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Empathy: A tool to unite?

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Claremont McKenna College

Empathy: A Tool to Unite?

submitted to
Professor Craig Bowman

by
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Finally, this thesis and my experience at Claremont McKenna College taught me that empathy for most humans is a choice. This choice can mean the world to both the recipient and the provider.

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Keywords

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Abstract:

Research indicates most healthy humans, and even some animals, possess the ability to empathize. Further, environmental factors may impact empathic behavior, both positively and negatively. Studies suggest that empathy-bias within “ingroups” or like-cohort groups may develop. This often manifests in less empathy toward “outgroups,” or people outside of the familiar societal group. Research indicates leaders may demonstrate greater difficulty measuring their own lack of empathy, potentially exacerbating divisions. Studies indicate integration, empathy training, and perspective-taking training show promise in bridging empathy-bias between ingroups and outgroups, including improving racial division, fostering positive student-teacher and coaching relationships, and encouraging cross-societal volunteerism.

With record levels of partisanship in America, could empathy training be a potential solution to ease political tension? Recent data suggests the establishment of political outgroups, as people rate members of the opposing political party more negatively than other Americans. However, if an individual has a friend in the opposing political party, their perception of that party improves. Studies indicate politics is not

processed in the rational or conscious reasoning part of the brain, but the emotional brain circuitry. Literature suggests using empathy as a means to bridge political outgroups is not novel. However, while scholars posit empathy as a solution to ease partisanship, political tension still grows. This is because empathy alone, without action, will not solve partisan issues. Purposeful integration of ingroups and outgroups that may include empathy and perspective-taking training is needed. The nature of humans to inherently possess and demonstrate empathy, combined with the positive research of integration and empathy training, shows promise to thwart political ingroup and outgroup empathy-bias, and to help bridge the partisan divide.

Chapter I. Introduction

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”

--Harper Lee, (1960), *To Kill a Mockingbird*, p. 32

What does it take to understand the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of someone else, whether or not you have experienced their situation? Why are some people capable of sharing another person's pain, to the point of physical anguish, or their happiness, to near-euphoria, as though they were feeling it themselves and understood their perspective? This is empathy. While ideas surrounding empathy have been described for centuries, from Homer to Heinz Kohut to Carl Rogers, even the definition of empathy is at times still debated as is the application to the social sciences. Empathy is

widely credited as a motivator for positive social behavior (Singer, 2006). However, empathy is also on a continuum. Too much empathy can result in over-active emotions and can be at times, debilitating. Conversely, a lack of empathy can be found in antisocial, and even emotionally or physically damaging behavior (Singer, 2006).

Empathy, whether too little, within a normal range, or too much, is frequently attributed to genetics, behavioral, and environmental factors (Baron-Cohen, 2011). Research indicates there are both nature and nurture components to empathy, with empathic behavior empirically measured in babies (Field, Woodson, Greenberg, & Cohen, 1982) and even primates (Masserman, Wechkins, & Terris, 1964). Empathic response has been empirically measured through a variety of test methods, including fMRI studies. Several neurons in the brain that react to actual pain are also strongly associated with empathic response to pain (Singer, Seymour, O'Doherty, Kaube, Dolan, & Frith, 2004). While brain reaction is shown through fMRI studies, other empathy measurement standards and empathy scales have been created to determine degrees of empathy (Hogan, 1969; Baron-Cohen, 2011).

While empathy is important in augmenting positive social behavior and helping to temper undesirable, antisocial behavior, is there an intrinsic motivation to demonstrate empathy? In addition to the positive benefits the recipient of empathic behavior may receive, it appears that empathy can also provide positive benefits to the individual demonstrating empathy. Studies indicate that the emotional benefit from providing empathy is powerful and may be more motivating than the impact of social shame or social rewards (Batson, et al., 1988).

If empathy is inborn in most healthy human beings, and even measured in some animals, why is there the degree of social division? In a 2006 speech to Xavier University in New Orleans, then-President Barack Obama told graduates America suffered from an “empathy deficit” (Obama, August 11, 2006). President Obama may have been partially correct. While empathy deficit is not the root of the division, studies indicate that while empathy can be nurtured and developed, so can empathy bias. Research suggests empathy can vary in seemingly normal adults, with stronger feelings of empathy for more similar peers, or people within an “ingroup” or cohort group (Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti, 2010). As adult humans may demonstrate empathy-bias, or higher empathy toward ingroups with shared traits, they may also demonstrate lower empathy toward “outgroups,” or groups that are different (Avenanti et al., 2010). Additional research indicates that a sense of perceived fairness may influence empathic response (Singer, Seymour, O’Doherty, Stephan, Dolan, & Frith, 2006). This poses the challenge: if people tend to gravitate towards like-minded people, can empathy be leveraged to encourage conversations across different groups to allow people to understand the feelings of others, and enable people to see the world through a different lens? Studies indicate empathy can be successfully trained and cultivated (Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011; Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014). With current societal divisions, from the political red-state-blue-state divide to ageism to gender bias to racial issues, could integration, empathy training, and perspective-taking training play a role?

The current political divide in American is deeper than the hyperbolic headlines, it is supported by empirical data, with Americans more critical of the opposing party than supportive of their own party (Pew Research Center, 2016). This political bifurcation in

America suggests the political equivalent of ingroups and outgroups. A Pew Research Center (PRC), 2016 study indicates the American population has greater polarization between political parties than in the past, viewing members of the opposing party unfavorably. While having a friend in the opposite side of the political aisle yields positive feelings to the opposing party as a whole (PRC, 2016), similar to bridging between an ingroup and an outgroup, friendships across parties appear to be rare. The same study indicates that most people surround themselves with politically like-minded friends. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the political divisions are deepening, conversations are limited, and there is no obvious solution in sight.

The notion of empathy as a positive means to mend societal division has been raised by academics, sociologists, and authors with little progress (Hochschild, 2016; Kredell, 2017; Shashkevich, 2017). Some scholars even argue against empathy as an over-hyped and ineffective notion (Bloom, 2016). While academics debate the merits of empathy as a solution to America's political woes, little progress has been made and the intensity in political division is on the rise. What is lacking is a systemic application of proven integration, empathy, and perspective-taking techniques and training at each level of the country, from communities to colleges to congress, to help mend the divide. Certain studies suggest that this may be effective. Racial perspective-taking training demonstrated the potential to use empathy to bridge racial divide, while training with teachers indicated that empathy in the classroom setting led to greater academic success and higher student satisfaction (Rogers et al., 2014). Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) demonstrated the potential for perspective-taking training to reduce stereotyping between ingroups and outgroups. Despite the promising studies, as Heinz Kohut (1981), a pioneer

and expert on empathy in the social sciences argued empathy in and of itself is not a “cure” (Kohut, October 4, 1981). Rather empathy serves an “informer of appropriate action” (Kohut, October 4, 1981). Kohut’s reminder is vital. Empathy as a standalone concept or definition may not be the answer. It is the willingness to take the perspective or the feelings of others into consideration to determine actions, decisions, and outcomes.

This thesis seeks to understand the potential empathy may have through integration and training, particularly in bridging political ingroups and outgroups. Chapter II explains the definition and the history of empathy. Chapter III outlines the impact of nature and nurture on empathic behavior, and the development of empathy bias, including ingroups and outgroups. Chapter IV reviews the studies that support empathy and perspective-taking training, and the potential application. Chapter V reviews the growing partisan divide in America, the need for intervention, and the potential application for empathy and perspective-taking training. Chapter VI provides final conclusions.

Chapter II. What is Empathy?

Empathy’s roots originated in an unlikely fashion: German art. The term empathy comes from nineteenth century German, Robert Vischer, who proposed the word *Einfühlung* as it related to the human connection with art and the feelings and relationship to inanimate objects as “feeling oneself into” (Jahoda, 2005, p.153). This differed from sympathy, or *Mitgefühl*, meaning “feeling with” (Jahoda, 2005, p. 153). Vischer’s fellow countryman Theodor Lipps further defined *Einfühlung* for use with humans and adopted it in the psychological realm (Jahoda, 2005). However, the actual word empathy, was introduced in 1909 by E.B. Titchener, as he stated that the mind

behaved as a “muscle,” (Titchener, 1909, p. 209) as it reacted to a litany of emotions. Titchener suggested the idea of empathic response well before neural imaging was available to confirm the brain’s empathic reaction to pain or emotions in others, and prior to studies confirming this hypothesis. Further, Heinz Kohut suggested the importance of empathy in psychotherapy (Kohut & Omstein, 2011), stating that psychotherapy cannot effectively occur without empathy.

With a litany of current definitions, there is broad consensus that empathy is the understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and the point of view of someone else (Decety, 2012). The notion of empathy was eluded to well before it was formally defined. As early philosopher Homer said, “Yet, taught by time, my heart has learned to glow for others’ good, and melt at others’ woe” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XVIII, p. 561). Homer defines an important component of empathy, the ability to not only sympathize or feel for someone, but to actually feel what the other person may be feeling. Empathy is often confused with sympathy, and to understand the concept of empathy it is crucial to be able to differentiate between the two. As Burton (2015) surmises, sympathy is a similar feeling but lacks the sharing of thoughts and emotions. Empathy takes it further, allowing the ability to share in the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of others. Although sharing the emotions of another person is an important part of empathy, it goes beyond sharing the feelings of others. While there is no singular definition for empathy, it is broadly accepted that empathic behavior relies on two important factors: first, the aforementioned ability to share the feelings and emotions of others; and second, using those feelings to see the world through their perspective (Decety, 2012).

As Heinz Kohut suggests, from a psychoanalytic standpoint empathy is an “essential” (Kohut & Omstein, 2011, p. 209) part of any psychological session, albeit not the only aspect of a psychological interaction. Carl Rogers’ statement on the importance of being understood, and of having someone truly listen, further illustrates the definition of empathy and its impact from the recipient’s vantage point:

I think in some real sense, when a person is really heard, he’s weeping for joy. It’s as though he were saying, ‘Thank God: somebody heard me. Someone knows what it’s like to be me.’ In such moments I’ve had the fantasy of a prisoner in a dungeon tapping out day after day a Morse code message: ‘Does anybody ear me? Is there anybody there? Can anyone hear me?’ And finally, one day he hears some faint tapping which spell out ‘yes.’ And by that one simple response he’s released from his loneliness, he’s become a human being again (Rogers, et al., 2014, p. 69).

However, Rogers’ definition and application of empathy extends well beyond the therapist-patient relationship. In a series of previously unpublished interviews with Carl Rogers, Hal Lyons, Rogers’ former colleague, with education researcher Reinhard Tausch, authored *On Becoming an Effective Teacher*. This body of work includes “person centered” teaching practices, with empirical support for the application of empathic behavioral techniques in the classroom and beyond (Rogers, et al., 2014).

Senator J. William Fulbright approached the importance of empathy from the vantage point of intercultural education: “The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy—the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see, or may see it more

accurately” (Rogers, et al., 2014, p. 84). While understanding how someone feels is important, Simon Baron-Cohen (2011) argues that recognizing the feelings of others is necessary but not enough. Consistent with Kohut (1981), Baron-Cohen posits that empathy provides the correct lens to respond and act to the feelings of others, an important by-product of empathy.

There are differences in brain activation for empathy and sympathy as measured by electrical neuro-imaging (EEG). Using the original German definition for sympathy or “feeling with” and for empathy of “feeling into,” Thirioux, Mercier, Blanke, and Berthoz (2014) measured the brain as it demonstrated similarities and differences in sympathetic and empathic response. The definitions are important as with empathy, the individual transfers their presence to the other person, as Thirioux et al. (2014) suggest, “empathy is associated with disembodied self-location, in which the imagined self-location does not match the position of one’s physical body in space” (Thirioux et al., 2014 p. 287). In this study, subjects viewed a tightrope walker and were asked to perform spontaneous and explicit tasks, including Mirror Imaging (MIR), and Own-Body Transformation (OBT) tasks to measure sympathy and empathy, moving in the direction the tightrope walker moved. The study findings (Thirioux et al., 2014) indicate that sympathy and empathy create different reactions in the brain, with sympathy creating a reaction in the entire sequence of events in the MNS, while empathy did not. Instead, empathy creates an initial reaction in the insular to the temporal cortices to the IPL. It then activates both the MNS inferior frontal node and the dlPFC on the right side. Finally, in a third stage, empathic reaction demonstrates activity in the left TPJ in the MENT and the precuneus (Thirioux et al., 2014). Thirioux et al. (2014) posit that the difference between the

reaction to sympathy and empathy as seen in the brain imaging is due to the change from “ego centered strategies in the MNS to heterocentered strategies” (p. 303) consistent with the change in perspective required for empathy in comparison to sympathy. Hence, the definition of empathy and its difference from sympathy appears to have support from neuro-imaging.

Chapter III. Nature, Nurture, Empathy Bias, and Ingroups

The case for genetic empathy is supported by human infants, primates, and even rats. Newborn babies, even at thirty-six hours have been proven to imitate facial expressions. In a study by Field, et al. (1982), neonates were held by adults, as the adults demonstrated happy, sad and surprised emotional facial expressions. The neonate accurately mimicked the adult’s face, as they demonstrated the three-different emotional facial expressions. More recently in another study, empathic response to peers was studied in eight-month old infants (Liddle, Bradley, & Mcgrath, 2015). In this study, Liddle et al. (2015) placed infants in strollers’ facing each other, with the infants’ mother placed behind the baby, but still in view. In addition, the same conditions were tested with the mothers absent. Data from Liddle et al. (2015) suggests that when a baby cried in the study, the other infants looked at the baby that was crying first. Second, the infants would look at the mother of the crying baby. Only after the infants in the study looked at the crying baby and the crying baby’s mother did they then look at their own mother. The babies gaze at their distressed peer was predominantly the first response. Early evidence of empathy in infants is further supported by Roth-Hanania, Davidov, and Zahn-Waxler

(2011) in their study of eight to sixteen-month-old infants, responding to a distressed infant and their mother in a video. This study indicates some levels of empathic behavior in both affective empathy as well as some empathic cognition (Roth-Hanania et al., 2011). These studies suggest that a sense of empathy is in-born in humans.

Traits of empathy have been studied in primates. Masserman et al. (1964) studied empathy in monkeys. Masserman et al. (1964) provided monkeys the choice of two pull-chains that released food. One of the pull-chains released twice the amount of food as the other pull-chain but shocked another monkey. Two-thirds of the monkeys' tested pulled the chain with lesser food that did not shock the other monkey, rather than choosing the chain that would provide more food (Masserman et al., 1964). Two monkeys stopped pulling the chain altogether, one for twelve days and one for five days, going without food rather than risk shocking a fellow monkey (Masserman et al., 1964). The monkeys that chose to go without food and starve rather than potentially shock the other monkey were more apt to have been shocked as a stimulus animal (Masserman et al., 1964). This demonstrates the importance of understanding the perspective of the other being, as the monkeys' that had experienced the pain of shock were willing to starve rather than inflict pain on others. When one has experienced the pain of others and their perspective, they may even sacrifice food, their equivalent of survival.

Ben-Ami, Decety, and Mason (2011) studied empathic behavior in rats. In this study, a free rat and a rat trapped in a caged area were paired in an observational area to test the propensity for the free rat to liberate the caged rat through pushing a lever. This was compared to control conditions of a free rat next to a cage without a rat, or with a toy rat, and a free rat with another rat separated, but unrestrained. In the test condition, free

rats quickly and frequently pushed the lever to free their caged counterpart, significantly more than in control conditions. As an additional test, chocolate was qualified as appealing to rats. (Ben-Ami et al., 2011).

When pushing a lever to gain chocolate in comparison to freeing the other rat, the rats pressed the lever for the chocolate and the lever to free the caged rat. Further, over half of the rats shared the chocolate with their caged counterpart. Female rats demonstrated a higher propensity to open the lever and free the caged rat, consistent with learnings that human females may be more empathetic than males (Ben-Ami et al., 2011; Wakabayashi, Baron-Cohen, & Wheelwright, 2006).

If infants, primates and even rats demonstrate a propensity for empathy, why is human empathic behavior not more prevalent? Baron-Cohen (2011) attributes empathy or the lack thereof to genetics, biological or environmental factors, and often a combination of these factors. This often includes people with antisocial personality disorders (ASPD) and other psychological/personality disorders, for example, narcissistic and Borderline Personality Disorders. While this also includes psychopaths, it is much broader than the notorious commercialized Ted Bundy-like characters. Those on the autism spectrum are more typical examples of individuals with empathy deficits. The author reviews genetic, biological, and environmental components that lead to lack of empathy. For example, issues of neglect and abuse as a child can lead to a Borderline Personality Disorder. Kohut (October 4, 1981) posits that the lack of emotional presence by a mother is a large contributor to a lack of empathy.

With the rapid emergence of online technology, it is important to understand the impact of time on the internet and time spent gaming on empathic behavior. Research

indicates online activity may not reduce empathy so long as it does not reduce face-to-face human interaction (Carrier, Spradlin, Bunce, & Rosen, 2015). In this research, Carrier et al. (2015) studied the impact of online activity in Southern California university students. A Daily Media Usage scale that tracked face-to-face interactions, as well as all online and technology behavior, including video games, was used to measure both online and in-person behavior. In addition, a Basic Empathy Scale was used to assess both the affective component and the cognitive component of empathy in the study subjects. The affective component is linked to “experiencing” another person’s feelings, whereby the cognitive component related to the identification and understanding of the feelings of someone else (Carrier et al., 2015).

Subjects were measured via a Virtual Empathy Scale that modified the Basic Empathy Scale with wording relevant to online activity. Finally, perceived social support was measured, to understand the positive impact of support, or empathy, received by friends and family members face-to-face and online. In measuring the correlation between real-world empathy and the subjects’ online activity for all subjects, there was not a significant impact. Results indicate that online activity that promotes face-to-face activity has a positive impact on real-world empathy (Carrier et al., 2015). While men showed no significant difference in online activity impacting empathy, for women, there was a significant negative impact in higher levels of online activity and real-world empathy measurements. Further, when face-to-face activity was lessened due to a reduction of online activity that promoted face-to-face interactions, the impact for women was even greater (Carrier et al., 2015). Carrier et al. (2015) demonstrated a positive correlation with real-world empathy and virtual empathy, although real-world empathy

scores were higher in the absolute than virtual empathy scores. Real-world empathy has a much stronger relationship with social support, yet virtual empathy also leads to social support, albeit at weaker levels (Carrier et al., 2015). While men were not as negatively impacted as their female counterparts by online activity and the impact of lower face-to-face time, male subjects' experienced reduced cognitive empathy by playing video games (Carrier et al., 2015). However, for men, playing video games did not negatively impact face-to-face contact. Online activity impacts men and women differently (Carrier et al., 2015). While video gaming for males and online activity that lessens a female's face-to-face contact time does impact empathy to some extent and should continue to be studied, the internet and gaming does not appear to be the root issue in lack of empathy or empathy bias.

The theory that neurons that react to actual pain also react while observing pain in someone else has been studied via imaging, providing further support to empathic response (Lamm & Majdandžic, 2015). An fMRI study by Singer, et al. (2004) illustrated empathic reaction to pain, as they measured the brain's empathic and actual response to pain in the same subject. This study demonstrated that empathy elicits affective components of pain rather than sensory components of pain in neural responses. In this study, subjects were measured by fMRI as they watched a loved one experience pain. The subjects were then measured by fMRI as they actually experienced a similar pain (Singer et al., 2004). Empathic reaction to pain in a loved one was then compared to actual pain for the study participant, using the fMRI data. Functional imagery demonstrated that while the entire pain system was not activated during empathic pain, several areas were activated during empathic pain that coincide with actual pain activation. This neural

activation for empathic reaction includes the rostral anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), the bilateral anterior insula (AI), the lateral cerebellum and the brainstem in response to the pain for a loved one. While these areas also showed a neural response when participants personally experienced the pain, in self-felt pain additional areas of the brain also demonstrated a reaction. When a subject experienced actual pain, the sensorimotor cortex (SI/MI), the caudal ACC, and the posterior insula/secondary somatosensory cortex also indicated a reaction that did not occur in empathetic response to pain, in addition to the rostral anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and the bilateral anterior insula (AI), lateral cerebellum and the brainstem (Singer et al., 2004). However, the AI, ACC, the lateral cerebellum and the brainstem did show neural responses for both empathetic, or perceived pain and the actual pain for the participant (Singer et al., 2004). While the pain circuit for actual pain is not identical to the activation shown for empathic pain, this demonstrated that there is a clear association between actual experienced and empathic pain brain activation (Singer et al., 2004). The AI and ACC specifically indicated response to empathic pain and to actual pain.

Empathy testing has also been developed in assessing the personality of an individual. Robert Hogan (1969) created a sixty-four-point Empathy Scale, to assess characteristics that correlate with heightened or lower empathy attributes, and to even measure the scale in comparison to socially acceptable behavior. Hogan's scale attempted to quantify the self-reporting of empathy attributes in comparison to socially and morally "appropriate behavior" (Hogan, 1969). This scale did find a relationship with low-empathy scores seen in unemotional, aggressive subjects, whereas high-empathy scores were seen in prosocial, emotionally intelligent subjects. Hogan (1969) acknowledged that

identifying a correlation between greater empathic behavior and higher moral behavior could be difficult to quantify due to the subjective nature of the question. However, Hogan also believed that the early findings regarding the empathy scale warranted further research (Hogan, 1969).

More recently, Baron-Cohen (2011) created an empathy scale, measuring empathy from zero to six. This scale consists of an Empathy Quotient (EQ) questionnaire, with the bell-curve, or the bulk of the population falling into the normative empathy range. Borderlines, Narcissists, and Psychopaths typically fall in the “zero negative” empathy zone. However, a lack of empathy is not necessarily evil (Baron-Cohen, 2011). Rather, as aforementioned, some people that lack empathy may fall on the autism spectrum, as Baron-Cohen (2011) makes a case that empathy is part nature, part nurture, with what he submits are genes associated with positive degrees of empathy. Additionally, Baron-Cohen (2011) posits that empathy can and should be taught. As such, Baron-Cohen (2011) questions why a focus on empathy is not built into law-enforcement, academics, and even politics (Baron-Cohen, 2011, p. 152).

While data suggests that the ability to empathize is inherent in most healthy humans, studies indicate empathy-bias may occur. In a study by Avenanti, et al. (2010), African American and Caucasian subjects were screened for empathy levels, which proved similar. The subjects were then measured using transcranial magnetic stimulation to understand the sensorimotor empathic brain response as they viewed the pain in strangers. Subjects viewed pain in three visually identifiable different types of hands, violet-shaded hands, African American hands, and Caucasian hands. Subjects in both groups were asked to rate pain of the violet-shaded handed, the hands in their ingroup

defined as their same ethnic group, and the hands in the outgroup or the other ethnic group. All subjects showed an empathetic response to the violet-shaded hands (Avenanti et al., 2010). When subjects viewed the pain of their respective ingroup, their reaction was similar to the subject actually experiencing the pain (Avenanti, et al., 2010). However, the pain reaction to the outgroup, was not demonstrated. Inherent empathy toward strangers was proven, illustrated by the reaction to the pain in the violet-handed model. However, Avenanti et al. (2010) also found that racially biased individuals expressed less empathy towards a known outgroup, demonstrating learned empathy-bias. The African American and Caucasian respondent groups were screened for racial bias with the Implicit Association Test (IAT). In this test both subject groups rated and responded to the term “African” and “Italian,” placing either positive or negative ideas with each term. Within the African American subjects, there was a significant bias demonstrated, with positive concepts associated with “African” in comparison to the term “Italian.” Conversely, there were more negative associations for the African American subjects with term “Italian” than “African” (Avenanti, et al., 2010). For Caucasian participants the bias was similar, with more positive associations with “Italian” than “African” and more negative associations with “African” than “Italian” (Avenanti, et al., 2010). This data indicates the empathy bias that may develop. This is particularly important as neither group felt negative bias toward the race-neutral violet-handed subjects, but instead felt empathic response.

Empathy bias was once again seen in research, this time with immigrants. In this study, immigrants indicated empathy bias upon initial arrival to a new country that dissipated over time with positive societal integration. Cao, Contreras-Huerta, McFadyen,

and Cunnington (2015) demonstrated the positive impact of daily integration of immigrants in neutralizing empathy bias, while also revealing empathy bias amongst ethnic groups with social division. In this research, Cao et al. (2015) studied Chinese immigrants to Australia, using fMRI techniques to measure brain activity in the emotional and sensory areas, the bilateral insula and the anterior cingulate cortices, that have shown empathic response. The subjects in the study were Chinese immigrants that ranged in their arrival to Australia from five years to six months. The subjects watched videos of Chinese and Australians experiencing pain, and Chinese and Australians not experiencing pain. The data indicated that racial bias moved over time, with new immigrants showing less empathy activation in the brain in watching Australians experience pain. This racial-bias changed over time, as daily contact with Australians occurred. While regular, daily integration was tantamount to overcoming empathy bias, the contact did not necessarily need to be particularly intimate or close (Cao et al., 2015). This demonstrates the need to integrate people of various backgrounds, and that regular contact, even without specific training has the potential for positive impact.

Other factors impacting empathy is a perceived sense of fairness. A study by Singer et al. (2006), illustrates that a lack of perceived fairness could inhibit the ability to demonstrate empathy. In this study by Singer et al. (2006), men and women subjects were engaged to understand if empathy was impacted by perceived fairness in a game. The subjects were measured using Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The subjects watched as people engaged in a game with some game-players participating fairly, while other players were viewed cheating (Singer et al., 2006). The male and female test subjects then observed both the fair players and the unfair players subjected to pain. When a fair

player was subjected to pain, both male and female test subjects' demonstrated activity in the anterior cingulate cortices and the fronto-insular cortices, consistent with the empathic pain region reaction in the brain. However, when a player that cheated was the recipient of pain, the reactions by men to their pain lessened. Rather, when a perceived cheater from the game received pain, the areas of the brain that correlates with reward, equating to vengeance was active in men (Singer et al., 2006). While the natural reaction to empathy was demonstrated in observing the perceived fair game-players by both male and female subjects, the reaction to perceived cheating by male subjects (Singer et al., 2006) differed, thus demonstrating the concept of fairness and revenge by male subjects. This also indicates some gender variation in empathic response. A study by Wakabayashi, et al. (2006) also indicated a potential for gender differences in empathic behavior. In this study, a model was created to test empathy in comparison to sympathy, with an empathy quotient (EQ) and sympathy quotient (SQ). There were gender differences, with women more prone to higher EQ scores while men scored higher on the SQ scale (Wakabayashi et al., 2006).

Empathic behavior appears to be lacking in a variety of seemingly high-touch relationships. A German study by Tausch and Huls indicates a void of empathic behavior in adult subjects from teachers and parents (Rogers, et al., 2014). Subjects in this study included university students, patients, and corporate employees. This study asked participants to report perceived empathy on a four-point scale, with a response of four indicating perceived empathy as always, a response of three indicating perceived empathy as often, a response of two indicating perceived empathy as seldom, and a response of one indicating as rarely or never. Empathy in the educational setting appears

to be lacking, with approximately sixty-percent of subjects reporting no empathy from university professors and about the same for school teachers, with approximately fifty-five percent “rarely or never” receiving empathy from school teachers (Rogers et al., 2014). Of the forty-five percent of subjects that reported feeling empathy “often” by teachers, over eighty-percent felt empathy provides helpful outcomes, that includes feeling “valued” (Rogers et al., 2014). While more study subjects reported gaining empathy from their parents than their teachers, forty-percent of subjects’ report only “rarely or sometimes received empathy from their parents” (Rogers et al., 2014). The impact of a lack of empathy by educators and parents could be far-reaching. When subjects were asked about the importance of role-models in learning empathic behavior toward others, approximately twenty-five percent of subjects felt the behavior of teachers and parents played a key role in the ability to empathize with others (Rogers et al., 2014). This indicates that despite the natural tendency for empathy, the nurture component could be lacking in some parental or teacher relationships, important to a child’s development.

As a whole, empathy appears to be a combination of nature and nurture, with empathic traits demonstrated in infants (Field, et al., 1982). Masserman et al. (1964), demonstrate the importance of understanding the perspective of others, as a monkey that experienced pain would rather starve than hurt another monkey. The role-models of educators and parents play an important part in empathy development (Rogers et al., 2014). Additionally, empathy bias may occur over time, and may limit the ability to empathize beyond certain ingroups or peer-groups. Empathy bias may simply be derived from a lack of exposure, as was indicated in the Cao et al. 2015 study, demonstrating the need to better integrate people to gain perspective and empathy.

Chapter IV. Can empathy be trained?

Research on the effectiveness of empathy and perspective-taking training shows promise in a variety of settings, with a variety of ingroups and outgroups. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) conducted three experiments to understand if perspective-taking training or stereotype suppression could reduce stereotypes. While results from all three experiments demonstrated the positive impact of perspective-taking training amongst study participants, the third experiment specifically simulated an ingroup and outgroup context to understand the impact of perspective-taking training toward outgroups. Upon arrival to the study, subjects viewed a computer screen filled with dots and were asked to provide what they believed were the number of dots. All subjects were then told that they had overestimated the number of dots, and that without judgment, some people had a propensity to overestimate, while others were inclined to underestimate. Subjects were separated into four groups. Three of the groups were asked to write an essay about someone that might underestimate. One group was asked to take the perspective of an underestimator, a second group was asked to think of a time that they might have underestimated something, a third group was asked to write how people that over and under estimate are alike, while the fourth group did not write an essay (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Next, subjects were asked to rate overestimators and underestimators against ten positive characteristics on a scale. Subjects were asked a variety of questions as to how their proclivity to overestimate impacted their normal life tasks. Subjects then rated the impact of their overestimating bias in carrying out a variety of tasks and were again asked to rank the impact of being an overestimator on a scale (Galinsky &

Moskowitz, 2000). With the exception of subjects that experienced perspective-taking training, the groups rated the ingroup, the overestimators, more positively than the outgroup, the underestimators. While this demonstrates how quickly ingroup and outgroup bias can develop, it also indicates perspective-taking training may provide increased sensitivity to an outgroup.

An empirical study by the National Consortium for Humanizing Education suggests empathy training with educators elicited better results in educational outcomes and satisfaction (Aspy, Roebuck, & Aspy, 1984). Research indicates that students only made up ten percent of the conversation in the classroom, with teachers speaking eighty percent of the time. Additionally, the classroom was primarily focused on the memorization of data, with eighty percent of the work in class on recall of memorized data. Finally, teacher control of the class was higher when the focus was on memorization. This approach of memorization and teacher-centered communication led to little time to understand the feelings of students. When teachers moved beyond only rote memorization and instructed at elevated cognitive teaching above simple recall, they were found to leverage a less controlled teaching method. The teachers were trained in “person centered” teaching that focused on an empathic approach. The objectives were threefold: 1) to increase teacher positive reinforcement of students with less controlling teaching methods; 2) to increase the level of empathy in the classroom, better understanding students’ feelings; and 3) to increase congruence, or relatability and sincerity (Aspy, et al., 1984). The results of person-centered teaching were positive, with increased English, Math, and Reading levels. In addition, absenteeism was reduced and student self-confidence increased. The role of the school leaders, the principal and their

person-centered capabilities also played a role in the success of the teachers. Training of faculty members during in-service for all faculty members was an important step in the studies success (Aspy, et al., 1984). This led to another important finding; the ability level of the person-centered trainers played a role in the classroom success (Aspy, et al., 1984). The positive results from the National Consortium for Humanizing Education is further supported by a meta-analysis of controlled trials (Teding van Berkhout & Malouff, 2016) that showed promising results of empathy training programs in a university setting among students and healthcare workers.

An important part of empathy is the ability to take on the perspective of the other person, in addition to feeling their emotion. Research indicates that perspective-taking training (Todd et al., 2011) may help counter racial divides. Five studies tested various methods of perspective-taking. In the first experiment, male and female Caucasian and Asian subjects viewed a video whereby a Black male experienced discriminatory behavior in comparison to a White male. Participants viewed the video one of three ways: as an objective observer; to take on the perspective of the Black man as though they were experiencing the issue; or to take on the perspective of what the Black man might be thinking (Todd et al., 2011). Participants then conducted an Implicit Association Test (IAT) that was a personalized evaluation of race, to assess the associations with African Americans and Whites. In both perspective-taking groups, the results indicated positive results, with a significantly lower pro-White bias (Todd et al., 2011).

In the second study Todd et al. (2011), instructed non-African American participants to view a picture of a young African American male and write an essay about his day. The participants believed the person they were to write about was assigned

randomly. Some study participants were provided perspective-taking instructions that were consistent with the first experiment's instructions in the perspective-taking-other group. With methods somewhat in line with the first experiment, participants then were asked to conduct a personal evaluative race IAT to assess the racial associations.

Perspective-taking participants demonstrated lesser pro-White feelings in comparison to objective subjects (Todd et al., 2011).

The third experiment closely mirrored the second experiment, with the addition of a supplemental "racial oppression" IAT, whereby participants were asked to sort privilege and oppression related language in the context of photographs of Whites and Blacks (Todd et al., 2011). Finally, the participants were asked to rate Latinos, Asians, Whites, and Blacks on a temperature scale, indicating their feelings of coldness to warmth for the four aforementioned ethnic groups. Once again, perspective training proved effective, with less negative and more positive associations for Blacks (Todd et al., 2011).

In the fourth experiment, Todd et al. (2011) tested non-African American male and female participants and their willingness to approach or avoid African Americans. Using essay-writing methods similar to experiments two and three, participants were then asked to view images. Using a joystick, they then pulled the joystick toward them for a face and away if they viewed a piece of furniture. Finally, the participants were asked to stay if possible for another five minutes to help the research assistant practice interviewing techniques. The research assistant was either described as Tyrone or as Jack, stereotypical names for African Americans and Caucasian males. They were then moved to another room, whereby then asked to set up chairs for the interviews. Subjects with

perspective taking placed interview chairs closer and responded more favorable with the joystick in reaction time in viewing African American images (Todd et al., 2011).

The final experiment tested interracial contact, with male and female non-African American subjects, with participants told the study topic was “the dynamics of interpersonal interactions” (Todd et al., 2011). Subjects were greeted by a White experimenter and given instructions, including writing an essay about an African American Male. Once again, participants either received control, objective or perspective-taking instructions. Following the essay portion of the study, the subjects interacted with one of two African American experimenters, also blind to the experiment. The African American experimenter was instructed to tell the participant that the other student-participant had not arrived, and that they could complete this portion of the experiment with them, whereby they asked routine questions regarding a class (Todd et al., 2011). This subject-experimenter exchange was video recorded. Following this exchange, the African American experimenter was asked to evaluate the exchange with the study participant including the behavior of the participant and the enjoyment of the exchange on a scale (Todd et al., 2011). The videos were then assessed and rated, with only the participant viewed. Results for the perspective-taking trained group was more positive in the perception and subjective assessment by the African American experimenter, and as assessed in the video. Of note, Todd et al. (2011) defined contemporary racial bias issues as less obvious than the past, with “automatic negativity and behavioral avoidance” as the symptom of “contemporary racial bias” (Todd et al., 2011, p. 1027). The notion of avoidance may be relevant to current political division, where PRC 2016 research indicates that while having a friend in the opposite political

party softens negative feelings, most people surround themselves with politically like-minded friends.

Empathy training has demonstrated promising results in cosmopolitan helping, defined in this study as caring about less fortunate people in other areas of the world. Results indicated higher volunteerism levels amongst people that underwent empathy training (Faulkner, 2018). A perspective-taking method was employed with subjects using stimulus whereby participants read a story about a child laborer. In one group, the participants were instructed to remain objective and detached as they read the story. Participants in the other group were asked to take on the perspective of the child laborer, and take on their perspective (Faulkner, 2018). This technique was cross-checked by a series of questions. In the group asked to take the perspective of the child laborer, cosmopolitan helping, as measured by volunteer hours' subjects agreed to provide to a child elsewhere in the world, was higher by averagely one-and-a-half hours, or over seventeen-percent greater than the objective group. In addition, measures of empathy, guilt, and anger were also measured, with only empathy having a direct impact on the increase in hours for the perspective-taking group versus the objective group (Faulkner, 2018).

Can outgroup bias be countered more broadly and with younger groups? Research indicates that using the globally best-selling novel, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling may reduce outgroup negativity (Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, & Trifiletti, 2015). Italian fifth-grades were initially screened for attitudes towards immigrants and split into a test group and a control group. The test group read a racially motivated passage from Rowling's novel, where a non-magical character is referred to in a racially-disparaging

term as a “filthy little Mudblood” (Vezzali, et al., 2015, p. 108) in comparison of the control group reading a racially innocuous yet equally interesting passage. Results indicated test subjects showed more positive outcomes in welcoming the outgroup, immigrants, in comparison to the control (Vezzali, et al., 2015). This is important as this is first type of “secondary identification” (Vezzali, et al., 2015, p. 115). Instead of the test subjects reading a story regarding immigrants to Italy experiencing prejudice, the test subjects transferred a fictional characterization of prejudice to Mudbloods to the immigrants. This also suggest that good role-models in literature may help overcome ingroup bias (Vezzali, et al., 2015). While study outcomes are positive, this study also demonstrates racial bias towards outgroups by fifth graders, indicating racial bias even amongst children.

How do leaders respond to empathy training? In a study by Lorimer and Jowett (2010), a group of coaches received empathy training through watching videotaped interactions and gaining corrective feedback. Overall, coaches improved through this heightened self-awareness through the video feedback. However, a coach’s initial perceptions of their own empathy skills were typically inaccurate. Through feedback, the coaches improved both self-awareness and empathic behavior. Interestingly, a coach’s experience had little to do with their degree of empathy or accuracy of self-assessment. In fact, experienced coaches had lesser empathy accuracy in self-assessment (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010). According to the study, the hypothesis is that experienced coaches may believe they “know it all” (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010) contributing to lesser self awareness. This may be a relevant and important learning for not only experienced coaches, but also experienced politicians or people with set opinions, as the attitude of “knowing it all”

may get in the way of listening to another point of view or being open to empathy training, setting a tone for their groups to follow. This is consistent with Aspy et al. (1984) learning that indicates results from teachers was improved in the classroom when empathy training also successfully occurred at the leadership level, with principals.

While empathy and perspective-taking training shows promise in a variety of studies, understanding what motivates empathy is important in understanding if empathy training may work when people are not monitored in testing or training settings. Batson et al. (1988) conducted five studies to determine if empathy was motivated by altruism, self or social-reward, or avoidance of self or social-punishment. Their study concluded that empathy on its own was a stronger motivator than either social-reward or social-punishment. This helps to understand if empathy is driven by egoistic motivations, for example the need to personally benefit from the empathic act, if empathy is driven by the fear of public shaming, or if altruistic motivation is enough to motivate empathic behavior in the absence of personal benefit or public repercussions. Results from Batson, et al. (1988) demonstrate an empathic behavior link to altruism. This empathy-altruism link is counter to the empathy link to egoistic reward, or an empathy link to social punishment. Batson et al. (1988) used a variety of test methods across five studies. To measure egoistic motivation, testing included measuring the emotions of the subject when a victim the subject attempted to help was helped by someone other than the subject. The results from this test indicated the subject was relieved that the victim was helped despite not gaining the ego-boost from directly helping the victim. This demonstrated greater concern that the victim received relief rather than the need to feel credit for *providing* the relief. In addition, Batson et al. (1988) used methods to test rationalization for failure to

help, testing the empathy-punishment notion with subjects defined as high empathy and subjects defined as low empathy. For example, subjects were told that helping a person in need was either very easy, and that most people would be able help the victim, or very difficult and that most people would not be able to help, and the subjects were told “whichever you want to do is fine” (Batson et al., 1988, p. 68). Should the link between empathy and social punishment be demonstrated, Batson et al. (1988) posited that low empathy subjects would shy away or not try too hard in the more difficult situations, as they were given an excuse to avoid social punishment. Results indicated that subjects with high empathy helped in either case, no matter the degree of difficulty. In summary, Batson et al. (1988) learning indicates that altruism is a motivator for empathy rather than ego or social punishment, further indicating the promise of empathy training. Of note, there is no data on training a control group of the “low empathy” subjects prior to this type of study to understand if empathy training could further altruistic motivation (Batson et al., 1988).

While empathy training appears to show promise, some argue empathy is not the answer. Rather, some posit empathy is counterproductive. In *Against Empathy: The case for rational compassion*, (Bloom, 2016) Yale University Professor Paul Bloom argues against empathy. For example, Bloom (2016) suggests that empathy bias and too much empathy may lead to displaced worry or helpfulness. Conversely, he argues that those in the greatest need may be bypassed, as empathy bias leads to helping like-cohorts. Bloom (2016) does not question that empathic response is real and acknowledges work by Jean Decety and Tania Singer, two sources for this paper. However, he believes empathic behavior results in misplaced actions (Bloom, 2016). Using the 2012 Sandy Hook

Newton, Connecticut mass-school-shooting to support his case against empathy, Bloom submits that children die every day of shootings, and that more school-age children were killed in 2012 in Chicago than at Sandy Hook (Bloom, 2016 p. 32). Further, Bloom (2016) explains that mass shootings represent less than one-tenth of one percent of all homicides. He posits that Sandy Hook captured the empathy of Americans as it was a mass shooting and that *relatable* children were victims, not underprivileged African American children living in Chicago, indicating empathy bias. Bloom (2016) outlines the massive support Sandy Hook received, from Bloom's own school-age child wearing a bracelet to Bloom being drawn to attend an event for the Sandy Hook victims to how millions of dollars, toys and more came to the community from around the country. Bloom (2016) talks of the irony of children from lesser means donating to a place that did not need the money. He notes this misplaced empathy is due to the fact that typical Americans cannot relate to the child shot in the Chicago ghetto or even more underprivileged children around the world. Using the hyper-empathic response to Sandy Hook to support his case for a more logical, morality-based compassion, Bloom's point is valid, as it demonstrates the degree of empathy people will take to support communities they can relate to. However, this is exactly the point that leads to *support* empathy and perspective-taking training to circumvent the empathy bias or ingroup empathy that occurs, to offer additional understanding and perspective to broaden the support for people "not like me" or in outgroups. Empathy training and perspective-taking training shows promise in broadening the reaction to help people beyond the typical social circles and like-minded cohorts (Faulkner, 2018). For many of the reasons Bloom (2016) uses to

suggest empathy is misplaced, is why empathy and perspective-taking training is needed, to bridge between ingroups and outgroups.

Chapter V. A Divided Country, the Need for a Solution

On Tuesday, November 8, 2016, America elected Republican Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States, as he defeated Democrat Hilary Clinton in a bitterly divisive campaign. The candidates were the two least popular Presidential nominees in the history of the U.S., with Trump as the least popular, followed by Clinton (Martin, Sussman, & Thee-Brenan, 2016). Americans felt the impact of the negative campaign. According to the CBS News and the *New York Times* final pre-election poll, when asked if the 2016 Presidential election left them “excited,” “disgusted,” or “neither,” over eighty-percent of voters surveyed answered “disgusted.” Headlines highlighted the growing violence at Trump rallies, while Clinton’s public persona suffered as only thirty-two percent of Americans believed she was honest and trustworthy (Martin, et al., 2016). While both Democrats and Republicans agreed on the negative nature of the campaign, this is where the common ground ended. When the votes were tallied, the West coast and Northeast corners of the United States were primarily blue states, or Clinton supporters, with the bulk of the middle of the country as red states, or Trump supporters. As Clinton garnered the popular vote and Trump triumphed in the electoral college, there was no healing in sight for a sharply divided America. Following the election, Pew Research Center (2016) data indicates the U.S. not only hit record highs of partisan division, but also heightened levels in the intensity of divisiveness.

With little exception, negative feelings towards the opposing political side have been on the rise since 1964 (PRC, 2016). However, if the United States feels more divided amongst party lines than in the past, it is not just hyperbolic headlines or partisan talk radio, it is because the country is more *intensely* divided. While political debate and party identification is part of America's heritage, this divisiveness has escalated (PRC, 2016). Since 1964, the American National Election Studies have measured the attitudes of Americans toward their own party and toward the opposing political party on a scale, similar to a thermometer, with one-hundred as the warmest temperature, or positive response, and zero as the coldest or negative response, with zero to twenty-four degrees as "Very Cold" and twenty-five to forty-nine degrees as "Cold." The frostiness between the Republicans and Democrats has risen, with seventy-seven percent of Republicans rating the Democratic Party as Very Cold/Cold, up from thirty-one percent in 1964. The Very Cold rating increased during the same period from ten percent to forty-four percent. Democrats feel similarly toward their Republican compatriots, with seventy-eight percent rating Republicans Very Cold/Cold, up from thirty-two percent in 1964, with the Very Cold rating rising to fifty percent, up from fourteen percent during the same time period (PRC, 2016). An increase in the dislike for the opposing political party also supports the sharp, intense divide in America, with the level of dislike for the opposing party at an all-time high since this question was started in 1994 (PRC, 2016). While in 1994, seventy-four percent of Republicans had either an unfavorable or very unfavorable attitude about the Democratic Party, this number climbed to ninety-one percent by 2016. Moreover, the unfavorable opinion has more than doubled during that period, from twenty-one percent to fifty-eight percent. The Democrats opinions of the Republican Party are similar, with a

combined unfavorable and very unfavorable opinion of eighty-six percent. During the same period, the percent of very unfavorable climbed from seventeen percent to fifty-five percent (PRC, 2016).

The political divide goes beyond just judging the candidate, as it appears to be very personal, with judgements made about more than just the policies, but the people in the party. In a study by Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012), the disapproval of inter-party marriage is on the rise in the United States. Using a 1960 Almond and Verba study that measured displeasure in an offspring's marriage to someone in the opposite political party in the United Kingdom and the United States, Iyengar et al. (2012) used the same questions. In 1960, the disapproval was greater in the U.K. than the U.S. for inter-political marriage between political parties. By 2010 that had changed, with the United States indicating higher disapproval for marriage between political parties in the absolute, and on a percentage increase. From 1960 to 2010, the increase in displeasure regarding marriage between political parties in the United States was significant, with an increase of twenty-seven percent for Republicans, and twenty percent for Democrats, both significant increases over the time frame.

Iyengar et al. (2012) further posit the heightened partisanship goes well beyond political philosophy. Rather the data suggests that out-party ratings continue to slide downward over time, more rapidly than the opinions on the key issues. The 2008 out-party rating for Republicans and Democrats hit around 30 (Iyengar et al., 2012). Iyengar et al. (2012) note that the rating for the out-party is not only down from the 1980's, but also lower than numbers for other typically partisan issues. An example of this is how Democrats rate "Big Business" at 51 in comparison to rating Republican averagely

twenty points lower, further suggesting ingroup and outgroup bias between the political parties (Iyengar et al., 2012 p. 9).

It is clear that partisan politics is carrying over into personal beliefs about the individuals in the opposing party, well beyond policy or the politicians in charge. Pew Research (2016) asked respondents to rank people of the opposing party on five non-political characteristics and if they shared more, about the same, or less of that trait than other Americans. For example, seventy percent of Democrats surveyed believe Republicans were more closed-minded than other Americans, with the rating for the top five negative attributes as Democrats surveyed believing Republicans are more dishonest at forty-two percent, more immoral at thirty-five percent, more unintelligent at thirty-three percent, and lazier at eighteen percent. Republicans have similar feelings the Democrats (PRC, 2016). Fifty-two percent of Republicans surveyed rated Democrats as more closed-minded than the average American, forty-seven percent more immoral, forty-six percent lazier, forty-five percent more dishonest, and thirty-two percent as more unintelligent (PRC, 2016). This may indicate the formation of ingroups and outgroups based upon political lines. Based upon how Americans feel about their contemporaries in the opposing political party, it should be no surprise that the news media is now tailored to appeal to this political divide, often fanning the flames and exacerbating partisan conversation.

Having conversations about politics yields mixed results, as almost half of people surveyed reveal that talking politics across the aisle is a negative experience (PRC, 2016). The data further supports the notion of political ingroups and outgroups, as of those surveyed, forty-six percent stated political discussions with someone in the other party as

“stressful and frustrating” rather than “interesting and informative” (PRC, 2016). Further, sixty-one percent of people surveyed found they had “less in common” with the person than they thought (PRC, 2016). Does this show conversation does not work to bridge the divide? Perhaps not. The same research did not measure the context or quality of the conversation, the listening, or the relationship between the participants. However, when someone has a friend in the opposing party, the cold feelings about the party begin to thaw. For example, a Republican with a Democratic friend that is half as likely to rate the Democratic party as unfavorably, or “very cold” as a Republican without a Democratic friend (PRC, 2016).

How many Republicans or Democrats have friends in the opposite political party? Not many. In a separate Pew Research Center (PRC) Study (August, 2016), only twenty-one percent and twenty-five percent of Clinton and Trump supporters, respectively, had close friends that supported the opposing candidate. Conversely, thirty-one percent and forty-seven percent of Clinton and Trump supporters respectively, claimed to have no close friends that supported the opposing candidate (PRC, 2016). Rather, the same people surrounded themselves with like-minded friends on the political front, with eighty-one percent and eighty-two percent of Clinton and Trump supporters claiming to have a lot or some friends that supported the same candidate (PRC, 2016). This trend was more pronounced amongst less educated voters, with fifty-two percent and forty percent of Clinton and Trump supporters with a High School degree or less claiming none of their close friends support the other candidate. Younger Clinton supporters and African American Clinton supporters had even fewer friends that supported Trump, at fifty-eight

percent and seventy-two percent respectively stating that none of their friends supported Trump (PRC, 2016).

Popular culture indicates that healing the political divide may hold great appeal to Americans, and the use of humanity and humor may help ease the tension of the stress that comes with political debate. This comes from the unlikely response from both sides of the aisle to the resurrection of the 1990s situation-comedy, *Roseanne*. The show's namesake character, Roseanne, an off-and-on screen Trump supporter is pitted against her sister as her political nemesis in the show's recent debut, with the terms "deplorable" and "fake news" included in the banter (Poniewozik, March 26, 2018; Fallon, March 26, 2018). While Rosanne supports Trump and her TV-sister dons a pink "nasty woman" shirt and as she peaks out from under her "pink-pussy" cap, they both hurl their point of view at their well-armed opponent. (Poniewozik, March 26, 2018; Fallon, March 26, 2018). The humor does not simply rely on sophomoric, crude insults. The plot line indicates the pair had not talked since the election, demonstrating the political divide, or ingroups and outgroups even amongst family. When a family member reunites the feuding-sisters, between the pointed one-liners, the sisters explain *why* they voted for their respective candidates. America's response? People watched. A lot of people tuned in and stayed tuned in for two back-to-back episodes, and not just from one side of the aisle. The critics, from the New York Times (Poniewozik, March 26, 2018) to the Daily Beast (Fallon, March 26, 2018) suggest there is good reason for the meteoric ratings. The critics' reviews suggest the *Roseanne* encore allows Americans a much-needed avenue to talk, to laugh and to listen to the reason for the political differences, instead of burying the divide or only talking one side of the issue. As Poniewozik from the New York Times

submits, the original *Roseanne* show didn't put people into "neat boxes" (Poniewozik, March 26, 2018) and that may be why the show's humorous political debate works. Whatever the case, the empirical data, TV ratings, indicate people from both the "red" and "blue" states watched. According to the Washington Post (Rao, March 29, 2018), both the "blue state" New York and the swing state Ohio delivered strong ratings. *Roseanne* had the highest ratings amongst the important 18-49-year-old age demographic target audience since 2014, with 5.1 percent watching. In total, over eighteen million people watched during the back-to-back, two thirty-minute episodes that aired up against popular programming such as *The Voice* and *NCIS*, delivering 11.8 and 8.9 million viewers respectively, for the same time period on the same night (Porter, March 28, 2018). Interestingly, North Carolina, a Trump state in the 2016 election, delivered some of lowest ratings in the country for *Roseanne* (Porter, March 28, 2018).

The *Roseanne* show elicited more than audience viewership and editorial reactions. President Trump personally called Roseanne Barr, the star of the show, to congratulate her on the show's ratings. Lest this just be perceived as an unimportant U.S. sit-com, the phone call from President Trump to Barr made international news, with the BBC News reporting on President Trump's call to Barr (BBC News, March 29, 2018). The BBC News reported the enormous popularity of the show, as demonstrated by the initial ratings and called out President Trump from an Ohio speech, celebrating the success of the show (BBC News, March 29, 2018). The BBC News report on the show came despite the show having no plans to be broadcast in the United Kingdom, at least as of yet. The Washington Post blasted the show, as making an incorrect Hollywood caricature out of Trump supporters as lower-class Caucasians (Scott, March 30, 2018).

Scott (2018) warned that this stereotype of Trump voters may mislead Democrats as to why Trump won in the first place. As Scott (2018) points out, while white middle-class voters may have voted for Trump, the *Roseanne* show's portrayal of the low-income level is not the entire story. As Scott asserts, twenty-percent of the white non-college educated voters have incomes that exceed \$100,000 (Scott, 2018). Trump also triumphed with white millennials and most college independents and college educated Caucasian voters (Scott, 2018). While the call from President Trump to the show's star and the warning of the risk for further stereotyping of Trump supporters may give some pause from both sides of the aisle, the show's rating for back-to-back episodes show a bit of humor and putting feuding families together works, at least in television-land. Why is a sit-com important in making a case for empathy helping bridge the political divide? Showing two sides of the divide coming together to talk with the huge draw and review it received, albeit for a sit-com, may indicate the desire America has to see the two sides talking, laughing, sharing their perspective, listening, and even breaking bread. As demonstrated by Vezzali, et al. (2015) with Harry Potter, even fictional literature relevant to the topic in a positive manner showed potential in breaking down outgroup divides.

Politics may be more about emotion than rationale behavior, further explaining the need to be surrounded by like-minded people. According to an Emory study (Westen, Blagov, Harenski, Kilts, & Hamann, 2006) that measured political opinions and judgements using an fMRI to assess reactions, supporters of Presidential candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry attempted to rationalize inconsistencies in their candidate's statements. In this study (Westen et al., 2006), the respondents saw three statements from the Presidential candidate they supported, either George W. Bush and

John Kerry. Of note, the second statement was in direct conflict to the first statement made by the candidate, while the third statement attempted to rationalize the conflicting first and second statements. Using an fMRI to measure the subjects' reaction, there was no activation in the rationale or conscious reasoning part of the brain, but rather the emotional brain circuitry reacted (Westen et al., 2006). This study indicates that logical reasoning is different than reasoning that includes emotional rationale and justification in the decision making. This study differentiates "motivated reasoning" from "cold reasoning" (Westen et al., 2006), with reactions to motivated reasoning shown in the anterior cingulate cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, insular cortex, lateral orbital cortex, and ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Important to note, there is overlap in the motivated reasoning activation areas with the Singer et al. (2004) study that showed activation in the rostral anterior cingulate cortex and the bilateral anterior insula.

Therein lies the issue: Partisan politics appears to be emotionally, not logically motivated. Research indicates that having friends in the opposing party creates less negative partisan feelings, but few Clinton or Trump supporters have friends that support the opposing candidate. Further, people find conversations with folks on the other side of the political divide stressful (PRC, 2016). Short of forcing friendships to create less divisive opinions of the opposing party, could there be another answer to create connections? Could the neural overlap between political motivation and empathy be a place to start?

Chapter VI. Conclusions

Empathy has been termed “the most valuable resource in the world” (Baron-Cohen, 2011, p. 153). Studies show it is an inborn trait in most mentally healthy adults, with fMRI imaging supporting empathic response. Empathy can be further nurtured in a positive manner, or empathy-bias can also occur. Further, research indicates that cross-cultural integration, empathy and perspective-taking training can ease empathy bias and ingroup and outgroup division. However, the divide in America is empirically proven to be as big as the seemingly hyperbolic headlines suggest. While encouraging empathy sounds like a simple solution, it is not. Americans spend more time with like-minded people and are uncomfortable having discussions with members of the opposing political party (PRC, 2016). Further, the literature review reveals that using empathy as a potential solution for political divisiveness is not a new idea. In 2017, the USC Price school of Public Policy and the USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism led a forum on how to increase conversation and even mentioned encouraging empathy (Kredell, April 5, 2017). But USC was not the first to recommend empathy as a cure for social divide. Stanford sociology professor Robb Willer suggested a technique called “moral reframing.” Willer states that both liberals and conservatives must use “empathy and respect” to unify the country (Shashkevich, January 23, 2017). Prior to Willer, sociologist and author, Arlie Russell Hochschild lived in Southern Louisiana for five years to better understand Tea Party politics and the people that supported them. Hochschild encouraged Americans to look over the “empathy wall” to empathize with voters on the other side of the fence (Hochschild, 2016, p. 5). If academics and sociologists propose empathy as a solution for the American divide, why has there not been more progress?

Bloom (2011), who argues against empathy, is correct in several regards. Empathic bias is a factor. There is evidence that there is a predisposition for people to be generally more empathetic to those that are part of their socially relevant group (Lamm & Majdandžić, 2015). The tendency for ingroup empathy bias could limit what might be the most important part of empathy, to try to understand the perspective of people that may have a different point of view and have a different experience. However, that is precisely why exposure to other groups, empathy training, and perspective-taking training is so important. Learning from Faulkner (2018) suggests that cosmopolitan-helping, or the willingness to assist those beyond the ingroup or in eyesight is increased through perspective-taking training, counter to Bloom's argument. Outgroup bias may begin early, as demonstrated with Italian fifth-graders outgroup bias toward immigrants. However, Vezzali, et al. (2015) demonstrates that using ubiquitous literature that portrays prejudice may be a relatively simple way to counter outgroup bias. Empathy bias is not always due to nefarious reasons, nor can the full blame be placed at the increase in technology usage (Carrier et al., 2015). In some cases, an absence of empathy can simply be due to a lack of exposure. As Cao et al. (2015) posit from their study of Chinese immigrants in Australia, people learn what they live. Even passive integrated living over time leads to greater empathy. As the integration of immigrants into mainstream culture through everyday living may not be applicable to integrating people from opposite political parties, empathic and perspective-taking training may help people understand a different point of view. With the increasing trend line in political division and the positive results indicated from empathy training and perspective-taking research, creating a systemic approach to empathy training could provide a much-needed opportunity to

reset the divide. Further, when empathy is demonstrated, it does not just help the person being heard, it also helps the person providing empathy (Batson, et al., 1988), indicating empathy may be a more powerful motivator than social reward or punishment. The results from teacher empathy training, where empathetic behavior in the classroom led to higher student performance and satisfaction, further suggests the promising results of empathy training.

While the research supports the potential positive outcomes of empathy and perspective-taking training, it is not an easy answer. As Heinz Kohut stressed, empathy alone will not solve the issues. Empathy is only the lens in which the right actions may take place. Empathy “informs” (Kohut, October 4, 1981) the actions. It is not a one-stop-shop approach. Rather, to achieve the success that empathy can deliver, it is predicated upon using that perspective to inform action. Further, those that need empathy training, the leaders, may be the last to sign-up. As the Lorimer and Jowett (2010) study indicated, often the most experienced coaches demonstrated the least accurate self-perception of their degree of empathy. Finally, several of the studies (Wakabayashi et al., 2006; Singer et al., 2006; Ben-Ami et al., 2011) indicate female humans and even female rats are more empathetic than their male counterparts. As many of our American political leaders tend to be male, this could potentially exacerbate the empathy-bias issue.

Without empathy training for politicians, our schools and divided community groups, it has little potential to achieve the full value as a resource to bring people together. As Fulbright submits, the importance of “intracultural education” is to see the world through the eyes of someone else (Rogers, et al., 2014, page 84). What if Claremont McKenna College took Fulbright’s suggestion? Could faculty, from

administrators to professors to coaches, receive empathy training similar to the successful training in the Lorimer and Jowett (2010) or Aspy et al. (1984) studies? Could empathy training be part of the freshman orientation, even using something as simple as relevant literature, as demonstrated in the Vezzali et al. (2015) study? During the past three years at Claremont McKenna, the College has made national news on two different instances, largely due to division on social and political issues. Claremont McKenna College may only be one school, but it might be the beginning of a microcosm that could impact the country.

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