

Empathy and Emotion Regulation: Training complementary skills for well-being

Compassion in Action Webinar Series

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Moderator



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Audience Reminders

- This webinar is funded in part by a donation in memory of Julian and Eunice Cohen.
- You may submit a question by typing it into the Question and Answer pane at the right of your screen at any time.
- Please respond to audience polls by clicking on the answer of your choice.
- We value your feedback! Please complete our electronic survey following the webinar.

Host



Beth Lown, MD
Medical Director

The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare

September 8-10, 2019

THE
**COMPASSION
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the schwartz center
FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

Today's Speaker



Tammi Kral, MS

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Overview

- What is empathy?
- Measuring empathy
- Learning empathy
- Mindfulness meditation for emotion regulation
- Complementary approach to empathic well-being



What is empathy?

Underlying processes & neural bases

Empathy

- The ability to understand others' emotions
- May be first step in altruistic behavior
- Associated with less bullying and internalizing symptoms in teens

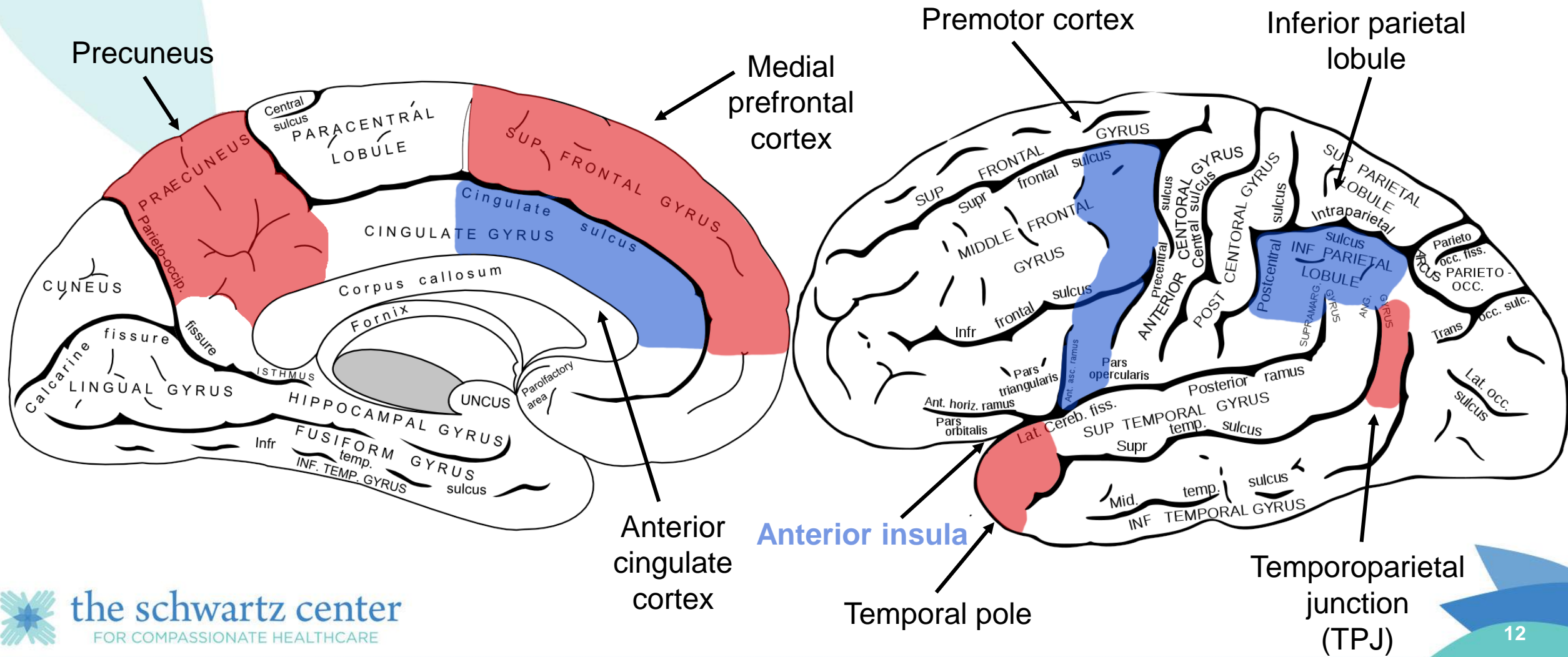
Empathy & Patient Care

- Empathic care associated with improvements in:
 - Outcomes
 - Satisfaction
 - Adherence to treatment
 - Professional satisfaction (physician)
- Can also relate to provider burnout
- For summary see:
Decety & Fotopoulou, *Front Behav Neurosci*, 2015

Psychological Processes

- Perspective Taking
 - “cognitive empathy”
 - *thinking*
- Experience Sharing
 - “affective empathy”
 - *feeling*

Neural bases of perspective taking & experience sharing



Polling Question 1:

In general, what do you feel when empathizing with others?

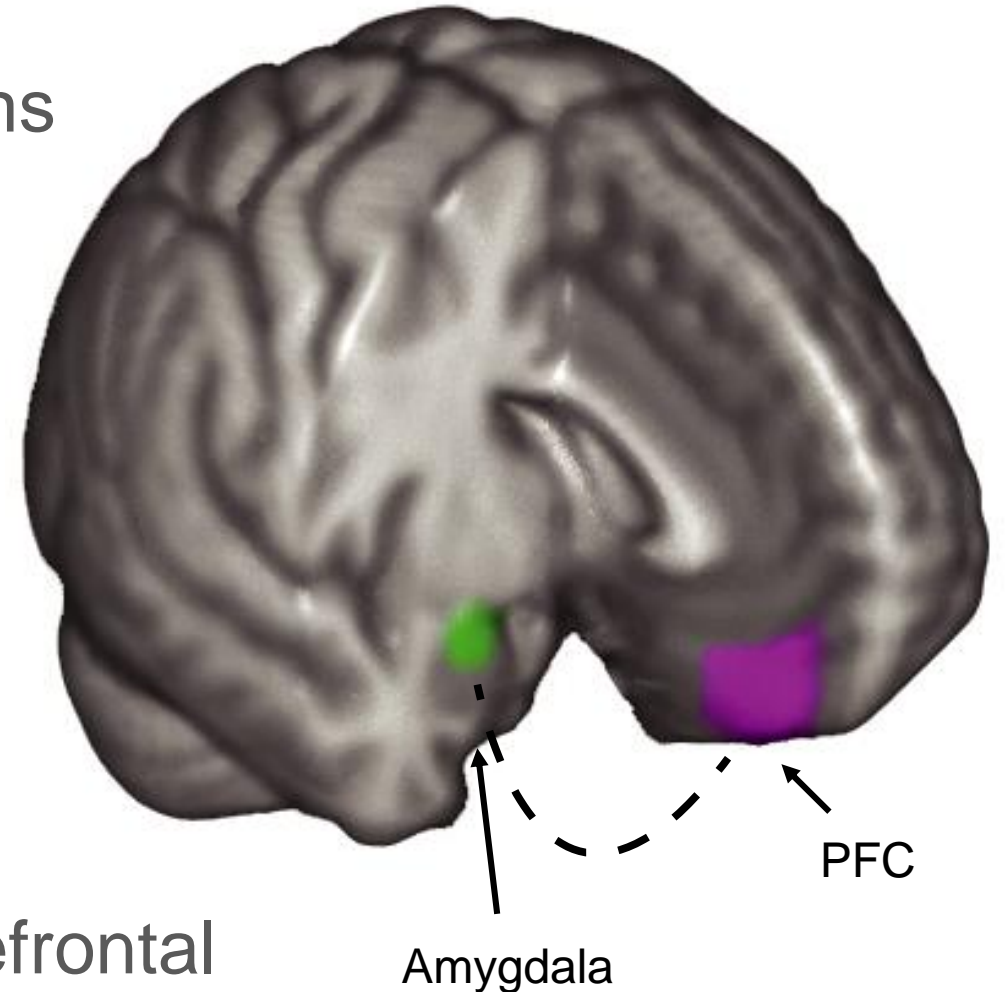
- A. warmth, compassion**
- B. stress**
- C. sadness**
- D. a combination**
- E. none of the above**

Empathic Response

- Empathic Concern
 - Other-focused
 - Associated with altruism
- Empathic Distress
 - Self-focused
 - Necessitates emotion regulation

Emotion Regulation

- The ability to alter one's emotions
- Explicit strategies
 - Cognitive reappraisal / reframing
 - Suppression of response
- Implicit (e.g. automatic) forms
 - Extinction learning
- Supported by amygdala and prefrontal cortex (PFC)



Polling Question 2:

Have you learned any strategies to regulate your emotions?

- A. cognitive reframing / reappraisal**
- B. mindfulness-based stress reduction**
- C. compassion meditation**
- D. acceptance**
- E. other strategy**



Measuring empathy

The importance of accuracy

Empathic Accuracy

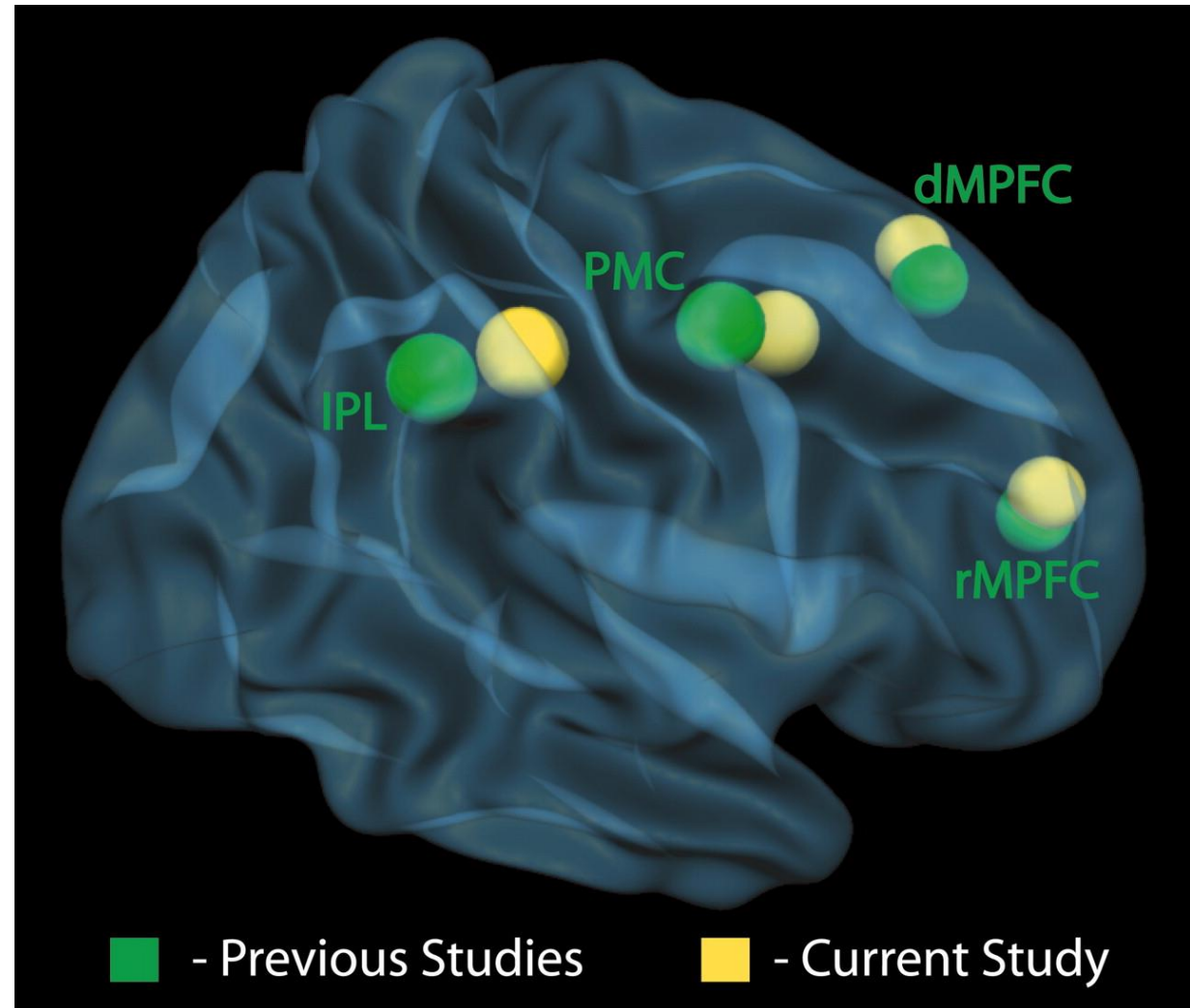
- Naturalistic, behavioral measure
- Opportunities for perspective taking (narratives) & experience sharing (emotionally expressive faces)

A. TARGET PROCEDURE



Neural bases of empathic accuracy

Supported by brain regions underlying perspective taking & experience sharing in adults.



Zaki, J., Weber, J., Bolger, N., Ochsner, K., 2009. The neural bases of empathic accuracy. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U. S. A.* 106, 11382–11387. doi:10.1073/pnas.0902666106

Example Video: Empathic Accuracy Task

Neural bases of empathic accuracy in teens

PERSPECTIVE
TAKING
NETWORK

EXPERIENCE
SHARING
NETWORK

Kral et al., SCAN,
2017



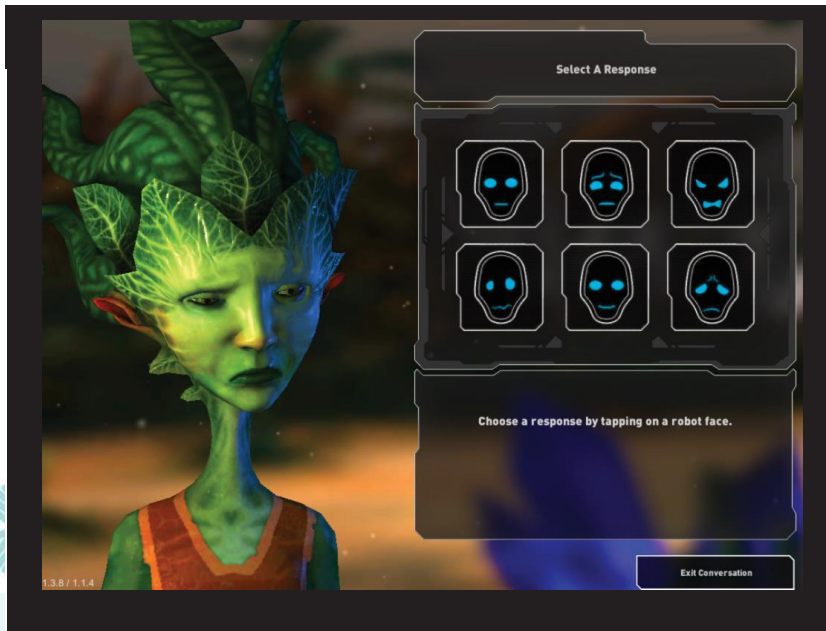
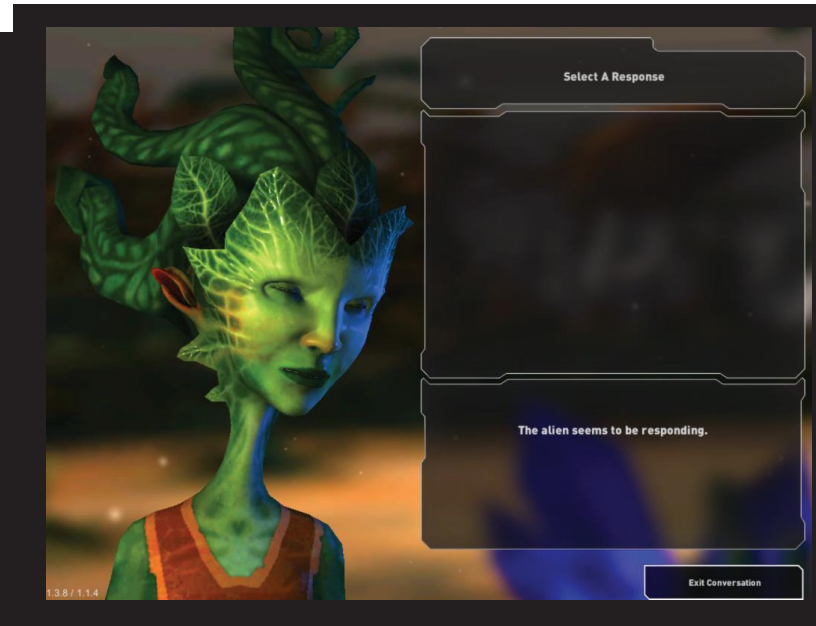
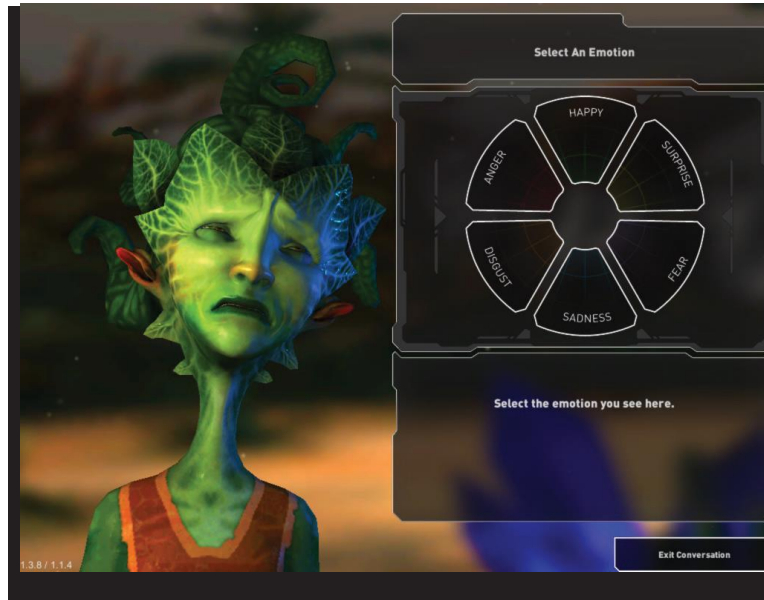
Experience sharing in teens

- Activation of experience sharing brain networks associated with lower empathic accuracy
- Experience sharing can easily lead to empathic distress, especially when regulation is lacking
- Teens have difficulty with emotion regulation
- Empathic distress without regulation may hinder ability to empathize (accurately)

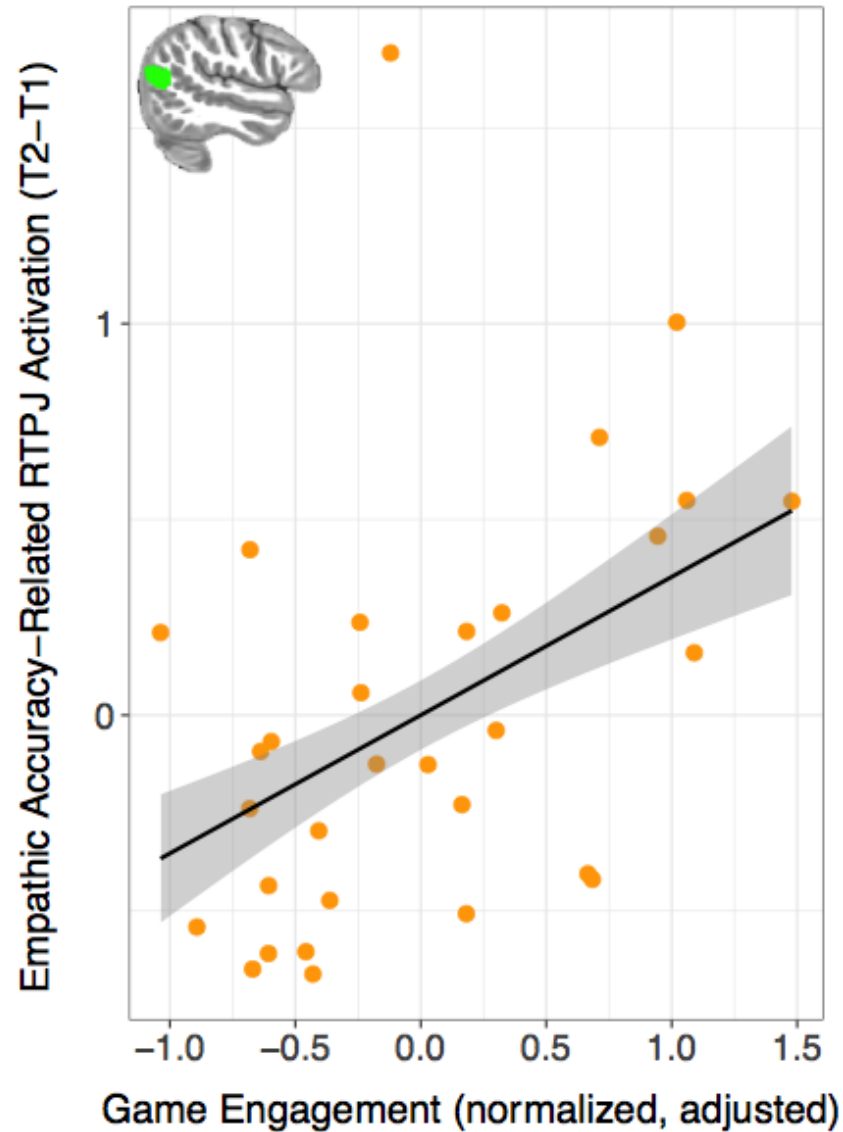
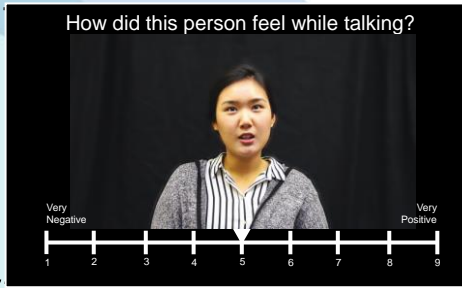


Learning empathy

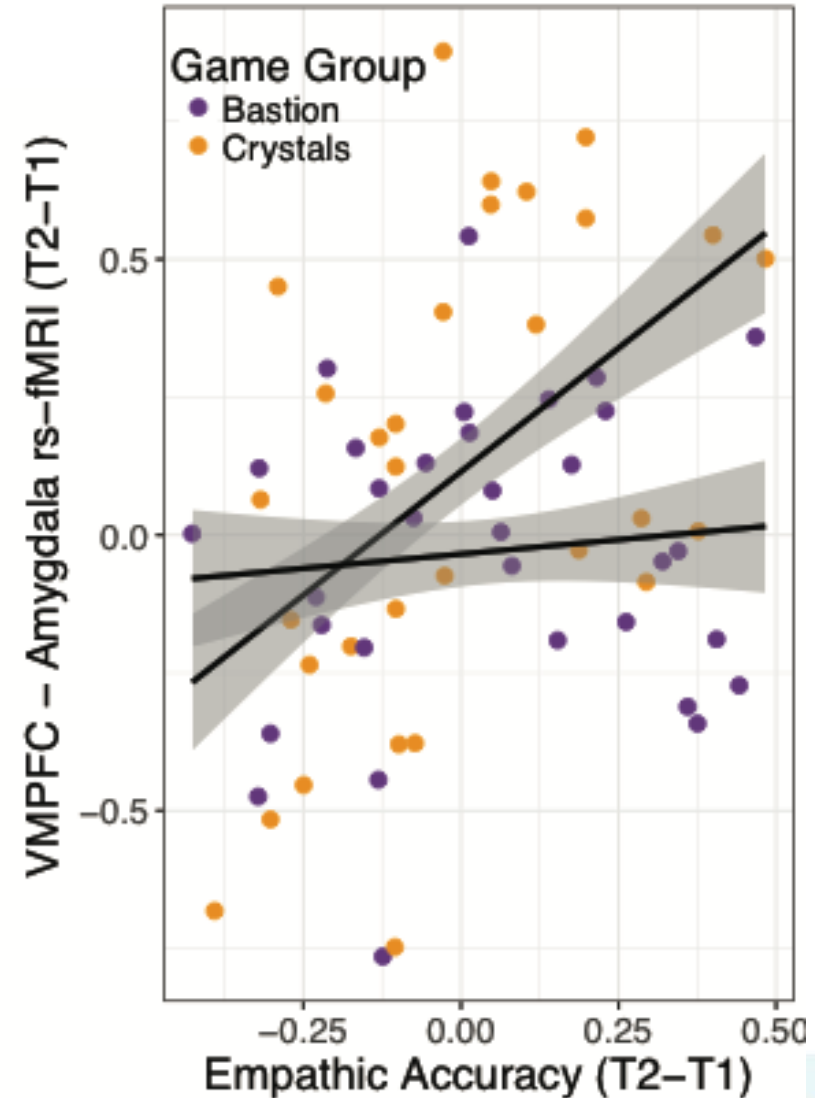
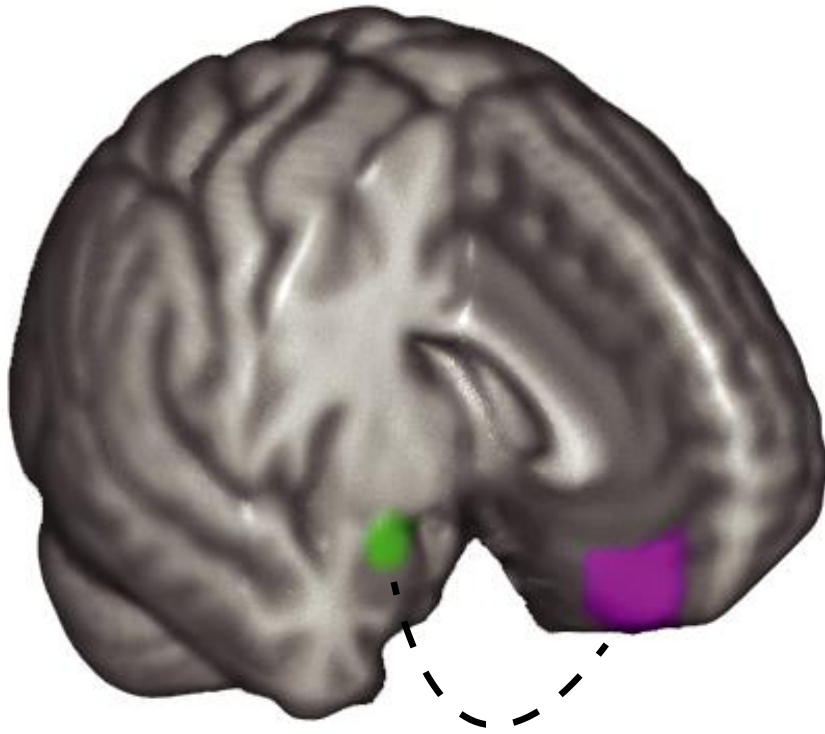
Video game training



Empathic Accuracy-Related Changes



Empathic Accuracy-related Changes in Connectivity of Emotion Regulation Brain Network





Mindfulness Meditation

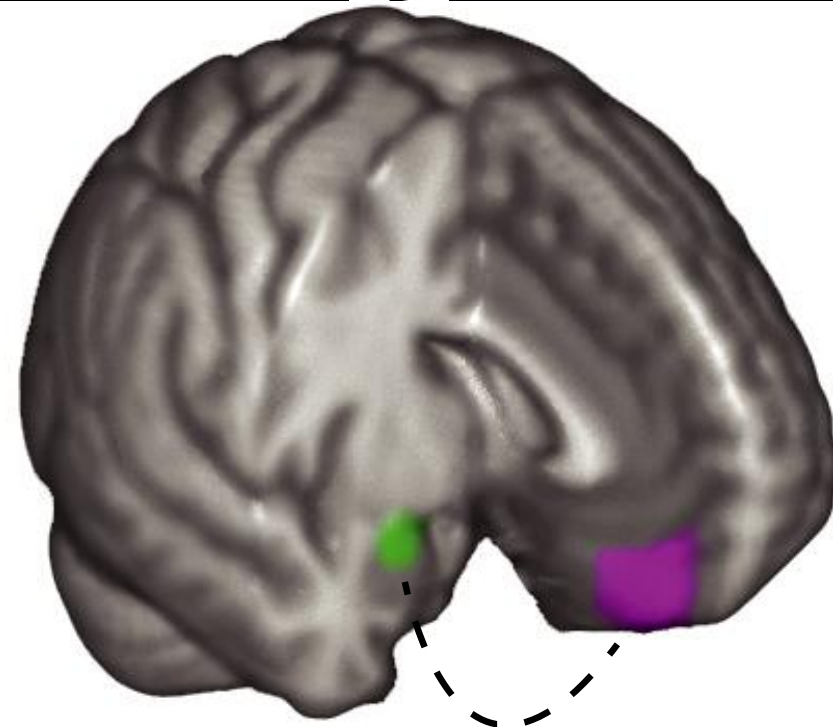
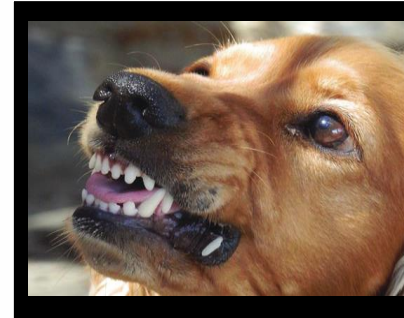
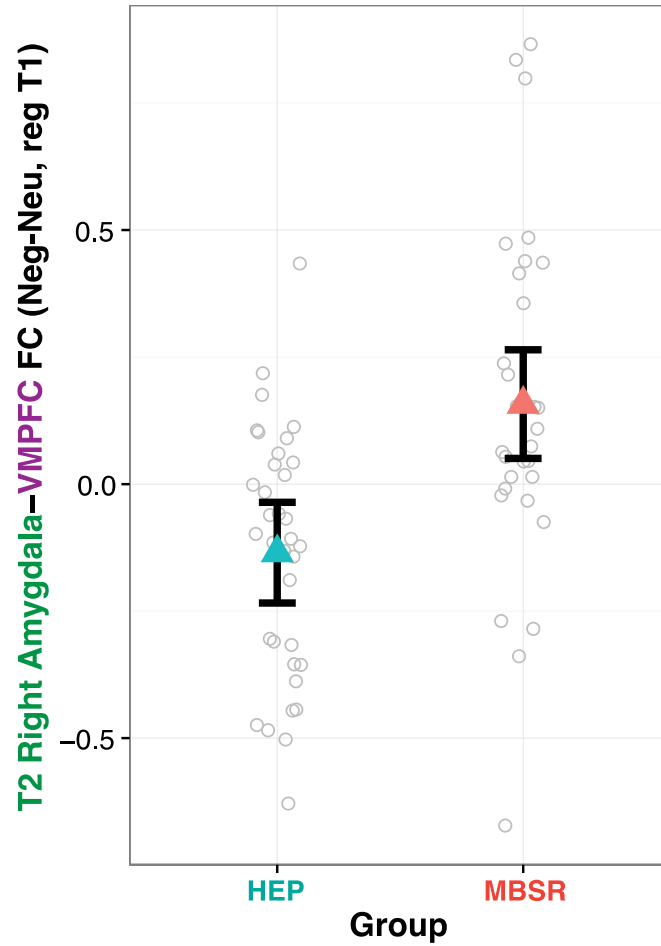
Training to improve emotion regulation

Mindfulness meditation to improve emotion regulation

- Attention focused on present-moment experience without avoiding negative or clinging to positive feelings
- Practice seeing thoughts as temporary, impersonal
- Improves anxiety, depression, mood and emotion regulation

Mindfulness Training Increased Amygdala

Connectivity for Negative Pictures





Empathic well-being

A complementary approach

Combined training in empathy & emotion regulation

- Improved emotion regulation through mindfulness meditation could mitigate empathic distress
- Regulating emotions increases empathic concern
(Decety & Fotopoulou, *Front Behav Neurosci*, 2015)
- Initial evidence a mindfulness-based intervention for physicians may improve empathy while lowering burnout
(Krasner, *et al*, *JAMA*, 2009)
- May be particularly useful in helping professions to avoid burnout, improve well-being & outcomes

Thank YOU!

Richard Davidson
Jeanette Mumford
Brianna Schuyler
Rick Solis
Melissa Rosenkranz
Constance Steinkuehler
Steven Loria
Nate Vack
Mike Beall
Diane Bussan
Rasmus Birn
Antoine Lutz

Lisa Flook
Elena Patsenko
Craig Anderson
Michael Anderle
Robin Goldman
Dan Grupe
Ron Fisher
Jeanne Harris
Chris Harty
Lisa Angelos
Abigail Freeman
Andy Schoen
Cory Burghy



Reza Farajian
Nagesh Adluru
Steve Kecskemeti
Sasha Sommerfeldt David
Perlman
Daniel Levinson
Shannon Harris
Greg Vaughn
John Binzak
Kurt Squire
Allison Salmon

*And a big thanks to all of our participants & their families!

Questions & Answers



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Type your questions in the Questions Pane on your screen at any time.

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today's session.**

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