

The background is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this are numerous thin, white, curved lines that flow from the left side towards the right, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are most concentrated in the center and right, where they form a large, rounded shape that resembles a wave or a mountain peak. The lines are more sparse on the left side.

EMPATHY & COMPASSION

LEARN WHAT MATTERS – SEPT 2022



THIS IS
UGANDA'S
UGLIEST
MAN



- This is Godfrey Baguma.
- He suffers from Fibrous Dysplasia.
- Godfrey Baguma is also known as "Ssebabi" which means "the ugliest of all".
- He used to work as a cobbler.
- He has fathered eight children



- Godfrey was born in his hometown Uganda, as a single child. After his birth, his mother left him after saying that he wasn't a normal child. He was cared for by his grandmother.
- At 10 years old he noticed unusual swelling in his cheek. Over the years as his symptoms worsened, he found it difficult to mix with others.
- He mended shoes to make a living. At 27, he was approached by people who asked him to pose for photos to be entered in a competition. He agreed and won a contest for "the ugliest man in the world".
- Fibrous Dysplasia is a disease where muscles and connective tissue (eg ligaments, tendons, etc) become bone over time, trapping a person in his/her own body. The inflammation and swelling of soft tissue are often painful as they transform soft tissue into bone.
- In time, ossification of muscles around the lungs occurs. Spinal deformities also develop, causing twisting of the body. Patients often find it hard to breathe and move around later in life.
- The disease does not pass on to children because the gene mutation occurs after conception.

EMPATHY



- Neuroscience language - activate your own insula to identify your own emotions in that situation, in order to connect
- Challenges – alexithymia, etc
- Neurotransmitters - oxytocin and vasopressin can generate aggression and antagonism on behalf of 'victims'¹
- Empathy is different from agreement, and need not replace discernment²



COMPASSION DESCRIBED ³

Defined as a sympathetic consciousness of another's distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

Merriam Webster



1. **Affect** – generating feelings, activating prosocial motivation (also known as the care system) which floods the brain with opioids and dopamine

2. **Perspective** - cognitive ability to assume an observational perspective of another person's thoughts, while being aware of your own
- also known as 'cognitive defusion' in psychological jargon

3. **Presence** - the ability to stabilize the mind, to perform introspection/ interoception, and focus on what is happening in the present moment

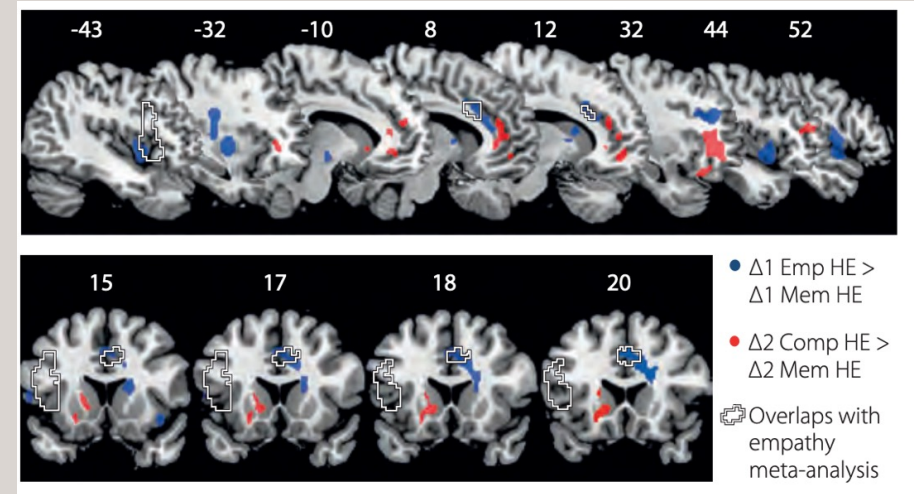
SPRINGER'S RESEARCH USING FMRI ⁴

- Neural activation in the anterior insula and anterior medial cingulate cortex
- 'Empathy-for-pain' studies show the same results irrespective of whether the other person is close or known to us
- Compassion found to be different from empathy, thanks to a monk!



TRAINING EFFECTS

- Same piece of research also showed that empathy and negative affect both increase after empathy training
- This implies that if one feels empathy continuously, it may lead to fatigue and burn-out



Blue regions light up after empathy training (similar to 'empathy-for-pain' meta-analysis)
Red regions light up after compassion training

- Conversely, compassion training decreased negative affect and increased positive affect
- Seems to reside in a different network in the brain - the care seeking network, which include dopamine, a pleasure seeking chemical

INSIGHTS

- There are some limits to how much/ long we can direct empathy toward others, as negative feelings can build up over time. Compassion, on the other hand, seems to be limitless (i.e. we can generate more with practice) and it makes us feel better, not worse, the more we practice it
- Both are important. It doesn't mean that empathy is bad and compassion is good. Learning the differences between them can help you decide when to use each one



References

1. Empathy, Target Distress, and Neurohormone Genes Interact to Predict Aggression for Others—Even Without Provocation (2014), Buffone & Poulin, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0146167214549320>
2. The Empathic Christian Counsellor: Skilled Helpers Influencing Client Action by Jan Hook and George Ohlschlager, Competent Christian Counselling for the 21st Century(2002) American Association of Christian Counsellors, Yates & Yates LLP, California USA, P 207
3. Compassion – Bridging Practice and Science”, Singer & Boiz, p334
4. Research Report 2012/2013 from the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences (Leipzig)