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A Future Without Violence: Lessons from the Science of Compassion

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Dacher Keltner

University of California, Berkeley

keltner@berkeley.edu

greatergood.berkeley.edu

Violence is inevitable, it is human nature

- *FREUDIAN MIND: The very emphasis of the commandment: Thou shalt not kill, makes it certain that we are descended from an endlessly long chain of generations of murderers, whose love of murder was in their blood as it is perhaps also in ours.* Sigmund Freud
- *LIBERTARIANISM: If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of altruism that men have to reject.* Ayn Rand
- *POLITICAL THEORY: Of mankind we may say in general they are fickle, hypocritical, and greedy of gain.*
- Machiavelli
- *EVOLUTIONARY SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST: The natural world is "grossly immoral". Natural selection "can honestly be described as a process for maximizing short sighted selfishness"* George Williams
- *MORAL THEORY: Sympathy as a good natured emotion is always blind and weak.* Immanuel Kant

We are a changeable species

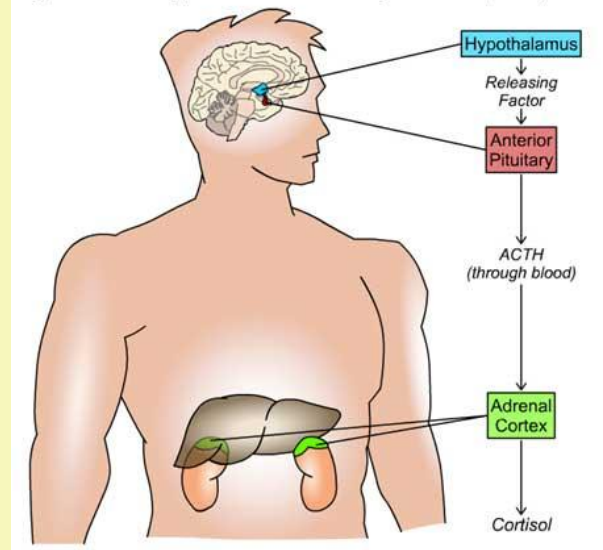
- Aggression-related genes need abuse to trigger aggression
 - 85% of males with defective MAOA gene who were abused engage in antisocial behavior
 - 28% of males with defective MAOA gene who were not abused engage in antisocial behavior

Social causes of violence and the Hypothalamic Pituitary Adrenal (HPA) axis

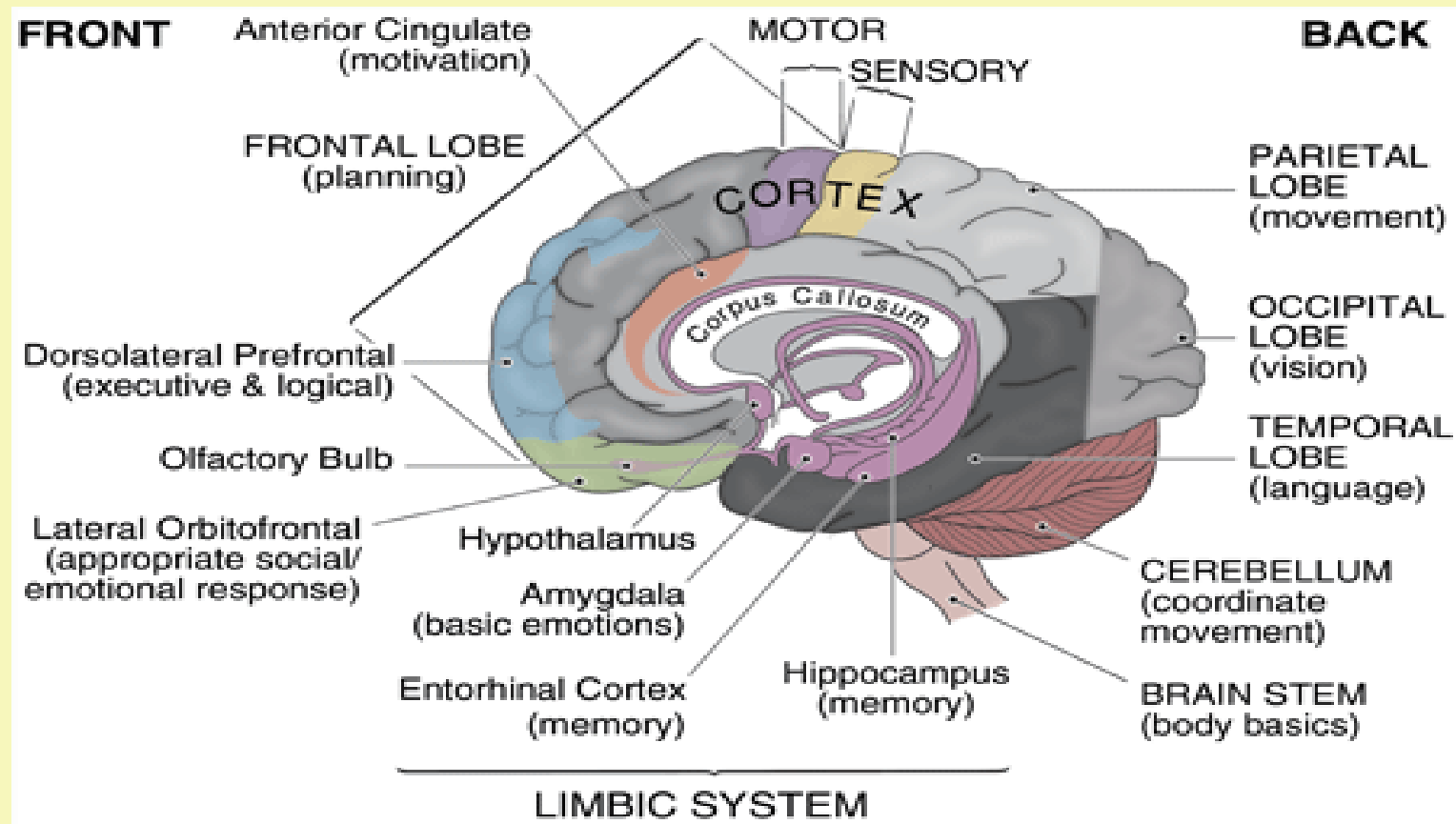
- Chronic stress:
 - Lack of control
 - Disempowerment
 - Social exclusion
 - immune system compromise, ulcers, damage to DNA, damage to brain cells, shortened lives in response to disease



Figure AN-1: Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis



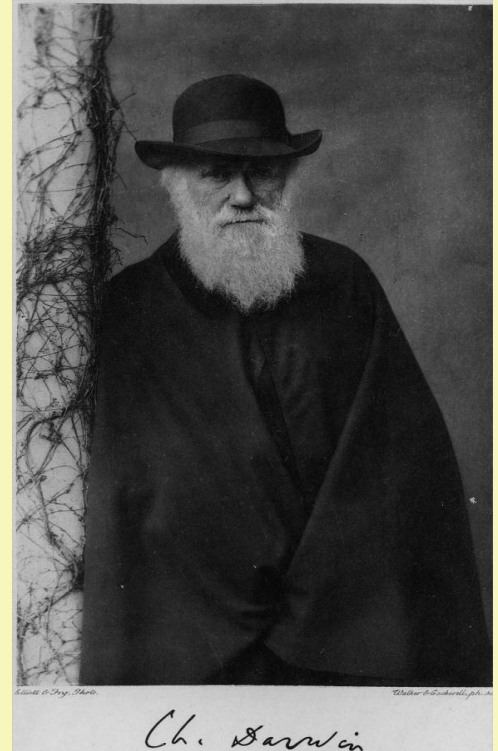
Social pain = Physical Pain (Naomi Eisenberger)



Darwin: Survival of the Kindest

Darwin argued that sympathy “will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring”.

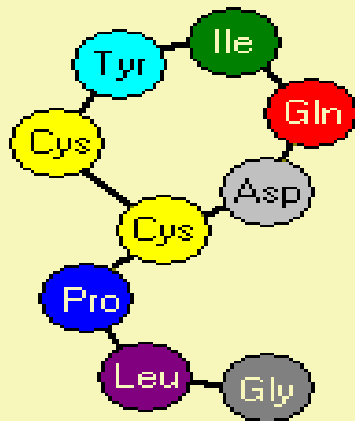
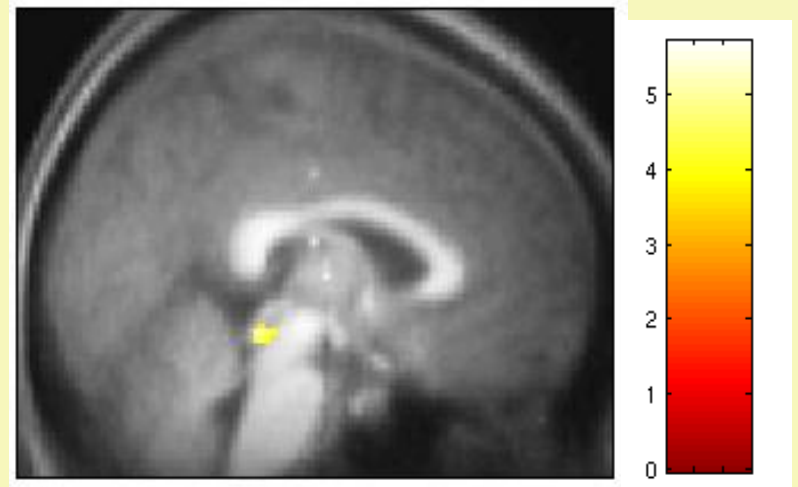
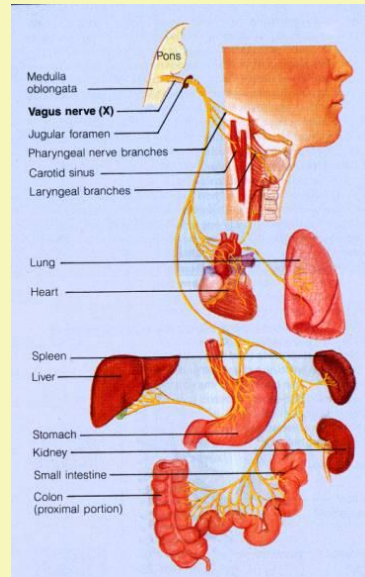
(Darwin, 1871/2004, p.130)



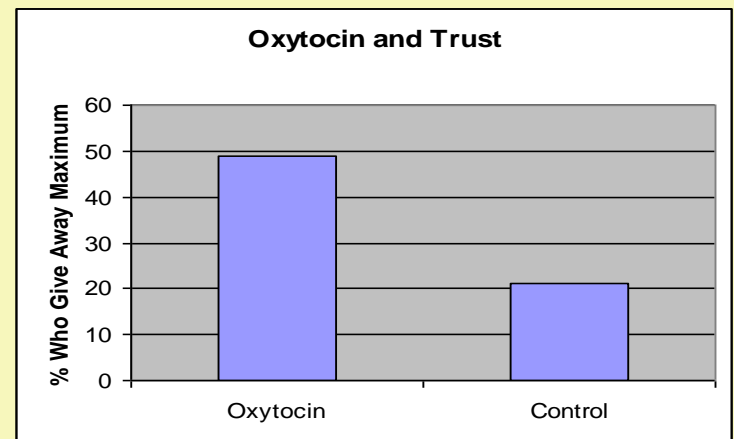
Take care or die



The prosocial nervous system



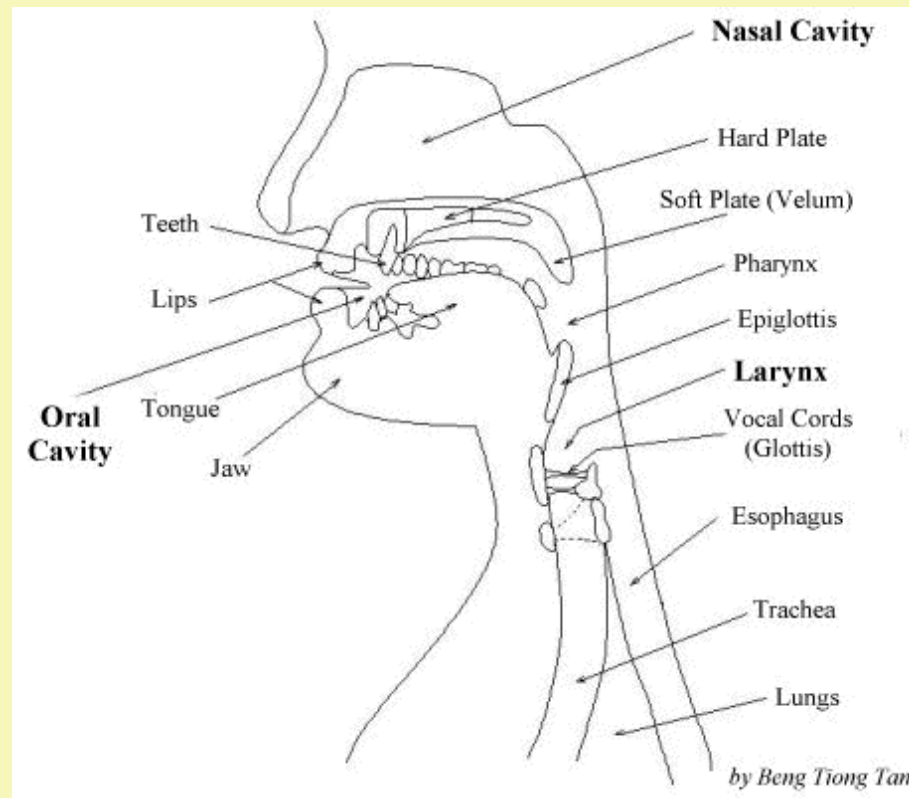
Oxytocin



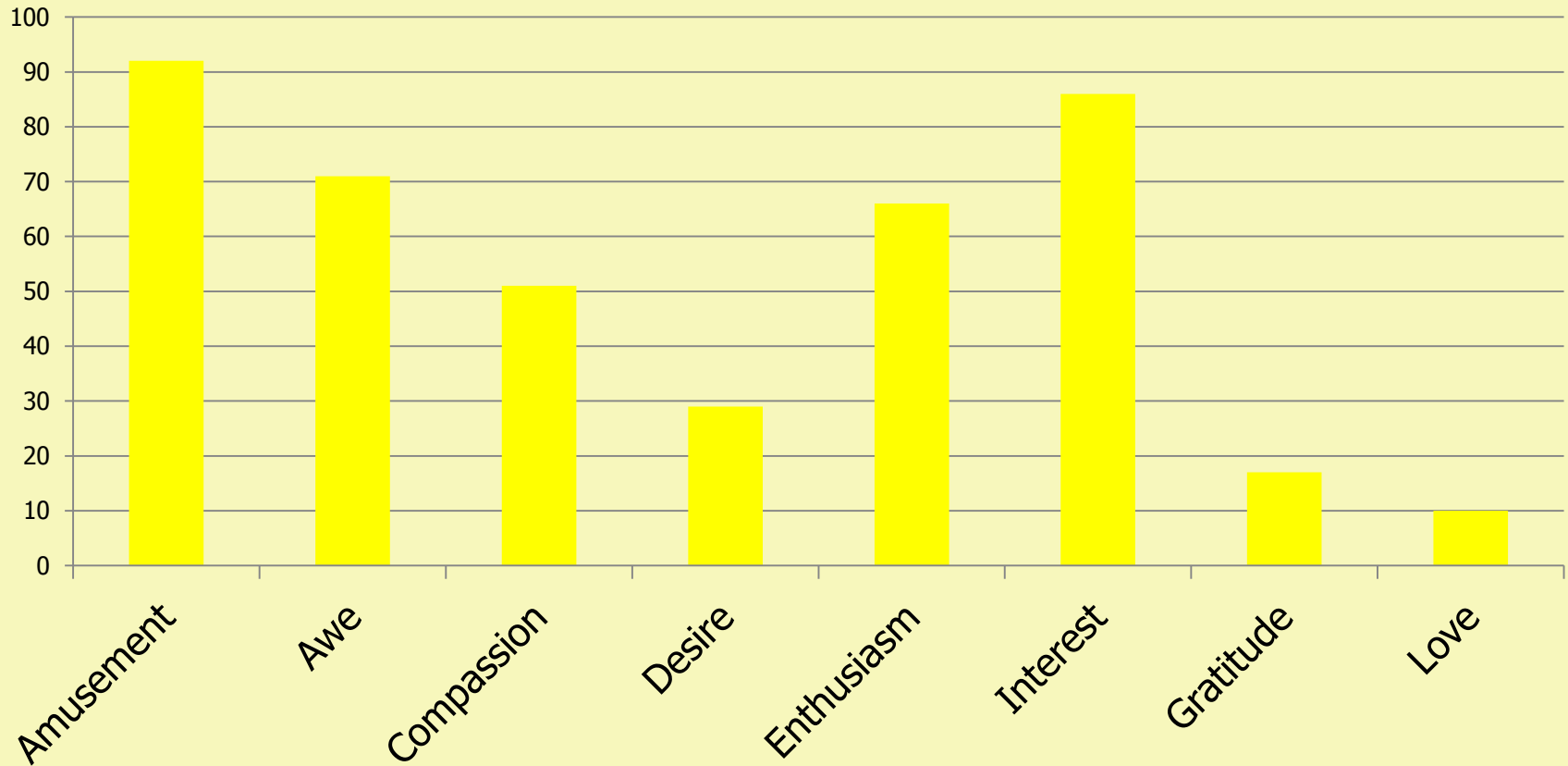
Connect

- Strong support leads to lower levels of cortisol (Kiecolt-Glaser)
- Give stressful speech with supportive member in audience, lower blood pressure
- Spiegel et al., 1989: women with breast cancer who are in supportive group therapy better life expectancy (37 vs. 18 mos.)
- Your connections spread outward

The Vocal Register of Compassion



Vocal Bursts of Positive Emotion (Simon-Thomas et al., 2009)



Narrative

- Write about strongest emotions of trauma, or the facts of the event
- Traumas studied: bereavement, divorce, holocaust survivors, 9-11 victims
- Effects: increased well-being, enhanced immune function, reduced visits to health center, reductions in anxiety, depression

Contemplation

(Alan Wallace: *Genuine Happiness*)

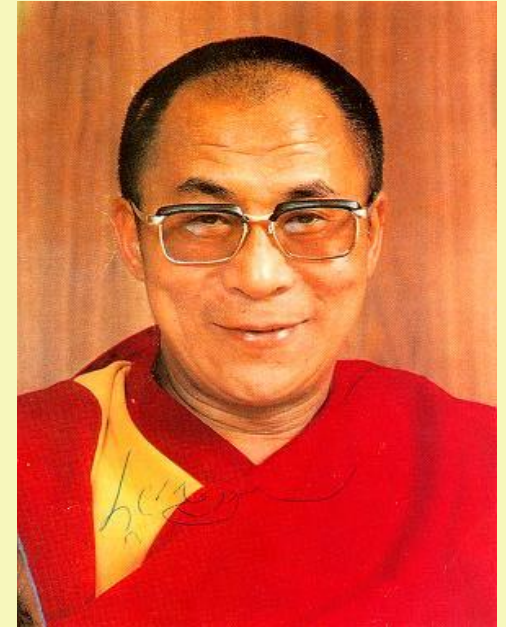
- Attention
 - Breathing
 - Settle into relaxed posture
 - Focus attention in between what you're looking at and eyes
 - Breathe 21 times
 - Attend to movements of lungs
- Mindfulness
 - Of body
 - Imagine attention as curved surface
 - Move this attention up and down body
 - Be mindful of sensations throughout body
- Loving Kindness
 - Bring to mind a person who is dear to you
 - Imagine person's sufferings, yearnings
 - Wish for person's happiness
 - Extend to another person, broadening circle of care

Buddhism

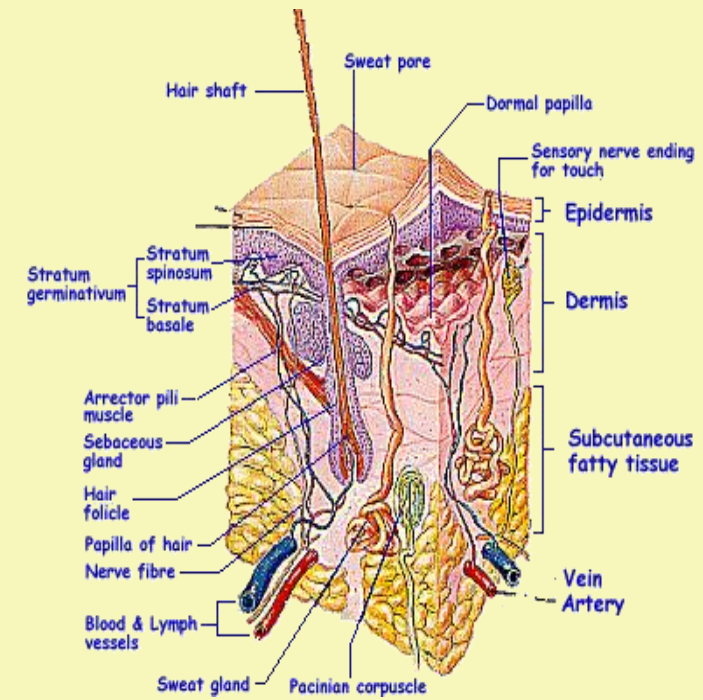
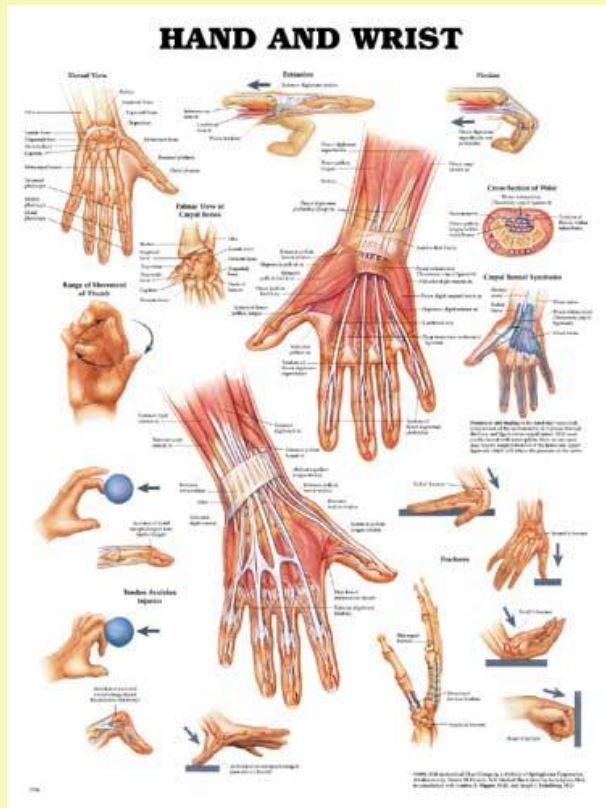
*If you want others to be happy,
practice compassion;*

*if you want to be happy
practice compassion.*

His Holiness the Dalai Lama



Tactile Contact: The First Language of Compassion



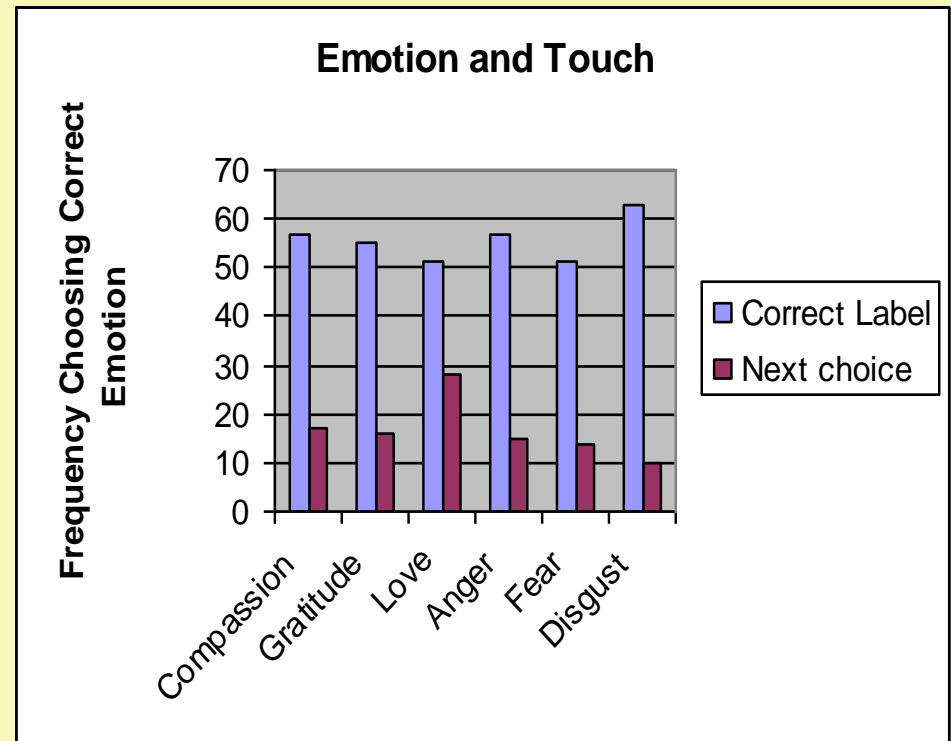
Touch



- Rewards
- Builds Trust
- Signals Safety
- Soothes

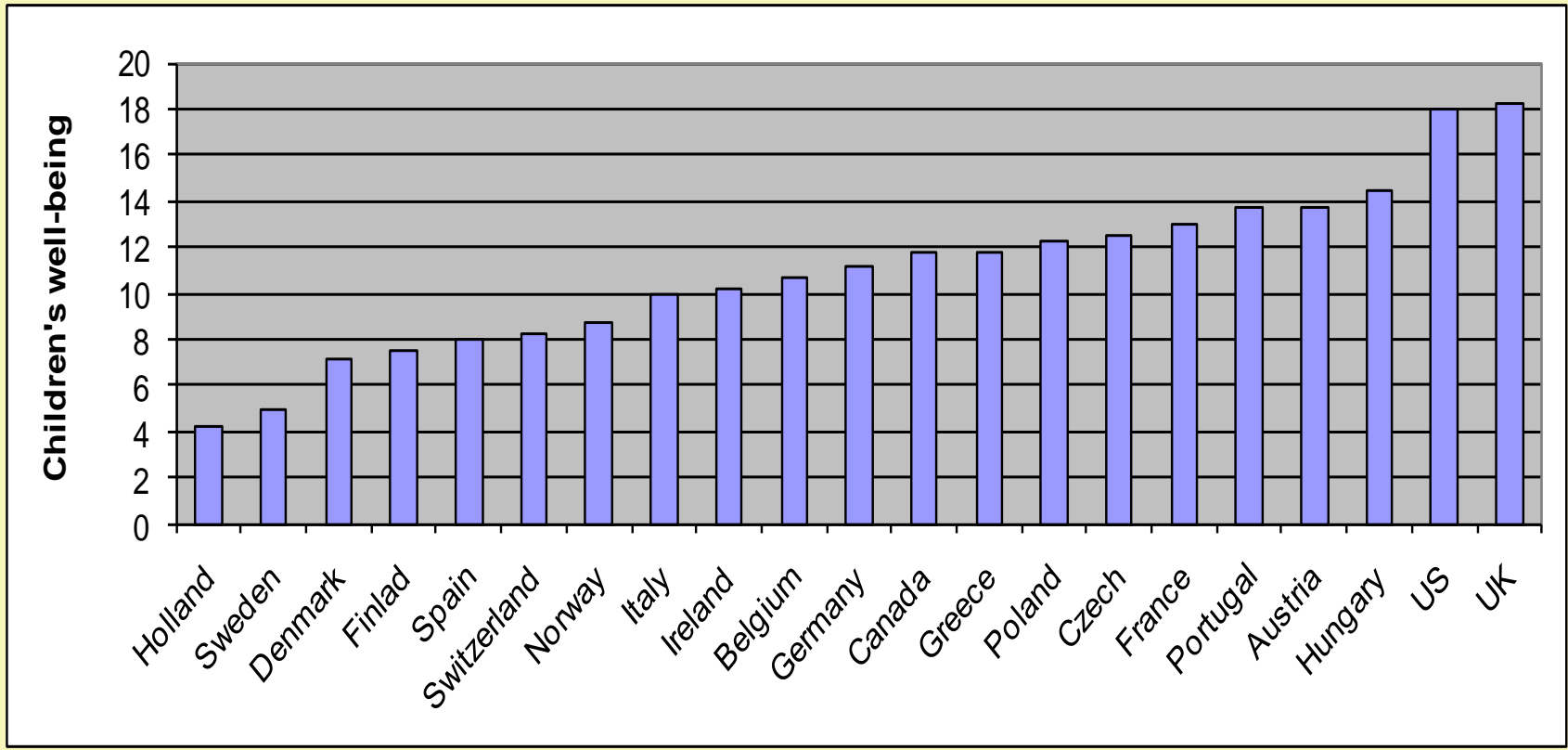


Touch and the Spread of Goodness





Deficits in Compassion in US Children



We are moving towards a less violent world

- *Better Angels of Our Nature* (Steve Pinker)
 - Historical declines in
 - Homicide
 - Rape
 - Likelihood of death in combat
 - Violence against those with mental illness
 - Violence against children
 - Torture

A Future Without Violence



High Jen Engagement

- Connect
- Trust
- Give
- Play
- Appreciate
- Optimism
- Acceptance
- Narrative
- Contemplate
- Sacred

Cynicism

- Isolation
- Distrust
- Greed
- Aggress
- Blame
- Pessimism
- Rejection
- Suppression
- Hyperactivity
- Anomie



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THANK YOU!

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