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Understanding Developmental Processes Underlying Mother-Child Conversations about Emotions

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Understanding Developmental Processes Underlying Mother-Child Conversations about Emotions

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Celia Hsiao & Greg Moran

Understanding Developmental Origins: Quality of Attachment Relationship

- Theoretically:
 - Secure mother-child attachment relationships promote emotion communication that is open, elaborative and fluent (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1990)
 - Children in secure attachment relationships expected to receive warm, sensitive, and consistent caregiving (Ainsworth, 1969)

Understanding Developmental Origins: Quality of Attachment Relationship

- Empirically:
 - Discourse between securely attached children and mothers more emotionally open, coherent, elaborative, and result of collaborative effort (Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Oppenheim, Koren-Karie, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2007)

Understanding Developmental Origins: Examining Maternal Attachment Representation

- Why are some mothers better able than others to foster a more open, collaborative, and coherent discussion with their children about previous emotional experiences?
- Researchers have called on need to examine influence of mothers' attachment representation on her scaffolding ability of child's personal narratives
 - Evidence currently mixed



Current Study

- Purpose 1: Examine the link between maternal attachment status and quality of mother-child emotion dialogues
- Purpose 2: Examine mechanisms by which maternal representations influence quality of mother-child emotion dialogues
 - Maternal sensitivity as moderating link between maternal attachment and mother-child co-construction

Current Study

□ Participants

- 50 mother-child dyads (26 girls; 24 boys) from middle-class families

□ Procedure

- Time 1: 3 mths infant age – Maternal attachment representation
- Time 2: 10 mths infant age – Maternal sensitivity
- Time 3: 3.5 yr child age – Mother-child emotion dialogue



Current Study

□ Measures

■ Maternal attachment representation

- Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996)
- Mothers assigned primary classification for their state of mind with regards to attachment
 - Autonomous (F)
 - Dismissing (Ds)
 - Preoccupied (E)

Current Study

□ Measures

■ Maternal sensitivity

- Maternal Behaviour Q Sort (MBQS; Pederson & Moran, 1995) 25 item home mini version

■ Mother-child emotion dialogue

- Autobiographical Emotional Events Dialogue (AEED; Koren-Karie et al., 2000)
 - 7 mother scales and 7 parallel child scales; 2 narrative scales
 - Classifications:
 - Emotionally matched (EM)
 - Non-emotionally matched (Non-EM)



Results: Control Variables

- Control variables
 - Child gender
 - Child age
 - Mother education
 - Mother vocabulary
 - Child vocabulary
- Not associated with related variables, thus no controls included in subsequent analyses

Results: Associations Between AAI and AEED Classifications

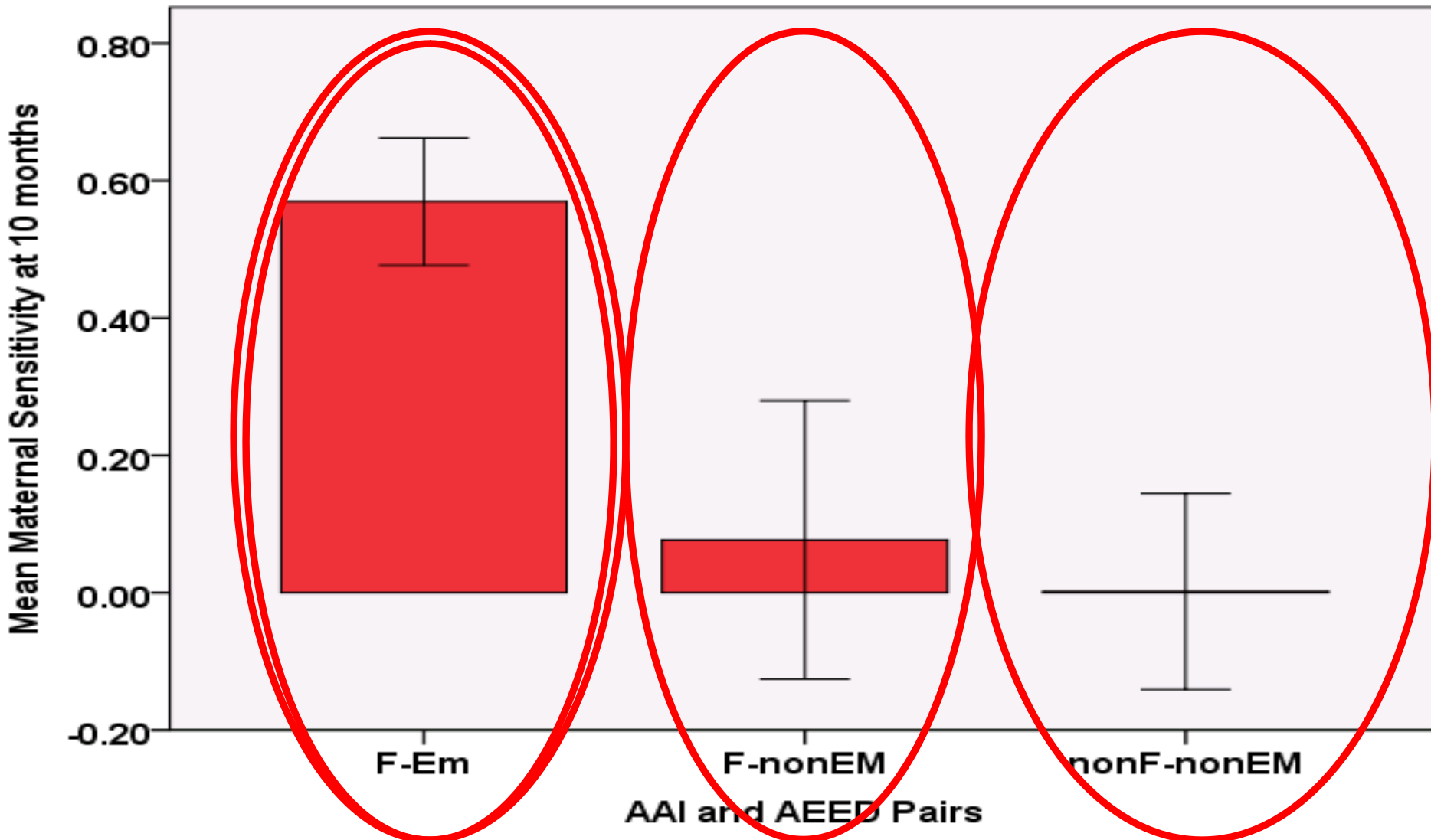
AAI 3-way Classification	AEED Binary Classification		Total
	Non-EM	EM	
Dismissing (Ds)	8 (4.6, 2.6)	0 (3.4, -2.6)	8
Autonomous (F)	13 (19.1, -3.7)	20 (13.9, 3.7)	33
Preoccupied (E)	8 (5.2, 2.1)	1 (3.8, -2.1)	9
Total	29	21	50


Note: Numbers in parentheses refer to the expected value (first number, italicized), and adjusted standardized residual (second number). $LR = 17.499, df = 2, p < .001$

Results: Maternal Sensitivity as a Moderator

- AAI-AEED classification concordant and discordant pairs:
 - F-EM ($N = 20$)
 - ~~NonF-EM ($N = 1$)~~
 - F-NonEM ($N = 13$)
 - NonF-NonEM ($N = 16$)

Results: Maternal Sensitivity as Moderating Link Between AAI and AEED Classifications





Summary: Contributions of Maternal Attachment to Mother-Child Emotion Dialogues

1. Autonomous mothers who reflect on their own childhood experiences in an open and coherent manner provide sensitive guidance during conversations about children's past emotional experiences

Summary: Moderating Role of Maternal Sensitivity

2. There is evidence supporting early sensitivity as moderating this link insofar as :
 - Levels of early maternal sensitivity seem to facilitate transmission of positive impact of Autonomous state of mind on later mother-child emotion dialogues as in the case of concordant dyads (F-EM and NonF-NonEM, mean sensitivity = .57 and .00, respectively)
 - Low levels of early maternal sensitivity may attenuate the positive impacts of an Autonomous state of mind on later mother-child dialogues as shown in significant difference between F-EM (.57) and F-NonEM dyads (.08)



Conclusion

1. Mothers' state of mind with regards to attachment is an important precursor to the manner in which mothers shape discussions with their children surrounding their emotional past
2. There is some evidence indicating that early maternal sensitivity moderates the impact of maternal attachment representations on later mother-child emotion communication



Thank You!!