



共情与亲社会行为的关系再思考

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摘要 经典社会心理学理论认为, 共情在促进亲社会行为方面发挥着重要作用: 当个体对他人的处境产生强烈共情时, 更有可能做出有利于他人的行动, 包括(但不限于)救助他人免受痛苦、分配更多资源给予他人, 以及纠正他人受到的不公正对待——为此, 个体甚至愿意无偿牺牲自己的一部分利益. 根据近期文献回顾以及本团队的研究进展, 本文对上述理论提出3条修正建议: (1) 共情与亲社会行为的关系受到各种因素的制约, 共情水平的提高并不必然导致亲社会行为; 在特定因素的影响下, 共情甚至可能会诱发反社会行为. (2) 共情对亲社会行为的影响不一定在于提高亲社会行为的发生频率, 而主要在于增强其稳定性: 共情特质水平较高的个体, 其亲社会倾向在不同外部条件下的变化程度较小. (3) 共情对亲社会行为的促进作用, 是通过缓解个体对外部环境的焦虑体验而达成的. 上述部分观点已得到实证证据支持, 另一部分仍停留在猜想阶段, 有待未来进一步验证. 本文相信, 这些观点可以深化研究者们对共情以及亲社会本质的认识, 在一定程度上推动社会心理学理论的发展.

关键词 共情, 亲社会行为, 利他, 亲社会稳定性, 焦虑

共情(empathy)一般是指个体通过外部观察、语言交流等途径, 间接地理解、感受、解释他人情绪状态的能力^[1,2]. 有的文献也用这个概念指代人们体验他人情绪的心理过程本身^[3]. 共情还可以进一步被划分出不同维度, 目前一种广受采纳的划分方式认为, 存在认知共情(正确地识别和理解他人的情绪, 即所谓“心领神会”)和情感共情(对他人的情绪感受产生替代性的情绪体验, 即所谓“感同身受”)这两个相对独立的维度^[4,5]. 共情是社会性动物所普遍具备的“指向他人”(other-oriented)的心理能力^[2], 被广泛认为是社会群体的“黏合剂”, 使不同个体能够通过情感纽带联系在一起^[2,6]. 有研究者在此基础上提出, 共情可以为亲社会行为(尤其

是利他行为)的出现提供一种理论解释^[7,8]. 利他行为往往以牺牲个人利益为代价, 比如帮助他人需要耗费自己的时间精力, 分享资源给他人就会减少自己可用的资源, 甚至因此降低自己的生存机会. 因此, 利他行为至少在表面上是对个体不利的, 但它又是在生活中随处可见的, 甚至可以说是每个社会正常存续和发展壮大的关键, 因为“社会”存在的主要意义就是各成员在危难时刻能够互相支持^[9,10]. 许多社会心理学家相信, “非理性”的亲社会行为(包括利他行为)背后是由共情体验所驱动的; 共情使人们对他人的痛苦感同身受, 由此产生了救助他人免除痛苦的动机^[11~14]. 例如, 经典的“共情-利他假说”(empathy-altruism hypothesis)认为, 共

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情体验越鲜明,共情对象表现出的痛苦越深,共情者的帮助动机就越强。当共情者成功地帮助了共情对象——或者至少主观上这么认为,他们就更能超脱共情所带来的负面影响(如忧伤、悲痛等)^[15]。

发展心理学领域的研究表明,在1岁左右的幼儿身上就可以观察到对他人的共情体验,具体表现包括哭泣、啜泣以及凝视共情对象等;年龄更大的幼儿则开始尝试用行动抚慰共情对象,例如触摸、亲吻、拥抱以及更复杂的助人行为^[2,16]。由此可见,人类会本能地因为共情而做出亲社会行为,两者之间的联系是自然而然产生的。进化心理学领域的“俄罗斯套娃”理论模型(Russian-doll model)将上述发展过程归结为从低到高的3个层次:最底层是运动模仿和情感共鸣,中间层是共情关注和安慰,最高层是观点采择以及有目标的帮助行为^[2,17]。

共情体验会进一步引发其他情绪,包括内疚(如果共情者自己是导致共情对象不幸的原因)或者愤怒(如果其他人是导致共情对象不幸的原因)。这些情绪可以转化为不同类型的行为动机(图1):内疚推动共情者做出补偿行为(如捐赠等)^[16,18],而愤怒与亲社会行为的关系较为复杂:Fehr等行为经济学家主张,人类天生就具有对公平、均等、互惠等状态的偏好^[19,20]。出于这种偏好,我们认为每个人都理应根据实际的工作付出或贡献而得到相应的回报,即所谓的“公正世界信念”(belief in a just world)^[21]。当某人受到不合理的对待,违背了上述原则——比如收入远少于付出,甚至被剥夺了获取回报的权利,这些情况都可能会促使旁观者的共情转化为愤怒,并采取行动纠正这些不合理的状况,包括惩罚、报复那些以不公正方式处理问题的人^[16]。司法领域的研究者和实践者们都承认,共情(以及由共情转化而来的愤怒)不可避免会对法官和陪审团的裁决产生影响,也就是说道德情绪渗透进了司法判断之中^[16]。

1 研究争议与潜在解释

根据前一部分内容,读者可能会认为共情与亲社会行为之间存在不容置疑的因果关系。但实际上情况恰恰相反:针对这个主题的前人研究所得出的结论存在较大差异^[22-25]。在很多实证研究中,共情体验的增强并没有相应地加强个体对亲社会行为的偏好,甚至有时还削弱了这种偏好^[26-29]。例如,研究者们普遍认为,当个体的亲社会偏好增强,其攻击性行为应该随之而

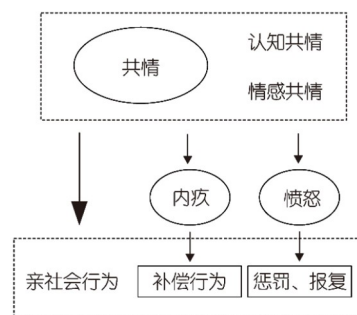


图1 共情与亲社会行为关系的经典理论认识(情绪概念以实线圆框表示,行为概念以实线方框表示)

Figure 1 Classic theoretical understanding of the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior (emotional concepts represented by solid line circles; behavioral concepts represented by solid line squares)

减少^[30]。但是一项重要的元分析表明,对他人的共情无法有效地在个体层面减少攻击性行为的出现——包括言语攻击、身体攻击和性攻击^[29]。还有研究者通过一系列实验发现,对于不同类型的亲社会行为(包括助人行为和捐赠行为),个体的共情水平要么无法预测其发生率,要么就只能反向预测(也就是说,共情水平越高,亲社会行为的发生频率越低)^[31]。如何解释这样的研究结果?有文章提出:对于个体来说,“能够体验到他人的种种感受(即共情),并不意味着在乎这些感受”,也不意味着会针对这些感受采取行动^[31]。但上述思路相当于否认了共情能够转化为行为动机,从而割断了共情和行为之间的联系,所以本文认为这不是最佳的处理办法。作为替代方案,本文认为,共情与亲社会行为之间的因果链条是可以成立的,但前提是要对它的限定条件有更全面的认识(图2(a))。

首先,共情是否转化为亲社会行为,会受到共情体验强度的制约。正如Hoffman^[16]指出,强烈的共情会使人在主观上痛苦不适、心烦意乱。因此当共情对象引发的反应过于激烈时,共情者可能会有意识地转移注意力,避开——而不是救助——共情对象,从而避免自己的神经系统受到过度刺激。这种心理机制有助于解释为何人们有时会对受害者袖手旁观——真相可能并非在于漠视受害者的伤痛,而是恰恰相反。例如,研究者们发现,处于培训阶段的新进护理人员往往会逃避照顾临终病人,因为他们还不能很好地消化对病人的共情给自己带来的心理影响^[32]。在信息传播高度发达的现代社会,新闻和娱乐媒体喜欢通过极度夸大、渲染苦难来制造心理冲击,吸引更多注意力。但这种信息轰炸常常会导致广大受众在心理上麻木疲惫,刻意避

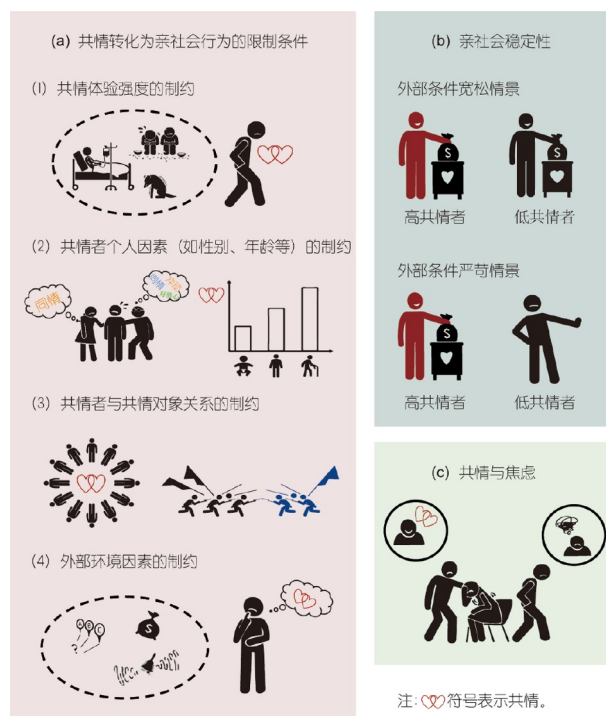


图2 (网络版彩色)对经典理论的3方面修改意见。(a) 共情转化为亲社会行为的四个限定条件。(b) “亲社会稳定性”。(c) 共情与焦虑的关系

Figure 2 (Color online) Three proposed modifications to classical theories. (a) Four moderating conditions for the transformation of empathy into prosocial behavior. (b) “Prosocial volatility”. (c) The relationship between empathy and anxiety

开此类信息，更遑论主动关心和帮助被报道的受害者^[33]。

其次，共情是否转化为亲社会行为，也受到共情者个人因素(如性别、年龄等)的制约。本团队近期使用虚拟现实技术，研究被试(即实验参加者)目睹犯罪行为发生时的见义勇为倾向。实验结果表明，男性被试的共情能力，与其见义勇为的概率呈负相关。而女性被试恰恰相反：共情能力越强，越倾向于见义勇为。如何解释这个结果？作者认为，女性的见义勇为主要是由对受害者的同情所引发的。其他团队的研究也表明，女性比男性更有可能在共情的驱使下做出亲社会行为^[34,35]。相比之下，男性见义勇为背后的动机可能更复杂多样^[36]。此外，共情与亲社会行为的关系，在不同年龄群体中也呈现出不同的特点：研究者们普遍认为，个体的共情倾向会随着年龄的增长而上升，而且共情水平是年龄与亲社会行为之间关系的重要中介变量^[37-39]。

再次，共情是否转化为亲社会行为，还受到共情者与共情对象关系的制约^[40]。任何遭遇不幸的个体都有

可能激发人们的共情体验。但总的来说，人们还是更倾向于对血亲、朋友、同胞等“群体内成员”产生共情。这种心理倾向源自于本能的“群体内偏见”(ingroup bias)^[41]。群体内偏见的负面影响在于：现代社会的结构非常复杂，由各类不同群体(例如不同种族)组成，需要提倡所有群体平等、和谐共处。在群际冲突之中，当人们对某一方产生强烈共情联系，可能就会因此而做出损害其他群体的行为^[16]。此时由共情引发的行为反应，其性质就不一定是亲社会的，而是部落主义(tribalism)、排外主义的。例如，北京大学韩世辉教授课题组^[42]的跨文化研究表明，当被试观察他人脸上的疼痛表情，不论东方人还是西方人，都对同族面孔的共情反应更强，对异族面孔的反应更弱——而且与种族特征识别有关的大脑区域(如额下皮层(inferior frontal cortex))激活越强，被试对异族人群的共情反应和帮助意愿就越弱。在另一项研究中，他们设计了一种新颖的行为范式使被试可以选择伤害(电击)某名战斗人员，但这个决定会同时牵涉到另一名非战斗人员(平民)。研究结果表明，无论以色列犹太人还是巴勒斯坦人，在做出针对群体外成员的决策时(即犹太人决定是否伤害巴勒斯坦人，或者巴勒斯坦人决定是否伤害犹太人)，与群体内条件相比，他们回避伤害非战斗人员的意愿都变得更弱——换句话说，更不在乎自己的决定是否牵涉到无辜平民。该成果对于研究者们理解现实中的巴以冲突(以及其他种族间冲突)极富借鉴意义^[43]。

还需要注意，“共情者与共情对象的关系”不但指社会关系(如亲友、同胞等)，也包括物理关系：两者的距离感可以影响共情反应的强度，也可以决定共情是否转化为亲社会行为^[44]。前人研究已经表明，一个具体的共情对象比一个抽象的、模糊的对象更容易引发共情和亲社会行为，导致所谓的“可识别受害者效应”^[45]。

“腐败合作”(corrupt collaboration，可理解为集体腐败)是一种对国家和集体危害极其严重的反社会行为^[46]。本团队^[47]发现，个体卷入腐败合作的可能性，不但与其道德判断能力负相关，而且与其共情能力正相关(越共情，越倾向于跟队友腐败合作)。本团队认为，某些人参与腐败合作的动机往往不是为了利益，而是因为跟所在团队成员(如同事)的共情纽带过于紧密，以至于被这些人的意愿所带动，哪怕这种“同流合污”行为可能会损害更大范围群体的利益。可见这项研究也表明，共情者与共情对象的关系，在某些情况下会导致共情转化成反社会行为。这里需要强调的是，如果从共

情对象的角度看,共情者做出的腐败合作选择也可以说是具有亲社会性质的;但是当上升到集体和社会的高度去考虑,腐败合作就是毋庸置疑的反社会行为。

最后,共情是否转化为亲社会行为,会受到外部环境因素的制约。在大部分前人研究中,被试需要在自己和他人之间分配的资源往往是一笔金钱(或者代币),这种“资源”影响的主要是被试的经济利益^[48~51]。本团队在实验设计中创造性地引入了“解救资源”(relieving resources)的概念:所谓解救资源,是指能够帮助被试或他人脱困的资源,比如饥荒时期的食物,或者疫情时期的药品等。本团队认为,探讨共情对解救资源分配的影响,能够更好地帮助人们从进化心理学角度理解共情对群体存续和发展的意义。在具体的实验任务中,操纵了解救资源的稀缺性、不确定性等因素。一系列研究结果表明,这些因素都会对共情者的资源分配模式产生影响(详见下一小节)。

2 亲社会稳定性

为了更精确地描述共情与亲社会行为的关系,在下文中引入“亲社会稳定性”(prosocial volatility)这个新术语。当外部条件宽松的情景下,利他行为的潜在成本较低,低共情者也愿意抓住这种机会向他人表现出友好的姿态。因此,高共情者和低共情者的行为在这类情景中未必有很大区别。而在外部条件较为严苛的情景下,低共情者行为的亲社会性会大大减弱;相反,高共情者的行为模式在不同情景下倾向于保持不变,我们称之为“亲社会稳定性”——这种稳定性使高共情者在社会互动中成为更可靠、更容易被预测、更值得信赖的伙伴。总的来说,虽然前人研究主张共情会从总体上加强亲社会偏好,但本团队认为还可以从“提高亲社会稳定性”的角度理解共情跟亲社会行为的关系(图2(b))。本团队通过一系列研究工作,对上述理论进行了初步检验。

首先,要求被试在自己和陌生队友之间分配解救资源,发现在资源总量充足的条件下,高共情者和低共情者都乐意将较多资源分享给队友。而当资源总量变得匮乏的时候,共情对分配行为的影响才显现出来——低共情者的行为变化较大,分享风格从慷慨转变为吝啬;高共情者的行为模式则相对稳定,较少受到外界条件变化的影响^[52,53]。对此的推测是:低共情者的资源分享行为带有更多的功利主义色彩,因此只有在资源充沛的情况下才会表现出来(许多研究都表明,共情

水平与马基雅维利主义人格(Machiavellianism)存在负相关,可以从侧面支持这个观点^[54~57])。而在资源稀缺的情况下,低共情者更多关注自身需要,行为目标转向自我保护——其中的逻辑可以借用“穷则独善其身,达则兼济天下”这句话来概括(英语中也存在类似的说法:“Prosperity makes friends; adversity tries them”)。相比之下,高共情者的资源分享行为背后的动机主要是利他主义,因此更不容易随自身处境的变化而发生改变,表现出较高的“亲社会稳定性”。

在本团队正在进行的一项研究中,实验操纵的不是资源的稀缺性,而是其不确定性(uncertainty):被试在与队友分享资源之前,无法事先确切知道资源总量,只知道其上下浮动的范围。实验结果与上述针对资源稀缺性的研究异曲同工——随着资源不确定性的程度渐次增强,低共情者的资源分享风格也随之发生很大改变,而高共情者的分配模式则较少受到不确定性因素的影响。

本团队的“亲社会稳定性”理论,在一定程度上可以解释不同前人研究的彼此冲突之处:之所以某些研究无法证明共情与亲社会行为之间存在相关,甚至发现两者呈负相关关系,可能是因为这些研究中的任务情景对于被试来说考验较为宽松。例如,这些研究要求被试在自己和队友之间分配的是金钱资源,而被试参加实验所得的固定报酬又相对较高。在这种情况下,被试不认为自己掌握的资源具有稀缺性,因此即使低共情者也会乐意慷慨地分享这种资源。只有对情景因素在不同条件下进行更细致的操纵,才有可能观察到高共情者表现出跨情景的亲社会稳定性,从而全面地认识共情的效应——当然,上述论断的前提是,实验适当地控制了共情体验的强度、共情者的个人因素,以及共情者与共情对象之间的关系因素等干扰变量。

3 共情与焦虑

毋庸置疑的是,共情并非唯一能够对亲社会行为造成影响的情绪^[58]。本团队认为,在资源分配等典型的社会决策情景中,焦虑情绪的参与也值得格外重视,而且共情与焦虑所扮演的角色可能恰好处于对立的两极。大量前人研究表明,焦虑情绪的增强会导致个体更倾向于在经济决策中回避风险^[59,60]。但是对于焦虑在助人行为、资源分配、道德判断等社会决策中扮演的角色,前人尚未得出一致结论。本团队推测,焦虑会促使个体在社会决策中更注重自我保护,而忽视他人的需

要。本团队^[61]近期进行的一项研究,要求被试在自己和队友之间分配解救资源,用于抵消随之而来的10秒噪声刺激。前文献指出,这种预期中的潜在负性刺激可以引发个体的焦虑情绪^[62]。被试在进行资源分配之前,需要先自我报告此时此刻的焦虑状态。实验结果表明,被试与队友分享资源的行为倾向,随自评焦虑水平的提高而减弱,也就是说个体“越焦虑、越吝啬”。

本团队进一步提出:焦虑和共情作为两种能够塑造个体行为的情绪内驱力,它们对亲社会行为的影响模式可能是相反的。就其本质而言,焦虑是一种由不确定的、未必成真的威胁(例如,墙角处看起来像蜈蚣的一条黑影;或者出现某些征兆,但是尚未到来的一场天灾)所引发的不安、警惕、心神不定的情绪体验,伴随着生理应激反应^[63]。从进化心理学的角度看,焦虑的作用是帮助个体为潜在的风险提前做好应对准备^[64]。所以在焦虑情绪的推动下,个体会将更多认知资源用于关注自身周围的威胁信号,注意范围变得狭窄,更少顾及到他人所面临的风险(除非该风险对自身的处境能起到预示作用)^[65]。其结果是焦虑个体行为的亲社会性减弱。例如,他们会将更多的资源留给自己备用^[61]。简单来说,共情增强个体对他人状况的关注,而焦虑增强个体对自身状况的关注(self-focused)^[66,67],本团队认为两者会分别提高和降低行为的亲社会稳定性(图2(c))。部分前人研究发现,个体的共情水平和焦虑水平表现出此消彼长的变化模式,或可从侧面印证本团队的上述观点^[68-70]。

4 小结与展望

总的来说,本文赞同经典心理学理论的观点,认为共情对于人类的亲社会性确实至关重要。如果要合理地解释各种利他行为的动机,则共情因素所扮演的角色是不容忽视的。但必须注意的是,共情与亲社会行为并不必然存在直接的因果关系——如果这样去阐释它们之间的联系,恐怕是一种理论上的过度简化:近期研究已经证明(或部分证明),共情的增强是否导向亲社会行为,受到多种不同因素的调节,包括共情体验的强度、共情者本身的个人因素、共情者和共情对象之间

的关系,以及外部环境因素等,无法一概而论。此外,关于共情影响社会行为的心理机制(例如它与焦虑的内在关系),也仍然需要更深入的探索,这样才能更好地理解人类亲社会行为的本质。

展望未来,从方法学的角度,本文认为研究者在探讨共情与亲社会行为之间的关系时,应该将其理解为一种具有多元性质的层级结构;基于这种认识,尝试建立多因素理论模型,并且对无关变量进行更严格的控制。此外,研究者在分析个体亲社会行为时,可以更多地“将亲社会稳定性”这个指标纳入考虑——也就是说,以行为在不同条件间的变异性(而不是其绝对值)衡量共情的影响效应。但必须指出的是,本团队^[52,53,71,72]以往的研究主题侧重于资源分配行为、助人行为等,此时共情者和共情对象的处境是不平等的。而在双方地位平等的条件下,共情对亲社会行为(如互惠合作)的影响模式是否也适合用“亲社会稳定性”这一概念来描述,还有待进一步探讨。本文在此推测:与低共情者相比,高共情者在合作决策中,即使受到认知负荷和情绪负荷的限制,他们对他人的想法、信念和需求的共鸣与理解仍然会保持在更稳定的水平,因此仍然在行为层面表现出更强的亲社会稳定性。

此外从研究主题角度,本文建议未来研究者们加强关注人类对人工智能体(artificial intelligence, AI)的共情。这个问题涉及到AI机器人能否在将来对人类社会关系构成有效的补充^[73-76]。随着技术的飞速发展,AI机器人已经能在一定程度上理解人类的情感表达并做出恰当的反应^[77,78]。近年有研究探讨在敬老院等社会服务机构,由社交型AI机器人为独居老人(或出于其他原因与社会隔绝的人群)提供日常陪伴服务,从而改善他们的情绪状态^[79-81]。老人是否会对这类AI产生共情,直接决定了AI技术能否满足老人在社会交流和情感方面的需要。因此本团队相信,针对人智互动中的共情问题开展研究,将有助于实现国家“智慧养老”战略目标,以及智能社会的全面建设——作者建议,这方面的研究可以关注:(1)本文提出的4条主要限定条件,是否同样适用于人对AI的共情;(2)“亲社会稳定性”的概念在人智互动情景中是否有效。

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Summary for “共情与亲社会行为的关系再思考”

Reconsidering the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior

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Classical psychological theories widely assert that empathy plays a pivotal role in facilitating prosocial behavior. In essence, individuals are more likely to engage in actions beneficial to others when they experience a strong sense of empathy toward those individuals. Such actions encompass, but are not limited to, rescuing others from suffering, allocating more resources to them, and resisting unjust treatment they may face. Empathic individuals, in a nutshell, demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their own interests for the well-being of others. However, previous empirical studies focusing on the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior have yielded heterogeneous findings, challenging classical theories and prompting a reconsideration. Based on a recent literature review and the ongoing research progress within our team, the authors propose three corrective suggestions for the aforementioned theory.

First, the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior is constrained by external conditions, and an increase in empathy levels does not always guarantee prosocial actions. These conditions include, but are not limited to, the intensity of empathic experience, personal attributes (such as gender and age), environmental factors (such as the scarcity and uncertainty of resources), and the relationship between the initiator and recipient of empathy (e.g., whether they are relatives, friends, or colleagues). In specific cases, empathy might even trigger antisocial behavior. For instance, the authors recently found that the tendency to engage in corrupt collaboration (which is an antisocial phenomenon) increases as a function of trait empathy level.

Second, the primary impact of empathy on prosocial behavior lies not in increasing the frequency of its occurrence but in enhancing its stability. Individuals with higher trait empathy, rather than exhibiting more frequent prosocial tendencies, demonstrate less volatility across different external conditions. Thus, individuals with higher trait empathy may be considered as more reliable and accountable partners in social interactions as their responses to environmental changes are more stable and predictable. The above idea has been supported by our recent experimental studies modulating the scarcity and uncertainty of resources. Here, please note that the “resources” in our experiments were not monetary resources (which have been frequently employed in previous research), but some “relieving resources” (such as flu masks during the pandemic) that could help one or others to get out of trouble. These kinds of resources were used because of their potential implications in evolution psychology.

Lastly, the facilitating role of empathy in prosocial behavior is achieved through alleviating individuals’ anxiety experiences related to the external environment. More specifically, the authors believe that stronger anxiety response to environmental changes during social decision-making processes would make people more focusing on their own risk rather than others’ well-being. As a result, anxious people are more likely to make more self-serving choices. The authors suggest that the influence of empathy and that of anxiety on prosocial volatility counteract with each other.

While some of these points have received empirical support, others remain speculative and warrant further exploration. The authors believe that validating these perspectives will deepen researchers’ understanding of empathy and the essence of prosocial behavior, thereby contributing to the advancement of social psychological theory. It should be noted that previous studies conducted by the authors have focused on resource sharing and helping behavior, in which the status of different participants was imbalanced. Future studies should examine the validity of our “prosocial volatility” hypothesis for other kinds of prosocial behavior such as cooperation. Additionally, exploring empathic responses to artificial intelligence agents remains an important avenue for investigation.

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