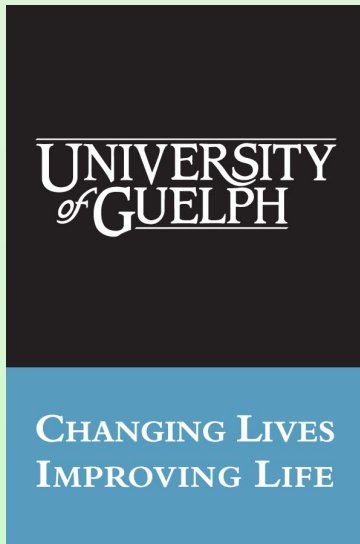


The Criticality of Matched-Expectancy Placebos in Positive Interventions



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Callie Hill
Dr. M. G. Gonzalez-Morales
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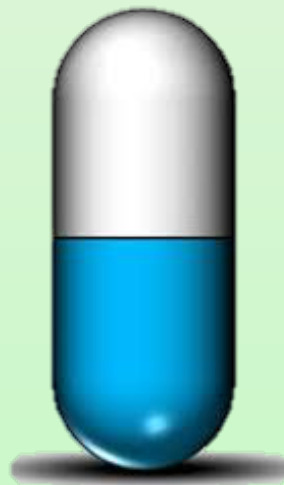
Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

What is a Placebo?

- **Beneficial effect of an inert substance (Sliwinski & Elkins, 2013):**
 - Meta-analyses including unpublished trials show placebo pills are as effective as antidepressants – Unless in the most severe depression score range (Kirsch et al., 2008; Kirsch & Sapirstein, 1998)



Reconceptualization of “Placebo”

- *Question* classic view of placebo as **negative, deceptive, “inert”**
- Researchers **claim term “placebo” be removed** from clinical contexts (Blease, 2011; Louhiala & Puustinen, 2008)
- Replaced with **“Positive Care Effect”** for patient transparency (Blease, 2011)



Reconceptualization of “Placebo”

- If treatments are improved when combined with placebo, then it is in the **clients’ best interest to bolster placebo effects** (Sliwinski & Elkins, 2013)



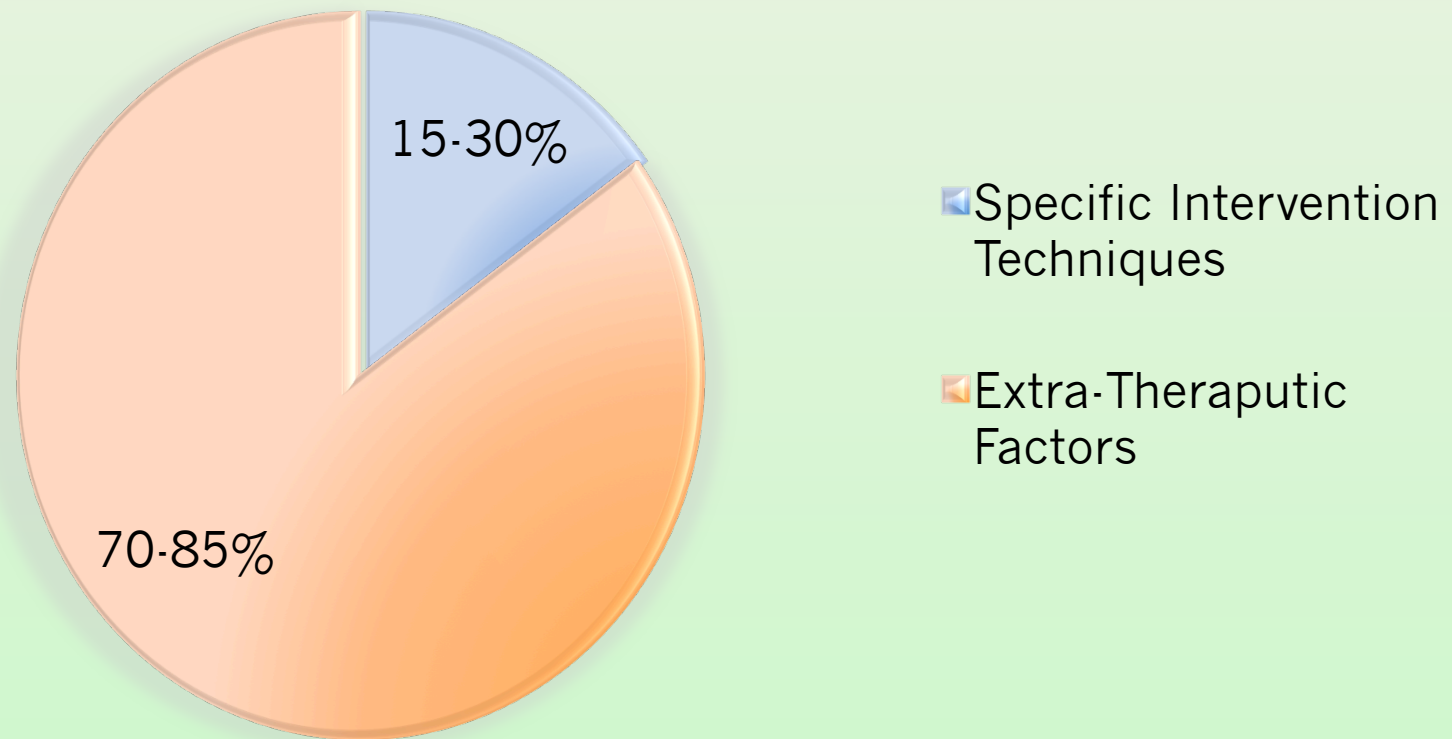
Placebo versus Positive Psychology Interventions?

Placebos help emotion regulation!
BETTER than placebo!
NOT Better than placebo



Does “positive care effect” matter in Positive Interventions?

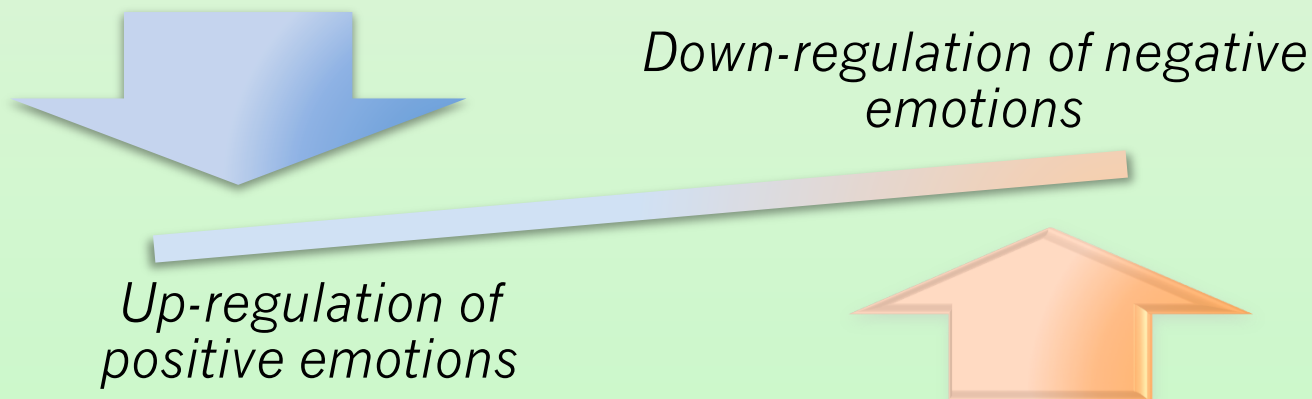
Clinical Psychology Meta-analyses suggest...



Thomas, M. L. (2006). The contributing factors of change in a therapeutic process. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 28, 201– 210.

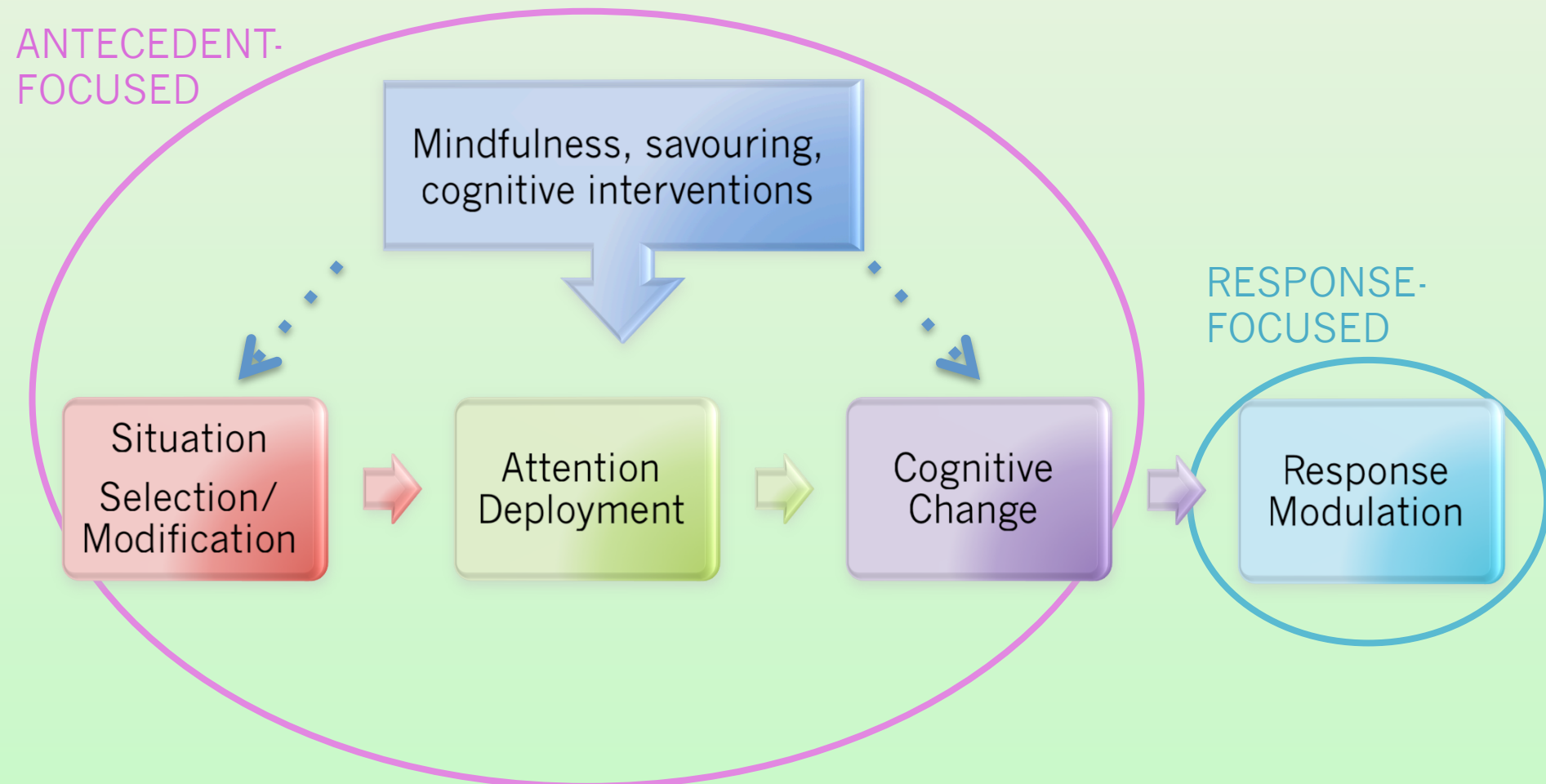
Current Intervention: Emotion Regulation “Toolkit”

- Emotion regulation utilized widely in positive interventions (Quoidbach, Mikolajczk & Gross, 2015)
 - **3 Good Things:** gratitude, love, happiness, joy
 - **Mindfulness/meditations:** acceptance of emotions
 - **Positive Meditations “loving kindness”:** gratitude, love
 - **Gratitude journaling:** gratitude, love, happiness
 - **“Best possible self”:** hope, excitement, inspiration

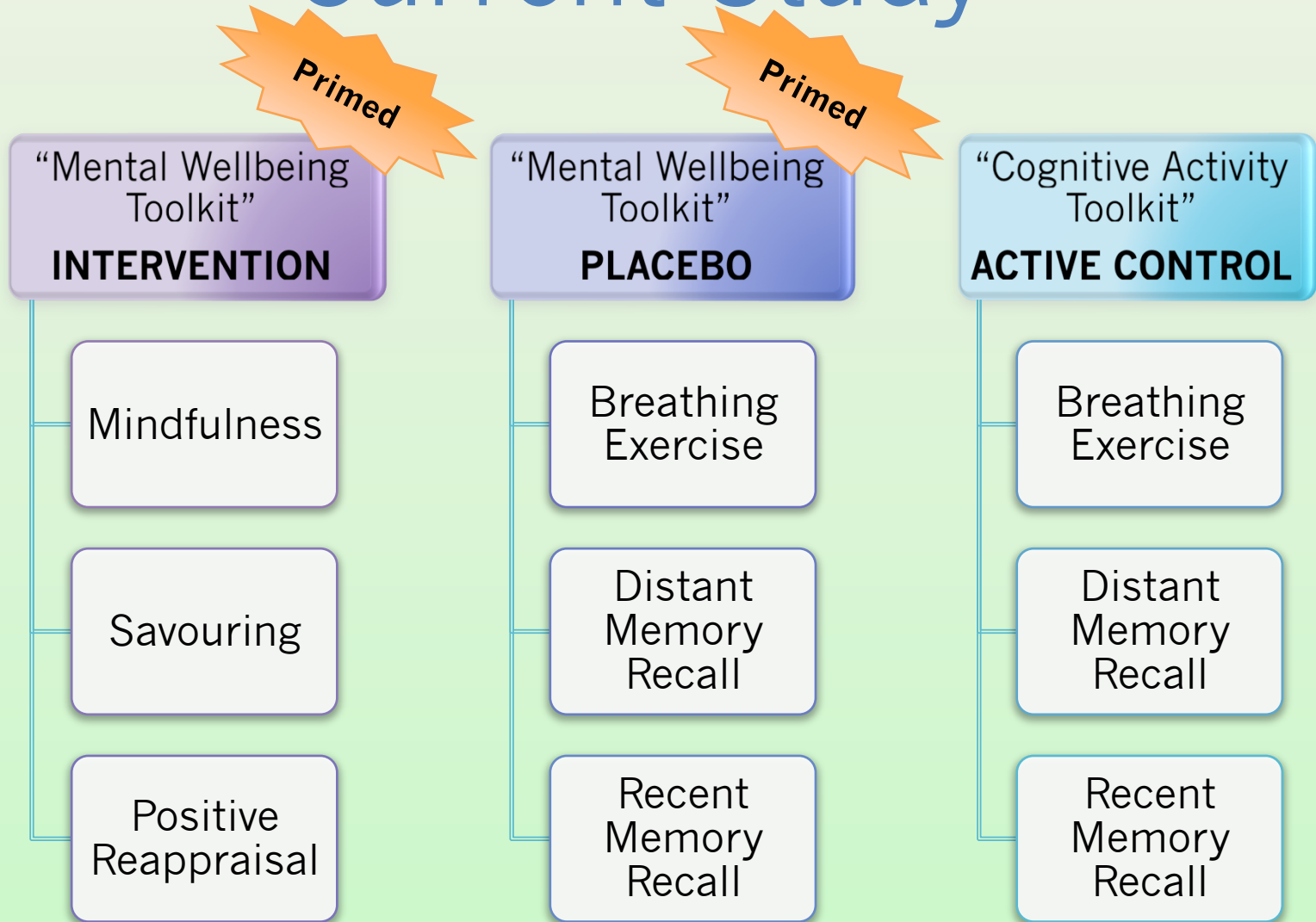


How Emotion Regulation Interventions Work

- Process Model of Emotion Regulation (Gross, 2015)



Current Study

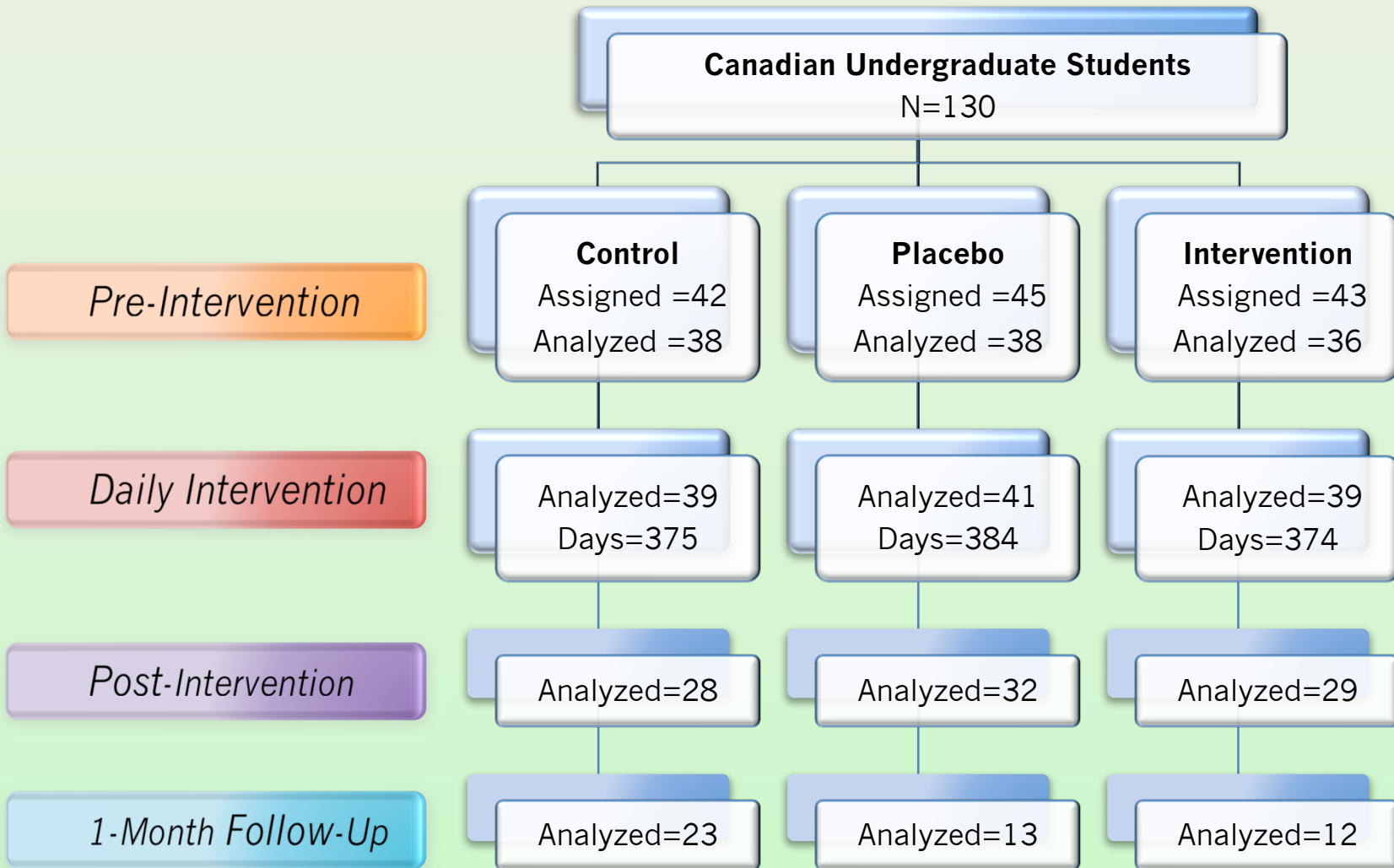


3-arm design based on recommendations by Temple & Ellenberg (2000)

Priming

“The distant memory reflection is a **research-based, helpful practice** to understand yourself better and really learn to reflect on your life and who you are as a person. Next time you think about the past, look deeper and examine the details. **Why should you reflect on distant memories and how does it promote well-being?** Self-reflection can allow us to **understand ourselves**, our lives, and the people in it better to **reduce our stress in the present.**”

Current Study

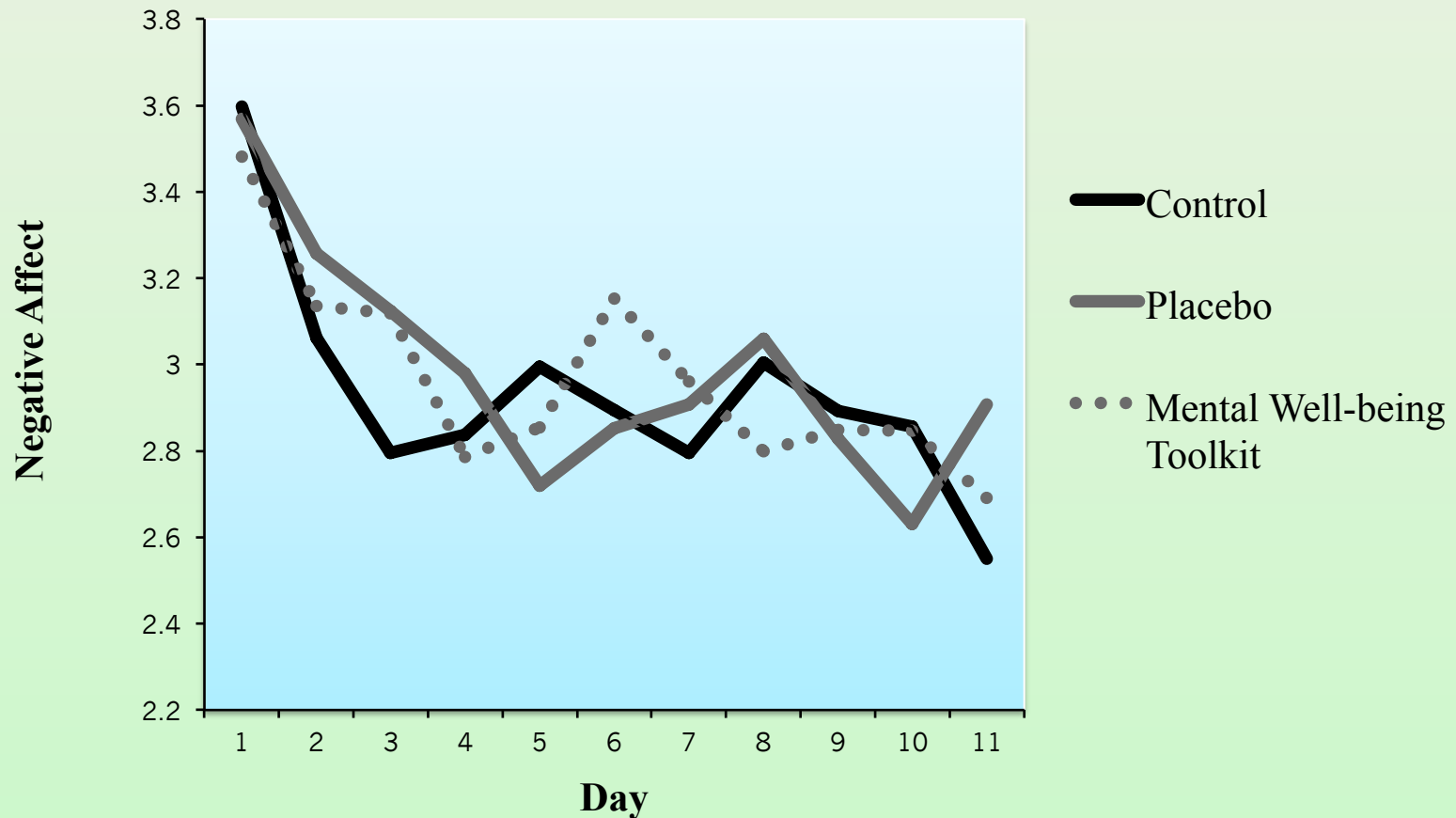


TOTAL = 119 participants, 1133 daily data points

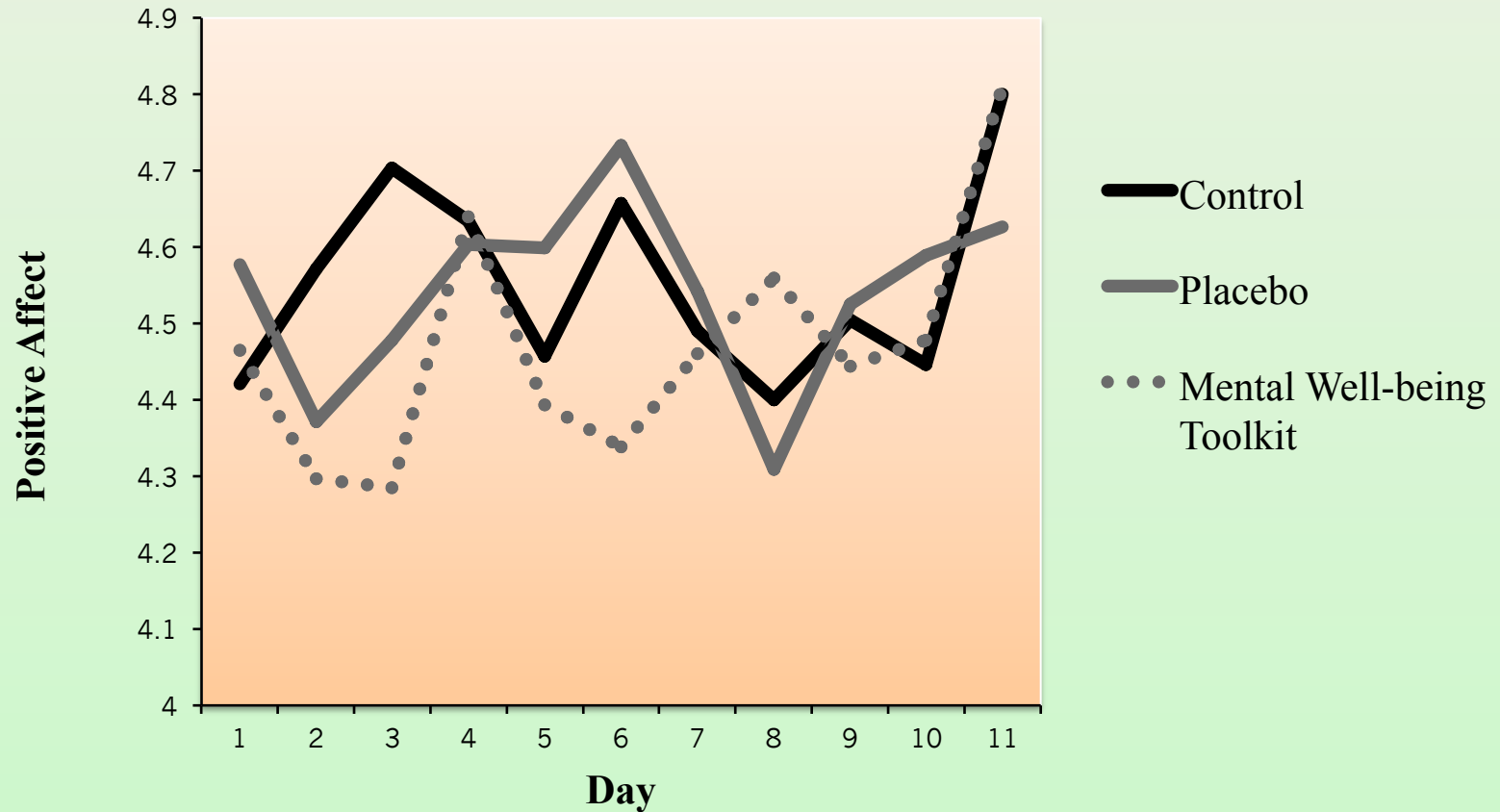
Results

- Manipulation Check ✓
- **E.g., “How confident are you that this Toolkit will be successful in improving your mental wellbeing?”** (Treatment Credibility Scale; Borkovek & Nau, 1972)
- Non-significant ANOVA differences across all conditions in expectancy beliefs, $p = .59$

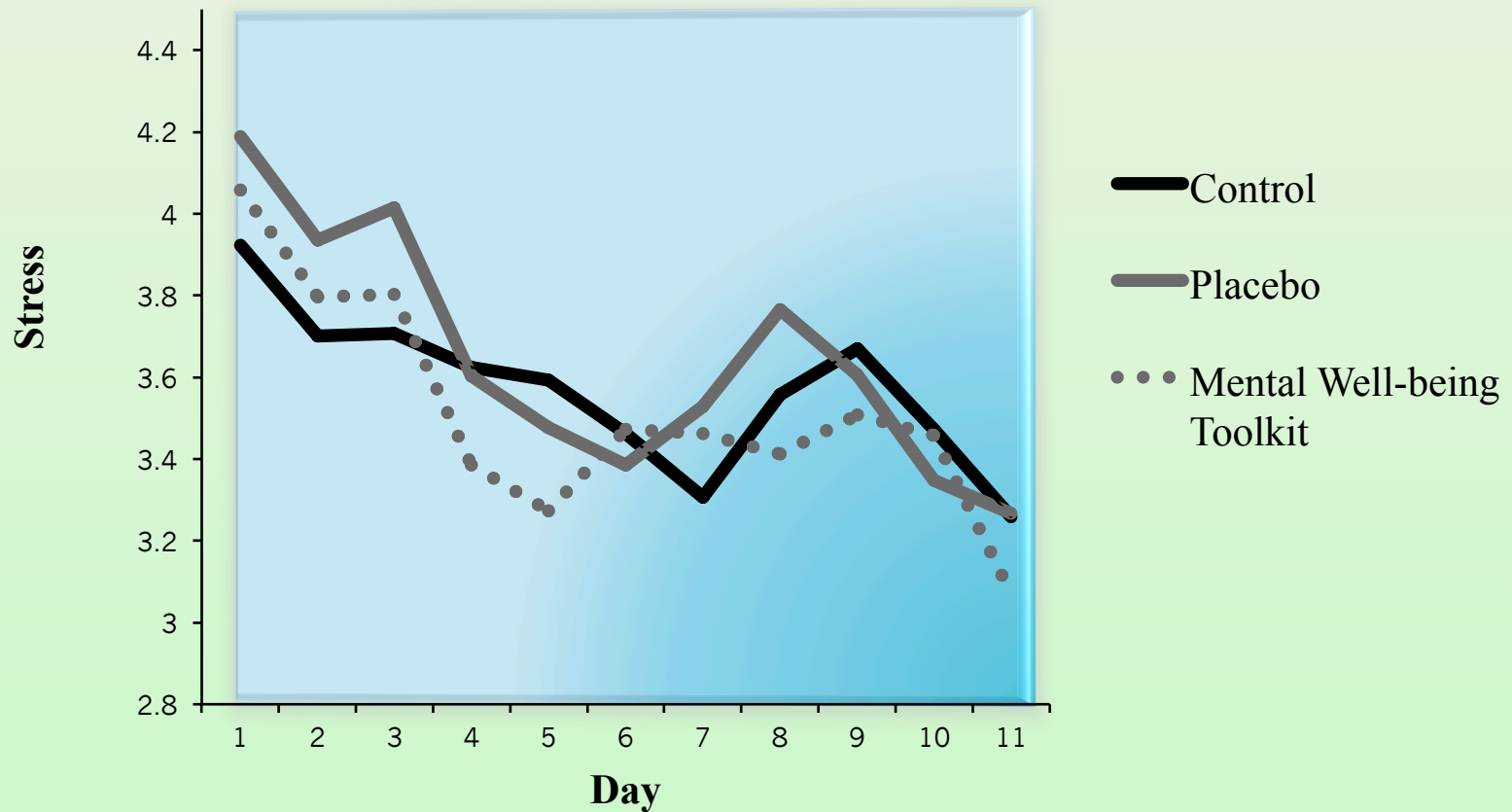
Negative Affect Change Over 2-Week Intervention



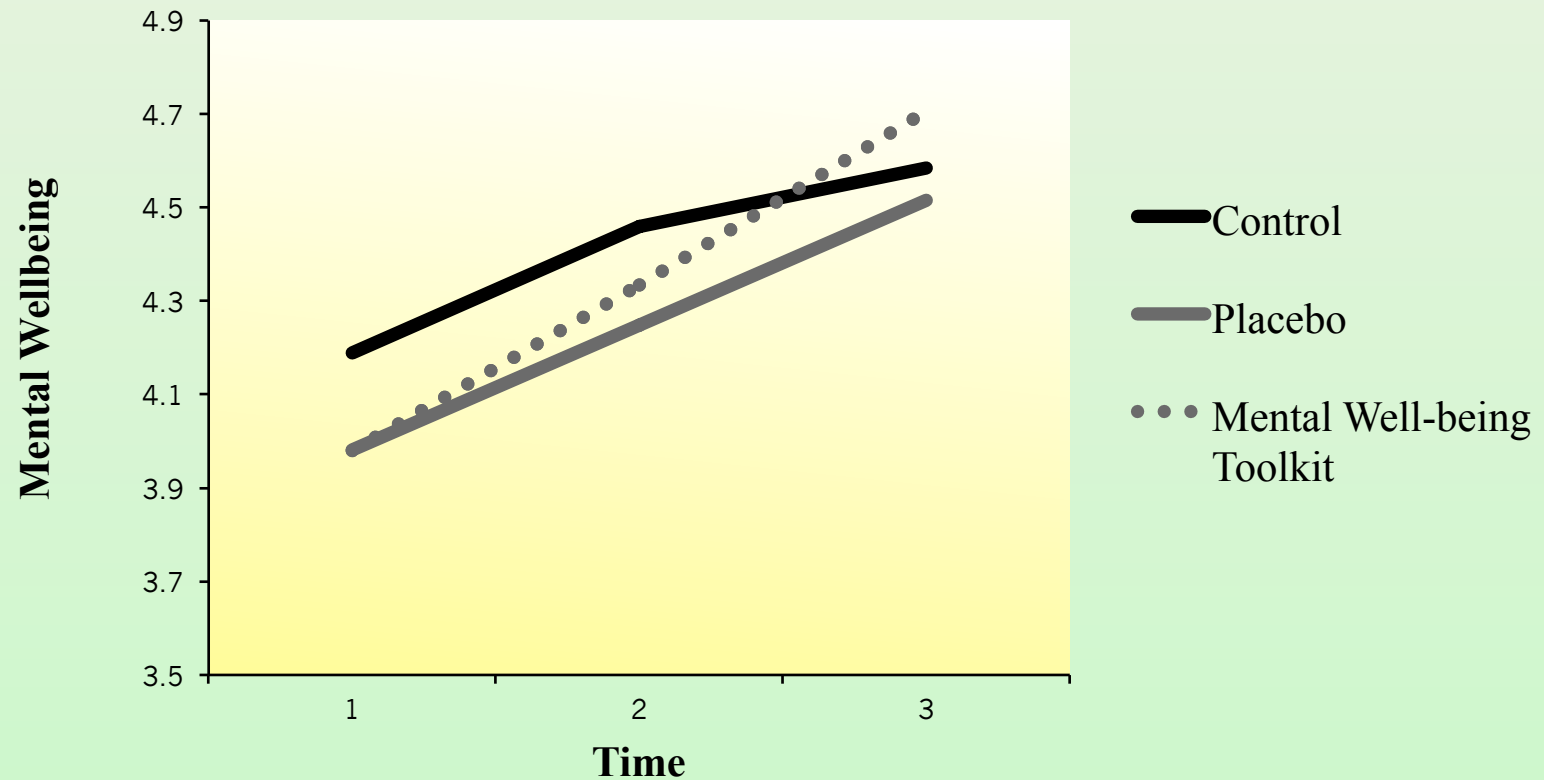
Positive Affect Change Over 2-Week Intervention



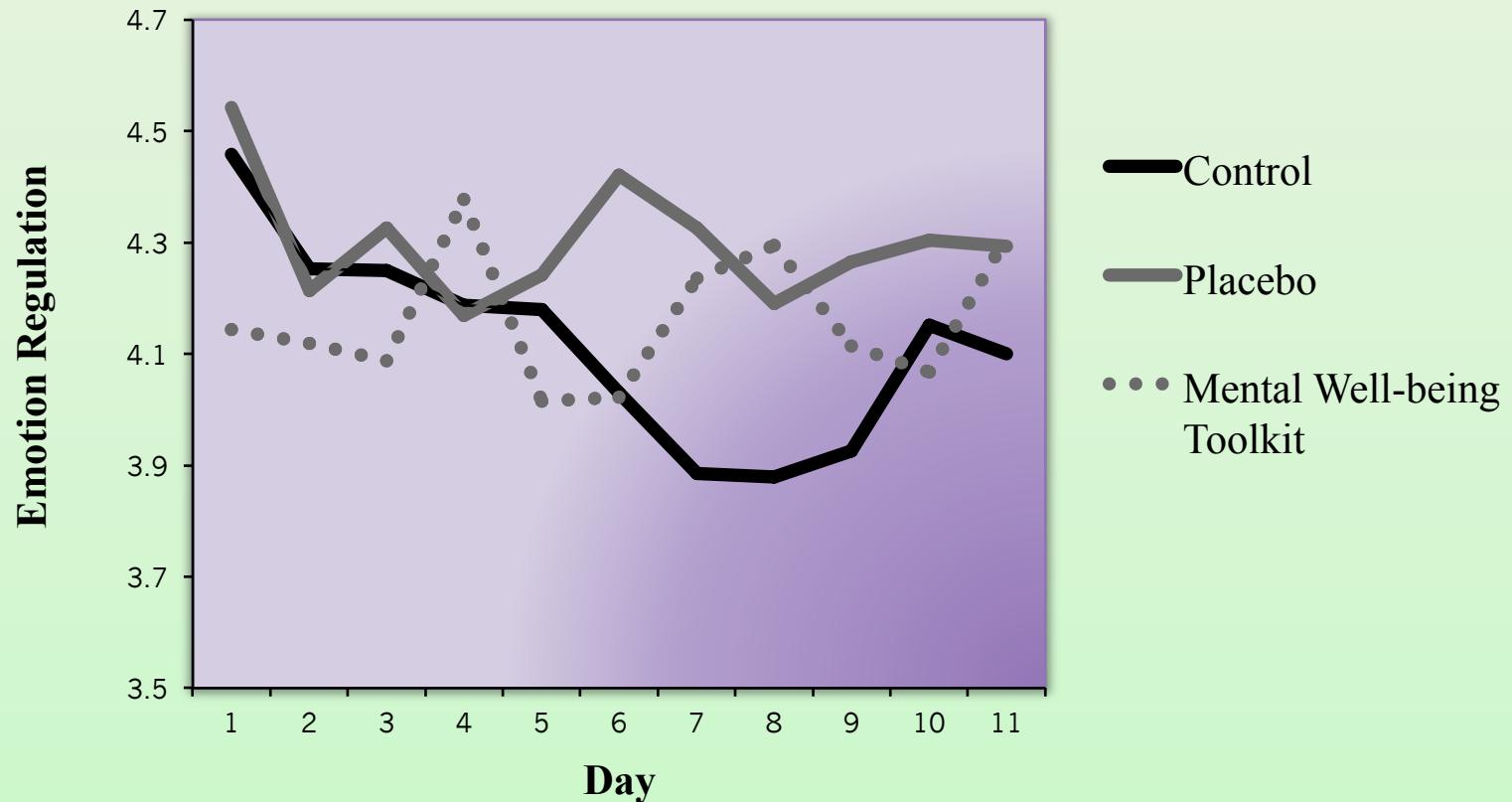
Stress Change Over 2-Week Intervention



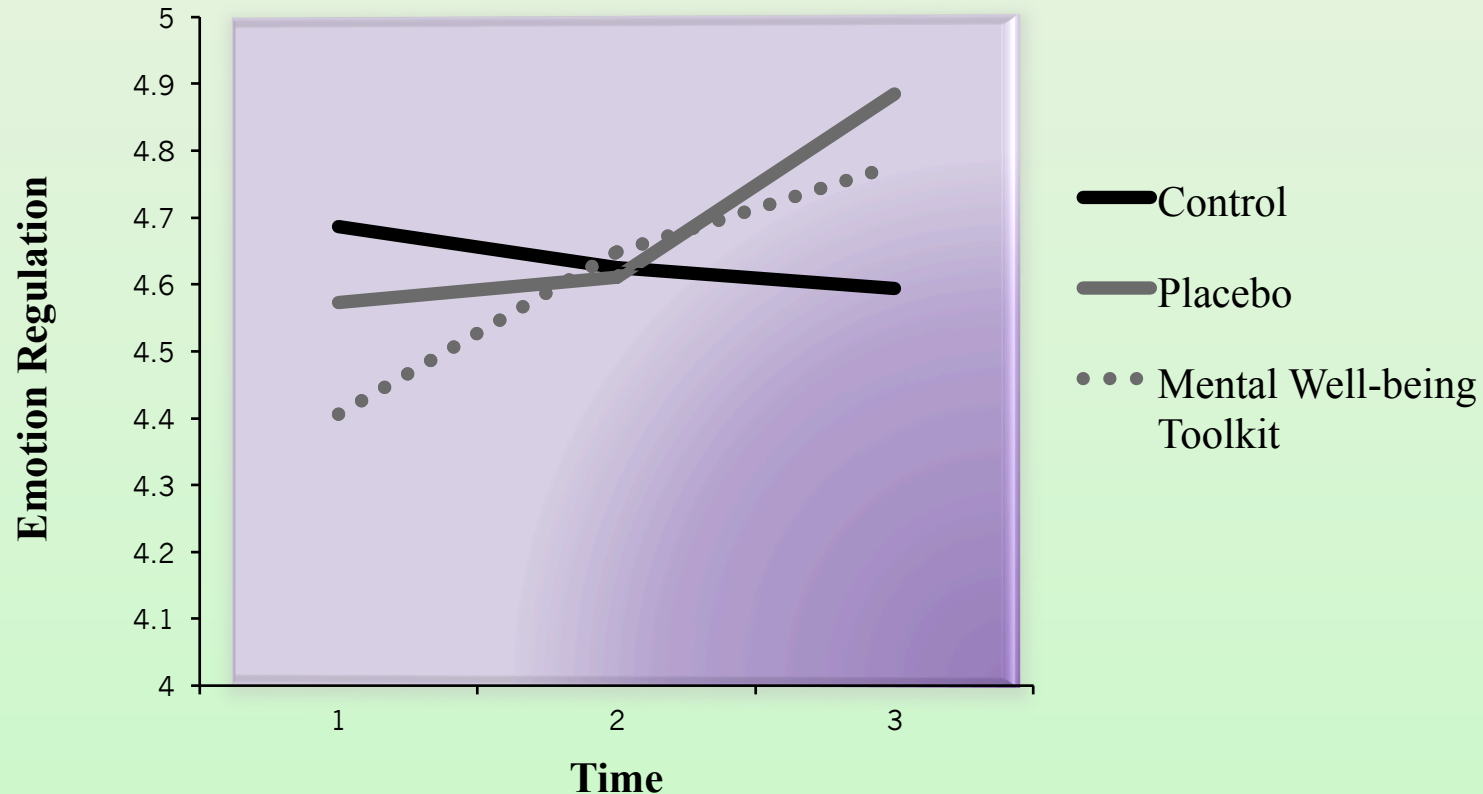
Mental Wellbeing Change Baseline – 1-Month Follow-Up



Emotion Regulation Change Over 2-Week Intervention



Emotion Regulation Change Baseline – 1-Month Follow-Up



Multilevel Growth Results for Emotion Regulation

Parameter	Model 2			
	Estimate	SE	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>
Between-Persons				
Intercept	4.29	0.09	1011	49.11***
Intervention vs. Placebo	-0.15	0.12	116	-1.22
Placebo vs. Control	-0.08	0.12	116	-0.67
Residual Variance	0.76	0.87		
R ²	0.01			
Within-Persons				
Time	-0.02	0.01	1011	-2.11*
Time*Intervention vs. Placebo	0.02	0.01	1011	2.04*
Time*Placebo vs. Control	0.03	0.01	1011	2.56*
Residual Variance	0.28	0.53		
R ²	0.00			

Implications

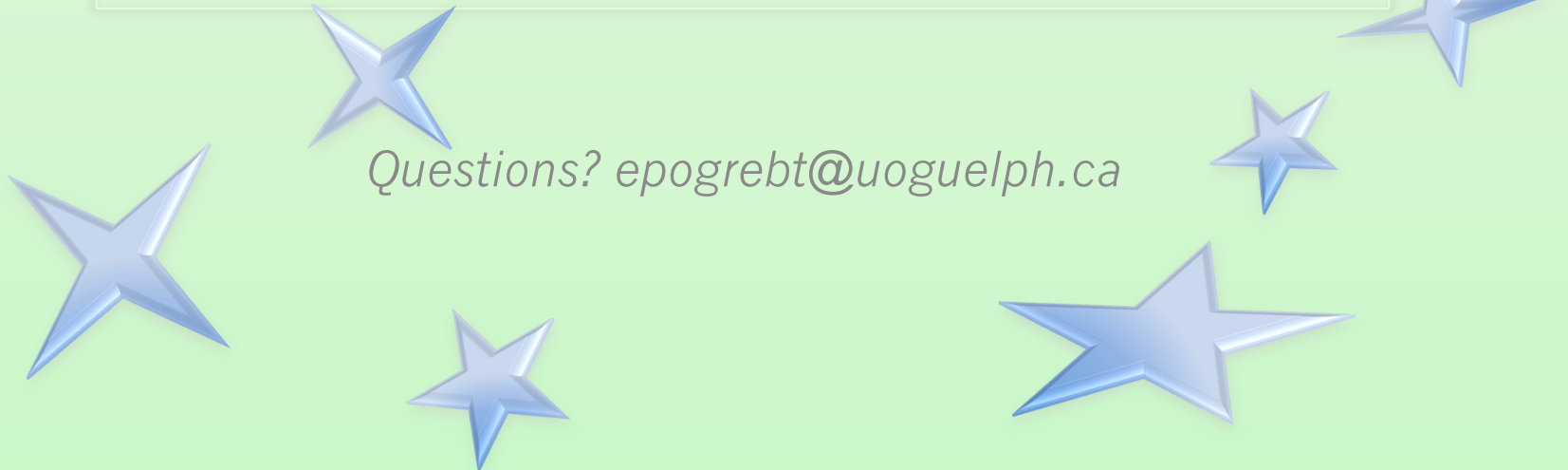
- Placebo is Powerful (*not “inert” but ACTIVE based on how it is used*)
- Reconceptualization of “Placebos” in healthcare, schools, workplaces... all services
- “Positive Care Effect” communicated for full client and research transparency
- **Focus on POSITIVE intervention EXPERIENCE more than specific strategies**



Thank you!

*Critically examine and harness the
power of placebos*

Questions? epogrebt@uoguelph.ca



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