Persuasive Communication

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Professor

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Assignment #2 – Thesis Finalization & Paper Outline 1. Create Developmental Readings from the Assignment #1 Works Cited list and additional resources discovered during your research. The developmental readings should support your arguments and counterarguments. a. Refer to the "Student Guide to Developmental Readings" in the General Helps folder for updated information on sample comments, the grading rubric, and key definitions related to developmental readings. 2. Revise your thesis statement according to feedback from your professor, if needed. 3. Develop a sentence outline for your argumentative essay. Include main points and subpoints for your argument and the counter-arguments you will present. Make sure your outline clearly indicates the direction of your argument. Provide one properly cited (APA) quotation that you can use to support each of the main points and sub-points in your outline

Note to professor: the topic researched is narrowed from the original concept in Assignment 1 due to the scope of the inquiry. The outline presented reflects the more focused thesis and narrowed topic.

Thesis: Empathy is often assumed to be a positive resource for social research and action but hyperempathic bias may significantly cloud a researcher’s interpretations and conclusions leading to less objective and accurate findings.

# Developmental Readings

**Source One:** Sinden, J. L., & Devall-Martin, L. (2024). Emotions Are not in the way, They are the way: abolishing unhealthy beliefs about emotion and cultivating the spiritual–emotional development of athletes. *Religions*, 15(3), 270. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030270

**Comment 1:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“This previous research with rowers explored how certain emotion norms, or beliefs about emotion, (referred to as ‘technologies of emotion’), were normalized and impacted athletes’ decisions to train irrespective of their health (Lee Sinden 2010, 2013).” (Sinden and Devall-Martin, 2024, p. 1) “The results showed that unhealthy beliefs about emotions were socialized through normalizing methods in rowing environments and these beliefs played an influential role in athletes’ decisions to continue training despite their health. In particular, these beliefs persuaded athletes to ignore their thoughts and feelings, and subsequent health issues, because they did not want to appear weak and/or negative. As a consequence, the athletes exacerbated their health problems and suffered adverse health during and after retirement (Lee Sinden 2010).” (p. 1)

“In addition, as Christian researchers, we seek to understand the relationship between beliefs about emotion, unhealthy behaviours, and spiritual formation among Christian athletes.” (p. 2)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of emotional processing. It highlights the impact that social expectations can have on emotional processing.

**Contextualization:**  This reading indicates that expectations of peers and role models, including leadership, had on the emotional processing of athletes. From these influences, the athletes normalized certain beliefs about emotions leading them to ignore feelings that would conflict with the expectations of their peers and leaders because they did not want to appear “weak and/or negative.” This suggests that peer groups and leadership could impact research expectations strongly enough to exert normative influence, such as a researcher operating within a setting that is strongly positive toward the group or behavior they are researching, potentially generating hyperempathic bias.

**Source Two:** Vos, Matthew. (2022). *Strangers and scapegoats: Extending God’s welcome to those on the margins*. Baker Academic. <https://www.everand.com/book/580545206/Strangers-and-Scapegoats-Extending-God-s-Welcome-to-Those-on-the-Margins>

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**We people of God are exhorted  to avoid the “patterns of this world.” Finding identity at the expense of others—by making strangers of them, guarding resources for ourselves, and taking the seat of greater honor—is ‘the’ dominant pattern of this world. It’s the pattern at work, in sports, in our neighborhoods, in international politics, at church, in school, and just about everywhere else.” (p.30) “…because our contrast with them—our  superiority against their inferiority—affirms our dominant and  desirable position in the social hierarchy.” (p.23) “Social comparison as a means to positive identity is itself rooted in intergroup (between-group) dynamics. Social identity theorists (which we’ll get into later) explain that we see ourselves as group members (my family, my school, my church, my team) and that group identity is established through favorable comparison with relevant out-groups.” (p.41) He writes, we don’t just “encounter” outgroups but actively search for them… and if we can’t find one, we’ll construct one. (p.42) All categories by which we measure our worth are “…maintained by social comparison.”  (p. 41)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is both additive and variant to my understanding. This introduces me to Social Identity Theory providing insight into the common process of dismissing others without objective consideration as part of a “dominant pattern.” This suggests that this cognitive process is common and habitual, something we as Christians should certainly be conscious of given our Lord’s example and command to reach across social boundaries to love our neighbor. This is also helpful in understanding why Christians can develop not just confident but arrogant attitudes toward oppositional positions and why many Christian opponents are closed off to conversation with or consideration of Christian positions. This suggests that “out-grouping” is inherently a negative process from a Christian perspective. But is this necessarily so? Like all human processes, this one is indeed corrupted by sin, but does that mean the process itself may not serve a necessary function? This is something for consideration.

**Contextualization:** Given our strong need for a positive identity, this observation adds insight into the operation of empathy and the observation by many researchers of demonstrated empathic bias toward one’s ingroup and less empathy felt toward outgroups. This tendency could also be intricately connected to our sinful depravity and our normal self-oriented and self-interested posture toward the world. This also suggests an understanding of why influential social identities are constructed that become divisive, such as race, which are not as grounded in objective reality. For instance, human beings of different “races” biologically and behaviorally have far more things in common than not in common. The differences largely emerge due to social identifications, social processes, and socially influenced value sets.

**Source Three:** Boyer, Pascal. (2018). *Minds make societies: How cognition explains the world humans create*. Yale University Press. <https://www.everand.com/book/472063601/Minds-Make-Societies-How-Cognition-Explains-the-World-Humans-Create>

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“When participants allocate goods to others but do not receive goods from these same others, the in-group bias disappears. 21 So groupishness is not a blunt instinct to follow the herd, so to speak. People behave in ways that seem to favor in-groups because they implicitly use a social exchange heuristic, a set of assumptions about how the social interaction that is presented to them (evaluating different individuals or allocating resources between them) is a form of reciprocal cooperation.” (Boyer, Pascal, 2018, p. 46)

Alliances form because human cognition has a specialized capacity toward coalition building with a focus on certain goals. This is enhanced by computations that recognize the cost of supporting an alliance will likely be outweighed by anticipated gains. The vast majority of this computation is unconscious. These include computations regarding competing groups. We recognize that others are in a group and that they are “against us” moving action toward accommodation or conflict. (pp. 48-49) These judgments are related to the ability to compute the cohesiveness of each group, how committed group members are to the welfare of their group, and the stronger the cohesion of a rival group the stronger the impulse to take action. (p. 66)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of group competition. The author argues that the cognitive ability described above evolved over time to provide a competitive edge in the securing of resources against rivals. His insights helped me to factor that the feeling of rivalry and competition experienced by individuals may likely be a large social phenomena as it is influenced by the groups and alliances we associate with as we encounter others in groups and alliances, we consider in competition with ourselves.

**Contextualization:** This insight gives rise to a couple of ideas. First, this insight is helpful to better understand why human beings experience more empathy toward those in our alliance than toward those in other alliances, especially competing ones.

Secondly**,** Competition and out-grouping are often perceived negatively within Christian and many progressive circles, though one can argue for an exception within conflict theorists. The author suggests that there is value in this cognitive capacity toward coalition building if there is an actual threat generated by another cohesive group. It is a valid discussion to have if perceived threats are actual threats. It is also a valid discussion within Christian circles to explore how this capacity may be sinfully corrupted. But it may not be accurate to essentially consider the process itself to be sinful. These insights contribute to an understanding of why we are inclined to define our identity, and our group’s identity and value, against other groups perceived as competing with us. But they suggest that rather than dismissing this process as entirely a negative and sinful process, it may serve a necessary function. For instance, the New Testament is filled with examples not only of crossing such boundaries as we see in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan but also of the importance of maintaining such boundaries for the protection and integrity of the group (in this case the Christian fellowship). It is observed that Christians are called to modify this impulse with a higher cognitive approach (love) as in 1 Cor 5:9-11 Paul warns of associating with sexually immoral people, with a focus on those who claim to be Christian but follow these practices while at the same time saying we cannot avoid people of the world who so practice, for we would have to leave the world. The focus is not on the destruction of the practitioners, but a principled reaction to the practice.

**Source Four:** Bloom, P. (2016). *Against empathy*. HarperCollins. <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/589048/11?element_originalid=_idParaDest-15&page_number=166>

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**An empathic response can be automatic and rapid. If you see someone hitting his finger with a hammer, you might flinch, and this seems to be a reflexive response. But for the most part, whether or not we are consciously aware of it, empathy is modified by our beliefs, expectations, motivations, and judgments. This is the second finding from neuroscience: Our empathic experience is influenced by what we think about the person we are empathizing with and how we judge the situation that person is in….It turns out, for instance, that you feel more empathy for someone who treats you fairly than for someone who has cheated you. And you feel more empathy for someone who is cooperating with you than for someone you are in competition with. (Bloom, 2016, p. 68) This is a different perspective on why empathic appeals so often work. It is not that empathy itself automatically leads to kindness. Rather, empathy has to connect to kindness that already exists. (p. 76)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of empathy. Empathy is normally considered to be a positive human process allowing us to connect to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of other people. Bloom communicates findings that demonstrate empathy should be considered more neutrally, not as necessarily positive. The amount of empathy we experience is highly subjective and self-oriented.

**Contextualization:** The common assumption is that empathy helps to overcome our self-orientation and serves the interests of the other. Bloom is suggesting that empathy may not be as “selfless” as it is understood to be. It may be that even empathetic connection with outgroups has at its base some self-interested connection.

**Source Five:** Abdurokhim, A., Solikin, I., & Hendrayati, H. (2022, October 11-12). *The difference of cognitive bias and emotional bias* [Conference presentation]. Proceedings of the 6th Batusangkar International Conference, Batusangkar-West Sumatra, Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.11-10-2021.2319519>

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“Emotional biases are deviations in that they emphasize feelings and spontaneity rather than facts. In emotional biases, there are three kinds of behavioral biases, including (1) Regret aversion bias, namely the decision to act to avoid the same decision explicitly because there is feeling of fear (2) Herding bias, namely as a tendency for investors' financial behavior to follow the actions of other investors (3) Loss aversion bias is a very strong feeling of urge to avoid loss rather than gain” (Abdurokhim et al., 2022, pp.1-2]

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This entry is additive to my understanding of bias, specifically increasing my understanding of emotional bias. These three emotional biases suggest may disregard facts because of a concern of loss or threat or from a positive desire toward confirmation by one’s group.

**Contextualization:** This information is particularly useful in that it suggests that the social pressure one’s group may exert toward expecting empathy, may lead one to empathize, which would normally be considered a positive thing, but may result in over empathizing with a research group leading to disregarding various facts. For example, there is a great deal of conversation and research going on today regarding transgender individuals, often focusing on their felt experience and the importance of medical treatment that validates the perceived gender identity. There is less research regarding the potentially negative aspects of this medical treatment for long-term health care, though we are seeing some of this coming out in the United Kingdom and there it is having an impact on standards of care. But this is not without opposition or controversy as many researchers continue to highlight the importance of facilitating felt experiences. One can be reasonably suspicious that one factor in this is the social pressure of the groups and institutions within which the researchers are operating.

**Source Six:** Vickers, S. (2017, February 6). Against empathy by Paul Bloom; The empathy instinct by Peter Bazalgette – review. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/06/against-empathy-paul-bloom-the-empathy-instinct-peter-bazalgette-review>

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

Referencing and applying Bloom, Vickers writes, “…empathy is ‘innumerate and biased.’ Empathy, he suggests, narrows our focus in a self-regarding way – there is sustained evidence that we empathize more with those that either resemble us or those we find attractive. The picture of five-year-old [Omran Daqneesh](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/18/boy-in-the-ambulance-image-emerges-syrian-child-aleppo-rubble), pulled from the rubble in Aleppo, prompted widespread breast-beating, but Bloom would be sceptical of this having much effect on our willingness to give aid to Omran’s equally affected – but unknown – fellow citizens.” (Vickers, 2017)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of empathic connection. This comment is representative of many similar observations from various readings, that empathy is felt most strongly toward to who “resemble us or those we find attractive.” Empathy is normally understood as an emotional connection to those different from us. This comment indicates empathy is more nuanced than that.

**Contextualization:** There is an understanding in research literature that this form of empathy bias does exist, an inclination toward feeling more empathy toward those like us than those who are different. This provides evidence that empathy is not always a positive force helping to support a more objective and neutral position taking toward the role of empathy in various aspects of our lives including social research. If empathy is recognized as being biased in this exclusionary way, empathy may be biased in inclusionary ways.

**Source Seven:** Vaage, M. (2023). Should we be against empathy. In F. Mezzenzana & D. Peluso (Eds.), *Conversations on Empathy: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Imagination and Radical Othering* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003189978>

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** I argue that the ease with which the spectator is made to empathize with morally bad anti-heroes in television series demonstrates that empathy is amoral – neither morally good nor morally bad. (Vaage, 2023, p.116) “The antihero is a radical other in some ways: in the trend of morally bad protagonists in American television series, he is very often a criminal –indeed, a murderer.” (p. 118)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This entry is additive to my understanding of empathy. Empathy is usually interpreted as a positive emotional connection that leads to more other-oriented responses and hence more morally positive responses. This observation leads us to recognize that empathic connection to others does not necessarily lead to a morally positive response but could generate a negative moral response, in this case approving of immoral action or rationalizing immoral action.

**Contextualization:** If empathy is better understood as simply a process of connection, not necessarily good nor bad, it is reasonable to conclude that empathy could generate both positive and negative outcomes from this connection, for instance as in the previous entry where the argument is made that emotional bias can lead one to disregard facts. Hence, empathy may not necessarily be just a connector that overcomes obstacles to understanding but could also be a process that creates obstacles to understanding. This observation indicates empathy may lead us to be biased toward those who are different from us, in that they are engaged in highly immoral actions, because of our emotional connection to them. So, whether we should be “against empathy” as the author asks, it is reasonable to be suspicious of empathy and objectively aware of the role it is playing in one’s research.

**Comment 8:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

Hoffman agrees that “it may be difficult to empathize directly with an abstract mass without first empathizing with an individual victim and then generalizing to the group,” and argues that the latter is exactly what we start doing when we form social concepts and classify people (Hoffman 2014, p. 81). He argues that this effect can often be enhanced by media and gives such media-enhanced empathy an important role in social change. Among the examples he points to is Uncle Tom’s Cabin inducing empathy for slaves and thus making people more opposed to slavery. (Vaage, 2023, p.125)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is both additive and variant to my understanding of empathy as it has progressed in this research project. It is additive in that it helpfully reminds us of how empathy may be a positive force for positive social change. It is variant in that the argument of the importance of empathizing with a victim before generalizing to a group does not speak to how this process could also lead to negative change.

**Contextualization:** This material is helpful for consideration of an alternative or contrasting viewpoint to my thesis, in that it supports the assumption that empathetic connection with victims can lead to support for a victimized class, in this case regarding slavery. What is missed here is that *a priori* value judgments are coming into play, in this instance that slavery is a moral evil. I certainly accept that slavery as experienced in the antebellum South was a moral evil. The point is that an *a priori* value is leading to a positive spin on the role of empathy. How a person or a class comes to be considered a “victim” and hence someone necessary to empathize with for social change, is something that also needs to be considered. For instance, it is common for defense attorneys for serial killers, rapists, or child abusers to seek to build empathy with the perpetrator based on how he or she was victimized in the past by others or life experience.

**Source Eight:** Hu, K.-C., & Hsin-Lin, T. (2024). Effects of embarrassment on self-serving bias and behavioral response in the context of service failure. *Behavioral Sciences*, *14*(2), 136. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14020136>

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** This study explored a specific aspect of empathic connection in the context of being in setting such as restaurant with a group of associates and experiencing a failure of service. It found that when such a service failure occurred, the customer connected less empathically with their server if the customer believed they would be blamed for transgressing a social expectation of his group.

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of empathy bias and how social influences can impact empathic connection. Here expected or perceived critical evaluation from the group in that the customer feels blame is placed on him generating embarrassment for failing a social expectation, lead to lower empathy for the server who may not be responsible for service failure.

**Contextualization:** As with most literature I reviewed that considered empathy bias or failure, the focus is on the negative or loss of connection. In this case, the customer’s connection to his ingroup and concerns with their comfort and care, an empathic consideration, combined with his self-interest to avoid embarrassment, leads to a reduction of empathic connection with the server, or perhaps an empathic shift toward his group that he feels responsible for. But what if the customer were a server in another restaurant and the server was at fault? Might he not also be positively biased by empathic connection toward the server to rationalize, minimize, or overlook a service failure? Many would consider this a polite and good thing to do, enhancing social connection. But laying the value judgment aside, what if the server was at fault, and the customer is not a server, but some or all of his group are or have been servers? Might the expectation of the group then lead him to overcompensate in empathic connection to the server leading him to overlook the fault of the server? For instance, might the expectation of the group lead him to give a big tip even if the server may have not earned it? By extension, the expectations of one’s peers in one’s research circle could be a generative force not just against empathy but for building empathy clouding objective judgment of negative behavior.

**Source Nine:** Bailey, O. (2022). Empathy and the value of humane understanding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *104*(1), 50–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12744>

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“Empathy is a form of emotionally charged imaginative perspective-taking. It is also the unique source of a particular form of understanding, which I will call humane understanding. Humane understanding consists in the direct apprehension of the intelligibility of others’ emotions. This apprehension is an epistemic good whose ethical significance is multifarious…humane understanding of others is non-instrumentally valuable to its recipients. People have a complex but profound need to be humanely understood. Because we respond to others’ very real needs when we pursue this sort of understanding of their emotions, empathy is best understood as itself a way of caring, rather than just a means to promote other caring behavior. (Bailey, 2022, p.50)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive and variant to my understanding of empathy’s connection to caring behavior. It is understood that empathic connection may lead to more caring behavior as we identify with and understand other’s emotions, situations, and interpretations. But this comment implies something that may not be entirely accurate. That caring behavior empathy generates as reinforcing the felt needs or expectations of the person empathized with will necessarily actually be caring as understood objectively. For instance, a family member of a patient with lung cancer suffering withdrawal from cigarettes may be led by an empathic connection to provide cigarettes worsening the disease. The author’s observation that “empathy is a form of emotionally charged imaginative perspective-taking…” is a helpful reminder here.

**Contextualization:** This is useful as it illustrates the expected counterargument to my thesis and reminds me of the importance of understanding emotional processing in general, as empathy may be less an emotion and more an emotional process combining a variety of emotional intuitions. There are four basic emotions: mad, sad, scared, and glad. The first three are normally considered to be negative emotions, the last positive. I prefer to describe them as subtractive and additive. Anger and fear relate to perceived threats whereas sadness relates to experienced loss. These are responses to actual or potential subtraction from one’s life, thus generating the emotional impulse to avoid the stimulus. Gladness is a reinforcing emotion that since an experience is perceived as adding something of value to one’s life, the interpretation of additive value is reinforced by an emotional state that says, “let's get more of that.” While emotional intuition exists to support our survival and growth, it has long been recognized emotions do not necessarily convey the best information at all times. Hence one doughnut may be pleasurable. So may a dozen, but the dozen may not be good for us. If empathy is “emotionally laden” then the pitfalls of emotional processing and intuition should be suspected to be potentially at play. Empathy may be impacted by any of the primary emotions. Empathy is commonly associated with feeling other’s suffering, though it may also be reflected in feeling their joy. Empathy may be influenced by sadness when we share feelings of loss and sorrow. Anger comes into play when we emotionally connect with someone who is under threat. The same can be said for fear or happiness. Empathic connection is emotionally laden. If we understand that the basic emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and happiness may generate information in the form of intuition that can lead to misinterpretations or faulty courses of action, then it is reasonable to conclude that empathy as an emotionally laden process may do the same. Emotions are not always wrong. But they are sometimes wrong. And I have argued that emotions are often the root of much that is wrong in the world. Empathy is understood as a positive connecting emotional process that overcomes our self-inclination helping lead to better social outcomes, but emotional processing, including empathic processing is far more complicated than that.

**Source Ten:** Viviani, G., De Luca, F., Antonucci, G., Yankouskaya, A., & Pecchinenda, A. (2022). It is not always positive: Emotional bias in young and older adults. *Psychological Research*, *86*(6), 2045–2057. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-021-01614-2>

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Attending to some information while ignoring other relies on an interplay of goal-driven and stimulus-driven mechanisms. Goal-driven, selective attention requires cognitive control, which allows active maintenance of processing priorities in working memory and provides biasing signals in favour of goal-relevant stimuli (e.g., Corbetta & Shulman, 2002; Desimone & Duncan, 1995)…When emotional stimuli are competing for selective attention, the focus is on the factors affecting what is prioritized (i.e., which emotional category or valence) and whether processing priorities might differently affect the resolution of conflict for negative and positive stimuli. In fact, it has been argued that negative information, and particularly threat-related one, is prioritized over other information due to the adaptive value of detecting potential harm (Öhman & Mineka, 2001).” ([Viviani et al., 2022, p. 2045]

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of emotional processing in general and how it may apply to understanding the empathic process. Recognizing the importance of attending, this attending to information being influenced by “an interplay of goal-drive and stimulus-driven” mechanisms is important for understanding how both negative and positive empathic bias may be generated. The reason for attending to negative information over positive information is an added dimension for consideration.

**Contextualization:** Empathy is a form of attention as it is associated with either impulsive or deliberative connection with another that understands and feels what another is feeling and experiencing. Since attending can have both impulsive and deliberative components, so may empathy. Empathy arises naturally when we are associating with our ingroup. Outgroup empathizing is something we have to work on. Those who advocate for empathizing with outgroups normally suggest exposure to build experience of the individuals in the group. We may be encouraged to talk to them, hear their stories, or read materials produced by them. The former may be understood as more stimulus-driven and the latter goal-driven. But as noted before, if the expectation of one’s ingroup, such as a college institution, is to empathize with a particular marginalized outgroup, goal-driven impulses may generate stimulus-driven impulses of self-interest. (I do not want to get fired. I want to be admired by my peers.) Thus, empathic attending may be generated by a complexity of stimulus and goal-driven impulses. This does not necessarily indicate that empathy may lead to both negative and positive bias, but it does indicate that empathy is a complex process of attending that can have any number of reasons within our cognitive processing for its generation. Which brings us to the second point.

The author notes we likely reinforce negative experiences over positive experiences as it facilitates avoiding harm. Normally emotional responses to others we are supposed to empathize with such as fear or anger are considered negative, even immoral, and counter-productive to well-functioning in society. But this assumes that those we are expected to sympathize with (our outgroup) are not actually a threat, that our response is unobjective or irrational. (Consider the term homophobic.) It has become a taboo topic in most public institutions to even consider the hypothesis that homosexuality can be harmful. Empathy is socially normed as the counter to such negative viewpoints as is more “humane” and valuable. These are *a priori* positions that limit the objective consideration of the matter at hand. Thus, the call for empathy may actually cloud judgment and restrict research that can assess both the helpful and harmful aspects of particular social behavior.

**Source Eleven:** Calero, A. D., Rosenfeld, N., Jader, M. B., & Burin, D. I. (2023). Theory of constructed emotion: Emotional vocabulary and emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, *15*(2), 175–179. <https://doi.org/10.56300/BVAA2684>

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“The theory of Constructed Emotion is a novel theory on the development of emotional skills. In opposition to theories that assert the existence of innate basic emotions, the theory of Constructed Emotion emphasizes top-down modulation and individual/cultural variation in emotions. Emotions are construed as conceptual categories, coherent internal models, and simulations that make it possible to assign meaning to external and internal perceptions (Hoemann, et al., 2020) …From this perspective, an emotion is a concept that is generated from a sample of perceptual experiences (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Words enable the establishment of regularities in the sensorial input, and the development of concepts, to create shared realities (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Language is essential for learning abstract conceptual categories, such as emotions, and for everyday conceptual acts of understanding one’s emotional state.” (Calero et al., 2023, p. 176)

**Essential Element:** This selection is related to the essential element “Student-selected Keyword Search Terms for Essay” as it pertains to the research necessary for the construction of the Forum Paper.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive and variant to my understanding of emotional formation and processing. While I do not agree that emotional processes do not have an innate source, this theory does suggest the role culture, socialization, and social expectation play upon emotional formation, understanding, and expression may be significant. Rather like the nature/nurture debate, the best answer may not be an either/or but a both/and. The fact that we use language to communicate our emotions to one another and within internal dialogue to clarify our own feelings suggests the role socialization plays in our emotional processing. In addition, this theory is correct that emotional processing does differ from culture to culture. I have observed how in general Black Americans express their grief much more openly than other ethnic groups. I have observed differences in emotional expression from my culture while living in South Korea and Iraq, even within Europe which shares a common Western heritage with my country of origin. This may be more about how we understand our emotions or classify them rather than what leads to their actual genesis. That said, our self-understanding of emotion certainly plays a key role in how we process the information an emotion conveys to our cognitive processes.

**Contextualization:** This suggests that Symbolic Interactionism would be a useful tool in exploring emotional bias and specifically my thesis regarding hyperempathic bias. Given the recognition that emotional processing is impacted by socialization related to interpretation and meaning-making and that language plays an “essential role,” Symbolic Interactionism becomes a particularly useful tool for exploring how emotions generate bias, even an emotion like empathy.

# The Detrimental Role of Empathy in Social Research

1. Introduction
2. Description of problem/Hook:

* We have all read research that faithfully follows particular research approaches, which draw untenable conclusions from a Christian worldview.
* Does this lead us to suspect one of the traditionally understood research biases such as confirmation bias, question-order bias, or leading question bias is in play?
* Or could the sociological approach itself be flawed?
* Or could the source be in another little-recognized researcher bias, one I call hyperempathic bias?

1. Counterclaim & Setting the environment): Empathy is assumed to facilitate social understanding, relationships, and social research.

* Empathy evolved to compel social bonding. (Lucchesi, 2023)
* Human beings have specialized cognitive capacity and disposition to form alliances to enhance member welfare. (Boyer, 2018, p.46)
* Since we are naturally inclined to our own self-interest and protection, perspective-taking is considered a positive counter as it tries to understand the significance of a situation to another person. (Suttie, 2022)
* Empathy is understood as enhancing objectivity by developing the ability to be selfless, approaching an understanding of the other without an agenda or vested interest. (Ambike, 2020)

1. Last sentence Thesis statement

* Empathy is often assumed to be a positive resource for social research and action but hyperempathic bias may significantly cloud a researcher’s interpretations and conclusions leading to less objective and accurate findings.

1. MAIN ARGUMENT #1: Empathy is an emotionally laden cognitive process.
2. Key definitions

* Emotion is a distinctive form of thought described as feeling that generates a psychological state and a tendency toward action. (Abdurokhim et al., 2022, p. 5)
* Empathy is the action of understanding and experiencing the feelings of another (Merriam Webster, 2024, p. 1)
* Empathy is understanding and sharing the feelings of others. (Hasson et al, 2022, p.1)
* Empathy is emotionally charged (Bailey, 2022, p. 50)
* Empathy may be broken down into two types: affect and cognitive empathy (Vaskinn et al., 2023, p. 2)
* Empathy – my working definition: Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, facilitating an emotional connection by resonating with and comprehending their experiences and perspectives, often resulting in a deeper emotional understanding.
* Hyperempathic bias == Hyperempathic bias is a form of researcher bias characterized by emotional enmeshment, which interferes with the researcher's ability to maintain objectivity, thus impeding the conduct of unbiased research.

1. Understanding Empathy as an Emotionally laden cognitive process

* Emotional cognitive functioning contains both interpretations by emotions and by examination of facts. (Peters, 2021, pp. 16-45)
* Our limbic brain plays a role in shaping who we can trust. (Glaser, 2014, p. 50)
* Our experience is interpreted emotionally. (Steinke, 2019, pp. 13-14)
* The brain processes constant internal and external stimulation using past experiences and remembered interpretations to give meaning to current experiences. (Dreisback, 2023, pp. 494-495)
* There are four basic emotions, mad, glad, sad, and scared. (Nurick, 2021)
  + Emotions are defined or understood as a state of pleasure or a state of arousal. (Dreisbach, 2023, p. 489)
  + my categories – Emotions can be seen as interpretations indicating an experience is additive or subtractive.
  + empathy is an emotional process utilizing all four emotion groups. (author analysis)
* These emotional interpretations are not just innate but learned from social interaction. (Dreisbach, 2023, p. 495; Mezirow 2000, p. 128)
* Emotions modulate what we think, remember, and perceive. (Dreisbach, 2023, p. 490)
* Emotional processing leads us to attend to some information and ignore other information based on goal relevancy. (Viviani et al., 2022, p. 2045)
* Emotional interpretations are also shaped by cultural rules and norms. (Sinden and Devall-Martin, 2024, p. 1-6)
* Empathy is susceptible to social influence and manipulation. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 128)

1. MAIN ARGUMENT #2: Empathy is recognized as potentially biased toward negativity and exclusion.
2. Empathy may be mistaken.

* Bloom argues empathetic understanding comes from comparing our memories of similar experiences to the perceived experience of the other with the assumption they will feel a similar experience in the same way we do. (Bloom, 2016, p. 66)

1. Empathy may overload our thinking processes.

* Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others and can lead to experiencing intense emotion that overloads our cognitive processing, an example of which is compassion fatigue when a caregiver is overloaded with painful emotions. (Lucchesi, 2023)

1. Empathy is normally biased towards one’s ingroup.

* Social identity theorists posit we understand our group identity by comparison with other outgroups. (Vos, 2022, p. 41)
* Human cognitive processes compute information about other groups whether emphasizing if they are a threat to be accommodated or attacked. (Boyer, 2018, p. 49)
* We naturally feel more empathy toward those who resemble us or are attractive to us. (Vickers, 2017)
* We feel more empathy for those who are cooperating with us, who treat us well, than those who we compete with or have not treated us well. (Bloom, 2016, p. 68)
* Fear of embarrassment leads us to protect our self-image or self-esteem. (Hu and Hsin-Lin, 2024, p. 12) This could mean one’s ingroup expectation and desire to avoid embarrassment or humiliation can lead to motivation to empathize with an outgroup that is emphasized by the group. (application)

1. MAIN COUNTER ARGUMENT #3: Empathy may also be potentially biased positively toward nonobjective inclusion.
2. Humans are naturally self-inclined and sinful.

* We organize and interpret experience so we can act upon it in terms of our own needs. (Suttie, 2022)
* We pay more attention to things that have high emotional significance for our self-interest. (Goodhew and Edward, 2022)
* Threat-oriented emotion is prioritized over other emotional processes, and this is not always a bad thing. (Viviani, et. al, 2022, p. 2045)
* Empathy is never just other focused but narrows our focus in a self-regarding way as we seek to alleviate the emotional injury we are feeling. (Bloom, 2016, p. 73)

1. Empathy can be biased in a positive way (hyperempathic researcher bias)

* Empathy does not generate a positive or open predisposition but rather proceeds from a positive predisposition. (Bloom, 2016, p. 76.)
* Empathic understanding can be a form of misplaced bias as seen when people empathize with protagonists or criminals, including murderers leading them to be positive toward and justify their behavior. (Vaage, 2023 pp. 116-118)
* Empathic emotional processing can so enmesh us with the felt needs of others that we are not able to make reasonable judgments regarding them, for example, a parent becoming hyper-focused on solving a child’s suffering or increasing their happiness at the expense of what is good for them such as being unable to discipline them. (Bloom, 2016, p. 98)
* Empathy is like a magnet, with repulsive and attractive poles, either of which can cloud objective judgment (author’s description)
* This bias occurs when individuals become so overwhelmed by empathizing with others that they lose objectivity and make decisions solely based on emotional responses, disregarding other important factors. In this case, individuals may become overly influenced by emotions, leading to irrational or biased judgments. (author’s conclusion)

1. Researchers need empathy-consciousness and objectivity.

* Social systems are emotional systems that function better when there is differentiation. (Steinke, 2017, p. 115)
* Differentiation is the ability to be in a social relationship while maintaining a separate self and not becoming emotionally reactive but maintaining objectivity. (Steinke, 2017, p.9)
* A stranger may be both inside and outside a social group and brings insights not available from inside the group. (Vos, 2022, 58-60)
* Cultivating an ability to stand back provides more rationally effective care. (Vickers, 2017)
* Sympathetic understanding is additive only when augmented by prior rational moral principles and rational judgment. (Vickers, 2017)
* There is a value in developing our emotional intelligence understood as an ability to be aware of our feelings and they lead us to understand and make judgments about our experience. (Calero, et al., 2023, p. 175)

1. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
   1. Empathic connection is required to truly understand another person’s perspective.

* Bazalgette advocates putting oneself into another’s shoes is essential for right action. (2017 as cited in Vickers, 2017)
* Empathic response has historically generated positive social change. (Vaage, 2023, p. 125)
* We must include lived experiences, and emotional, and cultural traditions of outgroups and privilege them over reason and evidence-based knowledge which is unfairly dominant. (Pluckrose, 2020, p. 241)
* Partiality is required for justice as complete impartiality makes one indifferent to others and their situations. (Suttie, J. 2022)
* Lack of empathy leads us to be unfair to others, for example, saying why can’t an addict just quit? (Meier. J. D.)

B. Empathy and the Golden Rule

* Empathy sounds like the Golden Rule (Vos, 2022, p. 346)
* The Golden Rule is not an affirmation or celebration of sinful behavior but rather built on redemptive love. (Romans 1-3)

1. CONCLUSION: Frame the sociological integration of faith/religion and society
   1. Analysis through Sociological Theory
      * 1. (*Symbolic Interactionism*: two key principles of this tradition are useful in better understanding the role of empathy in social research.
           + From the perspective of meaning-making: Symbolic interactionists argue that individuals actively interpret and construct the social world through their interactions with others. They attach meanings to symbols, gestures, and language based on shared understandings and cultural norms.
           + From the perspective of role-taking: Symbolic interactionists emphasize the importance of socialization and role-taking in the development of social identity and behavior. Through socialization, individuals learn the norms, values, and expectations of their culture, which guide their interactions with others. Role-taking involves imagining oneself in the position of others and understanding their perspectives, which facilitates empathy and cooperation.
        2. Apply the chosen theory to the problem.
      1. The researcher actively interprets and constructs meaning through the social world through her research with others.
         * Empathy functions as a socially constructed symbol that can both facilitate and hinder objective research.
      2. The social researcher imagines himself in the position of those he is researching to understand their perspectives generating empathy that may help uncover unseen aspects.
         * Hyperempathic connectivity may lead to hyperempathic bias crowding out objective understanding rejected by the group being studied.
         1. Explain how this theory aids in understanding the issue.
            * The researcher is involved in his research.
            * The researcher is an active component in constructing an understanding of the issue being studied.
            * Researching people groups at the micro level will likely generate empathy which may facilitate better understanding.
            * Overempathizing with the research group can lead to hyperempathic bias.
   2. Faith Analysis through N.T. Wright’s 7 Universal Longings Truth

* The longing for justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty, as well as truth and love, are fundamental to the human experience. These desires, which transcend cultural boundaries, suggest a deeper truth beyond the mundane. This truth, though elusive, requires a different kind of understanding. In a world where these longings persist, the quest for truth is far more complex than simple yes-or-no answers can address. (Wright, 2009, p. 48-51)
* The world limited by sin and imperfection sees truth as unattainable. (Heddendorf and Vos, 2010, p. 13)
* Truth is revealed, a gift from God. (2 Timothy 3: 14-17, John 1:18)
  1. Go back, revisit, and restate the thesis statement as your concluding remarks.

Hyperempathic bias in social research could lead researchers to overlook or downplay the negative aspects of the behavior they are studying. They might sympathize so much with the subjects of their research that they fail to maintain objectivity and accurately assess the situation. This bias could influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation, leading to skewed results and conclusions that do not accurately reflect reality.

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