LOCATING THE LIMINAL: DISCURSIVE PRACTICE AND THE CHALLENGE OF EMPATHY

by

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Abstract

Few authors agree on a standard definition of empathy, yet empathy is widely assumed to be easily accessible and innately pro-social regardless of factors such as power dynamics or other manifestations of social injustice within a society. Such assumptions in dominant discursive practices, both academic and popular, obscure the emergence of two important questions: what does it mean when we cannot empathize with another? And could it be that we may gain greater insight from the examination of empathy's limits and failures than the hopes we have for its success? I propose that discussions of empathy must be grounded in social context and that assumptions must be continually troubled if one is to have a cogent conversation, whether as a philosopher, psychologist, social theorist, educator, or policy maker, about what empathy is (or is not) and what it does (or does not) make possible.

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And the biggest thanks to A.

Table of Contents

Introduction

''Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time answer to the question asked to every newcomer: 'who are you?'''

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958, p. 178*)*

When I began my graduate work I thought I had a grasp of what empathy meant. After all, when I was in high school empathy was one of the character traits that I was encouraged to learn and display under the York Region District School Board's flagship *Character Matters!* initiative. Presently, in my work as a high school teacher, empathy remains a character trait that I am mandated to encourage my students to learn and display. As a researcher beginning to look at empathy academically, I initially reveled, and indeed, continue to delight in the wealth of empathy scholarship. However, the more I read, the more I believe that claims about empathy have to be made with great care. After all, what exactly is empathy? In the literature I have surveyed to date empathy has been described as an emotion, as a type of emotional contagion, as a rational process, as a hybrid of both rational and emotional processes, as a form of intuition, as a fusion of identities, as an essential component of our humanity, as a form of sympathy, as a quantifiable set of neurological transmissions, as neuron "mirroring", as pro-social behaviour, as a responsibility to help others, and most often, as several combinations of the aforementioned.

It is clear that the increased interdisciplinary interest in empathy scholarship over the last few decades (Coplan, 2011, p. 42) has certainly contributed to the wide variation of empathy definition and measurement. And indeed, it is generally accepted in the literature that the definition of empathy remains contested and the methods for measuring it varied and at times mutually exclusive (Coplan, 2011; Preston and de Waal, 2002). At first I was distressed by this trend in the literature, since I wondered how I could ever study a concept that I no longer felt I clearly understood and that furthermore, seemed impossible to define. However, as I continued reading I was surprised to note that even as the definition of empathy remained disputed, beliefs as to what empathy entailed and/or made possible were less so.

Increasingly I have become troubled by two suppositions that I find, surprisingly, consistently unchallenged in empathy literature across disciplines. The first is that empathy (for the sake of

this statement defined generally as the ability to understand another's experience) is easily accessible despite systemic injustice. The second is that *when* (not *if*) achieved, empathy leads to intrinsically pro-social and/or compassionate behaviours.

I find it fascinating that despite about a century's worth of scholarship on the difficulty of defining empathy, little of it engages with the complicated social contexts in which intersubjective interactions in general, and empathy specifically, take place. In studies where empathy has been attempted to be operationalized and measured (for example Decety 2006; Decety and Grezes, 2006; Goldman, 2006; Iacoboni, 2008), there is little engagement with the complications of empathy transference from controlled settings into the complexities of "the real world". Many works on empathy "in the real world" (for example, de Waal, 2010; Cherniss and Goleman, 2001, Goleman, 2006; Goldman, 2006) discuss the virtues and potentials of empathy with little, if any, attention to mitigating factors outside of individual temperament, ability to learn, or individual will. Indeed, the discourse of empathy, regardless of how it is defined, is overwhelmingly that of an essential skill at least or a panacea for assorted social ills at most. In short, it seems that even though few researchers can agree on just what empathy entails, the overwhelming sentiment in the literature is that empathy is not only unquestionably possible, but also unquestionably good.

These trends are clearly apparent not only in academic, but also popular discourse. The founders of both Facebook (Stengel, 2010) and Twitter have commented that that the goal of their respective platforms is to create empathy. In 2011, Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey explained that through Twitter, "[w]e can minimize conflict because [we] have an understanding of where people are coming from" (Tiku, 2011). Comments like Dorsey's are somewhat ironic in context of the role social media seems to play in facilitating various forms of social strife but not surprising, as empathy is often discussed as a solution for the various ills faced by our societies. A particularly interesting example of this is a 2011 study by neuroscientists at the University of Chicago called "Pro-social behavior in rats is modulated by social experience" which suggested that rats free each other from cages based on what the researchers interpreted as feelings of empathy. The general interpretations of the findings were that if rats can demonstrate empathy-induced altruism over self-interest, then surely humans can do so as well. A representative article is David Brown's "A new model of empathy: the rat" published in *The Washington Post* on December 8, 2011.

However, in an article published in *The Guardian* in January 2013 Mark Honigsbaum asks, "But can the solution to violence, cruelty … really be a matter of promoting a trait that we appear to share with rats? And are scientists and politicians talking about the same thing when they invoke empathy in these different experimental and social contexts?" (Honigsbaum, 2013). These are excellent questions, and an illustrative example both of the widespread confusion as to what empathy entails, and the (perhaps equally widespread) reticence in challenging the assumptions on which claims about empathy are built.

Despite some recognition of the diverse definitions of 'empathy,' its usage in commonsense everyday culture is widespread and its common parlance means it becomes less open to critical scrutiny, even by scholars. Un-excavated, powerful ethical and/or moral words, of which empathy is one, can be used dangerously. Such concepts can also easily be mobilized into questionable terrains. Across numerous scientific, technological and other disciplinary discourses, whether in context of web 2.0 applications or extrapolations of what altruism we may share with rats, what exactly is meant by empathy? In scholarly debates the onus is on the researcher to describe her terms. When a contentious term like empathy is used outside of the academic context, there is the danger of the normative understandings of empathy ("feeling someone's pain" or "walking in another's shoes") being superimposed on statements about Facebook or interpretations of the behaviour of rats. The risk here is that empathy can be quickly reduced to something that takes little effort and is a sure way to "understand" another and/or improve our societies.

Honigsbaum, addressing the danger of equating empathy with pro-social behaviour observes that "[[o]ne of the problems with using the same word to describe the pro-social behaviour of rats and similar behaviour observed in humans is that people are infinitely more complex and reflective than rodents. It also confuses the different psychological and philosophical meanings of empathy" (2013). It is this particular tension between what empathy means between and within different schools of thought, rarely explored, that I will focus on in the first chapter of this thesis.

But beyond the differences in empathy conceptualizations across disciplines, one of the major, yet often ignored, factors that complicate human expressions of empathy is the intricacy and diversity of the societies in which we live. Obviously empathy is not as easy as imagining what it could be like to be another or feeling the need to help another. And even if one does feel an

"innate" need to help another, as suggested by the experience of the aforementioned allegedly empathetic rodents, this interaction does not happen in a social vacuum. The last three chapters of this thesis put the academic and discursive conceptualizations of empathy from the literature review into conversation with one another through case studies that undermine some of the dominant assumptions about what empathy entails and makes possible.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will look at the life and work of philosopher Edith Stein to problematize the idea that empathy, defined by Stein as "the experience of foreign consciousness in general" (1989, p. 10) can be effectively conceptualized as innate or transcending social and historical context. In the third chapter, I will examine Judith Butler's 2005 book *Giving an Account of Oneself* and its focus on the role of recognition as an important counterpoint to dominant discourses of empathy. In the final chapter I will examine the relationship between liberal individualism and empathy in greater detail, focusing specifically on the challenge that research on meta-stereotypes, conducted primarily by psychologists, poses to the narrative of empathy as a force for universalism and egalitarianism within societies as represented by John Rawls' "veil of ignorance" thought experiment.

Through this work I propose that not only is what I see to be the normative narrative of empathy as a panacea for social ills not limited by the longstanding and ongoing academic debates on how best to define and measure it, but that the dominant popular discursive practices obscure the emergence of two vital questions: what does it mean when we cannot empathize with another? And could it be that we may gain greater insight from the examination of empathy's limits and failures than the hopes we have for its success? And while I do not answer these questions in this thesis, I attempt to clear a path to doing so by questioning some of the assumptions about what empathy entails and/or makes possible.

My work on empathy thus far has inspired me to think of it as a concept inhabiting a liminal space. Certainly, as I demonstrate in the literature review chapter, empathy occupies a liminal space between disciplines. But perhaps most critically, the potential for empathy, no matter how it is conceptualized, also inhabits the liminal space between people. I increasingly imagine empathy as occurring, or not, as the case may be, on the threshold between ourselves and another. Inhabiting that liminal space, along with the potential for empathy, are all the factors – factors such as systemic injustice, power dynamics within a society, our own understanding of

our identities, our prejudices and biases, social conditioning, various forms of privilege, and our capacity for (self)reflection, among others – that can facilitate empathy, but also perhaps more often demonstrate its limits and failures.

I am invested in this work personally, academically, and professionally. Growing up with multiple cultural identities and languages, one of the most common questions I remember being asked as a child was "So, what *are* you?" When I first encountered the concept of empathy (for which there is, incidentally, no equivalent in the other languages I speak) as a grade 9 student in a character education class, I vividly remember being somewhat skeptical. After all, if understanding the experience of someone else was as simple as "imagining another's experience", then why was I first being asked to make myself recognizable to others so that they in turn could then try to imagine my experience?

Working as a high school teacher in Toronto with students of almost unimaginably disparate backgrounds and lived experiences, I am daily reminded of the challenges of intersubjective understandings. And my experiences have made me fear the illusion of having reached an understanding a lot more than the chance for misunderstanding, even as I grapple with how to introduce empathy (as a mandated skill) to my students. To that end, I believe that recognizing and engaging with the complexity of empathy scholarship is imperative for educational theorists, policy makers, and practicing educators. Necessarily interdisciplinary, educational theory, policy, and pedagogical practice are deeply influenced by academic work. However, when empathy is invoked by educational theorists, policy makers and/or educators, the complicated historical and etymological legacy is rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

The danger of this is that we continue to ignore the social context in which our interactions – whether they be empathetic or not – take place. The stakes become ever higher as empathy becomes more and more accepted as a goal of education (just a few examples are worldwide initiatives like Ashoka's 'Start Empathy' campaign or studies such as Stripling, 2012) and what researchers, policy makers and educators mean when they invoke empathy remains unclear. And while I, as both an educational researcher and practicing teacher, keenly appreciate the necessity of operationalizing a concept if it is to be "properly" studied or learned, I have serious misgivings about doing so too readily.

The document that outlines my mandate to teach empathy, *Finding Common Ground: Character*

Development in Ontario Schools, K-12 (2008), explains that "[e]mpathy for others and respect for the dignity of all persons are essential characteristics of an inclusive society" (p. 6). As a teacher, I am advised that "[q]ualities such as empathy are best nurtured through relationships that cross the lines that often divide people in society" (p. 2). But what is empathy? Where are these divisive lines? Why is there no mention of the systems and institutions involved? Are "nurturing relationships" sufficient to deliver this curricular mandate? Is empathy innate? Under which conditions can it be accessed, or even taught? And when empathy does occur, who gets to decide that this empathy was successful? Who creates and perpetuates discursive practices on empathy, and to what end? This thesis is an attempt to begin to answer such questions.

Chapter 1
Interdisciplinary Literature Review

1   Philosophy

The definitions, conceptualizations, and discursive practices around empathy are so varied and at times contradictory that there does not seem to be an obvious place to begin a literature review. In the first few pages of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault asks,

> By what criteria is one to isolate the unities with which one is dealing; what is a science? What is an oeuvre? What is a theory? What is a concept? What is a text? How is one to diversify the levels at which one may place oneself, each of which possesses its own divisions and form of analysis? What is the legitimate level of formalization? What is that of interpretation? Of structural analysis? Of attributions of causality? (1972, p. 5-6)

This passage encapsulates the challenge of understanding and writing about empathy which is, frankly, as old as the word itself. Methodologically guided by Michel Foucault's ideas of archeological analysis, one where "contradictions are neither appearances to be overcome, nor secret principles to be uncovered… [but] are objects to be described for themselves…" (Foucault, 1972, p. 151), this literature review aims to provide context for the following chapters by beginning to clarify the complicated history of conceptualizations of empathy. Due to the sheer volume of literature an exhaustive review is beyond the scope of this particular project. However, though somewhat brief and selective, this chapter is structured to give particular prominence to debates within philosophical, psychological, and political (specifically liberal) spheres with enormous implications for the discursive practices around what empathy entails and/or makes possible.

A close reading of the literature through an archeological lens problematizes some prevalent assumptions embedded in discursive practices around empathy. For example, if we assume that empathy is innate, how do we know and support this belief? If we assume that empathy is pro-social, how are "empathy" and "pro-social" defined by researchers? And indeed, after a critical look at the empathy research done to date, do these assumptions still stand? I propose that

assumptions on empathy must be continually troubled if one is to have a cogent conversation, whether as a philosopher, psychologist, social theorist, educator, or policy maker, about what empathy is (or is not) and what it does (or does not) make possible.

While the review is structured with headings and subheadings for philosophy, psychology and liberalism, there is, obviously, great overlap between the disciplines for historical and etymological reasons. Structuring the literature review by discipline allows for clearer delineation of both the convergences, but more tellingly the divergences both within and between those disciplines, as well as between scholarly and popular discourses around empathy.

Consistently most empathy researchers, regardless of their discipline, begin with an acknowledgement that definitions of empathy are, and have always been contested. Indeed, there is no doubt that identifying a precise and widely adapted meaning of the English word empathy, as well as its precursor, the German word *Einfühlung*, has been consistently difficult. However, while the earliest empathy scholarship was written by a relatively small group of German speaking scholars familiar with one another's work (for example, Edmund Husserl, Theodor Lipps, Edith Stein and Max Scheler, as well as to a lesser extent that of Antonin Prandtl, Theodor A. Meyer, Max Deri, August Döring, Johannes Volkert, and Richard Müller-Freienfels), contemporary empathy scholarship is as ubiquitous as it is discipline-specific. As a result, it is common to find researchers working with disparate, if not mutually exclusive, conceptions of empathy. Popular adaptations of this research, however, rarely engage with the inconsistencies in how empathy is understood. Putting disparate understandings of empathy in conversation with one another allows for a clearer understanding of what is at stake, both discursively and in resulting practical applications, when empathy is invoked in academic and/or popular contexts.

1.1 Empathy explained? Early twentieth century debates

The German philosopher Robert Vischer first used the German word *Einfühlung* in 1873 in reference to aesthetic theory to explain how one might "feel oneself" into a work of art to experience it more deeply. In 1903 *Einfühlung* was perhaps much more famously investigated by German philosopher Theodor Lipps in his doctoral work. Lipps, while also concerned with aesthetics, was the first scholar to expand the concept of *Einfühlung* from aesthetic theory to an explanation of how people emotionally connect not only with objects, but also each other. Lipps posited that people empathize with one another by "following a three-step model: First, we rely

on our inborn tendency to imitate their expressions which, second, recreates a similar kind of experience in us which, third, we project onto the other person" (Stueber, 2013). Lipps believed that projection was necessary in empathy, even as he described it as an instinct because he posited that the only mental states an individual has access to are her own. Thus, Lipps' model of empathy relied on the empathizer's ability to internally imitate another's state, share the experience of that state, and then project the experience onto the other person to understand their experience. For Lipps, empathy was "the primary basis for recognizing each other as minded creatures" and it was this conception of empathy the British psychologist Titchener referenced in 1909 when he translated *Einfühlung* into the English "empathy", derived from the Greek empatheia (from em- 'in' and pathos 'feeling'). Titchener originally used the term to describe the "process of humanizing objects, of reading or feeling ourselves into them" (Meneses and Larkin, 2012, p. 261) and Lipps' influence is obvious in the conceptualization.

Contemporary readers may well wonder if Lipps' understanding of empathy was primarily philosophical or psychological. Alasdair MacIntyre in his 2006 book *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922*, explains that "[a]lthough Lipps occupied a chair in philosophy, psychology was his primary interest… His principal aim as a philosopher was to make use of psychology to aspects of mental life, so as to render intelligible the different types of experience to which he gave the name 'Einfühlung', 'empathy'" (p. 16). Lipps' work, which broadened the concept of empathy to explain a wide range of intersubjective experiences, was not without controversy, however. Indeed, it was Lipps' writings that the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl had in mind when he criticized the popularity of "psychologism" in describing intersubjective experience in his *Ideas II* (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 17). However, it is important to note that the debate about whether *Einfühlung* is primarily a psychological or philosophical phenomenon is complicated by the fact that at the turn of the twentieth century both the concept of empathy and the discipline of psychology were just emerging from the incubator of philosophy writ large. Nevertheless, these early debates about empathy still resonate today as contemporary philosophers form what Monika Dullstein identifies as two opposing factions of understanding empathy in philosophy: promoters of "simulation theory" and scholars advocating for the "phenomenological proposal" (2013, p. 334).

1.2 Simulationist approaches to understanding empathy

Scholars writing on the simulation theory of empathy, sometimes also termed information-based empathy and theories of mind, propose that in intersubjective understandings, people see themselves as a "model for the other person's mental life" (Stueber, 2013). Support for the simulation theory extends to more recent work on "mirror neurons" and indeed, there is considerable correspondence between neural areas of excitation that make possible our observation of another person's action and the areas that are activated when we perform the same action (Stueber, 2013). Most simulation-based approaches to empathy assert that empathy necessitates an interpersonal similarity relation condition, or what some scholars call the isomorphism condition. Dan Zahavi explains this as the condition that "an empathizer's experience must stand in a suitable similarity relation to the target's experience in order for the former to qualify as a case of empathy" (Zahavi, 2001, p. 542).

In this way the simulationist view of empathy is deeply influenced by Lipps. However, while prominent in both philosophy and psychology, the simulationist approach to exploring empathy has always been somewhat imprecise. Indeed, in 1967, Jørgen Hundsdahl wrote a thorough analysis of *Einfühlung* by examining the writings of several prominent German theorists debating the topic at the beginning of the twentieth century. His article, published in the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, examines the work of Theodor Lipps, but also his colleagues Antonin Prandtl, Theodor A. Meyer, Max Deri, August Döring, Max Scheler, Johannes Volkert, and Richard Müller-Freienfels. Having conducted his analysis in German, which has a much more nuanced vocabulary for differentiating between empathy and related states than English, Hundsdahl nevertheless concludes,

> The concept of Einfühlung has often been used in the framework of establishing a larger coherent theory, without anyone making the attempt to define exactly the contents of this concept and its relations to the other (often just as ambiguous) concepts. In many cases demonstrative definitions are used uncritically. In ostensible (wrong) analogies there is rarely another renewed definition (re-definition), and often a change of the contents of the concept takes place without the author's drawing our attention to this change. (1967, p. 191)

Hundsdahl's criticisms, most notably about the "uncritical" use of definitions and changes in

what constitutes empathy, are strikingly consistent with contemporary researchers who have undertaken similar literature reviews of empathy scholarship. The conflation that Hundsdahl notes in pursuit of a "coherent theory" of empathy also extends to the confusion between sympathy and empathy, which historically have been used interchangeably. And while this nuance will be explored in greater detail in the political philosophy section of this chapter, it is important to, at this juncture, discuss Max Scheler's work on sympathy in relation to Lipps' on empathy.

German philosopher Max Scheler wrote *The Nature of Sympathy* (the original title was *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* which literally translates as "Essence and Forms of Sympathy") in which he intended to prove that "affective life precedes the intellectual life" and that "[[i]n the case of the experience of others, there is an affective or emotional understanding of others prior to any intellectual or rational understanding" (Davis and Steinbock, 2013). To that end, Scheler proposed five ways in which people identify with one another, or co-feel: feeling with one another (*Miteinanderfühlen*), as in the case of two parents sharing the experience of worry for their child; vicarious feeling (*Nachfühlen)* "a type of grasping a feeling in the other without any subsequent feeling of the grasped pain or joy, a feeling at a distance" (Davis and Steinbock, 2014); fellow feeling (*Mitgefühl*), in which one not only feels what another feels, but also feels *for* them; psychic contagion, or emotional infection, (*Gefühlansteckung*) in which one is so overtaken by a feeling that one loses oneself in the mood of another or a group; and finally identification (*Einsfühlung*) wherein one identifies with another so strongly that they live an experience "in the other" (Davis and Steinbock, 2013; Switankowsky, 2000). Although Scheler does not use the word *Einfühlung* it is clear that in many ways his ideas resonate with Lipps'. Indeed, there is great overlap between Lipps' work on empathy and Scheler's on sympathy. This is an important historical detail for as Meneses and Larkin (2012, p. 151) note, "Lipps, Scheler and [Edith] Stein proposed theoretically distinct views of these interpersonal phenomena (sympathy and empathy), which, over time, have been confused with one another" (2012, p. 151). While Lipps', and to a lesser extent Scheler's work is situated in what has become seen as a simulationist model of empathy, Edith Stein's contribution to understanding empathy is rooted in phenomenology.

1.3   Phenomenological approaches to understanding empathy

Contemporary scholars of the "phenomenological proposal", such as Dan Zahavi, argue that there is a "specific mode of consciousness, called empathy, which is taken to allow us to experience and understand the feelings, desires, and beliefs of others in a more or less direct manner" (Zahavi 2001, p.153). And while phenomenologists studying empathy consistently reject Lipps' explication of empathy as being based on processes of inner resonance and projection, Stueber writes that "authors within the phenomenological tradition of philosophy were persuaded by Lipps' critique of the inference from analogy" (2013) and that as a result, scholars such as Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein "continued using the concept of empathy and regarded empathy as an irreducible 'type of experiential act *sui generis*'" (Stein 1989 p. 10 in Stueber, 2013).

Hundsdahl's 1967 article is not only of interest as it demonstrates and foreshadows the confusion about understanding empathy, but it is also noteworthy because it demonstrates a significant divergence in philosophical empathy scholarship. Hundsdahl does not mention Edith Stein in his review even as he discusses in great detail the work of her contemporaries and colleagues. While it is impossible to definitively know the reasons for this, a potential explanation may be Stein's posthumously higher profile, especially in the 1960s, as an ecclesiastical figure rather than a secular philosopher. Stein's life and work will be explored in detail in the following chapter, but for the purposes of the literature review it is essential to discuss her role as a foundational philosopher in phenomenological understandings of empathy.

Edith Stein began her PhD under the supervision of Edmund Husserl in 1913 and took classes with both Husserl and Scheler. When Stein began working with Husserl he had already used the word *Einfühlung* in response to Lipps' writings and she identified empathy as an "…important, but underdeveloped topic in Husserl's thinking" (Dullstein, 2013, p. 342). Interestingly, Husserl had yet to define empathy in his own work even as he rejected Lipps' conceptualization of it (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 67). Encouraged by Husserl to locate a definition of empathy in opposition to Lipps', Stein became "…gradually dismayed, partly by the variegated uses to which [Lipps] put his concept of empathy and partly by the discovery that whatever Lipps meant by *Einfühlung* it was something very different from what Husserl had meant by his use of that word" (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 68). Ultimately, she wrote "a rare, canonical example of orthodox,

Husserliana, phenomenological inquiry" in which she "provides one of the most systematic, complete, and thorough applications of Husserl's methodological approach to experience" (Meneses and Larkin, 2012, p. 153).

In her dissertation Stein agrees with Lipps that empathy is "inner participation" and interprets this as the moment when "…we are 'at' the foreign subject and turned with it to its object" (1989, p. 19). However, she systematically problematizes claims Lipps makes as to what empathy entails and makes possible. She observes that imitation cannot be empathy, as Lipps claims, because in imitation one "[does] not arrive at the phenomenon of foreign experience, but at an experience of [one's] own that arouses in [one] the foreign gestures witnessed" (Stein, 1989, p. 23-24). She further notes that what one witnesses does not serve a cognitive function and does not announce a foreign experience which, according to Stein, empathy does. In fact, Stein cautions that being saturated with "transferred feelings" keeps people more deeply in themselves and indeed, potentially precludes empathy (Stein, 1989, p. 23-24).

Stein's biggest point of divergence with Lipps is her rejection of Lipps' idea of complete empathy as a state where there is no distinction between one's self and the object of empathy. Stein maintains that it is impossible to suspend one's "I" in any process, especially in the experience of empathy with another (1989, p. 17). In short, in empathy the individual does not lose oneself. Instead, she is aware of observing, perhaps feeling, reflecting upon, and finally perhaps gaining an understanding another's state. Stein's criticisms of Lipps' theories of empathy are both strikingly similar to, as well as essential context for, contemporary philosophical debates on empathy.

1.4   Locating the simulationist/phenomenological debate in contemporary scholarship

Dan Zahavi and Søren Overgaard wrote a chapter called "Empathy without Isomorphism: A Phenomenological Account" for the 2012 collection *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*, edited by Jean Decety. In the chapter, Zahavi and Overgaard trace the evolution of the phenomenological account of empathy and propose that increasingly widely accepted models of empathy, based on Lipps', raise specific difficulties of intersubjectivity which the phenomenological account reconciles.

Zahavi and Overgaard observe that "[r]ather than explaining empathy, that is, empathy understood as an experience of the minded life of others, Lipps' account is better geared to handle something like motor mimicry or emotional contagion" (2012, p. 5) since it does not engage with the complexity of context or (self)reflection. Furthermore, they note that for phenomenologists, most of whom base their work on Stein's, "…empathy is not a distinct and specific emotion like embarrassment, shame, or pride; rather, it denotes a basic, *sui generis*, form of intentionality directed at other experiencing subjects as such" (Stein, 1989 in Zahavi and Overgaard, 2012, p. 6). This distinction is crucial since it reconciles the confusion around the problem of other minds, as well as the need for a form of emotional conflation for empathy to occur. If empathy is seen as a unique form of intentionality, a search for understanding rather than an innate insight or a direct awareness of another's mind, then its success, nor any insight, cannot be necessarily ensured, nor affectively experienced.

Furthermore, Zahavi and Overgaard note that "[a]lthough it might be permissible to say that certain aspects of the other's consciousness, such as joy, sorrow, pain, shame, pleading, love, rage, and threats, are given to us directly and non-inferentially, it does not follow from this that we also have a direct access to the *why* of such feelings" (9). The question of "why" is critical, since many scholars of the simulationist school view empathy not as a *sui generis* experience, but rather as a means to some sort of (overwhelmingly pro-social) end. For phenomenologists, it is the recognition of the role that inference, context, and reflection play in empathy that make it unique from other forms of inter-subjective understanding, such as emotional contagion, that provide some awareness of "what" but not necessarily "why".

Zahavi and Overgaard present the work of Frederique de Vignemont (and colleagues) to illustrate the dangers of privileging even a minute component of the simulationist framework (in this case, a condition of isomorphism, a corresponding affective state between the person empathizing and the object of empathy) within understandings of empathy. In their paper "The empathic brain: how when and why?" de Vignemont and Singer posit that a narrow conceptualization of empathy needs to be used in order to "enable precise claims to be made about the nature of empathy" and distinguish it from phenomena such as emotional contagion, which is "self-centered", whereas empathy is fundamentally "other-centered" (2006, p. 435). These claims all overlap clearly with the phenomenological proposal. However, de Vignemont and Singer also suggest that a condition for empathy requires an isomorphic affective state of

which the empathizer is aware (2006, p. 436). This condition has Zahavi and Overgaard question whether self-aware emotional contagion is not still, fundamentally emotional contagion.

In a 2010 work called "Knowing other people's mental states as if they were one's own" de Vignemont introduces a further condition for empathy, the "caring condition". Once again, Zahavi and Overgaard problematize this criterion. After all, is feeling concern for the experiences of another a form of sympathy, or just a clearer delineation of the line between self and other (Zahavi and Overgaard, 2012, p. 13)? Furthermore, the idea of a "caring condition" for empathy provokes the question of what role the opposite of caring may play. After all, as Zahavi and Overgaard muse, "high degree of empathic sensitivity might precisely be of use if one wants to inflict especially cruel pain on somebody" (2012, p. 6). Apart from this being a very interesting point, it also further demonstrates the pervasiveness of the assumption that an ability to empathize with another is innately pro-social.

Relatedly, a fundamental tension that remains unresolved by accounts of empathy such as thaose provided in de Vignemont's work is the context of intersubjective understanding. Zahavi and Overgaard emphasize that "…when we perceive an object, we perceive it in a perceptual field. We are conscious of it in a particular setting, and the way it is given to us is influenced by what is co-given with it" (2012, p. 13). In this way, direct experience can be seen as both contextual and direct, and in light of this, one's potential for empathy is very likely determined by the ability to reconcile both the direct and contextual data. It is this tension between what is perceptual, and therefore dependent on context, and direct that is the fundamental divergence in the philosophical study of empathy. While the work of simulationist scholars seems to (pre)suppose that any intersubjective experience is ultimately accessible to another, phenomenologists are wary of the limitations of intersubjective experience as dictated by each individual's lived experiences and contextual frame(s) of reference. While empathy scholars in philosophy are foremost concerned with the theoretical dimensions of empathy, psychologists grappling with similar questions navigate the tension of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies attempting to operationalize empathy.

2   Psychology

2.1   Empathy as a psychological phenomenon: What's at stake?

Heavily influenced by interpretations of the work of Theodor Lipps and Max Scheler, empathy, towards the middle of the twentieth century, was increasingly conceptualized in psychological terms (as they evolved). An interesting survey of mid-twentieth century understandings of empathy can be gleaned from an 1981 observation by American psychologist Phyllis Newton Hallenbeck. She writes,

> In the studies I have read, the descriptive phrases for empathy include "consideration, sympathy, and kindness for others" (Bridges, 1931); "sympathetic concern and respect for persons" (Smither, 1977); "perspectivistic thinking" (Chandler & Greenspan, 1972); "a vicarious affective response" (Feshbach & Roe, 1968); and "decentering" (Chaplin & Keller, 1974). [and]… According to Flavell et al., … empathy is one dimension of a developmental skill called role taking. (p. 225)

The shift in language in how empathy is both described and defined makes clear the continuing influence of initial conceptualizations of empathy, the increasing conflation between disparate ideas of empathy, and the emerging and evolving language specific to the discipline of psychology.

In the 30 years since Hallenbeck's review, psychologists have continued to grapple with multifaceted, contradictory, and at times mutually exclusive understandings of empathy. This debate was crystallized in the response to a May 2013 article published in *The New Yorker* and written by Paul Bloom, professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale University. Bloom concluded his opinion piece with "Empathy will have to yield to reason if humanity is to have a future." Defining empathy as "feeling our way into the lives of others," Bloom argued that while empathy is a quality that "makes us human" it is also a completely irrational and questionable, if not dangerous, moral compass (Bloom, 2013).

Bloom's article generated uproar among many well-known scholars of empathy. Helen Riess, an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and director of the Empathy and Relational Science Program in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General

Hospital suggested that Bloom was "using an outdated definition of empathy" (Riess, 2013) and soon after wrote an editorial published in the *Huffington Post* where she, in turn, defined empathy as "a complex capacity that includes cognitive, emotional, moral and behavioral processes, not only to feel another's pain but to imagine how one could alleviate his suffering and take rational steps to help that person". Similarly, Sara Konrath, an assistant research professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan also took issue with assumptions Bloom made in regards to empathy. She criticized Bloom's argument for "assum[ing] that empathy and reason always operate in opposition to each other, with the implicit idea that being empathic is not very intelligent" (Konarth, 2013).

The reactions to Bloom's piece are indicative of the live tensions in psychological scholarship, as well as the resulting discourse, about what empathy is and makes possible. Specifically, they demonstrate the divergence between understanding empathy as a primarily affective phenomenon, a primarily cognitive phenomenon, and/or an innately pro-social or even moral experience. They also highlight the lack of priority that social context has in many dominant psychological discourses on empathy. It is these four topics that will be now broadly explored.

2.2   Empathy as a primarily affective vs. primarily cognitive phenomenon

Most psychological conceptualizations of empathy are consistent in that they are some version of simulationist approach. However, "affective" conceptualizations of empathy diverge from "cognitive" conceptualizations of empathy in their emphasis on direct perception. Traditionally, the direct perception element of empathy was interpreted to be various forms of emotional contagion, helpfully defined by psychologists Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson as the "…tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (1994, p. 153–54). Cognitive empathy, also referred to as "perspective taking", "theories of mind", "information based empathy" is commonly understood as the ability to identify and comprehend another's experience.

In her 2011 article "Will the Real Empathy Please Stand Up" Amy Coplan undertakes a detailed review of psychological literature on affective and cognitive conceptualizations of empathy. She notes that there is physiological basis for affective empathy in evidence of neuron "mirroring". That is, analogous areas of the brain show activity when people witness a recognizable emotion,

for example, fear. She emphasizes that such findings have "significant implications for the theory of emotion debate since [they] provide clear evidence of emotion taking place through automatic, unconscious processes that occur in the absence of any cognitive evaluation (Coplan, 2011). However, she questions whether they are indeed empathy, since, as mentioned in the previous section, while emotional contagion yields an awareness of the affective *what* (for example, fear), it provides little, if any, insight into the *why*.

Some psychologists have suggested that emotional contagion has an evolutionary basis. For example, if I am gathering berries with another person and I all of a sudden register intense fear on my partner's face, the vicarious fear I feel will be effective to motivate me to react to the situation, i.e. run away. In order to respond effectively in such a situation, I do not need to know immediately about, nor see the bear that my fellow berry-gatherer has seen. Nevertheless, some researchers have interpreted this data to suggest that empathy, understood as the ability to comprehend (broadly stated) another's experience, is natural and innate (for example, Decety 2006).

One of the dangers of viewing empathy as merely a "direct representation" is that it appears to negate, even more so than other conceptualizations of empathy, both context and the need for reflection. Indeed, one common critique of understandings of empathy is that often, what is called empathy may, in fact, just "mirror the social norms of a community; that is, only certain groups deserve empathy" (Gair, 2013, p. 138). One of the risks of viewing empathy as direct is that various sociological mitigating factors can be easily obscured, and in essence, left out of the conversation on empathy to an even greater extent than they had been in prior research. This perpetuates a narrative of empathy as a phenomenon that is easily accessible, indeed innate, regardless of context.

At the very least, differentiating between "affective" and "cognitive" empathy is helpful in avoiding a conflation of the two into a generic, presumably natural ability to "empathize". Indeed, some psychologists conducting neurological studies on empathy have suggested that affective and cognitive empathy are neurologically and behaviourally distinct. In 2009 Shamay-Tsoory and colleagues suggested that empathy in the brain operates on two distinct level: "one low-level system involving emotional matching or mirroring and a separate, more advanced system involving perspective taking and the cognitive understanding of others' mental states (in

Coplan 2011, p. 51). In a 2006 study called "The neuronal basis and ontogeny of empathy and mind reading" Singer conducts a detailed literature review of neurological work on empathy and concludes that "the capacity for affect sharing develops much earlier than the capacity for mentalizing because it is based on limbic and paralimbic structures and the somato-sensory cortices, which rely on structures that begin to form early in brain development" (in Coplan 2011, p. 52). So in this way, emotional contagion and neuron mirroring are definitely phenomena that provide some insight into another's experience but this leaves in question the depth of insight possible through affective empathy.

In the same study as referenced above Singer explains that brain imaging consistently shows that cognitive empathy, often also referred to as "theory of mind" or "mentalizing abilities" show activity in the neo-cortex, for example the prefrontal cortex and lateral parts of the temporal cortex. These are structures that form much later in brain development. Due to these relatively recent developments in empathy research, scholars such as Alvin Goldman have adapted their theories on empathy to accommodate the disparate neurological processing of "high order" and "low order" empathy. In her review Coplan emphasizes that the "refinement of Goldman's account of simulation is motivated in large part by fMRI neuroimaging data showing that the brain regions that subserve perspective taking have minimal overlap with either motoric areas or the areas involved in mirroring sensations or emotions" (2011, p. 53). The idea that "higher order" or emotional and "lower order" or cognitive empathy are distinct phenomena is getting increasingly accepted among psychologists. However, there is still a great deal of conflation among the two in discursive practices around what empathy is and does.

Interestingly, developments in neuropsychology have also yielded indications that the brain processes two forms of cognitive empathy differently: self-oriented perspective taking and other-oriented perspective taking (Coplan, 2011, p. 53-54). Coplan reviews research that indicates that people use different regions of the brain to imagine what *they* would do in another's situation as opposed to trying to imagine what another's situation may feel like for that person (2011, p. 55). The complexity of trying to imagine an experience from another's perspective, rather than simply projecting oneself into someone else's situation leads Coplan to term "an attempt to adopt a target individual's perspective by imagining how we ourselves would think, feel and desire…" (2011, p. 54) as pseudo-empathy. It is this form of empathy, also often called "projective" which will be discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

Coplan's concerns about "pseudo-empathy" are an interesting complement to the research conducted by Jacquie Vorauer on meta-stereotypes, the beliefs that one's group is judged negatively by another group. Apart from the bias that people tend to demonstrate in feeling more comfortable imagining how *they* would act in another's place, therefore arguably not empathizing with another at all, Vorauer's research also indicates that when confronted with the need to understand the experiences of someone her participants deem an "out-group" member people are more concerned with how they may be negatively perceived by another than about the other's experiences (Vorauer and Sasaki, 2009, p. 191). The implications of this research will also be discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

Findings on "pseudo-empathy" and meta-stereotypes complicate the narrative of empathy as innately pro-social, and it is this dimension that will now be discussed.

2.3   Empathy as innately pro-social

Some of the most detailed research on the relationship between empathy and helping behaviour has been conducted by psychologist Daniel Batson. Batson, who coined the phrase "empathy-altruism hypothesis", has, over a career that spans thirty years to date, conducted a variety of experiments that have attempted to empirically observe the relationship between empathy and altruism. Batson explains that he "came to empathy as a research topic through a back door…" (2012, p. 41) and the primary impetus for his research initially was whether people's motivation in helping those in need was consistently and completely self-motivated. When Batson began his research in the 1970s, the other-oriented emotion "elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of the person in need… was called empathy", a concept that Batson incorporated into his research based on the work of Stotland (1969), Hoffman (1975), and Krebs (1975) (Batson, 2012, p. 41).

Batson is an empirical researcher believing that "…we *can* empirically discern other people's ultimate goals; indeed, we do it all the time" (Batson 2012, p. 42). So it is perhaps not surprising that Batson adheres to an extremely narrow definition of empathy. For Batson, empathy is *not* "knowing another's thoughts and feelings; adopting the posture or matching the neural response of another; coming to feel as another feels; feeling distress at witnessing another's suffering; imagining how one would think and feel in another's place; imagining how another thinks and feels; a general disposition (trait) to feel for others" (2012, p. 42). Batson goes on to emphasize

that none of the aforementioned phenomena, "each of which has been called empathy, produces altruistic motivation – except as the phenomenon evokes empathic concern (2012, p. 42). This is a very important detail overwhelmingly unacknowledged in interpretations of Batson's work. Batson's concern is not with empathy per se, but rather with whether people feel what he terms empathic concern, which in turn produces altruistic motivation (2012, p. 42).

Batson's fundamental research question aims to understand the end goal of a person's actions, specifically, to determine whether the goal of a behaviour was indeed altruistic. Batson's research framework is guided by four principles: that self-reports on motivation are not reliable; that goals are never observed but inferred; that if an observed behaviour has potentially more than one goal then motivation cannot be inferred; and that situations can be manipulated in an experimental setting to control for identifying the ultimate goal (2012, p. 43). Consistently, Batson has found that "…empathic concern – other-oriented emotion elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of the person in need – produces altruistic motivation" (2012, p. 50). The experimental designs used by Batson over the years tests the empathy-altruism hypothesis against potential egoistic alternatives (such as aversive-arousal reduction, punishment avoidance or reward seeking). Batson and colleagues have, for example, designed experiments where they have manipulated both the level of empathic concern elicited in the participants and the ease of avoiding a potential helping situation elicited by empathic concern. They have found consistently that when empathic concern is low, people do indeed attempt to avoid the situation. However, when the level of empathic concern is high, people seem compelled to help even when given a relatively easy way to avoid engagement (Batson, 2012, p. 44).

Batson recognizes that his research has demonstrated positive practical implications. For example, he notes that empathic concern has been found to increase cooperation in competitive situations, is an effective factor in conflict resolution workshops and has been recognized as a potential factor to improve perceptions of and advocacy on behalf of marginalized groups in society (2012, p. 48). However, Batson emphasizes that "[n]ot all the effects of empathy-induced altruism are positive" (2012, p. 48). This is a critical point of divergence often glossed over in popular interpretations of Batson's work. There is a significant body of literature (for example, Stotland et al. 1978; Maslach 1982; Shaw, Batson and Todd 1994) indicating that if overwhelmed by the situation or seeming futility of helping people "may try to avoid empathic concern in order to be spared the resulting altruistic motivation" (Batson, 2012, p. 48).

Furthermore there is strong evidence (Hornstein, 1976; Krebs, 1975; Stotland, 1969 in Batson et al., 1981) that people are more likely to empathize with a person they perceive to be similar to themselves. To that end, power dynamics are an element that is implicit in the study of empathy. Nevertheless, this is an element with which many psychologists studying empathy do not engage much to date. An illustrative example is the 2002 paper "Empathy: its proximate and ultimate bases" in which Stephanie Preston and Franz de Waal propose a unified psychological theory of empathy amalgamating the many disparate understandings of empathy discussed in this section to date.

2.4   Towards a unified psychological theory of empathy?

One specific literature review has undertaken, arguably with mixed success, to reconcile disparate psychological understandings of empathy into a coherent whole. Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal's 2002 article, "Empathy: Its ultimate and proximate bases", published in the journal *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* proposes that the "different views of empathy can be cohered into a unified whole…" (2002, p. 4). Preston and de Waal conducted a comprehensive review of how empathy ia defined in psychological literature and their article aims to "…present data [on empathy] across disciplines so that the continuity is apparent" and "…show that consistencies exist because all empathic processes rely on a general perception action design of the nervous system that has been postulated for over a century, is adaptive for myriad reasons, and exists across species" (Preston and de Waal, 2002, p. 2). In their paper, Preston and de Waal present a chart of the definitions of empathy used by contemporary researchers organized by "variables of classification" (2002, p. 2):

Term	Definition	Self-other distinction?	State matching?	Implications for helping?	Synonyms
Emotional contagion	Similar emotion is aroused in the subject as a direct result of perceiving the emotion of the object.	Lacking	Yes	None	Personal distress, Vicarious emotion, emotional transfer
Sympathy	Subject feels "sorry for" the object as a result of perceiving the distress of the object.	Intact	No	Depends on the costs and benefits of the situation.	
Empathy	Subject has a similar emotional state to an object as a result of the accurate perception of the object's situation or predicament.	Intact	Yes	Increasing with familiarity/similarity of object and salience of display.	
Cognitive empathy	Subject has represented the state of the object as a result of the accurate perception of the object's situation or predicament, without necessary state matching beyond the level of representation.	Intact	Partial, because it can be arrived at in a "top-down" fashion, involving emotional circuits to a lesser extent.	Likely, because it is more likely to be invoked for familiar/similar objects.	True empathy, Perspective-taking
Prosocial behaviors	Actions taken to reduce the distress of an object.	Depends	Not necessarily	Inherent	Helping, succorance

TABLE 1: Usage of terminology by most current researchers divided into main variables of classification.

The chart is a helpful tool, certainly the most helpful in all the literature I have read so far, for crystallizing the dilemma in defining empathy vis-à-vis its philosophical legacy and position as a psychological phenomenon. This matrix is remarkably comprehensive, including all elements that dominate century-old debates on empathy. However, Preston and de Waal's assertion that all of these phenomena are indeed empathy and that furthermore, they have physiological basis, is not universally or even widely accepted by scholars.

Open peer commentary was solicited by the journal for Preston and de Waal's article. The response was overwhelming, and generally echoed the confusion around empathy that I have outlined so far. Nevertheless, there are suggestions that the integrative view of empathy that Preston and de Waal put forth is getting increasingly accepted by empathy scholars as a definition for empathy as more research is done on "mirror neurons" and empathy. This research increasingly suggests that humans (and some non-humans) are capable of understanding "…observed actions, somatic sensations, and emotions via a kind of direct representation of those actions, sensations, and emotions" (Debes, 2010, p. 220). In some studies this understanding is conflated with all other possible forms of conceptualizing empathy.

While Preston and de Waal's intention was to argue for the similarities across psychological conceptualizations of empathy the article also does an excellent job of emphasizing disparities that are extremely difficult to reconcile. Also of note is the almost studious discounting of social aspects demonstrated by Preston and de Waal in their analysis of empathy.

2.5   The risks of examining empathy outside of social context

In 1979 Kenneth B. Clark, perhaps best remembered as the psychologist cited by the U.S. Supreme Court of its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, accepted the Distinguished Contribution to Psychology in the Public Interest Award at the meeting of the American Psychological Association. At the beginning of his address Clark observes that in preparing for his address, although he found no shortage of articles with empathy as their subject, it soon "…became clear that there were relatively few articles that attempted to attack the more fundamental problems of the nature and the determinants of empathy" (1979, p. 180).

Clark himself defines empathy as "… that unique capacity of the human being to feel the experiences, needs, aspirations, frustrations, sorrows, joys, anxieties, hurt, or hunger of others as

if they were his or her own" (1979, p. 187). He proposes multiple levels on which empathy can be understood: the "extreme psychopathic egocentric" who lacks empathy; the "egocentric individual" whose "empathy is limited to the self" (which Clark notes is not empathy); the individuals who can only empathize with their families, communities, and/or those "who are similar to themselves in colour, religion, nationality, sex, and status." Clark calls this "chauvinistic empathy" which, if not held in check, would lead to "the ultimate extinction of the human species" (1979, p.189).

The highest form of empathy for Clark is "functional" empathy. He describes it as:

> … empathy is that in which the individual is compelled to embrace all human beings. This expanded empathy is the most difficult level to achieve. It probably requires the highest level of development of the anterior frontal lobe of the brain, reinforced by training and experience. It is a level of empathy that can be simulated by verbal adherence but remains most difficult to express consistently and functionally. It is the level of empathy that religion seeks to reinforce, with varying degrees of failure. It is the level of empathy that is neglected by those practical and self-defined objective educators and social scientists who substitute moral relativism for moral sensitivity in propagating their trade. It is a level of empathy that intellectuals frequently seek to rationalize by obfuscating contemplations of the impossibility of verifying empirical ethics. (1979, p. 189)

Clark's claim that functional empathy is "…reinforced by training and experience… can be simulated by verbal adherence but remains most difficult to express consistently and functionally… and that is neglected by those practical and self-defined objective educators and social scientists who substitute moral relativism for moral sensitivity" is particularly jarring. Indeed, in the context of the doubts that a careful examination of neurological research on empathy, as well as Batson's work on the empathy-altruism hypothesis, raise about how innate or accessible empathy is, Clark's warnings merit careful consideration.

Most psychological studies of empathy (and related phenomena) undertaken by psychologists are done with little, if any, attention to the complicated social dynamics of the "real world". A notable exception to this trend, as mentioned previously, is the work of Jacquie Vorauer (and colleagues). It is, however, very telling that this blind spot in empathy scholarship continues,

especially in light of the fact that Clark eloquently described its dangers as early as half a century ago.

In his 2002 paper called "Kenneth Clark in the Patterns of American Culture" Keppel writes that "Clark has a cultural significance that goes beyond his importance within psychology; he was speaking not only as a scientist but also as a Black intellectual whose words would be given greater visibility by the mainstream media, which were seeking authentic interpreters of the ''Black experience' during the civil rights years" (p. 29) It is imperative to note that while earlier in his career Clark wrote with optimism about uncovering and remedying deeply ingrained racial prejudice, his tone, towards the end of his career, was deeply pessimistic.

Clark's increasing cynicism can be perhaps be explained at least in part by the rise of opposition to integration in the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*. As the social climate moved to greater conservatism, Clark believed that it was imperative for "…social scientists to turn their analytical focus back on themselves and the " status hierarchy" that afforded them positions of privilege, "rather than merely to study some system 'out there'" (Clark, 1974, p. 71 in Keppel, 2002, p. 35). Clark's frustration with those privileged within society not situating themselves (and recognizing their privilege) in their work is still, if not more, urgent today. It must be said that to my present knowledge, North American (and therefore currently the most prevalent) empathy researchers, regardless of discipline, are overwhelmingly white. Given Clark's cautions, perhaps it is not remarkable at all that so few papers deal with issues of marginalization and social injustice in an engaged manner.

In 1964 Clark spoke explicitly of the insidiousness of systemic racism which, he argued, must be publicly acknowledged by institutions in order to be overcome:

> Negro Americans will have . . . to learn . . . how to deal with a curious and insidious adversary—much more insidious than the outright bigot. . . . The public schools in New York City are not headed by bigots, they're not headed by people who say outwardly, "I believe that Negroes are inferior. . . ." But the fact is that these schools are woefully inferior. . . . They are not getting better; the evidence is that they are getting worse and worse. And the people who are directly responsible for this are self-identified liberals. (Clark in Podhoretz, 1964, p. 39)

The connection Clark makes between covert subjugation and the professing of liberal ideals is well documented, and it is this aspect that will be the focus of the next section of the literature review.

3 Liberalism

3.1 Historical Context

In the introduction to their 2014 book *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature* authors Megan Hammond and Sue Kim note that the concept of empathy was written about in English long before "empathy" entered the lexicon. They observe that "…the theories of sympathy in David Hume's 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature* and Adam Smith's 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* mark a watershed moment in the history of fellow-feeling" (p. 2). For Hume, specifically, "…sympathy was the process by which our external knowledge of the passions of others transformed into internal experience" (2014, p. 2), something which anticipates contemporary dominant conceptualizations of empathy in both philosophy and psychology. Indeed, some scholars have traced liberal understandings of empathy directly back to the thought of Hume and sentimentalism, specifically the idea that "…empathy is, in some sense, a precondition for moral approbation and disapprobation" (Prinz, 2011, p. 215). In the 2011 paper "Against Empathy" published in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* Jesse Prinz notes Hume's words that "…the good of society, where our own interest is not concerned, or that of our friends, pleases only by sympathy. . . . [A] true philosopher will never require any other principle to account for the strongest approbation and esteem" (in Prinz, 2011, p. 216). Prinz proceeds to argue that as a result of empathy's "…alleged link with approbation, [it] has an exalted position within Hume's moral philosophy" (p. 215).

What Prinz suggests is the most striking about the link between Hume's thought, empathy, and its place in liberalism is that "…if approbation and disapprobation depend on empathy, then empathy is the foundation of moral judgment" (p. 215). While few liberal social theorists write on empathy per se (though as demonstrated in the previous sections references to "sympathy" and "fellow feeling" are not uncommon) some academics, perhaps most notably psychologist Martin Hoffman, have written extensively about how empathy can be interpreted to be a tacit element in the thought of liberal philosophers such as John Rawls.

Over the course of his career, Hoffman wrote several articles describing empathy as a motivating force for liberal justice. Framing empathy as an inherently liberal ideal, he suggests that it furthers egalitarianism. As always with questions of empathy, however, a deeper analysis yields many further questions, not the least of which is how empathy could be an egalitarian force within societies with systemic inequalities. Indeed, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on John Rawls Leif Wenar writes that "…Rawls assumes that the liberal society … is marked by reasonable pluralism … and also that it is under reasonably favorable conditions: that there are enough resources for it to be possible for everyone's basic needs to be met. Rawls makes the simplifying assumption that the society is self-sufficient and closed, so that citizens enter it only by birth and leave it only at death" (Wenar, 2012). And while admittedly Rawls has always been clear that his ideas concern an ideal conceptualization of society, Hoffman's incorporation of the ideal of empathy into Rawls' theory seems a vehicle for bridging the gap between theory and application, or at the very least social/political theory and psychology.

In his 1989 article called "Empathic emotions and Justice in Society" Hoffman frames Rawls' veil of ignorance as a potentially empathetic tool. He writes of the veil as

> …an analytic device to ensure that in their reasoning the participants do not take account of their particular fortunes, talents, or abilities. It thus forces them to adopt an abstract, more general point of view … Through this reasoning Rawls concludes that the participants, operating from the original position, would, in order to assure economic justice and basis liberties for themselves, end up constructing a just society that incorporates the difference principle and the priority of liberty" (p. 301).

In this way, Hoffman suggests that liberalism moves from an ideology that is primarily self-focused to one in which others can, do, and indeed must consider the welfare of others (even if it is still essentially in their own interest to do so).

3.2   Cautions about "liberal empathy"

In her 1994 paper "A Kinder, Gentler Liberalism?" legal scholar Cynthia Ward writes about a similar scholarly direction as that demonstrated in Hoffman's work, where thinkers "take the position that liberalism could become compatible with community if appropriately modified by a communitarian principle of "political empathy." Ward describes this as an "add empathy to

liberalism and stir" approach, with the aim of creating a society "…that would simultaneously respect equality and individual diversity and avoid liberalism's flaws: selfishness, atomistic separatism, and emotionless abstraction" (1994, p. 931).

Ward suggests that such conceptions are inherently problematic in that empathy is, in that framework, interpreted as a tool for building upon presupposed equality. That is, projective empathy, putting oneself in another's place, presupposes that the places are fundamentally interchangeable to begin with. Therefore, Ward concludes that "[i]f there is no universal element in human selfhood, then any individual 'I' can fully empathize only with others whose self-developing experiences are at least closely analogous to its own; in short, projective empathy will not allow us to transcend the social differences, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic background, that contribute to the formation of the "self" (1994, p. 944). Ward's ultimate verdict on the dangers of projective empathy as a facet of liberalism is that "[t]hough it might lead to mutual understanding and increasing closeness within different social groups-for example, among whites, among blacks, and perhaps among women - it could make empathy between groups impossible since, by hypothesis, socially created differences cannot be transcended in order to achieve it (1994, p. 944).

While Ward's article was published over twenty years ago and for the intended audience of legal scholars, her work both pre-empts and echoes work on empathy and social theory conducted by affect theorists. In her 2011 article "Empathy and the Critic" Ann Jurecic notes that the work of thinkers such as Sara Ahmed's 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Lauren Berlant's 2008 piece "The female complaint" "…[warn] us to be wary of the fellow feeling associated with social emotions, such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and pity." She cautions that "[a]lthough these social emotions may seem authentically personal… they can be expressions of power, appropriations of others' experience, and falsely oversimplified understandings of social and cultural relationships". Indeed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Sara Ahmed goes as far as to state that "…empathy is dangerous: it placates the privileged and obscures 'the cultural politics of emotion'" (2004, p. 17). Ahmed's analysis draws attention to the fact that empathy may be interpreted more effectively not merely as an affective, emotional, or cognitive response, but rather as a socially constructed behaviour.

3.3   Empathy as socially constructed?

Viewing empathy as both some form of *sui generis* experience and simultaneously socially constructed is certainly not new. Indeed, Edith Stein, among others, advocated for a similar understanding a century ago. Currently, some researchers across disciplines are doing fascinating work which explicitly focuses on how potential empathy is affected, and often mitigated, by social factors. In a 2011 paper called "Us and them: Intergroup Failures of Empathy" psychologists Cikara et al. argue that "…outgroup members' suffering elicits dampened empathic responses as compared to ingroup members' suffering… [and] an alternative to empathy in the context of intergroup competition [is] Schadenfreude— pleasure at others' pain" (p. 149). Social work scholar Susan Gair in a 2013 paper called "Inducing empathy: pondering students' (in)ability to empathize with an Aboriginal man's lament and what might be done about it" demonstrates Australian social work student's inability to self-report empathizing with the experiences of an Aboriginal Australian's narrative. Of note again are the long-term studies on how empathy is affected by social factors conducted by Jacquie Vorauer.

What the affect theorist's critique of liberal empathy, as well as the research done by Ciaka et al., Gair, and Vorauer reveal is that empathy, regardless of how it is conceptualized, becomes a lot less attractive as a pro-social tool in "real world" applications. This is also certainly the suggestion from philosophers and psychologists who have engaged with the tension between the ideal of accessible, potentially pro-social inter-subjective understanding and the messiness of uncontrolled human interactions. What to my mind seems to be at the root of a nuanced discussion of empathy is the question of recognition: under which circumstances do we recognize another to be "like us" (or now) and how to we understand ourselves in relation to others. Few scholars writing on empathy per se have explicitly grappled with this idea, but there is a wealth of scholarship which addresses this phenomenon and that is, in my opinion, essential for a deeper understanding of how to unpack discursive assumptions of empathy as easily accessible and innately pro-social.

Judith Butler's 2005 work *Giving an Account of Oneself* is one example of such scholarship. Interpreting Foucault, Butler writes that "…the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes if intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of

what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgement…" (2005, p. 22). I take this to mean that in the liminal space between ourselves and another we have agency to recognize the systemic factors that shape our interactions, to reflect on what we (do not) recognize and how we (are not) recognized, and then choose to proceed (if possible). This may be possible, without "common ground" but I cannot conceive of it being innate or easy.

Chapter 2
What is Empathy? The Importance of Edith Stein's Conceptualization

This chapter explores philosopher Edith Stein's work on empathy with the aim of bringing to prominence a historically overlooked and extremely precise understanding of empathy. Stein's account clearly outlines empathy as a phenomenon and raises important cautions on why we need to be critical in distinguishing empathy from its potential effects. In this chapter I will contextualize Stein's scholarship on empathy within some of her lived experiences before going on to discuss the implications of Stein's conceptualization of empathy for current directions in empathy scholarship and pedagogy.

Stein, one of the first scholars to propose a comprehensive and rigorous definition of empathy, has been conspicuously absent from dominant discussions -- both scholarly and popular -- on empathy, its function, and potential effects. Her absence from English scholarship on empathy can be explained in part by the fact that until the 1980s very few English translations of Stein's work were available. Despite the growing interest in Stein's work from philosophers and psychologists, as well as practitioners of fields as disparate as nursing (Määttä, 2006), Jewish studies (Astell, 2004), and physical therapy (Davis, 1990), she remains little known as a philosopher. Joyce Avrech Berkman writes in the introduction to her 2006 edited collection, *Contemplating Edith Stein* that "[a]t the outset of the twenty-first century, Stein the brilliant philosopher is not widely recognized. Rather, Stein the nun Sister Benedicta a Cruce, murdered at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, and canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1998, stirs popular interest and debate" (p. 2). The tension between Stein's life as a phenomenologist and Catholic saint has definitely coloured interpretations of her work, but of course, these identities need not be mutually exclusive.

Indeed, several scholars have suggested that it is difficult, and perhaps disingenuous, to view Stein's remarkable life through a single lens, be that as a pioneering phenomenologist, Catholic martyr, a Jew, or a woman. Berkman emphasizes that equally important as Stein's scholarship, both secular and ecclesiastical, are "…her myriad modes of self representation, specifically her

struggle, constantly shifting with her private and societal experience, to combine her selves as female, Jew, German, Catholic, and Carmelite nun" (2006, p. 3). Stein's canonization a mere 56 years after her death further complicates interpretations of her life and work. Dana K. Greene in her 2006 essay "In Search of Edith Stein: Beyond Hagiography" laments that the framing of Stein's life has "until recently been largely captive to the hagiographical tradition" (2006, p. 49). And while this is understandable, it also paints a very specific picture of Edith Stein's life. For example, Berkman notes that "[r]egrettably, much recent clerical attention to Stein sidesteps her feminist challenge to the political and religious institutions of her lifetime" (2006, p. 8). She suggests that this is due to the fact that Stein's feminist writings did not serve the purposes of the church. This clearly brings to the fore the limitations and challenges of posthumous curation of a scholar's writings.

While the hagiographical interpretation of Stein's life and death can certainly be limiting, Stein's life and work as a phenomenologist is, too, often discussed out of context of the rest of her remarkable life. Berkman emphasizes that as Stein was "[c]onstantly shaping and being shaped by a multitude of relationships to other human beings and historical events, her life offers ample evidence of the protean and dynamic nature of individual identity" (2006, p. 6). Thus, her work on empathy is especially compelling in context of Stein's identities, friends and colleagues, and the historical context in which she lived and died.

Indeed, not only is Stein's 1916 doctoral dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy* that is a powerful reminder of the need to distinguish empathy from its effects. Stein's life is also a striking example of the irony of imagining empathy to be an accessible phenomenon generating not only a glimpse at another's inner life, but also affect and pro-social effect. The systemic obstacles that Stein encountered throughout her life – most notably as a woman and as a Jew – were certainly not mitigated by empathy in the manner optimistically expressed in many contemporary accounts of empathy's function and effects detailed in the previous chapter.

A Brief Biography of Edith Stein

Even the sparsest biographical details of Edith Stein, more commonly written about as Sister Teresia Benedicta a Cruce of the order of The Discalced Carmelites, are fascinating. Stein was born in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland) in 1891 into a devout Jewish family, and in her teens declared herself an atheist (Meneses and Larkin, 2012, p. 154). In 1916 Stein, the

second woman in German history to defend a doctorate in philosophy, completed her PhD summa cum laude under Edmund Husserl. Until 1919 she worked as Husserl's assistant. A philosopher in her own right, Stein was initially denied a job teaching at universities because she was a woman, and later, because she was Jewish (Lindblad, 1996, p. 270). In 1922, after a long-standing interest in the faith, Stein was baptized and received into the Catholic Church. She taught at several schools and wrote prolifically before entering a Carmelite convent in 1933, where she continued to write and work. Stein was sent to Holland to escape Nazi persecution in Germany, but after being arrested in retaliation for the 1942 Dutch bishops public condemnation of Nazi activities, she was murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1942. In 1987 Pope John Paul II beatified her as a Catholic martyr.

Meneses and Larkin explain that in discussing Stein's contribution to philosophy they "have taken her work in its own right, but of course…recognise that the story of her life and death is remarkable" (2012, p. 155) and inevitably affects the interpretation of her work. Much of Stein's philosophical work was done as a cloistered nun and has been, as a result, interpreted as theological work. Meneses and Larkin observe that this categorization is not entirely fair since "[a]s a writer of her time, Stein is not alone in having to address, and reflect upon, the relationship between her own ideas and the concept of God; the concept of God was central to the concerns of her readership and peers" (2012, p. 155). They also emphasize that Stein's work on empathy was written much earlier than her conversion to Catholicism and that "…it is not in any way a mystical artifact—although this misunderstanding does exist" (2012, p. 155). Such reinterpretations are an example of how Stein's multifaceted identity has led to selective portrayals of her life and work.

It is not difficult to find examples of such reinterpretations. In an article published in the journal *Spiritual Life* Lynn A. Meier interprets Stein's work on empathy as describing an experience akin to prayer, wherein "[e]mpathy… is an in-breaking of the other into our own consciousness" (1998, p. 132). Meier concludes her paper with the analysis that in choosing to explore empathy, Stein "…chose to investigate the act through which, she believed, God is known" (1998, p. 133). Although it is most difficult to guess at an author's motivation, Meier's analysis is somewhat disingenuous since Stein very clearly states the motivations behind her study of empathy in the first pages of her thesis and they are very not theological. Indeed, Stein's exploration of empathy, while encouraged by Husserl as perhaps a means of advancing his own work on the subject, also

solidified her standing as a scholar in her own right, independent of Husserl. Berkman notes that despite often being portrayed as merely Husserl's student and assistant, "…Stein collaborated with Husserl as a peer, not hesitating to differ with him. Stein held ideas both consonant and highly dissonant with Husserl's; she wielded crucial influence on his widely read and acclaimed *Ideen (Ideas) II* and *III*" (2006, p. 9).

Stein is survived by an impressive collection of her correspondence and papers and Berkman notes that "[h]er copious, intellectually rich, and generous correspondence abounds in philosophical reflections and testifies to her sustained passion and truth seeking and to her fervent belief in multiple perspectives and dialogue" (2006, p. 2). These papers clearly demonstrate Stein's attempts to reconcile the divergent worlds of her social context, political context, personal, spiritual, and academic lives. Greene notes that "[i]n the ten years prior to her entrance into the Carmelite order, Stein tried to integrate phenomenology and Thomism… she also attempted to integrate feminism with Catholic teaching and Thomistic philosophy" (2006, p. 53). Nor did Stein reject her Jewish roots as she moved deeply into the word of the Carmelite order. At the time of her arrest Stein had for some years been working on an autobiography, which Berkman writes was "…initially intended as a memoir of her mother and a defense of German Jews" (2006, p. 39). The work remained incomplete but was published posthumously as *Edith Stein: Life in a Jewish Family*.

It is also vital to remember that while Stein had applied to join the Carmelite order as a cloistered nun prior to 1933, she applied again (and was accepted) in 1933 in in no small part because as a Jew she was no longer allowed to work in Germany (Berkman, 2006, p. 40). In her 1996 paper called "Reading Edith Stein: What happened?" Ulrika Lindblad describes this oft overlooked biographical detail and calls Stein's beatification a "reinterpretation of her death." She notes "Stein was beatified as a Christian martyr… But she was murdered… because as a Jew she did not have the right to exist… Her murderers cared nothing, one way or another, for her Christian faith" (2006, p. 270). Berkman cautions that debates on who exactly Stein *was* – a Jew or a Christian or indeed, both - obscure fundamental questions of how she is to be remembered. She writes, "…what is lost in this skirmishing are the more fundamental questions of how the meaning of Stein's remarkable life should be constructed and who is to determine that meaning – Edith Stein herself? Those who have canonized her? Or some interpretation of past, present, and future interpreters?" (1996, p. 49) This question gestures at the questions of voice that underlie

much of my interest in empathy. If we are to empathize with Stein, do we get to pick and choose which elements of her identity we empathize with?

Perhaps the insights one is to take away from a look at Edith Stein's extraordinarily, seemingly contradictory, and multifaceted life are similar to those one takes away from her dissertation – that all interactions are dynamic and more complex than might appear at first glance, and that it is the pursuit of understanding, rather than a pre-conceived function of its end, that allows one to recognize another in their full complexity, recognizing nuances of similarity and alterity both.

Stein's Project: the "Problem" of Empathy

In his book 2006 book *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* Alasdair MacIntyre (p. 75) writes that "Stein's doctoral thesis is a work of some philosophical importance, not so much because of the conclusions that she reaches or the arguments that she advances in support of them – important as some of these are – as because of the questions that she raises." The questions are far-reaching and intricate. The overarching question Stein asks and attempts to answer in her dissertation deals with what empathy *is*. However, in attempting to answer this question she raises many more. MacIntyre (2006, p. 75) notes that "…among the questions posed for us in Stein's thesis is that of whether the treatment of *Einfühlung,* translated in English as empathy, provides grounds for deciding between [phenomenological realism and transcendental idealism]" (2006, p. 76). And while Stein's dissertation is considered by most scholars to be a work firmly grounded in Husserl's phenomenological framework, it also no doubt transcends it.

Meneses and Larkin in their 2012 paper "Edith Stein and the Contemporary Psychological Study of Empathy", call Stein's dissertation "a rare, canonical example of orthodox, Husserlian, phenomenological inquiry" in which she "provides one of the most systematic, complete, and thorough applications of Husserl's methodological approach to experience" (2006, p. 153). MacIntyre writes that "[w]hen Stein had chosen empathy as the subject for her dissertation, it had been because Husserl had so far not given an account of it, and because a good account of it was necessary, if some of his central claims were to be sustained." (2006, p. 71) Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy* predates Husserl's published ideas on empathy in Ideas II, for which Stein was editor and in which he follows her characterization of empathy.

Stein elegantly questions the need to explain empathy as one *thing* with clear results. Indeed, her understanding of empathy is not that of a homogenous phenomenon. Rather, she maintains that **"**[t]he comprehension of foreign mental states "…be they sensations, feelings, or what not—is a unified, typical, even though diversely differentiated modification of consciousness and requires a uniform name**"** (Stein in Dullstein 2013, p. 343). In this way Stein characterizes empathy as the foundation of any intersubjective experience, and a phenomenological understanding of empathy as the most credible. She explains that for "…a science which proposes ultimately to clarify all scientific knowledge [phenomenology] must not, in turn, be based on a science already extant, but must be grounded in itself" (1989, p. 3). Stein believed that phenomenology was the ideal, and indeed, the only appropriate lens to explore a unique experience such as empathy, an experience which she understands to be both primordial and mitigated at the same time.

Stein devotes a fair bit of her dissertation to arguing against Theodor Lipps' work on empathy, suggesting that Lipps' definition of empathy is invalid. Stein rejects Lipps' conceptualization of "fellow feeling" as empathy, noting that "fellow feeling" is merely sympathy (1989, p. 17). She emphasizes that for Lipps complete empathy is a state where there is no distinction between one's self and the object of the empathy. Stein maintains that it is impossible to suspend one's "I" (1989, p. 17). In short, in empathy the individual does not lose oneself. Instead, s/he is aware of observing, feeling, and understanding another's state. Stein notes that empathy can be similar to memory, expectation, and fantasy, but differs in that "[memory, expectation, and fantasy] do not present their objects as being primordially given, but rather re-present (*vergegenwärtigen*) or reproduce (*reproduzieren*) them in one way or another" (Dullstein, 2013, p. 343). It is this idea of primordiality, what can be directly experienced, that is at the crux of Stein's conception of empathy.

Stein defines empathy as a "non primordial experience which announces a primordial one" (1989, p. 14) and it is this tension between that which can and cannot be directly experienced that makes empathy unique. The non-primordial experience (what we observe about another) allows us to empathize with them, and empathy for Stein is always primordial because it is experienced in the here and now (1989, p. 10). She notes, however, that as a result, empathy is "…an act that is primordial as present experience though not primordial in content" since it is impossible to live what the other person is living, just understand what they are living (1989, p. 10). This is an important distinction. As Meneses and Larkin emphasize, "For Stein, empathy is a

founding or fundamental act, which…has a status analogous to direct perception; that is, it is not a product of other deliberated, intellectual, or cognitive processes. Rather, it is the result of a perceptual act, which directly brings another's experience into one's own awareness" (2012, p. 166). Stein's understanding of empathy does not end at the point where one perceives another's experience. Instead, empathy for Stein is a multi-step process with its beginning in a fundamental awareness.

For Stein, empathy is dynamic and multidimensional, and she identifies three stages: "[One is] vaguely aware of someone else's mental state; [One] follow[s] a tendency to be drawn into this state; [One] objectif[ies] the mental state in an "apperceptive grip" (Stein 1989, p. 17 in Dullstein 2013, p. 344). In this model, "…empathy always presents a mental state as non primordially given, even in the second phase. We are always well aware of the fact that the mental state we share is not our own, …but that it is the representation of someone else's state which is given in its fullest only to the other person" (Dullstein 2013, p. 345). Nevertheless, even though the other's mental state is non- primordially given, the experience of becoming aware of it, focusing on it, and then comprehending it (the "apperceptive grip") is primordial.

Stein stops short of saying that the intention to understand, or indeed, perceived comprehension of another's experiences leads to any specific action. Meneses and Larkin write that "…we can place Stein alongside those researchers who understand empathy as a way of knowing what another person is experiencing, and in opposition to those for whom empathy is a response to that knowledge" (2012, p. 158). This is an important distinction to make since the line is not always drawn, in defining empathy, between understanding another's experience and responding to it. For Stein, empathy is the process of understanding the inner life of an/Other, but in no way the response to that inner life.

In Stein's vision, empathy is always an intentional act in that it "occurs as a result of effort and as a result of active engagement with another person" and in that respect there is a clear similarity between Stein's conception of empathy and Scheler's fourth type of sympathy, emotional identification (Switankowsky, 2000, p. 91). It is critical to note, however, that nowhere in her dissertation does Stein argue that empathy yields universal or even consistently accurate understanding of another's experience. However, empathy for Stein is what Curtis Hutt describes as "a kind of a minimal condition for being truly human" and interacting with fellow

human beings (2009, p. 18). To that end, empathy is the means through which humans attempt to understand the world beyond their immediate experiences. Stein makes clear that being able to see the world "independent of [one's] perception" is "…the basis of intersubjective experience [and] the condition of possible knowledge of the existing outer world" (1989, p. 88). Thus empathy is clearly defined not as a virtue, but rather as a necessary, integral part of the experience which is, nonetheless, not guaranteed to "work" and yield accurate understanding of an/Other. Stein emphasizes that without empathy, human beings are at an experiential disadvantage, seeing the world through one perspective alone. She notes, "…if we take the self as the standard, we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality" (1989, p. 88). But the belief that we have understood an/Other, or empathized with them, does not mean that we indeed did.

Stein describes empathy, coupled with reflection, as the processes that work "…hand in hand to give me myself to myself" (1989, p. 89). Empathy for Stein is not only the process by which one connects with the experience of others, but also the context in which one occasionally realizes that they cannot. When one runs into the limits of one's own empathic understanding, Stein writes, "…we become conscious of our own deficiency or disvalue" (1989, p. 116) in the sense of acknowledging the limitations of our capacity for understanding. Thus, the inability to empathize can be just as instructive in signaling that there are certain realms of experience that are not available to a given individual but that are, nevertheless, lived by others.

Implications of Stein's Definition

Drawing a clear line between empathy and its potential effects is undoubtedly difficult. After all, even when empathy is understood as a way of understanding instead of reacting to another's lived experience, an ethical dimension is difficult to avoid. Does the understanding of another's experience compel one to any sort of action? Hutt notes that exploring Stein's understanding of the ethical considerations of empathy is particularly difficult, as Stein did not address the topic specifically in any of her writings (2009, p. 17). Hutt claims that for an understanding of Steinian ethics "…one must turn to writings composed during different periods of her life, before and after her conversion to Roman Catholicism" (2009, p. 17). In his paper called "Identity, Alterity and Ethics in the Work of Husserl and his Religious Students: Stein and Levinas" Hutt attempts to understand the ethical implications for Stein's empathy through an analysis of Stein's writings

on topics such as the essence of community, the role of women, and the experience of being a Jew in early twentieth century Germany.

Hutt describes the foundation of Steinian ethics as the dismissal of empathy as an entirely rational process. He writes that Stein's "non-rationally mediated identity or feeling of oneness - first apparent in intimate personal relationships and then in smaller groups - leads to the understanding of the human community as a single, unified, all encompassing whole" (2009, p. 18). This view was often articulated by Stein in papers she wrote in response to the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany in the twenties and thirties. Stein maintained that Jews are "fundamentally like their Christian neighbors whom they live alongside --- individuals raised in families and communities with the same joys and needs as every other German" (in Hutt, 2009, p. 19).

Although Stein does not write explicitly about empathy in these papers, she emphasizes the similarities that humans have and the grounds that those create for understanding through and beyond difference. Hutt suggests that perhaps Stein's ethical maxim, if one needs to locate one at all, can be interpreted as the well-known adage of 'treat others the way you want to be treated' (2009, p. 19). And although Hutt does not explicitly say this, it seems harder to tease out a view of Steinian ethics that is not rooted in, or perhaps reinterpreted in terms of, religious ideals, specifically the lives of the Saints (2009, p. 19.) Whether or not Stein's ethical writings can be accurately interpreted as having been modeled on the lives of the Saints, it is imperative to remember that her work on empathy deals with the phenomenon of empathy and not its content or ethical implications. This is extremely significant as in this way, Stein's conception of empathy transcends much of the current debate on what empathy is and isn't. Stein's definition and scholars' analysis of it as "intuitive" reconciles both the cognitive and affective processes that are involved in seeking and directly understanding, not experiencing, another's lived experience. The resurgence of interest in Stein's work on empathy is well timed, as the expectation of empathy becomes an increasingly omnipresent concept across disciplines, often tied to claims of its importance for improved interpersonal relations. With the help of Stein's definition it is easier to contemplate empathy apart from its effects. Not only does this enable a more meaningful discussion around what empathy is, but it also allows for clarity when discussing its effects, whether on the inter-subjective or inter-group level.

Indeed, Antonio Calcagno in his 1997 paper "Persona politica: unity and difference in Edith

Stein's political philosophy" writes that "[u]nless there is a tacit personal willingness to accept the other, no community of any kind is possible; we would revert to being but a mass or, in Nietzchean language, a herd" (1997, p. 212). He maintains that Stein's understanding of the intersubjective experience is instructive in understanding that "If we absolutize our personal differences, which is easy to do in our postmodern climate, we risk any concrete possibility of significant exchange" (1997, p. 212). The tension Stein's work holds between recognizing the similarity and alterity of another is what strikes Calcagno as essential in conceptualizing interactions, whether they be between individuals, or individuals and states. Indeed, he interprets Stein's work to suggest that we should be just as careful being absolute about either difference or similarity. Indeed, Stein's scholarship foregrounds the view that regardless of context, "[u]nity does not necessarily preclude diversity, and *vice versa*" (Calcagno, 1997, p. 215). At the state level, Calcagno interprets Stein's work to suggest that "[a]lthough there will be tension, recognition of our personal ontic structures will reveal that both sameness and difference are constitutive and should not be glossed over. Rather, they should be accommodated simultaneously – a *convenientia unitatis et differentiae*", or a harmony between unity and difference (1997, p. 214).

This insight is certainly relevant to pedagogy. Writing about the viability of "teaching" students to empathize, Carol M. Davis observes in her article called "What is empathy, and can empathy be taught?" that in Stein's understanding "[e]mpathy catches us in its process. My contention is that we can facilitate it, and we can prevent it from happening, but we cannot make it happen (1990, p. 711). Davis, like Stein, emphasizes the self-reflective element as essential in empathy, whether it facilitates "successful" understanding of an/Other's experience or not. She also recognizes that an inability to look past oneself is an inhibitor to empathy. In a pedagogical context, she notes that "[a]nxiety, self-doubt, prejudice, and self-esteem focus one's attention inward, making it difficult to establish a therapeutic presence for others, and thus these behaviors can prevent empathy from occurring" (1990, p. 714). And while Davis is writing about the medical context, her insights are arguably generalizable to many personal and professional interactions.

Indeed, Stein's work can be seen as a strong caution to imagine that regardless of context, empathy can be taught to others. Davis writes, "…although empathy, as a process, can be facilitated to occur, the behavior itself cannot be directly taught as a skill (1990, p. 715). Indeed,

he notes that self-awareness, not a focus on trying to understand the experiences of others, may be the best vehicle for facilitating empathy. He notes that "[c]ertainly, teachers can help develop [empathy] in students by offering experiences that increase self-awareness… [and respect and tolerance for the differences." (1990, p. 716) These differences can also often involve contradictions, wherein one must navigate the complex dynamic of not only having difficulty understanding another, but recognizing them as different from ourselves to begin with. Edith Stein once wrote, "I am not a cleverly designed book; I am a human being with my contradictions" (Berkman, 2006, p. 13). A close reading of Stein's scholarship on empathy, as well as reflection on her lived experience, opens up avenues for considering empathy not as a skill, or one *thing* with pro-social effects, but rather as an opening for the recognition of all the contradictions that signal similarity and alterity between individuals and groups.

Chapter 3
Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* as a Starting Point for Situating Empathy in Social Context

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, both the life and work of Edith Stein underscore the paradox of many discursive interpretations of empathy. Stein theorized that empathy, though a fundamentally human primordial experience, is neither innate nor easy. Her murder in a genocide conceived and executed by people whom she did not see as essentially unlike herself underscores the importance of her contributions to understanding empathy. Indeed, there is no shortage of atrocities, both past and ongoing, that should give empathy-as-a-foolproof-way-of-making-the-world-a-better-place enthusiasts pause. After all, at the very least, if empathy is really innate and universally assessable, then why is it seen as tool to overcome barriers between individuals and groups? If humans are really "hard wired" for that level of understanding, why do all those barriers exist in the first place?

The idea that empathy cannot always be achieved challenges the narrative of being able to "understand" another's experience and then do "right" or "good". However, there are not many academic (or other) papers that address the gap between the discourse of empathy as a panacea for our social ills (social fragmentation, apathy, discrimination, exploitation, xenophobia) and the myriad factors that disadvantage some and empower others in a society. This chapter focuses on two case studies demonstrating this common view of empathy and explores them in the context of Judith Butler's 2005 work *Giving an Account of Oneself.* Although Butler does not use the word "empathy" in her book, her exploration of the work of thinkers Theodor Adorno, Michel Foucault, Jean Laplanche, Emmanuel Levinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in examining just what it means to understand oneself, morally and ethically, in relation to others is an essential, if often tacit, dimension empathy.

Critically, Butler recognizes that "the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition" (2005, p. 24). And indeed, the whole question of what it means to empathize with another can be reduced to the question of recognition or reconizability. After all, in order to understand anything at all about someone else or their experiences we need

first recognize them as someone distinct from ourselves. And so, when one thinks about empathy within the complexity of our societies as recognition, a lot of ideas about empathy being "innate" or "easy" must be interrogated further since recognition in itself implies a set of rules, not some sort of unmitigated direct experience. The two case studies explored in this chapter are a review of some of Barak Obama's early public comments on empathy and a 2013 video created by the UK based NGO Save the Children to raise awareness and donations for children affected by the ongoing Syrian civil war. While these two instances of discursive practices on empathy are dissimilar in scope, audience, and intended outcome, they are similar in that they poignantly demonstrate the complexity of discussing empathy as a moral, or even merely pro-social force.

I propose that in both these instances, attempts to effectively discuss (as in Obama's case) or elicit (as in the case with the "Save the Children" video) empathy are obscured by the complicated social web in which these interactions take place. Butler (2005, p. 21) emphasizes that "the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our 'singular' stories are told" (2005, p. 21). Thus, even as we experience our lives through unique, seemingly singular experiences, Butler's critique makes clear that no one's experience is truly singular insofar as our very understanding of ourselves and each other is shaped and mitigated by social context. This becomes especially obvious, and, I argue, problematic, once empathy is invoked as a force for understanding not only between two individual people, but many diverse people whether within a country (as Obama suggests) or the international community.

Obama and empathy as a requirement for a Supreme Court Justice

One of the highest profile promoters of empathy over the past decade has been Barak Obama. In 2007, as a senator, Obama created great (and arguably ongoing) controversy by making a statement in which he identified 'empathy' as a necessary characteristic for a Supreme Court justice. Obama explained, "We need somebody who's got the heart, the empathy, to recognize what it's like to be a young teenage mom," he said, "…the empathy to understand what it's like to be poor or African American or gay or disabled or old" (Obama in Just, 2009). Interestingly, in these comments Obama seems to assume that anyone in a position of potentially being a

Supreme Court justice would likely not know firsthand, therefore arguably necessitating empathy, what it would be like to be a teenage mom, and/or poor, and/or African American, and/or gay, and/or disabled, and/or old. It is also a startling (although perhaps realistic) assumption on his part that potential Supreme Court justice nominees would not be African American but would be able bodied and heterosexual.

Indeed, it seems that what Obama is describing is not the need for empathy, but rather, a whole set of systemic factors that disenfranchise people like young teenage moms, and those who are "poor or African American or gay or disabled or old". In the spirit of looking at the discursive practice that Obama's remarks represent, I cannot help but ask: is Obama referencing "empathy", or calling for a reexamination of systemic discrimination and injustice? And if Obama meant to speak to what has been repeatedly called the "empathy deficit" (Just, 2009), what makes most sense as a focus? Advocating for "more empathy" or a thoughtful, critical look at reasons for the deficit?

Of course, these two directions are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, they are likely very intimately intertwined. Butler makes clear that no individual can identify oneself, nor indeed, interact with anyone else, outside of social context:

> The ''I'' does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks. In an important sense, this matrix is also the condition for the emergence of the ''I,'' even though the ''I'' is not causally induced by those norms. We cannot conclude that the ''I'' is simply the effect or the instrument of some prior ethos or some field of conflicting or discontinuous norms. When the ''I'' seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the ''I'' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. (2006, p. 7-8)

In light of this analysis Obama's comments can be viewed as a call for understanding that the lived experiences of the aforementioned Supreme Court justice inevitably colour their understanding of criminality and the law. On the other hand, implicated as we all are "in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration", how exactly does one gain that

capacity to understand the particularities of the lived experience of others? How, at the very least, does one become aware of factors that may exceed our capacities for narration?

An interesting opening for understanding this can be gleaned from an article published in June 2009 in *Investor's Business Daily*, two years after Obama's initial comments on justice and empathy. Raghavan Mayur, a self proclaimed "polling Guru", has written similarly themed articles in other publications, and this particular article references what he calls Obama's "'empathy' standard" as being important in particularly difficult Supreme Court decisions. Reviewing the data generated by his poll collecting opinions on Obama's take on the relationship between empathy and justice, he reports that "[t]hree in five (59%) believe a high court justice should consider only the Constitution, applicable laws and precedents rather than all of these plus his or her own life experiences and views. Only one in three (32%) say justices must consider their life experiences and personal views" (Mayur, 2009). One is left wondering at the gap such rationalization leaves between the ideals of a document like the American Constitution and the lived experiences, often deeply internalized, that accompany its interpretation.

Perhaps what Obama was expressing in his initial remarks on empathy is that the most disenfranchised members of society might not feel as protected by the Constitution as those enjoying full, unquestioned enfranchisement. But perhaps if justices enjoy, and have consistently enjoyed, that full enfranchisement then they are unable to conceive of that not being the case for everyone. And that is the gap that empathy is imagined to fill, perhaps. But the complexity lies in the fact that such an understanding may not be positive, but rather negative. That is to say, perhaps a more useful conceptualization of empathy lies not in imagining it as a tool for understanding the experiences of another, but rather as a way of seeing that not all experiences can be understood by everyone. The challenge is to not let that lack of particular understanding cannot render said experiences invisible.

Indeed, this is the gap that is not filled by ideas of empathy as a means of recognizing a "shared humanity" or experiences fundamental to "being human". Butler's work makes clear that while no experience is singular in that we are all shaped by dynamic social forces, so too are no experiences universal. So, what happens when we cannot imagine what another person is living? And what do we do with the knowledge that accepting our limitations in understanding another also forces us to re-examine who we are ourselves? Butler puts particular emphasis on the value

of acknowledging the limitations of self-knowledge. If each individual person is shaped by myriad forces of which she may or may not be aware, and then her interactions with others are coloured by those forces within a dynamic social space, there is ample opportunity for lapses in self-knowledge, as well as the knowledge or understanding of others. This, for Butler, is an integral component of consideration and thoughtfulness towards others. She writes,

> If the subject is opaque to itself, not fully translucent and knowable to itself, it is not thereby licensed to do what it wants to ignore its obligations to others. The contrary is surely true. The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency. (2005, p.19-20)

Re-examining Obama's comments in this light forces one to reflect upon what "empathy" really means within the context of individual justices interpreting the law. Is empathy in this case really, as many have commented, a gratuitous emotion rooted in personal experience that has no role in the "rationality" of the law? Or is it an understanding that there are experiences, as well as aspects of our selves, that will always remain unknowable to us, and that it is precisely that which is incomprehensible to us that we must acknowledge and respect?

This question seems important. Butler's observation that it is "…the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition" (2005, p. 24) challenges the notion that someone who has experienced marginalization would *ipso facto* be more empathetic. This is what Obama's words seem to imply. But does this mean that all experiences of marginalization are similar enough to draw some instructive conclusions? Or that having experienced marginalization in one part of their lives, people may be more sensitive for it in the lives of others? I'm not sure, but I believe such claims about empathy's potential must be made very carefully.

Butler's emphasis on the challenge of self-knowledge gestures to the importance of intersectionality and its relationship with the many norms that "govern recognition". After all, our marginalization in some areas of our social lives is rarely all-encompassing. Self knowledge for the purposes of recognition, or empathy, invariably involves a concurrent appreciation of socially constructed privilege as well as subjugation. In this way, though we are all constructed and (un)recognized by ourselves and one another within a particular social context (rendering none of our experiences singular for the purposes of recognition), the recognition of an experience and the feeling of that experience are not the same thing. We can be seen as something and yet not see ourselves the same way. So is the takeaway from Obama's comments that a person who may have experienced marginalization more aware of the difficulty posed by the "norms that govern recognition"? Perhaps, but then the focus is perhaps better placed on an examination of those norms (arguable embodied by the justice system) than the individual person.

Save The Children Syria Video Campaign

In 2013 the UK NGO Save the Children released a video aiming to raise awareness about and money for children affected by the civil war in Syria. The video, occasionally subtitled "If London were Syria" was created, according to Jake Lundi, Director of Brand and Communications at Save The Children, with the hope that it would "…resonate with members of the public, particularly those who don't know much about the situation in Syria so they can really understand the plight of innocent Syrian children." I will argue here that "understanding the plight of innocent Syrian children" is not as easy as it may seem, and that much more difficult than viewing the video is locating oneself in the suffering of those who are to be the objects of our understanding.

Posted on youtube.com, the video is 90 seconds long with each second representing a day in the life of a young girl in the year between two birthday celebrations. In that time, the viewer is shown the girl's transition from living as a "normal" child (healthy, with two parents, a comfortable home, extracurricular activities, strong family ties) to living in a refugee camp (ill, one parent lost, no home, traumatized by war). The video ends with the words "Just because it isn't happening here, doesn't mean it isn't happening". Posted by Save the Children, the video is

titled "Most Shocking Second a Day Video". It is prefaced by the words: "A young girl's life gets turned upside-down in this tragic second a day video. Could this ever happen in the UK? This is what war does to children". The video has 46 254 910 views and 26 081 comments at the time of writing.

The antecedent for "it" in "Just because it isn't happening here, doesn't mean it isn't happening" is war. The cause of war is only vaguely alluded to in the video. The child in the video has a fair complexion, dark hair, and green eyes. Presumably she was chosen since she could easily represent a Syrian child or a child in the UK, perhaps alluding to the many children in the UK being of Middle Eastern background. Yet implicit in the words is the idea that war *could* happen in the UK (read: to the audience) and so, the reason to care about the conflict in Syria is because it is not, but *could* be *your* conflict. While a potentially useful awareness and fundraising tactic, this use of language employs several problematic discursive elements of empathy.

The video is certainly deeply affecting. However, where does the fact that this content "resonated" with me, not in the least as a mother of a young child, fit into the discursive practices on empathy? To put it another way, when I watch the video and feel anguish, is it for the particular child in the video? Is it fear for my child? Is it possible to feel anything at all through this vehicle for children in Syria in general? Do I gain greater understanding of the humanitarian crisis in Syria? If so, how? If not, why not? And ultimately, does it matter? I propose that in aiming to understand what empathy is and how it works, these questions matter a great deal.

In a paper called "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty" Karen Wells claims that "melodrama directly confronts the emotional and ethical question of what kind of world we want by making visible the injury wrought by social inequality in ways that elicit a visceral response" (2013, p. 278). While melodrama is an effective vehicle for creating a visceral response, it can also be seen as a discursive practice with a long history in the Western world, a genre that Wells calls the "melodramatic mode". Wells suggests that the "visceral emotional response and moral legibility of the melodramatic mode produces an identification of the spectator with the experiences of the suffering subject" (2013, p. 278). The videos she surveys in her study are similar to the Save the Children video in question where the "suffering subjects" are children and the moral legibility is the seemingly self-evident idea that no child *should* be suffering. She notes that "[c]ritical to the effective representation of innocence and the

powerlessness of the suffering subject [is] the subject's lack of structural power and capacity that signifies the impossibility of being culpable for his or her own suffering. It is for this reason that melodrama invariably centres on women and children and, to a lesser extent, racialised minorities" (2013, p.281). In this way, the same factors that make the child in the video such an effective object of empathy (her vulnerability, her defensiveness) are also, taken to an extreme, factors that strip her of agency.

Viewing the pursuit of empathy through melodrama as a discursive practice raises, as Wells makes clear, several extremely problematic aspects. When portraying a "suffering subject" is the lack of agency appropriate to display in a child and inappropriate in an adult? And is it possible to use the melodramatic mode, or this form of discourse, without degrading the "suffering subject" even as their suffering evokes emotion? But the case of this particular video is even more complicated. If we are to examine this video from the starting point of situating everyone in their respective social context, then the choice to situate the subject of the video in the UK instead of Syria is extremely significant. Asking the audience to recognize the plight of Syrian children through imagining the suffering of children in the UK underscores the assumed lack of recognition that the intended audience would feel for children suffering in Syria. This should give us pause as we consider the "norms governing recognition" of which Butler reminds us. Is one of the norms at play here the potential desensitization of the video's intended audience to the suffering of *Syrian children in Syria*? After all, those children are the implied subjects of the video's message, represented by a child in the UK. And what does it mean for empathy when the intended subject of empathy is first made recognizable to the empathizer (a "Western looking" child in the UK) and then the melodramatic mode is utilized to elicit an emotional response? This question must be asked, and I find the potential answers to it troubling.

Wells suggest an emotional reaction elicited by a such a video can be positive in terms of facilitating understanding as "…compassion for distant others may be at least as critical to the formation of solidarity as a politically informed understanding of the structural causes of social injury" (2013, p.270). And indeed, this certainly seems to be the assumption behind initiatives that aim to elicit strong emotion for a "cause". However, this particular video frames the issue of the "suffering subject" by removing them from consideration in noting that not only is a "distant Other" suffering, but more importantly, it could also be *you* ("Just because it isn't happening here, doesn't mean it isn't happening"). Can such a framing be helpful in terms of not only raising

donations, but seeing the children in Syria as people in their own right, caught in a disastrous situation that exists within a geopolitical context? After all, the UK (and worldwide) audience of the Save the Children video is complicit, even if only as witnesses, and this is where Butler's attention to self-knowledge is most instructive.

Perhaps reading what I have written above one says, "But I haven't done anything to cause suffering of children in Syria! I don't have a role in these geopolitical matters! How am I implicated? Is it wrong that I feel bad for that child and want to help?" Of course not, and here again Butler's text provides important context for understanding invocations of empathy in this context. She writes that "[t]he universal not only diverges from the particular, but this very divergence is what the individual comes to experience, what becomes for the individual the inaugural experience of morality" (2005, p. 8-9). Indeed, the space between the universal context and our particular experience of it is precisely the liminal space in which aspects of morality and the potential for empathy coexist.

Butler begins her book by "…considering how it might be possible to pose the question of moral philosophy, a question that has to do with conduct and, hence, with doing, within a contemporary social frame" (2005, p. 3). She notes that inevitably, however, "[t]o pose this question in this way is already to admit to a prior thesis, namely, that moral questions not only emerge in the context of social relations, but that the form these questions take changes according to context, and even that context, in some sense, inheres in the form of the question" (2005, p. 3). In this way, situating ourselves, loosely identified as the "Western" audience of the Save the Children video becomes very an exercise in understanding layers of social construction and meaning. The video suggests that the suffering of children is inexcusable, and rightly so. However, the choice to have the object of empathy a child situated in the UK somewhat obscures the fact that the overwhelming majority of children suffering in Syria are Muslims. Can we fear Muslims, increasingly represented as a threatening "other" in our societies, as the same time as we empathize with the plight of children in Syria? At what point does cognitive dissonance become an issue? An analysis of the social context of this video (created for "Western" viewers/donors, by a Western NGO, about Syrian children represented by a child in the UK) makes such questions uncomfortable.

With this in mind, "really understanding" the plight of children in Syria becomes extremely

complicated. With the vehicle to understanding being the Save the Children video, understanding is inherently coloured by the power dynamics implicit in that frame. With the war in Syria neatly transplanted to Europe, audiences do not have to confront the dehumanization of civilian casualties across the Middle East in the wars there since 2003, the complicity of their governments in the ongoing suffering of civilians in Syria (and elsewhere in the region), and their own potential discomfort with identifying with someone who they are repeatedly told is unlike themselves, Furthermore, the disconnect between the universal and the particular in that context is not only significant, but multifaceted. We may not identify as representatives of "the West". We may struggle with the fear of war happening "to us" more than we struggle with how war is affecting children in Syria. We may grapple with the connection between a particular child in our lives, the ideals of universal child rights, and the reality of children living through war. Butler's text reminds us that there are no singular stories at the very same time as we struggle with understanding ourselves as individuals within shifting social contexts. That is, even if we, the intended audience of the video, may not identify with "the West" that is still an aspect of our recognisability to others, and therefore, an integral part of who we are.

 Here again, as in the example of Obama's comments on empathy and justice, a seemingly straightforward appeal to empathy is revealed to be fraught with complications. "Understanding" the experience of that symbolic Syrian child demands that we somehow situate ourselves in relation to the presumed object of our understanding. On the final page of *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler writes,

> Perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient ''I'' as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven. (2005, p. 136)

This is for Butler the challenge of ethics, and without debating whether empathy is innately

ethical, I think that her words also encapsulate the challenge of our highest hopes for empathy.

Chapter 4
Liberal Individualism and Empathy: Promises and Predicaments

This chapter will explore the challenge posed by meta-stereotypes, beliefs that one's group is judged negatively by another group, to inter-group empathy. I base my discussion vis-à-vis the universalist assumptions of liberal individualism and with specific attention to the pedagogical context. I will first situate a particular conceptualization of empathy, often refereed to as "projective" empathy, in visions of liberal individualism and critique the ideal of this form of empathy as an extension of liberal individualist assumptions. I will then discuss in detail the challenge posed by research on meta-stereotypes, "…a person's beliefs regarding the stereotype that out-group members hold about his or her own group" (Vorauer et al., 2008, p. 917), to both empathy and universalist assumptions of liberal individualism. Finally, I will provide a case study from the Ashoka "Start Empathy" initiative to illustrate some of the tensions implicit in reconciling liberal universalism with empathy receptive to the complexity of social dynamics.

Undoubtedly, it seems disingenuous to suggest that empathy is primarily an individual intersubjective experience when its pro-social potential is commonly celebrated on the inter-group level. The social entrepreneurship organization Ashoka proclaims that empathy, defined as "the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, and to use that understanding to guide one's actions", is "critical both to individual human development and to our collective ability to solve problems and build a stronger society" ("Ashoka Empathy: Everyone a Changemaker"). In an article titled "More than a feeling: integrating empathy into the study of lawmaking, lawbreaking, and reactions to lawbreaking" authors Chad Posick, Michael Rocque, and Nicole Rafter of Northeastern University propose that empathy "…emerges as an important predictor of criminal behavior, support for harsh laws, and perceptions of police effectiveness" (2014, p. 5).

Such sentiments sound undoubtedly hopeful, and indeed seem ubiquitous. But alas, they are also ambiguous. After all, in increasingly pluralistic societies, who exactly are the "others" whose emotions and perspectives one is to recognize and share? And who are "we" in relation to "them", whether as individuals or groups? Is empathy between groups an extension of, or different from empathy between individuals? And how exactly does one theorize the complexity

of an individual's identification with a particular group and presumed lack of identification with another? Such questions become especially mystifying in the context of social institutions built on principles of liberal individualism, like Ontario's education system, organizations like Ashoka, and the North American criminal justice system writ large. As John Michael notes in a piece called "Liberal Justice and Particular Identity: Cavell, Emerson, Rawls", "Liberalism's central tenet, reaffirmed from Locke through Kant, to Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Rawls, holds that justice dissolves all particularities before a universally shared and immanent lawfulness" (2008, p. 27). But if justice "dissolves all particularities" then how would empathy, a phenomenon dependent on recognizing not only the similarity, but also fundamentally the alterity of an/Other, operate? After all, to recognize anything in an/Other must start from an awareness that that other person is, at the very least, somewhat unlike oneself.

Saba Mahmood explains in her book *The Politics of Piety* that a danger of liberal individualism is that "…moments of difference [are] subsumed within a teleological process of improvement" (2005, p. 198). But what exactly is the design or purpose of said improvement? If it is the attainment of a form of universalized equality, then the "problem" of identity is a prominent stumbling block. John Michael observes that, "For the liberal tradition, justice and identity appear both difficult to relate and inextricably intertwined" (2008, p. 27). Perhaps identity could be more easily "transcended" if there were no aspects of prejudice, discrimination, and systemic injustice. But in the conspicuous presence of the aforementioned, "moments of difference" seem impossible to "subsume". Michael emphasizes that "[i]f prejudice and discrimination did not exist, then injustice and identity might not be so closely linked. If injustice and identity were not so closely linked, then doing justice might not require attending to the experiences of the world identity helps shape and the problems in the world identity poses. Identity, therefore, represents both the potential fulfillment and the actual failure of liberalism's dream of universality…" (p. 28). In this way, the same forces that are to be emancipatory for the individual in society can also simultaneously be subjugating.

However one places the question of identities and difference within the framing of empathy, there is certainly much at stake in fostering the goal of harmony between disparate groups. After all, as MIT researchers Mina Cikara, Emile G. Bruneau, and Rebecca R. Saxe point out in their article "Us and Them: Intergroup Failures of Empathy", "[a]lthough interpersonal morality prohibits people from harming others, engaging in violence on behalf of the ingroup is accepted

in times of group conflict" (2011, p. 150). Interestingly, however, inter-group empathy, whether in educational, development, or criminal justice system contexts, is often described as a decontextualized experience, with its aim being not to recognize and understand difference, but rather to move beyond it as quickly as possible to the place of shared humanity, or universal understanding. However, as Sara Ahmed notes in her article "This other and other others", all encounters, and perhaps especially those understood as facilitating empathy, "…involve relationships between the past, present and future and are inflected by the regulation of citizenship, work, bodies, and spaces" (2002, p. 561). In order to understand both ourselves and another we must engage with the material, discursive and historical contexts in which individuals (and groups) are situated. Indeed, even the most abstract liberal proposals for universal understanding are not workable without engaging with the complexities of identity. Michael echoes this idea when he stresses that even in Rawls' "veil of ignorance" thought experiment, "…without foregrounding precisely that which the original position and the veil of ignorance were invented to obscure, no practical conversation of justice—indeed no conversation or sociability at all—can actually be imagined" (2008, p. 9). That is, discrepancies in self-identification, power and privilege must be recognized even in, and perhaps especially in, frameworks that aim to transcend them.

Within this paradox lies perhaps the biggest challenge in unpacking the dynamics and potential effects of inter-group empathy. Despite long-term work articulating the link between empathy and pro-social behaviour (Batson et al., 1981), a significant body of increasingly referenced research, conducted predominantly by psychologists over the past two to three decades, suggests that inter-group empathy, also often referred to as "perspective taking" or "projective empathy", instead of "…dissolve[ing] all particularities before a universally shared and immanent lawfulness" can facilitate mistrust, decreased empathy, and even *Schadenfreude*, joy at another's suffering (Cikara et al., 2011, p. 149). A consistent factor in reducing or altogether disrupting inter-group empathy has been what researchers call "meta-stereotypes", an individual's notion "…about how their own group is viewed by a particular out-group … easily activated in social situations where the potential for evaluation by an out-group member exists" (Vorauer et al., 2000, p. 690). In other words, when meta-stereotypes are activated people's concern about how their group might be judged by a member of an out-group comes the fore.

Meta-stereotypes are a steadily growing research area both within and beyond psychology. As

Vorauer et al. explain, in the paper called "Meta-Stereotype Activation: Evidence From Indirect Measures for Specific Evaluative Concerns Experienced by Members of Dominant Groups in Intergroup Interaction", "When people are focused on how they are viewed by someone else, they are apt to perceive the person's actions as reflecting evaluations of themselves rather than aspects of the other person's disposition … and they may therefore have more extreme reactions to his or her behaviour" (2000, p. 690). This research is especially salient in helping explain extreme situations like claims of perceived "reverse racism" where, for example, people who self identify as white may react with hostility towards non-white others. In this instance, thinking about meta-stereotypes helps us ask if whether such a reaction is motivated in fact by anxiety around being perceived as a privileged representative of a racist society.

Indeed, the growing body of research on meta-stereotypes suggests that the power dynamics of a society and their material, discursive, and historical manifestations cannot be easily, if at all, surmounted in the interest of accessing shared humanity in situations requiring inter-group empathy. Or, rather, they can be, but only in the abstract. In their 2009 paper called "Helpful only in the Abstract? Ironic effects of empathy in intergroup interaction" University of Manitoba authors Jacquie Vorauer and Stacey Sasaki explain, "Interventions and recommendations based on studies of individuals' reactions to out-group members in the abstract might have dramatically different consequences when put into practice in real exchanges between members of different group" (2009, p. 196). In fact, in studies where participants believed they had to or did indeed interact with a member of an "out-group," meta-stereotypes were identified as inhibitors for attempting to understand another. This demonstrated that fascinatingly, when participants only had to *imagine* interacting with an out-group member, meta-stereotypes were not activated (Vorauer and Sasaki, 2009, p. 196). However, as soon as participants had to encounter, or even anticipated encountering, a real person from the "outgroup" their awareness shifted exclusively to how they will be perceived by that person.

The terms "projective empathy" or "perspective taking" are predominantly used by scholars in reference to inter-group empathic processes. The terms are used most consistently in psychological empathy research, and in fields such as literary studies, philosophy, and political thought, an equivalent phenomenon can be referred to as simply 'empathy' or even as a form of sympathy (Hammond and Kim, 2014, p. 3-4). Such confusion is one of the reasons that interdisciplinary scholarship on empathy must critically examine not only how various forms of

empathy have been defined, but more urgently, explore the assumptions that underlie distinct definitions. After all, "projective empathy" described in the literature review as a form of cognitive empathy is quite different than the empathy as direct-perception. While both may be called "empathy", the processes their describe are quite different and it is dangerous to rely on the shorthand "empathy" when extrapolating from these concepts to new settings.

It is also important to note that while much of the work on meta-stereotypes discussed in this paper is done by psychologists, work on (and the critique of) inter-group projective empathy is not recent, nor limited to the field of psychology. While the "ability to project oneself into the experiences of another", is, discursively, consistently identified as a desired pro-social quality, increasingly, it is also identified as a potentially problematic vehicle for maintaining systemic power inequities between groups. Lauren Berlant and Ricardo Delgado propose that such empathy "…can be politically dangerous, constituting a liberal fantasy of knowing the Other without actually understanding histories of structural oppressions and violence" (Hammond & Kim, 2014, p. 9). Indeed, empathy, despite the myriad ways it is conceptualized or described, seems an innately unequal interaction. As Brenda Gray notes in her 2010 article "Empathy, Emotion and Feminist Solidarity", "Relationships based on empathy are easily read as always already hierarchical with the empathiser having the power to act or turn away" (p. 208). Arguably, liberal imaginings of empathy have a tendency to bring this inequality to the fore even as they attempt to transcend it.

Meta-stereotypes: a foil to individual liberalism's promise?

In her 1994 article ""A Kinder, Gentler Liberalism? Visions of Empathy in Feminist and Communitarian Literature" Cynthia Ward emphasizes that the problem with an imagined inter-community understanding is that in a liberal context, "projective" empathy may just be imagining that another is exactly like oneself. She explains,

> When 'I' am suddenly living the experiences of another, I come to understand the other in the intimate way that I understand myself. Projective empathy, then, draws its power of understanding not from feelings of altruism but from feelings of self-regard. Extending help to the other becomes, psychologically, extending help to oneself, one's judgment is emotionally won over to the other person's point of view,

which has, through empathic understanding, imaginatively become one's own. (p. 938).

Ward stresses that for projective empathy to be effective at moving beyond the limitations of self-understanding it "must at least require that the empathizer attempt to imagine herself in the events of the other's life with the other's politically relevant differences-for example, with the other person's race, gender, or socioeconomic class" (1994, p. 940). But this inevitably brings one back to questions of which are the "politically relevant" differences, and who decides. In fact, her critique, while from the legal sphere, anticipates Jacquie Vorauer's work on meta-stereotypes which has consistently demonstrated that the other person's race and socioeconomic class are essential considerations in intersubjective and inter-group empathy.

Cikara et al. similarly conclude that "[f]ailures of empathy are especially likely if a sufferer is socially distant—for example, a member of a different social or cultural group" (2011, p. 149). But disturbingly, other researchers have demonstrated that even between groups where a divide is created synthetically or arbitrarily (competing dodgeball teams in a gym class, for example) people tend to show more empathy for ingroup members than for outgroup members who are rejected by their peers (Masten et al., 2010, p. 117). This element cannot be separated from elements of power dynamics unaccounted for in visions of egalitarianism proposed by liberal individualism. The studies demonstrating that outgroup members, "…merely by virtue of who they are and not anything they have done—reliably elicit diminished perceptions of suffering and fail to elicit equivalent physiological and affective empathic responses" pose a strong challenge to liberal ideals of a cohesive pluralistic society.

Leach and Spears in their paper "Dejection at in-group defeat and *Schadenfreude* toward second- and third-party out-groups" have suggested that "Schadenfreude is … a powerful and common alternative to empathy, offering positive emotions and self-affirmation in the face of a competitive threat" (2009, p. 659). These findings seemed to hold even when researchers controlled for self-interest, often framed positively in the liberal tradition as a form of enlightened self-interest. Cikara et al. propose that "The lure of *Schadenfreude* can even overpower self-interest: People feel pleasure at rivals' misfortunes, even when the misfortunes have negative implications for themselves and society more broadly" (2011, p. 151). This research indicates that in- and out-group bias, potentially in combination with meta-stereotypes,

are a reliable foil to intergroup empathy. However, this consensus is not unanimous among psychologists studying inter-group empathy in large part due to the different methodologies used.

Vorauer and Sasaki (2009) and Todd et al. (2011) explore inter-group empathy with race as group identification. The researchers attempt to measure whether subjects' (white university students') attempts to take on the perspective of a person from an "out-group" (an Aboriginal Canadian student in Vorauer and Sasaki's study and a Black person for Todd et al.) would result in a more empathetic subsequent interaction with an individual from the same "out-group". Vorauer and Sasaki conclude that "interventions based on studies of individuals' reactions to out-group members in the abstract might have dramatically different consequences when put into practice in real exchanges between members of different groups" (2009, p. 191). Todd et al., clearly familiar with Vorauer and Sasaki's work and citing it repeatedly, report that based on their research, empathy "can combat automatic expressions of racial biases without simultaneously decreasing sensitivity to ongoing racial disparities" (2011, p. 1027).

Todd et al. explain their conclusions by identifying several procedural differences between theirs and Vorauer and Sasaki's research: Todd et al.'s participants were not informed in advance that they would need to interact with a member of an "out-group"; they were not asked to engage in perspective-taking specifically in preparation for interacting with a member of an "out-group"; and their subsequent interacting with the "out-group" member was only 3 min in length and on an "innocuous" topic (2011, p. 1039). Interestingly, Todd et al. observe, "These procedural differences suggest the possibility that approaching an intergroup interaction with a perspective-taking mindset may foster positive outcomes, whereas actively taking the perspective of the out-group individual with whom one is interacting may have negative consequences" (2011, p. 1039). One is left somewhat perplexed at how one can make claims that empathy "can combat automatic expressions of racial biases without simultaneously decreasing sensitivity to ongoing racial disparities" if the whole process is thus decontextualized.

Indeed, one is compelled to ask whether Todd et al.'s findings that empathy "can combat automatic expressions of racial biases without simultaneously decreasing sensitivity to ongoing racial disparities" were possible only because by not telling their subjects that they were to interact with a member of an "out-group" they controlled for the absence of the emergence of

meta-stereotypes. As Vorauer and Sasaki's study, as well as subsequent research makes clear, in uncontrolled interactions, or the "real world", the emergence of meta-stereotypes in inter-group interactions is almost guaranteed. Indeed, if an individual is aware not only of their own identity in relation to an/Other (or a group of Others) but also aware that those Others may interpret the individual's gaze and actions negatively, it becomes clear that empathy cannot be imagined as operating (or not) in the immediate intersubjective or the seemingly clear-cut inter-group process. Rather, this complexity suggests to me that empathy occurs in a dynamic liminal space where individual identity and group affiliation are in continual flux, influenced both by their materiality and discursive interpretations of that materiality.

I use the word "materiality" to refer to how our awareness of ourselves and others is shaped by our bodies and what they represent when it comes to inter-group empathy. Therefore, when it comes to inter-group empathy studies that do not engage with the material and discursive interplay (what it means to "be" and "look" white, for example) are inherently limited in terms of their application. To be fair, Todd et al. do conclude with the thought that "the most pressing question for future research is not whether perspective taking yields positive or negative behavioral effects in intergroup contexts but rather under what circumstances and for whom positive versus negative behaviors can be expected" (2011, p. 1039). This seems to unequivocally echo the results of Vorauer and Sasaki's work: namely that inter-group interactions in real life are not possible to control, and are therefore much more messy, dynamic and unpredictable than in controlled studies. The following case study demonstrates this difficulty.

The Ashoka "Start Empathy" Initiative

Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, psychologist at UC Berkeley, contrasts the findings of Vorauer and Sasaki and Todd et al.'s studies in a 2012 piece on the Ashoka "Start Empathy" site titled "Does Empathy Reduce Prejudice—or Promote It?" and concludes: "Therein lies the value of science: Conflicting findings, rather than just being a source of frustration, help us arrive closer to important, more finely-tuned conclusions… rather than asking, 'Is empathy good or bad for intergroup interactions?,' the more important question may be, 'Under what conditions does empathy activate meta-stereotypes?". This is a critical question for theorists, educators, and policy makers alike. Many classrooms today are arguably more diverse than ever before, and the

research on meta-stereotypes puts into question the liberal individualist assumptions that all students will be seen as equal, and will treat each other equally. In such contexts, what does "teaching" empathy entail?

Megan Boler, in her 1997 article "Disciplined Emotions: Philosophies of Educated Feelings" notes, "One could say that moral, character, and aesthetic educational studies are concerned with power relations. But such analyses of power generally are subsumed in a liberal model of power: the role of schools is not to alter social inequities but to adapt the individuals to the existing system" (p. 211). This insight is instructive. Within the post-secondary educational context of Vorauer and Sasaki and Todd et al.'s research, meta-stereotypes disrupt inter-group empathy because the in-group (white) students are worried that they will be perceived unfavourably by the out-group students. Presumably an element of this awareness is the role of educational setting, whether K-12 or post-secondary, as institutions that more so maintain than challenge the power dynamics (and inequalities) within societies. The resulting anxiety reflects the complexity of social power dynamics in respective researchers' communities, at the very least. But the benefits of inter-group empathy are often extolled on an even larger, global scale. The Ashoka "Start Empathy" initiative is one example of such a narrative.

Ashoka's "Start Empathy" initiative is described as "a community of individuals and institutions dedicated to building a future in which every child masters empathy." Viewing empathy as a teachable skill, the initiative aims to further Ashoka's vision of "Everyone a Changemaker^{TM} world," a world that "that responds quickly and effectively to social challenges, and one where each individual has the freedom, confidence, and societal support to address any social problem." In an article published on the Ashoka "Start Empathy" site, called "Empathy and Racism", Madeleine Rogin, a teacher from California, USA, involved in the Ashoka "Changemakers" program, reflects on empathy as a vehicle for overcoming racism in the classroom and larger society. She writes,

> To illustrate the complexities around creating inclusive, empathetic conversations about racism with young people, consider Sara, a second grader, and the only black girl in her class. The teacher teaches a lesson to the class about slavery, and, afterwards, a group of Sara's white classmates comes over to give Sara a hug. Sara is made so uncomfortable by this display of affection that she does not tell her mother

about it until she is in the 5th grade, at which point she reflects that she couldn't wait for that classroom conversation to be over. What was it about Sara's classmates' hug that made her so uncomfortable? Their compassion felt to Sara like an expression of pity, rather than empathy; though the gesture was sweet, it was misguided in that the children did not themselves feel affected by the history lesson.

Rogin suggests that in order to avoid such "uncomfortable" experiences teachers can ensure that all students are represented in the discussion, and therefore "In addition to teaching about key African American figures in the Civil Rights movement, it is important to teach about white people in history who fought against racism…" And while Rogin emphasizes that her "goal is to structure each conversation with my students in terms of how our shared history around racism is devastating for all of us," one is left questioning whether she indeed means to say (as her article seems to suggest) that the shared history of racism she confronts in her classroom is *equally* "devastating for all of us". After all, the way Rogin's statement is articulated, it seems to imply that the "shared history" is in the past. But is that history more devastating for students who continue to encounter racism on a daily basis than for students for whom it may seem like a thing of the past?

In a classroom with a seemingly clear "in" and "out" group division (like in Sara's class, for example) the idea of creating a space where all students are seen as distinct individuals and at the same time a part of a inclusive group seems both possible and attractive. But the purpose of this website, and the "Start Empathy" program is to apply these ideas on a global scale. In a world where "every child masters empathy" on whose terms will this be, and for whose benefit? Amy Shuman in her 2005 book "Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy" cautions that "empathy is always open to critique as serving the interests of the empathizer rather than the empathized" (p. 18). And while there is value in discussing the involvement of white people in the civil rights movement, one wonders what potential there is in such an approach for meaningful, transferable, and lasting inter-group understanding.

Ward suggests that if empathy is to transcend the straightjacket of liberalism as a means to egalitarianism, it needs to be rooted in difference, not similarity. She explains, "[e]mpathy must create a sense that the outsider's claims are just; it does so by making us realize that were we in the circumstances of the other's life, we would also make her claims" (1994, p. 943). That is, it is

not enough to imagine what one might do in another's place. Instead, what is required is to imagine that if one was in another's place they would be essentially other to themselves, someone whose experience, and subsequent claims, are perhaps incomprehensible. Such an understanding would be rooted in difference, not in a vision of shared humanity that obscures, if not dissolves, material, discursive and historical differences.

Conclusion

Through this work I propose that it is imperative to approach the concept of empathy, and especially assumptions made about its accessibility and innately pro-social character with caution. Not only are what I outline as dominant discursive practices of empathy not limited by the longstanding and ongoing academic debates on how best to define and measure empathy, but these same discursive practices obscure the emergence of two vital questions: what does it mean when we cannot empathize with another? And could it be that we may gain greater insight from the examination of empathy's limits and failures than the hopes we have for its success? And while I do not answer these questions in this thesis, I attempt to clear a path to doing so by questioning some of the assumptions about what empathy entails and/or makes possible.

Some may wonder whether the topic of empathy hasn't already been sufficiently challenged, found wanting, and simply remains an intractable dilemma. Yet the current exponential proliferation of pedagogical, curricular, popular, and scientific discourses on the benefits of empathy—all of which continue to make uncritical assumptions about its universal applicability—demonstrates the pressing need for a comprehensive scholarly treatment on the complex histories and practices surrounding empathy.

Such study has tremendous implications for educational theory, policy, and pedagogical practice. Undoubtedly, a reductive model of empathy is as seductive as it is problematic for both researchers and educators. Currently, the fastest growing research direction is on empathy as an innate, non-reflexive, neurologically quantifiable characteristic (Debes, 2010). The assertions about the transformative and universal powers of empathy in Ontario's character education curriculum *Finding Common Ground* are based almost exclusively on the work of psychologists Howard Gardner (1999) and Daniel Goleman (1996; 2006), neither of whom engages very deeply, if at all, with aspects of social injustice or power. Similarly, the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1938) and Martha Nussbaum (1995) on empathy and pedagogy is widely advocated despite its premise that a universal empathic understanding, gleaned from literature, reliably transcends forms of systemic injustice. Current directions in empathy scholarship operationalize empathy as a "cognitive" skill, under the umbrella of theories of mind or perspective taking (Castano and Kidd, 2013; Todd et al., 2011); and increasingly accepted are accounts of empathy as a pre-conscious neurological process, often called "neuron-mirroring" (Iacoboni, 2009;

Cozolino, 2014). Whether approached philosophically or neuroscientifically, the danger in universalizing empathy is that it overlooks very real differences of power, privilege, identity, and experience.

I do not suggest that there are no pro-social elements to empathy, nor that since empathy is so difficult to both define and achieve we should not bother. I do, however, in the somewhat broad-ranging examples I bring forth in the preceding chapters hope to underscore the importance of thinking critically about the claims we make and accept about empathy.

Edith Stein's scholarship problematized empathy as a concept at the beginning of the twentieth century when it was only emerging as we understand it today. Judith Butler's 2005 work *Giving an Account of Oneself* deals specifically with the ethics of intersubjective experiences within a social context. The application of her thought to an examination of discursive practices around empathy demonstrates the urgency of (re)examining empathy as a fundamentally social, dynamic, liminal phenomenon and not merely an occurance to be understood as primarily philosophical or psychological, cognitive or affective, or innately pro-social.

As to the relationship between liberal individualism and empathy, as well as the critique of "liberal empathy", Karen Barad's ideas on intra-action may propose a useful alternative foundation to liberal individualism in rooting intra-group empathy in difference, instead of similarity.

In her 2007 book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* Karen Barad proposes that "[p]ractices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming" (p. 185). Barad's suggestion is that the material and discursive aspects of identity constantly reinforce and re-constitute one another, that "neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior" (p. 186). This framework makes it very difficult to accept that distinct identities could ever be subsumed in a narrative of universal understanding, or any other form of cohesive universalism.

Barad's rejection of assuming the "independent or prior existence" of individuals is what makes her ideas such an interesting counter-point to the assumptions of liberalism. Vorauer and Sasaki (2009, p. 191) found that "…one of the first things that individuals are apt to see when they try to

look through an out-group member's eyes is themselves." Barad's re-imagining of a stable sense of a fixed individual self has fascinating implications for meta-stereotypes. After all, not only do Barad's ideas undermine a fixed understanding of social "groups", they also demand an understanding of a self that is in constant intra-action with its material, discursive and historical surroundings. Of course, it is impossible to completely let go of understanding ourselves and one another through the categories of sex, race or socioeconomic status, for example. However, Barad's thought opens the door to understanding that such identifiers are dynamic, molded by discourse and context.

The challenge of Barad's scholarship is that it helps one reconsider the manner in which identities are remembered, imagined, and constructed to the extent that one questions whether there is, or can ever be, a fixed understanding of identity. Philosopher R.M. Hare asks, "[i]f all the properties of the situation in which I had to imagine myself, including the properties of the person in whose shoes I was putting myself, were so unlike those of myself and my present situation, would it any longer be me?" (in Ward 1994, p. 939). Beginning to see "me" as an entity constructed in the ongoing interplay of materiality and discourse within a historical context opens up the dilemma proposed by Hare. Of course, it certainly also presents new predicaments, not least of which is what it means to empathize with another when everyone's identity, and interpretation of that identity, is constantly (re)constructed by social factors.

I suggest that it is these very dilemmas that we must grapple with in both academic and popular discursive practices on empathy. Struggling with the complex history of empathy's evolution, as well as the intimate link between intersubjectivity, social context, and our responsibility to our fellows in our societies is difficult. However, it is, I suspect, less difficult than uncritically accepting the assumption of empathy as an innate equalizer and then trying to figure out why we still do not understand one another.

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