The Relationship between Empathy in Children and their Parents

A Senior Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Degree in Child Development

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The development of empathy, the understanding of what other people feel, is important in children's lives.   "Research indicates that empathy is basic to developing socially competent behavior" (Jensen, Peery, Adams, & Gaynard, 1981, p. 879).   In other words, a key to successful interactions is knowing how others and feel. "It is agreed that empathy is a critical part of a broader moral sense that leads generally to harmonious functioning between individuals on a day-to-day basis, as well as helping behaviors in times of distress" (Moreno, Klute, & Robinson, 2008, p. 613). Given the importance of empathy in everyday interactions, it should come as no surprise to learn that researchers have investigated when and how children develop the skills necessary to empathize.

How children gain an understanding of empathy so early in life is a question of interest to researchers in the child development field. Despite this interest, "relatively little is known about factors that influence the development and expression of empathy" (Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo, Troyer, Speer, Karbon, et al., 1992, p. 583). There are several possible ways that children might learn about empathy, such as television shows or peers; however, the most likely source is parents. Many studies show that empathy and other emotional behaviors stems from parents' own use of empathy towards their children (Barnett, King, Howard, & Dino, 1980; Spinrad, Losoya, Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, et al., 1999; Strayer & Roberts, 2004).

Since the development of empathy is imperative to effective social interactions, parents need to use multiple strategies to help their children understand empathy. One way to encourage parents to talk to their children about empathy is through the use of

children's books that show characters being empathetic towards others. Tools such as books may get parents to explain the importance of empathy to their children, as well as how to act empathetically in everyday situations. The goal of this senior project was to examine children's books for any potential opportunities they might give parents to talk to their children about empathy.

I conducted a study of 30 children's books. Books were selected using 3 strategies that a parent might use during a visit to a library. I chose the first 10 books based on librarian recommendations of empathy themed books. I chose the second set of books based on their titles and what books I personally thought may include empathy themes. Finally, a third set of books was included via a haphazard process of pulling books off of the shelf at random. I read through all of these books and paid particular attention to the gender of the character, the characters use of empathy, the gender of whom the empathy was directed toward, and whether or not a child would understand the empathy lesson. This analysis revealed that male and female characters expressed empathy the same number of times, but boys were on the receiving end more than girls. Of the books chosen, librarian's recommendations were found to be the best when looking for empathy. Limitations to this study include a small sample size, the use of only one library, and only one researcher. In the future, it would be beneficial to look at more libraries to assess whether the librarians know which books would be helpful for empathy lessons. Using more books to look at the gender differences in expressing empathy would also benefit future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's stories often include emotional events that children must interpret to understand the storyline. For example, Simba's father dies in the beginning of the Lion King, Cinderella's stepsisters treat her cruelly, and Peter Rabbit is frightened of what his mother will do when she discovers that he has lost his jacket (again!). When reading such stories, some children may find that they are actually feeling the very same emotions that the characters in the story are feeling, such as sharing Simba's grief over Mufasa's death in the Lion King. The extent to which children, or adults, experience the emotions of others differs from individual to individual; some people are highly sensitive to emotional events whereas others are less likely to take the emotional perspective of others. Such differences are commonly referred to as differences in *empathy.*

Although empathy is difficult to define precisely, many psychologists explain this concept in comparable ways. Trommsdorff (1991) has defined empathy as, "An other oriented emotional reaction involving concern for the other's well-being" (p. 387). Similarly, Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, et al., (2002) describe empathy as, "an emotional reaction based on the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition, which is consistent with the other's emotional state or condition" (p. 583). Others refer to empathy as more of a trait by explaining that empathy lies at the center of all human emotions and without it the "human" part ceases to exist (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990).

Technically, empathy can be differentiated from sympathy, a closely related term. Fabes, Eisenberg, and Miller (1990) define sympathy as a reaction produced from viewing another person's emotional state that involves a concern or feeling of sorrow for the other

person. Thus, sympathy is an emotion that consists of feelings for the other person, but not necessarily feeling the same emotions as the other is experiencing in that moment. In contrast, empathy is described as feeling an emotion that someone else is currently feeling, an experience akin to "walking in someone else's shoes" and fully understanding what they feel. Frequently, authors use the words empathy and sympathy interchangeably, however it is useful to know that they do possess different meanings.

It is important to look at where, when, and how empathy for others is developed to gain a better understanding of how to help children get along with other people throughout their lives. Researchers in developmental psychology have investigated the developmental trajectory of empathy development, as well as factors that influence the development of empathy, such as child gender and parent-child interactions. This body of research can help those who engage with children in families, neighborhoods, communities, and the world at large as they strive to guide the younger generation in understanding the way people feel.

The Development of Empathy

Barnett (1987, as cited in Zhou et al., 2002) proposed that empathy is important because it, "Satisfies the child's own emotional needs and discourages excessive self-concern, encourages the child to experience and express a broad range of emotions, and provides opportunities for the child to observe and interact with others who encourage emotional sensitivity and responsiveness" (p. 895). Research has demonstrated that children's empathy development is related to both age and gender.

Typical Developmental Trajectory

Hoffman (as cited in Lightfoot, Cole, & Cole, 2009) proposed that there are four stages to empathy development and the first one, global empathy, develops within the first year of life. Global Empathy refers to babies as young as two days old crying or becoming visually anxious when they hear the sounds of another infant crying. Egocentric Empathy is the second stage of empathy development. This stage occurs during the second year of life and it is shown when a child is able to understand that another person is upset, not themselves. At this stage they may try to comfort the other person by offering something that would comfort them such as their own favorite blanket. Children still believe what is helpful to them would be helpful to other people as well. The third stage occurs during early childhood and takes place when the child's role-taking skills increase. This means they have become less egocentric and now know someone else's feelings from their own emotions entirely. The last and final stage happens in middle childhood when the child begins to link another person's responses to something that may have occurred in past experiences that were only felt and known by the other person in question.

Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) conducted a study that looked at how empathic concern develops in young children by observing children while their mother, father, or caregiver acted sad or stressed out. They found that children as early as two years of age were showing signs of emerging empathy as evidenced by children helping, sharing, providing comfort, and attending to others in distress. Evidence of empathy was also seen as children tried to figure out how to put together the attitudes and facial expressions shown by their parents or caregivers. Young children would try to "help" them in some way when they looked upset by hugging or patting their backs.

It is possible that children might display different levels of empathy depending on whom they are interacting with. Moreno, Klute, and Robinson (2008) conducted a study which looked at children's empathic reactions to their mother acting like she hurt her knee getting up from playing versus a random examiner getting their finger pinched in a clip board. They found that children showed higher levels of empathic concern for their own mother's empathy level over a random other's empathy level. This information suggests that children's empathy may be targeted primarily at their mothers, with children caring more for how their own mothers are feeling than others they meet.

Sex Differences in Empathy Development

An understanding of empathy and how it develops in children can be informed by a consideration of gender differences. Stereotypically, females are assumed to show more empathic responses than are their male counterparts. Investigating where children develop such ideas is the next step to understanding the differences in empathy associated with child gender. An explanation for gender differences in empathy is that the different social roles assigned to females and males within society influences their opportunities to practice and learn about empathy. Traditionally, females are expected to be highly emotional and caring, whereas males are often depicted as being less emotional and stronger in times of weakness (Eisenberg, et al., 1992; Spinrad et al., 1999). Spinrad et al, conducted a study that looked at parent encouragement during children's empathy related responding. They found that, "it may be more socially acceptable for girls to report the experience of negative emotion or concern in response to others' distress than it is for boys," (p. 334) which would mean that girls have a broader range of emotions with which to show empathy then do boys.

The role of parents in fostering the development of empathy in both boys and girls has been investigated in psychological research. For example, Zhou, et al., (2002) found that, "parents of girls displayed more warmth toward their children during the parent-child interactions than did parents of boys" (p. 912). Such experiences may set boys and girls on different pathways toward emotional understanding. In the next section, I consider the important socializing role of parents in helping children to develop empathy.

Familial Factors Contributing to the Development of Empathy

The impact of parents on empathy development has received substantial research attention. Work in this area uses multiple methodologies to explore this topic, including observation of parents and children as they watch empathy inducing clips, analysis of parents' and children's responses to questions that relate to empathy, and observations of parents' and children's engagement with stories meant to produce empathic responses. Many participants are also videotaped during interactions between the parents and children so researchers can view any empathy shown. Investigation of the relationship between the parent's and child's empathy understanding and empathy behaviors can reveal the extent to which parents' empathy levels correlate with their children's level of empathy development.

Eisenberg, et al., (1991) for example, invited parents and children to watch an empathy inducing film together. Participants were then asked questions about how they felt afterward, as well as subject to a battery of tests, such as Bryant's empathy scale for children and three subscales of Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index for parents. This study demonstrated that sympathetic parents help to show their children how to cope more effectively with distressful emotions than do nonsympathetic parents. Furthermore,

this guidance is associated with children being more sympathetic to others in certain situations.

Consistent with these findings, Spinrad et al., (1999) performed a study using puzzle box tasks designed to lead to frustration. Children participated with either their mothers (N = 204) or their fathers (N = 12). Parent-child pairs were hooked up to electrodes to monitor their heart rates; they were also videotaped to see how they interacted with each other during this task. Children also completed questionnaires about empathy and sympathy. The results indicated that parents who were warm and supportive with their children during the puzzle tasks had children who were more focused on other people's needs and showed concern for others on the questionnaires. Thus, across several studies research demonstrates that children's empathy development correlates with the empathy demonstrated by their parents.

Before a general conclusion can be drawn about the impact of parents on their children's empathy development, it is useful to consider potential effects of parent and child gender on this relationship. Barnett, King, Howard, and Dino, (1980) suggest that gender of parent and child are important factors. Children may receive gender norm ideas from parents of the same sex. Eisenberg, et al., (1991) also report that parents might use emotional responses differently whether dealing with their son or their daughter. Although the studies described above included boys and girls, and mothers and father as participants, very few fathers actually took part. As a result, these studies leave unanswered the question of whether mothers and fathers have equal influence over their children's empathy development.

Investigations of the impact that mothers, specifically, have on their child's empathy development seem to support the claim that children's empathy is related to mother's empathy. Valiente, Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, Cumberland, and Losoya, (2004) found that mothers with positive emotional communication have children who are better able to take the perspective of others. Once they are able to take on the role of the other, mother's empathy significantly correlates to the empathy shown by their children (Eisenberg, et al., 1992). Similarly, Trommsdorff (1991) found that, "Mothers of more highly empathic children were significantly higher in empathy, showed more understanding for their children, and pursued more prosocial goals," (p. 388) than mothers of children who ranked low on empathy scales. Further, Fabes, Eisenberg, and Miller (1990) showed that the mothers who were more empathetic and sympathetic had children who were more likely to say they would volunteer their time again to help out a sick child. Mothers who scored high in empathy concern had daughters that were more other-oriented than daughters/children of mothers who did not score as highly (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990).

Another investigation of the correlation between mothers' empathy levels and those of their children, however, complicates the story. Eisenberg, et al., (1992) invited mother-child pairs to view sympathy-inducing films. They placed electrocardiograph monitors on both the children and the mother while they were viewing the films. The researchers then separated the mother and child to ask them individual questions relating to empathy and how they felt while watching the film. Findings extended prior work by showing that there was a significant relationship between mothers and daughters' emotional responding. However, no such correlation was found between boys and their mother. This finding

suggests that the gender of the parent and gender of the child may intersect to create specific contexts for empathy development.

Robust support for this possibility is limited as there is a lack of research on fathers' impact on their children's empathy development. Given Eisenberg et al.'s (1992) finding of a stronger correlation between the empathy of mothers and daughters than mothers and sons, investigations of the degree to which sons' empathy levels correlate to those of their fathers' are of great interest. Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, and Miller (1991) found that a father's sympathy was related positively to his son's empathy levels, as revealed by heart rate monitors used when participants were placed in empathy and sympathy-inducing contexts. Looking at the impact of fathers' empathy on children is needed in future research to better understand how gender of parent and child influences the development of empathy.

In addition to considering the impact of parent gender and child gender on empathy development, researchers have investigated the role that such other factors such as child age and parent-child attachment status might play in the relationships between parent and child empathy levels. Abraham, Kuehl, and Christopherson (1983) highlighted that levels of empathy are not only related to who is involved in a potentially empathy-inducing situation, but are also related largely to children's age and experiences with their parents. They took note that younger children rank closer together on empathy scales with parents than do older children. Children receive their empathy lessons directly and indirectly from their parents and children begin to have ideas of their own as they get older. As children mature they are able to infer things for themselves about male and female roles in relation to empathy and others. Though they receive these empathy models from their parents,

they change over time. At different ages, parents' behaviors may reinforce empathic responses or hinder them. Older children are able to relate on a more personal level to others, which may affect their empathy levels.

Attachment research is also relevant to considerations of empathy development in that in order for children to grow up in a mentally healthy way, a secure attachment to mothers or primary caregivers is important. Such a relationship leads children to develop a sense of trust and security in the world. More specific to the question at hand is research done by Iannotti, Zahn-Waxler, Cummings, and Milano (as cited in Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991) that demonstrated that a secure attachment to parents and caregivers in early life has been associated with a child's level of empathy. Ainsworth and Bowlby's (1991) research on attachment patterns demonstrates that children and their primary caregivers can relate to each other in a variety of ways. For infants to become securely attached they need to experience a continuously intimate and warm relationship with their mother or a consistent caregiver (Brethertson, 1992). Britton and Fuendeling (2005) said that those that show a secure attachment should be more empathic than those that show an insecure attachment because these children have been shown stability and begin to recognize other's needs. Many children develop a secure attachment with their caregiver, which should help them develop empathy.

Effects of Parental Book Reading on Children's Empathy Levels

One context within which parents may impact children's empathy development is book reading. Investigations of this relationship are somewhat of a departure from traditional approaches to evaluating the importance of joint book reading. For example, literacy skills and word recognition are two domains that are highly impacted by book

reading, particularly book reading enjoyed with parents (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005). Socioemotional development and literacy development need not proceed in separate streams. The strategies that advance one domain of development may also impact other domains. Partridge (2004) suggests using analytical talk when reading books to children to make the most of time spent together. Analytical talk gets them involved in what is happening in the pictures but not being referred to in the context of the book. This sort of talk helps children analyze the book by responding to the book, talking about life experiences, and clarifying ideas. Since most storybooks revolve around people or personified animals it is a perfect outlet to get children talking about feelings and emotions. It has been, "found that, on average, a reference to emotions or social events occurred every three sentences," in children's books (Aram & Aviram, 2009, p. 177). Using book reading to talk about empathy development and what it means to feel for another person is something parents can do when reading to their children. With parents guiding the development of empathy, children can gain knowledge as they read.

Aram and Aviram (2009) explored how mothers choose books and the content in them based on a questionnaire sent home from school and observations during a home visit. They found that, "maternal expertise in choosing books was very productive and relates to both children's empathy and socioemotional adjustment" (p. 187). Mother's who have knowledge about empathy choose books that present more relationships and emotional events. These books also invite more socioemotional discussions between the mother and child. "Discussing these issues during the shared storybook reading probably supports the development of young children's emerging empathy and social behaviors" (Aram & Aviram, 2009, 187). Using analytical talk and picking out books that make it easy

to discuss empathy are helpful ways for young children to understand empathy. Aiding

parents in choosing books that have empathetic storylines to help them talk to their

children is a very interesting topic to me that I decided to research more about. For my

senior project I chose to look at some of the children's books available to parents and

children.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this project was to investigate whether and how typical children's books addressed the theme of empathy and, if they do, how it is portrayed. I was particularly interested in the relationship between gender and empathy, as depicted in children's stories. Children seem to love books and being read to; they also gain a lot of knowledge about how to act from hearing such stories. I was interested in looking at how males and females are portrayed in children's books, especially when to comes to the lesson of empathy. I wanted to see if females were shown to be more empathetic than males, which would show children that it is a female trait.

Materials

In my initial efforts to collect children's books about empathy, I went to the San Luis Obispo public library and asked one of the librarians about children's book that had empathy in them. The librarian was very helpful and picked out ten books for me that she thought had to do with empathy. On a second visit, I went through the children's section of the library myself and chose ten more books that I thought looked like they might have some themes of empathy in them. Finally, I went back to the children's section yet again and chose ten more books at random to serve as a sort of control. I did not look at the titles; I just walked around and grabbed ten books. I ended up with three sets of 10 books: (1) those given to me by the librarian who thought they would pertain to empathy (2) those that I chose because I was looking for an empathy theme and (3) those that I picked out at random. The specific books used in this content analysis are described below. In addition to book titles, I include information about the authors, as well as the description of

the story provided on the inside cover of the book. If the cover did not have a description, I found one online.

Set One: Chosen by Librarian:

1. *Owen* by Kevin Henkes—"Owen had a fuzzy yellow blanket. "Fuzzy goes where I go," said Owen. But Mrs. Tweezers disagreed. She thought Owen was too old for a blanket. Owen disagreed. No matter what Mrs. Tweezers came up with, Blanket Fairies or vinegar, Owen had the answer. But when school started, Owen's mother knew just what to do, and everyone—Owen, Fuzzy, and even Mrs. Tweezers—was happy." (Inside Flap)
2. *The King's Equal* by Katherine Paterson—"Long ago, in a country far away, a dying king makes his son, the selfish prince Rachael, ruler of the kingdom. But there is one condition: Raphael cannot wear the crown until he marries a woman who equals him in beauty, intelligence, and wealth. Where will such a women be found? Raphael believes that no one is as smart or beautiful as he, and his greed soon makes him the wealthiest person in the land. But there is one thing he does not have: the crown to the kingdom. Raphael demands that his councilors search the world over for the perfect princess. At last, through the powers of a magical wolf, a poor and clever young woman named Rosamund is chosen to be the king's equal. But the story is not as simple as that. For not only must Rosamund be Raphael's equal, but Raphael must also be hers." (Inside Flap)
3. *The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper—"A grandfather and his young grandson discover some words posted on a wall: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Golden Rule. It can be found in all the world's religions and in every culture. It's easy to say and to remember, but what does it really mean? And how can you live by it?" (Inside Flap)
4. *Babushka's Doll* by Patricia Polacco—"Babushka's doll was special. She had played with it only once, when she was a little girl like her high-spirited granddaughter, Natasha. Now Babushka is going to the store and it's Natasha's turn to take the little doll down from the high shelf. When the naughty doll comes to life—and is even more rambunctious than the little girl herself—Natasha finds out why playing *once* with Babushka's doll is enough!" (Inside Flap)
5. *The Very Best of Friends* by Margaret Wild—"James and his cat, William, are the very best of friends. William helps James plow the fields, muck out the stables, and feed the cattle on James and Jessie's farm. At nigh William curls up on James's lap and watches TV with him. Although William knows that Jessie doesn't really like cats, he tries his best to win her affection. And, because Jessie loves James, she tries to be kind to William. But when James dies suddenly, Jessie no longer cares about herself or anything else. It is up to William to show Jessie that although he can't replace James, he can be a good friend." (Inside Flap)
6. *Best Friends* by Steven Kellogg—"To Kathy the greatest thing in the world is a best friend. And Louise Jenkins is hers. They do everything together, from sharing their chocolate milk at lunch to riding Golden Silverwind, their make-believe horse who lives in the imaginary stable between their houses. But when summer comes so do

Louise's aunt and uncle, taking her away to the mountains. Kathy is crushed. While her friend is away having a wonderful time, their neighborhood feels like a lonely desert. Then a new neighbor with a dog expecting puppies moves in—and it looks like the summer will be just great. Well, almost...Kathy still thinks about Louise a lot, and how Louise doesn't seem to be missing her one bit." (Inside Flap)

7. *That's What Friends are For* by Valeri Gorbachev—"Why is Friend Pig crying? Goat isn't sure. Could he have fallen down the stairs and broken his leg? Could he have forgotten to turn off the shower and flooded the house? Could robbers have stolen his apple pie? Whatever it is, Goat has a way to fix it—after all, that's what friends are for!" (Inside Flap)

8. *Bully* by Judith Caseley—"'You used to be a mouse," said Mickey to his ex-friend Jack. "And now you've turned into a great big rat." Maybe Jack wasn't a rat, but he certainly was a bully. And he made life very uncomfortable for Mickey. Mickey's parents had some helpful ideas, but Mickey found that it was easier to talk about loving your enemies than actually to do it, and brave words were often just words. But then something happened that surprised Mickey as much as Jack. And the unexpected result was that the ex-bully was once more a friend, and Mickey had good reason to be proud of his problem-solving technique." (Inside Flap)

9. *George and Martha* by James Marshall—"George and Martha books teach us nothing, and everything." (Website: http://www.amazon.com/George-Martha-Complete-Stories-Friends/)

10. *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang—"Everybody gets angry sometimes. And for children, anger can be very upsetting and frightening. In this book, children will see what Sophie does when she gets angry. Parents, teachers, and children can talk about it. People do lots of different things when they get angry. What do you do?" (Inside Flap)

Set Two: Trying to find Empathy:

1. *The Very Kind Rich Lady and her One Hundred Dogs* by Chinlun Lee—"The very kind rich lady in this book happens to have *one hundred dogs.* Every day she feeds them, brushed them, calls them by name, and plays with them (even the little one names Bingo, who's always a bit late). And of course, she has more than enough love—and room—for each and every one." (Inside Flap)

2. *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida—"'I'll never take it off," Emi promises her best friend, Laurie Madison, as she puts Laurie's going-away gift of a gold heart bracelet around her wrist. Emi and her family are being sent to a place called an internment camp, where all Japanese-Americans must go. The year is 1942. The United States and Japan are at war. Seven-year-old Emi doesn't want to leave her friends, her school, her house; yet as her mother tells her, they have no choice, because they are Japanese-American. For her mother's sake, Emi doesn't say how unhappy she is. But on the first day of camp, when Emi discovers she has lost her heart bracelet, she can't help wanting to cry. How will I ever remember my best friend? she asks herself." (Inside Flap)

3. *Rugby and Rosie* by Nan Parson Rossiter—"Rugby is top dog in his human family. He and his boy are the best of friends—nothing can come between them. Nothing, that is, except for a nosy little puppy named Rosie who joins the family one autumn day. But Rosie is no ordinary pup—she has been specially bred as a guide dog for the

blind and will live with Rugby and his family for only one year. It's not too hard for Rosie to win Rugby over with her persistent antics, and the two dogs become inseparable. When fall comes again, it is time for Rosie to leave the family and go to a special training school. Both Rugby and his boy must come to terms with the sudden absence of Rosie and the realization that she has a very important purpose as a working dog." (Inside Flap)

4. *Ruthie and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie* by Laura Rankin—"Ruthie *loves* little things— the smaller, the better. When she finds a teeny tiny toy on the school playground, she can hardly believe her luck. There's just one problem: it belongs to somebody else! Ruthie insists the toy is hers, but deep down, she knows better. How could one little toy turn into such a great big problem?" (Inside Flap)

5. *Ruby the Copycat* by Peggy Rathmann—"Ruby is a copycat! On the day Angela wears a red bow in her hair, Ruby returns from lunch with a red bow in her hair. When Angela wears a flowered sweater, Ruby returns from lunch wearing a flowered sweater. Ruby even copies Angela's poem! Fortunately, Ruby has the patient and perceptive Miss Hart as her teacher. Miss Hart helps Ruby discover hr own creative resources, which keeps Ruby literally jumping for joy!" (Inside Flap)

6. *The Happy Prince* by Jane Ray—"High above the city, on a tall column, stands the statue called the Happy Prince. Glided with gold from hear to toe, he has sapphires for eyes and a ruby on his sword hilt. But despite his name and fine appearance, the Prince is far from happy, as a little Swallow discovers after landing at his feet one night. For, from his pedestal, the statue can see the sadness and misery of the people in the city below, and he is powerless to help them. Only the tender, restless Swallow can help the statue stop the suffering. In doing so, both he and the Prince find happiness as last." (Inside Flap)

7. *Bear Feels Sick* by Karma Wilson—"Autumn has come to the woods, and Bear doesn't feel well. He sniffles and he sneezes. He cannot sleep. He aches all over. Worst of all, he's feeling too poorly to play with his friends. How Bear's good friends take care of him with herbal tea and lullabies until he begins to feel better is the heart of this loving story that will be familiar to any little on who has ever had the sniffles." (Inside Flap)

8. *Rosie and Buttercup* by Chieri Uegaki—"Rosie truly has it all—a routine for her one-rodent revue, two pet crickets named Eenie and Meenie and an adorable baby sister named Buttercup (not to mention a whole bag of sun-dried dandelion puffs). But when Buttercup lays claim to one of her prized pets, Rosie decides to give her little sister to their neighbor—"for free." Yet as she settles down to bask in the glow of having everything to herself once more, Rosie discovers that live without Buttercup isn't at all what she'd expected." (Inside Flap)

9. *The Boy Who Wouldn't Share* by Mike Reiss—"Edward has oodles of toys but doesn't share any of them with his little sister, Claire. She cannot ride his rocking horse, hug his teddy bear, or even *think* about touching his Slinky. "THEY'RE MINE!" he says. That is, until one day when Edward finds himself stuck under his enormous pile of toys and can't move! With a little help from an unlikely ally, he learns that if he can share with others, they'll share right back with him." (Inside Flap)

10. *My Somebody Special* by Sarah Weeks—"It is the end of a busy day, and one by one almost all of the children have gone home. Now just one worried child sits along

with his teacher, waiting and wondering…*When will my somebody special come for me, too?*" (Inside Flap)

Set Three: Chosen at Random:

1. *Like a Windy Day* by Frank and Devin Asch—"Imagine if you were the wind. You could be powerful and mischievous, stormy and playful. What fun you could have sailing boats, stealing hats, flying kites, and driving clouds and rain across the sky." (Inside Flap)
2. *Please Say Please* by Margery Cuyler—"Penguin has invited his animal friends to dinner, and their manners are all mixed up. Hippo puts her napkin on her head, and Elephant sprays his milk everywhere." (Inside Flap)
3. *Goldilocks Returns* by Lisa Campbell Ernst—"Did you ever wonder what happened to Goldlocks, that naughty little girl who broke into the three bears' house? She grew up, of course. She shortened her name and pinned up her curls so no one would recognize her. She even opened a lock shop to protect people from snoops. But none of these things helped her feel better about that dreadful incident with the bears. So Goldi returns to the scene of her crime—fifty years later—to make amends. Once again she arrived when the bears aren't at home, but this time she has a plan to make everything right. Will nosy Goldi redeem herself?" (Inside Flap)
4. *Papa is a Pirate* by Katharina Grossmann-Helsel—"Is Papa **really** a pirate? Does he **really** sail to faraway islands and find hidden treasures and tame sea monsters?" (Inside Flap)
5. *Katie's Sunday Afternoon* by James Mayhew—"On a hot, sunny day, a painting of a group of swimmers paddling about in a cool river proved too tempting for Katie during a visit to the art museum, and so she dives straight into the picture. But Katie doesn't just cause a splash—she causes a flood! So, while playing with her friends might be fun, Katie has to find a way to stop the water from pouring into the art gallery." (Inside Flap)
6. *I Saw a Bullfrog* by Ellen Stern—"The bullfrog's a creature of which we've all heard, but have you once paused to consider the word? Is this an example of twisted linguistics or frogs that exhibit bull characteristics?" (Inside Flap)
7. *Without You* by Sarah Weeks—"Where would I be, what would I do, without you? So sings a newborn penguin in this tender tribute to dads the world over. While a mother penguin leaves her mate and newly laid egg to go and feed in the deep blue sea, the father penguin protects the eggs by holding it on his feet until it hatches. Father and chick huddle together, braving the Antarctic winter as they wait for the mother's return." (Inside Flap)
8. *Whatever Wanda Wanted* by Jude Wisdom—"Wanda is a very greedy girl. And because her parents love her so much, whatever Wanda wants, Wanda gets! Then a new store with an amazing assortment of kites appears in town. The most magnificent kite of them all catches Wanda's eye—but that kite, says the shopkeeper, is *not* for sale. So cleaver Wanda throws a tantrum, only this time she gets more than she bargained for. Up, up, and away, the magical kite carries Wanda…to a deserted island. She must learn to live without all the things she was *sure* she needed. To her surprise Wanda survives, and it's Mom and Dad she misses most." (Inside Flap)

9. *What did I look like when I was a Baby?* by Jeanne Willis—"'What did I look like when I was a baby?" Michael asks his mom. "You looked just like your grandpa—bald and wrinkly!" she says. Curious animals around the world ask their parents the same questions and they're all told how they resembled someone in their family, until a young bullfrog starts wondering…"Son, don't even ask," his mom says. Seeing a picture of himself as a tadpole sends this bullfrog into a hilarious tizzy that will elicit giggles from al children who can't believe they were ever that funny-looking person in their baby pictures." (Inside Flap)

10. *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni—"Rosa Parks is one of the most famous figures in American history. On December 1, 1955, she got on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus after work and refused to give up her seat to a white man, an act that sparked a revolution. Suddenly, Mrs. Parks became the center of one of the most important events in the battle for civil rights. This is the story of that event, and of a woman whose quiet determination changed our history." (Inside Flap)

Coding

To code each book, I created a coding scale that included the following yes/no coding options:

Male/Female Displays Empathy: If there was empathy in the book, I looked at who was displaying the empathy, male or female. This could be something like a father telling his son to be nice to the other children at school because he would want them to be nice to him too. It could also include a girl feeling sorry that she hurt her friend's feelings when she took her doll.

Male/Female Receives Empathy: If there was empathy in the book, I wanted to know who was on the receiving end of the empathy shown or the empathy lesson given. This included the boy whose dad told him to be nice and the friend who was told sorry for taking your doll.

Underlying/Apparent Empathy: To judge underlying or apparent empathy I thought about whether or not a child would grasp the message based on pictures and text alone, or if more explanation would be needed. If the message seemed pretty straight forward with
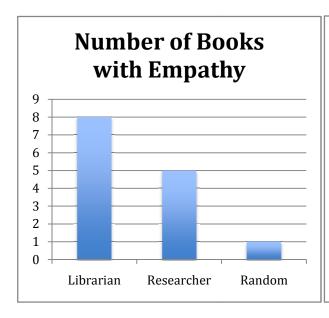
little to no need for explanation I gave it an "apparent" score. If it would need to be

explained further such as, "How do you think you would feel if (character name) did that to

you" or "How would you feel in their situation?" I gave it an "underlying" score.
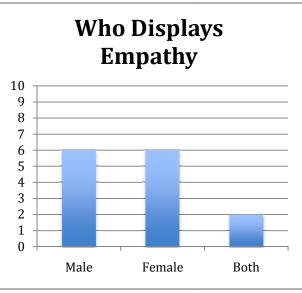
While reading each book, I went through and made decisions on each coding

measure. I also included some other coding categories that are not reported here due to

their tangential relationship to the goals of this project (e.g., male/female main character,

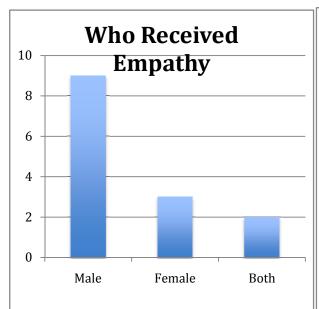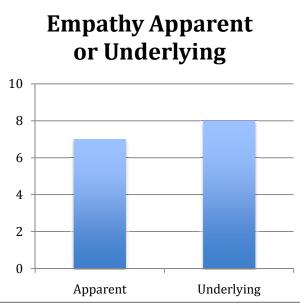personified animal, friendship theme, etc).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The books that the librarian picked out displayed much more empathy than those I

selected myself or chose at random. The librarian's books showed empathy eight times out

of ten. The books I thought would have empathy in them did so only half the time and the

ones chosen at random only showed empathy once (see Figure 1). Of the books that

displayed empathy, male and female characters were equally represented as empathizers

with each gender being shown as showing empathy in six books. In two books both a male

character and a female character displayed empathy (see Figure 2). With regard to the

gender of those receiving empathy from others, males overall received more empathy than

females in the books. Males received empathy nine times while females were the receivers

of empathy three times. A male character and female character both received empathy in

two books (see Figure 3). Finally, underlying empathy was shown in eight books whereas

apparent empathy was shown in seven (see Figure 4).

Who Received Empathy

Male	Female	Both

Empathy Apparent or Underlying

Apparent	Underlying

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Empathy is literally empathizing with others, knowing how they are feeling in the moment and reacting to that knowledge. That is a big concept for little children to grasp but research shows that empathy can be seen in very young children. Where they receive their lessons about what it means to be empathetic is a big question. As the research shows, children develop empathy from their parents and caregivers. They watch them and interact with them on a daily basis. Children receive social cues and rules from those they are with the most during development. Children can also receive lessons about empathy through talking with their parents about what it means to feel for the other person.

In this study, I examined children's books to investigate the prevalence of empathy themes and to examine whom is portrayed as being empathetic. The librarian was helpful in picking out books that have empathy in them. For parents looking to read books about empathy to their children, this is a good resource to have. Librarians are there for a reason, and she was definitely more useful than trying to find books with empathy in them on my own since I only picked 5 books out of 10 that had anything to do with empathy. Picking books at random is not a good method either. I only picked one book that had an empathy theme out of 10. If parents or caretakers want better results when searching for books that will help them talk about empathy with children, the librarian is their best bet in finding those books.

What I found about these books was very interesting when it came to who showed empathy and who received empathy. Males and females displayed empathy an equal amount of times, but males received empathy in six more books than did females.   When

you take into consideration that most of the studies show females as being more empathetic, you would think the books would show that as well. Since the books had boys and girls showing empathy the same number of times it is inconsistent with what the research shows. This shows that perhaps book writers are trying to show boys that empathy is a good trait to possess and not always a female characteristic. Gooden and Gooden's (2001) study of gender representation in children's books over a five year period found, "the prevalence of gender stereotypes decreased slightly but the stereotyped images of females are still significant," in children's literature (p. 96). As our culture embraces a more egalitarian outlook on most things that use to be gender stereotyped, the books we are producing for our children are also seen to be changing. Males and females can show empathy as well as be on the receiving end of it.

Of the books containing empathy, underlying empathy was found the most. This is useful for eliciting conversation between the book reader and listener. Books such as those that have underlying empathy in them give the perfect opportunity to spark up a conversation about what it means to be empathetic and how children can act towards others in their lives. Gaining this base knowledge will be helpful for children in everyday life. Activities such as reading storybooks help children understand the world they live in; understanding empathy is an important aspect of development.

Children's understanding of empathy happens with time. When children are discovering books such as the ones I looked at they may still be in Hoffman's second (egocentric empathy) or third (less egocentric) stages (Cole & Cole, 2009). During this time it would be important for parents to know where their children's level of empathy development is and take that into consideration when discussing what themes are in the

books. These books that are geared toward younger children can be helpful in showing the beginning steps of empathy; with the help of an adult's understanding, children may pick up on empathetic messages at an earlier age.

Future Directions for Research

There are numerous open questions for researchers who are interested in the parental impacts on empathy in children to pursue. For example, there is a lack of research on children's different temperaments and how they relate to how other's feel. The media has a lot of influence over what children see these days; it would be interesting to look at those kinds of outlets and how they impact empathy development in young children. There is a big gap in research when it comes to different ethnic groups. Most of the studies out there have the majority of participants from white middle class families from the middle of the country. There could be many differences in empathy development and how empathy is viewed among other ethnic groups and their upbringings as well. As already stated, researchers need to look closer into the act of mirroring same sex parent's levels in empathy and that of their children. Again, research is lacking in how important fathers are to empathy development and will need to be looked at in the future to help bridge some gaps. Research that helps parents promote the theme of empathy is a new area of research that also does not have many answers.

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