

SOCIAL EMPATHY



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Social Empathy:

Using Interpersonal Skills
to Effect Change



What is Social Empathy?

- **Social empathy is the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities.**

- (Segal, 2007; 2011)

Why do we need social empathy?

- **Increased understanding of social and economic inequalities can lead to social and economic justice and societal well-being.**
- (Loeb, 1999; Hoffman, 2000, 2011)



Social Empathy.....



- Offers a model for how we can help people think about and act in ways that are in the best interest of others
- Helps us to see how we can achieve social justice
- Can serve as an educational model to help policy makers and members of society make decisions that are grounded in the experiences of those who will be impacted by the policy
- Can effect change

What's wrong with this picture????

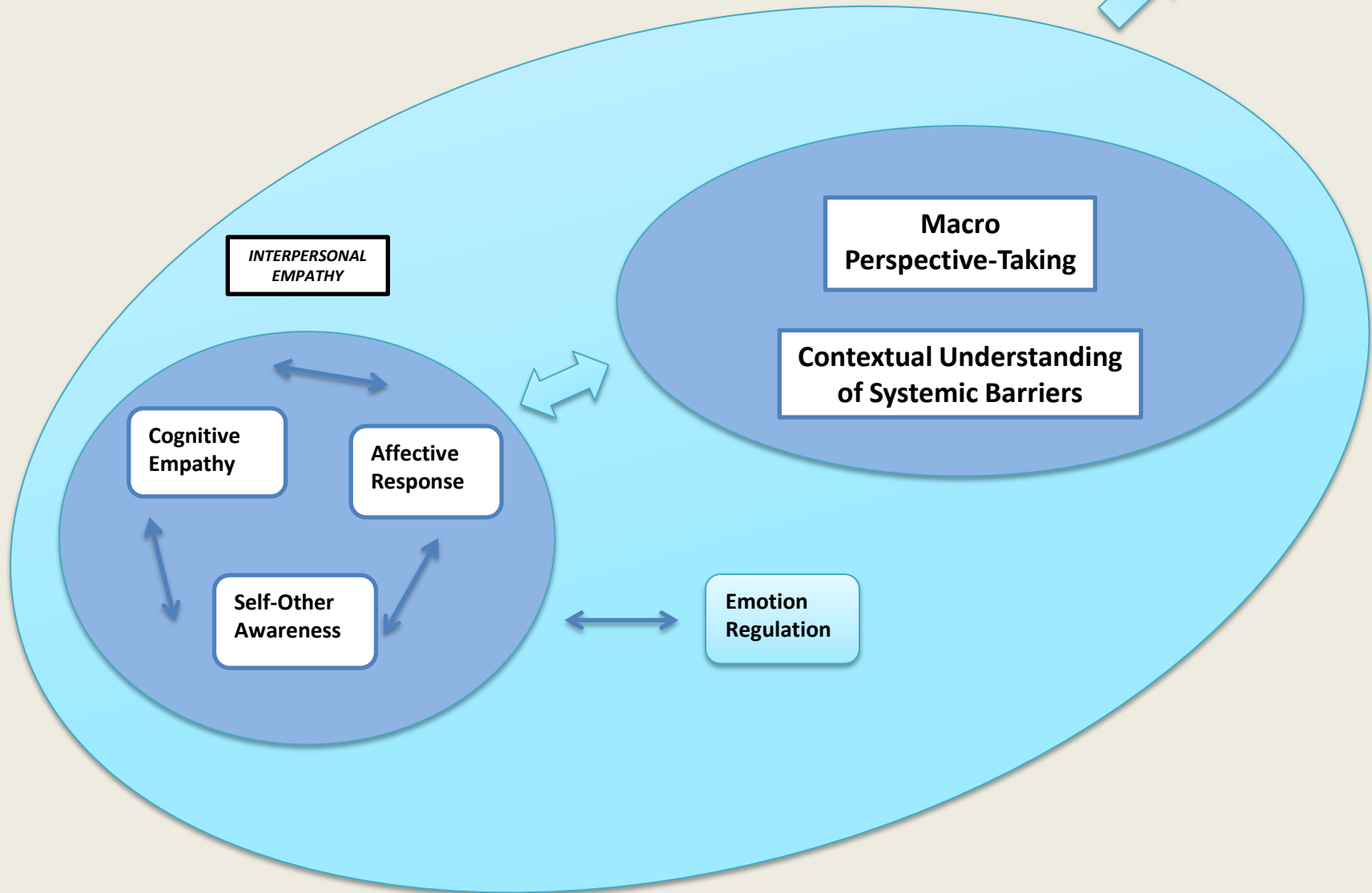


WHY DO WE NEED TO PROMOTE SOCIAL EMPATHY?

**Because people need help to
understand how we are
connected across groups and
social policies**

SOCIAL EMPATHY

SOCIAL JUSTICE



What do we know about interpersonal empathy?

- **Empathy is the ability to understand what other people are feeling and thinking – essential skill for navigating personal relationships** (de Waal, 2009)
- **Critical for survival – requires accurate perception, interpretation and response to signals of others**
(Preston & de Waal, 2002)
- **Important for development of healthy relationships** (Toussaint & Webb, 2005)
- **Foundation for moral development** (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2009)

What else do we know about interpersonal empathy?

- **Absence of empathy can lead to destructive behaviors:**
 - **Bullying** (Gini, et al, 2008)
 - **Violent crime** (Joliffe & Farrington, 2004)
 - **Abusive parenting** (Joliffe & Farrington, 2004)
 - **Spousal battering** (Covell, et al, 2007)
 - **Sexual offending** (Elsegood & Duff, 2010)
 - **Narcissism** (Ritter, et al, 2011)

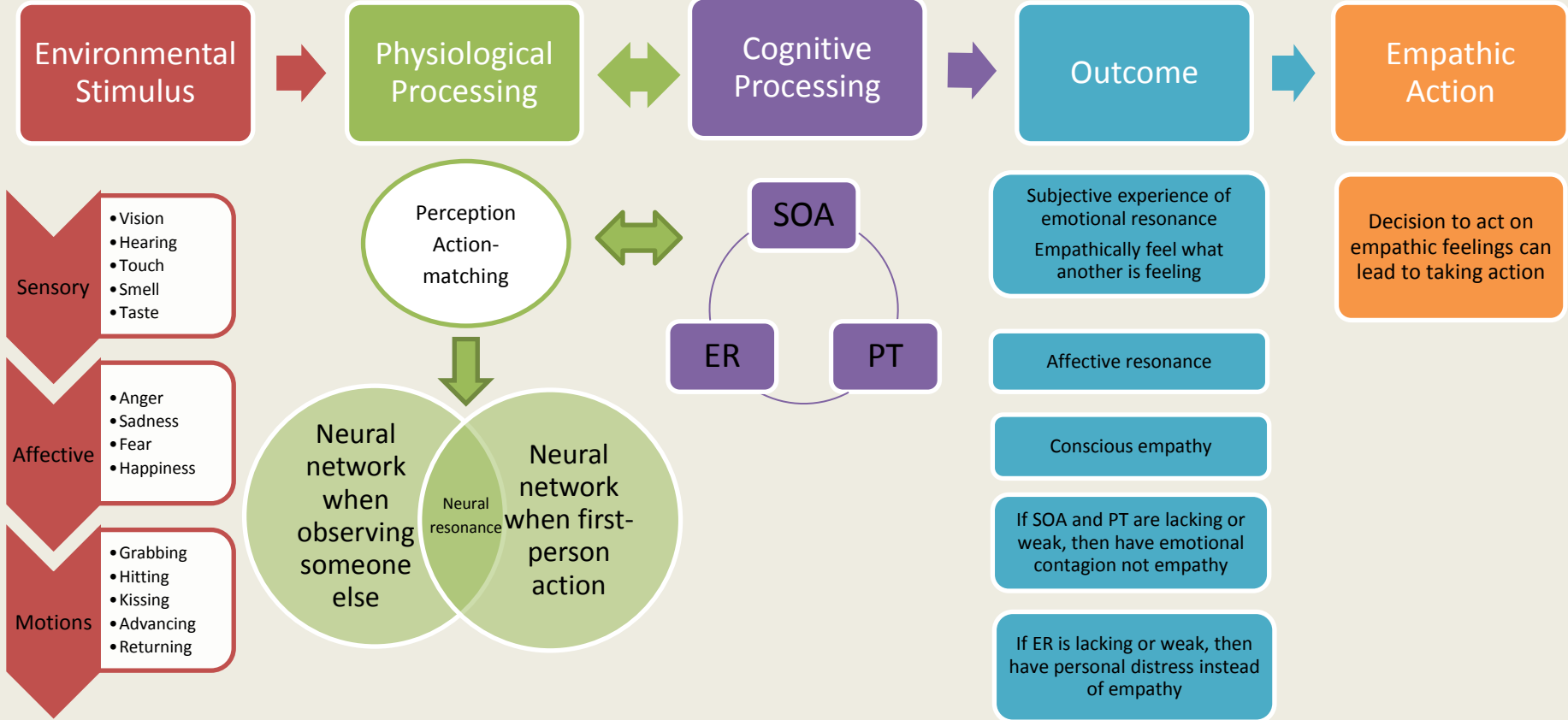


Two “forms” of empathy

AFFECTIVE EMPATHY

Neural networks in our brain activated when we feel, experience, hear, smell or move in a way that overlaps with the neural networks that are activated when we observe someone else experiencing those same things (mirroring)

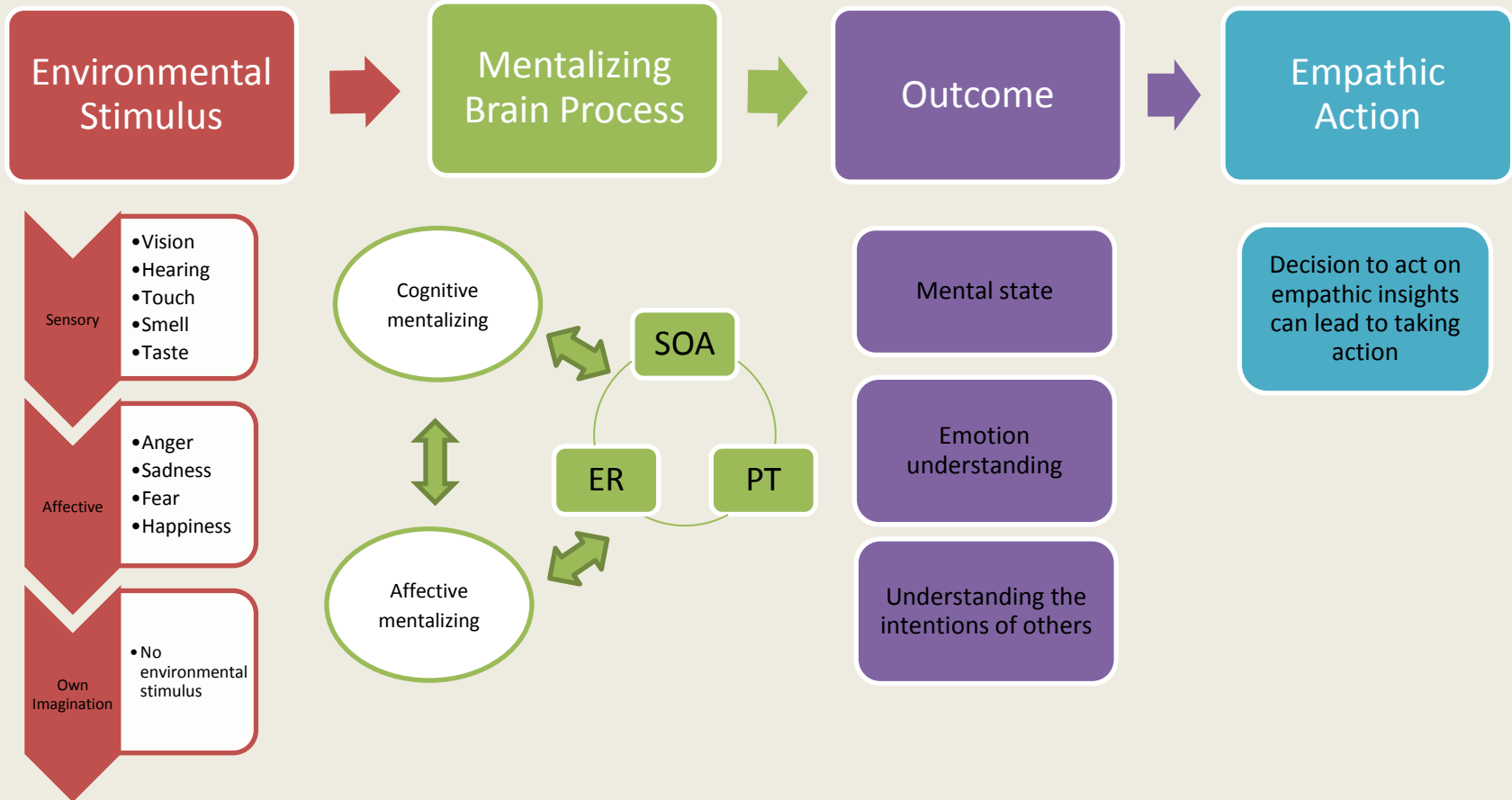
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY



COGNITIVE EMPATHY

- **Cognitive processing abilities of self-other awareness, perspective-taking and emotion regulation that result in the inductive (thinking) process to help explain affective empathy**

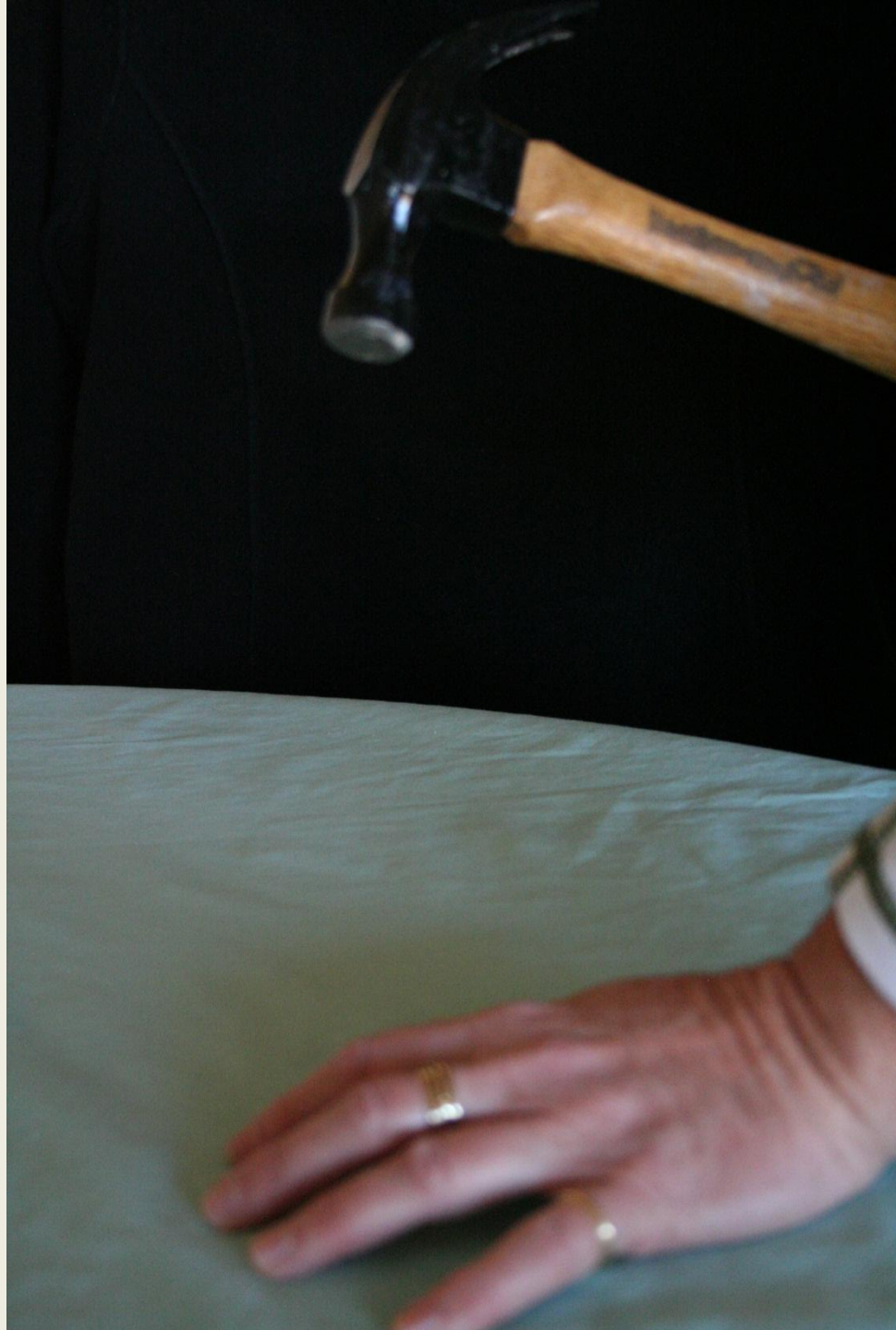
COGNITIVE EMPATHY



Together, affective and cognitive empathy create the full array of interpersonal empathy

- When both occur, feels simultaneous, yet are distinctly different neurologically
- One is physiological and unconscious – affective
- Other can be brought to conscious level - cognitive



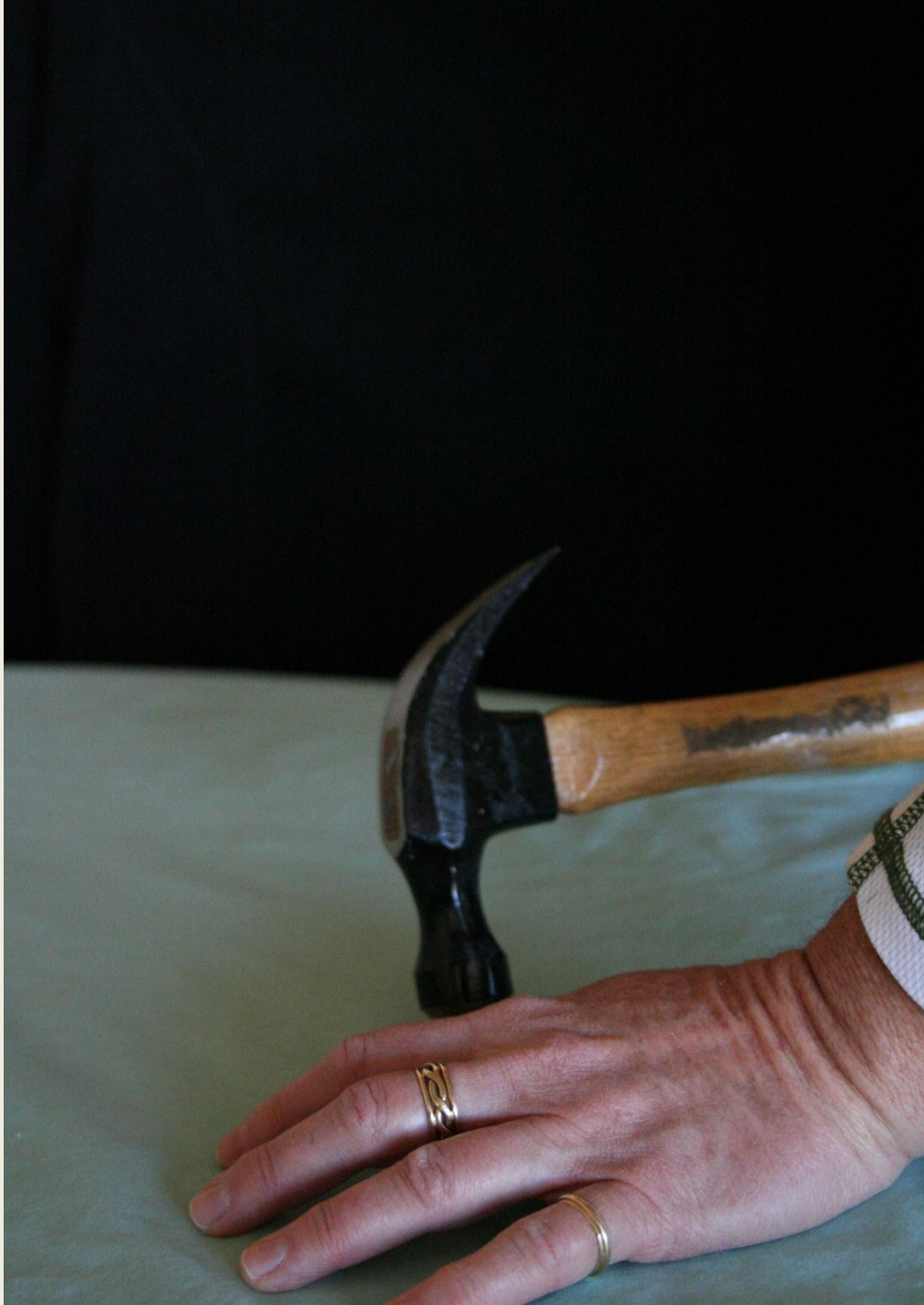












What did you feel? How did you feel?

- Did you have a momentary physical response?
- Could you imagine yourself hitting your thumb with a hammer?
- What memories of pain were brought to mind?
- You were having an affective response and possibly a moment of affective mentalizing

VACATION.....



**What thoughts came to your
mind?**

Did you feel anything?

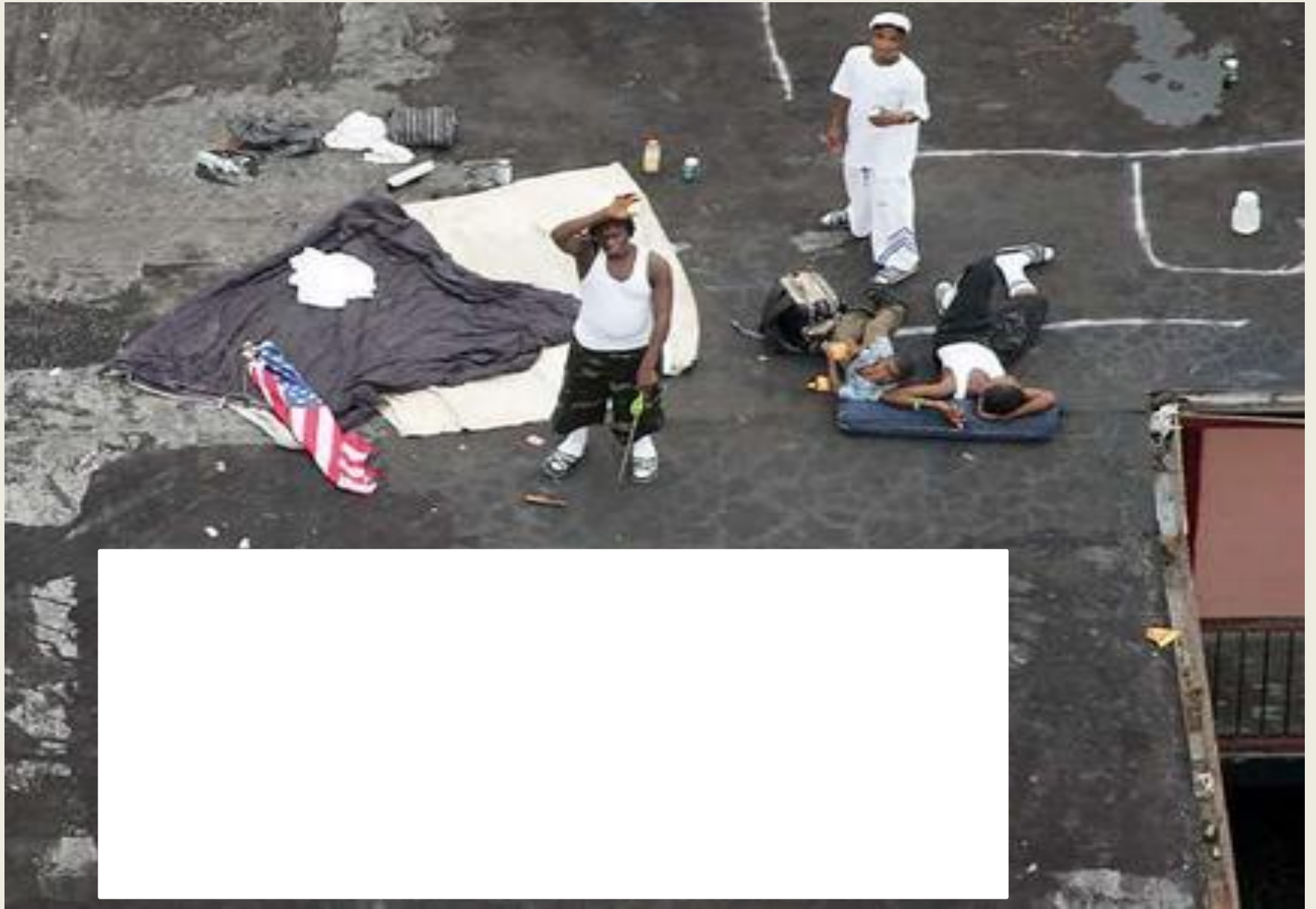
- **Affective response**
- **Affective mentalizing**



Leeches



The FDA has approved medical leeches for modern wound therapy







PLEASE
HELP US!

- PEOPLE
1 - DOG
1 - CAT

Seeing the pictures?

What physical feelings did you have?

What thoughts came to your mind?

- Affective Response
- Affective Mentalizing
- Self-Other Awareness
- Micro and Macro Perspective-Taking
- Contextual Understanding
- **Together = Social Empathy**

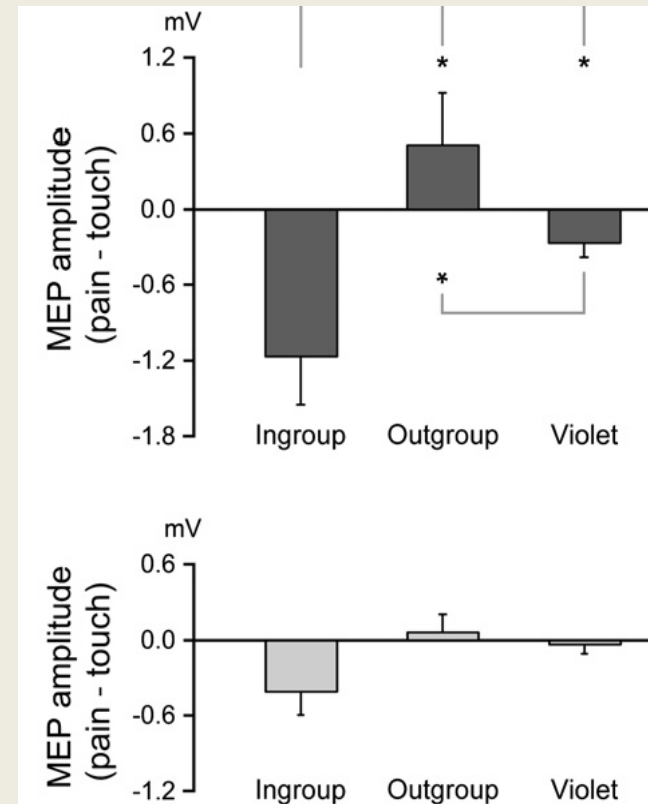
Social Empathy as a pathway to social change

We need social empathy because:

- **Lacking a deep understanding of others can lead to scapegoating, distrust, and in extreme cases destruction of other cultures** (Glick, 2008)
- **Levels of empathy are neurally different for people who are different - ingroup vs. outgroup or “us vs. them”**
(Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012)
- **Racism is related to lack of empathy** (Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti, 2010)

Racial bias impacts empathy

- Empathic emotional reactions are more immediate and resonant for same-race members



- Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti, (2010)

From Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti, (2010), p. 1021

- **Differential pain and empathic brain responses to ingroup and outgroup pain are linked to implicit racial bias**
- Additional testing of those who scored high on tests of racial bias showed greater dissonance (lack of empathy)
- “the basic reactivity of human beings implies empathy with the pain of stranger individuals. This reactivity may be maximal when the perceived similarity with the model is high (ingroup model) but is also present for very unfamiliar others if no stereotype can be applied to them (violet-hand model).”

• **Neural evidence of empathy gap**

(Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012)

- People do not vicariously feel outgroup members' emotional and motivational states
- The more prejudiced, less likely to intuitively catch emotive states of outgroup members
- Failure to share states with out group members means less responsiveness to outgroup members' needs, less likely to help or understand what support is needed.

What do we know about empathy across groups?

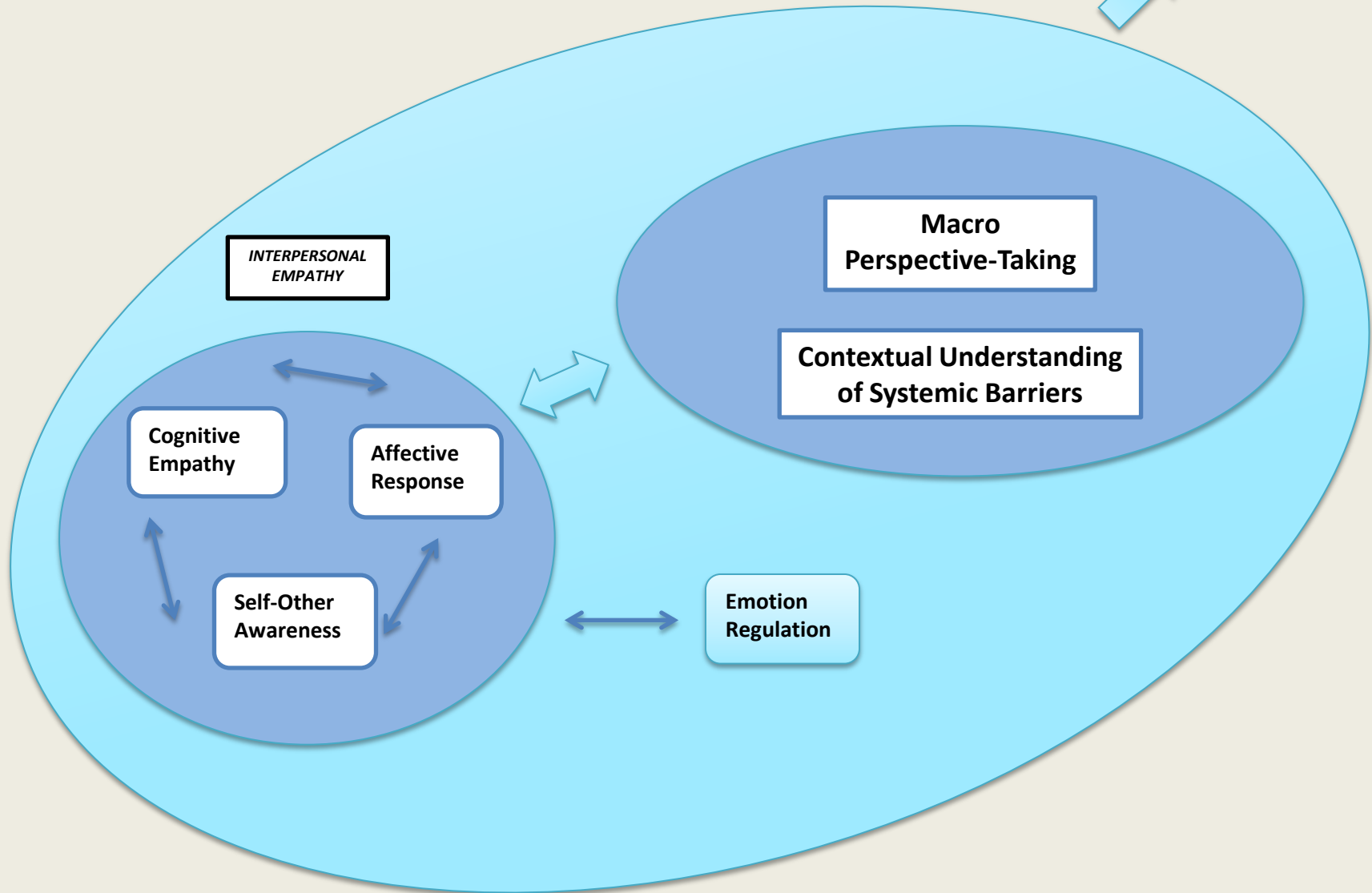
- Greater inclusion of others into ingroup can create stronger feelings of connectedness (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012)
- Macro perspective-taking can improve social relations by decreasing prejudice and stereotyping (Galinsky, Ku & Wang, 2005; Van Bavel & Cunnigham, 2009)
- Accurate empathic insight into other people's lives is often followed by a sense of social responsibility (Frank, 2001)
- “An empathic perspective would lead one to take the welfare of others into account” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 230)

When we use perspective-taking skills with an understanding of context, we can begin to think about ways to take action that will improve social conditions.

This is social empathy

SOCIAL EMPATHY

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Measuring Social Empathy

- **Development of the Interpersonal and Social Empathy Index**
- **Includes items from two ongoing validation studies, one to create the Empathy Assessment Index (EAI) and another to assess Social Empathy**

What is the EAI?

- **The Empathy Assessment Index (EAI) was developed to update current measures of empathy to reflect recent neuroscience research, which documents that observable brain activity can be linked to specified components of empathy**
 - (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Decety, 2010).
- **The EAI was developed over two years through a series of applications conducted to improve upon the psychometric properties of the EAI measure**
 - (Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011; Lietz, Gerdes, Sun, Geiger, Wagaman, & Segal, 2011)

What are the social empathy components?

- **Two key ingredients influence social empathy beyond the development of interpersonal empathy:**
 - **Insight into the contextual environment, with particular understanding of systemic barriers to health and well-being**
 - **The ability to take the perspective of other groups and imagine what it is like to live as a member of those other groups**

The Interpersonal and Social Empathy Index components

- **a) Affective Response (AR)**
- **b) Affective Mentalizing (AM)**
- **c) Self-Other Awareness (SOA)**
- **d) Micro Perspective-Taking (PT)**
- **e) Emotion Regulation (ER)**
- **f) Contextual Understanding (CU)**
- **g) Macro Perspective-Taking (MPT)**

a) affective response

- the brain includes neurological pathways that are capable of physiologically simulating the experiences of others. Often referred to as “mirroring” in the literature, this ability is unconscious, automatic and involuntary. For example, if a person starts crying in front of you, even if you do not understand why, you too will feel like crying. Affective response can run through all types of emotions (happy, sad) as well as physical sensations (feeling pain when watching another person being physically hurt). Humans appear to be hard-wired to mimic one another, setting the stage for experientially connecting to another person.

b) affective mentalizing

- not all physiological reactions or mirroring come from the actual viewing of an event or experience. Often we are exposed to stories or explanations of events, and as we are hearing the information, our mind develops a picture of the events. This allows us to develop perceptions of another's experiences. It may also trigger an affective or physiological response. When this occurs, we are "mentalizing" or imagining the event and potentially experiencing it as if it is happening to us as well.

(c) self-other awareness

- once the affective response occurs, we need to recognize the difference between the experiences of another person from our own. We may feel like crying (as in the example above) but it is the other person's experience and not our own. This moves empathic response into a cognitive or conscious arena.

(d) micro perspective-taking

- assuming that one successfully mirrors and then processes the affective response to understand that it belongs to the other person, it becomes possible to cognitively process what it might be like to personally experience the experiences of another. This is what we commonly refer to as “stepping into the shoes of another.”

(e) emotion regulation

- the last interpersonal component helps us to move through these affective and cognitive processes without becoming overwhelmed or swept up into someone else's emotions. This is the ability to sense another's feelings without becoming overwhelmed by the intensity of their experience.

What do the SEI components mean?

f) contextual understanding of systemic barriers

- insight into the social, political, and economic conditions that impact people's life opportunities

g) macro perspective-taking

- the ability to recognize the difference between the experiences of other groups from our own social, cultural, political and economic experiences, and take the next step and try and understand the perspectives of other groups.

The Current Study

- **We examined components of empathy, social empathy, and demographic variables.**
- **We wanted to examine the relationship between interpersonal empathy and social empathy**
- **It was hypothesized that high measures of social empathy would be correlated with high levels of individual empathy.**

It was further hypothesized that

- **High individual empathy does not necessarily lead to high social empathy**
- **But that social empathy is likely to require the foundation of interpersonal empathy**

Sample

- 450 participants
- 66% female 34% male
- Mean age of 23 years
- 16% were Latino, 52% were Caucasian, 8% were Asian, 8% were Middle Eastern, 8% were multi racial, 5% were African American, and 2% American Indian
- Family of Origin SES: 8% poor, 20% working class, 42% middle class, 26% upper middle/wealthy, 4% no response



Methods

- **Online survey with 450 university students in Fall of 2012**
- **38-item instrument (6 point Likert scale) with focus on 5 social empathy and 10 interpersonal empathy items following exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses**

The Interpersonal and Social Empathy Index (ISEI)

MPT	Q1	I take action to help others even if it does not personally benefit me.
	Q2	I am comfortable helping a person of a different race or ethnicity than my own.
	Q3	I feel it is important to understand the political perspectives of people I don't agree with.
	Q4	I believe that people who face discrimination have added stress that negatively impacts their lives.
	Q5	I believe government should protect the rights of minorities.
COG	Q6	I can consider my point of view and another person's point of view at the same time.
	Q7	I am good at understanding other people's emotions.
	Q8	When I see a person experiencing a strong emotion I can accurately assess what that person is feeling.
	Q9	I can tell the difference between someone else's feelings and my own.
SOA	Q10	I am aware of what other people think of me.
	Q11	I am aware of other people's emotions.
	Q12	I can explain to others how I am feeling.
AR	Q13	When I see someone receive a gift that makes them happy, I feel happy myself.
	Q14	When I am with someone who gets sad news, I feel sad for a moment too.
	Q15	Hearing laughter makes me smile.

Three Class Model –

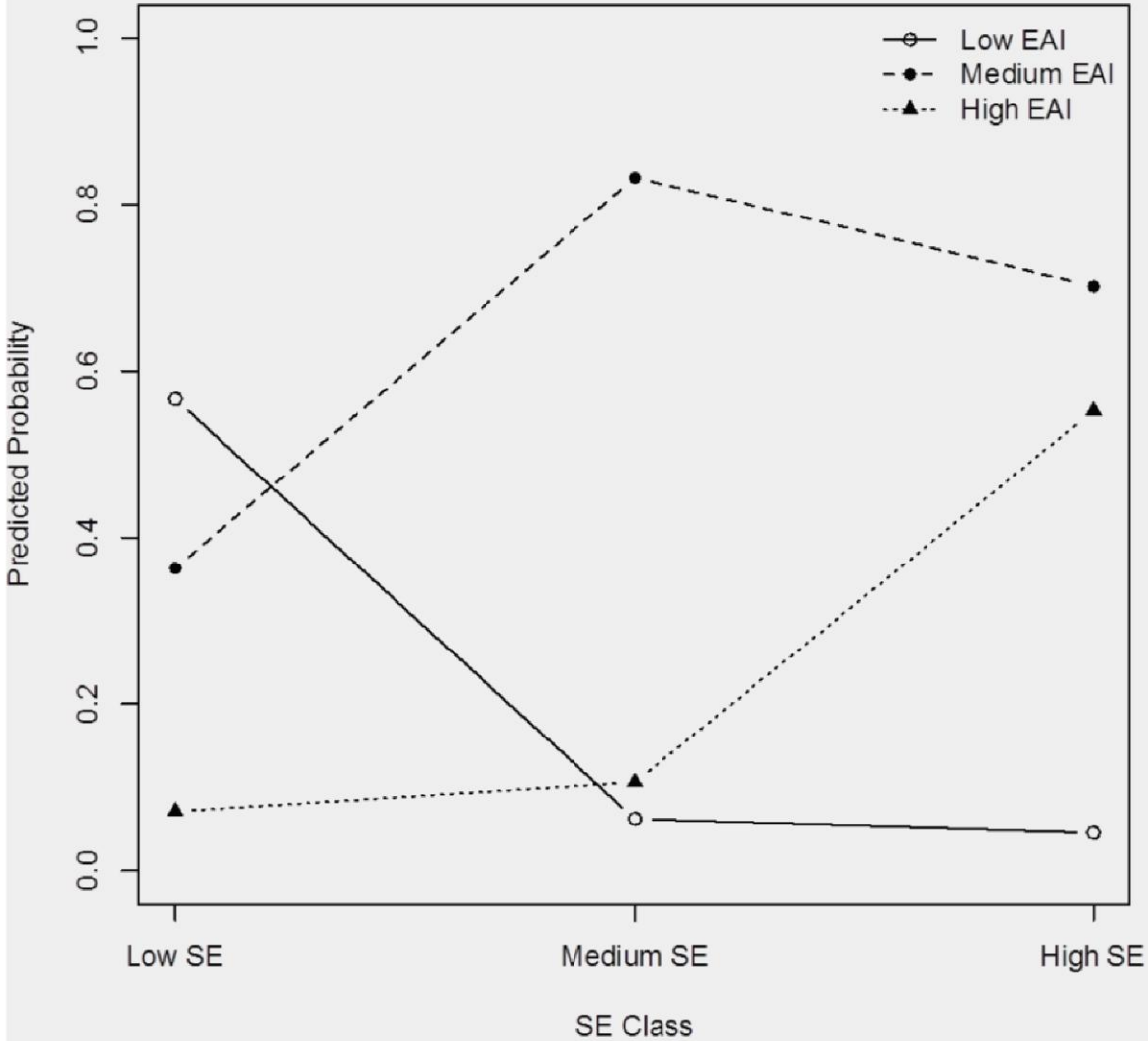
Nine categories

- High SE, high IE
- High SE, medium IE
- High SE, low IE
- Low SE, low IE
- Low SE, medium IE
- Low SE, high IE
- Medium SE, medium IE
- Medium SE, high IE
- Medium SE, low IE

Distribution of sample

		Interpersonal empathy		
		L	M	H
SE	L	23.5%	8.2%	1.3%
	M	4.7%	25.3%	4.2%
	H	4.5%	12.2%	16.0%

Predicted Probabilities by SE Class



Key Findings

- **High levels of social empathy are accompanied by high levels of interpersonal empathy**
- **Low levels of social empathy are accompanied by low levels of interpersonal empathy**

What does this tell us?

- **Without interpersonal empathy, it is unlikely to have social empathy**
- **In order to build social empathy, we likely need to first build interpersonal empathy**
- **With understanding of the components, we can identify which components of interpersonal and social empathy need development and design interventions to promote each component**

Building Social Empathy

Level 1 – Exposure

Visit new places and people who are different from you

Who is different from me?

How are they different?

How do we describe those differences?

Level 2 – Explanation

Strive to understand why we are different

What history, culture, geography, ancestry contribute to our differences?

What is the impact of those differences today?

Level 3 – Experience

Imagine yourself as a person of a different class, sex, ability, age, sexual identity, race or national origin.

What would your life be like if you were different?

What opportunities would you have or would you miss?

How would you be treated?

Limitations

- **Sample – college students, majority female and white.**
- **Likely to be economically above average**
- **Self-report**
- **Potential for social desirability**

What's Next?

- **Identify ways to teach empathy to build foundations for social empathy**
- **Develop techniques to improve contextual understanding and macro perspective-taking to in turn teach social empathy**
- **Distribution and use of assessment tools to help measure changes in interpersonal and social empathy levels (EAI, SEI, and ISEI)**

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Thank you

Empathy Assessment Index (EAI)

- 1) When I see someone receive a gift that makes them happy, I feel happy myself. [AR]
- 2) Emotional stability describes me well. [REG]
- 3) I am good at understanding other people's emotions. [AM]
- 4) I can consider my point of view and another person's point of view at the same time. [PT]
- 5) When I get angry, I need a lot of time to get over it. [REG] R
- 6) I can imagine what the character is feeling in a good movie. [PT]
- 7) When I see someone being publicly embarrassed, I cringe a little. [AR]
- 8) I can tell the difference between someone else's feelings and my own. [SOA]
- 9) When I see a person experiencing a strong emotion I can accurately assess what that person is feeling. [AM]
- 10) Friends view me as a moody person. [REG] R
- 11) When I see someone accidentally hit his or her thumb with a hammer, I feel a flash of pain myself. [AR]
- 12) When I see a person experiencing a strong emotion, I can describe what the person is feeling to someone else. [AM]
- 13) I can imagine what it's like to be in someone else's shoes [PT]
- 14) I can tell the difference between my friend's feelings and my own. [SOA]
- 15) I consider other people's points of view in discussions. [PT]
- 16) When I am with someone who gets sad news, I feel sad for a moment too. [AR]
- 17) When I am upset or unhappy, I get over it quickly. [REG]
- 18) I can explain to others how I am feeling. [SOA]
- 19) I can agree to disagree with other people. [PT]
- 20) I am aware of what other people think of me. [SOA]
- 21) Hearing laughter makes me smile. [AR]
- 22) I am aware of other people's emotions. [AM]

Social Empathy Index items – added to EAI items

- 23) I believe adults who are poor deserve social assistance. [CU]
- 24) I confront discrimination when I see it. [MSP]
- 25) I think the government needs to be a part of leveling the playing field for people from different racial groups. [CU]
- 26) I believe it is necessary to participate in community service. [MSP]
- 27) I believe that people who face discrimination have added stress that negatively impacts their lives. [CU]
- 28) I am comfortable helping a person of a different race or ethnicity than my own. [MSP]
- 29) I take action to help others even if it does not personally benefit me. [MSP]
- 30) I can best understand people who are different from me by learning from them directly. [MSP]
- 31) I believe government should protect the rights of minorities. [CU]
- 32) I believe that each of us should participate in political activities. [MSP]
- 33) I believe people born into poverty have more barriers to achieving economic well-being than people who were not Born into poverty. [CU]
- 34) I feel it is important to understand the political perspectives of people I don't agree with. [MSP]
- 35) I think it is the right of all citizens to have their basic needs met. [CU]
- 36) I believe the role of government is to act as a referee, making decisions that promote the quality of life and well-being of the people. [CU]
- 37) I have an interest in understanding why people are poor. [MSP]
- 38) I believe that by working together, people can change society to be more just and fair for everyone. [CU]
- 39) I believe my actions will affect future generations. [MSP]
- 40) I believe there are barriers in the United States' educational system that prevent some groups of people from having economic success. [CU]

What is the ISEI?

- **The Interpersonal and Social Empathy Index (ISEI) was developed to identify and measure the concept of social empathy (Segal, 2011).**
- **The ISEI was developed through a series of applications conducted to improve upon the psychometric properties of the measure (Segal, Cimino, Gerdes & Wagaman, under review).**
- **It includes items from the EAI and was validated based on the methods used to validate the EAI (Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011; Lietz, Gerdes, Sun, Geiger, Wagaman, & Segal, 2011).**

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