Demonstrations of empathy’s ability to ameliorate antisocial or maladaptive behavior are plentiful, from reducing bullying, reducing conflict in close relationships, to increasing positive affect towards stereotyped outgroups. Perhaps the most well-research application of empathy in social psychology demonstrates empathy’s role in altruism. Given this impressive list of positive effects of empathy, researchers have attempted to develop empathy training programs. Most of these training programs are targeted at populations deficient in empathy, such as sexual offenders, pedophiles, and aggressive adolescents, or children at developmentally significant stages for empathy. However, there are no empathy training programs that focus on perspective taking and target non-clinical adults. The goal of this research project is to develop and test a perspective-taking training program aimed at a non-clinical adult population.

Our general strategy is to use established measures of perspective taking as tasks in timed game play. We believe that practicing these mental activities will improve perspective taking. Thus we have developed software that requires participants to complete repeated perspective-taking tasks under time pressure. The task for the current research is Piaget and Inhelder’s (1948/1956) three mountains test. In general, participants were shown a setting picture and then a series of possible pictures depicting various points of view. They had to select the correct picture depending on which point of view is indicated. We predicted that playing this perspective-taking game would make participants better perspective takers.

Participants
- 47 participants
- Average age = 20.5
- 15 males, 32 females

Procedure
Pre-post design with treatment and control conditions.

Pre- and Post-Test Measures
- Perspective-taking subscale of Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980)
- “Draw an E on the forehead” task (Hass, 1984)
- Spatial perspective-taking task (Tversky & Hard, 2009)

Participants came to the lab and completed the three measures in person, and they were then given instructions about how to access the “game” via a web browser. Participants played either the perspective-taking training “game” or a similar control “game” once a day for 6 consecutive days. The first day consisted of 12 trials, and the remaining 24 trials. Trials became progressively more difficult across days. They then returned to the lab and completed the same three measures a second time.