

Empathy & Narrative Discussion Session

January 22nd, 2021



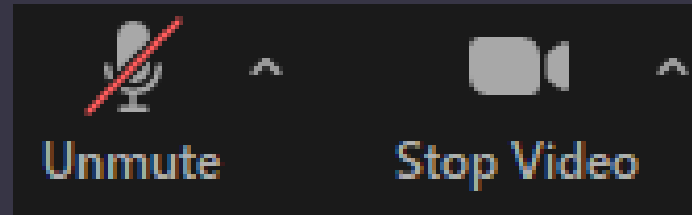
Welcome

Program

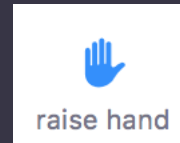
- 15.30-15.40: welcome
- 15.40-15.55: introduction of two main themes
- 15.55-16.00: organization of break-out rooms
- 16.00-16.30: discussion in break-out rooms
- 16.30-16.50: synthesis in main session
- 16.50-17.00: closing off

How to use Zoom

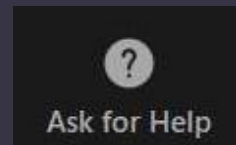
- Please mute yourself when you're not talking and unmute when you want to say something:



- 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



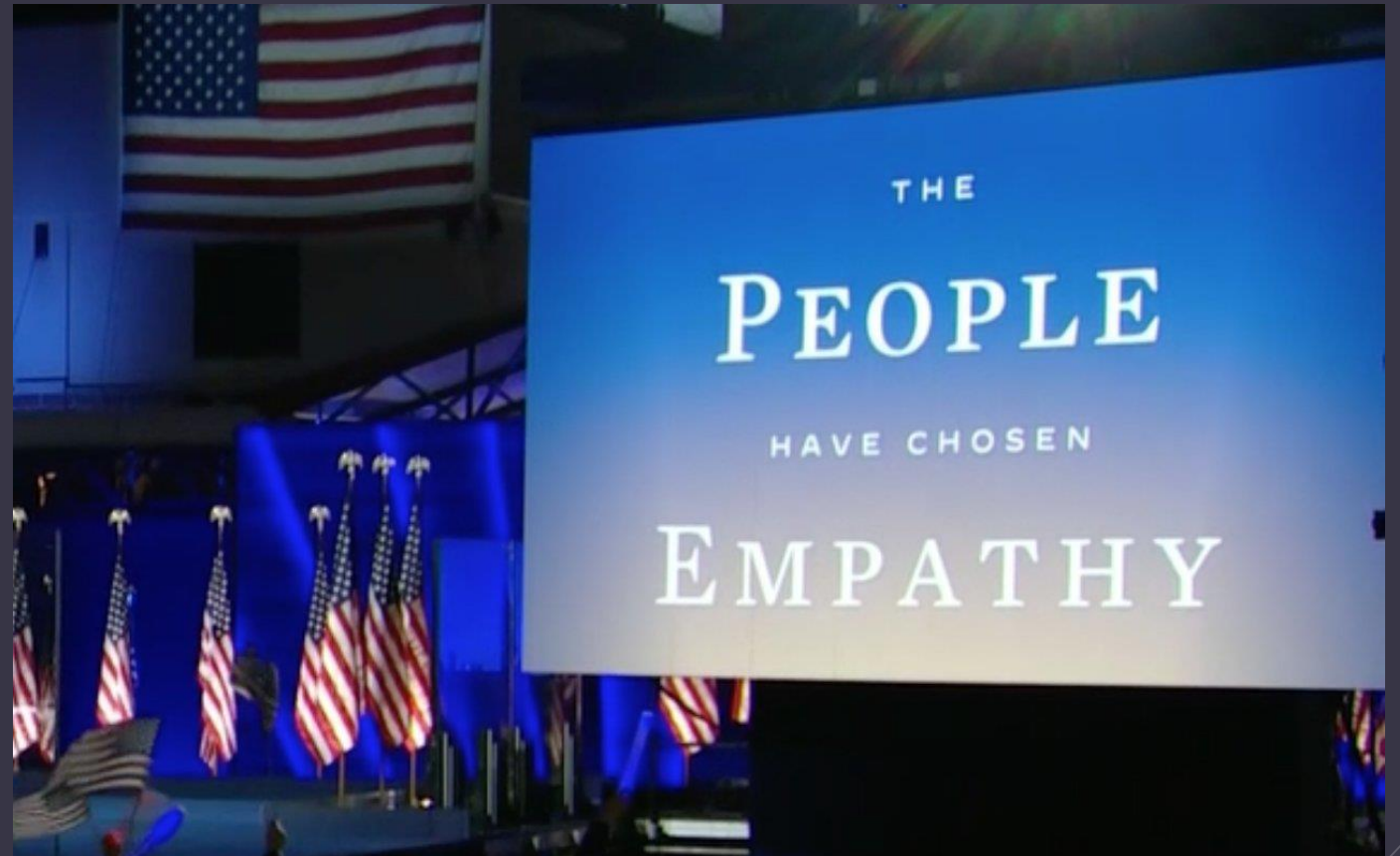


Empathy is
important

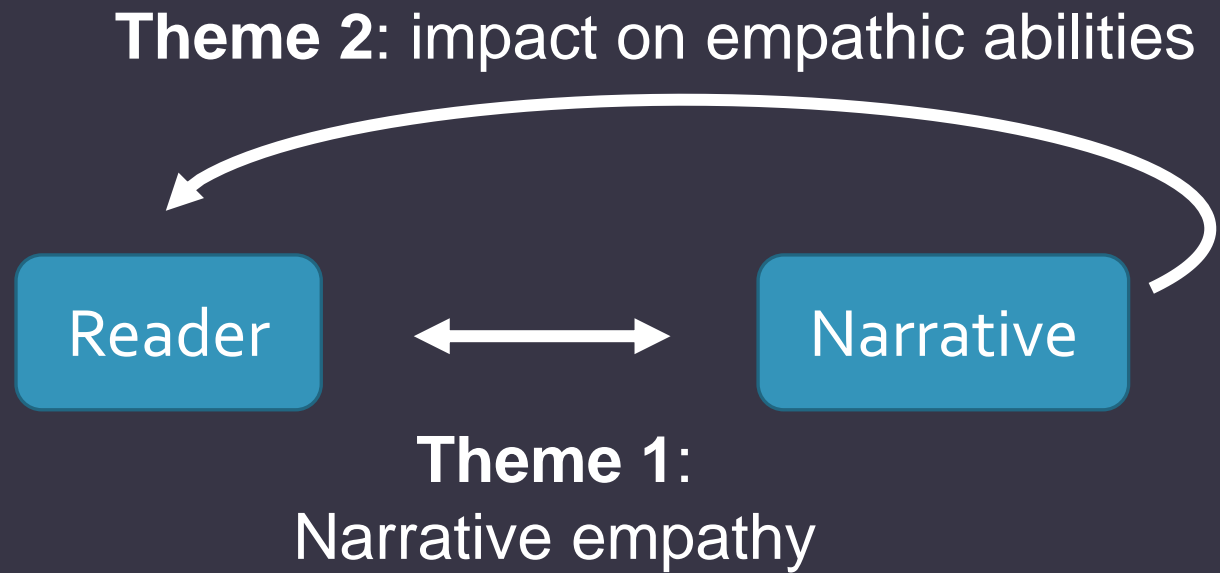
Amy Coplan (2011):

“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



Two main themes



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

Narrative Technique	Textual Realisations	
Character identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterisation techniques, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming (or not naming) • Descriptive language • (In)direct implication of traits (both effective) • Reliance on types (not necessarily complex or realistic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flatness/roundness • Depicted actions • Roles in plot trajectories • Quality of attributed speech • Mode of representation of consciousness
Narrative situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to characters' consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal focalisation (not externalised focalisation) • Person of the narration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First person (vs third person) • Hindered by narrative consonance or dissonance, unreliability, discordance, excess of narrative levels with multiple narrators, extremes of disorder, convoluted plots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre (may help or hinder) • Setting (may help or hinder) • Time period (may help or hinder) • BUT: too many factors to put first person vs third person against each other (p. 216) • Modes of representing inner life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrated monologue or free indirect discourse • Quoted monologue and psycho-narration
Use of generic and formal choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulaic conventions or unusual representations that promote foregrounding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yet familiar/formulaic plot trajectories may contribute too
Plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing (pace) • Order (anachronies) • Nested levels of narrative • Serial narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong or weak closure • Supplementary plot events • Repetition • Gaps
Other elements of fiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitions of works in series • Length of novels • Genre expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vivid use of settings • Metanarrative commentary • Aspects of discourse that slow pace (e.g. foregrounding/order)

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

Kidd & Castano (2013), Kidd & Castano (2018), Panero et al. (2016), Pino & Mazza (2016), Samur, Tops & Koole (2018), Van Kuijk, Verkoeijen, Dijkstra & Zwaan (2018)

- *Literary fiction vs. Non-fiction*

Bal & Veltkamp (2013), Black & Barnes (2015a), Black & Barnes (2015b), De Mulder, Hakemulder, van den Berghe, Klaassen & van Berkum (2017), Djikic, Oatley & Moldoveanu (2013), Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman & Peterson (2009a), Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman & Peterson (2009b), Kidd & Castano (2013)

- *Popular fiction > Non-fiction*

Pino & Mazza (2016), Samur et al. (2018)

Open questions

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.stradling2@hud.ac.uk
- Lynn: l.eekhof@let.ru.nl

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