

The impact of parent mindfulness training on parental empathy and infant prosociality

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Prosocial behavior emerges early in development



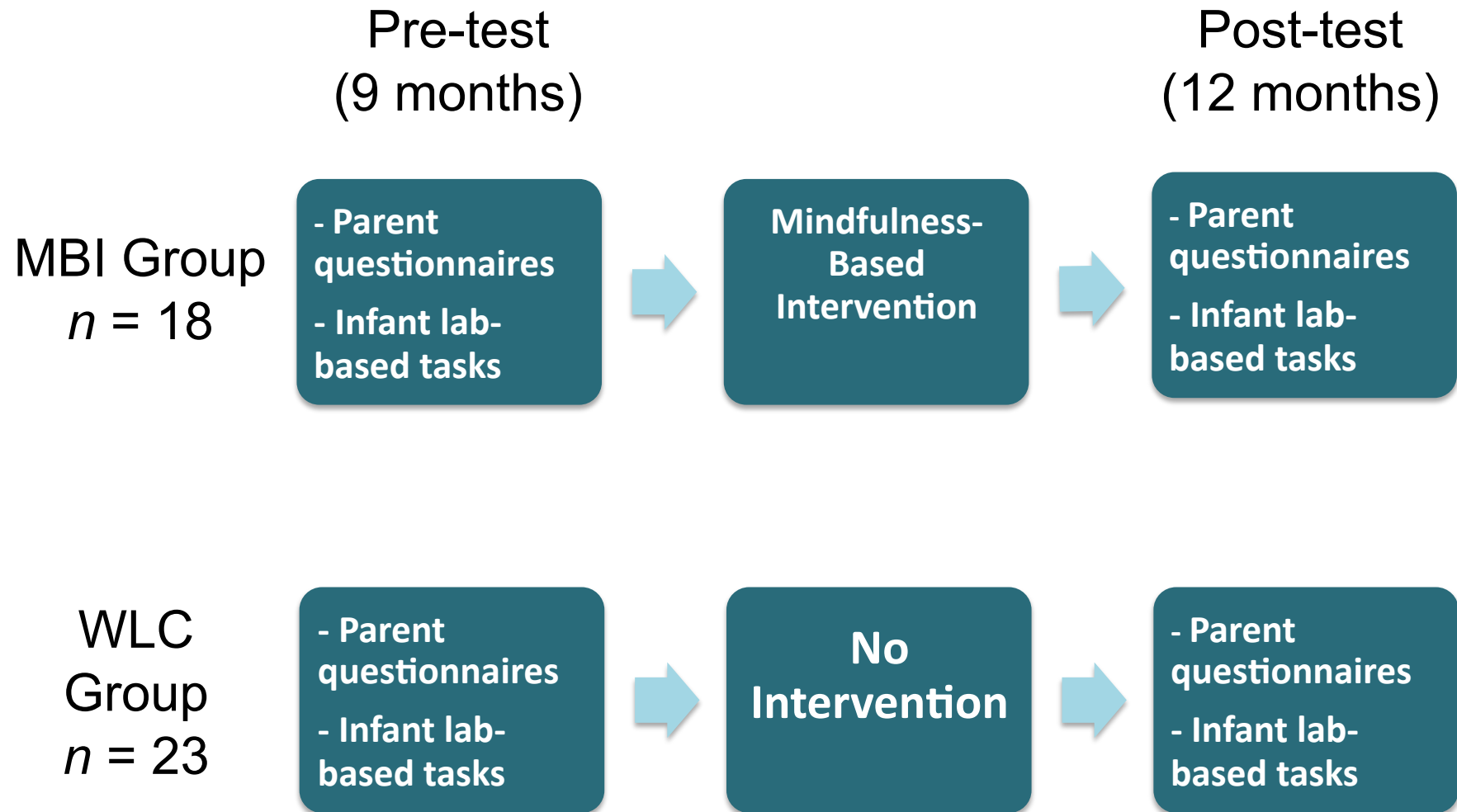
Prosociality is predicted by parental empathy



The effects of mindfulness training on empathy

- MBIs have a range of beneficial positive psychological and physical/health outcomes (see Bishop et al., 2004 for a review)
- MBIs significantly increase self-reported empathy (Bernie et al., 2010; Block-Lerner et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 1998; Wallmark et al., 2012)
 - Particularly PT
- The effects of MBIs extend to parent-child interactions (Singh et al., 2010).

**Can participation in an MBI both
increase parental empathy and
enhance infant prosociality?**



Pre & Post-test measures

- Parent questionnaires
 - FFMQ (Trait mindfulness)
 - Observing
 - Describing
 - Acting with awareness
 - Non-judging of inner experience
 - Non-reactivity to inner experience

Pre & Post-test measures

- Parent questionnaires
 - Davis IRI (Dispositional empathy)
 - **Perspective taking**
 - **Empathic Concern**

Pre & Post-test measures

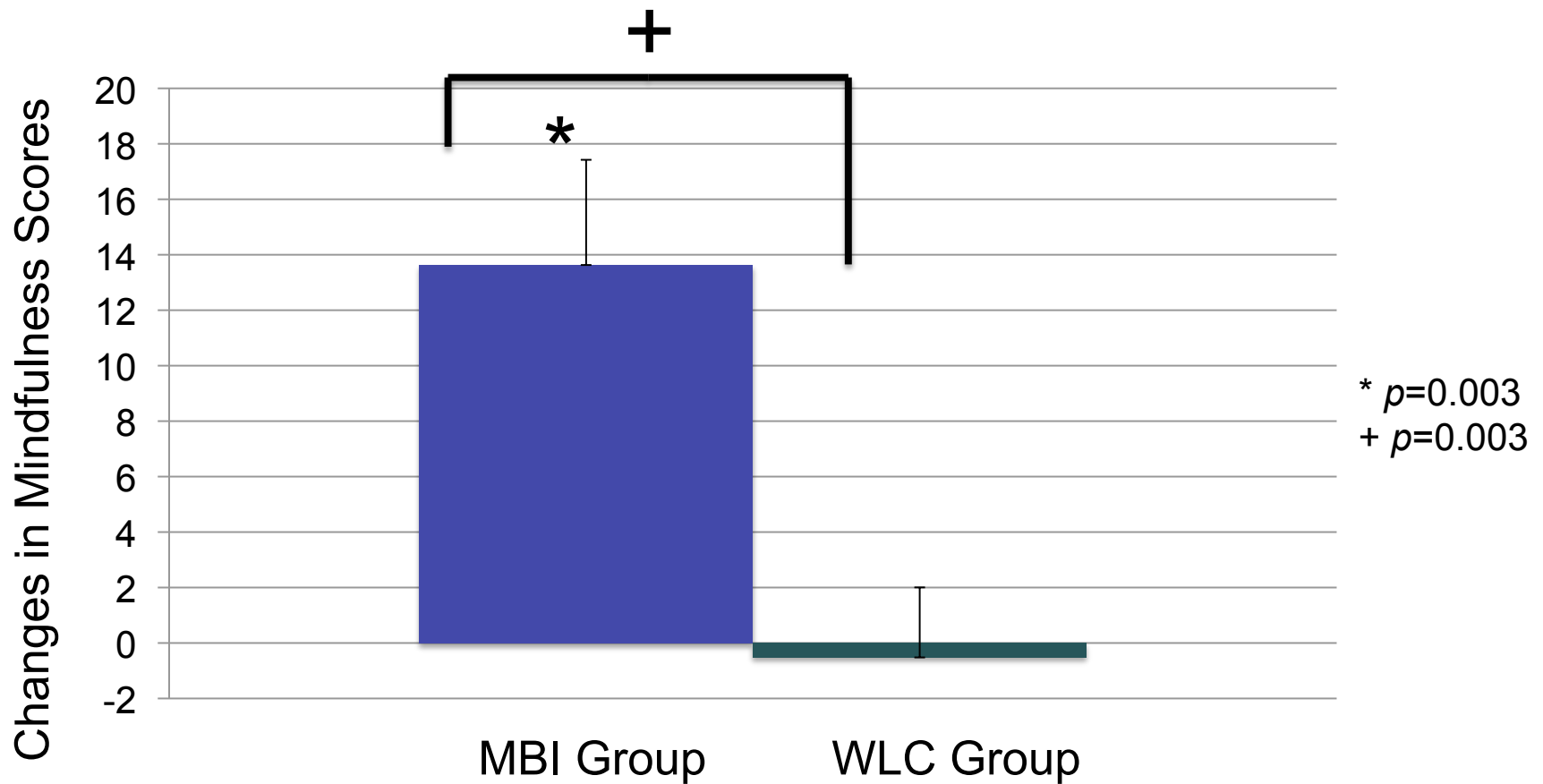
- Infant lab-based tasks
 - Sharing task (prosocial behavior)
 - Experimenter requests toys from infants
 - 10 trials
 - Fairness task (prosocial understanding)
 - Infants visual attention to resource distribution events
 - Fair versus unfair outcomes
 - Parent-infant free play interaction (quality of parent-child interaction)
 - Parent and infant sit on blanket and asked to interact as they normally would for 10 minutes

Mindfulness intervention

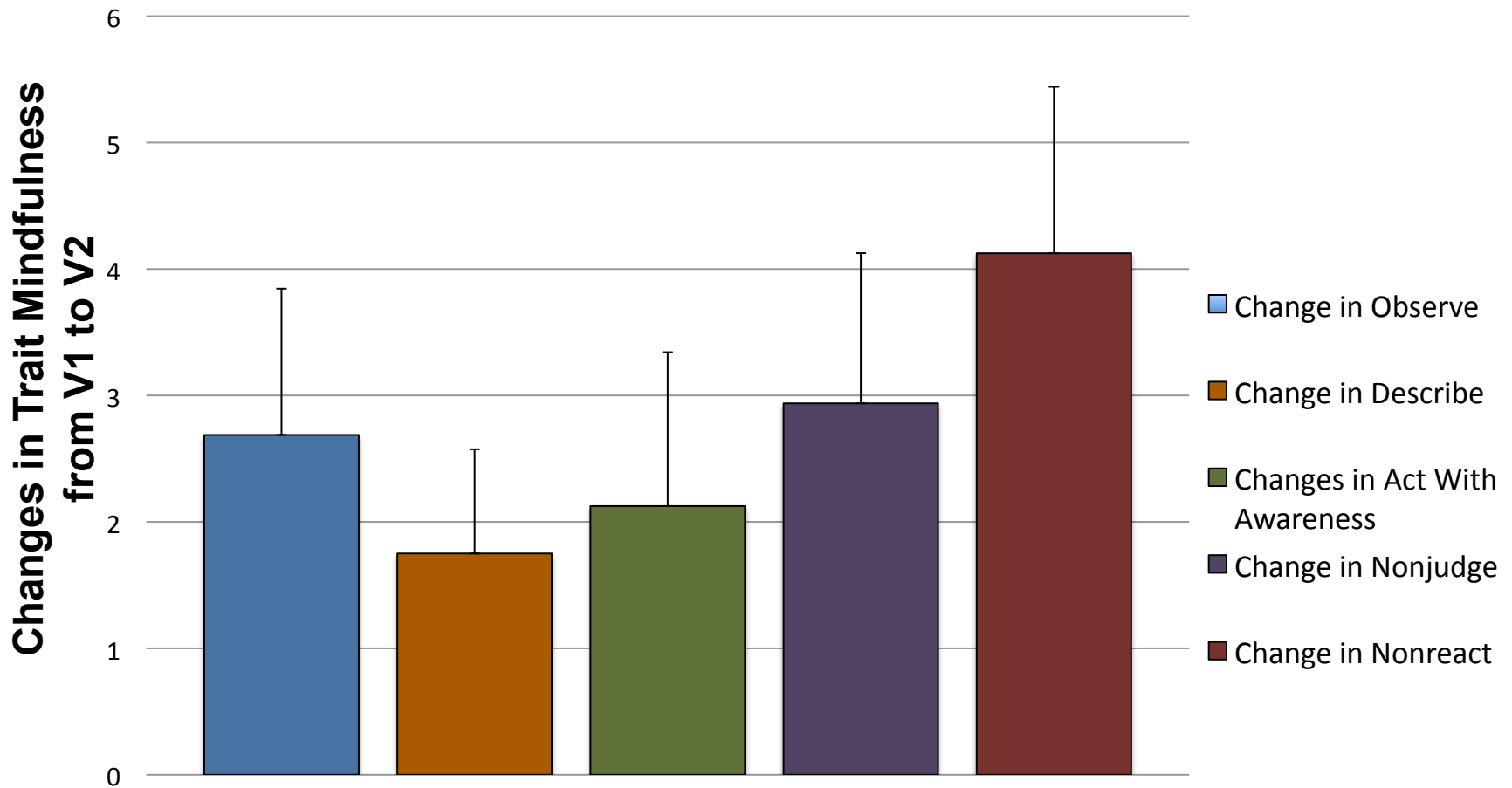
- Mindfulness-based intervention (adaptation of Kabat-Zinn MBSR course)
 - Includes two sessions on compassion
- 10 sessions; 2 hours/session
- Parents maintain a weekly log of at-home practice

Parent Mindfulness & Empathy

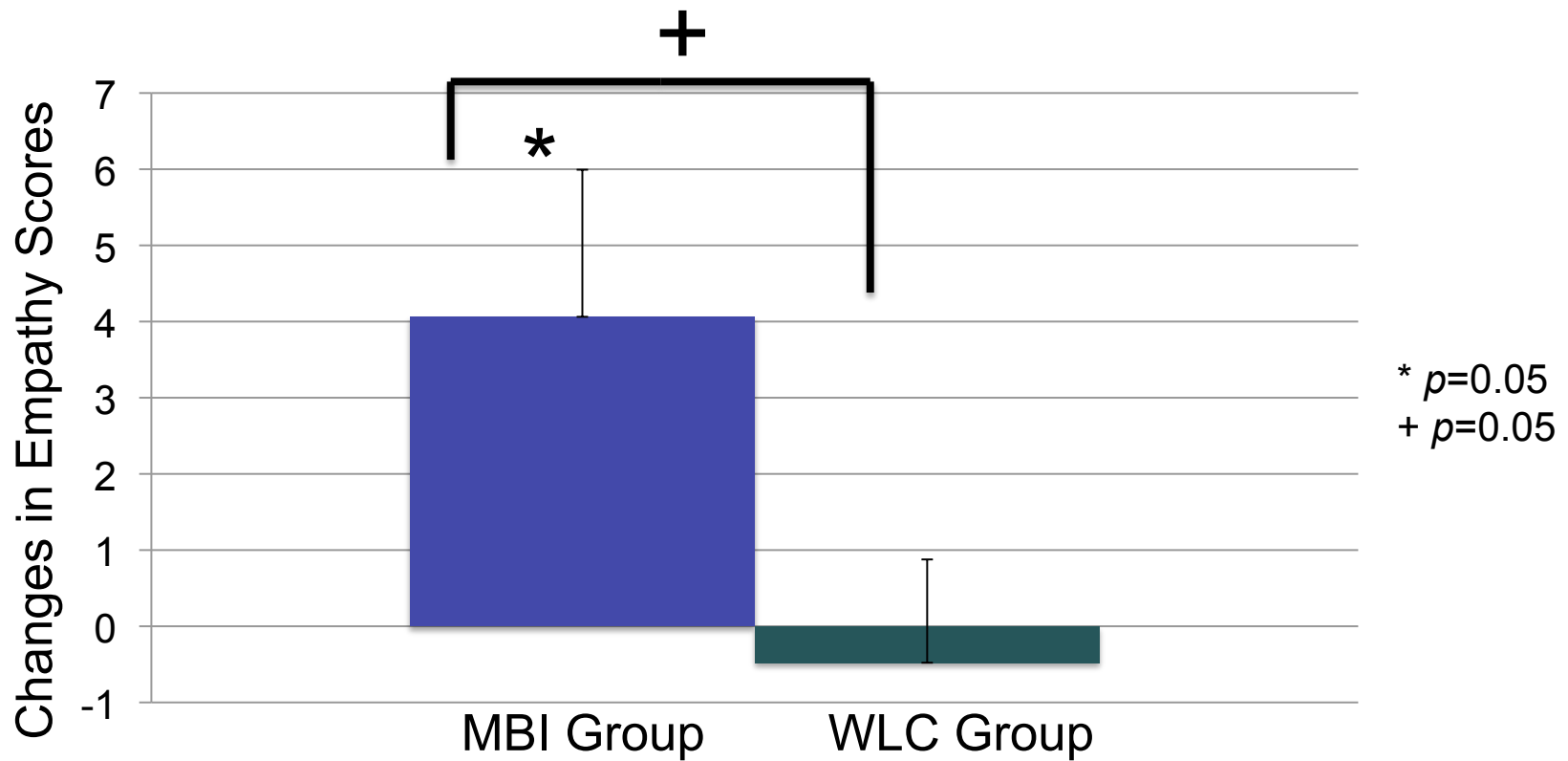
Changes in Mindfulness from Visit 1 to Visit 2



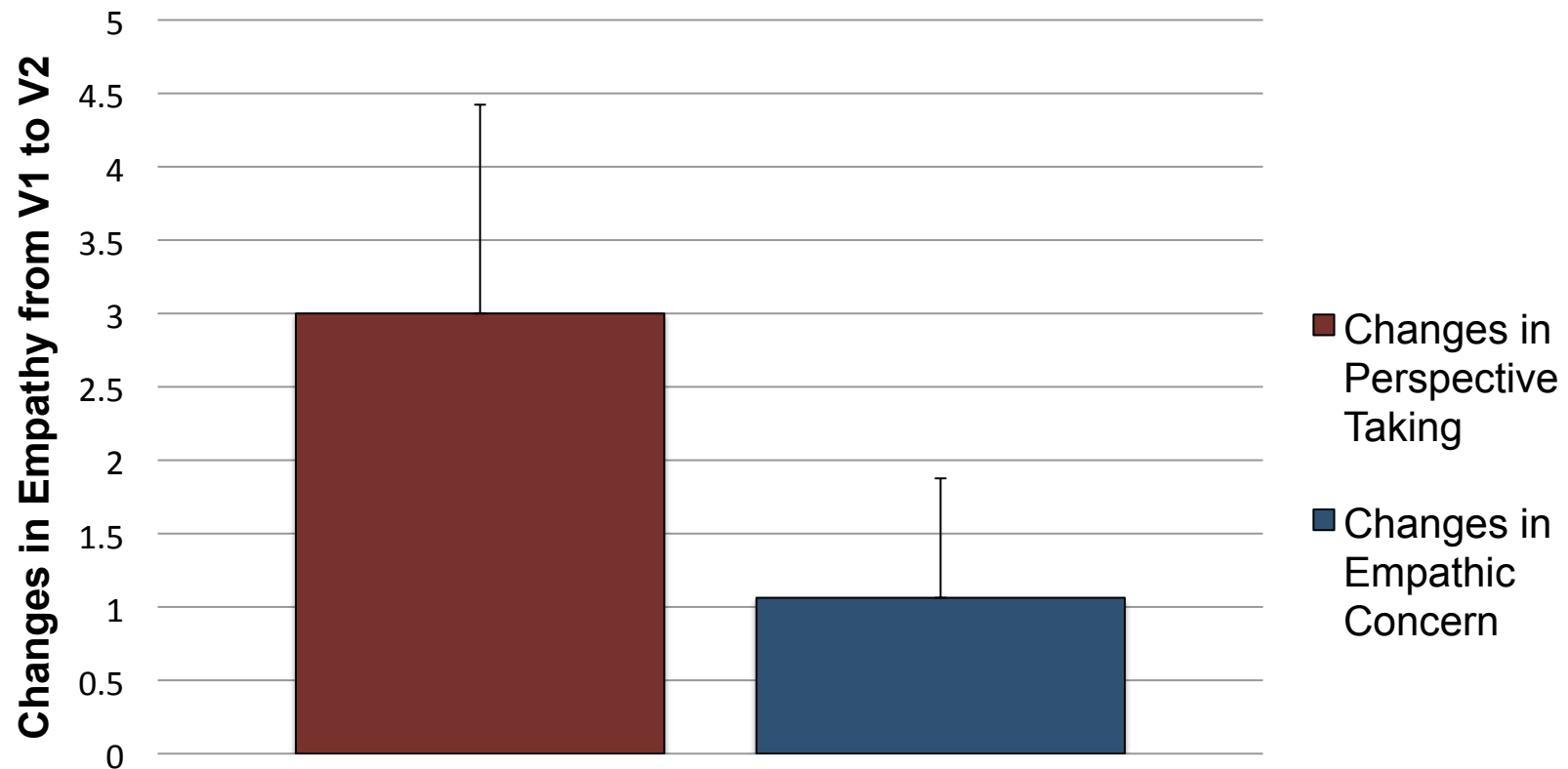
MBI Group changes in 5 Facets



Changes in Composite Empathy from Visit 1 to Visit 2

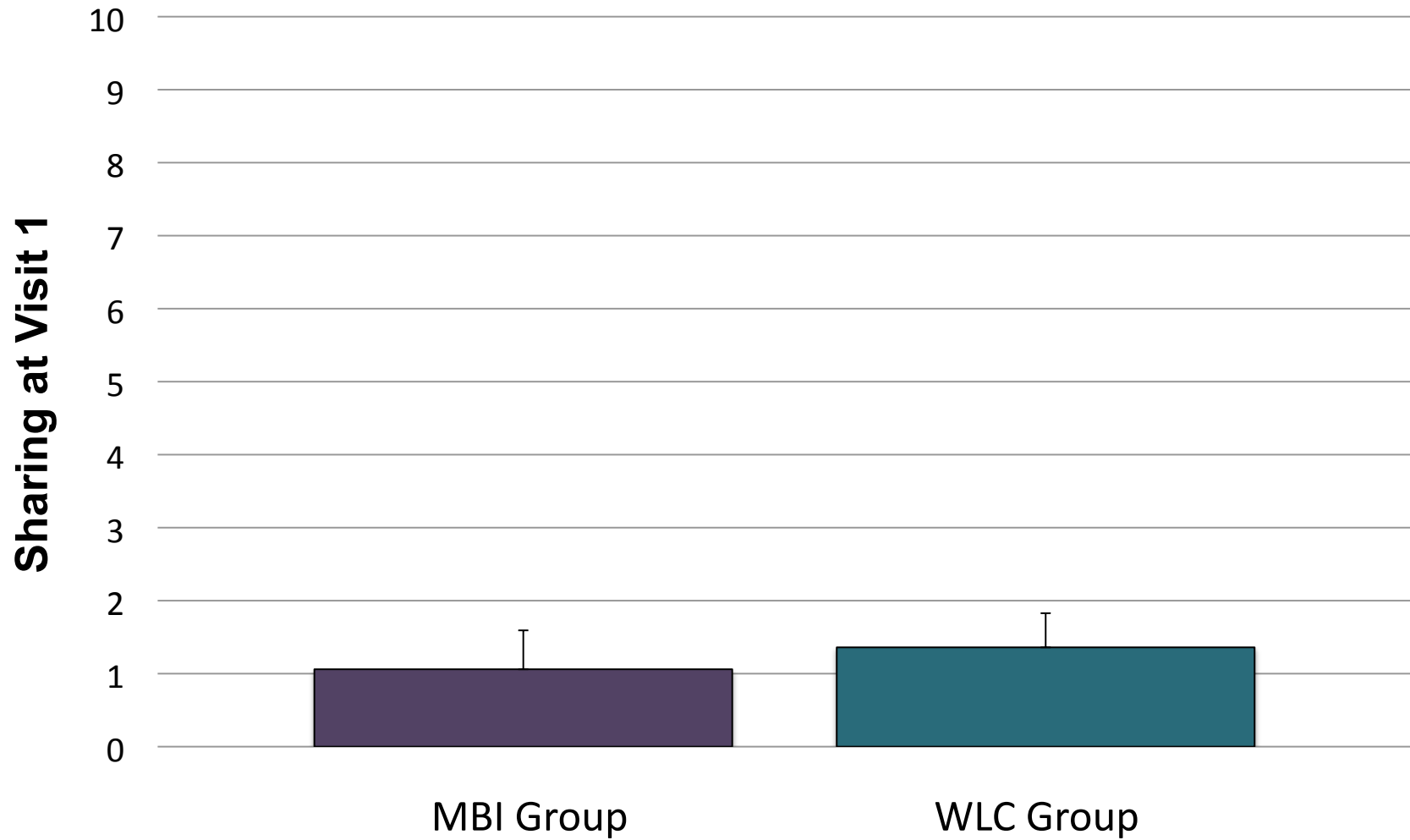


MBI Group: Changes in EC and PT

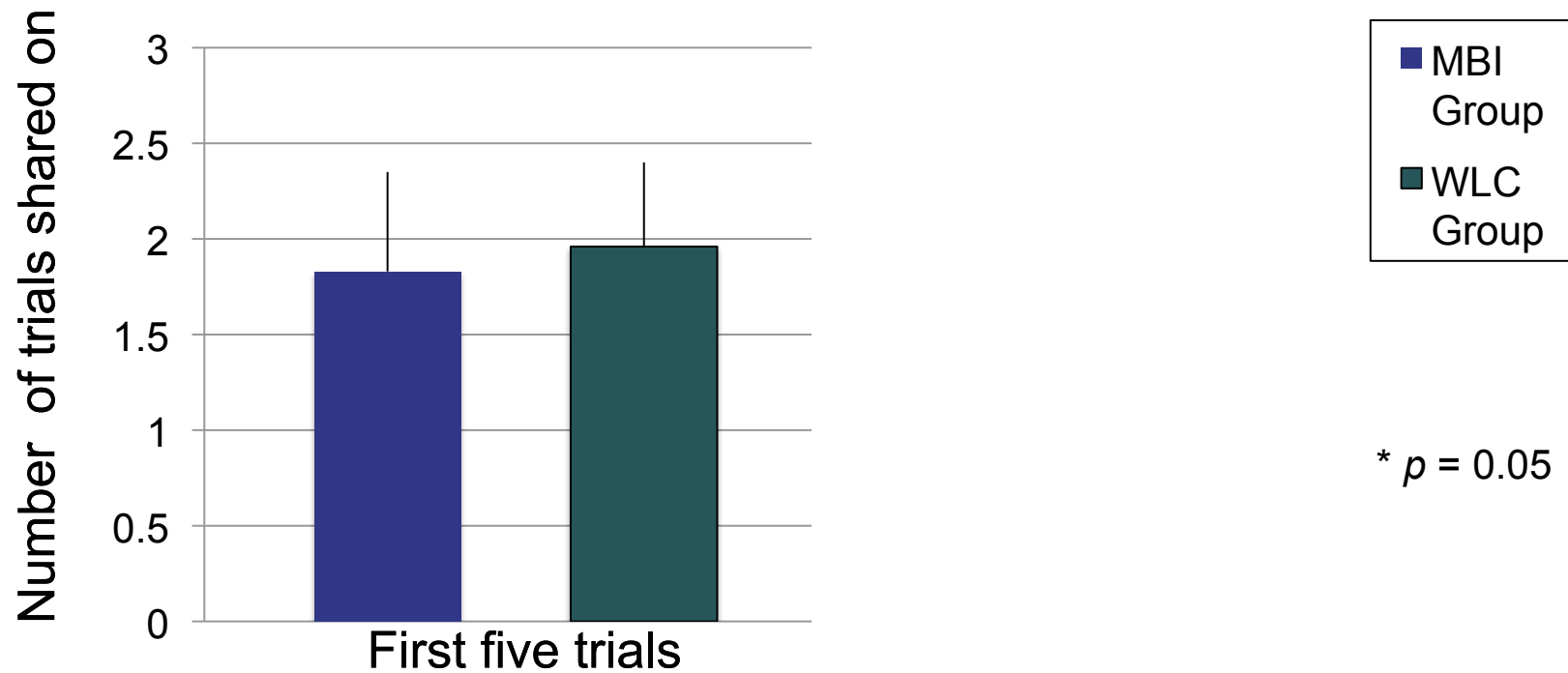


Infant prosocial behavior

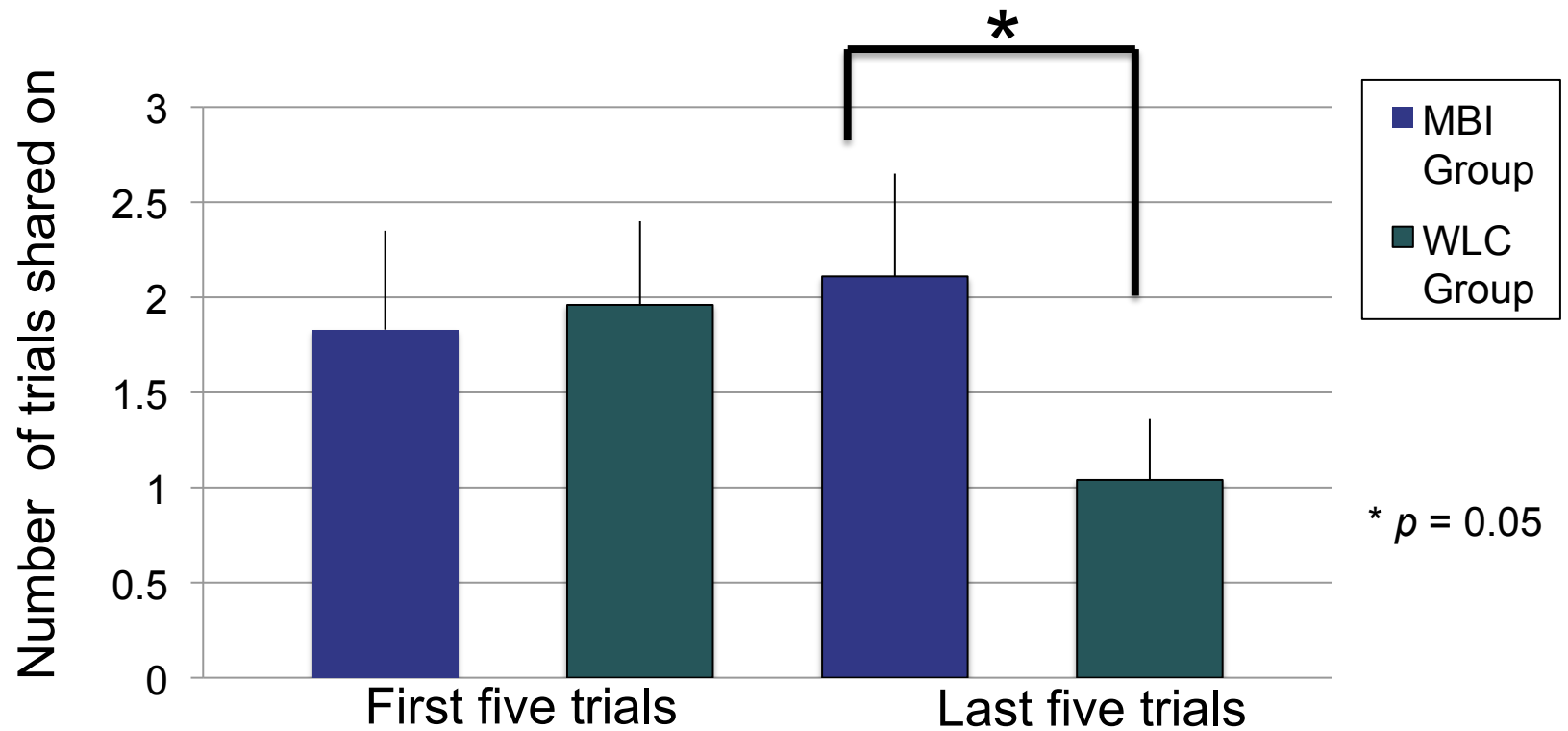
Infants' Sharing at V1



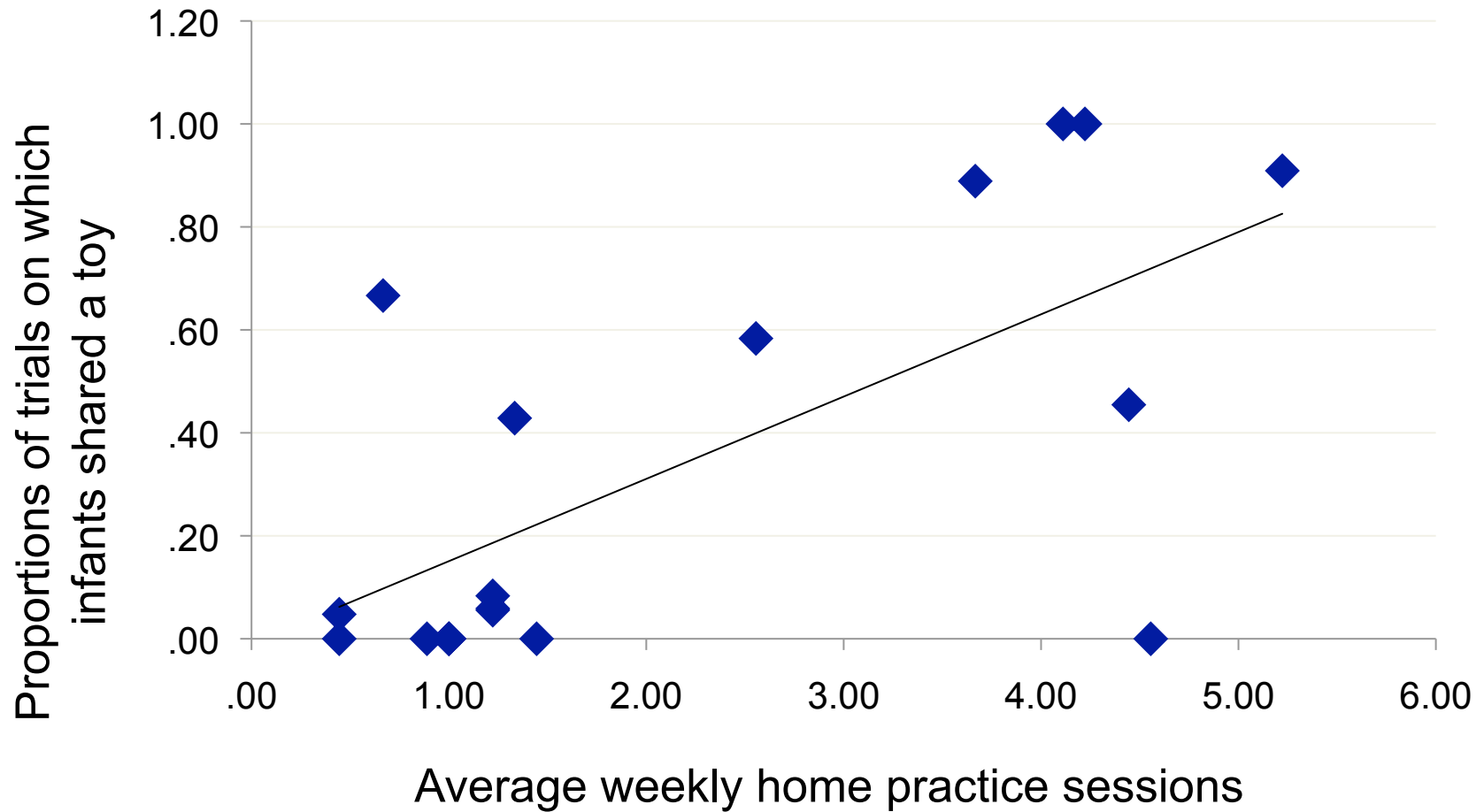
Infants' Sharing at Visit 2



Infants' Sharing at Visit 2



Relations between mindfulness home practice and infants sharing



Caveats & limitations

- Pilot sample/small sample size
- Need better matched control group
 - Weekly meetings, interactions with parents of same-aged peers, etc.
- Test a broader array of outcome measures
 - Breadth versus specificity of effects

Conclusions

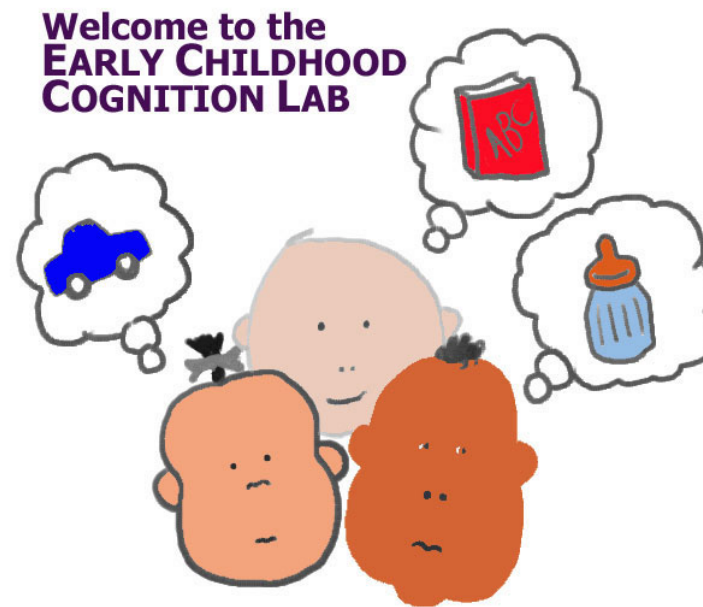
- A mindfulness-based intervention led to increases in trait mindfulness and dispositional empathy in parents of 9- to 12-month-old infants
- Parental participation in the MBI was associated with greater prosociality in their 12-month-old infants
- Investing self-care practices that promote parental well-being have beneficial downstream consequences for their children

Acknowledgments

Jessica Sommerville



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