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## The Impact of Story Emotion and Personal History on Empathy

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The Impact of Story Emotion and Personal History on Empathy

Megan Hurley

Eastern Kentucky University

### Abstract

Empathy is integral to the average human experience, allowing individuals to understand others and motivating action if help is needed. A lack of empathy can have profound negative implications for the individual and society as a whole, and therefore factors that influence levels of empathy are of interest to researchers as well as professionals involved in persuasion. The purpose of this experiment is to analyze the behavioral effects of consuming stories, examining the impact of the story's level of emotion and demographic variables like past experiences on empathy. The hypotheses will be tested that individuals with a similar background to the story will have lower levels of empathy than individuals who do not have a similar background to the story, individuals who read the emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who read the non-emotional story, and individuals with a similar background to the story who read an emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who have a similar background to the story and read the non-emotional story. Participants will be Eastern Kentucky University students who will read a vignette and complete questionnaires over bullying and empathy.

### The Impact of Story Emotion and Personal History on Empathy

Empathy is integral to the human experience, allowing individuals to understand others and motivating action if help is needed. Empathy is the act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing and responding to the emotional state of others (Barker, 2003). State empathy, in particular, can be defined as a process by which we understand others (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). A lack of empathy can have profound negative implications for the individual and society as a whole. The applications of empathy have been studied in a variety of settings such as a skill in the field of social work, persuasion in public service announcements, antisocial behavior, and helping behaviors (Cuff, Brown, & Taylor, & Howatt, 2014; Shen, 2010; Shirtcliff, Vitaccos, Gostisha, & Mertz, 2009; Hein, Lamm, Brodbeck, Singer, 2011). Fluctuations in empathy can be caused by a variety of factors, including emotional stimuli that can increase levels of empathy (Barraza, Alexander, Beavin, Terris, & Zak, 2015). It is still unclear how a story's level of emotion and a participant's background would interact to affect empathy. The current study analyzes the behavioral effects of consuming stories, examining the impact of the story's level of emotion and demographic variables like past experiences on empathy.

Empathy has been studied among a variety of groups, including prosocial responses to victims of natural disasters (Banfield & Dovidio, 2012), deficits of empathy in sex offenders (Buschman, Wilcox, Spreen, Marshall, & Bogaerts, 2008), and empathy in victims of extreme violence (Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008). Bullying is a particularly prominent topic of study. Bullying is defined by an intention to harm, power imbalance, and repetitiveness (Olweus, 1994). Bystander responses to offline bullying and cyberbullying can help stop bullying, help the victim to cope with the incident, or increase the severity of harm by joining the bullies. This makes empathy reactions in response to bullying important. Cognitive empathy and affective empathy have been

found to be negatively correlated to aggression, offline bullying, and cyberbullying and are positively correlated to prosocial behavior and defending behavior in offline bullying (Machackovai & Pfetsch, 2016). Normative beliefs have been positively connected with reinforcing the bully and the more participants approved of aggressive responses in relation to a provocation, the more they reported reinforcement as bystanders of cyberbullying (Machackovai & Pfetsch, 2016). Multiple variables can affect empathy towards bullying victims, which is information that can be used to understand the reactions of bystanders.

While fluctuations in empathy can be provoked by changes in emotional stimuli, a person's empathetic reactions can also be accounted for by their background and personal history with the subject matter. A person's memory changes based off of their current appraisals of the subject matter. After the verdict of the criminal trial of O.J. Simpson was announced, participants reported their emotional reactions and their appraisals when they first learned of the verdict a week after the trial, after two months, and again after more than a year. The emotional responses participants reported depended on how they currently appraised the event. Those who desired the verdict of "not guilty" said they felt primarily happy when he was acquitted and those who wanted a conviction reported feeling primarily angry and surprised when he was acquitted. After two months, the more participants' opinion of O.J Simpson's innocence or guilt had changed, the less stable were their memories for how happy and angry they had felt when he was acquitted (Levine, Prohaska, Burgess, Rice, & Laulhere, 2001). Another way that change of opinion can be accounted for by desensitization bias— exposure can change subjective experiences, meaning people who have more experience with something may perceive situations as better than they are. With time, individuals tend to feel differently about a situation than when they were currently in the situation (Campbell, Boven, O'Brien, & Schwarz, 2014; Nordgren, van der Pligt, Harreveld, 2006).

Victims of extreme violence are assumed to be sensitive to the suffering of others, but the evidence contradicts this. Chaitin and Steinberg (2008) examined the psychosocial effects of the Holocaust and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, finding that being a victim of collective violence often inhibits empathy toward others and creates animosity. They also found that persecution and violence can lead people to become suspicious of others and repress their ability to take positive actions within their own groups. Some research indicates that behaviors that seem to go against self-interest are not necessarily always a product of deliberate decision making, but rather from uncontrolled emotional and physiological factors such as cravings associated with drug addiction, drive states, moods and emotions, and physical pain (Lowewenstein, 1996).

This is similar to how judging others of a similar background seems irrational and is driven by other factors. In general, individuals tend to have more compassion for those going through similar distressing situations than they have endured in the past. However, in some cases, this is not seen. For example, Rutton and McDonnel (2015) found that people who succeeded in completing a challenging task felt less compassion and more contempt for an individual who failed to complete the same challenging task. Individuals who endured a tough event had less favorable evaluations of an individual failing to endure but made more favorable evaluations of an individual who is managing to endure the event. While the general societal consensus is that individuals struggling through an emotionally distressing event should turn to those with similar backgrounds as themselves, this does not account for the psychological consequences of making it through these distressing events. Individuals with a similar background to actually be less empathetic if the current sufferer is perceived as failing in some way (Rutton & McDonnel, 2015). Although having a similar background as someone can certainly induce greater empathy and compassion, it is

necessary to note that this is not always true. People with similar backgrounds can have significantly different viewpoints than each other.

The presentation of stories is useful in evoking different levels of empathy. Exposure to narrative stimuli can have a significant and positive effect on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors and can cause stronger persuasive effects than non-stories (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; Appel & Richter, 2010). Viewing stories can also evoke neurological changes as seen through using magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Neural responses to changes in the stories occurred in the vicinity of regions that increase in activity when people view similar changes or carry out similar activities in the real world (Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, & Zacks, 2009). Stories therefore offer a way to provoke an emotional response from participants.

Research has been done examining empathy from exposure to stories. People exhibiting greater empathy, in the form of donations, had prominent physiological responses (Barraza, Beavin, Terris, & Zak, 2015). Viewing an emotional video increased physiological responses and empathy significantly compared to those who watched an emotionally neutral video. The increase in experienced empathy was associated with greater generosity. Participants who were more empathically engaged by the video showed greater generosity (Barraza & Zak, 2009). Viewing emotional stories provoked higher empathy responses than emotionally neutral stories. The body of research looking at how stories can provoke empathy is steadily building as researchers find ways to use empathy responses in the persuasion of others.

There has been research over the positive correlation between empathy in reaction to emotional stimuli and there is research over how a participant's background influences their level of empathy. However, there are no studies combining the relationship between how emotional the stimuli is, participant's background, and empathy levels. In studies analyzing how emotional

stories provoke higher empathetic changes, they do not account for how the participant's background in relation to the story is a factor. In research looking at how a participant's background impacts their levels of empathy, the level of story emotionality is not accounted for. The current experiment will test how the level of story emotion and participant's background impacts levels of empathy.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Individuals with a similar background to the story will have lower levels of empathy than individuals who do not have a similar background to the story.

H2: Individuals who read the emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who read the non-emotional story.

H3: Individuals with a similar background to the story who read an emotional story will have higher empathy and levels than individuals who have a similar background to the story and read the non-emotional story.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants will be 80 psychology students from the Eastern Kentucky University. Participants will be recruited online through SONA registration and will receive credits counting towards a class.

### **Materials**

**Narratives.** Participants will read one of two vignettes about a bullied high school student. In one narrative, the student is repeatedly teased and bullied by the other students, resulting in her being complicit in bullying as well. The other narrative is also about bullying but

is less emotional. The stories are modified from previous narratives found online (Appendix A). The stories will be given to the participants on a piece of paper that they will be verbally instructed to read.

**Trait Empathy.** Participants will be given the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) as a measure of trait empathy. 28-items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale. Types of statements include “I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me” and “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me”. The participant answers to the degree with which they agree with each statement on a 5-point scale (1 = *does not describe me well*, 5 = *describes me very well*). Each point is designated by choosing a letter on a scale of A, B, C, D, or E with A meaning “Does not describe me well” and E meaning “Describes me very well”. The measure has 4 subscales, each made up of 7 different items. The subscales are perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress. The exact questionnaire will be used without any modifications (Appendix A).

**State Empathy.** Participants will be given the State Empathy Scale (Shen, 2010) after being exposed to the stimuli. 12 items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not agreeing at all*, 5 = *agreeing completely*). The scale measures affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and associative empathy. Each dimension includes four items. An example of a statement for affective empathy is “The character’s emotions are genuine”, an example for cognitive empathy is “I can see the character’s point of view”, and an example of a statement for associative empathy is “I can relate to what the character was going through in the message” (Appendix A).

**Bullying.** Previous bullying scales (Ruttan & McDonell, 2015) will be used to indicate the severity and frequency of the participant’s past bullying experiences. The severity of bullying will be measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *I wasn’t bullied at all*, 5 = *extremely serious*), and

frequency of bullying will be measured on a scale from 7-point scale (1 = *never bullied*, 7 = *constantly bullied*) (Appendix A).

### **Procedure**

All components of the study will be conducted in Dr. Adam Lawson's Lab in the Cammack building on Eastern Kentucky University's campus. All of the participants will be run individually. Participants will be given a consent form prior to the completion of the questionnaires (see Appendix A). Participants will then be asked to complete two questionnaires, each taking little time so the participants can work at their own pace (Appendix B). Participants will then be asked to read one of two different stories about bullying, one group will read an emotional story and the other will read a non-emotional story (Appendix B). Participants will complete one final questionnaire (Appendix B) and then be provided a debriefing form that includes additional information about the study and contact information (see Appendix C).

### **Scoring**

For the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) each item is designated for which subscale it represents by the abbreviations in parenthesis beside them with PT=perspective-taking scale, FS=fantasy scale, EC=empathic concern scale, and PD=personal distress scale. Some of the items will be scored A=0, B=1, C=2, D=3, E=4, and items denoted with a minus will be reversed scored as A=4, B=3,C=2, D=1, E=0. Each subscale of perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress will be scored separately. The numbers given will be averaged together to get a mean for each of the four subscales.

The items on the scale of state empathy are on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all*, 4 = *completely*). The scale includes affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and associative empathy. All items are averaged together and one mean is obtained.

Participants self-report the severity of bullying on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *I wasn't bullied at all*, 5 = *extremely serious*), and frequency of bullying on a 7-point scale (1 = *never bullied*, 7 = *constantly bullied*). Both scales need an answer that is 2 or over for the participant to be counted as being bullied. Answers of 1 will be re-coded as 0 and answers from 2 to 5 will be re-coded as 1.

### **Data Analysis and Expected Results**

I will test the hypotheses that individuals with a similar background to the story will have lower levels of empathy than individuals who do not have a similar background to the story, individuals who read the emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who read the non-emotional story, and individuals with a similar background to the story who read an emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who have a similar background to the story and read the non-emotional story. I will conduct a Univariate ANOVA test. For this test, level of story emotion and participant background will be entered as the independent variables and empathy will be entered as the dependent variable. For the hypothesis to be confirmed, I expect to find statistically significant F-statistics for both main effects and the interaction effect, with the group reading an emotional story having a higher mean than the group reading a non-emotional story, the group having a more similar participant background having a higher mean than the group with a less similar background, and the group with a more similar background who read an emotional story having the highest mean of all the groups.

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Appendix A. Recruitment Statement

The current experiment looks at the emotional reactions to stories.

## Appendix B. Consent Form

## Consent Statement "Reactions to Stories"

Megan Hurley

Hello! I am a student in the Psychology Department here at Eastern Kentucky University. Today, you will be asked to read a narrative and provide your reaction. You will complete three different questionnaires. Your overall participation should take no longer than 30 minutes. If you agree to participate, you will receive a 1.0 outside unit credit.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving prior notice and without penalty. Your responses are anonymous. If you would like to know more about the experiment, you may contact me at [megan\\_hurley15@mymail.eku.edu](mailto:megan_hurley15@mymail.eku.edu). Thanks for participating!

-Megan Hurley

IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE, YOU MAY CONTINUE WITH THE EXPERIMENT. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCONTINUE AT THIS POINT, PLEASE INFORM THE EXPERIMENTER

## Appendix C. Materials

Interpersonal Reactivity Index

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter next to the item number. READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

A: DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME WELL

B

C

D

E: DESCRIBES VERY WELL

1. \_\_\_ I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me.

(FS)

2. \_\_\_ I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)

3. \_\_\_ I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (-)

4. \_\_\_ Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC)

(-)

5. \_\_\_ I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)

6. \_\_\_ In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)

7. \_\_\_ I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely

caught up in it. (FS) (-)

8. \_\_\_ I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)

9. \_\_\_ When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.

(EC)

10. \_\_\_ I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)

11. \_\_\_ I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)

12. \_\_\_ Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (FS) (-)

13. \_\_\_ When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)

14. \_\_\_ Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)

15. \_\_\_ If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other People's arguments. (PT) (-)

16. \_\_\_ After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)

17. \_\_\_ Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)

18. \_\_\_ When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (-)

19. \_\_\_ I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)

20. \_\_\_ I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)

21. \_\_\_ I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)

22. \_\_\_ I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)

23. \_\_\_ When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)

24. \_\_\_ I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)

25. \_\_\_ When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)
26. \_\_\_ When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)
27. \_\_\_ When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)
28. \_\_\_ Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.  
(PT)

Previous Bullying Scale

On a scale from 1 (I wasn't bullied at all) to 5 (experienced extremely serious bullying) rate your level of previous bullying experience:

On a scale from 1 (never bullied) to 7 (constantly bullied) rate the frequency of your previous bullying experience:

State Empathy Scale

Rate the following statements on a scale of 0 to 4 with 0 meaning you agree “not at all” and 4 meaning you agree completely. Write your answer next to each statement.

1. The character’s emotions are genuine.
2. I experienced the same emotions as the character when reading this story.
3. I was in a similar emotional state as the character when reading this story.
4. I can feel the character’s emotions.
5. I can see the character’s point of view.
6. I recognize the character’s situation.
7. I can understand what the character was going through in the story.
8. The character’s reactions to the situation are understandable.
9. When reading the story, I was fully absorbed.
10. I can relate to what the character was going through in the story.
11. I can identify with the situation described in the story.
12. I can identify with the characters in the story.

Story One:

Sticks and stones may break my bones

But words will never hurt me.

I can still remember sinking into my chair when my primary school teacher wrote that ridiculous rhyme on the blackboard. Every day I was living the reality of feeling hurt by words, but that was wrong. My well-meaning teacher gave me yet another reason to feel small and stupid, as if I needed one.

I was bullied throughout most of primary school, mostly by one girl. It was that insidious type of bullying that can go unnoticed by teachers for years. I can no longer remember much of it, but I do remember often lying in bed and trying to stay awake as long as I could on school nights, to delay having to wake up and face another day of humiliation. There were weeks (and sometimes even months) when we had an odd kind of pseudo-friendship, but it never lasted. The wind would change and I would again become contemptible to her. Because she was quite a popular girl, some of my classmates would treat me in accordance with her whims.

I didn't understand it then, and I don't today. I don't really think there's any reason to try.

“Just ignore it”

Kind and well-intentioned adults who had probably never been bullied said things like “Don't rise to it”, “Ignore her and she'll get bored”, and “Ask your teacher to sort it out.” I trusted adults so I did what they told me to do. But it didn't work, it just added ‘tattle-tale’ to the list of verbal sticks and stones that were flung at me when teachers were out of earshot.

There were also negative consequences for my family. It is often said that a school bully is likely to be someone with a difficult home life, but the humiliations at school is why I had problems at home. No one thinks about the child who, after a day of diligently ignoring bullies and keeping their rage veiled, goes home and takes it all out on family members. Because I was so powerless at school, I became a complete nightmare at home. Anger does not disappear when it is suppressed, it simply looks for a different outlet. Throughout high school I had a negative relationship with my family members, constantly yelling at my parents and wanting nothing to do with my brother.

When I began secondary school, I was relieved that another girl was the class punching bag. Making fun of her was a team sport, and I desperately wanted to belong. I had been on the margins throughout most of primary school and I finally had a chance to free myself from that.

One day I made a cruel remark to her. I can no longer remember what it was. She turned around with hurt and anger in her eyes and snapped back at me. Again, I don't remember her words anymore – but I do remember how disgusted I was with myself at that moment. Her reaction reminded me of exactly how it felt to be bullied. Despite this, I continued to make hateful remarks to her in fear of the other students turning on me again. I didn't enjoy participating in bullying, but over time I became unfeeling in my actions. A few of the other girls would stuff hateful messages in her locker that said things such as “you're a whore” and “I hope you kill

yourself.” She transferred abruptly in the middle of the school year and it wouldn’t be until years later that I would hear that she had been cutting herself.

I continued to be very awkward and self-conscious for many years, even though I had been a confident and talkative child before I was bullied. But there were even worse ramifications. I pandered to a boyfriend who accused me of showing off when I expressed pride in something. Later, I allowed myself to be pushed around by a mean-spirited colleague. I could barely muster an objection when he thought it would be hilarious to try to trip me up while I was on crutches.

Story Two:

Sticks and stones may break my bones

But words will never hurt me.

I can still remember sitting in my chair when my primary school teacher wrote that rhyme on the blackboard. Every day I was living the reality of feeling hurt by words, but that was wrong. My well-meaning teacher gave me yet another reason to feel frustrated, as if I needed one.

I was teased throughout most of primary school, mostly by one girl. It was the type of trouble that can go unnoticed by teachers for years. I can no longer remember much of it, but I do remember often lying in bed and worrying about being teased on school nights, wishing to delay having to see this girl who teased me. There were weeks (and sometimes even months) when this girl and I had an odd kind of pseudo-friendship, but it never lasted. Something in her would change and I would again seem unimportant to her. Because she was quite a popular girl, some of my classmates would treat me the same as she would treat me.

I didn't understand it then, and I don't today. I don't really think there's any reason to try.

"Just ignore it"

Kind and well-intentioned adults who had forgotten what it is like to be a teenager said things like "Don't rise to it", "Ignore her and she'll get bored", and "Ask your teacher to sort it out." I believed adults so I did what they told me to do. But it didn't work, it just added 'tattle-tale' to the list of things that were said to me when teachers could not hear us.

There were also negative consequences for my family. It is often said that a kid acting out at school is likely to be someone with a difficult home life, but the trouble at school is why I had problems at home. No one thinks about the child who, after a day of disregarding other kids and keeping their feelings under control, goes home and takes it all out on family members. Because I was so stifled at school, I became very challenging at home. Anger does not disappear when it is pushed down, it simply looks for a different outlet. Throughout high school I had a negative relationship with my family members, constantly raising my voice at my parents and wanting nothing to do with my brother.

When I began secondary school, I was relieved that another girl was being bothered by the class. Making fun of her was a group effort, and I really wanted to belong. I had been on the fringes throughout most of primary school and I finally had a chance to be part of the main group.

One day I made a mean remark to her. I can no longer remember what it was. She turned around with hurt and anger in her eyes and grumbled back at me. Again, I don't remember her words anymore – but I do remember how mad I was with myself after her reaction. Her anger reminded me of exactly how it felt to be teased. Despite this, I continued to make mean remarks to her in fear of the other students bothering me again. I didn't enjoy participating in bugging her, but over time I became unfeeling in my actions. A few of the other girls would stuff mean messages in her locker that said things such as "Purple is not your color" and "Stay away from my

boyfriend.” She transferred in the middle of the school year and it wouldn’t be until years later that I would hear that she had been seeing a counselor.

I continued to be very awkward and self-conscious for many years, even though I had been a confident and talkative child before I was teased. But there were even worse consequences. I stayed with a boyfriend who accused me of showing off when I expressed pride in something. Later, I allowed myself to be pushed around by a mean colleague. I could barely speak up in response when he thought it would be hilarious to make fun of me when I was on crutches.

## Appendix D. Script

**Verbal Script:**

- Debriefing stage:

Hello, this is a copy of the consent form, please read over it and if you agree, sign and date it at the bottom.

- First round of questionnaires:

Here are three different surveys. The instructions for each one are at the top and you can take your time.

- Reading the vignette:

Please read this this story, you can take your time.

- Final questionnaire:

This is the last part of the study. You just have to fill out this survey, and again, the instructions are at the top and take your time.

- Debriefing form:

Here is a copy of the debriefing form. This just goes over what the study is about. If you have any questions, you can reach out using the contact information at the bottom.

## Appendix E. Debriefing Form

## Debriefing Form

## “The Impact of Story Emotion and Personal History on Empathy”

Thank you for participating in this experiment! The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of level of story emotion and participant background on empathy. This study tests the hypotheses that people with a similar background to the story will have lower levels of empathy than individuals who do not have a similar background to the story, individuals who read the emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who read the non-emotional story, and that individuals with a similar background to the story who read an emotional story will have higher empathy levels than individuals who have a similar background to the story and read the non-emotional story. The independent variables in this study were participant background and level of story emotion and the dependent variable was empathy. Empathy was measured through the Interpersonal Reactivity Index and a State Empathy Scale.

With this information, we hope to learn more about the different factors that influence empathy.

If you have any questions, please contact us. Megan Hurley, the Principal Investigator responsible for this project, can be reached at [megan\\_hurley15@mymail.eku.edu](mailto:megan_hurley15@mymail.eku.edu). If you would like to learn more about the concepts of this study, you may want to read the following papers:

- Barraza, J. A. & Zak, P. J. (2009). Empathy toward strangers triggers oxytocin release and subsequent generosity. *Annals of the New York Academy of Social Sciences*, 1167, 182-189.
- Rutton, L. R. & McDonnel, M. H. (2015). Having “been there” doesn’t mean I care: when prior experience reduces compassion for emotional distress. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 108(4), 610-622.