

# The role of emotion in the development of prosocial motivation



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## Emotional competence can assume many roles in the development of constructive social behavior

- Emotion understanding can contribute to young children's comprehension of another's needs, desires, and goals
- Attention to and awareness of another's feelings can contribute to empathy or sympathetic responding
- Maternal mental state language can enhance children's emotion understanding by highlighting the importance of feelings, goals, desires, and their influence on another's behavior
- A young child's experience of emotionally warm, responsive relationships, especially with caregivers, can contribute to a reciprocal interest in attending to others' intentions and goals
- Mother-child conversation can enlist a young child's awareness of others' intentions and feelings into a system of values that promotes constructive social behavior

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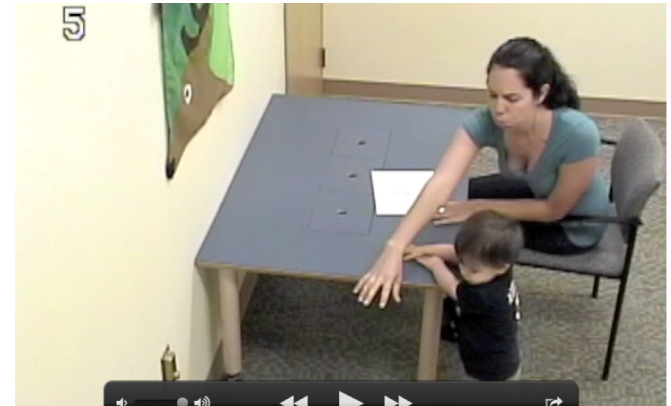


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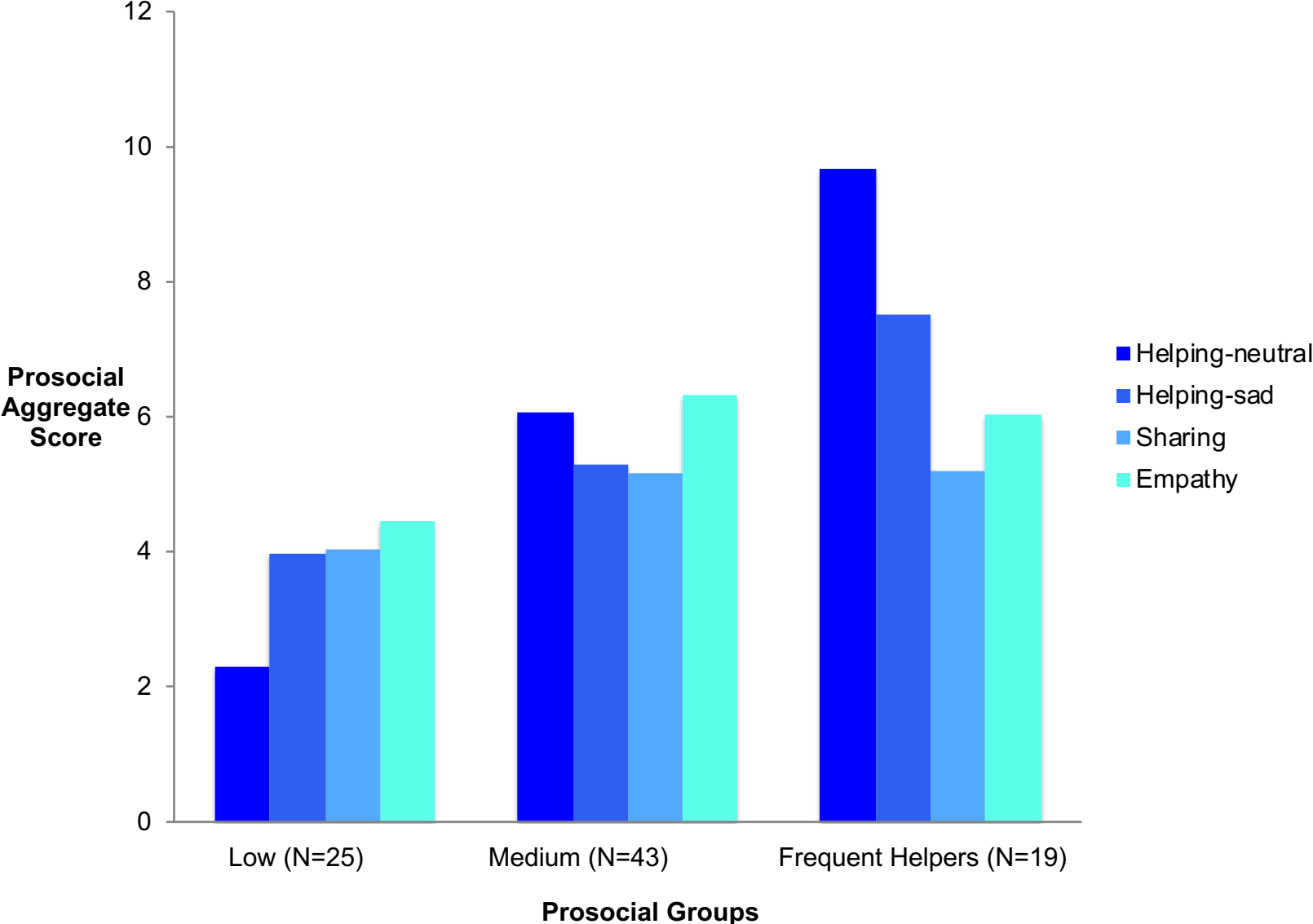
# Prosocial measures ...

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

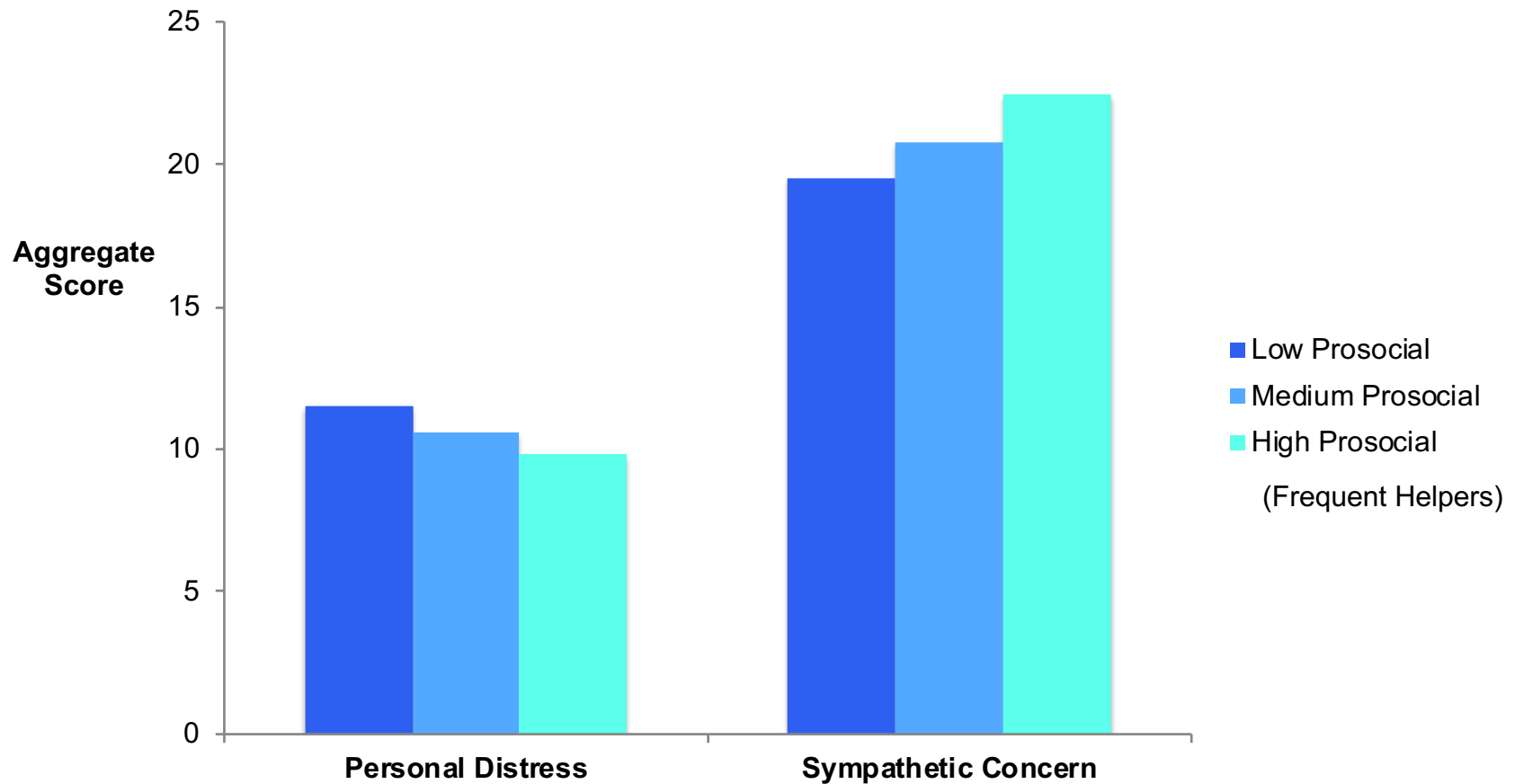




# Are there reliable individual differences in prosocial responding by toddlers?



# 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:  $F(2,75) = 8.08, p < .001$

# How are individual differences in prosocial behavior associated with mother-child interaction?

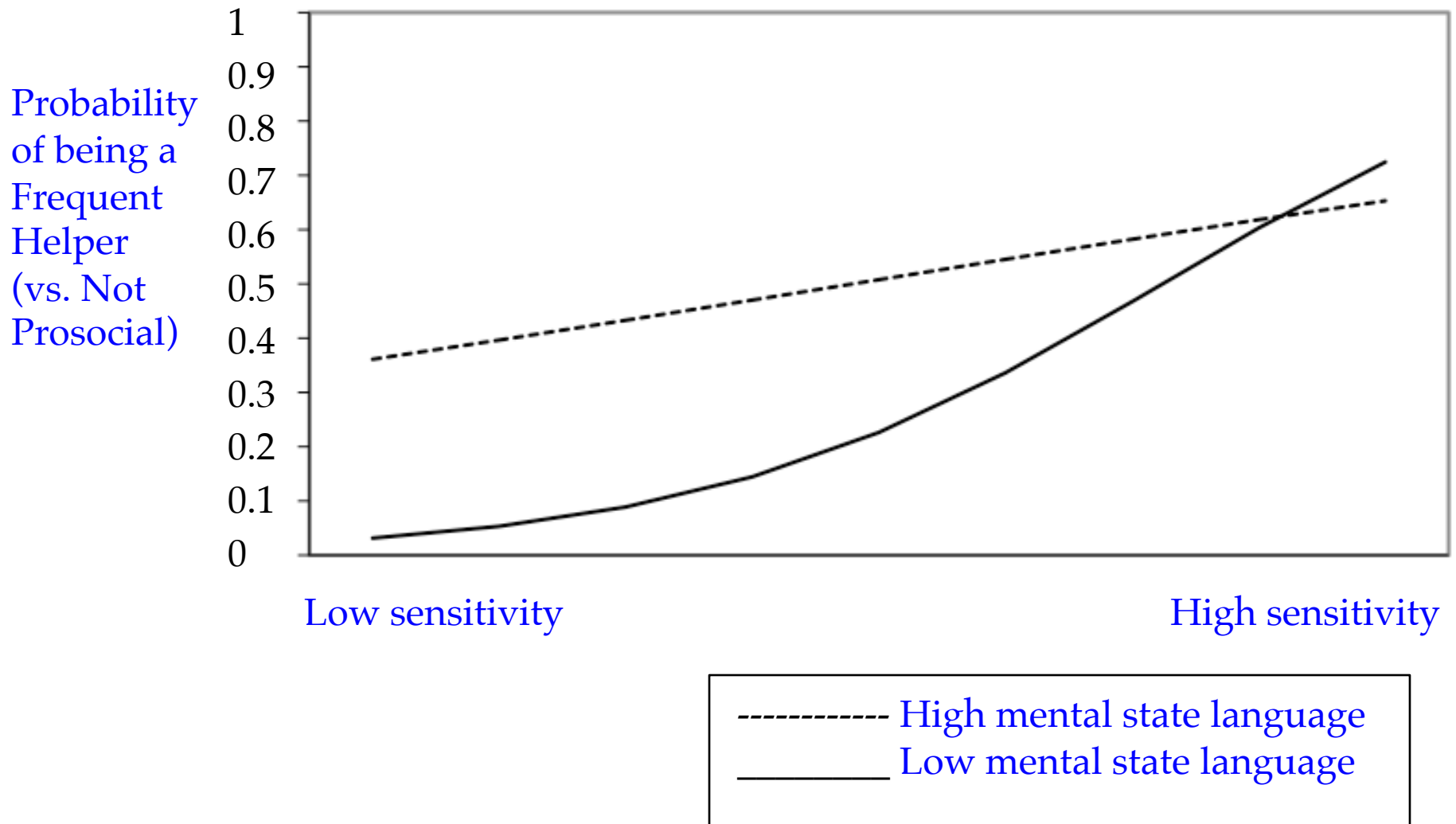
## Logistic Class Regression Analysis

Variables	Class 1 vs. Class 2 OR (95% CI)	Class 2 vs. Class 3 OR (95% CI)	Class 1 vs. Class 3 OR (95% CI)
Child Sex	0.58 (0.20-1.68)	1.77 (0.50-6.22)	1.03 (0.27-3.93)
Child Age	1.02 (0.99-1.05)	0.99 (0.95-1.02)	1.01 (0.97-1.05)
Maternal Sensitivity	1.39 (0.85-2.27)	<b>2.49 (1.17-5.31)*</b>	<b>3.45 (1.63-7.33)***</b>
Maternal Mental State Language	0.95 (0.86-1.03)	<b>1.17 (1.02-1.33)*</b>	1.10 (0.96-1.27)
Sensitivity x Language	0.99 (0.92-1.05)	0.91 (0.81-1.01)	<b>0.89 (0.80-1.00)*</b>

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

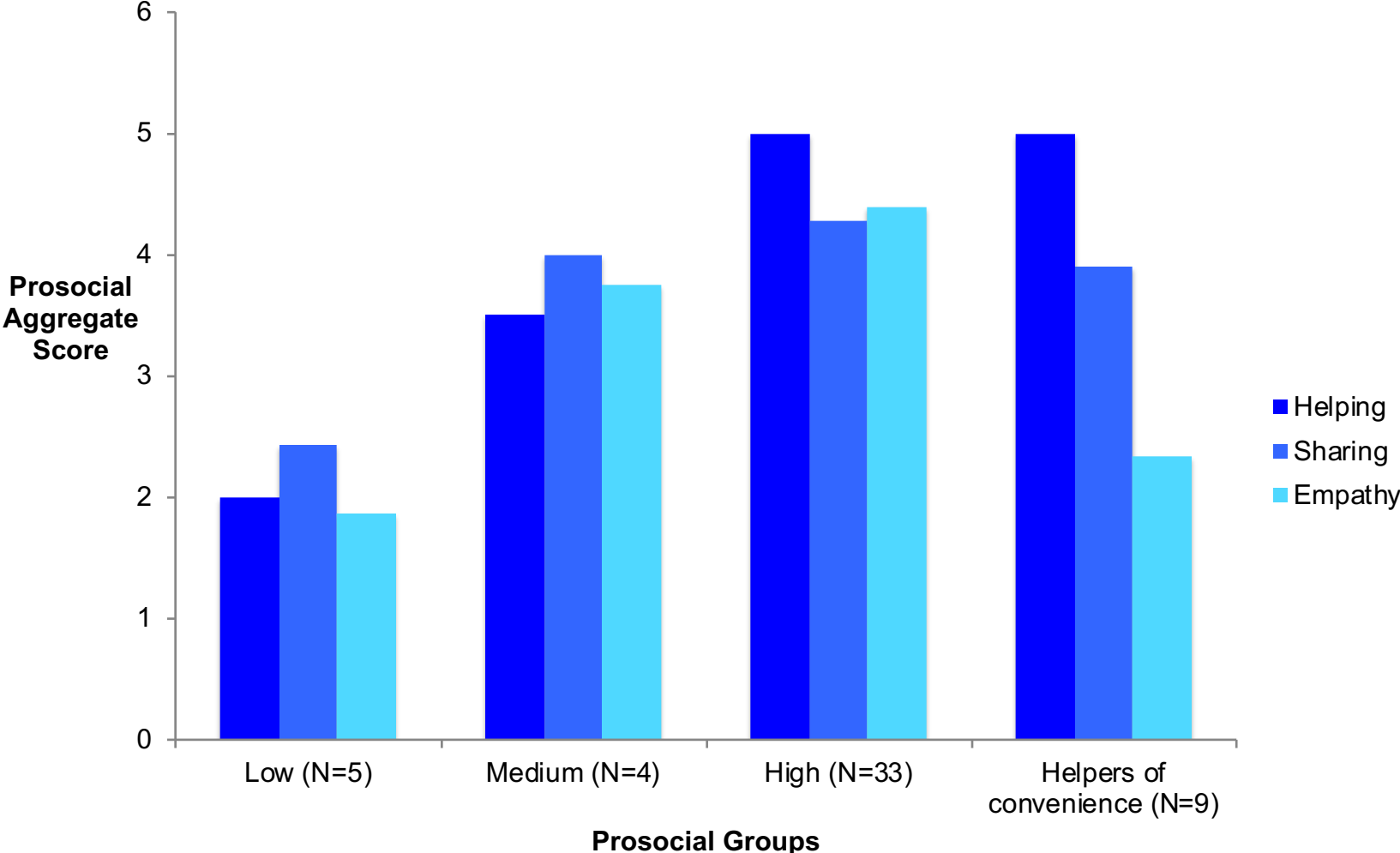
Class 1 = Not Prosocial, Class 2 = Moderately Prosocial, Class 3 = Frequent Helpers; OR = odds ratio

# Interaction between maternal sensitivity and maternal mental state language in predicting children's prosocial class membership (LCRA)



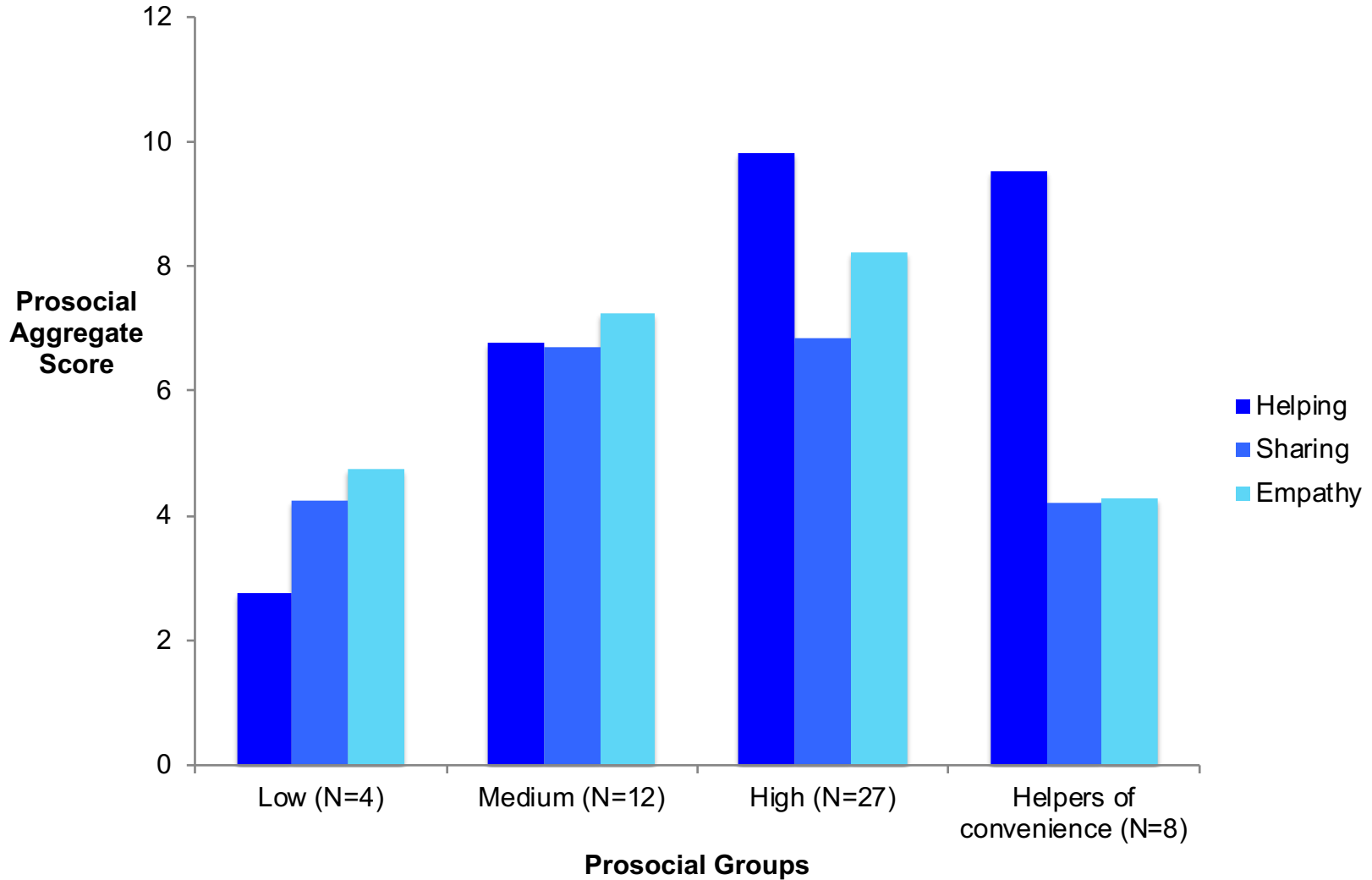


# Do preschoolers show reliable differences in prosocial responding at age 4½ ?





# Prosocial groups at 6 years of age



## How consistent are prosocial groups at 4½ and 6?

T1 Groups	T2 Groups				Total
	High	Moderate	Low	Frequent Helpers	
High	19	8	2	4	33
Moderate	1	2	0	1	4
Low	2	0	2	1	5
Frequent helpers	5	2	0	2	9
Total	27	12	4	8	51

Winer, A. C, Newton, E. K., Thompson, R. A., & Goodman-Wilson, M. (submitted). *Becoming prosocial: The reliability of individual differences in early prosocial behavior.*

## 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 4½ were shorter but were more strongly associated with prosocial behavior at age 6
- In the conversations about not helping, mothers' use of **positive moral evaluatives** (“That was nice to do”) and their references to **negative moral emotions** (e.g., "sorry") were significant predictors of prosocial behavior at age 6
- **Shared positive affect** between mothers and children at age 4½ 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

## Interim conclusions ...

- Individual differences in early prosocial behavior are consistent across helping, sharing, and empathy tasks, suggesting that a core disposition to assist others is developing during this period
- Differences in prosocial behavior across tasks are associated with empathic concern but are negatively associated with personal distress, consistent with theoretical expectations about prosocial motivation
- In very young children, differences in prosocial behavior are associated with maternal sensitivity and maternal mental state language, pointing to the importance of the child's experience of care and emotion understanding.
- Emotion-focused language assumes a broader role in mother-child conversations about helping with older children, along with morally evaluative statements. Rule-based justifications are never influential.

# Thanks!

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