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EMPATHY: A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

ABSTRACT

In the domain of interpersonal relations empathy has been widely regarded as a valuable tool for peacebuilding. Past research has shown that if enough empathy is extended to a victim of violence, insight into the victim's plight tends to give pause to the aggressor and also prompt bystanders to help. While the victim is the sole recipient of empathy in an interpersonal conflict, elevating the concept of empathy from an individual level analysis to a group level analysis encounters further complications. In intergroup conflicts, both parties in the conflict stand to receive empathy. In light of this, one theoretical question is whether both kinds of empathy, those directed to the ingroup members and the outgroup members, have similar utilities in peacebuilding. We reference the literature on intergroup contact and intergroup threats, to scrutinize the role of empathy in intergroup conflicts. We argue that ingroup and outgroup empathy have the opposite effects on group violence – directing empathy to the outgroup results in the denouncement of aggression, whereas directing empathy to the ingroup may lead to a desire to counterattack. Thus, rather than boosting the overall amplitude of empathy, striking the right balance is the key of leveraging empathy towards peace.

Key words:

empathy, ethnocultural empathy, ingroup and outgroup, aggression, war, peace

1. Introduction

Empathy is an indispensable tool with respect to peacebuilding because people with this trait exhibit a wide range of prosocial behaviors at all ages. Empathic children shun bullies and help victims¹. Empathic adults volunteer, donate, pick up dropped objects for a confederate, assist graduate students to conduct studies, aid people who fall off of crutches, and even accept electrical shocks for others (C.A. Anderson et al.², C. Batson et al.³, J. Dunn & P. Munn⁴, N.D. Feshbach & S. Feshbach⁵, P. Miller & N. Eisenberg⁶, R. Zeldin, S. Small, & R. Savin-Williams⁷).

Empathy works as a remedy for aggression as it enlightens the protagonist to the victim's plight. Imagining someone else's trauma is often enough to make the protagonist change his/her aggressive tendencies⁸. This way of assuming a different perspective to achieve empathy is sometimes called cognitive empathy⁹. Beyond cognitive exercises, another way to accomplish empathy is by vicariously feeling the victims' sensations and these feelings also help the protagonist to denounce aggression. To highlight the emotional nature of empathy, other popular labels are emotion contagion, autonomic nervous system synchronicity, physiological

¹ N. Eisenberg, M. Schaller, R.A. Fabes, D. Bustamante, R.M. Mathy, R. Shell, K. Rhodes, *Differentiation of Personal Distress and Sympathy in Children and Adults*, "Developmental Psychology" 1988, No. 24(6), pp. 766–775.

² C.A. Anderson, A. Shibuya, N. Ihori, E.L. Swing, B.J. Bushman, A. Sakamoto, M. Saleem, *Violent Video Game Effects on Aggression, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior in Eastern and Western Countries: A Meta-Analytic Review*, "Psychological Bulletin" 2010, No. 136(2), pp. 151–173.

³ C. Batson, J.G. Batson, C.A. Griffitt, S. Barrientos, J. Brandt, P. Sprengelmeyer, M.J. Bayly, *Negative-State Relief and the Empathy – Altruism Hypothesis*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1989, No. 56(6), pp. 922–933.

⁴ J. Dunn, P. Munn, *Siblings and the Development of Prosocial Behavior*, "International Journal of Behavioral Development" 1986, No. 9(3), pp. 265–284.

⁵ N.D. Feshbach, S. Feshbach, *The Relationship between Empathy and Aggression in Two Age Groups*, "Developmental Psychology" 1969, No. 1 2), pp. 102–107.

⁶ P.A. Miller, N. Eisenberg, *The Relation of Empathy to Aggressive and Externalizing/Antisocial Behavior*, "Psychological Bulletin" 1988, No. 103(3), pp. 324–344.

⁷ R. Zeldin, S.A. Small, R.C. Savin-Williams, *Prosocial Interactions in Two Mixed-Sex Adolescent Groups*, "Child Development" 1982, No. 53(6), pp. 1492–1498.

⁸ T. Malti, L. Gasser, M. Buchmann, *Aggressive and Prosocial Children's Emotion Attributions and Moral Reasoning*, "Aggressive Behavior" 2009, No. 35(1), pp. 90–102.

⁹ M.H. Davis, *Measuring Individual Differences in Empathy: Evidence for a Multidimensional Approach*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1983, No. 44(1), pp. 113–126.

linkage or empathic resonance (see more: Davis¹⁰, Levenson & Ruef¹¹, Watson & Greenberg¹²). Most researchers today have abandoned the debate of the true nature of empathy and accept its complex composition. The growing consensus is that empathy is consisted of at least the cognitive and the emotional components, plus a third component which enjoyed less general acceptance (de Waal¹³, Eisenberg & Eggum¹⁴).

Its complex nature could deem empathy a collection of loosely connected ideas without a coherent core. Evolution research however, has asserted a sense of unity in the psychological construct. Altruistic behavior has a phylogenetic root that can be traced back to birds and it has¹⁵. For example, primates not only become intensely distressed when they witness harm to their peers but also come to aid the troubled individuals. In addition, primates have demonstrated behaviors that do not have immediate and personal benefits, such as caring for a blind group member. With an improved theory of mind, humans are more able to discern the mindset of another. Empathy built on such an acute awareness of someone else's position is only more accurate and eloquent.

Genetic research has shown that empathy is heritable from parents to children. A.Knafo, S. Isreal and R. Ebstein¹⁶ studied children's dopamine receptor D4 7-repeat allele in pairs of twins. Their results showed that the effect of genes accounted for 34% to 53% of variance in the similarities of empathetic behavior. It seems that the way humans responded to the selective pressure to their species has been encoded in the genes which in turn guide the manifestations of empathetic feelings and prosocial behaviors¹⁷. The research into the genetic basis of empathy is in an

¹⁰ M.H. Davis, *Empathy: Negotiating the Border between Self and Other* [in:] *The Social Life of Emotions*, L.Z. Tiedens, C. Leach (eds.), New York 2004, pp. 19–42.

¹¹ R.W. Levenson, A.M. Ruef, *Empathy: A Physiological Substrate*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1992, No. 63(2), pp. 234–246.

¹² J.C. Watson, L.S. Greenberg, *Empathic Resonance: A Neuroscience Perspective* [in:] *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, J. Decety, W. Ickes (eds.), Cambridge 2009, pp. 125–137.

¹³ F.M. de Waal, *Putting the Altruism Back into Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy*, "Annual Review of Psychology" 2008, pp. 59279–59300.

¹⁴ N. Eisenberg, N.D. Eggum, *Empathic Responding: Sympathy and Personal Distress* [in:] *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, J. Decety, W. Ickes (eds.), Cambridge 2009, pp. 71–83.

¹⁵ F.M. de Waal, op.cit.

¹⁶ A. Knafo, S. Israel, R.P. Ebstein, *Heritability of Children's Prosocial Behavior and Differential Susceptibility to Parenting by Variation in the Dopamine Receptor D4 Gene*, "Development And Psychopathology" 2011, No. 23(1), pp. 53–67.

¹⁷ M.L. Hoffman, *Moral Development* [in:] *Developmental Psychology: An Advanced Textbook*, M. Bornstein, M. Lamb (eds.), Hillsdale 1988, pp. 497–548.

early stage and it is promising that more genes will be identified and the impact of the genes will be verified across the life span.

Besides evolution and genes, empathy is also quantifiable in neurobiological terms¹⁸. The neuroanatomies implicated for empathy include the limbic system, as well as parts of the prefrontal, temporal cortex, orbitofrontal and right parietal cortex¹⁹. The initial discovery of “mirror neurons” has also been extended to explain the basic mechanism of empathy²⁰.

Behavioral research has given further credence to the existence of this psychological construct. Empathy exhibits notable stability in middle childhood and adolescents²¹. Test-retest self-report measures correlated at around .40 during this developmental period²². Besides stability overtime, empathy also demonstrates consistency across situations²³. C. Marangoni, S. Garcia, W. Ickes and G. Teng²⁴ found that some people are better “empathizers” and more accurate perceivers than others. However, they also suggested that observers’ accuracy could be improved by increasing acquaintanceship and providing immediate veridical feedback (see Gladstein & Feldstein²⁵ for using film to induce empathy).

The viability of empathy should lend great hopes for peacebuilding. Caregivers intuitively know to ask aggressive children to reflect on how the victims feel; educators build similar curricula to increase emotional intelligence in school aged children. If ethnic group members and members of humanity at large are made empathetic, intergroup aggression can be mitigated. In fact, the concept of empathy has been construed on a group level and a noteworthy construct is ethnocultural

¹⁸ R. Elliott, A.C. Bohart, J.C. Watson, L.S. Greenberg, *Empathy*, “Psychotherapy” 2011, No. 48(1), pp. 43–49.

¹⁹ J. Decety, *Dissecting the Neural Mechanisms Mediating Empathy*, “Emotion Review” 2011, No. 3(1), pp. 92–108.

²⁰ J. Decety, C. Lamm, *Empathy versus Personal Distress: Recent Evidence from Social Neuroscience* [in: *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, J. Decety, W. Ickes (eds.), Cambridge 2009, pp. 199–213.

²¹ J. Block, *On Further Conjectures Regarding Acquiescence*, “Psychological Bulletin” 1971, No. 76(3), pp. 205–210.

²² N. Eisenberg, P.A. Miller, R. Shell, S. McNalley, C. Shea, *Prosocial Development in Adolescence: A Longitudinal Study*, “Developmental Psychology” 1991, No. 27(5), pp. 849–857.

²³ R. Zeldin, R.S. Savin-Williams, S.A. Small, *Dimensions of Prosocial Behavior in Adolescent Male*, “The Journal of Social Psychology” 1984, No. 123(2), pp. 159–168.

²⁴ C. Marangoni, S. Garcia, W. Ickes, G. Teng, *Empathic Accuracy in a Clinically Relevant Setting*, “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 1995, No. 68(5), pp. 854–869.

²⁵ A. Gladstein, J.C. Feldstein, *Using Film to Increase Counselor Empathic Experiences*, “Counselor Education and Supervision” 1983, No. 2(23), pp. 125–131.

empathy²⁶, which has already demonstrated some utility in intergroup peace. Political or ethnic victims showed more ability to empathize, and thus a willingness to help others in distress²⁷. Group members with ethnocultural empathy (which was correlated with personal empathy) tended to be more open about building peaceful relationships with other ethnic groups²⁸ and scored lower on militaristic attitude²⁹. N. Milgram³⁰ identified the impact of cultural empathy on interethnic relations. The study focused on two long-standing groups in conflict, the Israeli Jews and Arabs, and measured their affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and inter-ethnic discomfort. Participants with higher cultural empathy showed more readiness for relations with members of the other group. It was concluded that cultural empathy is related to personal readiness, expected readiness, conflict resolution, and contact importance. If the members of the ingroup are exposed to the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of the outgroup, cultural empathy will be enhanced and there is a greater likelihood of a positive relationship between the two groups.

One complication of elevating the concept of empathy from an individual level to group level is the question of target. Empathy is often directed at someone/something. It is understandable for the target to go unmentioned in interpersonal interactions – it automatically means the victim and the victim is fairly obvious in the bully-bullied or the batterer-battered relations. An early mention of the problem of target in empathy can be found in White's³¹ observation about the blind spots in realistic empathy. Empathy does not seem to apply to all people; each person has limits to his/her own empathy such that their empathy is only lent to a personalized selection of targets.

²⁶ Y. Wang, M. Davidson, O.F. Yakushko, H. Savoy, J.A. Tan, J.K. Bleier, *The Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy: Development, Validation, and Reliability*, "Journal of Counseling Psychology" 2003, No. 50(2), pp. 221–234.

²⁷ E. Staub, *Preventing Violence and Terrorism and Promoting Positive Relations between Dutch and Muslim Communities in Amsterdam*, "Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology" 2007, No. 13(3), pp. 333–360.

²⁸ N. Milgram, M. Geisis, N. Katz, L. Haskaya, *Correlates of Readiness for Interethnic Relations of Israeli Jews and Arabs*, "Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology" 2008, No. 14(1), pp. 93–118.

²⁹ L.L. Nelson, *Correlations between Inner Peace, Interpersonal Behavior, and Global Attitudes*, paper presented at 115th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association at San Francisco, 2007.

³⁰ N. Milgram et al., op.cit.

³¹ R.K. White, *The Kinds of Empathy Needed in Arms Control Negotiation*, "American Journal of Social Psychiatry" 1987, No. 7(3), pp.181–184.

A study conducted by C. Batson³² illustrates the idea of blind spots by showing that empathy is differentially applied to stigmatized groups. Three scenarios were introduced related to AIDS, the homeless, and murderers. Each experiment was measured with a high empathy condition and low empathy condition for a scenario where the victim is responsible or the victim is not responsible. Participants were assessed based on their emotional states, empathetic responses, and attitudes towards the target group. Empathy manipulation was effective in inducing empathy in both victim-not-responsible and the victim-responsible conditions, but the effect was stronger in victim-not-responsible condition.

Under this light, ethnocultural empathy in a way, is a call for removing blind spots and applying empathy equally to all. In an intergroup conflict, the outgroup is often in the blind spot as it is difficult to extend empathy to people who are dissimilar to “us” in crucial ways, such as religion, political values and cultural practices. Given that the construct was developed against the backdrop of the increasing diversifications of the ethnic groups in the U.S. and the need to promote the acceptance of individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds³³, the definition of ethnocultural empathy – interest, knowledge, and affective concern for another group – implicitly assumed that this particular brand of empathy is directed at the outgroup.

Even though ethnocultural empathy has moved the concept of empathy from an individual level analysis to a group analysis, it has neglected the fact that victims can be found on both sides of a conflict. Take 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as an example, one group of victims were the Muslims (i.e. the civilians who died or might die in the Middle East conflict). When empathic Americans direct their empathy at this target, they might denounce the military response to the 9/11 attacks. But the reality at the time was that the Americans who died in the 9/11 attacks were the more visible group of victims. In fact, this group of victims is still more memorable to the American public as the relatives of 9/11 victims appeared regularly on mainstream news outlets in the immediate aftermath and on the anniversaries of 9/11. A key theoretical question to ask is whether the existing understanding of empathy can be applied to an American who felt a particularly deep sense of connection with the 9/11 victims. Can we trust the heightened feelings and thinking to lead these Americans to reject the military solutions in Afghanistan and Iraq?

³² C. Batson, S. Early, G. Salvarani, *Perspective Taking: Imagining How Another Feels versus Imagining How You Would Feel*, “Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin” 1997, No. 23(7), pp. 751–758.

³³ Wang et al., op.cit.

Our question on the two versions of empathy is not about quantity. There is little doubt that more empathy is generally elicited by the suffering of an ingroup member than that of an outgroup member. Past research has used pain perception as a proxy for empathy and found that observers had an easier time building physiological linkages with the ingroup member than with the outgroup member. Specifically, observers showed more activations in the anterior cingulate cortex (which is activated in pain perception) as well as greater empathic response (in the form of resonant corticospinal inhibition) when they watched the ingroup members in pain than when they watched the outgroup members suffer³⁴.

Nor is our question about comparing the degree of aggression towards the outgroup versus the ingroup. There is little doubt that an average person has fewer qualms about harming an outgroup member than if they have to hurt an ingroup member. Even highly empathic protagonists are not immune from this differential. For example, A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein measured participants' emotional empathy before assigning them into mock teaching conditions where the "teachers" were placed at two different levels of immediacy to the "students". The task of the teacher was to choose a level of shock to punish the "slow-learning students"³⁵. Results showed a significant empathy X immediacy interaction effect suggesting that while low empathetic "teachers" aggressed equally to both immediate and distant victims, the high empathetic "teachers" was significantly affected by the immediacy of the victims. These teachers aggressed less towards a nearby victim as compared to faraway victims.

Our question on outgroup and ingroup empathy pertains to the qualitative differences in the way they relate to aggression. We are convinced that outgroup empathy, as was conceptualized and researched in ethnocultural empathy, is a valuable tool in peacemaking. But we question the empathy-nonaggression link when the empathy is directed at a victim in one's own group. A common notion is that it is particularly difficult to watch a loved one suffer and the results of that kind of experience are often hatred and vengeance – the opposite of peace. This pathway can also be understood anecdotally. Someone moving to harm a baby in front of the mother would get to experience the wrath of ingroup empathy firsthand.

The answer to the question on the qualitative difference between the two versions of empathy may be gleaned from the research on several outgroup and ingroup dynamics. This line of research does not focus on empathy per se, but

³⁴ X. Xu, X. Zuo, X. Wang, S. Han, *Do You Feel My Pain? Racial Group Membership Modulates Empathic Neural Responses*, "The Journal of Neuroscience" 2009, No. 29(26), pp. 8525–8529.

³⁵ A. Mehrabian, N. Epstein, *A Measure of Emotional Empathy*, "Journal of Personality" 1972, No. 40(4), pp. 525–543.

touches on the role of empathy in related topics such as the interpretation of outside threats or prejudiced attitudes towards an outgroup. Nonetheless, ingroup and outgroup provide a vocabulary with which to deliberate the targeting issue in empathy and a tool to visualize the underlying mechanism between empathy and group aggression.

2. Outgroup Trust

One of the utilities of Allport's intergroup contact theory is to promote intergroup contact as a way to reduce prejudice. Although prejudice is only meant to refer to an irrational hostility to people of a certain group (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.), a broader application of intergroup contact theory is to tackle intergroup conflict at the societal level and politically explosive issues. Many of the recent studies on intergroup contact theory reckoned empathy as an explanatory variable as to why intergroup contact reduces animosity. This line of research can shed light on the inner workings of empathy because the roles of the ingroup and outgroup are clearly articulated.

Previous research has manipulated empathy and anxiety to support the intergroup contact theory. Multiple pathways were found to connect intergroup contact to prejudice via empathy and anxiety. A study conducted by T. Pettigrew and L. Tropp demonstrated that enhancing knowledge about the outgroup, reducing anxiety of intergroup contact, increasing empathy and increasing perspective are effective ways of lowering prejudice. In particular, influencing anxiety and empathy proved to have the strongest mean correlation with reducing prejudice³⁶. Vescio et al. conducted a study where stereotypic perceptions were formed by either receiving confirmation of a negative stereotype or receiving disconfirmation of the same stereotype. Regardless of confirming or disconfirming stereotypicality, asking subjects to adopt the target's perspective led to improved intergroup attitudes³⁷.

By reducing prejudice and forming a new perspective, the ingroup develops more trust towards the outgroup, which has come to be known as outgroup trust. M. Noor et al. investigated the roles of outgroup trust as well as empathy in their

³⁶ T.F. Pettigrew, L.R. Tropp, *How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 2008, No. 38(6), pp. 922–934.

³⁷ T.K. Vescio, G.B. Sechrist, M.P. Paolucci, *Perspective Taking and Prejudice Reduction: The Medial Role of Empathy Arousal and Situational Attributions*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 2003, No. 33(4), pp. 455–472.

study of intergroup reconciliation in Northern Ireland³⁸. The aim of the study was to understand the post-conflict relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland by developing a theoretical model of reconciliation orientation (ROM). Participants of this study were Northern Irish undergraduate students who completed a questionnaire pertaining to the outcome variables of interest – intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence (which tapped into the justification for the violence acts conducted by one’s own group). The questionnaire also assessed several mediators, including outgroup trust and empathy. Results showed that empathy was a positive predictor for forgiveness and a negative predictor for the subjective evaluation of past violence. In order for the ingroup to be more forgiving of the outgroup and less righteous about their own past violent deeds, there should be certain level of outgroup trust in addition to empathy.

The kind of empathy that was effective in improving the intergroup relations in Northern Ireland seems to be directed at the outgroup. The target of empathy is made clearer in another study of a sample of Bosnian Muslims in terms of their readiness to forgive the misdeeds committed by Bosnian Serbs during the 1992–95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina³⁹. Results showed that empathy and outgroup trust were the significant mediators in the positive relationship between contact and forgiveness. In this study, the authors have adopted the term outgroup empathy explicitly in their mediation analysis to punctuate the fact that the empathy they measured was towards the outgroup. Sample items included “I sometimes think how Serbs might have felt during the war,” and “Usually, I am able to understand Serbs point of view”⁴⁰.

Empathy is conducive to forgiveness because it induces affective and cognitive transformations when each group looks at the conflict from a new angle. This new angle is from the perspective of the other side, or the outgroup. The literature of intergroup contact can be taken to mean that developing empathy towards the outgroup may be wielded as a tool to improve intergroup peace. Therefore, outgroup empathy operates in a similar fashion as the existing understanding of empathy in interpersonal domains.

³⁸ M. Noor, R. Brown, G. Prentice, *Precursors and Mediators of Intergroup Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: A New Model*, “British Journal of Social Psychology” 2008, No. 47(3), pp. 481–495.

³⁹ S. Cehajic, R. Brown, E. Castano, *Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, “Political Psychology” 2008, No. 29(3), pp. 351–367.

⁴⁰ S. Cehajic et al., *op.cit.*, p. 358

3. Ingroup Identity

The research on the topic of intergroup threat offered some insights into how a group interprets and responds to an outside threat⁴¹. Although empathy has rarely been explicitly identified in this line of research, the ability to think or feel for members in one's own group, or what we call ingroup empathy, is inevitably a part of the underlying mechanism. We review some of the relevant literature below and draw the conclusion that ingroup empathy defies the conventional wisdom of empathy and may even perpetuate group aggression.

Intergroup threats occur when members of an ingroup feel challenged by the actions of an outgroup. The conditions or types of threats include realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. An example of realistic threat is competition for resources. When two groups have to share limited resources, the belief that only one group can succeed tends to create negative outgroup attitudes. In particular, this rivalry among groups will increase ingroup solidarity and ingroup/outgroup distinction due to conflicting goals, and the end result can be increased hostility between groups⁴². For example, Sherif and Sherif⁴³ divided children into two groups with well-drawn boundaries. When the groups realized that they were to play a zero-sum game and there could be only one winner, they started to act violently towards the other group.

Another type of threat, esteem threat, can be used to illustrate a similar relation between threat perception and antagonism, when the threat does not involve tangible resources or materials. A study by N. Branscombe and D. Wann found that when highly identified American participants watched an American boxer losing a match to a Russian boxer, they reported an increased likelihood of derogating Russians⁴⁴. The mediating mechanism in this case was the perceived threats to the collective self-esteem of Americans. It also follows that people who identify strongly with the ingroup will experience greater esteem threat and as a result, they feel more responsible to maintain a positive group image, hence motivated to increase group esteem.

⁴¹ B.M. Riek, E.W. Mania, S.L. Gaertner, *Intergroup Threat and Outgroup Attitudes: A Meta-Analytic Review*, "Personality and Social Psychology Review" 2006, No. 10(4), pp. 336–342.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 239.

⁴⁴ N. Branscombe, D. Wann, *Collective Self-Esteem Consequences of Outgroup Derogation When a Valued Social Identity Is on Trial*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 1994, No. 24(6), pp. 641–657.

Since the degree of identification towards one's own group seems to motivate the ingroup members to develop antagonistic attitudes towards the outgroup members, the concept of ingroup identification warrants a closer look. L. Tropp and S. Wright suggested that ingroup identification is not a simple act of self-categorization but includes a host of psychological ramifications⁴⁵. When a social identity is salient, individuals act and think as group members and rely on the ingroup as a guide for their own thoughts and behaviors. The well accepted definition of ingroup identification includes four components, how individuals see themselves within as a group, the significance of the group to an individual's sense of self, pride in one's group, and "psychological attachment" where individual "feels close to" a specific ingroup⁴⁶. L. Tropp and S. Wright believe that there is a common theme underlying the various components of ingroup identification and the conceptual core is the degree to which the ingroup is included in the self⁴⁷. Rather than being perceived as separate beings, self and other are regarded as "overlapping selves." In other words, a psychological connection among group members or a subjective sense of interconnectedness can be found among the ingroup members.

As the definition of ingroup identification expands from simple self-categorization to include psychological attachment, it starts to merge into the construct space of empathy. Rather than referring to connectedness between self and other on a general level, this particular type of empathy refers to an individual's sense of connectedness with one's own group members. If we were to accept the fact that the expanded view of ingroup identification is akin to the idea of ingroup empathy, then the research findings on ingroup identification provides a different view of how empathic group members operate when his/her group faces an outside threat. A person who is guided by a keen connection to the ingroup should be more eager to protect their group's welfare and seek to maintain both a positive and distinct image of their group.

Another mention-worthy study offered support to the link between ingroup empathy and intergroup violence even though it falls slightly outside the tradition of intergroup identification theory. V. Yzerbyt, M. Dumont, D. Wigboldus and E. Gordijn, followed the tradition of social emotion model which examined emotions in group settings. Emotions have been traditionally examined on an interpersonal level in terms of the antecedent event, the experience of the emo-

⁴⁵ L. Tropp, S. Wright, *Ingroup Identification as the Inclusion of Ingroup in the Self*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin" 2001, No. 27(5), pp. 585–600.

⁴⁶ R.R. Lau, *Individual and Contextual Influences on Group Identification*, "Social Psychology Quarterly" 1989, No. 52(3), pp. 220–231.

⁴⁷ L. Trop, op.cit.

tion (psychology and facial expressions), as well as the related action tendency⁴⁸. For example, a moral transgression when perceived as an insult will trigger an anger response, which will then prompt approach or attack behaviors⁴⁹. Smith (1993) formulated the theory of social emotions, which suggest that the dynamic of emotions may be influenced by group identity. A study by V. Yzerbyt and his team tested whether emotional reactions would change as a function of social categorization. Results showed that emotional reactions of anger and its offensive action tendencies were more prevalent when participants were induced to see the victims and themselves as part of the same group⁵⁰. This study took a step further from an unwillingness to forgive in some of the studies and suggested that high ingroup identification can lead to a greater tendency to attack or punish the outgroup.

Admittedly, ingroup identification applies to many types of groups. Group boundaries can be drawn along the lines of ethnicity, politics, national identity, etc. One of the salient group bases is religion and religious fundamentalists can be reinterpreted in this framework as a strong ingroup identification to a religious collective. This type of ingroup would be the case in point for critics who wonder if group values could modify the overall effect of ingroup empathy. It is certainly plausible if a group developed firm values around peace and humanity, it will be resistant to violent tendencies. But according to Z. Rothschild, A. Abdollahi, and T. Pyszczynski, religious fundamentalists tend to exhibit higher levels of prejudice, ethnocentrism and militarism, regardless of their strong religious ethics⁵¹. Therefore, the associated body of literature linking religious fundamentalism to intergroup aggression, may be seen as a concrete manifestation of a tight ingroup who feel that their values are under siege and that they are willing to abandon certain religious teachings in order to use violence to protect their group integrity.

⁴⁸ V. Yzerbyt, M. Dumont, D. Wigboldus, E. Gordijn, *I Fell for Us: The Impact of Categorization and Identification on Emotions and Action Tendencies*, "Journal of Social Psychology" 2003, No. 42, pp. 533–549.

⁴⁹ V. Cheung-Blunden, B. Blunden, *Paving the Road to War with Group Membership, Appraisal Antecedents, and Anger*, "Aggressive Behavior" 2008, No. 34(2), pp. 175–189.

⁵⁰ V. Yzerbyt et al., op.cit.

⁵¹ Z. Rothschild, A. Abdollahi, T. Pyszczynski, *Does Peace Have a Prayer? The Effect of Mortality Salience, Compassionate Values, and Religious Fundamentalism on Hostility toward Out-Groups*, "Journal of Experimental Social Psychology" 2009, No. 45(4), pp. 816–827.

4. Conclusion

In an interpersonal setting, there is usually one recipient of empathy – the victim – and insight into the victim’s plight is what gives pause to the aggressor and prompts bystanders to help. The assumption that empathy is always directed at the victim may be the reason why the issue of target has not surfaced in the theories about empathy. As a result, this assumption continued when the construct of empathy was elevated from an individual level analysis to a group level analysis. A closer look at the new constructs developed to capture group empathy, such as ethnocultural empathy, suggests that the receiver of empathy is assumed to be the outgroup (or victims in the outgroup). A review of the research along the line of Allport’s intergroup contact theory confirmed that outgroup empathy is nurtured through intergroup contact and its overall effect is in line with the well-known empathy-nonaggression hypothesis – less prejudiced attitudes and less violence towards the outgroup.

However, we argued in this paper that in intergroup settings, there is another party that stands to receive empathy. The idea that empathy can be directed at an ingroup member who is distressed by an intergroup conflict has been a neglected topic. Admittedly, past studies have pointed out the differential ability to build rapport with an ingroup member over an outgroup member, and alluded to the possibilities that empathy knows boundaries⁵². Rather than a matter of the amount of empathy, the question raised in this paper pertains to the way empathy plays out in a dynamic intergroup conflict, and how empathy directed at the ingroup and outgroup can have qualitatively different utilities in peacebuilding. We reviewed the literature on intergroup threats and highlighted that ingroup identity goes beyond a simple act of self-categorization, and includes a subjective sense of interconnectedness with ingroup members. This idea of interconnectedness, the ease with which to reflect on the common past history, current experiences, and future prospects is akin to the definition of empathy, except that the target in this case is the ingroup. We leveraged the research findings on ingroup identity and showed that ingroup empathy can result in greater animosity against the outgroup and even perpetuate violence.

To the extent that general empathy exists in each person on a basic trait level, the trait may manifest in separate forms depending on whether the ingroup or outgroup is in focus. Ingroup and outgroup empathy may differ significantly, and

⁵² J. Decety, *op.cit.*

the most damaging combination to peace prospect is low outgroup empathy and high ingroup empathy. Therefore, rather than suggesting that empathic people are inherently resistant to aggressive tendencies in intergroup conflicts, we contend that empathy may serve as a double-edged sword. It can quell or exacerbate an antagonistic response depending on the targets of empathy.

We have advanced the group level analysis of empathy to include both ingroup and outgroup empathy. The hypothesis that the two versions of empathy exert different effects on intergroup peace ought to be tested on a range of platforms on which trait empathy has been scrutinized – evolution, genes, neurobiology, physiology, and behaviors. The language of ingroup and outgroup is adapted based on the two lines of literature we have reviewed. These terminologies may be critiqued based on the common notion of heterogeneity within groups or simultaneous memberships that a person possesses (such as family, socio-economic class, ethnic group, city, and country). Nonetheless, we believe that ingroup and outgroup are the best framework to articulate the neglected topic in the analysis of empathy on a group level and allow research to investigate how the target of empathy can modify empathy's utility in peacebuilding efforts.

It has been said that the increasing open-mindedness towards diversity and the ability of the Internet to draw the world closer, may eventually help to erase group boundaries in the future. However, group dynamics remain salient for the time being. Redrawing group borders still generates deep angst, not necessarily because of the immediate costs or benefits but because of the psychological implications. The uproar over the surveillance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel by the National Security Agency may diminish as President Obama has promised to moderate such practices, but the psychological effects will continue to reverberate in the respective group members for a long time. The recent debate on whether Ukraine should join the European Union goes beyond the immediate question of whom the Ukrainians will trade with, as it provokes the deeper question of who the “one people” includes.

To work with the reality of salient group memberships, one way to educate citizens is to caution against a sense of complacency. Acts of ingroup empathy are easy to perform and can actually stand in the way of peaceful relations with outsiders. Citizens must challenge themselves to extend their empathy to people who live outside their borders, pray to different gods, and cherish a different set of values. This kind of outgroup empathy is harder to manifest, but it is highly promising to peaceful group relations. A concrete way to sway empathy in the general public is via the media. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, the mainstream media in the U.S. fanned the flames of outrage by ruminating on the carnage of the Twin

Towers and reminding Americans of their values⁵³. They could have just as easily depicted a shop owner in Baghdad and his/her distress about the impending invasion. A truly balanced view promotes a deeper empathy for the predicament of both parties in a conflict. If empathic adults are willing to accept electric shocks on behalf of total strangers, perhaps they will take pause before they allow their leadership to unleash the dogs of war. Empathy, when harnessed correctly, can be a useful resource to mitigate the desire for further aggression in intergroup conflicts.

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⁵³ V. Cheung-Blunden, B. Blunden, *The Emotional Construal of War: Anger, Fear, and Other Negative Emotions*, "Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology" 2008, No. 14(2), pp. 123–149.

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