**Issue 17: Does True Altruism Exist?**

**YES: C. Daniel Batson, Bruce D. Duncan, Paula Ackerman,**

**Terese Buckley, and Kimberly Birch,** from “Is Empathic Emotion

a Source of Altruistic Motivation?” *Journal of Personality and Social*

*Psychology* (February 1981)

**NO: Robert B. Cialdini, Mark Schaller, Donald Houlihan, Kevin**

**Arps, Jim Fultz, and Arthur L. Beaman,** from “Empathy-Based

Helping: Is It Selfl essly or Selfi shly Motivated?” *Journal of Personality*

*and Social Psychology* (April 1987)

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

**YES:** Social psychologist C. Daniel Batson and his colleagues believe

that people sometimes help for purely altruistic reasons. He proposes

that empathy is the key factor responsible for altruism and

describes the results of an experiment that supports his position.

**NO:** Social psychologist Robert Cialdini and his colleagues are not

convinced that empathy alone can motivate helping. Instead they

propose that people often help others in order to make themselves

feel better.

**D**o people ever behave selfl essly? Is it possible that we help simply out

of genuine concern for another person’s welfare and nothing else? These are

fundamental questions for social psychologists who study altruism. Altruism

can be defi ned as an unselfi sh interest in helping others. At fi rst glance, it may

seem as if altruistic behavior is commonplace—philanthropists donate to charities,

public safety workers risk their lives on a daily basis, and everyday people

often lend a helping hand to others for no apparent ulterior motive. However,

if we look more closely at helping, it becomes evident that there may be other

factors, besides a concern for the welfare of others, that may motivate helping.

For example, philanthropists who donate money to a charity are likely to feel

good about themselves after making their donation. If these positive feelings

were the primary factor that motivated the donation—the person donated the

money to feel good—then this act of charity could not be considered truly

altruistic. It would be considered an *egoistic* act because it was ultimately aimed

at improving the welfare of the person giving the help rather than the person

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receiving help, even if the donation had positive con sequences for others. But how can we tell if it is altruism or more self-cen tered motives that are responsible for helping? When helping occurs in the real world, it can be diffi cult to ascertain the true motivation of those who provide help. A social psychology

laboratory is likely to be a more promising place to determine whether true

altruism exists; in the laboratory the causes of helping behavior can be isolated

and systematically studied.

In the fi rst selection, Daniel Batson and his colleagues propose that

empathy plays a key role in altruistic behavior. Empathy is the ability to experience

someone else’s feelings by imagining what it would feel like to be in the

same situation as another person. According to Batson, when we feel empathy

for another person we become genuinely concerned for their well-being and

are more likely to help for altruistic reasons. Batson will describe a laboratory

experiment designed to test this hypothesis.

Robert Cialdini and his colleagues propose a different model to explain

helping behavior, which they call the Negative State Relief Model. According

to this model, people help others in order to avoid the negative feelings that

they might experience if they did not help. Imagine that you are witnessing

someone suffering. How would it make you feel to watch them suffer? It would

probably bother you and make you feel personally distressed. Accord ing to

Cialdini, you would be likely to take action to reduce this person’s suf fering in

order to reduce the distress that *you* were currently experiencing. If this were

your motivation for helping then it would not be altruism, because the ultimate

goal of your behavior would be to increase your own welfare. So according

to this perspective, we often help in order to avoid negative conse quences for

ourselves—such as the feelings of sadness that would result if we did not help.

It should be noted that the two selections you will read were only the

ini tial exchange in a series of articles that have debated the existence of altruism.

In response to Cialdini’s Negative State Relief Model, Batson has produced

additional research that he believes demonstrates the existence of true altruism.

Despite Batson’s efforts, the debate over altruism continues to this day.

**POINT**

• We sometimes help others for altruistic

reasons.

• Altruistic helping is a result of em -

pathic feelings for others.

• Experimental evidence supports the

importance of empathy in generating

altruistic helping behavior.

**COUNTERPOINT**

• Other motivations besides altruism

can explain helping behavior.

• We may help others to reduce our

own distress rather than to reduce the

distress of others.

• Experimental evidence has not conclusively

demonstrated that people

help for purely altruistic reasons.

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**Paula Ackerman, Terese Buckley,**

**and Kimberly Birch**

**Is Empathic Emotion a Source of**

**Altruistic Motivation?**

**E**vidence indicates that feeling empathy for the person in need is an important

motivator of helping (cf. Aderman & Berkowitz, 1970; Aronfreed & Paskal,

cited in Aronfreed, 1970; Coke , Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Harris & Huang,

1973; Krebs, 1975; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972). In the past few years, a number

of researchers (Aronfreed, 1970; Batson, Darley, & Coke, 1978; Hoffman, 1975;

Krebs, 1975) have hypothesized that this motivation might be truly altruistic,

that is, directed toward the end-state goal of reducing the other’s distress. If the

empathy-altruism hypothesis is correct, it would have broad theoretical implications,

for few if any major theories of motivation allow for the possibility

of truly altruistic motivation (cf. Bolles, 1975, for a review). Current theories

tend to be egoistic; they are built on the assumption that everything we do is

ultimately directed toward the end-state goal of benefi ting ourselves.

The egoistic orientation of modern psychology should not be dismissed

lightly; it has prevailed for decades, and it can easily account for what might

appear to be altruistic motivation arising from empathic emotion. To illustrate:

You may answer the question of why you helped someone in other-directed,

altruistic terms—you felt sorry for that person and wished to reduce his or

her distress. But this apparently altruistic concern to reduce another’s distress

may not have been the end-state goal of your action but rather an intermediate

means to the ultimate end of reducing *your own* distress. Your own distress

could have arisen not only from the unpleasant emotions you experienced as

a result of knowing that the other person was suffering (shock, disgust, fear, or

grief) but from the increase in unpleasant emotion you anticipated if you did

not help (guilt or shame). Interpreted in this way, your helping was not altruistic.

It was an instrumental egoistic response. You acted to reduce the other

per son’s distress because that reduced your own distress.

If we allow that apparently altruistic helping may be no more than an

instrumental egoistic response, and we believe that we must, then there is no

clear empirical evidence that empathic emotion leads to altruistic motivation

to help. The diffi culty in providing evidence is, of course, that egoism and

altruism are motivational concepts, and we cannot directly observe motivation,

only behavior. If we are to provide empirical evidence that empathic

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emotion leads to altruistic motivation, we need to identify some point at

which the egoistic and altruistic interpretations differ at a behavioral level.

If no such point can be found, then we must conclude that the claim that

empa thy evokes altruistic motivation is of no real theoretical signifi cance.

**Conceptual Distinction between Egoism and**

**Altruism**

In an attempt to fi nd a point of behavioral difference, it is important, fi rst, to

be clear about the points of conceptual difference. Therefore, let us be explicit

about what we mean by egoistic and altruistic motivation for helping. As we shall

use the terms, a person’s helping is egoistic to the degree that he or she helps

from a desire for personal gain (e.g., material rewards, praise, or self-esteem) or a

desire to avoid personal pain (e.g., punishment, social castigation, private guilt,

or shame). That is, *egoistically motivated helping is directed toward the end-state goal*

*of increasing the helper’s own welfare*. In contrast, a person’s helping is altruistic to

the degree that he or she helps from a desire to reduce the distress or increase

the benefi t of the person in need. That is, *altruistically motivated helping is directed*

*toward the end-state goal of increasing the other’s welfare*.

This conceptual distinction between egoism and altruism leads to three

observations: (a) Helping, as a behavior, can be either egoistically or altruistically

motivated; it is the end-state goal, not the behavior, that distinguishes an

act as altruistic. (b) Motivation for helping may be a mixture of altruism and

egoism; it need not be solely or even primarily altruistic to have an altruistic

component. (c) Increasing the other’s welfare is both necessary and suffi cient

to attain an altruistic end-state goal. To the degree that helping is altruistically

rather than egoistically motivated, increasing the other’s welfare is not

an intermediate, instrumental response directed toward increasing one’s own

welfare; it is an end in itself. Although one’s own welfare may be increased by

altruistically motivated helping (for example, it may produce feelings of personal

satisfaction or relief), personal gain must be an unintended by-product

and not the goal of the behavior. This conception of altruism and of the distinction

between it and egoism seem quite consistent not only with Auguste

Comte’s (1875) initial use of the term but also with modern dictionary defi nitions,

for example, “unselfi sh concern for the welfare of others.”

**Empirical Distinction between Egoism and**

**Altruism**

Equipped with this conceptual distinction, we may turn to the problem of

making an empirical distinction between egoistic and altruistic motivation for

helping. As we have said, all we can directly observe is the behavior, help ing.

The challenge is somehow to use the behavior as a basis for inferring whether

the motivation underlying it is egoistic or altruistic.

Batson and Coke (1981) have recently proposed a technique for doing

this. Building on the work of Piliavin and Piliavin (1973), they point out that

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the effect on helping of a cost variable—the cost of escaping from the need

situation without helping—should be different, depending on whether the

bystander’s motivation is egoistic or altruistic. If the bystander’s motivation

is egoistic, his or her goal is to reduce personal distress caused by seeing the

other suffer. This goal can be reached either by helping, and so removing the

cause of one’s distress, or by escaping (phys ically or psychologically) and so

removing contact with the cause; either behavior can lead to the desired goal.

The likelihood that the egoistically motivated bystander will choose to help

should, therefore, be a direct function of the costs associated with choosing

to escape. These costs include the physical effort involved in escaping from

the need situation (often minimal) and, more importantly, the feelings of distress,

guilt, and shame anticipated as a result of knowing that the per son in

need is continuing to suffer. Thus, if the bystander were egoistically moti vated

and all other variables were held constant, increasing the cost of escaping by,

for example, preventing the bystander from leaving the scene of the accident

and so making it hard to avoid thinking about the continuing distress of the

unhelped vic tim should increase the rate of helping. Conversely, reducing the

costs of escaping by, for example, making it easy for the bystander to leave the

scene of the accident and thus avoid thinking about the victim’s continuing

distress should decrease the rate of helping.

If the bystander’s motivation is altruistic, his or her goal is to reduce

the other’s distress. This goal can be reached by helping, but not by escaping.

Therefore, the likelihood that the altruistically motivated bystander will help

should be independent of the cost of escaping because escaping is a goal-irrelevant

behavior. Increasing or decreasing the cost of escaping should have no

effect on the rate of helping; the rate should remain as high when escape is

easy as when it is diffi cult.

These predictions suggest a way of determining whether the motivation

for helping is egoistic or altruistic. The motivation cannot be inferred from

any single behavioral response, but it can be inferred from the *pattern* of helping

responses presented in Table 1. To the extent that the motivation for helping

is egoistic, the helping rate should be affected by the diffi culty of escaping.

The easier it is to escape continued exposure to the need situation, the lower

the cost of escaping and the less chance of a bystander’s helping. But to the

***Table 1***

**Rate of Helping When Diffi culty of Escape Is Varied and**

**Motivation Is Egoistic or Altruistic**

**Type of motivation (level of empathic emotion)**

**Diffi culty of escape Egoistic (low empathy) Altruistic (high empathy)**

Easy Low High

Diffi cult High High

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extent that the motivation for helping is altruistic, the helping rate should be

unaffected by the diffi culty of escaping; helping should be just as high when

escape is easy as when it is diffi cult.1

**Application to the Problem of the Motivation**

**Resulting From Empathic Emotion**

Now let us apply this general technique for discriminating between egoistic

and altruistic motivation to the specifi c question of whether empathic emotion

leads to altruistic motivation to help. If the motivation associated with

feeling empathy for the person in need is altruistic (the empathy–altruism

hypothesis), individuals induced to feel a high degree of empathy should help

regardless of whether escape is easy or diffi cult (column 2 of Table 1); individuals

feeling little empathy should help only when escape is diffi cult (column 1).

Thus, if empathy leads to altruistic motivation to help, one can relabel the columns

in Table 1, as has been done in parentheses. If, however, the motiva tion

to help resulting from empathic emotion is egoistic, as seems to be implied by

those who speak of “empathic pain,” helping in the high-empathy condition

should be affected by the ease of escape. Then we would expect to observe

two main effects: As in previous research, high empathy should lead to more

helping than low empathy, presumably as a result of an increase in feelings of

personal distress or in anticipated guilt or shame. And in each empathy condition

diffi cult escape should lead to more helping than easy escape.

Note that the entire one-versus-three interaction pattern depicted in

Table 1 is important if one is to provide evidence for the empathy–altruism

hypothesis. If, for example, one were to compare the easy and diffi cult escape

cells only in the column marked altruistic motivation (high empathy), the

altruistic prediction is for no difference in the rate of helping. Such a result

could easily occur simply because the escape manipulation was too weak or

the behavioral measure was insensitive. If, however, an escape manipulation

has a signifi cant effect on helping when a bystander feels little empathy but

does not when a bystander feels much empathy, the evidence that empathic

emotion evokes altruistic motivation is much stronger. Then the evidence cannot

be dismissed as being the result of a weak escape manipulation or an insensitive

measure.

It is also clear that one must be on guard for a possible ceiling effect. A

ceiling effect in the high-empathy column could obscure the two-main-effect

pattern that would be expected if the motivation were egoistic, making it look

like the one-versus-three interaction that would be expected if the motivation

were altruistic.

**Present Research**

We conducted two experiments to test the hypothesis that empathic emotion

leads to altruistic motivation to help. As suggested by the preceding analysis,

a 2 \_ 2 design was used in each. Subjects observed a young woman named

Elaine receiv ing electric shocks; they were given an unanticipated chance to

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help her by vol unteering to take the remaining shocks in her stead. Cost of

escaping without helping was manipulated by making escape either easy or

diffi cult. Subjects believed that if they did not take Elaine’s place, either they

would continue to observe her take the shocks (diffi cult escape condition)

or they would not (easy escape condition). Level of empathic emotion (low

versus high) was manipulated differently in the two experiments. Following

the classic studies of Stotland (1969) and Krebs (1975), in Experiment 1 we

used similarity information to manipulate empathy. In Experiment 2 we

sought to manipulate empathy more directly through the use of an a emotionspecifi

c misattribution to a placebo. In both experiments, the empathy–

altruism hypothesis predicted that helping responses would conform to the

one-versus-three pattern depicted in Table 1.

**Experiment 1**

There is evidence (e.g., Hornstein, 1976; Krebs, 1975; Stotland, 1969) that people

are more likely to identify with a person they perceive to be similar to

themselves and, as a result, to feel more empathy for a similar than for a dissimilar

other. In the clearest demonstration of this relationship, Krebs (1975)

manipulated male subjects’ perceptions of their similarity to a young man (an

experimental confederate) prior to having them watch him perform in a roulette

game in which he received money if the ball landed on an even number

and an electric shock if the ball landed on an odd number. Similarity was

manipulated by telling subjects that their responses to a personality test completed

several days earlier indicated that they and the performer were either

similar or different. In addition, subjects received information suggesting that

the performer’s values and interests were either similar or different from their

own. Compared with subjects in the dissimilar condition, subjects who perceived

themselves to be similar to the performer showed greater physiological

arousal in response to his pleasure and pain, reported identifying with him to

a greater degree, and reported feeling worse while waiting for him to receive

shock. These subjects also subsequently helped him more. But it was not clear

whether the motivation to help was egoistic or altruistic. To clarify this issue,

we used a procedure similar to Krebs’s but varied perceived similarity and

dif fi culty of escape in a 2 \_ 2 factorial design.

***Method***

**Subjects.** Subjects were 44 female introductory psychology students at the

University of Kansas participating in partial fulfi llment of a course requirement.

They were randomly selected from those who had completed a personal

value and inter est questionnaire, which formed the basis for the similarity

manipulation, at a screening session held a few weeks earlier. Subjects were

assigned to the four conditions of the 2 (easy versus diffi cult escape) \_ 2 (similar

versus dissimilar victim) design through the use of a randomized block

procedure, 11 subjects to each cell. Four additional participants, one from each

cell, were excluded from the design because they suspected Elaine was not

actually receiving shocks.

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**Procedure.** On arrival, subjects were told that they would have to wait a few

minutes for the arrival of a second subject, Elaine (actually a confederate).

They were given an introduction to read while waiting:

In this experiment we are studying task performance and impression

pro jection under stressful conditions. We are investigating, as well,

whether any ineffi ciency that might result from working under aversive

conditions increases proportionately with the amount of time

spent working under such conditions.

Since this study requires the assistance of two participants, there

will be a drawing to determine which role will be yours. One participant

will perform a task (consisting of up to, but not more than, ten

trials) under aversive conditions; the aversive conditions will be created

by the presenta tion of electric shock at random intervals during the

work period. The other participant will observe the individual working

under aversive conditions, This role involves the formation and report

of general attitudes towards the “worker” so that we may better assess

what effect, if any, working under aversive conditions has upon how

that individual is perceived.

After reading the introduction and signing a consent form, subjects drew lots for

their role. The drawing was rigged so that they always drew the observer role.

Subjects were then escorted to the observation room and given more

detailed instructions. They learned that they would not actually meet the

worker but would instead observe her over closed-circuit television as she

performed up to 10 2-min, digit-recall trials. At random intervals during each

trial, the worker would receive moderately uncomfortable electric shocks.

The instructions went on to explain that equipment limitations made it

impossible to capture visually all of the worker’s reactions and that this was

a problem, since prior research sug gested that nonverbal cues were important

in assessing another person’s emo tional state. To compensate for this

lost information, the worker would be connected to a galvanic skin response

(GSR) monitor, which would be visible in the lower right-hand corner of the

television screen. The level of arousal indicated on the monitor would enable

the subjects to assess more accurately the worker’s emotional response, and

help them form an impression.

***Diffi culty of escape manipulation.*** To manipulate diffi culty of escape without

helping, the last line of the detailed instructions varied the number of

tri als that subjects expected to observe. In the easy-escape condition, subjects

read: “Although the worker will be completing between two and ten trials, it

will be necessary for you to observe only the fi rst two.” In the diffi cult escape

condition they read: “The worker will be completing between two and ten trials,

all of which you will observe.” All subjects were later to learn that Elaine

agreed to complete all 10 trials, and they were given the chance to help her

by trading places after the second trial. Therefore, in the easy-escape condition,

subjects who did not help would not have to watch Elaine take any more

shocks; in the diffi cult-escape condition they would.

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***Similarity manipulation.*** After the subject fi nished reading the detailed

instructions, the experimenter handed her a copy of the personal values and

interest questionnaire administered at the screening session, explaining that

this copy had been fi lled out by Elaine and would provide information about

her that might be of help in forming an impression. Elaine’s questionnaire

was prepared in advance so that it refl ected values and interests that were

either very similar or very dissimilar to those the subject had expressed on

her question naire. In the similar-victim condition, Elaine’s responses to six

items that had only two possible answers (e.g., “If you had a choice, would

you prefer living in a rural or an urban setting?”) were identical to those the

subject had given; her responses to the other eight items were similar but not

identical (e.g., “What is your favorite magazine?” Answers: *Cosmopolitan* for

the subject, *Seventeen* for Elaine; *Time* for the subject, *Newsweek* for Elaine). In

the dissimilar-victim con dition, Elaine’s responses to the six two-answer items

were the opposite of those the subject had given, and her responses to the

other eight were clearly different (e.g., *Cosmopolitan* for the subject, *Newsweek*

for Elaine). . . .

While the subject looked over Elaine’s questionnaire, the experimenter

left to see if Elaine had arrived. She returned to say that she had and that the

subject could now begin observing her over the closed-circuit television. So

saying, the experimenter turned on a video monitor, allowing the subject to

see Elaine. Unknown to the subject, what she saw was actually a videotape.

***Need situation.*** On the videotape, subjects fi rst saw Elaine, a moderately attractive

young woman, tell the research assistant (female) that she would complete

all 10 of the digit-recall trials. As the assistant was going over the procedure,

Elaine interrupted to ask about the nature of the electric shocks that were to be

used. The assistant answered that the shocks would be of constant intensity and,

although uncomfortable, would cause “no permanent damage.” “You know if

you scuff your feet walking across a carpet and touch something metal? Well,

they’ll be about two to three times more uncomfortable than that.”

After GSR electrodes were attached to the fi rst and third fi ngers on Elaine’s

nondominant hand and a shock electrode was attached to her other arm, the

digit-recall trials began. The experimenter left subjects alone at this point. As

the fi rst trial progressed, Elaine’s facial expressions, body movement, and the

GSR monitor all indicated that she was fi nding the shocks extremely unpleasant.

By midway through the second trial, her reactions were so strong that

the assis tant interrupted the procedure to ask if Elaine were all right. Elaine

answered that she was but would appreciate having a glass of water. The assistant

readily agreed to this request and went to get the water. . . .

Returning with the glass of water, the assistant asked Elaine if she had

ever had trouble with shocks before. Elaine confessed that she had—as a child

she had been thrown from a horse onto an electric fence. The doctor had

said at the time that she suffered a bad trauma and in the future might react

strongly to even mild shocks. (This information was provided to ensure that

subjects would view Elaine’s extreme reaction to the shocks as atypical and

would not expect to fi nd the shocks as unpleasant if they chose to take her

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place.) Hearing this, the assistant said that she did not think Elaine should

continue with the trials. Elaine replied that even though she found the shocks

very unpleasant, she wanted to go on: “I started; I want to fi nish. I’ll go on

… I know your experiment is important, and I want to do it.” At this point,

the assistant hit upon an idea: Since the observer was also an introduc tory

psychology student, maybe she would be willing to help Elaine out by trading

places. Elaine readily consented to the assistant checking about this possibility.

The assistant said that she would shut off the equipment and go talk with the

experi menter about it. Shortly thereafter, the video screen went blank.

***Dependent measure: Helping Elaine.*** About 30 sec later, the experimenter

entered the observation room and said:

First of all, let me say that you’re under no obligation to trade places. I

mean, if you would like to continue in your role as observer that’s fi ne;

you did happen to draw the observer role. If you decide to continue as

the observer, ([easy-escape condition] you’ve fi nished observing the two

trials, so all you need to do is answer a few questions about your impression

of Elaine and you’ll be free to go) ([diffi cult-escape condition] I

need you to observe Elaine’s remaining trials. After you’ve done that

and answered a few questions about your impression of Elaine, you’ll be

free to go). If you decide to change places with Elaine, what will happen

is that she’ll come in here and observe you, and you’ll do the aversive

conditioning trials with the shocks. And then you’ll be free to go.

What would you like to do? [Experimenter gets response from

sub ject.] OK, that’s fi ne. [If subject says she wants to trade places with

Elaine, the experimenter continues.] How many trials would you like to

do? Elaine will go ahead and do any of the eight remaining trials that

you don’t want to do. [Experimenter gets response.] Fine.

The experimenter then left, ostensibly to go tell the assistant what had been

decided. In fact, she recorded whether the subject wanted to trade places and,

if so, how many of the eight remaining trials she would do. This information

provided the dependent measure of helping. Then the experimenter made herself

aware of the subject’s similarity condition.

***Debriefi ng.*** The experimenter returned promptly and fully debriefed the subject.

Subjects seemed readily to understand the necessity for the deception

involved in the experiment, and none seemed upset by it. After debriefi ng,

subjects were thanked for their participation and excused.

***Results and Discussion***

**Relieving Elaine’s Distress by Helping.** The proportion of subjects in each

experimental condition who offered to help Elaine by trading places is presented

in Table 2. . . . The 2 \_ 2 analysis revealed a highly signifi cant main

effect for similarity, 2(1) \_ 11.69, *p* \_ .001 qualifi ed by a signifi cant Escape

\_ Similarity interaction, 2(l) \_ 4.19, *p* \_ .04. The main effect for diffi culty of

escape did not approach signifi cance, 2(l) \_ 1.34, *p* \_ .20.

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Inspection of the proportion of helping each condition revealed that the

interaction, was of the form predicted by the empathy–altruism hypothesis;

the proportion in the easy-escape–dissimilar–victim condition was much lower

than in the other three conditions. To test the statistical signifi cance of this

predicted one-versus-three pattern, the rate of helping in this condition was

contrasted with the rate in the other three conditions. This planned com parison

revealed a highly signifi cant difference, 2(1) \_ 14.62, *p* \_ .001. . . . Indi vidual

cell comparisons revealed that, as predicted, the proportion of helping in the

easy-escape–dissimilar-victim condition was signifi cantly lower than the proportion

in each of the other three conditions (*zs* ranging from 2.27 to 3.87, all

*p*s \_ .015, one-tailed). Comparisons among the other three conditions revealed

no reliable differences (all *z*s \_ 1.60).

With one exception, an identical pattern of signifi cant effects emerged

from analysis of variance and planned comparisons one the number of shock

trials subjects in each condition volunteered to take for Elaine. The one exception

was that the number of trials was signifi cantly lower in the two diffi cultescape

conditions (pooled) than in the easy-escape–similar-victim condition,

*t*(40) \_ 2.25, *p* \_ .03, two-tailed.

These results were quite consistent with the empathy–altruism hypothesis;

they were not consistent with the view that empathy simply increases egoistic

motivation to help. In the dissimilar-victim condition, where empathic

emotional response to Elaine’s distress was expected to be relatively low and

according to the empathy–altruism hypothesis, the motivation to help was

expected to be primarily egoistic, the diffi culty of escape manipulation had

a dramatic effect on helping. When escape was easy, subjects were not likely

to help, presumably because a less costly way to reduce any personal distress

caused by watching Elaine receive shock was to answer the experimenter’s

fi nal questions and leave. When escape was diffi cult, subjects were likely to

help, presumably because taking the remaining shocks themselves was less

costly than sitting and watching Elaine take more.

***Table 2***

**Proportion of Subjects Agreeing to Trade Places with Elaine in Each**

**Condition of Experiment 1**

**Similarity condition**

**Dissimilar victim Similar victim**

**Diffi culty of escape condition Proportion *M* no.a Proportion *M* no.a**

Easy .18 1.09 .91 7.09

Diffi cult .64 4.00 .82 5.00

*Note. n* \_ 11 in each condition.

a Mean number of shock trials (from 0 to 8) that subjects agreed to take for Elaine (*MS*e. \_ 9.70, *df* \_ 40).

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In the similar-victim conditions, however, where empathic emo tional

response to Elaine’s distress was expected to be relatively high and, according

to the empathy–altruism hypothesis, the motivation to help should be at least

in part altruistic, diffi culty of escape had no effect on subjects’ readiness to

help. Presumably, because their concern was to reduce Elaine’s distress and not

just their own, they were very likely to help, even when escape was easy. . . .

Overall, the results of Experiment 1 seemed to conform closely to the oneversus-

three pattern that, according to Table 1, would be expected if increased

empathic emotion led to altruistic motivation; they did not con form to the

two-main-effect pattern that would be expected if increased empathy led to

egoistic motivation. Still, although Stotland (1969) and Krebs (1975) had provided

rather strong evidence that a similarity manipulation like the one used

in Experiment 1 manipulated empathic emotion, the manipula tion was indirect.

Therefore, a second experiment was conducted in which we sought to test

the empathy-altruism hypothesis by manipulating empathic emotion more

directly. . . .

**General Discussion**

As we noted at the outset, the hypothesis that empathic emotion produces

truly altruistic motivation contradicts the egoistic assumption of most, if not

all, current theories of motivation. Because egoism is a widely held and basic

assumption, it is only prudent to require that the evidence supporting altru ism

be strong before this hypothesis is accepted.

To the degree that the conceptual analysis and resulting predictions presented

in Table 1 provide an adequate framework for an empirical test of truly

altruistic motivation, the two experiments reported here seem to make an initial

step toward providing such evidence. . . .

It may be, then, too early to conclude that empathic emotion can lead to

altruistic motivation to help. But if future research produces the same pattern

of results found in the experiments reported here, this conclusion, with all its

theoretical and practical implications, would seem not only possible but necessary.

For now, the research to date convinces us of the legitimacy of *suggesting*

that empathic motivation for helping may be truly altruistic. In doing so,

we are left far less confi dent than we were of reinterpretations of apparently

altruistically motivated helping in terms of instrumental egoism.

**Note**

1. It is worth noting that another cost variable, the cost of helping, is frequently

thought to be the key to altruism. If helping occurs when the cost

of helping is high (at the extreme, when the helper’s life is in danger), this

is thought to be evidence of altruistic motivation. A little refl ection shows

that such an inference is unfounded, for even highly costly helping could

easily be an instrumental egoistic response, motivated by a desire to avoid

guilt or to attain praise and honor either in this life or an anticipated life

to come.

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**Empathy-Based Helping: Is It**

**Selfl essly or Selfi shly Motivated?**

**T**he existence of pure altruism among humans has been a topic of longstanding

debate in both philosophical and general psychological circles (see,

e. g., Bentham, 1789/1879; Campbell, 1975; Comte, 1851/1875; Hoffman, 1981;

Hume, 1740/1896; McDougall, 1908). Recent attention to this issue within

social psychology has been stimulated by the contributions of Batson and his

associates (Batson, 1984 ; Batson & Coke, 1981; Batson, Duncan, Ackerman,

Buckley, & Birch, 1981; Batson, O’Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Coke,

Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Toi & Batson, 1982). The signifi cance of the work

of these last authors lies in their presentation of an experimental method for

assessing the possibility of selfl essly motivated aid and in their presentation

of systematic empirical support for the existence of such aid among empathically

oriented subjects. If research continues to verify their data and conceptual

analysis, they will have provided the fi rst persuasive argument that we

are capable of truly selfl ess action. The implications for fundamental characterizations

of human nature are considerable.

In constructing their experimental method, Batson and his colleagues

proposed that an observer of a suffering other is likely to react in one of two

primary ways to the victim’s plight: by reducing the other’s need through helping

or by escaping the situation. The egotistically motivated observer would

be expected to choose the option entailing the smallest personal cost (Piliavin,

Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). An altruistically motivated observer,

however, should be principally concerned with reducing the other’s suffering.

Although the operations have changed from study to study, the basic paradigm

of these researchers is as follows: Subjects are exposed to the plight of a

suffering victim under conditions of high or low empathy for the victim. The

subjects are next given the opportunity to aid the victim under conditions

that allow them easy or diffi cult escape from the helping situation. The consequence

is a factorial design crossing two levels of the empathy fac tor (high vs.

low) with two levels of the escape factor (easy vs. diffi cult).

On the basis of the hypothesis that selfl essly motivated helping occurs

under conditions of high empathic concern for a victim, Batson and his colleagues

predicted a three-versus-one pattern of helping within the design.

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That is, they suggested that the factor of ease of escape from the helping

situa tion should play a role in a subject’s helping decision only when the

subject’s behavior is motivated by egoistic concerns. Thus, when subjects are

not ori ented toward others (low empathy), they should help less when escape

from helping is easy than when it is diffi cult. However, when empathy is high,

ego istic concerns such as ease of escape are dwarfed by the subject’s primarily

altruistic motive to relieve the victim’s suffering; highly empathic subjects,

then, should help at elevated levels whether escape from the helping situation

is easy or diffi cult. This predicted pattern—that subjects in the low-empathy,

easy-escape condition will help less than subjects in the other three cells of

the design—has been borne out repeatedly in the previously cited studies (e.g.,

Batson et al., 1981; Batson et al., 1983; Toi & Batson, 1982).

A critical piece of support for the selfl ess altruism explanation of this

data pattern has come from the elevated helping scores of subjects in the

high-empathy, easy-escape condition of the design. According to the selfl ess

altru ism interpretation, the heightened benevolence of these subjects occurs

because their empathic state motivates them to help the victim with little

regard for egoistic considerations (such as the ease of escape) that would otherwise

reduce aid. Yet, there is at least one alternative interpretation that could

explain this fi nding in egoistic terms. That is, it may be that an empathic

ori entation causes individuals viewing a suffering victim to feel enhanced sadness.

A substantial body of research exists to indicate that temporary states of

sadness or sorrow reliably increase helping in adults (for reviews see Cialdini,

Kenrick, & Baumann, 1982, and Rosenhan, Karylowski, Salovey, & Hargis,

1981), especially when the sadness is caused by another’s plight (Thompson,

Cowan, & Rosenhan, 1980). Moreover, the research of Cialdini and his associates

has suggested that these saddened subjects help for egoistic reasons: to

relieve the sadness in themselves rather than to relieve the victim’s suffering

(Baumann, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 1981; Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973;

Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Kenrick, Baumann, & Cialdini, 1979; Manucia,

Bau-mann, & Cialdini, 1984). Because helping contains a rewarding component

for most normally socialized adults (Baumann et al., 1981; Harris, 1977;

Weiss, Buchanan, Alstatt, & Lombardo, 1971), it can be used instrumentally

to restore mood.

Thus, it may be that in the typical experiment of Batson and his associates

the high-empathy procedures increased helping not for selfl ess reasons,

but for an entirely egoistic reason: personal mood management. It is important

to recognize that the mood at issue is rather specifi c to the temporary state

of sadness or sorrow. Cialdini and his coworkers have argued (see Cialdini,

Baumann, & Kenrick, 1981) that their data on negative mood effects implicate

only temporary sadness in the enhancement of helping, and they have repeatedly

asserted that other negative moods that are normally not reduced through

benevolence (e.g., anger, frustration, agitation, anxiety) con sequently would

not be expected to increase helping. This distinction among negative moods

may help explain why, in the research of Batson and associ ates, an index of

personal distress has not been systematically related to help ing among highempathy

subjects. The adjectives making up this index (e.g., *alarmed, disturbed,*

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*upset, worried*) are agitation or anxiety based rather than sadness based. Because

empathic concern, sadness, and distress all involve negative feelings, we would

expect them to be strongly intercorrelated. At the same time, however, we see

them as functionally distinct in their relation to helping.

A major implication of our analysis, then, is that empathy-induced helping

in the Batson et al. design is mediated by the increased sadness of highempathy

subjects witnessing a suffering other and that the help is an egoistic

response designed to dispel the temporary depression. This interpretation is

crucially different from that of Batson and his colleagues, in which empathy

is said to stimulate helping through a selfl ess concern for the welfare of others.

To test these alternative explanations against one another, it would be

neces sary to separate subjects’ feelings of sadness from the empathic orientation

that is said to bring about that sadness. Our fi rst experiment sought to

provide such a test by (a) replicating the basic Batson et al. empathy procedures

for all subjects; (b) presenting some subjects with a gratifying event

(money or praise) designed to relieve any sadness that an empathic orientation

may have produced, without simultaneously interfering with that

empathic orientation; (c) allowing subjects the opportunity to help a victim

or escape the situation; and (d) assessing whether subjects’ helping tendencies

are related primarily to Batson’s measures of empathic concern or to traditional

measures of sadness.

The experimental design, then, included a replication of the standard

four cells of the paradigm of Batson and his associates (two levels of empathy

orientation and two levels of ease of escape). We also included additional

high-empathy orientation cells in which subjects received a gratifying event

(either money or praise) between the empathy manipulation and the chance

to help. From our egoistic, sadness-based interpretation of helping in the Batson

et al. paradigm, we made the following predictions. First, subjects in the

high-empathy conditions of the Batson et al. design would show (Prediction

la) greater empathic concern and (Prediction 1b) greater sadness than would

those in the low-empathy conditions of that design. This pair of predictions,

if confi rmed, would establish the possibility that the helping pattern of previous

Batson et al. studies was not caused by the action of empathic concern

but by the action of sadness. Second, high-empathy subjects who received a

grati fying intervention would have their (Prediction 2a) greater sadness but

(Pre diction 2b) not their greater empathic concern canceled by the gratifying

events. This pair of predictions, if confi rmed, would provide the basis for a test

of whether empathic concern or sadness was functionally related to help ing

in this design. Third, high-empathy subjects who did not receive a sadness

canceling intervention (i.e., those subjects expected to show the greatest sadness)

would show greater helping than all other subjects (i.e., those subjects

in whom enhanced sadness was canceled or in whom enhanced sadness had

not been experimentally induced). If confi rmed, this prediction (Prediction 3)

would support the idea that empathically oriented subjects in this study and

in the general Batson et al. paradigm help for a primarily egoistic reason (i.e.,

personal mood management) rather than a primarily selfl ess reason (i.e., concern

for the other’s welfare).

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**Experiment 1**

**Method**

**Subjects.** Eighty-seven introductory psychology students at Arizona State

University participated in the study as partial fulfi llment of a course requirement.

Six subjects were dropped from the analyses because they expressed

suspicion about the legitimacy of the need situation. These subjects were distributed

approximately evenly across experimental conditions.

**Procedure.** With the exception of a different empathy manipulation and

several changes necessary for the inclusion of the rewards manipulation, the

procedures of the study followed those of Batson et al. (1981, Experiment 1)

and Batson et al. (1983, Experiment 1). Only the manipulations and important

changes are described in detail here.

All subjects were randomly assigned to conditions and run individually

by either a male or a female experimenter. On arrival, subjects read a short

introduction while waiting for the other subject, “Elaine,” to appear. They

read that one subject—the worker—would be performing a series of learning

trials while receiving mild electric shocks, and the other—the observer—would

watch her and form impressions. The instructions went on to say that because

the study involved personal perceptions of others, it would be necessary to

have subjects take a short personality test as well. The subject then drew lots to

determine whether she would be the worker or the observer. The drawing was

rigged so the subject always drew the role of the observer. The experi menter

then ushered the subject into an experimental room where she was told she

would be watching the worker over closed-circuit television.

At this point, the subject was given the “Remington–Hughe Scale of Social

Abilities.” The experimenter stated that this was a previously validated instrument

that was shown to measure social abilities very reliably. The test was

actually the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Mar lowe,

1964). The experimenter left, announcing that she or he would check to see if

the other subject had arrived yet.

**Ease-of-escape manipulation.** When subjects fi nished the scale, the experimenter

returned and began telling them what they would be watching over the

closed-circuit television. At this time, the experimenter introduced the escape

manipulation. Subjects in the easy-escape condition were told, “Although the

worker will be completing between two and ten trials, it will be necessary for

you to observe only the fi rst two.” Subjects in the diffi cult-escape condition

were told, “The worker will be completing between two and ten trials, all of

which you will observe.”

**Empathy-set manipulation.** Just before turning on the television monitor,

the experimenter presented subjects with written instructions on the perspective

they should adopt while observing Elaine. These instructions were adapted

from those used in research by Batson and his colleagues (Fultz, Batson,

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Fortenbach, McCarthy, & Varney, 1986; Toi & Batson, 1982). The experi menter

was blind to the empathy-set manipulation. Subjects in the low-empathy-set

condition read the following:

While you are observing the trials, try to pay careful attention to the

infor mation presented. Try to be as objective as possible, carefully

attending to all the information about the situation and about the person

performing the trials. Try not to concern yourself with how the

person performing the trials feels about what is happening. Just concentrate

on trying to watch and listen objectively to the information

presented.

Subjects in the high-empathy-set condition read the following:

While you are observing the trials, try to imagine how the person

perform ing them feels. Try to take the perspective of the person performing

the tri als, imagining how she feels and how it is affecting her.

Try not to concern yourself with all of the information presented. Just

try to imagine how the person performing the trials is feeling.

The videotape showed Elaine reacting more and more strongly to the

shocks presented to her during the learning trials. Toward the end of the second

trial, the assistant stopped the procedure and asked Elaine if she was

all right. Elaine responded that she was, but would like a glass of water. The

assis tant agreed and left. During this break, the experimenter returned to the

experimental room, turned off the television monitor and announced that as

long as there was this break, they could do some things they would have to do

anyway during the experiment.

**Reward manipulation.** To subjects in the high-empathy/money condition

the experimenter said, “First of all, we were awarded some additional funding

for this experiment to pay subjects, so everyone who participates gets

one dol lar.” The experimenter gave the subject a $1 bill and then presented

two short questionnaires to till out: a mood questionnaire and an emotionalreactions

questionnaire. To subjects in the high-empathy/praise condition,

the experi menter said that he or she had just scored the subject’s responses

on the Remington-Hughe scale and noted that the subject had scored a 26,

indicating a high level of social ability. The subject was shown a brief explanation

of her score:

People scoring in this category have fi ne social abilities. They are normally

liked by their peers, who enjoy spending time with them. This is

so par tially because people scoring in this category tend to be interesting

and versatile conversationalists who can contribute intelligently

on a fairly wide range of topics. They also bring a creative fl are to the

social situa tions they fi nd enjoyable. Finally, they are known for their

capacity for rec ognizing which of their friends and acquaintances will

get along together.

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After reading this false feedback, subjects were given the two questionnaires to

fi ll out. In the high-empathy/no-rewards condition and the low-empathy condition,

the experimenter simply presented subjects with the two questionnaires.

**Mood and emotional-reactions questionnaires.** The order of the two questionnaires

was counterbalanced across subjects. The mood questionnaire consisted

of nine 7-point bipolar scales. On the fi rst of these scales subjects were

asked to rate how much happier or sadder they were relative to how they felt

before the experimental session. On the other eight scales subjects were asked to

rate how they presently felt. The poles of these eight scales were *depressed– elated,*

*happy–sad, hopeful–hopeless, active–passive, good–bad, exhilarated– dejected, useless–*

*useful*, and *satisfi ed–dissatisfi ed*. The emotional-reactions questionnaire was an

abridged form of the list of 28 adjectives used in previ ous research (Batson et al,

1981, Experiment 2; Batson et al., 1983) and con sisted of the 20 adjectives Batson

and Coke (1981) found to load highly on either an empathic-concern factor (e.g.,

moved, compassionate, sympathetic) or a personal distress factor (e.g., *alarmed,*

*upset, worried*). Subjects were asked to rate on 7-point scales the extent to which

they were presently experiencing each of the emotions.

When the subject had fi nished fi lling out the questionnaires, the experimenter

returned, announced that Elaine was about ready to start again, turned

on the monitor, and left. Subjects saw the assistant ask Elaine about her strong

reaction to the shocks and Elaine hesitantly replied that she had pre viously

experienced problems with electric shock. The assistant suggested she not continue.

Elaine resisted until the assistant suggested that perhaps the other subject—

the observer—might be willing to help her out by trading places. Elaine

acquiesced, the assistant left, and the screen went blank.

**Dependent measure: Helping Elaine.** After about half a minute, the experimenter

returned to the experimental room and began explaining to the sub ject

what her options were, following verbatim the script used by Batson et al. (1981;

1983, Experiment 1). During this discourse, the experimenter reiterated the subject’s

escape condition: In the easy-escape condition, subjects were reminded

that if they chose not to trade places they would be free to go; in the diffi cultescape

condition subjects were reminded that if they chose not to trade places

they would have to remain and continue to watch Elaine perform the trials. Subjects

were asked what they would like to do. If they volunteered to take Elaine’s

place, they were asked how many of the remaining trials they would like to do,

as Elaine had agreed to do any of the remaining eight that the subject did not.

The dependent measure was the number of trials subjects chose to do.

**Debriefi ng.** The experimenter left briefl y to note the subject’s helping

response and then returned and presented the subject with a brief questionnaire

to assess subjects’ suspicions about the procedures. This questionnaire

asked subjects to describe what they thought the hypothesis of the experiment

was and to note if they had entertained any doubts about any aspects of the

procedures. After responding to these questions, subjects were verbally probed

for suspicion and then fully debriefed.

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**Results**

**Reported empathic concern and distress.** To measure empathic concern,

three adjectives from the emotional-response questionnaire were averaged to

comprise an empathy index: *compassionate, moved*, and *sympathetic* ( Cronbach’s

alpha \_ .60). These adjectives were selected to be consistent with those currently

refi ned for use by Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson et al., 1983). To measure

personal distress, fi ve other adjectives from the same ques tionnaire were similarly

selected: *alarmed, worried, upset, disturbed*, and *grieved* (Cronbach’s alpha \_

.89). Two subjects were dropped from the analyses on reported empathy, and

three were dropped from the analyses on reported distress because they did not

respond to all the items on the appropriate index.

Two of the predictions of this experiment involved subjects’ reported

empathy scores. The fi rst (la) stated that in the four replication cells of the Batson

et al. paradigm, high-empathy-set subjects would report more empathic

concern than would low-empathy-set subjects, replicating the prior Batson et

al. results. This was the case, as the two high-empathy-set/no-reward cells (*M* \_

5.40) showed greater empathic concern than did the two low-empathy-set/

no-reward cells (*M* \_ 4.63), *F*(1, 71) \_ 4.10, *p* \_ .05. The second empathyrelated

prediction (2b) suggested that the reward interventions of the current

design would not interfere with the heightened empathic concern produced in

the high-empathy-set conditions. Therefore, it was expected that the empathy

index scores in the four high-empathy-set cells with a reward intervention (*M*

\_ 5.10) would not differ from the two such cells without a reward interven tion

(*M* \_ 5.40) This prediction was also supported, *F*(1, 71) \_ 1. . . .

***Reported sadness.*** It was suggested that an empathic orientation toward a suffering

other may depress one’s mood, leading to a state of temporary sad ness or

sorrow. Three of the 7-point scales on the mood questionnaire were relevant to

this type of affect. On the fi rst, subjects rated how much happier or sadder they

felt relative to their mood before the experiment. On the other two, subjects rated

their present mood on bipolar scales of *elated–depressed* and *happy–sad*. Responses

on these three scales were averaged for each subject to form an overall index of

mood (lower numbers indicating sadder mood). Not surprisingly, this resulting

mood index was correlated with both the empathy index (*r* \_ \_.44) and the distress

index (*r* \_ –.49). The relation to empathy is clearly predicted by the Negative

State Relief model; the relation to distress is not formally a part of the model but

is to be expected, as both measure a neg ative emotion and both are related to

empathy. Apparently because of a con fusing placement in the mood questionnaire,

12 subjects failed to respond to the scale assessing relative change in mood,

and these subjects were therefore dropped from the mood analyses.

A pair of experimental hypotheses directly involved the mood measure.

The fi rst (1b) predicted that within the four replication conditions (i.e., the

no-reward cells of the present design), high-empathy-set subjects would show

greater sadness than would low-empathy-set subjects. This prediction was confi

rmed, *F*(1, 61) \_ 5.73, *p* \_ .02 (*M*s \_ 2.63 and 3.47, respectively). This outcome

supports the contention that empathically oriented subjects experience

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a saddened mood when observing a suffering other. The second mood-related

experimental prediction (2a) stated that the greater sadness of high-empathy

set subjects would be canceled through the presentation of an unexpected

reward such as money or praise. This prediction was tested by a set of contrasts

show ing that the high-empathy-set subjects who received a reward

(*M* \_ 3.25) were equivalent in mood to the low-empathy-set subjects (*M* \_

3.47), *F*(1, 61) \_ 1, and were less sad than the high-empathy-set subjects who

had not received a reward (*M* \_ 2.63), *F*(1, 61) \_ 3.81, *p* \_ .06. Combined with

the outcomes of the earlier analyses, these results support the argument that

rewards such as those of this study will cancel the saddened mood but not the

empathic orientation of subjects empathizing with a suffering other.

**Helping.** The nature of the dependent variable allows for two, different helping

measures: a continuous measure based on the number of learning tri als

for which subjects volunteered in taking Elaine’s place, and a dichotomous

measure based on the proportion of subjects in each condition who chose to

help Elaine. Table 1 presents results on both measures. The analyses reported

here are on the continuous measure. Parallel analyses were performed on the

dichotomous measure, which yielded results consistent with those reported

but short of conventional levels of signifi cance.

***Table 1***

**Experiment 1: Mean Scores on Empathic Concern, Mood,**

**and Helping Measures**

**High-empathy set**

**Lowempathy**

**set**

**Ease of escape Money Praise No reward No reward**

Easy

Empathic concern 4.29 5.23 4.90 4.84

Mood 3.61 3.10 2.50 3.42

Helping 1.71 (29) 2.27 (45) 3.60 (50) 1.75 (33)

*n* 7 11 10 12

Diffi cult

Empathic concern 5.24 5.41 5.85 4.40

Mood 3.40 2.92 2.73 3.52

Helping 1.82 (36) 4.00 (56) 4.73 (73) 2.60 (40)

*n* 11 9 11 10

*Note*. For the mood measure, lower scores represent more depressed mood; for the other measures, high scores

indicate more of the quality. For the helping measure, proportions of helpers are presented in parentheses.

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In keeping with our predictions, a pair of planned contrasts was performed.

First, the helping scores of the high-empathy set subjects who did

not receive a reward intervention (*M* \_ 4.19) were contrasted with the helping

scores of the subjects in the other cells of the design (i.e., those subjects in

whom enhanced sadness had been canceled or had not been experimentally

induced; *M* \_ 2.34). This contrast proved signifi cant, *F*(1, 73) \_ 4.09, *p* < .05.

Second, the helping scores of the high-empathy-set subjects who received a

reward intervention (*M* \_ 2.45) were tested against those of the low- empathyset

subjects (*M* \_ 2.14) and, as predicted, were found to be no different,

*F*(1, 73) \_ 1. An additional contrast, somewhat redundant with the two reported

above, showed that the difference in helping between high- empathy-set/

reward and high-empathy-set/no-reward subjects was marginally signifi cant,

*F*(1, 73) \_ 3.19, *p* \_ .08.

Besides the tests of the experimental prediction regarding the helping

measure, an additional analysis was conducted to determine whether the basic

one-versus-three pattern of the Batson et al. paradigm showed the form of the

traditional pattern, in that the easy-escape/low-empathy-set subjects helped

the least (*M* \_ 1.75) compared with subjects in the other three no-reward conditions

(combined *M* \_ 3.68), *F*(1, 73) \_ 2.53, *p* \_.12. Although this difference

is not conventionally signifi cant, it would appear to be suffi cient for the purpose

of replication. The failure of this analysis to reach conventional signifi -

cance is in large part a function of the unexpectedly low level of helping in

the low-empathy-set/diffi cult-escape cell. Fortunately, helping scores in that

particular cell hold relatively minor theoretical weight in our argument. . . .

**Discussion**

In this study we sought to provide data to help to explain the frequently demonstrated

tendency for empathically oriented individuals to be more helpful

toward a needy other (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). The empathic–altruism model

of Batson and associates, which views empathically concerned individ uals as

primarily selfl ess in their approach to helping, was examined relative to the

Negative State Relief model of Cialdini and associates, which posits the egoistic

desire to manage personal sadness as a primary cause of helping in such individuals.

To pose a proper test of these conceptually opposed models of helping,

we considered it necessary to demonstrate several effects within the Batson et al.

empathy–altruism paradigm: fi rst, that empathic orientation toward a sufferer

not only increased a person’s empathic concern but also that person’s sadness

and, second, that the receipt of a gratifying event (money or praise) would serve

to reduce the increased sadness but not the increased empathic concern. The

results of the study supported both of these sets of conditions. Relevant highempathy-

set subjects reported greater empathic con cern and sadness than did

low-empathy-set subjects; furthermore, the receipt of a rewarding event by highempathy-

set subjects relieved their sadness but not their empathic concern. With

these two sets of conditions in place, it was then possible to examine whether

helping was related to manipulated levels of sadness or empathic concern. It was

found that high-empathy-set subjects did show elevated helping scores, except

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when they had received a sadness-canceling reward, whereupon they were no

more helpful than low-empathy-set subjects. Therefore, it appeared to be personal

sadness rather than empathic concern that accounted for the increased

helping motivation of our empathically ori ented subjects. . . .

**Conclusion**

The nature of benevolent motivation has been a long-standing issue of philosophical

and psychological inquiry. Recently, psychologists have examined

the role of empathy in the generation of and explanation of such motivation

(see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987, and Hoffman, 1981, for reviews). An impressive

and important body of research by Batson and his associates has repeatedly

pro vided evidence for the selfl ess mediation of helping under conditions of

heightened empathy for a needy other. The two studies reported here offer

a reinterpretation of that evidence by associating increased personal sadness

with such empathy and by supporting the egoistic motive of sadness reduc tion

as the mediator of this form of helping. We recognize fully that no mere pair

of experiments is capable of resolving so fundamental a question as the motivational

nature of benevolence; accordingly, we do not see our studies in such

light. Instead, we view them as providing a plausible egoistic explanation for

the fi rst powerful experimental evidence for pure altruism.

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**CHALLENGE QUESTIONS**

**Does True Altruism Exist?**

1. Do you think it is possible for research to distinguish between selfi sh

motivations for helping and truly altruistic motivations?

2. Try to think of a time when you gave assistance to someone in need.

Do you think that your behavior was altruistic, or can you think of

egoistic reasons why you may have helped? Explain.

3. Can you think of any practical applications for the research examining

helping behavior? How might the results of this research be used

to promote helping behavior in the real world?

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