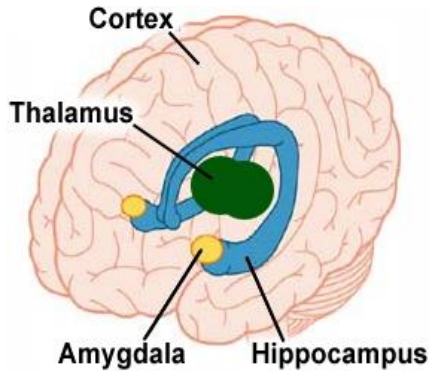


## Biological reasons why we don't want to get too close to other people - Kennedy et al (2009).

Psychologists already knew that the **amygdala** plays an important role in **emotions** and **social awareness**.



### Aim

Kennedy et al based their research on what psychologists already know about a part of the brain called the **amygdala**. This small section deep inside the brain is responsible for **decision making** and **emotional responses**.

People automatically move themselves to maintain a comfortable **personal distance** from other people during social interaction.

### Hypothesis

Kennedy's team hypothesised that the amygdala might have something to do with our sense of personal space.

### Procedure

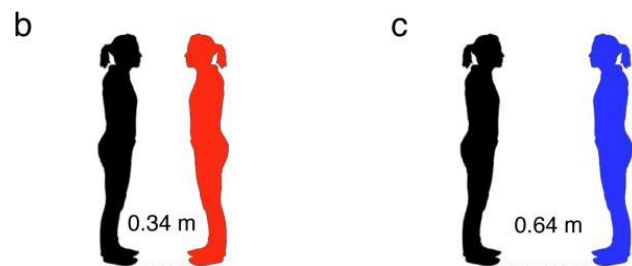
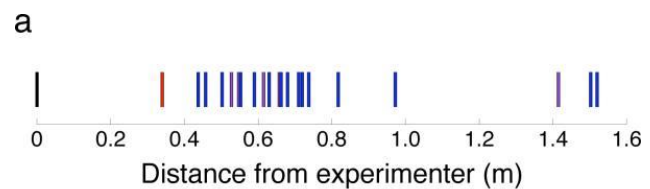
The researchers studied **S.M.** – a 42-year-old woman who had suffered extensive damage to her amygdala. S.M. indicated the position she felt most comfortable as a female experimenter approached her from 4.7m across a room. The distances were measured using a digital laser measurer. This was repeated four times. The same experiment was then carried out with control subjects.

### Results

S.M.'s preferred distance – a mean of **0.34m** – was smaller than the preferred distance of any comparison group. The mean of the comparison group was **0.64m**. Her preferred distance was smaller than any of the control group by a statistically significant distance.

### Evaluation

1. This was a **case study** of one person – S.M. – with damage to her amygdala. Unless the same experiment is repeated with a **bigger sample**, we cannot apply the results to the entire population. There might be **other reasons** why S.M. felt differently about her personal space compared to the other participants.
2. This research doesn't explain why **situational** and **personal** factors - such as whether we like a person, whether they are members of our family, or whether we are in a social or formal situation (at the park, in school, at a job interview) - have an impact on **how close** we are willing to get to another person.



(a) Shows all of the experiment's results (b) Shows S.M.'s preferred mean distance from the experimenter. (c) shows the control participant's mean preferred distance from the experimenter. Shown to scale.