

Reinterpreting the Empathy–Altruism Relationship: When One Into One Equals Oneness

Robert B. Cialdini, Stephanie L. Brown, Brian P. Lewis, Carol Luce, and Steven L. Neuberg
Arizona State University

Important features of the self-concept can be located outside of the individual and inside close or related others. The authors use this insight to reinterpret data previously said to support the empathy–altruism model of helping, which asserts that empathic concern for another results in selflessness and true altruism. That is, they argue that the conditions that lead to empathic concern also lead to a greater sense of self–other overlap, raising the possibility that helping under these conditions is not selfless but is also directed toward the self. In 3 studies, the impact of empathic concern on willingness to help was eliminated when *oneness*—a measure of perceived self–other overlap—was considered. Path analyses revealed further that empathic concern increased helping only through its relation to perceived oneness, thereby throwing the empathy–altruism model into question. The authors suggest that empathic concern affects helping primarily as an emotional signal of oneness.

Although social psychologists regularly inquire into the form and intent of behavior, rarely do they address questions designed to reflect directly on the basic nature of humanity. That has not been the case, however, in one notable research domain: the study of true altruism. Not content to leave the issue to the philosophers who have pondered it through the ages without clear resolution (Bentham, 1789/1879; Comte, 1851/1875; Hume, 1740/1896; Nagel, 1970), various social psychologists have examined the possibility that wholly altruistic motivation falls within the range of human functioning (e.g., Campbell, 1975; McDougall, 1908; Rushton, 1989; Staub, 1978). The question of whether we are ever genuinely selfless—that is, motivated solely or principally to enhance the welfare of another—has been advanced significantly by theorists who have introduced the concept of empathy to the debate (Batson, 1987; Hoffman, 1984; Krebs, 1975).

Currently, the most prominent and easily the most research productive of these empathy-based formulations is that of Batson and his associates (Batson, 1991; Batson, in press; Batson

et al., 1989; Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981; Batson et al., 1988; Batson & Shaw, 1991; Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Toi & Batson, 1982). According to Batson's empathy–altruism hypothesis, purely altruistic action can occur reliably, provided that it is preceded by a specific psychological state: empathic concern for another. Empathic concern is defined as an emotional reaction characterized by such feelings as compassion, tenderness, softheartedness, and sympathy. It is brought about by the act of perspective taking, wherein one person (e.g., the potential altruist) takes the point of view of another (e.g., a suffering victim). Perspective taking, in turn, is brought about by a perception of attachment (kinship, friendship, familiarity, similarity) to the other or by instructions to take the other's perspective (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

In a remarkably extensive program of investigation, Batson and his associates (see Batson, 1991; Batson, in press, for reviews) as well as researchers working independently (e.g., Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990; Schroeder, Dovidio, Sibicky, Matthews, & Allen, 1988) have generally supported the empathy–altruism hypothesis. Dozens of experiments have demonstrated that, first, the circumstances hypothesized to lead to perspective taking do increase empathic concern, and second, under conditions of empathic concern for another, individuals help more frequently in what appears to be an altruistically motivated attempt to improve the other's well being rather than an egoistically motivated attempt to improve their own. Especially impressive is that the empathy–altruism hypothesis has been repeatedly confirmed in response to challenges from a variety of egoistically based alternative accounts of the basic effect.

For instance, Batson and colleagues have produced data sug-

Robert B. Cialdini, Stephanie L. Brown, Brian P. Lewis, Carol Luce, and Steven L. Neuberg, Department of Psychology, Arizona State University. Brian P. Lewis is now at the Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Robert B. Cialdini, Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287-1104. Electronic mail may be sent via the Internet to robert.cialdini@asu.edu.

gesting that the increased helping accompanying perspective taking is due to a selfless regard for the other rather than a selfish desire to escape aversive arousal (Batson et al., 1981) or social disapproval (Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, & Varney, 1986) or guilt (Batson et al., 1988) or shame (Batson et al., 1988) or sadness (Batson et al., 1989) or to increase vicarious joy (Batson et al., 1991). Although some are not convinced that the empathy-altruism position has won every battle against the egoistically based alternatives (e.g., Davis, 1994; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988), that position does appear to have won the war in important respects. Even champions of egoistic accounts of helping have conceded that Batson and his associates have provided credible experimental evidence for the existence of true selflessness in the human character (Archer, 1984; Cialdini et al., 1987; Piliavin & Charng, 1990), and the empathy-altruism hypothesis is described as generally supported in most contemporary texts in the field (e.g., Brehm & Kassin, 1996; Brewer & Crano, 1994; Franzoi, 1996; Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995; Smith & Mackie, 1995).

Rooted as they are, though, in centuries of philosophical and scientific thought, nonaltruistic explanations of human conduct are not easily dismissed. Indeed, the purpose of this article is to propose a nonaltruistic reinterpretation of the data supporting the empathy-altruism hypothesis. To do so properly, it is necessary to consider two relatively recent theoretical developments. The first concerns the contemporary view of the self as dynamic and malleable, especially in the moment (Higgins, 1996; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987; McGuire & McGuire, 1988). That is, although our self-conceptions are fairly stable over long periods of time, they can be made to shift temporarily, flowing across established boundaries with changes in various factors, such as whom we are with, what immediate goals we have, which aspects of the self are currently prominent, and which roles we are instructed to play (Leary, 1995; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir, 1986; Schlenker, 1985).

The Other as the Self

The notion of a responsive and fluid sense of self offers the provocative possibility that when one takes the perspective of another (either through instructions or a feeling of attachment) and vicariously experiences what the other is experiencing, one comes to incorporate the self within the boundaries of the other. If true, such a process would seriously undermine the logic of the empathy-altruism hypothesis. That is, if the distinction between the self and other is compromised by perspective taking, then so is the distinction between selflessness and selfishness.

It is important to recognize the nature and limits of this proposed merger of self and other. What is merged is conceptual, not physical. We are not suggesting that individuals with overlapping identities confuse their physical beings or situations with those of the other. If one were to stub a toe, we would not expect the other to experience the same kind of localized, sharp pain—although, tellingly, the other might wince in a different sort of pain. That is, the other might well be pained emotionally that someone with whom he or she shares an identity has been hurt. Thus, according to contemporary views of the self, it is

conceptual identities that are merged, not physical identities or situational circumstances.

The merging of self and other identity has been suggested before as an explanation for helpfulness (Aron & Aron, 1986; Hornstein, 1982; Lerner, 1982; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). Batson and his colleagues have examined this possibility within the context of the empathy-altruism model and responded in two ways. The first was to acknowledge that the model depends critically on the separateness of the self and the other; without a distinct self and other and without distinct motivations to aid the self or the other, it is not possible to detach altruism from egoism (Batson, 1987; Batson, in press; Batson & Shaw, 1991). The second response has been to doubt the likelihood that a merging of self and other ever genuinely occurs, "except perhaps in some mystical states" (Batson & Shaw, 1991, p. 161), and to argue that, in any case, feelings of attachment and altruistic motivation do not blur the self-other distinction but may even intensify it (Batson, in press; Batson & Shaw, 1991; Schoenrode, Batson, Brandt, & Loud, 1986).

However, accumulating evidence suggests that a merging of self and other identity *can* occur and that it is most likely under conditions linked by the empathy-altruism model to feelings of attachment and altruistic motivation: relationship closeness and perspective taking. For instance, Davis, Conklin, Smith, and Luce (1996) found that individuals instructed to take the perspective of another subsequently saw more of themselves as residing in the other. In addition, research by Aron and Aron has demonstrated that as relationship closeness escalates, so does blurring of the self-other distinction, as measured by more similar self-other word associations, the selection of self-other representations with greater boundary intersections, and longer me/not me reaction time latencies on nonshared traits (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991).

The Self in the Other

A second relevant theoretical development is the growing application of evolutionary principles to much of human social behavior (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992; Buss & Kenrick, in press), including helping behavior (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994; Cunningham, 1986). Perhaps the evolutionary principle most pertinent to the empathy-altruism hypothesis is Hamilton's (1964) concept of inclusive fitness, because it, too, undermines the distinction between self and other. Hamilton's position, which is now widely accepted among evolutionary theorists (Alcock, 1993; Dawkins, 1989), is that individuals do not so much attempt to ensure their own welfare and survival as to ensure the welfare and survival of their genes. This is a crucial point for conceptualizations of true altruism in that it implies that the *self* in self-interest can lie outside of one's body and inside the skin of another—in the form of genes that may be shared with the other. By this logic, it can be selfish to give away resources in a helpful act, provided that the recipient gives evidence of greater than average genetic overlap with the helper.

Of course, it is not possible to detect one's degree of genetic overlap with another directly; instead, one must rely on discernible cues that are associated with a relatively high level of genetic commonality (Krebs, 1991). It is telling that these cues—kinship, friendship, similarity, and familiarity (Cunningham,

1986; Rushton, Russell, & Wells, 1984; Wells, 1987)—are precisely those that Batson and his associates contend produce true altruism through their effect on attachment (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Batson et al., 1995).

Oneness

The upshot of the foregoing analysis is that close attachments may elevate benevolence not because individuals feel more empathic concern for the close other but because they feel more *at one with* the other—that is, because they perceive more of themselves in the other. This experience of oneness—a sense of shared, merged, or interconnected personal identities—could come about in one or both of two ways.¹ First, consistent with contemporary theories of the self as situationally malleable (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987; McGuire & McGuire, 1988), enhanced oneness could stem directly from the act of perspective taking that accompanies attachment (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Miller, 1990) and that facilitates the symbolic merging or expansion of the self into the other (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 1992; Aron et al., 1991; Davis et al., 1996). Second, consistent with evolutionary theory, felt oneness could arise as a consequence of exposure to attachment-related cues (e.g., kinship, friendship, and familiarity) that signal relatively high genetic commonality (Cunningham, 1986; Rushton, Russell, & Wells, 1984; Wells, 1987). In either event, perceived oneness provides a nonaltruistic alternative account of the findings that Batson and colleagues have attributed to altruistic motivation. If people locate more of themselves in the others to whom they are closely attached, then the helping that takes place among such individuals may not be selfless.

To test this alternative to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, we conducted an initial experiment that operationalized degree of attachment in terms of the closeness of the relationship between two individuals. Recall that according to the empathy-altruism model (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Batson et al., 1995), feelings of attachment stem from such factors as kinship, friendship, and familiarity. Consequently, participants in our study focused on an individual who was a near stranger, an acquaintance, a good friend, or a family member. They were then asked to indicate their willingness to provide various levels of aid upon learning that this individual had been recently evicted from his or her apartment. Participants also rated the extent of oneness they felt with the evicted person, as well as the amount of empathic concern, personal distress (aversive arousal), and sadness. Thus, our participants were not asked to speculate on what they *might be* feeling should this set of events occur. Rather, they rated what they *were* currently feeling, after having spent time focused on the need situation. In this fashion, we sought to inquire into the genuine emotional responses of our participants in the same way that one might inquire into the genuine emotional responses of individuals viewing a movie or other engaging depiction.

We had several expectations as to the experimental outcomes. First, in keeping with the empathy-altruism model (Batson & Shaw, 1991), we expected that as relationship closeness (attachment) intensified, so would feelings of empathic concern. Second, in keeping with our oneness-based alternative, we expected

that as relationship closeness intensified, so would feelings of oneness (merged identity) with the other. Third, we expected that extent of empathic concern would predict level of helping, as has been found in numerous prior studies (see Batson, 1991; Batson & Shaw, 1991, for reviews). Fourth, we expected that extent of felt oneness would also predict level of helping. Fifth, we expected that empathic concern would remain predictive of helping after the influence of the egoistic factors of personal distress and sadness was removed, as has been shown previously (e.g., Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Fultz et al., 1986). Finally and most crucially, we expected that empathic concern would no longer be predictive of helping after the influence of oneness was extracted but that oneness would be significantly predictive when empathic concern was partialled out. This last prediction was based on our view that empathic concern is not the functional cause of increased helping under conditions of increased attachment but a concomitant of the functional cause: perceived oneness.

A Methodological Rationale

In testing these expectations, we sought to avoid a criticism that had been leveled against the data gathering approach of Batson and his colleagues (Cialdini, 1991; Sorrentino, 1991). The criticism is that, although the procedural rigor of individual experiments supporting the model is by and large quite good, there is a meta-methodological weakness in the overall approach. Consider the following sequence of experimentation. To examine whether a particular egoistic factor, concern about social approval, could account for seemingly selfless action, researchers conducted a set of studies that removed or controlled for the role of such concern and that still found evidence of selfless responding (Fultz et al., 1986). With that egoistic factor apparently dispatched, the focus shifted to another egoistic contender, guilt, and another set of procedures and situations was devised to rule out the role of guilt (Batson et al., 1988). That done, the focus shifted to yet another egoistic factor, sadness, and its mediational influence was tested and rejected in still another set of experimental situations (Batson et al., 1989). Finally, using a different experimental situation again, researchers assessed the possibility that empathic joy could account for obtained altruistic patterns and found it wanting (Batson et al., 1991).

Despite the success of this sequential strategy in supporting the empathy-altruism hypothesis, there is a problem with its one-at-a-time approach to dealing with egoistic alternatives. After all, the fundamental dispute the empathy-altruism model

¹ As we have noted, the sense of shared personal identities has been suggested by earlier workers as importantly implicated in the helping decision (Aron & Aron, 1986; Hornstein, 1982; Lerner, 1982; Piliavin et al., 1981). These workers have tended to use the term *we-ness* to refer to this shared sense of identity (see especially Piliavin et al., 1981). Since those earlier statements, however, *we-ness* has frequently been used to denote a feeling of group membership or social identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Turner, 1987). Thus, we have opted for the term *oneness* to differentiate it from a sense of merger with a collectivity and to reserve it for that which occurs in a dyadic relationship with a specified other.

attempts to resolve is not between altruism, considered as a concept, and various egoistic concepts, considered independently; rather, it is between altruism as a whole and egoism as a whole, which has not been tested. Ruling out the influence of one egoistic motive in a specific situation does not rule out egoism due to other factors there. Moreover, the one-egoistic-factor-at-a-time approach ignores the plausible possibility that different egoistic motives may be active (and inactive) in different situations. The desire to reduce sadness, for instance, may not be strong or even applicable in one setting but may be quite prominent in another. If so, then demonstrating that a single egoistic motivator, such as sadness, fails to account for helping in a particular experimental situation does not eliminate its possible influence on helping in a *different* experimental situation where it has not been removed or held constant. The implication is that investigations of the empathy-altruism hypothesis should properly include procedures that allow for the simultaneous elimination of multiple nonaltruistic motives. To that end, the present research incorporated design and analysis procedures that allowed the simultaneous consideration of the impact on helping of an altruistic motivator—empathic concern—and three nonaltruistic motivators—personal distress, sadness, and oneness.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Forty-four male and 46 female introductory psychology students at Arizona State University participated in the experiment in return for course credit. We assured participants that their responses would remain anonymous in order to discourage stated helping on the basis of social approval pressures.

Procedure

In a study said to be investigating impression formation, participants were asked to focus on a particular individual who, depending on condition, was a near stranger, an acquaintance, a good friend, or a family member (preferably a sibling). To instantiate their focus, participants described in writing, as best they could, the individual's physical characteristics, personality traits, interests, values, and attitudes. Next, they were asked to consider a need situation in which the described individual had recently been evicted, to concentrate on that situation, and to indicate the level of aid they would be willing to provide him or her in that situation. They also rated the amount of sadness, personal distress, empathic concern, and oneness they were feeling toward the described individual. Each of these ratings followed the willingness-to-help assessment, with the exception of the oneness measure, which was counterbalanced so that it occurred either before or after all other measures. The timing of the oneness measure had no significant and systematic impact in this or any of the subsequent studies; therefore, this order factor is not considered further.

Independent Variable

We manipulated relationship closeness by instructing participants to think about and describe one of four same-sex persons: a near stranger, an acquaintance, a good friend, or a family member. Participants in the near stranger condition described "a man/woman you don't really know...someone you would recognize from class, but not say 'hello' to

if you passed each other on campus." Participants in the acquaintance condition described "a man/woman who you don't know really well, but you would stop and chat with him/her for a few minutes if you passed each other on campus." Participants in the good friend condition described "a man/woman who is a friend of yours, who you sometimes go out with outside of school." Participants in the family member condition described "your closest male/female family member, a sibling if possible."

Dependent Variables

Helping measure. All participants were asked to consider that the described person "was just evicted from his/her apartment." Participants were then asked to indicate the level of help (if any) they would be willing to give the evicted person by choosing one of seven increasingly costly helping options: nothing, give him or her an apartment guide, help him or her find a new place to live by driving him or her around for a few hours, offer to have him or her come stay with you for a couple of days (provided you had space), offer to have him or her come stay with you for a week (provided you had space), offer to have him or her come stay with you until he or she found a new place (provided you had space), and offer to let him or her come live with you rent-free (provided you had space). In all analyses, the level of cost associated with each of these seven options was determined in pilot work in which 21 introductory psychology students rated (on a 0 to 100 scale) each of the options in terms of its cost to the helper. The resultant ratings (divided by 10) formed weights that were applied to each option. For the seven options, the weights were, respectively, 0.0, 0.6, 2.9, 3.6, 4.2, 5.9, and 8.3.

Mediational measures. After responding to the helping measure, participants rated the extent of empathic concern they felt for the evicted person, as measured by the four empathic adjectives used by Batson et al. (1995) to constitute their empathic concern index *sympathetic*, *compassionate*, *softhearted*, and *tender*. Participants also rated the amount of personal distress (aversive arousal) and sadness they felt, as measured by emotion adjectives suggested by Fultz, Schaller, and Cialdini (1988) to reflect personal distress (*alarmed*, *worried*, *uneasy*) and sadness (*sad*, *low-spirited*, and *heavy-hearted*). We administered the personal distress and sadness items to assess egoistic affect. The empathic concern, personal distress, and sadness adjectives were intermixed on the questionnaire and were rated along 7-point scales with anchors *not at all* (1) and *extremely* (7).

Additionally, participants rated the extent of oneness they felt with the evicted person by responding to two items that were combined in all analyses to form a oneness index. The first item incorporated the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale used by Aron et al. (1992) to measure perceived self-other boundary overlap. It consisted of a set of seven pairs of increasingly overlapping circles. Participants selected the pair of circles that they believed best characterized their relationship with the evicted person. The second item asked participants to indicate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they would use the term *we* to describe their relationship with the evicted person. For purposes of counterbalancing, the oneness index items appeared either immediately after participants engaged in their description of the target person or after all other measures were taken.

Results

Before examining our specific predictions, we performed an analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing our general expectation that relationship closeness would lead to greater willingness to help. That analysis produced a supportive and highly significant effect, $F(3, 82) = 33.28, p < .001$. The helping means associated with each of the levels of relationship closeness are pre-

Table 1
Means of Helping, Empathic Concern, and Oneness Scores as a Function of Level of Relationship Closeness and Need Situation

Need situation	Level of relationship closeness			
	Near stranger	Acquaintance	Good friend	Close family member
Study 1: Eviction				
Helping	1.20 _a	4.13 _b	6.63 _c	6.89 _c
Empathic concern	3.04 _a	4.36 _b	4.21 _b	4.50 _b
Oneness	1.52 _a	3.16 _b	4.52 _c	4.57 _c
<i>n</i>	22	22	20	22
Study 2: Orphaned children				
Helping	4.13 _a	6.11 _a	7.96 _b	9.01 _b
Empathic concern	4.42 _a	5.52 _b	5.85 _b	5.82 _b
Oneness	1.90 _a	3.18 _b	5.24 _c	5.16 _c
<i>n</i>	15	17	17	19
Study 3				
Phone call				
Helping	0.80 _a	0.98 _{a,b}	1.54 _b	1.55 _b
Empathic concern	2.87 _a	3.49 _{a,b}	4.55 _b	4.66 _b
Oneness	2.17 _a	3.16 _a	4.43 _b	4.66 _b
<i>n</i>	33	18	20	19
Eviction				
Helping	1.77 _a	3.63 _b	5.88 _c	6.95 _c
Empathic concern	3.56 _a	4.34 _{a,b}	4.90 _{b,c}	5.66 _c
Oneness	2.16 _a	3.56 _b	5.00 _c	5.66 _d
<i>n</i>	27	19	20	16
Orphaned children				
Helping	4.15 _a	5.36 _a	8.23 _b	8.83 _b
Empathic concern	4.53 _a	4.51 _a	5.41 _{a,b}	6.21 _b
Oneness	2.40 _a	3.02 _a	4.48 _b	4.80 _b
<i>n</i>	20	23	19	20

Note. Within each row, means sharing the same subscript are not significantly different by Tukey test.

sented in Table 1. Next, we examined the set of hypotheses designed to provide information about the mediation of this basic effect.

Effect of Relationship Closeness on Empathic Concern and Oneness

Our first and second hypotheses, that relationship closeness would lead to greater empathic concern and to greater oneness, were supported by ANOVAs demonstrating a significant impact of relationship closeness on empathic concern, $F(3, 82) = 5.37$, $p < .01$, and on oneness, $F(3, 86) = 30.58$, $p < .001$. The means for these variables are presented in Table 1.

Relation of Empathic Concern and Oneness to Helping

Our third and fourth hypotheses, that empathic concern and oneness would predict helping, were confirmed by correlational analyses showing significant relationships between helping scores and scores on both empathic concern ($r = .45$, $p < .01$) and oneness ($r = .76$, $p < .01$).

Mediation of Helping

Our fifth and sixth hypotheses were that empathic concern would remain predictive of helping after the influence of ego-

istic affect (personal distress and sadness) had been removed but would no longer be predictive after the influence of oneness had been extracted. A test of those hypotheses required a hierarchical regression analysis in which helping served as the criterion variable and empathic concern, personal distress, sadness, and oneness served as predictors. In that analysis, participant gender was entered in a first step and had no significant impact, $b = .01$, $F(1, 82) < 1$. When entered on the second step, empathic concern was a highly significant predictor of helping, $b = 0.90$, $F(1, 81) = 19.52$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, consistent with our fourth hypothesis, when the egoistic affect adjectives were entered on the third step, empathic concern remained significantly related to helping, though less so, $b = .62$, $F(1, 75) = 4.09$, $p = .05$. Finally, supportive of our sixth hypothesis, when oneness was entered on the last step of the analysis, it both predicted helping powerfully, $b = 1.10$, $F(1, 74) = 48.27$, $p < .001$, and rendered the impact of empathic concern nonsignificant, $b = .11$, $F(1, 74) < 1$. In addition, the unique proportion of variance accounted for by oneness was many times that for empathic concern (30% vs. 0.36%). This last step in the regression procedure highlights the fundamental asymmetry between oneness and empathic concern as mediators of help. That is, controlling for oneness eliminated the influence of empathic concern, whereas controlling for empathic concern left oneness a powerful predictor of willingness to help.

Discussion

In several ways, the outcomes of Study 1 are congruent with what has been found by Batson and his associates and with what would be predicted according to the empathy–altruism model. First, in keeping with statements of that model (Batson, 1987, 1991), relationship closeness led to greater feelings of empathic concern for a needy other. Second, as has occurred in much prior research (see Batson & Shaw, 1991, for a review), levels of empathic concern predicted willingness to help. Moreover, once again consistent with previous work (e.g., Batson et al., 1983; Fultz et al., 1986), when the influence of the egoistic factors of personal distress and sadness were extracted, a significant relationship between empathic concern and helping remained. These parallels between the present findings and those of past studies offer a necessary degree of reassurance that our procedures and measures adequately manipulate and capture the variables under consideration.

Two additional findings of Study 1 suggest a nonaltruistic alternative to the empathy–altruism model, however. First, increasingly close relationship attachment to another person produced an increasingly elevated perception of self–other oneness, raising the possibility that the enhanced helping that regularly takes place in attached relationships does not occur altruistically—without consideration of its impact on the self. Support for this possibility can be seen in the second additional finding: When the effect of oneness was extracted from the analysis, the empathy–altruism model's proposed source of altruistic motivation (empathic concern) no longer had any impact on helping. One implication of these findings is that empathic concern had appeared to motivate helping in past work only because it is a concomitant of oneness, which had not been measured or taken into account.

Before assigning much confidence to such contentions, however, we felt it necessary to replicate the basic findings of Study 1 and to do so with a different need situation. It is conceivable, for example, that the eviction predicament that served as the helping context in Study 1 somehow obscured the impact of altruistic motivation on our helping measures. Therefore, to establish the generality of our results, we decided to conduct a follow-up study in which the needy person could not be deemed responsible for his or her plight. To assure that the empathy–altruism hypothesis would have a good opportunity for support, we chose a type of victim that had been used frequently in studies confirming that hypothesis (Batson et al., 1991; Coke et al., 1978) and that was likely to evoke a high degree of empathic concern: recently orphaned children.

Study 2

Method

Participants

Thirty-eight female and 36 male introductory psychology students at Arizona State University participated in return for course credit. Again, participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous.

Procedure

The procedures and measures of Study 2 were identical to those of Study 1 with the exceptions of the need situation and the consequent helping options.

Need situation. After participants focused on and described a near stranger, an acquaintance, a good friend, or a close family member (preferably a sibling), they were asked to consider that the described individual "died in an accident leaving his/her two children without a home."

Helping options. Participants indicated the amount of help they would be willing to give by choosing one of seven helping options: nothing, donate \$10 toward a fund for the kids, donate \$25 toward a fund for the kids, donate \$50 toward a fund for the kids, start a fund-raising campaign for the kids' welfare, have the kids come live with you until a permanent home was found, and have the kids come live with you and raise them as you would your own. As in Study 1, each option was weighted according to pilot work, which for this study produced helping weights of 0.0, 3.0, 4.2, 5.7, 6.0, 8.0, and 9.2, respectively.

Results

Our first analysis was an ANOVA designed to examine the influence of relationship closeness on willingness to help. That analysis demonstrated a powerful impact of relationship closeness on helping responses, $F(3, 70) = 17.43, p < .001$. Table 1 provides the relevant means.

Effect of Relationship Closeness on Empathic Concern and Oneness

As in Study 1, our first and second hypotheses, that relationship closeness would lead to greater empathic concern and to greater oneness, were tested with ANOVAs that showed a significant effect of relationship closeness on empathic concern, $F(3, 70) = 6.73, p < .001$, and on oneness, $F(3, 64) = 27.75, p < .001$. Relevant means appear in Table 1.

Relation of Empathic Concern and Oneness to Helping

We examined our third and fourth hypotheses, that empathic concern and oneness would predict helping, with correlational analyses that, as in Study 1, showed significant relationships between helping scores and both empathic concern ($r = .33, p < .01$), and oneness ($r = .53, p < .01$).

Mediation of Helping

As in Study 1, we tested our mediational hypotheses with a hierarchical regression analysis in which helping served as the criterion variable and empathic concern, personal distress, sadness, and oneness served as predictors. The effect of participant gender was partialled out in step 1 of the analysis and proved nonsignificant, $b = -.21, F(1, 65) < 1$. When empathic concern was entered on step 2, it was a significant predictor of helping, $b = .84, F(1, 64) = 15.39, p < .01$. Although adding the egoistic affect (personal distress and sadness) adjectives at step 3 reduced the influence of empathic concern, it remained a significant predictor of helping, $b = .72, F(1, 58) = 5.14, p < .03$. Just as had occurred in Study 1, however, when oneness was introduced to the analysis on the final step, it not only significantly influenced helping, $b = .57, F(1, 57) = 10.39, p < .01$, but it reduced the impact of empathic concern to nonsignificance, $b = .37, F(1, 57) = 1.37, ns$. Furthermore, the unique proportion of variance accounted for by oneness

was again several times greater than that for empathic concern (10.4% vs. 1.4%).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated exactly the findings of Study 1. It is noteworthy that this was so despite substantial differences between the studies in the victims and need situations considered by participants. Although consistency of this sort enhanced our confidence that our model might apply across a wide range of helping situations, we recognized that additional work would be necessary to establish such generality. To that end, we decided to test our model in a need setting quite different from those of our initial two studies. That is, Studies 1 and 2 involved rather severe and unusual forms of need. We wondered whether oneness would have a similar mediational influence on minor and mundane types of aid. One small kind of everyday help, aid in making a phone call, seemed a desirable choice in that it has been used frequently in helping research and has been shown to be responsive to an array of social psychological factors (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Isen, Clark, & Schwartz, 1976; Manucia, Baumann, & Cialdini, 1984). Therefore, in a third study we asked participants to decide how much help they would be willing to provide to an individual who needed aid in making a phone call. To contrast this level of need severity against much higher levels, we replicated the need situations of Studies 1 and 2 as well.

More than providing information about the generality of our model, varying severity of need within our design provided the opportunity to test a hypothesis that comes from the evolutionary perspective on helping which is gaining prominence within social psychology (Burnstein et al., 1994; Buss & Kenrick, in press; Cunningham, 1986). A fundamental assumption within this perspective is that as indications of genetic commonality between individuals increase, so will willingness to offer assistance—an assumption that was supported in our initial two studies by the significant effect of relationship closeness on helping. However, evolutionary theory makes an additional, qualifying assumption: This effect should occur primarily in situations of severe need where survival of the needy other (and of his or her genes) could be at risk (Burnstein et al., 1994). Thus, a second purpose of Study 3 was to test the prediction that the influence of relationship closeness on helping should be strongest in the relatively severe need contexts involving eviction and orphaned children.

Study 3

Method

Participants

Eighty-two male and 181 female introductory psychology students at Arizona State University responded to an experimental questionnaire in return for course credit. As in Studies 1 and 2, all participants were made aware that their responses would be anonymous.

Independent Variables

Two independent variables, relationship closeness and severity of need, were crossed in a 4×3 factorial design. The relationship closeness

variable was identical to that of Studies 1 and 2. The severity of need variable was composed of three levels of need, the lowest of which was introduced for the first time. It consisted of a need situation in which the target person required aid in making a phone call. The next highest level of need consisted of the eviction situation used in Study 1. The highest need level consisted of the orphaned children situation used in Study 2.

In order to create a continuous variable for situation severity as well as validate our severity levels, a weighting scheme we developed from pilot work in which 25 participants were asked to compare the three situations and assign a value between 0 and 10 that would indicate "how important it is that this person receive help." The means of these values were calculated so that they could be used as a weighting factor for situation severity in our analyses. Consistent with our operationalizations, the phone call scenario was weighted 3.3, the eviction scenario was weighted 6.6, and the orphaned children scenario was weighted 8.8.

Dependent Variables

Helping measures. The helping measure used in the phone call need situation asked participants to indicate the level of help they would be willing to provide by choosing one of seven helping options: nothing, stop to tell him or her where the nearest pay phone is located, help him or her find a phone, drive him or her to a phone that is 5 min away (assume you have a car), drive him or her to a phone that is 15 min away (assume you have a car), cut class to drive him or her to a phone (assume you have a car), and cut class on the day of the exam to drive him or her to a phone (assume you have a car). As in the earlier studies, each helping option was weighted according to pilot work, which in this instance produced respective weights of 0.0, 0.3, 1.0, 1.4, 1.9, 2.9, and 7.7. The helping options for the eviction and the orphaned children need situations were identical to those of Studies 1 and 2, respectively.

Mediational measures. The mediational measures designed to assess empathic concern, sadness, personal distress, and oneness were identical to those of Studies 1 and 2. On an exploratory basis, for each need situation, we also included several items inquiring into egoistic motives that would be specific to that need situation (situational egoistic motives). For example, those participants exposed to the phone call need situation were asked how much they would want to help someone find a phone in order to enhance a friendship. Those exposed to the eviction need situation were asked how much they would want a roommate in order to enhance the security of their home. Those exposed to the orphaned children need situation were asked how much they would want to raise children to gain love. These items, considered individually, did not prove instructive in our analyses; consequently, we do not detail them further.

Results

A Relationship Closeness \times Severity of Need ANOVA was conducted on the helping measure. Replicating the pattern of Studies 1 and 2, there was a significant main effect for relationship closeness, $F(3, 243) = 62.35, p < .001$. A significant main effect of severity of need also appeared, indicating that helping increased as need increased, $F(2, 243) = 217.62, p < .001$. More important, a significant interaction emerged, supporting the evolutionary-theory-based prediction that the impact of relationship closeness on helping would be more pronounced in the higher need situations, $F(6, 243) = 10.33, p < .001$. Figure 1 presents the pattern of these effects.

Mediation of Helping: Within Levels of Need

Phone call situation. Our mediational hypotheses were tested with a hierarchical regression analysis in which helping

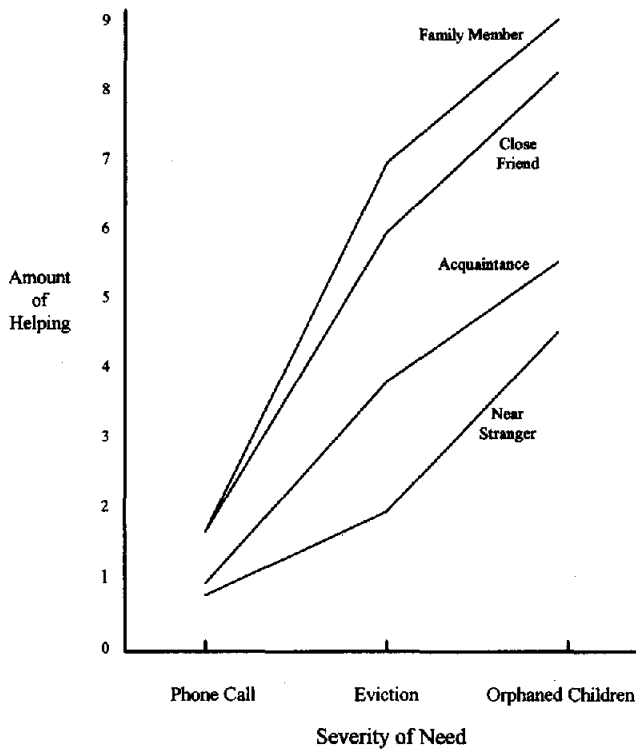


Figure 1. Amount of helping in each relationship type as a function of severity of need.

served as the criterion variable and empathic concern, personal distress, sadness, situational egoistic motive items (as a group), and oneness served as predictors. Participant gender was entered at step 1 of the analysis and proved marginally significant, indicating a tendency for women to be more helpful, $b = -.38$, $F(1, 84) = 3.31$, $p = .07$. At step 2, empathic concern was significantly related to helping, $b = .26$, $F(1, 83) = 26.06$, $p < .0001$. At step 3, the items related to personal distress, sadness, and the situational egoistic motives were entered, reducing but not eliminating the relationship of empathic concern to helping, $b = .18$, $F(1, 66) = 6.84$, $p < .05$. However, when oneness was introduced at step 4, not only did it prove a significant predictor of helping, $b = .21$, $F(1, 65) = 13.39$, $p < .001$, it rendered nonsignificant the effect of empathic concern on helping, $b = .08$, $F(1, 65) = 1.46$, $n.s.$, and it accounted for much more unique variance than did empathic concern (7.7% vs. 0.8%). Thus, even within this minor form of need, the pattern of our earlier studies was replicated exactly.

Eviction situation. The same type of regression analysis was conducted on the data from the eviction need situation of Study 3. It produced comparable results. At step 1, the influence of gender was not significant, $b = .57$, $F(1, 73) < 1$. At step 2, entering empathic concern revealed its significant relation to helping, $b = 1.09$, $F(1, 72) = 38.32$, $p < .001$. At step 3, the introduction of personal distress, sadness, and situational egoistic motive items reduced but did not eliminate the predictiveness of empathic concern, $b = .56$, $F(1, 51) = 4.03$, $p < .06$. At step 4, oneness added an independent significant

influence, $b = .87$, $F(1, 50) = 27.15$, $p < .001$, that rendered nonsignificant empathic concern's role in helping, $b = .18$, $F(1, 50) = 2.15$, $n.s.$ Again, oneness accounted for much more of the unique variance than empathic concern (14% vs. 0.7%).

Orphaned children situation. At step 1 of a similar regression procedure done on the data from the orphaned children need situation of Study 3, participant gender was not significant, $b = -.92$, $F(1, 73) = 1.66$, $n.s.$ At step 2, empathic concern was entered and was predictive of helping, $b = .55$, $F(1, 73) = 5.07$, $p < .05$. Entering the items constituting personal distress, sadness, and situational egoistic motives at step 3 rendered empathic concern somewhat less predictive, $b = .65$, $F(1, 51) = 2.95$, $p < .09$. At step 4, oneness was entered, again proving significant, $b = .79$, $F(1, 50) = 16.13$, $p < .001$, and again removing the significant impact of empathic concern on helping, $b = .36$, $F(1, 50) = 1.12$, $n.s.$ As before, the unique proportion of variance accounted for by oneness was many times that for empathic concern (13.5% vs. 0.9%).

Thus, the mediational pattern obtained in Studies 1 and 2 reappeared in virtually identical form at each level of need in Study 3.

Mediation of Helping Across Levels of Need

We used the EQS program (Bentler & Wu, 1995) to explore the mediation of helping as it occurred across the various need levels explored in Study 3. Relationship closeness, severity of need, and their interaction (calculated after we centered the two variables) served as exogenous variables. We created composites of oneness, empathic concern, and personal distress on the basis of the simple averaging of their constituent items; these composites, along with the sadness item, were assessed as potential mediating predictors.² Finally, the helping measure served as the outcome variable.

Supporting our hypotheses, oneness was the only explored predictor to mediate the effects of the manipulated variables on helping. Although relationship closeness and severity of need did indeed increase levels of empathic concern, personal distress, and sadness, these latter constructs did not influence helping when oneness was in the model. Figure 2 presents the best fitting model. This model captures the observed data quite well, $\chi^2(12, N = 236) = 16.70$, $p > .15$, CFI = .995, and all depicted paths are significant at $p < .01$ or less, two-tailed. No other paths reached conventional levels of significance, nor does adding or eliminating paths significantly improve the model's fit.³ More-

² Because the three sadness items revealed somewhat different patterns of influence in the studies reported here, we felt it inappropriate to aggregate them into a composite. Findings from the following analyses remain the same when we use the low-spirited or heavy-hearted items in our models instead.

³ Readers should note two features of the path model. First, for purposes of visual clarity, we do not depict the covariances among our manipulated variables and their interaction. However, adding these three paths does not improve the fit of the model, and none of these paths approaches statistical significance (all $ps > .35$). Second, note that the model allows for covarying, as opposed to causal, relationships among the psychological variables. (Covariances were estimated on these items' error terms, which are not depicted in Figure 2 for reasons of visual clarity.) This decision was predicated on technical issues and not a theoretical stance. In the present model, the covariance arrows could

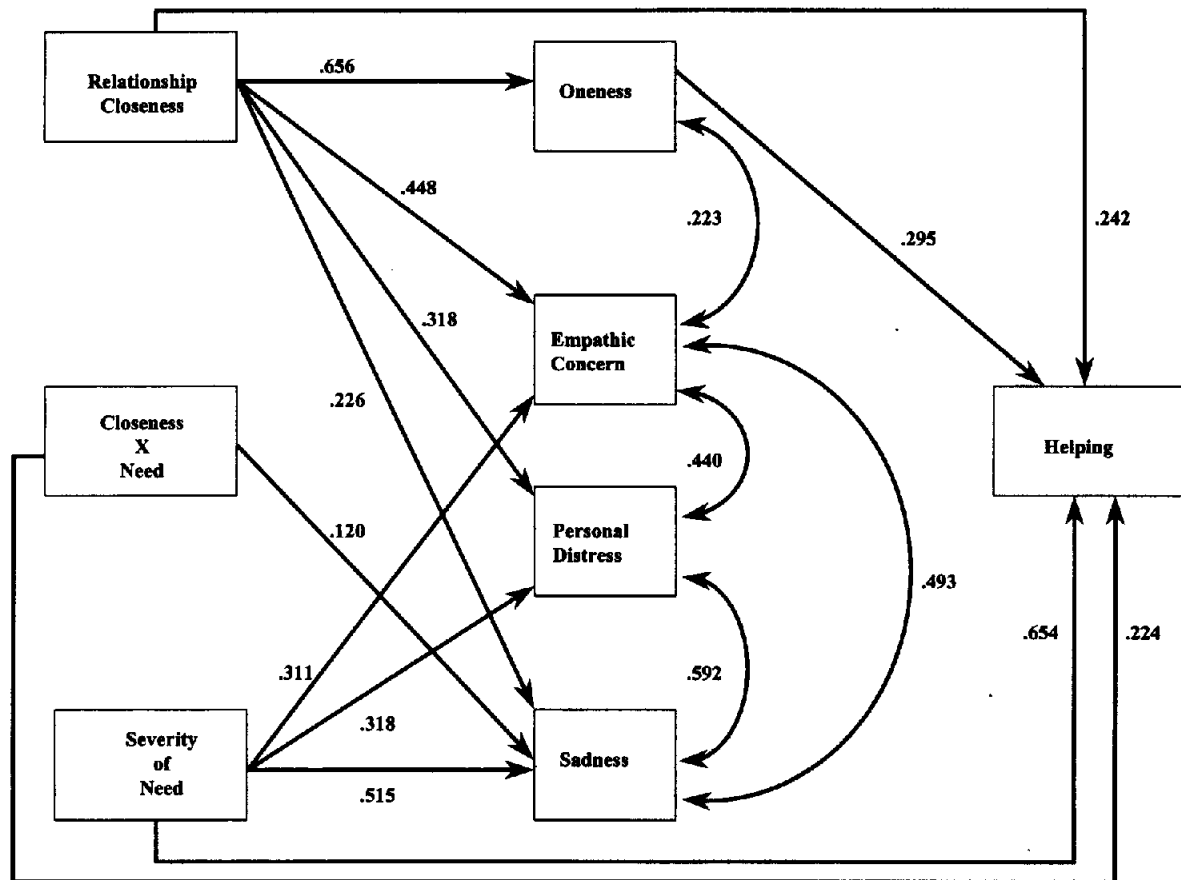


Figure 2. A path model representing the effects of relationship closeness and severity of need on helping, as potentially mediated by oneness, empathic concern, personal distress, and sadness. The model fits the data well and illustrates the sole mediational effect of oneness.

over, alternative models—for instance, one in which the putative psychological mediators are viewed merely as consequences, rather than causes, of helping—resulted in a significantly degraded fit to the data. In sum, consistent with the regression analyses conducted within each level of need, path analyses conducted across all three need levels revealed a pattern whereby perceptions of oneness (a) had an appreciable mediating influence on helping and (b) reduced the mediating role of empathic concern to nonsignificance.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated and added to the findings of Studies 1 and 2. As before, perceptions of oneness accounted for helping in the relatively high need eviction and orphan contexts; furthermore,

empathic concern had no such influence once perceptions of oneness were taken into account. Extending these results, the unique mediating influence of oneness revealed itself as well when participants in Study 3 confronted a lower need helping decision, whether to aid a person wishing to make a phone call. And a path analysis conducted across the three need settings of Study 3 further revealed that decisions to help were influenced by participants' perceptions of oneness but not by their levels of empathic concern. That path analysis suggested a bidirectional causal relationship between the more cognitive variable of oneness and the more emotional variable of empathic concern. Such bidirectionality is consistent with our view that the perception of oneness with a needy other generates empathic concern and that the experience of empathic concern generates the perception of oneness. However, it appears to be oneness and not empathic concern that mediates help.

Although the results of Study 3 answer the question of whether oneness mediates the impact of empathic concern on helping even at low levels of need, they do not address whether such mediation occurs even at low levels of relationship closeness. The latter question is worthy of attention, as support for the empathy-altruism model has come almost exclusively from studies of near strangers. Participants in such studies typically

be replaced with directional arrows—pointing in either direction—with no appreciable loss of fit. Indeed, consistent with theoretical expectations, further analyses suggested the likelihood of bidirectional causal influences among these variables. Unfortunately, technical concerns—related to the need to independently “anchor” all variables in bidirectionally causal relationships—precluded a formal test of this possibility.

rate their feelings of empathic concern toward a stranger or near stranger after being exposed to that person's suffering.⁴ The standard experimental outcome is that higher helping scores are linked to higher empathic concern (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

To examine the effects of empathic concern and oneness on willingness to help another with whom one has only a minimal relationship, we analyzed the data of just those individuals in our near stranger condition (across all levels of need). The results were identical in form to those we had obtained when analyzing across relationship types: When entered at step 1 of a regression procedure, participant gender had no significant influence on helping ($b = -.53$, $F < 1$); when empathic concern was entered at step 2, it proved significantly predictive, $b = .66$, $F(1, 72) = 14.57$, $p < .001$; entering items constituting personal distress, sadness, and situational egoistic motives at step 3 rendered empathic concern somewhat less predictive, $b = .31$, $F(1, 55) = 1.40$, $p < .25$; finally, at step 4, oneness was entered, proving significant, $b = .39$, $F(1, 54) = 10.26$, $p < .01$, and completely eliminating any influence of empathic concern on helping ($b = .08$, $F < 1$). Clearly, then, the basic form of our findings is not limited to close relationships.⁵

Two other findings are of interest in Study 3. First, the path analysis demonstrated that relationship closeness, severity of need, and their interaction influenced helping in an additional manner not captured by the mediating variables explored here, making it likely that other psychological constructs account for these effects. This result underscores the multiplicity of causes for help that typically apply in any given situation. Even though oneness stood above the other mediating factors that we investigated, we do not wish to be misinterpreted as suggesting that it is the only influence to be seriously weighed. Second, the Relationship Closeness \times Severity of Need interaction revealed a pattern wherein the impact of relationship closeness on helping increased as severity of need increased: In low-need circumstances, relationship closeness had only a small positive effect on helping; in higher need circumstances, however, relationship closeness had a profound influence. This pattern is compatible with an evolutionary perspective in which concern for a close other (and thus a likely carrier of common genes) should be especially potent when that other's survival is at risk (Burnstein et al., 1994). The pattern, which may also be compatible with formulations based on social or cognitive factors such as the social expectations or the need salience associated with different levels of severity, is not completely consistent with a strict evolutionary model, however. That is, as Table 1 shows, although help was always greater in the close family member condition than in the good friend condition, it was never significantly so. A proponent of a strict evolutionary model may wish to explain this in terms of the documented tendency of friends to perceive an extremely high degree of phenotypic similarity with one another (Cunningham, 1986). Our own view, however, is that a variety of factors besides genetic commonality predict helping in high-need situations, including those factors associated with the social aspects of friendship—a view we think most evolutionary theorists would not find objectionable.

General Discussion

The data patterns of the three studies of this investigation are compelling in their consistency. In each, as relationship close-

ness increased, so did empathic concern for a needy other. In each, empathic concern significantly predicted willingness to help. And in each, it did so even after the influence of the egoistic factors of personal distress and sadness had been removed. More telling for the purposes of this research, however, was a fourth type of consistent internal replication: Invariably, when a nonaltruistic factor that covaries with empathic concern was introduced to the analyses, it reduced the impact of empathic concern to nonsignificance. That nonaltruistic factor, oneness, reflects a sense of interpersonal unity, wherein the conceptions of self and other are not distinct but are merged to some degree.

The implications of these results for the empathy-altruism model are considerable. If the circumstances specified in the model as leading to truly altruistic acts (interpersonal closeness and perspective taking instructions) are the same circumstances that enhance the merging of self and other, as has been shown in the present studies as well as earlier studies (Aron et al., 1991; Aron et al., 1992; Davis et al., 1996), then one can doubt whether those helpful acts reflect the selflessness required of true altruism. As even the proponents of the model admit, if self and other are not sharply distinct in a helper's mind, it is not possible to separate egoism from altruism in a helper's motive (Batson, 1987; Batson, in press; Batson & Shaw, 1991). After all, as the self and other increasingly merge, helping the other increasingly helps the self.

Moreover, one can doubt the empathy-altruism hypothesis even further when, as we have demonstrated, oneness both covaries with empathic concern and is the functional mediator of helping when the two factors are considered simultaneously. That is, although relationship closeness elevated the levels of both factors, only one (perceived oneness) predicted helping when the influence of the other factor was controlled. Overall, then, our findings suggest that empathic concern may have only appeared to mediate aid in much prior research because it is a concomitant of perceived oneness, a construct that offers a nonaltruistic path to such aid.

An attentive reader may have noticed that throughout this article we have avoided characterizing oneness as an egoistic motivator of helping, preferring instead the label *nonaltruistic*. Such usage reflects an important feature of our argument: When the distinction between self and other is undermined, the tradi-

⁴ Sometimes empathic concern is measured after a perspective-taking manipulation has focused participants on the other's plight; other times, as in our studies, it is simply measured as a naturally occurring response to suffering. However, these two approaches, the manipulation of empathic concern or its simple assessment, have produced comparable demonstrations of the facilitative effect of empathic concern on helping (Batson et al., 1989; Batson et al., 1983; Fultz et al., 1986).

⁵ Indeed, the form of these findings does not seem dependent on level of relationship at all, as comparable analyses done within each of the other three levels of relationship closeness in Study 3 produced findings comparable to those done within the near stranger condition. In fact, in no instance within any of the 12 relationship conditions across our three studies was empathic concern still predictive of helping after the influence of oneness was extracted. These results offer assurance that our data patterns were not caused by a stronger correlation between rated oneness and our manipulated variable of relationship closeness than between empathic concern and relationship closeness. Similar patterns emerged within and across relationship levels.

tional dichotomy between selfishness and selflessness loses its meaning. Accordingly, under conditions of oneness, helping should not be considered necessarily egoistic; it can be considered nonaltruistic, however, to distinguish it from the concept of selflessness.

Alternative Accounts

Although our results are robust and consistent, objections may be raised to the manner in which they were generated. It could be argued, for example, that because participants were not placed in actual helping settings, their responses are suspect in two ways. First, the task of focusing on a specified need situation may not have produced a strong enough emotional reaction in participants to energize the crucial empathic concern variable. However, an examination of the means in Table 1 indicates that this was not the case; the levels of empathic concern felt by our participants as a consequence of our procedures were sizable and well within the range of those of earlier studies using actual need situations. Second, it is possible that our willingness-to-help measure did not reflect the way participants would have responded in settings that provided the opportunity for active helping. Although conceivable, this objection is rendered less plausible by evidence that the outcomes of the experimental paradigm we used replicated exactly the prior outcomes of other experimental paradigms that did afford participants active opportunities to help. As with participants in the settings constructed by Batson and his colleagues: (a) our participants felt greater empathic concern with greater interpersonal closeness; (b) their empathic concern was correlated with personal distress and sadness; (c) this concern was predictive of helping; and (d) it continued to be predictive of helping after the impact of sadness and personal distress had been controlled. Thus, it appears that our paradigm and measures were able to reproduce extremely well the pattern of findings that has traditionally supported the empathy-altruism hypothesis.⁶ Indeed, we suspect that if we had not added the oneness variable to our investigation, publication in a highly selective outlet would have been unlikely, as our other findings so resemble those from work using an active helping opportunity that they would have been seen as adding little new.

Alternatively, it might be argued that oneness, as operationalized, is merely a more reliable and sensitive indicator of empathic concern than the traditional one used by Batson and his colleagues, which we appropriated for our studies. Three pieces of evidence militate against such an argument, however. First, across all of our studies, the empathic concern index we used had reassuringly high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$, compared with $.83$ for the oneness index). Second, it was invariably a significant predictor of helping in our five experimental tests; when empathic concern was entered early in our regression analyses, the F s reflecting its impact on helping were modally above 20. Plainly, this index was neither unreliable nor insensitive. Third, and more telling, the path analysis revealed different profiles for the empathic concern and oneness variables: Empathic concern was influenced by severity of need whereas oneness was not, and empathic concern was linked tightly with personal distress and sadness whereas oneness was not. Although oneness and empathic concern apparently share some

variance—shared variance that we believe has produced an illusion of empathic concern's mediating role—these variables are clearly not the same. Not only do the operationalizations differ considerably on their face, but they are also affected differently by situational variables and have distinct relationships with helping behavior.

Speculations and Connections

Although our data suggest that the impact of empathic concern on helping is mediated through its relationship with perceived oneness, it is important to understand the conceptual link between these two constructs as well as between them and the other variables in our study. The path model that best fits our data offers some valuable information in this regard. First, it is evident that severity of another's need had effects that are entirely in keeping with the presumed conceptual separateness of empathic concern and oneness. That is, within our formulation it makes sense that the depth of another's plight would influence feelings of sympathy for that other but would not affect the perception of oneness.

Our second manipulated variable, relationship closeness, did affect empathic concern and oneness similarly, however. Our view is that this was the case because empathic concern and oneness are both influenced by a crucial feature of relationship closeness: perspective taking. As relationship closeness increases, the relevant parties are more likely to engage in perspective taking (Eisenberg et al., 1990), which because it puts one party in the place of the other, fosters both a sense of commonality and a sense of compassion for the other. What strikes us as most instructive about our results is that it is the commonality, not the compassion, that generates helping. We believe that this is so because the primary role of empathic concern is to serve as an emotional *signal* of oneness. When one feels empathic concern, it is normally due to the perspective taking that attends relationship closeness and that leads to self-other overlap. Upon experiencing empathic concern for another, then, an individual is consequently informed of a likely degree of oneness with that other, and prosocial action is more probable as a result.

In one respect, our argument is similar to that of a relatively recent position taken by Batson and his associates (Batson et al., 1995). They, too, believe that empathic concern is a signal for something else, something more fundamental in its impact on helping decisions. They refer to it as "valuation of another's welfare." Such a conception is not incompatible with our own. However, there is a central distinction. According to Batson et al. (1995), the valuation of another's welfare that is signaled by empathic concern spurs assistance that is entirely selfless. On the basis of our findings, we would argue differently. Empathic concern signals unity with another, and it is precisely because the self is thereby implicated in the other that his or her welfare is valued (and promoted).

⁶ This was the case even though, in contrast to the typical sequence of Batson and colleagues, we assessed empathic concern after, rather than before, the helping measure. The parallel data patterns suggest that this difference in the order of these measures was not of consequence. However, researchers should collect additional data to affirm this likelihood.

Aside from the data we have presented, support for our interpretation comes from a decidedly more remote source: the work of ethologists, biologists, and evolutionary psychologists. That is, the factors that, according to the empathy–altruism model, naturally produce empathic concern and valuation of another's welfare (similarity, friendship, familiarity, and kinship), are the same factors that have been identified in human and animal research as signals for one powerful form of self–other overlap: common genetic makeup (Cunningham, 1986; Holmes & Sherman, 1983; Rushton et al., 1984; Wells, 1987). From an evolutionary perspective, it is no accident that the factors associated with valuation of another's welfare are those that designate likely kin—others with whom one shares (genetic) components of the self. Hence, from an evolutionary perspective, and from ours, that valuation should not be seen as selfless.

The self and the in-group. There is a striking similarity between the concepts we have found useful to account for our findings and those used to account for the powerful in-group favoritism effect, in which individuals allocate greater resources to members of their own groups (see Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1985, for reviews). Certain interpreters of this effect have argued that it is mediated by a merger of self and group identity; the greater the felt unity of self and group, the greater the consequent favoritism (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Dawes, van de Kragt, & Orbell, 1990; Kramer & Goldman, 1995; Turner, 1987). The link between the groups and helping literatures is brought into relief by research demonstrating that focusing group members on their group identity leads them to allocate resources away from *themselves* and to other in-group members (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Kramer & Brewer, 1984). The possibility that such allocation decisions may indeed be the product of perceived oneness with the group—and may be directly related to the oneness-based helping decisions in our data—is supported by the findings of three independent research teams.

First, Cadinu and Rothbart (1996) determined that individuals generalized their self-images to an in-group, projecting their own traits onto this group (but not to an out-group). Recall that this sort of self-projection is what occurred when Davis et al. (1996) asked individuals to take the perspective of a stranger, suggesting that oneness is brought about similarly by perspective taking and in-group membership. Second, Smith and Henry (1996) found that a result of in-group membership is that self attributes become directly linked to cognitive representations of the group, as indicated by slower me/not me reaction times to traits not shared by the self and the group. Recall that Aron et al. (1991) found a similar pattern as individuals felt greater relationship closeness and self–other overlap; that is, as perceived self–other overlap increased, slower me/not me reaction times occurred for nonshared traits. Third, in yet another paradigm, Dovidio, Gaertner, Validzic, Matoka, and Johnson (in press) found that the traditional bias for in-group members and against out-group members—in both evaluative and helping responses—could be reduced by procedures leading participants to see the two groups as one. Moreover, the reduction of bias was mediated by this perception of oneness rather than by feelings of empathic concern. In all, there is good suggestive evidence that the willingness to divert resources to relevant others that attends perspective taking, relationship closeness, and in-group mem-

bership is spurred by a common cause: a perception of the self as merged with those others.

The notion of the self as existing partially outside of the individual is hardly a novel or narrowly held view. Theorists and researchers who have taken a pan-cultural perspective have noted that the idea of self–other overlap is dominant in many non-Western societies of the world, in which a communal rather than individualistic orientation is the norm (Geertz, 1973; Gilligan, 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989), and that it is the Westernized view of self (as encapsulated) that is relatively recent and localized (Triandis, 1996). As would be expected from our data on oneness and helping, citizens of Eastern communal cultures, who imbue more of their self-concepts into their groups, are more willing than Westerners to help in-group members and less willing to help out-group members (Leung, 1988). It is instructive that theorists coming from very different starting points—multiculturalists, on the one hand, and evolutionary psychologists, on the other—are teaching the same lesson: Crucial features of the self exist outside the body of the individual and inside close others. Consequently, what one does to and for these others one does to and for oneself.

A Final Word

To some, a perspective such as ours that denies pure altruism a place in the human repertoire may seem cynical. However, like certain other proponents of nonaltruistic accounts of prosocial motivation (e.g., Piliavin et al., 1981), we do not agree. Instead, we are much impressed by the reach of the system for distributing aid that spurs individuals to help not just close others (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, coworkers) but distant others with whom one can see a connection or share a perspective as well (e.g., victims of remote natural disasters). That our species has adapted a system that extends helping motivation to remote victims strikes us as commendable and ennobling. Furthermore, because it provides a rationale for assistance based on the intersection of self and others, such a system offers promising prospects for normative and educational messages that emphasize commonalities rather than differences among people.

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