CHAPTER 11

Automatic and Controlled Empathy

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Sometimes, empathy just happens. We take another person's viewpoint and experience that person's world without trying at all. Automatically, we find ourselves disheartened as we lament the other person's misfortune, or hear ourselves spontaneously cheering as we rejoice in that person's victories. This fast, involuntary, and seemingly effortless empathy is often extended to our closest intimates and occasionally to certain others when circumstances combine to draw us without thinking into the other's social perspective.

However, at the other extreme are the times when we feel it is virtually impossible to appreciate another person's situation, even if we work at it. We struggle to suppress thoughts that we feel will interfere with our empathy, such as what a fool we think the person has been, or we rack our brains for clues that will help us to understand what it is that might possibly be so compelling in the other's situation. We are perplexed and frustrated as we try to see the other person's point of view as something meaningful.

This chapter is about these two different forms of empathy—automatic and controlled. By considering separately those processes of empathy that simply happen to people and those that people can consciously and intentionally produce, we can move into a better position to appreciate the sources of accuracy and inaccuracy in empathy. This enterprise can give us some insight into the paths to empathic accuracy that are open to our own wiles and interventions, and those that are closed. We begin by examining the nature of empathy with a view toward applying the conceptual apparatus made available by the contemporary study of auto-

maticity and control. Then, we chart what we believe are some key characteristics of automatic and controlled empathy in turn, and finally explore some of the most interesting conflicts of mental life—when the empathy-control attempts that stem from the exercise of our "better judgment" have the ironic consequence of creating automatic empathic states that undermine what we intend.

EMPATHY AS A STATE OF MIND

When you move from one place in a room to another, everything looks different. What seems in one sense like a simple linear change is, in another sense, a complex transformation in which some things seem larger than before and others smaller, some become visible while others disappear, and some gain new features that were previously unknown while others become obscured so as to lose features they previously had. The transformation is not haphazard, as much of this change could be predicted by someone with good spatial skills who had access to measurements of the room, the latest engineering software, and a large pot of coffee. Nonetheless, the change in perspective is a *thoroughgoing* transformation, one that changes a wide array of surface features of one's perceptual field.

This kind of thoroughgoing transformation also occurs in empathy with another person. To empathize with a person in a situation involves more than simply changing one's spatial viewpoint (Piaget & Inhelder, 1956); it also involves changing one's judgment of the situation (Regan & Totten, 1975), one's memory for events (Bower, 1978; Wegner & Giuliano, 1983) and one's emotional responsiveness to them (Stotland, 1969), one's conception of the person's traits and goals (Hoffman, Mischel, & Mazze, 1981), and even one's conception of oneself (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987). We bring all this up at the outset to emphasize what we believe is a key feature of the definition of empathy: The occurrence of empathy involves such a generalized structural transformation in thought and emotion that it must be conceptualized more broadly than many less sweeping changes in mental content (Karniol, 1990). Thinking of a hat, for example, seems to induce nothing like the far-reaching mental changes that accrue from empathizing. A social perspective is an organized mental entity not unlike a mood, a belief system, or a spatial perspective, and can be most clearly understood as a state of mind. With this idea, we can glimpse the remarkably numerous repercussions produced in human thought and emotion by simple variations in empathy.

As a state of mind, empathy can be produced by variables beyond our control. Just as happiness or a belief in elves or a state of drowsiness

can follow directly from some experience or stimulus, empathy can be created automatically by events that impinge on us. The more noteworthy implication of classing empathy as a mental state, however, is the recognition that empathy is a state of our minds upon which we can reflect. That is, beyond any cognitive structural characteristics of empathy, it is also true that empathy is an experience that we can think about. This means that we can approve or disapprove of what we perceive to be our current level of empathy for any particular other person, and such preferences may then prompt us to begin to try to control this state. So, just as we might want to be more happy or wish to overcome our archaic belief in elves, we can reflect on or even anticipate our empathy (or lack thereof) in a particular situation and then attempt to change this level in a more advisable direction.

Our attempts to control our mental states may not always be based on veridical perceptions of these states. We may misattribute our moods, for example, or become confused by situational pressures about our attitudes, and so base preferences about these states on incorrect apprehensions of them. Knowledge of both our current mental states and those we wish to achieve is, after all, a matter of our own fallible judgments about our states of mind (Wegner & Wenzlaff, 1996). We can't simply "read off" our levels of these states from some interior meter in our minds, but instead must perceive and label them in a metacognitive sense. We look at our ongoing behaviors and thoughts and self-perceive our states of mind. Empathy is like this as well. Any control of empathy rests on potentially faulty perceptions of how empathic we are in a given case, and on imperfect estimates, too, of what it would be like to be as empathic as we would like to be. The attempts we make to control our minds are often effective despite such difficulties, however, and to some degree we are empathically accurate and inaccurate because we can perceive and control the state of empathy.

Beginning with this broad conception of empathy as a mental state, we can now go on to note that empathy can have either an emotional component (e.g., the feeling you get when you see another person who is sucking a lemon), a cognitive component (e.g., the thoughts you have about what that lemon-sucker might perceive or want), or both. There are, in this sense, both emotional and cognitive facets to the empathic state of mind. Either the emotional or cognitive components can be automatic or controlled processes, although past empathy dichotomies have tended to lump the emotional with the automatic and the cognitive with the controlled (e.g., Davis, 1983). The truly great acts of empathy, such as empathically motivated helping behaviors, may require both an emotional and a cognitive component. In studies by Coke, Batson, and McDavis

(1978), for example, participants who perceived themselves to be emotionally aroused and who also cognitively took the perspective of another person were most likely to provide help to the other person.

Our division of empathy into automatic and controlled processes resembles several prior ideas, and we wish to acknowledge these important precursors. For example, social commentators through history have often remarked on matters of choice versus compulsion in moral life. Our favorite early champion of this distinction was Charles Darwin (1871), writing in *The Descent of Man*. He noted the moral implications of both controlled and automatic actions as follows: "But in the case of man, who alone can with certainty be ranked as a moral being, actions of a certain class are called moral, whether performed deliberately, after a struggle with opposing motives, impulsively through instinct, or from the effects of slowly gained habit" (p. 89). Darwin went on to remark at length on how even an ant or a monkey can often be sympathetic and so easily do the moral thing, whereas a human may try to second-guess such automatic impulse and exert effortful deliberation in order to be sympathetic in a circumstance that would leave the ant or monkey unmoved.

Other writers have assimilated ideas of empathic choice to the distinction between empathy and sympathy. Most notably, Wispé (1986) described empathy as an "effortful process" (p. 318) by which we try to comprehend another's experience. In contrast, he defined sympathy as a direct perceptual awareness of another person's experience akin to the phenomenon of sympathetic resonance, whereby musical instruments, even when they are not being played, will resonate to notes played on another instrument. Finally, Wegner and Giuliano (1982) developed the idea that people might adopt different forms of social awareness, empathy among them, as a result either of situational instigating factors that move attention without choice, or as a consequence of "direct solicitation." In direct solicitation, people act upon others' requests ("Please try to take my point of view") or upon their own choices in adopting or avoiding empathic states of mind.

The ideas we present in this chapter go beyond such past distinction making by specifying in more detail how and when the automatic and controlled processes operate to produce empathy. In this respect we owe much to the views of automatic and controlled cognitive processes developed by Bargh (1984, 1989, 1994), Hasher and Zacks (1979), Logan (1988), Posner and Snyder (1975), and Shiffrin (1988; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). We believe that automatic empathy, like other automatic processes, may be understood in terms of a variety of different criteria. "Automaticity" has been used variously to refer to processes that are unintentional, outside of awareness, uncontrollable, efficient, or that share some combination of these or still other features (Bargh, 1994; Shiffrin, 1988). These features do not necessarily covary, and though we use automaticity as an umbrella term to describe them, we find them each of interest in their own right.

Controlled empathy, on the other hand, may be intentional, conscious, controllable, or effortful, and thus subject to interference by other cognitive tasks. The unique feature of controlled empathy is that, like other controlled processes, it necessitates a control system (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960) that is responsible for directing behavior toward the goal of empathy (or nonempathy, if that is the goal)—steering thoughts in goal-relevant directions. Thus, having an idea about what would constitute accurate empathy is very important in the process of controlled empathy. In essence, an empathic state of mind (or its absence) is installed as the goal of a control process. Such a process is comprised of an operating process, a cognitive activity that is instituted to move the person toward the goal, and a monitoring or test process that is instituted to check on the degree to which this goal has been attained (cf. Wegner, 1994; Wegner & Wenzlaff, 1996). The operations or strategies we may exert toward the goal of empathy are many, and may often take advantage of our own self-knowledge about the processes that can automatically make us empathic.

Although automatic and controlled empathy may lead us in conflicting directions, the two should not be thought of as disconnected constructs. Just as automatic empathy can be initiated by an intentional, controlled action (e.g., as we look purposefully at the tears of the person in trouble), controlled empathy may be triggered by an automatic response. For instance, the automatic surprise and failure to empathize we feel when we see the church choir director publicly drunk may prompt a controlled exploration of the director's experience ("Well, perhaps the altos have failed him"). Furthermore, as we will discuss later, controlled empathy takes a lot of its cues from its more uncontrollable cousin. Trying to get a handle on the stimuli that evoke automatic empathy is one of the major things controlled processing is trying to achieve. In what follows, we discuss automatic empathy first, controlled empathy second, and then focus in detail on their potentially ironic interrelations.

AUTOMATIC EMPATHY

The simplest and clearest examples of automatic empathy are emotional. Automatic emotional empathy also appears earliest developmentally. Evidence of behaviors that can be seen as automatic emotional empathy occur virtually right after birth. Newborn infants imitate the facial expressions of others (Meltzoff & Moore, 1977) and cry when other infants cry (Simner, 1971). At a very young age, infants may not even distinguish very clearly between themselves and others (Hoffman, 1977). With no line be-

tween the emotional expressions of self and others, infants are veritable emotional sponges, automatically experiencing the emotions of everyone they encounter as a result of basic processes of imitation. (Hence, the dangers of allowing a group of nursery-schoolers to watch one of their peers spit up.)

With maturity, the distinction between self and others becomes clearer, but not absolute, so that automatic emotional empathy still occurs. Just as babies cry when they hear other babies cry, humans of all ages are susceptible to emotional contagion. When we process human faces, a process that is apparently automatic, and possibly innate and cross-cultural (Hansen & Hansen, 1994), nonconscious facial reactions occur. For example, when we see a happy face, our smiling muscles react (Bush, Barr, McHugo, & Lanzetta, 1989; Dimberg, 1988). When we see a pained expression, on the other hand, our facial muscles react in the way we would if we were pained (Vaughan & Lanzetta, 1981). These results occur to some degree even when people are asked to inhibit their facial expressions in such situations (e.g., Bush et al., 1989; Vaughan & Lanzetta, 1981), and this is a strong indicator that automatic activation is taking place.

The interesting result of this mimicry is that people can then come to feel the emotion they have observed. Through feedback from the automatically enervated facial muscles (see Adelmann & Zajonc, 1989), people come to report feeling the same emotions as the model (Bush et al., 1989; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Vaughan & Lanzetta, 1981). Thus, observing a person who touches a stove and winces causes us to wince, and, via physiological feedback from the set of muscles required to wince, we too can almost feel the burn. The mimicry involved in emotional contagion seems to occur quickly and without prior intention, and sometimes even against our wills, and this suggests that seeing and mirroring the emotional expressions or physiological states of others (Levenson & Ruef, 1992) is an automatic pathway to empathy.

Perhaps because it lacks the dramatic element of concern for our fellow human beings, automatic empathy that is evoked cognitively gets less of the limelight than emotional automatic empathy. However, the effects are no less striking. Cognitive empathy can be evoked automatically in a variety of ways. For example, people whose visual perspectives are changed to match those of other people appear to also adopt their mental perspective. Storms (1973) found that attributions could be reversed by allowing participants in his study to view the scene from a different physical perspective in videotapes of the experimental session. Subjects whose actions were of interest in the study (actor-subjects) made more dispositional attributions to themselves when they viewed a video of their action that was recorded from the perspective of an observer. Conversely, observer-subjects who were focused on these actor-subjects, and who then viewed a video of the situation from the perspective of the actor-subject, made more situational attributions after the perspective switch, although their attributions changed less than those of the actor-subjects (see also Arkin & Duval, 1975).

In a sense, cues in our environment that make us more self-aware—such as video cameras, mirrors, microphones, or audiences—automatically change our perspective, too. We go from being our usual selves, focused on our environment, to being self-focused and highly aware of ourselves, a perspective more like that of other people who might be observing us. For example, in a study by Hass (1984), participants were asked to draw the letter "E" on their foreheads (with their fingers—no ink). When subjects were made self-attentive by the presence of a video camera aimed at them (from one side), they were more likely to draw an "E" that was oriented so that it would be readable to an observer (the spine of the "E" above the participant's right eye). Subjects who were not made self-aware in this way were more likely to draw the "E" so that it was readable from an internal perspective (with the spine of the "E" over their left eye).

Work by Baldwin and his colleagues (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; Baldwin & Holmes, 1987) suggests that sometimes just a reminder of another person is enough to evoke automatic cognitive empathy. Baldwin and Holmes (1987) found that when participants in their study were reminded of either their relationship with their parents or their relationship with their friends, they tended to judge a sexually permissive story more in line with the standards of the group of which they were reminded. This adoption of others' perspectives can then impact the person's view of self. Taking the perspective of someone who is highly critical of you, for example, can make you feel like so much chopped liver. When participants in one study were primed with subliminal pictures of authority figures (such as the Pope), they made more critical self-judgments (Baldwin et al., 1990).

The idea that unconsciously registered environmental cues can prompt automatic empathy is also evidenced in research showing that social behaviors of several different kinds can be elicited automatically through priming. People become more hostile when the concept of hostility is primed outside awareness (Carver, Ganellen, Froming, & Chambers, 1983), and they can become more competitive when the concept of competitiveness is primed subliminally as well (Neuberg, 1988). Bargh and Barndollar (1996) have presented evidence indicating that these effects may accrue from the automatic priming of general goals or motives, not just specific behavior categories, and the implication of this generality is that empathy with another person is also a state of mind that could be primed automatically without the perceiver's awareness.

A particularly relevant study of the automatic priming of empathy

was conducted by Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996). In this research, college-student subjects completed a sentence-unscrambling task that primed for them the stereotype of an aging person. The sentences they unscrambled referred to Florida and graying hair and the like. Other subjects did not experience this priming manipulation. Following this, each subject was observed surreptitiously as he or she walked down a hall. The interesting result here was that those subjects for whom aging was primed proceeded to walk down the hall more slowly than the others. This suggests that thinking about the characteristics of a person may yield an automatic empathic response that increases the likelihood that one will behave as one believes that person would behave. It is not clear at this point whether subjects were behaving in a mimicking fashion of true empathy, or whether they were behaving as one would behave on walking down a hall *with* someone who would walk slowly. Automatic empathy could conceivably yield simple identification with others or reciprocal role identification (cf. Kelman, 1958).

The priming of automatic empathy is suggested when extremely subtle variables influence this state. When variations in situations are so minimal as to be taken in by the perceiver without conscious awareness—such as the primes of the aging stereotype—and these variations still induce empathy, it seems unlikely that the empathy is arising through controlled processes. Clear cases of minimal variations influencing empathy occur in the story comprehension research literature as well. When people are asked to read a story, for example, they seem to grasp very quickly and automatically the perspective from which the story can be understood. When several people are described in a story, readers quickly adopt the perspective of the person whose actions are the first to be described (e.g., Wegner & Giuliano, 1983). This "initialization" of a perspective leads to a variety of effects on memory, emotion, and attribution. Moreover, the initial perspective is then robust, in the sense that readers who have locked in to their particular protagonist are not inclined to switch perspectives when they subsequently see information about others. They now consider the other people as entities in the protagonist's situation rather than as potential alternative perspectives to be adopted.

More generally, the first perspective we take on a situation is at a distinct advantage over subsequent ones (Hoch, 1985; Tweney et al., 1980). Constructs are identified and schemas are invoked in our first construal (Kochler, 1991; Koriat, Lichtenstein, & Fischhoff, 1980), and our knowledge structures have a tendency to spread or metastasize (Gilbert & Osborne, 1989), so that we are not always aware of how much a particular point of view influences later judgments. Thus, even if we allow ourselves to see things quite differently in later construals, they will still be influenced by our first perspective. The automaticity of empathy is not only

fast and subtle, then, but also can produce states of mind that seem to preclude the adoption of alternative states.

Automatic processes are often most evident in behaviors or cognitive procedures that have been practiced, and in this sense empathy also appears to have an automatic element. Feedback and increased exposure to another person lead to greater empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1993; Marangoni, Garcia, Ickes, & Teng, 1995), and it may be that this improvement involves the development of automatic skills. For example, parents may at first have some trouble understanding their children or responding to their needs; however, with practice they may reach the point where their child's welfare is their first concern and they know how to predict exactly what will promote that welfare in many situations. Zealots in a religious or social movement similarly may learn to put the needs of the cause before their own. However, it is arguable that at some point, at least some of these people cease being empathic in the original sense of the word, because their own original perspective no longer exists in a form that could be retrieved, but has instead been replaced by the new one.

Certain roles may reinforce automatic empathy, either by allowing the practice of empathy or by serving to attract role players who are already good at empathy. For example, ministers have been found to be less susceptible to the confirmation bias in attributing characteristics to others (Mahoney & DeMonbreun, 1977), perhaps because they are so used to trying to adopt someone else's perspective. In addition, personality characteristics may make people more automatically empathic. In the "Draw an 'E'" study described earlier (Hass, 1984), subjects who were high in dispositional public self-consciousness behaved more like the subjects in the high self-consciousness condition, even when the situation was not one that should have produced high self-consciousness.

It is worth noting that there are also likely to be ways in which empathy can be automatically undermined. The tendency to adopt another person's perspective is obstructed by anything that makes us focus on that person as an object (Wegner & Giuliano, 1982). When we think about a person's characteristics or group memberships, we are less likely to be able to appreciate the contribution of the person's situation and goals to the person's behavior. This means that when we are automatically drawn to think about a person's personality traits or other characteristics, be it spontaneously (Newman & Uleman, 1989) or as the result of information that leads to rapid inferences about such traits or category memberships (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), our ability to empathize will be hindered. The automatic inferences we reach about others' personalities may often be incorrect without adjustment to take their situations into account (Gilbert, 1994), and this will automatically damage our empathic accuracy as a result.

The automatic operation of empathy, in sum, encompasses many of the occurrences of empathy in everyday life. Like Darwin's ants and monkeys, we people are frequently driven unknowingly to take or to reject the perspectives of others. When we are forced to empathize by the power of others' emotional expressions or the compellingness of their thoughts or concerns, we are automatically empathic. When we empathize unwittingly because of stimuli that cast us into this state of mind without our awareness of their occurrence, we are automatically empathic. When we empathize even against our conscious will, we are automatically empathic. And when we empathize because we have done it so often it has become habitual, we are automatically empathic. Fortunately for those around us who know they cannot count on our second thoughts, our first thoughts often make us understand the pains and pleasures of others as easily and quickly as we understand our own.

CONTROLLED EMPATHY

Whereas automatic empathy has all the inertia of running or tumbling downhill, controlled empathy is as effortful as climbing up a mountainside. In fact, the mountainside analogy is apt in several ways. We can think of reaching a particular mountain peak as offering a certain vista, or perspective, just as reaching empathy offers us a certain person's perspective. In our attempts to reach the mountain peak, we search for grips, holds, and trails that will help us on our way. In our attempts to achieve empathy, we also seek out aids to help us along the way. Our controlled strategies for attaining the goal of empathy typically involve, as their first step, identifying the items of information in our experience or memory that will trigger automatic empathy. However, when we are seeking to control empathy, we have the added job of controlling our actual or imagination-evoked exposure to those stimuli.

The analogy fits in one final way: Climbing mountains and pursuing empathy are both hard and effortful tasks. Thus, just as for other controlled processes, where we alternate between making adjustments in our behavior that we think will bring us closer to a goal and then examining how close we are to that goal (Miller et al., 1960), in the steep climb to controlled empathy, we alternate between looking down at the trail for the next handhold or rock we can grab to help us along, and looking around us to gauge our progress toward the mountain peak. Our success at reaching a mountain peak depends on having enough handholds and trail markers to allow us to proceed, and expending the effort to keep climbing. Similarly, our success at achieving controlled empathy depends on whether or not we find cues to the experience of the other

that will induce an empathic state of mind in ourselves, and being willing to expend the effort to seek out these cues and continue to direct our attention to them.

Motivation to Control Empathy

Given that controlling empathy is a difficult task, and that we will experience some empathy automatically, why would we be motivated to control empathy? To begin with, we may be motivated to control empathy for moral reasons. In our desire to do the right thing, particularly where others are involved, we may use empathy to figure out how we should treat other people. This is the moralist's favorite way of understanding empathy—as a duty that one undertakes in pursuit of some moral ideal. This notion goes beyond the idea that morality involves a personal ability to take others' perspectives, and installs in its place the notion that we are good or bad to the degree that we actively choose to expend effort to understand others' lives and situations.

Empathy may be controlled, however, for much less noble goals. Perhaps the most obvious pragmatic reason to empathize is to figure out how others feel in order to manipulate their behavior. Dale Carnegie's (1936) famous *How to Win Friends and Influence People* includes as Principle 8 that one should "Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view." This point is not lost even on some toddlers; Hoffman (1975) cites the example of a 20-month-old child who cleverly used the knowledge that her sister was possessive about her rocking horse. The 20-month-old, who wanted to play with the doll that the sister was playing with, crawled onto the prized rocking horse. This outraged her sister and distracted her from her play, leaving the doll free so that the 20-month-old could play with it. There is more than one psychology major who wishes to learn our field for similar manipulative reasons, hoping that knowledge of others will allow for control of empathy that will win dates, sales, and lots of other good stuff.

We do not always have ulterior motives (either bad or good) for controlled empathy. We may just want to be empathic in order to gain a more accurate view of a situation. We may wonder why a person did something, or what it was like to be in a particular situation, and so we set out to control our empathy. The knowledge we acquire via controlled empathy does not have to be used for anything—we may be interested in it for its own sake. Alternatively, this knowledge may be useful, but not for reasons of manipulating others. We may engage in empathy to find out more about ourselves. For example, imagine a girls' slumber party at which one of the guests has the worldly distinction of actually having kissed a boy. The oth-

er guests are likely to question her about the course of events, how it felt, and what she was thinking—in essence, trying to achieve empathy—in order to plan ahead for when this momentous occasion occurs in their own lives. Engaged people ask newlyweds, novitiates ask nuns, and candidates ask jobholders what their lives are like in order to find out what their own lives will be like.

We are not always motivated to use mental control to be *more* empathic. Sometimes our motivation to control empathy is a motivation to *stem* empathy. For example, Simpson, Ickes and Blackstone (1995) found that people involved in insecure dating relationships were less likely to acknowledge that their romantic partners were attracted to another person. In other words, their own insecurities got in the way of their ability to see their partner's true feelings. Our motivations may also guide which perspectives we choose to take from the outset; we may be motivated not to see someone's perspective because of the costs associated with it. For example, in a study by Shaw, Batson, and Todd (1994), subjects who knew they were going to have an opportunity to provide high-cost (time-consuming) help to a homeless person were less likely to choose to hear a highly empathy-inducing appeal for help from the homeless man than they were to choose to hear a non-empathy-inducing plea from the man. Subjects in this study were practicing a type of "exposure control." Wilson and Brekke (1994) discuss exposure control as a way of "avoiding [mental] contaminants that might bias one's judgments" (p. 134). In the realm of controlled empathy, exposure control involves avoiding the environmental cues that might help us see things from someone else's perspective. By choosing not to hear the plea that might evoke empathy, the subjects were saving themselves from possibly feeling empathy for the man, and thus also saving themselves from feeling compelled to expend the effort to help him.

The motivation to empathize or not to empathize is an important clue to whether empathy is being controlled. It makes sense that people would control behaviors that can get them what they want—or help them avoid what they do not want. We can, of course, envision cases in which people happen to experience automatic empathy that causes them to behave the way we would also expect them to be motivated to behave. More than one person who has performed an impulsive, automatic act of heroism, for example, has later found the rewards to be so great that these rewards could have been motivating had they been anticipated. However, just as one might judge a crime suspect as more likely to be guilty when motives to commit the crime are present, the presence of motives to be empathic or not to be empathic strengthen the inference of empathic control. The suspicion is raised that the hero may, after all, have saved the day consciously and intentionally, just to enjoy the parade.

Indirect and Direct Control of Empathy

An indirect pathway to the control of empathy occurs through the manipulation of one's purposeful exposure to stimuli that influence automatic empathy. We can control our level of emotional empathy with the victim of some atrocity in a film, for example, by looking away from the screen during the ugly part. We may make a special point of not watching a person's tears or pained expression when we hope to suppress empathic emotion. In contrast, we might enhance our emotional response to the beneficiaries of a worthy charitable cause to which we plan to contribute by spending some time focusing our attention on the sorrowful facial expressions of the people the cause will benefit. These same tactics also work when we want to share or avoid sharing another's happiness. Looking at or away from emotional displays and emotion-producing situations is a straightforward way to manipulate our response to the individuals who populate those situations.

Alex Haley (1977), the author of *Roots,* talked about preparing to write his book by lying in the dark hold of a ship in order to capture the feelings of the fear and desperation his slave ancestors must have felt. Method actors may surround themselves with things that will bring about the emotion they desire to portray in their characters (Stanislavski, 1949). Even cultural customs, such as wearing black to a funeral, may be attempts to control our emotions and increase our empathy for the survivors. Lest we forget their sadness, all we have to do to be reminded is to look down at what we are wearing. Although such self-exposure to empathic stimuli might be more effective in controlling our empathic responses to those experiencing negative experiences than positive ones, (Stotland, 1969), it might also be used to bring our emotions in line with those around us who are feeling good. Some noteworthy portion of empathy management, in short, involves indirect control—what Wegner (1989) has called "remote control"—the manipulation of our situations to influence our mental states (cf. Schneider, 1993).

We also seem to be able to influence our empathy without recourse to external stimulation, and this gets us into the direct exercise of mental control (Wegner & Pennebaker, 1993). In lieu of directing our eyes one way or another when we are with a person whose experience we want to share, in the absence of any relevant stimulation we may still *think* about items that help to initiate such empathy. We may retrieve particular memories or images and rehearse them in our minds. Alternatively, we may bar particular thoughts from mind, distracting ourselves by thinking about other things whenever the unwanted thoughts appear in consciousness. These strategies of concentration and suppression are basic attentional manipulations that stand at the center of normal mental control. When

we use them to control empathy, they can be thought of as effortful attentional strategies aimed at *perspective production* and *perspective suppression.*

Perspective Production

The production of a perspective can occur through attention to and rehearsal of a variety of possible thoughts. Abelson (1975) found that people who imagined themselves in a particular physical location during an event tended to remember more details that would have been salient to someone in that location. This finding suggests that simply imagining events as they occur from the spatial standpoint of another person can be enough to instigate a modicum of empathy control. In the Storms (1973) study mentioned earlier, observers who saw an interaction from the physical vantage point of the actor-subject made attributions more like the actor's. In a study reported 2 years later, Regan and Totten (1975) got similar results by instructing observers to empathize with the actor. Even though these subjects watched the interaction from the perspective of observers, their attributions reflected the fact that they were trying to think like the actor-subjects they observed. It might be that the control of empathy in such instances could involve nothing more than imagining events in the room from a different physical standpoint.

It is probably a more general rule, though, that the production of perspectives involves considering and attending to the goals of the other. Pichert and Anderson (1977) found that when subjects were asked either to take the perspective of a home buyer or a burglar, they tended to remember information from a story about a home that was important to the assigned point of view. The likely goals of a home buyer and a burglar are not too difficult to discern, and adopting these during the reading of the story probably involves the minimal exercise of attention to keep the goals in mind. The effects of such rehearsal can then pop up in inferences that are quite remote from the original goals that were held in focus. Ginossar and Trope (1987) found, for instance, that people who imagined they were lawyers (and so presumably attended to the goals of lawyers) became more accurate in using base rate information for determining the likelihood of a driver's guilt in a hit-and-run accident.

The production of perspectives is likely to depend on the amount of relevant and accurate goal information we have available for any given perspective. Generally, the more experiences we have shared with people, the better we should be at empathizing with them, because it gives us more such information to consider. In addition, the more similar we are to someone, the easier it should be to gather cues to that person's situation and hold them in mind as we consider the person's actions. The theory

that we should be more empathic toward people we are similar to is one that has received empirical support (Krebs, 1975; Stotland, 1969). In a sense, the more similar we are, the less we will have to go outside ourselves to gather cues, and the more we can just respond as we ourselves would to the circumstances (Shantz, 1975). It is possible, however, that similarity of experience alone may not be enough—what really helps is knowledge of the other person's frame of mind (Ickes, 1993).

Even if we do succeed at lucking upon and grabbing the right "handholds" to empathy, there is another barrier to the production of a different perspective. Controlled empathy, like other controlled processes, requires mental effort, so our success at it depends on our cognitive capacity. Furthermore, empathy is an ongoing process that requires updating (Rogers, 1975) and thus "demands far more of the social perceiver than do impressions or memory" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 334). If we do not take hold of the next cue, or if we stop to catch our breath, we cease making any more progress toward empathy. Continuously apprehending and comprehending empathy cues in the environment takes a lot of mental effort. All the available cues in the world will not help us if we do not have space to think about them. The therapist who is trying to remember if she has enough eggs to make a quiche for dinner and the priest who is worrying about whether he really should rather have been an interior decorator will both be lousy at empathizing. Under cognitive load, we will be less attuned to our target of empathy's situation. For example, Gilbert, Pelham, and Krull (1988) told subjects that they were going to be asked to endorse a position they did not support, placing them in the same situation as that experienced by the target people they would later judge in the study. However, when these subjects were placed under cognitive load, they still showed the fundamental attribution error when making judgments about other people whose behavior was constrained in the same way the subjects' had been—overattributing the target's behavior to the target's traits. Gilbert et al. (1988) reasoned that because the subjects were cognitively busy, they were unable to use the experiential information.

All told, then, the production of perspectives is a difficult and effortful process that requires the use of cognitive strategies to introduce the right items to our attention: the situational cues, facial expressions, goal information, reminders of our own experience, and other "handholds" that can yield accurate empathy.

Perspective Suppression

Taking one person's perspective often requires suppressing other perspectives, most notably our own. In our attempts to achieve controlled empa-

thy, we are essentially telling ourselves that our own perspective is not good enough, so we try to abandon it while we simultaneously try to create the illusion that we are seeing things through another person's eyes. Imagining another person's reaction to a situation is certainly more difficult and more developmentally advanced than simply imagining ourselves in that situation (Higgins, 1981). For example, suppose we buy tickets with a friend to a hot concert. A week later, she comes to us to report that her Uncle Donald will be in town the night of the concert. Our own perspective cries out for her to come to the concert with us, but because we are good, sensitive, friends, we try to see things from her perspective. We try to focus on how much she would hate to leave Uncle Donald home with nothing to do. Such entertaining of multiple perspectives can cause a bottleneck; we must take them in succession because we can only think from one perspective at a time (Anderson & Pichert, 1978; Wegner & Giuliano, 1982; Wicklund, 1975). Thus, we find ourselves suppressing our own desires in the exercise of controlled empathy.

Suppressing our own point of view is not easy. We may not realize, for example, the extent to which our private experiences influence our perspective. Just as additional knowledge may be the key that sometimes unlocks automatic empathy, knowledge can be a curse, too (Keysar, Ginzel, & Bazerman, 1995), impeding us from being empathic. For example, Newton (cited in Griffin & Ross, 1991) gave participants in a study the task of either tapping out a tune with their fingers, or identifying a tune being tapped out by someone else. The identifying task turns out to be remarkably difficult (only 3 out of 120 songs were identified by listeners in the study), but tappers were very bad at seeing just how hard it was when they were asked to estimate the percentage of songs that would be recognized. They were unable to take the perspective of the listeners and realize how ambiguous the taps must sound, because "rather than impoverished knocks on the table" they imagined "a full orchestration, complete with rich harmonies" (Griffin & Ross, 1991) as the song automatically ran through their heads accompanying their taps. Similarly, Keysar (1994) found that subjects were unable to ignore privileged information they had about a social interaction when asked to determine whether an uninformed participant in the interaction would realize that another participant was being sarcastic.

There may be times when it is not our own perspective that we wish to suppress, but someone else's. For example, suppose we find ourselves left in a room with one other person and only one slice of "Chocolate Kevorkian" cake left. If we are true chocoholics, we will want to suppress the other person's perspective so we can eat the cake unfettered by guilt. Alternatively, we may try to suppress someone else's perspective because we consider it invalid. For example, we may tell ourselves not to feel sorry for a student who, on account of a power surge, has just lost all of her term paper on the day it was due, because we believe she should have started earlier and she should have had a backup disk. Each time we encounter an opinion with which we disagree, there is some sense in which we may try to control our response to that perspective and suppress any impulse to find it acceptable.

The suppression of perspectives may ultimately be more difficult than the production of perspectives. The fact that perspectives often occur to us as a result of automatic processes means that they are frequently being thrust into mind and are thus, by definition, difficult to control. Much of our mental work in perspective suppression may involve finding ways to avoid the cues that automatically elicit unwanted perspectives. But beyond this, there are difficulties peculiar to the suppression of thoughts that further complicate perspective suppression and sometimes even automatically activate the very perspectives we hope to avoid. We turn now to this problem and a theory that allows us to understand it.

IRONIC PROCESSES IN EMPATHY CONTROL

The theory of ironic processes of mental control (Wegner, 1994) offers a way of viewing several of the phenomena of controlled and automatic empathy. In particular, it suggests a way to conceptualize how the production and suppression of perspectives can operate—and how they can both break down. It also offers some insight into the conditions that give rise to automatic empathy that occurs ironically in direct opposition to the empathic control we are trying to achieve. In what follows, we outline the theory and its application to perspective taking, and then present the preliminary results of an experiment we have conducted to test the theory's predictions.

The Theory in Outline

The ironic process theory proposes that every act of mental control normally invokes two cognitive search processes: a conscious operating process that searches for thoughts that will produce the intended state of mind, and an ironic monitoring process that searches for thoughts that indicate a failure to produce the intended state of mind. In the case of perspective production, then, this theory begins by reiterating the basic notion of control systems—that when control is instituted, part of the mind is attempting to exert the control and part of the mind is testing the effectiveness of that control (as in Miller et al., 1960). The ironic process theo-

ry goes on to suggest, though, that the conscious operating process is relatively more effortful, effective, and interruptible than the ironic monitoring process. Normally, this just means that the operating process keeps the mind filled with whatever we have intended to put in it and the monitor occasionally notes failures to do this—and so reinstates the operating process and reasserts control.

When we are attempting to produce a perspective, then, this theory says that we are searching for items of information that will bring the empathic state to mind, that is, the expressions or goals or cues that can prompt our move to empathy. The ironic process in this case would be looking for failures to assume the empathic state, and so would tend to notice when we were being selfish, for example, or when goals of someone other than our empathy target had come to mind. In the case of perspective suppression, on the other hand, the operating process would be seeking information that would help us to distract ourselves from the other's perspective, whereas the monitoring process would seek information that could lead to the adoption of the perspective.

The curious result of all this is that while empathy control thus works very well when we have enough conscious capacity to keep the operating process functioning at peak performance, the attempt to control our empathy without such mental capacity unleashes a failure-inducing monitoring process to wreak havoc with our intended mental state. This is why it is called an ironic monitor: Its effect is to promote the state of mind that precisely opposes the one being sought. This suggests that the attempt to produce a perspective, under mental load, would make the perceiver lose that very perspective; the attempt to suppress a perspective under mental load would make the perceiver ironically adopt that perspective.

There is good evidence for just this kind of ironic, automatic process in a number of other domains of mental control. Ironic processes have been observed in studies of thought suppression (Wegner & Erber, 1992), mood control (Wegner, Erber, & Zanakos, 1993), relaxation (Wegner, Broome, & Blumberg, in press), motor control (Ansfield & Wegner, 1996), concentration (Wegner, 1996), and a variety of other venues (Wegner, 1992, 1994). It makes sense that if empathy is a state of mind we ever do try successfully to control, it should show positive effects of such control when we exert control without mental load, but should display ironic effects of such control when we exert control in the presence of mental load.

The upshot of this reasoning is that controlled empathy can sometimes produce an opposing automatic effect—a tendency to take perspectives that are consciously rejected or to abandon perspectives that are consciously sought. We suspect that this tendency may underlie many of the instances in daily life when we find that our attempts to influence our own

levels of empathy descend rapidly into perverse and counterintentional errors of perspective taking. When we are actively trying to take another's perspective, mental loads can lead us to be particularly cruel to that person. We might be hoping to empathize with our spouse, for instance, and in a moment of stress find ourselves rejecting his or her perspective impulsively and automatically. When we are actively trying not to take the perspective of another person, in turn, the frailty of the suppression operating process in the face of the ironic monitor could lead us to slip inadvertently into precisely the perspective we were hoping to avoid. We might hope not to empathize, for example, with the parent of an unruly child sitting behind us on an airplane so that we can assemble the proper withering stare when we prepare to leave—and yet at some time in the flight find ourselves slipping to think, "Oh, you poor yutz."

Don't Be a Burglar

We tested several of these ideas in a study (Hodges & Wegner, 1996) that borrowed a perspective taking memory paradigm created by Pichert and Anderson (1977). Participants were given a story to read about a house: a four-paragraph narrative about two boys who play hooky and go to one boy's house for the afternoon. Throughout the story, the layout of the house is described, including facts about its contents, visibility to the road, and the schedules of its occupants during a typical day.

Participants in our study read the story under one of four conditions. Some were told to read the story while trying to take the perspective of a house burglar (this was one of the conditions in the original Pichert and Anderson study). These instructions were designed to evoke controlled empathy. Other participants were told to read the story while trying not to think like a burglar, a condition under which we might expect "ironic empathy" effects under load, because the suppression instructions would result in an operating process of trying not to think like a burglar, and an automatic ironic process searching for examples of burglar-like thoughts. Another group of participants was given no instructions other than to read the story, but unlike the first two conditions in which the story was untitled, the story was titled "Would You Rob This House?" We adapted this manipulation from another variation on the original Pichert and Anderson (1977) study (Baillet & Keenan, 1986), and expected that it would result in participants automatically thinking like burglars. Finally, a comparison group was given the untitled story, with no perspective taking instructions.

All participants were assigned to either a high or low cognitive-load condition, which we manipulated by having some participants remember

a one-digit number and other participants remember a six-digit number while reading the story. All participants read the story, were asked to recall the appropriate number, and then were given a short filler task to distract them from any rehearsal of the story and make sure we would learn later what had entered their long-term memories. Next, participants were given another number to remember (once again, one digit for participants in the low load condition and six digits for participants in the high load condition) and then completed a free recall task, in which they were asked to write down as much as they could remember of the story they had just read.

Participants' attempts at recalling the story were coded with a coding system devised by Pichert and Anderson that divided the story into 72 memory units. Pichert and Anderson had a group of subjects code each of these memory units for its importance to a burglar on a 5-point scale, with 5 being "essential" and 1 being "easily eliminated due to its unimportance." In our study, we computed a memory measure that consisted of the number of units a subject recalled that had an importance rating greater than 2.

Because neither the participants in the comparison condition nor the participants in the title condition were engaging in the control of empathy, we expected that their recall for units important to burglars would be unaffected by the load manipulation. Because the title was expected to result in automatic empathy for a burglar's perspective, we expected that participants in the title condition should show better burglar recall than participants in the comparison condition. We expected participants who were trying to control their perspectives under low load conditions would be able to engage in controlled empathy, and thus those in the burglar perspective condition should recall more of the facts that were relevant to a burglar than those who were instructed not to think like burglars. However, the high cognitive load was expected to interfere with controlled empathy. Participants instructed to take the burglar's perspective should be less able to do so because of the deterioration of their operating process and the added effects of the ironic process seeking nonempathic thoughts. In contrast, participants under load who were instructed not to take a burglar's perspective might end up ironically recalling more of the facts that were relevant to a burglar because the cognitive load should interfere with the controlled process that is redirecting the mind away from burglar-like thoughts, but should not interfere with the ironic process that is automatically turning up instances of thinking like a burglar.

Our results, shown in Figure 11.1, are consistent with these hypotheses. A planned contrast testing the complete hypothesized pattern of means was significant, $F(1, 146) = 6.23$, $p < .02$. Cognitive load produced the predicted ironic effects when people were trying to control their perspectives, but had no differential influence when empathy control was not exerted (in the comparison condition) or when automatic empathy was instigated without an appeal to intentional control (in the title condition).

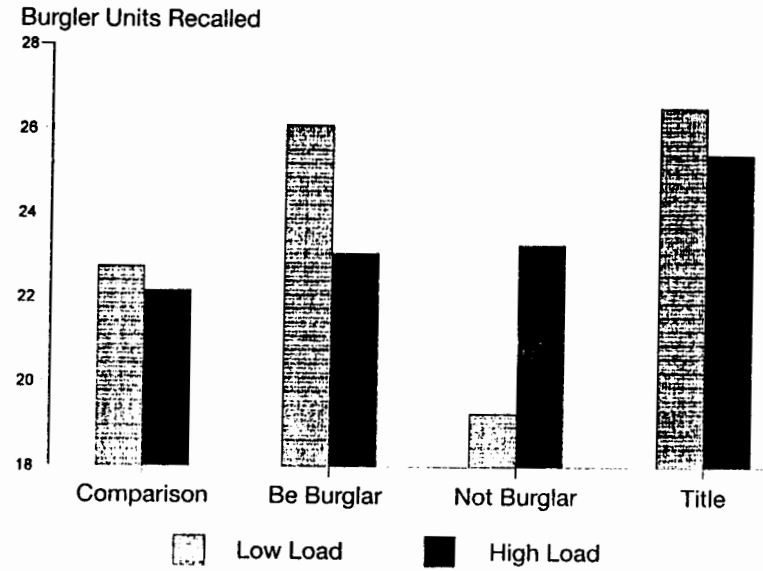

FIGURE 11.1. Number of burglar-relevant memory units recalled, by condition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCURACY

This chapter has introduced some of the conditions under which empathy can be produced or suppressed by automatic or controlled means, but it has not focused on whether these processes do indeed influence empathic accuracy as measured by some criterion of correctness. The present approach, however, does suggest basic, conditional, guidelines for empathic accuracy, namely, that empathic accuracy is (1) essentially a happenstance matter of the architecture of uncontrollable processes when empathy is automatic, (2) a matter of the selection of effective operating processes when empathy is controlled, and (3) open to potentially devastating sabotage by ironic automatic processes when it is undertaken in a controlled way without benefit of ample mental capacity. Beyond these broad strokes, the idea that empathy has automatic and controlled components suggests some novel speculations about the production of empathic accuracy.

First, our framework allows the study of empathic accuracy to benefit from the accumulating body of knowledge about mental control. For example, it sets up specific predictions about how cognitive load should affect automatic and controlled empathy. People whose jobs require them to be empathic, such as counselors and pastors, probably implicitly know that they must clear their minds before taking the effortful plunge toward (controlled) empathy. However, not all the predictions involving cognitive load may be quite so obvious to people trying to be empathic. According to the ironic processing model, empathic accuracy might be improved by knowing when *not* to try to avoid thinking about something under cognitive load. For example, a social worker with a heavy case load might be better off abandoning any effort of ignoring the fact her client is a recovered drug user. Although thinking about this fact may generally be considered biasing, trying *not* to think about it under cognitive load may result in her being ironically and unduly affected by the information. Counterintuitive findings are commonplace in social cognition; we should be on the lookout for them in the production of empathic accuracy as well.

However, it is important to keep in mind that although other areas of cognitive processing and mental control may guide our study of empathic accuracy, we should not expect the findings to be exactly parallel. For example, a very complex perspective may not be the same as a simple thought when it comes to ironic processing. In general, more specific thoughts are more susceptible to ironic effects, because the more specific the thought, the more clearly defined the job of the ironic processor about what forbidden thoughts it should be locating (Wegner, 1994). Thus, not taking a person's perspective under load, particularly if we know enough about the person to construct a relatively complex point of view for him or her, may not result in as powerful ironic effects as not thinking about something more specific, such as white bears or the Statue of Liberty (targets used in several of Wegner and his colleagues' studies). In general, the simpler the perspective that is to be avoided (e.g., "don't think like a burglar" vs. "don't think like a 6th century B.C. Chinese courtesan who loves the emperor but feels guilty about betraying her mother and must consider her children's future"), or the more clearly we can define it, the greater the ironic effects we should expect under load.

By incorporating the mental control literature into the study of empathic accuracy, our framework suggests a number of means for improving empathic accuracy, or at least explaining why some steps toward accuracy are more effective than others. For example, using indirect but controlled strategies that mimic automatic empathy cues, such as the defense lawyer who arranges her bedroom like her client's prison cell, should be highly effective. Perhaps the jealous but oblivious lovers in Simpson, Ickes, and Blackstone's study (1995) could become more sensitive to their partner's feelings if they were asked to make their judgments in the presence of a person to whom they were attracted. The success of therapy addressing relationship issues in which not just the individual with the problem but also those who are related to that individual are brought in could also be explained. Presumably having the family or spouse physically present provides the therapist with a key cue to automatic empathy. Although such actions are actually controlled empathy, once the initial effort has been exerted, some of these strategies will be relatively impervious to cognitive load, because they will start to function as automatic empathy cues in the environment.

The interface between controlled and automatic empathy, and how it can be manipulated to increase accuracy, seem ripe for investigation. For example, does repeated exposure to automatic empathy cues contribute any positive transfer to controlled empathic accuracy? If so, then we would expect the cameras in front of news anchors and dance studio mirrors in front of dancers, which make these individuals more self-aware (which we discussed earlier as constituting a form of automatic empathy), to make them eventually more empathically accurate. In other words, practicing their livelihood in this state of forced automatic empathy toward other people might serve to make them better at knowing what other people will think of them when they are off the job. Bringing individual differences into the fray, it would also be important to ask whether a similar regime of self-awareness would have the same effect on people who were not drawn to such careers in the first place.

Last, our framework may also provide an explanation why some attempts at empathic accuracy fail. Insight into the mind of another person would be very handy for a variety of people, such as the parole officer who wants to predict which prisoners are ready to return to society as law-abiding citizens, but, in fact, strategies based on the individual are often inferior to actuarial methods in such tasks (see Dawes, Faust, & Meehl, 1989). Perhaps there are just too many points at which the parole officer trying to take the perspective of his or her prisoners can go astray: first by picking the wrong route, and then by failing to keep control of the perspective. A less pessimistic outlook might work to explain why controlled empathy is a better strategy in some investigative situations than others: The detective who has a whole staff to devote to constructing the motives behind a criminal's act may be in a better position to use controlled empathy than the parole officer who must review dozens of cases a day.

We see such explorations of empathic accuracy as a logical next step, but we are encouraged even at this point by the potential utility of our approach in everyday settings. As we have stated before, using our mountain climbing analogy, controlled empathy is effortful to begin with, but no amount of effort will make us empathic if we grab the wrong "handholds."

Empathic accuracy is important, but meta-accuracy, or knowing how accurate one is, can be almost as useful as accuracy itself, and people's empathic meta-accuracy appears to be quite dismal: Marangoni et al. (1995) found essentially no correlation between how empathically accurate people were and how empathically accurate they thought they were. If a perceiver can be educated in how to control empathy as well as when conditions are favorable for the control to work, the perceiver inevitably will have taken some great strides toward accuracy even before we begin to compare the outcome of such efforts to standards of correctness. After all, when we attempt to control what cannot be influenced, in ways that do not work, and under conditions that indicate we may achieve not only no change but the opposite of what we seek, a lack of empathic accuracy is virtually assured.

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