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## Openness in Domestic Infant Adoption: A Longitudinal Examination of Adoptive Parents, Birth Parents and Adoptees from Research and Practice

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# Openness in Domestic Infant Adoption: A Longitudinal Examination of Adoptive Parents, Birth Parents and Adoptees from Research and Practice

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The Early Growth and Development Study: A  
Prospective Longitudinal Study of Birth Parents,  
Adopted Children and Adoptive Parents

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# The Early Growth and Development Study (EGDS)

## PIs

Leslie Leve (OSLC)

Jenae Neiderhiser (PSU)

David Reiss (Yale)

Jody Ganiban (GWU)

## Investigators

Rand Conger (UC Davis)

Philip Fisher (OSLC)

The late Xiaojia Ge (Univ. Minnesota)

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## Current Consultants

Joel Gelernter (Yale)

Helen Egger (Duke)

Gordon Harold (Univ. Leicester)

Laurie Wakschlag (Northwestern)

Linda Mayes (Yale)

# Early Growth and Development Study

- 561 domestic adoption placements to non-relative families (2 cohorts)
- Placement by 3 mo. (ave. 7 days)
- Infant free of major medical problems
- 2-3 major assessments for birth parents and up to 7 major assessments for adoptive families spanning infancy through 9 years
- Telephone interviews between major assessments (7-11 AP, 7-9 BP) at approximately 6 mo. intervals



# Interlocking Set of EGDS Studies

## EGDS-Toddler (PI: Reiss)

NICHD, Sept 2002- Aug 2007

361 families (**Cohort I**). Assessed parenting, context, externalizing, internalizing, social competence, birth parent characteristics

## EGDS-MH (PIs: Neiderhiser & Leve).

NIMH, Sept 2010 – July 2015

### Both Cohorts

**New:** Psychiatric diagnosis of children and adoptive parents

Prenatal Period

3-6 mo

9 mo

18 mo

27 mo

36-48 mo

4 ½ yrs

6 yrs

7 yrs

8 yrs

9 yrs

## EGDS-Prenatal (PI: Neiderhiser)

NIDA, June 2007 – May 2013

**New:** 200 families (**Cohort II**), DNA, enhanced measurement of prenatal exposure effects (including BFs)

## EGDS-School (PI: Leve)

NICHD, Aug 2007 – July 2013

### Cohort I

**New:** Emergent literacy, executive functioning, HPA axis functioning

## EGDS-Health (PI: Ganiban).

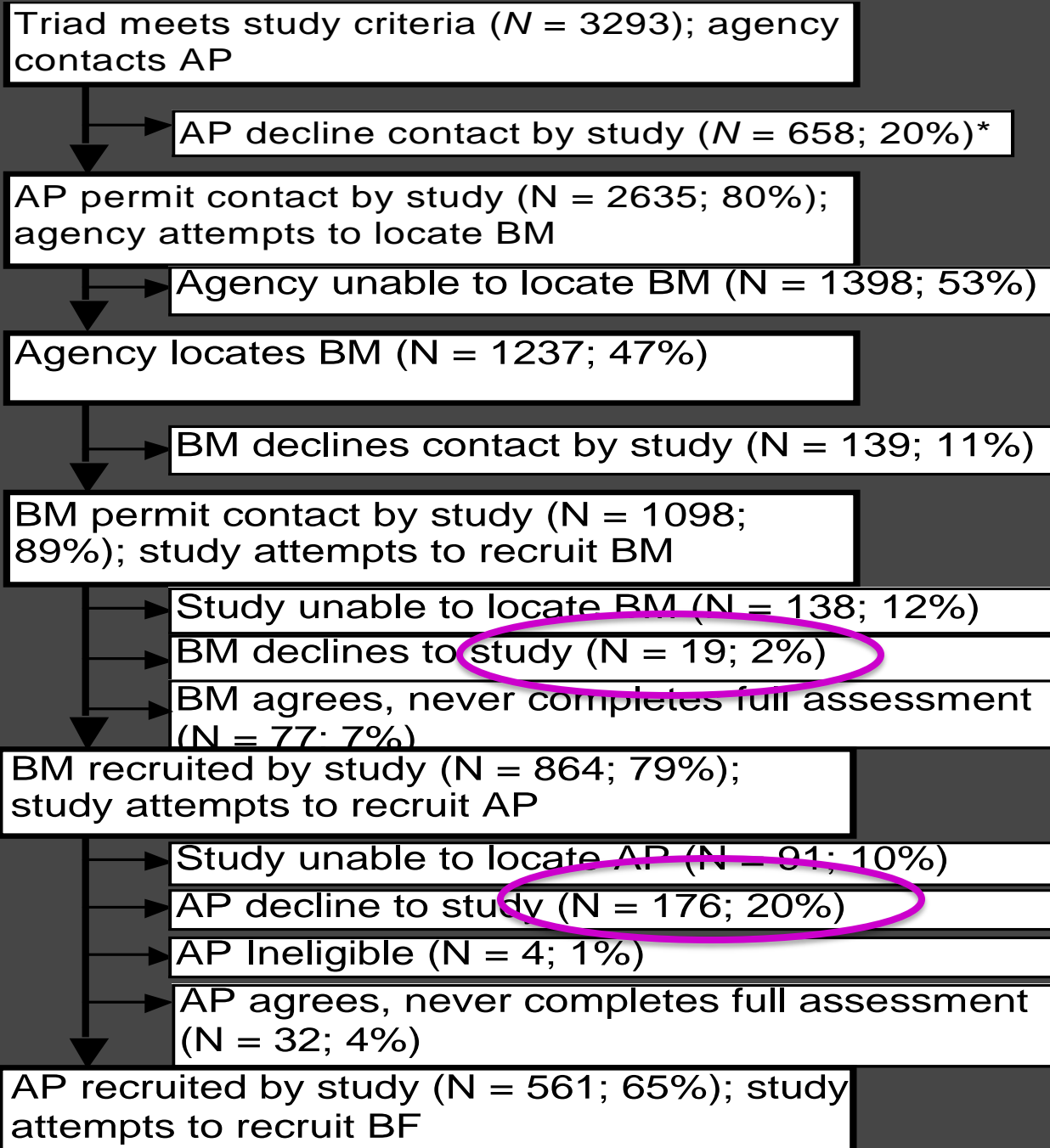
NIDDK, Aug 2011-June 2016

### Both Cohorts

**New:** weight development

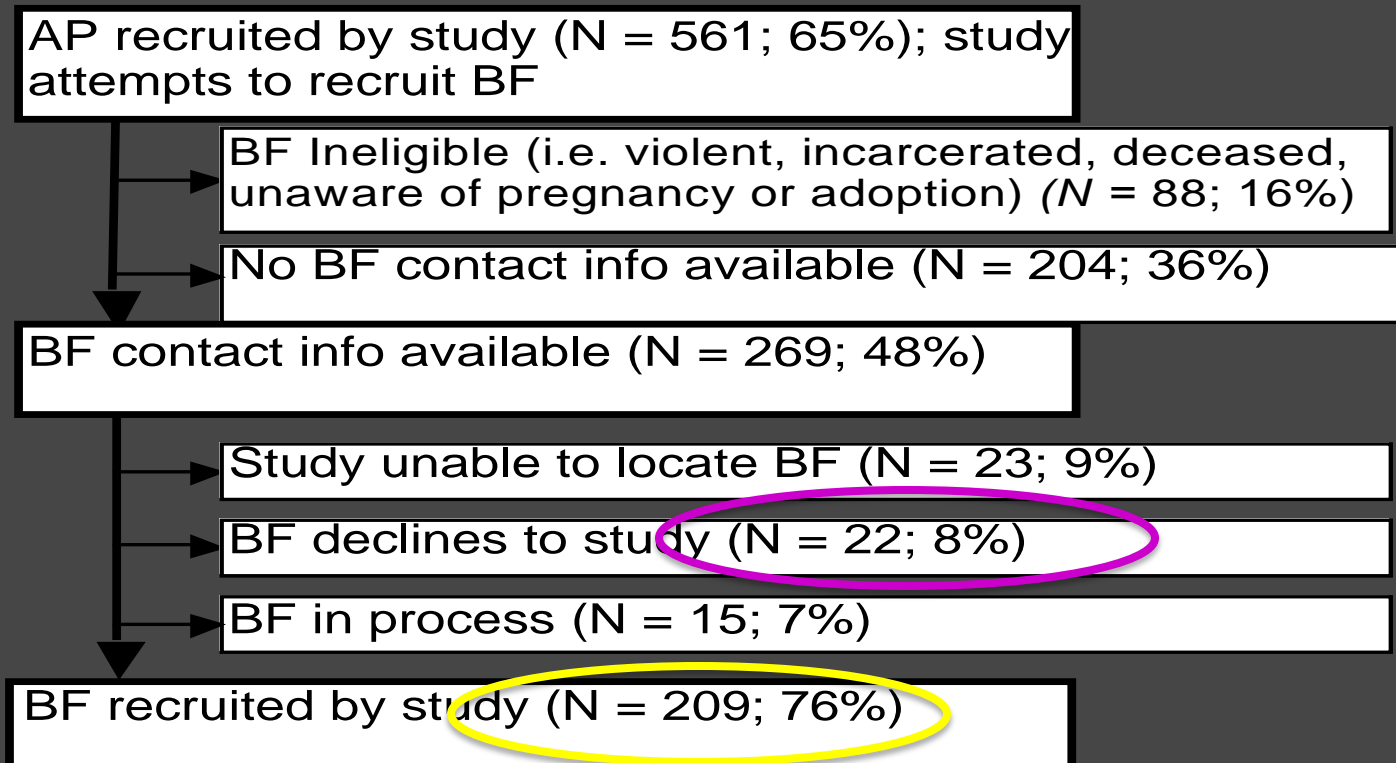
# Recruitment flow chart for EGDS

## Adoptive Families & Birth Mothers



# Recruitment flow chart for EGDS

## Birth Fathers



37% of eligible birthfathers are participating  
(35% in Cohort I; 40% in Cohort II)



# Assessment Methods

## Sample

- Retention: Adoptive family = 90%; Birth parent = 90%
- Data collection complete for child age 9-, 18-, 27-months (both cohorts) and 4.5 and 6 years (cohort I)
- Data collection complete for birth parents at 4 & 18 mo postpartum (both cohorts) and at 5 years postpartum (cohort I)

# Assessment Methods

- Videotaped Observation for adoptive families: Child temperament, parent-child interactions, marital interactions video recorded in the home
- Interviews and Questionnaires for adoptive parents: Couple relationship, parent-child relationship, psychopathology, SES, parenting, child behavior and symptoms, child sleep problems
- Interviews and Questionnaires for birth parents: Couple relationship, diagnosis and symptoms of psychopathology, drug use, economic conditions, life stress, temperament, social support
- Interviews and Questionnaires for birth and adoptive parents on adoption process, openness, agency support & satisfaction, knowledge about the other
- Questionnaires and School Records – teachers and schools
- Diagnostic Interview – birth parents, adoptive parents, child
- Biological data: diurnal cortisol, DNA

# Sample Demographics (first assessment)

	BM	BF	AM	AF
Age (avg)	23.8 ± 6.1 (14-48)	25.3 ± 7.4 (14-54)	37.0 ± 5.6 (20-54)	37.9 ± 5.9 (21-57)
Race/ ethnicity	78% Cauc. 11% Afr. Am. 4% Hisp./Lat. 5% Multi-eth 2% other	63% Cauc. 20% Afr. Am. 8% Hisp./Lat. 5% Mult-eth. 4% other	93% Cauc. 4% Afr. Am. 1% Hisp./Lat. 2% Multi-eth. 1% other	92% Cauc. 5% Afr. Am. 1% Hisp./Lat. 2% Multi-eth. 1% other
Median Income	\$14K	\$21K		\$119K
Median Education	completed trade school	completed trade school	completed college	completed college

# Adoptive Families participating in EGDS

- Adoptive families
  - 90% adoptive mother and adoptive father (506)
  - 2% single adoptive mother (10)
  - 0.1% single adoptive father (1)
  - 4% two adoptive mothers (23)
  - 3% two adoptive fathers (18)
- 19 divorces/separations by child age 7

# Birth Parents participating in EGDS

	Birth Mother	Birth Father
Single, never married	42%	40%
Single, widowed	0.4%	0.5%
Married	13%	14.3%
Married, but separated	3%	3.4%
Divorced, not remarried	5%	4.9%
Remarried	0.4%	0%
Living in committed relationship	32.7%	36.5%

# General Aims Across EGDS Studies

## ***Longitudinal Model Testing free from Influences of Shared Genes:***

Identify early emerging behaviors and emotions in children, and reciprocal relations with parenting and marital processes, that predict later behavioral, psychiatric, and health outcomes from early to middle childhood, controlling for genes common to parents & children

## ***Isolate G and E Influences using a Behavioral Genetic Approach:***

Estimate postnatal family environmental effects on child development independent of genetic risk and prenatal exposure, and genetic influences independent of prenatal and postnatal influences

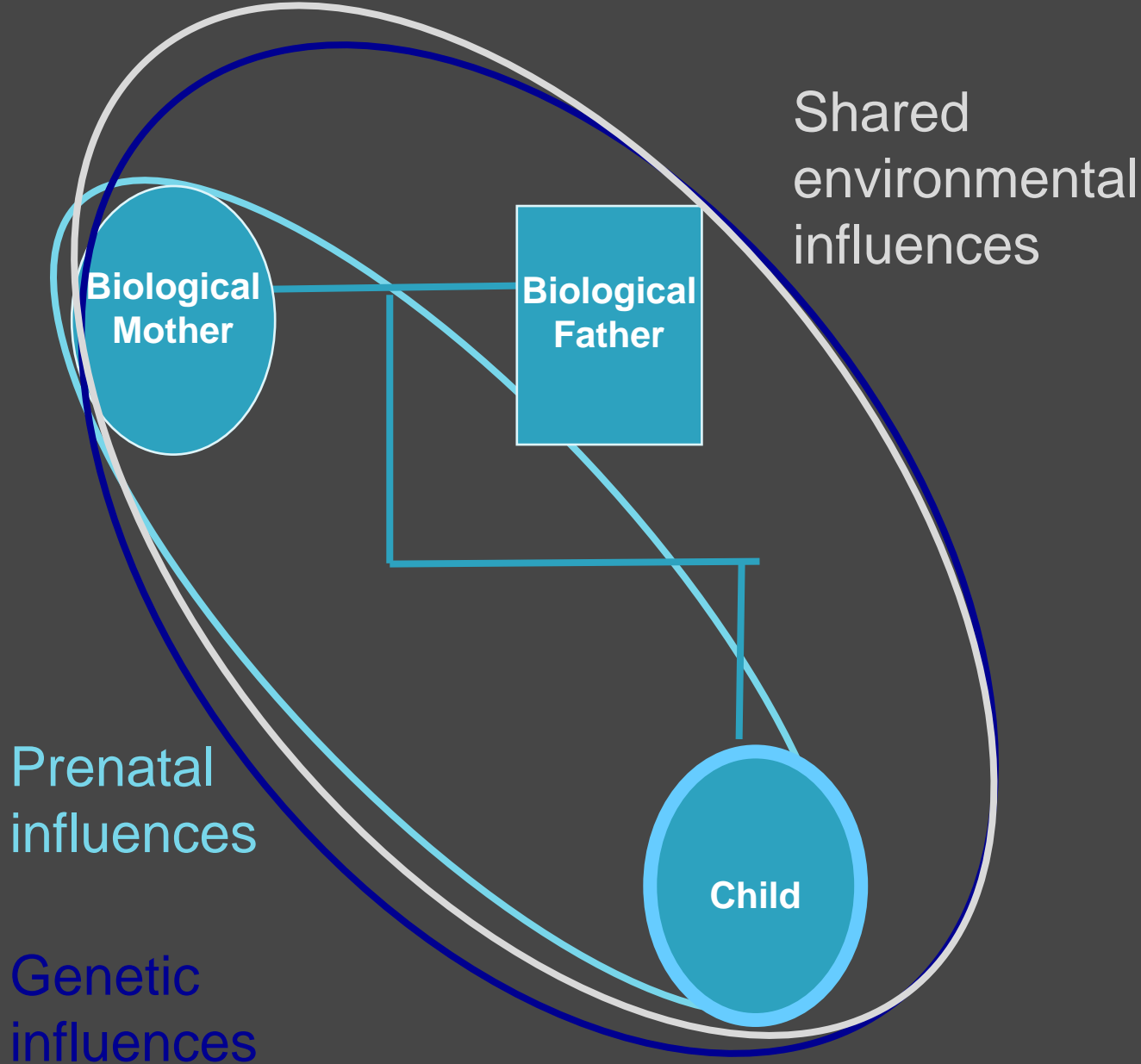
## ***How do G Influences Affect the Social Environment?***

Examine the *mediating* role of the rearing environment on genetic influences on child outcomes cross-sectionally and over time

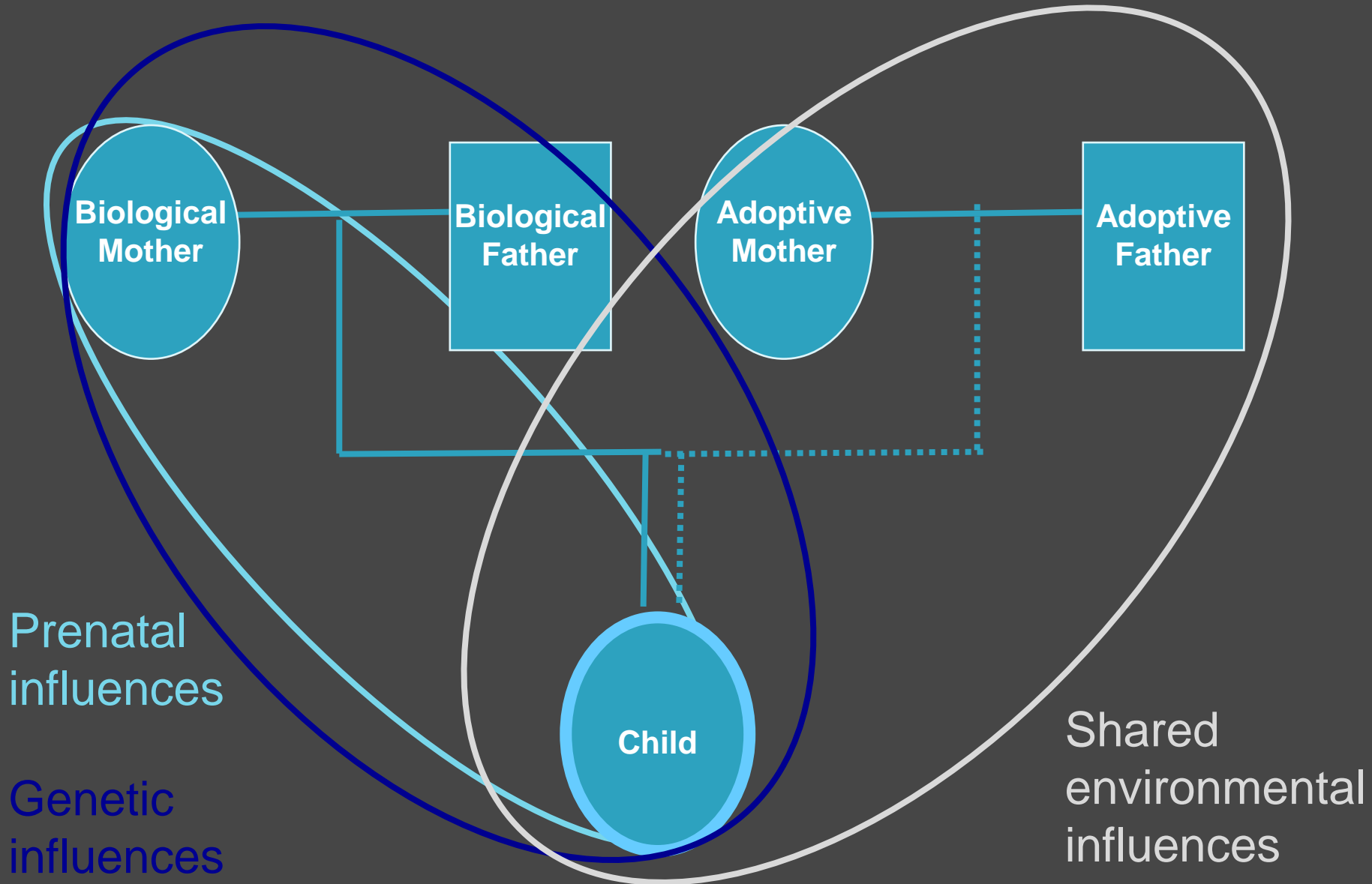
## ***How does the Interaction of G and E Influence Child Outcomes?***

Examine the *moderating* role of the rearing environment on prenatal and genetic influences on child outcomes

# Biological Parent-Child Designs



# Adoptive Parent-Child Designs

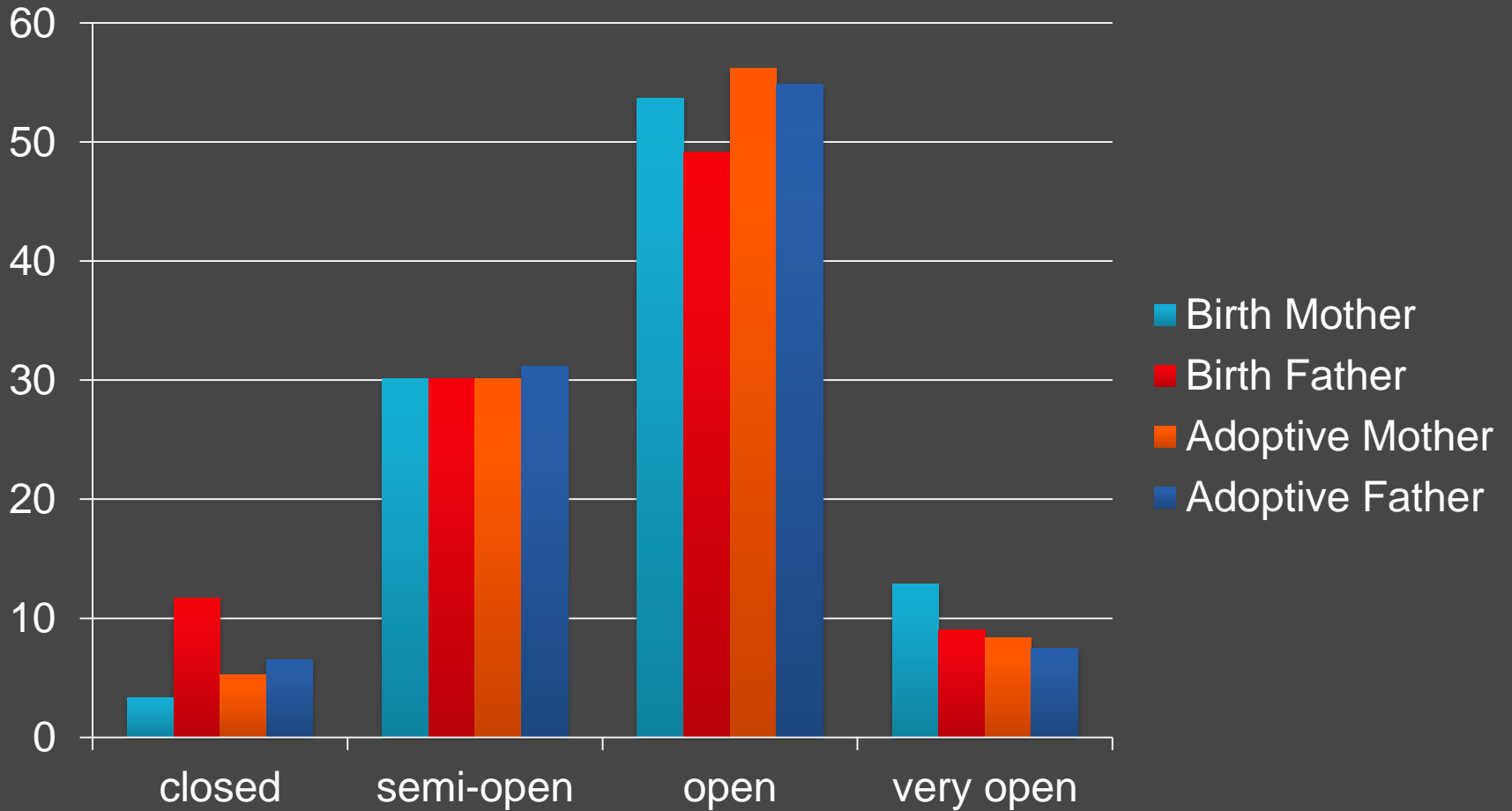




# Openness in EGDS

- Assessed at each in-person assessment for birth parents and adoptive parents
  - Level of openness
  - Satisfaction with openness
  - Contact
    - Frequency and type
- Adoptive families
  - 9 mo, 18 mo, 27 mo, 4.5 yrs, 6 yrs & 7 yrs
- Birth parents
  - 4 mo, 18 mo & 5 yrs

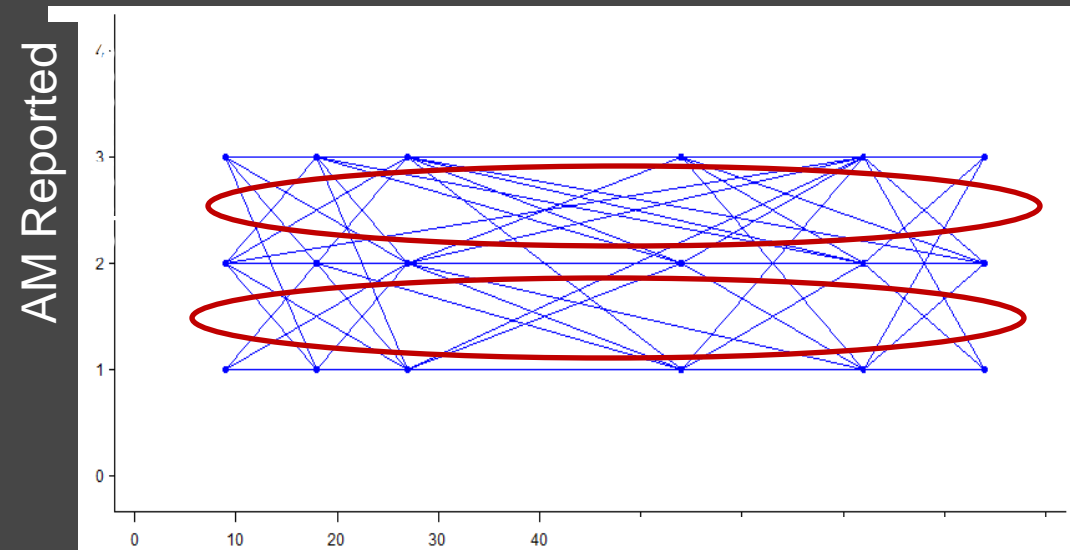
# Openness in EGDS



# What is the impact of change in openness on the functioning of triad members?

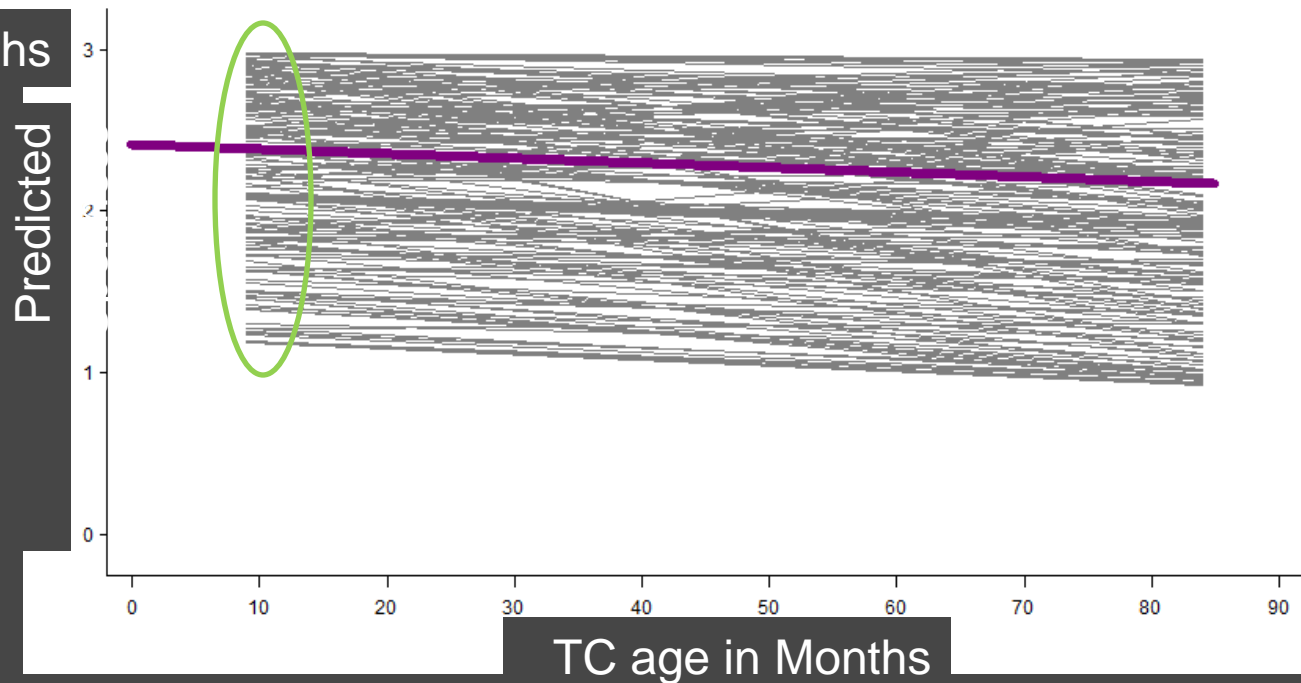
- **Highly stable over time for all reporters**
  - 68-72% of variance is stable over time
  - Pattern is consistent for birth parents and adoptive parents
- **Time-based effects**
  - Small decrease in openness over time, but not systematic
  - Satisfaction increases over time for birth parents and decrease over time for adoptive families
    - Very small decrease for adoptive parents
    - Substantial change for birth parents (accounting for over half of the within-person variance)

# Changes in AM reported Openness over time



31.78% of total variance = within-person changes

68.22% of variance = between-person differences



# How does openness relate to adoptive and birth parent functioning?

- **Adoptive mothers**
  - Appear to be links between adoption openness and satisfaction and their own feelings of parenting self-efficacy, anxiety symptoms and marital happiness and instability
  - For example: when AM reports higher marital happiness they also report adoption as more open
- **Similar patterns for adoptive fathers**
- **No systematic findings for birth mothers or fathers**
- Overall, there are no consistent links with change in openness and adoptive parent or birth parent adjustment or relationships measures

# How does openness relate to adopted child adjustment?

- It doesn't really...
  - There are some associations with child externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, parent reports of daily hassles with the child
  - Nothing is consistent over time

# What have we learned about openness?

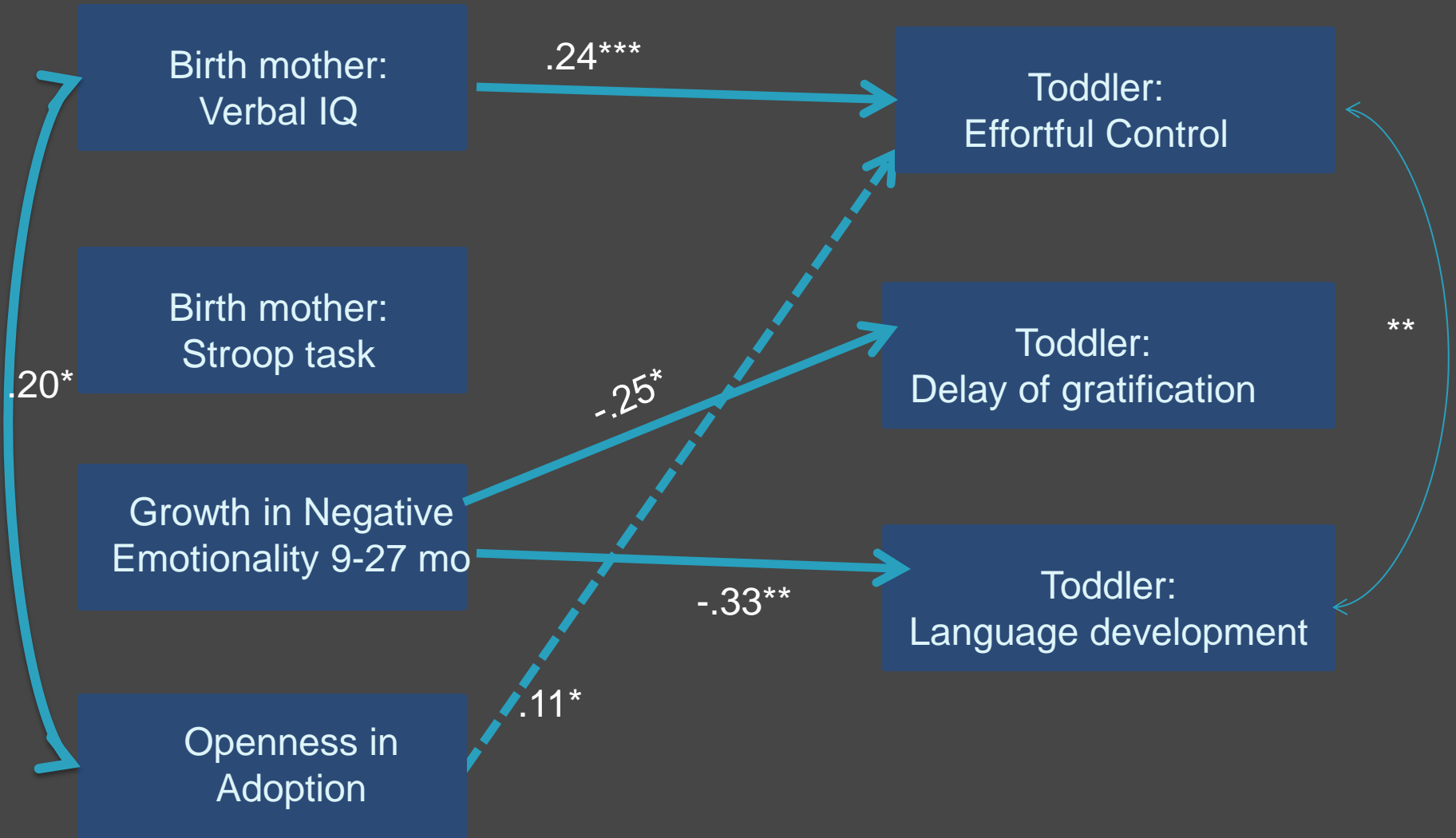
- It is highly stable over time
  - There are fluctuations within individuals for their reports of openness and satisfaction, but they are not systematic
- Patterns of change in openness AND overall correlations among different openness measures are similar for adoptive parents and birth parents
  - In other words, openness seems to operate similarly for both
- The children (oldest are age 7) may simply be too young to show an impact at this time

# What are we doing with openness in EGDS?

- Including it as a control variable in analyses examining gene-environment interplay
  - If children in more open adoptions are more similar to their birthparent than children in less open adoptions we need to be very careful about how we interpret links between birth parents and children
  - *Generally* we aren't finding this to be the case
- An interesting exception...



# Predictors of Child EF at Age 27 mo.



(Leve et al., in press, Dev Psych)

# Key take-home messages

- Adoption openness
  - We expect to see more of a direct role of openness on all members of the adoption triad as the children become adolescents
- In general the associations between adopted children and their birth parents are not systematically greater in more open adoptions than in less open adoptions
- Much, much more needs to be done
- Check out two posters from the study for more detailed openness analyses - Amy Whitesel & David Martin

# Grant Support

**NICHD R01 HD042608**

The Early Growth and Development Study:  
Family Process, Genes, and School Entry

**NIDA R01 DA020585**

Genes, Prenatal Drug Exposure, and Postnatal Environment:  
An Adoption Study

**NIMH R01 MH092118**

Gene-Environment Interplay and Development of  
Psychiatric Symptoms in Children

**NIDDK R01 DK090264**

Gene-Environment Interplay and Childhood Obesity:  
An Adoption Study

**OBSSR (Office of the Director) co-funding**