Who Are Empathic People? It Depends on Your Definition of Empathy.

Fred Duong, Judith A. Hall, Rachel Schwartz Northeastern University; Stanford University School of Medicine







Overview

There is no comprehensive psychological profile of the "empathic" person. But the definition of empathy varies widely across researchers (Batson, 2009; Hall & Schwartz, 2018) and laypeople (Hall, Schwartz, Duong, 2020). Thus, personality correlates of empathy have only been done piecemeal; they are tied to empathy definitions that aren't agreed upon. We identified 7 distinct aspects of empathy and correlated them with a large battery of self-report instruments. We found personality profiles differed according to how empathy was defined.

Method

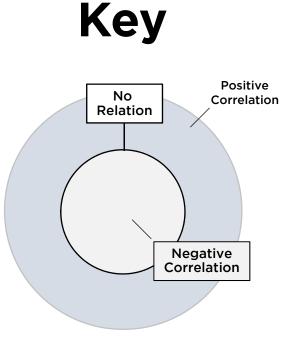
Participants

MTurk (N = 351). Age: M = 33. Gender: 59% Female. Race/Ethnicity: 79% White.

3 Empathy Instruments, 7 Empathy Scales

We used a battery of 99 items drawn from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983), Empathy Quotient (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004) and Affective and Cognitive Measure of Empathy (Vachon & Lynam, 2016). Participants rated themselves on how much items described themselves from 0 (Doesn't describe me at all) to 10 (Describes me very well). Because no items contained the word "empathy" (nor do most existing empathy measures), we also created a set of three items we that we call "Global Empathy".

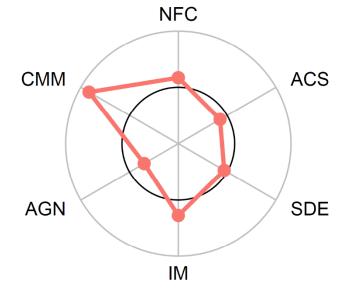
7 empathy scales were created from the 99 items and 3 global empathy items. The first two authors independently classified items into conceptually homogeneous categories, then resolved disagreements via discussion to drop items and create 6 categories. Low item-total correlations were used to further drop items.

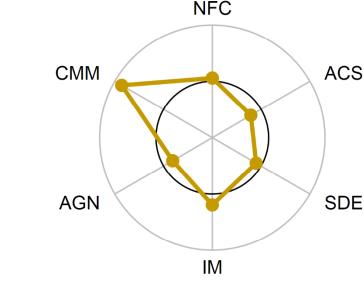


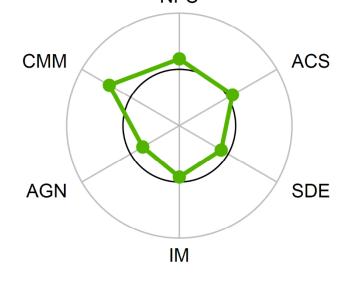
	Empathy Definitions						
	Tenderhearted Feelings	Tenderhearted Feelings plus Behavior	Immersion	Taking the Perspective of Others	Interpersonal Perception Accuracy	Personal Distress	Global Empathy
Example Item & Scale Info	I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. 16 items / Cronbach's alpha: .80	I often try to help people feel better when they are upset. 9 items / Cronbach's alpha: .88	When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. 7 items / Cronbach's alpha: .84	I find it easy to put myself in somebody else's shoes. 16 items / Cronbach's alpha: .87	I can tune into how someone else feels rapidly and intuitively. 17 items / Cronbach's alpha: .94	When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. 7 items / Cronbach's alpha: .81	I think of myself as someone who feels a lot of empathy/who often shows empathy to others. 3 items / Cronbach's alpha: .88
Demographics Gen: Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female) Age: (18 to 55 only) Rel: Religiosity (higher is more religious) Pol: Political ideology (higher is more conservative) Inc: Income Correlation range:4 to .4	Rel Age Pol Inc	Rel Age	Rel Age	Rel Age	Rel Age	Rel Age	Rel Age
Dig 5 O: Openness to Experience C: Conscientiousness E: Extraversion A: Agreeableness N: Neuroticism Big Five Aspect Scales Correlation range:9 to .9	N C E	N C E	N C	N C E	N C E	N C E	N C E
Affect & Emotion PA: Positive Affect NA: Negative Affect ACK: Guilt and Shame Acknowledgement ¹ SW: Shame Withdrawal ¹ LI: Low Insight ² OBS: Emotional Obstacles ² ¹ Guilt and Shame Proneness ² Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Correlation range:4 to .4	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK	OBS PA ACK
Morality Alt: Altruism Scale IH: Instrumental Harm Utilitarianism ¹ IB: Impartial Beneficence Utilitarianism ¹ UO: Universal Orientation ¹ Oxford Utilitarianism Scale Correlation range:6 to .6	UO IH	Alt UO IH	UO IH	UO IH	Alt UO IH	UO IH	UO IH
Other Traits NFC: Need for Cognition ACS: Analytic Cognitive Style (Cognitive Reflection Task) SDE: Self-Deceptive Enhancement ¹ IM: Impression Management ¹	NFC	NFC	NFC	NFC	NFC	NFC	NFC

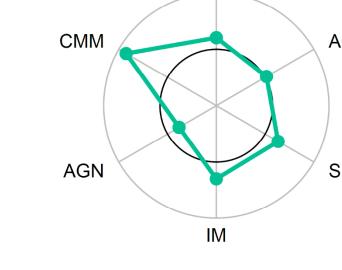
IM: Impression Management¹ **AGN**: Agency² **CMM**: Communion² ¹ Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding ² Personal Attributes Questionnaire

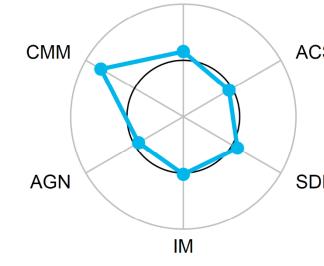
Correlation range: -.7 to .7

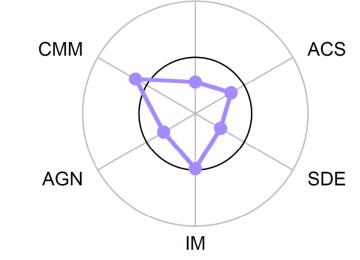


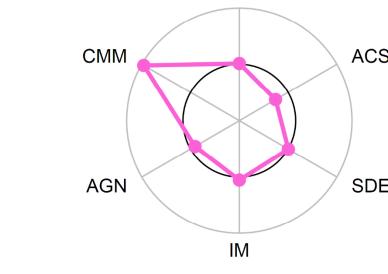












Vector Correlations

Profile similarity to other empathy scales.

Positive correlations (.79 to .95) with all except PD (-.02)

Positive correlations (.72 to .95) with all except PD (-.05)

Positive correlations (.64 to .79) with all except PD (.30)

Positive correlations (.64 to .93) with all except PD (-.38)

Positive correlations (.72 to .93) with all except PD (-.25)

See other summaries.

Positive correlations (.73 to .94) with all except PD (-.07). Most similar to THB.