The Link between Adult Attachment Security and Depression: A Meta-Analysis

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DEPRESSION

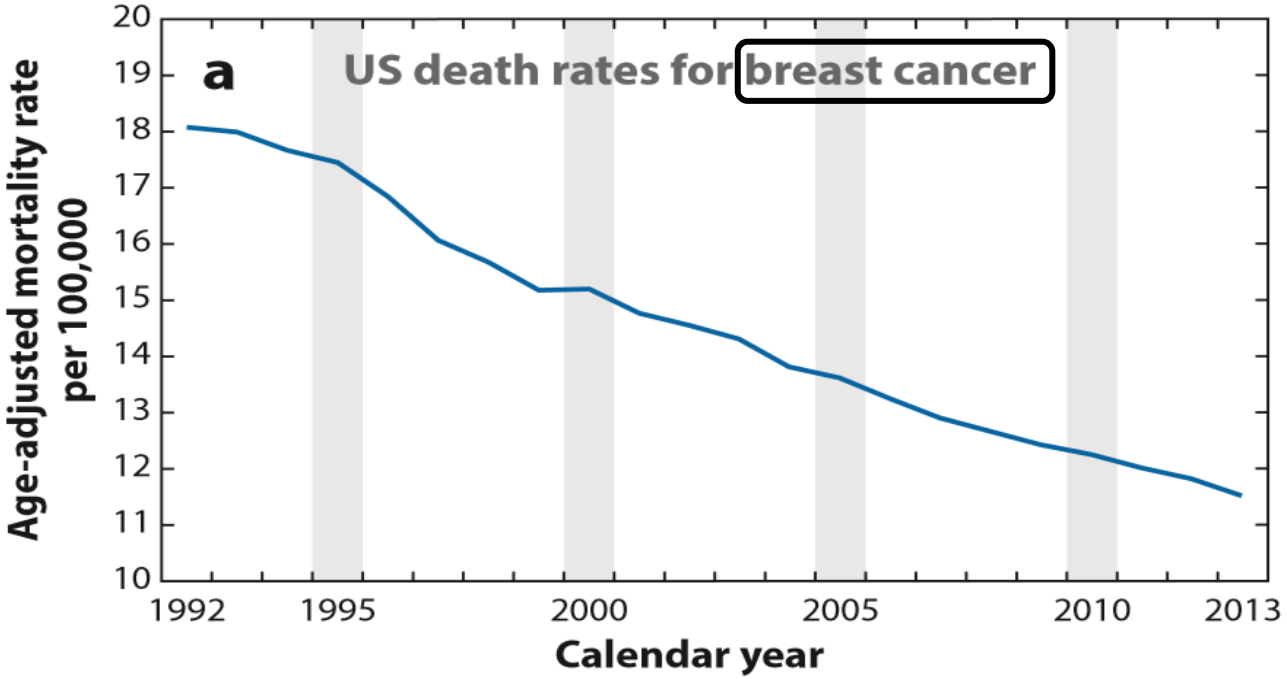
- SXS include sad mood, loss of interest and enjoyment, and decreased energy

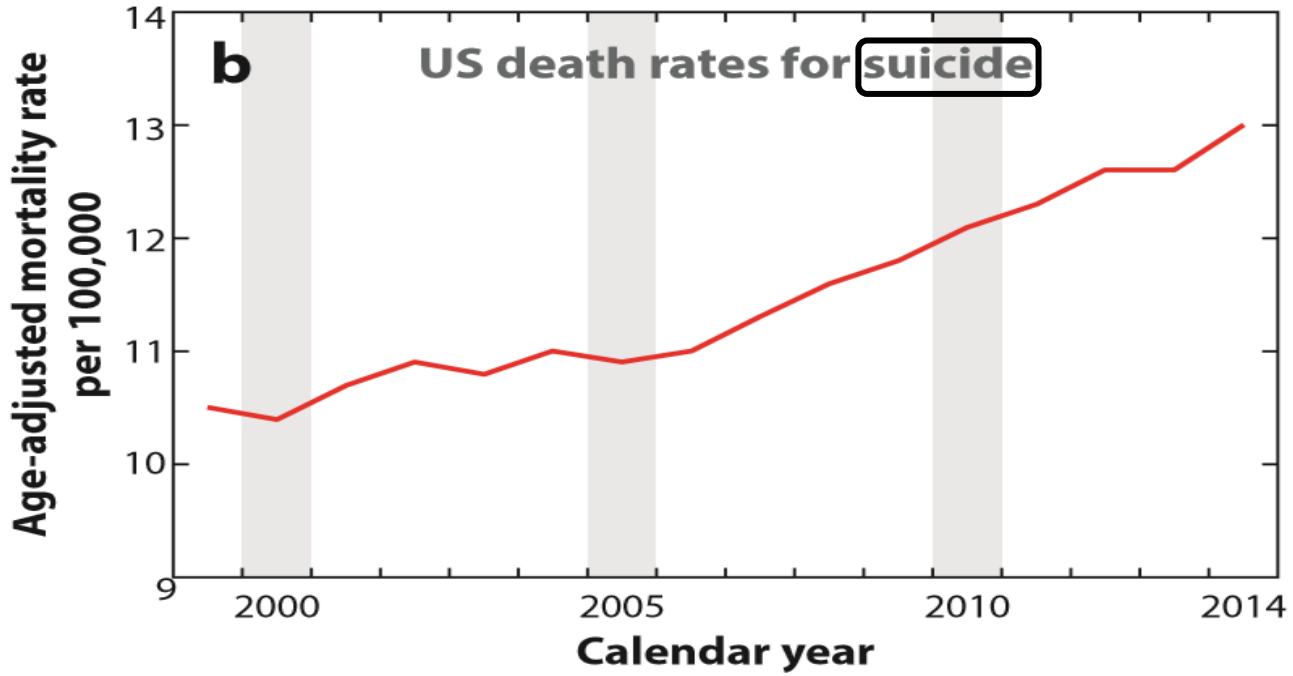
- Lifetime prevalence of between 4%-15%

- Leading cause of disability for people aged 15-44 years (Greenberg et al. 2015)

- By year 2030 is estimated to be the leading cause of disease burden (e.g., residual sxs, low work functioning, weight gain, hospitalization, enhanced risk for CVD) (World Health Organization; WHO)

- And becomes increasingly fatal..





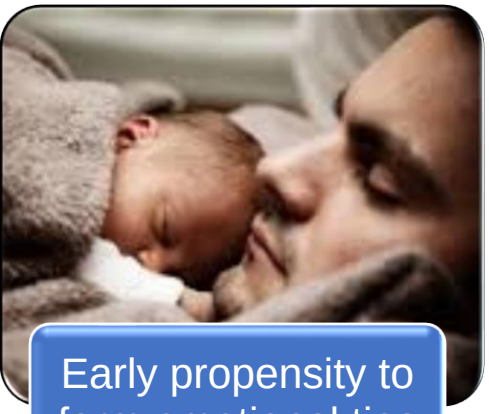
Levenson. R. W. (2017). Clinical Psychology Training: Accreditation and Beyond. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 13*, 1-22.

“…**loss** gives rise to sorrow…”

John Bowlby, The making and breaking of affectional bonds, *1977*

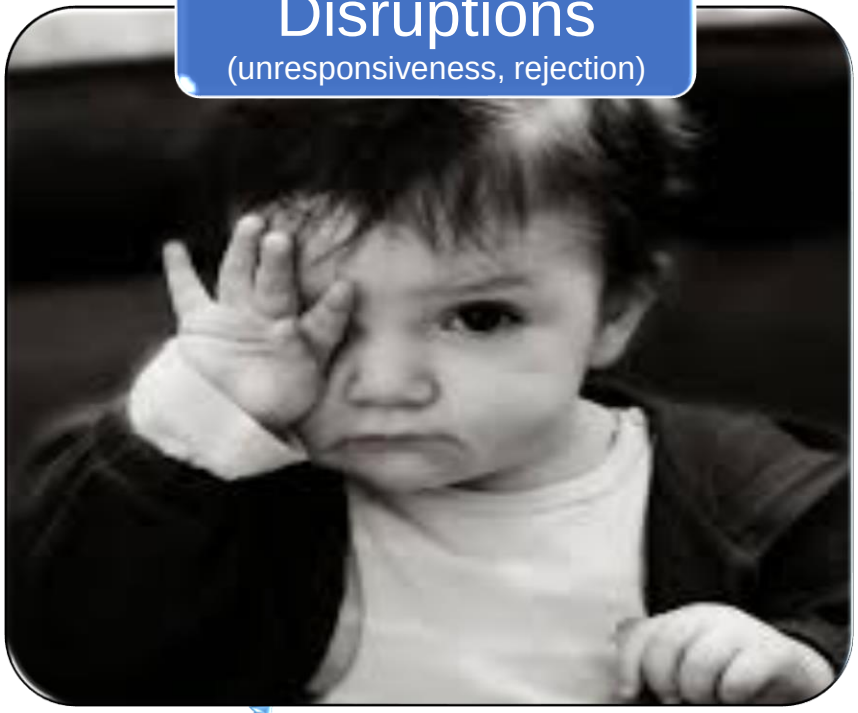
LOSS

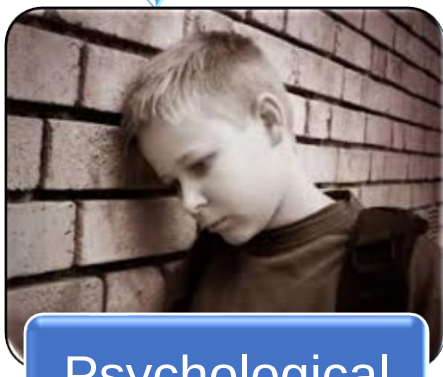
Loss = failure to hold, keep, or preserve *a possession*



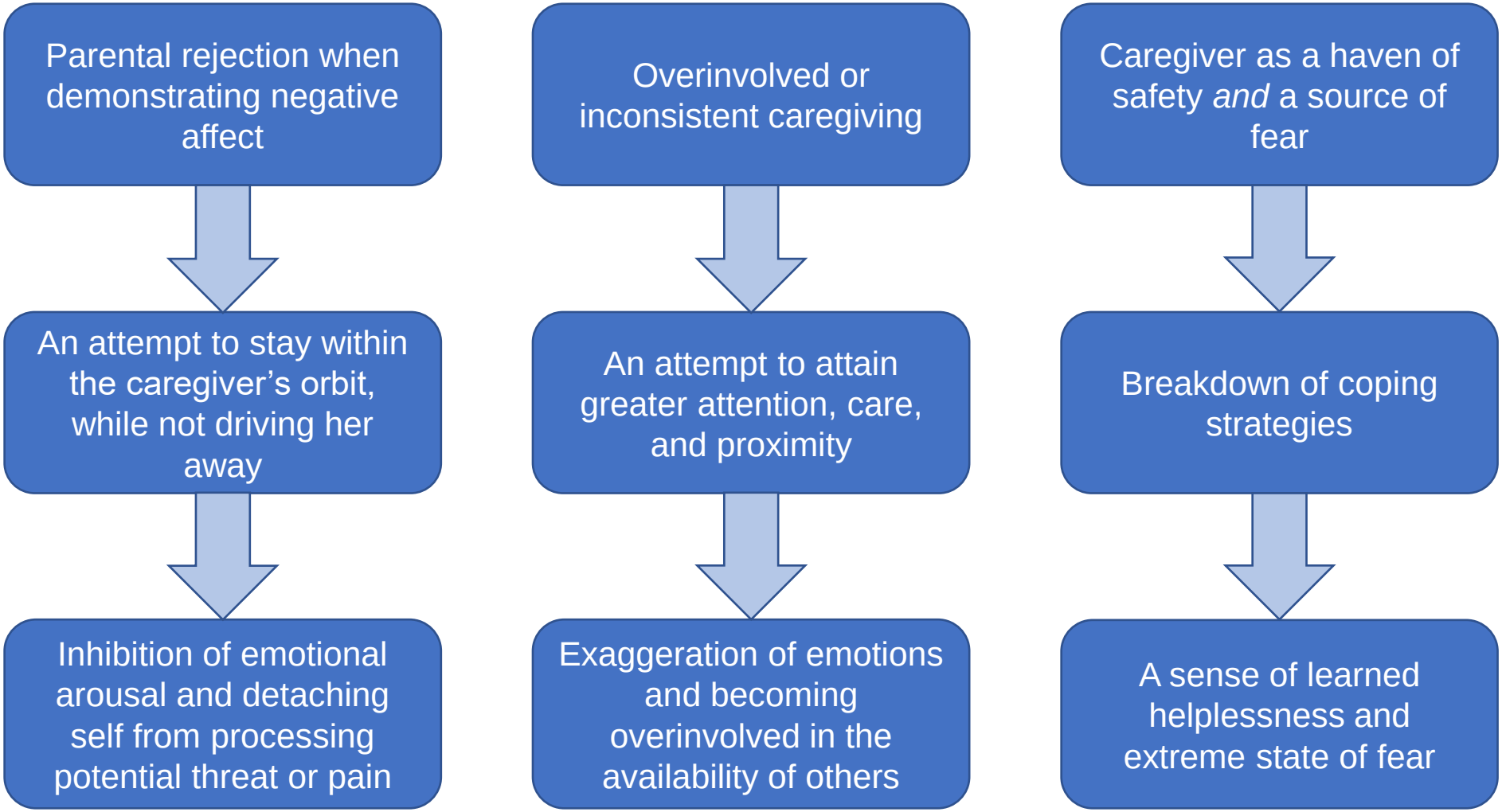
Early propensity to form emotional ties to caregivers

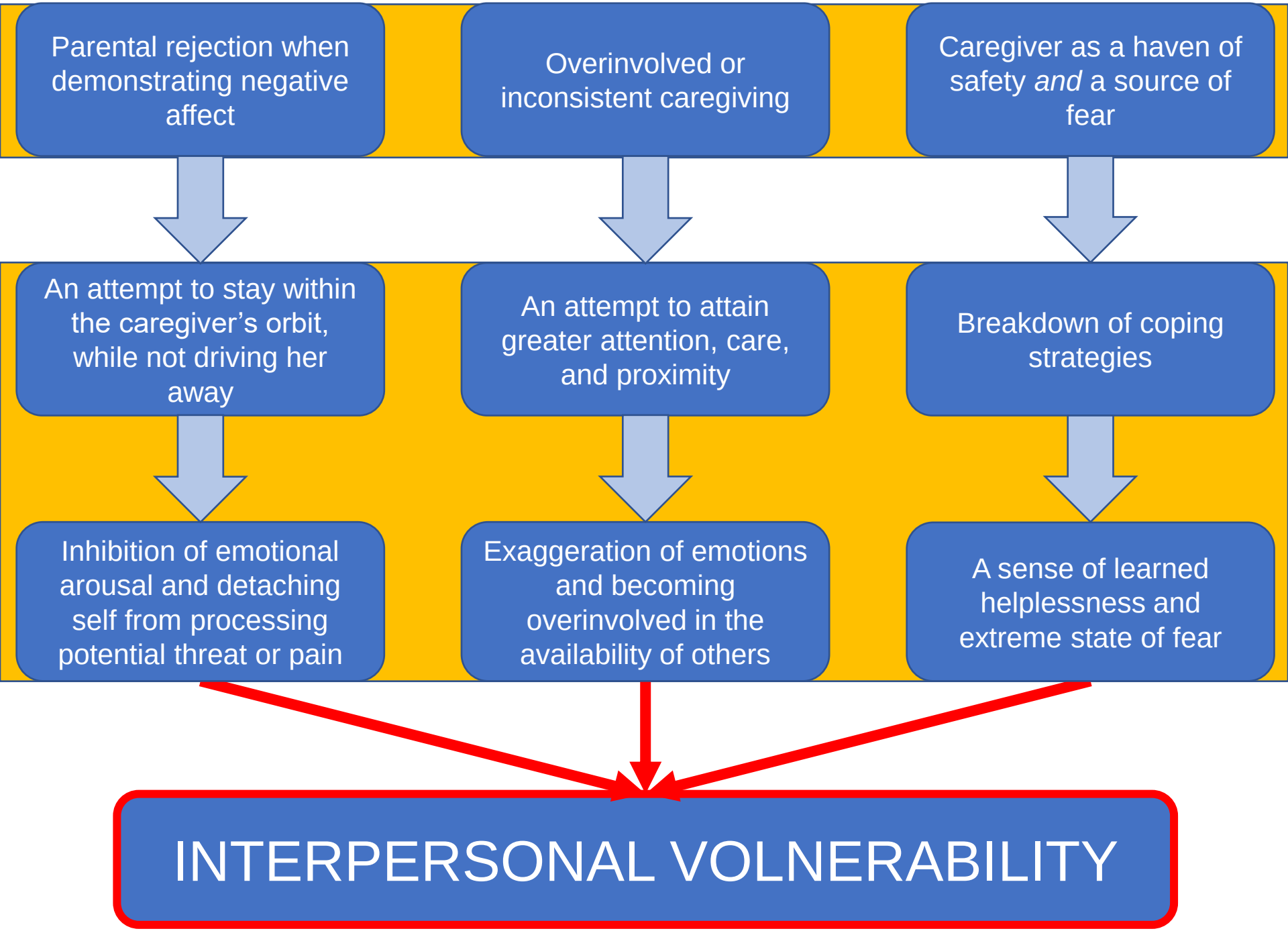
Absence
(neglect, death)
Disruptions
(unresponsiveness, rejection)





Psychological distress


Parental rejection when demonstrating negative affect
An attempt to stay within the caregiver's orbit, while not driving her away
Inhibition of emotional arousal and detaching self from processing potential threat or pain
Overinvolved or inconsistent caregiving
An attempt to attain greater attention, care, and proximity
Exaggeration of emotions and becoming overinvolved in the availability of others
Caregiver as a haven of safety *and* a source of fear
Breakdown of coping strategies
A sense of learned helplessness and extreme state of fear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INTERPERSONAL VOLNERABILITY

IF:
Insecure/Disorganized attachment→ *Interpersonal vulnerability*

***AND**:*
Interpersonal vulnerability → Risk for depression
(e.g., Hammen, 2000; Williams & Riskind, 2004)

THEN:
Insecure/Disorganized attachment → Risk for depression

ATTACHMENT AND DEPRESSION: STATE OF THE FIELD

- Research is inconsistent

  Insecure-preoccupied adults ←→ Depression
  (e.g., Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996; Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996)

  Insecure-dismissing adults ←→ Depression
  (e.g., Ivarsson et al., 2010; Patrick et al., 1994)

  Insecure adults in general ←→ Depression
  (e.g., Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996; Borelli et al., 2010)

  No secure/insecure difference in depression
  (e.g., Dickstein et al., 2004)

- Meta-analysis: High adult insecure attachment representation in depression groups
  (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009)

  - Clinical populations
  - *Frequencies* of attachment classifications in depressed samples

THE CURRENT STUDY

- **Question 1**:

Are *Insecure* adults likely to be more depressed than *Secure* adults?

- **Question 2**:

Are *Preoccupied* adults likely to be more depressed than *Dismissing* adults?

- **Question 3**:

Are *Unresolved* adults likely to be more depressed than *resolved* adults?

METHOD: LITERATURE SEARCH

- Peer-reviewed articles and dissertation reports

- Online databases PsycINFO, MEDLINE, ProQuest were searched using the following combination of key terms:

attachment*
depress*
adult attachment*
mood
psychopath*
representation*
distress*
affectiv*
symptomat*

METHOD: STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA

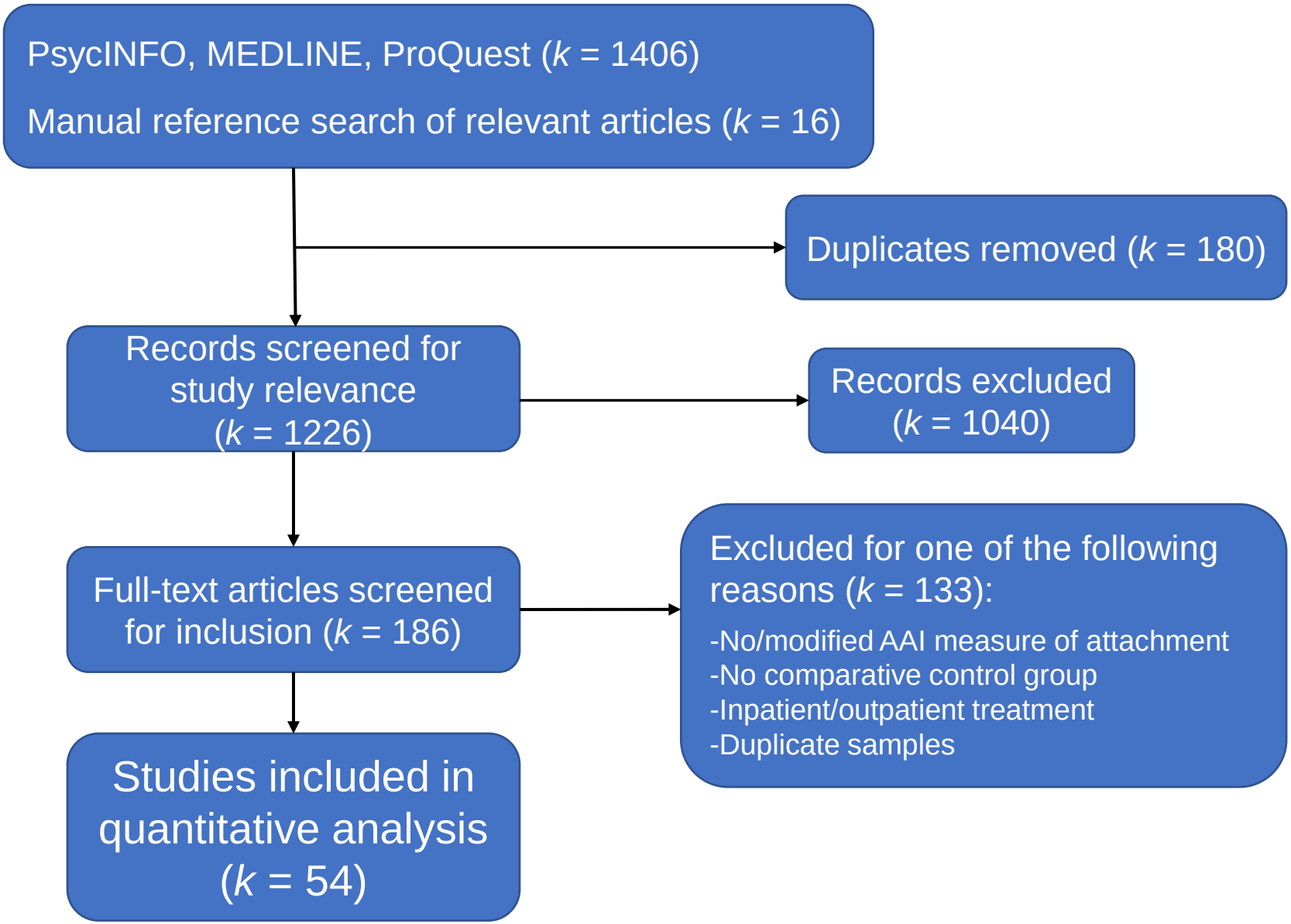
Inclusion criteria:

- Attachment was assessed using the **AAI**
- **Depression** was measured using a standardized assessment
- Written in English

Exclusion criteria:

- Only used a clinical sample
- Reported co-morbid depressed sample
- Depression and/or AAI assessed **during/after** an intervention

STUDY FLOW CHART



METHOD: COMPARISONS AND EFFECTS SIZE

- **Comparisons (#studies):**
  - Secure vs. Insecure (49)
  - Secure vs. Insecure-Dismissing (41)
  - Secure vs. Insecure-Preoccupied (36)
  - Insecure-Dismissing vs. Insecure-Preoccupied (33)
  - Resolved vs. Unresolved (35)

- **Effect size (Cohen's d):**
  - **Mean** differences in depressive symptoms between attachment classifications groups
  - Differences in **frequencies** of attachment classifications between depressed/non-depressed groups
  - **Correlation** between attachment classifications and depression (both continuously measured)

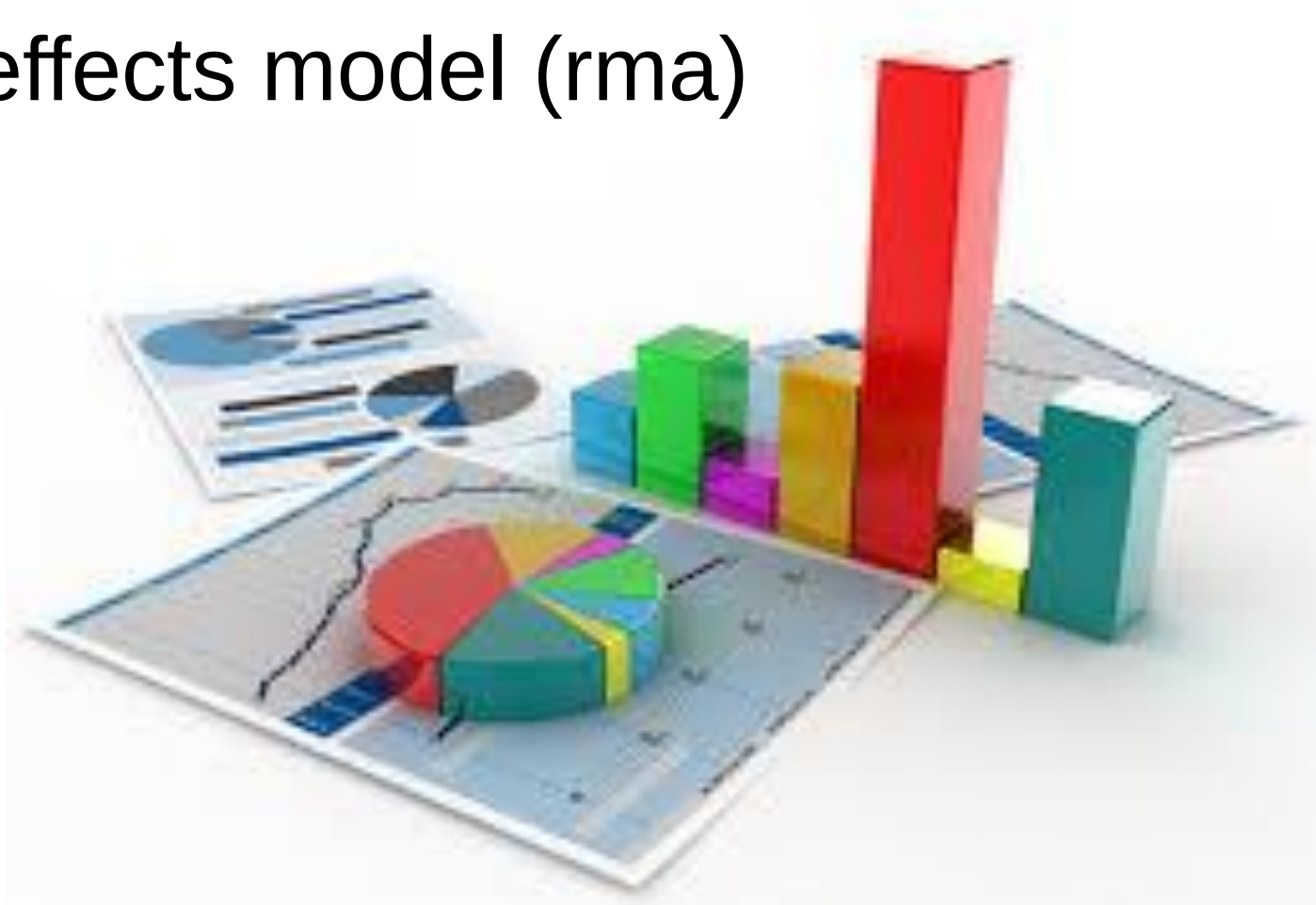
METHOD: STUDY-LEVEL VARIABLES

- **Source characteristics**
  - Publication year, Country of study, Publication type
- **Sample characteristics**
  - Age, Gender, Ethnicity, SES, Education, Parental status
- **Methodological characteristics**
  - Depression measures: Self report/Clinical assessment
  - AAI: Main/Q-sort coding system, Categorical/Dimensional
  - Interval between depression and AAI assessments

METHOD: DATA ANALYSIS

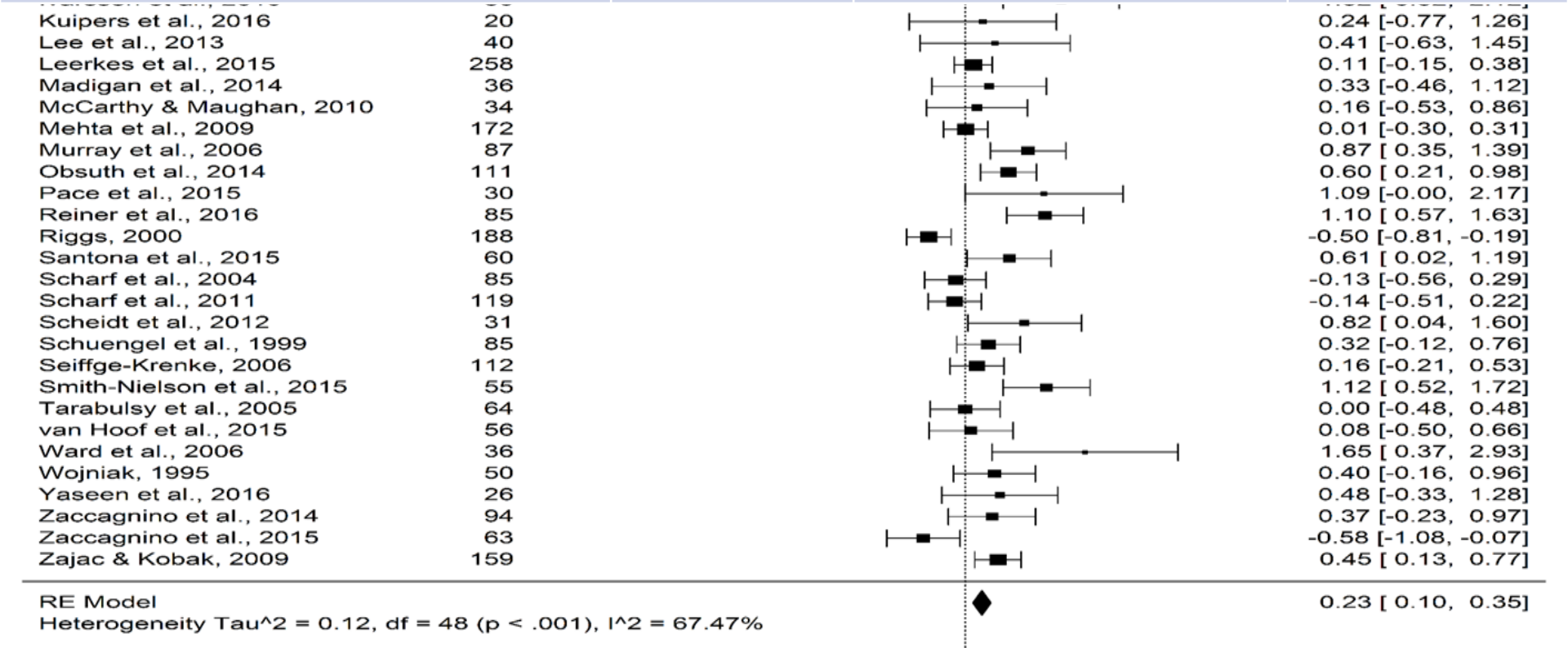
- Statistical software R
  - ✓Package 'metafor' (Viechtbauer, 2010)

- Random-effects model (rma)



RESULTS: ES PER COMPARISON

Comparison	Cohen's *d* **p <. 0005*	95% CI [low, high]	Fail-Safe N
Secure vs. Insecure	0.23*	[0.10, 0.35]	597



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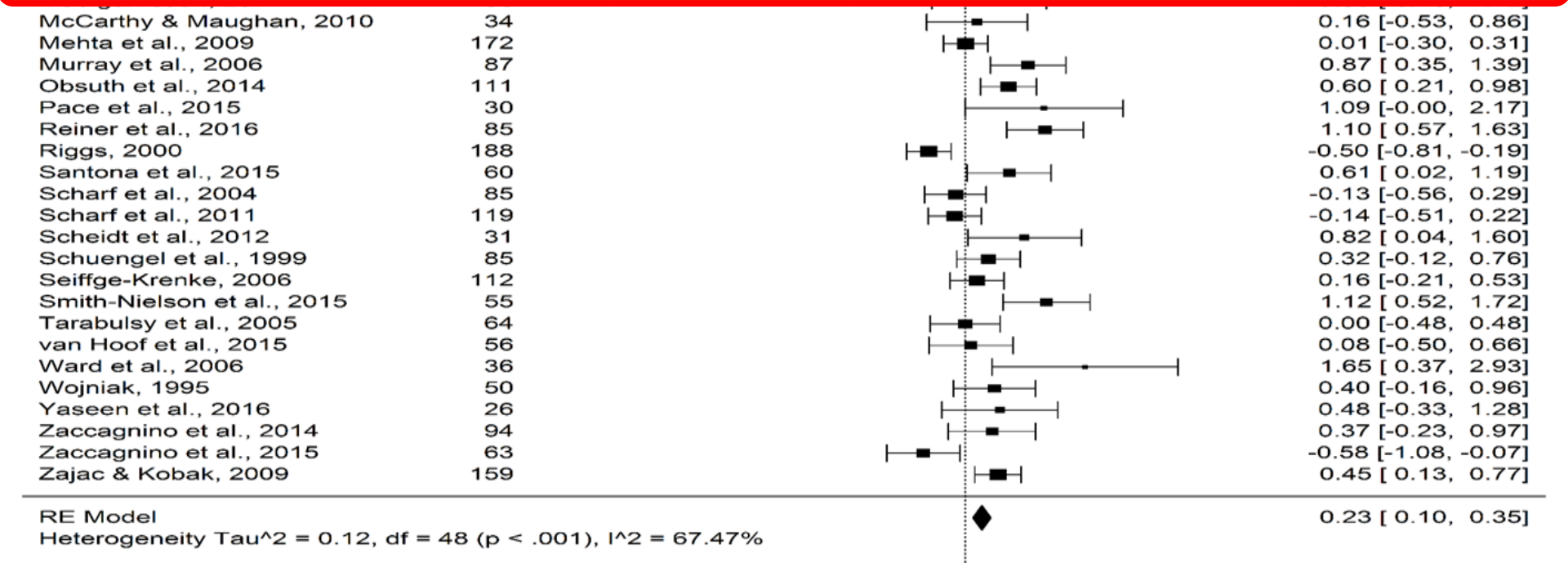

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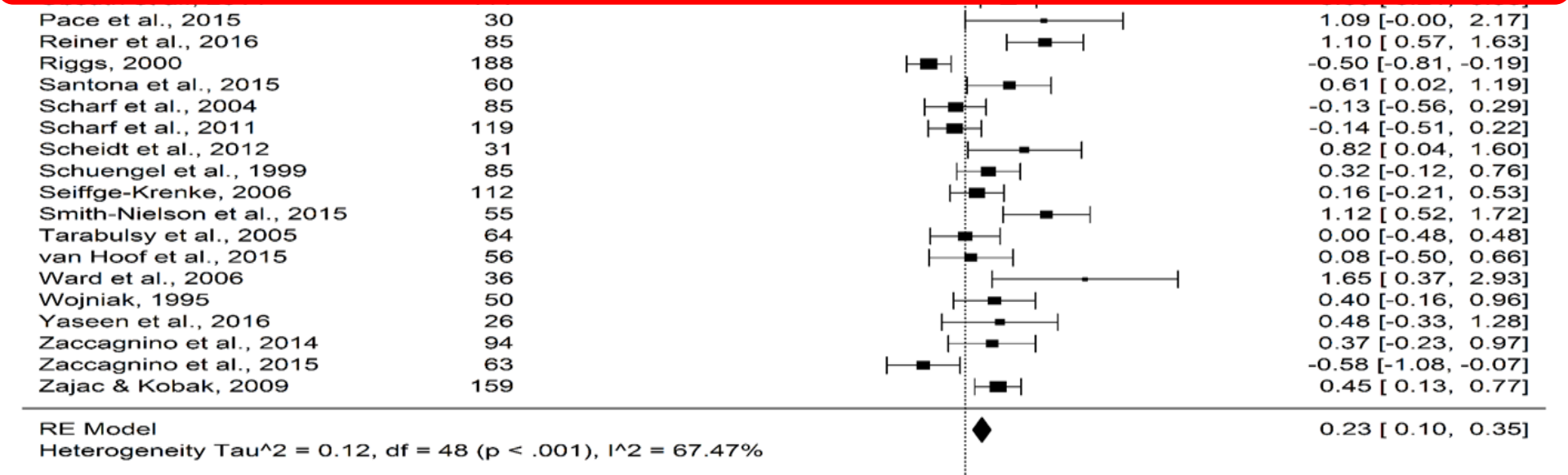
Secure vs. Preoccupied	0.50*	[0.33, 0.68]	843



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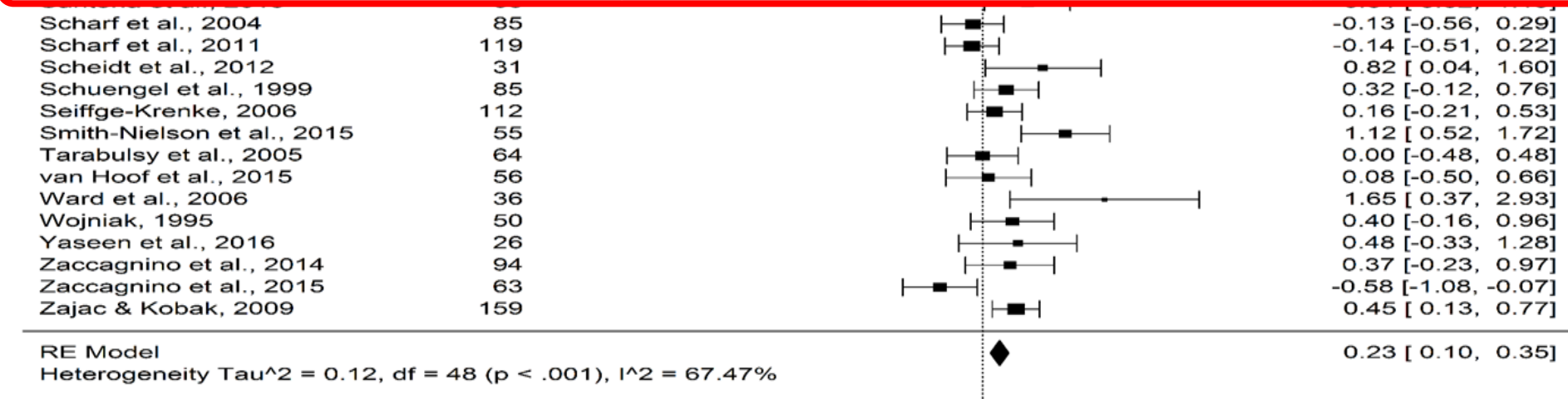

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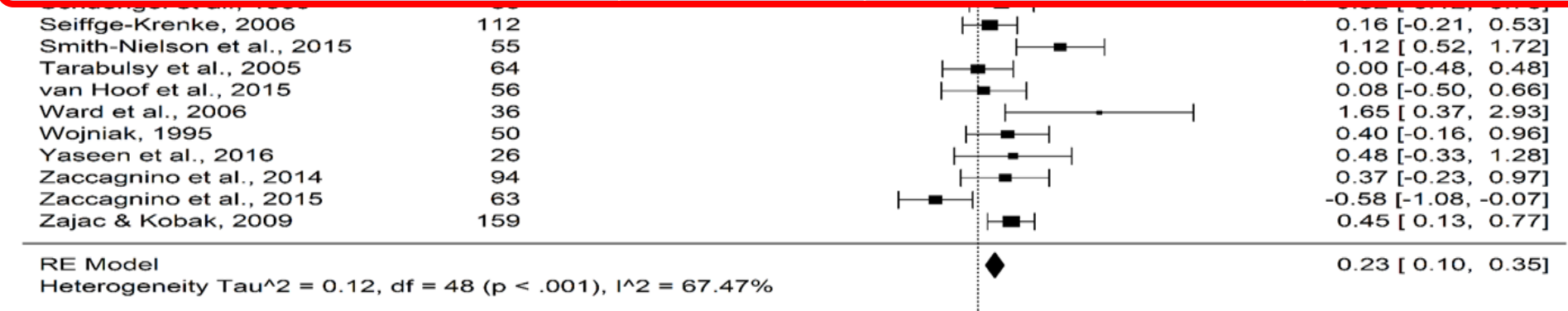
Resolved vs. Unresolved	0.30*	[0.14, 0.46]	346



RESULTS: SIG. MODERATORS

RESOLVED vs. UNRESOLVED							
Categorical Moderator analysis using a mixed-effects model							
		k	*N*	β	95%CI	*Q*	*p*
Time gap AAI/Dep.						3.96	.03
Less than a week	b_0	12	1120	0.57	[0.34, 0.79]		
Over a week	b_1	8	724	-0.37	[0.05, 1.06]		
DISMISSING vs. PREOCCUPIED							
Categorical Moderator analyses using a fixed-effects model							
		k	*N*	β	95%CI	*Q*	*p*
SES						4.62	.03
Middle/High	b_0	27	869	0.47	[0.30, 0.63]		
Low	b_1	6	320	-0.32	[-0.61, -0.03]		
Ethnicity						4.09	.04
>60% White	b_0	24	770	0.43	[0.25, 0.59]		
<60% White	b_1	9	401	-.029	[-0.56, -0.01]		

DISCUSSION

Attachment patterns of ***insecure-preoccupied*** and ***unresolved*** increases likelihood of becoming more depressed than if securely attached

Are Insecure adults likely to be more depressed than Secure adults?

- Yes
- **Cohen's *d* = 0.23**, 95% CI [0.10, 0.35]
- Effect size may be driven mostly by insecure-preoccupied and cannot-classify attachments

Are Preoccupied adults likely to be more depressed than Dismissing adults?

- Yes
- **Cohen's *d* = 0.35**, 95% CI [0.19, 0.51]
- Dismissing adults-
  - May not be aware of own experience of psychiatric distress
  - Isolate self → Preventing from experiencing further loss → Less depressive sxs
- Preoccupied adults-
  - Hyperactivating responses are ***ruminative*** → A hallmark of depression
- Attachment pattern → Reporting style

Are Unresolved adults likely to be more depressed than resolved adults?

- Yes
- **Cohen's *d* = 0.30**, 95% CI [0.14, 0.46]
- Much stronger effect if AAI and depression concurrently measured
  - Unresolved status less stable than organized attachment patterns?

(Crowell, Treboux, & Waters,2002; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 2008)

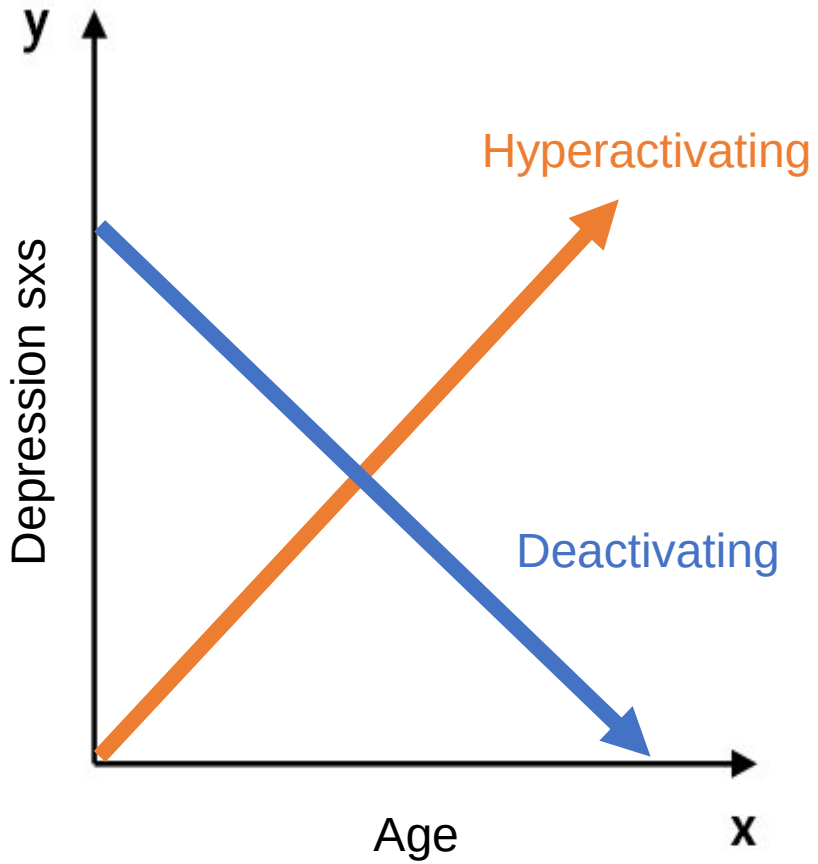
DISCUSSION: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Attachment and internalizing behavior ***in mid/later childhood***:

(Groh, 2016; Madigan et al., 2013)

✓ Avoidant ←→ internalizing sxs

X Resistant ←→ internalizing sxs



Attachment and depressive sxs ***in adulthood***:

X Dismissing ←→ depressive sxs

✓ Preoccupied ←→ depressive sxs

“…loss gives rise to sorrow…

John Bowlby, The making and breaking of affectional bonds, *1977*

“…loss gives rise to sorrow… [and] the *renewal of a bond* [is] a source of joy”

John Bowlby, The making and breaking of affectional bonds, *1977*

Author(s) and Year	Sample Size
Adam et al., 2004	100
Allen et al., 2004	101
Ammaniti et al., 2006	49
Atkinson et al., 2009	96
Babcock et al., 2000	36
Bashe, 2000	65
Blumberg, 1997	50
Borelli et al., 2012 (Sample 1)	50
Borelli et al., 2012 (Sample 2)	46
Borelli et al., 2010	69
Busch & Lieberman, 2010	73
Busch et al., 2008	81
Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996	30
Davis et al., 2014	215
Dawson et al., 2014	175
DeKlyen, 1992	50
DeOliveira et al., 2005	59
Dickstein et al., 2004	74
Dollberg & Keren, 2013	17
Ehrlich et al., 2011	182
Finger, 2006	85
Granqvist et al., 2014	81
Ivarsson et al., 2010	50
Kuipers et al., 2016	20
Lee et al., 2013	40
Leerkes et al., 2015	258
Madigan et al., 2014	36
McCarthy & Maughan, 2010	34
Mehta et al., 2009	172
Murray et al., 2006	87
Obsuth et al., 2014	111
Pace et al., 2015	30
Reiner et al., 2016	85
Riggs, 2000	188
Santona et al., 2015	60
Scharf et al., 2004	85
Scharf et al., 2011	119
Scheidt et al., 2012	31
Schuengel et al., 1999	85
Seiffge-Krenke, 2006	112
Smith-Nielson et al., 2015	55
Tarabulsy et al., 2005	64
van Hoof et al., 2015	56
Ward et al., 2006	36
Wojniak, 1995	50
Yaseen et al., 2016	26
Zaccagnino et al., 2014	94
Zaccagnino et al., 2015	63
Zajac & Kobak, 2009	159

THANK YOU!