Not all empathy is equal: How empathy affects charitable giving

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Presentation Overview

• Background and research question
• Data and methodologies
• Findings
• Discussion
What Is Empathy

• Definitions

  – “Affective reaction to another’s emotional experience”
  
or
  – “Sharing the perceived emotion of another”
    (Unger & Thumuluri, 1997)
# Dimensions of Empathy

**Interpersonal Reactivity Index** *(Davis, 1980, 1983)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathic Concern</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective Taking</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Distress</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Egoistic</td>
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Empathic Concern

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- “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.”
- “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.”
- “I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.”
"When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in their shoes" for a while."

"I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective."

"I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision."
Personal Distress

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- “When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.”
- “Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.”
- “I tend to lose control during emergencies.”
Research Question

What roles do different dimensions of empathy play in charitable giving?
Principle of care:
E.g. “People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate.”
Hypotheses

• H1: Higher *empathic concern* increases both the likelihood and the amount of charitable giving.

• H2: Higher *perspective taking* increases both the likelihood and the amount of charitable giving.

• H3: Higher *personal distress* increases the likelihood of charitable giving, but *does not influence* the amount donated to charities.
Data

• Data: 22nd wave of the 2008-2009 American National Election Studies (ANES) Panel Study

• Survey questions include:
  – Charitable giving
  – Empathy
  – Principle of care
  – Religious similarity and giving

• Sample: 2,266 respondents aged 18+
Methodology

• Analyses:
  – Factor analysis
  – Probit regression
  – Tobit regression

• Dependent variables:
  – Charitable giving: % of giving, $ donated

• Independent variables:
  – Empathic concern
  – Perspective taking
  – Personal distress
Methodology

• Control variables:
  – Gender, Age
  – Ethnicity
  – Religious affiliation and attendance
  – Education, Marital status
  – Household income, Home ownership
  – Principle of care
## Descriptive Statistics

### Respondent Profile (N=2,266)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate or above</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>HH income ($50K - $100K)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Charitable Giving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probability %</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average $ (if &gt; $0)</td>
<td>$1,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median $ (if &gt; $0)</td>
<td>$700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empathy and Total Giving

Notes:
Marginal effects are estimated with conditional marginal effect. Tobit regressions are examined with donors only. Outliers for total giving were excluded.
Probit N = 2,034; Tobit N = 1,849.
Significance levels:
*** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.10.
Research Question

Does the impact of empathy on giving vary across different types of nonprofits?
Empathy and Giving to Basic Needs

### Probability of Giving

- **Empathic concern**: 0.043
- **Perspective taking**: -0.079***
- **Personal distress**: -0.021

### Dollar Amount Given

- **Empathic concern**: -51.69**
- **Perspective taking**: 44.002**
- **Personal distress**: -153.331***

**Notes:**
Marginal effects are estimated with conditional marginal effect. Tobit regressions are examined with donors only. Outliers for total giving were excluded.

Probit N = 2,034; Tobit N = 1,849.
Significance levels:
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Empathy and Giving to Education

Notes:
Marginal effects are estimated with conditional marginal effect. Tobit regressions are examined with donors only. Outliers for total giving were excluded.
Probit N = 2,034; Tobit N = 1,849.
Significance levels:
*** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.10.
Empathy and Giving to Health

Probability of Giving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathic concern</th>
<th>Perspective taking</th>
<th>Personal distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.108***</td>
<td>-0.084***</td>
<td>0.071***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dollar Amount Given

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Empathic concern</th>
<th>Perspective taking</th>
<th>Personal distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42.042***</td>
<td>-33.312**</td>
<td>-2.174**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
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Empathy and Giving to Environment

Probability of Giving

- Empathic concern: 0.046 ***
- Perspective taking: 0.007
- Personal distress: -0.022 ***

Dollar Amount Given

- Empathic concern: 149.495 ***
- Perspective taking: 28.423
- Personal distress: -237.734 ***

Notes:
Marginal effects are estimated with conditional marginal effect. Tobit regressions are examined with donors only. Outliers for total giving were excluded.

Probit N = 2,034; Tobit N = 1,849.
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Empathy and Giving to Youth/Family

Marginal effects are estimated with conditional marginal effect. Tobit regressions are examined with donors only. Outliers for total giving were excluded.

Probit N = 2,034; Tobit N = 1,849.

Significance levels:

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Empathy and Giving to Arts

Probability of Giving

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<tr>
<th>Empathic concern</th>
<th>Perspective taking</th>
<th>Personal distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.055 ***</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dollar Amount Given

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<tr>
<th>Empathic concern</th>
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<th>Personal distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.525 ***</td>
<td>-5.619</td>
<td>-11.687</td>
</tr>
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Notes:
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Empathy and Giving to International

Probability of Giving

Empathic concern: -0.003
Perspective taking: -0.003
Personal distress: 0.021***

Dollar Amount Given

Empathic concern: 12.117
Perspective taking: 4.964
Personal distress: 16.738

Notes:
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Empathy and Giving to Religion

Probability of Giving

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<th>Personal distress</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.14 ***</td>
</tr>
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Dollar Amount Given

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<tr>
<td>-14.524</td>
<td>-6.224</td>
<td>-252.793 ***</td>
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Summary of Key Findings

Not all empathy is equal
Discussion

• Implications for fundraising

• Limitations: self-report survey data
Thank you!

Questions and Comments?