Can ecologically relevant stimuli improve task performance for people living in poverty?

Hidden Talents in Harsh Environments

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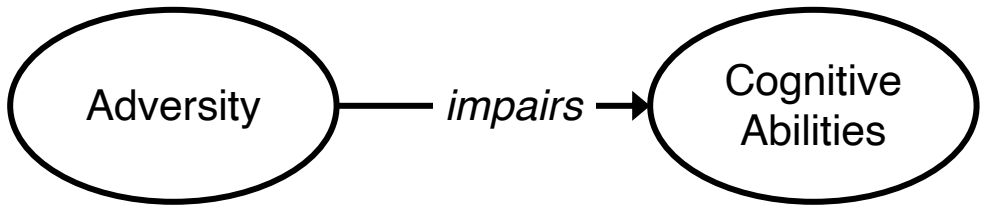
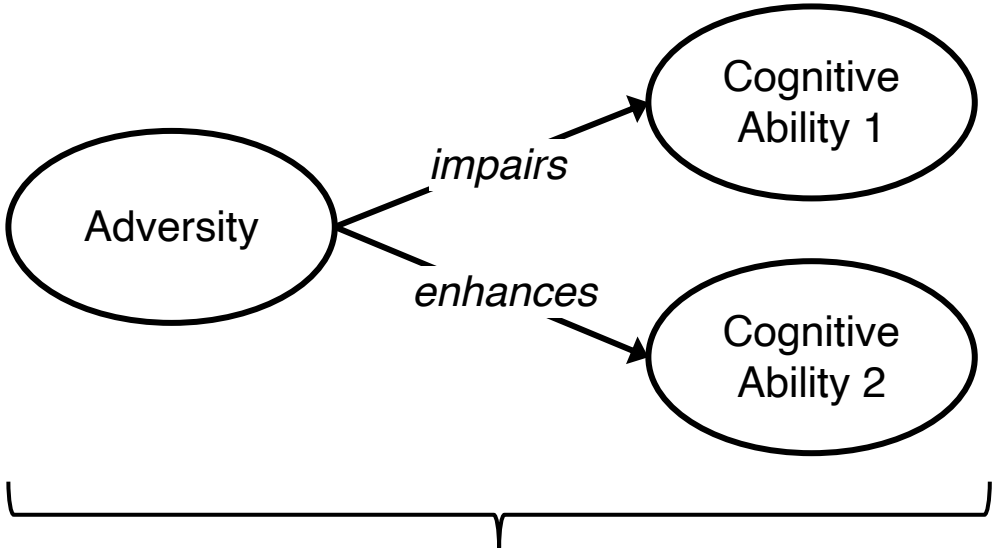
Cognition in Harsh Environments

Deficit Model



Hidden Talents Approach

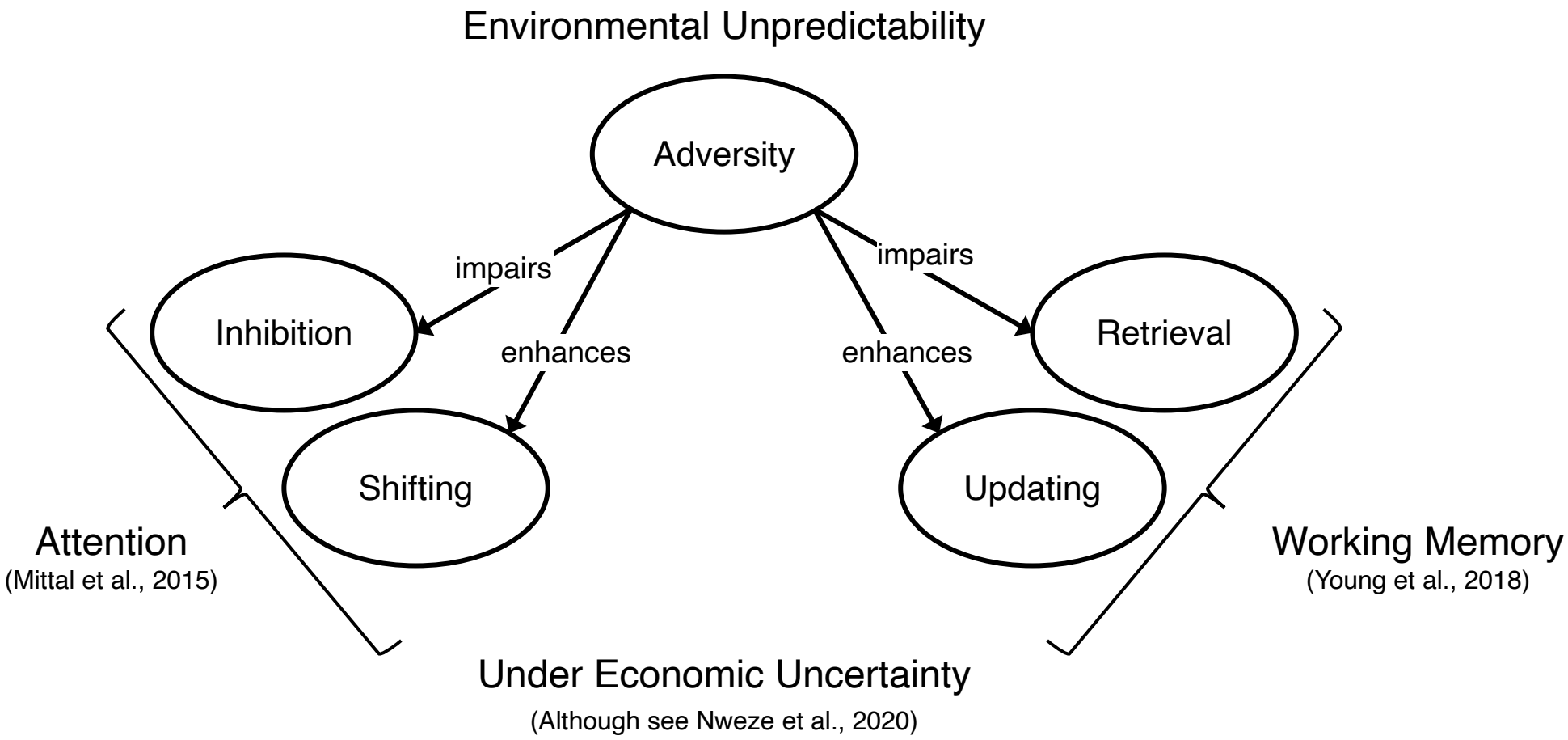


people develop abilities that are ***ecologically relevant*** to their lived experience

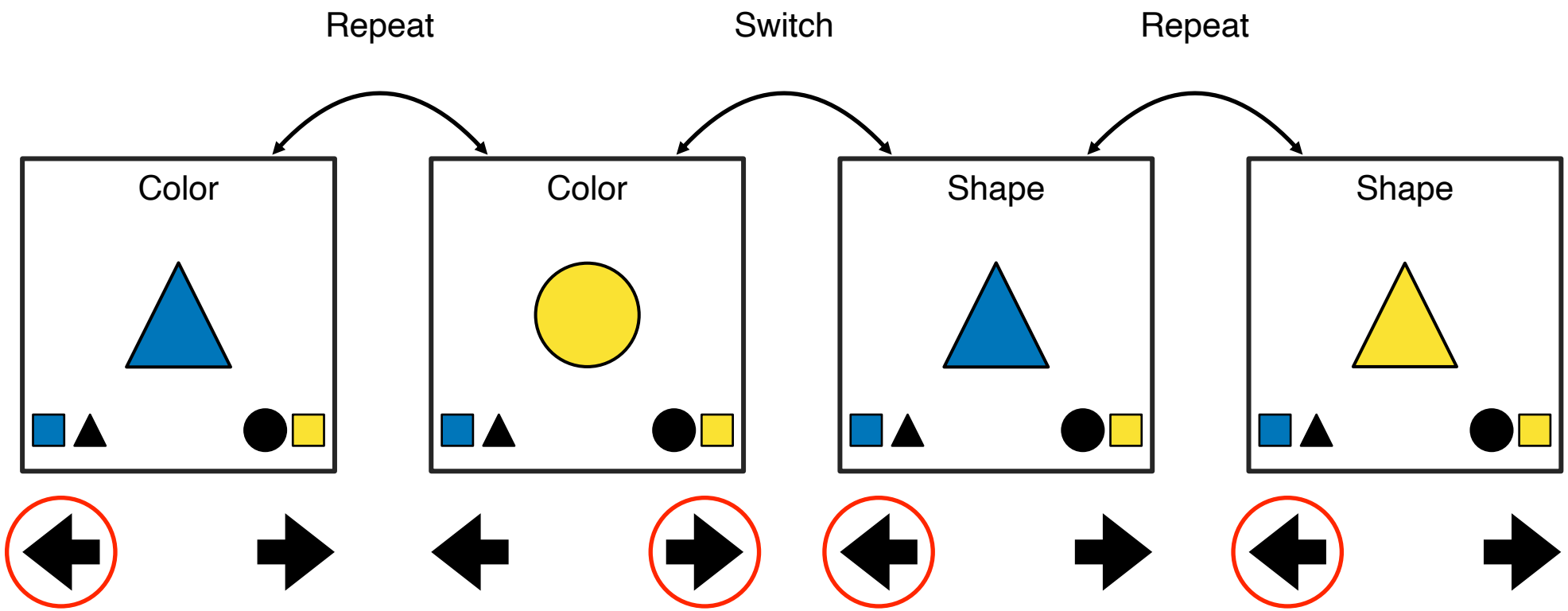
Blair et al., 2011
Bradley & Corwyn, 2002
Farah et al., 2006
Hackman et al., 2014

Ellis et al., 2017
Ellis et al., 2020
Frankenhuis & de Weerth, 2013
Frankenhuis et al., 2020

Executive Functions



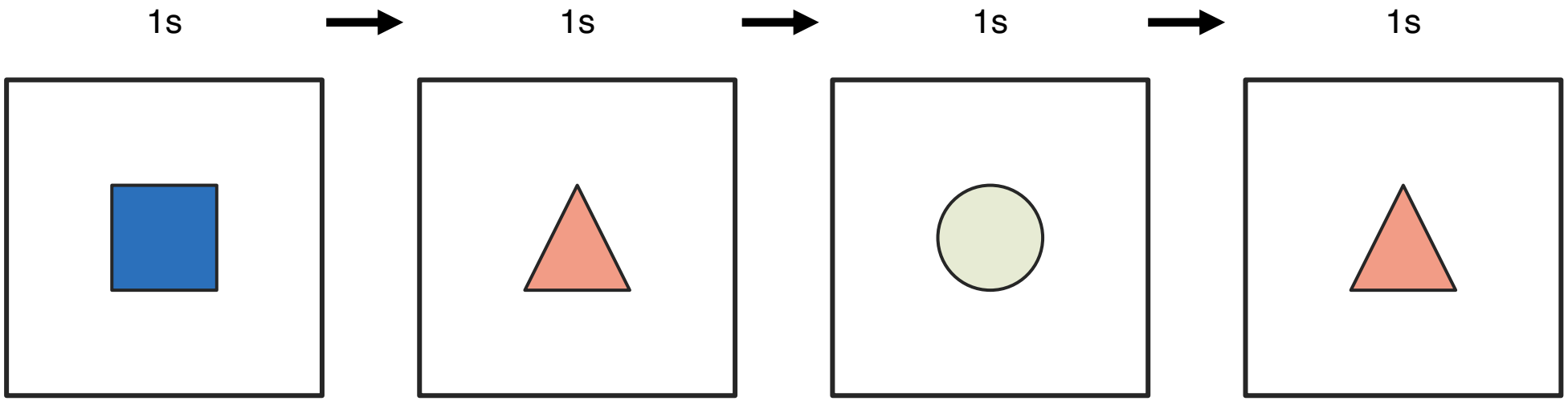
Attention-Shifting



$M_{\text{switch}} - M_{\text{repeat}}$ = **Switch Cost** (smaller is better)

Friedman et al., 2008
Mittal et al., 2015
Miyake & Friedman, 2012

Working Memory Updating



Triangles:	0	1	1	2
Circles:	0	0	1	1
Squares:	1	1	1	1

Proportion Correct (higher is better)

Unsworth & Engle, 2008
Unsworth et al., 2015
Young et al., 2018

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Current Study

Sample data from a **broad range** of socioeconomic conditions

- Mean age 13.6 (.8)
- 43% economically disadvantaged
  - Reduced-price or free lunch
  - Fee waivers
  - Homelessness (N = 32)

Measure **multiple dimensions** of adversity

- Environmental Unpredictability
- Exposure to Violence
- Socioeconomic Status (SES)

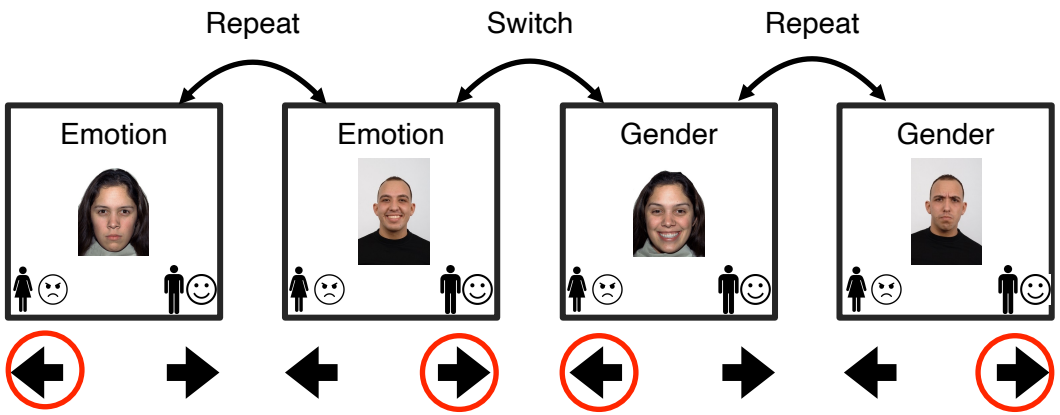
Compare performance on tasks with **abstract** versus **ecologically relevant** content

- Attention-Shifting
- Working Memory Updating

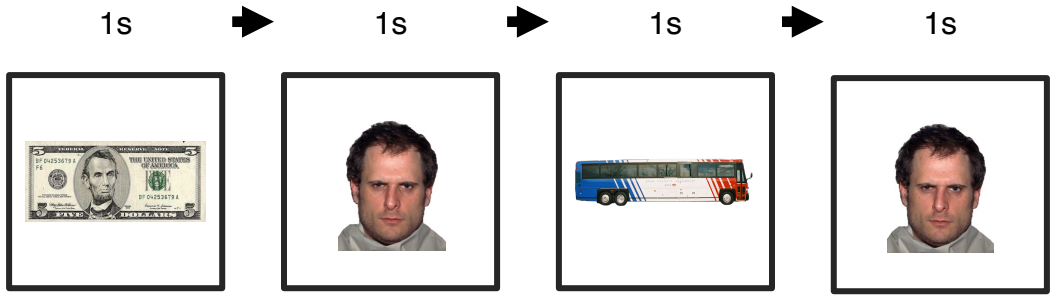
Analyze performance using **multiverse analysis**

Ecologically Relevant Content

Attention-Shifting
with real-world stimuli



Working Memory Updating
with real-world stimuli



Faces:	0	1	1	2
Buses:	0	0	1	1
Bills:	1	1	1	1

Replace abstract content with the real-world content

NimStim library (Tottenham et al., 2009), Radboud Faces Database (Langner et al., 2010).

Multiverse Analysis

Non-Arbitrary

Some alternatives better than others

Arbitrary

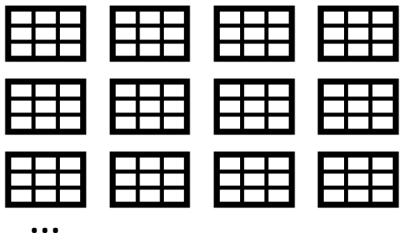
Equally defensible alternatives

6 arbitrary data decisions

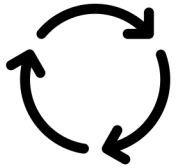
2 alternatives each

64 possible data sets

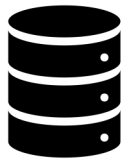
Multiverse of datasets



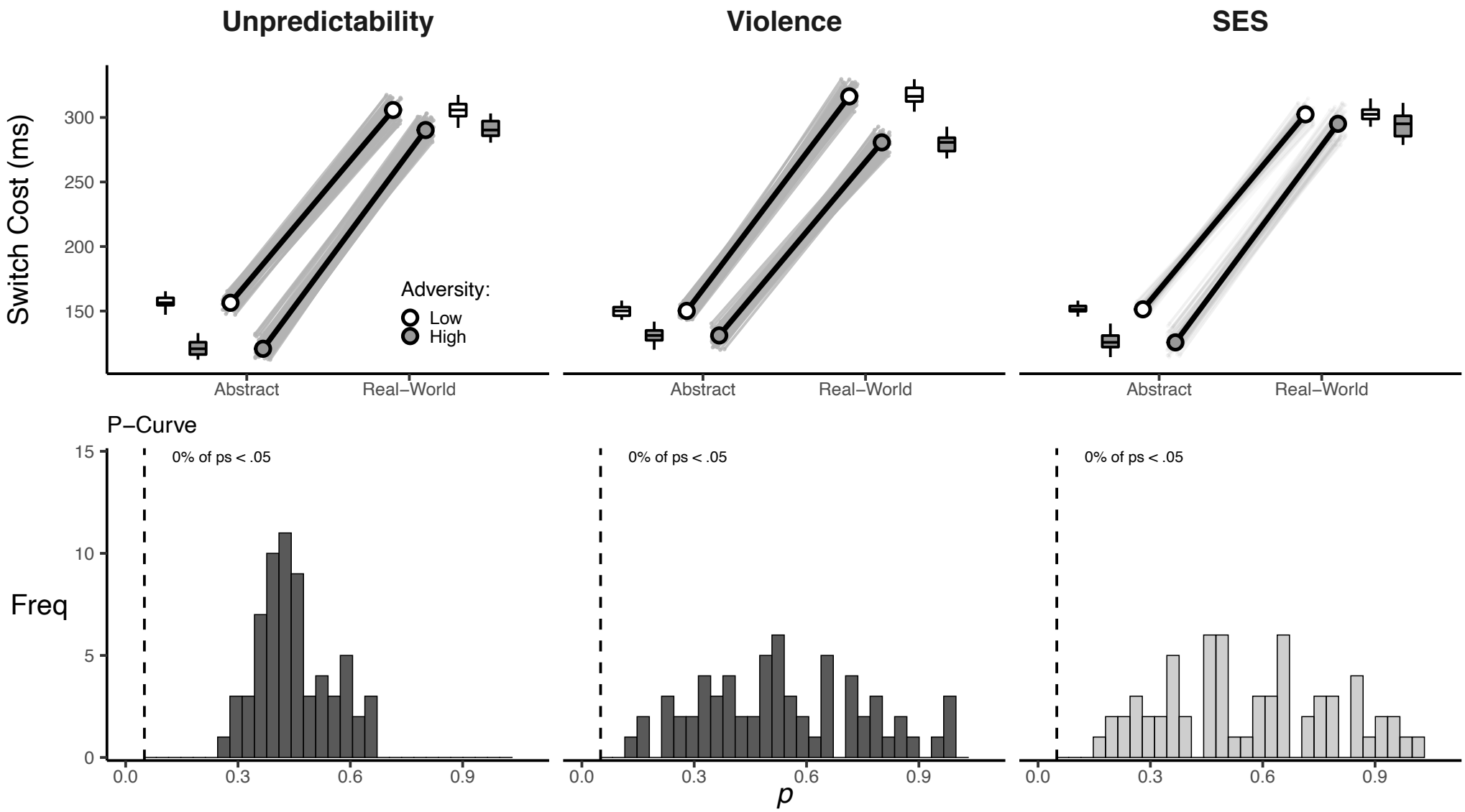
Iterate over data performing same analysis



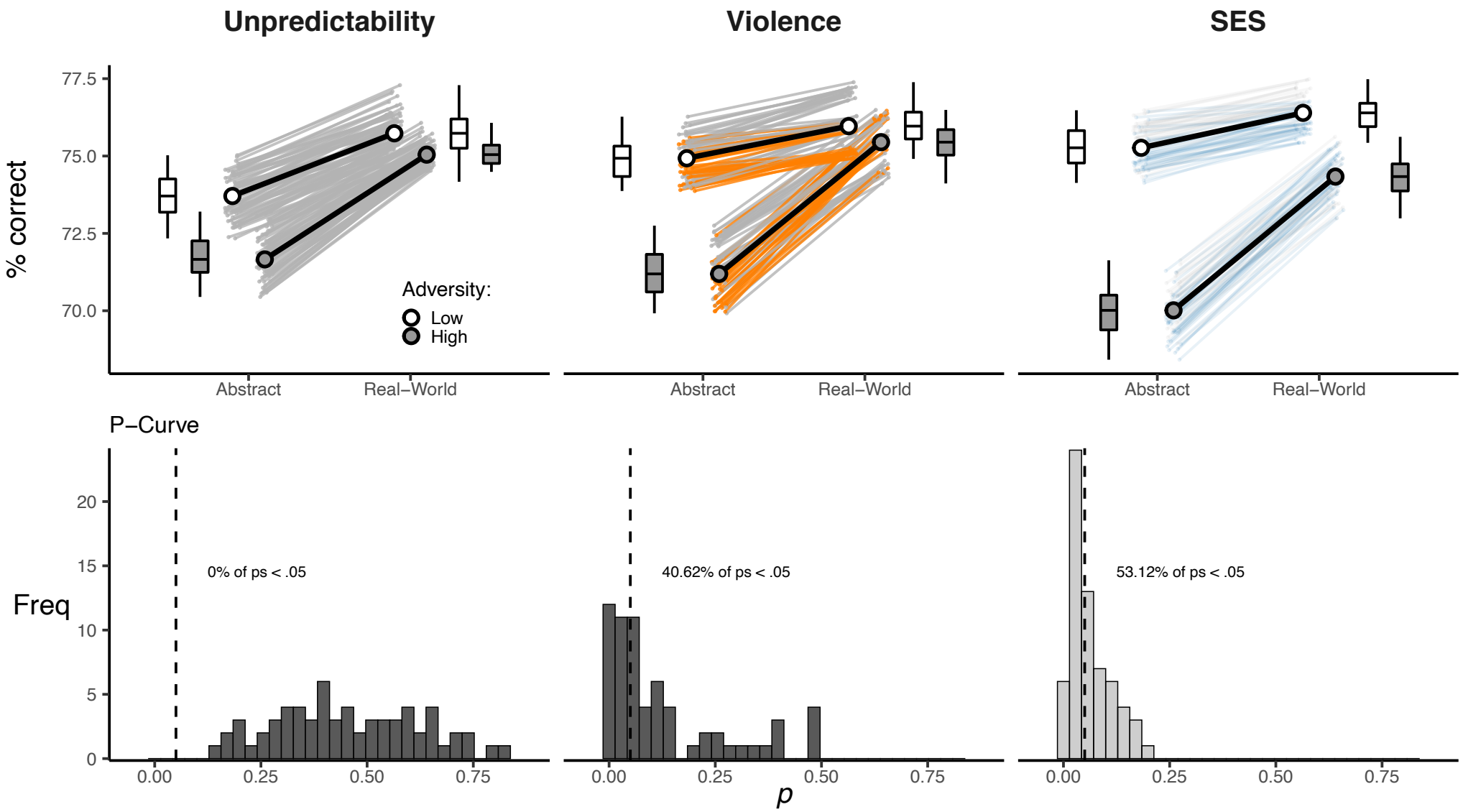
Compile Results



Attention-Shifting



Working Memory Updating



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Not for attention-shifting…

But it does for working memory updating!

Particularly for people exposed to violence and poverty…

At least under some analytic decisions…

Take-Aways

- Take-aways
  - Deficits are only one piece of the puzzle
  - People also develop **adaptations** to adverse conditions
  - Both processes may operate **simultaneously**
  - Real-world content may **equalize** performance for people from adversity

- Multiverse Analysis
  - **Transparently** and **systematically** unpack your data
  - Provides future research with guidelines for data decisions
  - Come with some pretty cool plots ;)

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Jacobs Foundation

Dutch Research Council