|  |
| --- |
| **Theorizing empathy as the root of health promotion practice** |
| **Background/Objectives**Health promotion as a field employs diverse psychological and social theory in practice, yet its own theoretical underpinnings remain ill-defined (McQueen & Kickbusch, 2007). The objective of this paper is to explore the construct of empathy as a potential theoretical underpinning of health promotion practice.**Methods**A discourse analysis of key health promotion texts will explore how empathy manifests in health promotion practice at diverse social ecological levels (McLeroy et al.); intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and political. Key texts will include the charters and declarations resulting from the WHO conferences on Health Promotion, and the contents of foundational textbooks such as ‘Health Promotion in Canada’ (Rootman et al., 2017).**Results**Preliminary analysis demonstrates that the construct of empathy is embodied in the foundational health promotion texts of the last three decades as both an outcome and a method of ethical and effective health promotion practice. Notably, empathy appears to be both practiced and produced through participatory methodologies, regardless of the level of intervention, ranging from individual-level clinical health behaviour change, to community-organizing approaches and political action. Reciprocal empathy emerged as an antecedent to creating a more relational and transformative health promotion practice. **Discussion**Empathy ought to be considered a foundational concept in health promotion practice, both as an outcome and as a method. Intentionally fostering empathy in and of itself may be an important and effective target for health promotion practice, toward a more relational, ethical and just approach to tackling ‘health for all’. It will be argued that empathy can be fostered through various participatory methodologies, at diverse social ecological levels.**Keywords**Empathy, health promotion practice, participatory practice. |