



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

JEP:General, 2019

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2024.10.11

Empathy

share in and understand others' experiences vicariously



Empathy is a **motivated phenomenon**



money



time



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



vicarious emotion

Introduction

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



involve little effort



largely overlap and are likely co-active in many everyday situations

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

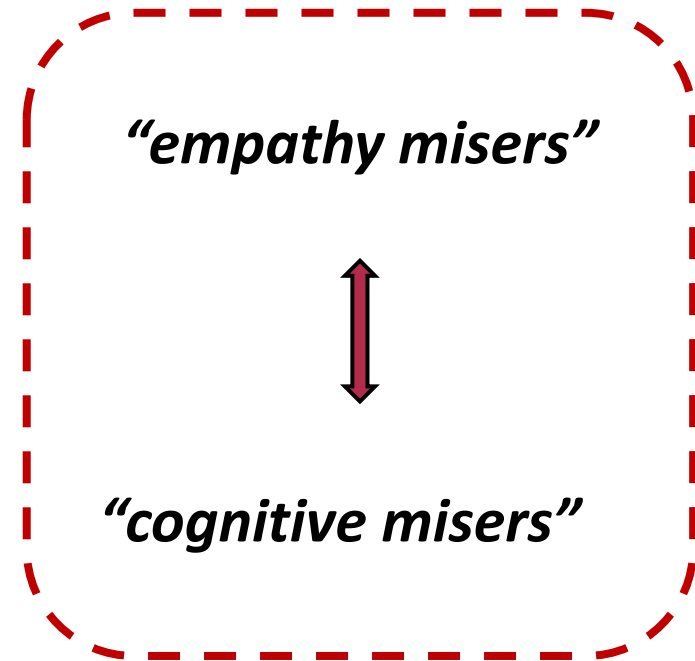
Introduction

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

Figure 1.

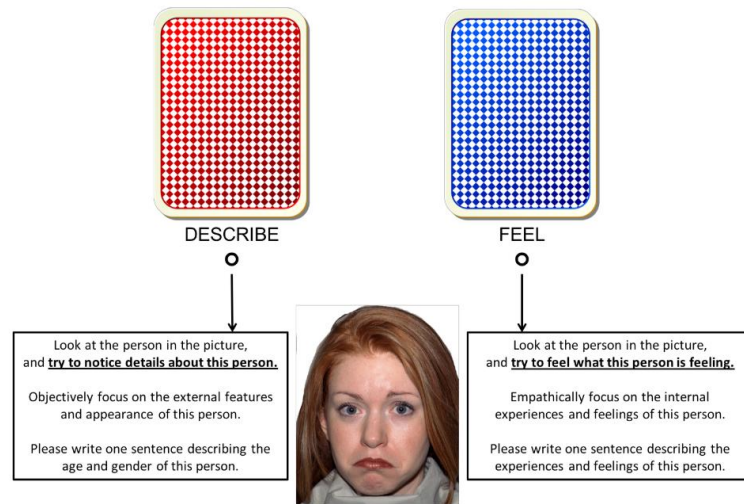
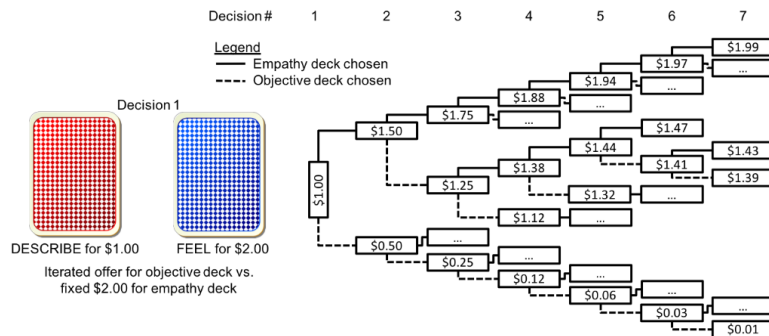


Figure 7.



Study	Empathy Choice <i>M (SD)</i>	95% CI <i>M_{diff}</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>N</i>	Hedges' <i>g</i>
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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

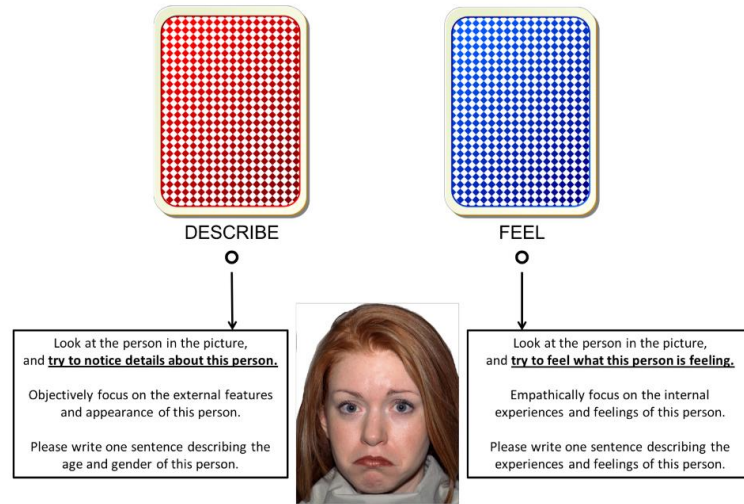
cognitive costs of empathy lead people to avoid choosing empathy

Study 11: Varying Empathic Demand

empathy is cognitively costly

Design

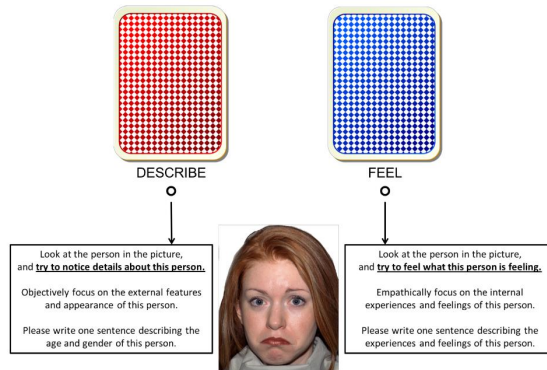
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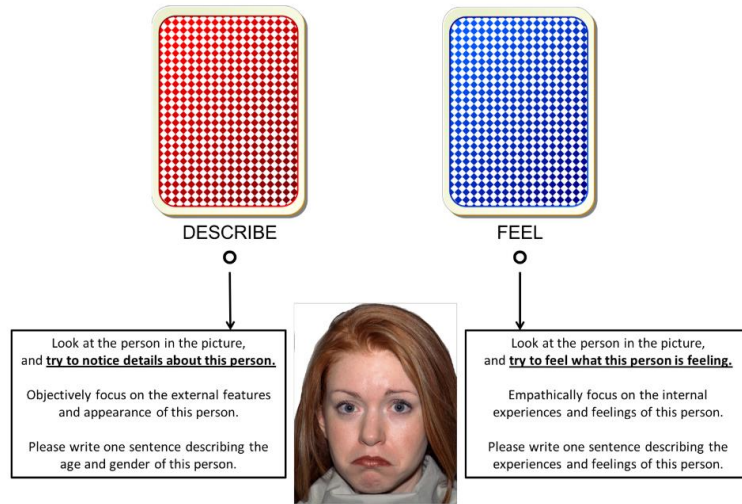
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3 keywords describing the objective facial expression of this person

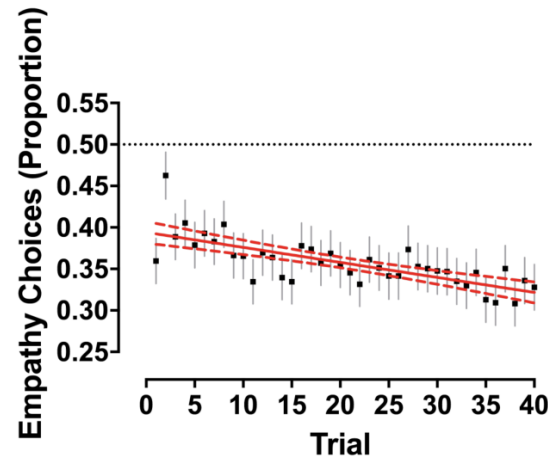
Design

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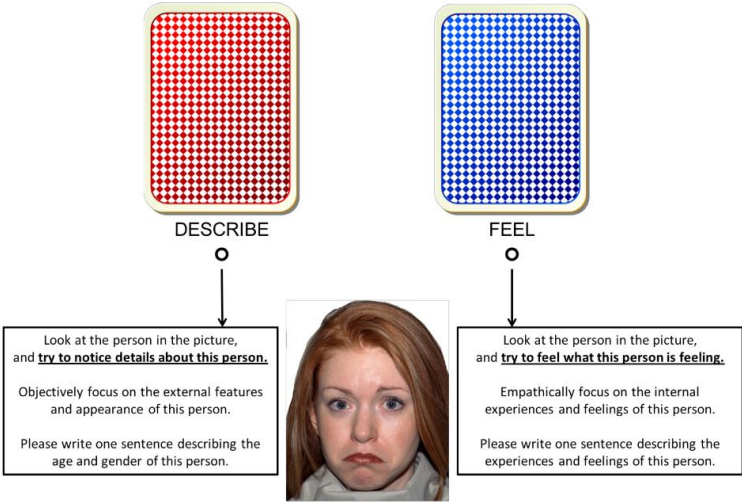
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VALENCE

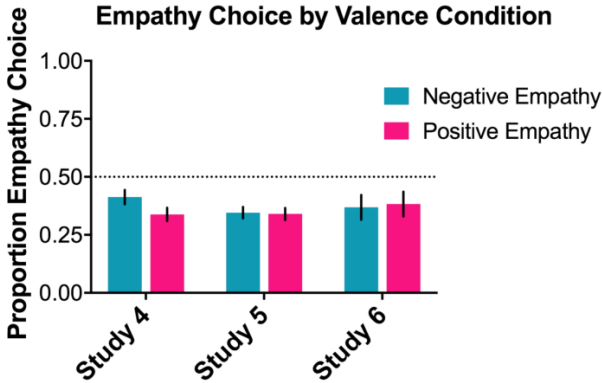
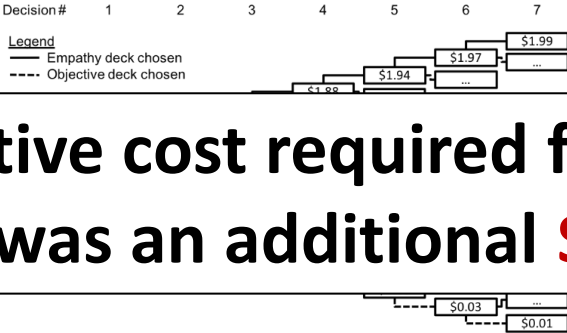


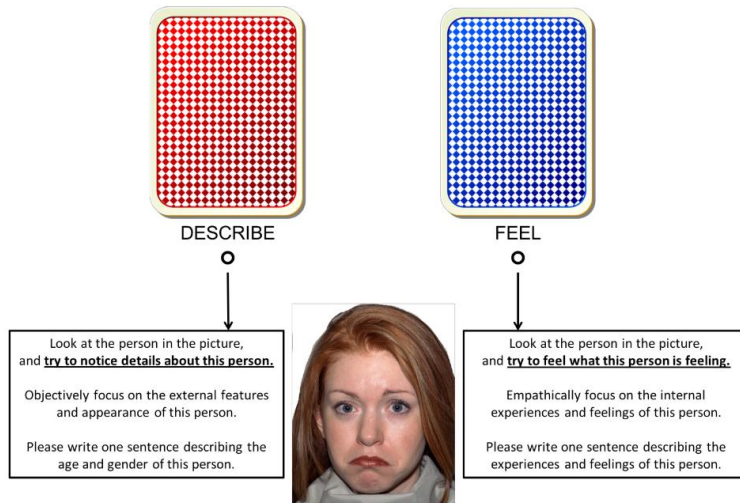
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**subjective cost required for
empathy was an additional \$0.39**

Design

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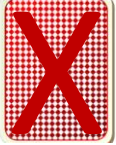



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VERBALIZIING?

EMOTIONAL STATE?

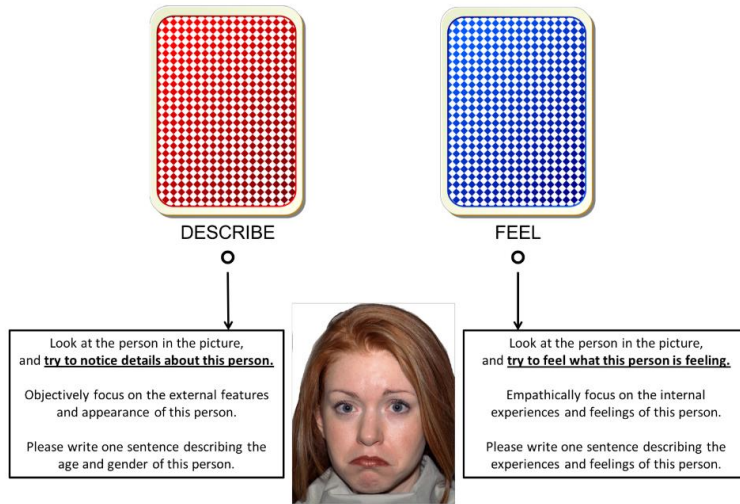
 

FEEL-OTHER FEEL-SELF



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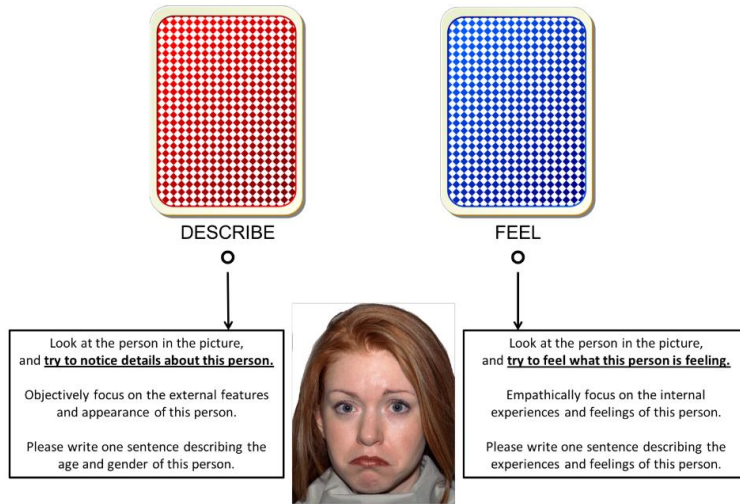
95% Better 50% Better



50% Better 95% Better

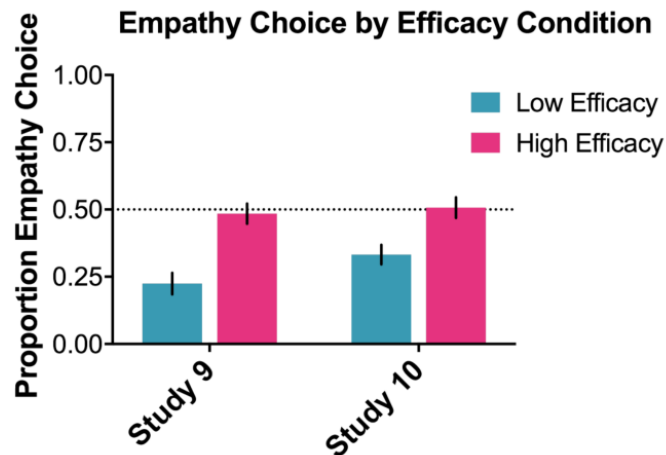
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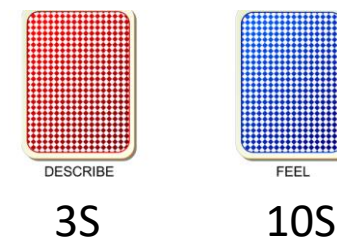


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when more empathy is required,
people prefer it less



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