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# Evaluations of Empathizers Depend on the Target of Empathy

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Psychological research on empathy typically focuses on understanding its effects on empathizers and empathic targets. Little is known, however, about the effects of empathy beyond its dyadic context. Taking an extradyadic perspective, we examined how third-party observers evaluate empathizers. Seven experiments documented that observers' evaluations of empathizers depend on the target of empathy. Empathizers (vs. nonempathizers) of a stressful experience were respected/liked more when the empathic target was positive (e.g., children's hospital worker), but not when the target was negative (e.g., White supremacist; Experiments 1 and 2). Empathizers were respected/liked more when responding to a positive target who disclosed a positive experience (i.e., a personal accomplishment), but less when responding to a negative target who disclosed a positive experience (Experiment 3). These effects were partly, but not solely, attributable to the positivity of empathic responses (Experiment 4). Expressing empathy (vs. condemnation) toward a negative target resulted in less respect/liking when the disclosed experience was linked to the source of target valence (i.e., stress from White supremacist job; Experiments 5 through 7), but more respect/liking when the experience was unrelated to the source of target valence (i.e., stress from cancer; Experiment 7). Overall, empathizers were viewed as warmer, but to a lesser extent when responding to a negative target. These findings highlight the importance of considering the extradyadic impact of empathy and suggest that although people are often encouraged to empathize with disliked others, they are not always favored for doing so.

**Keywords:** attitudes, empathy, impression formation, perspective taking, person perception

**Supplemental materials:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000341.supp>

In November 2017, a *New York Times* article by journalist Richard Fausset drew harsh criticism from the public. The article profiled a man, Tony Hovater, and depicted mundane details from his life, including the contents of his wedding registry, TV shows he enjoys, and his music tastes. The journalist took an empathic approach to understand why “. . . this man, intelligent, socially adroit and raised middle class . . . gravitate[s] toward the furthest extremes of American political discourse” (Fausset, 2017). The profile was derided because Hovater is a White nationalist. “Nazi sympathizers are supposed to be reviled and ostracized, not humanized and normalized,” a reader wrote to the editor (Shapiro, 2017). Other readers similarly chastised the journalist for expressing empathy toward Hovater, claiming instead that the journalist


should have been more neutral or even actively condemning (e.g., Vernon, 2017).

The backlash to this profile illustrates that expressions of empathy—typically studied at a dyadic level between expressers of empathy (i.e., *empathizers*) and the recipients of those expressions (i.e., *empathic targets*)—can have a broader impact on people outside the dyad. Despite the vast literature on empathy and the central role it plays in public discourse (e.g., Baron-Cohen, 2011; Decety & Ickes, 2009), however, current understanding of empathy largely remains limited to the empathic dyad. The view emerging from this literature is generally positive: Empathy is often celebrated as a moral virtue, and expressions of empathy are evaluated favorably by targets (e.g., Goldstein, Vezich, & Shapiro, 2014). Understanding how third-party observers evaluate empathy, especially how they evaluate empathizers, not only promises to advance theoretical understanding of the social effects of empathy; it also has practical implications for understanding how empathy affects social networks, where observers' evaluations can have consequences for people in empathic dyads. Here, we examined how third-party observers—those who witness expressions of empathy as outsiders—evaluate empathizers.

## Evaluations of Empathy

Empathy is broadly conceptualized as a multifaceted, interpersonal construct (Batson, 2009; Davis, 1994). Although many definitions of empathy exist, most definitions include cognitive and affective components that entail acknowledging (and sometimes sharing) how another person thinks or feels (e.g., Decety &

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Hodges, 2006; Zaki & Ochsner, 2012). Empathy is commonly viewed as a “universal good.” Buddhist traditions consider “empathic joy” a human ideal (Davidson & Harrington, 2002; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Philosopher Adam Smith (1759/1982) claimed that the ability to “place ourselves in [another’s] situation . . . and become in some measure the same person with him (p. 48),” is essential to moral good. More recently, empathy has been hailed by politicians, entrepreneurs, and scholars as a key path toward various forms of social flourishing, including justice, intergroup harmony, global peace, and even human survival (e.g., Baron-Cohen, 2011; Obama, 2006; Rifkin, 2009; Safire, 2008). This call for empathy parallels the growing popularity of empathy training in the workplace and the classroom (Crowley & Saide, 2016; Lublin, 2016; Spencer-Keyse, 2018). Empathy, it seems, is a virtue believed to improve social relations and to shape the next generation for the better.

Why is empathy so fervently advocated? One putative benefit of empathy is that it can help bridge social divides. This idea can be traced to various cultural roots: For example, religious teachings explicitly encourage empathy toward people who are different from oneself—even people one may actively dislike. Christians are taught to “love your enemies.” This sentiment is echoed in a Sioux prayer: “Great Spirit, help me never to judge another until I have walked in his moccasins.” Contemporary perspectives likewise maintain that empathy across social divides enables prosocial outcomes and that intergroup conflict results, in part, from empathic failures (Klimecki, 2019; Todd & Galinsky, 2014; Zaki & Cikara, 2015). For example, the Center for Empathy in International Affairs (CEIA), in its 2016 report on conflict resolution, championed empathy as “an essential tool to resolve conflict and to ensure the sustainability of peace” (CEIA, 2016, p. 2). Together, these views converge in extolling the virtues of expressing empathy toward outgroups, adversaries, and otherwise disliked others.<sup>1</sup>

### Evaluations of Empathizers

Given that expressing empathy toward other people—even disliked others—is encouraged, how might empathizers be evaluated? At first glance, the answer to this question seems obvious: Presumably, people who show empathy should be viewed positively, because empathy itself is highly valued. Although little work has directly examined this question, existing evidence, generally from the perspective of empathic targets, suggests that empathizers are indeed liked. Such is the case in romantic relationships (e.g., Cramer, 2003; Davis & Oathout, 1987). For example, believing that one’s spouse has taken one’s own perspective predicts favorable relationship outcomes (Long & Andrews, 1990). Such associations are also evident in nonromantic relationships: Patients who feel empathized with by their physicians trust their physicians more and are more likely to comply with treatment (Kim, Kaplowitz, & Johnston, 2004), and customers who feel empathized with by salespeople view these salespeople more favorably (Aggarwal, Castleberry, Ridnour, & Shepherd, 2005). Because these studies were correlational and examined congenial (and often established) relationships, however, it is unclear whether the targets’ positive views of empathizers were attributable to empathy per se or simply reflected overall relationship satisfaction.

Several experiments have provided causal evidence for how empathizers are evaluated by targets in dyads of strangers. Gold-

stein et al. (2014), for example, examined the consequences of *perceived perspective-taking*, which they defined as the belief that another person has taken one’s own perspective. Participants wrote about a personal experience (e.g., being treated unfairly by their boss), which they then shared with another ostensible participant. Participants who believed that the other participant had taken their perspective viewed that person more positively. Furthermore, this effect was mediated by participants’ belief that the perspective-taker felt empathy toward them. Positive views of empathizers have also been found in relationships that are typically antagonistic: People who imagined being victims of bullying were more likely to trust and forgive the offender when they believed the offender had taken their perspective when renouncing bullying (Berndsen, Wenzel, Thomas, & Noske, 2018).

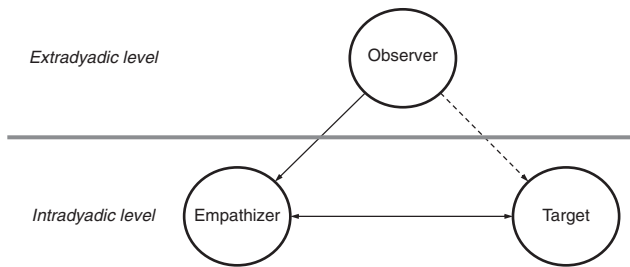
Notably, existing research on evaluations of empathizers has focused exclusively on how empathic targets evaluate those who have empathized with them. Given that empathic targets are likely beneficiaries of empathy, it is perhaps unsurprising that their evaluations of empathizers are positive. What remains unknown is whether empathy has evaluative implications beyond the empathic dyad. Third-party observers can form impressions of both empathizers and targets (see Figure 1). Indeed, empathy is often apparent in conversation speech patterns, such as the speaker’s use of expressions familiar to the target and incorporation of the target’s feedback (Krauss & Fussell, 1991)—information that can be readily observed by people outside the conversation. Expressions of empathy can also be directly stated. As exemplified by Bill Clinton’s refrain of “I feel your pain,” made famous during his 1992 U.S. Presidential campaign, empathizers can express empathy toward specific people (i.e., intradyadic targets) in a way that allows third-party observers (in Clinton’s case, audience members and other potential voters) to witness. The same is true in daily life: One might observe someone saying “I feel for you” to a friend or overhear a person say “I can put myself in your shoes” to a coworker.

### Third-Party Observers’ Evaluations of Empathizers

How might third-party observers of expressions of empathy evaluate empathizers? On one hand, empathizers can make a positive impression on observers. For example, many credited Bill Clinton’s empathic connection with voters as a reason for his eventual win (Levine, 1993). On the other hand, as the backlash to the empathic *New York Times* profile of a White nationalist illustrates, observers’ evaluations of empathizers might not be uniformly positive and might even be negative. What remains unknown is whether, and under what conditions, expressing empathy has different consequences for third-party observers’ evaluations of empathizers.

We considered three accounts of how observers might evaluate empathizers. The first account draws from elemental approaches to impression formation and suggests that observers’ evaluations of empathizers should have the same valence as evaluations of em-

<sup>1</sup> Importantly, not all scholars have a purely positive view of empathy (e.g., Bloom, 2017; Prinz, 2011; Scarry, 1996). Bloom, for instance, claims that empathy is biased and can lead to parochialism, atrocities, and immorality. Instead, he favors utilitarianism and compassion as guides for moral decision making. Yet, the case remains that empathy is widely celebrated.



*Figure 1.* A conceptual diagram of the current research. Moving beyond the vast majority of research on empathy, which examines the effects of empathy on the empathizer or the target within a dyad (i.e., intradyadic level), we focus on the effects of empathy beyond the dyad (i.e., extradynamic level). Specifically, we examine how people outside an empathic dyad evaluate the empathizer (depicted as the solid arrow pointing from observer to empathizer) as a function of how observers evaluate the target (depicted as the dotted arrow pointing from observer to target).

pathy. Information integration theories, for example, posit that evaluation of an attitude object (e.g., empathizer) is the weighted average of evaluations of relevant elements of that object (e.g., empathic expressions; Anderson, 1971): Because empathy is viewed positively, evaluations of empathizers, on average, should also be positive. Similarly, expectancy-value models of attitudes maintain that evaluation of an attitude object is a function of (1) beliefs about the attributes that characterize the object and (2) evaluations of those attributes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Thus, if one (1) believes a person is an empathizer and (2) evaluates empathy positively, one should evaluate the empathizer positively. This account aligns with research documenting positive evaluations of empathizers by empathic targets (Goldstein et al., 2014). Importantly, this account suggests that observers' evaluations of empathizers should not be calibrated to the specific target of empathy. Instead, evaluations of empathizers should simply reflect the (positive) valence of empathy itself.

The second account, which draws from balance and attribution theories (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965), suggests that evaluations of empathizers might not be uniformly positive. Instead, observers might consider characteristics of the empathic target and form evaluations of empathizers accordingly. If observers dislike the target, for example, they should also dislike the empathizer, because the empathizer expresses affinity for the disliked target. Doing so allows observers to achieve affective balance (Heider, 1958) and to resolve conflict between the positive valence of empathy and the negative valence of the target. This proposition draws from a rich theoretical tradition on the importance of maintaining cognitive consistency (Abelson et al., 1968; Festinger, 1957; Insko, 1984; Newcomb, 1953; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). According to these perspectives, inconsistencies lead to attitude change in the direction of restoring consistency. Given a positive evaluation of empathy and a negative evaluation of the target, observers should devalue the empathizer to preserve attitudinal consistency.<sup>2</sup>

A third account arises from a logical integration of the first two accounts; it suggests that observers' evaluations of empathizers should be shaped by both the valence of empathy and the attitudinal consistency pressures that target characteristics impose. On this account, neither the valence of empathy nor attitudinal con-

sistency pressures alone drive evaluations; rather, both exert forces that together shape observers' evaluations of empathizers. When the target is liked, the two forces operate in conjunction: The positive valence of empathy (i.e., "I like empathy") and the positive valence of the target (i.e., "I like the empathic target") are aligned, resulting in positive evaluations of empathizers. When the target is disliked, however, the two forces are in opposition: The positive valence of empathy is counteracted by attitudinal consistency pressures (i.e., "That person is expressing empathy toward someone I dislike"). Because attitudinal consistency pressures should bolster evaluations of empathizers with liked targets but dampen evaluations of empathizers with disliked targets, evaluations of empathizers with disliked targets should be less positive than evaluations of empathizers with liked targets.

Both the second account and the third account posit that evaluations of empathizers should be attuned to target valence. Unlike the second account, however, the third account predicts that evaluations of empathizers with a disliked target should not fully align with the negative valence of the target, due to the positive valence of empathy acting in the opposite direction. That is, the positive effect of the valence of empathy on evaluations of empathizers should be attenuated or even "canceled out" by the negative effect of the valence of the disliked target, but not fully reversed (as would be predicted by the second account). The relative strength of these two opposing forces is a key determinant of whether the positive effect of empathy is tempered or eliminated when the target is disliked.

Thus, the three accounts yield different concrete predictions about how evaluations of empathizers should vary as a function of target valence. The first account posits that empathizers should be evaluated positively regardless of the target and thus predicts only a main effect of empathy and no moderation by target valence. The second account proposes that evaluations of empathizers should align with target valence and predicts a crossover interaction whereby empathizers are evaluated more positively when the target is liked but are evaluated more negatively when the target is disliked. The third account holds that evaluations of empathizers should integrate both the valence of empathy and the valence of the target; this account predicts an attenuated or even a "knockout" interaction whereby the positive effect of empathy when the target is liked is attenuated or even eliminated (but not reversed) when the target is disliked.

## Overview of Experiments

Guided by these different accounts, we report seven experiments and an internal meta-analysis examining whether third-party observers' evaluations of empathizers differ based on characteristics of empathic targets. In all experiments, participants learned about an interaction in which a target disclosed a personal experience to a responder, who responded in an empathic or a nonempathic way.

<sup>2</sup> These consistency-based perspectives generally suggest that people preserve consistency by adjusting evaluative elements that are easiest to change (e.g., Festinger, 1957). Thus, although updating general beliefs about empathy or changing existing evaluations of a disliked person can also allow observers to preserve consistency, both possibilities are more drastic than updating beliefs about a particular person (especially a stranger) who displays empathy and arguably less likely in many circumstances.

Participants then evaluated the responder. This paradigm reflects a common way that people observe expressions of empathy: via social interactions in verbal forms (e.g., reading online exchanges between people). More importantly, it afforded experimental control by allowing us to manipulate characteristics of both the responder and the target.

Experiment 1 examined evaluations of empathizers and the potential moderating role of target valence (i.e., whether the target is positively or negatively portrayed). Experiment 2 conceptually replicated Experiment 1 with a more realistic setup and a less extreme target valence manipulation. In Experiment 3, we changed the nature of the target's experience and explored how positive empathy (i.e., empathizing with a positive experience) affects evaluations of empathizers. Experiment 4 investigated whether the results of Experiments 1 and 2 could instead be explained by response positivity rather than empathy. We also assessed inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target as a potential mediator. Our final three experiments focused on empathy toward a negatively portrayed target and examined whether a condemning (vs. empathic) response evokes more positive evaluations of the responder (Experiments 5 through 7), whether these effects are moderated by the gender of the characters (Experiment 6), and whether these effects may be reversed in some cases (Experiment 7).

In all experiments, participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and completed the materials online for modest remuneration. MTurk workers were eligible to participate if they lived in the United States; in Experiments 2 through 7, they were eligible only if they had not completed a previous experiment in this line of work. We decided a priori to exclude data from participants who failed any attention checks or gave identical nonneutral responses (i.e., other than "4" on seven-point scales) across all dependent variables (DVs).

We conducted power analyses to determine the target sample size for each experiment and collected data until reaching our a priori target sample size before analyzing data. In Experiment 1, we set a target sample size that would provide 80% power ( $\alpha = .05$ ) to detect a small effect ( $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ) in a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects design. In Experiments 2 through 7, we set conservative target sample sizes based on power analyses that used effect size estimates observed in our previous experiments. We report sample sizes and data exclusions in the main text; participant details and power for each experiment appear in the online supplemental materials.

For each experiment, we report all conditions, manipulations, and key DVs of interest. All manipulations in all experiments were successful; details appear in the online supplemental materials. We distinguish between planned and unplanned (exploratory) data analyses, and we note departures from planned data analyses where appropriate.

## Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was our first test of whether evaluations of empathizers depend on the valence of the target. Participants read about an interaction between Ann (target) and Beth (responder), who were meeting for the first time. They learned that Ann, who worked for either a children's hospital (positive target) or a White supremacist group (negative target), disclosed a stressful experience, and that Beth responded in an empathic or nonempathic way.

Our three accounts yield different predictions. The first account predicts only a main effect of response type and no moderation by target valence. The second account predicts a crossover interaction whereby the empathic response results in more positive evaluations of the responder when target valence is positive but more negative evaluations when target valence is negative. The third account predicts an attenuated interaction whereby the positive effect of the empathic response in the positive target condition is weaker (and possibly eliminated) in the negative target condition.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants were 464 MTurk workers (75.9% White, 8.0% Black or African American, 8.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.7% Native American, 4.7% mixed race or multiracial, 1.3% self-described other racial identities)<sup>3</sup>. Based on our a priori exclusion criteria, we excluded 89 participants for failing the attention check on Beth's response, 52 for failing the attention check on Ann's employer, and seven for giving identical nonneutral responses to the DVs (note that some participants met more than one exclusion criterion). The final sample size was 336.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 2 (response type: empathic vs. nonempathic)  $\times$  2 (target valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects conditions. As part of a study on "first impressions," participants learned about an interaction between two people, Beth and Ann. Participants saw an ostensible business card belonging to Ann; it included her name, contact information, and, critically, her employer. In the positive target condition, Ann did event planning and outreach for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. In the negative target condition, Ann did event planning and outreach for Aryan Nations (a White supremacist group; see Figure 2). To ensure that participants understood the mission of Ann's employer, an organization slogan appeared on the business card ("Finding Cures/Saving Children" for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, "White People Awake/Save Our Great Race" for Aryan Nations).<sup>4</sup> Participants then reported their first impression of Ann (1 = *very negative*, 4 = *neutral*, 7 = *very positive*) as a manipulation check on target valence.

Next, participants read an excerpt of an interaction between Beth and Ann, who were meeting for the first time. Beth had just learned about Ann's job, and Ann was telling Beth about a recent stressful experience. All participants read the following statement from Ann:

I'm feeling really stressed. I'm organizing an event, and my team is expecting a large attendance. I've been having trouble with the logistics of it, and the date of the event was recently delayed because we did not hear back from the city council in time. The stress has affected my sleep, and I've been feeling awful because of it.

Participants then saw Beth's response. In the empathic response condition, Beth said, "I feel for you—I can really put myself in

<sup>3</sup> Due to a programming oversight, we did not collect information on participant gender and age in Experiment 1. We report participant gender and age for all other experiments.

<sup>4</sup> Both slogans are real. "Finding cures. Saving children." is indeed the slogan of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. "White people awake, save our great race" is commonly associated with the Hammerskin Nation, another White supremacist group (Tenold, 2018). We decided to use Aryan Nations because it is more well-known.

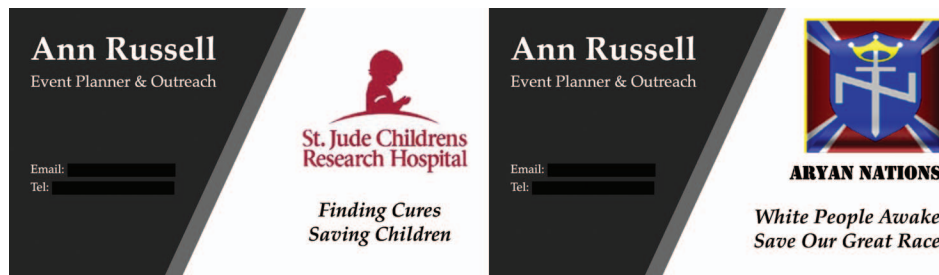


Figure 2. Stimuli used in Experiment 1 to manipulate target valence. In the positive target condition (left), the target (Ann Russell) works for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital; in the negative target condition (right), the target works for Aryan Nations. Fictitious contact information (redacted here) appeared on the business card. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

your shoes in this situation. When is the event taking place?" In the nonempathic response condition, Beth said, "Okay, I see. When is the event taking place?"

Following the excerpt, as an attention check, participants identified Beth's response to Ann from a list ("I can really put myself in your shoes in this situation," "Okay, I see," "I do not understand your situation," or "none of the above"). They then completed the primary DVs assessing evaluations of Beth by indicating how much they *liked*, *respected*, *trusted*, and *would like to be friends with* Beth (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and how *understanding*, *kind*, *cold* (reverse-coded), and *caring* Beth was (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very* \_\_\_\_\_, with \_\_\_\_\_ as the trait word). Participants then completed an exploratory measure, a manipulation check on response empathy ("To what extent do you think Beth empathized with Ann?" 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and an attention check on Ann's employer ("St. Jude Children's Research Hospital," "Aryan Nations," "Pacific Gas and Electric Company," and "no work information of Ann was given").<sup>5</sup> Last, they answered an open-ended question on their reaction to the interaction and completed demographic questions.

## Results

**Data reduction.** To reduce the dimensions of our primary DVs, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using promax rotation in R (Version 3.6.0; R Core Team, 2019) and arrived at a two-factor solution,  $\chi^2(13) = 22.88$ ,  $p = .043$ .<sup>6</sup> Four items loaded onto the first factor, which we interpreted as respect/liking; the other four items loaded onto the second factor, which we interpreted as warmth (see Figure 3). Each item loaded onto its primary factor at higher than  $\lambda = .70$  and the other factor at lower than  $\lambda = .25$ . Solutions with three or more factors did not have theoretically sensible structures or item loadings on any additional factors above  $\lambda = .35$ , and the solution with one factor did not describe the data well,  $\chi^2(20) = 283.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ; thus, we retained our two-factor solution, which accounted for 66% of the total variance (Factor 1 = 35.6%; Factor 2 = 30.0%). Based on this factor structure and the comparable item loadings within each factor, we calculated the mean ratings of the first four items as a respect/liking composite ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and the mean ratings of the last four items as a warmth composite ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Although these composites were highly correlated ( $r = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ), EFA suggested that they were best considered as distinct dimensions, so

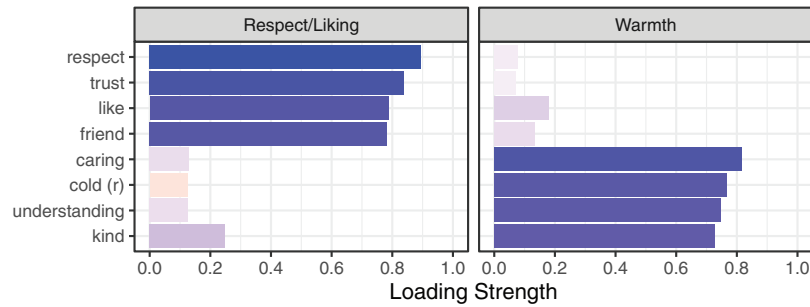
we conducted our primary analyses on these composites separately.

**Respect/liking.** A 2 (response type: empathic vs. nonempathic)  $\times$  2 (target valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) on respect/liking revealed that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 332) = 14.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ , 90% confidence interval (CI) [.01, .08], and when Ann was positively (vs. negatively) portrayed,  $F(1, 332) = 48.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ , 90% CI [.08, .18]. More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 332) = 5.40$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , 90% CI [.001, .05]. When Ann was positively portrayed, participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.01$  vs.  $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $F(1, 332) = 20.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ , 90% CI [.02, .10]. When Ann was negatively portrayed, however, respect/liking for Beth did not significantly differ by response type ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.73$  vs.  $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ),  $F(1, 332) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .317$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .02] (see Figure 4, left panel).

**Warmth.** An identical 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA on warmth revealed that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 332) = 46.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ , 90% CI [.07, .18], and when Ann was positively (vs. negatively) portrayed,  $F(1, 332) = 8.07$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , 90% CI [.004, .06]. More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 332) = 9.23$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ , 90% CI [.01, .06]. When Ann was positively portrayed, participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.10$  vs.  $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F(1, 332) = 52.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$ , 90% CI [.08, .19]. Unlike the results for respect/liking, even when Ann was negatively portrayed, participants still rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD =$

<sup>5</sup> In this and all subsequent experiments, we included an exploratory item assessing beliefs about the similarity between Beth and Ann. Because this variable was not central to our research questions, we report it here for transparency but do not discuss it further. Exploratory analyses on this item appear in the online supplemental materials.

<sup>6</sup> Following Flora and Flake's (2017) recommendations, we verified that our interpretation of the factors was consistent across several oblique rotations and estimation methods.



*Figure 3.* Results from the exploratory factor analysis on the primary dependent variables in Experiment 1. The *x*-axis depicts the absolute loading strength of an item on the factor indicated in the panel headings. All factor loadings except that of *cold* (reverse-coded) on respect/liking were positive. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

1.45 vs.  $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), though this effect was significantly smaller,  $F(1, 332) = 6.75$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , 90% CI [.003, .05] (see Figure 4, right panel).

## Discussion

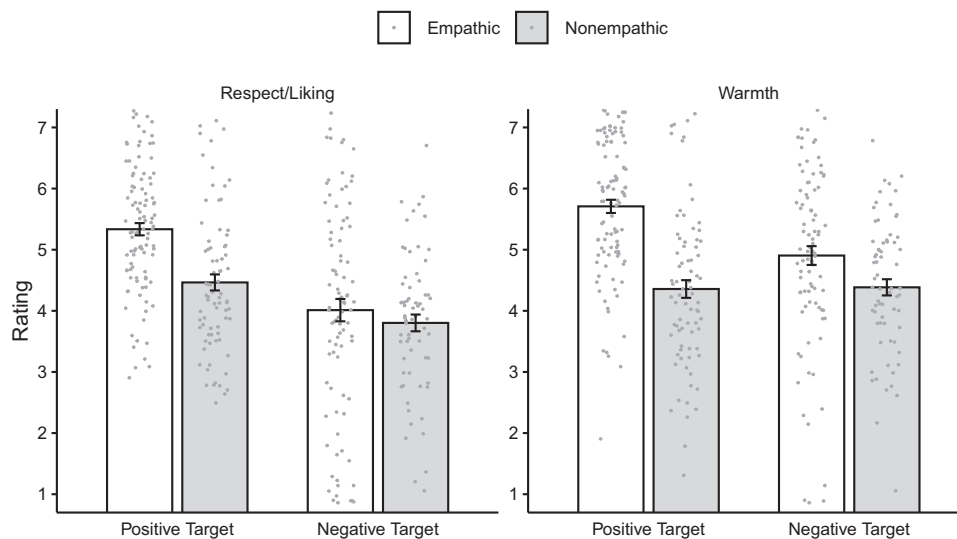
Experiment 1 provides initial evidence that evaluations of empathizers depend on to whom empathy is shown. Participants respected/liked the empathizer more when the target was positively portrayed, but not when the target was negatively portrayed. Participants rated the empathizer as warmer overall, but this effect was stronger when the target was positively (vs. negatively) portrayed. Experiment 1 also provides initial evidence that respect/liking and warmth reflect two related but distinct dimensions along which participants evaluated the responder.

The study materials contained several ambiguities, however, that might have contributed to these results. Although the instructions explicitly stated that Beth and Ann were meeting for the first time, some participants might have assumed that they knew each other beforehand. If so, perhaps the observed

effects are due, in part, to participants' beliefs about the relationship between Beth and Ann (e.g., Beth associates with a White supremacist, so Beth is not a good person), rather than Beth's response to Ann. Furthermore, because the target valence manipulation appeared before the dialogue, participants in the negative target condition might have assumed that Beth did not know that Ann worked for Aryan Nations or what Aryan Nations is.

To address these ambiguities, we conducted a conceptual replication of Experiment 1 (see Experiment S1 in the online supplemental materials). We extended the dialogue between Beth and Ann to clarify that (1) they did not know each other beforehand and that (2) Beth learned, via Ann's self-disclosure to her, what organization Ann worked for and understood its mission. Results largely replicated those of Experiment 1.

Together, Experiments 1 and S1 indicate that evaluations of empathizers depended on target valence. When the target was positively portrayed, the empathizer was respected/liked more and was rated as warmer than the nonempathizer; when the



*Figure 4.* Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type and target valence in Experiment 1. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.



target was negatively portrayed, the empathizer was still rated as warmer but no longer respected/liked more. In Experiment 2, we used a different paradigm and target valence manipulation to test the generalizability of these findings. We also modified the responses to rule out a potential confound: Beth's question "When is the event taking place?" might have implied interest in attending the event; thus, we removed this question from all conditions in Experiment 2.

## Experiment 2

Experiment 1 used a vignette-based paradigm in which the target was portrayed as working for either a children's hospital or a White supremacist organization. Although the strength of this manipulation helped maximize the statistical power of our experimental design (Ledgerwood, 2019), it is possible that the findings in Experiment 1 depend on this particular manipulation and would not replicate with a less extreme target valence manipulation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, although the vignettes resemble some real-world scenarios (e.g., reading about an empathic exchange between two people on social media), participants might have treated the interaction as a hypothetical scenario and might have reacted differently if they believed the interaction was real. Therefore, in Experiment 2, we tested the generalizability of the key findings from Experiment 1 by using a less extreme target valence manipulation (target holding provaccination vs. antivaccination beliefs) and presenting the interaction as part of an ostensible, in-person study. These changes allowed us to test if the findings from Experiment 1 are limited to its particular manipulation and paradigm or are broader in scope.

## Method

**Participants.** We publicly preregistered our analysis plan on AsPredicted (<https://aspredicted.org/qr8nk.pdf>). Participants were 614 MTurk workers (49% female, 51% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.9$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.5$ ; 77.4% White, 11.7% Black or African American, 6.2% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 2.8% Native American, 1.1% mixed race or multiracial, 0.8% self-described other racial identities). We excluded 88 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 526.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 2 (response type: empathic vs. nonempathic)  $\times$  2 (target valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects conditions. Similar to Experiment 1, participants learned about an interaction between Beth and Ann, who were meeting for the first time. Unlike Experiment 1, participants learned that the interaction between Beth and Ann was ostensibly recorded and transcribed as part of an in-person study previously conducted in the lab, and that their real names had been replaced with pseudonyms for purposes of anonymity. Participants then learned that Beth and Ann had filled out a survey prior to their interaction and shared their answers with each other. All participants were assigned to read Ann's ostensible answer to the survey question, "What is an issue you care about?" In the positive target condition, Ann's answer implied that she held provaccination beliefs; in the negative target condition, Ann's answer implied that she held antivaccination beliefs (see Figure 5 for exact wording). Partici-

pants then completed the same manipulation check from Experiment 1 by reporting their impression of Ann.<sup>8</sup>

Next, participants read an excerpt of the ostensible interaction between Beth and Ann. Text for Ann's statement in the positive target condition appears below; in the negative target condition, the organization name was "Stop Mandatory Vaccination":

So yeah, I work for an organization called Vaccinate Your Family, and I'm putting together an event for them. My team is expecting a large attendance, but I've been having a lot of trouble with the logistics of it, and the date of the event was recently delayed because we did not hear back from the city council in time. I've been under a lot of stress, and it is really overwhelming. I'm not sleeping well, and I've been feeling awful because of it.

In the empathic response condition, Beth responded, "I feel for you—I can really put myself in your shoes in this situation." In the nonempathic response condition, Beth responded, "Okay, I see."

Participants then completed the same DVs from Experiment 1, a manipulation check on Ann's affect ("How positive did Ann feel when she told Beth about her recent experience at work?" 1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*), an exploratory measure on the positivity of Beth's response ("How positive was Beth's response to Ann's disclosure about her experience at work?" 1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*), and an exploratory measure on general attitude toward vaccines ("In general, what are your views on vaccinations?" 1 = *very negative*, 4 = *neutral/mixed feelings*, 7 = *very positive*).

## Results

The target valence manipulation was successful: Participants evaluated Ann more positively when she was portrayed as pro-versus antivaccination ( $M = 5.66$ ,  $SD = 1.19$  vs.  $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(442) = 21.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.94$ , 95% CI [1.73, 2.15]. As expected, this target valence manipulation was considerably weaker than the manipulation used in Experiment 1 (see Footnote 7). Results of other manipulation checks are available in the online supplemental materials.

**Factor analysis.** To confirm the factor structure from Experiment 1, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in R using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012). Drawing from the EFA solution in Experiment 1, we specified a model with two latent factors; four items (like, respect, trust, and friends) loaded onto the first factor (respect/liking), and the other four items (understanding, kind, cold [reverse-coded], and caring) loaded onto the second factor (warmth). Because factor loadings of all items on their nonprimary factors were low in the EFA solution in Experiment 1, we specified no cross-loadings in the CFA. This two-factor model fit the data well,  $\chi^2(19) = 102.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.09, confirmatory fit index

<sup>7</sup> The effect size of the manipulation check was  $d = 2.97$ , 95% CI [2.66, 3.29] (see online supplemental materials).

<sup>8</sup> This cover story appeared convincing to participants, most of whom commented on the interaction in their open-ended responses at the end of the experiment (e.g., what they would have said to Ann, wanting to know what happened after the interaction). Three participants expressed suspicion about the veracity of our cover story, but excluding their responses did not change the significance of any result. Following our pre-analysis plan, we retained their data in the reported analyses.

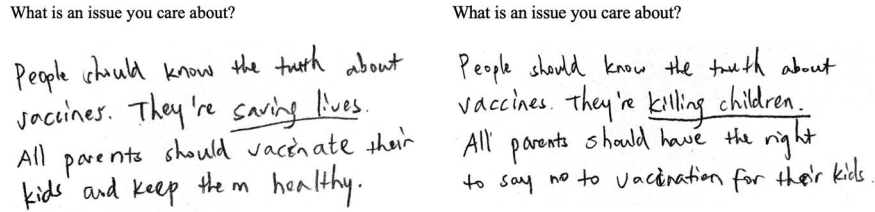


Figure 5. Stimuli used in Experiment 2 to manipulate target valence. In the positive target condition (left), the target (Ann) expressed provaccination beliefs; in the negative target condition (right), the target expressed antivaccination beliefs. To enhance the perceived authenticity of the stimuli, both answers were handwritten and contained an ambiguous typo in “vaccinate”/“vaccination.”

(CFI) = 0.98, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.97, with all factor loadings higher than  $\lambda = .60$ . The two-factor model also fit the data better than a one-factor model in which all items loaded onto a single factor,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 430.82, p < .001$ . Thus, we confirmed the factor structure from Experiment 1. As in Experiment 1, we calculated the mean ratings of items for respect/liking ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and warmth ( $\alpha = .90$ ) as composites and conducted the primary analyses on these composites.<sup>9</sup>

**Respect/liking.** A 2 (response type)  $\times$  2 (target valence) between-subjects ANOVA on respect/liking revealed that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 522) = 66.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11, 90\% \text{ CI } [.07, .16]$ . The target valence main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 522) = 0.84, p = .359, \eta_p^2 < .01, 90\% \text{ CI } [.00, .01]$ . More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 522) = 33.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06, 90\% \text{ CI } [.03, .09]$ . When Ann was positively portrayed, participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.11, SD = 1.04$  vs.  $M = 3.69, SD = 1.30$ ),  $F(1, 522) = 99.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16, 90\% \text{ CI } [.12, .21]$ . When Ann was negatively portrayed, participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.29$  vs.  $M = 4.38, SD = 1.04$ ), but this effect was smaller and not significant,  $F(1, 522) = 2.75, p = .098, \eta_p^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI } [.00, .02]$  (see Figure 6, left panel).

**Warmth.** An identical 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA on warmth revealed that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 522) = 264.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34, 90\% \text{ CI } [.28, .38]$ , and when Ann was negatively (vs. positively) portrayed,  $F(1, 522) = 21.20, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04, 90\% \text{ CI } [.02, .07]$ . More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 522) = 19.31, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04, 90\% \text{ CI } [.01, .07]$ . When Ann was positively portrayed, participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.44, SD = 1.06$  vs.  $M = 3.39, SD = 1.24$ ),  $F(1, 522) = 221.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30, 90\% \text{ CI } [.25, .35]$ . When Ann was negatively portrayed, participants still rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.46, SD = 1.05$  vs.  $M = 4.28, SD = 1.18$ ), but this effect was smaller,  $F(1, 522) = 68.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12, 90\% \text{ CI } [.08, .16]$  (see Figure 6, right panel).

## Discussion

Experiment 2 replicated the key findings from Experiment 1. Using a less extreme target valence manipulation and a more

realistic setup, we again found that evaluations of empathizers depended on target valence. The interaction pattern was largely the same as that in Experiment 1: Participants respected/liked the responder more when she responded empathically to a positively portrayed target, but not when she responded to a negatively portrayed target. Participants also rated the responder as warmer when she responded empathically, but this effect was smaller when the target was negatively portrayed. The sizes of the interaction effects were comparable with those in Experiment 1, perhaps because the enhanced realism of the paradigm compensated for the weaker target valence manipulation.

Notably, we observed no evidence of backfiring in either experiment: Participants did not respect/like empathizers of a negatively portrayed target *less*. If anything, the pattern of results for the negatively portrayed target was in the same direction descriptively, with participants respecting/liking empathizers slightly more. This pattern is consistent with our “opposing forces” account, which suggests that the nonreversal in respect/liking when the target was negatively portrayed resulted from the valence of empathy and the attitudinal consistency pressures operating in opposition. On one hand, empathy is generally liked; it is also the default response to a person experiencing negative affect (McAuliffe, Carter, Berhane, Snihur, & McCullough, 2020). Thus, it is likely that an empathic response was both expected and viewed positively when the target experienced stress. On the other hand, this positive view might be attenuated by attitudinal consistency pressures toward viewing Beth negatively because she expressed empathy for a disliked target. If the null effect of response type on respect/liking in the negative target conditions was due to the two forces—the positive view of expressing empathy in response to negative affect (which should increase respect/liking) and the attitudinal consistency pressures (which should decrease respect/liking)—canceling each other out, then shifting the relative strength of those forces should change the results.

We explored this possibility in Experiment 3. We reasoned that when a negative target discloses a positive experience, the influence of the valence of empathy on evaluations of the empathizer

<sup>9</sup> Following Flake, Pek, and Hehman’s (2017) recommendations for ongoing construct validation, we confirmed the factor structure observed here with CFAs in subsequent experiments, all of which supported the same two-factor structure (i.e., it fit the data well and provided substantially better fit than a one-factor model, which fit the data poorly). We only report the internal consistencies of the composite scores in Experiments 3 through 7; the full set of CFA results are available in the online supplemental materials.

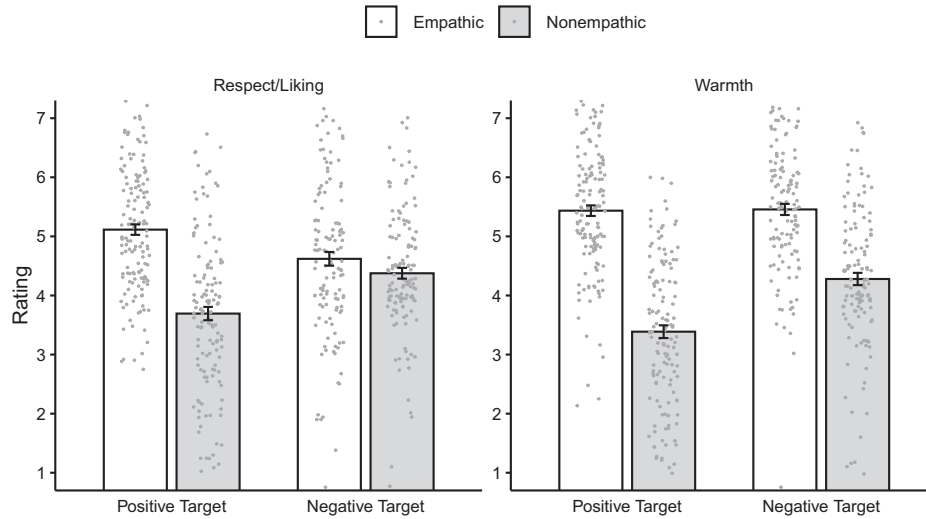


Figure 6. Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type and target valence in Experiment 2. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

should diminish, because empathy may no longer be the default, expected response. In this way, responding empathically to a positive experience should be especially diagnostic of the responder's values as a person (i.e., as someone who responds in an active–constructive manner to a White supremacist's positive disclosure; see Gable & Reis, 2010), thereby enhancing attitudinal consistency pressures. Consequently, empathizers (vs. nonempathizers) might be evaluated more negatively when a disliked target discloses a positive experience.

### Experiment 3

Experiment 3 tested whether target valence moderates evaluations of empathizers (vs. nonempathizers) when the target discloses a positive rather than a stressful experience. Positive empathy refers to understanding and sharing others' positive emotions (Morelli, Lieberman, & Zaki, 2015). It is closely related to negative empathy (i.e., sharing and understanding others' negative emotions; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Yet, positive and negative empathy differ in the valence of the shared experience (Morelli, Sacchet, & Zaki, 2015). More central to the goal of Experiment 3, examining positive empathy allowed us to test our “opposing forces” account, which accommodates the results of Experiments 1 and 2 but predicts a different interaction pattern here.

Specifically, we expected a crossover Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction whereby the effect of response type on respect/liking for Beth when Ann was positively portrayed would reverse when Ann was negatively portrayed. Unlike Experiments 1 and 2, a normative expectation of empathy was less likely to be operating here, given that Ann disclosed a positive experience. Thus, we predicted that participants would respect/like Beth *less* when she gave an empathic response to negatively portrayed Ann. We did not have a priori predictions for warmth. Because the effect sizes of the interactions were comparable in Experiments 1 and 2, we returned to the paradigm from Experiment 1.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 507 MTurk workers (52% female, 44% male, 4% no gender information;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.4$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.6$ ; 73.4% White, 12.2% Black or African American, 8.9% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.6% Native American, 2.8% mixed race or multiracial, 1.0% self-described other racial identities, 0.1% did not disclose racial identities). We excluded 91 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 416.

**Materials and procedure.** This experiment was identical to Experiment 1, the only difference being that participants read that Ann told Beth about a recent positive experience (instead of a stressful experience):

Things have been going really well lately. I recently organized an event, and it was a huge success. A lot of people showed up to participate, and we received a large anonymous donation, which is going to make my job so much easier in the future. On top of that, I just found out that I got a raise!

Next, participants saw Beth's response. In the empathic response condition, Beth said, “Good for you! I can imagine how excited you must feel” (see Reis et al., 2010, for a similar positive empathy expression). In the nonempathic response condition, Beth said, “Okay, I see.” Participants completed the same set of measures from Experiments 1 and 2 and the same manipulation check on Ann's affect from Experiment 2.

### Results

**Respect/liking.** A 2 (response type)  $\times$  2 (target valence) between-subjects ANOVA on respect/liking ( $\alpha = .95$ ) revealed that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 412) = 28.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ , 90% CI [.03, .11], and when Ann was positively (vs. negatively) portrayed,  $F(1, 412) = 12.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ,

90% CI [.01, .06]. More importantly, the expected crossover Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 412) = 91.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18, 90\% \text{ CI} [.13, .24]$ . When Ann was positively portrayed, participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.24, SD = 0.92$  vs.  $M = 3.36, SD = 1.38$ ),  $F(1, 412) = 122.17, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23, 90\% \text{ CI} [.17, .28]$ . When Ann was negatively portrayed, however, participants respected/liked Beth *less* when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 3.58, SD = 1.64$  vs.  $M = 4.12, SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1, 412) = 8.22, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .02, 90\% \text{ CI} [.004, .05]$  (see Figure 7, left panel).

**Warmth.** An identical  $2 \times 2$  ANOVA on warmth ( $\alpha = .91$ ) revealed that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response,  $F(1, 412) = 173.30, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30, 90\% \text{ CI} [.24, .35]$ . Unlike the results for respect/liking, however, the target valence main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 412) = 0.04, p = .835, \eta_p^2 < .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .00]$ . The Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(1, 412) = 92.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18, 90\% \text{ CI} [.13, .24]$ . When Ann was positively portrayed, participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.64, SD = 0.91$  vs.  $M = 2.99, SD = 1.19$ ),  $F(1, 412) = 287.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .41, 90\% \text{ CI} [.35, .46]$ . When Ann was negatively portrayed, participants still rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. nonempathic) response ( $M = 4.49, SD = 1.48$  vs.  $M = 4.09, SD = 1.13$ ), though this effect was smaller,  $F(1, 411) = 5.67, p = .018, \eta_p^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [.001, .04]$  (see Figure 7, right panel).

## Discussion

Experiment 3 tested whether the results observed in Experiments 1 and 2 would change when the target disclosed a positive experience. As before, target valence moderated both respect/liking for and warmth of the responder (Beth), but the pattern of moderation for respect/liking was different here. Participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic response to positively portrayed Ann, but they respected/liked Beth less when

she gave an empathic response to negatively portrayed Ann. In contrast, participants still rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic response to negatively portrayed Ann, though this effect was smaller than that in the positive target condition.

These results suggest that target valence moderates evaluations of empathizers, regardless of whether the target's experience is negative or positive. The pattern of moderation for respect/liking is consistent with our "opposing forces" account: Because experiencing a positive event (e.g., an accomplishment) dampens the expectation of an empathic response, this dampened expectation, in turn, should both diminish the influence of the valence of empathy and exert greater attitudinal consistency pressures on evaluations of the empathizer when the target is negatively portrayed. A different interaction pattern emerged for warmth; we revisit this observation in the General Discussion.

One limitation of this experiment is that our response type manipulation might have inadvertently manipulated more than empathy. Specifically, participants might have interpreted the first part of the empathic response, "good for you," as indicative of Beth's approval of Ann's work. Although participants rated the empathic response as comparably empathic across target valence ( $M = 5.55, SD = 1.07$  vs.  $M = 5.63, SD = 1.36$ ),  $t(170) = 0.46, p = .647, d = 0.07, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.21, 0.34]$ , it is possible that the simple main effect of response type on respect/liking in the negative target condition partially reflects what participants inferred about Beth based on her positive response to someone who works for a children's hospital versus a White supremacist organization. In Experiment 4, we tested the role of positivity in driving the effect of response type on evaluations of empathizers.

## Experiment 4

Thus far, we have examined evaluations of empathic versus nonempathic responders. It is possible, however, that it is not empathy per se that is driving these effects, but rather response positivity. Our exploratory measure on response positivity in Experiments 2 and 3 suggested that the empathic response is unde-

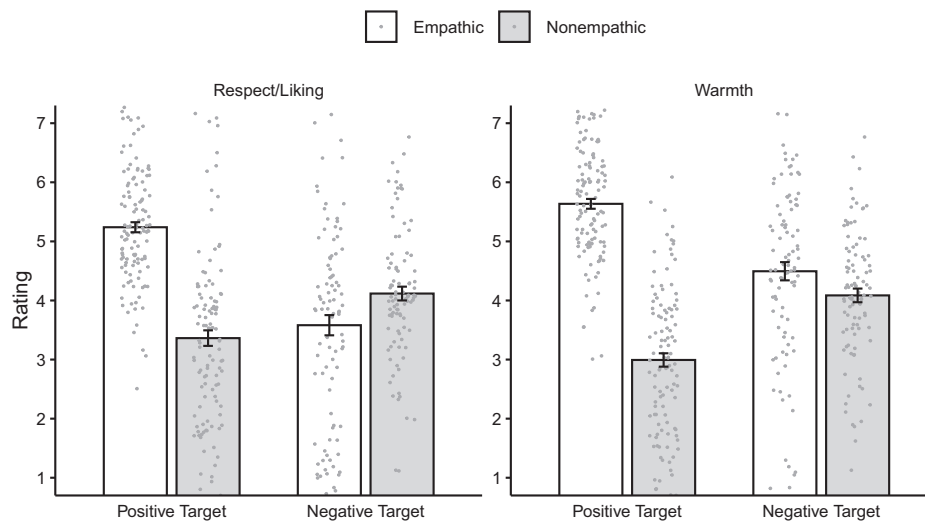


Figure 7. Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type and target valence in Experiment 3. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

nably more positive than the nonempathic response ( $ds = 1.32\text{--}2.60$ ). Empathic responses naturally tend to be positive (indeed, it is difficult to imagine an ecologically valid response that is both empathic and neutral). Yet, if a difference in positivity between the empathic and the nonempathic responses underlies the effects, they should disappear when the responses are equated on positivity. In Experiment 4, we manipulated response positivity to test whether the results observed in Experiments 1 through 3 would still emerge (moderation-of-process design; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005).

We also examined how these results might be related to participants' inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target. We reasoned that if participants infer that the responder's evaluation of the target differs from their own evaluation of the target, then they should evaluate the responder less positively. We assessed inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann as a potential mediator of the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on both respect/liking and warmth (measurement-of-mediation design; Spencer et al., 2005).

## Method

**Participants.** We publicly preregistered our analysis plan on AsPredicted (<https://aspredicted.org/uq3ct.pdf>). Participants were 838 MTurk workers (58% female, 42% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.6$ ,  $SD = 12.4$ ; 76.5% White, 10.7% Black or African American, 6.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, 2.7% mixed race or multiracial, 1.7% self-described other racial identities; 1.6% did not disclose racial identities). We excluded 98 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 740.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 3 (response type: positive empathic vs. positive nonempathic vs. neutral nonempathic)  $\times$  2 (target valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects conditions. The target valence manipulation was identical to previous experiments. After the target valence manipulation and its manipulation check, participants saw the same instructions and Ann's statement from Experiment 1.

Participants then saw Beth's response. In the empathic response condition, Beth said, "I feel for you—I can really put myself in your shoes in this situation." In the positive nonempathic response condition, Beth said, "Just stay positive! Life is better when we look on the bright side." In the neutral nonempathic response condition, Beth said, "Okay, I see."<sup>10</sup>

Next, participants completed the same DVs and attention checks (with updated response options to reflect the current response type manipulation) as before. We used the same manipulation checks from Experiments 2 and 3. We measured inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann with three items: Participants indicated how much they agreed that Beth (1) liked Ann, (2) felt positive toward Ann, and (3) had an unfavorable opinion of Ann (reverse-coded; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

We followed our preanalysis plan for all planned analyses. We also conducted several exploratory analyses, which we report in the following text.

**Respect/liking.** A 3 (response type: empathic vs. positive nonempathic vs. neutral nonempathic)  $\times$  2 (target valence) between-subjects ANOVA on respect/liking ( $\alpha = .96$ ) revealed a response type main effect,  $F(2, 734) = 23.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ , 90% CI [.03, .09]. The target valence main effect was also significant: Participants respected/liked Beth more when Ann was positively (vs. negatively) portrayed,  $F(1, 734) = 5.24$ ,  $p = .022$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ , 90% CI [.001, .02]. More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction was significant,  $F(2, 734) = 17.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ , 90% CI [.02, .07]. Planned contrasts in the positive target condition indicated that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. positive nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.11$  vs.  $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ),  $t(734) = 5.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.67$ , 95% CI [0.42, 0.93], and when she gave an empathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t(734) = 8.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.12$ , 95% CI [0.83, 1.40]. Participants also respected/liked Beth more when she gave a positive nonempathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response,  $t(734) = 3.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ , 95% CI [0.18, 0.70] (see Figure 7, left panel).

Though not planned, we also explored whether respect/liking for Beth differed among the three response types in the negative target condition. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave a positive nonempathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response to negatively portrayed Ann ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.60$  vs.  $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $t(734) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $d = 0.32$ , 98.3% CI [0.02, 0.63].<sup>11</sup> Neither of the other two pairwise comparisons was significant ( $ts < 1.49$ ,  $ps > .414$ ).

**Warmth.** An identical 3  $\times$  2 ANOVA on warmth ( $\alpha = .92$ ) revealed that, as in the previous experiments, there was a response type main effect,  $F(2, 734) = 86.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .19$ , 90% CI [.15, .23]. The target valence main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 734) = 1.12$ ,  $p = .291$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .01]. More importantly, there was a significant Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction,  $F(2, 734) = 17.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ , 90% CI [.02, .07]. Planned contrasts in the positive target condition indicated that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. positive nonempathic) response ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.11$  vs.  $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $t(734) = 7.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.87$ , 95% CI [0.60, 1.13], and when she gave an empathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ),  $t(734) = 12.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.64$ , 95% CI [1.32, 1.95]. Participants also rated Beth as warmer when she gave a positive nonempathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response to positively portrayed Ann,  $t(734) = 5.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.77$ , 95% CI [0.50, 1.04] (see Figure 8, right panel).

Though not planned, we also explored whether ratings of warmth differed among the three response types in the negative

<sup>10</sup> We conducted a pilot study ( $N = 201$ ) in which participants evaluated Beth's different responses without information about Ann. Results confirmed that the empathic and the positive non empathic responses were comparably positive, and that both responses were more positive than the neutral non empathic response. The empathic response was also more empathic than both the positive non empathic response and the neutral non empathic response. We report details of the pilot study in the online supplemental materials.

<sup>11</sup> We used the Dunn-Bonferroni correction for all post hoc pairwise comparisons. The CIs from those comparisons correspond to the corrected  $\alpha$  level of .017, rather than  $\alpha = .05$  (Dunn, 1961).

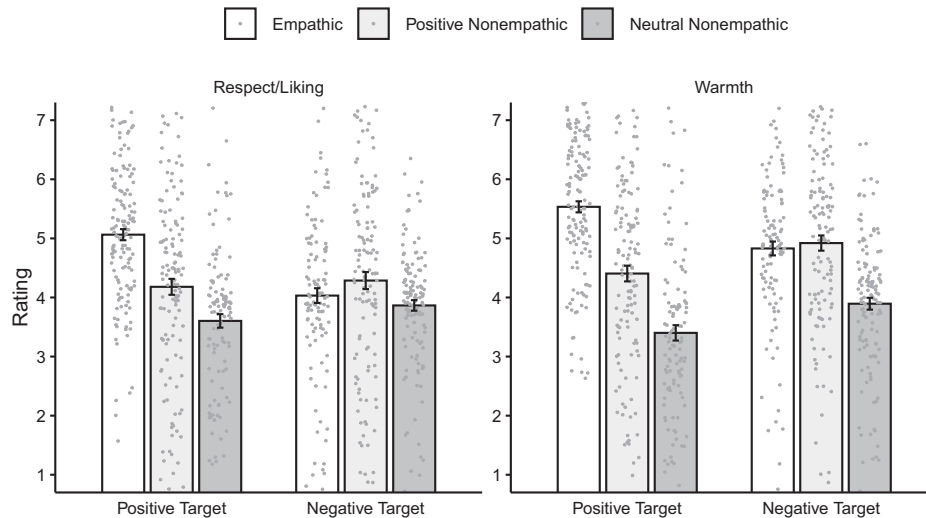


Figure 8. Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type and target valence in Experiment 4. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

target condition. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. neutral nonempathic) response ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.23$  vs.  $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(734) = 5.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.72$ , 98.3% CI [0.38, 1.05], and when she gave a positive nonempathic ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) versus neutral nonempathic response,  $t(734) = 6.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.79$ , 98.3% CI [0.46, 1.11]. The difference in warmth ratings between the two positive response conditions was not significant,  $t(734) = 0.53$ ,  $p > .999$ ,  $d = 0.07$ , 98.3% CI [-0.24, 0.38].

**Latent moderated mediation analyses.** We conducted latent moderated mediation analyses to test whether the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interactions on evaluations of Beth were mediated by inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann. We used a latent variable approach to account for the measurement error of our mediator and thereby obtain more accurate estimates of indirect effects (Ledgerwood & Shrout, 2011). In our planned analyses, the primary predictor was response type, its levels effect-coded by empathy (+2/3 = empathic, -1/3 = positive nonempathic, -1/3 = neutral nonempathic) and positivity (+1/3 = empathic, +1/3 = positive nonempathic, -2/3 = neutral nonempathic). These effect codes allowed us to test whether the effect of response empathy (i.e., empathic vs. nonempathic responses) was mediated and whether the effect of response positivity (i.e., positive vs. neutral responses) was mediated. Though not planned, we also conducted a pair of exploratory analyses in the conditions in which Beth gave a positive response (+1 = empathic, -1 = positive nonempathic), which allowed us to isolate the pattern of mediation for the effect of empathy among comparably positive responses.

In all analyses, the moderator was target valence (+1 = positive, -1 = negative); the mediator was inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann, modeled as a latent factor indicated by its three items. We conducted analyses separately for respect/liking and warmth, each modeled as a latent factor indicated by its four items. Here and in subsequent experiments, we used Yzerbyt, Muller, Batailler, and Judd's (2018) component approach, which

requires the joint significance of individual parameter estimates of an indirect effect to establish its presence (see also Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). This approach can also simultaneously test for both first-stage moderated mediation (i.e., interaction effect is mediated) and second-stage moderated mediation (i.e., mediating effect is moderated; Edwards & Lambert, 2007).<sup>12</sup>

A summary of the models and evidence of first-stage and second-stage moderated mediation appears in Table 1, and parameter estimates of individual paths appear in Table 2. We conducted all mediation analyses here and in subsequent experiments with the *lavaan* (Version 0.6–3; Rosseel, 2012) and *semTools* (Version 0.5–1; Jorgensen, Pornprasertmanit, Schoemann, & Rosseel, 2018) packages in R (Version 3.6.0; R Core Team, 2019). All models reported below fit the data reasonably well,  $\chi^2(57) = 269.86 - 580.33$ ,  $ps < .001$ , CFIs = 0.91–0.97, TLIs = 0.90–0.96, RMSEAs = 0.07–0.11; details of model fit are reported in the online supplemental materials.

**Moderated mediation with response empathy.** We first conducted the analysis on respect/liking using response empathy as the predictor (Model 1). The Response Empathy  $\times$  Target Valence interaction significantly predicted the mediator ( $a_{\text{mod}} = 0.22$ ,  $p = .012$ ) and the mediator significantly predicted respect/liking ( $b = 0.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting the presence of first-stage moderated mediation. In addition, response empathy significantly predicted the mediator ( $a = 0.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the Mediator  $\times$  Target Valence interaction significantly predicted respect/liking ( $b_{\text{mod}} = 0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting the presence of second-stage moderated mediation. Supporting these results, the effect of response empathy on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann, the association between inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann and respect/liking, and the overall indirect effect were all stronger

<sup>12</sup> Note that the key Predictor  $\times$  Moderator interaction on the mediator is a component of the first-stage moderated mediation (denoted as  $a_{\text{mod}}$ ), which is simultaneously estimated in our structural equation models with the other paths. We present results for that path in the context of the full models.

Table 1  
Summary of Moderated Mediation Models in Experiment 4

Model	Predictor	Dependent variable	First-stage moderated mediation	$a_{\text{mod}}b$ [95% CI]	$p$	Second-stage moderated mediation	$ab_{\text{mod}}$ [95% CI]	$p$
1	Empathy	Respect/liking	Yes	0.10 [0.02, 0.19]	.015	Yes	0.40 [0.28, 0.52]	<.001
2		Warmth	Yes	0.16 [0.04, 0.30]	.014	Yes	0.40 [0.28, 0.53]	<.001
3	Positivity	Respect/liking	No	-0.04 [-0.12, 0.04]	.358	Yes	0.95 [0.74, 1.18]	<.001
4		Warmth	No	-0.05 [-0.17, 0.06]	.352	Yes	1.02 [0.79, 1.26]	<.001
5	Empathic vs. positive nonempathic	Respect/liking	Yes	0.09 [0.05, 0.15]	<.001	Yes	0.08 [0.03, 0.13]	.002
6		Warmth	Yes	0.14 [0.07, 0.22]	<.001	Yes	0.08 [0.03, 0.13]	.002

Note. Evidence of first-stage moderated mediation was determined by the joint significance of both  $a_{\text{mod}}$  and  $b$ ; evidence of second-stage moderated mediation was determined by the joint significance of both  $a$  and  $b_{\text{mod}}$ .

when Ann was positively portrayed ( $a_{\text{pos}} = 1.17$  vs.  $a_{\text{neg}} = 0.73$ ,  $b_{\text{pos}} = 0.90$  vs.  $b_{\text{neg}} = 0.06$ ,  $a_{\text{pos}}b_{\text{pos}} = 1.05$  vs.  $a_{\text{neg}}b_{\text{neg}} = 0.04$ ).

We then conducted the same analysis on warmth (Model 2). The results were very similar to those for respect/liking: In addition to the effect of the Response Empathy  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on the mediator ( $a_{\text{mod}}$ ), the mediator significantly predicted warmth ( $b = 0.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting the presence of first-stage moderated mediation. Moreover, in addition to the effect of response empathy on the mediator ( $a$ ), the Mediator  $\times$  Target Valence interaction significantly predicted warmth ( $b_{\text{mod}} = 0.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting the presence of second-stage moderated mediation.<sup>13</sup> Supporting these results, the effect of response empathy on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann, the association between inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann and warmth, and the overall indirect effect were all stronger when Ann was positively portrayed ( $a_{\text{pos}} = 1.06$  vs.  $a_{\text{neg}} = 0.66$ ,  $b_{\text{pos}} = 1.09$  vs.  $b_{\text{neg}} = 0.30$ ,  $a_{\text{pos}}b_{\text{pos}} = 1.37$  vs.  $a_{\text{neg}}b_{\text{neg}} = 0.24$ ).

Together, Models 1 and 2 suggested that both first-stage and second-stage moderated mediation were present when comparing the effects of empathic versus nonempathic responses: The Response Empathy  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on evaluations of Beth was mediated by inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann; associations between the mediator and both respect/liking and warmth, in turn, were moderated by target valence.

**Moderated mediation with response positivity.** We next conducted our planned moderated mediation analyses using response positivity as the predictor. Unlike the results with response empathy (Models 1 and 2), there was evidence for second-stage moderated mediation but not first-stage moderated mediation for both respect/liking (Model 3) and warmth (Model 4). Supporting these results, the effect of response positivity on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann was similar across target valence, but the association between the mediator and both respect/liking and warmth were stronger when Ann was positively portrayed, and the overall indirect effects were also stronger when Ann was positively portrayed (see the online supplemental materials for detailed descriptions of Models 3 and 4). That is, inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann mediated the Response Positivity  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on evaluations of Beth, but such inferences were predicted only by response positivity and did not differ by target valence.

**Exploratory analysis.** Last, we explored within the empathic and positive nonempathic response conditions whether the Re-

sponse Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on evaluations of Beth was mediated. Similar to results from Models 1 and 2, there was again evidence for both first-stage and second-stage moderated mediation for both respect/liking (Model 5) and warmth (Model 6). Supporting these results, the effects of the empathic (vs. positive nonempathic) response on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann, the associations between the mediator and evaluations of Beth, and the overall indirect effects were all stronger when Ann was positively portrayed (see the online supplemental materials for details of Models 5 and 6). That is, even when comparing only empathic versus positive nonempathic responses, inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann mediated the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on evaluations of Beth, and such inferences were predicted by the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction.

## Discussion

Experiment 4 served two purposes. First, to determine whether the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interaction on evaluations of empathizers was driven by the positivity of the empathic response, we added a condition in which the responder gave a positive but nonempathic response. We found that positivity contributed to, but did not fully account for, the effects of empathy: When the target was positively portrayed, the empathic response elicited more respect/liking and higher ratings of warmth than did the comparably positive but nonempathic response, and both responses elicited more respect/liking and warmth than did the neutral nonempathic response. When the target was negatively portrayed, all responses elicited comparable respect/liking. The empathic and positive nonempathic responses, however, elicited comparable ratings of warmth that were higher than those elicited by the neutral, nonempathic response, suggesting that the effect of response type on warmth in the negative target conditions might be due to response positivity.

We also examined, in a series of latent moderated mediation analyses, whether inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target mediated the Response Type  $\times$  Target Valence interac-

<sup>13</sup> Because Models 1 and 2 have the same predictor and mediator, estimates across the two models are close to identical for  $a$  and  $a_{\text{mod}}$ . This is also the case for estimates of  $a$  and  $a_{\text{mod}}$  in Models 3 and 4 and in Models 5 and 6.

Table 2  
 Parameter Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals From the Latent Moderated Mediation Models in Experiment 4

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
$a$	0.95 [0.77, 1.13]	0.94 [0.76, 1.12]	1.78 [1.56, 2.00]	1.76 [1.54, 1.98]	0.18 [0.08, 0.29]	0.18 [0.08, 0.29]
$a_{\text{pos}}$	1.17 [0.92, 1.41]	1.15 [0.91, 1.40]	1.70 [1.41, 1.98]	1.68 [1.40, 1.96]	0.43 [0.28, 0.58]	0.43 [0.28, 0.58]
$a_{\text{neg}}$	0.73 [0.48, 0.99]	0.72 [0.47, 0.97]	1.86 [1.58, 2.15]	1.85 [1.57, 2.13]	-0.06 [-0.21, 0.09]	-0.06 [-0.21, 0.09]
$a_{\text{mod}}$	0.22 [0.05, 0.39]	0.22 [0.05, 0.38]	-0.08 [-0.26, 0.09]	-0.08 [-0.26, 0.09]	0.25 [0.14, 0.35]	0.25 [0.14, 0.35]
$b$	0.48 [0.38, 0.58]	0.76 [0.64, 0.88]	0.44 [0.34, 0.54]	0.65 [0.53, 0.77]	0.37 [0.25, 0.49]	0.57 [0.43, 0.71]
$b_{\text{pos}}$	0.90 [0.75, 1.04]	1.18 [1.01, 1.35]	0.97 [0.82, 1.13]	1.23 [1.05, 1.41]	0.78 [0.60, 0.96]	0.99 [0.79, 1.20]
$b_{\text{neg}}$	0.06 [-0.06, 0.19]	0.34 [0.20, 0.47]	-0.10 [-0.23, 0.03]	0.07 [-0.06, 0.21]	-0.04 [-0.20, 0.12]	0.14 [-0.02, 0.31]
$b_{\text{mod}}$	0.42 [0.33, 0.51]	0.42 [0.32, 0.52]	0.54 [0.44, 0.64]	0.58 [0.47, 0.68]	0.41 [0.29, 0.53]	0.42 [0.30, 0.55]
$c$	0.44 [0.26, 0.62]	0.88 [0.67, 1.09]	0.67 [0.48, 0.85]	1.28 [1.06, 1.49]	0.06 [-0.04, 0.16]	0.15 [0.05, 0.26]
$c'$	-0.02 [-0.20, 0.17]	0.17 [-0.03, 0.36]	-0.11 [-0.35, 0.13]	0.13 [-0.12, 0.38]	-0.01 [-0.10, 0.09]	0.05 [-0.05, 0.15]
$a_{\text{pos}}b_{\text{pos}}$	1.05 [0.78, 1.34]	1.37 [1.03, 1.73]	1.65 [1.29, 2.05]	2.06 [1.62, 2.54]	0.34 [0.21, 0.49]	0.43 [0.27, 0.61]
$a_{\text{neg}}b_{\text{neg}}$	0.04 [-0.04, 0.14]	0.24 [0.13, 0.38]	-0.18 [-0.43, 0.06]	0.14 [-0.12, 0.39]	0.00 [-0.01, 0.02]	-0.01 [-0.04, 0.01]

tion on evaluations of the responder. Although the strength and pattern of moderated mediation differed somewhat by model, evidence of moderated mediation emerged in all models. Overall, the presence of second-stage moderated mediation across all models indicates that inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann were more strongly associated with evaluations of Beth when Ann was positively portrayed. The presence of first-stage moderated mediation in all models with response empathy as the predictor (Models 1, 2, 5, and 6) indicates that such inferences were moderated by target valence: Whether Beth responded empathically had a stronger effect on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann when Ann was positively portrayed; these inferences, in turn, were associated with evaluations of Beth. The absence of first-stage moderated mediation in models with the positivity contrast (Models 3 and 4) further suggests that the effect of Beth's response positivity on inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann was not moderated by how Ann was portrayed.

In sum, Experiment 4 replicated the results of Experiments 1 and 2: The effects of the empathic (vs. nonempathic) response on evaluations of the responder depended on target valence. This pattern of results was partly due to the positivity of the empathic response, but the empathic response had effects that were distinct from a comparably positive but nonempathic response. We also found evidence consistent with the possibility that participants drew inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target and used this information to form their own evaluation of the responder, though other models and/or mediators might also be consistent with the data. We return to this point in the General Discussion.

### Experiment 5

In Experiments 1 through 4, we operationalized empathic versus nonempathic responding as the presence versus absence of empathy. Nonempathic responses, however, can take another form: The responder can actively withhold empathy from the target. In circumstances where someone responds to a generally disliked target, actively withholding empathy (e.g., expressing condemnation) unambiguously reveals how the responder views the target, which should afford evaluations of the responder. In Experiment 5, we tested this possibility by using a scenario in which a responder gives an empathic versus condemning response to a negatively portrayed target. As before, we examined the effect of response type

on evaluations of the responder. We also assessed whether this effect is mediated by inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target; we present these results, along with results from the same analysis in Experiments 6 and 7, in the upcoming Mediation Evidence in Experiments 5 Through 7 section.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 504 MTurk workers (50% female, 41% male, 9% no gender information;  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.0$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.9$ ; 73.4% White, 15.1% Black or African American, 6.5% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, 3.6% mixed race or multiracial, 1.0% self-described other racial identities). We excluded 52 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 452.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions based on response type (empathic vs. condemning). All participants saw the same target information from the negative target conditions in the previous experiments and completed the manipulation check on target valence. Participants then read the same instructions and Ann's statement from Experiments 1 and 4, followed by Beth's response. Beth's response in the empathic response condition was the same as that in Experiments 2 and 4 ("I feel for you—I can really put myself in your shoes in this situation"). In the condemning response condition, Beth said, "To be honest, it sounds to me like you're getting what you deserve."

We collected the same dependent measures and attention checks as in previous experiments (with updated options for the attention check on Beth's response to Ann). We used the same manipulation checks from Experiments 2 through 4 and the same measure of inferences about Beth's attitude toward Ann from Experiment 4.

### Results

**Respect/liking.** An independent samples  $t$  test on respect/liking ( $\alpha = .96$ ) indicated that participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave a condemning (vs. empathic) response to Ann ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.63$  vs.  $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(445) = 7.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.73$ , 95% CI [0.54, 0.92] (see Figure 9, left panel).

**Warmth.** An independent samples  $t$  test on warmth ( $\alpha = .89$ ) indicated that participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. condemning) response to Ann ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.44$



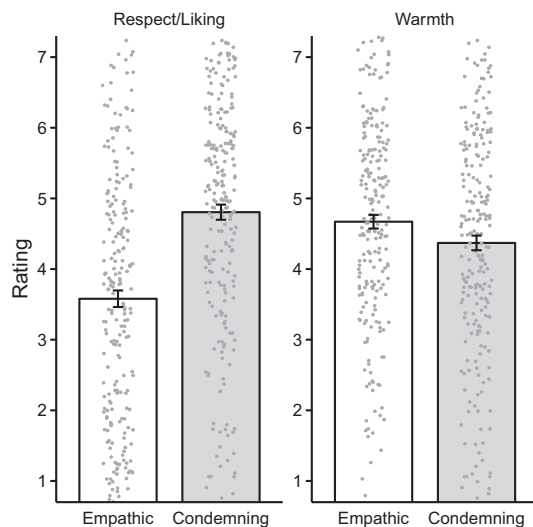


Figure 9. Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type in Experiment 5. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

vs.  $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ),  $t(449) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .035$ ,  $d = 0.20$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.38] (see Figure 9, right panel).

## Discussion

Experiment 5 examined the effect of a condemning (vs. empathic) response to a negatively portrayed target on evaluations of the responder. Whereas the condemning (vs. empathic) response increased respect/liking, it reduced the responder's warmth. Insofar as condemnation and empathy reflect negative and positive views of the negatively portrayed target, respectively, results for respect/liking align with a balanced affective triad in which participants preferred a responder who condemned (vs. empathized with) a disliked target. Results for warmth, however, are inconsistent with a balanced triad: Participants rated the responder as less warm when she condemned (vs. empathized with) a disliked target.

One potential explanation for the dissociation between respect/liking and warmth here is that they reflect judgments of the responder's morality and sociability, respectively. A growing literature indicates that morality and sociability play different roles in impression formation (e.g., Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Landy, Piazza, & Goodwin, 2016). Accordingly, it is possible that participants drew from their views on Beth's morality (e.g., her values) in evaluating if they respected/liked her, and they drew from their views on Beth's sociability in evaluating if they considered her warm. Another potential explanation for the dissociation is that participants might have relied on their evaluation of the empathic response itself, rather than that of the responder, in rating the responder's warmth. This explanation draws from research on the "act-person dissociation" in moral judgment, in which evaluation of a person can differ in valence from evaluation of an act performed by that person (Tannenbaum, Uhlmann, & Diermeier, 2011; Uhlmann,

Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). We revisit both explanations in the General Discussion.

## Experiment 6

Experiments 1 through 5 used scenarios in which both the responder and the target were women. Might empathy between men be evaluated differently? On one hand, neither our target valence manipulation nor our response type manipulation was gender-specific, and we expect similar processes to operate in evaluating male versus female empathizers. On the other hand, prescriptive gender stereotypes suggest that women are expected to be warmer, kinder, friendlier, and more emotional than men, whereas men are expected to be more principled and aggressive than women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These gender stereotypes might, in turn, serve as standards of comparison when people evaluate male versus female empathizers and thereby produce gender differences in such evaluations. Therefore, we conducted Experiment 6 to test if the effects observed in Experiment 5 are moderated by the gender of the characters.

## Method

**Participants.** We publicly preregistered our analysis plan on AsPredicted (<https://aspredicted.org/ud6hh.pdf>). Participants were 566 MTurk workers (48% female, 52% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.3$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.9$ ; 65.5% White, 27.0% Black or African American, 3.2% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.2% Native American, 2.1% mixed race or multiracial, 0.9% self-described other racial identities). We excluded 162 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 404.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 2 (response type: empathic vs. condemning)  $\times$  2 (character gender: female vs. male) between-subjects conditions. This experiment was almost identical to Experiment 5, except for the following changes. In the male character conditions, we changed the target's name to Adam and the responder's name to Bill. We also changed the target's job title to "Organizer" and modified the wording of the target's dialogue so that it sounded natural in both male-male and female-female interactions.

Adam/Ann: Work has been killing me lately. I'm organizing a rally in City Park, and we're expecting a huge turnout. The city council has been giving me a hard time with the permits. They were supposed to come through weeks ago, but they keep getting delayed. The stress is really getting to me. I feel like I haven't slept in days.

Beth/Bill then gave the same empathic response ("I feel for you—I can really put myself in your shoes in this situation") or condemning response ("To be honest, it sounds to me like you're getting what you deserve") from Experiment 5.

## Results

**Respect/liking.** A 2 (response type: empathic vs. condemning)  $\times$  2 (character gender: female vs. male) between-subjects ANOVA on respect/liking ( $\alpha = .97$ ) revealed that participants respected/liked the condemning (vs. empathic) responder more,  $F(1, 400) = 47.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .11$ , 90% CI [.06, .15]. The character gender main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 400) = 0.21$ ,

$p = .643$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .01]. The Response Type  $\times$  Character Gender interaction was not significant either,  $F(1, 400) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .106$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .03], suggesting that character gender did not moderate the effect of response type on respect/liking (see Figure 10, left panel).

**Warmth.** An identical ANOVA on warmth ( $\alpha = .88$ ) revealed no significant effects of response type,  $F(1, 400) = 0.01$ ,  $p = .929$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .00], character gender,  $F(1, 400) = 1.06$ ,  $p = .304$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .02], or Response Type  $\times$  Character Gender interaction,  $F(1, 400) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .116$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .03]. Although character gender did not moderate the effect of response type on warmth, we unexpectedly did not observe a response type main effect either. An exploratory analysis in the female character condition (akin to Experiment 5) revealed that participants rated the responder as less warm when she gave a condemning (vs. empathic) response ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.74$  vs.  $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ), but this effect was not significant,  $F(1, 400) = 3.36$ ,  $p = .067$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .03]. There was no effect of response type on warmth in the male character condition ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 1.40$  vs.  $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ),  $F(1, 400) = 0.15$ ,  $p = .698$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , 90% CI [.00, .01] (see Figure 10, right panel).

## Discussion

Experiment 6 examined the effect of a condemning (vs. empathic) response to a negatively portrayed target on evaluations of the responder, and whether this effect was moderated by character gender. As in Experiment 5, the condemning (vs. empathic) response increased respect/liking for the responder; however, unlike Experiment 5, the condemning response did not reduce warmth toward the responder. Character gender did not moderate the effect of the condemning (vs. empathic) response on evaluations of the responder, suggesting that the moderating effect of character gender is absent or too small to be detected in our sample.

## Experiment 7

Experiments 5 and 6 provided consistent evidence that actively condemning a negatively portrayed target increased respect/liking for the responder and provided mixed evidence that the same condemning response might decrease the responder's warmth. Experiment 7 aimed to replicate these effects and to determine whether these effects could be reversed. That is, are there circumstances where empathy with a negative target increases respect/liking for the responder? In our previous experiments, the target disclosed an experience that was directly tied to the target valence manipulation (i.e., feeling stressed because of her job). In Experiment 7, we included conditions in which the disclosed experience was unrelated to the source of target valence (i.e., stress from cancer treatment). If the effects of response type on evaluations of the responder from Experiments 5 and 6 require a direct link between the disclosed experience and target valence, then removing that link should produce different effects.

## Method

**Participants.** We publicly preregistered our analysis plan on AsPredicted (<https://aspredicted.org/4wj66.pdf>). Participants were 573 MTurk workers (52% female, 48% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.9$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.8$ ; 68.9% White, 20.9% Black or African American, 5.6% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 0.5% Native American, 2.6% mixed race or multiracial, 1.4% self-described other racial identities). We excluded 105 participants from data analyses based on our a priori exclusion criteria. The final sample size was 468.

**Materials and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 2 (response type: empathic vs. condemning)  $\times$  2 (disclosed experience: job stress vs. cancer stress) between-subjects conditions. In the job stress condition, the procedure was the same as in Experiment 5: Participants learned that Ann was experiencing stress from work (Ann also gave the same statement in Experiments 1 and 4). In the cancer stress condition, participants

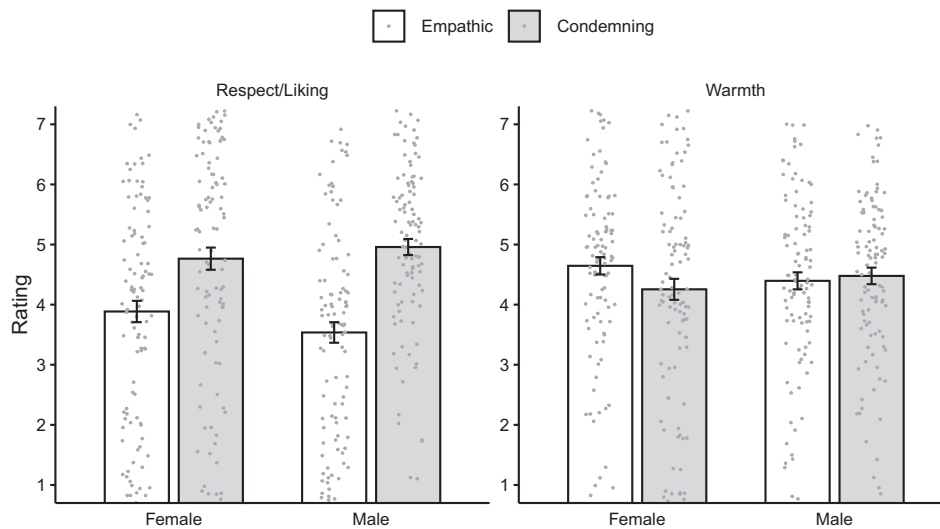


Figure 10. Ratings of the responder on respect/liking and warmth by response type and character gender in Experiment 6. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

learned that Ann was experiencing stress from cancer treatment. The statement from Ann follows; wording differences between the conditions are enclosed in brackets:

I'm feeling really stressed. [I was recently diagnosed with cancer/I'm organizing an event], and my [doctors are expecting a long treatment/my team is expecting a large attendance]. I've been having trouble with the logistics of it, and the [starting date of my cancer treatment/date of the event] was delayed because the [chemotherapy medications I need are low in stock/we did not hear back from the city council in time]. The stress is overwhelming and has affected my sleep, and I've been feeling awful because of it.

Ann's statement in the two conditions closely parallel each other, in that she used the same affective expressions ("I'm feeling really stressed," "I've been having trouble . . . ," "The stress is overwhelming and has affected my sleep, and I've been feeling awful because of it"), but the source of her stress was either related or unrelated to her job at Aryan Nations.

We collected the same set of measures and attention checks as before. We added exploratory measures that assessed whether participants thought what Ann experienced was due to the nature of her job (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) and whether Ann's circumstances were within her control (1 = *completely within her control*, 7 = *completely out of her control*).<sup>14</sup> All other aspects of the procedure were the same as in Experiment 5.

## Results

We followed our preanalysis plan for all planned analyses. We also conducted several exploratory analyses, which we report in the following text.

**Respect/liking.** A 2 (response type: empathic vs. condemning)  $\times$  2 (disclosed experience: job stress vs. cancer stress) between-subjects ANOVA on respect/liking ( $\alpha = .96$ ) revealed that participants respected/liked Beth more when she responded to Ann's disclosure about job stress (vs. cancer stress),  $F(1, 464) = 4.52, p = .034, \eta_p^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI } [.0004, .03]$ . The response type main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 464) = 2.10, p = .148, \eta_p^2 < .01, 90\% \text{ CI } [.00, .02]$ . More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Disclosed Experience interaction was significant,  $F(1, 464) = 40.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08, 90\% \text{ CI } [.04, .12]$ . When Ann disclosed stress from her job, participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave a condemning (vs. empathic) response ( $M = 4.63, SD = 1.62$  vs.  $M = 3.88, SD = 1.71$ ),  $F(1, 464) = 11.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03, 90\% \text{ CI } [.01, .05]$ . This effect reversed when Ann disclosed stress from cancer treatment: Participants respected/liked Beth more when she gave an empathic (vs. condemning) response ( $M = 4.53, SD = 1.46$  vs.  $M = 3.33, SD = 1.82$ ),  $F(1, 464) = 30.25, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06, 90\% \text{ CI } [.03, .10]$  (see Figure 11, left panel).

**Warmth.** An identical 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA on warmth ( $\alpha = .91$ ) revealed that participants rated Beth as warmer when she responded to Ann's disclosure about job stress (vs. cancer stress),  $F(1, 464) = 8.58, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .02, 90\% \text{ CI } [.003, .04]$ , and when she gave an empathic (vs. condemning) response,  $F(1, 464) = 126.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21, 90\% \text{ CI } [.16, .27]$ . More importantly, the Response Type  $\times$  Disclosed Experience interaction was significant,  $F(1, 464) = 39.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08, 90\% \text{ CI } [.04, .12]$ . When Ann disclosed stress from her job, participants rated Beth as warmer when she gave an empathic (vs. condemn-

ing) response ( $M = 4.81, SD = 1.50$  vs.  $M = 4.13, SD = 1.42$ ),  $F(1, 464) = 12.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03, 90\% \text{ CI } [.01, .05]$ . This effect was significantly larger when Ann disclosed stress from cancer ( $M = 5.26, SD = 1.25$  vs.  $M = 2.88, SD = 1.69$ ),  $F(1, 464) = 152.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .25, 90\% \text{ CI } [.19, .30]$  (see Figure 11, right panel).

**Exploratory analysis.** Last, we explored whether beliefs about the controllability of Ann's circumstances differed by disclosed experience. Participants thought that Ann's circumstances were more out of her control in the cancer stress (vs. job stress) condition ( $M = 5.26, SD = 1.90$  vs.  $M = 3.85, SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(463) = 8.36, p < .001, d = 0.77, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.58, 0.96]$ .

## Discussion

Experiment 7 provided additional evidence for the effects of a condemning (vs. empathic) response to a negative target on evaluations of the responder. Replicating Experiments 5 and 6, when a negatively portrayed target disclosed a stressful experience that was directly linked to why she was negatively evaluated (i.e., stress from her job at a White supremacist organization), participants respected/liked the responder more when she gave a condemning (vs. empathic) response. This effect reversed, however, when the target's stressful experience was unrelated to why she was negatively evaluated (i.e., stress from cancer treatment). These results suggest that respect/liking for someone who actively withholds empathy from a disliked target depends on whether the disclosed experience is directly linked to why the target is disliked. Furthermore, replicating Experiment 5 and consistent with the direction of the simple main effect in the female character condition in Experiment 6, the condemning (vs. empathic) response elicited lower ratings on the responder's warmth when the disclosed experience was directly linked to the source of target valence; this effect was even stronger when the link was absent.

One limitation of our disclosed experience manipulation is that participants in the cancer stress condition might have found the source of the target's stress jarring. Although the wording for the target's affective experience was identical in the job stress and cancer stress conditions, a life-threatening illness like cancer is arguably more stressful than work problems. We do not have direct evidence suggesting that participants viewed the target's cancer stress as more severe than job stress, but the generalizability of the findings in this experiment could benefit from future research that uses alternative manipulations of the cause of stress.<sup>15</sup>

## Mediational Evidence in Experiments 5 Through 7

Similar to Experiment 4, in Experiments 5 through 7, we conducted latent mediation analyses to test whether the effects of

<sup>14</sup> We collected additional exploratory measures on response positivity, participants' subjective ambivalence about Beth, and participants' evaluation of Ann after reading the interaction. Because those measures were not central to our research questions, we report them here for transparency but do not discuss them further.

<sup>15</sup> Our exploratory variable on ratings of Ann's affect did not significantly differ in the job stress (vs. cancer stress) conditions ( $M = 2.57, SD = 1.58$  vs.  $M = 2.34, SD = 1.54$ ),  $t(466) = 1.63, p = .104, d = 0.15, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.03, 0.33]$ . It is possible, however, that participants did not believe cancer-stricken Ann felt worse, but they felt worse for her.

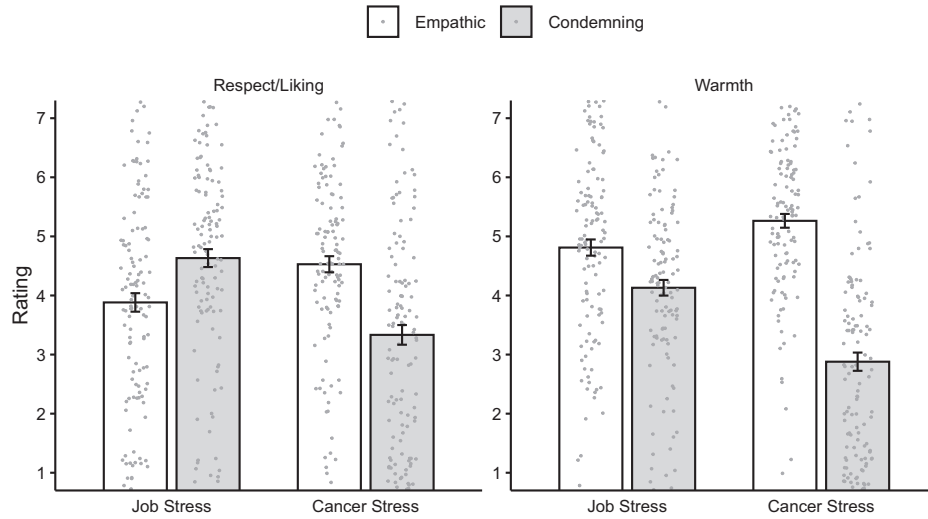


Figure 11. Ratings of Beth on respect/liking and warmth by response type in Experiment 7. Error bars depict  $\pm 1$  standard errors; dots depict jittered individual data points.

response type on evaluations of the responder were mediated by inferences about the responder’s attitude toward the target. In these mediation models, the predictor was response type (+1/2 = condemning, -1/2 = empathic), and the mediator was inferences about the responder’s attitude toward the target, which was modeled as a latent factor indicated by its three items. As in Experiment 4, we conducted analyses separately for respect/liking and warmth, each modeled as a latent factor indicated by its four items (see Figure 12 for a model diagram).

We conducted simple mediation models on all data in Experiment 5, all data in Experiment 6 (due to the lack of character gender main effect on the DVs), and all data in the job stress condition in Experiment 7. Simple mediation models were planned a priori in Experiments 5 and 6 and were exploratory in Experiment 7 (for which the planned analyses were latent moderated mediation analyses, reported below). We followed our planned analyses except for one data-dependent modeling decision: We allowed the residual covariance of the two positively worded items in the mediator (agreement with the statements “[Responder] likes [target]” and “[Responder] feels positive toward [target]”) to be freely estimated. This decision reduced model misspecification of the mediator from ignoring wording-related covariance (Marsh, 1996) and better isolated the true mediator variance, which, in turn, should provide greater power and more accurate indirect effect

estimates (Gonzalez & MacKinnon, 2020). To retain local independence of the latent mediator, we also constrained the factor loadings of those two items to be equal.

These models fit the data reasonably well,  $\chi^2(18) = 86.18-233.08$ ,  $ps < .001$ , CFIs = 0.92–0.97, TLIs = 0.87–0.95, RMSEAs = 0.12–0.17 (see the online supplemental materials for model details). Results were mixed across the three experiments: The indirect effects ( $ab$ ) had largely overlapping 95% CIs, but the point estimates differed in sign and significance for both respect/liking and warmth (see Table 3). Integrated analyses on the pooled data from the three experiments indicated that the indirect effect was significant for respect/liking ( $ab = 0.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not for warmth ( $ab = 0.08$ ,  $p = .594$ ).

To assess the robustness of evidence for indirect effects from the simple mediation analyses, we compared the results with those from two alternative analytic approaches. The first alternative approach was almost identical to the main approach but ignored wording differences among the items in the mediator (i.e., the mediator items had freely estimated factor loadings and independent residual variances). The second alternative approach contained only observed (rather than latent) variables and modeled both the mediator and the DVs as composite scores. Results from these two approaches were largely consistent with our main analytic approach and revealed mixed evidence for the indirect effects (see the online supplemental materials for details). We conclude that there is some evidence for mediation by inferences about the responder’s attitude toward the negative target on evaluations of the responder in Experiment 5 through 7. Importantly, this evidence is weak, inconsistent across experiments, and dependent on analytic approaches. Note, however, that because Experiments 5 through 7 only presented negative targets, the weak mediational evidence is in line with the results of Experiment 4, which found that the indirect effects were weaker in the negative (vs. positive) target conditions (see Table 2,  $a_{neg}b_{neg}$ ).

Last, we followed our preregistered analysis plan for Experiment 7 and conducted latent moderated mediation analyses by

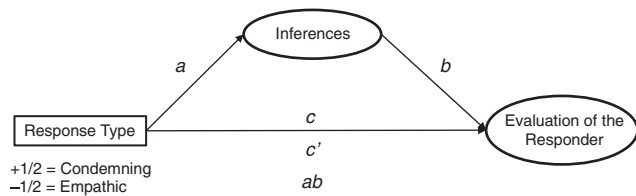


Figure 12. Diagram of the latent simple mediation models in Experiments 5 through 7. Inferences refer to the inferences about responder’s attitude toward the target. Evaluation of the responder is either respect/liking or warmth. For visual clarity, measurement models are not shown.

Table 3  
Parameter Estimates, 95% Confidence Intervals, and P Values From the Main Simple Latent Mediation Models in Experiments 5 Through 7

Dependent variable	Dataset	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ab</i>	<i>P<sub>ab</sub></i>
Respect/liking	Experiment 5	-4.46 [-5.12, -3.79]	-0.30 [-0.44, -0.16]	1.34 [0.68, 2.00]	<.001
	Experiment 6	-3.25 [-3.81, -2.69]	-0.22 [-0.37, -0.08]	0.72 [0.23, 1.22]	.004
	Experiment 7	-3.36 [-4.00, -2.72]	0.09 [-0.08, 0.26]	-0.31 [-0.87, 0.26]	.289
	Pooled Data	-3.69 [-4.05, -3.33]	-0.17 [-0.26, -0.09]	0.64 [0.32, 0.96]	<.001
Warmth	Experiment 5	-4.40 [-5.05, -3.75]	-0.14 [-0.27, -0.01]	0.63 [0.05, 1.20]	.034
	Experiment 6	-3.23 [-3.79, -2.68]	-0.03 [-0.17, 0.11]	0.10 [-0.35, 0.55]	.655
	Experiment 7	-3.37 [-4.01, -2.73]	0.19 [0.02, 0.37]	-0.65 [-1.25, -0.05]	.035
	Pooled Data	-3.66 [-4.02, -3.31]	-0.02 [-0.11, 0.06]	0.08 [-0.22, 0.38]	.594

Note. All parameter estimates are in unstandardized metrics.

entering disclosed experience as a moderator (+1/2 = job stress, -1/2 = cancer stress). These moderated mediation models revealed no evidence of moderated mediation for respect/liking (first-stage moderated mediation:  $a_{\text{mod}}b = 0.07$ ,  $p = .126$ ; second-stage moderated mediation:  $ab_{\text{mod}} = 0.11$ ,  $p = .526$ ), and weak evidence of first-stage moderated mediation for warmth ( $a_{\text{mod}}b = 0.13$ ,  $p = .034$ ; second-stage moderated mediation:  $ab_{\text{mod}} = 0.26$ ,  $p = .154$ ). Because of the mixed results on the simple indirect effects across Experiments 5 through 7, we similarly conclude that the evidence of moderated mediation is weak; details of these analyses are available in the online supplemental materials.

### General Discussion

Although empathy is widely studied, little is known about its effects beyond the dyadic context. The current research focuses on the extradyadic implications of empathy for empathizers. In seven experiments, we examined how third-party observers evaluate empathizers and how target characteristics affect such evaluations. Evaluations of empathizers consistently depended on target valence. Empathizers were respected/liked more when they responded to a positively portrayed target, but not when they responded to a negatively portrayed target (Experiments 1, 2, and 4). Empathizers and nonempathizers were respected/liked comparably when a negative target shared a stressful experience (Experiments 1, 2, and 4), but empathizers were respected/liked less when a negative target shared a positive experience (i.e., success at work; Experiment 3). In addition, empathizers were rated as warmer when they responded to both positive and negative targets, but the effect was smaller for negative targets (Experiments 1 through 4).

We found that the effects on evaluations of empathizers were partially, but not solely attributable to the positivity of the empathic response (Experiment 4). In addition, inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target frequently mediated the effects, though the mediational evidence was weaker when the target was negatively portrayed (Experiments 4 through 7). Last, when the responder condemned (vs. empathized with) a negatively portrayed target, they were respected/liked more but seen as less warm when the target experienced stress from working for a White supremacist organization; when the target's stressful experience was unrelated to her negative portrayal (i.e., cancer treatment), the responder was respected/liked less and also rated as less warm (Experiments 5 through 7).

By examining the effects of empathy beyond the dyad in which it takes place, our research expands current understanding of the social impact of empathy. Importantly, our findings reveal that empathy not only can have an impact on extradyad observers, but also that the impact is nuanced: Observers' evaluations of empathizers are attuned to an array of target characteristics, including the target's valence, the target's experience, and the cause of the empathized experience. These findings lend credence to the idea that empathy can serve as a tool for social affiliation: By expressing empathy, empathizers signal for whom they care, which, in turn, can be used by observers to evaluate empathizers' personal character. In this spirit, the current research converges with other recent work in showing that affiliative intradyad phenomena can affect third-party observers' judgments and behaviors (e.g., Algoe, Dwyer, Young, & Oveis, 2019; Critcher & Zayas, 2014; Kavanagh, Suhler, Churchland, & Winkielman, 2011).

The impact of empathy on observers also poses a conundrum: People are often encouraged to empathize with disliked others, but our findings suggest that they are not always viewed favorably for doing so. Given that empathizing with liked others has evaluative benefits for empathizers, whereas empathizing with disliked others might not (or might even incur evaluative costs), these benefits and costs might, in turn, affect the reputation and social standing of empathizers. This possibility underscores the importance of considering the extradyadic effects of empathy, because it suggests that the effects of empathy within a dyad might not be congruent with its effects beyond the dyad. Insofar as empathy is seen as an affiliative act, it might not bridge social divides as some have claimed, because those who empathize across social divides might be repudiated by their own peers for doing so. Consequently, the social evaluative benefits of empathy might accrue more readily within groups than across them. Empathy might thus ironically reify the very social divides it is touted to bridge.

### Dissociation Between Respect/Liking and Warmth

One intriguing finding is that respect/liking for and warmth of empathizers were dissociated when the target was negatively portrayed. To provide a cumulative picture of how respect/liking versus warmth varied by response type in the negative target conditions, we meta-analyzed the effect across all experiments using McShane and Böckenholt's (2017) single-paper meta-analysis tool. We coded the levels of response type as -1 for

empathic responses and +1 for nonempathic responses (i.e., nonempathic response in Experiments 1 through 3 and S1, neutral nonempathic response in Experiment 4, and condemning response in Experiments 5 through 7) for respect/liking, and the reverse for warmth (i.e., +1 for empathic responses, -1 for nonempathic responses). The Response Type  $\times$  DV interaction was significant ( $b = 0.94$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.42, 1.46]), suggesting that respect/liking and warmth indeed differed by response type in the negative target conditions (see Figure 13 for estimates across all experiments). Because we used different manipulations of empathic versus nonempathic responses across experiments, unsurprisingly the effect sizes were heterogeneous ( $I^2 = 93%$ , 95% CI [91%, 94%]).

Why might people evaluate empathizers of negative targets differently on respect/liking versus warmth? One perspective is that in our experimental contexts, respect/liking and warmth reflect different evaluative dimensions. This possibility is largely consistent with the literature on the dual dimensions of social evaluation (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Asch, 1946; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Todorov, Said, Engell, & Oosterhof, 2008): In our experiments, respect/liking is similar to agency/competence, and warmth is similar to warmth/communion. We note, however, that there are important points of divergence between the two dimensions we observed and the dual-dimension models. For example, our results suggest that respect and liking belong to the same dimension but that liking and warmth belong to different dimensions; in contrast, both agency–communion models and the stereotype content model view liking as reflecting warmth/communion (e.g., Asch, 1946), and that liking and respect are separate dimensions (e.g., Fiske et al., 2007; Wojciszke, Abele, & Barylka, 2009).

Another perspective on the dissociation between respect/liking and warmth in the negative target conditions is to view it through the lens of moral judgment. Although we did not assess participants' beliefs about the morality of the negative targets, it seems likely that those beliefs underlie their unfavorable views of the negative targets (i.e., participants disliked the targets because they repudiate the values those targets held). If negative views of the negative targets were moralized, then respect/liking for the empathizer might similarly result from judgments of the empathizer's morality (e.g., "Is Beth a *good* person for empathizing with a

White supremacist/anti-vaxxer?"). Insofar as participants' values diverge from their inferred values of the empathizer, they should respect/like the empathizer less. In contrast, warmth might capture the empathizer's sociability (e.g., "Is Beth a *nice* person for empathizing with a White supremacist/anti-vaxxer?"). In other words, whereas warmth might reflect evaluations of what the responder is like interpersonally, respect/liking might reflect evaluations of what the responder stands for. This possibility draws from research indicating that morality and sociability represent two distinct components of person perception (Cottrell et al., 2007; Goodwin et al., 2014; Landy et al., 2016), which might also explain why liking for the empathizer did not load onto the warmth factor: Insofar as liking reflects a global impression of the empathizer, it should be aligned with judgments of the empathizer's morality, because of the primacy of moral information in shaping global impressions (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Landy et al., 2016).

Alternatively, drawing from the act–person dissociation in moral judgment (e.g., Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann et al., 2015), the dissociation between respect/liking and warmth might reflect a focus on the person (i.e., empathizer) versus the act (i.e., showing empathy). For instance, Uhlmann, Zhu, and Tannenbaum (2013) found that consequentialist actions (e.g., throwing a dying man overboard to prevent a lifeboat from sinking) can lead to positive evaluation of the action (as morally permissible) but negative evaluation of the person's character, due to the attribution that the person lacks empathy. It is possible that respect/liking reflects evaluations of the moral character of empathizers and that warmth reflects evaluations of the act of empathy (e.g., "Empathizing with a White supremacist shows care, but I don't like the person doing it.").

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our findings indicate that expressing empathy affects observers' evaluations of empathizers. A promising direction for future research is to examine whether these evaluations have behavioral implications as well. This direction is applicable to everyday interpersonal settings, where observers might choose to affiliate with or distance themselves from empathizers. It is also applicable to more visible settings, where public figures might outwardly display empathy. For example, when a political candidate ex-

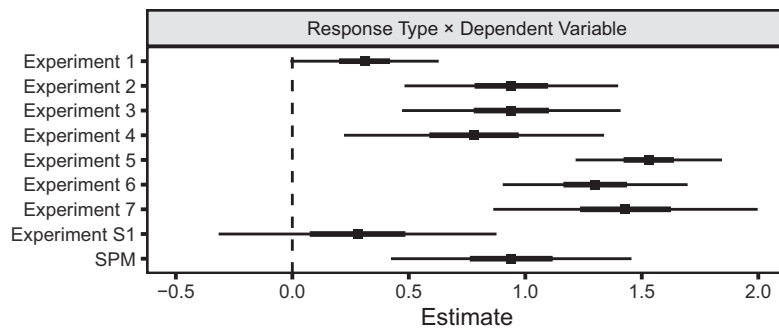


Figure 13. Estimates of the Response Type  $\times$  Dependent Variable interaction effect in all experiments and the single-paper meta-analyzed (SPM) effect. Thick and thin lines, respectively, represent 50% and 95% confidence intervals.

presses empathy toward potential voters, under what conditions does that candidate garner more support? Past research suggests that empathy is among the most important and influential traits that voters consider in U.S. Presidential and Congressional elections (Hayes, 2005, 2010). Yet, our research suggests that voters' support for empathic political candidates might be conditional on how voters view the recipients of the candidates' empathy (e.g., someone voters like vs. dislike). Furthermore, additional factors could influence behaviors toward empathizers more heavily than evaluations of empathizers. One such factor is authenticity: People might be willing to positively evaluate but not personally affiliate with or support empathizers who seem inauthentic or performative. Examining when evaluations of empathizers lead to affiliative behaviors could shed additional light on how empathy coordinates social behaviors.

We found that inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target largely mediated the effects of our experimental manipulations. We caution that this finding, although consistent with the possibility that people use their inferences to evaluate the responder, should be viewed as correlational evidence. The limitations of drawing causal inferences from cross-sectional mediation analyses are well-known (e.g., Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010; Spencer et al., 2005), and it is possible that other variables could additionally or alternatively explain the effects reported here. Future research could clarify the causal role of inferences about the responder's attitude toward the target by directly manipulating those inferences.

Across experiments, we used verbal information to manipulate expressions of empathy in a dyadic exchange. We did so not only for experimental control, but also because it is an important medium through which people observe empathy (e.g., in printed media or online exchanges). As illustrated by the reactions to the *New York Times* profile we discussed at the outset, verbally conveyed empathy alone can elicit observers' evaluations. At the same time, other forms of expressing and observing empathy, particularly those involving live, in-person interactions, likely contain richer information and afford more nuanced inferences and evaluations. For example, in inferring an empathizer's attitude toward a target from an in-person interaction, observers might integrate the target's and the empathizer's nonverbal behaviors, such as their tone of voice, eye contact, and proximity to each other (e.g., DePaulo & Friedman, 1998; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). These factors might also contextualize verbal communications: For example, observers might interpret someone expressing empathy in an insincere tone as evidence that the empathizer does not actually like the target. Thus, our results might not generalize to live empathic interactions in which a wider range of variables might affect how observers evaluate empathizers.

Finally, we focused on observers' impressions of empathizers in cases where observers had no existing relationship with the empathizer or the target. What would happen if the observer does? For example, how would someone evaluate their own parent for empathizing with a disliked person? Unlike the impression formation context we examined, established relationships between observers and empathizers afford observers knowledge about and attitudes toward empathizers that observers might be motivated to preserve (Festinger, 1957; Kunda, 1990). One possibility in the context of established relation-

ships is that observers who already view the empathizer positively might be motivated to "explain away" empathy with a negative target (e.g., "She might empathize with White supremacists, but she's still a good person") or reinterpret empathy in a positive way (e.g., "She empathizes with White supremacists because she sees the good in everyone"). We consider this possibility a promising direction for future research.

## Conclusion

Empathy is often considered a virtue, yet people who display it might not always be viewed positively. The present work indicates that third-party observers' evaluations of empathizers crucially depend on the target of empathy. More broadly, our findings underscore the extradyadic effects of empathy: Empathy connects people, but the connections have evaluative consequences. Understanding how people view empathy and empathizers promises a deeper understanding of how empathy functions in social contexts.

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