# Exploring the phenomenon of empathy

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Abstract

Although empathy is the phenomenon that connects otherwise isolated individuals, knowledge concerning the nature of this phenomenon is still scarce. This thesis presents three studies on empathy based on qualitative and quantitative data. In Study 1, narrative accounts of empathy situations were collected to identify constituents that exist in both empathizers' and targets' experiences of empathy. From both perspectives, the constituents of empathy included the empathizer understanding the target, the target experiencing one or more emotions, the empathizer perceiving a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced earlier, and the empathizer being concerned for the target's well-being. Similarity of experience occurs at different levels of abstraction. Study 2 consisted of three experiments exploring the role of a person's actions in how empathetic the person is perceived as being. In the experiments participants read different versions of an empathy story. The results suggested that action is crucial in the experience of empathy from both empathizer's and target's perspectives, as well as from the perspective of an unspecified observer. Study 3 explored in two experiments how empathy is related to viewing another individual as a subject/object. The results revealed that subject view and perceived difficulty of the person's situation together explain a considerable part of differences in empathy. The empirical findings are discussed in a broader context of altruism, morality, similarity of experience, and foreign experience.

Key words: Emotion, action, similarity of experience, understanding, altruism, subject view, interpersonal phenomenon, morality, foreign experience.

"Empathy...is the experience of foreign consciousness in general"

- Edith Stein,
1917/1989, p.11

"Altruism itself depends on a recognition of the reality of other persons, and on the equivalent capacity to regard oneself as merely one individual among many."

- Thomas Nagel,
1970/1978, p. 3

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The fact that other people have experiences can easily be understood theoretically. In contrast, to experientially understand consciousness outside of one's own is far more difficult. However, if one succeeds in experientially grasping the subjectivity of another person, this can be a remarkable experience that, by incorporating a new subjective world, literally expands one's own.

The vast majority of philosophers and psychologists have regarded empathy as a kind of understanding of another person's thoughts and feelings. It is fairly common that those who view empathy as a kind of understanding argue that others who speak about empathy as benevolence or concern have blurred the distinction between understanding and caring. In many contexts, it is certainly reasonable to distinguish between understanding something and caring for it, but when it comes to the empathy phenomenon this may not be true. According to Rogers (1975), "it is impossible accurately to sense the perceptual world of another person unless you value that person and his world – unless you in some sense care" (p. 7).

Although it is often recognized that empathy is the phenomenon that connects otherwise isolated individuals (cf. Barrett-Lennard, 1997; Davis, 1996) knowledge concerning the nature of the phenomenon as well as its relations to other phenomena is scarce. Therefore, in the present thesis, the empathy phenomenon will be investigated in three empirical studies using qualitative as well as quantitative data, and will be discussed in a broader theoretical context.

Definitions and theories of empathy

In order to provide a background to the empirical studies and the theoretical discussion, previous literature and research are reviewed in this section. Here it will be described how empathy was studied during the twentieth century and bloomed due to Carl Rogers and Heinz Kohut after World War II. The section ends with a review of the dominating research in the field today.

Historical views of empathy
The term empathy is of relatively recent origin, having been coined by Titchener, (1909). Conceptually, however, the notion of empathy, or Einfühlung, grew out of earlier work in German aesthetics by Lipps (Lipps,

1903, 1905) and Prandtl (Prandtl, 1910). Lipps (1903, 1905) was one of the most important in this connection because he systematically organized the concept of Einfühlung. The concept referred to the tendency of perceivers to project themselves into the objects of perception which can be considered a kind of animism. These subjective qualities were experienced by the person as being in the object; objects were felt as well as seen. Lipps (1903, 1905) appropriated the term for use in more psychological contexts, first applying it to the study of optical illusions and later to the process by which we come to know other people. The English word empathy was actually invented by Titchener (1909) as a "translation" – he coined the term as a rendering of Lipps' Einfühlung, which he defined as a "process of humanizing objects, of reading or feeling ourselves into them" (Titchener, 1924, p. 417).

Theories of empathy in psychology were largely influenced by the affective view of Lipps and Titchener until Kohler (1929), who was one of the first to argue in a more cognitive vein. Rather than continuing to focus on "feeling into" the experiences of another, Kohler held that empathy was more the understanding of the other's feelings than a sharing of them. At roughly the same time, two other highly influential theorists, George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1934) and Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1932), separately addressed the question of empathy, and both offered views that emphasized the cognitive over the emotional. Mead, who recognized the self-other differentiation in empathy, added a cognitive component, an ability to understand, to empathy. Mead's (1934) work placed a huge emphasis on the individual's capacity to take on the role of other persons as a means of understanding how they view the world. Mead saw the child's ability of role taking as the key to social and ethical development. Also, Piaget, with his research on the child's development of cognitive functions, contributed to the emphasis on empathy as a cognitive function and to the ideas of what is required of an individual in order to decenter and imagine the role of another (Piaget 1932, 1967).

Although some researchers have historically emphasized affect and others cognition, the term empathy has always conveyed the idea of knowing about the awareness of another, a capacity by which one person obtains knowledge of the subjective side of another person. Stein (1917/1989) conceptualized empathy in more general terms: "Empathy...is the experience of foreign consciousness in general...This is how man grasps the psychic life of his fellow man" (p. 11).

Although empathy was discussed during the first half of the century, it did not become truly popular within psychology until the work of Carl Rogers and Heinz Kohut (for reviews, see Bohart & Greenberg, 1997).

Their contributions and impact will be reviewed in some detail in the following sections.

Two influential contributions
The two clinical psychologists Carl Rogers and Heinz Kohut have been considered pioneers in the study of the phenomenon of empathy (Bohart & Greenberg, 1997). After World War II, a great interest in empathy research developed in the psychology field. This mostly involved attempts to test Rogers' hypothesis that three therapeutical conditions – unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness – were necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change. In addition, after years in the background, empathy became a central concept within psychoanalysis with Kohut's self-psychology. In this section, these two clinicians' contributions to the field of empathy will be reviewed.

    Rogers' contribution
During the decades after World War II, the American psychologist and therapist Carl Rogers introduced a new perspective on personality change and therapy of which empathy was a core component (cf. Rogers, 1957). Many psychologists had participated in the war, and were now ready to apply their knowledge in society at large. It was in this climate that Rogers' idea of empathy was born (Wispé, 1987). In fact, much of empathy's popularity today within psychology can in some way be traced back to Rogers.

    Rogers' theory is based partly on phenomenological philosophy, according to which a person's actions are determined by his or her perceptions of the surrounding world. Thus, for Rogers it was important to understand how clients viewed the world rather than to understand the factual circumstances. Naturally, empathy played a fundamental role in the theory.

    Rogers developed his therapy from his own experiences of meeting clients and from some specific philosophical ideas about the human nature. He had in essence a very positive view of human nature and believed that people have a basically positive direction in their lives. One of Rogers' most basic philosophical assumptions was that people have a capacity for self-actualization, and that under the right circumstances will find their own way to develop and grow, unless these potentials are hindered. More generally put, Rogers argued that human nature was good rather than evil. Also, he assumed that when a person experiences empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard from another individual (e.g. a therapist), this constructive actualizing force is promoted (Rogers, 1959). However,

the positive forces in personality development can be slowed down, especially during childhood, by discouragements from significant others.

Rogers' therapy tried to provide an atmosphere of acceptance and openness to new ideas and behaviors, which could be created only by conditions of genuineness, positive regard, and empathy (Rogers, 1959). According to Rogers, these three factors are in fact the only ones necessary for therapeutic improvement. Under these conditions, Rogers maintained, the client could find his or her own best way. However, Rogers, in line with his phenomenological ideas, explicitly emphasized that it is the client who must perceive these conditions to be present for therapeutic improvement to occur (Rogers, 1959, 1975). Therefore, Rogerian therapy was nondirective (or inner directed). Moreover, in the therapeutic situation, empathy was regarded "one of the most potent factors" (1975, p. 3).

According to Rogers, in the psychologically healthy person, the self-concept is built on the client's own evaluations of his or her experience. An individual's development is enhanced when he or she can interpret the experiences without distortion. When assisting in this process, the therapist creates a safe climate for the client, understands the client, and communicates his or her understanding back to the client. In encountering the empathic and accepting therapist, the client learns to trust his or her own feelings (Rogers, 1959).

Likely the most persistent investigations of the process of empathy, especially in psychotherapy, were carried out by Rogers and his students. Although most – but not all – of their findings are related to therapy, their conclusions about empathy have much more general significance. Without doubt, much of the present popularity of empathy as a phenomenon comes from Rogers' emphasis on it. However, as a clinician Rogers was less concerned with a theory of empathy than with finding a term to convey that particular attitude of nonjudgmentally entering another's inner world he regarded as so important in psychotherapy. Rogers' choice of term was well made, as his description of empathy is quite compatible with that of Titchener (Wispé, 1987). Almost from the beginning, Rogers' insistence upon an empirical approach led to research, not only on the process of clinical empathy, but also on a series of empathy scales.

Rogers considered empathy to be a central therapeutic construct and not just a prerequisite for other forms of intervention, and not any specific technique or way of responding but part of a whole attitude (Bozarth, 1997). In contrast to the psychoanalytic emphasis on empathically grasping the unconscious structure of experience, for Rogers empathy involved focusing on the client's present available meaning and experiences. Rogers

offered two definitions of empathy. Earlier (1959), he had written that empathy was a state and meant

> to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. (p. 210-211)"

Later (1975), he wrote that empathy was a "process" rather than a state and that it means

> entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware...It includes communicating your sensing of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive...to be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another world without prejudice... (p. 4)

Rogers' later definition is maybe the most complete description of empathy to date. Although the description is lengthy, Rogers held that empathy is perhaps too complex a phenomenon for a short definition. To adopt this kind of attitude is, as Rogers said, complex and demanding (Rogers, 1975).

In sum, Rogers' idea is that clients who receive empathic understanding will be better able to trust and understand themselves and make behavioral changes in positive directions. In Rogers' view, no matter the wrong a client has done, he or she can still be accepted by the therapist as a worthy human being (Rogers, 1975).

Kohut's contribution

The Austrian-American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut is best known for his self-psychology, of which empathy is an essential component. Self-psychology held that empathic failures in childhood lead to deficits in the self-structuralization process in the client. Empathic responsiveness from a therapist creates an environment in which transferential feelings toward the therapist related to empathic failures in the client's past could develop. Occasional empathic failures on the part of the therapist offered opportunities for clients to learn and to strengthen defects in their self-structures (Kohut, 1959).

Kohut early came to believe that the "experience-distanced" way the psychoanalytic therapist interacted with the client was not beneficial. By "experience-distant" Kohut meant a way of knowing the patient in which the therapist observes the patient's free associations and then uses those observations in combination with theory to detect patterns of unconscious meaning. In contrast, Kohut wanted to give empathy a central role in therapy, since he believed it important that therapists to try to understand what was going on inside the client in an "experience-near" way. This meant that the therapist had to place him/herself, through a process of "vicarious introspection", into the mental life of the client (Kohut, 1959).

Although Kohut's work has not greatly influenced academic psychology, his impact upon modern psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theory has been considerable (Wispé, 1987). Kohut proposed that introspection and empathy were the most important aspects – "the essential aspects" – of psychoanalytical observation. Kohut's claim that the "limits of psychoanalysis are defined by the potential limits of introspection and empathy" (Kohut, 1959, p. 482) was taken to indicate his departure from classical analysis. Empathy grew significantly in importance with the development of Kohut's self-psychology.

Many of Kohut's writings included defining precisely what he meant by the term empathy (e.g., Kohut, 1959, 1977, 1981, 1984). In fact, Kohut defined empathy on two different levels, one being more abstract and the other more clinically applied. At the most abstract level, Kohut (1959) viewed empathy as "vicarious introspection". In a more applied definition Kohut (1984) stated that empathy "is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person." (p. 82)

For Kohut, empathy was the means by which psychoanalysis collects its data (Kohut, 1959). Kohut seems to have been familiar with phenomenologists such as Husserl and Stein. Part of Kohut's phenomenological position is a description of the kinds of activities in which empathy would be appropriate. After defining empathy, Kohut went

further and considered empathy as a scientific method for the investigation of mental states and claimed that psychoanalysis should limit itself to studying these mental states (MacIsaac, 1997). This is in contrast to the natural sciences in which observations are made from an outside perspective with telescopes, microscopes, and so forth. Some sciences, he wrote, are founded on introspection and vicarious extrospection whereas others base themselves on introspection and vicarious introspection (empathy). The physical and biological sciences belong to the first category and the psychological sciences to the second. He meant that without empathic observation we note only physical movements. Empathy, therefore, is not only a mental state, for Kohut it is also a method of collecting data for scientific aims.

Kohut believed it to be of importance that the therapist has his or her own experience when trying to understand the client, because only through introspection in the therapists own experiences he or she can understand what it is like for the other individual. Through "vicarious introspection" in our own experiences it is possible to understand what it is like for someone in similar circumstances (Kohut, 1959).

Kohut held that empathy is the very basis of all human interaction. He was, however, eager to emphasize that for him empathy is a form of understanding and should not be confused with being nice, kind, compassionate, or loving. Also, for Kohut empathy was not infallible. Empathy is a process that can lead us to both accurate and inaccurate results (Kohut, 1980, p. 485).

Contemporary research on empathy
It is evident that the concept of empathy has evolved and become transformed in many ways during the last century and that distinctions among the various meanings of empathy are insufficiently drawn. However, a consensus today seems to be that a basic aspect of empathy is an awareness, an understanding, a knowing of another's state, condition or consciousness. Some of the authors have referred to this as role taking or perspective taking, others as empathy. This appears to be the most basic meaning in the history of the concept.

Although the opinions are still diverse about the nature of empathy, a substantial body of research has been generated in the last decades on how empathy relates to things such as altruistic motivation, moral development, similar experiences, aggression, and interpersonal relationships. Also, after the contributions of Rogers and Kohut, the concept of empathy has been appreciated particularly in psychotherapy (cf. Barrett-Lennard, 1981; Bohart & Greenberg, 1997; Duan & Hill, 1996; Gladstein, 1977). Built on

this kind of research, a number of empathy scales has been constructed (see Campbell, Kagan, & Krathwohl, 1971; Hogan, 1969; Truax, 1972).

While most approaches have focused on what is going on inside the empathizer, some has studied the whole process that is taking place between the empathizer and the target. For instance, Barrett-Lennard's (1981) as well as Davis' (1996) conceptualizations of empathy have in common splitting the empathy phenomenon into different activities which occur at different points in time and which have a cause-effect relationship with each other. Barrett-Lennard (1981) distinguished between three different stages involved in empathy: empathic understanding, communicated empathy, and the target's perception of empathy.

A controversy that has survived through the history of the concept is the role of affect in empathy. Stotland (1969) defined empathy in only affective terms; this definition has a strong resemblance to the historical definitions discussed earlier. More recent contemporary theorists have also tended to define empathy only in affective terms, but unlike Stotland have restricted the term to reactions congruent with those of the other. Since the middle of the 1980's, a trend of conceptualizing empathy in solely affective terms has developed. These researchers usually also restricted the term empathy to refer to affective reactions similar to those of the target (for a review, see Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Hoffman (1987) saw empathy as an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own. Similarly, Barnett and his colleagues (1987) conceptualized empathy as feeling a vicarious emotion that is congruent with but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another. Batson (e.g., Batson, 1991) restricted the term empathy to refer not only to other-oriented feelings in general but to certain feelings such as compassion, warmth, concern, and the like. He defined empathy as feeling a vicarious emotion that is congruent with but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another (Batson, 1991).

An exception to the trend of conceptualizing empathy in affective terms is Wispé's position (Wispé, 1986), which is more cognitive and similar to the original meaning of the concept (Davis, 1996). Another cognitive conceptualization is that of Ickes (see Ickes, 1993, 1997). He coined the term "empathic accuracy", which does not involve emotion on the part of the empathizer. Ickes (1993, 1997) defined empathic accuracy as a person's capability to accurately infer the specific content of another person's thoughts and feelings. It is not clear, however, if Ickes' definition of "empathic accuracy" captures the essence of the empathy phenomenon. There are also contemporary researchers emphasizing both cognitive and affective aspects of the phenomenon, for instance Davis (1996).

A number of contemporary psychologists have also acknowledged the role of similarity or similar experiences in empathy (e.g., Barnett, 1984; Barnett & McCoy, 1989; Barnett, Tetreault, Esper, & Bristow, 1986; Barnett, Tetreault, & Masbad, 1987; Batson et al., 1996; Borg, 1992; Davis, 1996; Hoffman, 2000; Houston, 1990; Hume, 1751/1957; Kohut, 1984; Krebs, 1975; Kubo & Muto, 1984; Stotland, 1969).

Empathy as related to altruism, morality and aggression has also been of interest in contemporary research (for reviews, see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987a; 1987b; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Also, empathy as it develops in children with respect to these variables has been a major focus within the field (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1996; Feshbach, 1975; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1982; Lennon, Eisenberg, & Carroll, 1986; Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Welsh, & Fox, 1995; for reviews, see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987b; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Feshbach, 1987; Feshbach, 1997; Hoffman, 2000; see also Barnett, 1987).

Among contemporary empathy researchers, it is evident that four of them (Hoffman, Eisenberg, Batson, and Davis) have been most productive. They have all at least to some extent focused explicitly on how empathy relates to altruism and prosocial behavior. Hoffman, and Eisenberg as well, have studied empathy primarily in relation to prosocial behavior as it develops in children, while Batson relates empathy to altruism and prosocial motivation in people in general. Compared to the more affective conceptualizations of Hoffman, Eisenberg and Batson, Davis (see Davis, 1996) takes a broader approach and views empathy explicitly as a multidimensional phenomenon and has proposed an organizational model of the empathy construct. Because these four researchers have dominated the field in the last decades, their contributions will be reviewed in some detail in the following sections.

Hoffman's research on empathy
For several decades, Martin L. Hoffman has been interested in social and emotional development, especially empathic and moral development, and the relation between the two. Already 25 years ago (e.g., Hoffman, 1977), Hoffman viewed empathy as a source of prosocial motivation. Included in his research are certain affects and motives that result from the interaction of empathy, causal attribution and situational contexts: sympathy, guilt, empathic anger and feelings of injustice. Also of great interest to Hoffman has been the interaction of empathy and abstract moral principles, such as justice, and the interaction between affect and cognition in general (Hoffman, 1977, 1981, 1985, 1987, for a review, see Hoffman, 2000).

Hoffman attempted in a theoretical model of empathy to explain how cognitive and affective processes interact in empathic responses (Hoffman, 1985, 1987). Particularly of interest to Hoffman was the study of how the interplay between cognitive and affective factors in empathy develops from infancy to adulthood. Hoffman has also studied empathy's role in clinical contexts.

Hoffman studied empathy as related to altruism and morality in a wide sense. He assumed that empathy and moral principles complement each other in order to produce moral behavior. Empathy is the motivation for acting morally in the first place while moral principles reduce "empathic bias" and "empathic overarousal" (Hoffman, 2000).

Hoffman's research provides a comprehensive account of prosocial moral development in children. His focus has been on empathy's contribution to altruism and compassion for others in physical or psychological distress. Also highlighted by Hoffman (for a review see Hoffman, 2000) are the psychological processes involved in empathy's interaction with certain parental behaviors that foster moral internalization in children and the psychological processes involved in empathy's relation to abstract moral principles.

Hoffman held that a mechanism that accounts for altruism must be flexible enough to consider the pros and cons of a potential helping effort for the helper as well as for the person helped. Empathy, according to Hoffman, is a phenomenon that meets this requirement. Thus, along with, for instance, Eisenberg as well as Batson, Hoffman is one of the contemporary psychologists that sees empathy as a cause of altruism.

According to Hoffman, evolution has provided us with two important prerequisites for empathy: the ability to use cognitive processes to take someone else's perspective and the ability to react affectively in response to others' affectivity. According to Hoffman, perspective taking developed through evolution in order to provide a flexible and smooth way of social interaction and affective empathy to produce a self-sacrificing, altruistic behavior. In his model, Hoffman tried to explain how these two abilities interact to produce specific empathic responses (see Hoffman, 2000).

Eisenberg's research on empathy

Nancy Eisenberg was interested in what motivates people to care for others. She quickly realized that in order to better understand why people care for others, she would have to consider emotional factors and not only cognitive ones. This insight naturally led her to the study of empathy (Eisenberg, 2002). Consistently, Eisenberg defined empathy in affective terms as "an affective response that stems from the apprehension or

comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel" (Eisenberg, 2002, p. 135).

Most of Eisenberg's empathy research during the last two decades has been guided by the overall ambition to identify the causes of altruism and prosocial development (cf. Eisenberg, 2002). Although she has contributed to the empathy field in a broad sense, her research has particularly been devoted to exploring the development of prosocial behavior in children, and she has investigated the various factors that contribute to children's prosocial development (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1996; Lennon et al., 1986; for reviews, see Eisenberg, 2000; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987b; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Another important contribution to the field is Eisenberg and her coworkers' reviews and analyses of sex differences in empathy (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; see also Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). For instance, in a literature review including meta-analyses when appropriate, Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) found that whether or not studies report sex differences in empathy is influenced by the type of method used. Particularly studies using self-reports tend to report women as being higher in empathy than men.

One of the primary goals of Eisenberg's early research was to differentiate between sympathetic and personal distress reactions (using self-reports as well as more objective measures) and to investigate the relations between these reactions and prosocial behaviors. Empirical studies revealed that physiological arousal was higher in children experiencing personal distress than in children showing sympathetic reactions (an affective response that frequently stems from empathy) (see Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Also, children in these studies experiencing sympathy were relatively likely to help others while those experiencing personal distress were relatively unlikely to help (see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990).

Based on these results, the next step for Eisenberg was to identify factors that might influence whether a person would experience personal distress or sympathy when confronted with a person in need (Eisenberg, 2002). Based on this line of reasoning, in their subsequent studies, Eisenberg and her colleagues demonstrated the influence on empathic responding of the two factors *level of emotional intensity* and *emotion regulation* (for instance the ability to experience but not be overwhelmed by affect) (Okun, Shepard, & Eisenberg, 2000; see also Eisenberg, 2002).

In search for factors that might influence a child in one direction or the other along the continuum of altruistic and prosocial or destructive behaviors, Eisenberg and her colleagues used a variety of methods

including measure of heart rate, skin conductance, facial reactions, and self-reported emotional reactions (e.g., Lennon et al., 1986; Eisenberg et al, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1996). In Eisenberg's more recent work, she has shown that individual differences in the quality of interactions with parents, as well as differences in children's dispositional emotionality and emotion regulation predict children's social development (e.g., Zhou et al., 2002).

Although physiological measures had been used before in the study of empathy (e.g., Krebs, 1975; Stotland, 1969), Eisenberg pioneered the use of psychophysiological measures in the field (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Gurthrie et al., 1997; Holmgren, Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Eisenberg found it difficult to measure children's empathy with self-ratings and, therefore, other more objective methods were needed (Lennon, Eisenberg, & Carroll, 1983; see also Eisenberg, Fabes, Bustamante & Mathy, 1987).

Based on a large body of research on empathy, altruism, and moral development, Eisenberg (2002) concluded that prosocial behavior can be learned and is modifiable. Further, Eisenberg has proposed that developing empathy, altruism, and other humanitarian behaviors among the world's children could reduce aggression and destructive tendencies and lead to a focus on cooperation and concern for the larger community of humankind (Eisenberg, 2002).

Batson's research on empathy

Most of C. Daniel Batson's research has examined the motives behind peoples' prosocial behavior. Batson has focused on vicarious emotions such as empathy (e.g., Batson & Moran, 1999; Batson et al., 1995), and personal values such as religion (e.g., Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001), as potential sources of these prosocial motives. Particularly interesting for the purpose of this thesis, Batson and his colleagues have looked at empathy as a possible source of altruistic motivation and have found strong support for this view (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Toi & Batson, 1982; for reviews, see Batson, 1991; Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002). Batson has described empathy as feeling a vicarious emotion that is congruent with but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another (Batson, 1991), which typically means such other-oriented emotions as compassion, tenderness, sympathy, and the like (see Batson, 1991; Toi and Batson, 1982). He defined altruism as "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare" (Batson, 1991, p. 6).

Batson became interested in whether genuine altruism exists and, if it does, what its cause is. Batson wanted to know if anyone ever, to any

extent, transcends the bounds of egocentrism and helps out of true concern for the well-being of another person. In other words, he wanted to know whether altruism is at all part of the human nature. Over the past two decades, his research has attempted to answer what he calls "the altruism question" (for reviews, see Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 2002); when we help others, is our ultimate goal ever to benefit them or is it always, somehow, to benefit ourselves?

According to Batson, those who deny the empathy-altruism hypothesis claim that everything we do, no matter how beneficial to others, is actually directed toward the ultimate goal of benefiting oneself. Those arguing for the existence of altruism do not deny that the motivation for much of what we do, including much of what we do for others, is egoistic. But, according to Batson, they claim something more. Proponents of altruism claim that at least some of us, to some degree, in some situations, are capable of a qualitatively different form of motivation, a motivation with an ultimate goal of benefiting someone else.

Batson admits (Batson et al., 2002), however, that those arguing for universal egoism have simplicity on their side in the dispute. It is simpler to explain all human behavior in terms of egoistic motivation than to assume a motivational pluralism in which the other's benefit as well as self-benefit can be ultimate goals. Although elegance and simplicity are important criteria in explaining phenomena, Batson argued, they are not the most important. The most important task, Batson claimed, is to adequately explain the phenomenon in question. If individuals feeling empathy act, at least in part, with an ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of another, then the assumption of universal egoism must be replaced by a more complex view of motivation that allows for altruism as well as egoism. Such a shift in our view of motivation requires, in turn, a revision of our underlying assumptions about human nature and human potential. The existence of altruism implies that we humans may be more social than we thought; other people can be more to us than sources of information, stimulation, and reward as we each seek our own welfare. We have the potential to care about others' welfare as well.

The claim that feeling empathic emotion for someone in need evokes altruistic motivation to relieve that need has been called, by Batson, the empathy-altruism hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, motivation can be truly altruistic, provided that it is preceded by empathic concern for the other, and, the greater the empathic emotion, the greater is the altruistic motivation. Empathic concern is, in turn, an effect of perspective taking. (Coke et al., 1978; see also Batson, 1991; Batson, 1997).

In an extensive research program, Batson and his colleagues have tested the empathy-altruism hypothesis against possible egoistic alternatives. According to Batson (1991) (see also Batson et al., 2002) three general types of self-benefit can result from helping a person for whom empathy is felt. Helping can enable one to (1) reduce one's empathic arousal, which may be experienced as aversive, (2) avoid possible social and self-punishments for failing to help, and (3) gain social and self-rewards for doing what is right. The empathy-altruism hypothesis does not deny that these self-benefits of empathy-induced helping exist. It claims, however, that, with regard to the motivation evoked by empathy, these self-benefits are unintended consequences of reaching the ultimate goal of increasing the other's well-being. Proponents of egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis disagree with this assertion, claiming that one or more of these self-benefits is the ultimate goal of empathy-induced helping.

In the past decades, more than 25 experiments have tested these three egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Toi & Batson, 1982; for reviews, see Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 2002). According to Batson and his colleagues (Batson et al., 2002), results of these experiments designed to test the hypothesis have proven supportive of the empathy-altruism hypothesis by ruling out each of the egoistic alternatives. These results have led Batson to tentatively conclude that feeling empathy for a person in need does indeed evoke altruistic motivation to help that person (Batson et al., 2002).

Lately, Batson and his colleagues have also explored psychological aspects of the empathy-altruism relationship, and have moved beyond the egoism-altruism debate to consider other types of prosocial motives, such as collectivism and principlism (Batson, 1994; for a review, see Batson et al., 2002).

According to Batson's results, empathy is a source of altruistic motivation, perhaps *the* source. Although Batson's research has aimed primarily at examining whether true altruism exists, he has become interested in empathy indirectly via altruism and as a consequence his research has thrown considerable light on the empathy phenomenon as such.

To conclude, Batson and his colleagues have examined empathy as related to altruism. Their results may not only reveal a relationship between empathy and altruism, but perhaps also tell us something about the empathy phenomenon in itself. An intriguing question implicitly raised by Batson's results is whether the findings should be interpreted as empathy and altruism being two separate phenomena (with empathy causing

altruism) or as empathic emotion and altruistic motivation being two aspects of the same phenomenon. Because the correctness of the empathy-altruism hypothesis is a prerequisite for the main argument of this thesis, Batson's position will be discussed and evaluated below in the section on empathy and concern for others' well-being, and will reappear in later discussions about empathy in relation to altruism and morality.

Davis' research on empathy

In contrast to the relatively specific conceptualizations of Hoffman, Eisenberg, and Batson, the most inclusive approach to empathy in contemporary research is that of Mark H. Davis (e.g., Davis, 1983; Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Davis, Hull, Young, & Warren, 1987; Davis, Luce, & Kraus, 1994; for a review, see Davis, 1996). Davis views empathy explicitly as a multidimensional phenomenon and has analyzed it in four separate but related self-report subscales - perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress (Davis, 1983) and has proposed (Davis, 1996) an organizational model of the empathy construct.

Davis (1983) developed a measure of individual differences in empathy, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The rationale underlying the IRI is that empathy is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be described as a set of distinct but related constructs that all involve reactivity to others. The IRI consists of four 7–item subscales, each intended to measure some aspect of empathy. The Perspective taking scale measures the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others; the Fantasy scale respondents' tendencies to transpose themselves imaginatively into the feelings and actions of characters in movies, books and plays; the Empathic concern scale "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy, compassion, warmth, and concern for unfortunate others; and the Personal distress scale "self-oriented" feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings.

Davis has found empirical support for his multidimensional approach to empathy (e.g., Davis, 1983; for a review, see Davis, 1996). Davis demonstrated the validity of the IRI by showing relationships among the subscales of the IRI, between the subscales and other psychological measures, and between the subscales and previous empathy scales (Davis, 1983).

Davis (1996) argued that there are problems with the existing views of empathy and that the nature of empathy is still not agreed upon by researchers. Those that all claim to study empathy often focus on different parts of a larger phenomenon. According to Davis, the term is often used to describe two different phenomena: cognitive role taking and affective

reactivity to others. According to Davis, another source of confusion has been between process and outcome in thinking of empathy. This is, according to Davis, an important distinction. Process refers to something that happens when someone is exposed to another person. Processes are for example to take the other's perspective or unconsciously imitating the other's facial expression. An outcome, on the other hand, is something that results from these processes, for example affective responses in the observer, cognitive understanding, or helping behavior resulting from the perspective taking. Some empathy researchers have focused on the process while others have focused on the results of such processes (Davis, 1996).

Davis has developed a model in order to deal with the confusion around the empathy construct by illustrating how different aspects of the phenomenon are related. Davis called the model organizational since it aims at organizing the research on empathy within the social psychological field. Davis model builds partly upon an earlier model by Hoffman but has been extended as well as reduced. According to Davis, the model helps classify and interpret previous findings.

In his model, Davis divides the empathy phenomenon into different activities that occur at different points in time and have a cause-effect relationship to each other. His organizational model is based on a definition of empathy that sees empathy as a set of constructs having to do with the experiences of a person who observes another person. The model organizes antecedents, processes, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes in a temporal order. Antecedents come first in time, and influence the others. Next come processes, which have an impact on intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. Intrapersonal outcomes influence interpersonal outcome. Antecedents are related to all later parts of the model. Parts located closer to each other in the model are more strongly related than are those far away from each other. The organizational model covers both the affective and cognitive, individual differences, origins, and interpersonal aspects of empathy.

There are some advantages to this comprehensive model of empathy (Davis, 1996). First, it helps researchers to see what part of the empathy construct they are studying. Secondly, it takes more aspects of empathy into account than do previous models: characteristics of the observer, the observed person, and the situation. This model also relates the antecedents to the other parts of the processes, intrapersonal outcomes, and the interpersonal outcomes. Davis (1996) concluded that empathy may be best studied by such a multidimensional theory.

Comments

Four themes appear repeatedly in the empathy literature and thus seem to be central to the phenomenon: understanding, emotion, perceived similarity and concern. The majority of researchers seem to agree that empathy includes a cognitive or understanding dimension and an affective or experiential dimension, and is positively related to concern. Although the role the empathizer's previous similar experiences play regarding empathy is far from conclusively described, many have acknowledged its relevance to the empathy phenomenon. Therefore, the following four sections of the introduction will treat each of these four themes' specific role in empathy.

Empathy and understanding

The term empathy has always included the idea of knowing about the awareness of another, and thus understanding is emphasized in most conceptualizations of empathy. For instance, Wispé (1987) viewed empathy as the capacity by which one person obtains knowledge of the subjective side of another person. Although understanding has been regarded as an aspect of empathy by a vast majority of researchers, the opinions have been diverse regarding two issues: (1) how to describe the understanding process occurring within the empathizer and (2) what the object of this understanding is. The latter issue includes among others the question of whether the object is the target's present experiences or life in a wider sense. How one describes these two aspects of understanding may have implications for how one views the connection between empathic understanding and concern, which is a major focus of this thesis.

The process of understanding

Understanding or knowing is crucial to many conceptualizations of empathy (e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 1981; Berger, 1987; Davis, 1996; Holm, 2001; O'Hara, 1997). For instance, Davis (1996) argued that understanding as a result of perspective taking should be considered an aspect of empathy. Most researchers have considered empathy as some kind of understanding, which means that empathy provides the empathizer with some kind of knowledge. Less clear and not at all agreed upon is the kind of knowledge empathy involves. Experiential knowledge? Cognitive knowledge? Theoretical knowledge? Emotional knowledge? Researchers have used different terms such as "understand" (Holm, 2001), "feel" (e.g., Batson et al., 2002; Kohut, 1984), "share" (e.g., Kohut, 1984; Schafer, 1959), "experience" (e.g., Greenson, 1960; Kohut, 1984; Schafer, 1959),

"apprehend" (Eisenberg, 2002) "comprehend" (Eisenberg, 2002; Schafer, 1959) "be aware of" or "imagine", "perceive" (e.g., Rogers, 1959), "live in", (e.g., Rogers, 1975) or "sense" (e.g., Rogers, 1959) to denote the process taking place within the empathizer.

The object of the understanding
Researchers also differ with respect to how they conceptualize the content of the target's inner world, the object of the understanding. For instance, the object of the understanding may involve the other's thoughts (e.g., Ickes, 1993; Schafer, 1959), feelings (e.g., Greenberg & Elliott, 1997; Greenson, 1960; Ickes, 1993; Schafer, 1959), emotions (e.g., Batson, 1991; Eisenberg, 2002), desires (e.g., Schafer, 1959), psychological state (e.g., Schafer, 1959), consciousness (e.g., O'Hara, 1997), meaning (Greenberg & Elliott, 1997; Rogers, 1975), situation (e.g., Hoffman, 2000), internal frame of reference (Rogers, e.g., 1959), inner world (e.g., Greenberg & Elliott, 1997), inner life, (e.g., Kohut, 1984), or experiences (e.g., Berger, 1987; Greenberg & Elliott, 1997; Schafer, 1959). However, many empathy researchers have agreed that understanding is in some way essential to empathy.

Ickes (1993) described empathic accuracy as the ability to accurately infer the content of another person's thoughts and feelings. This may be contrasted to Deigh's (1995) conceptualization of "mature empathy", by the perspective one takes up is not only that of the other's present thoughts and feelings, but that of the whole person. In this way, the experiences, thoughts, feelings, attitudes etc. one reproduces have much greater depth than when one takes up the perspective of the person at that particular moment and without regard to the person's most important commitments and values. This includes the purposes that give extension and structure to a person's life. According to Deigh, seeing these commitments and values as worth having and promoting is part of the empathic experience. This means to see from the other person's perspective that his purposes are worthwhile.

An issue that is not clear in many conceptualizations of empathy is whether the object of the empathy is the target's present experiences (cf. Ickes, 1993) or the target's whole life including future experiences (cf. Deigh, 1995). Also, empathy means not necessarily to empathize only with another person's present conscious experiences. It may also be possible to empathize with unconscious processes (if they can potentially be experienced consciously) and it is also possible to imagine that one can empathize with another's past or future experiences.

Comments

Two important questions raised in this section about understanding concerned the kind of process taking place within the empathizer and the object of the understanding within the target. The answers to these two questions have great relevance for how one view the relationship between understanding and concern, one of the main themes of this dissertation.

Whatever kind of understanding empathy is, it seems reasonable that the process of understanding taking place within the empathizer is, at least to some degree, colored by emotion. After all, empathy tends to activate actions of concern and emotions are widely recognized as causing actions (see Oatley & Jenkins, 1996).

Empathy and emotion

Virtually all definitions and theories of empathy involve emotion (e.g., Batson et al., 2002; Davis, 1996; Duan, 2000; Eisenberg, 2002; Gillett, 1993; Greenson, 1960; Hoffman, 1985, 1987; Holm, 2001; Ickes, 1993, 1997), either on the side of the empathizer (e.g., Batson et al., 2002; Greenson, 1960; Hoffman, 1985, 1987), the side of the target (e.g., Ickes; 1993, 1997), or both (e.g., Duan, 2000; Eisenberg, 2002; Gillett, 1993; Greenson, 1960). Some researchers see empathy as a state in which the empathizer actually feels some of the target's feelings (Eisenberg, 2002; Gillett, 1993; Greenson, 1960). For instance, Greenson (1960) viewed empathy as sharing and experiencing the feelings of another person, and Gillett (1993) argued that the empathizer feels the force of the target's emotions. Also, Holm (1996) regarded as part of the empathic process the ability to read one's own feelings as a means of getting information of the other's feelings. Others see empathy more as a process of knowing the other's mind (e.g., Ickes, 1993, 1997).

Target's emotions

Most, perhaps all, conceptualizations of empathy, take for granted that the target experiences emotions (e.g., Duan, 2000; Eisenberg, 2002; Gillett, 1993; Greenson, 1960; Ickes, 1993, 1997; Royzman & Kumar, 2001; Schafer, 1959), which are more often assumed to be negative than positive. Duan (2000) conducted a study on how the nature of the target's emotions influences an observer's empathy, the results of which revealed that positive emotions and sadness evoked more empathic emotion than did anger and shame.

Empathizer's emotions

Many researchers and authors have conceptualized empathy as involving emotion on the part of the empathizer (e.g., Batson et al., 2002, Duan, 2000; Eisenberg, 2002; Gillett, 1993; Greenson, 1960; Hoffman, 1985, 1987; Kerem, Fishman, & Josselson, 2001; Rogers, 1959; Stotland, 1969). For instance, Hoffman (1987) viewed emotion on the side of the empathizer as crucial to empathy. He saw empathy as an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own. Hoffman's conceptualization stands in sharp contrast to the research by Ickes and his colleagues (see Ickes, 1993, 1997), who coined the term "empathic accuracy", which does not involve emotion on the side of the empathizer. It is not clear, however, if Ickes' definition of "empathic accuracy" aims at capturing the essence of the empathy phenomenon. It can be argued that empathy includes both a cognitive element and an emotional element on the part of the empathizer (Davis, 1996; Greenson, 1960; Hoffman, 1987; Rogers, 1959). Recently, a phenomenological study suggested that affect in the empathizer's experiences of empathy reflects a fuller empathic experience than just a cognitive understanding (Kerem et al., 2001).

Most contemporary researchers have defined empathy in terms of emotional reactions that are at least broadly congruent with those of the target (for a review, see Davis, 1996). Some researchers view empathy as feeling the same or a similar emotion as the other (e.g., Eisenberg, 2002; Gillet, 1993; Greenson, 1960)). For instance, Greenson (1960) described empathizing as sharing and experiencing the feelings of another person and Gillett (1993) stated that the empathizer may feel the force of the target's emotions. Eisenberg (2002) viewed empathy as an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel.

Some researchers, instead of conceptualizing empathy as sharing the same feeling as the target does, viewed it as a special empathy-feeling (e.g., concern or compassion) and not at all the same feeling as the target. For instance, for Batson (Batson et al., 2002) empathy is other oriented feelings of concern and compassion. Formally, he defined empathy "as an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else" (Batson et al., 2002, p. 486).

Comments

Most researchers agree that empathy involves emotions, at least in some way. There are, however, several different ways of including emotion in the empathy process: the empathizer experiences emotion, the target

experiences emotion, or both. Among those who argue that the empathizer feels something some hold that the empathizer and the target share the same feeling, while others view empathy as a specific empathy emotion (e.g., concern or compassion). However, in my view it is not enough to consider empathy to be just a match of feelings, because the empathizer contributes with a perspective on the empathy situation that the target lacks. Thus, the empathizer should feel something different from what the target does. On the other hand, the empathizer is necessarily in contact with the target's feelings in the situation and at least to some extent shares the target's feelings, since this is likely needed to be at all able to experientially understand the target. Thus, it seems that empathy includes both feeling the same feeling as the other to some degree and feeling concern for the other.

It is important to understand the feeling component on the side of the empathizer better in the future, because it can most likely be the link between understanding another person and caring for that person, the link that is one of the main focuses of the present thesis.

Empathy and similarity of experience

Several philosophers (e.g., Hume, 1751/1957; Schopenhauer, 1818/1958), psychologists (e.g., Barnett, 1984; Barnett & McCoy, 1989; Barnett et al., 1986; Barnett et al., 1987; Batson et al., 1996; Borg, 1992; Davis, 1996; Hoffman, 2000; Houston, 1990; Hume, 1751/1957; Kohut, 1984; Krebs, 1975; Kubo & Muto, 1984; Stotland, 1969) and other writers (e.g., Damasio, 1999) have acknowledged the relevance of the empathizer's previous similar experiences for empathy. The underlying principle behind this idea is that only if you have experienced hangover can you empathize with those who wake up in terrible agony because of having drunk too much; only if you have had children can you adopt a mother's perspective; and only if you have slept outside can you understand a homeless person. This is also consistent with the idea behind *The Affect Reading Scale* (Holm, 1996) that a prerequisite for empathy is the ability to read one's own feelings. Also, Houston (1990) noted that having children focus on the emotions of others and to see the similarities with themselves increased the probability of empathic reactions.

Empathy related to similarity of experience in the literature
The philosopher David Hume argued that because people are constituted similarly and have similar experiences they are able to vicariously experience the same feelings as another person when they imagine being in

that person's situation (Hume, 1751/1957). Recently, Hoffman (2000) returned to the same idea when arguing that perceived similarity contributes to empathy:

> Seeing that people in other cultures have similar worries and respond emotionally as we do to important life events, while sitting in the audience and feeling the same emotions, should contribute to a sense of oneness and empathy across cultures. (p. 294-295)

Damasio (1999) emphasized the importance of similarity in relations and understanding between people:

> Surely enough, there are variable expressions and there are variations in the precise configuration of stimuli that can induce an emotion across cultures and among individuals. But the thing to marvel at, as you fly high above the planet, is the similarity, not the difference. It is that similarity, incidentally, that makes cross-cultural relations possible and that allows for art and literature, music and film, to cross frontiers. (p. 53)

Kohut (1984) considered it important to have had similar experiences oneself in order to understand another person. Through "vicarious introspection" into our own experiences, he argued, can we understand what it is like for someone else in a similar situation to one we have been in before. Also, according to Davis (1996), it is more common that people empathize with those similar to themselves than those different from themselves.

Hoffman (2000) discussed in more detail how the process of relating another individual's situation to similar experiences in their own past may work in evoking empathic feelings in the empathizer. Cues in the target's situation remind the empathizer of similar experiences in his or her own past and evoke feelings that match the target's situation. For instance, if we have a distressing experience, and later observe someone in a similar situation, cues in the other's situation that remind us of our own past experience may evoke a feeling of distress in us again.

Empirical research on the role of similar experience
Although it is frequently noted that empathy is increased by similar experiences, this idea has not often been tested. However, there is some empirical support for the connection between perceived similarity and empathy (Barnett, 1984; Barnett et al., 1986; Barnett et al., 1987; Batson et

al., 1996; Krebs, 1975; Kubo & Muto, 1984). These researchers have treated similarity of experience as a dichotomous variable by which an observer has or has not been in a similar situation as a target. Krebs (1975) demonstrated that perceived similarity of persons (which does not necessarily mean similarity of experiences) facilitates empathic responses. He measured the psychophysical responses of participants as they observed another individual experiencing pleasure and pain. Half of the participants were led to believe that they were similar to the target and the other half were led to believe they were different. Observers who believed they were similar to the other individual reacted more strongly emotionally than did those who believed they were dissimilar from the target. Further, Barnett and his colleagues investigated the role of similar experiences for empathy in a series of studies (Barnett, 1984; Barnett et al., 1986; Barnett et al., 1987). For instance, Barnett et al. (1987) found that women that had been raped considered themselves as more empathic with, and more similar to, a rape victim presented on videotape than did controls that had not been raped. They found no difference between the two groups in empathic reaction to a videotape of a person in a difficult situation not related to rape. Likewise, Kubo and Muto (1984) showed that empathy can be triggered by recalling similar events.

Batson and his colleagues (1996), when treating similar experience as a dichotomous variable, found somewhat mixed results for men and women regarding the role of similar experience. They tested the hypothesis that having had prior similar experiences with a need increases empathy for a target currently experiencing that need. Participants reported some degree of empathy, whether they had had a similar experience or not. Women who had had a similar experience empathized more than women who had not, while men who had a similar experience reported no more empathy than did men who had not. Batson and his colleagues suggested that the sex difference may reflect a difference in sex-role socialization, although empirical evidence for this claim is limited. Batson et al. concluded from their findings that prior experience may facilitate empathy but does not seem to be a necessary condition for it.

Comments

Several researchers and philosophers have noticed a connection between similar experiences and empathy. This link has also been examined empirically to some extent, especially as a dichotomous variable. However, similar experiences may not be a matter of all or nothing but instead of degrees, and perhaps needed in order to feel empathy. In fact, the importance of similar experiences may have been undervalued by those

who have treated it as an all-or-nothing variable and similar experiences may not only have some limited influence on empathy, but instead compose its entire base and the key to understanding the empathy phenomenon. If empathy is not a theoretical understanding but an experiential understanding (Greenson, 1960; Schafer, 1959), it must be based on relevant experience.

Empathy and concern for the other's well-being

Empathy has been considered as a source - if not *the* source - of altruistic motivation by philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Adam Smith, and by psychologists ranging from William McDougall to contemporary researchers as Nancy Eisenberg (e.g., Eisenberg & Miller, 1987a), Martin Hoffman (e.g., Hoffman, 2000), Dennis Krebs (e.g., Krebs, 1975), and Daniel Batson (e.g., Batson, 1997). Numerous researchers have found a link between empathy towards a target and concern for the target (Coke et al., 1978; Davis, 1983; Krebs, 1975; Oswald, 1996: Toi & Batson, 1982; for a review, see also Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 2000). A large number of experiments by Batson and his colleagues have demonstrated both that perspective taking does increase empathic concern and that people tend to help others more frequently under conditions of empathic concern in what appears to be an altruistically motivated effort to improve the other's well-being (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Coke et al., 1978; for reviews, see Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 2002).

At the same time as Batson has presented considerable evidence for empathy being a cause of altruism, there are also, according to him, other possible sources of altruism, for instance an altruistic personality (Batson, 1991; Batson, Bolen, Cross, Neuringer-Benefiel, 1986). Whether there are other sources of altruism than empathy Batson considers to be an empirical question (Batson, 1991).

Comments
Batson's results of the empathy-altruism relationship seem clearly to be in the right direction. However, it might perhaps be possible to go further and show empirically or with rational argumentation that empathy necessarily evokes altruistic motivation, and also that empathy is the only source of altruistic motivation. After all, empathy seems to be the only way of experientially understanding what other people feel (cf. Greenson, 1960), which can be argued to be needed for altruism (cf. Nagel, 1970/1978).

Also, to experience *as if* one were the other person (cf. Rogers' 1959 definition of empathy) can perhaps be argued to be sufficient for concern. In other words, in the same way as it was suggested that similarity of experiences is connected more closely to empathy than previously believed, the link between concern and empathic understanding may also be closer than most think.

Empathy and moral principles

Although empathy may evoke altruistic motivation, empathy for one other individual is not sufficient for moral action (cf. Batson et al., 1995; Hoffman, 2000). In addition, principles are also needed in order to distribute one's action in a fair rather than arbitrary manner. Empathic feelings and moral principles seem to complement each other in order to produce moral behavior. Empathic feelings motivate, according to research, people to care for others (for reviews, see Batson, 1991; Hoffman, 2000). Without empathy, moral principles seem to lack the motivating force for people to care for others (Hoffman, 2000, see also Laskey, 1987). It seems that empathy is needed to see the situation morally at all (Thompson, 2001). Likewise, Staub (1987) suggested that "without empathy, people might develop moral principles...but it is unlikely that they would feel genuine connection to and caring for others" (p. 111-112). However, in order to direct our empathic concern to others in a more fair way, we use moral principles and norms, such as Kant's categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2000), the Golden rule, or Utilitarianism (Bentham, 1789/1876). Without moral principles it often happens that people favor those closest and most similar to one self. Moral principles in combination with empathic feelings help us also consider those people and animals living far away from us, and even future generations.

Olsen (2001) offered an account of how empathy-based caring can be combined with justice. However, in Olsen's view, this is not a matter of combining empathy with abstract principles of justice from an intellectual standpoint, but to altering one's experience of others. Thus, although empathy can be immoral if directed toward only specific other individuals, it is consistent with justice if it is felt for others irrespective of whom they are (Olsen, 2001).

Comments
The relevance of experiential and emotional knowledge (e.g., empathy) for ethics may be the reason why Buddhists claim that it is in the meditative

experience that we develop our compassion. Likewise, Schopenhauer argued that theoretical knowledge is not enough in becoming a good person: "Virtue does indeed result from knowledge, but not from abstract knowledge communicable through words" (Schopenhauer, 1818/1958, cited in Magee, 1997, p. 199). Later in this thesis, the connection between empathy, altruism and morality will be discussed in greater detail.

The "Simulation account" versus the "Theory account" of empathy

In the philosophical literature, two models of empathy, the "simulation account" and the "theory account", are currently being discussed as part of a broader philosophical debate between two ways of understanding another person's mental life (cf. Goldman, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Gordon, 1992, 1995, 2000; Ravenscroft, 1998; for a review, see Kögler & Stueber, 2000). One model emphasizes theory; the other focuses on our capacity to re-enact or simulate fragments of another's mental life.

Nagel (1974) argued that no theorizing could ever help us to know what it is like to be a bat. In a similar vein, Jackson (1986) claimed that no amount of theorizing could help someone color-blind to understand what it is like to experience color. As pointed out by Ravenscroft (1998), Nagel's and Jackson's examples make it clear that there exists a gap between theory and experience. According to Ravenscroft (1998), the theory-theory cannot explain how we bridge the theory-experience gap. No amount of theorizing or inference provides the experience of another's mental life.

With this gap in mind, Gordon (1992, 1995, 2000), Goldman (1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995) and others draw a distinction between "theory" and "simulation". The majority of definitions of empathy in psychological literature seems to be consistent with the simulation account. For instance, Dymond (1949) conceptualized empathy as "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does" (p.127), and Kohut (1984) saw empathy as the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person. In contrast, a conceptualization that corresponds more to the "theory account" is Ickes (1997) conceptualization of empathic accuracy as the ability to infer the specific content of other people's experiences. In contrast, to empathically grasp what it is like to be another person from his or her perspective, it does not help to *infer* the other's thoughts and feelings (Ravenscroft 1998). When we empathize with another person we do not hold a number of propositions about this person's thoughts and feelings,

but instead experience mental states very similar to his or her (Ravenscroft 1998; see also Greenson, 1960; Schafer, 1959).

Ravenscroft (1998) explored these two models of empathy further, and argued that considerations of simplicity and parsimony strongly support the latter, simulative approach. Ravenscroft claimed that in empathy we simulate the content of the other's experiences. Ravenscroft pointed out that the majority of normal human adults have the capacity to imagine what it is like to be someone else. According to him, simulation theory is the best available explanation for how we can do this. In line with simulation theory, the affective states with which we can possibly empathize should be roughly the same as those we can experience directly. Ravenscroft also suggested that empathy may arise from our recollections of having similar experiences in our own past, which is in line with the ideas discussed in the "Empathy and similarity of experience"-section in the introduction of this thesis. Thus, if the simulation account of empathy is true it also explains why similar experiences would have a crucial role in empathy.

Comments
A few philosophers have discussed whether a "theory-account" or a "simulation-account" best describes the empathy process on the side of the empathizer. Proponents of the "theory-account" claim that empathy involves inferring the other's thoughts and feelings while the simulation account suggests that we simulate the other's thoughts and feelings. Although the debate is not settled, it appears that the literature favors the simulation account. This view is also consistent with the idea in the present thesis that empathy involves concern for the other's welfare, because it is easier to see how simulation can involve emotional concern for the other than to see how theorizing about another's experiences can.

Empathy and viewing the other as a subject versus an object

Empathy and viewing another person as a subject versus an object have been associated in theoretical contexts, but empirical research on this issue is scarce. Based on the conviction that subject view and empathy have much in common, for instance the acknowledgment of the other's first-person perspective, a perception of fundamental similarity with the other, and concern for that person's well-being, the aim of the present section is to discuss the relationship between the two phenomena.

In comparison to the relatively large body of research on empathy, there is considerably less empirical research on how we view others as subjects and objects, although a few philosophers have described these different views of another person (e.g., Sartre, 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989). For instance, according to Sartre, the other as object is someone that I can perceive, and the other as subject is someone who can also perceive me.

In the present thesis, subject/object view is regarded as a matter of degrees, by which people vary along a continuum from inside to outside perspectives of other individuals. The conceptualization of subject view in the present dissertation is inspired by the above philosophers as well as by Rogers' (1957) idea of a therapist identifying with and having warmth, respect, and unconditional positive regard toward a client. In Rogers' belief, no matter how socially disapproved of a client is, he or she can still be accepted as a human being. Likewise, in the present thesis, subject view is conceptualized as a view by which one takes up the other's first-person perspective, is focused on the other's experiences rather than traits, and is positive and non-judgmental toward the other's experiences (not necessarily toward the other's traits or behavior).

As conceptualized in the above literature, empathy and subject view seem to have at least three features in common. First, both appear to involve the acknowledgment of the other person's first-person perspective, which is an essential irreducible characteristic of any conscious state (cf. Chalmers, 1998; Nagel, 1974). Second, it looks as if we feel a sense of similarity and identity with the other when empathizing (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1997; Neuberg, et al., 1997) as well as when viewing the other as a subject. Third, empathy (for reviews, see Batson, 1991 & Hoffman, 2000) and subject view in contrast to object view (c.f. Hare, 1999) also seem to involve at least a minimum of care for others' welfare.

While empathy and subject view have certain features in common, they may also differ in important respects. First, while empathy involves emotion on the side of the empathizer (cf. Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 1987), subject/object view as conceptualized in the literature (e.g., Sartre 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989) seems to be relatively independent of affective responses. Second, empathy usually concerns a specific situation that the target is experiencing, whereas subject view seems to be a view of other people that is relatively independent of specific situations. Third, subject view may sometimes be reciprocal while empathy is asymmetric in the sense that focus is on the target rather than on the empathizer.

The essence of empathy as well as of subject-view may be an experience of another individual as a sentient being like oneself, and it seems that we become concerned when we feel an identity with the other; in other words, reacting to the idea of oneself in that same situation.

Comments
In sum, the relationship between empathy and viewing another as subject versus object has been discussed in theoretical literature. It seems that subject view, on the most basic level, involves viewing the other as oneself, perceiving the other as similar on the most fundamental level. Thus, perceived similarity at the most fundamental level may be, in empathy as well as in subject view, to perceive the other as a sentient being like oneself.

Aims of this thesis

A basic assumption in this thesis is that there are subjective experiences in the world that are at least equally real as an objective description of the world (cf. Chalmers, 1998; Nagel, 1974, 1986). Some of these experiences are one's own and directly accessible to oneself. The rest are not in the same direct way accessible to oneself, but are still equally real. That is, one's own experiences have no privileged position among experiences in general. However, in order to experientially (in contrast to theoretically/ conceptually) realize that there are experiences outside oneself at all, empathy is probably required.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of empathy, particularly what constitutes the phenomenon, but also to discuss the phenomenon in a broader context. The first two empirical studies of this thesis aimed to examine the phenomenon of empathy from the target's, as well as the empathizer's, perspectives. In the third study, empathy was also related to viewing another as a subject/object. In more detail, the aim of the first study was to identify the constituents of the empathizer's as well as the target's experiences of empathy. It was hypothesized, in line with earlier research from an outside perspective, that the empathizer's understanding, perceived similarity of experience, and actions of concern are crucial to the empathy experience from both the empathizer's and target's points of view. Also, the target's emotions were expected to be more in focus than the empathizer's emotions in the empathizers' and the targets' shared experience of empathy.

The aim of the second study was to experimentally investigate the importance of action for the perception of empathy from the perspective of an unspecified observer (Experiment 1) or from the perspectives of the empathizer or the target (Experiments 2 and 3). It was hypothesized that concern expressed in action would affect the perception of empathy. Further, a convergence was expected between empathizers' and targets' perceptions of the empathy situation regarding the importance of action.

Although philosophers have discussed how we view others as subjects and objects, empirical research on subject view and the connection to empathy is lacking. Therefore, the aim of the third study was to operationalize subject view and empirically investigate its relationship to empathy.

A further aim was to discuss the results in the broader context of altruism, morality, similarity of experience and foreign experience in general, in order to suggest directions for future research.

2. SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The present thesis contains three studies with the purpose of exploring the phenomenon of empathy. Each study is summarized below with respect to its background, aim, method, major findings, and discussion.

Study 1: Empathy as an Interpersonal Phenomenon

Background and aim
Although empathy is a central concept in modern psychology, empirically based knowledge concerning the essential constituents in experiences of empathy is scarce. From a phenomenological point of view, it may be natural to find qualities that together constitute the experience of empathy. Four empathy constituents that have been investigated in previous research are understanding, emotion, perceived similarity, and action.

The aim of this study was to identify the constituents of the empathizer's as well as the target's experiences of empathy. In line with earlier research it was hypothesized that the empathizer's understanding, the target's experiencing of emotions, perceived similarity of experience, and actions of concern are crucial to the empathy experience both from the empathizer's and target's points of view.

Method

In this study, descriptions of freely chosen empathy situations were collected from 56 participants. Because it is difficult to simulate empathy in a laboratory, participants were asked to freely choose and describe a situation from their own past. Half of the participants were asked to describe a situation in which they empathized with someone, and the other half were asked to describe a situation in which someone else empathized with them.

The authors listed all features (67) that they assumed would appear in the written empathy descriptions, as well as some other dimensions of which they wished to verify the presence. One of the authors then coded all the empathy stories, and two other raters each coded half of the stories. Thus, each story was coded by two raters. The raters' task was to determine if a feature was present (coded as "yes") or not (coded as "no") in a story.

Major findings

Data analysis resulted in four constituents that in line with previous research conducted from an outside perspective appeared to be necessary from both the empathizer's and the target's perspectives for the experience of empathy. From both perspectives, the constituents of empathy included that (1) the empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions, (2) the target experiences one or more emotions, (3) the empathizer perceives a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced earlier, and (4) the empathizer is concerned for the target's well-being.

Discussion

The four constituents were observed to a great extent in both empathizers' *and* targets' descriptions of empathy situations. In the discussion it is argued that the four constituents acquire their meaning from empathy's character of being an interpersonal phenomenon and comprise a meaningful whole by which the presence of each constituent is dependent on the presence of the other constituents.

Both empathizers and targets talked about their *own* emotions in the narratives. However, targets did not usually mention the empathizer's emotions while, in contrast, most of the empathizers referred to the target's emotions. Therefore, it seems that the target's emotions may be seen as a constituent that is shared by the empathizer and the target.

The similarities between empathizers' and targets' descriptions were more striking than the differences. It should be noted that at least three constituents – understanding, target's emotions, and perceived similarity -

are typically seen as phenomena occurring inside the empathizer's or the target's mental world. Even so, the empathizers and the targets referred to the same constituents in their narratives. To explain how this is possible, the fourth constituent – concern – needs to be taken into account.

The empathizer's concern for the target is expressed most often in actions that communicate to the target that the empathizer genuinely understands the target. In the communication between empathizer and target, the three internal constituents become external and shared. What enables this is the fact that the situation is based on shared experiences at different levels of generality.

Study 2: The Role of Action in Empathy from the Perspectives of the Empathizer and the Target

Background and aim
Earlier research has found a relationship between empathy towards another person and a motivation to act for the benefit of the person (Coke et al., 1978; Davis, 1983; Krebs, 1975) (for a review, see also Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 2000). Research on the connection between empathy and altruistic action may be studied from different perspectives. Most previous research has been carried out from an outside perspective (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Coke et al., 1978; Davis, 1983; Duan, 2000), although a few studies have focused on the target's perspective and have found that targets perceive empathy to a great extent in terms of the empathizer's actions, such as being facilitative or nurturing towards the target (e.g., Bachelor, 1988; Olson, 1995). An additional possibility is to study the empathizer's perspective and investigate whether empathizers perceive their own actions towards the target as empathetic.

The previous study (Study 1) suggested that action was *perceived* to be an important constituent in the empathy experience from both the empathizer's and the target's perspective. In the present study a further step was taken, investigating the extent to which the empathizer's actions *cause* people to perceive themselves (empathizer's perspective) or others (target's or observer's perspective) as empathetic. If it were found that the occurrence of certain actions by the empathizer leads to a perception of empathy, this would add to the credibility of the phenomenological reports in the earlier study showing the crucial role of actions in the empathy experience.

The aim of the present study was to experimentally investigate the importance of action for the perception of empathy from the perspective of

an unspecified observer (Experiment 1) or from the perspective of the empathizer or the target (Experiments 2 and 3). It was hypothesized that concern expressed in action would effect the perception of empathy. Further, in line with our earlier study (Study 1), a convergence was expected between empathizers' and targets' perceptions of the empathy situation regarding the importance of action.

Method
Participants were students in an introductory psychology course at Stockholm University. Each student took part in one of three experiments. Using a between-subjects design, participants were assigned to read one of a number of slightly different versions of a story about a boss at a small company who fires an employee who has worked there for a long time. Although the versions of the story were similar to a great extent, they differed with respect to (1) whether the boss claimed to understand the employee, (2) whether the boss promised to act, (3) whether the boss actually acted, and (4) which perspective the participant was asked to take (empathizer's, target's, or an unspecified observer's perspective). The manipulation of these variables in various combinations consequently produced a number of somewhat different stories and thus different experimental conditions. After reading the story, participants were asked to tell how empathetic they perceived the boss in the story to be.

Major findings
Experiment 1 suggested that in order to be perceived as empathetic, it is more important to promise to act than to verbally express understanding. Moreover, when one promises to act, expressed understanding seems to have little additional effect on perceived empathy. This indicates that action has an influence on perceived empathy, and more so than verbally expressed understanding.

What was new in experiment 2, compared to Experiment 1, was that the participants were asked to take the perspective of either the boss or the employee while reading the story and answering the questions. In the condition "promise to act", the boss (participants taking boss' perspective) perceived the boss to be more empathetic than the employee perceived (participants taking employee's perspective) the boss to be. Although the employee regarded the boss as more empathetic when promising to act, the greatest effect was on the boss' self-perception of being empathetic.

In Experiment 3, as in Experiment 2, participants were asked to take either the boss' or the employee's perspective. However, this time the "understanding" - condition was exchanged for a new condition - "action".

In this condition, the boss actually carried out the action, and not only promised to do so. When the boss actually acted, the perceived empathy increased further from both perspectives.

Discussion

Taken together, the results of the three experimental studies seem to provide considerable evidence for action being crucial to the experience of empathy from both empathizer's and target's perspectives (Studies 2 and 3) as well as from the perspective of an unspecified observer (Study 1). Thus, the two perspectives examined in Experiments 2 and 3 – the boss' (empathizer's) and the employee's (target's) – converged to a great extent with respect to the importance of the boss' actions. These results are in line with our previous finding that empathizers as well as targets assign a central role to the empathizer's action when describing empathy episodes from their own lives.

Study 3: Empathy and Viewing the Other as a Subject

Background and aim

Empathy and viewing another person as a subject or object has been associated in the literature, but empirical studies on their relationship are scarce. In contrast with the relatively large body of research on empathy, there is much less empirical research on how we view others as subjects and objects. However, within philosophy, these different views of another person have been discussed (e.g., Sartre, 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989).

According to the literature, empathy and viewing another as a subject seem to have some characteristics in common. First, both appear to involve a focus on the other person's first-person perspective. Second, it seems that people feel a sense of identity with the other when empathizing as well as when viewing the other as a subject. Third, empathy and subject view also seem to share the trait of involving at least some degree of caring for the other's welfare. At the same time, they may also differ in important respects. While empathy is affective, a subject view seems to be relatively independent of emotional responses, and empathy normally concerns a specific situation while subject view transcends situations. Also, in contrast to a subject view, which may be reciprocal, empathy is usually asymmetric in the sense that focus is on the target and not on the empathizer.

The conceptualization of subject view in the present thesis is influenced by the above literature as well as by Rogers' (1957) view of the ideal therapist identifying with and having warmth, respect, and

unconditional positive regard toward the client. Similarly, in the present research, subject view was defined as a view by which one takes up the other's first-person perspective, is focused on the other's experiences, and is positive and non-judgmental toward the other's experiences.

Although philosophers have discussed how we view others as subjects/objects, empirical research on subject view and the connection to empathy is lacking. Therefore, the aim of the present research was to operationalize subject view and empirically investigate its relationship to empathy.

Method

Participants of Experiment 1 were 81 high school students. They watched two short film clips and, afterward, freely described how they perceived four different characters in the clips. These descriptions were then rated by psychologists with respect to degree of subject/object view of the film characters. Participants' self-rated empathy with the film characters was also measured.

Participants of Experiment 2 were 31 psychology students. They watched the same two short film clips as did the participants in Experiment 1 and afterward freely described how they perceived the same four persons in the film clips. The descriptions were then rated by the participants themselves with respect to subject/object view, instead of (as in Experiment 1) by third-person raters. Participants' self-rated empathy and perception of the difficulty of the situation were also measured.

Major findings

A score was computed for each of the participants on each of five subject view dimensions. Internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was for all five dimensions .88. However, when only keeping the three dimensions *The film character could have said this about himself or herself*, *The participant has a positive view of the film character*, and *The participant does not judge the film character*, alpha was .93. Based on the alpha values, it was decided to keep only these three dimensions as a measure of subject view.

Participants' empathy was measured by self-ratings on five items. For each participant, a score was computed for each of the five items. The internal consistency (alpha) was .75 for the five items. However, the only items that correlated significantly with each other for all film characters were *understanding situation* with *understanding feelings* and *concern* with *feelings of compassion*. Because feelings of concern and compassion more than cognitive understanding of the other's situation and feelings reflect

what is meant with empathy in this paper, it was decided to keep only the two items *concern* and *feelings of compassion* as a measure of empathy.

The main interest of Experiment 1 was the relationship between empathy and subject view. As expected, there was a positive correlation, albeit low ($r = .24$, $p < .05$), between the two phenomena.

As anticipated, in Experiment 2, there was a positive relation between empathy and subject view, a positive relation between empathy and perceived difficulty, and almost no relation between subject view and perceived difficulty. The design also allowed analyses regarding the extent to which differences between the film characters in subject view and perceived difficulty predicted differences in empathy. Therefore, standard multiple regressions were performed with difference in empathy between two of the film characters as the dependent variable and differences in subject view and perceived difficulty between the same two characters as independent variables. In five of the six possible comparisons, differences in subject view and in perceived difficulty significantly predicted differences in empathy.

Discussion

Two experiments indicated that empathy is usually felt when a person in difficulty is viewed as a subject. At the same time as subject view and empathy are positively related, the findings indicated that viewing the other individual as a subject is usually not enough in order to feel empathy. As revealed in Experiment 2, the difficulty of the situation along with subject view is important for evoking empathy. People may view others as subjects or objects independently of the other being in a positive or a negative situation, but empathy is felt most often for people in negative situations. On the other hand, a difficult situation is not sufficient to evoke empathy; the other individual must also be viewed as a subject rather than an object. Also, the result that empathy, more than subject view, is related to the difficulty of the situation is in line with the more general assumption that empathy typically concerns a specific situation while subject view transcends particular situations.

3. GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Main findings and contributions of this research

In Study 1, empathy was examined qualitatively with narrative accounts, which has rarely been done before. In this research, a qualitative study was conducted in order to identify the essential constituents in empathizers' as well as in targets' perspectives. The findings demonstrated that the perspectives of empathizers and targets coincide to a great extent, and that both empathizers and targets experienced four distinct constituents of empathy that together comprised a meaningful whole. Although these constituents have been mentioned in the literature as important for empathy, it may be considered a new approach to regard them all (especially perceived similarity and concern) as constituents of the empathy experience. Further, even though similarity of experience has been related to empathy before, earlier empirical research has probably not showed how perceived similarity of experience can occur at different abstraction levels.

In Study 2, the results of three experiments seemed to provide considerable evidence for action being central to the experience of empathy from both the empathizer's and the target's perspectives (Experiments 2 and 3) as well as from the perspective of an unspecified observer (Experiment 1). These results are in line with the previous finding from Study 1 showing that people give a central role to the empathizer's actions when they describe empathy episodes from their own lives. The experiments also suggested that the empathizer's and the target's perspectives on the role of action in empathy converge to a great extent.

In Study 3, the extent to which the participants saw the characters in the film clips as subjects or objects was measured, and the author is not aware of a study to date in which subject/object view has been operationalized and measured. The data suggested that the construct of subject/object view can be considered along a continuum in which people view other individuals more or less as subjects and objects, and that the construct can be measured reliably.

The most important result was that subject view along with perceived difficulty explained differences in empathy to a considerable extent. Also, there was almost no relation between subject view and perceived difficulty.

In summary, these three studies have revealed that empathy seem to involve having concern for another person in addition to understanding the other. Also, although an individual can certainly empathize with positive as

well as negative situations, the present research suggests that empathy is evoked most often with people in difficult situations.

Shortcomings and limitations

In Study 1, empathy was investigated from two perspectives using narrative accounts of real-life situations. Each participant was asked to describe an empathy situation from his or her own past. An advantage of this design was that the situations picked had a good chance of being good examples of empathy. A limitation of the study was that the pairs were not kept together so that two persons (who had experienced a situation together in which one was the empathizer and the other the target) described the same situation. This would have provided interesting opportunities for comparisons within the pairs. For instance, the opportunity would have existed to see the ways the two persons experienced the empathy situation similarly or differently.

Such a study could also be performed with the instruction to write about a situation in which participants had experienced the opposite, lack of empathy. Instead of writing about empathy situations they would be asked to write narratives about situations where they themselves or someone else failed to be empathic. The opposite phenomenon can often illuminate the phenomenon one is primarily interested in.

The sample size of Study 1 was relatively narrow, even with the addition of the follow-up interviews. The narrative methodology is not the most sensitive means of uncovering differences in interpersonal dynamics, thus a larger sample size might have resulted in fewer null results when comparing empathizers and targets as well as men and women on the different dimensions.

In Study 1, four constituents of empathy were found and in Study 2 one of these - the concern constituent - was investigated experimentally. Although Study 2 was an attempt to study the role of concern in empathy, more research is needed in this area. Of particular interest would be to try to investigate empirically whether the empathy phenomenon involves both understanding and concern. Also, it would be important to further empirically test the interrelations of all the four constituents.

A limitation of Study 2 was that the participants were not real targets or empathizers. The perspectives were imagined rather than true empathizer and target perspectives. Therefore, in future research testing these ideas participants may be asked to actually act as empathizers and targets and afterwards rate the empathizer's empathy. Alternatively, this could also be studied in natural situations in which empathy occurs.

Another limitation of Study 2 was that the empathy situation in the narrative occurred in a work place setting in which the relationship between boss and employee was asymmetric in the sense that the boss had some power over the employee. Thus, it is uncertain whether these results generalize over other types of relationships. Also, although multiple items would often be preferable, one single item was used to measure empathy, because the idea was to get the participants impression of the narrative without reflecting too much.

In Study 3, a main idea was that subject view and perceived difficulty cause empathy. However, it cannot be ruled out that empathy is required for seeing another as a subject at all, as well as for perceiving another's difficulty in the first place. Therefore, further experimental designs manipulating all three variables are needed to clarify the issues of their relations. Also, only 31 participants were used in the second experiment of Study 3. Therefore, additional data must be collected in order to test the generalizability of the results.

4. EMPATHY IN A BROADER CONTEXT AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the general discussion of the empirical studies was related closely to the data, this part of the thesis will discuss empathy in a broader context, related less strictly to the empirical studies. Although references will be made to the empirical studies of the thesis as well as to the literature, some ideas that go beyond the empirical data and the reviewed literature will be discussed and directions for future research suggested.

Empathy, altruism and morality

In Study 1 of this thesis, empathy was described in terms of concern as well as understanding. In fact, understanding and concern were along with emotion and perceived similarity found to constitute experiences of empathy. The significance of such a view of the empathy phenomenon will be discussed in some detail in this section.

Although in many contexts it is relevant to distinguish between understanding and caring for something, the transcendence of this distinction may be characteristic of the empathy phenomenon. It is important to note, though, that this suggestion is not trivial. A phenomenon with the features of knowing as well as caring is precisely what the field of

meta-ethics needs to consider in order to obtain a complete and coherent understanding of morality (cf. Smith, 1994). Consequently, in a vast body of literature, empathy has been identified as the phenomenon giving morality its motivational content (Hoffman, 2000; see also Batson, 1991), at the same time as it is viewed as a kind of understanding. Based on the view of empathy as both understanding and concern, the following sections will relate the phenomenon to the field of ethics.

Empathy as understanding and concern
If understanding and concern can usually be separated, how then can they go together in the empathy phenomenon? Is the empathy phenomenon so special that it is unique? As argued at numerous places in this thesis, empathy differs from every form of understanding that is theoretical or conceptual; it is foremost an experiential, emotionally colored understanding (Greenson, 1960). However, the empathy phenomenon may not be unique in this regard, but instead by virtue of being in some sense an emotion similar to other emotions. It can be argued that emotions involve a kind of emotional knowledge at the same time as action-readiness (cf. Frijda et al. 1989; Mandler, 1984; Toda, 1980). For instance, Frijda and coworkers (1989) found that emotions provide people with the energy to respond to features of the environment. Thus, empathy may be seen as an emotion that provides knowledge as well as energy for helping others.

Empathy as a possible solution to "the moral problem"
The present conceptualization of empathy as both understanding and concern may turn out to also be useful in identifying the essence of moral judgments, an issue philosophers has struggled with (cf. Smith, 1994). Smith (1994) claimed that the field of meta-ethics within philosophy is remarkably diverse and that the cause of this diversity is primarily the difficulty of how to describe what moral judgments are in such a way that two features that we believe morality to have are captured – the objectivity and practicality of morality. The objectivity concerns our tendency to think that moral judgments express beliefs about the world, moral facts. The practicality of morality is our belief that someone having a moral opinion also finds him/herself with a corresponding motivation to act. Given the standard picture of human psychology that we owe to the philosopher David Hume (Hume, 1739/1978), that beliefs as well as desires cause our motivation to act but are distinct existences, it is, according to Smith, hard to see how moral judgments about an objective reality may be motivating in themselves.

Smith called the difficulty of combining objectivity, practicality, and the Humean picture of psychology in a description of moral judgments, "the moral problem". However, the conceptualization of empathy as understanding and concern presented in this thesis may turn out to be useful in describing moral judgments as both objective and motivating in themselves, thus solving "the moral problem". This would mean that moral judgments could be conceptualized as a kind of empathy for one or more other individuals. That is, moral judgments conceptualized in terms of empathy would be beliefs about reality (one or more other individuals' inner realities) and would imply motivation to act (concern for one or more others' welfare).

The idea of empathy involving understanding and knowledge is crucial since it sees empathy as something beyond being nice and kind. By means of empathy, one's kindness and motivation to care (practicality) may be directed toward someone else's feelings and needs (an objective matter of fact) rather than misdirected. Likewise, Holm (1995) argued that it is not enough to be nice in relation to others - empathy is also needed.

Future research on empathy, altruism and morality
As with many philosophical problems, much of the research needed is conceptual rather than empirical, and much conceptual work remains for solving "the moral problem" completely. However, *some* aspects of the suggested solution to "the moral problem" may be tested empirically. For instance, this empirical research may involve investigating whether there exists a kind of phenomenon, a moral judgment, that is a belief that at the same time leads to a motivation to act accordingly. Such an experiential/emotional valuing may be operationalized in terms of empathy, although not limited to empathy for one other individual, which could be immoral (cf. Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995).

Although the details of such research remain to be worked out, it may in brief terms include comparing the relationship between experiential valuing and moral motivation with that of theoretical valuing and moral motivation. In line with the suggested solution to "the moral problem", the hypothesis would be that there is a stronger relationship between experiential valuing and moral motivation than between theoretical valuing and moral motivation. More specifically, theoretical valuing may be operationalized in terms of inferring what is important to others, while experiential valuing may be operationalized in terms of simulating others' thoughts and feelings, feeling the force of others' feelings, and seeing from others' perspectives that their purposes are worthwhile.

Empathy and similarity of experience

Similarity at different abstraction levels
Although similarity of experience appears to be a key to understand the empathy phenomenon, research on the link between perceived similarity and empathy is scarce. However, similar experience as a dichotomous variable has been related to empathy in a few studies (Batson et al., 1996; Barnett, 1984; Barnett et al., 1986; Barnett et al., 1987). In the first study of this thesis, it was found in contrast to previous research that empathy seems to depend on degrees of similarity of experience rather than being an "all-or-nothing"- phenomenon. In the present section, the idea of degrees of similarity will be discussed further and future research about the relationship between empathy and similarity of experience proposed.

Although earlier research provides considerable evidence that similar experience plays a role in empathy, the reasoning behind these studies of how similar experience relates to empathy is questionable. If empathy is a kind of understanding of an experience, it is hard to see how one can empathize without having had that experience at some level, nor how two people can ever have experienced exactly the same thing. Rather, it appears that similarity of experiences in relation to empathy operate at different levels of generality, ranging from an almost precise match to a common denominator only at a high level of abstraction or generality.

Study 1 of this thesis showed that the empathy situation is based on shared experiences that make it possible for the empathizer and target to cooperate from a shared understanding of the target's situation. These data showed that these shared experiences can occur at different levels of generality. Thus, in order to understand another person, one does not need to have experienced exactly the same thing as that other individual. The other's experience can be abstracted to a level at which it resembles something the empathizer has previously experienced and can thereby be understood.

There are similarities as well as differences among humans. Although the similarities are not greater than the differences per se, similarities have priority in the sense that to understand differences we must relate to something that is similar (cf. Borg, 1992). In this regard, perceived similarity is a prerequisite for empathic understanding of another person. Borg (1992) expressed the very same idea: "In the theory of knowledge similarity must have priority over dissimilarity. That people differ from each other can only be understood as a deviation from something that is similar."

Oneness
Similarity of experience may correspond to what in some traditions has been called "oneness" (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1997; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Neuberg, et al., 1997; Schopenhauer, 1818/1958). For instance, Schopenhauer (1818/1958) was thinking along these lines when he asked wherein the connection lies between another's welfare and one's own motivation. The connection, argued Schopenhauer, is fellow feeling, compassion, and this in turn rests on self-identification. Schopenhauer argued that all of us in our deepest nature are one with each other, are undifferentiable from each other. Thus, in my innermost being I am not only similar to other human beings – it is just on the surface that similarity appears; at the very bottom they and I are literally one and the same (Schopenhauer, 1818/1958).

Even though Schopenhauer developed his ideas independently of Eastern thinking, his ideas are also in agreement with those traditions. Eastern philosophies and meditation traditions all have the intention to promote empathy for others that leads toward oneness with them (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, 2002). At a high level of abstraction, one may feel perceived similarity and oneness with all other humans, at an even higher level with all animals and at the highest level with all sentient beings, which also tends to be part of the ideal Buddhist or Hindu aspiration. For instance, Schulman (2002) described how Hinduism stresses empathic bonds, as exemplified by the following quotation from the Hitopadesa, a sacred text: "As one's life is dear to oneself, so also are those of all beings. The good show compassion towards all living beings because of their resemblance to themselves" (p. 508).

Future research on empathy and similarity of experience
Study 1 revealed that perceived similarity of experience can occur at different levels of generality. Because the few earlier experiments conducted on similar experiences and empathy have usually treated similarity of experience as a dichotomous variable, it would be natural to further examine to what extent perceived similarity occurs at different abstraction levels in empathy. Thus, because it could possibly be a new way of conceptualizing similar experiences as related to empathy, it seems important to test this idea of abstraction levels further. Based on this reasoning, a hypothesis would be that similar experience is not needed at a concrete level but at some level of abstraction for empathy to occur. This would mean that similar experience not only has some limited influence on empathy, but instead is a key to the phenomenon. Also, by virtue of being a key to empathy, perceived similarity of experience at different abstraction

levels may be the means by which one can reach experience outside oneself, which is the topic of the next section.

Empathy and foreign experience

So far in this thesis, the empathy phenomenon has been described through reviewing the literature in the field, presenting three empirical studies, and discussing the phenomenon as related to concern and similarity of experience. Given the description of empathy generated in the three empirical studies, I would finally like to discuss and propose research regarding the range of this phenomenon. More specifically, what are the experiences one can empathize with and where are they located in relation to each other and to the empathizer's own experiences?

Empathy as a way of connecting to foreign experience
     Assuming that all foreign experiences at some abstraction level are similar to one's own, it may be possible to empathize with every experience outside oneself. However, as long as a certain being is not empathizing, this being may be exclusively limited to its own present experiences. That is, this being has an egocentric and now-oriented perspective and views only its own present experiences as real (see Figure 1.).

A's experiences over time

B's experiences over time

C's experiences over time
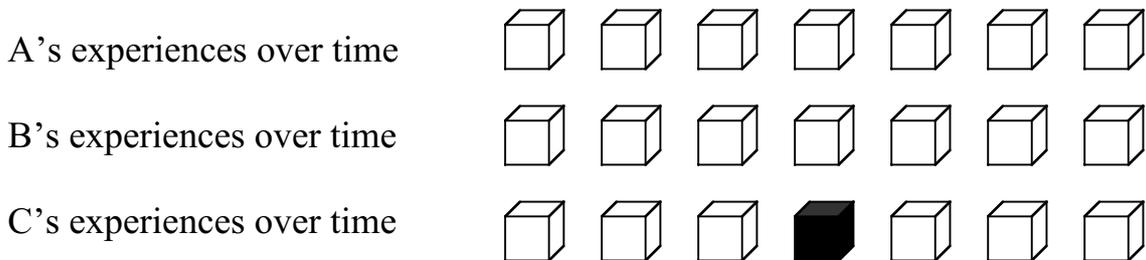
Figure 1. Egocentric and now-oriented perspective in which only being C's present experiences are perceived as real by C.

     For at least most human beings, however, there may be several qualitatively different ways of transcending an egocentric and now-oriented perspective by means of empathy. More precisely, as Figure 2 suggests, there may be five possible forms of empathy: empathizing with (1) someone else's experiences in the present moment, (2) someone else's experiences in the past, (3) someone else's experiences in the future, (4) one's own experiences in the past, or (5) one's own experiences in the future. That is, a person may enter into someone else's present, past, or

future experiences, move backwards in his or her own time through, for example, imagining some episode from childhood, or move forward in his or her own time by imagining some future state of his or her own life. In fact, that people cognitively time travel is well known in the field of memory (Friedman, 1993; Roberts, 2002; Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997; Tulving, 1984). Traveling backward in subjective time to remember specific events from one's personal past has been referred to as episodic memory (Roberts, 2002; Tulving, 1985, 1993). Also, in the opposite direction people travel forward in subjective time by planning future activities (Roberts, 2002). Further, Suddendorf and Corballis (1997) argued that some of the capacities needed for time traveling are also important aspects of a "theory of mind".

A's experiences over time

B's experiences over time

C's experiences over time
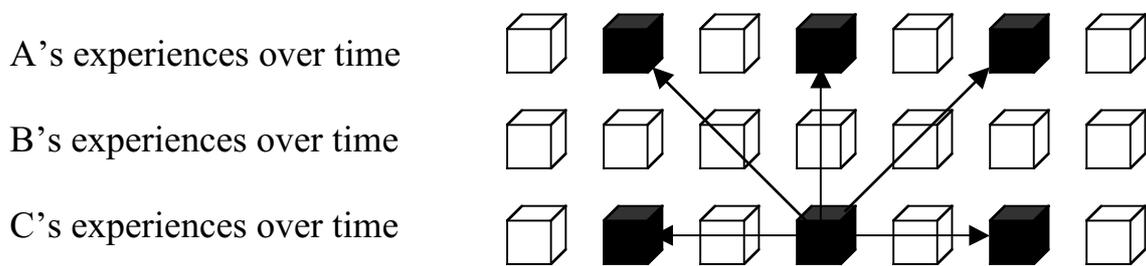
Figure 2. Five different forms of empathy: empathizing with (1) someone else's experiences in the present moment, (2) someone else's experiences in the past, (3) someone else's experiences in the future, (4) one's own experiences in the past, or (5) one's own experiences in the future.

It is important to note, however, that to view foreign experiences as real is a matter of experiential or emotional, not theoretical, contact. This idea was discussed in the section addressing empathy and understanding, in which empathy was conceptualized as an experiential rather than a theoretical understanding of someone else (see also Greenson, 1960; Ravenscroft, 1998; Schafer, 1959.). The idea of empathy as experiencing rather than theorizing about foreign experience was also one of the main themes of "The simulation versus the theory account of empathy", "Empathy and subject view", and "Empathy as a possible solution to the moral problem". To empathically view another part of the subjective reality as real is in this sense not a theoretical standpoint, but an experience colored by emotion by which the other's experiences are simulated and the other is perceived as a subject rather than an object. Also, according to Study 1 of this thesis, this means understanding the other as well as becoming concerned for the other's welfare.

In order for two beings to understand each other in a genuine meeting or shared reality (cf. Hardin & Higgins, 1996), it is not sufficient that they are at the same line, same area, in the same space, or at the same objective time. In addition, for a genuine meeting to occur, even four dimensions are not enough – a person can be at the same place at the same time as many other people and still feel lonely. In order for a genuine meeting of two persons to occur they must, in addition to being at the same place at the same time, also have empathy for each other.

Future research on empathy and foreign experience
Because there appear to be essential features shared between empathy for others in the present moment and "empathy" for others or oneself in the past or the future, this may be well worth investigating empirically. The main question of this research would be how far a parallel between empathy with another person in the present moment and "empathy" with oneself in the future can be drawn. This research may show the range of the phenomenon and offer interesting opportunities for comparing what we usually mean by "empathy" (empathy between two persons at a certain moment) with research about episodic memory ("empathy" with one's own past experiences) and with research about how people imagine what it will be like for themselves in the future ("empathy" with one's own future experiences, cf. Martz, 2001). In fact, previous findings in, for instance, the areas of episodic memory may turn out to be valid for empathy as well, and vice versa. That is, these phenomena may be found to be essentially related or even the same phenomenon.

The present conceptualization of empathy may also offer a framework for studying the role of empathy within ethics in general. From a (detached) moral point of view, it may be fair to give an equal weight to interests independently of to whom they belong and when they occur. However, in reality, we are probably usually biased towards ourselves (rather than towards others) as well as towards the present (rather than towards the future). That is, we often allocate more resources to ourselves than what is fair to others and we allocate more resources to the present moment than what is "fair" to ourselves in the future. Lowest priority is perhaps given to the interests of others' future experiences. As Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson & Ahmad, 2001; Batson, et al., 1995; Batson, et al, 1999;) have demonstrated, empathy makes a difference in how we divide resources between ourselves and others in the present. In the same way, it may be hypothesized that "empathy" for ourselves in the future increases the moral weight of our own future experiences. In general, an impulse to be moral should include other people but also the dimension of time. In an

experimental design in which empathy is (or is not) induced, allocation of resources to oneself in the present, to another person in the present, to oneself in the future, and to others in the future may be compared. Thus, a hypothesis would be that lack of empathy is partly responsible not only for favoring oneself over others but also for favoring the present over the future.

A natural objection to this framework may be that the proposed parallel between empathy for someone else and "empathy" for oneself in the past or the future does not hold. One could argue that when "empathizing" with oneself, in contrast to with someone else, it is still about oneself, the same person, and thus the similarity between "empathizer" and "target" is much greater. However, although this is certainly true, it need not be regarded as evidence against the proposed parallel, but instead as support for the idea in this thesis of the role of similar experience for empathy. It may be relatively easy for a person to imagine what it will be like to be him/herself in the future because that will likely be very similar to being him/herself now and in the past.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has presented three empirical studies on empathy as well as discussed the phenomenon in a broader context of altruism, morality, similarity of experience and foreign experience in general. The main conclusions of this thesis are that (1) experiences of empathy involve emotion, understanding, perceived similarity of experience, and concern, (2) perceived similarity of experience as related to empathy can occur at different levels of generality, (3) the empathizer's actions are crucial for him or her to be perceived as empathetic, (4) the empathizer's and the target's perspectives on the empathy situation coincide to a great extent, and (5) empathy is evoked primarily when a person in difficulty is viewed as a subject.

Empathy's uniqueness as a phenomenon may often be overrated and underrated, sometimes by the same persons. Empathy is often studied as a unique phenomenon, but it is important to see that some aspects of empathy are instead aspects of the more general phenomenon "emotion" of which empathy can be seen as an instance. The conceptualization of empathy as involving both understanding and action-readiness may simply be two features of emotions in general. Also, empathy is almost exclusively considered to occur between two persons. Less acknowledged is that

empathy for other people may share central features with empathy for one's own past and empathy for one's own future experiences.

On the other hand, in one sense empathy may be more unique than many people think. Although empathy is often mentioned and grouped together with phenomena such as sympathy, warmth, compassion and so forth, and naturally have much in common with these phenomena, it is likely the only phenomenon that enables us to understand as well as care for consciousness outside ourselves.

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STUDY 1

Empathy as an Interpersonal Phenomenon

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find the constituents of empathizers' and targets' experiences of empathy. We analyzed 28 empathizers' and 28 targets' narrative accounts of situations where they had experienced empathy. From both perspectives, the constituents of empathy included that (1) the empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions, (2) the target experiences one or more emotions, (3) the empathizer perceives a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced previously, and (4) the empathizer is concerned for the target's well-being. The data suggested that actions associated with the fourth constituent - concern - make empathy an interpersonal phenomenon.

Empathy is the phenomenon that connects two otherwise isolated individuals to each other: the *empathizer*, who empathizes with another person, the *target* (Davis, 1996). Even though empathy is a central concept in modern psychology, knowledge concerning the essential constituents[1] in experiences of empathy is scarce. Moreover, in prior research the emphasis has been on the empathizer's experiences without considering the target's viewpoint. Based on the belief that empathy is something that happens both within and between two individuals, the objective of this paper is to describe the phenomenon of empathy from both the empathizer's and the target's perspectives.

The Concept of Empathy

In many definitions of empathy, the idea of acquiring another person's perspective is crucial. As pointed out by Bohart and Greenberg (1997), most definitions of empathy include the idea of "trying to sense, perceive, share, or conceptualize how another person is experiencing the world" (p. 419). Dymond (1949) conceptualized empathy as "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does" (p.127), and Kohut (1984) saw empathy as the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person. In other words, empathy can be seen as "putting oneself in someone else's shoes." An extensive definition is that of Rogers (1959):

> The state of empathy or being empathic is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. (p. 210-211)

This research has largely been focused on the empathizer's viewpoint, usually with no, or little, regard to how the target interacts with the empathizer. However, a few attempts have been made to clarify the multifacetted nature of the empathy phenomenon including the target's perspective. Barrett-Lennard (1981) distinguished between three different stages involved in empathy: empathic understanding, communicated empathy, and the target's perception of empathy. Davis (1996) distinguished between process and outcome when thinking about

empathy. The process of empathy might include taking another person's perspective or unconsciously imitating another's facial expression. The outcomes of empathy result from these processes, and may include empathizer's affective responses, cognitive understanding, and helping behavior.

Barrett-Lennard's (1981) and Davis' (1996) conceptualizations share the notion of splitting the empathy phenomenon into different activities which occur at different points in time and which have a cause-effect relationship with each other. From a phenomenological point of view, it may be more natural to find qualities that in conjunction form the experience of empathy with no regard to temporal aspects and cause-effect relationships. To provide a basis for such a framework, four empathy constituents that have been investigated in previous research will be discussed: understanding, emotion, perceived similarity between empathizer and target, and action.

Empathy and Understanding

Understanding is crucial to many researchers' conceptualizations of empathy (Barrett-Lennard, 1981; Davis, 1996). For instance, Davis (1996) argued that understanding as a result of perspective-taking should be considered an aspect of empathy. Researchers have used different terms such as "understand", "enter into", "share", or "imagine" to denote what the empathizer is doing in the situation. Researchers also differ with respect to how they conceptualize the content of the target's inner world. For instance, the object of the understanding may involve the other's thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, situation, perspective, or experiences. However, what many empathy researchers have agreed upon is that some kind of understanding is central to the empathy process.

Empathy and Emotion

Many researchers and authors have conceptualized empathy as involving emotion on the part of the empathizer (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 1987; Rogers, 1959; Stotland, 1969). For example, Hoffman (1987) viewed emotion on the part of the empathizer as crucial to empathy. He defined empathy as "an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own" (p. 48). In particular, he refers to the distress that the empathizer feels in response to another's immediate pain or discomfort.

Hoffman's conceptualization contrasts with the research by Ickes and colleagues (see Ickes, 1993). They coined the term "empathic accuracy", which does not involve emotion on the part of the empathizer.

Ickes defined empathic accuracy as a person's capability to accurately infer the specific content of another person's thoughts and feelings. It is questionable, however, if Ickes' definition of "empathic accuracy" captures the essence of the empathy phenomenon. Empathy can be argued to include both a cognitive component (such as that described by Ickes) and an emotional component on the side of the empathizer (Davis, 1996; Hoffman, 1987; Rogers, 1959). Recently, a phenomenological study suggested that emotional components in the empathizer's experiences of empathy reflect a fuller and more meaningful relational experience than cognitive understanding alone (Kerem, Fishman, & Josselson, 2001).

The target's emotions are also discussed in the empathy literature. It is taken for granted by many researchers that the empathizer shares the target's emotions, which are typically assumed to be negative. For example, Greenson (1960) described empathizing as sharing and experiencing the feelings of another person, and Gillett (1993) stated that the empathizer may feel the force of the target's emotions. Recently, an empirical study was conducted on how the nature of the target's emotions influences an observer's empathy (Duan, 2000). The results showed that positive emotions and sadness elicited more empathic emotion in the empathizer than anger and shame did.

Empathy and Perceived Similarity

The British philosopher Hume reasoned that because people are constituted similarly and have similar experiences they are able to vicariously experience the same feelings as another person when they imagine being in that person's situation (Hume, 1751/1957). Recently, Hoffman (2000) returned to the same idea when arguing that perceived similarity contributes to empathy:

> Seeing that people in other cultures have similar worries and respond emotionally as we do to important life events, while sitting in the audience and feeling the same emotions, should contribute to a sense of oneness and empathy across cultures. (p. 294)

Hoffman (2000) described how people relate another individual's situation to similar experiences in their own past. Cues in the target's situation remind the empathizer of similar experiences in his or her own past and evoke emotions that match the target's situation. For instance, if we have a distressing experience, and later observe someone in a similar situation, cues in the other's situation that remind us of our own past experience may evoke a feeling of distress in us again (Hoffman, 2000).

There is empirical support for the connection between perceived similarity and empathy (Barnett, Tetreault, and Masbad, 1987; Krebs, 1975). Krebs (1975) demonstrated that perceived similarity facilitates empathic responses. He measured the psychophysical responses of participants as they observed another individual that ostensibly experienced pleasure and pain. Empathizers who believed they were similar to the other individual exhibited greater psychophysical reactions than those that believed they were different from the other. Further, Barnett, Tetreault, and Masbad (1987) found that women that had been raped considered themselves as more empathic with, and more similar to, a rape victim presented on videotape than did controls that had not been raped.

Empathy and Action

So far, it has been noted that the empathy experience involves the empathizer's understanding in relation to the target, the target's emotions, and the fact that the empathizer perceives similarity between the target's and his or her own previous experiences. In this section, an additional constituent in the empathy experience will be introduced – action. We believe that understanding, emotion, perceived similarity, and action form a coherent whole in the empathy experience. To clarify, consider a scene from the Spanish Civil War described by George Orwell (1957), and later discussed by the philosopher Frederick Schick (1991). Orwell served as a soldier on the Republic's side. One day he had gone out close to the Fascist trenches in the hope of finding someone to shoot at. After a long wait, he saw that a man…

> … jumped out of the trench and ran along the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him … I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at "Fascists"; but a man holding up his trousers isn't a "Fascist". He is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting him. (p. 199)

This scene exemplifies how understanding (seeing the Fascist soldier as a fellow creature), sensing the target's emotions although not explicitly (target likely to be experienced as scared and also perhaps as embarrassed) and perceived similarity (fellow creature, similar to yourself) brings about the action, or rather the non-action, whereby Orwell refrains from shooting the soldier.

Schick makes a strong case for distinguishing between belief and understanding. Understanding is linked to action, which is not necessarily true for belief. Orwell certainly believed that the Fascist soldier was a Fascist, but he did not *see* (*understand*) him as a Fascist, but instead as a fellow-creature, and this seeing led him to refrain from shooting the soldier. Had he instead *seen* the soldier as a Fascist, he would probably have shot the soldier (even if he believed that the soldier also was a fellow-creature).

In empathy, we believe that understanding the target as similar to oneself brings about a motivation to act for the benefit of the target. Put differently, we believe that empathy is associated with a concern for the target's well-being. This assumption is compatible with the more general assumption that empathy involves an altruistic motivation to help other people. In an extensive research program spanning over more than 20 years, Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson, 1991; Batson, Sager, Garst, Kang, Rubchinsky, & Dawson, 1997) found empirical support for the empathy-altruism connection. A large number of experiments have demonstrated that when empathizing, people are more often altruistically motivated to improve the other's well-being (rather than egoistically motivated to improve their own).

Empathy's status as an emotion (e.g., Hoffman, 1987) implies that research on the relation between emotion and action is relevant for the empathy-action connection. This is because it has been found that emotions provide people with the energy to respond to features of the environment (e.g., Frijda, 1989; Mandler, 1984; Toda, 1980). Empathy may be seen as an emotion that provides energy for helping other people (action).

The empathy-action connection will gain additional credibility if we assume that empathy is an interpersonal phenomenon. Obviously, from the target's perspective the empathizer's actions will be an indicator of his or her empathy. In line with the Correspondent Inference Theory (Jones & Davis, 1965), a helping person will be experienced as having internal states corresponding to that observable behavior. Empathy is an obvious candidate for this internal state. More specifically, it has been found that perceived empathy is largely based on the empathizer's actions, such as being facilitative or nurturing in the case of therapy (Bachelor, 1988). Similarly, Olson (1995) found a positive relationship between nurse-expressed empathy (e.g., in terms of the Behavioral Test of Interpersonal Skills) and patient-perceived empathy.

Present Study

By describing empathy from an outside perspective, the reviewed research mainly provides knowledge about researchers' observations of co-variations between empathy and a number of factors. Usually, it is not known whether the factors involved in these co-variations correspond to constituents in the experience of empathy. In the present study, the nature of constituents in empathizer's and target's empathy experiences are investigated. We examine the extent to which the same constituents occur in empathizer's and target's empathy experiences.

The interpersonal character of the empathy experience may also be shown in that empathizer and target both provide input to the empathy experience. Previous research has focused on the input from the empathizer, that is, on his or her understanding, emotions, and experiences of similarity with the target's situation and on his or her actions. From an experiential point of view, it may be hypothesized, in line with previous research conducted from an outside perspective, that the empathizer's (rather than the target's) understanding, experienced similarity, and actions are crucial for the empathy experience both from the empathizer's and target's point of view. However, as alluded to above, the situation may be different for emotions. The target's emotions may be more salient than the empathizer's emotions in the empathizers' and targets' shared experience of empathy. The empathizer may feel the force of the target's emotions (Gillett, 1993) and the target may experience it as important that the empathizer responds to his or her emotions. Consistent with the reviewed research, we predict that the empathizers as well as the targets in the present study will consider the following constituents to be important for the empathy experience: (1) the empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions, (2) the target experiences one or more emotions, (3) the empathizer perceives a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced in the past, and (4) the empathizer is in some way concerned for the target's well-being, that is being motivated to act for the benefit of the target.

Method

Participants wrote narrative accounts of situations where they had experienced empathy. Because empathy is difficult to simulate in a laboratory, participants were asked to describe an empathy situation from their own lives. This method in collecting data was found to be useful in

studying unrequited love from two perspectives (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

Participants

Fifty-six persons, 14 undergraduate students at Stockholm University and 42 employees at different places of work participated. Both students and employees were included to get a variety of individuals to describe empathy. Students were recruited from the Psychology and Business administration departments. Psychology students received course credits for participating, while the business students and the employees received lottery tickets or a book. The participants were 28 men and 28 women aged 20-64. They were guaranteed anonymity and no story was individually identifiable.

Procedure

We assigned the same number of men and women to two groups. Half of the participants (14 men and 14 women) were asked to describe a situation in which they empathized with someone, and the other half (14 men and 14 women) were asked to describe a situation in which someone else empathized with them. The instructions for the two perspectives were (in translation from Swedish) to "describe a situation in which you empathized with someone (entered into what someone was experiencing)" and to "describe a situation in which someone empathized with you (entered into what you were experiencing)," respectively. Participants were instructed to describe a personal experience of empathy, and not to write a theoretical reflection about the concept of empathy. Further, they were encouraged to do their best to remember and describe the situation in as great detail as possible. Participants wrote until they were finished with their story, which generally took about 30-60 minutes.

For ten participants, the collection of written records was followed up by an interview. In the interviews, the participants were asked about the situation they had described in the written records. The purpose of the interviews was to collect additional information about the experiences of the situations in order to get a richer understanding of the empathy phenomenon. Also, the interviews provided additional material for selecting quotes for illustrating the empathy phenomenon. All of the interviews were conducted by one of the authors and took about thirty minutes each. The interviews started with the same general question as in the written records. Follow-up questions were then asked for clarification, and further information about the experience of the situation described. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Coding

The participants often described empathy situations that were not meaningfully divided into smaller units in important respects. For instance, although a certain participant may not have used the word "understood" in any specific statement in the text, it may be evident when reading the entire story that the empathizer understood the target. Conversely, single statements could equally reasonably be coded in different ways. For instance, the statement "I felt sorrow when I experienced her loneliness" could be interpreted as that *the empathizer and the target experienced emotion*, *the empathizer understood the target*, and that the empathizer was concerned for the target's well-being. Based on these observations, we decided to code the stories as wholes, instead of dividing them into statements. In this respect, the coding procedure used in this study was in essence the same as that used by Baumeister, Wotman, and Stillwell (1993) for coding stories of unrequited love from two perspectives. Before coding, the handwritten empathy stories were typed by one of the authors (JH) to hinder any potential effects of the participants' handwriting and to further assure the anonymity of the participants. Three of the stories (one empathizer and two targets) were excluded because the participants had not adequately followed the instructions.

A list of coding features was produced by the authors. We tried to generate enough features to cover the content of the stories as well as possible. These attempts were guided by a common structure that we found in the stories, which also made sense from a semantic point of view when considering what it means to experience empathy. Thus, we expected that each story would involve (a) an empathizer and a target having some kind of relationship to each other, (b) a situation where something has happened to the target, (c) the empathizer's and the target's thoughts, emotions, and actions in relation to what has happened to the target (expected to provide evidence of empathy constituents) as well as (d) consequences of the empathy experience. Consequently, we listed all features (e. g. by trying to supplement a given feature by its antonym) within these general categories in a systematic way. We repeatedly checked and updated the list of features by reading through the stories. The list of features was also inspired by a pilot study where 112 introductory psychology students at Stockholm University answered the open-ended question "What is empathy in your opinion?" Altogether 67 features were generated. To get a more abstract, less detailed, and simpler characterization of the features, they were collapsed into 21 dimensions

(see Table 3 and Table 4). For instance, the features *empathizer is a parent of target*, *target is a parent of empathizer*, *empathizer and target are siblings*, *empathizer is a grandparent of target*, *target is a grandparent of empathizer*, and *empathizer and target are related in some other way* were collapsed into the dimension "empathizer and target are relatives". The raters' task was to determine if a feature was present (coded as "yes") or not (coded as "no") in a story.

One of the authors (JH) then coded all the empathy stories on all 67 features. Two other raters, one woman and one man, both graduate students of psychology, each coded half of the stories on all 67 features for the purpose of computing reliability. Thus, each story was coded by two raters. Differences in coding among raters were discussed, and the final coding reflected a consensus on all 67 features.

Reliability

In order to estimate the inter-rater reliability, stability of assessments across raters was measured. Inter-rater agreements (before discussion) were computed for the 21 dimensions. The proportion of agreements between raters ranged from 77% to 100%, with a mean of 89.4%. Cohen's kappa ranged from .40 to 1.00 with a mean of .70. , which suggests a reasonable inter-observer reliability (Bakeman & Gottman,1989).

The assessment of inter-rater reliability was supplemented by asking four of the participants for their opinion of the interpretations and analyses of their protocols. All of them could personally identify with the results.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The results are based on the 21 dimensions presented in Tables 3 and 4. The data analysis revealed similarities as well as differences between the two perspectives on the 21 dimensions. Constituents were identified among these dimensions based on the following two criteria: (i) relatively high frequency in both empathizers' and targets' stories and (ii) involving the empathizer's and the target's thoughts, emotions, and actions in relation to what has happened to the target. Using these criteria, we identified the four predicted constituents. Expressions illustrating the constituents of understanding, target's emotions, and concern occurred in practically all descriptions. The frequency of similarity expressions was somewhat lower (Table 4). However, this frequency was equally high in empathizers' and targets' stories and similarity between empathizer and

target was connected to experiences of empathy in most of the ten follow-up interviews. Examples of all four constituents in one empathizer's and in one target's story are shown in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

The characteristics of empathizer and target, the empathy situation, the emotions involved, the four constituents, and the consequences of empathy are presented below, illustrated by quotes from the participants showing how empathizers and targets experienced empathy situations.

Characteristics of Empathizer and Target

The characteristics of empathizers and targets are summarized in Table 3. In the majority of the empathy stories (60.4%), empathizers and targets knew each other prior to the event (Table 3). This was the case in both empathizers' and targets' stories. The empathizer and target were often friends or relatives, or had a professional relationship. None of the participants chose to describe a situation where their current or former romantic partner was the empathizer or the target.

A pattern in both empathizers' and targets' stories was that the other person was more often a woman (64.2%) than a man (35.8%). In other words, in these stories where the participants were free to choose, women occurred more often than men as empathizers and also more often as targets, being the case for both men and women. On the other hand, χ^2-tests revealed no significant differences between the stories written by men and women on any of the 21 dimensions.

Type of Situation

The types of situations that were described by empathizers and targets are summarized in Table 3. In both empathizers' and targets' stories, the targets were more often in a difficult or troublesome situation (94.3%) than in a pleasant situation (1.9%). The dimension "something bad has happened to the target" was defined by the features *the target experiences illness or injury*, *the target experiences death of someone close*, *the target experiences personal problems*, *the target experiences relationship problems*, *the target experiences loss or damage of property*, *the target experiences being homeless*, *the target experiences loss of his or her job*, and *the target experiences some other kind of troublesome situation*. For instance, a female empathizer described how difficult a target's situation was:

> She told me about her feelings of despair and guilt for her husband's death, not being able to prevent it, not having a chance to forgive, the

rage because of being alone with the children, the house, the economy…

Understanding

The dimension of understanding included four features that reflected different aspects of the empathizer's understanding of the target: *understanding the situation*, *understanding the feelings*, *imagining how the target experiences the situation*, and *imagining how the target feels*. Some kind of understanding of the target was mentioned in a great majority of stories (86.8%). From both perspectives, the empathizer's understanding of the situation and emotion was a central feature of the empathy situation (Table 4). Empathizers and targets did not differ with regard to their mentioning of understanding, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.748, *ns*.

Often, the empathizer thought that he or she understood some aspects of the target's situation even better than the target himself or herself. A 26 year old woman said about her friend:

> Among other things, she struggles with very low self-confidence. In addition, there are other issues, like being single. I really feel so sorry for her. She is an individual with many qualities that she disregards or that she can't see herself.

Emotion

Emotions were coded as present when the empathizer or the target experienced positive or negative emotions in the empathy situation (emotions experienced as a *consequence* of the empathy experience were coded as a "consequence of empathy experience" instead of coded as an emotion). The term emotion was used in a broad sense, including feelings, affects, pleasure and pain, longings, and wishes. The main findings regarding emotions are shown in Table 4. Emotions were included to a great extent in both empathizers' (92.6%) and targets' (96.2%) stories. Empathizers and targets did not differ with regard to their mentioning of emotion, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.000, *ns*. A young woman that empathized, talked about her own feelings as well as her colleague's:

> I feel the mother's (my colleague's) and the father's grief so strongly.

The target's emotions were also mentioned in a great majority of empathizers' (81.5%) and targets' (96.2%) stories. Again, the difference

in percentage between empathizers' and targets' mentioning of target's emotions was not significant, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.1.57, *ns*. What was specially noted from both perspectives was targets' negative emotions. In both empathizers' and targets' stories, the target experienced negative emotion. The difference in percentage between empathizers' and targets' mentioning of target's negative emotions was non-significant, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.975, *ns*. For example, one empathizer noted that his mother-in-law experienced negative emotions:

> My mother-in-law experienced severe death agony, feelings of panic.

Targets more frequently spoke about targets' (their own) positive emotions than empathizers did, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=18.12, *p*<.001. On the other hand, empathizers more often spoke about empathizers' (their own) emotions (74.1%) than targets did (15.4%), χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=16.12, *p*<.001.

Similarity

The dimension of similarity was defined by the features, *empathizer has been in exactly the same situation as target, empathizer has experienced exactly the same emotion as target, empathizer has experienced a similar situation, empathizer has experienced a similar emotion*, and *there are similarities between empathizer and target*. Similarity was mentioned almost equally as often by empathizers as by targets (Table 4). The difference between empathizers' and targets' mentioning of similarity was non-significant, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.000, *ns*.

The empathizers typically perceived a similarity between the target's experience and something they had experienced previously themselves. More precisely, empathizers talked about recognizing something in the other person's experience that they had experienced themselves before. Also targets acknowledged that the empathizers' experiences of similarity are crucial for their empathy. For instance, a 26 year old man pointed out the value of similar experiences in the empathy process:

> It's probably easier to empathize if you have experience, than if it is something completely unfamiliar.

The similarities between the target's and the empathizer's experiences were at different levels of abstraction. In some cases, the empathizer had experienced the exact same thing the target was

experiencing. In other cases, the similarity was on a more abstract, fundamental level, and thus less precise. A 26 year old woman talked about a similarity at a low level of abstraction, a precise match between what her girlfriend experienced and what she herself had experienced earlier in her own life:

> It could have been me as well. I have also woken up and felt in terrible agony because of having drunk too much.

As a target, a 23 year old man experienced similarity at a low level of abstraction. The girl that empathized with him had been in conflict situations with her parents:

> Also, I felt that the conflict I had with my parents wasn't very unique, and that this intelligent girl had also experienced similar situations.

A 36 year old man perceived a similarity between a homeless person's life situation and his own experiences at a more fundamental level:

> Sleeping on a park bench has a resemblance, to a miniscule degree, with sleeping outside during military service.

Targets spoke of similarity at higher levels of abstractions as well as at lower levels. A 20 year old woman noted how difficult experiences can help to understand other people, although the events may differ in detail:

> She is a very empathetic person. I have other close friends that I like, but they haven't lost anyone close, nor given me the impression of ever having had a really difficult time in life.

Concern

The dimension of concern involved the empathizer's care for the target, specifically the features of *giving time*, *paying attention*, *giving the target advice*, *doing something for the target*, *being concerned for the target*, *being respectful towards the target*, and *performing coordinated acts demonstrating concern*.

Concern for the target's welfare was mentioned in a great majority of the stories (92.5%). From both perspectives concern was central to the empathy experience (Table 4). Empathizers' and targets' did not differ

with regard to mentioning concern, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=.000, *ns*. The empathizer saw the target's purposes as something that really matters. Empathizers conceived of the target's emotions in a way that resonates with him or her. In fact, the empathizer's reactions appear to be more appropriate to the target's situation than to his or her own situation. The empathizer shows the target through actions that his or her feelings of concern are genuine. The targets especially stressed that the empathizer's behavior proved to them that the empathizer's reactions were true empathy. From the empathizer's perspective, one young woman described how she spent time with her grandmother:

> What I can do is to show her the love and care that I feel, and to express that by, for example, listening to her and seeing her and talking to her and giving her time and attention and giving her something that I think that she wants.

The targets, as well as the empathizers, talked about attention and the giving of one's time in empathy. A 26 year old man said about the nurse that helped him at the hospital:

> I got the feeling that she was genuinely interested, that it was beyond what was required of her job.

A 57 year old woman said about the woman who helped her in a difficult situation at the employment exchange:

> Due to the fact that someone took time and really listened to me, I appealed and received my membership and a lot of money retroactively.

Empathizers often explicitly stated that they were motivated to do something for the target. A 26 year old woman said that she really wanted to help her friend:

> I wish I could make her feel better.

A 64 year old woman pointed out how a specific act can demonstrate understanding and care:

She gave me two homemade candles wrapped in tissue paper. The woman said nothing. We cried together. Words weren't needed to explain her compassion and understanding.

Consequences

The dimension of "positive consequences of empathy experience" was defined by the features, *the empathy experience has some positive consequence for the empathizer after the situation is over*, *the empathy experience has some positive consequence for the target after the situation is over*, *the target experiences positive emotions as a consequence of the empathy experience*, and *the relationship is improved as a consequence of the empathy experience*. The dimension of "negative consequences of empathy experience" was defined by the features, *the empathy experience has some negative consequence for the empathizer after the situation is over*, *the empathy experience has some negative consequence for the target after the situation is over*, *the target experiences negative emotions as a consequence of the empathy experience*, and *the empathizer feels powerless over not being able to help as much as he or she would have liked*. Empathizers as well as targets mentioned both positive and negative consequences of empathy (Table 4). However, targets more often spoke about positive consequences of the empathy experience than empathizers did, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=9.56, *p*<.005. Positive consequences can, for example, be that the target has been helped in a troublesome situation, views the situation in a more positive way, or is feeling better after having talked with someone that understands his or her situation and emotions. A woman said for instance about the empathy she received from a colleague at her place of work:

She made me feel like SOMEONE. This empathy made me grow as a human being.

In contrast, empathizers more often spoke of negative consequences of the empathy experience than targets did, χ^2 (1, N=53 stories)=5.67, *p*<.05. These consequences could, for instance, be that the empathizer was very sad or worried about the target afterwards. One woman described how she felt after having empathized:

Afterwards I felt very tired, probably because I cried so much, but at the same time I felt despaired and overcome by the fact that things are so bad for children in our society.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to describe the phenomenon of empathy from both the empathizer's and the target's perspectives. Descriptions of freely chosen empathy situations from empathizers' or targets' perspectives were collected from 56 participants. An advantage of letting the participants choose a situation themselves was that the situations described were probably good examples of empathy. Nearly all participants could think of a situation where they experienced empathy, remembered this situation in detail, and could express in words what happened, and remembered what they were thinking, feeling, and doing. The present data suggest that there are four constituents that are present both in the empathizer's and the target's experiences of empathy. We think that the key to this congruity in targets' and empathizers' experience is to be found in the fact that empathy is an interpersonal phenomenon. Below, we discuss the evidence for this assertion as well as its nature.

The presence of the four constituents was observed to a great extent in both empathizers' *and* targets' descriptions of empathy situations. Thus, both empathizers and targets stated that the empathizer understood the target's situation, showed concern for the target, and perceived similarity between the target's situation and the empathizer's previous experiences. As far as emotions are concerned, both empathizers and targets referred to their *own* emotions. However, targets did not usually refer to the empathizer's emotions. In contrast, a great majority of empathizers referred to the target's emotions. Thus, it appears that the target's emotions may be seen as a constituent in the empathy experience that is shared by the empathizer and target. Obviously, the empathy experience is focused on the target's situation rather than the empathizer's situation. In this sense, the relationship between empathizer and target is asymmetric.

In general, we think that the similarities between empathizers' and targets' descriptions were more striking than the differences with respect to frequencies of the different constituents that were observed. This is because one might expect greater differences than were, in fact, found. After all, at least three constituents - understanding the target's situation and the target's emotions, target's emotions, and perceived similarity - are typically seen as internal rather than external phenomena, that is phenomena occurring inside the empathizer's or the target's mental world. Still, the empathizers and the targets referred to the same constituents in their descriptions of the empathy situations. How is this

possible? To answer this question, we need to consider the fourth constituent - the empathizer's concern for the target.

The empathizer's concern for the target is typically (but not necessarily) expressed in overt actions. The empathizers in our study showed their concern by paying attention to, listening to, responding to, and helping the target in many ways. These actions occur *between* empathizer and target. They are performed in a shared reality (cf. Hardin & Higgins, 1996) where the empathizer and target cooperate to the target's benefit. The empathizer attends to the target's needs and often tries to help, whereas the target welcomes the empathizer's concern (we found no case where the target turned down the empathizer's concern).

How does the data show that actions associated with concern could make empathy an interpersonal phenomenon? The actions, which serve as an expression of the empathizer's concern, *communicate* something to the target. They communicate that the empathizer understands the target's situation (e. g., as a result of listening carefully). The actions associated with concern also serve as the empathizer's response to the target's situation, particularly to the emotional distress (the typical case) experienced by the target. This response is in turn communicated to the target by showing compassion to him or her. Finally, empathizers' concern for the target sometimes involved telling him or her that they had been in a similar situation as the target (often reported in the targets' reports). Thus, in the communication between empathizer and target, the three "internal" constituents become external (i.e., socially shared, by means of the communication expressed and received in the concern constituent). The three "internal" constituents all address features of the target's situation that are necessary for making the concern adequate. Without understanding the situation, the empathizer's actions could easily become misdirected and no adequate concern would then be shown. Without focusing on the target's emotions, the actions will miss the sensitiveness and the involvement that are necessary for communicating the concern to the target and making him or her ready to welcome this concern. Finally, the fact that the situation is based on shared experiences makes it possible for the empathizer and target to cooperate from a shared understanding of the target's situation. Our data show that these shared experiences can occur at different levels of generality. Thus, in order to understand another person, people do not need to have experienced exactly the same thing as that other individual. The other's experience can be abstracted to a level where it resembles something the empathizer has previously experienced and thereby understood.

It is important to note that the present study does not examine causal connections between the empathy experience and its constituents. Thus, even though participants' descriptions suggest that they perceive empathy from actions associated with concern we do not know to what extent and how the actions are *causally connected* with the empathy experience. For example, our data do not exclude the possibility that empathizers and targets may experience empathy also in cases when no concern is shown (although practically all stories referred to concern). To clarify this issue, experimental investigations may be conducted where the empathy experience is examined as a function of presence of actions related to concern.

In this study, we have been critical about viewing empathy as existing only within the empathizing person. Similarly, other researchers have criticized the stress on individuals' ways of functioning in modern psychology (for a review, see Gergen, 1994). Also in social psychology, research is mainly concerned with individuals' cognitions and behavior, although here these activities are related to characteristics and behavior of other people. As pointed out by Gergen (e. g., Gergen, 1994; Gergen & Walker, 1998), an alternative possibility is to use the interpersonal relationship as the basic unit in psychology. Other researchers have claimed that attitudes and opinions do not exist within people but are adopted or constructed in conversations implying that these phenomena must be understood from their functions in social interchanges (Billig, 1991; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In the same vein, our data show that empathy can be understood in interpersonal terms such as communication, cooperation, and shared reality.

Although the two perspectives converged to a great extent, some interesting differences between empathizers and targets with regard to consequences of the empathy experience appeared. Data suggested that targets experience more positive consequences of the empathy situation than do empathizers. This seems intelligible considering that it is the target who is in a troublesome situation getting support, is being helped, or is feeling understood. It seems also plausible that the empathizers rather than targets stress negative consequences of the empathy experience. After all, it is for the empathizer empathy has a price in terms of time, attention, or making an effort for the empathizer– one can perhaps say that "it costs to help". Most empathizers did in fact really care about the target and often reported feeling sad or powerless afterwards because of not being able to help as much as they would have liked.

A gender difference was also noted in the data. Participants freely chose whom to write about, and this resulted in the fact that in the majority of the empathy stories the other person was a woman, independently of whether the writer was a man or a woman him or herself and independently of whether the other was an empathizer or a target. Why then did the participants choose to write about woman? Although the empirical evidence is mixed regarding whether women really are more empathetic than men (Davis, 1996; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), women are usually perceived as being more empathetic (Davis, 1996). This may be part of the explanation for women being chosen more often as empathizers. Possible explanations for women being more often chosen as targets are that women might have more desire for empathy or that it might be easier to empathize with a woman.

Also notable was the fact that none of the participants chose to write about empathy with a current or former romantic partner. One can only speculate about the explanation for this finding. Perhaps one is too involved and close with one's romantic partner to have the emotional distance that one wants for being able to describe empathy experiences in a research context.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the perspectives of empathizers and targets coincide to a great extent. Both empathizers and targets experience four distinct constituents of empathy. These constituents are (1) the empathizer's understanding of the target's situation and emotions, (2) the target's experiencing of emotion, (3) the empathizer's perception of similar experiences, and (4) the empathizer's concern about the target's well-being. It is suggested that actions associated with the fourth constituent - concern - make empathy an interpersonal phenomenon.

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Footnotes

[1]The term "constituent" was preferred to the very similar term "component" since "constituent" more than "component" refers to a basic part of a whole (Watson, 1980).

Table 1
Example of the Four Constituents from one Empathizer's Perspective

The author of the empathy story and the other person	Empathizer understands	Target experiences emotion	Empathizer perceives a similarity with previous experience	Empathizer is concerned about the target's well-being
Empathizer: Woman, 26 Target: Empathizer's grandmother	Then it doesn't matter if she talks, then the words are not important, but to take her in; not get stuck on the surface, but to see the whole person as she is.	I see her with all her experiences, her longing, her wishes.	There is something true I really can identify myself with… see that there is very much the same longings and the same things that guide us.	That's what's in the feeling, that you wish to do something.

Table 2
Example of the Four Constituents from one Target's Perspective

The author of the empathy story and the other person	Empathizer understands	Target experiences emotion	Empathizer perceives a similarity with previous experience	Empathizer is concerned about the target's well-being
Target: Woman, 20 Empathizer: Target's friend	I knew also at those times when we didn't talk exactly about my brother or how my family or I felt, that she knew.	I imagine she also could feel my fear of losing someone, but I don't think we had exactly the same feeling.	My friend lost her grandfather, to whom she was very close, a couple of years earlier, so she had at least some understanding of…	I could call her at any time, and know that if I wanted I could always come home to her and just talk.

Table 3
Characteristics of Empathizers, Targets, and Empathy Situations

	Percentage coded as yes	
Dimension	Empathizers' stories	Targets' stories
The other person is a man	37.0	30.8
The other person is a woman	66.7	61.5
Empathizer and target know each other from before	55.6	65.4
Empathizer and target do not know each other from before	29.6	30.8
Empathizer and target are friends	14.8	30.8
Empathizer and target are relatives	25.9	11.5
Empathizer and target have a professional relationship	40.7	53.8
Something good has happened to target	3.7	0.0
Something bad has happened to target	77.8	76.9
Something bad has happened to someone the target knows	37.0	23.1

Table 4

Understanding, Emotion, Similarity, Dissimilarity, Concern, and Consequences

	Percentage coded as yes	
Dimension	Empathizers' stories	Targets' stories
Empathizer understands situation and/or emotions	92.6	80.8
Empathizer experiences positive emotions	29.6	7.7
Empathizer experiences negative emotions*	70.4	11.5
Target experiences positive emotions*	18.5	80.8
Target experiences negative emotions	74.1	88.5
Empathizer feels sorry for target	33.3	11.5
Similarity of previous experiences	44.4	42.3
Dissimilarity of previous experiences	29.6	15.4
Empathizer is concerned about the target's well-being	92.6	92.3
Positive consequences of empathy experience*	44.4	88.5
Negative consequences of empathy experience*	70.4	11.5

*Significant difference between the two perspectives on the dimension (χ^2), p<.05.

STUDY 2

THE ROLE OF ACTION IN EMPATHY FROM THE PERSPECTIVES
OF THE EMPATHIZER AND THE TARGET

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ABSTRACT
*Three experiments explored the role of a person's actions on how
empathetic the person is perceived to be from the perspective of an
unspecified observer (Study 1) and from the empathizer's and the target's
perspectives (Studies 2 and 3). In each experiment, undergraduates read
different versions of a story about a boss who fires an employee and
afterwards rated the boss' empathy. The results of the three experiments
suggested that action is crucial in the experience of empathy from both
empathizer's and target's perspectives (Studies 2 and 3), as well as from
the perspective of an unspecified observer (Study 1). It is concluded that
the convergence between the empathizer and the target on the importance
of action in empathy can be understood in terms of empathy being an
interpersonal phenomenon.*

Empathy is a central phenomenon in human social interaction (Bohart &
Greenberg, 1997; Davis, 1996: Rogers, 1959). Several researchers have
found a close connection between empathy towards a target and a
motivation to act for the benefit of the target (Coke, Batson, & McDavis,
1978; Davis, 1983; Håkansson & Montgomery, in press; Krebs, 1975) (for
a review, see also Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman,
2000). Thus, empathy is not only an intrapersonal phenomenon involving
cognitions, emotions, and motivations that in some sense exist inside the
empathizer (e.g. Barrett-Lennard, 1981; Håkansson & Montgomery, in
press). It may also be studied as an interpersonal activity, where one person
shows his or her concern for another person.

Research on the connection between empathy and social action may be studied from several different perspectives. Most previous research has been carried out from an outside perspective, where the researcher looks for causal connections between specific states, such as emotion and motivation (e.g., Batson, Sager, Garts, Kang, Rubchinsky, & Dawson, 1997; Coke et al., 1978; Davis, 1983; Duan, 2000). A few studies have taken the target's perspective and have found that targets perceive empathy largely in terms of the empathizer's actions, such as being facilitative or nurturing towards the target (e.g., Bachelor, 1988; Olson, 1995).

In a recent study, we explored how empathy is experienced from both the empathizer's and the target's perspectives (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press). Participants were asked to describe situations where they had empathized with someone (empathizer's perspective) or a situation in which someone else had empathized with them (target's perspective). We found four constituents in the empathy experience to be common from both perspectives: (1) the empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions, (2) the target experiences one or more emotions, (3) the empathizer perceives a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced previously, and (4) the empathizer is concerned for the target's well-being. The four constituents were observed to a great extent in both empathizers' *and* targets' descriptions of empathy situations. It was argued that these four constituents get their meaning from empathy's character of being an interpersonal phenomenon and that they comprise a meaningful whole, where the presence of each constituent is dependent on the presence of the other three constituents.

In our recent study (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press), the empathizer's concern for the target was usually expressed in actions that communicated to the target that the empathizer understands the target's situation and that this understanding is genuine. In the communication between empathizer and target, the three internal constituents become external and shared. Concern, as shown in overt action, may be assumed to be the connection between empathizer's expression and communication of empathy and the target's reception and understanding of the empathy.

The present study focuses on the role of the empathizer's actions for the empathy experience. Our previous study suggested that action was *perceived* to be an important constituent in the empathy experience from both the empathizer's and the target's perspective. In the present study we

take a further step by examining the extent to which the empathizer's actions *cause* people to infer that they themselves (empathizer's perspective) or others (target's or observer's perspective) are empathetic. If it is found that the occurrence of certain actions by the empathizer leads to an inference that he or she is emphatic, this will add to the validity of the phenomenological reports showing the central role of actions in the empathy experience. That is, such results will provide evidence that the phenomenological reports are not seriously distorted by selective memory or by lacking self-insight. At the same time, agreement between phenomenological reports and experimental results implies that phenomenological data may be used for interpreting experimental data on inferences about empathy.

To investigate the role of action in perceived empathy from the perspectives of the empathizer and the target an experimental approach was used where participants read different stories of empathizers showing more or less overt concern to a target. Judgments of perceived empathy were made from the perspective of an unspecified observer (Study 1) or from the perspectives of the empathizer or the target (Studies 2 and 3). We hypothesized that concern expressed in overt action would have an effect on perceived empathy. More precisely, we expected that action plays a crucial role for perceived empathy as compared to empathy expressed in words only (Study 1). Although empathy typically is referred to as an internal mental phenomenon (in terms of understanding or emotions) (e. g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Hoffman, 1987), which can be expressed in words, we think that people in everyday life expect that real empathy must be shown in action or at least in a manifest motivation to act. "Actions speak louder than words." To the extent that this assertion is true, future research on empathy would benefit by considering the role of action for perceived empathy, and not only focus on the mental – "internal" - aspects of empathy.

Since our earlier study (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press) showed a convergence between empathizers' and targets' perceptions of the empathy situation regarding the importance of action, we expect this pattern to be found from both perspectives. It should be noted that although this result is predicted from our recent study, it does not follow self-evidently from previous research. Conversely, a large body of research has demonstrated that actors view their own behavior differently than how observers or targets interpret the actor's behavior. In line with the so called actor-observer discrepancy it has been shown that actors interpret their own

behavior as more driven by external causes and less by internal factors as compared to how observers view the same actions (for a review, see Watson, 1982). In the present study this would mean that the variations in the empathizer's behavior should be seen as more related to a variation in empathy (internal factor) from the target's perspective (observer) than from the empathizer's perspective (actor). Instead, we hypothesized, in line with our recent study, that empathy may be a case where actors' and targets' common focus take priority over the differences between actors' and observers' perspectives that appear in other situations.

STUDY 1

In the first experiment, we manipulated the two variables "understanding" and "promise to act" to test the prediction that a person's actions of concern have greater impact than verbally claimed understanding on how empathetic a person is perceived by others. To test this prediction, we asked participants to read slightly different versions of a story about a boss that fires an employee. After reading the story, participants were asked to rate the boss' level of empathy.

Method

Participants. Participants for Experiment 1 were 112 students in the introductory psychology course at Stockholm University. They took part in the experiment to earn partial credit toward a course requirement. Using a between-subjects design we assigned participants to each of four experimental conditions. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous.

Procedure. Participants read one of four versions of a story (no understanding/no promise to act, understanding/no promise to act, no understanding/promise to act, or understanding/promise to act) about a boss at a small company who fires one of the employees that has worked there for a long time. After reading the story, participants were asked to tell how empathetic they perceived the boss in the story to be. Finally, in order to obtain insight into how the participants defined empathy, they were asked to answer the open-ended question "What is empathy in your opinion?"

Independent variables. Although the four versions were similar to a great extent, they differed slightly from each other in that the two variables "boss understanding" and "boss' promise to act" had been manipulated. The manipulation of these two variables consequently produced four different

stories and thus four different experimental conditions. Participants in the no understanding/no promise to act-condition read:

A company has had financial problems for some period of time. This is a small company with about twenty employees where everyone knows everybody else. All the employees know that because of the financial problems it is necessary to reduce the staff. One of the employees has worked at this company for approximately twelve years. He likes his job and thinks it would be difficult to lose his job. Now the employee is called in to the boss' office, where the boss says: "Because of financial difficulties at our company, you unfortunately have to quit your job, even though you are very important to the company. I want to thank you very much for your time at the company."

Participants in the understanding/no promise to act-condition read the same story with the addition "I understand how you feel. It must of course be difficult to lose your job." Participants in the no understanding/promise to act-condition also read this story, but instead of reading "I understand how you feel. It must of course be difficult to lose your job." *They read* "To compensate for the loss of your job, I will personally try to find a new job for you through my contacts." Participants in the understanding/promise to act-condition also read this story, but with both conditions added: "I understand how you feel. It must of course be difficult to lose your job. To compensate for the loss of your job I will personally try to find a new job for you through my contacts."

Dependent variables. After reading the story, participants were asked to rate the boss' level of empathy along a 9-point scale with anchors at *not at all* (1) and *very much* (9). Rating of the boss' empathy was the major dependent measure. To check whether participants really believed how difficult it was for the employee to lose his job, they were also asked to tell how they thought the employee perceived the loss of the job on the same type of 9-point scale with the anchors *easy* (1) and *difficult* (9).

Results and Discussion

Definitions of empathy. In response to the question "What is empathy in your opinion?" participants generated their views concerning the meaning of the term "empathy." Most commonly, empathy was defined in terms of understanding another's thoughts/perspective/situation/experiences (mentioned 87 times), understanding/entering into another's feelings (66

times), and feeling in/feeling with/feeling compassion (49 times). Although less frequent, empathy was also characterized as a respectful attitude (30 times) and concern expressed in action (18 times).

Perception of the employee's experience of the situation. Participants in all four conditions believed it to be difficult for the employee to lose his job ($M = 8.28$). A 2 (understanding/no understanding) X 2 (promised action/not promised action) ANOVA did not reveal any reliable differences in perceived difficulty across conditions.

Perception of the boss' empathy. Mean ratings of the boss' empathy in the four experimental conditions are presented in Table 1. A 2 (understanding/no understanding) X 2 (promised action/no promised action) ANOVA revealed that there was an effect of "promise to act" on perceived empathy, which was in line with the predictions, $F(1,108) = 29.26$, $p < .001$. In contrast, the effect of "understanding" was only marginally significant, $F(1,108) = 3.48$, $p = .065$, and there was no reliable interaction between "understanding" and "promise to act," $F(1,108) = 2.51$, *ns*.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Number of Cases by Condition for Participants' Perceptions of the Boss' Empathy in Study 1

	The boss does not claim to understand the employee's feelings		The boss claims to understand the employee's feelings	
	The boss does not promise to act	The boss promises to act	The boss does not promise to act	The boss promises to act
Mean rating	2.68	5.36	4.00	5.46
Standard deviation	1.52	2.33	2.26	1.90
Number of cases	28	28	28	28

In this first study, the two variables "understanding" and "promise to act" were manipulated. The data suggested that in order to be perceived as empathetic it is more important to promise to act than to verbally express understanding. In particular, when one promises to act, expressed

understanding seems to have little additional effect on perceived empathy. This indicates that action has an influence on perceived empathy, and more so than verbally expressed understanding.

STUDY 2

Experiment 1 supported the hypothesis that action plays a significant role in the perception of empathy. However, this result did not clarify how this is perceived from the empathizer's and the target's perspectives, respectively. That is, do the empathizer and the target in the present study perceive action as equally important for the empathy as was found in the narrative accounts analyzed in our earlier study (Håkansson och Montgomery, in press)? More specifically, we examined whether action is perceived as more important than expressed understanding for the perception of empathy from the boss' and the employee's perspectives.

Method

Participants. Participants for Experiment 2 were 103 introductory psychology students at Stockholm University. They took part in the experiment as an option for getting extra insight into social cognition research. Using a between-subjects design, we assigned participants to each of four experimental conditions. Again, participants were assured that they would remain anonymous.

Procedure. The procedure in Study 2 was identical to that of Study 1, except for the choice of manipulated variables. This time, we also assigned participants randomly to read one of four slightly different versions of the same story as in Study 1 about the boss that fires an employee, and then they were asked to indicate the boss' level of empathy. However, the manipulated variables instead were "understanding/promise to act" and "boss' perspective/employee's perspective." This meant that we asked half of the participants to take the boss' perspective and the other half to take the employee's perspective while reading the story and answering the questions. After reading, they were also this time asked to indicate the boss' empathy and how easy/difficult they thought the situation was for the employee.

Independent variables. The manipulation of the two variables produced four different stories, as in Study 1. Participants in the boss' perspective/understanding-condition read the same story as those in the

understanding/no promise to act-condition in Study 1, and in addition were instructed to: "Please imagine that you are the boss while reading the story." Participants in the boss' perspective/promise to act-condition read the same story, but instead of "I understand how you feel. It must of course be difficult to lose your job." they read "To compensate for the loss of your job I will personally try to find a new job for you through my contacts." Participants in the employee's perspective/understanding-condition read the same story as those in the boss' perspective/understanding-condition, but were instead instructed to imagine that they were the employee while reading the story. Participants in the employee's perspective/promise to act-condition were also instructed to take the employee's perspective. They read the same story, but instead of "I understand how you feel. It must of course be difficult to lose your job." they read "To compensate for the loss of your job I will personally try to find a new job for you through my contacts." Also, the pronouns in the different versions of the story were adjusted to the two perspectives, respectively. More specifically, those participants that were supposed to take the employee's perspective read "you (the employee)" and "the boss," and those taking the boss' perspective read "you (the boss)" and "he (the employee)."

Dependent variables. After reading the story, we also this time asked the participants to rate the boss' level of empathy and to indicate how difficult the situation was for the employee. How empathetic the boss ("you" in the boss' perspective-condition and "the boss" in the employee's perspective-condition) was perceived was again rated along a 9-point scale with anchors at *not at all* (1) and *very much* (9). How the participants believed the employee ("he" in the boss' perspective-condition and "you" in the employee's perspective-condition) perceived the situation was again measured on the same type of 9-point scale with the anchors *easy* (1) and *difficult* (9).

Results and Discussion

Perception of the employee's experience of the situation. Participants in all four conditions believed it to be difficult for the employee to lose his job ($M = 7.78$). However, a 2 (employee's perspective/boss' perspective) X 2 (promised action/understanding) ANOVA revealed that "promise to act" had a significant effect on perceived difficulty so that the situation was perceived as more difficult, $F(1,99) = 15.33$, $p < .001$. In contrast, there was no significant effect of "perspective," $F(1,99) = 3.00$, *ns* and no significant interaction effect, $F(1,99) = .003$, *ns*.

Perception of the boss' empathy. What was different in this study, compared to Study 1, was that we asked the participants to take either the boss' or the employee's perspective while reading the story and answering the questions. The perception of the boss' empathy in the four different conditions is shown in Table 2. A 2 (employee's perspective/boss' perspective) X 2 (promised action/understanding) ANOVA was performed. As in Study 1, the main effect of "promise to act" on perceived empathy was significant, $F(1,99) = 10.95$, $p < .001$. In contrast, there was no reliable main effect of perspective, $F(1,99) = .746$, *ns*. However, there was a significant interaction effect of "promise to act" and "perspective," $F(1,99) = 5.76$, $p < .05$. Scheffe's tests revealed that the mean of the empathy ratings in the boss' perspective/promise to act-condition was significantly higher than the mean in the boss'perspective/understanding-condition ($p < .005$) and in the employee's perspective/understanding-condition ($p < .05$).

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Number of Cases by Condition for Perceptions of the Boss' Empathy by Participants Taking the Boss' or the Employee's Perspectives in Study 2

	Boss' perspective		Employee's perspective	
	The boss claims to understand the employee's feelings	The boss promises to act	The boss claims to understand the employee's feelings	The boss promises to act
Mean rating	3.46	5.46	4.00	4.32
Standard deviation	1.90	1.70	1.95	1.39
Number of cases	26	26	29	22

In this experiment, the effect of "promise to act" was again significant. What was new in this study compared to Study 1, however, was that we asked the participants to take either the boss' or the employee's perspective while reading the story and answering the questions. In the condition "promise to act," the boss (participants taking boss' perspective) perceived the boss to be more empathetic than the employee perceived (participants taking employee's perspective) the boss to be. Although the employee

regarded the boss as more empathetic when promising to act, the greatest effect was on the boss' self-perception of being empathetic. A reasonable explanation for this finding is that the boss, when promising to act, really felt committed to an act that would cost time and effort, and therefore was empathetic. In contrast, the employee may not have trusted the boss fully to really carry out the promised act, and therefore perceived the boss as less empathetic. We decided, consequently, to investigate further when there is and when there is not a difference between the two perspectives.

STUDY 3

From the results of Study 2, we reasoned that the boss when promising to act had a self-perception of being very empathetic, while the employee on the other hand did not fully believe that the boss was really going to carry out the promised act. Therefore, in this third study we hypothesized that if the boss would actually carry out the act, the employee would also perceive the boss as very empathetic. We assumed that if we created a story where the boss was truly acting, and not just promising to act, the boss would be perceived as equally empathetic from the employee's and the boss' perspectives. To test our interpretation of the interaction involving perspective and promise to act, we asked the participants in this study how trustworthy they thought the boss was.

Method

Participants. Participants were 122 students at the introductory psychology course at Stockholm University. Again, they took part in the experiment as an option for getting research experience. Using a between-subjects design, we assigned participants to each of four experimental conditions. Anonymity was also assured on this occasion.

Procedure. The procedure in Study 3 was basically the same as those of Study 1 and Study 2, except for the manipulated variables and one of the measured variables. In this third study, the manipulated variables were "action" and "perspective." As in Study 2, we asked half of the participants to take the boss' perspective and the others the employee's perspective. As in Studies 1 and 2, participants were asked to indicate the boss' empathy, but this time instead of answering how they believed the employee perceived the situation, we asked them to indicate how trustworthy the boss was.

Independent variables. Participants in the boss' perspective/promise to act-condition read the same story as participants in this condition in Study 2. Participants in the boss' perspective/real action-condition read the same story and in addition "You (the boss) then really find a new job for the employee." Participants in the employee's perspective/promise to act-condition read the same story as participants in this condition in Study 2. Participants in the employee's perspective/real action-condition read the same story with the addition "The boss then really finds a new job for you."

Dependent variables. Again, after reading the story participants were asked to indicate how empathetic the boss ("you" in the boss' perspective-condition and "the boss" in the employee's perspective-condition) was perceived, as rated along the same 9-point scale with anchors at *not at all* (1) and *very much* (9). However, in this study instead of answering how they believed the employee perceived the situation, we asked them to answer how trustworthy the boss ("you" in the boss' perspective-condition and "the boss" in the employee's perspective-condition) was perceived. We used the same type of 9-point scale, but this time with the anchors *not at all* (1) and *very much* (9).
Results and Discussion

Perception of the boss' trustworthiness. No significant effects were found for the ratings how trustworthy the boss was perceived to be, although ratings for "acting" ($M = 4.82$) tended to be higher than for "promise to act" ($M = 4.27$), $F(1,117)=2.40, p < .124$.

Perception of the boss' empathy. As in Study 2, we asked the participants to take either the boss' or the employee's perspective. What was new in this third study, compared to Studies 1 and 2, was that in half of the stories, the boss now really carried out the promised act. The perception of the boss' empathy in the different conditions is shown in Table 3. In line with our expectations, a 2 (boss' perspective/employee's perspective) X 2 (promised action/action) ANOVA revealed that perceived empathy increased in both perspectives when there was a real action carried out by the boss. More specifically, there was a main effect of "action" on perceived empathy, $F(1,118) = 23.12, p < .001$. As was also hypothesized, when the boss really carried out the promised act, this was regarded as equally important for the empathy from both perspectives, $F(1,118) = .249$, *ns*.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Number of Cases by Condition for Perceptions of the Boss' Empathy by Participants Taking the Boss' or the Employee's Perspectives in Study 3

	Boss' perspective		Employee's perspective	
	The boss promises to act	The boss acts	The boss promises to act	The boss acts
Mean rating	4.59	6.46	4.61	6.10
Standard deviation	2.05	1.79	2.01	1.81
Number of cases	32	28	31	31

The results of Study 3 show a uniform effect of perspective across boss' and employee's perspectives. This is in contrast with the results of Study 2, where the factor involving action (understanding/promise to act) had stronger effects on perceived empathy for the boss' perspective than for the employee's perspective. Apparently, this discrepancy in the findings of the two experiments cannot (fully) be explained in terms of differences in how the boss' trustworthiness is perceived from the boss' and the employee's perspective. A perspective difference due to perceived trustworthiness would primarily be expected for "promise to act" (boss believes in his/her promise vs. employee distrusts boss' promise), but no such reliable difference was found. The interaction effect obtained in Study 2 remains however to be explained. Perhaps the interaction effect may be related to how those in the "employee's perspective"-condition in contrast to those in the "boss' perspective"-condition viewed the boss. Those instructed to take the employee's perspective might have imagined "a typical boss" when reading the story, while those taking the boss' perspective instead thought of themselves being in a boss' situation. If so, this could have made a significant difference in how the boss was experienced; those thinking of themselves being the boss (boss' perspective) might have thought action to be more important for the perception of empathy than those thinking of "a typical boss."

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The overall aim of the present research was to experimentally investigate the role of action for the perception of empathy from different perspectives. Taken together, the results of the three experimental studies seem to provide considerable evidence for action being central to the experience of empathy from both empathizer's and target's perspectives (Studies 2 and 3) as well as from the perspective of an unspecified observer (Study 1). These results are in line with our previous finding that people give a central role to the empathizer's action when they describe empathy episodes from their own lives (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press). It may be noted that the results cannot be explained in semantic terms inasmuch as they would result from how people define empathy. Our participants defined empathy mainly in terms of understanding of the target's situation and feelings rather than in terms of actions. Moreover, manipulation of whether the boss expressed his or her understanding of the target's situation or not had weaker effects on how his or her empathy was perceived than his or her actions had. Evidently, the participants perceived action as more directly reflecting empathy than words did, even if the words matched the participants' definition of empathy.

The parallelism of the results from the present research and our previous study support the validity of phenomenological reports of the role of action for empathy (previous study) and provides possibilities for interpreting the results of the present studies (see below). The finding that empathy is related to actions for the benefit of the target is also consistent with previous research on the relationship between empathy and altruism (cf. Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Davis, 1983; Håkansson & Montgomery, in press; Krebs, 1975).

The two perspectives examined in Studies 2 and 3 – the boss' (potential empathizer perspective) and the employee's (potential target perspective) – converged to a great extent with respect to the importance of the boss' actions for inferring that he or she is empathetic. It should be noted that a between-subjects design was used in all experiments, which means that the boss could have been perceived differently in the two perspectives. Still, the results of Study 3 showed an almost perfect match between how the boss was perceived from the two perspectives when the boss' actions were described as more or less definite (performed action vs. promise to act). There was, however, an interaction effect in Study 2, which possibly suggests that the boss was perceived differently from the two perspectives

when the empathizer's actions involve weak or moderate efforts (claim to understand vs. promise to act). We don't know how much this effect is due to problems resulting from using a between subject design (implying problems to have the participants imagining the same boss in the two perspectives), to some "real" difference (e. g., in terms of perceived trustworthiness) in how a given boss' empathy is experienced from different perspectives or result from chance variations in the empathy ratings.

Although the results by and large showed a clear pattern across the three experiments, it should be noted that the validity of this pattern is dependent of the participants' ability to imagine how they would react if the episode described in the vignette had been real. Thus, a limitation of the present research was that the participants were not real targets or empathizers. To come closer to a realistic situation participants may be asked to really act as empathizers and targets and afterwards rate the empathizer's empathy. However, the procedure used in the present experiments made it possible to study factors influencing empathy in a more controlled manner than would have been possible in a more realistic situation. For this reason, we regard the present research as complementary to more realistic empathy studies that are called for in future research.

Another possibility for continuing the present research is to collect data on possible covariates to empathy as an interpersonal phenomenon. In our recent study (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press), both empathizers and targets reported that the empathizer had (or was believed to have had) previous experiences that were similar to the target's present situation. In future research, it would be interesting to get a more precise picture of the role of the empathizer's previous relevant experiences (e. g., of being dismissed from one's job in the present investigation) by collecting ratings (both from empathizers and targets) of such experiences as a covariate to empathy ratings.

How can the convergence between the empathizers and target's perspectives (particularly in Study 3) be explained? First it can be noted that this pattern disagrees with asymmetries that have been found in how actors (empathizers in the present case) and observers (targets) perceive the causes of the observer's behavior (Watson, 1982). Previous empathy research has tended to view empathy as occurring within the empathizing individual. Although this is in some sense correct, it is important to also take into account the target's perspective in order to get a more complete

picture of the empathy process. Our previous study of empathy (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press) suggested that there are processes taking place *within* the empathizer (understanding and perceived similarity) and the target (emotion), as well as significant processes occurring *between* the two. Although the processes taking place inside the two individuals, respectively, are in some sense hidden from the other, the study revealed that they largely agreed on the presence of these processes. To understand how this is possible, the critical link between the two perspectives must be considered – action. We believe that the internal processes become interpersonal when the empathizer communicates his or her understanding to the target through actions, at the same time as the target communicates his or her emotions through his or her actions, which in turn may be reflected in the empathizer's actions. That is, the two perspectives converge to a shared reality (cf. Hardin & Higgins, 1996) by means of the communication expressed through the actions of empathizer and target. Although the two parties have different roles in the empathy situation, they have a common interest in focusing on how the empathizer can improve the target's situation, which means that it will be important to act from a shared perspective – a we-perspective (cf. Montgomery, 1994).

In conclusion, these three studies demonstrated a significant role of action for how empathetic one is perceived. The data also suggested that the empathizer's and the target's perspectives on the role of action in empathy converge to a great extent. We assume that the role of action can be understood in terms of empathy being an interpersonal phenomenon by nature.

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STUDY 3

Empathy and Viewing the Other as a Subject

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Abstract

Empathy and viewing another person as a subject rather than an object are often associated in theoretical contexts, but empirical research of the relation is scarce. The purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationship between subject view and empathy. In Study 1, participants watched film clips and indicated their empathy for specific characters in the clips, as well as the extent to which they saw these persons as subjects and objects. The subject/object view explained some, but not all, of the differences in empathy, which raised the question of what else accounts for differences in empathy. A second study was conducted to investigate whether the difficulty of the other's situation also contributes. In Study 2, another group watched the film clips and rated the difficulty of the film character's situations in addition to empathy and subject view. The results of Study 2 revealed that subject view and perceived difficulty together explain a substantial part of differences in empathy. It was concluded that empathy is evoked primarily when a person in difficulty is viewed as a subject.

Human beings are capable of viewing others as human beings with lives that truly matter (Batson, 1991), and of seeing others as objects to be used for their own gratification (Hare, 1999). A related capacity that humans also have is to enter into another individual's thoughts and feelings, empathy (Davis, 1996; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, Hoffman, 1987). Empathy and viewing another as a subject have been associated in theoretical contexts, but empirical research on their relationship is lacking. Based on the belief that subject view and empathy have much in common, particularly the acknowledgment of the other's first-person perspective, a perception of similarity with the other and concern for that person, the present research aimed at investigating the connection between the two phenomena.

Most definitions of empathy, as pointed out by Bohart and Greenberg (1997), include the idea of "trying to sense, perceive, share, or conceptualize how another person is experiencing the world" (p. 419). For instance, Kohut (1984) saw empathy as the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person, and Hoffman (1987) conceptualized empathy as "an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own" (p. 48). Further, in our own research (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press) we have found that the experience of empathy involves a focus on the target's perspective: the empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions, the target experiences emotion, the empathizer perceives a similarity with his or her own prior experience, and the empathizer is concerned for the target's well-being. This is also how empathy is conceptualized in the present research.

In contrast with the relatively large body of research on empathy, there is considerably less empirical research on how we view others as subjects and objects. However, several philosophers have described these different views of another person (e.g., Sartre, 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989). For instance, Sartre (1943/1976) distinguished between seeing the other as an object and as a subject. According to Sartre, the other as object is someone that I can perceive, and the other as subject is someone who can perceive me. Sartre further argued that another human being is a being for whom I can also appear as an object.

In the present research, subject/object view is thought of as a matter of degrees where people vary along a continuum from inside to outside perspectives of other individuals. In the present account, it is also assumed that the inside perspective is necessarily connected to a positive evaluation of the other (cf. Montgomery, 1994). According to Rogers (1975), "it is impossible accurately to sense the perceptual world of another person unless you value that person and his world – unless you in some sense

care" (p. 7). Thus, indicators of a person having a subject view of another individual in a certain situation may be that the other would have perceived and described his or her situation in a similar manner, but also that the person sees the other more positively and is less judging than someone having an object view. Prior research has shown the existence of a pervasive tendency to see the self as better than others (for reviews, see Greenwald, 1980; Taylor & Brown, 1988). For instance, Lewinsohn, Mischel, Chaplin, & Barton (1980) had participants rate themselves along a number of personality dimensions, and had observers rate the participants on the same dimensions. The results showed that self-ratings were significantly more positive than observers' ratings. Alicke (1985) also showed that normal participants judged positive traits to be remarkably more characteristic of self than were negative attributes, and Kuiper and Derry (1982) demonstrated that positive personality information is for most individuals efficiently processed and recalled, while negative personality information is poorly processed and accessed. Additionally, people give themselves more credit for success and less blame for failure than they ascribe to others (Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977; Schlenker & Miller, 1977). Consistent with these tendencies, there is also considerable evidence that when identifying with another, the other will be seen in a positive manner (for a review, see Montgomery, 1994).

The conceptualization of subject view in the present paper is inspired by the above reviewed literature as well as by Rogers' (1957) idea of a therapist identifying with and having warmth, respect, and unconditional positive regard toward the client. In Rogers' belief, no matter how socially disapproved of a client is, he or she can still be accepted as a worthy human being by the therapist. Similarly, in the present two studies, subject view was defined as a view by which one takes up the other's first-person perspective, is focused on the other's experiences rather than traits, and is positive and non-judgmental toward the other's experiences (not necessarily toward the other's traits or behavior).

As conceptualized in the above literature, empathy and viewing another as a subject appear to have at least three features in common. First, both seem to involve the acknowledgment of the other person's first-person perspective, which is an essential irreducible characteristic of any conscious state (Chalmers, 1998; Nagel, 1974). As Nagel (1974) put it, for any conscious organism it is something it is like to be that organism. To understand what it is like to be another person from his or her perspective, it does not help to *infer* the other's thoughts and feelings (cf. Goldman, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Gordon, 1992, 1995, 2000; Jackson, 1986; Nagel, 1974; Ravenscroft 1998). Inferring can at best only provide

knowledge of the other from an outside perspective. What is required instead is to take up the other's perspective and simulate his or her thoughts and feelings (cf. Goldman, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Gordon, 1992, 1995, 2000; Ravenscroft 1998). To acknowledge another's first-person perspective may be central to empathy as well as to viewing the other as a subject.

Second, it seems that we feel a sense of similarity and identity with the other when empathizing as well as when viewing the other as a subject. Viewing another as a subject is to perceive the other as a human being, fundamentally similar to oneself. In effect, we are reacting to the thought of ourselves in that situation. Likewise, our earlier study (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press) showed that the experience of empathy includes the empathizer's perception of a similarity between what the target is experiencing and something the empathizer has experienced previously. The earlier study also showed that the perception of similarity can occur at different levels of generality. Thus, in order to understand another person, people need not have experienced precisely the same thing as the other individual has. The other's experience may be abstracted to a level at which it resembles something the empathizer has experienced in the past and can thereby be understood (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press). Thus, perceived similarity at the most fundamental level may be, in empathy as well as in subject view, to see the other as a sentient being like oneself.

Third, empathy and subject view also seem to have in common the involvement of at least some degree of caring for others' welfare. According to Nagel (1978), altruism itself depends on the recognition of the reality of other people. People typically viewing others as objects as well as lacking empathy are psychopaths that use other people for their own purposes (Hare, 1999). Likewise, empirical research has shown that empathy is related to concern for other people (Batson, 1991, 1997b; Hoffman, 1987; Håkansson & Montgomery, in press, 2002; Krebs, 1975). For instance, in a far-reaching research program Batson and colleagues (e.g., Batson, 1991; Batson, et al., 1997) have found empirical evidence for empathy leading to altruistic motivation. Further, in an investigation of how people experience empathy situations, Håkansson and Montgomery (in press) found that empathy from the empathizer's as well as from the target's perspectives involves concern for the target's well being, and in three experiments Håkansson & Montgomery (2002) showed that concern expressed through actions is important for empathy.

At the same time as empathy and subject view have certain features in common, they may also differ in important respects. First, while empathy is typically affective by nature (cf. Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987;

Hoffman, 1987), subject/object view as conceptualized in the literature (i.e., Sartre 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989) seems to be relatively independent of emotional responses. Second, empathy typically concerns a specific situation that the target is experiencing (cf. Håkansson & Montgomery, in press), whereas subject view transcends particular situations. Third, in contrast to subject view, which often will possibly be reciprocal, empathy is usually asymmetric in the sense that focus is on the target rather than the empathizer (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press).

Although philosophers have discussed how we view others as subjects and objects, empirical research on subject view and the connection between subject view and empathy is scarce. Therefore, in the present paper, subject view is operationalized and measured, and the relationship to empathy empirically investigated.

Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate the relationship between subject view and empathy by letting participants answer questions about four specific persons in two different film clips. It was hypothesized that differences in subject view would explain differences in empathy to a considerable extent. The effect an instruction to take a certain person's perspective would have on empathy and on subject view was also tested. Because empathy has been successfully induced in earlier research (Batson, Early & Salvarani, 1997a; Batson et al. 1997b; Stotland, 1969, see also Davis, 1996), the expectation was that such instructions would make people consider other individuals more as subjects and thus increase empathy.

Method

Participants watched film clips and, afterward, freely described how they perceived certain characters in the clips. These descriptions were then rated by psychologists at Stockholm University with respect to degree of subject/object view of the film characters. Participants' self-rated empathy with the film characters was also measured. While empathy in previous research has been reliably measured through self-ratings (e.g., Batson et al. 1996; Batson, Early, & Salvaroni, 1997a), it was reasoned that direct ratings of this concept, or factors related to it, would be biased by motivational factors, such as the social desirability of viewing people as subjects. Instead, an indirect procedure was used where independent judges rated components of subject/object view in free descriptions of the film characters given by the participants.

Participants. Participants were 81 high school students in Visby, Sweden. They were 29 men and 52 women aged 16-20 ($M = 17.93$, $SD = 1.08$). High school students were included because the classroom setting was assumed to be appropriate for showing videotapes and suitable for allowing participants to answer questions in a standardized manner. Further, the high school students were assumed to be old enough, in contrast with younger children, to understand and carry out the task. In exchange for their participation, the participants were given the opportunity to attend a lecture about empathy. They were guaranteed anonymity and their answers were individually unidentifiable. Later, when the study was completed, participants received a summary of the group level results.

Design and procedure. Two film clips were shown to seven classes of high school students. Each participant was seated at a desk in front of a television and a VCR. The researcher explained that the aim of the experiment was to study empathy and included viewing two short film clips and answering some questions about the clips. The experimenter asked if the participants had any questions about the study, then started the videotape. After each film clip, the experimenter turned off the video and TV equipment and the participants filled out the questionnaire, which consisted of an open-ended question and some closed-ended questions concerning each of the two film characters. The purpose of the open-ended question was to obtain free descriptions of the film characters. These descriptions were later rated by the researcher and two additional coders.

For the first film clip, no participants received instructions to take any particular film character's perspective. In contrast, for the second film clip, perspective-taking instructions were randomly given to some of the classes (57 participants) before watching film clip 2. They were to imagine that they were either the woman or the man in the film while watching the clip. Some of the classes received no imagine-instruction.

Stimulus film clips. From a collection of film stimuli, one excerpt from a Swedish film and one excerpt from a Swedish TV series were selected (in Swedish, so that the participants could understand the language perfectly). These two excerpts were chosen on the basis of language, length, intelligibility, and content of the scenes. The idea was to include one film clip whose episode was relatively ambiguous and one whose was not, in case this may have an impact on the results. The two films were *Skärgårdsdoktorn* (*The Archipelago Doctor*) (Marnell, Petri, & Petrelius, 2000) and *Den Goda Viljan* (*Best Intentions*) (Dahlberg & August, 1992). Participants watched an approximately 1-minute clip of *Skärgårdsdoktorn* and an approximately 5-minute clip of *Best Intentions*. Because the clip from *Skärgårdsdoktorn* was very short, participants watched it twice.

The Archipelago Doctor is a Swedish TV series set on an island in the Stockholm archipelago. In the film clip, there are four characters: the girl Wilma (about 13 years old), her mother, father, and grandfather (about 75 years old). Although there were four characters in the film excerpt, the participants were asked questions about only Wilma and her grandfather. In this scene, Wilma, her mother, and her father are in their kitchen when Wilma's grandfather enters the room bringing with him an old nightshirt, which they have used in the past. He now wishes either his daughter or Wilma to use it again. He seems disappointed when no one is interested in the old nightshirt. The questions in the questionnaire address how the participants perceive Wilma and her grandfather during this scene, respectively, and how much empathy they have for each. This film clip was selected for its relative obviousness that someone was experiencing a negative affect (disappointment), since negative affect is typically what the target of empathy is experiencing (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press).

Best Intentions is Ingmar Bergman's story about his own parents. In this film clip, there are only two characters: Henrik is a young, poor, and idealistic priest student who meets Anna, a unconventional young woman. They fall in love, and when this scene takes place, they are having a quarrel about their approaching wedding. The questionnaire concerns how the participants perceive these two persons during this dispute and how much empathy the participants have for them. This film clip was chosen for its relative ambiguousness about who "was right" in the quarrel. In a pre-study, the film clip was shown to a group of graduate students and approximately half sympathized with the woman and half with the man.

Independent variables. For the first film clip, *The Archipelago Doctor*, no participants received instructions to take any specific film character's perspective, but were instead told only to watch the film clip carefully. In contrast, for the second film clip, from *Best Intentions*, where according to the pilot study it was unclear as to who was in the most difficult situation, it was tested whether perspective-taking instructions would increase empathy and subject view for either Anna or Henrik, or both. Thus, perspective-taking instructions were assigned randomly to some of the classes before they watched film clip 2. They were to imagine that they were either Anna (10 men and 17 women) or Henrik (8 men and 22 women) while watching the film clip. Some of the classes received no imagine-instruction (11 men and 13 women).

The imagine-instruction for Anna was formulated "Enter into the woman's experience while watching. Really try to see what happens through her eyes. It is important that you constantly imagine that you are the woman while watching the film clip", and for Henrik, "Enter into the

man's experience while watching. Really try to see what happens through his eyes. It is important that you constantly imagine that you are the man while watching the film clip".

Dependent measures. For the purpose of measuring how the participants viewed the film characters, after having watched a film clip participants answered the open-ended question *How did you perceive the person in the film clip?* about each of the film characters they were going to describe. These free descriptions of the film characters were later coded by the researcher and two additional raters.

After having completed the closed-ended questions, participants proceeded to the empathy questions, which were intended to measure participants' self-rated empathy with each of the two characters in each film clip. The questions were, in translation from the Swedish, *Can you understand the person's situation? (Not at all – Extremely well)*, *Can you understand the person's feelings? (Not at all – Extremely well)*, *Can you see a similarity between what the person is experiencing and something you have previously experienced yourself? (Not at all – Extremely well)*, *How important would it be for you to do something for the person if you could? (Not at all – Extremely important)*, and *How much compassion did you feel for the person in the film clip? (Not at all - Very much)*. They were rated along a 7-point scale with anchors at (1) and (7). To complete the questionnaire for one film clip generally took approximately 10 minutes.

Finally, in order to investigate how the perspective-taking task was perceived, those who were instructed to take Anna's or Henrik's perspectives answered the additional question *How was it to enter into the woman's experience while watching?* or *How was it to enter into the man's experience while watching?*, respectively. They answered this question along a 7-point scale with anchors at *Very easy* (1) and *Very difficult* (7).

Scoring of the open-ended question. Before rating, the handwritten descriptions of the film characters were typed to prevent any potential effects of the participants' handwriting and to further guarantee the participants' anonymity. Five dimensions that were intended to reflect the construct "subject view" were defined by the author. The five dimensions were (1) *the film character could have said this about him or herself*, (2) *the participant has a positive view of the film character*, (3) *the participant does not judge the film character*, (4) *the participant talks about the film character's states*, and (5) *the participant does not talk about the film character's traits or social background*. The raters' task was to read the participants' descriptions of the film characters and determine how well each of the five dimensions reflected each of the descriptions along a 7-point scale with anchors at *Not at all* (1) and *Extremely well* (7).

The author rated all the descriptions on the five dimensions. The two other raters each rated half of the descriptions on the five dimensions. The results were then computed by averaging the author's and the others' ratings.

For the purpose of estimating the inter-rater reliability, stability of assessments across raters was computed for the five dimensions. The correlation between raters ranged from .61 to .80, with a mean of .72.

Results

Empathy measure. Participants' empathy was measured through self-ratings on five items. For each participant, a score was computed for the four film characters taken together for each of the five items. However, although the estimate of internal consistency (alpha) was .75, which seems to be a satisfactory level, these five items did not reflect empathy in a consistent way. More specifically, the only items that correlated significantly with each other for all four film characters were *understanding situation* with *understanding feelings* (Wilma $r = .59$, $p < .001$, the grandfather $r = .56$, $p < .001$, Anna $r = .65$, $p < .001$, Henrik .62, $p < .001$) and *feelings of concern* with *feelings of compassion* (Wilma $r = .40$, $p < .001$, the grandfather $r = .58$, $p < .001$, Anna $r = .58$, $p < .001$, Henrik .68, $p < .001$). In order to obtain a more consistent measure than that provided by all five items, it was decided to keep only one of these pairs of items as a measure of empathy. Because empathy in earlier research has been measured reliably through self-ratings of empathic feelings such as compassion, sympathy and the like (e.g., Batson et al. 1996; Batson, Early, & Salvaroni, 1997a), it seemed reasonable to keep the two items *feelings of concern* and *feelings of compassion* as a measure of empathy. In contrast, it did not seem that the items *understanding situation* and *understanding feelings* were appropriately formulated for self-ratings of empathy. The intended meaning of "understanding" was experiential/emotional understanding, and was expected to be close to feelings of concern and compassion. However, because of the low correlations between *understanding of situation/understanding of feelings* and *feelings of concern/feelings of compassion*, it is likely that the participants regarded "understanding" as intellectual instead of experiential/emotional. Thus, based on the correlations among the five items together with these theoretical considerations, it was decided to keep only the two items *feelings of concern* and *feelings of compassion* as a measure of empathy.

The mean of these two empathy items was for all participants 4.33 ($SD = .90$), for men 4.08 ($SD = 1.00$) and for women 4.47 ($SD = .81$). A 2 (gender) X 3 (year in high school) ANOVA revealed that women scored

significantly higher than men in empathy, $F(1, 75) = 4.85$, $p < .05$. In contrast, there was no reliable main effect of year in high school, $F(2, 75) = 2.53$, *ns*, and no significant interaction effect of gender and year in high school, $F(2, 75) = .72$, *ns*.

Subject/Object View Measure. The participants' views of the film characters (subject/object view) were measured by letting participants freely describe the film characters, and thereafter having raters score these descriptions on five dimensions from 1-7 (reflecting a continuum from subject to object view). A score was computed for each of the participants on each of the five subject view dimensions. Internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were computed for the subject view dimensions. Estimate of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .88 for all five subject view dimensions. However, when only keeping the three dimensions *The film character could have said this about him or herself*, *The participant has a positive view of the film character*, and *The participant does not judge the film character*, Chronbach's alpha was .93. Based on the alpha values, it was decided to keep only these three dimensions as a measure of subject view.

Typical subject views and object views are illustrated below by quoting some of the participants' free descriptions of the characters in the film clips. Each quote reflects the participant's entire description of that film character.

Examples of subject view. The examples of subject view are chosen for the relatively high scores on the dimensions *The film character could have said this about him or herself* and *The participant has a positive view of the film character*, and a low score on the dimension *The participant judges the film character*. For example, one female student described how she perceived the grandfather in *Skärgårdsdoktorn*:

> He wants to keep his memories from the past. He just has good intentions when he offers them the shirt. Of course he is disappointed when they do not care about him.

Another female student said the following about the woman in *Best Intentions*:

> She is hoping for a big wedding. Like many women do from their childhood. She wishes to experience her dream and wants nothing to go wrong.

One male student expressed his perception of the girl in *Skärgårdsdoktorn*:

> She makes an effort not to hurt the elderly man's feelings. On the other hand, she doesn't want to be on his side because of fear of coming in conflict with her mother. Tries to stay out of the conflict.

Examples of object view. Examples of object view, characterized by low scores on the dimensions *The film character could have said this about him or herself* and *The participant has a positive view of the film character*, and a high score on the dimension *The participant judges the film character,* are illustrated below by quotes from the participants. For instance, one participant told how he perceived the woman in *Best Intentions*:

> Very determined and narrow-minded, cannot see possibilities, a little conservative perhaps…comes from a well-off home, with traditions and fixed outlines. Like the man in the film clip, she has difficulties paying attention to others' viewpoints. Introverted and self-confident.

Another participant expressed his view of the man in *Best Intentions*:

> Although more of a lower class, he is still certain of the man's right to decide in a relationship. Has difficulties considering others' opinions and wishes.

One male student described how he perceived the grandfather in *Skärgårdsdoktorn*:

> Irresolute, conservative, confused, somewhat weak.

The mean of the three subject/object view dimensions (*judgmental* reversed) was for all participants 4.04 (*SD* = .92), for men 3.76 (*SD* = .91) and for women 4.20 (*SD* = .89). A 2 (gender) X 3 (year in high school) ANOVA revealed that women were significantly higher in subject view than were men, $F(1, 75) = 4.40$, $p < .05$. However, there was no reliable main effect of year in high school, $F(2, 75)=1.75$, *ns.* and no significant interaction effect of gender and year in high school, $F(2, 75) = .011$, *ns.*

Effects of perspective taking instructions. For the film clip from *Best Intentions*, perspective-taking instructions were given to some of the

classes (57 participants) before watching to test whether such instructions would have effects on subject view and empathy. These classes were asked to imagine that they were either the woman or the man while watching the clip. Some classes received no perspective-taking instructions.

The effects of perspective taking instructions (no instructions/Anna's perspective/Henrik's perspective) on empathy and subject view for each stimulus person (Anna or Henrik) were first analyzed by two-way Perspective taking X Gender ANOVAs. Since Gender showed no significant effects the final analysis was based on one-way perspective taking ANOVAs. A significant effect of perspective taking was found for empathy with Anna, $F(2, 79) = 3.33$, $p < .05$ but not for empathy with Henrik, $F(2, 79) = 1.31$, *ns*. Scheffé's tests revealed that the mean of empathy with Anna in the "take Anna's perspective"-condition was significantly higher than the mean in the "no instruction"-condition ($p < .05$).

A significant effect of perspective taking instructions was found on viewing Henrik as a subject, $F(2, 79) = 3.76$, $p < .05$. Post hoc tests (Scheffé) showed that the mean of the subject view with Henrik in the "take Henrik's perspective"-condition was significantly higher than the mean in the "no instruction"-condition ($p < .05$). The perspective taking instructions did not yield a significant effect on subject view on Anna, $F(2, 79) = 2.40$, *ns*.

Those who were asked to take Anna's or Henrik's perspectives answered the additional question *How was it to enter into the woman's experience while watching?* or *How was it to enter into the man's experience while watching?*, respectively, along a 7-point scale with anchors at *Very easy* (1) and *Very difficult* (7). The mean of the answers was for all participants 4.00 (*SD* = 1.64), for taking Anna's perspective 3.97 (*SD* = 1.40), and for taking Henrik's perspective 4.04 (*SD* = 1.72), $t(55) = -.161$, *ns*.

Relationship Between Subject/Object View and Empathy. Means of subject view and empathy for each of the four film characters are shown in Table 1. As expected, there was a positive correlation between empathy and subject view for the four film characters taken together ($r = .24$, $p < .05$). When the four film persons were analyzed separately, the correlation between empathy and subject view was significant for Anna and Henrik (Wilma $r = .075$, *ns*, the grandfather $r = .122$, *ns*, Anna $r = .611$, $p < .001$, Henrik $r = .381$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

In Study 1, the extent to which the participants saw the persons in the film clips as subjects or objects was measured, and the author is not aware of any study to date in which subject/object view has been operationalized and measured. The data suggested that the construct of subject/object view can be considered along a continuum in which people view other individuals more or less as subjects and objects, respectively, and that the construct can be reliably measured.

The five items in the present research that were intended to measure empathy were based on the results of our earlier study (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press), which revealed that the experience of empathy consists of four constituents: *The empathizer understands the target's situation and emotions*, *The target experiences one or more emotions*, *The empathizer perceives a similarity with his or her own prior experience*, and *The empathizer is concerned for the target's well-being*. The results of the present study showed fairly low correlations between the five self-rating items based on these empathy constituents. A possible explanation for the low correlations is that although understanding of the target's situation, understanding of the target's emotions, and similar experiences are essential to empathy (along with compassion and concern), self-ratings may be inadequate measures of these empathy aspects.

In line with the expectations, the data indicated that subject view and empathy are positively related, although only moderately. However, only for two of the film persons, Anna and Henrik, the correlation was significant. For Wilma and her grandfather, the lower correlations may be a result of the participants varying much less in empathy and subject view for them than for Anna and Henrik. This, in turn, is possibly a consequence of the fact that the episode with Anna and Henrik was selected for its ambiguity, while the scene with Wilma and her grandfather was chosen for being nonambiguous.

It was found that women scored higher in self-rated empathy than did men, which is consistent with previous research (for reviews, see Davis, 1996; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). The gender difference of self-rated empathy was found also for subject view: women regarded the film characters more as subjects than did men. However, it is important to note that empathy was measured with self ratings while subject view was measured with third-person ratings.

For the second film clip, some participants were instructed to imagine being either Anna or Henrik while watching the clip. The instruction to imagine being Anna had a positive effect on empathy for her

and the effect of imagining being Henrik had a significant effect on viewing him as a subject. This suggested that it is to some extent possible to increase empathy and subject view with instructions, which is consistent with previous research in which empathy has been experimentally induced (Batson, et al., 1997a; Batson et al. 1997b; Stotland, 1969, see also Davis, 1996).

Although the data indicated that empathy is to some degree explained by subject view, it was also evident that it is not sufficient to view another individual as a subject in order to feel empathy. Apparently, something else contributes to evoking feelings of empathy. Because empathy typically concerns a specific situation (cf. Håkansson & Montgomery, in press), whereas subject view transcends particular situations, it seemed natural to take a closer look at the film characters' specific situations in order to identify what more than subject view accounts for differences in empathy. Consequently, in order to identify an additional factor playing a role concerning empathy, the different levels of empathy and subject view for the four film characters (see Table 1) were related to the nature of the film episodes. This examination gave the impression that empathy but not subject view is related to the difficulty of the situations, which is also consistent with the literature that regards empathy as affective by nature (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 1987) in contrast to subject/object view (cf., Sartre 1943/1976; Stein, 1917/1989). Therefore, a second study was conducted to explore whether perceived difficulty of the situation along with subject view contributes to explain empathy.

Study 2

Study 1 investigated how empathy and subject view are related. Although there was a significant relationship, it was only moderate. This raised the question of what, besides subject view, contributes to empathy. This second study, therefore, investigated whether the perceived difficulty of the situation in addition to subject view explains empathy.

Participants watched the same two film clips as in Study 1 and were afterwards asked to freely describe how they perceived the persons in the film clips. In contrast to Study 1, which used third-person raters, the descriptions were then rated by the participants themselves with respect to subject/object view. Self-ratings of subject/object view were used in order to get data that were more comparable to self-ratings of empathy and the difficulty of the situation, which was also measured.

Method

Participants. Participants were 31 students at Stockholm University, 7 men and 24 women aged 19-46 (*M* = 28.2, *SD* = 8.0). In exchange for their participation, the students were given either partial credit toward a course requirement or 50 Swedish Crowns. Anonymity was guaranteed and their answers were individually unidentifiable. Later, when the study was completed, participants received a summary of the group level results.

Design and procedure. The two film clips were shown to the students in groups of up to five people at a time. Approximately half of the participants watched *The Archipelago Doctor* first while the others watched *Best Intentions* first. Each participant was seated in a chair in front of a television and a VCR. The same general instructions used in Study 1 were given to the participants. The researcher explained that the purpose of the experiment was to study empathy and included viewing two short film clips and then answering some questions about the film clips. The experimenter asked if the participants had any questions about the study and then started the videotape. After each film clip, participants were presented with a questionnaire consisting of a number of questions for each of the two film characters in each film clip.

Dependent measures. For the purpose of measuring how the participants viewed the film characters, after having watched a film clip participants answered the open-ended question *How did you perceive X in the film clip?* for the film characters. In contrast to Study 1, in which third-person raters were used, subject view was measured by self-ratings of these descriptions of the film characters. Thus, participants rated their own free descriptions of the film characters on the three dimensions of subject view by responding to three statements: (1) *It is reasonable that the film character could have said him or herself what you wrote about him or her*, (2) *In your description you have a positive view of the film character*, and (3) *In your description you are judging the film character*. They responded along a 7-point scale with anchors at *Not at all true* (1) and *Extremely true* (7). As in Study 1, a subject view score was computed using the mean value of these three dimensions.

After having completed the subject view questions, participants proceeded to the empathy questions, which measured their self-rated empathy with each of the two characters in each film clip. Self-rated empathy was measured with the same items as in Study 1. How difficult the participants perceived the film characters' situations to be was measured with the item *How do you believe X perceived the situation in the film clip?* for each of the four film characters. This item was rated along a 7-point scale with anchors at *Not at all difficult* (1) and *Extremely difficult*

(7). Finally, in order to check whether the two film clips, respectively, evoked the negative feelings and feelings of concern (empathy, compassion, concern, sadness, etc.) that were intended, after each film clip participants were asked to write down three feelings they had while watching.

Results

　　Empathy measure. The same five empathy items as in Study 1 were administered to the participants. Estimate of internal consistency (alpha) was for the five items .38. The two items *concern* and *feelings of compassion* that, in Study 1, were kept as a measure of empathy correlated significantly with each other for three of the four film characters (Wilma *r* =.37, *p* < .05, Anna *r* = .36, *p* < .05, Henrik *r* = .44, *p* < .05, the grandfather *r* = .31, *ns*) and were therefore kept in this study as well as a measure of empathy.

　　The participants' self-rated empathy with the film characters is shown in Table 2. The mean of the two empathy items for the four film characters was for all participants 4.20 (*SD* = .59), for men 4.25 (*SD* = .52), and for women 4.18 (*SD* = .62), *t*(29) = .264, *ns*.

　　Subject/Object View Measure. Participants' view of the film characters (subject/object view) was measured by letting participants freely describe the film characters, and thereafter rating these descriptions on the same dimensions as in Study 1 from 1-7 (reflecting a continuum from subject to object view). Cronbach's alpha was computed for the three dimensions and was .68 for the four film characters taken together. The mean of the three subject view dimensions for the four film characters (*judgmental* reversed) was for all participants 4.41 (*SD* = .65), for men 4.39 (*SD* = .32) and for women 4.41 (*SD* = .72), *t*(27)= −.121, *ns*. Subject views of each of the four film characters are reported in Table 2.

　　Perception of the Film character's Situation. Participants were asked how difficult they believed from 1 to 7 the film characters experienced their situations. The mean of the four film characters was for all participants 4.85 (*SD* = .64), for men 4.68 (*SD* = .37), and for women 4.90 (*SD* = .70), *t*(29) = −1.08, *ns*. The perception of each film character's difficulty is shown in Table 2.

　　Participants' Feelings. In order to check whether the film clips evoked the intended feelings, after each film clip participants were asked to write down feelings they had while watching. As expected, different kinds of feelings of concern (such as care, empathy, compassion, and pity) and negative feelings (such as sadness, hopelessness, irritation, and frustration) were the most common in response to both film clips.

Relationships Between Subject View, Perceived Difficulty of Situation, and Empathy. The correlations between empathy, subject view, and perceived difficulty of situation for each of the four film characters as well as the mean correlations for the four film characters are shown in Table 3. As anticipated, there was a positive relation between empathy and subject view for the four film characters taken together, a positive relation between empathy and perceived difficulty, and almost no relation between subject view and perceived difficulty of situation.

In Study 2, the objective was to investigate the extent to which subject view and perception of difficulty predicted empathy. Therefore, four standard multiple regressions were performed, one for each of the four film characters, between empathy with a film character as the dependent variable and subject view of that person and perception of that person's difficulty as independent variables. Table 4 shows the results of regression analysis for the four film characters Wilma, the grandfather, Anna, and Henrik, respectively. Subject view and perceived difficulty predicted empathy significantly for Wilma, the Grandfather, and Anna, but not for Henrik.

In the present study, the design also allowed comparisons between the four film characters regarding the extent to which differences between the film characters in subject view and perception of difficulty predicted differences in empathy. Therefore, standard multiple regressions were performed with difference in empathy between two of the film characters as the dependent variable and differences in subject view and differences in perceived difficulty between the same two film characters as independent variables. Table 5 shows the results of regression analysis for the six possible comparisons of the four film characters. In five of the six comparisons, differences in subject view and in perceived difficulty significantly predicted differences in empathy.

Discussion

In Study 2, empathy, subject view, and perceived difficulty of the film characters' situations were measured. The main result was that subject view and perceived difficulty together explained a considerable part of differences in empathy.

In Study 1, as in Study 2, there was a substantial variation among the four film characters with respect to the amount of empathy they evoked. Study 1 showed that differences in empathy could be partly explained by differences in how much one viewed them as subjects and objects. In Study 2 a second factor, difficulty of the situation, was introduced. There was again a relationship between empathy and subject view, as well as a

relationship between empathy and the nature of the situation. Multiple regression analysis was performed for each of the four characters in the film clips, and for Wilma, the grandfather, and Anna, subject view and difficulty of situation explained a significant part of differences in empathy. For Henrik, the regression model was not significant. This may be explained by the fact that, in contrast to the other three film characters, the correlation between subject view and perceived difficulty was nearly as high as the correlation between subject view and empathy and nearly as high as the correlation between empathy and perceived difficulty.

In this second study, the nature of the situation played a significant role for empathy felt for the different persons, but not for subject view. This is in line with an earlier study in which participants freely related situations in which they had experienced empathy (Håkansson & Montgomery, in press). In that study, it was much more common that participants chose to describe a situation in which something negative or difficult, compared to something positive, had happened. According to Royzman and Kumar (2001), it is possible to empathize with positive as well as negative emotions, but it is probable that empathy is most needed when something difficult has happened. Further, Royzman and Kumar (2001) have suggested that empathy with positive emotions requires very special bonds and that it takes a better person to feel for another's successes than for another's misfortunes. Royzman et al. also noted that the very same authors that define empathy in neutral ways (e.g., Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 1987) analyze it mainly in negative contexts.

General Discussion

The present research aimed at exploring the relationship between subject view and empathy. The main result was that subject view along with perceived difficulty explains differences in empathy to a considerable extent. Study 1 showed that subject view and empathy are positively related, which is consistent with the literature (cf. Hare, 1999). Both phenomena involve taking the other's first-person perspective seriously; empathy involves simulating the other's thoughts and feelings (cf. Ravenscroft 1998) and having a subject view is to recognize the other's first-person perspective. Further, since these two phenomena involve seeing from the other's perspective that his or her purposes are worthwhile, they tend both to have implications for caring about the other (cf. Deigh, 1995; Hare, 1999). The essence of empathy as well as of subject-view may well be a perception of the other as fundamentally similar to oneself, and it

seems that we respond with concern when we feel a sense of identity with the other. That is, we react to the idea of ourselves in that same situation.

Although Study 1 showed that subject view is important for empathy, the findings also indicated that viewing the other individual as a subject is usually not enough in order to feel empathy. As revealed in Study 2, the difficulty of the situation along with subject view is important for evoking empathy. People may view others as subjects or objects independently of the other being in a positive or a negative situation, but for empathy the nature of the situation is important. Thus, empathy is not felt equally often for people in positive situations as for people in negative situations. On the other hand, a difficult situation is also not sufficient to evoke empathy. The other individual must also be viewed as a subject rather than an object; a psychopath encountering a person that he or she regards as an object in difficulty will likely not feel empathy. Further, the results revealed that empathy, more than subject view, is related to the difficulty of the situation, which is consistent with the more general assumption that empathy typically concerns a specific situation that the other is experiencing while subject view transcends particular situations.

These results can also be related to the idea that empathy as well as subject view involve perceived similarity. Subject view typically involves seeing the other as a human being similar to oneself independently of the situation, while the perception of similarity in empathy is context dependent. When empathizing, the perceived similarity is a relation between the target's specific situation and something in the empathizer's past. Thus, similarity is central to empathy as well as to subject view, but may operate at various levels of generality only in empathy.

The results of the present research indicate a multiply-determined nature of empathy by which both subject view and perceived difficulty predict empathy. The present data does not suffice, however, for deciding whether these two variables contribute to empathy independently of each other or if there is an interaction between them. Also, the main idea in the present paper has been that subject view and perceived difficulty *cause* empathy. However, it may also be possible that empathy is required in seeing another as a subject at all, as well as in perceiving another's difficulty in the first place. Thus, further experiments involving manipulations of all three variables are needed to further clarify the issues of their relations.

In summary, two studies indicated that empathy is related to one person-factor (subject-view) and one situation-factor (perceived difficulty). It is suggested that empathy is usually felt when a person in a difficult situation is viewed as a subject. Philosophers such as Sartre and Stein

discussed how we view other people as subjects and objects, and the present research has been an attempt to operationalize and measure the construct as related to empathy. It is important to continue investigating subject/object view in combination with empathy, not the least because of the essential role of the two phenomena in motivating people to care for other individuals.

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Table 1

Mean Scores on Subject View and Empathy for the Four Film Characters in Study 1

Film character	Subject view	Empathy
Wilma	4.32	3.63
Grandfather	4.86	5.21
Anna	3.17	4.09
Henrik	3.76	4.42

Table 2

Mean Scores on Subject View, Difficulty of Situation, and Empathy for the Four Film Characters in Study 2

Film character	Subject view	Difficulty of situation	Empathy
Wilma	4.73	2.58	3.05
Grandfather	5.13	5.77	5.48
Anna	3.87	5.48	4.11
Henrik	3.79	5.55	4.15

Table 3

Correlations Between Empathy, Subject view, and Perceived Difficulty of Situation for the Four Film Characters in Study 2

	Film character				
Dimension	Wilma	Grand-father	Anna	Henrik	Mean
Empathy – Subject view	−.034	.291	.618***	.310	.296
Empathy – Perceived difficulty	.533**	.390*	.565**	.265	.438
Subject view – Perceived difficulty	.321	−.314	.223	.211	−.050

*p < .01. **p < .005. ***p < .001.

Table 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Empathy from Subject View and Perceived Difficulty for the Four Film Characters in Study 2 (N=30)

	Film character			
	Wilma	Grand-father	Anna	Henrik
β for Subject view	.152	.459*	.518***	.266
β for Perceived difficulty	.581**	.534**	.449**	.209
R^2	.305*	.342**	.574***	.138

*p < .01. **p < .005. ***p < .001.

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Differences Between the Four Film Characters in Empathy from Differences in Subject View and Differences in Perceived Difficulty in Study 2 (N=30)

	Film characters					
	Wilma and Grand-father	Wilma and Anna	Wilma and Henrik	Grand-father and Anna	Grand-father and Henrik	Anna and Henrik
β for difference in subject view	.193	.290*	.106	.571***	.305	.661***
β for difference in perceived difficulty	.553**	.679***	.553**	.486**	.036	.274*
R^2	.232*	.489***	.248*	.531***	.032	.582***

*p < .01. **p < .005. ***p < .001.