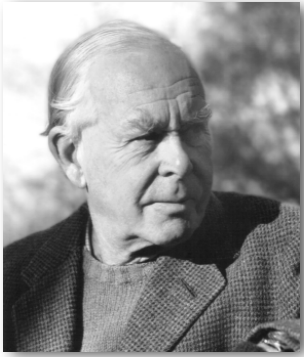


Attachment and developmental risk in boys: An evolutionary perspective



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John Bowlby



Mary Ainsworth

Risk for externalizing disorders, aggression, generalized psychopathology



Anxious/ambivalent attachment

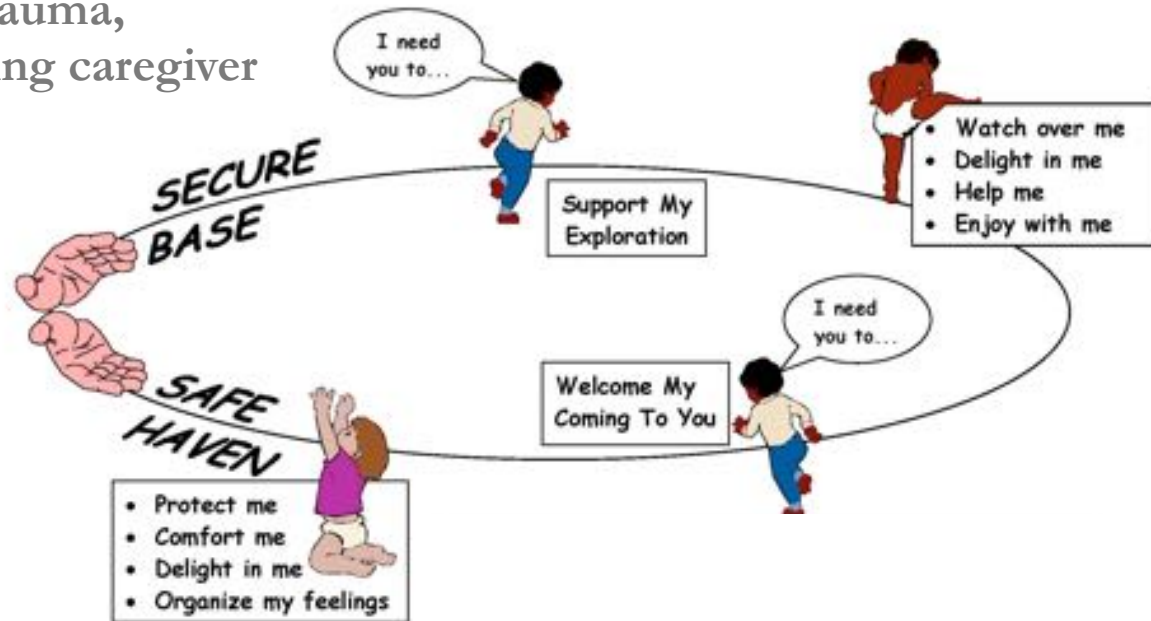
Insensitive, rejecting, or inconsistent caregiving

Unresolved trauma, frightened/frightening caregiver

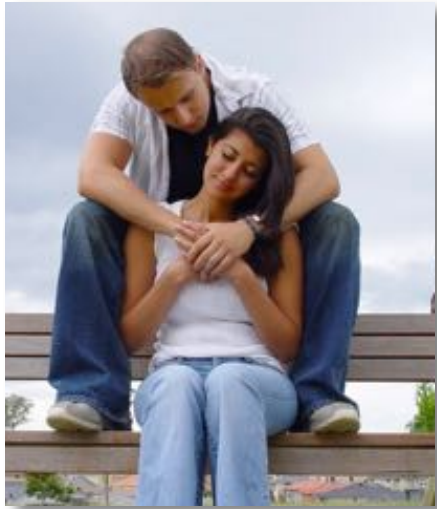


Sensitive caregiving

Secure attachment

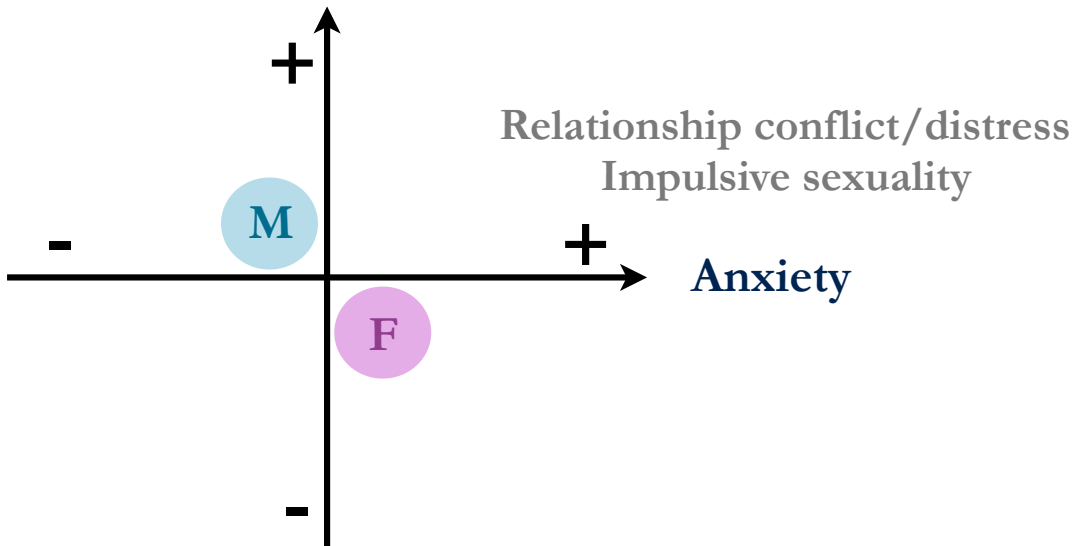


Romantic attachment

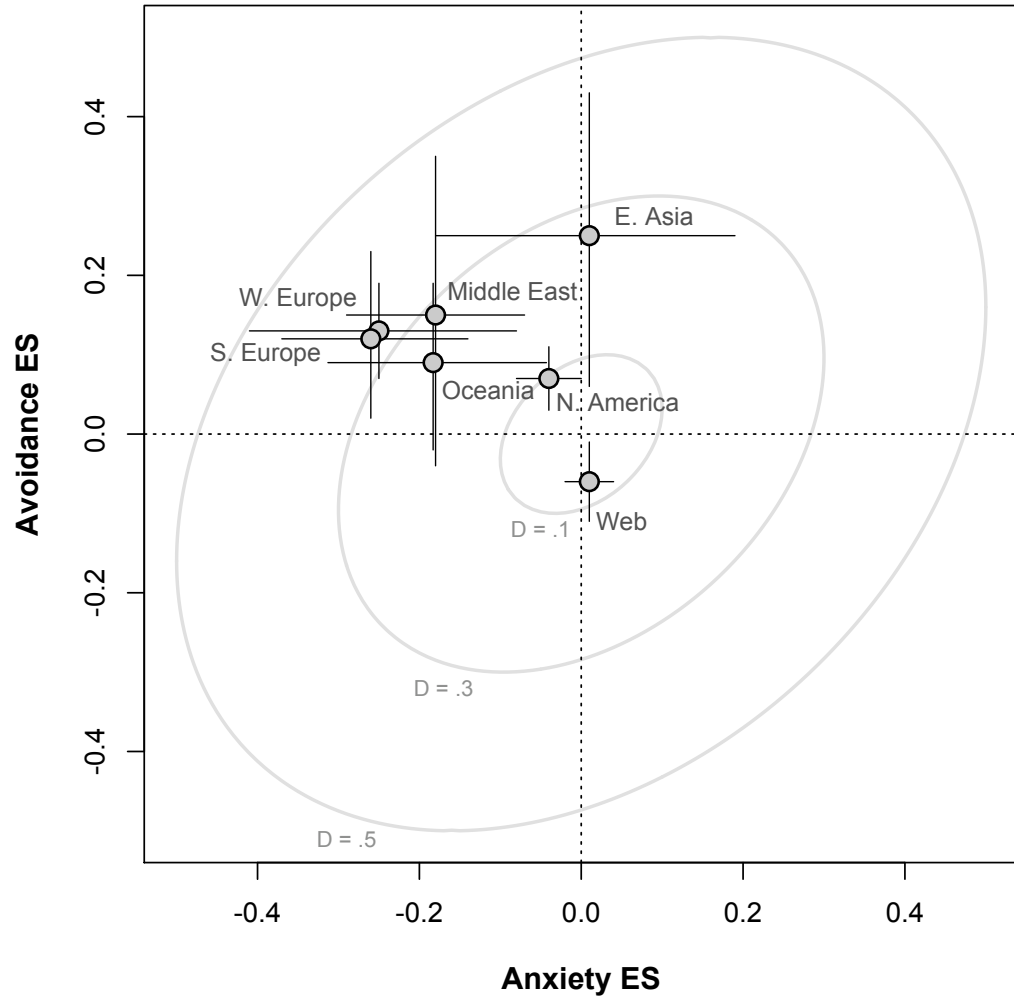


Relationship instability/divorce
Promiscuous sexuality

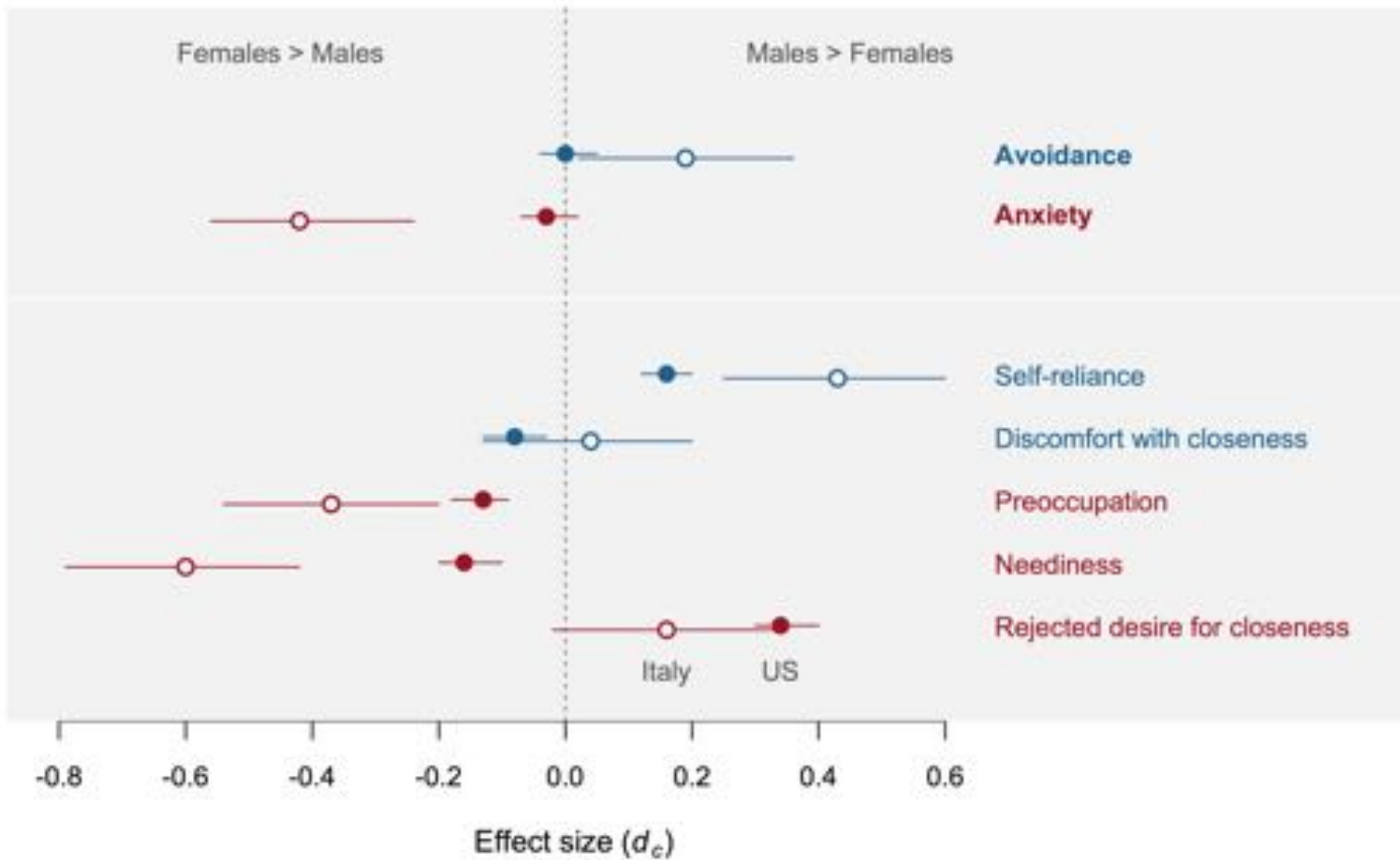
Avoidance

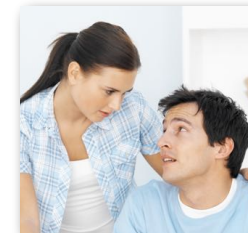


Effect size by region



Del Giudice (2011)





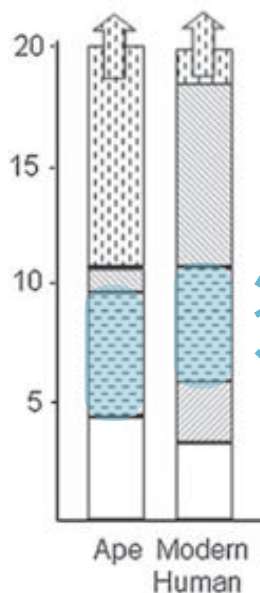
Infancy/early childhood

No sex differences

Adulthood

Sex differences avoidance/anxiety

Middle childhood
as a key transition point



“5-to-7 years shift”

- Major changes in behavior/cognition

Social integration

- Social role learning
- Helping, contribution to family needs
- Responsible behavior

Social competition

- Peer hierarchies
- Dominance, status, social networking





Brain growth

Approaching peak of overall brain volume

Peak of gray matter volume

Continuing increase in white matter volume/integrity

Motor and perceptual skills

Increased gross motor skills (e.g., walking)

Increased fine motor skills

Local–global shift in visual processing preferences

Cognitive skills

Increased reasoning and problem-solving skills
(e.g., concrete operations)

Increased self-regulation and executive functions
(inhibition, attention, planning, etc.)

Increased mentalizing skills (multiple perspectives, conflicting goals)

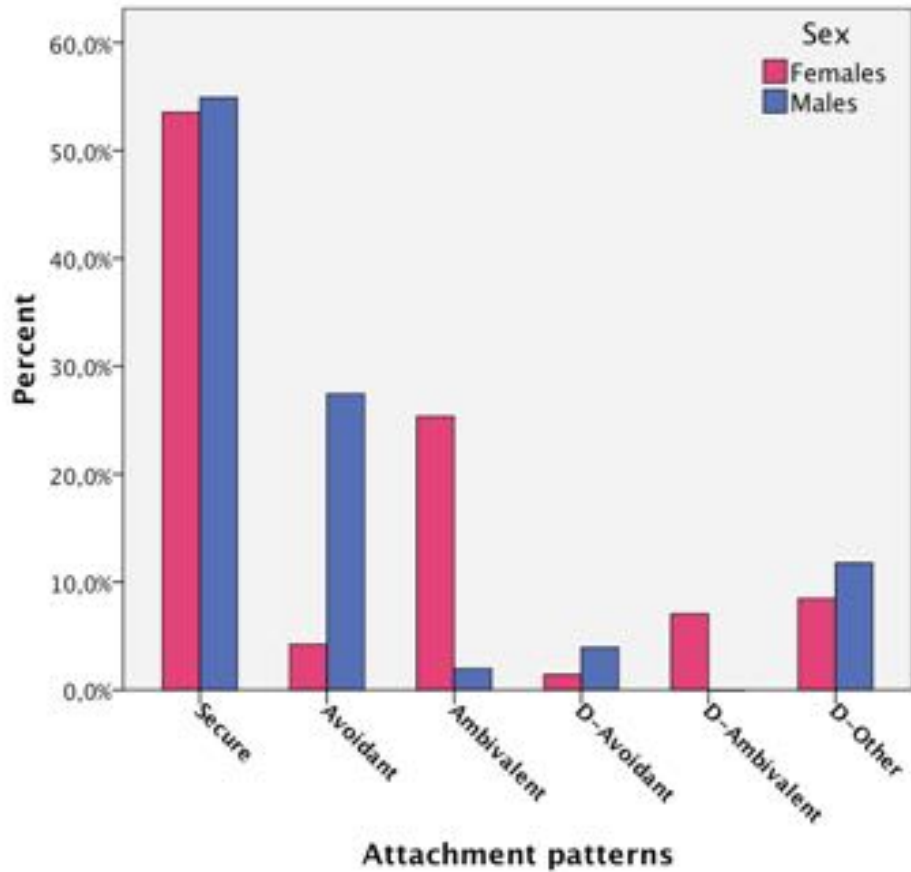
Increased navigational skills (working memory,
ability to understand maps)

Motivation and social behavior Acquisition of cultural norms (e.g., prosociality)
Complex moral reasoning (conflicting points of view)
Increased pragmatic abilities (gossiping, storytelling, verbal competition, etc.)
Consolidation of status/dominance hierarchies
Changes in aggression levels (individual trajectories)
Development of disgust
Changes in food preferences (e.g., spicy foods)
Onset of sexual/romantic attraction
Increased frequency of sexual play
Increased sense of gender identity
Peak of sex segregation
Peak of sex differences in social play (including play fighting vs. play parenting)
Increased sex differences in physical aggression (M > F)
Emergence of sex differences in attachment styles

Psychopathology Early peak of psychopathology onset (externalizing, anxiety, phobias, ADHD)
Peak onset of fetishistic attractions
Emergence of sex differences in conduct disorders (M > F)

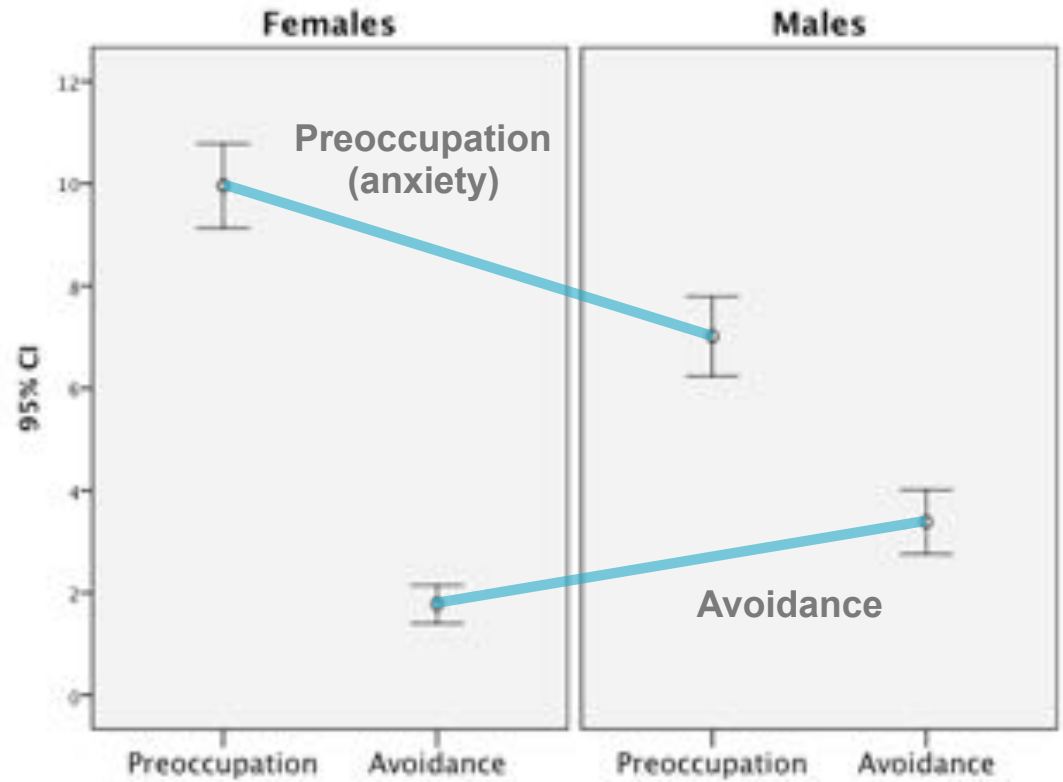
Social context Active involvement in caretaking, foraging, domestic tasks, helping
Expectations of responsible behavior
Attribution of individuality and personhood (“getting noticed”)

Doll-play task (7 y)



Del Giudice (2008)

Questionnaire study (8-10 y)



Del Giudice & Angeleri (2015)



**Parent-child attachment
in middle childhood**

Anticipates



**Romantic attachment
in adulthood**

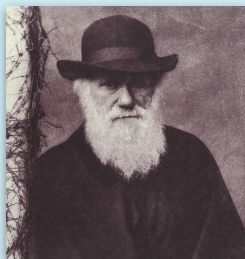
Avoidance in boys:

- Functional to maximize self-reliance
- Reduced empathy, aggressive status competition with peers

Avoidance in men:

- Functional to minimize commitment, maximize short-term sexual relationships

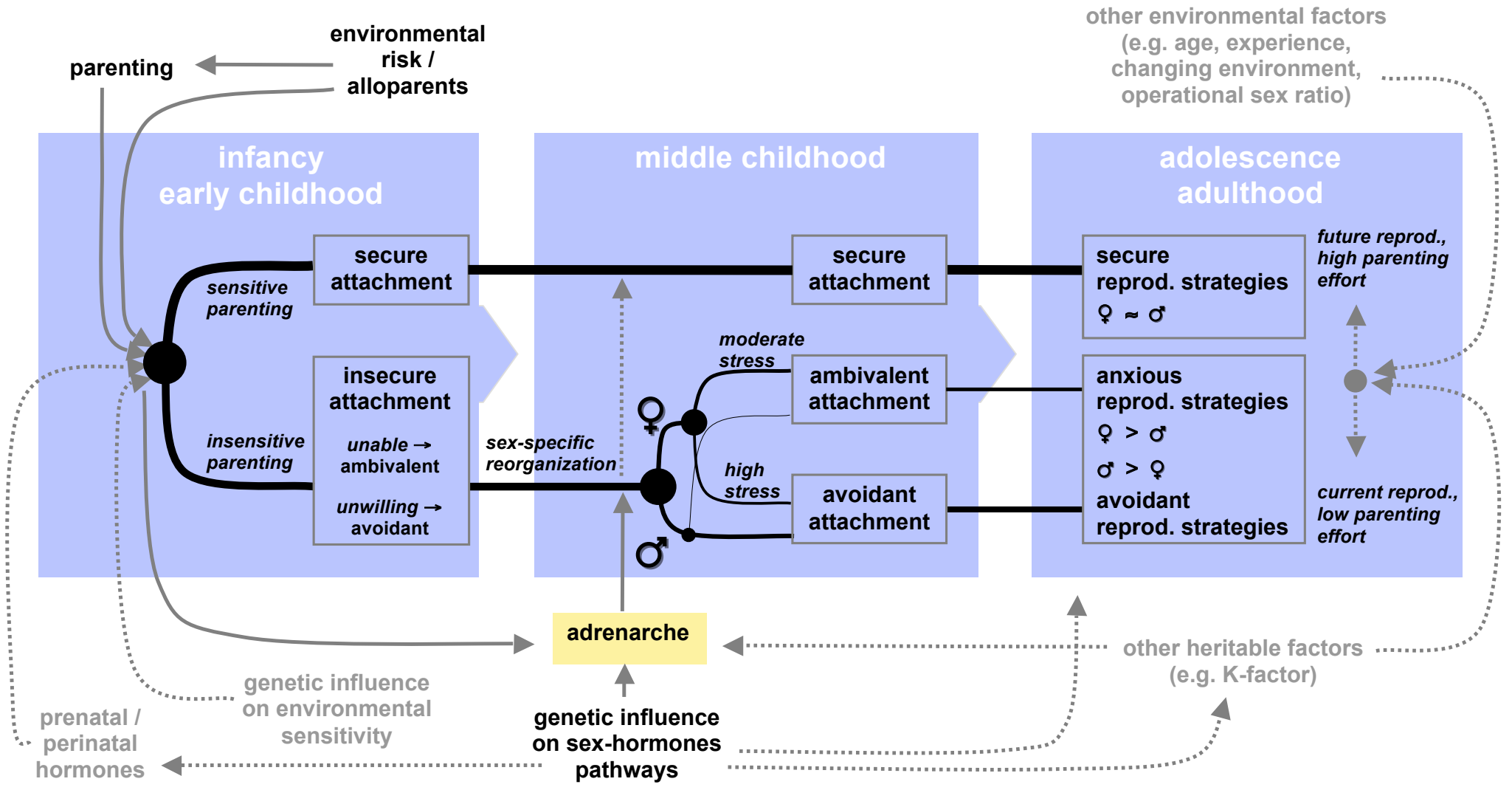
Can be **biologically adaptive** - especially in dangerous, unpredictable contexts

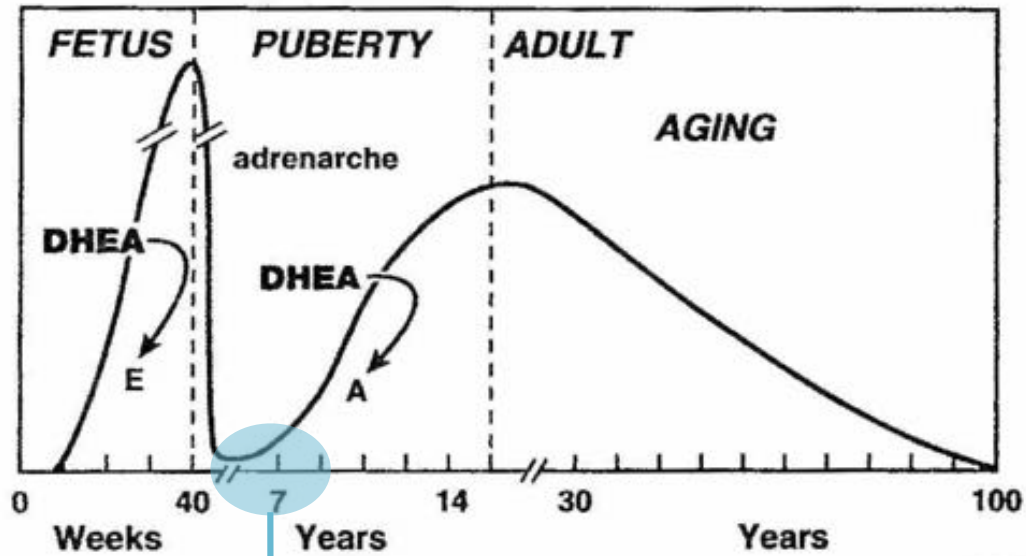


Natural selection favors: anything that improves reproduction and transmission of genes to the following generations

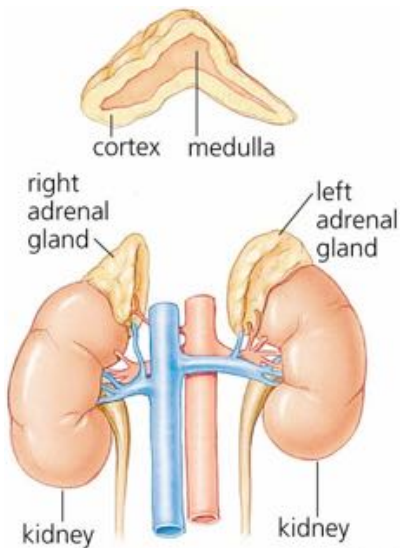
...**survival** is optional...

...**health and well-being** are luxuries!

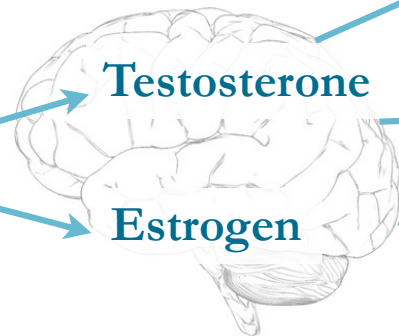




Adrenarche



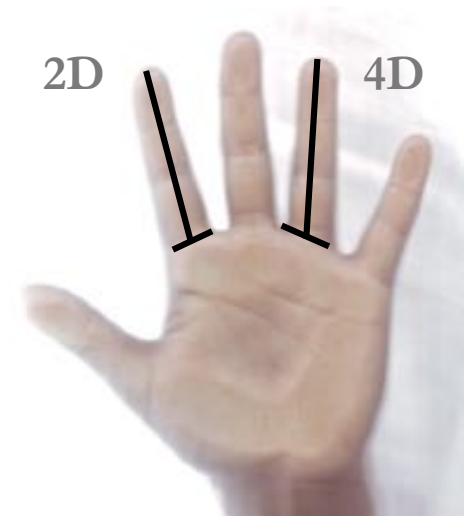
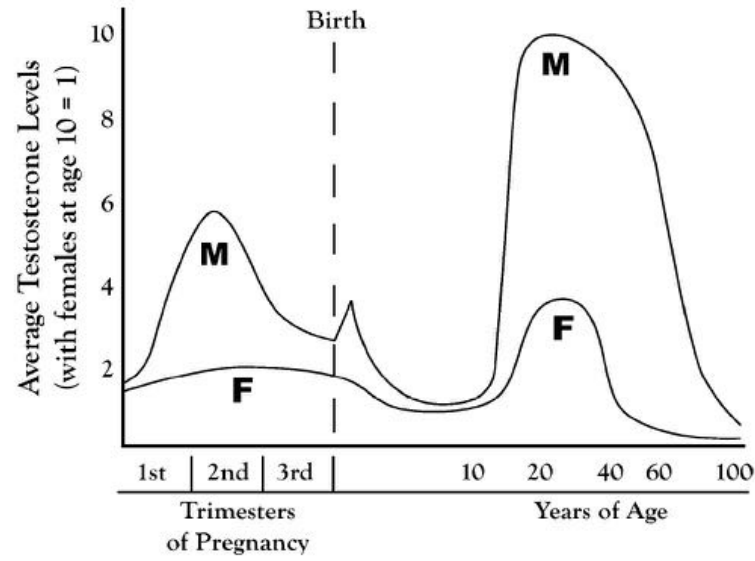
Adrenal androgens



Emergence/intensification of sex differences

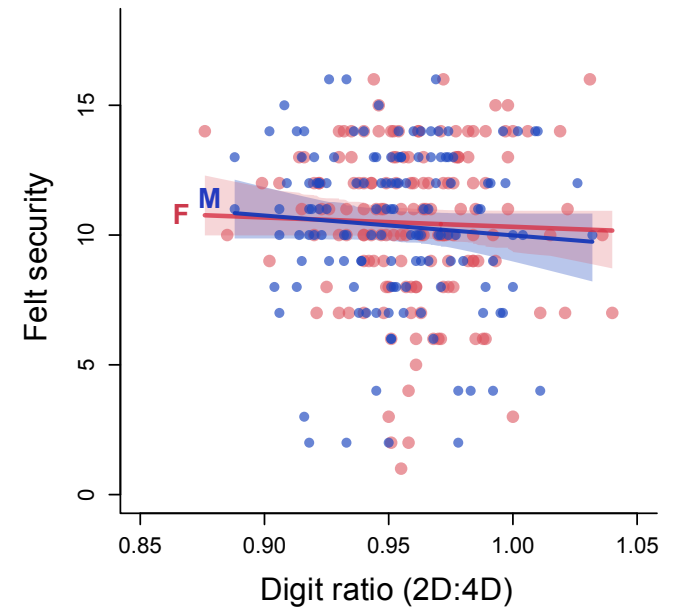
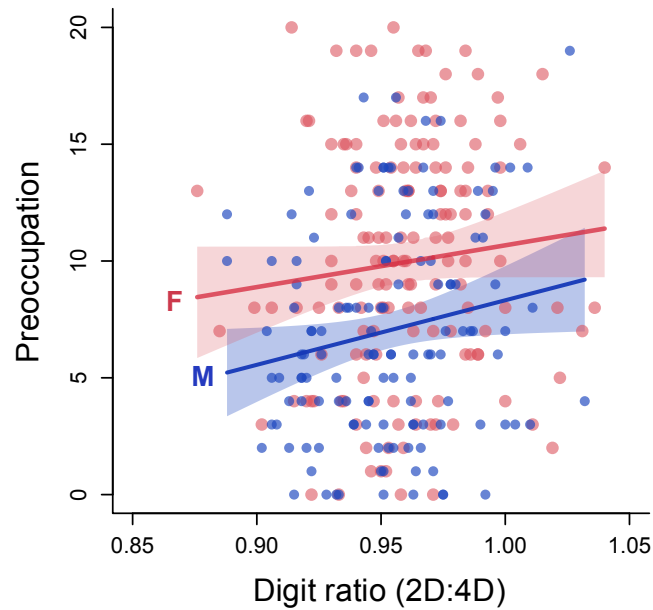
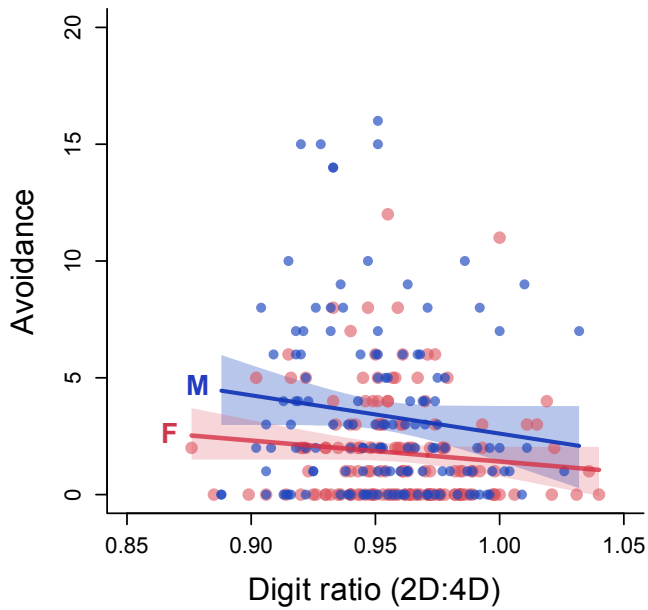
Activation of prenatal hormonal effects

Shift toward avoidance in insecure boys?

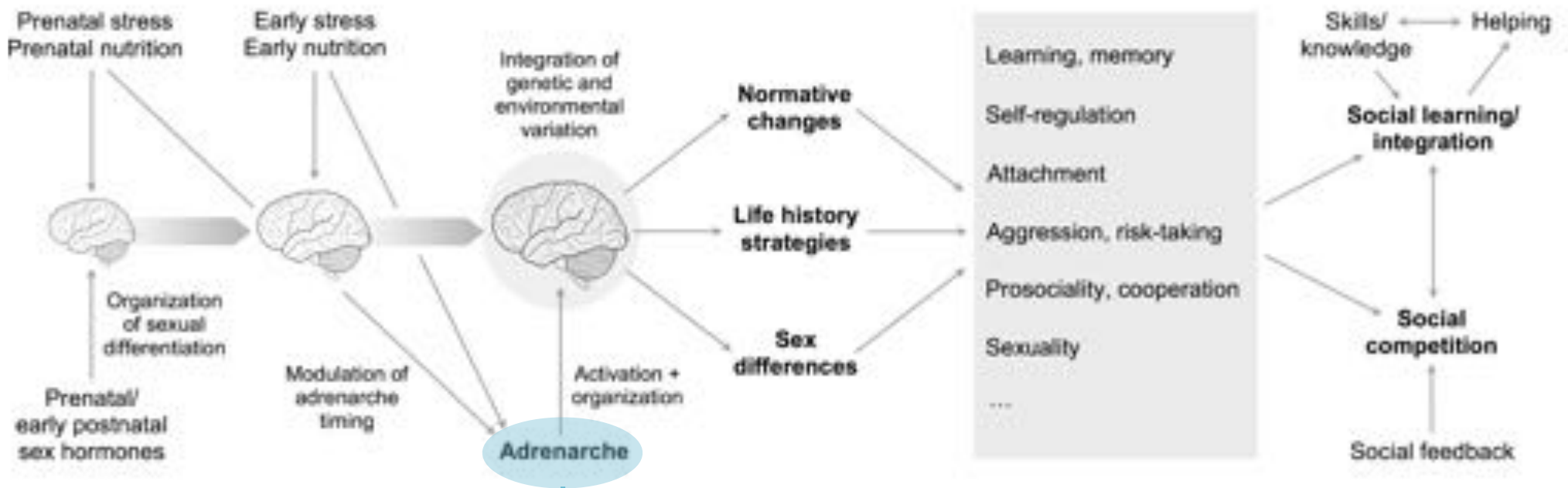


Digit Ratio (2D:4D)

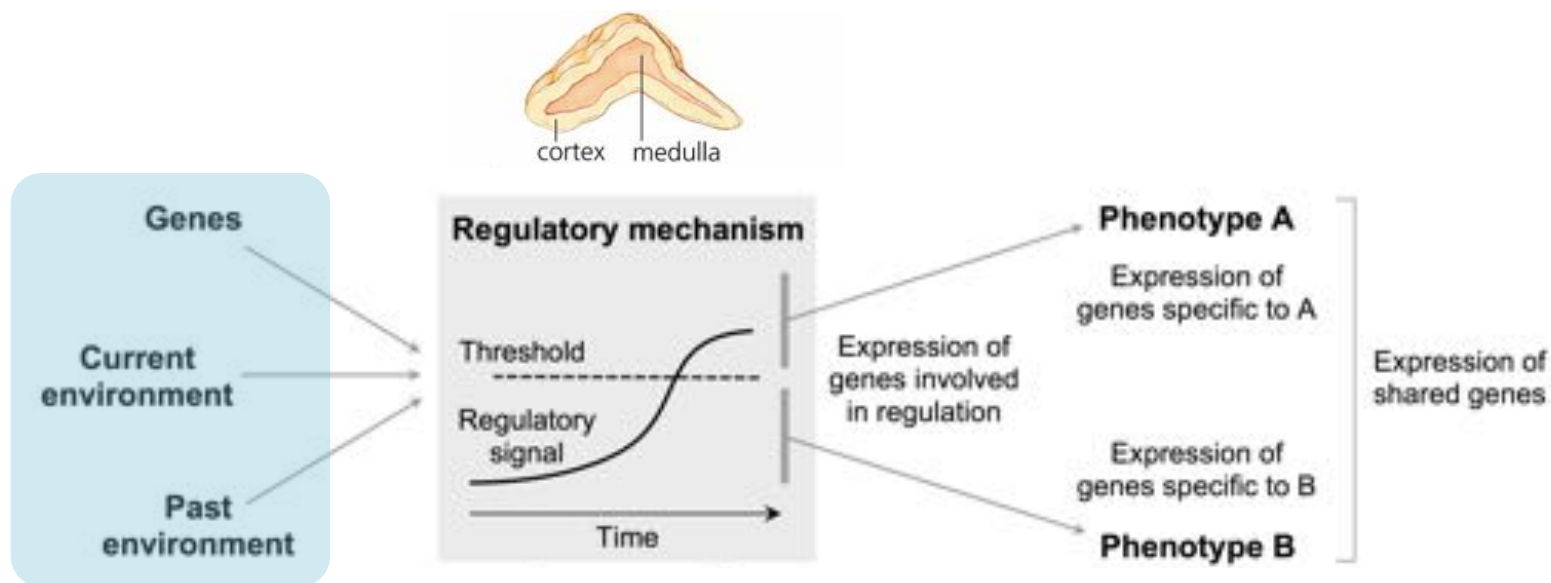
285 children, 8-10 years



Del Giudice & Angeleri (2015)



Adrenarche as a **developmental “switch”** (West-Eberhard, 2003)

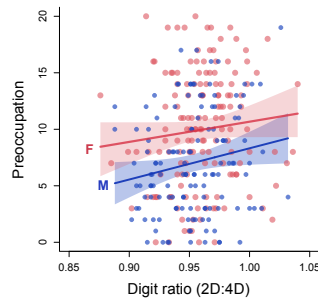


Implications



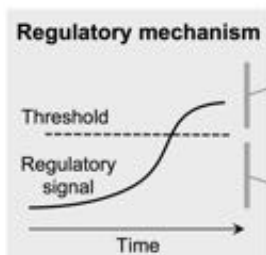
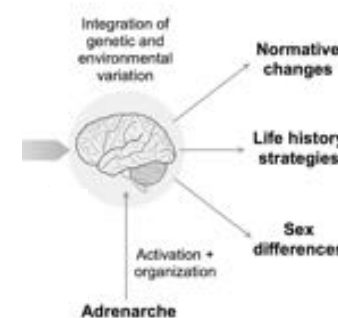
Insecure attachment: not a “dysfunction” but an **adaptive response**

Correlates of avoidance as a **coordinated, adapted set of traits**: no “magic bullet” to fix them



The environment is not everything: **sex differences, genetic factors...**

Transition from early to middle childhood: a “**switch point**” in developmental trajectories



Transition to middle childhood/adrenarche: a **plasticity “hot spot”** for interventions?

Thanks for your attention!



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