INFLUENCES OF EMPATHY IN CHILDREN:

CONTEXTUAL CREATION OF MEDIA AND PARENTAL MESSAGES

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Larisa Christine Cornelius

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OR

Dean
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
University of Saskatchewan
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5C9
Canada

ABSTRACT

Empathy is an important aspect of moral development and its presence in children has been shown to relate to empathy levels in later life, as well as pro-social behavior (Thompson & Newton, 2010). There are many external influences that impact a child's moral and empathic development, including media and parents. Regarding media, past research demonstrated the modelling effect of behaviors displayed in various media outlets. The vast majority of research in this area has examined the negative effects of violent media on children's aggression and few studies have looked closely at the positive influences media can have on children's empathy development, with conflicting results. Within an Ethnomethodological framework, Study One examined how television media displays empathy compared to callous behavior by using a constant comparative method of analysis and focusing on verbal, nonverbal, and contextual factors in popular television shows for children aged 7-11. When exploring and understanding messages surrounding empathy in selected television shows, many themes emerged. Overall, themes suggested a black and white portrayal of characters as either all good or all bad, as well as context that gives authority to callous characters while pulling for pity for victimized characters. Regarding Study Two, through modelling and reinforcement, parental influence theorized to be is an important factor in developing empathy in children; however, few studies have examined this influence in a way that gives the parents a voice. Study Two allowed parents to reflect upon the way they influence their children's empathic development through the everyday context of parenting. By engaging parents of children ages 7-11 in a qualitative interview, Study Two explored how parents positively influence their child's empathy development in everyday interactions. The present research began a more positive and deep exploration of important influences in empathy development in a way that illuminates the worth of context. The various emerging themes from Study One and Study Two are discussed within the context of current research regarding empathy development in children and current theories of moral development. Limitations and areas for possible future research are also considered.

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1. Introduction, Theoretical Background, Related Literature, and Research Questions

1.1 Introduction

Empathy, and the positive behaviors and emotions that accompany it, is often not given consideration until it is absent. It is not until an individual completely disregards the feelings or experiences of another through words or actions that we became concerned about the important role empathy plays in relationships and how it might contribute to moral development which seems more salient. Understanding the role of empathy can be enhanced by following the typical pathway of empathy development, a pathway that begins early in childhood. Through the sharing of toys, the act of comforting other children, and the empathic responses of sadness upon seeing another person distressed, we can witness the outcomes of empathic and, by extension, moral development, even at a young age. Compared to moral development, the development of empathy has received less attention in the literature. However, although the connective links are yet unclear, many external influences such as parents, siblings, peers, school, and media seem to both assist in and impede the development of empathic and pro-social responses, which are deemed to underlie mature moral development. Looking at the contextual messages about empathy that may contribute to its development, the present research explores some of these obscure links. To address a primary importance of context when studying various messages about empathy, the present research used ethnomethodology as a framework to understand the regular, day-to-day messages media and parents provide regarding empathy. Ethnomethodology illuminates the way in which contextual factors help us create, change, or add to our views of the world. Ethnomethodology directed the research questions and thematic analysis provided the process by which themes were uncovered in television shows and parental interviews.

Because of both the attention given to it, and its link to empathy, the literature on moral development is outlined briefly at the outset. Following is a discussion of the concept of empathy, including its definition and differentiation from other similar concepts, indicators of empathy throughout early childhood, and gender differences in the expression of empathy. Once a foundation for understanding empathy has been laid, literature on two specific factors that can most influence empathy development in children, namely media and parenting, is reviewed. First, the role of media in influencing empathy is elucidated and then, in the adjacent territory of

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callousness, the role violent media has in shaping aggressive behavior in children is discussed. Second, the literature pertaining to the power parenting has in empathy development is reviewed. From this background, specific research questions are formulated and supported.

1.2. Moral Development.

Thompson and Newton (2010) provide an overview of how theories of moral development have grown and changed over the past few decades. Citing the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, the cognitive stages of Kohlberg and Piaget, as well as the behaviourally based theory of Bandura, they note that past theories of moral development have focused on fear of punishment, anxiety regarding consequences, reward expectations, and internalized guilt feelings as the driving forces in the development of conscience. These ideas rest on the assumption that children obey because of the consequences of disobeying.

1.2.1. Early Moral Theories: Freud, Bandura, and Kohlberg. In Freud's understanding of moral development and development in general, fear and struggle play a primary role in the development of a child. Freud discusses his theory of development in *Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1909/1962). Evoking such concepts as the Id, Ego, Superego, psychosexual stages, and Oedipal Complex, Freud outlines an attempt to mask unacceptable impulses in a way that is socially acceptable. To prevent rejection and overwhelming anxiety, the impulses of the Id are defended against through various mechanisms often unconscious to the individual. Moral development comes to a head during the Oedipal Complex from ages three to six. During the Oedipal Complex, children originally experience an unconscious sexual drive towards their opposite-sex caregiver and an unconscious death wish towards their same-sex caregiver. However, due to fear that the same-sex caregiver will uncover their unconscious wishes, they begin to identify with the same-sex caregiver; this identification leads to the internalization of the same-sex caregiver's values, and ultimately results in the Superego's creation. The Superego is then responsible for being the moral compass that influences the pro-social behavior of the individual. Although a simple explanation of his understanding of children's development, it outlines the driving factor of fear in Freud's understanding of all development, including moral development. Children are considered not-yet-moral and grow into moral adults by way of

obedience and consequences. Fearing that their natural desires will lead to rejection by society, children morph their behavior into acceptable offerings to society.

One prominent theory that is useful in understanding what impacts moral and empathic development of children is Social Cognitive Theory, put forth by Bandura (1986). Originally termed Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1965) and later reformulated to include more cognitive processes, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) hypothesizes that people learn in one of two ways— either through direct experience or through observation and imitation. As Bandura noted, observational learning is likely more efficient than learning by trial and error (Bandura, 2009), and many everyday people or events can act as models for observation. As they observe the model engaging in a behavior and become aware of the way in which the model is reinforced for that behavior, children may then imitate the behavior expecting similar reinforcement. Children's cognitive processes (what they attend to, encode, the way in which they evaluate and interpret the behavior) are engaged after initially observing the model, thus determining whether they will imitate the behavior or not; therefore, some children may imitate media or parental behaviors more readily than others.

Research supports SCT in some domains, finding that children who witness violent acts are more likely to act out violently themselves (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963; Boyatzis, Matillo, & Nesbitt, 1995; Coyne et al., 2008; Scharrer, 2005). While any individual or character can serve as a model to imitate, given the amount of time children spend with parents and in media consumption activities, it could be argued that these two influences are very important in terms of understanding their impact on child development. Further, certain characteristics of the model impact the observer's likelihood of imitation, such as admiration (Bandura, 2009), authority, wealth (Cialdini, 2001), respect, and trust (Frei & Shaver, 2002).

The behaviourist theory of Bandura, although less routed in fear than Freud's psychoanalytical theory, also sees the development of morals and conscience as primarily in response to felt consequences. Bandura understands behavior change as happening mainly because of either personally experienced consequences or consequences observed for others. In either scenario, it is the desire to avoid certain punishments, or even fear of those punishments, that changes behavior to become more social, considerate, and empathic.

In Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1982/1984), development is outlined as occurring in stages, with children playing an active role in their understanding. Nevertheless, obedience, punishment, and fear continue to feature as factors driving development through Kohlberg's three levels and six stages. At the Pre-conventional level, children engage in moral behavior either to avoid punishment (stage 1) or obtain some benefit (stage 2). The Conventional level sees children using moral behavior to manage their image as a good person (stage 3) and using moral behavior to maintain order in their world (stage 4). Although less blatantly focused on direct fear and punishment, children in stages 3 and 4 are moral, not because they are focusing on the other person's perspective, but because they fear the consequences of not acting morally (either being perceived as bad or living in a world where bad behavior is not punished justly). At the Post-Conventional level, children act morally according to social contracts used to respect the various views of others (stage 5) or because of their adherence to abstract universal views of justice (stage 6). Although Kohlberg's later stages of development often transcend ideas of obedience and consequences, he concedes that not everybody reaches these stages and, instead, many get "stuck" in the early stages where avoiding punishment, desire to be seen as "good" or accepted by the larger public, and the need to obey larger authorities are the main drive to engage in moral behavior.

1.2.2. Contemporary theories of moral development. In contrast to the earlier theories, Thompson and Newton (2010) note that more recent research has posited that the impetus for moral development is found in the early sensitivity to others' needs and feelings seen in toddlers and even infants, forming the foundations of the Social Domain and Social Information Processing theories of moral development. These theories focus on early helping behaviors, positive reinforcement for obeying, relational incentives for cooperating, and parental explanations that connect moral and obedient behaviors to others' emotions. Although the present research focuses on children in later childhood, meaning ages 7 to 11, moral development does not begin at these ages; instead, many theories conceptualize moral development observed in later childhood as building upon prior experiences in early childhood.

1.2.2.1. Social domain theory. Social Domain Theory (SDT) makes itself distinct in the way it connects one's emotional and cognitive understanding. SDT not only contends that one's

emotions and cognitions are connected, but that each is integral in the moral development of the other. For instance, people's experience with a social injustice makes them feel angry and ashamed, leading them to understand that others may feel similarly when experiencing even dissimilar forms of injustice. Through their own experience, they learn how others should be treated. Similar to other theories of development, SDT views children as active members in constructing ideas of morality as they seek to make sense of their world.

SDT posits that through experience children learn within three domains: the moral, the social, and the psychological. Moral concepts are so named because they are generally viewed as obligatory rules that generalize to (almost) all situations and remain in place even in the absence of rules or authority governing their implementation (e.g., murder is wrong even if no law existed prohibiting murder). Social concepts refer to generally culturally dependent rules used to create a sense of order and expectation within a society (e.g., waiting in line, not talking with a mouth full of food, gift giving). Psychological concepts are related to ideas of identity, privacy, and autonomy (e.g., choice of friends, what one chooses to wear, or control over one's body). The personal issues that make up the psychological domain are considered by SDT to be related to morality, although distinct in that matters are not based on right and wrong so much as personal preference. For young children, the psychological domain is likely to be more influenced by parents or other authorities; however, as children age, more and more aspects of the psychological domain are considered personal decisions to be made by the children themselves.

According to SDT, by the age of two years, children differentiate the moral, social, and psychological domains, an ability that continues to increase in flexibility and subtlety as children develop. For instance, by the age of five, children are able to better coordinate moral ideas with their own emotions. Additionally, children's developing theory of mind begins to establish an understanding of how their actions affect others. As theory of mind becomes more complex into adolescence, the ability to better understand what drives the actions of others leads to a more nuanced understanding of morality, allowing for specific circumstances to change their judgement of what is right or wrong. Adolescents are also able to use unexpressed consequences to inform their ideas of what is right and wrong. For instance, while younger children rely heavily on obvious cues of distress to understand the consequences of their actions (e.g., crying, saying

"ouch"), by adolescence, subtle downward glances or secluding oneself may serve as strong enough cues to express hurt or disappointment. Increased experience and understanding of interactions in the world also leads individuals to move away from morality dominated by individual rights and choices to morality focused on interactions between individuals and a social or cultural group.

    1.2.2.2. Social information processing. Originally meant to describe the continuum of moral behavior from social competence to aggressive behavior, Social Information Processing (SIP) outlines the way in which children take in, process, retain, and use information about social interactions from their environment. Each social experience gives children information to put into a "database" that also consists of information from prior social encounters and general knowledge, which is also influenced by biological predispositions. Then, in future social encounters, the children will pull from this database and use the information to interpret their environment. The children will then react according to their interpretations. For example, if children have a history of aggressive, hostile, or prejudiced interactions with school peers, they may interpret even the most neutral behaviors, such as an accidental nudge, as hostile and react aggressively. Meanwhile, children who have a history of primarily friendly and supportive encounters with their peers, may interpret the nudge as accidental and react with little emotion.

    SIP outlines six steps that occur quickly, sometimes simultaneously, prior to a reaction. The steps include: encoding situational cues, interpreting social intent, clarifying one's goals in the situation, generating some possible responses, evaluating each response, and deciding on which response to use. Research on SIP has primarily centered upon individuals with aggressive or antisocial histories, although other populations have been considered. Although SIP has been criticized for not considering the extent to which emotion can play a role in the processing of information, Lemerise and Arsenio (2000) have expanded on the SIP theory to include more emotional information (Lemerise & Maulden, 2010).

    Similar to SDT, SIP sees children as active in their moral development. It is through their interaction with and experience of the world and others that they build up a "database" through which all future interactions are filtered. Rewards and punishments are not the driving force, but rather children's own predispositions, past experiences, and interpretations. Further, fear is not

necessarily the impetus for pro-social behavior, although it may play a factor for children based on their database or past interactions. The driving force for pro-social behavior is based upon prior social interactions, the relational building between peers and caregivers, and interpretations for behaviors that caregivers or others may offer the children.

Both SDT and SIP are based upon research that explores pro-social and empathic indicators in children from infancy. This body of research indicates that early in life, children show empathy, or at least the potential for empathy through an understanding of emotion in others. As they age, children learn to further identify, label, interpret, understand, relate to, and react to the experiences and emotions of others, all of which increase their ability to empathize.

1.3. Empathy

Empathy is one of several emotions that are considered "moral" in that they come from a more advanced understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, self and other. Neither children nor adults can empathize if they cannot first begin to take another person's perspective, understand how events might affect one's emotions or experience, and have a basic concept of what is good and desirable versus what is bad, wrong, or undesirable.

Recently, the conceptualization of empathy has included the notion of sympathy. In fact, at its conception, sympathy had an almost identical definition to modern-day empathy. Gerdes (2011) outlined the history and evolution of "sympathy," noting that when first introduced as a word, sympathy meant to feel the emotions of another person. Although modern definitions of sympathy differ depending on the source, modern definitions of empathy can be summarized as one's ability to feel and understand the emotions and experience of another individual. In Gerdes' review, sympathy is given a modern definition more in line with feeling concern for another individual's distress; it does not require a sharing of the actual emotions experienced by that individual, but only a general "feeling bad" about another's negative life experience. In contrast, empathy is the sharing of the emotions of another, whether those emotions include sadness, joy, anger, frustration, or anything else one can feel.

Empathy is an "affective response that is identical, or very similar, to what the other person is feeling or might be expected to feel given the context—a response stemming from an understanding of another's emotional state or condition" (Eisenberg, Eggum, & Di Giunta, 2010,

p. 145). Empathy can be considered a multidimensional construct that involves empathic concern, emotional sharing, and perspective taking (Decety & Cowell, 2014). The components of empathy employ more than just emotional ability, but also behavioural and cognitive action. An individual who is displaying empathy understands another's experiences (perspective taking), feels an emotion similar to the one experienced by the other person (emotional sharing), and becomes motivated to care for the other person (empathic concern). Empathy is a complex process that requires an advanced level of development. Nevertheless, empathy begins to develop early in the life of an individual.

 1.3.1. Research on moral behavior and empathy. Despite earlier beliefs that children were largely egocentric, research has shown that children are actually quite aware of and concerned with the emotions of others, even from a very young age. For instance, infants can differentiate between positive and negative emotions by way of facial or vocal expression and infants prefer facial and vocal affect that are congruent (Bornstein & Arterberry, 2003; Fernald, 1993; Walker-Andrews, 1997). Infants are able to understand how emotions can portray the thoughts or desires of others. In several studies, by the age of 12 months infants could infer another's intention based on that individual's emotional expression (Liszkowski, Carpenter, Striano, & Tomasello, 2006; Phillips, Wellman, & Spelke, 2002). In these studies infants either pointed to or showed interest in objects in which the experimenter had previously shown interest through emotional expressions. These studies provide evidence that the ability to use emotional information in interpersonal interactions begins early.

 Infants are not only aware of facial expressions and their underlying meaning, they are also interested in how others react to unknown situations. Through social referencing, infants as young as 12 months of age seek emotional information from the expressions of adults when faced with an unknown situation and in doing so, they gage the appropriate emotional reaction to the situation (Moses, Baldwin, Rosicky, & Tidball, 2001; Sorce, Emde, Campos, & Klinnert, 1985). The act of social referencing indicates that young children are not only interested in what others think and how they react emotionally, but they also have the ability to interpret the emotions and expressions of others. The interest in and ability to interpret emotions allows the guardians to connect the emotional cues of others to the children's behavior (Thompson & Newton, 2010). For

example, guardians may refer their child to the tears of another child, whom their child just hit, explaining that the aggressive behavior (hitting) has caused sadness (tears). In this way, the child can begin to understand how his or her actions affect the feelings of others.

By the time they reach toddlerhood, children become much more skilled at reading emotions and more willing to offer help when an adult expresses a need for help (through body movements and emotions alone; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006, 2007). Toddlers begin to respond to the desires of others rather than only to their own wishes. For example, Repacholi and Gopnik (1997) demonstrated that toddlers will offer a food item to which another individual expressed a preference rather than offering the food item they themselves prefer. With praise and encouragement, young toddlers (beginning their second year of life) demonstrate increased helping behavior (Dahl et al., 2017), showing the importance of caregiver attention to the pro-social interactions of toddlers.

Young children's awareness of and interest in emotions shows their early moral development; these are the early skills they will need to build later empathy, compassion, guilt, and altruism. Thompson and Newton (2010) note that being aware of others' emotions motivates the young children to help and is a precursor to the later expression of more complex empathy. This is also the beginning of their ability to understand how their behavior affects those around them.

Even though the moral emotions (guilt, empathy, remorse) are complex, toddlers begin to express them, demonstrating more advanced forms of moral development. For instance, toddlers exhibit guilt behaviors (unprovoked confession, attempts to make amends), shame behaviors (avoiding adults, anxiety over wrongdoing), and embarrassment (avoiding eye contact) on appropriate occasions (Barrett, 2005; Drummond, Hammond, Satlof-Bedrick, Waugh, & Brownell, 2017; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). Regarding positive moral emotions, toddlers also display empathy, such as offering comfort when others are upset, questioning the cause of one's sadness, or becoming personally distressed upon seeing another in distress (Spinrad & Stifter, 2006; Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, & Emde, 1992). Although toddlerhood marks the beginning of a much longer stage of moral development, these foundations are important for later conscience development; individual differences in guilt behavior at 22, 33, and 45 months of age remained

stable and predicted differences in conscience at 56 months of age (Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002).

Although moral development has its foundations in infancy and early childhood, children in later childhood have reached a distinctly different period of moral development. As cognitive abilities increase, perspective taking skills advance, and experiences with interpersonal emotions become more prevalent, children become better able to understand the feelings and thoughts of others (Eisenberg, Murphy, & Shepard, 1997; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006). By preschool, children are already reacting to the negative emotions of others (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1982; Zahn-Waxler, et al., 1992), and they are responding with pro-social behavior when others feign an injury or are distressed (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987; Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, & Emde, 2001). These empathic and pro-social responses increase in sophistication during the elementary school years and in one study elementary-aged children reported more empathy experiences (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987).

At the age of six or seven, children reach a distinctly more sophisticated kind of empathy that includes a self-reflective understanding of their own empathy (Hoffman, 2000). Children aged 7 and up begin to understand that their empathic responses are caused by the distress of others (Strayer 1993). Further, by age seven the more complex forms of moral emotions begin to emerge (Harris, 1989) and they greatly increase between the ages of seven and nine (Keller, Gummerum, Wang, & Lindsey, 2004). Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) noted an increase in empathy and sympathy across childhood, both when these moral emotions were being self-reported and upon observation. Although it was unclear whether this upward trajectory in empathy continued into adolescence, it was clear that there are quantitative changes in the experience of moral emotions as children move from preschool and into the elementary years.

By age eight, children begin to understand that different people can have different reactions to the same situation (Fischer, Shaver, & Cornochan, 1990). At age nine and ten, when understanding their current emotions and behaviors, children begin to take into consideration previous life events (Gnepp & Gould, 1985). As children reach adolescence, their empathic abilities further mature as they are better able to understand emotions that seem to conflict with

circumstances and react in a more subtle and appropriate way to the unspoken needs and desires of others (Hoffman, 2000).

Children's experience of empathy is not merely emotional or cognitive, but also translates into behavior. Children who experience increased empathy through objective and physical measures, as well as through self-report also demonstrate a greater pro-social responding such as increased helping behavior and decreased aggressive acts (Eisenberg, Eggum, & Di Giunta, 2010). For instance, Catherine and Schonert-Reichl (2011) found that, compared to children in grades 1-3, children in grades 4-7 had increased levels of empathy, and, when presented with a crying infant, offered more potential causes for the crying and more caregiving strategies. Further, earlier signs of empathy in children based on parent ratings are related to later pro-social responding as indicated by parent and teacher report (Taylor, Eisenber, Spinrad, Eggum, Sulik, 2013).

As children reach late childhood, the consistency between their empathic emotions and pro-social behaviors increases as well. For instance, when shown empathy-inducing stimuli, mid-elementary school children who reported less positive emotion from the stimuli also displayed more pro-social responding (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990). In contrast, for younger children the correlation between reports of empathy and pro-social responding was weaker (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). In addition, empathic responding in children aged 7 and up becomes more demonstrative as they enter wider social circles and experience more opportunities to display their empathy and moral development. For instance, as peer interaction increases, children have more opportunity to hear about and respond to sadness or anger from other children.

Although with increasing age and cognitive capacity children become better able to empathize with those wholly unlike themselves or far removed from their own circumstances, a closer relationship between the children and another person assists in the empathic process. Both feeling empathy and acting pro-socially as a result of empathy increase within closer relationships. Children report and demonstrate greater empathy to those with whom they feel a stronger bond or with those whom they identify as similar to themselves (Cheng, Chen, Lin, Chou, & Decety, 2010; Clark, Boothby, Clark-Polner, & Reis, 2015; Davidov, Zahn-Waxler,

Roth-Hanania, & Knafo, 2013; Masten, Gillen-O'Neel, & Spears-Brown, 2010; Rhodes &

Chalik, 2013).

1.3.2. Gender differences in empathy. Just as with age differences, it is important to

consider differences in moral development and empathy for boys and girls. Regarding empathy,

the gender difference becomes important when one takes into account the gender stereotypes of

females as nurturing, empathic, and gentle, and males as independent, strong, and competent.

However, the strong stereotypes regarding expected empathic reactions from boys or girls are not

clearly supported by empirical evidence. As Eisenberg and colleagues (2006) note, the strength of

gender differences in empathy depends largely on the ways in which empathy is assessed, and in

some cases, the difference is rather small.

When children are asked to self-report general levels of empathy (and sympathy), gender

differences, and the size of these effects, are large, demonstrating greater empathy from girls than

boys (Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; Garaigordobil, 2009; Karniol, Gabay, & Ochion, 1998;

Olweus & Endresen, 1998). The difficulty with relying on self-report of general empathy levels is

that it is highly obvious what is being assessed, and children, who are aware of gender

stereotypes regarding empathy behaviors, may answer according to what reactions are *expected*

given their gender. In support of stereotypes affecting self-report of empathy, Eisenberg and

Fabes (1998) found that the discrepancies between the level of self-reported empathy from boys

and girls increased with age, a pattern that was similar to the increase in awareness of and

adherence to gender stereotypes (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Gender stereotypes may also explain

why parents and teachers asked to rate children's empathy typically report girls having higher

levels than boys (Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, et al., 1998; Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson,

Usher, & Bridges, 2000; Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1999; Romer, Ravitch,

Tom, Merrell, & Wesley, 2011).

Research attempting to assess empathy levels in children using a different methodology

finds less discrepancy between empathy levels of boys and girls. For instance, when children are

given a specific situation (using vignettes, puppets, or film), and then assessed for empathy, there

are much smaller differences and effect sizes showing higher empathy levels in girls (Kienbaum,

Volland, & Ulich, 2001; Strayer & Roberts, 1997; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992; Zhou et al., 2002).

Similarly, when objective observations of nonverbal behaviors are used to assess empathy levels in children between 4 and 13 years, the results less consistently favour girls. When researchers measure facial expressions in response to a film depicting a person in distress, some find that girls display more empathic expressions than boys (Hastings et al., 2000; Strayer & Roberts, 1997), while others find no sex differences (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, & Miller, 1989; Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) completed a meta-analysis of nonverbal depictions of empathy in children and found that girls tended to display more behaviors indicative of empathy than boys. Altogether, it appears that although girls may display higher levels of empathy, empirical evidence is much less conclusive than gender stereotypes regarding how large the difference in empathy is between boys and girls.

Regardless of age or gender, the development of moral emotions, specifically empathy, does not occur in a vacuum. Children are frequently engaged with people and activities that can bolster their understanding and expression of empathy. It is important to consider the ways in which influences, such as media, may impact children's development of morality in general, and empathic emotions in particular.

1.4. Children and the Media

Within the context of understanding *how* media affects children's morality-related behaviors, it is important to understand *why* media has any influence at all. One reason for this influence may be linked to the sheer quantity of media consumed by children. Some estimates have children using various types of media upwards of seven hours each day (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) with a significant portion of that media use being spent watching television (Carlsson, 2010; Rideout et al., 2010). Comparing the high frequency of actual media use with the American Academy of Pediatrics' (2011) recommendation that children only have one to two hours of "screen time" (use of computer, television, or video games) each day, and no screen time before the age of two (2011b), merely emphasizes the volume of children's usage of media. Despite warnings to limit media use in children, the time spent with media is not likely to decrease, particularly as schools and workplaces seek to incorporate social media content and internet use into their education and functioning. However, media use can be concerning when it is considered that increased time spent with media relates to

decreased time spent in various other activities that benefit a child's development. Singer and Singer (2012) note that children spend more time using media than talking to their parents, playing, exploring their environment, or reading.

Many factors have been linked to higher rates of media use. Children are most likely to use media frequently: if media use is normative for their family and no rules exist for television viewing (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Rideout et al., 2010); if they are of low socioeconomic status (Anderson, Mead, & Sullivan, 1986; Comstock, 1991); if media resources are easily accessed through multiple household television sets and many channels available (Comstock & Scharrer, 2012); and as they age (Comstock & Scharrer, 2007). Links have also been found to suggest a genetic basis for media use motivation, leading some individual to obtain higher rates of pleasure from viewing television (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Plomin & Defries, 1985; Rothschild, Thorson, Reeves, Hirsch, & Goldstein, 1986). Although the present research intends to explore the influence of media and parenting on empathy development concurrently and in separate studies, these two facets of children's lives may be connected to one another as well.

Despite how access to media occurs, a plethora of research outlines the effects its use has on childhood development, although this influence happens through a variety of channels. Subrahmanyam (2009) outlines three pathways through which children are affected by media use. The first pathway is termed the displacement hypothesis and states that the more time spent using media, the less time children have to spend on other beneficial activities, such as schoolwork and reading (Rideout et al., 2010), sleep (Van den Bulck, 2004), or physical activity (Stettler, Singer, & Sutter, 2004). The second pathway through which children are affected by media is through the formal features of media, meaning the symbols and representations of media. Children must decode the actions, images, and symbols of media and it is thought that with repeated media exposure, and hence, repeated decoding, the skills needed to decode media become internalized (Subrahmanyam, 2009). Once internalized, these skills are thought to then affect all the other representational skills of children. The third pathway through which children are affected by media is through the media content, or messages sent through the formal features. These may be messages of literacy, history, materialism, or aggression, and much research indicates that media

influences the moral emotions and behaviors of children, such as level of aggression and likelihood of engaging in pro-social behavior.

       1.4.1. The influence of television content on children. One effect of media content influence that is studied with great vigour is the effect of violent media on aggression and violence. If children are spending more than seven hours each day using media, and if the media they are consuming is full of violent content (Dill, Gentile, Richter, & Dill, 2005; Hetsroni, 2007**;** Hunnicutt & Andrews, 2009; Kubrin, 2005), then what might the effect of violent media exposure be? Bushman and Huesmann (2012) nicely categorize violent media's effects. First there is the aggressor effect, meaning the link between viewing violent media and aggressive behavior. Second, there is a fear-of-victimization effect, where consuming violent media may create more fear of becoming a victim of crime. And third, there is a conscience-numbing effect wherein we are desensitized to violence due to increased exposure through media. It is important to consider the effect media has on one's anxiety of becoming a victim. For instance, individuals report greater anxiety about and expected frequency of being victimized in an unfamiliar setting with increased media exposure (Heath & Petraitis, 1987; Peterson & Zill, 1981**;** Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Sparks & Ogles, 1990). However, a more concerning possibility is that media exposure is creating individuals who are more aggressive and less affected by seeing violence.

       Accumulating experimental evidence shows that exposure to violent media leads to immediate increases in violent behavior such as giving others electric shocks (Geen & O'Neal, 1969), sounding loud noise blasts (Bushman, 1995), and being physically aggressive towards others (Bjorkqvist, 1985; Bushman & Gibson, 2011; Josephson, 1987). In quasi-experimental studies, boys shown frequent media violence were more likely to get involved in physical and verbal altercations (Boyatzis et al.,1995; Leyens, Parke, Camino, & Berkowitz, 1975; Sebastian, Parke, Berkowitz, & West, 1978). Long-term effects have also been observed in children who are exposed to media violence. Children who view greater amounts of violent television, participate in violent video games, or listen to violent music have been found to show increased rates of aggressive behavior in both later childhood (Huesmann & Eron, 1986) and as young adults (Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003; Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1972; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995). These

effects have been found independent of aggression rate in childhood and when controlling for other factors such as parenting, socioeconomic status, or intelligence (Huesmann et al., 2003).

Even for people who do not take on an actively aggressive role, violent media can affect the way they sympathize and empathize with victims of violence. Both adults and children who frequently view violent media display lower levels of empathy for victims of crime, even several days after the initial media viewing (Bushman & Anderson, 2009; Drabman & Thomas, 1974; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988; Molitor & Hirsh, 1994). One explanation for reduced empathy with exposure to media violence is the physiological desensitization that occurs with frequently viewing aggressive acts (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007; Cline, Croft, & Courrier, 1973; Thomas, 1982). Unfortunately, one consequence of desensitization towards violence may be an increased likelihood of acting as the aggressor (Bushman & Huesmann, 2012).

Despite the plethora of research examining the adverse effects of media on childhood development, there can be more positive consequences of media use. Wright and Huston (1995) noted that toddlers who viewed educational television programs showed increased readiness for school by Kindergarten (although viewing non-educational television programs predicted decreased school readiness). Further, many media programs directed towards children contain a social or moral lesson (Woodard, 1999) and one study of children's programming observed at least four acts of helping or sharing for every hour (Smith et al., 2006).

The research examining the link between pro-social television and pro-social behavior is less prevalent than the research examining aggressive television and its relationship to aggression in children. Nevertheless, in one study, children who recently viewed a television show with a pro-social message were more likely to engage in pro-social behavior, which in this study, meant they more frequently sought out help for a confederate who appeared to be in trouble (Poulos, Rubinstein, & Liebert, 1975). Furthermore, Abelman (1985) found that children were strongly influenced by pro-social television when their parents also used more pro-social discipline techniques. It is important to note, however, that despite some research suggesting that pro-social television influences children to behave pro-socially, there is a need for caution. Many studies only show small effects for the influence of pro-social television on later behavior; the effects

become even smaller when other factors, such as parenting or personality, are considered (Mares & Woodard, 2012). Furthermore, children who report watching many pro-social television programs also report viewing antisocial television programs frequently, perhaps negating or contaminating the pro-social messages with antisocial content (Wiegman, Kuttschreuter, & Baarda, 1992). Research has also found that including moral lessons within or after violence is ineffective in increasing pro-social attitudes and behaviors in children (Boyatzis et al., 1995; Liss, Reinhardt, & Fredriksen, 1983).

An additional obstacle to the influence of pro-social messages on children comes when considering the cognitive limitations of children. For instance, research has found that children do not always report an accurate "moral of the story" (Narvaez, Gleason, Mitchell, & Bentley, 1999; Rosenkoetter, 1999); in some instances, even fifth grade students accurately chose the correct pro-social message only 45% of the time (Narvaez et al., 1999). Further, Whitney, Vozzola, and Hoffman (2005) found that children aged 8-17 gave many different moral interpretations of *Harry Potter* characters. Fisch, Brown, and Cohen (2001) noted that children also often take the moral lesson too concretely and do not generalize to multiple situations; for instance stating that it is not good to lie to your mother if you break a vase, rather than making the more general conclusion that it is not good to lie. If children are unable to understand the pro-social messages, then transferring those messages to real life behaviors becomes an especially difficult task. However, if the story is realistic, rather than grounded in fantasy, children seem to be better able to accurately understand the pro-social message (Goldman, Reyes, & Varnhagen, 1984; Lehr, 1988), making it possible to focus television so that it provides pro-social, child-appropriate, accessible messages.

As noted previously, one difficulty when discussing the influence of pro-social messages in media is the general paucity of research in the area. There is a plethora of research discussing the effect of violent and aggressive media on children. The research that does examine pro-social messages in media is mostly concerned with helping behaviors rather than displays of empathy, or even sympathy. Given the ubiquity of media and the powerful effects demonstrated in terms of aggression and violence, it is possible that with more research, we may be better able to understand media's effects on pro-social emotions and behaviors in children. Further, more

research on the pro-social emotions and behaviors may clarify why pro-social messages are misunderstood or missed by children, while messages of aggression, violence, and callousness are understood and internalized. The current research attempts to better understand the positive and negative messages of children's media by exploring the portrayal of both positive and negative morality-related messages—namely, the portrayal of empathy compared to the portrayal of callousness.

1.5. The Influence of Parenting on Empathy

Moral development is partly shaped by parental influence (Thompson & Newton, 2010). Generally, positive parenting practices are related to later pro-social behavior in children (Clark & Ladd, 2000; McGrath, Zook, & Weber-Roehl, 2003). More specifically, behaviors between caregiver and child impact the development of empathy in children, even from infancy, and then into later childhood. Warm, encouraging parents are more likely to observe their children react to others in a concerned way (Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Strayer & Roberts, 2004). When mothers model empathy and make themselves emotionally available to their distressed children, the children engage in imitation and conditioning that teaches them to respond to others' distress in a similar fashion (Hoffman, 1984; Robinson et al., 2001). Beyond modeling feelings of empathy and concern, parents also teach their children to regulate emotions and resolve conflicts, which assist their children in displaying higher levels of empathy and sympathy towards others (Eisenberg, 2003). In addition, children who have a secure parent-child relationship and who experience positive emotions from their parents are more advanced in their conscience development (Kochanska, 1995; Kochanska, Forman, & Coy, 1999; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Children are also found to be more advanced in their conscience development when they have mothers who reference the feelings of others while discussing the children's prior good or bad behavior. In contrast, having a mother who refers to rules and consequences when discussing past behavior has no predictive value for conscience development (Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 2002). It is not only discipline, but also these more positive incentives of a relationship that lead children in moral development (Thompson & Newton, 2010).

Nevertheless, the relationship between parenting practices, the development of empathy, and pro-social behavior is not straightforward. For instance, Krevans and Gibbs (1996) found evidence that empathy in children is an important mediator between positive parenting practices and later pro-social behavior. In addition, it has been found that warm and responsive parenting practices that include teaching children to take the perspective of others, mediate the relationship between a caregiver's own level of empathy and the children's development of empathy skills (Farrant, Devine, Maybery, & Fletcher, 2012). Taken together, it appears that an empathic parent will be more likely to use warm and positive parenting practices, enhancing their children's own empathy which then increases the likelihood that the children will engage in pro-social behavior.

Despite parenting practices, individual differences influence the development of empathy. For instance, children with a temperament characterized by low emotional reactivity, low fearfulness, and low reactivity to punishment are more likely to display low levels of empathy and guilt (Dadds & Salmon, 2003; Frick & Morris, 2004). Nevertheless, parenting practices also interact with temperament to produce different outcomes in empathy development. Cornell and Frick (2007) found that behaviourally inhibited children showed high levels of guilt and empathy regardless of the parenting practices to which they were exposed. Children exhibiting a difficult, or more uninhibited temperament benefited most from consistent, authoritative parenting practices; if these children experienced authoritarian parenting, they were less likely to be rated as having high levels of empathy.

Parenting practices and their interaction with children as individuals, are not experienced in a vacuum; children are also interacting with peers, adults, organizations, and media. In recent years, the prevalence of media use has led researchers to search for its effect on the behavior and development of children, including their development of morality-related behaviors, such as aggression and empathy. Considering the prevalence of media use, and particularly the link between media use and violence or pro-social behavior that will be discussed shortly, it appears the current fascination of media effects is warranted, providing further reason to explore both parenting and media as potentially important components of empathy messages directed towards children.

1.6. Callousness

In understanding the development of empathy in children, it may be helpful to also understand callous emotions and behaviors in children. When an individual does not demonstrate empathy at a time when empathy is expected, that individual is said to have been callous. For some adults and children, callousness is an occasional response; for other adults and children, responding to others with a lack of empathy is a chronic feature of their personality. Callous-unemotional (CU) traits (lack of empathy, lack of guilt or remorse, and a general poverty of emotions; Frick & Marsee, 2006) have been considered a distinguishing factor in psychopathy (Kazdin, 1997) and are an important correlate of heightened aggression in children (Frick, Cornell, Barry, Bodin, & Dane, 2003). Furthermore, children with CU traits often partake in more dangerous activities (Frick, Cornell, Barry et al., 2003), are less reactive to emotional stimuli (Blair, 1999), and are less sensitive to punishment (Barry et al., 2000). The presence of callous-unemotional traits also designates a more severe and stable pattern of antisocial behavior (Caputo, Frick, & Brodsky, 1999; Christian, Frick, Hill, & Tyler, 1997; Frick, Cornell, Bodin et al., 2003; Kruh, Frick, & Clements, 2005).

Although lack of empathy is a defining callous-unemotional component, Dadds and colleagues demonstrated that at times and with increased cognitive abilities, older children can learn to mimic empathy in order to get what they want from others (Dadds et al., 2009). Although this is not true empathy in the typical sense, their research indicates a link between callousness and empathy besides the inherent relationship of the two concepts as opposites of one another.

Much research has demonstrated the difficult and possibly devastating pathway for children who lack empathy. Therefore, just as it is important to understand normative development of empathy, it is also important to learn about disruptions in that typical development. Understanding messages that reinforce or model callousness, as well as understanding messages that interrupt the typical development of empathy, is important in capturing the way childhood moral development is impacted.

1.6.1. Aggression. A behaviourally prominent way to detect callousness is by looking at aggression. There are many types of aggression discussed in research literature, however, regardless of the way in which aggression is defined or categorized, its presence in children,

particularly when of a more proactive nature, can indicate disruption of or delay in the moral development process that assists children in developing empathy. Aggressive behavior is often linked to the development of other areas in children's lives, specifically the trajectory of their moral development. Deficient moral development, particularly a lack of empathy, is tied to aggressive behavior (Kreuger, Markon, Patrick, Benning, & Kramer, 2007). Aggressive behavior is important to identify and explore in children, as it has been shown to be stable across the lifespan (Farrington, 2003; Huesmann, Dubow, & Boxer, 2009; Moffitt, 1993; Pulkkinen, Lyyra, & Kokko, 2009). Of further importance to the present research, physical aggression, with an increasing focus on relational aggression, is the main focus of research exploring the effects of media violence. The continued use of violent media may propagate aggressive behavior, particularly if empathy, an important factor in aggression, is not well developed.

Although there are several factors that predict aggression, the process through which children become aggressive is not as well understood. Nevertheless, it is known that there are both biological and genetic influences on aggression; these are neurotransmitter levels, emotional arousal, and perceptual biases (Cloninger & Gottesman, 1987; Deater-Deckard & Plomin, 1999; Mednick, Gabrielli, & Hutchings, 1984). As well there are contextual influences, such as religion, socioeconomic status, divorce, and parenting practices (Caspi et al., 2002; Duncan, 2002; Rutter, 1996). Parents have influence beyond passing on genes and creating an environment for their children; parents also serve as models for aggressive behavior (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007) and serve as conditioning agents for their children's behavior (Patterson, 1986). No matter how the aggression is passed from parent to child, it is clear that parents with high levels of aggression often pass this on to their children (Conger, Neppl, Kim, & Scaramella, 2003; Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, Lizotte, Krohn, & Smith, 2003). Beyond parental involvement, researchers have been able to establish a link between early maltreatment and later aggression with mediating cognitive processes such as hostile attributions and hyper vigilance (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992).

Social information processing (SIP) has been a popular method of explaining aggression in children (de Castro, 2010). This model takes into consideration the encoding, processing, goal activation, and decision-making abilities of children and uses dysfunction at any of these steps to

explain the aggressive behavior of certain children (Crick & Dodge, 1994). However, controversy abounds regarding the abilities and social outcome of aggressive children according to the SIP model. On one hand, certain groups noted that children with overly aggressive tendencies have well developed social cognitive skills that they can use to manipulate others and are able to achieve social goals effectively, thereby maintaining social status (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). On the other hand, Crick and Dodge (1999) pointed to the long-term developmental deficits of overly aggressive children and concluded that they could not be considered socially competent.

1.6.1.1. Reactive and proactive aggression. Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) discussed the debate about outcomes for aggressive children. They stated that this debate did not take into consideration different types of aggression; more specifically, they did not consider reactive versus proactive aggression. Reactive aggression is a response to a frustrating or threatening event, such as hitting somebody in response to getting hit. Reactive aggression typically involves difficulties in the early stages of social information processing, such as misjudging the level of threat. Proactive aggression, also called instrumental aggression, is an act done in order to achieve a desired goal, such as obtaining money or status and is often more highly linked to empathy deficits. Unlike reactive aggression, proactive aggression typically involves deficits in later social information processing steps, such as deficits in goal setting and evaluating behavior (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001; Xu & Zhang, 2008). These differences, as Arsenio and Lemerise noted, are the reasons behind the different social competencies seen in aggressive children. Arsenio and Lemerise's argument, as well as additional research (Merk, de Castro, Koops, & Matthys, 2005), highlight the usefulness of dealing with aggression categorically in order to glean more precise information.

Arsenio, Adams, and Gold (2009) studied the differences of individuals with reactive and proactive aggression and found that proactive aggression, unlike reactive aggression was linked to deficits in moral reasoning. The presence of high levels of proactive aggression also corresponded to less social difficulties (Poulin & Boivin, 2000), higher theory of mind (Renouf et al., 2010) and more long-term negative consequences (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2002) than the presence of high levels of reactive aggression. It is important to note however, that while

some children show only high levels of reactive aggression, most children who show high levels of proactive aggression also show high levels of reactive aggression (Brown, Atkins, Osborne, & Milnamow, 1996; Polman, de Castro, Koops, van Boxtel, & Merk, 2007). Most importantly for the proposed research, proactive aggression and its corresponding outcomes and traits are linked to deficits in empathy and the presence of callousness (Kruh et al., 2005; Frick, Cornell, Barry et al., 2003). Therefore, when looking at the influence of parenting and media on the development of empathy in children in the current research, proactive aggression will be a particularly important type of aggression to consider.

1.6.1.2. Physical, relational, and verbal aggression. Although dividing aggression into reactive and proactive is a useful and common distinction, aggression can also be divided based on the form the aggressive act takes, that is, whether the aggression is physical, relational, or verbal in nature. This distinction is made regardless of the motivation behind the aggression (i.e., as a response to a threat or as a way to obtain a reward), and therefore proactive aggression can take the form of physical, relational, or verbal aggression. Physical aggression includes any behavior that intends to cause bodily harm to another individual or physical damage to property. Obvious examples include hitting another person or punching a hole in the wall. Relational aggression includes "behaviors that harm others through damage to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion " (Crick et al., 1999, p. 77). Common examples include gossiping, spreading rumours, or telling others to ignore an individual. Finally, verbal aggression involves using words to harm another person (through name calling or insulting). Verbal aggression occasionally overlaps with relational aggression, so an act is only considered verbal aggression if it is not used to harm another's social status or relationships (Coyne, Robinson, & Nelson, 2010).

Much of the previously cited research on aggression has focused on physical aggression. There has also been an increasing focus on relational aggression and its causes and consequences. Relational aggression has been linked to several difficulties such as peer rejection (Crick, 1996), low self-esteem (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001), and depression (Marsee, Weems, & Taylor, 2008). The negative effects of being relationally aggressive are more pronounced for girls and can lead to externalizing problems (Prinstein et al., 2001), and violent behavior (Moretti,

Holland, & McKay, 2001; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Several predictors of relational aggression have been found, such as inconsistent parenting, harsh punishment, and coercive parenting, particularly maternal coercion (Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992; McFadyen-Ketchum, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 1996).

Many of the risk factors for relational aggression are similar for physical aggression. Therefore, many researchers have turned to gender as an explanation for the use of relational versus physical aggression, but with conflicting results. Studies have found that girls are more relationally aggressive than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), that boys are more relationally aggressive than girls (Goldstein, Tisak, & Boxer, 2002; Henington, Hughes, Cavell, & Thompson, 1998) and that relational aggression is equal across genders (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). Still further research looking across types of aggression found that while males and females show similar levels of aggression, males show more overt aggression, have higher rates of delinquency and carry out more violent acts (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Rose, 2000). Researchers have looked to socialization factors to explain why males are traditionally more aggressive than females. Females tend to receive more instructions to refrain from aggression than males from both parents and teachers. Furthermore, parents and teachers have been found to ignore or rationalize male aggression (Zahn-Waxler & Polanishka, 2004). Even peers seem to allow male aggression to go unpunished while reacting negatively to assertion from females (Fagot & Hagan, 1985). Despite research stating that males have been traditionally more aggressive than females, researchers agree that general aggression in females is increasing and growing closer to the level of aggression seen in males (Chesney-Lind & Brown, 1999). The increase in aggression appears to intensify for females who associate with other relationally aggressive females (Werner & Crick, 2004).

Compared to physical and relational aggression, very little research has looked exclusively at verbal aggression in children. Many researchers investigating verbal aggression combine it with relational or physical aggression. The few studies that have been done in the area of verbal aggression show that children self-report using more verbal aggression than physical aggression (Verona, Sadeh, Case, Reed, & Bhattacharjee, 2008). Also, during adolescence males tend to be more verbally aggressive than females. Just as is the case with relational and physical

aggression, parental verbal aggression greatly influences children's well-being. Children with parents who are verbally aggressive show an increase in general aggression (Pagani et al., 2009), as well as anxiety, depression and anger (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, & McGreenery, 2006). Morimoto and Sharma (2004) found that these negative outcomes were much greater for females who experience verbal aggression from their parents. However, maternal verbal aggression is related to internalizing problems for males (Lee, Beauregard, & Bax, 2005). Finally, children who perceive verbal aggression between their parents have a greater likelihood of being involved in a violent relationship in their adulthood (Palazzolo, Roberto, & Babin, 2010). Not much research has looked at the long-term effects for children who are verbally aggressive themselves, but one study discovered a link between physical and verbal aggression. Pagani and colleagues (2009) found that children who were physically aggressive tended to show increased verbal aggression towards their family. Despite the paucity of research looking exclusively at verbal aggression, there is already a link being established between verbal aggression and negative outcomes for children. It is important to continue research in this area, particularly due to the fact that verbal aggression is experienced more often than either relational or physical aggression.

1.6.1.3. Indirect aggression. Just as it has become popular to divide aggression into physical, relational, or verbal, many researchers make the distinction between direct and indirect aggression. Indirect aggression is summed up by Bjorkqvist (2001) as social manipulation, basically using others as a means of attack rather than attacking an individual directly. Generally, it has been found that older children (above 8 years of age) tend to use indirect aggression more frequently (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Geriepy, 1989; Osterman et al., 1998). As children develop verbally and socially, they increase their use of indirect aggression (Bjorkqvist, 1994). Females also tend to make use of indirect aggression more frequently than males, while males use physical aggression more often (Bonica, Arnold, Fisher, Zeljo, & Yershova, 2003; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Tapper & Boulton, 2004). Interestingly, females also tend to begin using indirect aggression earlier in childhood than males (Vaillancourt, Miller, Fagbemi, Cote, & Tremblay, 2007).

Controversies regarding the differentiation between relational/social and indirect aggression have arisen. Certain researchers (Bjorkqvist, 2001) argue that indirect aggression is

essentially the same as relational or social aggression. A meta-review by Archer and Coyne (2005) demonstrated limited differences and vast commonalities between the constructs of indirect aggression, social aggression, and relational aggression; they argue that differentiating between these is not entirely useful. Further, in a factor analysis by Warren, Richardson, and McQuillian (2011), two measures of indirect aggression and one measure of relational aggression were found to all load on the same factor, suggesting they each measure the same construct. Additionally, they found that the indirect and relational measures were assessing behaviors distinct from more direct forms of aggression such as physical and verbal assaults. Finally, they noted that each measure of indirect and relational aggression related in similar ways to other variables such as anger, hostility, impulsivity, and ability to delay gratification. Similar to Archer and Coyne (2005), Warren and colleagues (2011) concluded that psychometrically sound measure of indirect and relational aggression are functionally the same construct.

In contrast, relational aggression and indirect aggression can be argued as two distinct constructs. Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Lagerspetz (1994) define indirect aggression as any aggressive act that minimizes confrontation with and possibly retaliation by the victim. Richardson and Green (1997) define indirect aggression as any behavior designed to harm another that is delivered in an evasive or circuitous manner. Accordingly, relational aggression could be considered to be direct in some instances. Warren and colleagues (2011), for instance, note that relational aggression often includes direct actions such as telling an individual they are uninvited to a social outing as a way of creating social exclusion. Despite the definitional differences between indirect and direct aggression, factor analyses continue to support the conclusion that the current measures created to assess indirect and relational aggression are measuring the same underlying constructs, and relate in similar ways to other variables.

Regardless of the way in which aggression is categorized, heightened aggression in children is associated with reduced moral development generally and empathy specifically (Frick, Cornell, Barry et al., 2003; Kreuger et al., 2007; Kruh et al., 2005). Therefore, efforts to increase empathic development in order to reduce aggressive and callous behavior are important endeavours. Rather than merely emphasizing reparative measures used to correct antisocial and aggressive behavior, more recent attempts have been made to prevent later aggression, violence,

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and callousness; Roots of Empathy is an example of such a program. By providing special programming in childhood, the hope is that empathy development will be bolstered, and negative outcomes will be reduced.

1.7. Present Research

The previously reviewed literature suggests that there is a special reason for studying empathy development in later childhood (ages 7-11) separately from that of earlier childhood (birth-age 6). By the age of seven, children have reached a more sophisticated form of empathy that includes self-reflection and metacognition (Hoffman, 2000). Further, as outlined earlier, older children typically display an increase in empathic emotions, demonstrate a closer relationship between feeling empathy and responding pro-socially, and engage in a wider array of opportunities in which to display empathy as their social circles widen. Although the sophistication of empathy continues to be refined as children move from age 7 to age 11, the distinctly mature and introspective nature of empathy provides reason to separate this stage of empathy development from earlier stages of more egocentric and primitive empathy. Given the differences in empathy development in later childhood, the present research focuses on what influences the development of empathy for children aged 7-11, particularly the influence of parents and media.

Based on the previous review of literature, it can be seen that media and parents are two factors that impact children either positively, resulting in increased empathy, or negatively, resulting in callousness or high rates of aggression. Although research that will not be currently reviewed does demonstrate the influence of other factors, due to the frequency of media use in children of all ages and the amount of time spent with parents, particularly in creating foundations in early childhood, media and parents are two very important influences for children. Much research has explored the way in which media impacts behavior in children, however the vast majority of this research has looked at the violent messages children receive from video games, television, and movies. Little research has evaluated the pro-social messages children receive from media and the research that has been conducted has been primarily quantitative in nature, often summing pro-social content or using experimental methods to measure the impact of pro-social messages on children's behavior. The findings have been mixed, showing that

children do not always understand or imitate pro-social media messages. A qualitative approach that explores and compares pro-social and antisocial messages in media, especially those that pertain to the development of empathy, helps provide an explanation for these conflicting conclusions. In addition, comparing the pro-social and antisocial messages in media allows for a closer examination of the context of those messages, giving insight into how context contributes to the creation, enhancement, and understanding of television media messages regarding empathy.

Similarly, research has explored the influences of parents, even the way in which parents impact the development of empathy; however, the intentional and unintentional actions, words, and purposes of parents in directing empathy development from the parents' perspectives has had little attention in the research. Further, the research has given little attention to the way parents individually create understanding about parenting for empathy development. More specifically, parents have not been given much opportunity to reflect on their unique attempts to teach their children empathy, foster empathic responses, and do so within the context of their daily parent-child interactions.

Given the established importance of both media use and parenting influences on the development of children's empathy and their expression of aggression, the present study explored these influences in more depth. The overarching questions being explored were: a) How are children positively influenced to develop empathy; and b) How does the surrounding context help people create meaning regarding empathy and its development?

Using qualitative methods, Study One explored both content and contextual issues of television scenes displaying empathy and scenes displaying callousness using a comparative method for analysis. The following research questions guided Study One:

1. How does children's television media create and display empathy?
    a. How do the contextual factors (verbal and nonverbal) of scenes depicting empathy contribute to their creation and portrayal of empathy?
2. How does children's television media display callousness?
    a. How do the contextual factors (verbal and nonverbal) of scenes depicting callousness contribute to their portrayal of callousness?

3. How do scenes of empathy and scenes of callousness compare and contrast regarding the contextual factors (verbal and nonverbal) used to portray the message?

4. Overall, what messages are portrayed regarding empathy and callousness in children's television media?

Using a constant comparative method with an ethnomethodological framework, important contextual differences between antisocial and pro-social interactions in media were highlighted. Television was the primary focus of Study One. Although other forms of media (such as video games, movies, and texting) are becoming increasingly influential in children's lives, research looking at the prevalence of screen time shows that children typically spend much more time watching television than engaging with any other form of media (Rideout et al., 2010), highlighting the importance of using television as the form of media in Study One.

In Study Two, an interview format was used to explore the ways in which parents create meaning regarding empathy development within their daily parent-child interactions. The following research questions guided Study Two:

1. How do parents intentionally influence their children's empathy development?
   a. How do parents encourage empathy behaviors?
   b. How do parents deal with callous behaviors in order to encourage empathy development?

2. How do parents construct the meaning of empathy and its development in their daily interactions with their children?
   a. How do the contextual factors (verbal and nonverbal) of their daily life influence their construction of empathy and its development?

Through interviews with parents, Study Two explored the use of purposeful teaching and/or incidental teaching, such as modeling or reinforcement, to guide children towards higher empathy development, as well as the way parents create meaning regarding parenting towards empathy development within the context of their daily interactions.

1.7.1. Ethnomethodology. The current research is based upon Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). Positing that the ordinary members of society actively create reality to have meaning, Ethnomethodology comes from a social phenomenological perspective, which holds

that it is important to understand the way in which the world is created and understood by others (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). According to Schutz (1970), individuals make meaning from any life event by approaching it with a base knowledge, which itself is socially constructed from previous life events. Although concerned mostly with social order and practice, meaning/reality is produced as individuals continuously interpret and organize their experiences. Ethnomethodology continues in this tradition. Ethnomethodology is not concerned with prior ideas of social structure or whether or not the way in which people construct order is logical; instead it is important to understand the methods and reasoning behind the creation of order or structure—the way individuals tie behavior or thought to rules, values, beliefs, etc. In sum, Ethnomethodology is concerned with the practical, everyday ways in which people create and organize their experiences into "objective" reality (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). Put more plainly, Ethnomethodology is concerned with "the study of the methods for sense-making and fact-finding in use among the members of society" (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 2006, p. 155).

More specifically, by constructing order and knowledge, individuals must distinguish between truth and fiction, correct or incorrect conclusions, between real and imagined connections and results, essentially determining if something is true or not (Cuff et al., 2006). This can be accomplished by checking one source of information against another, using scientific methods to test ideas, or collaborating with others to reach a consensus of truth. Ethnomethodology, at its most basic, seeks to study the way in which these distinctions are created, for example, the way parents explain or provide logic for their behaviors as being models of empathy their children can imitate, or the way they came to understand what were effective discipline techniques for their children. Context is particularly important in Ethnomethodology in that without context, events can have no meaning attached to them. Furthermore, context is reflexive such that interpretations take place both within and about the particular setting; the way in which context is discussed influences its effect (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). For example, the presence of other children, the location of teaching empathy, the size of the children, etc., may all impact what the parent uses or believes to be best to teach empathy or discipline callousness.

Regarding the current research, Ethnomethodology provided insight into the way individuals create moral meaning—the way they define and construct empathy within context,

the process by which behaviors are labeled as empathic versus non-empathic (or callous), and the way in which they use context to provide meaning to their attempts to teach empathy. According to the basic tenets of Ethnomethodology, instances of empathy cannot be objectively defined, but rather are constructed within our social context and interactions with others. Although the resulting moral order appears akin to common sense or objective law, individuals in fact use subjective reasoning to define empathy and create moral order. The current research attempts to explore the process of establishing empathy and teaching it to children, both in media and parenting.

Because context is of importance in Ethnomethodology, it was important to pay attention to the before and after of an interaction, as well as social cues, life situations, etc. For instance, when examining the way in which media works to define and display empathy, it was important to pay attention to cues from all characters in a scene, as well as nonverbal behaviors and character motivation.

With ethnomethodology as the guiding principle for what questions to ask and what information to consider, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used as the process by which to search for themes. Thematic analysis is a tool used in qualitative research to pick out themes and organize information. It can be broadly used in conjunction with many methodologies, including ethnomethodology. Thematic analysis itself does not guide the researcher regarding how to ask questions, what information to attend to, or how information is learned and discovered. Therefore, its multi-step analysis process was used within the framework of ethnomethodology.

2. Study One Method, Analysis, Themes, and Discussion

2.1. Study One

    2.1.1. Methods. To examine the use and display of empathy in visual media, Study One consisted of viewing popular children's television shows for empathic interactions between characters, or directly empathic show content. Comparing both between different empathy scenes and between scenes of empathy and callousness, Study One examined the content and context of empathy interactions.

    2.1.1.1. Show selection. Four fictional shows were selected. To obtain the television content viewed most often by target children, currently available television ratings for children aged 7-11 were examined. Based upon 2009 popular ratings, the four chosen shows were *Hannah Montana*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, S*pongeBob SquarePants*, and *Big Time Rush*. *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) is a half-hour, live-action comedy about a female teenager who is balancing both a regular, adolescent life and a secret life as a teenage pop star. *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer, O'Connell, & Geoghan, 2005) is a half-hour, live-action comedy that centers around the hijinks of twin pre-adolescent brothers who live in a hotel where their mother works as an entertainer. *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) is an animated half-hour comedy show that tells the story of a sponge who lives in the ocean, works at a fast food restaurant, and constantly gets into trouble with his neighbours or boss. Finally, *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009) is a half-hour, live-action show that follows four teenage males who move to Hollywood to follow their dreams of becoming a successful singing group. From the discovery of themes and contextual factors within these shows, a point of saturation based upon repeating codes, themes, and observations was obtained. Therefore, no additional shows were included in the study.

    2.1.1.1.1. Scene selection. Episodes from each show were randomly selected for viewing. The selected episodes were viewed and scenes depicting either empathy or callousness were identified and set aside. An example of a television scene depicting empathy is one character demonstrating sadness when a friend is distressed over a failed test. An example of a television scene depicting callousness is one character expressing joy that a friend failed the test, despite that friend expressing distress.

To guide the identification of empathy and callousness, I created an empathy map and a callous map (see Appendix A and B). Each map consisted of various facial and verbal expressions, interactions, and behaviors that were used to determine whether empathy or callousness was being displayed in the viewed episode. The verbal and nonverbal factors in the empathy and callous maps were included based on frequently used markers of empathy and callousness in the literature. No specific reference informed the creation of these maps.

Once appropriate scenes were set aside, I rated the chosen scenes based on the level of empathy or callousness depicted. While I watched the scenes, I was guided by the previously created diagram outlining different facets of empathy for reference and to prevent drifting. Although the ratings were subjective in nature, it was considered important to analyze scenes that most strongly portrayed empathy or callousness. Future research may benefit from analyzing mild displays of various emotions. However, in the current qualitative exploration into the representation of empathy in children's media, it seemed most fair to begin by analyzing the most blatant empathy expressions available. The scene ratings were based on a scale ranging from -5 to 5, with a central rating of 0. Scenes depicting empathy were given a score between 1 and 5 (1 = *mild display of empathy* and 5 = *high display of empathy*); scenes depicting callousness were given a score between -1 and -5 (-1 = *mild display of callousness* and -5 = *high display of callousness*). A display was considered mild if it was based primarily on small changes in face or vocal tone or if catching the display required repeated viewings. The more obvious the empathic or callous display, or the more involved the display (including facial, vocal, and body changes), the stronger the representation of empathy or callousness. For instance, a small facial change to match expressions would be considered a mild display of empathy, while matching facial expression and vocal tone, while also speaking empathic words would be considered a strong display of empathy.

After providing a subjective rating, the five scenes with the highest positive scores and the five scenes with the highest negative scores within each television show were chosen for further analysis (see Appendix C and D). An important consideration when choosing scenes for further analysis was the use of the constant comparative method. It was important for comparative analysis purposes that some of the scenes chosen for analysis came from the same episode which

occasionally impacted which scenes were chosen for analysis. However, no scene rated over -3 on callousness, or under 3 on empathy were selected for analysis.

2.1.2. Analysis strategy.

2.1.2.1. Generating themes: Thematic Analysis. Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the data collected in Study One. Thematic Analysis is a foundational method and includes many core skills of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), Thematic Analysis is a flexible method of analysis that is suitable for positivistic or constructionist epistemologies, such as that of ethnomethodology. Thematic Analysis allows the researcher to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes within the dataset where the researcher plays an active role in identifying those themes that are of interest to the research.

To analyze the selected scenes of Study One, Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide for doing Thematic Analysis was followed. It should be noted, however, that although Thematic Analysis lends itself to a step-by-step process, it is still a fluid and flexible approach, permitting one to move back to previous steps to glean more information and to ensure as thorough an analysis as possible. Important to note is that these steps were minimally modified to suit a visual data set, rather than a written or transcribed data set. Throughout the analysis, I made use of the qualitative analysis tool NVivo 9 to assist in organizing codes and themes. The steps were as follows.

2.1.2.1.1. Step 1. Familiarizing oneself with the data. This step began by becoming familiar with the entire data set. Although it typically occurs through the transcription process, this step was completed by repeatedly viewing the selected scenes. Being open to the data and watching carefully were the tasks necessary to prevent foreclosure. During the third and fourth viewings, careful notes were taken and the formation of ideas while watching was tracked as initial impressions were formed. These impressions were largely made up of observations regarding character style, type of character, tone of voice, facial expression, emotions displayed, the obviousness of displayed emotion, or motivations for behavior. This process allowed me to be open with the data and view it carefully before forming complete ideas or impressions.

2.1.2.1.2. Step 2. Generating initial codes. In this step, an initial list of ideas about what is in the data was created with the goal of connecting meaningful information to the research

question. It was important in this step to code for each data item (typically a sentence of phrase, or in the case of scenes, single facial expressions, touches, or spoken phrases) so that no interesting information was skipped or missed. In later steps, some codes were combined or excluded altogether, but it was essential that as many codes as possible were found in this preliminary step. Because the current research was focused on theory around the concept of empathy development, the data was analyzed with these concepts in mind and coded accordingly. Occasionally, different data items were relevant to more than one code, and for each code, surrounding information in the data set was included to retain the context of a particular code. Finally, in an effort to control for personal bias in the analysis, it was important that inconsistencies were not yet reconciled and mismatching information was not ignored.

2.1.2.1.3. Step 3. Searching for themes. Step three involved putting the different codes into prospective themes while considering how the different codes may be combined to form a broader theme. During this step of coding the data, themes remained tentative and no possibilities were discarded. During this step of analysis, I began using NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool, to assist in keeping track of codes, potential themes, and data that corresponded to each.

2.1.2.1.4. Step 4. Reviewing themes. During this stage, the themes found in step three were pared down. Themes without enough data support, themes that were supported by codes that were too diverse, or themes that were too similar were discarded, reformed, or combined. In this step, the principles of internal homogeneity (themes need to cohere together meaningfully) and external heterogeneity (themes should be distinct from one another) guided the process. During this step, I went back to the data and initial codes to ensure that the identified themes captured the data adequately.

2.1.2.1.5. Step 5. Defining and naming themes. This step involved carefully looking at the themes and the codes that made up each theme to define each theme and to track what aspect of the data the theme captured. Any subthemes within the theme were also considered in this step. A detailed analysis was undertaken to understand how the themes fit into previous theory and knowledge, how the themes interacted with the research questions, and why the themes were important to the research topic. Themes were also named during this step of analysis.

2.1.2.1.6. Step 6. Producing the report. The final step in Thematic Analysis involved writing a coherent analysis of the identified themes and creating an argument that tied the themes to the original research questions and theory. In writing the analysis, evidence for the themes was outlined so that the readers will understand the conclusions of the analysis.

2.1.2.2. Comparing themes: The constant comparative method (CCM) is an important analytic procedure, prominent in the grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To "discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns" (Tesch, 1990, p.96), CCM uses, as its main tool, comparing and contrasting. One goal of CCM is to describe both the commonalities and differences that are found within the data of interest. It is achieved through the processes of fragmenting and connection. Fragmenting is a process of separating the themes that emerge from the data and taking them out of their context in order to explore the content. Connecting is a process whereby the themes are inserted back into the context and the parts are interpreted as a whole, a process particularly important in ethnomethodology with its focus on context in daily interaction. Boeiji (2002) notes that although many make use of CCM, few researchers outline how to actually make the comparisons. To describe the process, Boeiji gives a detailed account of using CCM within recorded interactions between couples, providing a 5-step guide that outlines comparisons at levels within and between each recording, as well as within and between each group. Using Boeiji's process of comparison, other researchers have utilized CCM to explore both live and prerecorded interactions, as well as to explore third-party reactions to the recorded interactions (Shaw, Dunn, & Heinrich, 2012; Villagran, Goldsmith, Wittenberg-Lyles, & Baldwin, 2010).

Although the present research is not rooted in grounded theory, the principles and strategies of CCM as put forth by Boeiji were utilized in order to explore the context and content of the visual media. Using the processes of fragmenting and connecting, the content and context of scenes depicting empathy and scenes depicting callousness emerged more clearly. Extrapolating from Boeiji's 5-step process and to make it fit the present research, four additional steps were created to follow step 5 of the Thematic Analysis process. Each step indicates the level at which the analysis took place followed by the questions that guided the analysis at that step. It is important to note that these questions were considered guiding rather than required. Some

comparisons and scenes did not lend themselves to all questions. However, using the following steps as a guideline ensured a more thorough and purposeful comparison.

1. The single interaction/scene
    a. What are the main themes of this interaction or scene?
    b. Are there contradictions in this scene?
    c. Is the scene consistent?
    d. Is there consistency among characters in this scene?
    e. Does the context of the scene add to or enhance the content?
2. Comparison across scenes that depict the same type of interaction (empathy or callousness)
    a. Are the themes comparable across the scenes?
    b. What are the similarities/differences between the scenes?
    c. What are the similarities/differences between characters in each scene?
3. Comparison across scenes depicting different interactions (empathy vs. callousness)
    a. What does group A say about certain themes and what does group B say about the same themes?
    b. What appears in group A but not in group B and vice versa?
    c. What context is present in group A but not in group B and vice versa?
    d. What character differences are seen between the groups?
    e. What character similarities are seen between groups?
4. Comparison of overarching themes across shows
    a. Which themes are present across multiple shows?
    b. What differences are seen between show A and other shows? (complete for each separate show)
        i. What might lead to these differences?
    c. What patterns across shows exist for scenes of empathy? Of callousness?

Throughout this process and throughout these questions, the main themes that presented themselves, both in terms of comparisons and contrasts, were explored in their relation to influencing empathy development in the viewing audience (children).

2.2. Study One Results and Discussion

The data produced from the selected television scenes are discussed separately according to the three guiding questions of Study One. First, the creation and depiction of empathy in these scenes is discussed. Second, themes pertaining to the creation and depiction of callousness are outlined. Third, the data produced from comparing and contrasting empathy and callous scenes are presented.

2.2.1. The creation and depiction of empathy. Across the selected empathy scenes, five main themes are identified in the show's attempt to both create a definition and sense of empathy and to display that empathy to the audience. Each of these themes, as well as selected data relating to these themes, are briefly presented.

2.2.1.1. Theme 1: Empathic character as intrinsically good. Within the selected empathy scenes, the character who is showing empathy towards another is depicted as someone who is naturally and consistently kind and upstanding in his or her moral behavior, therefore his or her empathy is a natural extension of an inherent goodness. The empathic character shows frequent instances of empathy and kindness and few instances of callousness. The empathic character may be sarcastic, hyperactive, silly, or stern, however these characteristics are only present in conjunction with a tendency to choose the "right" (i.e., kind, lawful, supportive) course of action, help those in trouble, and show genuine concern for those around him or her. The character's empathy is a quick response to the distress of those around him or her, leaving the impression that empathy is his or her natural reaction rather than a response driven by a cue other than the empathizee's distress (such as a parent's guidance). As a result, empathy is not displayed as something learned or developed, but rather an inherent quality that one has or does not have. Further in line with this theme, many of the characters showing empathy are main characters, at times the eponymous character, in their respective television shows. This means that the viewing audience is very familiar with these characters. These empathic characters are situated to be well-like by their show's audience, and are popular with the other main characters in their show.

Many of the selected empathy scenes demonstrate this theme. For example, in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *Rule of Dumb* (Cervas, Wiese, & Michaeli, 2007)*,* SpongeBob SquarePants demonstrates empathy towards another character,

Patrick, who is afraid of a man standing outside his house. SpongeBob demonstrates empathy by joining Patrick in fear of this man as expressed in facial expressions and body movements. SpongeBob is the main character of the television show, featured in the vast majority of episodes. In the five empathy scenes I sampled from the television show, SpongeBob SquarePants is the character displaying empathy in four of those scenes. Across several episodes, SpongeBob SquarePants demonstrates kind behavior towards others. For example, in the episode *Best Day Ever* (Cash, Tucker, & Banks, 2006), SpongeBob allows Patrick to use his brand new jellyfish net after Patrick breaks his own, he helps Mr. Krabs by leading bugs away from Mr. Krabs' restaurant, and he helps Patty fix a leak in her house. SpongeBob even helps those who do not reciprocate his friendly demeanour, as is seen when he saves Squidward's concert by fixing a broken clarinet reed (Cash et al., 2006). In *Rule of Dumb* (Cervas et al., 2007), SpongeBob is ready to protect Patrick when Patrick thinks somebody is spying on him. Further, in the episode *Krusty Krushers* (Cash, Charmatz, & Iversen, 2008), SpongeBob runs over to help Patrick when he yells out in pain. SpongeBob gets into trouble often, however, he knows when he needs to admit he was wrong and do the right thing. For instance, in the selected episode *Driven To Tears* (Brookshier, King, & Banks, 2007), SpongeBob admits that he was the one who was littering after Patrick is sentenced to jail for littering. SpongeBob tries his best to help his friends whenever he is able. Taken together, the portrayal of SpongeBob SquarePants in general, and across the episodes I sampled in particular, indicate an individual who is naturally good, kind, and empathic.

A second example of intrinsic goodness in empathic characters is demonstrated in the character Cody Martin from the television show *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). Cody is one of the two main characters of the television show, along with his twin brother, Zack Martin. In three of the five empathy scenes I sampled from the show, Cody is the character displaying empathy, both vocally and expressively. Of the two main characters, Cody is portrayed as the more reasonable, thoughtful, and intelligent brother. He stands up for underdogs. For instance, he helps Arwin, the awkward hotel janitor, train for a competition despite Arwin's difficulty completing physical tasks (Lapidus & Correll, 2006). He also works with his brother to save a carriage horse from being sold to a mean man who intends to work the horse too much

(Quine & Correll, 2006). He also helps others in need, as is seen in the selected episode *Health and Fitness* (Nemetz & Correll, 2007) when he works hard to help the chef lose weight. In another episode, *Hotel Inspector* (Flanagan & Chan, 2005), Cody attempts to help Mr. Moseby resume his job as the hotel manager after being fired. Just as with SpongeBob SquarePants, Cody has a sense of morality and is naturally good to others. These instances of kindness do not mean that Cody is never reprimanded for bad behavior, however, the specific episodes sampled for analysis, as well as other general episodes, see Cody's missteps quickly remedied and primarily taken to help another person, rather than occurring because of a natural inclination to misbehave.

A third example of this theme is Miley Stewart, the main character of the television series *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) whose alter-ego is the eponymous character of this show. Miley's character is portrayed as kind, talented, and funny. Miley is considerate of others and in three of the five empathy scenes I sampled, she is the character displaying empathy. In the selected episode *On The Road Again* (Meyer & Christiansen, 2006), Miley hides her own disappointment regarding her father leaving for a concert tour because she does not want him to stop pursuing his music goals. Even in scenes not selected for this study, Miley is portrayed as a kind character. For example, in the episode *Sing Sung Bad* (Escajeda & Christiansen, 2007) when Miley tries to teach Lilly how to sing so that she can win a karaoke sing-off. In the sampled scenes where Miley demonstrates empathy, her response is automatic upon seeing or hearing of another's distress. For instance, when her best friend Lilly sorrowfully explains that she was stood up on a date, Miley's expression immediately changes to sadness and she quickly reaches out to touch her friend's arm in comfort (Lapiduss & Christiansen, 2007). Miley kindness is also extended to those who do not reciprocate. For example, Miley attempts to befriend a classmate who bullies her when she learns that Jackson, a good friend, likes the bully (Green & Sheridan, 2008). Miley's actions make her appear as someone who is naturally a good person, from which her empathic responses are a natural extension.

Given the previous analysis of this theme, the selected empathy scenes set up certain characters as naturally good based upon the ways in which viewers see them interact with others. Our conclusions about which characters are good and kind are based primarily upon their behavior, either within a single instance or over time. Each character's behavior and speech can

give us clues as to their internal motivations and emotions, although we as viewers are not privy to all internal thought or feeling. Therefore, it may seem to be a stretch to claim certain characters as inherently good when we are only truly privy to their behavior. Certain lines of research indicate that behavior can be a good indicator of stable character traits, for instance, pro-social behavior can be motivated by empathy. Although the concept of being *good* may be more of a philosophical question, the interaction of genetics and environment, along with research on teaching and learning empathy, may provide insight as to whether the depiction of empathic characters being innately good in children's media is a fair representation.

Research supports the idea that empathy leads to pro-social responding. In other words, people that demonstrate empathy appear "good" towards others. A series of studies outlined by Eisenberg, Eggum, and Edwards (2010), demonstrated that children who experience empathy, indicated through physiological measures such as heart rate or skin conductance, facial reactions, or self-report, are more likely to engage in helping behaviors and are less likely to engage in aggressive behavior, particularly as children get older. Further, differences in the prevalence of pro-social behavior tend to be stable over time, meaning that those who are pro-social at one age are more likely to act pro-socially later in life as well (Eggum et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2001). However, the fact that those who feel greater empathy are more likely to act pro-socially cannot speak to whether or not people who are "good" by nature are more likely to respond with empathy, although that seems to be a natural conclusion. Interestingly, the genetic influence on pro-social behavior seems weakest at younger ages and increases over time (Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Knafo , Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008).

The difficulty with scientifically addressing the question of whether empathic individuals are intrinsically good is the ambiguous nature of "good" and how to define it in terms of a person's character in order to study it, which is beyond the scope of the current research. Nevertheless, if we want to base someone's innate goodness on his or her behavior, such as helping other people in distress or refraining from causing harm to others, then the previously cited research demonstrating that empathy leads to pro-social responding may support the idea that those who display empathy, and by extension engage in pro-social behavior, are good. The difficulty comes in knowing that most if not all people will likely engage in good behavior at

some point in their life. How consistently must behavior be good in order for a person to be considered good? Therefore, although the selected empathy scenes may depict the empathic character as intrinsically good, this does not necessarily relate to research or real-life experience as the idea of innate goodness is difficult to define and requires a longer, more philosophical debate.

Although research tells us that empathy leads to pro-social behavior, the larger and deeper question of whether an innate goodness makes one more likely to be empathic ultimately comes down to what makes a person innately good. While research can tell us that people who are more empathic engage in more pro-social behavior, it does not give us information on the percentage of their behavior that is pro-social versus antisocial. Further, the question of what makes a person good is based less on static and measurable qualities and more based on philosophical or religious bent. However, some guidance may come from research on personality. One's personality can include traits that are observed as fairly consistent across time and situation, one's adaptations to different circumstances, and one's own understanding of his or her unique identity (McAdams & Pals, 2006). The expression of our personality comes from a complex, and not completely understood, interaction between genetics and environment. Although the representation of empathy as intrinsic may portray personality as more due to genetics, the role of environment is important. Prior to birth, children's environments begin to interact with their genetics by influencing the way in which genes are expressed (Feldman, 2008). As growth progresses, environment continues to influence changes in personality traits that occur, while genetics largely impact the stability seen in personality traits (Krueger & Johnson, 2008; Saudino & Wang, 2012). As our understanding of genetics increases, the extensiveness of the gene and environment interaction becomes clearer. For instance, certain genetic differences in some children interact with the social support and skill of their mothering to produce either a fearful and inhibited personality or not (Fox, Hane, & Pine, 2007; Fox et al., 2005). Parenting quality, when interacting with a specific genetic makeup, produces increased activity in toddlers, whereas it has no affect for children without this specific genetic makeup (Sheese, Voelker, Rothbart, & Posner, 2007). The research on the interplay between genetics and environment in forming personality is expansive and research outcomes differ depending on the specific personality trait examined. The

complex nature of personality formation indicates to us that portraying any personality trait, such as empathy, as inherent and inborn is a misleading simplification.

The problem with the assumption about innate empathy or goodness seen in the selected children's television shows is that it may lead children to black and white thinking where good people do and feel good things and bad people do and feel bad things. Therefore, empathy is portrayed not as something developed or learned, but something you have or do not have. However, empathy-based learning programs, such as Roots of Empathy (ROE), challenge the assumption that empathy is something you do or do not have, rather than something you learn and develop. ROE is based on the notion that emotional processing and social understanding are at the root of positive interpersonal relationships (Izard, 2002). Specifically, ROE emphasizes the importance of empathy in reducing aggression and guiding pro-social behaviors, two important goals of ROE. In order to accomplish their outlined objectives, the ROE program targets children in kindergarten to grade 8, and provides curriculum in school settings (Gordon, 2005). ROE is a 9-month program where an infant and his or her parent(s) make monthly visits to a classroom. Through observation, discussion, and direct interaction, the classroom learns about infant development, perspective taking, parenting, and caring for others. A ROE instructor also visits the classroom, and, in an attempt to develop emotional understanding, problem-solving, and empathy, uses the parent-infant interactions to start age-appropriate discussions with the class.

In accordance with its goals, one study showed that children in grades 4 through 8 who engage in a ROE program demonstrate improved understanding of infant development, increased pro-social behavior, and decreased levels of proactive and relational aggression (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, & Hertzman, 2012). A 2009 report released by ROE summarized quasi-experimental and randomized control trial research on the program's effectiveness. After one school-year, children who engaged in the ROE classroom program demonstrated the following: a decrease in physical, relational, proactive, and reactive aggression; a greater likelihood of pro-social behavior including sharing, helping others in need, and including others; an increase in social and emotional understanding, as well as the understanding of displays of mixed emotion; a greater understanding of parenting skills; and greater classroom autonomy (Roots of Empathy—Report on Research, 2009). One study outlined by the report noted that the social and emotional

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improvements seen in children after completing ROE were maintained three years after the program's completion, demonstrating the programs long-term effectiveness.

The program and research of ROE are important in that they outline the importance of empathy and assisting its development. Their research demonstrates how empathy can reduce antisocial behavior and increase pro-social behavior and understanding, and importantly in consideration with the messages to the reviewed television shows, their program indicates that empathy can be developed over time, which contradicts the depiction of empathy being a characteristic of those who are innately good. In this way, the scenes do not portray positive empathy development, but rather the choice of characters who are empathic creates empathy as being something naturally occurring - a person is born with the capacity for empathy rather than learning it over time and experience. This depiction of empathy not only defies research on the ability to learn empathy, but also potentially gives young viewers who are learning about empathy the impression that empathy cannot be personally developed.

2.2.1.2. Theme 2: Empathy is deserved. The selected empathy scenes depict receiving empathy as something one deserves by displaying typically desirable characteristics. Just as the empathic characters are displayed as being naturally good people, those receiving empathy are also displayed as being naturally good, generally kind to others, attractive, and popular. They are generally portrayed as characters with whom one can easily empathize. Attractiveness is a particular quality that is observed in the empathizee. The characters are presented as typically attractive (i.e., they are slim, fit, have thick and shiny hair, have generally pleasing facial features with no distinguishable irregularities, and dress is moderately fashionable clothing). Past research has documented a "halo effect"—people generally associate positive characteristics with attractiveness, despite having no additional knowledge of another's personality (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Langlois et al., 2000). Therefore, based on attractiveness alone, the empathizees are likely to be assumed to possess qualities that make them deserving of empathy. (There are, of course, attractive characters in the selected episodes who do not possess likeable characteristics and are therefore not likely to be observed as deserving of our empathy. However, the audience is provided with additional information about these characters that make them unlikable and so our judgements of them, based on media presentation, do not have to be based

solely on their physical appearance. In the selected empathy scenes, the attractive empathizees are not obviously presented as having any disqualifying additional characteristics, but rather have characteristics that support the conclusions general populations might draw about them based on their attractiveness.) The characters who are shown empathy but who are not typically attractive (i.e., heavier build, balding, unfashionable glasses) are observed to have other characteristics that pull for empathy. These "pitiable underdogs" are quirky and depicted as "nerdy", but are kind and gentle, particularly towards the main characters. Other than appearance, the scenes portray empathizees who are kind, gentle, funny, and well-liked.

One example of this theme in the selected empathy scenes is Lilly Truscott in *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006). In the episode *You Are So Sue-able To Me* (Lapiduss & Christiansen, 2007), Miley empathizes with Lilly, who is sad after being stood up by her date. Lilly is the main character's best friend. She is a slim, blonde, and cute tomboy who is fiercely loyal to her best friend, Miley. One example of Lilly's kindness to her friends is seen in her own display of empathy towards Miley who feels jealous when Lilly befriends one of Miley's enemies (Green & Sheridan, 2008). Lilly is one of the few people trustworthy enough to know about Miley's famous alter-ego, Hannah Montana. Lilly's deadpan sense of humour also endears her to the audience, who is guided with a laugh track frequently following Lilly's lines. Although within the show Lilly is not portrayed as overly popular, her personality and status as Miley Stewart's best friend make her someone who can be liked by the show's audience. Therefore, seeing Miley empathize with Lilly seems natural, as Lilly is someone good who deserves empathy when she is sad.

Another example of a character portrayed as deserving of empathy is Jennifer Knight, the mother of Kendall Knight who is a main character in *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In the selected scene from *Big Time Mansion* (Menendez & Spingarn, 2010), Jennifer's daughter, Katie, recognizes and empathizes with Jennifer who feels she has no purpose now that her children are grown and able to do things for themselves. Jennifer plays the loving caregiver to Kendall and the three other boys who comprise the singing group around which this show centers. Because the four boys must relocate to Los Angeles to pursue a music career, Jennifer goes along with them so she can protect and care for them away from home. This situates her easily as a likeable

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character because she plays the part of traditional nurturer. For example, she stands up for James, a member of the singing group, when James' mom wants him to quit the group (Fellows & Holland, 2011). She regularly makes meals for the boys and acts as their cheerleader throughout their musical projects. She is also their general protector, who is concerned with their overall well-being apart from their ability to generate profit. Finally, Jennifer is an attractive character - thin, with long, softly curled hair, a bright smile, and big, blue eyes. Taken together, all Jennifer's desirable qualities make her come across as someone who has earned the empathy of others.

A third example of an empathizee being a character who deserves empathy comes from Arwin, the hotel janitor in *The Suite Life with Zack of Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). Arwin is a semi-regular character who is on friendly terms with the show's two main characters, although he is much older than they. Unlike the two previous examples, Arwin is not attractive and has characteristics that are not overly desirable. In the selected scenes, he is portrayed as absentminded and awkward. For instance, in one of the selected scenes, he trips several times over furniture or other objects and seems unaware of others around him while working out. Additionally, he is not typically attractive—he is balding, wears outdated glasses, is often dirty from his work, and walks hunched over. Arwin's odd characteristics, however, make him a likeable underdog. His awkward demeanour provides chances for humour, both with the audience and the other characters. He is friendly and talkative to the other characters on the show. In one of the selected scenes, he shares one of his dreams with the two main characters, inciting their empathy and desire to help him reach these goals (Lapidus & Correll, 2006). Arwin is not mean to others, rude, or annoying. Therefore, he does not display characteristics that might disqualify him being relatable or likeable. Given his good and quirky nature, when Arwin is bullied by a janitor at another hotel, the main characters, along with the viewing audience, can feel pulled to both empathize with his plight and desire to stand up for him. In juxtaposition with a character who is not well known on the show, but portrayed as arrogant, mean, and selfish, Arwin's character comes off as one deserving empathy.

The second theme enhances the understanding of how media can affect the development of empathy in children. Depicting those receiving empathy as doing so based upon some characteristic that makes them deserving of the empathy, such as attractiveness or kindness, gives

a problematic message that people who do not have pleasant characteristics do not deserve our empathy. However, the way the scenes depict the empathizee may not be far off from research on the characteristics of people to whom we tend to show preference. For instance, empathy and attractiveness may not produce an obvious relationship, but some research on judgement based upon appearance may give clues as to how the attractiveness of a character on television affects the viewers understanding of that individual as an empathic being. The halo effect is a well-known social phenomenon describing the general tendency to ascribe good personality traits to attractive children or adults, and negative personality traits to less attractive children or adults. Taking this one step further research finds that those who are attractive are portrayed positively and their positive personalities then make others more connected to them and empathic towards them. Prior research has examined both the role of attractiveness in forming relational connection and the role of connection in feelings of empathy. In the selected scenes, since the characters have a relational connection, attractiveness is more likely to have a positive effect on the empathy displayed within that relationship. Attractiveness increases relational connection, increases judgements of the other as "good", and therefore increases the display of empathy. The current study is not the only analysis of children's media to find that attractiveness and goodness are paired together. Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, and Martz (2010) studied the characteristics of Disney characters, finding that attractive characters, more than unattractive characters, demonstrated positive personality traits, such as bravery, morality, and lower aggression, making them "good". The attractiveness, and therefore goodness, of the empathizees in the selected empathy scenes, along with the other positive characteristics they demonstrate, make them deserving of care and empathy from the viewers and from other characters in the television show.

Interestingly, a recent series of studies by Fisher and Ma (2014) demonstrated that attractiveness may actually have a negative effect on one's ability to pull for empathy. In their research, they demonstrated that when rating levels of empathy for children who had experienced some sort of negative event, people rated lower levels of empathy towards children identified as attractive compared to non-attractive counterparts. However, in this research, the participants had no personal connection to the children in the vignettes, whereas in the rated television shows, the characters typically have had several previous interactions with the empathizee. More exploration

may be needed to flesh out the relationship between attractiveness, personal connection, and empathy in television shows or movies. For example, perhaps the empathizees are attractive mainly because they are the primary characters who need to be portrayed positively. Nevertheless, it is telling that the primary characters, and the ones receiving empathy, happen to be attractive.

These three characters used as examples of empathizees who deserve empathy are just a few of several characters who pull for empathy based on good and desirable qualities. The message coming through an analysis of the types of characters who receive empathy is that people receive empathy because they deserve empathy. The disturbing implication of deserved empathy is that some people do not deserve empathy and empathy is something we should earn by possessing desirable traits or behaving in desirable ways. Just like the previous theme of empathic characters being intrinsically good, here we see that giving and receiving empathy is displayed as something based upon internal characteristics rather than requirements from a situation. The message of deserved empathy does not provide young viewers with a positive message to develop empathy, but instead creates empathy as being a commodity one trades in their relationships. Again, the types of characters who receive empathy offer a context in which empathy is a reward for good behavior.

2.2.1.3. Theme 3: Empathy as a turning point. Many episodes had two plot lines, the main story line and a secondary story line. The main story line took up more time in the episode and it was noted through my analysis that the selected empathy scenes often related to the main story line of the reviewed episode rather than the secondary story line. Given that the main story line had more time within the episode to set up conflict, advance plot, and resolve the story, it makes sense that empathy scenes could more often be found in the main story line. However, empathy scenes were used in the main story lines as a turning point in the plot. At times, the empathy was a reaction to conflict between two characters, where the conflict was used to set up a plot which the rest of the episode attempted to explore and resolve. Other times, the empathy was present in scenes meant to resolve the major conflict of that particular episode.

One example of an empathy scene used to set up a plot is in the show *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In the episode *Big Time Moms* (Fellows & Holland, 2011), immediately after the

opening credits an empathy scene showcases James, Kendall, Logan, Carlos, and Jennifer (the four members of the singing group with Kendall's mother), being confronted by James' mom who wants him to discontinue the singing group and return to Minnesota with her. Kendall, Logan, Carlos, and Jennifer, immediately act shocked and worried upon seeing James' react to this news by freezing in shock. The scene prior to the opening credits involved the four members of the singing group setting up a bouncy castle as a Mother's Day present for Jennifer. Therefore, the empathy scene is used as a change in direction from focusing on celebrating Mother's Day to seeing James' future in the group threatened. The scene is used to set up the major conflict permeating this episode, namely the singing group attempting to convince James' mom to let him stay in Los Angeles and pursue his music career. The empathy scene introduces the major conflict between James and his mother which continues until one of the last scenes which includes James' mother allowing him to stay in Los Angeles as long as he promises that she can see him more often. Most of this episode includes events directly related to this major story line, although a subplot is introduced as well.

Another example of a scene used to resolve a story line, changing direction from conflict to harmony, is seen in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). The episode *Boston Holiday* (O'Connell & Passaris, 2006) centres on Zack and Cody who meet a teenaged prince from the Middle East. Zack and Cody learn that Prince Sanjay feels very burdened by his position and is not allowed to engage in typical teenaged fun because his advisor is very strict. Throughout the episode, Zack and Cody help to deceive Sanjay's advisor so that Sanjay can sneak away and have fun. At the end of the episode, after Zack and Prince Sanjay get caught shoplifting, the advisor begins to yell at Prince Sanjay for abandoning his official responsibilities. At this point, Zack and Cody, empathizing with Prince Sanjay's frustration towards his princely duties, stand up for him in anger and tell the advisor that Sanjay never has time to be a teenager because he works too much. Through this outburst, the advisor agrees to allow Sanjay more time for fun in his schedule, resolving the long-standing friction between Prince Sanjay and his position as prince. The empathy scene also changes direction from conflict and trickery when Zack and Cody are sneaking Sanjay around and engaging in bad behavior, to harmony between the three young boys and the adults who are responsible for their well-being.

A further example of empathy scenes used as a turning point for an episode include the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *Driven to Tears* (Brookshier et al., 2007). In this episode, SpongeBob becomes jealous of his friend Patrick for getting a driver's license first. While driving, SpongeBob and Patrick begin arguing and SpongeBob rips up Patrick's license and throws it out of the car. Patrick then gets arrested for littering and sentenced to serve time in prison. Upon hearing this ruling, SpongeBob empathizes with Patrick's plight by becoming fearful of what will happen to Patrick in prison. This brings SpongeBob to feel remorse for his behavior throughout the episode and he confesses that he was one who had littered. The judge then punishes SpongeBob instead of Patrick. This empathy scene changes an episode of conflict and arguing between two friends and brings them to a place of harmony and peace. Immediately after this scene, SpongeBob is released from prison, reunited with Patrick, and the two resume their happy friendship. The empathy scene allows for discord to climax and resolution to take place.

The analysis of this theme shows a formula for story-telling. Van den Broek, Lorch, and Thurlow (1996) nicely summarized typical components of European-based stories, including stories depicted in television shows. The main structure of stories is identified as the causal relationship between various events in the story. Van den Broek and colleagues (1996) noted that the events throughout the story are all tied together, eventually relating the initial events to the final outcome. Further, the events of the story can be categorized based on whether they provide information about the setting, involve an initiating event, contain a reaction to the initiating event, provide a goal for the protagonist, involve some action resulting from the initiating event, or include the final outcome of the story. The initiating event introduces some sort of obstacle or conflict on which the remaining events rest. Within the various categories of events, empathy scenes fit in as reactions to the initiating event and the final outcome of the story meant to resolve the initiating event.

Given that empathy is often a precursor to pro-social behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987; Robinson et al., 2001), it makes sense that a television show would use empathy as way to bring opposing sides together. Previous mistakes can be remedied once one person empathizes with the distress of another and takes step to rectify the situation. In both

these instances, empathy to set up a plot or empathy to resolve a plot, a major change in the story line is taking place; relationships are repaired or fractured, ideas are formed, and plans are altered.

In terms of developing empathy and creating meaning, the events prior to and after the use of empathy portray empathy as something with power to change situations and relationships. Viewers see the way in which empathy can mend conflicts or create alliances. If children are able to pick up on this use of empathy in the episodes, they may come to see empathy as a positive tool when experiencing conflict in their own relationships.

2.2.1.4. Theme 4: Empathy in a close relationship. In the selected empathy scenes, one noticeable theme is empathy displayed within already strong relationships. Although the types of relationships may differ, the characters within the relationships are emotionally connected, engage with each other on a regular basis, and support one another. Within the selected empathy scenes, although there were few instances of empathy being offered to a less well-known character, there were no instances of empathy being offered to an unknown individual. Rather, empathy is portrayed as something offered to those who are well known and loved. Empathy is an extension of an already supportive relationship. This theme may relate to the theme of empathy as being deserved. By offering empathy to someone relationally close, the characters increase the chances of receiving empathy from that individual down the road (or have received empathy from that person in the past); one character deserves empathy by being someone who will reciprocate the support when needed.

One example of empathy being displayed within a close relationship is in *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In the selected scene from *Big Time Mansion* (Menendez & Spingarn, 2010), Jennifer becomes upset upon realizing that her children are growing up and do not need as much of her assistance anymore. As Jennifer laments over baby pictures, her daughter, Katie, realizes that Jennifer is feeling a lack of purpose. Katie insists that she still needs a mother to care for her and feigns an illness to give Jennifer someone to care for as she grieves her children's dependence. Katie and Jennifer have a close relationship as mother and daughter. They interact frequently, not only because they live together as a family, but also because most of their

activities take place within the hotel where they live and so they spend time together most of the day.

Another example of empathy displayed within a close relationship is in *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999). In the episode *Krusty Krushers* (Cash et al., 2008), Patrick, in an attempt to intimidate others, tries to rip paper and gets a paper cut as a result. Patrick instantly yells in pain and grabs his hand. Immediately upon hearing Patrick's pain, SpongeBob runs over to Patrick with panic in his voice and mimicking Patrick's pained facial expression. SpongeBob and Patrick are best friends and therefore it is understandably why SpongeBob shows such care and concern for Patrick. Many of the selected episodes (and many additional SpongeBob SquarePants episodes) revolve around SpongeBob and Patrick. They live next door to each other, enjoy similar activities (such as catching jelly fish), and often spend time with one another at home or in their community. *The Secret Box* episode (Dohrn, Tibbitt, & Williams, 2001) details for the audience that SpongeBob and Patrick have been best friends since they were babies, giving further evidence to a longstanding friendship of support and love. Since they know each other well and spend much time together, empathy is an obvious extension of their care and love for one another.

A third example of empathy being demonstrated within a close relationship is observed in the relationship between Miley and her brother Jackson from the television series *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006). The episode *On the Road Again* (Meyer & Christiansen, 2006) details the adjustments for Miley and Jackson when their father decides to rekindle his music career with a series of concerts far from home. While he is absent, Miley and Jackson are cared for by Hannah Montana's bodyguard, Roxy. Roxy is very strict and frequently invades the privacy of Miley and Jackson. After not being allowed to go to the movies with his friends, Jackson leaves the house in anger and says he is going to bring their father back home. Miley chases after Jackson and assures him that she also misses their father. She mimics Jackson's expressions of sadness, but also voices her sharing of his emotions. In other episodes Jackson and Miley have sibling squabbles. For instance, the episode *You Gotta Not Fight For Your Right To Party* (Meyer & Hahn, 2007) centres around several disagreements between Miley and Jackson when they have to share a bathroom and the hilarious measures their father takes to rectify the

situation. However, they also have a relationship built upon caring for each other and helping each other out in need. Miley and Jackson live together, have some similar circles of friends, and spend time together at home; therefore, despite some arguments or jealousy, they know each other well and have a relationship that is open and supportive. Within such a relationship, empathy may be easy to offer as there is opportunity and an understanding of the other person's typical emotions and reactions.

Other close relationships involve a mom empathizing with her son's best friend (*Big Time Rush*; Fellows, 2009), a teacher empathizing with a student (*Suite Life of Zack and Cody*: Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005), a boyfriend empathizing with his girlfriend (*Hannah Montana*: Peterman & Poryes, 2006), and one coworker empathizing with another (*Suite Life of Zack and Cody*: Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). Throughout these relationships, although the depth of the connection differs, each relationship is defined by frequency of contact, mutual feelings of positive regard, and evidence of caring which is often displayed through empathy or sympathy. These relationships are long-standing, beginning prior to the selected episode, and built on many previous interactions. Therefore, the selected empathy scene builds on the prior relational foundation and allows for seamless and appropriate display of empathy.

Further answers to the research question about empathy are found in this theme which too has some overlap with the literature. The analysis of the theme shows empathy displayed primarily within close relationships. Close relationships may offer more opportunity for empathizing for a couple reasons. First, more frequent interactions increase the chances that one character will see another character in a situation where empathy is an appropriate response. Rarely interacting with another person will merely limit the times one character is able to offer empathy. Second, disclosure of one's emotions is more likely to take place in a close relationship built on trust and sharing.

Even from a young age, people are more likely to display empathy towards individuals who are similar to them in some way. Two year old children exhibit more empathic behaviors towards their mothers than they do toward strangers (Davidov et al., 2013), the empathy of eight year old children correlated positively to in-group status (Masten et al., 2010), and children ages three to nine opined that people are only unconditionally and morally responsible towards in-

group members, whereas causing harm towards out-group members is situationally dependent (Rhodes & Chalik, 2013). Even at a neurological level, we are more likely to display empathy to those to whom we are close. In 2010, Cheng and colleagues demonstrated that the neural network indicating pain is more highly activated when imagining a loved one in pain versus imaging a stranger in pain. Further, when viewing faces of racial out-group members in pain, the pain neural network response is weaker than when viewing faces of racial in-group members in pain (Xu, Zuo, Wang, & Han, 2009). Overall, both in terms of individual report and in terms of neurological response, our empathy for others differs based on whether the "other" is someone we know well and somebody to whom we are similar.

Not only can our empathic response differ based on the closeness of a relationship, but our empathic and pro-social behavior is also subject to relational influence. By examining available research regarding the frequency, content, antecedents, and consequences of helping behavior, Clark and colleagues (2015) concluded that people are more likely to help family, friends, and romantic partners (i.e., those with whom they are close) than they are to help strangers or acquaintances. In their summary, Clark and colleagues (2015) noted that in situations that are serious or life-threatening we are more willing to provide assistance to close friends and family (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994), we are more likely to respond pro-socially to the sad mood of somebody close to us than a stranger (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987), and we report greater happiness when helping those to whom we are close than when helping those to whom we are not close (Aknin, Sandstrom, Dunn, & Norton, 2011). A particularly important indicator of pro-social behavior in relationships for my research is reported empathy. Maner and Gailliot (2007) demonstrated that within a close relationship, empathy leads to greater prosocial responding; however, within a distant or nonexistent relationship, empathy did not predict willingness to help. In their study, Maner and Gailliot asked participants how willing they would be to help somebody who had been evicted from their apartment. Not only was the level to which they would go to help greater for those to whom they had a close relationship (e.g., close friends, family members), participants reported feeling greater levels of empathy towards those to whom they were close, and their felt empathy predicted the level of helping behavior only within close relationships, not within distant or nonexistent relationships.

Agnew and Le (2015) attributed our tendency to display greater empathy and prosocial behavior towards those to whom we are close to an increased level of commitment in such relationships. They argued that one's sense of commitment is driven by one's satisfaction in the relationship, the degree of investment in the relationship, and the quality of available alternatives to the relationship. The three factors combine to create a degree of dependency, and ultimately, commitment. According to Agnew and Le, then, individuals may be more committed to their friendship if they enjoy spending time with their friend, the friends are mutually kind or enjoyable towards one another, the friends have known each other many years or have many experiences together, and there are few other friends of similar quality available. In such a situation, these factors will then increase the person's commitment to the relationship and will increase the frequency of pro-social behaviors such as accommodating less desirable behaviors or qualities, forgiving relational trespasses more quickly, denigrating or avoiding attractive relational alternatives, or acting selflessly for the other person (Agnew & Le, 2015).

Overall and at a basic level, the depiction of empathy being displayed within a close relationship on the selected television shows is supported by research. When we feel a connection to another individual, we are more likely to share in his or her emotions, feel concern for him or her, and then act in a prosocial or helpful manner. However, to a viewing audience of children aged 7-11, the depiction of empathy primarily being displayed between friends or family, an important aspect of empathy development is missing - that of empathy towards those we do not know in situations with which we are unfamiliar. Although children will increasingly move towards the ability to demonstrate removed empathy as they near and progress in adolescents, this type of empathy was not depicted in the selected television shows. The message children may pick up from the selected television shows, then, is similar to empathy being deserved and is one in which only certain people require our empathy, and those are the people we know and like best. The types of characters displaying empathy to one another portray empathy as an aspect of friendship rather than something that can be used within other relationships. Although this is not an overly positive message about empathy, it does allow for space to develop and learn about empathy in close relationships and then use empathy in other relationships.

2.2.1.5. Theme 5: Moving towards. Within the selected empathy scenes, empathic characters are observed to move towards characters being shown empathy. The moving towards is most obviously a physical phenomenon. The empathizer may reach out to the empathizee, offer a hug, touch their arm, or move closer beside them. However, the physical moving towards signifies an emotional attempt to move towards that is mirrored in facial expressions. As one might expect when viewing empathy in action, the empathizer often changes his or her facial expression, not only to match the expression of the empathizee, but also to match the empathizee's stated mood or situation. The matching facial expression, combined with physical proximity, offers a greater emotional connection between the characters. As discussed in Theme 4, those displaying empathy in the selected scenes are doing so in the confines of an already close relationship and the moment of empathy allows for further relationship building as the empathizer has the opportunity to display his or her support and care for the empathizee. Nevertheless, even in instances where the relationship between the empathizer and empathizee is not particularly tight-knit, a tendency to move towards, both in body movements and facial expression, is present.

The first example from the selected scenes comes from *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In the episode *Big Time Moms* (Fellows & Holland, 2011), after James' mom tells him that he will move back to Minnesota to work with her instead of pursuing his music career in Los Angeles, James panics and his facial expression freezes in a forced smile. Carlos, Logan, Kendall, and Jennifer (Kendall's mother) are in the room with James as he receives the bad news. While James' mother is talking, Carlos, Kendall, Logan, and Jennifer all mimic James' panic with their own facial expression. They raise their brows, widen their eyes, and open their mouths in shock. James' mother does not realize that despite James' smile, he is upset by the idea of moving back to Minnesota, but the others in the room react with the same shocked expression as James. Kendall reaches his arms around James' shoulders while James is frozen in panic. Soon after James' mother leaves the room, Carlos, Logan, and Jennifer turn towards James, step closer to him, reach out their arms to him, and attempt to get his attention. James' friends understand how upset James' is and they empathize with this emotion, knowing what moving away will mean for his music dreams and for their relationship. In James' distress they are simultaneously connected

to James through matching facial expression and by drawing close to him with their body movements. In this way, the empathy is manifested physically through touch - they are emotionally, but also literally, supporting him.

Another example of moving towards the empathizee is displayed in the *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) episode *Joannie B. Goode* (Green & Sheridan, 2008). After a gruelling hockey game, Miley sits in the stands with physical injuries. She is exhausted, but more than that, she is upset because her two best friends have befriended her arch rival, Joannie. Throughout the episode, Miley has displayed feelings of jealousy and fear of losing her friends. While sitting in the stands, Lillie and Oliver, her best friends, comfort her and tend to her physical injuries. After some discussion, Miley alludes to her jealousy of Joannie. Lillie and Jackson quickly change their facial expressions to sadness by knitting their brows and turning their mouths downward. They both reach out hands to place on Miley's leg and arm. Lillie puts an arm around Miley, and they comment on Miley's fear of losing them as friends. After reassuring her that they will always be best friends, the three offer hugs to one another and begin joking around. The intimacy of their physical interactions and matching facial expressions serve both to repair the friendship and demonstrate to the audience the care and love in their relationship. Their words to Miley are encouraging and intimate, matching the closeness of their body movements.

The final example of moving towards the empathizee is a scene from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). In this scene from *Going For The Gold* (Lapidus & Correll, 2006), Arwin, the janitor at the hotel in which Zack and Cody live, is training for the annual janitor competition. Zack and Cody come upon him after a run. As Arwin proudly tells Zack and Cody about how far he has run, they both burst into smiles along with him. Then as he falls down because he is dizzy, both boys run to his aide and reach to help him up, both with concerned expressions. Later, when Arwins arch rival, Irv, comes over and begins making fun of Arwin, both Zack and Cody display angry facial expressions on Arwin's behalf, despite not knowing Irv or his history with Arwin. They show their allegiance by standing closer to Arwin and staring angrily at Irv. They also demonstrate a "moving towards" by verbally declaring their support and encouragement of Arwin in the competition. In each of their actions, it is obvious

whom they are supporting, whom they care about, and with whom they are empathizing. Their physical movements (both facial and body movements) mirror their emotional alignment with Arwin throughout this scene. Although Arwin is not an individual with whom they interact often, this scene furthers their relationship with him by deepening their emotional connection.

The analysis of this theme makes use of three examples of moving towards that demonstrate the ways in which verbal, physical, and facial expressions can mirror a deeper connection between two or more individuals. The empathy given, combined with connecting physically with another person, offers the audience of sense of emotional intimacy and support. Moving towards the one who receives empathy is another aspect of the media presentation that can contribute an answer to the research question.

Current attempts to operationalize empathy and track it in research tend to focus on thoughts and emotions rather than behavior. Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000) measured empathy in their *Emotional Competence Inventory*. However, the components of empathy that they measure are cognitive (e.g., "accurately assesses the underlying or root causes or a person's problem" or "accurately reads people's moods, feelings, or nonverbal cues"), verbal (e.g., "asks questions to be sure he/she understands another person") and when they are behavioural, they only vaguely outline what constitutes empathic behavior (e.g., "shows empathy or understanding"). Dadds and colleagues also use primarily cognitive and affective components in order to identify and measure empathy with the *Griffith Empathy Measure*, such as "My child gets upset when another person is acting upset" and "My child doesn't seem to notice when I get sad" (Dadds et al., 2008). The fact that primarily cognitive and emotional abilities are targeted in empathy is understandable given that empathy is typically defined in cognitive and emotional terms. Sharing emotions, taking another's perspective, and experiencing empathic distress at another's difficulty are hallmarks of being empathic. Technically, none of these empathy components require an overtly behavioural response, although they may be needed for us to recognize their presence in another individual.

Although a physical moving towards another is not typically represented in standard measures of empathy, an emotional sense of moving towards another is important. Both the previously mentioned empathy measures, the *Emotional Competence Inventory* and the *Griffith*

Empathy Measure include questions assessing one's ability to bring his or her own emotions in line with the emotions he or she notices in another. Therefore, although the representation of moving towards in the selected television shows may not appear in research representations of empathy in the physical sense, certainly the process of emotionally moving towards another is an important aspect of empathy.

Throughout the five themes presented, the selected empathy scenes show good individuals demonstrating empathy to those who are good themselves, within a close relationship in such a way as to build up relational intimacy. The message presented, then, is one that supports showing empathy, but to a subset of the population. In the selected scenes, empathy is not extended to those who have been mean or rude and it is not something given to those who cannot reciprocate within the confines of a relationship. Empathy is a quality of an existing friendship and the closeness of the relationship helps create a sense of empathy. Given the many opportunities for demonstrating empathy we can encounter daily, this display of empathy is limited and provides viewers with a very specific way in which to be empathic.

2.2.2. The creation and depiction of callousness. Across the selected callous scenes, five main themes are identified in the show's attempt to both create a definition or sense of callousness and display that callousness to the audience. Each of these themes, as well as selected data relating to these themes, will be briefly presented.

2.2.2.1. Theme 1: Victimizing through humour. Humour is a strong theme running throughout the selected callous scenes. Humour is used in two different ways. First, humour is used to belittle the victim. Jokes are made at the expense of another person and the callousness itself comes within a humourous interaction. Although many non-callous interactions use humour in the selected episodes, the jokes within the callous scenes attack the victim in order to make him or her feel small, stupid, ugly, and generally low. The jokes may be given with a sneer or with an audience who then joins in looking down upon the victim. Second, the lack of empathy is made to seem humourous even when the callousness is not presented as a joke itself. In this way, the callousness is softened and seems less offensive or hurtful to the audience. Instead, callousness is something light and enjoyable. In both uses of humour within the callous scenes,

either through the use of a laugh track or by way of other character reactions, the sense that callousness has a positive aspect (namely hilarity) is presented.

One example of humour used at the victim's expense is in a selected callous scene from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). In this scene from *Fairest of Them All* (Ahern, McLaughlin, & Correll, 2005), Carey, the mother of the two main characters, comes face to face with an old rival, Tim. Carey and Tim are both musical entertainers and know each other from previous events. Tim happens to be at the hotel in which Carey lives and they see each other for the first time in a long time. Although their faces both contain smiles throughout their conversation, they continually insult each other. For example, when Carey tells Tim that she works at the hotel, Tim responds with condescension by saying, "Ah, good for you. There's no shame in being a maid" (Ahern et al., 2005). At this, the laugh track plays, cuing the audience to laugh at the joke. Soon after, Carrie reveals that she has two children. Tim responds with, "Oh yes, I heard you had kids. Don't worry, you'll get your figure back" (Ahern et al., 2005). Again, the laugh track indicates that his insult is funny. The insults go back and forth between Tim and Carey, each followed by a laugh track. Although both characters spend the interaction insulting each other's appearance and life situations, the insults are phrased to be humourous, and the audience is cued to laugh along. No insults are held back, even when the person receiving the insult reacts in such a way as to indicate offense. Nevertheless, humour is the main goal of this interaction, along with setting up a conflict and story arc for this episode.

Another example of callousness being construed as humourous can be found in a selected scene from *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbett, 1999). In the episode *Picture Day* (Alexander & Michaeli, 2007), SpongeBob is shown getting meticulously dressed and prepared so his picture can be taken. Immediately upon leaving his house, however, a piece of seaweed flies onto his outfit. Upset, but still optimistic, he returns home and starts his lengthy grooming procedure once again. This time, when leaving his house, a passing garbage truck mistakes SpongeBob for a trash can, lifts him up, and dunks him into the trailer full of garbage. SpongeBob is put down covered in garbage and stench. SpongeBob's neighbour, Squidward, witnesses this and begins laughing hysterically, even bending over and holding his side. Given the physical humour often present in *SpongeBob SquarePants*, it makes sense that the audience is

supposed to find it humourous when SpongeBob is mistaken for trash and completely covered in garbage. The humour is furthered by Squidward's reaction. Despite SpongeBob's clear distress as he stands frozen and shocked, Squidward's laughter turns the distress into humour.

Another example of humour used in callous scenes is in *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006). In the episode *Oops I Meddled Again* (Albert & Hurd, 2006), Jackson, the main character's brother, is working at a beach food booth. Rico, a younger supporting character, whose father owns the food booth, is eating a plate of ribs. His hands are full of sauce when Jackson asks if he is finished eating. Rico reaches across the counter and wipes his dirty hands all over Jackson's shirt. Jackson cannot say anything because his job at the food booth depends upon being kind to the boss' son. Although Jackson is angry with Rico's actions, the laugh track plays in response to Rico's actions. The scene continues with Rico continually belittling Jackson and treating him as an object. When Rico gets hot sauce in Jackson's eyes, Rico laughs, along with the laugh track. As Rico's callous behavior increases, the humour seems to also increase, using both sarcasm and physicality to get laughs. For the audience, this scene does not create a sense of empathy for Jackson who is in a difficult position, but rather creates a sense of fun and comedy.

The analysis of this theme uncovers three examples of the way in which the selected television episodes use humour at the expense of a victim and use humour to make callous behavior seem less offensive. While humour is often used in television shows, the selected callous scenes make use of a specific type of humour to belittle other characters and provide laughter for viewers.

The current study is not the only instance where humour at the expense of another is a common occurrence. Parrott (2016) found that disparaging humour is common in adult comedy television, occurring in 24% of the television slips examined. Parrott was not only interested in the frequency of disparaging humour, but also in the particular types of characters that use disparaging humour and the types of characters that become victims of such humour. Upon examining the characteristics of characters most likely to be the disparager or the victim, Parrott found that although average and underweight characters were more likely to be the disparager than the victim, overweight characters were more likely to be the victim than the disparager. One-third of the disparaging jokes targeted a character's physical appearance, and almost half of the

jokes about appearance targeted a character's weight. Of greater concern, Parrott found that in the majority of cases, the disparaging humour was met by a validating response either through clapping and laughing from the live or canned audience, or through comments from television viewers underneath online clips of the disparagement.

Generally, humour is a typical aspect of social interactions in children and adolescence, assisting in creating friendships and deepening friendships (Sanford & Eder, 1984), as well as finding social acceptance (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). At times, people find aggression itself humourous. In a peer nomination study, Bowker and Etkin (2013) found that children who engaged in relational aggression were viewed as more popular. Further, they noted that humour mediated this relationship, specifically when the relationally aggressive acts (such as gossiping, spreading rumours, or making disparaging remarks) were viewed as humourous by other children.

The television shows used in the current study follow the research closely in that humour is not only used frequently *by* the callous characters but is often callous itself. Parrott (2016) noted that humour may be a way to deliver harsh information about or to a person in a more socially acceptable or softened way. Whereas people may react badly to hear a direct comment disparaging another's appearance, when the comment is made to be humourous, we are more likely to react with a laugh or smile. Further, the canned or live audience reactions that are often used in television shows, and are heard during instances of callous humour in the present study, cue anybody watching the scene that laughter is the appropriate response. In this way, callous behavior is passed off as funny and entertaining rather than hurtful.

Using humour as a conduit for callousness portrays lack of empathy as funny or entertaining rather than hurtful or problematic. Humour creates an atmosphere where being callous is desirable by creating a positive reaction, such as laughter, to the callousness. Moreover, the use of humour may mask the negative effects of the callousness by keeping the audience focused on a funny statement or action rather than the potentially hurt or sad reaction of the victim. Overall, the use of humour in callous interactions creates callousness as something fun and entertaining, making it seem more attractive. The message portrayed to children is one in which callousness can have positive consequences.

2.2.2.2. Theme 2: Callous character as superior. Across the selected callous scenes, many different types of characters display callousness towards others. Nevertheless, a theme running through these scenes is that of a callous character who is superior to the victim in some fashion. By situating the callous character "above" the victim, the callous character becomes someone with a desirable characteristic, whether that be wealth, beauty, power, or position. Further, the victim becomes someone who, although more relatable in his or her underdog position, possesses an unwanted quality. Being superior to the victim also gives the callous character an easy position in which to be callous as he or she has power to make the victim's life more difficult. Besides the position granted to the callous character by the writers of the television show (allowing him or her to be a wealthy individual, or the manager of another person, or powerful in terms of physicality), the character himself or herself uses body language to further the view of him or her as superior to the victim. By standing, walking, or making movements in such a way as to indicate extreme confidence or intimidation the character establishes himself or herself as greater than others.

The first example of the callous character being in a superior social position is observed in a relationship pitting wealth against poverty. The episode *Health and Fitness* (Nemetz & Correll, 2007) in the television series *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005) introduces the character of Francesca. Francesca is the very wealthy friend of one of the main characters, London. Francesca wears several pieces of jewelry, has expensive clothes, and flaunts her wealth to others. During one interaction, Francesca sees another main character, Maddie, in a dressing room prior to a fashion show. Maddie is attempting to choose which outfit to wear for the show. Although Maddie is not in a state of extreme poverty, she is far from the financial position of Francesca—Maddie has to work at the hotel to support herself and cannot afford expensive clothes, trips, or activities. Even though Maddie is meeting Francesca for the first time, Francesca insults Maddie's taste in clothes, her body type, and her position at the hotel. When London tells Francesca that she cannot boss around people who are not in her employ, Francesca hands Maddie a bit of money, believing that this then allows her to insult Maddie further. Francesca's wealth not only gives her a personal sense of immunity, but also allows her to obtain things the other characters envy, such as high-end fashion, elaborate vacations, and lavish homes.

Further, Francesca carries herself in a way that demonstrates her own view of herself as powerful or better than others. Francesca walks with her shoulders thrown backwards, looking around nonchalantly, with her perfectly manicured hands waving people out of her way. When she is finished talking with another person she flicks her hand towards them in a dismissive gesture. Her body language throughout this scene lets the viewer know that Francesca sees herself as better than others and she is overly confident in her own importance.

A second example portraying the theme of the callous as superior is demonstrated in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *Krusty Krushers* (Cash et al., 2008). In the selected scene, SpongeBob SquarePants and Patrick are tricked into a wrestling match. Their two competitors have wrestled dozens of other contestants and have greatly injured each one. As SpongeBob and Patrick approach the two individuals against whom they must compete, it is clear that they are at a disadvantage. The two wrestlers are menacing - they are approximately ten times the size of SpongeBob and Patrick, they have large, bulging muscles, and both growl at SpongeBob and Patrick with such force that it pushes them backwards. Before engaging with SpongeBob and Patrick, they stand in an aggressive, intimidating stance, flexing their muscles and leaning slightly forward as if ready to pounce. It is clear they feel no threat from SpongeBob and Patrick. As the scene carries on, SpongeBob and Patrick are punched, thrown across the ring, squished so forcefully that they become liquid, and must retreat to their corner for a rest. In this scene, the two wrestlers are placed in a position of much superior strength. They are portrayed as bigger, meaner, and tougher. It is quickly clear to the viewer who has the more desirable qualities for a wrestling match. The two wrestlers are able to seriously injure and even kill SpongeBob and Patrick, who are completely at their mercy.

A third example of the callous character being placed in a superior position over the victim is demonstrated in a selected scene from *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In the episode *Big Time Girlfriends* (Spingarn & Schill, 2010), Gustavo, the music producer for Big Time Rush, attempts to teach Carlos, a member of the music group, about true heartbreak by paying an actress to date him. His hope is that if Carlos learns what it feels like to be heartbroken, he will sing a sad love song more convincingly. While Carlos quickly becomes taken with the actress, Gustavo watches with glee, relishing in the success of his plan. Gustavo does not care about the

potential harm to Carlos and is only concerned with the financial benefits of selling more records. The relationship between Gustavo and Carlos is purely business and Carlos' ability to live out his dream of being in a music group is partly dependent upon Gustavo. Since Gustavo writes and produces the music for the group, he is positioned as the "boss" and has the power to end Carlos' involvement in the group. In this case, Gustavo holds great power over Carlos, leaving Carlos in a vulnerable position as long as he wants to pursue his music goals.

The analysis of this theme demonstrates scenarios in which the person in the callous position holds some form of influence or authority over the victim. It may be a social, economic, or physical position of superiority, but the victim is left being the weaker character. The callous character is also placed in a position more culturally tied to images of success - wealth, strength, authority, and control.

This theme can also be measured against the psychological literature. When conceptualizing Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Bandura postulated that learning can occur vicariously through modelling. According to SCT, one way in which our ideas, beliefs, and future actions can be shaped is by watching others and then imitating their behavior (or choosing not to imitate if the consequences are negative). However, we do not attend to and imitate just any other person; there are certain factors that influence whom we are most likely to notice and imitate (Sarapin, Christy, Lareau, Krakow, & Jensen, 2015). One factor influencing whether or not we will emulate another is our admiration for him or her. In fact, the more we admire the other person, whether somebody to whom we have direct contact or somebody whom we see through our television screen, the more likely we are to copy his or her behavior (Bandura, 2009), whether that means buying a product he or she is endorsing or changing career paths (Martin & Bush, 2000). In his book, Cialdini (2001) outlined several characteristics that increase our admiration for another person; interestingly, the characteristics he mentions also increase the influence that person will have over our behavior. Cialdini noted that characteristics indicating authority increase the likelihood that we will comply with another individual. Characteristics of authority include one's title (e.g., doctor, professor, CEO, or boss), one's manner of dress (e.g., wearing a business suit or a lab coat), and items indicating wealth (e.g., jewelry, fancy cars, or brand name clothing). In this respect, the callous characters on the selected television shows may

influence audience members more strongly because they appear to be successful by several measures—they have higher career positions, they have more money, they are attractive, and/or they have authority over others.

Interestingly, however, Frei and Shaver (2002) outlined the correlation between admiration and other characteristics, such as respect, trust, and liking. Frei and Shaver found that admiration for another leading to imitation of behavior is positively correlated with both respect and trust—when thinking about people they admired, participants also tended to rate those individuals as more trustworthy, as having moral qualities, and as having specific talents or skills. Sarapin and colleagues (2015) found similar relationships between admiration leading to behavioural imitation, and trust and respect. Additionally, liking was related to admiration such that the individuals whom participants reportedly admired, were also the individuals whom participants liked. In this respect, there may be some buffer between the seemingly successful callous characters displayed on selected television shows and the likelihood of audience members admiring and then emulating the callous behavior. The determining factor may be not only how successful and admirable the characters appear, but also how respected, trustworthy, and likeable the audience members find the characters. However, Cialdini (2001) noted that how much we like somebody can be partially determined by his or her attractiveness, our similarity to that individual, and how familiar we are with him or her. An interesting opportunity for follow-up research presents itself when considering how each of the selected television characters are viewed by an audience of children according to factors of authority, admiration, and likability; such research could better illuminate the potential mimicking of callous behavior by an audience member.

Overall, putting callous characters in a superior position to the victim depicts callousness positively. Those who are callous are better, stronger, smarter, and more desirable overall. Similar to previous themes of callousness in television, this association gives the message to viewers that callousness is not entirely negative and can make someone appear to be in a better position; callousness becomes something to attain rather than avoid. Callousness is portrayed as something used by those who are better than others—it is a tool of the strong and admirable.

2.2.2.3. Theme 3: Intrinsic callousness. Just as the selected empathic scenes portray empathy characters as being inherently good people, so the selected callous scenes depict callous characters who seem essentially callous. This is partly due to the limited time the audience has with these callous characters. The callous characters are more likely to be included in one episode than given recurring roles in the television show. Therefore, the only information the viewers have about the characters revolve around their callous behavior towards others with very little evidence to disconfirm their personality being basically callous. These characters are also situated as being mean, rude, and aggressive based on the opinions of their personality that the audience receives from other characters. At times, before even seeing the callous character, another character has already altered our opinion of him or her as a nemesis or someone to fear. This further influences the view that these characters are characteristically bad.

One example of a callous character portrayed as inherently callous is in the show *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999). In the episode *Black Jack* (Alexander, Cervas, & Pursel, 2007), SpongeBob recounts childhood interactions he has had with his cousin, BlackJack. Before beginning the re-telling, however, he is already frozen with fear at the thought of BlackJack, giving the audience a first impression of BlackJack's character. SpongeBob also reveals that BlackJack has just recently been released from prison, although offers no information on what crimes he had committed. In a flashback, the audience sees BlackJack, a large, muscled, tattooed, and grimacing character who is several times larger than SpongeBob. In the callous scene, BlackJack tosses a frightened SpongeBob into the air, throws him around, all while taunting him. Despite SpongeBob's obvious panic and shaking, BlackJack continues his assault. The only other information received about BlackJack comes at the end of this episode, when SpongeBob sees him several years later, only to discover that BlackJack never grew past his childhood size and is now much smaller than SpongeBob. Although this takes away SpongeBob's fear of BlackJack, BlackJack is still portrayed as an aggressive individual who tries to wrestle SpongeBob again (although is much less capable this time). As BlackJack is not a regular character and only appears in this episode, there is no additional information about his personality to counter the idea that his core personality is one of callousness.

The *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) episode *Joannie B. Goode* (Green & Sheridan, 2008) offers another example of an intrinsically callous character. In the selected callous scene, Miley and Lilly are discussing a sad book they have both read. Joannie comes over to them and begins making fun of them for being so emotional. She goes on to make fun of Miley's year book picture and calls her ugly. When Lilly attempts to stand up for Miley, her and Joannie threaten one another with physical harm before Joannie walks away, sneering. Later in the episode, Miley and Lilly attempt to make up with Joannie and invite her for a sleep over. Throughout the night, Joannie has a difficult time fitting in with Miley and Lilly—she is portrayed as a grumpy, aggressive, bully. Even when Lilly finds common ground with Joannie, Joannie continues to dislike Miley, feelings that Miley reciprocates. The only scene where Joannie is not depicted as a bully in this episode is when she has romantic encounter with Miley's friend, Oliver. Throughout the series, Joannie makes small appearances in several episodes, however, she is the long-standing rival of Lilly, one of the well-liked characters on the show. It is revealed that Joannie bullied Lilly when they were younger, resulting in a feud. Therefore, even though Joannie is known better as a character than some of the other callous characters in selected scenes, what is known about her contributes to the perception of her as a naturally mean individual.

In the episode *Fairest of Them All* (Ahern et al., 2005) from the television series *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005), the character, Tim, is introduced. Tim is identified as the arch rival to Carey, one of the main characters. Prior to Tim being introduced to the audience, Carey sees him across the room and responds by trying to hide from him while voicing her dislike. As soon as Tim begins interacting with Carey, he is insulting and belittling her. Tim is portrayed as arrogant and pompous, especially considering how he treats one of the popular characters on the show. No redeeming qualities are provided for Tim because the audience sees so little of him throughout this episode; during the major interactions with him, he is rude and critical. Therefore, he is perceived as somebody who is mean and callous at his very core, whereas Carey's rude responses to Tim are perceived as being a product of that particular interaction rather than a part of who she is as a person.

The theme is discussed in relation to the question of what it means to be intrinsically "bad" once again. Recalling a previous discussion with empathy, if one bases the goodness or badness of an individual on his or her behavior, one is left with the difficulty of defining how often a person needs to engage in good or bad behavior to be considered good or bad respectively. As the viewer, one can make assumptions about the character's personality based on a few (or in some cases, a single) actions. The selected television shows pull for the fundamental attribution error, the tendency to assume intrinsic rather than extrinsic causes for another person's behavior (Ross, 1977). Characters displaying callousness in the chosen television shows are particularly susceptible to the fundamental attribution error because they are often characters with whom the audience has little contact. Due to the limited contact with the audience, our beliefs of these characters as inherently callous or mean have little opportunity to be challenged. Therefore, the audience may view bad behavior and assume bad person, an assumption that is then confirmed by a lack of evidence to the contrary. The difficulty comes, however, from generalizations made to reality based on television experiences. If, on television, the "bad" characters are portrayed as intrinsically bad with no opposing evidence, it reinforces the assumption, which are already prone to be based on the fundamental attribution error, that people in reality who do a single bad thing are inherently bad.

The particular case where an individual is more likely to be intrinsically "bad" may be made for psychopathy. After all, one of the defining features of psychopathy is a lack of empathy (Hare, 1991). In the case of psychopathy, several brain regions have been implicated in the individual's increased callousness, such as the amygdala and the Medial Orbital Frontal Cortex (Blair, 2013). While the neuropsychology of psychopathy can illuminate but not necessarily excuse or explain all psychopathic behavior, it may be the closest we can come to saying that somebody is internally bad if we want to make synonyms of "bad" and "psychopath". However, it is not necessarily true that all the callous characters observed in the current study were psychopaths and the information required to make such a statement is not provided, therefore any such assumption would be a large and most likely incorrect leap.

Further, even in the case of psychopathy, empathy may be learned, although not necessarily for prosocial purposes. A study by Dadds and colleagues (2009) demonstrated that as

males with psychopathy traits move from childhood to adulthood, they begin to learn how to empathize at a cognitive level, meaning they can understand how somebody is feeling and explain why the person may feel that way, although they do no enter into a shared experience of that emotion. This study indicated that individuals high on psychopathic traits can talk about and maybe even feign empathy due to their understanding of emotions, however they are still missing the key piece of empathy, the shared experience of the emotion. Therefore, at least at the level of psychopathy, it seems that lack of empathy may be intrinsic. However, aside from extreme cases, single callous interactions do not necessarily provide information on complete personality or relational patterns of callousness, despite the portrayal of callous characters in the television shows.

Unlike the previous themes presented regarding the portrayal of callousness in children's television shows, the theme of intrinsic callousness does not portray callousness in a positive way. Generally, the "good guy" is something to attain to, while the "bad guy" is someone to be defeated, making viewers less inclined to be seen as the bad guy in their life. If children internalize this message, they may be more likely to engage in behavior that is pro-social and motived by empathy, rather than engage in antisocial behavior motivated by a lack of empathy. However, depicting callousness as something that one inherently has or does not have can create problems in children's understanding of callousness as it creates black and white thinking with regard to behavior. Black and white thinking can create an atmosphere where certain individuals are seen as villains based upon one or two interactions. Over time, this can create a lack of empathy in children, an environment where they fail to see the point of view of individuals engaging in callous behavior. In this way, although callousness as intrinsic can be a positive message if it makes callousness less desirable, it also has the potential to create an atmosphere of less empathy towards individuals who have been callous. However, further research is needed to explore the messages children are able to decipher and how they think about these messages.

2.2.2.4. Theme 4: A lovable victim. Opposite the callous character, who is both shown to be essentially bad and in a superior position, is the well-liked, loveable, and pitiable victim. Within the selected callous scenes, the person on the receiving end of callousness is often a main character of the television series. Because he or she is a main character, the audience has been

able to see the victim in several settings, engaging with many people, and displaying several personality traits prior to the callous interaction. In contrast, the callous character is often less known to the audience and therefore less nuanced in character. The victim is often either *the* main character of the show and very well liked or is close to the main character of the show, a best friend or confidante. Therefore, the audience can be more sympathetic to the victim. Further, the victim is placed in an inferior position relative to the callous character, which creates a sense of pity when the callous character takes advantage of or harms him or her in some way. As a result, if the victim does retaliate, his or her reciprocated callousness seems justified.

In a selected scene from *I Want You to Want Me…To Go To Florida* (Poryes & Christiansen, 2007) from the television series *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006), Hannah Montana herself is a lovable victim. Hannah is participating in a television interview with a fellow singer, Mikayla. When the interview breaks for commercial, Hannah turns to compliment Mikayla on her singing, but Mikayla responds by insulting Hannah's singing and appearance. Although Hannah is visibly taken aback, Mikayla continues by saying that she will take away all of Hannah Montana's fans. Hannah responds in kind and begins insulting Mikayla. Their verbal feud goes on, eventually involving Mikayla's manager and Hannah's father, until the television interview goes back on air. Even though Hannah insults Mikayla throughout this scene, Hannah is the more sympathetic character. She is well known by the audience as the main character, she is well liked, and she is not the instigator. Because she is so cruelly insulted, her response seems more appropriate as a way to defend herself, while Mikayla's attack seems entirely unjustified and cruel.

Another example of a lovable victim can be found in Arwin, the janitor on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). In the episode *Going For The Gold* (Lapidus & Correll, 2006) Arwin becomes victim of Irv, who belittles Arwin prior to the janitor competition in which both are taking part. Ira, the previous year's winner, insults Arwin's competency, indicating that Arwin is too weak and slow to beat him in the competition this year. Arwin seeks retaliation by insisting that he will dominate Irv and take the trophy, however Irv just laughs at his attempts of bravado and walks away. Although Arwin is not a main character in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, the two main characters of the show get along well with him. Since the main

characters are well liked on the show, Arwin is also likeable by association. Further, Arwin is a pitiable character—he is clumsy, nerdy, and insecure. Although he wants to do well, he often messes things up. For example, in the selected callous scene alone he trips and falls on three occasions. Nevertheless, he is kind and tries hard to succeed. Because Irv starts his interaction with Arwin by insulting Arwin's abilities, Arwin's retaliation does not appear arrogant or without cause, but rather just an attempt to defend oneself against a threat and defeat the antagonist. Consequently, Irv comes across as arrogant and mean, while Arwin comes across as determined and honourable.

One last example of the victim as a lovable character is the eponymous character in *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999). During the episode *Krusty Krushers* (Cash et al., 2008), Mr. Krabs learns of a wrestling competition where the grand prize is a sizeable amount of money. However, the individuals against whom one must wrestle are very large and ferocious. Mr. Krabs is particularly greedy and immoral, so he signs up SpongeBob and Patrick to wrestle and win him the money. When SpongeBob and Patrick see their competitors, they run back to Mr. Krabs in fear, questioning whether it is safe to wrestle. Mr. Krabs assures SpongeBob and Patrick that they will be completely safe, and even tells them the wrestling match is just a game, with no real potential for injury. SpongeBob and Patrick, being less intelligent beings, easily buy into his lies and go on to wrestle, receiving several injuries in the process. SpongeBob SquarePants is the main character of the show, he is well known to the audience, and he is depicted as gullible, optimistic, fun-loving, and kind. Although Mr. Krabs is also a main character, and liked well enough, he is frequently portrayed as greedy and without conscience. Given SpongeBob's positive, yet naive, nature, it is easy to sympathize with his fear of wrestling and feel sorry for him when he so easily believes Mr. Krabs' lies. Mr. Krabs is SpongeBob's boss from work, so SpongeBob is also in a vulnerable position where he wants to please his boss so he can maintain his good standing at work. Based on SpongeBob's character traits, his popularity on the show, his naïveté, and his vulnerable position, it is easy to take his side during this exchange with Mr. Krabs.

Given the analysis of this theme, it is difficult to separate personal characteristics from relational status in the selected television scenes (since the victim is often well known to others

present in the scene). Research supports a relationship between liking and empathy. When comparing facial expressions of empathy towards either in-group or out-group members, Yabar and Hess (2007) found that displays of empathy were more likely to be shown towards individuals whom one liked or perceived as similar in some way, such as belonging to the same ethnic group. Further, increased empathy for an individual is also demonstrated to increase liking for that individual when that individual is part of an out-group (Nesdale, Griffith, Durkin, & Maass, 2005). Displays of empathy can even result in increased liking for individuals who were originally disliked (Nesdale et al., 2005). Based on these studies, an associated between empathy and liking is clear; we are more likely to empathize with those we like and like those to whom we have displayed empathy. The relationship between liking and empathy corresponds to the selected television scenes. By having victims who are more likeable, there is an increased possibility that the audience will empathize with the victim over the callous character.

A note of caution is warranted. The previously discussed studies used in-groups and out-groups that were based on ethnicity, while the characters in the selected television shows are by and large white individuals (with the exception of SpongeBob SquarePants where the characters are various cartoon sea creatures). In fact, Nesdale and colleagues (2005) found that for individuals part of an ethnic in-group, there was no relationship between feelings of empathy and later reports of liking, perhaps because levels of liking were higher towards in-group members regardless of whether empathy was or was not felt. Therefore, because the selected television shows do not include out-group interactions (arguing that by and large the characters are part of similar groups), there may be no real need for the victim to be likeable other than the effect his or her likability has on the closeness of his or her relationships, which may then impact the empathy he or she receives as per the previous discussion on empathy in close relationships. Either way, it makes for good television to have clearly delineated, black and white, depictions of callousness (bad people) and victims (innocent people), which, as discussed in the summary, is a common characteristic of the selected television shows.

Overall, most research examining factors that lead to the likelihood of empathy being displayed or pro-social behaviors being enacted focuses less on the person receiving the empathy (aside from whether he or she belongs to an in-group or out-group), and instead focuses on the

individual providing the empathy or pro-social behavior (e.g., his or her general level of empathy or his or her cognitive ability to take another's perspective). Although the message should in no way focus on whether a person deserves to receive empathy, future research may benefit from looking deeper at the characteristics of those with whom people empathize. Not only would further research illuminate the accuracy of media in its depiction of victims or empathizees, but it also may provide information on how best to illicit empathy for different groups or causes.

When the victim is likeable, part of the message given to children regarding callousness is one in which kind and considerate people open themselves up to ridicule, aggression, or general callousness. Moreover, likeable victims may give the message that certain people deserve pity and empathy because of desirable behavior and others do not deserve empathy. However, because the victim is more typically likeable, the viewers may want to identify more with the victim than the aggressor, making them more likely to distance themselves from callous behavior. Overall, the message about empathy and callousness continues to be black and white, good versus bad, callous aggressor versus kind, likeable victim.

2.2.2.5. Theme 5: Callous scene sets up conflict. The selected callous scenes are often used at the beginning of an episode to set up the main story line conflict. Just as the empathy scenes marked a resolution or changing point for the episode, the callous scenes also serve a specific purpose. Callous scenes may be used to set up conflict partly due to the fact that they create conflict between two characters, allowing the rest of the episode to follow the rise of the action and eventual resolution. Also, because callous scenes are made up of some sort of friction, they offer a quick chance to engage the audience. An argument or fight between two characters gives some startle value to the beginning of the episode, easily pulling the viewers into the theme of that particular episode. When you are expecting someone to invest 20 to 25 minutes into the television show, it makes sense to insert an early point of interest to capture the audience's attention.

One example of the callous scenes setting up the episode's conflict is the selected scene from *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). Early in the episode *Big Time Audition* (Fellows & Holland, 2009), the viewers are introduced to the music producer, Gustavo, and his associate, Kelly, who are attempting to find the next big music sensation. The scene follows as numerous individuals

audition for a chance to sign a deal with a record label. Gustavo is an intimidating and aggressive character. Each time somebody auditions, Gustavo loudly insults their talent, yelling phrases such as, "Your singing makes me want to dance…off a cliff" (Fellows and Holland, 2009) and "Listen here sister, that's the worst singing I've ever heard in my life" (Fellows and Holland, 2009). Gustavo also pounds his hand on his desk in frustration and even pulls out a gun and points it at the person auditioning, although his associate quickly grabs the gun away from him. This scene serves to both introduce viewers to the idea of a music group being created by a record label and set the scene for the eventual audition of the four main characters in the television series. Gustavo's frustration with the many terrible singers makes his eventual introduction to Carlos, Kendall, Logan, and James even more exciting because he views them as highly marketable and talented - he has finally found the individuals for whom he was searching. The main story line of the episode is the four main characters igniting their dream of becoming musicians, Gustavo discovering the boys, and then Gustavo bringing them into Hollywood to begin their journey. The particular callous scene at the beginning of the show sets the stage for the continued story arc and resolution.

Another example of the callous scene used to set up conflict is a selected scene from *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006). In the episode *You Are So Sue-able To Me* (Lapiduss & Christiansen, 2007), Lilly, who is a tomboy, is confronted by two girls from her class who begin making fun of her for being too masculine. They comment sarcastically on her abilities in sports and tell her that she does not know how to be a girl. Although Lilly responds by making a mean face at the two girls as they walk away, this interaction sets up the story line of this episode. After interacting with the two girls, Miley feels free to then let Lilly know that sometimes she tends to behave more like a boy than a girl. Miley tells Lilly that if she does not act more like a girl, she may not be able to catch the interest of the boy she likes. So, Miley does a make-over on Lilly with the goal of making her more feminine and, of course, disaster ensues. The conflict that the selected callous scene creates is not necessarily between Lilly and the two girls because these two girls are not present for the rest of the episode. Rather, the conflict created by this callousness is within Lilly herself. The comments of the two girls lead Lilly to doubt who she truly is, making her more susceptible to Miley's desire to make her more feminine. The end

resolution is, of course, that Lilly discovers that it is best to be true to herself and people will like her for that.

One final example of the callous scene setting up the conflict of the episode is in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). Near the beginning of the episode *Health and Fitness* (Nemetz & Correll, 2007), London introduces her wealthy and spoiled friend, Francesca, to Maddie. Because Maddie is not wealthy, Francesca looks down upon her. While Maddie attempts to find clothes to wear for an upcoming fashion show, Francesca insults her fashion sense. Francesca also ends up telling Maddie that she has "chicken legs." Francesca's interaction with Maddie reverberates throughout the rest of the episode as Maddie attempts to gain weight. Maddie makes herself sick by trying to eat too much calorie heavy food. Eventually, of course, Maddie learns that her friends actually think she is perfect as she is, despite Francesca's comments. The callousness of Francesca set off a series of troublesome, and sometimes comical, events for Maddie throughout the episode before the final resolution made Maddie confident in her appearance. Although Francesca herself does not appear in the rest of the episode, similar to the previously described callous scene in *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006), Francesca's words created a conflict within Maddie herself.

Given the analysis of this theme, it can be suggested that placing callous scenes at the beginning of the conflict gives viewers the message that callousness is part of and sets up conflict, but also that it requires future resolution—callousness is not the end of the interaction. Although using callousness to set off conflict has entertainment value, it also gives a positive message that callousness can be resolved in the future. However, future research may want to further explore how well children follow the television story arch from the initial callous interaction to the final resolution or whether children lose interest throughout the story. Because the callousness is often displayed at the beginning of the television show, children who cannot maintain their focus for 20 minutes may not witness the final resolution.

2.2.3. The comparison of empathic and callous scenes. After analyzing the empathic and callous scenes separately, a comparative analysis allows the researcher to further explore the contextual factors used to portray empathy and callousness within the selected scenes. Through

the process of comparing empathic and callous scenes, four main themes were identified. Each of these themes, as well as selected data relating to these themes, is briefly presented.

2.2.3.1. Theme 1: Differing motivations behind humour. One similarity between the selected callous and empathy scenes is the frequency of humour within the scene. However, the selected empathy scenes make use of humour in a different way than the selected callous scenes. When humour is used within the selected empathy scenes, it appears lighthearted, often a moment shared between good friends. Further, the humour displayed in the selected empathy scenes is not made at another person's expense but is rather situational humour about a shared experience. The motivation behind this humour appears to be building a relationship, sharing an experience, and having fun. In contrast, the humour in the selected callous scenes is often used to degrade another individual. While the characters taking part in the humour are amused, other characters are being victimized by the humour. The selected callous scenes use humour as a way to intentionally harm one character while providing entertainment or an entitled air to other characters. While the audience is meant to find both the empathy and callous humour entertaining, as indicated by the laugh track guiding the audience response, the humour within the callous scenes is disrespectful.

The contrast in motivations behind humour between selected callous and empathy scenes is demonstrated when comparing an empathy scene in the *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009) episode *Big Time Mansion* (Menendez & Spingarn, 2010) with a callous scene from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005) episode *Health and Fitness* (Nemetz & Correll, 2007)*.* In the *Big Time Rush* scene, Katie, a child who is much older than her years, pretends to be sick to make her mother, Jennifer, feel needed. After Katie complains of a stomach ache, Jennifer rushes to grab her a thermometer and blanket while leading her to the couch to lie down. While walking to the couch, Katie blurts out, "Maybe some online poker will settle my stomach" (Menendez & Spingarn, 2010). Jennifer looks at her quizzically. Because the audience, but not Jennifer, knows that Katie is faking, Katie's declaration combined with Jennifer's brief suspicion is amusing. However, this humourous exchange does not demean any character or create hurt feelings; rather the situation of Katie faking illness and Jennifer not being in on the gag create a humourous moment. In contrast, during the callous scene in *The Suite Life of Zack*

and Cody (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005), Francesca, a particularly wealthy but mean character, repeatedly insults the other characters and each insult in followed by the laugh track playing to indicate that a joke just occurred. For instance, when London introduced Francesca to her "poor friend," Maddie, Francesca leans forward slightly, opens her eyes wide, and slowly says "It's so nice to meet you" (Nemetz & Correll, 2007) while using exaggerated gestures to explain her words; all this indicates that Francesca assumes because Maddie is not rich, she is incapable of speaking English well enough to understand Francesca. Later, when Carrie enters the scene and exclaims that she thinks Maddie's dress is pretty, Francesca waves her away and says, "Thank-you, but we really don't need an opinion from the help" (Nemetz & Correll, 2007). At the end of the scene, Francesca tells London that her bottom is very large and exclaims that Maddie's legs are too skinny before walking out of the scene. After all these verbal exchanges, a laugh track plays. Francesca's words are insulting and belittling of Maddie, Carrie, and London. It is obvious throughout the scene that she thinks of herself as better than the others. Further, the other characters respond with confused, angry, and surprised expressions at Francesca's rude comments. Nevertheless, Francesca's demeanor and opinions are meant to be presented as hilarity at the expense of others.

The above analysis portrays just one contrast example of many. Humour is used frequently in the children's television shows I sampled because it is a way to keep the interest of audiences and make a show entertaining. However, the comparative analysis revealed how different the use of humour is when a scene centers on a callous interaction verses an empathic interaction. This certainly makes sense as callous interactions usually involve at least two individuals who are not on friendly terms at that moment and the humour is one way to demonstrate the callousness at that time. In contrast, empathic interactions usually involve individuals who are currently showing care and concern for one another and in these instances, biting humour would only break the sincerity of empathy.

Keeping in mind the previous discussion about the ubiquity of callous, disparaging humour in television, it may be more surprising that any humour in a comedy show can be kind, or at the very least, not disparaging, than it is surprising how often humour is used to belittle or

hurt a character. Various theories outline the purpose and style of humour and occasionally these theories associate certain kinds of humour with certain personality traits or traits of wellbeing.

The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003) outlined four types of humour based on a dichotomy of adaptive-maladaptive and a dichotomy of self-other. According to their model, affiliative humour is adaptive and others-focused; its purpose is to use wit, jokes, and laughter to build relationships and put others at ease. Self-enhancing humour is adaptive and self-focused; it is based on general life situations and uses humour as a way to cope with difficulties in life. Aggressive humour is maladaptive and others-focused; sarcasm, put-downs, and disparagement is used without care about the effect on others and sometimes with the intent to threaten or manipulate. Self-defeating humour is maladaptive and self-focused; it makes use of self-disparagement as a way of hiding negative characteristics or trying to gain attention and approval. According to the model of types of humour outlined by Martin and colleagues (2003), humour that is considered affiliative or self-enhancing is correlated positively with self-esteem, well-being, and social intimacy. When people use humour to connect with others, it benefits not only their own health, but the health of their social relationships. Meanwhile, aggressive and self-defeating humour styles are positively correlated with aggression and hostility; rather than building up relationships and well-being, these humour styles area associated with factors that destroy relationships. Based on the various relationships between types of humour and self or other well being, there is a clear demarcation between "good" and "bad" humour.

However, some theorists believe that all humour targets another person. For instance, Gruner (1978, as cited in Meyer, 2000) and Billig (2005) argued that there is a target or "butt" of every joke, that humour only creates rifts between groups and is always meant to embarrass or belittle. The idea that all humour is denigrating corresponds to the superiority theory of humour which says that laughter is an expression of superiority—we laugh at things to which we feel superior (Feinberg, as cited in Meyer, 2000; Grotjahn, 1957; Gruner, 1997, 1978; Morreall, 1983). If all humour is, in a way, callous, then both the selected empathy and callous scenes have elements of callousness because humour is used often (although not always) even in the empathy scenes.

Nevertheless, other humour theorists counteract the view that all humour is disparaging. In fact, views such as the relief theory or the incongruity-resolution theory of humour both see humour as arising from a certain play on tensions or emotions rather than humour relating primarily to the content of the joke (Boyd, 2004). So, rather than finding something humourous because its content makes us feel superior to another person, we find something humourous because of the way the joke or event builds up our expectations or emotions and then resolves that build, either by providing us with an unexpected outcome and punchline or releasing the tense energy created in the build-up. In either alternative theory of humour, the joke itself may or may not degrade another individual, but it does not necessarily do so. Such seems to be the case with the selected television shows. Although at times (and as has been demonstrated, more so in the callous interactions) individual characters are put down in the name of laughter, at times laughter comes from an unexpected event, a release of tension, or an odd coupling of event and outcome.

Meyer (2000) outlined how the different theories of humour (relief, incongruity-resolution, and superiority) have different functions. Meyer noted that no one theory can explain all types of humour, but rather each theory can help us understand the purpose of certain kinds of humour. For instance, he indicated that relief humour serves to build identification between the person communicating and the people listening. Often accomplished through self-deprecation or humour that highlights the similarities between the communicator and audience, relief humour reduces the perceived gap between individuals. For instance, a teacher may make a joke about him or herself in order to appear more relatable to the students. Whether or not humour can serve a positive purpose at a theoretical level, children viewing humour within the selected television shows may have more difficulty than adults distinguishing between the motivations behind the humour and instead focus on the outcome, which includes laughter. Although humour in the empathy scenes does not disparage others, such subtleties may not be noticed by younger audience members. Nevertheless, the direct contrast between the disparaging humour of the callous scenes and the lighthearted humour of the empathy scenes helps bolster the presentation of callousness or empathy. Although both presentations of humour provide entertainment and

laughter, the different kinds of humour may help viewers see the negative and hurtful motivations of callousness or the caring and familiarity of empathy.

   2.2.3.2. Theme 2: Victims as empathizees. Another theme that is illuminated through a contrast and comparison of the selected empathy and callous scenes is the idea that the victims in the callous scenes are often the same characters who receive empathy in the empathy scenes. At times this occurs because the characters are shown empathy due to their recent victimization. For instance, in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *BlackJack* (Alexander et al., 2007), SpongeBob is fearful of his cousin BlackJack and remembers all the times that BlackJack physically hurt him. As a result of SpongeBob's fear and reminiscing, his pet snail, Garry, offers empathy by joining in SpongeBob's fear despite lacking any possibility of real harm himself. Another example is in selected scenes from *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006), Lilly Truscott is portrayed as the empathizee as she describes to Miley how she had been stood up on a date in the episode *You Are So Sue-able To Me* (Lapiduss & Christiansen, 2007). Earlier in the episode, she is portrayed as the victim when two girls make fun of her and mock her for being too masculine.

   At other times, the instances of a character being a victim and then being an empathizee are not connected. For example, in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005), Zack is the empathizee when he is diagnosed with dyslexia (even though he is faking the disorder to avoid doing his schoolwork) in the episode *Smart and Smarterer* (Kallis, Lapidus, & Correll, 2005). Then, in the episode *Let Us Entertain You* (Kallis, O'Connell, & Correll, 2008), Zack is a victim when he and his family are prohibited from eating enough food aboard a cruise ship until they provide entertainment for the other passenger. *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) demonstrates another example of a character being both a victim and empathizee in unconnected scenarios. Jackson Stewart is portrayed as the empathizee in the episode *On The Road Again* (Meyer & Christiansen, 2006) when he misses his father and his sister empathizes with his sadness. Then, in the episode *Oops I Meddled Again* (Albert & Hurd, 2006), Jackson is portrayed as the victim when his employer's son takes advantage of Jackson's vulnerable position, making Jackson participate in humiliating tasks.

Earlier identified themes indicate that both the victims and the empathizees largely emerge as positive personalities in the selected television shows. The internal and positive traits of the empathizees create an image of deserving the goodness that others offer through their own kindness, attractiveness, or friendliness. The victims are portrayed in a very similar way—they are kind, attractive, and friendly, not deserving of the callousness they are shown and certainly deserving of pity for being victimized. While it is not possible to identify all the motivations behind the show creators placing these particular characters in the victim/empathizee roles, the traits displayed by the characters suggests that one reason may be their likability. To create a character that is viewed as "mean," create a conflict that the audience wants to be resolved, and pull for empathy from the audience, the writers have created a character with whom it is easy to empathize.

The contrast analysis demonstrates that, just as in the previous themes discussing the empathizees as deserving and the victims as loveable, having these likeable characters play both roles creates the same impression that our empathy for others is partly based on their actions or internal worth rather than empathy based upon our own inclinations and the objective situation. As previously discussed, offering empathy to certain individuals more readily than others is supported by research outlining our proclivity for empathizing in closer relationships. Nevertheless, as discussed, research also supports the notion that certain individuals are naturally more empathic, challenging the notion that empathy is pulled from the empathizer by the empathizee rather than offered from the empathizer to the empathizee.

One possible consequence of the same characters being both victims and empathizees is that the audience begins to see certain people or character traits as more "needy," and easier to prey upon. Finding certain character traits as more vulnerable based upon interactions on television is not an obvious conclusion and further study would have to explore the opinions that audiences make about the victim and empathizee characters. Whatever the conclusion of the audience regarding the victim/empathizees, whether they are viewed as needy and weak or as likeable characters who are deserving of the empathy they receive for their "lot in life," the depiction of a particular type of character in these roles creates stereotypes of the kinds of people who need empathy or help from others. Overall, the message confused victimization with

empathy, making empathy appear possibly weaker or less desirable as a characteristic. Whether viewed positively or negatively, black and white characterization of individuals may create assumptions about people in the viewing audience, although further research may benefit from exploring this relationship.

  2.2.3.3. Theme 3: Public versus private interactions. Another theme that presents itself when comparing selected callous scenes with selected empathy scenes is the difference in where empathic versus callous interactions take place. In the selected callous scenes, character interactions take place in more public areas. For instance, in the *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) episode *I Want You To Want Me…To Go To Florida* (Poryes & Christiansen, 2007), Rico ignores Miley's anger when she hears her popstar rival's song on the radio, and Rico turns up the radio and starts dancing in order to make Miley more angry. This scene takes place in an outside restaurant on the beach with many people watching in the background as the loud interaction takes place. Similarly, in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *Krusty Krushers* (Cash et al., 2008), Mr. Krabs tricks SpongeBob and Patrick into wrestling some much larger characters so that he can win money. Later, SpongeBob and Patrick are wrestling the two large competitors and are being beaten and hurt. These two interactions take place in a wrestling ring with an entire audience watching and cheering along. Other callous scenes take place in school cafeterias, on the set of a television show, on a webpage video, and in a hotel lobby. In comparison, the selected empathic interactions take place in private settings, away from any potential background audience. In *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005) episode *Smart and Smarterer* (Kallis, Lapidus et al., 2005), an empathic moment between Zack and his teacher takes place in a classroom where nobody is present except for Zack, the teacher, and Zack's mother. An empathic confrontation in *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009) between James' mother and three other mothers takes place in a hotel room with only the four mothers present. Other empathy scenes take place in bedrooms, backyard patios, or private homes.

  More than just the location, a comparison between the selected empathic and callous scenes reveals that there is a difference in privacy regarding who else is witnessing the interaction. While many characters are present to witness the callous interaction, the empathic

interaction has few witnesses, if any, even when the interaction is occurring in a more public location. For instance, in the episode *Going For Gold* (Lapidus & Correll, 2006) from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005), London is sitting in the main hotel lobby, lamenting her failed clothing store when Moseby, the hotel manager, sits and talks with her. Although the hotel lobby is busy, the conversation is quiet, the camera is focused closely on London and Moseby, and the presence of others in the hotel lobby is minimized. Comparatively, a callous scene from that same episode shows Arwin, the hotel janitor, being confronted aggressively by his arch rival, Irv, in the same hotel lobby. In this instance, several background characters interact with the scene—two ladies run away from Arwin who is sweating profusely after a run and one older lady looks at him after he trips over her suitcase. Rather than a private interaction, the conversation between Arwin and Irv is loud, and their movements cover more of the hotel lobby - there is not the same sense or privacy as the empathic scene from the same episode.

A similar contrast is found when comparing an empathic and callous scene from *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). In *Big Time Girlfriends* (Spingarn & Schill, 2010), Katie and Reginald are watching an argument between Camille and Logan, who are dating. During the argument, Katie and Reginald comment to one another about the specifics of the argument, such as who is making the best points and how it will affect the relationship. While commenting, Katie and Reginald are smiling and eating popcorn, clearly enjoying the distress of Camille and Logan. This entire interaction takes place by the very public pool of a hotel and many background characters are present. Further, the argument, along with the commentary by Katie and Reginald, are loud and there is no real attempt at privacy. This is very different from the empathic scene in *Big Time Mansion* (Menendez & Spingarn, 2010) where Katie listens to her mother sadly reminisce about when her children were younger. Katie comes to understand that her mother feels unneeded and so Katie pretends to be sick so that her mother can take care of her. This interaction takes place in the private hotel room of Katie and her mother. No other characters are present during this interaction and it is a special moment only between a daughter and mother.

Given the above contrast analysis, the overall message is one in which callousness is less intimate and more effective with an audience. Empathy, however, is a very personal interaction

between two individuals. Although this may portray empathy positively, it also creates a narrow view of when and how to demonstrate empathy to others. Viewers may come away with a false sense of the environment most conducive to empathic displays, one in which there is a prolonged, private, and meaningful interaction. In reality, empathy can be displayed publicly, more subtly, and for individuals with whom one is not even in the same room. However, with repeated exposure to private, intimate empathic interactions, viewers may come to narrowly define and recognize empathy in their own lives and relationships.

2.2.3.4. Theme 4: Remorse. Conflict is to be expected in the selected callous scenes by the very fact that one character will be mean, rude, or indifferent to another character. Nevertheless, even in the selected empathy scenes, the interactions between characters are not always free of friction. While both the selected empathy and callous scenes can include discord between characters, in the callous scenes the conflict is not followed by remorse whereas remorse is an important part of reconciling characters in the selected empathy scenes. In fact, at times the initial friction in the empathy scene is necessary to allow for the empathy; the empathizer starts the interaction frustrated with the empathizee before coming to experience the empathizee's emotions and motivations.

One example of conflict leading to remorse can be found in *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (Kallis, Dreayer et al., 2005). In the episode *Health and Fitness* (Nemetz & Correll, 2007), Zack's mother, Carey, wants Zack to eat healthier so she makes him avoid all sugary snacks. However, at the end of the episode, she finds him in the hotel kitchen, eating ice cream straight out of a large bucket. Immediately she gets mad at Zack and lectures him for eating so unhealthy. When Zack begins to look sad and ashamed, however, her facial expressions soften, she reaches out to Zack, and she apologizes for forcing him to avoid all sugar which then led him to gorge himself later. Carey comments on how difficult her dietary restrictions must have been for him and agrees to help him learn balance and moderation.

Another example of remorse in the empathy scenes can be found in the episode *Big Time Moms* (Fellows & Holland, 2011) from the television series *Big Time Rush* (Fellows, 2009). Near the end of the episode, the mothers of Logan, Kendall, and Carlos confront James' mom regarding her desire to take James home, which would result in the break-up of the boy band and

the end of James' musical dreams. The three mothers meet James' mother aggressively and accusingly. However, when James' mother becomes sad and explains that she only misses James and wants him closer to home, the three other mothers soften. Each of the mothers mimic the sad expression of James' mom and explain how hard it must be for her to be separated from her child for so long. To reconcile with James' mom they come up with a plan to make sure she is able to speak to and see James more often.

Similarly, in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *Driven to Tears* (Brookshier et al., 2007), SpongeBob, who is jealous that Patrick has his license, litters while Patrick is driving him around town. Patrick is arrested and sentenced to prison for littering. At first, SpongeBob is very angry with Patrick and happy that Patrick's luck has turned until his conscience leads him to feels scared about what the prison environment will be like for Patrick. After thinking about how hard jail will be for Patrick and how scared Patrick will be when there alone, SpongeBob finally confesses that he was the person who littered and he should receive the punishment.

The concept of remorse is not present in the callous interactions from the selected television scenes. In the *Hannah Montana* (Peterman & Poryes, 2006) episode *I Want You To Want Me…To Go To Florida* (Poryes & Christiansen, 2007), Miley's popstar rival, Mikayla, repeatedly insults Miley, who then returns the insults. Eventually Miley's own father and Mikayla's agent become involved in the argument. However, despite the many mean comments made to one another, there is no point throughout the episode where reconciliation happens. Instead, the conflict continues to escalate, and further arguments ensue. Even in conversations with other characters, Miley and Mikayla do not appear apologetic for their aggressive and biting comments.

In the *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbitt, 1999) episode *SpongeBob's Last Stand* (Springer, Banks, & Iversen, 2010), Squidward callously rejoices when he believes he will never have to see SpongeBob again if the Krusty Krab closes. Even though SpongeBob is crying and very upset at the prospect of losing his job and the friend he believes he has in Squidward, Squidward ignores SpongeBob's pain and instead smiles. At no later point does Squidward experience remorse for acting callously or hurting SpongeBob's feelings.

As the contrast analysis highlights, remorse is a part of empathic scenes. Using remorse in empathic scenes presents an overall positive message about empathy. Not only do the television shows demonstrate a way in which remorse can lead to and include empathy, but they also offer examples of how recognize one's own mistakes and act apologetically. Characters who display empathy are not always entirely innocent, but their demonstration of remorse provides viewers with a template for apologies and gives more nuanced understanding of empathic characters. Further, not including remorse in callous scenes gives viewers the message that when acting anti-socially, part of the negativity comes from failing to apologize and make up for the mistake, whereas in empathic scenes, remorse and empathy helps in resolving relationship conflict. If children pick up on the demonstration of remorse in empathic scenes, the positive message about admitting mistakes provides children with another understanding of how empathy can be used to bolster relationships.

2.2.4. Study One summary. Although teaching children about empathy is not typically the main motivation for creating television programs, repeatedly watching character interactions can influence the way children then come to view "normal" behavior between friends, coworkers, or family. Many different themes have come out from analyzing the selected television shows, and due to the various television programs for children, the current analysis cannot be considered exhaustive. Themes may change over years as television trends also change. Nevertheless, the selected television shows demonstrate one way in which this form of media tends to create and demonstrate empathy. A character's internal and inborn qualities play a prominent role in empathy—whether someone will provide or receive empathy—leaving the impression that empathy is not learned but is earned through either being a kind and likeable person or having a close relationship to the empathizer. Similarly, callousness is presented as an inborn quality, providing children with a very black and white view of the world - people are born as either good or bad.

Perhaps what is missing for the audience from the selected television shows is a thorough understanding of each character's upbringing. It is possible that the recent theories of moral development provided by SDT and SIP could provide an explanation for these character's behavior. It is possible that the empathic characters had histories that included many instances of

displayed empathy, that these characters were on the receiving end of empathy quite often, thereby providing them with an understanding of how it feels to receive empathy. And it is possible that such histories have helped these characters interpret current interactions based upon the past positive experiences and emotions, leading them to be empathic, kind people. However, these are possibilities that must be assumed to fit the television presentation of empathy into current theory and research, rather than possibilities with evidence. Without making such assumptions about the presented stories, the more likely portrayal of empathic and callous characters that emerges is one of inherent personality that is not learned from or integrated with past experiences but is rather inborn and unchanging.

The creation of empathy (and callousness) as an internal, unchangeable characteristic is presented, and thus examined according to typical storytelling techniques. The typical story arc furthers the way empathy and callousness are viewed. Callousness is presented as something to start and build conflict, or more troublingly as a comic relief in an otherwise serious exchange, and empathy is the serious interaction provided to assist in resolving the conflict. Again, a very black and white view of callousness and empathy is presented. The black and white depiction may serve to control the audience's distraction from the punch lines. It contrasts with the view of empathy portrayed through my interviews with parents in a subsequent study. In discussion with parents, empathy is constructed to be more subtle and intertwined with conflict or callous interactions. Further, the journey towards creating and teaching empathy is less rigid or "one size fits all" than that which is depicted in the selected television shows.

The one instance where messages about empathy and callousness are less black and white concern whether being empathic is more desirable than being callous. For instance, empathic characters are presented as being good, kind, and likeable, but also weaker because they also often are victimized by callous characters. Callous characters are presented as being superior and humorous, but also as being inherently bad across many or all areas of character and personality. On the one hand, this may provide a more nuanced understanding of being empathic or callous for children. On the other hand, this also may confuse children about the positive aspects of being weak versus superior, or well liked versus entirely bad. Children who are unable to integrate all the aspects of the character's personality may focus on the most salient aspect of the character at

the expense of other characteristics, leaving those children to identify more with the empathic or callous character based on one desirable trait. This leaves the overall message about empathy portrayed by television shows as either black and white, or conflicted, with little attempt to integrate information about the characters and their behavior to create a realistic presentation of what it means to demonstrate empathy.

Overall, the selected television shows, as expected, presented empathy, and its counterpart, callousness, less in light of current research and understanding, and more in terms of entertainment value and ease of story-telling. Within 20 minutes, it is easier to portray characters along simple dimensions rather than providing them with complex histories and motivations. While it may be tempting to use an audience of children as an excuse to keep the story telling simple, research on the way children understand emotions and motivations, even by the age of two, lets us know that children are capable of more advanced social understanding than such television shows give them credit. Considering the selected television shows were some of the most popular shows for children aged 7-11, it is clear that most of the viewing audience for these shows would be capable of understanding more subtle and complex characterizations and circumstances. Certainly, modern theories of moral development and empathy would argue that by showing children more complex social interactions in terms of empathy and callousness, children may then have more ability to interpret and understand later, real life experiences where such complex emotions are present. For instance, according to SDT, seeing social interactions where a callous character does something empathic can add to the child's understanding that individuals are capable of both good and bad behaviors. Therefore, if another individual does something mean, they have that past experience to prevent them from thinking of that individual as only a mean person and can instead, learn to look for other situational cues to explain the behavior. Overall, this is a complex process, however, with each interaction, children can learn more, put this information into their bank of social understanding, which will then influence their future social behavior.

If television were the only influencing factor in children's moral and emotional understanding, such black and white characterizations would be more problematic (although are

still something that should be considered). However, the interviews I completed with parents provides a glimpse into an alternative message about empathy that children may receive.

3. Study Two Method, Analysis, Themes, and Discussion

3.1. Study Two

Study One and Study Two are concurrent explorations of two areas that influence the development of empathy in children ages 7-11. Study Two was not necessarily looking to build upon the themes of Study One, although some themes were similar or related across studies and data related at some points. Whereas Study One explored the display of empathy in media, Study Two explored the ways in which parents contribute, either intentionally or unintentionally, to the development of empathy in their children. However, unlike previous research that looks at explicit parenting techniques and their subsequent effect on children't behavior, the present research intended to view the influence on empathy development from a parent's unique perspective. Study Two adds to Study One by looking at another important influence in children's development and behavior; as well, participants in Study Two were asked to briefly comment on their children's use of and reaction to media. Divergences and convergences between the two influences are noted.

3.1.1. Methods. For Study Two, five parents who consented to participate were asked questions intended to address the two overarching research questions. Recall that the first question was, how do parents intentionally influence their children's empathy development? This question was broken down further into two questions: a) How do parents encourage empathy behaviors, and b) How do parents deal with callous behaviors in order to encourage empathy development? The second overarching questions was, how do parents construct the meaning of empathy and its development in their daily interactions with their child?

3.1.1.1. Participant selection and recruitment. After receiving ethical approval to begin Study Two by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Boards (See Appendix E), individuals who were currently parenting a child or children between the ages of 7-11 were eligible to be interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol created by myself with the study purpose in mind. The interview protocol was created and edited with clarity, utility, completeness, and appropriateness of the questions in mind. Although the interview script acted as a guide, the goal of the interview was to remain as open as possible to each participant's experiences and insights regarding their influence on their children's empathy development.

Five participants were initially interviewed for Study Two, two fathers and three mothers. All participants had at least some post-secondary education, four had full-time jobs, and two were currently separated from their partners. Three of the participants grew up in North America and the two that grew up elsewhere had been living in Canada for at least several years. Further, all participants grew up in countries with predominantly western philosophical viewpoints. Every participant interviewed had more than one child.

After examining the interviews of the first five individuals, the question of saturation was considered. Morrow (2007) outlines the use of saturation to ensure an adequate number of participants are used for the study. Saturation means that participants were chosen for the research until the data obtained from the participants reaches a point of redundancy. After beginning analysis on the five participants, it was determined that redundancy had been met based on both the broadness of themes and the depth within each theme. Specifically, repeated information became common as analysis continued, indicating that new information was becoming less expected.

Participants were recruited by placing posters (See Appendix F) throughout the community in locations parents frequent with or for their children (e.g., libraries, medical clinics, community centres, etc.) and adding posters to online communities (e.g., parenting forums, university bulletin boards). The posters briefly outlined the purpose of the research and asked interested individuals to contact the primary researcher. Those who contacted the researcher were screened using a brief screening interview to ensure they met the selection criteria. They were also briefed on the nature of the research and the types of information for which they would be asked. Once it was determined that they met selection criteria and expressed a desire to continue their participation, we set up a mutually suitable time and place to meet for the consent process and interview.

3.1.1.1.1. Selection criteria. In Study Two, participants were selected to participate if they met the following criteria: a) they were currently parenting at least one child between the ages of 7 and 11; b) they were considered the primary parent of the child, if the child resides part-time with another caregiver; c) they had been parenting the child from at least 6 months of age; and d) they were the child's biological or adopted parent. There were also exclusion criteria.

Certain current situational factors were identified that would have resulted in the individual being unable to participate. During the screening interview, if any of these exclusion factors were identified, an explanation would be given, namely that the situational factor would have to be resolved prior to obtaining additional data. If they still wished to participate in the study, those excluded were asked to inform the primary researcher when the situational factor had been resolved. None of these exclusion criteria were identified in participants undergoing the screening interview and so this process was not needed.

3.1.1.2. Procedure. All interviews were conducted at the University of Saskatchewan in the Psychological Service Centre. Prior to beginning the interviews with each participant, a consent form (See Appendix G) was provided to them and verbally explained by myself. Participants were given time to ask any questions they had about the interview and its purpose. In Study Two, data was gathered using individual semi-structured interviews which permitted participants to share their own perspective in a confidential environment and to elaborate if they desired further expression. For the researcher, the semi-structure contained a set list of questions and prompts, however, with the flexibility to follow up with further questions and requests for clarification. An interview guide covering relevant areas of discussion and open-ended questions and prompts is displayed in Appendix H. An additional list of prompts was used to provide the interviewer with general statements to use throughout the interview, such as "Tell me more," "Can you give an example" and "What happened next." It was expected that each interview would take between approximately one to two hours (varying as needed for the participant). Once the researcher and participant felt confident that the area of interest had been adequately explored, the interview was closed according to the interview script. Prior to adjourning the interview, participants were asked if there was additional information they felt was important.

All interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim. To protect confidentiality, each participant either chose or was given a pseudonym that was then used throughout the transcript of their interview. Further, children and occasionally spouses were given pseudonyms for ease of reading the transcript. Some participants chose their own pseudonyms and others requested that I chose one for them. Other identifying information such as towns, schools, friends' names, etc., were excluded from the transcript. Once the transcription process

was complete for each participant's interview(s), the respective participant was contacted and given the transcription of their interview(s) for review. The participant was offered a short meeting time to ask any questions or identify any section of the transcript that they felt did not accurately reflect what they said during the interview. No participants indicated any disagreement or concern with their transcript. After reviewing and approving the transcript, the participant signed a transcript release form (See Appendix I).

3.1.2. Analysis strategy: Thematic analysis. To uncover themes, a process similar to that used in Study One was adapted for the nuances in Study Two, namely, instead of TV scenes viewed repeatedly and coded, transcribed parent interviews were read repeatedly, first with no note-taking and then while taking notes and ultimately searching for codes. Enlightened by the literature, the 6-step process used in Study Two was repeated with the transcripts. Past research on parenting influences on empathy development at various ages was kept in mind.

3.2. Study Two Results

Themes emerging from the interviews are discussed separately according to the two guiding questions, first about empathy and then about callousness. Across the two categories, themes are presented sequentially.

3.2.1. Intentionally influencing children's empathy development: Encouraging empathy. Two main themes emerged regarding parents' attempts to encourage the children's development of empathy behaviors. These two themes, as well as the selected interview data displaying these themes, appear next.

3.2.1.1. Theme 1: Parent-led perspective taking. The participants identified question-asking as a strategy to assist their children to develop deeper connections between the emotions and behaviors of both themselves and others. The examples given by participants left the impression that these questions took the form of a general wondering. For instance, if the child came home from school and wanted to talk about a conflict or troubling situation, parents would ask progressively deeper questions about instances surrounding the event, including how different individuals associated with the event might have been feeling, how those emotions relate to the behaviors of each party involved, and what the child might do next regarding the particular situation. When the child was unsure of what to answer, parents took the lead by

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offering suggestions and then checking in with the child to ensure understanding of the other's perspective. Illustrations of the focus on perspective taking are as follows.

In Interview 5 a mother discussed one incident where her daughter was in a conflict with another girl at school. While discussing this conflict, the participant outlined the way in which she attempted to guide her daughter in perspective taking.

Audrey: And then so I was like talking to her, "why do you think she's feeling that way?"
Interviewer: Mmm
Audrey: "I don't know." "Well her parents are getting a divorce, I'm pretty sure that her older sisters are picking on her a lot, and so she's probably taking it out on you." And she's told me that she's hurt her, like her sisters' being like really mean. She's like "I was at her house and she was being- her sisters were being really mean to her." I'm like "So that's what she brings to school. All of that, everybody on her this way. And she comes out at school and lets it out. And unfortunately, it's on you."
Interviewer: Right
Audrey: So, again, learning experience, I had to talk her through it
Interviewer: Mmhmm
Audrey: and then she got it.
Interviewer: So she did?
Audrey: But it wasn't immediate, like now if that situation happened again, I might just have to give her a little cue, like "What's going on in her life that she's feeling that way?"

During interview 1, a father discussed a similar process after intervening in conflict presented by his child. To assist the resolution of these conflicts, he helped his child to understand his own motivations as well as those of the other party in the conflict, which eventually led into a discussion of the emotions behind the behavior.

Diego: but, um you know, um, yeah some of them, sometimes, like, if one of them is crying then obviously we'll go and say "what happened," and then they'll say "well this happened and then, you know, Ro hit me" and then, you know, we'll say "well why did he hit you?" "Well, I don't know." You know, then we'll start asking questions about it. We'll have to go to the other one and get his version of the story you know, and try to figure out what happened. "So okay, no hitting allowed, that's not allowed," and all that so
Interviewer: Yeah
Diego: um so we'll try to reinforce that message and then um, we'll talk about, you know, "well why did you say this" and

Interviewer: Okay

Diego: you know, then we'll try to you know, explain it to them, "well he felt bad that you said that"

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Diego: and um and, but then we'll say, "but even when you felt bad then you shouldn't have, you know, hit your brother,"

Interviewer: Right

Diego: uh so we'll explain that, um, and then, and then we'll kind of have them make up or whatever

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Diego: so that they, you know, this is his story, this is your story, we'll say, "well how can you do it better next time, how can you"

Interviewer: Okay

Diego: "you know, react differently in the future?"

—

Beth: …um, there's one little boy who was giving her a really hard time and his family was going through an issue where his dad had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. And so we would talk about, understanding that, yes his behavior is inappropriate or not kind, but also talking about why that might be happening or what he might be feeling that's contributing to those things and taking into consideration some of that as well,

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: that "Wow, that must be really hard to hear that your dad is that sick, and really scary. How would you- what do you think you would feel like if you found out that mommy was sick"

Interviewer: Right

Beth: and kind of "do you think that would change your behavior?" And so we do some of that.

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: Um, "How do you think that person would be feeling right now? How would you feel if you were there?" And um, "what would help you feel better?"

—

Stanley: Well, I just said to her, to Dora just quietly and discreetly "remember how happy you were your first day of Kindergarten, and that's how he's feeling now. So even if you can't remember how you felt, it's an important time for him and he's happy, so um let's just leave it at that." It was along those lines, I don't remember the exact words.

Interviewer: Yeah

Stanley: It was just trying to get her to remember how she felt her first day

—

Diego: some of the things that he might say, like "well, you're hurting"

Interviewer: Right

Diego: "that person's feelings."

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Diego: But he doesn't see that, so yeah, um, so we have to kinda uh, say, "well how would you feel if"

Interviewer: Yeah

Diego: "if somebody said that to you?"

Interviewer: Yeah

Diego: He might say "well, no big deal." So he'll just write it off.

Interviewer: Yeah

Diego: But then we'll say "well, remember when your older brother did this and you felt bad?"

Interviewer: Yeah

Diego: "And so maybe when you say something to your friend at school, they'll feel the same way."

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Diego: And then he might get that connection.

By engaging in these discussions with the child, the parents have the opportunity to deepen the child's own knowledge about motivations, emotions, and behavior, with the intent that if a similar situation presents itself in the future, the child has greater skill to deal with the situation. This deconstructing of the event begins naturally with the parents intervening in a conflict or through the child's own retelling of events. Due to the complementary nature of parent-led perspective taking and assisting children in internalizing empathy for others (as the upcoming second theme uncovers), this theme will be further discussed later in conjunction with the second theme.

3.2.1.2. Theme 2: Internalized empathy. Another important aspect of encouraging empathy in children that emerged from the parent interviews was based upon the idea that children cannot offer to others what they have not experienced themselves. Parents expressed the importance of being empathic to their own children so that they could experience what it feels like to experience empathy. The hope appears to be that when children understand how good it feels to have empathy provided to them, they will want to provide empathy to others. Further, by showing children empathy, the parents are modelling the skill of showing empathy. Illustrations of the theme are as follows.

During Interview 2, the mother discusses their intentions to teach empathy by providing empathy.

> **Jenny**: Um, and, trying- the hope is, is if they see that I am aware of them as a, as a human being with their own thoughts and their own desires that they will then, you know, react to other people in the same way.

In another interview, a mother discusses how important she feels this process is when a person outside the family offers empathy to her daughter or teaches her daughter about empathy.

> **Beth**: Um, I think it furthers her understanding of the concept in general. And reinforces it more that it's coming from someone other than just mom. Um, and I think she appreciates it more because she's seeing others be empathetic towards her.
> **Interviewer**: Oh okay
> **Beth**: And so therefore she is more inclined to be empathetic towards someone else.
> **Interviewer**: Mmmhmm
> **Beth**: Um, because she sees- she likes that when somebody is empathetic, it makes her feel better, feel good or whatever the situation is, and therefore, she's more inclined to wanna do that for someone else.

The above analysis discovered two themes: parent-led perspective taking and internalized empathy. The two themes demonstrate the parents' recognition of their leadership in the parent-child relationship. Here, the leadership is demonstrated through intentional modelling rather than through structured teaching, discipline, or lecturing. There is a keen awareness that if a certain behavior is expected of the child and for learning to take place, then that behavior must be exhibited by the parents first. The behavioural approach of modelling desired behavior is contrasted with the theme of incidental modelling, which will be discussed shortly, where the parents expressed lack of structured or intentional modelling. When directly questioned about modelling empathic behavior, they were unable to come up with occasions on which they chose to model empathy in teaching moments. Rather, the interview responses indicated that teaching empathy was a byproduct of helping children to develop a natural desire to be kind and empathic to others. However, when working through everyday conflicts with their children, the parents described a process which indicates a very intentional and structured attempt to teach empathy. Gentle questioning, offering answers or solutions, and helping their children see another's

perspective are appropriate and purposeful attempts to instill empathy. The working through process that these parents discussed also mirrors closely the various facets found in empathy: empathic concern as they lead their children to care about another person and their difficulties, emotion sharing as they guide their children in understanding the other persons' feelings in this situation, and perspective taking as they help their children understand the reasons why another person thinks or feels in a particular way. The teaching may be intentional, but even unintentionally, the interviewed parents are clearly attempting to pass down knowledge of empathy as a larger construct rather than merely kindness or a sense of pity.

Even in the attempt to lead their children to empathy by direct modelling, parents show deliberation (although that is likely not the only reason that the parent is empathic to his or her child). The intent behind being empathic is to help the children understand what it feels like to have others provide empathy with the hopes that then they will go and "do unto others." Again, this type of modelling is intentional, despite the parents later expressing a belief that their modelling is entirely unintentional. Overall, it seems that the parents recognize a certain planned teaching during their parent-child interactions even if that purposefulness is difficult to put into words in response to direct questioning.

Although no parent used this term when describing conversations with their children about everyday conflict, the developmental construct of scaffolding is apparent. Instead of requiring the children to work the problem out for themselves, the parents reported allowing space for the children to think about the conflict, asking questions, and offering suggestions or alternatives when the children appeared to be stuck. The benefits of the scaffolding were apparent during the interviews as well as when parents reflected on their children's growing ability to solve similar conflicts with less parental guidance over time.

The ideas of providing empathy and leading children in the empathic process nicely brings to life the research of Farrant and colleagues (2012). Farrant and colleagues found that mothers who demonstrated higher levels of empathy for others were also more likely to teach their children how to take the perspective of others and demonstrate empathy. Further, children of mothers who encouraged empathy for others demonstrated greater levels of empathy. Finally, children with greater levels of empathy also displayed more pro-social behaviors. Separate

research has also noted that scaffolding, modelling, and reasoning through difficult situations are found to increase children's ability to empathize (Eisenberg, 2003; Robinson et al., 2001). In the same way, the interviewed parents felt that their display of empathy to their children would increase the likelihood of their children demonstrating empathy to others. Although their use of such parenting practices was not informed by research, and although they expressed feelings of uncertainty regarding their chosen parenting strategies, the parents' chosen practices largely coincided with researched strategies on increasing empathy in children. The message they intended to pass down to their children was along the lines of, "follow what I do, and when you get stuck, I'll help you out."

        3.2.2. Intentionally influencing children's empathy development: Addressing callousness. Regarding parents' attempts to encourage the development of empathy behaviors in their children, and from the way in which parents reported how they address instances of callous behavior, two main themes emerged. These two themes, as well as the selected interview data relating to these themes, will be briefly presented.

        3.2.2.1. Theme 3: Delayed processing. Participants were asked about situations in which their children did not show empathy when empathy would have been appropriate. Participants discussed ways in which they deal with the callous behavior exhibited by their children, whether that behavior is intentional or unintentional. One of the emerging themes was the importance of delaying serious discussion about the behavior until the children were in a more emotionally neutral state. For instance, if they were acting callously because they were angry or excitable, the children were given time to become calm before making an attempt to correct and teach them. Delaying the attempt, however, did not mean that misbehavior was completely ignored until emotional neutrality was reached. As will be discussed further within Theme 4, parents may need to intervene quickly in some situations. Nevertheless, when attempting to elicit perspective taking and empathy from children, parents indicated that postponing serious times of teaching and processing the situation was important.

        One of the primary explanations offered by some participants for delaying discussion was that the children were not able to listen well or learn when they were in a negative emotional state or too excited. Some parents felt that their particular child required time to calm down before he

or she was able to really process and understand his or her own behavior as well as the behavior of others, which in turn meant that he or she needed to be calm before being able to empathize with another individual's needs, desires, and situations. Below are a few short excerpts of parents discussing how important it is to let the children calm down after any type of conflict where they have become particularly angry or frustrated.

> **Audrey**: Sometimes I try to talk to them, but sometimes there's no point talking to them 'cause they're so escalated that there's no point.
> **Interviewer**: Right
> **Audrey**: You need to get them to a neutral zone and then you can.

And then later on:

> **Audrey**: When she's neutral than I can talk to her and she understands and she gets everything.
>
> —
>
> **Beth**: Occasionally they have escalated enough to the point that it just can't be done at that time
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> —
>
> **Jenny**: Um, once you get passed, because you have to calm him down first
> **Interviewer**: Mmm
> **Jenny**: then he gets very cross. Five minutes later, "can we talk now." Cause there's no point asking him anything as soon you start telling him off he stops [inaudible]

3.2.2.2. Theme 4: Quick directive with subsequent teaching. When discussing how to correct callous behaviors, an emerging theme was the use of a quick command or directive to immediately stop a negative behavior, which was then followed by more careful teaching about being empathic for similar situations in the future. During the interview, parents discussed that at times, callous behaviors are potentially harmful and the parents wants to stop the negative behavior quickly. To do so, a brief, clear, command is required to stop the behavior right away. The immediacy of such situations leaves little room for thought out discussions. However, the parents also discussed that to help their children build skills, further conversations were warranted. Intentional teaching about taking another's perspective, being kind, and thinking

outside of one's own wants or needs were marked as an important part of stopping callous behaviors for the future. Taken together, this surfacing theme speaks to both instantaneous and long-term approaches to dealing with callous behavior.

Such models of reacting to callousness were thought to be successful over time, rather than immediately. To instill a sense of empathy, participants noted the need to repeat certain teachings a few times and to allow the child's natural maturation to combine with parental guidance. In Interview 2, Jenny recalls a heated argument between her children about the best way to play a computer game.

> **Jenny**: If they're playing a two-player game on the computer and they'll start screaming at each other 'cause one's not doing what the other wants them to do.
> **Interviewer**: Right
> **Jenny**: I can't abide listening [Laughing] to that, so I have to keep stopping them and go "Stop"

Similarly Jenny recalls a time when her son, while playing Lego, took a piece that his sister was using without asking, leading to an argument.

> **Jenny**: So by the time I'm gettin' involved, it's, it's too late for that particular instance. But I'm just trying to take them through it. And I mean, generally, I mean when that happens, usually what it then, what it, for that particular instance, what will end up happening, I will, I will quite often just have to say "Give it back."
> **Interviewer**: Mmmm
> **Jenny**: And, deal with this- their frustration losing what they wanted.

In Interview 4, Beth discusses similar interactions between her two daughters when they cannot agree while playing together.

> **Beth**: Occasionally they have escalated enough to the point that it just can't be done at that time
> **Interviewer**: Right
> **Beth**: they just need to be separated. Um, and then usually simply by separating them, and that's just a "K, we're gonna take a quiet time for ten minutes in your room. Do your own thing. Read a book, colour a picture, whatever."
> **Interviewer**: Yeah
> **Beth**: And that, within five minutes, they're usually ready to start playing together again.

During Interview 1, Diego told about a different incident where he had to provide a non-negotiable rule for his son in order interrupt a bad influence in his son's life. As Diego indicates, while the rule itself did not allow for compromise, he was able to provide follow up information about the reasons behind the rule so that his son was given the opportunity to understand why the rule was laid down sternly for him.

> **Diego**: I think he gravitates towards those troublemakers
> **Interviewer**: Okay
> **Diego**: 'cause it's more exciting. It kinda fits his personality. So have to definitely um, tell him to play with other kids and
> **Interviewer**: Yeah
> **Diego**: you know, stay away from those kids. You know, they're using bad words and so we don't want you to use those bad words.

The analysis discovered two themes demonstrating that when reacting to instances of callousness or aggression, parents respond with the same sensitivity to the child's needs as when reacting to opportunities for empathy teaching. However, not only are they sensitive to the child's differing needs, but also, parents flow flexibly among disciplining, teaching, and trying to impart or instill empathy. Here, scaffolding is not the only concern, although the parents certainly are adjusting to the various needs or abilities of the children (for instance, responding differently to younger than older children). Goodness of fit (Thomas & Chess, 1977) is also important as parents navigate how to handle hints of callousness. For instance, issues of privacy, the child's emotions, the parent's emotions, the seriousness of the transgression, and the immediacy of the situation are instantly considered.

According to Thomas and Chess (1977), goodness of fit describes a matching between children's abilities or personality with the parents' behavior, often meaning the parenting expectations or responses. Although the concept of goodness of fit is typically used to understand the way in which parents and parenting behaviors interact with children's temperaments to produce the best outcomes for the children, it also seems fitting in terms of the way in which parents alter their practices to meet other needs. A great example of goodness of fit within empathy teaching came out in the interviews. During an intense emotional state, the parents

discussed the need to leave time and space for the children to calm down prior to further teaching or disciplining. As one parent explained, if this cool down period is not provided, any information from the parent will be quickly ignored or put aside, if it is even attended to in the first place. Here is an example of how parenting can be altered in a way to ensure that the children's needs are met most appropriately, even though temperament is not the main reason for the parent's alteration.

3.2.3. Constructing meaning and development of empathy.

3.2.3.1. Theme 5: Empathy as action. As parents discussed definitions of empathy, situations in which their children displayed empathy, and the way they discussed empathic events with their children, the idea of empathy as primarily a behavioural display became apparent. Participants were asked to define empathy early in the interview. Provided definitions involved the demonstration of empathy in terms of behavior towards another. Actions such as sharing a toy, hugging somebody who is hurt, involving another person who is being left out were interpreted as empathy. Although these actions could easily be due to feelings of sympathy, participants noted that it was not feelings based on pity for another, but an understanding of how it feels to be left out or saddened, that led to the kind deeds. In this way, although behavior led the definition of empathy, it was not the sole defining feature of empathy. Even when the definition for empathy was initially more cognitively or emotionally based, following up with a behavioural example was added to punctuate the meaning.

Interviewer: Um, so if I had to ask you to explain to me what empathy was, how would you, how would you put it?
Jenny: Well, for me it's uh, yeah, I don't know whether my impression of it, my sense of is right or not, but to me it's um cari- showing caring about other people and an awareness of how other people are affected by what you do.

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Interviewer: Alright, so before I ask specific things about when you've seen empathy in your kids, people have a wide range of ideas of what empathy means and over time the definition has changed a little bit. So for you, when you hear the word empathy, what do you think of it in terms of what it means?
Beth: Um, [pause] um, kindness for one,
Interviewer: Mmhmm

Beth: consideration,

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: putting yourself in somebody else's shoes. Um, [pause] kind of the general of it.

Apart from definitions of empathy, action played an important role in the conversation parents had with their children about empathy. One parent pointed out that the reason he became aware of empathic instances in his child's life was because of conversations where his child started to share troubling emotions or thoughts about a situation. Other participants also noted that they observed empathy in their children as they were discussing situations that had occurred at school or with friends. When parents are then assisting their children in processing the situation or emotions, the theme of spurring to action is revealed. Although the participants discussed emotions and thoughts with their children, their conversations led to a sort of "so now what are you going to do" moment. Rather than merely being content with their children empathizing with another child, they wanted their children to act upon that empathy. Therefore, action became an important part of what it means to be empathic.

Diego: And, I mean there's some events at school that would indicate that, you know, my older son was empathetic for other kids. Like, so, he will help other kids if they're not understanding a concept

Interviewer: Oh yeah

Diego: or things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah

Diego: So he'll teach them and help them

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Jenny: —both of them if they see that I'm tired will instantly get me a quilt, they will, they will just have this whole thing of, "Okay, we're gonna look after you." And, like I say, I mean Brian will make a joke or he'll jump on me because he wants to give me a hug, and it completely ruins the whole things but he, you know, the first thing he does, his first instinct is to, is to, is to care and be aware of what the other person is doing, it's just he doesn't, he doesn't make the connection properly. So it kinda [inaudible] and then gets ruined when he, [Laughing] when his mouth comes into it. But he does- so it's in their actions that I really see them

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Jenny: properly caring for other- and, and being aware

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Stanley: I don't think there's been too many incidents where she's been emotionally empathetic to someone. But I mean there've been a few. There's um, there's a kid in her class right now whose mom is a little bit ill. Um, I don't know exactly what's wrong with her, but she's in the hospital. Uh, she'll be fine, but um, she's got some routine surgery and the daugh- their daughter's obviously "My mommy's in the hospital" sort of thing. You know that sort of thing. So my daughter is definitely- has actually gravitated towards her

Interviewer: Oh yeah

Stanley: to talk about it more. Um, and she said coming home and asking me questions, you know "What would happen to me if mommy is in the hospital?" Those sort of things.

Interviewer: Mhmm

Stanley: So, she's, she's- like I said she's not being- she's not very emotionally empathetic to certain things, uh, outside of physical injury

Interviewer: Yeah

Stanley: but that was definitely one that, uh, that's awesome that, you know, she, at recess, she'll tell me she played with (girl in class) because (girl in class) was sad. And so, maybe it's more sympathy than empathy but, she thinks, she gets sad at the prospect of her mom being in hospital even though she's not. So I guess that is a bit of empathy—

Interviewer: Yeah, she's trying to understand what it would feel like

Stanley: Yeah

Interviewer: to have your mom in the hospital.

Stanley: She recognizes it wouldn't be nice.

Interviewer: Right

Stanley: So she's spending more time with (girl in class)

—

Beth: Yeah. Yeah, we talk about, if she's telling me something that's happened, um, there's one little boy who was giving her a really hard time and his family was going through an issue where his dad had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. And so we would talk about, understanding that, yes his behavior is inappropriate or not kind, and- but also talking about why that might be happening or what he might be feeling that's contributing to those things and taking into consideration some of that as well,

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: that "Wow, that must be really hard to hear that your dad is that sick, and really scary. How would you- what do you think you would feel like if you found out that mommy was sick"

Interviewer: Right

Beth: and kind of "do you think that would change your behavior?" And so we do some of that.

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: Um, "How do you think that person would be feeling right now? How would you feel if you were there?" And um, "what would help you feel better?"

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Beth: "Is there something like that that you could do for this person? Could you ask them?" And so, yeah I guess coaching to some extent in those things. Teachable moments and such.

The tendency to use behavior to talk about empathy is understandable. Although the definitions of empathy provided in literature revolve more around the thought or emotional process in a person, we are not privy to that information. Humans are able to describe what they see another person do more easily than they are able to infer about emotions or thoughts they cannot observe. Using inference, then, we can go backwards from behavior to understand the internal push, which may bring up empathy as a motivation. So it is unsurprising that behavior would be the primary way to define and describe empathy in one's child specifically, and humans generally. At times, through conversations with their children, the participants were able to speak more to the internal mechanisms driving their children's empathy—their children were able to speak to their thoughts about a situation, even if only in part. In other instances, parents were merely using their existing knowledge about their children's thoughts and emotions to conclude that empathy was driving certain observed actions. And certainly, acting upon one's empathy is an important step in feeling with another person.

Audrey: No, I would say that it's grown for sure. Um, you know even sometimes she can relate to what's going on in someone's head. Like for example with Emily, but sometimes she just doesn't care because she's mad or she's- right? Then-
Interviewer: Mmhmm
Audrey: so she can maybe, but she doesn't act on it. You know what I mean?
Interviewer: Right
Audrey: So there's also a distinction there too, is being able to actually feel what's going on and understand, and actually acting on it.
Interviewer: Yeah, having the self-control that comes with maturity.
Audrey: Or even the self-confidence to go up to someone who
Interviewer: Yeah
Audrey: looks like they're hurt or having a hard time, to say anything, because you don't know who they are and you don't know-
Interviewer: Mmhmm
Audrey: a little tentative of yourself. Lacking the self-confidence and so then you don't go up to them.

The earlier review of definitions of empathy and sympathy comes to bear when considering the ways in which parents try to make sense of empathy and its meaning. Although both the provided definitions of sympathy and empathy involve the process of feeling certain emotions, empathy, by definition, takes those feelings and imposes cognition as well (Gerdes, 2011). As a result, empathy becomes deeper than mere concern for another and leads to action. Certainly, for the parents interviewed, empathy appeared indistinguishable from behavior—not only in terms of seeing empathy in another person, but also in terms of understanding empathy in their children. Although emotions were a part of the discussion, they were not the primary focus; not even an ability to *understand* another's emotions was the focus of the discussion. The focus was behavior. Now, this may be due to logistics—it is easier to talk about behavior than to discuss another person's potential emotions or cognitive processes. However, it may also be that for the everyday human experience, aside from academic understanding, empathy and behavior are a required pairing.

The above analysis outlined the theme of empathy being primarily behavior-based. In the area of empathy leading to action, the parental focus on the empathic behavior is consistent with research linking empathy to prosocial behavior. While behavior is not required for empathy (i.e., it is not in the definition of empathy), research has consistently demonstrated that there is a relationship between feeling empathy, either in a specific situation or as a personal disposition and acting in a prosocial manner. For example, Batson (1991, 1998) found that both in instances where sympathy and empathy are induced (by having people actively take another's perspective) or when sympathy and empathy are merely reported by the participants, instances of helping behaviors and a desire to help increase. A similar relationship was not found between mere feelings of personal distress caused by another's circumstances and helping behavior. Even for young children, the relationship holds true. When viewing empathy-inducing film clips, children demonstrating facial and heart-rate cues of empathy (e.g., sadness and heart-rate deceleration) or children who reported greater levels of empathy were more likely to exhibit prosocial responding (Eisenberg et al., 1990; Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Welsh, & Fox, 1995). Further, there is a relationship between one's general empathy as measured by self-report or other-report, and his or her's level

of pro-social behavior (Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1999, 2002).

In general, although a behavioural response is not fundamentally a part of empathy, despite the strong way in which the parents being interviewed linked the two concepts, empathy is more likely to lead to pro-social behaviors than other types of emotions such as personal distress. The way in which people generally view empathy in relation to behavior would be an interesting area of future research—do people see a purpose for empathy if no action follows?

3.2.3.2. Theme 6: Incidental modelling. One of the components of the interviews was asking parents the ways in which they intentionally or unintentionally model empathy for their children. Out of these discussions, it became clear that, for these parents, modelling empathy was incidental rather than intentional. Although the parents indicated that being a role model was important in teaching children empathy, they noted that their actions were not empathic in order to teach their children, but rather out of an extension of their own empathic natures. The empathy based behaviors they display are things they "just do" rather than merely teaching moments for their children's benefit. Nevertheless, some parents provided specific ways in which their children either reacted to or mimicked the displayed empathy, giving the participants confidence that even unintentional modelling was having a positive effect on their children. Below is a brief portion of Interview 1 where incidental modelling was discussed.

> **Diego**: Um, I don't think we do anything consciously to model empathy, but like I think, you know, I'm pretty empathetic and putting myself in other people's shoes and stuff like that, so I think that's who I am, but I'm not-. Yeah, I mean I guess there might be some incidences where I might, say, well think about the other person or whatever, or so they might see that, but we don't consciously, I think, do anything
> **Interviewer**: Right
> **Diego**: just because we're trying to teach them anything

During Interview 5, after describing specific examples of modelling empathy, Audrey went on to note that these are things she "does all the time" as a natural inclination rather than thought out opportunities to teach. In Interview 2, Jenny outlines the same sentiment:

Audrey: So that was- yeah, I can't, I can't give you- well there is a specific example, I guess. But, I just-
Interviewer: So she sees that you're willing to help and that you see other people…
Audrey: I do it all the time. That's what I do all day
Interviewer: Yeah
Audrey: is help people. So-
Interviewer: Yeah. She can just see kinda the way you are.
Audrey: I hope so.

—

Jenny: -actually, all, all my interactions with other people, I mean I try to do it all the time regardless of if I'm with them or not because it's, you know, trying to be a nice person…

And then later on:

Jenny: But it is um- a lo- it's funny, a lot of it isn't, I don't do things specifically 'cause I'm thinking "Okay, got to model good behavior."

Similarly, Beth indicated that she is naturally a very sensitive and empathic individual, resulting in frequent behaviors towards others that are considerate and empathic. Therefore, she noted that although she does not do these things as an intentional teaching tool for her children, she is teaching incidentally, almost accidentally. Beth goes on to describe one such instance of incidental modelling.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So are these things that you feel you do consciously, like "I wanna make sure that I really praise her for this so she keeps doing it"? Or—
Beth: I think it just comes automatic.
Interviewer: Yeah
Beth: Um, I think I would be, if you asked people, I would probably be said to be a very sensitive and empathetic person myself.
Interviewer: Okay, yeah
Beth: Um, and I see a lot of that in Annie.
Interviewer: Mmhmm
Beth: I think that I, to some extent, I mean I encourage that without necessarily realizing I was doing it, simply because it's the way I am,

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Beth: Annie and I were in the middle of doing something 'cause it was Melissa who was in class, and I just noticed something happening, asked Annie to excuse me for a moment

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and went and just did to help move the door for the person and just came right back. Um, I didn't think anything of doing it 'cause to me it just what you do

Interviewer: Right

Beth: and I didn't say anything about doing it. I didn't make an issue or bring attention to it, but as I came back, I noticed that Annie had been watching me, and I watched her face. And so I saw a reaction in her face, um, as to me doing that, and just a "Oh," a positive, kinda smile, in a way, like she was proud of me for going to do it. Just that, I don't know if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah

Beth: But um, not that that's really a big sign of empathy or anything but it- just helping and just uh, that she's learning and watching and acknowledging without it needing to be said.

Asking parents to comment on their own empathy modelling provides an interesting contrast between the focus of Study One, which is media. With parents, the analysis demonstrated that rather than an idealized or more removed individual in contrived situations, parents offer a very real and raw model for children. Although the viewed media depictions of empathy focused on close relationships, the parents brought forth the idea that empathy is a way of life rather than specific instances, which made it difficult for them to provide specific instances of empathy when asked. Terms such as "the way I am" and "what I do all day" indicate a way of *being* that is less intentional and more intrinsic. Intrinsic empathy in parents harkens back to the discussion in Study One of empathy and callousness being intrinsic to the characters. As stated previously, although this may not be true in terms of extremes (psychopaths), empathy is a learnable trait, although perhaps that is not how society views empathy.

It is important to note in this discussion that the parents interviewed in no way overtly suggested that empathy cannot be improved upon. In fact, another idea emerging from our discussions was often the changing and developing nature of their children's empathy as they aged. However, coming out of our discussions was also the belief that their children's place on the age appropriate continuum of empathy had remained relatively stable. For instance, although they might develop more sophisticated ways of displaying empathy, children with naturally high levels of empathy sustained that level as they aged. Further, children with naturally lower levels of empathy remained lower when compared to children their age, although their ability to control emotion and understand others may have progressed with maturity.

The tendency for us to see empathy as intrinsic while also wanting to teach or learn empathy provides interesting commentary on the nature of empathy. While the perspective taking aspect of empathy can be improved upon, the essential matching of emotions and concern are perhaps more difficult to teach and develop. Dadds and colleagues (2009) noted a similar trend even among children high on callous unemotional traits. Although their cognitive empathy developed over time, their emotional empathy remained low, indicating that they learn to "talk the talk" but not "walk the walk." Although the television characters in Study One provided a black and white picture of empathy and callousness as inherent traits we either possess or do not possess, discussions with parents offer a more nuanced understanding of the intrinsic nature of empathy and its development.

3.2.3.4. Theme 7: Child specific intervention. Some of the participants had more than one child, and when this occurred, it offered the parent an available comparison for the empathy that one child discusses. For instance, when discussing one child's empathy or behavior, the participant might use another child in their family to assist in describing the first child—the comparison offered a clearer understanding of their first child's traits, temperament, or actions. Throughout this comparison, it became clear that each child, based on his or her own unique abilities or personality, required a specific type of teaching to develop empathy. For instance, some participants noted that their child, or one of their children, was naturally empathic from an early age and required little guidance to see from another's point of view and enter into another's emotional world. Other children, were described as needing more purposeful, step-by-step learning in order to become more empathic and truly understand another's perspective. Other children were described as being variable in their ability to step outside their own world and understand others, resulting in the parent needing to teach their children to cope with various emotions enough that they were then free to display empathy. In each case, whatever the particular needs of each child, the participants were able to indicate the tools they had developed to help that child build empathy.

In each of the excerpts below, the participants are discussing how teaching one of their children empathy is different from the way they teach their other children empathy due to personality, maturation, and cognitive differences. For instance, in Interview 1 and 4, Diego and

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Beth comment on the personality differences between their older and younger children that lead to different approaches for teaching empathy.

Diego: Uh, we don't have to do too much with our older son. Like, he's pretty, like he listens pretty well, so we're, we're, we don't actually have to do much with him.
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: Like, if we say something once, he'll do it.
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: And with our younger one we'll have to say it like, maybe six times or—
Interviewer: Yeah, so you do it just, the way you deal with both kids—
Diego: Totally, cause they're totally different personalities, so we have to approach things differently.

—

Diego: Yeah, and uh, you know I think our older son is very sensitive
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: and a lot more empathetic, compared to our younger son.
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: So there is a definitely, you know, a gap
Interviewer: Yeah
Diego: and so we've definitely realized that. Um, so yeah, our older son is more caring towards other people. He's kind of thinking about their situation
Interviewer: Okay, yeah
Diego: whereas our younger son is more about himself [laughing].
Interviewer: Okay, yeah
Diego: And that really thinking about others situation. So that is really apparent
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: and so we'll have to spend more time with our younger son, um, trying to make him comprehend how somebody else would feel

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Beth: Annie is always- Annie's always wanted to please. Um, so she hasn't really been a big issue as far as discipline goes because her knowing that you're disappointed, is often enough.
Interviewer: Right
Beth: Um, where Melissa it's been a lot. She's just very, very stubborn, very independent, wants it her way.
Interviewer: Yeah
Beth: Um, and so finding a way to discipline her that's effective, has been a lot more difficult.

Interviewer: Yeah

Beth: There's been a lot of trial and error as far as that's gone

In Interview 2, Jenny speaks of the cognitive differences in teaching her son, who has Aspergers, empathy, since perspective taking is a particular difficulty of his.

Jenny: So that's one thing we do have to, sort of

Interviewer: Yeah

Jenny: teach him. Not, not turn him off but teach him because he's you know- he's- he's just- his brain just isn't intuitively making those connections, so.

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Jenny: There's a lot of things where uh, we-, it's almost like teaching him math, so it's another thing he has to learn.

Jenny: So, um, and so I'll be talking to him and um "so why do you think she got cross?" 'Cause I just constantly trying to get, get him to figure out see it from someone else's point of view

Interviewer: Right

Jenny: 'cause he'll just go "I don't know!" "Well, were you doing this? Do you think maybe she got annoyed? Were you do-" you know 'cause he just gets so frustrated because he doesn't, he doesn't see why it's a problem

Interviewer: Yeah

Jenny: so he just feels then hard done by. And so it's- and it is teaching him. It's like teaching him a foreign language. That's basically what it is.

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Jenny: So, I've always kinda- no but it is, ah, I'll just be sitting there and I'll suddenly realize that "Okay that's not gonna work for Brian. Brian needs this." And I have put a lot of thought into it now that- because they, 'cause what they need is getting more different as time goes on.

3.2.3.5. Theme 8: Creating independence. During the interviews, one of the most interesting themes that emerged, and that continued to emerge upon more careful and deliberate analysis, was the participants' desire to create independence in their children. Although the parents noted that it was important for their children to be empathic and kind towards others, they also wanted to be careful in the way in which they taught these important characteristics; it was vital that these characteristics developed naturally in their children without too much direct interference from parents. This theme emerged from the tendency for parents to wait until

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becoming involved in their children's interactions with others and also in their desire to be gentle rather than directive when correcting or guiding certain behaviors.

Diego: Yeah, yeah. I mean and sometimes they will have their arguments
Interviewer: Yeah of course
Diego: and fights and all that
Interviewer: Yeah
Diego: so we have to come and manage that. We try not to do that too much, but
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: we get pulled in obviously when they're arguing and we'll counsel, "okay what happened, what did he say, what did he say, and what did he do" and all that so
Interviewer: Come in to referee a bit, yeah.
Diego: Yeah, yeah
Interviewer: So you said you try not to—
Diego: Yeah, we want them to kind of figure it out on their own
Interviewer: Okay
Diego: you know, then, so we're trying to teach them how to talk
Interviewer: Mmm
Diego: to each other to figure it out
Interviewer: Yeah
Diego: umm as opposed to always having to call on mom or dad
Interviewer: Right
Diego: so we want them to learn those skills

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Beth: way. I'm quite often not involved when they're doing that. I try, I try to sit back and let them
Interviewer: Okay
Beth: um, interact and do without stepping in until it becomes that someone is being hurt
Interviewer: Okay
Beth: and then I'll step in.

—

Beth: And I'm making a conscious effort to not step in um, as quickly or as often
Interviewer: Okay
Beth: because, sh- Annie tends to tattle, a lot. She tends- for everything. Um, and so, that's something I'm trying to teach her not to do.
Interviewer: Okay
Beth: Um, when it's appropriate and when it's not to come for help. And I'm trying to just get her to have more confidence in dealing with those things on her own. So I don't step in until it has escalated significantly.

This desire for independence appeared to stem partly from a desire to have their children be inclined to empathy and kindness—after all, we all want to be inherently good people rather than individuals who only *seem* good. But, the desire for independence also appeared to come from a fear of shutting down the people the children were meant to be by imposing too many restrictions or behaviors upon them. In giving their children space to grow and makes mistakes, they wanted their children's personalities to shine through. Parents also noted that by giving children greater independence, their children would be able to develop confidence in their own abilities to help others and navigate life without constant assistance. The parents who discussed independence in their children were careful to point out that certain situations are too dangerous to let children get their way and that letting children have what they want at all times was not the goal—rather the goal was allowing children to develop according to their own skills, temperament, and personalities instead of creating children identical to their parents.

> **Diego**: but yeah definitely could be a bit more- but it's not a big, um, sore point for us, because like he does have an outgoing personality so we don't want to impose too much restrictions and things to kinda suppress his personality
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> **Jenny**: And that is, and I guess that's where it's all coming from. But also just trying to- since then- I know, I mean I'm not, i- it's all tied in together. I don't think my way of doing things is necessarily right therefore I want my kids to have the ability to be able to work out for themselves what is right. I'm not trying to raise clones of me. I'm trying to raise them.
> **Interviewer**: Right
> **Jenny**: And I mean, it helps if they have such amazing personalities. I mean you can see it. J- as they grow, but e- even when they were toddlers, they were always you know, they just- I mean all kids do, you know. They have their world, they grow up. I can see so much in them, that potential is in them. I don't wanna shut that down.
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> **Beth**: Right, but I'm trying to let them find their way through that. Because I won't always be there to fix it for them. Especially at school with other kids.
> **Interviewer**: Mmhmm
> **Beth**: So they need to learn to do that on their own.
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> —

Audrey: Make a choice. Oh yeah, we do lots of choices.
Interviewer: Okay
Audrey: You choose this or you can choose that.
Interviewer: Yeah. And do you find that's better than- or for them that works better than just telling them, "Go do this"?
Audrey: Oh, well yeah. They have to be the ones to decide what to do.
Interviewer: Mmhmm
Audrey: I have very, very independent, headstrong
Interviewer: Okay
Audrey: little girls.

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Audrey: is, I think that kids- and even if they don't understand you can try to explain. K, there's a difference between a three year old and a nine year old. But you can try to explain things and rationalize things to them and help them come to their own solutions.
Interviewer: Yeah
Audrey: But if they don't then you can take them as far as they can go and then obviously you'll take over, but—

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Audrey: but, I, I prefer to think that I'm teaching, we are teaching them to- [pause] developing their own sense of self discipline and what's right and wrong instead of having it forced upon them. 'Cause when there's a decision later on in life that they have to make, and "Oh, I was never told what to do here. So I don't know what to do."
Interviewer: Get mad, yeah. So then how do you- do you just kinda leave it and "you guys will work it out" or do you leave it because you're like "Well you kinda deserved that" or do you try to come and help navigate things?
Audrey: That depends on my mood, I suppose. Again, the whole patience thing. Um, yeah, if they're- I'll usually try to let it play out a bit. But if they're really like screaming and crying, and- if someone has like really crossed the line, I will step in for sure. Um,
Interviewer: If it's amping up to a certain level.
Audrey: Yeah, or if they start hitting then I'm like in there right away.

In the analysis of themes 7 and 8, the parents' discussion of creating independence in their children seemed to be an extension of the parents desiring to show empathy to their children. Because the parent is taking into account their children's own abilities and needs, they are moving beyond their own desires for their children and putting themselves into the emotions and thoughts of their children leading them to do what they believe is best for their unique child.

Of all the themes emerging from discussion with parents, I found the desire for independence in their children to be the most surprising and refreshing. Hearing parents discuss this wish for their children was touching—the parents truly wanted their children to flourish and become the full person he or she was meant to be regardless of the parent's own desires. Desire for their children was not the only expression, but also fear that they, as the parent, would actually halt their children's development if they attempted to impose too many restrictions and guidelines. Admittedly, the parents interviewed were primarily from a middle to high class, generally well-educated population. If the individuals interviewed were from a lower class or were less educated, perhaps the theme of creating independence would not have emerged so strongly, if at all. Further, although not all the interviewed parents were raised in North America, they were all from countries with predominately individualistic views. Interviewing parents who were living in or were raised in countries with a more collective orientation may have also brought about themes in contrast to creating independence through parenting.

Specifically, for a Canadian context, interviewing First Nation parents may have also resulted in less focus on independence given the cultural teachings and emphasis on collective family and social concerns. For example, in Cree Tipi Teachings, while there is no teaching specifically labelled "empathy," there are teachings around respect for the rights of others, humility, and love, which complement the aims of empathy by focusing on and reacting to the emotions and experiences of others. Within the same Tipi Teachings, there is a focus on obedience, sharing, and kinship, demonstrating the great importance of focusing on community over self. While, the Tipi Teachings offer only one example of First Nation values, they provide insight to the potential differences in parenting values that may have been uncovered by interviewing parents from less individualistic cultural backgrounds.

Further, we can be cautious in extrapolating the focus on independence uncovered in this research to all parents, noting that some cultures and some families give greater value to collective concerns. Nevertheless, for the subset of parents in the current study, independence was a primary goal and concern, even while attempting to instill a concern for and awareness of others. The idea emerged of not just wanting children to *behave* empathically but wanting them to *embody* empathy as their natural bent.

Just as in earlier discussions of identified parenting practices in the realm of empathy development, there is a parental attempt to fit parenting practices into the children's needs and personality. Perhaps the flexibility of parenting emerges from a desire to honour and develop the children's individuality, as well as being aware that eventually the parent's influence will lessen considerably, and the children will need to react empathically on their own, without a parent guiding the behavior. As parents noted, they will not always be around to help their children navigate conflict or respond empathically and so it is important to allow them space to learn from experience and put into action previously taught skills.

3.2.4. Study Two summary. Throughout the various themes emerging from the interviews with parents, a distinct desire and attempt to be responsive towards their children emerged. By using different parenting techniques, altering responses based on the situation or child, providing more help to younger children, and giving increasing space to the child as he or she learns and grows, the discussions centred around the way in which empathy development, just as with many other skills a child learns, is not a cookie cutter process—it is a reflexive, fluid process often requiring empathy from the parents themselves. It appears to be the parents' belief that by responding with empathy, the children will see empathy in action, experience empathy themselves, and then be released into the world understanding the empathic process. Although not sufficient itself, the process of providing empathy can be combined with more purposeful teaching about perspective taking, emotions, and actions to assist the children in developing their ability to understand and feel with others.

When comparing the conversations with the five parents to information provided through modern theories of moral development, such as SDT and SIP, many similarities are noted. In fact, although presented less in scientific terms and more in experiential terms, the ways in which parents discussed modelling and teaching empathy could be taken directly from the pages of SDT or SIP instruction manuals. According to both the SDT and SIP views, the parents' tendency to help their children take another's perspective when conflicts arise will add to the children's later ability to interpret and respond to conflicts—they will either have greater emotional and motivation understanding (according to SDT) or have a different way to interpret behavior (according to SIP). In fact, parents even vocalized this hope, that their guidance through conflicts

in the present would change their children's ability to deal with conflicts in the future. Additionally, the parents' use of empathy in parenting and modelling of empathy in hopes that their children will understand what empathy feels and looks like, thereby influencing their use of empathy in the future, follows closely to the proposed mechanism of empathy and moral development in SDT and SIP. Even the way in which parents described changing their teaching or discipline tactics to suit the individual child's needs fits into SDT and SIP theory that each person will have different emotions, cognitions, behaviors, and understandings based upon past experiences. Since, even within one family, each person will have different social interactions, it takes increased introspection and behavioural interpretation on the part of the parent to change his or her response to each child based upon individual need. Taken together, these early experiences within a close relationship are changing the way the children see others, interpret behavior, and integrate emotions, cognitions, and behavior, both according to theory, but also according to the parents' understanding of their influence over their children.

The desire to teach and develop empathy in children contrasted with the view presented during the interviews that empathy is a fairly intrinsic personality characteristic rather than a developed skill. The tension exists between a belief of empathy as innate and a desire to teach, however this tension was not particularly acknowledged or upsetting for the parents. It appears similar to the concept of intelligence. Even if society generally views intelligence as an innate characteristic, we still attempt to teach all children. Similarly, the tendency to see and understand others' emotions may be easier for some children, however there are cognitive and action based skills that can be developed within empathy—this is an idea the interviewed parents appear to understand and embrace within their parenting journey (although the children that less easily empathize with others may test the patience of the parenting journey of teaching empathy, just as children with little desire to read books may test the patience of the parenting journey towards teaching reading).

Although the parents' understanding of their influence over their children's empathy development overlapped with the way SDT and SIP view moral development, the messages from parents regarding empathy development are more holistic and general than the messages from theories of empathy or morality. While various theories are attempting to explain actions and

motivations (e.g., what is good or bad, how do we respond to bad behavior to create future behavior, how do we reward or respond to good behavior to allow it to increase, how do we instill a desire to do good), the parents were ultimately more concerned with helping their children to become the best version of him- or herself. While the best version of oneself included being an empathic and considerate person, it also included education, exploring interests, and being genuine. Moreover, empathy was not removed from the other life pursuits, but was discussed in tandem, suggesting that empathy is a part of but not distinct from other traits that the parents were attempting to develop in their children. For the parents, the ultimate goal was not just kind children who did good to others, but successful and happy children, part of which meant being kind and good to others in a way that was united with their natural personality. In this way, the past and current theories of empathy may be incomplete, missing the mark, or at the very least compartmentalizing a human experience that should be more broadly considered. While moral thinking and learning empathy through relationships is important, my discussions with parents suggest that these goals are intertwined with some of their other parenting goals such as teaching responsibility, allowing for independent learning, encouraging exploration, and helping the child learn to fit in *and* stand out. If nothing else, I learned through the interviews the benefit of interdisciplinary thinking that goes beyond a narrow scope of understanding and attempts to create a more holistic view of humanity. While it is still important to be specific and focused at times, always being aware of the hidden relationships between various experiences, especially experiences as varied as child rearing, can add significant value to our understanding of what it means to teach empathy, to understand empathy, and to become empathic as children develop.

4. Integration of the Two Studies, Concluding Remarks, Discussion of Limitations, and Future Research.

4.1. Integration of Studies

The process of completing media analysis and parent interviews with a focus on empathy was an enlightening foray into the complexities of understanding and depicting empathy for others. Empathy can be a subtle process—a look, a small gesture, a single statement, or even just an internal process that is invisible to others. Therefore, it is difficult to always recognize and put into words either the instance or process of empathy. Overall, the ways in which the selected children's television shows portray empathy (when they do portray empathy, that is) differ from the ways in which parents think about and attempt to teach empathy. Because, at its core, empathy requires an ability to take the perspective of an individual person, and because each person has his or her own unique set of experiences and reactions, parents appear to teach and provide empathy uniquely according to the needs of the situation at hand. Meanwhile, the media depictions of the current research allow for little flexibility or individuality in understanding or portraying empathy. The world is divided into groups and rigid lines are created between empathy and a lack of empathy.

In the selected media depictions of empathy, empathic characters were portrayed as good, kind, friendly, likeable, or attractive characters, while callous characters were portrayed as bad, ill-meaning, and generally unlikeable. Humour in the callous scenes was biting and meant to denigrate, while humour in the empathy scenes was more lighthearted, often without a human target. Callous scenes were used early in the episode to set up the rest of the episode, while empathy scenes were more often near the end of the episode in order to provide resolution. Comparing the callous and empathy scenes provides several instances of direct contrasts—a black and white view of the world emerges. The dichotomous world view in the media might have entertainment advantages in that as little distraction from the main story theme as possible permits a kind of closure in the half-hour episode. Callous and empathy scenes play a supportive role to the main theme and supporting characters within those scenes do not have much of a history in their relationships. Within the content of the particular episode, people get what they

deserve and the audience is not left with nagging feelings of injustice. Very little action following from the empathy scenes is expected.

During parent interviews, an entirely different worldview emerges, one in which different aspects of a child's world, abilities, and personalities are attempted to converge to create a more holistic and fully formed human experience with people in prolonged, indeed lifetime, relationships. Parents talked about helping their children see the motivations behind callous behavior to demonstrate that sometimes callousness comes from hurt, fear, or ignorance rather than an inherent "badness". Parents discussed attempts to teach their children to do better, knowing that their own children's bad behavior was not a foreclosed reality. Parents discussed a desire to help their children find a genuine sense of self, understanding the unique aspects of each child as important; in this way, the children were not placed into one of two categories but rather were viewed as unique persons learning and growing in order to navigate the world successfully alongside many other unique persons. Parents did not mention using humour as a teaching device and implied that developing empathy was a very serious matter indeed. Empathy was much more than that which people deserve and had broader applications than just behavior towards victims. It was as if all people deserve empathy and all people need to develop empathy as a kind of social capital for a civil society. Empathy necessitates prosocial action.

The difference in worldview between the media depictions of human experience relating to empathy and parental experience relating to empathy is significant. The difference may be partly due to the fact that the parents discussed attempts to teach empathy, while children's media is not necessarily engaging in a teaching process, but rather an entertainment-focused process. Teaching any concept may require more flexibility, more back and forth, in order to be effective when compared to providing mere entertainment or humour. It may also be more difficult to provide nuanced character depictions in a half hour show with content intended to captivate children. Further research may benefit from exploring black and white depictions of empathy and callousness in children's media, as well as the way in which children and parents view characters in empathy versus callous roles.

During the parent interviews, each parent briefly commented on the role of media in his or her child's life. While no major themes emerged from the discussions, brief comments

indicated that media was viewed as a negative influence on the children, resulting in an attempt, however successful, to limit the children's access to various media, whether it be television, movies, video games, or social media. It was beyond the purposes of this study to ascertain in depth reasons why parents were cautious about the media depictions of empathy. It may well be that they sense the shallow coverage and the second place to callousness works against parents' attempts to teach empathy in its broadest sense. To test the veracity of these speculations, more research is needed.

Nevertheless, the media selected for the current research was not entirely negative. Empathy was demonstrated in the concept of friendship and while this is not the only relationship in which empathy can be displayed, empathy can be a positive aspect of any friendship. Although some of the humour depicted was disparaging or rude, some was lighthearted and uplifting. Although conflicts were presented (sometimes accompanied by callousness), attempts at problem solving or resolution were also displayed. And, although the selected scenes presented a black and white picture of people, the media itself is not entirely good or entirely bad.

4.2. Research Limitations

Although the television shows in Study One were chosen specifically because they were amongst the most popular television shows with the target age of children aged 7-11, children within this age range are also most likely watching several other television programs which provide different views and messages surrounding empathy. Even children within the same age range may have varying levels of media literacy, which can change the way messages are understood by children the same age who are watching the same television program. Also, children aged 7-11 may also be viewing programs meant for older viewing audiences, such as adolescents or adults; these more mature shows may include message about empathy that are different or even more complex than the ones provided by the television shows used in Study One. Therefore, although conclusions can be made about the messages surrounding empathy in the specific shows chosen for Study One, further research looking at other popular television shows for children is required to make broader statements about the impact of television media on children's views of empathy.

Further, watching children's television when you are not a child introduces its own challenges in understanding and developing themes regarding messages of empathy. As an adult researcher, I am inserting my own knowledge of empathy, as well as my adult expectations and experiences, onto content meant for children. It is possible that the messages received by the viewing audience change depending on the age of said audience, for instance, as media literacy changes and progresses throughout one's lifetime. Therefore, although I acknowledge my bias as an adult and attempted to limit its impact, it is not possible for me to completely engage in analysis independent from my age.

For Study Two, despite attempts to include a range of parenting experiences, styles, and backgrounds, many of the parents involved in the interviews presented as psychologically minded and very interested in parenting practices. The parents being interviewed discussed books or articles they read and talked about their interest in my research specifically and child development generally. All the parents involved in the interviews were also employed in various professional capacities. Therefore, although they provided interesting insights into their parenting experiences, the research is limited in that it does not include information from parents in other socioeconomic, cultural, or educational spheres. The limited representation of parenting styles and philosophies, as well as the small sample provided through qualitative methodology, leads to a required caution when attempting to apply the themes emerging from the parent interviews to other parents who were not involved in this study or are dissimilar from those involved in the study. Further research would do well to interview parents with varying parenting philosophies, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, or culture, to better understand the breadth of empathy messages provided to children. It would also be interesting to run focus groups with parents who hold different views on parenting to look at the way in which different parenting practices interact and understand other views of parenting.

In addition to the limitations from style of parenting and cultural values, my research also did not include interviews with others who have great impact on children's lives, such as teachers, school staff, daycare workers, and many others. Because children spend a great deal of time in school, teachers can specifically be a very rich source of information regarding their behavior and displayed empathy. Further, teachers have a large influence in a children's lives and

have many opportunities to teach children about social and emotional matters. At school children are interacting with a wide range of peers, providing more opportunity to see peer-to-peer behavior, including empathy or callousness. Therefore, teachers are able to witness a wide range of interactions and relationships. Interviewing teachers on their attempts to teach and develop empathy in children could provide valuable information for understanding the messages children receive daily about being empathic. Also, a case study or quasi-case study on children's empathy development, including interviews with parents, teachers, and others who interact frequently with them could provide interesting and rich information about empathy displays and teaching in various contexts.

Overall, my research looked only at the messages from two factors that influence a child's understanding of empathy. Although media and parenting greatly influence children, they are not the only factors that impact how children learn about and develop empathy for others, nor do they influence children in isolation. Peers, school, personality traits, specific experiences, and many other factors that were not included in Study One or Study Two can impact children's empathy. Therefore, although the research helps us understand the way in which media and parenting may understand, frame, and depict empathy to children, there is undoubtedly more involved in the overall picture. Caution is always warranted, then, in making broad or sweeping statements about children's whole experience of empathy in their world based upon this research alone. Further qualitative research into the other influential factors, as well as the interaction between the different factors can help us continue to understand the intricate and possibly inconsistent messages children receive about empathy from their environment. Once we can better understand what the messages are and how the messages are passed along, we can gain a more holistic picture of empathy in children, whether it is present or absent.

4.3. Directions for Future Research

The various limitations to my current research provide several avenues for additional research to broaden and deepen my findings. My current research also opens up other interesting prospects of future research. Because my research focused specifically on messages provided to children aged 7-11, future research can expand my findings by considering other ages. For instance, it would be interesting to analyze television media meant for younger children and

television media meant for older children to see what themes emerge regarding messages and context of empathy. Performing a constant comparative analysis between media for these different ages to look at both the changes and similarities in the depiction of empathy in media aimed for different age groups; within a discussion on changing cognitive development, such research could be particularly interesting and enlightening.

The parents involved in my interviews provided great insights into their attempts to teach and model empathy, however, unless their children attend to and understand these messages, their effectiveness is limited. Therefore, it may be beneficial for future research to engage in several case studies involving parent interviews, child interviews, teacher interviews, and observation to look at the ways in which a parent's intended messages are received by children and by the observing researcher. It may even be beneficial to follow parenting styles and teaching of empathy as children age to look at the ways in which parents change their approach to match the age and developing cognitive abilities of their children.

Finally, future research may benefit from not only exploring the messages about empathy within television shows (or other media platforms as the research expands), but also interviewing both parents and children as they view the television shows to gather their impressions and interpretations from the shows. This may help researchers see the ways in which the intended audience (children) and parents are similar or dissimilar to the researcher in terms of identifying and understanding the empathy messages.

4.4. Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to make theoretical conclusions on the messages of empathy based upon its portrayal in the selected television shows, primarily because they present empathy as formed or unformed and less as a changing ability or trait. In this way, empathy's representation in television shows neither fits with earlier theories of moral development built upon guilt and consequences, nor later theories of moral development built upon relationship guidance and incentive. However, the fact that empathy is primarily displayed within relationship suggest that relationship may provide the impetus for developing empathy. In contrast, the themes that emerged from the parenting interviews in Study Two fit well with the later theories of moral development where a close relationship allows for modelling, reinforcing, teaching, and offering

empathy and moral behavior in order to instill it within children. The parents discussed consequences briefly, and often in relation to disobedient behaviors that put the children at imminent risk. Whereas displays of callousness, although disciplined, resulted more importantly in discussions, perspective taking, and guidance for better behavioural options in the future. Interviewed parents also indicated that modelling and offering empathy in an attempt to help children *feel* empathy were important in releasing them to display empathy towards others later in life. In this way, the themes that emerged in parenting practice mirror the theoretical shift outlined by Thompson and Newton (2010) in that older, consequence-based teaching is replaced with learning through relationship. However, Thompson and Newton, when discussing the theoretical shift, were primarily concerned with moral development as a whole, not with empathy specifically. Since empathy has an inherently relational component, perhaps it is inevitable that teaching empathy requires relationship rather than merely discipline and consequence.

Once again, we see the limitation of current moral development research in understanding empathy in that moral behavior is primarily about good and bad, while empathy may not lead to good and bad valuations, but rather lead to compassion or understanding of another, regardless of subsequent behavior. It is not surprise that empathy can and often will lead to positive behavior, but the experience is more about the whole human experience. The television shows analyzed portray empathy as all or none, bringing in a philosophical questioning of what good or bad mean regarding human existence, but certainly the parenting interviews offer a view of empathy that goes beyond current understanding of emotion, cognition, and behavior. For the parents, empathy bleeds into personhood, existence in the world, and future success. Despite this difference in empathy portrayed through the current research and more general moral development research, it is also important to acknowledge that both selected television shows and parenting interviews appeared to define empathy in terms of behavior. Part of this may be because television is a visual medium in which we are not always privy to a character's motivations or thoughts, and because when evaluating children's empathy, parents are often required to lean heavily on behavior to hint at internal motivations. Whatever the reasoning may be, the definition of empathy in behavioural terms aligns more with morality's tendency to focus on behavior rather than the conceptualization of empathy as an internal process as outlined by Gerdes (2011).

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Empathy makes sense within the framework of moral development, especially as a moral emotion, however, it also extends beyond mere morality, both in terms of teaching, guiding, and understanding. If future research continues to take a deeper, individual, and personal look into views on empathy as well as its felt impact, there is the possibility that our understanding of its importance, as well as its effects will continue to broaden.

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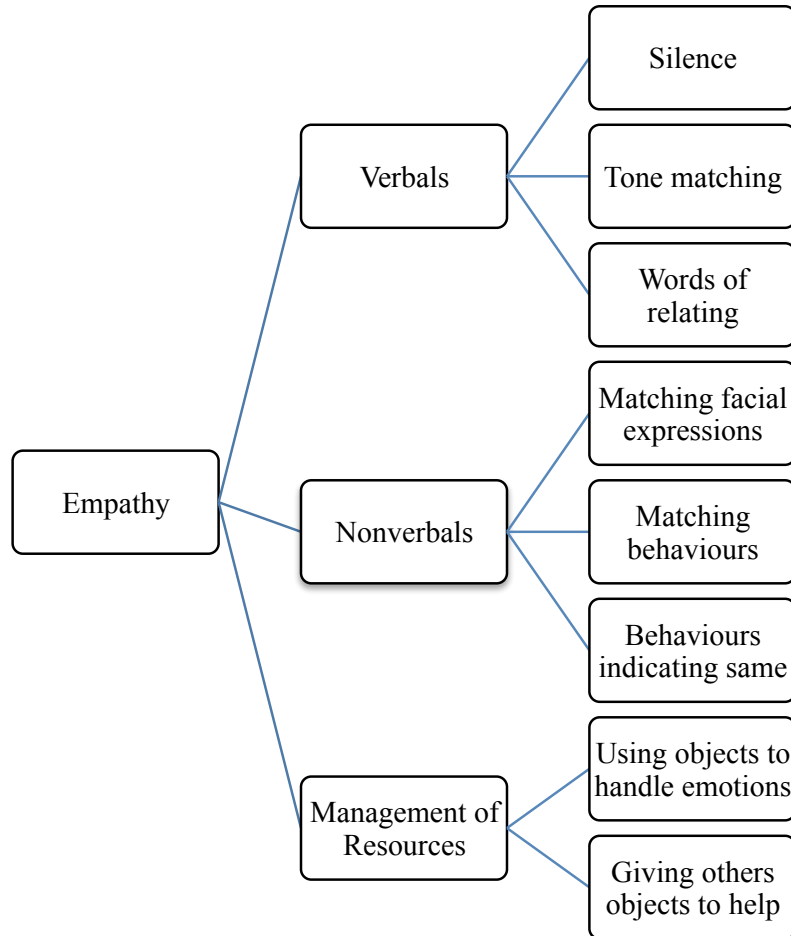
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Empathy map

Callous Map

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                                    │  Mismatched  │
                                    │ expression or│
                                    │     tone     │
                                    └──────────────┘
                ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
                │ Intentionally│    │   Opposing   │
                │   Opposing   │────│  Behaviours  │
                │   Reactions  │    └──────────────┘
                └──────────────┘    ┌──────────────┐
   ┌──────────┐                     │Words indicating│
   │          │                     │   opposite   │
   │ Callous  │                     └──────────────┘
   │          │                     ┌──────────────┐
   └──────────┘                     │  Aggression  │
                ┌──────────────┐    └──────────────┘
                │Intentional Harm│  ┌──────────────┐
                └──────────────┘    │Taking/Denying│
                                    │  Resources   │
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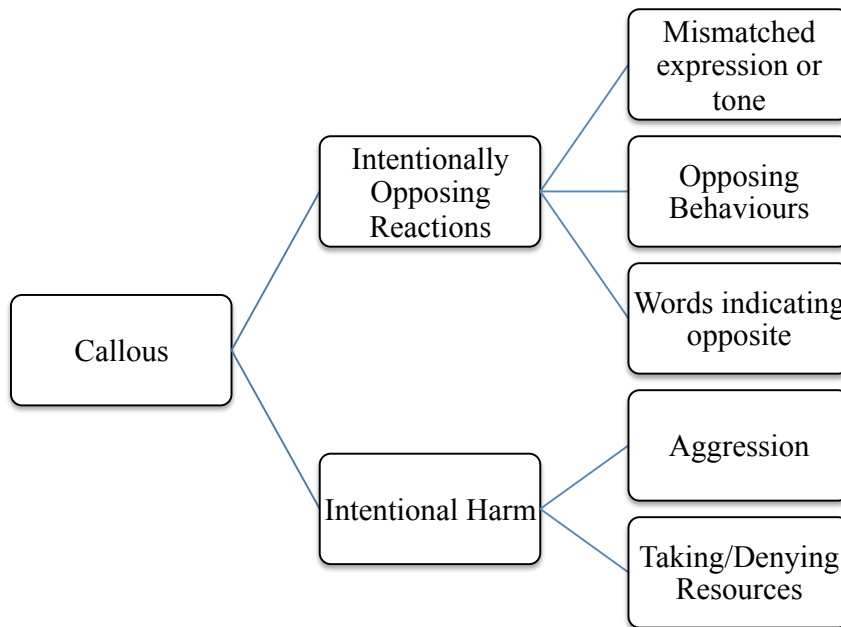
APPENDIX C

List of Selected Empathy Scenes

Big Time Rush

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Big Time Moms	2011	Season 2, Ep. 16	Fellows & Holland
Big Time Moms	2011	Season 2, Ep. 16	Fellows & Holland
Big Time Demos	2010	Season 1, Ep. 10	Fellows & Chan
Big Time Concert	2010	Season 1, Ep. 19	Fellows, Saric, & Holland
Big Time Mansion	2010	Season 1, Ep. 6	Menendez & Spingarn

Hannah Montana

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
On The Road Again	2006	Season 1, Ep. 12	Meyer & Christiansen
On The Road Again	2006	Season 1, Ep. 12	Meyer & Christiansen
You Are So Sue-Able to Me	2007	Season 2, Ep. 3	Lapiduss & Christiansen
Joannie B. Goode	2008	Season 2, Ep. 28	Green & Sheridan
He Could Be The One	2009	Season 3, Ep. 18	Brown-Gallenberg, Wordham, & Correll

SpongeBob SquarePants

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Driven to Tears	2007	Season 4, Ep. 17	Brookshier, King, & Banks
Rule of Dumb	2007	Season 4, Ep. 17	Cervas, Wiese, & Michaeli
Rule of Dumb	2007	Season 4, Ep. 17	Cervas, Wiese, & Michaeli
Krusty Krushers	2008	Season 6, Ep. 13	Cash, Charmatz, & Iversen
BlackJack	2007	Season 5, Ep. 13	Alexander, Cervas, & Pursel

The Suite Life of Zack and Cody

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Boston Holiday	2006	Season 2, Ep. 13	O'Connell & Passaris
Going for Gold	2006	Season 4, Ep. 3	Lapidus & Correll
Smart and Smarterer	2005	Season 2, Ep. 5	Kallis, Lapidus, & Correll
Health and Fitness	2007	Season 5, Ep. 8	Nemetz & Correll
Health and Fitness	2007	Season 5, Ep. 8	Nemetz & Correll

List of Selected Callous Scenes

Big Time Rush

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Big Time Girlfriends	2010	Season 2, Ep. 3	Spingarn & Schill
Big Time Girlfriends	2010	Season 2, Ep. 3	Spingarn & Schill
Big Time Moms	2011	Season 2, Ep. 16	Fellows & Holland
Big Time Concert	2010	Season 1, Ep. 19	Fellows, Saric, & Holland
Big Time Audition	2009	Season 1, Ep. 1	Fellows & Holland

Hannah Montana

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
You Are So Sue-Able To Me	2007	Season 2, Ep. 3	Lapiduss & Christiansen
Oops I Meddled Again	2006	Season 1, Ep. 11	Albert & Hurd
I Want You to Want Me to Go to Florida	2007	Season 2, Ep. 13	Poryes & Christiansen
I Want You to Want Me to Go to Florida	2007	Season 2, Ep. 13	Poryes & Christiansen
Joannie B. Goode	2008	Season 2, Ep. 28	Green & Sheridan

SpongeBob SquarePants

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Krusty Krushers	2008	Season 6, Ep. 13	Cash, Charmatz, & Iversen
Krusty Krushers	2008	Season 6, Ep. 13	Cash, Charmatz, & Iversen
Picture Day	2007	Season 5, Ep. 13	Alexander & Michaeli
BlackJack	2007	Season 5, Ep. 13	Alexander, Cervas, & Pursel
SpongeBob's Last Stand	2010	Season 7, Ep. 8	Springer, Banks, & Iversen

The Suite Life of Zack and Cody

Episode Title	Year	Season, Episode	Episode Writers
Fairest of Them All	2005	Season 1, Ep. 2	Ahern, McLaughlin, & Correll
Let Us Entertain You	2008	Season 7, Ep. 10	Kallis, O'Connell, & Correll
Let Us Entertain You	2008	Season 7, Ep. 10	Kallis, O'Connell, & Correll
Going for the Gold	2006	Season 4, Ep. 3	Lapidus & Correll
Health and Fitness	2007	Season 5, Ep. 8	Nemetz & Correll

APPENDIX E

University of Saskatchewan Behaviour Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

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UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	DEPARTMENT	Beh #
Gerry Farthing	Psychology	14-46

INSTITUTION (S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED

University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)
Larisa Cornelius

FUNDER(S)
INTERNALLY FUNDED

TITLE:
Influences of Empathy in Children: Messages and Modeling of Empathy in Media and Parenting Behaviour

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE	APPROVAL ON	APPROVAL OF	EXPIRY DATE
18-Feb-2014	04/Mar/2014	Application for Behavioral Research Ethics Review Participant Consent Form Transcript Data Release Form Interview Guide Poster	03-Mar-2015

Full Board Meeting

Delegated Review ✔   Expedited Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/

Beth Bilson, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to   Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon, SK S7N 4J8
Phone (306) 966-2975   Fax (306) 966-2699

Recruitment Poster

Empathy may be the solution to bullying.

How do YOU help children develop empathy?

I am a graduate student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. Under the supervision of Dr. Gerry Farthing, I am conducting a research project focusing on parents' perspectives of developing **empathy** in their children. In this study, I am interested in learning about the ways parents intentionally and unintentionally teach and model empathy for their children. I am looking for volunteers to participate in an interview (approximately 90 minutes long). For your participation, you will be given a $20 gift card to your choice of coffee shop or bookstore.

You are eligible for this study if:
1. You are currently parenting a child between the ages of 7 and 11
2. You are the child's primary caregiver
3. You have been parenting the child from the time he/she was least 6 months of age
4. You are the child's biological or adoptive parent
5. You are willing to describe and reflect upon your parenting experiences

For more information about the study please contact:
larisa.cornelius@usask.ca
If you do not have access to email, please call Dr. Gerry Farthing at
306-966-8925

This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca   larisa.cornelius @usask.ca

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in the second study of a research project entitled *Influences of Empathy in Children: Messages and Modeling of Empathy in Media and Parenting Behavior*. This project is being conducted as part of a Doctoral thesis in Clinical Psychology. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher: Larisa Cornelius, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, larisa.cornelius@usask.ca

Supervisor: Gerry R. Farthing, Faculty, Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, 966-8925, gfarthing@stmcollege.ca

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of this study is to explore parental influences on the development of empathy in children, as well as how parents understand and create the way in which they influence their child's empathy development. This study will focus on both direct practices used to teach empathy, such as the use of discipline or verbal explanations regarding empathy. As well, this study is interested in indirect practices that assist children in their development of empathy, such as modeling empathic responses or exposing children to experiences where empathy is displayed or expected. Your participation in this study would involve taking part in a one-on-one interview, expected to last approximately 90 minutes. The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and location. All interviews in this study will be audio-taped and transcribed so that there is an accurate record of the discussion.

During the interview, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your observations, experiences, and parenting practices relevant to empathy development. You will also be asked to relay stories about times your child has or has not displayed empathy at appropriate times. In addition, you will be asked to answer more general questions about your child's peers and

activities. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Potential Risks: Some of your experiences with developing empathy in your child may be quite personal and sensitive in nature, and it is possible that you will experience some discomfort sharing these experiences in the interview. It is very important for you to know that you are free to decide what you will or will not share. You can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with and may choose to turn off the tape recorder at any point in the interview. After the interview, if you want to talk about the thoughts and feelings you are having, I can provide you with a list of counseling resources in the community that you may contact.

Please recall that this study is **not** intended for individuals and families currently experiencing domestic violence, currently going through a divorce, currently suffering from severe or chronic illness, or with children who have been the victim of a crime. We may choose to discontinue a participant's involvement in the study if, at any time, your participation raises concern for Dr. Farthing and myself regarding the possibility that you or your family may be experiencing any of these things. In this case, your data will be deleted from the research project and appropriately destroyed beyond recognition. Contact information for available counseling resources will be provided as well as an offer to assist the participant in making contact with such resources.

Potential Benefits: If you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to share, in your own words, your experiences with teaching your child empathy. As well, you will be able to reflect upon the ways in which you model empathy for your children and teach empathy is less obvious or direct ways. Your involvement may help you obtain a better understanding of the many ways in which you can influence your child in their development. The findings of this study also have the potential to enrich current research understanding about the possible significance or meaning of intentional and unintentional parent influences on child's development of empathy. It is important to note that these are possible benefits, and are not guaranteed.

Compensation: For your participation in this study, you will be offered a $20 gift card to your choice of a coffee shop (e.g., Starbucks, Tim Hortons, etc.), **or** a bookstore (e.g., Chapters/Indigo, McNally Robinson, etc.).

Storage of Data: Consent forms will be stored in a securely locked drawer in the office of the researcher, separate from all other data. The audio files and transcribed interviews will be stored in password-protected documents on the encrypted computer of the researcher, as well as on an encrypted backup drive. The audio files will be destroyed after all the participants' interviews have been transcribed and samples of the transcripts have been checked for accuracy against the recordings. Upon completion of the study, Dr. Gerry Farthing will securely store all the data at a secure location of the University of Saskatchewan. This data is kept for a minimum of five years. When the data is no longer required, it will be destroyed beyond recovery.

Confidentiality: The findings from this study will be reported in my Doctoral thesis, and may be used in subsequent academic publications or conference presentations. The findings will be presented as common themes, and direct quotations from the individual transcripts will be used to illustrate the themes. Measures will be taken to maintain confidentiality of the information you contribute to the study and ensure that it is not shared outside of the research team. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym (an alias or fake name) for yourself and your child that will be used to protect your identity. The pseudonym will be substituted for your actual name and your child's actual name in all instances within the transcripts and final report. Additionally, any personally identifying information will not be included when describing the characteristics of the participants in the final report. While the study is being conducted, all the data will be stored securely and labeled with your pseudonym to assure confidentiality.

Prior to the data being written up, you will be given the opportunity to review the complete transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript that you believe does not accurately reflect what you said in the interview. You will then be asked to sign a transcript release form to indicate that the transcript accurately reflects what you said during the interview and that you give permission for me to use quotations from the transcript.

Limits of Confidentiality: Although the information you provide will be kept confidential, there are certain instances under which confidentiality must be broken.
1) Children are a very vulnerable population; therefore, in the interest of protecting individuals under the age of 16, if it becomes apparent during your participation in the current research that an individual who is currently a child (under 16 years of age) may be experiencing abuse or neglect, the researcher is obligated to inform the necessary individuals (parents, legal authorities, etc.).
2) If, during your participation in this research, it becomes apparent to the researcher that you may be planning to imminently harm yourself or somebody you know, the researcher is obligated to inform a third party in the interest of protecting your welfare and the welfare of others.
3) If a judge subpoenas your research records and information, the researcher is legally obligated to present this information.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any kind. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question(s) that you do not wish to answer. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. **Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until all participants' data has been pooled for analysis. After this, it is not possible to identify individual participant's data to exclude it. Also, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data** You will also be informed of any new information that may affect your decision to participate.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researcher or supervisor at the email address or phone numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. If you are interested in learning about the study's finding, you may request a copy of the final report from the researcher or supervisor at any time. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on October 17, 2014. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office, ethics.office@usask.ca, (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description of the research study provided above. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research study, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____
(Name of Participant)   (Date)

Parent Interview Script

Introduction
- Introduce myself and review consent form
- Thank you for deciding to participate in my study. I appreciate your willingness to share a bit of your life and your experience of being a parent with me.
- **Purpose of the Interview**: Teaching children about right and wrong is a very important part of parenting and can often feel overwhelming. Oftentimes parents influence how their children develop feelings of caring and empathy. Sometimes these influences are intentional, meaning that you set aside time to teach your children about caring for others. Sometimes though, parents do things without thinking, maybe even out of habit, that also teach their children about how to show empathy and compassion. Today, I want to talk to you about experiences you've had teaching your child about developing empathy for others, as well as helping your child during times when they are not showing empathy. My goal is also to understand how you decide what will or won't help your child develop empathy in terms of your parenting.
- I want you to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers here today. I want to understand <u>your</u> efforts and <u>your</u> techniques for teaching your children, as well as the context of <u>your</u> life.
- You are free to decide what you will or won't share and I will respect that. If you are having a hard time finding the right words, feel free to take a moment and think things through.
- I will be writing notes while we talk, not to evaluate you or make judgments about your answers, but just so I can remember ideas or questions for later.
- Do you have any questions before we get started?

Opening Questions
Warm-up questions about child
- I want to learn more about your children before we talk more generally about your influence on their development. So tell me about your children.
- For the purposes of our interview, I'm going to ask you questions about only *one* of your children. So, when we are discussing today, and when you are thinking through my questions, I'll ask you to only answer regarding your child (boy/girl between ages 7-10) as much as possible.
  - How would you describe your child, generally?
- What do you like to do with your son/daughter?
  - What kind of places to go together?
  - What games or activities do you play together?
  - What is your favourite way to spend time with your son/daughter?

- What does your son/daughter do well?
  - We all have things that we have to put more work into in order to do it well. So what sorts of things does your son/daughter need to work extra hard on?
- What kind of student is your child?
  - Is there anything they need extra assistance with?
  - What makes your child unique?
- What are some of your child's favourite TV shows or movies?
  - What do you think they like about that show?
  - What do you think they learn from that show?
- Does your child have a favourite superhero or TV character?
  - What do they like about that character?
  - What do they learn from that character?
- How does your child usually spend his/her day?

Introduce Questions About Empathy
- As I said before, when we were discussing the interview process and what we'd be talking about today, one of the things I'm most interested in learning about is how parents influence different parts of their child's development and the context around those instances.
- There is some research about how children develop and maybe what kinds of experiences influence that development, in areas such as thinking, playing with others, working hard, doing schoolwork etc. [However, I want to know more about the experience, from the parents' point of view about how they feel they actually contribute to those experiences, help their children along the way, and come to decide what will or won't help with that.]
- I'm particularly interested in how parents help their children learn to be kind to others and learn empathy. So, before we get into the more detailed questions, I want to lay some groundwork so we are all talking about the same thing and on the same page.

Discuss Definition of Empathy

- Empathy has a history of meaning different things. Tell me, what does it mean for you?
  - How would you define empathy?
  - How would you know your child has been empathetic?
    - What would they do?
    - What would their actions be like?
  - How would you describe empathy to your child?
- One definition of empathy is matching our emotion to the emotion of another person, or "putting yourself in someone else's shoes." How does that definition of empathy fit or not fit with your ideas of what empathy is?
- Okay, now what about sympathy. What does "sympathy" mean for you?
  - How would you define it?
  - How would you know that your child has been sympathetic?
    - What would they do?

- ▪ What would their actions be like?
  - ○ How would you describe sympathy to a child?
  - ○ Tell me, how would you describe "compassion"? Where does that fit in?

[If they are not understanding, bring them to a point of understanding what empathy and sympathy mean.
- Some people think empathy means to "put yourself another person's shoes" or to feel what another person is feeling. How do you feel about that definition of empathy?
- Some people think sympathy means to feel sorry for another person and their situation. How do you feel about that definition of sympathy?]

Okay, so based on our discussion, let's agree that when we say "empathy" we'll mean (insert the definition they've come to understand), and when we talk about sympathy or compassion we'll mean (insert the definition they've come to understand).

Parent's Influences on Child's Empathy
What are your experiences with your children in regards to empathy?
- What instances of showing empathy have you seen in your child? [Bring up answer to previous question about how they'd know their child was showing empathy.]
  - ○ I want to get more context; tell me about what was happening at the time.
    - ▪ Were there other people around?
    - ▪ Where was your child?
    - ▪ What were you doing at the time?
  - ○ Tell me about what you think prompted him/her to show empathy.
    - ▪ What do you think was going on in the mind of your child?
  - ○ Can you think of another instance where your child showed empathy?
- What changes have you seen in your child's ability to show empathy over the years?
  - ○ What was your child like before that is different from now?
  - ○ What are some reasons you think your child's ability to show empathy changed?
    - ▪ What else?

We talked about times you've seen your child showing empathy, now tell me about ways that you try to teach your child to show empathy.
- Can you describe a specific instance where you tried to teach your child about empathy?
  - ○ What was going on at the time?
    - ▪ Were other people around?
    - ▪ Where were you and your child?
    - ▪ What were you doing at the time?
  - ○ Describe your child's reaction.
  - ○ How was your child's behavior after that incidence different?
  - ○ Describe your decision making process – how did you decide that your actions in this scenario would help your child?

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- What do think affected or influenced the parenting techniques you chose in this instance? (past successes, watching other parents, the way you were raised, reading parenting books, etc)
- Can you describe another instance where you tried to teach you child empathy?

Tell me about others ways you might influence your child to show empathy. [Sometimes people call these "Teachable Moments where they try to teach their child what to do or not to do.]
- Are there any actions or feelings you try to demonstrate to your child? Tell me about those.
  - What thoughts lead you to use these actions or feelings as teachable moments? (How do you choose to demonstrate *these* actions or feelings to teach empathy.)
  - What influenced your use of parenting technique in this instance?
- Describe the effect your modeling of this behavior has on your child's behavior.

Sometimes parents do small things with or to their children that they don't think have much of an impact, but are important for teaching kindness or empathy. Can you think of any instances where that might be the case for you?
- Has there been a time you were surprised – you didn't mean to do any teaching but when you reflected back you noticed that you influenced your child?
  - Tell me about one of those times.
  - What else?
- What are your intentions when you do these small acts? Describe why you think you do these things.
- What effect do these small acts have on your child's behavior?
  - How do you think if affected empathy development?
- Describe how the success or failure of these small acts changes your future parenting.

Regarding all these things you do to try to get your child to be empathic or kind to others, how does your child respond?
- Do you notice changes in their behavior because of these 'Teachable Moments'?
- Have there been any setbacks or roadblocks as they learn about empathy?
  - Have there been times when things have become difficult? For instance, when potty training, sometimes your child learns to go to the bathroom on the toilet and they do so for a while, but then revert back.
    - What happened?
    - What was going on at the time?
    - What were they/you thinking?
  - What explanations have you given for having (no) setbacks?

Sounds like you've had some fun experiences and some important experiences when teaching your child! Is there anything else? Have I given you time to tell me all you wanted to about empathy and your child?

Introduction to Questions About CU Traits
- Okay, that was really helpful!
- Now, I'm going to ask you a bit about the opposite experience. Children are often very aggressive to each other, and they learn at their own pace how to be kind and empathic.
- So, now I'd like to ask you about times when your child has NOT shown empathy.

Difficulty with Empathy
- Describe some of your experiences with your child where he/she has (not shown empathy/ intentionally harmed another/not shown caring/enjoyed another's misfortunes).
  - What was going on at the time?
  - Who was around your child at the time?
  - How did your child react after the incident was over?
    - How did they feel about the situation?
    - How did they feel about their behavior?
    - How did they behave after?
    - How did they think about what happened?
  - How did you respond to this event?
  - What other times has your child not shown empathy when he/she should have?
    - E.g., any time they've done something like tell somebody who's upset to "get over it"
    - E.g., any time they've pushed or hit somebody to steal a toy or show they were tough
- All children show aggression at some point, and there are many things that influence children to be aggressive. What do you think are some things influencing your child in terms of being aggressive?
  - How do you see this influence changing your child's empathy or caring?
    - Are there any examples of this change?
  - What else?
    - What about friends/peers/siblings/television/video games?
  - How do you respond when your child is aggressive?
    - What are some other ways you respond?
    - How does your child react to that response?
  - When thinking of these incidents, is there something you thought of later while reflecting on the situation?

Closing Comment: Is there anything else you would like to tell me or that you feel we have missed?

Summarization
So, if you could sum up the influence you have in helping your child develop empathy in one sentence, what would that sentence be?
- (If unsure of how to summarize their experience) If your path to helping your child develop empathy were a movie, what would the title be?

What was it like for you to come here and talk with me today?
- What was it like to discuss empathy in your child with me today?
- What was it like to discuss aggression and your child with me today?
- Have you learnt anything new about your parenting or your child?

<u>Closing</u>
- Thank you very much for your time today. I have found your experiences extremely valuable. As you know, parenting is one of the most difficult jobs somebody can take on and I appreciate your willingness to share both difficult and positive experiences with me.
- I will be in touch with you once I have our interview transcribed and then we can arrange a time for you to go over the transcript.

APPENDIX I

Transcript Release Form

_____

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Department of Psychology

9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK S7N 5A5 Canada
Telephone: (306) 966-6657
Facsimile: (306) 966-6630

Transcript/Data Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interviews in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interviews with Larisa Cornelius and her dissertation supervisor, Gerald R. Farthing. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Larisa Cornelius and Gerald R. Farthing to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form.

I have received a copy of this Transcript/Data Release Form for my own records.

_____   _____
Name of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Signature of Researcher