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Temperature Changes due to Empathetic Responses

Empathy is the ability to comprehend and relate to the emotions of others. This ability can have far reaching effects on the way people feel, as well as their reaction to others’ behaviors. Prior research has shown women, more so than men, have stronger feelings of empathy and are able to recognize these feelings and share them with others. (Luo et al., 2015). Other studies suggest that race can have an effect on the strength of empathic response (Xu et al., 2009). Cooper et al. (2014) found that empathy can affect peripheral physiological responses, but they did not consider race or gender variables. The design of this study is intended to assess whether gender and race affect physiological empathetic responses. Participants will view, either face to face or via video, an individual who places their hand into cold water. While viewing this scene, participants’ hand temperature will be measured to determine if any changes occur in response to seeing another’s hand temperature change. Data collection are ongoing, but results are expected to show that watching another’s temperature change will elicit a similar response in the viewer. Furthermore, women are expected to show more empathy and racial differences will be reported. These findings will unlock an understanding of how gender and racial differences can affect how our bodies respond to one another at an unconscious level through empathy.