

Tell Me, How Do You Think?

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Tell Me, How Do You Think?

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Summary

Deanna tells a young Starfleet officer stationed on Betazed how Betazoid telepathy works.

Notes

Originally written for [peasina](#) as part of the 2022 round of [space_swap](#). Original A/N: Hello fellow first time Space Swap participant, I hope you enjoy this fic! (Beta'd by [Herenya Writes](#) - Thank you!) This was originally posted on March 32 2022 [Sic]. Date was changed to reflect creator reveals for the exchange.

"I was wondering," William Riker asked Deanna one day, "If you'd be willing to tell me what Betazoid telepathy is like?"

Will was a Starfleet officer stationed on Betazed. The two of them knew each other due to the fact that Will often had to interact with Deanna's mother as part of his job. They had gotten along very well, much to each other's surprise, and met up regularly at a cafe. They were friends, but not particularly close ones.

Deanna looked at him curiously. "Don't they tell you how telepathy works in Starfleet classes?"

Will grinned. "They do, but it's a pretty general treatment; they don't really go into much detail in how telepathy presents itself in different species beyond the cultural expectations surrounding them. Besides, I think that hearing about an experience from someone who's actually experienced it would be more accurate and enlightening than from an instructor who's only heard about it second or third hand from papers and books."

Deanna nodded, then frowned. While the physical basis for telepathy and related phenomena was the same in all species, there were still variations. Vulcan telepathy was different from Betazoid telepathy, which was different from the rare cases of Human telepathy. Still, she wasn't sure if she was able to explain to Will why she might be unable to help him as much as he'd like.

Seeing her hesitation, Will hastened to add, "You don't have to do it if you don't want to, obviously - if you don't want to talk about it for whatever, reason—"

"No, it's not that," Deanna said, putting a hand up to stop his ramblings. She could tell that he'd asked the question in good faith and genuine curiosity. "It's that I can't initiate telepathic contact. I'm half - Human, you see. On my father's side."

"Oh." Will shifted back in his chair, clearly surprised.

"But," Deanna added, "I *could* tell you how I experience telepathy when I communicate with my mother and her family. And I *am* able to sense the emotions of others much better than Humans."

"That would be excellent." Will leaned back in his chair and waved a hand. "So, Betazoid telepathy. Tell me about it."

"Where do you want me to start? It's a pretty big topic."

"Huh." Will paused to think. "How about how Betazoid telepathy is different from, oh, I dunno, Vulcan telepathy?"

"Sure." Deanna nodded and began to explain. "Now, for Vulcans telepathy is mainly used to communicate information and ideas, with

emotional transference more of a secondary effect. Betazoids, on the other hand, can and do use their telepathy for that kind of communication, but for us it's more about *feelings*. We - they - can carefully manipulate and modulate the emotions they send across, sending coordinated bursts of hope or anger or excitement or what have you to send a message that's just as complex as anything that you or I can say out loud. They both have their advantages and disadvantages - speech is better for communication of technical ideas and instructions. In fact, we developed thought-words in order to communicate those types of things via telepathy."

Will nodded. "And what about emotional communications?"

"Those are better for *emotions*," she said in a slightly teasing voice. "'Good Job', 'Stop that right now', 'I love you' - those are all things that get communicated solely via bursts of emotion. Most Betazoids use a mixture of the two that leans a bit more towards the emotion side of things. For example, we'd combine the thought-words for 'concert' and 'you' with feelings of hope, curiosity, affection, and excitement to communicate the equivalent of a non-telepath asking their friend 'Do you want to go to the concert with me?' Now, I used a friendly, eager tone for that question, and if I was using telepathy the tone would be communicated along with the words."

Will nodded, understanding, and asked another question. "So, then, how can you tell what emotions others are experiencing?"

Deanna frowned. "I'm not sure, actually. It's so natural to me that I can't really explain how it happens, it just *does*. I suppose that the best way to explain that to you is to talk about how the way that I experience emotions is different from full Humans."

"I'm guessing that people who are hiding their emotions aren't able to keep them hidden around you," Will said with a grin.

Deanna smiled back. "There is that, but also, most Humans are just as easily able to figure out the emotions that a person in a holograph or video is experiencing as someone they meet in real life."

"I'm guessing you can't do that?"

"I can, but it's much harder, and I need to examine faces and body language carefully in order to determine what emotions someone is feeling."

"Whereas if it's an actual person, you can just tell their emotions by standing next to them," Will concluded.

"Exactly. And then you add in the fact that different species and cultures use different cues to signal different emotions - particularly when it comes to things outside of simple happiness, sadness, anger, etcetera - and the fact that I didn't begin learning how to do that type of stuff until my teens, and deciphering emotions can become a very difficult task."

Will nodded. "I can only imagine." He paused, trying to think of something. "I can't really think of any other questions, so I guess I'm wondering if there's anything else you can think of off the top of your head about your empathy and how you experience telepathy?"

Deanna nodded. "Yes, actually. When a Betazoid becomes very close with another person of any species, in either a platonic or romantic sense, an imzadi bond can form between them. This bond can be used by the people involved in it - the imzadi - to communicate telepathically over greater distances than would be normal for Betazoids. Additionally," and here she leaned in a bit closer to Will, "There have been cases of half-Betazoids being able to form Imazdi bonds with others and be able to send telepathic messages to the other person or people that they have a bond with."

"So if you formed one of these imzadi bonds with someone--"

"--then I could initiate telepathic contact with them, yes." Deanna nodded. "But I'd *only* be able to initiate contact with my imzadi, not every single person that I meet. And aside from that, I'm quite happy with my life as is. Would I like to have imzadi? Yes, but only because I'd like to have a very close relationship with another person or people, not because I feel like being non-telepathic means that my life is lacking or unfulfilling. I think that my life would be quite happy and fulfilling, whether or not I had imzadi."

Will nodded slowly, taking in everything that Deanna had told him. "Thanks for the information," he said, satisfied with the information that he had received.

"You're welcome," replied Deanna.

"I suppose I ought to return the favor. Is there anything that you'd like for me to tell you about?"

Deanna could tell that his offer was genuine, so she decided to ask him for information on something that she had been thinking about for some time. "I was actually wondering about Starfleet. I've been thinking about joining up, and so I want to hear about the experience from someone who's been there for a while."

"Really?" Will grinned. "What track?"

"I've wanted to become a counselor for a while, and I've also thought that it would be nice to follow in my father's footsteps and become a Starfleet officer. He talked about his service some when he was still alive, but I think that getting a more recent perspective on what they're like would be good before committing myself."

"I can certainly do that," Will said, nodding. "Now, back in your father's day I suppose that there was a lot more diplomacy and explorations going on, given that there hadn't been any major wars since we fought the Klingons." Will became very serious. "I'm going to be blunt: Since the border skirmishes with the Cardassians started, we've slowly become more militarized. Right now it's still not that huge, but it is noticeable. Everyone I know thinks and hopes that we'll become less so once we've settled things with the Cardassians, especially since it seems like things have finally started to settle down somewhat, but that probably won't happen for a couple years yet, so you should be aware that that's the kind of environment you'll be entering into."

As Will talked, Deanna listened intently. She was happy that Will was willing to talk about Starfleet, and she hoped that she would be able to serve in Starfleet alongside Will in the future, though she doubted that they would get assigned to the same ship. Still, she looked forward to the possibility of them both being officers in the 'fleet.

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