Considering others in Need: On altruism, empathy and perspective taking
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Chapter 2

When Your Suffering Becomes Mine: The Influence of Social Comparison Orientation on Affect Resulting in a Willingness to Help Others

Just like other primates, humans need the help of others to survive. Because receiving help from others also requires a willingness to help others in return, it is not surprising that people are often affected by the suffering of others. Yet, people differ in the way in which this suffering affects them. This chapter argues that these individual differences are not only strongly dependent on the perspective from which one views the suffering of the other, but are also dependent on the degree in which one compares oneself with the person in need.

Depending on the perspective one takes, observing someone in need will have different affective implications for the observer (Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 1997a). For instance, one can imagine how the other must perceive the situation, and consequently, which affect that situation will arouse in the other (other perspective). One can also try to stay objective and not to get involved in the suffering of the person in need (objective perspective). Research has repeatedly shown that imagining how the other person must feel leads to higher levels of empathy (an other-oriented emotion) and distress (a self-oriented emotion) than trying to stay objective, and that these emotions in turn predict helping the other (Batson et al. 1997a; Batson et al. 1997b; Cialdini et al., 1987). Yet, not everyone who takes a certain perspective will experience the same emotions. Obviously, besides the perspective one takes, other factors come also into play. One of these factors is the extent to which one compares oneself with others.

The desire to learn about the self through comparison with others is assumed to be a universal characteristic of humans (Buunk & Gibbons, 2005). Yet, many individuals are reluctant to admit engaging in social comparison (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Helgeson & Taylor, 1993). This reluctance can be partly explained by the fact that people differ in

1We fully agree with Maner, et al. (2002) that referring to this perspective as ‘empathy manipulation’ may be misleading since this perspective evokes more than just empathy (i.e. sadness and distress).
their disposition to compare themselves with others (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Hemphill and Lehman, 1991). To capture these differences, Gibbons and Buunk (1999) developed a scale that assesses individual differences in what they labelled social comparison orientation (SCO; the disposition to compare oneself with others). A variety of studies have shown a quite clear pattern of behaviour of individuals high in SCO. According to Buunk and Gibbons (2005), the “typical” comparer is characterized by features such as: a chronic activation of the self, a strong interest in what others feel, and a moderate negative affectivity. One of the strongest correlates of SCO is interpersonal orientation, i.e., the need to have close interpersonal relationships \( r = .45, p < .001 \); Buunk & Gibbons, 2005). Also, SCO is correlated moderately \( r = .31, p < .001 \) with communal orientation, i.e., a desire to give benefits in response to the perceived needs of others (Clark et al., 1987). At the very least, these correlates suggest that people high in SCO have a strong interest in the experiences and feelings of others surrounding them. But what does this interest do with the resulting affect felt for these persons? More specifically, when confronted with a person in need, do people high in SCO respond with a different affect than people low in SCO?

Surprisingly little research is conducted on the influence of social comparison with a victim on the willingness to help that person. Yet, studies on the relationship between SCO and affect felt for downward comparison targets (people who are worse off) provide us with some clues which may be applicable to person in need situations. A number of studies have shown that for people high in SCO, particularly downward comparisons evoke negative affect. For instance, Buunk et al. (2001) asked sociotherapists high in SCO to read a bogus interview about someone involved in the same profession being very unsuccessful. The higher the level of burnout of the sociotherapists, the more negative affect was evoked by the description of the downward comparison target, but only among individuals high in SCO. In a similar study, a sample of nurses was exposed to either a downward or an upward target. The higher individuals were in SCO, the more negative affect they reported following exposure to the downward comparison target (Buunk et al., 2001). Although these studies provide us with some insights in the affective reactions of people high in SCO, the need of the comparison targets in these situations was not very strong (compared to the need of a victim). Yet, these findings suggest that people high in SCO may be more sensitive to the suffering of others than people low in SCO and that this sensitivity results in higher levels of negative affect. This seems to occur because people high in SCO relate the situation of that person to themselves, which makes them particularly inclined to imagine how that person must feel.
Although it seems clear that exposure to others who are relatively worse-off tends to evoke negative affect especially in those high in SCO, the precise nature of this affect is not completely clear. This reported negative affect can be an expression of peoples’ own distress in reaction to the need of the other as well as an expression of their empathy for the suffering of the other. The studies above did not provide their participants the opportunity to specify if this felt negative affect was a consequence of their empathic concern. Nevertheless, both the sensitivity for the suffering of the other, as well as the correlations of SCO with interpersonal orientation and communal orientation suggests that this negative affect might be an expression of empathy. And, when relating these findings to the research on perspective taking mentioned above, it seems likely that this empathy should be especially apparent when people high in SCO imagine how this person must feel.

In sum, we expect that people who are induced to take an other perspective will experience more empathy—and not distress—for a person in need, and will be more willing to help that person than people who are induced to stay objective. This effect of perspective taking should be especially strong for people high in SCO and should also extend to their willingness to help this person. In Study 2.1, university students were presented with a person in need and were randomly assigned to take the perspective of this person or to stay objective. SCO, their willingness to help—as well as a number of putative predictors of helping—were assessed. Study 2.2 was designed to replicate findings of Study 2.1 and provide an answer to some of the questions that Study 2.1 raised.

Study 2.1

Method

Participants

Sixty-one female psychology students (mean age 20 years, SD 3.2 years, ranging from 18 to 37 years old) at the University of Groningen participated in exchange for course credits. Participants were randomly divided over two perspective-conditions: trying to stay objective (objective-condition) and imagining how the person described must feel (other-condition).

Procedure

The study was presented as a study on “personality and close relationships.” Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated in individual cubicles. They were told
that the research would consist of two unrelated parts, a short questionnaire and a study concerning a new practicum for first year psychology students. The practicum would teach students how to cope with stigmatized others by means of going out with them to develop new activities in their daily lives. The aim of the current study would be to gather students’ opinions on such a practicum, which would be taken into account by the university in the final make-up of the practicum. Participants read on their computer screens a story that gave them a global idea of the practicum. They also read an introduction on Leonie, a student who had a major bicycle accident and consequently ended up with serious facial damage, a shattered foot, and social stigma. She would tell in an interview about her experiences.

Before listening to the interview, the experimental manipulation was introduced to the participants following Batson et al. (1997a): Those randomly assigned to the objective condition read the following:

“Try, while listening to the interview, to be as objective as possible about what has happened to the person interviewed and how it has affected her life. To stay objective, it’s important not to imagine what this person has been through and how this has influenced her life. Just try to remain as objective as possible.”

Those assigned to the other condition read:

“Try, while listening to the interview, to imagine how the person being interviewed feels about what happened and how it has affected her life. Try not to concern yourself with attending to all the information presented. Just try to imagine how the person interviewed feels and concentrate on this.”

The instruction stayed on the participants’ screen while listening to the interview. In the interview, Leonie told about her experiences in the hospital, how she felt when she saw herself again for the first time, how she has been recovering, and how she is feeling when people stare at her. She ended her story saying that she would like to meet some new people who would be willing to do something ‘nice’ with her. Participants then completed a set of questionnaires (described below); upon completion, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

**Measures**

*Social Comparison Orientation.* Social Comparison Orientation was measured with the Iowa-Netherlands comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). This 11-item scale was developed on the basis of a larger item pool, and has been tested in over 25 studies. The measure consists of statements reflecting social comparison
activities and interests. The items were measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Cronbach’s alpha was .77, $M = 3.61, SD = .52$.

Manipulation checks. As part of the practicum evaluation form, two questions were designed to measure the effectiveness of the perspective-manipulation: “To what extent did you concentrate, while listening to the interview, on being objective?” and “To what extent did you concentrate, while listening to the interview, on the feelings of Leonie?”; 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much).

Empathy. Target-specific state empathy was measured with the adjectives sympathetic and compassionate ($r = .75, p = .001$). These two items are often included among the list of adjectives used to tap empathy in research on prosocial behavior (see Batson, 1991, for a review). On 7-point scales, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), participants indicated the extent to which they felt these emotions.

Distress. Feelings of distress were measured with adjectives distressed, disturbed, and alarmed (alpha = .76). Participants provided responses on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Willingness to help. Willingness to help was part of a broader questionnaire titled “Practicum Evaluation form” which asked some questions covering the cover story of the study. To measure helping intention, participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely not) to 5 (definitely yes) whether they were willing to help Leonie in a practicum such as described previously.

Results and Discussion

The manipulation appeared successful. Participants in the objective condition reported more concentration on being objective ($M = 6.39, SD = 1.33$) than participants in the other condition ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.41$; $F(1,59) = 22.12, p = .001$). Also, participants in the other condition reported more concentration on the feelings of Leonie ($M = 7.47, SD = .94$) than participants in the objective condition ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.6$; $F(1,59) = 24.91, p = .001$).

Table 2.1 shows the mean levels of all measures in the objective condition and the other condition. As expected, participants experienced greater feelings of empathy in the other than in the objective condition, $t(59) = 1.82, p = .036$ one sided. Means on the remaining measures did not differ between the two conditions.
Table 2.1
*Mean levels of Empathy, Distress, and Willingness to Help in Objective and Other Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>Willingness to help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective (n = 31)</td>
<td>5.44 a</td>
<td>3.26 a</td>
<td>4.23 a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n = 30)</td>
<td>5.88 b</td>
<td>3.46 a</td>
<td>4.30 a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means with different superscripts differ at least at \( p < .05 \).

Of particular conceptual interest was whether SCO would be differently related to the dependent variables within the other condition in comparison with the objective condition. Correlations among these variables revealed some very clear differences between both conditions. The correlations are reported in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2
*Correlations among All Measures in Objective and Other Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Objective condition</th>
<th>Other condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. SCO</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Empathy</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Distress</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Willingness to help

Note. * \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \).

In the objective condition, SCO was unrelated to any of the other measures, whereas in the other condition, SCO was related to both empathy and participants’ willingness to help. There was no relationship between SCO and distress in either of the conditions. As expected, these correlations suggest a model in which people high in SCO experience more empathy than people low in SCO, especially when they take an other-perspective.

Because several of these predictors were correlated with each other (in both objective and other conditions), in order to test the independent effects of SCO, empathy and distress on willingness to help, we conducted two regression analyses, separately for the objective and other conditions. The results are reported in Table 2.3.
Table 2.3
Results of Regression Analyses in Objective and Other Conditions in which Willingness to Help was the Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Objective condition</th>
<th>Other condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Reported one sided.

The results of the regression analyses showed that in the objective condition, people high in distress were more willing to help than people low in distress ($\beta = .35, p = .051$ one sided). When the other variables were controlled for, no other predictor exerted a significant effect. On the other hand, in the other condition, when people imagined how the recipient must have felt, empathy was the only substantive predictor of willingness to help ($\beta = .38, p = .028$ one sided). Although the correlation in Table 2.2 suggested a relationship between SCO and willingness to help in the other condition, these regressions show that the effect of SCO on willingness to help was due to the shared variance between SCO and empathy. In sum, when all putative predictors were pitted against each other, distress predicted willingness to help when the helper concentrated on being objective, whereas empathy predicted willingness to help when the helper imagined how the recipient must have felt.

This study shows us that not only one’s perspective on a situation, but also the extent to which one is inclined to compare with others determines the affect felt for a person in need. More specifically, when people take an objective perspective on the situation, no relationship exists between SCO and distress, and willingness to help seems to be predicted only by the amount of distress one experiences. On the other hand, when people try to imagine how the recipient must feel, SCO is related to both empathy and willingness to help. Empathy in turn, is the main predictor of willingness to help, indicating a mediating role between SCO and willingness to help.

Clearly, only within the other perspective, people high in SCO experience more empathy than people low in SCO. But the question remains why this is the case. We would like to suggest that this higher empathy occurs because people high in SCO identify more easily with the other. As Buunk and Gibbons (2005) pointed out, people high in SCO tend to see the fate of the other as their own possible fate and they can
recognize themselves in the other. To test this explanation we conducted a second study in which we added a measure of identification as well as a 'close-other' perspective. In this perspective, participants were to imagine the victim to be a person close to them. Identification was measured in terms of the amount of oneness (Aron et al., 1992) people experienced with the victim. Expected was that in the close-other condition, people would experience more oneness with the victim than in the other two perspectives.

If the explanation of identification for people high in SCO holds true, people high in SCO should experience more feelings of oneness in the other condition than people low in SCO. This moderating role of SCO is not expected in the close-other condition since all people should identify with the victim in that condition. Neither is it expected in the objective condition because people –both high and low in SCO– are actively trying not to identify with the victim when asked to stay objective.

**Study 2.2**

**Method**

**Participants**

Hundred twenty-nine female students (mean age 21.02 years, $SD = 1.60$ years, ranging from 18 to 26 years old) participated in exchange for the chance to win a DVD player.

**Procedure and Measures**

The experiment was conducted in the same way as that of Study 2.1, except for a few modifications. This time, participants were led to believe that the research was conducted to test an advertisement campaign for an existing Dutch institution called 'Victim Care'. This institution's main focus is providing psychological support to people who have been recently the victim of some sort of trauma. The results of this study would be helping 'Victim Care' in determining how to conduct a follow-up national research. The experimental manipulation was identical to that of Study 2.1, except that a third perspective was added: a close-other perspective. Participants in the close-other condition first got the instruction to think of someone who was important to them and describe five characteristics of this person. While listening to the interview they had the same instruction as people in the other condition except that they had to imagine how it would be for the person they just described.

Again, Leonie was described as having had serious facial damage, a shattered foot, and social stigma. SCO (alpha = .80, $M = 3.33$, $SD = .39$), empathy ($r = .75$, $p = .001$)
and distress (alpha = .79) were measured in the same manner as in Study 2.1. To assess identification with the recipient, oneness was measured using the Inclusion of Others in Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992). The IOS exists of seven drawings of two gradually more overlapping circles. To measure actual helping behaviour instead of willingness to help, the questionnaire ended with a letter of authority. On this letter, participants could indicate whether they would support 'Victim Care' by either, donating money, becoming a volunteer or becoming a collector for 'Victim Care'.

Results and Discussion

Analyses showed significant differences between the conditions for all three dependent variables: empathy, F (2,126) = 4.22, p = .017; distress, F (2,126) = 8.58, p = .001 and oneness, F (2,126) = 24.96, p = .001. Table 2.4 shows the mean levels of all measures in the three conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>Oneness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective (n = 42)</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n = 44)</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-other (n = 43)</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means with different superscripts differ at least at p < .05.

Contrasts revealed that participants experienced more empathy when taking an other-perspective (as in Study 2.1) and also when taking a close-other perspective than when staying objective. Also as expected, feelings of oneness differed significantly between all three conditions with participants experiencing more oneness in the close other condition as compared to the other- and objective conditions. Moreover, participants experienced higher levels of distress in the close-other condition than in either of the other conditions. Apparently, the close other condition was effective since it lead to the highest amount of felt oneness with the victim. In this condition both feelings

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2 Due to the large amount of answering categories (divided over the three forms of helping, 13 in sum) and the few amount of people who answered positively to the letter of authority (less than 13%), it was impossible to do any meaningful analysis on this data. We have therefore chosen not to consider this helping measure in the following of the article.
of empathy and distress also raised substantially. But what was the role of SCO in relation to these dependent variables? To provide an answer to this question we took a closer look at the correlations (reported in Table 2.5).

Table 2.5
Correlations among All Measures in Objective, Other and Close-Other Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Objective condition</th>
<th>Other condition</th>
<th>Close-Other condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

Oneness We expected only an effect of SCO on feelings of oneness within the other perspective, with people high in SCO experiencing more oneness than people low in SCO. A moderated multiple regression analysis (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003, pp. 375-378) with oneness as the dependent variable and both the main effects of the perspectives and SCO as well as the interactions between the perspectives and SCO as predictors revealed an overall model with $R^2 = .32$, $F (5,126) = 11.39$, $p = .001$. This model showed a main effect of the other condition versus the objective condition ($b = 1.34, t(84) = 4.79, p = .001$) as well as a main effect of the close-other condition versus the objective condition ($b = 1.94, t(83) = 7.0, p = .001$). There was no main effect of SCO ($b < -.03$ ns.). The main effect of the other versus objective perspective was qualified by a trend towards an interaction between the perspectives and SCO ($b = .45, t(83) = 1.63, p = .106$). Although this interaction effect did not reach statistical significance, simple effect analysis within the perspectives showed once more a very clear pattern. Within the other perspective, people high in SCO experienced more oneness than people low in SCO ($b = 1.06, t(42) = 2.32, p = .025$). No significant raise in oneness as a function of SCO was found in one of the other conditions $b's < -.42$ ns. Figure 2.1 clarifies the combined effects of both the perspectives as well as SCO on these feelings of oneness.
The results described above and visualised in Figure 2.1 clearly show that participants experienced more oneness when they were induced to imagine that the victim was a close-other. Yet, only within the other perspective there was a substantial relationship between SCO and oneness, with people high in SCO experiencing more oneness than people low in SCO. This moderating role of SCO was not expected in the close-other condition since all people should identify with the victim in that condition. Indeed, no relationship between SCO and oneness was found in the close-other condition. These findings are entirely in line with our expectations and seem to confirm that for people high in SCO a natural process of identification with the victim takes place.

**Empathy** Just like in Study 2.1, SCO was also related to empathy in both other conditions but not in the objective condition. The findings indicate once more that people high in SCO experience more empathy when they imagine how the recipient must feel – indifferent of whether this person is a stranger or known to them – but not when they try to stay objective.

**Distress** In Study 2.1 no correlation was found between SCO and distress in either of the conditions. In this study however, a substantial correlation was found between SCO and distress in the objective condition, with people high in SCO experiencing more distress than people low in SCO. It is important to interpret this finding with some caution since it was not found in Study 2.1. Yet, it seems likely that this correlation reflects the often reported higher levels of negative affect of people high in SCO when confronted with a downward comparison target (Buunk & Gibbons, 2005). Apparently, when people high in SCO do not actively focus their attention on the other, they
experience higher levels of personal negative affect. Yet, when their direction of attention
is clearly focused on the other person –i.e. by means of perspective taking– people high in
SCO express a raise in empathy rather than a raise in self related negative affect.

Remarkably, no correlations were found between empathy or distress and feelings
of oneness in the close-other condition. Scatter plots revealed that this lack of
relationship was most likely due to the strength of the manipulation in this condition.
Although there was considerable variance in empathy and distress within the close-other
condition, feelings of oneness were high regardless of this variance, and this has most
likely suppressed the correlations.

The results of this second study show some remarkable consistencies with those of
Study 2.1. In general, people high in SCO tend to experience more empathy for a person
in need when they shift their focus of attention to the recipient. Study 2.2 confirms that
this raise in empathy is related to a process of identification with this person. People high
in SCO experience more feelings of oneness with the recipient than people low in SCO,
regardless whether they know the recipient or not.

General Discussion

These studies were conducted to investigate whether SCO plays a significant role
in the effects of perspective taking on empathy and helping. They also shed a new light
on the fact that people high in social comparison orientation repeatedly experience more
negative affect when confronted with others who are worse off than themselves (Buunk
& Gibbons, 2005; Van der Zee, Oldersma, Buunk, & Bos, 1998). We hypothesized that
this reported negative affect might be an expression of their sensitivity towards, and
sympathy with the suffering of others. Our findings suggest that this is indeed the process
at hand, but only when people focus their attention on that other person. Study 2.1
revealed that people high in SCO who imagine how a person in need must feel experience
more empathy for this person than people low in SCO or people who try to stay
objective. Study 2.2 not only replicated this result, but additionally showed that a process
of identification with the victim takes place. People high in SCO naturally experience
feelings of oneness when focusing their attention on the victim, whereas people low in
SCO only experience oneness when experimentally induced to imagine the other close to
them. Moreover, the empathy felt by people high in SCO was strongly related to the
extent to which they experienced feelings of oneness with the victim.

Some interesting puzzles arise from these studies that need further investigation.
Now that we know that people high in SCO might be potential helpers by nature, the
question rises to what extent these people are naturally inclined to take the perspective of someone else. According to the studies that have shown that people high in SCO report higher levels of negative affect, one might expect they are not. Yet, these studies did not measure empathy in the first place. The reported negative affect might have been simply the result of their incapability to express their empathy for the victim. Also, the relationship between SCO and helping needs further investigation. Due to measurement issues, Study 2.2 did in part not replicate the findings in Study 2.1. Is there a direct link between SCO and willingness to help? Or is this relationship entirely mediated by feelings of empathy?

The line of research on motivations to help others in need is known for its controversial outcomes and fierce discussions. Is it possible, as Batson (1991) states, that help can be motivated by an altruistic tendency? Or is it rather an egoistic motive like relieving one’s own negative affect that leads people to help others (Cialdini et al., 1987). The close-other perspective as well as the oneness measure have been extensively used before in research attempting to clarify that although motivations for helping might appear altruistic, those motivations may be ultimately egoistic in nature (Maner et al., 2002; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). With the current research we did not intend to tap into this debate over the existence of ‘true’ altruism. We merely tried to determine whether the relationship between SCO and empathy was due to the underlying process of oneness (identification). Whether oneness is an egotistic motivation for helping is another question, which first needs further specification of its concepts. Obviously, the concept of ‘oneness’ and the concept of ‘empathy’ are interrelated under some circumstances. For those people who are naturally inclined to compare themselves with others this seems to be especially true.

These findings complement and extend previous research, both on the effects of perspective taking in a person in need situation, as well as on ‘mapping’ the differences between people high and low in SCO. Complementing the work by Buunk and Gibbons (2005), these findings clarify the nature of the negative affect that is has repeatedly been found among people high in SCO in response to downward comparisons. First, this negative affect might stem from a process of identification with the other in need. Second, and more importantly, when their attention is channelled in a perspective on the other, this negative affect seems to be primarily an expression of sympathy for the person in need. People high in SCO are obviously more sensitive to the suffering of others than people low in SCO. This involvement can be channelled in such a way that it leads to a raise in empathy. To conclude, the present research underlines again that empathy is an
important predictor of peoples’ helping intentions, and is the first to demonstrate that this empathy results in part from a social comparison process.