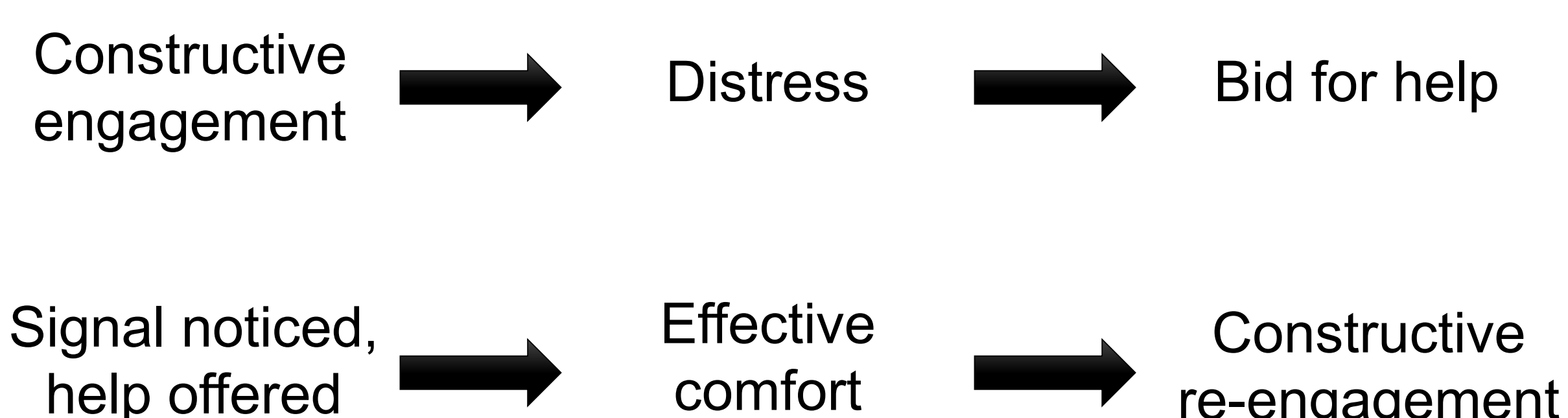


INTRODUCTION

Early Caregiving and Attachment in Adulthood

- Bowlby's attachment theory (1969/1982):
 - Early caregiving experiences develop into mental representations.
 - Mental representations shape later relationship functioning.
- These representations include a cognitive script of secure base use and support (i.e., secure base script).
- Research on the stability of attachment has focused largely on the first two decades of life.
- Less is known about attachment stability later in life.

THE SECURE BASE SCRIPT



Waters & Waters (2006)

PRESENT STUDY

We present an investigation of the stability of the secure base script from late-adolescence into mid-life.

Participants

- Combination of two longitudinal samples ($N = 113$)
 - High risk ($n = 74$; 59% Female; 66% White)
 - Low risk ($n = 39$; 64% Female, 100% White)
- Assessment of secure base script knowledge:
 - High risk sample: Age 19 and 39 years,
 - Low risk sample: Age 20 and 41 years.

METHODS

Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

- Retrospective autobiographical interview focused on early caregiving experiences (prior to age 13 years).
- Transcripts coded for secure base script knowledge using the AAI Secure Base Scale (AAI_{SB} ; Waters & Facompré, in press; Waters et al., 2013).
- AAI_{SB} measures secure base script knowledge on a 9-point scale.

Attachment Script Assessment (ASA)

- Participants given fictional attachment story outlines.
- Asked to tell best possible story from the outline.
- Four attachment related story prompts:
 - 2 mother-child relationship stories
 - 2 adult-adult relationship stories
- Each story scored for secure base script knowledge on a 7-point scale.
- Mean script scores averaged across all stories.

MATERIAL EXAMPLES

AAI_{SB} Narrative Exemplars

Sample: High secure base script knowledge

"I got bit by a dog and I ran home and uh she...she took, you know, **she came right for me**, I was crying, she hugged me, she got ice, she cleaned it, she explained to me we had to go to the doctor. And she just uh very calm about the whole thing and uh, you know, **she made me feel safe.**"

Sample: Low secure base script knowledge

I remember **there was this one girl I was terrified of...cause she made my life hell**, and I didn't know how to deal with it...and I went to my mother for advice and...she just told me...**she just brushed it off**, you know. **So emotionally, I was just a wreck...you know, she wouldn't help me with solving [my problems].**"

MATERIAL EXAMPLES

ASA Narrative Exemplars

Doctor's Office

Tommy	hurry	mother
bike	doctor	toy
hurt	cry	stop
mother	shot	hold

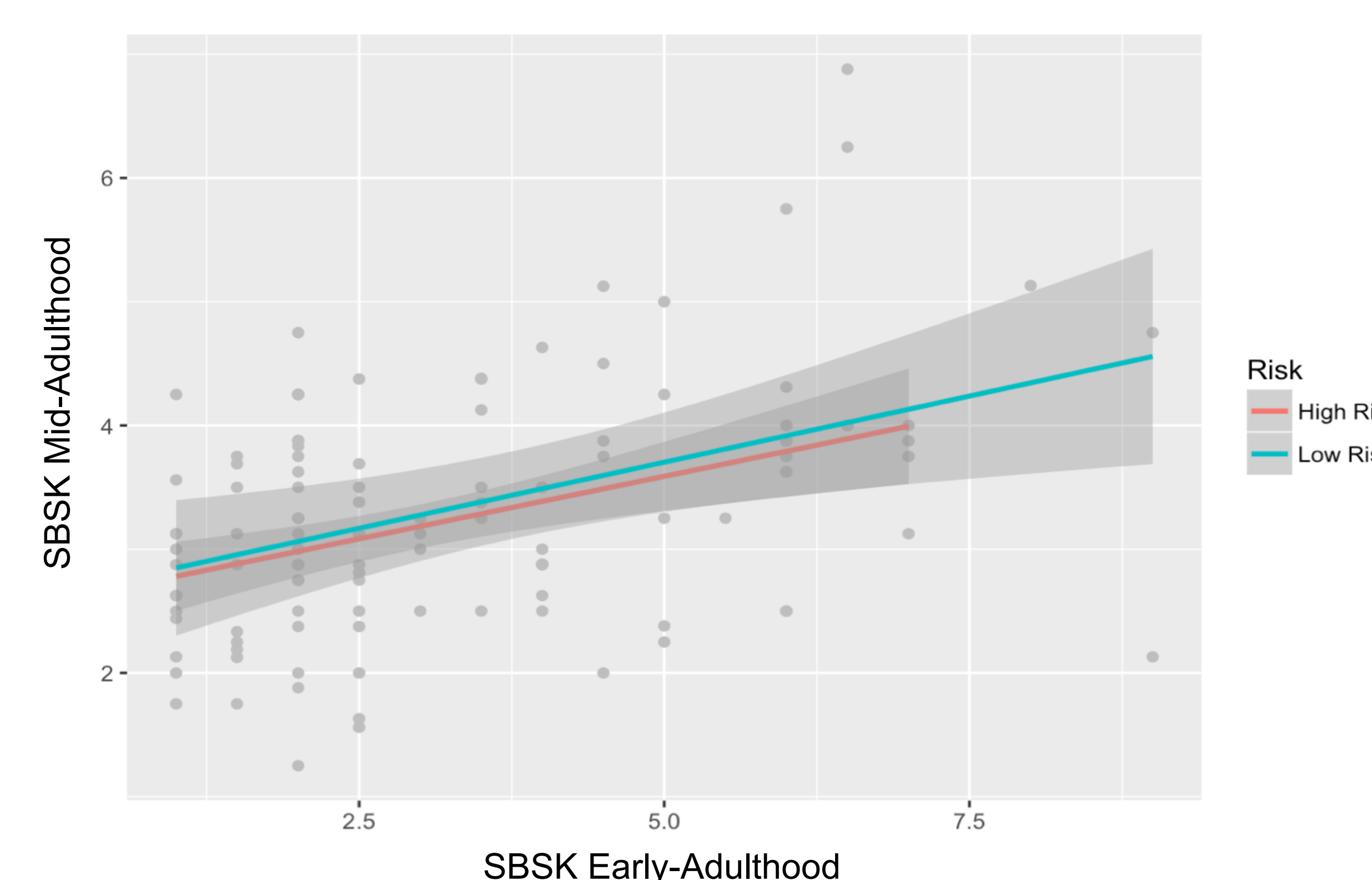
Sample: High secure base script knowledge

"[...] **He hit a large rock and fell over. He called his mother and they hurried to the doctor's office. While he was at the doctor he cried and cried. [...] Tommy said, "Mother please help me." She hugged him and gave him his favorite toy and told him that if he let the doctor treat him, everything would be stop and he could go home again. Now, Tommy was rejoiced when he heard this [...]. When they finally got home, the mother held him and told him that everything would be okay and tomorrow he would be able to ride his bike once again.**"

Sample: Low secure base script knowledge

"[...] **He fell and hurt himself. But his mother told him to suck it up and he'd be fine, and believe it or not, it was. He didn't have to hurry to the doctor, 'cause he didn't need to cry. And [unknown] went out and started fighting and – and got shot. The mother was sad, and – but [unknown] 'cause he had a toy, and every time he sees it he makes it stop – it makes him stop and think about it all, and he just feels himself and feels sad and – oh, I don't know.**"

RESULTS



RESULTS CONT.

- SBSK significantly higher in the low-risk than in the high-risk sample at time 1 but not time 2 ($t(111) = 1.98, p = .049$; $t(111) = 1.32, p = .19$).
- SBSK was moderately stable over the 20 year interval ($r = .43, p < .001$); this effect was not moderated by risk status.

SBSK Mid-Adulthood Predicted by SBSK Early-Adulthood

	B	SE	t	p
Constant	.09	.15	.61	.54
Risk	-.10	.19	-.54	.59
SBSK Early-Adulthood	.41	.12	3.51	.00
SBSK Early-Adulthood x Risk	-.02	.17	-.13	.90

$R^2 = .19$; $F(3, 109) = 8.25, p < .001$

DISCUSSION

Summary

- Significant stability was found in secure base script knowledge from early to mid-adulthood.
- Previous work suggests less stability in higher risk than in normative risk cohorts (Fraley, 2002).
- Interestingly, stability in the present study was not moderated by variability in risk status.

Future Directions

- Mechanisms of stability of attachment across adulthood should be explored.
- Contributors to change in secure base script knowledge should also be investigated (e.g. life stress, romantic relationship quality).

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NIA R01 AG0394532 (J.A Simpson); NICHD F32 HD078250 (T.E.A Waters)