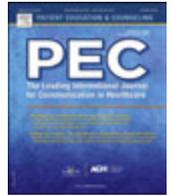




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## Review Article

# Toward a consensus on the nature of empathy: A review of reviews

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective was to provide a synthesis of already synthesized literature on empathy in order to identify similarities and differences among conceptualizations.

**Methods:** A review of reviews was conducted to locate synthesized literature published between January 1980 and December 2019. Two authors screened and extracted data, and quality-appraised the sources. A total of 52 articles deemed relevant to this overview were synthesized using thematic analysis.

**Results:** The analysis resulted in four themes found in most empathy conceptualizations. In empathy, the empathizer (1) understands, (2) feels, and (3) shares another person's world (4) with self-other differentiation.

**Conclusions:** Most writings about empathy begin by claiming that there is far from a consensus on how empathy should be defined. This article shows a developing consensus among neuroscientists, psychologists, medical scientists, nursing scientists, philosophers, and others that empathy involves understanding, feeling, sharing, and self-other differentiation.

**Practice implications:** A clarification of the content of empathy may assist practitioners and researchers in avoiding confusion regarding the meaning of the concept, as well as in developing and measuring the relevant aspects of the concept.

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## 1. Introduction

Most articles and books about empathy begin by claiming that there is far from a consensus on how empathy is to be defined. For instance, according to Coplan [1], “a longstanding problem with the study of empathy is the lack of a clear and agreed upon definition” (p. 40). Engelen and Röttger-Rössler [2] argued that “almost anybody writing in the field would declare that there is no accepted standard definition of empathy” (p. 3). De Vignemont and Singer [3] stated that “there are probably nearly as many definitions of empathy as people working on the topic” (p. 435).

Although there is a lack of agreement regarding how to define empathy, there is a vast amount of research findings on it, particularly within psychology, nursing, neuroscience, and philosophy. In the last hundred years, approximately ten thousand scientific articles on empathy have been published, most of them in the 21st century. Half of the peer-reviewed English articles with empathy, empathic, or empathetic in their title in the PsycInfo database were published between 1918 and 2011, and the other half in 2012 or later; that is, half of the articles on empathy in psychology were published during the last eight years. In the Philosopher’s Index database, half of the articles were published during the last nine years. This trend is the same in both neuroscience and nursing.

To date, the most comprehensive literature reviews involving empathy have included up to a few hundred articles. For example, in the 1980s Eisenberg and colleagues wrote a review article on gender differences in empathy [4] and one on empathy and prosocial behavior [5]. In the last two decades, empathy research has come to be dominated by neuroscience-oriented researchers, partly thanks to the discovery of mirror neurons and improved methodological possibilities. A number of review articles have been written within neuroscience. Among the most significant are Preston and de Waal [6], De Vignemont and Singer [3], Decety and Jackson [7] and Decety and Svetlova [8], the most comprehensive being that written by Preston and de Waal [6]. Their article attracted much attention and took the field forward. However, about half of the empathy research that now exists has been published since then.

In the present study, we want to move beyond Preston and de Waal [6] and other review articles in neuroscience by including articles published after 2002 as well as articles from areas outside neuroscience to a greater extent. Using an inductive approach, we want to synthesize the knowledge on empathy presented in high-quality, scientific publications so that general, abstract patterns emerge. This may lead to the crystallization of a conceptual core around which most of the definitions revolve, which would show the possibility to approach a consensus for the first time in the empathy field. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to provide a synthesis of the already synthesized literature on empathy, in order to identify similarities and differences among conceptualizations. We believe this aim can be powerfully addressed in a synthesis of articles that have already covered large parts of the empathy research field.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Search methods

The literature review was conducted based on the seven stages described by Pluye and Hong [9]: (i) formulating the review

question; (ii) defining the eligibility criteria; (iii) applying the search strategy; (iv) finding relevant studies; (v) selecting relevant studies; (vi) appraising quality; and (vii) synthesizing results from the included studies. As step vi mainly applies to empirical studies rather than systematic reviews, we replaced this step with the alternative quality assessments described in the next section.

The early 1980s saw the beginnings of increasing numbers of published empathy articles. For example, a search in the PsycInfo database for peer-reviewed English articles with *empath\** in their title for 1970–1979 generates 130 articles, while the same search for 1980–1984 generates 154. We wanted to include articles from the four decades that have passed since then. We also wanted to include articles from the four areas in which most empathy articles are published: neuroscience, nursing, philosophy, and psychology. A librarian specialist developed and ran the specific searches for each database (Cinahl, Cochrane, Medline, Philosopher’s Index, PsycInfo, Scopus, and Web of Science) to identify relevant studies: (1) MeSH term “*empath\**” in the title; (2) systematic review or concept analysis; (3) peer-reviewed; (4) in English; and (5) published during the period January 1980–December 2019. The original search was conducted in April 2018 (n = 1507), and the updated search in December 2019 (n = 267) resulted in 1774 potentially relevant references. No additional articles were found through other sources.

### 2.2. Data collection

All articles identified in the original search (n = 1507) and the updated search (n = 267) were imported into EndNote, and duplicates were removed (n = 435) and (n = 150). We selected articles with the following criteria: (1) “*empath\**” in the title; (2) concerning human empathy; (2) generating a new theoretical result regarding the concept, content, or meaning of empathy based on systematic reviews or other types of reviews (e.g., narrative, integrative) or concept analyses; in (3) all areas of nursing, neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy.

Excluded were quantitative studies (for example, estimates of effect size) and systematic reviews with results that did not concern empathy per se (for instance, empathy training or the relationship between empathy and helping behavior). Also excluded were theoretical articles lacking a result concerning the concept of empathy based on a systematic review, articles on methods for measuring empathy, articles in which empathy was not the main focus, and articles on only non-human empathy. Also, when the same author appeared several times as a single author, we included only the article with the most elaborated conceptualization of empathy. However, the same author could appear several times on articles with coauthors.

Titles and abstracts were read by the authors (JHE, MSM) to exclude articles that were not eligible. The authors, both independently and together, appraised the full text of retained articles to identify those that were potentially eligible. The authors participated in discussions about the selection process, which served as part of the quality assessment along with the selection criteria described above.

### 2.3. Included studies

The search strategies generated 1774 references. Among the remaining 1189, 989 were excluded as a reading of their abstract

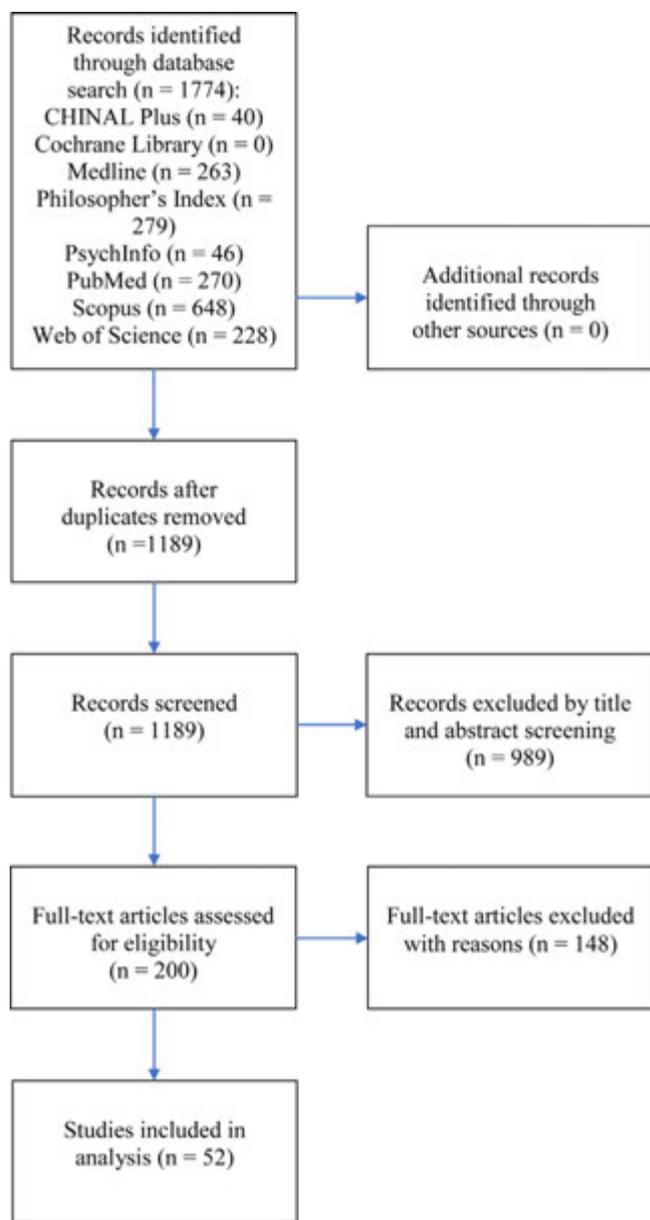


Fig. 1. Data search and selection process.

revealed that they did not meet our inclusion criteria, described in Section 2.2. Then, 200 full-text articles were screened based on the same criteria and a further 148 articles were excluded. The selection process resulted in 52 articles for inclusion in the analysis. For an overview of the search process and included studies, see Fig. 1 and Tables 1 and 2.

#### 2.4. Analysis

The analysis was based on thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke [10], but consideration was also given to the unusually high abstraction level of the included data. Both

authors participated in the analyses, and initially read all the included articles and marked all the text in the *Results* and *Discussion* sections that described the nature of empathy to generate codes. Codes are characteristics of the data that describe an aspect of empathy and thus fit the aim of the study. Codes with similar content were grouped into potential themes and sub-themes of empathy (see Tables 3–7). As the descriptions of empathy in the analyzed articles were already at a high abstraction level, some of the codes are already on an abstraction level similar to that of the sub-themes and themes. We strived for the themes to be more general and abstract than the sub-themes and codes, but in some cases it was not obvious whether a theme, sub-theme, or code was the most abstract. For example, we chose to have *feeling* as a theme, with *affect*, *emotion*, and *sensation* as its sub-themes. While it is not obvious that feeling is more general and abstract than these sub-themes, we chose feeling as it is a more common concept in the empathy research field than the three sub-themes. To strive for transparency, we have included examples of codes for the sub-themes of the four main themes of the study (see Tables 3–7).

The authors repeatedly checked and updated the list of codes, sub-themes, and themes by rereading the articles. Through this iterative process, the authors could determine whether or not a theme or sub-theme was present in an article (coded as “yes” or “no”).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Themes

The thematic analysis of the 52 articles [1,3,7,8,11–58] generated 30 sub-themes used in the articles to describe empathy. The analysis allowed us to group these sub-themes into 13 themes. For example, the three sub-themes *knowing*, *perspective-taking*, and *cognition* were grouped into the theme *understanding* (see Table 7).

Among the 13 themes, *automatic*, *observing*, *interaction*, *regulation*, *behavior*, *caring*, *listening*, *nonjudgmental*, and *being present* were found in some but nowhere near all of the articles on empathy. Four of the themes were found in all, or almost all, of the articles: *understanding*, *feeling*, *sharing*, and *self-other differentiation*. Thus, in the empathy literature there is virtual consensus that the empathizer (1) understands, (2) feels, and (3) shares the other person’s feelings (4) with self-other differentiation (Fig. 2).

##### 3.1.1. Understanding

The theme of *understanding* is cognitive and involves knowing something about the mental life of the other person. It includes the sub-themes *knowing*, *perspective-taking*, and *cognition* (see Tables 3 and 7). Decety and Moriguchi [20] claim that empathy involves “some minimal recognition and understanding of another’s emotional state” (p. 1). Smith [55] states that “empathy plays a distinctive epistemological role: it alone allows us to know how others feel” (p. 709). According to Sutherland [40], “empathy is a complex process in nursing involving cognitive analysis . . .” (p. 565). Leiberg and Anders [35] suggest that “empathy is the ability to perceive and understand other people’s emotions and to react appropriately” (p. 419). According to White [16], the empathizer must “understand what the empathee feels” (p. 255).

Table 1  
Number of included articles by first-author academic discipline.

Neuroscience	Philosophy	Psychology	Nursing
24 [3,7–8,13,15,17–21,23–26,29–32,34,36–39,45]	10 [1,46–51,53,55–56]	11 [11–12,14,22,27–28,33,35,42–43,52]	7 [16,40–41,44,54,57–58]

**Table 2**  
Number of included articles by first-author country affiliation.

United States	Germany	United Kingdom	France	Switzerland	Sweden	Israel	Canada	Finland	Netherlands	Poland	Italy	Norway	Austria
22	7	6	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Table 3**  
Examples of codes for the sub-themes on the theme of understanding.

Article	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
Campelia & Tate 2019	Know feelings	Knowing	Understanding
Fishman 1999	Awareness		
Preckel et al. 2018	Knowledge		
Haney 2009	Know other	Perspective-taking	Understanding
Inzunza 2015	Perspective-taking		
Singer 2006	Perspective-taking		
Jankowiak-Siuda et al. 2011	Simulation	Cognition	Understanding
Zaki & Ochsner 2012	Mentalizing		
Bird & Viding 2014	Cognition		
Morse et al. 1992	Cognition		
Decety & Lamm 2006	Top-down process		
Walter 2012	Theory of mind		

**Table 4**  
Examples of codes for the sub-themes on the theme of feeling.

Article	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
de Waahl & Preston 2017	Emotion	Emotion	Feeling
Xavier et al. (2013)	Emotional		
Sutherland 1995	Emotional experience	Sensation	Feeling
Inzunza 2015	Emotional state		
Gallese 2003	Sensation		
Decety 2015	Sensitive	Affect	Feeling
Singer 2006	Sensation		
Zaki 2014	Sensory		
Aragno 2008	Affect	Affective experience	Feeling
Aaltola 2014	Affective		
Decety & Moriguchi 2007	Affective experience		
Gonzalez-Liencre et al. 2013	Affective state		

3.1.2. *Feeling*

The theme of *feeling* involves an affective response appropriate to another person's situation. It includes the sub-themes *affect*, *emotion*, and *sensation* (see Tables 4 and 7). For instance, Zaki [43] argues that “empathy is a vital emotional force” (p. 1634). Gonzalez-Liencre, Shamay-Tsoory and Brune [31] claim that “empathy allows individuals to share the affective states of others” (p. 1537). De Waal and Preston [30] view empathy as “emotional and mental sensitivity to another’s state, from being affected by and sharing in this state to assessing the reasons for it and adopting the other’s point of view” (p. 498). For Xavier, Tilmont and Bonnot [42], “the capacity of empathy has two dimensions, emotional and cognitive” (p. 291). Cuff et al. [14] state that “empathy is an emotional response” (p. 150).

**Table 5**  
Examples of codes for the sub-themes on the theme of sharing.

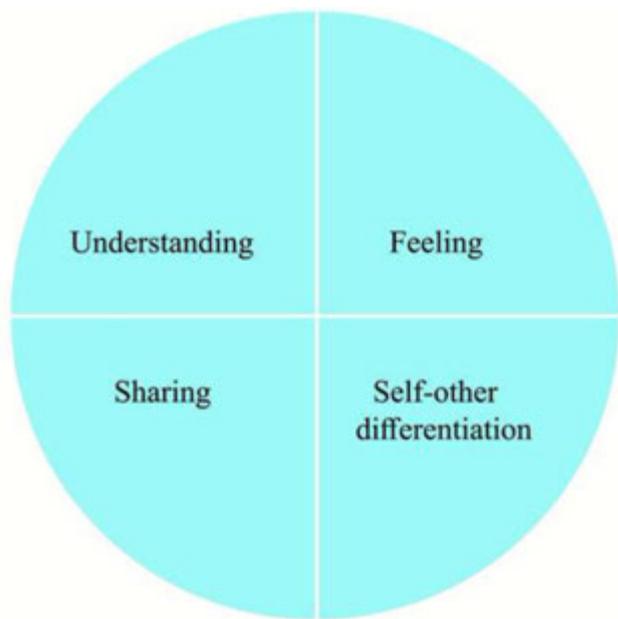
Article	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
White 1997	Merging of self-and other	Sharing experiences	Sharing
Aaltola 2014	Resonation		
Sutherland 1995	Identification		
Zaki 2014	Sharing experiences	Sharing representations	Sharing
Coplan 2011	Simulate states		
Dwash & Shamay-Tsoory 2014	Sharing representations		
Blair 2005	Activates corresponding representations	Sharing feelings	Sharing
Kiverstein 2015	Sharing perspectives		
Campelia & Tate 2019	Feeling with		
Aragno 2008	Affect matching	Sharing emotional states	
Walter 2012	Sharing emotional states		
Decety 2015	Sharing affective states		

**Table 6**  
Examples of codes for the sub-themes on the theme of self-other differentiation.

Article	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
Lamm et al. 2017	Self-other distinction	Self-other distinction	Self-other differentiation
Eklund 2013	Self-other differentiation		
Decety & Moriguchi 2007	No confusion between self and other	Differ-en-tiation of feelings	Self-other differentiation
Coplan 2011	Self-other differentiation		
Cuff 2016	Recognition that the other is source of feeling		
Bird & Viding 2014	Recognition that feeling is appropriate for the other	Objec-tivity	Self-other differentiation
De Vignemont & Singer 2006	Recognition that the other is source of feeling		
Deigh 1995	Recognition that the other’s feelings are distinct		
Morse et al. 1992	Objective	Sense the other’s world “as if” it were your own	
Galetz 2019	Self-awareness		
Neumann et al. 2009	Sense the other’s world “as if” it were your own		
Wiseman 1996	Objective		

**Table 7**  
Themes and sub-themes of empathy identified in the articles.

Theme	Percentage of the articles including the theme	Sub-themes
Understanding	100	Knowing Perspective-taking Cognition
Sharing	100	Sharing experiences Sharing perspectives Sharing feelings
Feeling	96	Affect Emotion Sensation
Self-other differentiation	96	Self-other distinction Differentiation of feelings Objectivity
Automatic	62	Bottom-up processes Involuntary Uncontrolled
Observing	46	Perceiving Recognizing Seeing
Regulation	35	Emotion regulation Modulation Self-regulation
Behavior	35	Action Motor Response
Interaction	35	Communication Relationship Bond
Caring	29	Altruistic motivation Concern Prosocial motivation
Listening	6	-
Nonjudgmental	4	-
Being present	2	-



**Fig. 2.** Model of empathy based on the most common themes identified in the included articles.

**3.1.3. Sharing**

The theme of *sharing* involves experiencing states similar to those the other person is experiencing. It includes the sub-themes *sharing experiences*, *sharing representations*, and *sharing feelings*

(see **Tables 5 and 7**). For example, according to Blair [12], in empathy “the perception of another individual’s state activates the observer’s corresponding representations” (p. 700). Bernhardt and Singer [29] view empathy as “the ability to share the feelings of others” (p. 1). For Chismar [48], “to empathize is to respond to another’s perceived emotional state by experiencing feelings of a similar sort” (p. 257). Darwall [49] states that “empathy involves something like a sharing of the other’s mental states” (p. 263). For Galetz [58], empathy involves the notion that “I share your feelings” (p. 452).

**3.1.4. Self-other differentiation**

The theme of *self-other differentiation* involves a recognition that there is a differentiation between the other person and oneself. It includes the sub-themes *self-distinction*, *differentiation of feelings*, and *objectivity* (see **Tables 6 and 7**). For example, Coplan [1] conceptualizes empathy as “a complex, imaginative process through which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation” (p. 40). Cuff et al. [14] include in their definition of empathy “a recognition that the source of the emotion is not one’s own” (p. 150). White [16] argues that not “losing their recognition that the feelings belong to the empathee and not the empathizer” (p. 255) is essential to empathy. For Deigh [50], mature empathy means “to recognize others as autonomous agents and to participate imaginatively in their separate lives” (p. 760). According to Decety and Meyer [17], empathy “depends crucially on self-other awareness” (p. 1074).

**3.2. Relations among the four core themes**

We found four themes, which were present in all or almost all of the included articles. Further, the reading of the articles revealed not only the existence of each of the four themes but also relationships among them. That is, the analysis suggested that the four themes together comprise a meaningful whole that provides a more complete picture than when they are regarded separately.

In some of the articles [1,3,7,14,19–21,24,28,52], the four core themes are presented not as isolated from each other but instead as an integrated, meaningful whole. For example, de Vignemont and Singer [3] describe empathy as a meaningful whole, including the four core themes *understanding*, *feeling*, *sharing*, and *self-other differentiation*. They state that “there is empathy if: (i) one is in an affective state; (ii) this state is isomorphic to another person’s affective state; (iii) this state is elicited by the observation or imagination of another person’s affective state; (iv) one knows that the other person is the source of one’s own affective state” (p. 435). Likewise, Decety and Lamm [21] also describe empathy as a meaningful whole, including the four core themes when arguing that “empathy is the ability to experience and understand what others feel without confusion between oneself and others” (p. 1146). Preckel et al. [24] describe empathy as a meaningful whole with the four core themes as “sharing feelings, that is, resonating with someone else’s feelings, regardless of valence (positive/negative), but with the explicit knowledge that the other person is the origin of this emotion” (p. 1). Cuff et al. [14] also describe the four core themes in empathy as a whole: “The resulting emotion is similar to one’s perception (directly experienced or imagined) and understanding (cognitive empathy) of the stimulus emotion, with recognition that the source of the emotion is not one’s own” (p. 150).

When the four themes are not considered separately but rather as related to each other, three insights emerge: (1) empathy is both closeness and distance, (2) empathy is both emotion and cognition, and (3) empathy is both body and mind.

The first insight, that empathy is both closeness and distance, involves getting close to the other person but not getting so close that you think you *are* the other. Without distance, you cannot add a new perspective. For example, a therapist who has no distance to a client's depression may find it difficult to add a new perspective and suggest a way out of the depression.

The second insight, that empathy is both emotion and cognition, means that the feeling is one of understanding and that this is not a cold but a sentient understanding. The feeling motivates the empathizer to do something, while the cognition tells the empathizer what to do. For example, cognition can make a nurse understand that a patient is thirsty while the feeling motivates the nurse to bring them a glass of water.

The third insight, that empathy involves both body and mind, means that empathy is both physical and mental. Our analysis of the articles showed that empathy is not only an intellectual process in the mind but that the body is also intensively involved. For example, automatic bodily processes can evoke feelings in the empathizer from the “bottom up” while cognitive processes in the mind contribute an understanding of the situation from the “top down”. Among the four themes, *feeling* and *sharing* are the more physical and the other two the more intellectual, “in the head”. In the analyzed articles, the themes of *feeling* and *sharing* often meant automatically feeling the other's feeling in one's own body. The themes of *understanding* and *self-other differentiation* often meant deliberately reflecting upon the other as a person distinct from oneself.

## 4. Discussion and conclusion

### 4.1. Discussion

The analysis resulted in four themes found to be present in most of the empathy conceptualizations. In empathy, the empathizer (1) understands, (2) feels, and (3) shares another person's world (4) with self-other differentiation.

It is somewhat surprising that we were able to identify things that empathy conceptualizations have in common. How could it be at all possible to identify themes that conceptualizations have in common when so many authors [1–3] claim that there is far from a consensus regarding the nature of empathy in the literature? A possible explanation for the failure among previous authors to see the consensus may be that they have focused on differences between definitions rather than similarities, and based on this focus have concluded that the definitions differ. Above all, they have likely failed to concentrate on seeing the similarities that emerge only at more abstract levels.

The present finding raises questions not only about the fact that we found consensus, but also about *what* we found to be the consensus. That is, why are these four themes, rather than other ones, present in all or almost all the articles? The finding of the four themes does not appear to be arbitrary or a coincidence. The first two correspond to the two basic dimensions of the human psyche: thinking and feeling. It is therefore not surprising that they are contained in the empathy phenomenon. The third, *sharing*, is also not surprising. Empathy involves the contact between two minds, their sharing of something. It is worth noting that clinical psychologists Carl Rogers and Heinz Kohut, regarded as pioneers in empathy research [59], also included these three themes in their definitions of empathy [60,64]. Kohut [63] stated that empathy “is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person” (p. 82). Rogers [64] stated that empathy is “to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them,

but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth” (pp. 210–211”).

The fourth theme, *self-other differentiation*, is the opposite of sharing, and means that the empathizer is aware that it is the other person and not oneself who is experiencing something, for example sadness, fear, or anger. Avoiding confusing oneself with the other seems not to be arbitrary but rather a necessary requirement for empathy, in order to be differentiated from the concept of identification with the other person. In identification there is a confusion of self and other, while in empathy the other is regarded as a separate person. Along these lines, in his definition of empathy above, in addition to understanding, feeling, and sharing, Carl Rogers also emphasized the role of self-other differentiation [61,62,64].

While the four main themes we found in the present study can be described independently of each other, it is also important to stress that they are intimately linked and together form a meaningful whole. The relationships between the themes of *understanding*, *feeling*, and *sharing* are such that to share another's world *is* to understand and *is* to feel the other's world, and to feel it *is* to understand it. Thus, these three themes are three ways of establishing closeness to the other person. The fourth theme, *self-other differentiation*, is related to the themes of *understanding* and *feeling* in such a way that self-other differentiation is an understanding and *is* a feeling that “I am not the other person”. The themes of *sharing* and *self-other differentiation* are so related that, while they are each other's opposites, they require each other to produce empathy. For it to be empathy, a delicate balance between closeness and distance is required [52].

It should also be noted that in most of the included articles empathy is described as something that occurs *within* one single individual. Situating empathy within the empathizing person is especially common in the neuroscience articles. A different picture emerges in some of the psychotherapy and philosophy articles; here, empathy instead happens interactionally *between* the two persons, who cooperate and communicate and form a shared world. Håkansson and Montgomery [65,66] are critical of viewing empathy as existing only within the empathizing person, and have described empathy by noting that the actions of the empathizer and the other person communicate something and make empathy an interpersonal phenomenon. The actions of the other person communicate to the empathizing person the nature of his or her situation and feelings, while the actions of the empathizing person communicate that he or she genuinely understands the other person's situation and feelings [65,66].

Also notable is that most of the included articles depict empathy as different from compassion. For example, Preckel et al. [24] state: “While empathy refers to an isomorphic representation of another's affective state, compassion is a complimentary social emotion elicited by witnessing the suffering of others and is rather associated with feelings of concern and warmth, linked to the motivation to help” (p. 1). It is also important to note that most of the articles distinguish between empathy and sympathy. For example, according to Chismar [48], sympathy includes empathy but also “entails having a positive regard or a non-fleeting concern for the other person” (p. 257).

### 4.2. Strengths and limitations

A strength of the present study is its inclusion of articles from a variety of disciplines such as nursing, medicine, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology. Another strength is that both the researchers participated in the analysis process. To ensure the analysis and the rigor of this study, the themes derived were reviewed by both authors. In contrast to a single researcher, two researchers can strengthen the analysis and offer supplementary

views. Another strength is the relatively high abstraction level of the analysis, which allowed for the identification of common themes across the conceptualizations.

The study was limited to the inclusion of previous reviews, and no empirical data were directly analyzed. Although two researchers participated in the analysis, the grouping of codes into sub-themes, and sub-themes into themes, is still somewhat subjective. In a thematic analysis, there are always numerous possible ways of interpreting and relating the themes to each other. However, this is a problem all researchers encounter when analyzing a concept at higher levels of abstraction. An additional limitation is the inclusion of English-language articles only.

#### 4.3. Conclusion

The present study addresses the existing gap and confusion regarding the concept of empathy in the literature. While most articles and books on empathy start out by stating that there is far from a consensus on how empathy should be defined, this article reveals a movement toward four themes in empathy upon which most authors tend to agree. Although definitions of empathy do vary, it seems that they share the view that it involves understanding, feeling, sharing, and maintaining self-other differentiation. Based on these four themes, empathy can be defined as follows: *Empathy is to understand, feel, and share what someone else feels, with self-other differentiation.*

#### 4.4. Practice implications

The clarification of the content of empathy that the present analysis has generated may assist practitioners and researchers in avoiding confusion regarding the meaning of the concept, as well as in avoiding misunderstandings when discussing empathy. The results of this study may guide practitioners and researchers in developing and measuring the relevant aspects of the concept. The findings may also inspire practitioners and researchers to reflect on the relationship between closeness and distance, feeling and cognition, and body and mind in empathy.

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Study design: JHE, MSM; article search: JHE, MSM; analysis: JHE, MSM; drafting of the article: JHE, MSM.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declarations of interest.

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