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The Continuity of Attachment Development from Infancy to Toddlerhood: The Role of Maternal Sensitivity

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The Continuity of Attachment Development from Infancy to Toddlerhood: The Role of Maternal Sensitivity

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

> The patterns of attachment between infants and mothers have far-reaching consequences for infants' development; infants with secure attachments fare better socially and emotionally than those with non-secure attachments (Deklyen & Greenberg, 2008).

> Theory suggests that differences in attachment quality result from differences in mother-child interactions: secure attachment results from a history of sensitive interactions and non-secure attachment from insensitive interaction.

> Since the attachment security is held to be a product of the quality of interactions; a change in the quality of interactions should theoretically lead to a change in attachment quality. Thus, a child in a secure relationship later encountering insensitive care should tend towards a non-secure relationship, and *vice versa*.

PRESENT STUDY

> The current study investigated the development of attachment across the first two years of life.

> The primary goal was to examine the association between changes in maternal sensitivity and parallel changes in attachment security over the same period of time.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

> Community sample of $n = 68$ adult mothers and their first-born infants.

> Mean age of mothers was 30.12. Majority of mothers were married (77%) and had completed an average of 14.57 years of education. Average household income was \$50,000 - \$70,000.

METHOD Cont'd

MEASURES

> Maternal Sensitivity:

> Based on 2-hour observations of parent-infant interactions at home; maternal sensitivity was assessed using the *Mini-Maternal Behaviour Q-Sort* (Mini-MBQS; Pederson et al., 1999).

> Strange Situation Procedure (SSP; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990):

> Standardized laboratory assessment of attachment in infancy.

> Interesting-but-Scary Paradigm (IbS; Forbes et al., 2007):

> Standardized laboratory assessment of attachment in toddlerhood.

PROCEDURE

> 10-Months: Home Visit

> Maternal sensitivity and demographics.

> 13-Months: Laboratory Visit

> Strange Situation assessment of attachment.

> 21-Months: Home Visit

> Maternal sensitivity.

> 26-Months: Laboratory Visit

> Interesting-but-Scary Paradigm assessment of attachment.

RESULTS

> 1. STABILITY OF MATERNAL SENSITIVITY ACROSS TIME

Table 1. Maternal sensitivity increased from 10 to 21 months.

	Means (SD)		t	p
	10 mo.	21 mo.		
Mini-MBQS Sensitivity	.22(.60)	.34(.60)	-1.47	.14

Note. Correlation between 10 and 21 months sensitivity was .49, $p < .001$; $n = 59$.

> 2. STABILITY OF ATTACHMENT SECURITY ACROSS TIME

Table 2. The number of secure attachment relationships increased from 13 to 26 months.

Months	2-way attachment classifications		Total
	Secure	Non-Secure	
13	34 (59)	27 (41)	61
26	41 (67)	20 (33)	61

Table 3. Substantial change in attachment security between 13 and 26 months – Secure relationships more stable than non-secure.

13 months	26 months		Total
	Secure	Non-Secure	
Secure	26(76)	8(24)	34(100)
Non-Secure	15(56)	12(44)	27(100)
Total	41(67)	20(33)	61(100)

Note. Stability of forced 2-way secure and non-secure attachment classifications was 62%, $\chi^2(1) = 2.99$, ns ; $\kappa = .22$, ns .

> 3. ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MATERNAL SENSITIVITY AND ATTACHMENT SECURITY

Table 4. Maternal sensitivity at 10 and 21 months and attachment security at 13 and 26 months were significantly inter-correlated

Sensitivity	Secure Attachment	
	13 months	26 months
10 months	.34**	.35**
21 months	.29*	.31*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4. ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CHANGES IN MATERNAL SENSITIVITY AND CHANGES IN ATTACHMENT SECURITY

Table 5. Three-step logistic regression predicting attachment security at 26 Months: Sensitivity at 10 months (not change in sensitivity) predicted security at 26 months

Predictors	Wald	p	Exp(B)
Block 1:			
10 month Sensitivity	6.69	.01	3.64*
Block 2:			
10 month Sensitivity	4.72	.03	3.22*
13 month Security	.33	.57	1.45
Block 3:			
10 month Sensitivity	2.29	.13	2.44
13 month Security	.24	.62	1.38
21 month Sensitivity	1.19	.28	1.81

Note 1. Block 1: $\chi^2(1) = 7.30$, $p < .01$; correctly classified 72% of cases (87% secure, 45% non-secure)

Note 2. Block2: $\chi^2(2) = 7.63$, $p < .05$; correctly classified 74% of cases (84% secure, 55% non-secure)

Note 3. Block 3: $\chi^2(3) = 8.80$, $p < .05$; correctly classified 74% of cases (87% secure, 50% non-secure)

CONCLUSIONS

> This study found significant stability in maternal sensitivity between infancy and toddlerhood. However, there was substantial change in attachment quality across time.

> Secure relationships were largely stable, but a greater portion of non-secure relationships became secure by 26 months.

> In addition, changes in maternal sensitivity did not result in theoretically predicted parallel changes in attachment quality.

> These results suggest that factors other than sensitivity may be responsible for change in attachment patterns. Belsky (2005) argued that children are born differentially susceptible to parenting. This argument raises intriguing questions about the role that children's differential susceptibility may play in affecting the developmental trajectories of their attachment relationships. Further longitudinal studies exploring other factors (e.g. differential susceptibility) are needed to illuminate the complex, non-linear nature of the developmental of attachment.