

# From attachment representations to mother–child mutually responsive orientation: Developmental cascade via maternal sensitivity and child attachment

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## Introduction

Attachment theory posits that the link between parental attachment representations and child attachment is mediated by maternal sensitivity [1]

Mother–child mutually responsive orientation (MRO) results from the joint contribution of maternal and child factors [2]

## Objective

Examine a 4–step serial mediation in which mother–child MRO is the outcome of the attachment transmission developmental process

## Method

### Sample

171 mother–child dyads (48% boys)  
89% White  
76% family income of 60k or over

### Measures

#### 7 months

Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1996)

#### 12 months

Maternal Behavior Q–Sort (Pederson & Moran, 1995)

#### 15 months

Attachment Behavior Q–Sort (Waters, 1995)

#### 2 years

Mother–child Mutually Receptive Orientation (Aksan et al., 2006)

## Results

**Table 1**

Correlations Among Study Variables

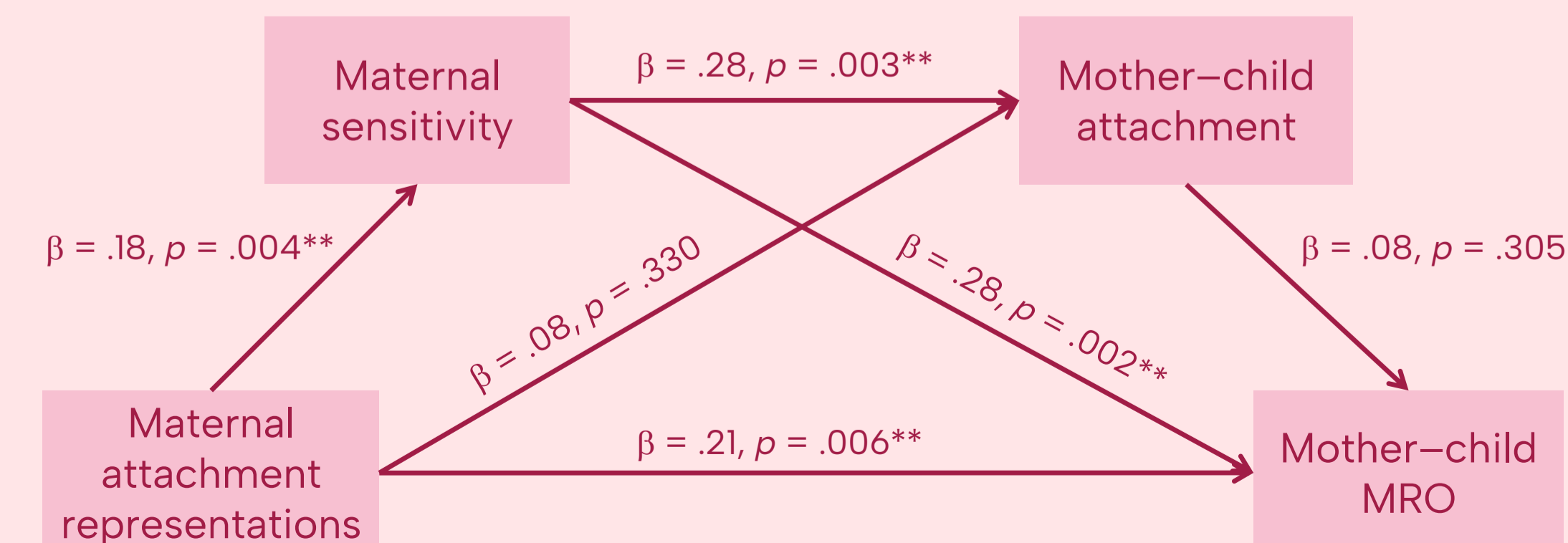
	2	3	4	5
1. Child sex	-.01	.08	-.01	.15 <sup>t</sup>
2. Maternal attachment representations		.22**	.13	.26**
3. Mother sensitivity			.25**	.31**
4. Mother–child attachment				.16*
5. Mother–child MRO				

Note. Child sex is coded: 1 = boy; 2 = girl (biserial correlations).  
<sup>t</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

- ✓ Maternal sensitivity mediated the link between maternal attachment representations and mother–child attachment ( $\beta = .05$ , 95% CI [.01, .12])
- ✓ Maternal sensitivity mediated the link between maternal attachment representations and mother–child MRO ( $\beta = .06$ , 95% CI [.02, .12])
- ✓ The full 4–step mediation was not significant

**Figure 1**

Mediation Model



Note. Covariate = child sex. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

These results suggest the presence of two distinct developmental processes involving maternal attachment representations and sensitivity, one resulting in mother–child attachment and the other, in mother–child MRO

Mother–child attachment and mother–child MRO seem to be two distinct yet associated components of mother–child relationships

## Strengths & Limits

- + Longitudinal design (4 steps)
- + Observational measures
- Correlational design
- Mostly well–educated French–Canadian White families
- Mothers only

## References

- Cassidy, J., Jones, J. D., & Shaver, P. R. (2013). Contributions of attachment theory and research: A framework for future research, translation, and policy. *Development and Psychopathology*, 25(4pt2), 1415–1434. doi:10.1017/S0954579413000692
- Aksan, N., Kochanska, G., & Ortmann, M. R. (2006). Mutually responsive orientation between parents and their young children: Toward methodological advances in the science of relationships. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(5), 833–848. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.833

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