

## The “Identified Victim” Effect: An Identified Group, or Just a Single Individual?

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### ABSTRACT

People’s greater willingness to help identified victims, relative to non-identified ones, was examined by varying the singularity of the victim (single vs. a group of eight individuals), and the availability of individually identifying information (the main difference being the inclusion of a picture in the “identified” versions). Results support the proposal that the “identified victim” effect is largely restricted to situations with a single victim: the identified single victim elicited considerably more contributions than the non-identified single victim, while the identification of the individual group members had essentially no effect on willingness to contribute. Participants also report experiencing distress when the victim is single and identified more than in any other condition. Hence, the emotional reaction to the victims appears to be a major source of the effect. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS emotion; affect; individuating information; victims

In recent years there has been growing interest in the different roles emotions play in decision making (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). The affective process, or the experiential system, as it has been termed (Epstein, 1994), is considered responsible for generating an immediate response to a novel stimulus. This immediate response often determines the decision outcome. Researchers have referred to this spontaneous affective response as the “wellspring of action.” Bad feelings trigger action designed to avoid a potentially dangerous situation, while good feelings may promote acts that would help maintain favorable circumstances. The growing interest in the affective system seems to be matched by a growing appreciation of its importance to human survival. In particular in the domain of risk preference, the “affect heuristic” (Slovic Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2002) has been proposed as a main heuristic that guides people’s behavior.

While the affective system may have an important task in directing the individual’s attention to potentially high-priority events, its role is not entirely positive. In their discussion of the “risk as feelings” hypothesis, Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, and Welch (2001) argue that the direct emotional influence on the decision process (including feelings such as worry, fear, dread and anxiety) often results in behavioral responses that

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depart from what the individual would view as the best course of action. In particular, stimuli that evoke more immediate emotional response may take precedence over less-affect-rich stimuli, even if the latter have more important consequences. The arousal of emotions may be affected by factors that don't always correlate with importance. For example, vividness exerts great influence on feelings, although it does not necessarily reflect the severity of the problem, whereas probability, a factor that is normatively of high importance, often has no effect on the feelings evoked in a risky situation (Rottenstreich & Hsee, 2001). The influence exerted by the affective system has been proposed as an explanation for a wide range of behaviors that depart from the principles of rationality, such as willingness to pay for insurance against a specific cause more than for insurance against a more inclusive category of causes (Johnson, Hershey, Meszaros, & Kunreuther, 1993), the failure to save and invest appropriately for retirement (Weber, 2004), and the general preference for options that potentially minimize regret (Mellers, Schwartz, & Ritov, 1999).

In the present research we examine a particular phenomenon, the "identified victim effect" that may often lead to non-normative choices. We explore the conditions that promote this phenomenon, and the role of emotions in this context. The notion that people are sometimes willing to contribute more to save an identified victim than a non-identified one has a strong intuitive appeal. Schelling, in his seminal economic analysis of the worth of preventing human death (Schelling, 1968) noted the distinction between individual lives and statistical lives. Schelling's assumption, concerning the different reactions to identified and non-identified lives has recently been tested by Small and Loewenstein (2003a, 2003b). In their research, they demonstrate that people are more generous toward an identifiable victim than toward a statistical victim. Conversely, people are also more punitive toward determinate wrongdoers than toward equivalent, but indeterminate, wrongdoers, even when determining the wrongdoer conveys no meaningful information about him or her.

Small and Loewenstein's research addressed the distinction between identifiable and non-identifiable victims. The identifiable victims in their studies were determinate, although no personalizing information about them was provided. Their findings clearly show that people are more willing to contribute to a determined victim, than to an undetermined one. Small and Loewenstein attribute the identifiability effect that they found to stronger affective reactions toward the identifiable target. Those reactions are likely to intensify even more if the target of the judgment were not just identifiable but actually identified. Thus, willingness to contribute to determined victims may be further affected by their being identified, in the sense that some individuating information is available to potential contributors. Although the role of availability of individuating information is difficult to separate from the impact of the information itself, the distinction between the identifiable victim, who is actually identified, and the one who is not may be an important one. This distinction is the starting point of the present research.

The study of empathy is most pertinent to the above conjecture. The empathy altruism hypothesis (Batson et al., 1991) posits that helping-behavior motivation, such as willingness to contribute to help a victim, is directly related to aroused empathic emotion. A necessary precondition for the arousal of empathic emotions is the adoption of the other's perspective, imagining how that person perceives the situation and how he or she feels as a result. (Davis, 1994, Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995). This is likely to evoke, in the perceiver, feeling of empathy (sympathetic, moved, compassionate, tender, warm, softhearted, etc.) and also feelings of distress for that other person (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997).<sup>1</sup>

When will a perceiver adopt the victim's perspective, in the absence of explicit instructions? We suggest that people are more likely to adopt this perspective when the victim they observe is identified. Previous research suggests that specific cases tend to evoke different kinds of processing than general ones (Sherman, Beike, & Ryalls, 1999). The former are usually more emotionally engaging and personally relevant than the

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<sup>1</sup>Alternatively, imagining how oneself would perceive the situation were one in the other's position, may induce feelings of personal distress (upset, worried, disturbed, distressed, troubled, etc.; Batson, 1987). The important distinction between distress for the other and personal distress, elucidated by Batson and his associates (Batson et al., 1997) is beyond the scope of the present research.

latter. More vivid and concrete details, such as those available when the victim is identified, cause the case to be perceived as more self-relevant and give it some of the elements of direct experience. Thus, for example, Stapel and Velthuisen (1996), comparing the effect of vivid, concrete newspaper reports of car accident with a pallid presentation of the same information, found that the estimates of the likelihood of ever becoming a victim of a car accident were higher for the participants who had read the vivid, concrete reports. These authors suggest that when a person is exposed to vivid, concrete information, this information may be almost as self-relevant and influential as events experienced personally. In another context, Hsee & Weber (1997), found that subjects made less risky decisions for themselves than they predicted that others would make for themselves, only if the target of prediction was abstract, but not when it was concrete and vivid. This study indicates that self-other differences are minimized, if not eliminated, when the other is concrete and vivid.

Beyond the difference in vividness, one feature that often distinguishes identified victims from unidentified ones is the fact that the former are typically encountered as single individuals: John, who needs a costly treatment to get cured from a rare disease; Miriam, the little girl who just lost her parents, and so on. Recent research comparing how people form an impression of individuals and how they form an impression of groups, showed that these are two distinct processes (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Susskind, Maurer, Thakkar, Hamilton, & Sherman, 1999). According to this research, a single individual, unlike a group of individuals, is viewed as a psychologically coherent unit. Expectancy of coherence leads to a more extensive processing of information, and to active integration of the information in real time. Thus, people more readily make extreme attributions about individuals than about groups, they respond more quickly and with greater confidence when asked to make a judgment, and they recall more information when it pertains to an individual rather than to group members. The distinction between the two processes, that of perceiving individuals and that of perceiving groups, is likely to become clearer the more extensive the available information. Hence, identifying information is expected to play a greater role in case of a single victim than in the case of a group of victims.

The perceptually distinct processes may give rise to different behavioral tendencies toward individuals and groups. Indeed, Redelmeier and Tversky (1990), studying physicians' decision making, found that physicians were more likely to order an additional test, expend time directly assessing a patient, avoid raising some troubling issues, and recommend risky therapy, when considering an individual patient than when considering a group of patients. Redelmeier and Tversky concluded that physicians give more weight to the personal concerns of patients when considering them as individuals and more weight to general criteria of effectiveness when considering them as a group. In a different domain, Tenbrunsel, Diekmann, and Naquin (2003) found that people are more likely to engage in misrepresentation when their behavior was directed toward a group than toward an individual person.

The convergent evidence discussed above suggests that the processing of information related to a single victim may be fundamentally different from the processing of information concerning a group of victims. The distinct processing of information concerning the victims, bears upon the perceivers' emotional reaction and their willingness to help. In particular, we suggest that people are more likely to adopt the victim's perspective not only when the victim is vividly presented, but also when the victim is a single individual rather than a group. Thus, in line with the findings of Batson and his associates (Batson et al., 1995, 1999) we predict that when considering an identified single victim, people will tend to experience more empathic emotions than when considering an unidentified single victim or a group of victims.

The emotional response to the victim is expected to be reflected in the perceivers' willingness to help. Thus, in sum, we hypothesize that identification of the victim will have an effect mostly when the victim is a single individual. Willingness to contribute to help a single identified victim is expected to be greater than willingness to contribute to help a single unidentified victim, whereas willingness to contribute to groups of victims is not expected to differ for identified and unidentified targets.

The hypothesis that willingness to contribute to help a needy victim will show an interaction effect, such that the identified victim will receive higher contributions than the unidentified one only when the victim is a

single individual is tested in the following experiments. In these experiments willingness to contribute to a life-saving treatment is examined under different conditions. In all cases the victims are children in need of a costly life-saving treatment. This is essentially the only information provided in the “unidentified” conditions. In the most fully “identified” conditions the children are identified by name and by a picture. The groups of victims are always made up of the same eight individuals, included, separately, in the single victim conditions. Finally, as the proportion of victims in the “reference group” who are expected to die or to be saved has proved a significant factor in people’s decisions (Ritov & Baron, 1990; Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997) this factor was kept constant across all conditions, by creating a situation in which the treatment will either be provided to all eight victims in the group, or to none.

The first study examines willingness to contribute to save the lives of the children, varying both the extent of identification and the number of victims. The second study examines the emotional response to the victims’ predicament, and the link between the evoked feelings and willingness to contribute. Finally, Study 3 replicates the main finding of Study 2 with real contributions.

## STUDY 1

The first study was designed to test our main hypothesis, namely that willingness to contribute (WTC) to save identified victims is greater than WTC to save unidentified ones, predominantly when the target is a single individual. Identifying details necessarily provide additional information about the target. The additional information, in the present study, included the child’s age (as opposed to just “child”), name, and a picture. Pictures of eight different individuals were used, so that the willingness to contribute to a single identified victim we observe can be averaged across the different victims. Furthermore, the group of identified victims was made up of all the individual victims that were used in the single victim condition. This affords a meaningful comparison between average willingness to contribute for saving single identified victims and willingness to contribute for saving a group of identified individuals.

The three additional personal details of the victim, namely his or her age, name and picture, can be viewed as providing an increasing level of distinct individual information: stating the child’s age does not further identify him as a unique individual, whereas giving his or her name does. Presenting the child’s picture, in addition to his or her name, further strengthens the perception of an identified individual. The present study was designed to examine the effect of each of these increasing levels of identification for single victims vs. a group of victims.

## METHOD

Two hundred forty-seven undergraduate students at the Hebrew University participated in this study. They were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions. Two factors were varied between subjects in a  $2 \times 4$  factorial design: the singularity of the victim (single vs. a group of eight individuals) and the identifying information (unidentified; age only; age & name; age, name, & picture).

All participants read the same basic story describing a sick child or a group of eight sick children, being treated in a medical center, whose lives are in danger. Next, the questionnaire reported that: “recently a new drug was developed that cures the disease. Unfortunately this drug is extremely expensive, and unless a sum of 1,500,000 Shekels (about US\$300,000) is raised soon, it will no longer be possible to save the lives of the sick children [sick child].” Participants were then asked whether they were willing to contribute money to save the victim(s) lives and, if so, how much money they would donate at this moment.

The unidentified victim(s) versions mentioned just that “there is a child [there are eight children], being treated in a medical center, whose life is [lives are] in danger.” The first level of identification added only the

victim(s) age(s). These versions stated: "there is a two-year-old sick child [there are eight, two-year-old children], being treated in a medical center, whose life is [lives are] in danger." The identification by age and name condition, introduced the children by their names. For example, the group version said: "Sharon, Avi, Ronit, Shiran, Yonatan, Rachel, Oma and Yotam, are eight-two-year-old sick children who are treated in a medical center." In the fourth condition, the age, name and the victim(s)' picture were also presented. We used a group portrait of eight children (four boys and four girls) for the identification of the group, and eight separate pictures of the same eight children for the identification of the single individual (using sections of the group portrait presented in the group conditions). Each individual child was presented an equal number of times in the identified single victim condition (that is, in six out of 48 questionnaires in this condition).

## Results

Means of willingness to contribute (WTC) in each condition are presented in Table 1. Since the contributions were not distributed normally, we report here, as in all other reports of statistical analyses of monetary contributions in this research, the results for the log-transformed contributions. Contributions to the single identified victims did not significantly differ for the different children, and were averaged across the eight children. As can be seen in the table, participants' WTC depended upon the kind of identifying information,  $F(3, 238) = 5.088$ ,  $p < 0.002$  for the identifying information main effect, in an ANOVA of WTC by singularity and identifying information. Across the two singularity conditions, willingness to contribute was highest when the victims were identified by age, name and a picture (63.69), and lowest for victims identified by age and the unidentified victims (36.87 and 45.68, respectively, the difference between those two conditions is not significant). Singularity did not have a significant main effect on WTC. The lack of a significant singularity effect indicates quantity neglect, as participants were willing to contribute to saving a single victim as much as they were willing to contribute to save eight victims.

Most importantly for our present study, we found, as expected, a significant interaction ( $F(3, 238) = 2.77$ ,  $p < 0.042$ ) between the two independent factors (singularity and identifying information). Separate analyses revealed that the type of identifying information significantly affected WTC for single victims ( $F(3, 119) = 6.04$ ,  $p < 0.036$ ), but not for the group of victims ( $p = 0.102$ ). Post hoc comparisons among the means of WTC for single victims yielded a significant difference between identification by age, name, and picture and both unidentified ( $p < 0.036$ ) and identified by age ( $p < 0.001$ ) conditions. WTC to victims identified by age did not significantly differ from WTC to unidentified victims ( $p = 0.504$ ). Mean WTC for

Table 1. Experiment 1: Mean willingness to contribute (WTC)

Identification	Target victim	
	Single	Group of eight
Unidentified		
Mean	47.17	44.11
SD	56.37	42.93
Age		
Mean	26.45	46.97
SD	33.84	89.25
Age and name		
Mean	73.19	44.74
SD	123.31	93.25
Age, name, and picture		
Mean	83.90	43.48
SD	76.89	41.80

$N = 247$ .

children identified by age and name only was in between mean WTC for children identified by age only, and mean WTC for children identified by age, name and picture, but identification by age and name did not significantly differ from any of the other groups. Thus, a significant difference between an unidentified and an identified single victim is revealed only when identification includes a picture. We note also that the increased WTC for the fully identified single victim resulted, in particular, in higher contributions for the single victim than for a group of eight, when all victims were identified by name, age, and picture ( $t(60) = 2.434, p < 0.05$ ).

In sum, the present results suggest that the effect of identification may be largely restricted to single victims. The results also indicate that identification of the single victim is more effective the more vivid the representation. These findings are compatible with the assumption that information about individuals is processed differently from information about a group, and that this difference comes to bear particularly when individuating information is available. The different processes are likely to vary also in the emotions that arise with them. Hence we turn next to the role of the emotions evoked by the victims as determinants of the willingness to contribute to save their lives.

## STUDY 2

The present study was designed to test the role of empathic emotions evoked by the victim in explaining the pattern of WTC found in the first study. In particular, we examine whether those emotions, expressed as rating of empathic concern and distress, differentiate between the response to an identified and an unidentified single victim more than the response to identified and unidentified groups.

Self-report measures of vicarious emotions are susceptible to measurement problems (Batson et al., 1991, 1997). In particular, social norms regarding expression of empathic response to the plight of another, may render direct measures of empathy less useful for detecting differential arousal in response to different victims. Measures of distress may be somewhat less influenced by the social norm, and hence more sensitive to subtle variations. Following the discussion of empathy introduced earlier, we expect a significant interaction between the factors of identification (identified vs. unidentified) and singularity (single vs. a group), such that the identified victim will evoke higher ratings of distress than the unidentified one only when the victim is a single individual.

### Method

One hundred twelve undergraduate students at the Hebrew University participated in this study. They were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of the 2 (single vs. a group of eight individuals)  $\times$  2 (identified vs. unidentified) experimental design. The identified victims were again identified by name, age, and picture. All participants read the same basic story about a sick child or a group of eight sick children, described in Study 1. After reading the story and answering the "willingness to contribute" question, participants were asked to rate their feelings of distress and concern on a 7-point scale. The first sentence, examining feelings of distress, read: "After reading the child's [children's] story I felt worried, upset and sad." The second sentence, examining feelings of empathic concern, was: "I felt sympathy and compassion towards the sick child [children]." The 7-point response scale for each sentence ranged from "not at all" to "very much."

### Results

Mean WTC are presented in Table 2. As in Study 1, contributions for the single identified victims did not significantly differ for the different children, and were averaged across the eight victims. Results replicated the findings of Study 1 in that identification of the victim significantly interacted with the singularity factor

Table 2. Experiment 2: WTC, ratings of distress, and ratings of empathy

Identification	Target victim					
	Single			Group of eight		
	WTP	Distress	Empathy	WTP	Distress	Empathy
Identified						
Mean	52.9	5.3	5.43	29.9	4.4	5.2
SD	59.4	1.28	1.45	32.8	1.17	1.2
Unidentified						
Mean	36.1	3.96	4.96	45.4	4.4	5.0
SD	69.7	1.68	1.43	39.4	1.3	1.3

$N = 112$ .

( $F(1, 108) = 7.12, p < 0.009$ ). Again the identified single victim elicited considerably more contributions than the non-identified single victim ( $p < 0.034$ ), while the identified group did not differ significantly from the non-identified group.

Turning next to the emotions rating, we find that the ratings of distress significantly correlated with WTC ( $r = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ), while the correlation of empathic concern ratings and WTC was not significant. Ratings of distress and empathic concern were further analyzed using a 2 (identified vs. unidentified)  $\times$  2 (single victim vs. group of victims) ANOVA, as in the analysis of WTC. As predicted, distress ratings showed a significant interaction between the factors of identification and the singularity of the victim, replicating the same pattern found for WTC. Identified victims yielded higher ratings of distress than unidentified ones only when the victim was a single individual ( $p < 0.001$ ). Ratings for empathic concern did not show any significant main effects or interactions. In order to test the contribution of evoked distress to the interaction effect found in WTC, we re-analyzed WTC by the two manipulated factors (singularity and identification), with rating of distress as a covariant. The interaction between the factors of identification and singularity was only marginally significant ( $p = 0.077$ ) in this analysis. Thus, it appears that the identified single victim effect may at least partly be due to the fact that a single identified victim evokes particularly strong feelings of distress in the perceiver.

### STUDY 3

In a recent study (Kogut & Ritov, 2005) we were able to replicate the identified victim effect with real contributions. In particular we found that contributions for the single identified victim exceeded those for the identified group. The present study was conducted in order to examine whether the link between evoked distress and the willingness to help the victim, found in Study 2, will hold when the hypothetical WTC is replaced with real contribution. In particular, we were interested in whether the apparent deviation from economic rationality, the preference for the single identified victim over the identified group, would be reflected in ratings of distress evoked by the victims in the contributions. Thus, in the present study, subjects were given an actual opportunity to contribute to saving the victims. The target victim was either an identified single child, or a group of identified children. In addition to deciding whether and how much they wanted to contribute to the presented victim (or victims), participants rated their feelings of distress and empathic concern.

#### Method

Seventy-eight undergraduate students at the Hebrew University participated in this study. Participants were paid ten shekels to complete a five-page booklet, including the present questionnaire and a questionnaire for

an unrelated study. They were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: an identified single victim or an identified group. We used the same descriptions and pictures for the identification of the victims as in the first study (again the group portrait of eight children used for the identification of the group was cut into eight separate pictures for use in the identification of the single individual). After reading descriptions of the victims, participants were asked to rate their feelings of distress and concern on a seven-point scale, using the same two sentences as in the previous study. On the next page, participants were asked whether they were willing to contribute money to help save the victim(s)' lives. If they responded in the affirmative, they could contribute any amount of money they wished. In particular, they could donate any part of the ten shekels they had received in payment for their participation in this study, or they could donate a higher sum by adding as much as they wanted to. Subjects were instructed to put the questionnaire, together with the donation (if any) in a sealed, unmarked envelope. All the money raised in this study was transferred by the experimenter to the Hayim Association, an Israeli organization that helps children with cancer.

### Results

As in the previous experiments, the contributions were not distributed normally, and we report the analyses of the log-transformed contributions. Contributions for the single identified victim did not differ significantly for the different victims and responses were averaged across the eight victims. The results are reported in Table 3. As can be seen in the table, participants in the single-victim condition contributed significantly more money than participants in the group condition ( $t(76) = 3.33, p < 0.001$ ). As with hypothetical WTC, here too, the amount contributed was significantly correlated with rating of distress ( $r = 0.227, p < 0.05$ ), but not with rating of empathic concern. Ratings of distress were again significantly higher for single victims than for the group of eight victims ( $t(76) = 2.23, p < 0.028$ ). There was no significant difference between the ratings of empathic concern for the two experimental conditions. In sum, the findings of the present study replicate those of Study 2, but this time, the contributions were real. Thus, the feelings of distress appear to be predictive not just of declarative hypothetical choices, but also of actual behavior.

## DISCUSSION

The identified victim effect represents an apparent deviation from the principle of economic rationality, as it is unlikely that social benefits will be maximized when resources are made available to identified victims more than to unidentified ones. Furthermore, unless willingness to contribute is driven either by a special personal attachment to the particular identified victim, or by an assessment (biased as it may be) of the need for one's contribution, the greater contribution to an identified victim may also not serve the contributor's goals to the best extent. Thus, understanding the sources and boundaries for this effect is of great importance.

In the studies presented here we first tested the proposal that the identified victim effect is more pertinent for single victims than for groups. Results yielded a consistent interaction between the singularity or plurality of the target and the availability of identifying information. A single identified victim elicited higher contributions than

Table 3. Experiment 3: WTC, ratings of distress, and ratings of empathy

	Target victim					
	Identified single			Identified group		
	WTP	Distress	Empathy	WTP	Distress	Empathy
<i>Mean</i>	6.37	5.66	5.34	3.22	4.92	5.54
<i>SD</i>	4.68	1.35	1.51	4.37	1.57	1.26

*N* = 78.



a non-identified individual while a group of eight identified individuals did not elicit significantly higher contributions than a group of unidentified individuals. The interaction between singularity and identification uncovered here suggests a possible explanation for the lack of vividness effect in Jenni and Loewenstein's earlier study (1997). In their research, providing vivid details about the victim failed to affect respondents' judgment of the importance of saving his or her life. However, participants in Jenni and Loewenstein's studies, even those in the separate evaluation conditions, all considered several victims. Evaluating different victims in close proximity could induce a similar process to the one employed in evaluating the group of identified victims in our studies. As we have shown, identifying information has little or no effect in this case.

The present research went a step further beyond delineating the boundaries of the identified victim effect, in exploring the source of this effect. The emotions evoked by considering the victim's plight seem to play a major role in that context. Drawing upon the extensive research on empathic emotions, as well as the research on the processes involved in perceiving individuals vs. perceiving groups, we proposed that a single identified victim evokes stronger feelings than an unidentified single victim, or a group of victims, regardless of their being identified or not. The results of Study 2 support this proposal, in showing a link between reported distress and increased willingness to contribute. Distress was rated higher in the single-identified condition than in the other conditions, and this rating significantly predicted willingness to contribute. The impact of distress was further confirmed in Study 3, in which actual contributions were used, instead of hypothetical ones. Here the single identified victim evoked more distress and elicited more contributions than the group of identified victims.

Self-report measures of vicarious emotions are susceptible to measurement problems (Batson et al., 1991). In particular, social norms regarding expression of empathic response to the plight of another, may render some measures of empathy less useful for detecting differential arousal, depending on the nature of the victim. Measures of distress may be somewhat less influenced by the social norm, and hence more sensitive to subtle variations, than measures of direct empathic concern. A different interpretation of our findings with regard to distress ratings involves the distinction between distress for the victim and personal distress, a self-oriented aversive emotional response of the sort one would feel when undergoing a bad experience oneself (Batson et al., 1997). Personal distress may evoke an egoistic motivation to reduce one's own aversive arousal (see also Cialdini, 1987) as well as an increase in empathy, thus maximize the motivation to help. As we noted earlier, the important distinction between the two kinds of distress is beyond the scope of the present research. For our present purpose it suffices to say that our findings show an increased emotional arousal in the single identified victim condition relative to all the other conditions, and that this emotional arousal was associated with greater willingness to help the victim. It remains for future research to determine the exact nature of this emotional response.

One aspect of the experiments that may constrain their implications is the nature of the victims. The victims used in the present studies were attractive young children, most likely to evoke emotional reaction in our respondents. Other victims may not arouse such emotions, and in those cases no identification effect is to be expected. Furthermore, in all experiments described here the victims belonged, in some sense, to the same social group as the respondents. The great impact of identifying the single individual relative to the impact identifying a group of individuals may be confined to victims within the respondent's in-group. Indeed, research currently underway suggests that the interaction between the victim's singularity and the availability information occurs only for in-group victims, but not for out-group ones.

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