

# Stress, Childhood Socioeconomic Status, and Impulsivity

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## Background

- Research finds that people with low socioeconomic status (SES) in childhood development go on to exhibit an exaggerated inflammatory response to stress as adults (Janusek et al., 2017).
- Although inflammation is damaging in the long-term, this response is thought to be the result of a **physiological** present-focus, where present survival is prioritized at the cost of long-term health (Gassen et al., 2019)
- It is unknown whether stress also elicits a **psychological** present focus among people from low SES environments, which could guide behavior.

## Hypothesis

We predicted that people experiencing stress would exhibit greater impulsivity (a reduced ability to delay gratification and lower self control), compared to people not experiencing stress.

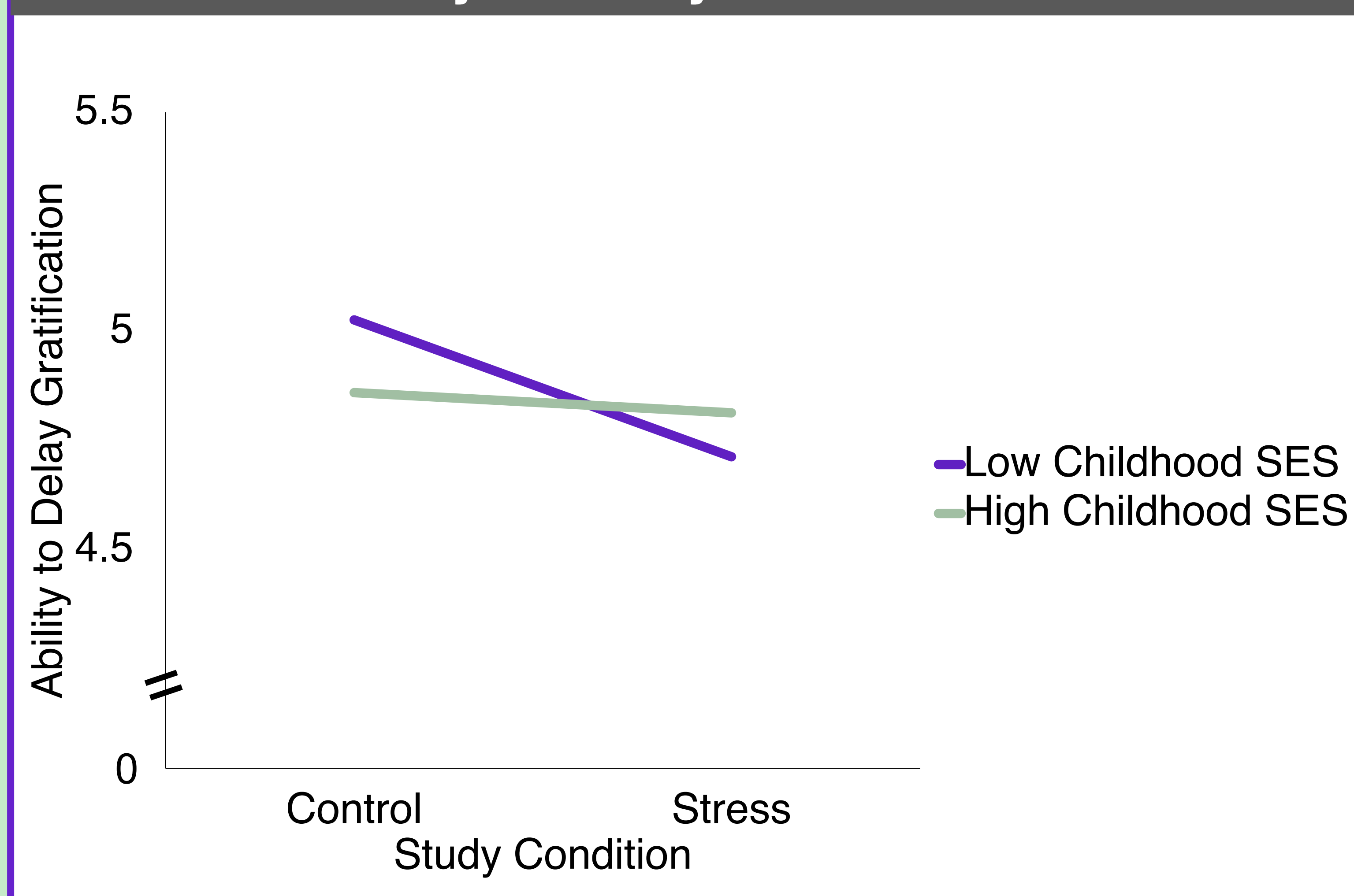
### HOWEVER

We predicted that stress would only increase impulsivity among people with low childhood SES.

## Method

- 56 participants ( $M_{age} = 19.32$ ) were randomly assigned to the stress **or** the control condition of the Trier Social Stress Test.
- Participants then answered questions about their ability to delay gratification and their ability to exercise self control.

## Ability to Delay Gratification

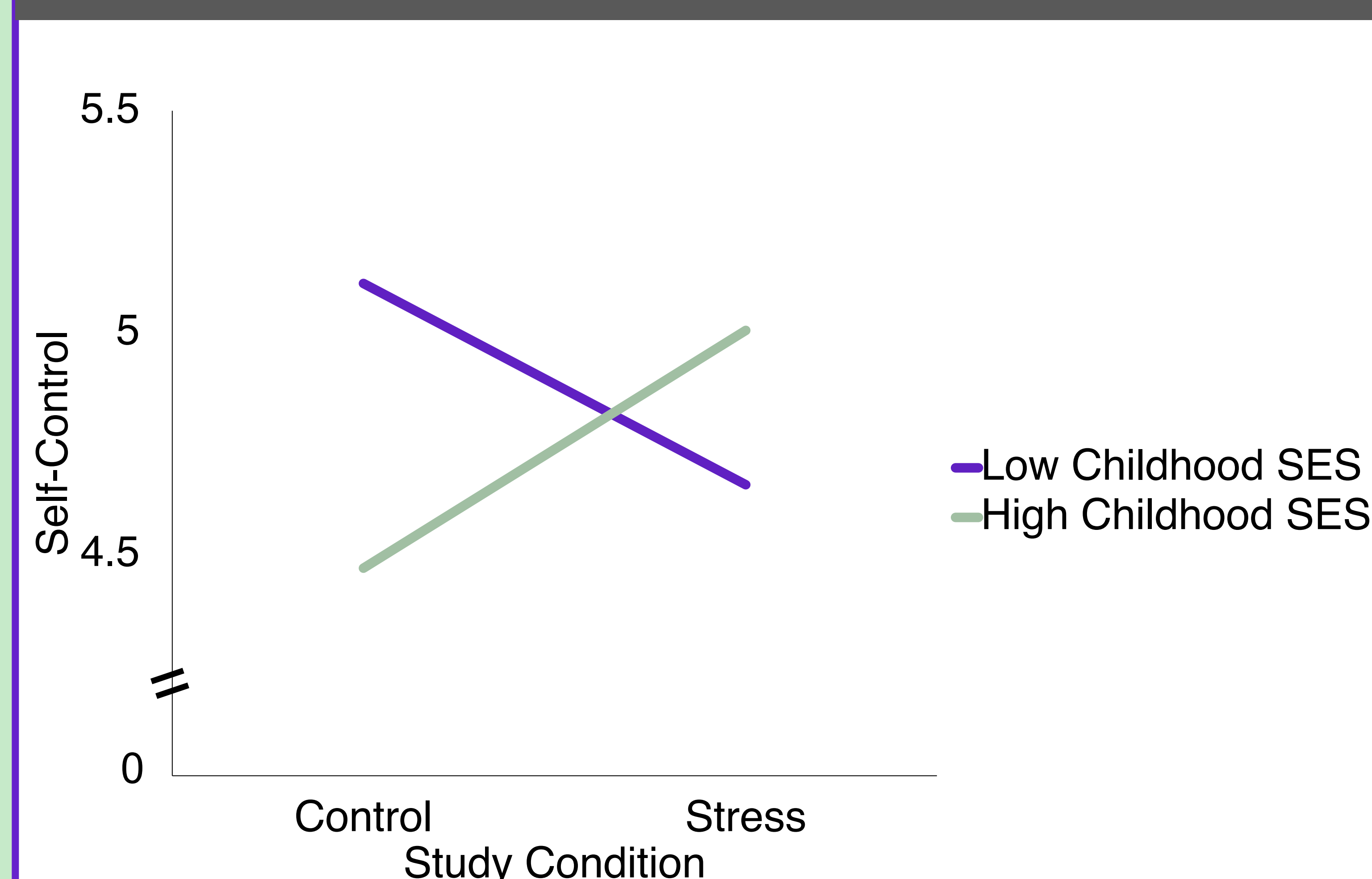


## Preliminary Results

Note that the reported results are preliminary.

Data collection is still ongoing, but current results are trending in support of the hypothesis.

## Self Control



## Results

- People who grew up in high SES environments did not report a worse ability to delay gratification after being stressed, compared to control.
- For people who grew up in low SES environments, experiencing stress was associated with reduced ability to delay gratification, compared to control.
- People who grew up in low SES environments also reporting lower self control after experiencing stress, compared to control.

## Conclusions

- Similar to the physiological present focus observed in previous research, people from low SES environments respond to stress by becoming more psychologically present focused.
- Stress appears to motivate people to prioritize current gratification, potentially at the cost of long-term outcomes.
- Continuing and future research is needed to examine how this psychological present focus may impact the behavior and long-term outcomes of people from low SES backgrounds.

## References

- Gassen, J., Prokosch, M. L., Eimerbrink, M. J., Proffitt Leyva, R. P., White, J. D., Peterman, J. L., Burgess, A., Cheek, D. J., Kreutzer, A., Nicolas, S. C., Boehm, G. W., & Hill, S. E. (2019). Inflammation predicts decision-making characterized by impulsivity, present focus, and an inability to delay gratification. *Scientific Reports*, 9(1).
- Janusek, L. W., Tell, D., Gaylord-Harden, N., & Mathews, H. L. (2017). Relationship of childhood adversity and neighborhood violence to a proinflammatory phenotype in emerging adult African American men: An epigenetic link. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 60, 126–135.

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