Empathy & Narrative Discussion Session

January 22nd, 2021
Program

- 15.30-15.40: welcome
- 15.55-16.00: organization of break-out rooms
- 16.00-16.30: discussion in break-out rooms
- 16.30-16.50: synthesis in main session
- 16.50-17.00: closing off
How to use Zoom

- Please mute yourself when you’re not talking and unmute when you want to say something:

- Use the ‘raise hand’ function in the main session if you want to say something:

- Use the ‘ask for help’ function in the break-out rooms if you need technical assistance from one of the organizers.
Amy Coplan (2011):

“The concept of empathy has received an enormous amount of attention in the past few decades, appearing in the popular press, political campaigns, and in the study of a wide range of topics, including autism spectrum disorders, psychopathy, political ideologies, medical care, ethics and moral development, justice and the court, gender differences, engagement with art and the media, therapeutic methods in clinical psychology, mirror neurons, and theory of mind. Given its central role in so many discussions and debates, it’s safe to conclude that **whatever empathy is, it’s important.**”
Empathy is important

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Two main themes

Theme 1: Narrative empathy

Theme 2: impact on empathic abilities
Theme 1

Narrative empathy
What is narrative empathy?

We need an understanding of:

- Conflation of phenomena
- Relation to empathy with real people
- Factors that modulate empathetic experiences
How do we measure it?

Operationalisation of:
- Narrative empathy itself
- Readerly background activated during reading
- Narrative triggers
What are its triggers?

- Keen’s list of “empathetic narrative techniques” (2007)
- Role of readerly experiential background
- Role of reader disposition
- Role of reading situation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character identification</th>
<th>Narrative situation</th>
<th>Use of generic and formal choices</th>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Other elements of fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characterisation techniques, such as</td>
<td>Access to characters’ consciousness</td>
<td>Formulaic conventions or unusual representations that promote foregrounding</td>
<td>Timing (pace)</td>
<td>Repetitions of works in series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Naming (or not naming)</td>
<td>• Internal focalisation (not externalised focalisation)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Order (anachronies)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Descriptive language</td>
<td>• Person of the narration</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Nested levels of narrative</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• (In)direct implication of traits (both effective)</td>
<td>• First person (vs third person)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Serial narrative</td>
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Open questions

1. **Demarcation:** What does narrative empathy entail and how does it relate to empathy with real-world people?

2. **Measurements:** How can we reliably measure readers’ narrative empathy (during reading)?

3. **Textual triggers:** What narrative (linguistic or narratological) aspects trigger empathetic engagement with narrative characters?
Theme 2

The impact of narratives on empathic abilities
SPaCEN framework (Mar, 2018)

**Social process route**
- Stories must represent the social world
- Stories must elicit or invite social processes
- Social processes must be improved by practice

**Social content route**
- Stories must contain accurate social content
- This social content must be learned
- This social content must be applied

**Improved social cognition**
Experimental evidence

- Long-term associations between reading habits and social cognition
  Black & Barnes, 2015; Djikic et al., 2013; Lenhart et al., 2020; Mar et al., 2006/2009; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017

- Direct effects
  - Literary fiction vs. Popular fiction
  - Literary fiction vs. Non-fiction
  - Popular fiction > Non-fiction
    Pino & Mazza (2016), Samur et al. (2018)
1. **Demarcation**: What social-cognitive abilities are impacted by exposure to narrative, and how can we define these?

2. **Measurements**: How can we reliably measure the impact of narrative exposure on the social cognitive abilities?

3. **Textual triggers**: What narrative aspects drive the social cognitive potential of narratives?
Please choose a break-out room

- Narrative empathy
  - Break-out room 1: Demarcation
  - Break-out room 2: Measurements
  - Break-out room 3: Textual triggers

- Impact of narratives on empathic abilities
  - Break-out room 1: Demarcation
  - Break-out room 2: Measurements
  - Break-out room 3: Textual triggers

www.tinyurl.com/EmpathyNarrative
Discussion time (25 min.):

- Appoint a chair/spokesperson
- Appoint someone to take notes
- Be prepared to share a **brief** statement about:
  - Your discussion
  - How your topic impacts one or more of the issues discussed in the other groups
- Discussion points available via: www.tinyurl.com/DiscussionPoints
Synthesis
Group discussion
Please send us your notes

- Fransina: fransina.stradlingz@hud.ac.uk
- Lynn: leekhof@let.ru.nl
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January 22nd, 2021
Approach to the study of the effects of reading literary fiction on empathy. Four replication experiments of Kidd and Castano (2013).

Interdisciplinary Erzählforschung wuppertal.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=5844

van Lissa, C. J., https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.117


