

“John Wesley’s Anthropology: A Resource for Empathy Development Among College Students”
Stephen Rankin, Southern Methodist University
Oxford Institute
August, 2018

Introduction: Does Campus Ethos Contribute to Lowered Empathy?

The impetus for this paper on empathy development came from a study of the General Social Survey (GSS) by psychologist Jean Twenge and two of her colleagues. They found that college students rate high in tolerance,¹ but low in empathy. Another researcher, writing about the troubling effects of prolonged interaction with social media, refers to a study by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, which “found that ‘kids today are about 40 per-cent lower in empathy than their counterparts 20 or 30 years ago,’ and that the steepest de-cline had occurred over the preceding decade.”²

The GSS study also noted two other points that raise questions about forces shaping college students. Americans are increasingly individualistic, a long-term trend brought to light by books like *Habits of the Heart* (originally published in 1985) and *Bowling Alone* (published in 2000)³ and continuing into the present. Secondly, individualism also positively correlates with education level. College educated people tend to be more individualistic in their views than

¹ Tolerance is defined as “agreeing that controversial groups (such as ‘homosexuals, Communists, anti-religious atheists, militarists, and racists’) should be allowed public expression.” See Jean M. Twenge, Nathan T. Carter and W. Keith Campbell, “Time Period, Generational, and Age Difference in Tolerance for Controversial Beliefs and Life-styles in the United States, 1972-2012,” *Social Forces*, 94(1), (September 2015), 379-399. See p. 379.

² Christine Rosen, “Expose Thyself: On the Digitally Revealed Life,” *Hedgehog Review* (Spring 2018), 44. Rosen does not explain how the University of Michigan study quantified the lower rate of empathy.

³ “Individualistic” is defined in the GSS as the need to look out for oneself, of having no religious affiliation, and of having a generally skeptical or wary attitude about social rules.

those with no significant college experience.⁴ This fact intensifies the question about the possibility that, somehow, the college experience contributes to reduced empathy in students.

The GSS study further shows that tolerance and empathy as defined by the study are independent variables, a point that seems counterintuitive. One would think that attitudes of tolerance and empathy would positively reinforce one another, but it appears not to be the case. It raises questions about the value and emphasis we place on tolerance, along with other attitudes like “respect,” also strongly promoted on college campuses. Might our individualism weaken these two values in ways we do not recognize? Of greater concern, is there something about campus environments that unwittingly contributes to lowered empathy?⁵

I intend to explore that last question in this paper and then to contemplate how United Methodist-related colleges and universities can draw on the theology of John Wesley, specifically his anthropology, to gain insight into the weaknesses of conventional approaches and to start to imagine other more effective and salutary ways that we could help develop college students’ empathy. The thesis that I would like to try in this paper is that a Wesleyan anthropology provides fertile resources for shaping both campus ethos in general and individual students through appropriate programming.

The plan of this paper is as follows: first, I define “empathy,” using mainly the work of moral psychologists. The dominant view in that field is that empathy is necessary for prosocial or altruistic behavior, though this question is still debated. This material raises fundamental anthropological questions. I will then turn – as a form of case study – to a particularly difficult

⁴ Twenge, et. al., “Time Period, Generational, and Age Difference...” 395.

⁵ One obvious factor comes to mind. Through the various ways we encourage students to think about “what they want to do with their lives,” the self-focus may allow little time for other-focus. We can dress up this feature as a normal part of college student development and that empathy will begin to “catch up” at a later date. But what if some of our institutional practices actually contribute to stunting empathy development?

topic in which empathy plays, in my view, a key but largely unrecognized role: bystander intervention training. A sampling of research shows that, although some programs are beginning to pay more attention to the affective dimension, empathy remains virtually out of sight and I hazard the guess that it has to do with a persistent reliance on an egoistic anthropology (one part of the debate among moral psychologists), which unnecessarily limits the topics covered in bystander intervention training. I then make a start with John Wesley's anthropology, which comports well with the empathy-altruism hypothesis advanced by a significant number of moral psychologists (the other side of the egoism-altruism debate) developed most forcefully by Daniel Batson. I conclude with preliminary thoughts on how to operationalize this view of human nature on a college campus.

What is empathy?

For the purposes of this paper, I will define empathy as a composite affective-cognitive response to the distress or joy of another person.⁶ It "stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition and is very similar to or the same as what another person feels or would be expected to feel."⁷ Empathy thus involves both perspective-taking⁸ and imagination on the cognitive side and a "feeling with" on the affective side. Experimentally, these two functions, though analytically distinguishable, work together virtually as one mental phenomenal experience.

⁶ For comprehensive review of the major issues involved in defining "empathy," see "Empathy" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/>. Accessed 8/15/17.

⁷ Spinrad and Eisenberg, "Empathy and Morality: A Developmental Perspective," in Heidi L. Mabom, ed., *Empathy and Morality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60.

⁸ Lawrence Blum, "Empathy and Empirical Psychology: A Critique of Shaun Nichols' Neo-Sentimentalism," in Carla Bagnoli, ed., *Morality and Emotions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 170-198. See p. 182. See also John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group, *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 173.

Empathic arousal is viewed by many researchers as fundamental to helping or pro-social behavior, which is typically defined as “voluntary behavior intended to benefit another.”⁹ To use a phrase from John Wesley, empathy as the “spring of action” moves one to help, but empathy in its most natural state is also morally ambivalent. It extends to those to whom we feel close, but not much further. The more relationally remote people become to us, the less empathy we naturally feel with obvious moral implications. Empathy can also move us to act immorally on occasion,¹⁰ unless adequate moral training has been given to provide guidance for the proper development of empathy.

Recognizing that a basic, natural empathic response is morally ambiguous helps to raise the need for formation in moral reflection. That formation, which necessarily includes practice, helps to shape the empathic response. It does so by “reference to an ideal,”¹¹ which introduces the need for cognitive interaction with a set of ideas and values, with the opportunity for reflection on the meaning and value of sentient beings. In other words, moral reflection that also engages views of human nature seems to be requisite for proper development of empathy.

What kind of moral training is most appropriate for this goal? We know that there are several ethical systems on offer. Which take best account of the empirical research? These questions go beyond the scope of this paper, but they gesture in an interesting way toward the difficulties we will see in the next section, with bystander intervention training. Those difficulties connect to what I believe is a reductionistic anthropology. One question, then, that has surfaced in the longstanding reflection on empathy is inherently anthropological. Are humans

⁹ Tracy L. Spinrad and Nancy Eisenberg, “Empathy and Morality: A Developmental Psychology Perspective,” in Mabom, ed., *Empathy and Morality*, 60.

¹⁰ Heidi L. Mabom, ed., *Empathy and Morality*, 47.

¹¹ Antti Kauppinen, “Empathy, Emotion Regulation and Moral Judgment,” in Mabom, ed., *Empathy and Morality*, 106.

basically self-interested or are they a combination of self- and other-interested? The view that argues for fundamental self-interest is called egoism. According to Stephen Stich and others, “Egoism is arguably the dominant view of human motivation in much contemporary social science.”¹² This view affects how we understand empathy. Is pro-social or helping behavior ultimately self-interested? In the case of empathy, perhaps I help another who is suffering in order to reduce my own distress, rather than truly caring about the other. The ultimate goal is actually to reduce my own suffering and helping the other is the instrumental means to that end.

The other dominant view regards human nature as a combination of egoistic and altruistic inclinations. The work of researchers like Daniel Batson, with his empathy-altruism hypothesis, has provided evidence that humans can and do act for truly altruistic motives, suggesting that altruistic actions cannot be reduced to egoistic motives. Empathy, according to Batson and as described above, does appear to provide the motivational ground for truly altruistic behavior. This view does not deny self-interest, but argues that there is more to human nature than an egoistic anthropology recognizes. If so, then a vision for the development of empathy among college students opens, or perhaps, re-opens, for due consideration. In the next section, I will try to show how. Using bystander intervention training as a test case, it appears that the theory giving rise to most training programs still assumes a fundamentally self-interested (egoistic) understanding of human nature, and thus appeals to utilitarian, instrumentalist motives. Whereas more attention is being given to the affective dimension, empathy development still does not seem to be a matter of interest, even though, in other areas it has proven to be

¹² Stephen Stich, John M. Doris, and Erica Roedder, “Altruism,” in John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group, *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 147.

effective in resolving other problems.¹³ For a good end or aim (harm reduction and better health and wellness for college students), I must ask if the anthropology still dominant undercuts those efforts.

Bystander Intervention Training: Where's the Empathy?

Sexual assault on campus results in devastation and a host of long-term complications, most often for female students who are in their first year of college. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest Network (RAINN), almost one in four undergraduate women experience some form of sexual violence.¹⁴ In spite of increased attention and efforts to mitigate this national problem, the prevalence of sexual assaults on campus nationally has "remained stubbornly unchanged over thirty years."¹⁵ This fact alone should prompt serious evaluation of the effectiveness of current efforts to counter the problem. If empathy development is possible and if it serves to increase pro-social behavior, then how does empathy development appear in bystander intervention training? This area is but one concern for the quality of college student experience, but it is an extremely important one, so seeing whether we are bringing our best efforts to the problem is a worthy task.

Evaluation of bystander intervention training programs seems to be somewhat lacking, although this picture is changing.¹⁶ In the sample that I could develop for this paper, I found a

¹³ See for example, Jamie Dawson, "Empathy through Animals: Generating Evidence-Based Outcome for Empathy Development," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 67 #4 (2016), 43-54; Matthew Hudson-Flege and Martie P. Thompson, "Empathy and Extracurricular Involvement in Emerging Adulthood: Findings from a Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Males," *Journal of College Student Development*, 58 #5 (July 2017), 674-684.

¹⁴ "Campus Sexual Violence Statistics," <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>. Accessed 7/3/18.

¹⁵ Danielle Labhardt, Emma Holdsworth, Sarah Brown, and Douglas Howat, "You See but You Do Not Observe: A Review of Bystander Intervention and Sexual Assault on University Campuses," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 35 (2017), 13-25. See p. 14.

¹⁶ Although research on bystander intervention training seems to be growing, there is not as much as one would expect and very little of it addresses the questions of interest in this paper. One article admits that research "has

number of studies that drew close but gave no direct attention to empathy. The most common topics revolve around (1) student *confidence* (self-efficacy) and *intent* to intervene, (2) students' *beliefs* about sexual assault, the (3) *situations* in which sexual assaults are the most likely to happen and (4) whether students feel as if they have the *opportunity* to intervene. Training programs tend to focus on helping students recognize the *situations* in which sexual assaults most easily occur. (They almost always involve parties and large amounts of alcohol.¹⁷) The training then generally moves to providing information or guidance that purportedly helps to change beliefs and raise confidence in a student's ability to intervene effectively. A number of beliefs stubbornly persist among college students (mostly males) that also contribute to sexual assaults. One of the most egregious is that women who say "no" do not really mean "no." The belief persists that women "say no" because they want to be "pursued" and so they say no. Men "learn" this message from other men, thus revealing the communal or social aspects of how empathy, or the lack of it, develops. It reveals how beliefs shape desires and motives that result, in this case, in unwanted and criminal behavior.

To a much lesser degree, some of the research on bystander intervention training gives attention to the formative influence of relationships (e.g. models and mentors) and community. Students with good mentors or who identify with a community in which willingness to intervene when it appears that an assault is about to occur tend to feel more confident and ready to

been limited and produced mixed results." See Blake R. Silver and Rick C. Jakeman, "College Students' Willingness to Engage in Bystander Intervention at Off-Campus Parties," *Journal of College Student Development* 57 #4 (May 2016), 472-476. See p. 476.

¹⁷ Usually the training comes through interactive video and coaches students to recognize potentially dangerous situations and to keep an eye on people who might be drinking too much or otherwise making themselves vulnerable to attack. For a description, see "Not Anymore," from Student Success, <https://title9.studentsuccess.org/not-anymore/overview/>.

intervene should the need arise.¹⁸ But the research focus remains on self-confidence rather than care for the other. Participating in a community that talks honestly about the devastating effects of sexual assault helps to raise the confidence (therefore intent) of persons to intervene. These studies have positive implications for empathy development, but unfortunately leave that goal unaddressed. Is this the case because the training assumes an egoistic anthropology?

This sampling of research on bystander intervention training efforts suggests a number of general concerns reflecting that inadequate anthropology and that a more adequate anthropology would help to resolve. Research that favors studying behaviors overlooks the possible range of motives for prosocial behavior. Public health terminology dominates, partly in order to avoid the perceived problem of sounding “moralistic” and “preachy,” for fear that students will stop listening and so the terms used to describe problems and intended outcomes are unnecessarily restricted. The language of “skills and competence”¹⁹ signals the utilitarian approach to training’s focus on behavior. Only when interested in discerning how and when students *intend* to intervene do questions about students’ affective states arise, with reference to confidence and self-efficacy. The interest in motives, however, remain egoistic, a problem made worse by the ways that schools incentivize student’ participation in training, either by the carrot of receiving some benefit or the stick of punishment or loss of privilege.

The research interests and the programmatic efforts in bystander intervention training concern critical aspects of widespread problems manifest on college campuses across the United States. I applaud the efforts to reduce harm. However, the lack of attention to empathy

¹⁸ Sarah McMahon, N. Andrew Peterson, Samantha C. Winter, Jane E. Palmer, Judy L. Postmus, and Ruth Anne Koenick, “Predicting Bystander Behavior to Prevent Sexual Assault on College Campuses: The Role of Self-Efficacy and Intent,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 56 (2015), 46-56.

¹⁹ Danielle Labhardt, et. al., “You See but You Do Not Observe,” 14.

that stems from a truncated view of human nature leaves important anthropological ground uncovered. The growing research on empathy development provides hopeful material for enhancing and improving these efforts. It is intriguing for those of us working in United Methodist-related colleges and universities to consider that the theology of John Wesley has something not only valuable, but critical, to teach us about human nature.

Help from John Wesley's Anthropology

As we move into this section on the theological resources of the Wesleyan tradition, I pause to gather the most important conclusions from the first part of this paper. Empathy is a complex composite phenomenon involving affect and cognition, of perspective-taking and "feeling with." It is regarded by a significant number of moral psychologists as the main motive for altruistic behavior, therefore it is of crucial interest for college student development. The trend, however, goes in the opposite direction. A sample of bystander intervention training research provides hints that insufficient attention is being paid to empathy. From the standpoint of loving God and neighbor, this trend is very worrisome. Even from a secular standpoint of simple good citizenship, we should be concerned. But it also reveals the missional opportunity United Methodist-affiliated schools have to envision ways to enact a pedagogy grounded in solid empirical research and relevant Christian theological resources.

To this end a book published in 2010, *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science*, exemplifies the direction serious and sustained reflection and practice could take. Kathryn Armistead's chapter provides an example by putting the self-psychology of Heinz Kohut in conversation with Wesleyan theology. What she does conceptually, I would like to begin to try programmatically in this paper by drawing on our theological tradition so as to revise college student develop-

ment activities already built in to the experience. Armistead's description of empathy is a good starting point for the bridge between social science and Wesleyan thought: "Empathy is a dynamic interpersonal transaction between at least two people. One cannot be empathetic by one's self or in one's own imagination."²⁰ Although she is speaking in the context of the therapist-client relationship, her work provides a model for linking Wesley's theology with good theory in developing empathy in college students.

We start with a summary of John Wesley's anthropology by noting his "empiricist moral psychology," as Randy Maddox describes it.²¹ Wesley famously made detailed descriptions of the experiences of Methodists, interpreting them through his convictions about scriptural truth and the Christian life. Without wishing to commit the sin of anachronism and make Wesley out to be a twenty-first century researcher, we can still recognize that, by making and collecting keen observations and then analyzing them through a theological framework, he did what good researchers do. Data gathered inevitably will be and in fact must be interpreted by theory. This aspect of scholarship is unavoidable. The sources I used for this paper work from both the empirical and the theoretical. As I mentioned in reference to the egoism-altruism debate among moral psychologists, one can discern a working anthropology, even if it is not made explicit. Therefore, when Wesley interpreted Methodists' experiences, he followed essentially the same

²⁰ M. Kathryn Armistead, "Empathy: A Bridge Between Wesleyan Theology and Self Psychology," in M. Kathryn Armistead, Brad Strawn and Ronald W. Wright, *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), 58.

²¹ Randy L. Maddox, "Wesleyan Theology and Moral Psychology: Precedents for Continuing Engagement," in M. Kathryn Armistead, et. al., *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science*, 10-11.

steps as modern researchers.²² He rooted his anthropology in a relational understanding of the image of God.

Students of Wesley know well the category terms describing that image: the natural, the political and the moral. Within the natural image we find the faculty of understanding. A person can cognitively grasp terms and ideas and draw proper inferences and synthesize them (Wesley follows John Locke in this vein). As we saw earlier, cognition plays an important role for empathy development in perspective-taking and moral deliberation. Exploring fully what Wesley has to say about understanding would produce fruitful matter for aiming at empathy development among students at United Methodist-related schools.

The moral image, for Wesley, is of chief concern.²³ Therein resides the will, the healing and development of which is crucially important in Wesley's theology. A very important distinction arises here and must be recognized. Whereas (as Maddox points out) modern people think of "will" in the voluntarist sense of freedom to choose, Wesley thought in affective terms, of "love, hatred, joy, sorrow, desire, fear, hope, etc., and a whole train of other inward emotions, which are commonly called 'passions,' or 'affections.'"²⁴ These emotions or passions or

²² There remains an anti-metaphysical attitude in research in the human sciences, the vestiges of a naïve empiricism and perhaps even logical positivism, which were dramatically anti-metaphysical. I would argue that we cannot avoid metaphysics and that much modern empirical research, at least in education-related fields, often does not recognize the metaphysical assumptions on which their works rely. This is especially true in the field of college student development, which is a course all masters degree-level students in higher education have to take. It is a very troubling gap in their formation.

²³ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 55.

²⁴ John Wesley, "What is Man?" in *The Works of John Wesley*, bicentennial edition, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 4:22. See also footnote 21. The eighteenth century had a host of emotion-related terms that modern science has scrubbed, unfortunately, from use. For a history of this impoverishment of emotion language, see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

affections are responsive to people and situations, thereby revealing the fundamentally relational dimension of human nature, of the *imago Dei*.

We can thus already begin to imagine the challenge for busy college students. They need leisurely time to reflect on this dimension of their lives, time which they often do not have, a problem that should not be understood not simplistically a matter of their choosing.²⁵ It is also a matter of institutional ethos. Students would not be surprised by the notion that we are relational beings, but very little in their college experience gives them opportunity to consider what this might mean for their education. Whatever good might result in scattered moments of such reflection is overwhelmed by the dominant utilitarian ethos on most campuses. Nevertheless, reflecting on these features of Wesley's anthropology provides an enormously helpful starting point for developing empathy.

Included also in Wesley's view of the moral image is liberty. "Liberty" was the category term Wesley used for what we moderns call "will." He firmly believed in the grace-induced ability of people to make choices, but a term like "free will," common in modern parlance, is not how Wesley thought of the person. Liberty grounds moral responsibility, therefore it is crucial to human development and flourishing. Liberty signals our moral responsibility, not in an abstract sense, but in a relational sense. We are *responsible* to God and to one another, because we are created to be *responsive* to God and to one another. We are morally responsible because God created us for relationship with God and one another and thus to respond to

²⁵ In fact, the steady reference to students "choosing to..." or "choosing not to..." should signal those of us who work with students that our implicit anthropology is a vestige of some Enlightenment version of rationalism that takes insufficient account of affection and motivation.

God's love. We are therefore able, by God's grace, to respond to God's moral imperatives, the chief of which are to love God and neighbor.²⁶

These two aspects of John Wesley's anthropology – the will and liberty – put into conversation with modern moral psychology, provide fertile ground for thinking about how to develop empathy in college students. In the final section I will attempt to show how college personnel might attempt to incorporate these views into students' experiences, but at this juncture, I want to suggest the relevant connections between Wesley's thinking and modern psychology. Once we sort the different use of terms, we can see that, with regard to activity and subjective experience,²⁷ Wesley is covering much of the same ground as modern researchers, and his views offer practical guidance in three important ways. First, both Wesley and scholars doing the work on empathy and moral development are interested in how people's affective and cognitive functions interact with one another in empathy. Wesley's view of the affections enriches modern research by giving descriptive language that adds nuance to understanding human responsiveness. Second, both are concerned with how to grow and develop empathy. Wesley, of course, did not use the word, since it did not come into use until the nineteenth century.²⁸ Finally, both Wesley and moral psychologists recognize the link between affectivity and morality, which has clear implications for the development of empathy.

On reflection, the modern discussion of empathy and pro-social or altruistic behavior grasps at least a portion of what Wesley understood as love. In terms of our created state (the

²⁶ The title of Randy Maddox' masterful theology of John Wesley, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), reveals how central to Wesley's moral theology is human responsibility. Maddox makes the point that we are responsible because we, through God's grace, are response-able.

²⁷ That is, we do not have to throw out the baby of Wesley's keen insights with the bath water of his eighteenth-century faculty psychology.

²⁸ For a history of the term, see the article on empathy in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/>

problem of sin presses, but cannot be addressed in this paper), love is understood to guide the passions toward the good. Love is therefore a key to understanding the empathy that leads to behavior for the benefit of others. Here, the modern understanding of empathy and the theology of John Wesley find a way to “dance,” as the subtitle of *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science* puts it,²⁹ and could help create the kind of student experiences that all colleges and universities talk about in their marketing and recruitment materials.

Envisioned Application: How to Operationalize on a College Campus

It remains to offer a sketch of how these thoughts on empathy and John Wesley’s theology could enrich student experience at United Methodist-related colleges and universities. It starts with recognizing the anthropological orientation that all student programming already has. Many people working in higher education decry the materialist, consumerist assumptions driving campus ethos, but we fail to recognize that much of our literature and research shares assumptions about human nature that drive consumerism. We therefore generally do not recognize opportunities to counter those forces through careful construction of growth opportunities. Too often our programming takes the very consumerist shape that we criticize.

The bystander intervention training illustrates this point. Most students have to be properly “incentivized” in order to get them to take the training seriously. This means relying on alternating carrot-and-stick approaches, requiring students to take the training and offering them a benefit or warning them of punishment or loss of privilege. Moreover, much too much of the various training programs we require of students depends on the assumption that giving

²⁹ See footnote 20.

students accurate and timely information will somehow lead to changes in their practices.³⁰

These efforts reveal the still-prevalent instrumentalist orientation in institutional ethos, even while pockets and sub-cultures may think entirely otherwise.

Rather than grounding an experience in these instrumentalist assumptions, schools should develop an approach to important developmental concerns based on other, more intrinsic motives. Human beings do respond to formative practices guided by sound moral principles.³¹ Using a Wesleyan anthropology informed by materials from moral psychology, could produce programmatic efforts that effectively develop college student empathy. The following suggestions give examples of how such an effort might work.

All schools offer programs that aim at developing socially responsible citizens. What if some of it aimed at enhancing empathy? What if we shifted our practices to a different anthropological foundation that incorporated Wesley's description of the will and liberty, enhanced by the work of moral psychologists? What if we found ways to help students recognize their responsiveness to one another and their responsibility to one another? To do so would necessarily involve the development of practices (sustained, systematic experiences organized into a coherent pedagogical framework) that recognize the need to shape the affective dimension of human life. For the sake of illustration, I outline in the following some possible avenues.

Residential colleges and universities³² generally view the first year, and even more narrowly, the first few weeks of the first year, as especially critical for the quality of student experience.

³⁰ Social norming theory exercises powerful influence in this regard. It seeks to correct students' perspectives on problematic behavior (like alcohol abuse) by exposing students to accurate information through motivational interviewing techniques. These efforts have limited impact because they are techniques that are not rooted in the values of the community, but rather are required add-ons that most students endure and then ignore.

³¹ See page 4 of this essay, as well as footnotes 10 and 11 on that page.

³² That is, who think of students living on campus as a significant part of students' *educational* experience.

rience. They therefore offer some form of orientation to college life aimed at helping students get a good start and to enhance their sense of belonging. Given that all colleges recognize the educational value of a diverse student population, this effort is simultaneously valuable and fraught with challenges. Two ways that schools respond are through a first-year experience and through enhanced residence life programming, usually organized around topics involving identity and diversity. These areas provide a good context for empathy development. Since students are often already divided into small groups for these experiences, intentionally designed exercises to help them practice listening and imagining a person's feelings in a given situation provides a starting point. An interested, qualified, and trained upper class (or graduate student) facilitator could help guide the group. It is critical to all involved to emphasize that it is educationally valuable to grow personally in this area, not just to meet some check-the-box requirement or to gain knowledge and skill to be more successful in the job search.

A key element here is that the school must signal through its institutional culture that *it is a primary goal of a good education* to empathize with other people in order to know them well and to care about their wellbeing. Good leadership is therefore essential. Empathy has to be modeled by professional staff as well as student leaders.

Another very important feature of this small group work is to focus on getting to know fellow students as individuals, not as mere instantiations of classes or collectives. Of course, we continue to recognize and include ethnic, religious and other forms of diversity as a normal part of our interactions and we should talk openly about them. However, one of the ironic unintended consequences of the current situation on many campuses is that we have emphasized diversity to the virtual exclusion of community. Many students recognize that they are differ-

ent from each other, but have a hard time giving voice to what they share and much conventional programming gives them scant opportunity to think about these things. Schools talk about community, but do not give students much opportunity to reflect on what “community” means and what it requires, apparently because we assume that community happens somehow naturally simply by virtue of participating in campus life.

A third critical aspect for developing empathy among college students is to practice honest communication. I emphasize listening here as much as talking. A trained (student?) leader could express openly to a group of students just beginning to get acquainted with one another that “feeling awkward” is a normal part of such a process, that it is natural and not a sign that something is wrong. The group can practice with “easy” topics so that no one feels that they have to expose aspects of themselves unwillingly. The truth is that students, for the most part, actually enjoy getting to know new people and hunger for meaningful relationships, but these relationships need to happen as organically as possible, not in “training sessions.” Even though small groups in a first-year experience start off feeling artificial and even contrived, with the right group leadership they can become a sort of real community. A good start along these lines helps students to “own” the group and to take responsibility for group life. The leader should help them start in this direction from the very beginning. Students need to know that they are being called to listen well, but also that they can speak honestly (always carefully and respectfully). The group also should be reminded to keep one of the major goals in mind, which is to grow in empathy, in understanding of and care for, other people. Participants are practicing empathy.

Residential schools are increasingly adopting a “commons” approach to residence life, which means that a cadre of trained faculty are either “living in” or are somehow assigned to a residence hall or group of students. This growing feature of college life gives opportunity for a more explicitly academic – even credit-bearing – angle on empathy development. An English professor teaching a literature course, for example, could systematically include discussion questions that invite students to practice empathic engagement. If the school coordinates a first year experience with certain credit-bearing classes (as some schools do), then the professor could team up with small group leaders in the community to enhance class discussions with small group opportunities around the same themes. This effort need not be limited to the residence life part of campus. Faculty across disciplines could find appropriate ways to salt their pedagogies with opportunities for students to think empathically.

One final example: Many schools have strong community engagement or service-learning programs. They are experience-based educational activities, sometimes for credit. Either way, for academic credit or not, they provide ready-to-hand ways to enhance the development of empathy in students. A Spring Break trip that is designed to give students time to reflect specifically on exercises that challenge them to think empathically and to begin truly to care for another person provides fertile ground for this kind of growth. Better yet would be if that Spring Break trip were part of a semester-long course. The combination of classroom interaction and field experience working with people in their own contexts would provide strong ways for empathy to grow.

Many schools already have the programs and activities just named, but prevailing assumptions about human nature (anthropology), coupled with training in best practices, often

misses the opportunity to make empathy development in college students an explicit goal. We may assume that it happens as students go through the usual college experiences and for some students it does. But good program design, with qualified, trained, and interested leaders (especially student leaders) will help to create an institutional ethos that positively addresses the concerns raised by the studies that prompted this paper. All these practices have to be wrapped, therefore, in clearly-communicated concepts (theory) that reflect the institution's commitments; that is, that they "think in these ways" about human beings, that, in addition to the usual concerns for intellectual growth and skill development, students also are affective beings developing attitudes toward other persons through their college experiences.

Given the diversity of campus communities, drawing on Wesley's theological anthropology might seem too complicated because it smacks of unacceptable Christian hegemony. Interested educators no doubt would need to think carefully about how to incorporate these teachings into practices. At the same time, we should all remember that a working anthropology is already in place in higher education. It is largely a secular one and, when we look at the problems most colleges and universities face, leaders of United Methodist-related schools should be willing to try all appropriate measures that improve student experience and help them grow as persons. Why is it that there is so much bad news associated with the college years? Why is the party culture so entrenched? Why is sexual assault a seemingly intractable problem? Why do students appear to decline in empathy while they are in college? The troubling question remains: what if, in our professional training and associations, we have an embedded anthropology that militates against our own best intentions?

After nearly twenty-five years in higher education, I am convinced that such a problem exists, but also a bracing opportunity. United Methodist-affiliated colleges and universities are peopled with caring and highly competent professionals across the various divisions of labor. Schools in the Wesleyan tradition have in our heritage sensitive, nuanced, and tested theological resources that, with careful thought and practice, work well with contemporary research. We can develop a set of orienting principles that are both robustly Christian and sensitive to the diversities of people who populate our campuses. Those principles can guide our pedagogies, both within the curriculum and beyond. The outcome should be an increased number of students graduating from our schools with deepened empathy, with mature moral sensitivity, and with a call to love and serve their neighbors.

Works Cited

Armistead, M. Kathryn, Brad Strawn and Ronald W. Wright, eds. *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010.

Blum, Lawrence. "Empathy and Empirical Psychology: A Critique of Shaun Nichols' Neo-Sentimentalism," in Carla Bagnoli, ed., *Morality and Emotions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 170-198.

"Campus Sexual Violence Statistics." Rape, Abuse & Incest Network.
<https://rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>.

Collins, Kenneth J. *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.

Dawson, Jamie, "Empathy Through Animals: Generating Evidence-Based Outcomes for Empathy Development." *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 67 #4 (2016), 43-54.

Dixon, Thomas. *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

"Empathy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/>.

Labhardt, Danielle, Emma Holdsworth, Sarah Brown and Douglas Howat, "You See But You Do Not Observe: A Review of Bystander Intervention and Sexual Assault on University Campuses." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 35 (2017), 13-25.

Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

McMahon, Sarah, N. Andrew Peterson, Samantha C. Winter, Jane E. Palmewr, Judy L. Postmus, and Ruth Anne Koenick. "Predicting Bystander Behavior to Prevent Sexual Assault on College Campuses: The Role of Self-Efficacy and Intent." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 56 (2015), 46-56.

Rosen, Christine. "Expose Thyself: On the Digitally Revealed Life." *Hedgehog Review* (Spring 2018), 36-53.

Silver, Blake R. and Rick C. Jakeman. "College Students' Willingness to Engage in Bystander Intervention at Off-Campus Parties." *Journal of College Student Development* 57 #4 (May, 2016), 472-476.

Spinrad, Tracy L. and Nancy Eisenberg. "Empathy and Morality: A Developmental Perspective," in Heidi L. Mabom, ed., *Empathy and Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Stich, Stephen, John M. Doris, and Erica Roedder. "Altruism," in John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group. *The Moral Psychology Handbook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Student Success. <https://title9.studentsuccess.org/not-anymore/overview/>.

Twenge, Jean M., Nathan T. Carter and W. Keith Campbell. "Time Period, Generational, and Age Difference in Tolerance for Controversial Beliefs and Lifestyles in the United States, 1972-2012." *Social Forces* 94(1), (September 2015), 379-399.

Wesley, John. "What is Man?" *The Works of John Wesley*. Bicentennial Edition, volume 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986.