Negative Consequences of Empathy:

How Group Salience & Empathic States Can Cloud Decision-Making

Overview

- Empathy Today
- Positive Outcomes & Its Darker Nature
- Evolutionary Insights
- Studies 1-3
- Discussion
- Limitations & Future Directions

Definition

“Empathy is an emotional response (affective), dependent upon the interaction between trait capacities and state influences. Empathic processes are automatically elicited but are also shaped by top-down control processes. The resulting emotion is similar to one’s perception (directly experienced or imagined) and understanding (cognitive) of the stimulus emotion, with recognition that the source of the emotion is not one’s own.” (Cuff et al., 2016)

Empathy

Cognitive

Affective

Components

Perspective Taking

Inferences

Emotional Contagion

Empathic Concern

Positive Outcomes

Positive Well-Being

(Grühn et al., 2008)

Prosociality & Cooperation

(Decety & Cowell, 2014)

Social Competence

(Decety & Cowell, 2015)

Improving Attitudes Towards Other Groups?

(Batson & Ahmad, 2009)

Darker Nature

PT: Selfish Behavior

(Pierce et al., 2013)

PT: Ineffective

(Eyal et al., 2018)

Activation Favors Familiars

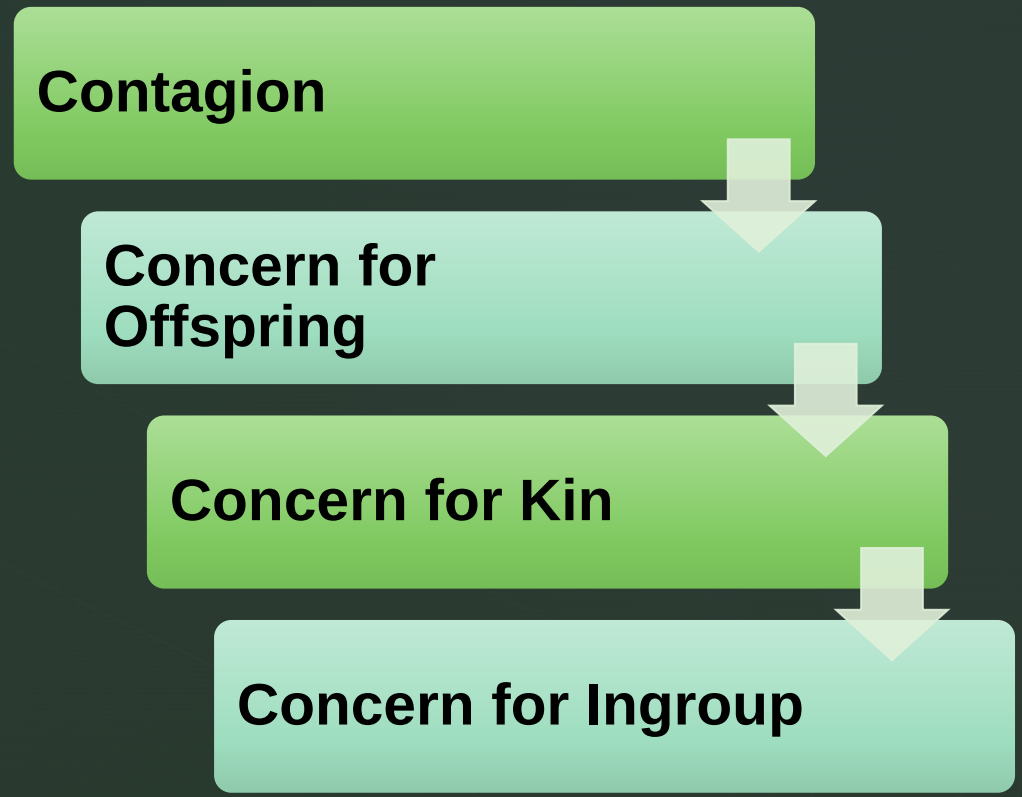
(de Waal, 2008)

Ingroup Partiality

(Tarrant et al., 2009)

Evolutionary Insights

- Contagion across species
  - Emotional investment in caregiving
- Learning abilities ➔ Affective concern spread to others in close social group
- Interaction with kinship cues
- Means to direct altruism ➔ Experience reciprocity
- Better group cohesion & coordination



Studies 1-3

Empathy, Group Membership, & Decisions

Study 1

- **“The CDC is monitoring an outbreak of a new virulent strain of the flu they have good reason to believe will lead to a global pandemic that will kill over 300 million people worldwide. They are racing to develop a vaccine before it is too late. Their best estimates are that the vaccine will come too late unless they start human testing immediately. Unfortunately, the normal ethical protocols for developing a vaccine will need to be suspended. In conjunction with the CDC, several global leaders have decided to secretly test the new vaccine on human populations by delivering it when people are getting flu shots, without their knowledge. The testing will take place in the (United States/Great Britain/Kenya).**

- **The best estimates are that close to 1 million of these unwitting test subjects will die because of this testing; however, these estimates also say there is a high probability that this will save over 100 million people. If they wait to go through the normal ethical testing procedures, there is a high probability that over 200 million will die.”**

Methods

286 Participants, U.S. Based, Majority Caucasian

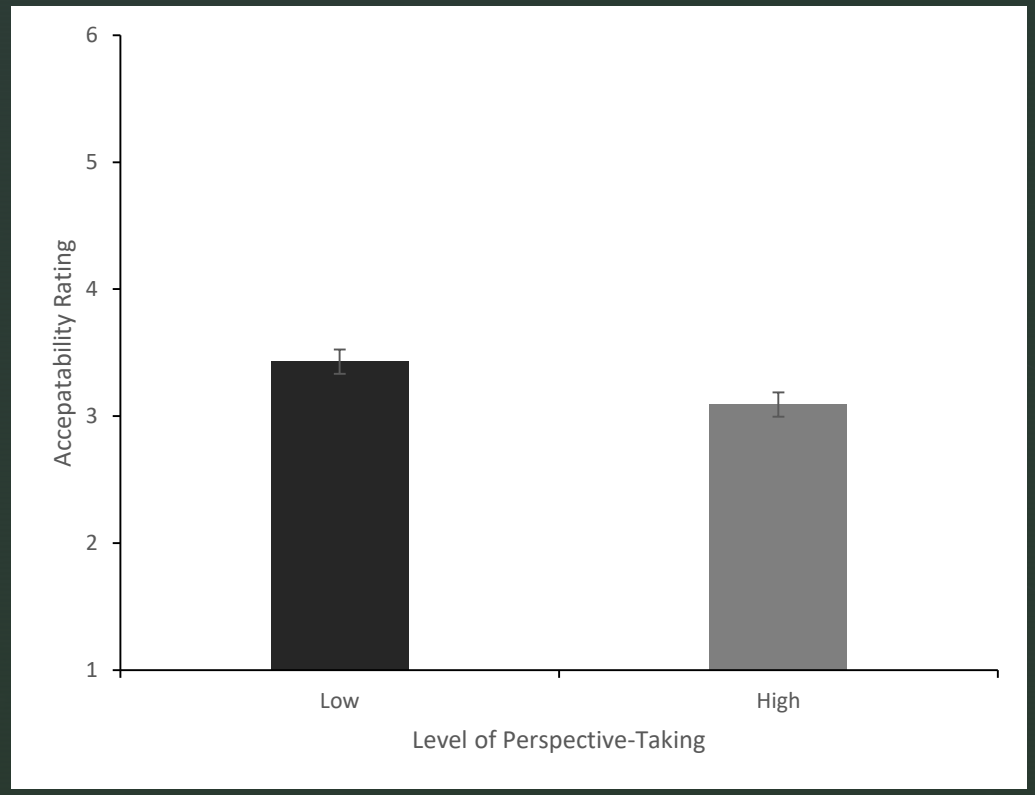
IVs:

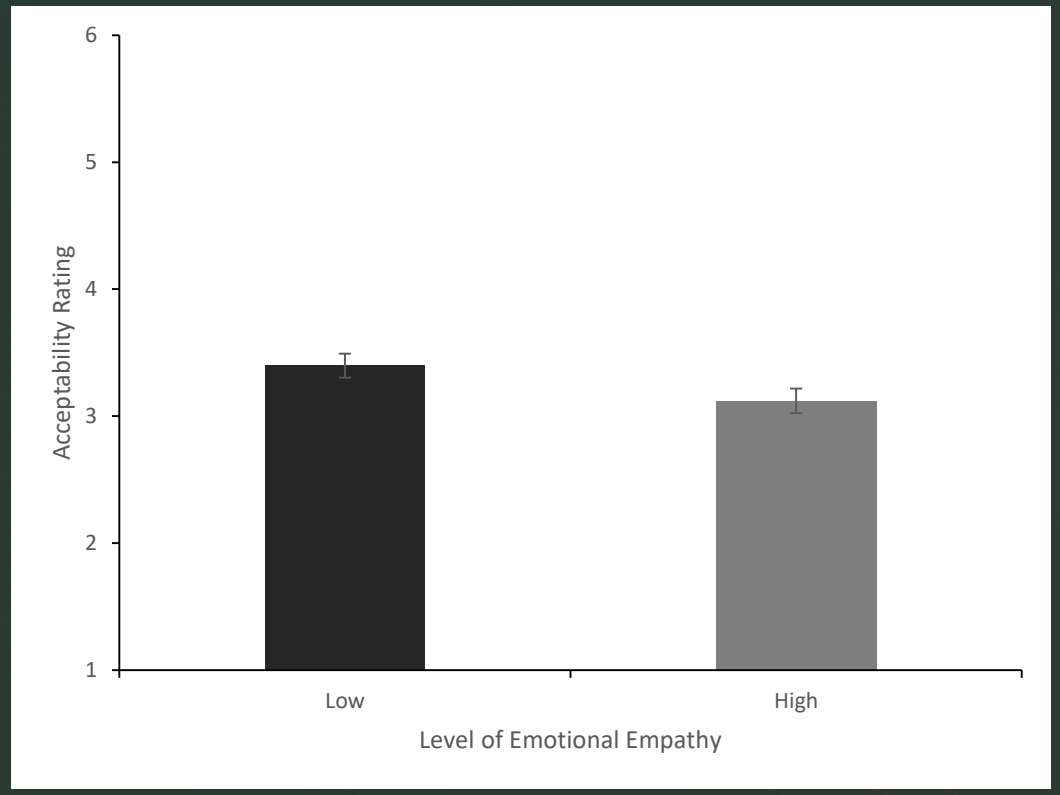
- **Country Condition**
- **Gender**
- **Trait Empathy**

DV:

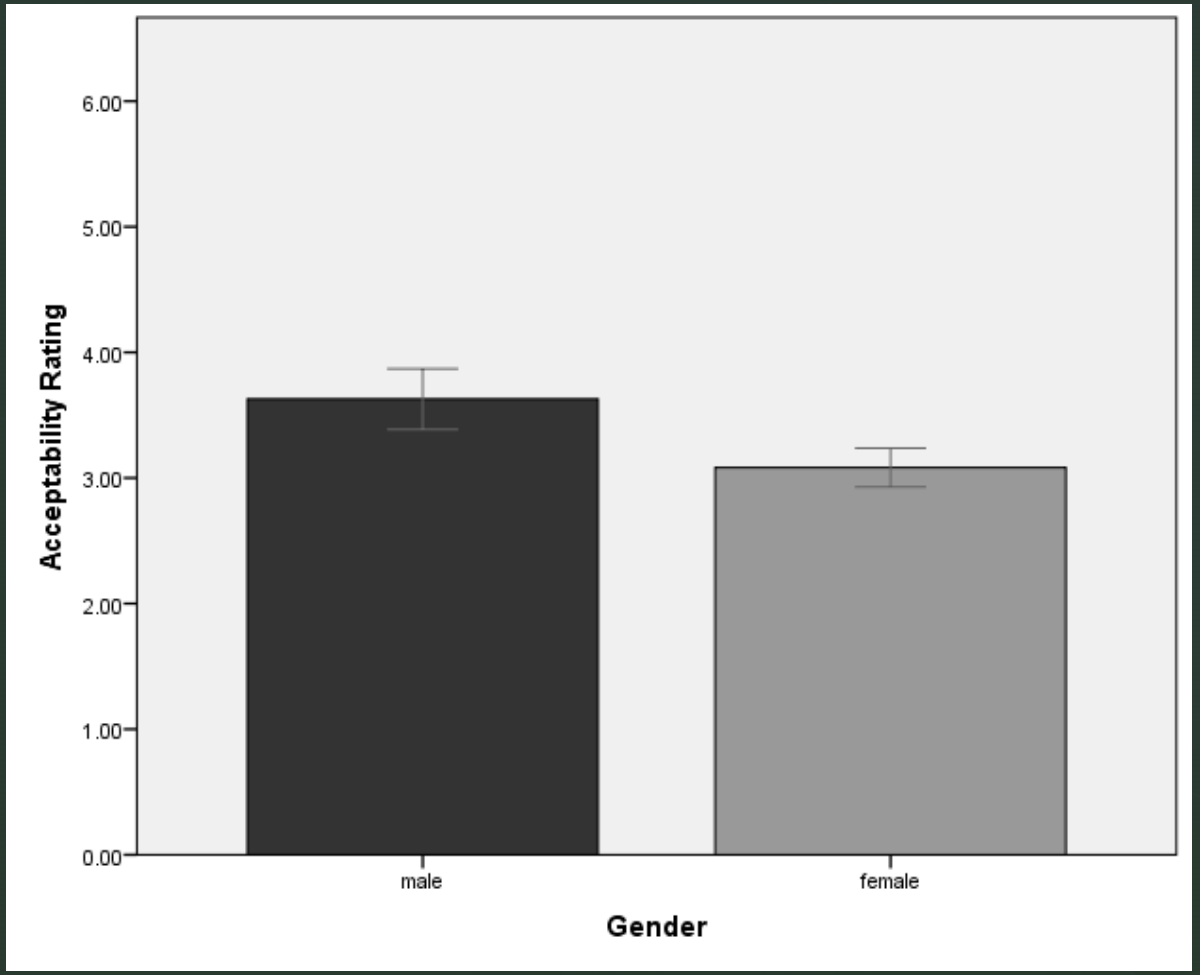
- **6-Item Acceptability**

Results


6
5
4
3
2
1
Accepatability Rating
Low
High
Level of Perspective-Taking


6
5
4
3
2
1
Acceptability Rating
Low
High
Level of Emotional Empathy

Results


6.00
5.00
4.00
3.00
2.00
1.00
0.00
Acceptability Rating
male
female
Gender

Study 2

Patient Condition Manipulation:

John Stevens vs. Habib Ahmadzadeh

NOVEMBER 2, 2018

Patient Dies in Surgery: Local Doctor Faces Suit

By: Payton Brown

(*Plano, TX*) - A family is filing a civil malpractice suit against a doctor at Mercy General Hospital following the death of a patient during surgery.

Dr. Robert Allen is a local trauma surgeon facing a civil lawsuit from the Stevens family following the death of John Stevens. Mr. Stevens was initially admitted for an emergency surgery at Mercy General which then led to complications. After his death on the operating table, the family is now suing claiming medical malpractice and seeking compensatory damages. The doctor denies the allegations.

The trial will be held next week, pending the legal preparations of both parties for court. Both parties have declined to comment about the situation.

Methods

158 Participants, U.S. Based, Majority Caucasian

IVs:

- **Patient Condition**
- **Gender**
- **Trait Empathy**

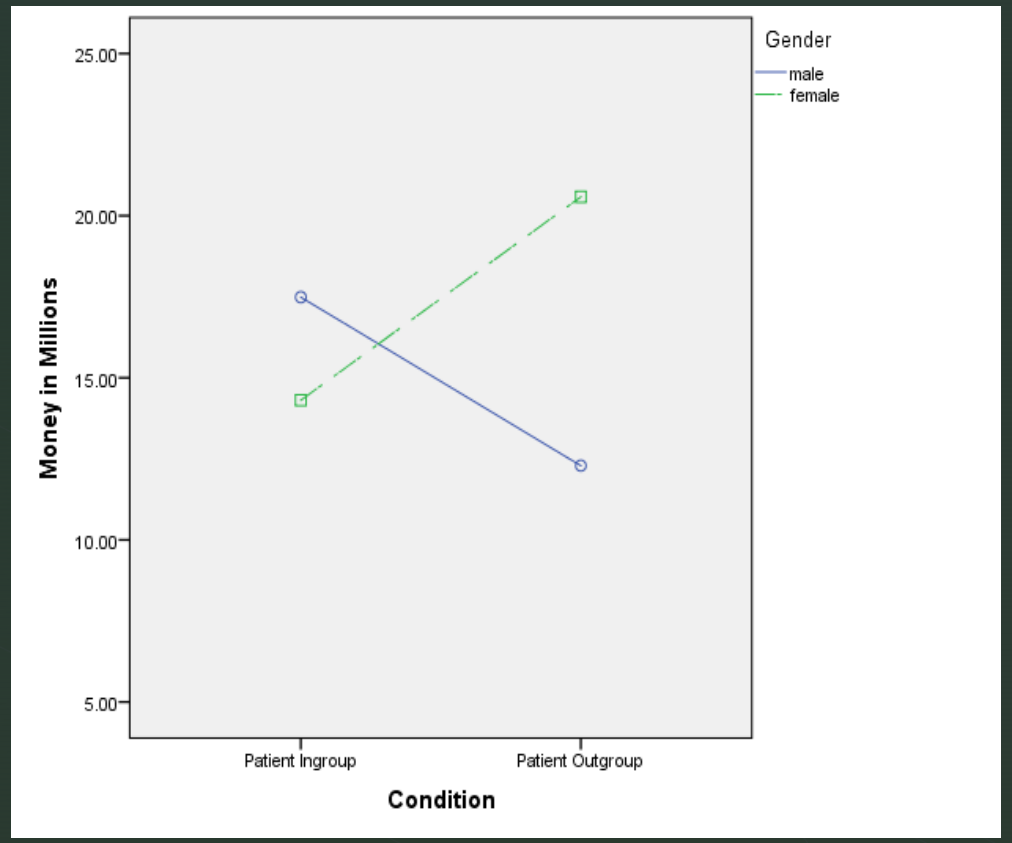
DVs:

- **Money Awarded**
- **Punishment***
- **Empathy Ratio Score**

Results

Participants higher in cognitive empathy had higher empathy ratio scores (M = .68) than those lower in cognitive empathy (M = .42)

$p < .1$



$p < .1$

Study 3

Doctor Condition Manipulation:

Dr. Robert Allen vs. Dr. Habib Ahmadzadeh

NOVEMBER 2, 2018

Patient Dies in Surgery: Local Doctor Faces Suit

By: Payton Brown

(*Plano, TX*) - A family is filing a civil malpractice suit against a doctor at Mercy General Hospital following the death of a patient during surgery.

Dr. Habib Ahmadzadeh is a local trauma surgeon facing a civil lawsuit from the Stevens family following the death of John Stevens. Mr. Stevens was initially admitted for an emergency surgery at Mercy General which then led to complications. After his death on the operating table, the family is now suing claiming medical malpractice and seeking compensatory damages. The doctor denies the allegations.

The trial will be held next week, pending the legal preparations of both parties for court. Both parties have declined to comment about the situation.

Methods

164 Participants, U.S. Based, Majority Caucasian

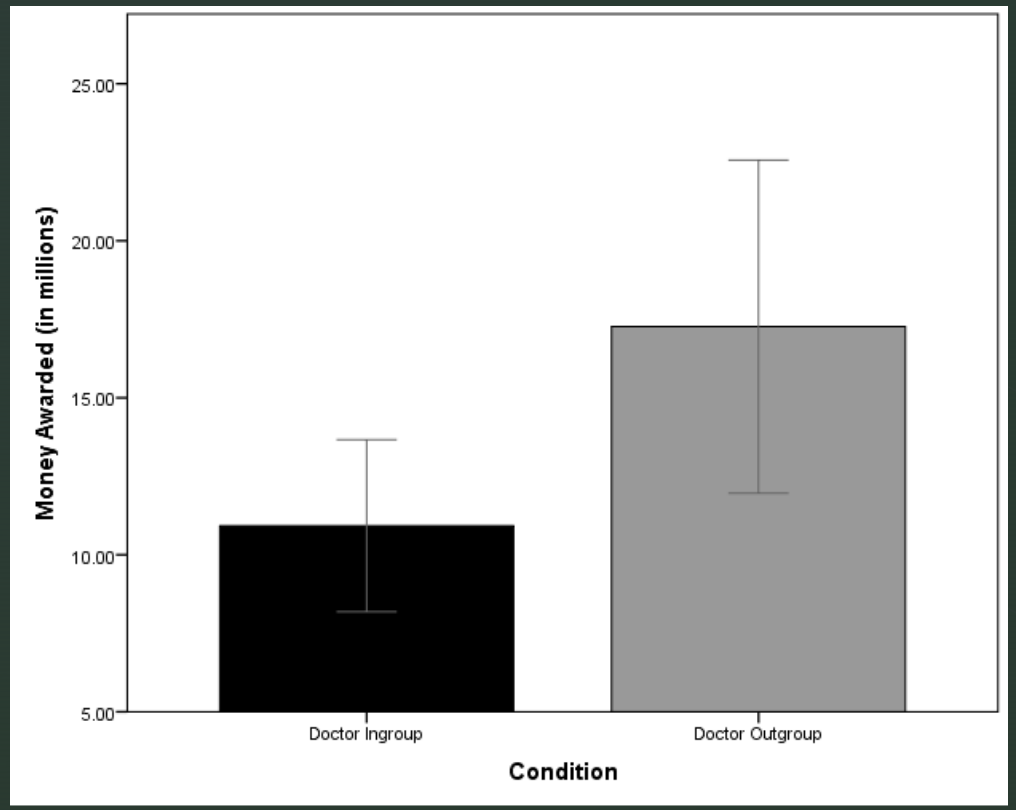
IVs:

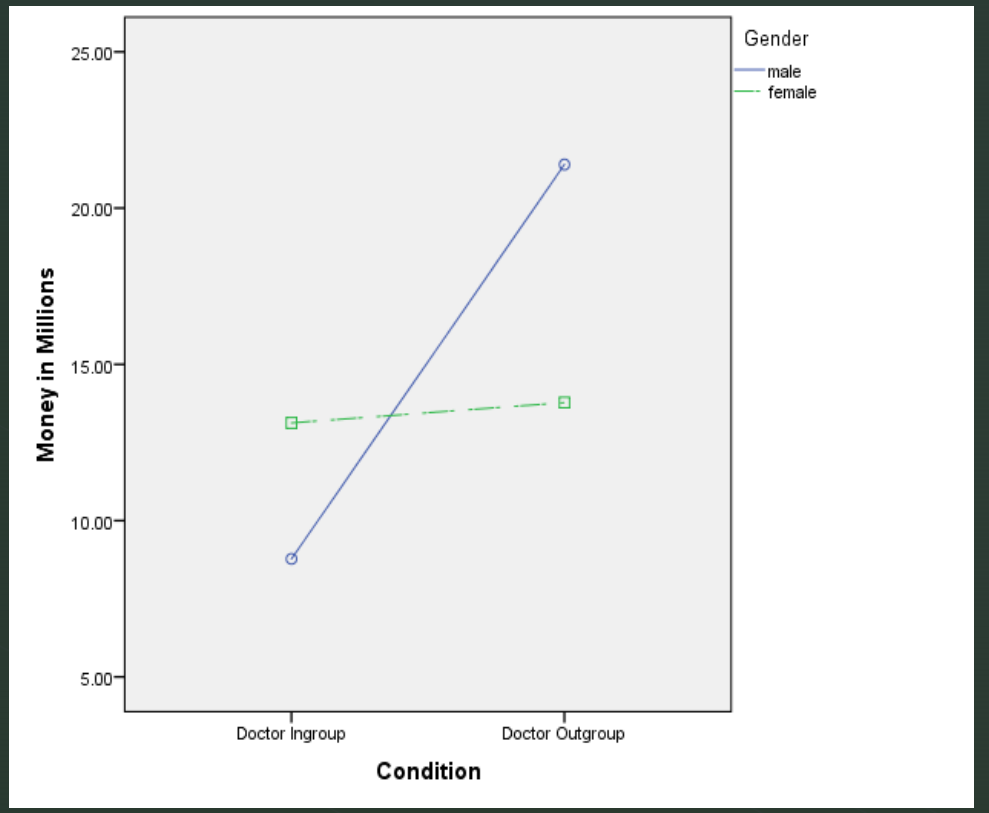
- **Doctor Condition**
- **Gender**
- **Trait Empathy**

DVs:

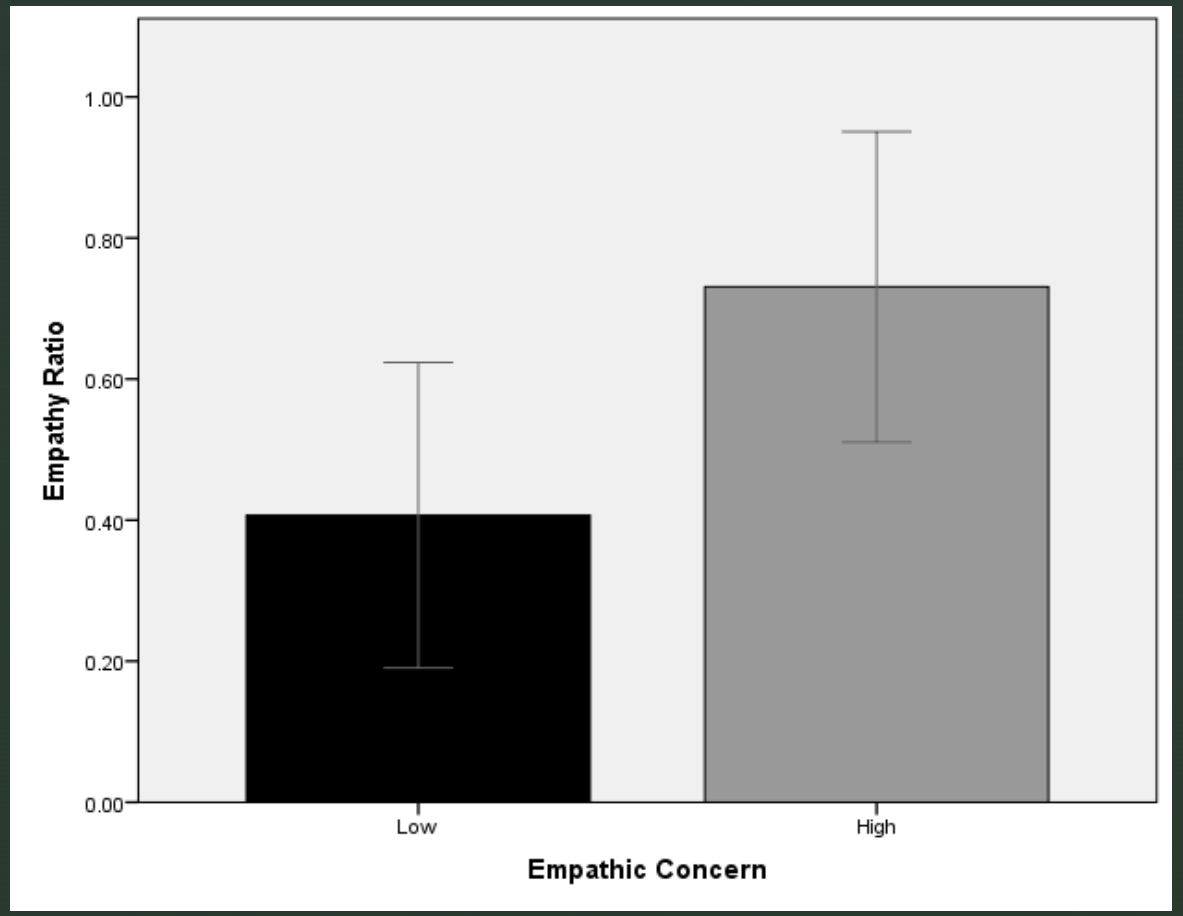
- **Money Awarded**
- **Punishment***
- **Empathy Ratio Score**

Results


Money Awarded (in millions)
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
Doctor Ingroup
Doctor Outgroup
Condition


Gender
male
female
Money in Millions
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
Doctor Ingroup
Doctor Outgroup
Condition

Results


1.00
0.80
0.60
0.40
0.20
0.00
Empathy Ratio
Low
High
Empathic Concern

Discussion

- Study 1: Higher Empathy ➔ Less Utilitarian
- Studies 2 & 3:
  - Patient vs. Doctor Condition
  - $ Bias of Males
  - Disconnect Between Empathy & Action

Limitations

- Social Desirability Biases
- Dichotomized Variables

Future Directions

- Creation of New Scales
- Overcoming Biases

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