

The Perils of Empathy

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The Wall Street Journal:

Everywhere you turn in American politics, leaders talk about the need for empathy. The best-known instance, of course, comes from Bill Clinton, who told an AIDS activist in 1992, “I feel your pain.” But it’s also been a recurrent theme in the career of Barack Obama, who declared in 2007 (while still a senator) that “the biggest deficit that we have in our society and in the world right now is an empathy deficit.”

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In a series of studies that I conducted with Yale graduate students Matthew Jordan and Dorsa Amir, just published in the journal *Emotion*, we compared people’s scores on two different scales, one measuring emotional empathy and another measuring compassion. As predicted, we found that the scales tap different aspects of our nature: You can be high in one and low in the other. We found as well that compassion predicts charitable donations, but empathy does not.

Read the whole story: [*The Wall Street Journal*](#)