

Who Are Empathic People?

It Depends on Your Definition of Empathy.

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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

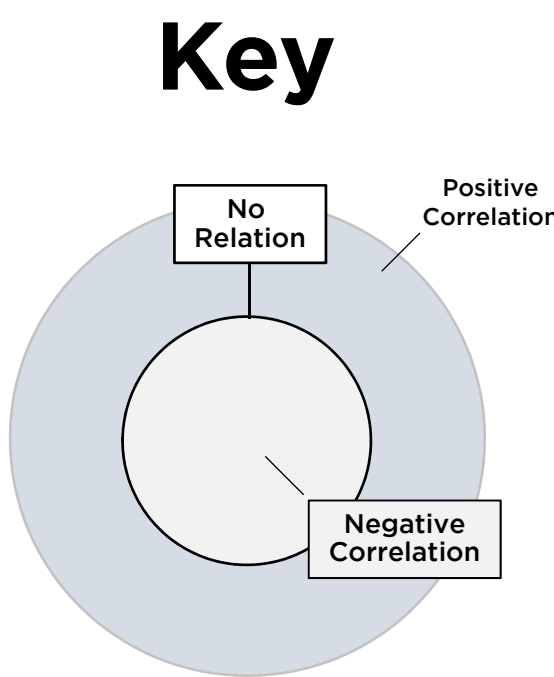
Participants

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

