

# The Emotionate Child

*The importance of early relationships*



Ross A. Thompson

*University of California,  
Davis*

**SEDL**  
THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT LAB

**UC DAVIS**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Presented at the Festsymposium in honor of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of developmental psychology at the University of Vienna Nov. 22, 2013



## **1922-1923**

Founding of the  
Vienna Psychological Institute

*"Golden age in psychology"*

### **Charlotte Bühler**

Founding of  
developmental psychology  
at the University of Vienna

"to view development from the  
perspectives of biological function  
and cultural value, of society and  
the individual"

*"The authors' descriptions of hilarious, learning babies will make you laugh, but the seriousness of their project, and its implications, are breathtaking." *Seattle Times**

# THE SCIENTIST IN THE CRIB

WHAT EARLY LEARNING  
TELLS US ABOUT  
THE MIND



Alison Gopnik, Ph.D.  
Andrew N. Meltzoff, Ph.D.  
Patricia K. Kuhl, Ph.D.

# The Philosophical Baby

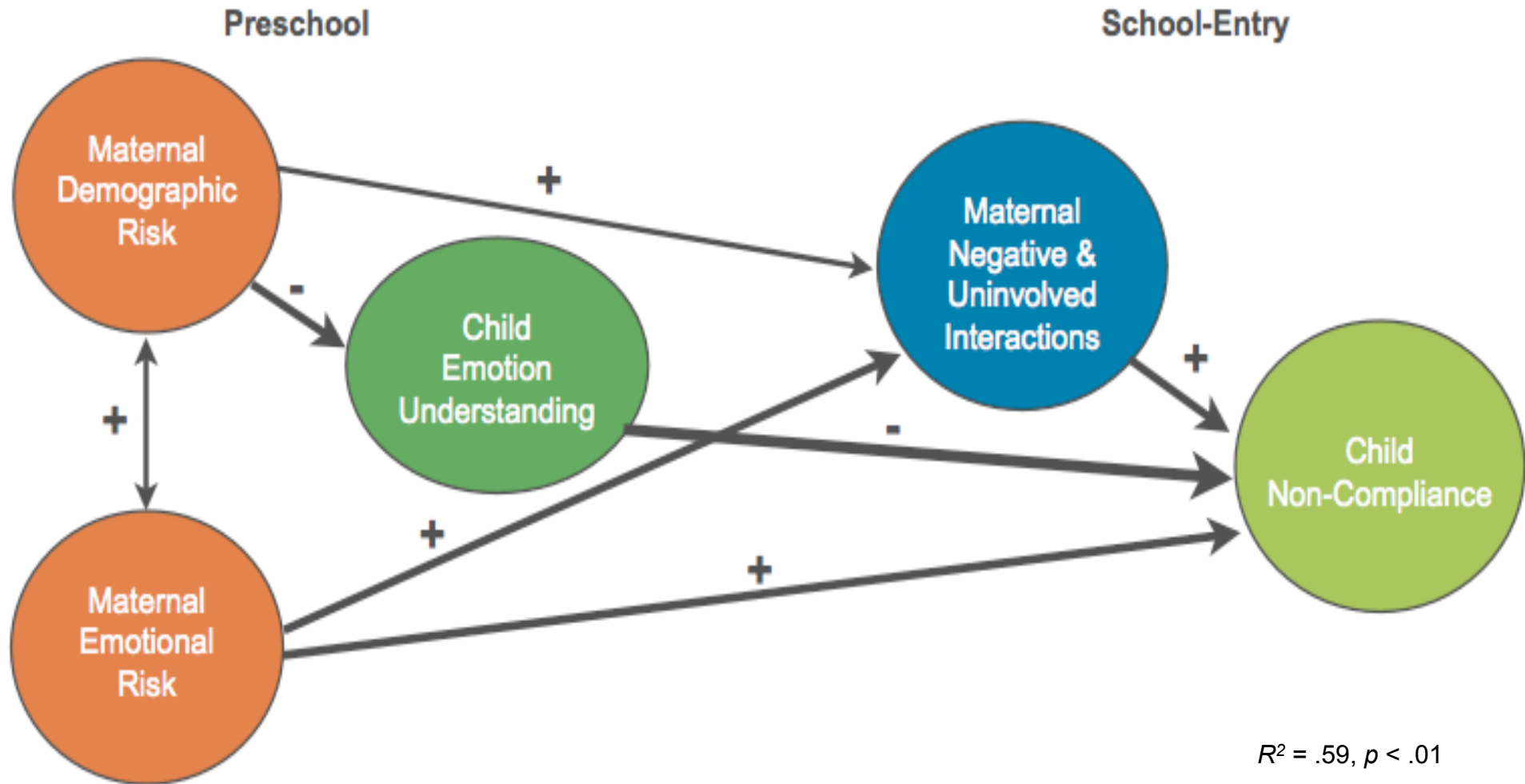
*What Children's Minds Tell Us About  
Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*



Alison Gopnik

# The emotional child

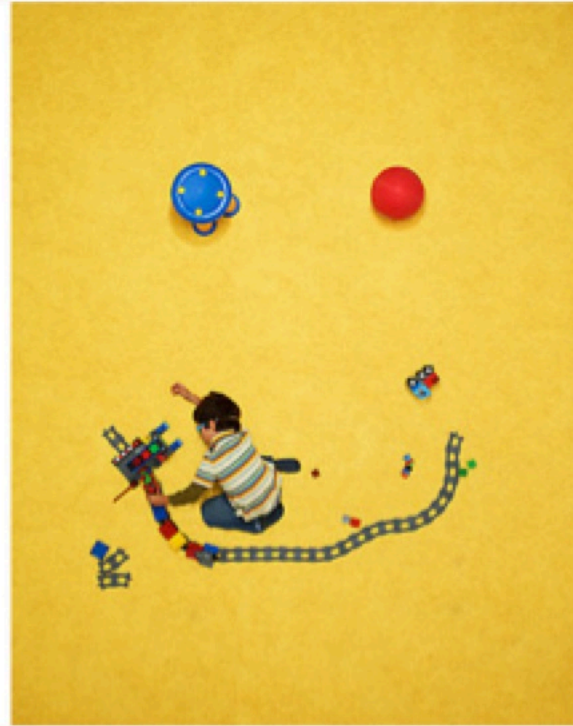




# The New York Times

August 25, 2010

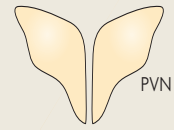
## Can Preschoolers Be Depressed?



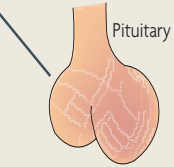
System

nal cortex

ACTH

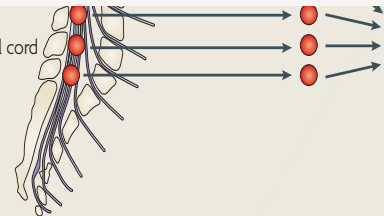


CRH, AVP and others

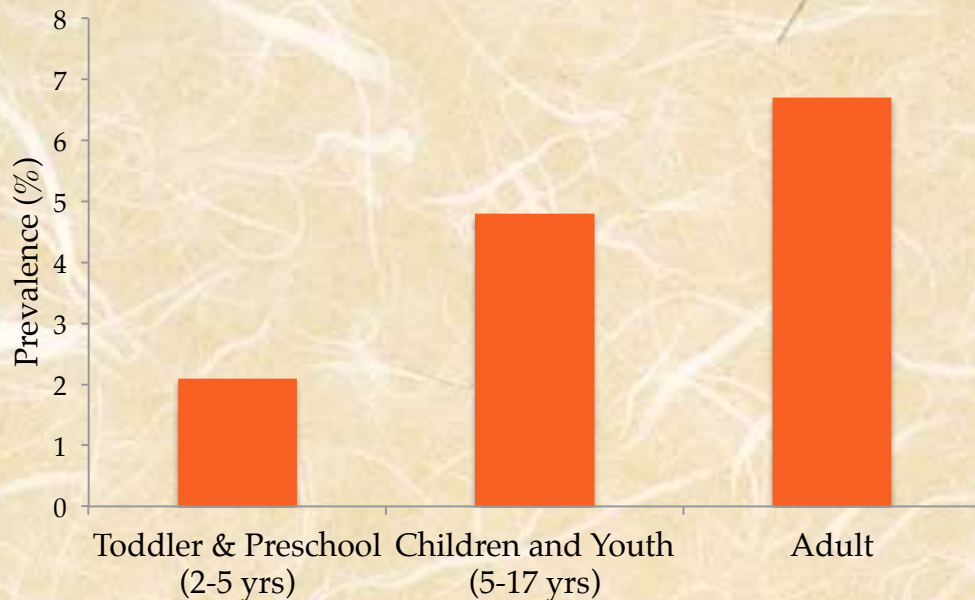


Sacral spinal cord

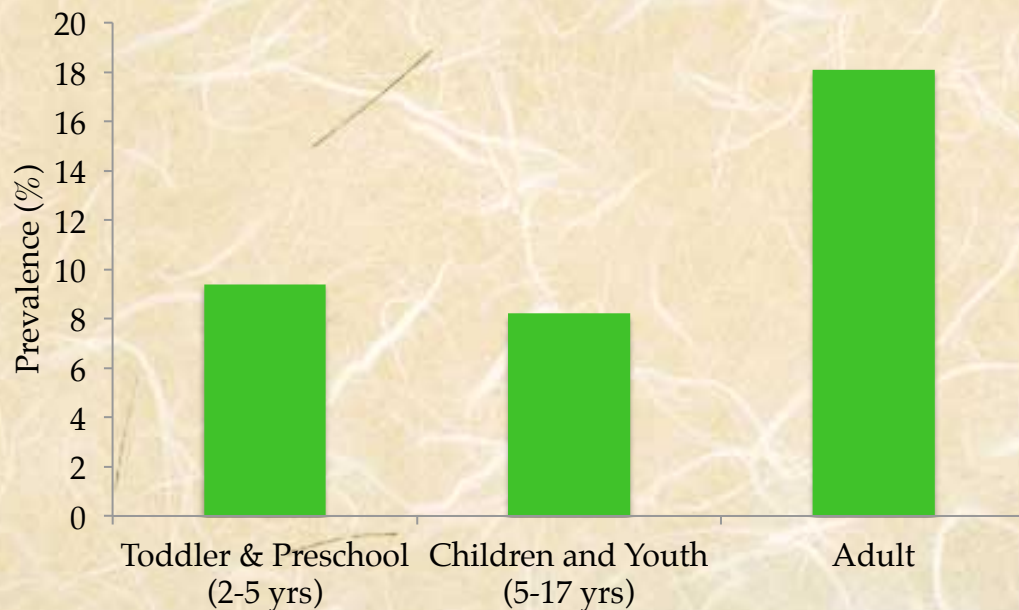
Abdominal viscera



## Depression



## Anxiety Disorders



Sources: Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005; Kessler, Chin, Demler, & Walters, 2005; Egger & Angold, 2006; and data from the Duke Early Childhood Study, courtesy Dr. Helen Egger, Duke Univ. Medical Center

# The emotionate child

## **Emotionate** (i-'mō-sh(ə-)nət):

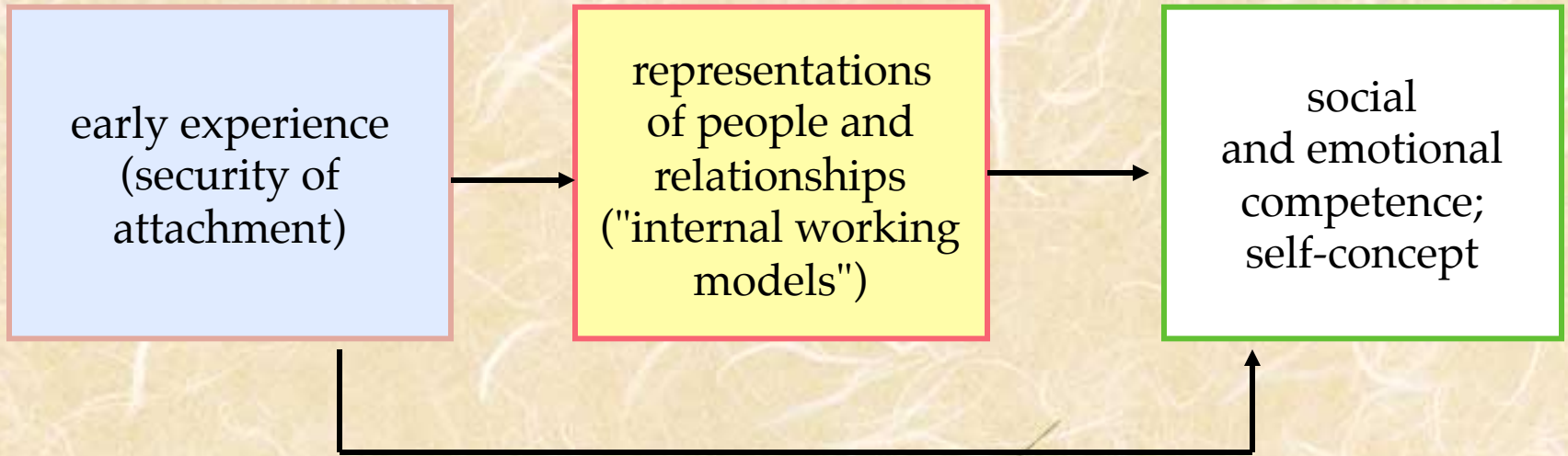
1. characterized by emotional apperception, sensitivity, and/or insight (*an emotionate side to his nature*)
2. behaviors reflecting emotional insight or understanding (*her sympathetic response showed that she was an emotionate child*)



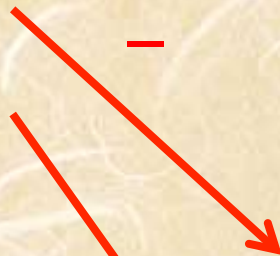
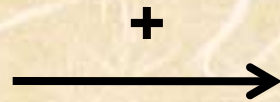


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A video player control bar with a progress bar showing 00:00:30 to -00:01:18. It includes a play/pause button, a volume icon, and a full screen icon.



Secure attachment with Mother  
age 3



**Negative attribution bias**  
Belief that others have negative intentions in uncertain situations (e.g., a block tower falls over when another child runs by)

**Social problem solving**  
Number / variety of positive solutions to social problems (e.g., how to make friends with another child)

**Loneliness**  
Children's responses to short interview questions (e.g., "Is it easy for you to make new friends?")

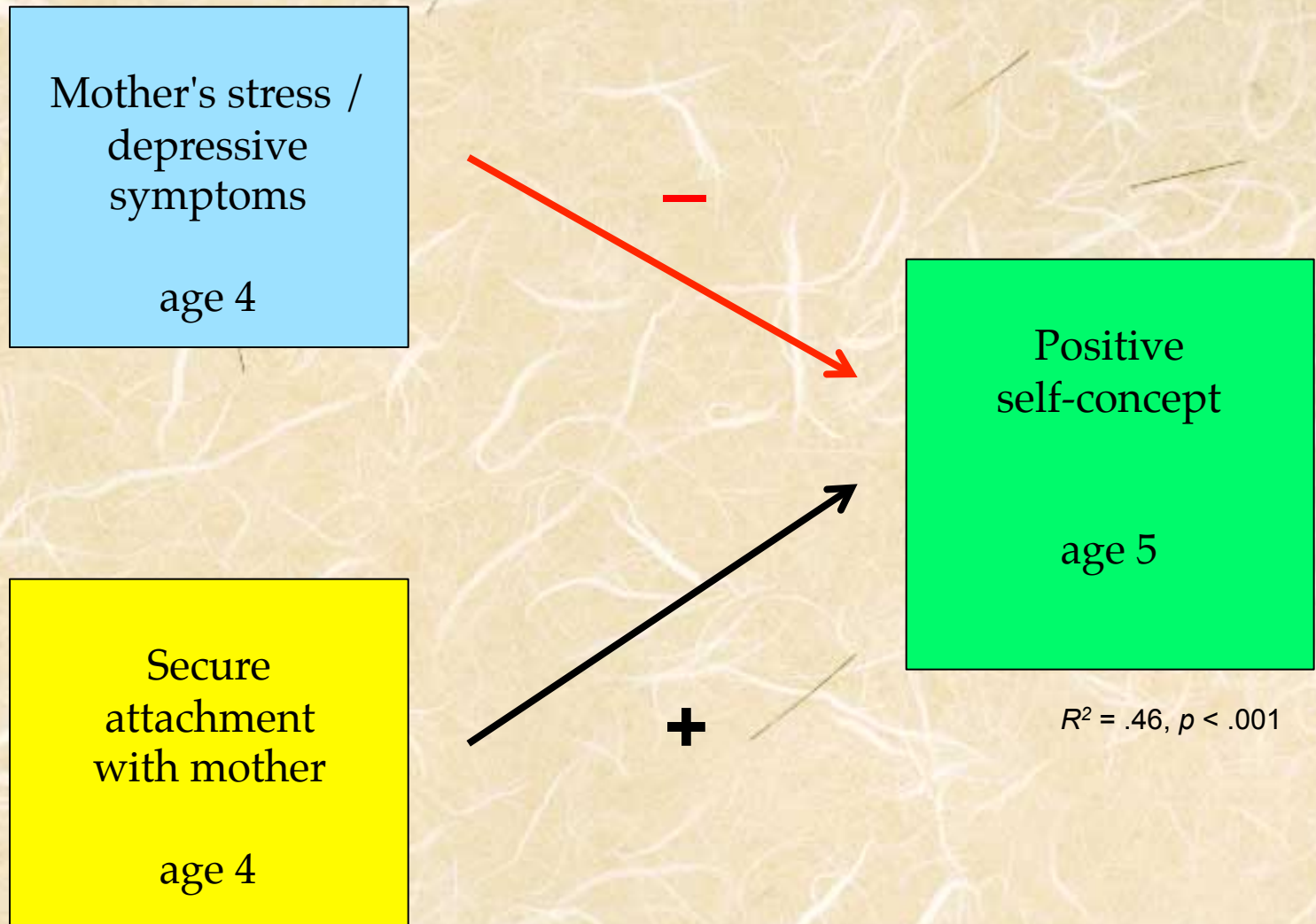
**Negative attribution bias**

4 1/2 yrs

1st grade

Raikes, H. A., & Thompson, R. A. (2008). Attachment security and parenting quality predict children's problem-solving, attributions, and loneliness with peers. *Attachment & Human Development, 10*(3), 1-26.

ps < .05 to .01



Goodvin, R., Meyer, S., Thompson, R. A., & Hayes, R. (2008). Self-understanding in early childhood: Associations with attachment security and maternal emotional risk. *Attachment & Human Development*, 10(4), 433-450.

Mother's depressive symptoms  
2 ½ years

Emotional risks to the family  
2 ½ years

Mother-child emotion conversation quality  
3 ½ years

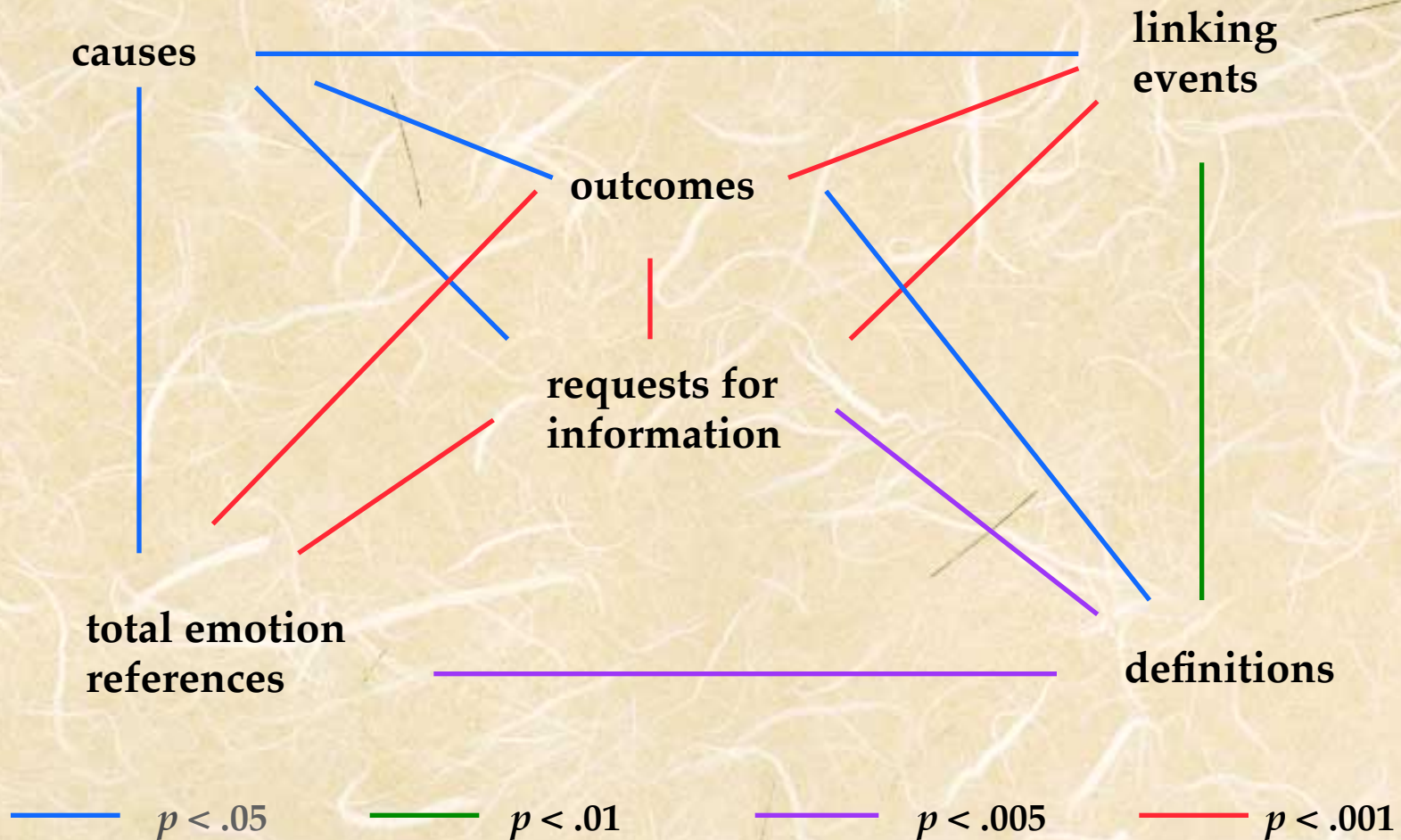
Secure attachment with mother  
2 ½ years

Emotion understanding  
3 ½ years

$R^2 = .50, p < .01$

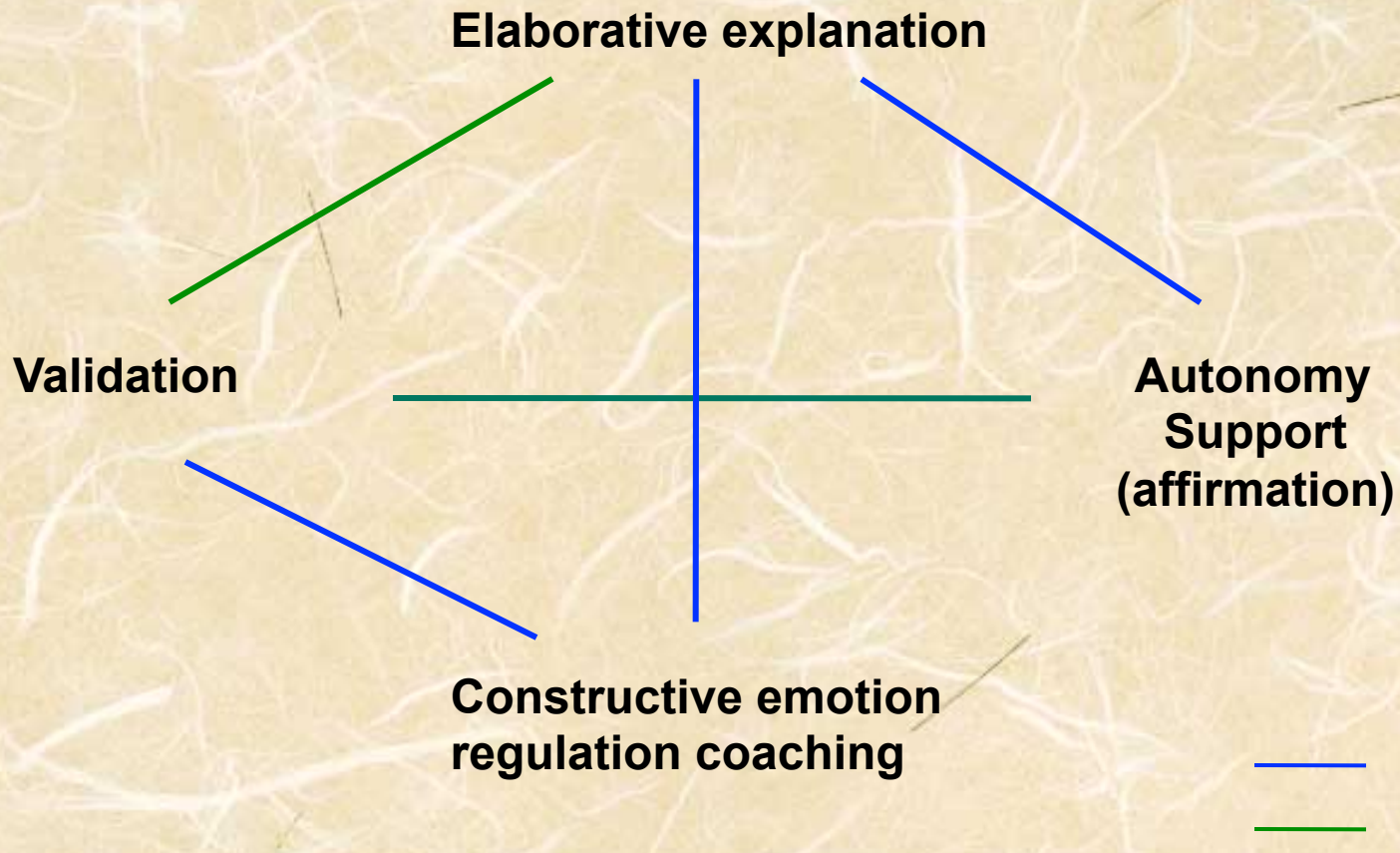
From Raikes, H. A., & Thompson, R. A. (2006). Family emotional climate, attachment security, and young children's emotion understanding in a high-risk sample. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 24(1), 89-104, and Raikes, H. A., & Thompson, R. A. (2008). Conversations about emotion in high-risk dyads. *Attachment & Human Development*, 10(4), 359-377.

## Elements of mother-child emotion conversation:





- It's hard when you feel so angry. You're going "AAAH, he's bouncing my guy off there!" Right?
- How did the other kids feel when you shut off the game?
- It makes you sad thinking about it, doesn't it?
- After you stopped the game, the other guys said, "You know, Joey wasn't really doing so bad." You thought you were losing, but you weren't.



Security of attachment is significantly associated with the combination of these measures of conversation quality



## 2 ½ years: Mother-child conversation elements during conflict episodes in the lab

Talking about rules

Talking about the consequences of actions

Talking about people's emotions

Moral evaluative statements ("good girl!")

Compromising or bargaining

Justification and reasoning /  
Low use of threats, teasing or insistence



Conscience  
Development  
age 3

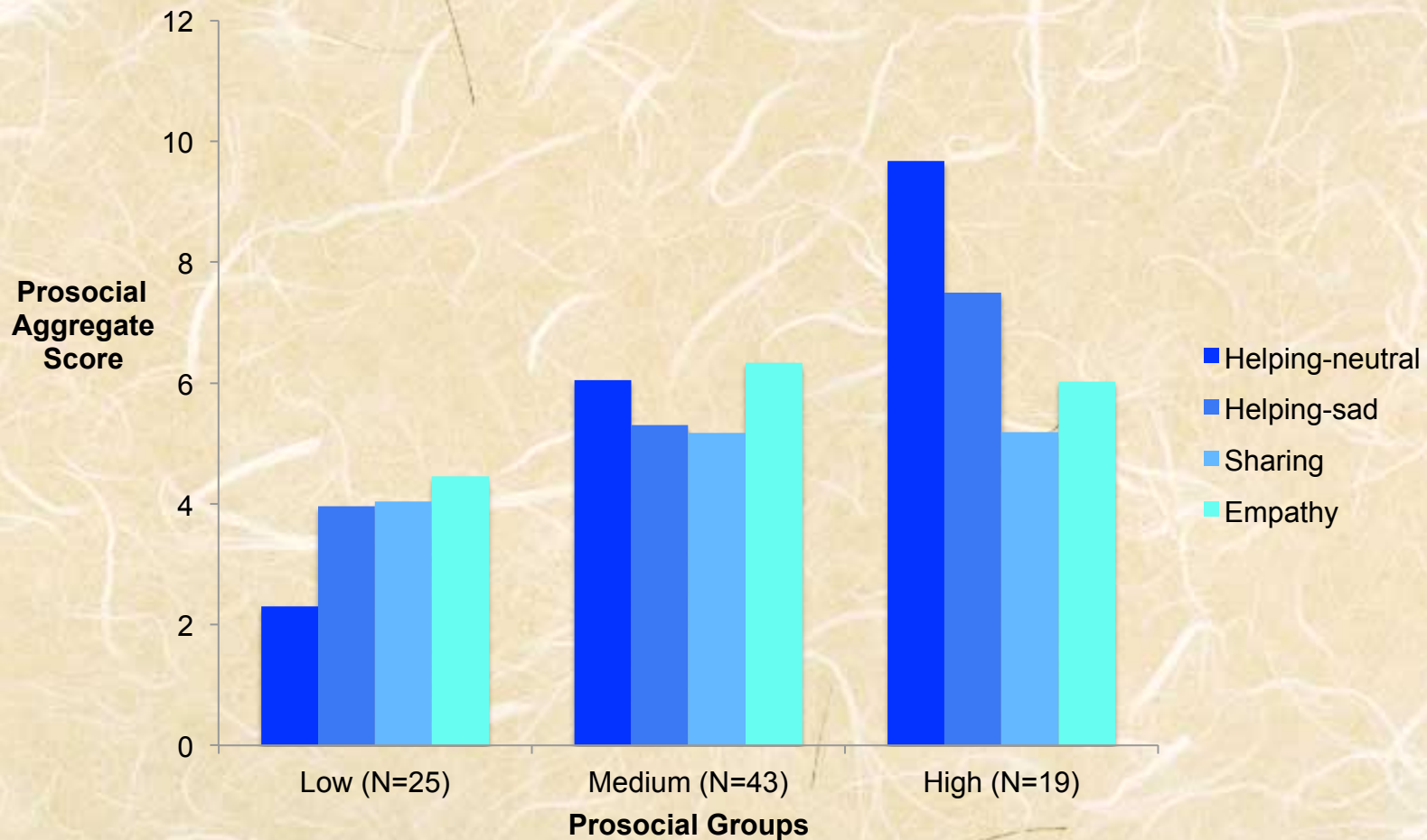
$R^2 = .37, p < .01$

# Prosocial measures ...

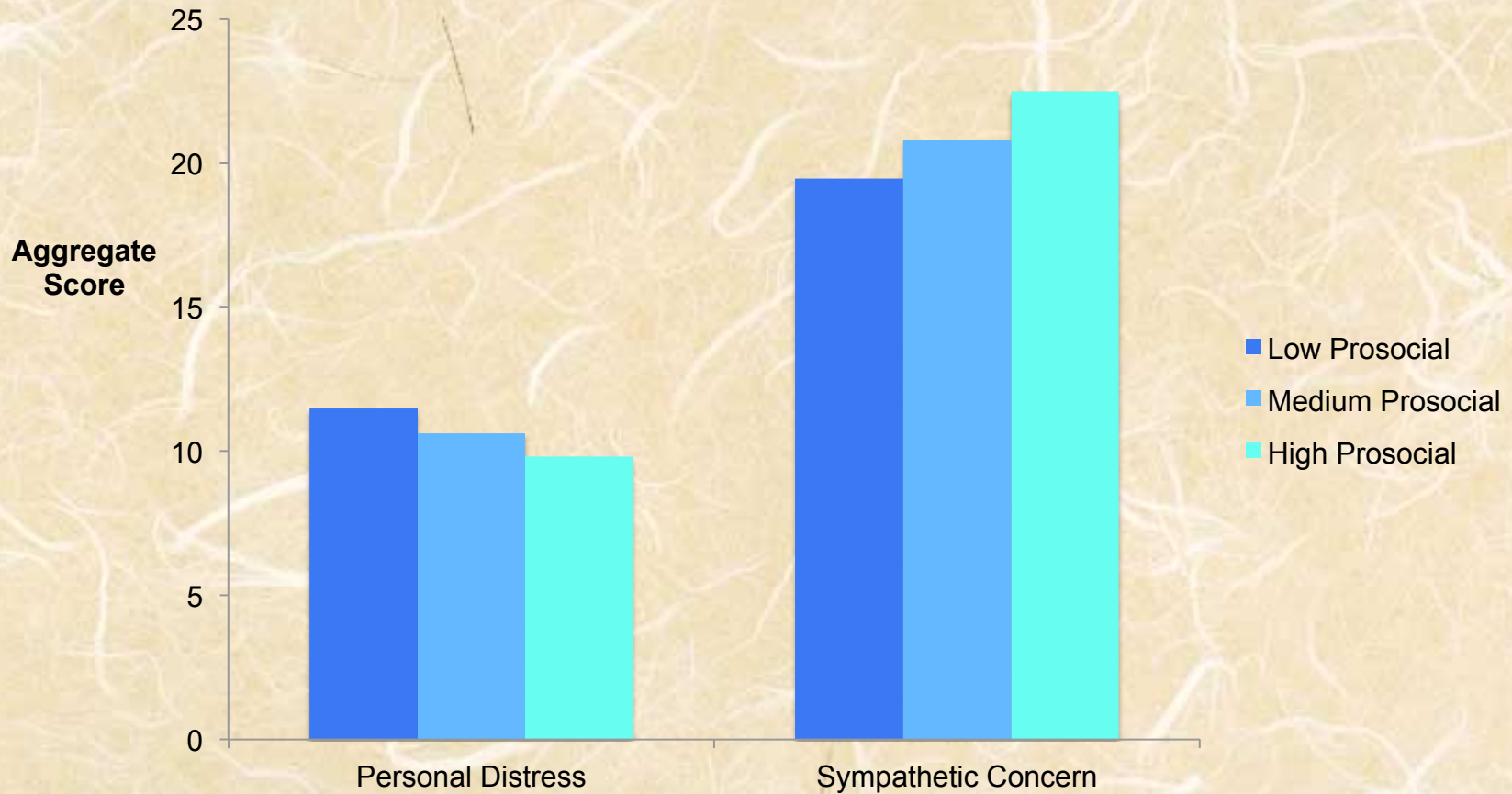
- Helping (neutral experimenter)
- Helping (sad experimenter)
- Sharing
- Empathy (repair)



# Are there reliable individual differences in prosocial responding by toddlers?

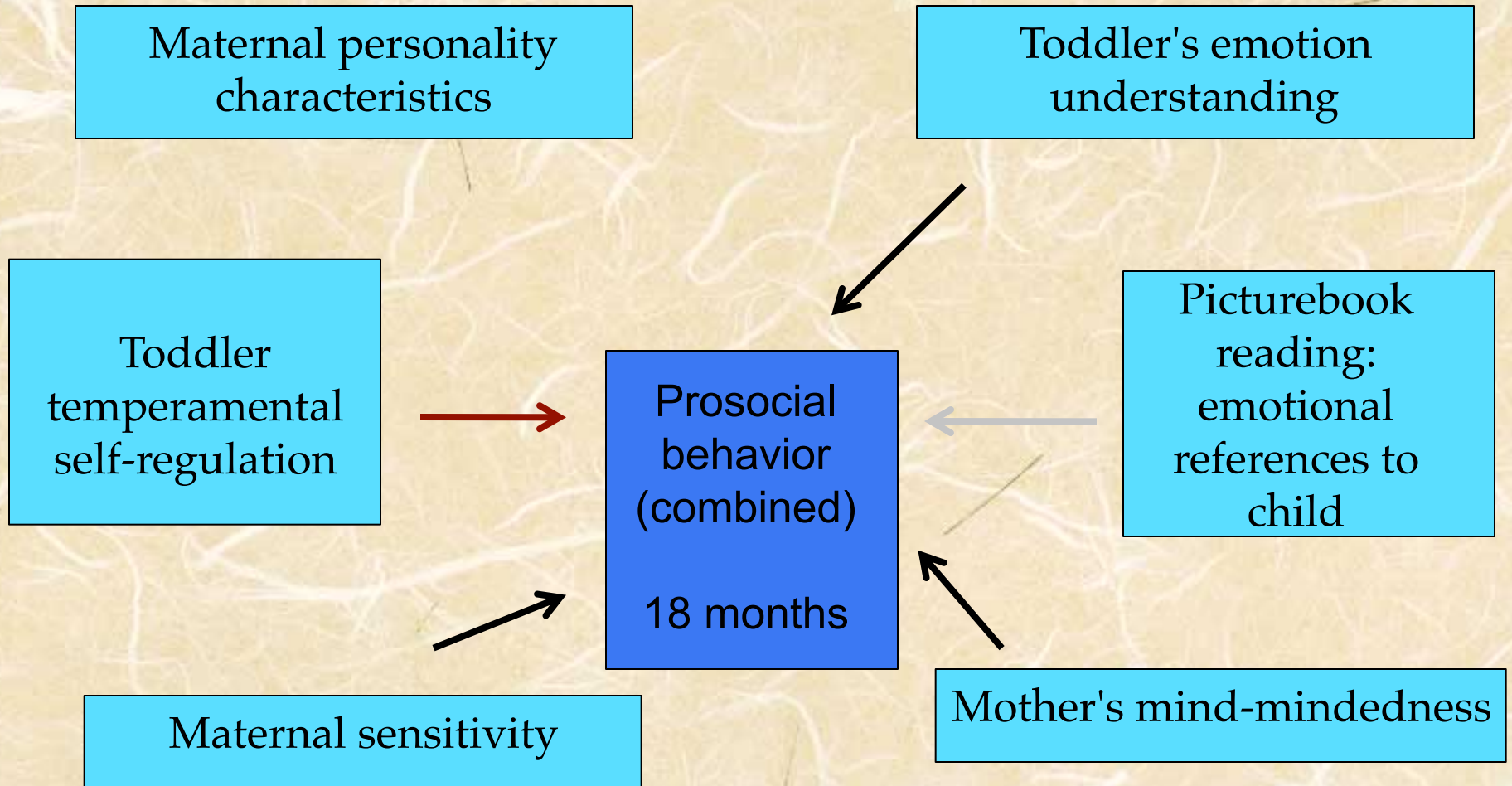


# How is prosocial behavior associated with children's sympathetic concern and personal distress?



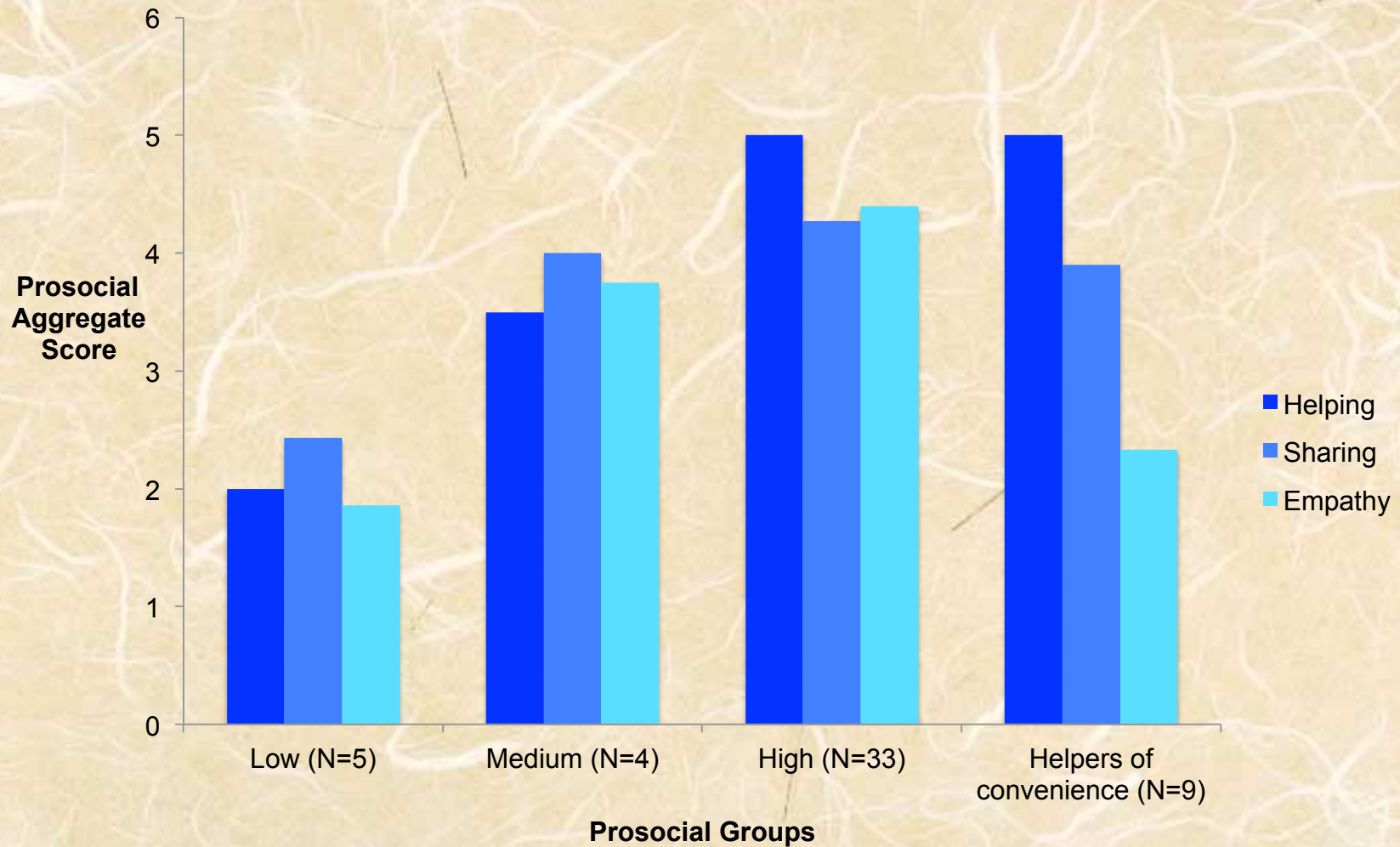
for Personal Distress:  $F(2,80) = 4.78, p < .05$  for Sympathetic Concern:  $F(2,75) = 8.08, p < .001$

# What characteristics of children, mothers, and their relationship are associated with differences in prosocial behavior?

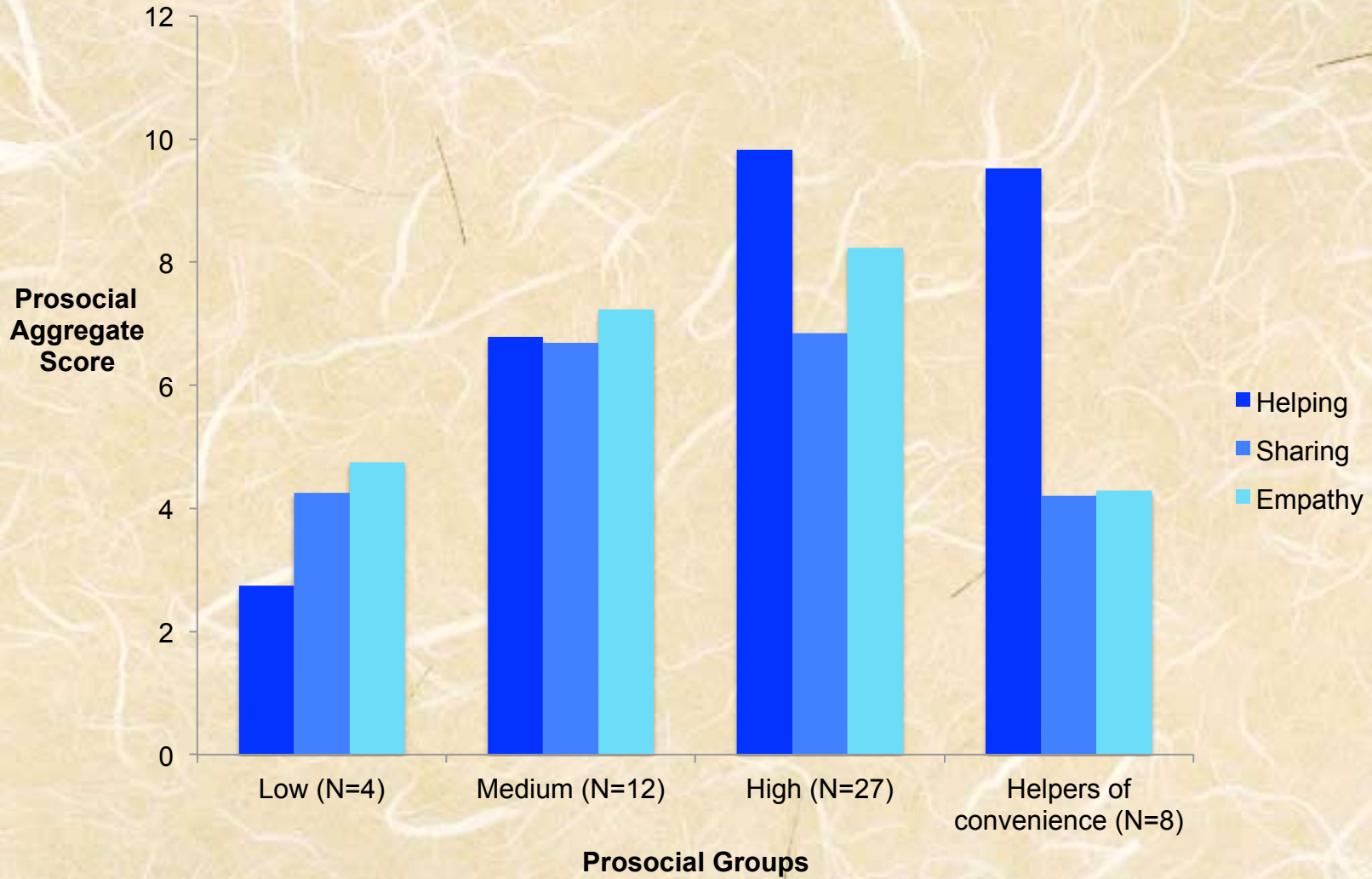




# Do preschoolers show reliable differences in prosocial responding at age 4 ½ ?



# Prosocial groups at 6 years of age





## Mother-child conversation about helping and not helping

- References to **emotions, needs, and desires** – of the (potential) help recipient or the child -- were frequent for each conversation type, along with positive or negative **moral evaluative** statements
- Conversations about **not** helping at age 4 ½ were shorter but were more strongly associated with prosocial behavior at age 6, particularly in mothers' use of **positive moral evaluatives** (“That was nice to do”)
- **Shared positive affect** between mothers and children at age 4 ½ was also a significant predictor of prosocial behavior at age 6
- Maternal **rule-based justifications** were never associated with children's prosocial behavior at any age

## Development of the emotionate child

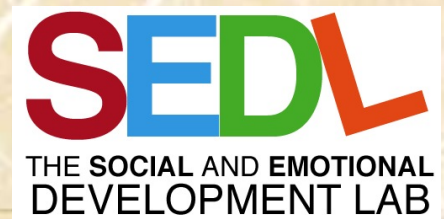
- An emotional connection to another's experience develops early and contributes, more than rules and sanctions, to emergent conscience, helping and sharing, and empathy-related actions
- The content and quality of mother-child conversation enlists this emotional capacity into representations of people, relationships, and the self that also support constructive social conduct.
- Early relational experience provides a context of safety and security that buffers stress, strengthens positive self-regard, and enhances young children's positive orientation toward others.
- Both what is said and how it is said is important: positive, emotion-focused discourse in the context of relational warmth provide young children with the experience of sensitivity to their own feelings as they become sensitive to others' emotions.

# Thanks!

rathompson@ucdavis.edu

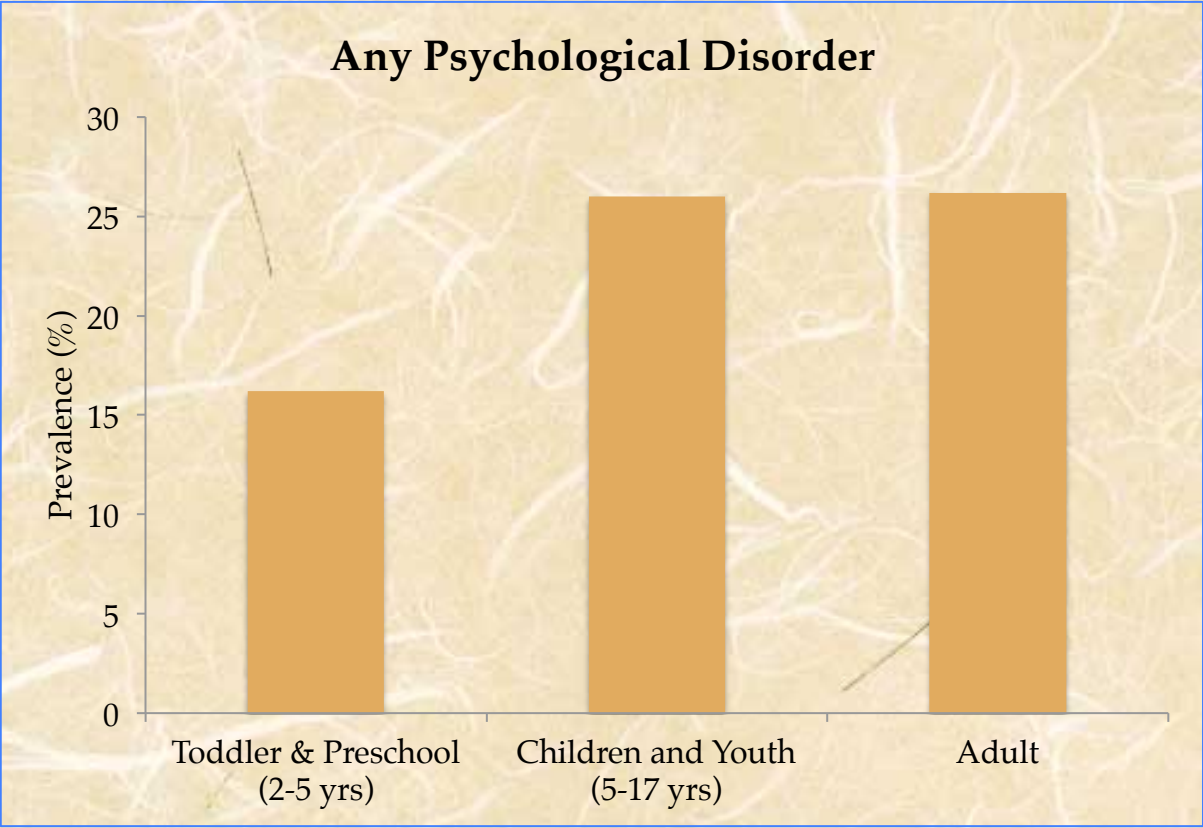


Financial support from The Amini Foundation for the Study of Affects





### Any Psychological Disorder



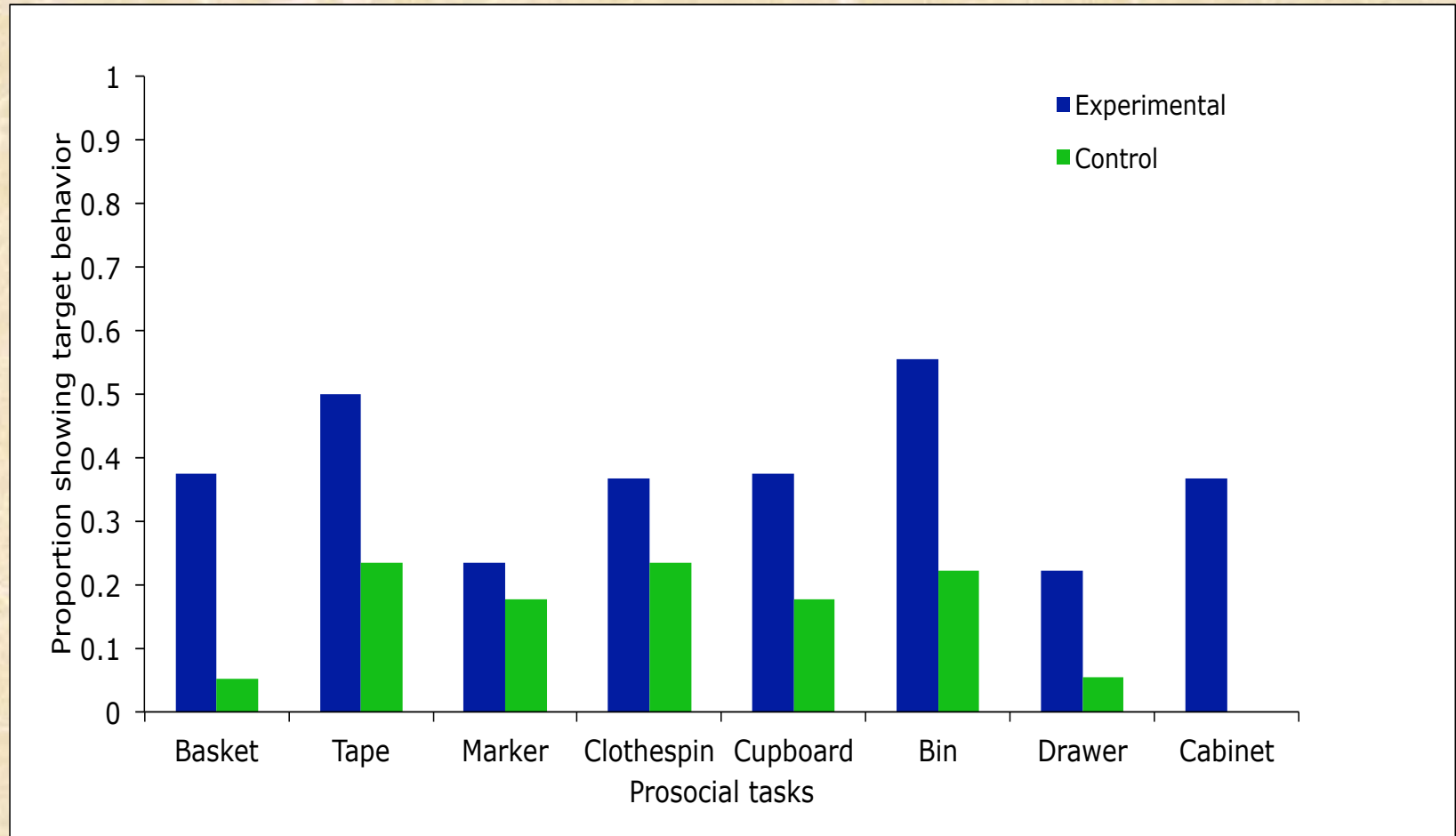
4



00:02:27:14



# Toddler helping in experimental and control conditions



Newton, E., Goodman, M., & Thompson, R. (in press). Why do some toddlers help a stranger? Origins of individual differences in prosocial behavior. *Infancy*, in press