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DISPOSITIONAL EMPATHY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Over two centuries ago, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) expressed the view that important social consequences flow inevitably from our tendency to 'sympathize' with the experiences of other people. In Smith's use of the term, 'sympathy' includes at least two processes by which the observed experiences of others come to affect our own thoughts and feelings—phenomena which are more typically termed *empathy* today. A century later, Herbert Spencer made similar assertions in his *Principles of Psychology* (1870). Both authors thus made the case that the quality of human social interaction is significantly shaped by the existence of our capacity to respond to the experiences of other persons.

In this century, two highly influential theorists have argued similarly that an ability to step outside the self underlies much of the social capabilities of humans. Both Mead (1934), with his emphasis on the human capacity to *role-take*, and Piaget (1932), with the concept of *decentering*, argue that an ability to understand the psychological point of view of others is essential both

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to a mature cognitive outlook and to harmonious interaction with others. Without this role-taking capacity, one's interactions with others are inescapably egocentric and self-centered; possessing such a skill, in contrast, allows one to tailor behaviors to the expectations of many different observers, thus producing smoother and more varied interpersonal relations.

What these approaches all have in common is the recognition that empathy (or role-taking, or sympathy) is necessary to overcome the fundamental obstacle facing us in social life: namely, other people. Many of the difficulties in social interaction stem inevitably from the fact that different people frequently have needs, desires, and goals different from our own. Many times these goals are incompatible with one another, such that one person's success at attaining his/her objective necessarily entails another's failure. At its most mundane level, we can think of this as the 'Bathroom Problem'—that is, in a home with several inhabitants and only one bathroom, any individual's success at gaining access to that room usually ensures the failure (temporary, it is hoped) of others. Of course, this zero-sum quality is not present in all situations; there are many times when the desires of the relevant parties are not incompatible with one another. This is of little consolation, however, when you are third in line to use the only bathroom in the house.

Thus, to a considerable degree social interaction necessarily comes to include a high level of conflict between the competing goals of the participants. As individuals single-mindedly pursue their own accomplishments, the goals of some are inevitably thwarted by others' success. Resentment, rancor, and recriminations result. Social relationships, rather than running more or less smoothly, are instead beset by conflict and disagreement.

The existence of an empathic ability—that is, being able to at least temporarily suppress one's own perspective on events and entertain that of another person—lessens the likelihood and severity of such social disruptions. While incompatible goals still exist, the empathic individual is capable of anticipating inherent conflicts prior to their actual occurrence, of recognizing and acknowledging the legitimate claims of the other social participants, and of acting in ways which minimize the conflict through compromise and accommodation. The means by which empathy allows this to happen can be simply stated: the presence of empathy reduces the overwhelming primacy that the individual's own thoughts, feelings, and desires usually enjoy, by temporarily making the thoughts, feelings, and desires of other people the major focus of one's attention. One way to think of empathy, then, is as a tool which helps to file down the rough edges inherent in all forms of social intercourse; although not perfect, it does make possible smoother, less abrasive social interaction. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore some ways in which dispositional empathy has these effects on social intercourse.¹

MODERN APPROACHES TO EMPATHY

Modern approaches to empathy have tended to focus on three major issues. One such focus has been on understanding the development of empathic capacities in childhood; developmental psychologists have carried out considerable research in an effort to map the acquisition and consequences of empathic capacities from infancy onward (eg, Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Flavell, 1968, 1974; Hoffman, 1975). A second focus has been in the clinical realm. Within the client-therapist relationship empathy has been accorded a position of central importance, especially since Rogers (1957) first included it among his list of six 'necessary and sufficient' conditions for effective therapy. As a result, numerous investigations assessing therapist empathy have been conducted, in an effort to discern its impact on client progress and overall therapy effectiveness (eg, Thrax & Carknuff, 1967). As Gladstein (1983) notes, empathy has continued to be seen as an important therapeutic construct, even in the face of some reviews questioning its role (eg, Gladstein, 1977; Lambert, DeJulio, & Stein, 1978). Finally, a third focus has been on using empathy to address questions of larger philosophical or theoretical interest. For example, theorists and researchers interested in the question of moral development have employed the constructs of empathy or role taking in an attempt to illuminate this topic (eg, Gilligan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1963, 1969). Similarly, strong interest in the issue of altruism has led some investigators to nominate empathy as the mechanism by which essentially selfish organisms may come to act in ways which benefit others, seemingly without any external incentive to do so (eg, Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981; Batson, Dyck, Brandt, Batson, Powell, McMasster, & Grifflit, 1988; Hoffman, 1977).

Each of these recent approaches has attempted to further our understanding of empathy and empathy's role in affecting some obviously important kinds of social interactions. What none of them do, however, and what almost no psychological research has yet done, is to examine the rather homely question of just what effect dispositional empathy has on everyday social functioning. That is, how do differences in empathic tendency actually influence everyday social life? Indeed, do such differences influence our everyday lives? What are the implications, if any, for the well-being of the empathic person? This set of questions may at the same time be both more mundane and more broadly important (from a practical point of view) than the traditional kinds of 'big ticket' issues described above.

This chapter will describe a new program of research undertaken to address questions such as these. The studies described here have been carried out over the last five years or so by the current authors and several colleagues. Taken as a whole, the evidence thus far is quite encouraging in suggesting some very specific ways in which dispositional empathic tendencies affect our day-to-day behaviors, the impact that those behaviors have on others' perceptions of us,

and the ultimate consequences of those perceptions. However, in order to fully appreciate this set of investigations, it is necessary to describe in more detail one more issue regarding the topic of empathy, an issue which is at the heart of the research program to be described here: the multidimensional nature of dispositional empathy.

EMPATHY AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

In empathy's long history, it has been conceptualized in a number of different ways. Over two hundred years ago, in fact, Smith's speculations about sympathy included two different forms of this construct. The first, *instinctive sympathy*, referred to the quick, involuntary reaction to another person's experience—for example, the spontaneous groaning or cringing at another person's physical distress. The second form, *intellectualized sympathy*, was a step removed from this instinctive reaction. It is characterized by the ability to recognize the emotional experience of another, and to respond appropriately (eg, consoling a loser) without vicariously experiencing that person's emotional state. This latter type was therefore more cognitive and less emotional than the former—a rather detached and affectively neutral response.

This distinction between different kinds of responses to others is important because in large measure it has persisted until the present day. Over the years, some writers and researchers have focused primarily on the cognitive side of empathy (eg, Dymond, 1949; Hogan, 1969; Kerr & Spieroff, 1954), viewing empathy essentially as an intellectual reaction to others. Such approaches have typically then focused on such 'intellectual' consequences of empathy as accurate perceptions of others. More recently, there has been an increased interest in the emotional side of the empathy coin, as some researchers have used a definition of empathy stressing its emotional facets (eg, Batson et al., 1981; Stotland, 1969). Those working in this tradition have often focused their research efforts on topics such as helping behavior (eg, Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972) in which emotional reactivity could be expected to play an important role.

While these two separate approaches to empathy have each produced important gains in knowledge, there have been costs as well. For example, there have been costs associated with the tendency for researchers within one tradition to largely ignore or downplay the findings resulting from work within the other tradition. More importantly, such a 'separate but equal' strategy has until fairly recently led to a dearth of information regarding the possible interaction between the cognitive and emotional components of empathy. To the extent that cognitive, perspective-taking abilities influence emotional reactions to others, or that cognitive judgements are influenced by emotional reactions, then separate research programs will be found inadequate.

The last decade has seen an encouraging movement toward a more sophisticated and multidimensional view of the empathic process. In a number of ways, both theoretical (eg, Hoffman, 1977) and empirical (eg, Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Davis, 1983a, 1983b, 1983c) treatments of empathy have reflected a growing realization that the cognitive and affective components of empathy almost certainly comprise an interdependent, interactive system in which each influences the other, and which can never be fully understood as long as research efforts concentrate on one aspect to the relative exclusion of the other. In particular, some careful distinctions have begun to be drawn between the different types of response to others which have heretofore been largely lumped under the single heading of empathy. While not all the investigators in this field agree about precise terminology, there is growing acceptance about a few of the major types of reactions that frequently accompany the observance of a distressed other. Let us examine three of these.

Perspective Taking/Role Taking

One facet of empathy about which substantial consensus exists is the construct usually referred to as *perspective* or *role taking*. In its broadest sense it refers to the cognitive ability to see things from the point of view of another person instead of solely from one's own perspective. It is this facet of empathy which can be seen in Smith's 'intellectualized sympathy', Piaget's 'decentering', Mead's 'role-taking', and in the more recent approaches to empathy which have emphasized the individual's ability to accurately perceive other people (eg, Dymond, 1949). Common to all of these approaches is the idea that an individual is capable of knowing something about the internal state of another person without necessarily experiencing an affective reaction in the process; in this sense, perspective taking can be thought of as a relatively 'cold' process compared to the more affective responses which are also possible.

As Eisenberg (1986) notes, perspective taking itself has generally been viewed as taking three forms: (1) perceptual perspective taking, or the ability to comprehend the literal visual perspective of another person; (2) cognitive perspective taking, or the ability to predict another's thoughts, intentions, behaviors, etc.; and (3) affective perspective taking, or the ability to infer another's emotional states. Although the conceptual similarity is obvious, these three constructs seem largely independent of one another empirically (eg, Ford, 1979). In terms of their effects on social functioning, it seems likely that cognitive and emotional perspective taking are the most influential; indeed, social and personality psychologists have tended to focus on these aspects much more than on perceptual perspective taking. To reiterate, however, despite their differences, what all three constructs have in common is that they involve an intellectual understanding of another person without any accompanying emotional re-

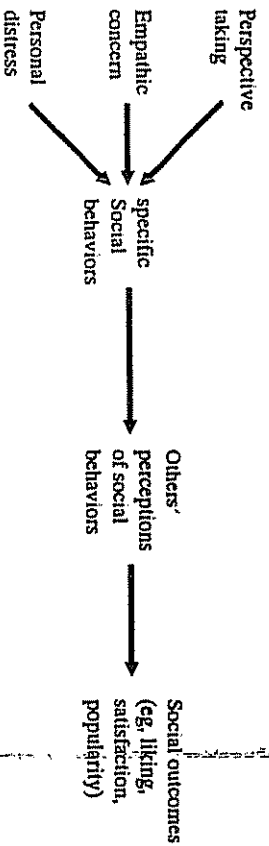


Figure 1. General theoretical model.

example, one consequence resulting from an individual's behaviors, and the subsequent perceptions of those behaviors by others, is a subjective feeling state in the target individual. Unfavorable perceptions by others could produce in the target individual feelings of loneliness or depression. Alternatively, the social outcome in a given situation could be reactions, judgements, or feelings of the perceiver. Thus, a target's behavior and the resulting perceptions of others could produce greater or lesser liking for the target by other people. The term 'social outcomes' can therefore include either type of phenomena.

The second point to be emphasized here is that this model reflects a phenomenological approach in that it assumes that social outcomes are directly influenced not by one's behavior, but by *perceptions* of that behavior. Clearly, one's behavior will affect others' perceptions, but it seems just as clear that those perceptions will be influenced by other variables as well. To take just one example, perceivers' expectations about a target—based perhaps on prior experiences—can strongly affect their perceptions of that target. The important thing to remember, from the point of view of the model, is that it is *perceptions* of reality which most directly affect social outcomes.

Third, and finally, we should note one obvious boundary condition of this model. It seems clear that personality characteristics other than empathy must also play a significant role in shaping an individual's behaviors within social relationships. In particular, it seems apparent that such traits as extraversion, neuroticism, and shyness have important roles to play. Clearly, then, the model we are proposing here is not an exhaustive one. However, within its limited context, certain important questions may be addressed. What kinds of behavioral consequences are likely to result from high or low levels of dispositional empathy? What specific effects can we anticipate from the several components of empathy outlined earlier? What impact will these behaviors ultimately have on individual well-being? Let us consider each facet of empathy in turn.

Perspective Taking: Expectations

A person who habitually makes an effort to step outside his or her own perspective and see things from the psychological point of view of other people might be expected to exhibit several behavioral characteristics. First, such people should be expected to be relatively *tolerant* of others; regularly assuming the point of view of other people should make one more able to understand others' motives, and thus be more tolerant of their behavior. Second, such people should be relatively *accommodating*; a clearer recognition and appreciation of others' thoughts, wishes, and feelings should lead to a greater willingness to compromise and accommodate oneself to their views. Third, such people should exhibit a relative *lack of selfishness and egocentrism*. Frequently and repeatedly stepping 'outside' one's own viewpoint should have the effect of making one especially aware of the multiplicity of viewpoints possible, and less insistent that one's own perspective is the only legitimate one.

Taken as a whole, these hypothesized characteristics of active perspective takers suggest something about the general nature of their social relationships. Recognizing that all relationships inherently produce some conflict, active perspective-takers should have *relatively* smooth and noncontentious interactions with others, brought about by their greater tolerance for others, their willingness to accommodate to the wishes and behaviors of others, and the weaker tendency to insist on their own positions to the exclusion of others. Overall, we would expect the level of conflict in these relationships (as reflected in number of fights, arguments, and serious disagreements) to be lower than for those low in perspective taking. Further, we might anticipate that those conflicts which *did* exist in these relationships would be resolved in a less fractious and damaging manner.

Empathic Concern: Expectations

Persons with high dispositional levels of empathic concern regularly experience feelings of warmth, sympathy, compassion, and concern for others. As a result, such people might be expected to act in relatively *supportive* ways toward others. Such people should also be relatively *generous and giving* to others. If an important underlying basis for altruism is the experience of empathic concern (eg, Batson et al., 1981; 1988), then high dispositional levels of this characteristic should be associated with generous and helpful interpersonal behavior more generally. Finally, it might be expected that such persons will have relatively *free and open communication* with other people. The sharing of feelings—especially sensitive or troubling ones—with another person is made much easier (and thus more likely) when the other person is a warm and sympathetic listener. Consequently, those with high levels of empathic concern are likely to report better and/or more frequent communication with other people. Taken as a whole, the hypothesized picture emerging for those high in

empathic concern is of warm, supportive, and sympathetic social interactions; as a result, social relationships with these people are likely to be perceived by others as attractive and enjoyable. Although the hypothesized relationships of high perspective takers were also described in positive terms, there is an interesting difference to be noted. Relationships involving high levels of empathic concern would seem to be attractive because of the addition of 'positive' features: greater warmth, sympathy, generosity, and sensitivity. Relationships involving high levels of perspective taking would seem to be attractive because of the absence of 'negative' features: selfishness, intolerance, and intransigence. To the degree that positive and negative aspects of a relationship are *differentially* important in affecting the quality of the relationships, then the distinction between these two kinds of dispositional empathy may prove to be important.

Personal Distress: Expectations

Those with high dispositional levels of personal distress consistently experience feelings of anxiety and discomfort in response to the negative experiences of others. It might be expected, then, that they will be relatively *non-supportive* in social relationships; it would seem more difficult to effectively reassure and support a friend or lover when one's own dominant response to that person's misfortunes is self-oriented distress. For similar reasons, it might be anticipated that these persons will experience relatively *poor communication* with others; rather than providing a sympathetic audience, and thus inviting meaningful communication with others, those high in personal distress provide a relatively anxious and uneasy audience, which may not be conducive to comfortable and intimate communication. Finally, it seems possible that the relationships of these people may be characterized by *insecure and immature* behavior. Because of their anxiety and distress in social situations, those high in personal distress may feel insecure in such settings; it is possible that as a result they could demonstrate such behaviors as jealousy and possessiveness.

The most obvious difference between personal distress and the other two facets of empathy is that heightened levels of perspective taking and empathic concern should tend generally to improve the quality of social relationships (although possibly through different mechanisms), while heightened levels of personal distress should tend generally to harm the quality of social relationships through damaging behavioral correlates: non-supportiveness, non-communicativeness, and possessiveness.

In summary, to speak globally about the effects of 'empathy' on social behavior is probably misleading; different facets of empathy are likely to have different kinds of effects on behavior, and it is important to specify which 'kind' of empathy is under consideration. In evaluating this model, therefore, care must be taken in the measurement of dispositional levels of empathic tendencies. It is to that final issue that we now turn.

MEASURING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN EMPATHY

In 1980, the first author developed an individual difference measure of empathy, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980). Unlike previous measures of empathy, which typically regarded empathy as a unitary construct (either cognitive or emotional), the IRI employed four separate subscales explicitly measuring four separate qualities, all of which had usually fallen under the rubric of empathy. Three of these scales correspond to the constructs we have been discussing thus far: the Perspective Taking (PT), Empathic Concern (EC), and Personal Distress (PD) scales. The fourth scale assesses the tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into the place of *fictitious* characters in books, movies, and plays; it is termed the Fantasy Scale (FS).²

Evidence regarding the reliability and validity of these scales has been accumulating since the IRI's development, and is now quite convincing. For example, internal reliabilities for the four IRI scales typically range from .7 to .8. Davis (1980), utilizing a sample of over 1000 undergraduate college students, reports the following standardized alpha coefficients, for males and females respectively: perspective taking, .75 and .78; empathic concern, .72 and .70; personal distress, .78 and .78; and fantasy, .78 and .75. Davis (1980) also reports test-retest correlations for a smaller independent sample. Over a 60-75 day interval, the correlations were: perspective-taking, .61 and .62; empathic concern, .72 and .70; personal distress, .68 and .76; and fantasy, .79 and .81. Regarding the issue of validity, numerous investigations now support the notion that these measures do indeed tap the characteristics they purport to measure (eg, Bernstein & Davis, 1982; Davis, 1983a, 1983b, 1983c; Davis, Young, Hull, & Warren, 1987; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985; Neale & Bazerman, 1983). Table 1 displays the items comprising each of the four scales.

In the research which follows, all the findings involving dispositional levels of perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress utilize the corresponding scales of the IRI to assess these constructs. It should also be noted before proceeding that scores on these three measures are for the most part independent of one another—that is, while each of them taps some facet of global 'empathy', these facets are quite distinct from each other. For example, the average correlation for college-aged respondents between PT scores and EC scores is about .30; between PT and PD, about -.20; and between EC and PD, about .05 (Davis, 1980).

Table 1. Interpersonal Reactivity Index

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter on the answer sheet next to the item number. **READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING.** Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

ANSWER SCALE:

A	B	C	D	E
DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME WELL				DESCRIBES ME VERY WELL

PERSPECTIVE TAKING SCALE:

3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other guy's' point of view. (-)
8. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
15. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (-)
21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
25. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.
28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

EMPATHIC CONCERN SCALE:

2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (-)
9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.
14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (-)
18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (-)
20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

PERSONAL DISTRESS SCALE:

6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease.
10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.
13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (-)
17. Being in tense emotional situation scares me.
19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (-)
24. I tend to lose control during emergencies.
27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.

FANTASY SCALE:

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me.
5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel.
7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (-)
12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (-)
16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters.
23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character.

Table 1 / *contd.*

26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.

NOTE: Items are scored as follows: A=0, B=1, C=2, D=3, E=4, except for reverse-coded items [denoted by (-)] which are scored: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0.

INITIAL EVIDENCE FOR THE MODEL

Before the model presented in this chapter was completely formulated, some research involving dispositional empathy and social behaviors was conducted. This research typically focused on only one or two elements in the full model—for example, on the link between dispositional empathy and social behavior, or the link between dispositional empathy and a social outcome such as number of friends—rather than on the complete system as displayed in Figure 1. Therefore, to the degree that these findings support the model, they can only be viewed as partial support. Nevertheless, they do provide the first evidence relevant to our contentions that dispositional empathy has reliable and predictable effects on specific social behaviors and outcomes.

Empathy, Social Style, and Social Feelings

Davis (1983c), carried out a study in which over 1300 undergraduate students at the University of Texas completed a battery of psychological measures. Among these was the IRI, as well as several measures which tapped a variety of interpersonal styles and some which measured social feelings (that is, typical affective reactions to social settings). For example, the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Holohan, 1979), which was a part of the battery of measures, includes two scales assessing relevant social styles: the Femininity scale and the Negative Masculinity scale. The Femininity scale measures psychological characteristics which are seen by society as characteristically possessed by females but which are viewed as positive regardless of who possesses them (eg, aware of feelings of others; understanding of others); thus, this scale seems to tap exactly those 'other-oriented' qualities earlier described as typical of those high in perspective taking or empathic concern. The Negative Masculinity scale, on the other hand, measures qualities which are seen as stereotypically male, and which are viewed as *negative* no matter who possesses them (eg, arrogant, boastful, dictatorial); thus, it seems to tap the kind of 'self-centered' behaviors which are predicted to be uncharacteristic of those high in perspective taking and empathic concern. In addition to these measures of social style, at least two instruments tapping unpleasant social feelings were also included in this battery. The social anxiety subscale from the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Schrier, & Buss, 1975)

measures feelings of anxiety and discomfort in social situations, and the Shyness scale (Cheek & Buss, 1981) measures chronic feelings of shyness and inhibition. Thus, these measures seem to capture at least some of the affective tone which was earlier predicted to accompany high levels of personal distress. Those regularly experiencing personal distress and anxiety in response to others' misfortunes might well be expected to have generally high levels of shyness and social anxiety as well.

The relationships between these measures and the IRI subscales are displayed in Table 2. As expected, perspective taking and empathic concern are significantly and positively correlated with the F-scale of the EPAQ—that is, high scorers on the PT and EC scales report a greater tendency to possess such characteristics as being aware of others' feelings and being understanding of others. In addition, these people also report a *lack* of the self-centered social style reflected by the Negative Masculinity scale: an absence of arrogance, boastfulness, and dictatorial behavior. In contrast, scores on the personal distress scale were much more weakly (and inconsistently) related to this kind of social style. In short, the idea that perspective taking and empathic concern may contribute to a pleasing, other-oriented social style received support from these data.

Table 2. Correlations between empathy, social style, and social feelings for females ($N = 204$) and males ($N = 225$), respectively. All r 's $> .10$ are significant at the .05 level (from Davis, 1983c).

Empathy	Social Style		Social Feelings	
	Femininity	Negative Masculinity	Social Anxiety	Shyness
Perspective Taking	.33/.37	-.28/-.30	-.17/-.07	-.20/-.13
Empathic Concern	.55/.58	-.35/-.30	.12/.14	.07/.15
Personal Distress	-.12/-.01	.07/-.11	.39/.43	.44/.49

The picture is different when the social feelings data are examined. As Table 2 indicates, those high in personal distress display a strong tendency to report higher levels of both shyness and social anxiety, as expected. In contrast, perspective taking and empathic concern are much less strongly related to these constructs, although perspective taking does display a consistent though small negative association with them. Thus, as anticipated, the tendency to experience personally unpleasant feelings in response to others' distress is substantially

related to other unpleasant social feeling states; for the most part, the other facets of dispositional empathy are not.

Perspective Taking and Conflict Resolution

One clear implication of the empathy model is that those persons characterized by high levels of perspective taking should be more tolerant and accommodating of other people. If this is true, and the social style evidence suggests that it is, then two further implications follow: first, that the accommodating social style of these people might lead them to experience fewer instances of interpersonal conflict; and second, that they might handle more smoothly than low perspective takers those interpersonal conflicts which *did* occur.

Number of conflicts. Information collected from two different samples is relevant to the first of these questions. One sample consists of 120 participants at a summer camp, surveyed in 1982 (Davis & Kraus, 1990). This sample was overwhelmingly male (117 males; 3 females), and ranged in age from 10-18 years old. In addition, there was one unusual feature about this camp—it was devoted almost exclusively to the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*. We will have much more to say about this sample later, but for now we need only report that all of the campers completed the IRI during their week-long stay at camp, and that as part of a larger questionnaire they also provided answers to two questions concerning interpersonal conflict: how many angry fights (fistfights, biting, kicking, etc.) and how many angry arguments (repeated name-calling, taunting, etc.) had they engaged in during the past two years. The respondents were cautioned *not* to include fights and arguments with brothers, sisters, or parents, thus providing measures of interpersonal conflict solely with peers. Because responses to these two items were significantly and positively correlated ($r = .39$), they were summed into a single composite measuring interpersonal conflict.

As expected, levels of dispositional perspective taking were significantly and negatively related to amount of self-reported social conflict ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). In addition, levels of empathic concern and personal distress displayed no significant association with the measure of conflict (r 's = .01 and .11, respectively). This pattern suggests, then, that perspective taking tendencies are associated with a reduced likelihood of engaging in angry arguments and fights with peers.

Further bolstering this argument is that fact that very comparable findings were discovered for a different sample. Also in 1982, the senior author and a colleague (Stephen Franzoi) surveyed the entire student body at a small high school (grades 9-12) in Michigan's upper peninsula. As part of that survey, participants completed the IRI and the two questions concerning conflict with peers. For both males ($N = 225$) and females ($N = 215$), the negative correlation between perspective taking and the conflict composite was significant (males:

$r = -.19, p < .01$; females: $r = -.17, p < .01$). Again, none of the correlations between conflict and empathic concern or personal distress reached significance (all r 's less than $-.10$). Thus, for two different samples a very similar pattern was discovered, with perspective taking alone demonstrating a significant negative association with peer conflict.

Resolution of conflicts. Evidence regarding the way in which high perspective takers resolve their social conflicts comes from a study conducted by Franzoi, Davis and Young (1985), in which 131 heterosexual student couples at Indiana University were surveyed. Both members of the couple completed a questionnaire which included the perspective taking scale (the other IRI scales were not included in this study), self-reported behavior (such as degree of self-disclosure), items assessing each partner's satisfaction with the relationship, and an item asking about the way in which the partners resolved conflicts ('When disagreements between you and your partner arise, they generally result in: (a) You giving in (b) Partner giving in (c) Neither giving in (d) Agreement by mutual give and take.')

For both males and females, the predominant response was the 'mutual give and take' option, with over 70 per cent of each gender choosing this answer. In order to explore the importance of this mode of conflict resolution, however, it was necessary to use the *couple* as the unit of analysis (conflict resolution is, after all, a joint process); as a result, responses were recoded in the following way. If both members of the couple reported mutual give and take in settling their disputes, the couple was assigned a score of 1.0; if both members reported some other mode of resolution, the couple was assigned a value of 0.0; if one member reported mutual give and take and the other did not, a value of 0.5 was assigned. Thus, couples were given higher scores as they reported higher levels of mutual give and take.

A multiple regression analysis was then carried out in which the criterion variable was the couple's conflict resolution score, and the predictor variables were length of relationship, and each partner's score on the perspective taking and private self-consciousness scales (included for other reasons). Only one of the predictors exerted a significant effect on conflict resolution: male perspective taking was positively related ($\beta = .24, p < .01$) to conflict resolution, such that greater male perspective taking was associated with the couple reporting a greater likelihood of mutual give and take. The effect of female perspective taking was in the predicted direction ($\beta = .15$) but failed to achieve significance.

Consistent with expectations, then, these results suggest that greater perspective taking tendencies do contribute to a social style emphasizing tolerance and equitable resolutions of competing claims. According to the empathy model, moreover, this social style should consequently have an impact on some social outcome such as relationship quality. Happily, the Franzoi et al. (1985) investigation allows an examination of this question as well. A final pair of multiple regression analyses were conducted in which the criterion variables were male

and female satisfaction with the relationship. The predictor variables included (among others) the conflict resolution variable and male and female perspective taking. For both male ($\beta = .31$) and female ($\beta = .31$) satisfaction, conflict resolution displayed a significant positive association, indicating that greater give and take in conflict resolution was associated with greater satisfaction for each partner. In fact, conflict resolution exerted the strongest effect of any predictor in the equation. Interestingly, even after the effects of conflict resolution on satisfaction were assessed, individual perspective taking still exerted an impact on satisfaction above and beyond that mediated by conflict resolution. In particular, female perspective taking displayed a substantial association with male satisfaction after all other variables were controlled for statistically; male perspective taking had no such effect on female satisfaction. We shall have more to say about this finding later on. For the moment, however, it is enough to say that this pattern of results suggests that perspective taking tendency may operate to enhance relationship quality not only through conflict resolution but through other mediating paths as well.

Empathy, Social Behaviors, and Social Outcomes

Another source of evidence relevant to the empathy model comes from an investigation by Davis, Franzoi and Wellinger (1985), which utilized data collected from the Michigan high school sample mentioned earlier. Following the data collection in 1982, similar surveys were administered to the high school student body for each of the next three years. At each of these four time periods, the survey instrument included the IRI, as well as questions concerning social behaviors and social outcomes. For example, regarding social behavior, questions were asked each year about the respondents' self-disclosure (the degree to which he or she typically talked about intimate matters with others), the number of friends they reported having, and the frequency with which they went out on dates with members of the opposite sex. The social outcome measured in this investigation was subjective loneliness—respondents completed the UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), either the full scale or the 4-item short scale, at each of the survey points. The logic of this investigation, following from the model displayed in Figure 1, is that dispositional empathy affects social behaviors, which in turn affect the social outcome of feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Multiple regression analyses were then carried out on these data for each of the four years separately. First, individual regression analyses were conducted in which four social behaviors served as criterion variables: number of friends, number of dates, disclosure to same-sex peers, and disclosure to opposite-sex peers. The predictor variables in these analyses were scores on the empathic concern, personal distress, and private self-consciousness scales (included for other reasons). Next, a regression was conducted in which the four social

positive or negative) during all four years, and second, the coefficient had to reach statistical significance (.05 level) for at least three of the four years. Figures 2 and 3 display the associations which meet these criteria; the regression coefficients indicate the *mean* beta weight associated with that effect, averaged over the three or four significant years.

As the figures indicate, both empathic concern and personal distress displayed significant associations with social behaviors, albeit different ones. Turning to the males first, empathic concern was positively associated with the tendency to self-disclose to members of the opposite sex, and with reported number of dates. In contrast, dispositional level of personal distress had no reliable impact on self-disclosure, but was significantly and negatively associated with reported number of friends and dates. In turn, both of these social variables were significantly and negatively associated with the social outcome of loneliness. Thus, for males, empathic concern exerted an eventual effect on loneliness through the social mechanism of 'number of dates'; personal distress exerted an impact on loneliness not only through this mechanism but also through the reported number of friends.

For females, the picture was different. Empathic concern affected only one social variable—increasing same-sex self disclosure—and such disclosure in turn was strongly and negatively associated with feelings of loneliness. Personal distress, in contrast, affected only the number of reported friends (a negative association), and number of friends was again negatively associated with loneliness. Thus, for both sexes, both facets of empathy had effects on social behavior which in turn affected social outcomes.

These results provide additional evidence, then, for the empathy model. As expected, empathic concern was consistently related to intimate communication with peers; somewhat unexpectedly, personal distress had no association with self-disclosure for males or females, although it had consistent associations with number of reported friends. Thus this study, with its identification of the most stable and reliable effects, strongly supports the predictions of our theoretical model. What it lacks, however, and what all of the evidence presented thus far lacks, is a more detailed analysis of the wide variety of specific behaviors which may result from dispositional empathy. Such an analysis might help address such issues as *why* those high in personal distress possess fewer friends or go out on dates less frequently. The studies reviewed thus far have provided bits and pieces of the picture; the next body of evidence attempts to examine the empathy model in its entirety.

EVIDENCE FOR THE FULL MODEL

The full theoretical model holds that dispositional empathy influences specific behavioral tendencies of the individual, that these behaviors lead to correspond-

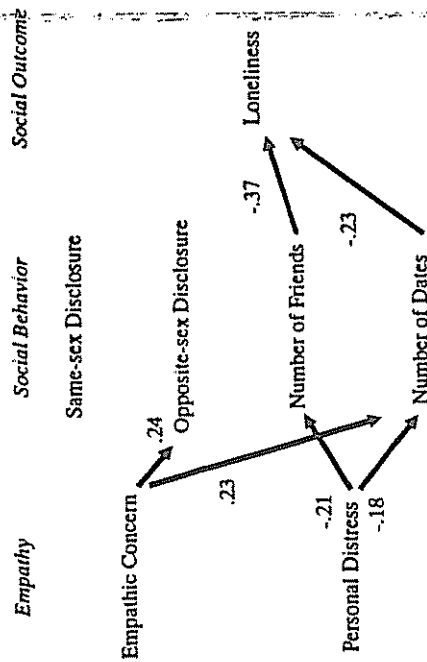


Figure 2. Beta weights, averaged over three or four significant years, for males (modified from Davis, Franzoi & Wellinger, 1985).

behaviors served as predictors of loneliness. Thus, the same general analysis approach employed in the Franzoi et al. (1985) investigation of romantic couples was taken here.

To avoid capitalizing on unreliable or inconsistent findings, Davis et al. identified a set of results which demonstrated the most stability over the four year span of the study. To be included in this set, two criteria had to be met. First, the regression coefficient for the effect had to hold the same sign (either

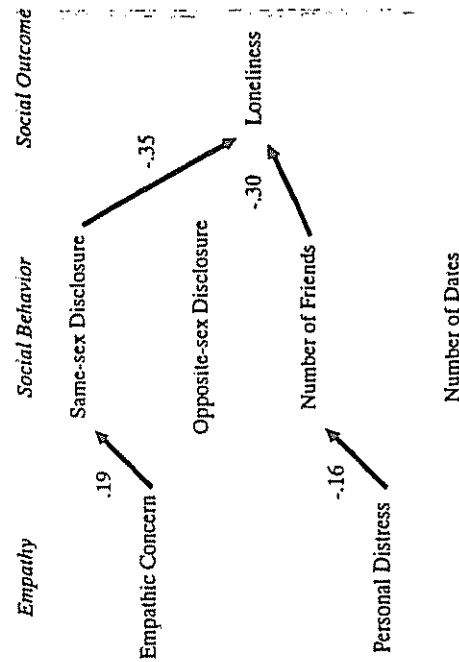


Figure 3. Beta weights, averaged over three or four significant years, for females (modified from Davis, Franzoi & Wellinger, 1985).

ing perceptions on the part of others, and that others' perceptions of the individual lead to feelings and judgements of social importance to the individual. For example, a person's tactful, accommodating social style should generally lead to a perception of him/her as a tactful, accommodating person (although this is not guaranteed), and such perceptions should then lead others to *like* that individual more, to be more *satisfied* with him/her as a friend, or to *act* in a more positive way toward him/her. (Assuming, of course, that these perceived characteristics are viewed by the observer as important ones.) In short, our social outcomes are said to result in large part from the ways in which others perceive and judge us; our dispositional levels of empathy and resulting behavioral tendencies are strong influences on those perceptions. Let us turn now to evidence which directly assesses the impact of dispositional empathy within this full theoretical framework.

Empathy in Romantic Relationships

Davis and Oathout (1987) carried out an investigation which included assessments of each step in the full theoretical model; in particular, this investigation went beyond the previous research by including measures of another person's perceptions of and reactions to the target individual, in addition to the simple effects of the individual's empathic tendencies on behavior. This was accomplished by studying heterosexual romantic relationships; in this study, both members of a romantic couple were surveyed, thus allowing an assessment of each partner's judgements about the other.

The first step in the study was to decide on the specific behaviors which might be influenced by dispositional empathy and which in turn would affect the romantic partner's perceptions. Rather than decide *a priori* on a set of behaviors which might be predicted to result from dispositional empathy, a different strategy was used. In the semester prior to the main investigation, an independent group of 100 undergraduates were asked to respond to two questions concerning the behavior of their current romantic partners. First, they were asked to list as many behaviors of their partner as they could which 'bother you, irritate you, displease you, or make you unhappy in some way.' They were also asked to list as many behaviors as possible which 'make you happy, or comfortable, or contented and satisfied in your relationship.' Over 1000 responses were generated by this sample (696 positive; 437 negative); after eliminating the numerous duplicates and excluding unusual or highly infrequent responses, this list was reduced to 25 separate behaviors. It was this list of behaviors which was administered to members of romantic couples in the main investigation.

This list of 25 behaviors encompassed a wide variety of actions. The positive behaviors included such items as acting affectionate and loving, readily listening to the other person, acting in a friendly and outgoing fashion, acting confidently, and acting honestly or dependably. The negative behaviors included such things

as acting in a possessive way, acting selfishly, not opening up to one's partner, and acting in an untrustworthy manner. Although the participants in the main investigation were to read and respond to each of the 25 behavioral items separately, responses to some of these items were later combined into a smaller number of behavioral indices for convenience in analysis and interpretation. Seven behavioral indices resulted from this procedure, four made up of positive behaviors and three made up of negative behaviors. The four positive indices are Warmth (including such items as *affectionate/loving* and *thoughtful/considerate*), Even Temper (*even tempered* and *patient/understanding*), Positive Outlook (including *confident*, *friendly/outgoing*, and *positive/optimistic*), and Good Communication (including *opens up to partner* and *readily listens to partner*). The three negative indices are Insensitivity (including *rude* and *selfish/egocentric*), Untrustworthiness (*untrustworthy* and *pays excessive attention to members of the opposite sex*), and Possessiveness (the single item *possessive*).

Respondents were asked to make two ratings for each of these 25 behavioral items: one for self and one for partner. Each rating was made using a five-point Likert-type response scale running from one (*I/my partner never act(s) this way*) to five (*I/my partner very often act(s) this way*). Thus, data were collected for each individual which revealed how each individual reports acting and how his or her partner *perceives* those actions. In addition to these ratings, the questionnaire contained the IRI, several background questions about the relationship itself, and four slightly modified items from the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke, 1951) to assess respondents' satisfaction with the relationship. The data collected in this questionnaire therefore provide measures of each step in the full model: an individual's dispositional empathy, his/her specific self-reported behaviors, the perceptions of those behaviors by the romantic partner, and the social outcome represented by the romantic partner's satisfaction with the relationship.

The data were analyzed by means of path analysis (Pedhazur, 1982; Wright, 1934), following the logic of the empathy model. The results of these path analyses are displayed separately for men and women in Figures 4 and 5.

Regarding the first step in the model, it can be seen that all three measures of dispositional empathy had predictable effects. All of the 21 significant paths (14 for women; 7 for men) held the expected sign: that is, perspective taking and empathic concern were always positively associated with positive behaviors and negatively associated with negative behaviors. Personal distress displayed the opposite pattern: always negatively associated with positive behaviors and positively associated with negative ones. For females, every one of the seven behavioral indices was significantly associated with at least one facet of empathy; for males, six of the seven indices were so associated.

It is also clear, however, that the first step of the model seems to fit the data better for female than male respondents. Females displayed 14 significant paths

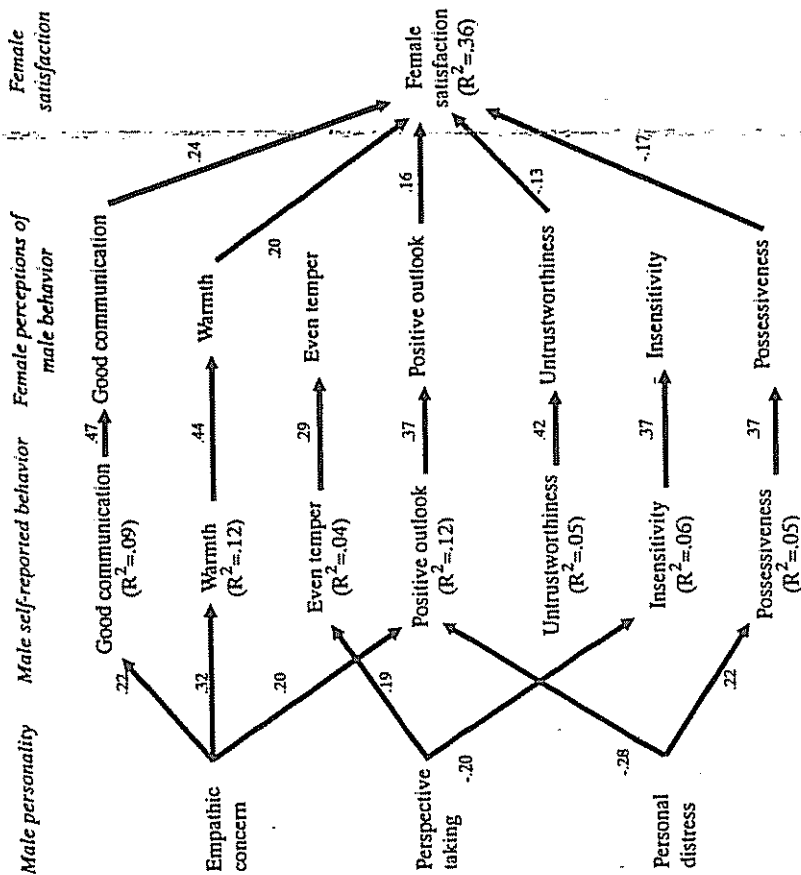


Figure 4. Model predicting female satisfaction (from Davis & Oathout, 1987)

from empathy to self-reported behavior while males displayed only 7. The difference can also be seen in a comparison of the variance accounted for in the self-reported behavior of each sex. For men, the mean R^2 for their seven self-reported behaviors was .08; for women the mean R^2 was .14.

As expected, the evidence was also strong for the second step of the model: the link between self-reported behavior and partner's perception of the behavior. For both men and women, significant positive paths emerged for each of the seven behavioral indices. These paths ranged in size from .27 to .47, with a mean of .39 for women's perceptions and .35 for men's perceptions. The size of these associations are far from unity, illustrating what everyone knows to be true: that an individual's perceptions of his or her behavior are not invariably shared by loved ones. However, the consistently significant and positive associations found here also indicate that people in romantic relationships do have some shared understanding of each other's behaviors.

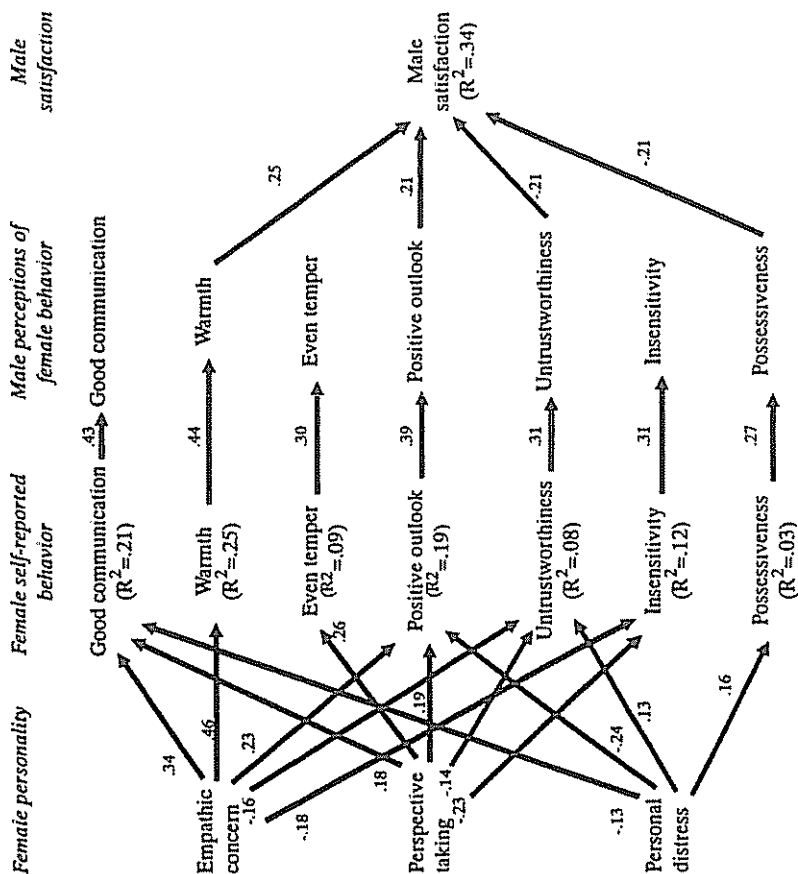


Figure 5. Model predicting male satisfaction (from Davis & Oathout, 1987).

Finally, turning to the last step in the model, it is apparent that the model's ability to account for variation in partner satisfaction is considerable. For each sex, approximately one-third of the variation in relationship satisfaction is accounted for by one's perceptions of partner behavior ($R^2 = .36$ for female satisfaction and $R^2 = .34$ for male satisfaction). Given the numerous other determinants of such satisfaction not included in the model (eg, physical attractiveness, shared values and interests), this predictive power is substantial. For both sexes, satisfaction was significantly influenced by perceptions of both positive and negative partner behaviors: satisfaction was diminished by perceptions of partner possessiveness and untrustworthiness and increased by perceptions of partner warmth and positive outlook. In addition, for women only, a perception of good communication with her partner also enhanced satisfaction.

These results provide clear and considerable support for the theoretical model. As expected, dispositional levels of empathy *do* influence behavior, which *do* affect others' perceptions, which *do* affect others' ultimate judge-

ments. These findings are especially persuasive because of the way that the specific behaviors utilized in this study were chosen. They were not selected *a priori* because of their hypothesized relevance to dispositional empathy; instead, they were derived empirically from their nomination as behaviors perceived by students as important in influencing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with romantic relationships. Consequently, to find consistent associations between measures of empathy and self-reports of behaviors chosen in this fashion further reinforces the view that the different facets of empathic responding are crucial influences on exactly the interpersonal behaviors most important in affecting the quality of one's social life.

One especially striking feature of Figures 4 and 5 is the stronger associations between dispositional empathy and self-reported behavior for women than for men. Based on this pattern, it seems fair to say that among these couples the empathic predispositions of the women ultimately had a stronger effect on male satisfaction (mediated through behaviors) than male empathy had on female satisfaction. It may be remembered that the Franzoi et al. (1985) investigation similarly found that women's perspective taking affected male satisfaction above and beyond the impact of conflict resolution, while male perspective taking had no such effect on female satisfaction. Why should this be so? Why should the effect of the female member's empathy have a larger or more pervasive impact on male satisfaction than the converse?

One possibility, originally raised by Franzoi et al. (1985), rests on the idea that men and women usually play different, largely complementary roles in romantic or family relationships. Parsons and Bales (1955) have characterized these roles as *expressive* and *instrumental*. The expressive role, usually assigned to women, involves attending to the needs—particularly the emotional needs—of the family, including the maintenance of a pleasant and harmonious social atmosphere. Nurturant, other-oriented characteristics are particularly valuable in fulfilling this role. In contrast, the instrumental role usually assigned to men deals largely with providing for the family's economic welfare; characteristics such as independence and self-reliance are more important for fulfilling this role.

Within this theoretical approach, therefore, it is possible to view empathic capacities, especially perspective taking and empathic concern, as role-relevant to the expressive role but not to the instrumental role; that is, tendencies to understand the feelings of others and experience sympathy and compassion for others are of greater utility for successful role enactment if the role is primarily concerned with smooth and harmonious social relations. They are less useful outside such a context. If the assumption is made that women, even in today's society, are still predominantly fulfilling the expressive role in relationships, then empathic predispositions for women may be especially powerful as predictors of successful role performance, and might consequently produce greater satisfaction for both self and partner. Although somewhat speculative, this

explanation is strengthened by the fact that two separate studies have thus far reported evidence consistent with it.

One final set of analyses from this investigation should be mentioned. To explore the ways the model might work in relationships of differing longevity, Davis and Oathout (1987) divided the sample into two groups: those couples who reported being together one year or less and those who had been together longer than one year. Path analyses identical to those already reported were then conducted on the two groups separately. Two findings resulting from those analyses deserve special mention.

First, the ability of empathic predispositions to predict self-reported behavior was considerably stronger among those couples who had been together over one year. For example, among these 'longer' relationships a total of 19 significant paths emerged from empathy to self-reported behaviors; only 12 such paths emerged for the 'shorter' relationships. Likewise, for virtually every self-reported behavior, the variance accounted for by dispositional empathy was greater for longer relationships than for shorter ones. Although the reason for this is not entirely clear, one promising possibility is that personality variables such as empathy may play a lesser role in affecting behavior at the early stages of a relationship, when role constraints, self-presentational concerns, peer influences, and other situational forces may be more salient; the importance of these situational factors may thus restrict the opportunity for personality variables to affect behavior. As the relationship progresses, these situational forces recede in importance, and stable empathic dispositions play a commensurately larger role.

A second finding from these analyses was the much more consistent effect that perspective taking had on self-reported behavior among those in the longer relationships. For example, only three significant paths were found from perspective taking to reported behavior in the shorter relationships, while eight such paths emerged for the longer relationships. In contrast, the other two facets of empathy displayed roughly comparable effects on self-reported behaviors regardless of relationship length.

This intriguing pattern is consistent with a view of romantic relationships as evolving from a relatively intense, emotional beginning into a less intense, more companionable union (eg, Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Sternberg, 1987). Perspective taking, the nonemotional and explicitly cognitive tendency to entertain the points of view of others, may not be especially important as an influence on behavior during the heady and emotional early stages of a romantic relationship. As time passes, passion subsides, and the relationship stabilizes, a consistent tendency to put aside one's own perspective and entertain that of the partner may begin to pay dividends. Consequently, perspective taking becomes a more powerful predictor of a variety of behaviors that ultimately influence partner satisfaction.

Immediately prior to the morning lecture/discussion session each day, a set of questionnaires was administered to the campers and the ten DM's. These questionnaires included a wide range of items, but of special interest to us is the fact that early in the week the respondents completed the IRI, and on the final day they responded to a questionnaire concerning social behaviors and outcomes. The social behaviors came from an instrument developed by Wiemann (1977) to measure 'communicative competence': the ability of an individual to present himself or herself effectively to others in social settings. Greater communicative competence is said to be one influence on how others perceive the individual (Wiemann, 1977); given the highly verbal nature of the *D&D* game, it seemed as though this measure would be relevant to the camp setting. The social outcome measure was a set of three items assessing the respondents' liking for others at camp.

Items tapping three different facets of Wiemann's communicative competence scale were included: *affiliation/support* (good listening skills; warm, personal style), *behavioral flexibility* (awareness of the appropriate behavior in different situations; adaptability), and *empathy* (understands other people; pays attention to others' feelings). Each scale consists of five to seven items, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .60 to .92.

The campers were asked to rate themselves and their *roommate* at camp on each of the items; in addition, each DM rated each of the campers in his group. Thus, for each respondent in camp, information was collected which indicated: (1) how that camper rated himself or herself; (2) how that camper's roommate rated him or her; and (3) how that camper's DM rated him or her. The liking questions provided a measure of how much each respondent's roommate and DM liked that respondent. All of the elements necessary to evaluate the full model were therefore present.

Path analyses paralleling those used in the Davis and Oathout study were carried out; as before, paths were estimated from each of the IRI scales to the self-reported communication variables, from each of the communication variables to another person's *perception* of that behavior in the individual, and from each of these perceptions to that other person's *liking* for the individual. The results of the path model concerning roommate's perceptions are displayed in Figure 6.

As the figure illustrates, some elements of the model are supported by these results while others are not. Turning to the first stage of the model, it can be seen that two significant paths emerged from empathic predispositions to self-reported behavior. Greater perspective taking was associated with greater self-reported behavioral flexibility, and greater empathic concern was associated with self-reported affiliation/support. Both of these associations are consistent with the hypothesized consequences of perspective taking (tolerance and adaptability) and empathic concern (sympathy and other-oriented behavior). Dispositional personal distress had no effect on any of the three behaviors.

The Davis and Oathout study thus provides very encouraging evidence. In the first investigation attempting to test all aspects of the model, convincing support was found for each stage. The final set of data to be presented in this chapter involves another investigation (Davis & Kraus, 1990) which also gathered information making possible a test of the full theoretical model. This investigation utilized a different, younger subject population, a different kind of social relationship, and a different set of behavioral measures than the Davis and Oathout study. To the degree that the model receives support under these new circumstances, confidence in its power and robustness will be increased.

Empathy in Same-Sex Acquaintanceships

As mentioned previously, the current authors collected data several years ago in a summer camp devoted to the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*. In this game, players adopt the personae of imaginary characters such as magicians, fighters, monks, thieves, and so forth, through dice rolls, a complicated set of rules, and the force of imagination, the players engage in a series of adventures which often involve overcoming obstacles in order to obtain some reward, usually treasure. These adventures are not acted out physically, but are instead conducted verbally, as players indicate aloud what behaviors—consistent with their characters' abilities and motivations—they intend to perform. The success or failure of their intended courses of action is then determined by rolling special dice and consulting elaborate charts which explain the interpretation of these dice rolls. Overseeing the entire game is an individual known as the dungeon master (DM), who has typically created the fictional world which the players inhabit, placing in it all the treasure and obstacles which the players respectively seek and overcome. The DM informs players of the success or failure of their intended actions, settles disputes, and in general sets the tone of the game; an imaginative and creative DM produces an atmosphere conducive to an involving game for the players.

Participants at this camp were all aficionados of *D&D*, and ranged in age from 10 to 18; 117 of the 120 campers were male. Each morning of camp was spent in a large group session at which very experienced players (not campers) would conduct lectures and discussions on the finer points of the game. In the afternoons, groups of five to seven campers would convene to play the game. Groups were composed of campers of roughly the same age and experience with *D&D*. The DM's of the groups were slightly older male players, employed by the camp, who also doubled as camp counselors. Since the camp was one week long, the groups continued the same adventure for several days, and the DM's consequently had continuous contact with the same set of five to seven players during the week. Following each day's gaming session, the campers had free time in the evening to see movies, play *D&D* informally, or engage in other activities.

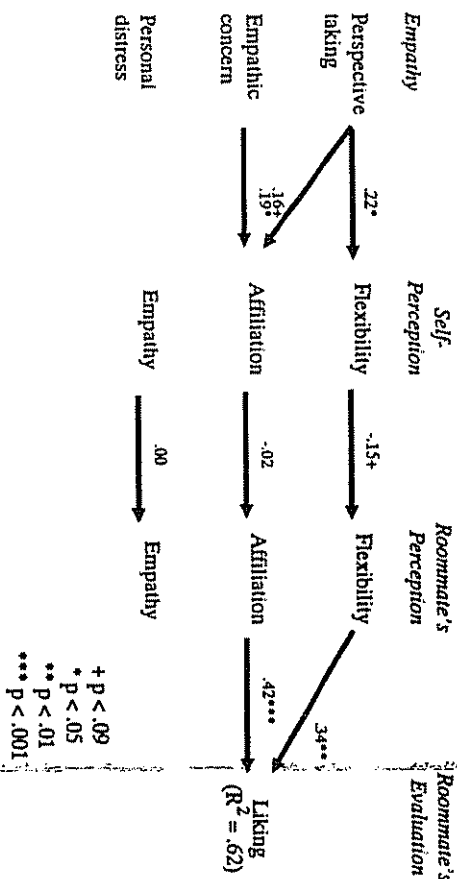


Figure 6. Path analyses of the relationships between empathy, self- and roommate's perception of communicative competence, and other's evaluation of self ($N > 101$).

It is at the second step in this model—the link between an individual's perceptions of self and the perceptions regarding that individual held by his/her roommate—that the evidence is least supportive of the model. None of these paths are significant, and in fact two of them are *negative* in sign, which is certainly not to be expected by the model.

Results more in keeping with expectations are found for the third stage of the model. Of the three roommate perceptions regarding communicative competence, two are significantly associated with the roommate's liking for the subject. The degree to which one's roommate is viewed as flexible and supportive significantly and positively affects one's liking for him/her. The size of these associations is considerable; over 60 per cent of the variance in roommate liking is accounted for by these three perceptions.

Before turning to a general discussion of these results, let us examine the analyses involving the DM's. In these analyses the 'other person' is not the camper's roommate, but the slightly older adolescent male who oversaw the daily *D&D* sessions for the camper's group. As a result, the nature of these relationships was slightly different, and less of a relationship between two peers. The results of these analyses appear in Figure 7.

The connections between dispositional empathy and self-reported behaviors are of course identical in these analyses to those in the previous figure, since dispositional empathy and self-reported behavior were assessed only once, and do not depend upon the perceptions of others. The links between self-reported behavior and the perceptions of DM's, however, are noticeably different from those found earlier regarding roommates' perceptions. All three of these associations are positive in sign; one (regarding Wiemann's 'empathy') attains

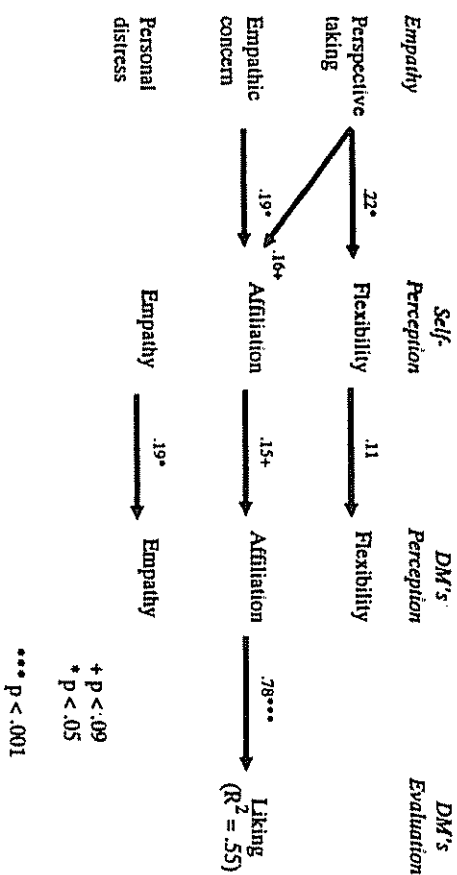


Figure 7. Path analyses of the relationships between empathy, self- and DM's perception of communicative competence, and other's evaluation of self ($N = 104$).

statistical significance, and another (Wiemann's 'affiliation/support') just misses conventional significance levels ($p < .06$). Thus, the association between campers' self-perceptions and DM's perceptions offer support for the model in a way that the roommate analyses did not.

Finally, regarding the social outcome of DM's liking for the camper, it can be seen that one variable—DM perceptions of the camper's level of affiliative/supportive behavior—was very strongly related to DM liking for that camper. The other DM perceptions exerted no significant impact on liking. Overall, about 55 per cent of the variance in DM liking was accounted for by these three perceptions.

Taken as a whole, then, the results of these two path analyses offer some support for the theoretical model, but support which is noticeably weaker in some ways than that provided by the Davis and Oathout investigation, especially regarding the connections between self-reported behavior and the perceptions of others. Why should this be? What are the most appropriate explanations for these two differing patterns?

Two possibilities concern differences between the two subject populations used in these studies: primarily, differences in age and gender. The college students constituting the earlier study's sample were almost all 18 years of age or older; in contrast, the *D&D* sample was almost exclusively younger than 18 (mean age = 13 years, 9 months). One possibility is that responses to these questionnaires are more reliable for older than younger respondents. However, a comparison of the alpha coefficients for the computed scales across the two samples reveals very little difference between the two groups. Another possibility, which cannot be ruled out at this point, is that dispositional empathy

another dissimilarity between the investigations which may account for their differing patterns of results.

Before leaving this study, we should mention one final finding. Included among the final day's questionnaire was a request for the respondents to nominate the five people at camp that they liked the most; they were explicitly told that these people did not have to be members of their particular gaming group. By examining the responses, it was possible to assign a peer nomination score to each camper, which consisted simply of the number of times that camper was nominated by peers. Higher scores therefore denote greater popularity.

Because we conceive of this variable as another social outcome—popularity among the camp at large—we examined the correlations between this variable and the two sets of perceptions of others (roommate and DM). It was found that all three roommate perceptions correlated positively with peer popularity (behavioral flexibility, $r = .25$; affiliation/support, $r = .19$; empathy, $r = .17$). When all three roommate perceptions were entered simultaneously as predictors of popularity, behavioral flexibility emerged as the sole significant predictor ($\beta = .44$; $p < .05$). For DM's, the correlational pattern was similar (behavioral flexibility, $r = .28$; affiliation/support, $r = .34$; empathy, $r = .26$), but the regression analysis revealed affiliation/support to be the sole significant predictor ($\beta = .43$; $p < .05$).

The interesting thing to note about these findings is that the criterion variable (peer popularity) is based on nominations from the entire camp, while the predictor variables are the perceptions of *one* other person. While that one other person is a member of the larger group which offers the nominations, his/her contribution is only one among many; the fact that roommate and DM perceptions both significantly predict an individual's popularity in the camp at large suggests strongly that these perceptions, held by individuals, were also shared by others at the camp.

In sum, then, these results suggest that even under the limiting conditions discussed earlier, dispositional empathy has a predictable effect on some social behaviors, and that others' perceptions of those behaviors significantly influence liking for that individual. However, the results also indicate that during the short camp session, little agreement was obtained between individuals' self-reports of behavior and the perceptions of others. With longer contact, as with the romantic couples in the Davis and Oathout study, it is quite possible that the association between self- and other-perceptions would increase. Even absent such evidence, however, we should not lose sight of the support which was evidenced for the first and final portions of the model.

simply may not affect behaviors as strongly for these younger respondents as it does for older ones; that is, there may be an age limit on the applicability of this model, or at least on the first parts of it. Regarding gender differences, recall that the findings in the Davis and Oathout (1987) study indicated that dispositional empathy had stronger effects among female than male college students. Thus, the *D&D* study, in utilizing a sample almost entirely male, may have 'stacked the deck' against finding very many links between empathy and self-reported behavior.

Perhaps a more theoretically interesting explanation of the differences between these two investigations lies in the different kinds of social relationships examined in each. The Davis and Oathout study dealt with important romantic relationships, a majority of which were of at least 12 months' duration at the time of the study. In contrast, the *D&D* study concerned relations between same-sex peers at a camp lasting less than six days! This is an especially important point to remember when considering the complete lack of correspondence between camper and roommate perceptions. The fact that one's roommate of five days has perceptions that agree not at all with one's own perceptions of self should, in retrospect, not be surprising. The process by which we form perceptions of others—while quick to start—may require a considerable amount of behavioral information before resulting in accurate judgements. Given the brief period in which two people shared a room at camp it is perhaps easy to understand how they may not have come to share perceptions about what kind of person the other was.

In fact, the discovery that DM's perceptions do display a positive association with self-perceptions after this short period is perhaps remarkable. It also suggests that the low association between self-perceptions and roommate perceptions may also be due in part to the young age of the respondents; after all, the DM's had the same brief exposure, yet displayed a set of perceptions about the camper that more closely matched the camper's self-view. This suggests that the different perspective enjoyed by the older DM contributed in some fashion to the greater correspondence between self- and other-perceptions.

A final factor which may have contributed to the differing patterns of results is the specific set of behaviors employed in each investigation. In the Davis and Oathout study, the behaviors were empirically derived, based on information collected from an independent sample very similar to the target population. As a result, this set of behaviors was highly ecologically valid: it represented exactly those behaviors most important in the kind of social relationship under study. In contrast, the *D&D* study employed an existing set of behavioral items constructed for another purpose. While these behaviors seemed relevant for the camp setting, and undoubtedly were to some degree, it also seems highly likely that empirically deriving a set of *D&D* behavioral items would have provided an even better instrument. Whether such a strategy would have eventually provided stronger support for the model is unknown; however, it does represent

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

The accumulated evidence presented here suggests both some strong and weak features of the theoretical model. Some of its stronger features would include:

1. *The evidence regarding perspective taking's impact on social style.* Greater levels of dispositional perspective taking have been found to be associated with less frequent interpersonal conflict, with more egalitarian methods of resolving conflict, with a social style characterized by sensitivity to others and a lack of egocentrism and arrogance, and with a flexible and supportive communicative style. In addition, the study of romantic partners suggests that perspective taking increases in importance as the length of a relationship increases. All of these findings are consistent with the earlier hypotheses that perspective taking would lead to tolerance, accommodation, and a lack of egocentrism.
2. *The evidence regarding empathic concern's impact on social style.* Greater levels of dispositional empathic concern have been found to be associated with a social style characterized by sensitivity to others and a lack of egocentrism and arrogance, with a tendency to engage in greater self-disclosure with peers, with going out on more dates (for males), and with greater warmth and supportiveness in both peer and romantic relationships. These findings are consistent with our earlier hypotheses that empathic concern would be associated with being more supportive, generous, and communicative to others.
3. *The evidence regarding personal distress's impact on social feelings and social outcomes.* Greater levels of personal distress have been found to be associated with greater shyness, social anxiety, having fewer friends, having fewer dates (males), and possessiveness in romantic relationships. These findings are generally consistent with our expectations that personal distress would be associated with being generally non-supportive and somewhat insecure/in-mature. Little evidence was found for the expectation that personal distress would contribute to poor communication.
4. *The evidence regarding the impact of others' perceptions on social outcomes.*

In both of the studies dealing with this aspect of the model, it was found that a considerable amount of the variation in outcome measures (satisfaction with the romantic relationship; liking for the individual) was accounted for by others' perceptions of an individual. In the romantic relationship study, people were more satisfied with the relationship to the degree that they perceived their partners to be warm, optimistic, trustworthy, and non-possessive. All of these perceptions were affected to one degree or another by the empathic predispositions of the target individual, in keeping with the model. In the D&D study, DM's and roommates reported greater liking for the subject if s/he was perceived to be high in affiliative/support; roommates also experienced

greater liking if s/he was seen as behaviorally flexible. Thus, the phenomenological view that it is others' perceptions that count in affecting social outcomes was consistently supported.

The model's weaker points would include:

1. *The apparent limitations on the link between self-behavior and others' perceptions.* While substantial connections were found between self-reported behavior and the perceptions of romantic partners, these findings were obtained in clearly important relationships which had been underway for some period of time. The evidence from the camp study strongly suggests that in relationships of lesser importance and length, the perceptions that others form may have little connection with the way we perceive ourselves. While this in no way invalidates the model, it does illustrate its limits: self-perceptions probably cannot be expected to covary substantially with the perceptions of others without some significant period of exposure of self to others. Settings which lack such exposure may be poor choices for research utilizing this model.
2. *The necessity of choosing behavior items appropriate to the research setting.* As mentioned earlier, the empirical approach taken to behavior selection in the romantic relationship study yielded a highly appropriate set of items. Whether or not a completely empirical approach is necessarily superior in every instance is not known. However, it is clear that careful thought should be given to the precise behaviors thought to be most important in a given situation, whether the particular behavioral instrument utilized is an existing one or not.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Given the successes of the empathy model thus far, and mindful as well of its limitations, a number of possible avenues for future research seem possible. The many possible research questions would include the following.

Applying the Model to Other Settings

With the strengths and limits of the model in mind, several new settings in which the model may apply seem especially interesting. First, it would be quite valuable to examine the model using a sample of married adults. The differences between college student romantic couples and a married sample reflecting a fuller range of age and experience are obvious. It would be particularly interesting (and important) to utilize a set of behavioral items specifically appropriate to married life, since the behavioral issues of importance to college-aged lovers may vary quite drastically from those of importance to older adults with more adult responsibilities and demands. In particular, issues of child rearing, and the

balancing of work and family obligations, would seem to be very important for a married sample. Especially valuable would be a longitudinal investigation, with its greater power to address issues of cause and effect.

Using a married sample of course ensures that the partners in the relationship have had sufficient exposure to each other for the model to be appropriate. What other kinds of social relationships possess this feature? Long term, same-sex friendships (eg, 'best friends') would seem to qualify, as would some family relationships (eg, siblings), although there may be some additional complications with such groups. Another interesting possibility would be to test the model with long-term coworkers—those people who over some considerable period of time share the factory or office. Care would again need to be taken to ensure that the behavioral measures were appropriate to the particular setting, but it would be interesting to learn whether dispositional empathy influences the behavioral styles which ultimately affect social outcomes in the workplace.

Identifying Moderators

In our discussion of the difficulties which result when the participants lack a minimum period of exposure to one another, we were implicitly addressing the question of moderator variables. That is, in the presence of some variables (such as long-term relationships), the model would be expected to function well, while in their absence the model would not perform as well; length of the relationship therefore moderates the effectiveness of the model. Specifically, relationship length seems most likely to moderate that part of the model linking self-reported behavior and the perceptions of others.

Other portions of the model may also be subject to such moderating effects, however. For example, the superiority of the model in predicting self-reported behavior for women (Davis & Oathout, 1987) indicates that gender may be a moderating variable for the first part of the model—the link between dispositional empathy and self-reported behavior. Another avenue to pursue, therefore, might be the identification of variables which may make portions of the model more or less effective in accounting for variations in behavior.

Recently, a first step was taken in this direction. Alan Oathout (1987) conducted a follow-up study to the Davis and Oathout investigation, in which he focused on the link between empathy and self-reported behavior, and specifically on the possibility that there might be psychological variables moderating this link. Oathout surveyed 117 college students (91 females, 26 males) currently involved in romantic relationships, assessing their dispositional empathy and asking them to offer self-ratings on the same set of behavioral items used in the original Davis and Oathout study; no attempt was made in this investigation to contact or query the partners of these subjects. Thus, the variables making up the first portion of the empathy model were collected for each respondent. To address the question of possible moderator effects, Oathout

also obtained measures of other variables which seemed likely to moderate the effects of empathy on self-reported behavior.

One of these variables was a measure of heterosexual social anxiety, first used by Leary and Dobbins (1983), and said to measure an individual's usual levels of tension and nervousness in ordinary encounters with members of the opposite sex. Oathout's reasoning was that chronically high levels of anxiety in the presence of the opposite sex might act as a 'barrier' to the usual empathy-behavior link. That is, perspective taking or empathic concern might be less predictive of positive interpersonal behaviors among those people who experience significant nervousness in the presence of the opposite sex; conversely, people untroubled by this form of social anxiety should be most likely to display a strong connection between their empathic dispositions and their social behavior. In Oathout's terms, there might exist for some people a 'wall of anxiety' between empathy and behavior.

Some recent analyses of the data collected in that project provide promising though limited support for the hypothesis. Because women and men displayed some differences in the original Davis and Oathout (1987) study, it was decided to analyze the responses of each gender separately. Unfortunately, the number of male respondents was too small to allow meaningful analyses; thus, the following analyses were carried out only on the sample of 91 women included in the Oathout study.

First, the sample was split into those above ($N = 46$) and below ($N = 45$) the median on the heterosexual anxiety measure. Next, for each group, a series of multiple regression analyses was carried out in which the criterion variables were the seven self-reported behaviors described earlier and the predictor variables were the three measures of empathic predisposition. Support for the moderating variable hypothesis can be claimed if the model works better (ie, more significant paths; higher R^2) for those low in anxiety than for those high in anxiety.

In fact, this is the pattern that was found. There were seven significant associations between empathy and behavior for those women low in heterosexual anxiety and three for those high in such anxiety. The mean percentage of variance accounted for (R^2), averaged across all seven behaviors, was 20 per cent for those low in anxiety and 12 per cent for those high. An examination of the R^2 's for each behavior separately revealed a larger proportion of variance accounted for among those low in anxiety for four of the seven behaviors. Due to the small sizes of the samples resulting from the median split on the anxiety variable, it is difficult to obtain significant differences when comparing the multiple R 's for these behaviors. Nevertheless, for one of seven behaviors (warmth), the difference in multiple R between those low ($R = .634$) and high ($R = .269$) in anxiety was significant (using the t to Z transformation, $Z = 2.18$, $p < .03$). Bearing in mind the limits of small samples, these findings nonetheless

provide encouraging support for the idea that the moderator variable approach may prove useful.

The Behavioral Measures

All of the current evidence regarding the effect of dispositional empathy on behavior has utilized individuals' self-reports of behavior rather than actual measures of behavior. While we believe it reasonable to assume that there is a substantial relationship between one's behavior and one's reports about it, it is also obviously true that this relationship is not perfect. One very important goal of future research, then, should be to begin the process of assessing the connections between dispositional empathy and actual, observable behavior. Within the context of romantic relationships, for example, this might involve direct observation of romantic couples in a controlled setting; ideally, the setting would be structured so as to make possible and appropriate the full range of behaviors which have thus far emerged as important in romantic relationships. Thus, an experimental scenario in which partner communication, warmth/support, or insensitivity were possible behaviors would allow an assessment of whether or not those behaviors were reliably linked to high or low levels of dispositional empathy. A related approach may be to look for associations between empathy and behavioral outcomes such as relationship breakup; longitudinal designs would obviously be desirable for such attempts.

Relevance to Other Approaches

Another future direction is to begin the process of integrating this empathy model with other approaches dealing with similar phenomena. Many such approaches exist. For example, the notion that dispositional empathic capacities can systematically improve one's ability to maintain social relationships fits neatly with the construct of *relational competence* (Hansson, Jones, & Carpenter, 1984). Relational competence refers to those characteristics of individual that 'facilitate the acquisition, development, and maintenance of mutually satisfying relationships' (Hansson et al., p. 273). Clearly, the influences of various facets of empathy described here can be seen as facilitating the maintenance of relationships. Whether empathic predispositions are as valuable in fostering the *acquisition* of new relationships is an open question; it seems likely that other personal characteristics, such as sociability or shyness, might play a more powerful role at the stage of relationship formation. Addressing the question of empathy's role in the relational competence framework is therefore one potentially fruitful area of exploration.

Another current research area with which the empathy model may have some interesting connections is the general topic of romantic love. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in theoretical attempts to grapple with fundamental

questions about love: what is it, what causes it, what are its components? In particular, recent treatments have all posited the existence of different 'kinds' of love (eg, Lee, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1974), or have speculated about different 'components' of love (Sternberg, 1986; 1987). Despite the differences which clearly exist between these various approaches, all of them incorporate the notion that there are varieties of love in which passion and emotion are especially salient and important, and other varieties in which such elements are less important or lacking entirely.

An intriguing possibility is that dispositional empathy may have some more or less important roles to play in romantic relationships, depending upon the precise *nature* of those relationships. The types of behaviors most influenced by perspective taking and empathic concern in the Davis and Oatout study included warmth/support, good communication, and a positive, optimistic outlook. These all seem to have the flavor of a solid, companionate kind of love, while not *inconsistent* with a more passionate relationship, this pattern suggests that these facets of dispositional empathy may be especially important for certain kinds of less passionate romantic relationships. While this is clearly speculation, it seems a potentially useful lead to follow. This seems especially true since perspective taking in particular was found to have stronger effects on behavior for the longer relationships, precisely those relationships which are most likely to have evolved into a less passionate and more companionable union.

'Complications' with the Model

A final recommendation concerning future research involving this model is to focus on some possible 'complications' of the model. As it currently stands, the model is drawn simply, with easily understandable connections among its various elements. However, there are any number of ways to refine the model which would involve incorporating new ideas or elements. For example, consider the matter of perceptions. The model currently holds that Partner A's empathy affects his/her behavior, which influences Partner B's perceptions of that behavior. However, it also seems possible that Partner B's perceptions are influenced by Partner B's empathy as well. That is, a highly sympathetic, role-taking person might form a different perception of his/her partner—based on the very *same* objective behaviors—than would be formed by a less warm and sympathetic person. Thus, empathy may enter into the general model at more than one point, exerting a direct as well as indirect effect on one's perceptions.

Or consider the issue of empathy's potential 'dark side'. The model currently emphasizes the beneficial outcomes of perspective taking and empathic concern, and the research evidence supports this view. Is it not possible, however, that under some circumstances identifying with and sympathizing with another person could lead to negative outcomes? In particular, might not 'burnout'—a

common problem in the helping and teaching professions—be at least partially attributable to the effects of empathizing *too much*? The model as it stands does not easily incorporate such an idea. Thus, a final suggestion regarding future directions might be to attempt a broadening of the model to accommodate such new and ‘complicating’ factors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been our assumption in this work that dispositional levels of the characteristics usually labelled empathy can have important, identifiable effects on routine social behaviors, thus setting in motion a chain of events which ultimately leads to positive consequences for the individual. The evidence reviewed and presented here seems to bear out that assumption. It would be unrealistic, however, to claim that dispositional empathy is the only (or even the most important) determinant of the kinds of social behavior examined here; certainly situational factors and other dispositional factors have important roles to play. It would be similarly unwise to believe that our social outcomes can be understood solely in terms of the perceptions others form from our behavior. Again, other situational and dispositional variables not included in the model certainly play an important role.

With these limits acknowledged, however, let us hasten to add that the processes described in this model are *not* simply of minor importance. The particular behaviors examined here are undeniably mundane: a word of praise, a petty argument, a kiss hello, a moody silence. These everyday acts are the minutiae of social life, often unnoticed because of their very ubiquity. However, just as ocean waves imperceptibly but inevitably wear away the coastline through their cumulative effect, so too do these commonplace behaviors systematically affect the social ties between individuals—not typically because of a sudden or dramatic event, but through the gradual influence of small positive and negative social acts. Despite the real and acknowledged limits of the empathy model, therefore, we feel that it is valuable because it offers us a way to understand an important but often dimly seen social phenomenon—the soft, slow, but insistent effect of personality on the course of human relationships.

FOOTNOTES

1. The focus of this chapter will be entirely on dispositional levels of empathy, rather than on the empathic *state*, which can be affected by situational variables. Thus, while the term ‘empathy’ may occasionally appear without the qualifier ‘dispositional’, it will always refer to the chronic individual tendency.

2. Because of its primary content—identification with *fictitious* characters—the Fantasy Scale was often not employed in the research reported here, which deals with real-life situations. Thus, it will not be referred to again in this chapter.

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