Conversations that Facilitate Change: The Interpersonal & Intrapersonal Effects of High-Quality Listening

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I. Declaration

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Signed: Fateha K. Tia Moin [signed electronically]

Where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included, the contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

Where data is available, this can be accessed via an online depository (OSFHOME, 2024a, 2024b).

II. Acknowledgments

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VI. Publications

The following chapters were adapted from manuscripts accepted for publication:

Chapter 4 – The Effects of Listening While Talking About Character Strengths on Speaker and Listener

Moin, T., Weinstein, N., Itzchakov, G., Branson, A., Law, B., Yee, L., Pape, E., Cheung, R. Y. M., Haffey, A., Chakrabarti, B., & Beaman, P. (2024). The effects of listening on speaker and listener while talking about character strengths: An open science school-wide collaboration. *Royal Society Open Science, 11*(12), 221342. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.221342

Chapter 5 – Deep Listening Training to Bridge Divides: Fostering Attitudinal Change through Intimacy and Self-insight

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The following chapter is under review:

Chapter 3 – Understanding and Cultivating Effective Listening: A Dialectical Theory of the Tensions between Intuition and Behaviour

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First author, Fateha K. Tia Moin confirms she is the lead writer of the manuscripts, with co-authors credited with assisting in the research design, data collection and reviewing of the manuscript. All published articles allow reproduction of the material under the Author Publishing Agreement.

VII. Abstract

Conversations that Facilitate Change:

The Interpersonal & Intrapersonal Effects of High-Quality Listening

Ms. Fateha K. Tia Moin

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Previous research designed to understand listening has been heavily focused on factors other than human connection (for example, focusing instead on learning, comprehension). More recently, researchers have begun to explore listening as a relational behaviour, but there is scant research into listening in naturalistic contexts with more diverse groups of participants, and under less optimal circumstances, such as between strangers and while discussing disagreements – gaps that this thesis aimed to investigate. Evidence suggests that conversations can facilitate intrapersonal change, such as reshaping attitudes and behaviour, yet more needs to be understood regarding how these changes come about through listening, and in particular, considered alongside the relational effects of high-quality listening. The three studies within this thesis (presented as a collection rather than a linear progression from the other) employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to develop theory, but also to determine causal effects of high-quality listening in the context of change and growth-focused conversations.

I propose a theory of tensions, termed dialectical listening theory, which are experienced while learning to listen well. Dialectical listening theory describes a tension between explicit (factual) and implicit (holistic) dual processes of thinking while listening. When people received high-quality listening by another person whom they did not know, they experienced optimal relational experiences which occurred during conversations about a constructive topic (character strengths), as well as while discussing more contentious topics

(opposing social/political views). Importantly, these relational effects created circumstances which supported further downstream benefits, including a behavioural intention to continue listening, increased clarity about previously unexplored aspects of the self (self-insight) and attitude change. Results also suggested a direct relationship exists between high-quality listening and intrapersonal effects such as self-insight and to a degree, authenticity, suggesting a more complex dynamic exists between high-quality listening and interpersonal or intrapersonal listening effects.

Further research directions and methodological improvements for listening research have been suggested. Suggestions include research which investigates the "dual-process" (explicit and implicit thinking systems) nature of listening, whether the positive relational effects of listening can buffer against the negative impacts of listening to stressful content, and extending beyond listening to explore outcomes when high-quality listening is combined with other conversational strategies such as questioning and challenging viewpoints.

Keywords: *listening, listening training, relational listening, positivity resonance, intimacy, character strengths, defensiveness, state anxiety, authenticity, attitude polarisation, behavioural intention, self-insight.*

Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

"Let's be responsible, not just for how we speak, but for how we listen."

Dr. Gabor Maté.

Using the power of our voice is an often a relied upon strategy for inspiring people to change their attitudes and subsequent behaviours. For example, politicians deliver well-rehearsed speeches to win the hearts and minds of their constituents and attain their vote. In one-to-one conversations, sales-people deliver persuasive messages to convince buyers of the value of their product so that they will purchase it, and job applicants highlight their best attributes to influence recruiters to hire them for a position. Yet, there are always two sides to a conversation. When considering conversations that have the potential to change people, much work has focused on verbal communication strategies by the speaker to influence a person's views and decisions, but what role does listening play in conversations that change? How can a listener shape and influence the conversation and what are the subsequent effects on the speaker as they experience being listened to? Conversely, what effects does listening have on the listener while they engage in the act of listening to another person?

The collection of studies in this thesis explored whether and why high-quality listening within important conversations facilitates change. Specifically, I investigated emotional reactions experienced by the listener and speaker during a high-quality listening encounter, the effects on relationship quality between the speaker and listener (from zero acquaintance, i.e., strangers), and how high-quality listening facilitates introspective thinking across two different change-oriented conversations – one supportive and one stressful in nature. To explore the impact of high-quality listening on facilitating change in individuals, I also investigated the downstream effects of high-quality listening on attitude change and

behavioural intention.

1.1 Conversations that Change Attitudes and Behaviour

While the conversations described in the introductory paragraph represent crude forms of communicating that aim to change people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours for a short-term gain (e.g., persuading, selling, influencing), there are alternative ways to inspire change in people. Explicit tactics of persuasion may only achieve a superficial (extrinsic) level of change which is not helpful for all situations, such as those which require continued and meaningful engagement beyond a one-off decision. If motivation is intrinsically motivated (e.g., driven by a person's values or interests) rather than externally driven (from outside pressures such as punishments or rewards) and thus, "autonomously motivated" as explained by self-determination theory (Gillison et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000a), then motivation to change may be more sustainable over the longer-term (Slovinec D'Angelo et al., 2014; Udall et al., 2021).

A change in attitude or behaviour can be attained through direct persuasion communication strategies for example, by convincing a person of perceived relevance and perceived validity of thoughts relating to the change (Petty & Briñol, 2020). In such circumstances, beliefs, attitudes or behaviour may be gradually accepted by the person because they can see the value in it, even if they do not intrinsically feel inclined towards it (i.e., integrated motivation; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Yet, such a change may not always reflect a deep change, and behaviour undertaken in line with attitudes changed by persuasion may be more difficult to maintain; individuals may ultimately resort to old habits (Itzchakov et al., 2018b).

In contrast, some conversations aim to achieve a transformational change, defined as "the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, pp. 222-223). Where a

longer-term, transformational or sustainable change is sought, appealing to individuals at a more personal level (Ryan et al., 1991) may yield different outcomes. When decisions, attitudes and beliefs align with one's worldview, values and existing self-concepts, a process of integration facilitates an alignment of the self, which evidence supports leads to increased well-being, motivation and better relationships (Weinstein et al., 2013).

This type of transformational change is more likely to be attained through means which allow the individual to engage in a process of critical self-reflection and self-insight, facilitating a broader understanding which leads to self-regulation of behaviour (Grant et al., 2002; Mezirow, 1994). Such a process can be facilitated by a caring, attentive listener, as originally proposed by renowned humanistic psychologist, Carl Rogers who theorised the process for personal change by analysing his psychotherapy clients (Rogers, 1957, 1958). The aforementioned theories – namely, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and Rogers' theory of personal change (Rogers, 1957) suggest a less direct or forceful approach is desirable when pursuing a more meaningful, lasting change.

1.1.1 The Importance of Person-Centred Conversations

Certain situations demand a less coercive approach due to the nature of the conversation, for example, when it is important to respect someone's autonomy and individuality out of respect or because the person is vulnerable. Such situations might include honouring a patient's right to make informed decisions about their own life (Entwistle et al., 2010), or where there exists a power imbalance between the communicator and recipient of a message, for example, a teacher or manager discussing future career options with a student or employee (Paixão & Gamboa, 2022).

During such conversations, persuasion or direct influence is less desirable because there is a risk that the person with greater power could sway the individual from making decisions that truly reflect their needs and desires (Hurwitz & Kluger, 2017), leading to

compromised self-determination. In such cases, it is appropriate and important to employ alternative strategies that will still support someone to change in an autonomously motivated manner, such as through listening when they self-disclose.

A conversational approach that centres on listening and autonomous motivation is recognised as being valuable within professional contexts and organisations (Shefer et al., 2018). But it is widely embraced and applied in therapeutic conversations such as Motivational Interviewing (Rollnick & Miller, 1995) and it is an underpinning foundation of professional coaching conversations (Hanssmann, 2014; Spence & Oades, 2011). Authorities which govern some of these professions, for example, The British Psychological Society, which acts as a professional institute for psychologists (including Clinical, Organisational and Coaching Psychologists) in the United Kingdom, agree that it is important to support the self-determination of the client for ethical reasons (see *BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct,* 2021), as well as for practical, efficacy reasons as already explained above. In a therapeutic and coaching context, listening deeply to determine a person's needs and views is referred to as a "person-centred" approach, which places trust in the client to know what is best for them (de Haan & Burger, 2014; Rogers & Dorfman, 1973) leading to "self-actualisation", where behaviours and decisions align with the inner self (Rogers, 1959).

1.1.2 Threatening Conversations can Also Benefit from Listening

Another context where direct persuasion could potentially be counter-productive is where information communicated may be threatening and unwelcome. People may perceive threat when faced with information that compromises their safety or sense of self, including their beliefs, attitudes and worldviews or ideologies (Yap & Ichikawa, 2024). For example, such situations might include discussing a medical diagnosis (Shafran-Tikva & Kluger, 2018), negative feedback (London et al., 2023), or when conversing about a controversial topic which may elicit strong emotions or feelings of opposition (Minson & Dorison, 2022).

Defensive reactions in people are evident from early developmental stages, for example, a child who ignores a returning parent who has previously abandoned them is said to be conveying defensive behaviour, representing a "dismissive-avoidant" attachment style (Bowlby, 1969). In a similar manner, hearing information that threatens one's self-identity (for example, by making salient a conflict between one's attitudes and morally guided behaviour; Steele, 1988) may lead people to react defensively.

In such situations, defensive behaviour can include avoiding giving one's attention to the discussion; or if engagement has already commenced then "blunting" (avoiding the threatening component of a message); once at the comprehension stage of processing the message then "suppressing" (mental disengagement from the message); or if elaborating, then "counter-arguing" (generating contradicting arguments), in an effort to discredit what is being communicated. Reactions varied depending on coping styles and context (Blumberg, 2000). The result is a rejection of the message (Lehmann et al., 2023; Porter & Schumann, 2018) and further ingraining of previously held beliefs and attitudes (Heller et al., 1973).

In the real world, this kind of defensive reaction has been observed in diversity and inclusion trainings that are designed to address concerns such as "unconscious bias" (Noon, 2018). Often training may inform individuals that they are inherently biased or racist (even if unconscious bias is unintentional and they are unaware they are doing it), causing some to react defensively to such training. This has resulted in criticism that such training has done more harm than good by further cementing problematic attitudes or causing anxiety (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Hausmann et al., 2014; Kulik et al., 2000; Moin & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2020).

This kind of defensive reaction was also evident when people discussed polarised or opposing views on global or political matters in society (Lin et al., 2023; Minson & Dorison, 2022), exacerbating conflict in communities and contributing to the polarisation of attitudes,

identified as a phenomenon particularly in Western communities (Levin et al., 2021). Previous research supports that a less direct conversational approach as described earlier, where the listener is keen to truly understand the speaker, can reduce defensiveness (Schimel et al., 2001) and increase receptiveness (Chen et al., 2010).

1.2. Thesis Overview

To further understand how to have conversations for change where transformational and sustainable change is key, this thesis investigated proximal and distal effects of high-quality listening on both the listener and the speaker, and the downstream effects on attitudes and behavioural intention through a collection of studies. As the experimental studies (2 & 3) were carried out concurrently rather than consecutively, there are some implications relating to method and findings which I will address in the discussion section. Study 2, as a controlled laboratory experiment with local participants allowed me the opportunity and flexibility to design and implement an ideal experiment with tight controls and measures. Study 3 was a field study, which involved collaboration with external organisations and participants from a range of countries globally. This led to several considerations and constraints on study design and measurement, however, offered a great opportunity to learn how best to negotiate and implement research in a field environment.

1.2.1 Training People to Listen

The first study in this thesis (Chapter 3) aimed to expand and define what we understand good listening (referred to in this thesis as "high-quality listening" - explained further in §2.1) to be, both in practical and academic terms and following on from this, explored whether people can be effecti vely trained to listen well.

Researchers have mixed opinions on how to define listening (Glenn, 1989) and therefore, it is no surprise that there is no consistent or agreed upon approach to training people to listen well. Indeed, on a methodological level, even the measurement of listening

quality is an area which needs further clarity and precision (Bodie, 2013). In this thesis, I have attempted to address some of these challenges, and I shared key learnings with regards to both defining and measuring listening quality to enhance future listening research.

While most researchers have relied on academic literature and concepts of listening to enhance understanding of listening and listening training, I explored an overlooked resource - the lay practitioner's perspective. Listening is naturally omnipresent within the real world, therefore a whole body of information relating to listening and learning to listen (created by lay practitioners) exists outside of academic literature. My aim was to synthesise and draw insight from this information to develop a normative perspective of what listening is from the real world, how it should be developed and what challenges are faced in the process. From my insights, I propose a theory of tensions experienced in the listening process (dialectical listening theory) which must be addressed for high-quality listening to take place. The novel insight in this theory is that the listener may need to oscillate between explicit (factual) and implicit (holistic) dual-processes of thinking (Barnard & Teasdale, 1991; Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011) during high-quality listening, as well as engage in preparatory and self-regulatory work in order to manage the tensions which include issues of authenticity and bias (explained further in §3.8).

1.2.2 Listening During Naturalistic Conversations

Defining and understanding how to train people to listen well enhances our understanding of antecedents to good listening, which in turn helps to broaden our understanding of listening as an interpersonal phenomenon (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Several lab investigations have demonstrated the positive outcomes of high-quality listening (versus "everyday listening"), but training people how to listen in such a way that it is consistently perceived as being "high-quality" by the recipient or an independent observer has been challenging (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). This has made it difficult to test causal

effects of high-quality listening and their potential downstream benefits during naturalistic conversations (vs. vignettes or staged lab conversations where an experimenter played the role of listener). Experimental studies of listening which identified causal effects have largely relied on the listener being a trained confederate, or by attempting to distract the listener, for example, with flickering screens (Lehmann et al., 2023). This poses two methodological problems. The first is that listening is confounded with unintended variables, for example, a distracted listener using flickering screens in the background may convey rudeness, rather than "moderate-quality" listening. Secondly, such an approach makes it difficult to test the effects of high-quality listening on the listener between two naïve participants.

Building from my work here, I applied findings from Chapter 3 on listening training to develop a short listening training video. I implemented the training in a between-subjects listening experiment (with a randomised control group) to test whether the training could create a perceptible change in listening quality (high-quality versus moderate-quality) as measured from a range of perspectives (the listener, speaker and an observer). In this study (Chapter 4), I demonstrate that it has been possible to significantly manipulate listening quality through a short training intervention which was perceived by both the listeners and the speakers. Although the effects of the listening training were small and needs to be refined and replicated, this is the first study I am aware of which has successfully manipulated listening quality in this way in an experiment where both the speaker and listener were naïve participants.

Another aspect of listening training that I explore within this thesis is the extent to which fit-for-purpose listening training can have a specific impact on trainees. Specifically, I tested whether listening to bridge socio-political divides supports connection while conversing with people who hold opposing attitudes to oneself (Chapter 5).

1.2.3 Listening Across Real World Contexts

On a practical level, understanding how to train people to listen to a high standard increases the potential of listening research to have real world impact. For example, listening can improve outcomes such as well-being, performance and improved relationships in many contexts including workplaces, families, schools, political institutions and global communities (Beyene, 2020; Bodie, 2012; Dutta, 2014; Kluger et al., 2023), but best practices need to be developed, through empirical efforts, to identify how to do this under both comfortable and tense conditions.

I examined the effects of listening across two different scenarios: How listening affects interlocutors when they are experiencing (i) inherent positive effects from the conversation itself; specifically, what does listening add over and above the already known positive benefits of discussing character strengths (Schutte & Malouff, 2019)?; and (ii) inherent negative effects from the nature of the conversation itself; How does listening effect interlocutors when faced with an aversive situation such as when discussing a social or political topic with a person who disagrees with them (Minson & Dorison, 2022)?

In the first scenario, while the relational nature of listening is not debated (Bodie, 2011b; Hinz et al., 2022), if the conversation itself is positive, what beneficial effects does listening add when competing against inherent positive properties of the conversation? And how exactly does listening support relational outcomes? I explored a dyadic relational effect that had not been studied before at the time of the study, but has been theorised to relate to listening: positivity resonance – a shared biological and affective experience (Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). I also explored intrapersonal listening effects that have been shown to occur in high-quality listening contexts – namely, reduced state anxiety and increased authenticity (Barber et al., 2021; Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Weis-Rappaport & Kluger, 2024).

In the second scenario, when the conversation is confronting due to a conflict in attitudes, I asked does high-quality listening attenuate or obstruct the positive, relational effects of listening? Specifically, I measured intimacy, which had been shown to be a causal effect of high-quality listening in prior studies between colleagues (Kluger et al., 2020) and unacquainted females (Malloy et al., 2023), but not between a global audience at zero acquaintance. Whether the benefits of listening can be achieved in the strained context of discussing challenging topics had also not yet been explored at the time of the study.

A symposium composed of four separate experimental studies focusing on this question drew together different streams of communication research: affect, medium of communication, language choice and interpersonal process. Studies supported that positive relational outcomes are possible in the context of disagreement: in face-to-face versus written interactions, when follow-up questions (as opposed to counter-arguments) were asked, when one appeared receptive (e.g., by hedging, acknowledgement) and when one showed genuine appreciation towards the speaker (Cohen et al., 2020). The components of communication investigated combined describe high-quality listening (see Chapter 3), lending support that listening training is likely to have positive relational effects in the context of disagreements or discussions where interlocutors hold opposing or polarised attitudes on political topics.

Examining listening under both conditions described extends our understanding of listening, allowing us to pinpoint interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes beyond the inherent conversational properties. Such an understanding can guide when and how people could leverage high-quality listening as a tool when specific outcomes are desired (e.g., to improve relationships, or to improve intrinsic motivation for self-regulatory change). In this sense, I further explore context-specific downstream effects of listening across the two scenarios. For example, a desired outcome of discussing character strengths is to inspire a person to apply their strengths to benefit from the positive effects of doing so (Niemiec,

2018). To support this, the listener is encouraged to actively and constructively recognise and respond to someone conveying their strengths, known as "strengths-spotting" (Linley, 2008). Thus, I explore the downstream impact of listening on interlocutors' motivation to continue the behaviours experiencing during the conversation (e.g., the speaker to apply their character strengths, and the listener to continue high-quality listening).

In the context of discussing opposing social and political attitudes, diversity trainings typically aim to facilitate self-insight and moderate extreme attitudes, ultimately striving for better interpersonal relationships in the context of disagreement. Evidence for some of these effects in the context of discussing prejudice and disagreement has been supported in lab studies with limited samples and ecological validity (e.g., Itzchakov et al., 2020, 2024a). In Study 3, Chapter 5, I showed that the findings translate to a global audience with lay people in a naturalistic context.

Thus, while conducting field research has come with its own set of challenges and limitations, the insights within this thesis present an original contribution to knowledge in terms of method applied to manipulate listening quality, effects of listening on both the listener and speaker in novel contexts, and with broader samples in naturalistic conversations that offer greater ecological validity.

1.3 Gaps in Research

There are three gaps in listening research that I addressed in this thesis. Firstly, I addressed a lack of consensus on how to train people to listen, in an effort to identify challenges and antecedents to listening well. Secondly, I investigated causal effects of listening in naturalistic contexts to improve the ecological validity of research outcomes. Thirdly, I investigated the effects of listening in two different contexts: A positive, constructive conversation and a threatening, challenging conversation. In both contexts, I explored whether high-quality listening could have significant interpersonal and intrapersonal

effects, and what the downstream impacts were on attitude and behaviour.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - Listening

As a ubiquitous human ability, people often overestimate their ability to listen (Vinokur et al., 2024), possibly mistaking high-quality listening for an ability to simply hear what is said. One of the earliest studies into listening investigated how students processed information for learning (Nichols, 1948), leading communication researchers to explore listening as a function of learning and speech pathology. Cognitive processes such as attention, memory, comprehension, interpretation and evaluation supported listening theories and listening assessments evaluated how well a person attended to and understood a message (Bodie, 2023).

Yet, listening is more than simply hearing. Parallel to Nichols' early investigation into listening for learning, renowned humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers proposed that personality change could be empirically investigated through learning theory, general systems theory or communication theory (Rogers, 1958). Focusing on the latter, Rogers described the process of personality change across a number of written works on listening as a relational concept. Within these, he described the term "active listening" (Rogers, 1980; Rogers & Farson, 1957), which he advocated as a therapeutic technique to support personal development (Rogers, 1951) and as a "way of being" more generally (Rogers, 1980). Rogers theorised in depth about a "person-centred" approach to therapy, grounded in relational listening principles such as showing respect, care and consideration towards the speaker (termed "unconditional positive regard"). The concept of active listening is still widely applied today both in clinical psychology settings and beyond, though it is argued that in practice, the core concept of embodying a caring disposition during listening has been overshadowed by preoccupation with demonstrating the correct listening behaviours, such as reflecting content, summarising, paraphrasing, and asking questions (Tyler, 2011).

Listening research has since expanded to investigate how people respond to mass communication (e.g., political and health messages), persuasion and influence (e.g., sales and marketing), and listening to music (e.g., Arendt et al., 2023; Drollinger et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2017). While communication research has acknowledged that the emotional disposition and relational intention of the listener may affect cognitive processes of listening, the study of relational listening as a social psychological phenomenon is still emerging (Bodie, 2023; Hinz et al., 2022), and researchers and practitioners alike are revisiting original concepts and theories of listening proposed by Rogers (e.g., Kluger et al., 2022; Shefer et al., 2018).

2.1 Defining Listening

As the empirical investigation of listening has spanned several disciplines not limited to psychology, it is no surprise that there are varying opinions on how to define listening as a construct, with more than fifty definitions proposed in the literature (Bodie, 2012; Glenn, 1989). Indeed, listening is understood to have many different functions and purposes, leading to a tendency to add an adjective in front of the word "listening" when defining it (Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023). One taxonomy distinguished between base-level listening: Comprising of discriminative (responding to behavioural cues) and comprehensive (understanding the message) listening. And higher-order levels of listening: Comprising of therapeutic (empathising, perspective-taking), critical (critically evaluating information), or appreciative (for pleasure) listening (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

Worthington and Bodie (2018) suggest that the definition of listening should be specific to the context within which it is being investigated. This is logical when you consider the stark difference in contextual definitions, for example: (i) critical listening, applied within an educational context, versus (ii) high-quality listening, applied within a relational context (see Table 1). Apart from obvious differences in listener focus, while critical listening references listening from the point of view of the listener, high-quality listening references

listening from the point of view of both the listener and the speaker aligning with the

contextual aspect.

Table 1 - *Listening Definitions Comparison - Critical and High-quality Listening*

Listening Label	Critical Listening	High-quality Listening
Typical Context	Learning	Social or Supportive
Definition	"The listener's critical ability to (a) recognize patterns, (b) compare and contrast new information with prior knowledge while comprehending, (c) re-evaluate prior knowledge in light of new information, and (d) evaluate the content of a message (i) for adhering to specific patterns and structural requirements that constitute the message itself and (ii) for its completeness and accuracy, such as its lack of faults, illogicality, and omission of critical components" (Ferrari-Bridgers & Murolo, 2022, p. 471).	"We define listening, in the middle of an abstract-to-concrete continuum, as a behavior that manifests the presence of attention, comprehension, and good intention toward the speaker (Castro et al., 2016, p. 763).

There is a lack of consensus among researchers on whether listening definitions

should situate from the perspective of the speaker or the listener (Yip & Fisher, 2022).

Empirical evidence suggests that results from listening measures based on listener behaviours

differ from measures of the speakers' experience of being listened to (Bodie et al., 2014),

supporting that the phenomenon of listening is perceived and experienced differently by the

speaker than the listener (Burleson, 2011). The most common listening attributes as identified

by the lay person include attentiveness, understanding, responsiveness, friendliness and

conversational flow. At the same time, intelligence, humour, confidence and clarity were not strongly related to listening although they did relate to the broader concept of communication competence (Bodie et al., 2012). The last two attributes, friendliness and conversational flow, support an added dimension of demeanour or personality may be a relevant influence that drives perceptions of a good listener (e.g. Flynn et al., 2023). More recent research suggests that listening is perceived in a more holistic manner rather than by its individual behavioural components (Lipetz et al., 2020).

Based on an analysis of the most recent listening definitions, Kluger and Mizrahi (2023; p. 1) defined high-quality (also known as relational or interpersonal) listening as: "the degree of devotion to co-exploring the other with and for the other". The definition reflects the dyadic (interactional between speaker and listener) and intentional nature of relational listening and expands beyond the behavioural components of listening. This definition mirrors to a degree, findings from the first study in this thesis (see Chapter 3), which support the intentional nature of listening. Yet, findings in this thesis do not completely disregard the behavioural component of listening, which analyses support is equally as important as intention.

The definition of listening adopted within this thesis aligns most closely to the aforementioned definition of *high-quality listening* by (Castro et al., 2016) in Table 1, as well as the definition of high-quality (relational) listening I propose below, which is based on insights gleaned from Study 1 (Chapter 3):

> **"a conscious, yet equally intuitive whole-hearted intention and effort to understand and genuinely respect a speaker through mutual communicative expression."**

To explain the definition I proposed above more clearly: Results from Study 1 supported that high-quality or relational listening is dyadic in nature, hence I applied the

word "mutual" – it is an exchange between two people. The deliberate nature of listening is reflected through choice of the terms "intentional" and "effort"; high-quality listening is not a passive act and will not occur while distracted or tired. The term, "communicative expression" reflects that it is behavioural as well as psychological, a behaviour that must be seen and acknowledged by the other. I also introduce the concept of dual-processing into the definition, which I identified to be a distinct tension of high-quality listening in Study 1. Use of the word "conscious" to represent explicit (i.e. self-aware, factual) processing, and "intuitive" to represent implicit (i.e. automated, holistic) processing captured this concept (see §3.8 for detailed explanation). And finally, use of the words "understand" and "genuinely respect" reflect the positive intentional nature of high-quality listening, further encompassed by the word "whole-hearted" – one must give their whole self to high-quality listening for it to be effective. These concepts are expanded upon further below and throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter 3.

2.1.1 High-quality versus Low-quality Listening

To advance relational listening research, a distinction is drawn between "high-quality listening" and average or everyday listening. It is important to consider how best to manipulate listening to create high-quality listening conditions over average or poor listening conditions, and to develop a robust approach to do this (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), a challenge this thesis aimed to address.

In high-quality listening, the listener is intentional about their listening and offers their undivided attention without distractions. Beyond processing and understanding the information (i.e., the cognitive components of listening as described earlier), the listener also demonstrates to the speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues that they have the listener's complete attention and that the listener has clearly understood the speaker's message. The listener respects the speaker's viewpoints, opinions and position, and withholds any criticism

or judgment towards the speaker. Because of the high level of attention and focus required, high-quality listening is not something that can be maintained all the time.

In average listening or "moderate-quality listening", while there may be an occasional, random effort to demonstrate high-quality listening, due to inevitable everyday distractions, stress or tiredness, attention is likely to be unintentionally diverted. Conveying signals of understanding may therefore be masked or hindered and the intention behind listening may vary for practical or other purposes (e.g., to problem solve or to persuade). This is different to destructive listening or "poor listening" where the listener may intentionally obstruct the process of listening and convey that they are doing so.

Thus, relational listening, and more specifically, *high-quality listening* can be defined as an intentional and focused activity which demands an enhanced set of psychological resources (beyond simply cognitive processes) to fully embody a listening disposition. This disposition has been described as the difference between "doing" listening and "being" while listening, a concept first introduced by Carl Rogers, and later emphasised by other researchers (Lipari, 2010; Rogers, 1980).

2.1.2 What Listening is Not?

As I define what listening is, it is important to consider related constructs to distinguish between them and listening (Podsakoff et al., 2016). For example listening may closely align with constructs such as empathy (Bruneau, 1989), perspective-taking (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012), responsiveness (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023), feeling understood (Reis et al., 2017), support (Wills & Shinar, 2000), respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002; Huo et al., 2010), trust (Brunner, 2008) and not being rude (Fritz, 2009). While listening might relate to these constructs, they are not isomorphic (Kluger et al., 2023).

Listening can be defined as thoughts, behaviours and affective states which the listener assumes (e.g., conveying care, respect, taking the speaker's perspective, being

understanding); as well as perceptions of the listener by the speaker (e.g., listener responsiveness, not being rude); followed by the effects of perceived listening on the speaker (e.g., feeling subjectively understood, supported) and effects on the relationship overall (e.g., trust, intimacy; Borut et al., 2024). Note here that being objectively understood by the listener is a different construct to feeling understood (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023), but both are likely to have considerable overlap with listening (Kluger et al., 2021).

While these constructs individually may be important components that overlap with the construct of listening, they are separate constructs which can still occur outside of the context of listening, for example, one can provide support, be responsive, understand a perspective or not be rude to someone in contexts other than listening (Itzchakov et al., 2022a; Itzchakov & Reis, 2023; Jones, 2011). Similarly, behaviours such as eye contact which may be considered as a core component of listening are not essential, and people can still offer quality listening via mediums such as the telephone (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). This corresponds with the fact that while people might be able to label specific components or behaviours of a good listener, generally, listening is perceived as something more holistic, a broader concept which may be greater than the sum of its parts (Lipetz et al., 2020). Rather than referring to listening as *doing*, listening could be thought of as a way of *being* (Rogers, 1980).

2.2 Conceptualising and Measuring Listening

The range of cognitive processes involved in listening made it difficult to define and assess listening. For example, some measures of listening comprehension focus on internal cognitive processes such as memory (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988), whereas others focus on actions which evidence good listening (e.g., following instructions; Worthington, 2017). Later, there was a shift toward assessing listeners' overt behaviours which signal that they are listening. These include summarising and asking follow-up questions (Bodie et al., 2012),

and the use of measures that rely on both self-report and observer ratings of competence (e.g., Cooper & Husband, 1993). A key oversight in earlier listening assessments is a lack of attention to the psychological component of listening, or the mindset or attitude of the listener (Bodie et al., 2012).

The speaker's perception of listening can also differ from what the listener is trying to convey. For example, it may be influenced in part by characteristic or traits of the listener (e.g., an extraverted listener may be rated more poorly; Flynn et al., 2023). Indeed, self-reported and perceived listening sometimes demonstrates low correlations (Bodie et al., 2014; Kluger et al., 2021), including a negative correlation ($r = -0.06$) between listener (self-report) and speaker ratings and a moderate correlation ($r = 0.30$) between speaker and trained observer ratings of the same interaction (Bodie et al., 2014).

These conceptualisations drive measurement. For example, the constructive listening sub-scale (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017) has been used successfully in experimental research in listening (e.g., Itzchakov et al., 2020; Weinstein et al., 2021) as it focuses on the speakers' perception of listening behaviours, integrating items from ten published listening scales and new items that reflect the growth and change of the speaker (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017). The scale items can also be adapted so that the listener self-reports on how well they listened according to the speakers' perspective. Indeed, it has been suggested that where possible, multiple measures (e.g., listening, speaker and observer) should be applied to overcome inflated correlations caused by common method variance (Bodie et al., 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Apart from the speakers' perception of listening, listening has been measured through multiple operationalisations. Broadly, it has been argued that listening could be measured using a single item given that it is perceived holistically (Kluger et al., 2023; Lipetz et al., 2020). Other work has argued for two form of listening perception: constructive and

destructive listening styles (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017), which correlate with

constructive and less effective interaction styles (e.g., in leadership; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013).

The destructive listening scale, a subscale of the Facilitating Listening Scale (Kluger &

Bouskila-Yam, 2017) has not been extensively applied in research as it did not correlate with

constructive interaction styles. However, it could further enlighten our understanding of the

negative effects of listening (Michelson & Kluger, 2021).

2.2.1 Individual Differences in Listening

Effects of listening can be moderated by individual differences such as coping styles

(Michelson & Kluger, 2021) and attachment style (Castro et al., 2016; London et al., 2023).

Those with avoidant attachment styles felt reduced psychological safety when experiencing

listening, placing a boundary condition on the effects of listening and indicating that listening

is not always positively received.

Listening also showed a correlational relationship with the big five personality traits –

all except neuroticism – suggesting that well-adjusted individuals might prefer constructive

listening styles (Itzchakov et al., 2014). Listening is reported to partially mediate the

relationship between openness and agreeableness personality traits, and to be negatively

related to narcissism.

There is also evidence that listening varies across context and gender. People tended

to employ more cognitive listening styles in learning and workplace contexts compared with

more relational forms of listening in social contexts. Gender differences are also evident;

women were more likely to employ an empathic listening style compared with men in social

contexts (Welch & Mickelson, 2020) which could be attributed to both motivation and ability

(Burleson et al., 2011).

Finally, early evidence hints that there may also be generational (Geiger, 2015)

differences in listening for example, Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) appeared to

employ more evaluative or critical listening styles than Millennial (born 1981 – 1996),

Generation X (born 1965 – 1980), or Boomer generations (born 1946-1964), which has the

potential to explain intergenerational differences in judgements or interpersonal evaluations

(Parks, 2022).

2.2.2 Cross-cultural Considerations in Listening

A large portion of listening research has been limited to western populations (Kluger

et al., 2023), and has been conceptualised by western researchers, including those studies

which have developed concepts and taxonomies of listening. This could potentially limit the

extent to which we can generalise existing knowledge to cross-cultural populations (Azar,

2010). It is currently unknown which aspects of these listening models are universally

applicable across cultures and whether listening training based on concepts derived from such

literature can be effective with diverse cultural populations.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop and determine a globally

relevant model of listening, I did test the effects of a listening training derived from our

current understanding of listening on a cross-cultural population (Chapter 5).

2.3 Models of Relational (High-Quality) Listening

It is broadly agreed that high-quality (or relational) listening comprises of three core

dimensions: intention, comprehension and attention (Bodie, 2016; Kluger & Itzchakov,

2022). This is consistent with early listening researchers who proposed a similar taxonomy of

listening comprising of affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions (Wolvin & Coakley,

1993; Wolvin & Cohen, 2012):

(i)   **Positive intention** such as caring, supporting, learning (*affective*: "I value")

(ii)   **Comprehension** is directed by the intention (*cognitive*: "I understand")

(iii)   **Attention** is conveyed through verbal/non-verbal cues (*behavioural:* "I do")

The listener sets an intention to listen for a specific purpose, which then directs their

attention and understanding of information, and finally, listening involves signalling to the speaker through observable behavioural or verbal cues that they have attended to and processed the message.

2.3.1 The Listener's Role

There is a common misperception that the listener plays a passive role in conversations and simply receives a message. However, the listener's intentions, thoughts and reactions will affect how they behave during listening, which in turn has an impact on the speaker's cognition and behaviour during the conversation, such as their focus, fluency, attention and memory (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2010).

2.3.1.1 Intention. Rogers' principles of listening include conveying "unconditional positive regard" (Rogers, 1951) which requires that the listener, first and foremost, comes from a position of good intention and care towards the speaker. The listener is guided to withhold judgment, even if the listener disagrees with the speaker (Rogers, 1962). Consistent with this, Wolvin and Cohen's taxonomy of listening (2012, p. 65) includes two further dimensions which appear to align with unconditional positive regard:

(iv)   *Context:* "I am aware of what settings I'm in and use different skills to better listen in them"

(v)   *Ethical:* "I work harder to not make immediate judgments about a message but rather listen to the arguments and then evaluate them"

The inclusion of such principles supports that tensions such as personal biases experienced while listening to another person (see Chapter 3) have always been prevalent. Indeed, this is similar to a phenomenon referred to as "countertransference" in therapeutic contexts; referring to a therapist's tendency to project their own experiences onto a client (Gabbard, 2001).

Apart from investigation into how to successfully manage countertransference within

the therapeutic field, research into how or whether this tension can be managed during the listening process has not been prevalent (Bodie, 2010), even though it has been identified as something that should be a core component of listening and listening training (Coakley & Wolvin, 1991). Rogers posited some strategies for the listener to manage this, emphasising that the listener would benefit from opening themselves up to become emotionally involved with the speaker's message, to not change the conversation topic, avoid persuading, rescuing or offering advice and making the speaker feel important (Kluger et al., 2022).

Taken to the extreme, Rogers' therapeutic definition of listening involved the listener avoiding providing reassurance (which could be classed as positive judgement) and avoiding explicit agreement with what the speaker says (Rogers, 1980). Indeed, even positive feedback, if it is inconsistent with a person's self-evaluation and perceived as being difficult to achieve, may be aversive rather than reinforcing – explained by self-verification theory, a need to reaffirm one's own view of oneself, even if negative (Linehan, 1997).

However, listening supportively may involve more than validation of emotions; speakers might prefer to receive advice on how to solve a problem, particularly following the provision of empathy and attempts to understand a problem (Feng, 2014) even if not always well received (Jones, 2011; Wills & Shinar, 2000). In contrast, Rogers original conceptualisation required that the listener trusts the speaker has within themselves to find answers when provided with the right conditions (created by listening), just as a plant will grow under the right conditions (Rogers, 1958, p. 143).

2.3.1.2 Comprehension. Paraphrasing and reflection (Nemec et al., 2017), reinforcing (Linehan, 1997; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005a), asking open-ended questions (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), and following with relevant, probing questions (Huang et al., 2017) indicate listener responsiveness and understanding (Cahn & Frey, 1992). These attentive responses can support the speaker to connect more with the listener, reflect on their

thoughts and attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2020), support basic psychological needs (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018; Weinstein et al., 2022), develop a self-narrative and provide self-verification of one's self-perception through feedback from others that supports that view (Linehan, 1997; Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015).

2.3.1.3 Attention. A focused listener will demonstrate positive body language such as leaning towards the speaker, known as "non-verbal immediacy" (Jones & Guerrero, 2001) and "back-channels" (verbal cues such as "mmm" or "uh huh"). Together, these listener responses support the speaker and listener to co-narrate the conversation (Bavelas et al., 2002). For example, a speaker tended to check in periodically with the listener and locked eye-contact until they got some form of meaningful response (verbal, non-verbal or a combination). In one study, a lack of appropriate or animated facial gestures by a listener in response to a speaker's narration of a "close call" story affected their capacity to narrate the story effectively (Bavelas et al., 2000).

In a further study, active listening behaviours (for example, "back-channelling" and paraphrasing) contributed towards feeling more understood compared with receiving advice, or a simple (back-channelling) acknowledgement. Both active listening and receiving advice contributed towards social attractiveness of the listener, albeit with small effect sizes (Weger et al., 2010), corresponding with additional findings that asking follow-up questions increases liking between strangers (Huang et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2019).

2.3.2 The Speaker's Role

The speaker's approach and style can also influence the listener, for example, story-telling elicited better listening (Itzchakov et al., 2016), as did being more open (self-disclosing), attentive and asking questions (Miller et al., 1983). It has also been found that sharing personal experiences rather than facts can lead to increased respect and perspective by the listener (Kubin et al., 2021), even in the face of political disagreement (Bruneau &

Saxe, 2012). This suggests that speakers themselves can influence how the listener engages, which in turn can flow back in benefits to the speaker from being listened to (Itzchakov et al., 2016). This supports the theory that listening is a dynamic, dyadic process (Kluger et al., 2021). It is also consistent with findings that listening may be equally, if not more powerful than verbal expression when it comes to interpersonal influence in certain contexts (Ames et al., 2012).

2.4 Training People to Listen

Proportionally less time is spent teaching students how to listen compared with how to read and write, when proportionally more time in classrooms is spent listening (Barker et al., 1980). When it comes to learning how to listen, academic researchers have achieved mixed outcomes on the best way to develop people's listening skills. The average effect size of listening training on listening behaviours was $r = 0.38$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.46], $\tau = 0.21$ (Kluger, 2020). However, listening (particularly high-quality) is argued to be much more than behaviour, it also involves the listener's mindset as well as the speaker's experience (Bodie et al., 2014; Burleson, 2011).

Kluger & Itzchakov (2022) called for the development of a theory for listening training as an antecedent to high-quality listening, and to test the effects of those interacting with the listening trainees. Addressing the core philosophy of listening, which for a long time was focused on learning rather than relating (Bodie, 2011b), it has been suggested that listening should be taught as a *relational* activity, rather than a single-sided activity which overly focuses on technical performance. Appreciating how listening creates a mutual experience and understanding of both the self and the other is suggested, informing a pedagogy on how to "be" in listening rather than "do" (Hinz et al., 2022).

Because of the broad scope of listening as being physiological, cognitive, relational, etc., Bodie (2012) argues that listening should be defined in such terms or a theory that fits

the context within which it is being applied, and I propose that listening training should also be approached with purpose and context in mind.

2.5 Why is Listening Important?

Beyond comprehension and information processing, emerging research supports that listening can be a powerful social behaviour causing profound effects on both the listener and the speaker (Bodie, 2023; Hinz et al., 2022; Kluger et al., 2023). Listening as a social psychological phenomenon includes studying experiences within romantic partnerships (Lachica et al., 2021), family (e.g., parent and child) relationships and friendships (Weinstein et al., 2023; Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023), as well as between strangers termed "zero acquaintance" individuals (Huang et al., 2017; Malloy et al., 2023). Listening has also been extensively researched in professional contexts including organisations more broadly, as well as healthcare and therapeutic professions (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Lee & Prior, 2013; Shafran-Tikva & Kluger, 2018). It is notable that there is scant empirical listening research in the field of coaching; a conversation-based intervention which leverages "listening" as a key strategy to support people with achieving goals (Burt, 2019). This may be because coaching psychology is comparatively a newly established field of research and practice.

The downstream effects of listening can have a real world positive impact for example, doctors who listen to their patients are more likely to be evaluated positively and their patients are less likely to be readmitted (Carter et al., 2018; Quigley et al., 2014). This might be because when healthcare staff listen, there is a stronger working alliance between them and their patients ($r = .84$) and this has been shown to increase compliance with medical and health recommendations, having a downstream positive effect on physical health indicators (Tikva et al., 2019). Similar downstream impacts have been indicated in the case of parents listening to teenage children, with children being more likely to self-disclose in the future on sensitive topics such as transgressions with vaping, coming about because of a

greater sense of autonomy support (feeling able to be self-congruent) and feeling connected with the listening parent (Weinstein et al., 2021).

In work contexts, listening facilitated improved supervisor feedback and relationships (London et al., 2023), organisational citizenship behaviours, attitudes, relationships and resilience (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Lloyd et al., 2015a; Rave et al., 2022). In addition to improved relational outcomes, meta-analytic findings support that the perception of being listened to in work situations led to improved performance outcomes (Kluger et al., 2023), with results being comparable to the well documented and powerful relationship between "conscientiousness" and work performance (grand mean of $\rho_M = 0.20$; Wilmot & Ones, 2019; Kluger et al., 2023).

Interestingly, meta-analyses support that the effect of listening is greater on relationship quality ($\bar{r} = .51$) than on performance ($\bar{r} = .36$; Kluger et al., 2023). This is consistent with meta-analytic findings on the results of coaching, with coaching effects on relationship outcomes ($g = .32$) being greater than the effects on performance outcomes ($g = 0.10$; Sonesh et al., 2015). Thus, when considering how does listening (or indeed applied forms of listening, such as coaching) work in facilitating outcomes? It is not unreasonable to consider that interpersonal processes factor significantly.

Indeed, this has been the direction of research in coaching psychology, which as a comparatively new field of research similar to relational listening, has explored the role of the coaching relationship in facilitating coaching outcomes (de Haan et al., 2020; Graßmann et al., 2020). However, opinions on the significance of relational factors on the outcomes are mixed (de Haan et al., 2020) and similar to listening research, much of the findings are subject to methodological limitations such as heavy reliance on self-reports which may raise issues with discriminant validity and inflated correlational estimates (de Haan & Nilsson, 2023; Kluger et al., 2023). Given the parallels with listening, outcomes from listening

research should be useful in guiding future coaching research directions.

2.5.1 Positive Effects on the Listener

Although research methods have limited our ability to determine effects of high-quality listening in everyday conversations on the listener, nascent research supports the positive benefits for the listener themselves, for example, prisoners who were given the role of supporting inmates by listening reported experiencing greater meaning in their lives (Dhaliwal & Harrower, 2009; Perrin & Blagden, 2014), patients with chronic diseases who supported peers with the same issues by listening showed similar outcomes with enhanced purpose, but also personal growth outcomes such as improved confidence, self-awareness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, and overall life satisfaction. Negative symptoms such as depression, fatigue and physical limitations were also improved, demonstrating an overall impact on well-being (Schwartz & Sendor, 1999). There is also evidence that professional coaches who utilised listening as a core skill, not only improved their listening skill but experienced improved leadership skills including self-confidence, visioning and interpersonal effectiveness (Mukherjee, 2012).

2.5.2 Negative Effects on the Listener

Perceptions that one is listened to may have benefits for the speaker. But there is also evidence it can be depleting for the listener, especially if they are listening to a difficult message. Understanding the impact of listening on listeners is important because there are mixed reports on whether listening is beneficial or detrimental to the listener. For example, in an educational context, while listening by a head-teacher enhanced resilience among teachers (Rave et al., 2022), and listening training more broadly with teachers across a school improved relationships over time (Itzchakov et al., 2023), teachers also experienced burnout from listening to students (Vinokur et al., 2024).

If listening can act as a powerful force for positive change, then the benefits of doing

so must be balanced out by any cost to the listener. Furthermore, identifying protective versus destructive factors of listening will guide in managing potential risks to the listener. For example, the worker who listens to performance feedback would benefit from psychological safety and mindfulness (Yip & Fisher, 2022), which might allow the listener to take on feedback without reacting emotionally.

A meta-analysis on the negative effects of listening supports a correlation between listening and stress levels (Michelson & Kluger, 2021), particularly in professions such as psychology, social work and nursing where individuals listen to distressing conversations which may lead to compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002) or secondary trauma (Elwood et al., 2011). There was, however, high variability in results by Michelson & Kluger (2021) who suggest that professional "listeners" who intentionally go into such professions may possess coping factors which minimise the effects of listening to trauma. Future research comparing negative effects of listening on the lay-person versus professional listeners may reveal more. In the broader context of listening effects in work contexts however, only 5.6% of effect sizes were negative, suggesting an overall positive effect of listening (Kluger et al., 2023).

2.6 How Listening can Support Change

2.6.1 Interpersonal Effects of Listening

Much of the power of listening to benefit or undermine speakers and listeners is through its influence on the relationship between the two interlocutors. People have an innate need to connect with other people and belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Listening has been theorised to foster a sense of worthiness and belonging with others (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), a view that has been supported by experimental research comparing high-quality listening with lower-quality listening. Studies show that following conversations during which speakers experienced high-quality listening, they experience reduced loneliness and increased social safety (Itzchakov et al., 2022c; Weis-Rappaport & Kluger, 2024).

Beyond relational benefits, listening has been related to increases in well-being, but understanding exactly how listening facilitates relationships and subsequently, well-being, has had relatively little attention by listening researchers compared to listening research in other areas (Bodie, 2011b, 2012; Halone & Pecchioni, 2001; Lloyd et al., 2015b).

A study that explored relational effects of listening between zero acquaintance dyads in a student population (Lloyd et al., 2015b) found that perceived listening created a sense of trust (a relationship outcome) between interlocutors, mediated by interpersonal attraction (how much they like the person on a socio-emotional level; Kiesler & Goldberg, 1968). Interpersonal attraction has been associated with partner responsiveness (Reis et al., 2011) contributing towards a sense of relationship satisfaction. For example, when a romantic partner practiced empathic listening, relationship satisfaction was mediated by the empathic listener processing information in a mindful and considerate manner (Manusov et al., 2020).

At the same time, effects of listening on (short-term, affective) well-being have been mediated by situational self-clarity and had no relationship with social attraction (Lloyd et al., 2015b). Such findings suggest that the effects of listening on well-being (in this case with unacquainted students) were facilitated by intrapersonal factors (see Section §2.6.3) rather than relational factors, while effects of listening on relationship outcomes, such as trust and satisfaction, were mediated by liking and interpersonal attraction. Put another way, people tended to like a good listening partner, and this increased the quality of the relationship; while being listened to improved positive affect and well-being through increased self-clarity. This supports the need for further research to determine how interpersonal and intrapersonal effects of listening work together to achieve downstream effects such as well-being.

2.6.1.1 Positivity resonance. A relational construct that has been linked to well-being and experiences of high-quality listening is positivity resonance (Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). Proposed to be a momentary experience between individuals, the repeated experience of such

moments can lead to the "supreme emotion" of love (defined as micro-moments of positivity resonance). Such momentary connections can be forged even between strangers because they rely on frequency rather than intensity (Fredrickson, 2016, p.17).

What is distinct about positivity resonance is its dyadic nature – a "two-person psychology" (Fredrickson, 2016, p.8). Similarly, listening is a shared phenomenon between two people where one person's behaviour can have an effect on the conversing partner's reaction – referred to as episodic listening theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). It is proposed that the effects of positivity resonance as a co-experienced phenomenon are underpinned by principles of broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2013), resulting in an "upward spiral" of reciprocated positive interactions and effects (Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023), as described in episodic listening theory.

Positivity resonance is thought to come about because of co-experienced positive affect, which played a more significant role in perceptions of relationship satisfaction than individually experienced emotion, across positive, neutral and negatively valenced conversation topics (Brown et al., 2022). Shared positive affect was more predictive than shared negative affect, except for in conversations that were positively valenced where both positive and negative shared effect became important. It could be that discussing negative or stressful topics was more constructive in the context of a positively valenced conversation (for example, addressing conflict with humour can be constructive in romantic couples; Gottman et al., 1998). Overall, the shared experience of positive emotion is likely to be a core condition of building and maintaining strong relationships (Brown et al., 2022).

As a relatively recent theory, antecedents and outcomes of positivity resonance have not been extensively researched. From research that has been conducted, we know that behavioural indicators of positivity resonance can predict marital satisfaction and health/longevity outcomes in long-term married couples, predict perceived meaning in life,

mediate the relationship between trait resilience and mental health, and mediate prosocial behaviour through prosocial motivation (Otero et al., 2020; Prinzing et al., 2022, 2023; Wells et al., 2022; West et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). In terms of correlational links with well-being, positivity resonance has been found to be associated with improved mental health, lower rates of depression, reduced loneliness, and fewer symptoms of illness after controlling for positive affect and social interaction (Major et al., 2018). As these are correlational results, researchers to date cannot isolate particular causal effects of positivity resonance. However, extant results suggest that positivity resonance may play an important role in explaining relational effects on well-being outcomes (Major et al., 2018).

Positivity resonance comprises of three core concepts: The first one is shared positive affect. Fredrickson proposed that love is not simply a positive emotion, rather it is a broader framework which encompasses a range and intensity of various emotions. It is in short, the experience of any positive emotion within the context of a safe (often close) relationship with another person. This positive, affective state of connection can motivate greater intimacy (a positive affective response to self-disclosure resulting in the speaker feeling understood and a sense of closeness between two people), and commitment to a longer-term social bond, but equally it is suggested that the causal direction may be reversed (Fredrickson, 2016).

The second component of positivity resonance is biological synchrony which in the context of listening, may include eye contact and gaze (Bavelas et al., 2002) as well as body language such as smiles, nods and facing towards each other (nonverbal immediacy; Jones & Guerrero, 2001). Fredrickson (2016) explains the significance of making eye-contact with someone who shows a genuine smile – that it triggers an unconscious mirroring of facial expression by the recipient of the smile in order to clarify authentic emotional expression and genuineness (Maringer et al., 2011). Aside from behavioural synchrony, positivity resonance also refers to mirrored levels of oxytocin (a biochemical that stimulates social bonding) and

neural stimulation in the brain such that might be observed when a parent interacts with a child (Feldman et al., 2010), or when two people share an emotional experience (Hasson et al., 2004).

The third component is conveying mutual care and concern. One of the core attributes of love is the "investment into the well-being of the other, for his or her own sake" (Hegi & Bergner, 2010, p.621). There is a clear alignment with the definition of relational listening: "the degree of devotion to co-exploring the other with and for the other" (Kluger & Mizrahi, 2023), reflecting Rogers' original concept of listening underpinned by unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1980). Positivity resonance refers to a mutual display of care. Drawing again on episodic listening theory, which predicts that as the listener conveys unconditional positive regard, this should be reciprocated by the speaker and may be as simple as a verbal affirmation or facial expression conveyed by the speaker and perceived by the listener as care and concern (Fredrickson, 2016).

In a subsequent, recent study to my own in Chapter 3, completed within the listening lab that I am part of, it has been found that listening quality does positively predict reported experiences of positivity resonance, even in the context of discussing disagreements. However, it is acknowledged that the direction of the causal pathway could go either way – suggesting that positivity resonance may precede listening, rather than come about because of listening. This is because engaging in high-quality listening itself enacts the core components of positivity resonance (Itzchakov et al., 2024b).

2.6.1.2 Intimacy. Another pathway to stronger relationships is intimacy. Being able to discuss personal thoughts, opinions or meaningful events with others can create a sense of intimacy and closeness with another person (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Intimacy tends to come about when a person responds positively to another person as they reveal something about themselves, showing care and empathy, which aids the speaker in feeling understood and

validated (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998). A positive response can be conveyed through high-quality listening behaviours such as nonverbal immediacy (supportive body language), for example, facing the speaker, smiling and leaning in which can facilitate interpersonal closeness (Jones & Guerrero, 2001) as well as other listening behaviours such as being responsive and supportive (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023; Jones, 2011).

2.6.1.3 Perceived responsiveness. These behaviours in a listening context are one form of perceived responsiveness, a related but separate construct to listening, defined as "the degree to which individuals feel understood, validated, and cared for by close others" (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023, p. 1). It is a core component of the intimacy model (Reis & Shaver, 1988) and is a relational construct. Perceived responsiveness has been shown to increase intellectual humility and attitude ambivalence in speakers, and reduce prejudiced attitudes when received by people in their close network (Itzchakov et al., 2022a; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021; Reis et al., 2018). With attitude change, while the topics discussed were not extreme political issues, outcomes were not moderated by either attitude certainty or morality. This suggests benefits of listening across individual differences on attitudes at baseline similarly reach those who are more and less convinced. Affective reactions such as anxiety or positive affect were also controlled for, but such affective reactions did not play a role. In all, the relational aspect was the most significant factor in explaining feelings of humility and moderated attitudes when the speaker perceived their partner to be responsive.

2.6.1.4 Feeling understood, or feeling heard, relates to the concept of perceived responsiveness, synonymous in terms of thoughts, feelings, motives and self-identity (Reis et al., 2017). People tend to have an innate need to "feel heard" (Myers, 2000). According to self-verification theory, perceiving that someone understands you (whether relating to a specific instance or more generally) is important because most individuals seek to verify their own perception of themselves (Swann Jr., 2012).

As a potential downside, if a person has a negative self-view, this can lead to adverse effects from well-intentioned listening where supportive responses are unfounded. For example, attempts to boost the speaker's self-view without sufficient reframing or evidence can come across as inauthentic, feeding perceptions and feelings of not being understood. This can set the speaker up for disappointment by pointing out who they should be, rather than who they are, ultimately corroding the relationship (Bosson & Swann, 2023). Indeed, feeling misunderstood often sits at the heart of conflict and disagreement (Weger, 2005).

Feeling understood or being heard may tap at an underlying survival instinct, when a person perceives that someone understands them, this might give rise to a sense of confidence that the listener will meet their needs in some way (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011). Trust is nurtured that the listener will be responsive enough to attend to their needs in a predictable and reliable way (Rempel et al., 1985). Indeed, meta-analyses support that there is a strong correlation between high-quality listening and trust $r = .57$ ($\rho = .62$; corrected for reliability) (Itzchakov & Reis, 2023). Both perceived responsiveness and listening are antecedents to trust, a key relational outcome (Itzchakov et al., 2024a).

Yet, the trust that occurs as a result of feeling understood might rely on the perception of the speaker rather than an objective understanding, as there is often low alignment between the listener's actual understanding of a person and the speaker's perception of feeling understood (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Objectively, identifying whether someone feels heard from the listeners' or other observers' perceptions of good listening will likely rely on paying attention to observable body language and attention (i.e., active listening behaviours; Rogers & Farson, 1957), but when it comes to a subjective interpretation of feeling heard, the speakers themselves may be more inclined to consider whether listeners follow through with relevant actions or conclusions drawn from the listening (Kriz et al., 2021).

Correlational research into listening between pairs in a work team context, where

individuals worked closely with each other, supported that listening quality correlates with intimacy. The extent to which speakers perceive better quality listening, they report a feeling of intimacy, which in turn facilitates helpful behaviour (Kluger et al., 2021). With these studies, the speaker's perception of listening versus the listener's perception of speaking was a better predictor of intimacy within these dyads.

Listening in such a way can be characteristic of "supportive listening" (Bodie, 2012), the kind of listening offered in everyday contexts when one talks about a distressing or stressful experience. In such circumstances, it has been found that specific (e.g., follow up questions), as opposed to general responses (e.g., body language) by the listener, are more likely to indicate support (Bodie et al., 2015).

It has also been demonstrated that it is possible for strangers to develop a close relationship from zero acquaintance through listening while talking about a negatively valenced topic, such as when discussing sources of stress. For example, in one study with unacquainted women, perceived listening quality predicted the level of closeness felt by the women and reduced the levels of stress they experienced (Malloy et al., 2023).

It is interesting that while women accurately perceived reciprocal "interactional intimacy" (a brief moment of intimacy which can occur even between strangers) within dyads, they do not perceive differences in listening quality when engaging with several different listening partners. Thus, at a global level, perception of listening is more consequential than objective listening quality (Malloy et al., 2023).

The authors explain the study findings by "tend and befriend" theory; a bio-behavioural adaptive stress response by women which sees a tendency to forge social connections for the sake of support and safety related to caregiving, potentially overriding the typical "fight or flight" response which may occur when engaging with strangers (Cannon, 1915). In such cases, it may be less about the opportunity to problem solve than the

interpersonal closeness that is created by being listened to and feeling heard, leading to a feeling of being understood (Cahn & Frey, 1992; Reis et al., 2017).

One explanation for the benefits on well-being and stress reduction in the study is given with relational regulation theory (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Relational regulation theory proposes that people self-regulate through the course of everyday conversations and shared activities which are "affectively consequential […] rather than through conversations about how to cope with stress" (p. 482). However, supportive listening during disclosures of stress can also result in more constructive coping discussion and behaviours (Kuhn et al., 2018).

Several questions remain in understanding the relationship between listening and intimacy. First, does intimacy hold a relationship with listening quality in other contexts such as between unacquainted dyads which cannot be explained by tend and befriend theory, and which include both men and women and a broader range of cultures? Also, what role does intimacy play in the self-regulation process from listening? Is it the interpersonal closeness itself or other intrapersonal processes that facilitate change?

2.6.1.5 Intimacy and positivity resonance. It could be argued that intimacy and positivity resonance are significantly correlated and overlap as a construct, given the model of intimacy proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988) posits that intimacy may come about through a shared positive, affectual experience when one person shares something personal of themselves with another person, resulting in a feeling of being understood and validated. I suggest that beyond shared positive affect, two people could co-experience positivity resonance following a self-disclosure, meaning that positivity resonance could be an additional component of the intimacy model, as well as an outcome.

In a similar manner to positivity resonance, intimacy can be experienced as a fleeting interaction between strangers. The frequency of intimate interactions (rather than intensity) builds into a closer relationship (interactional intimacy; Prager, 1995). While I do not test the

concept of positivity resonance as a component of intimacy in my research, I do argue that the two constructs are closely aligned as important relational outcomes of listening. Future work may seek to distinguish the difference between positivity resonance and intimacy as relational constructs, and how they relate to listening separately.

2.6.2 Affective Outcomes of Listening

Affective states can have an effect on both interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes, as explained by broaden and build theory. If a person is in a state of fear caused by a threat in the environment (whether perceived or real), then it would be difficult to experience positive emotions and the resulting social and cognitive openness from experiencing a positive affective state (Fredrickson, 2013).

Furthermore, other theorists have argued that psychological safety is an antecedent to positivity resonance, whereas it is an outcome of listening (Castro et al., 2016, 2018). Therefore, this may position listening as an antecedent rather than an outcome of positivity resonance. Previous experimental research comparing people who experienced high-quality versus moderate-quality or low-quality listening supports that the better listening condition predicted psychological safety (Castro et al., 2016, 2018) which mediated outcomes of creativity, possibly because listening created conditions where team members felt safe to suggest ideas without criticism thereby encouraging more self-disclosure (Miller et al., 1983). In this study, listening was also found to have a direct, predictive relationship with creativity. Building on our understanding that positive emotions can increase creativity (Langley, 2018), it is reasonable to speculate that safety and creativity also could have resulted from the positive affect or positivity resonance created by listening, and this could have facilitated more open thinking as stipulated by broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2013; Langley, 2018).

Whether or not listening follows an inhibitory pathway towards relational outcomes

through reducing feelings of defensiveness and anxiety, or an enhancing pathway through inspiring a positive affective relational experience such as positivity resonance, may have a consequence on rewarding (intimacy, affiliation) or punishing (rejection, conflict) social bonds. Gable (2006, p.182) posits that it is "important to differentiate social outcomes defined by the presence of positives from those defined by the absence of negatives" as it can affect motivation, attitudes and outcomes of social relationships differently. The approach-oriented motives have been shown to lead to increases in social gains and satisfaction over time. Furthermore, these findings align with theories that refer to the upward spiral effects of positivity resonance and episodic listening theory (Fredrickson, 2016; Kluger et al., 2021), whereas inhibitory or aversive motives (i.e., absence of negatives) tended to promote stronger negative reactions and outcomes over time (Gable, 2006).

Determining the extent and causal direction of the relationship of positivity resonance to listening is important because if listening does prove to be a strategy that can create conditions which support positivity resonance, and particularly within the context of discussing opposing viewpoints or disagreements, it can be built upon with fit-for-purpose listening training as a practical pathway towards creating more harmonious and constructive social relationships (Fredrickson, 2016), with potential downstream effects on both well-being and cognitive functioning within communities (Chu et al., 2010; Piolatto et al., 2022).

2.6.3 Intrapersonal Effects of Listening

Apart from positive relational benefits that are likely to come about from the nature of cognitive, behavioural and verbal exchanges which take place during high-quality listening, Rogers' theorised that when people receive high-quality listening, the experience facilitates conditions that makes a person feel less defensive and more open (aligned with broaden and build theory; Fredrickson, 2013), which then allows for safe introspection which increases self-awareness. As clarity is gained on inner thoughts, a person may re-evaluate and adapt

core aspects of themselves such as their attitudes, values and life philosophies, thereby

contributing towards increased well-being (Rogers & Farson, 1957). These concepts have

been tested experimentally by listening researchers, in a body of work that has rapidly

advanced in recent years which I will briefly summarise below.

    2.6.3.1 Self-esteem and anxiety. Firstly, a speaker's self-esteem can affect the

listening interaction. If a listener is perceived as being critical or dismissive, this can lower

the state self-esteem of the speaker (Reynolds-Kueny & Shoss, 2021) and particularly in zero

acquaintance interactions (Snapp & Leary, 2001). How people react in such situations may be

explained by sociometer theory, an alertness toward social rejection driven by trait self-

esteem (Leary, 2005). A person with lower trait self-esteem is less likely to disclose openly

causing others to be less responsive to them in turn, obstructing their ability to forge intimacy

(Forest et al., 2023).

    People with low self-esteem are also more likely to experience anxiety (Matthews &

Odom, 1989) and a situation that is perceived as an interpersonal threat, such as meeting a

stranger can trigger state anxiety, affecting speech fluency and eye contact (Buchanan et al.,

2014; Chen et al., 2023; Leal et al., 2017). Consistent with this, when a speaker perceives that

they are being listened to poorly, this can affect their speech quality, memory and overall

evaluation of the experience as being positive or negative (Bavelas et al., 2000; Pasupathi &

Hoyt, 2010; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). Thus, people may avoid self-disclosure if they are not

being listened to well (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005).

    Rogers posited that feeling listened to can help reassure people and encourage them

feeling more at ease while conversing (Atir et al., 2023; Rogers, 1959; Spielberger, 1966). If

such interpersonally threatening encounters can offer high-quality listening instead,

characterised by empathy and the absence of judgement, such experiences causally predict

reduced social anxiety (Itzchakov et al., 2017; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017), particularly in

those with higher trait anxiety (Itzchakov, 2020) and lower self-esteem (Itzchakov &
Weinstein, 2021).

    2.6.3.2 Authenticity. It is already established that relatedness and self-esteem are
constructs linked to each other (Leary, 2005). It is feasible therefore, that listening works to
enhance self-esteem through positive effects on the relationship. In an experiment which
causally tested the effects of high-quality listening while speaking in an esteem-threatening
context (discussing one's prejudice with a stranger), results showed that autonomy, rather
than relatedness need-satisfaction, mediated the effects of high-quality listening on self-
esteem (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021). Previous research exploring self-determination theory
(Deci & Ryan, 2008) supports that constructive relationships can be formed through
perceived autonomy support, that is, when a listener facilitates self-congruent expression
(Deci & Ryan, 2014; Itzchakov et al., 2022c) by demonstrating high-quality, caring and non-
judgemental listening. In the socially threatening situation of disclosing prejudice to a
stranger, being able to express attitudes received with empathy and without judgment
reinforced the speakers' authenticity, which then increased self-esteem (Itzchakov &
Weinstein, 2021). It seems that being accepted for being oneself was more significant than
feeling close to another person when it came to building self-esteem in this scenario (even
though relatedness was still important). The benefits of feeling assured of one's self-worth
according to self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) reflects lower need to defend oneself,
which then facilitates introspection and self-insight.

    2.6.3.3 Self-insight. Self-insight is a key factor in facilitating change through
therapeutic conversations (Jennissen et al., 2018) derived through introspection and self-
reflection, as proposed by major psychotherapy theorists (Perls et al., 1994; Rogers, 1957). It
is also believed to play a significant role in broader professional conversations such as
coaching (Grant, 2001). Self-insight occurs as a result of a person's capacity to introspect and

engage in meta-level reflective thinking about their own values, strengths, attitudes, thoughts and behaviours (Grant et al., 2002). Introspection can lead to increased clarity about the self, but it must follow a constructive rather than ruminative path for self-regulation to occur (Selwyn & Grant, 2019). Methods for constructive pathways include focusing on solutions as well as incorporating positive affect (Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Selwyn & Grant, 2019). This form of dispositional self-insight has been argued to be relevant in enhancing self-clarity when one is faced with conflict or uncertainty relating to self-relevant information. In the context of biased attitudes, it is argued that such a process of reflection and self-insight may differ slightly in that the focus is on learning new information about oneself in the absence of previous reflection (Itzchakov et al., 2020).

Ultimately, such thinking can support one's capacity for self-regulation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2011; Carver & Scheier, 1998), facilitating the development of a coherent sense of self (self-integration) where one's inner self aligns with the external self (Frank, 2021; Leary, 2007; Weinstein et al., 2013). The causal link between high-quality listening and self-reflection and self-insight has been supported in previous experimental research and found to mediate attitude clarity and openness (Itzchakov et al., 2018a; Itzchakov et al., 2020).

2.7 Listening in Context

2.7.1 Talking about Character Strengths

One focus I take in this thesis is on character strengths. Character strengths are defined as enduring aspects of one's personality, stated to be found universally in all people. Distinct from neutral personality traits (such as the Big 5; Goldberg, 1990), character strengths are said to be socially and morally valued across cultures. They are categorised under six core virtues (wisdom and knowledge, justice, temperance, courage, humanity and transcendence) which are further divided into twenty-four character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Evidence supports that character strengths can enhance meaning (Peterson

& Park, 2012), support with stress and well-being (Niemiec, 2020; Proctor et al., 2011; Schutte & Malouff, 2019), enhance motivation, and increase authenticity (Güler, 2018; Matsuo, 2020). Character strengths are often employed in settings to engage people in improved performance and motivation, for example, schools and coaching conversations (Fouracres & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020; Lavy, 2020). Yet, the relational aspects of strengths interventions have not been extensively researched (Quinlan et al., 2015). It has been found that teachers' application of "strengths-spotting" – an activity in which a teacher actively and constructively responds to another person's strength (Linley et al., 2010a) – mediates the relationship between strengths interventions and student outcomes (Quinlan et al., 2019). This suggests that the effects of character strengths may be partially explained by relational factors such as listening.

2.7.2 Disagreeing on Politically Sensitive Topics

Inattentive listening, which can have negative effects on the speaker as I discuss above, is distinct from conversations where interlocutors disagree on opinions or the message being discussed. There is evidence that listening while disagreeing can even lead to increased elaboration and meaning making (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015). Yet often, when presented with information that conflicts with one's own opinions, attitudes or values, people tend to resist persuasion (Kalla & Broockman, 2018). They may dismiss the strength of other people's arguments simply because they are contrary to their own social group (Leeper & Slothuus, 2014), or out of fear of manipulation (Cohen et al., 2000). These experiences result in feelings of defensiveness (Baker, 1980), which can impede the opportunity to reflect on attitudes and re-evaluate one's position, contributing towards societal divides and political polarisation where communities hold opposing attitudes which sit at extreme ends of the political spectrum (Lin et al., 2023).

2.7.2.1 Defensiveness

Extreme attitudes may be a defence mechanism when faced with a threatening situation (Maio & Haddock, 2007). It is argued that underpinning such resistance is the fear of losing one's self and sense of autonomy (Brehm & Brehm, 2013; Cohen et al., 2000). One of the outcomes of engaging in conversations with people who hold opposing viewpoints is increased deliberation and understanding of both sides of an argument (Price et al., 2002). This can carry a significant risk to the core self, for example:

> "If you really understand another person in this way, if you are willing to enter his private world and see the way life appears to him, without any attempt to make evaluative judgments, you run the risk of being changed yourself. You might see things his way; you might find that he has influenced your attitudes or your personality."
> (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991/1952, p.106)

Indeed, high-quality listening increases humility in both the listener and the speaker by being focused on someone other than themselves (Lehmann et al., 2023). For example, by being open to another person's story, some aspects may become internalised and expand one's self-concept (Leary, 2007; Paolini et al., 2016). This is referred to as "self-expansion" (Aron et al., 2001) which has been linked to reduced prejudice and increased intergroup contact (Wright et al., 2002). Rogers, critically, argued that when a listener is perceived as seeking to understand, instead of to judge, a more objective truth can be pursued through open conversation (Rogers and Roethlisberger, 1991/1952).

2.7.2.2 Attitudinal Openness

The conditions of safety created by high-quality listening can facilitate an open, constructive exploration of the self, including enduring or core aspects of the self, such as attitudes and values (Itzchakov & DeMarree, 2022). A series of field experiments showed that engaging in a narrative exchange (i.e., telling a story, perceived as less manipulative than a direct argument), and withholding judgement through high-quality listening, worked to

reduce exclusionary attitudes towards groups that typically face prejudice in voters, and that such attitudes lasted for at least four months ($d = 0.08$) (Kalla & Broockman, 2018, 2020).

Causal experiments reveal that a caring, non-judgemental and attentive listener not only increases attitude clarity (Itzchakov et al., 2018a), but that self-reflection and self-insight mediates effects on attitude change (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Attitude clarity related to self-awareness rather than believing the attitude is correct, and had a downstream consequence of motivation to express the attitude versus persuade another to hold the same view (Itzchakov et al., 2018a).

Listening also caused increased levels of comfort with objective attitude ambivalence which can help to contextualize one's previously held polarized attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2017). An example of objective attitude ambivalence is that one may hold an attitude that it is important to care for the environment, but believe everyone is entitled to drive their car to work (Kaplan, 1972). In contrast, people who experience subjective attitude ambivalence (Priester & Petty, 1996) when becoming aware of contradictions relating to their attitudes, showed increased defensiveness and biased thinking, such as the "better-than-average" effect (Alicke, 1985) and hindsight bias (Christensen-Szalanski & Willham, 1991; Reis et al., 2018).

Overall, high-quality listening moderated the strength of attitudes and increased open-mindedness in causal experiments (Itzchakov et al., 2017; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021). Boundary conditions suggest that the effect is reduced when people already have low dispositional social anxiety however, and when they hold extreme attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it is fair to suggest that an affirmed self can lead to objective evaluation of arguments and reduced bias (Correll et al., 2004).

2.7.2.3 Power

There is a potential dark side to political listening to consider, whereby differences

can be made more salient and reinforced, rather than bridged. Differences in interracial and power dynamics can affect how responsive and understanding a listener is (Eveland et al., 2023; Shelton et al., 2023). It must also be noted that it is the responsiveness of the listener, rather than agreement by the listener that is necessary for positive effects to occur from listening (Rogers, 1962) and the listener should take care not to agree with the speaker during discussions which might inadvertently reaffirm prejudiced attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020).

Power dynamics may also influence who is best listened to, and who is best being the listener. For example, when it comes to attitudes, it is the person with power whose attitude becomes less extreme by listening, and the person with less power whose attitude becomes less extreme by being listened to (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Interestingly, in an organisational context, listening has found to even the balance of power between speaker and listener and empower those with less scope towards action (Hurwitz & Kluger, 2017).

2.8 Summary

Researchers have begun to focus on listening as a relational construct over the past decade (Bodie, 2023; Kluger et al., 2023) and experimental (with randomised control groups as well as quasi-experimental) research supports that listening strengthens interpersonal relationships in a variety of contexts (Hinz et al., 2022; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). It is also acknowledged that listening can facilitate an intrapersonal self-regulatory process that helps the speaker to understand, organise and accept their thoughts more clearly to achieve attitude clarity, comfort with ambiguity or ambivalence within their attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2018a; Itzchakov et al., 2017), and attitude change (Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2020). This leads to increased well-being (Lloyd et al., 2015b) facilitated by self-insight (Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2020), self-verification (Linehan, 1997; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005), and increased authenticity (Weinstein et al., 2021).

The progress in this body of research has advanced at a rapid pace over the last

decade and supports much of Carl Rogers' original theories. It is a promising field of research because of global socio-political and environmental challenges which have exacerbated tensions among communities and populations, contributing towards increased polarisation of attitudes and political stances (e.g., Duffy et al., 2019).

As studies have supported the potential for listening to facilitate constructive change in people's attitudes and behaviour, this makes it increasingly important to test the ecological validity of this experimental research. With a few exceptions, the brunt of research noted above has been limited to Western populations (mostly originating in the United States, Israel or the United Kingdom) and those few quasi-experiments that have taken place in a natural environment have been limited to work contexts (Kluger et al., 2023). It will be important to continue to test the effects of high-quality listening in broader contexts relevant for the lay-person, given the potential for listening to improve both the relationships and well-being of populations globally.

Methodological limitations have also limited ecological validity. Many studies have relied on video vignettes, computer mediations, written scenarios, recall or where in-person conversations took place, either a trained confederate played the role of listener, or the poor-quality listening manipulation introduced confounds such as rudeness (by distracting listeners), or there was no randomised control group. Testing causal effects of listening in a naturalistic environment with conversations between lay-people would increase ecological validity of the outcomes and provide incremental confidence that findings are replicable outside of the lab, with more diverse populations. In order to achieve this, it was first necessary to review and refine the approach to listening training.

Lastly, we have yet to determine exactly how cognitive, affective and relational factors work together, and across a more diverse range of conversational contexts. For example, conversations that are supportive versus threatening in nature, which I aimed to

investigate with the empirical studies in this thesis.

2.8.1 Theoretical Pathway of Causal Effects

In summary, I posit the following paradigm of listening effects from the constructs reviewed in the literature (see Figure 1):

Listening and positivity resonance work as an upward spiral (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). When an upward spiral is achieved, shared positive affect and positivity resonance facilitates more open, caring and less defensive feelings (Fredrickson, 2013, 2016), which supports increased self-disclosure (Miller et al., 1983), spiralling upwards again to facilitate the development of intimacy from feeling understood and validated in the caring listening environment (Reis & Shaver, 1988). This cyclical reinforcement of positive affect and responsiveness increases intimacy and relationship strength (liking, social attraction, love) over time, and creates a psychologically safe environment for an individual (Castro et al., 2018; Itzchakov & DeMarree, 2022; Weis-Rappaport & Kluger, 2024).

The experience of relational warmth and care experienced is autonomy supportive, facilitating authentic expression of one's true self without fear of judgement, which upon positive reception by the listener, lowers state anxiety and increases self-esteem (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021).

The relational, positive affective and autonomy supportive conditions created by listening opens the opportunity for safe and constructive self-reflection leading to increased self-insight and self-verification, giving the individual freedom to explore themselves without risk of social rejection (Itzchakov et al., 2018a). This supports clarity, tolerance of ambiguity and attitude openness and change – facilitating expression or modification of attitudes without fear of criticism (Itzchakov et al., 2020, 2024b; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021; Reis et al., 2018).

Overall, the positive relational experience and opportunity for self-verification has downstream effects on well-being (Lloyd et al., 2015b), and I further posit, may facilitate a behavioural intention to continue what was experienced or discussed during the conversation, so long as it fulfils one's organismic (authentic) needs (Weinstein et al., 2022).

Figure 1 *Theoretical Pathway of Effects from Listening (Gleaned from Literature Review)*

Proximal Effects		Distal Effects
Listening	State-Anxiety	(Reflection) Self-Insight
Positivity resonance	Authentic	Attitude Openness
Open/Less Defensive	Intimacy	Behavioural Intention
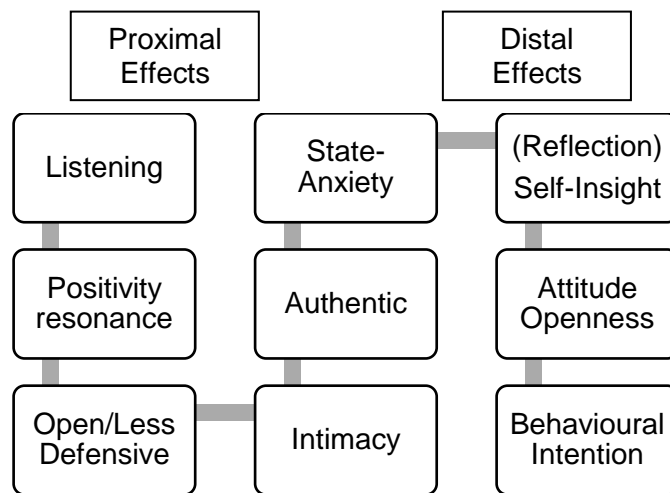
2.8.2 Aims of Studies in the Thesis

This paradigm guided the two empirical studies (see Chapters 4, 5) in this thesis, which causally test for proximal and distal outcomes of listening in between-subjects experiments which included randomised control groups. Before the experiments could take place, I first investigated listening training to identify and address challenges in learning to listen. These insights were incorporated into a short video-based training which was applied in Study 2 to manipulate listening quality. The third study was a field experiment which leveraged a longer listening training by an external listening trainer who had designed a "deep" listening training based on principles that aligned with the definition of high-quality listening in this thesis. The trainer delivered the training to a culturally diverse and global audience, for the purpose of having conversations about political disagreements. The details of the studies in this thesis are outlined further in Table 2.

Table 2 - *Aims of the Studies in this Thesis*

Chapter title	Gaps in current literature	Purpose of study
Chapter 2: Study 1 Understanding and Cultivating Effective Listening: A Dialectical Theory of the Tensions between Intuition and Intentional Behaviour	• Research shows mixed outcomes with listening training, particularly with effects on perceived listening and downstream effects on the speaker • Makes it challenging to conduct research with lay-people • Lay-practitioners' perspective on listening training has not been investigated in the literature	• To gain insights from lay-practitioner materials (freely available on web) on best ways to train lay-people to listen • To develop a theory that supports listening training in the lay population • To guide the development of listening training videos for subsequent study (2)
Chapter 3: Study 2 The Effects of Listening on Speaker and Listener while talking about Character Strengths: An Open Science School-wide Collaboration	• Methodological limitations prevented investigation of naturalistic conversations between lay-people • Authenticity has not been extensively researched as an effect of listening, but is linked with character strengths empirically and theoretically • Past literature had yet to examine the relationship between listening and positivity resonance, particularly in the context of character strengths • State anxiety had not been extensively researched as an effect of listening, relevant in the context of strangers interacting	• Testing a novel method: video-training to manipulate listening quality in a lay population • Understanding the effects of listening during a constructive conversational context: discussing character strengths to reveal the most prominent, proximal outcomes of listening • To further examine if effects from listening mediated behavioural intention to continue the conversation experience (apply character strengths, listening) • Pedagogical aim of enhancing student engagement with Open Science and improving schoolwide collaboration
Chapter 4: Study 3 Deep Listening Training to Bridge Divides: Fostering Attitudinal Change through Intimacy and Self-insight	• Gaps in examining effects of listening and listening training in the context of i) naturalistic conversations ii) discussing opposing political attitudes and iii) with a diverse, multi-cultural population • Investigating whether listening can create intimacy between strangers had not been examined before in the context of disagreeing • Exploring effects on feeling defensive was also a gap • Research into the effects of fit-for-purpose listening training is scant	• Testing to see if fit-for-purpose listening training can have effects on listening quality in this context • To determine causal effects of listening & listening training: intimacy, defensiveness, self-insight and attitude change • Use serial mediation analyses to investigate the causal pathway between listening training and attitude change (determining order of intimacy (interpersonal), defensiveness (affective) and (intrapersonal) self-insight)

Chapter 3: Understanding and Cultivating Effective Listening: A Dialectical Theory of the Tensions between Intuition and Behaviour

3.1 Abstract

High-quality listening is a multifaceted social behaviour, and theories and research concerning it are mixed in terms of listening definitions and recommendations. The current study canvassed lay practitioners' understanding of optimal listening qualities and training, drawing on a wide range of listening training materials ($N = 207$) sourced from the World-Wide-Web. Thematic analysis results were critically examined to systematically position praxis against our current understanding of listening theories. Findings are presented as a "dialectical listening theory" which posits that at its core, listeners' behaviours often exist in direct tension with their mindset or intuition. Furthermore, I posit that this tension is amplified when individuals are faced with conversations that conflict with their perspectives or values. Finally, I argue that listeners may need to oscillate between dual-process states of explicit (factual) and implicit (holistic) thinking while attempting to engage in high-quality listening. I conclude that high-quality listening involves direct recognition and strategic management of tensions throughout the listening process.

3.2 Introduction

People know when they are listened to well. Speakers form holistic evaluations of their conversation partners and report with some confidence when they feel 'listened to' or not, evaluations that impact their reactions to the conversation (Lipetz et al., 2020). In their conceptual and empirical work, researchers have attempted to address what listening looks like, largely in terms of the relational observed and unobserved behaviours used by the listener (e.g., Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Yet researching the nature and outcomes of listening has not been straightforward because approaches to conceptualising the construct are complex, varied, and fragmented and have spanned a range of disciplines, including

psychology, communication, management, and linguistics (Bodie et al., 2008; Glenn, 1989).

Outside of the research domain, listening is understood to be a fundamental tool that benefits individuals in professions that rely on communication. Those who listen well tend to perform better at their jobs including sales, healthcare workers, customer service professionals, journalists and leaders (Drollinger et al., 2006; Harro-Loit & Ugur, 2019; Itzchakov, 2020; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Wouda & van de Wiel, 2014).

Beyond helping people to perform better, many professional roles such as coaching, mentoring, consulting, counselling and psychotherapy may rely on listening as a core skill or activity (Burt, 2019; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rogers, 1942; Stein, 2021). Recognising the significance of listening as a performance enabler, practitioners have given ample attention to developing listening training to help others to improve their listening (e.g., Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2022b). The sum of knowledge by the lay practitioner is largely untapped in academic research, but this knowledge can help researchers develop clearer working definitions of listening and advance listening theory; including addressing gaps in our understanding about how to train people to listen well.

3.3 Academic Conceptualisations and Implications of Listening

Several branches of listening research have developed in recent years. For example, listening has been used to improve impaired attention (e.g., in children with autism spectrum disorder; Irwin & Brancazio, 2014), language acquisition (Feyten, 1991), learning and well-being in educational contexts (Rave et al., 2022), and to facilitate relationships with others (Bodie, 2012; Kluger et al., 2021). The current paper is particularly concerned with the latter – interpersonal listening – which is sometimes referred to as "active listening" (Rogers & Farson, 1957) or "active-empathetic listening" (Drollinger et al., 2006) in the academic literature. Interpersonal listening can be understood as "a complex behaviour that helps signal involvement or the degree to which participants are enmeshed in the topic, interpersonal

relationship, and situation" (Coker & Burgoon, 1987, p. 463).

Several components of interpersonal listening have been identified from listening research, which comprise our understanding of listening to date (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). These include attention (e.g., gazing, focusing, remembering), comprehension (e.g., processing, interpreting, learning), and positive intention (e.g., validating, empathising, being non-judgmental). These three constructs have been found to have strong positive causal relationships with feeling listened to (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Further downstream, as individuals perceive themselves to be listened to well, they report many greater benefits such as well-being (Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2022b; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Trahan & Rockwell, 1999), shared understanding and openness (Itzchakov et al., 2022a), and willingness for future self-disclosures (Weinstein et al., 2021, 2022); for reviews see (Bodie, 2011b; Kluger et al., 2021).

3.4 Training People to Listen Well

Researchers have been implementing listening training for the past several decades in work that has attempted to test the outcomes of listening in everyday contexts. The earliest listening training study of which I am aware focused on telephone counsellors dating back to the 1960s (Ross & Shoemaker, 1969), and more recently, meta-analytic data from 32 studies show an average moderate effect size on listening behaviours from listening training at r = .38, 95% *CI* [.30, .46], τ = .21 (Kluger, 2020). There is some evidence that even relatively brief training can be successful. Training as short as two hours or two days can improve listening behaviours (e.g., Aakre et al., 2016; Davidson & Versluys, 1999; Graybill, 1986; Lisper & Rautalinko, 1996). In a few cases, researchers reported the transfer of training to practical contexts, for example, after listening training was delivered to counselling students (Levitt, 2001) and insurance customer service employees (Rautalinko & Lisper, 2004), their professional practice was enhanced. However, listening training is not consistently effective

in creating the intended downstream benefits. For example, Rautalinko & Lisper (2004) reported customers did not experience different listening as a function of employees receiving training. In a parental communication program, although parents were objectively assessed as showing improved listening and felt more confident and competent, the children did not notice any differences, nor were there downstream effects on children's well-being (Graybill, 1986). In addition to downstream effects on the intended recipient of listening, another component of listening training that is inconsistently reported is the amount of time taken to train people to listen well. Establishing effective training methods that address time limitations is imperative in practice and we are still unclear on the optimal amount of time needed to train people to listen well. Recent findings suggest that very brief 10-minute training interventions embedded in broader courses may lead to negligible changes (Martin & Butera, 2022), and possibly extended programs yield better results (Rautalinko et al., 2007). It is as yet unclear whether it is difficult to train individuals to listen well or whether the basic approach to training listening needs to be developed.

Laypeople's perception can help to expand on broad and multi-faceted constructs (such as listening) to contribute to the scientific discourse, and they can offer academics resolution when concepts under study are intuitive and present within public conversations (Haddock et al., 2022; Schlehofer et al., 2008). Given the wide recognition of listening as an important human ability (Bodie, 2012), listening training resources are publicly shared on the World-Wide-Web (www), but this content has lived in relative isolation from research and published literature. A critical analysis of this information from a lay community of practitioners can provide important information on what tensions or challenges exist in how we define, learn and apply the listening process in everyday practice, and how practitioners address tensions or challenges in vivo. The findings in this study form a normative listening theory that I expect will guide future listening research that is of practical relevance on the

one hand; and on the other, informs listening training strategies that broad agreement suggest matters most.

3.5 Present Study Aims

Researchers have developed working definitions of listening, but there is little consensus in the academic literature about what listening entails or how best to develop others' listening (Weinstein et al., 2022). The current research employed thematic analysis (Robinson, 2022) to draw insights on how we understand and develop listening from the large body of practitioner training materials on interpersonal listening. The paper describes the practitioner's understanding of listening and listening training recommendations in light of researchers' current perspectives. Themes are then critically examined by identifying practical challenges, problems or tensions in the learning process. Using this approach, I attempt to construct a new, normative theory (rationally define universal principles and values) of listening and learning to listen to inform listening theory, future research directions and best practice in listening training.

3.6 Method

3.6.1 Sourcing Data

A search was carried out on publicly available www content using the search engine Google because of its top ranking and global coverage of over 90% of the web (RapidAPI, n.d.). Search terms included "listening and training," "listen and training," "active listening exercises," "listening courses," and "listening skills." These terms were chosen to capture variations of search terms that cover "listening skills training courses." The term "active listening" was chosen to acknowledge that the term has been broadly applied to listening training since its popularisation by Carl Rogers (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Tyler, 2011). To ensure adequate breadth and depth of qualitative data in the sample size, analysis continued until a point of saturation was reached with themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The top 207 texts

(approximately 15 pages) were sourced from search results and included blog posts, articles, training course outlines, and freely available training materials. Articles and content specific to listening for the purpose of learning a language or educational learning were excluded as this form of listening is markedly different from the type of listening we are interested in exploring further in this study, namely, listening for human connection.

Search settings were set to the default region (United Kingdom) and English language by Google. Results included organisations and institutes in the United States, Netherlands, and Australia, for example, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Astra Zeneca, PositivePsychology.com, and Professional Development Training (respectively), but there was a limited representation of entities in non-English speaking countries.

3.6.2 Epistemology and Approach to Thematic Analysis

From a position of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008), assuming that empirical observations of reality will be subject to some interpretation by researchers, my epistemological position assumed a "hybrid" approach to thematic analysis that incorporated both deductive and inductive measures; known as Structured Tabular Thematic Analysis (ST-TA; Robinson, 2022) – steps of which are outlined in detail in Appendix A. ST-TA method was chosen as it is appropriate for analysing large quantities of short-text (rather than lengthy interview transcripts) and because the epistemological position of ST-TA is well aligned to this research project (Robinson, 2022), situating itself between the essentialist approach of (Boyatzis, 1998) and the constructionist approach of Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The eight step ST-TA approach rigorously guided the identification of essential, common listening factors in publicly available listening training texts while acknowledging the research teams' collective experience and subjective influence (as psychologists with experience in organisational, coaching and clinical psychology) in identifying themes.

Analysis began with an a-priori set of codes from an initial set of sources, before inductively developing themes and codes through analysis of further text. Qualitative data was interpreted at a semantic level (surface meaning of language). A team of coders looked for frequently used terms, different terms that referred to the same underlying meaning and terms that were emphasised within the text to develop initial themes and sub-themes (Owen, 1984). Coders then engaged in reflexive discussion, adopted a consensus approach, before inter-rater reliability (IRR) analyses were calculated for each of the codes (Boyatzis, 1998 - see Appendix A, Table 10). Finally, a consensus was sought on the final set of themes, sub-themes, and descriptions and documented.

3.7 Results

Figure 2 *Themes and Sub-themes Identified from Thematic Analysis of the Data*

Way of Being	Inner-Work	Listening Behaviors	Holistic Listening	Training Techniques
Actively listens Focuses on speaker Demonstrates Respect Suspends judgment Avoids giving answers/solutions Understands perspective Conveys empathy Cultivates genuine curiosity Listens for social cues; in relation to people, groups or audiences Listens to relate Listens for facts, data & Information Listens for overall message	Undertakes preliminary internal work Raises self-awareness Addresses obstacles to good listening Identifies virtuous intention Sets aside personal agendas & interests Mindful practice Considers vulnerability & authentic communication Develops courage and accepts possibilty to change	Removes distractions in environment Listener's body language Listener's verbal cues Establishes rapport and trust Reflects back speech Reflects back emotion Asks follow-up questions Offers acknowledgement or validation Gives constructive feedback Matches thinking pace of speaker	Considers omissions (what isn't being spoken about explicitly) Notices incongruence between speaker's overt communication and body language Considers true meaning of words Notices and considers speaker's verbal nuances e.g. metaphors, hyperbole, superlatives etc.	Expains physiology Explains psychology Discusses when and when not to engage in active listening Explores barriers Explores cultural differences Shares examples of good & poor listening Shares tips for responding & good listening Shares ideas for staying focused Explores how to encourage good listening in others Develops a plan Allows time for practice & role-playing Incorporates experiential learning activities Discussion-based learning Measures listening effectiveness (e.g. assessment)

A total of five themes were identified, outlined in Figures 2 and 3 and described further below (refer Appendix A, Table 9 for final themes and sub-themes). *Way of Being* and *Listening Behaviours* were similarly prevalent at 34% of the analysed data. *Training Techniques* (16%), *Inner-Work* (11%) and, *Holistic Listening* (5%) were less prevalent. Note: Percentages referred to below under discussion of themes represent a percentage of the subset being discussed.

Figure 3 *Portion of Codes Attributed to Each Theme from the Dataset of 207 Training Texts[1]*
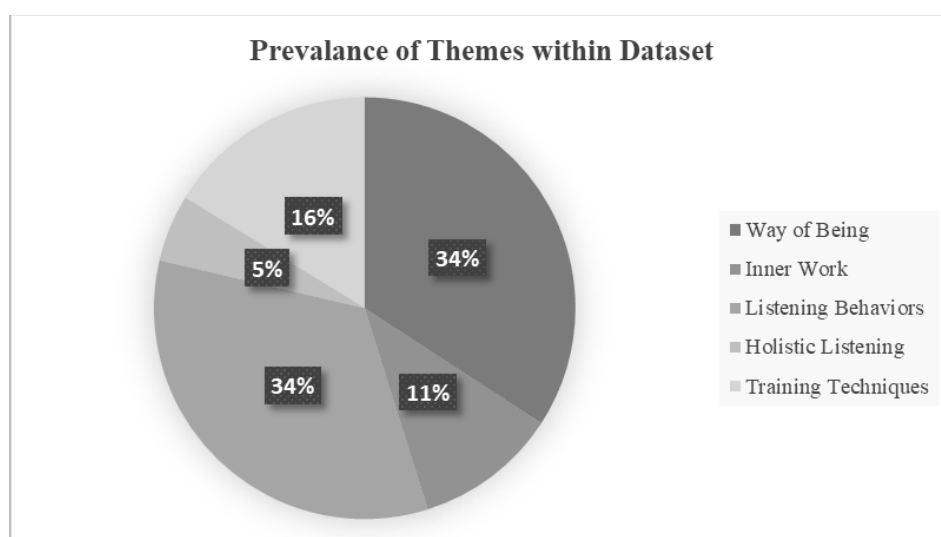
3.7.1 Way of being, the listener's conscious focus, intention, and manner as they engage with the speaker. Practitioner training sources emphasised that listening is an active, conscious process rather than a passive one (14.6% of the subset), listeners are to focus their attention in full (13.5%) to relate and connect with the speaker (8%).

During relational listening, understanding the listener's perspective (11%), showing empathy (9%), and to a certain extent, curiosity (4%) become important elements in the *way of being*. Treating the speaker respectfully was a core sub-theme, entailing avoiding interrupting, talking over, or presenting counterarguments to the speaker (12%). Furthermore, listeners must suspend judgment and resist deeply analysing their own reactions during the

interaction in the moment (11%). The focus on the speaker, rather than the self, was important if the speaker's perspective was to be understood (11%). Practitioners also recommended to *avoid giving answers/solutions* (2.3%), which although less frequent showed a significant level of agreement in the IRR analysis.

The final component of this theme referred to the listeners' mindset, which guides attention to specific information. Some practitioners recommended listening more broadly for the overall message or story (5.5%) and fewer to listen for meaning on a human or interpersonal level (3%). Business or work-related texts analysed (6.4%) recommended to focus on listening for accuracy or for facts, data, information, and accurate recall.

Only one or two sources recommended listening for "self-voice" (e.g., I, me) to gain insight into the speaker's attributions. This sub-theme (known in academic literature as *active voice*; Tannenbaum & Williams, 1968) was removed after IRR analysis due to low agreement. Following discussion, it was deemed a specialist, linguistic technique that mostly sits outside the framework of the lay practitioner's listening training.

3.7.2 Inner-work, the listener can engage in preparatory work to prepare for upcoming conversations and develop into becoming a better listener. This theme reflects discussions of the inner-work or psychological strategies that a listener might apply during the conversation or prior to ensure that deep listening can occur. As a deliberate process, the listener considers what values drive their intention to listen (18%). The focus is on a benevolent intention; for example, the listener can embrace humility or opt to learn from and connect with the speaker.

The listener also maintains a mindful presence on the moment (17%) where they intentionally work to relax their personal defences. This requires raising prior awareness of one's own biases, beliefs, or feelings (20%) and one's personal objectives, interests or agenda (15.4%) so that these do not end up creating a distraction during the interaction. Bad habits

that might obstruct listening (e.g., impatience, distractibility) should be planned to overcome (13.6%), and are recommended to be developed outside of the listening interaction and not during the conversation.

A few advanced training materials discussed the importance of developing personal courage (8%) and feeling safe to be vulnerable as a way of facilitating the possibility of changing one's views (2.5%) which is a potential outcome of listening well. It was recommended that listeners engage in such preliminary internal work to prepare themselves for the challenges of hearing messages they might not want to hear (5%).

3.7.3 Listening behaviours, observable listening behaviours that signal high-quality listening. The most common factors within this theme included the listener's body language and facial expressions (16%), reflecting back what the listener has heard (e.g., paraphrasing and summarising) (15.4%), asking questions (15%), offering verbal cues to indicate listening (12%) and reflecting back the speaker's body language (7%). Many training activities were focused on practicing these skills. Asking follow-up questions was understood as helping to convey understanding or demonstrate that the listener has accurately attended to, recalled, and interpreted what the speaker has communicated. Verbal cues include affirmations such as *"uh huh"* and *"yes"* but also the use of silence and pauses (4%) to match the speaker's pace. To provide full attention, listeners should remove distractions such as mobile phones (10%). A moderate amount of practitioner resources (9%) emphasised giving constructive feedback (e.g., "*that's great news*") and acknowledging or validating (5%) the listener's message (e.g., "*I see*," "*makes sense*"). Showing behaviours that express care, build trust, and create rapport (e.g., asking how the speaker is, reassuring that you care) was also recommended (6%).

A very limited number of resources focused on encouraging "story-telling" as a specific narrative technique. Only one resource recommended disclosing similar experiences to show understanding as a technique to connect with the speaker, while several others

advised the contrary, to reserve self-disclosure. None of the trainings picked up on points highlighted in the primary articles used for a priori coding; addressing power imbalances between the speaker and listener to remove impediments to trust and openness (Kasriel, 2021) and reflecting back muted or amplified emotions (Passmore, 2011). These four sub-themes presented with low IRR. As a result, they were excluded from the final interpretation of findings. It was agreed between the coding team that some of these could be considered advanced techniques.

     3.7.4 Holistic listening, attunes to less overt communication signals and identifies incongruence with overt signals to intuit the real message. This theme highlights elements of listening training that encompass a holistic interpretation of the speaker's communication, and in particular, moving beyond the surface-level interpretation of body language and verbal expression to identify underlying or unsurfaced emotions and messages. The codes within this theme were less frequent than in other themes (representing only 5% of the dataset), suggesting that they are either reserved for more advanced audiences or emerging as a trend in lay practitioner training. The most commonly occurring sub-theme involved omissions; noticing what is not being spoken about explicitly (34% of the subset). For example, a person may share how much they enjoy the travelling or relocation requirements of their job, but they may omit a less obvious downside such as missing family. In this example, a good listener might have a hunch (implicitly identified) by combining this "common sense" knowledge with noticing signs of sadness in the speaker.

     Another sub-theme was incongruence, or recognising the underlying emotions of the speaker despite seemingly contradictory body language or verbal expression (27% of the subset of data). For example, a speaker might verbally express that they are excited to act, but their non-verbal behaviour reflects low energy, apathy, or disengagement. In this case the listener learns more about the speaker from attending to their body language than their words.

Noticing verbal nuances was another common sub-theme under this theme (21% of the subset of data) such as hyperbole (exaggerated expression or terms not meant to be taken literally, such as "*I've said it a 100 times*"), metaphors (e.g., "*climbed a mountain*"), or figurative speech (e.g., "*opportunity knocking*") to consider again whether there is an underlying emotion or message sitting behind this use of language. Use of such terms may also indicate how important or intense an experience might have been for someone. A final sub-theme focused on understanding the true meaning of words, considering a deeper meaning of what is being communicated beyond surface-level interpretation (19% of the subset). People may substitute words for something less direct out of politeness or because they do not feel they can communicate authentically (e.g., using the word "interesting" when they really mean "strange" as a negative reaction). The listener must interpret the speaker's verbal intonations and nuances (e.g., sarcasm, politeness) and often, combine this information with the listener's own knowledge and experience (e.g., idioms often have cultural associations). Together these sub-themes form *holistic* listening.

3.7.5 Training techniques, content and features of listening training design. The final theme addresses elements of the training design that support the development and training of listening. The most common elements included sharing examples of poor listening contrasting against good listening (15%), the opportunity to practice using role-play or exercises (15%), addressing common barriers to listening such as filtering, advising etc. (13%), and sharing tips for common verbal cues and responses to indicate listening (8.5%). Incorporating the experience of feeling deeply listened to (5%) and discussion-based learning (2%) also presented as training techniques. Two themes, reflective questions (4.6%) and pacing training to allow time for reflection (5%), both presented with low IRR, and following discussion the analyst team agreed to merge these themes with discussion-based learning as it was agreed there was overlap between these three sub-themes.

Formally measuring or assessing listening effectiveness was recommended by 5% of sources, for example, by using the "The Listening Profile" adapted from (Brownell, 1996). Some sources described the psychology of listening (2%), but a larger number described the auditory, physiological process of hearing (11.4%). However, it could be argued that the psychology of listening overlaps with *Way of Being* and *Inner-Work* themes, even if they aren't explicitly referred to as "the psychology of listening". A small number of training materials included ideas for staying focused (4%), formulating a plan for listening in advance (2.4%), considering when it is appropriate to engage in active listening versus not (2.4%), how to encourage others to listen well (2.2%) and finally, noting cultural differences (2.4%).

3.8 Present Study Discussion

Integrating recommendations from listening training sources provided by practitioners on the web, I sought to utilise this largely untapped data source to further inform listening theory, research, practice and training. Five themes were identified that reflected both the internal process of listeners and their relational behaviours. These were termed *Way of Being, Inner-Work, Listening Behaviours, Holistic Listening*, and *Training Techniques*. Together, they highlighted a number of tensions between the practical application of listening and key philosophical ideals that listening theory supports. These tensions are discussed in further detail below and presented as "dialectical listening theory" (DLT), alongside strategies practitioners employ to overcome or address these challenges.

3.8.1 Tensions Experienced in Cultivating Listening

Themes revealed three interesting tensions (see Figure 4) in the practice of listening and listening philosophy; i) A listener can learn to perform the technical behaviours and verbal cues, but listening in this way may not compare well with listening that is driven by a specific mindset or "way of being"; ii) Listening very well (holistically) is more than a set of behaviours and relies on a "sixth sense" or intuition in addition to a way of being. Listening

therefore, comes with time and experience (versus training alone) despite the presence of

formulaic techniques; and iii) Maintaining a listening "way of being" and "unconditional

positive regard" can be challenging in the moment and has the potential to compromise

listener authenticity, especially when faced with confronting or contrary messages.

Figure 4 *Dialectical Listening Theory (DLT) – Three Tensions in Learning to Listen*
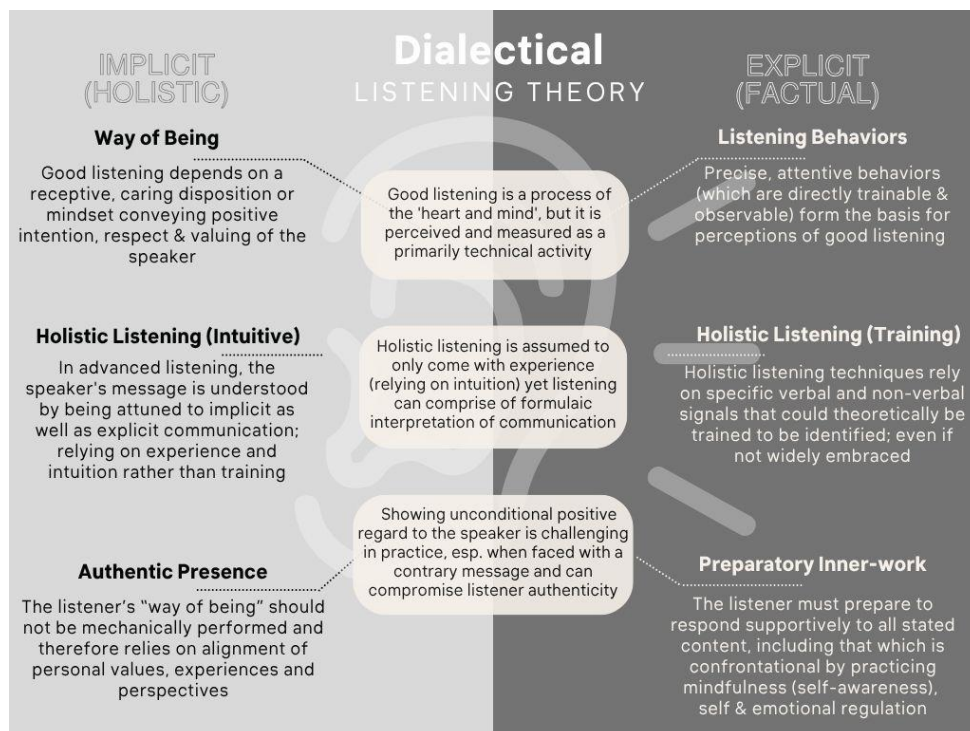
I summarise these tensions as a dialectical listening theory (DLT). At a basic level, an

excessive focus on technical performance detracts from an ideal mindset compromising the

quality of listening. Listening performance may be further challenged for listeners who fail to

intuit accurately the underlying meanings from explicit expressions, and finally, good

listening may be difficult to maintain when faced with messages that directly challenge or

conflict with our own beliefs and values. On the whole, findings support that efforts in

technical mastery can improve the listener's effectiveness but this alone is unlikely to suffice

in generating positive downstream effects from high quality relational listening.

These tensions present us with an overarching dialectic or paradox during high quality

listening; At an advanced level, implicit (or intuitive) processing of speaker communication is a key driver of listening, supporting greater authenticity on the one hand. Yet, when we stray away from explicit (or deliberate) processing of information (i.e., deeper processing of verbal cues by the listener; Burleson, 2011), our natural human tendency to convey personal biases or assumptions can impede non-judgmental listening, exacerbated when faced with conversations that conflict with one's own perspectives or values. Good listening then, may compromise listener authenticity as we actively seek to suppress our own judgments. It appears that good listening demands both implicit (intuitive) *and* explicit (deliberate) processes (Bodie & Jones, 2021), that may sit in conflict with each other at various stages of the listening process.

One dual-process model that best describes this phenomenon is Interactive Cognitive Subsystems (ICS; Barnard & Teasdale, 1991); a multi-level theory of human cognition and emotion which is considered a meta-theory of cognition because it aims to explain and incorporate many existing cognitive systems and theories (Teasdale & Barnard, 1993). ICS describes a cognitive structure comprised of sensory inputs (visual, auditory, somatic) which lead to internal subsystems - a "mind's eye" and "mind's ear" where inputs are conceptualised and stored in memory. These are then processed in two central "meaning-making" subsystems of cognition; the first - described as a *propositional* meaning-making subsystem - takes information from the external world and processes input in an "intellectual" (explicit, factual) manner – for example, a good listener makes eye contact, asks questions and nods on occasion. This system links in a back and forth manner to a second layer of cognitive processing referred to as the *implicational* meaning-making system where information is processed in a more "emotional" (implicit, holistic) manner – for example, it is here that the listener's individual reactions are processed more holistically as a schematic model; the speaker may notice that despite the listener demonstrating the right

behaviours, something feels "off". They may be mechanistically performing the behaviours but the *emotional* feeling is not resonating, compromising the listener's way of being. Indeed, the overall implicational meaning may be different than the individual components (e.g. a somatic sensation combined with a propositional meaning) from which they are contrived (Teasdale & Barnard, 1993).

Another way of thinking about these two levels of cognitive processing is that the first (propositional) is "knowing with the head" and the second (implicational) is described as "knowing with the heart" (Barnard & Teasdale, 1991, p. 21). The propositional sub-system is linked to verbal and muscular/skeletal output (i.e. what we say and do) and the second layer results in somatic and visceral emotional reactions derived from the implicit, holistic processing of information. This is where intuition is derived from and explains the phenomenon of "gut-feel", when someone has a sense or intuition about events but they are unable to explain it rationally. The presence of these two separate sub-systems of meaning-making – one propositional and the second implicational (the latter of which is argued not to be present in animals) - allows one to think or reflect while acting at the same time (Barnard et al., 2007).

When it comes to addressing the challenges or tensions summarised above, results from the analyses identified several strategies employed by listening trainers. This includes engaging in preparatory "inner-work" (or self-development) to listen well, and learning to apply psychological strategies (such as mindfulness) "in the moment" to address the challenge of withholding judgment and maintaining an authentic focus during listening. The second tension of relying on intuited or implicit processes to demonstrate holistic listening is not proactively addressed in listening training and from this dataset, appears to rely solely on gaining maturity in listening "experience". I discuss these potential resolutions further below in light of current and future academic research.

3.8.2 Managing the Tensions

To manage the first tension, technical performance versus mindset, practitioners suggest developing a ***way of being*** – an overarching mindset and approach that provides the core foundation needed for the optimal listening experience aligning with the *philosophy* of "active listening" - popularised by the humanist approach of Carl Rogers in the 1950s: that listening is only effective when the person embraces their role as a source of love and support (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Rogers' book titled "A Way of Being" (Rogers, 1980) was more broadly philosophical writing about human potential, but he also applied this term to high-quality empathic listening as part of the therapeutic process, suggesting that good listening comprises more than a set of behaviours. The tension being that good listening cannot simply be "parroted" or mechanistically performed through trained behaviours.

A wealth of research supports the view that active listening behavioural responses directly contribute towards the *perception* of listening by the speaker, for example, an automated, computer-driven social skills training (for populations diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder) based on analyses of head-nodding and back-channel responses alone predicted perceived listening skills at a correlation co-efficient over .43 (Tanaka et al., 2020). This can have downstream relational effects on speakers' trust, intimacy, and closeness (Gearhart & Bodie, 2011; Kluger et al., 2021). Yet, there is conflicting evidence relating to whether behaviour alone will suffice as good listening. Some researchers have found that viewing listening as simply mastery of skills or behaviour can be detrimental to social relationships and reduce listening motivation (Garland, 1981; Lachica et al., 2021). As a parallel, when considering the use of technology or "robots" to mirror active listening and mimic a human quality (Johansson et al., 2016), I suggest that this may be limited in the interpersonal impact on the speakers being listened to. Furthermore, we are unclear whether 'holistic listening' – discussed further below - can be (effectively) learned and expressed by

humans, let alone artificial intelligence, particularly as research into combined processing of verbal and non-verbal cues of communication is still emerging (Zhang et al., 2021).

In addressing the question, should listening training programs focus on helping people to identify and develop their "way of being" and if so, how? While some programs sometimes spontaneously target this explicitly (e.g., Kubota et al., 1997), it is worth noting that careful systematic approaches to developing listening behaviours can by proxy increase confidence and reduce anxiety of listeners (Hansen et al., 2002; Itzchakov, 2020; Nemec et al., 2017). Indeed, mastery in learning can in turn improve learner attitudes with more enduring results (Kulik et al., 1990). Briefer listening trainings have shown mixed results in improving listening attitude over and above listening ability (e.g., Behrs, 1994; Tatsumi et al., 2010), suggesting that developing a "way of being" through achieving mastery in listening behaviours might take time and advocates the implementation of more intensive, paced training programs.

The theme *training techniques* further reflected practitioners' emphasis on embracing both intention and behaviour during training with strategies that suggest *listening skills* (behaviours) are better built alongside *intention* (way of being) supporting empirical views by (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Kubota et al., 2004). While the non-scientific practitioner and layperson widely embrace the term "active listening" to describe good listening, some researchers (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Tyler, 2011) argue that use of the term has morphed to focusing on only teachable behaviours (such as paraphrasing and reflecting) rather than the original essence of active listening, which relies on empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1980). In an influential paper, (Tyler, 2011) analysed 12 business training sources sourced from the www and found that materials lacked sufficient depth to capture the true intention behind Roger's concept of active listening (Tyler, 2011). Interestingly, the frequency of codes in my analyses put the *Listening Behaviours* theme on par with the *Way of*

Being theme. With the larger set of sources here, it was possible to observe that the spirit of active listening, as well as its techniques, remains alive in practitioner recommendations today.

A second issue identified with listening training centres on the concept of ***holistic listening***. Originally proposed by (Lipetz et al., 2020), while lay people can describe how good listening looks in terms of broken-down components, listening is broadly perceived holistically. The listener's intention, way of being, and behaviour all play a role in shaping the speaker's holistic perception of feeling listened to; together they may be "greater than the sum of their parts". Through this theme, I extend the concept of holistic listening to emphasise the importance of a *listener's* ability to perceive the speaker's intended message as a whole (e.g., even if it is not explicitly communicated) through omitted information, inconsistent body language etc. and possibly before it even enters the speaker's conscious awareness. Despite the lower prevalence of holistic listening in this dataset, the findings highlighted its importance. Many of the resources analysed were limited to training outlines for basic level listening training, yet closer inspection of rejected sub-themes in the analyses (that presented with low occurrence/IRR) points to the presence of a broader range of advanced listening techniques (e.g., recognising linguistic patterns) to support holistic listening.

Holistic listening is not a new concept. For example, it is widely acknowledged in therapeutic literature (e.g., Therapeutic Metacommunication; Kiesler, 1988, Gestalt Therapy; Perls et al., 1994). Beyond linguistic patterns, holistic communication supports that listeners interpret a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues *together*, yet communication research which extends beyond linguistic processing is only just emerging - revealing a gap in our understanding in how we interpret body language and verbal communication together (Beattie et al., 2014; Trujillo & Holler, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

Holistic listening is attributed an almost magical quality by practitioners, described as intuitive – relying on a "sixth sense" – that only comes with experience. The ephemeral nature of this theme might explain why only 5% of the dataset contributed to it, revealing it is less prevalent in training materials targeted towards the layperson. It is perceived by practitioners as a challenge to teach or train novice listeners how to listen at this level and it seems that practitioners accept this level of listening is reserved for the more mature (experienced) listener (e.g., in coaching; van Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Passmore, 2011). Indeed, holistic listening is likely to be processed as an implicit cognitive process, rather than an explicit process as explained earlier through the ICS dual-process model (Barnard & Teasley, 1991). Such cognitive processing relies on previously formed heuristics, mental associations and schemas - supporting the capacity to "integrate[s] different parts of the speaker's talk into a working whole" (Bodie, 2011a, p. 279). Doing so may require the use of working memory (Janusik, 2005), synthesising information (Aotani, 2011), and making inferences (Hauser, 1984) based on verbal intonations and nuances (Nemec et al., 2017). I speculate that true holistic listening cannot be developed in a short time but must be practiced and trained alongside the development of inner-work. As an advanced level of listening, I suggest it deserves future attention by researchers in the context of relational listening.

The focus on implicit versus explicit processing at an advanced level of listening sits somewhat in contrast to previous suggestions by listening researchers, which conclude instead that advanced listening requires more considered (in-depth) processing of information, while basic levels of listening rely more on automatic (surface-level) cognitive processes (Burleson, 2011). It may be that this contrast exists because of a distinction between everyday listening such as in superficial conversations, which may happen with less conscious effort, and the effortful listening a trainee may exert when first attempting listening training. Questions of effort, deliberation, and intent, will be fascinating to explore in future

studies of listening that is deep and empathic, in contrast to listening within less personal conversations.

A third challenge was identified: In practice, it is difficult to maintain a conscious, positive intention during listening, especially when speakers' views differ from those of the listeners or conflict with their values (Adamu et al., 2022). Consequently, it may be challenging for the listener to remain authentic in their "way of being". When listening deeply and seeing the world through another's perspective, there is a risk to mental frameworks that make up "the self" which may be challenged (Rogers & Farson, 1957). This may result in automatic, unhelpful or obstructive responses by the listener, such as withdrawing from emotions, over-involvement or improper recall, to person-specific triggers - referred to as "countertransference" in the field of psychotherapy (Fauth, 2006), leading to an impeded relationship and therapeutic outcomes (Hayes et al., 2018). It was widely believed that countertransference is pathological and avoidable, however, more modern viewpoints accept it as a natural human response, one that can be managed or even leveraged to enhance understanding of the speaker (Gabbard, 2001). The question of whether such unconscious and biased responses can be managed or overcome, and how best to achieve this, is not only debated by countertransference researchers, but also by researchers in unconscious or implicit bias training to support diversity, equity and inclusion in organisations and communities (Noon, 2018; Schmader et al., 2022). One practical strategy proposed for overcoming countertransference is demonstrating good listening skills (Fauth, 2006). Yet, findings in this study suggest that being able to listen well is the result of having addressed the underlying conflicts in the first place.

This final tension is practically addressed by listening trainers in this study's review through the theme ***inner-work***. On a technical level, inner-work sub-themes in the results represent components of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005), integrated self-regulation

(Weinstein et al., 2013), and integrated emotion regulation (Roth et al., 2019). Indeed, these

are considered core components of managing countertransference (Gelso & Hayes, 2001) by

psychotherapy researchers. This is mobilised by practitioners through taking time to engage

in *preliminary internal work*; preparing to listen by reflecting on one's own emotions and

perspective, acknowledging potential obstacles such as personal biases or bad habits, and

practicing psychological strategies (e.g., clearing the mind, focusing, emotion regulation).

This preparatory work can help individuals to develop a strong internal foundation for non-

judgmental responding *prior* to engaging in listening interactions. I suggest that these

personal regulation strategies should be included in listening training programs, with

sufficient time for self-development to occur (e.g., by allowing time for self-reflection and

discussion-based, experiential learning).

Beyond this, mindfulness has also been shown to play a role in facilitating relational

listening (Goh, 2012; Manusov et al., 2020; Wachs & Cordova, 2007) and to support

listening training (Schaefer, 2018). For example, *interpersonal mindfulness* – is a relational

form of mindfulness consisting of presence, awareness of self and others, non-judgmental

acceptance, and non-reactivity (Pratscher et al., 2019). The aforementioned meta-theory of

cognition, ICS explains mindfulness as occurring within the meaning-making subsystems of

cognition. Mindfulness is considered a purposeful consideration of what a person is doing, or

what a person is experiencing emotionally (i.e. what is happening in the propositional and

implicational sub-systems) without judging or attempting to change it. Training to engage in

meta-thinking or "mindful experiencing" of emotional reactions supports the reconstruction

of mental schemas, particularly when they are disruptive or contributing towards

psychologically disordered thinking, incorporating new information from the propositional

subsystem (Teasdale & Chaskalson (Kulananda), 2011). It may be that the listener needs to

oscillate between "dual-process" states of explicit, factual and implicit, holistic thinking

modes during listening – taking time to develop self-awareness and acknowledge automatic thoughts, emotions and reactions before considering how to respond. Mindfulness may even support the listener to engage in both states of cognition concurrently (Teasdale & Chaskalson (Kulananda), 2011; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Spunt, 2013). Thus, can offer resolution to 'in the moment' challenges of good listening, helping to address the effects on listener bias (Burgess et al., 2017; Gibb et al., 2022; Kanter et al., 2020). In all, it is my suggestion that mindfulness training is important to include in listening training. While there has been research conducted on dual-process thinking for listening to persuasive (Chaiken, 1980) and supportive messages (Burleson, 2009), I also suggest that further exploring dual-processing in the context of listening to views that conflict with one's values or attitudes, and the impact on perceptions of listener authenticity, bias and self-awareness will provide important avenues for future study.

Finally, the findings in this study also point to an important consideration in assessing listening skills through observer ratings (e.g., Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017; Trahan & Rockwell, 1999). Those observations are limited to listening behaviours, but I emphasise the importance of assessments that measure actual and perceived *listening attitude,* as well as perception of listening behaviour (e.g., Bodie, 2011a; Mishima et al., 2000), particularly in the context of relational listening as a shared, social phenomenon between more than one party.

3.8.3 Future Research Informed by Dialectical Listening Theory

Together, these findings support that training people to listen well is more complex than learning a set of verbal and behavioural responses. While good listening can be demonstrated in this way (in some cases within a short space of time), listening also relies on establishing a positive and intentional mindset. At a more advanced level, processing of "holistic" communication signals from the listener need to be developed, yet formulaic

strategies to support this development could be identified and shared more readily rather than waiting for "the magic to happen" or intuition to set in. Indeed, it is often argued that intuition is not always accurate and so honing this in can benefit the trainee (e.g., Price et al., 2016). However, this would rely on research in the area of multimodal communication cues having advanced further than it currently stands (Zhang et al., 2021). Much research to date has focused on a single mode (linguistic) rather than multi-modal processing (which might include prosody, gestures and mouth movement) of communication. Questions still remain unanswered, for example, the extent to which people process information in natural conversation by relying on multi-modal cues and the dynamics of such cues (Zhang et al., 2021).

A key challenge that will benefit those learning to listen well is preparing how to maintain a facilitative and supportive mindset in the face of conflicting views or opinions shared by the speaker. Being human means having biases and opinions, and raising awareness of and managing our personal biases in the listening process is a skill that needs to be learned if people are to develop into being good listeners. This could be addressed through engaging in personal development (inner-work; e.g., learning what your biases are, how they relate to your values and how you prefer to constructively respond to those who differ from you); and by learning psychological strategies such as mindfulness and emotion regulation to apply "in the moment". While these strategies may already be employed by some practitioner listeners such as psychotherapists, this practice could be further investigated for effectiveness by any professional who aims to demonstrate high-quality listening, for example, teachers, doctors, managers and coaches.

Learning to overcome this final tension in listening has a practical utility beyond supporting practitioners to listen well. I advocate that this aspect of listening training might be ideal for supporting diversity, equity and inclusion programs, which traditionally rely on

methods such as "unconscious bias training" with questionable impact (Noon, 2018; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2020). Such listening training, which equips trainees with the skills needed to listen to opposing and diverse perspectives (e.g., Cumberland et al., 2021) without judgment and while maintaining respect, may be a suitable alternative approach to investigate in terms of achieving similar intended aims of diversity training. Indeed, listening can depolarise and foster less extreme attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). Creating comprehensive listening training or incorporating listening into diversity and inclusion interventions, could support acceptance between individuals from diverse backgrounds and enhance tolerance towards minority groups in society.

Results also hint that *courage* is needed to listen well, a quality that is recognised as important in high-conflict or polarised contexts, such as when listening to communities and oppressed social groups (e.g., Catlaw et al., 2014; Thill, 2009). The listener can face vulnerability in such situations and there is some evidence to suggest listening can reduce vulnerability (Dhaliwal & Harrower, 2009). Work already focuses on how an intentional, thoughtful listener creates an environment of psychological safety, where the speaker can express them self without fear of repercussions (Edmondson, 2004; Sapra & Kumar, 2020). Further work could also explore how the listener can listen without fear of repercussions to the self. To date, the role of psychological safety has been limited to effects on the speaker during listening (e.g., Castro et al., 2016, 2018; Fenniman, 2010; Itzchakov et al., 2023) not the listener's experience and mindset.

3.8.4 Constraints on Generality

The findings in this review should be interpreted within context and considering the limitations of the data. Researchers were based in the United Kingdom and all resources were written in English. Results are not generally representative of global practitioners or cultural differences, and we cannot make extrapolations for non-Western cultures. While there have

been a few works testing listening in non-Western cultures (e.g., Imhof & Janusik, 2006; Purdy, 2000; Wood & Alford, 2022; Zohoori, 2013) there has been little focus overall on cross-cultural differences in listening (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Future work could analyse cross-cultural training sources to address this gap in research.

3.9 Conclusion

This study employed a systematic qualitative review using thematic analysis to explore listening training as it presents in practitioner training materials. The search resulted in 207 listening protocols, and the analysis resulted in five themes: *Way of Being, Inner-Work, Listening Behaviours, Holistic Listening,* and *Training Techniques*. I critically examined themes to identify tensions or challenges in the listening training process.

Analyses addressed practical questions such as: does listening training need to target development of both attitude and behaviours? Can holistic listening be broken down into concrete strategies allowing us to fast-track training of advanced relational (implicit) listening skills? And, can inner-work (including developing courage, self-awareness, emotion-regulation) alongside learning practical skills such as "mindfulness" lead to better listening, particularly during challenging conversations? Results suggest that such self-development activities are essential in addressing the core tension of maintaining listener focus, neutrality and authenticity.

These insights could enhance listening training programs and contribute to developing listening theory. I posit a new, dialectical listening theory which highlights three main tensions in learning to listen; the overarching theme being a pull between (dual-process) states of explicit, factual and implicit, holistic thinking (Barnard & Teasdale, 1991). I suggest that the listener learns to navigate these two states in order to demonstrate effective listening and future research could examine this further (see Discussion §6.1.3).

Expanding on the original research aim, beyond training people to listen to enhance

professional performance, foster interpersonal connection and support well-being, the research could also guide tools such as fit-for-purpose listening training which aims to bridge divides across diverse groups of people to support diversity, equity and inclusion. Yet, when developing listening skills the listener must be aware of tensions in the learning process; which may directly stand in the way of high-quality listening if not resolved.

Chapter 4: The Effects of Listening while Talking About Character Strengths

4.1 Abstract

Listening is understood to be a foundational element in practices that rely on effective conversations, but there is a gap in our understanding of what the effects of high-quality listening are on both the speaker and listener. This registered report addressed this gap by training one group of participants to listen well as speakers discuss their character strengths, allowing us to isolate the role relational listening plays in strengths-based conversations. Participants were paired and randomly assigned to a high-quality listening (experimental) or moderate- quality listening (comparison) condition manipulated through a validated video-based training. High-quality listening predicted a more constructive relational experience; specifically, positivity resonance. Intrapersonal experiences (perceived authenticity and state anxiety) were not affected. Those who engaged in high-quality listening expressed a behavioural intention to continue listening, but experimental condition did not predict a behavioural intention for speakers to continue applying character strengths. This is the first evidence of positivity resonance as a shared outcome between both a speaker and listener when the listener conveys high-quality (as opposed to "everyday") listening. These early findings merit further study with stronger listening manipulations to explore the potential role of listening within interpersonal communication, and inform the applied psychological sciences (counselling, psychotherapy, coaching, organisational, education).

4.2 Introduction

A growing literature suggests that listening well can support a deep connection and sense of well-being within speakers as they share important thoughts, emotions, and experiences with their conversation partners, though less is known about the impact on the listeners themselves (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Rogers & Dorfman, 1973). This pre-registered study explored whether the quality of listening can enhance both speakers' and listeners' experiences as they discuss a topic selected to stimulate personal and consequential real-life conversations: their character strengths. Identifying and then using one's character strengths – understood as "positive traits/capacities that are personally fulfilling, do not diminish others, [and are] ubiquitous and valued across cultures" (Niemiec, 2018), increases well-being and buffers the negative impact of stress and psychopathology (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). "Strengths spotting" (Linley, 2008), an active and constructive acknowledgment (Gable et al., 2004) of strengths by others is seen as one key factor among others in strengths-based interventions (Quinlan et al., 2019). No research of which I am aware has examined whether the benefits of these conversations are attained as a direct function of the relational climate in which they take place, in this case, relational listening.

To fill this gap, this study tested the notion that high-quality listeners can aid speakers as they think about and discuss their strengths and that the listeners can also benefit from such conversations. Building on a foundation of listening effects (Mukherjee, 2012; Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018) I extend this work in two ways. First, though research is accumulating about the potential benefits of listening, little evidence has emerged from experimental tests of listening, and fewer studies yet combine experimental methods with naturalistic conversations between individuals. Second, more of this work is needed to understand how the speaker, and the listener, are both impacted by their conversations. The proposed project sets out to test this paradigm using a study design and data-collection

approach that involves a school-wide collaboration with academic supervisors and their students, placing the theoretical contribution on equal ground with the pedagogical benefits of testing it as a multi-lab (i.e., supervisors and their students) collaboration.

4.2.1 Listening in Conversations

High-quality listening matters within many of life's relationships. It is the bedrock of constructive psychotherapy (Hedges, 1992; Rogers & Farson, 1957), effective coaching (Woodcock, 2010), thoughtful parenting (Duncan et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2021), engaging management (Lloyd, et al., 2015a), and effective education and supervision (Jalongo, 1995; Prasetia et al., 2022). Across these interpersonal contexts, listening can be understood as a complex construct comprising three dimensions that are conveyed by the listener to the speaker (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). First, listeners convey their careful attention to what is said by using non-verbal behaviours such as maintaining appropriate eye contact (Bavelas et al., 2002), body posture, and facial expressions that convey openness (Bavelas et al., 2000), and head-nodding (Duncan, 1972). Second, listeners convey their comprehension of what is said, for example by using verbal behaviours that indicate to the speakers that the listeners understand them. These behaviours include asking open questions (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018) and summarising the speakers' content (i.e., paraphrasing; Nemec et al., 2017). The third component, positive intention, refers to behaviours that convey to the speakers that their listeners are caring, non-judgmental, and want to help. Positive intention can be conveyed through the tone of the listener (Itzchakov et al., 2022a), by using "soft" hedging phrases such as "perhaps" or "might" (Yeomans et al., 2020), and by providing validation e.g., "thank you for sharing this with me" (Rogers, 1980). While people tend to understand these complexities of listening, they also perceive listening in a holistic way (Lipetz et al., 2020).

A common misperception is that listeners play a passive role in the conversation, and

it is the speakers who shape the tone of the conversation (Bavelas et al., 2000; Zimmermann, 1996). On the contrary, various studies that manipulated listening quality found that listeners' behaviour impacts speakers' emotions, cognitions, and behaviours. For example, listening quality relates to greater speech fluency (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005), better memory of the conversation (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2010), greater attitude clarity (Itzchakov et al., 2018a), more helping behaviours (Kluger et al., 2021), and more empowerment (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012) among other potential benefits (for a detailed review on the effects of listening see (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Yip & Fisher, 2022).

4.2.2 Benefits of Listening on the Listener

Although the brunt of this work has focused on the benefits of listening for the speaker, there is reason to expect that listening affects the listener alongside those effects experienced by the speaker. For example, professions such as management, teaching, and particularly coaching and counselling place emphasis on listening in facilitating desired practitioner outcomes (Jonsdottir & Kristinsson, 2020; Kourmousi et al., 2018; Passmore, 2011; Rogers & Farson, 1957). While it is understood that high-quality listening plays a key role in forming a relationship between a practitioner and speaker (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010), it is less well understood how the listener experiences high-quality listening and exactly how listening facilitates outcomes. For example, taking coaching and counselling where listening is foundational to practice, it has been found that the effects on the listener can be both transformational and detrimental (Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018). For the coach practitioner, one case study findings revealed that performing coaching improved listening ability, as well as interpersonal skills, self-regulation (calmer and more focused as a result of better listening), confidence, sense of achievement, broadened perspective, and work-life balance (Mukherjee, 2012). On the contrary, another study revealed the detrimental effects on counsellors from listening to stories about trauma and explored mental and

practical strategies that could mitigate these negative outcomes (Roberts et al., 2018).

4.2.3 Mechanisms for Listening Effects on Well-being

In recent conceptual papers, researchers posit that conversations with high-quality listening hold benefits because they promote positive interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences during the conversation itself, which can carry weight with conversation partners (Itzchakov et al., 2022a). I review three specific benefits that will be the focus of this work below, which can help us to understand the reactions of both speakers and listeners in a high-quality listening context: authenticity, positivity resonance, and anxiety.

First, building on the episodic listening theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), a conceptual approach that highlights the importance of high-quality listening for promoting speakers' authenticity, I test the extent to which feeling authenticity is critical for the positive outcomes that speakers gain from being listened to. According to episodic listening theory, listening can even catalyse shared authenticity between conversation partners – the speaker's authenticity supports the listener in an upward cycle.

Though authenticity is believed to be an important outcome of listening in the episodic listening theory, this has not been empirically tested. Authenticity is a concept difficult to define (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019), and it is unclear whether there is actually a "true self" (Strohminger et al., 2017). Yet the dominant definition describes that authenticity reflects a congruence between one's internal experience, awareness of that experience, and self-expression (Barrett-Lennard, 1998). This aligns with the concept of authenticity that is also described within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which proposes that individuals who behave according to autonomous, intrinsic motivations feel themselves to be authentic. Importantly, in previous research, such conceptions of authenticity relate to downstream well-being (Al-Khouja et al., 2022; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019).

Indirect evidence supporting the link between listening and authenticity comes from work on autonomy need satisfaction, operationally tested in terms of feeling free to express oneself genuinely, and feeling that one can be "who they are", among other, similar experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In previous research across several conversation types, speakers who received high-quality listening have reported greater autonomy need satisfaction than speakers who experienced moderate-quality listening (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Weinstein et al., 2022).

Whereas authenticity may be a critical understudied *intrapersonal* outcome of listening, positivity resonance is an *interpersonal* outcome of listening that has received little attention in this context. *Positivity resonance* refers to a momentary interpersonal connection that is evoked between individuals (Fredrickson, 2016) when individuals have an interpersonal connection characterised by shared positive affect, mutual care and concern, and behavioural and biological synchrony (Fredrickson, 2013, 2016). As with authenticity, there has been little attention on the effect of listening on positivity resonance with the exception of (Itzchakov et al., 2024b). Supporting evidence comes from work that high-quality listening increases speakers' sense of relatedness (Itzchakov et al., 2022c), defined as a sense of closeness to others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Relevant to the listener, case studies in coaching and counselling described earlier support that those who engage in high-quality listening emotionally resonate with speakers. In non-clinical engagements such as coaching, they may be more likely to co-experience positive emotions. Indeed, co-experienced emotional experiences, particularly positive ones, have been found to support the perception of high-quality relationships and are consistent with the theory of positivity resonance (Brown et al., 2022; Fredrickson, 2016), lending support to the idea that high-quality listening can facilitate a co-experienced emotional state that breeds intimacy.

Though there is reason to believe relational qualities of authenticity and positivity

resonance drive downstream benefits, it may instead be that listening benefits are simply due to reduced anxiety because listeners create a relaxed and non-judgmental space in which to share ideas. This idea is not new. Carl Rogers, one of the noted fathers of modern psychology, theorised that when speakers feel listened to in a non-judgmental manner they become more relaxed and free from evaluative concerns (Rogers, 1959). In this work, I will define such *state anxiety* as temporary distress or physiological arousal in response to the potential for undesirable consequences (Lu et al., 2018; Spielberger, 1966). State anxiety can also arise when people perceive a discrepancy between the reactions of others and the standard people set for themselves (Leary, 1983). For example, a person may want to convey an image of an intelligent person in front of another person and is worried that that they will say something that might make them appear foolish. There is mounting evidence that speakers who experience high-quality listening feel less anxiety than those who experience lower listening levels (Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2018a; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017) , but this affective mechanism has never been tested alongside interpersonal or self-based approaches. Furthermore, in relation to the listener, applied literatures describe the experience of "critical moments" in the coaching interaction (de Haan, 2019) or "moments of meeting" in the therapeutic relationship (Stern, 2004), described as shared intense emotional experiences. These shared moments can be productive if approached in a certain way or alternatively, they can lead to anxiety and the need for strategies to resolve difficult feelings felt by the listener (Day et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2018). To bridge these areas, the current study is planned to directly measure and compare the proximal downstream effects of these conversation-level outcomes of listening in the context of a conversation about character strengths.

4.2.4 Listening to Character Strengths

There are various conceptualisations of "strengths" (e.g., Linley, 2008; Peterson &

Seligman, 2004; Rath, 2007; overview, Niemiec & Pearce, 2021), ranging from the qualities

that we have become skilled and experienced in, to virtuous, positive aspects of personality.

For this study, I have chosen to focus on the latter, aligning with character strengths (Peterson

& Seligman, 2004); positive attributes that can be used to engage in life and work towards

desired end goals (Linley et al., 2010b). Character strengths have been extensively researched

in the last decade in the context of well-being (Proyer et al., 2013a; Proyer et al., 2013b) and

as buffers for the detrimental effects of psychopathology (Rashid, 2015) and adverse

situations (Niemiec, 2020; Rashid & McGrath, 2020). Some literature distinguishes between

having an *awareness* of strengths and *using* one's strengths (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021; Quinlan

et al., 2019). Meta-analytic findings link identifying and then using one's character strengths

(i.e., through strengths-based interventions) to happiness, decreased depression and life

satisfaction (Schutte & Malouff, 2019), and reduced stress (Bos et al., 2016; Waters, 2015).

However, alongside this, recent findings reveal that awareness alone (of one's self-perceived

strengths), without applying the strengths, is sufficient to generate positive outcomes

including optimism, reduced stress, and less negative well-being in the anxiety-producing

context of taking examinations (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021). Yet, it is those with higher baseline

levels of self-esteem and positive affect that reported the greatest benefits after writing down

their strengths, suggesting the presence of moderators to this effect (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021).

Other studies have suggested that relational experiences may shape the outcomes of talking

about strengths (Quinlan et al., 2019; Quinlan et al., 2015) and I aimed to isolate the

relational aspects from the character strengths in this study.

Building on previous work suggesting that identifying one's strengths relates to

greater motivation and intention to leverage one's strengths for self-improvement and goal

success (Quinlan et al., 2012), I also sought to determine whether the positive outcomes of

high-quality listening would result in a downstream benefit, that is an intention to continue

what was experienced during the conversation (exploring character strengths, or continuing high quality listening). Indeed, studies on behavioural intention support that positive experiences can lead to increased satisfaction, resulting in behavioural intention to repeat the experience (e.g., Nasermoadeli et al., 2013; Piramanayagam et al., 2020). Building on this work I believe that the intrapersonally and interpersonally rewarding climate created by high-quality listening would shape intention to continue engaging in the activity for the listener (listening) and for the speaker (applying character strengths).

4.3 Present Study Aims

4.3.1 Theoretical Aims of the Project

Figure 5 *(Study 2) Listening Effects on Speaker and Listener*
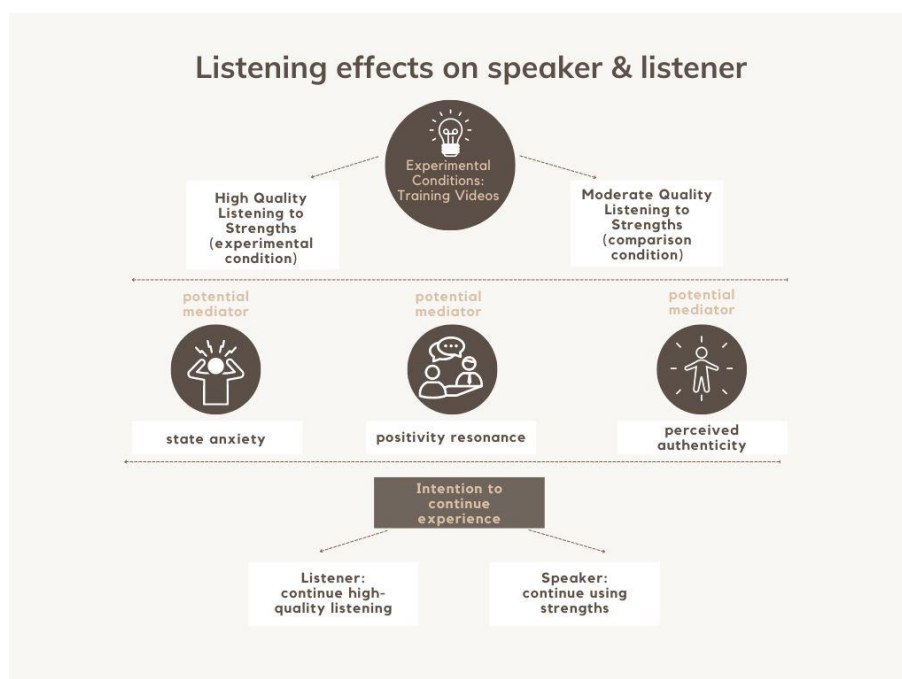
The project had an overarching theoretical aim: To build our understanding of the outcomes of *high-quality listening* during a positive conversation about character strengths. Further, at the time of writing, there were no studies that empirically isolate the effects of high-quality listening on the listener, and few that attempt to understand why both listeners and speakers may benefit from their conversations. This research explores the specific

outcomes of listening to strengths that may apply to both speakers and listeners in a high-quality listening conversation. As an added dimension, a positive benefit from the effects of high-quality listening was expected - a behavioural intention to continue the experience. Hypotheses (below) relate to the proposed conceptual model depicted in Figure 5. This study set out to test three directional hypotheses (*H*):

H_1) Both *speakers* and *listeners* who participate in a high-quality listening conversation about character strengths would report more positive interpersonal and intrapersonal conversation experiences (positivity resonance, authenticity, lower state anxiety) than when in the control condition where I anticipate, moderate-quality listening will take place.

H_{2a}) *Speakers* who participate in a high-quality listening conversation about character strengths would report a greater intention to use their character strengths following the conversations.

H_{2b}) *Listeners* who participate in a high-quality listening conversation about character strengths would report a greater intention to continue engaging in high-quality listening.

H_{3a}) For *speakers*, the effects of condition on intention to use strengths following the conversations would be mediated by positivity resonance, authenticity, and lower anxiety.

H_{3b}) For *listeners*, the effects of condition on the intention to continue high-quality listening following the conversations would be mediated by positivity resonance, authenticity, and lower state anxiety.

4.3.2 Methodological Aims of the Project

Alongside the conceptual aims, I also pursued a methodological advance to build on the existing listening literature. Within the listening research, the state-of-the-art involves

staging live conversations, ideally paired with an experimental manipulation for drawing causal conclusions. This pairing is easier said than done, but two primary approaches have been attempted in past experiments. The first involves distracting listeners, for example, by placing flickering computer screens behind the speaker (Castro et al., 2018; Itzchakov et al., 2018a) or instructing listeners to complete a cognitive task that disrupts their ability to concentrate (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005; Weeks & Pasupathi, 2011). A second approach is to rely on trained confederates (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2022a). Both approaches have their limitations. The distinction between regular and high-quality listening is important in determining the presence of psychological factors that are not detectable in low-quality or moderate listening conditions (Castro et al., 2018). Manipulating listening by distracting listeners does not enable testing better-than-average or high-quality listening, and it might simultaneously manipulate rudeness (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Manipulating listening using trained confederates addresses these problems. However, such experiments are lengthy and expensive, they are not "natural" conversations and are vulnerable to researcher bias. In the present study, I manipulated listening through the use of training videos (see Appendix B), which were viewed by participants assigned to the role of listener only, paired in dyads with a speaker who watched a neutral video. This approach involves an experimental manipulation preceding conversations that unfold naturally between paired participants. It therefore benefits from relatively high internal and external validity.

4.3.3 Pedagogical Aims of the Project

The project had a tertiary aim: To undertake a collegial collaboration across an academic department that promotes new working relationships among teaching staff, educates and engages students in the value of Open Science, and leverages the benefits of cross-disciplinary collaboration in advancing research (see Appendix B).

4.4 Method

4.4.1 Ethical Approval

The research complies with British Psychological Society ethical guidance and has been approved by the School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences Ethical Review Board at the University of Reading. Participants were issued with information about the study aims, procedure, commitments required of them, and data management plan upon invitation. Participants provided written consent and verbal assent prior to engagement in research activities and were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Participants were also offered an opportunity to debrief following completion. As the topic of conversation is generally positive in nature, there was no expectation of any adverse effects from participating in the study.

4.4.2 Open Research Practice

Raw data, materials, and time-stamped pre-registration were made available for download on the Open Science Framework following Stage One peer review but before starting data collection to comply with best practice. For study scales, and for information on the design, analysis and data incorporated recommendations made by reviewers in the first stage, please refer to the registered report on the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/kdvx5.

4.5 Participants

4.5.1 Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited by student researchers through snowballing procedures and by using the participant pool at the academic institution. Participants were 18 years and older, spoke English at a conversational level, and could hear speech and sound to ensure consistency in the interpretation of listening signals. Outside of this requirement, there were no other exclusion or inclusion criteria. Demographic data on participant ethnicity was collected, nationality, and whether participants spoke English as their home language to

explore whether notions of high-quality listening differ across cultures, and whether

"matched" pairings differ from "mixed" pairings in participant characteristics such as gender,

age, and ethnicity. Participants were required to have access to suitable video-conferencing

facilities; where they did not have access to this, they were offered a physical space to engage

in the interaction. Participants were included in a raffle to win one of three £300 prizes and

undergraduate students received course credits for participating.

4.5.2 Sample Sizes

Through the school collaboration, all potential collaborators and any of their student

researchers who were interested in participating were invited. Therefore, I could not

confidently estimate the final sample size for the registered report. Furthermore, considering

the novelty of the dependent variables in relation to listening effects, I could not rely on

existing benchmarks for a-priori power analyses. Based on the number of invited

collaborators, a sample size of approximately 220 dyads (the higher-order unit of analysis)

was anticipated. Sensitivity analyses indicated that the minimum effect size that could be

observed with an 80% power, for the proposed sample size ($N = 220$) was $d = 0.38$, but I

planned to report the adjusted observable effect size at 80% power following data collection.

The plan was to explore the main effect of condition (confirmatory) and whether this effect

differed as a function of role (listener vs. speaker; not hypothesised). The estimated sample

size ($N = 220$) had a power of 80% to detect the often-used benchmark of $d = 0.50$ in a one-

tailed test. A one-tailed test has been argued to be convincing when combined with

preregistration and a-priori directional hypotheses (Hales et al., 2019; Kathawalla et al.,

2021), as in the case of the present research.

The attained sample ($N = 606$) was 303 dyads in total, 606 participants. Sensitivity

analysis indicated that the smallest effect size that this sample can detect with an 80% power,

one-tailed test is $d = 0.20$ (Faul et al., 2007). The intraclass correlation coefficients of the

positivity resonance, authenticity and state anxiety dependent variables were 0.00, 0.41, and 0.02, respectively which is below the 0.45 threshold for a consequential non-independence (Kenny et al., 2020).

The high-quality listening condition consisted of 70% female, 29% male, and 1% another gender (including non-binary). Participants identified as British (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish; 52%) and any other white background (6% including 1% Irish). Other ethnic groups represented included Arab (5%), Asian or Asian British (15%), Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (9%), and mixed or multiple ethnical groups (6%).

The moderate-quality listening condition consisted of 71% female, 28% male, and 1% another gender (including trans-woman). Participants identified as British (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish; 54%) and any other white background (5% including 1% Irish). Other ethnic groups represented included Arab (4%), Asian or Asian British (20%), Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (6%) and mixed or multiple ethnic groups (7%).

In terms of disabilities, 2% of participants in both conditions reported issues with vision, and 1% with hearing (upon examining the data further all were in the role of speaker). As for learning disabilities, 2% of the high-quality listening condition, and 5% of the moderate-quality listening condition presented with difficulties including dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and recovering from a concussion. In each condition, 5% of participants reported social or behavioural disabilities. Four participants (0.6% per condition) could not speak English very well (also in the role of speaker).

4.5.3 Exclusion Criteria

Dyads were excluded from analyses if they i) Talked about the manipulation itself, and/or ii) Engaged in unrelated conversation in more than 30% of the chat (two minutes). The latter was done to ensure there was at least four minutes of listening relevant conversation to evaluate to ensure that the majority of the conversation had been on the topic of focus. These

two qualities were determined by student researchers collating the conversation videos. I also added an attention check item to the surveys completed after the conversation; "please mark 5 for this question" and excluded any responses that failed this attention check.

4.6 Research Design and Procedure

This study used a randomised 2x2 between-participant experimental design crossing listening quality (high vs. moderate) and role (speaker vs. listener). Those in the role of "listener" were trained in listening by watching a short training video; receiving high-quality listening training or moderate-quality listening training as a comparison. During this time, all those in the role of "speaker" watched a neutral nature video of the same length (refer to Figure 6).

4.6.1 Procedure

The procedure described in the registered report was followed. Following a briefing and consent process including consent to video-record the conversation, participants were paired with a conversation partner with whom they were not familiar. Each individual within the dyad was randomly assigned to one of two listening training conditions (high-quality listening training or moderate-quality listening training - comparison condition), and one of two roles (listener; speaker).

Student researchers introduced the pairs to one another and coordinated the listening interaction. Participants met via video-conferencing using Microsoft Teams using the university's secure IT infrastructure (allowing flexibility for restrictions due to social distancing needs). Sessions were video recorded using Microsoft Stream so that interactions could be coded by student researchers (see more on this below). To maximise interaction quality via video-conferencing, guidance was provided on camera positioning (e.g., having shoulders and arms visible, the camera aligned with the screen so that eye contact is level and maintained) and lighting, as well as setting up the interaction in a private space where there

are unlikely to be interruptions or distractions to ensure optimal conditions for virtual

communication (see: https://youtu.be/5eQWag1lkR8). Participants were discouraged from

using smartphones for video-conferencing due to limited screen size and quality of video

interaction. Where participants did not have access to video-conferencing facilities or where

supervisors preferred it, a lab was available on the university campus where in-person

interactions could take place and be video-recorded.

Figure 6 *(Study 2) Experimental versus Comparison Conditions*
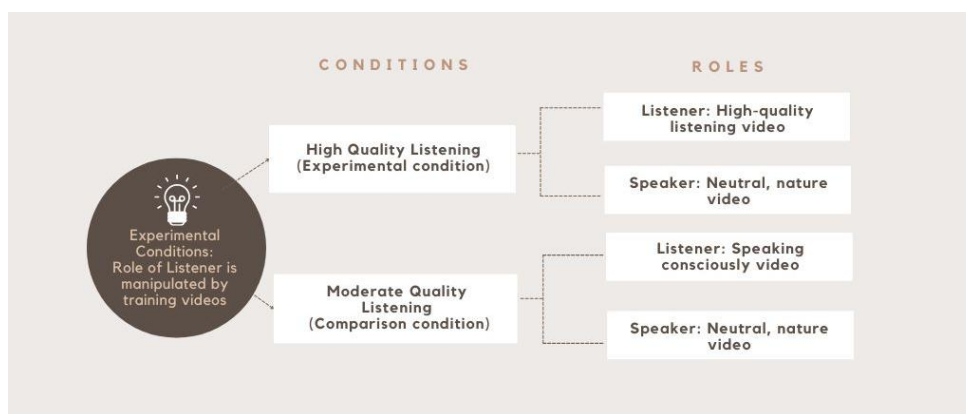
The listening manipulation, shown only to participants in the role of "listener", was

delivered through a validated set of stimuli: i) a training video describing high-quality

listening, or ii) a comparison condition video intended to invoke moderate-quality listening

by encouraging the participant to focus on "conscious speaking" (see Appendix B for full

details of videos). Participants in the role of "speaker" watched a neutral unrelated film for

the same period of time. These videos are described in more detail below under §4.7.1.

Participants were then guided by student researchers to engage in a short conversation

about character strengths for six minutes. This time was selected based on previous

experiments with trained researchers lasting eight to ten minutes that balanced time to discuss

and listen well with the ability of participants to maintain a natural flow of conversation in

this lab paradigm (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2022b). In this study, the

conversation was shortened because the current study's listeners were not trained to extend

the conversation deliberately as in previous experiments. Thus, this timing allowed sufficient time for participants to engage in an active and aware manner, but not so much time that the flow of conversation was exhausted. Conversation instructions, as well as the training videos, made it clear that silence was acceptable and encouraged in order to reduce the likelihood of feelings of awkwardness during the listening interactions.

4.6.2 Discussing Strengths

Scripts were adapted from the study on strengths awareness (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021) as the script has been found to successfully manipulate a strengths condition in comparison to a weakness and neutral conditions. I adapted the description of strengths to align with the definition of VIA character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and for a speaking rather than writing, exercise:

> We are interested in gaining insight into your personal character strengths. In other words, we would like to understand what virtuous characteristics you feel most energised by and that feel most authentic to who you are. Refer to the VIA character strengths information sheet for a list of character strengths (see attachments). Think back over the past week and talk about your personal character strengths, relating them to experiences that you had during the past week. Be as specific and detailed as you can when you describe the experiences in which your strengths manifested. There is no correct answer to this question, and you are not being assessed on your speech in any way. Feel free to speak whatever comes to mind, and know that it is normal and acceptable to have periods of silence to allow time for thinking while you express yourself. (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021).

Participants completed the follow-up scales described below immediately following the interaction. Student researchers had the option to further assess listening quality by rating

behavioural observations or analysing transcripts from the video recordings.

4.7 Materials

4.7.1 Listening Training

Training for participants in the role of listener consisted of a set of two short expert training videos of approximately 13 minutes in length (see Appendix B for scripts). The moderate-quality listening training comparison condition mirrored the same format and content structure as the high-quality listening training condition to reduce possible confounding effects, training listener participants to speak consciously rather than focus on high-quality listening. Participants in the role of speaker viewed a nature documentary of a comparable length, selected to be neutral to interpersonal contexts.

Training videos were created and validated as part of ongoing research into listening, specifically listening training (Moin et al., 2024c – Chapter 3). Research into the central themes of practitioner listening training informed the content of the high-quality listening condition training videos, which had an academic and professional tone including suggestions on how to listen well from listening experts (see Appendix B for further details of listening video development and validation).

4.7.2 Measures

4.7.2.1 Overall approach to study scales. A scale ranging from *1 (not at all)* to *7 (extremely)* was applied for consistency across the questionnaires unless an alternative is indicated in the scale description below, and because 7-point Likert-type scales have been shown to provide higher internal consistency and test-retest reliability than scales with fewer points (Finstad, 2010). Where possible, I opted for brief versions of the scale to respect participants' time. I tested for internal reliability for all questionnaires with three or more items to establish internal reliability of $\alpha \geq 0.70$. I then averaged all items on a scale after reversing items as appropriate. All scales met the threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (see Table 4).

Therefore, I did not need to implement the pre-planned strategy outlined in part one of the registered report of excluding the lowest-loading items one by one until the threshold was achieved. Where relevant, items were phrased accordingly to align with either the speaker or listener in the dyad.

4.7.2.2 Listening quality (manipulation check). I sought to establish a high-quality listening experimental condition. The Facilitating Listening Scale (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017) measures perceptions, and attributions of consequences of listening behaviours by a conversation partner as perceived by a speaker. Items have been developed from existing measures and theories on listening resulting in nine factors and scales. Only the Constructive-Listening Behaviour subscale was used consisting of 10 items (previous α consistently exceeded .90; Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017) to measure the perception of high-quality listening by the speaker on a continuum from poor to high-quality. For this scale, an 11-point Likert-type scale was applied as suggested by the authors to reduce the effects of scale coarseness (Aguinis et al., 2009). Items include "pays close attention to what I say" and "gives me time and space to talk". I adapted the scale so that listeners could also self-report on their own quality of listening, (speaker α = .87; listener α = .81).

4.7.2.3 Positivity resonance. The seven-item Episode-Level Positivity Resonance Scale (Major, et al., 2018) was used to measure facets of positivity resonance (shared positivity, mutual care and concern, behavioural and biological synchrony) that occurred during the interaction (previous α = 0.96 - 0.97). Example questions are, "Did you experience a mutual sense of warmth and concern toward the listener?", "Did thoughts and feelings flow with ease between you and the conversation partner?" and, "Did you feel in sync with the conversation partner"? The following stem was applied: "Considering only the time during this episode when you were interacting with your conversation partner, for what proportion of the time. . ." Items were answered on a scale from 0 to 100, (speaker α = .93; listener α =

.93).

4.7.2.4 (Perceived) authentic expression. The Authentic and Inauthentic Expression Scale (Al-Khouja et al., 2022) measures two aspects of self-expression; authentic and inauthentic with four items each (previous α authentic subscale = .96 and α inauthentic subscale = .92). In the current study, I only used the authentic expression scale, an approach the authors recommend to take when more suitable for the study. Items included "I express my real thoughts and feelings to others" (speaker α = .87; listener α = .91).

4.7.2.5 State anxiety. I used an adapted version of the Short Version of the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAIS-5; Zsido et al., 2020), which has shown high reliability, α = .91, and high correlations with the original scales and other well-established comparable measures. Authors excluded reverse-scored items from the original Spielberger scale (Spielberger et al., 1983) to improve reliability, internal consistency, and validity, then applied Item Response Theory analyses to reduce the number of items per scale according to the optimal threshold (α > .17) for discrimination ability. While a total of nine items met the threshold, the STAIS-5 consists of the five highest-scoring items. Not all items are relevant for this context (e.g., frightened, upset, confused); I therefore retained two (nervous, jittery) and selected three alternative items from the original nine that met the threshold that would be sensitive to the aspects of anxiety experienced during a brief conversation about a neutral to positive topic (tense, strained, and worried), (speaker α = .90; listener α = .90).

4.7.2.6 Positive and negative experience. (SPANE, hereafter referred to as positive affect; Diener et al., 2010) has twelve items, with six items focusing on positive affect and six focusing on negative affect, rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from very rarely or never to very often or always. Positive and negative affect scales are scored separately, then negative affect is subtracted from positive affect for a relative score. Psychometric statistics for the

scale have previously shown acceptable internal consistency (α = .87 and temporal stability = .62). The SPANE correlates strongly with PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) as well as other similar, short measures of affect (Diener et al., 2010), (positive affect speaker α = .87, listener α = .87; negative affect speaker α = .80, listener α = .84).

4.7.2.7 Behavioural intention measures. I adapted items from (McGarrity & Huebner, 2014) to measure the likelihood of participants to either use their strengths (for speakers; α = .89) or continue engaging in listening (for listeners; α = .81). Behavioural intention (e.g., *"I intend to…"*) and self-prediction (*"How likely is it that you will…"*) items have been shown to relate to subsequent behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001). I adopted both self-prediction and behavioural intention items, as self-prediction items take into account constraints to performing behaviours and employed a subjective probability scale from *1 - (not at all likely)* to *7 - (extremely likely)* as this has been shown to be more suitable than forced-choice measures for behavioural intention (Flannelly et al., 2000). Items were as follows:

1. Intention to use strengths (speakers):
   a. **"**Now that you have discussed your character strengths, how likely is it that you will use and apply your character strengths?"
   b. "I intend to use and apply my character strengths that I spoke about today, as I engage in life and work activities in the future."

2. Intention to continue practicing listening (listeners):
   a. "Now that you have practiced being a listener, how likely is it that you will continue practicing the listening skills you applied in today's interaction?"
   b. "I intend to continue listening in the way I have today when I am engaging with people in future conversations."

4.7.2.8 Listening observer ratings. To triangulate measures of listening quality by

participants, I included an observational measure of listening quality which was intended to be undertaken by student researchers as they played back a recording of the video conversation. Due to time restrictions associated with the end of the academic term, I was unable to resolve reliability issues in the initial video coding. Following editor recommendations from the Royal Society Open Science journal who published the registered report, the 120 videos retained from the students were recoded with two new and trained coders to allow calculation of an independent observer's score as originally planned. Mirroring the method of listening observations ratings in (Graybill, 1986), recordings of the last four minutes of the interaction were reviewed – where high-quality listening was expected to take place – and high-quality listening behaviours rated. The new coding team rated the videos in blocks of 30-second clips. As indicated in stage one of the registered report, a portion of videos were double-coded so that inter-rater reliability (IRR) could be calculated between coders, aiming for a minimum of 0.4 - moderate agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). When reliability fell below 0.61 – substantial agreement, coders discussed discrepancies and revisited ratings to ensure that the rating scale had been interpreted consistently. As I was exploring the full range of high-quality listening behaviours, coders rated more than just active listening statements as was done by (Graybill, 1986) and covered the three core components of good listening (body language, verbal behaviours, and positive intentions) as outlined earlier in the introduction. Behavioural indicators are outlined below and were included in an observation score sheet.

1) Body Language:
- Maintains appropriate eye contact with the speaker (without staring)
- Posture is open and either leaning in or facing towards the speaker
- Facial expression is neutral or positive, and conveys openness
- Head nodding

2) Verbal Behaviours:
- Summarises the speaker's content (e.g., paraphrasing or in speaker's

words)

- ▪ Asks open-ended questions to clarify understanding or show interest
- ▪ Uses verbal cues (e.g., "uh huh" or "mmm" etc.)
- ▪ Positive or neutral tone of voice

3) Positive Intentions:

- ▪ Offers validation (e.g., "Thank you for sharing" or "That sounds interesting")
- ▪ Uses soft hedging phrases such as "perhaps" or "might"
- ▪ Allows silence, time and space for speaker to express themselves fully (e.g., doesn't speak over them or fill in silences when the speaker is obviously thinking)

Since body language could not be rated by frequency, coders allocated one point per indicator per 30-second block but deducted the point if any of these were violated per 30-second block (e.g., listener looks away for a noticeable period of time - 0 points for the 30-second block, or adopts a judgmental tone of voice in one of their responses - 0 points for the 30-second block, nods head 3 or 4 times in the 30-second block - 1 point for the 30-second block, facial expression remains neutral or positive across the 30-second block, 1 point). The remaining verbal behaviours and positive intention behaviours were rated by frequency of occurrence per 30-second block. Scores for each section were summed such that the higher the overall score, the better the listening quality.

4.8 Analysis Strategy

The following recaps the planned analysis steps as stipulated in stage one of the registered report.

4.8.1 Preliminary Tests

4.8.1.1 Collinearity. Feedback from reviewers in the first stage of the registered report raised a point that the three dependent variables of listening (state anxiety, positivity resonance, and authenticity) could be correlated at least modestly (Barber et al., 2021). Therefore, I planned to empirically distinguish between the three variables before performing

analyses by measuring the scale score correlations and comparing point estimates against a

cut-off of $r = .70$ (a level judged as sufficient for this study based on a plausible conceptual

distinction between the variables; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). Where correlations exceed $r = .70$

between two or more of the variables, I would accept that they are not empirically

distinguishable, and planned to average the scores and treat them as reflecting one multi-

faceted construct.

4.8.1.2 Manipulation checks were planned to determine listening quality as the

independent variable across conditions. These included triangulated measures of listening

quality; including a self-report by the listener, speaker-report and independent observer

evaluations. For *speakers*, a manipulation check would involve a between-subjects analysis

of variance (ANOVA) predicting perceived listening from the high-quality listening versus

moderate-quality listening comparison condition contrast. For *listeners,* the high-quality

listening versus comparison condition would predict the perception of their own listening. A

final test would predict listening behaviours as recorded by independent observers from these

two conditions. No covariates were defined for these models. I anticipated the manipulation

would be entirely successful in effecting listening providing that all three models showed

significant condition effects at $p < .05$. Along with statistical significance, I planned to report

effect sizes and their confidence intervals. The manipulation would be interpreted to be

partially successful if the condition effects any, but not all, of the outcomes at $p < .05$.

4.8.1.3 Hypothesis 1 was planned to be tested with a MANOVA predicting

simultaneously the three immediate, conversation-specific outcomes of authenticity,

positivity resonance, and anxiety from a 2 (between-subjects: condition: high-quality

listening vs. comparison condition) X 2 (between-subjects: role: listener vs. speaker). To

evaluate all possibilities, I planned to test but did not anticipate, a two-way interaction effect

because I expected that speakers and listeners would benefit similarly in terms of their

authenticity, positivity resonance, and anxiety when the listener engages in high-quality listening. In short, H_1 was tested through the main effect of condition across roles. If a statistically significant condition main effect was observed at $p < .05$, I planned to interpret H_1 as being partially supported; if I observed condition main effects on all three outcomes, I planned to interpret H_1 as being fully supported. Despite the focus on main effects, if I did find an unexpected two-way interaction at a statistical significance of $p < .05$, I planned to test simple slopes for listener and speaker, separately, for the outcome that showed the interaction effect.

4.8.1.4 Hypothesis 2a was planned to be tested with a between-subjects ANOVA similar to that used to test H_1 but including only speakers. For speakers only, the condition would predict the intention to use strengths as an outcome. If I observed a statistically significant effect of condition at $p < .05$, I would interpret H_{2a} as being supported.

4.8.1.5 Hypothesis 2b would be tested with a between-subjects ANOVA to align with H_1 but include only listeners. For listeners only, the condition would predict the intention to continue listening well as an outcome. If a statistically significant effect of condition at $p < .05$ was observed, I would interpret H_{2b} as being supported.

4.8.1.6 Hypothesis 3a would be tested with Model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) using 5000 bootstrapped samples. For *speakers* only, defining condition as a predictor, the three mediators (authenticity, positivity resonance, anxiety) simultaneously, and intention to use strengths as an outcome. I would therefore examine mediators in competition for variance in the outcome. I would interpret indirect effects through each of the three mediators, understanding them to be present if they are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

4.8.1.7 Hypothesis 3b would be tested using the same PROCESS approach for *listeners* only, defining condition as a predictor, the three mediators (authenticity, positivity resonance, anxiety) simultaneously, and intention to continue listening as an outcome. I

would therefore examine mediators in competition for a variance on the listener's intention to continue listening and understand indirect effects to be evident providing they are significant at $p < .05$.

4.9 Results

Results of the study are described below and followed the phase one registered report plan except that the coding of listening by independent observers was not performed by the student researchers as proposed, but by a separate team of coders due to student-researcher timeframe restrictions. All data is available on the OSF page: https://osf.io/q2bgr/. The software SPSS Statistics Version 28 was used to perform analyses.

In Table 3, the means and standard deviations for each variable are presented. Means for listening quality were above the mid-point for both the high-quality and moderate-quality listening conditions indicating that there was generally a high-quality of listening in both conditions, yet there appeared to be a greater perceived difference in listening quality by the speaker across conditions. Positivity resonance, authenticity, and behavioural intention measures were also above the mid-point, and state anxiety was below across both conditions.

4.9.1 Collinearity

Table 4 presents the correlations between study variables. As correlations exceeding $r = .70$ were not found between two or more of the variables, I could accept that the dependent variables are empirically distinguishable and sufficiently distinct to be modelled simultaneously. Positivity resonance was strongly correlated with positive affect ($r = .61$). State anxiety also had a strong negative correlation with positive affect ($r = -.58$) and a weaker negative correlation with positivity resonance ($r = -.31$) and authenticity ($r = -.20$). Positive affect was not included as a main outcome in the model, however, theoretically it is a component of positivity resonance.

Table 3 - *(Study 2) Descriptive Statistics for Conditions and Variables*

Variables	Scale Range	High-quality		Moderate-quality	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Listening (self-report)	1-11	8.92*	1.06	8.53*	1.23
2. Speaker (perceived listening)	1-11	9.42**	1.09	8.96**	1.38
3. Observed listening	∞	55.63	8.43	52.72	11.49
4. State anxiety	1-7	2.06	1.16	2.19	1.28
5. Positivity resonance	0-100	74.95*	16.22	71.80*	15.96
6. Authenticity	1-7	5.83	1.18	5.77	1.19
7. Positive affect	1-7	4.08	1.41	4.04	1.47
8. Intention to continue using CS	1-7	5.61	0.97	5.63	1.11
8. Intention to continue listening	1-7	5.85*	0.95	5.62*	0.98

Note. Difference between means: *p < .05, ** p < .001. ∞ = frequency of observed behaviours. CS = character strengths.

Other important results include that self-reported listening and perceived listening as rated by speakers is weakly correlated ($r = .33$). Furthermore, self-reported listening was moderately correlated with positivity resonance ($r = .39$) and with an intention to continue listening after the conversation ($r = .42$); and weakly correlated with positive affect ($r = .37$), authenticity ($r = .31$) and lower state anxiety ($r = -.30$).

Speakers' perceived listening was strongly positively correlated with positivity resonance ($r = .53$) and positive affect ($r = .46$) and showed weaker positive correlations with authenticity ($r = .30$) and intention to continue using character strengths ($r = .27$) following the conversations.

The speaker's evaluation of listening showed a very weak relationship with an intention to continue listening by the listener ($r = .13$). The listener's self-reported quality of listening showed little to no relationship with the speaker's intention to continue using character strengths ($r = .05$); and finally, intention to continue listening and to continue using character strengths also showed little to no relationship ($r = .06$).

Table 4 - *(Study 2) Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha of Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Listener (self-report)	(.81)						
2. Speaker (perceived listening)	.33**	(.87)					
3. State anxiety	-.30**	-.16**	(.90)				
4. Positivity resonance	.39**	.53**	-.31**	(.93)			
5. Authenticity	.31**	.30**	-.20**	.42**	(.91)		
6. Positive affect	.37**	.46**	-.58**	.61**	.39**	(.87)	
7. Intention to continue strengths	.05	.27**	-.28**	.32**	.47**	.37**	(.89)
8. Intention to continue listening	.42**	.13**	-.17**	.38**	.27**	.35**	.06

Note. **p < .001 level. α in brackets.

4.9.2 Listening Quality Manipulation Check

A between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) for speakers' perceived listening showed a significant effect of condition on listening quality, $F(1, 293) = 10.34$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.38$, 95% CI [.14, .61], showing a positive difference between the high-quality listening versus the moderate-quality listening comparison condition. A condition effect was also present for listeners' self-rating of their own listening between the high-quality and the moderate-quality listening conditions, $F(1, 303) = 8.92$, $p = .003$, Cohen's $d = 0.34$, 95% CI [.17, .57]. Results support that participants who were trained with the high-quality listening training video were perceived by both the speaker and the listener (self) to demonstrate higher quality listening during the experimental conversation with a small effect size.

4.9.3 Listening Observation Ratings

A total of 130 videos were coded for listening quality by 2 coders (high-quality: $n = 66$; moderate-quality: $n = 64$). The intra-class correlation coefficient calculated using a two-way mixed, average measures ICC (Hallgren, 2012) revealed a reasonable level of agreement between coders, ICC = .802, $p < .001$, α = .86. Observer ratings between the conditions showed

no significant difference in the total listening quality, $p = .103$.

Table 5 - *(Study 2) Listening Observation Scores (Total and Subscales)*

Listening Observations	Condition	N	M	SD	t	p	d	Cl (95%)
Total Listening	HQ	66	55.63	8.43	1.64	.103	.29	[-.06, .64]
	MQ	64	52.72	11.49				
Body Language	HQ	66	36.20	3.39	2.11	.037*	.37	[-.02, .72]
	MQ	64	34.66	4.82				
Verbal Behaviour	HQ	66	12.13	5.65	0.97	.334	.17	[-.17, .52]
	MQ	64	11.08	6.63				
Positive Intention	HQ	66	7.43	3.01	0.95	.342	.17	[-.18, .51]
	MQ	64	6.91	3.25				

Note. HQ = high-quality listening condition. MQ = moderate-quality listening (comparison) condition.

*Difference between means: *p < .05.*

Table 5 reports descriptive statistics and results of the between-subjects comparison of means between conditions for the total listening score, and the three sub-component scores of listening observed. A significant difference for the subscale of body language only, $p = .037$ was evident.

Overall, the listening manipulation was successful across two (self-report and speaker perception) out of three of the triangulated measures of the independent variable, thus I deemed the listening manipulation as having been partially successful.

4.9.4 Hypothesis 1

A two-way MANOVA predicting three immediate, conversation-specific outcomes of authenticity, positivity resonance, and anxiety from a 2 (between-subjects: condition: high-quality listening vs. comparison condition) x 2 (between-subjects: role: listener vs. speaker) was performed. Statistics are presented in Table 6: Tests of between-subjects effects by condition showed a significant, positive difference for positivity resonance experienced by

both the listener and speaker in the high-quality listening condition compared with the

moderate-quality listening condition with a small effect size. No effects were present between

conditions for state anxiety or authenticity, therefore, H_1 was partially supported.

Table 6 - *(Study 2) F, p, Cohen's d values, Confidence Intervals for d, for Each of the*

Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	F	df	p(one-tailed)	d	CI (95%)
State Anxiety	1.82	596	.089	-.11	[-.27, .05]
Positivity Resonance	5.70	596	.009*	.20	[.04, .36]
Authenticity	0.45	596	.252	.05	[-.11, .21]
Intention to continue CS	0.03	293	.433	-.02	[-.25, .21]
Intention to continue listening	4.64	302	.016*	.25	[.02, .47]

*Note. *p < .05.*

While the test for an interaction effect between role and condition was not significant

for any of the dependent variables: state anxiety $F(1, 596) = 0.88$, $p = .348$; positivity

resonance $F(1, 596) = 0.01$, $p = .927$; authenticity $F(1, 596) = 1.00$, $p = .318$; it is worth

noting that a main effect of role (listener or speaker) predicting authenticity was evident, $F(1,$

$596) = 39.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.52$ (medium effect size); thus speakers appeared to experience

greater authenticity than listeners across both conditions.

4.9.5 Hypotheses 2a and 2b (Confirmatory Analyses)

Results are presented in Table 6 and were tested with a between-subjects ANOVA.

Results supported that condition predicted the listener's intention to continue listening (H_{2b})

with a small effect size. Condition did not predict the speakers' intention to continue using

character strengths (H_{2a}). Results suggest that listeners in the high-quality listening condition

were motivated to continue their listening behaviour following the interaction. The high-

quality listening condition did not predict the speakers' intention to continue applying their

character strengths, however.

4.9.6 Hypotheses 3a and 3b (Confirmatory Analyses)

Hypotheses were tested with Model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) using 5000 bootstrapped samples. The model for H_{3a} (including total effect, direct effect, and indirect effects) was not supported therefore, condition did not predict *speakers'* intention to continue using character strengths via the three mediators (authenticity, positivity resonance, anxiety) simultaneously.

For H_{3b}, the total effect of the model; that condition would predict listeners' intention to continue listening was significant, $b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -2.15$, $p = .032$, 95% CI [-0.46, -0.02] consistent with the results for H_{2b}. In contrast, the direct effect of condition to intention to continue listening: $b = -0.18$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -1.73$, $p = .085$, 95% CI [-0.38, 0.02] and indirect effects of positivity resonance, $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.00]; authenticity $b = 0.00$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.04]; and state anxiety $b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.02] were not statistically significant. This indicates that the effect (behavioural intention) was not a direct result of the condition, nor mediated from condition by authenticity, positivity resonance, and anxiety. Thus, H_{3b} was also not supported.

4.9.7 Exploratory Analyses

To explore the contradictory finding of H_{3b} further, I performed auxiliary mediation analyses (tested with Model 4 in PROCESS using 5000 bootstrapped samples; Hayes, 2022). Since the listening manipulation was only partially successful, I replaced condition as the predictor in the models, with speaker's perception of listening for H_{3a}, and self-reported listening for H_{3b}, since conceptually, the individual's own perception of listening quality (x) would be most important for their own motivation to continue the behaviour (y).

4.9.7.1 Pre and post state anxiety. The main effects did not show an effect for state anxiety, contradicting previous research findings (Itzchakov, 2020; Weis-Rappaport & Kluger, 2024). Through the schoolwide collaboration, students' secondary research questions

required implementation of a pre- and post-conversation measure of state anxiety, completed

just before the experimental conversation. Exploratory analyses comparing the difference

between means of pre-and-post measures of state anxiety across the two conditions revealed

that means in the high-quality listening condition (Time 1: $M = 2.19$, $SE = 0.07$, Time 2: $M =$

2.06, $SE = 0.07$) were significantly reduced ($p = .02$, $\bar{x}1 - \bar{x}2 = -0.14$, 95% CI [-0.02, -0.26],

$d = 0.12$). The difference between means for the moderate-quality listening condition (Time

1: $M = 2.30$, $SE = 0.07$, Time 2: $M = 2.19$, $SE = 0.07$) was not statistically significant ($p =$

.08, $\bar{x}1 - \bar{x}2 = -0.11$, 95% CI [-0.01, -0.24], $d = 0.09$).

Figure 7 *Exploratory Mediation Analyses for the Pathway from Speaker Perceived Listening*

(x) to Behavioural Intention to Continue Strengths (y) via Authenticity (m)
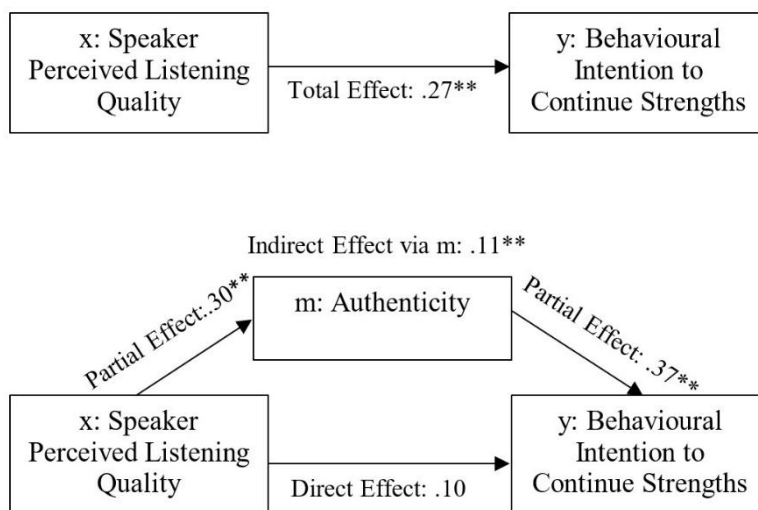
Note. Standardised pathways. **$p < .001$

4.9.7.2 Intention to continue using strengths. For H_{3a}, the total effect of the revised

model (see Figure 7) was significant: $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 4.86$, $p < .001$ [0.13, 0.31]. The

direct effect of x on y was not significant: $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 1.66$, $p = .097$ [-0.02, 0.18].

Speaker perceptions of listening quality showed significant partial effects on all three

dependent variables (state anxiety $b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -2.79$, $p = .006$ [-0.26, -0.05],

positivity resonance $b = 6.71$, $SE = 0.63$, $t = 10.68$, $p < .001$ [5.47, 7.95], and authenticity $b =$

0.20, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 5.34$, $p < .001$ [0.13, 0.28]). Only the indirect effect with authenticity as a mediator to behavioural intention to continue using strengths was statistically significant, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, [0.04, 0.16]. The indirect effects for state anxiety $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, [-0.00, 0.04] and positivity resonance $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.03$, [-0.02, 0.09] were not statistically significant, and thus only authenticity appeared to mediate the effects. Thus, authenticity accounted for approximately 41% of the variance of the effect of speaker-perceived listening quality on intention to continue using strengths, however, perceived listening quality did not have a significant direct effect on behavioural intention.

Figure 8 *Exploratory Mediation Analyses for the Pathway from Self-reported Listening (x) to Behavioural Intention to Continue Listening (y) via Positivity Resonance (m)*
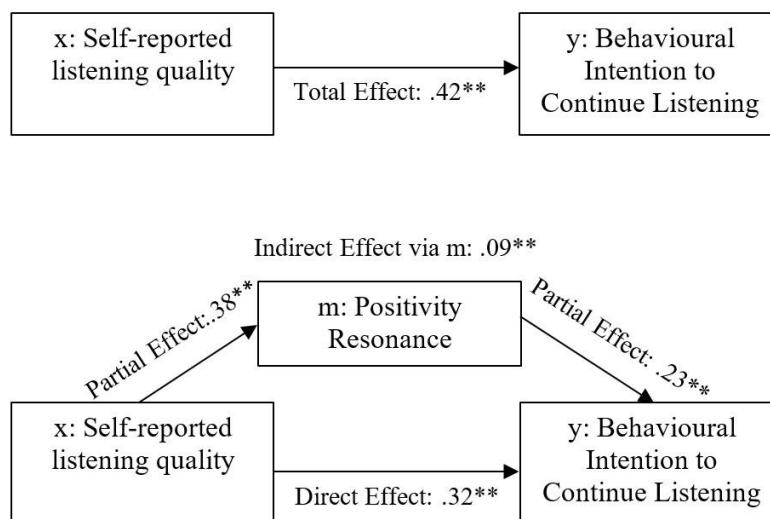
Note. Standardised pathways. **$p < .001$.

4.9.7.3 Intention to continue listening. For H_{3b}, the total effect of the revised model (see Figure 8) was significant: $b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 8.05$, $p < .001$ [0.27, 0.44], as was the direct effect of *x* on *y*: $b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 5.52$, $p < .001$ [0.17, 0.35]. Self-reported listening quality reported a significant partial effect on all three dependent variables at $ps < .001$ (state anxiety, $b = -0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -5.23$, $p < .001$ [-0.41, -0.18], positivity resonance $b = 5.37$, $SE = 0.75$, $t = 7.16$, $p < .001$ [3.89, 6.84], and authenticity $b = 0.36$, $SE =$

0.06, $t = 5.62$, $p < .001$ [0.23, 0.49]). However, only the indirect effect with positivity resonance as a mediator was statistically significant $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, [0.02, 0.16]. The indirect effects for state anxiety $b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.02$, [-0.03, 0.03] and authenticity $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, [-0.02, 0.06] were not statistically significant, and thus only positivity resonance appeared to mediate the effects. Positivity resonance accounted for approximately 21% of the variance of the effect of self-reported listening quality on intention to continue listening, and 76% of the variance appears to be accounted for directly by self-reported listening.

4.10 Present Study Discussion

Speakers can experience a range of intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits from being listened to well, but we know less about the effects on the listener. The current experiment sought to explore the effects of high-quality listening on both the speaker and listener, in a unique experiment that involved a naturalistic conversation between interlocutors thus creating greater ecological validity. I explored the consequences of a positive conversation about character strengths, which allowed exploration into the benefits of high-quality listening over and above the known benefits of discussing character strengths (Bos et al., 2016; Schutte & Malouff, 2019; Waters, 2015). The outcomes of the hypotheses tested in this study showed mixed findings overall for the effects of high-quality listening during the conversation. The study found that of the three potential immediate outcomes of listening measured: namely, positivity resonance, authenticity, and state anxiety – positivity resonance was the only significant outcome benefited after listeners within the dyad received a brief listening training. The effect size of listening benefits to positivity resonance was small, but benefits were attained across both speakers and their listeners. High-quality listening therefore seemed to have supported feelings of shared positive affect, mutual care and concern, and behavioural and biological synchrony (Fredrickson, 2013, 2016) between both the speaker and the listener. Furthermore, a second benefit of the listening condition was

identified such that listeners in the high-quality listening condition were further motivated to listen in this way to conversation partners in the future; notably, this desire to continue behaving in ways consistent with the conversation's aims did not extend to speakers applying their character strengths.

Here, I built on a literature that finds that conversing about character strengths can elicit positive outcomes for the speaker (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021); findings suggested that positivity resonance can be attributed to high-quality listening within such otherwise, still quite beneficial conversations. Positivity resonance has been conceptualised as a dyadic experience, shared between two members of a conversation. This study's findings supported this view, suggesting that positive benefits from high-quality listening can benefit *both* the listener as well as the speaker. Though these findings are preliminary and based on statistically significant but relatively small differences in listening across the two conditions tested, it is worth noting the benefits of listening training were not similarly observed for the intrapersonal outcomes of authenticity and reduced anxiety, suggesting that the relational nature of listening may be the most prominent effect of high-quality listening and supporting conceptualisations that listening may bring about a sense of togetherness that is its most proximal and powerful outcome (Kluger et al., 2021). Positivity resonance can be experienced between strangers in a fleeting moment, where both individuals co-experience positive emotion, express care towards one another, and share behavioural and biological synchronicity - but it is the repeated experience of positivity resonance that builds toward a more complete, relational concept of love or intimacy (Fredrickson, 2016).

Links between high-quality listening and positivity resonance can inform conversations that aim to generate specific outcomes for both the speaker and listener. These conversations include professional helping conversations that rely on listening as a core skill, for example, counselling, therapy, and coaching (Jonsdottir & Kristinsson, 2020; Kourmousi

et al., 2018; Passmore, 2011; Rogers & Farson, 1957). First, the findings are consistent with early theories on counselling and listening by Carl Rogers (Rogers & Dorfman, 1973), who posits the positive relational effects on individuals when they experience the non-judgmental and caring space created by good listeners (Rogers, 1959). Similar to broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2013), it is believed that positivity resonance can enhance a person's capacity to think more openly and broadly (Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023); the findings here suggested that high-quality listening – through downstream effects of positivity resonance – has the potential to improve both a speaker and listener's capacity to think creatively, solve problems (Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and support well-being, with further potential of mitigating depression, illness and loneliness (Major et al., 2018). However, these conclusions should be drawn with caution, as positivity resonance did not seem to further benefit speakers in the current study.

Also applicable to these professions is that this study's findings were generalised across speakers and their listeners. Professionals themselves are at risk for mental health costs, especially when discussing potentially confronting or traumatic topics (Roberts et al., 2018). Understanding the listeners' experience of positivity resonance as well as the speakers' suggests that high-quality listening has the potential to minimise or "buffer" practitioners from the risk of professional burnout (van Steenbergen et al., 2021). Since the results suggest that receiving listening training predicted the listener's desire to continue listening, the listener likely perceived a benefit from their high-quality listening. This provides indirect evidence for listening well as a protective factor for those within listening professions, as well as for those whom they serve.

Confirmatory analyses of the mediation models exploring the effects of condition on the dependent variables as a mediator for intention to continue listening or continue using strengths were contradictory to results obtained in the study, producing null results. As the

listening manipulation was only partially successful, exploratory analyses which replaced the listening condition as the predictor within the mediation model, and instead modelled listener-reported listening as a predictor of listeners' own intention to listen, and speaker-reported listening as a predictor of speakers' intention to apply their character strengths produced further insights. Analyses support that at the least, perceptions of listening may play an important role in conversations deemed satisfying and engaging, specifically in inspiring conversants' continued engagement. Positivity resonance mediated these downstream benefits for listeners with intention to continue listening, suggesting tentatively that interpersonal connection may play an important role in building satisfying or productive relationships. An unexpected finding of this exploratory model, which sought to reproduce condition effects with a more sensitive predictor (namely, self-reported listening quality), was that state authenticity (rather than positivity resonance) mediated the effects from speaker-perceived listening to intention to continue using strengths. This tentative result is explored further below.

4.10.1 Developing a Science of Listening

Using a novel approach within this field, listening quality was manipulated through a brief listening training delivered by video to participants who otherwise did not receive training as a methodological improvement to previous research attempts to manipulate listening (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2022a). Manipulation checks suggested that laypeople could be, to some extent, trained to listen well after a brief, 13-minute listening training video. Participants who watched the high-quality listening training video were perceived - at least by themselves and the speaker, to have demonstrated significantly better listening than those in the comparison condition. However, the effect sizes of the manipulation were quite small, and not supported by observer coding of the videos.

The small but significant effects of training on both listener-reported and speaker-

reported listening informs literatures attempting to understand and improve listening within conversations. In the past, there have been mixed findings in the success of listening training, particularly shorter length training (Martin & Butera, 2022) and in achieving significant differences in perceived listening by others over self-ratings (Graybill, 1986; Rautalinko & Lisper, 2004). The study findings support that brief listening training can show promise in supporting high-quality listening behaviour that has downstream effects on perceived listening by speakers, specifically in the short-term and during a short interaction. While I am not suggesting that learning to listen well is a process that can be a "shortcut" (Moin et al., 2024c – Chapter 3), it is acknowledged there may be some benefit of brief training, particularly with professionals for whom relational listening during short interactions could have significant downstream benefits, for example, doctors with patients to avoid malpractice claims (Shouhed et al., 2019) or teachers with students to increase the potential for academic success (Košir & Tement, 2014).

Independent observer ratings in the study – also a relatively new method in a field dominated by self-reports of listening, did not show a condition difference in listening quality. I hope that future work can fine-tune and therefore advance this process to improve our understanding of listening within conversations. In the current study, correlations between the total listening scores and subscores of body language, verbal behaviour and positive intention reveal the strongest correlations with verbal behaviour: $r = .84$; followed by body language: $r = .69$ and positive intention $r =. 50\text{-}64$ (for both Coder 1 and Coder 2 respectively in our team). I suggest fine-tuning observable markers for positive intention may be a worthwhile endeavour in future studies to improve accuracy.

4.10.2 Limitations

As discussed above, small effect sizes were observed in both the listening manipulation and the outcome of positivity resonance. The approach to manipulating

listening needs to be improved to create meaningful change in how people listen. However, the relatively weak manipulation could be explained in part by the topic being discussed, namely, character strengths, which may have been an inherently engaging topic of conversation inspiring natural listening and connection. Indeed, both conditions showed high levels of listening *and* positivity resonance. It may be that under conditions where high-quality listening is less likely, such as listening to views with whom one disagrees, listening training may play a more important role. Other strategies to improve the listening manipulation might be to allow listening training participants more time to practice and embed the listening skills they have learned, for example, by leveraging goal-setting theory (Gearhart et al., 2014; Locke & Latham, 2019) and setting a "listening learning challenge" prior to the conversation where they practice listening well in their day to day conversations (with before and after assessments to measure their listening progress).

The topic of conversation, namely, character strengths, may also explain the absence of condition effects for state anxiety and authenticity. The high-quality listening condition did not show significant difference in post-measures of state anxiety compared with the moderate-quality listening condition as was hypothesised and previously observed (Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2018a; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). However, exploratory analyses did reveal a significant difference between pre-and-post measures of state anxiety for the high-quality listening condition only. This suggests that there was a reasonable effect as the conversation progressed. Furthermore, high-quality listening did not increase levels of authenticity for either the speaker or the listener as has been shown in previous listening research (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

The topic of conversation served as useful in allowing me to isolate the relational effects of listening against the inherent effects of character strengths in order to address this important question raised by previous researchers (Quinlan et al., 2012, 2019; Quinlan et al.,

2015), but character strengths are already associated with increased authenticity and well-being (Matsuo, 2020; Medlock, 2014; Schutte & Malouff, 2019). The study findings showed that relational factors (and namely, listening) did not account for these outcomes when competing against character strengths. Indeed, exploratory analyses showed that participants in the role of speaker reported greater authenticity when compared with those in the listener role, lending some, though tentative, empirical support to the relationship between feelings of authenticity and character strengths (Matsuo, 2020; Medlock, 2014). Exploratory analyses further suggested that speakers' perception of being listened to well linked with their feelings of greater authenticity while discussing their character strengths, and this further mediated their intention to use those character strengths. Building on this and past work on strengths interventions (Quinlan et al., 2015), it may be worthwhile to consider the role of listening in supporting positive change in individuals.

4.10.3 Future Research Examining Listening and Positivity Resonance

Tools such as listening training can also be applied to areas outside of constructive conversations such as character strengths. I suggest further research to explore positivity resonance as a downstream benefit of listening (and listening training) is worthwhile in several different contexts: for example, as a tool to foster relations between people who are engaging in dialogue on challenging topics such as when discussing prejudiced or polarised attitudes (DeMarree et al., 2023; Itzchakov et al., 2020). The added dimension of a positively valenced relational experience could stimulate further benefits for example, positive emotions have been demonstrated to have a desirable effect on perceived similarities and differences between racial characteristics (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005), reducing racial bias explained in part through broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

Other conversations include those between people who are seeking to establish stronger relationships, such as colleagues, team members, or acquaintances. A particularly

interesting dynamic to explore is where there exists a power difference in the relationship between two people, such as during a performance discussion between a manager and a subordinate, or teacher and a student, where both may be required to focus on problem-solving and performance outcomes. The positive affect and relational benefits experienced by both when high-quality listening (and positivity resonance) is present may enable and empower the speaker to share ideas more openly, feel more secure, and create and suggest their own ideas and solutions (Lin et al., 2016).

Finally, conversations between friends, family members, and even romantic partners could benefit from high-quality listening, and positivity resonance may explain in part, the support for stronger relational bonds achieved (Brown et al., 2022; Lachica et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018; Weinstein et al., 2021). It may be that listening training for parents can provide positive parenting benefits that support prevention of mental illness (Schwartz et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2014), and stronger intimacy that will support both parents and their children to address challenges more constructively (Weinstein et al., 2021).

4.11 Conclusion

We know that high-quality listening has the potential to ignite self-awareness, self-exploration and broaden attitudes in individuals who experience it. However, the effects of high-quality listening on both the speaker and listener during naturalistic conversations deserved robust experimental testing. This study found mixed support for the conclusion that both the listener and speaker can co-experience positive outcomes in a listener-speaker engagement. Listening had few downstream effects from those hypothesised, but notably, brief training in high-quality listening appeared to result in greater perceived listening quality by the speaker and listener, even if less so by the listeners themselves. This difference was not perceived by independent observers of listening, however. The clear benefit that did yield from high-quality listening was positivity resonance – a sense of mutual warmth, caring and

biological synchronicity between both the speaker and the listener. Together with other emerging evidence of the associated relational and interpersonal benefits of experiencing positivity resonance, as well as high-quality listening, I suggest that high-quality listening could be an effective tool to bolster motivation, well-being, and particularly, positive relationships.

Chapter 5: High-quality Listening Training to Bridge Divides

5.1 Abstract

Deep, high-quality listening that offers a non-judgmental approach, understanding, and careful attention when speakers share disparate views can have the power to bridge divides and change speakers' attitudes. However, can people be trained to provide such listening while disagreeing with what they hear, and if so, are the effects of the listening training sufficient for creating perceptible change during disagreements? This study, conducted with delegates ($N = 320$) representing 86 countries experimentally tested a "deep" (otherwise termed 'high quality') listening training against a randomly assigned subgroup of attendees who served as a "waitlist" control. During a conversation with another participant on a subject about which they strongly disagreed, participants who had completed a six-hour training over three weeks in high-quality listening demonstrated improvements in their observed listening behaviours, reported higher levels of interactional intimacy with conversation partners, appeared to increase their self-insight and subsequently, showed evidence of attitude change. Among the first studies to test causal outcomes of high-quality listening training between attendees with diverse and contrary attitudes in a real-world, cross-national setting; I discuss the potential and limitations for listening training to support positive relations and an open mind in the context of discourse, disagreement and polarisation.

5.2 Introduction

Most people are born with the ability to *hear*, but developing the ability to *listen* to people may not come naturally. Listening is an important and active social behaviour that conveys attention, comprehension, and personal valuing of speakers (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Listening quality varies from person to person across contexts, relationships and it depends on the topic and qualities of the conversation partner (Itzchakov et al., 2016; Kluger et al., 2021). For example, the way people listen during a conversation with a family member as they drive their car might be quite different from how they listen to a friend in need, and even more so, when listening to a stranger expressing an opinion they sharply disagree with. Indeed, in contexts where contested topics are being discussed – it is quite difficult to provide high-quality listening (Creasey et al., 1999; Moin et al., 2024c – Chapter 3). Even if a person signals that they are listening, the very act of disagreeing can lead to a perception of poor listening by the speaker (Ren & Schaumberg, 2023).

The primary goal of this project was to examine the effects of listening training purposefully designed to boost participants' listening to conversation partners holding opposing views to their own. I predicted that engaging in behaviours encouraged by the training, namely high-quality listening, not only leads to a more positive intrapersonal (i.e., lower defensiveness) and relational (i.e., interactional intimacy) experience but also raises self-insight, resulting in downstream benefits including changing one's attitude.

By doing so, the study aimed at advancing the literature in three ways. First, it relied on an experimental design that compared the effects of listening training with a "waitlist" control, testing a fit-for-purpose listening training designed specifically for situations where a listener disagrees with a speaker's perspective. Second, it explored the use of observer ratings during naturalistic conversations. Third, it tested listening training effects in a diverse cross-national context with data collected from 320 participants representing 86 of 119 (72%)

countries in attendance during the training.

5.2.1 Can Listening Serve to Depolarise

Listening and feeling listened to well can benefit conversants as they disagree. In conversations more broadly, the speaker, as the recipient of high-quality listening is likely to experience increases in well-being (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Lloyd et al., 2015b; Weinstein & Itzchakov, 2023), a sense of deep connection to their conversation partner (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023), and a willingness to continue sharing (Marcus & Swett, 2002; Weinstein et al., 2021).

Listening may be especially important, but also challenging, in the context of polarising conversations, ones where individuals disagree on issues about which they feel strongly (Baumann et al., 2021; Petty & Krosnick, 2014). These conversations are difficult because interlocutors feel threatened and protective of their core beliefs (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2004; Minson & Dorison, 2022). Such perceptions are barriers to individuals' willingness and effort to understand others (Hart et al., 2009; Nickerson, 1998), and result in avoiding conversations to prevent discomfort and anxiety (Minson & Chen, 2022) or even defensively bolstering initial attitudes (Heller et al., 1973; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018). As a result of these experiences, listening may come less naturally to conversation partners who disagree than to partners who agree (Zhao et al., 2020), and disparate worldviews have the potential to be affirmed rather than aligned (Bail et al., 2018; Eveland et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023).

But if listening can be encouraged, it may prove to be particularly helpful in shifting the trajectory of such conversations from a destructive discord to a constructive open exchange of ideas, enabling conversation partners to engage across their differences. This idea is not new. Listening has been long believed to build bridges and increase understanding when the listener provides empathy, asks clarifying questions, and summarises or paraphrases

the speaker's words (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Rogers also emphasised the importance of the listener's openness to expressed content, no matter their own position, which is likely to be reciprocated by the speaker (Rogers, 1980). Supporting this view, recent research suggests that high-quality listening fosters the speaker's interest in learning more about their attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2018; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021), for re-examining prejudices (Itzchakov et al., 2020), and increases listeners' and speakers' propensity for humility (Lehmann et al., 2023). Ultimately, these processes reflect a move towards depolarisation; Holding more moderate views and seeing the views of one's conversation partner as being more similar to oneself (Itzchakov et al., 2024b).

Research findings have shed some light on the reasons that high-quality listening fosters such openness to one's attitudes and willingness to reconsider them. High-quality listening can lead speakers to increase self-insight, a curiosity about how oneself is in relation to one's attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2018a, 2020; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021). Self-insight is important as it is believed to play a central role in attitude and behavioural change, often the intended outcomes of therapeutic and coaching interventions (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Jennissen et al., 2018).

Alongside fostering self-insight to help individuals constructively *approach* conversations that may give voice to opposing views, listening can also mitigate concerns that lead individuals to *avoid* constructive engagement – such as feelings of self-protective tension and defensiveness (Weinstein et al., 2022). Specifically, interacting with people from opposing social groups to one's own can lead to anxiety and avoidance and lead one to make assumptions about the existence of differences in the other group (Stephan, 2014). In earlier research, high-quality listening conditions are thought to reduce defensiveness by providing social validation of the speaker's intrinsic self (Schimel et al., 2001).

The listener and speaker both stand to benefit because the positive relational climate

brought on by listening feeds back to increased intimacy (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998) and a more connecting (Broome et al., 2019) and psychologically safe (Castro et al., 2016, 2018) environment. Based on the interactional intimacy model put forth by Reis and Shaver (1988), when a speaker discusses a strong, and especially a polarising opinion, with a conversation partner who responds to the disclosure by listening deeply, the experience should not only facilitate a positive relational experience but it should also result in the speaker feeling genuinely understood. In other words, the speaker's disclosure, in combination with the partners' responsive behaviours, facilitates *interactional intimacy*, intimacy specific to the conversation (Reis and Shaver, 1988). Indeed, necessary and sufficient conditions for intimacy have been described as disclosing personal information about oneself, positive involvement, and a shared understanding (Prager & Roberts, 2004, p.46), conditions that a good listening partner can facilitate. Such intimacy mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship-wide satisfaction (Lee et al., 2019), and may give rise to self-insight and lower defensiveness, ultimately fostering a conscious sense of openness towards one's attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020).

5.2.2 Psychological Mechanisms for Depolarisation of Attitudes

There are a couple of psychological explanations which might explain how the effects of high-quality listening investigated in this study could lead to overcoming differences of opinion. The first is that high-quality listening has the potential to facilitate more complex thinking which involves "differentiation" among perceptions and "integration" of these perceptions, organising them into a relational framework to facilitate information processing and decision making (Conway et al., 2001). By listening attentively to an opposing point of view and really attempting to understand that perspective, a listener will have not only elaborated, but diversified and potentially integrated their initial perceptions with additional sources of information on the topic, leading to a more complex understanding of the subject

being discussed. This is referred to as Integrative Complexity (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977).

Specifically, when opposing viewpoints or sources are integrated, this is referred to as dialectical integrative complexity (Conway et al., 2008). We know from prior research that high-quality listening can improve self-insight and objective attitude ambivalence (Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2020), that is, a person sees things in a new light and feels more comfortable when made aware of divergence in attitudes that are held side by side - consistent with the concept of integrative complexity. This kind of thinking has been linked to more moderate political views (centre-left compared with extreme left or extreme right; Molina et al., 2023), more willingness to negotiate with opposing parties even if it results in a drastic change of policy (Ziv, 2011) and as a predictor of political decisions which lead to war or peace (Conway et al., 2001). Thus, the link between listening, attitude ambivalence and integrative complexity in thinking may be one potential pathway that leads to depolarisation of attitudes.

A second possible explanation of the effects of high-quality listening on attitude change is addressed by self-expansion theory; broadening one's self concept in order to improve self-efficacy for achieving goals (Aron et al., 2001). Self-expansion theory is grounded in relational theories in which one might expand their view of themselves through a close interaction with another person (Aron et al., 2001) or through identification with a particular group (Wright et al., 2002). For example, they may start to include another's identity, resources and experiences as one's own. In this study's context, interacting with someone who holds a very different perspective will increase the listener's understanding and empathy (and thereby their intellectual resources and perspectives) and aid them in holding more intelligent conversations and well positioned arguments in the future. Overall, self-expansion is described as a positive affective experience (Aron et al., 2001). In a group sense, the listener may benefit from an expanded social network, gaining a potential advocate or advisor from a different social group and any resources the new group brings (Wright et al.,

2002). The listener may even realise personal attributes which subsequently contribute toward greater self-esteem and self-efficacy (Aron et al., 2001). In a high-quality listening context, the positive feedback from an understanding conversational partner, despite the challenging topic of discussion, may support an individual's latent capacity for dealing with stress, showing compassion and understanding and more importantly, relationship-building under difficult circumstances – ultimately serving to enhance the individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Indeed, one study revealed that participants primed with self-expansion motivation experienced closer relationships, self-growth and higher feelings of social self-efficacy when interacting with members of an outgroup (Dys-Steenbergen et al., 2016).

Another way to define self-expansion is that through a close interaction with another person, an individual may start to include the other in their own self-concept. This is possible with strangers, particularly through empathising with their needs which can result in increased openness, helpful behaviour and reduce prejudice towards outgroup members (Aron et al., 2001; Cialdini et al., 1997; Paolini et al., 2016).

While integrative complexity and self-expansion mechanisms were not specifically measured in this study, previous studies investigating these mechanisms relate to the dependant variables in the study (intimacy, openness – defensiveness, self-insight) and further expand on our understanding of how high-quality listening training may serve to depolarise attitudes.

5.2.3 Fit-for-Purpose Listening Training on a Globally Diverse Population

Although not applied to polarised attitudes, listening training approaches have been used to help encourage more positive environments with teachers (Itzchakov et al., 2023), employees in organisations (Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov, Weinstein, et al., 2022), marital relationships (Garland, 1981) and parent-child interactions (Graybill, 1986; Gregson et al., 2016). These approaches promote high-quality listening by instructing attendees on the

qualities of high-quality listening, giving opportunities for practicing listening in observed sessions, and then offering conversation circles that provide time to reflect, practice, and further develop listening mindsets and skills (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). These interventions can help trainees to feel closer and more connected over time (Kluger et al., 2021), report more job satisfaction and less burnout (Itzchakov et al., 2022b), and feel more psychological safety and autonomy at work (Itzchakov et al., 2023).

A few real-world, experimental listening training studies that address broader conversations have measured effects in relation to a control group that received no training (Itzchakov, 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2025; Itzchakov et al., 2022b; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). However, the literature on listening training in the context where people significantly disagree is only emerging (Itzchakov et al., 2024b). It has rarely been tested experimentally against a comparison condition that allows researchers to measure causal or quasi-causal effects on outcomes under study, particularly outside of a lab setting. In addition, training that targets building core listening skills has not been applied to build individuals' openness to engaging with individuals with different perspectives. This is important because listening training not fit-for-purpose may focus on different qualities and outcomes, for example, in the different domains of sales and persuasion (Itani et al., 2019), career development and reputation enhancement (Andersen, 2008), or even (servant) leadership (Greenleaf, 2002). It is yet unclear whether their training impacts would translate to these more challenging conversations.

Finally, more broadly, listening training and its effects have rarely been studied outside individualistic Western cultures. A recent meta-analysis (Kluger et al., 2023) reports most studies (exploring listening in work contexts) have been conducted on people from the U.S.A. (46%), Israel (15%), Germany (7%), and the United Kingdom (5%). Apart from those studies, research shows that people perceive themselves to be good at listening in Iran

(Zohoori, 2013), Asia (including Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia; Abe et al., 2013),

Ireland and Australia (McDevitt et al., 1994). Thus, a global perspective is essential because

listening is understood to have the potential to enhance peacekeeping efforts (Beyene, 2020;

Cumberland et al., 2021; Kasriel, 2021).

5.3 Present Study Aims

I tested the effects of a fit-for-purpose listening training programme which aimed to

develop listening skills in a cross-national setting specifically for the context of polarising

conversations, provided through the "Crossing Divides – Deep Listening project" – a joint

initiative between the British Council and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as part

of the BBC's centenary celebrations. The Crossing Divides project aimed to develop

individuals' confidence in holding conversations with people who hold opposing views to

their own by developing "deep" (hereafter termed 'high-quality' because it was

operationalised in a way consistent with this widespread term in the literature; Kluger &

Itzchakov, 2022) listening skills that conveyed attention, caring and understanding. As the

listener is likely to experience tensions while listening to someone with an opposing view

(Moin et al, 2024c – Chapter 3), the training included content to address challenges with the

three core components of listening - such as mindfulness (Jones et al., 2019) to support

attention; the use of language and judgments to support *understanding* (Rogers & Farson,

1957); and finally addressing unconscious parts of the personality (known as "shadows";

Jung, 1954) and self-compassion (Neff, 2023) to overcome internal biases and address

caring.

This field study compared the experiences of interlocutors who conversed about a

socially divisive topic (more detail presented below under procedure) after having received

the high-quality listening training with interlocutors from a randomly assigned "waitlist"

control group who had not yet received the training. In line with the literature reviewed

above, I predicted that the fit-for-purpose listening training would induce self-insight and lead to more open-mindedness in the experimental group, expressed as a change in attitude. I sought to test whether the main outcomes of speakers' self-insight and attitude change from the listening training were more affected by interactional intimacy (as an approach-oriented relational mediator) or by the alleviation of defensiveness (as an avoidant-oriented relational mediator).

Figure 9 *(Study 3) Experimental Hypotheses Depicting Dependent Variables and Serial Mediation Models from Listening Training*
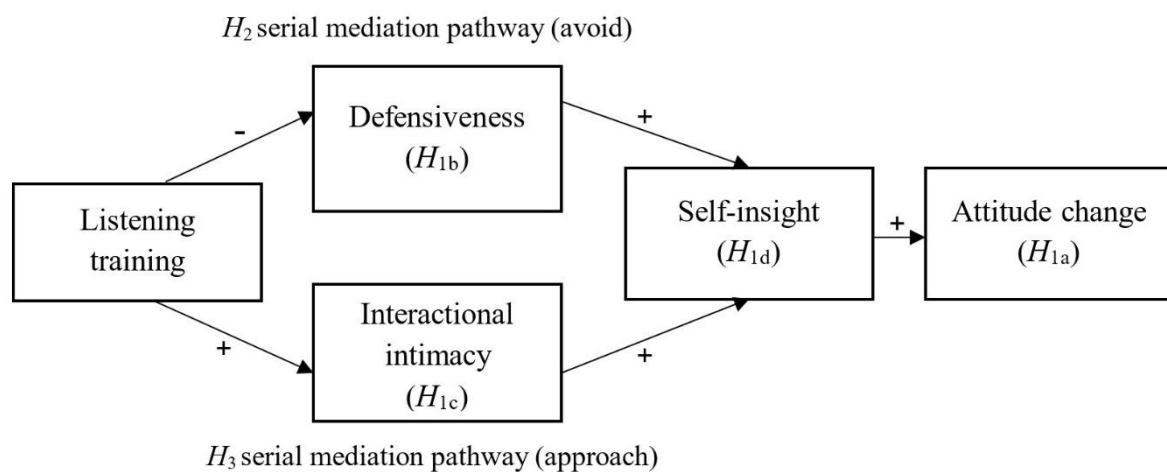
I set out to test three hypotheses (H), graphically presented in Figure 9. Specifically, I anticipated that:

H_1**:** Listening training (as compared to the waitlist control) will predict interlocutors' a) perceived change in attitude, b) lower feelings of defensiveness, c) greater interactional intimacy, and d) greater self-insight.

H_2: Downstream effects of the training on increased self-insight and attitude change will occur through reducing avoidance; lowering a person's feelings of defensiveness. Listening training (as compared to the waitlist control) will improve a person's propensity for attitude change, serially mediated by lower defensiveness and increased self-insight.

H_3: Downstream effects of the training on increased self-insight and attitude change

will occur by increasing a person's experience of interactional intimacy. Listening training (as compared to the waitlist control) will improve a person's propensity for attitude change, serially mediated by interactional intimacy and increased self-insight.

5.3.1 Listening Quality Observations

Independent observers (course facilitators) measured observable listening behaviours to determine listening quality during the conversations, as has been done in previous studies, and to overcome the limitations of self-reported listening ability (Garland, 1981; Graybill, 1986; Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017; Trahan & Rockwell, 1999). Observers rated overt listening behaviours and non-verbal listening cues in situ (present in the virtual room with camera and microphone turned off) rather than via video recording for ethical reasons given the sensitive nature of conversations. This was also intended to minimise confounding effects such as hesitancy to speak openly because of the recording (Moin & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Due to the number of resources, observers were present in a random portion of the experimental discussions that were held (see further details below under *5.4.1. Participants*).

5.3.2 Tests for Consistency

Whereas most materials tested the dependent variables in the study, 10 items from a brief measure of personality were randomly inserted into the questionnaires to evaluate the integrity and consistency of participant responses (Tellegen, 1988). As a relatively stable construct, I expected no statistically significant difference in personality scores between conditions, allowing us to check for attention and social desirability.

5.4 Method

5.4.1 Participants

Following ethical approval complying with the British Psychological Society standards granted by the University of Reading, a global group of participants were recruited

and selected by the BBC and British Council to participate in their Crossing Divides Deep Listening Project. A total of 870 adults from 119 countries participated in the training programme overall. The study participants comprised a subset of the total trainees in attendance ($N = 320$); namely, those who responded to an invitation to participate in the study as part of the training and further, those who completed study activities fully and according to their assigned condition. Of these, $n = 157$ were in the control (i.e., waitlist) group and $n = 163$ were in the experimental (i.e., training) group. Sensitivity analysis indicated that the smallest effect size that this sample ($N = 320$) can detect with 80% is Cohen's $d = 0.31$ in a two-tailed test for a between-participant design with two groups (Faul et al., 2007), which is considered small-to-moderate (Funder & Ozer, 2019).

The study participants represented 86 countries and 80 nationalities including the United Kingdom, Malaysia, New Zealand, Iran, Philippines, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Netherlands, Spain, Barbados, and Libya (see Appendix C for further detail). Furthermore, 68.4% were female, 30.6% were male and 0.9% identified another way.

British Council volunteers ($n = 78$) who were providing facilitation to support the training acted as observers in a portion of the virtual rooms (control: $n = 41$, experimental: $n = 57$). Observers were trained facilitators, however, due to limitations in the number of observers they were unable to observe every experimental and control conversation (missing completely at random; Newman, 2014). Furthermore, observations of conversations where participants did not have cameras on due to technical difficulties or failed to choose a topic they disagreed about were excluded from the data (control, $n = 14$; experiment, $n = 6$).

5.4.1.1 Participant selection and assignment. The Crossing Divides programme was advertised through newsletters, the BBC, and outreach to educational establishments, inviting participants to learn about deep listening and have conversations across divides. A total of 1363 individuals applied to join the training programme, of which 870 successful applicants

were chosen to be trainees in the programme. Roughly 75% of the participants came from the British Council network, while others were recruited from among BBC audiences and other methods. The following selection criteria were applied: i) age (18-34 years), ii) level of English-language speaking ability (Level 6; *International English Language Testing System*, n.d.), iii) technical means (internet access with camera), iii) motivation (commitment to attend all sessions and use a camera) and iv) representation across a range of countries/nationalities. Rejected applicants included $n = 201$ for not meeting the above criteria, $n = 172$ because their country was overrepresented, and a further $n = 144$ for providing incomplete answers (note: some participants met more than one rejection criteria).

Trainees who agreed to participate in the study were randomly assigned at the outset to (1) participate in a waitlist control group, or (2) participate in the experimental group. All participants, regardless of condition, were asked by email to complete questionnaires before joining the training programme, including providing their consent for the study and completing personality and demographic items.

A randomly selected sample ($n = 240$) of participants were invited to participate in a pre-training opportunity to interact with others across the world (the control condition experimental conversation – more details below). This was scheduled an hour before the training was due to start to mirror a "waitlist" or "no treatment" condition so that I could compare participants who had not been trained with participants who had been trained. Participants were not informed they were on a waitlist and indeed, were scheduled to receive training at the same time as the intervention group, mitigating waitlist condition limitations such as a negative psychological expectation of having to wait for the intervention, thus better representing a "no treatment" group (Furukawa et al., 2014). The control group ($n = 157$) consisted of those (65%) who responded to the invitation (see Appendix C) and who completed the surveys.

5.4.2 Procedure

5.4.2.1 Experimental intervention. The listening training (i.e., experimental) group

consisted of those who participated in the experimental conversation after having attended the

full training programme (but did not attend the control condition activity beforehand), and

who responded to an invitation to complete the post-training questionnaire ($n = 163$).

Participants in the experimental group received listening training over three weeks (two hours

per week – see Appendix C for details of training content). The core focus of the training was

instruction on listening well and opportunities to practice body language and silence. The

training was intended to be a holistic listening training that supported participants in listening

to attitudes that were opposed to their own. Because mindset is a key component of this,

content included some specific activities to make the listening training fit-for-purpose;

including meditation (Jones et al., 2019), loving-kindness (Neff, 2023), shadows (Jung,

1954), and finally, language and judgments (Rogers & Farson, 1957). The listening training

also employed group reflection and experiential learning techniques, where participants had

the opportunity to test listening response strategies with each other. During the final week,

they were randomly paired together to engage in the experimental conversation.

5.4.2.2 Experimental conversation for both conditions. For both the experimental

and control conversations, participants were assigned to breakout rooms to hold

conversations about a topic on which they disagreed. None of the participants were made

aware of the specific experimental nature of the conversation.

Observers measured participants' ability to listen by quantifying behavioural (eye

contact, open posture, and focus on the speaker) and verbal cues (instances of using silence,

reflecting content, interruptions, changing topic) during the live conversations (see Appendix

C for details of conversation instructions and listening scoring).

Instructions for the conversation were as follows: Participants received a ten-minute

briefing during which they were instructed to select one topic over which they most disagreed from a list of eight polarising topics (e.g., the impact of social media on humanity, marriage as an essential institution for a healthy society, and reparations paid to descendants of the enslaved). The first participant was instructed to speak to a conversation partner for five minutes, while the second partner was instructed to listen. These roles were then reversed, so the other participant spoke and their partner listened for another five minutes. After these two interactions, both participants were instructed to converse together for five minutes about the topic. The encounter was fifteen minutes in total.

5.4.3 Measures

5.4.3.1 Listening quality manipulation check. Observed behaviours comprised scaled ratings (*1- Rarely, 2- Sometimes, 3- Often, 4- Always*) of maintaining eye contact, an open posture, and being focused on the speaker as core components of listening (internal reliability across non-verbal indicators; $\alpha = .93$). Observers also attempted to measure frequency of verbal cues such as use of silence, number of reflective statements, interruptions or changing topic back to self (internal reliability across verbal cues; $\alpha = .30$).

5.4.3.2 Overall approach to dependant variable measures. All dependent variable measures were anchored on a 7-point scale ranging from *1* (*not at all*) to *7* (*very much*). Stems referred participants to recall the control/experimental conversation, with the prompt: "When I was talking to my discussion partner, I felt…", or "How much do you feel this conversation…"

5.4.3.3 Interactional intimacy. Three items were designed to measure interactional intimacy based on necessary and sufficient conditions for intimacy (self-disclosure, relational connection, and a shared understanding; Prager & Roberts, 2004) and included items: "safe to express myself"; "connected to the other person," and "genuinely understood" ($\alpha = .80$).

5.4.3.4 Self-insight. Six items measured participants' learning about themselves (in

the absence of previous reflection, e.g., Michael, 2019) shown to be relevant in the context of biased attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Items included "Helped me to understand myself better"; "Made me think more deeply about the topic"; "Helped me to discover new or different insights about myself"; "Helped me to reflect about my attitudes"; "Helped me think about things in a different way"; and "Helped me to reassess my values or priorities" (α = .92).

       5.4.3.5 Defensiveness. Using the stem "When I was talking to my discussion partner, I felt…", three items made up the positively valenced subscale of feeling non-defensive (Open, Receptive, Inviting; α = .66) and four items made up the negatively valenced subscale of feeling defensive (Closed up, Exposed, Defensive, Tense inside; α = .61). After reversing non-defensiveness items, items were averaged and reported combined overall reliability of α = .65.

       5.4.3.6 Attitude change. A single item: "To what extent do you feel that the conversation changed your attitude about the subject?" measured participants' perceived change in their attitude towards the topic. The item has been adapted from prior research (relating to a prejudiced attitude; Itzchakov et al., 2020; Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

       5.4.3.7 Big Five Inventory-10. (BFI-10 English version; Rammstedt & John, 2007). A ten-item big five personality questionnaire. These items were issued before and after training to measure social desirability and consistency of questionnaire completion. The measure reports a correlation of r = .83 with the BFI-44 (John et al., 1991) and the test-retest correlation of r = .75 (over a period of 6 to 8 weeks; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

       5.4.3.8 Qualitative open-ended question. The following open-ended qualitative question was included at the end of the training to gauge the participants' subjective experience of listening during the experimental conversation: "Please share a story which stands out for you about your experience today of listening and being listened to when

discussing controversial topics with someone who disagrees with you".

5.5 Results

5.5.1 Preliminary Analyses

Table 7 - *(Study 3) Correlations Across Variables Tested*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Defensiveness			
2. Interactional intimacy	-.49**		
3. Self-insight	-.18*	.50**	
4. Attitude change	-.05	.21**	.56**

Note. $*p = .001. **p < .001.$

Table 7 presents the correlations among the dependent variables. Defensiveness was negatively correlated (moderate strength) with interactional intimacy but had little to no relationship with self-insight and attitude change. Interactional intimacy was moderately correlated with self-insight, and while interactional intimacy showed a weak correlation with attitude change, self-insight had a stronger (moderate) correlation with attitude change. All variables remain statistically distinct variables.

5.5.2 Main Effects

5.5.2.1 Observed listening behaviour (manipulation check). Comparison of means (in Table 8) suggests condition effects on listening behaviours: The experimental group observers identified more quality listening behaviours (body language, eye contact, attention) than the control group. Cohen's $d = 0.73$; a medium effect was observed in support of behavioural changes. The reliability of observers' evaluation of verbal cues was too low ($a = .30$) to draw any conclusions on verbal indicators of listening, thus the manipulation of listening quality was supported by the subset of observations quantifying non-verbal listening behaviours.

5.5.2.2 Dependent variables. Tests of between-subjects comparison of effects (see Table 8) indicated that the listening training manipulation predicted interactional intimacy; $d = 0.39$ (medium effect), self-insight; $d = 0.94$ (large effect), and attitude change; $d = 0.54$ (medium effect) following the conversation. There was no statistically significant difference in the means for feelings of defensiveness. These findings supported H_{1a}, that the listening training condition predicted attitude change, and also H_{1c} and H_{1d} (see Figure 9) - that listening training predicted both interactional intimacy and self-insight respectively. H_{1b} was not supported - thus listening training had no bearing on feeling defensive.

Table 8 - *(Study 3) Mean, SD per Scale Split by Condition, p, d, and Confidence Intervals for d Comparing Conditions*

Variable	Condition	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*d*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Observed listening Behaviour	Control	3.47	0.51				
	Experiment	3.76	0.32	.011	.74	0.25	1.20
Defensiveness	Control	2.42	0.88				
	Experiment	2.39	0.83	.772	-.03	-0.25	0.19
Interactional intimacy	Control	5.60	1.22				
	Experiment	6.02	0.93	< .001	.39	0.17	0.62
Self-insight	Control	4.74	1.41				
	Experiment	5.86	0.92	< .001	.94	0.71	1.18
Attitude change	Control	3.32	1.77				
	Experiment	4.29	1.79	< .001	.54	0.32	0.77

5.5.3 Mediation Analyses

I used Model 6: PROCESS v4.2 in SPSS (Hayes, 2022) to test the serial mediation pathway for H_2, the avoidance-oriented causal pathway (see Figure 9) towards attitude change (y) with listening training versus control condition (x) predicting defensiveness (m_1) and then self-insight (m_2). The pathway was not supported.

Figure 10 *(Study 3) Serial Mediation Model for H3 - Approach Pathway (Model 6: Process v4.2; Hayes, 2022)*
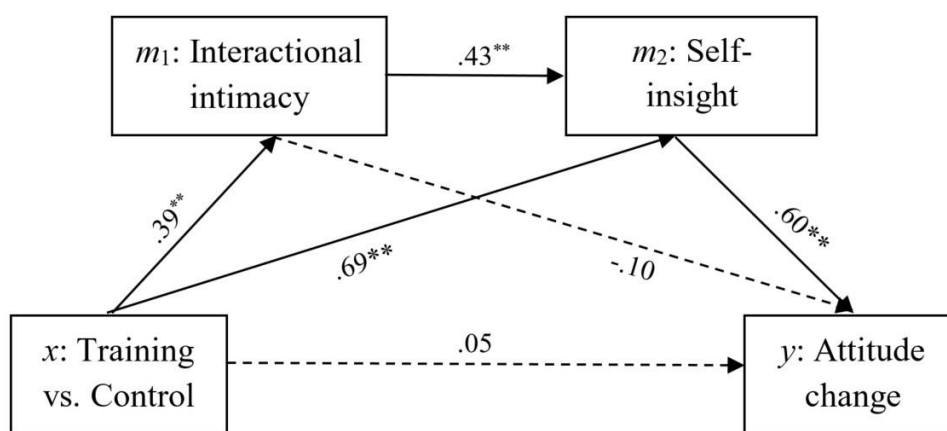
I used the same statistical package to test H_3, the approach-oriented serial mediation pathway (see Figure 10), to examine whether the manipulation: Listening training versus control condition (x) predicted attitude change (y) via interactional intimacy (m_1) and self-insight (m_2).

The total effect of the serial mediation model was significant, $\beta = .53$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant indirect effect of the condition (x: training vs. control) on attitude change (y) via interactional intimacy (m_1), followed by self-insight (m_2), $\beta = .10$. This supports the serial mediation model suggesting that those who were trained in listening gained more self-insight through its effects on interactional intimacy, which then facilitated a change in attitude. In all, approximately 19% of the variance in the model between training and attitude change was accounted for by this indirect serial mediation pathway (condition:

training vs. control → interactional intimacy → self-insight → attitude change).

The indirect pathway from condition (x) to attitude change (y) via self-insight (m_2) alone was also significant, $\beta = .41$, suggesting that the effect of the listening training (x) on attitude change (y) could also be explained by increased self-insight (m_2) beyond its association with interactional intimacy (m_1). The model shows that approximately 78% of the variance of listening training towards attitude change could be accounted for by this indirect pathway (condition: training vs. control → self-insight → attitude change). The direct effect of the training condition on attitude change was not significant, $\beta = .05$, supporting that the change in attitude occurs as an effect of the mediators, and not directly by the training.

In sum, the mediation analyses suggested that participants who received the deep listening training reported higher levels of interactional intimacy during a conversation with someone over a topic they strongly disagreed about, which appeared to increase their self-insight and subsequently, supported a change in attitude.

5.5.3.1 Personality (social desirability and consistency check). The two conditions did not differ in personality scores; $t(318) = 0.73$, $p = .468$, suggesting that participants answered the questionnaires consistently across the conditions.

5.5.3.2 Qualitative feedback from open-ended question. Themes identified from qualitative feedback received ($N = 163$) from the open-ended question on the experimental conversation supported that participants' experience of the conversation broadened their minds and helped them to appreciate a different perspective ($n = 56$), helped them to value listening ($n = 38$), it was described as a great or positive experience ($n = 35$), participants valued connection and empathy with others ($n = 34$), felt validated and respected ($n = 33$), felt more socially confident ($n = 13$), and discovered they had things in common with their conversation partner ($n = 20$). Equally, it was acknowledged that it was not easy to demonstrate listening in this (polarised opinions) context ($n = 28$), but that having tools and

being able to practice helped ($n = 27$) and a few expressed a desire to continue listening ($n = 8$). Ten participants ($n = 10$) reported they didn't strongly disagree, and one ($n = 1$) reported a poor listening experience. There was an acknowledgment that it was an artificial environment and that transferring to the real world might be more difficult ($n = 6$).

5.6 Present Study Discussion

High-quality listening training has the potential to bridge divides by facilitating constructive interactions even in the face of disagreement. Such interactions can increase self-awareness and support an open mind, encouraging people to re-evaluate their own attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Only a few studies to date have attempted to determine the outcomes of high-quality listening when participants disagree, and I am unaware of studies in real-world settings or beyond Western populations. To address this gap, the current research investigated the effectiveness of a three-week high-quality (deep) listening training with a diverse, global population of participants from the British Council and from among BBC audiences.

Following the training, attendees demonstrated more high-quality non-verbal listening behaviours, namely body language, eye contact, and focused attention on the speaker, during a conversation about a divisive topic over which participants held opposing views. Differences between the experimental and control groups showed a medium effect size, suggesting that the listening training was successful. Importantly, listening training may have promoted conversations that helped to bridge divides. Specifically, compared to participants in the waitlist control group who had not yet received the training, those who conversed after listening training experienced stronger feelings of interactional intimacy with their conversation partner. They felt safer to express themselves, genuinely understood, and a sense of connection with their partner. These findings are important because when such interactional intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988) is present, people are more likely to consider

the relational consequences of communication strategies they employ when they disagree with others, resulting in more respectful strategies (Cody et al., 1981). Indeed, high-quality listening is one such strategy that may preserve the relationship when conversation partners disagree.

According to the serial mediation analyses, interactional intimacy mediated part of the effects of listening training on self-insight. In other words, it may be that the listening training facilitated the experience of interactional intimacy, and partly because it did so, participants reported more self-reflective thinking about themselves regarding their attitudes. As a result of this connecting and reflective process, participants felt they could re-evaluate and change their attitudes. Mediation analyses also showed that the training had a direct effect on a participant's ability to self-reflect, which then supported a change in attitude. This suggests that high-quality listening training can enhance self-insight beyond what could be explained by interactional intimacy, but one means of gaining self-insight is an intimate interaction with another person through listening.

These findings, understood in light of existing research (Itzchakov et al., 2018, 2020), support a growing evidence base that suggests that high-quality listening can have downstream benefits towards increased self-insight and ultimately helps speakers to be more open in reconsidering their attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov et al., 2024b). Furthermore, the findings that listening training confers these benefits in part because it fosters interactional intimacy, speaks to the importance of listening as a means to foster positive relationships in conversations where there is discord or disagreement.

It must be noted that although the listening behaviours were statistically significantly different between conditions, the difference between them was not large. Indeed, speakers in both conditions rated the listening quality above the mid-point of the scale. This finding aligns with previous experiments where research assistants were trained to provide moderate

or high-quality listening (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021). This offers an interesting insight into how speakers perceive the listening they receive. It suggests that even moderate-quality listening, which lacks the features of high-quality listening (see Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), may be viewed as better than the average listening people typically experience. Future research could compare moderate-quality listening with speakers' perceptions of their everyday listening experiences. This could illuminate why listening is consistently rated positively in these experiments. The general state of listening in daily life may be quite poor that when a listener merely avoids interrupting or appearing distracted, it is perceived as 'better-than-average' listening (for evidence of poor everyday listening, see; Neill & Bowen, 2021).

Although I focused on interactional intimacy in the current study, other similar relational outcomes, such as positivity resonance, described as a co-experienced positive relational experience involving mutual care, shared positive affect, and behavioural or biological synchrony, have been theorised and demonstrated to be effected by listening (Itzchakov et al., 2024b; Moin et al., 2024b - see Chapter 4; Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). Despite operational differences in the two intimacy constructs, I inform this work by demonstrating that relational benefits can support attitude change, this time with evidence collected outside of the lab. I speculate that relational constructs such as intimacy and positivity resonance – and other indicators of closeness, tap into the same underlying construct and, ultimately, that high-quality listening supports many forms of closeness.

In addition, while this work tested interactional intimacy between strangers - which meant that there was a "blank slate" that supported unobstructed development of intimacy - future research may consider comparing the effects on self-insight and attitude change through high-quality listening in populations where there is already a history of relational intimacy; for example, with close friends, family members or romantic partners compared

with strangers. It may be that the existing presence of intimacy strengthens self-insight and attitude change even further, or conversely, if intimacy is impeded during the natural highs and lows of personal relationships, that self-insight and subsequent attitude change is also impeded – revealing the role of intimacy as a moderator.

It is interesting to note that feelings of intimacy could develop relatively quickly in this study, even while disagreeing with a stranger in a cross-cultural context. While Intergroup Contact Theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) suggests that mere interaction (Eveland et al., 2023) can explain positive results under the right conditions, there is evidence to suggest that even when the right conditions are present, cross-partisan conversations do not naturally result in positive outcomes (Santoro & Broockman, 2022). Future researchers could explore the power of listening and listening training in developing feelings of intimacy during short and longer interactions.

Overall, the findings support a view that fit-for-purpose listening training can effectively operationalise listening behaviours and principles to be used as a tool within communities and organisations that can support intrapersonal (self-insight, an open mind) and interpersonal (interactional intimacy) benefits in the context of disagreement and polarised attitudes. I show that this may be feasible in a cross-cultural context. While the research is still quite nascent, organisations or groups with culturally diverse populations can consider listening training to inspire better interpersonal relationships and understanding across divides. This could be implemented through listening circles (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017) or as part of an applied model or professional practice that is founded on the central principle of listening e.g., embedding a culture of coaching within organisations (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006).

The current study also began to explore the question of whether *approach-oriented* (i.e., increasing intimacy) versus *avoidance-oriented* (i.e., reducing defensiveness) processes

were most effective in facilitating self-insight and open attitudes as a result of listening training. Counter to my expectations, listening training did not appear to reduce feelings of defensiveness, although, as expected, it did increase self-insight. Defensiveness protects one's self-concept and can occur because internal discrepancies are brought to the surface (Wylie, 1957). Given clear condition effects were unable to be established on listening quality itself, it may be that learning to listen well to people who hold opposing beliefs is challenging work, and speaker threat or discomfort could not be effectively expelled, despite benefits attained for the positive, approach-oriented experiences of interactional intimacy and self-insight. Indeed, feedback from the qualitative comments revealed a theme that listening to polarised views was still not easy, for example;

> "*I found it interesting to realise that while I was happy to listen deeply, I was still very cautious and careful while speaking - as if I still did not expect the other person to listen deeply (even though this was the final workshop on deep listening). I shall have to reflect if this is an attitude I should work to dissolve, or if it is a natural and healthy approach to an unknown situation that will just as naturally go away when trust is cultivated between the two parties through such interaction*". (Participant feedback)

It is interesting to note that defensiveness was moderately negatively correlated with interactional intimacy. Therefore, although the training itself did not appear to directly influence feelings of defensiveness over the short duration of the course, it may be worth exploring the relationship between defensiveness, intimacy, and listening further. Potentially, defensiveness is slower to change than intimacy and repeated experiences of high-quality listening behaviour in this context could reduce defensiveness over time as intimacy builds into a stronger relationship. Tracking attitudes over time, it may be important to determine whether defensiveness plays a role in sustained attitude change.

Another potential explanation is that the inclusion of mindfulness within the training

may have drawn participants' attention to their internal states, including feelings of defensiveness, but also allowed participants to detach from potentially harmful reactions that might have otherwise arisen as a result of defensive feelings (Wells, 2005). This would be a fruitful avenue for future research.

I also note limitations of the defensiveness scale itself, including the fact that it has not been validated in previous research. A meta-analysis on the effectiveness of defensiveness measures reported that while direct, self-reported feelings of defensiveness tend to be reliable, they carry small effect sizes and therefore are limited in revealing the presence of defensiveness (Good & Abraham, 2007). Instead of direct self-report measures of defensiveness, authors recommend measuring defensive behavioural responses such as attention avoidance, blunting (attending to non-threatening information only), suppressing (mentally disengaging from the message) and counter-arguing (forming arguments to oppose the message) (Blumberg, 2000) – the latter could even see enhanced attention and listening in some contexts (Good & Abraham, 2007). Thus, future studies exploring defensiveness may benefit from an alternative measurement approach (see §8.1 for further discussion).

Overall, feelings of defensiveness did not appear to preclude the experience of associated intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits from listening training in this study. Themes from the qualitative feedback further supported that the conversational experience of those who had received listening training was a positive relational experience for many participants, who reported broadening their minds, appreciating a different perspective, and having learned the value of listening. At the same time, participants acknowledged the difficulty in applying listening skills in the context of discussing polarised attitudes. As a self-protective mechanism, it is reassuring that vulnerable or at-risk populations need not let their defences down entirely to experience a relational connection while demonstrating good listening, for example, victims engaging with their aggressors or coaches and therapists

working with risky populations (Moin, 2021).

5.6.1 Limitations of the Research

The study was conducted in a field setting and presented some methodological limitations. Firstly, the British Council selected participants from a global pool of applicants with a limited range of demographics (e.g., trainees' age, comfort with the English language, access to technology), and therefore, the sample is not representative of the general population in each global region represented.

The experimental conversation took place at the end of the training programme where both speakers and listeners were participants who had been trained to listen well, making it difficult to isolate effects on the listener and speaker, separately. As participants reflected on the entire conversation which involved assuming dual roles and a back-and-forth interaction, I could attribute effects towards a dyadic interaction between the two, considering the relational nature of the outcomes observed to be affected by the listening training.

In addition, given the current sample self-selected into the training, it may well be that the participants were naturally more receptive and willing to engage with opposing views (Minson & Chen, 2022) and more likely to hold a positive intention (a core component of good listening; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022) while doing so. While these qualities were held constant across conditions and participants were randomly assigned to receive an invitation to the waitlist or training group, it is possible that individuals receptive to participating in the training and participating in the study were more enthusiastic about developing their listening and therefore more likely to benefit from the listening training than attendees who may have been mandated to join, such that stronger effect sizes than we might have otherwise attained were observed.

Finally, my research attempted to measure listening quality via observer ratings rather than self-ratings as a methodological improvement on previous studies. Observers rated

behavioural cues reliably, however, attempts to quantify verbal listening cues (e.g., silence,

verbal affirmations, interruptions) reduced the internal reliability of the listening scale to

unacceptable levels ($\alpha = .30$). I believe the reason may have been the attentional capacity of

the observers, and specifically, that it was difficult for them to accurately evaluate multiple,

time-sensitive observational cues in situ. Perhaps, this is why I observed that the more

reliable scores (of behaviour) came from a rating scale whereas verbal cues were attempted to

be measured as a frequency. This is further considered and discussed in §8.1.

5.6.3 Future Research

While practical limitations didn't allow in the current study, future work could

explore the outcomes of conversations between interlocutors leveraging a dyadic model of

analysis (e.g., The Social Relations Model; Kluger et al., 2021; Malloy et al., 2023).

Furthermore, effects could be investigated in a setting outside of the training (e.g., employees

within an organisation) to explore how the training transferred to conversations between

speakers and/or listeners who were not similarly trained. A replication of the study with a

longitudinal design exploring the stability of listening-induced changes is also recommended.

Moreover, in future, interactions could be video-recorded to improve intra-rater and

inter-rater reliability in observer measurements. However, it is worth noting that the benefit

of in situ observers is that participants may have felt more comfortable discussing contentious

attitudes openly knowing that no recording would capture their conversation (Moin & Van

Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Regardless of whether it is done in in-situ or

through a recording, I suggest it is worthwhile for future researchers to develop a consistent

observer rating scale covering cues for each aspect of listening (i.e., identifying specific

indicators of attention, comprehension, and positive intention). This could be combined with

a more holistic evaluation of listening to align with how listening is generally perceived

(Lipetz et al., 2020).

5.7 Conclusion

The current experiment showed that a six-hour listening training resulted in more listening behaviours when interlocutors discussed a subject over which they firmly disagreed and that listening training promoted interactional intimacy, self-insight, and a change in attitude following discussions with people from different cultures about a divisive topic. Individuals trained in high-quality (i.e., deep) listening were largely able to develop the skills necessary to respectfully engage with people holding opposing views across cultures, laying the foundations for future respectful encounters and positive relationships. As the first study to explore causal outcomes of listening training when individuals disagreed about real-world social and political positions, and testing interlocutors from 86 countries, I demonstrate that in a world where polarised attitudes can cause division, high-quality listening training has the potential to support global communities and organisations seeking to build and enhance relationships across divides.

6. Summary of Results & General Discussion

The work presented within this thesis was designed to build theory relevant to listening training and then examined causal effects of high-quality listening on speakers and listeners, focusing on relational (positivity resonance, intimacy), affective (state anxiety, defensiveness) and intrapersonal outcomes (self-insight, attitude change, behavioural intention). Specifically, the effects of listening across two different conversational contexts was investigated (talking about character strengths and discussing opposing political views). One of the contexts was positively valenced and linked to constructive benefits (i.e., character strengths), while the other was negatively valenced and linked to fear and threat reactions (i.e., disagreements). In this final chapter, I summarise the findings across each of the empirical chapters, before discussing broader theoretical relevance and the novel contribution made by the studies. Finally, I outline the limitations of the research and make

recommendations for future research, before offering a concluding statement.

6.1 Study 1 (Chapter 3)

A thematic analysis on a sample ($N = 207$) of qualitative data consisting of practitioner listening training materials sourced from the world-wide-web. The method of analysis employed a combined top-down and bottom-up approach to coding using structured-tabular thematic analysis methodology (Robinson, 2022). Following tests to determine inter-rater reliability between coders on the themes, six themes were revealed in total: Way of being, listening behaviours, inner-work, holistic listening and training strategies. In the discussion, themes were analysed for tensions between theory and practice in order to develop a normative theory of listening training.

6.1.1 Study 1 Contribution

While the themes in themselves mirrored listening dimensions identified in previous listening research e.g., (Bodie et al., 2012; Kluger et al., 2022), the study revealed that contrary to researcher opinion on how listening is applied in the real world (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Tyler, 2011), practitioners attempt to honour Roger's original proposition of holding unconditional positive regard while listening, and do not simply enact "active listening" behaviours. Engaging in "inner-work" is recommended in advance of the listening interaction, developing the listener's mindset and commitment towards listening by pre-empting potential conflicts and barriers to listening such as heuristics and bias. This guided the inclusion of content in the listening training videos developed for Study 2.

Three core tensions in learning to listen were identified and put forward as "dialectical listening theory" (see Figure 4, Chapter 3, p. 66). From these tensions, a novel insight was posited: that in order to demonstrate good listening, the listener must oscillate between explicit, factual and implicit, holistic (dual-processing; Barnard & Teasdale, 1991) listening modes in order to best manage the tensions in the listening process and to achieve an

advanced level of listening. Findings were contradictory to existing theories (Burleson, 2011), which suggest that developed listeners will rely on more deliberate thought-processing, yet analysis of practitioner listening materials supports the opposite, that the more advanced listener relies on a "sixth sense" which is more intuitive and capable of being reached only after a lot of practice and experience.

6.1.2 Study 1 Implications

Based on the insights gained in Chapter 2, several strategies were proposed to improve the way people are trained to listen, considering that people may need support identifying and managing each of the tensions during listening training. Future research to test these strategies for efficacy is suggested below.

The first tension referred to a mechanical focus on listening behaviour by the listener compromising perceived listening quality. While this may be resolved naturally as the trainee listener gains more confidence and maturity, it may be that by focusing on mindset first, the behaviour follows more naturally after that in a more authentic and more intuitive manner. Comparing training success between two different listening trainings; one that focuses on behaviour, and a second that focuses on mindset would reveal more.

The second tension related to a reliance on more implicit, cognitive processing to identify incongruences or patterns between the speaker's verbal and non-verbal communication. Being attuned to such patterns in communication may reveal generative information about the speaker's message – identifying underlying meaning that the speaker themselves might not have acknowledged yet. Identifying and defining communication "rules" or patterns between verbal and body-language expressions that a novice listener could potentially be trained in could resolve this tension. Research into such patterns or rules between verbal and non-verbal communication cues is lacking in the communication field however, and theories of multimodal communication are only just beginning to emerge

(Trujillo & Holler, 2023). Listening researchers would benefit from following this research domain closely to determine how insights can be translated to advanced level listening training.

The third tension related to managing potential biases in the face of listening to information that a person disagrees with or that conflicts with one's own values. Engaging in "inner-work" to raise awareness and planning how to manage such reactions was recommended, mirroring the practice of mindfulness. While this is recognised as a strategy for reducing practitioner bias, it does not appear to have been tested as a core component of listening training for this purpose (Bodie, 2010).

To manage biased attitudes, this thesis supports that listening itself is an effective approach to attitude moderation and self-regulation, thus, exploring the effects of "listening to the listener" during training, to determine effects on listener bias following training may be a fruitful avenue for further investigation. This mirrors assertions that professional listeners would benefit from engaging in supervision and from receiving listening themselves so that they can give voice to and address countertransference (Harber, 2023).

6.1.3 Study 1 Future Research

The insights from this study are useful for directing future research into listening training. In addition to the studies already published within the literature, my work highlights the importance of addressing the dual-processing nature of listening. Such processes have been examined in the context of persuasive and supportive listening contexts (Burleson, 2009; Chaiken, 1980), but have not yet been explored in the context of relational listening and in particular, while addressing tensions that may be inherent to listening.

Interactive Cognitive Subsystems (ICS), a meta-theory of cognition supports that there are two levels of meaning-making systems in the brain supporting the existence of (i) explicit, factual processing of information and (ii) implicit, holistic processing of information

(the former is where emotional reactions take place; Barnard & Teasdale, 1991). Consistent with this, neuroscience research based on brain-imaging also supports there are different systems that activate in the brain when processing *how* something is being is communicated (e.g., interpreting specific, non-verbal behaviour from visual cues) versus contemplating *why* something is being communicated (e.g., "mentalizing" implicitly the emotional state of the listener based on prior knowledge and inferences; Spunt, 2013).

While a large number of studies suggest the two systems operate in a mutually exclusive manner, they can be co-activated. For example, this may occur when inferring someone's mental state from an observed emotional expression (Spunt, 2013). This is also supported by ICS theorists (Cowdrey et al., 2017; May & Barnard, 2006). As such, investigating the activation of dual-process states using neuro-imaging methods during moderate-quality and high-quality listening may reveal fascinating insights. Specifically, whether training strategies (such as mindfulness and listening to the listener) might support the listener to co-activate the *how* (explicit) and *why* (implicit) systems of the brain together (Spunt, 2013), which may prevent the listener from losing focus on the speaker while they simultaneously evaluate their own reactions and draw meaning from the speaker's message. Theoretically, this could facilitate the opportunity to minimise biased reactions without impeding listening quality and authenticity. This will be important to examine, particularly in the context of listening to challenging information, to see how biased responses of the trained and untrained listener are processed in the moment. When doing so, researchers may wish to test mediators to explore the reasons that some listeners might avoid acting through bias, include self-integration (Frank, 2021; Leary, 2007; Weinstein et al., 2013) potentially resulting from being listened to themselves, and emotion regulation (Roth et al., 2019) that may be achieved through practicing mindfulness (Schaefer, 2018).

While it argued that there are methodological challenges to performing functional

magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans during live listening interactions due to restrictions of lying completely still in a neuroimaging machine (Spunt, 2013), listeners could observe videos of a simulated interaction and imagine being the listener, as has been done in listening experiments cited within this thesis (e.g., Weinstein et al., 2021). Watching videos with the use of a mirror in the scan machine has been achieved with other experiments involving fMRI scans (Spunt, 2013). While the ecological validity of such a study may be limited, it may reveal important insights regarding dual-processing while listening and the effects on listener bias.

6.2 Study 2 (Chapter 4)

A randomised, control group between-subjects experiment which compared the effects of listening and listening training between lay people while they conversed about character strengths. The study tested for three specific effects of listening (positivity resonance, authenticity and state anxiety) considering both the condition (high-quality versus moderate-quality as a control) and the role of the participant (speaker or listener). While no interaction effects were apparent, only positivity resonance showed a statistically significant outcome between listening conditions experienced by both the speaker and listener roles in the high-quality listening condition.

6.2.1 Study 2 Contribution

This is the first experimental study to show that positivity resonance is experienced by *both* the speaker and the listener as a result of high-quality listening, even in the context of a constructive conversation topic as character strengths. Interestingly, the other variables tested (authenticity and state anxiety) showed no difference by role and in between listening conditions, despite being reported as listening effects in previous listening experiments. These findings suggest that character strengths played a more significant role in accounting for those effects than listening, consistent with prior empirical and theoretical assertions in

character strengths research.

There is more to the picture, however, and exploratory analyses showed that speakers experienced more authenticity than the listener. Thus, speaking about character strengths supported feelings of authenticity. Furthermore, while post-conversation measures of state anxiety did not differ between conditions and by role, state anxiety was significantly lower at the end of the conversation when compared with the start of the conversation for those in the high-quality listening condition only.

Mediation analyses were also carried out to determine effects on behavioural intention to continue the conversational experience (listening for listeners, applying character strengths for speakers). Based on perceptions of listening (speaker-perception and self-reported listener), perceptions of listening quality predicted respective behavioural intentions. Specifically, listening effects on behavioural intention for speakers to continue applying strengths was mediated by authenticity, and listening effects on behaviour intention for listeners to continue listening was mediated by positivity resonance.

6.2.2 Study 2 Implications

The most meaningful conclusion drawn from Study 2 is that positivity resonance, a relational construct, was the most proximal effect of listening between both the listener and speaker in an already constructive conversational context. This implies that listening is primarily relational in nature and thus, an important component in facilitating interpersonal connection.

Importantly, mediation analyses also support that this positive relational experience can act as a motivator for future behaviour, specifically to continue listening. This might add confusion as to whether listening is an antecedent or an outcome of positivity resonance, however, it lends tentative support that it may be both - supporting theories relating to the positive upwards spiral hypothesised to occur from listening by episodic listening theory and

broaden and build theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Zhou & Fredrickson, 2023). If the study is repeated, it would also be useful to measure the speaker's motivation to continue listening, to see if perceived listening is related to a motivation to continue listening by the speaker also.

For speakers, perceived listening did also increase their feelings of authenticity which then had a downstream effect on their behavioural intention to apply their character strengths. These findings are novel because they lend tentative support to the theory that speaker-perceived listening (as a relational factor) plays a motivational role in character strengths interventions (via authenticity as a mediator). This is consistent with previous findings in one study that found that the teacher "strengths-spotting" of students – identifying students' strengths – acted as a mediator between character strengths interventions and student outcomes within a school environment (Quinlan et al., 2019). High-quality listening could be an important focus in character strengths interventions that aim to build motivation and enhance well-being, for example, during teaching and managerial conversations. This could also explain in part, the "how" of strengths coaching conversations (Fouracres & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Further research is needed to learn more about the power and boundaries of listening in this context.

6.2.3 Study 2 Future Research

Broader implications worth investigating further include exploring whether training people in high-quality listening may be a practical strategy for nurturing flourishing communities mediated by positivity resonance (West et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). In this way, listening training solutions could be combined with positivity resonance interventions to enhance connection and well-being in communities (Major et al., 2018).

Exploring positivity resonance and further downstream benefits on listeners who provide high-quality listening to speakers who disclose distressing experiences is also

suggested. For example, researchers could further explore listening effects on resilience

(Brown et al., 2021) and secondary trauma (Elwood et al., 2011). Such studies could aid in

determining whether high-quality listening could offer protection against the negative effects

of listening. It is recommended that effects are compared between lay persons and

professional listeners, as well as examining the differences in traits between those who show

more or less resilience to stress, for example when responding with more or less depression

and anxiety as a result of experiencing similar stressors (Michelson & Kluger, 2021).

6.3 Study 3 (Chapter 5)

The third and final study in this thesis examined the effects of a fit-for-purpose

listening training that was designed to support people with conversations where views

discussed conflicted with their own. Similar to my previous studies, the study focused on

naturalistic conversational contexts between two zero acquaintance lay people who had

received the training. Furthermore, at the time of the study, it was the first of its kind not only

to explore listening in the context of discussing disagreements, but also to do so with a global

sample of participants (representing 86 countries).

6.3.1 Study 3 Contribution

Those who received the training experienced greater intimacy with conversational

partners, developed improved self-insight, and were more open to attitude change compared

with the control group. There was no significant difference in feelings of defensiveness

across those who were trained to listen and the comparison condition.

Serial mediation analyses supported the temporal order of mediators as intimacy (the

most proximal outcome) preceding self-insight (as a mediator) towards attitude change (distal

outcome). When reversing intimacy and self-insight, the serial mediation model was not

statistically significant. The findings were consistent with previous studies which reported the

effects of listening on attitude change, mediated by self-insight, but the added dimension of

intimacy as an antecedent to self-insight was interesting and once again, supported that a relational outcome (intimacy) was the most proximal effect.

Serial mediation analyses also examined two pathways to self-insight from listening training: (i) via intimacy as an approach-oriented pathway and (ii) via defensiveness as an avoidance pathway. The approach-oriented pathway linking listening training to self-insight through intimacy was supported.

6.3.2 Study 3 Implications

Study 3 produced several intriguing conclusions. First, findings demonstrated that it is possible for strangers from among a globally culturally diverse population to develop a close relationship from zero acquaintance through effects of listening training, and in particular while talking about a socially threatening topic. In past studies, intimacy has been achieved from high-quality listening between strangers who spoke about sources of stress limited to a population of women from the United States of America. Perceived listening quality influenced both the level of closeness felt by those women as well as reducing the levels of stress they experienced (Malloy et al., 2023). In that study, this was explained by "tend and befriend" theory. My study's sample achieved effects of intimacy with both male and female participants from a global sample of 86 countries and the topic of conversation was more contentious therefore the underlying motive to "tend and befriend" was not the same. My study did not appear to reduce feelings of tension, however.

Furthermore, understanding the temporal order of the mediators offered insight into the dynamic between relational and intrapersonal effects of listening, and how listening supported personal change. The most proximal outcome of listening being intimacy suggests that listening worked to change individuals in this context by first creating a supportive environment (via intimacy $d = 0.39$), which then facilitated safe introspection leading to enhanced self-insight ($d = 0.94$), and then attitude change ($d = 0.54$, self-regulation). The lack

of significant change in feelings of defensiveness was interesting, however, because participants still had positive relational experiences and benefited from further downstream improvements despite the apparent remaining presence of defensive feelings. Further investigation into other relational factors such as trust, interpersonal attractiveness and relationship satisfaction is recommended to examine whether repeated instances of interactional intimacy builds relationships and reduces defensiveness over time, while discussing disagreements in particular. It is also worth considering alternative approaches to measure defensiveness, since direct self-report measures of defensiveness tend to be limited (Good & Abraham, 2007).

The serial mediation model also supported a direct effect from the listening training to self-insight, which by comparison, accounted for a larger percentage of variance in the model than the effect through interactional intimacy. This finding suggests that other variables associated with the training itself (unaccounted for in the mediation model) helped participants to develop and gain self-insight. Consistent with the theme of inner-work from Study 1, this may be because during the training, participants worked through specific skills such as practicing mindfulness and listening to each other, or because the content itself invited introspection (preparing to adopt the right mindset for listening). Further research could examine these factors more closely.

Moreover, Study 3 results indicated that the approach-oriented pathway (self-insight through intimacy) was facilitated by listening as opposed to the avoidance-oriented pathway (reducing defensiveness). This might guide the focus of future training content and goals (i.e., aiming to build relationships may be more constructive than reducing defensiveness) and consistent with previous research on approach versus avoidant-oriented social goals (Gable, 2006), should result in more sustainable positive relational and well-being outcomes.

7. Research Limitations

7.1 Study 1 Limitations

The research in Study 1 was based on listening training outlines, descriptions, full texts, and articles sourced largely from Western countries, therefore, the tensions and strategies may be quite specific to Western culture. The other limitation is that the texts sourced referred to basic rather than advance listening trainings and many were limited to outlines of the training content rather than full training content. Research into more complete, advanced listening training from a broader range of global regions may reveal further insights which could inform further strategies into managing the listening tensions identified in dialectical listening theory.

7.2 Study 2 Limitations

The effects of listening training (via short video) only produced a small effect size and there were generally high levels of listening across both conditions. Furthermore, although listener and speaker perceptions of listening showed an improvement in listening quality following the training, the same was not perceived by observers. This suggests that the method for evaluating listening quality by observations could be improved.

While a naturalistic conversation was attempted, participants were on task to have "a conversation" immediately following the "communication" training regardless of condition, which may have introduced demand characteristics and artificially inflated the participants' focus on listening. It would be worthwhile exploring and refining the listening training approach to create stronger effects. To address demand characteristics, video-based training could be completed in advance of the experimental conversation to create more distance between the training content prior to the conversation. This would require validating the listening training more formally to determine how successful the listening training has been, and whether such effects are sustained a few weeks later.

7.3 Study 3 Limitations

As both studies 2 and 3 of this thesis occurred concurrently, I was unable to build upon learnings regarding measuring listening quality via observational ratings as one might expect if the studies had been conducted consecutively. Certainly there was opportunity for the observational cues for the listening evaluations to be improved.

As a field study, the method for observation in this study had several constraints including resources and ethics (i.e. confidentiality), particularly given the global diversity of participants. This led to the decision to evaluate listening quality in situ which limited the reliability of the verbal listening indicators. Although the difference in listening quality between conditions was supported by behavioural indicators, overall effects could not be attributed to conversational listening quality confidently. More reliably, effects were attributed to which group had attended the training or not. While this supports the effects of the fit-for-purpose listening training, it makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding the direct effects of listening on measured outcomes in this study.

Another further limitation is that the measure of defensiveness relied on a direct, self-reported measure of defensive affect, rather than observed defensive reactions or behaviours which has potential to be a more effective measure (Good & Abraham, 2007). I have expanded further in §8.1 my learnings and recommendations for future observational ratings for listening and defensiveness.

The study suggested that there is potential for listening to facilitate attitude change - consistent with previous findings which supports openness to changed attitudes and increased favourability towards outgroups (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Although I could not measure the strength or direction of attitude change due to time restrictions in the field setting, there was an indication from the qualitative responses that this was in a positive direction. In a further, subsequent study recently carried out by the lab I am part of, examining attitude change

following high-quality listening while discussing a disagreement in a more controlled environment, it was shown that listening consistently changed attitudes in a positive direction regardless of a need to belong, how strongly one held their attitude or whether the attitude was grounded in morality (Itzchakov et al., 2024b). This supports findings in my study and also suggests that the effects of listening may not always be moderated by group dynamics.

8. Future Research Recommendations

The studies in my thesis inform future research in the area of listening and change, and highlight there is much more work to be done to examine causal effects of listening on both interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits to listener and speakers. It is vital researchers gain further insight into that conditions that support self-regulation and change as a result of delivering and receiving high-quality listening.

8.1 Observational Measurement Methods for Listening and Defensiveness

Reflecting on how I could have improved listening measurement for both studies, I outline below valuable learnings from my experience evaluating high-quality listening through observational ratings. Firstly, I suggest that leveraging well established methods for rating behaviour, such as behaviourally anchored rating scales is a good approach (Campbell et al., 1973). Reliable and observable behavioural indicators for high-quality listening behaviour need to be universally defined and validated as an initial step, building on evidence-based models of high-quality listening such as that of Kluger & Itzchakov which posits positive intention, comprehension and attention as core components (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). The same could be applied for a measure of defensiveness in this context, leveraging the model of defensive reactions by Blumberg (2000) including attention avoidance, blunting, suppression and counter-arguing. Evaluations could be triangulated with independent observer ratings, speaker ratings and self-report (listener ratings).

It is clear from Study 2 findings that self-reported listening will be a clearer indicator

of downstream effects on the listener (and speaker-perceptions on downstream effects on the speaker) than relying on condition or more removed measures of listening quality. This should also be triangulated with observer measurements to reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Video recording will allow more nuanced and accurate coding although in situ evaluations will minimise issues with storing confidential data. Where there is limited capacity to record videos, it is recommended to rely on fewer, more intuitive and holistic measures using a rating scale. For example, researchers may elicit overall ratings of listening quality that are formed from three sub-components, tested separately: positive intention, understanding and attention (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), combined with an overall holistic rating (Lipetz,et al., 2020) to ensure more accurate and reliable observer ratings.

　　　With the availability of modern technologies and artificial intelligence to analyse interactions, there is valid argument to employ and adopt these technologies to create efficiencies and improvements in how listening research is conducted (Yeomans et al., 2023). Yet, before this can be embraced, some preparatory work is essential. There may be challenges with developing accurate algorithmic models for listening due to the dual-process (verbal and non-verbal) nature of communication in listening - as models may become quite complex (Yeomans et al, 2023). Nevertheless, building on literatures which identify perceptions of listening by a speaker (i.e. feeling heard), an independent observer (objectively evaluating listening quality) and by the listener themselves (i.e. their mindset and intention towards the speaker) will help to build a comprehensive model of behavioural indicators from three different perspectives to form a triangulated, behaviourally anchored rating scale.

　　　Previous research supported a low correlation between speaker and listener perceptions of listening. However, in Study 2, my own results showed a stronger correlation between the self-reported listening and speaker-perception, with the speaker's perception being stronger than the listeners. More recent research also supports that speakers and

observers tend to overestimate the attentiveness of listeners when behavioural components of listening are observed (Collins et al., 2024). This suggests that future research is needed to verify listening indicators from each of the three perspectives, and to develop a consistent and reliable model to measure listening as a broader construct, while being clear on which perspectives are being considered. Once these indicators have been validated by human observers and raters, such a model could inform a technical framework which may then be developed and implemented with greater efficiency through technology and artificial intelligence systems.

8.2 Dyadic Level Analysis

Dyadic experiences which account for the reciprocated back-and-forth nature of conversations could be further examined in future research, as outlined in the episodic listening theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Dyadic level of analyses and designs, for example the Social Relations Model is one such approach that could facilitate this (Back & Kenny, 2010; Kluger et al., 2021; Malloy et al., 2023). Other models such as multi-level modelling could also be considered, for example, by leveraging the "actor-partner" model for analysis proposed by Griffin and Gonzalez (2003, p. 578). This model of analysis reports correlations *within* dyads as well as *between* dyads, revealing specific differences which account for the characteristics of the dyad when compared with traditional mean analyses between groups. For example, in a study by Stinson & Ickes (1992) which analysed interactions between dyads consisting of strangers, and dyads consisting of best friends, a stronger correlation was reported of reciprocal smiling (e.g., the more a person smiled, the other did too) in the stranger dyads versus the best friends dyads. However, between dyad analyses showed that overall, there was more smiling in best friend dyads than the stranger dyads. This form of analysis breaks down the overall correlation between variables into more nuanced dyadic level insights helping to determine whether the predictive power can be

attributed to behaviours of one person in the dyad "the actor", or the behaviour of "the partner" in the dyad (Griffin & Gonzalez, 2003).

In all, it is recommended that a design which facilitates dyadic data analysis is incorporated at the outset for future studies so that nuances can be explored more deeply. With such a study design, researchers can explore questions such as, "how does the speaker's perception of intimacy affect the listener's capacity to uphold unconditional positive regard and withhold listener bias?"

8.3 Beyond Listening

Future research could also explore how speakers might respond to being challenged on specific views or attitudes they hold, it has been proposed that combined with messages of acceptance (e.g., through high-quality listening), being challenged to do something that an individual might not have otherwise chosen to do can be effective in inspiring change in individuals (e.g., with weight management; Dailey, 2010; Dailey et al., 2010), or alongside constructive problem solving (Behfar et al., 2020). This would be an interesting line of inquiry in the therapeutic and coaching psychology fields for example, which leverage not only listening as a conversational strategy, but also questioning and challenge (Day, 2021; Heron, 2001).

9. Thesis Conclusion

9.1 Theoretical Implications

The first study in this thesis explored how best to train people to listen and proposed a theory for learning to listen: Dialectical listening theory, which emphasises the tensions between explicit, factual and intuitive, holistic thought processes during the listening process. Directions for future listening and communication research were recommended and included examining dual-process thinking during listening to understand better how listeners can manage the tensions highlighted.

A core line of inquiry was to understand how relational and intrapersonal effects work together to facilitate self-insight and self-regulatory change in individuals, and how this might differ across contexts (constructive and threatening). A series of proximal and distal effects were hypothesised from the literature review (see Figure 1, p. 51). Originally posited as occurring serially or linearly, instead it seems unlikely that there is linear progression of effects from listening. The findings in this thesis support the theory that there may instead be a more complex dynamic, supporting an upward spiral of effects (i.e., high-quality listening created positivity resonance, which then facilitated motivation to continue high-quality listening).

Models supported that relational effects were the primary outcomes of high-quality listening. However, intrapersonal effects may also come about directly from high-quality listening (when relationship is controlled for), such as feeling more authentic from discussing strengths, or developing self-insight, possibly from the "inner-work" undertaken in preparation for listening in the fit-for-purpose training – further research should examine this.

Figure 11 proposes an alternative model (to Figure 1) of effects hypothesised from high-quality listening - rather than being linear, reflecting a more interdependent dynamic. It is feasible that listening triggers all of the cycles proposed in Figure 11 directly i) relationship, ii) authenticity and iii) self-integration, with each of the "cogs" in Figure 11 affecting the other in an upward spiral based on the quality of listening, and likely moderated by individual differences such as self-esteem and attachment style.

A relevant framework through which to understand this dynamic - which I have mentioned throughout this thesis - is self-determination theory (built upon four decades of research; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When one person makes another person feel that they can be authentic (through high-quality listening) and thus able to express themselves in a way that feels true to themselves, this is considered to be an autonomy supportive relational behaviour.

Therefore authenticity can be linked to autonomy need satisfaction.

The "cogs" in Figure 11 map well onto the two basic psychological needs of relatedness and autonomy (relational → relatedness; and authenticity → autonomy), reflecting a more integrated relationship between the two, as supported by a "mini-theory" of self-determination theory: relational motivation theory (Deci & Ryan, 2014). The theory states that the establishment of good quality relationships satisfies not only the need to belong and feel a sense of connectedness with other people, but also that such relationships support the other basic psychological needs, namely autonomy and to some extent, competence. Indeed, individuals tend to thrive on and seek out relationships that are autonomy supportive and facilitate authenticity (Al Khouja et al., 2022). There is emerging evidence to support this as a viable theory to explain the effects of high-quality listening (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Weinstein et al., 2022) and therefore, this would be an interesting avenue to explore downstream links to well-being and motivation.

Figure 11 *Revised Model Depicting Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Effects from Listening*
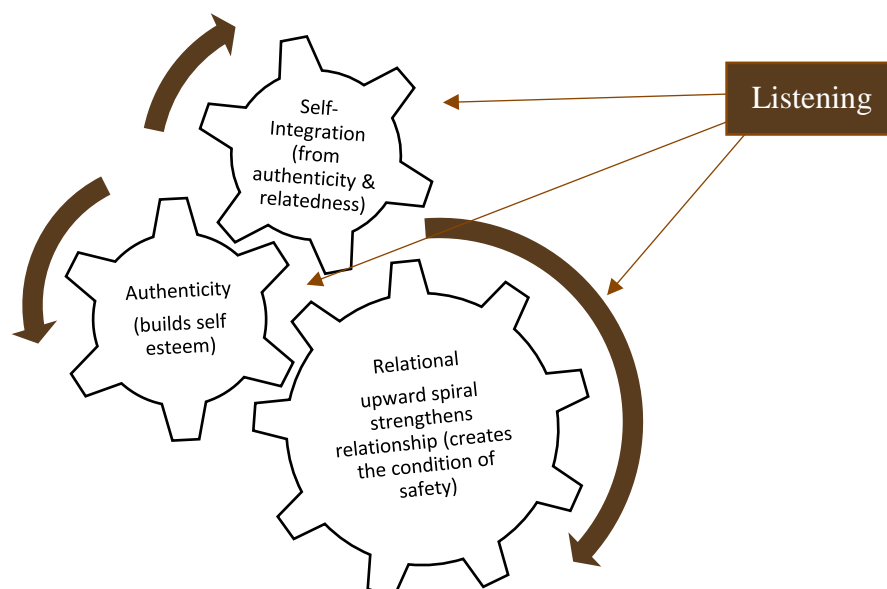
9.2 Practical Implications

Interpersonal effects such as intimacy and positivity resonance were shown to be the

most proximal outcomes of listening even after brief encounters while talking about both a constructive and threatening topic of conversation. These relational experiences facilitated further positive downstream effects such as behavioural intention and attitude change from these brief encounters. This suggests that high-quality listening, first and foremost, serves to build the foundations of a safe and trusting relationship. The relationship foundation and listening facilitates subsequent intrapersonal experiences including feelings of authenticity and self-insight. Together, these effects of high-quality listening mediated further downstream outcomes creating opportunities for change in the speaker including behavioural motivation and attitude change (authenticity → continue applying character strengths; self-insight → attitude change).

The contrast between the two contexts – discussing character strengths, a positive and constructive topic known for motivational and well-being effects already, and discussing polarised political attitudes creating a socially threatening scenario giving rise to feelings of tension – is that the effect size for listening and relational effects was lower in the constructive conversation than what was observed in the threatening conversation (i.e., Study 1 listening quality $d = 0.29$; Study 2 listening quality. $d = 0.73$, Study 1 positivity resonance $d = 0.20$, Study 2 intimacy $d = 0.39$). While these cannot be directly compared due the different experimental conditions and listening manipulation across the two experiments, in both scenarios relational effects were achieved during the brief encounters between strangers and they mediated further downstream outcomes. These findings highlight the potential power of high-quality listening in facilitating change in individuals. It was unclear however, whether high-quality listening could have a significant impact on negative feelings such as state anxiety and feelings of defensiveness across both contexts and this warrants further investigation.

9.3 Concluding Statement

The capacity for high-quality listening to bring about meaningful change in individuals has been affirmed through the studies in this thesis, building on previous research findings but extending that findings can translate from controlled, lab conditions to more naturalistic contexts, and in the context of disagreements with a much more diverse and broader population of participants. Findings support the potential for high-quality listening to strengthen relationships and facilitate constructive introspection and subsequent self-regulatory mechanisms (such as attitudinal openness and behavioural motivation). This was able to be achieved between strangers and during brief encounters, with training that ranged from being short (a 13-minute video) and a more intensive, fit-for-purpose training (6 hours over 3 weeks).

On this basis, I emphasise that the importance of high-quality listening as the bedrock of conversations that change should not be underestimated. In a world where division and conflict are escalating (Levin at al., 2021), rediscovering and harnessing a primal human sense such as listening, when applied intentionally and purposefully, could serve as a key relational tool to develop constructive relationships. If listening training can be fine-tuned for increased efficacy, listening training and interventions may just be one answer to helping people change for the better, not only for themselves but for everyone around them.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Study 1

Analysis & Coding Tables

We undertook steps of analysis following the Structured Tabular Thematic Analysis (ST-TA; Robinson, 2022) framework, which involves an eight-step process (outlined below) to develop, count, and test the occurrence of qualitative codes.

Phase A: Deductive – a priori code and theme selection. The first five papers analysed were sources known to the researchers that comprehensively covered the topic of listening, including a business magazine article, professional magazine articles, a website article for practitioners, and an academic journal article targeted at practitioners. These papers were selected as they would cover a comprehensive range of listening factors for people in practice, and they helped us as researchers to get into the data:

1. (Business Magazine Article): Deep Listening - Emily Kasriel - Stanford Social Innovation Review (Kasriel, 2021).

2. (Professional Magazine): Positive psychology techniques: Active constructive responding – The Coaching Psychologist, 2014 (Gable et al., 2004, as cited in Passmore & Oades, 2014).

3. (Practitioner Web Resource): Practicing Empathic Listening – positivepsychology.com (n.d.) https://positivepsychology.com/empathic-listening/

4. (Professional Magazine): Motivational Interviewing techniques: Reflective listening – The Coaching Psychologist, 2011 (Passmore, 2011).

5. (Academic Journal) - The Listening Guide for Coaching: exploring qualitative, relational, voice-centered, evidence-based methodology for coaches, Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice (Woodcock, 2010).

The following data synthesis approach was applied to these texts to form an a priori set of codes:

1. The content was read and re-read from the initial data set (five articles) and notes were recorded.

2. Codes (sub-themes) were created from the first data set, and a table was created in Excel. Analysts looked for frequently used terms, different terms that referred to the same underlying meaning and emphasis of terms (Owen, 1984) to generate these.

3. Themes were identified from the first data set, and codes were re-organized into themes.

4. Codes from one theme were compared with codes from other themes and critically reviewed to identify anomalies.

5. The first draft of a "code book" was documented and presented to a team of five coders, with an explanation for each code and its meaning.

Phase B: Deep immersion in the data. The following analysis was then carried out:

6. The remainder of the texts were read, re-read, and coded according to the initial code book by the first rater using a tabular method by adding a "1" in the column for that code if it appeared in the source.

7. New codes were added inductively as they were identified through subsequent sources.

8. The team of additional raters cross-coded at least ten of the initial set of sources each, overlapping with each other by at least five sources so that a portion of sources were double-coded.

9. Coders met to review and reach a consensus on overlapping sources as a form of calibration and to ensure a shared understanding of what codes represented.

Phase C: Inductive, developing revised themes in the context of and influenced by a priori themes.

10. A coding meeting was held between all coders, and coders held a reflexive discussion on codes, disagreements in ratings were discussed, and critical feedback was sought on the formation of codes and themes until a consensus was reached. No major changes were made to the themes during this stage. However, clarification was achieved on various codes as coders gained familiarity with the qualitative content, and some codes were moved to different themes following discussion and agreement.

Phase D: Tabulating codes/themes against data chunks.

11. The coding team each rated an additional 30 sources, overlapping with each other by five sources to ensure a portion of sources were double-coded yet again.

12. Data were entered into excel, entering "1" in the column against codes/sources.

Phase E: Agreement & Phase F: Exploring code/theme frequencies.

13. Researchers performed an inter-rater reliability analysis to estimate Kappa between the two sets of ratings for each code that was double-rated to measure the consistency of judgment.

14. Coders met again to critically discuss codes that fell below the threshold for moderate agreement (IRR > .40), and an agreement was reached to remove these codes based

on disagreement and low frequency (or prevalence) in consideration of the research question.

15. Final themes, codes, and descriptions were revised based on coder discussions and consensus on retention, rejection, overlap, and meaning, and the title was agreed upon for each of the themes and codes.

Phase G: Thematic Map and Phase H: Producing the report.

16. The themes and sub-themes were mapped and re-ordered logically, as a collaborative task between coders, before being documented in a final report.

17. The final codebook detailing themes and sub-themes was documented and presented (see Table 1).

Inter-rater Reliability Analysis

An inter-rater reliability (IRR) analysis was performed to assess the degree to which coders consistently assigned ratings to codes from the qualitative data. Kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960) was chosen to measure the level of agreement between the categorical (yes/no) ratings while correcting for an agreement that might occur due to chance (refer to Appendix – Table 2).

We followed recommendations by Landis & Koch (1977) regarding the interpretation of Kappa. We did not deem it necessary to follow Krippendorff's higher bar for interpretation (Krippendorff, 2004) due to the low level of risk present in our research question and the subsequent interpretation of results (i.e., it does not place human lives at risk; Hallgren, 2012). Where kappa estimates fell below .61 to .80 (substantial agreement), coders met and critically discussed possible reasons for lower agreement. Following discussion, codes that showed at least moderate agreement (> .41) were either modified with tightened descriptions, merged with similar sub-themes, or retained as they were, based on the agreement between coders.

In cases with lower reliability (fair, slight, or chance agreement at >.40), we noticed that in some cases, there were only one or two occurrences of the code in the data. Hallgren (2012) explains the lower agreement as an issue of prevalence, where "distributions of

observed ratings fall under one category of ratings at a much higher rate over another" (p.6), resulting in kappa estimates falling lower than is representative. In this instance, prevalence (or lack of) is meaningful in our results, suggesting deviation from "general" listening training and possibly straying into more specialized listening applications. For example, our analyses showed that the following codes resulted in a "Fair Agreement" (.21-.40); *7. Listen for self-voice*, *26. Encourage story-telling* and *39. Reflecting back muted or amplified emotions,* coders agreed that these could be considered "specialized" listening skills employed by highly trained professionals such as therapists. This would explain the lack of prevalence in our data (which largely included training intended for audiences much broader than professional therapists). We agreed to remove these codes for this reason.

We also discussed the remaining codes with "Fair Agreement"; *56. Reflection questions: What surprised you, what did you learn?* And *57. Spread training over time to allow space for reflection and practice* in the Training Techniques theme. Coders agreed with one another that these overlapped with other codes (*45. Discussion-based learning,* and *53. Practice and Role-playing*) and that *spread training over time* was present in design but mostly not made explicit. Therefore we agreed to remove code 56. And 57. And tighten up the description for overlapping codes.

Percentage agreement for codes *32. Address power imbalances, 38. Recognizing gas-lighting and lying* and *50. Match speaker and listener to topic,* needed to be calculated manually as the kappa estimate was unable to be computed due to the variable being a constant (explained by lack of prevalence and agreement). We calculated percentage agreement by dividing the number of agreement scores by the total number of scores (McHugh, 2012). Again, coders agreed that these codes could be removed for low agreement.

Finally, codes where Kappa estimates revealed "Agreement equivalent to chance" were discussed, and it was agreed that *25. Disclose similar experiences to show*

understanding could also be removed. Coders discussed that whilst this occurred in one source, there were references to avoid doing this in others. Therefore there was conflict about whether this is recommended for high-quality listening.

The final code, *33. Co-create narrative*, was discussed as overlapping with *26. Encourage story-telling* (also with lower agreement), and it was agreed that this could be removed as it could be considered a specialized therapeutic skill.

To summarize, all codes where Kappa estimates fell between 0 and .41, revealing less than moderate agreement, were removed (a total of 10 codes).

Fair Agreement – 7, 26, 39, 56 and 57

Chance Agreement – 25 and 33

0% Agreement – 32, 38 and 50

The final iteration of themes and descriptions involved re-ordering the sub-themes logically, and tightening up the descriptions following the coder discussions in the earlier process. The output is below:

Table 9 - *(Study 1) Themes and Sub-themes (with quotations from sourced text to illustrate meaning)*

Title	Description	Quotes
THEME ONE: WAY OF BEING	**The listener's conscious focus, intention, and manner as they engage with the speaker.**	
1. Actively listens	A conscious process that requires the listener to *choose* to listen to what is being communicated	"Listening, on the other hand, is purposeful and focused rather than accidental. As a result, it requires motivation and effort." *Virtual Speech, Source 41* "…'active listening'. This is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, the complete message being communicated." *Mindtools, Source 6*
3. Focuses on speaker	Looking at, and maintaining attention on the speaker	"An active listener focuses on their communication partner and is able to express interest and engage meaningfully in the conversation" *Masterclass, Source 115*
9. Demonstrates respect	Listener shows respect (does not speak over or	"I listened to what they had to say and considered it, they usually got on board because they knew they'd been respected and heard"

	counter-argue, treats as oneself would expect to be treated etc.)	*New York times. Source 128*
23. Suspends judgment	Listener "suspends" critical thoughts that might enter their head (that don't signal immediate warnings), for the duration of the conversation	"it is 'impossible' to answer all these questions at the same time as you are listening… Instead, you have to be ready and willing to pay attention to the speaker's point of view and changes in direction, patiently waiting to see where she is leading you." *The Three A's of Active Listening, Source 59*
2. Avoids giving answers/solutions	Listener is not thinking about, or offering answers or solutions in response	"You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by forming counter arguments while the other person is still speaking." *Mindtools, Source 6* "…there can be risks in suggesting solutions. It takes responsibility away from the other person. It implicitly disempowers the other person by saying: 'You can't solve the problem, but I am better/smarter/more worldly than you, so I have to do it for you'. This can make the person feel belittled or patro nised." *Australian Family Physician, Source 50*
12. Understands perspective	Listener tries to grasp the point of view and perspective of the speaker	"If you go into the discussion with the main goal of understanding their perspective, free of any judgment, people will open up to you" *New York Times, Source 128*
10. Conveys empathy	Listener attempts to understand the feelings of the speaker, and expresses empathy	"When we listen empathetically, we go beyond sympathy to seek a truer understand how others are feeling." *Business communication, basic concepts and skills, Source 113*
14. Cultivates genuine curiosity	Listener channels curiosity into the direction of the speaker and is open to learning by listening	"Bad listeners make snap judgments that justify the decision to be inattentive. Yet, since you're already there, why not listen to see what you can learn?" *The Three A's of Active Listening, Source 59*
4. Listens to relate	Listener engages with the intention to relate to the speaker, despite potential difficulties	"How to create understanding, trust and deeper connections with others through active listening skills". *The Power of Deep Listening, Source 12*
8. Listens for social cues; in relation to people, groups or audiences	Listener attends to information that conveys the speaker's intention or understanding of social situations (including this interaction)	"focuses on what the interaction means for others. They filter what is heard through interests in other people, groups and audiences. They are socially intuitive and can pick up and respond to subtle cues." *Mandel, Source 9* "…using systematic reasoning and careful thought to analyze a speaker's message and separate fact from opinion. Critical listening is often useful in situations when speakers may have a certain agenda or goal, such as watching political debates, or when a salesperson is pitching a product or service." *Maryville University, Source 26*
5. Listens for facts, data and information	Listener attends to information that is objective such as (facts, data or	"When we're listening to learn or be instructed we are taking in new information and facts, we are not criticising or analysing. Informational listening, especially in formal settings like in work meetings or while in education, is

	information)	often accompanied by note taking…" *Skills You Need, Source 25*
6. Listens for overall message	Listener is able to pull away from the detail and comprehend the broader message being conveyed (e.g., message, plot. narrative. story, concept)	"Each time, the listener must try to remain sensitive to the total meaning the message has to the speaker. What is he trying to tell me? What does this mean to him? How does he see this situation?" Gordon Training International, Source 60 "The key then is for the listener to quickly ascertain the speaker's central premise or controlling idea. Once this is done, it becomes easier for the listener to discern what is most important." Three A's of Active Listening, Source 58

THEME TWO: INNER-WORK	**The listener can engage in preparatory work to prepare for upcoming conversations and develop into becoming a better listener.**	
19. Undertakes preliminary internal work	Listener makes the time and commitment to do inner-work to prepare to listen well	"If you really want to be heard and understood by another, you can develop him as a potential listener, ready for new ideas, provided you can first develop yourself in these ways and sincerely listen with understanding and respect." *Gordon Training International, Source 60* "To completely empty oneself of ones own prejudices, patterns of responding and frame of reference, and to try to understand all of this about another person is an act of great generosity and respect. It is a commitment of not only time, but mental energy and a preparedness to explore another person's world and see the way life appears to them." *Family Physician, Source 48*
21. Raises self-awareness	Considers own biases, feelings and beliefs on a topic	"In order to understand the need for active listening, we need to be aware that we receive and evaluate everything through our personal lens, through which we interpret the world." *Positivepsychology.com, Source 58* "We listen to what is going on within ourselves, as well as to what is taking place in the person we are hearing." *Australian Family Physician, Source 50*
15. Addresses obstacles to good listening	Identifies and overcomes bad habits and listening preferences	"You will notice how hard can be to listen to a person and/or to a situation, especially when you don't agree, you feel bored or you are eager to express your opinion. You will also realize how practice is key!" *Udemy Course, Source 14* "Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening skills are as bad as many people's are, then you'll need to do a lot of work to break these bad habits." *Mindtools, Source 6*
16. Identifies virtuous intention	Considers the virtues of listening well	"The foundational component of the deep listening approach is how the listener shows up to the discussion—

	(e.g., humility, connection, understanding)	in terms of both their intention and the kind of attention they give to the speaker. Entering into conversations with humility is a simple yet potentially transformational way to help create more profound encounters." *Deep Listening - Emily Kasriel, Source 1*
18. Sets aside personal agendas and interests	Considers own interests and questions in relation to satisfying own needs, and sets these aside for the purpose of the interaction	"You will always need to make up your own mind about where you stand —whether you agree or disagree with the speaker—but it is critical to do so after listening." *The Three A's of Active Listening, Source 59* "...approaching all conversations without any preconceptions of what might happen or what someone else might say. This allows you to listen without being critical and will stop you from getting distracted if any of your assumptions are proved wrong or right" *Virtual College, Source 117*
17. Mindful practice	Practices mindfulness; learns how to be fully present and attentive to what the listener is saying	"Think of listening as a form of meditation. You have to clear your mind of everything else, so you can focus entirely on what the other person is saying" *How to be a better listener – smarter living guides, Source 128* "Sometimes the subject may be quite boring, force yourself to refocus. It is a skill and does require practice." *Careers in Sport, Source 104* "In an interpersonal context, active listening aims to minimize the effect of our biases and to practice mindful patience whilst bypassing our own agenda". *Positivepsychology.com, Source 58*
22. Considers vulnerability and authentic communication	Considers in advance how vulnerable and honest they can be to create feelings of safety and trust	"Getting in touch with our own feelings… Listening as gift and authentic Communication" *Listen Well Scotland, Source 16* "Listening expert Avraham Kluger also asserts that projecting honest vulnerability helps create a sense of safety: "I've learned that if I am brave enough to share a weakness, it demonstrates on some level that I have accepted myself, that I can accept others." *Deep Listening - Emily Kasriel, Source 1*
13. Develops courage and accepts possibility to change	Works towards feeling secure and courageous enough to accept that their own views might be changed as a result of listening well	"Active listening carries a strong element of personal risk. If we manage to accomplish what we are describing here—to sense deeply the feeling of another person, to understand the meaning his experiences have for him, to see the world as he sees it—we risk being changed ourselves… To get the meaning which life has for him - we risk coming to see the world as he sees it. It is threatening to give up, even momentarily, what we believe

		and start thinking in someone else's terms. It takes a great deal of inner security and courage to be able to risk one's self in understanding another." *Gordon Training Institute, Source 60*

THEME THREE: LISTENING BEHAVIORS	Observable listening behaviors that signal high-quality listening.	
20. Removes distractions in environment	Turns off cell phone, technology notifications, organizes a suitable private space etc.	"These distractions may be influencing, how much are advisors listening to what the customer actually wants?" *Call Centre Helper, Source 130*
29. Listener's body-language	For example, mannerisms, breathing, posture, eye contact signal attention, smiles, avoids frowns, mirrors the speaker	"Show that you are engaged and interested by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining An open and relaxed body posture. Avoid attending to distractions in your environment or checking your phone. Be mindful of your facial expressions: Avoid expressions that might communicate disapproval or disgust." *Greater Good Science Center, Source 36*
30. Listener's verbal cues	For example, verbal affirmations such as "yes", "uh huh" to encourage the speaker	"… use innumerable verbal encouragers with minimal or no interruption and yet provides the patient with the necessary confidence to keep going. Such neutral facilitative comments include "uh-huh", "go on", "yes", "um", "I see" – we all have our own particular favourites." *Listening Attentively – The Skills, Source 54*
11. Establishes rapport and trust	Listener makes an attempt to establish rapport, show care and build trust	"Build trust. As you speak to customers make sure you use an empathetic and friendly tone. While doing this let customers know that you're doing everything in your power to help them. They need to know that you are a champion here to defend them, not an obstacle in their way" *Gladly customer service, Source 125*
31. Reflects back speech	Repeats back what the speaker has said through summarizing and paraphrasing salient points that have been understood. This requires remembering what the participant has said.	"Reflecting is paraphrasing back to the speaker what they said. One of the things a lot of us find when we try to use this technique is that it's real a challenge. We don't want to just parrot back what was said; we want to paraphrase. It takes creativity to think of appropriate ways to paraphrase what we've heard" *Scott Williams Listening Training, Source 123* *"Remembering details, ideas and concepts from previous conversations proves that attention was kept and is likely to encourage the speaker to continue".* *Virtual Speech, Source 41*
40. Reflects back emotions	Describes the speaker's emotions	"For example, if someone is sharing how they are sad about a lost pet, do not respond by talking about when

	and energy to reflect what is being observed (e.g., your shoulders have really sunk as you said that)	this last happened to you. Instead, ask them a follow-up question to show that you care about their experience." *Positivepsychology.com, Source 58* "the listener has to summarise the key things described by the talker including facts about what was described as well as emotions that were described." *Communication Exercises, Source 65*
27. Asks follow-up questions	Asks open-ended questions aim to learn more about what the speaker is saying (e.g., Can you tell me more about…?) while avoiding *why* questions. Clarifying questions aim to ensure correct understanding of what has been heard (e.g., did I get that correct?)	"Ask clarifying questions to gain more information. You can also ask confirming questions, such as "I want to make sure I got that right. It sounds like you're saying Is that correct?" This can help you gauge if you've received the message accurately. " *Maryville University, Source 26*
24. Offers acknowledgement or validation	Recognizes the feelings and emotions of the speaker in an affirming way by offering verbal acknowledgement or validation of what has been spoken.	"…give verbal affirmations to show that you understand what the speaker is telling you. Saying things like 'yes' and 'I see' or 'you're right' lets the person talking know that you are following what they're saying and makes them feel more confident and at ease." *Virtual College, Source 117* "Show your attentiveness using sentences such as "I can imagine how sad you must have been," or in a happy update, "I hope you are impressed with yourself!" *Positivepyschology.com, Source 58*
28. Gives constructive feedback	Moving beyond acknowledgment and validation, offers personal feedback that is supportive in nature. For example, "that's great news that x has happened".	"Rather than simply acknowledging what has been said, the coach, using ACR [active constructing responding], responds to the excitement in the voice tone and body language by providing positive feedback ('I'm so pleased'). This response is grounded, supported by evidence ('because you have worked so hard over the past months, and you deserve this…well done….I'm so proud of you')." *Positive Psychology Techniques – Active Constructive Responding, Passmore & Oades (2014), Source 2.*
36. Matches thinking pace of speaker	Shows patience, adjusts pace of conversation to suit the speaker and allows for noticeable periods of silence to allow the speaker time to think and reflect.	"Resist the urge to fill moments of silence. There are different types of silence. Respecting quiet moments can a powerful tool for a deep conversation. It gives the speaker and receiver a chance to reflect and continue with this process. So often we rush to "fill" silence, right before someone has a breakthrough thought to share." *Three A's of Active Listening, Source 58* "Silence is also a powerful tool for both speaker and listener. In some East Asian cultures, for example, silence

		is a sign of respect for what has been said and it would seem rude to immediately speak after the other person has finished. It's also important to remember colleagues who speak your language as their second or even third language sometimes need longer to formulate their thoughts. Pausing is thinking time rather than a signal for you to start talking." *Active Listening across Cultures, Source 23*

THEME FOUR: HOLISTIC LISTENING	**Attunes to less overt communication signals and identifies incongruence with overt signals to intuit the real message.**	
34. Considers omissions (what isn't being spoken about explicitly)	Considers what is not being spoken about directly, or what is not being said, to correctly interpret the entire message or meaning of what is being spoken.	*"A key to understanding communication is not only listening to what is said, but also to what is *not* said. The ability to read between the lines and tune in to non-verbal signals, such as facial expressions and body language, can help significantly"* *Active Listening Across Cultures, Source 23*
35. Notices incongruence between speaker's overt communication and body language	Understands the speaker's true emotions, despite seemingly contractionary body language, verbal message etc.	"In some instances, the content is far less important than the feeling which underlies it. To catch the full flavor or meaning of the message, one must respond particularly to the feeling component." *Gordon Training International, Source 60* "When the feelings, body language, or voice expression do not match the verbal message, this is called incongruence. The speaker is sending conflicting signals… Some examples of responses from a listener might be, 'You say you want to get home early, but your voice sounds hesitant." *Student Manual - Listening for Understanding, Source 38*
41. Considers true meaning of words	Considers whether specific words used accurately reflect, and are consistent with the broader, intended message of the speaker	"… often use vague or tentative language when they speak, using word choices that may not accurately reflect what they mean. Depending on the context, there could be several reasons for this. It might mean that they are unsure of what they want to say, and are having trouble expressing themselves; or it might mean that they are uncomfortable with the topic." *Paraphrasing in a Nutshell, Source 56.*
37. Notices and considers the speaker's verbal nuances	Notices, and looks for patterns in the speaker's use of words or images. For example, using metaphors, hyperbole, superlatives, figurative language.	"Repeated words, phrases and images, information and comments that jump out at the coach, contradictions, omissions, and revisions… helping… follow… what is meaningful to the client" *Woodcock, Source 5* Listening implies decoding (i.e., translating the symbols into meaning) and interpreting the messages correctly in communication process. *Student Listening, Source 36*

THEME FIVE: TRAINING TECHNIQUES	Content and features of listening training design.	
52. Explains the physiological aspects of listening (hearing vs listening)	Explains that hearing is physiological, recognizing that something is being said - different to listening, which is "internalizing" or processing the words of the speaker.	"Hearing and listening are not the same. You hear music, the sound of rainfall, or the sound of food being prepared in the kitchen. Listening, on the other hand, requires attention, comprehension of the message that's being relayed, and recollection of what's been said." *Maryville University, Source 27*
54. Explains the psychology of listening	Explains psychological theories and processes related to listening	"Some of the powerful topics you'll discover include: ✓The psychology of listening" *Listening skills training, Source 15*
55. Discusses when to and when not to engage in active listening	Recognizes when it is appropriate to listen and when it's not (e.g., medical context)	"There may be legitimate reasons why it is inappropriate to actively listen in any given situation, but rather than deny the need, it is usually more helpful to acknowledge it, and arrange a more appropriate time or setting to address it." *Australian Family Physician, Source 48*
42. Explores barriers to effective listening	Explains common obstacles to listening effectively, for example, rehearsing, filtering, advising, attention span	"Some of the factors that interfere with good listening might exist beyond our control, but others are manageable. It's helpful to be aware of these factors so that they interfere as little as possible with understanding the message. Here are some key barriers: 1. Noise, 2. Attention Span…" *Virtual Speech, Source 41* "There are a multitude of factors that may impede upon someone's ability to listen with purpose and intention; these factors are referred to as listening blocks.[14] Some examples of these blocks include rehearsing, filtering, and advising." *Wikipedia, Source 61*
44. Explores or considers cultural differences in listening	Raises awareness of cultural differences and discusses examples or encourages exploration of how to navigate these	"Be aware of how certain differences (such as gender, race, age, authority, language) between you and the other person might impact how each is perceived by the other, or how each person might perceive the other." *Workplace Learning and Development – Umass Amherst, Source 22* "Always look directly at the speaker. In some countries, direct eye-contact is rude and offensive. However, in Western Culture, direct eye contact means you are listening." *Listening for Understanding, Source 38*
46. Shares examples of good and poor	Runs through practical examples of	For example:

listening	what good and bad listening behaviors look like to demonstrate and contrast	"Nod your head, smile and make small noises like "yes" and "uh huh", to show that you're listening and encourage the speaker to continue. Don't look at your watch, fidget or play with your hair or fingernails." *British Heart Foundation, Source 119*
58. Shares tips for responding and good listening	Includes examples of phrases and questions that a good listener might say to demonstrate that they are listening well	For example: "In active listening, open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered with 'YES' or 'NO'. Examples of open-ended questions include: □ What alternatives have you thought about... ? □ What do you mean by... ? … Examples of paraphrasing statements include: □ I'm not sure I'm with you but... □ If I'm hearing you correctly..." *The University of Adelaide, Source 42*
49. Shares ideas for staying focused	Offers psychological strategies for how to stay focused and avoid distractions during listening	"If you're finding it difficult to focus on what someone is saying, try repeating their words in your head as they say them – this will reinforce what they're saying and help you to concentrate. Try to shut out distractions like other conversations going on in the room. And definitely don't look at your phone." *British Heart Foundation, Source 119* "Tip: If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say them. This will reinforce their message and help you to stay focused." *Mindtools, Source 6*
48. Explores how to encourage listening in others	Addresses situations where one might be engaging with someone who is not a good listener	"What if you are the one speaking and the other person isn't being an active listener? All of us have been in a situation where the person listening to us was distracted or disinterested. The following are some tips to help you with this situation… In doing so, you might help that person learn how to become a better listener." *Very Well Mind, Source 63*
43. Develops a plan for good listening	Encourages preparation of a plan detailing techniques to be used in a situation where good listening is required	"Lead a discussion in which students develop a code of listening behavior (see Activity 4) for their classroom". *Listening Activities, Source 45*
53. Allows time for practice and role-playing	Allows time and space for practicing listening, or role-playing in listening scenarios (good and bad)	"skills training also gives the learners rehearsal space" *Flick Learning, Source 70* "Ask two pairs of students to demonstrate for the class both poor and good listening skills. Tell students to observe you in the conversation." *United States Institute of Peace, Source 52*

47. Incorporates experiential learning activities	Gives the listener the experience of being deeply listened to by someone who can listen well so that they understand what it feels like	"Participants had brief conversations (about their biggest disappointment with their university) with someone trained to engage in active listening, someone who gave them advice, or someone who gave simple acknowledgments of their point of view. Participants who received active listening reported feeling more understood at the end of the conversation". *Greater Good, Source 36*
45. Discussion based learning	Allows time and space for reflection and discussion to facilitate learning	"3. At the end of the conversation, ask the student how he or she felt while they were talking. 4. Ask the class what listening skills, good or bad, that they observed. 5. Explain to the class that good listening requires active participation. Ask students for examples of how to be a good listener. Write these on the board, separating the verbal and non-verbal skills… 8. Lead a class discussion using some or all of the following questions: • How did you know that your partner was listening to you? • What did it feel like to really be listened to without being interrupted? • What made this activity challenging for you? • How can active listening help you resolve conflicts?" *Institute of Peace, Source 51*
51. Measures listening effectiveness (e.g., through assessment)	Incorporates a form of listening evaluation or measurement to determine whether listening has improved	"Why you'll love our courses… - Multiple choice exam with an 80% pass mark - Unlimited exam retakes at no extra cost" *Active Listening online training course, Source 76* "The following are possible means to evaluate student mastery of the objective and standards addressed in this lesson. 1. Differentiate between hearing and active listening. 2. Replay Active Listening Kahoot! with improvement in answering the six questions. 3. Complete SKILFUL listening questionnaire compare to the one completed before the lesson. Ask students if they rated themselves differently after completing this lesson." *Illinois State University, Source 38*

The following tables reflect codes and themes *before* coder discussions and reviews that involved re-naming, re-ordering and moving of sub-themes to appropriate themes. The bolded sub-themes had substantial agreement or more in the IRR.

Table 10 – *(Study 1) Kappa Calculations Measuring Agreement between Code Ratings*

THEME ONE: WAY OF BEING	Kappa Value (*k* value)	Approx. Sig (*p*-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
1. Active Listening - conscious process	0.604	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	127
3. Focus on the speaker	**0.801**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**117**
9. Respect (don't speak over, counter-argue, treat as you would expect to be treated etc.)	0.589	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	104
12. Understand their perspective	**0.634**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**96**
10. Show empathy	0.607	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	76
4. Listen for connection with others	0.511	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	69
5. Listen for facts, data, and information	0.435	0.002*	Moderate Agreement	56
11. Trust, rapport, care (relationship)	0.537	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	51
6. Listen for the overall message, plot, narrative story, concept	0.564	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	48
8. Listen for social cues, people, groups, audiences, and what it means to others	0.557	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	25
2. Avoid giving answers/solutions	**0.628**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**20**
7. Listen for self-voice (I, they, you etc.)	0.243	0.051	Fair Agreement	6

significant at 95% confidence interval. Total Theme One Frequency: 791.

THEME TWO: INNER- WORK	Kappa Value (*k* value)	Approx. Sig (*p*-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
23. Suspend judgment (vs. non-judgmental) through awareness	0.567	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	96
20. Remove distractions in the environment	0.48	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	86
21. Self-awareness (biases, beliefs, feelings)	**0.69**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**57**
16. Intention (e.g., humility, learn, connect)	**0.648**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**50**
17. Intentionality (mindful presence, let go of defenses)	0.5	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	48

	Kappa Value	Approx. Sig	Interpretation	Frequency
18. Park agendas	**0.635**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**43**
15. Identify and overcome bad habits and listening preferences	**0.677**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**38**
14. Genuine curiosity	**0.67**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**35**
13. Feeling secure and courageous to sit with discomfort and the possibility to change.	**0.847**	**0.000***	**Near Perfect Agreement**	**22**
19. Preliminary internal work	0.541	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	14
22. Showing vulnerability creates psychological safety (trust self)	0.48	0.001*	Moderate Agreement	7

significant at 95% confidence interval. Total Theme Two Frequency: 486.

THEME THREE: BASIC LISTENING ACTIONS	Kappa Value (*k* value)	Approx. Sig (*p*-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
29. Listener body language (frowns, smiles, mannerisms, breathing, posture, eye contact, mirror)	**0.75**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**136**
31. Reflecting through summarising/paraphrasing - salient points, remembering what has been said	0.424	0.002*	Moderate Agreement	131
27. Follow up questions – e.g., did I get that correct? Tell me more? Have I missed anything? Avoid why. Open-ended.	0.494	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	129
30. Listener's verbal cues, including silence, pause	**0.645**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**105**
28. Giving Feedback (e.g., that's great news that x has happened)	0.531	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	78
24. Acknowledgement/validation	0.564	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	42
26. Encourage storytelling	0.397	0.002*	Fair Agreement	11
25. Disclose similar experiences to show understanding	-0.027	0.838	Agreement equivalent to chance	11

significant at 95% confidence interval. Total Theme Three Frequency: 637.

THEME FOUR: ADVANCED LISTENING TECHNIQUES	Kappa Value (*k* value)	Approx. Sig (*p*-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
40. Reflect back on interpretation and energy of speakers emotions (e.g., by describing body language)	0.607	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	60
34. Interpretative listening: Consider the deeper narrative (what	0.547	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	44

	Kappa Value (k value)	Approx. Sig (p-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
isn't being spoken explicitly)				
39. Reflect back (muted) (e.g., tone down the emotion or reflect back (amplified) emotion)	0.293	0.028	Fair Agreement	36
35. Intuition of speaker's emotions	0.453	0.001*	Moderate Agreement	35
36. match the thinking pace of the speaker (i.e., patience)	**0.673**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**33**
37. Notice /emphasize the speaker's verbal nuances, figurative, metaphor, hyperbole, superlatives	**0.733**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**27**
41. True meaning of words	**0.807**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**25**
33. Co-create narrative	-0.02	0.886	Agreement equivalent to chance	6
38. Recognizing gas-lighting and lying	Not Calculated- variable is constant	Not Calculated – variable is constant	% Agreement calculated manually = 0	3
32. Address power imbalances - motivations that impede trust and openness – For example, show that lived experience is more valuable than power, Ethics - give speaker control	Not Calculated- variable is constant	Not Calculated- variable is constant	% Agreement calculated manually = 0	2

significant at 95% confidence interval. Total Theme Four Frequency: 264

THEME FIVE: TRAINING TECHNIQUES	Kappa Value (k value)	Approx. Sig (p-value)	Interpretation	Frequency (first rater only)
46. Examples of good/poor listening to contrast	0.448	0.001*	Moderate Agreement	60
53. Practice and Role-playing	0.522	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	60
42. Barriers to listening (e.g., rehearsing, filtering, advising)	**0.657**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**54**
52. Physiological aspects of listening (hearing vs. listening)	0.495	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	47
58. Tips for responding	0.508	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	35
51. Measure listening effectiveness (e.g., assessment)	**0.622**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**22**
47. Give the listener the experience of being deeply listened to so that they can embody and understand it.	0.491	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	22
57. Spread training over time to allow space for reflection and practice	0.156	0.232	Fair Agreement	20

56. Reflection questions: What surprised you? What did you learn?	0.194	0.019*	Fair Agreement	19
49. Ideas for staying focused	**0.79**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**16**
55. Recognize when it is appropriate to listen and when it's not (e.g., medical context)	**0.658**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**10**
44. Cultural differences	**0.73**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**10**
43. Create a plan	**0.79**	**0.000***	**Substantial Agreement**	**10**
48. How to encourage listening to others	0.469	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	9
54. Psychology of Listening	0.48	0.001*	Moderate Agreement	9
45. Discussion-based learning	0.485	0.000*	Moderate Agreement	9
50. Match speaker and listener to the topic (e.g., racial equity topic, then same race)	Not Calculated-variable is constant	Not Calculated-variable is constant	% Agreement calculated manually = 0	7

significant at 95% confidence interval. Total Theme Five Frequency: 415.

Appendix B: Study 2

Listening Video Validation

We developed a set of listening videos varying in length (from 9 minutes to over 30 minutes) and mirrored these videos with two comparison conditions. We tested whether the videos would improve viewers' listening with participants sourced from Prolific. Participants were asked to view the videos and were then asked to answer ten items from the Facilitating Listening Scale (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017, see below under *Listening Self-Efficacy*) to measure listening self-efficacy as a result of watching the videos. We adapted the prompt to "Now moving forward, how much do you think you will be able to do the following? I will be able to…" Participants were asked to rate the items on a Likert- type scale where *1 = not at all, 5 = somewhat, and 11= very much so*.

Results indicated a significant difference in listening self-efficacy between the two video conditions, $t(150) = 2.453$, $p = .015$.

In a second validation study, participants were also asked if they felt the videos would effectively help viewers to listen better and learn the mindset and behaviours that make people more effective listeners (see training effectiveness questions below). Again, results supported a significant difference between the video conditions, $t(148) = 5.838$, $p < .001$.

Listening Validation Questions

Open Questions

1. Try to list 10 things you learned after watching these videos?
2. Was there anything that you liked or disliked while watching the videos?
3. How did you find the length of the videos?
4. Do you have any other feedback to share about the videos?

Listening Self-Efficacy (Kluger & Bouskila-Yam, 2017)

Now moving forward, how much do you think you will be able to do the following?

I will be able to…

1 – Not at all, 5 – Somewhat, 11 – Very much so

- try hard to understand what a speaker is saying
- ask questions that show my understanding of a speaker's opinions
- encourage a speaker to clarify a problem
- express interest in a speaker's stories
- listen to a speaker attentively
- Pay close attention to what a speaker has said
- Give a speaker time and space to talk
- Give a speaker my undivided attention
- Create a positive atmosphere for a speaker to talk
- Allow a speaker to express themselves fully

Training Effectiveness

1 – Not at all, 5 – Somewhat, 11 – Very much so

Now, please spend a few minutes considering how effectively you feel the video training teaches people to LISTEN:

- The video training teaches people to LISTEN more effectively to others

- The video training would help someone to be a better conversation partner

- Watching this video training helps viewers to learn more about LISTENING behaviors and what they look like

- Watching this video training helps viewers to learn more about the kind of mindset that creates good LISTENING

- Watching this video training helps viewers to learn more about SPEAKING behaviors and what they look like

- Watching this video training helps viewers to learn more about the kind of mindset that creates good SPEAKING

Watching this video would help someone listen more effectively while:

- making a complaint about a bad service I received

- describing my plans for the working week ahead

- revealing a personal secret, or confession

- explaining instructions for a complicated task

- sharing a happy memory or story that means a lot to me

- expressing my personal opinion or perspective on a topic we disagree on

Please share any other thoughts or comments about the video training, including the length of the training:

Listening Intention
1 – Not at all, 5 – Somewhat, 11 – Very much so

- If I were to talk to someone right now, I would apply the techniques I have learned in the video(s) I just watched

- When I am engaging with people in future conversations, I intend to listen in the way I have observed in the video(s) today

- Now that I have watched the videos, I will continue practicing the listening skills and techniques I learned

Attention Check

To ensure you have paid attention to the video content, please answer the following questions:

- Briefly, what was the main topic or theme in each of the videos?
- Briefly, what were the 3 key strategies we shared to improve listening/speaking?

Transcript for Video One: High-Quality Listening Training

Did you know that people spend between 70 and 80% of their day engaged in some form of communication? Some research has shown that even in a student population, reading and writing only accounts for about 25% of our time communicating? About 20% of the time is spent speaking, and the largest portion of time, 55% can be attributed to listening.

It's interesting then to reflect that we invest so much time learning to read, write and speak, and comparatively less time learning to listen.

Topic 1 – Way of Being

Listening is tough. But there are things we can all do to really listen to others. The first think is to get rid of all distractions in our environment. As listeners we want to focus deeply on our speaking partner. When we listen, soundwaves trigger receptors in our ears that send signals to our brain. But it's up to us to give those signals meaning. Most of us are able to hear things all of the time but that doesn't mean we are always listening.

Because listening is a conscious process, we need to "switch on" our listening mode and make an effort to move into a space where we are ready to pay attention.

A good place to start is to ask yourself, **what is that you will be listening for?**

Are you listening with curiosity to learn, to truly understand the speaker; or are you listening to provide support to someone who is feeling emotional?

On the other hand, are you listening to challenge or correct someone, to solve a problem, or purely out of politeness before you get the chance to have your own say?

The difference behind these intentions is that effective listening focuses on the speaker, and ineffective listening focuses on a personal agenda. Naturally, that agenda will detract your focus from listening well.

So what does it mean to listen well? Listening expert Oscar Trimboli says it's about taking the perspective of the speaker:

"As a listener, it helps to step inside the world of your speaker, to understand how things look through their eyes. Imagine you are putting on a virtual reality mask, and as you step into the speaker's position, you begin to see clearly, and really understand their perspective and viewpoint."

Now it's time to take the virtual reality experience up a level, and consider what the speaker is feeling.

Listening expert Guy Itzchakov says: "We suggest you notice the speaker's body language, their tone of voice, what they say, what they don't say… and, of course, you can simply reflect back what you are observing and ask them if you're accurate They key is to really understand how they are feeling rather than projecting your own feelings onto the speaker."

As your listening improves, you will notice how the process of really understanding the speaker influences the trust and rapport that is building between you.

Now is a good time for us to pause. Before you watch the next video, I invite you to personally reflect on the questions on the screen. Take a few moments to write down your responses in a personal journal or on an e-document.

Think of a time when you listened really well, who were your speaking with?

- What was the situation?

- How did it feel to listen really well?

- What strengths did draw upon?

- Why do you think it's important to listen well?

Now, Imagine we are listening to someone speak. We set our mind to listen-mode. We have committed to understanding the perspective of the speaker and empathising with how they feel. How does the speaker know that we are doing all of this?

Now I'm going to talk you through three main techniques we can apply to demonstrate good listening.

Number 1 is reflecting back our understanding of the message

Imagine you are holding up a mirror to reflect back the message you have received.

We can do this in several different ways. For example, we may simply choose to repeat back exactly what we heard using the speaker's own words. Or we can paraphrase what the speaker said. This means repeating back what we understood in our own words.

Every once in a while, it's also helpful to speakers when we choose to summarise what was said, using fewer words but retaining the speaker's key words and language.

All of this signals to the speaker that we have taken in the words that have been communicated – we have acknowledged what they have said. In other words, we have let them know that we heard them.

A particularly powerful technique is if we have remembered and reflected back something that was said at the start of a conversation or connected something to a previous conversation, it really signals that we have listened and attended, because not only have we listened but we have retained and recalled information.

The technique of reflecting back words might signal that we heard, but it doesn't always signal that we have understood or even empathised with the speaker.

A lot is said in people's body language, including eye contact, the way they hold their body, their tone of voice, and how quickly or easily they speak. There's also a lot of information we can get from what isn't being said and when speakers use silence and pauses. This gives us a sense of the feeling and meaning of the words that are being spoken. This is where we can really start to build a sense of empathy with the speaker.

It is also possible to reflect back our observations and feelings of this to the speaker, by telling them how you see and feel them. For example, you could say it feels like you are concerned about this, as your shoulders slumped as you said the words.

Asked as a question rather than as a statement, this can also be a way to check in that we have correctly interpreted the feeling in the room.

This leads us on to the second technique we can apply to demonstrate good listening, that is to **ask follow up questions**. Questions might include asking directly whether your interpretation or reflection is correct, and asking if you missed anything in your understanding. You may ask questions to show that you understood what has been said, or to show your interest, for example: tell me more about what happened? Or what happened next? Or you might say "did I understand correctly?", and again this gives you other opportunity to check that you have understood and get more information.

One of the important points about listening well, is that we take care to avoid imposing our own biases, judgments, or opinions onto the speaker therefore it's important to ask open-ended rather than closed statements or questions. These kinds of questions start with words such as: how, what, tell me, or describe…

There is one exception to this rule which is use of the word why? Because whether intentional or not, this can come across as critical or judgmental.

And this brings us to the third technique we can apply to demonstrate that we are listening; **sharing verbal and physical cues**. We've already talked about the speaker's body language. Now, consider your own body language – are you looking at the speaker appropriately, or are you distracted by something or looking down? What are your facial expressions communicating? Are you saying things that show you are listening? Sometimes a genuine, uh-huh, or acknowledging the speaker with a nod or by leaning in, shows that you are paying attention.

Take care that you are not raising your eyebrows or gasping in shock, which can give cues of judgment and detract from the speakers own thoughts and feelings. You might need to train yourself to maintain a neutral expression, of course, the best way to do this is to keep an open mind!

It might be easy to listen to someone when they are speaking about an interesting and engaging topic, or when they are telling an entertaining story or communicating views that resonate with you. However, where listening gets difficult, is when the person speaking is conveying a message that you might disagree with, that might cause emotional discomfort, or if they're simply talking about something that you have very little interest in.

Consider for example, when you are faced with a potential confrontation. This often triggers a stress response known as "fight or flight". For people who are inclined to experience a "flight" response under pressure, they might avoid the encounter by deflecting with humour, changing the subject or avoiding talking to the person in the first place. For those inclined to experience a "fight" response under stress, they may be inclined to engage head on by immediately pointing out flaws in the speaker's speech to discredit them, or by interrupting or speaking over the other person, so that they don't get a chance to finish speaking. Quite often these reactions transcend our conscious thoughts and can be automatic.

In this video, we suggest three things you can do to better prepare yourself to be a good listener:

1.   Raise your own self awareness

It's easy to feel impatient to get our own views across or to correct someone if they're wrong. We might like to be the first to get our voice heard, for fear of not having a chance to speak later. We might be too proud, or afraid to acknowledge that we are wrong. These are all very natural and normal human reactions. This is why in order to truly listen well, it can be helpful to do some inner work to really prepare ourselves to be better listeners.

2. Get clear on why you want to be a good listener

Beyond raising your self-awareness, it's also important to consider why you would choose to listen well in any given situation? What are the benefits and costs of doing so? What is at stake if you do listen? What is at stake if you don't?

It's important to think about how this aligns with your personal values and how you want to show up as a person. Are you someone that values learning? How much do you want to connect with other people? Do you feel that you have room to grow in your understanding about the world?

Finally, **3. Ask yourself some hard questions**

With this in mind, you will also need to consider what your existing agendas, beliefs, values and potential biases are in relation to topics that you are likely to be discussing? How prepared are you to set these aside while the other person is speaking so you can truly appreciate their perspective as we described in the first video?

This might require you to place yourself in a vulnerable position and therefore it might be useful to think about what you need in order to feel secure enough to be open to change. If you start to feel defensive about a subject, consider what it is that is being threatened and how you can overcome these feelings of threat?

In this short video, we have covered several deep, reflective questions that may be relatively easy for some and more challenging for others to explore. If you feel these are challenging questions to explore, you may find it helpful to talk these through with a professional (such as a coach or therapist depending on the nature of the topic)

Transcript for Video Two: Moderate Quality Listening Training (Conscious Speaking)

Did you know that people spend between 70 and 80% of their day engaged in some form of communication?

Reading and writing accounts for about 25% of our time communicating? In addition, about 20% of our time is spent speaking.

Our research has found that those who can speak and communicate consciously, are able to be more successful and impactful.

Speaking consciously is an ability that does far more than facilitate communication. Speaking has obvious benefits for relaying information, but another aspect of speaking that is often overlooked is the impact that speaking consciously has on ourselves such as increasing our capacity to achieve. Our research shows that we are often "absent-minded" when we speak, and this affects how well we communicate.

So let's get into how to speak and communicate consciously?

Topic 1: *Way of Being*

Speaking while maintaining a conscious presence is tough. All too often we get overwhelmed by other pressures in our environment and we can walk away without having communicated what we intended to. But there are things we can all do to improve. The first is to get our environment well organised.

Thinking about what you need to say is a given, but it also important to be prepared to embrace anything that might detract from your attention on speaking. This will help you divide your attention between distractions and speaking without too much thought, rather than sacrificing conscious speaking altogether.

This might include pre-empting your distractions, and keeping a phone or clock in your line of sight, for example, or positioning yourself so that you can see your child whilst they play, or facing the door so that you can be alert to someone coming.

When we speak, soundwaves trigger receptors in others' ears that send signals to the brain, and people automatically give those signals meaning. Most of us are able to _hear_ things all of the time –and our brains will naturally attribute meaning to what we hear – we can rely on this natural process to listen.

Because we are talking about speaking as a conscious process, we will need to "switch in and out" of a conscious speaking and automatic listening mode.

As mentioned earlier, a good place to start is to ask yourself, what is it that you need to communicate? Alongside this, what will be the most important items you need to get across?

Are you speaking to gain answers to specific questions you have in mind, or are you speaking to provide support to someone who is feeling emotional? Or, you may be speaking to challenge or correct someone, to solve a problem?

Whatever the reason, it's important to keep in mind what you aim to achieve in your conversation before you start speaking. Keep this in mind while listening at a high level:

Speaking expert Oscar Trimboli explains more:

"As a speaker, it helps to keep one eye on your conversation partner, to understand how the conversation might, or might not be progressing. Imagine you are following the story, as long as you are across the headlines, you will appreciate how their narrative is unfolding. Listen out for headlines and check in approximately every 15 seconds, while you're using your tone of voice effectively."

Now it's time to take the experience up a level, and consider how you respond to feelings in the conversation.

Communication expert Guy Itzchakov says: "We suggest you simply reflect back what you would feel or have felt in similar situations, and raise your tone of voice at the end to indicate you are asking a question. This will show you are attempting to empathise with the speaker and if you can share a similar experience of your own, that helps to show you understand your conversation partner."

As your speaking improves, you will notice how easy it is to switch your focus between your conversation and your own thoughts. The more you practice, the more you will perfect this skill. Now imagine the possibilities of speaking in such a conscious way? You can be present for people whilst focusing on your own communication objectives and ensuring that you are getting your message across.

Now is a good time for us to pause. Before you watch the next video, I invite you to personally reflect on the questions on the screen. Take a few moments to write down your responses in a personal journal or on an e-document.

- Think of a time when you spoke and communicated really well, who were your speaking with?
- What was the situation?
- How did it feel to speak and communicate really well?
- What strengths did draw upon?
- Why do you think it's important to speak and communicate well?

Imagine we are speaking to someone. We set our mind to speaking consciously – this might come quite naturally to many of us, particularly if we value communicating effectively. Speaking consciously trains the brain to do more and achieve more.

Now I'm going to talk you through three main techniques we can apply to *demonstrate* to others that we are speaking consciously.

Number 1 is *gut-reactions* to the message

Imagine you are picking up the information you've had with you your whole life, and applied it to this conversation.

We can do this in several different ways. For example, we may choose to *share our gut reaction* to what has been said, so that the conversation partner knows that we really feel. This means sharing our thoughts and feelings – usually the first thoughts and feelings that occur to us.

Every once in a while, it's also helpful when we choose to *summarise* what we have just said, using fewer words. It's best to do this immediately following your conversation partner's response.

This signals to the speaker that we really mean the words that have been communicated – and helps them to acknowledge what we have said.

A particularly powerful technique is making eye contact when you do this. If you can for these few moments, maintain eye contact before breaking away, the conversation partner will appreciate that you have an important message to convey and they will be more inclined to understand what you have to say.

When we ensure that we are acknowledged in this way, we create conditions to continue speaking and getting our message across. Indeed, words are not the only way information is being conveyed in a conversation, therefore it's important to invest in our communication with some of our body language to really reinforce our message.

Apart from eye contact, our tone and speed of voice also sends a message to the speaker. We gain a sense of the feeling and meaning of the words that are being spoken. This is where we can really start to assert what we mean when we speak. We recommend starting with a slightly faster pace than your conversation partner. It's also good etiquette to signal that you will likely interrupt what your conversation partner has to say by leaning forward and slightly opening your mouth. That way your conversation partner will know what to expect.

This leads us on to the **second technique we can apply to demonstrate conscious speaking, that is to *check understanding by asking questions*.** Questions might include asking directly if the other person understood what you said. You may ask questions such as "did that make sense?" You might even like to repeat what you just said, but using different words. Or, you might ask questions such as "What do you think about that?" Or "How do you feel about that?" to encourage your conversation partner to elaborate on what you just said. This will ensure that the message is really getting across.

And this brings us to **the third technique we can apply to demonstrate that we are speaking consciously; assuming a more dominant physical position**. Consider your own body language –what are your facial expressions communicating? What is your body language saying? Leaning forward, sitting upright (or even standing), or opening our arms and taking up physical space are all signals that you are present and embracing speaking. Face your conversation partner squarely, to show you are really engaged. It's really important to connect in this way.

School Multi-Lab Framework

We engaged undergraduate and Master's students completing capstone projects, therefore, to support aims for original research, students determined their own secondary research questions within their disciplines with support from their academic supervisors. Thus, we opened the door to exploratory research questions such as those described below (see Figure 12):

- What are the effects of high-quality listening on listeners, and speakers diagnosed with [autism/depression/anxiety], when the speaker talks about their character strengths?
- How does high-quality listening affect the self-esteem of individuals diagnosed with depression?

Basic Paradigm. We invited all staff members at our school [masked] to supervise their undergraduate and Master's level students through this study. We welcomed all who wished to collaborate alongside their academic supervisors across the school and therefore did not know in advance the numbers of student researchers who would take part. Student researchers were expected to recruit a minimum of 24 participants each (or twelve listening dyads each) via snowballing sampling.

A core set of resources were provided to all academic supervisors and the students: 1) Experimental protocol: Participant information and consent sheets, participant criteria, experimental procedure. 2) Study resources: Core paradigm assessments, listening training videos, dyad conversation instructions, project template for data collection software. 3) Core

outcome measures: listening quality (triangulated including perception by speaker, self-report by listener and observer ratings), authentic self-expression, positive and negative affect, positivity resonance, state anxiety, behavioural intention measures. 4) Ethical approval: Students were required to submit their own version of ethical considerations via their supervisors, to address any additional elements. Each supervisor submitted their own ethics application to cover their student groups and secondary studies. 5) Data management plan – Data from all "mini-labs" were collated, anonymised and shared live via a secure, encrypted cloud service hosted on the university's server (back-up will be stored separately) so that students could conduct their own data analysis utilising the entire data set. Only students who had contributed the minimum number of participants could access the shared dataset.

Figure 12 *(Study 2) - Students' Secondary Research Questions*
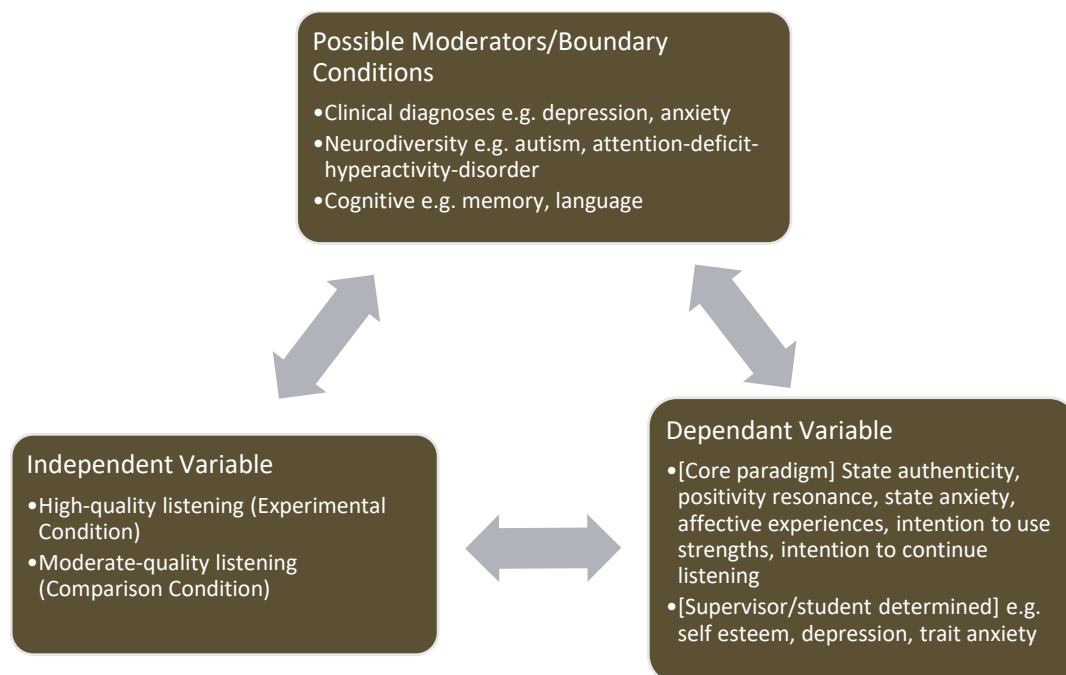
Pedagogical Considerations. To support academic requirements to produce original research, students were invited to consider: 1) How the stimulus applied in their field of

interest? Students suggested their own subset of research questions, within the broader framework. 2) Students considered predictor/moderator variables or relational variables of interest. 3) Students considered ethical considerations of their own research question and prepared a version of an ethics application to address additions to the core ethical approval. 4) Students received guidance on secondary data analysis (where required, provided directly by supervisors to avoid plagiarism risks). 5) Data integrity/quality monitoring took place via academic supervisors involving student engagement ratings (are they attending supervisions sessions, have they come prepared, are they completing work as agreed between sessions), and random checks with participants (what was the experience of participating, did they understand what they were asked to do, did they feel supported by the researcher).

Open Science Engagement Event for all School Psychology Students. An event was hosted inviting all student researchers and supervisors but more broadly, all undergraduate psychology students at the school. The event was funded by the institution's Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TELF)**.** We invited guest speakers from within the institution but also external influential guest speakers, with the aim of encouraging students to look critically at research practice within the field of psychology. Our speakers were invited to talk to students in such a way that engaged their "hearts" as well as their minds, reflecting about the deeper meaning of practicing Open Science and what it means to them personally. Speakers covered topics such as establishing an inclusive, open and ambitious "culture" for research, diversity and bias within samples of studies, the reproducibility crisis in psychology and publication bias. We also introduced the school-wide open science collaboration (this project) and the session ended with a workshop on ethics and data management for student-researchers on the project.

We created an environment with food, networking and sharing with the guest speakers so that students could discuss how they personally felt about open science. Student

feedback was positive, saying they felt inspired to care about open science and understand its

purpose. Students also provided feedback that they appreciated having their "eyes opened"

about research practice and that they appreciated the passion of the speakers:

"I really liked the way so many people from different backgrounds came together and

were passionate about this topic" (Undergraduate Student)

Appendix C: Study 3

Training Outline

BBC British Council Deep Listening Training Outline (two hours per week)

Week one began with a meditation and interactive talk on how to listen well, followed

by an interactive session on body language and the power of silence. Participants were then

randomly assigned for a series of practice sessions in breakout rooms in groups of three -

listener, speaker, or practice observer (another participant who acted as a safeguard). These

roles rotated, so each individual played each of the roles over the course of the dyad

conversations. In each of these conversations, the listener was instructed to ask a question

and then listen to the speaker respond. The listener was instructed to use a variety of different

response strategies, which they then tested out in the breakout room conversations.

Participants returned from the breakout room after the three conversations were completed

for group reflections. After more learning on reflecting back as a technique, participants went

into new breakout rooms to try the amended technique, assuming the same rotating roles that

they practiced in the first breakout room.

One week later, the four groups of participants returned for another two hour training

session. Following meditation and group reflections on prior learning, they received listening

modules based on loving kindness, shadows, language, and judgements. These modules are

intended to develop core listening principles of attention, positive intention and

understanding within the context of listening to views one doesn't agree with. Participants

were once again randomly assigned to groups of three in breakout rooms to practice the

listening skills in groups of three. They held conversations with each other structured in the

same way as week one. After a break, participants engaged in one of four interactive

exercises based on the modules covered earlier. After receiving these instructions,

participants were randomly assigned to groups of three in breakout rooms for more practice.

In the *third week*, participants returned for their final training and practice before

engaging in the experimental conversation. Participants were randomly assigned to groups of

three in breakout rooms to practice listening skills learned. The conversations were structured

once again according to speaker, listener and practice observer.

Guidance for Facilitators during Training

Welcome. Thank you for committing your time to be a facilitator on Crossing Divides

around the Globe. We are hugely grateful. This document gives you more information on

your role and some practical information that will help you fulfil that role.

What role do facilitators play?

Facilitators play and important role in supporting delivery of the project. You role is twofold:

1. You will collect data that will be shared with the [Institution – masked] for them to
   undertake **research** on the impact of Deep Listening and the training.
2. You will support the participants in breakout rooms in their **learning and practicing**
   of deep listening during the training session itself.
3. You will support **safeguarding** of participants.

Can you tell me more about the research?

[The trainer- masked] is working with the [Institution – masked] to undertake research to

assess the impact of the training and the impact of deep listening on participants. There are

four groups of approximately 250 participants (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday

[Trainer – masked] and the researchers from [Institution – masked] are interested in the

impact the training has on how people engage in challenging conversations.

For the research, a subset of participants from each cohort will be invited to join the session 1 hour early in week 1. They will go into breakout rooms and will be asked to talk on a topic over which they disagree with no guidance or training. The researchers will analyse observed behaviours in these rooms, and perceptions of that conversation from the participants, compared with behaviours in and perceptions of the final conversations in week 3 of the training.

What do we need to do?

During the conversations in the early 'control' sessions and in the final conversation in week 3, facilitators will complete a coding sheet that will log the following by observing the person in the role of the LISTENER:

These questions relate to the first interaction you observed - the first 6 minute speaker/listener interaction. i.e., Person B speaking for 6 minutes.

How often did person A, the LISTENER, display the following non-verbal tools?

1. Non-verbal tools:
    a) Eye contact (always, often, rarely, never)
    b) Open posture (always, often, rarely, never)
    c) Focused (always, often, rarely, never)
2. Verbal tools:
    a) Number of times listener interrupted
    b) Total seconds of silence used before speaking
    c) Reflecting back core of other's story
        - Number of times
    d) Asking questions which take speaker down road of listener's own interests.
        - Number of times

The coding sheet will be shared with you with for guidance. This will be on Forms. A Word document will also be shared in case you want to do an offline version first.

For these encounters only (i.e., the pre training encounter and the first 17 mins of the final encounter), you will stay in one breakout room for the duration to complete the observation.

Code of
Conduct_Crossing D

Control Group Invitation and Facilitation Instructions to Participants

Invitation:

"We are inviting a limited number of participants to join us for an additional session

prior to the main training and would like to invite you to join us slightly early on day one at

15:15 BST."

Facilitation Instructions:

Welcome to you all.

Thanks so much for agreeing to come early- and have an extra opportunity for a

conversation across divides.

The training will start at (8.00, 900, 1600 BST), after you've had this conversation and

completed a survey.

You will have received a list of questions by email. [Otherwise here is a link in the

chat.]

There is no wrong or right answer. The idea is to identify an issue you feel strongly

about so you can find an issue over which you feel strongly differently from your

partner.

You will be sent into a breakout room, another zoom room in which there will be 4

people:

- A pair of you (participants) who will be speaking and listening to each other, and a third participant will be present for safeguarding and time-keeping. A member of the Crossing Divides facilitation team will also be observing (without their video).

In the smaller room – this is how you will be allocated roles:

- Person A, The participant with the first name closest to the top of the alphabet will be the first Listener.

- Person B, The participant with the first name next closest to the top of the alphabet will be the first speaker.
- Person C, The participant with the first name next closest to the top of the alphabet will be present as a safeguard only.
- Person D, A facilitator will be the observer throughout – with camera turned off and will not contribute to the discussion.

Instructions:

Person B will speak about this issue for 6 minutes and person A will listen.

The speaker and listener swap roles:

Person A will speak about this issue for 6 minutes and person B will listen.

Person A and person B talk about the topic for 5 minutes.

Person C, another participant, makes sure timings are kept.

Person D, a facilitator who will be another observer, will be making notes, not speaking just observing.

After 17 minutes the smaller zoom breakout rooms will then close and everyone returns to the main room to complete a survey. You then have a short break.

Participant Countries and Nationalities

Table 11 – *(Study 3) Top Ten Countries and Nationalities Represented*

Countries	Control	(Percent)	Training	(Percent)	Total	(Percent Total)
United Kingdom	15	9.55	30	18.40	45	14.06
Malaysia	16	10.19	9	5.52	25	7.81
New Zealand	17	10.83	8	4.91	25	7.81
Iran	10	6.37	5	3.07	15	4.69
Philippines	8	5.10	6	3.68	14	4.38
India	6	3.82	6	3.68	12	3.75

Kenya	4	2.55	7	4.29	11	3.44
Netherlands	6	3.82	5	3.07	11	3.44
Spain	6	3.82	5	3.07	11	3.44
Barbados	5	3.18	3	1.84	8	2.50
Total	93	59.24	84	51.53	177	55.31

Nationalities	Control	(Percent)	Training	(Percent)	Total	(Percent Total)
United Kingdom	9	5.73	21	12.88	30	9.38
Iran	13	8.28	9	5.52	22	6.88
Malaysia	14	8.92	7	4.29	21	6.56
New Zealand	14	8.92	6	3.68	20	6.25
Philippines	8	5.10	8	4.91	16	5.00
India	6	3.82	6	3.68	12	3.75
Kenya	4	2.55	7	4.29	11	3.44
Sri Lanka	5	3.18	4	2.45	9	2.81
Barbados	5	3.18	3	1.84	8	2.50
Libya	3	1.91	5	3.07	8	2.50
Total	81	51.59	76	46.63	157	49.06