

Barbara Simonič
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Empathic parenting and child development

Abstract

Our experience of the world and life is associated with our sense of ‘self’, which begins to grow in the preverbal period through the child’s primary relationships with his/her parents. Such relationships should be optimal and full of true, genuine and deep contact, marked with a parent’s empathic responsiveness. Empathic parents encourage positive development, while lack of empathy is many times associated with dysfunctional patterns of behaviour in later life. Empathy is a critical factor for the healthy development of a child, especially for the growth of a creative and genuine sense of ‘self’, which in adulthood is essential for a healthy and vibrant personality, one who is capable of coping with life and living empathic relationships. Empathy in the narrowest sense of the word is the ability to share and comprehend the feelings and thoughts of another, e.g. the ability to have insight into experiencing. In a broader sense, it is the basic dynamics of relationships that fully enable us to feel safe and accepted with others and thereby give us space for growth and development.

Keywords

Empathy, early development, parent-child relationships, sense of self, religious experience.

1. The importance of relationships

Integration into the relational matrix marks the most basic dimension of human existence. Already at birth, we are not so much creatures of instinct, but rather relational beings. Relationships are innate to human nature, to the human experience, biologically and genetically ingrained in our very existence. The individual is in constant interaction with others right from the start, and

these primary relationships constantly build and supplement the individual's primary experience¹.

Many important researchers and psychoanalysts (e.g. Winnicott, Klein, Fairbairn, Sullivan, Bion, Kohut, Stern, Bowlby et al.) have demonstrated that children are relational beings by nature. The first thing any individual seeks, already at birth, is a sense of connection, a relationship. After all, we cannot survive without a relationship. Being in a relationship is a primary need. The affective dynamics that transpire in these primary relationships are of great significance. Our brains and bodies are naturally designed to link us to each other in our primary and fundamental relationships, all of which are learned in the family of origin. Further, we then continue to seek many of these affects throughout life in ensuing relationships, simply because they promise connection. The affective dynamics and atmosphere from primary relationships thus constitute an individual's psychological structure². They provide the basis upon which individuals then proceed to perceive the world, their relationships and their selves. An individual with a healthy and vibrant sense of self is capable of coping with life, and living it in all fullness, with regard to their self, others and also with God.

2. Empathy as the fundamental characteristic of functional relationships

Relationships that have a positive influence on the individual's development are full of genuineness and connection right from birth. Parental empathy is the main characteristic of such relationships, and it marks a real commitment as well as the physical and emotional availability of parents from the day their child is born onwards. This will determine the breadth and depth of the child's social and relational world. After all, this primary relationship will determine how the newborn will develop. The first three years of the child's life are fundamental for the development of the child's brain. Since the brain is not yet a fully formed organ at birth, it develops and grows in response to the spontaneous relationships experienced within the environment. Experiences

¹ C. Gostečnik, *Sodobna psihoanaliza*, Ljubljana 2002, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 20.

² C. Gostečnik, *Inovativna relacijska družinska terapija*, Ljubljana 2011, Brat Frančišek, Teološka fakulteta in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 385–389.

from the early formative years of the child's life are the most consequential. The child's primary relationship, especially with the mother, thus provides the basis for how the circuitry for emotional processing will form in the child's brain; this circuitry will also determine the individual's greater or lesser capacity to enter into emotional relationships later in life³.

Empathy could be defined as our ability to feel into the feeling and thinking of another person. By this we put ourselves in the position of others so that we gain internal knowledge and insight of the other's internal life. We understand what someone else is experiencing and how they feel about it. The term is often used as a synonym for careful, sensitive and sympathetic listening, that's why it is also often equated with notions such as 'compassion', 'understanding', 'sympathy', and 'charity'. These are related but different phenomena. They all denote the emotional and rational perceiving of another person's situation, but they differ in the depth of engagement of the individual who is experiencing the situation of this person⁴.

Reaching beyond all cultures, religions and gender, the capacity for empathy is universal. It is something spontaneous and natural, innate to every human being, and as such it is fundamental for dialogical relationships at a deeper level; moreover it facilitates understanding others, which provides the foundations for every decent relationship. Other similar capacities (e.g. compassion, sympathy) also contribute to this; however empathy is considered the "royal road" to understanding other individuals⁵. Empathy enables us to place ourselves within the psychological framework of experiencing another individual. What the other individual feels and thinks and how they function then becomes somewhat understandable and anticipated. This stance is often exemplified with the image of "placing yourself in someone else's shoes". This is far from just a cold calculating regard of what someone else is thinking or feeling. True empathy is realized in vulnerable interactions with another; one in which this other individual can be understood, and one's behaviour can be anticipated and connected to, through recognizing the atmosphere (especially

³ K. Kompan Erzar, A. Poljanec, *Rahločutnost do otrok*, Ljubljana 2009, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 16.

⁴ B. Simonič, *Empatija*, Ljubljana 2010, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 353.

⁵ M. O'Hara, *Relational empathy: Beyond modernist egocentrism to postmodern holistic contextualism*, in: A. C. Bohart, L. S. Greenberg (eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy*, Washington 1997, American Psychological Association, p. 295–320.

emotional) of the relationship⁶. This is how we can understand each other without having to be in each other's bodies or having to actually undergo identical experiences. Empathic understanding is based on imagining the experience of others and then adding, to a certain degree, what such similar experiences would indeed mean to us ourselves. In all this imagining the experience of others, the other individual reveals themselves also as someone who has their own self, autonomous and separate from other selves, and marked by their own individuality⁷. Empathy is thus intrinsic to humanity. It is part and parcel to relational connectedness and it enables growth of the individual's consciousness, which marks where – in the field of their experiencing – they incorporate other individuals and their mutual relationship with them.

3. Empathic parenting

Important authors from the field of relational psychoanalysis and psychotherapy they all emphasize parental responsiveness and parental empathy as factors that are critical for the healthy psychological development of children⁸. Parental empathy encourages positive development, while the lack of empathic responsiveness is often associated with subsequent non-functional patterns of behaviour. If parents are less empathic and remain insensitive to their child's feelings and needs, this leads to their child's frustration and to their not understanding what they are experiencing⁹.

The importance of early empathic relationships for healthy development is also evident from the results presented by authors of contemporary developmental psychology, which are mostly parallel to the Object relations theory¹⁰. Object relations theorists ascribe great importance to maternal empathy in early

⁶ S. Baron-Cohen, *The essential difference: The truth about male and female brain*, New York 2003, Basic Books, p. 2.

⁷ O. Flanagan, *Consciousness reconsidered*, Cambridge 1992, A Bradford Book, The Mit Press, p. 106.

⁸ B. Simonič, *Empatija*, Ljubljana 2010, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 176–179.

⁹ N. D. Feshbach, *Parental empathy and child adjustment/maladjustment*, in: N. Eisenberg, J. Strayer (eds.), *Empathy and its development*, Cambridge 1987, Cambridge University Press, p. 271–291.

¹⁰ L. Murray, *Contributions of experimental and clinical perturbations of mother-infant communication to the understanding of infant intersubjectivity*, in S. Bråten (ed.), *Intersubjective*

infancy, while often drawing on the thoughts of Donald W. Winnicott. His understanding of human development, which is deeply based on relationships with significant others in early childhood, derives from extensive clinical work with infants and young children. Winnicott understood the mother-child relationship to be the primary relationship (while he mostly used the term mother, he was inclusive of the relationship between a child and father or any other primary caretaker). According to Winnicott, a duality governs this primary environment, and it is marked by the child's autonomy, who is at the same time fully dependent on the mother. A mother and child are initially one. A mother is part of the child's mental structure. While the child is independent in this primary condition, she or he remains nonetheless completely dependent on the mother. That is, while the child is a separate subject with her or his own motivations and needs, the child remains completely dependent on her or his mothers' ability to identify those motives and needs and empathically harmonise with them. Mothers bear witness and give credence to their children. A mother's attuned responsiveness to her child allows and cultivates the maturation of the child's individuality. Mothers are like a mirror that reflects what the child sees. Her response to her child tells the child who she or he is¹¹. In this sense, the child's self is only as heard and as seen as allowed by the empathy of her or his mother. Although a child is a person before being able to consciously know so, the mother cultivates this awareness by mirroring, thus allowing the child to feel seen and heard and felt. A "good enough" and empathic mother responds to her child's feelings and needs and thus reflects the true image of her child. This is how a child learns about her or his self. When mirroring is insufficiently responsive or suffused with distress – which is purely the mother's – the child is then unable to build a true self; rather, this leads to the development of a "false" self. This results in feeling not good enough to be who you are or perhaps, that you do not even know who you are. The false self derives from a mother's failure to reflect her child's image as it is, but rather she reflects the image of a child according to the image she wants and has about her child. Children who experience this subsequently often suffer from emotional artificialness, numbness and non-creativity. The development of a child's self-image thus largely depends on the mother: if she will be able to meet the demand of her

communication and emotion in early ontogeny, New York 1998, Cambridge University Press, p. 127–143.

¹¹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London 1971, Routledge, p. 113.

child's complete dependence, if she will allow the child to be and feel what she or he feels, then the child's self-image will be strong and authentic¹².

The mother's empathic capacity is essential here. A mother's empathic ability is reflected in her being able to recognize a child's subtle motives as distinct and separate from her own emotional impulses, in following these motives and responding to them. A child whose basic needs will be adequately met will feel that her or his parents can be relied upon. This good enough and empathic care will form the basis for basic trust to be formed and maintained; subsequently this provides a sound foundation for later development of personality¹³. For Winnicott, the mother-child relationship is an empathic entity, which is dynamic, lively, interactive and focused much wider than only on satisfying biological needs. This entity is essential for the child because it allows the development of a healthy, vibrant personality, capable of satisfaction, freshness, creativity and playfulness.

Representatives of Self Psychology also view empathic interactions as those most strongly affecting the healthy psychological development of the individual. Heinz Kohut's understanding of healthy personality development (in particular, he dealt with the formation of narcissistic states) views parental empathic responsiveness as most essential. In his psychoanalytical work, especially with narcissistic clients, Kohut realized that those who lacked empathic interactions with significant others in their early childhoods were later more likely to develop certain forms of psychopathology states and conditions. Empathic caregiver caretakers and their responses are essential for the development of self, which is the basic structure through which individuals develop their sense of self. The Self is developed through connecting with others¹⁴. Empathic harmony and mirroring are what give the individual a sense of self-worth and importance. If the caregivers are lacking empathic responsiveness, this leads to the emergence of psychopathology. In children who were exposed to neglect or abuse, when there were no empathic caregivers, the result was the development of a weakened or damaged sense of self. Small lapses in empathy with parents are not harmful, while a chronic lack of empathy prevents healthy development

¹² L. K. Kompan Erzar, *Odkritje odnosa*, Ljubljana 2001, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 65.

¹³ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London 1971, Routledge, p. 102–110.

¹⁴ A. J. Clark, *Empathy in counseling and psychotherapy*, New Jersey 2007, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 125–129.

of children's self and consequently, it depletes the growth of having empathic capacity for others later in life¹⁵.

It can be seen that parental empathy, which is reflected as warmth, sensitivity, compassion, understanding, care, low levels of punishment and positive relationship with the child, have positive effects on the child. Conversely, a lack of parental empathy, especially from the mother, leads a child towards a fragmented sense of self and other forms of psychopathology. Cold and rejecting parenting has adverse effects on child development and adaptive capacity to the environment; while attuned and responsive parenting promotes mental health and contributes to functional behavioural patterns in adulthood¹⁶. That is, empathic parenting promotes healthy development in children, while people who suffer from various mental disorders often report that in their childhood there was no real empathy from their parents¹⁷. In general, parental empathy has a positive influence in the process of socialization and also encourages the development of appropriate behaviour in a child¹⁸.

Lack of empathy or disturbances in parental empathy can be found in the relationships that are marked by violence, abuse or other problems of parents, such as psychiatric illness, which has consequences for the long-term well-being of children. Low levels of parental empathy are characteristic of abusive parents, and likewise, abused children often show a subsequent lack of it¹⁹. In other words, empathic parenting encourages empathy in children and also reduces aggressive behaviour²⁰. It can be expected that children who were exposed to parental physical violence are less empathic than children without a history of abuse. Likewise, abused children do not respond as equally functional in social

¹⁵ H. Kohut, *How does analysis cure?*, Chicago 1984, The University of Chicago Press, p. 82–83.

¹⁶ N. D. Feshbach, *Parental empathy and child adjustment/maladjustment*, in: N. Eisenberg, J. Strayer (eds.), *Empathy and its development*, Cambridge 1987, Cambridge University Press, p. 271–291.

¹⁷ H. A. Guttman, *Empathy in families of women with borderline personality disorder, anorexia nervosa, and a control group*, "Family Process" 39 (2000) 3, p. 345–358.

¹⁸ N. D. Feshbach, *Empathy: The formative years: Implications for clinical practice*, in: A. C. Bohart, L. S. Greenberg (eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy*, Washington 1997, American Psychological Association, p. 33–59.

¹⁹ N. D. Feshbach, *The construct of empathy and the phenomenon of physical maltreatment of children*, in: D. Cicchetti, V. Carlson (eds.), *Child maltreatment*, Cambridge 1989, Cambridge University Press, p. 349–373.

²⁰ C. Zahn-Waxler, *The development of empathy, guilt, and internalization of distress*, in: R. J. Davidson (ed.), *Anxiety, depression, and emotion*, New York 2002, Oxford University Press, p. 222–265.

environments as those who were not abused²¹. Difficulties in adulthood can be seen in those people who have, as children, lived with depressed parents, who were not able to fully develop the capacity for empathic parenting because of their disease. Such parenting may have manifested in various ways, such as where there was no room for real empathy and understanding: absent parents, intrusive parenting or very ambivalent parenting, which results in a combination of sadness, absence and violence, thus in the ambivalence of emotions. Due to this inconsistency, the children of such parents may have difficulties in recognizing emotional distress in others. It can happen that they also are not able to distinguish well between the distress levels in others. This distinction can become obscure due to inappropriate responses received from parents who failed to provide them with good enough “mirroring”²².

4. Neurobiology of empathic parenting

Neuropsychological studies highlight the additional importance of parental empathy. They show that empathic interaction in primary relationships between the child and parents, especially the mother, impact the development of basic brain structures. Not only the self, but even the brain is under constant development and is structurally dependent on interactions within the emotional environment. The first three years of a child’s life are crucial for the development of the brain²³. The brain is not a fully formed organ at birth; rather, it develops in spontaneous relationships experienced in the environment. Of particular significance are the experiences of relationships from the early period of life. This is what many relational theorists have already perceived, and what is even further confirmed in neuropsychological research. Affective and emotionally charged interactions are especially significant²⁴. How the regulation of emotions or affects takes place

²¹ N. D. Feshbach, *The construct of empathy and the phenomenon of physical maltreatment of children*, in: D. Cicchetti, V. Carlson (eds.), *Child maltreatment*, Cambridge 1989, Cambridge University Press, p. 349–373.

²² C. Zahn-Waxler, *The development of empathy, guilt, and internalization of distress*, in: R. J. Davidson (ed.), *Anxiety, depression, and emotion*, New York 2002, Oxford University Press, p. 222–265.

²³ L. K. Kompan Erzar, *Odkritje odnosa*, Ljubljana 2001, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 92.

²⁴ E. Thompson, *Empathy and consciousness*, “Journal Of Consciousness Studies” 8 (2001) 5, p. 1–32.

in these interactions is essential. Daniel N. Stern²⁵ emphasizes the importance of maternal emotional harmony and attunement to the child, which form the foundations for the self and the psychological basis for perceiving the world and others. An empathic caregiver, one who is able to correctly identify and put into words the child's early affects, is an essential factor of impact on the development of primary regulation of affective states. Empathic responsiveness thus helps the child to be able to put feelings into words so as to be able to cope with them, rather than having to act out the affect in some other, possibly even destructive, way. The mother's role is to help her child distinguish among the affects being experienced, to synthesize the various affective experiences, to develop a certain degree of tolerance for them, to use affective experiences as sources of information that are telling something about what is happening, and to create a capacity to consciously articulate affective states²⁶. A mechanism for emotion regulation, a key mechanism in human development, is thus formed. This mechanism translates emotional impulses in the body and vice versa. The regulation of emotions refers to how we recognize impulses in such a way that we endure them, without these very impulses and other physical stimuli then being directed back against us and our whole bodies²⁷. The regulation of emotions is subject to the links and connections in the orbitofrontal cortex of the brain along with the subcortical limbic system. In the absence of these links, a child cannot adequately regulate emotional impulses. Maturation and development of these links however, depend on the interaction between mother and child. A relationship, one which accommodates love, responsiveness and reciprocity, is thus the key to a mental structure that is conducive to emotion regulation²⁸. We can even go so far as to say that an empathic relationship builds the brain.

Research on mothers and infants indicates that mothers have a direct impact on the development of a child's brain, and that this impact is positive when the mother affectively attunes to her child. Early relational experiences are not recorded only in the deep unconscious field, they also affect the development of

²⁵ D. N. Stern, *The interpersonal world of the infant*, New York 1985, Basic Books, p. 138–161.

²⁶ R. D. Stolorow, B. Brandchaft, G. E. Atwood, *Psychoanalytic treatment: An intersubjective approach*, Hillsdale 1987, The Analytic Press, p. 70–73.

²⁷ K. Kompan Erzar, A. Poljanec, *Rahločutnost do otrok*, Ljubljana 2009, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 74.

²⁸ L. K. Kompan Erzar, *Odkritje odnosa*, Ljubljana 2001, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 97–98.

the organ system in the brain, which is responsible for unconscious processing of information in later life. This is how the child's first relationship, the mother-child relationship in particular, provides the basis for how the emotion processing circuits develop in a child's mind; this in turn determines an individual's skills and capacity for entering into subsequent emotional relationships²⁹. Neuropsychology also proves that it is possible to explore the relationship between the adult brain and child brain at a biochemical and neurological level. This relationship is conditioned by the mother's ability to perceive and remain cognizant and aware of her own emotions, and to distinguish them from those emotions aroused in her by her child. In other words, this means that mother and child, both in empathic relationships, together create the conditions that colour how the child will ever even enter into the world. Further, they create conditions that impact the child's psychobiological basis for self-awareness and self-regulation of emotions³⁰. Adult "empathic brains" are thus a foundation for the healthy development of a child.

5. Empathic parenting as a basic of religious experience

The quality of parent-child relationships, especially their emotional aspect, plays an important role with regard to the experiencing of God and one's relationship with God. Early psychological development and relationships strongly impact our subconscious as well as later religious experiencing as an adult. That is, our relationship with our parents forms the earliest basis for our subsequent intrapsychic image of God, building and establishing an intimate relationship with Him. Empathic parenting, as the formative model for all later relationships, also provides the model for connection that a child will later follow in her or his adult relationship with God³¹. Relational theories argue and prove that the intrapsychic image of self, as well as the self and intrapsychic images of God, are essentially constructed in the human context

²⁹ A. N. Schore, *Affect regulation and the repair of the self*, New York 2003, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 18–19.

³⁰ L. K. Kompan Erzar, *Odkritje odnosa*, Ljubljana 2001, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut, p. 99.

³¹ A. Belford Ulanov, *Finding Space*, Louisville 2001, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 17–22.

and in the family environment³². This occurs either by means of loving and caring relationships, or through cruel and limiting relationships with parents. The child's perception of relationships provides the basic material from which a child builds an image of self and others. While these images are first constituted on the basis of the relationship with parents, they result with the child's creation of an inner, intrapsychic divine image. This develops much earlier in children than that which is available from the institutional aspect of religion. The process of creating an intrapsychic image of God and relation with Him includes observation of, and especially a deep inner experiencing of, love and transcendence in the relationship between parents as well as the parent-child relationship³³. A child's sense of God, and her or his intrapsychic image of God, are thus both – in a very complex way – connected with the child's parents and their relationships³⁴.

A child's first experience of love is through parental empathic responsiveness. And where there is love, no matter how human and flawed, there is always a path to God. *Ubi caritas Deus ibi* – where there is love, there is God³⁵. The compassionate and empathic relationship is the space that reflects the love that is from God and is God. Parental love – which is compassion, empathy, and compassion in responding to a child's needs – is therefore a reflection of God's love. Through empathy, a family becomes a place of love and salvation³⁶.

Bibliography

Baron-Cohen S., *The essential difference: The truth about male and female brain*, New York 2003, Basic Books.

Belford Ulanov A., *Finding Space*, Louisville 2001, Westminster John Knox Press.

Clark A. J., *Empathy in counseling and psychotherapy*, New Jersey 2007, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

³² N. Rijavec Klobučar, *The role of spirituality in transition to parenthood: Qualitative research using transformative learning theory*, "Journal of religion and health" (2015), published online (in press).

³³ A. M. Rizzutto, *The Birth of the Living God*, Chicago 1979, The University of Chicago Press, p. 180–201.

³⁴ B. Simonič, T. Rahne Mandelj, R. Novšak, *Religious-related abuse in the family*, "Journal of Family Violence" 28 (2013) 4, p. 347.

³⁵ M. I. Rupnik, *Reči človek: Oseba, kultura velike noči*, Koper 2001, Ognjišče, p. 89.

³⁶ B. Simonič, A. Poljanec, *Starševstvo kot prostor razvoja empatije pri otroku (Parenthood as the Place for Developing the Empathy of a Child)*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 72 (2012) 1, p. 113–122.

- Feshbach N. D., *Empathy: The formative years: Implications for clinical practice*, in: A. C. Bohart, L. S. Greenberg (eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy*, Washington 1997, American Psychological Association, p. 33–59.
- Feshbach N. D., *The construct of empathy and the phenomenon of physical maltreatment of children*, in: D. Cicchetti, V. Carlson (eds.), *Child maltreatment*, Cambridge 1989, Cambridge University Press, p. 349–373.
- Feshbach N. D., *Parental empathy and child adjustment/maladjustment*, in: N. Eisenberg, J. Strayer (eds.), *Empathy and its development*, Cambridge 1987, Cambridge University Press, p. 271–291.
- Flanagan O., *Consciousness reconsidered*, Cambridge 1992, A Bradford Book, The Mit Press.
- Gostečnik C., *Inovativna relacijska družinska terapija*, Ljubljana 2011, Brat Frančišek, Teološka fakulteta in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut.
- Gostečnik C., *Sodobna psihoanaliza*, Ljubljana 2002, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut.
- Guttman H. A., *Empathy in families of women with borderline personality disorder, anorexia nervosa, and a control group*, "Family Process" 39 (2000) 3, p. 345–358.
- Kohut H., *How does analysis cure?*, Chicago 1984, The University of Chicago Press.
- Kompan Erzar L. K., *Odkritje odnosa*, Ljubljana 2001, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut.
- Kompan Erzar K., Poljanec A., *Rahločutnost do otrok*, Ljubljana 2009, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut.
- Murray L., *Contributions of experimental and clinical perturbations of mother-infant communication to the understanding of infant intersubjectivity*, in S. Bråten (ed.), *Intersubjective communication and emotion in early ontogeny*, New York 1998, Cambridge University Press, p. 127–143.
- O'Hara M., *Relational empathy: Beyond modernist egocentrism to postmodern holistic contextualism*, in: A. C. Bohart, L. S. Greenberg (eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy*, Washington 1997, American Psychological Association, p. 295–320.
- Rijavec Klobučar N., *The role of spirituality in transition to parenthood: Qualitative research using transformative learning theory*, "Journal of religion and health" (2015), published online (in press).
- Rizzutto A. M., *The Birth of the Living God*, Chicago 1979, The University of Chicago Press.
- Rupnik M. I., *Reči človek: Oseba, kultura velike noči*, Koper 2001, Ognjišče.
- Schore A. N., *Affect regulation and the repair of the self*, New York 2003, W. W. Norton & Company.
- Simonič B., *Empatija*, Ljubljana 2010, Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut.
- Simonič B., Poljanec A., *Starševstvo kot prostor razvoja empatije pri otroku (Parenthood as the Place for Developing the Empathy of a Child)*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 72 (2012) 1, p. 113–122.
- Simonič B., Rahne Mandelj T., Novšak R., *Religious-related abuse in the family*, "Journal of Family Violence" 28 (2013) 4, p. 339–349.
- Stern D. N., *The interpersonal world of the infant*, New York 1985, Basic Books.
- Stolorow R. D., Brandchaft B., Atwood G. E., *Psychoanalytic treatment: An intersubjective approach*, Hillsdale 1987, The Analytic Press.

Thompson E., *Empathy and consciousness*, “Journal Of Consciousness Studies” 8 (2001) 5, p. 1–32.

Winnicott D. W., *Playing and Reality*, London 1971, Routledge.

Zahn-Waxler C., *The development of empathy, guilt, and internalization of distress*, in: R. J. Davidson (ed.), *Anxiety, depression, and emotion*, New York 2002, Oxford University Press, p. 222–265.