Fiction and Social Cognition

Professor: Dr. Jennifer Barnes, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Professional Writing

Email Address: jbarnes@ou.edu

Project Description: Understanding the minds of others is fundamental to social functioning, and a failure to attribute complex and fully human minds to out-group members can dehumanize them and lay the groundwork for discrimination, prejudice, and bias. Prior research in my lab suggests that fiction may serve as practice at imagining the rich, internal lives of others. This project will extend this work by exploring the effect of reading novels and watching popular television shows on a variety of measures involving moral judgment, our beliefs about relationships, the confidence with which we read other people, our understanding of other people as individuals with complex internal lives, and the degree to which we extend that understanding to people whose race, gender, or religion differ from our own.

Student Responsibilities: The student will participate in all aspects of research, including stimuli selection and creation, experimental design, conducting relevant literature reviews, running studies, coding data, and helping to communicate the results to the public. No prior psychology background is needed, but a passion for fiction is a must! Creative writing skills and experience with social media are a plus, and students with an interest in the publishing or film industries and/or media representation of race and gender are especially encouraged to apply.