

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF PERSPECTIVE TAKING ON COMMUNICATION TO THOSE IN NEED

By Angela Whirry-Achten

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of perspective taking on empathic communication styles. Previous research has shown that the experience of empathy can be manipulated by instructing participants to adopt one of three perspectives, either to remain objective while observing the target person, to imagine how the target feels (imagine other), or to imagine how they would feel to be the target (imagine self). Participants in this study adopted one of these perspectives while watching a recording of a target in need. The target was a female describing a recent break-up with her boyfriend. Participants were led to believe that the target was also a participant in the study, with the same target video used for every participant. Following the viewing, participants rated their emotional responses to the video and then recorded a response to the target's communication. The recorded responses were then evaluated by judges who were blind to experimental condition to determine if perspective taking affected communication style. As predicted, participants in the imagine-other condition reported feeling more empathic concern than did those in the objective condition. Also as predicted, participants in the imagine-self condition reported feeling more personal distress than those in the objective group. Despite these differences in emotional reactions, the judges' ratings of participants' communications revealed no significant differences in communication style between conditions. The results suggest that although different forms of perspective taking create different emotional reactions to those in need, these reactions may not manifest in different communication styles when observers verbally communicate with the person in need. Limitations and implications of these findings are discussed.

THE EFFECT OF PERSPECTIVE TAKING ON COMMUNICATION TO THOSE IN
NEED

by

Angela Whirry-Achten

A Thesis Proposal Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

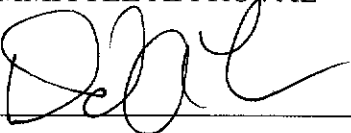
Master of Science
Psychology

At

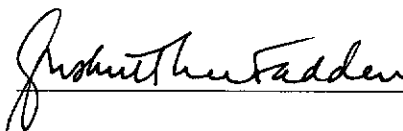
The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh WI 54901-8621

January, 2012

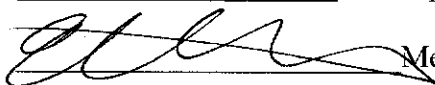
COMMITTEE APPROVAL

 Advisor

1/19/2012 Date Approved

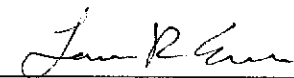
 Member

1-13-12 Date Approved

 Member

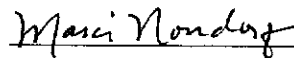
1-13-12 Date Approved

PROVOST
AND VICE CHANCELLOR



5/3/12
Date Approved

FORMAT APPROVAL



4/5/12
Date Approved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my thesis committee for their patience, persistence, and guidance throughout my endeavor to complete this project. Without their willingness to put up with my complicated life, I could never have completed this manuscript. I especially wish to acknowledge Dr. David Lishner, who answered my countless e-mails, sorted through my innumerable drafts, and filtered through what seemed like endless results. All of his hard work was done with enthusiasm and respect for me and for the research. For this I have deep gratitude.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Empathy	1
Davis' Structural Model of Empathy	2
Effects of Altruism on Interpersonal Communication	10
Present Research	12
CHAPTER II: PROCEDURE	14
Participants	14
Apparatus	14
Procedure	14
CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS	17
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION	22
APPENDIXES	27
Appendix A: Informed Consent	27
Appendix B: Introduction to Study	30
Appendix C: Condition Assignment	32
Appendix D: Instructions	34
Appendix E: Condition Specific Instructions	36
Appendix F: Actress Script	40
Appendix G: Video Communications Reactions Questionnaire	43
Appendix H: Video Communication Perceptions Questionnaire	47
Appendix I: Video Release Form	45
Appendix J: Judge Rating Form	49
REFERENCES	51

Chapter I

Introduction

Empathy has been a focus of scientific inquiry for some time (Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim, & Sleight, 1988). The term “empathy” has been used to describe many different phenomena that may occur when witnessing a person in need. Two ways that the term has been defined are: (a) to refer to feelings of concern for a person in need or (b) feelings of distress at the person’s plight. These different feelings may in turn lead to different motivational responses toward the person. Batson, Fultz, and Schoenrade (1987) propose that feelings of empathic concern evoke an altruistic motivation to increase the person’s welfare as an end in itself, whereas feelings of distress evoke egoistic motivation to escape the source of distress. Although previous research has used helping behavior to assess altruistic motivation, altruism also may be expressed in different ways, such as through communication with the person in need, aggression, or other social behaviors. The purpose of this research is to examine how perspective taking influences participants’ communication toward a target person in need as a result of affecting these different types of empathic and motivational processes.

Empathy

Taken very broadly, empathy is an important construct in many areas of psychology, including counseling (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988; Rogers, 1980/1995), healthcare (Morse, 1992) and organizational research (Korsgaard, Meglina & Lester, 1997). For example, Rogers describes empathy as important for understanding

personality dynamics and how to best implement changes in personality and behavior in clinical settings. From a social psychological perspective, Davis writes that empathy lies “...at the border which separates the individual from the other...” (providing) “...a kind of bridge which links otherwise isolated persons...” (1996, p. 221). Both examples illustrate an exchange between the state of the target of empathy and the empathizer. It is unclear, however, how the empathizer may communicate such a state to the target and how such communication may affect the target.

Davis’ Structural Model of Empathy.

Davis (1996) provides an organizational model for integrating the many ways that the term “empathy” is used, as well as for understanding the processes involved in the feeling of empathy. This model consists of four constructs: antecedents, psychological processes, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes.

Antecedents.

There are two variables accounting for the antecedents in Davis’ model. The first is the person, or observer. According to Davis (1996), the observer’s capacity for empathy is indicative of his or her responsiveness to the target. The second antecedent variable is the situation, which consists of the strength of the situation and the similarity of the person in need to the observer. The strength of the situation refers to the situation’s power to evoke emotion, so that a strong situation may produce an intense emotional reaction, whereas a less powerful situation may place more importance on observer-related factors. The same applies for the degree of similarity: as similarity increases, so does the probability of an empathic reaction. Therefore, as the number and

strength of situational antecedents increase, the likelihood and intensity of an empathic response increases.

Psychological processes.

In this model, the combination of these antecedent variables results in three potential classes of psychological processes.

Noncognitive processes. Noncognitive processes include primary circular reactions and motor mimicry. Both of these processes result in identical matching between the observer's state and the target's state. With primary circular reactions, this matching is direct and automatic, such as an infant crying when it hears another infant's cry. Motor mimicry reactions occur as a result of an imitation of motor responses, which then produces similar affective responses.

Simple cognitive processes.

In this model simple cognitive processes consist of classical conditioning, direct association, and labeling. Classical conditioning occurs when observer reactions toward a target result from learned associations between the target's expressions and similar states in the observer. Direct association is more general than classical conditioning in that it is not necessary for the observer to ever have experienced a situation like the target. Instead, the observer has experienced a similar kind of emotion from which to generalize. Labeling is different from either of those in that the observer uses simple cues, such as scripts, to infer something about the target's situation. Labeling may occur even if the observer never has experienced a similar situation.

Advanced cognitive processes.

Advanced cognitive processes include language-mediated associations, activation of elaborated cognitive networks, and perspective taking. Language-mediated association and the activation of elaborated cognitive networks are similar, with the major difference being that the former concerns language based cues, whereas the latter concerns semantic associations. Language-mediated associations occur when the target verbally expresses the experience of emotions from which the observer symbolically derives meaning. The activation of elaborated cognitive networks is a similar complex cognitive process in which the observer uses other forms of cues to access knowledge stores that aid in the development of inferences regarding the target's experience. However, Davis points out that there is no empirical documentation of such associative processes.

Perspective taking, or the "active entertaining" of the target's perspective is the most advanced cognitive process in Davis' model. According to Stocks and Lishner (2009) two basic perspectives exist. The first is an "imagine-self" perspective, whereby the observer imagines herself in the target's situation. Alternately, the observer may imagine what the target is experiencing, which is called an "imagine-other" perspective. These two perspectives, although similar at first glance, have been shown to lead to different intrapersonal outcomes (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997), which make up the third construct in Davis' model of empathy.

Intrapersonal Outcomes.

In Davis' model intrapersonal outcomes consist of both non-affective and affective outcomes. Nonaffective outcomes are cognitive activities such as interpersonal accuracy and attributional judgment. Interpersonal accuracy refers to an attempt to accurately infer the target's internal state. Attributional judgment refers to attempts to infer the causes of the target's behavior, and include consideration of both dispositional and situational causes. Affective outcomes include parallel and reactive affective states. Parallel affective states are those that match the affective state of the target. Reactive affective outcomes have two components, as identified by prior research: empathic concern and personal distress. Empathic concern (Batson & Shaw, 1991) refers to an emotional state congruent with the perceived welfare of another. This state is best captured by words such as *sympathy*, *tenderness*, *soft-heartedness*, and the like, according to Batson and Shaw's research. Personal distress reflects a state that is best described by words such as *upset*, *disturbed*, *troubled*, and the like (Batson et al., 1987).

One factor that seems to lead to differences in feeling empathic concern or personal distress is the type of advance cognitive perspective-taking one adopts. For example, in one study Batson et al., (1997) randomly assigned participants to one of three perspective conditions. The researchers asked participants to listen to a broadcast about a woman whose family had just died in an auto accident. Participants were asked to either imagine how the woman felt (imagine other), imagine how they would feel in her situation (imagine self), or remain objective and focus on the technical details of the message while listening to the broadcast. The two groups instructed to take an imagining perspective reported increased empathic concern in response to the broadcast; however,

the imagine-self group also showed increases in personal distress. This is a notable distinction because previous research has shown that whereas empathic concern appears to create an altruistic motive to improve the target's welfare, personal distress appears to lead to an egoistic motive to improve the welfare of the self (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983).

Interpersonal outcomes.

The final component of Davis' organizational model consists of interpersonal outcomes, which are behavioral responses directed toward the target. These include helping behavior, aggression, and other forms of social behavior. The interpersonal outcome that has received a high degree of empirical scrutiny is helping behavior. However, the motives that drive such helping behavior depend on the nature of the parallel and reactive intrapersonal outcomes that are experienced.

One motive that may result from empathic concern for a target in need is altruism. The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis predicts that the experience of empathic concern leads to a motivational state to increase the welfare of the target of empathy as an end in itself (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Altruism is contrasted with egoism, which refers to a motivational state in which the goal is to increase the welfare of the self as an end in itself. A large body of research suggests that an association exists between feelings of empathic concern and helping. Batson's research has focused on identifying whether altruism or egoism accounts for this association.

Besides altruism, Batson (1991) describes at least three egoistic possibilities that may explain why empathically-aroused people help others: 1) to reduce aversive arousal, 2) to avoid punishment, or 3) to seek rewards.

In order to identify whether aversive arousal reduction accounts for the association between empathic concern and helping, Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, and Birch (1981) conducted an experiment in which they varied the degree of empathic concern felt for a target in need as well as the ease of escaping from witnessing the target's need. In this study, ease of escape was manipulated by instructing participants that they would or would not have to continue watching another person receive electric shocks if they chose not to help. High and low empathic concern groups were created by manipulating similarity between the participant and the person receiving the shock. The researchers assessed the proportion of participants who were willing to take the place of the person in need and receive shocks in his or her place. The empathy-altruism hypothesis predicted that helping should be higher in the high empathic concern group in both escape conditions, and low in the easy escape/low empathic concern condition. The aversive arousal reduction explanation predicted that helping should be low in both easy escape groups. Results supported the empathy-altruism hypothesis over the aversive-arousal reduction explanation. (See Batson & Shaw, 1991 for a review of other studies testing the aversive arousal reduction explanation.)

The next egoistic explanation for the association between empathic concern and helping is motivation to avoid punishment. There are two different types of punishment that need to be addressed when considering this explanation. First, there can be socially

administered punishment for not helping someone in need. This punishment can include negative social evaluations or social judgments. After manipulating levels of social evaluation (low or high) and empathy (low or high), Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney (1986) examined participants' willingness to help a person in need. In the high social evaluation condition, the experimenter and the person in need would both learn of the participant's decision to help or not, whereas in the low social evaluation condition, only the participant would be aware of the decision to help. If helping among empathically-aroused individuals was motivated by a desire to avoid negative social evaluations, then participants should help more in the high empathic concern condition, but only if social evaluation was high. Results showed that helping among those in the high empathic concern condition was high regardless of the level of social evaluation, a finding that supports the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

In addition to social punishments, personal punishments may result from not helping. Personal punishments include negative self-evaluation, guilt, or shame (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Due to the difficulty in measuring self-evaluation or feelings like guilt or shame, researchers tested the personal punishments explanation by manipulating social justifications for not helping the person in need (Batson et al., 1988). In the low justification condition, participants were presented with a volunteer pledge form on which five of seven available spaces were already signed by "previous subjects." In the high justification condition, participants were presented with the same pledge form on which appeared only two signatures. The researchers assumed that participants presented with a long list of names of volunteers would have a lower justification for not helping,

and therefore should anticipate experiencing more personal punishments for not helping. In the high justification condition, fewer names should lead to less anticipation of personal punishment for not helping. The researchers also manipulated the level of empathy experienced by the participants. Alternatively, the empathy-altruism hypothesis predicts that levels of helping should be high in the high empathic concern condition, regardless of the level of justification, whereas the self-punishment alternative predicts high levels of helping only in the high empathic concern/low justification group. Results of this study provided support for the empathy-altruism hypothesis (see Batson & Shaw, 1991, for a review of other studies testing the social punishment explanations).

The final alternative to the empathy-altruism hypothesis is that empathy evokes a desire to obtain rewards. Like the punishment explanation described above, these rewards can be socially or self administered. Social rewards include social praise and material reward. Self administered rewards include pride and positive mood for alleviating the target's need (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

To test whether self and social rewards motivate helping behavior among empathically-aroused individuals, Batson et al. (1988) measured mood change in participants who were not allowed to help a victim in need. Using a 2 (low vs. high empathy) X 2 (prior vs. no prior relief of victim's need) X 2 (perform vs. not perform the helping task), the researchers examined mood change among participants. Both the empathy-altruism hypothesis and the reward-seeking hypothesis predict that no mood changes should occur other than in the high empathy groups. However, the empathy-altruism hypothesis predicts that participants in the high empathy/prior relief groups

would experience a positive mood change regardless of the ability to perform the helping task. The reward alternative predicts that participants in the high empathy condition who were allowed to help would experience positive mood changes regardless of the outcome of the helping, whereas those not allowed to help would experience negative mood change. Results of this study supported the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

Taken altogether, the results of these studies do not support egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Although some debate continues to exist regarding the status of the empathy-altruism hypothesis, Batson and his colleagues present compelling evidence that empathic emotion may indeed evoke an altruistic motivation. In terms of Davis' model, the results of these studies seem to indicate that interpersonal outcomes are motivated primarily by what Batson calls the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis.

Effects of Altruism on Interpersonal Communication

Considering the research on altruistic motivation, it is natural to consider other ways in which such a motivation may be expressed besides direct helping behavior. One of these behaviors is communication. Davis (1996) reviewed several studies that concluded that self-reported empathic concern trait scores were associated with self reports of "good communication" (Davis, 1996). This "good communication" was assessed by how much the participants "opened up" and also "readily listened" to the target. In a more specific description, Meyer, Boster, and Hecht, (1988) hypothesized that empathic communication is characterized by: 1) a humanistic orientation, 2)

perspective taking, 3) empathic concern, 4) emotional responsiveness, and 5) communicative responsiveness. In their study, participants were asked to record and rate a dialogue of a conversation that included empathic responding. These dialogues were also rated by judges. Results of this study indicated that skillful perspective taking predicted responsiveness in communication, which in turn predicted comforting behavior by the participants. In this case, what the authors refer to as “skillful perspective-taking” is defined in the same way as what Batson referred to as imagine-other perspective taking. Skillful perspective taking led to communicative responsiveness, which refers to the participants’ ability to communicate understanding and concern for the person in need.

Haase and Tepper (1972) studied nonverbal empathic communication by asking counselors to rate target combinations of body leaning, eye contact, body orientation, sitting distance, and verbal empathy. The results of this study produced evidence that all factors except body orientation independently effected independent judges’ ratings of empathy in the counselors. The combination of forward trunk leaning, duration of eye contact, and a close sitting distance (approximately 36 inches) had the most impact on empathy ratings. The authors suggest that empathy should be rated for more than verbal content, and estimated that 66 percent of empathic communication is made up of nonverbal cues.

In a study of communication and supportive messages Feng & Lee (2010) describe helpful emotional social support as containing “expressions of care, concern,

affection, and interest” (Feng and Lee, 225). They refer to this as supportive communication, with the point of reducing the target’s negative emotional state.

Finally, in a study examining participants’ experience and empathic communication, Holm (1997) asked nursing students and experienced nurses in Sweden to rate appropriateness of descriptions of conversations between nurses and patients. Contrary to predictions, results indicated that first year students were better at determining the appropriateness of the empathy in the descriptions than were nurses with several years of experience. The authors concluded that experience did not play a role in rating empathic communication, indicating that non-expert judges are able to rate communication.

Present Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how perspective taking affects the communication of participants who are exposed to a target person in need. As described above, prior research has indicated that participants instructed to adopt an imagine-other perspective experience higher levels of empathic concern, whereas those instructed to adopt an imagine-self perspective report increased personal distress. That same technique was utilized in the present research. It was hypothesized that participants who adopt an imagine-self or imagine-other perspective while viewing a video of a person describing the break up of a romantic relationship would report feeling more empathic concern and personal distress, respectively. After viewing the video, participants prepared a video-taped response to the target. Independent judges rated the participants’

responses for supportive communication, which, for the purpose of this study, is defined according to Feng and Lee's (2010) description of being caring, showing concern, and having interest. The communications were not rated for verbal content or specific non-verbal behaviors, again along the lines of Feng and Lee's description.

It was specifically predicted that: 1) participants in the imagine-other and in the imagine self perspective groups would report feeling more empathic concern than would those in the objective group; 2) participants in the imagine-self group, but not those in the imagine-other group, would report feeling more personal distress than would those in the objective group; 3) judges would rate supportive communication by those in the imagine-other and imagine-self perspective groups higher than those in the objective group.

Chapter II

Procedure

Participants

Forty-five female undergraduate psychology students participated in this study. Participants were recruited through the psychology department's online participant pool, and were randomly assigned to either the imagine-other, imagine-self, or objective perspective condition. In return for their participation, all participants received partial credit toward course research requirements. Female participants were used to enhance the similarity antecedent of Davis' model of empathy, as both the actor and primary researcher were females.

Apparatus

A Panasonic digital video camera, model number PVGS250 was used for both the recording and the playback. Videos were recorded on a San Disk 256 MB memory stick.

Procedure

Participants were led to a room containing a television and a digital video camera positioned on a tripod. Participants read an informed consent (Appendix A) and a general introduction to the study (Appendix B). Once the consent form was signed the researcher went over the main points of the introduction. It was explained that there were two people participating in a study on communication styles. Participants were told that

there would be communication between them and their partner using videotaped messages or handwritten notes. They were informed that the purpose of the study was to see which method was preferable, and that the topic of the communication was to be one that was important to the partner who initiated the communicating. Participants then were given a folder that contained information about their condition assignment (Appendix C). All participants were informed that they had been assigned to the video tape condition. Additionally, all participants were told that they were randomly selected to be the second partner to produce the video, and so would respond to the communication created by the partner.

Next the researcher provided participants with instructions on what to expect in the video tape condition (Appendix D). In a separate folder were instructions for “viewing” the video. The researcher informed participant that these instructions were very helpful for this type of research. There were three versions of these viewing instructions, one for each of the three perspectives, with one third of all participants receiving either objective, imagine-other, or imagine-self instructions (Appendix E). While participants reviewed this material, the researcher left the room, allegedly to obtain the freshly recorded message from the partner.

When the researcher returned, she demonstrated how to operate the recording equipment. The participants then viewed the video. All participants were exposed to the same video. The 3 minute video depicted a similarly aged female describing her recent relationship break up with her boyfriend (see Appendix F for script). The researcher left the participant alone in the room for 3 minutes while the video was being watched.

Immediately following the video, the participant filled out the Video Communications Reactions Questionnaire (Appendix G). The researcher prepared the recording equipment and set a digital timer for three minutes, which allowed the participant to see how much time had elapsed during the recording. The researcher left the room before the participant began the communication.

Following the recording, the researcher provided participants with a Video Communications Perceptions Questionnaire, VCPQ (Appendix H). When participants had completed this form, the study was complete. Participants were debriefed as to the nature of the study and asked to sign a statement releasing the video for research purposes (Appendix I).

The second phase of the study was completed following the testing of all participants. All communications were assembled in randomized orders. Three independent judges, blind to condition, viewed and rated the video-taped responses of all participants using the rating sheet found in Appendix J. Judges were graduate students from the same university as the participants, and received research credit for their time.

Chapter III

Data Analysis

Manipulation Checks

Planned contrasts in which responses of participants in the objective condition were compared to responses in the (a) imagine-other condition and (b) imagine-self condition were conducted to determine whether participants reported adopting the particular perspective they were assigned. Specifically, participants rated the extent to which they (a) imagined what the other was thinking and feeling, (b) imagined themselves in the situation of the other, and (c) remained objective and detached. Mean ratings on each of these items by condition are listed in Table 1.

As expected, participants in the imagine-other condition reported trying to imagine how the target was thinking and feeling to a greater degree than did participants in the objective condition, $F(1, 42) = 8.30, p = 0.006, d = 1.32$, whereas there was not a significant difference on this measure between the imagine-self and the objective conditions, $F(1, 42) = 1.53, p = 0.224$. Also as expected, participants in the imagine-self condition reported trying to imagine themselves in the other's situation to a greater extent than did participants in the objective condition, $F(1, 42) = 5.52, p = 0.024, d = .94$, whereas there was not a significant difference on this measure between the imagine-other and objective conditions, $F(1, 42) = 2.33, p = 0.134$. Finally, although those in the objective condition did report remaining more objective and detached than did those in either of the other conditions, neither contrast comparison was statistically significant,

both $F_s(1, 42) = 2.78$, $ps = 0.101$. Overall, these findings suggest that the perspective taking manipulation was successful.

Table 1. *Mean Manipulation Check, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress, and Supportive Communication Scores by Perspective-Taking Condition*

Measure	Condition		
	Objective	Imagine Other	Imagine Self
Manipulation Check			
Imagine Other	4.80 (1.26)	6.20 (0.86)*	5.40 (1.72) _{ns}
Imagine Self	4.80 (1.78)	5.67 (1.72) _{ns}	6.13 (1.06)*
Objective	4.67 (0.82)	3.80 (1.42) _{ns}	3.80 (1.82) _{ns}
Emotion			
Empathic Concern	4.06 (1.08)	4.98 (1.05)*	4.87 (1.19) _{ns}
Personal Distress	2.76 (1.03)	3.32 (1.21) _{ns}	3.61 (1.39)*
Supportive Communication	5.56 (0.80)	5.30 (0.96) _{ns}	5.59 (0.82) _{ns}

Notes. N = 15 in each condition. * differs from the objective condition at $p < .05$, two-tailed. _{ns} does not differ significantly from the objective condition. Means for Personal Distress are adjusted for Empathic Concern Scores. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Empathic Concern

To examine differences in empathic concern by condition, an empathic concern index was created by averaging participants' responses on the six items used to measure

empathic concern ($\alpha = 0.82$). Mean differences on the empathic concern index by perspective-taking condition are listed in Table 1.

Planned contrasts in which responses of participants in the objective condition were compared to responses in the (a) imagine-other condition and (b) imagine-self condition were conducted to determine whether the perspective-taking manipulation created the predicted differences in empathic concern. As predicted, those in the imagine-other condition reported feeling more empathic concern for the other than did those in the objective condition, $F(1, 42) = 5.18, p = 0.028, d = 0.86$. Although those in the imagine-self condition also reported feeling more empathic concern than did those in the objective condition, the difference was not statistically significant, $F(1, 42) = 4.01, p = 0.052$.

Personal Distress

To examine differences in self-reported distress by condition, a distress index was created by averaging participants' responses on the six items used to measure distress ($\alpha = 0.85$). Because previous research by Batson et al. (1997) suggests that measures of distress for individuals in need who are not physically suffering assess both empathic concern and personal distress, adjusted distress scores were computed by covarying empathic concern index scores. The resulting adjusted personal distress index scores by perspective-taking condition are listed in Table 1.

Using ANCOVA, planned contrasts in which responses of participants in the objective condition were compared to responses in the (a) imagine-other condition and

(b) imagine-self condition were conducted to determine whether the perspective-taking manipulation created the predicted differences in personal distress. As predicted those in the imagine-self condition reported feeling more personal distress than did those in the objective condition, $F(1, 42) = 4.30, p = 0.045, d = 0.70$. Although those in the imagine-other condition also reported feeling more personal distress than did those in the objective condition, the difference was not statistically significant, $F(1, 42) = 1.80, p = 0.187$.

Supportive Communication

A supportive communication index score was computed for each participant by averaging each judge's ratings of how "interested", "caring", and "friendly" the communication seemed along with how much the participant seemed to "value" the other and care about her welfare ($\alpha = 0.85-0.91$). The three judge index scores were then averaged to compute a total supportive communication index score for each participant ($\alpha = 0.70$). Mean total supportive communication index scores by perspective-taking condition are listed in Table 1.

Planned contrasts in which total supportive communication index scores in the objective condition were compared to scores in the (a) imagine-other condition and (b) imagine-self condition were conducted to determine whether the perspective-taking manipulation created the predicted differences in supportive communication. Contrary to predictions, neither the imagine-other versus objective condition contrast nor the

imagine-self versus objective condition contrast was statistically significant on this measure, $F(1, 42) = 0.01$, $p = 0.922$, and $F(1, 42) = 0.65$, $p = 0.426$, respectively.

Chapter IV

Discussion

The first prediction, that participants in the imagine-other and in the imagine self perspective groups would feel more empathic concern than the objective group, was supported by the data. Similar to the results reported by Batson et al. (1997), the participants in both imagine perspective conditions reported feeling more empathic concern after viewing the video than did participants in the objective condition. The participants in the imagine-self condition also reported the highest levels of distress, which supports the second prediction. This also is in concordance with the findings by Batson et al. (1997). Those in this perspective condition reported feeling more personal distress after watching the video. Finally, the prediction that the imagine-other condition would receive the highest ratings of supportive communication by the judges was not supported by the data.

Working from Davis's Structural Model of Empathy, this study sought to generate the process of experiencing empathy through the model's four constructs. As an antecedent, the target in the video was chosen for her degree of similarity to the participants themselves (a female undergraduate psychology student). The story described by the target evoked emotional reactions in observers, as reflected in participants' emotion ratings and as reported by the participants during the debriefing stage of the study. Two cognitive processes were also part of the study: language-

mediated association between the target video and the participants, and the perspective-taking done by the participants, which was manipulated.

The next two parts of Davis's model consist of the outcomes, both intrapersonal and interpersonal. These were measured by emotional self-report (intrapersonal) and judges ratings of communication behavior (interpersonal). The results revealed the expected intrapersonal outcomes reported by the participants as evidenced by differences between perspective conditions on empathic concern and personal distress. In contrast, the results did not show evidence of the expected interpersonal outcome. Judges were unable to detect differences in the behavior of the participants of this study using the rating tools provided. Although intrapersonal processes did differ between the perspective conditions, interpersonal behavior did not.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations to this study. The first concerns the inability of the judges to detect any differences in behavior. Most obviously, it may be that Hypothesis 3 is wrong: differences in perspective taking and empathic concern do not produce differences in supportive communication. Another possibility, however, is that the instrument judges used to evaluate supportive communication was invalid. It is noteworthy that reliability within judges was higher than was reliability when judges' ratings were combined, suggesting that the judges did not interpret "supportive communication" in the same way. One way to overcome this would be to use expert judges who understood what is meant by supportive communication. This would,

however, reduce the external validity of the findings given that most people are not trained to assess the supportiveness of the communication of those around them.

It may be that supportive communication effects occur via more implicit affective reactions that are not easily detectable unless one is presently in need, which the judges were reportedly not. In Feng and Lee's (2010) study, they measured how rational or experiential their participants characteristically are. They suggest that these states are not static, but may play a role in how one interprets helping messages. Because of the potential issue of ethics due to utilizing judges or participants who are known to be in a need situation that study design is not desirable. But a potential alternative would be to alter the judges' level of "experientiality", as described by Feng and Lee, to more closely simulate the feeling of need.

Another potential limitation to this study is the exclusive use of female participants. This was done intentionally in order to reduce experimenter effects and to increase the similarity between the target and participants. Batson et al. (1997) reported that they found no sex effects for perspective-taking, which would indicate that selecting one gender over the other would not lead to significantly different outcomes. Furthermore, Davis (1996) presents a review of studies pertaining to empathic effects and sex of participant. He writes that "the sex of the experimenter turned out to be a critical factor in producing sex differences" (page 59). Specifically, females experienced higher empathy when the experimenter was female, and males experienced higher empathy when the experimenter was male. For that reason, it is logical to assume that the similarity in sex between target, experimenter, and participant should maximize the

possibility of supporting the hypothesis assuming the supportive communication measure was valid.

The final limitation to mention concerns the series of studies reported by Batson and his associates in which the empathy-altruism hypothesis was tested against egoistic alternative explanations for the empathic concern-helping effect. As mentioned above, these studies created high and low ease of escape from the situation. When escape from the situation was difficult, participants who experienced both low and high empathic concern helped at high rates (Batson, et al., 1981). However, it was only when escape was easy that participants in the low empathy group helped at lower rates than those in the high empathy group. Unfortunately, the present study possessed a difficult escape context because participants anticipated receiving a second communication from the person in need after she received the participants' first communication. If so, even participant in the imagine-self condition may have tried to be supportive in order to reduce the other's need and consequently reduce their own personal distress during the second round of communication.

Implications and Future Directions

Overall, this study was consistent with prior findings that adopting the perspective of another in need creates different emotional reactions (i.e., primarily empathic concern) than does imagining oneself in the other's need situation (i.e., a mix of empathic concern and personal distress; Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997). What remains unclear, however, is whether these differences in emotions in turn lead to differences in the degree

of supportive communication offered by those experiencing these emotions. Future research should examine this question by (a) ensuring that escape from the need situation is easy or by manipulating the ease of escape; (b) ensuring that judges take on a “need” perspective while rating the degree of supportive communication; and (c) ensuring that both verbal and nonverbal routes for communicating support are validly assessed.

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

University of Wisconsin OshkoshConsent Form

The Department of Psychology supports the practice of protecting human participants in research. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. Your participation is solicited but is strictly voluntary.

In this study you will be asked to communicate with a partner by sending written messages or videotaped messages. You will also be asked to complete surveys of your perceptions and reactions of the communication.

Although unlikely, you may experience some discomfort during participation in this study. Although participation in this study will not directly benefit you, we believe that the information you provide will be useful in furthering our understanding of how people react to communication.

If you agree to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time and will receive credit for your participation. If you decide not to participate in this study, please let the researcher know and she or he will excuse you from the study. You do not need to tell the researcher your reasons for choosing not to participate. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any information collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.

Any responses you provide will be confidential and will not be associated in any way with your name. No information that could identify you will be released in any form.

If you have any further questions, please ask us or contact:

Angela Whirry-Achten
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901
whirra12@uwosh.edu

or

David A. Lishner, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 424-2301
lishnerd@uwosh.edu

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the following individual:

**Chair, Institutional Review Board for
Protection of Human Participants
C/o Grants Office
UW Oshkosh
920-424-1415**

Although the chairperson may ask for your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Consent Statement: I have received an explanation of the study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name

Date

This research has been approved by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh IRB for the Protection of Human Participants for a one year period, valid until (date of approval).

APPENDIX B

Communication Styles Study: Introduction

Communication Styles Study: Introduction

Purpose

In this day and age, people communicate in a variety of ways. For example communication can occur through the use of telephone or cellular phone, email, instant messaging, webcam, or personal communication. In addition, many people spend a lot of time engaged in these methods of communication. This dramatic increase in communication methods and length of communication may impact our lives in many ways. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects some of these types of communication have on our reactions and perceptions. In particular, in this study we will be considering the effects of personal and impersonal methods of communication. Previous research shows that this can be accomplished by using two communication methods; therefore we will be looking at verbal communication that involves the use of video (personal condition) or hand-written notes (impersonal).

What Will Happen in this Study?

In this study you will be assigned to communicate with another participant either through the personal method of a video recording, or the impersonal method of letter writing. You will be asked to send and receive communication twice. Random assignment will be used to determine which of you will begin communication. Whichever of you is assigned to begin communication will be asked to discuss an important event that has happened to you recently, which will be the topic of discussion for the remaining communications.

Please note that only the other participant will view your communication. The research assistant will not be in the room while communications are being prepared. Following this scheduled time all written communications will be destroyed and video recordings will be erased.

APPENDIX C

Communication Styles Study: Condition Assignment

Communication Styles Study: Condition Assignment

You have been randomly assigned to the following communication condition:

- ☐ Video (personal)
- ☐ Written (impersonal)

You have been randomly assigned to:

- ☐ Initiate communication
- ☐ Receive communication

APPENDIX D

Communication and Perspective Taking Instructions

Communication Styles Study: Receive Communication #1

You have been selected to participate in the personal communication aspect of this study, which is conducted through use of video-recording. In addition you have been randomly assigned to receive communication which means the other participant will be the first to send communication. Your partner has been asked to prepare a communication in which he or she discusses an important event that has occurred to him or her recently. After you view this initial communication you will be asked to record a response. You may say whatever you wish in response, but please make sure that your communication focuses on the topic your partner has discussed in his or her initial communication. Because of time constraints your recorded message should not exceed three minutes, although it may be shorter if you like. After this initial round of communication, a second round of communication will occur.

The research assistant will demonstrate how to start the video recorder and the timer. While you are recording your message the research assistant will not be in the room. Once you are finished recording your message, just stop the camera and wait for the assistant to return. Also, the research assistant will not view your communications or the other participant's communications. Only the other participant will view your recording.

APPENDIX E

Perspective Taking Instructions

Communication Styles Study: Instructions for Viewing

We have found that previous participants find it easiest to receive communication if they adopt a specific perspective. Therefore, while you are observing your partner's communication, try to remain objective and detached. Try not to get caught up in the other participant's thoughts and feelings. Just try to concentrate on the content of the message.

Communication Styles Study: Instructions for Viewing

We have found that previous participants find it easiest to receive communication if they adopt a specific perspective. Therefore while you are observing the communication, try to imagine what the other participant is thinking and feeling. When doing so, try to imagine how the event the participant is describing has affected him or her.

Communication Styles Study: Instructions for Viewing

We have found that previous participants find it easiest to receive communication if they adopt a specific perspective. Therefore, while you are observing the communication, try to imagine yourself in the other participant's situation. When doing so, try to imagine the thoughts and feelings you would have if a similar event happened to you.

APPENDIX F

Actress' Script

The research assistant said I'm supposed to talk about something that's important to me. I was thinking that she probably meant a current event, or politics or something, but I can't think of anything like that. Actually, I'm glad to have the opportunity to talk with someone, even though it is through a videotape. I know you don't know me, and that we won't meet, but that sorta makes it easier, to be honest. Well anyway, I don't know if this will be important or interesting to anybody else, but the one thing I can think of is that two weeks ago my boyfriend broke up with me. We've been together since our Junior year in high school. I thought we were really close, and we even came to Oshkosh together. I thought he felt the same, but I guess things have changed. He wants to see other people. He says he still cares a lot about me, but he doesn't want to be tied down to just one person. I'll admit that I am feeling really sad, but I'm trying to think that it might be ok. I tell myself it gives me a chance to go out and meet some new people, and I'll have more time to make some friends here at Oshkosh. But, since we came here together, I didn't really try to meet other people. I recognize a few people from my classes, but I don't know very many names. It's been a rather lonely time for me. I keep thinking about dropping out and going home. At least back home I have some friends and my family. But I didn't even tell my family yet because I don't want them to worry about me. I just try to pretend that everything is ok when I talk to them.

I don't know... I'm sorry I have been rambling about my personal life. It feels good to talk about it, even to a machine just because I know that someone will hear me. I know this is a really normal thing that I'm going through, too. It's not like I'm the first person in history to get dumped. I'm sorry I sound so pathetic... this is just a really hard

time for me. I just thought I should try to keep my grades up while I am here...and that's why I thought I should sign up for this study. I can use the extra credit because it's been hard for me to concentrate on studying. I only want to watch TV when I get back to my room. (Looks at timer.) Oops. My time is up.

APPENDIX G

Video Communications Reactions Questionnaire

Video Communications Reactions Questionnaire

Directions: Please circle the number that best describes the degree to which you experienced each of the following emotional reactions while viewing your partner's communication. Do not worry if you did not experience several of these emotions; only a few may have been relevant to you at this time. However, please be sure to circle a response for each emotion.

	not at all		moderately			extremely	
1. happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. alarmed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. sympathetic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. sad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. troubled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. softhearted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. joyful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. low-spirited	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. distressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. compassionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. elated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. upset	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. tender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. worried	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. disturbed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. heavy-hearted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. moved	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. disconcerted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. sorrowful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. grieved	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. pity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. cheerful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. angry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX H

Video Communication Perceptions Questionnaire

APPENDIX I

Release of Video

Thank you for your participation. As was discussed, we are interested in analyzing your communication for research purposes. Because the communication you prepared is very valuable, we ask that you grant us permission to view your communication strictly for research purposes.

By signing below, you agree to allow your video to be used for research purposes only. The video will only be viewed by psychology personnel under the supervision of Dr. Lishner. Furthermore, your personal information will in no way be connected to the video recording.

Name _____

Date _____

APPENDIX J

Communication Study: Judge Rating Form

Communication Study: Judge Rating Form

Communication saved as: _____

Judge ID _____

1. How interested in the other person's situation does the participant seem to be?

Not at all						Very interested
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. How much does the participant seem to care about the other person?

Not at all						Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. How friendly does the participant seem to be toward the other person?

Not at all						Very friendly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. How understanding of the other person's situation does the participant seem to be?

Not at all						Very understanding
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. How uncomfortable does the participant seem to be in her response to the other person?

Not at all						Very uncomfortable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. How distressed does the participant seem to be in her response to the other person?

Not at all						Very distressed
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. How much does the participant seem to value the other person?

Not at all						Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. How concerned about the other person's welfare does the participant seem to be?

Not at all						Very concerned
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. How much does the participant seem to be concerned about herself rather than the other person?

Not at all						Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

References

- Batson, C.D. (1991). *The altruism question*. Lawrence Earlbaum Publishers: Hillsdale, NJ.
- Batson, C. D., Duncan, B., Ackerman, P., Buckley, T., & Birch, K. (1981.) Is empathic emotion a source of altruistic motivation? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40, 290-302.
- Batson, C. D., Dyck, J. L., Brandt, J. R., Batson, J. G., Powell, A. L., McMaster, M. R., & Griffitt, C. (1988). Five studies testing two new egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 52-77.
- Batson, C. D., Early, S., & Salvarani, G. (1997). Perspective taking: Imagining how another feels versus imagining how you would feel. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(7), 751-758.
- Batson, C. D., Fultz, J., & Schoenrade, P. A. (1987). Distress and empathy: Two qualitatively distinct vicarious emotions with different motivational consequences. *Journal of Personality*, 55, 20-39.
- Batson, C. D., O'Quin, K., Fultz, J., Vanderplas, M., & Isen, A.M. (1983.) Influence of self-reported distress and empathy on egoistic versus altruistic motivation to help. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 706-718.
- Batson, C.D., & Shaw, L. L. (1991). Evidence for altruism: Toward a pluralism of prosocial motives. *Psychological Inquiry*, 2, 107-122
- Davis M. H. (1996). *Empathy*. Westview Press: Boulder, CO.

- Feng, B., & Lee, K. (2010). The Influence of Thinking Styles on Responses to Supportive Messages. *Communication Studies*, 61(2), 224-238.
- Fultz, J., Batson, C. D., Fortenbach, V. A., McCarthy, P. M., & Varney, L. L. (1986). Social evaluation and the empathy-altruism hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 761-769.
- Haase, R. F., & Tepper, D. T. (1972). Nonverbal components of empathic communication. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 19(5), 417-424.
- Holm, O. (1997). Ratings of empathic communication: Does experience make a difference. *Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied*, 131, 680-682.
- Korsgaard, M. A., Meglino, B. M., & Lester, S. W. (1997.) Beyond helping: Do other-oriented values have broader implications in organizations? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 160-177.
- Meyer, D. J., Boster, F. J., & Hecht, M. L. (1988). A model of empathic communication. *Communication Research Reports* 5, 19-27.
- Miller, K. I., Stiff, J. B., & Ellis, B. H. (1988). Communication and empathy as precursors to burnout among human service workers. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 250-265.
- Morse, J. (1992). 30th anniversary commentary on Morse J.M., Bottorff J., Anderson G., O'Brien, B., & Solberg, S. (1992) Beyond empathy: Expanding expressions of caring. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 53, 87-88.
- Rogers, C. R. (1995). *A Way of Being*. Houghton Mifflin: New York.

- Stiff, J. B., Dillard, J. P., Somera, L., Kim, H., Sleight, C. (1988). Empathy, communication, and prosocial behavior. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 198-213.
- Stocks, E. L., & Lishner, D. A. (2009). *Empathy*. In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*. Boston, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wispe, L. (1986). The distinction between sympathy and empathy: To call forth a concept, a word is needed. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 314-21.