

Empathy Is Hard Work: People Choose to Avoid Empathy Because of Its Cognitive Costs

JEP:General, 2019

Yang Ziyang 2024.10.11

Introduction



Empathy

share in and understand others' experiences vicariously



Empathy is a motivated phenomenon





time



cognitive costs (e.g., effort, aversion, inefficacy)



Introduction

whether people exert situational control over experience sharing due to its perceived psychological costs



largely overlap and are likely coactive in many everyday situations

involve little effort

Empathy can involve uncertainty

attempting to share in others' experiences may feel demanding because of less familiarity and external information to rely upon.



concerns about error feed into perceptions of effort

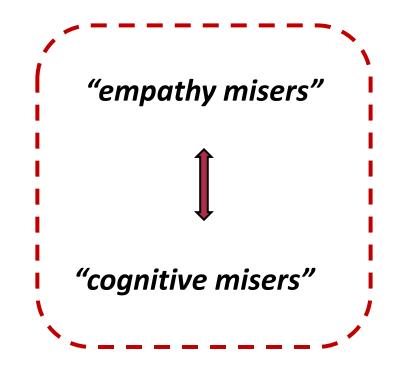
Introduction

Indiscriminate empathy can be overly costly, leading to fatigue, financial costs, and opportunity costs

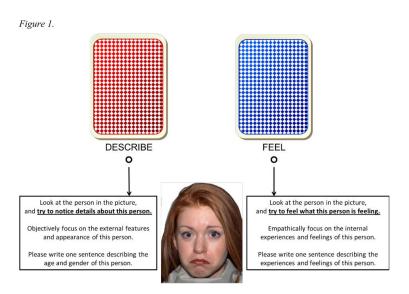
tend to avoid empathy, and that avoidance will be associated with perceptions of cognitive work

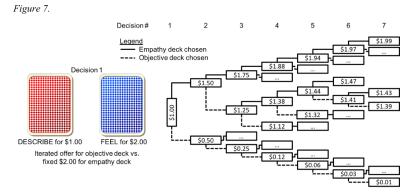


felt cognitive costs can lead people to avoid it altogether



Design





	Empathy				
	Choice	95% CI			Hedges'
Study	M(SD)	$M_{ m diff}$	t	N	g
1	0.33 (0.27)	[-0.24, -0.10]	-4.70	56	-0.62
2	0.26 (0.25)	[-0.31, -0.16]	-6.59	47	-0.95
3	0.41 (0.29)	[-0.13, -0.05]	-4.19	196	-0.30
4	0.38 (0.29)	[-0.17, -0.08]	-5.87	193	-0.42
5	0.34 (0.26)	[-0.19, -0.12]	-8.81	206	-0.61
6	0.38 (0.35)	[-0.22, -0.02]	-2.47	50	-0.34
7	0.30 (0.19)	[-0.24, -0.16]	-9.69	91	-1.01
8	0.34 (0.18)	[-0.20, -0.12]	-8.46	87	-0.90
9	0.22 (0.25)	[-0.36, -0.20]	-6.94	41	-1.06
10	0.33 (0.24)	[-0.24, -0.09]	-4.64	44	-0.69
11	0.38 (0.26)	[-0.16, -0.08]	-6.48	193	-0.46
Total				1204	-0.64

Studies 1-3: Validating the Empathy Selection Task

Studies 4–6: Manipulating Target Affect people avoid empathy because they want to avoid vicarious distress

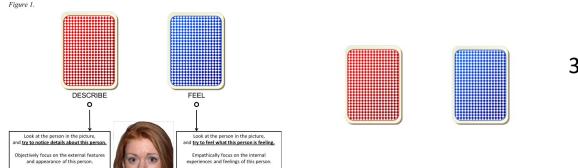
Studies 7–8: Are People Avoiding Verbalizing Emotions? people are avoiding any kind of emotional state, or avoiding having to verbalize feelings.

Studies 9–10: Manipulating Empathy Efficacy cognitive costs of empathy lead people to avoid choosing empathy

Study 11: Varying Empathic Demand empathy is cognitively costly

Design **Empathy** Choice 95% CI Hedges' Study M(SD) M_{diff} N 0.33(0.27)[-0.24, -0.10]-4.7056 -0.62Figure 1. 0.26 (0.25) [-0.31, -0.16] -0.95-6.59 47 0.41 (0.29) [-0.13, -0.05] -4.19196 -0.300.38 (0.29) [-0.17, -0.08] -5.87193 -0.420.34 (0.26) [-0.19, -0.12] -8.81 206 -0.610.38 (0.35) [-0.22, -0.02] -0.34-2.4750 0.30(0.19)[-0.24, -0.16] -9.69 -1.010.34(0.18)[-0.20, -0.12]-8.46 -0.90**DESCRIBE FEEL** 0 9 0.22 (0.25) [-0.36, -0.20] -6.94 41 -1.0610 0.33(0.24)[-0.24, -0.09]-0.69-4.64 44 11 0.38 (0.26) 193 -0.46[-0.16, -0.08]-6.48Look at the person in the picture, Look at the person in the picture, and try to notice details about this person. and try to feel what this person is feeling. 1204 -0.64Total Objectively focus on the external features Empathically focus on the internal experiences and feelings of this person. and appearance of this person. Please write one sentence describing the Please write one sentence describing the age and gender of this person experiences and feelings of this person.

Studies 1-3: Validating the Empathy Selection Task



Please write one sentence describing the experiences and feelings of this person.

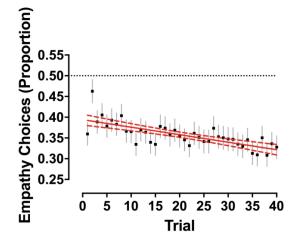
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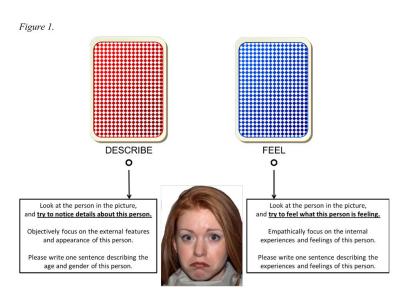
3 keywords describing the objective facial expression of this person

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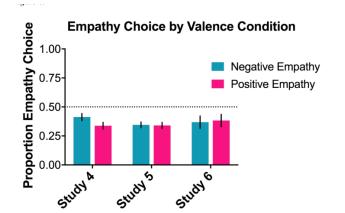


Figure 7.

subjective cost required for empathy was an additional \$0.39



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Empathically focus on the internal

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Please write one sentence describing the

experiences and feelings of this person

Objectively focus on the external features

and appearance of this person.

Please write one sentence describing the

age and gender of this person





EMOTIONAL STATE?



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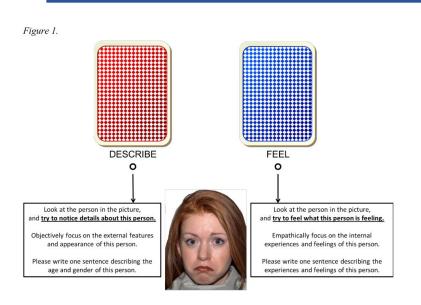
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95% Better 50% Better

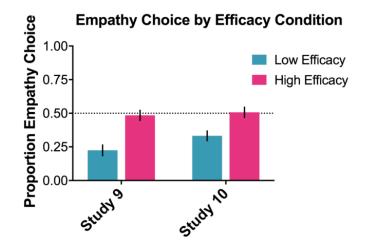
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when more empathy is required, people prefer it less



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