

Title: Empathic Concern's Ingroup Bias

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Some suggest that society would benefit if humans possessed higher empathy; a suggestion supported by many previous studies (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2010; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). While that sounds positive, recent research has found that those high in empathic concern also seemed to enjoy the failure of members of an outgroup (Simas, Clifford, & Kirkland, 2019). The present study investigated correlates to dispositional empathic concern with California community college students using an online survey. Like recent research, the present findings uncovered mixed outcomes. High “empathic concern” scores, measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983), were significantly correlated with agreeableness ($r(65) = .634, p < .001$), openness ($r(65) = .290, p = .017$), gratitude ($r(65) = .452, p < .001$), appreciation ($r(65) = .540, p < .001$), and reward responsiveness behavioral activation ($r(65) = .393, p < .001$); qualities promoting an emotionally positive experience. Empathic concern scores were also significantly correlated to behavioral inhibition or avoidance ($r(65) = .322, p = .008$) and not related to subjective happiness ($p = .421$) suggesting that the internal experience is not all emotionally positive. It might be that there is in-group bias involved with empathic concern, fostering more social agreeableness but only towards members of a common social unit. Higher levels of gratitude and appreciation are experienced but likely only towards in-group members. This suggests that for higher empathic concern to help society, we would need to consider all humans as part of our in-group.

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