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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

may also be studied as an interpersonal activity, where one person shows his or her concern for another person.

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

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

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

The present study focuses on the role of the empathizer's actions for the empathy experience. Our previous study suggested that action was *perceived* to be an important constituent in the empathy experience from both the empathizer's and the target's perspective. In the present study we take a further step by examining the extent to which the empathizer's actions *cause* people to infer that they themselves (empathizer's perspective) or others (target's or observer's perspective) are empathetic. If it is found that the occurrence of certain actions by the empathizer leads to an

inference that he or she is emphatic, this will add to the validity of the phenomenological reports showing the central role of actions in the empathy experience. That is, such results will provide evidence that the phenomenological reports are not seriously distorted by selective memory or by lacking self-insight. At the same time, agreement between phenomenological reports and experimental results implies that phenomenological data may be used for interpreting experimental data on inferences about empathy.

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

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Since our earlier study (Hakansson & Montgomery, in press) showed a convergence between empathizers' and targets' perceptions of the empathy situation regarding the importance of action, we expect this pattern to be found from both perspectives. It should be noted that although this result is predicted from our recent study, it does not follow self-evidently from previous research. Conversely, a large body of research has demonstrated that actors view their own behavior differently than how observers or targets interpret the actor's behavior. In line with the so called actor-observer discrepancy it has been shown that actors interpret their own behavior as more driven by external causes and less by internal factors as compared to how observers view the same actions (for a review, see Watson, 1982). In the present study this would mean that the variations in the empathizer's behavior should be seen as more related to a variation in empathy (internal factor) from the target's perspective (observer) than from the empathizer's perspective (actor). Instead, we hypothesized, in line with our recent study, that empathy may be a case

where actors' and targets' common focus take priority over the differences between actors' and observers' perspectives that appear in other situations.

STUDY 1

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

Method

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

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

Independent variables. Although the four versions were similar to a great extent, they differed slightly from each other in that the two variables "boss understanding" and "boss' promise to act" had been manipulated. The manipulation of these two variables consequently produced four different stories and thus four different experimental conditions. Participants in the no understanding/no promise to act-condition read:

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

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

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

Results and Discussion

Definitions of empathy. In response to the question "What is empathy in your opinion?" participants generated their views concerning the meaning of the term "empathy." Most commonly, empathy was defined in terms of understanding another's

thoughts/perspective/situation/experiences (mentioned 87 times), understanding/entering into another's feelings (66 times), and feeling in/feeling with/feeling compassion (49 times). Although less frequent, empathy was also characterized as a respectful attitude (30 times) and concern expressed in action (18 times).

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

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

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

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

In this first study, the two variables "understanding" and "promise to act" were manipulated. The data suggested that in order to be perceived as empathetic it is more important to promise to act than to verbally express understanding. In particular, when one promises to act, expressed understanding seems to have little additional effect on perceived empathy. This indicates that action has an influence on perceived empathy, and more so than verbally expressed understanding.

STUDY 2

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

Method

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

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

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

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

Results and Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

STUDY 3

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

Method

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

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

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

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

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Results and Discussion

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

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

carried out the promised act, this was regarded as equally important for the empathy from both perspectives, $F(1,118) = .249, ns$.

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

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

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

GENERAL DISCUSSION

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

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

The two perspectives examined in Studies 2 and 3 'the boss' (potential empathizer perspective) and the employee's (potential target perspective) 'converged to a great extent with respect to the importance of the boss' actions for inferring that he or she is empathetic. It should be noted that a between-subjects design was used in all experiments, which means that the boss could have been perceived differently in the two perspectives. Still, the results of Study 3 showed an almost perfect match between how the boss was perceived from the two perspectives when the boss' actions were described as more or less definite (performed action vs. promise to act). There was, however, an interaction effect in Study 2, which possibly suggests that the boss was perceived differently from the two perspectives when the empathizer's actions involve weak or moderate efforts (claim to understand vs. promise to act). We don't know how much this effect is due to problems resulting from using a between subject design (implying problems to have the participants imagining the same boss in the two perspectives), to some "real" difference (e. g., in terms of perceived trustworthiness) in how a given boss' empathy is experienced from different perspectives or result from chance variations in the empathy ratings.

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

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

How can the convergence between the empathizers and target's perspectives (particularly in Study 3) be explained? First it can be noted that this pattern disagrees with asymmetries that have been found in how actors (empathizers in the present case) and observers (targets) perceive the causes of the observer's behavior (Watson, 1982). Previous empathy research has tended to view empathy as occurring within the empathizing individual. Although this is in some sense correct, it is important to also take into account the target's perspective in order to get a more complete picture of the empathy process. Our previous study of empathy (Hakansson & Montgomery, in press) suggested that there are processes taking place *within* the empathizer (understanding and perceived similarity) and the target (emotion), as well as significant processes occurring *between* the two. Although the processes taking place inside the two individuals, respectively, are in some sense hidden from the other, the study revealed that they largely agreed on the presence of these processes. To understand how this is possible, the critical link between the two perspectives must be considered ' action. We believe that the internal processes become interpersonal when the empathizer communicates his or her understanding to the target through actions, at the same time as the target communicates his or her emotions

through his or her actions, which in turn may be reflected in the empathizer's actions. That is, the two perspectives converge to a shared reality (cf. Hardin & Higgins, 1996) by means of the communication expressed through the actions of empathizer and target. Although the two parties have different roles in the empathy situation, they have a common interest in focusing on how the empathizer can improve the target's situation, which means that it will be important to act from a shared perspective ' a we-perspective (cf. Montgomery, 1994).

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

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