

## The Emotionate Child

*The importance of early relationships*



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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

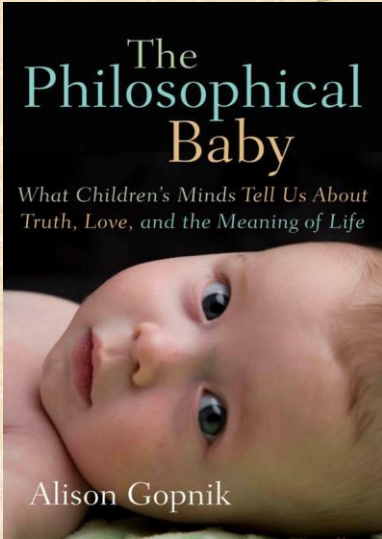
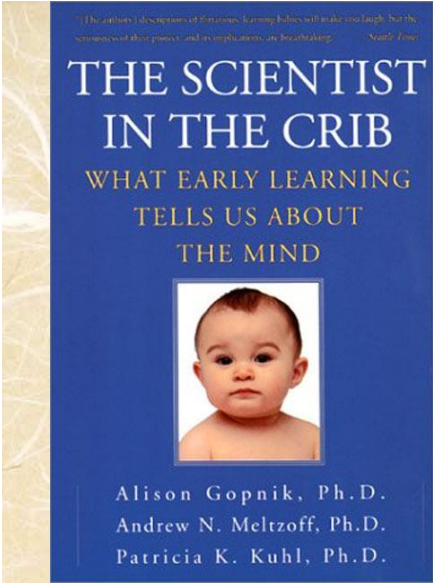
*"Golden age in psychology"*

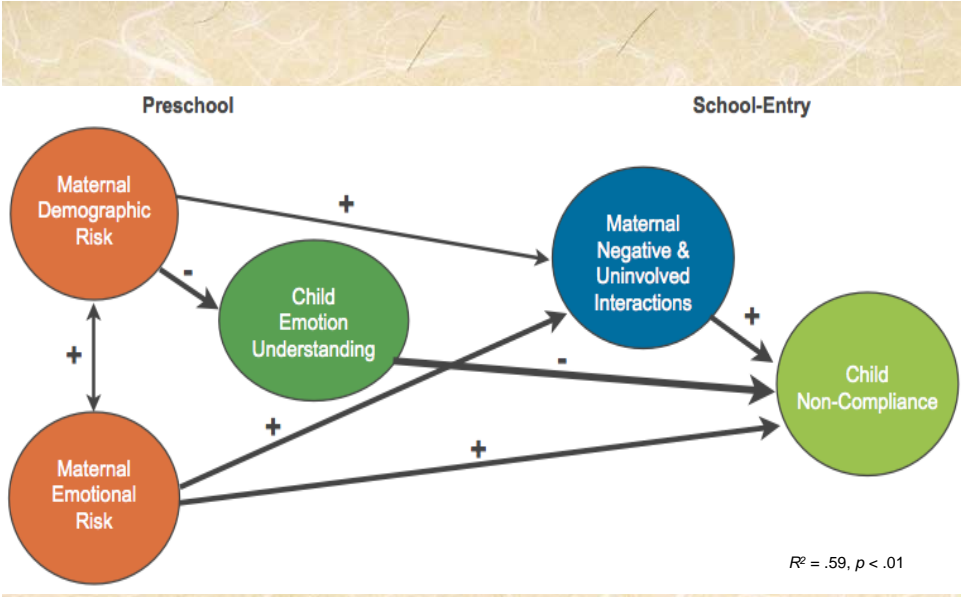
**Charlotte Bühler**

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"

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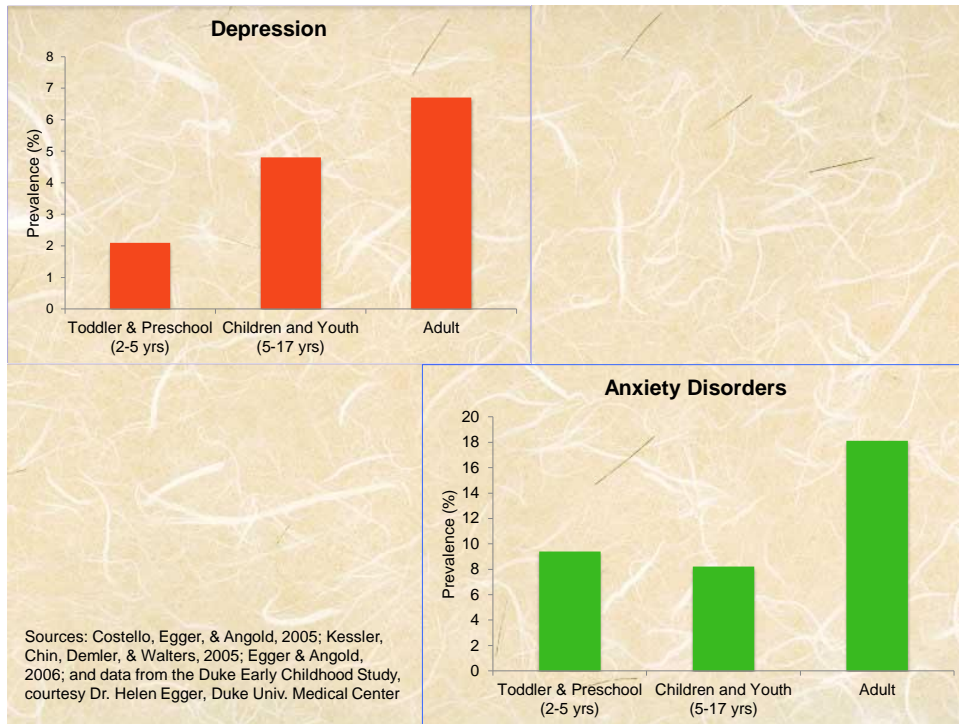




Winer, A. C., & Thompson, R. A. (2013). *How poverty and depression impact a child's social and emotional competence*. UC Davis Center for Poverty Research website: <http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/article/impact-poverty-childs-social-and-emotional-competence>.

This block contains three main visual elements. On the left, a photograph shows the back of a child with long dark hair. In the center, a screenshot of a New York Times article from August 25, 2010, titled "Can Preschoolers Be Depressed?" is displayed. The article includes two photographs: one of a child lying on a blue carpet and another of a child playing with toys on a yellow carpet. On the right, a diagram of the HPA axis shows the hypothalamus releasing CRH, AVP, and others to the pituitary gland, which releases ACTH. ACTH then acts on the adrenal cortex to release cortisol. Below this, a diagram shows the sacral spinal cord with arrows pointing to the abdominal viscera.

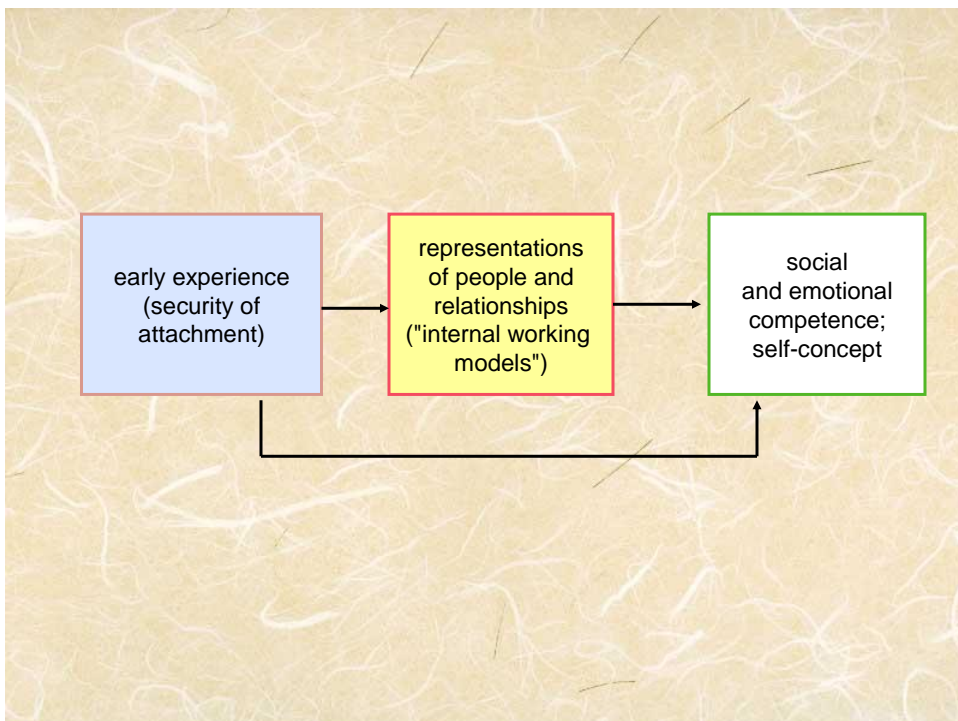


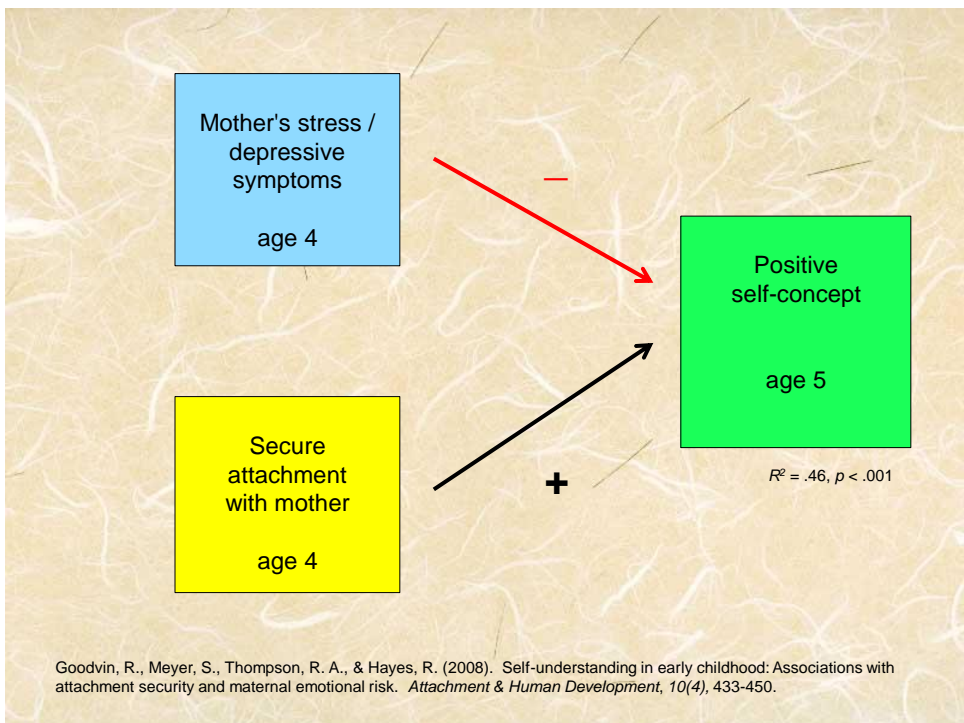
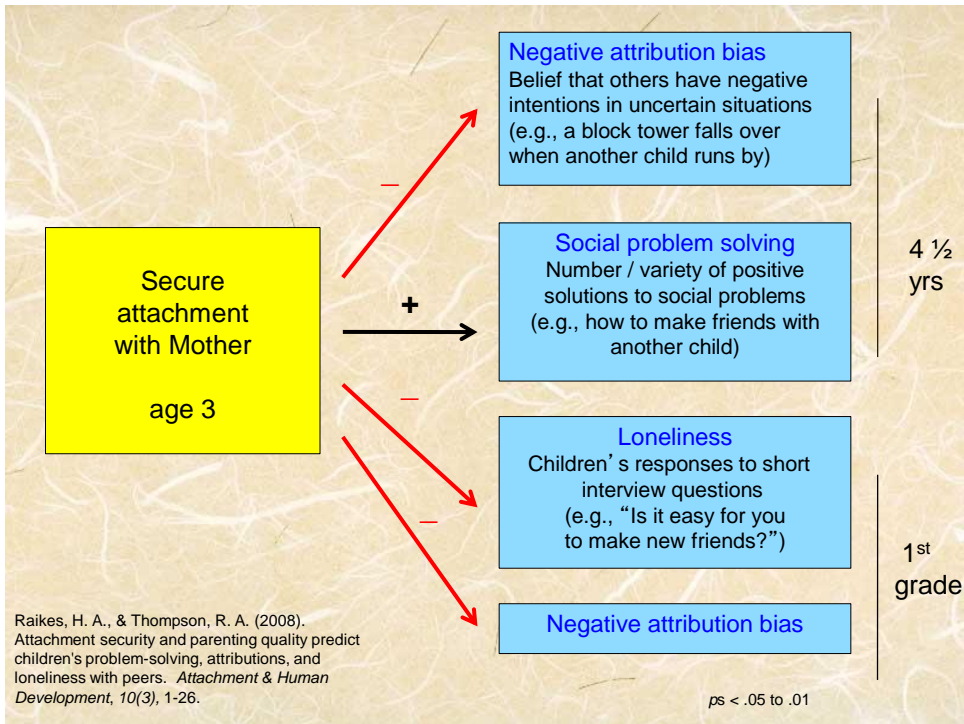


## The emotionate child

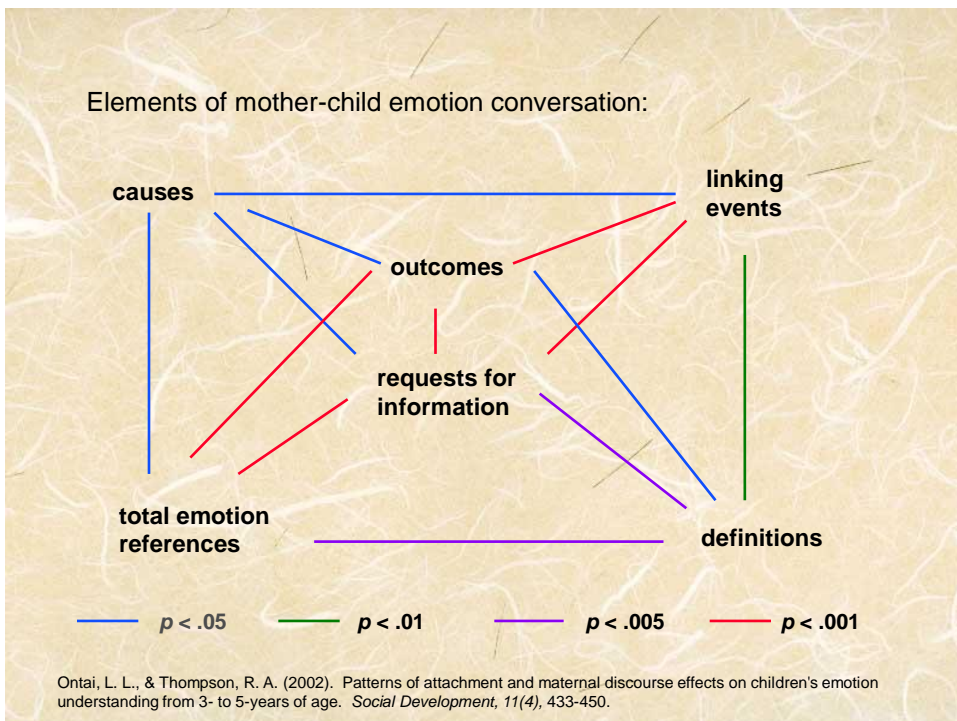
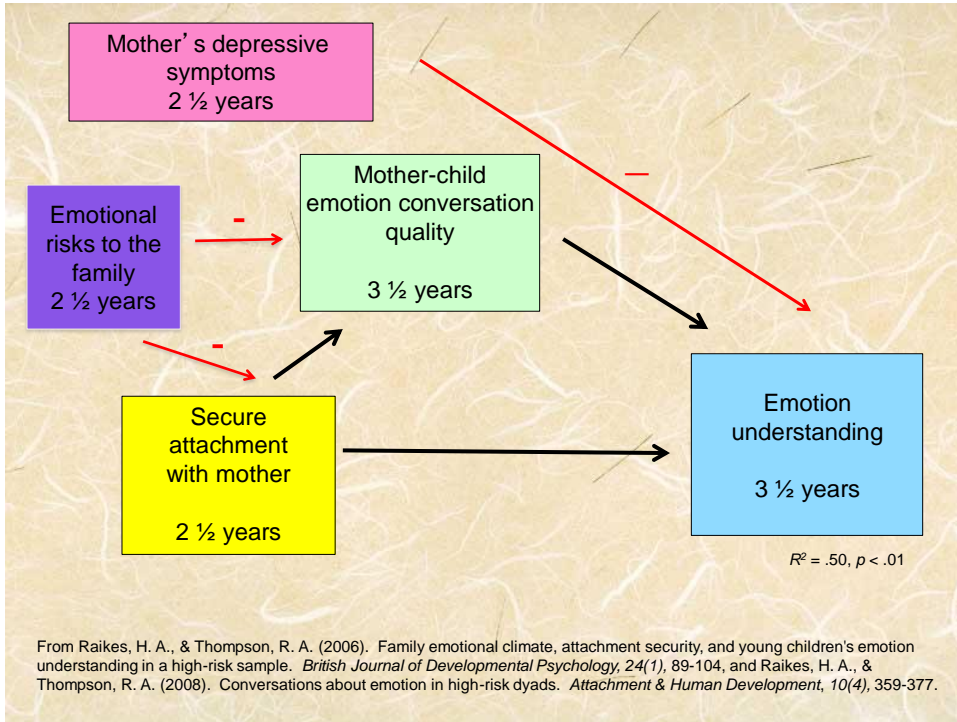
### **Emotionate** (i-'mō-sh(ə-)nət):


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*)



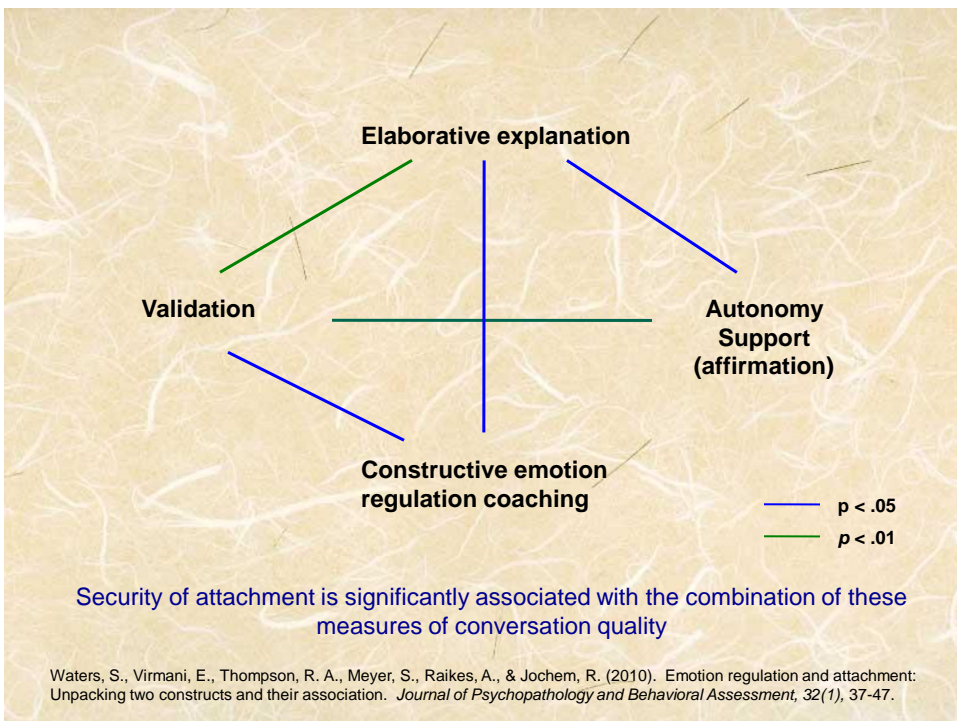








- It's hard when you feel so angry. You're going "AAAH, he's bouncing my guy off there!" Right?
- How did the other kids feel when you shut off the game?
- It makes you sad thinking about it, doesn't it?
- After you stopped the game, the other guys said, "You know, Joey wasn't really doing so bad." You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





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

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

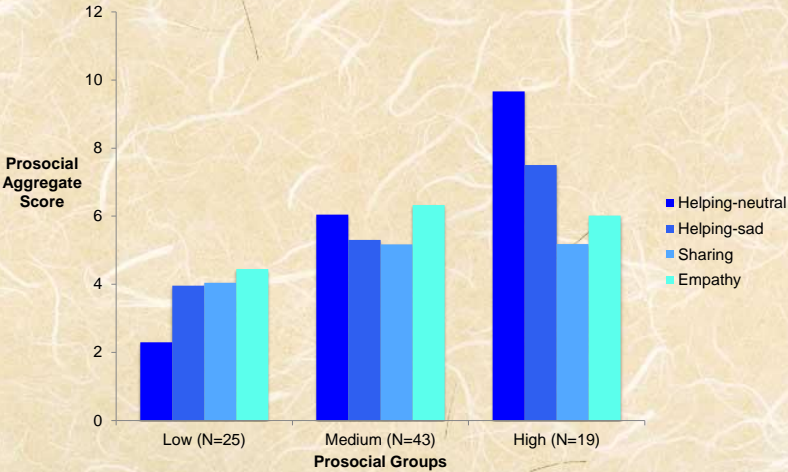
Laible, D. J., & Thompson, R. A. (2002). Mother-child conflict in the toddler years: Lessons in emotion, morality, and relationships. *Child Development, 73*(4), 1187-1203.

## Prosocial measures . . .

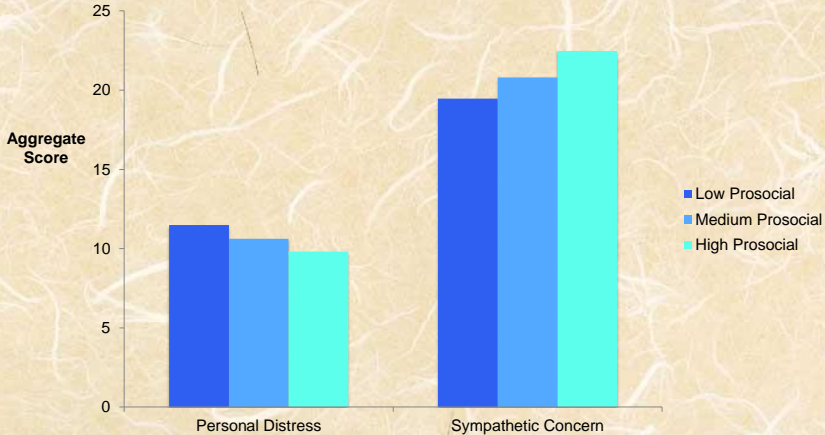
- Helping (neutral experimenter)
- Helping (sad experimenter)
- Sharing
- Empathy (repair)



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

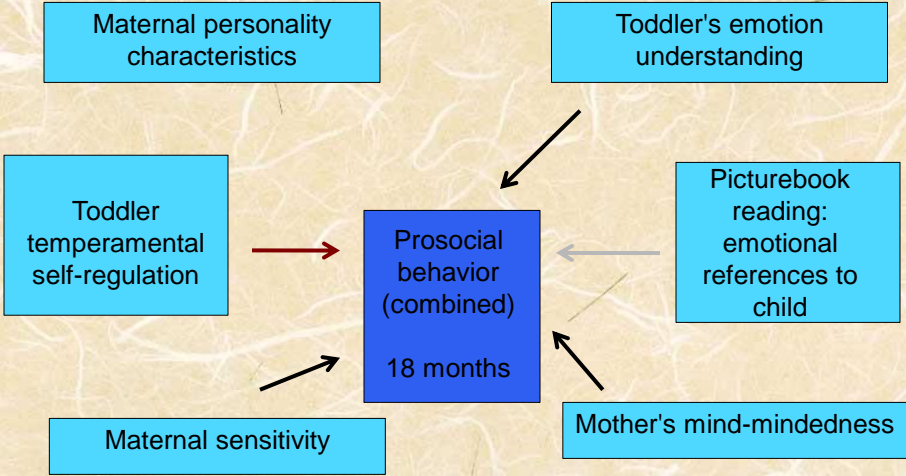


### How is prosocial behavior associated with children's sympathetic concern and personal distress?



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?

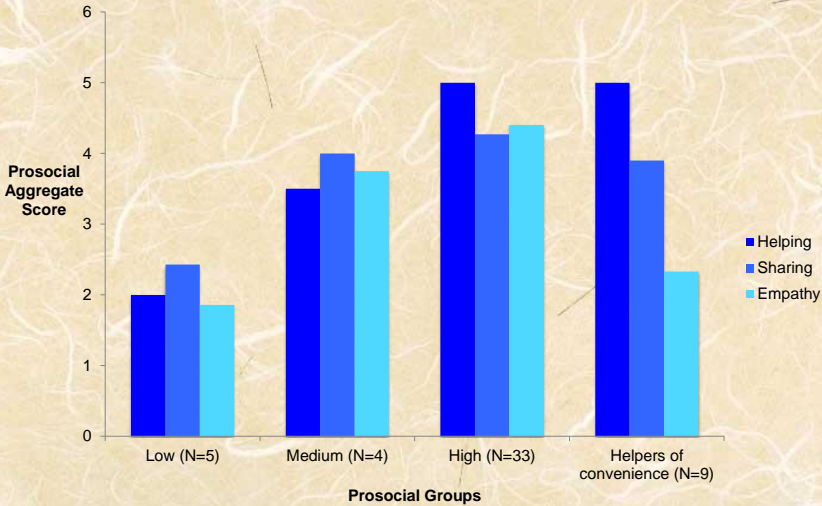


Newton, E., Goodman, M., & Thompson, R. (in press). Why do some toddlers help a stranger? Origins of individual differences in prosocial behavior. *Infancy*, in press and unpublished data.

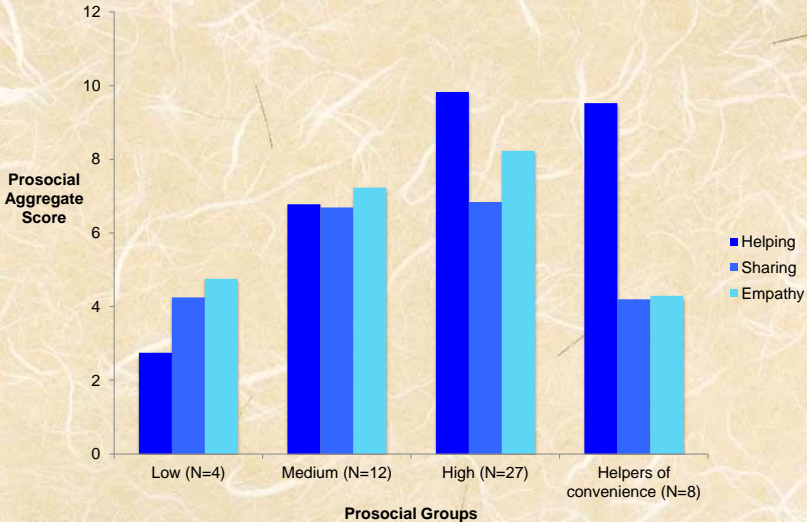




### Do preschoolers show reliable differences in prosocial responding at age 4 ½ ?



### 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!

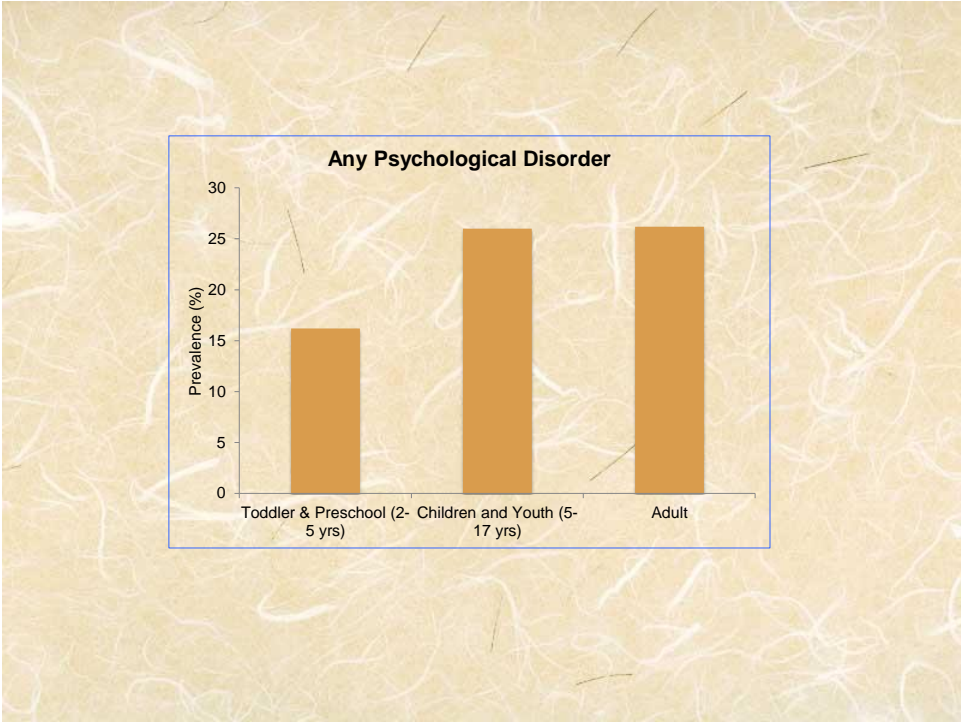
rathompson@ucdavis.edu



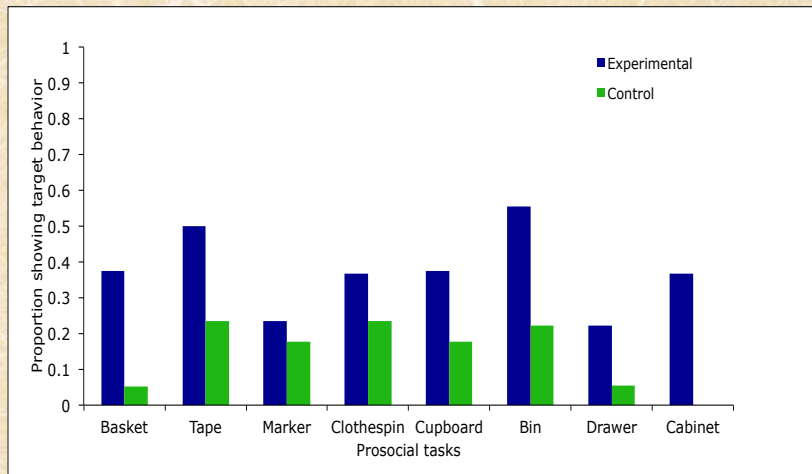
Financial support from The Amini Foundation for the Study of Affects







## 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