

# Conférences scientifiques du CRIR

Centre de recherche  
interdisciplinaire  
en réadaptation  
du Montréal métropolitain

## Clinical empathy: Why should we care?

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**Jacqueline Peters** received an Honours BA in Linguistics from Concordia University, a MA in Linguistics from the University of Toronto and is a Doctoral candidate in Linguistics at York University. Her doctoral dissertation, "Feeling heard: The discourse of empathy in medical interactions", is a qualitative study on empathy in medical interactions.

Her research has been funded by a Master's SSHRC and a Doctoral SSHRC. She has previously examined identity construction of non-European immigrants living in Montreal and young people of Caribbean descent in Toronto, and has presented her work at numerous international linguistic conferences.

Her publications are "Black English in Toronto": A New Dialect? (Co-authored with Laura Baxter) Conference Proceedings of Methods in Dialectology 14. 201, and "(Be)coming Jamaican": (Re)Constructing an Ethno-Cultural Identity." In Identity through a Language Lens. Kamila Ciepiela (ed). Lodz Studies in Language (23). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Wien: Peter Lang Publishing House. 2011, 109-118pp.

In this paper I examine the role of empathy in audio-recorded interactions between clinicians and their patients at a rehabilitation centre in Montreal. The clinicians are physical and occupational therapists and the clients are all middle-aged women with chronic diseases who have been working or dealing with medical professionals for most of their lives. The encounters I examine take place during their initial interviews, that is, the first meeting between client and clinician. I explore how empathy is co-constructed by these participants, first in terms of the ways clients create "empathic opportunities" (Suchman et al. 1997) and second, in terms of the practices by which clinicians respond (or do not respond) to these "windows of opportunity" (Branch and Malick 1993). Preliminary results of my analysis show that in most cases of a client's affective display the clinicians use the occasion to provide empathic feedback while remaining within the boundaries of the institution's specific mandates to expand on pertinent medical history and assess the client's achievable goals as well as general institutional goals of remaining an impartial participant. This study extends previous research on empathy in clinical settings by considering the particular practices clinicians use that lead these clients to report feeling that they "had been heard" (in post-encounter interviews); providing a better understanding of the specific practices through which practitioners can display empathy, which, in turn, can lead to more positive outcomes in healthcare.



**Le lundi 16 avril 2018**

12h00 à 13h00

**CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-  
de-l'Île-de-Montréal**

**Centre de réadaptation Constance-  
Lethbridge**

Salle Edith-Strauss A (1-112)  
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