questions feel free to stop me at any point and ask away.”

Carla: “Alright, I sure will.”

Ms. Hawkins: “Okay, so as I stated before I administered the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale Assessment. The purpose of this instrument is to measure a multi-faceted scale of emotional empathy. Now when I use the term empathy, it’s in relation to perspective taking or understanding of others. For this process to work, the first step is that we must be able to experience our own emotions. This means we must be open to them and not distract ourselves from them or try to numb ourselves from our feelings through such things as drugs, alcohol, etc. Does that kind of make sense?”

Carla: “Yes ma’am. I could never see myself running to drugs or alcohol for comfort. But I do console a lot inside which I understand isn’t all that healthy either.”

Ms. Hawkins: “You’re very right about that. This leads me to one other thing. Next, we need to become aware of what we are actually feeling -- to acknowledge, identify, and accept our feelings. Only then can we empathize with others. That is one reason it is important to work on
your own emotional awareness and sensitivity-- in other words, to be "in touch with" your feelings. Any questions so far?"

Carla: “No, but Wow! I never really looked at it that way. I’m going to keep that in mind.”

Ms. Hawkins: “I’m glad you’re getting something out of this. And you know you can tweak this information about empathy to what works best for you. So now let’s talk about your scoring. So you scored a 42. Now what I want you to understand is there is no right or wrong answer to the questions that were presented. However, your score is a representation of where you fall in terms of your level of empathy. Now this test has been proven to be extremely reliable and valid through extensive research and empirical data. So with a score of 42 you are placed in a moderate level of emotional empathy. You have a lot going for you. Healthy beliefs and patterns are serving you well. You may be concerned about some energy drains that just won’t seem to go away. Consider the possibility that you can reach all of your dreams, by working diligently to grow your assets and reduce your liabilities.”

Carla: “Surprisingly enough that sounds just like me. I concern myself with entirely too much and it become so draining.”

Ms. Hawkins: “Well I can see how that can become a hindrance. I know you’re working and going to school full time, not to mention still dealing with the emotional aspect of your break up with James. Now that we have kind of laid a foundation for your emotional empathy I want to make some recommendations. Would that be alright with you?”

Carla: “Sure, I welcome any and all assistance.”

Ms. Hawkins: “I would like for you to try becoming aware and acknowledging yours and others feelings. Empathy begins with awareness of another person’s feelings. It would be easier to be aware of other people’s emotions if they would simply tell us how they felt. But since most people do not, we must resort to asking questions, reading between the lines, guessing, and trying to interpret non-verbal cues. When your having a conversation with someone try showing that you are aware of their feelings by saying something to the effect of “I can see how that would make you uncomfortable” or “I understand why you would be upset”. You can also try writing in a journal to release some built up emotions. This is a sure sign of growth in your emotional intelligence.”

Carla: “The journal thing sounds like something I can definitely benefit from. I use to write when I was little and stopped for whatever reason. Now as far as showing empathy in my conversations, sometime I feel like I’m bias to certain situations because of my past experiences.”

Ms. Hawkins: “And that’s okay. I think it’s more so in what your response is. Its okay for you to have some bias, but be aware of how that person may feel and acknowledge their feelings. So those are two things I want you to work on – awareness and acknowledging.”

Carla: “I think I can handle that. I’m really glad I took this assessment. It gave me a whole other outlook on my emotions.”
Ms. Hawkins: “Well that’s wonderful. I’m seeing great progress in the short time we’ve been meeting. So in the meantime I will schedule you for next week the same time and if you have any additional questions or concerns you have my contact information so do not hesitate to call.”

Carla: “Thank you so much.”

Ms. Hawkins: “You are most welcome. I’ll see you next week.”

*** BEES Instrument Administered to Carla Harris

Instructions:

1. Rate yourself on each item with a _____ beside it.
2. Use the respective 0-5 Assets Scale and Liabilities Scale to rate yourself.
3. Calculate the difference between your asset score and your liability score

Assets Scale
0--Not at all 1--Very little 2-- Moderate 3-- Sufficient 4-- Very good 5-- Excellent

Energy Assets—established and lasting energy resources

Healthy mental processes:
1. Self-knowledge—how well you know your strengths and weaknesses _____
2. Spiritual and philosophical beliefs that bring comfort, peace and tranquility _____
3. Grounded optimism—a basically positive view of yourself and the world that is inclusive of “the big picture” _____
4. Self-enhancing beliefs—belief systems that give you energy, strengthen your faith and optimism, and get you through the difficult times _____

Healthy emotional patterns:
1. Self-empathy—the ability to see your deep emotions clearly, and to have compassion for yourself (without self pity) _____
2. Self-esteem—your reserve of good feelings about yourself in general _____
3. Resilience—the ability to bounce back from physical and emotional stress and difficulty _____
4. Stability—your level of consistency regarding your emotional response patterns, value systems and relationships _____

Healthy, established behavior patterns
1. Exercise/fitness program _____
2. Healthy diet _____
3. Contact with nature _____
4. Self-reflection, journaling _____
5. Meditation, prayer, spiritual practice _____

Meaningful work/professional life
1. Work satisfaction _____
2. Alignment between work and sense of purpose _____
3. Balance of work with home/family/social life _____

Fulfilling relationships
1. Good communication skills _____
2. Established community Family _____
3. Friends
   a. One or more very close friend’s _____
   b. A variety of casual friendships _____
   c. A number of friendly acquaintances _____
4. Larger community identity affiliations _____

**Liabilities Scale**

0--N/A 1--Very little 2--Moderate 3--Noticeable 4--Significant 5--Major Concern

**Energy Liabilities** -- Patterns and processes that drain your energy

**Unhealthy mental processes**

1. Low level of self-knowledge—little knowledge of your strengths and/or weaknesses _____
2. Insufficient or negative spiritual and philosophical belief systems _____
3. Pessimism, skepticism, cynicism re. Self, others, life, the world _____
4. Self-limiting beliefs _____

**Unhealthy emotional patterns**

1. Negative self image _____
2. Depression, residual anger, chronic fear/anxiety _____
3. Emotional volatility _____

**Unhealthy behavior patterns**

1. Lack of self-discipline—impulsivity _____
2. Lack of self-motivation—poor initiative and follow-through _____
3. Lack of self-empathy—self-loathing, self-denigration _____
4. Compulsive-addictive behaviors (food, sex, TV, internet, work, alcohol, drugs) _____

**Work/professional life**

1. High work-related stress levels _____
2. Work does not match your values/vision _____
3. Do not like your work/profession _____

**Relationships**

1. Poor communication skills _____
2. Poor social skills _____
3. Social isolation _____
4. Dysfunctional relationships
   a. Codependency _____
   b. Dependency _____
   c. Victim-persecutor-rescuer triangles _____

**Total Energy Assets Score:** _____ -- **Total Energy Liabilities Score** _____ = **Emotional Energy Balance:** _____

**Assessing your Emotional Balance**

The following are merely guidelines for self-assessment. If anything does not fit, disregard it. Use your own judgment and intuition to assess your assets and liabilities. Use this tool only to the extent that it is helpful to you.

**Less than zero:** You are in an energy depletion condition. This may be an excellent time for preventive health care. You probably need to take immediate action to work toward better balance in your life. Read, research and/or seek professional help to accomplish your goals and overcome your difficulties.

**0-15:** You may be “running on fumes.” This is a survival mode, where you may feel you are just barely keeping your head above water. This can work for a lifetime, and may seem “normal,” but you can certainly improve on your condition by increasing your assets and reducing your liabilities.

**16-33:** You probably are not having a lot of fun. It may seem that you are just barely staying ahead of your problems, or maybe a little behind. You have some energy to work with, and it would be a good idea to build on your strengths and look to reducing the things in your life that drain you.
34-51: You have a lot going for you. Healthy beliefs and patterns are serving you well. You may be concerned about some energy drains that just won’t seem to go away. Consider the possibility that you can reach all of your dreams, by working diligently to grow your assets and reduce your liabilities.

52-69: You are close to “the top of your game.” You add energy to the lives of others, and your participation in any project is an asset to your associates. You will receive great benefit from helping others and sharing your knowledge and skills. Continue what you are doing, with a close eye on managing your assets and liabilities, and you are likely to prosper in many ways.

70-85: You are in a fortunate and blessed position in life. Your energy flows freely from within and all around you and you have much to give to this world. There is great freedom and responsibility that goes with your level of health and emotional wealth. Your freedom is in how you choose to use your abundant energy, and your responsibility is to give back to this world that has blessed you. You will receive as you give. You are a plus to the world.

What’s Your Emotional Intelligence Score? (Sample Assessment)

Directions: For each of the following items, rate how well you are able to display the ability described. Think of actual situations in which you have had the opportunity to use the ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Slight Ability</th>
<th>Moderate Ability</th>
<th>Very Much Ability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Associate different internal physiological cues with different emotions.
2. Relax when under pressure in situations.
3. “Gear up” at will for a task.
4. Know the impact that your behaviour has on others.
5. Initiate successful resolution of conflict with others.
6. Calm yourself quickly when angry.
7. Know when you are becoming angry.
8. Regroup quickly after a setback.
9. Recognize when others are distressed.
10. Build consensus with others.
11. Know what senses you are currently using.
12. Use internal “talk” to change your emotional state.
13. Produce motivation when doing uninteresting work.
14. Help others manage their emotions.
15. Make others feel good.
16. Identify when you experience mood shifts.
17. Stay calm when you are the target of anger from others.
18. Stop or change an ineffective habit.
19. Show empathy to others.
20. Provide advice and emotional support to others as needed.
22. Know when you are thinking negatively and head it off.
23. Follow your words with actions.
24. Engage in intimate conversations with others.
25. Accurately reflect people’s feelings back to them.

Scoring: Sum your responses to the 25 questions to obtain your overall emotional intelligence score.

Your score for self-awareness is the total of questions 1, 6, 11, 16, 21.
Your score for managing emotions is the total of questions 2, 7, 12, 17, 22.
Your score for motivating yourself is the sum of questions 3, 8, 13, 18, 23.
Your score for empathy is the sum of questions 4, 9, 14, 19, 24.
Your score for social skills is the sum of questions 5, 10, 15, 20, 25.
Interpretation: This questionnaire provides an indication of your emotional intelligence. If you received a total score of 100 or more, you have high emotional intelligence. A score from 50 to 100 means you have a good platform from which to develop your emotional intelligence. A score below 50 indicates that you realize that you are probably below average in emotional intelligence. For each of the five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating one’s self, empathy and social skill, a score above 20 is considered high, while a score below 10 would be considered low. People who are attuned to their own feelings and the feelings of others can use their understanding to enhance the performance of themselves and others.

Read the following description of five components of emotional intelligence and think about what you might do to develop those areas.

Self-awareness: This component provides the basis for all the other components of emotional intelligence. Self-awareness means being aware of what you are feeling, being conscious of the emotions within yourself. People who are in touch with their emotions are better able to guide their own lives. We need to be in touch with their emotions in order to interact effectively and appreciate emotions in others. People with high levels of self-awareness learn to trust their “gut feelings” and realize that these feelings can provide useful information about difficult decisions.

Managing emotions: The second key component of emotional intelligence is managing emotions. This means you are able to balance your moods so that worry, anxiety, fear, or anger does not get in the way of what needs to be done. People who manage their emotions perform better because they are able to think clearly. Managing emotions does not mean suppressing or denying them but understanding them and using that understanding to deal with situations productively. People should first recognize a mood or feeling; think about what it means and how it affects them, and then choose how to act.

Motivating oneself: This ability to be hopeful and optimistic despite obstacles, setbacks, or even outright failure is crucial for pursuing long-term goals in life or in business. A classic example of self-motivation occurred when the MetLife insurance company hired a special group of job applicants who tested high on optimism but failed the normal sales aptitude test. Compared to salespeople who passed the regular aptitude test but scored high on pessimism, the “optimistic” group made 21 percent more sales in their first year and 57 percent more in the second.

Empathy: The fourth component is empathy, which means being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes—to recognize what others are feeling without them needing to tell you. Most of the time people don’t tell us what they feel in words but rather in tone of voice, body language and facial expression. Empathy is built from self-awareness; being attuned to one’s own emotions makes it easier to read and understand the feelings of others.

Social skill: The ability to connect to others, build positive relationships, respond to the emotions of others and influence others is the final component of emotional intelligence. We need social skills to understand interpersonal relationships, handles disagreements, resolve conflicts and pull people together for a common purpose.

Adapted from *Training in Management Skills* by Phillip L. Hunsaker. 20 01. Prentice-H all: New Jersey.

From the handout library of Johanna Vanderpol, Coach [www.johannavanderpol.com](http://www.johannavanderpol.com)
## Comparison of Empathy Measurement Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of test</th>
<th>IRI</th>
<th>ECRS</th>
<th>BEES</th>
<th>AES</th>
<th>HRS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written self-evaluation</td>
<td>Written self-evaluation</td>
<td>Written self-evaluation</td>
<td>Assessment of an interaction by trained</td>
<td>Written self-evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific to medicine</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, for entire instrument; no for empathy</td>
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- **Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI):** 28-item test, self-scored on 5-point scale. Sample item: “I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.”

- **Empathy Construct Rating Scale (ECRS):** 100-item test, self-scored or used to rate another person on 6-point scale. Sample item: “Seems to understand another person’s state of being.”

- **Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES):** 30-item test, self-scored on 9-point scale. Sample item: “I cannot feel much sorrow for those who are responsible for their own misery.”

- **Accurate Empathy Scale (AES):** 9 stages of empathy, defined using excerpts from psychotherapy transcripts, scored by trained observer. Sample stage: “Therapist accurately responds to all of the client’s more readily discernible feelings. He also shows awareness of many less evident feelings and experiences, but he tends to be somewhat inaccurate in his understanding of these...”

- **History-taking Rating Scale (HRS):** 5 items of this 16-item scale were used. Items scored by trained observer on a 4-point scale using specific criteria. Sample item: “Empathy: the student’s expressed understanding of what the patient is feeling and communicating.”

- **Empathy, Spirituality, and Wellness in Medicine survey (ESWIM):** 44-item test, self-scored on 5-point scale. Sample item: “I am a good listener.”
References


