

The Institute for Advanced Study and the Poynter Center

Announce a Multidisciplinary Workshop on

EMPATHY

Scholars in many fields have suggested the importance of empathy in our lives and have stressed its role in helping to hold societies together. Some have emphasized how it can help humans and other primates care for others and identify with those who are not only similar but—more importantly—different. Empathy is often cited as essential to effective interactions in personal, political, and professional life. Yet empathy is more difficult to achieve than sympathy, which is usually an affinity expressed among those who are essentially the same. And the survival of empathetic feelings is continually challenged by a variety of factors from countervailing biological instincts to a growing acceptance of violence in contemporary culture. It may also be a flickering feeling, as the rich and ambiguous history of concepts of empathy, pity, and sympathy since Aristotle demonstrates.

In recent years, examinations of empathy have advanced into the center of several humanistic and scientific disciplines. Neuroscientists now credit mirror-neurons for direct and pre-rational intersubjective understanding. Biologists examine the advantage that comes with understanding a rival. Social scientists question what kind of bonds empathy provides and whether they can contribute to social stability. Psychologists ask how empathy is acquired and whether a lack of empathy explains some undesirable conduct. Philosophers have probed its role in everything from moral judgment and motivation to our concern with our own future interest. Scholars of religion and culture examine distinct modes of empathy in different societies. Historians probe the varying ways in which people respond to images and representations of war and tragedy.

This workshop will discuss the latest insights on empathy and their implications for various areas and disciplines. Experts from a range of fields will be invited to suggest what their specific knowledge could mean for scholars in other fields.

The Institute for Advanced Study and the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions INVITE APPLICATIONS for membership in the Workshop on Empathy to be held in the 2009-10 academic year. Participants will contribute to discussions, meet with invited scholars, and possibly make presentations at 2-3 workshop meetings per semester. IUB faculty selected for the workshop (eight maximum) will each receive an award of \$2,000, which can be paid as an honorarium or as a grant to a research account. Faculty from any discipline are invited to apply.

Please send a one-page letter/application describing your specific interest in empathy and how the workshop will benefit your research, along with an abbreviated c.v. of no more than 3 pages as a Word attachment to: John Bodnar, Institute for Advanced Study, Indiana University. bodnar@indiana.edu
DEADLINE IS Feb. 17, 2009.

Workshop meetings will be open to students and other faculty as space permits. If you are not interested in applying for a workshop membership but would like to be placed on a workshop mailing list, please email Ivona Hedin, IAS: ihedin@indiana.edu

The workshop planning committee consists of: Kate Abramson (Philosophy), Colin Allen (History and Philosophy of Science and Cognitive Science), John Bodnar (History and Institute for Advanced Study), Fritz Breithaupt (Germanic Studies), and Richard Miller (Religious Studies and Poynter Center).